



The Weekend Academy

Byam Shaw School of Art Central Saint Martins

A teacher's workbook
for an eight session
course in large-scale
portrait painting.

Art is great!



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The workshops were led by artists Oreet Ashery, Janey Hagger, and Stephen Wilson.

From the experience of the workshops we have devised this teacher's pack, to enable the project to be replicated and built on with groups of young people, by teachers, artists and youth workers.

We welcome your feedback and comments: please contact us at: www.theweekendacademy.com

This workbook is based on workshops run by The Weekend Academy at Byam Shaw, working with students and staff from Pupil Referral Units in North London.

Art is great!



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The sessions lead on from one to the next, and include various drawing and painting activities, in groups, in pairs or alone. The sessions are designed to build up towards a final large-scale painting on an MDF board.

On our course we had around 12 PRU students with support staff, with an age range of between 13 and 17 years, from KS 3 and 4. One student (aged 17) had already left school.

We had a large light studio as a main room with an adjoining dark projection-space. At the point in the course when you are projecting slides, you will need to use a dark space.

At the end of each session we 'hung' the resulting drawings and paintings on the walls, so students could look at the work during their break.

We spent a whole day together divided into two sessions a day, with breakfast before the first session and lunch in between. However, the sessions can be divided in a flexible manner; for example the whole course can be done over one intensive week, or for one session a week over eight weeks. The length of each session can be modified according to the group's abilities.

This was our structure for the day:

- 9.30 – 10.30** tutors and helpers setting up the studio
- 10.30 – 11.00** breakfast – we found a healthy breakfast to be very important for the overall calmness of the group.
- 11.00 – 12.30** morning session
- 12.30 – 1.15** lunch break
- 1.15 – 2.30** afternoon session
- 2.30 – 3.30** tutors and assistants tidy and reflect

This is an in-depth description of an eight session course in large-scale portrait painting.

Intro.



Session 1

Introductions, practising compositions without cameras.

Creating three instant Polaroid portraits.
Choosing colours and priming boards.

Session 2

Making A2 and A1 collages from the coloured photocopies, using drawing and various coloured and patterned paper.

Using a detail from one original Polaroid to create a collage which will be more abstracted.

Session 3

Making one large collage using different materials that change every 10 minutes.

Creating a portrait by filling a body-shape outline with drawn objects of every-day life, like a dog, a mobile phone etc. The words are thrown into the room and students have 30 seconds to draw them.

Session 4

Paint the other side of the board.

Taking slides of the students outside with a combination of head and shoulders and the whole body.

Making a painting using an upside-down Polaroid and only three colours of acrylic paints.

Session 5

Slide-show of figurative paintings and a slide-show of images we took of each student.

Drawing outline portrait on the boards with a projected slide.

Painting over newspaper images.

Session 6

Continue with outline tracing on the boards.
Making a drawing of a bedroom or living-room, wearing a blindfold or with eyes shut.
Making fast paintings of various landscapes announced by tutors.

Sessions 7+8

Each student paints his/her portrait on a big board.

Contents



- Very short introduction of everyone's names, including participants and support staff. Finding out about participants' previous experience in making art, and their expectations from the course. Basic health and safety issues. If the group is more communicative it is possible to make the introduction longer, and talk more about what students have made previously in art classes and more about the tutors' experience.
- Participants looking at a colour chart of shop-mixed matt emulsion to choose colours to prime their boards. We brought in large decorators' colour charts with many colours to choose from. The participants got very excited about choosing a colour from the chart.

After everybody has decided on a colour, someone goes to the shop straight away and gets a litre or half-litre of each colour. We used a local DIY shop where a wide range of British Standard colours can be mixed to order. If this seems too complicated, it is possible to get a selection of colours of matt paint in advance, and the participants can choose from what is available.

- Working in pairs: Polaroid camera passed around, taking three Polaroid pictures of your partner with three facial expressions, thinking of interesting compositions and angles, trying to encourage close-ups and also more adventurous angles, like from up on a chair, or from down on the floor.
- Meanwhile the rest of the group will be given a card each with a small square (the size of a 35 mm slide) cut out of the middle of it. They will use the card to look at the room and other people through the open square as a mean of practising and understanding photographic composition.

