

# NO ONE IS WATCHING YOU



# RONNIE VAN HOUT 12.7–21.10.18

EDUCATION RESOURCE



**BUXTON  
CONTEMP  
ORARY**

3	About this resource and curriculum links
3	Planning your visit
4	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— About the exhibition</li><li>— About the artist</li><li>— About Buxton Contemporary</li><li>— Starting points for discussion and research</li></ul>
7	The self as subject <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— Exploring and responding</li><li>— Focus artworks</li><li>— Activity</li><li>— Questions to consider</li><li>— Research activities</li></ul>
11	Self-effacement and humour <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— Exploring and responding</li><li>— Focus artworks</li><li>— Activity</li><li>— Questions to consider</li><li>— Research activities</li></ul>
15	The absurd & the uncanny <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— Exploring and responding</li><li>— Focus artworks</li><li>— Activity</li><li>— Questions to consider</li><li>— Research activities</li></ul>
19	Glossary of terms
23	Selected references for further research
25	Artist Summaries
28	Image references

## About this resource and curriculum links

Target Audience: Secondary school level students

Artist: Ronnie van Hout

Curator: Melissa Keys

Education resource author: Brooke Babington

This learning guide is intended for educational purposes to aid teachers, tutors and other educational staff to support student learning in visual art subjects. It is designed to provide a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to *No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout*, to be used in conjunction with the exhibition catalogue, didactic labels and artworks.

The resource is intended for use in the design of projects related to subject strands and curriculum outcomes. It is broadly aimed at students from years 7 to 10 and VCE Units 1–4, however, it provides generalised information that can be tailored to suit younger students. While the focus of the resource is Ronnie van Hout's artistic practice, it can be adapted to explore modes of artistic practice more broadly, and to extend avenues for further discussion and research. Similarly, the scope of this resource may be modified to suit cross-curricular activities in various subject strands – particularly for psychology, philosophy, film and theatre studies streams – and to enable a range of pedagogical outcomes.

The material in this resource references the Australian Curriculum for the Arts, the Victorian Curriculum Art bands and the VCE Art and Studio Arts curricula. Where possible, links to suitable articles are provided as references for commentaries relevant to the VCE Art curriculum.

## Planning your visit

Before visiting *No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following:

- Opening hours, transport and parking options and cloakroom facilities.
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours.
- Education and public programs, artist talks etc. that coincide with the exhibition.

Before your visit you may wish to discuss the following with your students:

- *No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout* contains themes including violence, nudity and coarse language and addresses sensitive issues covered in the introduction of this guide.
- Your expectations for appropriate behaviour at a gallery, with regards to the safety of students and artworks given that a gallery is a public space.

# INTRODUCTION

## About the exhibition

*No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout* is a major survey exhibition of work by New Zealand-born, Melbourne-based artist Ronnie van Hout. The exhibition brings together sculptures, videos, photographs, embroidery, paintings and text works from over thirty years of practice and features significant new installations created specifically for Buxton Contemporary.

*No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout* is the first major solo exhibition at the new Buxton Contemporary gallery and is presented in association with Melbourne International Arts Festival.

4

## About the artist

Among other concerns, van Hout's practice explores the aesthetics of ugliness, B-grade and lowbrow forms of culture, gritty human experience, stigmatised symbols that cannot be rehabilitated and repulsive things we reflexively look away from, or do not wish to see.

— Melissa Keys, *No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout*, exhibition catalogue, Buxton Contemporary, 2018

Much of Ronnie van Hout's work is recognisable for its mischievous and absurd approach to self-portraiture. Taking the self as his subject, van Hout creates life-like sculptural replicas or body doubles of himself in various guises; as a child, as figures from pop culture, or as his warped doppelganger. The work is often autobiographical, exploring ideas about memory and family history, referencing the toy robots of his childhood, for example, his fascination with UFO culture or his lived experience as an artist.



He draws upon references from classic 1980s science fiction and horror films, stand-up comedy, cults, art history and popular and celebrity culture.

Through the use of humour, van Hout's slightly disconcerting, awkward and often seemingly vulnerable figures are shifted into tragicomic terrain; they are self-deprecating and absurd. Using strategies that include playing with expectations of scale and juxtaposition, the artist transforms seemingly everyday settings into perplexing and uncanny scenarios inflected by deep psychological resonances such as feelings of inadequacy and failure to explore the human condition more broadly.

Ronnie van Hout was born in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1962. Between 1980 and 1982 he studied film at the School of Fine Arts at Canterbury University before moving to Melbourne in 1999 where he completed a Masters of Fine Arts at RMIT University. Since the early 1980s, Ronnie van Hout has exhibited regularly in solo and group shows in New Zealand and Australia, and his work has featured in exhibitions in the USA, Netherlands, Austria and Germany.

Ronnie van Hout is represented in Australia by STATION, Melbourne and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney. In New Zealand, Ronnie van Hout is represented by Ivan Anthony, Auckland and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.

