

# ART ACROSS THE CURRICULUM | ENGLISH

## THE ART OF STORYTELLING

### INSPIRED BY ROSEMARY LAING'S *GROUNDSPEED* (RED PIAZZA) #2, 2001

LEVELS 7–9

#### OVERVIEW

In this resource students will analyse and interpret *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*, 2011. Through exploration of the image, they will consider how artist Rosemary Laing uses visual elements to communicate and how this creates opportunities to stimulate narrative writing. Students will develop vocabulary through descriptive writing, simile and metaphor, and craft powerful sentences for their own short story.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Analyse and interpret *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*
- Use art as a stimulus to construct different narratives
- Develop strategies for expanding vocabulary and developing written expression
- Use appropriate language features and vocabulary to write and present a short story narrative inspired by Rosemary Laing's *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*

## Level 7

- Analyse how point of view is generated in visual texts by means of choices, including gaze, angle and social distance (VCELA370)
- Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (VCELT372)
- Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose (VCELY379)

## Level 8

- Recognise that vocabulary choices contribute to the specificity, abstraction and style of texts (VCELA401)
- Investigate how visual and multimodal texts allude to or draw on other texts or images to enhance and layer meaning (VCELA402)
- Analyse and evaluate the ways that text structures and language features vary according to the purpose of the text and the ways that referenced sources add authority to a text (VCELY413)

## Level 9

- Identify how vocabulary choices contribute to specificity, abstraction and stylistic effectiveness (VCELA432)
- Experiment with the ways that language features, image and sound can be adapted in literary texts (VCELT447)
- Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features (VCELY449)

# ABOUT THE WORK

## 1. ROSEMARY LAING *GROUNDSPEED (RED PIAZZA)* #2, 2001

**Rosemary LAING**

*groundspeed (red piazza) #2*  
2001

type C photograph

110.8 × 205.1 cm (image)

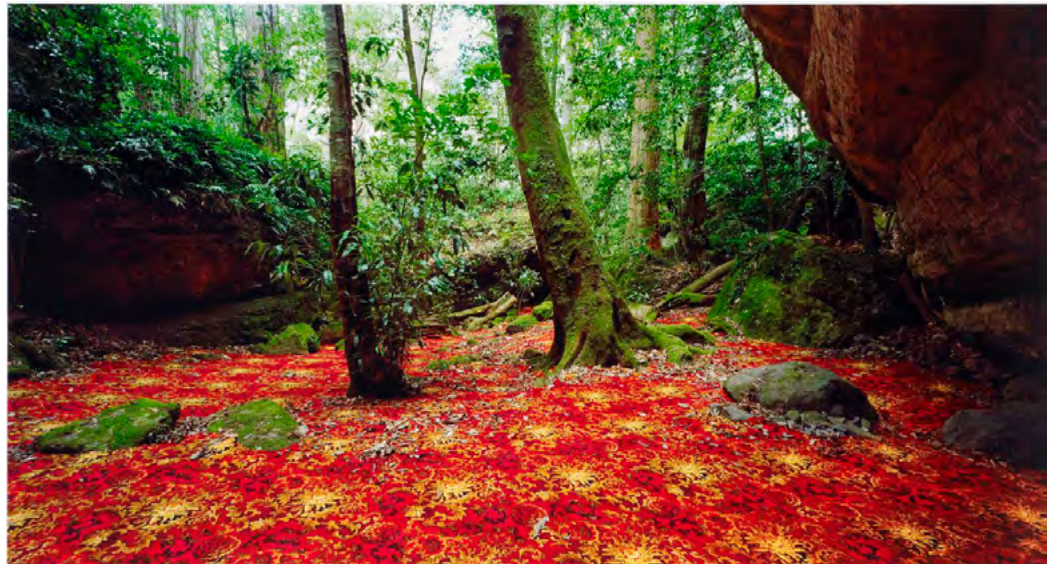
125.9 × 225.2 cm (sheet)

ed. 11/15

National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne

Purchased with funds from the  
Victorian Foundation for Living  
Australian Artists, 2004

© Courtesy of the artist and  
Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne



Rosemary Laing's *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*, 2001, is part of a photographic series called *groundspeed*. The image depicts an area of bushland in the Morton National Park on the New South Wales coast of Australia. Working with a team of people, Laing carefully placed an industrially produced carpet over the forest floor, blending it seamlessly with the contours of the surrounding environment.

