

EDUCATION KIT

Daniel Boyd  
Rainbow Serpent  
(Version)

Curated by Liz Nowell

9 September–16 December 2023

IMA

## HOW TO USE THIS EDUCATION KIT

This kit has been developed for use alongside viewing the exhibition *Daniel Boyd: Rainbow Serpent (Version)* at the Institute of Modern Art. It focuses on three key works in the show. Teachers can adapt the curriculum-linked questions and activities for learning experiences in the gallery or classroom. Definitions of key terms and links to further resources are provided at the end of the kit.

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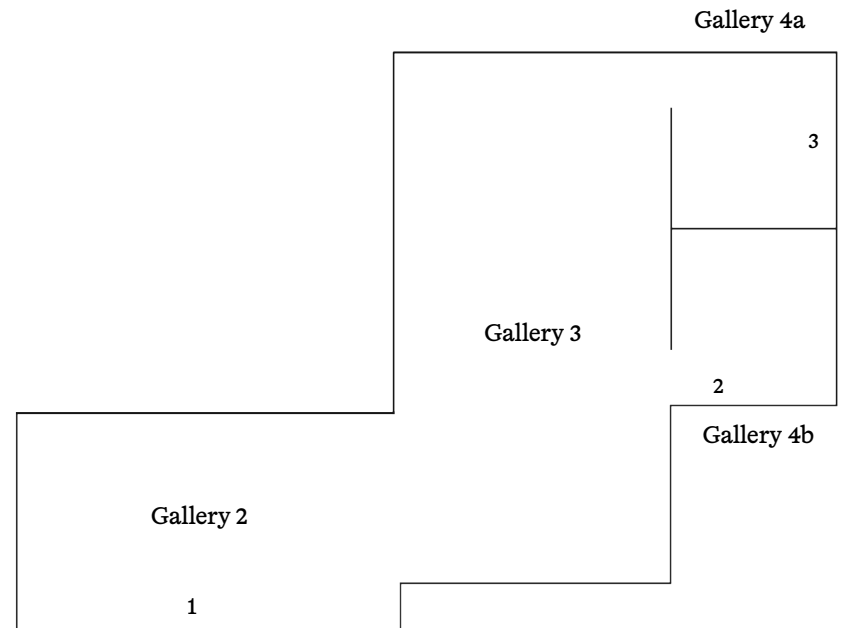
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## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Daniel Boyd has achieved international acclaim for his works addressing Australia's colonial legacy. *Rainbow Serpent (Version)* is his first major exhibition in Meanjin/Brisbane, and features an ambitious new commission, a mirrored-floor 'stage' developed in partnership with Gropius Bau, Berlin. The exhibition also includes new paintings, a sculpture, and a program of live activations by First Nations scholars and artists, community groups and activists. *Rainbow Serpent (Version)* contends with the legacy of imperialism in our built environment, civic spaces, and architectural monuments. As part of his longstanding interrogation of Eurocentric histories, Boyd invites us to reconsider the spaces and places we inhabit.



Daniel Boyd *Untitled (HTAALMSTALS)* 2023, oil, charcoal, and archival glue on canvas, 190cm x 150cm, courtesy Station, Melbourne.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Daniel Boyd has been exhibiting since 2005. He draws on his heritage—as a Kujjala, Ghungalu, Wangerriburra, Wakka Wakka, Gubbi Gubbi, Kuku Yalanji, Bundjalung, and Yuggera man from North Queensland and North Pentecost Island in Vanuatu—to interrogate legacies of colonisation. In 2014, he was the first Indigenous Australian to win the prestigious Bulgari Art Award. He has participated in major biennales and exhibitions, including the 2015 Venice Biennale, the 2016 Biennale of Sydney, the 2017 National Indigenous Art Triennial at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the 2017 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art. In 2017, he was in *Mondialité*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Asad Raza, at the Boghossian Foundation, Brussels. In 2022, his survey exhibition *Treasure Island* was presented by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Boyd is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; Station, Melbourne; and Kukje Gallery, Seoul.



