



Exploring Identity Through New Zealand Art Education Resource

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About this resource

Centring on New Zealand painting from the late 18th century to today, The Fletcher Trust Collection offers a rich resource for learning and inspiration. This unit introduces ākonga to artworks created in and reflecting Aotearoa New Zealand, offering deeper insight into the pieces, the artists behind them, and their broader cultural, historical, and thematic contexts.

Designed for ākonga in Years 7–10 (Curriculum Levels 3–6), the unit explores the theme of Identity through three artworks from the Collection. It considers how contemporary artists express—and sometimes challenge—ideas of identity through painting and textiles. Students will engage in observation, discussion, critical thinking, and art-making to explore the diverse ways identity can be represented in artworks by Jacqueline Fahey, Ayesha Green and Areez Katki.

While primarily aligned with the Visual Arts learning area, this resource also supports learning in English and the Social Sciences, demonstrating how art can be a powerful cross-curricular tool. It has been designed as an adaptable toolkit, allowing teachers to select and customise materials to suit their classroom needs. Key sections are structured to be easily extractable as handouts for direct student use.

To introduce the theme of **Identity**, kaiako might consider the following activities:

Personal Reflection: Ask ākonga to reflect on the prompt, “What makes you who you are?” Students can write a short response (1–2 paragraphs) about something that shapes their identity, such as family, culture, or experiences.

Collaborative Discussion: Use open-ended questions to encourage conversation, such as: *How do we show who we are through art? Can art capture what makes us unique? Why might someone choose to represent themselves in a particular way in an artwork?*

Visual Analysis: Show an artwork that explores identity (such as one from this resource). Ask guiding questions like: *What do you notice in this artwork? What do you think the artist is saying about identity? How does the artwork make you feel?* Record responses as a class to highlight different perspectives.

Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum Links Composite of Levels 3–6

This resource offers the opportunity to develop the five key competencies of the New Zealand curriculum: thinking; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing. It is also relevant for a majority of the Levels 3–6 achievement objectives in the New Zealand Curriculum for Visual Arts, as well as presenting opportunities in other learning areas, as outlined below:

Visual Arts: communicating and interpreting, developing ideas and practical knowledge, understanding the visual arts in context, and inspiring curiosity

English: understanding oral, visual and written language

Social Sciences: understanding how identity is formed by history (may also support teaching of the Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories curriculum)

Understand Big Ideas

Ākonga can explore ideas about the theme of **Identity** in response to artworks by Jacqueline Fahey, Ayesha Green and Areez Katki.

This unit also connects to each of the Big Ideas outlined in the Visual Arts NZC, especially *Whakapapa – Visual Arts descends from, embodies, and creates forms of cultural expression* and *Visual Arts communicates ahurea tuakiri and evokes responses*.

Explore
Communicating
& Interpreting

Ākonga can think critically about how identity is formed, represented, and interpreted, both in artworks and in their own lives.

- Describe key elements in an artwork using appropriate visual language.
- Identify visual evidence to support interpretations and ideas about artworks.
- Interpret emotional tone, symbolism, and mood in visual art.
- Explore how materials and techniques contribute to the meaning of an artwork.
- Analyse how artists express identity, heritage, and belonging through visual choices.
- Explain how stories can be told visually without words, using composition, setting, and metaphor.
- Make personal connections between artworks and their own experiences of emotion, family, culture, or belonging.
- Use critical inquiry, evidence, and collaborative discussion to build shared understandings of artworks.

Create
Developing Ideas &
Practical Knowledge

Ākonga develop practical knowledge as they:

- Identify and reflect on places, memories, and objects that are meaningful to their identity.
- Experiment with visual elements such as colour, pattern, spatial layout, and symbolic imagery to communicate aspects of self and belonging.
- Explore a range of media—including collage, photography, drawing, and painting—and use techniques such as flatlay composition, bold outlines, abstraction, and perspective to express layered ideas.
- Create artworks that communicate personal meaning through intentional artistic choices, drawing inspiration from the work of local artists.
- Reflect on how artists Jacqueline Fahey, Ayesha Green, and Areez Katki use place and identity in their work, and apply similar strategies in their own art.

Jacqueline Fahey In My Studio



Jacqueline Fahey
b. 1929, Timaru,
Aotearoa

In My Studio 2021
Oil on canvas
1065 x 605mm

A key figure in Aotearoa's feminist art, Jacqueline Fahey is known for her richly coloured paintings that reflect her perspective as a woman. Her detailed works often show scenes from the home and suburban life, including her own family life: birthday parties, messy kitchens, eating takeout, teenagers fighting over stolen clothes. When Fahey began her career in the 1950s and 1960s, society had strict rules about how women should live. Fahey used her paintings to push back against these expectations, employing busy compositions and unusual perspectives to reveal the complexity—and often claustrophobia—of women's lives at this time.

