

CASE STUDY:

BEYOND THE BALCONY

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Flow

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ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



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OVERVIEW

Beyond the Balcony is the title of the digital artist-led project, which aimed to offer longer in-depth engagement with community groups and a high-profile display and celebration for the conclusion of the Manet programme. Digital artists brook & black (Tiffany Black and Leo Brook) were commissioned to work with two groups to create digital responses to the portrait, and to make their own work to engage the wider public in the Museum and online. Participants created digital collages incorporating poems and self-portraits in imaginatively depicted scenes of their lives, using the balcony as a device, looking back into their past and domestic world, and looking out to future and wider landscapes.

These were combined into animated narratives, one for each group. The final work by brook & black involved a descendant of Fanny Claus, an artist herself now living in Paris, using the same theme of the balcony as a liminal place.

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SESSION OUTLINES AND FEEDBACK

The project ran from September 2015 to May 2016, with two five-week series of workshops for 12 members of Mind's art group and 20 people from Young Dementia UK.

Over the following pages we have outlined the activity from each session, and where available the feedback gathered from participants using a set of sensory prompts.

More detail can be found on the project blog <http://www.ashmolean.org/ashwpress/beyondthebalcony>



WEEK ONE

INTERIORS, VIEWS, BALCONIES, WINDOWS

The sessions started in the education space, where participants came together for the first time and found out about the projects themes of interiors, views, balconies, windows, and how these related to their own lives. They practiced using iPads to take photos, before going up to the gallery to see Mlle Claus's portrait.

They explored the third floor taking photographs to capture details and subjects that inspired them and related to the themes. They looked for imagined views from the balcony, or focussed on an interior and imagined the lives lived inside.

There were lots of interesting discussions in front of the paintings, on their thoughts or memories, which Brook & Black recorded so that they could use words and ideas in the final work later in the process.

The session ended back in the learning room with lunch and more discussions about the project themes, while the photos they had taken were projected onto a screen.



Mind on the gallery balcony (top) and YDUK in the gallery

Participants exploring the paintings for detail and colour

WEEK ONE

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - MIND

Twelve participants from the Mind group completed a feedback form at the end of this session.

I saw... Most of them mentioned the paintings they saw in the galleries; two mentioned the other people in the group.

I used my hands to... While most of the answers were very literal ('Take photos') four used language which reflected the session, such as 'capture', 'frame' and 'feel'.

I heard... There were six responses to this, half focused on the background noises, and half on the conversations they were having e.g. 'Interesting thoughts and ideas'.

I enjoyed... They all gave very short answers, seven mentioning the whole experience: 'it all', 'the experience', 'the time present' and five mentioning moments such as 'being in the galleries' or simply 'the pictures'.

I thought or talked about... Nine of the participants answered this. There was a focus on colour, and talking about the artworks e.g. 'Paintings and WHY they were made'. One of the more able participants was very moved: 'I got goose bumps, which to me signifies wonderful build up of great group energy'. Another was inspired to talk about their own art 'displaying my own portraits'.

I'm looking forward to... Of the nine responses only one was unsure of the experience, 'Not sure, felt a bit out of place, might be a bit too public for me this activity, but an interesting experience as a one off'. All the others were positive about the next week, with three talking about exploring or developing ideas and energy. One was looking forward to bringing in their own work, and two mentioned more social aspects 'Looking forward to going out again and sharing time and ideas with others.'

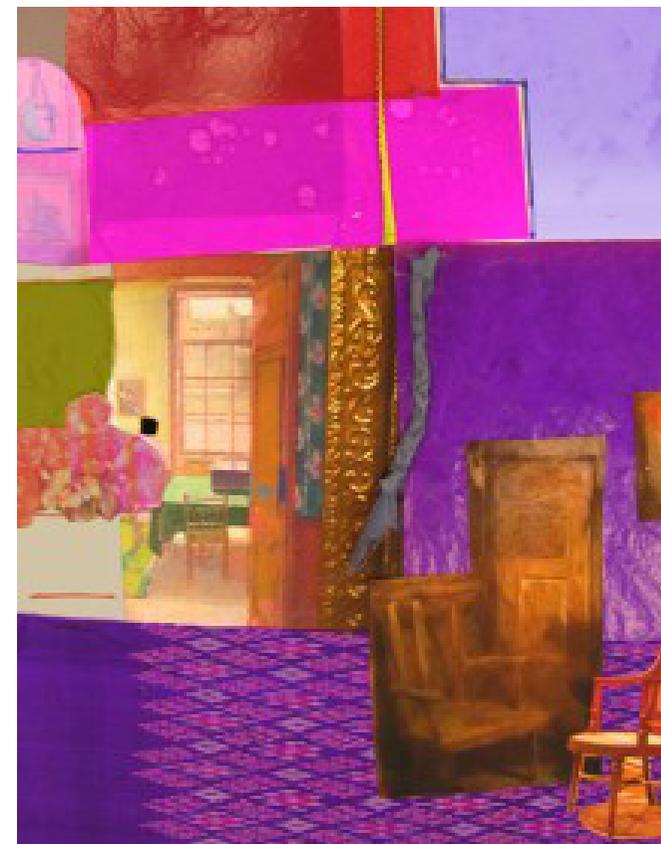
WEEK TWO

BEHIND THE BALCONY

The participants constructed a picture of an imagined space which Brook & black described as 'the space that lies behind us, or supports us, or perhaps where we are coming from'. They had been invited to bring in photos of their own, and use these alongside pictures that they had taken the week before to create a collage image symbolising their thoughts on this imagined space.

