INTERPRETIVE LEARNING GUIDE

NEW PSYCHEDELIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND ART MUSEUM, BRISBANE
7 MAY-3 JULY 2011
ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This Interpretive Learning Guide is intended for use in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition New Psychedelia. The Guide may be used by visitors prior to, during or following a visit to this exhibition. Alternatively, this online resource may be used for independent e-learning experiences by tertiary students, senior high school students and teachers. It is available to download from www.artmuseum.uq.edu.au/learning.

This learning resource aims to enhance audience understanding of the exhibition New Psychedelia. As curator Sebastian Moody writes:

The exhibition New Psychedelia surveys works made by contemporary Australian artists over the past decade that present psychedelic tendencies, and examines why new life is being breathed into psychedelic art. Renewed interest in psychedelia has evolved in response to the growing impact on daily life of global capitalism and technology, psychedelia serving as a strategy to transcend those constraints. While not driven by a drug culture as it was in the 1960s, conjuring the spirit of these experiences remains critical to the new psychedelia. The aesthetic is apparent in hallucinogenic mandalas, fractals, optical illusions, cosmic landscapes, pop typography, vibrating DayGlo colours and ‘trippy’ lights.

Central to all of the artworks in the exhibition is the desire to expand consciousness. Those engaging in a new psychedelia may also look to find the spiritual within consumer society, negotiate perception within an ever-expanding technological matrix, and explore neo-shamanism and other forms of mysticism. By engaging with psychedelic ideas and aesthetics, contemporary artists seek a transformative power, an ability to channel moments of transcendence or at least to suggest that this moment is possible.

The artists featured in this Interpretive Guide are Belle Bassin, Damiano Bertoli, Geoff Kleem, Nick Selenitsch, Nike Savvas, Kate Shaw, Noël Skrzypczak, and John Young. Each artist page provides information about the artist and their work in the exhibition, and will help you understand the key themes explored in New Psychedelia.

The eight artist statements and focus questions are intended to support the inquiry learning model of the Queensland Visual Art senior curriculum and align with the general objectives of making and appraising. The guide provides opportunities for Year 11 and 12 senior students to:

- extend their knowledge and experience of contemporary visual arts practice and career paths;
- develop their capacity to research, develop, resolve and reflect on their own and others’ art works in the specific context of audiences and purposes; and
- explore how the visual arts reinforce and challenge their own individual experiences.

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BELLE BASSIN

With a background in drawing, Belle Bassin works across a variety of media. In *Disruptive Peach* Bassin harnesses the power of colour to draw the viewer into a two-dimensional energy field. She believes an ‘internal resonance’ can be achieved when particular colours, which attract and repulse each other, are combined. Bassin sees this resonance as a spiritual exploration capable of heightening the consciousness of the viewer, and has singled out the colour peach as a ‘disruptive force.’ *Disruptive Peach* was originally exhibited in a gallery where the roof and the floor were painted in a peach colour.

**BELLE BASSIN**

During the conception of *Disruptive Peach*, I was undergoing a form of shamanic spiritual training. This particular type of training lasted for a year and a half. The training involved making contact with the spirit world, conversing and journeying through time and space. The activities became a vehicle to transform myself through the clarification of my energy fields and the confrontation of my conscious and unconscious minds’ intentions and choices.

*Disruptive Peach* was the last body of work created whilst undertaking this training. I engaged the materials I was working with as live energy fields (paper and watercolours).

I went about composing colours, using myself as a channel to mix up the right composition of tones. The peach colour became the most important, consisting of the highest and lowest notes (the warmest blue, hottest pink, purest yellow and the creamiest most illuminating white).

It was in this peach colour that I found a disruptive force, anything that has the potential to intensely lift your consciousness can involve the shattering of old structures that your reality has rested upon, initiating a loss of stability and in this case a natal soothing and vulgarly maddening peach free-fall.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

**Reflect**

Consider Belle Bassin’s statement about her experience of shamanic spiritual training and her choice of the colours for *Disruptive Peach*. Think about creating a body of work that explores the relationship between ideas of internal resonance and particular colours.

**Research**

Belle Bassin makes reference to conversing and journeying through time and space in her artist statement. Assess the significance of her use of the triptych.
Of all the artists in the *New Psychedelia* exhibition, Damiano Bertoli has perhaps most consistently and directly addressed the psychedelia of the 1960s. His work explores our sense of perception and reality in relation to time and, consequently, to technology. With works carrying the title *Continuous Moment*, he collages different points of history – mainly countercultural events from the 1960s ranging from the murders committed by the Manson family in 1969 to the Italian radical architectural collective Superstudio and their dystopian ‘Continuous Monument’ of the same year – as a tactic to collapse time.

