

# EDUCATION RESOURCE

*an unreliable narrator*

Consuelo Cavaniglia + Brendan Van Hek



*an unreliable narrator*, street view. Photo: Siobhan Sloper

# KEY WORDS

Narrator

Perspective

Colour

Light

Geometry

Space

Refraction

Perception

Optics

Shape

Illusion

Shadow

Reflection

Transparent

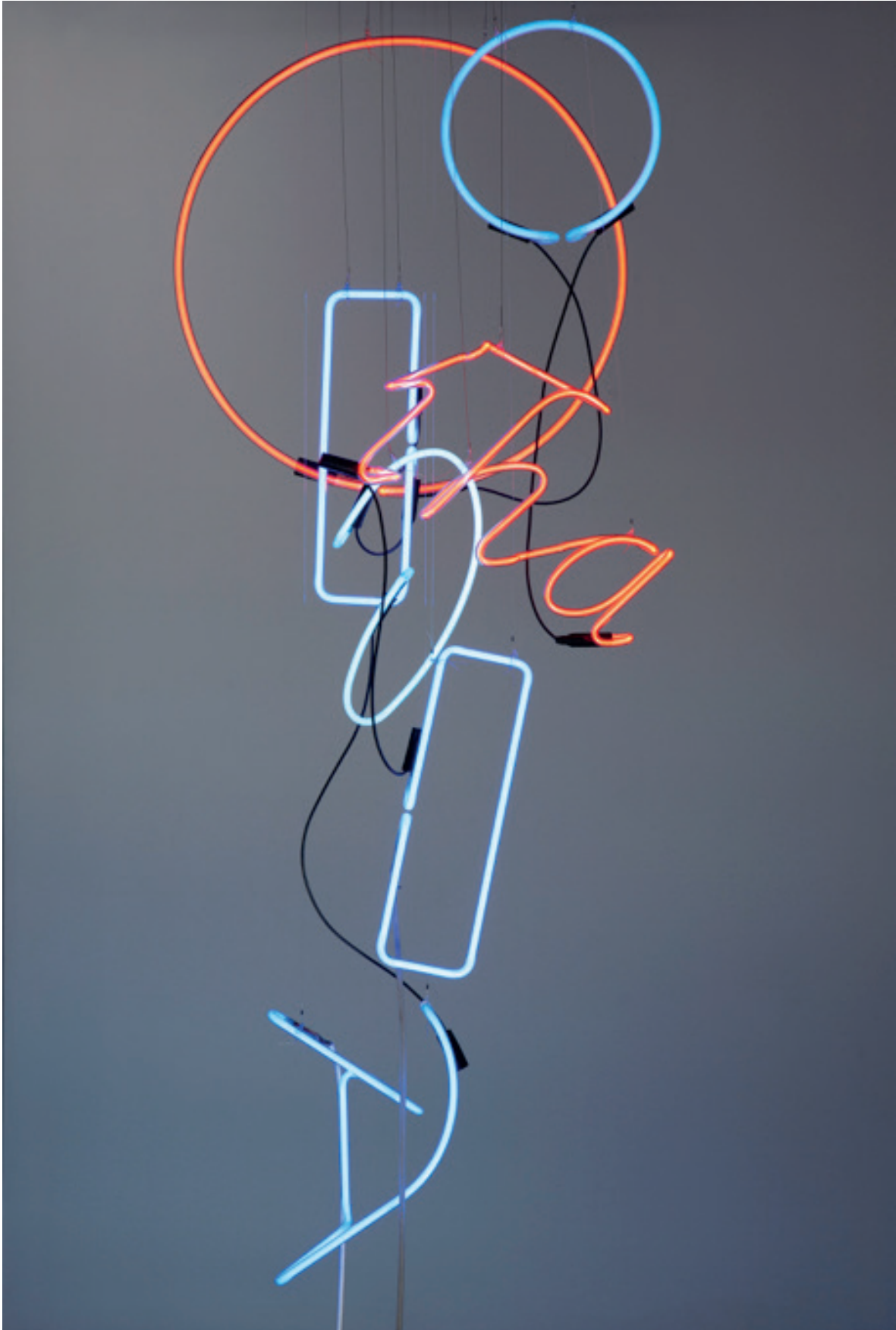
In-the-round

Viewpoints

*an unreliable narrator* is the most substantial institutional exhibition to date by Sydney-based artists Consuelo Cavaniglia and Brendan Van Hek, and their first major collaboration together. The exhibition holds the task of working in collaboration as a key conceptual anchor, exploring the nature of duality from both a spatial perspective in terms of the gallery architecture at Gertrude, but also, and importantly, the alignment of two intellectual perspectives, two approaches to the development of narrative, and two distinct artistic practices. It is from this process of attempting to synergise these perspectives, or rather, to concede their differing viewpoints and embrace such pluralism, that the exhibition adopts its title, *an unreliable narrator*.

