Themes:

- **Weather** warm · cold · tropical · arctic · meteorologist · forecast · unpredictable · changeable · global · climate
- **Political Events** news · global · domestic · foreign · serious · impact · governmental · happening · action · press · demonstrations · history · votes · universal
- **Trees** nature · varied · leaves · roots · bark · wood · paper · oxygen · global
- **Perspective** depth · surface · image · look · idea · viewpoint
- **Work** effort · toil · try · make · earn · labour · challenge
- **Towers** homes · concrete · rock · manmade · natural · tall · legendary · social · imposing · communal
- **Insects** small · big · creepy · shells · legs · wings · bugs · crawl · pattern · colour · antenna · scuttle · fly · food chain · nature
- **Interwoven** together · combine · overlap · layered · tied · linked · mixed
It is usually the case that Artists and Designers use materials specific to the theme of their work, so they can illustrate a specific meaning, mood or story. They may also consider composition, scale, colour, text and style. They will develop their ideas, refine them through testing, reflect and record their work in writing and practical outcomes and present their work to reflect the theme running through it.

When collecting research and contextual influences:

- Consider how the artist has made the work.
- Look at what materials have they used.
- Why do you think they used these materials?
- Do you think the medium effectively portrays the concept/ theme of the work?
- Do you think there is more than one theme in the work?
- Do you see inspiration/ influences from other artists, art movements or events in the work?

The following artists in Known Unknowns particularly illustrate some of the themes listed above:

**Weather** Chris Hood/ Maria Farrar

**Political Events** Alida Cervantes

**Trees** Tom Anholt/ Kirstine Roepstorff

**Perspective** Stuart Middleton/ Francesca DiMattio/ Tom Anholt/ Kirstine Roepstorff/ Saskia Olde Wolbers/ Maria Farrar

**Towers** Kirstine Roepstorff

**Interwoven** Stuart Middleton/ Francesca DiMattio/ Maria Farrar/ Kirstine Roepstorff/ Mona Osman/ Saskia Olde Wolbers
Osman’s work is bold, busy and buoyant. Both her use of colour and composition are intense and help to highlight the darker undertones running throughout her work. Themes including alienation, depression and darkness are explored and expressed in her paintings, with the characters taking on different emotional guises. The figures in her paintings seem to gesture and play with each other and the space around them. Much of her inspiration comes from philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Friedrich Hegel, from whom she explores what it means to be a human being. There is a strong sense of narrative in Osman’s paintings, which often comes with a sense of anxiety due to the tightly packed surfaces. The hustle and bustle of her paintings invite the viewer to sense a painterly charm of traditions long past. The witty titles also offer a clue to her state of mind and how she views 21st century life in general. Osman’s paintings are densely packed with symbolism and emotive scenes.

- The figures are interwoven across the composition
Anholt’s work is in a sense quite autobiographical, drawing inspiration from his Irish and Persian Jewish background, which pushed him to explore Christian and Islamic art history. His love for German Expressionism and neo-expressionism prompted Anholt to move to Berlin, with many of his recent works being reminiscent of Cubist collage. Colour is extremely important in Anholt’s work. He uses colour concepts to influence the viewer. He may use subtle colours to show harmony or intense colours to create conflict and clashing. Anholt himself says: “This depends on how I wish the viewer to view the painting, I may want them to take a warm bath or an ice cold shower”. He is antagonistic in his approach and says “nothing should be thought of as off limits”. His paintings fully engage the viewer, describing and deciding how they should be feeling. In this sense, his background, use of scale and colour concepts, very much impose upon the audience how they should be reacting to the work.

- **Rows of tress**
- **Interwoven** patterns and shapes making up layers of landscape
- **Flat perspective**, which has been elongated to create depth
Farrar’s paintings are playfully complicated. They use a wide range of techniques to weave together classical themes of Eastern and Western visual language. Highly autobiographical, Farrar’s work incorporates elements from the childhood she spent in Japan with a rich variety of artistic techniques she has learnt over the years. These include calligraphy, manga, old masters, the study of the nude and observational drawing. Within each painting, she will include various objects like tables, windows or fish and use them in isolation. This inclusion refers both to herself and to general impressions of luxury, loneliness or secrecy. Whilst made up of loose gestural marks, Farrar’s work maintains a strong sense of figuration, which cements a feeling of reality, albeit an abstract version of one.

