

GERTRUDE  
CONTEMPORARY

# CONTEMPORARY ART ON THE ROAD WITH ANNDEBONO

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Ann Debono is a painter based in Narm/Melbourne. She graduated from Victorian College of the Arts with Honours in 2015 and she was the inaugural recipient of the Cranbourne Bequest which allowed her to undertake a three month residency at The British School at Rome at the end of 2018. In 2019 she commenced her studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary. Ann is currently awaiting for the COVID crisis to be over in order to present her show, *Diachronic*, which will be her first solo presentation at Sutton Gallery. This ambitious body of work is the culmination of her research undertaken in Italy in 2018. Ann is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

### **What ideas/concepts do you base your artworks on?**

My painting practice is founded in questioning how images function. I try to draw attention to the paradoxical status of images through my paintings. This paradox arises from the fact that images are simultaneously material and continuous with the material world, but also virtually harbour a reference to the material world beyond them. I try to corrupt the legibility of depiction through my practice, forcing a divergence between recognition and understanding.

I am very preoccupied with the role of Christian theology in the development of the Western attitude towards images. The history of theological argumentation about the status of the Icon is woven deeply into the fabric of modern and contemporary critical theory surrounding the image.

### **Why are your ideas / concepts / discussions important to a contemporary audience or in a contemporary context?**

I think the contemporary Western world is culturally committed to an enlightenment/rationalist notion of a static, material 'real' world that is accessible and knowable. Science is the paradigm of knowledge for the West. I believe we are living through an epistemic collapse of this system right now.

In terms of my practice specifically, I want to make work that invites people to wonder whether knowledge arises as a direct consequence of visual perception. We live in an environment hyper-saturated with photography, both produced and consumed. It is so ambient and ubiquitous that it elides fundamental questions about how an image attains communicative capacity and especially what quality of 'truth' the photograph is capable of sustaining. I don't think that images simply mimetically peel off a positive 'real'. I think that it is highly relevant in a contemporary context to re-assess our relationship to and understanding of images and truth.

### **How do you begin your studio practice? Where do you find inspiration?**

I go on really big walks with my film camera and sometimes they are fruitful and sometimes not. I look for weird and ugly things to photograph. Often decay and detritus, but I try and be really aware of not leaning into things which are picturesque. I'm really interested in objects and images that are troublingly, mute and ungiven. I think this often comes across as austerity, but not in the sense of making detail absent. I also collect images from other sources, such as second-hand books.

I like seeing how the film process distorts what I originally saw through the viewfinder of my camera. I take all my images and I kind of play tarot with them on my desk. I don't cut up my photos, I just sort of assemble them in my head and sometimes make a very rough pencil sketch of how the images will fit together in the painting. Because I am impatient I try and get to the painting with as little preparatory work as possible.

### **How has your practice evolved over time?**

When I was in art school I developed a nearly manic collage process that produced tonnes of unusual images to base my paintings on. This workshop is based on that process. It helped me find a visual language that arose from a relationship with images rather than trying to will something into existence purely synthetically from inside my head. My paintings were very abstract expressionist and I really tried to conceal depiction so that there was an intimation of 'real objects' but without obviousness. I've become more interested in depiction and I feel more confident that it is still possible to be very visually engaging as well as ambiguous when the depiction is highly rendered. I have also become more comfortable with not knowing what the paintings I make mean. I am content with a painting that I do not understand but seems to me to possess some complex emotional resonance.

### **Who are your biggest influences?**

I don't just find the impetus to make paintings just from engaging with art history. I am mostly motivated by literature and film. In terms of literature, I've recently been very preoccupied with W.G Sebald and Gerald Murnane. I also really love Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. In terms of films, I like Agnes Varda, Apichatpong Weerasethekul, Andrei Tarkovsky and Chris Marker.

