

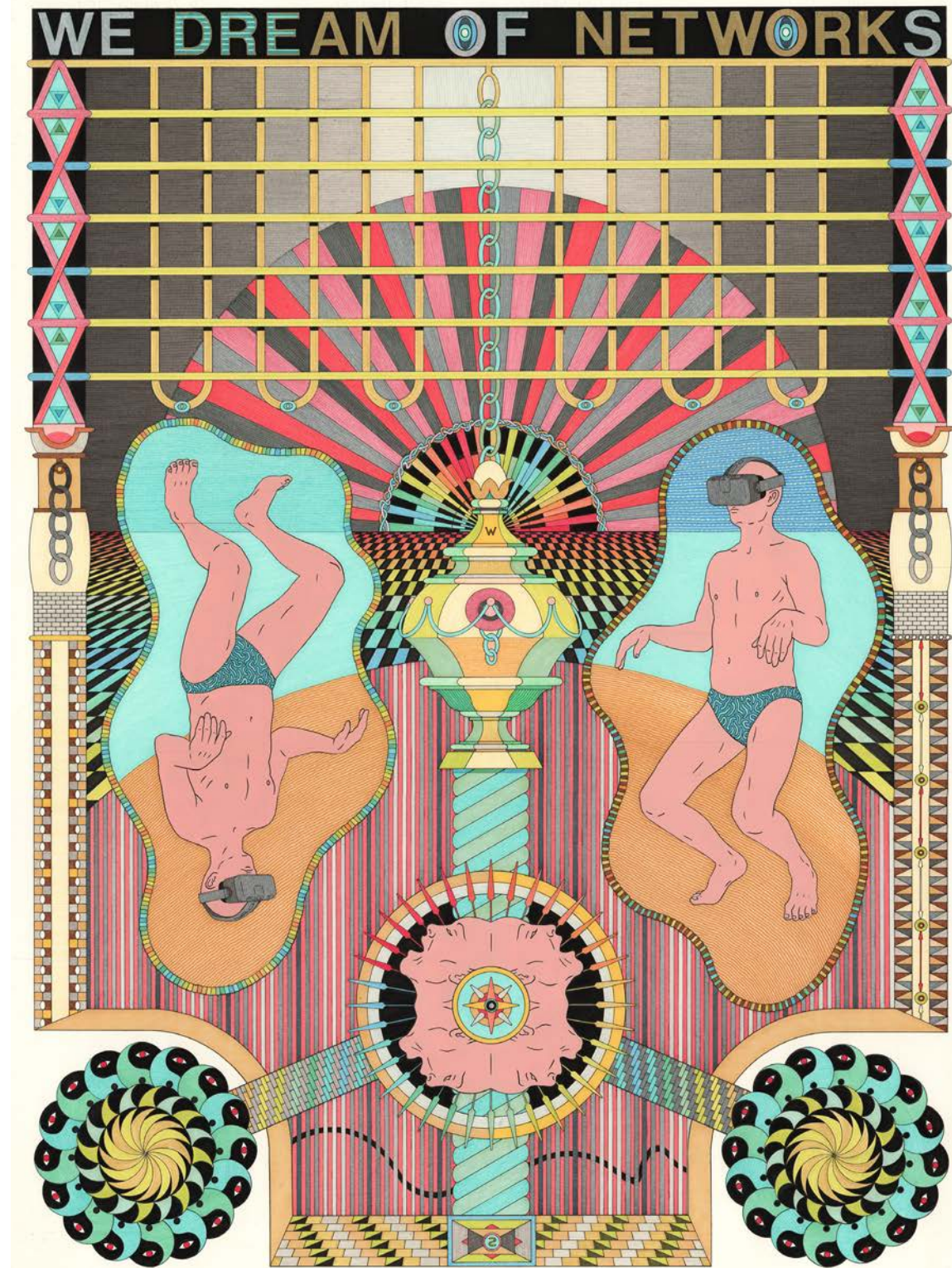
Jess Johnson
& Simon Ward

Terminus

**BALNAVES CONTEMPORARY
INTERVENTION SERIES**

Secondary Education Resource

NGA
National Gallery of Australia



Teacher's notes

This *Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series* education resource encourages students to engage with contemporary art practice through responding and making. It explores the ideas that underpin New York-based artist Jess Johnson and Melbourne-based animator Simon Ward's collaborative commissioned work *Terminus*, comprising 2D drawings, animated video and virtual reality experiences. This resource offers a cohesive thread that invites the viewer to explore connections between language, science fiction, culture and technology.