- Wild weather
- Flat perspective, which has been elongated to create depth
- Western and Eastern visual language and techniques interwoven
Francesca DiMattio’s busily layered work is an embodiment of *Horror Vacui* or *Kenophobia* – the fear of empty spaces. Both her 2D and 3D work depicts a need to fill up every space. In her simultaneously structured and chaotic sculptures and paintings, everyday materials and patterns are reimagined, prompting the viewer to reassess how they perceive seemingly ordinary objects. Drawing inspiration from forms found in Dutch Tulip Vases, DiMattio’s ceramic sculptures reference stereotypes of femininity. Some of the sculptures even begin to take on animal like characteristics, with eyes and noses.

There is both a delicacy and brashness to the work, which helps to create a sense of playful characterisation within the pieces.

- Skewed **perspective**
- Altered **perspective**
- **Interwoven** shapes and layers of clay
Hood’s alternative methods of making offer alternative realities. On first impression, his large scale paintings look like brush washed landscapes. However on closer inspection one can see that the surface is in fact the back and the back of the canvas has been used to create the surface image, binding the back and front of the canvases tightly together. By using both sides of the canvas he allows his images to become their own master. This gives Hood’s paintings a sense of freedom and softness, which he controls by adding bold cartoon characters and bitmojis who represent elements of contemporary imagery. The “inside out” effect which occurs as the oils bleed through the canvas, together with the characters who live in amongst the landscapes, offer the audience a glimpse into the psyche of the artist and how he perceives online and social media outlets.

- Wild weather
- Indications of weather
Whilst Middleton’s mass of entangled body parts appears both strange and amusing on the surface, there is an underlying sense of something darker. Within his work, Middleton addresses themes of gender, social hierarchies, power play and money. His work in essence explores the human condition. His work focuses on the body, where he uses it as a carrier for exploring public expectations, whilst playing with the idea of fiction meeting popular culture. Using the human body also makes the themes within the work more relatable and relevant to the viewer, as they can identify parts of themselves within the structures. His practice is entirely multimedia, incorporating installations, sculpture, video, animation, and paper. There is a DIY feel to his work where he uses cheap accessible materials and a seemingly haphazard style of construction. This again makes the work more playful and comical.

- Odd perspective
- Off perspective
- Interwoven bodies
Roepstorff’s work is a visual exploration of alternative realities. Large in scale, she incorporates found images from the media and uses these images to question the systems and powers that be. Roepstorff uses collage as her primary tool, as well as glitter, aluminium, paper and paint, giving her work a sense of playful accessibility and the everyday. Each artwork is a cultural probe. She regularly makes reference to various standard cultural icons and plays with the format of them, in order to question and mock them. In Roepstorff’s Hidden Truth (pictured) the huge scale of the piece mocks the idea of advertising and imagery. Produced in the style of a billboard-sized postcard-collage, the work depicts an estate agent’s dream of a rustic sci-fi paradise, with building blocks precariously slotted in and around the sprawling landscape.

- Forests of trees
- Different types of trees
- Wide perspective
- Alternative perspective
- Tower blocks are interwoven
Perspective/Interwoven  Saskia Olde Wolbers  Gallery 10

Olde Wolbers uses traditional methods to explore contemporary themes. Working with film rather than digital media, she painstakingly builds each set in miniature – a process which can take years. This gives her work a sense of authenticity and timelessness. Whilst the stories in her videos are fictional, they do often take inspiration from actual news articles, television documentaries, and urban legends. This is emphasized in the way they are presented. At the same time, due to the structure of her work, her videos also often take on a science-fiction aesthetic, making them seem dreamlike. Nonetheless, Olde Wolbers’ work explores rich and topical themes including the dynamic of relationships, identity construction, and co-dependence.

The dreamlike quality only helps to make the themes more accessible.

- Altered perspective
- Different perspectives
- Fiction and reality are interwoven