

Education Resource Framework

(Referring to Stage 6
Visual Arts Curriculum
Frames:
Subjective, Cultural,
Structural and
Postmodern)

Georges River Artist in
Residence Program
March / April 2022



Artist in Residence

CARSS PARK ARTIST COTTAGE

Kathy Mackey

Week 1

Initial site investigation:

-Natural environment including impact of recent flooding

-Social History - use of Carss Bush Park as a place of leisure and recreation



This residency took place during March and April 2022, immediately after significant flooding had impacted on the eastern seaboard of Australia. This flooding certainly had an impact on the riverine system of the Georges River and this was very evident as the cottage faced the shoreline of Carss Bush Park.

The colour of the water remained quite an inky brown for most of the period of the residency, which actually offered a **unique subjective frame** from which to consider the site. Technically this meant that I had to utilise the natural light very strategically in order to deal with a colour palette that was more subdued than my previous works. During the residency I gained a greater understanding of the colonial history of Carss Bush Park, its [*museum*](#) and the surrounding areas. The park has a rich and well documented history as a still water bathing reserve and tidal pool and is a very popular place for family picnics, dog walking and general leisure activities. The park features some very interesting sandstone structures including flag stones of the sea wall, a stage and a somewhat ceremonial archway. Drawing upon my interest in public leisure I was particularly drawn to the sea wall structures that offered a form of threshold between the safety of the swimming enclosure and the more “dangerous” open areas of water beyond.

I began creating a [*visual narrative of the site*](#) by creating installations of pool noodles and bodies moving through spaces within the park and along the shoreline. I am very interested in utilising the pool noodle form that symbolises floating, swimming and leisure activities into the areas that have historical significance as still water swimming enclosures and how these sites - which are found all over around the Australian coastline - can be represented.

Week 2

Investigation of the interior of the Artist's Cottage as a site



During the second week I also began investigating the interior of the artist cottage and studio as a place for installation. As an artist who has always been interested in the performative acts of photography, I enjoy re-creating the concept of the traditional slide night, when images from another time and place are projected into a domestic interior. I set up still life formations with the pool noodles and projected subtle images inspired by leisure artifacts (in this case plastic toys) over them in a manner similar to a theatrical wash of lighting. I also utilised the other sculptural materials, including conduit and zip ties, to add contrast to the commonly recognised colours and unique “skin” of the noodles.

This methodology allows me to consider **a structural frame** in my practice creating some beautiful, unexpected abstractions of objects, their shadows and the softer projected patterns being cast back onto the wall. Regarding depth of field, the only light source is that being cast from the projector. As a result – these works are more ***formal abstractions of colour*** – while still invoking a sense of recognition that the objects are in fact pool noodles. Hence, there is a duplicity between the play of colour, pattern and light, and the physical play associated with the objects themselves.

View for more examples of Mackey’s projection and performative photography-based works.



Week 3

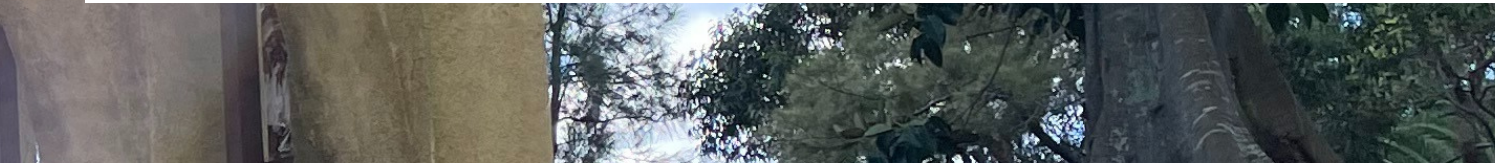
Media experiments: Field sketches/collages

By Week 3, I had made many working drawings and began working these up as a series of mixed media paintings. I don't work literally but rather create a series of abstracted works drawing from the research as a whole. For me the sculptural form of the pool noodle cutting into the landscape provides the most exciting starting point for painted compositions.

Building on from my projection work where I utilise the formal structural aspects of composition as the driver – I also layer in a postmodern frame by embracing the fact that the brightly coloured forms are in fact pool noodles. I purposely include the text-based safety messages that are inscribed on the pool noodles as a form of playful irony, particularly inferences that can be gleaned from statements such as “this is not a lifesaving device.”

Those [works in progress](#) do aim to capture the essential elements of the site – in particular the view from the artist's cottage – the shape of the bay and the natural and man-made rock formations around the shoreline. I use loose brush strokes and several layers of oil paint (applied as glazes) to capture the sense of movement of wind across the water.

