

“My 5-year-old could have done this”

Engaging Early & First Level with Modern & Contemporary Art

Examples from the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) Glasgow



Introduction

Looking at original art, engaging with and talking about it is a brilliant way for young children to get acquainted with a museum space while nurturing creativity and language acquisition. As modern and contemporary artists in particular depict and engage with a variety of interesting and topical matters, visiting a museum like the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) can be a fantastic opportunity to playfully encourage interdisciplinary learning. Creativity is vital for both personal and academic development and exploring it while being surrounded by world-class art can make a lasting impact on how children understand and react to art, how to talk about it as well as trying it out themselves in a safe and fun environment.

Modern and contemporary art can sometimes appear a bit intimidating so the following activities are designed to guide both teachers and learners in a playful and non-didactic approach. It is recommended to visit the museum before you bring your class in order to get familiar with the artwork. Please note that some exhibitions might not be suitable to younger children due to the content; however this will always be specified. Feel free to ask our friendly and knowledgeable Gallery Assistants if you have any questions regarding anything on display! The activities listed in this resource relate to displays at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow (GoMA), but most can translate to other museums and collections. Teachers can use the ideas and adapt them for their own visits, purposes and classroom activities.

Looking for familiars

“Close observation of a single subject, whether it is as tiny as Pasteur’s microbes or as great as Einstein’s universe, is the kind of work that happens less and less these days. Glued to computer and TV screens, we have forgotten how to look at the natural world, the original instructor on how to be curious about detail.” (Jennifer New).

In order to enjoy art we have to look closely. Even if the children – and you! – do not grasp what the artwork is all about straight away we can approach it by sticking to the things we **do** know. Point out different shapes and colours and encourage everyone to count things together. This is also a great introductory activity to make everyone feel more at ease in an unfamiliar place!

‘I can see loads of blue – what other colours can you see?’

‘How many rungs can you count on the ladder shape?’

‘Here is a circle – what other shapes can you see?’ *Eduardo Paolozzi, Hamlet in a Japanese Manner, 1966*



Nikki de Saint-Phalle, Vache Vase, 1992

Changing perspectives

Three dimensional artwork such as sculptures and installations are great to have a look at from different angles and in more detail. Look at things upside down/lying down/through a viewfinder or telescope and discuss what you can spot. You can also arrange your class in a circle around the artwork and one by one can say one thing they have spotted.

With All Senses

If we look out for details and have a task associated with it that engages more than just one sense we are much more likely to pay attention to what we are actually supposed to be looking at. Send the children out in smaller groups and a helper to spot

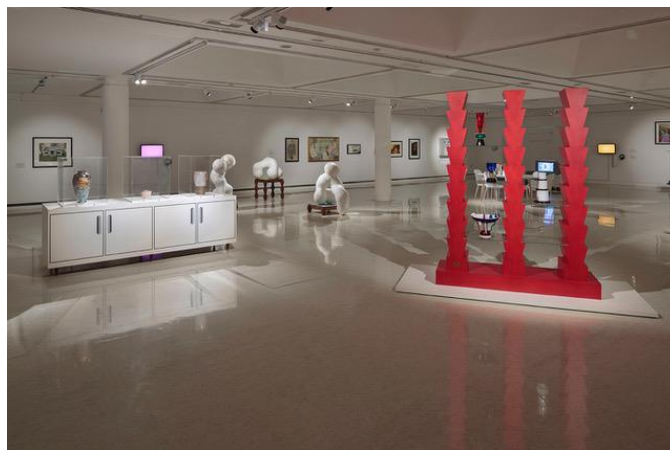
- Animals – which sounds would they make if there were alive?
- The colours of the rainbow – can they think of a specific food that has the same colour? How would it taste?
- Sounds – the air conditioning, the sound of other people. A lot of digital art installations involve audio. Invite learners to close their eyes and listen. What does it make them think of?



Daphne Wright - Home Ornaments, 2002-2005

Right Where You Are Sitting

Split the group into pairs. Learners will tell each other ten things about where they are sitting right now that they hadn't noticed when they first came in to the space. Depending on the learners' ages you can also encourage them to draw or write down what they can spot.



