# Alexia Sinclair – Storyteller

**Course:** Stage 5 (Elective course) Visual arts / Photographic and digital media

**Topic:** Ctrl + Alt + Shift, new perspectives in art and technology

**Lesson sequence duration**: 10 lessons

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

## Overview

Alexia Sinclair is an Australian artist working in the fields of photography and digital media. Sinclair creates fictional narratives that sit at the intersection between art, history and fashion photography. Each artwork is hand crafted, with every element carefully stitched, built, painted, sculpted, directed, photographed and edited by Alexia. Her artworks are inspired by the decadent and ornate art of the Baroque period. Lavish theatrical sets and costumes are embedded with many hidden layers of detail that continue to be enhanced in post-production. Sinclair has been celebrated internationally in solo and group exhibitions and been the finalist and recipient of several photography prizes including the 2007 Winner of the Harper's BAZAAR Fashion Photography Award and 2006 Finalist in the Photographic Portrait Prize (Archibald), Art Gallery New South Wales.

Her highly celebrated series for the Global Vaccine Alliance involved creating a work for their publication and exhibition entitled ‘The Art of Saving a Life’. The development of a vaccine to treat smallpox is staged as a narrative, in an elaborate doctor's surgery, heightened using nature and symbolism.

This learning resource draws on the [Alexia Sinclair – Storyteller](https://vimeo.com/435558298/bd07fe6843) (10:37) video resource. Students engage with aspects of her work to understand how to reveal and interpret signs and symbols that create layers of meaning.

Students engage in critical and historical investigations to compare the conventions of the Pre-Raphaelites and the work of Alexia Sinclair to understand postmodern appropriation.

Students engage in artmaking activities creating a series of digital portraits that convey a narrative inspired by Alexia Sinclair’s practice. Students will include a range of composite elements that they Photoshop together to create a painterly image with fine attention to detail.

### 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.

| **Area of content** | **Visual arts** | **Photographic and digital media** |
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| **Conceptual framework** | 5.2 makes artworks informed by their understanding of the function of and relationships between artist – artwork – world – audience. | 5.2 makes photographic and digital works informed by their understanding of the function of and relationships between artist – artwork – world–audience. |
| **Frames** | 5.3 makes artworks informed by an understanding of how the frames affect meaning. | 5.3 makes photographic and digital works informed by an understanding of how the frames affect meaning. |
| **Resolution** | 5.6 demonstrates developing technical accomplishment and refinement in making artworks. | 5.4 selects appropriate procedures and techniques to make and refine photographic and digital works. |

#### 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.

| **Area of content** | **Visual arts** | **Photographic and digital media** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Practice** | 5.7 applies their understanding of aspects of practice to critical and historical interpretations of art. | 5.7 applies their understanding of aspects of practice to critically and historically interpret photographic and digital works. |
| **Conceptual framework** | 5.8 uses their understanding of the function of and relationships between artist – artwork – world – audience in critical and historical interpretations of art. | 5.8 uses their understanding of the function of and relationships between the artist–artwork–world–audience in critical and historical interpretations of photographic and digital works. |
| **Frames** | 5.9 demonstrates how the frames provide different interpretations of art. | 5.9 uses the frames to make different interpretations of photographic and digital works. |

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

### Learning intentions

Through studying this sequence of lessons students will be able to:

* investigate and apply appropriate photographic and digital media conventions, techniques and processes to make artworks.
* develop, research and investigate material and conceptual choices using their visual arts diary or photographic and digital media journal.
* recognise how human experience provides a creative source of ideas for artmaking by drawing on their imaginative responses and personal and family experiences and values.
* discuss and write about their understandings of different aspects of contemporary practice.
* explain how artists interpret the world in making artworks and how they seek to represent concepts that are personal and/or social through a range of styles and approaches.
* identify how critical and historical accounts provide a way to understand the intentions and practices of artists.
* explain how critical and historical accounts provide a way to understand social conditions, perspectives and the social construction of meaning.

### Cross curriculum content

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

#### Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Throughout the study of this lesson sequence, students will engage with a range of digital photographic practices to explore contemporary technologies in their artmaking practice through working in 2D and 4D forms, and also in their research and investigation of critical and historical studies of art.

#### Work, employment, enterprise

The focus on the development of Alexia Sinclair’s practice allows students the opportunity to investigate how artists create artworks for political, social and work-based issues including posters, campaigns, murals and billboards. Students investigate and develop their understanding of artists and practice and the relationships between artists and audiences, artworks and the world in making, and in critical and historical studies. They do this through investigations of global issues such as health and gender in visual arts.

