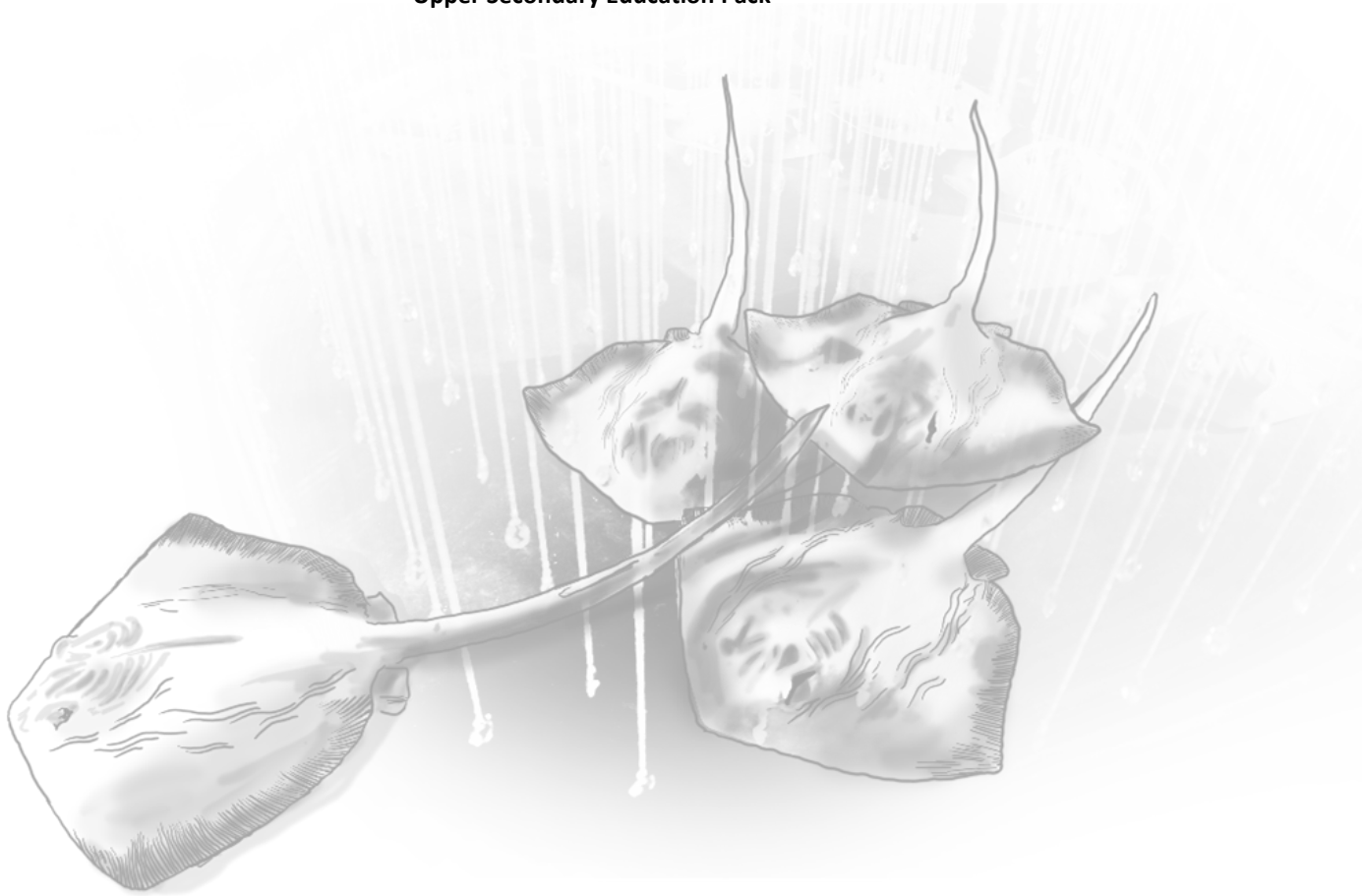


Everything Is True: Abdul Rahman-Abdullah

John Curtin Gallery

Perth Festival 2021

Upper Secondary Education Pack



Note: This exhibition has been designed so that viewers experience the artworks in a specific order, please enter on the left.

The artworks have been curated under the themes of Dream, Nightmare, Redemption/Uplift, Death, Fear/Lies.

Trigger Warning: Artworks in this exhibition tackle complex issues such as death and suicide which may be upsetting/confronting for some students.