Jess Johnson and Simon Ward's *Terminus* is perfectly suited to foster students' critical and creative thinking skills. By applying a sequence of exercises, students will develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of problem solving processes and interpretation. Through the creation of their own works of art students are required to identify, explore and organise information and ideas.

This resource is directly linked to the Australian Curriculum and is designed to develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active, informed citizens. Students are encouraged to reflect on *Terminus* from a contemporary perspective and to consider and question values, attitudes, perspectives and assumptions. The resource provides an opportunity for students to develop their understanding of how and why artists realise

their ideas through different art practices, processes and viewpoints.

This resource is designed for:

- secondary students and can be adapted for upper primary or tertiary students
- Visual Arts students, but also has relevance for English, Philosophy, Technology, and Humanities and Social Sciences students.
- senior secondary Visual Arts students undertaking in-depth case studies of contemporary artists.

This resource may be used to:

- complement an experience of *Terminus* through activities and ideas to assist with preparation for the gallery visit
- as a reference when students are viewing the work
- deepen understanding and engagement post-visit
- support in-depth research into Jess Johnson and Simon Ward's art practices.

This resource addresses the following areas:

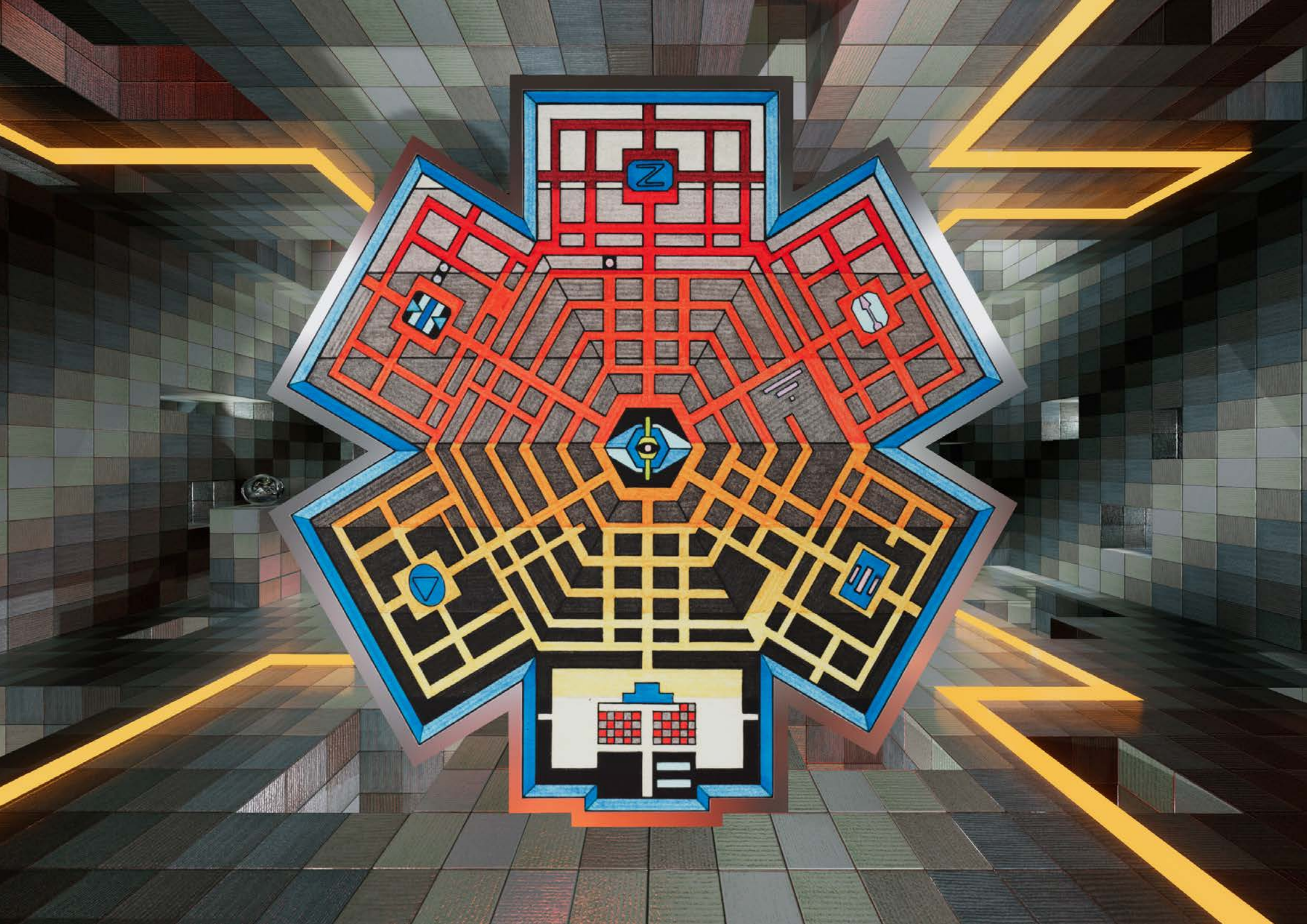
- **Contemporary Practice**
- **Cultural References**
- **Process and Materials**
- **Visual Language**
- **Experience and Interpretation**