Damiano Bertoli 1969 –
*Continuous Moment: 2 + 2* 2011
collage and pencil on paper, 47.0 x 42.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne
Photo: Tony Martin

In *Continuous Moment: 2 + 2*, Mick and Keith of the Rolling Stones exhibit the two ‘faces’ of abandon and intoxication - reverie and regret; they are enacting in the personal realm the crescendo and denouement of possible worlds unrealised.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

**Develop**
Carefully re-read Damiano Bertoli’s artist statement and discuss the representation of the idea of time in this series of collages. Consider how you might collage different points of history in your own work.

**Reflect**
Reflect on and create a body of work focusing on contemporary countercultural events and predict how such events may change our perception of reality over time.
Damiano Bertoli 1969 – Whiteys on the moon – Cathy & George 2006
digital print on canvas, 75.0 x 75.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne

digital print on canvas, 75.0 x 75.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne
The Good Forest is a large-scale stereo photographic representation that is produced as an inkjet print and viewed through 3D glasses in the exhibition space.

GEOFF KLEEM

The Good Forest is an anaglyph stereo photograph which I’ve created via contemporary digital imaging and printing processes. Anaglyph stereo photographs were first produced in the 19th century not long after photography was invented. The purpose of stereo images was to provide the effect of depth in conventional photographs, to heighten the ‘realness’ of an image. This type of image making has been used by many artists to explore a perplexing idea: how to create a three dimensional image on a two dimensional surface.

When I made The Good Forest my intention was to create a utopian view of a forest glade at the same scale as the original site then to displace it within the museum. One of my objectives in doing this was to create an active physical relationship between the viewer and the virtual work by way of scale.

The silhouette image on the surface of the print might be interpreted as a creature caught in the gaze of the viewer; the silhouette is also a very early method of imaging. In a sense The Good Forest could be construed as a metaphor for the relationship generated between the art work and the viewer, each regarding the other while caught in each other’s gaze.

My interest in using the stereo process to create this work was to heighten the viewer’s sense of the act of seeing. I was not so much making a work intended to create a perfect representation in space but to make the viewer aware of space and the physical act of looking.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Research
Find out as much as you can about the history of the anaglyph photograph and research how artists, including Marcel Duchamp, have used stereo photographic techniques. You might like to read this article as a starting point for your research. [www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/Multimedia/Shearer/Shearer10.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/Multimedia/Shearer/Shearer10.html)

Resolve
Analyse Geoff Kleem’s use of optical illusion, space, and the act of looking to highlight relationships between his artwork and the viewer.

Reflect
How does the experience of viewing The Good Forest through 3D glasses affect your response to the work? Did you like it or dislike it? Why?
NIKE SAVVAS

Much of the work by Nike Savvas consists of large-scale installations that ‘translate’ painting into three dimensions and popular culture into high art. Her practice deals with blurring the boundaries between disciplines, genres and materials to create her own unique iconography. The purpose is to create art that celebrates and debunks certain ideologies with a view to re-defining an experience of perception. Savvas combines colour theory with mysticism in her Sliding ladder series.

NIKE SAVVAS

The Sliding ladder series is named after an algebraic equation \((x^2/3 + y^2/3 = L^2/3)\) that gave rise to string art in the 1960s and 1970s. In this I reference optical art, for example Bridget Riley, and use this in a broader sense, as a means to address different perceptual modalities.

It is inspired as much by a playful referencing of formal architectonic structure as it is in its use of colour systems in space. Premised on the translation of equations into geometric patterns and abstract forms, it combines aspects of mysticism, theories of sun gazing, altered states, and ideas that pertain to the expanded field of painting.

The Sliding ladder series uses wool as a container for the colour and is based on my intuitive responses to the geometric forms that I play with. The forms set up a number of propositions that I then respond to. I avoid making my colour choices too polite and familiar. I try to problematise them by creating discords that work well together.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Develop
Discuss the intuitive process of art making described by Nike Savvas and her interest in addressing different experiences of perception.

Reflect
Compare and contrast Nike Savvas’ use of geometrics, colour and three dimensions to challenge the boundaries of art making. What does her work have in common with the work of other artists in the New Psychedelia exhibition?
Nike Savvas 1964 –
Sliding ladder: Dihexagonal #1 2010
wood, wool and steel, overall 96.0 x 96.0 x 40.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and BRENSPACE, Sydney
Photo: Jamie North
Nick Selenitsch’s handmade Frisbee ‘money mandalas’ are decorated with patterns made from different currency symbols.

NICK SELENITSCH

The psychic income works are about everything that international currency symbols might represent, everything that a mandala might represent, and everything that the collapsing of these two symbolic references together might represent. This obviously describes a ridiculous amount of information and the situation is not being made simpler by the idea that the works are also about nothing: pure, confused, blissful nothing. In fact, they are about contradiction; about a desire to depict a state where evading any singular conclusion is the goal and finishing with the outcome “I don’t know” is precisely the point of the exercise.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Research
Research the spiritual meaning of the ‘mandala’. Think about the symbolic meaning of this reference in Nick Selenitsch’s psychic income (frisbee) series and the theme of global capitalism in the New Psychedelia exhibition. Consider developing a body of work that focuses on your own uniquely designed symbols.