The Artist

Abdul Rahman-Abdullah is a Western Australian artist who lives and works on a rural property near Mundijong, about an hour's drive from Perth.

A prolific sculptor, this is the first time this large number of works spanning the past 8 years of his career has been shown together. The exhibition takes us through a journey of childhood to adulthood, life and death, dreams and reality. It is deeply personal to the Artists' own experiences but also engages with wider world events, political moments and troubled Australian histories that wind their way through his sculptures and installations. Strongly influenced by his Muslim identity and the sharing of family stories of growing up in Victoria Park, an inner suburb of Perth.

Abdul Rahman-Abdullah often uses animals to articulate complex and very human experiences and emotion. Animals, both wild and domestic, are a daily part of working and home life on his wife's (Anna Louise Richardson's) seventh generation family farm. Before formally studying art, Abdul also worked at the Perth Zoo for many years as a model maker. Jobs ranged from creating realistic animal enclosures- in his words 'making lots of rocks', to creating life size 3-dimensional fiberglass renderings of animals from dinosaurs to gorillas and at one point even taking a mould of an elephant's foot to make a fake foot used in zookeeper training!

An ongoing presence in his work; animals both frame and articulate moments of love, light, death and darkness. He manages this without anthropomorphising or making them more human but rather the animals 'otherness' or separation from human experiences help to explore many of life's big questions and ideas that our own fallibility often seems ill equipped to deal with.

Abdul Rahman works predominantly with wood carving using traditional craftsmanship to tell old stories in new ways. However, he is not purist about his approach to materials, often combining his carved elements with fabric, everyday objects, and other materials to create a moment. "Why would I spend months carving a goats horns when I can use real goat's horns in my work and they are better than I could ever make them?" This combination gives his work a playful edge, balancing between the real and the imaginary.

Entry

Atrium



The Men Who Sold Lies | 2018, carved and painted wood, dimensions variable

This work is a triptych of three white covers thrown over rectangular forms. Which, on closer inspection, are not soft folds of fabric sheeting but carved and painted wood.

These sculptures were made in response to three landscape paintings by convict and colonial artist Joseph Lycett. Also a convicted forger he painted the three works in 1818 to celebrate the newly established colony of Newcastle. These works were commissioned with the intention of being sent back to England to promote ideas of colonial success and romanticised lies of Terra Nullius.



Inner view of Newcastle 1818, by Joseph Lycett

Partly copied from other works of the era, Lycett paints Newcastle as a peaceful, idyllic town that looks much like his English homeland. Life looks peaceful with European settlers enjoying leisure activities in the foreground.

The reality of the penal colony however, as across of much of Australia, was dramatically different. Newcastle is a site of the invasion of Aboriginal land, defence of country, huge suffering, death and displacement. Being a colony specifically for the further punishment of unruly convicts from other settlements military rule would have also been brutal. Paintings like Lycett's helped to create a myth of terra nullius or 'no one's land' in which an empty, prosperous landscape was there to be tamed and enjoyed. This myth was used to justify the exploitation, invasion and genocide that occurred as part of colonial occupation.

The carved forms are designed to be covers for the original Lycett paintings, not only shielding the viewer from the propaganda produced to sell the idea of a peaceful colonization of Australia but to entomb them permanently in a solid cover.

Structural frame:

- ?
- What is this work made of? Does it look like the material it's actually made of or is it tricking you? (Real/IMPLIED texture)
 - What are its material qualities? Is it hard or soft? Transparent or solid? Floppy or rigid?
 - What shapes are being described here?

Subjective frame:

- What do you think the title of the artwork tells us?
- Who is the other artist that inspired these works? And what do you think of him?

Cultural Frame:

- What was Terra Nullius?
- Why do you think the gallery has chosen to put this work first/in the foyer?
- What is the role of institutions such as Art Galleries and Museums in telling stories and shaping histories?
- Who gets to choose what goes into art galleries? Both now and in the past?
- Why do you think that the artist would want to cover up these works of art?
- How does the choice of wood as a sculptural material give meaning?
- If you could cover up a sculpture or a painting or an artwork in your own city what would it be and why?

Dream



To dream a good luck dream | 2019 | painted wood, sheepskin

"To dream a good luck dream offers a physical presence to intangible ideas. To sleep and to dream is to experience contiguous modes of being, a state of lightness in the dark where memory meets a subjective future. To dream about a white snake is said to bring good fortune. This work is one of the many ways to describe a sense of optimism."