5

### **About buxton contemporary**

Buxton Contemporary houses the Michael Buxton Collection, an extraordinary collection of contemporary art donated to the University of Melbourne by the property developer and passionate art collector Michael Buxton.

The Michael Buxton Collection is made up of over 350 works by 59 artists made since the mid-1980s. The collection was established in 1995 and became one of the most important private collections of contemporary art in Australia. In 2014, Michael Buxton donated his collection to the University along with funds to build and partially endow a new museum. The aim of the collection and its donation is dually to support and foster contemporary art practice and to engage audiences with the culture and issues of today.

Buxton Contemporary is housed within the grounds of the University's art school, the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). It's specially designed building was created by renowned architects Fender Katsalidis. The digital screen above the museum entrance is a significant feature of the building's design; it is one of the

largest digital screens in Australia and showcases a continually changing display of digital and video works from the collection.

### Starting points for discussion and research

- Consider the title of this exhibition – *No one is watching you: Ronnie van Hout*. Who do you think the ‘you’ in this title refers to? What attitudes and feelings does it suggest? How does this title make you feel about the artist?
- In the press release for the exhibition, curator Melissa Keys writes that van Hout’s, ‘unsettling tableaux unleash deep social anxieties and feelings of self-consciousness, triggering the impulse to simultaneously laugh and cry’. What aspects of the work reveal emotions and psychological states of mind such as self-confidence, loneliness, anxiety, insecurity, joy, nostalgia, embarrassment, defiance, complacency, alienation, rebelliousness, vulnerability etc.? What methods does the artist use to reveal them?
- The exhibition addresses challenging themes including violence, difficult emotions and antisocial behaviour. Is there a difference between depictions of these themes in visual art or other art forms, and their representation in the news media? How do different contexts affect the way audiences view images? What ethical issues should be considered by artists and galleries?
- In what ways do artists such as Paul McCarthy, Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, and Jake and Dinos Chapman employ similar approaches, processes and concepts to address these themes? What techniques and materials do they use? Document your findings in your reflective journal.
- Discuss the overall installation of the exhibition. Does the placement of works add to their meaning? How do the artworks interact with one another? How does the display enhance the relationship between the artist and the audience? What is the role of the curator in this exhibition – can you identify elements of good presentation?
- Analyse and describe the characteristics of Buxton Contemporary. What are the roles of private and public institutions? What is philanthropy? What is the economic effect of galleries like this? Compare the way in which artworks are exhibited at Buxton Contemporary with methods of display used at the National Gallery of Victoria or the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art nearby. How are these spaces similar and how are they different?

# THE SELF AS SUBJECT



Van Hout diminishes his physique to that of an eight-year-old, dresses himself in jarmies and sneaks a fiddle with his privates and a cigarette on the toilet ... Van Hout's (figures) often seem strangely innocent, a borderline pubescent with furrowed brow, a middle-aged man diminished in stature and struggling to come to terms with his status in the grown-up world.

— Ashley Crawford, 'Growing Up: Ronnie Van Hout's Tumultuous Year', *The Article*, November 23, 2016, <http://thearticle.com.au/2016/11/growing-up-ronnie-van-houts-tumultuous-year/>

## Exploring and Responding

- van Hout's figurative sculptures are presented as children dressed in pyjamas but with sullen adult faces bearing the artists own features. Some sit on the toilet, or crawl on the floor, while others stand on the bed and stare into the distance defiantly. Thinking about these 'diminutive Ronnies', do you think these works are self-portraits? What makes a self-portrait?
- Look at *Sick Child* 2016. Critic and arts writer Ashley Crawford asks whether we see this as a child with adult features, trapped in an awkward adolescent phase or as an adult with a childlike body – do we read it as 'a sick child or a childish sicko?'. Thinking about this and other 'self-portraits' in the exhibition, how does the artist present himself in these artworks? How do you think he wants us to see him?
- Consider how and why Ronnie van Hout realises his ideas using these specific visual representations, i.e. why represent himself with a child's body? Why the pyjamas?
- Find some examples in the gallery where the figures seem to be performing. When we act for an audience, do we present our

‘true’ selves? Do you think the characters here represent truthful self-portraits? To what degree are all personalities performed?

- Listen to the artist discuss his work in *Melbourne Now* at the NGV in 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqWteu3zmN4>

Now listen to curator Blair French discuss Ronnie van Hout’s installation *I know everything* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney in 2017 for *The National: New Australian Art*: <http://www.the-national.com.au/artists/ronnie-van-hout/punk-on-a-bed/>

Using these videos as your starting point, examine how Ronnie Van Hout’s personal experiences have shaped his practice and evaluate some of the different ways he represents ‘the self’ in his art.

