

acca education



Mortality



# MORTALITY

Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, English, Religious Education, Biology, Literature, Media and of course, Art – for ACCA's new exhibition Mortality an Educators cross curriculum dream. ACCA's new exhibition has something for every student, subject and teacher.



Fiona Tan  
*Tilt*, 2002  
Video instal-  
lation DVD  
& digital  
betacam  
master

## artists

Charles Anderson  
George Armfield  
Melanie Boreham  
Bureau of Inverse Technology  
Nathan Coley  
Aleks Danko  
Gabrielle de Vietri  
Tacita Dean  
Sue Ford  
Garry Hill  
Larry Jenkins  
Peter Kennedy  
Anastasia Klose  
Arthur Lindsay  
Dora Meeson  
Anna Molska  
TV Moore  
Tony Oursler  
Neil Pardington  
Giulio Paolini  
Mark Richards  
David Rosetzky  
Anri Sala  
James Shaw  
Louise Short  
William Strutt  
Darren Sylvester  
Fiona Tan  
Bill Viola  
Annika von Hausswolff  
Mark Wallinger  
Lynette Wallworth  
Gillian Wearing

## rationale

Mortality: The condition of being Mortal or susceptible to death; opposite of immortality. Can also be a rate of measuring death.

ACCA's major exhibition Mortality explores the 2010 Melbourne International Arts Festival theme of spirituality, death and the afterlife by taking us on life's journey from the moment of lift off to the final send off, and all the bits in between. Devised as a wunderkammer space, this exhibition co-mingles contemporary and historical works with artefacts and other items to create an evocative and dense story of life.

*Life is what happens to you while you're  
busy making other plans  
- John Lennon*

This exciting and dynamic trans-historical event features over 30 artists works ranging from mid 19th century oil paintings by James Shaw, George Armfield and William Strutt to video, photography, sculpture and installation works by internationally renowned contemporary artists such as TV Moore, Bill Viola, David Rosetzky and Gillian Wearing.

From the cradle to the grave this exhibition explores and captures artists long-time fascination with the passage of life and death. As curator and Artistic Director of ACCA Juliana Engberg says:

*'As seems appropriate to such a title, I have designed this exhibition as a sweeping narrative. Joy, ennui, struggle, uncertainty, happiness, loss, hilarity and so much more is gathered into this epic journey of life and its cycle. The visitor to the exhibition will travel physically and metaphorically through the labyrinth of existence.'*

# key ideas & artists

*'When I was Three, I was hardly me'*

– AA Milne

Ever heard someone exclaim that a child they know seems 'like a 30 year old in a 3 year olds body'? It is an interesting thought to wonder what the world would seem like if we were to return to our 3 year old bodies, with all the understanding of our adult selves. English photographer and video artist **Gillian Wearing**'s work explores her fascination with human behavior and the complexities of both interior and exterior relationships. Using masks and other disguises in many of her works the piece featured in Mortality titled *Self Portrait at Three Years Old* (2004), is a part of her Family Album series where she disguises herself in silicon prosthetics as a process of reconstructing old photographs of her own family. These portraits include turning her image into her mother, father, brother and younger self. *Self Portrait* sees Wearing transform herself into the figure of herself as a three year old. Eerily audiences are meet with the provoking image of Wearing's adult eyes within a child's face. This piece demonstrates Wearing's interest in the 'self' and changes in social development.



Gillian Wearing  
*Self Portrait at Three Years Old*, 2004  
digital c-type print

*'Oh, why can't you remain like this forever?'*

- J.M Barrie *Peter Pan and Wendy*

Progressing to insights from the age of eight and nine Melbourne artist **Gabrielle de Vietri**'s piece *The I Don't Know Show: Philosophy for Kids* asks the big philosophical questions covering everything from identity and faith to epistemology and aesthetics to a group of children fast approaching 'double digits'. This piece presents a fascinating insight into innocent perceptions of life and death and offers interesting philosophical questions for students of all ages to ponder and discuss.



Gabrielle de Vietri  
*The I Don't Know Show: Philosophy for Kids*, 2009  
DVD



## 'Still don't know what I was waiting for'

– David Bowie

What were we waiting for during our teenage years of boredom and angst? Artist **Darren Sylvester**'s photography in *Mortality* presents, secondary students specifically, with a glossy, highly stylized image of themselves participating in their regular activities e.g. eating junk food and looking bored in a library. Sylvester depicts regular moments in everyday life but with a glossy hyper-real advertising aesthetic and gives the photographs theatrical titles such as *If all we have is each other, that's OK* (2003), and ***Our Future Was Ours*** (2005) which suggest that these are monumental occasions.

