



## Education Guide

# Alison Page: Creative Shape Shifter

Saturday 16 May - Wednesday 1 July 2026

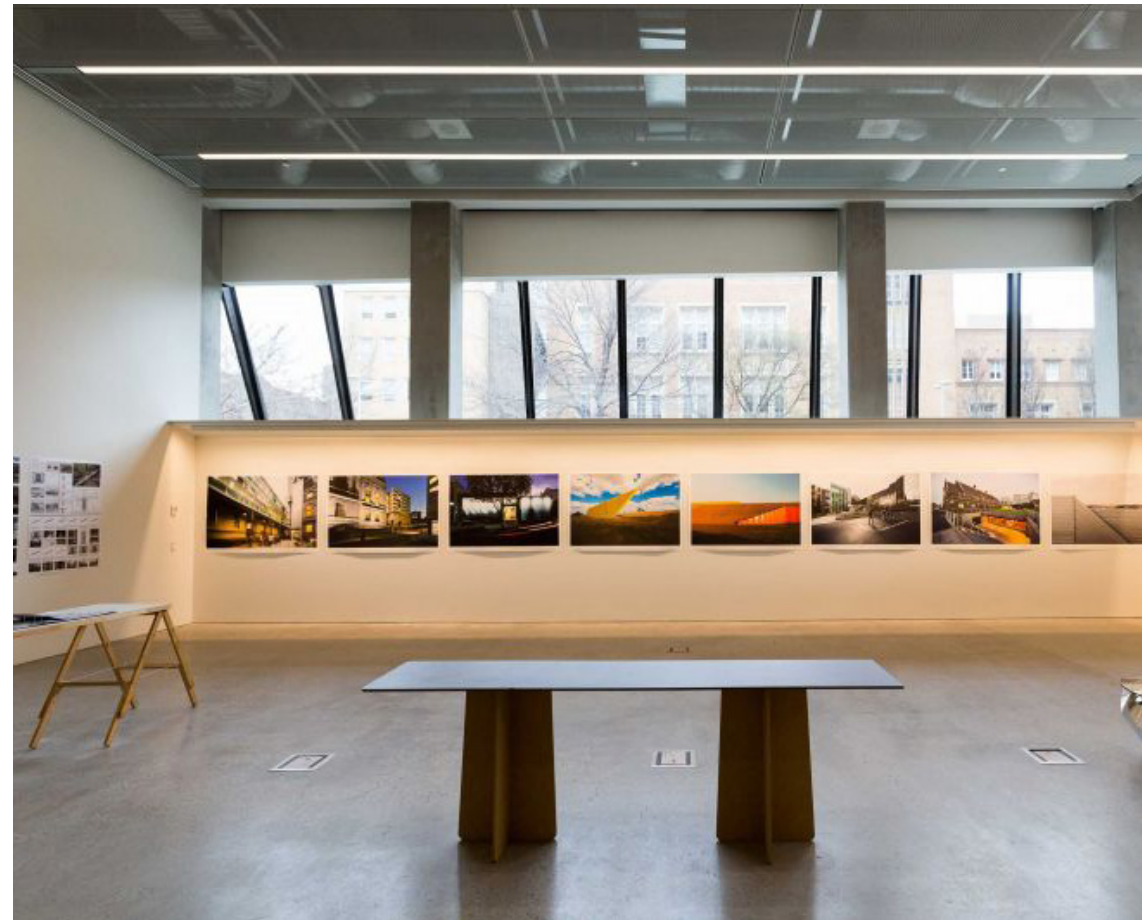
The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples, the Yorta Yorta Nation, and the Dja Dja Wurrung people. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy.

This education guide has been made possible through the generous support of ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects. We gratefully acknowledge their ongoing commitment to design, innovation, and creative practice.

# Introduction



The Design Gallery, located on the lower ground floor of the Glyn Davis Building, showcases innovative design through exhibitions of plans, films, models, and artworks. Exhibitors include students, academics (university lecturers), alumni (past students) of the Melbourne School of Design, and established professionals from the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, planning, art and construction. For students, presenting work in the gallery often marks the culmination of a major project. The large L-shaped space can be partitioned to create different configurations to suit different types of exhibition. The gallery's purpose is to enrich the MSD community by highlighting new and creative ideas, approaches, and techniques relevant to the built environment.