### Focus artworks

- *YOU!*, 2016
- *End Doll*, 2007
- *Sick Child*, 2016

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### Activity

- Using a smartphone or camera, take a series of selfies – consider transforming yourself with the addition of makeup, face paint, costumes and props. The photographs should bear a resemblance to you, but they should not be idealisations of the self.
- Print them out. Now attach your face to everyday objects – consider your choice of objects and the meanings they convey, think about placement, scale and colour and experiment to find those combinations that best represent your intentions.
- Consider the aesthetic qualities of your assemblage – tone, texture, shape and overall composition.
- Identify any unexpected, ambiguous, humorous or uncanny results. Adjust or manipulate to enhance your meaning.
- The primary component of the activity is to create a sculptural assemblage or installation with the self as subject. The aim is to



conceptualise and develop a representation of theme/s of identity. This activity could also suit printing, painting, drawing or ceramics practices.

- Ronnie van Hout often uses casting techniques in the production of his work along with dummies, models and mannequins. This activity can be taken further by investigating the possibilities of casting your everyday object.
- Casting can be as simple as pouring plaster into the cavity left by your everyday object when pushed into a bed of clay. More complex investigations could include researching mould-making processes and professional casting materials such as silicone or alginate (skin safe) for moulds and resin for casts (always seek advice and refer to material safety data sheets whenever using chemical materials).
- But casting doesn't have to be expensive; other materials could include water (ice), wax, plasticine, slip clay, concrete, glue, coconut oil, Vaseline, chocolate! Consider sustainable or reusable materials like paper pulp or soap.
- Research some ways in which sculptures have been displayed throughout history and across different cultures. Document your observations and apply the most appropriate elements to the display of your sculpture/s.

9



## Questions to consider

- What does it mean to 'be yourself'? Did the use of props or costumes help to reinforce or conceal your 'true-self'?
- What does it mean to represent yourself in a way that is not intended to aestheticise or beautify yourself?
- How do the original meanings or significances of your photographs change when you juxtapose them with various everyday objects? How important is this juxtaposition in establishing the final tone of your work? How do the aesthetic characteristics of your materials compare – do they create any contradictions or paradoxes?
- Reflecting on this activity, what can self-portraiture reveal about people in general? How could you refine this message further next time?
- How was the everyday object transformed by the materials you used to cast it? How do the materials you used affect the meaning of the work?

## Research activities

- When we encounter Ronnie van Hout's sculptures we often find ourselves looking at someone else; or, rather, discover someone else staring at us! We get the unsettling sense that we have intruded on a private scenario and have somehow become implicated in the narrative. Ronnie van Hout achieves this sense by shifting the gaze from the viewer to the subject. Compare Ronnie van Hout's sculpture *YOU!*, 2016 with Tracey Moffatt's photograph *The movie star: David Gulpilil on Bondi Beach*, 1985. Consider contexts of time and place, and established ideologies when considering similarities and differences.
- Discuss the role of the traditional sculptural method of casting. Why might the artist have chosen this approach to represent his themes – i.e. what specific characteristics or qualities of casting make it a good choice for communicating the artist's message? What other forms and styles could suit this message? Research developments in casting over time. How have casting techniques been used in traditional and contemporary styles and using established and innovative technologies?
- How do artists from different cultures represent concepts of self? How have the techniques of portraiture and self-portraiture

changed over time? Differed across cultures? Between genders?  
Some starting points: Zanele Muholi, Yasumasa Morimura,  
Sarah Lucas, Giuseppe Archimboldo.

- Look at the work of Cindy Sherman, Frida Kahlo and Ana Mendieta. Compare the aesthetic qualities of self-portraiture in their visual language.

# SELF-EFFACEMENT AND HUMOUR



Ronald has good ability which [he] has chosen not to apply in any concerted and concentrated way this year. He is very much an individualist and [is] determined not to conform to normal standards of work, dress etc. If he is motivated, however, Ronald shows originality, flair and genuine ability. He has a genuine talent in art and a considerable interest in filmmaking. His fellows and teachers tolerate his eccentricities remarkably well, mainly perhaps because of his basic sense of humour and lack of malice.

— Excerpt from school report, *Manson Son* 1996 (detail)

11

## Exploring and Responding

- Look at *Bananaman (fallen)* 2010 and *Bad Traveller* 2010. What is your personal opinion of these works and why?
- Describe some of the materials, processes and techniques the artist employs. How do these elements affect your interpretation of the artwork? For example, examine the role of scale in these works, what possible meanings and messages does it convey?

Slipping on a banana peel is a staple of physical comedy ... For van Hout, the banana has an enduring appeal as the funniest of

fruits, associated as it is with falling over, stupidity and chimpanzees ... [*Bad Traveller*] is filled with comic pathos and, somehow, the artist nudges us to feel for – or even identify with – the absurd hard luck of this gigantic Ronnie banana.  
— *Bad Traveller* 2010, extended label

- Discuss the difference between laughing at another person's expense and laughing at oneself. Think about other examples from popular culture that use self-deprecating humour. What does this kind of humour have to say about our contemporary times? What is the effect of using humour – like slapstick or mockery – to address serious human issues like isolation, failure or disillusionment?
- Ronnie van Hout has said of his work, "I think the work has humour, but in that 'I don't get it' or 'that's not funny' school of anti-comedy". What do you think the artist means by this? Can you identify a work in the exhibition that uses this kind of anti-humour? How is it achieved?
- Ronnie van Hout appears in many of his videos, playing characters that reference figures from popular culture – such as well-known films like *Planet of the Apes* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In performing these parts, Ronnie van Hout seems to draw parallels to the role of the artist. In *Standup* 2016, van Hout re-enacts comedy routines by comedians from the 1980s and '90s including Woody Allen and Ellen DeGeneres. By playing these roles, what do you think Ronnie van Hout could be suggesting about the public persona of the artist? Is the work funny?

