

***Albert Tucker: Marking the Past***  
**29 February 2020 to 14 March 2021**

**VCE Art: Unit 4, Outcome 1**



Albert Tucker  
*Mourning Disciples* 1955  
oil on composition board  
78.5 x 127 cm  
Heide Museum of Modern Art  
Donated through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program by Barbara Tucker 2015  
© Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation. Courtesy of Smith & Singer Fine Art

**This education resource is designed to support students of VCE Art:  
Unit 4, Outcome 1**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to examine and analyse an art idea and its related issues to inform their viewpoint.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

**Key knowledge**

- ideas and issues expressed in viewpoints and attributed commentaries about the meanings and messages of artworks
- connections between the artwork/s, viewpoints and commentaries in relation to an art idea and related issue that explores the role of art in society
- a range of relevant resources to support research
- opinions and viewpoints in attributed commentaries about an art idea and related issues that explores the role of art in society
- terminology used in discussion
- relevant aspects of the Analytical Frameworks.

**Key skills**

- develop a statement that defines an art idea and related issues regarding the role of art in society
- analyse a range of viewpoints in relation to the identified idea and related issues
- use commentaries and viewpoints from a range of resources to examine and evaluate interpretations about an art idea and related issues
- develop a personal point of view about an idea and issue regarding art in society and support it with evidence and reference to the viewpoints of others
- refer to relevant artwork/s and a range of attributed commentaries to support viewpoints
- use appropriate terminology
- use relevant aspects of the Analytical Frameworks.

## Albert and Barbara Tucker Gallery

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The Albert and Barbara Tucker Gallery was established in 2006 to host a series of changing exhibitions related to the life and work of Albert Tucker. In-depth explorations of the themes and periods of Tucker's oeuvre alternate with projects that examine his work within an historical, art historical, theoretical or contemporary context. *Marking the Past* is part of this ongoing series. Guest Curator Lili Belle Birchall has brought together selected works from the Heide Collection and positioned them alongside other examples of Tucker's work from his pivotal Italian period in the 1950s, which have been borrowed from the Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation and private collections.

## Artist

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Albert Tucker, born 1914 Melbourne; died 1999 Melbourne

Download the list of artworks here:

<https://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/albert-tucker-marking-past>

## Curator Biography

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Lili Belle Birchall is a Melbourne-based arts manager and independent curator with ten years' experience in the visual arts sector. She has an Honours Degree majoring in Art History and a Master of Arts Management from the University of Melbourne. Previous roles include Exhibition Attendant, Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale; Assistant Curator, Medical History Museum, University of Melbourne; and Secretary, Grants Coordinator and Vice Chair, BLINDSIDE ARI. Lili Belle is currently a Senior Visitor Services Officer at Heide Museum of Modern Art and Gallery Assistant at Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art.

## Sources of further information

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A brief biography of Albert Tucker can be found at:

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/tucker-albert/>

Exhibition overview can be found at:

<https://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/albert-tucker-marking-past>

## Exhibition Overview

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In 1952 Albert Tucker travelled to Italy and embarked on a new chapter in his artistic practice. He had left Australia for Europe in 1947, however, it was only after he settled in the quaint seaside town of Noli on the Italian Riviera that he moved away from the expressive urban imagery that had dominated his work throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Inspired by early Christian and Renaissance art he began to paint biblical narratives about resurrection, rebirth and overcoming adversity. Reflecting on this period, Tucker later realised he had subconsciously linked the wounded figures of Christ, martyrs and saints that he observed in Italian churches to memories of his time documenting injured and traumatised soldiers in the plastic surgery ward at Heidelberg Military Hospital during World War II.

Tucker was conscripted into the army in 1942 and stationed at a camp in Wangaratta, Victoria. Initially tasked with drawing anatomical pictures for the commanding officer to use in medical lectures, he was later sent to Heidelberg Military Hospital where he documented injured troops in the plastic surgery unit. During this time he produced twenty to thirty drawings and a small number of paintings of men in and around the wards. For five weeks Tucker directly witnessed the effects of war, recording wounded and shell-shocked men with missing limbs and scarred faces. Much of what he witnessed during this period was etched into his consciousness.

Tucker later noted: 'I went through all the usual feelings: a grievous sense of injustice and that life was out to get me, which on one level it was. I was in a state of outrage and frustration. Yet these, the very things that traumatised me, forced insights that I would never have acquired in any other way.'

