

REKO RENNIE



INTERPRETIVE
RESOURCE



ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
NORTH TERRACE, ADELAIDE Open daily 10am–5pm artgallery.sa.gov.au

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The activities suggested in this resource link with the Australian Curriculum: Arts (Visual Arts) through the strands of Responding and Making, providing opportunities for students to experience and explore the concepts of artists, artworks, world and audience. These can be used as a starting point to consider a range of perspectives within the context of social, cultural and historical viewpoints.

Some of the ways students can learn more about contemporary art include:

- Responding by using eyes, ears and imaginations
- Discussing how and why works are made and displayed
- Investigating the diversity of contemporary art forms
- Exploring techniques and materials
- Making by experimenting with new or familiar materials
- Using art to tell their own story

We encourage you to use this resource as prompt to make connections to other works of art in the Gallery's collection. By viewing works of art in the Gallery and initiating dialogue with students Australian Curriculum outcomes can be met with ease.

KEY LITERACY WORDS

Aesthetic	Multidisciplinary
Aerosol art	Pattern
Appropriation	Repetition
Camouflage	Stencil
Commission	Site specific
Icon	Street art
Identity	Symbolism
Installation	Temporary

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Sustainability

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- ICT Capability
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding

cover image: Portrait of Reko Rennie photo: David Varga 2017



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image detail: Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi people, New South Wales, OA_CAMO, Adelaide, 2017; Commissioned for TARNANTHI: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art supported by BHP 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Courtesy of the artist and blackartprojects, Melbourne, photo: Saul Steed

REKO RENNIE

Titled *OA_CAMO* this site-specific work initiates our re-presentation of the Australian Art collection, incorporating Galleries 6, 7 and 17. This work is an extension of Rennie's *Visible Invisible* series which inverts the idea of camouflage. Traditionally, camouflage conceals or disguises animals or objects by using a combination of materials and colouration to optically confuse the observer. Rennie's use of camouflage amplifies, rather than conceals, his identity. His use of luminous colours commands our attention and asserts his cultural presence in contemporary Australian art.

With his signature use of a street art aesthetic, combined with bold geometric patterning inspired by his Kamilaroi heritage, Rennie challenges us to rethink our assumptions about Australian art and identity.

Rennie is an interdisciplinary artist who explores his Aboriginal identity by combining painting, stenciling, sculpture, installation and film. He acknowledges the connections between his own background as a street artist and the traditional practice of blowing a fine mist of ochre over hands and arms to create a stenciled rock art. Instead Rennie employs contemporary techniques by using laminated paper as stencils and aerosol paint to create his striking designs.

'As an urban Indigenous Australian, my work often references the hip-hop and graffiti subcultures that were influential on my artistic practice in my formative years, merging traditional Kamilaroi diamond-shaped designs, hand-drawn symbols and repetitive patterning to subvert romantic ideologies of Aboriginal identity.'

Reko Rennie



Reko Rennie installing OA_CAMO in Gallery 17, 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Courtesy of the artist and blackartprojects, Melbourne, photo: Saul Steed

RESPONDING

Rennie's work is often presented on buildings or as installations in galleries. Making works of art that are large and, often, located in public spaces encourages people to think differently about certain issues. Does OA_CAMO challenge your prior knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal art? As a class discuss your responses.

What word would you use to describe Rennie's installation?

In the Gallery you may find works of art that have been created using an airbrush (Howard Arkley) or a paintbrush (Sidney Nolan). Explain how these marks differ to the stencilling technique used by Rennie.

Imagine you have enlisted Reko Rennie to create an installation on the exterior of your school building. Write a letter to your school principal outlining why you think this work of art should be installed on this site. Investigate other public projects Rennie has worked on. How did the community respond to these installations? Perhaps the outcomes of these projects could provide you with evidence to support your own proposal.

Some animals and insects camouflage themselves helping them to blend into their environment to increase their chance of survival. List as many animals you can think of that use camouflage. Select one animal and investigate how their camouflage protects them from predators.

MAKING

Rennie's work is often temporary due to his choice of materials and location for his installations. As a class brainstorm a list of materials or sites that could be used to create a temporary work of art. Create a work that will only last for a short period of time.

Rennie states that 'being an artist is all about sharing your skill with others'. Teach a skill you have to a sibling or guardian. Document this process using photography or film and share your experience with your classmates. Research other community initiatives that Rennie has been involved in.

Camouflage is a means of hiding something or someone using a combination of materials or coloration. Most commonly we associate camouflage with military uniforms or an animal's ability to disguise themselves from predators. Rennie's use of camouflage amplifies, rather than conceals his identity. Create your own camouflage pattern that represents who you are.

