

contains



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Following the success of 'Making an Exhibition of Ourselves', displaying sixty self portraits at the Contains Art Gallery on the East Quay Watchet last year, a number of exhibitors asked us if we would put on another group show for West Somerset Artists in 2015.

Last year the exhibition was seen by over two thousand visitors and we had exceptionally positive feedback, especially from those Schools and Colleges that came to the exhibition or used our on line resources.

Building on the experience of last year, this year's project/exhibition '**Knowing Our Place**', 12th to the 27th of September, continues the focus on 'self portraits' of the artists, but as the subjectivity of this title is very open, their interpretation of it highlights or suggests aspects of their personalities in a very different way.

The exhibition itself provides a fascinating insight into the places that the artists have chosen to share with you. Each artist has made an accompanying statement describing their approach and we have presented these together, with images of their work, in an exhibition Contextual Study Guide.

If you visited the show last year you would be aware that the work, presented using a fixed size and format, provided students with an accessible way of exploring the differences and similarities in the individual artist's approach to conceptual issues, media choice and compositional considerations. We have adopted the same fixed size as last year, in a landscape format, which has huge potential for use in the classroom or studio.

You can download a range of supporting on-line resources to coincide with the show from the 'resource' menu of our website www.containsart.co.uk. There are some 'off-the-peg' practical ideas for activities, which you may like to use as part of your teaching programme or in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition or as a starting point for further modification to suit your curriculum needs or the age ranges that you teach. The work itself provides a catalyst for creative discussion in the curriculum areas of Literacy and Art as well as a starting point for practical activity.

We hope there is something here for students of all ages, but if you have any other ideas for using the exhibition as an educational resource, we would be interested in hearing them and sharing them further on our website with other teachers/lectures in the region.

If you are thinking of visiting the exhibition or would just like more information please do not hesitate to contact: mikebradshaw3springs@gmail.com leaving your contact details and we will get back to you.

art contains



The curators: Sue Lowe, Andy Davey and Mike Bradshaw.

‘knowing our place’

The artist's world is limitless. It can be found anywhere, far from where he lives or a few feet away. It is always on his doorstep. Paul Strand

Throughout history, artists have been compelled to record and depict, where they live and work. From paintings by Van Gogh of his Yellow House to photographs of Mondrian’s abstract apartment, we are able to see the environments where great works have been conceived, made or constructed and we can piece together a context and imagine what it was like to live and work in these places.

You may have recently seen the Chanel 4 documentary on Grayson Perry’s ‘Dream House’, defining a sense of place through his constructed narrative about an imagined personality named Julie. We all have a place, which holds a particular connection for us. It maybe personalised and made accessible to practise and explore our creativity. It could be the kitchen, a bathroom, a room converted into a studio, the landscape itself or somewhere in our head.

Starting points for Practical Activities

The following tried and tested exercises would all be suitable ways to explore practical work in conjunction with the exhibition. We have adapted them from last year and broken them down into exercises that can be done whilst visiting the exhibition and ones that students can engage in at School or College. Some can be suitably tailored for both visits and classroom/studio venues if you download the images of the artists work from the resource menu on our website. We have not mentioned media exploration, which you may consider and personalise to your groups’ specific curriculum needs.

Art and Literacy

To build confidence in the vocabulary used to describe works of art and or the places and people they portray, students can work in pairs to play 'spot the picture'. Students describe the picture to their partner based on their observation of characteristics, colour, light, form, concept, expression, mood etc. and once the picture has been identified, they can move onto another one or swap roles.

If you download the Contextual Study Guide (artist's images of their work and their statements) from the 'Contains Art' website (via the resource menu) you can reproduce this exercise to be carried out in the classroom or studio. You will need to number each of two sets of colour copies, one which depicts the images of the work with the artists' statements (the Study Guide) and the other with just the image of their work to be displayed up on a board or screened via power point; you could use the 'knowing your place' poster for this.

The person describing the artist picks an image and statement at random from the Study Guide reads it out and adds any further clues they can describe from the work itself. Students listening to the student with the Study Guide, use the images on the board or screen to try and match the statement description, calling out the number of the of the piece of work when they think they know the answer.

There are over fifty pieces of work in the exhibition/collection so this exercise could take some time!

Auction

This is a fun role-play activity designed to help students understand the language- features of 'writing to describe'. Students are to imagine they are working for an auction house and they are on the phone to say, a Japanese buyer. They are unable to send a picture (of a chosen portrait from the exhibition) and have to describe the picture in detail. This exercise can be done in conjunction with the exhibition or using the down loads as above.

Additionally:

- A follow on or an alternative exercise for working in pairs, could be that one half of the group have to draw a picture using just the description given by their partners in the other half. The picture could then be revealed, comparisons made, difficulties discussed and the accuracy of the language considered.
- To continue building confidence in writing and speaking to persuade, students could 'auction' their particular picture, i.e. rather than just describe it, they have to sell it!

Vocabulary mining or comparative contexts

Choose a picture and see how many words can be found that could describe the picture or the context of how it is perceived. Students could be encouraged to start with physical description and then move into hypothesising about the mood of the artist.