Fahey has painted herself many times over her long career, sometimes using mirrors to show her reflection among objects in a room. In this painting, there is a red velvet chair, which at first seems to be the main focus. However, instead of sitting in it, Fahey appears off to the side, seen in a mirror wearing blue latex gloves to keep her hands clean while she paints. Other details in this painting provide more hints about Fahey herself, where she lives, and the things that matter to her.

IDENTITY

EXPLORE — JACQUELINE FAHEY

What do you see?

What can you see in this painting? Work with a partner to list all the things you notice.

Are there any clues that suggest where in the world this painting is set?

Using your list, come up with at least three true statements about the subject of this painting.

How is it made?

How has Fahey used space and placement in the painting? What might it mean that she isn't in the centre?

Why might Fahey use mirrors or reflections in her self-portraits? What effect does that have?

How can colour show emotion or identity in a painting? Consider what stories the colours in this painting are telling. Are there any colours that feel like "you"?

What does it mean?

What do the different objects in the painting tell us about Fahey? What might her story be?

What can everyday things, such as chairs, gloves, or furniture, tell us about a person? How could they help tell a story without showing a face?

Artists have been making self-portraits for hundreds of years, often placing themselves clearly in the centre of the artwork. Fahey takes a different approach by only showing a small part of herself and situating this at the very edge of the painting. Why do you think she chose to do that? What might she be saying about herself by focusing on showing her studio instead?

Why does it matter?

Fahey has observed that there is power in self-portrayal, saying:

I always thought to insert oneself into a painting was a radical thing to do. Taking charge of it! This is my story, not someone else's story!

Do you agree with Fahey that it is a powerful thing to paint yourself? Why do you think this might be particularly important for women, or for other groups in society?

How can someone tell a story about themselves without using words? What role can objects, images, and settings play?

Inspired by artist Jacqueline Fahey, this activity invites you to create a self-portrait that tells a story about you. Instead of the usual selfie, you'll explore new ways of showing yourself through everyday objects, reflections, and the spaces you live in. Just like Fahey, you'll use colour, detail, and unexpected angles to express your identity, interests, or even a moment in your daily life.

Step 1: Brainstorm Your World

Start by thinking about what you want your self-portrait to say about you:

- What objects do you use every day?
- What colours or clothes feel like you?
- What's a moment from your life—funny, ordinary, or meaningful—you'd like to show?

How do you want to be seen: up close or in the background? Clear or half-hidden? Relaxed or dramatic?

Jot down a few ideas or sketch them roughly in your journal.

Step 2: Choose Your Path

You could also try combining the two approaches: create a painting of a flatlay that includes a reflection!

Pick one of the two creative paths below:

Option 1: Flatlay Photograph (Bird's Eye View)

Create a flatlay—a photo taken from above—where you lay out objects that tell a story about you.

But here's the twist: Find a way to include a reflection of yourself in the image! Use a mirror, shiny object, or even a screen to capture your face or hand.

Tips:

Use a phone or camera held directly above your setup. Try placing the mirror at an angle that catches your reflection. Play with lighting and shadows to create mood. Include layers such as objects, books, clothes, snacks, drawings; anything that will tell the viewer about you.

Option 2: Mirror Painting (or Drawing)

Set up a mirror and paint (or draw) yourself reflected in it. Like Fahey, you don't have to be the centre of attention—let the objects around you, the room you're in, or even your expression, do the storytelling.

Tips:

Use bold colours to highlight important parts.

You can show yourself painting or holding something, just like Fahey with her gloves!

Think about what's in the background—posters, plants, piles of stuff—they all add meaning.

Try an unusual angle: sit to the side, look away, or crop part of your face.

Ayesha Green Mum (May 1985)

Ayesha Green
b. 1987, Ōtautahi
Christchurch,
Aotearoa

Mum (May 1985)
2020
Acrylic on canvas
1690 x 1390mm



Ayesha Green (Ngāti Kahungunu, Kāi Tahu) is a contemporary Māori artist known for her bold, graphic paintings. She uses bright colours and flat shapes to explore how Māori and Pākehā people have been represented throughout history. Her work often asks questions about the stories we've been told, asking what is true, and what might be a myth?