The works also include fragments of field work photographs as useful cues that map out the formal composition of the works.



Week 4

Identifying a line of inquiry

By the mid phase of the residency I had consolidated **the line of inquiry around 3 main ideas that all deal with the Stage 6 Frames of Subjective, Cultural, Structural and Postmodern.**

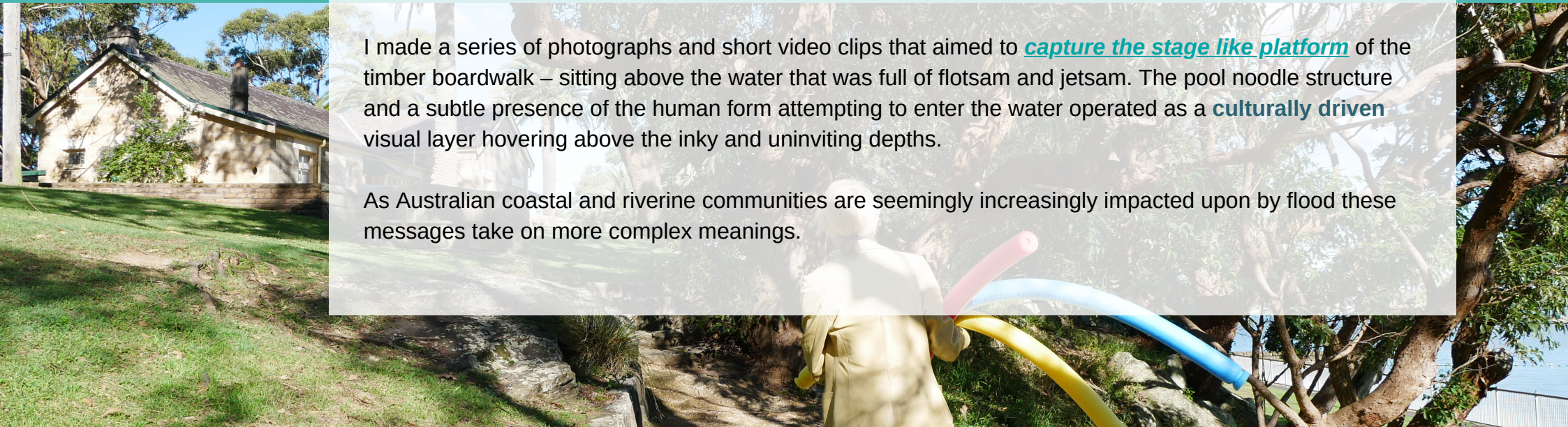
- History of ocean pools and sea baths.
- Human form traversing the space between the open water and the protected bathing area.
- Installation potentials of my introduced objects when used as an intervention against the natural and man-made stone structures of the site.

During Week 4 I had the opportunity to investigate other tidal pools and swimming enclosures in the southern outskirts of Sydney. My journey took me to the heritage listed [GyMEA Bay Baths](#) which are situated just over 7 kilometres away at GyMEA Bay at the entry point of Coonong Creek.

Visually this site is very different to the enclosure at Carss Bush Park. It is set in a narrow bay and is only accessible to the public via some steep stone stairs – evoking the sense of a much more secret location. The enclosure features a timber boardwalk and even marked swimming lane end plates.

I made a series of photographs and short video clips that aimed to [capture the stage like platform](#) of the timber boardwalk – sitting above the water that was full of flotsam and jetsam. The pool noodle structure and a subtle presence of the human form attempting to enter the water operated as a **culturally driven** visual layer hovering above the inky and uninviting depths.

As Australian coastal and riverine communities are seemingly increasingly impacted upon by flood these messages take on more complex meanings.



