



# Reflections on the Year 3 Project

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The term *Tate Year 3 Project* in the first instance and *Year 3* thereafter refers to the whole project including planning and production stages.

*Steve McQueen Year 3* refers to the artwork and exhibition.

For clarity, we have referred to the school year group of Year 3 as Y3.

# Foreword

## An Educationalist's Perspective

*I am pleased to introduce and share these nine essays commissioned by A New Direction to reflect on the Tate Year 3 Project and provoke thinking about future projects. As Chair of A New Direction, I want to thank Steve McQueen, who in making this project happen and having the vision to see things differently, offered both a huge challenge, and the opportunity to let us all see London's children, teachers, schools, families, and communities as never before. Between 2018-2020, that vision helped to highlight the rightful prominence and rights-based place of arts and culture in the curriculum - for all learners and teachers.*

Through Year 3, we were challenged to really **see** our children and young people, who as well as being the future of this great capital, are almost 25% of its citizens now - not citizens in waiting. My memory of seeing the *Steve McQueen Year 3* exhibition for the first time was gazing at the faces of future leaders, parents, scientists, artists, healers, and community activists; teachers now, and in the years to come.

Artists see things the rest of us can't. And so *Year 3* enabled us to see, and hear, what is to come.

November 2019: already two years ago, saw the launch of *Steve McQueen Year 3*. That year, it had been 50 years since humanity landed two men on the Moon. Yet still, in this, the sixth richest

country in the world, we have apparently decided it is okay that 4 million children will go to bed tonight, as they did in 2019, hungry, cold, and poor.

We opened 40 years after the late, great Mary Warnock told us in her ground-breaking review of Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) that we are charged, as teachers, with love for the children who we work with. Not with labels. With love. She was clear until she died that education is not about numbers, or league tables - it is about love.

As we opened it was 30 years since the first National Curriculum came into use. It had a whole curriculum A4 file on art. Another on music. It included drama in the

English file and dance in PE. That whole curriculum, whatever the weight it placed on us, championed breadth, balance, entitlement, equality of access and opportunity. For **every** child, including the challenging and difficult ones.

It was 30 years since the Children Act 1989, whose founding tenet and primary principle was the best interests of the child. Not the adults. The child.

It was 30 years since the UN ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the world's most signed and ratified human rights treaty bar none, with only one nation not signing: the USA. The Convention is not incorporated in UK law, but it is a treaty. We are bound by it because we are

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We are duty bearers for these rights holders. Children do not have to earn the rights. If they are here, they have them all. From us, to them.

a ratifying state party. If you don't know it, go to the [UNICEF website](#) where it is explained, and look at the [Rights Respecting Schools](#) page. This is **not** about children being in charge. It is about mutuality, and everybody of all ages having reciprocal rights.

- Articles 1-5 are general principles, stating the rights are **all** applicable.
- Article 12 says children's voices must be heard, listened to, and their views must be acted on in line with their age and stage of development, in ways that help them shape what happens to them.
- Article 23 is very direct on the right to education, and to **our** making adjustments, for all children with SEND.
- Articles 28 and 29 say every child has a right to an education: broad and balanced, about aptitudes, tolerance, breadth, and balance.
- Article 31 says all children have a right to rest, leisure, and access to - and involvement in - arts and culture.<sup>1</sup>

We are duty bearers for these rights-holders. Children do **not** have to earn the rights. If they are here, they have them all. From us, to them.

On the walls of Tate Britain's main gallery in the *Steve McQueen Year 3* exhibition were some of London's holders of these universal rights. Whoever they are, wherever they are from, whatever their lives have given them or will give in future. Educators hold these duties because they are teachers. They have a vocation, making it the greatest job on earth. *Year 3* affirmed us in that conviction, all over again.

Myself aged 7 to 8? I am a West Riding of Yorkshire girl, so my education authority was led by the late, great Sir Alec Clegg. He believed children, **all** children, deserved **everything** from education. Into my one-form-entry working class school came choirs and orchestras; termly loans from an art collection to shame the great galleries – original art by the nation's greats. Our cursive script was beautiful and italic. I learned to write with a fountain pen on plain

paper, with a line guide under it. I still write that way given half the chance.

Out of school, my Irish-Yorkshire grandad taught me to think, argue, debate. And took me to stand in the middle of the big reading room at Barnsley's central library, held my hand and said, "If you never leave Barnsley, but you come here, books will take you anywhere in the world, and beyond in your dreams, and in your heart." My folks scraped the money together to let me learn the piano, and to sing and sing.

Teachers hold equal possibilities in their hands for all our children. As an artist, administrator, curator, teacher or project manager, funder or parent, you hold these things as gifts to give them. And therefore, so do the children. ■

1. UNICEF, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', UNICEF, *What we do, What is the UN Convention on Child Rights?* <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-rrsa/what-is-a-rights-respecting-school/> accessed 27 May 2021

### Professor Maggie Atkinson, Chair of A New Direction

Professor Maggie Atkinson chairs A New Direction. She is an Independent Scrutineer in safeguarding partnerships, and a UNICEF UK and Michael Sieff Foundation Trustee. She was the second Children's Commissioner for England (2010-2015). She is a Comprehensive School educated Cambridge graduate and taught English and Drama before working in school and service

improvement in many local authorities. She was Director of Education and Culture, and then of Children's Services, in Gateshead (2003-2010) and President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) (2008-2009). She has a Doctorate in Education (EdD) from - and is an Honorary Professor at - Keele University, and holds Honorary Doctorates from Northumbria, Keele, and Nottingham Trent.

# About the Project



**76,146**  
students in photos



No. of teachers,  
carers and teaching  
assistants in photos

**6,250**



individual class  
photographs

**3,128**



No. of  
schools  
involved

**1,504**

## Academic year

**2018**  
**2019**

**Sep – Jul:**

3,128 40 – 60 mins class photography sessions in schools across London

**Jan – Feb:**

99 Ambassador school day long workshops for those schools that helped test out the ideas and photography sessions

**2019**  
**2020**

**Sep – Oct:**

54 Duty of Care school half day assembly and workshops for those schools participating in the Outdoor Exhibition

**4th Nov – 14th Nov:**

Outdoor Exhibition on over 600 billboards across London

**12th Nov – 16th Mar:**

Gallery Exhibition in the Duveen Galleries, Tate Britain

802 schools (1764 classes) booked half day visits to the exhibition

630 schools (1363 classes) visited prior to early closure on 17th March due to Covid-19

**Marina Lewis-King**

**A New Direction**

Marina is Programmes Manager at A New Direction. A former primary school teacher, she worked on the *Tate Year 3 Project* coordinating the photographer visits, communicating with schools, and helping develop workshop and school resource content.

# A Year With Year 3

# A Year With Year 3

*Subjects of artwork should always have a positive experience of the process, but when those subjects are 7- and 8-year-olds and there are over 76,000 of them featuring in a national gallery, the need for it to be meaningful participation becomes even more important. Through our role in the Tate Year 3 Project, A New Direction worked hard to make this happen.*

## Marina Lewis-King

When the Year 3 photographers visited 1,504 schools to photograph more than 3,000 classes over the course of just one academic year, it might have been easier to simply snap a picture and move on to the next one like on the usual school picture day. Instead, A New Direction developed an engaging range of workshops for the children and continued to support the photographers to deliver the sessions. The discussions and games focused on the children engaging with the themes of their identity, both individually and within the community, and their ambitions and hopes for the future.

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There must be a hundred million here! Wait... there's more!

These led to some insightful discussions, often with teachers being delighted and surprised at seeing another side to their pupils. It enabled the children to become active participants in the artwork they are at the heart of, and because they were having fun, we got big grins for the photo too.

### Launch Day – 11th November 2019

On Monday 11th November, I was lucky enough to witness the excitement of one Year 3 (Y3) class when I accompanied them to see their photo on a billboard and in the gallery exhibition.

On the way to the billboard site, the class played a game of 'I spy' and talked about hoping to see Big Ben. We first spotted the billboard through the windows of the coach and the children erupted into cheering. When they got off the coach, they stood underneath the poster, pointing at themselves in excitement before posing for a photo underneath. They chatted in awe about how weird it felt to see their class picture at the side of the road, and about how

special that felt. School trips are always memorable, but I suspect nothing will compare to the time they saw themselves alongside other London landmarks.

As we pulled up to Tate Britain, a few started chanting "Tate Britain! Tate Britain!" in anticipation. Once in the exhibition within the Duveen Galleries, there were gasps and guesses at how many photos there might be, as we walked past the walls covered in pictures. "There must be a hundred million here! Wait... there's more!" one child exclaimed. Students were invited to disperse, and they hurried off to try and find not just their own photo but schools of friends and family too.

### School trips to see Steve McQueen Year 3

It wasn't just that lucky class being invited to Tate Britain on a special trip. There were dedicated slots available for participating schools during weekdays for the duration of the exhibition. Classes were able to view their photo up close on a screen, and shown their photo situated in the gallery too (though some eagle-

eyed students managed to somehow spot the picture themselves, first!).

I joined another school on their trip in February 2020, where we had fun spotting the differences between photos and trying to find the one featuring a dog. It was interesting seeing staff and students having similar reactions of awe at how similar the pictures could be, and yet so different once you got up close – in class size, uniform colour, and individual expressions. We made the most of the experience using the self-guided activities provided by Tate and it was small things, such as the blue plaques next to other paintings in the gallery specifically written to engage Y3 students, that made the children feel like that the whole gallery offered something for them – not just the exhibition they were part of.

### Children's experiences at the photo sessions

Seeing the children engage with artwork hanging in such a major gallery, which they feature in, felt powerful to me. Over the previous year, I read daily updates from our photographers visiting all the schools, attended sessions myself and heard time after time how much children enjoy art and their views on its importance at school. Yet many also felt as though it might not be for them because they weren't 'good' at it, or that they didn't get to do it enough at school because, "it wasn't learning like English and maths". This view of art was one that teachers were often keen to take on and respond to. It was inspiring to see how

many teachers used this session and the resources to plan more creative activities and opportunities exploring their identity and community.

Kerri Sellens, Assistant Head and Curriculum Lead at Lansbury Lawrence, echoed a view we heard from many teachers about how important the additional activities were to the photography sessions, saying: "The children enjoyed learning about photography through interacting with the photographer and loved the drama activities accompanying the session to encourage deeper thinking about why our community is special."

We asked pupils about their experience of *the Tate Year 3 Project*. One pupil said: "I am really proud to be in the Tate Britain and on a billboard. I love being shown to London and I am proud to have the chance to be in the Tate." Another felt it brought his class closer together saying, "When the photographers came it made me feel like my class were a big family." Even months on from the photographer visits children had lasting positive impressions, such as: "I like how it wasn't a boring photo thing, they made it into a fun game."

We made every effort to be as inclusive as possible, with sessions tailored to each school's need. For example, some schools had shorter workshops with sensory focused games that helped create a sense of community between children who might not usually collaborate in lessons. One of the highlights for me over the workshops I attended

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I am really proud to be in the Tate Britain and on a billboard. I love being shown to London and I am proud to have the chance to be in the Tate.

was seeing the fun that children had when playing games involving the whole class, and how proud they felt about being part of something together.

A New Direction commissioned Greg Klerkx to develop a new set of classroom resources with artists and experienced creative education facilitators, with a range of lengths and themes. These weren't required for the photography sessions to happen, but it meant that teachers could choose to have the photographer's visits as part of a whole teaching unit, or just as a unique stand-alone experience. [The Year 3 Learning Lenses](#) are free and available to download on A New Direction's website.

### Working with teachers

In order for the children to participate and enjoy the experience, adults had to make sure lots of things were in place, with lead teachers at schools often going out of their way to accommodate the project staff. We made sure the whole process was as smooth as possible for the schools and teachers involved and worked hard not to be disruptive to busy timetables. There are also over 6,000 teachers



and educators featured in the photos so we wanted them to enjoy it too!

Communication was key in this both before and after the session, and logistics and timings had to be considered in scheduling - particularly when navigating the politics of who could use the coveted school hall and when! For this to happen, advanced planning was vital. Workshops were developed in schools by experienced facilitators Shermaine Slocombe and Hannah Joyce, who trained the photographers to deliver a variety of activities in the photography sessions. This planning, with the help of Ambassador Schools in the first half term of the project, enabled us to communicate to schools what to expect both in terms of timings and content. Sessions were continually developed and reflected on, with A New Direction running weekly professional development meetings to support the photographer team.

The other vital element for coordinating a large number of school visits in such a short window of time was using technology – with a specially designed website and dedicated email address for us to streamline booking and respond to queries from teachers as quickly as possible.

#### **Photographers' assistants**

Safeguarding was paramount throughout all aspects of the project, with every child featured in the exhibition submitting a parent/carer consent form to their school, along with an extra one for schools involved in the outdoor exhibition. If for whatever reason a child could not

feature in the picture (including those who chose not to despite having consent in place) they were still involved in the games and activities. To make sure they felt part of the process, they had the chance to act as the photographer's assistants during the photo itself – often resulting in envious questions from their classmates about how it felt being a photographer.

#### **Children's superpowers**

For those schools who were featured on billboards, we worked with the NSPCC and London Connected Learning Centre on a *Duty of Care* programme, which included staff briefings to ensure the focus could be maintained on the children's welfare and wellbeing. Facilitators then visited those schools to deliver another workshop for the children centered around digital citizenship, giving them space to talk about their feelings about being featured on the posters. This enabled them to consider what the reactions of the public could be and when they might need to talk to a trusted adult.

