

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

VCE Studio Arts: Unit 4, Outcome 3



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
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**This education resource is designed to support students of
VCE Studio Arts: Unit 4, Outcome 3**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to compare the methods used by artists and considerations of curators in the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in at least two different exhibitions.

Key knowledge

- the methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks
- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions
- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

Key skills

- identify and describe the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study
- describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, university art galleries and museums, outdoor spaces and online galleries, which have been visited in the year of study
- analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists' and gallery curators' intentions
- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display
- analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited in the current year of study

Albert and Barbara Tucker Gallery

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

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

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.

Exhibition Overview

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.

Number of works and type

8 works from the Heide Collection

5 works on private loan

6 works from the Tucker Foundation

8 exhibition prints of archival material from the Albert Tucker Archive items from the Albert Tucker Archive

Total 19 works and 8 items of archival material (27 objects)

In the gallery:

18 paintings by Albert Tucker

In display cases:

9 work on paper by Albert Tucker

Significance in Heide's program and program rationale

- Part of the ongoing series of exhibitions in the Albert & Barbara Tucker Gallery that alternate between exhibitions which investigate Albert Tucker's oeuvre in detail, and exhibitions which place him in an historical, art historical, theoretical or contemporary context
- presents new research and interpretation of a thematic strand in the Heide Collection
- brings together lesser known works from the Heide Collection and makes them accessible to the public
- offers potential for stimulating education and public programs

Sources of further information

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>

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.

Question for students

1. Compare the *Wall Text* above with the *Exhibition Overview* information on page 4.
You will notice that this text summarises that information.
Imagine you are the curator of a gallery that has a particular audience demographic. How would you summarise the overview information for the wall text?

Webinar Series: The Curatorial Process

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

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

Please note: these stages do not occur discretely and the curatorial process involves going back and forth between all of these considerations. In all three videos Lili Belle refers to her understanding of conservation processes. Videos are best watched consecutively, as Lili Belle discusses her curatorial process chronologically.

If you have further questions regarding the curation of the exhibition, please contact Heide Learning at learning@heide.com.au or book an online Industry Contexts live webinar with your students. This includes a presentation by Heide Learning staff and a Q&A with curator Lili Belle Birchall.

Presentation and Conservation:**An interview with Heide Collections Manager, Svetlana Matovski**

As Collections Manager, Svetlana Matovski manages the conservation of artworks in the Heide Collection.

How do you control the potentially damaging effects of: temperature and humidity, light, insect and vermin damage, and air pollution and dust in the gallery?

SM A centralised 24-hour temperature control system ensures that the temperature and humidity in the galleries is maintained at a constant level. Temperature and relative humidity are maintained at $21^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $50\% \pm 5\%$. The Facilities Manager is immediately notified of any variations outside of these ranges via computer and SMS messaging.

Light levels are adjusted according to the medium of the work on display as different materials have different light sensitivity. E.g. works on paper such as photographs, water-colours require light levels of a maximum of 50 lux.

An Integrated Pest Management system ensures that all galleries are monitored on a regular basis for pests including laying and checking pest traps monthly.

How are the works hung and installed in the gallery safely?

SM 2D works are hung from two points (d-rings) onto the wall. Installation staff must ensure that screws are adequately secured to the wall to hold the works in place. For security reasons, small 2D works are tethered to the wall to ensure that they can't be removed easily.

3D works such as small sculptures and ceramics, unframed works on paper, archives, are generally exhibited in display cases to ensure works are not touched or knocked. Items are often secured in the display cases as an added safety measure.

How are the works protected from damage by visitors?

SM CCTV cameras are used in gallery spaces and are monitored in real time by staff. Visitor Services Officers monitor the galleries ensuring that visitors do not touch art works. Visitors are asked to cloak bags, umbrellas or large items before entry into the gallery and food or drink is not permitted in the galleries.

Did any particular works in this exhibition require specific conservation or special handling?

SM Artworks are at risk the more they are handled. Trained art handlers minimise risk by planning the move ahead of time and limited the unnecessary handling of objects.

Framed works are placed on chocks (ethafoam blocks) along the wall to keep them raised from the floor, reducing the risk of dust from the floor surface, and making it easier for handling staff to lift the works when required. Gloves are worn when handling artworks.

Extra care was taken when handling works with thick or dense paint applications, including some works that have sand mixed in with the oil paint, such as *Lunar Landscape*, *Wounded Landscape*, *Figure*.

Emaciated Head (Untitled Head) 2000.312 was unframed for display as the curator preferred to have this work displayed in a case rather than hung on the wall. A framing conservator was asked to unframe and de-mount the work. The image below, to the right shows the framed work as it was displayed in the exhibition *Albert Tucker: We are the Dead Men* in 2014.



Albert Tucker
Emaciated Head (Untitled Head) 1943
 pastel on paper
 13.5 x 17.6 cm
 Heide Museum of Modern Art
 On long-term loan from the Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation
 © Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation. Courtesy of Smith & Singer Fine Art



Emaciated Head displayed in the exhibition *Albert Tucker: We are the Dead Men*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2014
 Photograph (detail): Christian Capurro

Regarding conservation once installed, the overall rule with artworks is to handle them as little as possible. With this in mind artworks are checked for dust, which is removed with a soft Hake brush and fingerprints are removed from display cases with an appropriate cleaner and soft cloth.

Presentation and Conservation:**An interview with Heide Exhibitions Manager, Julia Powles**

As Exhibitions Manager, Julia Powles manages the installation of exhibitions in the Heide galleries.

How does your role interrelate with the Curator, Collections Manager, Registrar and install team?

JP An Exhibition Manager is a type of museum-specific project manager who liaises with all the people involved in putting together an exhibition and oversees the scheduling of activities in the lead up to, and during, the installation, while ensuring that all the things that need to happen to make an exhibition stay within its budget. Usually I meet with the curator at the beginning of the project, when the exhibition is still in the concept stage. My job is to know what's possible in terms of the engineering of the building, costs and staff resources. My input helps the curator think about how they are going to display the artworks, particularly the way they might sequence the works to create a narrative or give meaning while taking into account practical considerations. For example, I know that the natural light that comes in from the window at the end of the Tucker Gallery makes that end of the gallery impossible to achieve 50 lux light levels, so it's not suitable for works on paper. Curators need this sort of practical information early on in their planning. Sometimes an artwork will have special installation instructions, and in that instance the collection manager (if the artwork is in the Heide collection) or the Registrar (if the artwork is a loan) will communicate those requirements to me and I'll pass them on to the curator and install team. The install crew report to me and each day of the exhibition installation we start with a project meeting outlining the order in which to carry out the day's tasks.

What was the reason for installing the false wall between the Tucker and Project Galleries? Can you describe the process of installing this and how it impacted on the Marking the Past show?

JP We had to build a temporary wall between the two galleries in preparation for displaying with a large scale video work in the Project Gallery that required a black out environment. This involved overseeing builders, plasterers, electricians and painters. Obviously it's not possible to do any building work near any artworks, so this was done prior to installing the exhibition in the Tucker Gallery. Whenever we need to do any building inside these two galleries for a new exhibition we have to try to fit this in to our usual exhibition changeover schedule of 5 days. Normally two days are allocated to the deinstallation, packing of the previous exhibition and gallery refurbishment and three days are allocated for the installation of the new exhibition. With *Albert Tucker: Marking the Past* the install time was pushed back to two days because of the false wall and we all worked longer hours to get everything done.

Did any aspect of this exhibition present particular challenges?

JP This exhibition was really well organised and thought through, so it was really smooth to install.

Curator's Exhibition Bibliography

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.