

CASE STUDY 1: And Breathe

The exhibition, *And Breathe* is Manchester Art Gallery's ongoing commitment to providing a space where people can come de-stress by using art. Devised in 2018, it was the product of a collaboration with adults from Manchester Mind and pupils from Charlestown Community Primary School. The grownups and children worked with the gallery team to select six works from the city's collection that they found aided relaxation. Using this as a starting point, the gallery set up a short app, downloadable for free, that visitors can use to access basic mindfulness techniques and relax with paintings on display. Visitors can sit on sofas and other comfortable chairs. Evaluation shows that the majority of people spend 30 minutes in the space or "lose track of time." *And Breathe* has undergone two rehangs, the most recent co-curated with staff from the de Paul charity. Part of this focuses on supporting people who have suffered a bereavement. The other focuses on helping create coping strategies for people in the city who are coping with the strains of working with homelessness.

And Breathe can be accessed during all opening hours. In addition, the gallery offers fortnightly 30 minute *Take Notice* long sessions and quarterly afternoon long *Mindful Marks* activities. These are set up for drop-in visits, but increasingly patterns are emerging of people who have been referred, or are deliberately using them to care for their mental wellbeing.

What participants have said:

"I spent two months in a psychiatric unit earlier this year due to major depression and psychosis. I am actively trying to look after my mental health; being in this room has helped me. Thank you."

"I've been feeling really down recently so a visit was in desperate need. This was just what I needed for my mental health. I feel better now."

"Thank you. I came into the gallery feeling sad and anxious. I feel much better and stronger now."



A community group selects painting for *And Breathe*....

CASE STUDY 2: Early Years at Manchester Art Gallery

In 2017 Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) developed a partnership with the Manchester Health Visiting Team (MHVT) and the city centre Sure Start. The initial driver for this was the need to find a venue for the St Peter's Sure Start weekly Baby Stay and Play sessions in light of the closure of the Town Hall. However, in consultation with the MHVT, the gallery quickly realised that early years art practices could be used to enhance the work of the MHVT and combine skills to deliver better health outcomes for babies and parents in the city centre. In this way, MAG moved beyond being a venue to being an active collaborator.

The weekly health clinics have now become part of the gallery's programme. New parents / carers from the city centre and nearby wards, many of whom are first time gallery visitors, access their baby's first health checks or are signposted to other services. To make this more effective and enjoyable, the gallery works with an artist (who is also an early years arts specialist) to design an immersive, sensory environment. This forms the "waiting room" where parent and baby relax and enjoy themselves with others. The health visitors have reported that this initial non-clinical and creative approach not only relaxes both baby and parent, it opens up fresh and non-judgemental conversations, both of which lead to more effective health checks and diagnosis. There is also an indication that this is underpinning better maternal mental health. The gallery has now extended this partnership to include Manchester Metropolitan University and a PhD has been set up to explore how art practices and the gallery is contributing to these better health outcomes.



On the back of this work, MAG has helped deliver these type of clinics at Clayton Sure Start and at Olivia Lodge, a supported housing unit for vulnerable young mothers. Creative sessions for eligible two year olds and their parents have taken place at Martenscroft Sure Start and a new creative approach to development tests for 2 year olds has been piloted, again giving a tool to the MHVT for better, early diagnosis.

“Great to see a health visitor in the gallery – more of a day out than going to the doctors, great stimulation for baby and a chance to chat to other parents. Plus conversation starters – the gallery, art exhibitions etc. It’s the one thing ‘ve done regularly since birth.” Parent at the gallery’s health clinic.

CASE STUDY 3: Schools in Residence

Manchester Art Gallery piloted a new schools in residence programme with Abraham Moss Community School. The school covers both primary and secondary education and draws pupils from Crumpsall and Harpurhey. The student population is highly diverse, with 63 languages spoken and over 20 countries of origin. This initiative focused on the primary school's complete Year 6 (3 classes) and their teachers and took residence at the gallery over a two week period. The residency was worked up in consultation with the Head Teacher and Director of Creativity who were interested in exploring ways that the children could enhance their self-confidence in the post SATs summer term, prepare for transition to the secondary school and connect with Manchester's cultural venues.

In response to this, the gallery designed a bespoke residency, connected to the exhibition *Get Together and Get Things Done* and drew in other partners. These included Central Library, the Manchester Together Archive, Bridgewater Hall, Royal Exchange and the Town Hall. Based at the gallery and through these partners, the pupils explored the importance of culture to the city through its buildings, collections and activities. They also discovered how art can be used to articulate voice and identity with confidence. They produced a set of mini-protest figures representing the issues that matter to them (these became part of the gallery exhibition) and designed their own t-shirts. They left secret messages on loose pieces of paper in books in the library and on the Metro (with consent of both Library and Metro). The result of the residency was increased confidence, the realisation that art and culture in the city can be used to articulate their voices, and a greater shared identity between the pupils, their neighbourhoods and the city.

From the pupils:

"First I thought art was boring. Then Mrs Venessa (workshop leader) told me each painting has a message. Then I like to find out about the message in each painting. It was fun."

"Art is for everyone no matter if you are good or bad [at it]"

"Art can be anywhere."