Introductions, practising compositions without cameras. Creating three instant Polaroid portraits. Choosing colours and priming boards.

Session 1



The card is a simple and effective way to learn about close-ups and long-shots, about composition and angles, without using film or having the pressure of the camera. In this way, when they have the camera they will be more prepared. When they hold the card near someone's face it is a close-up, when they move the card further away it is a long-shot, and when the open square is showing someone's head and torso, it is a mid-shot. It is a great way to practise a 'way of looking' at the world through a frame, or a square, which should help generally with visual literacy.

For some students however, this might be too abstract, so close guidance and enthusiasm from tutors for this part can help a lot. A good way of dealing with it, is to ask each participant to show the group an example of a 'framed' close-up, medium-shot and a long-shot. Interesting angles and compositions will get a good response.

- One Polaroid photo for each student will be photocopied twice, onto each of five different coloured papers, and the photos will be enlarged to fit an A4 page. So each student should have 10 photocopies of exactly the same image on different coloured paper.
- Meanwhile, the helpers should be back with the paint, and students will start priming their boards. We chose large boards, for example 2/3 of a full length MDF sheet, 18 mm thick. It is very exciting to work towards painting on such a large board.

Session 1



- Using the different colour photocopies to make two colourful collage A4 portraits, using scissors, or tearing paper by hand and using glue to stick them together. Tutors will show one example of what is possible. The same image (the photocopied portrait) is created from different colours according to the way the papers are torn, to create an 'Andy Warhol' style, or a graphic-like effect. This is a very quick and effective way to make powerful images that boost their confidence and to get them used to working with their own faces; cutting them up, sticking them together in different ways etc.
- Using the left-over photocopies and other colour and printed paper each student will make an A2 collage inspired by one of the pictures they took, also using drawing, taking the image a step further to make a more 'invested' collage.

- Time permitting, each student will isolate a section from one Polaroid image and will make a drawing of it on paper using pencils, charcoal, pastels and collage – understanding the idea of a detail, making a detail into a large collage, to help understand abstraction.
- Boards that are not finished will be primed throughout the day. The priming can be exciting for some and too demanding for others, as it is quite physical; those who work slowly or have difficulty covering large areas with paint, could do with help in priming their boards.

Making A2 and A1 collages from the coloured photocopies, using drawing and various coloured and patterned paper. Using a detail from one original Polaroid to create a collage which will be more abstracted.

Session 2

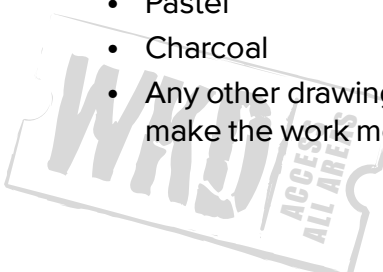


Materials & equipment list 1+2

- MDF boards (size can vary, we recommend 18mm thick and at least 1.20m high)
- Brushes for priming
- Pre-mixed colour chart, check availability of paint in the shop! If this proves not very reliable, buy paint in advance and students choose from what is already there
- Polaroid camera
- 5 Polaroid films – 50 shots altogether (for a group of 12)
- Cards with a small square cut out in the middle, one for each student.
- 5 or more different colour packs of A4 printer paper
- PVA glue
- Scissors (this can be a health and safety issue, so needs to be dealt with according to each individual student)
- Cartridge paper sizes A1, A2
- Patterned and coloured paper for collage (for example, wrapping papers)
- Pencils
- Pastel
- Charcoal
- Any other drawing materials which might make the work more interesting



Ideas 1+2

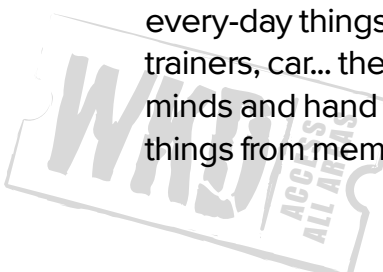


- Setting up for each student – easels, hard boards, tables and chairs. Polaroid, A1 cartridge paper, pencils, charcoal, paper for collage, pastels, and any other materials.
- Students choose a Polaroid image from last week and make a collage/ drawing from it on A1 paper. Every 10 minutes we announce different material to be used like – ‘pastels’. The whole activity should last about 50 minutes. The collage slowly builds up using pencil, collage, pastels, charcoal etc.
This becomes like a game where they have to work fast and they have to experiment with different materials.
- Each student gets various A4 colour papers. In turn each student throws a word to the group that come to their mind. Tutors do it first to help out, and get the group going. As a word is spoken the students draw it very quickly, in about 30 seconds, with thick black felt pen. The words are every-day things like – mobile phone, trainers, car... the idea is to train their minds and hand to draw everyday things from memory and imagination.

