

ARTICULATE presents BLANK CANVAS // 4 // North and South

Exhibition programme notes

Welcome to Blank Canvas, a virtual exhibition of artworks created by young people during lockdown through online workshops.

On Tuesday 7th July, you are warmly invited to an Opening Party where you can move around the digital gallery space and hear a few words from the artists about their work. The link will remain active afterwards so friends and family are encouraged to share the website with anyone else who may like to view the group show of sculptures.

About Blank Canvas // 4

Creativity knows no quarantine! When the lockdown rules were announced, Articulate was keen to find new ways for a group of young artists to continue making art together.

The group began collaborating over a year ago when Caroline Thompson, Associate Producer for Articulate, working with sound artist and composer, Duncan Chapman, photographer Louise Mather and film-maker Basharat Khan would take some of these young people on outdoor field trips in Possilpark in Glasgow and Cove Park, about an hour away on the west coast in Helensburgh. The young people would explore their environment and document it through photography and field recordings. In late 2019, the young people began taking part in weekly workshops in a studio with teacher and artist Steven Grainger, where they made sculptures from paper, cardboard, modroc and paint.

When the COVID-19 pandemic made physical meetups impossible, it seemed important not to lose the good momentum that had been built up until that point, so Articulate decided that the weekly workshops should continue through Zoom calls instead.

“Articulate is a small organisation and we needed to make a plan, quickly,” explains Steven. “We jumped in with two feet and decided to figure it out as we went. I’ve been amazed at how the group has got round the obstacles of not being in the same room.”

“Everyone was pleased to be able to see each other,” adds Caroline. “That’s been very important – the social side of it. It was important to maintain that connection from before. So the focus shifted; we’d been thinking about the environment that people lived in *outside* and now the focus is more on *inside*.”

“I was excited but a little confused about how it was going to work, going online,” remembers Mirrin Gemmell, one of the young people exhibiting work as part of Blank Canvas. “It was quite difficult at first but Caroline and Steven helped me a lot and then it got easier. After a while, it was just the same. Now we are used to meeting up online.”

“There was no brief as such for the sculptures . . . everyone found their own path,” says Steven. “I had initially planned a ‘What does the future look like?’ theme or direction. It became apparent quite quickly though that the immediate present, new technology and intermittent internet connection was enough to get to grips with. Looking back on it now I think the element that ties the whole project together was working together, but in isolation. Working on bedroom floors, back gardens and kitchen tables is the common thread, and these limits have shaped and framed both the artwork and its mode of presentation.”

The result is a vibrantly colourful collection of sculptures, where each artist has approached their work from a different angle.

“Colour was always an important theme,” says Steven. “Back in 2019 we were in a rented unit with totally white walls and the young people wanted to brighten it up. We’d have chats about different artists and styles and see what each of them felt inspired by. During this project we’ve looked at art by people like Mark Rothko, Keith Haring, Ugo Rondinone, Lynn Chadwick and David Smith. We’d talk about the different aesthetics and go from there, letting everyone talk about their own influences. Everyone had a different approach. Kiara’s is more abstract for example; she followed her instincts and intuition. But there’s a similarity in the way Chloe and Kiara made their pieces – they both worked with the materials, experimented with what worked well and adapted their piece as they went along. I absolutely love the results and would be very happy to display all of the sculptures in my own home!”

The sculptures:

‘Untitled’ by Rhiannan Aitken

“Rhiannon’s favourite colour is yellow, so it was an obvious choice for her sculpture, which has limbs attached by wire, “ says Steven. “She’s a fan of YouTube videos and is also fascinated by conspiracy theories. Rhiannan knew in advance that she wanted to create a piece in specific reference to a YouTuber she follows. She liked a clip and things took shape from there.”

‘Justin on Cloud’ by Cameron McDowall

“I didn’t know what to make so Steven played this word association game with me,” says Cameron. “The words ‘Justin’ and ‘Cloud’ came up and I got an idea instantly. Justin Bieber! I’m not a huge fan – he’s ok I guess. I looked up some images of him on Google. I started with legs, then body and finished with the hair. He’s wearing a black t-shirt and a chain. I wanted to give him pink hair but I didn’t have pink wool so I used purple wool instead. I’m sure he’s probably had purple hair at one time. I’m really proud of it.”

‘Orange Square’ by Cameron McDowall

“This was another one inspired by random words given to me by Steven. I got ‘orange’ and ‘square’ so I thought I’d put them together. I didn’t want it to be boring though so I added some details. I gave it a label and put a frame around it.”

‘The World Now’ by Mirrin Gemmell

“The idea just popped into my head. I’ve been wearing a face mask lately and there’s obviously been loads of people getting the virus. I think it’s quite serious. That’s why I decided to make something so people would know about it more. I was just going to make a world, then I put a mask on it that I’d found in the house and that changed everything. I looked at some pictures of the world. My mum helped me and we put on glue to make it look shiny. You don’t always know how the piece is going to end up. It’s like sometimes you have an idea and you think it’s really good but you try it and it doesn’t work. You’ve always got to try things out before you have your masterpiece.”

‘Three Donuts’ by Chloe Boag

“Chloe began by scrunching up newspaper to make a big sausage,” explains Steven. “She was wrapping it around her fingers and she thought, ‘These are like doughnuts!’”

“The red doughnut is meant to be strawberry flavoured, the blue one is blueberry and the green one is sour green apple,” says Chloe, who watched a lot of TikTok videos for inspiration and experimented with various paints to see which colours and textures worked best.

‘Untitled’ by Kiara Milan

“Kiara was very particular about how this was to be displayed,” says Caroline. “The tower has fallen and Kiara wanted it to be lying on its side. Things aren’t as we expect them. Things are knocked for six, everything is knocked out of kilter. We thought we’d be in our homes for a few weeks but we’re still in our homes.”

“Kiara added the drips to both ends of the tower - she has been using that detail since before Christmas; it’s a bit of a signature style,” adds Steven. “There are a lot of bold colours and strong shapes in her piece then actually when you look up close there are these really soft details, where she’s added felt tip details very carefully on to the paint.”

‘Pumpkin’ by Niamh English

“Niamh was particularly interested in Tim Burton and loved the film *The Nightmare Before Christmas*,” says Steven. “She made a pumpkin shape inspired by the Halloween scenes in the film and then added her own colourful patchwork pattern over it in paint and marker pen. She’s incredible at drawing, very visually aware. She had some input right at the start then worked independently.”