12

### Focus artworks

- *Bananaman (fallen)* 2010
- *Bad Traveller* 2010
- *Manson Son* 1996
- *Standup* 2016
- *I should've done that ages ago* 2012

### Activity

- Make a video of yourself performing in a self-deprecating fashion. If you feel comfortable doing so, make your response



personal by exaggerating particular quirks or eccentricities you have that could amuse your audience or speak to the human condition more broadly. Alternatively, make one up!

- Think about trying to communicate an emotional state while you perform. Consider ways in which you can express yourself physically and psychologically.
- Play the video back and identify aspects of your body language that best and most humorously communicate your emotion.
- Now create a figurative sculpture that replicates this body language. When selecting the most appropriate materials for your sculpture, consider ethical and sustainable options. For example, jesmonite or 'bio-resins' are better for the environment than traditional polyurethane based resins. Consider reclaimable or recyclable options such as reusable modelling clay or discarded construction materials.
- Create various sculptural studies – Develop and refine your techniques and processes as you go to better represent your ideas and subject matter. Try reducing your form to the bare minimum required to capture the essence of your body language.
- Think about the elements of modelling, proportion, finish and texture and how each could elaborate the humour or expressive potential of your sculpture. Think about how and why Ronnie van Hout's sculptures make you feel amused. Can you apply similar techniques to your artwork?
- When presenting your artwork, consider how it is displayed to enhance its meaning to your audience. Consider the most appropriate format for your audience. Should the work be displayed on a screen? On a plinth? On the floor? How do your display choices reflect, challenge or extend the relationships between the artwork and the audience?

### Questions to consider

A joke isn't a joke until someone laughs at it.  
— Ronnie van Hout

- How did the use of digital technologies enhance your intended meaning?
- Did your audience respond to the work as you had expected? What could you do differently next time to enhance this response?



- Did the materials you chose and the modelling techniques you used affect the expressive potential of your sculpture? How could you better plan these outcomes next time?
- Is your sculpture persuasive? Think about degrees of naturalism and stylisation – does your sculpture veer closer to one or the other? Is your work realistic or a caricature?

### Research activities

- Research some examples of humorous artworks by different artists and document them in your journal. Explore humorous artworks from different historical and cultural contexts.
- Discuss the specific aesthetic qualities used in each instance – what makes these works funny? Think about the themes, materials and techniques artists use in your examples. Think about how the different contexts and audiences for these works might affect the reception of the work.
- Look up definitions for the terms irony, slapstick and farce. Can you find examples of these ideas in work in this exhibition?



Sausages and bananas are regular cast members in van Hout's artworks. Sometimes endowing them with human limbs and other figurative references, the artist finds these forms endlessly amusing. For example, he sees sausages as simple shapes that remind him of human waste. Van Hout appreciates the symmetry of the idea that when sausages are made they are connected together in a string and that once they pass through the body they re-emerge in approximately the same shape that they went in. It's a grotesque circulation of form – an abject reference to movement of matter from one orifice to another.  
— *Sausageman* 2010, extended label

# THE ABSURD & THE UNCANNY



Van Hout is fascinated with our need to create and accept irrational narratives as truths. These works explore the psychological imperative to believe in super beings, phenomena and forces beyond our control. While the artist doesn't necessarily believe that aliens are watching and studying us, he is interested in the absurd and often disturbing nature of abduction narratives – encounters that sometimes entail bizarrely erotic, physically or psychologically invasive experiences. Van Hout is curious about the social phenomena of abduction narratives and what these stories might suggest about humanity and our relationship with the unknown.  
— *Ersatz (Alien)* 2003, extended label