Within each area we have included the following learning activities:

- **Speak your mind:** Talking points or provocations to facilitate contemplation and discussion as well as offer opportunities for students to engage with art history and theory through exploratory research tasks.
- **Get to work:** Creative art making suggestions that explore key concepts.
- **Think it through:** Ideas, considerations and extensions to aid students in their art making.

A glossary of terms and further research links are included on the final page of the resource.

The NGA values the feedback of students and teachers on the education resources we have produced. To share student work or your feedback on the resource please email education@nga.gov.au.



Introduction

Launched in 2018, the Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series is a multi-year commissioning platform which provides leading artists with the opportunity to present innovative works not previously deemed possible. Delivered in partnership with The Balnaves Foundation, this ambitious program challenges artists to reinterpret familiar locations and reimagine the concept of what a gallery can be. A central aspect of the NGA's renewed focus on contemporary art practice; these interventions will engage and excite as art experiences transform spaces throughout the gallery.

Jess Johnson and Simon Ward

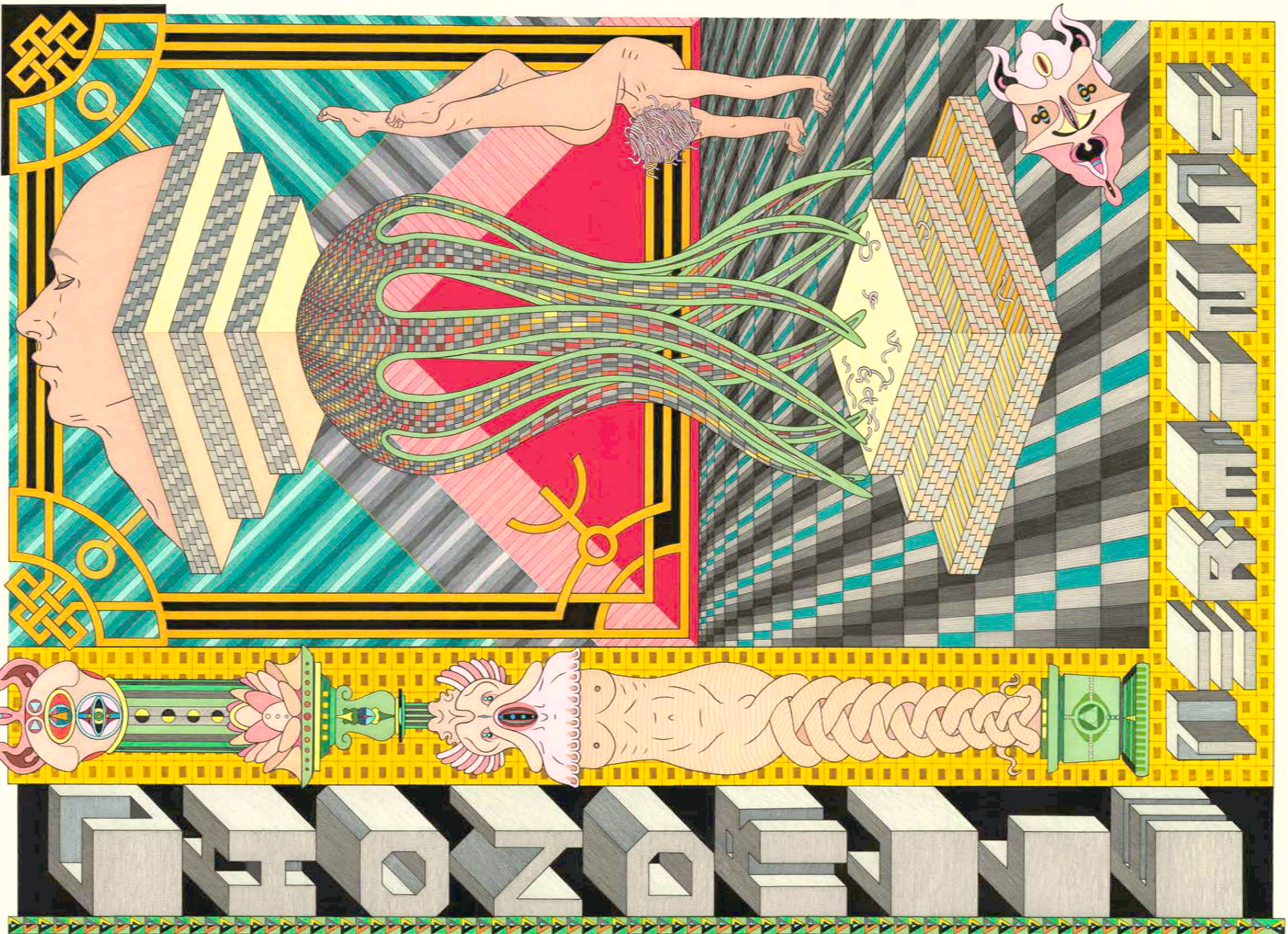
Terminus 2017–18

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Joseph Campbell, 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces'