At first the participants found it difficult to settle into the concept of creating a symbolic image without worrying about it looking like a conventional picture, but they were all eventually able to create their own very different and intriguing work. Brook & black described the participants as eventually being 'absorbed' in the activity, and spoke of the energy and imagination that came through in the resulting images.

One of the OYAP volunteers Tess Anderson joined them to help and get to know the group.



Mind (top) and YDUK working on their backgrounds

The work of a YDUK participant

WEEK TWO

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - YDUK

I saw... Of the seven responses, five of them mentioned the other people in the room, or the work others were doing. Three mentioned pictures or artwork, one in a very descriptive way 'a picture of a lady in a room'. One found the session challenging due to her poor eyesight, so she responded 'I find the light quite dim in the room'.

I used my hands to... Seven responses were more process-driven, such as 'cutting, glueing, writing' and 'create an artwork using different materials'. Two were more tactile: 'Feeling textures/materials' and 'to greet'. The participant who was struggling to see was able to enjoy the collage aspect: 'I didn't know what we were doing particularly. But I had good fun because we made things out of tiny pieces.'

I heard... Four of the seven responses mentioned the music, two of whom also mentioned 'people chatting', which was the focus for the rest of the responses with mentions of 'conversation' or 'other people enjoying themselves'.

I enjoyed... The majority (five) of the responses referred to the creative stimulus: 'The colours, the French music, being creative', 'The whole creative process + sharing ideas and spaces' and 'The way it stimulated my imagination and working together'. Three were more people-focused: 'Taking part and being with everyone and looking at their work'. Lunch also got a mention.

'At the beginning I was a bit confused so I was a bit wary. But the best thing was to choose all those materials. We had such a good choice of colours and texture... I enjoyed it when people came over and said how gorgeous it was.' (Participant)

I thought or talked about... Conversations about the creative process either focused on ideas and techniques, such as 'How to break the rules in creating something', 'Everything including food, share ideas + where this whole project is going is slowly making sense', or about making connections with everyday life e.g. 'Connections about our life and past', 'Living in a prefab house'. Two of the participants also mentioned getting to know new people.

Next time I'm looking forward to... The responses were equally mixed between looking forward to the poetry aspects of the next session, seeing the people in the group again, and carrying on with the creative side of their work: 'Exploring poetry -> and bring humour/laughter into my poetry', 'Approaching a different art form and more work together', 'Working together to create the next stage of the session' and 'To see how it will all come together'.

WEEK TWO

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - Mind

I saw... Six of the responses were literal, such as 'Shapes, spaces' and 'Lots of colour and ideas, blossom' but only three mentioned photos, showing that they had seen beyond the materials they were using. Three were more conceptual: 'A different perspective of things', 'Clarity', and 'Fun, creativity in progress' and one of the more able participants summed up the process, 'An image from a photograph which grows into a story'.

I used my hands to... Two of the participants used the word 'create' and the rest were more descriptive of the process.

I heard... Only two mentioned the music in this session. The rest were very conceptual, using words such as 'encouragement', 'inspiration', 'Admiration', 'activity' and 'some moments of silent concentration'. One mentioned 'Advice and help'.

I enjoyed... Three of the participants enjoyed working with others, or seeing how other people's work came together. Four were more general: 'the creativity', 'the project'. Four had a more internal response about their own work: 'building my own thoughts', 'being free to

play with ideas' and 'not thinking about technique or composition'. The participant who had heard 'admiration' enjoyed the 'attention' they got from the group.

I thought or talked about... Their thoughts and conversations mostly extended from the activity they were doing, and how it made them feel. 'Feelings, love of art, colour, texture in general', and 'My work in ways I hadn't considered, feeling free to discuss the ideas and feelings'. They also thought about important things in their lives such as 'my children' and some transcended to new heights: 'Climbing the stairs into the light' and 'Standing on a pedestal of my achievement'.

Next time I'm looking forward to... They were very much looking forward to the next session, and the poetry they would both hear and make. There was a clear sense of continuation, with comments such as 'using my imagination further', 'developing ideas next week' and 'want to see it through'.

WEEK THREE

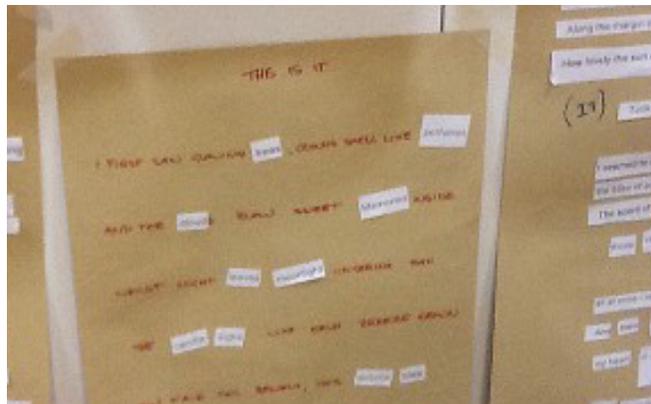
THE PERSON ON THE BALCONY

This week the group used poetry rather than imagery to explore and express their ideas. They listened to a poem by Baudelaire titled 'the balcony' and read some of their favourite poems out to the rest of the group. On Friday Tess from OYAP did a reading of Edward Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussycat'.

They then created poems of their own by cutting up lines from other poems and using these to create new ones using a collage method inspired by Dada, William Burroughs and David Bowie. Brook & black chose this method to allow them to be free with their thoughts and ideas, and were really pleased with the resulting poems, and the creative energy that they felt from the participants:

'We were all surprised by the intensity, humour and humanity that came through the works...really beautiful.' (brook & black)

For lunch they chose a French theme, and then talked about their own lives and poems, while imagining they were in a vineyard under a clear blue sky.