Dreams have influenced artists through the ages and have been responsible for many pushing the boundaries of reality. This artwork may be seen to reference dichotomies of outside/inside, domestic/wild, good/bad, real/imagined. What do you see?



Structural frame

- Why is the monotone colour palette important to this artwork?
- The rug in this artwork is quite different to the one in 'Wednesday's Child', describe these differences and discuss whether these rugs remind you of different places/activities?

Subjective frame

- Do you believe in the meaning behind dreams?
- Snakes/serpents are one of the oldest and most widespread symbols. They hold meaning in history, religions and mythology, many of which are connected to stories of creation, sin, manipulation, temptation and power.
- What is your first thought when you see a snake? Discuss and compare your response to those of people around you, are there similarities/differences?

Cultural frame

- Most colours have cultural significance and are representative of different traditions and occasions for people of differing cultural backgrounds. What does the colour white remind you of?
- Dreams are often loaded with symbolism, and for many cultures the content of a dream can determine choices in life. What would the imagery of the dream presented in this artwork mean to you?

Nightmare

Mirrors and reflections play an important role in Abdul Rahman-Abdullah's work. They create a divide between realities; physical and spiritual, waking and dreaming, one kind of existence and the next. In *Watching Waiting* a cat straddles both worlds, part nightmare and part reality. But the two reflected realities also create the whole creature. Perhaps all animals exist in this way? Tied to the physical world but also connected and part of a spiritual one. The title gives this work an ominous edge, a cat not the agent of calamity itself, but prepared for it, waiting for...something.



Watching, Waiting II | 2012, tinted resin, mirror, timber shelf,
550mm x 550mm x 125mm



Structural frame

- The animals are positioned so they appear to be whole, describe the significance of this choice.
- This artwork uses the mirror's reflection to frame and draw in the space around the objects themselves, as well as the viewer. Does this make you become part of the artwork?

Subjective frame

- How does the cat make you feel?
- What role does colour play within this artwork?
- What associations do you have with black cats?

Cultural frame

- What superstitions can you think of that may connect the subjects within this artwork? Do you know their cultural origins?
- Identity is important in Abdul Rahman-Abdullah's work, how is it functioning here?

Redemption/Uplift



Wednesdays Child | 2013, tinted resin, carpet, chandelier



Wednesday's Child | 2015, bronze and concrete [public artwork, causeway exit, Burswood. Town of Victoria Park]

"Each morning began an hour before dawn, dressed in pyjamas and a traditional Topee we would drive from our family home in Victoria Park to the Rivervale mosque for Quran lessons with Imam Abdul-Jalil before the Fajr prayer. I remember those morning drives home from the mosque, watching the world awake as we returned for breakfast, changing into our uniforms and heading off for another day of school."



Structural frame

- Describe the use of space in this installation.
- Site specific artworks (created with purpose for the place where they will be exhibited) must consider their surrounds as part of the artwork. How is your reading of the artwork impacted by its placement within a gallery or in public?
- How do the materials differ between the public and gallery installations? Does this change impact your reading of the artwork?

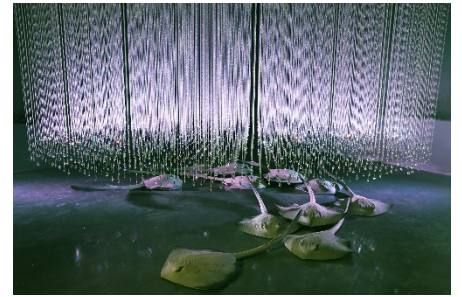
Subjective frame

- Does the Town of Victoria Park have meaning for you personally? Have you noticed this public artwork before?
- Look at the pose of the child and composition of the work. What do you think the child is thinking? Why?

Cultural frame

- What can you see in this artwork that is a cultural symbol of the Muslim faith?
- This artwork references the rituals of prayer and visiting the mosque. Do you have similar rituals in your life? How do these shape your day?

Death



Pretty Beach / 2019, painted wood, silver plate ball chain, crystals, audio, 500 x 500 x 500 cm

Pretty Beach is a magical memory of the home and life of a much-loved Grandfather who lived in Pretty Beach, NSW.

Grandpa Cliffy died by choice while suffering with diabetes and cancer, passing away while lovingly holding photos and letters from his grandchildren in his hands.

