



Finite Bounty: Dan Withey

Education Resource

Education Resource overview

Purpose of the education resource

The education resource has been designed to support students to build confidence in looking at and thinking and talking about Dan Withey's exhibition *Finite Bounty*.

Links to the Australian Curriculum 9.0

The following education resource to is aligned to the Australian Curriculum 9.0 with activities that:

- provide ideas and prompts to support teaching and learning before and after attending the Dan Withey exhibition – *Finite Bounty*
- can be adapted to extend the knowledge and understanding of students depending on their age and abilities.

Resource developed by Deanne Bullen 2025.

Cover image: *The awakening of the enchanted universe*, 2023, Acrylic on board, 125cm x 94.5cm

Acknowledgement of country

At Country Arts SA we pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, artists, communities, and recognise their continuing connection and spiritual relationship to these lands, waters and skies.

We embrace the principle of 'First Nations first', are committed to listening and helping care for Country, and to safeguard, share and celebrate First Nations' living cultures.

Off to the Art Gallery

for first time visitors to an art exhibition

For some students it might be their first visit to an Art Gallery. An understanding of the expectations and etiquette of an Art Gallery can avoid mishaps.

Observe – look – see

Slow down and take the time to look – this takes practice. Come back and look again. Did you miss anything. Can you see something you didn't see before.

Respect the art

- Unless you have been invited to handle an artwork make sure you do not touch it. Even the oils from your hands can damage an artwork.
- No eating or drinking in the gallery.

Noise level

Discussing what you are looking at is great. However, be aware of the other people in the gallery and speak in quiet tones.

Spatial awareness

Often there is artwork that you need to get up close to so that you can appreciate the detail. Make sure when you do that you:

- don't block the view for other visitors
- wait your turn to have a closer look if someone is already in front of you
- always walk inside the gallery.

Etiquette

From Old French meaning “little note” or “label”

A set of expected and accepted behaviours and rules. Many of these rules are unwritten and complex.

Photo by iSAW Company on Unsplash.



Preparing for the Finite Bounty encounter

Before attending the *Finite Bounty* exhibition, students undertake research of the artist, his work and his techniques. This pre-exhibition exploration will provide students with an opportunity to develop an understanding of Dan Withey's background, style, and the themes he explores in his art.

After students have gathered information about the artist, they can use the information to create a portrait of him.

Getting started

Students will use a range of resources to find out about:

- the artist
- the main themes or concepts in his work.

Working individually or with a partner students read:

- the Dan Withey Bio
- the Dan Withey Essay
- discover more about Dan Withey online.
A list of useful websites and an interview can be accessed in the Additional Resources section of this Education Resource.

Appendix 1

Dan Withey Bio

Appendix 2

Dan Withey Essay

About the *Finite Bounty* exhibition

www.praxisartspace.com/exhibitions/dan-withey/



One with all things, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 150cm x 122cm



I just can't see it, 2023, Acrylic on Board, 102cm x 72cm

Who is Dan Withey?

The Bio in Appendix 1 will provide information about his:

- education
- what has influenced him
- significant events.

What are Dan Withey's main themes or concepts?

The Dan Withey Essay provides information about his:

- style
- theme
- techniques
- subjects in his works.

Check out Dan's art online

Students use a keyword search to find and look at Dan Withey's art works.

Following are some suggested keywords:

art and **dan withey** and **finite bounty** and **images**.

- Partners select one of Dan Withey's art works to share with the class.
- Discuss why they have selected the particular piece.

Note: There are many Dan Withey artworks students will see online that won't be in the *Finite Bounty* exhibition.

Alternative to going online

Prior to the class select and print a range of Dan Withey's art works for students to look at.

With their partners students select one.

Animism

Animism has been noted as a source of inspiration for Withey – the belief that all elements of nature, from animals to inanimate objects, possess a spiritual essence.

