

Stephen Birch

looking out my back door

MCA LEVEL 4 SOUTH GALLERIES

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR 5-10 YEAR OLDS

Kids under 8 may need adult assistance.

This worksheet will help you to explore some of the **sculptures** and **installations** in this exhibition by Stephen Birch.

Stephen is an artist who lives in Sydney.

Stephen's work looks like things we see everyday or in nature. He often makes them by hand out of **synthetic** (not real) materials. Looking at his work we are sometimes not sure what is real and what is not!

Stephen uses many different materials and things (also called **media**) to make his work including **papier-mâché**, **resin**, **fibreglass**, **video** and **TV screens**.

ALL THESE ARTWORKS ARE VERY FRAGILE. PLEASE STAY WELL BACK!

WORD BANK:

papier-mâché is French for 'chewed up paper'. It is made with strips of paper and glue.

resin is a thick liquid that becomes hard. Some resins can be found in nature on cut trees. Resin can also be made in laboratories using chemicals.

sculpture is an artwork that is three dimensional.

installation is an artwork made up of sculptures or other objects placed in a room. Installations change the way we feel about a space.

★ Look up the meaning for 'fibreglass' in the dictionary or on the internet. Surfboards are also made of fibreglass. Can you think of other things?

Before you go into the exhibition read the information in the box ➡

Gallery rules:

- 1.** Children must be **supervised by an adult at all times.**
- 2. WALK SLOWLY** in the gallery space.
- 3. Stay at least a metre back** from the artworks.
- 4. DO NOT TOUCH** the artworks. Use your eyes, not your hands!

★ Activities with this symbol can be done at home.

Take the lift to Level 4. Walk out of the lift. Stop and turn to the right. Look up!

1. *Cosmos* (2002)

Look carefully around the ceiling. How many heads can you see? _____

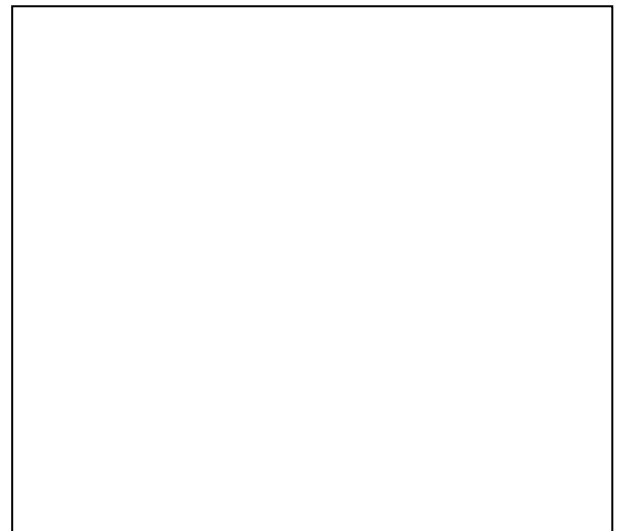
Are they the same person? **yes** **no**

How do you know? _____

Stephen made masks of people who are friends of his or who work as artists in the Sydney art world.

Each head has no hair or eyebrows.

Draw one of the heads in the box below: Draw your head with no hair:



The title of the artwork, **Cosmos**, comes from a Greek word meaning 'order, orderly arrangement, ornaments'. Cosmos also refers to the universe or outer space. Why do you think Stephen called this work **Cosmos**?

Circle any of the words below that describe how you **feel** when you look at this work.

scared watched weird brave excited
strange cold sad annoyed tired
confused small calm happy

Look to the left. Walk over to the figure of Spiderman.

