



REIMAGINING HISTORY THROUGH ART: THE POWER TO RETELL STORIES



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OVERVIEW OF RESOURCE

The Venice Biennale Learning Resource is made up of five learning pathways exploring three interrelated and overarching themes.

THEMES

1. New Zealand Art on a Global Stage

This theme highlights the significance of La Biennale di Venezia (the Biennale) and a contemporary artist's participation within it. Students examine artist selection, past artist contributions, and Venice itself.

Students will consider the logistical elements of installation and exhibiting in Venice, why Lisa Reihana was selected for the Biennale, and how her work might 'read' in a European context.

2. Representation and Difference

Who we are and who others see when they see us.

This theme focuses students on the subjective nature of representation – how values, attitudes, and beliefs impact on how identity is communicated to others.

There is a specific focus in this theme on the motivations and purpose of Lisa Reihana's work as a reaction to Joseph Dufour's wallpaper (1804-05). Students use comparison and contrast to explore the way Reihana has portrayed multiple cultures, narratives, histories, and peoples.

Students will also look at other examples of contemporary artists responding to, redressing, and retelling history – especially Māori, Pacific and women artists.

3. Time and Change

How things were and how things are.

This theme requires students to examine time, continuity and change – not only through the differences in artist motivation, but also in the differences in art-making practice.

Dufour's wallpaper used techniques on paint and paper to create a panoramic experience. Similarly, Reihana's work creates a panoramic, immersive experience – but through completely different technologies.

Students will examine the impact of static vs. moving image as well as begin to understand some of the challenges and opportunities of creating art using time-based media.

Students will look at the collaborative art-making process and seek similarities and differences in the artists' motivations.

The pathways are linked to Art History, Visual Arts, and Social Sciences. That said, we've intentionally left achievement objectives within specific learning areas open-ended so that you can adapt these learning pathways to suit your context and your students.

Each pathway focuses students on critically engaging with Lisa Reihana's artwork and creating student response. As *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* speaks of the importance of claiming identity, there is an emphasis in the activities on capturing authentic student experience and voice.

Prepare for using these inquiry-based learning pathways by reviewing the suggested activities and the discussion starters. Within each pathway, there are links for the extra-curious, should you or your students want to delve further into any one area.

The pathways are available to print off as PDF guides. Please be aware, however, that the guides are designed to be used in conjunction with the content on our website.

[Learning Pathway One – New Zealand at La Biennale di Venezia](#)

[Learning Pathway Two – Clothes maketh the \(wo\)man: Costuming, representation and identity](#)

[Learning Pathway Three – Back to a future: Reimagining Pacific encounters](#)

[Learning Pathway Four – Reimagining history through art: The power to retell stories](#)

[Learning Pathway Five – Wallpaper vs screen: Technologies in art-making practice](#)

INTRODUCTION

When Lisa Reihana saw Joseph Dufour’s wallpaper and ‘couldn’t see the Pacific anywhere’, she set out to create *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* to redress the balance.

In this pathway, students use a critical lens to focus on artists who produce work that challenges an accepted story. Students then produce their own visual art that responds to their own personal world.



Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (detail), 2015–17, Ultra HD video, colour, sound, 64 min. Image courtesy of the artist and New Zealand at Venice.

Cover image: Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (detail), 2015–17, Ultra HD video, colour, sound, 64 min. Image courtesy of the artist and New Zealand at Venice.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This pathway is recommended for Y11–Y13 students as there is some mature content. Teacher discretion is recommended.

We've purposefully left achievement objectives within specific learning areas open-ended. This means that **teachers are free to adapt these learning pathways to suit their context** and their students.