Working across the two gallery spaces and expansive atrium of Gertrude, the exhibition is conceived as a single work, and unfolds as a series of repeated scenarios, like versions of the same story, told and retold from slightly divergent perspectives. Each of these scenarios presents variations on the narrative – be it through form, material or scale – so as to set forth a collection of propositions without necessitating a delineation of hierarchy or authority.

While Cavaniglia's practice holds concerns for the perception and understanding of space – personal, psychological, architectural and environmental – and how we both exist, and appear to exist within spatial environments, Van Hek's practice is embedded within and informed by personal narratives, cultural politics and the proposition of and dismantlement of fictions. Both artists share an astute attention to refined production, material austerity and the cognitive and perceptual effects of colour and light, respectively explored principally through sculpture and installation. *an unreliable narrator* amplifies and calls into question the architecture of the building and collapses the delineation between the internal realm of the gallery spaces and the external public environment.



Brendan Van Hek, *signage*, 2019, found neon, steel cable, metal rack, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

# BRENDAN VAN HEK

Brendan Van Hek was born in Perth, and lives and works in Sydney. Selected recent solo exhibitions include: *the continual condition*, Turner Galleries, Perth (2017); *the scene was set*, Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney (2017); *Colour Restraint* (in collaboration with Rebecca Baumann), Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney (2015); *Untitled* (in collaboration with Rebecca Baumann), Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand (2015); and *Some Kind of Love Story*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney (2011). Selected recent group exhibitions include: *Autoluminescent*, La Trobe Art Institute, Bendigo (2019); *Superposition of three types*, Artspace, Sydney (2017); *Amour Fou*, New Westminister New Media Gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2015); *Becoming: Worlds In Flux*, C24 Gallery, New York, USA (2012); *Shifting Geometries*, The Australian Embassy, Washington DC, USA (2012); *NEW11*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2011); *REMIX*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth (2011); and *TarraWarra Contemporary 2010*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Victoria (2010).

Brendan Van Hek is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney.



Consuelo Cavaniglia, *Untitled (simultaneous spaces)*, 2016, galvanised steel, grey mirror and black acrylic 200 x 120 x 220 cm, (rear) *Untitled*, 2016, pigment ink on wall, dimensions variable, installation view, Artspace, Sydney. Photo: Zan Wimberley

# CONSUELO CAVANIGLIA

Consuelo Cavaniglia was born in Rome, Italy, and lives and works in Sydney. Selected recent solo exhibitions include: *between and among objects*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne (2018); *the light that catches*, Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney (2017); *the distant other*, STATION, Melbourne (2016); *in the distance a pool of light was not what it seemed*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2015); and *what we know of each other*, Sydney College of the Arts Gallery (2015). Selected recent group exhibitions include: *IN-Formalism*, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney (2019); *The Theatre is Lying: The inaugural Macfarlane Commissions*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2018); *Vanishing Point*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney (2018); *The Shape of Memory*, The Lock-Up Contemporary Art Space, Newcastle (2017); *Black Square – 100 Years (1913 – 1915)*, tcb inc., Melbourne (2015); *Arts NSW Visual Art Fellowship (Emerging)*, Artspace, Sydney (2016); and *Bliss*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth (2013).

Consuelo Cavaniglia is represented by STATION; and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney.

# VISUAL ARTS 7 - 10

## Explore and Express

### Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAE033)

Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to explore and develop themes, concepts or ideas in artworks.

### Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAE034)

Explore how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realise their intentions in artworks.

### Levels 9 - 10 (VCAVAE040)

Explore the visual arts practices and styles as inspiration to develop a personal style, explore, express ideas, concepts, and themes in artworks.

### Levels 9-10 (VCAVAE041)

Explore how artists manipulate materials, techniques, technologies and processes to develop and express their intentions in art works.

