

planning a gallery visit

These notes suggest ideas and ways in which teachers and group leaders can make the most of a visit to Ffotogallery and feel confident to use the exhibitions independently if necessary. Included are ideas for preparation, gallery-based activities and follow up work which we hope you will find stimulating and useful for your group. Please adapt them or select those that best suit the exhibition and the ages and abilities of your group.

2 Ideas for preparatory work >

3 Gallery based activities >

6 Follow-up work >

7 Glossary >

ideas for preparatory work

It is useful to make a preparatory visit to the Gallery before bringing your group to see the exhibition, familiarise yourself with the work and the space. If you have chosen not to participate in a gallery led tour or activity, ensure that you request enough information on the artist and exhibition to enable you to plan for your visit.

The following ideas for discussion and practical activities are intended to help you prepare your group for their visit:

Exercise 1:

Ask your group the following questions and lead a discussion:

- What is photography?
- Where do you see photographs?
- What are they used for?
- Who takes photographs?

Exercise 2:

Collect together a range of photographs of different subject matter and from different sources, e.g. Family photographs, newspaper – local and national, war photographs, portraits of famous people, advertising, style magazines, sport magazines, passport photographs, art photography. Conceal the identity and source of these photographs and lead a discussion asking who took the photographs, why and where you would expect to see them. How do the group's readings change when you reveal the true identity of the photographs?

Exercise 3:

Another variation on this activity would be to present these images in different contexts, e.g. a family photograph in a national newspaper, war photograph in a fashion magazine etc. Discuss how the context in which we view images affects our reading / interpretation of meaning.

Exercise 4:

Consider how context can alter your interpretation of a work of art. How does seeing photographs in a gallery differ to seeing them in a public context? What perceptions and expectations do the group have of galleries and of seeing art in galleries? What is the wider context in which the work was made? How does this affect your interpretation?

Exercise 5:

Since its invention photography has caused great debate about whether it is an art form. Why do you think this is? Ask the pupils if they regard photographs as works of art.

Exercise 6:

What is an artist / photographer? What qualifications do you need? What do artists / photographers do? How do they make their living? Why choose to exhibit work?

Exercise 7:

Research the work of the artist whose exhibition you are visiting. The gallery will be able to help with providing supporting information but you may also want to research using the library or internet. Find out about the artists background and education, their influences, the intention of their work and if relevant, the processes / techniques they use to create their work.

Exercise 8:

You may also want to research other artists / photographers who explore similar themes or ideas.



gallery based activities

Encourage the group to walk around the exhibition and look at the work individually or in pairs. Ask them to spend time looking at each piece of work and then report back to the group with their impression of the exhibition. It is important that individuals are given time to form their own opinions about the work before working on group activities.

Use the following image analysis to look at the exhibition and images in more detail:

Exercise 1: Looking at images and developing visual literacy

Although we are bombarded by visual imagery every day, we rarely take time to 'read' images. The following questions will help you to analyse most photographic images - you will need to adapt these for viewing installation, film, video, sound based and new media work. The following are all decisions made by the artist that control or affect your reading and interpretation of the work.

1. What technology was used to make the images? How does this affect your reading of the work?
2. Describe what you can see and where is it within the image?
3. What is the format of the image - is it portrait or landscape? What does this imply?
4. Consider the composition - where are things placed within the image?
5. What is included within the frame and what is excluded? What effect does this have?
6. What is the photographer's viewpoint - it is above, below or equal to the subject? What does this imply? How would the image change if the viewpoint was different?
7. What happened before and after the photograph was taken?
8. What is the light source within the image? Is it natural or artificial? What atmosphere or mood does this create?
9. Is the image colour or black and white? How does this affect your reading of the image? How would the work differ if it were changed from colour to black and white or vice versa?
10. What scale is the work? Is it small and intimate or large and dominating?
11. How is the work presented? Is it framed, hung on wall, floor based? Why? What effect does this have?
12. Is the work titled? How does the title affect the meaning of the image? What title would you give to the work?
13. Who might the image have been made by? Why? Who for?
14. What do you think the artist is trying to say? Do you think they have communicated their ideas successfully?
15. How does the work make you feel?
16. Do you like or dislike the work? Why?



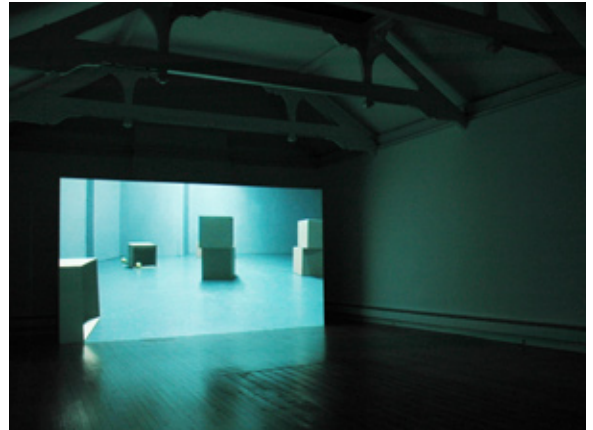
gallery based activities

2. Exercise: Looking at Installations

Viewing installation art is very different to looking at photographs or paintings hung on a gallery wall. Installation art creates an environment, drawing the space into the work as one of its components and engaging the viewer in an experience of this environment.