They were also encouraged to consider how to be responsible photographers themselves and understand when it might not be appropriate to share a picture, which is a topic of growing importance in the current digital world. The overall aim though was to keep the focus positive and help them to celebrate being in such a unique project - and celebrate their unique identities too. Most of the sessions ended in delightful illustrations of themselves as superheroes with their own special super-power, showing a special talent they had.

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My hope is that this artwork, and others to come, continue to inspire the young to engage with art, and have fun while they're at it.

#### **To the future...**

From a love of science and being able to do backflips, to teaching people to never give up and making other people happy; from wanting to be artists, computer programmers, gold medal winners, or even astronauts moonlighting as photographers – we have learnt that the future generation of London are talented and they have big hopes for the future. My hope is that this artwork, and others to come, continue to inspire the young to engage with art, and have fun while they're at it. ■

Adapted and updated from a blog previously published on A New Direction's website in November 2019.

**David Parker**

David is a freelance researcher and evaluator with an interest in arts and creativity programmes for young people. Recent evaluations have focused on work for the British Council, Arts Council England and Sorrell Foundation. Formerly he was Director of Research for Creative and Cultural Skills, *Creative Partnerships* and the British Film Institute.

# Participation Begins With Me: Reflections From Tate and School Headteachers on Year 3

*In Conversation with...*

**Kate Atkins**

Headteacher at Rosendale  
Primary School, Lambeth

**Dr Maria Balshaw CBE**

Director of Tate

**Jackie Benjamin,**

Head teacher at Tyssen  
Community School, Hackney

**Anna Cutler**

Director of Learning and latterly  
Director of Learning & Research  
at Tate (2010 - 2021)

**Kate Atkins**  
**Headteacher at Rosendale**  
**Primary School, Lambeth**

Kate has been teaching in Lambeth for over 20 years. She began her teaching career in Early Years, which is still an ongoing passion. In addition to being a Headteacher she is CEO of the Great North Wood Education Trust, a Multi Academy Trust with a local secondary school and 3 children's centres. Kate led *ReflectED*, one of the first school-led research projects in the country as well as leading *Connecting Knowledge*, a London based research project which resulted in Rosendale being an Excellence Hub for lesson study. Rosendale is an EEF Specialist Partner for Research, supporting schools in London and beyond to use evidence-based practice in the classroom to improve outcomes for all children.

**Dr Maria Balshaw CBE**  
**Director of Tate**

Maria has held the role of Director of Tate since June 2017. As Director, Maria is also the Accounting Officer appointed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Previously, Maria was Director of the Whitworth, University of Manchester; Director of Manchester City Galleries; and Director of Culture for Manchester City Council. Maria is Chair of the National Museum Directors' Council and is a Trustee of the Clore Leadership Programme and Manchester International Festival's Boards. In 2015, she was awarded a CBE for services to the arts.

**Jackie Benjamin,**  
**Head teacher at Tyssen**  
**Community School, Hackney**

Jackie has been teaching for over 20 years in schools in Tottenham and Hackney, becoming a head teacher 6 years ago. After leaving school with no qualifications, Jackie started working as a hairdresser and later a chef. She has always had a passion for working with children and at 30-years-old, she graduated as a fully qualified teacher. She strongly believes that there is a real need for children to see teachers who represent the community they live in and see that, no matter where you start, there are no limits.

**Anna Cutler**  
**Director of Learning and latterly**  
**Director of Learning & Research**  
**at Tate (2010 - 2021)**

With 30 years' experience working in education and cultural settings at a local, national, and international level, Anna's central purpose throughout her career has been to explore and improve educational interventions in a range of cultural and cross-disciplinary arts environments. In September 2016 she initiated Tate Exchange, a civic space aimed at building dialogue around art, society, and the urgent and complex issues facing us today.

# Participation Begins With Me: Reflections From Tate and School Headteachers on Year 3

*Why did schools engage with the Tate Year 3 Project in such numbers? What were their motivations for participating? And what did Tate learn as part of that process?*

**David Parker with Kate Atkins, Maria Balshaw, Jackie Benjamin and Anna Cutler**

Fundamentally Year 3 must be attributed to the artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen whose vision for the project and the artwork it became contains a beguiling surface simplicity, allowing inner complexities to slowly emerge over time. Yet the warmth of feeling and personal engagement felt by so many who experienced the *Steve McQueen Year 3* exhibition at Tate – along with the eye-catching billboards spread across London in 2019 – is also due in no small part to the schools and children that participated. They were the stars of this particular show.

But what motivated them to join in? On the face of it this was a simple idea with somewhat controlled content, a mass participation project with rigid logistics and timescales which were for the most part entirely inflexible: everything needed to happen with a particular year group within London boroughs within a single academic year. Yet, at the same time, it had a choral quality, ceding elements of individual control in order to enjoy the overall impact of many young people joining together in a shared endeavour. This was in essence a work of aggregation; an example of how the whole really can be greater than the sum of the parts.

To explore some of the dynamics underpinning the process, A New Direction organised two online discussions between key participants from Tate and from schools, the key themes of which are set out below. Maria Balshaw, Director of Tate, explained that Year 3 had helped the

venue explore ways of revaluing exhibition space and democratising the gallery.

*“When I looked at the photographs as a collection, I saw several different ‘Londons’, filled with a huge mix of limitations and opportunities. And I was aware that not everyone portrayed would consider Tate as their space. Year 3 was a chance to challenge that. By placing the images of those young people up on the walls, hopefully, it began a process of them feeling that the Tate might be for them and their families in the future.”*

Responding to this idea, Jackie Benjamin, concurred.

*“We probably had several motivations as a school but overall, it was very much about the children being represented and valued. And about them being involved in the process, making the artwork happen. It wasn’t just a visit in that sense. The children were partners, and they were really invested in the idea; they felt involved.”*

It was interesting to hear these interrelated expectations articulated from quite different vantage points. The ideas set out by Maria and Jackie speak directly to what we know to be important principles about participatory practice. Participatory projects aren’t just about empowering visitors. Every project has to address three constituencies – the institution, participants and the audience and Year 3 did this very well. A theme that was also picked up in the conversation between Anna Cutler and Kate Atkins. As Anna explained:

Maria Balshaw and Anna Cutler from Tate spoke with two headteachers from participating schools, Kate Atkins and Jackie Benjamin, to explore possible reasons behind Year 3’s success.

***“I think a lot of value came through the fact that for Year 3 the whole concept cut through directly to the cohort themselves. They are the piece. They are the relevance. The entire concept was about the participants.”***

Kate Atkins also saw a large part of the value in Year 3 generated by this sense of young people inhabiting the project.

***“It was absolutely clear this was a ‘school’s project’ as opposed to a project to which schools were invited... the project simply didn’t exist without the participants.”***

The concept of participation was a deep feature within this work. It was also multi-layered. Participation began with the individual, seeing themselves within the context of their classmates and the timeless nature of the school photo which is so relatable for us all. But each class photo was set in the wider context of year group cohorts, which in turn were scaled to include many other Year 3 (Y3) children from the same borough. Finally, as this process multiplied, a whole generation of 7- and 8-year-olds were situated within the sweep of an entire city. Effectively, this amounted to a window onto London in 2019, as if the youth of an entire city had a ‘photo booth’ snapshot simultaneously. Teachers embraced this concept with enthusiasm. Kate reflected:

***“You can’t overlook the nature of the ‘event’. It was a spectacle that happened at scale. Also, it was communicated as such so our expectations were clear up front and set early on. That was important and helped us connect with the ‘big idea’. But the nature of the project and its processes also connected with us – we’re interested in where we are and who we are. Schools are always interested in that, because education starts with the children’s realities. And Steve McQueen just got that – the idea of the ‘school photograph’; they are part of all our histories. It’s timeless.”***

There is something profound about the way Year 3 articulated this notion of participation. Schools often think of such projects as being heavily hands-on, yet in

the case of the core photography element, while there were spin off activities to help the children understand how that day’s photo would form part of an artwork at Tate and follow up work teachers could engage with, the creation of each class image was a traditional interaction between professional photographers and children and teachers who were subjects.

So far, so orthodox. Yet, as Anna pointed out, ‘they are the piece’. The children occupied the halls and walls of Tate Britain and therefore participation not only took the form of hands-on activities, it was also an aspect of each child’s identity, the affirmation of their place within their city and the possibilities their collective generational representation suggested. That schools embraced this concept so enthusiastically, potentially broadens what engagement with art museums can mean, transforming mass participation with young people as a core element of high-profile conceptual works. This extended to the role of Steve McQueen working as a partner with schools via Tate, Artangel, A New Direction and ArtsMediaPeople. Anna remarked on this aspect:

***“Steve’s presence was a big part of the concept and probably drew people toward the idea, but he also did personal things, face to face moments with teachers and talks to camera which directly valued the work of educators.”***

This invokes an instructive lesson about working at scale. Large scale projects still involve treating people as individuals. Providing partnership-spirited ways to enter and access the arts experience, Year 3 was in its entirety rested on the building blocks of relationship building and showing awareness of and respect toward key constituencies. Tate and A New Direction placed a great deal of emphasis on this, ensuring that timings, spaces and instructions were designed with the culture of schools in mind.

A New Direction’s outreach work was the entry experience for most schools that participated and as such framed the first contact in ways that made the settings feel

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This was in essence a work of aggregation; an example of how the whole really can be greater than the sum of the parts.

valued. Communications to schools were clear and understood the beat to which most schools march. Kate remarked on the importance of this:

***“There’s something hugely important about the pragmatics of projects like this; the timings, in fact the entire process, need to be structured in ways that fit with the three terms and seasonal rhythms of schools. Year 3 did this really well – so much thought was put into that aspect and that must have contributed to the high levels of engagement.”***

Relating to constituencies in this way helps cement connections which have the potential to build cultural capital over time, something Maria returned to in her conversation.

***“Ultimately Year 3 reminds us it’s our job to let families know we are for them. Tate is free to enter, they will be warmly welcomed, and they will find content that relates to them and their lives. We have to keep holding ourselves account to those ideas and Year 3 helped hugely with that.”***

This challenge and goal is certainly applicable to Tate but also has relevance for other cultural venues too. Designing arts experiences with education components that get better the more people interact with them is not simply a matter of providing experiences well suited to crowds. Successful ‘me-to-we’ experiences are ones which enable cultural institutions to toggle between personal and social engagement by choosing concepts which lend themselves to individual and collective meaning. Year 3 managed this by conceiving a project which worked effectively with intermediary organisations, coordinating schools’ actions and preferences to create a more powerful overall result in the final exhibition. Jackie felt Year 3 took time to understand school needs in this regard.

***“Year 3 made engaging easier for us. Every step was clear and well organised. We need that balance of expression and artistic freedom which came from the final event and the huge attention it got – something we felt part of. But it also came from***

***the way logistics were taken care of. We always knew what was needed and what the expectations were. Schools need that balance.”***

Both Kate and Jackie reflected on the important alternative learning spaces and contexts cultural venues provide schools, but also pointed to some of the challenges too. They spoke of a curriculum which is nominally broad and open to interpretation, but also driven by pressures to secure results in summative exams which favour knowledge transfer and memorisation. From the perspective of teachers, the arts – particularly when they are at their best - can generate work which feels transgressive and pushed to the margins by other modes of learning. While Year 3 creates some counterbalance to that, it was not what might be considered a standard curriculum experience and so questions remain about longer term legacy and ongoing impact.

How can schools be helped to build on the undoubted energy and enthusiasm this large-scale art project gave rise to? Year 3 offers some clues.

- Start from where schools already are – Year 3 showed that huge engagement was possible if the central artistic concept related to schools’ own start points.
- What is needed must be clear – whether it is a large collaborative production such as Year 3, an artist in residence programme or arts learning that is CPD driven – schools really need to see the shape of the activity and grasp it early on if they are to sustain their engagement. Clear communication and conceptual clarity are key.
- Degrees of commitment which are scalable – not all schools can do everything, or be engaged with every element of a programme, but if the core offer is strong and simple, they can and will engage in large numbers. Some schools will want to go further and engage more deeply, so additional activities or tiered levels of connection can be advantageous.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the impact Year 3 had and may continue to have.

The impact on Tate is tangible and the commitment from Maria and Anna to listen to feedback and take points of learning back to relevant Tate teams is commendable. Year 3 would be difficult to replicate, but other large-scale work that operates with similar principles is now more realistic from Tate's perspective – the project definitely set a precedent for working in this way.

The impact of large projects such as this is difficult to pin down. They are transitory in their delivery, but last long in the memory and have sustained experiential impacts. Elements that came through from Kate and Jackie's testimony spoke to the scale of impact a project of this size can have. Jackie reflected on the impact of seeing all the photographs together in the Duveen Galleries.

***"A lot of the children were struck by the lack of diversity or different forms of diversity in some schools; they noticed things that were dissimilar to their own experience, from the ethnicities of children to the different backgrounds in the photos, and that made them reflect on identity and place."***

Kate reflected on why she made the decision to engage, and again, it was a determination based on the scale of impact and its potential to work on many levels while retaining focus and sharpness.

***"I liked that it was about a whole year group. That seemed very important, because it was contained and limited in some respects, but also very inclusive. Everyone in that year group was part of it, and every school, potentially, could join in. The feedback from the kids when they came back was palpable. It was 'There's me!' But also, there's thousands of other mes."***

Other impacts the headteachers suggested included:

- Higher levels of parental interest in, and value for, the arts
- Improved self-esteem and individuality among young people
- Greater awareness of place and connectedness to others among young people
- Greater awareness of schools as organisations from the vantage point of cultural venues
- Reinforcement of the importance of art for school and school for art – that high quality artwork can emerge from large scale participatory endeavours involving children

Over 1,500 London schools participated in Year 3. And almost 80,000 young people featured in the final artwork in the Duveen galleries of Tate Britain. This is a scale and spectacle not usually associated with school arts projects, but there is good reason to believe that the emotional uplift such work can offer is replicable. The Covid-19 lockdown that finally encroached on visitor numbers to Tate Britain in March 2020 also reminded us of how much we need the energy projects of this size and ambition can foster.