The artist unsettles our sense of reality by bringing the warmth and cosiness of a domestic interior into the wilderness, a concept at odds with the traditional practice of displaying decorative images of rural landscapes on the walls of homes.

The carpet, entitled 'red piazza', is influenced by memories of carpet designs from Laing's childhood, and resembles the type of luxurious carpets often found in affluent European homes. It could symbolise the invasion of Australia by European colonisers, or the impact of Western culture on the environment, including the destructive effects of introduced plants and animals.

## 1.1 THE ARTIST

Rosemary Laing (b. 1959) is an Australian contemporary artist, renowned for creating meticulously staged photographs on a cinematic scale. The panoramic colour photographs, which involve no digital manipulation, are often referred to as strange, uncanny or unquiet due to the imaginative juxtaposition of incongruous elements.

Although documentary in style, Laing's images are in fact scenes that have been carefully constructed to tell a story. The placement of artificial, commercial objects in natural Australian environments creates metaphorical relationships. Laing intends to inspire viewers to reflect on the political, social and environmental issues of our day, both locally and globally.

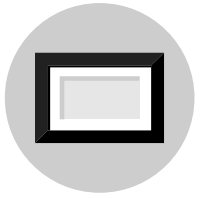
## 1.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The *groundspeed* series references the work of early colonial painters who tended to interpret the new and 'strange' continent of Australia through a European lens. Landscape paintings of the colonial period often combined features of the Australian landscape with aspects of the more familiar countryside of the artist's homeland, perhaps alleviating the sense of alienation experienced by early settlers.

Laing has been influenced by British artist John Glover, who settled in Tasmania in 1831; in particular, his work *A view of the artist's house and garden, in Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*, 1835.<sup>1</sup> Glover settled in Tasmania in 1831 and although he was excited by the exotic native flora and fauna in the new colony, this painting celebrates a typical English garden. Planted in a neat and orderly fashion with introduced species, it suggests an Arcadian perfection, so different from the wild and unstructured nature of the Australian bush.<sup>2</sup>

Note: The NGV Collection houses many of Rosemary Laing's photographs which can also be explored through the activities in this resource. The *welcome to Australia* and *flight research* series, explore immigration issues and flight respectively.<sup>3</sup>

# WARM UP



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

## 2. DESCRIBING DETAILS

Before starting the warm up, look closely at *groundspeed (red piazza) #2* for three minutes. Let your eyes wander over every part of the photograph and try to notice the colours, the shapes of the rocks and trees, the pattern on the carpet.

### 2.1 READING THE PHOTOGRAPH

Reading an artwork is very similar to reading a story. While writers use words to tell a story, artists predominantly use visual elements and images to communicate meaning. Use the following questions to describe the photograph in as much detail as possible.

- What can you see? List all the objects and colours you can see.
- What aspects of the image stand out most to you? What makes these aspects of the image stand out?
- Where do you think this scene might be set and what makes you think this?
- Where might you find a carpet like this?
- What story or ideas might the artist be communicating about contemporary issues? Justify your response by referring to specific features of the image.
- In what way might this photograph be seen as commenting on Australia's history of colonisation?

### 2.2 EXPLORING OPPOSITION

Rosemary Laing has included many opposing concepts and objects in her photograph (for example, inside vs outside). Make a list of all the opposing concepts that you can see in the photograph.