## Respond and Interpret

### Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAR038)

Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in artworks and how they are viewed by audiences.

### Levels 9-10 (VCAVAR045)

Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences.

## Visual Arts Practices

### Levels 7 - 8 (VCAVAV035)

Experiment with materials, techniques, technologies and processes in a range of art forms to express ideas, concepts and themes in artworks.

### Levels 9-10 (VCAVAE040)

Select and manipulate materials, techniques, and technologies and processes in a range of art forms to express ideas, concepts and themes.



# VISUAL ARTS 7 - 10

## Questions ( in the gallery)

Describe what you see in the gallery colours and shapes.

What medium and materials do you see?

How do the colours make you feel? Does it remind you of anything?

How does your perception of an artwork change from where you view it?

Are there multiple possible meanings you could draw from this work?

Does this exhibition remind you of any other artworks you have seen before?

## Activity ( in the classroom)

Discuss the properties of various materials in terms of their interactions with light, focus on concepts of opacity, transparency, translucency, reflection and refraction. Students should experiment with one of each object or material that is transparent, reflects or refracts light, plus a torch or overhead projector. Have students document their experiments by taking photos with a phone or digital camera.

Example materials:

Transparent - Acetate sheets or Cellophane

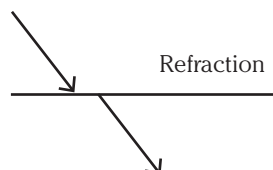
Reflect - Mirror or aluminium foil

Refract - Crystal or Perspex or water



Discussions with students can focus on:

- How light travels from sources like the sun in a straight line
- How shadows form when one object blocks some or all of the light shining on it
- How light is refracted or distorted when passed through objects like perspex or water
- How light is reflected at an equal angle to which it travels when shone into a mirror.



# VCE STUDIO ARTS + ARTS

## VCE Studio Art

### **Unit 3, Area of Study 3: Artists and Studio Practices**

Students analyse how specific artworks are presented and demonstrate their understanding of the artists' and curators' consideration of how artworks are displayed within the art exhibitions. They consider the artists' use of materials, techniques and processes, and the use of art elements and art principles to demonstrate aesthetic qualities and styles in artworks.

### **Unit 4, Area of Study 3: Art Industry Contexts**

Students examine a variety of art exhibitions and review the methods and considerations involved in the preparation, presentation and conservation of artworks. Students analyse how specific artworks are presented and demonstrate their understanding of the artists' and curators' consideration of how artworks are displayed within the art exhibitions.

## VCE Art

### **Unit 2, Area of Study 1: Contemporary artworks and culture**

In this area of study students focus on the ways in which art reflects and communicates the values, beliefs and traditions of the societies for and in which it was created. Particular emphasis is placed on the influence of contemporary materials, techniques, ideas and approaches to making and presenting artworks. Students explore and investigate the ways in which the world has changed and continues to change over time, the factors that influence these changes and their impact on artistic practice.

### **Unit 4, Area of Study 1: Discussing Art**

In this area of study, students discuss art ideas and issues and the varying interpretations about the role of art in society. Students select a statement about an art idea and related issues that they research, analyse and interpret.

# VCE STUDIO ARTS + ARTS

## **Question** (in the gallery)

The exhibition is conceived as “a single work, and unfolds as a series of repeated scenarios, like versions of the same story, told and retold from slightly divergent perspectives”... and is “the alignment of two intellectual perspectives, two approaches to the development of narrative, and two distinct artistic practices”.

What art elements or principals within the exhibiton can you see repeated? Can you find pairings or dualalities in the works?

What visual or spatial considerations can you identify within the galleries? Do you think the idea of the ‘unreliable narrator’ is clear within this exhibition? Can you tell this exhibiton design was a collaborative process? How do you think the collaborative approach to exhibition making has influenced the final outcome? Is it harmoneous? or are there clear tensions?

## **Activity** (in the classroom)

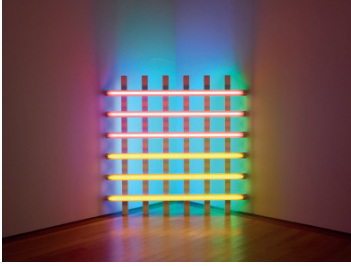
A key outcome for *Unit 2 and 3 of Studio Art* is the ability to research and draw connections between at least two artists and their artworks from different historical and cultural contexts. In this activity you will continue to consolidate this process.

