

Education Kit

**Contemporising the Modern**  
**The Russell Mills Collection**  
*MAMA Education Resource*



- Max Jupain '37

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### About the Education Resource

This education resource has been developed by the Murray Art Museum Albury in alignment with the NSW Visual Arts curriculum. The aim of this education resource is for students and their teachers to develop a further understanding of MAMA's Russell Mills Collection, its history and significance.

### Further Reading

- The Russell Mills Foundation Website <http://trmf.org.au/>
- Hemsley, J. and Acimovic, B. (2016). *Contemporising the Modern: Australian Modern and Contemporary Photography*. ISBN 978-0-9944175-8-9
- Hemsley, J. and Acimovic, B. (2015). *MAMA Here, MAMA Now*. Albury: Murray Art Museum Albury. ISBN 987-0-9944175-1-0

**Cover Image:** Max DUPAIN (1911 - 1992), *Sunbaker*, 1937/1980s. silver gelatin photograph. Gift of the Russell Mills Foundation, 2015. © Max Dupain Exhibition Print Archive.

## Curriculum Links Stage 6

### Preliminary course

P1: explores the conventions of practice in artmaking	•
P2: explores the roles and relationships between the concepts of artist, artwork, world and audience	•
P3: identifies the frames as the basis of understanding expressive representation through the making of art	•
P4: investigates subject matter and forms as representations in artmaking	•
P5: investigates ways of developing coherence and layers of meaning in the making of art	•
P6: explores a range of material techniques in ways that support artistic intentions	•
P7: explores the conventions of practice in art criticism and art history	•
P8: explores the roles and relationships between concepts of artist, artwork, world and audience through critical and historical investigations of art	•
P9: identifies the frames as the basis of exploring different orientations to critical and historical investigations of art	•
P10: explores ways in which significant art histories, critical narratives and other documentary accounts of the visual arts can be constructed	•

### HSC course

H1: initiates and organises artmaking practice that is sustained, reflective and adapted to suit particular conditions	
H2: applies their understanding of the relationships among the artist, artwork, world and audience through the making of a body of work	•
H3: demonstrates an understanding of the frames when working independently in the making of art	
H4: selects and develops subject matter and forms in particular ways as representations in artmaking	•
H5: demonstrates conceptual strength in the production of a body of work that exhibits coherence and may be interpreted in a range of ways	
H6: demonstrates technical accomplishment, refinement and sensitivity appropriate to the artistic intentions within a body of work	
H7: applies their understanding of practice in art criticism and art history	•
H8: applies their understanding of the relationships among the artist, artwork, world and audience	•
H9: demonstrates an understanding of how the frames provide for different orientations to critical and historical investigations of art	•
H10: constructs a body of significant art histories, critical narratives and other documentary accounts of representation in the visual arts	

## General: Contemporising the Modern

### Introduction

#### Alexandra Mills

Director (Chair)

The Russell Mills Foundation

My uncle, Russell Mills began collecting with the work of Australian photographers Harold Cazneaux, Max Dupain, David Moore and Olive Cotton. Soon he had books about photography, photographers and collecting and was travelling to see important collections. He became especially interested in the American photographers Dorothea Lang and Edward Steichen. By 2010 there were too many to hang on the walls of his home and in a conversation at a retrospective of Henri-Cartier Bresson's work at the Museum of Modern Art, New York he talked to me about the future of his collection as we questioned 'Could it be put to a really good use, perhaps to raise the profile of Australia photography?' The decision was not urgent because at that stage he was still planning to spend his retirement expanding and cataloguing the collection.

Soon after Russell heard he had been diagnosed with asbestos-related, malignant mesothelioma, he started to set his affairs in order. One of his primary concerns was protection of the photographs he had collected diligently over several years. His ambition was ideally that the collection would be donated to a public institution that would look after them appropriately, utilising them to inspire artists and the broader public to appreciate photography as an art form.