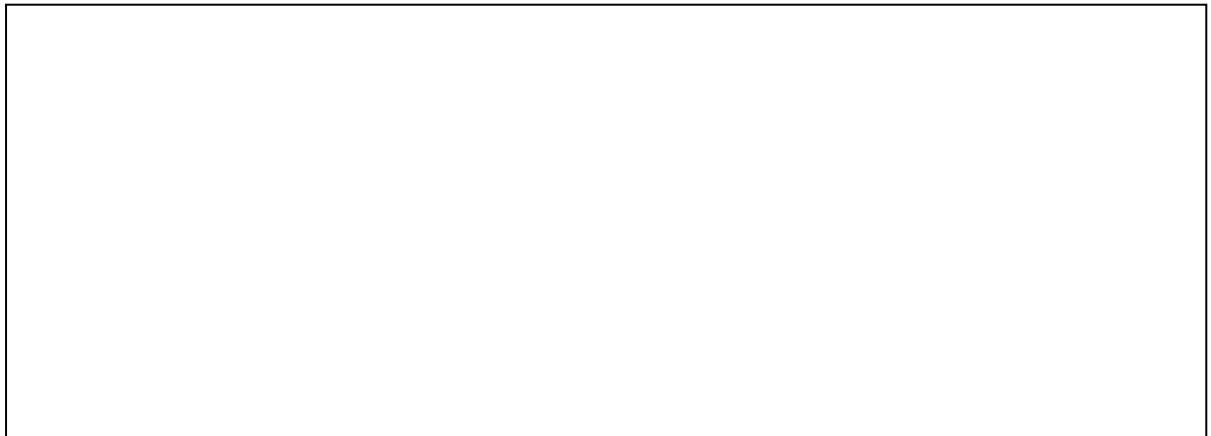
2. *Untitled* (2005)

What is the cartoon superhero Spiderman famous for?

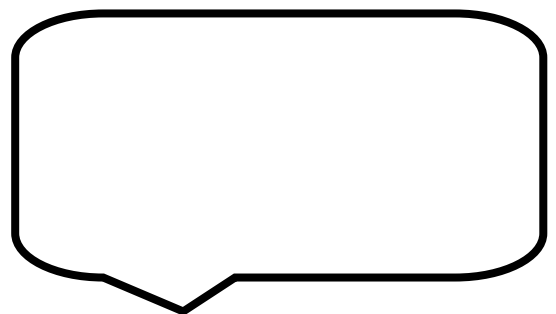
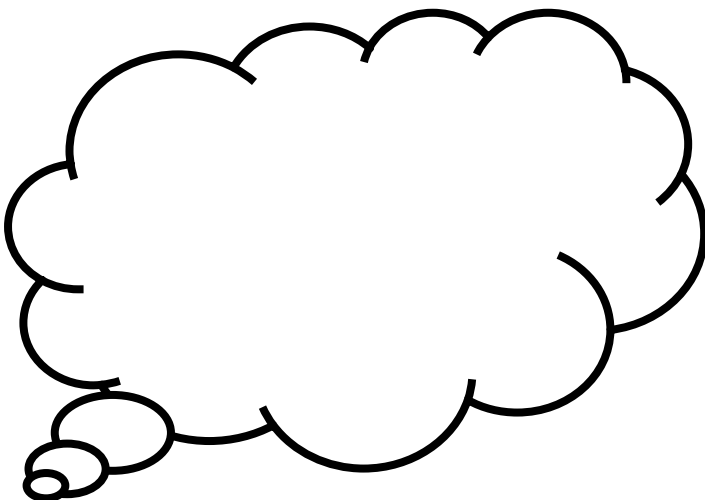
Does this Spiderman look like he can do anything special? Why or why not?

What super power would you like? _____

Stand to the side of the sculpture. In the box below make a sketch of the strange face coming out of the wall. Try to capture all the details of his face and beard.



Spiderman and the other figure are looking very closely at one another. Write in the thought bubbles what they could be thinking.



Turn around and stop near the next work. The four different objects in this sculpture are placed on the floor along both walls of the gallery.

3. *Unforgettable* (1997)

Look really carefully at this work and **count to six**.

Now turn around so that you have your back to the work. DON'T LOOK AT THE WORK AGAIN until you have finished!!

Can you remember what was there? In the box below, make a quick drawing of everything you remember. Include as many details as you can.



Now you can look again. Fill in what you forgot.

Do you think the tyres, stick and rubbish bin look real? What are two clues in the tyre works that these are not real?:

Walk up to the label on the wall and write down the different materials used by the artist to make this work:

Walk into the space on the right. Be very careful of the artworks and the cords on the floor! Find a safe place to sit down.