## Learning sequence

### Alexia Sinclair – storyteller

#### Students will:

* identify and interpret signs and symbols and the visual language used in artworks by Alexia Sinclair and selected Rococo and/or Pre-Raphaelite artists.
* create a photographic portrait that demonstrates an understanding the visual language and symbols used in Vanitas paintings and Pre-Raphaelite artworks.
* investigate and take inspiration from the artmaking practice of Alexia Sinclair
* use Photoshop to create a photographic and digital media artwork inspired by a fairy tale.

#### Teacher notes

* You may choose to let students know that their initial portrait photographs will form the basis of a fairy tale artwork later. This sequence of artmaking activities could be extended over several more lessons.
* Analysis of the Pre-Raphaelites can be extended into a more complex case study and used as a key example for an extended response.
* Prior knowledge of Photoshop is recommended or the use of tutorials during class to facilitate the post-production process.
* Demonstrations of how to sketch plans for artworks and annotate plans would guide student understanding.
* Students can use digital stock images to create composites, or students could each make their own prop and model the working methods of Alexia Sinclair.

#### Differentiation

* Discussions can take place as a whole class group or carefully organised small groups. Responses could also be collected online.
* Students can work in pairs or small groups to create their portraits and can change roles between photographer and sitter.

#### Ongoing assessment/feedback

* Formative assessment is collected throughout artmaking and critical and historical activities and recorded in student’s diary or journal.
* Summative assessment activities (completed artworks, compare and contrast analysis) could be developed into formal assessment tasks.