## Exhibitor

Alison Page, a descendant of the Dharawal and Yuin peoples, is a designer renowned for her work in the contemporary Australian Aboriginal cultural movement. Although Page is trained as an interior designer, her design practice is multi-disciplinary, which means she works across different forms including industrial design, public art, interiors, exhibitions, and urban design. She began her career in the late 1990s with Merrima, Australia's first Aboriginal Design Unit, which was part of the NSW Government Architect's Office. She is a Professor of Practice in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney, and founder of the National Aboriginal Design Agency and the Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance. In 2015, she was inducted into the Design Institute of Australia Hall of Fame, and in 2021 co-authored *Design: Building on Country*, as part of the Thames & Hudson First Knowledges educational book series.

## Alison Page's Language groups

There are more than 250 Indigenous languages and 800 dialects spread across Australia. Every single language group is specific to a particular part of Country and a people. Descending from the Dharawal and Yuin Peoples, Alison Page belongs to two different language groups.



# Exhibition



Alison Page: Creative Shape Shifter follows Alison Page’s twenty-five-year almost thirty-year career in design, beginning with her big question: What is Aboriginal design? It then explores how Blak design can influence and shape everyday Australian life and culture.

Alison Page is a designer, filmmaker, and artist who always has new ideas in motion. Her work is driven by stories—both ancient and modern—which guide her design process and help people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, connect to Country. With a strong entrepreneurial spirit, Page looks for ways design can support social and environmental justice for Aboriginal people. This exhibition showcases her diverse practice and includes interior and landscape design, public art, furniture, jewellery, and curating festivals, exhibitions, products, and films.

**“..the relationship between art and architecture doesn’t work when there hasn’t been that dialogue at the very beginning about the story of the place and Country.”**

(<https://architectureau.com/articles/alison-page-on-artwashing-in-architecture/>)

– Alison Page on the relationship between art and architecture, 2025.



# Key Ideas



## Key idea 1: Designing with Country

At the heart of Alison Page’s work is the idea of Designing with Country. This means she collaborates with Aboriginal communities, organisations, and other design practitioners to help ‘awaken the memory of Country’ through historical research, embedding storytelling in the design of places, objects, spaces and art installations.

## Key idea 2: Design is Storytelling

Alison Page sees design as a form of storytelling. For her, storytelling is an important way to develop a design because it helps explore ideas and bring them to life. In the Indigenous worldview, the built environment is an extension of Country, which is made up of a network of interconnected sites and stories. Consistent with Aboriginal Songlines, Alison believes stories are best told in many different forms—through art, design, dance, body paint, or graphic design—which explains why she works across so many areas. Storytelling is a social activity, and by sharing knowledge, it helps create connections and a sense of belonging.



### Key word: Blak

When you see Blak spelled with a capital B and without the “c”, it has a specific meaning that is different from the usual word black. The term “Blak” was coined in 1994 by Erub/Mer (Torres Strait) and K’ua K’ua (Cape York) artist Destiny Deacon. Deacon used it as a way to reclaim the word and push back against its colonial and derogatory (insulting) uses – reinventing it as a label of pride and Aboriginal identity.

# Inquiry questions:



## 1. How does storytelling play a role in Alison Page's exhibition?

Think about how the exhibition uses diagrams, objects, and the order of the display to tell a story.

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## 2. Choose one collaborative design from the exhibition.

Think about how the exhibition uses diagrams, objects, and the order of the display to tell a story.

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## 3. What does it mean to design and build on Country in a way that is not only creative, but also respectful?

How could the materials, stories, and knowledge of Country influence or shape a design? For reference, see Alison Page's furniture designs.

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# Workshop Activity: Onsite — Invent a Jaffle



In 2016, Alison Page worked with Australian appliance company Breville to create the Aboriginal Culinary Journey range. These appliances feature artwork by Aboriginal artists, are sold worldwide, and 100% of the proceeds support culinary education and nutrition for Indigenous communities.

The very first appliance Breville ever made was a jaffle maker. The jaffle is an Australian invention, and Alison Page sees it as a great way to share culture and personal stories through making and enjoying food together.