15

## Exploring and Responding

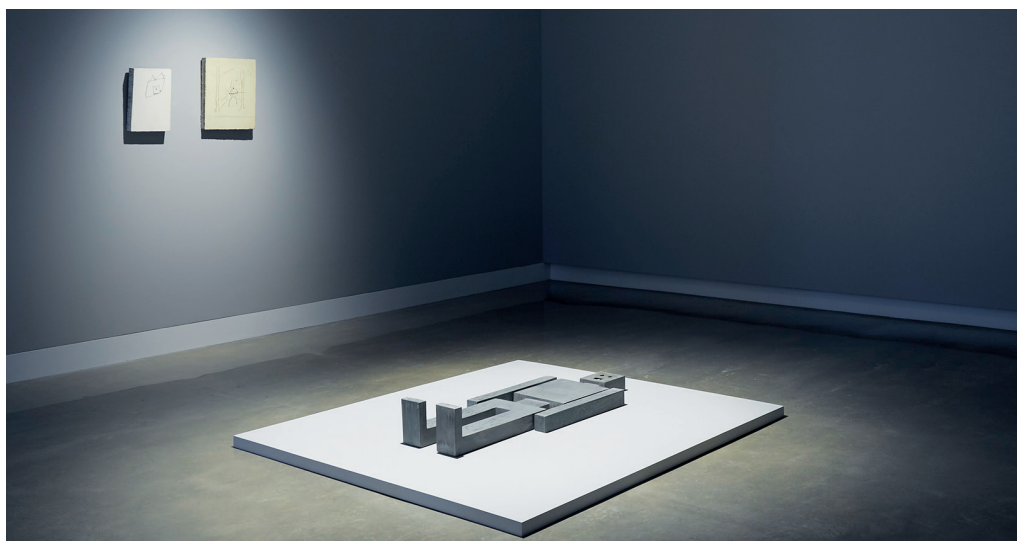
- Look at *Ersatz (Alien)* 2003. Analyse its components. What do you think the artist meant by including each of these elements? For example, consider the way the artwork is displayed. What does the text suggest to you? Do you think these and other components indicate something in combination or are they incongruous?
- In the extended label for *Ersatz (Alien)* 2003 curator Melissa Keys writes, 'Ersatz is a German word that means substitute, or stand-in for something else; it suggests something that might be false or artificial'. How does the title add to your understanding of the work?
- Through his interest in UFOs, alien abductions and the doomsday cultures of cults and religious movements, many of van Hout's works directly explore the figure of the 'outsider' and the outsider mentality. Photos shot in eerie night-vision, or perhaps bathed in the greenish glow of UFOs, depict Hollywood-signs that read ominously: Monster, Hybrid, and Abduct – set atop hills in

deliberately low-fi model landscapes. They have the appearance of stills from B-grade movies or amateur photographs of UFO sightings. In this context, Ronnie van Hout seems to be drawing analogies between these fringe enthusiasts and the artist himself. What might his intention be?

- Look at *Bad Ronald* 2013–18 and read the accompanying extended label. Analyse and compare this work with other works in the exhibition that you interpret as being about watching or being watched? How do these works make you feel?
- What references from popular culture are evident in this artwork? How does it reflect the personal interests, ideas, experiences and intentions of the artist? Discuss some of the ways the artist's work reflects his life and life experiences in this and other works in the exhibition.
- Look up the definition of the term 'absurd'. Considering the work *Failed Robot*, what elements of the absurd can you identify in this work? How has the artist achieved a sense of the absurd?

### Focus artworks

- *Ersatz (Alien)* 2003
- *Abduct* 1999, *Monster* 1999, *Hybrid* 1999
- *Failed Robot* 2007
- *Dave* 2014
- *Bad Ronald* 2013–18



## Activity

- This activity is designed to lead to the planning, creation and evaluation of a work based on the absurd or the uncanny.
- Starting with a collage, select a wide assortment of images from magazines or web sites and isolate objects, figures or features (such elements of the landscape or architecture).
- Cut them out.
- Combine your chosen images using intuition and without deliberation, but remain on the lookout for chance associations, unexpected and unpredictable correspondences and juxtapositions.
- Also consider the aesthetic qualities of your collage – colour, composition, perspective, scale, balance, repetition and shape.
- Deconstruct and reconstruct your composition, documenting arrangements you feel best represent your intentions or that capture elements of the absurd or uncanny. Add this documentation to your reflective journal of your developing work.
- Ronnie van Hout often uses text to aid in the communication of his intended meaning. Collect fragments of text or single words from songs, conversations, text messages, movies or television shows.
- Replace some of the images in your collage with these text fragments or words; replace some words from your collection with images. Consider the meaning of your words and the symbolism of your images – consider their antonyms or opposites!
- Your artwork may remain as a collage or develop into an assemblage, video, photograph, painting, sculpture, performance, embroidery or any other form that suits its intended meaning.
- Exhibit a selection of your artwork based on the theme of the absurd. Consider how you can enhance the meaning of your work through the way it is displayed.

## Questions to consider

- What is the effect of combining collage and text to represent your ideas? Did it make your work more or less absurd? More uncanny or less uncanny?

- Evaluate some of the characteristics and constraints of the process of collage. If you had utilised another technique or method, how would the meaning of your work have changed?



