

Visual Art 2019 v1.1

Supporting resource: Reverse chronology



2003–2004

Ricky Swallow
Killing Time



1900

Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull



1628

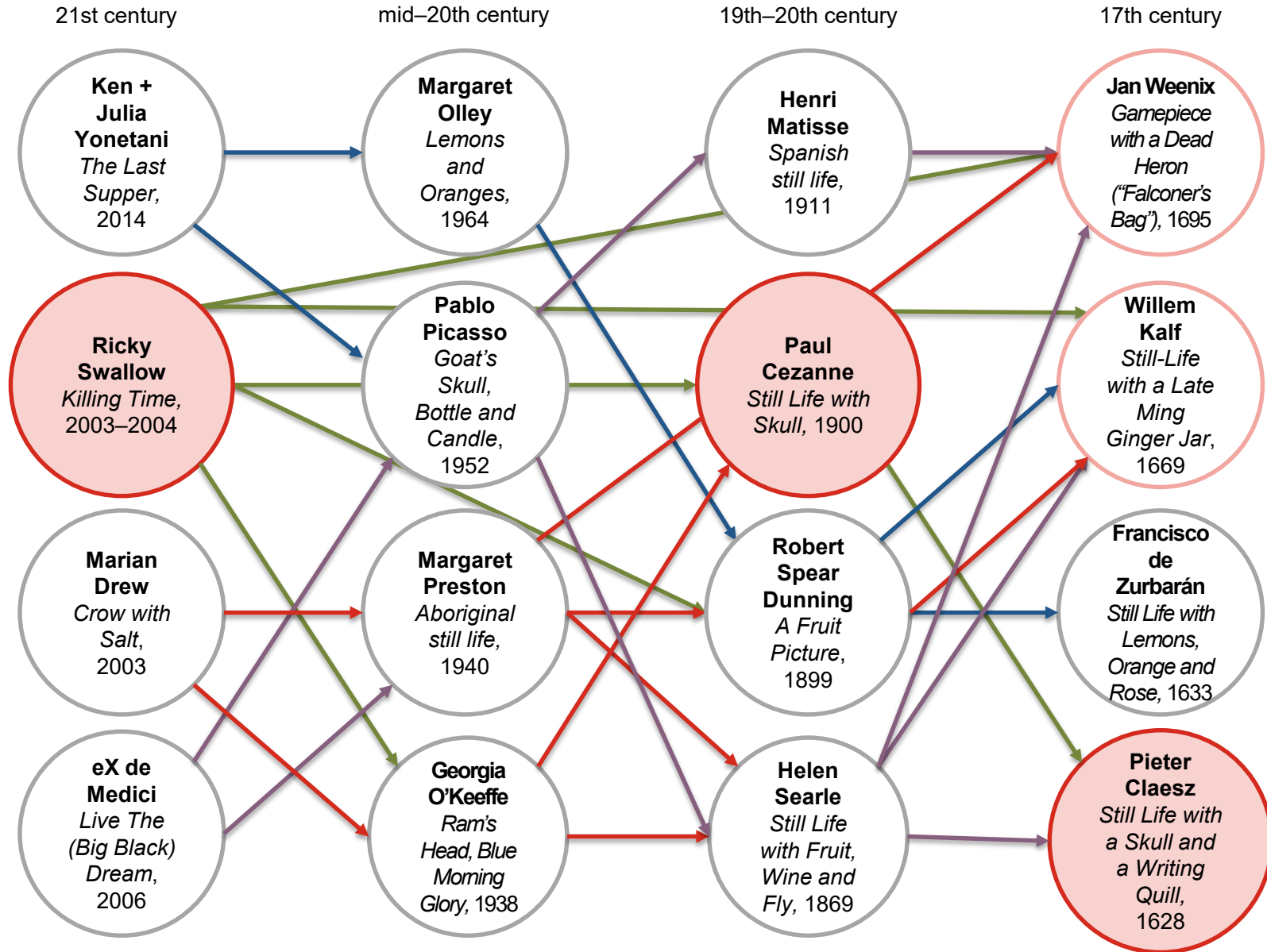
Pieter Claesz
*Still Life with a Skull
and a Writing Quill*

Reverse chronology begins with a contemporary focus and follows logical pathways backwards to learn about relevant historical, cultural and traditional styles and artforms.