4. *Westfield* (2003)

This work is made up of three different things all beginning with “M”. The first thing is **monitors** (TVs). List the other things:

1. **M** _____
2. **M** _____

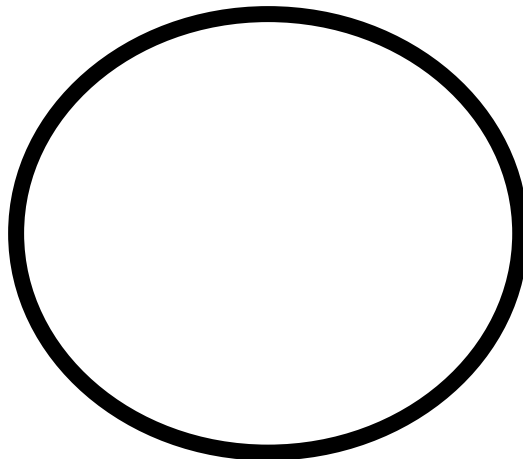
What is different about these mushrooms compared to the mushrooms in your fridge?

Stephen has made different types. Draw the different mushroom tops (known as **caps**) you can see in the box below. Draw a side view:



Look more closely. Can you find the mushrooms with stalks that look different to the others? What is different about them?

Carefully look up underneath the biggest mushroom to see the texture of the **gills**. Draw the **patterns** that you can see:



✪ Write a short story about where the white figure might be going...

Now walk out of *Westfield*, turn right and continue walking. Stand in front of the group of trees leaning against the wall.

5. *Underwood* (1998)

Look closely at this **installation**.

We know that trees are used to make paper. In this work Stephen has used paper to make the trees!

The trees all have a TV screen – it's like they are showing us **what the trees are thinking**. Name **three** things you can see on the little TV screens:

Why do you think the artist has chosen these particular things to be on the screens on the trees?

Imagine what would happen if the birds were in the gallery instead of on the **monitors**. Do you think that they would like living in here?

Use the space below to draw what you think would happen.



★ Make your own **papier-mâché** at home. Blow up a balloon and tie the end in a knot. Rip up newspaper into long strips. Use glue to wet the paper. Wrap the paper around the balloon until it is completely covered. (When the paper dries you can pop the balloon, pull it out and decorate your object with paint).

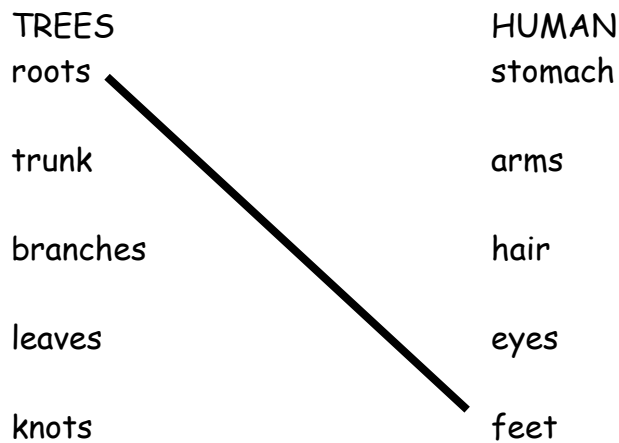
Turn around and walk (carefully!) in amongst the trees. Do you feel like you are in a forest? Two of the trees are different to the other ones (clue: look near the floor). Walk over to these trees.

6. *Civic minded* (1999)

The artist has added something to make the trees seem part-human. Draw these things in the box below:



Trees and humans have some things in **common**. Trees seem to have similar body parts to humans. Draw lines between the lists to match up the parts. We've done the first one for you.



What do you think the trees are doing? Maybe they are having a meeting or just looking at each other. In the first box, draw the trees as they are now. In the other boxes, draw a cartoon of what they will do next.



