

**GERTRUDE  
CONTEMPORARY**

# CONTEMPORARY ART ON THE ROAD WITH JASON PHU

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Jason's multi-disciplinary practice brings together a wide range of contradictory references, from traditional ink paintings to street art, everyday vernacular to official records, personal narratives to historical events. Working across installation, painting and performance, the artist frequently uses humour as a device to explore experiences of cultural dislocation. He often uses the stories of ghosts, spirits, demons and gods in Chinese culture as a personification of these concepts.

Recently he has shown in the *Dobell Drawing Biennale*, 2018 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, *The Burrangong Affray* at the 4A Centre

for Contemporary Asian Art, *Primavera*, 2018 at the Museum of Contemporary Art and was commissioned for the Sydney Opera House, 2019 *Art Assembly* commission. Jason is represented by Station Gallery (Melbourne) and Chalk Horse (Sydney).

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

I work a lot with Chinese folktales/ghost stories and my Chinese/Vietnamese background. A lot of those ideas in turn often come from stories my parents or relatives told me growing up. I've always had a particular fascination with masks/costumes used in rituals and in my mothers and grandmothers history in the theatre and Chinese opera.

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

I don't know if my ideas are important but I do hope that they are at least relevant to contemporary society. For me art has been and always will be about storytelling, I don't think it is the only definition but it is very important to our society and the diverse communities that exist in it. The importance of stories that have been passed down, but also how they have been built upon, and the importance of new stories that reinterpret the old, but also the ones that spring from new roots. I hope my work has a place in this.

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

My studio practice changes depending on the project I am working on. If it is a historical project I will start with research and any artistic input will come quite late, if it is a sculptural commission I will do a few sketches and do a site visit first. I do probably 80% administration/research and 20% actual making, and the fact that the physical process of creation doesn't usually take long with me (just the nature of my work), means my studio practice is quite boring. Although most artists don't have such relative short making times, they do still spend a lot more time than people think on administration, we are basically one person small business owners attempting to run every facet by ourselves.

My inspiration comes quite naturally to me, I'll often get an image of something while on a walk or on the bus. But behind this is historical research, visiting museums, visiting galleries, reading fiction, trialling materials, talking to my peers and scrolling through Instagram archiving images. Our imagination is bound by the parameters that we set through how much work we put into nurturing it.

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

Artworks now take a longer amount of time rather than a shorter amount. Sweeping the floor before I start a studio day. Having a tidier space. Drinking more water and sleeping more.

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

Monster Chetwynd  
Enku  
\_false\_face  
Peking Opera  
Hayao Miyazaki

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

[jasonphu.com](http://jasonphu.com)

## WORKSHOP SUMMERY

### **How to draw a face (15 minutes)**

You will have multiple sheets of A4 paper and a large black marker

- Draw a circle or oval on one sheet
- Put two dots
- Draw a frown or a smile, you have drawn a face
- Draw another circular shape
- Draw two dots
- Draw a large eggplant like nose
- Draw a circular mouth

Repeat this process with different shapes and fruit or vegetable references.

Participants are encouraged to draw a their faces focusing on simplicity, maybe adding things like ears and hair.

### **What to think about:**

It is easy to draw a face, all you need is a shape and a few marks. This is a good warm up exercise and loosens students up who may not be confident about drawing a "good" face. What makes up a face? Just three dots? Or two? Or just an oval shape? Where are the ears?

Do you think these are only artworks little kids would make? Look at drawings of the Chan and Zen Buddhist painters of China and Japan - their artworks were much more simple than these.

### **How to make a mask (15 minutes)**

Pick up one of the drawings you did that you are happy with.

Cut out the shape of the head and holes where the eyes are.

Cut out a few strips of paper from an A4 sheet long ways, cut them about as wide as your thumb is long.

Staple these strips together so they form a circle that fits over your head, you'll need to measure the strips on your head where your forehead is, but don't staple this while it's on your head!

Staple this to the drawing, now you have a mask.

### **What to think about:**

If you hadn't cut the eye holes out and made the headband and just held the paper up to your face would it still be a mask?

What is a mask? Is anything you hold up to your face a mask? Can you hold a vase up to your face and would it become a mask?

### **Flat cardboard mask (15 minutes)**

Pick up a piece of flat cardboard, without using your scissors or knives tear a rough round shape, the edges can be rough or spiky or wavy if you like, these don't have to be neat. Using your scissors make two small holes in the middle of the mask that is the width of your face, you can use your face to roughly measure this (please don't use the scissors while the mask is on your face).

Thread the elastic through both holes and tie two individual knots so they don't come through, make sure the elastic adjuster on the elastic.

Tear two eye holes, these don't have to be neat. Tear a smiley face or a frowny face.

Put the mask on, how fun is that?

You should have bits of cardboard left, you can use these bits to create scales, ears, horns, noses and patterns by tearing them up, use your glue/glue gun/tape to attach these bits.

Remember things don't have to stick flat, they can stick off the mask as long as you like (as long as they still attach).