### Research activities

- Research the history of the term 'uncanny' in art and print out your findings for your journal – good places to start are with Surrealism and Dada. Has 'the uncanny' always been used in the same way? Across different cultures?
- Explore the term 'absurd'. What does it mean? What other examples can you find of the absurd in art, literature or film?
- The 'Theatre of the Absurd' is a style of drama which began around the 1950s that emphasised the absurdity of the human condition by exploring what happens when existence has no inherent meaning or purpose. In these plays, meaningful, logical communication gives way to irrational and nonsensical speech and characters are trapped in hopeless situations in which they are forced to engage in repetitive, pointless routines. Inexplicable mysteries are sometimes a feature of these plots, revolving around, for instance, a supernatural metamorphosis. Research the 'theatre of the absurd' and compare it with how Ronnie van Hout uses absurd and uncanny scenarios to discuss broader questions about the human condition.



- The plays discussed above were shaped by significant political, scientific and social changes that the playwrights saw occurring in the world around them after the Second World War. What social and historical contexts shape what we think of as absurd or uncanny today?
- Research one of the influences or sources of inspiration for Ronnie van Hout identified above. In your opinion, how do these influences relate to the absurd or uncanny?



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Absurd:** Contrary to reason or common sense, obviously false or foolish, logically contradictory or ridiculous, especially comically so.

**Aesthetic:** Concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty. Also, an artistic expression viewed as reflective of a personal or cultural ideal of what is aesthetically valid.

**Alienation:** A withdrawal or estrangement, as of feeling or the affections. In psychology, a mental state characterised by feelings of unreality brought about by a sense of estrangement from one's social setting.

**Ambiguous:** Open to various interpretations; having a double meaning.

**Antisocial:** Unwilling or unable to associate normally with others. Opposed, damaging, or motivated by antagonism to social order, or to the principles on which society is constituted.

**Assemblage:** A three-dimensional artwork made by assembling a variety of materials, often including found objects.

**Caricature:** An image or description of a person that exaggerates physical features for comic or satirical effect.

**Casting:** A sculpture technique that involves pouring a liquid or pressing a soft material into a mould to harden.

**Collage:** Art created by sticking paper, fabric, photographs or other materials onto a flat surface, such as paper or canvas.

**Composition:** The arrangement of art elements in an artwork to create a complete design.

**Curator:** A person who researches, collects, cares for and displays artworks.

**Dada:** An intellectual and art movement, starting in Switzerland c.1916, that rejected and ridiculed the values, ideas and culture of the society that it held responsible for the destruction and brutality of World War I. Dada artists pioneered new and original ideas, including the use of found-objects, ready-mades and performance art. (e.g. Marcel Duchamp).

**Doppelganger:** An apparitional double or counterpart of a living person (German: double-goer).

**Everyday object:** Any object of or relating to ordinary or commonplace use, such as things found around the household or readily available to purchase as contrasted with precious or unique items. See *found object*.

**Existentialism:** A philosophical theory or approach that emphasises the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.

**Expressive art:** Art where personal feelings, responses and thoughts are emphasised, through the expressive use of art elements and materials, e.g. dramatic colour.

**Farce:** Foolish show; mockery; a ridiculous sham. Derived from comic plays using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterisation and ludicrously improbable situations.

**Figurative art:** Art with some form of likeness to real objects, people or places. Also known as *representational art*.

**Found object:** Any object (constructed or natural) chosen by an artist and exhibited as a work of art or part of a work of art. See *everyday object*.

**High culture:** Culture that is seen as serious and 'valuable', such as opera, classical music, ballet, literature and fine arts. Opposite to *popular culture*.

**Idealism:** Where the natural appearance of a subject is depicted in an 'ideal' way, often according to conventions of ideal beauty.

**Installation:** A site-specific arrangement of art elements, art materials, and other objects and media, such as sound, light or film.

**Intuitive:** Spontaneous. Based on natural impulses and feelings.

**Irony:** A figure of speech or artistic device in which the literal meaning is the opposite of that intended, employed in ridicule or merely playfully.

**Juxtaposition:** Two or more things placed close together or positioned side by side with contrasting effect.

**Medium:** A material used to make an artwork (the plural is media).

**Modelling:** A technique that involves shaping soft materials to create a sculptural form.

**Mould:** A hollow form into which soft or fluid material can be poured or pressed to create a sculpture. See *casting*.

**Naturalistic art:** Art that portrays a life-like representation of the subject.

**Patron:** A person (or organisation) who supports the work of an artist, usually by purchasing or supporting the artist's work.

**Philanthropy:** The desire to promote the welfare of others, expressed especially by the generous donation of money to good causes.

**Popular culture:** Products and activities, such as fashion trends, fast foods, movies, comics, magazines and advertising, that are usually cheap and mass-produced for general audiences. Opposite to *high culture*.

**Portrait:** An artwork that represents a particular individual.

**Proportion:** The size relationship between objects. For instance, to depict a human figure in proportion requires knowledge of how the size of different parts of the body relate to the body as a whole.

**Realistic art:** Art that depicts subjects drawn from everyday life. Also often used as a synonym for *naturalistic art*.

**Scale:** The relative or proportionate size which an object bears to another or which the representation of an object bears to what it refers.

