

Dennis Golding

Connecting Back, 2026

earthenware, stoneware, stains, oxide, ochre, steel, clear glaze

Courtesy of the artist

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Education Resource (7-12)



Former Aboriginal flag mural, Eveleigh Street Redfern, circa 2003.

Photograph: Patricia Baillie.

Courtesy City of Sydney Archives.

Overview



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Do you remember the colourful wire bead-maze toys often seen in doctors' waiting rooms? For most, they represent idle boredom. For Kamilaroi and Gamilaraay artist, Dennis Golding however, this object serves as a potent metaphor for his upbringing in Redfern, Sydney.

To understand the work, you must understand the landscape of Golding's childhood in the 1990s. Redfern was the heart of Aboriginal self-determination, yet it was also a site of struggle where Golding watched the systematic demolition of housing in 'The Block' and the forced displacement of his community.

Consider the toy's mechanics: beads trapped on a rigid, pre-manufactured wire. This mirrors how First Nations families were confined by urban planning decisions, forced onto predetermined paths of relocation with no agency to change direction.

In *Connecting Back*, Golding reclaims that agency. He scales up the toy, replacing thin wires with heavy metal scaffolding and plastic beads with oversized ceramics. He transforms the passive act of waiting into active wayfinding. The pipes are not random; they trace specific memories—the sweep of a family car door, the surf at La Perouse, and the lines of his childhood terrace house.

Crucially, the work incorporates bricks cast from the debris of a demolished community mural. By threading these fragments onto his own artistic pathways, Golding asserts that while buildings may vanish, the community's connection to the site remains. The artwork refuses to be a monument to loss, instead relocating decision-making back onto sovereign ground.





Cast in cast out, 2020
Photograph: courtesy of the artist.

Discussion Questions

Golding's work associates the bead maze toy with public places of transition, such as clinic waiting rooms and community centres.



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How does Golding use this universally recognised **object** to **communicate** the experience of **displacement** faced by First Nations communities?
Displacement often leaves communities in a state of limbo. How does Golding use the **mechanics** of the bead maze (where beads are stuck on a fixed loop) to **symbolise** a place of permanent **transition**, rather than a place of **destination**?

Golding transforms everyday materials to shift the artwork from waiting to wayfinding. What **materials** or **structural** choices make the work feel an **active** act of **reclamation** (taking back control) rather than just a **passive memory**?

He uses the colours of the Aboriginal flag to embed cultural identity into the infrastructure of the work.

How would the meaning of the work **change** if these specific **colours** were removed?
How do they **function** as a claim to **sovereignty**?

Practical Activities

Activity 1

Think of a single place meaningful to you or your family. Examples can include a park, street corner, family home, local shop, playground, community centre.

Using pencils draw a simple map with key features of your place.

Make a tiny key of symbols for features of your place that have remained the same, been removed, or upgraded.

Using another colour pencil, marking changes with your symbols directly on the map.

Reflect on your map and think – which changes do you like? Which ones don't you like?

What do you wish stayed the same and why?

Save your map and put it in a special place at home, and if you like keep adding the changes to your map overtime, building your own archive of place for you to reflect on one day.

Activity 2

With a pen and new page, you are going to draw five big, bold, bendy lines across your page according to the the instructions below.

Make sure these lines thick, let them overlap and fill the page.

These are your versions of Golding's maze pipes, each one shaped by something real in your life and memory:



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The Action Curve — Draw the shape of a gesture you saw recently. It could be a wave, a hug, a door closing, a dance move

The Journey Line — Trace a route you take regularly. Something simple like a familiar road, stairs, hallway passage, the path to the bus, the drive to school

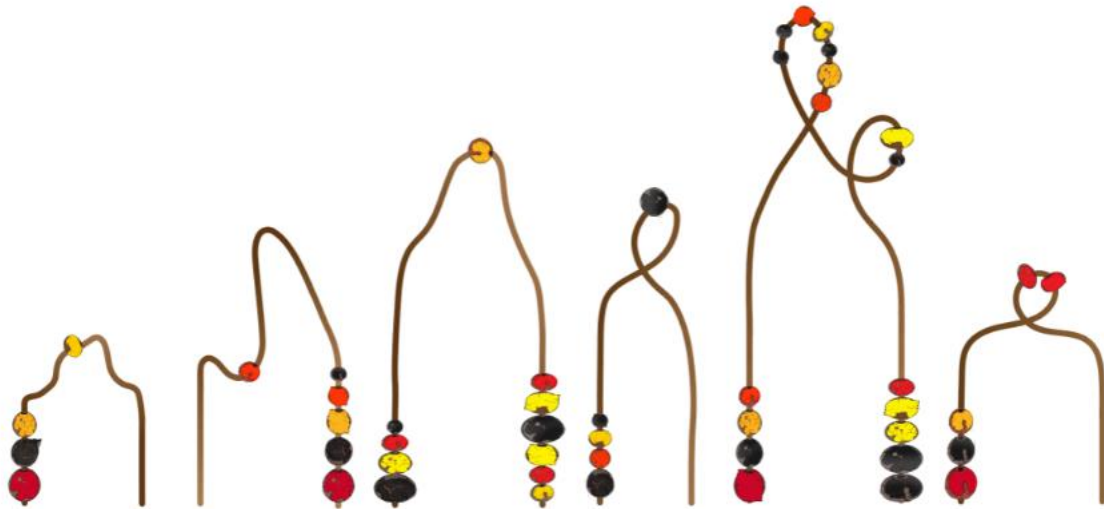
The Horizon Line — Think of a familiar place. What did the edge of the place look like? A roofline, a coastline, a fence, a mountain, the end of a street. Draw its silhouette.

The Carrying Line — Think of an emotion you had recently. Were you excited, tired, calm, hopeful, nervous? Draw a line that shows how that feeling moved through time. Did it build slowly? Stay flat? Come up and down?

Look at the pattern you've made. Does your maze feel like waiting, or wayfinding, or both?

Are the lines pulling toward a center, or radiating outward?

Write one or two sentences analysing the overall structure you've created.



Picking up the Pieces, 2026
Progress design
Photograph: courtesy of the artist.