SECONDARY

RESPONDING

Commissioned public works of art have a relationship with site. Consider the space that Rennie's work occupies. What might this placement suggest?

At an early age, Rennie was inspired by Australian artist Howard Arkley. Compare both artists' works in terms of their formal qualities and concept. Look at other works of art near Rennie's installation. What connections can you identify between them?

Tip: Look at *Riteroom*, 1998 by Howard Arkley which is part of the Gallery's permanent collection.

Investigate other Australian artists Nicholas Folland, Fiona Hall and eX de Medici who at some point in their careers have used camouflage as inspiration for their work. Do these artists share similar ideas? What is the symbolic meaning behind their use of camouflage and how does this differ to Rennie?

Before pursuing art as a career Reko Rennie was a journalist for *The Age* in Melbourne. He has stated 'I realised that in art I had more power than I ever did as a journalist'. Using Rennie's works of art as evidence explain what he may have meant by this statement. Consider what *power* artists have and their role in society.

Arts lecturer and writer Vincent Alessi stated '*Rennie's practice is underpinned by his personal identity, Indigenous history and memory and the capacity for the visual arts to be engaged in political commentary and activism*'. Discuss how *OA_CAMO* addresses one or more of these ideas.

Ivor Francis' paintings in Gallery 5, adjacent to Rennie's installation, also embody a camouflage aesthetic. Francis was affected by the war during the 1940s, resulting in works of art in which war was the subject matter. Throughout this time Francis produced a stylistic wide range of work that was highly abstracted. Although often referred to as a Surrealist, Francis categorised himself as 'a symbolist' instead. With reference to works of art by both Francis and Rennie, explain how both artists might be considered 'symbolists'.

MAKING

Rennie often combines a Pop Art aesthetic with the iconography of his Kamilaroi heritage. His use of the diamond patterning is linked to his cultural identity. Create your own family crest or shield using visual imagery that communicates who your family is and where



image detail: Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi people, New South Wales, *OA_CAMO*, Adelaide, 2017; Commissioned for TARNANTHI: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art supported by BHP 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Courtesy of the artist and blackartprojects, Melbourne, photo: Saul Steed

they come from. Use Photoshop to repeat your pattern and create a graphic wallpaper. Print your design on large paper and create a class installation.

Consider a wall or building that would benefit from a site-specific work. Investigate a political, social or environmental issue you feel strongly about. Using a minimal approach like Rennie, design an installation that represents your idea or perhaps camouflage your message in some way. Mock up a final image. You may even consider approaching your school or local council to seek permission to install this design on the site it was intended.

Make a stencil using a patterned fabric or camouflage design. Using aerosol paint, create a pattern with an emphasis on repetition. Experiment by overlapping your stencil and using a variety of colour combinations.

Iconic Australian images are often used in Rennie's work. This includes native animals, the Australian coat of arms and the 1950 postage stamp featuring Gwoya Tjungurrayi. Remembering the past and acknowledging history is also an important part to Rennie's practice. Investigate other well-known images that are synonymous with Australian history or a significant event. Select an image and research its history in depth. Create a work of art that responds to this time in history. What symbols will you utilise to communicate your message?

RESOURCES

WEBSITES/ARTICLES

The Design Files – Reko Rennie Interview
www.thedesignfiles.net/2013/11/interview-reko-rennie/

Reko Rennie
www.artlink.com.au/articles/4116/reko-rennie/

The Personal Structures of Reko Rennie (Australia Council – Venice)
www.australiacouncil.gov.au/arts-in-daily-life/artist-stories/the-personal-structures-of-reko-rennie/

Wearing his own Crown by Vincent Alessi
www.rekorennie.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pages-from-Vol-52-Number-1-Summer-2014_Reko_Rennie.pdf

Reko Rennie Website
www.rekorennie.com/

VIDEOS

Art Gallery New South Wales – Stencil Workshop
www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtFIY8BCEbY

Reko Rennie: Patternation
www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJXhz9to7fl

Art Gallery of Western Australia – artist talk
www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRYcz_0yU_g

Reko Rennie and Frank Buffalo Hyde: The Bridge PAI Mural
www.youtube.com/watch?v=5688AbTtE6k

In the Artist's Studio: Reko Rennie
<https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/artists-studio-reko-rennie>

Colossal Reko Rennie artwork unveiled in Kew
<http://creative.vic.gov.au/news/2017/colossal-reko-rennie-artwork-unveiled-in-kew>



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