A decade afterwards in Italy, Tucker became increasingly nostalgic for home. His exploration of the spiritual, physical and psychological wounds of the human condition led him to reflect on the rugged Australian landscape, and lay the foundations of his now iconic Explorers and Antipodean Head series. While living in Rome he met the renowned Italian artist Alberto Burri, who introduced him to polyvinyl acetate (PVA)—a binding adhesive that could be added to paint. This material had a significant impact on Tucker's stylistic development, as it allowed him to emphasise texture and incorporate sand and sawdust into his paintings to create three-dimensional effects. PVA was an ideal material for his Australian-themed paintings, as his memories of the Australian landscape were of texture first and then shape.

Tucker observed: 'There was this sense of landscape texture which mixed with my experience of plastic surgery at Heidelberg Hospital and the religious wounds in Noli and the churches, and made this material ideal for building these images into paintings.'

He similarly built up figures with a sense of the texture and cracks of the eroded landscape, aspiring to create an archetype that was both human and Christ-like. Through this process, Tucker observed he was 'unloading the demons', and creating personal metaphors for fortitude and sorrow that allowed him to move forward in his life as well as his practice as an artist.

## Albert Tucker: Marking the Past

### Wall text

In 1952 Albert Tucker travelled to Italy and embarked on a new chapter in his artistic practice. He had left Australia for Europe in 1947, however, it was only after he settled in the quaint seaside town of Noli on the Italian Riviera that he moved away from the expressive urban imagery that had dominated his work throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Inspired by early Christian and Renaissance art he began to paint biblical narratives about resurrection and rebirth, and overcoming adversity. Years later Tucker realised he had subconsciously linked the wounded figures of Christ, martyrs and saints that he observed in Italian churches to memories of his time documenting injured and traumatised soldiers in the plastic surgery ward at Heidelberg Military Hospital during World War II.

Tucker's Italian period was a time of self-discovery and regeneration. His exploration of the spiritual, physical and psychological wounds of the human condition led him to reflect on the rugged Australian landscape, and lay the foundations of his now iconic *Explorers* and *Antipodean Head* series. Building up figures with a sense of the texture and cracks of the eroded landscape, he aspired to create an archetype that was both human and Christ-like. Through this process, Tucker observed he was 'unloading the demons', and creating personal metaphors for fortitude and sorrow. This is an underlying theme of *Marking the Past*, which brings together and draws connections between four distinct but related bodies of Tucker's work.

### Webinars with the Curator

Curator, Lili Belle Birchall has created three webinars covering the Preparation, Presentation and Conservation stages of the curation process.

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|---------|---|
| Video 1 | Lili Belle discusses the early stages of planning and <b>preparation</b> undertaken in curating <i>Albert Tucker: Marking the Past</i> .<br><a href="https://vimeo.com/441913488">https://vimeo.com/441913488</a> |
| Video 2 | Lili Belle discusses the final stages of <b>preparation</b> and the <b>presentation</b> of <i>Albert Tucker: Marking the Past</i> .<br><a href="https://vimeo.com/441913580">https://vimeo.com/441913580</a>      |
| Video 3 | Lili Belle discusses the <b>conservation</b> methods used to care for the artworks in <i>Albert Tucker: Marking the Past</i> .<br><a href="https://vimeo.com/441913669">https://vimeo.com/441913669</a>           |

Please note: these stages do not occur discretely and the curatorial process involves going back and forth between these considerations. Videos are best watched consecutively as Lili Belle discusses her curatorial process chronologically.

## Applying the Analytical Frameworks

Lili has selected four different artworks from *Marking the Past* that each lend themselves well to discussion with reference to particular Analytical Frameworks. Students can write an analysis using the remaining three frameworks for each artwork.

### Structural Framework



Albert Tucker  
*Wounded Man* 1958  
 synthetic polymer paint and  
 cement on composition board  
 91.5 x 122cm  
 Courtesy of Gould Creative,  
 Melbourne

While living in Italy in the mid-1950s, Albert Tucker gained new perspectives and a knowledge of innovative materials that helped him visually express how he remembered Australia. The opportunity to meet Italian *Art Informel* artists, including Alberto Burri, who were experimenting with the materiality of painting, was part of a cross-fertilisation of influences that culminated in Tucker's quest to develop a distinctly Australian form. Burri introduced Tucker to polyvinyl acetate (PVA) a binding adhesive that can be added to acrylic paint. This material had a significant impact on Tucker's working methods as it allowed him to enhance the surface quality of his paintings and incorporate new materials such as sand, sawdust and cement to create three-dimensional effects.

