

**EDUCATION RESOURCE KIT**  
A CASE STUDY

# **ANNE ZAHALKA**

**LM**  
**LAKE**  
**MACQUARIE**  
**CITY**  
**ART**  
**GALLERY**



## INTRODUCTION

*Written by Kate Caddey and published by Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, this education kit is designed to assist senior secondary Visual Arts teachers and students in the preparation, appreciation and understanding of the case study component of the HSC syllabus. The gallery is proud to support educators and students in the community with an ongoing series of case studies as they relate to the gallery's exhibition program. This education kit is available directly from the gallery, or online at [www.artgallery.lakemac.com.au](http://www.artgallery.lakemac.com.au).*

## A CASE STUDY

*A series of case studies (a minimum of FIVE) should be undertaken with students in the HSC course.*

*The selection of content for the case study should relate various aspects of critical and historical investigations, taking into account practice, the conceptual framework and the frames. Emphasis may be given to a particular aspect of content although all should remain in play.*

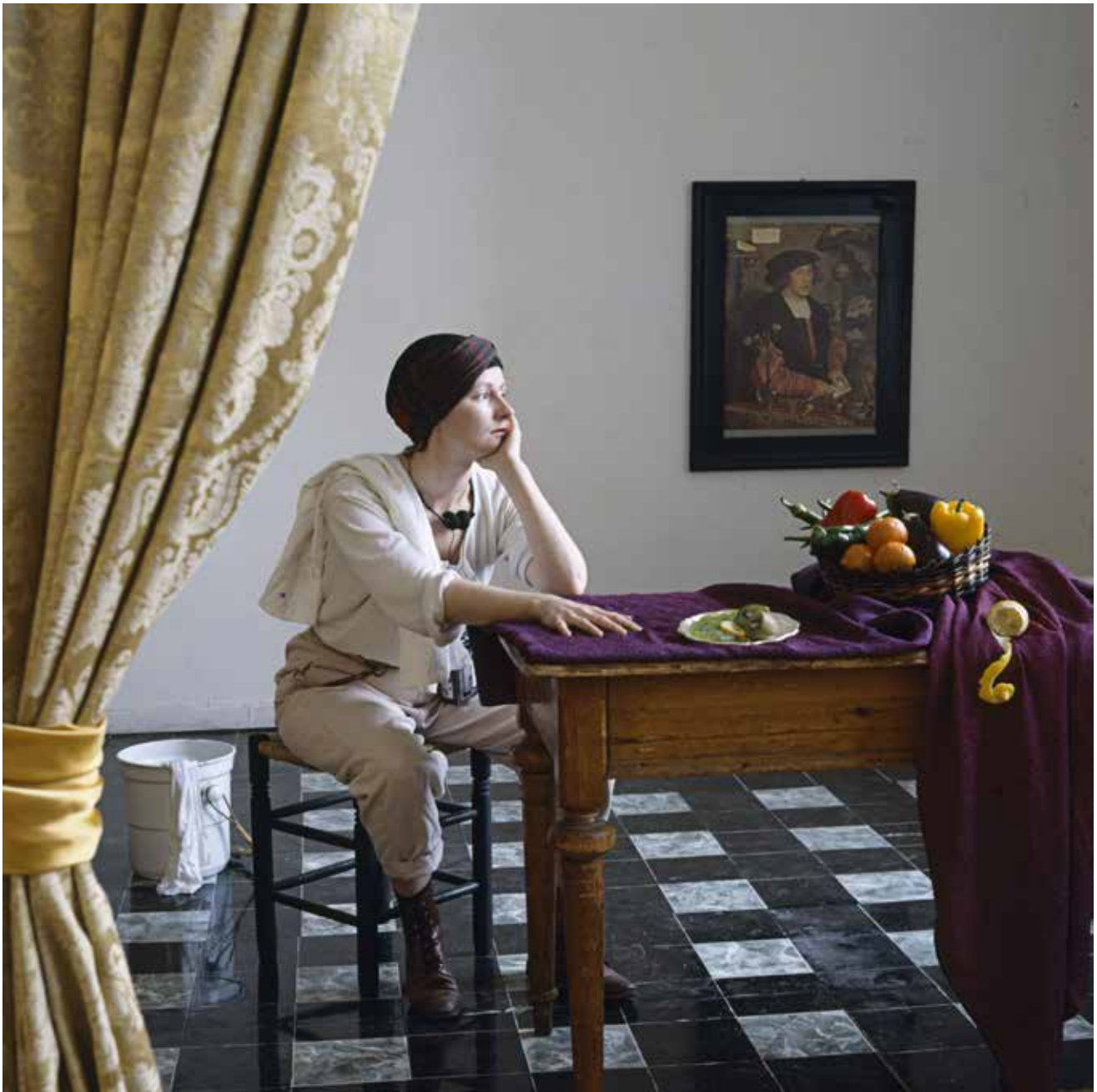
*Case studies should be 4–10 hours in duration in the HSC course.*

