

# CAI GUO-QIANG

## Falling Back to Earth

### Primary 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.

For further information, visit the artist's webpage at [www.caiguoqiang.com](http://www.caiguoqiang.com).

#### About the worksheet

The worksheet focuses on nature, and particularly our engagement with nature and place in the world. By experiencing the works of Cai Guo-Qiang, students can:

- ▶ **LEARN** how contemporary artists convey messages through art
- ▶ **CONSTRUCT** meaningful dialogue and investigate the larger world
- ▶ **DEVELOP** critical and creative thinking practices.

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

- 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'
- Using animals as metaphors to convey messages
- The use of spectacle, scale and number to create meaning
- Global issues, and responding to ideas presented in abstract forms.

#### GENERAL FOCUS AREAS:

- ▶ **CONCEPT** — delivering a universal message through contemporary art
- ▶ **METHODOLOGY** — understanding artistic practices and processes
- ▶ **EXPERIENCE** — investigating and reflecting to enhance learning outcomes

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES: FOR THE CLASSROOM

#### HERITAGE

- Objects, places, traditions and ideas that have been passed down from previous generations form our heritage. Make a poster that shows your group's heritage to display in your classroom.
- List some things that you think are important parts of Australian heritage. *How might you depict these aspects of heritage visually?* Draw your ideas.
- Research the history of the Quandamooka people of North Stradbroke Island. *How do dreaming stories about land and sea connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with their culture and identity?*

#### COMMUNITY

- To Cai, the idea of community is very important, as can be seen in *Heritage* 2013. Using three animals from this work, design an animal that combines the head of one, the body of another, and the tail and legs of a third. Give your new animal a name and write three things about their community. *For example, who would be the leader and how would you identify them, what they would eat, and how would they behave?*
- Propose a spectacular work for your school, one that communicates an important message to your community. Identify the key message. *Why is this message important to you?* Working individually or collaboratively, generate ideas for the project by designing and making an artwork model.

- Paint a picture of a large tree, and each student can either paint or collage their own tree-house design onto it. Write a list of rules or laws for the tree-house community to ensure a peaceful and sustainable environment. *If animals, birds and insects could talk, what do you think would be the three main rules and laws for their tree community?*
- Create a pattern for numbering the tree houses.
- As a class, give the tree and its community a name that reflects the heritage of the group.
- Research other examples of large-scale works by Cai Guo-Qiang. *Can you see any similarities in the way Cai makes his art or the messages that he conveys?*

## 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	
PROCESS AND MATERIALS	Students will have the opportunity to view the range of materials used by Cai Guo-Qiang to communicate his ideas.
SCALE	Cai Guo-Qiang's use of scale will help students appreciate the concepts of spectacle and viewer experience in contemporary art.
REPRESENTATIONS OF AUSTRALIA	Students will reflect on the way the artist portrays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ the purity of the Australian landscape</li> <li>▶ areas of wilderness still present in Australia, including animal habitats.</li> </ul>
STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)	
PLACE AND SPACE	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ consider community decisions about how resources are used and managed (i.e., in terms of sustainability in using, conserving and protecting environments)</li> <li>▶ identify the physical and human dimensions used to define global environments.</li> </ul>
CULTURE AND IDENTITY	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ reflect on the importance of land and its inhabitants to the formation of culture and identity (e.g., the connection between Indigenous Australians and Country).</li> </ul>
SCIENCE	
SCIENCE AS A HUMAN ENDEAVOUR	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ consider the ethical considerations involved in the application of science (e.g., preservation of wilderness environments to help protect endangered species)</li> <li>▶ reflect on how scientific knowledge can help to make natural, social and built environments sustainable, ranging from local to global (e.g., resource use).</li> </ul>
LIFE AND LIVING	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ think about life cycles and the different feeding relationships that exist within an ecosystem (e.g., producer/consumer or herbivore/carnivore relationships forming a food 'web')</li> <li>▶ consider that the survival of organisms is dependent on their adaptation to the environment (e.g., animals using camouflage to protect themselves).</li> </ul>
MATHEMATICS	
ALGEBRA	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ identify and describe patterns and relationships (e.g., space and number, and relationships between quantities)</li> <li>▶ recognise the ways that patterns can be represented using concrete and pictorial materials.</li> </ul>
NUMBER	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ consider the significance and meanings of symbolic numbers from a range of different cultures (e.g., the number 9).</li> </ul>
SPACE	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ investigate how 3-D objects and artworks can be constructed from plans, diagrams and models (e.g., Gallery staff constructing a model of Cai's installations).</li> </ul>
ENGLISH	
LITERARY AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ explore the poetic forms and devices used to express thoughts and ideas (e.g., lyric, haiku and metaphor)</li> <li>▶ consider the purpose, audience and subject matter explored through poetic forms.</li> </ul>

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 and Studies of Society and the Environment, Science, Mathematics and English have also been referenced (refer to [www.qsa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au)).