*Wounded Man* belongs to a suite of works by Tucker representing explorers who are almost indistinguishable from the terrain they inhabit. Gnarled and worn by weather and time, this solitary adventurer appears like a giant tree and is characterised by a deep wound carved into the surface of the painting. Set against a black backdrop, the wounded figure can be read as a symbol of strength and endurance as he emerges from darkness with raised scars piercing his face and body. The inclusion of cement in this work gives the explorer a strong presence both physically and symbolically. Tucker later reflected 'With the head I felt I succeeded in making a form that was humanised and was facing life with some kind of hope, if not of winning at least of surviving.' Using colour, tone, form and texture, this portrait disrupts our sense of reality by combining figure and landscape, distorting what is real and what is imagined. Merging the head with the landscape was a breakthrough in Tucker's practice and a theme that he continued to explore throughout his career.

## Personal Framework



Albert Tucker  
*Emaciated Head (Untitled Head)*, 1943  
 pastel on paper  
 13.5 x 17.6cm  
 Heide Museum of Modern Art  
 On long term loan from the  
 Albert & Barbara Tucker  
 Foundation

Albert Tucker was conscripted into the army in 1942 and stationed at a training camp in Wangaratta, Victoria. Initially tasked with drawing anatomical pictures for the commanding officer to use in medical lectures, he was later sent to Heidelberg Military Hospital where he documented injured troops in the plastic surgery unit. For five weeks Tucker directly witnessed the devastating effects of war, recording wounded and shell-shocked men with missing limbs and scarred faces. Much of what he witnessed during this period was etched into his psyche.

*Emaciated Head (Untitled Head)* was produced in the year following Tucker's discharge from the army in 1942. No longer recognisable as a specific individual, this figure can be read as a metaphor for sorrow and grief. The man's sunken eyes, disfigured nose and heavily creased face reflects the torment and trauma he has endured. As with other works from this period, Tucker emphasises the subject's emotional state to reveal the physical and psychological consequences of war.

Speaking about this time later in life, Tucker reflected:

*I went through all the usual feelings: a grievous sense of injustice and that life was out to get me, which on one level it was. I was in a state of outrage and frustration. These, the very things that traumatised me, forced insights that I would never have acquired in any other way.*

*So when I look back now I'm delighted I survived the period and came out with what I think is information I wouldn't otherwise have had.*



## Cultural Framework



Albert Tucker  
*Betrayal* 1952  
 oil on composition board  
 61 x 136 cm  
 Private collection

In 1952 Albert Tucker travelled to Italy and embarked on a new chapter in his artistic practice. He settled in the seaside town of Noli on the Italian Riviera and moved away from the expressive urban imagery that had dominated his work throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Inspired by early Christian and Renaissance art he painted biblical narratives about rebirth, resurrection and overcoming adversity. Spiritual themes provided a means to examine human values and moral lessons, exploring ideas and emotions linked to stories of faith.

*Betrayal* is considered Tucker's first religious painting and in 1952 it was his largest work to date. The story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus is central to Christian theology. The Bible relates how the Roman authorities sought to arrest Jesus and Judas led the guards to him, instructing them, 'Whoever it is I kiss, he is the one.' Following the example of celebrated Italian Renaissance and Baroque artists such as Giotto, Fra Angelico and Caravaggio, Tucker depicts the climactic moment when Judas reaches up to embrace Jesus, thus betraying his identity. *Betrayal* uses contemporary means to interpret an ancient story and when it was first exhibited in Rome in 1954 a critic noted the 'clear evidence of a cartoonist style in the Fortunato Depero fashion and a powerful sense of the monstrous in the style of Picasso, although a much more readable Picasso.'

In this modern depiction of *Betrayal*, Jesus stands tall and resolute. His piercing blue eye shows no sign of distress or anger towards Judas, who was one of his twelve apostles or closest followers. Judas' act of disloyalty ultimately led to Jesus' crucifixion, yet in the painting Jesus is calm and unfazed by the drama unfolding around him. The six figures in the composition stand at the front of the picture plane, emphasising the stage-like setting and theatricality of the scene. Bold colours of red, blue and green add vibrancy and balance, while the figure's exaggerated expressions, along with the weeping dove and dogs in the background add elements of intrigue and pathos. With this painting Tucker has portrayed an universal tale of betrayal, possibly as a way of reconciling his own feelings on the subject after leaving Australia in 1947 under difficult personal circumstances.