Cover: *The Photographer*  
(self portrait) 1989  
type C photograph  
50 x 50cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

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# PRACTICE

*The Cleaner*  
(Marianne Redpath/  
performance artist) 1987  
Ilfochrome print  
80 × 80cm  
courtesy the artist and Roslyn  
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist

*Students learn that practice refers to the social structures, positions, actions and sequences that affect choices, perceptions, directions, ways of working and views of those involved in the visual arts. Students learn that the nature of practice involves the inculcation of beliefs, actions and ideas over time.*

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## CONCEPTUAL PRACTICE

Anne Zahalka is one of Australia's best-known photomedia artists. She comes from an immigrant background, with Jewish Viennese and Catholic Czech heritage. Growing up in Australia at a time when immigration was increasing and Australians were becoming more aware of diverse cultural groups has greatly influenced her work, in particular with themes that reflect on multiculturalism, identity and the nature of representation.

The following are some of the features of, and influences on, Anne Zahalka's conceptual practice.

- 1 The rise of photography as a legitimate art form and the emergence of postmodernism.** The social and cultural world of the 1980s, when Zahalka first started exhibiting her work and establishing her practice, was the time when photography took its place in contemporary art. The emergence of postmodernism saw a shift towards experimentation and innovation, particularly in newer media areas such as photomedia. The idea of photography capturing 'the decisive moment', one of the traditional functions of photography, was challenged and changed by this new generation of photographers.
- 2 Art history and representation,** particularly the nature of image-making and its relationship to the world around us. 'As an artist working primarily with photography,' says Zahalka, 'I have always been interested in the historical and contemporary images of people and places and the modes used to address them. Through an investigation of these via painting and photographic traditions I have sought to question their influence and value.'

(Quoted from an interview published in *Senior Artwise*. See reference list page 23.)

Zahalka uses art conventions, but subverts or reinvents them with irony and often humour, drawing on such diverse sources of traditional and popular imagery as:

- European old master paintings, such as Vermeer, Holbein, van Eyck
- Australian paintings of idealised beach images from the 1930s, Charles Meere, Freda Robertshaw
- documentary photography
- the postcards of British photographer John Hinde from the 1950s and 60s
- old circus promotion photographs and posters
- ethnographic photography from the nineteenth century
- the film traditions of Alfred Hitchcock and more recent filmmakers like Francis Ford Coppola and the Coen brothers
- the paintings of Edward Hopper

Through quotation and reference, the artist allows the visual images of the past to enter our contemporary world and create new meanings for new audiences.

## PRACTICE

### 3 Cultural and social issues including:

- identity, both personal and national, stereotyping and multiculturalism
- private and public spaces – exploring how we create private spaces that become extensions of ourselves; the disjunction between our private and public lives; how we fit into an increasingly urbanised environment; how we assimilate into a new country, new places, new spaces; and how we are perceived by outsiders such as tourists

### MATERIAL PRACTICE

Initially trained in 'wet' photography, Anne Zahalka has been working with digital photography and the 'digital darkroom' for the major part of her career. She created her first video in 2008 to accompany the series *Hotel Suite*. Zahalka uses computer technology to underline her concepts, manipulating imagery to create meaning.

She usually works in series. Some series are ongoing, as evident in her reworking of her iconic *The Bathers* (1989) during the making of the documentary *The Art of Australia*.

Zahalka has a long-standing interest in tableau photography and portraiture and draws her imagery from a variety of settings, people and objects. Models come from many different sources. Some are friends and acquaintances, as for example in the series *Open House* (1995), others have been found using community contacts, as in the series *Welcome to Sydney* (2002).

*The New Bathers* 2013  
type C print  
90 x 74cm  
courtesy the artist and Roslyn  
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist



## PRACTICE

Although her works have a trademark staged quality, Zahalka uses both studio and outdoor spaces. Sometimes a temporary studio has actually been constructed on location. In 1989, she used Bondi Pavilion for the famous *Bondi, Playground of the Pacific* series, which includes *The Bathers*. The models were photographed in front of an obviously painted backdrop on top of sand brought in from the nearby beach. Some works are clearly 'in situ' but appear staged nonetheless, as for example in the *Welcome to Sydney* series. In other works she has used studios and the interior spaces of people's homes in carefully lit and composed tableaux.

