# Creature Discomfort

**Course:** Stage 5 Visual arts

**Lesson sequence:** 3-5 lessons (an excerpt from a ten-week unit of work)

**Focus content:** frames, conceptual framework, practice

## Overview

These introductory lessons are an excerpt from a 10-week program for Year 9 called ‘Creature Discomfort’. This lesson sequence provides practical examples of the teaching strategies employed to foster critical and creative thinking in the visual arts classroom.

In the lessons shared here, students use the postmodern frame to investigate the practice of selected artists whose work is inspired by science, our changing environment, the blurring of boundaries of the natural and unnatural world and biodiversity. In artmaking students create fantasy hybrid creatures. Students build their technical skills and understanding using 2D media such as drawing and collage. Later in the term they were introduced to Photoshop where they reinterpreted their drawings and collages to create hyperreal fantasy creatures. The hybrid hyperreal fantasy creatures created by students were intended to both intrigue and repel audiences.

### Focus outcomes

#### Artmaking

Students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills to make artworks informed by their understanding of practice, the conceptual framework and the frames.

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| Area of content | Visual arts |
| Frames | 5.3 makes artworks that involve some understanding of the frames |
| Representation | 5.4 recognises and uses aspects of the world as a source of ideas, concepts and subject matter in the visual arts |

#### Critical and historical studies

Students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills to critically and historically interpret art informed by their understanding of practice, the conceptual framework and the frames.

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| Area of content | Visual arts |
| Practice | 5.7 explores aspects of practice in critical and historical interpretations of art |
| Conceptual framework | 5.8 explores the function of and relationships between the artist – artwork – world – audience |
| Frames | 5.9 begins to acknowledge that art can be interpreted from different points of view |

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## Learning intentions

Through this sequence of lessons students will:

* investigate and apply appropriate drawing and digital media conventions, techniques and processes to make imaginative fantasy creatures that represent an understanding of postmodern practice, techniques and concepts including hybridity and adaption.
* investigate, critically analyse and interpret the material and conceptual choices of the focus artist Patricia Piccinini and others including Kathryn Fleming and document these in the visual arts diary
* use the frames and conceptual framework to investigate the ways that contemporary artists have responded to and represented scientific understandings about animal adaption, biotechnology and the changing natural world.

### Cross curriculum content

Within this lesson sequence, learning across the cross curriculum content is addressed in the following ways:

#### Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Students will engage with a range of digital practices to explore contemporary technologies in their artmaking practice through working in 2D forms and in their research and investigation of critical and historical studies of art.

#### Difference and diversity

In visual arts, experience of personal, social, spiritual and cultural differences is developed through practice and the study of artworks representing different frames.

In this unit of work, students begin to understand some relationships within the conceptual framework, to appreciate the diverse forms and styles that art can take and to appreciate individuals’ preferences for one over another. The focus is on the development of the practice of Patricia Piccinini and how she has been influenced by the world and events.

#### Environment

In this lesson sequence students use the frames and the conceptual framework to explore how the natural world is represented and how artists use the environment to make artworks. Students focus on the purpose of a range of artworks including sculptures and digital works and the audience they are intended for. They consider the ways that the changing natural world is represented in a range of artworks in critical and historical studies. The relationships between artists and artworks and the use of natural, built and social environments as a source of ideas is investigated.

## Learning sequence

Students will:

* use the postmodern frame and conceptual framework to critically investigate and construct an interpretation of the ways that contemporary artists have responded to scientific understandings about the natural world and how it might be represented
* investigate and interpret how contemporary artists construct artworks which communicate their ideas and interests about the world through the organisation of visual qualities and conventions to convey meaning (structural frame, artist – artwork)
* create a collage, drawings and digital artwork (using Photoshop) that represents their understandings of the key visual arts concepts of juxtaposition, hyperrealism and reinterpretation (postmodern frame).

### Teacher notes

In the lesson sequence students focus on the practice of artists Patricia Piccinini and Kathryn Fleming.

