

# EDWARD BURTYNSKY AUSTRALIAN MINESCAPES

“These landscapes tell us about the scale of human need and the lasting result of that ambition. If the human experience can be considered a manifestation of dreams and desires, mines can be thought of as the source for the raw materials of those dreams such as cars, aeroplanes, televisions, houses, jewellery and the endless number of goods which we expect to have.”

EDWARD BURTYNSKY

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

### Introduction

The **Australian Minescapes** exhibition is a collection of photographic works by Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky. These photos capture the mining landscapes of Western Australia on a grand scale. The Gold Museum is hosting this travelling exhibition from 8 March to 20 June 2010. The exhibition offers a rare opportunity for students to explore the influence of human activity on the landscape, and also to explore the artistic elements found in Burtynsky's work.

This education resource is designed to enable teachers to enhance their students' visit and offer suggestions for curriculum-linked activities during the excursion, and for follow up at school. It is divided into two key parts:

- **Art for senior students (Years 9-10, VELS level 6)**
- **History, Geography and Economics for Middle Years (Years 5-8, VELS levels 4-5)**

This exhibition is highly recommended as either a specific, art-focussed excursion to enhance critical studies of contemporary art, or as a visit combined with a Sovereign Hill Education experience giving students the opportunity to explore change over time.



*Silver Lake Operations #15, Lake Lefroy, Western Australia, 2007 © Edward Burtynsky*

## **PART 1 – ART FOR SENIOR STUDENTS**

### **Key ideas for senior students**

For Art students, the **Australian Minescapes** exhibition is a rich resource to explore artistic elements of photography and how it can communicate ideas. Each work in the exhibition is a large-scale, colour photograph carefully captured by Burtynsky. Although they are realistic representations of the locations, they are also carefully constructed works of art with identifiable technical and aesthetic elements.

### **Curriculum Links - VELS**

ART – EXPLORING AND RESPONDING: LEVEL 6

- Observe, research and critically discuss a range of contemporary and historical examples of arts works.
- Analyse, interpret, compare and evaluate the stylistic, technical, expressive and aesthetic features of arts works.
- Discuss and describe the way arts works communicate and challenge ideas and meaning.
- Comment on the impact of arts works, forms and practices on other arts works and society in general.

In this exhibition there is also an opportunity for teachers to link the students' studies of art with other curriculum areas, particularly Geography where they are encouraged to interpret geographical evidence from a range of sources, including photography.

### **At the exhibition**

The exhibition is located in the Clark Gallery at the rear of the Gold Museum. There are many other photographic works on display throughout the Museum that provide an opportunity for artistic comparison – particularly in the area of the communication of ideas and values, as well as the changes in photography as an artwork over time. Indeed, Burtynsky's use of state-of-the-art technology and his choice of subject invite comparisons with images by the landscape photographers working in Ballarat during goldrush times.

Just prior to entering the Clark Gallery, you will pass through the Cowles Gallery and see the Bardwell Panorama. These photographs, taken in 1872, communicate similar ideas to those of the **Australian Minescapes** images. As an introduction to the exhibition, pause the students at the Bardwell Panorama and encourage them to start expressing their thoughts on what the photographer is recording and why he took the photographs. Draw their attention to the idea of using large-scale landscape photography as an artistic tool – discuss the opportunity it provides to explore the scale and effect of human activity on the landscape. This is also a good time to ask the students to consider their prior knowledge about the contemporary medium of photography and suggest ways Burtynsky's images may differ from Bardwell's.

On entering the Clark Gallery, explore the artworks and gather the students' initial perceptions. The students could then be encouraged to consider the following questions:

- What technical elements are evident in Burtynsky's work? What choices has he made in his artistic composition?
- Burtynsky has used a helicopter as an artistic tool. How has that helped in making the images? Why do you think he chose to take an aerial view? How might the meaning of the pictures be altered if they were taken from a different view?
- How do the images make you feel? What do they cause you to think about?
- What beauty can you see in the images? Is there an 'ugly' side to them as well?
- Why do you think Burtynsky has chosen to present his photographs as such large prints?
- Is it important that these images were taken in Australia? Why/why not?

## **After the exhibition**

Following your visit to the exhibition there are a variety of activities the students can engage in. Some suggestions are outlined below. They all allow for the students to explore Burtynsky's images as artworks that communicate and challenge ideas and meaning.

### **Activity 1 – Reflection**

After returning from the exhibition students can discuss their perceptions and thoughts on the exhibition with their peers. Following this, they could write a reflective piece about how the exhibition made them feel. Ask them to reflect on: what it made them think about, what they noticed first, how the images relate to their own lives, how it compares to other photographic works they have seen, and whether or not their ideas about the tensions between human activity and natural landscapes and our need for the Earth's resources, and/or photography have changed as a result of visiting the exhibition.

### **Activity 2 – Debate**

Students can be divided into teams to debate the topic: 'Burtynsky's **Australian Minescapes** portray the beauty of man-altered landscapes'. Or 'Burtynsky's images are designed to confront and challenge our ideas about human consumerism'. Encourage students to analyse the images in detail and research other photographic artists capturing large-scale landscapes.