That said, this section connects easily to the following subjects:

VISUAL ARTS

- Understanding the visual arts in context: Investigate and consider the relationship between the production of art works and their contexts and influences
- Developing practical knowledge

ART HISTORY

- Activities in this pathway can be adapted for use with the following internal and external assessment standards:
 - **Level 1**
AS91016 Demonstrate understanding of the subject matter of art works
 - **Level 2**
AS91181 Examine the meanings conveyed by art works
S91182 Examine the influence of context(s) on art works
AS91184 Communicate understanding of an art history topic
 - **Level 3**
AS91483 Examine how meanings are communicated through art works
AS91484 Examine the relationship(s) between art and context
AS91486 Construct an argument based on interpretation of research
AS91487 Examine the different values placed on art works

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Understand how the ideas and actions of people in the past have had a significant impact on people's lives

A. MY STORY, RETOLD MY WAY

INTRODUCTION

Digital media provides Reihana with the opportunity to storytell. Throughout her work, Reihana stages scenes that express ideas of identity, representation, and belonging.

In Reihana's *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (2015–17), digital storytelling has allowed the juxtaposition of 'then' (Dufour's wallpaper) with 'now' (Reihana's video work).

In this activity, students use artistic conventions to retell their own history, by adapting and amending a static image.

By the end of these activities, students will have:

- manipulated a photograph to reveal new ideas about representation and identity.
- created their own visual image that uses some of the ideas evident in *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*.
- explored John Pule's techniques and experimented with their own of fusion of poetry and art.



Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (detail), 2015–17, Ultra HD video, colour, sound, 64 min. Image courtesy of the artist and New Zealand at Venice.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1 ANCHOR ME

In this activity, students choose a photograph from their past to add to, amend and adjust. Like Reihana, they overlay the ‘then’ with the ‘now’ to create new representations.

[Listen to Reihana’s interview](#) about how *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* evolved from thought to practice, and how stories are told within the work.

- ? What is the story that Reihana is telling?
- Is there more than one story?
- How is she disrupting the narrative?
- Changing the narrative?
- Is her story linear?
- Where are her stories drawn from?
- What is told through image without dialogue or script?
- How does sound add to the narrative?

Activity continues on p 7

1 ANCHOR ME (CONTINUED):

Students brainstorm their own memories of sounds, sights, smells, and tastes that they associate with places and times in their childhood. Then, using a photograph from when they were young, students reinvent it with some of these memories overlaid.

Students could use photo-editing software to alter and augment the image by adding, cutting, cropping, fragmenting, repeating, and zooming in and out.

They might like to use a program like [Voicethread](#) to add sounds, music, or voice.

? *Students can use digital technologies to add layers of meaning to the story of a photograph.*

For example, they may have a photograph of a day at the park, and all looks happy, but they remember the argument in the car beforehand. Students could add the spoken words overtop, a red slash across the photo, or a zoom-in on a shouting mouth.

They may have a photo of a girlfriend or boyfriend from before they started seeing each other. Students could add calendar dates, lines from song lyrics, or shared interests.

They may have the last photo taken of a deceased loved one. Students could add a translucent shroud layer, a zoom-in of the flowers lain, the hills that surround their grave.

They may have a photo of a holiday spot, which could be augmented with the roadtrip trail, the spot to stop on the way, or the birds they saw on the beach when they got there.

2 BURN MY HEAD IN HEAVEN

In this activity, students study the myriad of ways story can be communicated by studying artist John Pule's Burn My Head in Heaven.

As part of his hiapo paintings, Pule uses poetry and text along side images to tell his stories of migration, colonisation, and cosmology. Students watch [this episode of Tales from Te Papa](#) about John Pule's work [Burn My Head in Heaven](#) (1998).



Burn My Head In Heaven, Tales from Te Papa, episode 72

? What story does John Pule tell through his work?

How do words and images work together to convey the theme?

Pule was born in one colonised country and brought up in another – is that something that resonates with you?

How does he explore this idea in this work?

2 BURN MY HEAD IN HEAVEN (CONTINUED):

Students can either amend a work that they have already begun by adding a layer of text or poetry, or create a new work that fuses image and text together.

Consider carefully whether the text added will complement the image, or juxtapose against it. Both techniques can be effective – students can play with adding text on transparency or in layers digitally and consider the placement before adding it.

What has changed with the addition of text?

Students may like to explore the *Sangro* series by artist Ralph Hotere too, as well as other artists who combine text and image.



John Pule, *Burn My Head in Heaven No 1*, 1998, ink on paper.
Purchased 1998 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds,
Te Papa (1998-0034-1)

B. REIMAGINING (HIS)STORIES

INTRODUCTION

In this section, students examine Lisa Reihana's artistic practice in relation to other contemporary New Zealand artists.