With their pioneering use of virtual reality, artists Jess Johnson and Simon Ward hold a unique position amongst contemporary art practitioners. Johnson's drawings are transformed from analogue into digital, and from solo practice into cross-disciplinary collaboration, forming the basis of this virtual experience. Animated by Ward and enriched with input from Smith and Clarke, the result is *Terminus*: a mysterious universe of alien architecture populated by humanoid clones and cryptic symbols, explored via a network of travellers and gateways.

Terminus presents a quest, a choose-your-own adventure into the technological. The exhibition is a navigation of the many optical challenges and visual puzzles of the virtual, ultimately revealing that reality is not fixed, but both malleable and multiple.



Contemporary practice

Speak your mind

- Jess Johnson describes her art practice as **speculative**. What could it mean to speculate? How could speculation help an artist to generate ideas? Thinking broadly about contemporary society, discuss instances where speculation plays a valuable role
- Discuss what it might mean to be a contemporary artist in light of Jess Johnson's statement:

"To be able to imagine, a different way, different possibilities...the first step of being able to change your own reality is to be able to imagine a different one." ([ABC Arts 'Art Makers'](#)).

Connect your ideas back to what you can see and experience in the work of Jess Johnson and Simon Ward.

- Discuss what it might mean to be an artist today and in the future, considering Jess Johnson's statement:

"It will be artists who will harness...technology and use it in ways we can't even imagine yet, opening up new genres in storytelling, communication, expression and exploration." ([NGA artist interview](#)).