Gallery 4, GoMA, March 2020, various artists

Do you like it?

Once everyone feels comfortable in the space you can talk about the content or meaning of an artwork. A great way to start the conversation is to ask for the learners' opinions. Even very young children will know whether they like something or not and you can prompt them with different coloured flashcards (red & ☹ = dislike; green & 😊 etc). Encourage learners to give a reason why they like or dislike a certain artwork.

- Do you like this?
- Why/why not?
- What does it remind you of?



Beryl Cook, By the Clyde, 1992

Everything is interesting – an approach to conceptual art



Nick Evans, Dummy, Piglet and Wanton Seed, 2011

Choose an ambiguous yet intriguing artwork. By incorporating some of the actual information from the label you can start to make up a story. It does require some confidence but once you give the children a starting point they are quick to help adding to the story. Let them decide where your narration goes! “Once upon a time there was a creature. It was big and round and soft and it was fed up to just stand in a gallery. So it decided to see the world. The first thing he saw on his travels was....” The aim here is to engage the children with the artwork and fire up their imagination; a key point for any artist.

Practical Activities in the Classroom

Taking inspiration from modern & contemporary art has the massive advantage that a lot of time unusual and inexpensive media is used. You do not need special brushes, equipment or tools. One of the reasons that modern art evolved in the advent of photography is that the depiction of reality is not considered as important as the creative process and the dissemination of ideas. The playful aspect of creating is the focal point.

Unusual Paint “Brushes”

Try our sticks, feathers or even toy cars to apply paint on to paper. Thin the colour down and blow it across the page with a straw; thicken in and use corks, potatoes or fingers as stamps. This is a great sensory experience and children will learn about different material’s properties.

The Museum of Found Things

Art doesn’t have to be messy if you don’t have the location and means to do so. Art can be surprisingly “orderly” – artists and scientists analyse the world around them in surprisingly similar ways. They observe, collect, analyse, compare and notice patterns. You can use this approach and work interdisciplinary with your class by giving them the brief to design their own museum. A simple cardboard box (tea, oatcakes etc) can be decorated and then children “curate” their own museum. They can collect things that

- All have the same colour
- Come from the natural world
- Are really tiny
- Start with a specific letter

Older children can also provide an inventory; listing items and researching them as well as writing labels and exhibition text.

Spontaneous Sculptures

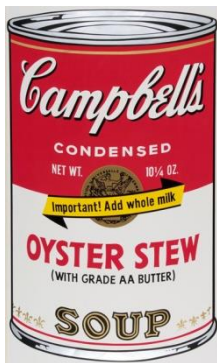
You don’t have to draw and paint in order to be an artist! Creating a 3d artwork is a really fun way of exploring shape, scale and physics. What can balance on top of each other without toppling over?



What different materials can stick together? You can use recycled items such as yoghurt pots, kitchen towel rolls, plastic bags and wire (careful with pointy bits!). You can suggest making sculptures that

- Are held together without glue
- Are a collective effort
- Represent the school
- Depict a human being/animal/plant
- Make you feel angry/proud/happy etc

Art is everywhere



Due to global consumerist culture processed food, drink and everyday items like soup cans, drinking bottles and shampoo containers surround us in abundance. Have you ever considered the design of them? Andy Warhol's famously claimed that "art should not be only for the select few but for the mass of the people." And his soup can certainly became ubiquitous! It is a fun and rewarding drawing exercise to invite children to draw their packed lunches or the items on the desk surrounding them. It really helps to draw attention to

detail and develop fine motor skills.

Andy Warhol, Oyster Stew, 1968



Reading List:

How to Draw Almost Everything by Chika Miyata

Why Your Five Year Old Could Not Have Done That by Susie Hodge

How to be an Explorer of the World by Keri Smith

Inspiration:

Collections Navigator <https://tinyurl.com/yd43amok>

Abelsplaythings on Instagram

www.tate.org.uk/kids