Using an artwork of Consuelo Cavaniglia or Brendan Van Hek as a base, choose another artist and artwork to compare their work with. Your research should focus on comparing the historical and cultural contexts in which both these artists were working and the artworks themselves. You will do this through an investigation of how personal and historical influences have affected both artists.

In this activity you should create both a written comparision of their cultural and historical influences and contexts as well as visual analysis where you annotate each artwork and draw connections between the two.

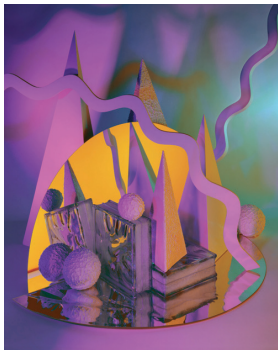
# RELATED ARTISTS

## Dan Flavin (1933 - 1996)



Dan Flavin was an American minimalist artist famous for creating sculptural objects and installations from commercially available fluorescent light fixtures. His illuminated sculptures offer a rigorous formal and conceptual investigation of space and light.

## Barbara Kasten (1936 -)



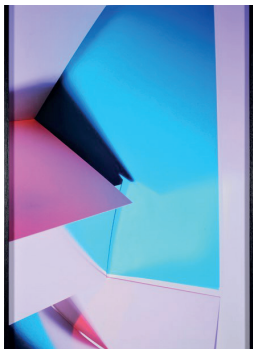
Barbara Kasten is an American artist, influenced by the Bauhaus movement. Her photography is often inspired by the act of depicting a three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional plane. She often uses mirrors, lights, and props for conceptually-based pieces - her later works have continued to pure abstraction.

## Daniel Von Sturmer (1972 -)



Daniel von Sturmer's practice involves a range of media and approaches including video, photography and installation. His works orchestrate a field of relations between people and things, light and space, video and time, where the encounter between audience and artwork reveals a dialectical interplay of viewer and viewed. His approach is experimental, playfully testing expectations of quotidian occurrences and ordinary experience.

## Lydia Wegner (1988 -)



Lydia Wegner's photographic practice examines the tradition of still life in a contemporary, consumer driven society. Her careful compositions suspend objects of the everyday in a state of limbo, their teetering balance reinforcing the fragility and ephemerality of items that would often be discarded as rubbish.

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**Narrator** - A person who narrates something, especially a character who recounts the events of a novel.

**Unreliable narrator** - An unreliable narrator is a character who tells a story with a lack of credibility or switches between points of view.

**Perspective** - 1. A particular perspective is a particular way of thinking about something, especially one that is influenced by your beliefs or experiences. Your point of view.  
2. the appearance of objects, buildings, etc, relative to each other, as determined by their distance from the viewer, or the effects of this distance on their appearance.

**Colour** - The property possessed by an object of producing different sensations in the eye as a result of the way it reflects or emits light.

**Geometry** - The branch of mathematics concerned with the properties and relations of points, lines, surfaces, solids, and higher dimensional analogues.

**Space** - 1. The dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist.  
2. The position (two or more items) at a distance from one another.

**Refraction** - the phenomenon of light being deflected in passing through the interface between one medium and another or through a medium of varying density.

**Perception** - the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses.

**Optics** - relating to the eye or vision.

**Illusion** - An idea or belief that is not true, or something that is not what it seems to be.

**Shadow** - a dark area or shape produced by a body coming between rays of light and a surface.

**Reflection** - the throwing back of light by a surface without absorbing it.

**Transparent** - a material that allows light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly seen.

**In-the-round** - in sculpture, this means an object that is viewable from all 360 degrees; you can walk and view it from each angle.

**Viewpoints** - a person's opinion, point of view, or position from which they stand.

## RESOURCES

**Gertrude Contemporary:** <http://www.gertrude.org.au/exhibitions/>

**Station Gallery:** <https://stationgallery.com.au/artists/consuelo-cavaniglia>

**Sarah Cottier Gallery:** [https://www.sarahcottiergallery.com/artist/38/Brendan\\_van\\_Hek.htm#a38](https://www.sarahcottiergallery.com/artist/38/Brendan_van_Hek.htm#a38)