

projectart works

10. Art, Freedom and Purpose

Painting and art as positive distraction

This is a checklist of some of the things you might consider before running a painting-based encounter with a person with complex needs.

To really support fully a person with complex needs, it is helpful to try to gain as much information about that person from their support team or family (*see participants pre-workshop questionnaire document*). Information that may be important might include any health concerns that may affect a workshop, communication preferences and likes and dislikes. However be cautious as the information you receive prior to meeting someone can sometimes be misleading:

- Because it is old and no longer relevant, because it is specific to a certain place or because it is a mythology that has built up over time (Chinese whispers)
- The information tends to highlight the worst behaviours of an individual
- Fear can be very quickly picked up on, with negative consequences

So be respectful of the information you receive but also ready to disregard it.

Environment

The studio set up is essential when creating the right working environment. This can mean removing dangers and triggers for the participants, but it is often more about what you add rather than what you take away.

Whilst you are looking to reduce certain behaviours you are also looking to inspire others. Arrange elements like the lighting, projections, materials and music to create an installation, a magical proposition in which to work.

The space becomes a direct response to the participants and their heightened sensitivity to their environment. Work on a large scale, a rare opportunity and usually outside of previous experience. Cover the wall with paper onto which we can project an image or video that becomes a subject for a large-scale painting

Use a photo or film that has a relevance to the participant. It can be something they choose, or something they discover when they enter the space. This shifts the

perception of the space, seeing a photograph of you on this scale is an impressive distraction.

Allow time for them to familiarise themselves with the space. To let them influence and take ownership of their environment

Approach

Think about difference in approach and what would work best. A non-confrontational approach may mean being busy working in the space, introducing painting as an action to join in with. A far more direct approach might mean a formal introduction and description of the space and plan of proposed action.

Remember it is essential to be completely in the moment, to be entirely vigilant to the signals you are given and to be open to being led. It important to recognise when something isn't comfortable and to be prepared to change it, take a train break, re-negotiate.

Be aware that the work itself rarely means the finished painting, and attachment to this artefact no matter how beautiful or arresting it is by no means guaranteed.

The work is the environment and everything that happens in it, be that the joy of squeezing blue into a bucket, the drama of painting a white wall black or the satisfaction of tracing a projected image.

Participation

Participation may be an opportunity to make choices and take control or it might just mean to *be* in the space. Remember that the work is also the collaboration between two people. The shared practice of painting can act as a non-hierarchical language. A conversation, of moves and counter moves in line and colour

Through this trust and relationships can be built which in turn present the opportunity for people to be challenged, to undertake a task that may be difficult.

The distraction of painting can be an expansive force in the lives of people who's needs have been described as challenging. It can offer an unusual freedom and hopefully a sense of achievement and purpose.