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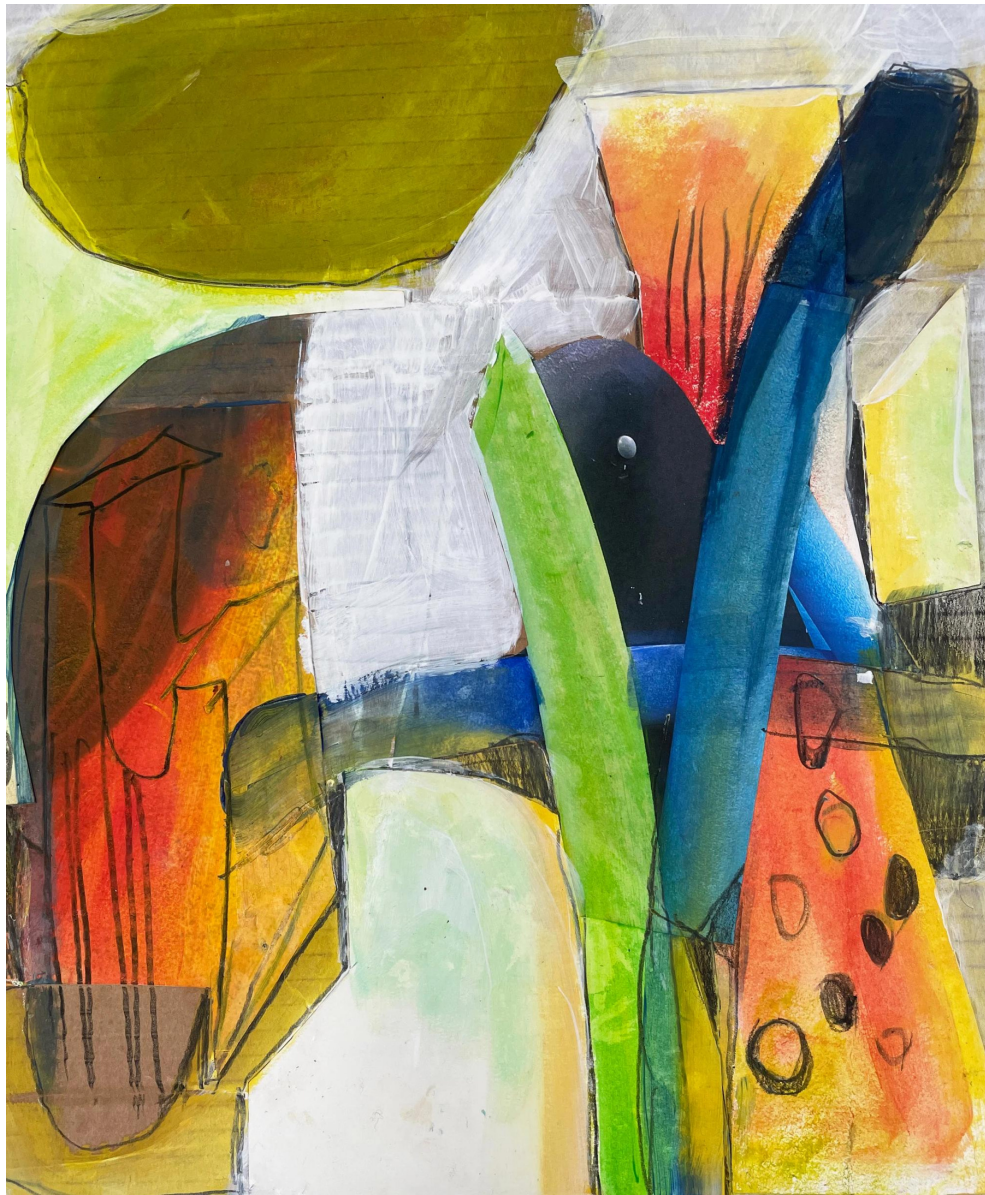
Week 5

Broader site investigations: Dolls Point

Midway through the residency I travelled east to the suburb of Dolls Point, featuring a beach of white sand that marks the entrance of the Georges River from Botany Bay itself. Here I discovered an old concrete wharf that is land locked by sand so that it does not actually join the foreshore. Apparently, a series of severe storms several years ago caused the sand to build up between the jetty and the foreshore seawall and it has remained that way. I saw this jetty as a monumental sculpture playing out on the beach and somewhat playfully could not resist thinking about the work of Robert Smithson and his famous earthwork [Spiral Jetty](#) at the Great Salt Lake in Utah (1970).

I installed the pool noodles on this jetty and made a [series of images](#) that responded to the drama of the landscape by capitalising on the unique perspective showing the exposed end of the jetty that would not normally be seen. I was also very conscious that by orienting my perspective I could create a strong sense of convergence – as if creating a marker point to the other side of Botany Bay in the direction of [Kamay Botany Bay National Park](#) and the site of first contact between Aboriginal Australians and the crew of Lieutenant James Cook's Endeavour. The flexibility of the pool noodles creates an opportunity to make bold gestural lines that contrast the solid concrete and the white sand. I also think of the pool noodles like large calligraphy brushes as they make marks in the sand. These marks offer a much more subtle intervention into the final visual plan of the photograph.