When viewing an installation you may find it useful to consider the following questions:

1. What are the ingredients of the installation – what different components have been brought together to make the work? Are you one of these ingredients?
2. Is the installation site-specific? Has it been made especially for or recreated for this space? If yes, can you identify why and how it is site specific? Can you imagine how the installation would look and feel different in a different type of space?
3. What associations do the different components of the installation have for you?
4. What associations does the installation as a whole have for you?
5. Would you normally expect to find these components in a different context?
6. Is the installation interactive? Is it affected by your movement through the space?
7. Does it require you to physically interact or engage with it?
8. Consider the placement of the different objects. Why do you think the artist has chosen this particular arrangement? Are any relationships formed between different objects and components?
9. Does the title of the work suggest any meaning or associations?
10. Is the installation entirely visual or does it require you to touch or listen? How do these different sensory experiences change your experience of the work?



gallery based activities

Exercise 3: Looking at exhibitions

Questions to ask your group:

1. How has the gallery space been used?
2. Why do you think the curator has hung the exhibition in this way?
3. What colour are the gallery walls painted? How does this affect your experience of viewing the exhibition?
4. What written information is provided?
5. Why do you think the written information has been presented in this way? Who is it written for? Is it easy to read or not?
6. What ideas do you have for presenting information to visitors?
7. What alternative information would you like available in the gallery to help visitors find out about the work.
8. How has the work been presented? How does this affect your reading of the work?
9. What sources are lighting are there in the gallery? How does this affect the mood of the gallery / exhibition?



Exercise 4: Role of the curator

Curators work with artists, selecting the final choice of work and editing or sequencing the work and deciding how it will be presented.

Select two pieces that are not presently positioned in the same room and pair them up.

1. Would you place them next to or opposite one another? Why?
2. Do the pieces look alike?
3. Do they explore similar themes? Are they opposites?
4. What is the relationship between them and how can you change the reading of the work by placing pieces together?

Consider relationships already existing between works in the exhibition.

1. Who do you think placed the work - the artist or curator?
2. Do you think that the curator can alter the meaning of work by the choice of placement?



follow-up work

Some of the preparation activities could also be developed as follow up activities or discussions.

An exhibition often raises issues and questions which can be explored within the classroom, often stimulating lively debate and helping to develop confident speakers.

Exercise 1: Ask the students to create individual pieces of writing about their experiences of visiting the Gallery and about the exhibition they came to see.

These could be bound as a class book about the visit which could include photographs or could form the basis for a small exhibition in school. You may want to use these as the basis of a project developing on from the visit to Ffotogallery.

Ask the students to write about a piece of work which they particularly liked or which particularly surprised or interested them? How would you describe the exhibition to someone who hasn't seen it?

2. Exercise: Curate your own mini exhibitions.

Select five images from the exhibition you have visited at Ffotogallery and photograph them in the gallery (you will need to obtain permission to do this).

Provide the group with copies of these images and ask them to arrange them within a small cardboard construction of a gallery space. They should consider why they choose to place particular images together and how the meaning of images can change when put next to another.

An adaptation of the above exercise – collect together images of artists work from brochures and catalogues and curate a group exhibition. How does curating and exhibition of several artists' work differ to curating a one person show? What themes or issues could be a reason for bringing different artists together? How can placing different artists' work together change the works meaning or interpretation?

3. Exercise: Plan a photographic project inspired by the exhibition you visited at the gallery.

Many of the students will have their own cameras at home or you could purchase process-paid disposable cameras. Photography need not be an expensive project, you could use a digital camera, pay for inexpensive commercial processing or work on slide film and explore projections. You could even take the ideas and issues raised by the exhibition and explore them in different mediums or art forms i.e. drama, installation, sculpture, textiles etc. The possibilities are endless...



glossary

Composition

The way in which different elements are arranged within the image, how they are framed and which are given priority. Composition is something which is carefully considered by the artist(s).

Contemporary

Belonging to the same time, modern in style or design.

Curator

Person with intimate and specialist knowledge of a particular art form or period who looks after a collection and creates exhibitions from it. Within a temporary exhibition space, the individual creatively brings together an exhibition from other or multiple collections.

Context

The place in which the work is shown and the communication takes place or the wider social, political or historical circumstances in which the work was made / communications are made.

Exhibition

A collection of artworks presented with careful consideration to layout and design and for presentation to the audience.

Format

Size and proportions of the image. Often refers to whether an image is 'portrait' (vertical) or 'landscape' (horizontal).

Installation

Is a difficult term to define. The term itself is relatively new and has only been used over the past twenty or so years to describe art which, rather than concentrating on one object, considers and often questions the relationship between different elements, the site and their contexts. It is a discipline made up of many others including performance art, architecture and many disciplines within contemporary visual arts, e.g. sculpture, video, photography.

Interpret

Make out or bring out the meaning of the work - to explain, understand or learn more about.

Interpretation

Materials provided by a gallery to assist visitors to interpret the artworks /exhibition. A bridge or negotiation between the artists ideas, the institution's knowledge and that of the audience.

New Media / multi media

Created using new technologies, e.g. computers, digital cameras and associated software. Includes both still and moving images. Not to be confused with mixed media which means the combining of different media such as painting, photography, textiles or sculpture.

Visual Literacy

Understanding how to 'read' or interpret the codes and conventions of visual imagery within its given context. (Codes are signs that have been organised together to create meaning).