

What's Your Story? Using digital technology with Arts Award to engage young people in Oxford



The People

Northfield School

The Ashmolean Museum of Arts and Archaeology

Angus Dick (Digital Artist)

Adrian Brooks (Arts Education Officer, Oxford University Museums)

Supported by Miranda Millward (Arts Award Coordinator, Oxford University Museums) and Helen Ward (Deputy of Education, Ashmolean Museum)

The Project

For some time, Oxford University Museums have been using and developing the use of iPads for digital art practice across our four venues (the Ashmolean Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the History of Science). Adrian Brooks, our Art Education Officer, has become highly skilled in using and demonstrating

The Arts Award programme provided the impetus for the pupils to work in the museum environment, and this had a definite impact on the boys' attitudes.



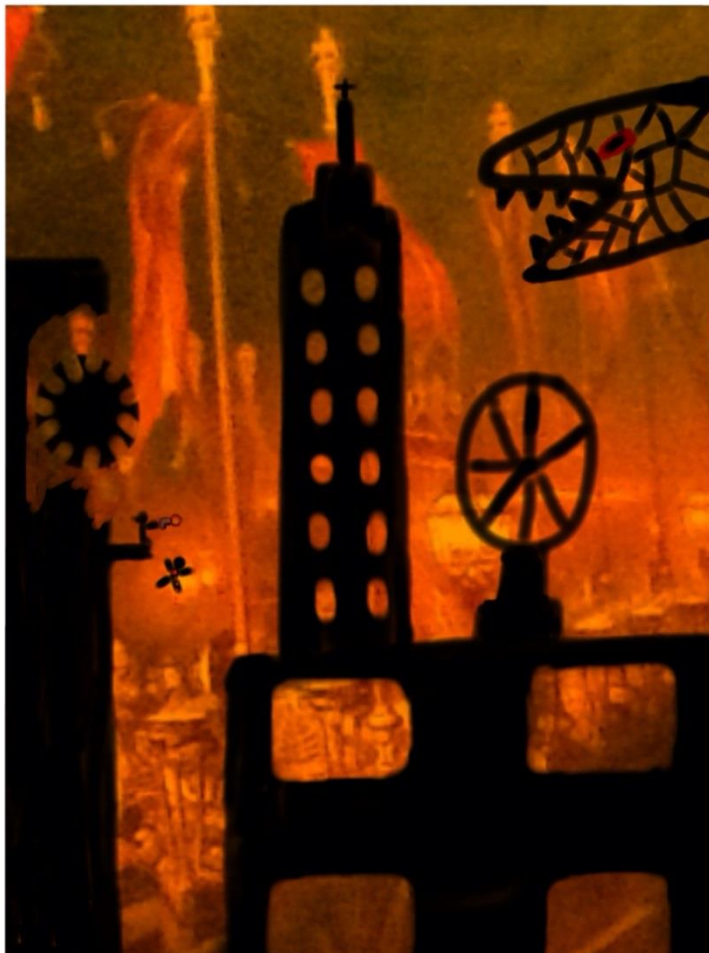
Adrian Brooks, Arts Education Officer, Oxford University Museums

a number of iPad apps, including *Brushes* and *Pic Collage*, with school groups that visit the museums as part of their art curriculum time.

Increasingly, schools have access to iPads for their students to work on and young people are keen to develop their ideas using digital media. With the advent of Artsbox (Arts Award's online portfolio tool), we felt it a good time to see if we could offer an Arts Award where the practical and creative work would be done entirely on iPads and managed via Artsbox. We were able to utilise some of our budget to invite digital artist Angus Dick to develop and deliver the project with us.

We decided that instead of choosing a school to work with, we would ask schools to submit a short expression of interest in working with us on a digital project. We solicited these expressions of interest via OAT (Oxford Art Teach) – a network of Oxfordshire Arts Teachers). The OAT group meets around three times a year and sets a theme to explore each year. The theme for 2013/14 was Digital Practice, including the use of iPads in the classroom. During the OAT meeting in January 2014, Adrian Brooks and Miranda Millward (Arts Award Coordinator for the University Museums) spoke about the potential project and asked schools to express an interest in working towards an Explore Arts Award using iPads. Six schools expressed an interest in working with us, but one in particular grabbed us – Northfield School.