This painting is based on a photo taken when Green's mum, Christina, visited their marae, Ōtākou, for the first time. She's standing at the entrance to the whareniui (meeting house), Tamatea, looking almost like she's about to begin an important journey—you can practically feel her excitement and nervousness. Painted in Green's iconic, cartoon-like style, Christina almost looks like a superhero from a comic book, the main character in a pūrākau that continues beyond just this one image.

Like her mum, Green didn't grow up near Ōtākou. As an adult, she went to live in Ōtepoti (Dunedin) for a while, close to the marae, and has been learning more about her whakapapa (family history) and building connections. This first visit of her mum to Ōtākou is really important in the story of Green's family because it was the first time someone had been back in generations. In a video interview, Green describes how her great-grandmother Hine always wanted to go back there to meet her cousins but wasn't able to because it was such a "long journey, cost money, and she had heaps of kids."

This portrait isn't just about one person: it's also about family, ancestors, and finding where you belong. The whareniui in the background represents all those who came before, and the way this place ties them together.

IDENTITY

EXPLORE — AYESHA GREEN

What do you see?

What do you notice first when you look at this painting? Describe the colours, shapes, and what the person is doing.

Who is in the painting, and where are they? What clues tell you about the setting or environment?

How is it made?

How does Green use colour, shape, and style to create a mood or feeling?

How does her cartoon-like style affect the way you see the person?

This painting is really big, about the height of a tall adult. How do you think seeing it at this scale might change the way you view it?

How does the wharenui in the background help tell the story in the painting? What does it make you think about?

What does it mean?

What feelings or ideas do you think Green wanted to express in this painting of her mum?

What does “finding where you belong” mean? Have you ever had a moment like that?

Have you ever been somewhere that helped you feel connected to your family, culture, or history? How did that experience feel?

Why does it matter?

How does this painting help tell a story about whakapapa? Why do you think that’s important?

How can art help people connect with their culture or heritage?

What can we learn from artworks like this one?

Activity 1:
At the Doorway

Create a portrait of yourself (or someone in your whānau) standing in a place that is meaningful to your identity, such as your grandparents' home, a marae, a church, a park, a beach, or a cultural festival.

Taking inspiration from Green, experiment with using a comic book style: think bright, flat colours and bold outlines. Think about including symbols or background details that hint at the history or significance of the place.

Activity 2:
Memory Map Collage

This activity is about reflecting on a place that is meaningful to your identity and representing that place through a creative, layered map.

- Where is a place that's meaningful to you?
- Where do you feel a strong sense of connection, pride, or belonging?
- What place reminds you of your whānau, culture, or personal history?

It might be a marae, a grandparent's house, a church, a local park, a festival site, or even your kitchen.

Sketch a map of this place from memory (it doesn't have to be geographically accurate). Think about including paths, rooms, landmarks, or special corners. Think of the emotional landscape as well as the physical one.

Next, add collage elements that tell your story. These could include photos, words, symbols, and drawings that reflect your connection to that place. Think about memories, family names or photos, smells, sounds, traditions, even foods or objects.

You can also show a "journey" on the map. Use arrows, footsteps or a drawn path that show how you move through the space. Is there a particular part of your map that is the most important place for you?

Areez Katki

Grasping (three anachronisms)

Areez Katki
b. 1989, Mumbai, India



Grasping (three anachronisms) 2020
Cotton thread hand-embroidery on handwoven
ikat khadi cloth , 810 x 360mm

Areez Katki is an artist who works with language and materials to explore ideas about identity, culture, and memory. Their art often tells personal stories and mixes real memories with imagined ones.

Born in Mumbai, India, and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau, Katki has moved between these two very different places throughout their life. This experience has made them think deeply about belonging to more than one culture at the same time.

For the past ten years, Katki has often returned to an old family apartment in South Mumbai. This home is not just a place to stay, it's become a part of their artwork. They use it to explore questions about mixed identities and what it means to live between different worlds.

Katki comes from a Zoroastrian Parsi-Irani background, is queer, and grew up as the child of migrants. Their art explores all of these parts of who they are. They often use writing and embroidery—especially stitching on old fabrics—as a way to tell stories. This is something they learned as a child, sitting with the women in their family.

In this artwork, Katki explores how colour and shape can make us feel and remember things. They use abstract patterns and marks (rather than clear pictures or words) to express complex emotions and memories.

The artwork is stitched onto a special handwoven fabric called *ikat khadi*. The colours in the fabric were carefully chosen based on a chart that links colours to different feelings. Katki designed the fabric so that both the horizontal and vertical threads match specific emotions.