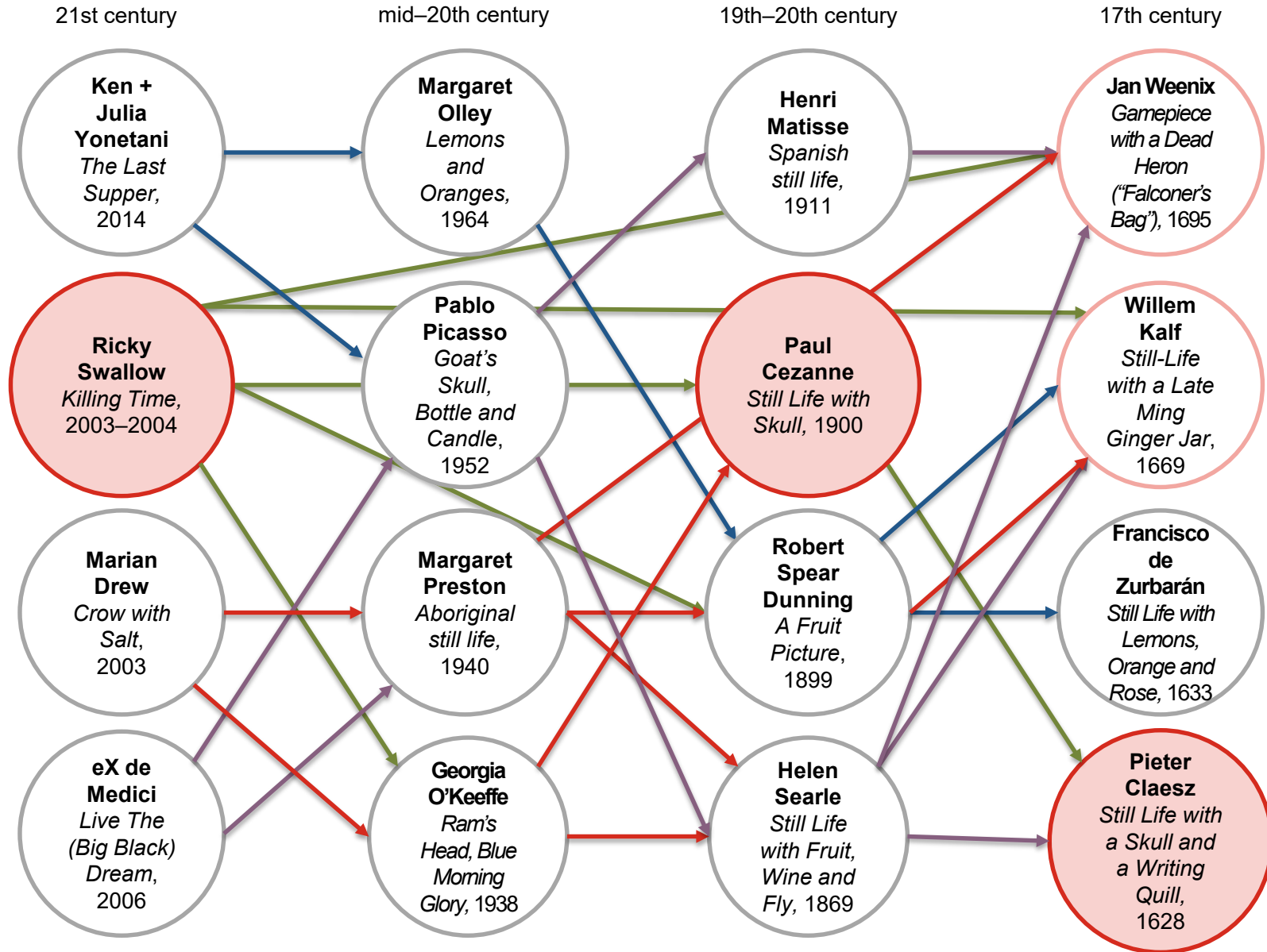
Influences, links and connections

- Reverse chronology follows a cause-and-effect pathway to understand historical influences on artworks, artists' practices, styles, subject matter, media, techniques and approaches.
 - Teachers will find their own research threads and conceptual links to investigate and make connections between artists and guide students to do the same. The Visual Art TLAPs on the QCAA Portal illustrate how this pedagogy can be embedded in teaching and learning experiences.
 - This resource illustrates an approach to the still life genre to support teachers' understanding of reverse chronology. This resource is not an example of a student response.
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Exploring still life through reverse chronology — multiple possibilities and pathways...