Zahalka has experimented with a variety of formats and presentations as part of her practice. These include:

### 1 Large format Type C photographs

Prior to digital photography, the artist used cameras that took medium-format film such as the Mamiya 6 x 7cm, which allowed for detailed enlargement from the negative. Since the 1990s, digital photography has almost replaced 'wet' darkroom practice. Chromogenic colour prints (or Type C) are full colour prints, and this method of producing prints is the most common photographic process. The photosensitive paper is usually plastic based and available in large rolls. A computerised light-jet printing machine is used, which exposes the digital image file onto the photographic paper. It allows the production of very large prints while retaining high resolution. Many of Zahalka's works have been produced to take advantage of the the scale and detail possible with this process.

*The Bathers* 1989  
type C print  
90 x 74cm  
courtesy the artist and Roslyn  
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist



## PRACTICE

Opposite: *Untitled No.1a*  
(traveller) 1993  
duratrans, lightbox  
120cm x 172cm x 20cm  
private collection

### 2 Lightboxes with Duratrans

Composed of a translucent plastic base and photographic emulsion, Duratrans (a brandname of Kodak) enable the finished print to be lit from behind. It is used in commercial signs in shopping precincts and public spaces like railway stations and airports. Illuminated with fluorescent light, Duratrans have crisp, bright, vivid colour. This enhancement of colour and light lends a hyperreal quality to Zahalka's imagery. Duratrans were used in the *Fortresses and Frontiers* series, and at Sydney Airport for the *Welcome to Sydney* series.

Brigitte Bailey, *Tightwire Performer (no. 1)* 2006  
polaroid photograph  
60 x 50cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Arc One Gallery, Melbourne  
© the artist



### 3 Large scale Polaroids

Polaroid cameras were an invention of the late 1940s. Their technology allowed photographs to be developed in the camera: in fact they were the original 'instant camera'. The resulting photograph has a distinctive black border. Zahalka uses Polaroid photos in her *Circus* series to evoke older photographic technologies and links the young, contemporary circus performers to a long and established tradition. The theatrical costumes and poses of the subjects reinforce this effect. For this series, a large format Polaroid camera was brought over from the USA to Albury Regional Gallery (NSW), where Zahalka and fellow artist Petrina Hicks were resident artists. The models for this series were performers from Albury's Flying Fruit Fly Circus.

Till Cappelli, *Juggler (balls)* 2006  
polaroid photograph  
60 x 50cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Arc One Gallery, Melbourne  
© the artist





## PRACTICE





## THE FRAMES

*Students learn about the frames – subjective, cultural, structural and postmodern – that provide different philosophical/theoretical and interpretive frameworks for understanding the layering of meaning, significance, value and belief in and about the visual arts.*

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### ARTWORK ANALYSIS USING THE FRAMES #1



Above: *Guangan Wu, Market Gardens, Kyeemagh 2001*  
type C photograph  
50 x 150cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist

Left: *Saturday 9:15pm 1995*  
type C photograph  
65 x 79cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist

#### Structural Frame

*In art criticism and art history, students can consider how artworks can be read and their meaning understood in terms of how specific symbols refer to the world. Students may study how visual information is transmitted in artworks, how the formal and organisational relationships in a work mean certain things and how the visual arts can operate as a visual language at a certain time and over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

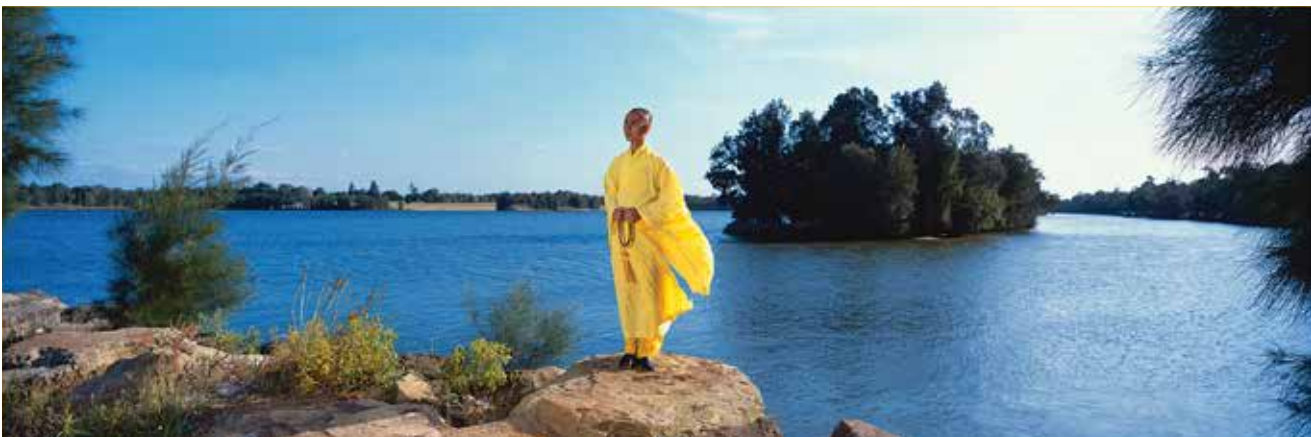
The above image is one of 17 works in the series *Welcome to Sydney* (2002). Commissioned by Sydney Airport Authority, they were initially displayed in lightboxes as Duratrans at Sydney International Airport. Although large, the images in this series imitate the format of postcards: in fact they were also published and sold as a set of postcards. In this particular work, a Chinese immigrant stands in a panoramic landscape of market gardens. These gardens are very close to Sydney Airport's runway and have been cultivated over two centuries by different ethnic groups: Irish, Cornish, German and Chinese. The perspective lines created by the rows of gardens draw the eye towards the jet landing in the distance. The figure in the foreground is balanced by the machinery and tank to the left of the composition. He stands impassively, wearing a traditional hat and holding Chinese 'luck' money given to him prior to his journey to Australia. The Type C photograph is rich with colour and detail. In the original lightbox the image would have glowed from within. Symbols acknowledging Guangan Wu's heritage can be found throughout, with the distant plane referencing his journey. The style of the photograph is documentary, but there is a distinctly staged quality in the combination of figure and background through the use of flash that makes us aware of the artist's careful control of purpose and meaning.