Daniel Boyd. Photo: Luca Girardini.





## ARTWORKS

### 1. *Untitled (ILYM)*

*Rainbow Serpent (Version)* begins by considering where the gallery stands and Boyd's connection to it through his matrilineal Yuggera heritage. Several paintings rework studio-portrait photographs of First Nations people made in Fortitude Valley in the 1870s. By reclaiming these images, Boyd offers his subjects an opportunity to exist beyond the ethnographic gaze. Another painting reproduces a photo of Boyd himself as a child in his mother's arms.

#### DISCUSSION

- What photographs does your family have in its collection? Is there an image of people or a place that has special significance for you? If so, what makes it special?
- Dots or 'lenses' are a signature motif in Boyd's work. How does this recurring motif convey meaning in his work?

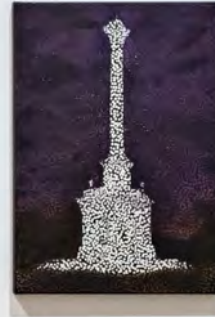
#### ACTIVITY

- Reframe an image of people or a place—perhaps a statue or monument—by experimenting with techniques and materials. Possible materials include mirrors and other reflective surfaces, transparency sheets, archival or hot glue, paint, and marker pens. Reflect on how the meaning of the work changes with this.



Daniel Boyd *Untitled (ILYM)* 2022, oil, charcoal, and archival glue on canvas, 184cm x 132cm.





## 2. *Untitled (YAPMFYCESYE)*

Boyd reframes Western aesthetics and symbols to confront the legacy of colonial violence in our built environment, civic spaces, and cultural discourse. His works depict relics from classicism, modernism, and the Enlightenment to explore the visual language of territorial conquest and imperial placemaking. In one pairing, a painting of an architectural drawing of an elaborate column capital hangs alongside one of the artist's impression of the Cook Monument, located in Cooktown, Queensland. This cenotaph, a towering presence on Guugu Yimithirr country, is one of many monuments dedicated to Captain James Cook, symbolising British occupation. By placing it in proximity to the classical column, an emblem of Ancient Greece, Boyd draws a powerful connection between the origins of modern democracy, often hailed as 'civilised freedom', and the theft of Aboriginal land. Drawing connections across time and space, these works reveal how white supremacy subtly asserts itself into the everyday environment.

### DISCUSSION

- What statues, monuments, or buildings are significant in your home town? How are they regarded by the community?
- How does Boyd bring to life objects from the past?

### ACTIVITY

- Choose a monument, statue, or building and research its significance for your local area. Talk to elders and family members to find out what they remember about it, then share your findings as a class.
- Create a 2D art work based on source material from your research, layering the past and the present.



Daniel Boyd *Untitled (YAPMFYCESYE)* 2023, oil, charcoal, and archival glue on canvas, 70.5cm x 50.5cm, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.







### 3. *Untitled (FLICSAIBE)*

The exhibition addresses how imperialism and capitalism were forged through the exploitation of First Peoples. Drawing on his Aboriginal and South Sea Islander heritage, Boyd's works offer a personal perspective on the global slave trade. In the exhibition, a portrait of the artist's grandmother faces a reproduction of a Victorian-era studio photograph of an Indigenous woman in a bonnet and a crisp white apron—a domestic servant. With their gazes both fixed upon a charred dining-room table installed between them in the gallery, these matriarchs confront the hidden history of slavery and indentured labour in Australia.

#### DISCUSSION

- What relationships can you imagine may exist between the works in this gallery? How do these relationships contribute to their meanings and messages?

#### ACTIVITY

- Research Victorian-era studio photography. You may like to refer to the online collections of state libraries and museums in Australia. What were the main features of studio portraiture during this time?
- In small groups, collaborate to create a studio portrait in the style of Victorian-era portrait photography. Consider the use of lighting, costumes, and poses. As a group, discuss each person's experience based on their role as sitter or photographer. Reflect on how integrity and power are realised through this process.