Year 3 wasn't just a spectacle. It was not only a 'wow' moment for the children who took part. It was a talking point and a means of reflecting on London as it is today and how it might be tomorrow. Steve McQueen's own take on the exhibition sums this up well:

'It's a telescope and microscope situation. You're looking through a telescope and seeing all these people, but it's also reflecting back on you, making you think: 'Who am I in all of this?'<sup>1</sup>

The legacy for Year 3 could be far reaching. It invites us to think about participation in a deep way. What counts as participatory art? How does taking part change the way we see ourselves and relate to others? How can art and the art museum become an open invitation to everyone to locate themselves within their cultural histories and futures? When the art is the children, and their participation becomes the work, we are all – families, community, schools - better placed to reflect on their potential and the ways we might improve to help them fulfil it. ■

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Large scale projects still involve treating people as individuals. Providing partnership-spirited ways to enter and access the arts experience, Year 3 was in its entirety rested on the building blocks of relationship building and showing awareness of and respect toward key constituencies.

1. G.Younge, "Childhood is a whirlwind": Steve McQueen on his mesmerising school photo project,' *The Guardian*, 4 Nov 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/nov/04/childhood-is-a-whirlwind-steve-mcqueen-on-his-mesmerising-school-photo-project>, accessed 22 April 2021.

**Colin Grant**

Colin is an author of five books. They include: *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and Director of *WritersMosaic*, an innovative online platform for new writing. Grant also writes for a number of newspapers including the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *New York Review of Books*.

# Out of the Shadows





# Out of the Shadows

*The representation of people of colour in British culture has alternated between near invisibility and hyper visibility; even though historians such as Peter Fryer tell us that, there were Africans in Britain before the English came here. For long stretches of our shared history, black people may have figured only as an afterthought or footnote in museums or galleries, but they've more often been demonised as feckless, dangerous wastrels on the front pages of British tabloids.*

## Colin Grant

The yearning to be integrated, included as part of the majority consciousness, going about your business without incident, is offset by the anxiety of being subjected to surveillance, banished to the margins of society, as an unwanted presence. This tension has played out in all facets of our society, perhaps dramatically so in those public spaces previously perceived as white places of privilege; arguably class is as much a factor as race. That combination can be seen in many working-class people of colour who have felt excluded from art institutions

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Historians such as Peter Fryer tell us that, there were Africans in Britain before the English came here.

or have excused and excluded themselves.

Visiting art galleries in the 1970s, my siblings and I (the children of black Jamaicans of the Windrush generation) used to play a game we called 'black people alert' when spotting fellow black and brown punters who'd breached these bastions of Britishness. We may have felt entitled to be in the museums but that didn't preclude discomfort. But that was the 1970s, things have changed, surely?

*Make Life Beautiful! - The Dandy in Photography*, an exhibition in Brighton in 2004 was shaping up as it purported to be: camp, aesthetically pleasing and dandyish. By the halfway point, walking round the show with my two daughters (then aged twelve and eight) we'd been exposed to the usual suspects - Cecil Beaton, Valentino, Noel Coward, Oscar Wilde. Finally, we came across the welcome sight of a black subject (for the first time), the photo in sepia of

a handsome, suited-man wearing a fedora, taken by F. Holland Day in 1897.

Underneath the portrait was the simple caption: 'Negro in Hat'. I was taken aback, immediately flushed with heat and embarrassment; I could see my daughters looked bemused as well. We stepped back and across to the next photo, also taken by the same photographer. Here now was a theatrical-looking white man from the same period in what appeared to be a fancy-dress turban. Its caption said: 'Man in Hat'. Our eyes flicked between the two portraits - 'Negro in Hat'; 'Man in Hat'; 'Negro in Hat'; 'Man in Hat'.

So, was a Negro not a man? My daughters and I were equally dismayed and dispirited. The next day I wrote an angry email to the curator; I included my phone number. He rang me straight away and defended the inclusion of the caption saying it was historically specific, and that, in any event, it had been given by the photographer. Fine, but

what, I asked the curator, would he have done if Holland Day had captioned the photo 'N\*\*\*\*r in Hat'? There was silence down the line. Eventually the curator and I reached a compromise; he would not amend the wording but would insert below it the phrase 'original caption'.

Other works such as *Ebony and Ivory*, a 'majestic countenance and muscled torso of an Ethiopian Chief,' according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, demonstrated Holland Day's 'genuine delectation for his subject.' Day was an American gentleman photographer (though much more than a dilettante) from the late 19th and early 20th century whose 'fascination' (veiled infatuation) with black models calls to mind Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Black Book*. Mapplethorpe's lascivious delectation in his naked African American models was evident in his photography of the body parts he considered 'the most perfect'. His aesthetic was anatomical; the projection of a hyper-sexualised fantasy of the black male, reduced to sex, to an object. Take for instance Mapplethorpe's *Man in a Polyester Suit*. Aside from the model's hands, the camera's focus is on the black man's penis, as if it somehow signified his essence.

Arguably, the fact that these black models were the subject of a white artist's attention was an upgrade, at least as far as Western art was concerned. Mapplethorpe's male nudes and Holland Day's *Negro in Hat* were an evolution from the role that models might have played in earlier decades and centuries. Then

they were appendages - the asexualised handmaiden in Manet's *Olympia* or the unnamed black servant (most likely Francis Barber), in Doyle's *A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds*. In that painting Barber, the 'faithful negro servant' of the great lexicographer Samuel Johnson, carries a salver laden with decanters of wine, attending to his master and eight other luminaries.

The revellers do not include Ignatius Sancho, but, had he survived beyond his death in 1780, you could imagine Sancho, the fabled 'African man of Letters' invited to such a gathering. It's possible. Sancho, who at times described himself as a 'black Falstaff', was a London celebrity deemed important enough in 1768 to sit for Thomas Gainsborough, the most famous portraitist of his time.

Gainsborough renders Sancho as a portly figure of sartorial elegance in fine clothes, a hand in his waistcoat; an erudite gentleman (far removed from his inauspicious beginnings as the orphaned child of enslaved African parents and later as a grocer; his actual profession). Apart from his dark skin there's no difference between Sancho and a white gentleman; his capacity for high culture is further demonstrated by his sensuous face.

Trawling through British art history Gainsborough's elegant depiction seems complimented by the high society portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the great niece of Lord Mansfield. Together with her white cousin and in the flush

of youth, Dido is painted almost as an African princess in satin, privileged, wealthy and care-free. Her and Sancho's portraits serve as a rebuttal of the stereotypical depiction of black people, at the time, as grotesque, uncivilised, licentious drunkards.

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There must be a reckoning but also reconciliation. We're not alone. Numerous countries have engaged with a difficult past to reimagine a better future.

But there's a catch. To see Sancho's portrait you must first venture to the National Portrait Gallery and make your peace with the past and the knowledge that, as with the Tate (which takes its name from the sugar baron Henry Tate of Tate & Lyle), such institutions came into being in part from the wealth Britain accrued through the plunder of black bodies during the transatlantic slave trade. Henry Tate, the gallery argues, was not a slave-owner or slave-trader, but concedes that it's 'not possible to separate the Tate galleries from the history of colonial slavery from which in part they derive their existence.'<sup>1</sup>

Given their past, how can such places make life beautiful? Many works depict scenes of

wealthy white aristocrats (emblematic of the privileges and exploitation of colonialism and empire) with black servants portrayed almost as pets. In the 1980s, I recall peers who boycotted the Tate and National Gallery, arguing that to venture into such contaminated places was to surrender moral surety and to indulge in an act of complicity; a great wrong, captured in paint without censure, should not be normalized. Conscious of such criticism, the Tate has at least begun the conversation on inclusivity with a number of outreach projects.

There must be a reckoning but also reconciliation. We're not alone. Numerous countries have engaged with a difficult past to reimagine a better future. What can we learn from the Germans? Two decades ago at the Venice Biennale, the artist Hans Haake with his work *Germania* critiqued the building and purpose of his country's pavilion (inaugurated by the Nazi government in 1938) by taking a sledgehammer and bulldozer to the slabs of its marble floor and reducing it to rubble. Its destruction was exhilarating and liberating. That sense of freeing is important. No one would advocate dismantling the Tate, but the institution needs to be liberated and repurposed. *Steve McQueen Year 3* is yet another step towards that eventuality.

It was a delight to see so many brown faces (76,000 youngsters, aged 7 and 8, from two thirds of the capital's primary schools) peering out from the walls of the Tate's Duveen Galleries at Steve McQueen's show.

Observing not just punters of colour but the subjects on the wall, it was as if my younger self was staring back at me from the 3,000 group portraits of school kids in their uniforms, arranged in columns and rows from the floor to the thirty-foot-high ceiling.

We look at school and class photos in awe and wonder but with ambivalence, too. If these portraits of childhood are celebrations of youth and a snapshot of the present, they're also heralds of what is to come. Poring over the fading images years later, we reconstruct narratives of the past, increasingly aware that the photos were always predictors of the future. Similarly, in decades to come, historians will look back to *Steve McQueen Year 3* as an indicator of a changing demographic where punters inside the gallery and the portraits on the walls began to more closely resemble the people outside who might ordinarily have walked on by.

Exhibitions like *Steve McQueen Year 3* and *Get Up Stand Up, Now* (at Somerset House in 2019) are the axis on which British art history is turning; away from the received notion of a canon, towards the representation of the lives and experiences of people of colour. They echo the chant, "We are here!" that children who attended the exhibition were encouraged to voice.

In the 1970s the same cry was heard from black households throughout the UK whenever a person of colour appeared on television screens; and my gallery-going siblings and I experienced a similar thrilling sensation when we nodded furtively at people of colour who'd braved the

same recognised white spaces. We need no longer nod now; and no longer will there be a need for such shows as *Steve McQueen Year 3* and *Get Up Stand Up, Now* to be advertised and heralded with the preface 'the first black...'

Reflecting on McQueen's show for *The Times Literary Supplement* I'd have found it hard to criticise it; I suspect that, had I not believed it worthy of merit, I'd have declined to review it. You don't want to kill the dream of inclusion before it's had time to blossom. For, make no mistake, we are in the midst of culture wars, and there comes a time when you cannot remain on the fence, or inadvertently align yourself with revisionist forces.

Organisers of the *Uncomfortable Art Tour*, focusing on cultural institutions such as the National Gallery and Tate Britain 'seek to resist triumphalist nostalgia with art history.' Their approach - evident in portraits on their website, for example, of Lord Nelson with 'White Supremacist' scrawled over it in red paint - seems polemical and provocative, but it is necessarily so. Artists of colour (such as McQueen, even though he might squirm at the description) have an obligation to interrogate the uncomfortable truths illuminated on such tours; to connect with other people of colour, in the act of rebellion, challenging the very seductive nature of nostalgic narratives, by stepping into the atrium of Tate Britain and shouting, "We are here. We reach." ■

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...in decades to come, historians will look back to *Steve McQueen Year 3* as an indicator of a changing demographic where punters inside the gallery and the portraits on the walls began to more closely resemble the people outside

1. Tate, 'The Tate Galleries and Slavery', [Tate.org.uk, About us, History of Tate, www.tate.org.uk/about-us/history-tate/tate-galleries-and-slavery#:~:text=While%20it%20is%20important%20to,part%20they%20derive%20their%20existence,](https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/history-tate/tate-galleries-and-slavery#:~:text=While%20it%20is%20important%20to,part%20they%20derive%20their%20existence,) accessed 26 April 2021.

**Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski**

Ego is an archivist, artist and is pursuing a PhD at Chelsea College of Arts (UAL)/Tate Britain. Her doctoral research places much needed critical attention on Jamaican born sculptor Ronald Moody (1900 - 1984). She holds an MA in Archives and Record Management, International (UCL). She is a member of the *Remembering Olive Morris Collective 2.0* and archivist for the *Rita Keegan Archive Project*. Her practice aims to develop collective, collaborative, archival strategies in relation to physical space, environment, the public and the personal in relation to the Diaspora.

# Across the Imaginative Threshold of the Future of Cultural Equity

# Across the Imaginative Threshold of the Future of Cultural Equity

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*A society that does not value imagination is one that has ensured its future will be a clone of its present traumas. This is why the global shift in the pitch of our generational frequency is so wondrous. If you have not heard, we are embracing a discourse of dreams and dignity versus one solely of struggle.<sup>1</sup>*

- Mark Gonzales

## Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski

There was something powerful and quite exhilarating, experiencing the sound of intermittent (joyful) shouts of “WE ARE HERE!” from the children visiting Tate Britain’s Duveen Galleries, last year (pre-Covid-19), as they spotted their photo in the *Steve McQueen Year 3* exhibition. It felt like young people were being encouraged to take up space in the gallery unapologetically, which didn’t feel like the norm in such places. The *Tate Year 3 Project* created quite the buzz, and excitement. I remember it got people talking about it, engaging with it. It captured something that felt like a contagious energy, and the familiarity of the photographic format of the school class photo seemed to allow everybody and anybody to engage in this ambitious art project which prompted conversations about the future, the future of this generation of children and the kind of world they would inherit. There was an inbuilt equity, diversity, inclusivity: this could be you or somebody that you knew. Turner Prize-winning artist and Oscar-winning filmmaker Steve McQueen’s own unassuming Year 3 (Y3) class photo, shared in press coverage and during the launch in 2018, attached a level of inspiration and aspiration for the possible futures of the 76,146 young people who participated.

