

# CAI GUO-QIANG

## Falling Back to Earth

### Secondary Teacher Notes

#### About the exhibition

'Cai Guo-Qiang: Falling Back to Earth' comprises three major installations. *Heritage* (99 life-sized artificial animals gathered around a watering hole) and *Eucalyptus* (a large eucalyptus tree within the gallery space), both 2013, were commissioned for this exhibition. They each respond to aspects of the Queensland landscape encountered by the artist during visits to the country. *Head On* 2006, a striking installation of wolves leaping through the air, is one of Cai's most renowned works and is on loan to the Gallery from the Deutsche Bank Collection, Berlin. The exhibition also includes a multifaceted interactive project developed by the artist for the Children's Art Centre.

#### About the artist

Chinese-born, New York-based artist Cai Guo-Qiang (pronounced tsai gwo-chang) is well known as a remarkable and inventive figure on the contemporary international art scene. Having grown up in China during the Cultural Revolution, Cai was introduced to art and literature by his father. His work has appeared in major galleries around the world, and he has a long history of engagement with the Queensland Art Gallery, having exhibited commissioned works in the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) in 1996 and 1999.

To learn more about Cai's life and art practice, see the displays in GOMA foyer or visit the artist's webpage at [www.caiguogiang.com](http://www.caiguogiang.com).

#### About the worksheet

The worksheet considers a range of exhibition-related themes, such as:

- Evolution of art practice – wide variety of materials and processes
- Utopian possibilities — different species coming together, the sharing of experiences, and creating communities
- The relationship between humans and the natural world
- The concepts of purity and wilderness associated with Australia; the idea of a 'last paradise'
- Global issues and universal scope of work — consideration of history, aesthetics, folklore and current events
- The use of spectacle, scale, number and allegory to create meaning, and for the consideration of large issues

#### Key terms:

- ▶ ALLEGORY
- ▶ IDEALISATION
- ▶ INSTALLATION
- ▶ REALISM
- ▶ SCALE
- ▶ SPECTACLE

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES: FOR THE CLASSROOM

#### Breadth of practice

- Cai Guo-Qiang has a reputation as a major international contemporary artist. Research the depth and variety of Cai's practice, referring to the timeline in the GOMA foyer. Compare Cai's past exhibitions at major art institutions around the world to observe how his practice has evolved. *Are there influences and similarities evident across Cai's practice?*

#### Heritage 2013

- Look at the way *Heritage* 2013 represents Australia as an Arcadian paradise through the use of allegory. *What messages are conveyed by this installation?*
- Discuss the idea of multiculturalism symbolised within *Heritage*.
- Compare *Heritage* 2013 with *Head On* 2006: *Head On* critiques human actions (elements of despair and unreflective behaviour) versus *Heritage's* message of hope (romantic vision or idealisation).
- Consider also that *Heritage* can be seen as conveying a sense of hopelessness (i.e., the animals could be portrayed to have lost their instincts and must rely on this last pool of water to survive).
- Write and illustrate a fable inspired by *Heritage* 2013.
- Plan an artwork and create a maquette based on the fable you have written. Consider the use of scale and materials to convey meaning.
- Research other perceptions of paradise, such as the Garden of Eden. Imagine your own Australian paradise. *What parts of Australia would you keep, emphasise, remove or change?* Draw up plans and concept drawings for a painting or large-scale installation of this paradise. Refer to other artists' practices for inspiration.

#### Eucalyptus 2013

- Eucalyptus trees often appear in Australian paintings, in the work of artists Albert Namatjira and Hans Heysen, for example. *What does the eucalyptus symbolise?* Explore the similarities between such paintings and Cai's installation at GOMA in the artists' use of this tree.
- The title of the exhibition, 'Falling Back to Earth', is inspired by a phrase from Tao Yuanming's fourth-century prose poem, *Ah, Homeward Bound I Go!* Tao epitomises the Daoist ideal of reclusion, or withdrawal into nature. Find and read a copy of the poem and explain how it relates to the themes presented in the exhibition.

#### Exhibition design

- Listen to the interview with the QAGOMA exhibition designer. Identify the steps or processes (e.g., planning, drawing, consultation, construction and consideration of site/audience) involved in realising an installation such as *Heritage*.
- *Do you have an important message that you would like to convey through art?* Think of some different ways in which you could get your message across. Imagine and then draw a plan for a large-scale art project that would be made for a museum like GOMA. *What elements would you have to think about?*

## RELEVANT CURRICULUM AREAS

Australian Curriculum priorities addressed:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
- Sustainability

For more information, visit

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities).

Links can be made between the exhibition and Queensland syllabus documents including Visual Art, Studies of Society and the Environment, Science, Mathematics and English.

VISUAL ART	
<b>EVOLUTION OF ART PRACTICE</b>	<p>Students will have the opportunity to view the range of materials used by Cai Guo-Qiang to communicate his ideas. They will identify his artworks' conceptual frameworks and meanings, and consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ use of the inquiry learning model (research, development, resolution and reflection)</li><li>▶ developmental ideas, analysis, stimulus, documentation</li><li>▶ formal and informal explorations and experimentations with media</li><li>▶ evidence of an evolving personal aesthetic and the discerning choices made in resolving the work(s).</li></ul>
<b>REPRESENTATIONS OF AUSTRALIA IN ART</b>	<p>Students will reflect on the idea of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Australia as an Arcadian paradise (i.e., the purity and wilderness associated with Australia).</li></ul>
ENGLISH	
<b>LITERARY AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ examine the way non-literary texts entertain, evoke emotion and develop themes</li><li>▶ consider how texts can reflect an author's point of view, beliefs and cultural understandings (e.g., Chinese poets from the fourth century, such as Tao Yuanming)</li><li>▶ analyse the use of symbols and allegory in literature to convey abstract concepts and how this compares with the use of such devices in visual art.</li></ul>
STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)	
<b>CULTURE AND IDENTITY</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ observe how cultures and identities are shaped by a range of factors, and how societies promote cohesion and diversity in different ways</li><li>▶ consider how group identities are influenced by different factors, including family, community, nationality, socioeconomic factors and religious beliefs (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Nationalism, Communism, Socialism).</li></ul>
<b>PLACE AND SPACE</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ consider the way environments are defined by spatial patterns, interactions and sustainable practices, which can balance human activity and environmental processes.</li></ul>
HISTORY	
<b>CULTURE AND IDENTITY</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ explore the way cultures and identities are shaped by events, people and movements</li><li>▶ how past events can promote division, cohesion and diversity (e.g., national histories of Australia and China).</li></ul>
<b>SYSTEMS</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ examine ways global citizenship has developed from social, political and economic factors, and the responses of individuals and groups</li></ul> <p>(e.g., how these characteristics vary perceptions of places to live in, as well as the size of communities).</p>
GEOGRAPHY	
<b>PLACE</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ explore the way that place can be defined by environmental, social, cultural, public and private characteristics</li></ul> <p>(e.g., how these characteristics cause variations in how they are perceived as places to live, as well the size of communities).</p>
<b>SYSTEMS</b>	<p>Students can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ consider how environmental, social, economic, cultural and political systems/decisions affect access to resources and information</li></ul> <p>(e.g., war, migration, economic issues and natural disasters).</p>

The cross-curriculum priorities referenced in this resource are outlined in the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (refer to [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)). The Essential Learnings and Standards of Queensland for Visual Art, English, Studies of Society and the Environment, Geography and History have also been referenced (refer to [www.qsa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au)).