"Often dramatic moments in life have a lot of fast food or makeup or products or pop culture tagged with them."- writes Nick Dent in *Time Out Sydney*

Sylvester maintains that his work is not a critique of pop culture but simply depicts real life.



Darren Sylvester  
*Our Future Was Ours*, 2005  
lightjet print



David Rosetzky  
*Nothing like this*, 2007  
16 mm film transferred to DVD, 24:36 min

Similarly **David Rosetzky**'s work in *Mortality* contemplates the external versus the internal. Rosetzky's piece titled ***Nothing like this*** (2007), features a collection of scenes of a young group of friends on a weekend getaway. Watching the visuals one would think that this group is at ease. Everyone seems tranquil and relaxed and aesthetically it all seems to belong together harmoniously. This however, is coupled with an audio track that allows the viewer to hear the inner dialogue of different members of the group intermittently and through this it becomes clear that, as in life, relationships are not as they may seem on the surface.



Larry Jenkins  
*Blackburn South Sharps* 1975 printed 2010  
colour photographs



Sue Ford  
*Faces*  
Self-Portrait 1976-96  
gelatin silver photograph

The highly constructed works of these two artists makes an interesting comparison to the photographic pieces featured in the show by artists such as **Larry Jenkins** and **Sue Ford**. Larry's photograph's *Blackburn South Sharps* offer a genuine image of 'feckless youth', un-styled these photos document a sub-culture in Australian history from 1975-1976.

## 'Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky'

– W. H. Auden

Icarus; with wings made of feathers and wax, despite his fathers warning, dared to fly too close to the sun and plunged to his death.

**Mark Wallinger's** whose title is shared by the Flemish landscape painter Pieter Bruegel **Landscape with Fall of Icarus**, is a video installation that includes five television monitors displaying footage of a man tittering on the edge of failure. This footage is slowed to a tenth of real time and the moments are recycled in a never ending cycle. The fall of the man from that moment of potential success is an important element explored in several other works within Mortality.



*Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, attributed inconclusively to Flemish landscape painter Pieter Bruegel  
oil on canvas (73.5 cm × 112 cm)



Mark Wallinger  
*Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus*, 2007  
Five-channel video installation

**James Shaw's** *The Admella wrecked, Cape Banks, 6th August, 1859* and **Giulio Paolini's** piece *L'altra figura*, 1984 (featured in the 2009 art exam), also invokes images of Icarus. *L'altra figura* consists of three identical plaster casts of classical heads; two mirroring each other glancing down at a third shattered on the ground. The third head perhaps represents Icarus- the figure fallen from great height. It is the use of classical forms that leads us to consider classical myths such as Icarus and even Narcissus and featured in the 2009 Art exam, it is a fantastically rich and accessible work to discuss with all students.



James Shaw  
*The Admella wrecked, Cape Banks, 6th August, 1859*  
Oil on canvas



Giulio Paolini  
*L'altra figura* 1984 Plaster



*'Is that all there is, is that all there is?'*

– Peggy Lee

Albanian photo and video artist **Anri Sala**'s piece *Time After Time*, documents a single horse standing in the median strip of the highway. Haunting and moving this piece documents cars hurling past the creature but no one stops to help it move from its dubious situation. Sala's camera blurs in and out of focus as the horse titters on the edge of life and death, conveying, both movement and stillness. This creature is out of place, its habitat now a landscape of progress the image of the skeletal horse 'deftly conjures the feeling of seeing a coffin lowered into the earth'

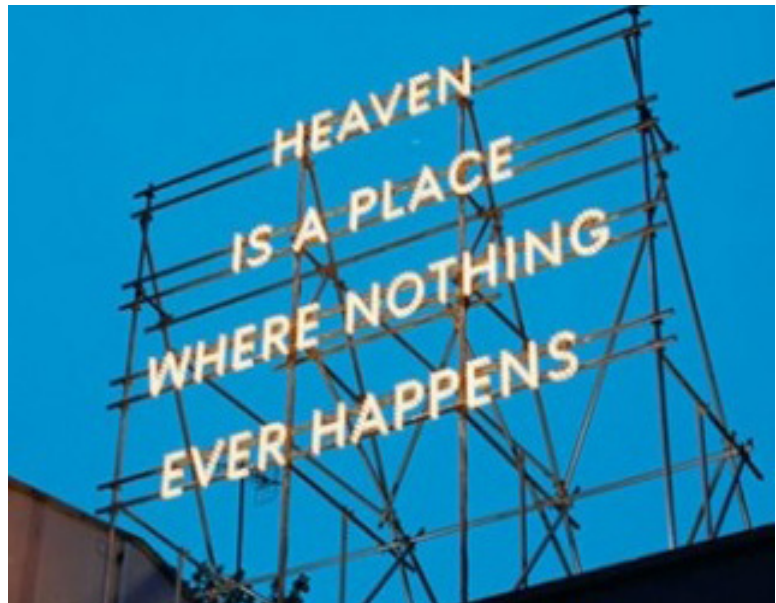
AS - <http://alt.berlinbiennale.de/pdf/Anri%20Sala.pdf>.



