

AYESHA GREEN: STILL LIFE

EDUCATION RESOURCE

McCAHON
HOUSE

About this resource

The vision for the Parehuia Education Resources is to connect ākonga to local artists, their work and their stories, and to grow students creative and critical thinking skills. In doing so, they will be able to see the value of art and stories made here in Aotearoa, and see themselves as makers of culture.

This resource [accompanies this video](#) and is aimed at ākonga in years 7-13 (or curriculum levels 3-8) and is designed as an adaptable toolkit for teachers to use selectively in devising their own units of classroom learning. Key sections are designed to be easily extractable as handouts for direct distribution to students. It is primarily devised for Visual Arts, but may also be used in English or Social Sciences learning areas.

This resource is also relevant for a majority of the levels 3-8 achievement objectives in the New Zealand Curriculum for Visual Arts, especially *Understanding the Visual Arts in Context*, *Developing Ideas* and *Communicating and Interpreting*. It also connects to many of the Big Ideas outlined in the Curriculum, especially *Whakapapa — Visual Arts descends from, embodies, and creates forms of cultural expression*, *Visual Arts communicates ahurea tuakiri and evokes responses* and *Taonga Tuku Iho — Visual Arts is a medium to explore, discover, express and value te ao Māori*.



Ayesha Green
CALYSTEGIA TUGURIORUM (1), 2022
acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm
Image credit: Sam Hartnett

Key themes: still life painting, national identity, whenua, whakapapa

[Ayesha Green](#)

Born 1987, Ōtautahi Christchurch

lives and works in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland

Ayesha Green (Ngāti Kahungunu, Kai Tahu) is a contemporary Māori artist best known for her cartoon-ish style of painting, in which she uses bright, unblended colours and an approachable flattened style to examine how Māori and Pākehā have been represented throughout history.

"I'm really interested in grand national narratives and the stories that we sort of tell ourselves about ourselves."

Throughout her career, Green has experimented with different styles of painting including portraits, landscapes, interior scenes and cartoons complete with speech bubbles. In this series of works, she focuses on the still life, a genre of painting that emerged in late 16th century Europe, and which involves depicting mostly inanimate objects such as food, flowers, vases, drinking glasses, books, dead animals, plants and so on. Green is interested in the way this style developed as a way to document the luxurious lives of wealthy people.

"When I started thinking about making still life paintings, I was looking at historical references and understanding how the history of still life is usually used to tell the story of a certain type of person, or a certain kind of group in society and a lot of that is always coming back to understanding someone's kind of wealth."

When I think about still life in a New Zealand context, I'm trying to think about, "what is New Zealand wealth and what does that look like?" And a lot of that came back to understanding how the land is used and thinking about all the things that we produce from the land, but also all of the things that we export. Because then we have to understand the objects as things that also create our national identity."

– Ayesha Green

"One of the things that excites me about Ayesha's work is the way whakapapa (genealogy) is expressed. What is the history behind a lot of these iconic brands? What is their connection to whenua? What do I think of when I look at these objects and how have they enacted themselves within my own whānau?"

– Matariki Williams, historian and curator

Glossary:

Export – a product or service sold abroad. For example, milk powder produced in Aotearoa is sold to countries around the world including China, Algeria and Indonesia.

National identity – is a shared feeling of belonging to a country, shaped by its culture, history, and traditions. In Aotearoa, the widespread pride we have in the All Blacks rugby team could be seen as an example of national identity.

Mātauranga – Māori knowledge and ways of knowing. Mātauranga is about the knowledge or understanding of everything visible and invisible existing in the universe.



Ayesha Green, *COROKIA BUDDLEIOIDES*, 2022
acrylic on canvas, 120 x 85 cm
Image credit: Sam Hartnett

Inquiry questions

- Watch [the video](#) of Ayesha and Matariki talking about *Still Life*. Discuss what you learned about still life painting. Research still life painting and find some historic examples. What can you assume about the lives of the people who owned the objects in them? How are these similar to Ayesha's paintings? How are they different?
- In [the video](#), Ayesha explains how the objects in her paintings such as branded products, native flowers, books and decorative materials (like lace tablecloths) tell us a lot about wealth in Aotearoa. Looking at one or more of the paintings in *Still Life*, consider if you have any personal memories or ideas attached to any of the objects pictured. For each object, consider where you might expect to find it – would you expect to find all of these objects in the same place? Who does that place belong to?
- Ayesha and Matariki both tell us that these objects relate to the whenua. Consider how each object relates individually, and how they create a story when they are placed together in one painting. What are these objects trying to tell us about Aotearoa, and about the national identity of this place?

Making activity

Think about the objects in your own home. How do new objects find their way in? What objects could you gather to tell a story about yourself, your whānau, and/or your whakapapa?

Considering these questions, choose 5-10 ordinary objects from your home to create a still life set up for you to paint or photograph.

Objects could be from anywhere in your home, but you might consider looking through the recycling bin; borrowing vessels such as cups or vases; finding books or other forms of media (DVDs, games); and gathering some plant cuttings from the garden or nearby parks and walkways.

Spend time arranging your objects to create a still life. Consider what angle you would like to paint your still life from and how your objects interact with each other – are they touching? Does this look like a natural scene you might come across in a home? You might also like to consider experimenting with Ayesha Green's simple style and use of flattened colours.

**Students could work individually or in groups for this task*