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| **Lesson** | **Teaching strategies** | **Assessment** | **Resources** |
| **Lesson**  **1** | **Critical and historical studies**  **Learning intention**  Students identify and explain how Alexia Sinclair uses signs a visual language in her portraits to tell a story.  **Lesson steps**   * Students carefully examine the artwork ‘Variola Vera’ from the [‘The Art of Saving a Life’](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-art-of-saving-a-life) series 2014, digital photograph and use the activity 1 ‘see, think, wonder’ scaffold in the t[resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx) to analyse the visual qualities of the work. * Watch the interview video resource [‘Alexia Sinclair – storyteller](https://vimeo.com/435558298/bd07fe6843)’ (10.37) * Following the video, students are advised to go back to their ‘see think wonder’ tables and annotate new ideas they discovered when watching the interview, noting any new questions they might have. * New insights concerning the artwork ‘Variola Vera’ are shared with a partner. * Teacher to lead a whole class discussion on the key ideas and processes in Sinclair’s practice. Suggestions sought from the class and might include storytelling, history, fashion, Rococo, social commentary, digital editing. The collaborative class notes are summarised on the board and students make a copy. | Formative assessment:  Completed scaffold in visual arts diary/ photographic and digital media journal. | Alexia Sinclair  [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx)  [Alexia Sinclair Storyteller](https://vimeo.com/435558298/bd07fe6843) video (10:37) |
| **Lesson**  **2** | **Critical and historical studies**  **Learning intention**  Students investigate and account for the ways that Alexia Sinclair uses signs and symbols to create layers of meaning in her works and communicate ideas to audiences.  **Lesson steps**   * Refer to activity 2 from the [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx) on signs and symbols. Read the definition of signs and symbols aloud. Ask students for examples of signs and symbols that they are aware of in everyday life. Responses might include the red cross on the side of an ambulance, the sign commonly used to indicate a crossing, and even signs and symbols used in advertising and fast food. * There is an optional reading linked within the resource that teachers might choose to reference or share a section of with classes. * Teacher directs class to again carefully examine the artwork ‘Variola Vera’ from the [‘The Art of Saving a Life’](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-art-of-saving-a-life) series and to read their notes from the previous lesson. Students refer to the two example symbols that are identified and explained in the table on the resource. * Students identify any other signs or symbols they can see in the artwork and add them to the table. Teacher allows 15 minutes. Students might label and sketch each symbol and then explain the meaning. Some symbols students might identify include the flowerbeds, 18th century costumes, the needle, the simple clothing of the young boy. * Students examine the image [The Cabinets of Curiosity](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/a-frozen-tale#the-cabinets-of-curiosity) by Alexia Sinclair in the [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx) and create a catalogue of symbols and their intended meaning. Students might sketch and label each symbol before annotating it with the meaning. * Whole class discussion. Teacher prompts students to share their findings and poses questions to the class. Examples include –are Sinclair’s symbols always visible at first glance, or does she hide them? How does she use devices such as scale and layering to build more complex meanings? Does Sinclair reference signs and symbols from Vanitas’ paintings? * Extension – students create a visual dictionary of the following symbols commonly used in Vanitas artworks for example   + extinguished candle,   + globe,   + musical instruments,   + rotten fruit,   + mirror,   + watch or timepiece or hourglass. | Formative assessment:  Completed scaffold in visual arts diary/ photographic and digital media journal. | Alexia Sinclair  [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx)  [Alexia Sinclair Storyteller](https://vimeo.com/435558298/bd07fe6843) video (10:37)    ‘Variola Vera’ from the [‘The Art of Saving a Life’](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-art-of-saving-a-life) series |
| **Lesson 3** | **Critical and historical studies**  **Learning intention**  Students investigate the key features and conventions of the Baroque and Pre-Raphaelite movements and demonstrate their understanding in a compare and contrast activity.  **Lesson steps**   * Alexia Sinclair states that her work is influenced by her knowledge of the Rococo and Pre-Raphaelite movements. Students are divided into pairs and are asked to create a series of no more than four slides that identify and explain the key features and conventions of either Baroque or Pre-Raphaelite art. Teacher reminds class that conventions are accepted ways of representing things. Students need to include images of artworks by at least two principal members of the movement in their slideshow. Teacher provides students with a list of online resources to refer to when researching. Some examples are listed in the resource column. * Student slides are uploaded and shared to a digital learning space where all members of the class can view the work. * Teacher selects several pairs to share their slideshows with the class to review learning. * In her artmaking practice, Alexia Sinclair carefully considers the composition and placement of figures and objects to create highly detailed images that evoke a particular time and place. Her work is influenced by and makes references to trends and movements drawn from her study of art history, including the Pre-Raphaelite movement. * Teacher now directs students to complete activity 3 in the . It would help to project the two artworks on the whiteboard so that students can see the layers of symbolism and the details. Students use the structural frame to compare the works and list all of the visual qualities they can see. This could be undertaken as a whole class activity or individually. * Students then write a paragraph that outlines several similarities between the two works. |  | Alexia Sinclair  resource [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-alexiasinclair-resourcebooklet-s5.docx)  Teacher selects and makes available a range of digital resources on the Rococo and Pre- Raphaelite movements.  Examples for student research include –  The a[rt story website](https://www.theartstory.org/movement/rococo/) definition of Rococo (accessed 22/02/2021)  The [art story website](https://www.theartstory.org/movement/pre-raphaelites/) definition of Pre-Raphaelite (accessed 22/02/2021)  [Tate art terms](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/rococo)- Rococo (accessed 22/02/2021)  [Tate art terms-](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pre-raphaelite#:~:text=The%20name%20Pre%2DRaphaelite%20Brotherhood,popular%20genre%20painting%20of%20time.)Pre-Raphaelite (accessed 22/02/2021) |