The [moving images](#) in this series also capture the drama and turbulence of the tide as it washes up and draws back under the far end of the jetty. For me the dramatic potentials of capturing the movement and sounds of this site represent many aspects of the contested nature of a post-colonial reading of the Georges River.



Artist: Kathy Mackey - WIP - Carss Park

Week 6

Broader site investigations: Bald Face Point

As a keen kayaker I am very interested in how the body moves through space over water as you have very different perspective of the waterline and your relationship to it . Often I find the best locations for installations through kayaking. I discovered a fabulous place upstream from Carss Bush Park, at Bald Face Point at Blakehurst. There is a small beach that features wonderful rock formations below a south facing bushland reserve. The beach is surrounded on three sides by inlets and the main channel of the Georges River.

After discovering this site at high tide, I went back a few days later at low tide to build some installations on the beach. It was great fun to hike down the hill from the road past the lookout and make some work among the sandstone formations.

The softness of the pool noodles allows me to make artificial drawings with them by embedding them in the crevices in the sandstone. The more I use and manipulate this group of pool noodles, the more flexible they become - so their qualities change when compared to the firmer sandstone and the stronger oyster covered rocks.

What really interests me about this place is that it features several jetties attached to homes that are marked as private property. This is of course the homeowners right to mark their jetty as private property, but the homeowner does not actually own the water that it protrudes over ... this is in fact the public space. [Discussions about public and private spaces can be contextualised within a range of domains including the Postmodern and Subjective.](#)

This is made further complex by the fact that there is [evidence that First Nations people gathered food including oysters and fish here](#) and so the conversation about ownership of space is relevant. I made some [still](#) and [moving images](#) that draw attention to this issue – being mindful that as a non-First Nations artist – I need to frame this as my interpretation only.

The work of Queensland born [Megan Cope](#) is of particular relevance in gaining further insights into First Nations works about middens and oysters as a food source.

".....my thinking returned to the culture of still water bathing along the Sydney shoreline and the sandstone structures that both decorated and delineated the boundaries of safe amusement and leisure."

Kathy Mackey
2022



Week 7 / 8

Thinking about a resolved body of work



During the final phase of the residency, my thinking returned to the culture of still water bathing along the Sydney shoreline and the sandstone structures that both decorated and delineated the boundaries of safe amusement and leisure. I made some [still images](#) based on the sandstone archway in Carss Bush Park that was constructed in 1934, prior to the construction of the tidal pool. This site provides the opportunity for installation of pool noodles that can be seen through a Structural Frame([link to curriculum materials](#)) as a similar curved directional line within the picture plane as well as a sense of contrast between the flexibility of the foam noodles and the rigidity of the stonework.

This place of public leisure is relatively quiet when compared to some of the very popular and iconic ocean pools along the Sydney beaches. The Ross Jones Memorial Pool at Coogee was built in 1947 and features some rather grand concrete turrets providing a safe place to swim while still being exposed to the dramatic wash and of the ocean waves – [an experience for curated leisure in a very public domain.](#)

The residency has provided me with a unique opportunity to research aspects of curated leisure sites along the New South Wales coastline with a focus on the intersecting themes of:

- The history of ocean pools and sea baths;
- The human form traversing the space between the open water and the protected bathing area;
- Installation potentials of my introduced objects when used as an intervention against the natural and man-made stone structures of the site

When beginning to think about how to resolve this body of work, it is important to experiment with the natural nodes and junctures in a series – thinking about how they relate both visually and conceptually. In this case I began by making some short video clips (Refer to video: [Interwoven Themes](#)) that explore how the overall body of still and moving images work together, before refining and distilling a group of key images that represent the three lines of inquiry. This process takes some time and benefits from a period of distillation – after what has been a relatively intense period of making. I look forward to seeing what the outcomes both short and long term will be.

Artist in Residence

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Georges River Artist in Residence March / April 2022

Refer to Artists photographic and video package, website and @klm186 for more information.

References and Resources:

[Carss Cottage Museum - MGNSW](#)

[Georges River Residency 2022 – Kathy Mackey \(kathymackeyartist.com\)](#)

[GyMEA Bay | Local History - Sutherland Shire Libraries \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty | Visit Our Locations & Sites | Visit | Dia \(diaart.org\)](#)

[Kamay Botany Bay National Park - Kamay Botany Bay National Park Planning Considerations \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CboBkspBt4S/>

https://www.georgesriver.nsw.gov.au/StGeorge/media/Documents/Council/Publications/Cultural-Strategy_ONLINE.pdf

[Foundations III by Megan Cope | MCA Australia](#)