"We have enjoyed every minute of the residency and I can't thank you enough for giving us the opportunity to work with you. The experience has not only been incredible for the children, but I know as staff we have been inspired too." Faye Bond, Head Teacher



Abraham Moss Community
Primary in the Manchester
Together Archive

CASE STUDY 4: Making Conversations



Making Conversations is a monthly three hour long workshop at Manchester Art Gallery. It was originally set up for blind and visually-impaired participants and the sessions incorporate multi-sensory approaches and audio-description. As the sessions developed, the appeal widened beyond the visual impaired community, showing that multi-sensory techniques worked with a greater range of people, many of who wanted an opportunity to meet at the gallery, make new acquaintances and join in conversations.

Making Conversations has since become a get-together for new and existing participants who have come in contact with the gallery through its outreach and community engagement projects. It's a 'go-to' session so that contact can be maintained after specific projects finish. As such the group has grown in diversity, both in age and background. When mobility or other access issues are a barrier, the gallery supplies transport so that the opportunity benefits those who may not be able to independently reach the gallery. In going this extra step, the gallery delivers a

social connection for a group of individuals who might otherwise be at risk of isolation.

Making Conversations forms part of the wider gallery Age Friendly and Access strand. Collaborating to shape and deliver this is the gallery's Age Collective, a group of Manchester residents who commit time and energy to the gallery's public programme.

From Making Conversation participants:

"Making Conversation gave me a safe creative space, helped me to regain my eroded confidence and contributed to my realisation that I am privileged to live with visual difference."

"It just spills over onto you. I just get wrapped up in it. It's so interesting. Every time I come I learn something different, I thoroughly enjoy it."

CASE STUDY 5: Speech Acts: Reflection, Imagination, Repetition

We curated the year-long exhibition *Speech Acts* to explore how to better use our publicly owned art collection in ways that are more representative, relevant and engaging for the large, diverse and cosmopolitan communities that we serve. It was the key national outcome of our partnership with Black Artists and Modernism (BAM), a three-year research project that asked what kind of stories are told by public art collections, how and for whom. BAM undertook a national audit of black-British artists of African, Caribbean, Asian or MENA region backgrounds in a selection of UK public art institutions including MAG to investigate how they feature in the story of British art. As well as highlighting a significant lack of publicly owned art by black-British artists, the research also revealed that most of their art was hidden in stores. With *Speech Acts* we set out to directly address these exclusionary and divisive practices. At a time of increased hate crimes, rising inequality and social fractures, how can the collective British culture embodied in our public collection better serve Manchester people's hopes, aspirations and needs.



Mis-imagining Britain in our public cultural institution contributes to a dangerous lack of awareness, understanding and insight into multicultural post-colonial British citizenship and identity. We curated *Speech Acts* to address this current urgency. By removing the lens of biography and difference through which black-British art is principally viewed, we could focus on entangled history and our interconnectedness. This enabled us to generate new stories and expand existing



ones with a wealth of participants in order to better understand our British selves. By also removing the traditional gallery text that serves to tell visitors how to think and feel, we were able to explore ways to encourage curiosity in everyone.

In the first section of Speech Acts, we used a variety of artists' self-portraits to reflect on the self, asking who we want to be and how do we want to be seen. It introduced identity as fluid not fixed. Next came a section of work that dealt with the human predicament engaging figure, place, myth, ritual and the spiritual to ask how individuals become communities. It included 'highlights' by leading modern British artists whose position was made possible by the liberalism that shaped British immigration policies of the 20th century. The third section looked at repetition as a method of learning or getting something 'right' as well as an aid to prevent institutional amnesia. New juxtapositions of work disrupted the received order of things.

We programmed our interactive family gallery Clore Art Studio as an open space with displays, talks, activities and workshops to explore art as a mode of social interaction. Personal creativity - the confidence to welcome new ideas and try something new - was encouraged in everyone too. We demonstrated how social interaction is integral to the making of meaning; in life as in art.

CASE STUDY 6: School of Integration

School of Integration was a new commission initiated by international artist and activist Tania Bruguera whose 'useful art' takes us back to the times when art was not something to be looked at in awe, but a tool for effecting social change. We researched, developed and delivered it collaboratively with 104 Manchester residents hailing from 53 countries all around the world, in partnership with the Manchester International Festival. It highlighted Manchester as an international city, defined by immigration and subsequently one of the most polyglot cities in the world.

School of Integration offered an opportunity to invert the one-way integration courses which can only ever fulfil half of their possible social potential. It asked what would happen if the integration of immigrants was not just based on the required one-way absorption of a new culture but, at the same time offered opportunities for both immigrants and established nationals to meet each other and grow together in their complexities and difference. In order to do this, School of Integration delivered a timetable of over 80 daily, free and open participation lessons which covered a diverse range of subjects from culture and cooking to history, languages and politics. Each lesson was initiated, planned and taught by Mancunian immigrants who expertly shared their skills and knowledge as 'teachers' in a wide variety of ways.



With School of Integration we also sought to provide a new form of solidarity for those involved. During these times of Brexit and global migration, it can be easy to imagine that immigrants share a singular identity. School of Integration provided an active opportunity to question this convenient stereotype. It also offered an opportunity for all visitors to take the Life in the United Kingdom test required for British citizenship. Most of the British nationals who attended School of Integration failed this test.

Rather than a temporary opportunity to rethink our current condition, School of Integration is an integral part of our ongoing and long-term rethinking about our civic and educative function. By actively sharing, shaping, rethinking and reforming our culture together, we can provide real change as a society. Full evaluation of School of Integration with our teachers, participants and MIF as co-commissioning partner is scheduled for October. This will inform and guide our development and future uses of this innovative and timely learning initiative.