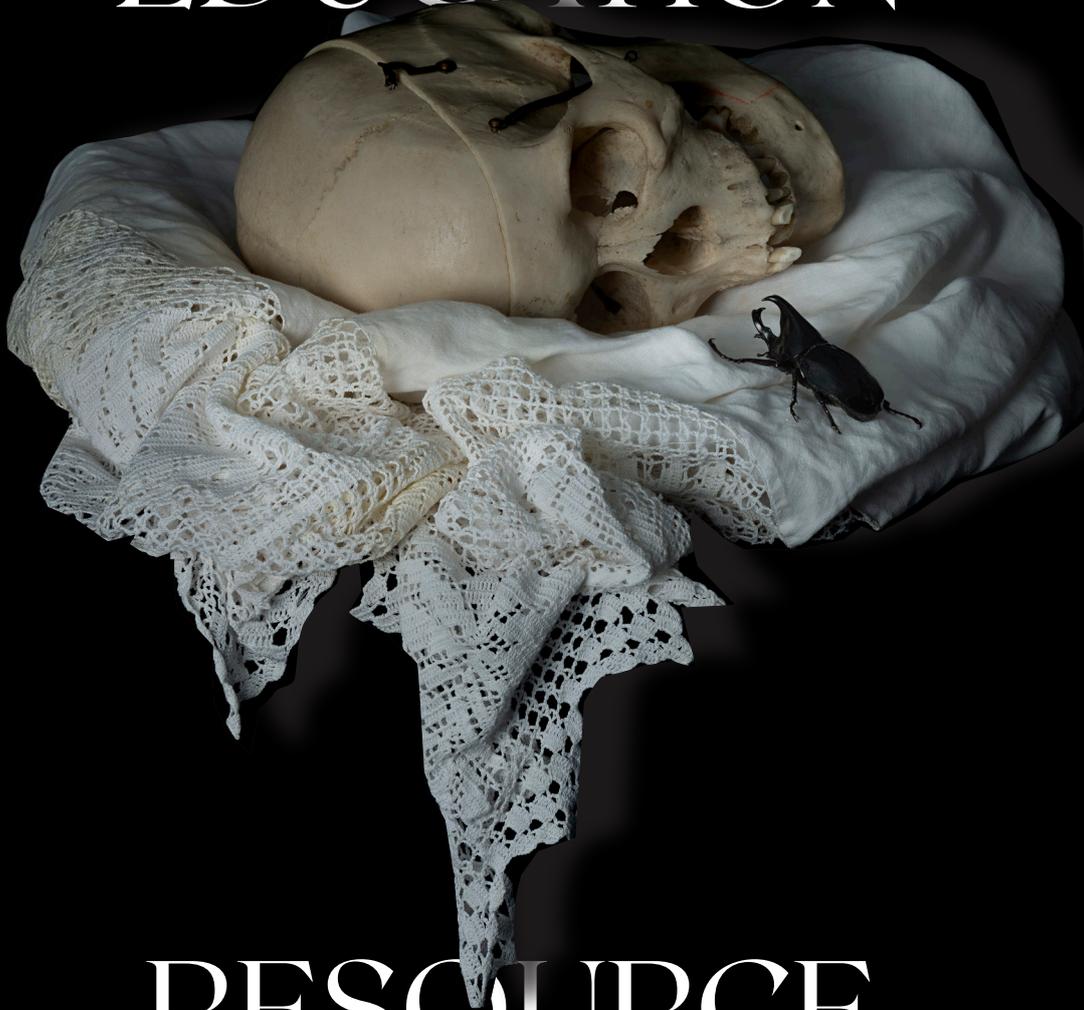


The
ENQUIRING
LIGHT

EDUCATION



RESOURCE

Art Gallery | Royal Park
20.04.19-22.09.19



City of LAUNCESTON
QUEEN VICTORIA
ART GALLERY Royal Park



About Angela Casey

The Enquiring Light brings together new and recent works by contemporary Australian artist Angela Casey in her chosen medium: photography, focusing on ideas reflecting the ephemeral nature of life, the ever-constant presence of death and the tension between ourselves and our environment.

