

Keys to the collection— Stories

Juan Davila

“For him, art doesn’t just offer imaginary or symbolic resolutions to real problems, but is itself a practice of freedom, even if that freedom can look pretty weird or unpleasant from the outside.”

—Justin Clemens, *Haranguing the Nation*, The Monthly Magazine, 2007

Juan Davila was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1946. He studied at Colegio del Verbo Divino between 1951–63. He trained as a lawyer at the Law School of the University of Chile between 1965–69 and attended the Fine Arts School of the University of Chile from 1970–72. Davila exhibited in Chile in 1974 then moved to Melbourne that same year. He has exhibited with many Australian and international galleries. Davila was editor of the *Art and Criticism Monograph* series in Melbourne and a member of the Committee of Revista de Critica Cultural in Santiago, Chile.

Davila is intent on debating issues of social and political significance and his works of art offer have a deliberate element of shock value. His complex and controversial paintings interrogate cultural, political and social issues and values. His earlier works frequently used mixed-media to create dislocated compositions of text and imagery.



The bush burial—

Davila often appropriates iconic works of Australian art. This work of art alludes to the iconic colonial painting *A bush burial* by Frederick McCubbin (1890) which is a significant work of art in the Geelong Gallery’s renowned collection. McCubbin’s painting celebrates settler fortitude in the face of loss. Davila uses the same title in his painting, *A bush burial* (2000), but brazenly recasts McCubbin’s painting. Davila echoes the idea of new settlement in Australia but he takes up the current issue of refugee arrival in Australia rather than that of colonial settlement.

**Geelong
Gallery**

AusVELS level 7 to VCE
geelonggallery.org.au/learn

Juan Davila
A bush burial 2000
oil on canvas
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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Juan Davila

born Chile 1946;
arrived Australia 1972

A bush burial 2000

oil on canvas

200.0 x 260.0 cm

Collection: Geelong Gallery
Gift of the Helen Mcpherson
Smith Trust and the Geelong
Gallery Foundation, 2001

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Question

What do the art terms 'appropriation' and 're-contextualisation' mean and how do they apply to Davila's work?

Both McCubbin's and Davila's works are considered exemplary in art terms. How have opinions of 'good' art changed over this 100 year period? Explain.

Research

Research Davila's *A bush burial* and attempt to interpret the symbols. Use this information to explain the meaning of the painting.

Activity

Create a cartoon which speaks about a new start in a foreign land. It may be any country or era and may reflect on political social or emotional issues associated with migration. Alternatively, create a cartoon which speaks about Indigenous people being dispossessed in their own land.