### Cultural Frame

*In art criticism and art history, students can consider how notions of cultural identity can inform the production of artworks. Students may study differing cultural attitudes towards the visual arts and the effects of scientific and technological innovation, politics and economics. They may study concepts of social and cultural identity (e.g. gender, Indigenous, regional, national, modern, contemporary etc.) on artistic practices in particular places at a certain time and over time.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Anne Zahalka has acknowledged that her own experience as the daughter of immigrant parents has influenced her conceptual practice. The changing, multicultural nature of Australian society has been a preoccupation in a number of her series. In *Welcome to Sydney* her subjects are all from different cultural backgrounds, and positioned in areas of Sydney with which they have a connection, for example a place of work or their home suburb. Zahalka chose some locations that were 'known and popular' and others that were less familiar. Each person holds a cultural or symbolic object they have brought from their homeland, hence the artist brings together elements that combine to form the Australian identity of her subjects. 'These portraits,' she has said, 'should be seen as positive affirmations of the complex and diverse nationalities settling here. I hope it portrays them with dignity and respect.'\*



Abbot Thich Vien Chohn,  
*Lake Chipping Norton, near  
Cabramatta* 2001  
type C photograph  
50 x 150cm  
courtesy the artist and Roslyn  
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney  
© the artist

### Subjective Frame

*In art criticism and art history, students can develop personal responses to artists and artworks that are highly significant to them. They can explore artworks as expressive and unique objects, develop notions of individual styles, and interpret the work and the influence of those artists who are of great personal interest to them.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

The desire to create a feeling of empathy with the people portrayed in *Welcome to Sydney* is important to Zahalka. 'I hoped that the audience would respond to the people as individuals who have different ethnic backgrounds,' said the artist.\* When the series was initially exhibited at Sydney International Airport, its audience would have included people who were migrating to Australia, similar to the subjects shown in the artworks. Tourists, other visitors and airport staff would have provided a very broad public audience as well. Moreover, the artist's use of lightboxes, sumptuous

## THE FRAMES

colour and large scale is designed to engage contemporary audiences who have been brought up in an age where colour photography is accessible and universal.

### Postmodern Frame

*In art criticism and art history, students can question practice in art and the generally accepted classifications of artists, artworks, movements and styles. They can identify inconsistencies in what is written. They can re-evaluate notions of the artistic genius and the masterpiece, and study influences and chronologies to reveal power relations, disjunctions and hidden assumptions.*

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012

Anne Zahalka has invested the *Welcome to Sydney* series with a sense of disjunction that goes beyond her picture-perfect postcard imagery. Her subjects 'appear both rooted to, but isolated from their surroundings, like a new species being planted but not yet becoming part of the native landscape'.\* Guangan Wu, who stares out at us from the panoramic background, is not quite at home: it seems almost as if he has been pasted onto the setting. Even though the artist has worked within the vernacular of postcard photography, she also challenges the stereotypes often portrayed in those postcards. This is part of her postmodern conceptual practice.

(\*Quoted from an interview with Karra Rees, exhibition curator, *Hall of Mirrors*, 2007. See reference list page 23.)