A school of 11 carved and painted stingrays glide underneath a shower of rain, created by the suspension of hundreds of Swarovski crystals. Abdul-Rahman Abdullah recreates for us a childhood memory of standing on the jetty that led from his Grandfather's house and watching the stingrays swim beneath him before being obscured by a shower of rain. He remembers the beauty and grace of these animals before the rain droplets caused the surface of the water to become opaque "the stingrays continue on – just taken away from what I can see".

The artwork is both a memorial to his grandfathers death and a celebration of his life. It asks an audience to consider the meaning of the soul and afterlife. The number 11 is also significant in Sufi Muslim thinking because it represents the idea of meeting your creator, a moment of transcendence and beauty rather than something to be feared.

Structural Frame:



- Discuss the significance of the materials used in this sculptural installation (wood, chain, crystal)
- Describe the use of contrast in this artwork
- View the installation from multiple perspectives, move around it and look at it from both high and low points, make note of how it changes when you move

Subjective Frame

- What kinds of feelings and or emotions do you get when you look at this artwork Eg: Does it make you feel peaceful, restless, happy, sad, or something else? What elements about this artwork do you think are making you respond in this way?
- Come up with some descriptive words for the different elements in this artwork for example are the stingrays graceful/floaty/peaceful/natural? Given some of these words what do you think the artist is saying about the end of someone's life?

Cultural Frame

- The artist had chosen to look at some very big and potentially confronting topics in this work such as death, suicide, and the right to choose how and when we die. However, is this artwork confronting? Or upsetting? What do you think the artist is saying about death?
- Voluntary assisted dying legislation was passed in Western Australia in 2020, What does this mean and what choices does it give people?
- When this artwork was created was this legislation in place? And what would that have meant for Grandpa Cliffy?

Fear/Lies



The Dogs | 2007 Carved wood, stain, chandeliers. 300x500x500cm

This work has its beginnings with a terrifying memory that Abdul Rahman-Abdullah has of being chased by dogs as a child. Growing up in Victoria Park, his neighbourhood was full of pawnshops, mechanics and used car yards, although gentrified now at the time it meant a lot of barbed wire and guard dogs. Dogs patrolled boundaries and borders which he was not welcome to cross, they were unpredictable and territorial, used to scare away. This fear was twofold for Rahman-Abdullah as dogs are also considered unclean animals in Muslim culture; suitable for hunting and protection but not as companions or pets. Black dogs in particular are considered representatives of Shaytan, the embodiment of evil and were so much more than just guard dogs to him at the time.

Although this artwork was initially inspired by a personal memory, *The Dogs* also explores post-colonial and political histories where dogs are used to control people and protect the rights of a ruling class. The dogs guarding the car yards also represent savagely guarded territories, closed borders and the exclusion of entire groups of people from safety and equal rights.

For example, throughout colonisation in The Kimberly region of W.A. dogs were often used at the entrance to a gorge or permanent water hole to give European settlers exclusive use of them and denying access of the Aboriginal owners to their own lands and vital resources such as fresh water, fishing and hunting grounds. Dogs are used today by police across Australia in crowd control at protests as well as riots and in prisons and detention centres.

The chandeliers represent systems of power, wealth and privilege guarded by the exploitation of these animal's natural instincts and indicating the underlying violence that is used to maintain social divisions.

Structural frame:



- This work is made up of a combination of different things, what are they?
- How are the dogs positioned in this installation? What meanings are created through their position
- How is lighting being used?
- How is the use of colour important in this work? Black has particular significance in many different cultures, what are some of these?

Subjective frame:

- Walk amongst and through the installation how does being in a different position make you feel? How do you feel when you are standing with the dogs under the chandeliers? Compare this to how you feel when you stand in front of them.

Cultural Frame:

- How has the artist's Muslim heritage and faith informed this work?
- Can you think of a historical example of Dogs being used by humans as agents of control and oppression? Share it with the class if you can.
- *The Dogs* reminds us that cultural context changes situations- although one person might view an animal in one way, another person might see that animal in a completely different light, can you think of any other ways that this might work? (it doesn't have to be about an animal)

Exit



Iftar | 2017, Concrete, fifteen 23.5 carat gold electroplated almonds,
15 x 15 x 15 cm

Iftar refers to the breaking of the fast at sunset during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. It represents the most celebratory event of each day, when the whole family comes together to eat something and pray the Maghrib (sunset) prayer. Traditionally, the fast is broken with almonds or dates and a glass of water before the larger evening meal.