Additionally:

- Given the nature of the exhibition i.e. having all work in the same size and format, viewing two different pictures together should enable quick identification/pinpointing of similarities and differences.
- You may even consider getting the students to write similarities on green slips of paper and differences on red pieces of paper? Depending on the age group this could then lead into work on sentence construction that compares and contrasts or takes them into more critical and contextual comparisons.

Art Critic

Students are asked to write their own review of the exhibition or a selected artist.

Questions like:

What went well?

eg. the work or particular aspects of it

What problems were there?

eg. layout of the space, use of light and shade

How could it be improved?

eg. signage, explanations, proportions, colour

Some students may find it helpful to use a word frame such as in the example below.

I really liked.....because..... I also felt
.....was a success because
However.....could have been improved
by.....
Also, I did not enjoy the..... because.....
Next time 'Contains Art' puts on a similar exhibition they could to make it even
better.

Additionally:

- This would work as a 'circle time' activity to encourage speaking and listening.
E.g. 'We liked this one because.....but didn't like this one because.....'

ICU: a 'what makes you special' activity

A quick icebreaker activity designed to support students, getting to know each other. Students are given the task of collecting objects, words, important things that are personal to them. These items are placed in a box or bucket with luggage tags labelled to say why they are important to the person whose collection it is. The boxes are mixed up, and then each box is examined in turn with one of the group reading out the labels and presenting the contents. The object of the exercise is to guess whose box or bucket it is.

Additionally:

- To build confidence in literacy skills, they could ask each other questions about their lives, perhaps prompted by the teacher: e.g. do you have a pet? What colours do you like?
- To focus attention on describing character and 'their place', students could pre-prepare some questions that could be drawn out of a hat by the teacher e.g. what are your favourite objects, toys, books, furniture etc?
- To inform the type of mark making used, the teacher could also prompt observation of surfaces, patterns and textures that could inhabit the imagined space eg. what kind of carpet, curtains have they got?

Observational drawing

An obvious starting point, but it would be remiss if we left this one out given its importance in helping students to both look and see. We have included a few suggested approaches below, but we are sure you will have many more to add.....do send us your ideas.

- As a homework, draw where you live.
- Older students could explore aspects of personality and a sense of place through drawing fellow students in the classroom environment using different media. Expression could be developed with a mouth, say, being drawn with different moods.
- Younger students could develop literacy skills with the describing different places they have visited and liked.

Chiaroscuro

As with observational drawing we have included this, for the importance that 'light' plays in creating a dramatic effect on the way we perceive our world. Students can identify work in the exhibition, where a dramatic light has been used and describe the effect on the way they perceive this.

Additionally:

- Using light strategically for effect, perhaps with the help of torches or sidelights, or through careful positioning near windows, students can draw favourite objects. For this approach, Black Berol pens, worked with a paintbrush and water wash can produce quick, expressive and dramatic results.
- A link with science and the affect of light on our world could be appropriate.

Continuous line drawing

In pairs students work on an observational drawing where the pen/pencil is not taken off the paper (works well with Berol felt tips). Students should be encouraged to look carefully at the object or space they are drawing and not the paper.

Additionally:

- This can be very successful when executed using wire as a 3D project.
- Discussion about the nature of drawing can be a useful follow on and can challenge the notion that drawings should be representational of the physical world.
- These activities can be further developed with use of colour and collage.

A recipe for our place

This exercise is about using descriptive words to construct ingredients for a recipe, which if followed by others will 'make' an individuals special place. Start by introducing phrases like a pinch of laughter, a delicious smile, a pint and a half of colour, crumble the wallpaper, roast the table, simmer cushions gently and whisk the trees.

My class

Another 'get to know you' activity at the start of the year. Students draw their life journey to create a personal 'metaphorical place'. For example, for things that have been difficult they may create mountains to climb, a forest to battle through, adding colours that express how they feel. These images are drawn on a small piece of card to which they add their name. These can then be pegged on a small line of string tightly wrapped several times around an empty picture frame.

Post it note exhibition

Add to the pictures in the exhibition by producing a fast drawing of a favourite place on a post it note, to be posted on a notice board.

Numeracy: Spot the.....

Looking at the work from the exhibition, students could be encouraged to spot how many, say, drawing easels are there in the pictures? How many paintings are mainly black and white? Questions could be linked to age groups and developed to go from simple counting activities to perhaps more complex numeracy for follow-up activities back in school, such as what percentage of the pictures featured landscapes, abstracts, rooms, still lives?

Simple and entertaining exercise to get students looking during a visit to the 'Contains Art' exhibition

Match the clues to the pictures! Write the name of the artist below.

This artist is floating!

.....

I can hear space

.....

Another fake!

.....

The Phoenix

.....

Strictly in the kitchen

.....

Wave patterns

.....

A chase with elephants and kingfishers!

.....

Sketchbook?

.....

Footprints in the sand

.....

Shadows of trees

.....

A fishy plaice

.....

Road to somewhere

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