### **Activity 3 – Juxtaposition**

This activity is designed for students to demonstrate their interpretation of Burtynsky's images and their understanding of photographic art as a powerful method for challenging ideas. Prior to beginning this activity, it would be valuable for the students to reflect on and discuss the meanings they perceived in the images. Then discuss the definition of juxtaposition as an artistic tool.

The students can then be asked to consider what they believe would be a contrasting image to those seen in **Australian Minescapes**. Their task is to find a photograph (or compose a photograph themselves if time and resources permit) of a contrasting subject matter – examples may include the natural environment untouched by humans or a piece of gold jewellery. They can present their photograph alongside a Burtynsky image to create juxtaposition. As part of the task, they could deliver a presentation to explain how their photograph contrasts with Burtynsky's and therefore challenges the viewer to consider new ideas and meaning behind each image.

## **Resources**

### **Edward Burtynsky: Australian Minescapes**

The official exhibition catalogue, compiled by the Western Australian Museum. This full-colour book includes Burtynsky's images alongside a series of essays about his works and their artistic value. It is available for purchase from the Gold Museum shop.

### **Edward Burtynsky [Photographic Works]**

[www.edwardburtynsky.com](http://www.edwardburtynsky.com)

This website has an excellent collection of Burtynsky's work, covering a range of subjects. It also provides background information on the artist and his work.

### **Western Australian Museum - online resources**

[http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/onlinepubs/online\\_resources.asp](http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/onlinepubs/online_resources.asp)

On this site you will find a podcast of Edward Burtynsky as part of the FotoFreo 2008 Floor Talks. This is a great resource to understand more about Burtynsky and what he is trying to achieve through his photographic works.

### **The Story of the Camera in Australia - J. Cato (1979)**

This book contains an historical overview of photography in Australia and makes reference to Bardwell's works as well as those of another large-scale mining photographer of the time, Charles Bayliss.

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*Otter Juan/Coronet Mine #1, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, 2007 © Edward Burtynsky*

## **Part 2 – History, Geography and Economics for Middle Years**

### **Key ideas for Middle Years students**

For students in Middle Years, this exhibition is an opportunity for comparing past and present and understanding the human interaction with the landscape in mining and resource use. This covers a variety of curriculum areas as outlined below. The key ideas that students can discuss include: the impact of human activity and mining on the environment; economic development and the growth of towns in remote landscapes; the differences between underground and open-cut mining; and the human desire for gold and other resources.

The size of the images will capture the students' attention and help them understand the scale of mining today.

### **Curriculum Links – VELS**

#### **HISTORY – HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

Level 4: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of significant events in Australian history including the 1850s gold rushes and make links and comparisons with contemporary Australia.

Level 5: analyse change and continuity over time and compare key aspects of past and present societies.

#### **GEOGRAPHY – GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

Level 4: compare the various ways humans have used and affected the Australian environment. Use geographic language to identify and describe the human and physical characteristics of environments as depicted by photographs.

Level 5: explain, using examples, how the interaction of physical processes and human activities creates variations within regions.

#### **GEOGRAPHY – GEOSPATIAL SKILLS**

Level 4: identify features from oblique photographs.

Level 5: collect geographical information from electronic and print media, and analyse, evaluate and present it using a range of forms.

#### **ECONOMICS – ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

Level 4: describe the nature of the economic problem (scarcity) and explain how goods are produced.

Level 5: explain how economic choices involve trade-offs that have both immediate and future consequences. Explain key factors that influence the Australian economy, including resource use, ownership and management.

### **At the exhibition**

The **Australian Minescapes** exhibition is located in the Clark Gallery at the rear of the Gold Museum. We recommend, however, that you guide your students through some of the other sections of the Museum prior to entering the Clark Gallery. This will assist students to make connections between the historical images and artefacts in the Museum's collections and the modern photographs in the exhibition. You can follow the suggested route through the Museum outlined in the following pages.

## **Self-guided trail**

[Enter the Museum and move around to the right, passing through the Buckland Gallery. Bend around to the left and enter the Eureka Walkway. On your left, you will see two large paintings.]

### **Stop 1 – The land before gold**

*Warrenheip Hills near Ballarat 1854* – by Eugène von Guérard

This painting shows some of the land of the Wathawurrung people. Ask the students to look at the landscape and draw some conclusions about how the land is being used. Draw their attention to the land being heavily wooded with native trees. There are also some Indigenous people in the foreground – how would they use the land? What are the main colours you can see?

*Koort Koort-nong homestead, near Camperdown, Victoria 1860* – by Eugène von Guérard

This painting captures a typical pastoral station. Pastoralists were using the land before the diggers arrived in Victoria. Ask the students to think about how the land is being used. How does the land look different from the previous painting? Who has altered the land?

[Walk through into the small circular gallery of nuggets.]

### **Stop 2 – Why mine?**

Encourage students to look at the nuggets. Ask them how they would feel if they found one. What would happen to the gold? Why do people like gold?