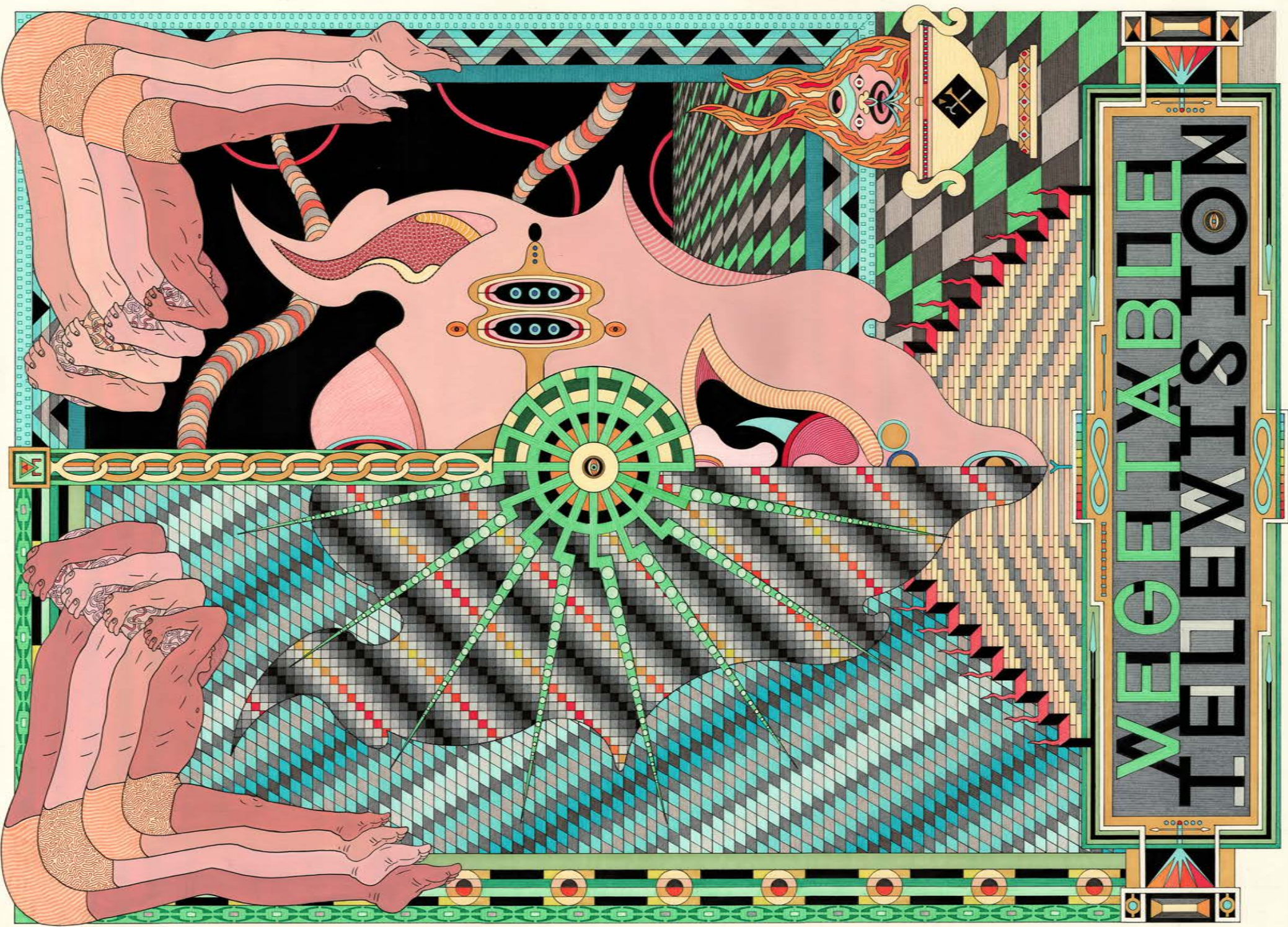
Connect your ideas back to what you can see and experience in the work of Jess Johnson and Simon Ward.

Get to work

Use your imagination to speculate about a **phenomenon** of your choice (for example, the origin of the universe, where dreams come from, how the internet works). Make a series of drawings that expand upon your speculations. Remember that your drawings are not bound by the established laws of science, but you may choose to establish your own set of laws or logic. What new questions, ideas or perspectives do you have about this phenomenon that you didn't have before?

Think it through

If you have difficulty getting started try selecting an everyday object or topic and brainstorming a list of questions about it. Choose one or more of your questions to imaginatively explore in your series of drawings. Phrase your questions along the lines of: What would it be like if...? How would it be different if...? Suppose that...? What would change if...? How would it look different if...?



WELGETAB STATION

Cultural references

Speak your mind

- Jess Johnson's drawings are highly imaginative, however the alternate universe that she creates contains extensive references to the world we live in. Look closely and break down the content of her mysterious images. Discuss any references to history, culture or religion that you can see. What might Jess Johnson's sources have been and why might they have inspired her? Research examples of other artists that have created individual or imaginative work by altering the configuration or context of existing imagery.
- Investigate the role and influence of science fiction in society, considering historical and contemporary examples, issues and perspectives. How might science fiction inspire innovation? How might it inspire escapism? How do you engage with science fiction in your life? What perspectives or scenarios would you like to see explored in science fiction? Emmanuel Tseklev's article [Science Fiction as Fact: How Desires Drive Discoveries](#) provides some interesting points to consider.