<https://foxgalleries.com.au/dan-withey/>



Literacy and reading tips

Tips to support students reading the texts

Check in with students to make sure they:

- know what information they are looking for
- understand terms- for example, use of the term *mise en scène* in visual arts and animism
- they are comprehending what they are reading

mise-en-scène

The term is a French phrase translating roughly as "putting in the scene" or setting the stage.

In visual art it refers to overall visual look and feel of a scene, encompassing everything visible in the frame.



Little buddy, 2023, Acrylic on board, 51cm x 40.5cm

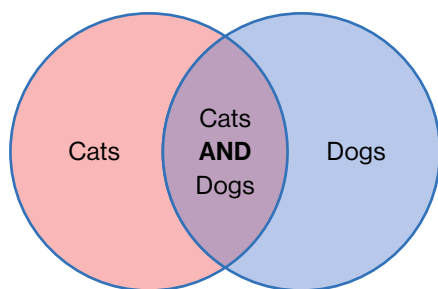
As a whole class

Students come back together as a whole class to discuss and review what they have found out.

Class Discussion Questions

Following are some suggested questions to get the conversation started:

- Did your research raise any questions for you?
What were your questions.
(For example – Why is the significance of the eyes?)
- How could you find answers to your questions?
(For example – use keywords “eyes” and “Dan Withey” in a search)
- What do Dan Withey’s paintings remind you of?
- Have you seen other paintings like Dan Withey’s?
- What do Dan Withey paintings remind you of in the real world?



Keyword Searches

Using a Boolean operator such as AND, OR and NOT alongside keywords will refine a search to find the most relevant results.

Sharing chosen images

Students pair with another pair to discuss the Dan Withey image they have chosen including:

- Why they chose the image.
- What theme/s and techniques they noticed.
- What they like about the artwork.
- What questions they have for Dan Withey about the artwork.

Pointillism

A painting technique developed mid-1880s, characterized by the application of small, distinct dots or marks of pure color directly onto the canvas. The core idea is that these dots, when viewed from a distance, optically mix in the viewer’s eye to create the perception of blended colors and forms.

<https://www.zenmuseum.com/finder/page/ultimate-guide-to-pointillism>



The soul of my shoe, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 81cm x 81cm

Australian Curriculum Links

Visual Arts Achievement Standard: Who is Dan Withey

Who is Dan Withey	
Year 3 and 4	By the end of Year 4, students describe use of elements, concepts and/or conventions in arts works they create and/or experience. They describe where, why and/or how arts works are created and presented across cultures, times and/or places, and/or other contexts.
Year 5 and 6	By the end of Year 6, students explain use of elements, concepts and/or conventions in arts works they create and/or experience. They describe how the arts communicate ideas, perspectives and or meaning across cultures, times, place and/or other contexts.
Year 7 and 8	By the end of Year 8, students analyse how visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated in artworks they create and/or experience. They evaluate the ways that visual artists across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning through their visual arts practice. They describe respectful approaches to creating and/or responding to artworks.
Year 9 and 10	By the end of Year, students analyse how and why visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated in artworks they create and/or experience. They evaluate how and why artists from across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials in their visual arts practice and/or artworks to represent and/or challenge ideas, perspective and/or meaning.
Visual Arts – subject outline Stage 1 and Stage 2	By analysing other practitioners' works of art or design, students gain knowledge and understanding of their styles, concepts, content, forms, and conventions, and learn to respond to these works in informed ways.

Create a portrait of Dan Withey

The following activity challenges students to use the information they have gathered about Dan Withey to create a portrait that captures the essence of who he is as an artist.

Photos and portraits of Dan

Appendix 3 provides two photos of Dan Withey and a link to portraits of him painted by Philip David.

Artistic Technique & Style

Students select one or a combination of a range of techniques including:

- drawing
- painting
- collage
- digital manipulation.

Students decide on the style of their portrait: This could include:

- a realistic, three-dimensional depiction
- stylised interpretation
- caricature
- pointillistic.