### **Artist Website / Gallery Website**

[www.anndebono.com.au](http://www.anndebono.com.au)

[www.suttongallery.com.au](http://www.suttongallery.com.au)

Images | Cover: Ann Debono, *Pinhole Firmament* (detail), 2019, acrylic and oil on canvas, 138cm x 97 cm

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## WORKSHOP SUMMARY

**1)** Collect images from a variety of magazine sources, so that there is a real diversity of photographic image types. For instance, all of the photos in a food magazine are likely to have similar photographic techniques and image types. However, the contrast between *Gourmet Traveller* and the image content in a 1980's *National Geographic* will provide substantial contrast. It is also possible to use old image-heavy books from Op Shops. Nature books, books about buildings, travel photography, etc.

**2)** Students will turn the magazines or books upside-down and leaf through pages trying to disregard recognising objects and figures, rather, paying attention to colours and shapes. The idea is to look for interesting shapes totally abstracted from their pictorial function.

**3)** Students may begin to carefully remove shapes from the source using a scalpel and cutting mat. This may take some time. It is good to neatly excise images, being especially attentive to preserving curves. Students may choose to remove negative spaces from objects (such as the enclosed window created in the back of a chair between the seat and the back rest) or leave them. This step can be quite time consuming to build up a good stash of bits. No less than 40 minutes should be spent on this step. It is VERY IMPORTANT to end up with a range of different sized cut-outs. Students may tend to only select very small details. Encourage them to find large motifs in their source material. These motifs can be composites of objects, we are not just cutting out a chair, or a mushroom. Images of architecture are very helpful for getting larger image bits.

**4)** Students will sort their bits into piles according to size: big bits, medium bits, small bits.

**5)** Taking a sheet of white, A4 paper, students will begin to play with composition and placement. It is possible to jigsaw together the bits, so that some part lays underneath and some part lays over the top of a corresponding bit.

There should be NO GLUE until students have spent quite some time making a number of configurations with their images. Students should turn their paper around with the composition they have made on it to look at it from all angles. Students should still be suspending any recognition of the objects. This is an exercise in abstraction, which begins with a mental withdrawal from depiction. There should be no regard paid to normative conventions spatial orientation, only dynamism and visual interest created when the images are combined.

**6)** Students may commit their arrangements to the paper with a glue stick. The good thing about glue stick is that it doesn't warp the paper as it is fairly dry and it is very easy to peel up and move things if you change your mind or make a mistake. Student should produce a minimum of three finished collages, but five would be ideal.

Steps 5 and 6 should take a minimum of 40 minutes.

The outcome of this task is being able to produce a psychological shift of 'bracketing' the visual material and suspending it in some purely visual regard, without attaching recognition and meaning to the image matter. This process allows students to arrive at an image product that they did not project or design; it is an unexpected image. This process should release student from having a fixed outcome in mind when they set out to the task and rather emphasises the process and journey of discovery. The collages may be used as prompts for paintings or finished artworks themselves.

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## EQUIPMENT LIST

- Scalpel
- Glue stick
- Variety of image sources: magazines, books, cooking books, printed photographs etc
- Cutting mat
- A4 white paper

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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Through critical and creative re-thinking of the visual imagery and material - students will learn how to experiment with different found images.
- Students will practice and develop processes for creating with out specific visual outcomes in mind.
- Students will develop skills in creative and conceptual thinking towards art making and material.
- Students are encouraged to play with found imagery, shape, form and composition.

### **The activity aims to:**

- Expand students' knowledge about materials and techniques.
  - Encourage imagination and enjoyment through engagement with art making.
  - Teach students to express themselves through abstract and expressive forms and compositions.
  - Expand students' critical and creative thinking, using visual languages, art practices and art history.
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## LEARNING ACTIVITY

### **Discussion**

- How can abstract things communicate meaning? Discuss how different media can act as sites for alternate meanings – for example certain imagery can be nostalgic or trigger memories, in the same way tone and colour can infer different meanings.
- How does Ann use collage and/or fragmented imagery in her practice? Look at the types of images Ann has used in her paintings. What found objects or images can you identify? Discuss how Ann creates a fractured narrative through her artworks.
- Talk about the use of collage in art history. When did it first emerge? And what were the intentions of the artist who first adopted the practice? Who are some contemporary artists that use collage in their practice?
- Look at the location and installation of an exhibition of Ann's work. How has she chosen to display her artworks? Are work framed, or not framed? Are they hung in a single row or at various heights (salon style). Analyze the display, do you think this is an effective way to present them? Why? Why not? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this display technique?