By using embroidery and fabric, Katki connects to their cultural background and personal history. This artwork is inspired by memories of their childhood home and is a way of showing deep thoughts and feelings without using language.

IDENTITY

EXPLORE — AREEZ KATKI

What do you see or sense?

Katki doesn't use clear pictures or words in this artwork, only colours, textures, and stitched shapes. What kind of feelings or memories do you think they might be expressing? (Don't worry too much about being "right" — focus on your own interpretation of these elements).

What colours, textures, or shapes stand out to you?

How would you describe the mood of this piece?

How is it made?

The artist stitched onto a fabric called ikat khadi, which they helped design. Why do you think the fabric itself is important to the meaning of the artwork? You may want to look at the meanings and histories behind ikat and khadi.

How might the artwork feel different if it were made with paint on canvas instead of stitching on cloth?

Each thread colour in the fabric was chosen to match a feeling. Are there any colours you personally connect with a specific emotion or memory?

Do you think something made by hand, like this artwork, feels different from something made quickly or by a machine? Why might the handmade process matter?

What does it mean?

Why do you think artists like Katki sometimes choose to tell stories without using any words? What do you think Katki might be trying to say through shape and texture?

Katki learned embroidery as a child, by sitting with women in their family. How do you think using a traditional craft like stitching might help tell a personal or cultural story? Are there any traditional crafts from your culture that are used to tell stories or make connections?

Katki says their art is about "living between different worlds." What do you think that means?

Can you think of a time when you've felt in between different places, cultures, or parts of yourself? How might you express that experience without words?

Why does it matter?

What makes this artwork powerful or meaningful, even without words or clear images?

How do you think traditional craft techniques like embroidery be used in new ways to tell modern or personal stories? What other crafts could we use to tell our own stories?

Like Katki, we all carry different layers of identity: our culture, memories, feelings, and family traditions. Instead of using words, this activity helps us explore those layers through colour, pattern, and shape.

Step 1:
Make Your Colour
& Pattern Chart

Create a chart with two columns, like the one below:

EMOTION or MEMORY	COLOUR or PATTERN
Feeling proud	Bright red + triangles
Feeling safe	Soft wavy green lines
Lost in the supermarket when I was 5	Black tangled scribbles

Fill out your own chart with at least 10 emotions or memories and invent your own symbols and patterns to represent each one.

Step 2:
Design a “Fabric
of Identity”

For this part of the activity, you will need:

- Coloured yarn or thread, watercolour or acrylic paint, coloured pencils, or collage materials
- A4 or A3 paper, or canvas/fabric if available*
- Ruler or tape to divide into a grid or panel design (optional)

Using your chart as a guide, create an abstract artwork that shows your identity without words.

Aim to include at least 5 colours or patterns from your chart and think about how you might layer these, use different textures or perhaps create a sense of movement.

You can divide the artwork into sections like a patchwork or let it flow freely like fabric.

*You might also choose to bring in a specific fabric or textile to stitch or paint your designs onto, for example, a piece of tapa or ngatu, woven flax, a tartan cloth or even something from your family life such as an old piece of clothing or tea towel.

IDENTITY

Jacqueline Fahey

Jacqueline Fahey, *Say Something!* (Ōtautahi: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2017). [PDF available](#).

[Jacqueline Fahey: In her own words](#), a video interview with curator Felicity Milburn

Other self-portraits by Fahey:

Final Domestic Expose – I paint Myself
1981–82

oil and collage on board

[Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Collection](#)

Fraser sees me, I see myself
1975

oil on hardboard

[Te Papa Tongarewa Collection](#)

Jacqueline Fahey is represented by [Gow Langsford Gallery](#).

Ayesha Green

Ayesha Green, *Folk Nationalism and other stories* (Te Whanganui-a-Tara: City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi, 2023). PDFs of most essays available [here](#).

[Ayesha Green on The Good Oil: Conversations with Aotearoa Painters](#) podcast 2024

Ayesha Green is represented by [Season Aotearoa](#) and [Jhana Millers Gallery](#).

Areez Katki

Areez Katki [website](#)

Areez Katki profile via [Satellites](#)

André Chumko, [“Areez Katki on queerness across histories and cultures,”](#) Stuff, March 2021

[“Areez Katki: breathing new life into the art of embroidery,”](#) RNZ interview, 2022

Areez Katki is represented by [McLeavey Gallery](#) and [Tim Melville Gallery](#).