Hints and Tips

Consider Dan Withey's:

- unique characteristics
- personality
- emotions
- Dan's unique style & technique.

Observe his physical appearance:

- Facial features – shape of his face, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears.
- Hair and hairstyle - does his hairstyle reflect his personality

- Body language – posture and gestures
- Clothing and accessories – style of clothing, or accessories
- Expressions – is he smiling, serious, thoughtful
- Known traits – what is important to him, his style of art or interesting stories about him.

Symbolic elements - incorporate symbolic elements into the portrait to add meaning.

Spark and grow

Critical and creative thinking and peer reflection.

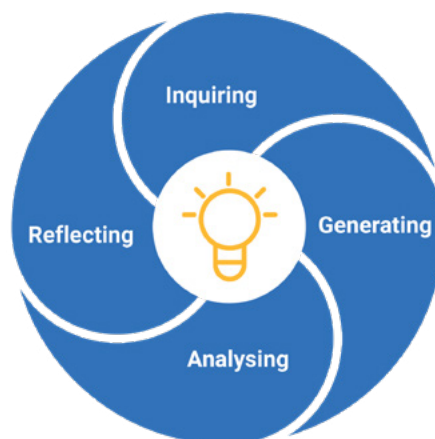
Students work with another student – a trusted peer and share the portrait they have created of Dan Withey.

Questions to guide reflection

1. What do you see?
2. Does the portrait tell a story about Dan Withey?
3. What does the portrait make you curious about?
4. Where is the spark – what is working well in the portrait.
5. What do you think could be improved to help the painter of the portrait grow in their practice.

Peer reflection

A conversation into gaining new insights to your practice with someone who is equal in age, status, or ability. The purpose is to develop a deeper understanding from a different perspective.



Gallery Walk

After completing their artworks students curate an exhibition of the portraits.

Exhibition opening

The exhibition of the Dan Withey portraits could be as simple as the class:

- displaying their portraits in the classroom
- completing a gallery walk to look at each other's portraits.

The class could also invite another class to come and view the exhibition. To provide the other class with some insight into the exhibition they will need to provide information to them about the development of the portraits.

Students should focus on providing information about:

- the theme of their exhibition
- why the portraits are all of one person
- examples of the inspiration and influence of the portraits.

Small group discussions

After the gallery walk students work in small groups and select three portraits to discuss.

1. What three words would they use to describe the portraits they have selected?
2. Why have they selected the three portraits that they have?
3. What does the portrait say about Dan Withey?
4. What can they see in the portraits?
5. What are their responses to the portraits?
6. How would they describe the mood of the portraits?
7. What questions do they have about the portraits?
8. What questions do you think Dan Withey might have about the portraits?

Muses, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 122cm x 122cm



Australian Curriculum Links

Visual Arts Achievement Standard: Create a portrait

Create a portrait	
Year 3 and 4	Students use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to create artworks that communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning. They share or display their artworks and/or visual arts practice in informal settings.
Year 5 and 6	By the end of Year 6, students explain use of elements, concepts and/or conventions in arts works they create and/or experience. They describe how the arts communicate ideas, perspectives and or meaning across cultures, times, place and/or other contexts.
Year 7 and 8	Students select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning. They curate and present exhibits and/or displays of their own and/or other's artworks and and/or other's artwork and /or visual arts practice for audiences.
Year 9 and 10	Students draw on inspiration from multiple sources to generate and develop ideas for artworks. They document and reflect on their own visual arts practice. They use knowledge of visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to create artworks that represent and/or communicate ideas, perspective and/or meaning. They curate and present exhibitions of their own and or/others' artworks and visual arts practice to engage audiences.
Visual Arts – subject outline Stage 1 and Stage 2	<p>Use information and communication technologies to research the conceptual, practical, analytical, and contextual aspects of the work of particular practitioners.</p> <p>Investigate, select, summarise, and present findings from practice and research in the visual arts through investigation and research reports, exhibition reviews, working notes, visual diaries, and other forms of personal response.</p> <p>Communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, and opinions through visual arts practice and in the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of works of art or design in a range of communication forms.</p>
Visual Arts – subject outline Stage 1 and Stage 2	By analysing other practitioners' works of art or design, students gain knowledge and understanding of their styles, concepts, content, forms, and conventions, and learn to respond to these works in informed ways. A range of approaches to the interpretation of works of art or design from different cultures and contexts is used to explore the messages and meanings that these works communicate.