A range of other artworks could be considered to support student understanding in artmaking and art critical historical lessons. These might include the examples below.

* Still image by AES+F Inverso Mundus[, ‘Still #1-02, 2015’](https://www.artsy.net/artwork/aes-plus-f-inverso-mundus-still-number-1-02-2), pigment Ink Jet print on paper, 55.6 x 80 cm to support student understanding of Photoshop and collage
* The digital works depicting fantasy hybrid animals by [Arne Olaf](https://mymodernmet.com/digital-collage-hybrid-animals-arne-fredriksen/) are referenced in lessons that introduce students to Photoshop.
* This [resource](https://agsa-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/media/dd/files/Piccinini20online20resource.5753a67.pdf) focuses on the artworks of artist Patricia Piccinini, based on the exhibition 'Patricia Piccinini: Once upon a time ...' at the Art Gallery of South Australia (2011). It explores themes such as biodiversity and biotechnology. Selected works or readings from this resource, and not the whole document, might be identified by the teacher and disseminated as appropriate for the class.

#### Teacher identified essential question

How can contemporary artists imagine and represent life beyond nature?

#### Teacher identified key concepts

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| Key Concepts | Definition and connections to content |
| Juxtaposition | Placing unusual or unexpected things together.  Postmodern frame, Piccinini’s practice |
| Hyper-realism | Linked to notions of superrealism or photo realism. This movement in art gained popularity from the 1970s onwards and is concerned with representing subject matter in strikingly realistic ways.  Postmodern frame, structural frame, Piccinini’s practice, artwork – audience |
| Reinterpretation | The act of interpreting something in a new or different manner.  Postmodern frame, Piccinini’s practice, artist – artwork |

#### Differentiation

Discussions can take place as a whole class group or carefully organised small groups. Responses could also be collected online.

Summary notes of discussion can be printed and shared rather than copied down.

More time can be spent on literacy techniques and the language of the postmodern frame as suits the needs of different learners.

#### Ongoing assessment/feedback

Formative assessment data is collected throughout artmaking and critical and historical activities and recorded in student’s diary.

Summative assessment activities included completed artworks such as the collage, drawing and a digital hybrid creature created using Photoshop. The completed short answer responses on the practice of Patricia Piccinini and Kathryn Fleming could be developed into formal assessment tasks.