### **Concept Development**

Students should begin by examining Ann's practice, looking at her work in person, through her website or her gallerist's website. Look at her use of imagery and materials. They should discuss significant artists that used collage or found image and objects. Who are these artists? Find and name 3 historical examples and 3 contemporary examples. How are abstract narratives communicated through their work? Students should begin by collecting magazines, books, catalogues, packaging and similar image-led print publications.

## Production

They should begin to look through the materials they have collected, forward, backwards, right way up, and upside down. Disregarding the identity or function of the form, students should begin to look for and cut out forms that appeal to them. Taking care to cut things out, they should end up with a collection of pieces of various sizes. Following Ann's instructions, they should then begin to arrange their pieces on white paper, turning the page from time to time to look at their creation from different perspectives. Working on multiple pieces at one time, to avoid creating a linear or logical scene. Once they are happy with their abstract forms, they can set their composition with glue. They should not be focused on creating a particular image or outcome, but rather play and experience and enjoy the journey to something unexpected.

Optional - once students are happy with their creations, they can brainstorm how they could display their creations. Would it look good in a frame? Or pinned to a wall? How do different display methods create or alter the interpretation or affect the work has?



Image | Ann Debono, *Untitled*, 2019, acrylic and oil on canvas, 49 x 39.5cm.  
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

## LINKS TO CURRICULUM

### PRIMARY & SECONDARY

#### **Present & Perform**

View the location and exhibition of Ann's work. Students then plan an exhibition of their own artworks. They should consider the audience of the artworks and how they wish the audience to interpret the artwork. They should decide how they can/should display their work and explain why they have chosen that particular display method.

#### **Respond & Interpret**

Level F – 6

Respond to Ann's artwork by identifying and describing technique and ideas. Consider how she makes her work. Students could also discuss collage, painting and art history.

Level 7 – 10

Analyse and interpret Ann's artworks discussing ideas and viewpoints. Compare her work with works by other contemporary artists to identify characteristics and features of the works.

#### **Explore & Express**

Levels F – 6

Investigate the ways in which Ann explores ideas, techniques and materials in her artworks. How are these expressed?

Levels 7 – 10

Explore Ann's art practice. Through a discussion of her use of materials discuss how she expresses her ideas and develops a particular style within her work. Discuss her work in terms of the themes that she explores. From this discussion students should develop their own ideas through the use of inspiration, materials, techniques and processes to develop their own artworks.

#### **Visual Arts Practice**

Levels F – 6

Based on the artworks of Ann's, students should explore materials, techniques, processes and visual conventions. They describe the use of these in the production of their artworks.

Levels 7 – 10

Think about the intentions that Ann has when she commences making his work, discuss her artistic practice. Using the artworks of Ann as a starting point, explore materials, techniques, visual conventions and processes to develop an individual artistic intention.

### VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (VCE)

Studio Arts

#### **Unit 1 Area of Study 3 | Interpreting art ideas and use of materials and techniques**

The work of artists from different times and cultures is studied to gain a broader understanding of how artworks are conceived, produced and exhibited. Students discuss the way in which Ann has used materials and techniques, collage practices and interpreted ideas and sources of inspiration in producing her artworks.

#### **Unit 2 Area of Study 2 | Exploration of Studio Practice and Development of Artworks**

Students focus on developing artworks through an individual studio process based on visual research and inquiry. Using this workshop as a catalyst for self experimentation and play with media, students develop their own aesthetic style.