Get to work

Working in pairs, research the scientific concept of a **wormhole**. Use the idea of a wormhole as a starting point to imagine future possibilities for movement across time and space. Work collaboratively with your partner to create a short stop-motion animation that explores your imaginative idea or narrative through images or shapes that move or transform over time. You may choose to animate drawn, collaged or 3D elements using a stop motion animation app, such as iMotion. Share what you have made with your class, using a projector to view each animation on a large scale.

Think it through

Stop motion animation turns a series of still photographs into a video. To achieve a smooth animation you will need to make lots of very small movements or changes to your image, remembering to take a photograph after each movement or change. Keeping your setup and lighting as consistent as possible will also help in achieving a smooth animation. Consider setting your camera up on a tripod or drawing a frame around your image indicating where to crop each photo. Remember that you will need approximately fifteen photos for every second of video.



Process and collaboration

Speak your mind

- Discuss the ways in which Jess Johnson and Simon Ward have collaborated to create a work of art using virtual reality technology. What can you learn about collaboration from Jess Johnson's statement:

*"(Simon Ward) has access to my whole archive of drawings and he cuts and pastes his own narrative through that world. He has a lot of **autonomy** in what he does. It keeps it interesting for me because he actually expands the world to feed back into my work..."* ([Studio International](#)).

Reflect on a time when you have worked collaboratively—how was this experience different to working alone? How could it have been improved? Pair up and share your ideas. Brainstorm some of advantages and challenges of collaboration, as well as the skills and considerations that might be important for a successful collaboration. Share your ideas with your class.

- Discuss Jess Johnson's thoughts about her art-making process:

"...if I work it all out on the page and encounter problems in the composition, that helps move the world forward. For that reason, I don't use a computer, because if I had a delete button I wouldn't be able to grow—all the mistakes, mutations and difficulties push it all forwards." ([Studio International](#)).

Think about an instance when a mistake or difficulty has helped you to create or problem-solve. Pair up and share your experiences. Join with another pair to discuss ways that mistakes could occur in a digital space. How could you allow mistakes to push you forwards when working digitally? Share your ideas with your class.

