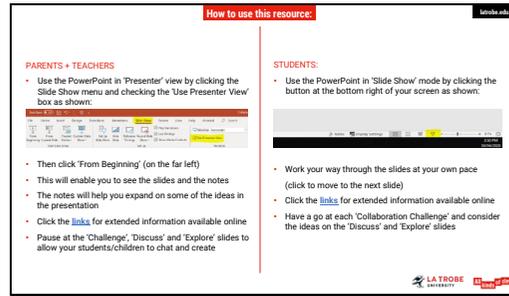


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COLLABORATORY is a series of exhibitions presented by La Trobe Art Institute. The series explores various working relationships and the impact that collaboration can have across a variety of creative practices and disciplines.

In 2018, LAI presented its first two collaborations:

- Established artist Jon Cattapan and emerging artist Ben Aitken, and
- Sisters Pip and Natalie Ryan, known as The Ryan Sisters.

In 2021, LAI will present an exhibition by contemporary photographer, Danica Chappell resulting from a collaboration with molecular scientist Dr Donna Whelan, as part of Photo 2021.

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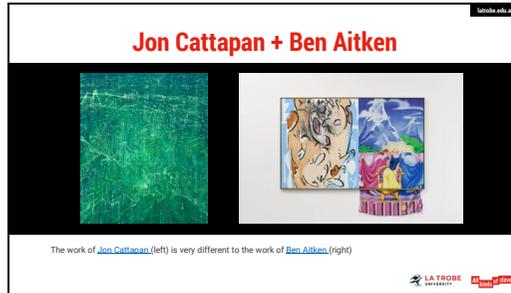
First, what is collaboration?

Unlike the normal way we work together at school or work, collaborating is where we work with someone to produce something specific. Both people contribute their skills and ideas (and perhaps other resources, such as their networks or audiences). They might also both contribute to the physical construction of the piece.

Can you think of some examples of collaboration, or where people might use collaboration? For Example, Musical collaborations: Justin Bieber and Ed Sheeran on "I Don't Care". Scientists collaborating to try to find a vaccine for a disease.

What do you think some of the benefits of collaborating with someone might be?
What might be some of the challenges?

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Jon CATTAPAN + Ben AITKEN

Jon is a renowned Australian artist who exhibits widely and has won loads of prestigious awards. He is also a Professor at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Ben is an emerging Melbourne based artist who has taught himself rather than going through a formal art school education. Both artists are dedicated painters who exhibit regularly and constantly seek out new ways to develop their practice.

Image Details: Jon Cattapan, "Raft City No1 (Surveillance Version)" (2015), oil on linen, 195 x 168 cm; Ben Aitken, "Childhood Memory 1" (2019) Synthetic polymer paint and fabric on canvas. 154 x 254 cm

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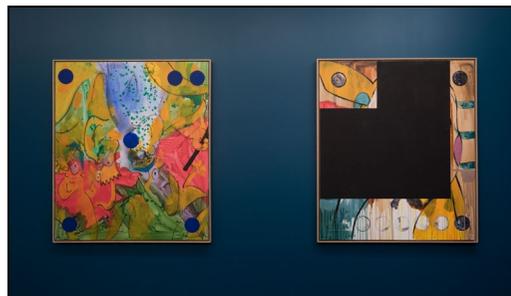


Jon Cattapan and Ben Aitken worked together for a year to create a series of collaborative paintings, which they called "Circling". The series was exhibited at LAI in 2018 as one of the first shows for Collaboratory.

Jon and Ben's collaboration was interesting, because while Jon's wealth of experience could have naturally placed him in the role of mentor (or leader), the paintings suggest that both artists contributed and responded to each other, as the exhibition title "Circling" suggests.

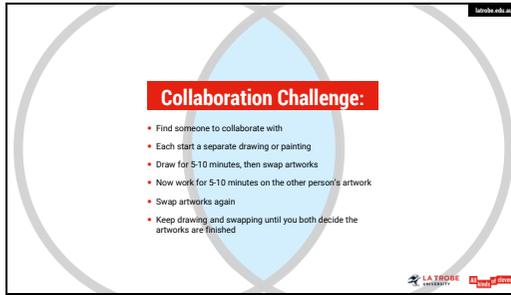
For each painting in the exhibition, the artists used a process whereby they each began a canvas then gave it to the other to continue the painting. Each painting was swapped back and forth allowing the artists to respond to the mark making of the other, sometimes disrupting and at other times, resolving the evolving composition until they agreed it was complete.

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As a result, the finished paintings are not immediately recognisable as the work of either artist, and instead represent a third identity with its own unique, quirky style.

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Collaboration Challenge:

- Find someone to collaborate with
- Each start a separate drawing or painting
- Draw for 5-10 minutes, then swap artworks
- Now work for 5-10 minutes on the other person's artwork
- Swap artworks again
- Keep drawing and swapping until you both decide the artworks are finished

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What did you learn from this experience?

