

Exhibition: *To Approach the Unknowable*

1 November to 6 December 2025



left to right:

ANTHONY CAHILL *The Garden Path*, 2025, oil on linen, 183 x 137 cmLOUISA CHIRCOP *Tongue against the cactus*, 2025, mixed media and photomontage on Arches paper, 91 x 71 cmRHONDA DEE *Mothers, daughters, masks and mirrors*, handbuilt ceramic sculpture, glaze, underglaze, 24 x 24 cmAMBROSE REISCH *The Disquiet Litigant*, 2023, oil on canvas, 92 x 92 cm

Before the exhibition the artists were invited to select artworks from the Hassall Collection. The artists selected works by James Gleeson, Louise Hearman, Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan and Pablo Picasso that they felt resonated with their own ideas and inquiries.

About: The exhibition title, *To Approach the Unknowable*, is taken from a 1976 poem by Australian Surrealist artist James Gleeson. It brings together Anthony Cahill, Louisa Chircop, Rhonda Dee and Ambrose Reisch, four Australian contemporary artists whose works, guided by a surrealist inclination, engage in a fascinating dialogue with their own personal ideas and with works selected from the Hassall Collection. The juxtaposition creates a rich exploration of the surrealist inspiration within the Australian context.

Studying:

- Look at <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/surrealism>
What did Surrealist artists aim to do?
Research Surrealist techniques: frottage, grattage, decalcomania, photomontage, automatic drawing, exquisite corpse (consequence drawing)
- Research the Australian Surrealist artist James Gleeson (1915-2008)
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/gleeson-james/>
Write about his life, aims, art study, influences, surrealist ideas and two examples of his art.

Making

Surrealist artists used **COLLAGE** to imaginatively reconfigure images to produce new meanings. Sometimes this is also **PHOTOMONTAGE**.

You could look up specific works for inspiration: Raoul Hausmann *The Art Critic* (1919-1920); Hannah Höch *Collage with Ethnic Mask*; Max Ernst, *Above the Clouds Walks Midnight* 1920; René Magritte, *Untitled*, 1926.

Create your own Surrealist collage

Materials: cartridge paper, magazine images, newspaper text, old photographs, ink, crayons, scissors and glue

- Process: From your magazine and newspapers cut out a selection of images and text. You may try to pick images according to a theme eg animals, environment; gender, city life etc
- On your drawing paper (cut to about 10x15cm) layout your collage items. Try to consider Surrealist ideas in your layout - ie unsettling, uncanny, unexpected and absurd.
- Before gluing you may choose to paint or sketch suggestion of a background. You could also use another Surrealist technique FROTTAGE - using a pencil or crayon, place your paper on a roughly textured surface, gently rub over it with the pencil/crayon.
- Arrange and glue your work. Give it an interesting title (consider your theme)
- EXTENSION: Copy your collage by sketching it onto a large canvas. Then paint it. (Look at the paintings above by artists in *To Approach the Unknowable*)