Bantay-Salakay installation view, 2025, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental. Photography by Sam Roberts.

Mark Valenzuela: *Bantay-Salakay*

Exhibition Kit

This exhibition kit has been developed by ACE Education to support student learning and engagement with the ACE exhibition *Bantay-Salakay*. Inside, you'll find a curatorial overview, background information on the artist, and insights into selected artworks.

The kit includes discussion prompts to encourage critical thinking, along with a flexible activity designed for use in the classroom or gallery setting. Educators can adapt the content to suit primary or secondary students, integrating it into broader visual arts, history, or cultural studies learning.

ACE

About the Exhibition

Audiences will enter a hostile environment of spikes, weeds, walls, shards, and noise, in an installation that combines ceramics, steel, timber, textiles, sound, and more. This exhibition can be seen and experienced from multiple angles, through an installation layered with colliding ideas. Spiky ceramics, for example, in some cases reference the encroaching spread of introduced weeds, and in turn colonising and oppressive forces; while elsewhere in the installation they are a nod to anarchic resistance to dominating forces.

Valenzuela considers the offensive and defensive characteristics of a place through the prism of his experiences in his home country of the Philippines and adopted country of Australia. The Philippines, Valenzuela believes, has a certain level of protectiveness, if not defensiveness, which stems from its history of colonisation. Defensiveness also typically appears in relation to the economic hierarchy, in the ways those with money and resources seek to protect and defend themselves from the majority poor. At an interpersonal level, however, Filipino culture is not characterised by defensiveness, but quite the opposite. The Tagalog term pakikipagkapwa translates to a kind of shared unity with another person, a term that means there is no space between oneself and another.

Comparatively, Valenzuela considers the lack of pakikipagkapwa he has experienced in dominant Australian culture. Through his work, he seeks to explore the reasons for this absence of pakikipagkapwa – population size, the individualistic nature of the dominant Western culture, the tenuous hold that most Australians have on this land that was never ceded by First Nations people - which manifests as a ubiquitous and pervasive defensiveness.

Bantay-Salakay installation view, 2025, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental. Photography by Sam Roberts.

About the Artist

With a career spanning two decades, Mark Valenzuela is an Adelaide-based artist who works between Australia and the Philippines. Although his practice wilfully resists categorisation, ceramics is an enduring medium for Valenzuela and has functioned as a linchpin to his many-parted installations that combine elements of painting, drawing, sculpture, video, assemblage and street art.

Working between the two countries, Valenzuela's expanded ceramic practice is sensitive to space. It considers ideas of occupation and annexation; examines themes of conflict, dominance and resistance – reflecting on his early experiences growing up in army base camps throughout the southern Philippines – and frequently combines the personal with the political.

Valenzuela was the Feature Artist for the 2022 SALA Festival and the recipient of the 2022 SALA Publication, a monograph dedicated to his twenty-year practice. His works have featured in the 2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art (2020), the 15th Australian Ceramics Triennale (2019), and the 3rd Jakarta Contemporary Ceramics Biennale (2014). He is a recipient of the 2015 Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award and is represented by Artinformal Gallery.

Mark Valenzuela. Photography by Rosina Possingham.

Selected Artworks

Bantay-Salakay installation view, 2025, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental. Photography by Sam Roberts.

Ceramic objects representing amulets are placed on top of a tall steel structure called an agimat. Each amulet contains a small speaker that plays a different sound. On their own, each sound feels unique, but when they come together, they can seem like a conversation, or even like the steady rhythm of a heartbeat.

The agimat is inspired by a Filipino protective amulet, often worn like a vest for strength and protection. Traditionally, it symbolises warmth, spirituality, and care. In contrast, the artist has made this structure from cold, heavy materials like concrete and steel. This contrast reflects the idea of *Bantay-Salakay*, a Filipino concept describing how protectors can sometimes turn into predators.

At the same time, the work also looks to the idea of pakikipagkapwa, recognising the self in others, and building community through trust, care, and shared humanity. By filling the amulets with sound, the artist connects this tradition with the spiritual use of voice, prayer, and chanting.

The combined soundscapes act like an invisible architecture of community, bringing people together. The layered rhythms invite us to listen more closely, to notice how sound can synchronise our own breathing and heartbeat, and to consider how art and sound can connect us with one another.

Discussion

- Valenzuela's work refers to Bantay-Salakay — when protectors become predators. Who or what do we trust to keep us safe, and what happens when that trust is broken?

Selected Artworks

Bantay-Salakay installation view, 2025, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental. Photography by Sam Roberts.

At the front of the room stands a hybrid structure that combines three familiar elements of Filipino street life: the karton (food cart), sari-sari (small convenience stall), and paipitan (metal cage used to transport pigs ready for market). By joining these components, the artist Valenzuela captures the rhythm and character of everyday Filipino street culture, showing both its ordinary routines and subtle tensions.

In the Philippines, where access to formal education is limited for many, spaces like the sari-sari often serve as hubs for information and learning. Valenzuela's structure highlights how everyday spaces carry cultural meaning.

