



***A(GAP)E –
mesmerized by
some / thing...***

Aleks Danko
a reflection 2016–2026

EDUCATION KIT

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McClelland acknowledges the Bunurong / Boon Wurrung people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we are placed.

About

This education resource has been developed to support the survey exhibition *A(GAP)E: mesmerized by some / thing ... Aleks Danko a reflection 2016–2026*, presented at McClelland 14 March–14 June, 2026.

For: Secondary levels, 7–10 Visual Arts, VCE Art Creative Practice and VCE Art Making and Exhibiting.

Teachers: using this resource

This resource highlights key ideas presented in the exhibition and encourages creative and critical thinking about artistic practice and the relationships between artist, artworks, audiences, and the world we live in.

Sections marked **Reflect** or **Explore** offer questions for student inquiry and can be used either independently or in group work.

Key learnings: Artist practice, curatorial practice, exhibition design, audience engagement, contextual analysis, and presentation of artworks.

The guide explores learning linked to the following areas of the curriculum:

- How artists communicate ideas
- How artworks are developed and presented
- Display and presentation influence meaning
- How meaning is constructed
- How artists communicate meaning through display
- Material, conceptual, cultural influences
- Curatorial practice and exhibition design
- Audience engagement

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education@mcclelland.org.au

Exhibition introduction

A(GAP)E is an exhibition of work made by Australian artist Aleks Danko over the past ten years. Curated by the artist himself, it is a distillation of his critique of the conventions governing the making of art, and how and where it is encountered, perceived, and read.

Aleks Danko began making art in the late 1960s. As well as being a period of acute political and social upheaval internationally, the era precipitated Australia's cultural transition from modernist painting and sculpture, with its unyielding principles of autonomy, authorship and originality to post-modernism's assault on the art object and its radical questioning of the role and status of art. New movements and forms—Conceptualism, performance art, 'happenings', Minimalism, and Fluxus—privileged processes and *ideas* over objects.



About the artist

Aleks Danko was born in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1950. He lives and works in Daylesford, Victoria.

Danko's work encompasses diverse media, from sculpture and installation to text and language-based works. Drawing actively on Australia's political and cultural history, his work is infused with humour and a subtle critique of contemporary social values.

Danko is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

<https://milanigallery.com.au/artists/aleks-danko/>
<https://suttongallery.com.au/artists/aleks-danko/>

Conceptual art

In the 1960s, a time of great social and political change across the world, several new and avant-garde artistic movements emerged. Artists began to develop dynamic performances, installations and interactive, experimental art. The longstanding dominance of key disciplines of painting and sculpture began to give way to conceptual practices prioritising ideas over aesthetics.

Some of the art movements which originated in the 1960s are performance art, land art, video art, Minimalism, Fluxus, 'happenings', Italian art povera, and perhaps the most significant of all twentieth century artistic developments: Conceptual art.

It is helpful to think about Conceptual art as embodying the shift from the **object** to the **idea**, or art which prioritises ideas, concepts and processes over the sale-able art object. It aims to communicate, argue, and stimulate ideas, often challenging viewer perception or expectation rather than providing a passive visual experience.



REFLECT

Choose one of the artworks in A(GAP)E.

Discuss some of the ideas and thoughts that come to mind when looking at and thinking about the work.

Tip: *Try to avoid describing how the work looks and instead focus on what thoughts it stimulates.*

Explore: Consider the work of Aleks Danko and the relationships between other artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Kosuth, Carl Andre and John Baldessari who have explored similar subjects and ideas.

Marcel Duchamp and the 'readymade'

French artist Marcel Duchamp (born 1887, died 1968) is widely considered a forefather of Conceptual art. Duchamp challenged conventions of artistic authorship and value through the nomination of everyday objects as art. The idea of the 'readymade' was set in motion by Duchamp in 1913 when, at 25-years-old, he presented *Bicycle wheel*, an ordinary, mass-produced bicycle wheel mounted on a wooden stool.

Aleks Danko attended a survey exhibition of Marcel Duchamp's in Adelaide in 1968, the same year that Duchamp died.