The collection's journey from Russell's home in Redfern to Albury is serendipitous indeed. He had been a benefactor of the Photographic Collection at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) for some time so the first call was to Judy Annear, Senior Curator of Photography AGNSW. As the AGNSW Collection already included most of the works in Russell's collection, she introduced the Directors of The Russell Mills Foundation to the dynamic team at the Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA). MAMA's Director, Jacqui Hemsley, and Curator, Bianca Acimovic, enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity of becoming custodians of the Russell Mills Collection. More importantly, they had a vision for sharing it - as a collection - in a way that will truly realise Russell's aspirations.

Russell Mills Foundation, established to continue Russell's philanthropic giving, along with his family and friends are all delighted that the new home for his beloved photographs is the Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA).

Collections reflect the lives and loves of those who build them. This catalogue is a valuable document because it creates a permanent record of the works in the Russell Mills Collection, but it also records the evolution of one man's passionate engagement with the beauty and power of photography.

## Syllabus connections: Contemporising the Modern

### Conceptual framework Years 7 – 12

The conceptual framework provides a model for understanding the complex and intentional functional relationships that exist between the agencies in the artworld. The four agencies in the conceptual framework exist in the artworld as a network of relationships between the artist, the artwork, the world and the audience.



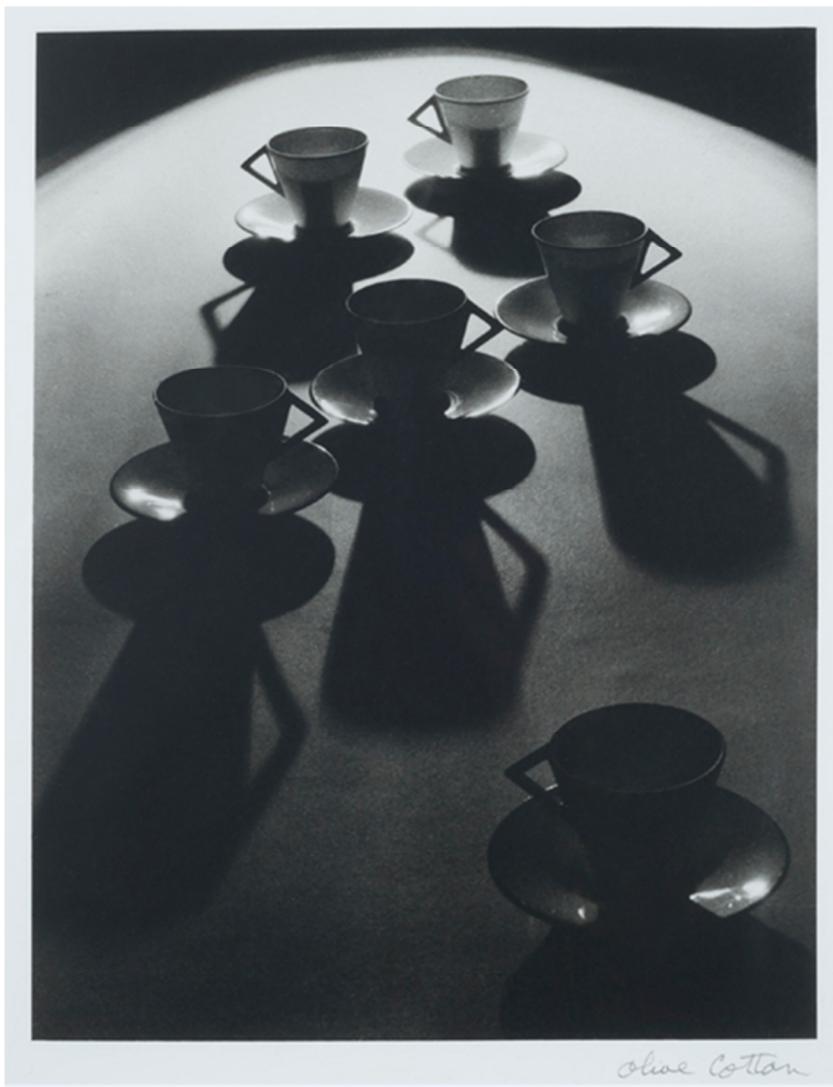
**Image:** David MOORE (1927 - 2003), *Migrants Arriving in Sydney*, 1966/1997. Silver gelatin photograph. Gift of the Russell Mills Foundation, 2015.