During the *Year 3* school and family visits, teachers and parents would often mention that it was their first time to visit Tate

Britain. I started to ask myself when was the first time I visited an art gallery? I had taken my art GCSE whilst in Sixth Form. I loved painting and pursued an art foundation. Art became both a way of channeling and managing grief and a pathway to gain further independence. As a teenager I would have described it in terms of a passport to freedom. And yet, I calculated I was 18 years old the first time that I went to an art gallery, this calculation created a wonder of ‘why?’ I asked those secondary school friends I am still in touch with if they remember us ever visiting an art gallery during our school years? They responded with a resounding no. Not that that meant we’d never engaged in the arts and culture, but that our relationship to these nationally funded institutions was possibly as limited as the *Year 3* participants were describing now.

In reflecting on *Year 3* and cultural equity for this essay, I turned to Steve McQueen’s description of the project as capturing the future in a milestone year:

‘There’s an urgency to reflect on who we are and our future [...] to have a visual reflection on the people who make this city work. I think it’s important and, in some ways, urgent.’<sup>12</sup>

I thought back to what the world looked like in my milestone year, 1980/81. I was attending Houndsfield Primary School, which backed onto Jubilee Park with its

1. M. Gonzales, In *Times of Terror*, *Wage Beauty* (*Wage Beauty* x *Think Disrupt*, 2014), 51

2. Tate, ‘Turner Prize-winning artist and Oscar-winning filmmaker Steve McQueen unveils his epic portrait of London’s Year 3 pupils’, [www.tate.org.uk/exhibitions-and-events/at-tate-britain/steve-mcqueen-year-3](https://www.tate.org.uk/exhibitions-and-events/at-tate-britain/steve-mcqueen-year-3), accessed 26 April 2021.

youth club called 'The Hut', with after school and summer youth provision and Houndsfield Library, across the street from the primary school. I wish I knew the name of the librarians; it was such a welcoming space. In musical terms the landscape was full – Adam and the Ants were introducing *Prince Charming* and George Benson was all about *Giving Me the Night*, Irene Cara's *Fame* was giving me a new found love for scissor jumps off of tables, and The Gang were in *Celebration* mode, Bucks Fizz were *Making Your Mind Up*; Thatcher was in power and the 1981 uprisings happened in London (Brixton), Birmingham (Handsworth), Liverpool (Toxteth), Manchester (Moss Side), and Leeds (Chapelton). A burgeoning Black Arts Movement was visibly on the horizon and making its mark.

Around this time, I was introduced to a P.E. teacher called Mr. Johnson, who brought dynamic, new things like 'pop mobility', a form of aerobics, to our school. He introduced me to gymnastics, taking that extra step of convincing my mother to let me attend Saturday gymnastics class in Enfield, part of the British Amateur Gymnastics Association (BAGA). I now frame this moment as someone who took an interest in supporting the expansion of my immediate world and space encouraging independence. An opportunity to do something I would probably never have considered. I can also recognise on reflection that Mr. Johnson was maybe one of the first times I encountered a person in educational terms that wanted the best for all his students, a clear system of equity, though not with a one-size fits all approach, always providing variations so whatever your ability you could participate.

My first experience of a gallery was the National Gallery, London. The reason why I remember this memory so vividly was because it was the first time I saw a Van Gogh painting in the 'flesh'. My older sister had a Vincent van Gogh book by Hans Bronkhorst (I still have her copy). I had fingered through this book a lot, alongside others on our family's much-loved rickety bookshelf. What I remember from this visit to see the real thing was the surprise of seeing the texture, the paint raised and poking off of the canvas. There was no comparison to the 2D version in the book, though the book is beautifully illustrated. We were given an assignment to reimagine/recreate one of the paintings and I produced a poor rendition based on

a Van Gogh using chicken wire and some black, yellow and green synthetic wool. In hindsight, this college visit took me across an artistic threshold of a perceived exclusion. The invitation to go into a space and building in a city where such institutional buildings can often appear intimidating and not necessarily appear to be inviting.

It would be 20 years later, through the world of archives, that I would be exposed to collections of Black British art from the interwar period to contemporary times. Through the work of historian Dr. Gemma Romain and geographer Dr. Caroline Bressey's work at the [Equiano Centre](#), UCL Geography Department and their historically curated exhibitions such as *Spaces of Black Modernism*. Or, at the Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths in residency exploring the [Women of Colour Index artist files](#), with arts and archives research collective *X Marks The Spot*. Or visits of respite to visit Lubaina Himid's [Making Histories Visible Archive](#) in Preston. However, I have sometimes wondered what my art education experience would have been like if I had seen exhibitions like [No Colour Bar](#) (2015), [Soul of a Nation](#) (2017), and [Get Up Stand Up Now](#) (2019) alongside exhibitions like *Sensation: Young British Artists* (1990).

For a period, I worked in Tulse Hill, South London as a youth worker. Year 3 reminded me of when I was working at Hightrees Community Development Trust, facilitating a group on a Wednesday and Friday called *Choices Young Women's Group*. The group was invited to produce artwork as part of a public arts commission by Inclusion Arts and Jason Gibilaro in 2003. The commission was for a mural on Brixton's railway bridge part of Destination Brixton's *International Trade Expo*.<sup>3</sup> *Choices Young Women's Group* provided the artwork for the letter 'T', in a mural that would read 'B Our Guest'. I remember the sense of pride the young women expressed, when they got to see what they had been a part of, making the place where they lived just that bit brighter. There had been something really powerful in the transformation from the moment of working together on an A4 sheet of paper and then seeing that activity translated into something larger than life for all their community to experience. I learnt how important it was to create those opportunities for young people to see themselves as part of something bigger.

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Mr. Johnson was maybe one of the first times I encountered a person in educational terms that wanted the best for all his students, a clear system of equity, though not with a one-size fits all approach

3. M.Urban, 'Design competition launched to replace Brixton's 'B Our Guest' bridge artwork', *Brixton Buzz*, 26 Sept 2017, <https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2017/09/design-competition-launched-to-replace-brixtons-b-our-guest-bridge-artwork>, accessed 27 April 2021.

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The principle of looking back at the past in order to understand the present and make positive progress.

Which brings me back to Year 3 where considerable effort was made by the project partners to make sure the young people involved were able to see themselves as part of something bigger. The project received considerable investment in financial terms with a significant amount going towards staff time to ensure that young people understood what they were part of when they had their photo taken at school and that all the new visitors to Tate Britain felt welcomed. There is no getting away from the difference resources make to the often intangible but essential back-end work that is often required with such projects to ensure its success, particularly in relation to a positive experience for all involved. However this tends to be in relation to the artwork itself, which raises the question of what more long lasting and wide-ranging changes are needed for us to think more readily of cultural institutions as equitable spaces.

For me, I think of the importance of outreach, equitable partnerships that nurture, healthy reflective relationships, shared and equal powers, and the need to carve space and trust to do things differently; something that is done so well through community spaces which our nation's cultural institutions could learn from and support. Lamenting over community spaces that no longer exist, I have found myself wondering how those still standing in this current climate are being supported or invested in; spaces like the [Karibu Education Centre](#), formally the Abeng, in Brixton, a crucial longstanding community space and resource, that functions as the alternative to the world wide web system of 'just Google it'. Here notice boards still reign supreme and so do discussions, groups, workshops, training and meetings, all ways in which you can access information about what's going on in local and wider community. These spaces can be like springboards and stepping-stones to intimate access to cultural institutions and they often play the role of creating a bridge to trust and access.

The role these community space ecosystems have, should never be undervalued, neither should what it has taken to still be standing in this moment. It can't just be about the end game of 'bums on seats', or numbers, or box ticking. Instead I think the urgency is how we reflect on the events of summer 2020 and use this as a basis to forge authentic,

long term engagement, building trust and relationships to encourage access for all, and a role in decision making. Maybe adopting an approach that reflects the 'Sankofa' philosophy, a Twi word from the Akan people of Ghana which literally translated means 'go back and get it', and refers to the search for knowledge being based on constant examination and thoughtful methodical investigation of the past. The principle of looking back at the past in order to understand the present and make positive progress.

Cultural Institutions are the custodians of past and future cultural knowledge, so it seems fitting that they would think about how they are best positioned to inform positive change. There is something to be said for how we audit progress, beyond the end of the session evaluation sheet, but over a longer timeline period. How do we measure the change taking place, or how do we measure the static energy of things that don't seem to ever change? It requires a mindful monitoring that reflects a diverse value system and holds cultural institutions accountable to all its constituents, alongside the need to acknowledge the burnout and fatigue that exists around what to some feels like a never-ending conversation around audience development and equity without much evidence of change. The reality is these conversations have been going on for decades.

Organisations like the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA), formed in 1991, to work in the realms of education, museums and libraries to foster research on Black and Asian people in Britain; the 2005 Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage, *Delivering Shared Heritage* was about developing a strategy and a series of recommendations, through exploration, with the aim of reinforcing a commitment to promote heritage and history within the capital, in response to the marginalisation of African and Asian heritage. Or the 2016, *Black Arts and Modernism* (BAM) project, which investigates how artists of African and Asian descent feature in the British art narrative. And the National Collection's audit of artworks by Black, Caribbean and Asian artists in over 30 major national and regional public collections of art across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, which culminated in a searchable database.

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...opportunities shape services with a 'by us, for us and our community' philosophy has proved invaluable in addressing actual identified need

The question remains however, how could projects and queries like these enrich and inform the discourse around the curation of permanent collections, educational programmes and the design of how visitors experience cultural institutional spaces and artworks? Moving beyond aspirational statements towards palatable, grounded change. Aye Ikomi and Eibhlin Jones's, [spreadsheet](#), created in June 2020 and platformed by the White Pube, documented Black Lives Matter statements and responses by art, cultural and heritage entities. It is maybe one example or tool in how we measure and chart the journey to move beyond what researcher Hassan Vawda said in his speculative essay: 'a history of maintaining a cultural supremacy that speaks to the very foundations of the violence that they are showing solidarity for'.<sup>4</sup> How can we reflect on the events of summer 2020 and use these reflections as a basis to forge authentic, long term engagement, and an embedded cultural change, particularly in regard to the role of decision making and agenda setting?

The importance of informal opportunities for lifelong learning alongside community spaces, have continued to be essential spaces in personal terms. They have created alternative pathways to build community wealth, networks, knowledge and autonomy. And opportunities to

shape services with a 'by us, for us and our community' philosophy has proved invaluable in addressing actual identified need. It was in these spaces that I was fortunate to access the wealth of knowledge and expertise that is often lurking in plain sight throughout the community we work and live. In my experience the experts are often around us, sitting around our tables, at meetings, attending consultations, events, developing programs that bring wider diverse audiences in, working/ volunteering with cultural institutions, or working independently or adjacent to develop new production, knowledge and ways to disseminate, often filling the chasm left by and in cultural institutions. For me, reaching out and working in authentic partnerships may be where the future of cultural institutions lies if they are to become places of equity. ■

4. H. Vawda, 'A statement from a 'national public cultural institution': BLACK LIVES MATTER', *Medium*, 6 Jun 2020, [hassanevawda.medium.com/a-statement-from-a-national-public-cultural-institution-black-lives-matter-893d76d3b133](https://hassanevawda.medium.com/a-statement-from-a-national-public-cultural-institution-black-lives-matter-893d76d3b133), accessed 27 April 2021



**Pauline Tambling**

Pauline recently retired following a career working in the arts, most recently as Chief Executive of Creative & Cultural Skills, a charity supporting young people into careers in the creative industries. Previous roles include as Director of Development at Arts Council England and Director of Education for the Royal Opera House. She is currently a trustee of Roundhouse London, Masterclass TRH and Voluntary Arts.

# **Year 3: Achieving Scale and Quality in a Cultural Endeavour**



# Year 3: Achieving Scale and Quality in a Cultural Endeavour

*As a working-class child living in a very rural community, arts experiences outside the school itself were very rare but my English class was once taken to London for the Royal Shakespeare Company's A Midsummer Night's Dream (the famous one directed by Peter Brook and designed by Sally Jacobs). It was just before the O-level examination, and suddenly the play made sense and sowed the seeds for a new and long-term interest in the arts. Arguably children in London are within easy reach of professional arts projects but nevertheless I have always believed that the **quality** of the engagement with arts organisations is more important than the **quantity** of visits. Even as a teenager I was aware of the extraordinary effort it took to organise a class visit to the theatre and that investment, by teachers, children, and parents, needed to be justified. Too often art galleries and theatres think they are doing schools a favour by engaging with them at all.*

## Pauline Tambling

This raises the question, what is the best way for national cultural organisations to engage with schools? More pressingly what makes sense in the current context reflecting the stresses schools are under following Covid-19? The arts in schools had already been 'squeezed' long before the pandemic following a number of curriculum 'reforms' over many years. Some schools offer only the minimum of what the National Curriculum requires whilst other governors and headteachers do all they can to fund the staff and resources to make their schools 'arts rich'. As well as curriculum and examination demands, all schools need to comply

with safeguarding, data protection and general health and safety making the administration of anything extra-curricular, out-of-school or with third-party organisations challenging. It's not a 'level playing field'. It was hard for many schools to engage with external partners before Covid-19, but in the current climate, where so many children have missed months of education time in school, it can only get harder. How can cultural organisations respond?