| **Lesson 4 and 5** | **Artmaking**  **Learning intention**  Students develop plans in their art diaries or journals and then take simple photographic portraits of each other. These portraits reflect an understanding of the Rococo and Pre-Raphaelite movements and also Vanitas symbolism.  **Lesson steps**   * Artmaking – Students work in pairs to plan photographic portraits of each other that combine the pose and lighting reminiscent of Rococo or Pre-Raphaelite artists. Students are also challenged to include one Vanitas symbol in the portrait. For example, they might consider using a time piece, ripe fruit, a candle, an open book or an empty glass. Students can bring in their own symbolic object from home or use some provided by the teacher on the day of the shoot. * Students use remaining time to plan their portrait for the following lesson. Their plans include annotated sketches. They are advised to consider composition and framing. They consider how close or how far they are from the subject. Teacher advises that the position of the light source should be deliberate and might come from one side only. Ideally the background details are kept to a minimum and warm or bright lighting is used in a dark space to create a chiaroscuro effect. Students might also consider including drapery and costumes and include these details in their plans. * On the agreed photoshoot day, students work in pairs (or threes) to compose and photograph their images. Images can be documented on digital cameras, iPads or even mobile phones. Teacher might supply some props and lighting. * By the end of the learning experience, each student should have at least 3 good shots that might have been manipulated digitally to further enhance the warmth, tone and cropped to adjust the composition. If not moving onto the next artmaking task, these images can be printed or shared in a digital class exhibition so that peer feedback can be shared. | Formative assessment –Annotated sketches and planning recorded in visual arts diary or photographic and digital media journal.  Summative assessment: Finished portraits | Teacher brings in some resources for the photoshoot. For example, books, candle, mirror.  Photographic lighting is ideal but a few lamps can also be used to create interesting effects. |
| **Lesson 6** | **Artmaking**  **Learning Intention**  Students are challenged to use their photographic portraits to create digital fairy tale portraits inspired by Alexia Sinclair’s [The Royal Dozen](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-royal-dozen). Students plan to make a digital composite, assembling multiple images using Photoshop and using their symbolic portrait as the base layer to create a final image.  Artmaking sequence:   * Teacher starts lesson by asking class what is now known about Alexia Sinclair’s artmaking practice. Ideas are recorded on the board. Teacher then plays Alexia Sinclair’s [A Frozen Tale](https://vimeo.com/86472013) (04.08). Students are directed to carefully observe her artmaking practice. After video, the teacher leads a discussion and adds to the class notes on board. Some prompts for this whole class discussion might include – What are her intentions? What processes does she undertake? What are some of her material and conceptual choices? How does she use pencil and paper? How does she use her computer? Students add new insights to their own notes on the artist in their art diaries or journals. * Artmaking task – How can students transform their digital portraits into a magical fairy tale style artworks? Students are asked to consider the visual language Alexia Sinclair uses to transform her images into scenes that might be from a fairy tale. Students need to combine at least three found images into their digital portrait using Photoshop. The symbolic portrait they took last lesson provides them with the main character in their final image. They might consider adding a background layer and image. * Teacher asks class to think of as many fairy tales from childhood as possible. If students have devices, they might complete a [Mentimeter](https://www.mentimeter.com/features/word-cloud) or live online word cloud to quickly share ideas. * Students carefully examine their own portraits and consider ways to turn the image into a fairy tale style story. For example – to convey little red riding hood students might include red fabric/ backdrop/hood, a basket, and a wolf. * Students create thumbnail sketches in their diaries or journals of their concept and annotate their plans with colour choices and composition. * Students might search online for digital stock images of the symbols they want to add to their portraits. Save these files ready for post-production. | Formative assessment –Annotated sketches and planning recorded in visual arts diary or photographic and digital media journal. | Alexia Sinclair series [The Royal Dozen](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-royal-dozen)  Alexia Sinclair [A Frozen Tale](https://vimeo.com/86472013) vimeo (04:08)  Free word cloud [Mentimeter](https://www.mentimeter.com/features/word-cloud) |
| **Lesson 7 and 8** | **Artmaking**  **Learning intention**  Students are challenged to use their photographic portraits to create digital fairy-tale portraits inspired by Alexia Sinclair’s series of works called [The Royal Dozen](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-royal-dozen). Students use Photoshop to make a digital composite, assembling multiple images and using their symbolic portrait as the base layer to create a final image.   * Lesson starts with students watching a [time lapse](https://vimeo.com/7410543) (07:10) that reveals the attention to detail Alexia Sinclair goes into when working in the digital darkroom on her work ‘Macbeth’. Students use Photoshop to create their own works. * Students are challenged to create a layered image combining cut out signs and symbols from stock images and seamlessly blending, masking and merging them with their posed portrait to create a new work. * Teacher demonstrates techniques and effective use of specific tools where appropriate. * Students use the lasso tool, the magic wand tool and the selection tools to select the areas of the stock images to digitally cut out. * They also use the move tool to layer the cut-out section over the portrait. * Students blend the edges and smooth the composite image to create the illusion that the cut-out image is meant to be there. They are advised to play with composition, scale and lighting to create a believable scene. * Students are reminded to save each updated version of the image they create. * Students should consider manipulating colour balance, lighting, contrast, saturation, focal point, vignette. * Completed images are printed for exhibition and peer feedback. | Summative assessment: Finished fairy tale portraits | Photoshop is required to complete this task. Students have access to the Creative Cloud suite.  Adobe provides [tutorials](https://helpx.adobe.com/au/photoshop/tutorials.html?sdid=D4P81THY&mv=search&ef_id=CjwKCAiAyc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW8hhvqLM1zOXm4D5O9EX97pLx5RxWi5YndHzpwox_RaKqecVFlUWpxoCxUgQAvD_BwE:G:s&s_kwcid=AL!3085!3!444568336973!e!!g!!photoshop%20basics!194970784!15099760984&gclid=CjwKCAiAyc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW8hhvqLM1zOXm4D5O9EX97pLx5RxWi5YndHzpwox_RaKqecVFlUWpxoCxUgQAvD_BwE) for Photoshop at beginner, intermediate and expert levels.  Vimeo- Alexia Sinclair [‘McBeth’](https://vimeo.com/7410543) time lapse (07:10)  Alexia Sinclair series [The Royal Dozen](https://alexiasinclair.com/collections/the-royal-dozen) |

# References

[Visual Arts 7-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/visual-arts-7-10%22%20/) © 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.

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Adobe Photoshop [tutorials](https://helpx.adobe.com/au/photoshop/tutorials.html?sdid=D4P81THY&mv=search&ef_id=CjwKCAiAyc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW8hhvqLM1zOXm4D5O9EX97pLx5RxWi5YndHzpwox_RaKqecVFlUWpxoCxUgQAvD_BwE:G:s&s_kwcid=AL!3085!3!444568336973!e!!g!!photoshop%20basics!194970784!15099760984&gclid=CjwKCAiAyc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW8hhvqLM1zOXm4D5O9EX97pLx5RxWi5YndHzpwox_RaKqecVFlUWpxoCxUgQAvD_BwE), accessed 22/02/2021.