Duchamp's gravestone in France is known to bear the words '*D'ailleurs, c'est toujours les autres qui meurent*' [Besides, it's always the other people who die].

REFLECT

One of the artworks in *A(GAP)E* is a direct homage to Marcel Duchamp.

Describe the physical parts of the artwork.

What is your impression of the artwork?

Several artworks in the exhibition feature or make reference to an object from everyday life.

Choose one and explore the various meanings that the object may evoke and what its inclusion contributes to the artwork.

Why do you think the artist chose to include this particular object?



The plinth

In the traditional sculptural sense, plinths are bases made from stone, wood or metal, which elevate a sculpture above the ground. The role of a plinth is to create a separation between the ordinary everyday world and the rarefied art 'object'.

Early in the 20th century, a number of influential European sculptors began to dispense with the pedestal and or plinth in the presentation of their artwork and require that it was displayed on the floor. They thought that by raising the sculpture to a certain level, the plinth played too big a role in how the viewer interacts with the artwork, interfering with his or her direct response.

Three sculptures in this exhibition take the plinth as their subject: *Beware: Sculpture's enemy (debit or credit)* 2022; *In the presence of Folly* 2022; and *Plinth Prop & Tilt Too (PPTT)* 2022.



REFLECT

Aleks Danko is interested in the way that art is presented in the museum and art gallery, and the 'rules' that regulate the exhibition of art. Through his own art practice, he investigates how art objects gain meaning and cultural significance.

What kind of experience do you expect when you visit an art gallery?

What kind of objects do you expect to encounter?

How do you expect them to be displayed?

Explore: Consider alternate ways to display art beyond the 'plinth'. Experiment with presentation ideas for your own or other artists' work.

The 'self-portrait' and the 'selfie'

It was during the early Renaissance in the mid-15th century that the trend of self-portraiture really started to grow. This rise in artists experimenting with self-portraiture was brought on in part by mirrors becoming better quality and more affordable.

Some artists who are known for their commitment to self-portraiture include Rembrandt (born 1606; died 1609), Frida Kahlo (born 1907; died 1954) and Vincent Van Gogh (born 1853; died 1890).

A(GAP)E: mesmerized by some / thing ... Aleks Danko a reflection includes a number of self-portraits the artist has made in recent years. Some are photographs, and some utilise found objects.

Danko's ***SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY***, a collection of 6 mirrors etched with various phrases presented in a row, suggests a relationship between the portrait, self-portraiture and the contemporary 'selfie'.



REFLECT

Look closely at one of the following: *TAPE MEASURE LAUGH (a self-portrait)* 2022; *The Elf in Danko* 2026; and *I have to live with UNCLE AL* 2018; or *OOMAMABOOMBA (white out edit)* 2017.

Based on the image or object, what are your impressions of Aleks? What do you think he is trying to say about himself?

*Choose one of the mirrors from the **SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY**. How does it feel to see yourself in the artwork? What is your response to the phrase etched in the mirror?*

How do you control your own image and how others see you – in selfies, for example, and on social media?

Credits

Cover image and portrait of the artist (page 4) by Cassie Louise Creative. All other photographs by Christian Capurro



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Still from UH-OH from the On Top of The World project 2022



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A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE–D’AILLEURS, C’EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES QUI MEURENT (Marcel Duchamp 1887–1968) trans: BESIDES, IT’S ALWAYS THE OTHERS WHO DIE (another self-portrait) 2024–26



In the presence of Folly 2022



NO! NO! NO! NO MORE MUSEUM OF CRÉCHE ART – cut the boredom (after Bruce Nauman) (detail) 2019–26



Dyalishfoured Modernism (no more art language) 2019



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Plinth Prop & Tilt Too (PPTT) 2022



BEWARE: SCULPTURE’S ENEMY (debit or credit) 2022



In the presence of Folly 2022



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corner / cornered / cornerwise 2021–26



Etched Idiot (another self-portrait) 2014–26



No more signs necessary or when David Shrigley met Michael Leunig 2017–26



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and I have to live with UNCLE AL 2018



TAPE MEASURE LAUGH (a self portrait) 2022