How did you feel when the other person began drawing on "your" artwork?

Did you enjoy making the work together or did you find it challenging-why?

What do you think might be the special challenges and benefits of artists collaborating on an artwork, compared with people working together on other kinds of projects?

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Natalie Ryan + Pip Ryan



Sisters [Natalie](#) and [Pip](#) are both practising artists (Natalie's work is on the left, Pip's is on the right). They also work together as [The Ryan Sisters](#).

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Natalie RYAN+ Pip RYAN

Melbourne based artists Pip Ryan and Natalie Ryan work individually and as a collaboration.

Natalie Ryan makes sculptures and drawings that explore the way animals (often dead) have been represented in art and science throughout history.

Pip Ryan explores the idea of the uncanny or absurd in her drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations and videos. Often her work sits between humour (funny things) and horror (scary things).

Artwork details: Natalie Ryan, "Octopus" (2017) Porcelain, resin. 24 x 25 x 8cm. Presented with Blackartprojects. Photograph by Matthew Stanton; Pip Ryan "Lounging Lizards". Watercolour, gouache, pencil on paper. 76 x 56cm. Photo by Matthew Stanton

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The Ryan Sisters



[The Ryan Sisters](#) have been working together for a number of years. Their artworks are often humorous, strange and unsettling.

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The sisters have been working together for a number of years to produce artworks that are often humorous and at the same time strange and unsettling.

The work the sisters make together is very different to their individual creations. They combine their individual interests in death, absurdity, humour and horror to make installations and spatial interventions (one or more sculptural objects that interrupt the regular look or function of a space).

The sisters often use their own bodies in the casting of their sculptures, creating installations of objects that are at once life-like and fantastically absurd. It is possible to pick out their individual particularities (the shape of the wrists; Pip's broken finger) but at the same time their identities merge in the fragmentation and distortion of the forms. Through collaboration they leave their egos behind.

Artwork details: The Ryan Sisters "Slump" (2013). Wax, mixed media. Presented at The Big East, curated by Kiron Robinson, Heathmont Scout Hall, Melbourne; The Ryan Sisters "Lights Out" detail (2015). Wax, candelabras, wood, battery operated candles. Presented at Strange Neighbour - Horror Show curated by The Ryan Sisters.

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The Sisters' artwork called "Is Anyone There?" was also exhibited as part of LAI's first Collaboratory exhibition in 2018. They use a combination of *spatial installation* and *intervention*. This means that the space surrounding the objects is as important to how visitors will experience the artwork, as the artwork itself.

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The darkened space, clever lighting and velvet curtain created an eerie atmosphere in this exhibition. Both the visible objects and the empty void that surrounded them were of equal importance in this work.

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Collaboration Challenge:

- Find someone to collaborate with
(perhaps you could collaborate with a member of your family, like The Ryan Sisters do)
- Collect some cardboard boxes
- Discuss what you could make together
- Do some drawings to show each other your ideas
- Decide on a design for your *spatial installation* and make it together

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In this collaboration activity, a different process is used to develop ideas and create artwork.

The creation process is shared between the collaborators from beginning to end, rather than each person doing their own part and then swapping over and responding.

Which way of collaborating do you prefer?

What other ways of collaborating can you think of?

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Compare these two collaborations.

Working with a peer is different to working with family. Perhaps you don't know them quite as well as your family and so you might be more shy or polite. Collaboration can be a great way to get to know someone. You can learn from their strengths and experiences or perhaps you might even be able to share your own knowledge. Working together, you might create something completely new and unexpected.

Collaborating with family has its own particular set of advantages and challenges. Siblings are likely to interact with each other on a more intimate level than peers might. Family members have a shared history that informs their understanding of the world. There are often unspoken 'rules' at play, set up by the family dynamics.

Does your collaborative style differ when with peers to when you are with your family?

Can you think of some advantages and disadvantages of making things with your family?

What other experience have you had of collaboration with someone? Is it something you enjoy or do you find it challenging?

What ways of thinking and behaving make collaboration with others easier? What makes it harder?

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What does inter-disciplinary mean?

In this case, a discipline is the subject area that a person studies or works in (such as Art, Science or Law).

So, inter-disciplinary describes work or research that sits between two or more different disciplines, such as Art & Science.

What do you think might be the benefits of people working together from different disciplines - say an artist and a scientist for example?

Being part of La Trobe University, La Trobe Art Institute is very interested in encouraging creative and critical thinking and innovation. One way to do this is to encourage La Trobe University Academics (Lecturers and Researchers), to work with contemporary artists in lots of different ways.