Northfield School is a small, state secondary school located in Oxford, for boys with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). Art teacher Alice Girdlestone was very keen to be involved in the project because the art department were soon to be getting their own iPads. As the school has smaller numbers of students to coordinate, it also meant Alice and her pupils would be able to make a number of visits to the



Working on the iPads enabled artwork to be produced instantly which was very satisfying for the students.

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Alice Girdlestone, Arts Teacher, Northfield School

Ashmolean over several weeks, which we hoped would lead to a really rich collaboration.

We opted to work with digital artist Angus Dick – we felt he could really enhance the project by not only bringing his considerable iPad-based skills and knowledge to the table, but also by acting as an approachable and friendly ‘role model’ for the boys. In discussion with Angus, we decided that it would be best to use the Ashmolean’s Pre-Raphaelite collection as inspiration for the project. The paintings have plenty of visual detail and narrative, and the galleries are often quieter than other parts of the museum, so there would be space for the boys to sit and work.

The Northfield School pupils made around five visits to the Ashmolean between the end of April and June 2014. During their visits, the boys were able to work with Angus on three occasions and with Adrian Brooks on two. Due to the small number of pupils involved, it meant each young person could work on an iPad without needing to share, which could have been frustrating.

Successes

The boys covered a lot over the course of their visits – not only in terms of learning digital skills but also in getting to know the museum well. Angus’ project, ‘What’s *Your Story?*’ focused on enabling the boys to consider the objects in the museum, how they were displayed and presented, and what stories those objects and exhibits tell. The boys were invited to find and choose objects that they could tell their own stories with, using digital techniques.

The digital skills the boys developed were:

- Creating and using layers in painting apps, including *Brushes*
- Painting effectively using different brushes, colours and strokes
- Tracing details in images using layers
- Cutting out a photo to create a digital sticker, using a collage app, *Cut-Out*
- Creating a mixed media image using drawn and photographic elements
- Combining finished digital drawings and creating a comic strip containing text
- Creating collages from photographic sources

The biggest success was how much the boys engaged with using the iPads and developing their digital skills. They all worked visibly hard during their museum visits and were keen to complete the tasks set by Angus and Adrian. There was a real sense of focus as the boys persevered with the tasks, which were, at times, challenging. Angus was a very patient teacher and the boys were able to build good relationships with him thanks to this. They were inspired by Angus’ talk on his own practice and it seemed they had become aware for the first time that it was truly possible to make a career in the digital arts. They were keen to ask him about how much he earned and how much other digital artists earn too!

The boys got to know the museum well and it enabled them to be calm, comfortable and confident in a museum environment. Their interest grew over the weeks, from being concerned about what was on display to finding out more about things that happen behind the scenes too.

All Arts Award evidence was produced digitally, including any written sections, which were designed in *Pic Collage* using images, text boxes and bubbles. This meant that any written sections did not become a chore for the boys and they were able to maintain interest.

Challenges

- Artsbox was still very new and we had a number of teething problems using it. Initially the app was not ready for use on iPads and could not be used on mobile phones because the boys are not allowed phones in school.
- We also had a lot of problems uploading the boys’ finished work to Artsbox, owing to a temporary website failure. This was hugely frustrating and one of the boys was unable to complete his Award because of this. In the end, we have to save all the work to a memory stick and submit a postal moderation for him, which wasn’t very digital!
- We had to think very carefully about how to structure all aspects of the project because of the emotional needs of the boys. For the presentation part of Explore, Adrian devised

Angus valued what was produced in such a positive way that the students were motivated to constantly challenge their own ideas and imaginations.