## Contemporary Framework



Albert Tucker  
*Ayers Rock* (previously titled *Wounded Mountain*) 1955  
 oil on composition board  
 66 x 131 cm  
 Heide Museum of Modern Art  
 © Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation. Courtesy of Smith & Singer Fine Art.

While living in Italy Albert Tucker became increasingly nostalgic for home. After his joint exhibition with Sidney Nolan in 1954 at the Foreign Press Club in Rome, he developed a renewed interest in the Australian landscape. Remembering the fissures in old gum trees and the cracked earth of the outback, he began to paint Australia as a wounded landscape. His memories of organic cratered forms, warts, cracks and fissures became gashes, scars and wounds in the earth's surface. When Tucker painted *Ayers Rock* he was living in Rome and had never visited Central Australia. He originally titled the work *Wounded Mountain* but subsequently renamed it *Ayers Rock* in 1960.

In the year that *Ayers Rock* was painted, Alice Springs had introduced regular walking tours and camping around the rock. It was not until the 1980s that the area was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its ownership given back to the traditional owners, the Anangu people, who called it Uluru in Pitjantjatjara language. In 1993 the name of the site was officially changed to Ayers Rock / Uluru, the first landmark in the Northern Territory to be given a bi-lingual name. In 2002 the Regional Tourism Association in Alice Springs requested that the name become Uluru / Ayers Rock, which it still holds today. In 2019 walking on Uluru was permanently banned to respect its religious and cultural significance for the Anangu people who have lived in the area for at least 30,000 years.

In the mid-1950s Tucker was at a crossroads between painting scenes inspired by Europe, including religious narratives derived from the Bible, and returning to Australian themes. *Ayers Rock* was one of the first Australian outback scenes that he produced while living overseas. In this evocative and haunting landscape Tucker has emphasised the grandeur and scale of Uluru, with trees in the foreground reduced to light flecks while the sky is permeated by red dust emanating from the rock's surface. Devoid of people and wildlife, the mountain is marked by deep crevices and niches suggesting the land's spiritual power and wounded past. In 1955 when tourism to the area was increasing and Uluru's cultural significance was yet to be officially acknowledged or protected, Tucker produced a dark and melancholic portrait of a national icon as a wounded mountain.

### Questions for students

The following lists of questions are designed to assist students in writing about the four artworks discussed above, using the remaining three Analytical Frameworks. Student responses need not include answers to all of these questions. These lists should provide a broad range of ways a student might apply a framework in their engagement with artworks.

### Structural Framework

- What can you see?
- What first attracts your attention, what has the artist emphasised visually?
- Briefly describe the subject matter.
- Which of the art elements and principles are most prominent in the artwork?
  - Elements:  
Line, Shape, Colour, Tone, Texture, Form, Sound, Light, Time
  - Principles:  
Movement, Rhythm, Unity, Variety, Space, Balance, Contrast, Scale, Proportion, Repetition (Pattern), Emphasis (Focal Point)
  - & how do they contribute to the meaning/message of the work?
- Identify and describe the materials and techniques employed to create the artwork.
- What equipment was used?
- How has the artwork been made? Precisely/Carefully/Roughly/Expressively/Other?
- What effect has this created?
- How is the interpretation of the artwork shaped by the materials and the technical skills or processes used by the artist?
- Is this due to inherent qualities of the materials or to their application by the artist?
- Do you think it belongs to a specific style or art movement?
- What qualities or use of conventions in the artwork make you associate this artwork to that art movement?
- How does the work relate to other works in a similar style or from the same philosophical, historical or cultural context?
- Describe any possible symbols in the artwork? What could they represent?

## Personal Framework

- What relationship does the artwork have to the artist's life and experiences?
- What visual evidence supports this reading?
- Has the artist used a specific process or practice in creating the artwork that may reflect their personal philosophy and ideas?
- How is the artwork linked to people, places or experiences of personal significance to the artist such as the artist's personal feelings, thinking, aspirations, beliefs, desires or preoccupations to memories, dreams or personal world?
- How have these been represented in the artwork?
- What are the personal symbols or metaphors explored or utilised in the artwork?
- What evidence in the artwork reflects aspects of the artist's life or ideas?
- Are there any symbols that might reflect the artist's personality?
- How does the experience and background of the viewer (consider yourself) affect the interpretation of the artwork?
- What is your personal response to this artwork?
- What aspects of this artwork appeal to you?
- How do you relate to the artwork?