Off to the exhibition

Close Looking

When students attend *Finite Bounty* they should engage in close looking and find words to describe what they see. Prompt them to do this by getting them to imagine they are going to send a text to a friend of what they are seeing so that their friend would be able to recognise the artwork if they encountered it one day.

Close looking will also enable students to observe the detail, colour and form of Dan Withey's artworks that might not have been as apparent when viewing his artwork online..

Appendix 4 - What Did I See?

The What Did I See? sheet provides students with a way to note down and/or sketch important information to prompt discussions when they return to school.

The heading on the sheet include:

Observations

- Details, materials & composition
- Placement of objects, shapes, colours, lines and other elements.

Description

- Evidence for observations and interpretations.

Exhibition Information

- Example of information provided about themes and ideas about Dan Withey's artwork.

Presentation

- Was everyone able to access the exhibition?
- Was it easy to move around the exhibition and see all of the artwork.



Co-workers, 2023, Acrylic on board, 61cm x 45cm

Back at School

Reflecting on an art exhibition provides students with the opportunity to:

- Think about their understanding of the artworks
- Discuss the artist's intent
- Develop an ability to share their own emotional and intellectual responses.

Small group discussions

Following is a range of questions for students to discuss in small groups. Students use the sheets they completed at the exhibition to support their discussions.

These questions range in complexity depending on the year level and/or developmental level of students.

Year 3 to Year 6

- What did you notice about Dan Withey's artwork?
- What did you like or not like?
- Did you have a favourite artwork – what was it and why?
- What did you learn about attending the *Finite Bounty* exhibition?
- Do you have a question you would like to ask Dan Withey – what question or questions you would like to ask him.

Year 7 to Year 9

- What are the differences you observed between seeing the artworks up close and real as opposed to online?
- What did you notice about the storytelling of Dan Withey's artwork?
- What was your favourite artwork and why?
- What have you learned from researching and looking at Dan Withey's artwork that will influence your own artwork?

Year 10 to Year 12

Discuss at least two of Dan Withey's artwork that you observed at *Finite Bounty*:

- How did Dan Withey use contrast?
- What colours did he use to create contrast?
- What was the theme or idea of the two works that you chose – how did you know this?
- What elements and principles did Dan Withey use to create emphasis?

Support Resource – The Arts

Examples of knowledge and skills – Visual Arts

Information about:

- Elements – page 7
- Principles – page 15
- Composition – page 19

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/content/dam/en/curriculum/ac-version-9/downloads/the-arts/visual-arts/examples-of-knowledge-and-skills-the-arts-visual-arts-v9.docx>

Final observation & question

Closing the feedback loop

Students have:

- completed their exploration of Dan Withey
- created a portrait of Dan Withey
- sought feedback on their Dan Withey portrait from a trusted peer
- attended the Dan Withey exhibition.

The next step is for students to reflect on the information and think about:

- how they feel about their finished portrait
- what they might have done differently.