Daniel Boyd *Untitled (FLICSAIBE)* 2023, oil, charcoal and archival glue on canvas, 141cm x 110cm, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.



## KEY TERMS

### Anthropology

The science of humanity. Established during European expansion and colonisation, it used the supposedly scientific determination of the physical characteristics of Indigenous peoples to justify their oppression and exploitation.

### Classicism

A style that shaped European art and architecture between 1770 and 1840. It was characterised by clear lines and austere geometry. Many artists of the period oriented themselves to the design vocabulary of Greek and Roman antiquity, as evident in columns and temple facades.

### Ethnography

The detailed observation, description, and categorisation of everyday cultures.

### Eurocentrism

Assessments of non-European peoples based on European values and norms; the belief that Europe's historical development and social order are the yardstick for other countries and communities.

### First Nations (in Australia)

People with familial connection to the first human inhabitants of Australia—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. They comprise Indigenous communities with distinct languages, cultures, and customs.

### Imperialism

States extending their influence beyond their borders to exploit other states politically, economically, and culturally.

### Modernism

A global artistic movement of the early-twentieth century that prioritised the values of modern industrial life. It rejected conservative traditional beliefs, encouraged formal experimentation, and often espoused utopian social and political agendas.

### Rainbow Serpent

An umbrella term for various First Nations creation stories. Traditionally, God can appear as a flash of white light or its refraction into the rainbow-spectrum colours. Certain creatures display this phenomenon: the skins of reptiles, wings of certain insects, and scales of fish. Each community has a specific serpent species, such as Olive Python, Black-Headed Python, or King Brown Snake.

### The Enlightenment

A European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that emphasised reason and individualism rather than tradition. Prominent thinkers included Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith.

### The Victorian Era

The period between around 1820 and 1914, during which Britain was the most powerful empire in the world. This period roughly corresponds with the reign of Queen Victoria.



## CURRICULUM LINKS

### Australian Curriculum / Visual Art / Years 11-12 Syllabus Objectives

1. implement ideas and representations
2. apply literacy skills
3. analyse and interpret visual language, expression, and meaning in art works and practices
4. evaluate art practices, traditions, cultures, and theories
5. justify viewpoints
6. experiment in response to stimulus
7. create meaning through the knowledge and understanding of materials, techniques, technologies, and processes
8. realise responses to communicate meaning

### Australian Curriculum / Visual Arts / Years F-10

- Use materials, techniques and processes to explore visual conventions when making art works (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM111) (ACAVAM115)
- Explore ideas and art works from different cultures and times, including art work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM110) (ACAVAM114)
- Respond to visual art works and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (ACAVAR109) (ACAVAR113) (ACAVAR117)
- Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies, and processes (ACAVAM119) (ACAVAM121)
- Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art making (ACAVAM126) (ACAVAM128)

### Australian Curriculum / Cross-Curriculum Priority / Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Code	Organising ideas
Country/Place	
OI.1	Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups: Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and within those groups there is significant diversity.
OI.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place.
OI.3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.
Culture	
OI.4	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups.
OI.5	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.
OI.6	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in Australia as first peoples of Country or Place and demonstrate resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.
People	
OI.7	The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia.
OI.8	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' family and kinship structures are strong and sophisticated.
OI.9	The significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the present and past are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally.



## FURTHER RESOURCES

[Rainbow Serpent \(Version\)](#) at Gropius Bau, exhibition texts, audio descriptions, and glossary

[Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery](#) Daniel Boyd biography and previous work

[ABC News article](#) ‘Brisbane City Council won’t change “outdated” sculptures despite calls from First Nations leaders for their removal.’

[Q-Album](#) Perspective drawing of the Captain Cook Memorial, Cooktown

Further exhibition resources are available via the [IMA Resources](#) webpage.

## VISIT US

IMA Education programs are free and available for primary, secondary, and tertiary groups on weekdays during exhibitions. We offer guided exhibition tours and workshops tailored to your students. Book now via [ima.org.au/education](http://ima.org.au/education).

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#### TERMS OF USE

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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