The *Tate Year 3 Project*, led by Tate, A New Direction and Artangel presents one potential model. It began as the idea of the award-winning artist Steve McQueen to capture the

images of a generation of 7-year-olds across London as a collection of traditional school photographs presented together as a single artwork. Drawing on memories of his own school photograph at Little Ealing Primary School in 1977, McQueen wanted to explore the idea of 'the future in the present' within a 'portrait of citizenship' which would reflect contemporary London by literally placing a generation of 7- and 8-year-olds on gallery walls and in an outdoor exhibition across the city. The idea was to invite all 115,000 7- and 8-year-olds in London to take part and to present their photographs together as a single massive artwork in Tate Britain preceded by an outdoor exhibition

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Without the schools' co-operation and enthusiasm, the idea would have been a non-starter.

on advertising hoardings across all the London boroughs. Without the schools' co-operation and enthusiasm, the idea would have been a non-starter.

By the time the exhibition opened in the Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain on 12 November 2019, 76,146 children were involved from 1,504 London schools across all the London Boroughs. Until Covid-19 restrictions came in in March 2020, Tate Britain hosted 600 young visitors per day to see the work, an epic portrait made up of 3,128 individual class photographs. Over 7 million people saw huge versions of 50 of the images in the outdoor exhibition across London including on streets, station platforms and underground stations, and a 'takeover' of the platforms at Oxford Circus and Pimlico.

The credits for the final project read more like those of a feature film than a typical gallery education project and show the complexity of the enterprise. Like a feature film, the project started with a seemingly simple concept followed by a feasibility stage with fundraising and detailed scoping moving to assembling a team, production of the work, the indoor and outdoor exhibitions, and public engagement with the work. And like a feature film, a partnership came together specifically to deliver the project. The project extended over three years for which planning systems were built to achieve one unified artistic enterprise. Over the course of the project the partners were joined by curatorial teams, producers, administrators, photographers, editors,

designers, printers, media partners, framers and installers. There was an impressive list of funding partners including foundations, trusts, philanthropists, and public bodies. This was a project that in some ways defied classification: it was both a learning project and an artwork.

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This was a project that in some ways defied classification: it was both a learning project and an artwork.

Gallery education projects often respond to an artist, an exhibition or individual work of art but Year 3 placed a learning programme at the heart of a major contemporary art commission. In commissioning the work with Steve McQueen, Tate and Artangel were also commissioning the contributions of the schools which in turn needed expert brokerage from A New Direction's team led by Steve Moffitt and Rebecca Branch. Curatorial staff would normally be involved in creating an exhibition and a learning and participation team would provide the interface with young people visiting the gallery. Here all the gallery's staff, from curators to security, were involved in almost every aspect of both the commission and the learning project. The children were the work's subject and were

partners in its making. It was inconceivable that the children would not have the opportunity to see the finished installations. Ensuring that as many children as possible could see the work meant refocusing Tate Britain's visitor-facing services to accommodate 600 young visitors per day to the point of erecting a special marquee in the grounds as an education centre.

The lead partners in the project with producers, ArtsMediaPeople, had long experience of running projects from their different perspectives. Together, the three organisations brought expertise in commissioning and presenting contemporary arts practice along with a deep engagement with schools and young learners across the capital. None of the individual elements of Year 3 was particularly unusual or especially challenging. The component parts were tried and tested. The challenge was in the size, reach and complexity of the enterprise within a fixed timescale, its artistic ambition and the number of schools involved. The experience had to be something the schools and children would be proud to be part of, and something the children would always remember. Like any complex enterprise, the project was full of risk.

The interface with schools managed by A New Direction and the producers included everything from building the website, to safeguarding procedures, booking arrangements, photography workshops, training sessions, resource development, and ongoing school liaison.

Most importantly, A New Direction acted as guardians of the children's interests. With deadlines to meet, a project of this scale could easily privilege the end result over an inclusive process for the young people. Careful planning was critical: without an overarching time-plan the project could have easily 'run out of road' if, for example, all the photography sessions across London could not be organised within a single school year. Year 3s from Year 4 wouldn't be the same thing at all.

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Could we imagine that all young people in a city like London could be involved with arts organisations in a series of ambitious 'at scale' projects over the course of their school careers?

Schools signed up to the project in large numbers because it was both an irresistible idea and 'manageable' in terms of time commitment and effort. There was a minimum requirement of one workshop with a photographer in the school, with the option to visit Tate Britain to see the finished work in the following school year. Teachers had access to excellent classroom resources covering many curriculum areas. They liked the website and online booking systems. The workshop sessions elicited positive responses from the schools and the photographers, and

were rated as quality experiences. Teachers found their workshop days well-organised and inspirational: many said that they would use the ideas and resources again or recommend them to colleagues. There was enthusiasm for being able to take time out from normal curriculum activity to do something different, and a 'wow factor' following both the day in school with the photographers and the gallery visit. The gallery visit was a highlight for most of the schools.

Reviews and press coverage of Year 3 were extremely positive. This was never assured: there have been many debates about how to review and judge arts projects involving children. In this case, the role of schools and students was validated by the positivity around the artwork itself. Half of the schools had not engaged with an art gallery before, so this project managed to reach schools who don't normally take up external arts opportunities. This does not necessarily mean that they are not 'arts-rich' schools, as some school leaders feel that their school-based arts provision is strong enough without involving professionals, but it does suggest that the partners made the case for a collaboration with a professional gallery.

If projects like Year 3 are to be replicated there are some lessons to learn. Ambition and scale are important: the project has to be worth doing. The children were part of a project that included not just a cluster of other schools but **most schools** in their year in London. It was important to the schools

that Steve McQueen was an award-winning artist associated with a world-famous gallery and that the artwork would be viewed by millions of people. It was essential to the reputations of Tate and Artangel that the artwork was curated to the very highest of standards. The quality of the individual photographs, the extent to which they met the brief and how they were presented were all important.

Year 3 started with an irresistible idea that worked for the particular age group and caught teachers' and parents' imaginations. If schools are to sign up in numbers, then the proposition has to be exactly right. Teachers were able to incorporate the themes of the project across several curriculum areas including PSHE (personal, social, health, and economic education). It was relevant. Training was organised for the photographers and they were given check-sheets for how each session could run and how to work with the teachers and support staff during the sessions. Artists often resent such 'strait jackets' but here they embraced the brief whilst making daily adjustments to suit particular settings. The aim to engage all London's Year 3 (Y3) students meant that the project was automatically inclusive with adjustments made to ensure the involvement of all the young people including those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and this followed through to the gallery visits.

At a time when schools find it more difficult to engage with professional arts

organisations, projects like Year 3 offer an interesting model. Could we imagine that all young people in a city like London could be involved with arts organisations in a series of ambitious 'at scale' projects over the course of their school careers brokered by organisations like A New Direction (an Arts Council of England Bridge organisation) with a range of professional arts partners? Young people could experience a series of relevant special projects across different artforms working with galleries, theatres, libraries and arts centres. Such projects need not necessarily need the involvement of well-known artists (but why not?) but they must be special, tailored to the young people themselves, beyond what is possible in the classroom or within the curriculum, to justify the time spent in organising them, and the commitment of the young people and their teachers. As in Year 3 this might involve feasibility work with 'ambassador schools' to test propositions, session content and systems. In another example 14-18 NOW, the *World War 1 Centenary Art Commissions*, with ArtsMediaPeople worked with Creative & Cultural Skills who brokered a relationship with Further Education Colleges across the UK in response to the artist Bob and Roberta Smith's provocation, 'What does Peace mean to you?' Younger artists across the country worked with post-16 students, resources endorsed by the Awarding Body, UAL, were produced, and parallel work took place as part of the Extended Project Qualification

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Projects of this scale offer teachers and young people something special beyond the school curriculum: a chance to take part in something shared, thought-provoking, creative, big and qualifying as a 'once in a lifetime' experience.

(EPQ) in sixth forms. The project reached 213 Further Education Colleges and 44,000 students and was repeated the following year. Arts organisations in England have engaged with schools for over forty years, but the context of this work has changed dramatically. Opportunities to visit venues or attend performances are still important but increasing demands on schools make longer-term projects harder to justify or get taken up by only the most enthusiastic schools, leaving many out. It would be good to add an option for most schools to be able to take part in occasional significant projects of the scale of Year 3. Adding 'projects at scale' to our arts education repertoire would be an important response to the practical challenges our schools are facing post-Covid-19. Such projects are more challenging to organise and require brokerage beyond what a typical 'Learning and Participation team' can provide in an individual arts organisation, as demonstrated by the contribution of A New Direction in the case of Year 3. Projects of this scale offer teachers and young people something special beyond the school curriculum: a chance to take

part in something shared, thought-provoking, creative, big and qualifying as a 'once in a lifetime' experience.

A challenge for arts organisations and funders is how to put young people at the heart of programming. Year 3 started with the idea of young people as both the subject and the co-creators of an artwork. The result was a piece that reflected and spoke to all young Londoners, without concessions, or explanations, or indeed careful labelling. We have seen years of gallery education where the artworks are the focus, how can we turn things round to put young visitors at the centre as co-creators and co-curators? ■

**Anna Cufler**

**Director of Learning and latterly Director of Learning & Research at Tate (2010 - 2021)**

With 30 years' experience working in education and cultural settings at a local, national, and international level, Anna's central purpose throughout her career has been to explore and improve educational interventions in a range of cultural and cross-disciplinary arts environments. In September 2016 she initiated Tate Exchange, a civic space aimed at building dialogue around art, society, and the urgent and complex issues facing us today.

## **Year 3: Elements of Risk**



# Year 3: Elements of Risk

*Risk is generally not a welcome guest, particularly when children are involved. However, within the arts and creativity risk is often a necessary feature for pushing at boundaries and towards new ideas. Holding and shaping risk is part of the practice for artists and organisations that work with them. The Tate Year 3 Project had this in abundance, from risks if you did something to risks if you didn't, organisational risks, safeguarding risks, logistical risks and financial risks; whichever way you turned in this project risk was a constant companion.*

## Anna Cutler

As happens more often than is probably acknowledged by those working within complex arts projects, some of the best things can come from embracing the risk that accompanies the unplanned and the unforeseen. Of course, no-one wants too much of it in their professional lives because it could be chaotic, impossible to timetable and quite frankly a nightmare to manage. It's also unlikely that funders would jump at the idea of supporting organisations to 'see what pops up,' but the opportunistic and the unexpected can make for some inspiring outcomes - **if** the conditions are right.

This essay looks at these conditions and how they underpinned the educational and wider schools dimension of the *Steve McQueen: Year 3* exhibitions at Tate Britain in November 2019, and on billboards throughout London. It aims to explore aspects of the project and the organisational environments in which the project 'popped -up,' as well as making visible the high level of risk involved.

The beginnings of this project reach back as early as 2010 with Steve McQueen and Artangel. In late 2016, A New Direction was commissioned to produce a feasibility study to look at the requirements of organising photographs of as many London Year 3 (Y3) pupils as possible to create one of the most ambitious visual portraits of citizenship ever undertaken, in one of the world's largest and most diverse cities, explored through the vehicle of the traditional school class photograph. The feasibility study was undertaken by Jen Crook and accounted for the scale, school requirements, and extent of staffing

that would be needed to achieve this, though the detail did not at first find its way into the new partnership plans between Tate, where the gallery exhibition would take place, and Artangel, who were managing the organisation of the exhibition in the public realm.

Following discussion with the Schools and Teachers team at Tate, it was accepted that the scale of the project simply wasn't feasible in its entirety for them to manage in terms of their staffing capacity or existing work commitments. Connected, were risks around time, logistics, and cost as well as the fact that the remit for a photograph to be taken was different from their usual approach (outlined in *We Are Here! Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits*) in which participation would normally be rooted within the practice of creative learning bringing 'an audience into conversation **with** artworks and usually alongside an artist as well as their teachers.' The suggestion was, therefore, that we either kept to the original plan with the logistics and arrangements of photographing pupils, or that we rethought the proposal to create optimum conditions for taking photographs in schools in which we also created a bespoke educational dimension to the project enabling arts - learning experiences with, through and about the project for all the pupils. In either case, additional external expertise was required, but the latter would offer an unprecedented opportunity for the project to reach thousands of students with deep engagement, inspired by the ideas that the project so richly invited and with the children's voices writ large.

The stakeholders (Steve McQueen, Tate and Artangel) agreed to the expanded programme of learning as well as the need for an additional partner organisation to meet many, if not most of the schools-centred aspects of the brief. It was also understood that further funding would need to be sought to make this ambitious and complex educational plan possible. A New Direction, as a cultural and creative 'bridge' with schools in London, was contracted as a partner owing to their unique and specific existing relationship with schools, their strategic role within London and their skills and ethos. Gemma Clarke and Erin Barnes from ArtsMediaPeople were also contracted as producers who had the complicated task of working to three organisations (Tate, Artangel and A New Direction) in order to create a seamless whole.

Those involved knew some of the risks and what these might mean: that they were up against time and school timetables, that once embarked upon failure was not an option, that no partner wished to compromise quality or integrity, and that this new learning aspect had to be authentic to the artist's concept and of significant value to the schools if they were to invest. The common features were that each party had years of experience, expert staff in their separate areas of specialism, trust within their sector, and an approach that supported risk-taking with a confidence to meet this head on as part of the process. In addition, although the budget was underwritten, funding needed to be raised along the way. These conditions represented the organisational environments into which the learning dimension landed – or perhaps one might say from which it grew – but underpinned the ability to attend to the necessary risks, and the ways in which these were navigated. It is probably fair to say that they also grew from an ambition and appetite that might be more difficult for smaller or any single organisation to achieve. In this instance the partners enabled a whole that was far more than the sum of its parts which also extended to the artist's gallery ([Thomas Dane Gallery](#)), the media partners (BBC and Into Film), the curatorial leads at Tate, and many other departments or teams across the organisations with some specialists beyond. A forensic review of the scoping study was completed with all needs re-set. The result of which was the queen of all Gantt charts in its scrupulous detail. Once signed up to, there was no looking back, and structures and systems were developed to bring things together across all partners, in which the commitment to the artistic idea and the values that sat behind it did much of the invisible stitching.