#### **Unit 3 Area of Study 3 | Artists and Studio Practices**

In this area of study students focus on professional studio practices in relation to particular art forms. Students should investigate the ways in which artists have interpreted subject matter, influences, historical and cultural contexts, and communicated ideas and meaning in their artworks. Students should examine Ann's artist biography to understand the path of her professional development, the places and people she has exhibited alongside or collaborated with.

#### **Unit 4 Area of Study 3 | Art Industry Contexts**

You will visit a variety of art exhibitions and examine the different methods and roles undertaken in the preparation and presentation of art to the public. Examine one or two Ann's exhibitions. Discuss the presentation methods she has used and what they communicate to the viewer.

## RELATED ARTISTS



### **Batia Suter (b. 1967)**

Batia Suter is a Swiss-born contemporary artist. She is best known for her site-specific, monumental installations of manipulated images. She employs a mixture of collage and image sequences to explore underlying themes such as the 'iconification' and 'immunogenicity' of images, and how they become charged with associative values.



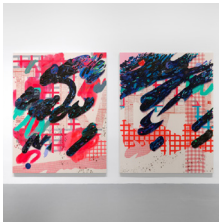
### **Matthias Weischer (b. 1973)**

Matthias Weischer is a painter who lives and works in Leipzig, Germany. He is part of the New Leipzig School Movement and his paintings often depict domestic interior scenes that question perception of space. Rather than using paintbrushes, he often uses thick layers of paint and palette knives to create texture in his works.



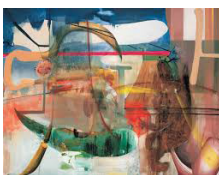
### **Per Kirkeby (1938 - 2018)**

Per Kirkeby was a Scandinavian artist originally trained as a geologist. Kirkeby was influenced by his scientific roots and abstract expressionism, and is known for his heavily layered, expressive paintings which often represent geological strata, the Danish landscape and the female form. Kirkeby worked across media and often collaborated with fluxus artists, best known for emphasising the artistic process over the end product.



### **Laura Owens (b. 1970)**

Laura Owens is a contemporary US painter known for her large scale mixed media paintings. Prior to becoming a painter she studied design, which is evident in her varied painting style. Owens mixes art historical and cultural references into her works, and creates more aesthetic questions than answers.



### **Albert Oehlen (b. 1954)**

Albert Oehlen is a German-born painter who challenges conventional abstract painting, and classifies his style as "post-non-figurative". His works are marked by constraints he sets for himself, such as through use of colour, using mirrors in canvases, collaboration and the use of computer software in his process. By using these constraints, Oehlen critiques the predominant values of traditional painting.



### **Adrian Ghenie (b. 1977)**

Adrian Ghenie is a contemporary Romanian painter who lives and works in Berlin. Themes he explores include history, memory and the legacy of villainous historical figures. Ghenie uses a palette knife and stencils, instead of traditional paintbrush to create his works. He has been compared to Francis Bacon.



### **Alexandra Leykauf (b. 1976)**

Alexandra Leykauf is a Berlin-based contemporary artist who studied photography and audio-visual media. She uses the medium of photography and cinema to construct images. Her works reveal such themes as the superficiality of images, or to appropriate a gender-oriented or feminine cultural gaze.



Contemporary Art on the Road is a unique professional development program that provides access to artists and art educators from some of Melbourne's leading art institutions: Gertrude Contemporary, Monash University Museum of Art and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. This resource was created to introduce teachers to hands-on, expertly designed strategies and resources for teaching contemporary art in their classroom.

Contemporary Art on the Road is funded by the Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET) through the Strategic Partnerships Program (SPP) and partnered with the following organisations:



Contemporary Art on the Road is an initiative developed by Gertrude Contemporary and in partnership with Monash University Museum of Art, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Image | Ann Debono, *Exchange*, 2018, acrylic and oil on linen, 121 x 98cm.  
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.