Anri Sala  
*Time After Time*  
2003  
DVD

Meanwhile in ACCA's forecourt Scottish artist **Nathan Coley** will erect his famous message sculpture *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens*. This piece is a reference to retro religious roadside signage with a message that is both reassuring and unsettling. A confronting proposition, the piece will get students thinking about both the big and small philosophical questions. Often the location of Coley's works are instrumental to their creation, and often he will decide on the location prior to creating the concept for the piece, as he likes to first consider the relationship between architecture and culture. This work part of series which includes; *We Must Cultivate Our Garden* and ***There Will Be No Miracles Here***—the phrases, not created by Coley *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens* asks us not only to think about the grand concepts of heaven and earth but more specifically about the town in which the piece is erected. The words have a duality about them that leads us to consider both the pessimistic and optimistic.

Nathan Coley  
*Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens*  
2008, scaffolding and illuminated text courtesy of the artist



## Philosophy

(This is the perfect show to visit for VCE philosophy- particularly Unit 2 Area of study 2)

### Primary

What is art? How do we decide what defines art? Compare a painting, a sculpture, a photograph and an installation work, within Mortality. Discuss what they all have in common.

### Middle years

Discuss notions of mortality and immortality throughout history. How do the works within the show comment on the human condition?

Use the exhibition to start a discussion on philosophical questions such as 'What makes something a work of art' and 'how have definitions of art changed over time'. Use your visit to Mortality to discuss how art has changed over time and what implications this has for the way we value art and our understanding of aesthetics.

What do the terms 'high' and 'low' art mean? Discuss in relation to the photographic pieces shown in Mortality.

### Upper years

Get your students to look at selected works in the exhibition such as; David Rosetzky's Weekender, Peter Kennedy's People who died the day I was born, Garry Hill's Site/Resite, and in particular TV Moore The Dead Zone. Use these images as an introduction the concepts of knowledge, self, and belief.

Examine representations of the human form in TV Moore's The Dead Zone. Then find several different representations of a man running – such as a sculpture, a diagram, a child's drawing etc. Discuss which may be classified as a work of art and why. This may also incite discussion on the concept of consciousness and man versus animal.

Use the gallery to inspire a discussion on aesthetics, philosophy and religion. Get students to pick a selection of works that they think inspire discussion on one of the above and apply philosophical arguments they have studied to the ideas within the artworks. Is beauty necessary in art? Are there particular works in the show that may incite controversy (such as The Bureau of Inverse Technology's Suicide Box), and if so why? Also examine notions of ethics.

Look at Nathan Coley's work *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens*. Discuss the phrase used in this work and the other works in the series such as *We Must Cultivate Our Garden* and what these signs suggest based on the language, the aesthetic and the context in which they are placed. (The origin of these phrases is not crucial to an understanding of the works and he purposely likes leaving the origin unknown as some will recognize the reference but others will bring their own meaning to the words as he places them in entirely different contexts to their creation – however, for your purposes *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens* is a line taken from the Talking Heads song 'Heaven' and *We Must Cultivate Our Garden* is taken from 'Candide' which is a French satire written in 1759 by Voltaire, a French Enlightenment writer and philosopher). Nathan Coley is a past winner of the Turner Prize, next discuss artistic debates surrounding this and get your students to write an essay or written reflection on the artistic merit of the Turner Prize or on philosophical questions and arguments in relation to Coley's work.

## Psychology

### Upper years

When do we start to devise a notion of 'the self'. Self and Identity are universal themes for much contemporary art and play a huge role in our social development. Use two of the works from the show that look at notions of the Self and discuss the developmental process of identity.

## Media

### Primary

Louise Short's works with found photography in her work; View this slide 2010. Here she has found slides and put them together, using images of different people, to create linear life narrative (eg, getting married, buying a house). Get students to create their own narrative of what they think happens in a life cycle to individuals by collecting photos from they find, in magazines or that you bring in for them that are of people they do not know. Get them to then create a life narrative with these images of significant life experiences.