Sharing a French themed lunch (top)

Dada poetry exercise

WEEK THREE

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - YDUK

Feedback was received from the YDUK group after their session.

I saw... Only four people responded, with practical points mentioning the images and words that the session involved.

I used my hands to... Only four responses, and very literal, 'Create a poem from several other poems'.

I heard... Five responses, again very literal, 'Poems and other peoples' poems that they had created'.

I enjoyed... The group enjoyed the hands-on aspect of this session, and that it was a simple exercise that they could achieve easily. Comments were: 'It was easier than last week. I enjoyed this week because everything was coming through in my head that we had been doing. We were hands on', and 'Exploring ways of combining words and phrases to create an original poem'.

They also appreciated the way the session was presented: 'How the artists spoke, very openly'. And the French-style lunch was mentioned twice.

I thought or talked about... Three of the six responses to this question went further than the general, practical response to mention the more creative aspects: 'How I used to write poetry. I was put off, and now by talking about poetry has given me the confidence to write my own poems again'. And, 'The rhymes within the poems and the thought process to create our own poems'. Another response focused on the sharing nature of the group 'Enjoying the sharing lunch, enjoyed being with lots of nice people'.

Next time I'm looking forward to... The group were looking forward to going back to the gallery, and being together: 'We are definitely looking forward to being in the galleries' and 'Seeing everyone again. Once you share a bond it's nice'.

WEEK FOUR

IN THE GALLERIES

Prior to the session the team had set up a green screen in the gallery near Sickert paintings so that the participants could take it in turns to be filmed as if they were standing on the balcony, imagining that they were looking out at the scene in front of them. While they were waiting for their turn they took photos of each other in the next door galleries, and of portraits in the collection that they would look at again later, re-framing them to see them in a different way.

The group was also joined by professional film maker Sam Hamper who was there to document the workshop as part of a film chronicling the whole Manet project.

The filming was done in the open, public gallery, with other groups of visitors in the space. Visitors who were attracted by the lively activity were interested to know what the group was doing and what the project was about.



YDUK participants recreate the balcony scene on gallery

WEEK FIVE

BRINGING THE LAYERS TOGETHER

This week brought all of the previous work together to create a storyboard for the final film. The groups considered the views they might be looking out at from the balcony, looked again at their 'interior' collages from week two that might be behind them, as they imagined themselves sitting reciting the poems they wrote in week three.

There was a lot of activity but they were assisted by Nicola, Helen, brook & black, staff and helpers from their groups and two OYAP volunteers Tess and Emma. They were shown an example of how the final film might look, using the green screen images from the week before that brook & black had prepared prior to the session.

Once everybody had made their decisions they brought their work to a long table to lay it out like a storyboard, which brook & black would use to structure the final film. They made decisions as a group on the look and feel or 'mood' of the film, and there was an air of celebration, for example applauding as they saw it come together as a narrative.

Lunch was an opportunity to reflect on the process, and the participants shared their thoughts on their time together and how it had impacted on their lives.

'As we worked it felt really sad that the regularity of a Tuesday and Friday creative morning, with smiles and new friendships, was coming to an end.' (brook & black)

See the observation reports below for more details of this session.



YDUK storyboarding their final film

FINAL ARTWORKS

The project culminated with the production of two film pieces, one for YDUK and one for Mind. Alongside this brook & black researched and created an installation of digital artpieces inspired by the painting and their process of working with the groups.

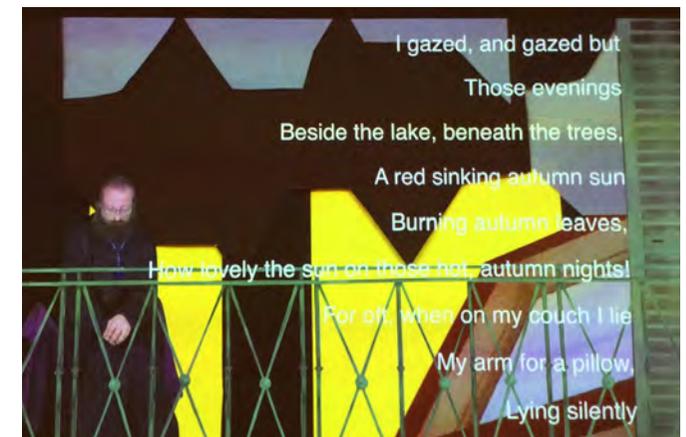
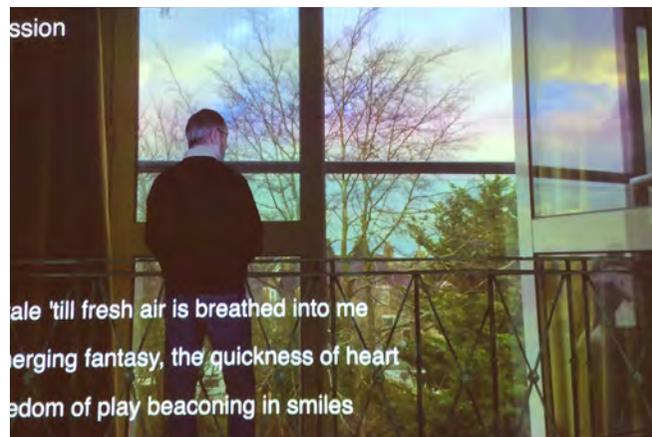
These were all displayed on gallery at the Ashmolean at the end of the project.



CELEBRATING THE FINAL FILMS

The participants' artwork, poems and photographs were edited together with a collage of sounds collected during the workshops to create the final films, with the help of multimedia artist Dave Farnham.