Things to consider

- Angela Casey is an artist who refines her practice within her chosen medium. She encourages us to look anew at familiar objects, challenging our pre-conceived notions about everyday life in a broader, more abstract way. Consider why the artist has chosen to explore her ideas through the use of particular objects and lighting to create the desired effects and new ways of looking at the world. Compare her works to the Dutch Vanitas artists and early Renaissance art and consider the references.
- Symbolism is an important theme throughout Angela's work. Think about which objects she has used to create visual meaning in her work. Can these objects have a functional and more abstract meaning at the same time? Give examples.
- Many of Angela's still life works are very finely crafted and illustrate instinctive connection to classical composition. It may be useful to contemplate how commitment, self-discipline, and patience are important in art and life, and how instinctive composition is synonymous with hard work and commitment to craft.
- A sense of whimsy is evident in some of Angela's works and it is clear that despite the serious message of her work the artist is having fun and letting her creativity wander freely. The result is that some of her pieces have a natural earthiness, and despite the themes being most serious the works maintain a lightness and hope for the future. Consider how we can include whimsy in our art work and what roles humour can have in communicating ideas and making art.

How does the artist communicate her intention?

- How does the artist communicate her intention?
- There are many ways you can interpret the visual metaphors in the artist's work and therefore appreciate the artworks more.
- Reading the labels (signage throughout the exhibition and under some of the artworks) will give you a brief background about the artist, what ideas she is interested in and where she draws her inspiration.
- The title of a work can sometimes reveal what the artist intends to communicate or provide a clue about the subject matter and her thought process.
- Looking at what has been used (and how) to create artworks can tell you more about the artist's intention.
- Look closely at the artwork. Take your time to get close to the pieces and study all the details. Often, the more you look at a work, the more will be revealed to you.
- It is important to remember that looking at art is a subjective experience and the way that you see an artwork is unique to you. Certain works may 'speak' to you more than others.

Themes in The Enquiring Light

As the title of this exhibition suggests, light is a through line that runs across this entire exhibition of Angela's work. The works in *The Enquiring Light* explore concepts of transience, connection to environment and symbolism. Looking closely at Angela's work *Artifice* for example, reveals how intricate such works are, taking precision and deliberate intent to create the still life composition that creates the mood of familiar yet strange, ephemeral yet timeless. In another work, *The Future of Light*, Angela displays the complexity that a well-constructed photograph can portray through two simple objects and a lighting effect. For all the meaning is portrayed in the choices of colour, objects, the stance of the bird and the text.

Angela's work has been known for not only the technical skill of her photographic work, but also her challenge to the traditional definition of beauty. She adopts a tried and true still life approach for her works in *The Enquiring Light*; inspired by the series of paintings from the Dutch Vanitas artists who used traditional still life motifs to portray the futility of valuing material goods because of the transient

nature of life itself. They alluded to the biblical reference in Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:8, where *vanitas* was translated from the Hebrew word *hevel*, which included the concept of transitoriness. Angela includes everyday objects such as plastic garbage bags to the traditional symbols of death, decay and deception not only to give the viewer a sense of the familiar, but also to send home a modern message of sustainability.

The title *The Enquiring Light*, is very apt, as Angela's masterful use of lighting effects both enhance and illustrate the meaning of each work, but at the same time they set the mood and create expectations in the audience of a dramatic revelation about the human condition.



Still Life composition

Still life composition is one of the oldest traditions in visual art. It can take many forms. As people, we are interested in the lives of others, but it is in still life composition that people as subjects are excluded and we are forced to focus on the form rather than the function of the objects in telling stories about who we are and what we have done. Sometimes we look for human features in non-living things too.



Symbolism

Some of the objects used in the works are everyday items but they are juxtaposed with more macabre objects to create a tension that make us question what they mean. Our awareness of the visual symbols and how we view these everyday objects is important in how we perceive reality and ourselves.



Reference to other artists

Angela Casey is an artist who has been inspired by the works of the Dutch Vanitas artists and has referenced them in her work. However, the lighting effects used are also reminiscent of the Renaissance artists who use the same techniques to create dramatic focus. Angela instinctively responds to these influences by creating technologically complex images as means to expand these concepts and express her own ideas and observations.



Victoriana Science and Spiritualism

The exhibition has strong references to the Victorian era, both in look and feel and in content. The artist examines the Victorian interest in science, magic and the supernatural as an awakening of possibilities, a sense of wondering about the world that, even though in hindsight may have been misguided, was still about exploring boundaries between the known and the unknown



Chiaroscuro and Sfumato

Learning how to do new things and master certain skills takes hard work and commitment. The same is true in making art. Angela uses a combination of two techniques known as *Chiaroscuro* and *Sfumato* to create dramatic impact for her work through painstaking selection and manipulation of lighting effects in her photographs. The title *The Enquiring Light* focuses our attention on the use of the light to illuminate our journey to a new look at somewhat familiar objects in a revealing way.