### **What to think about:**

You don't really need scissors or markers to make these masks do you?

Do you like the texture of tearing? Using your hands to tear makes a much nicer texture than scissors.

What other flat things and materials could you make masks out of?

A lot of cultures and religions throughout history and even now use masks for different reasons celebratory or ritualistic, can you think of a few examples?

Why do you think people make these celebratory or ritualistic masks? Why don't they just have their faces visible or paint their faces? Maybe they do both. If someone paints their face is that a mask?

### **Animal head with a found box or paper bag (15 minutes)**

Grab a cardboard box that fits over your head, you can use a box you have found (e.g..shoe box, cereal box) or use the brown paper bag provided.

Pick an animal real or mythological, what are the main attributes it has that distinguish it easily? Do a quick sketch of the animals head, it doesn't have to look good, you can exaggerate its main features if you want, like a cartoon.

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## WORKSHOP SUMMERY

Now tear and cut bits of the box without destroying the structure of the box so it still fits over your head and use these bits to make the main attributes of the animal, you can use a knife or scissors if you like.

Cut out some eye and mouth holes in your box or bag.

Does the box fit snugly on your head? If not you could stuff it with some pieces of paper.

### **What to think about:**

A lot of cultures and religions used animal masks, why do you think that is? Some of these cultures and religions don't exist anymore. Why do some people wear animals as clothing? There are different reasons some people think that wearing the animal as a symbol gives you the power of that animal? What other things apart from masks can you think of that do this?

### **Big Cardboard Box Mask (30 minutes)**

Make a big mask that fits on your head using the postage box provided.

Use the materials you have gathered from home to make textures, appendages and hair.

How will you make your mask comfortable?

Using the second elastic provided? Or by stuffing the inside with paper?

Will you have eye holes and mouth holes or none?

Will bits be sticking out or drooping down?

Will your mask look like something or be representative of something?

Remember the conversations and thoughts you had earlier, why are you making this mask? For a purpose or for fun?

### **What to think about:**

What do you think about masks? Has your opinion changed on them? Will you do some research on why people use masks?

Do you think there are some kind of masks you should not make because they may be sacred or offensive?

Can you think of examples of masks that are unimportant?

How do you feel wearing a mask? How does this change when wearing someone else's mask?

Take a selfie with your mask on.

### **Play time (15 minutes):**

Make a mask from your left over materials or go back and keep adding to one of the one's you've previously made. Can you rework it? Add to it? Or tear and cut away other bits?

### **What to think about:**

What should we build our masks out of in the future? Is recycling our materials important? Should we buy newly created environmentally friendly materials or should we recycle existing materials to make our masks?

### **Wrap up and discussion about other things you can find at home that you can use (15 minutes):**

Helmets and hats can be attached to the inside of masks to provide stability and comfort.

Fake Halloween wigs or beards, string, ribbons and fabric can add fun and character.

Paints, coloured markers, cellophane, paper plates, wrapping paper, egg cartons and alike can be good to add texture and form.

### **What to think about:**

What other things can be used? Look around your house and make a list. Try to think of things that aren't obvious be creative and imaginative.

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## EQUIPMENT LIST

- Box that everything will be sent in that fits over a head
- Large piece of cardboard that is stiff but can be torn by hand and fits in this box
- A4 cartridge paper (20 sheets)
- Large black marker
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Double sided tape
- Packing tape/Glue gun
- Box cutter knife
- Paper bag that can fit over your head
- 2 pieces of elastic that can easily wrap around your head and 2 elastic adjusters
- Coloured paper
- Paper plate

Extra materials you could source (not critical to workshop but in the spirit of it):

- A box that fits over your head, e.g. cereal box, shoe box, packaging
- Newspaper, tissue paper, egg carton, paper towel, napkins, string and ribbon
- Paints and coloured markers
- Fake wigs, fabric scraps or wrapping paper
- Flowers
- Glitter, sequins - anything that you can decorate a mask with!

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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Through critical and creative re-thinking of the processes of visual art - students will learn how to experiment with different objects and materials.
- 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 materials, and texture, shape and form.

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

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

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## LEARNING ACTIVITY

### **Discussion**

- Discuss the practice of mask making and wearing in different cultures, and the ways this practice is used by individuals to express who they are, their emotions, or relate to animals and spirits. What cultures can you identify that use these practices? How does Jason use masks and costume in his practice? Can you find other contemporary Australian artists that make and use masks besides Jason? (Teachers think Christian Thompson, Jacqui Stockdale and Polixeni Papapetrou)
- Look at the types of objects and materials Jason has used in his artworks. What found objects can you identify? How has Jason given new life to objects and materials that otherwise might be discarded? How has Jason combined traditional art materials like paints with found object and ornament?