Exploring still life through reverse chronology — multiple possibilities and pathways...



Exploring still life through reverse chronology — multiple possibilities and pathways...

21st century

mid-20th century

19th–20th century

17th century



Ricky Swallow
Killing Time,
2003–2004

Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull, 1900

Pieter Claesz
Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill,
1628

Making connections

Cezanne made many still-life paintings, particularly towards the end of his life. Cezanne's *Still Life with Skull* is not a documented direct influence on Swallow's practice but it provides a logical stepping stone as a historic and thematic link between Swallow's work and Pieter Claesz's *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill*.



Ricky Swallow
Killing Time
2003–2004
carved laminated Jelutong
life size

Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection © Ricky Swallow.
Courtesy of Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.
Purchased with funds provided by the Rudy Komon Memorial
Fund and the Contemporary Collection Benefactors' Program
2004. Photo by Karl Schwerdtfeger.



Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm

Pieter Claesz
*Still Life with a Skull
and a Writing Quill*
1628
Oil on wood
24.1 cm x 35.9 cm





Ricky Swallow, *Killing Time*. See full attribution slide 3.

Ricky Swallow
Killing Time
2003–2004
carved laminated Jelutong,
life size

Description

- life-sized sculpture
- carefully hand-carved from wood over two years
- dining table laden with seafood
- a replica of Swallow's childhood, family dining table
- the seafood is carved with such detail that it appears real



Ricky Swallow, *Killing Time*. See full attribution slide 3.

Ricky Swallow
Killing Time
2003–2004
carved laminated Jelutong
life size

Interpretation

- memory and the transience of life, death and time
 - Swallow's choice to hand carve the entire work emphasises the concept of time
 - the work reminds us that we have a short time to live
 - the work is lifelike but lifeless
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Ricky Swallow, *Killing Time*. See full attribution slide 3.

Ricky Swallow
Killing Time
2003–2004
carved laminated Jelutong
life size

Formal context

- monochromatic forms — unity of colour aids idea of lifelessness
 - illusion of realism created by intricate detail, such as scales on fish
 - repetition — the number of animals on the table reinforce the number that he killed
 - tension is created by the large fish that hangs off the table, and also the dangling lemon peel that could snap at any moment. This causes visual weight and emphasis.
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Ricky Swallow, *Killing Time*. See full attribution slide 3.

Ricky Swallow
Killing Time
2003–2004
carved laminated Jelutong
life size

Contemporary context

- Swallow appropriates 17th century northern European still life painting depicting everyday objects, food and flowers with accuracy and realism. Traditional Dutch paintings are idealistic, colourful and triumphant because they celebrate the skill of the artist and the wealth of the patrons, but there is an air of solemnity and even sorrow in Swallow's reflective rendering of dead creatures.

Sources

Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006, *Ricky Swallow*, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/125.2004/

National Gallery of Victoria, n.d. *Ricky Swallow: The bricoleur*, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/ricky-swallow/

Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm



Description

Cezanne's painting technique created a sculptural dimension in the rendering of still lifes to show multiple viewpoints and surfaces of objects. Characteristics included

- traditional in arrangement and modern in application of media
 - contained easily recognisable objects
 - were carefully arranged to suggest everyday disorder
 - study of colour and tone were more important than the objects.
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Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm



Interpretation

- Toward the end of his life, Cezanne painted a series of still lifes that included skulls.
 - Cezanne suffered from diabetes and at this stage in his life he was conscious of his mortality.
 - As opposed to his many earlier still lifes, the object of the skull is now imbued with meaning.
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Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm



Formal context

- formal qualities of the painting were Cezanne's primary concern
 - evident brushstrokes — a common characteristic of post-impressionism
 - complementary colour relationships emphasise the fruit
 - rhythm, harmony and repetition create movement and energy
 - contrast using the white cloth creates a focal point of the pear and leads to the skull, which also contrasts against the dark background
 - similar to the placement of the fish and lemon in Swallow's *Killing Time*, tension is created by placement of objects near table edges
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Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm



Contemporary context

- Cezanne experimented with new ways of thinking and representing, such as flattening surfaces and introducing multiple perspectives.
 - Objects are outlined; layers of colour are applied to the objects, as brushstrokes to build up a sense of round form, rather than the use of tones to make shadows. For instance yellow is the lightest tone and purple is the darkest tone on the focal point apple.
 - Cezanne studied 17th century Dutch still-life painting in the Louvre collection and was inspired to develop techniques that were more about rendering form using colour and brushstrokes, and controlling the viewer's gaze.
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Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull
1895–1900
Oil on canvas
54.3 cm x 65 cm



Cultural context

- In the 1890s, the genre of still-life painting was not regarded very highly. It had seen its high point in the 17th century.
 - Cezanne was not interested as much in the objects themselves (in the same way that Swallow is) but in the way they could be arranged in the space and the way that colour could create form. This was a very new way of representing objects.
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Sources

Guggenheim Museum, n.d. *Paul Cézanne*, Guggenheim collection online, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/paul-cezanne

Harris, B. & Zucker, S. n.d. Cézanne, Still Life with Apples. Khan Academy, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/post-impressionism/v/cezanne-still-life-with-apples-1895-98-moma

Spector, N. n.d. Paul Cézanne, *Still Life: Flask, Glass and Jug*, Guggenheim collection online, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from www.guggenheim.org/artwork/781

Barnes Foundation. n.d. *Still Life with Skull*, Barnes Foundation online collection, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from [collection.barnesfoundation.org/objects/4712/Still-Life-with-Skull-\(Nature-morte-au-crane\)/details](http://collection.barnesfoundation.org/objects/4712/Still-Life-with-Skull-(Nature-morte-au-crane)/details)



Pieter Claesz
Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill
1628
Oil on wood
24.1 cm x 35.9 cm

Description

- Claesz was a skilful Dutch painter who made exquisitely realistic renderings of ordinary objects.
- A skull is juxtaposed with a quill, penholder, inkwell and notebooks, a recently extinguished oil lamp and a wine glass.



Pieter Claesz
Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill
1628
Oil on wood
24.1 cm x 35.9 cm

Interpretation

- Vanitas still life genre; vanitas is the Latin word for vanity.
 - In this genre, each object in the painting is a symbol of mortality and the insignificance of material goods and pleasures:
 - skull — inevitability of death
 - upturned glass — fleeting life and worldly pleasures
 - writing equipment — academic learning and indulgence in art forms that won't assist after death
 - oil lamp — life-supporting substance
 - wisp of smoke and reflections — transience of time.
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Pieter Claesz
Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill
1628
Oil on wood
24.1 cm x 35.9 cm

Cultural context

- upholds a commonly-held Dutch 17th century, Christian view that worldly pastimes such as writing or studying are ultimately in vain because of the inevitability of death
 - supports the cultural belief that we are only on earth for a short while in preparation for going to heaven and that it is wiser to repent and pray, rather than study or enjoy life's pleasures
 - Ricky Swallow consciously made *Killing Time* to reference similar ideas of the brevity of life and the inevitability of death.
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Exploring still life through reverse chronology — multiple possibilities and pathways...