The final artworks were projected into the education gallery space, and the participants were invited with their families and friends to see them on two occasions – a private celebration event on the 8 May, and a public viewing as part of the Ashmolean's planned Late event on the 13 May.



Screenshots from the final films

CELEBRATING THE FINAL FILMS

8 MAY

The Celebration event was planned specifically for the participants, to give them an ending for the project, and a reason to come back together and celebrate what they had achieved. Participants from Mind and YDUK came with their families, and several of them arrived early and spent time in the Museum, an indication of their confidence in exploring the space gained through the project.

The participants were very well catered for, with many reminders of the project including displays of their work arranged around the room, the artwork and project blog projected for them to see, and cupcakes with edible images of the original portrait.

While people were sad the project has ended there were several outcomes mentioned in conversation that indicated that it will continue to positively affect people's lives. One participant mentioned a future exhibition of her work, and her intention to finish some of her drawings. Mind have started two new art groups, one about impressionism and one where they take easels outside, both directly because of their involvement.

Museum Director Xa Sturgis thanked the attendees, talking about the project's importance in the wider context of the Museum and mentioned an intention to continue working with both organisations in the future. The artists brook & black also thanked the participants, and the other people who had enabled the project including Nicola, Helen, the OYAP volunteers and Tim Payne who helped produce the final film.



Cupcakes and conversation

CELEBRATING THE FINAL FILMS

There was a lot of conversation in the room, with participants chatting to each other, and family members who had accompanied them commenting on the project and the effect it has had on the group.

‘Listen to that. Everyone’s chatting, that’s what we come here for. It’s lovely.’ Participant from YDUK

‘Dad has bad problems with his confidence, and normally holds on to mum’s arm, but then when we got here he was off, kissing his friends.’ Daughter of participant

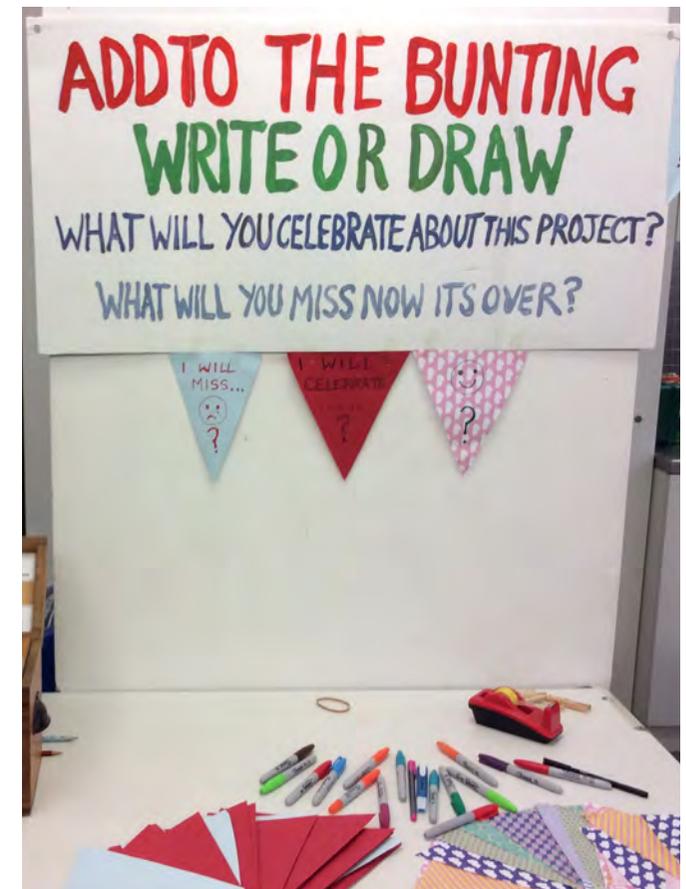
‘The project and the activities really stick in his mind and he remembers what he’s done in the week. It has affected his conversation, and he remembers people too.’ Sister of participant

‘Dad was gutted when it ended and wants to do more.’ Son of participant

‘It helps that they’ve been meeting over several weeks so they have got to know each other. It feels safe here. It’s a shared experience, with people like him, so he feels safe, he’s in the same boat.’ Daughter.

‘It is moving. For example, one of the people who took part said “Rest in Peace” when looking at the digital work, as there was a picture in it of someone who had died.’ Family member

To capture some of the responses of the participants we provided a simple activity to vote for a series of statements, and to tell us (on some bunting) what they will miss about the project. The comments gathered indicate that the biggest impact of the project has been on the participants’ confidence interacting with people, and trying new skills.



Collecting responses

CELEBRATING THE FINAL FILMS

13 MAY

The 'Late' event was independent of the HLF project but a good opportunity for the participants to see their work on public display, and the upper galleries were opened up specifically so that brook & black's additional artwork could be seen.

The film was projected in a prominent position, seen by everyone on arrival, and the participants who attended were clearly thrilled to see their work displayed in this way. A group of participants had gathered to look at the work and take photos, and were able to describe what the project had been about and what they had done to take part.

There was additional information on the project in the education gallery space, along with a slide show of images showing the participants at work. While this was not a main focus for the event, activity in the education room meant that a number of people would have had a chance to see it while they were waiting to take part. Upstairs in the gallery space was an installation of additional artworks created by brook & black, displayed alongside the portrait of Fanny Claus. These were the

mechanism of an umbrella which was opening and closing – relating to Fanny's family business, a video piece featuring Sophie, the great great grand-daughter of Fanny Claus, who brook & black had found through their research, and audio extracts of a book written by Fanny's son.