This is a nice group activity that keeps them engaged because of the speed. Also it is a good drawing training tool.

- When this high energy group activity is finished, students cut out the objects they have drawn from the various coloured papers.
- Then they are going to draw an outline of their partner’s head and torso body shape as they lean against the A1 paper. They can also use their own body shape outline. Next they will fill the figure with the cut-out colourful drawing – another form of a portrait. So it is like a head and torso filled with every-day objects, coming from their own lives.

Session 3



Paint the other side of the boards

- It is worth priming both sides, so the board does not buckle, and also students then have two choices of colours – or sides – if they make a mistake.

While they do this, we will take a number of slides of each student, one at a time. We take the students outside, one a time, with the slide film. Using available day-light, take pictures of them with the background and the body language and facial expressions they like. If they are too shy, they can take a slide of their mate and work on that. It is best to take up to 5 slides, with head and shoulders and full body, as well as different facial expressions. Background is very important as this is what they will be painting on their board, so brick walls, street scenes, trees, houses – anything that might be enjoyable to paint – makes a good choice.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group – stick or clip a Polaroid image up-side down to the top of the drawing-board, paint this upside-down image on paper with only 3 acrylic colours. They can add other materials if they want. This exercise is to get them used to working with paints and brushes. The image being up-side down helps them to be less precious about the representation element and enjoy the process of painting more. The limit of three colours is again to make the process less precious by focusing on realistic colouring and to be more imaginative with what they have.

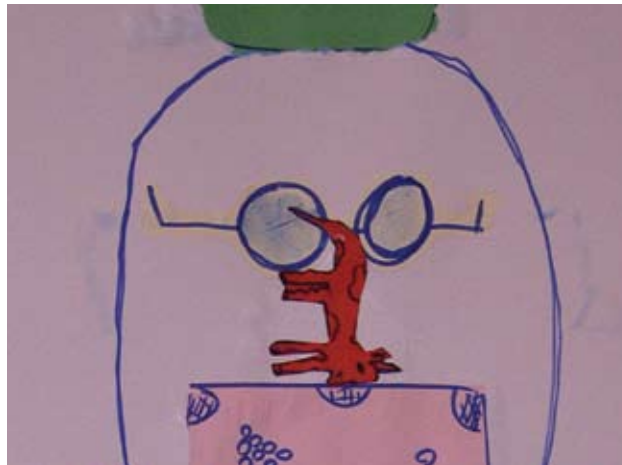
Paint the other side of the board. Taking slides of the students outside with a combination of head and shoulders and the whole body. Making a painting using an upside-down Polaroid and only three colours of acrylic paints.

Session 4



Materials & equipment list 3+4

- Polaroid photographs from previous week
- A1 cartridge paper
- Paper for collage
- Glue
- Pencils
- Pastels
- Charcoal
- Felt pens
- A4 colour papers
- Brushes/paint for boards
- 2 slide films – 400 ASA
- Camera + tripod
- Paper plates
- Brushes
- 3 paints on the plates
- Plastic cups for water



Ideas3+4



- Bring in other sources of inspiration, like books with contemporary painters and a slide-show of portraits (basic slide show to show examples of artists' styles – Chris Ofili, Basquiat etc). Although the group seemed very impatient when we first showed the slides, we later saw direct inspiration in their work.
- After the short slide-show (10 minutes) we looked through the slides of the students' portrait photographs with the whole group. As we went through them, each student chose the slide they wanted, to draw on their board.

Then we commence outlining projected slides onto the painted boards with black acrylic paint and a very good brush!! We projected the slides in a dark space. When each student draws the outline he/she will need a tutor or support staff next to him/her to help. Drawing the outline can be technically difficult for some; a good brush helps a lot. They will need to make decisions about which lines to include – the more lines the better, including folds in clothing, and facial features. The more details there are in the background the better the results will be too.