[Walk down the short ramp and look straight ahead. Gather students in front of the two displays: Mining Equipment and Life on the Goldfields.]

### **Stop 3 – How did mining change the land?**

In the paintings by S.T. Gill you can see people working the land and using equipment to move and sort the soil. How has the landscape changed from the first pictures you saw (at stop 1)? What are the main colours you can see?

[Walk around to the right and along that section until you reach the pictures of streetscapes – lithographs by François Cogné.]

In these pictures you can see how towns started to develop. Why did the discovery of gold in Victoria mean that towns grew and shops were built?

[Before you reach the stairs, turn to the left and walk down the ramp, and then turn left again and walk up into a round gallery.]

### **Stop 4 – Life in the mines**

This gallery contains a section of photos about what it was like working in the underground mines. In the centre of the room there is also a Mine Safety Cage, which was used to transport the miners down the shafts into the mines. Give the students some time to look around at the images and decide on two words to describe what it would be like to work in the underground mines.

[Walk straight out of the round gallery, down the ramp. Stop along the framed pictures on the right.]

In these lithographs, by Herman Deutsch, you can see technical drawings of some of the

underground mines. Here, students can consider how deep underground the workers were. Drawing on any experiences from their visit to Sovereign Hill, students can share their thoughts on what dangers faced miners working in underground mines.

[Walk along under archways, bend slightly to the right and head into the Clark Gallery and the Australian Minescapes exhibition.]

### **Stop 5 - Mining today**

This gallery holds the collection of landscape photographs of modern Western Australian gold mines by Edward Burtynsky. Give students the opportunity to explore the photographs and ask them to focus on key questions to share with the group when they gather again:

- How do these pictures make you feel?
- In what way has the land been changed by mining?
- How does mining today differ from the mines of the 1850s? Are they bigger/smaller? Safer/more dangerous? Better/worse for the environment?

After students have explored, gather them together to share their thoughts. Then choose one image to prompt further discussion. Ask students to consider the following questions:

- How big would you be in this picture? (Clue: the wheels on the mining trucks are taller than the average person).
- What impact would the mines have on nearby towns? In one image – Super Pit #4 – you can see the town of Kalgoorlie in the background. Which do you think came first – the town or the mine?
- What are the benefits of using open-cut mining? Why do you think people moved to using open-cut rather than underground mining?
- What are the disadvantages of using open-cut mining?
- Who is responsible for the environmental impact of the mines? Workers, governments, mining companies or people buying gold?

There is one photograph – Super Pit #5 – that shows the piles of debris (mullock) removed from the mine. In the debris you can see the remnants of old underground mines – the beams and scrap metal. This is a great spot to discuss with students how change occurs over time, how evidence of the past can be found, and the differences between mining then and now.

[Leave the Gallery and head straight ahead into the area under the clock tower to view the Bardwell Panorama.]

### **Stop 6 - Drawing it together**

This large-scale panoramic photograph was taken 20 years after the discovery of gold in Ballarat. Ask students how they think this photograph compares to those they just saw in the Australian Minescapes exhibition. Do they give you the same or different feelings? Are they telling the same or different stories?

On the second touch station (to the right of the Clark Gallery) there is a button to light up the Black Hill mine. Here you can show students that there was some open-cut mining during the goldrush era. But it was not on the same scale. Ask students to think about what has changed to allow for bigger mines to be developed? What are the changes in technology that have made super-pits possible?

[You can exit the Museum through the Jessica and Paul Simpson Gold Pavilion. Towards the end of the pavilion there is a display on Gold Today that shows common, modern uses for gold – including jewellery and accessories.]

## After the exhibition

Following your visit to the exhibition there are a variety of activities in which the students can engage to reflect on and extend their learning. Some suggestions are included below.

### Activity 1 – Now and Then.

Have students work in teams to compile a Venn Diagram showing their understanding of gold mining in the 1850-70s and gold mining today. This could be extended to look beyond the physical characteristics of each time to look at other features: the technology, the environmental impact or the political issues/public opinions about mining.

### Activity 2 – What causes mining?

Students could spend some time investigating the production process and how mined materials are used in their everyday lives. They could then create a flow chart showing the 'life' of a mined resource, from discovery to consumer use.

### Activity 3 – Open-air Museum 2150.

Sovereign Hill is an interactive open-air museum about gold mining in the 1850s and the impact it has had on the land and communities. Most students will have found their visit to Sovereign Hill an interesting and positive experience.

For this activity, students need to imagine they are living in the year 2150 and they have been asked to design an open-air museum showing open-cut gold mining in Western Australia. The students are to create their own museum and explain how it will work through descriptive writing and/or labelled diagrams. They will need to consider what message they are trying to give their visitors, what features of life working in open-cut mines they want to re-create and what aspects of the museum could be interactive.

An optional extension could involve the students hypothesising what mining will look like 150 years from now and using their art or writing skills to share their ideas. This activity could also allow students to engage in a theoretical discussion about how today's mining landscape might be managed in the future – whether to retain the artefacts or restore the landscape.

## Resources

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MUSEUM

2010  
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2010



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