Viewing the artworks

CELEBRATING THE FINAL FILMS

Next door the OYAP group had installed an activity asking people to respond to the question ‘What makes you unique?’, by choosing a coloured card to add to a ‘pop art’ version of a portrait of Manet (the event coincided with a display of Andy Warhol art). This was not an evaluation exercise so the responses were not being recorded or analysed, but it provided an additional reason for people to visit the upper galleries. The young people were giving people tokens as they arrived to tempt them to come up to the gallery, which seemed to be a successful technique.

The additional artworks produced by brook & black had become a far larger element of the project than the Ashmolean team had expected. Finding Sophie and uncovering family stories led to new ideas, which were influenced by the themes the artists were exploring with Mind and YDUK. The timing of this side of the project meant that the influence was quite one-way because, whilst the participants were aware of the ‘discovery’ of Sophie, this did not necessarily feed into their own work. However, the participants will have benefited from the elevated status that association with professional artworks gave the project. Many of them came up to the gallery and spent time looking at the

artworks in situ, and would never have attended a ‘Late’ event if their work had not been included and linked to these pieces.

Installing the artworks was an opportunity for the education team to test something new, by curating this space and overseeing the installation. Installing contemporary art without an infrastructure will have been an additional challenge, but they have now set a precedent that this is possible, and beneficial to the Museum.



OYAP volunteers on gallery during the event

BROOK & BLACK – DIGITAL ART PIECES

In parallel to the artworks created in collaboration with the community groups, brook & black created their own artwork in response to the further research they carried out during the project.

The initial preparation for both projects by brook & black explored the links and themes that the painting brought up for them, including the poetry of Baudelaire, Fanny Claus and her life and family, other paintings by Manet and links with Goya. They thought about the comparisons between inside and outside, light and dark, painting and contemporary digital art. They were particularly inspired by the way Manet played with perspective in his compositions, which often seem like a collage of different views, and how this can make his work feel uneasy, detached and isolating.

Another important theme for them was light, and the way Manet's paintings are often lit with a flat brightness as if they are lit from the position in which the viewer is standing. This brought up ideas about Mlle Claus's 'gaze' and who or what is being seen.

Another strand of research into Fanny's life revealed that as a violinist she was part of the first ever all woman

string quartet, and digging deeper, they discovered a great great granddaughter Sophie Prins Gapinski who was herself a painter, and had exhibited in a gallery that Tiffany knew. Contacting Sophie proved difficult until they managed to contact the Mayor of Cordes where the gallery was based, and in January brook & black travelled to Paris to visit her. They were surprised and inspired by her work as an artist, which resonated with their own. Prior to meeting her they had decided to ask her to continue a line of work they had used in previous installations: the motif of the woman who paints onto the glass of a window or screen, and then having painted herself out of the picture, cleans the surface to re-emerge from the painted surface.

They were pleased that Sophie added her own imaginative and sensitive approach to their art piece, and read part of a text of the words of Fanny Claus's son recalling her death, which formed part of the final installation. Sophie and her husband were able to travel to the Ashmolean for the Live Friday event.

The final art pieces included a video of Sophie filmed from behind a sheet of glass that she was painting and cleaning to reveal herself alongside scenes of Paris. The

video screen was framed in a replica of the frame on the original painting, and hung in the same gallery. In the same room was the mechanism from an umbrella which was opening and closing (in part symbolising Fanny Claus's family business), and an audio piece featuring Sophie reading extracts from the diary of her great uncle.



Participants viewing brook & black's work

BROOK & BLACK – DIGITAL ART PIECES

Brook & black used the project blog to pay tribute to the team of people who helped to design and install the works, including City AV Oxford who installed the screen, and Engineer Tim Payne who designed and produced the umbrella sculpture's mechanics. From the Ashmolean team, Curators Cath and Matthew moved some of the Manet Sketches to hang next to the video portrait, Executive Officer Harry Phythian-Adams and Andrew Brown, managed the install alongside delivery of some new display cases the same day, and Sarah Mossop and Helen Ward who commissioned and supported the project:

'Sarah Mossop and Helen Ward, who have nurtured and encouraged the project from the start were invaluable this week, oiling the wheels and giving feedback and support.' (brook & black)



OBSERVATION REPORTS

Susanne Buck and Bridget McKenzie attended the final sessions for both Mind and YDUK. Their notes are below.



YDUK

OVERVIEW DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

On Tuesday 4 February, 2016, Bridget McKenzie attended the final workshop of the YDUK group working with Tiffany Black, Leo Brook couldn't attend on this day.

In this session they were finishing their concept for the pieces that Tiffany and Leo would create and stitch together into a final joint film. They had in previous sessions created collages. These combined impressions and photographs from their own home lives looking into their environments or their past, with photos they had taken of landscape paintings displayed near the Manet. They had also created poems using a cut and paste technique with lines and phrases from other poems by Baudelaire, Edward Lear and others from the period. They had listened to a lot of music, and during this session Tiffany was playing music by contemporary female quartets, because Fanny Claus herself had set up the first female quartet in France. The participants had also taken still and moving photographs of themselves in their pairs, sitting and standing as if on a balcony. These were taken against a green screen and are going to be fitted digitally into their collage scenes. So the task today was to prepare these two scenes looking into the home

and looking out to the view, to cut out their portraits and place them on their chosen framings of these two views. When this was done they laid them out on a timeline in accordance with the sequence of the film, and facilitated by Tiffany. Made a series of decisions about how their poems would work with their images, the mood, the music, how everything would be pasted and sequenced, and how their project would be titled and credited. During lunch Tiffany also led a feedback session which was very useful for the evaluation.