Iftar aims to metaphorically explore how a handful of almonds can carry a weight of cultural significance. The traditional almond bowl is cast in a concrete cubic shape that references the Ka'aba (cube) in Mecca, the holiest site in Islam and the direction in which Muslims all over the world face when praying. Embedding the bowl of almonds within the cube creates a tangible relationship between the individual and the shared experiences of the Ummah (global Islamic community).

Structural frame



- What is the significance of the materials chosen in this artwork?
- Why is the shape of this artwork important?
- What does gold signify? And why has the artist chosen to use it here?

Subjective frame

- Why do you think this artwork was selected as the final artwork in this exhibition?
- What is something that you have waited for by choice and appreciated more as a result? This doesn't have to be a physical object or food it might be waiting to share good news or waiting to do something that you enjoy.

Cultural frame

- Can you think of any traditions and foods which hold significant memories or meaning for your family or culture?
- What do you know about Ramadan? Come up with three facts about it (you can talk to others, share information you already know or do some research online if you wish)
- Based on a memory from the artists childhood how do you think he felt about the almonds when it came time to break his fast?

Make notes about your observations and opinions

Artwork Title:

Subject	Technique	Intention	Composition	Influence

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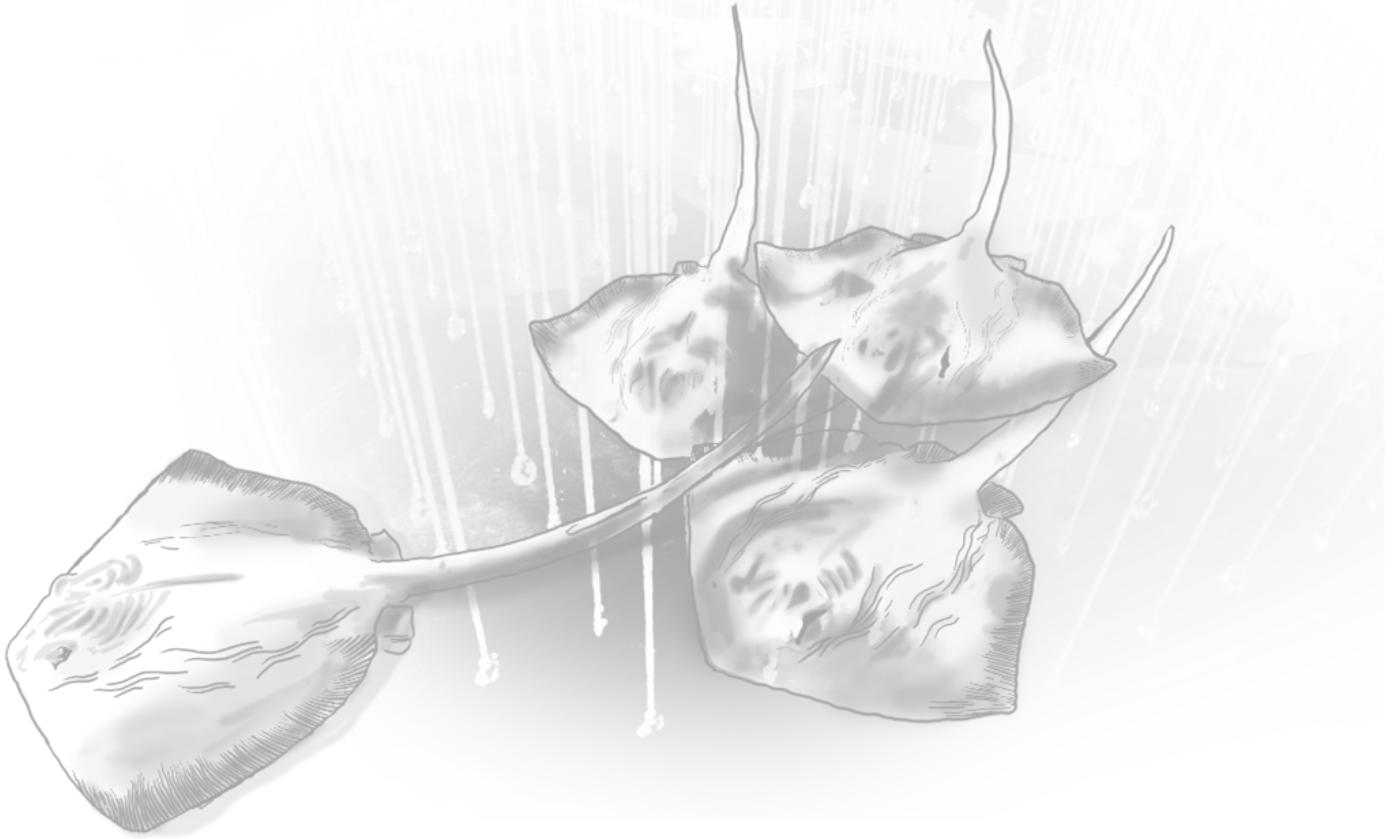
Everything Is True