**Sculpture:** A three-dimensional artwork.

**Self-deprecating:** Modest about or critical of oneself, especially for humorous effect.

**Slapstick:** Comedy based on deliberately clumsy actions, rough play and humorously embarrassing events.

**Style:** The distinctive way in which an artist works with art elements and materials.

**Stylisation:** The representation of subject matter according to a particular style or convention, often involving simplifying shapes, forms or colours of the subject.

**Subject:** What an artwork is about, including feelings experiences, beliefs, opinions, messages or ideas.

**Surrealism:** An art movement originating in 1920s Paris that created mysterious images and forms that defy logic and suggest a strange, new reality, often inspired by dreams. Surrealism means 'above reality'. (e.g. René Magritte).

**Technique:** The way an artist applies or uses an art material.

**Tragicomic:** A dramatic or other artistic composition combining elements of both tragedy and comedy.

**Tableau:** A group of models or motionless figures representing a scene.

**Uncanny:** Strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way, such as to arouse superstitious uneasiness; unnaturally strange.

**Unconscious:** Occurring below the level of conscious thought. In Psychology, the unconscious is an organisation of the mind containing all psychic material not available in the immediate field of awareness.

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# ARTIST SUMMARIES

**Paul McCarthy (born 1945)** is an American contemporary artist based in LA and working across a range of media including performance, installation, sculpture, and film. McCarthy references American popular culture, consumerism and the mass media and often relies on taboo subjects or sexual innuendo to create uncomfortable or controversial scenarios. Recurring themes include his satirising of the myth of the heroic male artist, and his irreverent stance toward the art world and American social convention through – for example, his series’ of transgressive, sexually charged Christmas and Disney themed paintings and sculptures. McCarthy received an MFA from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. His work is in the collections of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., among others.

**Ryan Trecartin (born 1981) and Lizzie Fitch (born 1981)** are an American contemporary art duo whose work includes video, sculpture and performance in immersive large-scale installations which they call ‘sculptural theaters’. Addressing themes of identity formation and ‘self-staging’ in today’s social media saturated world, their works set a frenetic pace and intensity that make them uncomfortable for audiences to watch. Their works consider consumerism, narcissism, excess, neuroses, market research, ‘millennial’ culture, reality TV, promotion, corporate rhetoric, language and the lived experience of the twenty-first century subject. The pair met in 2001 while studying at the Rhode Island School of Design. In 2006 Trecartin was the youngest artist ever included at the Whitney Biennial. They have exhibited at MoMA PS1 in New York (2011), Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2014), and have participated in the New Museum Triennial (2009) and the Venice Biennale (2013).

**Jake Chapman (born 1966) and Dinos Chapman (born 1962)** are British contemporary artists – often referred to as the Chapman Brothers – who came to prominence in the mid-1990s through their association with the YBA group (Young British Artists). Like the other YBA artists, their subject matter is deliberately shocking and regularly courts controversy. They predominantly create freestanding sculptures or sculptural tableaux using plastic models and mannequins which are distorted or disfigured to create illicit and iconoclastic scenes of war, torture, horror or violence or that examine politics, religion and morality. The brothers studied at the Royal College of Art from 1988–90 and began their collaboration in 1991.

**Tracey Moffatt (born 1960)** is one of Australia's most successful contemporary artists. A filmmaker and photographer, over the last 25 years, Moffatt has held more than 100 solo exhibitions of her work in Australia, Europe and the United States. Moffatt's photographic and film series' centre on implied but undisclosed narratives which question myth, history and psychology. Her works engage with themes of childhood trauma, indigeneity, and popular Australian culture. In 2017, Moffatt represented Australia at the 57th Venice Biennale and her work is in the collections of every major state and territory collection in Australia as well as the Tate Gallery, London, the Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, among others.

**Zanele Muholi (born 1972)** is a photographer and 'visual activist'. Her work is closely tied to her advocacy of the LGBTI community, exploring black lesbian and gay identities and politics through the genre of portraiture. Muholi considers her portraiture a political statement and archive – recording an 'often invisible community for posterity'. Her work challenges stigmas and the prevalence of hate crimes against homosexual people in South Africa. Muholi is based in Johannesburg and her work was included in the Venice Biennale in 2013, Documenta in 2012 and the São Paulo Biennial in 2010.

**Yasumasa Morimura (born 1951)** is a Japanese artist best known for re-creating well-known historical artworks with himself inserted into the scenes. Considering cultural and sexual appropriation and challenging traditional modes of portraiture, Morimura's work deals with ideas surrounding identity, race, gender and the effects of the male and/or Western gaze. Morimura graduated from Kyoto City University of Arts in 1978. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1992), the Guggenheim Museum (1994), the Yokohama Museum of Art in Yokohama, Japan (1996), and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney (2007).