## Cultural Framework

**NB.** Cultural influences can include: historical, political, social, socio-economic, artistic, technological, environmental and religious contexts as well as aspects of ethnicity and gender.

- What aspects of the artwork reflect the culture in which it was made? This might be the subject matter of the artwork, the use of techniques or the ideas that the artist is expressing.
- How do the social, political, cultural or religious contexts of the artwork contribute to its meaning?
- How have historical or contemporary events shaped the intention of the artist or our understanding of the artwork's meaning?
- How do values, beliefs and attitudes reflect the social context of the time the artwork was produced? How do these values compare to the values of today?
- How does the physical placement or location of artworks affect their interpretation?
- How does the cultural background of the viewer influence the interpretation of an artwork?
- Select an artwork that appears to represent a particular time period or societal concern. What aspects (subject matter, techniques) of the artwork reflect the culture in which it was made?
- Are there any cultural symbols used in the artwork?
- How was the artwork reviewed or critiqued during the time in which it was made? Was the work considered challenging or innovative?
- How does the intention of the artist differ from your view?
- Why did the artist produce this artwork?
- What meaning did the artist give to the work?
- Are you interpreting it in the way that was intended?

You may need to conduct further research.

## Contemporary Framework

**NB.** For the purposes of this study, artworks are considered contemporary if produced after 1990, however this framework can be used to interpret an artwork irrespective of when it was made, by looking at it from a current viewpoint.

- When was the artwork produced? Would it be considered contemporary?
- How might the original context in which an artwork was placed influence its meaning and purpose?
- How is an artwork of the past interpreted from a contemporary point of view? How does this differ from the way it was interpreted when it was made?
- How have contemporary art ideas and issues challenged traditional understandings of artworks and their significance?
- How does the placement or location of the artwork in a setting other than the intended setting impact on its meaning and value?
- How might the original context in which an artwork was placed influence its meaning and purpose?
- Has the role of the audience changed when viewing and interpreting contemporary artworks and if so, how?
- How does the choice of subject matter, or media, materials, and techniques or processes reflect or challenge artistic or social traditions?
- How might the original context in which an artwork was made change in its meaning or purpose for the contemporary viewer?
- If the work is by Australian artist, how is its meaning/message impacted by contemporary knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and culture?

## If the work is “contemporary”

- Would the work be considered Post Modern?
- What political concerns such as globalisation, environmental and social issues, are expressed in the artwork? How do these concerns challenge and influence the viewer’s interpretation?
- How are contemporary artworks that involve collaboration or participation of the viewer affect their interpretation? How does this differ from traditional ideas about viewing and experiencing artworks in museums and galleries?
- What are the symbols and metaphors from contemporary culture utilised in the artwork and how do they contribute to its meanings and messages?
- What new media and technologies has the artist used to make or produce the artwork
- What is the impact on the viewer of new media applications or technologies and other emerging art forms?
- How has the internet, virtual technology and augmented reality changed the way artworks are viewed and presented? How has social media changed the way audiences view art? How does this differ from traditional ideas about viewing and experiencing artworks in museums and galleries?

### Curator's Exhibition Bibliography

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Burke, Janine, *Australian Gothic: A Life of Albert Tucker*, Knopf, Sydney, 2002.

Fry, Gavin, *Albert Tucker*, Beagle Press, Sydney, 2006.

Harding, Lesley, *Pan in Armour: Albert Tucker's Bushrangers*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2010.

McCaughey, Patrick, *Bert & Ned: the Correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan*, Miegunyah Press and State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 2006.

Mollison, James & Minchin, Jan, *Albert Tucker: A retrospective*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1990.

Mollison, James, *Albert Tucker*, Macmillan; Australian National Gallery, South Melbourne, 1982.

Morgan, Kendrah, *Joy Hester & Albert Tucker drawings 1938-1947*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2010.

Uhl, Christopher, *Albert Tucker*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1969.

If you have further questions regarding the exhibition, please contact Heide Learning at [learning@heide.com.au](mailto:learning@heide.com.au) or book an online live webinar with your students.

Webinars include a presentation by Heide Learning staff and a Q&A with curator Lili Belle Birchall.