Below, left to right:  
*Room 4927 view to South Bank* 2008  
type C print  
75 × 92.5cm

*Room 3621* 2008  
type C print  
75 × 92.5cm  
courtesy the artist and  
Arc One Gallery, Melbourne  
© the artist

### ARTWORK ANALYSIS USING THE FRAMES #2

Anne Zahalka was selected for Sofitel Melbourne's 2008 Artist-in-Residence program, to spend three weeks at the hotel to produce a new body of work. The works pictured below and overleaf come from the resulting series, *Hotel Suite*.



### Structural Frame

Zahalka frequently probes our relationship with the places in which we live, both private and public. In the photographs *Room 3621* and *Room 4927 view to South Bank*, Zahalka revisits two settings/spaces she has explored in previous series.

## THE FRAMES

*The Stranger's Eye*  
(video stills) 2008  
digital video  
duration 13.30mins  
courtesy the artist and  
Arc One Gallery, Melbourne  
© the artist



One is the intimate space of a room; in this case a hotel room. A maid has found a book (Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*) while cleaning the room and sits reading on the end of the freshly made bed. Careful composition, utilising lines of direction and reflections in a mirror, recalls Zahalka's earlier series *Open House* (1995) and *Resemblance* (1987).

The other is the larger public space beyond, as captured in *Room 4927 view to South Bank*. Outside the hotel's walls is a vast landscape reaching out across inner city Melbourne. Strings of light pierce cool blues and sombre shadows, creating an urban world that is both remote and beautiful. Her interest in massive urban spaces can also be seen in the earlier series *Fortresses and Frontiers* (1993).

The video *The Stranger's Eye* brings together four separate experiences of people who stay and work in the hotel. One is the maid. We follow her through the vast internal space of the hotel to Room 3621 where the camera closely follows her work routine. When she breaks routine to sit and read in the privacy of the room, the maid transgresses. In this way the stereotype we have been invited to create for her is broken. She is the calmest of the four subjects in the film. The other three individuals are guests. Emotional states are evident particularly in gesture and movement. Cinematic devices used in parts of the video – including extreme close-ups, oblique camera angles, strong directional lighting and use of shadows and reflections – reference film noir conventions and enhance a feeling of brooding and tension.

### **Cultural Frame**

When undertaking the residency at the hotel, Zahalka said she became 'fascinated with "classifications" given to different types of guests such as "the business traveller" and the "holiday maker" and their transient existence spent in plush rooms and suites overlooking the city's burgeoning metropolis'. The modern microcosm of a hotel, with its public and private spaces and behaviours, mirrors the public/private separateness that has developed in our increasingly urban lives.

### **Subjective Frame**

An exploration of the 'psychological space of the hotel room through the emotional states of the guests' was Zahalka's rationale for *Hotel Suite*. The video's soundtrack of city and hotel noise serves as a reminder of the relentless larger world just outside the walls of the room, heightening the sense of intimacy and isolation within. The pairings of the large-scale photographs underline the same relationship. Each guest behaves as though unobserved in a private world and each exhibits behaviour – agitation, anticipation, nervousness, restlessness, abandon, alienation – that remains unexplained. We are invited to observe these private moments in an almost voyeuristic capacity: in one video scene our viewpoint is through a door security peephole. Other scenes adopt the look of security footage. In a world where surveillance and digital devices are a constant presence, are we really ever private? The viewer experiences a mixture of responses: fascination and curiosity mingle with guilt, expectation and anxiety.

### **Postmodern Frame**

Zahalka's still images in this series draw on past conventions, sometimes in homage. Her understanding of Edward Hopper's paintings, for instance, is manifest in an appreciation for light and implied psychological states, as well as austere rooms with their isolated inhabitants.

When looking at cinematic conventions, the artist has referenced classic thrillers from Hitchcock's to those of Coppola and the Coen Brothers. She subverts these with a more feminist perspective that denies the endplay of traditional narrative films. What are we waiting for? What is going to happen? Time for action, guns and fists! There is no such resolution for the hotel guests. They move only within the hotel space and all are mainly silent. Zahalka investigates the different ways we lead our public and private lives, while questioning the way this has been traditionally represented.





## IN CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

Self portrait of the artist  
with the backdrop she used  
for works produced for Lake  
Macquarie City Art Gallery's  
*Hunter Art 1* project 2004  
© the artist

### **Tell us about your career background. What drew you to photography?**

In high school I studied art as an elective and was inspired by the work of the Dadaists and Surrealists at this time. I read Kurt Schwitter's book on Dadaism before doing my HSC and thought the Dadaists were the most exciting and interesting artists, motivated by strong social and political views. I particularly liked the paintings of Rene Margritte, Giorgio de Chirico and Salvador Dali and the photo work of Man Ray, Hannah Hoch and John Heartfield. It was their work that inspired me to become an artist.