Exhibition of work by Abdul Rahman-Abdullah

John Curtin Gallery

Perth Festival 2021

Teaching Notes - Upper Secondary Education Pack



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Teaching Notes

Themes and areas of exploration:

- Domestic landscape
- Cultural narratives
- Muslim identity and faith
- Malay heritage
- Suburban Australia
- The every day
- Reality vs dreams
- Memory
- Story telling
- Australian socio-political histories
- Animals

The student booklet contains note taking pages under the STICI headings. You may like to direct your students to use these tables to compare and contrast artworks either through group discussion or written format.

Student Reflection

These questions may be answered independently or as part of a group discussion.

Which artwork stands out in your mind? Why? (Personal response)

How does your personal social/cultural/historical context compare/differ to that of the artist?

Which materials/techniques were you most surprised by? Why were these choices engaging?

Were there any artworks you found particularly intriguing, confusing or confronting? If so, Why?

Why do you think this exhibition was curated to guide the viewer to take a specific path?

How does the title of the exhibition, *Everything is True*, influence your reading of the narratives presented?

Draw what you remember of your favourite artwork.

Suggested Activities

A) Hard/soft

Abdul Rahman Abdullah's work plays with the way we expect materials to behave. For example, when we look at the folds of fabric in his work *The Men Who Told Lies* we expect them to be made of soft floppy material but on closer inspection you realise that they are carved from wood and are solid and inflexible. This creates meaning by suggesting that the artist wants these paintings permanently covered over in something solid and unmoving, like the wood of a coffin, rather than a sheet of fabric that can be taken off at any time.

You can also explore how materials behave and create simple material illusions in the classroom. The following activity would be best for upper high school (years 10 and up) as it involves working with hot paraffin wax.

You need:

- ❖ Some sheets of a fine white drapey fabric, cotton sheeting or old T shirt fabric is great.
- ❖ A selection of some objects to be 'draped' they need to be plastic or metal or covered with a layer of glad wrap to protect them from the wax. Op shops are great for these.
- ❖ A few Kg's of paraffin wax melted down in an electric frypan until liquid. (**Warning!** Handle with care, and manage the risk of burns in the classroom, this will be hot.)
- ❖ Two pairs of kitchen tongs, clothes pegs also make good disposable tongs too.
- ❖ Grease proof kitchen paper
- ❖ newspaper

Instructions:

- Pre-melt your wax, make sure it is liquid without overheating, the wax should NOT be smoking, this means it is too hot and you need to turn down your electric frypan.
- Choose an object to drape- it should have a strong silhouette
- Place the object on a clean sealed surface on a piece of wax proof paper to protect the desk.
- Take a sheet of fabric and using the tongs or pegs, carefully submerge it in the liquid wax. Make sure the wax completely coats the fabric.
- Gently lift out the fabric and allow a few seconds for the excess wax to drain off.
- Carefully carry and lay it over your chosen object so that it covers it completely. Make sure the newspaper and grease proof paper catch the drips.
- While the wax is still warm and flexible you can use the clothes pegs and other tools to push it gently around your solid object, make sure you still leave room to remove your object completely from the draping.
- Once cool your draped fabric should now be rock solid! You can remove your original object and experiment with your new draped sculpture!

b) Mindfulness activity

Many of Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's works are based on childhood memories and have a magical quality about them.

This activity can be undertaken outside on campus a shady bit of grass would be perfect!

You need some paper, and a range of easy to use drawing materials in different colours, a few boxes of pastels for example would be ideal

Close your eyes and try to think of a memory from when you were little that you would say was beautiful. When you have chosen one spend some time thinking about it. Who was there? What were you doing? What kinds of surfaces were present in your memory? Are they hard/soft/made of grass/or metal/bitumen etc. What temperature is it in your chosen memory? What was the weather doing? What is the light like and what does it smell like? What sounds are present in your chosen memory? Are there patterns on or in any of the surfaces?