- Talk about the use of craft in the arts. Look at the history and crossover of craft and mask making with the visual arts. Who are some contemporary artists that use craft methods in their practice?
- Look at the exhibition and location of one of Jason's exhibitions. How has Jason installed his works? Do you think this is an effective way to share them? Why? Why not? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this display technique? Do they help to communicate or alter the meaning of the work? How does Jason make an immersive experience? Think beyond visuals, to sound and smell. (Teachers good examples are: *where do i begin? where do i end (play)?*, 2017 at COMA Gallery, Sydney in the group show *Master of Three Worlds*; and his solo show Jason Phu at Alaska Projects, 2016.

### Concept Development

Students should begin by examining Jason's artworks and exhibitions, his use of materials and the history of mask making in cultural practices. They should discuss how Jason has drawn upon these cultural references in his own work, not just mask making but also his use of incense and candle. Students should begin by collecting cardboard, papers, string, ribbon, markers and like that they would like to use to make their masks. They should contemplate the colours and textures of the items they collected and say why they were drawn to that item or where they found it.

### Production

Students should begin with just a few sheets of paper and a pen. Following Jason's instructions they should do a few simple line and shape face drawings to loosen them up. They can discuss how easy is it to imply a face with just a few lines. Students can then start to cut, sticky and staple together things to one of their drawings, moving their mask from a two-dimensional form into a three-dimensional form. Once they have done this, they can create another mask, this time with a cardboard box they have found or a paper bag. They could begin again by drawing a face on it, or cutting away and removing sections from the eye, mouth and nose. They should experiment with ripping and tearing, not just relying on scissors or a box cutter. Once they've spent some time playing around, and seeing what techniques they enjoy they can move onto their final mask. They can work with some of their drawings and tests they've already started or start a new.

Optional - once students are happy with their masks you could organize a parade around the school yard, or through a local park. How does it feel to wear the mask? How does this change if you swap with someone else, and wear their mask? Does the mask allow you to adopt new or different characteristics? If your mask looks like a dog, do you want to act like a dog? Barking, scratching and alike?



Image | Jason Phu at Alaska Projects, 2016. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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## LINKS TO CURRICULUM

### PRIMARY & SECONDARY

#### **Present & Perform**

View the location and exhibition of Jason'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 Jason's artwork by identifying and describing technique and ideas. Consider how he makes his work. Students could also discuss mask making and cultural history.

Level 7 – 10

Analyze and interpret Jason's artworks discussing ideas and viewpoints. Compare his 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 Jason explores ideas, techniques and materials in his artworks. How are these expressed?

Levels 7 – 10

Explore Jason's art practice. Through a discussion of his use of materials and how he expresses his ideas and develops a particular style within his work. Discuss his work in terms of the themes that he 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 Jason 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 Jason has when he commences making his work, discuss his artistic practice. Using the artworks of Jason 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 Jason has used materials and techniques, cultural and craft practices and interpreted ideas and sources of inspiration in producing his 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 Jason's artist biography to understand the path of his professional development, places and people he 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 Jason's exhibition outcomes. Discuss the presentation methods he has used and what they communicate to the viewer.

## RELATED ARTISTS



### **Monster Chetwynd (b. 1973)**

Monster Chetwynd is a contemporary British artist known for her reworkings of iconic moments from cultural history in performances. Many of these playful performances are often improvised. Chetwynd's practice combines sculpture, installation, performance, painting and video. Stylistically, the performances can be described as childlike and props are made of cheap accessible material such as cardboard, textiles and foil.



### **Enku (1632-1695)**

Enku was a Japanese Monk, poet and sculptor, and is best known for carving approximately 120,000 wooden statues of Buddha and other Buddha icons during his lifetime. No two sculptures were alike, and the majority of them were coarsely or 'crudely' carved from materials such as tree stumps and scrap wood.



### **Instagram page: @\_false\_face**

The Instagram @\_false\_face is the research account of Jym Davis, who is a mask maker based in the US. Explored on this page are masks or face coverings made of varying materials, such as wire, wool, felt, textile, cigarette butts, feathers, leaves and endless other materials. The masks are explored in a less traditional manner, and can be viewed rather as "wearable art". This account poses the question: 'how can we use the things we cover our face with to express something?'



### **Peking Opera Costumes**

Peking Opera Costumes are the costumes worn in Chinese Opera, and are signified by their rich colours and intricate patterns. They are elaborate, head-to-toe costumes with headpieces, and their patterns follow a cultural symbolism, which is also embedded into all other aspects of Chinese culture. Popular colours seen in these costumes are red, deep blue, yellow/gold and green.



### **Hayao Miyazaki (b. 1941)**

Hayao Miyazaki is a Japanese director, screenwriter, author, animator, and Manga artist. He is known as a masterful story-teller, and is a co-founder of Studio Ghibli, a widely acclaimed film and production studio. Kiki's Delivery Service (1989) and My Neighbour Totoro (1988) are well-known examples of his works, which often explore fantastical, bizarre and highly imaginative storylines.





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.

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**GERTRUDE  
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**MUMA**

**HORSHAM**  
REGIONAL ART GALLERY

**sam.**  
Shepparton Art Museum

Castlemaine  
Art Museum

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.