

AN artSOUTH PROJECT: 'Space Kids: Discovering Astra'



The People

artSOUTH
Quay Arts (Ian Whitmore)
Aspex Gallery (Letty Clarke)
Binstead Primary School, Isle of Wight
The Bay Primary School, Isle of Wight

The Project

This was a partnership project between Quay Arts and Aspex to deliver artSOUTH workshops and an exhibition with Binstead Primary School and The Bay Primary School from the Isle of Wight. Project content was based on the artSOUTH associated exhibition at Quay Arts, *Chasing Sputnik*, by artists Tom Hall, Roy Brown and Julia Flatman.

Workshop 1 – at Quay Arts

Children from Binstead and The Bay Primary Schools attended a full day workshop at Quay Arts, facilitated by artists Ian Whitmore (Quay Arts) and Letty Clarke (Aspex). The workshop began with the children

exploring the exhibition *Chasing Sputnik* in The West Gallery.

Artist Letty Clarke led a Philosophical Enquiry with the group around a fictional story (written by Letty) about a city called Astra. The story was inspired by the exhibition *Chasing Sputnik* and led to the children devising their own inquiry question: 'Who should judge art?' The group debated this question, which led to some interesting discussions around the creation and curation of art.

Artist Ian Whitmore led a big paper exercise challenging the children to create space suits relating to the people of planet Astra. A pen outline was drawn around the children and then, working in groups of 5, they filled in the details of the suit using a variety of mark making and collage materials. The exercise was to move from looking (*Chasing Sputnik* exhibition) and questioning (Philosophical Enquiry) into *doing*, with the emphasis on the collaboration of ideas. The results varied from 'space hippies' to more traditional incarnations of suits and featured notations



Work from pupils at Binstead Primary School. Taken from The Audience Agency's 2014 artSOUTH Phase 2 Report

and diagrams relating to the practicalities of moving and surviving in space.

Workshop 2 - at The Bay

Artist Ian Whitmore worked with the children to explore toys and objects (supplied by the artists/ school/ children) relating to space, referencing artists Mark Dion and Cornelia Parker, and focusing on their use of common objects arranged in creative ways. Taking inspiration from Parker's *Cold Dark Matter*, the group experimented with hanging objects according to rough sketches they had made up for a space installation. Some children focused on cataloguing and labelling objects, ranging from rockets to magnets, giving them entirely new histories relating to the planet Astra (in the manner of archaeologists). While others decorated papier mache planets to hang in the installation. Time was spent developing text messages for an electronic scrolling display, as if 'tweeted' by people from the planet Astra.

During his workshop, artist Ian Whitmore used Quay Arts' newly commissioned evaluation tool 'A Bundle of Sticks' to gauge the children's response through a variety of statements, including:

I increased my understanding of art (during this mini-project)

I learnt how to collaborate to create an exhibition

I would like people to visit 'SPACE KIDS':

DISCOVERING ASTRA' and see my contribution.

For this exercise, blue sticks indicated yes/agree and red, no/disagree. Initially, the children held the sticks in the air to show their response, then a teacher suggested putting the sticks in a circle around their feet in colour order, to create a colour wheel, which worked better and was more focused. Ian Whitmore commented on the exercise:

"The questions used need to be improved and I think the context and audience will dictate individual responses from the person using the toolkit, but overall it went down well and was attractive to the children."

Artist Ian Whitmore worked with the children to explore the use of common objects arranged in creative ways.

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Workshop 2 – at Binstead

The group from Binstead returned to Quay Arts the following week to participate in a one-day workshop



Work from pupils at Binstead Primary School. Taken from The Audience Agency's 2014 artSOUTH Phase 2 Report

with Letty Clarke. The focus of the workshop was to create an installation for the Learning Curve Gallery, inspired by Tom Hall's work. The group made a collaborative artwork using cardboard and found objects, demonstrating life on the fictional planet Astra. The group also took part in printmaking activities to recreate footprints on the moon and the creation of a secret language.