Open your eyes and pick up your sketch book and some coloured drawing materials. See if you can draw some of the things that you remember, spend time describing things like light, sound and colour rather than worrying about correct representational drawing.

c) Carving (soap sculpture)

Abdul-Rahman often creates sculptures and installations which feature animals carved from wood. Similarly, this sculpting activity allows students to sculpt through a process of removing 'what you don't need' to reveal the animal form. Also referred to as a subtractive process.

Tai Mikala on Abdul Rahman-Abdullah's woodcarving process:

"I am struck by the process of creation which starts at scale with a chainsaw and large, sweeping actions and ends with him in stillness perched on the edge of a rolling stool with an almost comically small paintbrush. Through each step in the process his artistic gesture becomes increasingly smaller and, by the time the work is completed, the evidence of his hand has almost been erased."

You need:

- ❖ A block of bar soap (various brands/textures will behave differently, a waxy type works well)
- ❖ Carving tools (clay tools/skewers/pins/exacto knife/chisel/lino cutting tools)
- ❖ Sharp pencil

Instructions:

- Select an animal that you have a personal connection/story/superstition. You may like to find some photos to refer to.
- Use a sharp pencil or exactly knife to draw the simplified three-dimensional form onto your bar of soap.
- Consider the body proportions and whether your sculpture will include the animals full body. What pose will your animal be in? Are they friendly or fierce?
- Using your carving tools, begin to remove larger sections of unnecessary material to create negative space – this should resemble a loose, gestural drawing of the figure. Avoid fine details until you are happy with the basic form and proportions.
- Use the sharp pencil to lightly mark placement of features.
- Use your carving tools to create the textures and finer features on the animal – think about how your tools and mark making can create the illusion of fur/feathers/scales. Experiment with non-traditional carving tools.
*shallow marks can be 'erased' by rubbing the surface with a small amount of water on your fingertip.

Once completed, you may display your animals with found/household objects to create a narrative which reflects your initial intention.

D) Drawing in Space

[specialised equipment needed]

Abdul-Rahman describes sculpting as 'drawing in space', he believes that if you can draw, you can sculpt. The following activities give students the opportunity to use their drawing skills in the space around them, taking into consideration the larger scale of their movements and movement of their whole body in three-dimensional space.

Through any of the below methods, students may use slow gestural drawing techniques to build an armature of an animal or domestic object (which could stand alone as an activity or be used to build on further). The slow pace of this activity means students are forced to consider their movements carefully – it is a meditative process and truly drawing in space.

3D Drawing

You will need:

- A 3D drawing pen such as a 3Doodler
- 3D pen filament
- A small base board

The 3D pen can be used to introduce students to building in three-dimensional form with a mode they are more familiar with – drawing. The challenging aspect of this activity is speed and consideration of the material qualities (strength and gravity).

Virtual Reality Sculpture

You will need:

- A VR drawing app such as '3D brush' or a virtual reality headset and handset such as the HTC Vive and tilt brush.
- Appropriate device for the software such as a computer or phone

Drawing in three-dimensional virtual reality is a real brain workout but also a great way to integrate technology and the 'imaginary' with sculptural understanding. The challenging aspect of this medium is to make full use of the endless possibilities that exist in the virtual world – gravity and material qualities bend to the will of the maker in a dream world.

Light painting using a mobile (collaborative activity)

You will need:

- Any camera app with shutter speed control
- Smartphone or tablet
- Light sources for each person involved (some creativity is encouraged here, strong torches work well but students are encouraged to play with coloured novelty lights/hula hoops/light bars and beyond)

Light painting is a photography technique which captures the motion of light through slow exposure. In this case, the sculpture/drawing is ephemeral (the light) and the photograph becomes a record of this moment in which it existed.

Instructions:

- This activity requires a little planning beforehand and works well as a group activity.
- Each light source (held in the hand) becomes a brush stroke so it is often best to have a group of individuals with unique movements creating the whole image. In a completely dark space (indoors or outdoors) you will have greater control over your exposure time. Some trial and error may be needed but 10 seconds is usually sufficient.
- All group members will move at the same time. The movements will be repeated over throughout the exposure time. The recorded movements together will form the linework of the drawing/sculpture.
- For a demonstration, speak to your friendly photography/media teacher or check out one of the many youtube videos.