Still Life Composition

This is a photograph titled *Unstill Life*. It was produced using classic still life compositional techniques. However, the artist then introduces the surprise human element to create tension in the scene. We are both startled and disturbed to see such an unusual 'object' in the classical theme that is designed to create harmony and balance. Think about the ways we can use compositional elements to create either order or chaos within the subject of our art.

Have you ever made a judgement about a person purely on the basis of how they look? We call this 'objectification', or treating people like things. How can we use this to send messages within our work?

Looking at this work, there is an element of whimsy. Discuss the role that whimsy and humour can play in art making.

Still Life Composition

Look very closely at the symmetry of this piece. What effect is created by bejewelling the mouldy apple with fake jewels? What role does lighting and composition play in our understanding of this work?

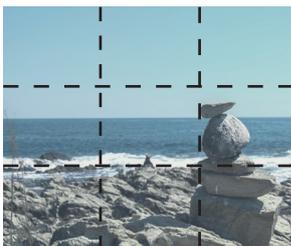
What do you think the photo reveals about the artist's thinking?

How does the artist use focal point, the rule of thirds and other compositional techniques to great advantage in this work? What is the effect on the viewer?

Focal point



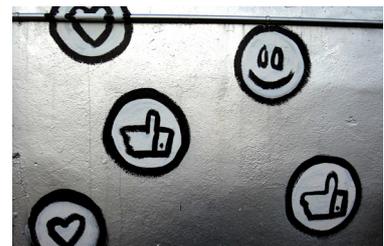
Rule of thirds

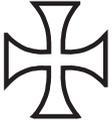


Perspective



Odd number of objects





Symbols

Look carefully at the work titled *Artifice*. What do you notice that is unsettling?

Get close to the work and notice all of the objects contained in the work. What do you associate with each of these objects? (Do a word association process with a partner to discover the obscure connections that might come to you).

Look at the list below of Renaissance symbols. Spend some time thinking about what you associate with the same objects.

The title *Artifice* suggests a trick or deception. What do you think the false idea may be?



Symbols

Look very closely at the photograph *Succession and Decay*. This work is full of symbolism. How would you sum up the artist's intention for this work? What symbols does she use to send this powerful message?

What animal do these skulls belong to? Why was this animal chosen?

Observe the use of visual repetition in this work. How does it link and at the same time separate these symbols? How does the use of light set the tone of this piece?

Renaissance Symbols

Skulls - death, decay,

Ivy - fidelity

Owls - wisdom, sacrifice, resurrection, the soul

Extinguished candle - lack of devoutness and piety

Orange - free will

Red thread - red denotes excitement, intensity and sin

Book - incomplete education or knowledge

Moth - butterflies were indicative of resurrection

These objects have no associated Renaissance meaning - what do they mean to you?

Reptile -

Matches -

Black plastic garbage bags -



Reference to Vanitas artists

The artist has been inspired by the subject of the Dutch Vanitas artists. The artist then added her own stamp to these compositions by including everyday items and embalmed animals to bring the message into a contemporary context. Think about the ways we can be inspired to create new work which references artists from the past.

Looking at this work, there are clearly macabre elements. Discuss the combination of traditional and modern, of abstract and concrete and of strange and familiar. What effect is produced by these visual contrasts? How do they relate to the work of Pieter Claeszoon?



Pieter Claeszoon- Vanitas - Still Life



Matthias Stomer - Annunciazione

Reference to Renaissance art

Look very closely at the use of light and colour. How are these two elements of the artist's work related to Renaissance art?

How do they emphasize the artist's intention?

Observe the source of light in Stomer's *Annunciazione* below. Notice how the faces in the work are illuminated, in dramatic detail. Think about the source of light in Angela's work: *Whatever is important to you*. What dramatic details are illuminated in this work and why? Discuss the use of negative space in both works.