Tiffany would also be doing the same activity for the Mind project which is very similar to this. However she wanted to be sure that the participants made their film in a distinctive way, reflecting that they are all very different people. She said that the Mind project was different because it was already an art group, so with this group there had to be a slight adjustment for that lack of confidence or experience.

I was observing and listening, while also interviewing everyone while they worked. I was gearing my questions around the main concept of the project, with the idea of the balcony as a liminal space, a place to look back and in, and to look forward and outwards. So I asked what

they had remembered or enjoyed about sessions so far, and what they looked forward to doing next. (This latter question was partly to see what their expectations were of the session ahead, if asked early enough, and partly to see whether they were motivated to do more creative activities, to revisit the Museum, to see how the film turns out, and/or the exhibition.)

Based on the planned objectives of the Beyond the Balcony project I was also looking for evidence of the following:

- Stimulating activity, and ways that digital tools were being used as part of an arsenal, to open up active possibilities for the participants and their carers.
- Learning about the Manet painting, other paintings and the Museum as a place to explore more.
- Evidence that the experience was giving confidence and motivation to get out, explore new places and meet new people, reducing isolation.
- Legacy, and relationships continuing to grow between the Museum and YDUK.

YDUK

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTISTS

Note that Leo wasn't there today. But Tiffany was reflecting their joint experience and viewpoint.

'It's not possible to use digital technology full on as there is such a range of disability in this group. It has to be more varied and active. We bring the digital tools and our skills to them as an aid and an enhancement.'

'It has been a really interesting learning process for me to see how we might use digital in a way that is easy and not frustrating.'

'We are gallery artists not community artists but in this case, the group's work is honoured. That's where the integrity lies I think. All our work has equivalent value.'

'It was really important to see them as artists, to get them into the mindframe of being artists not just being creative.'

'What was really challenging was that we overestimated what we could achieve in the time. But it was really helpful to have done the Mind and dementia training.'

Tiffany, on the value of having an evaluator visit, and also of documentation:

'Artists never know what it will feel like for others for the participants. It is so useful to hear the story. It's good to look back to see what is being captured because throughout the course like this wonderful moments have happened but they're past, they've gone. That's why photography is so valuable.'

EVIDENCE OF STIMULATING ACTIVITIES

Valerie said that Tiffany and Leo were very clear in their explanations about fairly complex ideas and tasks. This meant that they always had a sense of achievement. They didn't feel confused which is very common in their normal experience. This increased everybody's motivation.

Tools were provided that made the activities more

manageable. For example viewfinders helped participants select parts of their collage. Choices were offered, for example Tiffany said that they could choose several backgrounds, which could fade in and out. I'm not sure anybody took this up and generally chose just one of each type of background.

Some people said they weren't really sure what the final product would be. It felt a little as if it would be a surprise. However Tiffany understood this it was an inevitable part of a process involving multiple elements pulled together into a digital combinatory piece. She took pains to reassure them that she would show them the draft before it was shared with the world, so discussed how she could bring it to them in other meetings of the group.

Due to their disabilities, this wasn't always easy for them to grasp or remember. For example, she explained that the quality of print-outs were fairly poor but that this didn't matter as they were making a mock up and the digital final piece would be high quality. However, when people were working with the printouts there were some questions about whether marks or discoloration would appear in the final piece.

YDUK

Janet said that Jim was finding this project more challenging than the previous one at the Museum. She acknowledged this was partly because his dementia had progressed but she said he had particularly enjoyed the jigsaw collage approach of the previous project, which kept his hands busy, and he had loved the live music sessions before.

Helen said,

‘It is quite challenging but there’s plenty of support and Tiffany takes the pressure off because it’s art!’

Tiffany said to them

‘If we get into a pickle it doesn’t matter because it’s art and we can make it up!’

This had the effect of making everyone relax, laugh, and feel that it was okay to experiment and make mistakes. She wanted them to feel that they were artists. Indeed, she saw them as artists.

Nicola again offers a vital role alongside the artists as she knows the group so well and knows how to support their individual needs. Liz and Liz (both dementia sufferer and carer have the same name) were working

to create a very brightly coloured and sensory collage. Liz’s dementia causes a loss of eyesight, so Nicola had suggested including things that Liz could handle and feel. For example, they had plaited cloth to make a bell pull.

Nicola also had the idea that she could take Helen and Chris back up to the gallery to select another photograph for their landscape view. He particularly liked an image of Jerusalem. Unfortunately it was in an area out of public reach on this day but it was a nice helpful gesture that was appreciated, and then as an alternative Nicola found it as a digital image on the website.

EVIDENCE OF LEARNING ABOUT THE PAINTING AND ARTISTIC CONCEPTS

During the discussion at lunchtime Tiffany reminded them what they had explored, and asked if they felt they had learned or achieved these things. There was general positivity and agreement. However, they went further to show that they had not just learned from others, but had developed more personal and creative responses. For example, about the concept of inner and outer space,

‘We’ve done that, yes. When we went out to take photos we all had the same choice of paintings but everyone came back with different photos...it was nice to see how diverse we can be.’

Tiffany drew this out by reminding Janet that she had brought in pictures from home which had been chosen for personal meaning for herself and Jim. Janet said ‘We wanted to bring in images that are quirkiest, that reflected the things we are interested in.’

EVIDENCE OF CONFIDENCE TO GET OUT AND ABOUT

Molly talking about Tom. ‘He can’t drive now which is something he really enjoyed doing so this gets him out. It boosts his confidence.’

Helen and Chris used to go to creative minds sessions in the summer but the funding ran out. It is frustrating when activities they have got used to come to an end. This has helped them pick it up again and they look forward to doing more. Mick said

‘When I was first here I was frightened of doing it wrong but you can’t go wrong. If there was any fright there it’s gone.’