Renowned and widely travelled Australian photojournalist, David Moore in the 1960's was working on an assignment for the National Geographic. Stationed in New South Wales to cover the local situation following overseas interest in the region as a result of the Vietnam War in 1966 Moore captured passengers on the ship Galileo Galilei arriving in Sydney. Originally a colour image intended to document the increased number of European migrants being encouraged to come to Australia to meet a labour shortage, however the image was not publicised by the magazine. Exhibited by Moore as a black and white photograph in the 1970's, *Migrants Arriving in Sydney* is now an image that has become part of the Australian visual vernacular with each successive wave of migration.



## Framing Contemporising the Modern Years 7 – 12

The frames (structural, subjective, cultural, postmodern) provide an interpretive tool or lens for understanding the layering of meaning, significance, value and belief in and about the visual arts.



**Image:** Olive COTTON (1911 - 2003), *Teacup Ballet*, c. 1935. silver gelatin photograph. Gift of the Russell Mills Foundation, 2015.

Olive Cotton's early work is characterised by pictorial soft focus; however, by the late 1930s she was undertaking her art degree, which saw her adopt the practices of more modern photography. She continued to work at home as an amateur photographer during her studies. Soon after graduating she joined Max Dupain's studio. Dupain was a childhood friend whom she would marry in 1939.<sup>1</sup> It was during this period that Cotton produced one of her more acclaimed works, *Teacup Ballet*. Bringing together composition, light and tone, she transformed mundane domestic objects into graceful dancing figures lit on a ballroom stage.

1. Josef Lebovic, Joanna Cahill and Susetter Cooke, 1989, *Masterpieces of Australian Photography*, Josef Lebovic Gallery, p. 142.

Using the structural frame analyse *Teacup Ballet*. What techniques does Olive Cotton utilise to construct this emotive image?

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How important is the imagination of the artist and viewer in viewing *Teacup Ballet*? How well do you think Olive Cotton has portrayed her ideas through the use of composition, light and shadow?

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## Contemporising the Modern: HSC Extended Response