This is why the third exhibition for Collaboratory to take place in 2021 is the result of a collaboration between contemporary photographer Danica Chappell and a scientist (Bio-Chemist) Dr Donna Whelan

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Danica Chappell is a visual artist based in Melbourne who plays with and deconstructs all aspects of analogue photography to form abstract images.

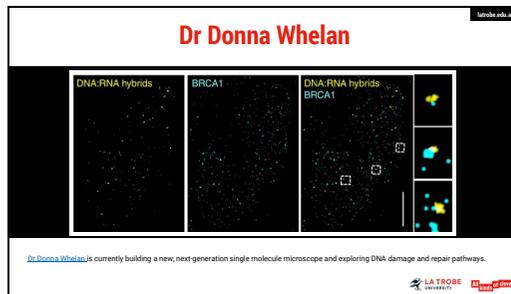
For Danica, each stage of the conventional analogue photograph process is an opportunity to experiment - from the moment when light from her enlarger is allowed to make a negative shape on the photographic paper, which is then reversed to become a positive image on paper.

Danica uses dichroic filters in her enlarger to vary light in a way that enables her to experiment with photographic materials in a painterly way to construct and blend shadow, to reveal or present forms from shadows.

Working directly on the surface of the paper, Danica manipulates both aspects of negative and positive overlapping forms until a final composition is reached.

Artwork credit: Danica Chappell, 'Glimmer' (working title for picturing objects), 2018, Daguerreotype, 42.0 x 49.0 cm. Image © Danica Chappell. Courtesy of the artist.

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Dr Donna Whelan is a Bruce Stone Fellow in Chemical Biology based in Bendigo as a part of the La Trobe Institute for Molecular Science. She is currently building a new, next-generation single molecule microscope, and exploring DNA damage and repair pathways. Dr Whelan collaborates with other scientists to research various causes of disease, viruses and how cell degeneration affects the brain and other parts of the body.

Danica and Donna were invited to form a collaboration by LAI's Senior Curator, Kent Wilson for *Colloboratory*, LAI's exhibition series. This particular collaboration was designed to feature in PHOTO 2021 a new State-wide contemporary photography festival.

Image Credit: These images are from a recent article co-authored by Dr Whelan titled "BRCA2 controls DNA:RNA hybrid level at DSBs by mediating RNase H2 recruitment". These are representative pictures of super-resolution imaging analysis of BRCA1 (in cyan) and DNA:RNA hybrids (in yellow) colocalization in S-phase synchronized NCS-treated U2OS cells. Scale bar: 5 μ m.

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How did they collaborate?

"Donna and I visited each other's work spaces as a way of introducing our processes and methods undertaken.

Although my work results in a photograph, the physical space and how the body occupies and uses that space is integral to the outcome.

The intention and purpose in Donna's individual processes have parallels ..to my own [work].

In the end there are clear intersections between our working processes, even if we do describe, perform and manifest our knowledge and ideas in different ways for a different audience."

Danica Chappell, 2020

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Over many discussions and exchanges, Donna and Danica found several parallels in their work despite being from different disciplines. Both work in dark, windowless rooms, using light and combinations of filters to expose new images and ideas.

Danica was also excited to hear how dust and skin particles infiltrate Donna's process. She said "Dust is something that is very real in photography and crucial in a laboratory. It's an aspect of truth in photography and I've learned to embrace dust and environmental detritus in my process. Considered an imperfection or blemish to the pristine artefact, it causes an interruption to the illusion but also becomes its own illusion when enlarged. The fingerprint or the dust particle, the blemish, grounds our perception to the experience the body and time."

Danica said that in some ways, she found exploring a different discipline like "being immersed in an unfamiliar language", but she believes that both scientists and artists seem to be responding to "the presence of an unrelenting, evolving question that is a platform for their investigation."

Both are "Dedicated and driven, often embracing the unknown or unknowable."

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Collaboration Challenge:

- What are you interested in besides art?
(science, geography, engineering, history, sport, cooking etc)
- Research your chosen area (discipline)
- Make an artwork that is influenced by your discoveries

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Consider another discipline that interests you – it could be an aspect of science, history, engineering, geography or maths – anything!

What are the main concerns of this field? Consider the types of tools, methods or materials used in this field. What is the language of that field? How are ideas represented and communicated? What images or symbols are used? For example maps are used in geography, with many different symbols to communicate the gradient of the land, features such as lakes or mountain peaks.

Consider how you can use the language and themes of this field to create an artwork. It does not need to be a literal or direct translation, but rather you are harvesting what interests you about this world.

What happens when you make an artwork that is influenced by ideas from another discipline? Does it give you new ideas and/or take you in a new direction?

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Let's reflect:

Collaboration with others helps us explore and challenge our own ideas and ways of doing things.

What have you learnt about yourself?

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Was is easier or harder to come up with ideas and solutions when collaborating?
What kind of collaborator are you?
What did you most enjoy?
What was the biggest challenge?