I began studying photography for the first time at TAFE using the family's old Rangefinder camera, which was hopeless, as was I. Later, after investing in a proper SLR camera, I explored the environment in which I lived, in a documentary style with limited success. Photography made me aware of the world around me and I was drawn to framing and looking at it through its exacting lens. I loved the magic of the darkroom and the surface of the photograph with its intricate detail embedded within the emulsion. As an indexical record, I found photography's ability to transcribe what lay before the lens completely transfixing. But it was some time before I learnt how to use the medium to develop my own photographic language.

I completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at Sydney College of the Arts and majored in photography, exhibiting my final body of work along with three other graduates. This exhibition was reviewed by Max Dupain, who called me the 'romantic' amongst the group. I had montaged the photographs of Harold Cazneaux and Henri Mallard with my own to reflect on the changing architectural and social landscape of the city.

In a later exhibition of photomontages at the Australian Centre for Photography, he wrote that I had 'defiled' the works of early Australian painters from the Heidelberg School and would have to pay in due course. He felt I had shown irreverence toward these old Australian masters and didn't seem to understand the irony. Returning to complete a Postgraduate Diploma following my year's residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin through the Australia Council, I exhibited *Resemblance* at the Australian Centre for Photography. Before travelling to Berlin, I inherited a Rolleiflex camera from my aunt (an accomplished, but retired professional photographer) and used this to create *Resemblance*, based on Old Dutch and Northern European masters. Some works were acquired for *Australian Photography: The 1980s* exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia, which had a major impact on my career. This body of work was formative and established a place as a photomedia artist within the contemporary art scene at this time. Without the residency and its successful outcome, I would not have had the recognition I now enjoy, nor the confidence to pursue a career in art.

### **How would you describe your work?**

My work can be divided into two distinct areas of practice. One is staged and constructed, the other documentary based (see my *Leisureland* series).

I reconstruct historical and popular artworks in order to provide new meaning and to consider them within a contemporary context. This stems from early postmodern approaches to the practice of pastiche and appropriation as a way of considering and questioning the images of the past as well as their meaning. My documentary approach explores cultural sites within tourist and leisure landscapes recording them with a medium-format camera and exposing their artificiality in a hyperrealistic way. My portrait practice sits within these two areas and sometimes combines both approaches. The finished works are often large scale, take on the grandeur of painting and invite the viewer into these immersive leisure spaces. Their surface is densely saturated and usually glossy.

### **You have previously said that your work is 'primarily concerned with representations to do with place, identity and culture'. Why do you think these themes are so important?**

I'm interested in the ways in which place, identity and culture have been defined through popular and mainstream images representing the individual, groups and communities. I like to play and interrogate these representations to expose the stereotypes and to reflect on cultural difference and diversity. These images don't necessarily portray or allow for the multiplicity of identities that make up who we are as a nation or as an individual. I'm interested in subverting these and representing those others not represented or portrayed within the popular or mainstream.

### **How do you make your images resonate with your audience? What do you want viewers to take away from your work?**

My images are often familiar to audiences yet there is something within the image that is not. I think the work is accessible on a number of levels and people feel they understand and get it. Humour is often involved and allows the viewer to engage with the work in a non-threatening way. They can laugh at it but also at their own initial assumptions about its meaning. If the viewer considers other stereotyped images with suspicion and questions them, then my work has provided a new way of reading and thinking about such images. For me, this is a positive outcome.

Within other works I want the viewer to be transported, to witness something that they may not have seen or considered looking at in this way before. It is to see themselves from outside and consider the way they engage both within the environment that is presented, as well as outside it as viewers. I want them to reflect on their own experiences within these environments and their behaviour as consumers there.

[see: <http://www.zahalkaworld.com.au/pages/naturalwonders.html> and *Wonderland* <http://www.arcone.com.au/index.php?navi=Artists&navj=Exhibition&aid=20&eid=78&navk=ANNE%20ZAHALKA&awid=400&name=Wonderland&date=2006>. Also [http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/3/Anne\\_Zahalka/328/](http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/3/Anne_Zahalka/328/)]

**Can you give us some insight into your artistic process? Do you have a daily routine? Is each work pre-planned or created very intuitively? And how long does each work take to complete?**

A lot of my work develops from an idea, which is then researched by reading and looking at other images produced about the subject. I often plan my pictures beforehand to ensure I know what I'm doing and that I have the right models, equipment and props for the shoot.

I spend considerable time finding suitable people, often through the organisations I am working with, or through friends and friends of friends. I rarely work with strangers. I rely on an assistant for more complex shoots, which involve difficult lighting of large groups, and in funded projects, a production assistant. But often I work alone.