Develop
Nick Selenitsch’s artist statement suggests the psychic income works are multifaceted in meaning. Yet paradoxically, he also states these artworks are about nothing. Explore this notion of the artist’s detachment to meaning and the critical role of the viewer in this context.
Kate Shaw’s ‘irrational geographies’ suggest, rather than delineate, floating dreamscapes in which imagination and reality merge.

**KATE SHAW**

My practice re-interprets notions of what constitutes landscape painting, both within an art historical context and a contemporary social context. The paintings deal with the tensions and dichotomies in both the depiction of the natural world and our relationship to it. I am concurrently exploring the sublime in nature whilst imbuing a sense of toxicity and artificiality in this depiction. The intention is to reflect upon the contradiction between our inherent connection to the natural world and continual distancing from it.

The paint pours comprise acrylic paint, inks and mediums. I am fascinated by the way the movement of the paint mimics something from the natural world such as a lava flow, a landslide, an avalanche. Within the dried paint pour I look for something that looks like a tree branch, a cliff or a mountain and then cut and collage the pieces. I use airbrush to achieve sky and watery effects and finally resin as a finishing surface.

I have been influenced by the way a painter such as Laura Owens uses various techniques in the ‘vocabulary’ of painting to make it evident to the viewer that we are ‘completing’ the painting. My paintings aim to convey ideas of nature, alchemy and creation by operating on one level as a landscape and on another as abstraction.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

**Resolve**

Kate Shaw’s landscape paintings “deal with the tensions and dichotomies in both the depiction of the natural world and our relationship to it”. Discuss the various painting techniques she has used to make *Ecology*.

**Develop**

think about creating a body of work inspired by Kate Shaw’s techniques; the sublime and use of scale in art history.
In *Where did I come from? Where am I going?* Noël Skrzypczak uses the material qualities of paint to create an ambiguous, atmospheric experience that taps into the emotions and the unconscious. Colour, form and movement are primary elements of a composition in which Skrzypczak allows paint to travel free form.

A melancholy soul drifts in an enchanted landscape. A memory from life in primordial waters, where we all once came from. In painting there is a powerful potential to depict abstract experience; that is, to make real through colour, form and movement of paint otherwise intangible forces of the psyche: emotions like joy and fear, dream states, the experience of time.

My challenge is to create an experience for the viewer. That is, rather than to paint “a picture”, I evoke a mood and I invite the viewer inside. I aim for the complex yet primal part of the consciousness that experiences life with innocent confusion.

The way I work, I often don’t know how the paint will act and this is precisely the point. I want the paint to be free, to be itself, because this is when it is most beautiful and alive. I delight in paint’s material qualities, and in the gamut of historical and cultural marks and methods that is the inheritance of the contemporary painter.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

**Reflect**

Creating an experience for the viewer and inviting the viewer inside is critical to the practice of Noël Skrzypczak. Devise a list of questions you would like to ask Noël about her way of working and her delight in the material qualities of paint.

**Develop**

Develop an introspective body of work inspired by Noël Skrzypczak comment on “intangible forces of the psyche”. Consider colour, form and movement with the application of various media, as a way of making these forces tangible.
JOHN YOUNG

A plane flight between Frankfurt and Berlin inspired John Young to make the works that form part of this series. During the flight, Young observed a perfectly round rainbow on top of the clouds, a phenomenon the Chinese refer to as ‘Buddha’s Ray’. In reference to this experience, Young has used digital technology to transform mundane photographic images into psychedelic abstract ‘drawings’.

JOHN YOUNG
Over the last six years, two series of these abstract paintings have been made. The two series are titled *Naive and Sentimental Paintings* and *The Day After Tomorrow*. The technological process used to produce these abstracts is mundane and ordinary – everyday from the studio, a thousand photographic images are downloaded or uploaded from/to the cloud. Overnight, these images are processed and transformed into abstract ‘drawings’. The next morning, a harvest of a thousand abstract drawings is gathered. Like strolling along the beach and finding seashells, a few drawings catch our eyes, they are then meticulously scaled up and rendered with utmost affection in oil paint and linen.

*Buddha’s Ray II* and *III* were transformed images that were chosen because they reminded me of a synchronic event whilst flying between Frankfurt and Berlin a couple of years ago. On the plane, I saw a perfectly round rainbow on the clouds, which followed me from one city to the other. In Chinese, the name of such a phenomenon is called Buddha’s Ray. This phenomenon was a synchronic event that took me to a complicated project later entitled *Safety Zone*, the story of John Rabe, who was also known as the Living Buddha of China.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Resolve
Consider creating a series of abstract paintings inspired by your response to a particular event in time. Will you, like John Young, make use of digital technology to develop this body of work?

Research
Investigate and analyse the use of colour to symbolise spirituality in John Young’s *Buddha Ray II* and *Buddha Ray III* and that of another artist in *New Psychedelia*. 