So, what of risk, if this was known from the outset and the scrupulous detail was in place? Were mitigations not put into action? The answer to this is yes, of course they were, but outlined below are areas of risk that never go away, whatever scale or timeframe one is working to with young people. Bigger can (and did) make the project riskier, simply owing to numbers and reach (more people, partners and pupils equals more room for error) but the aim in this essay is to begin to reach under the surface of the project's skin to make the tacit explicit, the invisible – visible, what have we to learn?

### Aligning the artistic and learning programme

Steve McQueen had a very clear vision and image of the exhibitions (at Tate and on the billboards). The artwork spoke of the present and the future, of hope and aspiration as well as to the uncertainty and contingency that this potential invokes. Given the newly agreed educational initiative, the learning teams, with A New Direction at centre-stage, needed to develop a programme and key themes for the pupils' exploration that were true to the artist's vision. It is always a possibility that in the discussion and enthusiasm of 'other parties' (those other than Steve McQueen), ideas might stretch beyond the scope or focus of the project, leaning into schools' or organisations' own concerns and interests. Sometimes this is helpful to a project as it brings with it the experience and knowledge of the participants, sometimes it is not and becomes something else altogether – another project. So being clear and authentic to the idea was vital, especially at such scale and with so many involved where confusion **could** get in the way of the clarity of design.

This might sound like a relatively small risk but the potential for mismatch between different elements of a complex project is real and a fundamental issue. It has derailed more projects than I care to mention; either with the artistic programme being pulled into an odd shape or with learning as an awkward add-on clanking behind the wedding car. Getting alignment established at the outset was the undercurrent of everything involved with respect to the learning programme and the schools' experience. It formed the to-and-fro of much conversation with the curators, artist, gallery, and organisational partners. From this

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The artwork spoke of the present and the future, of hope and aspiration as well as to the uncertainty and contingency that this potential invokes.



many judgements and decisions were made relative to the schools' needs and this generated not just authenticity and integrity to the idea, exhibition look and feel, but appropriately maintained the artistic stakes, whilst keeping risk in the right kind of check. Getting this wrong has the potential to diminish 'the whole' and one really does need to understand this as a risk in order to maximise the bits you want and minimise the bits you **all** do not.

Three themes were agreed with the artist: Identity, Community, and Future. All elements, resources and content were shaped by these as well as the way in which the project was approached: the schools and Y3 cohorts were communities in themselves, with multiple identities and infinite futures. These themes generated new conditions that created a tight framework for decision making and the development of educational (schools based) content. All three themes were consistent with the project's design but also rich ground for learning and could be given a light or deep dive by teachers and pupils, which a wide range of online and in-gallery resources and activities sought to generate. This was the endeavour, to invite ways of approaching these issues that reflected back into the project developing the children's understanding and insight and drawing on their wide range of lived experience. In this they became active participants, able to be creative in their own right, as well as the subject of the idea. It's a powerful and unusual combination.

This was one of the most aligned projects I have ever encountered, which is credit to the artist, who also invested a lot of personal time in meeting the teachers and students involved. It is also of credit to the extended partners and the time that was taken to attend to the risk; to ask good, if sometimes difficult, questions of each other and revisit this when needed. Steve McQueen always had the final artistic say but was hugely generous and very invested in the power of arts education, which meant that the project had cohesion and punched at even greater weight. The risk, obviously, was that the project failed to achieve this integration of ethos, activity, and idea, in which case the individual parts might be effective, but the expanded learning programme may have been separated

from the artistic programme and lacking in value as a contribution and continuum of the idea. The engagement and investment when achieved was high and when the children of Year 3 visited the exhibition they saw not only themselves but had a contextual and conceptual understanding of the work, which takes us to the second element of risk to be considered.

### **Safeguarding and collaborating to manage risk**

It is a feature of creative learning that it encourages critical thinking and asking questions: 'Why this?', 'What's going on in this idea?', 'Who is it for?' etc. These are questions that look beyond individual and internal worlds to the ways in which, in this instance, artistic work is made manifest - and where. This seemed especially important given that the children and schools were the subject of the artwork and were therefore at the centre of any meaning generation. Some of this is well articulated in the companion essays of Colin Grant, Ego Ahaive Sowinski, Christine Lai, James Broadley and Aoife O'Doherty that highlight race, power and

privilege within traditional art histories, the museum, and the public domain. At a time when Brexit was still in process and within a culture that may be hostile to difference this created risk for many of the participants.

Safeguarding the children involved in this project was a huge and very serious undertaking. There were multiple and various risks in the process of taking the photographs, in showing them in public and on social media platforms.

There are also strict rules

concerning digital images of children and their storage as well as for visits and workshops, with naming and identification not permitted. The first response to this risk within the overarching risk was presenting the idea to a small number of schools to test the water: several thought it was fantastic, a few said it was too risky and that they would not take part, others that unless they could have some guarantees, they didn't feel that parents or carers would sign up to the project, and each and every one of them involved would have to do so if a child was to take part. In all honesty, with social media so prevalent, the project partners could not guarantee that images would not be shared either from the billboards or the gallery and they therefore made explicit the risks and the duty of care

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Risk is not always a positive story and certainly there are challenges en route, but what all partners brought to this project was the ability to positively challenge one another, to push for quality and for the best possible experience of the participants, able to hear the better argument and have integrity to the idea.

and mitigation that was being put in place. The project invited on board legal expertise from [Farrer and Co](#) and [NSPCC](#), as well as an experienced high-profile individual, Tanya Joseph, who had been involved with a similar scale public-facing event [This Girl Can](#). Many systems were put in place and training was built into the project with each risk reviewed at every point for every aspect. It was extensive and thorough work for which ArtsMediaPeople deserve particular recognition. The social context meant that there could be risk around negative responses to race and gender as well as for those with particular needs, given trolling and the lack of control possible over aggressive social media posting. But as schools and parents began to sign up to the project, understanding and accepting the risks, the confidence grew and it was clear that it was felt that the bigger risk would be **not** to undertake this project, to evade the complex issues and debates that the public brought to it (not necessarily intended through the idea). Indeed, some schools actively promoted their difference, pleased to have their students visible and included. For example, one headteacher of a special school that helped test the waters described the project “as a platform to showcase our wonderful children; it is so important to us that SEND children are not invisible, that they are recognised as part of the community and are visible in a range of public venues and society as a whole.”

Managing the risks and the numbers of schools on billboards or how to communicate to schools and parents (but not the general public) on where their child was within the mass of faces in the exhibition was also complex and indeed the layout of the exhibition itself took this

into account (amongst the myriad of other exceptional contributions the curator, Clarrie Wallis, made). Every attention to detail in the work around the exhibitions was taken, in the outdoor placements of the billboard images to the workshops at schools and within the gallery to where the children ate their lunch. It was apparent in the Visitor Experience support, in the marketing and finance teams, in HR and estates. In fact, this particular risk for safeguarding children brought with it the creation of teams that never existed and new and collaborative ways of working to great effect. A huge wave of energy, support and endeavour was generated from almost every corner of staff at Tate who saw the children as their ‘charge’, they celebrated their presence and endorsed the leaps and shouts within the building: “WE ARE HERE!”

Risk is not always a positive story and certainly there are challenges en route, but what all partners brought to this project was the ability to positively challenge one another, to push for quality and for the best possible experience of the participants, able to hear the better argument and have integrity to the idea. Its clarity enabled the risks to be taken, not just for the sake of pragmatism, but because they were authentic to the project, to the needs of the exhibitions and to the children involved. Knowing and shaping risk is a key part of creativity, in art, in an exhibition, in learning. It turned out that it belonged to all those involved and was central to *Steve McQueen Year 3*. ■

### **Tate Schools and Teachers Team with Eileen Carnell**

The Schools and Teachers Team planned the students' visits with Effie Coe and Mónica Rivas Velásquez leading on the production of the resource. Alongside the team, Eileen Carnell, an independent researcher, collaborated in the observing and writing processes. These colleagues form part of a larger group involved in the planning of the visit, the bookings and training which are all framed by the team's practice led by Leanne Turvey and Alice Walton. Tate Schools and Teachers Team: Effie Coe, Linda Da Silva Coiradas, Viana Gaudino, Anna-Marie Gray, Sophie Langsford, George Lyddiatt, Emma McGarry, Amy McKelvie, Stef Martin, Sophie Popper, Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Leanne Turvey, Alice Walton, and Elizabeth Went.

# **We Are Here! Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits**

# We Are Here! Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits

*Before the Tate Year 3 Project, Tate had never engaged students and schools on this scale. During the exhibition, from 12th November 2019 to 16th March 2020, 600 students visited every weekday. For many schools and students this was their first experience of a cultural project and possibly their first engagement with the notion of an artist. Over 50% of the schools attending had not visited Tate before.<sup>1</sup>*

This text is about the impact of the resource on the students' experiences of the exhibition, what this produced and its ripples. The observer, Eileen Carnell, spent eight days with students, their teachers, and Tate staff, witnessing all stages of the visit and having conversations along the way.

1. Ascertained through cross referencing past booking data (55% had not visited Tate in the past 5 years).

2. Year 3 Group Assistants received bespoke training sessions (including the use of resources with young people and SEND schools) to support each group visiting the Steve McQueen Year 3 artwork. They were the most present members of staff directly witnessing all aspects of the young people's gallery visit and encounter with the artwork; including each's group's arrival and welcome, the journey to find their photograph, the use of the resource and safely guided returns to schools.

## Eileen Carnell

### What does a good project with children look and sound like?

Their voices fill the air and echo around the gallery. Building a gradual crescendo from a whisper to a mighty roar and back again, to a surprised silence. The students sing out: "I am here. You are here. We are here!"

This joyful and powerful assertion is in response to the invitation to wake up the whole gallery: a melodic dawn chorus. Our observations and the comments collected confirm this is a unique experience:

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*It's great our portraits are here alongside kings, queens and old dudes.*

**Year 3 (Y3) student**

*We are very important as this is all about us.*

**Y3 student**

*We are great and loud and much noisier than other groups.*

**Y3 student**

*The kids are responding so well to the challenge. I'm just overcome.*

**Year 3 Group Assistant<sup>2</sup>**

*The adults join in and smile which is unusual. I think it's because being part of the artwork themselves the kids know they have a right to be here. There is no tutting, no disapproval. Everyone, not just the kids, are liberated and spontaneous.*

**Teacher**

*The gallery feels like a completely different place. It's alive. Normally you can hear a pin drop. Now it's buzzing. The children are being dared to occupy the place and fill it.*

**Member of the public**

These comments paint a picture of what the project sounded and looked like in the space of the gallery and portray the sense that everyone, students, teachers, staff and 'found audience' felt it was a positive experience. The gallery becomes 'a radical space of possibility' and resonates with the inspiring words of bell hooks: 'developing a sense of community to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence'.<sup>3</sup>

As well as the sounds celebrating the students' presence the vision of their inhabiting the space is spectacular. When the groups of students are finding their class photo they resemble a flock of birds - a human murmur: 'It's like seeing a flock of starlings fly together in an intelligent shape-shifting cloud, a single being moving and twisting in unpredictable formations'.<sup>4</sup>

On entering the gallery, the students often gasp at the size of the photographic work of art and then, encouraged by the host, move around to find their photo amid the larger collection. Many cannot contain their delight: "It's so exciting, I can see me and my friends, and my teachers and see how I have changed since the photo was taken." ■

3. b. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

4. H. O'Donoghue, *Looking Back in Order to Look Forward- Examining Archival Practice in the MoMA* (Dublin, Ireland: IMMA, 2020)

5. *Colleagues included members of the Schools and Teachers Team, drawing on extensive experience of inclusive practice within learning in gallery settings including workshops, large scale projects and resources developed in collaboration with artists and partners. Teachers from A New Direction's SEND Network were consulted and training was led by artists Richard Phoenix and Aysen Aktu, who devised and delivered a session with the Year 3 hosts that drew on their co-curated Art and SEND-Supporting Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Teachers' Study Day that took place in May 2019.*

## Tate Schools and Teachers Team

### How does a project like this evolve?

We, in the Schools and Teachers team, were faced with unique challenges and opportunities during the exhibition's development and points of engagement.

The number of school groups and the amount of time students had available in the gallery led us to the decision that a student resource would be the best way of supporting students and teachers to engage with and draw out their experiences of encountering art and ideas in the gallery.

The nature of the students' visit was particular in that it was 'in company', not just with classmates but with other schools; 76,146 students took part, portrayed in 3,128 class photographs. This became a phenomenon that was widely commented upon in relation to the experience of the general public. The students created an atmosphere which was seen as synonymous with the artwork. They became the artwork, not just through their photos but through their presence. We understand this is not something that anyone, including Steve McQueen, expected. The students' presence became performative and fundamentally shaped how the artwork was 'seen'.

### The Tate Schools and Teachers Team's practice and planning process

Our practice at Tate brings an audience into conversation **with** artworks and usually alongside an artist as well as their teachers. It is a dialogic practice that welcomes participants into a process of discovery, building meaning collectively and with an emphasis placed on everybody's voices being valued.

We endeavour to challenge received notions of gallery etiquette, to confront assumptions about how to behave and encouraging multiple ways of being with art.

It is our belief that an individual should be welcomed to Tate, with all their lived experiences, what they know and don't know, what questions and ideas they hold and what culture they bring. This is the optimum starting point for looking at and being with

art. In this case it was the students themselves. This in turn was about equity and a broader challenge about dominant narratives, who gets to make meaning, be heard, and be valued.