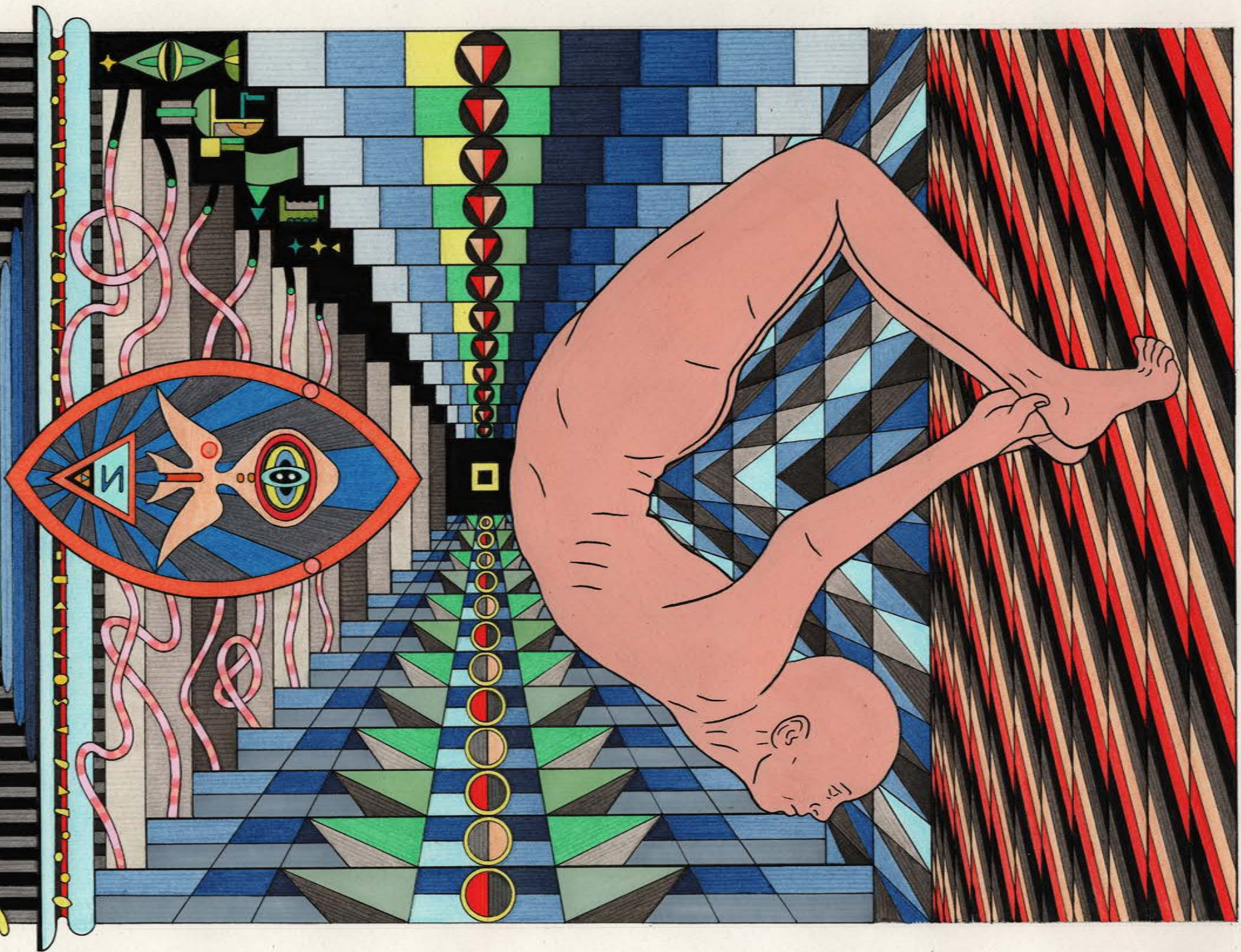
Get to work

Collaborate with a partner to create a work of art in multiple stages, moving back and forth between traditional and digital art-making processes. Draw inspiration from the synopsis of a science fiction film or book that neither of you has seen nor read before. Start by using the traditional drawing or painting materials of your choice to depict the environment that you imagine the film or book to be set in. Next, swap drawings, then scan or photograph your partner's drawing and import it into a digital drawing app. Within the digital drawing app add figures, characters or shapes that build on your partner's environment. Finally, print out multiple copies of your digital drawings and work together to cut them up with scissors—altering, editing and discussing as you collage the various parts into a new collaborative work of art.

Think it through

Depending on your device, there are a number of good drawing apps available for download, such as LINE Brush or Procreate. Your art teacher may also be able to work with your school's I.T., photography or media teacher and their students to access other digital technologies that might provide further possibilities for art-making.

Suburban Syndrome



Visual language

Speak your mind

- How would you describe the visual characteristics of *Terminus* to someone who hasn't seen it before? What might have inspired the development of this visual language? Can you see stylistic connections to imagery from art history, popular culture or other fields of knowledge?
- Identify examples of geometry, symmetry, repetition, tessellation, pattern, perspective and space in *Terminus*. Discuss the ways that these elements are used and how they are combined to achieve an overall sense of complexity and balance.
- Watch the video of Jess Johnson installing her work [Outer Head of the Order](#) (2013) for the *Melbourne Now* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. Discuss your observations about what the process of creating an installation can involve. Examine the choices that Jess Johnson has made in installing *Terminus* at the NGA. How has the architecture of the gallery influenced her choices? To what effect has she transformed the NGA gallery space?

Get to work

Use one point or two point perspective drawing to construct an imagined architectural space. You may seek inspiration from the history of architecture and combine elements from multiple time periods and cultures. Consider how and where you might use pattern to define or transform your imagined architectural space.

Think it through

Research the history and process of linear perspective drawing, a technique that artists have used for centuries to represent 3D objects on a 2D picture plane and to indicate how distant objects appear to diminish in size. The Virtual Instructor's [Two Point Perspective Tutorial](#) provides a good starting point. If you enjoy one point and two point perspective drawing, investigate and experiment with multiple point perspective as seen in M. C. Escher's work [Tetrahedral Planetoid](#) in the NGA's collection. As a further extension, Col Madigan's [Architect's Statement](#) provides an interesting insight into the geometry that underpins the complex architectural design of the NGA building.