I recently revisited *The Bathers* work I shot 24 years ago, basing the new one more closely on Charles Meere's painting and introducing the lesser-known painting of Freda Robertshaw, who worked beside Meere in his studio. I cast up to 14 people including six children and babies for the photograph. It was shot in an open studio with daylight and flash and involved a large backdrop that was rigged the day before and included a range of props gathered by a production designer. The composition was pre-planned on the computer combining the two paintings. The image was shot both on 120 film and a 35mm digital camera, put together in post-production and output as a high resolution file to be printed on photographic paper. The analogue film lacked the focus range and was slower to work, which was disappointing given I had planned to work with film and the original camera.

My daily routine is largely spent on the computer doing admin, writing proposals, archiving, researching, preparing images and working up new ones. The rest of the time is spent doing the domestics in our guesthouse, supervising and supporting a teenage daughter, attending to an elderly mother, enjoying meals and the company of my husband, when he is in town, and trying to keep relatively fit.

**What is next for Anne Zahalka?**

In collaboration with performance and multimedia artist Silvia Schwenk, I have undertaken a residency with HMAS *Penguin* to create an artwork for their centenary to be exhibited at the Mosman Art Gallery. A case study on my work currently at Lake Macquarie City Gallery features key works (including *The New Bathers*), and I have been invited to do a commission about the public and private areas of Parliament House for their forthcoming anniversary. I will continue working on a series of artists' worktables, looking at the materials, objects and processes they are currently working with, in a collaborative way. I am pleased to be able to exhibit these in many forms – from invitations, to catalogue images, to artworks for the respective artists' exhibitions and eventually for my own show. Lastly, I will undertake a project working in the giant Costco store at Auburn and will be creating new work about, and for, the store, so watch that space!

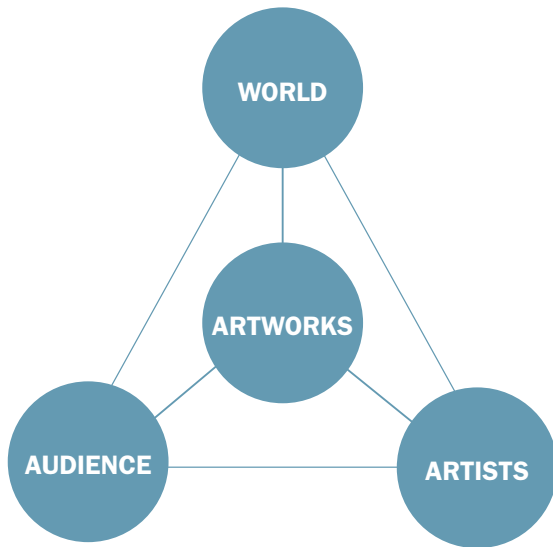
May 2013

This interview is reproduced from ONE THOUSAND WORDS [about photography] with kind permission from the artist and the Ballarat International Foto Biennale [http://issuu.com/ballarat\\_foto\\_biennale/docs/1000words\\_01](http://issuu.com/ballarat_foto_biennale/docs/1000words_01)

# THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework provides a model for understanding the agencies in the artworld – the artist, artwork, world and audience, and the relationships between them.

NSW Board of Studies, Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus, 2012



## WORLD

(also refer to Cultural and Postmodern Frames and Conceptual Practice)

**How interests in the world are represented in art,** for example, art as a representation of experience, class, ideology, age, events of significance.

## AUDIENCE

(also refer to Subjective Frame and Conceptual Practice)

**The role and value of the audience** as a body of critical consumers. The concept of the audience includes art critics and art historians as well as teachers, students, entrepreneurs, patrons and other members of the public. Audiences for works change over time and bring different meanings to artworks, artists and interpretations of the world.

Anne Zahalka's art can be found in national and international collections, indicating a well-established, successful career in visual arts. Her works are exhibited regularly in art galleries and museums, reaching art audiences as well as members of the general public. They have been published in numerous art and photography magazines, textbooks and journals, and the artist has participated in several artist-in-resident projects.

Zahalka has taken some of her works into large, busy public spaces like Sydney International Airport, where they reach a much broader audience. Her use of large-scale, strongly coloured images presented in lightboxes (normally used for advertising in this setting) intrigues audiences. Recently her *Homeground* series (2010) featured posters of Sydney's inner city suburbs displayed in the perspex advertising slots outside selected pubs. Although she is continually expanding and extending her practice into new areas and seeking new audiences, her early work continues to draw audiences.

**Historical:** Anne Zahalka's work exists in the timeframe of the 1980s until now, although her art references many earlier art traditions. This era sees the rise of the domestic computer, digital photography and the 'digital darkroom'.

**Cultural:** An increasingly diverse group of immigrants found a home in Australia during this time. Cities expanded, bringing new social and physical challenges. Australians became more urbanised. Notions of 'the typical Australian' were quickly superseded and cultural identity debated.