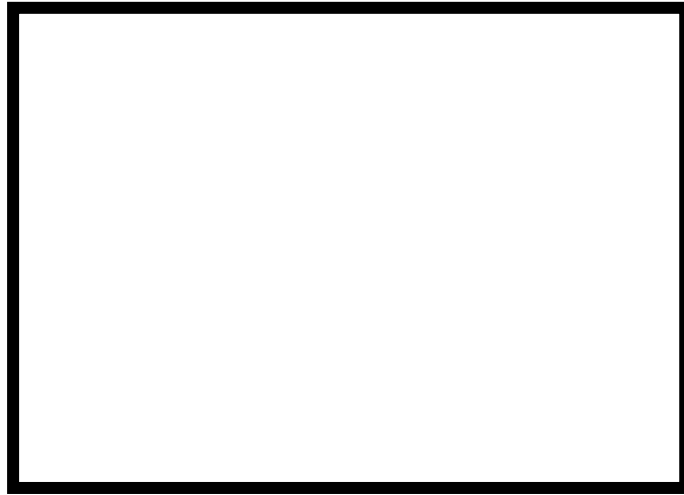
Look to the right of *Civic minded* to find the small tree stump on the ground. Sit on the ground near it.

7. *Happiness* (2000)

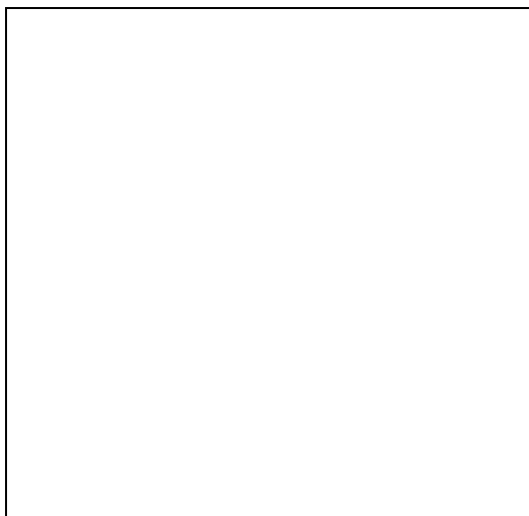
Look closely at the tree stump. This stump is smoking a pipe.

Instead of smoke, pictures are coming out of the pipe. This is an **animation** (a series of pictures shown really fast so they look like they are moving) TV cartoons are also called animations.

Draw one thing you can see on the screen:



Stephen made this artwork very carefully to make it look like it is made out of real wood. In the boxes below draw two of the different textures of the wood.



Now walk carefully into the middle of the big tree trunks. Be very careful to not touch them.

8. *Woodsprites* (2000)

Look closely at the trees. **Imagine** trying to climb them... Are these like the trees we would find in a park?

What are two things that are missing from these trees?

This artwork also uses **monitors**. Instead of birds or trees these screens show **faces**. Watch one screen on the **floor** and one on a **tree**. What the faces are doing on the monitors?

This artwork is called *Woodsprites*. A **sprite** is a fairy or a goblin. Who or what do you think is the Woodsprite in this artwork? _____

Look up! It looks like the trees go right through the gallery ceiling. Draw what the next floor up might look like with the trees going up into it:



This is the last work we will look at in the galleries. But there is one other surprise work by Stephen Birch outside the building! Turn and walk straight out of the gallery to the lift. Go down to Level 1.

Before you go outside return the clipboard and pencil to the MCA Front Desk. Take this worksheet with you!

As you leave the MCA, look on the front lawn to find the final artwork. Look carefully but don't touch!

When you look at the artwork ask your family or friends:

- Do you think the tree is real?
- What other kind of knots do trees have?
- Have you ever had a knot in your stomach?
- What else does tying knots remind you of? Talk to your parents about this (it was once common for a person to tie a knot around their finger to help remember something.)
- What do you think this tree knot might mean?

EXTRA ACTIVITY:

Stephen Birch doesn't talk much about what his works mean - he likes people to make up their own minds. If you would like to tell Stephen Birch what you think of his exhibition, or what you learnt about his artworks, email education@mca.com.au with "Stephen Birch Worksheet" in the subject line - and we will pass it on to the artist!

**Thank you for visiting this exhibition.
Please return your clipboard and pencil.**

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**Stephen Birch: looking out my back door
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THIS EXHIBITION IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF MCA AMBASSADORS



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