



George Gittoes on being there

Collection learning resource



NEWCASTLE
ART GALLERY
FOUNDATION

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SOCIETY

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Open Tuesday to Sunday & every day during school holidays

George GITTOES *Naphthalene Plant (Newcastle)* 1989 compressed charcoal and pastel on paper 99.5 x 140.0cm Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by George Gittoes 2019 Newcastle Art Gallery collection Courtesy the artist



Newcastle
Art Gallery

GEORGE GITTOES

born in 1949 Rockdale, Sydney

VISIT AND DISCOVER

GEORGE GITTOES: on being there

8 February – 26 April 2020

George Gittoes AM is a highly awarded Australian artist and documentary filmmaker. He is represented in public collections nationally and internationally. Gittoes uses painting, prints, visual diaries, field drawings, photography and filmmaking to present his work as an eyewitness account of social injustices and the difficult times in which we live. He has been recognised for his humanitarian and peacemaking efforts, awarded an Order of Australia (AM) and the prestigious 2015 Sydney Peace Prize.

As a co-founder of Sydney's bohemian Yellow House Artist Collective in the early 70s, Gittoes' most important contribution was an elaborately painted puppet theatre where he told stories using hand crafted puppets made from liquid polystyrene, fabric, metal and paint.

In 1989 Gittoes began a large-scale project, *Heavy Industry*, documenting the working conditions at industrial sites in Newcastle and Wollongong. *Naphthalene Plant (Newcastle)* 1989 was created during the artist's residency at Newcastle's BHP Steel Works and explores the humanity of men working in difficult and dangerous conditions in mining and steel factories. In this work of art the viewer is confronted with an apocalyptic industrial scene and invited to enter the hostile environment.

Quote from the Curator

The work of George Gittoes is deeply disruptive to the comfortable conventions of our seeing. His work serves to question our values and assumptions and confronts viewers with ethical questions about what it means to be human. Gittoes wants you, the viewer, to think about what it was like to be alive in the anti-Vietnam protest era, to work in the apocalyptic conditions of the Newcastle steel works, in fractured war zones, or in Chicago, the site of some of the worst gun violence in the world. These visual investigations push the viewer to consider what it would be like to be there.

Rod Pattenden 2020, *GEORGE GITTOES: on being there* catalogue essay p.1.

Topics to explore

Newcastle artist-in-residence
Artist as witness
Expressionist art
Simplification of form
Social justice and art
War artists

CREATE

Sketch your impression of *Naphthalene Plant (Newcastle)* 1989 with a large-scale charcoal or pastel drawing on paper.

Document an industrial scene using photography. Apply a filter to your series of images to create an apocalyptic lighting effect.

Design an imaginative ceramic vessel object or functional object. Inspired by Gittoes' collaborative work with artist Cameron Williams, ceramic ewer, *To Cleanse the World of War* 2019.

Record visual ideas and tell a story about your daily life. Use collage materials such as newspapers and magazines for stimulus images. Gittoes likes to record visual ideas in an art diary.

Create your own puppetry works of art decorated with papier-mâché, fabric, paints or cardboard. Use recycled materials and household objects. Perform your show to friends and family. Consider a thematic story for the show that focuses on one of the themes: fear, peace, love, or war.

Perform different sounds by using voice or body percussion in response to works of art. Explore colour, pattern and rhythm by making sounds, fast to slow, loud to soft.

RESPOND

Look at *Naphthalene Plant (Newcastle)* 1989 and consider what it reminds you of. In a group, take it in turns to say a word associated with one of the works of art. Move around the group for as long as possible.

Discuss the curators quote from the catalogue essay. Agree or disagree with the statement, "Can art change the world?"

View other works of art in the exhibition *GEORGE GITTOES: on being there* either by visiting the exhibition or reading the catalogue. Discuss the differences and similarities in the works of art. What statement is Gittoes trying to make through his works of art?

Write a short prose piece about the experience of one of Gittoes' subjects and their perspective. Imagine yourself in their shoes.

Investigate other Australian artists, such as Gordon Bennett and Shirin Neshat, who have created works of art and responded to the topic of conflict and social change for minority groups.

FURTHER READING

Newcastle Art Gallery resources

Pattenden, R. 2020, *GEORGE GITTOES: on being there* exhibition catalogue, Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle.

<https://nag.org.au/Exhibitions/Future/GEORGE-GITTOES-on-being-there>