Successes

- The project helped to develop the working relationship between the Learning and Participatory departments in both organisations, who have not had the opportunity to work together since an enquire gallery education programme in 2011. There was an initial planning meeting between aspex's and the Quay's Learning Managers and the two primary school teachers to discuss logistics. The two lead artists, Ian Whitmore and Letty Clarke then had a further meeting to plan workshop content. Both the gallery visit and delivery of the two workshops went according to plan and the children from both schools engaged with the concept and were absorbed in producing their responses. Both artists collaborated on installing the resulting work in the Learning Curve Gallery at Quay Arts.
- *Spacekids: Discovering Astra* ran from 12 Oct – 23 Nov 2013 and images from the project were displayed at the John Hansard Gallery for the *Arts Partnership in Action* event on 26th November 2013. The exhibition continued until 18th January 2014.
- A further development from Phase 1 is that the artists (one from each organisation) and schools collaborated on the gallery visit and exhibition, as described above. Both artists have been trained in Arts Award from Discovery to Silver and this was their first Arts Award delivery project.
- 25 of the 30 participating children completed all of the elements to achieve a Discover Arts Award.
- Phase 1 was with Binstead Primary, the Isle of Wight's only Teaching school. Phase 2

extended the partnership to The Bay CE Primary School, Sandown, an Alliance school.

- The work produced with the two schools resulted in *Spacekids: Discovering Astra*, (a title chosen by the children), a joint four week exhibition in Quay Arts' Learning Curve Gallery, which ran alongside the exhibition *Chasing Sputnik* in the West Gallery.
- The project successfully promoted engagement with the *Chasing Sputnik* exhibition and artSOUTH in general.
- Visitors to *Chasing Sputnik* were able to see *Spacekids: Discovering Astra* at the same time; the two exhibitions interrelated well and the children's show elicited very positive responses in our Learning Curve Comments Book (see below).

I like seeing that not all installation art is done by professional adults.

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Amelie, age 9

Such an interesting and inventive take on the original artwork.

A wonderful collaboration of creativity.

I love the crash landed spaceship and base.

This is outstanding. A fantastic response to an exciting past and bright future. I love it all.

Tom Hall

Challenges

- Unfortunately, we were not able to take the children to see Tom Hall's installation at West High Down because of transport costs and school timetables.

Statistics

Binstead Primary – 15 pupils attended 2 full-day workshops

The Bay Primary – 15 pupils attended 2 full-day workshops

Visitor numbers to the exhibition: 4570

The group made a collaborative piece using cardboard and found objects, and took part in printmaking activities.



Inspired by space travel



Students from Binstead and The Bay CE Primary School taking part in workshops with artist Letty Clarke at Quay Arts. 0913-R47657

YOUNGSTERS inspired by an exhibition of giant cardboard rockets are producing a space-inspired exhibition of their own.

Pupils from Bay CE Primary and Binstead Primary schools visited the artSOUTH Chasing Sputnik exhibition at Quay Arts before working with two artists to create their own models and paintings of astronauts and planets as part of a spin-off artSOUTH project.

By Sara Bryce

Jacque Cusack, learning and participation manager at Quay Arts, said: "The children were mesmerised by the scale of it and the whopping great cardboard rockets.

"It's all inspired by stories about going to space and children just respond to that.

"One group worked with an artist from Portsmouth's Aspex Gallery, Letty Clarke, and the other with Quay Arts artist Ian Whitmore."

As part of the project, the

youngsters are undertaking their Arts Award, a national initiative for young people to gain various levels of accreditation and develop their creativity.

The artworks created by the 30 children in a series of workshops will be on display at the Learning Curve Gallery from next Saturday, October 12, to Saturday, November 23.

Jacque added: "It's about giving creative Island children a platform and a way of demystifying galleries and artists."

Credits

Taken from: The Audience Agency's 2014 artSOUTH Phase 2 Report

Edited by: Laura J. Smith
Artswork
laura@artswork.org.uk

www.artswork.org.uk