



HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD: WHAT DO YOU SEE?

We take for granted that art is often a shared experience, and in schools that's not just in learning and participating, but also in the very tools the students use. When they walk into an art lesson, so much of the materials they need are pooled – many hands have touched the pencils, pens, paints and erasers. Suddenly, the pandemic removed access to this ability to share, both through lockdown and Covid compliance. So, when the Learning Team at The Hepworth Wakefield (THW) needed to adapt to the new reality for their schools, they began with the basics.

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“We were creating digital content, but we were having to think creatively about how we could run activities, knowing that students sometimes didn't have paper or pencils at home,” explains THW's Learning Projects Coordinator, Bea Wright. To overcome this, Bea and the team worked with the art teachers at University Academy Keighley and South Craven School, so they could understand which materials were required. They took guidance around where they could support the students and schools best, based on areas that the teachers had identified as a priority. “Because we'd been able to have contact with our schools prior to the summer holidays, we were also able to soundboard our visual language with them to really ensure that it was appropriate and suitable,” adds Bea.

The result was that The Hepworth Wakefield created a kit that both spoke to the needs of the curriculum, the students themselves and fitted with their own approach. “It's important to give them materials and mediums that they haven't encountered before,” says Bea, explaining the inclusion of oil pastels and clay – more challenging materials that are less readily available. “In particular, bringing sculpture to the kits develops a different kind of visual language for the students. Those 2D to 3D skills are a key part of what we do at The Hepworth.”

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Under normal circumstances, the gallery invites students to 'Cultural Experience Days' at the beginning of the academic year, but with both their building and schools shut to visitors, the team needed a new avenue through which the students could experience The Hepworth's unique visual world. The Creativity Kits represented a way to make sure they had the tools they needed, but also created an opening to introduce themselves. “We gave a virtual assembly to the students to launch the year and the kits into the schools,” explains Bea. “It was recorded at the gallery to give them a bit of a sense of who we are – we were aware that a lot of the students hadn't been to an art gallery, so we wanted to give that warm welcome.” This was followed up by some films, showing technique and the use of materials as a starting point for the students to then go and explore.

What began as an extra-curricular activity quickly became absorbing for all parties, in part because the kits were a mammoth task to source and assemble (“The logistics! We had crates, literal crates, coming off lorries.”), but also because of the wholehearted way in which students threw themselves into their tasks, and through the many important relationships that were built during the time. Many resources were developed with Studio in a School, New York and they created their shared Creativity Kits together, adapting the tasks to suit their schools. They enjoy what can best be described as a joyful continued collaboration, learning from each other and regularly working together to bring ideas and best practice to life.

Looking differently at their approach also meant building strong and supportive relationships with the teachers at UAK and South Craven School. “We've definitely delivered more and different teacher professional development this year than we have in previous years,” reports Victoria Boome, Senior Learning Manager at THW. “Previous years had been centred around the skills gap as identified by the art teachers, whereas we've really tried to develop that relationship between the teachers and facilitating artists this year.” And while they admit that they feel a real sense of loss though not being able to work directly in the classroom with students, the prevailing mood is one of positivity, as the solid relationships they have built with the teachers bear fruit. “The teachers really talked the students through each of the activities,” says Bea. “We had a meeting with them, and they were so excited to be able to show us their students work.” Teachers held up pieces of work to the camera and panned

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around the classroom to show just how much their students had achieved. “They were really proud of the engagement, the outcomes, the use of materials, the different approaches,” adds Victoria. “And that was possible because of that positive relationship with the school. They are constantly enthusiastic and excited for what is next.”

The ability to see beyond the obvious is the power of the artist, and so too have the team at THW in their adaptation to a year like no other. It is with a kind of bittersweet pride that they view their achievements – the planning, designing and packing of thousands of Creativity Kits, a programme of development for the teachers delivering them, videos and virtual assemblies and a new relationship with a stateside partner, in and among all the logistics and administration that would come with a normal year. “It's challenging for us to step back and recognise the achievements because we are really missing that in-person engagement with the students that's at the core of what we do,” says Victoria. “We know it's high quality and we know that we have positive relationships with school leaders and pupils. They are engaging with our content, but we're not engaging with the students and that's at the heart of our programme and that's really difficult.”



However, The Hepworth Wakefield see the legacy and learning value in the experience and the strong relationships they have built with the teachers at UAK and South Craven School. From the ability to design activities knowing students had the right materials, to the potential to stretch budgets and reach more students by recording elements of the artists in residence programme, everything has given them plenty of food for thought and a view of the future. “There's a lot of learning we can use for the future within the Burberry Inspire programme,” adds Bea. “But we've also got great art teachers in schools that are so on board and really positive relationships.”