21st century

mid-20th century

19th–20th century

17th century



Jan Weenix
Gamepiece with a Dead Heron
("Falconer's Bag"), 1695



Ricky Swallow
Killing Time,
2003–2004

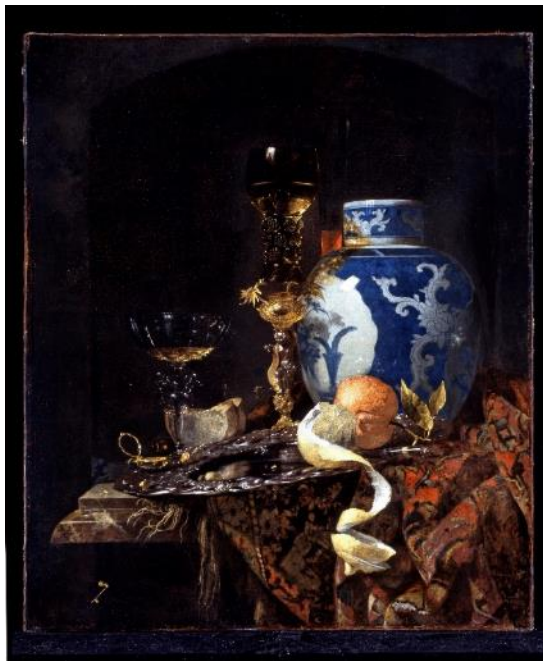
Paul Cezanne
Still Life with Skull, 1900

Willem Kalf
Still-Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar, 1669



Pieter Claesz
Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill, 1628





Willem Kalf
Still-Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar
1669
oil on canvas



Jan Weenix
Gamepiece with a Dead Heron
(*Falconers Bag*),
1695
oil on canvas

Swallow directly and deliberately references the still-life painting genre of northern Europe from 1600–1800. For example, Jan Weenix's *Gamepiece with a Dead Heron* (*Falconer's Bag*) is a typical arrangement of ornate objects, exotic fruit, flowers and dead game that communicates abundance and the wealth of the patron. Another clear reference employed by Swallow is the peeled lemon that rests on the edge of the table. A bitter lemon symbolised the negative effects of overindulgence in luxury. Several of Dutch artist Willem Kalf's paintings from circa 1660 depict exotic drapery and a lemon with its curlicue of peel cascading off the table. An example is *Still-Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar*.

Sources

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. n.d. *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill*, Audio, The Met collection, retrieved 8 April, 2019 from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435904>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. n.d. *Gamepiece with a Dead Heron*, The Met collection retrieved 8 April, 2019 from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437937>

Reverse chronology in the Visual Art syllabus

Within each unit, reverse chronology is an effective approach to investigate arts practice. This approach begins with a contemporary focus and follows logical pathways backwards to learn about relevant historical, cultural and traditional styles and art forms. Reverse chronology follows a cause-and-effect pathway to understanding influences on artists, styles and practices. This differs from a customary chronological approach that would begin in the past and follow a sequential path to the present.

Suggested artists and artworks

Core learning draws on the diversity of 21st century art practices as a way of focusing learning on current approaches to visual art engagement, communication and meaning. Suggested artists and artworks take into account contemporary, personal, cultural and formal contexts that influence artists' responses to both current and historical events and society.

Through the reverse chronology approach, these artists and artworks create links to relevant and influential past practices and traditions. Teachers should use the suggestions to guide selection of key artists and inspirational practices for examples, case studies and stimulus, and may use, add to, or replace the suggestions to suit local needs.

Subject matter:

- analyse and interpret
 - artworks through teacher-directed, reverse chronology case studies to examine historical influences on contemporary artists and examine how they acquire and transmit knowledge through their current art practice.
 - artworks in student-directed, reverse chronology case studies to investigate historical influences on key contemporary artists who engage with similar focuses and ideas.
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Useful reverse chronology resources

Hartman, J December 8, 2015, *Teaching the History of Rock Music Using Reverse Chronology*, retrieved June 3, 2017 from *iAchieveLearning*, <https://iachievelearning.com/2015/12/teaching-the-history-of-rock-music-using-reverse-chronology/>

Himes, G April 25, 2015, *Why We Should Teach Music History Backwards*, retrieved May 3, 2017 from *Smithsonian.com*, www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/why-we-should-teach-music-history-backwards-180955053/

Kleon, A 2012, *Steal Like An Artist: Austin Kleon at TEDxKC*, retrieved June 3, 2017 from www.youtube.com/watch?v=oww7oB9rjgw

Tew, D,J 2014, *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the chronological and thematic approaches*, retrieved May 3, 2017 from *West Oregon University Digital Commons*, http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=honors_theses