Chiaroscuro & Sfumato

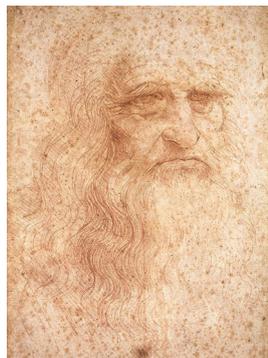
- The term chiaroscuro literally means 'light & dark'. It is commonly used to describe the contrast between these two extremes that can be used to make objects stand out in artworks. Angela skilfully uses a combination of this and sfumato, ('to tone down' or 'to evaporate like smoke'), fine shading that produces soft, imperceptible transitions between colours and tones to bring both clarity and subtlety to her work.
- Which feature is most prevalent in *The Gleaners* (above)?
- What techniques does Angela use to produce this dramatic effect?
- Why is it rarely used in photography?
- What effect does it have in this work?

Chiaroscuro & Sfumato

- Look very closely at *A Gown for Betsheb*. Once again this work highlights the artist's trademark use of a blend of these two techniques.
- Which features show a use of chiaroscuro?
- Which show a use of sfumato?
- What effect do you think these techniques have in our interpretation of the work?
- What do they reveal about the human condition?



Example of Chiaroscuro



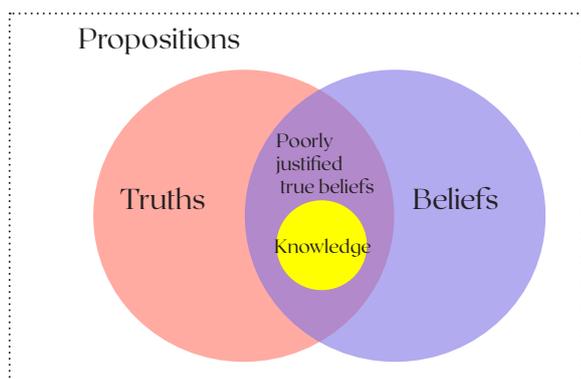
Example of Sfumato



Victoriana

The Victorian era saw a fascination with science as well as spiritualism. What to a modern observer seems two very different ends of the spectrum seemed indelibly linked to our forefathers. Angela poses the same question to her contemporary audience.

- How does science help us to explain the inexplicable?
- What techniques does Angela use to produce the effect of linking what is real and what is merely refracted light?
- William Crooke's dilemma was real. Should he risk his scientific credibility by chasing the proof of what he only suspected or risk everything for a chance to discover new things? What can we take from this?



Victoriana

The Conversation is a classical piece that references the daintiness and refinement of Victorian civilised society in the quality of the fabric, yet highlights their obsession with the afterlife with the conversation being had between the skull and beetle. The artist has captured the very spirit of the Victorian era when scientific and technological advances were so rapid that they encouraged a kind of magical thinking and were accompanied by a shadowy discourse of the occult. The natural and the supernatural became blurred.

- What do you think the discussion might be about?
- How does the artist use Victorian ways of thinking yet bring it into the 21st century?
- How does the work make you feel and why?
- Where does the artist stand in the dilemma between the known and unknown?

For Teachers

Links to Australian Curriculum Learning Areas

The Arts

- Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal style, reflecting on the styles of artists (ACAVAM125)
- Evaluate how representations communicate artistic intentions in artworks they make and view to inform their future art making (ACAVAR130)
- Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131).

English

- Analyse and explain the use of symbols, icons and myth in still and moving images and how these augment meaning (ACELA1560)
- Evaluate the impact on audiences of different choices in the representation of still and moving images (ACELA1572).

History

- Continuity and change in beliefs and values that have influenced the Australian way of life (ACDSEH149)
- The growth and influence of the environment movement within Australia and overseas and developments in ideas about the environment, including the concept of ‘sustainability’ (ACDSEH126).

General Capabilities

Literacy

Understand how visual elements create meaning.

Critical and Creative Thinking

Students imagine possibilities and connect ideas through considering alternatives, seeking solutions and putting ideas into action. They explore situations and generate alternatives to guide actions and experimentation and assess options and actions when seeking solutions. In developing and acting with critical and creative thinking, students:

- Imagine possibilities and connect ideas
- Consider alternatives
- Seek solutions and put ideas into action.

Personal and Social Capabilities

- Reflect critically on their emotional responses
- Articulate their personal value system

Ethical Understanding

- Recognise ethical concepts
- Explore ethical concepts in context
- Reason.

Cross Curriculum Priorities

Sustainability

- Identify and critique a problem, need or opportunity; generate ideas and concepts; and create solutions. They give prime consideration to sustainability by anticipating and balancing economic, environmental and social impacts.