## 2.3 SURREALIST TECHNIQUES

### JUXTAPOSITION

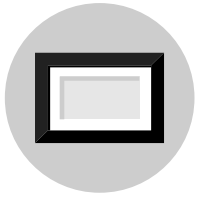
You might have been surprised by the bizarre contrast between the objects in *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*. This technique is called juxtaposition. Artists and writers can use juxtaposition to inspire their imagination and also to make others think more deeply about the concepts explored in a visual or written text. In the 1920s, a group of artists began a movement called Surrealism. Surrealists are famous for their use of juxtaposition. The imaginative and peculiar ways in which they contrast objects and concepts has been so popular that even the literature, art and advertising of today takes inspiration from them.

The following words are techniques used by Surrealist artists. Discuss their meaning with your class or research them online. Write a definition for each term.

- Metamorphosis
- Juxtaposition
- Dislocation

How might Rosemary Laing have employed these techniques in *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*?

# ACTIVITY



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

## 3. DEVELOPING LANGUAGE TO TELL A POWERFUL STORY

Stories can be used to inspire, teach, entertain and escape. The way that we tell our stories and the words that we choose are therefore the most important choices that we make as writers. Authors deliberately select the most precise and expressive words they can find to communicate meaning. They use sensory experiences, imagery, similes and metaphors to create an atmosphere for the reader and immerse them into an entirely different world.

### 3.1 TITLES

Titles can tell us a lot about a piece of writing or an artwork. They often help us make predictions about what we think the piece of writing or image might be about. Sometimes a title can even make us think of something we may not have otherwise considered.

1. What can we learn about the image from the title that Laing has provided for us? Write a definition for 'groundspeed' and 'piazza'. Why do you think she has chosen this title?
2. Imagine if the artist hadn't given *groundspeed (red piazza) #2* a title. What would you call it?
3. Consider how you can use language to adapt the artwork for different audiences. Create a title for each of the following publications:
  - a. A headline for an article in an environmental magazine
  - b. A title for a children's picture story book
  - c. A slogan for an advertisement in a magazine or on a billboard

### 3.2 SENSORY EXPERIENCES

Imagine if you were able to step inside *groundspeed (red piazza) #2*, how would you feel? What might you perceive through your five senses? For each sense, make a note of at least five words.

- Sight
- Smell
- Touch
- Sound
- Taste

### 3.3 SETTING THE SCENE

Reading an artwork is like reading a piece of writing except artists use different techniques to communicate. Consider how Laing uses colour, light and composition to create atmosphere.

- Describe the colours of the carpet as imaginatively as possible. Try to avoid obvious words like 'red' or 'yellow'. What other words could you use to describe these colours. You might like to think of fruit/vegetables or colours you have seen in nature (for example apple green, or ruby red)
- How many different ways can you describe the light or quality of light? For example, 'gleaming'.
- Reflect on your descriptions of the colour and light in the photograph. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood of the scene?

### 3.4 CREATING SIMILES & METAPHORS

Writers use similes and metaphors to make their writing more vivid, interesting and imaginative. Similes are phrases that use comparison words such as 'like' or 'as' to compare two things with similar characteristics. Metaphors are direct statements that describe one thing as if it is another.

- Use a simile to compare the pattern in the carpet to something else it reminds you of (e.g. 'The pattern looks like an extravagant display of fairy lights at Christmas').
- Create three metaphors to describe each of the following elements. (e.g. 'The trees are guardians of the forest, stretching their arms to the sky').

— Tree

— Rock

— Carpet



# PROJECT

## 4. SHORT STORY WRITING



IN SCHOOL

Artworks can fire our imaginations and bring stories to life. Writing a short story is a great opportunity to experiment with how different techniques are used to communicate a message.

### SHORT STORIES

Short stories are like works of art – they have a particular structure, a message and are centered on one experience or significant moment captured in a particular time and context. They:

- ✓ Have action which moves quickly and gets straight to the point.
- ✓ Have a small cast of characters.
- ✓ Often use sensory language.
- ✓ Tend to communicate a single, focused idea (theme).
- ✓ Follow the plot structure of orientation, complication, climax and resolution.
- ✓ Often finish with a climax or have an unexpected plot twist.