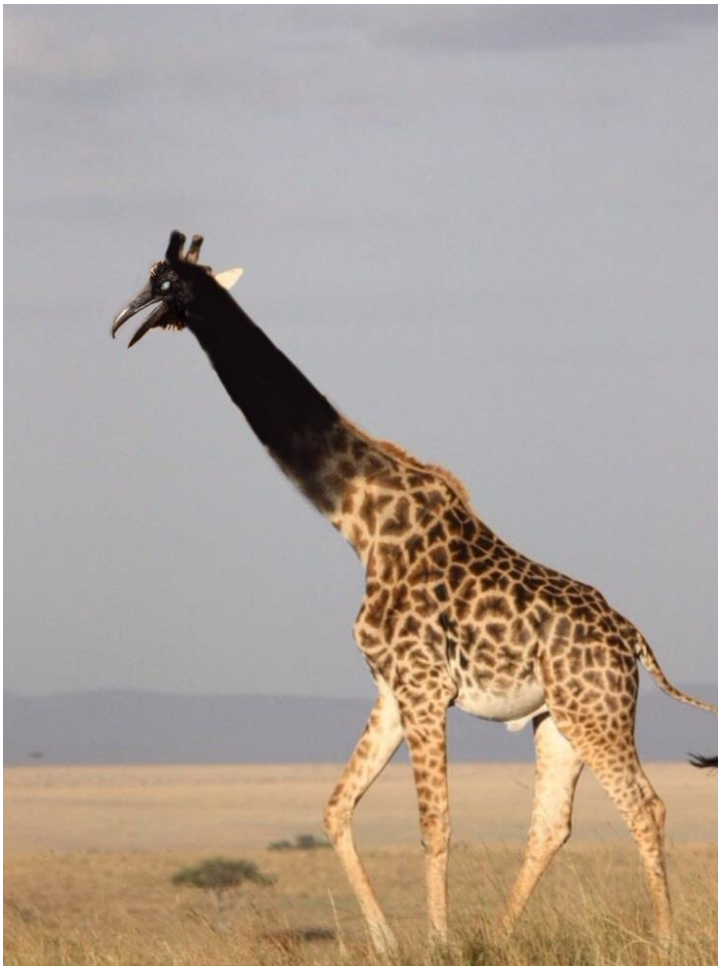
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an interview, which each boy did with him on a one-to-one basis, as having an additional audience would have proven too stressful. We recorded the interviews using a Dictaphone and once the boys felt comfortable, they were able to talk in detail about the work they had done.

- Initially, the boys borrowed iPads from the Ashmolean whilst waiting for the school iPads to be delivered. Unfortunately, this meant that mid-way through the project, we had to transfer work over using Dropbox. This was an additional workload, but it was really helpful for the boys to have iPads at school as it meant they could continue their project work outside of museum sessions, supervised by teaching staff.

How might the project influence how you approach or deliver similar work in the future?

- We hope to do more digital projects with schools using iPads – we are currently planning some project work using the collection at the Museum of the History of Science.
- We would like to try and use Artsbox successful as a tool to manage digital



A Year 10 student has since expressed interest in being a digital artist. He hadn't realised how his current interests could potentially lead to a career in the future.

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portfolios.

- We would like to try and share some of the work made by Northfield students online, perhaps with step-to-step guides on how they used different apps and techniques to produce their final pieces.
- We feel that being able to have a number of visits to the museums during a project means that students are able to get a much richer picture of museums as whole organisations rather than just 'places of display'.

Feedback

“The intimate atmosphere of the Pre-Raphaelite gallery, together with the general public's interest in the students' work, the informal discussions with Angus Dick about careers, and post-tour conversations provided learning experiences complimentary to those at school.” – Adrian Brooks, Arts Education Officer

“Angus' knowledge and enthusiasm made everyone feel anything was possible and achievable. The whole project was hugely motivational, not just for the students involved but for the school staff as well.” – Alice Girdlestone, Arts Teacher, Northfield School

How has the work been shared?

We are hoping to be able to exhibit some of the work made by the Northfield School pupils at the Ashmolean Museum over the next few months. We would like to hold a small celebration event and invite members of school staff and the boys' families to see what they have achieved and present them with their certificates.

As previously mentioned, we are also hoping to share some of the young people's work online, with guides on using different apps and techniques to create artwork.

Credits

**Project Evaluation by Miranda Millward, Arts
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