**Artworld:** In the 1980s, photography moved into the world of contemporary art, with practitioners like Anne Zahalka using techniques like documentation and tableaux to 'stage' their works rather than adopting more conventional photographic styles. The rise of postmodernism in the 1980s saw artists challenging stereotypes and questioning the nature of representation.

## ARTWORK

(also refer to Structural Frame and Material Practice)

**Artworks as real objects,** as material, physical and virtual objects. The concept of artworks includes art, craft and design as two- and three-dimensional works (including architecture), and time-based works. Artworks also exist as representations of ideas that reflect such things as personal responses, cultural views, symbolic interpretations and critical reinterpretations of other ideas.

Anne Zahalka's practice encompasses series of photodigital large-scale artworks concerned with identity, multiculturalism, stereotypes, and the relationship of individuals to private and public spaces.

In *Guangan Wu, Market Gardens, Kyeemagh* she explores the relationship between immigrants and their new country.

In the *Hotel Suite* series she investigates the everyday stereotypes we create and the individual identities that lie beyond these facades, revealed when her subjects transgress, or move out of 'type' inside the privacy of the hotel room.

**Critical reception:** one of the tasks of the critic is to unpack the meaning of artworks for audiences. The following critics offer insights into different aspects of Zahalka's practice.

'Unlike much current computer-derived art, Zahalka's practice is not techno obsessed ... she utilises computer technology to articulate ongoing conceptual concerns, in her case the signs and symbols of visual language.' Felicity Fenner, 'Insights that come with age', *SMH*, 11 Nov 1994

'While a lot of photomedia work is in your face, Anne's images don't do that. They draw you in with beautiful humour and with a critical eye. You laugh first and then it gets you thinking.' Karra Rees, exhibition catalogue, *Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987-2007*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2007

'Zahalka has mentioned that she sees the subject as just another object in the room, being equally interested in what surrounds them. When we look into these surroundings, however, we know they are not merely décor. They are the staging, and the ceremony, of the world.' Edward Colless, 'Anne Zahalka: the Ceremonial Subject' *Australian Art Collector*, Sept 2009

## ARTIST

(also refer to Cultural Frame and Conceptual Practice)

**The role of the artist:** the who, what, how, and why. The concept of the artist encompasses practitioners such as artists, craftspeople, designers and architects. The artist can be thought of as an individual or as a group, school, movement, etc.

Born in Sydney to immigrant parents, Anne Zahalka trained at the Sydney College of the Arts and later at College of Fine Arts. Her early works in the 1980s demonstrated her interest in socio-cultural issues with her series *Resemblance*, made when she took up a 12-month residency in Berlin in 1986-87. Her use of appropriation in this series was later extended in the *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific* series (1989).

In the 1990s, she turned to the interior spaces that show us glimpses of private lives in *Open House* and *Collectors* while also looking to the larger outdoor environment with the *Leisureland*, *Welcome to Sydney* and *Fortresses and Frontiers* series. More recently, her commissioned *Sofitel* series brings together the private and outdoor spaces explored in previous series.

Her body of work has raised the profile of art photography in Australia, where she has continued to find 'rich subject matter in suburban and urban sites'. She works and lives in Newtown, Sydney.

## PREVIOUS HSC EXAMINATION QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO THIS CASE STUDY

### PRACTICE

- 1** Discuss how cultural experience informs the practice of artists, art critics, art historians and/or curators. (2012)
- 2** Explain how exhibition sites affect the intentions of artists you have studied. Sites you could consider include museums, open spaces, virtual spaces, galleries, community spaces. (2010)

### FRAMES

- 3** Explain why artists use recontextualisation when making art. In your answer, refer to a range of examples. (2012)
- 4** *Most artists have critical and productive relationships with their culture.*  
Explore this statement with reference to a range of examples where these relationships are demonstrated. (2011)

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- 5** To what extent do audiences need art galleries to view artworks? (2011)
- 6** Explain how artists can borrow concepts and approaches from other artists and yet their artworks are still regarded as original. (2010)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kate Caddey would like to thank Anne Zahalka, who has been so generous with her time and information, Meryl Ryan and Debbie Abraham from the gallery, and her colleague Liz Courtenay.

The gallery would also like to thank Ballarat International Foto Biennale for allowing publication of the interview with Anne Zahalka.

Published to accompany the exhibition

**Anne Zahalka: a case study**

a gallery exhibition project curated  
by Meryl Ryan in consultation with  
Kate Caddey and Anne Zahalka

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery  
10 May – 28 July 2013

**Gallery Director** Debbie Abraham  
**Publisher** Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery  
**Writer** Kate Caddey  
**Editor** Meryl Ryan  
**Template Designer** Stephen Goddard  
**Layout** Raelene Narraway  
**Printer** Lakemac Print

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