Students are invited to share their portraits of Dan Withey by scanning them and sending them to education@countryarts.org.au



Contemplating the sky, 2023, Acrylic on board, 60cm x 60cm

Additional resources

Interviews and articles

Dan Withey works, biography and CV – Fox Galleries
<https://foxgalleries.com.au/dan-withey/>

Made Adelaide with Dan Withey (Adelaide Artist), 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ipmg3xV2OU>
(duration: 4 minutes 44 seconds)

Reanimating a magical universe
by Jane Llewellyn, 22 Sept 2023, updated 18 March 2025
InDaily SA
<https://www.indailysa.com.au/inreview/archive/2023/09/22/reanimating-a-magical-universe>

Create what makes you happy
by Shane Sody, 13 January 2023
Adelaide Park Lands association
<https://www.adelaide-parklands.asn.au/blog/2023/1/14/create-what-makes-you-happy>

Dan Withey's advice to others aspiring to emulate his success in this year's Park Lands Art Prize is to "think about the place [your Park Lands] and the experiences that you and others have in this area." And, he says, "create what makes you happy"

'Exquisite Familiar' Artist: Dan Withey
<https://access2arts.org.au/artist-interview/exquisite-familiar-artist-dan-withey/>

- Tell me a bit about yourself and your art practice.
- Where do you find inspiration?
- How does your disability influence your craft?
- What food, drink, or song inspires you?

Dan Withey questions notions of reality in his new exhibition at SA's Hill Smith Gallery
by Louise Nunn, 6 July 2018
The Advertiser
<https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/lifestyle/sa-weekend/dan-withey-questions-notions-of-reality-in-his-new-exhibition-at-sas-hill-smith-gallery/news-story/56fbfc7b4619ea90f9dcc8cffb05c9af>

Dan Withey
By harten, 12 June 2013
The Art Hunter
<https://thearthunter.com/dan-withey/>

Information about portraiture

What's in a face?

Learn more about portraiture, Education Resource Art Gallery of South Australia

<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/education/resources-educators/resources-educators-themed/whats-face/>

Behind the News btn ABC

History of Portraits (duration – 3 minutes 54 seconds)

<https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/history-of-portraits/10611872>

Other artists of interest

Laura Wills and Adelaide artist that creates works that are communicative in nature and connect to the environment

<https://www.laurawills.com.au/>

Check out her portraits: <https://www.laurawills.com.au/portraits>

Animism and the interconnectedness of all things – First Nations American and culture view

<https://library.fiveable.me/native-american-cultural-practice-art-and-identity/unit-2/animism-interconnectedness/study-guide/nE2XsqAgscBinwFu>



The return, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 50.5cm x 50.5cm

Appendix 1

Dan Withey artist bio

Born in Birmingham, England, Withey migrated to South Australia in 2004 as a teenager. Following completing his degree in illustration Withey has worked as an artist.

Withey's art practice draws on graphic art, storytelling, illustration, and patterning to explore thresholds: between the imagination and 'reality', representation and decoration, inner worlds, and the public subject. Withey creates vivid, playful and surreal compositions that recall the absurdity of dreamscapes and traverse the domestic to the fantastic.

With a practice spanning over a decade and half, Withey has exhibited extensively throughout Australia including recent solo exhibitions *Kindness is a Boomerang* (2021, Praxis Artspace, Adelaide), *Stay positive* (2020, Praxis Artspace, Adelaide), *Panpsychism* (2020, Penny Contemporary, Hobart), *Fight in a small world* (2019, Artvisory Gallery, Melbourne), *Seas of limbo* (2019, Hill-Smith Gallery, Adelaide).

Withey has been a finalist in the Hawkesbury Art Prize (2021), Centre for Creative Health Art Prize (2021), Heysen Art Prize (2018), Linden Art Prize (2018), Whyalla Art Prize (2018 and 2015), and winner of the Adelaide Parklands Art Prize (2021). In 2021 was awarded a Guildhouse Catapult mentorship to work with artist Richard Lewer.

Beauty spot, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 50.5cm x 50.5cm



by Anna Zagala
Associate Curator, Academic Engagement
Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum

The unusual is a common sight in the paintings and monoprints of Dan Withey. In them, the ordinary is often made strange. A wind with eyes. A flower for a face. A human figure, part spider part man, drawing a miasma of the ether together like a folding of a handkerchief. The floating form of a tree hovering like a suspended boat in the air. What do they have to tell us? Things are alive.