### Lesson Sequence

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| Teaching strategies | Resources and feedback |
| Lesson 1 Critical and historical studies  Learning intentions   1. Students think critically and creatively about two artworks by Patricia Piccinini. 2. Pre-existing knowledge and values about contemporary art concepts are shared, inter-related and extended through discussion and collaboration.   Employ the critical and creative thinking teaching strategies of:   * questioning, including ‘what-if’ questions * whole class discussion and provocation * peer to peer collaborative exchange.   ****Questioning and collaborative exchanges****  **The teacher**:****   * uses questioning to engage students in a discussion and to gauge understanding prior to commencing the unit of work. * Provokes a whole class discussion by projecting the unseen artwork: ‘The Young Family’ by Patricia Piccinini, 2003 and later ‘The Long Awaited, 2008, by the same artist onto the whiteboard. * Pose a range of questions which range from requiring from factual or descriptive responses through to questions that are specifically interpretive and engage students in clarifying, rethinking, reinterpreting, and justifying their claims. Some of the questions will be associated with the language and perspective of specific frames.   Sample questions (scaffolded from an understanding of practice and the frames)   1. What do we see here? What materials and techniques might this artist have used? (practice/ structural) 2. What is your initial response to this creature? What does it remind you of? Consider the artworld and other links. Can you give an example? (subjective) 3. What ideas might the artist be considering? What leads you to suggest that? (practice/ postmodern) 4. Are there other works / texts that the artist could be referencing? Why/how? (postmodern) 5. How does this work reflect an investigation of contemporary concerns in the world? (postmodern) 6. Why might the artist have used hyperrealist forms of representation in this work? What is the impact on the audience? (structural)   Provocations that prompt new ways of engaging reasoning about the key concepts  After being shown unfamiliar artworks in the question and discussion session outlined above, provide students with a handout with a colour image of the artwork ‘The Young Family’. Challenge them with a fantasy scenario: students are asked to imagine that it is 50 years in the future and that this is an image on the front page of the news.  Peer to peer collaborative exchange  Students:   * create three different news headlines to accompany the image on the handout. The headlines have to be concise, memorable, catchy and/or attention grabbing. What and who are these creatures? Why are they being documented for the news? * discuss their headline ideas and decide on effective headlines, and why. * following this, the teacher leads the class to share many of the imaginative perspectives and ideas generated by the image. * write down three things to know more about, with regards to the artwork and/or artist. These are discussed in class. | Still image to project on board of Patricia Piccinini’s [‘The Young Family](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/exhibition/we-are-family/blbmy)’, 2012  Still image to project on board of Patricia Piccinini’s [‘The Long Awaited’](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artwork/patricia-piccinini-the-long-awaited-2008/33:10966) 2008,Teacher prepared handout for newspaper headline task. |
| Lesson 2 brief overview  This lesson is not part of the example sequence, but an overview is provided here.  Students:   * consolidate their understanding of the practice of Patricia Piccinini by investigating the artwork ‘The Young Family,’ 2012 and ‘The Long Awaited’, 2008 * research the artist Patricia Piccinini and the artwork using carefully selected readings provided by the teacher or a range of resources online * apply an understanding of the artwork by creating word banks to describe the artwork. Students might also highlight the reading for specific frames –using pink for the postmodern frame and blue for the structural frame and so on. * use new words and understandings to create a written response to the short answer question: ‘How does Piccinini challenge the ways that the natural world might be represented in her works?’ Students may consider hybridity, biodiversity and the blurring lines between humans, science and technology in their responses and refer to the two artworks examined. |  |
| Lesson 3, 4 and 5 artmaking  Learning intentions   1. Investigate the artmaking practice of Kathryn Fleming and her ‘field guides’ for the works from the series [‘Endless Form, Endless Species’](https://www.dezeen.com/2015/03/10/kathryn-fleming-synthetic-biology-engineer-animals-survive-extinction-endless-species-cat-dog-hybrid-design-indaba-2015/), 2014 2. Inspired by Fleming’s practice, think critically and creatively about Australian animals and how they have adapted over time to changing environments. 3. Represent the ideas in an imaginative and resolved fantasy creature collage and drawing.   Employ the critical and creative thinking strategies of:   * questioning, including questions that connect new knowledge to previous knowledge and ‘what if’ questions * collaborative exchanges including whole class discussion and small group discussion * provocations using unseen source material and specific artmaking materials and techniques.   