One of the profound differences of the Year 3 experience was that the children in the gallery, taking up space, being noisy, enjoying their visit, were the same children **in** the artwork. This was particular for the young people themselves but also for the general visitor who was aware of witnessing the young people 'seeing' themselves on the gallery walls. We felt that this afforded the young people a certain confidence in being in the space; without them the artwork did not exist! And this drew attention to the value the team places on the students' presence in the gallery, however they choose to engage with the art they encounter.

Key to our thinking was the desire to focus on and foster empathy, supporting the notion of stepping into another's shoes to consider the students' experience, and how it related to their own. We avoided being drawn to difference in a negative/visual way, but rather talked about seeing differences in relation to commonalities. We lifted the reflection on difference from what can be seen to bring it into the realm of empathy.

In approaching the writing of all our resources and the use of language in them, we have high expectations of students and take particular care to ensure that resources are open, inviting, and clear. We put our trust in the belief that students are capable of grappling with difficult ideas.

Welcoming groups with additional needs was key and central to the visits. We called these occasions 'quiet days' from an organisational point of view. There were five schools in the morning, and five in the afternoon, to have more space and time, and a flexible schedule to make the most of the day. Preparation and training for these 'quiet days' was led by colleagues<sup>5</sup>. Rather than being the exception, these days were modelled on what we would want every Tate visit to be. ■

## Eileen Carnell

### The resource supporting the students' visits

It cannot be underestimated what this meticulous welcome offered students. They were seen, recognised and hosted. From the welcoming statements in the resource, it can be seen that students' experiences are central. The team drew on their learning from previous student experiences in the gallery to construct the new resource and used their knowledge to make a safe space for risk, expression, and exploration.

The activities in the resource supported by the encouragement of the host, inspired active participation, social engagement, fun and collaborative learning – all hallmarks of the team's particular approach: 'co-constructivist and dialogic models of learning, where individual's experience and prior knowledge is recognized as contributing to the shared meaning-making of the whole group'.<sup>6</sup>

The team has a long-standing practice of producing resources. These are often conceived and produced as printed media carrying prompts and invitations for ways of being in the gallery, sharing with peers and

encountering the artworks. While they often look like booklets, they are not for reading, instead, they are a platform to launch action. For Year 3, the booklet was extensive (12 pages) and held the team's welcome and strategies. The tone was crucial. It spoke directly to the individual student, inviting them to come together with peers, and raise their voice, and take up space. And from one prompt to the next the students gained ownership of the gallery.

The resource was a great success. Students expressed their delight in receiving a copy. One said: "We got this book 'cos we're really special. I can see my face in it." The resource was looked after carefully by the students. Not a single one was left behind. A teacher commented: "The resource is brilliant and I'll do more back at school with it as I have done with another class."

The resource drew heavily on '[studio thinking](#)', embedding and channeling dispositions commonly used by artists such as curiosity, testing, and experimenting, to foster a confident and playful exploration of the artwork and surrounding ideas. In developing the Year 3 resource, the team worked

slightly differently to their usual approach. As Steve McQueen was involved in all aspects of the project, the team centred on his ideas around which the team, many of whom are practitioners, drew on their practice, rather than involving others. ■

*" You have arrived at Tate Britain. You are in a very special artwork. You are also the audience. Congratulations! It is rare to visit an art gallery and see your own face..."*

Steve McQueen Year 3 exhibition resource

## Tate Schools and Teachers Team

### The learning

A key motivation for the Schools and Teachers team was our belief that welcoming the Year 3 students - we welcomed 33,450 out the 76,146 students featured in the artwork – to Tate Britain might have a transformative impact. It did.

All the experiences described here fundamentally shifted Tate. The students' visits were loud, lively, physical and did not follow set ways of being in the gallery. For that moment of their encounter, for each student it was their experience, it was art, it was Tate. We feel a responsibility to the process of students transforming Tate, through the challenge of their

presence, unequivocal given their role in 'making' this work, in ensuring that Tate remains as open, flexible, agile, and responsive as possible and willing to learn. Tate must remain changed.

Tate was made different by the students' presence. As a new and more inclusive institution, Tate needs to remember and honour this. Tate needs to be 'super adaptable' - more than just being welcoming but willing to re-morph to be better and give gallery space to hundreds of students. The belief, underlying this, is if students are listened to, heard, and learned from - not only by us as a team but by the whole institution - Tate will be better for all visitors and staff. ■

6. L. Turvey, & A. Walton, 'Audience, Artist, exploring the practice of learning with art', In *Site of Conversation: On learning with Art, Audiences and Artists* (London: Tate Publications, 2017), 11.

**Christine Lai, James Broadley and Aoife O'Doherty**

# Young Londoners' Perspectives on Steve McQueen Year 3

## **Christine Lai**

### **Tate Collective Producer**

Christine is a British-born Chinese curator/cultural producer. She began her training at 17 in the museum industry as a Tate Collective Producer which inspired her to take up degrees in History of Art and Museum Studies. Her practice is founded upon interrogating the processes within knowledge production and exploring socio-cultural histories within photography. Christine has worked with a wide range of organisations including Tate, National Galleries of Scotland, Procreate Project and curated exhibitions across the UK and The Netherlands. Recently, she curated *Late at Tate Britain: From Tomorrow* (Feb 2020) and currently works for Troy House Art Foundation under international artist Yuan Gong.

## **James Broadley**

### **A New Direction's Young Challenge Group**

James has been a member of A New Direction's Young Challenge Group for almost two years. James graduated from drama school in 2018 and now works at Amnesty International. James co-founded and facilitates *Make a Film in a Weekend*, a course designed for people aged 16 - 25 to develop their artistic voice and build creative communities through visual storytelling. James is based in East London, loves to climb and is currently writing a play about Londoners' connections with nature.

## **Aoife O'Doherty**

### **A New Direction's Young Challenge Group**

Aoife is a South London based graphic designer and producer driven by empathy, purpose, and people power. Alongside her work as a designer, she facilitates workshops and is currently developing cyanotype print workshops focused on climate change. Aoife joined the Young Challenge Group in 2019 with an interest in participatory design and inclusive decision making. As a creative teacher and facilitator, she advocates for equal creative access and use of design for the public good.

## **Edited by**

### **Jack Redfern**

#### **A New Direction**

Jack is Partnerships Officer at A New Direction and coordinates the Young Challenge Group, A New Direction's youth consultancy initiative. He works with place-based partnerships across London's cultural education landscape to support the development of its local creative and cultural ecologies.

# Young Londoners' Perspectives on Steve McQueen Year 3

*The reflections on the following pages are the thoughts of three young Londoners drawn from the Tate Collective Producers, a group of 15 to 25-year-olds who work with the galleries to curate youth-centred work, and A New Direction's Young Challenge Group, a panel of young creatives who advise on the city's cultural educational landscape. In their essay, the authors approach the Steve McQueen Year 3 exhibition through their own identities as 'young Londoners': tracing their personal journeys from primary school to maturity, they contrast the democratisation of the outdoor (billboards) and gallery exhibitions, examine whether the exhibition reflects the truth of their London, and ask whether Steve McQueen Year 3 ultimately succeeds as 'a hopeful portrait of a generation to come'.*

## Christine Lai

Tate Collective Producer

Responding to art is always a difficult thing for me. I dislike that imposing feeling that you're supposed to be articulate, smart and profound with your response; that you have to 'feel' something about the art. With this in mind, it almost seems counterintuitive to be writing this essay on how it feels to be a young Londoner looking at *Steve McQueen Year 3*. That's why I think it's really interesting how the public placing of this project – on busy roads, underground tunnels, pavements – works in removing that layer of pretence for me.

I remember my first encounter with this project: standing on the platform at Angel, idly waiting for the train to come and catching sight of the merry band of Year 3 (Y3) students smiling at me. My initial thought was: "Oh cool! What a nice gesture to see these children plastered all over London, rather than another advert trying to

sell another product I don't need."

The more I looked at it, the more I found myself remembering what it felt like to be that age; how my biggest problems were which friend I had on which day, what the Vikings wore, where my hymn book was. All these strange menial problems that now seem like nothing, but at the time were definitely the most difficult problems ever to be faced by a 7-year-old. I wondered what these children must think when they see themselves blown up to giant size on the platform's billboards. Do they feel proud? Do they have the same feeling we get as adults of whether or not they look good in that camera angle? I forget when that begins to happen: becoming consciously critical of how you look in pictures.

From tube stations to Tate Britain. It's one thing to be on a billboard, quite another to feature in a gallery

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I wondered what these children must think when they see themselves blown up to giant size on the platform's billboards. Do they feel proud?



dedicated to representing 'Britishness' in art. I don't remember caring about galleries, the meaning of art, or being British at that age: in fact, I distinctly remember kicking up such a fuss when my mother took me there to see John Singer Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. When I see the same photograph from Angel station installed at Tate Britain, that imposing feeling returns. This time when I look at the piece as part of its whole entity, those personal reflections on my time at school seem to simmer away and a sense of voyeurism and duty to these children now pervades. I suspect that this sense has been amplified by the Late Victorian grandeur of Tate Britain itself, the kind of architecture that reminds you of civics and morality; reminds you that museums are a way for one to be educated. Which only leaves me wondering, how much can we learn from this? And who should?

In an interview in *Elephant* with some children featured in the project, some were rather dismayed at their presence in the gallery. 'Normal, normal, normal,' one of them recalled; another mentioned that 'there were lots and lots and lots of other classes. I was just one out of a million. I was really small, and no one would notice me. They only look at it all together.'<sup>1</sup> I guess in-gallery it's all about strength in numbers; when they're scattered around on the billboards of London, then we really get to see these individuals as they are. And to me, that's what makes it really special: to see the real personalities in these photographs, the ones with the crooked smile, the unkempt hair, the wonky school tie. That's how I think McQueen gets us to care, by showing us that there are real children affected by our choices and consequences. ■

## James Broadley Young Challenge Group

Walking into *Steve McQueen Year 3* I was struck by the enormity of the project. Thousands of faces settled into shimmering colours, and each person had their own space to shine on the epic walls. Zooming in gave pink cushions, inspiring quotes, and walls with pictures of role models like Mo Farah. My heart glowed seeing a pupil and a Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) teacher as they both smiled, beaming with glee. For me, *Steve McQueen Year 3* is an exciting showcase of how far adults have come in the way we hold space for young people.

During my visit, I saw a young boy take a photo of his school and excitedly share it with family. This interaction is a testament to the immersive quality of the work and how it develops an authentic connection with artist, subject, and audience, empowering all three simultaneously in the live moment. Seeing this got me thinking back to my own school days, and I realised that it is the adults I respected who left positive impressions on me that have helped me the most in life so far: like after losing a school rugby match, our coach would give the team an uplifting speech. These interactions are the foundations of self-esteem in a growing person. The *Tate Year 3 Project* photographers' workshops in schools when they took the photos demonstrates the restorative power of being seen, accepted, and celebrated for the simple fact of being alive. For example, an image in a photograph that caught my eye was a child standing behind their teacher proudly forming the 'Wakanda Forever' salute across their chest. The defiant expression on their face moved me: a reminder to never underestimate the power of a good story told well.

*Steve McQueen Year 3* also got me thinking about my own nan's mantelpiece and the collection of school photos she has of herself, her children, and grandchildren: each generation has been collated to be celebrated. Reflecting on the

normality of school photographs since my nan's post-war portrait did, however, leave me questioning the notion that *Steve McQueen Year 3* is intrinsically a 'hopeful portrait of a generation to come'. World events that could test Londoners to the core of our humanity lie ahead, with or without powerful exhibitions: we should remain vigilant when galleries attach positive notions to art, as it could leave audiences content with the surface picture, rather than provoke us to uncover the underlying problems. Hope is an imaginative exercise and a cognitive function intrinsic to our survival as a species. Perhaps, therefore, it is not the finished product of *Year 3* that is the hopeful element: maybe hope is found more in the logistical ambition and execution of the project.

To hope is to believe a solution will be discovered. I stood in the gallery and considered the UK's current solutions and the problems now rising: nationalism, air pollution, sea levels, and infection rates and looked at the 76,146 children and did feel anxious. Yet, there is a paradigm shift occurring among younger generations. They are empowered by the internet and a realisation that power structures may not necessarily be serving them: take the *Fridays for Future* climate strikes, for example, self-organised by youth activists and led by teenagers like Greta Thunberg. A world movement organised by children is a phenomenal 21st-century development, but this dynamism could be in danger of being trapped behind the glass of Tate's photo frames unless genuine avenues of communication are created between current decision-makers and London's future leaders. The events of 2020 have shown that art will serve only as an escape unless systemic change is installed to ensure that everyone can fit into the picture. ■

1. L. Benson, "'Boring!' The Kids Reflect on Steve McQueen's Year 3 Project', *Elephant*, 26 Feb 2020, <https://elephant.art/boring-the-kids-reflect-on-steve-mcqueens-year-3-project-tate-britain-children-london-26022020>, accessed 28 April 2021

## Aoife O'Doherty

### Young Challenge Group

Creative institutions can be catalysts, igniting imagination and cultivating knowledge. The exhibition *Steve McQueen Year 3* documented future London, opened new understandings of art, and engaged with people who had not been to Tate before. Often it is proclaimed that art is for all, but not everyone has access and knowledge or feels welcome into places in which art exists. There is a proven desire in the energy and audiences behind exhibitions like *Steve McQueen Year 3* that needs to be matched with meaningful change from within institutions. Creative hubs must become more accessible and representative now. We need diversity in people and thought, from storytellers to board members, to transform institutions into places where people are comfortable to look at art, engage with art and become artists themselves.