Experience and interpretation

Speak your mind

- Focus in on the representation of the **humanoid** clones in Jess Johnson and Simon Ward's work. Observe and describe the physical characteristics of the humanoid clones, their relationship to each other and the space they occupy. Based on your observations, how would you interpret the role of the humanoid clones within the works of art? What could the humanoid clones symbolise within the alternate world presented? In what ways might your interpretations relate to the world we live in?
- Examine the relationship between the various techniques and technologies seen in this exhibition, from hand-drawn works on paper to virtual reality and installation. In what ways do they work together or stand alone? Compare and contrast the ways that technique or technology impacted your experience or interpretation of Jess Johnson and Simon Ward's work. How would you describe your overall experience of this exhibition? In what ways has this exhibition influenced your ideas about what art can be or how art can be experienced?
- Brainstorm a list of five to ten questions that you have about Jess Johnson and Simon Ward's *Terminus*. Consider questions such as: Why...? How would it be different if...? What are the reasons...? What if we knew...?

Review your list and highlight the questions that are most interesting to you. Select one or more of your highlighted questions to discuss with your class. As a result of the questions and discussions your class has shared, what new ideas do you have about *Terminus*?

Get to work

Select a favourite work of art from art history. Brainstorm ways that you could bring this work of art to life, extend its world beyond the frame, or create a new point of entry for viewers. You may work with any medium or technology, as long as it is different from the medium of the original work of art. Could your chosen work of art be complemented or expanded upon by an installation, an animation, a performance or a piece of music? The possibilities are endless—make sure to choose a medium that interests, excites or challenges you.

Think it through

Start by observing and analysing the distinguishing features of the work of art that you have chosen to expand upon. What are the strongest visual elements that make up the work of art (e.g. line, shape, form, colour, value, texture, space)? Are these elements put together in an abstract or representational way? Is the work of art connected to a particular style or movement? The better you understand your chosen work of art, the stronger your response will be.



Glossary

Autonomy is the ability to operate independently and the freedom to make your own decisions.

A **humanoid** is a being or machine that is not human, but resembles a human in form or character. In science fiction non-human or extraterrestrial life forms often closely resemble humans, but with some key differences.

A **phenomenon** is generally something interesting or extraordinary that exists or occurs and can be observed or experienced. In some cases phenomena can be explained by science and in some cases phenomena may not yet be understood or explained.

Speculative thinking generates ideas and theories based on questions, propositions and imagination rather than knowledge or facts.

A **wormhole** is a theoretical passage, portal or short-cut created by warping space and time. In theory, wormholes could permit interstellar or interdimensional travel beyond the speed of light. For further information see [Neil de Grasse Tyson Explains Wormholes and Black Holes](#).

Further research links

Terminus project site: <https://nga.gov.au/balnaves/johnson-ward.cfm>

NGA artist interview: <http://nga.gov.au/balnaves/johnsonposter.pdf>

Jess Johnson's website: <http://www.jessjohnson.org/>

Jess Johnson's instagram: https://www.instagram.com/flesh_dozer/

Simon Ward's website: <http://www.siward.tv/>

Simon Ward's instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/simonmward/>

Andrew Clarke's website: <https://www.andrewclarke.audio/>

ABC 'Art Makers' interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4it6y8gJ8I>

Studio International interview: <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/jess-johnson-interview-eclectrc-panoptic-virtual-reality-simon-ward>

Art now: contemporary art education programs

See and compare the Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series with contemporary art practices of artists from Australia and around the world.

In the following programs our educators will support students to respond creatively to the Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series. Students will discover and experience these immersive works then apply their interpretation through discussion or hands on art making.

[Contemporary art focus tour](#), 1 hour, free.

[See + create workshops](#), 2 hours, \$7 per student, max 60 students per session.

[Digital draw + explore](#), 1.5 hours, \$7 per student, max 20 students per session.

[online booking form](#)

groupbookings@nga.gov.au

(02) 6240 6519

Jess Johnson and Simon Ward *Terminus* 2018, virtual reality experience in five parts: colour, sound. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, commissioned with the assistance of the Balnaves Foundation, 2017. Installed at the NGA, Canberra. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland, and Jack Hanley Gallery, New York