Provocation and questioning   * The class is divided into groups of 4. Each group has butchers' paper, coloured markers and a printout of one artwork by Kathryn Fleming – either ‘Beaked Porcupine’ 2014, ‘The Superbivore’ 2014 or ‘Retro-reflective Carnivore’ 2014).Examine the artwork and invent a citation and artists statement for the artwork. The citation must include inventing a title for the work (these have not been revealed yet), a list of materials used to make the work and the dimensions. The artist statement must explain the subject matter and the imaginary creature, and must be in paragraph format and include an account of the ideas that might have inspired the sculpture. Students are encouraged to be creative and invent a back story for the artwork. Share responses. * Presents a slideshow presentation on the practice of Kathryn Fleming. Her ‘field guides’ for each animal should be shown as part of this. Learn the details of the correct citation and about the ideas- such as biotechnology, animal adaptation and extinction that inspired the works. * Review prior knowledge of the postmodern frame. Pose questions to draw out student understanding of postmodern techniques and concepts such as juxtaposition, irony, appropriation and re-contextualization. (Teacher note: These postmodern techniques are linked directly to the practice of Kathryn Fleming to provide concrete examples, such as – Fleming appropriates the style and design of naturalist field guides in the artworks already explored in class. The field guides for each artwork are a part of the slideshow and are read.) * Instructs students to Write a new artist statement about the work in an art diary using the information from the slideshow and the field guide to inform the writing, and some of the language of the postmodern frame.   Artmaking provocation   * Provide the class with a large pile of black and white photocopies of Australian animals. Imagine it is 50 years into the future. Challenges students with a ‘what if’ style question. What might and Australian hybrid fantasy creature look like 50 years from now? What environment might it live in and what if it developed special adaptations to cope with a future world? Create a collage of a fantasy hybrid creature to answer these questions. The animal needs to be given a name and can have special fantasy skills. This artmaking challenge is inspired by the practice of artist Kathryn Fleming. * Show a completed collage and explain some basic tips for effective collages.   The collage advice includes – cutting animal details carefully away from the background, looking for patterns and textures that work well together, creating a believable surface or body part, considering scale and pose, not pasting anything down until several collaged details are ready to combine, and checking that all pieces work together to combine on the provided coloured paper background. These collages will be used to inspire pencil drawings in an upcoming lesson. Incorporate postmodern techniques such as juxtaposition and reinterpretation when creating collages.   * When the works are complete, provide a blank ‘field guide’ template for students to complete about their own collages. The field guide has headings such as:   + animal name   + habitat   + diet   + size and sounds   + sketch and explanation of one imaginative feature   The completed field guides are pasted into art diaries.  Drawing techniques   * Demonstrate drawing techniques. Refer to Patricia Piccinni’s drawing ‘[Laura (with sandwich)](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artwork/patricia-piccinini-laura-with-sandwich-2006/31:1484)’ as an example. * Using the collage as the basis for the drawing, demonstrate how to create tonal and textural variation using hatching, cross-hatching, stippling, circling and show how to create highlights. Students practice these techniques in an art diary before sketching the collage of a fantasy creature on A3 drawing paper. * Foster collaborative exchanges about the creative and imaginative decisions students make about the way they represent their ideas. * Completed fantasy creature drawings are put up for display in the classroom and students provide peers with an audience and with two pieces of warm feedback and one piece of cool feedback on their material and conceptual practice. | Kathryn Fleming, works and field guides from the series [‘Endless Form, Endless Species’](https://www.dezeen.com/2015/03/10/kathryn-fleming-synthetic-biology-engineer-animals-survive-extinction-endless-species-cat-dog-hybrid-design-indaba-2015/) 2014  Butchers paper  Coloured markers  Teacher pre-pared slideshow with images of Kathryn Flemings work  Scissors and glue sticks for every student  Teacher pre-prepared stack of black and white printouts of a broad range of Australian animals  Coloured card for backgrounds of collages.  Range of pencils, 2B, HB, 4B  A3 art drawing paper  Erasers  Glue sticks  Scissors  Field guide templates  The drawing [‘Laura (with sandwich)’](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artwork/patricia-piccinini-laura-with-sandwich-2006/31:1484) 2006 is also shown to class. |

# References

[Visual Arts 7-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/visual-arts-7-10) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003. date accessed 17/12/2020.

Fostering [Critical and Creative thinking in Visual Arts,](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/stages-4-and-5/fostering-critical-and-creative-thinking-in-visual-arts-7-10) NSW Department of Education, accessed 21/10/21

[‘Collaborating Critically and Creatively in Visual Arts’](https://cpl.asn.au/journal/semester-2-2020/collaborating-critically-and-creatively-in-visual-arts) , Journal of Professional Learning, Dr Karen Maras, 2020, date accessed 06/08/2021

Still image to project on board of Patricia Piccinini’s [‘The Young Family](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/exhibition/we-are-family/blbmy)’, 2012

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‘Laura (with Sandwich)’ pencil drawing by Patricia Piccinini, 2006 at [Rosyln Oxley Gallery](https://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artwork/patricia-piccinini-laura-with-sandwich-2006/31:1484) date accessed 06/08/2021

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Patricia Piccinini [education resource](https://agsa-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/media/dd/files/Piccinini20online20resource.5753a67.pdf), 2011, created by the Art Gallery of South Australia, date accessed 06/08/2021