Meanwhile the rest of the group will be handed newspaper cuttings, to paint and collage into the image using all media available. We had collected cuttings of faces and photographs of people before the session started. They were in a pile on the main table. Using masking tape, stick the newspaper image onto an A1 cartridge sheet on the easel. Using the newspaper and media images, students will draw and collage on top, to create powerful and meaningful images. The results of this exercise went much better than we expected, including showing direct influences from the slide-show of artists we had seen earlier.

Slide-show of figurative paintings and a slide-show of images we took of each student. Drawing out-line portrait on the boards with a projected slide. Painting over newspaper images.

Session5



The remaining students will finish tracing their pictures on the boards in the other room, one at a time with the projector.

In the main space

- each student close their eyes or use a blindfold to use their memory better, they draw with graphite from memory a room like their bedroom, living-room etc.
- they make a painting or a collage based on the drawing they made from memory.
- Tutors announce a type of landscape like London or seaside, and the students make fast paintings using a plate with a variety of acrylic paints on the plate. This exercise is to get them to use paint quickly and in a less pressured way. It is also a preparation to paint the big boards.

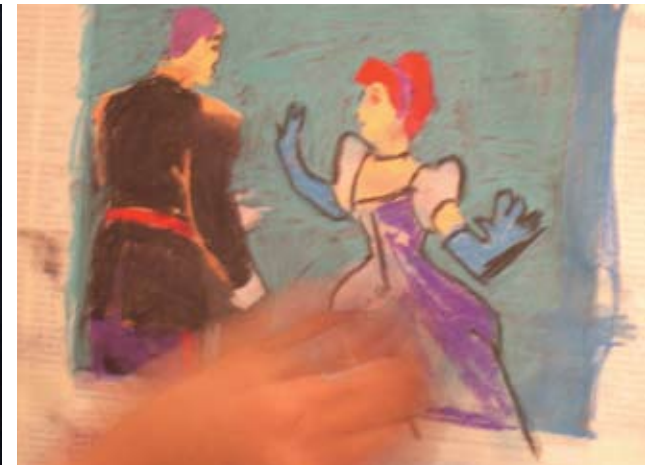
Continue with outline tracing on the boards. Making a drawing of a bedroom or living-room, wearing a blindfold or with eyes shut. Making fast paintings of various landscapes announced by tutors.

Session6



Materials & equipment list 5+6

- Slides of figurative paintings (an alternative is to use PowerPoint)
- Books of figurative paintings for reference
- The portrait slides of students taken previously
- Good quality black acrylic paint mixed with a bit of water on two plates
- Good-quality thin brushes for drawing the black outline
- Newspaper cuttings of images
- A1 cartridge
- A2 cartridge
- Glue
- Drawing materials; pastels, colour pencils, felt pens, charcoal
- Collage material
- Dark coloured fabric to be used as blindfolds
- Graphite
- Prepare for each student a plastic plate with a collection of different acrylic paints on the plate
- Water in plastic cups
- Brushes
- Plastic aprons/cover-ups for each student



Ideas5+6



The painting process gets harder as shading comes into it. It is best to fill in the areas first with flat colours, making sure the black outlines are not getting covered. Then start to put details in like the shading, the white of the eyes, etc. It might be a good idea to have some reference books around so students can look at how portraits are painted – however none of these students took advantage of that. Although students need help at this point, it is not a good idea to start painting it for them.

At this stage there is a lot of discussion with each student as to how to develop the image as a whole. Students can cover over the original board colour almost completely, or leave some as part of the picture. They can use any of the skills they have developed during the sessions, as they work on their boards. Some students collaged onto the boards. Some students added 3-d and mixed-media elements, for example casts of hands.

Each student
paints their portrait
on a big board.

Session 7+8



Materials & equipment list 7+8

- Enough good quality acrylic paints to go around
- Each student gets a small table next to their board with a cup of water and brushes
- Central table with all the paints. We found that when students help themselves to paint there is a great wastage, so it's best if a tutor or helper can dole out the paint
- Students will need to wear clothes that can get dirty, or to bring a plastic apron. Painting the big boards can be a dirty business



Ideas 7+8