### Middle years

Looking at the video and photographic works in Mortality, discuss the difference between the highly constructed pieces by David Rosetzky and Darren Sylvester compared to Larry Jenkins and Sue Ford's images. Look at how these pieces comment on youth and identity. How are they different and similar? Get students to look at representations of adolescents in television and film and then make a video and photographic work that makes a comment on what it is like to be an adolescent.

### Upper years

Video and Photographic artist Darren Sylvester's work creates visual scenarios which draw on the glossy aesthetics of advertising and consumer culture. Look at the form of advertising and perhaps couple it with watching episodes of the ABC series The Gruen Transfer. What are the elements in Sylvester's photographs that make us associate it with the advertising genre? Research product placement in film and advertising looking at the creation of consumer culture.

## English

### Primary

Aleks Danko has made a small suburb in his piece, Day in Day out. Every house in this piece is exactly the same and every day seems like any other. What is a routine? Use this piece as inspiration to discuss with your students what routines they have compared to other members of their family. You may like to get students to then write a character profile of someone from a story they have read or that they have written themselves outlining a particular character's daily routine.

### Middle years

Use the slide carousel show in Sue Ford's Time series as the inspiration for students to write a chronological narrative based on the images they have seen.

Senses and emotion. Use one of the images presented in the show (e.g. James Shaw's *The Admella wrecked, Cape Banks*) and ask your students to imagine that they have just stepped into the painting/image. How do they feel what are the words you would use to describe what your senses would experience (e.g. see, smell, taste, feel).

Get students to look at James Shaw's work *The Admella wrecked, Cape Banks 6th August, 1859*. First get students to develop their own narrative to accompany the work; this may be in short story or poetry form. Then research the actual event and look at stories surrounding ship wrecks.

## Art

### Primary

Look at Aleks Danko's piece, Day in Day out. Get students to think about what the street they live in or go to school in, looks and feels like? How would you represent it? What are the major aspects in the structure and feel of a home?

### Middle years

Look at Aleks Danko's piece, Day In Day Out and compare it to works by other artists who have explored the concept of 'the suburb' or the dwelling (e.g. Howard Arkley's piece titled *Stucco home*, 1991). Get students to create their own portrait of their home or a piece of work that conveys the feelings of a home or suburb.

Discuss the similarities between the Giulio Paolini's work *L'altra figura* and Mark Richards piece *Snow Boy*. Look at the differences and similarities in both the aesthetics and the content.

- Discuss with students the myths of Icarus and Narcissus and get students to respond to the Paolini work in the show. Get students to think about how artists have represented historical events or myths in their work throughout the ages.



## Upper years

17th century Dutch still life paintings are metaphors for transience. What does Vanitas mean? What are some of the traditional symbols of Vanitas and what do they signify?

Think about some of the issues for the gallery when showing a show like this? What could be some of the problematic works? Think about the exhibition design-what new meaning is created by the placement of the work and the architectural design?

## Religion and Society/Views and Values

### Primary

Do societies live differently and does the way they structure their towns change? Get students to look at Aleks Danko's work titled Day In Day Out. Students can see how different societies position their homes? For eg. one family per house in lined numbered streets or large families living together. What makes up a family and how do different cultures define it?

Get students to think about the cycle of life – what big event make up the story of our lives? Get students to list what they think are big events in the cycle of life – from birth to death.

### Middle years

What do different religions say about the after life? Get Students to focus on Gabrielle de Vietri's work. Reflect on religious and other perspectives on death, seeing the subject from different points of view? Perhaps get students to draw up a table comparing how different religions view the after life.

After looking Darren Sylvester's work get students to think about significant life experiences. Get students to reduce a full life into 4 or 5 instances. What are the most valued moments in a life? What are different students similarities and differences – discuss as a class.

### VCE

Discuss the ethical implications of showing some of the works in Mortality. Get your students to write a report or create a PowerPoint presentation on their position towards the showing of particular works in the show.

What values are represented in the works in Mortality (in particular you might like to focus on Tacita Dean's film Presentation Sisters, Bill Viola The Passing, Aleks Danko's work Day In Day Out or Anna Molska's work titled The Mourners)? What religious traditions do these works draw their inspiration from if any? Get your students to then research the origins, similarities and differences of these religions. Get students to think about which of these significant life experiences are connected with religious traditions.

Look at Paolini's work L'altra figura, and research the myths of Icarus and Narcissus looking at the society, stories and rituals surrounding them.

When looking and researching one particular religion use the exhibition Mortality as a basis for analysis of the particular religion. Each student could pick a religion to focus on when they enter the exhibition and choose 3 or 4 works to examine in the viewpoint of their specific religion. How would someone with that religion feel about the images, views and values expressed in each work?

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