**Sarah Lucas (born 1962)** is among the most significant and influential artists of her generation. From her association with the YBA group of provocateurs in the 1990's, Lucas has built a reputation for irreverence and an indifference to social convention. Lucas' work relies on her enduring vernacular device of using innuendo to address big issues – gender, sex, the body – using everyday objects or readymades as symbols for sexual organs, like bawdy visual puns. Lucas graduated from Goldsmiths College in 1987 and has exhibited and been collected widely since. In 2015, Lucas represented Britain at the 56th Venice Biennale while in 2005–6, Tate Liverpool held a major retrospective of her work followed by another major survey exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 2013.

**Giuseppe Archimboldo (c.1526–1593)** was an Italian painter, distinguished for his portrait paintings of sitters made entirely from fruit, vegetables, flowers, roots, sea creatures, books or other everyday items. The assembled objects were related to Archimboldo's sitter by signification, with the artist selecting objects related to his subject's profession or interests. Archimboldo was a mannerist – a style that emerged in European art around 1520 until approximately the end of the 16th century and which was characterised by heavily stylised forms, elongated limbs and exaggerated elegance.

**Cindy Sherman (born 1954)** is an American artist who works with photography and film and is best known for her self-portrait series in which she disguises herself as a range of characters. Sherman's most celebrated work is her *Untitled Film Stills* series in which she subverts the stereotypical depiction of women in film to question female representation and draw attention to the nature of representation by playing with the visual languages of cinema. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Sherman was a central figure of the 'Pictures Generation'. This group used photography to examine the strategies and codes of representation and the mass media, adopting critical attitudes toward the techniques of seduction and desire that played upon consumers.

**Frida Kahlo (1907–1954)** was a Mexican painter whose self-portraits are widely known and which combine realism with surrealist or magic realist elements and draw their inspiration from Mexican folk art, Kahlo's own autobiography and the natural world. Kahlo's work explores issues around identity and postcolonialism and is frequently aligned with Mexican indigenous cultures and with feminism for its resolute portrayal of the female experience and form. Frida Kahlo was a key figure (along with Diego Rivera, Tina Modotti, Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Lola Álvarez Bravo) in Mexico's post-revolution renaissance.

**Ana Mendieta (1948–1985)** was a Cuban-American artist working primarily in performance, photography and video. Displaced as an adolescent from Cuba to the United States, her work largely considered the concepts of identity, place and belonging and often centered on her body in the landscape and life cycles within the natural world. Using earth as her medium along with her body and other organic matter including blood, feathers, fire and wood, Mendieta drew correlations between her connection to the natural world and to feminism, for instance to address the issue of violence against women. Mendieta received an MA in 1972 and MFA in 1978 from the University of Iowa and exhibited internationally before her untimely death in 1985.

## Image references

p. 1 *Crawling Figure* 2016  
Painted polyurethane on polystyrene, clothing, wig, cast epoxy resin fibreglass, stainless steel plinth  
140 x 80 x 70 cm  
Courtesy STATION, Melbourne

p. 1 *Empty Doorways* 2016  
painted urethane on polystyrene, clothing, hair, resin coated and painted MDF  
60 x 40 x 120 cm  
Courtesy of Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

p. 7 *YOU!* 2016  
painted polyurethane, urethane coated CNC polystyrene, clothing, wig, MDF, lighting figure: 140 x 60 x 67 cm; MDF: 242.5 x 122cm; installation dimensions variable  
Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne

p. 9 *End Doll* 2007 (detail)  
fabric, cast resin, synthetic polymer paint, plastic, synthetic hair  
artist proof  
55 x 20 x 9 cm  
Collection of the artist

p. 9 *Sick Child* 2016  
painted resin, wig, clothing, plaster  
150 x 45 x 30 cm  
Collection of The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū: Purchased from 'Recovered Memory,' the fourth Goodman-Suter Contemporary Art Project and funded by the Goodman endowment and Burton Bequest in 2006

p. 11 *Bananaman (fallen)* 2010  
painted fibreglass and plastic on plywood  
17 x 15 x 15 cm  
Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne

p. 14 *I should've done that ages ago* 2012 (detail)  
painted polyurethane and fibreglass  
135 x 20 x 20 cm  
Courtesy of Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

p. 15 *Ersatz (Alien)* 2003  
resin coated styrene, clothing, synthetic polymer paint on composition board, string  
155 x 44 x 25 cm  
Private Collection, Christchurch, New Zealand

p. 16 *Failed Robot* 2007 (detail)  
synthetic polymer paint on fibreglass over polyurethane  
17.5 x 45 x 109 cm  
Private Collection, Melbourne

p. 18 *Dave* 2014  
cast polyurethane, fibreglass, acrylic, clothing, wig, glass eyes, wooden chairs  
95 x 170 x 55 cm  
Collection of Rae-ann Sinclair and Nigel Williams, Melbourne

p. 19 *Bad Ronald* 2013–18  
MDF, cast resin, soundtrack of *Bad Ronald*, 1974, director: Buzz Kulik  
installation dimensions variable  
duration: 00:1:14:00  
Courtesy of STATION, Melbourne and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Installation photography  
Christian Capurro

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