Reihana uses digital storytelling to tell new truths – challenging and changing preconceived understandings of mythology and history. Many other New Zealand artists are also interested in questioning past events – decolonising tales are being told and power is being balanced.

In these activities, students examine how Reihana's oeuvre fits within the wider contemporary New Zealand art scene, and explore other artists who are also challenging the status quo.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of these activities, students will have:

- investigated contemporary artists reimagining past events and structures in new ways
- developed their own response to an advertising image that is singular in focus.



Lisa Reihana, *Mahuika 2001*, colour photograph, type C print.
Te Papa (O.026798)

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1 SPEAKING ARTWORKS

In this activity, students explore Te Papa’s collections and choose a contemporary artwork that reframes an understanding of history.

Students view the high-resolution image of Captain James Cook’s death, featured in both [Joseph Dufour’s wallpaper](#) and [Lisa Reihana’s work](#).

? What are the differences and similarities?

How does that impact on our understanding of the event?

Many contemporary artists are returning, referencing, and reimagining past events, political systems, and histories. [Listen to Reihana’s interview](#) where she talks about representation and identity, what drew her into retelling histories and stories, and why she thinks it is important to re-imagine the past.

Redressing past events isn’t new to contemporary art. The emergence of new digital technologies, however, has changed the way in which artists can communicate these ideas.

Have a look through [this slideshow carousel](#), which highlights some other artists’ work in this area.

Students could print art works, or digitally paste them alongside each other, and overlay speech bubbles – as if they are in conversation with each other.

? What does this artwork say?

What would the artists say to each other?

What has been told in one artwork that is not told in another?

Who is communicating this scene to the world and what is their motivation to do so?

Extension idea:

- ‘History is written by the victors’ is a famous quote from politician Winston Churchill. What does he mean by this? How does this relate to the works you’ve found? How do attitudes change over time?

2

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE OF US

In this activity, students re-imagine an advertisement or political message and create a visual art response.

Reihana's reaction to Dufour's wallpaper inspired her seven-year artistic journey to the Biennale. Reihana was motivated to tell more than one story. She collaborated with New Zealand-based Pacific communities so that those that were represented in the work were included in the making of it too.

There are many examples in our contemporary world where just one perspective is portrayed as truth. This is particularly obvious in advertising, in fashion, and in politics.

Ask students to source an advertisement that tells a one-sided story about the people represented within it. Focus students on the advertisement's underlying messages around ethnicity, sexuality, gender roles, diversity, or disability.

Like Reihana's approach to Dufour's wallpaper, students can then adjust and amend the image to tell a new truth or perspective back to the original creator of the advertisement. Depending on the image they use, students may need to completely de-populate the page and then start again, using only the wireframe structure of the ad to connect the two images together.

LINKS FOR THE EXTRA CURIOUS

- Watch Lisa Reihana speak about her background and who she is (there are some fabulous shots of Reihana in front of *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peOtcDM0m_E
- Part of this hour-long talk has Reihana speaking about representing diverse Pacific experiences (start from 36 minutes in):
<https://vimeo.com/138022794>
- Watch this *Tales from Te Papa* episode about Reihana's past installation in Te Ara ā Hine:
https://youtu.be/PVKZW2Y_ZxI?t=18s
- Watch John Pule working with Massey University students:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzI6W3DZc9M>
- Watch Shannon Te Ao speak about the use of te reo and whakatauki within his work:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfOvuV8IXtQ>
- Read this article by Anthony Byrt about Michael Parekowhai's *The Lighthouse* on Auckland's waterfront:
<http://www.noted.co.nz/culture/arts/state-house-rules-michael-parekowhais-sculpture-is-aucklands-new-best-thing/>
- Icaro Doria used data from Amnesty International to reimagine the world's flags in an entirely new way:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaNANjJvIaw>
- Check out the 2006 All Blacks poster impregnated with the blood of 40 All Blacks:
<http://www.allblacks.com/News/4082/unique-poster-gets-fans-closer-to-the-all-blacks>

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