### 4.1 BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END

*groundspeed (red piazza) #2* lends itself well to the short story form – the bizarre opposing concepts suggested by the photograph could inspire many possible ideas for narrative writing. What story do you think *groundspeed (red piazza) #2* is telling?

Consider whether the scene shown in the image *groundspeed (red piazza) #2* belongs at the beginning, middle or end of a story. Make notes on each of the following prompts. This will help you begin your own story.

- If this image is the beginning of a story, what might happen next?
- If this image is the middle of a story, what might have happened before?  
What might be about to happen?
- If this image is the end of a story, what might the whole story be?

## 4.2 WHEN? WHERE? WHAT?

Have a go at writing a *when*, *where*, *what* sentence. Looking at the photograph, think about a time, place and an action that took place.

- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen
- What happened?

For example: *Winter, 1943, snow fell and he never came back.*

## 4.3 EVERY SENTENCE COUNTS

Short stories are very different from novels. Novelists can take entire chapters to develop characters and set the scene and plot. Short stories need to be succinct and economical; there is no opportunity to slowly draw the reader in. The short story writer needs to captivate their audience in one powerful opening sentence.

Opening sentences frequently create a sense of intrigue or mystery. Have a go at crafting a captivating first sentence.

Experiment with two of the following techniques to create to very different opening lines. Choose the one that you like best to begin your story.

- Use a strange combination of sensory details to set the scene.
- Start with the end! Create a sense of intrigue for your reader and encourage them to read the backstory of how a harrowing, somber or unusual circumstance came about.
- Reveal an unusual or private thought about your character. You might choose to do this through a first or third person voice.
- If you are setting this story in an alternate universe or in a different time or place, provide your reader with some curious details about the setting that makes it immediately different from the world in which we live.

## 4.4 AUTOMATIC WRITING – STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Now that you have your opening line, you are going to try using a technique called automatic writing. This is commonly used by Surrealist writers and involves freely writing whatever comes to your mind. It is a good way to brainstorm ideas for your short story.

Write your opening line at the top of a blank page and give yourself three minutes to write freely.

Are there any interesting ideas you can use?

## 4.5 ALL TOGETHER NOW!

1. Now it is time to write your story. If you are stuck, use one of the premises below to help:
  - a. A character has woken up in the area depicted in *groundspeed (red piazza) #2* and has no memory of how they arrived there. The character only remembers feeling dehydrated and then passing out.
  - b. She knew that despite everything that had happened, she would remember the red carpet – every detail of it. Every morning she set to work to lay the carpet further and further into the forest.
2. Use the following questions to develop and plan your ideas for a short story:

<b>Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who is the character?</li><li>• What is the setting – where and in what time period is the character?</li><li>• What is the character feeling at this moment?</li><li>• What does the character want or need? (these might be two different things)</li><li>• Who are the other characters interacting in the story?</li></ul>
<b>Complication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the central conflict and how does it deepen? What might prevent your character from achieving what they need or want?</li><li>• How does the character interpret what is happening to them?</li></ul>
<b>Climax</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What key incidents occur that take the action to a highpoint?</li><li>• What are the possible resolutions to the central conflict?</li></ul>
<b>Resolution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the story end?</li><li>• Is the conflict satisfactorily resolved? Are there any unanswered questions?</li><li>• Is there a twist at the end?</li><li>• Does a clear theme come through?</li></ul>

3. Now that you have a plan, write your story.

## NOTES

1. For a reference image of John Glover, *A view of the artist's house and garden, in Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*, 1835, visit the Art Gallery of South Australia's website <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/a-view-of-the-artists-house-and-garden-in-mills-plains-van-diemens-land/24282/>, accessed 8 October 2020.
2. To read more about John Glover visit NGV resource 'Colony to nation changes to Australia's environment' [https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school\\_resource/art-and-history-colony-to-nation-changes-to-australias-environment/](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/art-and-history-colony-to-nation-changes-to-australias-environment/), accessed 8 October 2020.
3. To view the NGV Collection of Rosemary Laing's photographs online visit the NGV website <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/artist/14104/>, accessed 8 October 2020

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