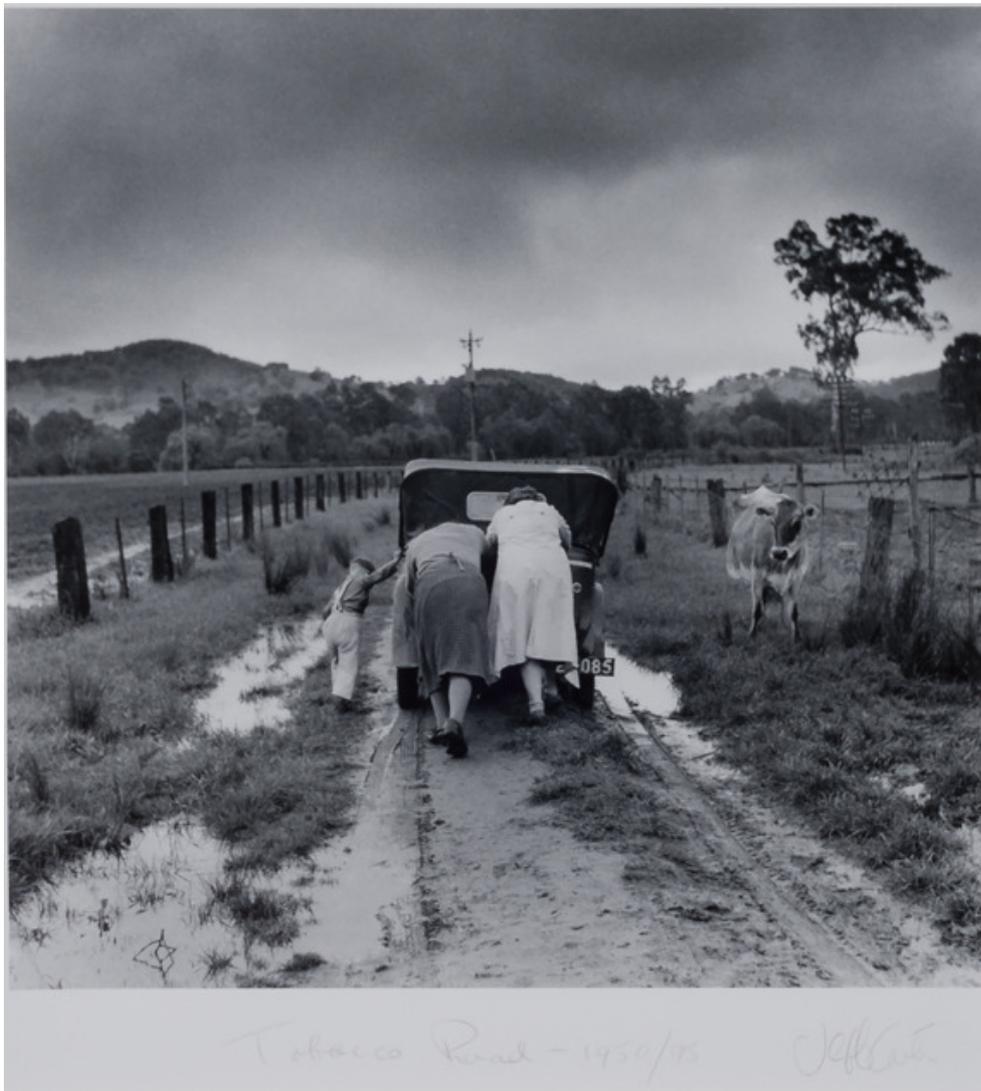
**Cover Image:** Max DUPAIN (1911 - 1992), *Sunbaker*, 1937/1980s. silver gelatin photograph. Gift of the Russell Mills Foundation, 2015. © Max Dupain Exhibition Print Archive.

One of Australia's most revered photographers, Max Dupain captures in his images the uniqueness of the Australian identity. He achieved both commercial and artistic success in a career that spanned decades. The beach is a prominent subject and setting in many of his most highly regarded images. This photograph, *Sunbaker*, is one of Dupain's most famous images, and has become an icon of Australian art. Taken many years after World War I, *Sunbaker* conjures memories of bronzed ANZACs during a period when contemporary Australia was emerging from the dark years of the Great Depression and undergoing a national renaissance. *Sunbaker* shone a light on the personality of the 'Aussie', and on the relationship we have with our environment. The work was created in 1937, in a period of optimism prior to the onset of World War II, while Dupain was on holiday at Culburra, on the NSW South Coast.<sup>1</sup>

1. National Gallery of Australia, 2015, *Federation: Australian Art and Society 1901–2001*, National Gallery of Australia, [www.nga.gov.au/federation/Detail.cfm?WorkID=102513](http://www.nga.gov.au/federation/Detail.cfm?WorkID=102513), accessed 11 August 2015.



## Contemporising the Modern: general strategies Years K-6



**Image:** Jeff CARTER (1928 - 2010), *Tobacco Road*, 1956/1995. silver gelatin photograph. Gift of the Russell Mills Foundation, 2015.

Photographer and writer Jeff Carter began taking photographs at age 18 after he finished school. Jeff tells stories of everyday Australian people through his photographs. He shows them working and living in Australian landscapes by the beaches, on rural farms or in the inner-city.

*Tobacco Road* shows the struggle of rural workers in the Ovens Valley as they laboured on the tobacco plantations that were common throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the area.

Imagine you are one of the people in this image. Where are you? What are you doing? How are you feeling? What are you thinking? Write a short story about your life.

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