YDUK

EVIDENCE OF SOCIABILITY AND CONNECTION

Jackie said ‘the thing with it is that we’re just touching base really, chatting away. If I was at home I’ll be just watching TV’. Jackie already does quite a lot of creative work herself so for her the sociability is very important. Molly said ‘Tom never says he is stressed here as he normally does in other places. I think that’s because it’s manageable and you don’t have to feel embarrassed for example you’re not having to dance in front of everybody, or anything difficult like that. Everybody is in the same situation. He’s made friends here, and we both feel the benefit from it.’

The project enabled carers and sufferers to explore and celebrate their relationship. This was particularly evident for those who are married couples, remembering their past homes or places visited together. For example, Valerie’s poem was a very touching celebration of their romance.

Tiffany talked about how they had created an atmosphere of trust between them. It was pointed out that the lovely environment of the Museum itself created a feeling of respect and care. Carer Liz talked

about how she trusted Liz to take the lead, despite her sight problems, ‘At the start we weren’t sure it will work so we thought would come to one. But when we were in the gallery Liz takes the lead, sees what she can see. The best times have actually been in the gallery.’ Dementia sufferer Liz replied ‘I feel I can pinpoint things and that makes me happy seeing the details’. Tiffany said that the group and herself had been inspired by Liz’s way of seeing, ‘You see things differently, really looking at detail, that’s helpful for us to notice more.’

Several also said various things that were very appreciative of the other participants. For example, Mick said that Peter’s poem was very witty. Jackie commented on the beautiful bright colours in Liz’s collage.

The group has a very relaxed, supportive and friendly atmosphere. During the discussion about their final piece, decisions were taken remarkably quickly and without disagreement. If one person suggested an approach, the others supported it. For example, Jackie suggested a way of introducing the participants with their portraits as a preface to the film. Everyone agreed this was a good idea.

This may have an element linked to apathy in dementia, but apathy was not very much in evidence in this project, as people were committed to creating very expressive works for themselves and were motivated to make a strong final piece to share. Tiffany took on board their suggestions in a spirit of equality, everyone being the artist. Tiffany talked about how they were working with traditional art and contemporary forms. Mick said ‘this is just right for the past and future metaphor as we’re using art from the past and technology of the future to make art about us now.’ Tiffany was very appreciative of his continuation of the core metaphor of the project. As everyone works in pairs there was already an atmosphere of collaboration, enhanced by the approach taken by the artists, and the support offered by Nicola and the Museum.

YDUK

EVIDENCE OF LEGACY AND RELATIONSHIP

On whether they will be able to continue doing some of these activities themselves, (because they mainly aren't digital so not relying on access and skills) giving it legacy: 'Perhaps they will use some of the creative tactics themselves but it's unlikely. What is really valuable for them is coming together as a group, it's about sitting sharing together, making a work that is about them together.'

Nicola: 'There will be legacy as they have opportunities to come back together again, and there is the exhibition. The film will also exist to capture their experience and ideas.'

Tiffany and Leo will maintain connection, for example attending meetings of YDUK to show drafts of the film. Participants were reminded of the blog and were invited to consider writing or producing something about their experience of the project or more creative work to share. This will help create an ongoing link to the activities and help to remind people what they have done.

Nicola talked about the opening event of the May

exhibition to which they could invite friends and family and also the Live Friday event, which would have VIP guests.

MORE STORIES OF GENERAL APPRECIATION FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

Tiffany told Jackie that she had been very inspired by her talking and showing photographs of Spain. It made Tiffany decide to go on a walking pilgrimage to Santiago. This really shows how appreciative Tiffany is being of the participants in the group.

Mick described how his partner wanted to go to more museums now that she had been attending the sessions to look at more art. He was also pleased to report that he had taken photographs of balconies and noticed connections between them and the Manet painting. He then described how their grandchild had been reading the owl and the pussycat which is a poem that had been explored in this project. He said 'I keep spotting all the connections, everything seems to link up'.

Tom and Molly said that they would miss it when it ended. Molly said of Tom 'At first initially he was very

sceptical, because he doesn't do art or anything like that, but I said to him let's just give it one try. But now he loves it. It gives him something to talk about with our family.'

Mandy from YDUK said this project had been really good. Her only challenge was the problem caused by a blocked door last week.

Simon was a new trainee carer who would come along to observe. He was very impressed by this project. He said that he had not seen such high levels of engagement in similar projects although his previous experience was with people with learning difficulties.

MIND

OVERVIEW DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

On Friday 5 February, Susanne Buck attended the final session for the Mind group, with both Tiffany Black and Leo Brook.

Before the session started Tiffany and Leo mentioned they are interested in what the Mind group will feel about their work, and if they will have a similar reaction to YDUK, who tended to see the final art piece as a collection of their own individual contributions, not as a one final shared outcome.

The group was joined by OYAP members Tess, and Emma, a recent graduate artist who works with sculpture and communities, helping communities to work together. Tess said she had only come for the first session but was asked to come back and take part for the whole project. She has really enjoyed it and really looks forward to coming every week. She feels the group has really gelled. Tess and Emma will be doing some evaluation work at the Live Friday to find out how the public will react. One of the OYAP members bumped into Andy (who runs Mind) at the weekend and said that this was the best project that they have run with the Ashmolean,

he hasn't been directly involved but has heard about it from Adam.

THE SESSION

Tiffany reminded everyone what they have done so far, preparing images to use as a green screen background, which relate to the theme of having something behind you and looking out to something new. She started the session by laying out everyone's paintings, and explained how they had also printed out photos of each participant so that they could use them to decide what would work best for their backgrounds.