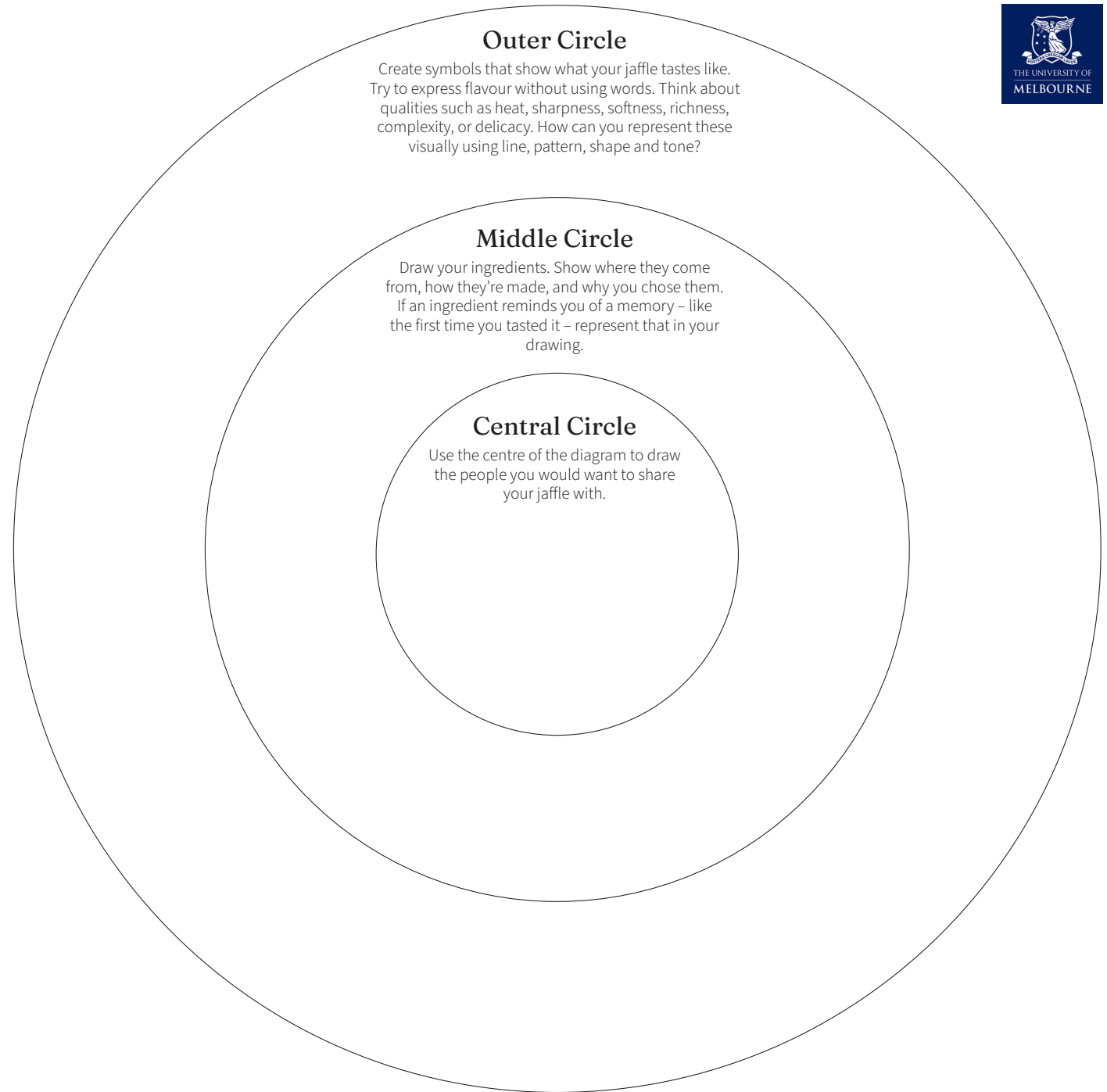




## Your Task

Invent your own jaffle and write a “recipe” using the diagram provided. When choosing your ingredients, think about how they can:

- Connect to your culture or background
- Combine flavours in surprising or original ways
- Represent ideas or hold symbolic meaning
- Avoid using words - approach this as a visual storytelling task



# Workshop Activity: At School — Create a Songline



For more than 65,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have passed down cultural knowledge without written language. Instead, they shared knowledge through Songlines—songs, stories, dances, ceremonies, and map-like narratives that hold important information about Country. It is a way of remembering vast amounts of knowledge by connecting it to the world around us. Songlines teach everything needed to live well on Country: animals, plants, landforms, climate, weather, and how to find food.

## Your Task

Create a Songline for your school by embedding useful knowledge about your campus. The goal is to communicate important knowledge without the written word by embedding knowledge in your school.

## Example:

If you're learning about elements in science, you could make a Songline that teaches where different elements appear in your school's materials. You might point out copper pipes (copper, phosphorus), glass windows (silica, sodium, calcium), stainless steel (iron, carbon), bricks (magnesium, silica, iron), or concrete (calcium, silica, aluminium, iron).

## How to Present It

Express your Songline as a story, song, artwork, or even a movement/dance piece that travels through your school. You could use symbols or post it notes pasted around the school. Describe things like:

- How the school was built
- Important dates or historical events
- Techniques used in construction
- What happens in different locations around the campus

## Extension

Research where the materials used in your school probably came from.

- Are any of them sourced locally?
- Which parts of Country do they come from?
- How many different Indigenous Countries have contributed to your school's built environment?