Withey's recent body of work marks a shift in the artist's practice. A return to study, after a long hiatus from formal education, has proved invigorating. Withey has always shown a hunger and curiosity to make sense of human existence – both his inner life but also the world at large – but in this body of work he has expanded the thematic preoccupation into a conceptual framework that has drawn together the disparate impulses and urgencies animating his practice into a singular focus.

For a prolific maker, it's an important juncture. An innate comedian Withey's work has always carried a wry and sly humour. Attendant to the instinctive brightness, the dazzling colour and patterning, is a dark seam. Withey's brightness feels like an unstable weather pattern. Looking at his work has a way of putting you in touch with the push and pull of cascading and conflicting thoughts. Those thoughts circle around ecological disaster and humankind. Human existence, or perhaps it's just human exceptionalism, weighs heavily on the artist.

Withey has talked about the influence of animism on his worldview. The term animism, coined by anthropologist E.B Taylor in the 19th century, is derived from the Greek word anima, meaning soul or spirit, and animism meaning the belief in soul or spirit. Animism encompasses the belief that objects, sacred places, animals and natural phenomena possess a distinct spiritual essence. Used originally to describe 'primitive' cultures cosmology, for a century animism occupied the disciplinary boundaries of religion and anthropology. Viewed with circumspection, tainted by the ideals of colonialism, more recently animist ideas have been the subject of renewed interest in the humanities, social sciences and environmental/ecological movements and have been harnessed by First Nations Peoples in their efforts for increased self-determination. Animist beliefs shape and communicate cosmology, explain obligation, and frame relationship to place.

Modern science has framed humans as sentient subjects and the rest of the material world as inanimate objects. Instead of human dominion over the landscape, in animist cosmologies, humans live under the dominion of the landscape around them. Establishing relationships of obligation that tie humans to the land, and the land to the humans who live on it, animism foregrounds the inter-relationship of all beings, human and non-human.



The remote chance of being located, 2023, Acrylic on board, 20cm x 20cm

Appendix 2

Dan Withey essay

The presence of animals and plants in Withey's artworks brings the relational into view. His hybrid creatures – part insect, part human – are often comic. Why they occupy interiors and create homes is one of Withey's fantastic and somehow existential, conceits. Urban and domestic environments have a way of appearing symbolic and faintly absurd. Light fittings and vases, furniture and objects introduce an off-kilter mise-en-scene.

In Withey's artwork, the world is dynamic and frequently unstable: it shifts and slides, collapses and refracts in unexpected ways. Compositionally, the works are active sites of negotiation in which opposing elements, figurative and abstract, co-exist. Converging lines and vanishing points create the illusion of space and depth but the coherence of the picture plane is always at risk of dissolving. Strong colours amplify this impression. Abundant decoration adds to the hallucinogenic effect. Withey's paint splats and squiggles across the canvas in energetic and inquisitive loops replicating the erratic markings of beetles. Patterning erupts in all directions producing a density of surface.

What these complex surfaces invoke is a threshold, one that invites speculation of the known and unknown, the seen and unseen, the spiritual and material. What of the eyes? In Withey's work eyes are everywhere. Both figurative and abstract they inject a watchful presence, by turns protective and sounding alarm.

Would you know if you saw it, 2023, Acrylic and oil stick on canvas, 152cm x 122cm



When the land is sick, 2023, Acrylic on Towel, 170 x 60 cm



Appendix 3

Photos and portraits of Dan Withey

Explore the portraits of Dan Withey painted by Philip David
<https://philipdavidart.com.au/Dan-Withey.html>



Appendix 4

What did I see?	
The What Did I See observation sheet prompts students to think about the following:	
Observations Details, materials & composition Placement of objects, shapes, colours, lines and other elements.	
Description Evidence for observations and interpretations.	
Exhibition Information Example of information provided about themes and ideas about Dan Withey's artwork.	
Presentation Was everyone able to access the exhibition? Was it easy to move around the exhibition and see all the artworks.	