At the base, terracotta fish heads are arranged to resemble street food, reimagining what is familiar in a new artistic form. Above them, a 100-peso fan from the Philippines rotates, its blades replaced with strips of plastic cellophane. Even though the flies it was meant to repel are gone, the motion continues, inviting viewers to notice small details of daily life. Valenzuela reflects, *"These things have become novelties since living in Australia. It's almost like kinetic art."*

Suspended from the structure are anting-anting, small, handcrafted amulets made by Valenzuela's mentee, Mikoo Cataylo. These amulets symbolise protection through trust, creativity, and shared culture. Unlike the ceramic rebar, which critiques fragile colonial structures, the anting-anting gain strength from friendship, collaboration, and care, reflecting the Filipino value of pakikipagkapwa, or shared humanity.

Discussion

- Through the idea of pakikipagkapwa, Valenzuela explores how sound and community create a sense of togetherness. How can we recognise ourselves in others and build stronger connections in our own lives?

Gallery Discussion

- Valenzuela grew up in the Philippines and now lives in Australia. His art explores living between cultures and the impacts of colonisation. How do you connect to your own culture, identity, or sense of belonging? What challenges or opportunities do people face when living between different places or traditions?

- The exhibition title Bantay-Salakay means "guard who attacks." What do you think this phrase suggests? Can someone—or something—be both protective and harmful at the same time?

- Valenzuela uses sharp forms, broken ceramics, steel, textiles, sound, and video to build his installations. What feelings do these materials create for you? Why might the artist choose to use everyday or fragile objects in his work?

- Valenzuela links the histories of colonisation in the Philippines and Australia. What connections can you see between history and the present in this work? How can art show both personal experiences and bigger political stories?

Classroom Activity

- Brainstorm words or phrases that come to mind when you think about boundaries in your own life. These could relate to:
  – Physical boundaries (walls, fences, doors)
  – Personal boundaries (privacy, safety, limits)
  – Cultural boundaries (rules, traditions, expectations)

- Using clay, cardboard, or recycled materials, create a small structure that represents a boundary. Experiment with forms such as walls, fences, barriers, doorways, or more abstract ideas, and texture or added objects to show if the boundary feels protective, welcoming, dangerous, or uncertain

- Alter your structure to explore change. You could break, crack, or cut a section. You could even add holes or weave string through gaps. Reflect on how damage, change, or repair shifts the meaning of your boundary.

- Bring the class works together in a group display. Reflect on the collection, how do the boundaries look side by side? Do they feel stronger together, or do cracks and openings create opportunities for connection?

- Walk around and respond to your peers' works. What repeating ideas or motifs do you notice? What similarities and differences emerge? How does combining individual works change the overall story about boundaries?

Further Reources

- Contemporary Art in the Classroom: Mark Valenzuela, ACE, video
- Mark Valenzuela, Wakefield Press, book
- markvalenzueladotcom, website
- Meet Your Maker: Mark Valenzuela, The Adelaide Review, article
- The 25th South Australian Living Artists Festival has officially opened!, Australian Art Review, article

Curriculum Links

Australian Curriculum / Visual Art /
Years 11–12 SACE Objectives

- Implement ideas and representations
- Apply literacy skills
- Analyse and interpret visual language, expression and meaning in art
- Evaluate art practices, traditions, cultures, and theories
- Experiment in response to stimulus
- Create meaning through the knowledge and understanding of art materials, techniques, technologies, and processes
- Realise responses to communicate meaning

Australian Curriculum / Visual Arts /
Years F-10

- Use materials, techniques and processes to explore visual conventions when making artworks (AC9AVAFD01 - AC9AVA10D01) (AC9AVAFC02 - AC9AVA10C02)
- Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times, including works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (AC9AVAFE01 - AC9AVA10E01) (AC9AVAFE02 - AC9AVA10E02)
- Respond to art works and consider where and why people make them, including visual art works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (AC9AVAFE01 - AC9AVA10E01) (AC9AVAFE02 - AC9AVA10E02)
- Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how they use materials, techniques, technologies, and processes (AC9AVA10D01) (AC9AVA10D02)
- Practice techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art making (AC9AVAFD01 - AC9AVA10D01) (AC9AVAFC02 - AC9AVA10C02)

Visit Us

Adelaide Contemporary Experiemntal

Lion Arts Centre
North Terrace (West End)
Kaurna Yarta
Adelaide SA 5000

Open Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 4pm

Contact

+61 8 8211 7505

education@ace.gallery

Tours

We welcome visits from education groups, primary through to tertiary, and encourage self-guided visits to our exhibitions. For more information about how to book, visit our website or email us.

Terms of Use

This education resource has been produced by ACE Gallery Education to provide information and classroom support material for education visits to the exhibition *Bantay-Salakay*. The reproduction and communication of this resource is permitted for educational purposes only.

Curator: Danni Zuvela
Mark Valenzuela is the 2025 recipient of the Porter Street Commission – ACE's annual award supporting new artwork commissions by South Australian artists. The performance program is supported by City of Adelaide and presented as part of the South Australian Living Artists (SALA) Festival.

Adelaide Contemporary Experimental (ACE) is supported by the South Australian Government. ACE is also assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its arts funding and advisory body. ACE is a member of Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia.