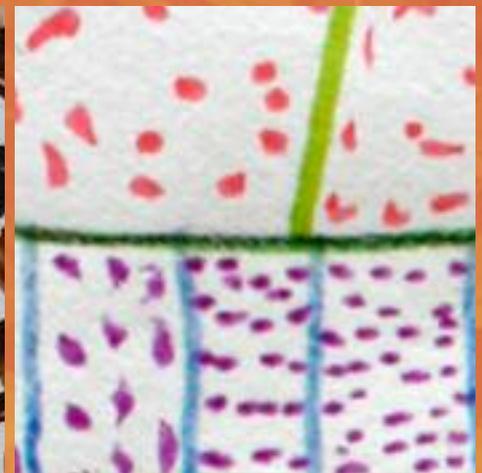


from
exclusion to
belonging



ART TABLES IN REFUGEE DROP-IN CENTRES

Based on Art Table
experience at Borderlands
Drop-in Centre, Bristol

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Foreword

by Steve Owen, Drop-in Manager, Borderlands, Bristol

This is a thorough, thoughtful and sensitive booklet, with great attention to detail. As the authors point out, drop-in welcome centres for asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants can be busy, chaotic places, with very many things going on at the same time. This is certainly true of the Borderlands Drop-in where I have worked as Drop-in Manager since January 2017. Being so preoccupied with the chaos, I feel that I myself have very little knowledge of the inner workings of our own art table, and all credit is due to these three enthusiastic and energetic people for this wonderful resource. I am sure it will be of great use to anyone considering providing art or craft materials at their centre.

From my perspective, it seems that art tables provide a place to anchor oneself or a slowing-down space. I have my own experiences of feeling more comfortable in a new space if I'm occupied by doing something, a task or an activity, rather than waiting awkwardly, perhaps anxiously, for someone to speak to me. At the Borderlands Drop-in we see more than 500 individuals a year, so there is always someone who is with us for their first time, who might be feeling afraid or nervous, and who might not have anyone to talk to. The art table provides a non-threatening space in between being alone and being in conversation, a place to hide in company, implicitly embodying a value of 'welcome'. And for those with a pre-existing passion for creativity, maybe artists in their own countries, the access to art resources is really valuable, and enables them to continue their identity in a strange land.

The other value that I am happy to read in this booklet is of a shared humanity, and the necessary work of empowerment demanded. Working cross-culturally, allowing space to 'play' and experiment, learning from others, sharing, facilitating rather than teaching, seeing yourself as a guest, being patient...it can be hard work sharing space with 'others' in a way that doesn't further disempower them. I think the potential for ownership of a space or activity through physically shaping or marking the content is great and definitely worth pursuing, even (especially) where it leads to chaos!

I hope that in reading this booklet, others will think more intentionally and sensitively about the spaces they are creating for asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants, and will feel inspired and able to explore similar creative activities in their own contexts.

Introduction

This booklet has been written with people in mind who are interested in setting up an Art Table in a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees. They may not have great confidence in themselves as artists – nor may they have had teaching, counselling or psychotherapy training. This may make them reluctant to put themselves forward. We want to reassure them that these limitations do not preclude them from taking on the role. However, because of the circumstances in which asylum seekers and refugees find themselves, there are certain matters that the prospective Art Table facilitator needs to consider and take into account. We have outlined these in this booklet.

Asylum seekers have many needs not provided by the statutory authorities. Charitable organisations respond to these needs by setting up drop-in centres. They provide warmth, free food, some access to legal and health advice and a place where those who use the centre can talk, share news and play board games with sympathetic volunteers. Free English lessons and access to art materials are also often provided. All drop-in centres tend to be noisy, busy, slightly chaotic places where everyone who works in them has to be open and respond flexibly to all the changes in circumstances, desires and needs of the people who use them. Above all, drop-in centres aim to be safe places, where asylum seekers and refugees – uprooted from their families and cultures – can find a sense of belonging.

The three authors of this booklet all work with refugees and asylum seekers in Bristol and meet several times a year to learn from each other. We come from a variety of backgrounds, within the caring and teaching professions. Marian is an art therapist specialising in conflict resolution and with extensive experience

working in the NHS and in war-torn countries in Africa. Her parents were refugees. Gaie has fifteen years' experience of being facilitator of an Art Table for the Refugee Women of Bristol (RWOB). Chris became an artist in his retirement, after a professional lifetime as a GP. He has been working as an Art Table facilitator for three years.

Because of our different backgrounds, we bring a variety of approaches. These are used in a pragmatic way, according to the situations which the users present and the skills and approaches of the facilitators working at the Art Table at the time. The range of our backgrounds and experience should encourage readers of this booklet to bring their own particular skills and experience to the rewarding role of being a facilitator at an Art Table in a refugee drop-in centre. We are united in our passion for the work and the conviction that having properly resourced Art Tables in refugee drop-in centres can greatly enhance members' experience. Members who use the Art Table may be artists in their own right or may just want to use the art materials for a respite from words.

Our convictions are supported by objective evidence. Involvement in the creative arts has been shown to improve health and wellbeing (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017). There is also evidence that these benefits extend to refugees (Phillips, Bradfield, Hogan, Sheffield, & Baker, 2018). As well as health and wellbeing, it has been shown that involvement in the creative arts improves societal cohesion and improves self-confidence and initiative (Matarasso, 1997). For those who manage drop-in centres and those who work as Art Table facilitators, such evidence provides a powerful incentive to make sure that their users have access to the creative arts in a safe and meaningful way.

Being an Art Table facilitator

One of the authors of this booklet (Gaie) was an art teacher before she started work as an Art Table facilitator. She describes here her initial experiences in her role as a facilitator:

When I started the work, I was apprehensive. I had expectations based on previous work as an art teacher. I made lesson plans, prepared a scheme of work with appropriate materials laid out. I wanted to do a good job and help this section of the community. It was soon apparent that this approach was not working. The paints, brushes, crayons and felt tips, plus paper and interesting resource books were not taken up, for a variety of reasons. I felt somewhat disillusioned. I discovered that, in general, this work is less about careful planning than remaining open to the needs and feelings of the refugees. I moved from assessing the success or otherwise of each session, to asking rather, ‘What went well? What did I learn? What can we share next week?’

I am providing a creative space that is available for people to drop into, to come and go as desired. Engagement is optional and usually fleeting, due to the necessity of attending English classes. There are, however, many women who are enthusiastic, excited by the opportunity to be creative, who can relate the arts activities to some part of their previous life and culture. Others use the Art Table as a meeting or reflective space. I work with regular volunteers, who bring their diverse creative skills and experience.

Our task is to be with the art-makers, to acknowledge their individual needs and responses, and take a lead from them.

Sometimes there is clear evidence of depression or withdrawal, which, in time, gives way to a gradual improvement and re-engagement. Or a group of refugees from a particular country or region may find each other at the table. Direct questions, especially about the women’s countries of origin, their families or their journeys to England, should be used with caution and sensitivity.

Running an Art Table within a drop-in centre for refugees requires the facilitator to be responsive to the needs of those who use the table. First of all, a facilitator needs to encourage the creative process. This can be achieved by adopting a flexible, listening, receptive attitude to those who use the Art Table. Second, it includes feeling comfortable using a range of art materials and understanding how they work. Finally, the facilitator needs to be sensitive to the way in which group dynamics may affect the creative process. These qualities are more important than having any particular individual artistic skills.

So, Art Table facilitators can come from many backgrounds – teaching, social work, caring professions, artists – anyone with an interest in art and people, and with the time and commitment needed. This may include refugee and asylum seeker members who have the relevant skills, who may be excellent role models to encourage participation from other members. However, they may be too busy with the rigours of Home Office applications and the uncertain circumstances in which they have to live - they may need to use the Art Table for themselves before being available to help others.

It takes time for many people to feel the Art Table is a place where they can feel at home. They may start by having a conversation with someone working on a picture. Then they may bring their cup of tea. After a while, they may play with some miniature clay bricks with their friends. Then they may pick up a

pencil and make some tentative marks. So the process is gradual. Similarly, introducing anything new on to the Art Table may need some time for people to see it as something worthwhile – facilitators need patience and perseverance.

It is vital to remember that those who attend drop-in centres are not our clients, our patients or our students. As Margaret, who is an English teacher at Borderlands refugee drop-in centre, with many years' experience, reminds us:

'Remember these are our brothers and our sisters.'

Setting up an Art Table in a drop-in centre

We believe that the Art Table should be in the main hall, where all the other activities, like playing board games, chatting with friends, and drinking tea and coffee are happening. It is then easy for people to wander over and see what is happening, and then be enticed in to draw, paint or make models. We also encourage volunteers to do artwork at the Art Table, so they become familiar with the material that is available. They may also use art-making as a means of processing a story they have heard.

If the Art Table is put in a separate room, even though it may have the advantage of being in a quieter space, it becomes an activity which requires a special effort for involvement. There is a danger in such circumstances that those who work on the Art Table become a separate group or 'clique'. This defeats the goal of making the creative visual arts accessible to all.

This piece is from Chris, who works at Borderlands, a drop-in centre for men and women:

We have two collapsible tables put together, to make a large table about two metres square. We cover this with a plain white plastic table cover to create a neutral background. Around the edge of the table we arrange paper, then in the middle we place jars containing coloured pencils, lead pencils, felt-tip pens, paint and paint brushes, and also some lumps of plasticine or clay. They are laid out so that participants (refugees or volunteers) can choose what materials they use. We may do some artwork of our own while working on the Art Table, to encourage others, but make sure we are available to welcome and support those who come to the Art Table. We aim to make a safe space for members to become mentally absorbed in the creative process – which may be copying images from magazines or their mobile phones, doing observational drawings, or painting remembered landscapes or people or events. We encourage people to experiment with the materials, to emphasise that there is no 'one right way' or standard to achieve.

It is helpful to have more than one facilitator working at the Art Table. If someone needs prolonged individual attention, then it means that there is still another facilitator available to attend to the needs of others. It is also helpful to have male and female facilitators present, as that encourages both genders to make use of the Art Table.

At the beginning of the session we put a colouring book (floral patterns are favourites) on another table, with a pot of felt-tip pens. These are often used by women who are too shy to come to the Art Table. We have also bought a laminated World Map, which we unroll on to another table – this often becomes a shared talking point as people show others the journey they took to the UK. Recently we read about refugees in Calais using sets of miniature bricks made

of baked clay to build walls and houses, so we have bought a set. Those who are shy about using paper and mark making materials, often enjoy building walls and little houses with these bricks. Occasionally we put a large piece of paper on a separate table, with a heading of a general theme, e.g. TREES or AUTUMN and encourage everyone to contribute.

Our main constraint is the time available to us. Relatively few people attend the Art Table before 11:00 a.m., when some of them who have attended the first hour of the English class skip the second hour to do some artwork. There is a rush of people when the English classes end at 12, and we then may have about 6 or 7 people working on the Art Table or chatting to their friends while they are doing artwork. The background noise at this time of day is quite considerable. We have to start to pack up the Art Table at about 12:30 so that the tables are available for the free hot meal served at 1:00 p.m.

It is important for those who want to do so, to be able to display their completed artwork. This was a problem, as the hall we use is used by other tenants who do not want the distraction of artwork on the walls when they are using the hall. To overcome this problem, one of our refugee members with joinery skills, made a shallow cupboard with doors, which can be opened during our session times and closed outside those times. We can pin up artwork done on the day, if members are willing – many of them are proud to see their work displayed.

We get requests from time to time for pictures to include in exhibitions, and we used to find it difficult to identify past work and get permission to show it. To overcome this, we now label all the work (with date and first name)

immediately it is completed. The work is stored in separate files for each week. A ring file containing brief notes of what happened in the session that day is kept on the table so that anyone can look at it and make a contribution if they want to. We have a plan chest (donated to us) to store the completed work and also a stock of paper.

Art materials

Wherever possible, a wide range of art materials should be available and should include wet and dry materials, 2D and 3D. However, it is always better to have a small quantity of good quality materials, rather than a large amount of poor quality materials.

Ideally, the art materials kit should include: ready-mixed paint, water jars, palettes or plastic plates/dishes, oil pastels, chalk pastels, charcoal, a range of pencils from hard to soft, graphite sticks, good quality coloured pencils, felt-tip pens (broad and fine), paper of different sizes and shapes (and including some thick enough to hold paint), scissors, glue sticks, PVA glue and spreaders, ruler, eraser, pencil sharpener, fixative (or a light-weight hairspray), Newplast (a soft modelling material), and clay. Miniature building bricks, made of the same clay from which life-size bricks are made are very attractive to play with, for those who do not regard themselves as having skills in drawing and painting. Sometimes simple printing materials can be popular as they give interesting effects with minimal experience.

A list of materials and their use can be found in the Appendix.



Laying out the table so that the materials are accessible and look attractive is helpful in enabling participants to get involved and feel welcome at a table where we are sharing our resources. In many towns and cities there are ‘Scrapstores’ providing off-casts of paper and card and basic art materials at low cost.

The photograph above is of the Borderlands Art Table laid out before the start of the session.

Other facilities to consider are sturdy tables and chairs, display boards, storage space, a strong folder or plan chest to store the artwork, map of the world and of the UK. It is helpful to have a sink near the Art Table for cleaning up spillages, wiping down tables and a place where hands can be washed. Where this is not possible it can be helpful to have wet wipes and paper towelling available.

Gaie contributes some insights from a more craft-based approach in a women-only drop-in centre:

Currently we are working with clay, as this medium is familiar to all cultures, and has a physical immediacy and universal appeal. Refugees’ previous access to education will vary wildly. Some may be illiterate, some may be students who have had their education disrupted, and others may be highly qualified. Similarly, there is a wide spectrum of facility with the English language, including speaking and comprehension. The haptic nature of working in clay, and the simplicity of demonstrating ceramic techniques, bridges this range of intellectual and linguistic abilities. I currently work with two volunteers, both of whom are artists and potters. Fortunately, one has a kiln that we can use to ‘biscuit-fire’ the work produced. This work is later painted.

Many of the women tell us that they remember their grannies making clay pots. They carry a strong cultural memory and bring these memories to the table. One woman brought her elderly mother, who had no English, to join us



Decorated pottery from Refugee Women of Bristol

at the table. Unable to communicate via language, her pleasure was obvious as she began to make hand-built pots, revisiting a familiar skill. She produced some beautiful pots, concentrating hard and enjoying the process.

The process, in this creative setting, is far more important than the product. Often the women make replicas of objects which carry a particular significance. It might be a miniature tray and coffee set, or a significant building from their home-town. These items are made with care and skill. Perhaps they are a way of managing the loss and separation in their lives.

Sometimes unexpected connections are made, and a happy result occurs. I brought in some plain white tiles, and some tile paint, which can be fired in a domestic oven. Before long the women were painting intricate, traditional patterns in brown tile paint on the tiles. They were familiar with painting henna on their hands and bodies, and now these beautiful designs were transferred to the tiles. When fired, the tiles made wonderful pot stands and mats.

A vast range of craft and art materials is available. The practicalities of the setting may dictate which media to choose, e.g. is there a sink in the room, how large are the

*Decorated
ceramic
tiles from
Refugee
Women
of Bristol*



tables, how many are in the group, how long is the session, what is the budget? Activities like sewing, embroidery, crochet and knitting are clean and portable activities, and are familiar to many cultures.

Art and wellbeing

An Art Table in a drop-in centre may be run by people who have a background in education, social work, art therapy or as a practising artist. The situation is informal and slightly chaotic. For example, a man may sit down and do some drawing for twenty minutes and then go off to his English class; a mother may come in, with her child in a buggy, and while keeping her child occupied, do a drawing of a flower; a young man may sit down and spend an hour drawing the landscape of the countryside of the village that he left in his home country. The facilitator is there to make sure that the users of the Art Table have what they need in the way of space and materials, so they can become totally absorbed in the activity.

A group of people working around the Art Table may generate a sense of ‘gathered’ focus, which may have a calming effect on all involved. When we get absorbed, when we are having fun, when we are being creative, then we relax and can find a new perspective on problems. This is sometimes called ‘flow’. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes research showing the benefits of ‘flow time’ absorption in activity such as art. By providing art materials, a safe environment and encouragement to play, the Art Table can thus help the healing process and provide the opportunity to rediscover or replenish the spark of individuality, that is so vital.



Drawing by Chris Watkins of a member at work at the Art Table

When the work is completed, the artist may want to explain what the work means to them. However, the facilitator’s role is to appreciate and to affirm, but never to criticise or interpret. An Art Table is a gathering space for people to have conversations as well as do artwork. Through these conversations people’s needs become better known. If a facilitator picks up health concerns, physical or mental, this can lead to a referral to their GP. Individuals can also be referred to those who visit drop-in centres who are knowledgeable about where people can get help about financial, housing and other social problems. There are some individuals whose work indicates that they might benefit from individual art therapy or being a member of art therapy group. Any referrals should always be done in conjunction with the person and the managers of the drop-in centre.

Safe practice

Some core principles from the world of psychotherapy and counselling are used by arts therapists, and can be useful for Art Table facilitators, to help people have a safe and fulfilling experience. As Papadopoulos says:

I would strongly argue that therapeutic considerations can always be useful and should be included in any kind of care plan refugees are offered. This means that regardless of their suitability for or availability of psychotherapy proper, refugees will always benefit from appropriately adjusted forms of ‘therapeutic care’ Therapeutic care refers to the wider application of psychotherapeutic principles to any form of assistance to refugees. (Papadopoulos, 2002: 4)

Art Table facilitators are not providing therapy but can benefit from applying some basic elements of it. Some of these are considered here.

Being reliable, trustworthy, sensitive and non-judgemental

At the Art Table, the facilitator provides an empathic environment by being warm, reliable, receptive, consistent and non-judgemental about participants’ stories and their artwork. In this context, it needs to be remembered that direct questions can be experienced as threatening and intrusive and should be avoided. The stories of those engaged at the Art Table will be shared when trust has developed over time. When this happens, it is a huge privilege.

Facilitators need to be sensitive to how art materials are being used, for the benefit of the participants; for instance, responding when someone is struggling and suggesting a change of material.

Remembering past events

Many asylum seekers and refugees have been forcibly separated from their families, their communities and their landscapes, in horrific circumstances. Such unimaginable loss can result in intense home-sickness, disturbed sleep patterns and depression. Many find comfort and a sense of healing in the process of representing the people, places and objects that they have loved and lost, by making models or doing drawings and paintings, sometimes using photographs that they have kept on their phones throughout their journeys. The powerful and meaningful images produced become important objects in themselves. As facilitators we are asked to manage, store and display them and it is important for us to appreciate the responsibility that we have when we are entrusted with their safe-keeping.

Boundaries

Boundaries give life a pattern and predictability. They help people to feel safe. The life of an asylum seeker without ‘Indefinite Leave to Remain’ has unpredictability at its core. The boundaries established at the Art Table help the asylum seeker to feel secure and include:

- An agreement to respect each other and each other’s work;
- A set place, day and time of availability, e.g. Borderlands drop-in centre, 10.00 to 12.30, every Tuesday, at which time tables need to be cleared for lunch;
- The Art Table is set up, with a core kit of materials, and continuity of facilitators wherever possible;
- No photographs or recording without explicit permission;
- Visitors to the Art Table are introduced and approaches by journalists are carefully managed;

- Protecting boundaries on behalf of the group, such as no male facilitators at female only Art Tables. This respects cultural differences and ensures safety for women who have endured gender-based violence.

Companionship

At the Art Table, ‘accompanying’ people who are making images or playing with art materials, communicates to the makers of artwork, that facilitators accept them and their unique expressions of such emotions as happiness, sadness, fear, confusion, anger and humour. This companionship involves paying close attention to what participants are doing, and engaging in conversation about it if someone wishes. It is also important to give someone space to be left undisturbed, in the company of others, to concentrate on their artwork.

Recovering a ‘supple’ way of living

Being able to recover quickly, emotionally, from difficulties and unexpected challenges (‘resilience’) is a skill that we learn as we interact with family and other people, as we grow up. Asylum seekers and refugees will have had to call upon an enormous amount of physical and emotional resilience in their home countries and on their journeys. At some stage they may begin to process emotionally what they have left behind. This can be a long and difficult process. Drawing or painting a picture or making a model can help people to process the impact of their circumstances non-verbally.

Mental health issues

Occasionally members using the Art Table display symptoms of mental health issues, such as unusual behaviour or incoherent

talking. Art Table facilitators should involve the manager of the drop-in centre, who may be able to refer them to their GP for medical help or onward referral to mental health facilities.

Gender issues

Some women asylum seekers have fled domestic violence, including rape and female genital mutilation (FGM). This may have occurred in their home country, their journey to the UK, through trafficking and/or after their arrival in the UK. They require specialist help. Because these women are vulnerable, drop-in centres need to provide a safe environment for them, through Women-Only drop-ins and Women-Only groups. A ban on photography for safety and cultural reasons, is crucial in these circumstances.

Practical safety issues

There are also a few practical safety issues. For example:

- It is important to protect members and facilitators, both emotionally and physically from the disruptive behaviour of other people using the Art Table. Other staff and volunteers with good interpersonal skills may be needed for this.
- Children may use the Art Table, particularly during school holidays. This brings a very different dynamic to an Art Table. Children need to be supervised by their parents, unless all facilitators have an enhanced DBS certificate. (Remarkably, the Government does not recognise adult asylum seekers as a statutory vulnerable group, which would demand DBS certification of all professionals and volunteers who work with them.)

- To protect clothes, it is best for everyone to use water-soluble paints and inks. A supply of old shirts is useful to protect particularly enthusiastic painters and those around them.

Completed artwork

It is important to let participants know that the artwork is theirs to take home if they wish. It is not 'work to be handed in' like at school. Sometimes they leave it behind because they have nowhere to keep it where they live. There needs to be clarity about where such work is stored and for how long, and what will happen to it when/ if storage is no longer possible. Artists should be able to retrieve their work when they want.

The ideal storage place is a plan chest, if a centre is lucky enough to find one that is cheap or donated, but any set of shelves can be used. It is a good idea to have a system - either by date or name - and some cheap folders or folded paper to keep sets of pictures separate.

If the centre is approached for pictures for an exhibition, book or research, it is important that participants are asked for their permission. For some requests, verbal permission is enough, but for some (e.g. books) written permission may be needed. In such cases the wording needs to be in clear English, or mediated by an interpreter, so that artists know what they are signing. Artists are often proud to exhibit their work, and to feel they can contribute something.

Psychological trauma and art-making

Not all of those who have experienced traumatic events will go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but those

who do may be susceptible to apparently benign stimuli, triggering a response more appropriate to emergency situations that threaten survival. Sounds, smells, textures, tastes and sights (experienced during the trauma or traumas) can instantly transport a person back to that moment, and they can react as if in immediate danger. This is widely understood as being in fight/flight/ freeze/ flop mode.

For example, a person who has been in a house fire can respond to the smell of burning toast in an exaggerated way. This is because the part of the brain that is activated in the potentially life-threatening situation, stores the sensory memory to prepare the survivor to act quickly, in the event that it occurs again (Spring 2008).

A more common example perhaps, is that those of us who grew up using 'playdough' might, upon smelling it, be transported back to childhood memories, positive or negative, and this may influence our attraction or avoidance of it. Around Art Tables, we have noticed that, instinctively, participants tend to be attracted to the material that will help them to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences in a visual language. In the same way, we have also noticed that participants may have an aversion to using certain materials or methods - for example, one person might find that they do not like getting paint on their hands and another might not like using clay.

Our role is to support the choices of participants in their art-making, to avoid potential compounding of trauma and to aid the experience of storytelling and relief through creativity, play and exploration. There is evidence that the mental absorption entailed in this engagement with art processes in individuals with anxiety improves self-esteem and wellbeing. This, in turn, helps to improve integration into the host society (Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya and Heusch 2005). We know from experience

that a lot of emotion and investment can be put into and contained by the artwork itself. However, at times, we might be presented with a verbal description of stress, sleeplessness, isolation, intrusive and sudden memories (flashbacks) and loss of hope that indicates referral for counselling or therapy.

Supervision

Supervision of those who work with vulnerable people who have endured extreme hardship is important. It is standard practice within social work, psychology and therapy. Its two main purposes are to support those who carry out close and sensitive work to maintain their own resilience and to reflect on their work. Supervision is a way to make sure that professionals work in the best interests of the people they serve. It is a place to share difficulties and successes and reduces the risk of burn-out. Some supervision can be informal, with facilitators observing each other at work and providing helpful support and feedback. Other supervision may be more formal, by providing a regular time and place to process what has happened, with a more experienced practitioner, reflecting on the personal emotional impact on the facilitator. It is incumbent on the managers of drop-in centres to provide supervision to volunteers and facilitators, whatever their roles.

We have our own quarterly meetings for artists and art therapists working with refugees in Bristol, and also a quarterly group meeting with the manager of the drop-in centre. Where this is either not possible, or not sufficient we would encourage a monthly reflective discussion with an experienced art therapist. Other experienced community artists, socially engaged artists, health and wellbeing practitioners, can also be approached for advice, guidance or supervision.

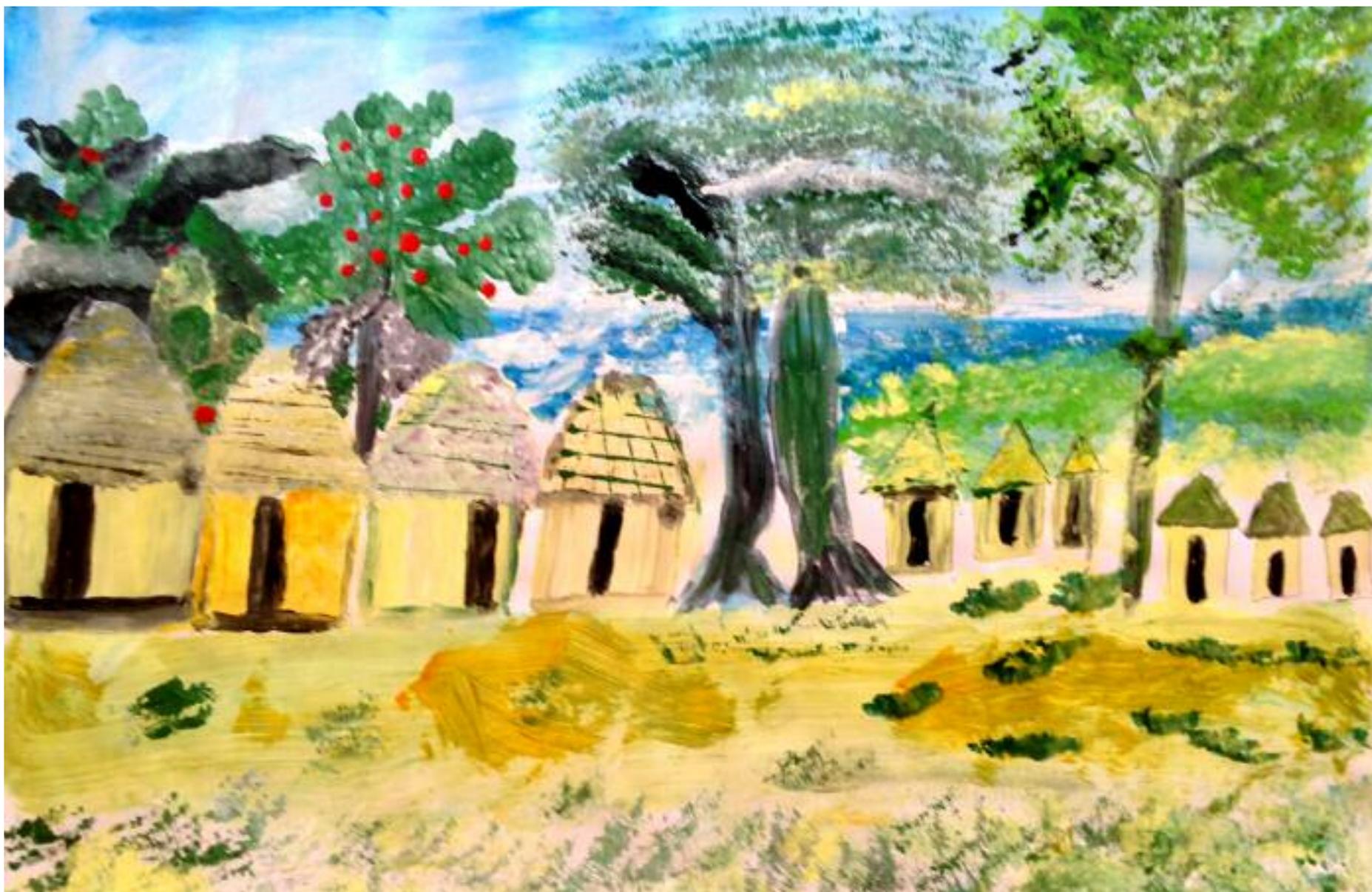
Narratives

Some of the people named in these stories use their own names because they are proud of the work which they have done and want the world to know about themselves and their work. Others prefer anonymity for reasons of personal safety or culture.

Adama's story (told by Marian)

Adama (not her real name) fled from Sierra Leone because of the war there. Rebels bombed her family's house and some of her relatives were killed. Her children were scattered, apart from her deaf-mute daughter. Adama had been a primary school teacher of English and maths, but the pay was too irregular to live on, and she set up her own business selling dresses and shoes. She had to go to the Gambia to get a visa and came to the UK with her daughter initially to donate a kidney to her half-brother, and claimed asylum because she was afraid to go back, with a new government which might be hostile to her family, and because of the Ebola crisis – she felt she would be vulnerable with only one kidney. She and her daughter applied for asylum together, but due to a bureaucratic error their applications got separated, and her daughter got refugee status, leaving Adama still waiting.

She came to Bristol in 2010 and attended the drop-in centre, first working with children, then later taking part in activities with adults. She loves coming to the Art Table, as she enjoys drawing and painting, and feels it has helped her deal with the voices she was hearing and her inability to concentrate due to stress.



*Painting
of
Adama's
village*

The picture she painted reminded her of villages in Sierra Leone, with palm-thatch roofs – many of her relatives lived in houses like these, though she herself had a zinc roof as better protection from

the cold. She loved the green trees all around and told me about the monkeys who came to steal their food.

Patricia's and my story (told by Chris)

Patricia sat next to me at the Art Table. She started working with some modelling clay and as she did so, she told me what she was making. I, too, picked up a piece of modelling clay and started working it, with no idea in my mind as to what I would make.

Patricia was making a miniature tea pot, decorated and with a lid. Alongside it was a set of small mugs. She told me how she used to visit her grandmother, who lived on the Niger Delta, during the school holidays and she explained that her grandmother made her own crockery from the clay she dug from the swamp. The models that Patricia made that day at the Art Table were replicas of her grandmother's teapot and mugs, from which she drank tea as a child. When her grandmother had finished making her crockery, she piled it all up in a pyramid and surrounded it with dry sticks and wood. She set fire to the wood and the heat made the clay go hard; the crockery was then ready for use.

When I looked at what I had made, I saw that I had also made a teacup, but of rather an unusual shape. I eventually realised that it was a replica of the teacup from which I drank tea when I visited my grandmother as a child.

Being the companion of someone working at the Art Table, by working alongside them, can result in unusual experiences.

Hassan's picture (told by Chris)

About halfway through the session, a tall slim man, colourfully dressed, and speaking with a loud voice arrived with a clear idea of what he wanted to do. This was Hassan from Somalia. He wore a diamante ring on his left ring finger. He has learning difficulties and is profoundly deaf, because of injuries he sustained in his home country.

He took some paper and scissors and shaped the paper into a rhomboid shape. He then drew this piece:



*Drawing
by
Hassan*

He told me that the little stairs at the bottom of the drawing were at the entrance to the church, which is the triangular piece of white paper. The priest is at the top doing the healing.

Hassan is always smiling and brings delight to those around him.

Mona's story (told by Gaie)

Mona (not her real name, changed for safety reasons) is a young woman in her late twenties. She has been coming to the drop-in centre for Refugee Women of Bristol for two years. She has never talked about her circumstances, her family or her homeland. She has a 3-year-old son. He is currently in a nursery, and she has to hurry off after the sessions, to pick him up. When she first arrived, she was evidently unhappy and depressed, the expression on her face was fixed and unchanging. She had no friends or acquaintances. She resembled a ghost.

Talking about herself as she felt then, she reveals how low and depressed she was, with no ability to concentrate, or desire to complete anything. (Mona had mentioned that she was unwell, and I knew that she was being seen by the medical team for physical and mental health problems.)

Mona recalls that the encouragement and support she received at the Art Table made a big difference to her. She told us that she had always been interested in using colour, creating clothes and drawings. Back home people used to come to her for advice on what colours to wear. Gradually her own wardrobe became more colourful, and she explored different media at the table, painting on paper and on tiles, and working with clay. Her tile designs were based on familiar, traditional henna patterns (see p.5). One day when things had not been going well for herself or her son, she painted a tile for him, 'for my son, with love from Mum.'

Mona now has several friends at the Centre, which she says feels like a family. She was living some way from the centre of town but has now been rehoused and is much happier. Last week she discussed ways to brighten up her new flat, deciding to use some strong, plain colours to make cushion covers out of a range of fabrics we had provided from 'Scrapstore', a very useful local resource.

The transformation that Mona experienced was of course complex, and largely due to the support she received, and her own resilience. Providing a safe opportunity for creative expression and play was also, I believe, an important part of the healing process.

She says of her own innate creativity, which is very much in evidence, 'If something's there, you just have to bring it out.'

Yuosef's story (told by himself)

'Before and After:

Before in Sudan I had a good life, with family and friends. But after, in my country – a problem with government. On the left you see many animals in the hills. On the right they are gone – gone because of bombs. Before the mountains were green – after black.

In the top right you see government planes and the army fighting with the people – beneath are young people like me with no guns but fight. Before there were many houses – now just government house.'



*Painting
by
Yuosef*

Community projects

In some ways the Art Table can be seen as a self-contained little haven within a larger multi-purpose safe place for asylum seekers and refugees, but many conversations that start at the Art Table spin off into further opportunities which may involve the whole drop-in centre or reach out into the community. The centre is part of the community and tries hard to be aware of suitable projects and opportunities for members to engage in.

And the community comes to the drop-in centres too – there is a constant stream of well-wishers, media people, researchers, offers of help of all kinds. It is good to know there is such widespread community support (especially given the negative portrayal of refugees in the media), and much of the help offered is valuable. However, sometimes the centre does not have the capacity to use all the help offered, as there are too few staff to coordinate such offers, and often inadequate space.

Some of these projects are concerned with art. Below we give a summary of recent art projects in which Borderlands members have been, or are still, involved.

Borderlands Rise Project

In March 2017, Borderlands presented the Rise Exhibition in Hamilton House, to celebrate the first year of the Borderlands Mentoring Programme (involving 25-30 volunteer mentors). It created an opportunity for refugees and asylum seekers to take part in creative workshops, exhibit their photography and artwork, and perform their music – an empowering experience, showing what asylum seekers and refugees bring to Bristol. These were supported by a series of portraits and sound recordings by

artist Hannah Kirmes-Daly and the radio DJ, Jazlyn Pinckney. Visitors were able to learn more about the daily lived experience of refugees and asylum seekers in Bristol and the importance of Borderlands Mentoring Project. The exhibition was opened by the Mayor of Bristol, who encourages our efforts, as it supports Bristol as a ‘City of Sanctuary’ (Borderlands 2017a).

Borderlands Anthology

In 2016 and 2017 some refugee and asylum seeker members of Borderlands attended creative writing workshops led by Alison Hallett and Lynsey-Ruth Mansfield. The work produced from these sessions was put together with artwork produced at the Art Table at Borderlands to make an attractive book called ‘Borderlands’. The costs of the production and printing of the book were covered by a successful crowd-funding campaign and launched in Bristol, at the Arnolfini Gallery, at the beginning of the Bristol Refugee Festival in June 2017 (Borderlands 2017b).

The book has been highly successful in providing insight into the life experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in their own countries, in the UK and on the journey between.

A Community Shelter

This was a community-led arts project funded by Bristol City Council. It was directed by Charlotte Biszewski and involved other artists: Luke Carter, Alex Goodman and Dean Ayotte. The project involved five groups in Bristol: Avonmouth Community Shelter, Borderlands, Studio Upstairs, See It From Her and Knowle West Young Mums. Over a six-month period, these groups were each paired with an individual artist who led workshops in lino-cut printmaking. The groups were encouraged to print images of objects and images which reminded them of

home, be it a teapot, an old cuddly toy, a beach... These were then printed on to canvas tents, which had been rescued by Charlotte from the Calais refugee camp. At Borderlands Marian encouraged members to join in, especially as English classes had stopped for the summer; many images were produced, such as cups of tea, African cooking tools, houses, trees and more. At the end of the project, the tents from all the groups were exhibited together at the Vestibules, an arts venue in Bristol City Hall. The participants were all invited to walk around each others' tents and view their own work on display with that of others.

Christmas Tree project – a collaboration

In 2018, Borderlands Drop-in Centre agreed to contribute to Tree Fest, a pre-Christmas community exhibition of Christmas trees in one of the main churches in Bristol. A Borderlands volunteer built a tree, deliberately roughly constructed with oddments of driftwood. A photographer had previously made professional portraits – heads and shoulders - of some of the refugees, staff and volunteers. These were printed and stuck on stiff canvas, with a space for messages and wishes and a loop to hang them on the sculpture/ tree.

People were encouraged to write on each other's photos in their own language and translated into English if this was possible. This required knowledge of people's relationships within the Borderlands community. The messages were heartfelt. One of the photos was of a Kurdish man who had been murdered, and his Kurdish friend expressed his respect and grief on it. He also expressed his appreciation for one of the workers on her photo and she reciprocated on his: 'A man who fills our belly with delicious food and makes us laugh'. Another man took his photo to the detention centre where his brother was interned, and it was returned with a message for the whole community. A Sudanese

Muslim woman wrote 'I love you' in English and Arabic on the photo of a Catholic sister. Circles of white paper were cut out so that more people could write messages and people flocked to the tree to do so: wishing each other happiness, hoping for peace, volunteers showing solidarity: 'We are one'.

After the exhibition was over, the tree sculpture fell apart and the photos and messages were returned and hung on the Borderlands Christmas tree. In the New Year the photos were given to the people they represented, with their precious messages. Nothing tangible was left intact at the end, but what mattered was the process, cementing belonging for all concerned.

African quilt

In 2017, the women at Refugee Women of Bristol helped create a colourful quilt for the Africa Eye Film Festival in Bristol, named the 'Rise and Shine Quilt'. Several local groups were involved. The quilt was made from African fabrics, each of which has a name and a story. These were shared, ideas were exchanged, sewing skills were learned, and the project connected them to their own culture and to each other in a creative and lively way. The quilt was displayed at the Watershed Cinema, auctioned and presented to a school in Ghana, and a book was written about the quilt's journey (Refugee Women of Bristol 2015).

Bristol – Learning City: Arts and crafts

In 2018, artefacts made by women from Refugee Women of Bristol were shown at Hamilton House, at the 'Bristol - Learning City' exhibition. These were also sold at the Refugee Women of Bristol stalls at the M-Shed (one of Bristol's museums) on International Women's Day, and at the annual Bristol Refugee Festival.

Print project

In 2017, the initiative for this project came from the managers of Spike Print Centre, Irena Czapska and Francisco Garnica, who had already offered several opportunities to people living in constrained circumstances, to work in the print studios.

The idea was to provide asylum seekers and refugees, who attend Borderlands drop-in centre the opportunities to use the printing presses to expand the skills that they had learnt at the Art Table. Irena and Francisco also wanted to help Print Centre members get to know some refugees and welcome them to our city.

Eight sessions at monthly intervals were offered, starting in September 2017. There have been three or four people who regularly attend, with additional members on an occasional basis. It was hoped that there would be more people who would attend this course, but it proved difficult to recruit enough who were interested. This was partly due to the difficulty of enabling refugees to understand the concept of an artist's print, and partly because many refugees did not feel safe travelling, unaccompanied, to a part of Bristol unfamiliar to them. Many young mothers who would have liked to attend were prevented from doing so, as we could not provide a creche. Finally, the lives of refugees and asylum seekers are precarious and unpredictable, which means that they often find themselves unable to attend at the last minute.

The techniques which are being shown to the participants include dry-point etching, monotype and lino-cut. This project is still in progress and is a source of delight to both the participants and the tutors.

The Bristol Refugee Artists Collective (BRAC)

An Art Table is somewhere where people can meet, maybe for the first time, and discuss common interests and ideas. Some visitors

will be serious artists, already academically/professionally trained, or hungry to learn; and in Autumn 2017 five Borderlands members decided to form a collective to promote and exhibit their artwork, supported by Ben Glatt, an Art Table volunteer facilitator. Since then BRAC has gone from strength to strength, now bringing together around a dozen members from Borderlands and Refugee Women of Bristol, including artists from Sudan, Sierra Leone, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan, Palestine, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Empowerment through collaboration and self-help is at the heart of BRAC's philosophy. The Group fosters personal development and friendship among members whilst sharing activities and ideas to inspire, educate and inform the wider community in creative partnerships. The cultural diversity in the group and its breadth and depth of ideas and life experiences provide an outstanding body of material on which creative projects can draw.

BRAC is full of stories of friendship. The artists encourage each other to run workshops and to bring their children along to enjoy making art. Because it meets regularly, there is a family atmosphere and members help and encourage each other in all sorts of practical ways. Members have talked about a real sense of achievement through making and showing art, running workshops and talking to others about their work.

The group's achievements and activities to date include:

- Taking part in Bristol Amnesty's 2018 exhibition of refugee-related art and photography in Hamilton House, Bristol.
- An artists' two-week residency in Bristol City Hall during the 2018 Bristol Refugee Festival, on the theme of 'Reunion'.

- An artists' week-long residency in Victoria Methodist Church on the theme of 'Generations' during the 2019 Bristol Refugee Festival, featuring artwork from a ten-week collaboration project with UWE Art & Design Students.
- A weekend exhibition and workshop run by BRAC members in the September 2019 St Werburghs Art Trail.
- In most of these exhibitions, members of BRAC have run workshops for the public, which have been well-received.
- Plans are afoot for further collaboration projects with UWE Art & Design Foundation Students, enabling BRAC artists to attend part of the Foundation Course, working towards a two-week exhibition and residency in the June 2020 Bristol Refugee Festival. A website is also planned.

Community cultural development

Some refugees wish to convey their feelings of anger and frustration, or of delight and elation to a larger audience. Collaboration with local artists can help them and can be a satisfying and enriching experience as well as having the result of making the larger community better informed about the plight of refugees and the richness of what they have to offer to British society. The projects described above show what can be done.

Moving on

Sometimes refugees who are professional artists gravitate towards the Art Table, and we are able to suggest people and places where they may be able to pursue their art. Some of the projects described in the last section show how we have tried to enable artists to find places where they can practise their art.

Some participants at the Art Table become 'regulars'. They find it is the place where they can express themselves and be creative, where they can become absorbed in a meaningful activity. For them, art becomes an important part of their lives. Some of the projects described in this section are relevant here. The hope is that such members can be helped to move on to artistic careers, whether voluntary or paid. Clearly, we need to know about relevant opportunities in the community and in education organisations (such as Counterpoint Arts, which engages with refugee and migrant experiences, or Studio Upstairs, a community project for vulnerable artists) and the availability of bursaries and access routes to courses run by local further education colleges.

Another way in which artist members can move on is by becoming volunteer Art Table facilitators alongside others. At Borderlands two of the Art Table facilitators are refugee members. They help to set up the table and art materials in the morning and clear them away before lunch. And they help to encourage diffident members to get involved. Sometimes they speak the languages of other members, so can help to explain things in members' own languages, and this can be very useful.

Learning from experience

We have learnt a lot from our experiences with these projects. So far, they have shown us:

- how important it is to communicate clearly what the project has to offer and that it will be enjoyable;
- the importance of involving the other volunteers in the centre in the project so that they can identify and encourage members who would enjoy and benefit from the experience;

- the need for a safe way of getting to and from the place where it is taking place. This is especially true for many women;
- although there may be a low take up to start with, once word gets around that the activity is enjoyable, attendance improves;
- the offer of free use of other facilities, such as Spike Print Studio, can be a symbol of the generosity of members of the local community in welcoming refugees in Bristol;
- Many of the refugees and asylum seekers at drop-in centres do not have email addresses, or access to the internet. We find the best way of communicating electronically is through text messaging to mobile phones.

These useful observations are generalizable to other projects outside the drop-in centres, involving refugees and asylum seekers.

Conclusion

Art Tables have a unique contribution to make to the overall ethos and provision of drop-in centres for asylum-seekers and refugees. They provide a non-verbal alternative to having to explain oneself in an unfamiliar language. Participants can express themselves individually, while also being part of a group engaged in similar work. We work from the belief that art-making can help to develop and maintain resilience, and make visible concepts that cannot be conveyed through words alone.

Art Tables provide a space where people can feel safe and can begin to rebuild the capacity to trust. This is part of the whole aim of the drop-in centre, and Art Tables have a strong role in helping this to happen. People who attend the Art Table regularly may go on to find a new role in their lives and participate in artistic activities in the wider community, contributing to their integration into the social networks of their adopted country.

Refugee drop-in centre managers have an important role too. They can encourage the setting up of Art Tables, help to obtain funding for them, recruit suitable facilitators, and arrange training and supervision for them.

One of our core shared beliefs is in the humanity of us all. The members are not our clients or our patients – they are our brothers and sisters and we support and learn from each other. Working on an Art Table in a drop-in centre is often chaotic and sometimes tiring, but always rewarding. As one of the volunteers who works on our Art Table said: ‘I receive much more than I give.’

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Appendix: Notes on Art Materials

This section includes some brief notes on different media and their particular advantages. Only readily available media are included here. They are usually available from catalogues of art materials. Many towns and cities have access to Scrapstores of recycled materials and cheap art materials.

This list does not imply that you need all these materials to start an Art Table. Its aim is to provide some notes so that you can choose the most relevant materials for your circumstances.

1. Dry media
2. Paints
3. Brushes and other painting implements
4. Paper
5. 3-D materials
6. Collage materials
7. Adhesives
8. Folders
9. Other

1. Dry Media

Pencils, crayons, felt-tip markers, etc. These are easier to control than wet or fluid media. This can be important for those with disabilities which make the mechanics of using fluid media difficult. They can also be useful for people starting off, if they

are afraid to use paints and need to retain control over their medium to feel safe. On a practical level, many situations allow only dry media, e.g. rooms with carpets which have to be kept clean, rooms with no access to water, sessions which are too short to allow time to set out or clear up paints, and so on.

Pencils

For ordinary pencils, soft ones (2B, 3B or 4B) are easier to use than hard pencils. Erasers and pencil sharpeners are also needed, including pencil sharpeners of different sizes. Pencils are popular with refugees as they are often the only drawing implement available in their home countries.

Coloured pencils are also popular. Many of the people who attend refugee drop-in centres are accustomed to using these as they last well in hot climates. It is worth getting a couple of sets of good ones giving strong colours.

Water-colour pencils can be used as pencils in the usual way but can also be dipped in water to use as water-colour paints.

Fibre/Felt-tip pens and markers

Easy to use, good clear colours. Strong effects possible, but expanses of colour difficult. Good-quality ones can be expensive. Thick markers are good for making a quick impact.

Wax crayons

Moderately easy to control, do not wear down quickly, cheap, large sizes available. Sometimes difficult to get good depth of colour. Good for children. Also useful for people who need to press really hard. Some adults find them difficult because of the associations with childhood. As well as the traditional colours, wax crayons are now available in metallic colours (bronze, silver and gold), which are popular with children and adults.

Oil pastels

Moderately easy to control, strong colours, variety of textures and blocks of colour possible. Reasonably priced. Some people don't like the sticky feel of oil pastels.

Chalks and pastels

Moderately easy to use, but effects can smudge easily and need fixing. Chalks are cheap, but difficult to get a great range of colours. Artists' pastels contain toxic pigments. Some clients really enjoy the range of textures that can be achieved. Good range of colours usually available.

Charcoal

Quite difficult to use, smudges easily, but very good for strong effects and large drawings. If used vigorously this can create a lot of charcoal dust which may not be acceptable in the halls where drop-in centres are usually situated. Once completed, the drawings need to be fixed with spray fixative (or hair spray).

Graphite sticks

Same purpose as charcoal, but not as smudgy or breakable, nor do they create dust.

Skin-tone colours

Some dry media are available in skin-tones of different shades and colours, e.g. wax crayons. This is important in our multi-cultural society.

Fixative

This is needed to prevent pastel and charcoal drawings from smudging. It can be bought from art shops or catalogues, but plain hairspray is a cheaper alternative which works well.

2. Paints

Paints are much more fluid and therefore more difficult to control than dry media, but also much more rewarding in the effects that can be obtained, and more enjoyable to use for many people. Many artists' quality paints are toxic, so it is better to use scholastic materials. The paints below are all used with water.

Water-colours

The most fluid and difficult to control, mistakes cannot be corrected. This can be daunting, but can also help people to accept their mistakes and live with them. Available in tubes and in sets of little blocks - tubes are often easier to use. Moderately expensive.

Powder paint

Cheap, but difficult to achieve the desired consistency, and can be messy to use unless pre-mixed. Not very easy to use thickly or to correct mistakes.

Ready-mixed paint

These are the same paint as powder colour, but mixed ready to use. Thick, easy to use, reasonably cheap. Available in large plastic bottles. Can achieve strong effects. Changes tone as it dries, to less vibrant colours. Nozzles often clog up - useful to have a large paper-clip on hand to unblock. As well as the traditional colours, they are now available in fluorescent colours (popular with children and adolescents) and metallic colours - bronze, silver and gold (popular with everyone). These are all slightly more expensive than ordinary colours.

Acrylic and polymer paints

Easy to use, variety of textures possible. Paints dry very quickly, mistakes are easy to correct. Can achieve strong effects.

Expensive. When dry, not soluble in water, so care needed with brushes and clothes.

Palettes

These are needed to put out and mix paints. Sturdy plastic ones with 6 or 9 wells are best. But old plates and discarded small plastic trays can be used.

Water containers

These can be glass jars, plastic pots, etc. Containers should have a stable base. For young children there are non-spill plastic pots with tightly-fitting lids.

3. Brushes and other painting implements

It is important to have a good range of sizes, especially larger ones.

- Hog, bristle, nylon: range of sizes up to size 12, for general use, round and square.
- Sable, ox-hair or squirrel-hair: a few fine brushes for detailed work.
- Decorating brushes: for large-scale work.
- Sponges on sticks: interesting alternative to brushes.
- Sponges: for spreading paint and for making prints
- Rollers: different widths and materials (sponge, rubber) for large paintings.
- Junk materials to paint with: variety of these for different effects.

- Adaptations (if needed): use holders, bandages or plastic balls for extra grip.

4. Paper

This can be an expensive item, but it is worth trying to ensure that a range of sizes is available, including large size. A range of colours is good too (including black), but if money is limited, white, grey or buff will suit most purposes. Paper should be thick enough to be enjoyable to use.

Sugar paper

Reasonably cheap, good for most paints, charcoal and pastels.

Cartridge

Good for water-colour paints and drawing. Quite expensive. Available in different weights.

Newsprint

Thin and cheap. Can sometimes obtain ends-of-roll from newspaper offices, stationery firms or 'Scrapstore' schemes. Gives large-size paper, useful for large projects.

Lining paper

Cheap. Comes in rolls from decorating suppliers, so needs cutting to size. Rather narrow. Tears easily.

Card

Useful for heavy paint and collages using junk and natural materials. Can be expensive, but offcuts are often obtainable from Scrapstores and Resource Centres.

Colouring books

These can be popular with people who may be too shy to come to the Art Table. Best to avoid children's themes. Floral patterns and abstract patterns are popular and are readily available.

5. 3-D materials

Malleable 3-D media are good for themes involving strong feelings, especially anger, because people can use some of the energy associated with the feelings to work the media.

Newplast and Clayola

Easy to use, not messy, easily portable, fairly cheap. Good for children and adults, though some adults find its associations with childhood difficult. Not easy to use for large-scale work or for very fine work.

Fimo

Useful for fine work, and can be baked in an ordinary oven to harden. Wide range of colours, including fluorescent and metallic. Expensive.

Clay

Messy, not easily portable, needs firing in a kiln if work is to be kept. Despite these difficulties, working with clay has many more possibilities than plasticine-type materials and is a completely different experience in feel and texture. Also good for letting off steam and large-scale projects. Reasonably cheap.

Nylon-reinforced clay

Does not need firing, can be painted or varnished when dry, but texture not as good as ordinary clay. Also more expensive. Useful in places where no kiln is available.

Junk materials

Variety of textures and methods of fixing available, large-scale projects possible. Good for using energy if tools are used, such as saw, hammer and nails.

Mask materials

Plaster of Paris bandages (available from chemists), paper bags, or pre-formed blank masks (available cheaply in bulk from most of the big catalogues for art materials). Masks can also be made from stiff paper, card, paper plates or papier-mâché over clay or a blown-up balloon (which is later popped).

Other materials

- Plaster of Paris in powder form. Big tubs usually available from catalogues. Fairly cheap. Messy to use, and need to work fast before it sets. Useful for large projects.
- Polyfilla - useful for slower working as it does not set so fast, but more expensive.
- Pipe-cleaners - useful for small 3-D work. Reasonably cheap.
- Straws - good for blowing paint.
- Miniature bricks – these are made from the same clay as ordinary bricks and so have the texture and colour of ordinary bricks. They are useful for adults who do not regard themselves as having any artistic ability. They can be used to construct buildings and to 'play' at being on a construction site.

6. Collage materials

Magazines

Choosing images and arranging them can be a less daunting first step than actually making images, as it reduces anxiety about 'artistic performance'. It also has a 'distancing' effect in that the images chosen may, but do not have to, relate to the person who chose them. For instance, it may be easier to choose 'angry pictures' from magazines than to paint a picture of one's own anger. Difficult topics may sometimes be approached indirectly in this way. A wide variety of magazines is needed.

Travelling kits

A travelling kit of images can be useful to avoid carrying heavy magazines around. The collection needs to include a wide range of situations and people of all colours, cultures and types. Specialised collections can be made, e.g. people, landscapes, actions, etc.

Other collage materials

Other collage materials, such as fabrics, tissue paper, natural objects, junk materials, string, etc., can be used in addition to other media, or to explore textures and effects of different materials. Scrapstore schemes are available in many towns and cities.

Glitter, sequins and other shiny materials are very popular, with adults as well as children.

Scissors

Good quality, sharp scissors are needed, but with rounded ends.

7. Adhesives

Glue sticks

These are easy to use, not messy, and easy to obtain in a variety of sizes. They are best for paper and light materials. They get used up very quickly.

Copydex

Rubbery emulsion, good for cloth.

PVA

Water-based emulsion. When dry, not soluble in water. Good for paper, cloth, wood. Useful for collage and general purposes. Can also mix with powder paint or ready-mixed paint to make plastic paint.

Glitter glue

This is a mixture of PVA-type glue and glitter, popular with children and adults.

Impact adhesive

Good for sticking wood and other materials quickly. But be careful of using glue which is flammable or has strong fumes.

Strong glue

There are other glues which stick wood and other materials more slowly than impact adhesives, such as Uhu, woodworkers' glue, etc. Avoid ones which are flammable or have strong fumes.

Sticky tape

This includes clear or coloured Sellotape (single or double-sided), brown parcel tape, masking tape and peel-off sticky labels. Parcel

tape is strong but tricky to use. Masking tape is cheap, easy to use, can be peeled off and re-applied, and can be painted over - good for taping sheets together for a group painting.

Blu-tack (or similar)

This is good for sticking things in temporary positions or fastening paper to walls, though it may take paint off walls when it is removed. If walls are precious, use it on doors. Can be re-used.

8. Folders

Most groups need a way of storing members' pictures and other artwork. There are a variety of possibilities:

- Home-made folders from large card and decorated by participants
- Cardboard folders or clear wallets from one of the catalogues
- Large clear portfolios with cardboard stiffening and 'plastic hole' handles
- Large corrugated plastic portfolios with proper handles

These go up in price according to quality.

However, if it is possible to obtain a second-hand plan chest, and the space where it can be put, this is the ideal way of storing completed artwork.

9. Other

World Map

Very useful to get conversation and stories going. Available from map shops and bookshops. Laminated ones are harder-wearing and can cope with cups of tea spilt on them.



Borderlands
Drop-in Centre,
Bristol

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