She explained that they would be creating a storyboard of the film by cutting out their photos of themselves and then re-photographing these against their paintings. She showed the group how to use viewfinders to select which part of their painting they will use, and there were also step by step instructions printed out if they wanted them. Leo said she would come round to help so everyone would be able to follow the session, and that Tess and Emma would chat with the group to find out what the mood or sound of the film would be.

Tiffany explained how at the end of the session they would lay out their images on a table to decide as a group what order the film would be edited in, and that the final film would be shown at the exhibition and on a big screen during the live Friday event on the 13 May. She showed them examples of how the films might come out, explaining how it might work and giving them options. She was very careful to explain that the outcome for today is the decision making process and the storyboard so not to worry about the precision of their cutting, explaining that she and Leo will take high resolution pictures to make the final film, and that another digital artist Dave would be completing it using after effects.

The artists were very patient and flexible. Some participants had brought photos in to use, including one woman who brought some pictures of her own sculpture work which they scanned and printed. Another participant emailed Tiffany some images from his iPad.

Leo spent some time filming and taking photos of the participants to use in their films against the green screen, giving them prompts for where to look and how to act.

MIND

At the end of the session the group came together to lay out their work in a storyboard along a table. Tiffany and Leo talked them through the next steps, and helped them make decisions about the way the final film would be edited, including how poems they had written previously would be included, and the order in which the 'scenes' would unfold. They all made the editorial decisions together – the language they used was technical and accurate, and they were told about the context of the way it would be displayed to help them make their decisions. They didn't oversimplify or patronise the group, for example they explained that three minutes is a good length to capture and hold a visitor's attention, and explained how the 'mood' would be important: 'if you think of some artwork it's uplifting but some work is introspective and darker'. The group decided to keep it simple, have a mix of dark and light, and to title it 'Le Balcon', because as one member put it: "the art mob would be there".

There was real excitement about the potential of 2000 visitors seeing their work, and when Brook & Black thanked them for their hard work and effort the group responded with a round of applause.

ATMOSPHERE

There were nine participants, two Mind helpers and five Ashmolean helpers (two students, Tiffany, Leo and Nicola). The Mind helpers were very hands off, working on their own contributions alongside the other participants.

There were lots of conversations between the participants about the session and other art projects that they are working on. Jackie who says she enjoys art and goes to lots of art groups was helping other participants, explaining what to do.

It was quite a complicated process, but there was plenty of help on hand, and everyone was able to carry on at their own pace with the help they needed. The atmosphere was busy and productive, with everyone wandering around and talking, selecting images and drinking tea and coffee. They were listening to music played by female musicians and quartets to connect with Fanny Claus.

FEEDBACK

During and after the session I spoke to the artists, helpers and participants to get their thoughts on the

process:

Tiffany – 'we are ambitious, we don't want to do colouring and sticking, we don't cut corners we did lots of planning, had 19 meetings beforehand and went to Mind to meet them and run some workshops before the start'.

Calvin (participant) said he has been inspired. He hasn't painted for about six months but brought in a painting last week that was inspired by the workshops of Berthe Morrisot on a balcony but with a new background. He loves painting, saying it's the only thing that keeps him going, adding that he's just spent about £100 on new paints and bought a new fridge to keep them in.

Meralee – 'it gets you excited and you get to play like you are in kindergarden which is energising'. She isn't a member of Mind but came with her neighbour Calvin, so told me she was here by accident. She feels it has been really wonderful, they are so patient and kind even though she wears two hearing aids and is sight impaired 'Too many words for my ears to even comprehend' thinks it will have more of an impact if it's simple. She has written a poem 'believing is seeing' which will hopefully go on the blog.

MIND

When everyone was eating lunch Nicola told them again how their work would be shown, at the live Friday and their own exhibition. Tiffany and Leo then asked the group a few questions, explaining it was for their evaluation, and filmed their responses:

Malcolm said he was really impressed that it was funded by the HLF, 'I didn't know they were so generous.'

Jackie said 'I feel like it's like my lounge now, I want to go to sleep in the corner and watch' on how she feels about the paintings now – 'The paintings are more human now, they are people.' Jackie has a lot going on with her family which is difficult but it's important to step aside and view it from a different angle – see the positive as well as the negative.

Calvin said 'It [the Ashmolean] feels more accessible, I felt before restricted to go into certain areas but now I feel like I can come in and enjoy it more.'

Question about the project making them feel less isolated: has it helped you feel it's a place to be?

'It's nice definitely, not stuck in a box at home.'

Hannah is pleased with herself for taking part in the whole course

Vince feels that January is a dead month so it's a good month to do [this kind of activity].

Maralee – feels it has been a meaningful time, a cycle of outward focus. She explained how she lost a son last year and it's been a process, she wasn't ready for this kind of thing earlier, it's been a year and it's been meaningful and energising and helpful. 'It's something that I truly truly look forward to and benefit from.' She got very emotional as she told this to the group.

Question about making work over a number of sessions:

Malcolm is a painter so it has felt completely different, it's a good experience, yes it's fed into his own work (he put his own work into the piece alongside paintings from upstairs). He had never been upstairs, he thought it was full of Roman crockery.

Willow has enjoyed it, he's been at the Natural History Museum a lot but it was nice to come back to the Ashmolean.

Carmen – welcoming, friendly fun, the amount of support from the staff has really helped.

Jackie said to Tiffany and Leo: 'It's just clear that you love what you do and that's what you do best.'

Mario 'It's a great achievement that everyone has come every week, especially as its away from the comfort of their usual environment, and 10:30/11 doesn't sound early, but for some for our members it is.'