I was struck by the joy and animated hope at the *Steve McQueen Year 3* exhibition, bringing to life the formal curated grids of photographs. Those visiting the exhibition were perhaps not 'visitors' in the expected sense, but could be described as active engagers, participants, learners or listeners: the exhibition was not just on the walls, it was also about the surrounding space that held a constant buzz. Walking around, I heard stories being exchanged, laughs, shouts and memories recalled. *Steve McQueen Year 3* created a lasting sense of belonging, both belonging in the space and to the city.

Going to school in London had a grounding positive impact on my life. I took diversity completely for granted. Sitting in classes with people from different backgrounds and places across London wasn't something I contemplated or even valued at the time, but as I continue navigating life, I can see that the embedded diversity from my education is a reflection of the everyday. I am a more considerate and aware person from being surrounded by friends and peers

who are different to me. *Steve McQueen Year 3* captures young students at a powerful stage in their life where they are beginning 'to understand more about their place in a changing world and to think about the future'. The exhibition urges us, the viewers, to consider what we want this generation to inherit and what they could become: not the possibilities of an individual but of a collective.

We tend to think that young children have an innocent approach to life, full of kindness and trust. They are friends with whoever they want to be friends with and at 7- or 8- years old are only starting to have wider awareness of class, gender, race, privileges, and social differences. *Steve McQueen Year 3* reflects this with the absence of labels for each photograph, which aside from providing privacy, I think creates positive uniformity. Seeing the entirety of future London framed on the walls of Tate as a shared front proposes and liberates possibilities. There is no need for explanations and no room for assumptions about why a school class is a certain way: this is simply London. Assumptions keep many from being a voice in this world, and this exhibition extends the ability for all to be recognised and seen.

As the young children of *The Tate Year 3 Project* grow up and continue to learn, I hope creative tools and spaces can help them recognise the power they hold to be storytellers. Art helps us to make sense of the world we live in and now, more than ever, this creativity needs to be activated, not squeezed out of the education system. Art education develops self-expression and cultivates new ways of thinking. It enriches our understanding of who we are and teaches us how to solve problems. This needs to be cherished in a climate of increasing global challenges. The display of *Steve McQueen Year 3* presents eager-eyed young children who could be future creative thinkers, leaders, and makers. ■

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The exhibition urges us, the viewers, to consider what we want this generation to inherit and what they could become: not the possibilities of an individual but of a collective.

**David Parker with Anna Cutler, James Lingwood  
and Steve Moffitt**

# Why Did We Do This, and What Did We Learn? Reflections From Lead Partners

## **David Parker**

David is a freelance researcher and evaluator with an interest in arts and creativity programmes for young people. Recent evaluations have focused on work for the British Council, Arts Council England and Sorrell Foundation. Formerly, he was Director of Research for Creative and Cultural Skills, *Creative Partnerships* and the British Film Institute.

## **Anna Cutler**

**Director of Learning and latterly  
Director of Learning & Research  
at Tate (2010 - 2021)**

With 30 years' experience working in education and cultural settings at a local, national, and international level, Anna's central purpose throughout her career has been to explore and improve educational interventions in a range of cultural and cross-disciplinary arts environments. In September 2016 she initiated Tate Exchange, a civic space aimed at building dialogue around art, society, and the urgent and complex issues facing us today.

## **James Lingwood**

### **Artangel**

James is Co-director of Artangel. Artangel commissions, produces and presents new projects by contemporary artists, writers, musicians, theatre-makers, and film-makers in a wide range of different sites throughout the UK and across the world. As a curator and writer, Lingwood has realised numerous exhibitions in galleries and museums across the world over the past three decades.

## **Steve Moffitt**

### **A New Direction**

Steve is CEO at A New Direction. He is responsible for the strategic leadership, vision and financial viability of the organisation. He is passionately committed to developing innovative creative change programmes for young Londoners, with over 38 years' experience of work in the arts, creative educational and community settings.

# Why Did We Do This, and What Did We Learn? Reflections From Lead Partners

*The Tate Year 3 Project, partly because it was a large-scale project and partly due to the nature of the artwork being created, was reliant on effective partnership working. Particularly key were the interactions between Tate, Artangel and A New Direction, each collaborating with the other to bring Steve McQueen's vision to fruition.*

In this essay key figures from each organisation, Anna Cutler (former Director of Learning and Research, Tate), James Lingwood (Co-Director, Artangel) and Steve Moffitt (CEO, A New Direction) look back on their motivations to make Year 3 happen, the reflections they have had on the process over the months since the exhibition came to a close, and key learning they are likely to carry to future projects and which they feel the sector at large may also find useful to consider.

**David Parker with Anna Cutler, James Lingwood and Steve Moffitt**

## **Why do the Tate Year 3 Project?**

For many years the moral imperative has been clear. The United Kingdom is a signatory to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states in Article 31 that every child 'has the right... to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'.<sup>1</sup> Connections with museum and gallery venues should therefore be a normal, familiar, and everyday experience for all young people.

Ideas for large scale projects are an obvious way to reach significant numbers of young people and, alongside other initiatives, may be an important component in building cultural capital. It is no surprise then that ideas to find a vehicle to work with many young people had circulated for some time, and versions of Year 3 as a concept stretch back to the pre-Olympic period (2010-12), when in London there was a good deal of interest in place-based art projects, designed to showcase the creativity and potential of the capital's youth within the context of Olympic ideals. James Lingwood explains:

*"Steve McQueen first shared the idea of Year 3 with me in 2010. I was clear at the time that Artangel couldn't take a lead role but agreed to write up a brief proposal to share with Ruth Mackenzie who was heading up the programme for the Cultural Olympiad. The Cultural Olympiad didn't pick up on the idea, and we didn't push very hard. Year 3 presented logistical and financial challenges way beyond what Artangel could take on. However, the idea stayed with me, and Steve and I would occasionally talk about it."*

While Year 3 did not emerge at that time, once it did, the conversations between A New Direction, Artangel and Tate focused on working at scale and provoked an ambition to find the right opportunity to work in a pan-London way.

1. UNICEF, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', UNICEF, What we do, What is the UN Convention on Child Rights? [www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/), accessed 27 May 2021

### Why did the ambition to work in this way persist?

First, and perhaps as a legacy of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, there was a renewed appreciation for the power and effect of working at scale, and how such work might be **an important affirmative statement for the young people of London**. Particularly in a period which had seen the effects of austerity and the start of many future political and economic challenges of Brexit hit their generation with disproportionate force. Steve Moffitt explained the motivation from A New Direction's perspective:

*"I was excited about the focus on London and its children. I liked the idea. It was simple bold and ambitious. It resonated with our values and our sense of purpose. The notion of the city seeing its community of 7- and 8-year-olds in a prestigious gallery and visible on over 600 billboards felt brave. The project had an irresistibly simple concept of capturing a moment in the lives of the Y3 children of the city through a Year 3 class photograph with the assumption that a) it was possible logistically and b) schools would be able and want to participate."*

In addition, and as is often the case with conceptually rich artworks, after the cultural upheaval in the US throughout 2020, Year 3 took on further significance as a sea of multi-cultural young faces stared back at a city which was struggling to find its own moral response to the death of George Floyd, a point noted by Anna Cutler:

*"Given the summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd and events led in response by the Black Lives Matter movement, the project developed an even more significant place in people's minds relative to race and the 'culture war'. I think this is very complex territory that will need (and will have) far more to be said as the cultural landscape and cultural climate changes. It's clear that context matters. Had the exhibition taken place in 2012 the interpretations would have been different."*

### What did we learn?

Building a clear sense of **collective creative endeavour** everyone could buy into was vital. Essential ingredients to that included Steve McQueen's status as a Turner Prize and Oscar winning artist, but also the expertise of Tate, A New Direction and Artangel which could be fused in ways that played equally to the strengths of each.

This meant planning discussions were key. The vision for the work was clear; the idea to communicate with schools had a surface simplicity but conceptual depth, and this combination of factors boosted the project's credibility. James Lingwood explains:

*"Any project with this scale of ambition, and especially one involving such large-scale participation, needs a micro-climate of credibility to be built around it. All the key players in Year 3 really believed in the importance of the idea, and its transformative potential for the participating schools and school children but also for the collaborating cultural organisation. Everyone was clear it was only worth doing if they pulled out all the stops to get as many school children as possible involved not only in getting the class photo taken, but also visiting the exhibition at Tate Britain."*

The fact that the project was multi-faceted meant that there were a number of ways schools could engage, and also multiple depths they could explore as part of their engagement. The concept of the class photograph was instantly relatable, but also lent itself to many sorts of application and interpretation; it was a rich stimulus for learning. While the work was managed by cultural sector partners, there was no set formula every school had to follow completely in order to participate. There was a base level of engagement, common-to-all, but aside from that, a multiplicity of **choices that schools were encouraged to make for themselves**. Steve Moffitt explains why this was important:

*"Year 3 was unusual. It was an art piece and a learning project. As a learning project the ask of schools was manageable and scaleable. The minimum engagement was to participate in an hour-long workshop where a Y3 class would be photographed after a series of games and introductory exercises. How the school could then use this starting point was up to them. A set of learning resources and tools could be utilised to scaffold and develop wider and deeper learning. The beauty of the project handed the leadership of the learning over to the schools. I would like to see more national large-scale institutions working in this way. Offering starting points for partnership – providing a catalyst for work to be generated and trusting schools to do what they do best, teaching their children and preparing them for life."*

There was something deeply integrated about this work, too, particularly when it came to the learning component. Often, with headline exhibitions from high profile artists there is a tendency for learning elements to be a bolt-on. With Year 3 **learning was intrinsic to the work** and this instantly boosted the value and visibility on the schools side, encouraging the high levels of take-up and the value they took away from participating. Anna Cutler noted this from Tate's perspective:

*"The importance of all aspects being of value and part of the whole. Often learning programmes are partial to an idea, here they were fully connected and spoke across all parts. This doesn't happen as often as one may wish for. It created a sense of value and shared endeavour that pushed people to go further and do better."*

Working with children at such scale and taking on board the feedback from the many teachers and headteachers involved pointing to important lessons about what to aim for with these projects with regard to balancing outcomes. **Year 3 managed to be both monumental – the Duveen Galleries, the Billboards – and highly personal** – the individual faces and peer group stories behind each photograph. James Lingwood reflected on this:

*"The excitement of being involved in something so big, something that was a national event, a massive social media happening, but which always remained theirs. The thrill of seeing themselves taking over Tate Britain, of feeling the place had become theirs. The opportunity to think about their own world (based on family, faith, neighbourhood, school etc.) in relation to a much bigger world, and to see themselves alongside so many others. Perhaps to raise consciousness about the extraordinary diversity of London schoolchildren, as well as underlying issues of class, faith and ability. Overall, it seems to have been a very affirmative experience for everyone involved. Everyone was valued, no-one felt used."*

*The sheer scale and ambition of Year 3 exercised a powerful magnetic pull on a huge community of participants – children, teachers, parents, carers; at least 200,000 individuals, probably more. Everyone was treated equally; everyone knew this ethos underpinned the entire project. In a society distorted by privilege and discrimination, this commitment to equality was welcomed by teachers, parents, and carers.*

*To each participant, Year 3 felt personal. It also involved a community of communities, each Y3 class being its own small community. It worked on both an immediate, local level, and on a more general, London-wide level."*

#### **What will A New Direction, Artangel and Tate do differently as a result of Year 3?**

Big lessons were learned about what is possible around equity, agency and working at scale, and the importance of framing concepts in ways that speak powerfully and directly to the communities you hope to engage. James Lingwood elaborates on this:

*"It is certainly feeding into our thinking about equity and inclusion – in the choices we make as an organisation, the way we allocate resources to projects, the work we are doing to diversify our audiences. It has reinforced our determination to think through our projects from the perspective – and the lived experience – of different communities."*

*It also made Artangel determined to push ahead with plans to realise Oscar Murillo's Frequencies, another hugely ambitious project based on a collaboration with children and young people in schools. Plans to present an exhibition in a 'found' space in Peckham were put on hold at the onset of the pandemic in April 2020. We then decided that it would be more meaningful and more energising to present the project in a school environment, in collaboration with students in the school. A vast installation of Frequencies will be presented in the Sports Hall at Cardinal Pole School, Hackney over the 2021 summer holidays."*

Anna Cutler reflected that for Tate there were important lessons about what could be achieved when the learning element of a work was given the same parity as curatorial considerations:

*"New ways of working with our curatorial colleagues were made possible. Clarrie Wallis as the lead curator should be named as a key person in this as she went several extra miles to ensure that everything was consistent and well thought through for Steve, and the exhibition at Tate, as well as for the children."*

*The role of the artist and their involvement can be significant to a learning programme if they have interest and investment themselves. Steve was very generous with his time and the long line of teachers wanting to speak with him at the teachers' events, and their feelings of being represented and championed*

*by him, was moving and felt important."*

For A New Direction, whose input had been so crucial in engaging schools and making workshops a plausible undertaking for the teachers taking part, Steve Moffitt thinks that their future work must not only take better account of schools' own capacities and start points, and to trust their sense of their own start points, but also embrace broader horizons Year 3 proved it was possible to work across. That included not being put off by the most challenging logistical/legal elements.

*"As an organisation we are less fearful of scale. We have grown bolder and clearer around our vision and being part of making Year 3 happen has affirmed our commitment to inclusion and equality. We are already in discussion with several organisations around how to best support them to work at scale. We are also clearer about our methodology and approach to working in partnership.*

*At the launch of the project the question many of the journalists in the room kept coming back to was safeguarding. Although a huge issue and a massive challenge for the cultural sector and for schools, safeguarding is part of the deal of working with children. It was a significant part of the project and at times it was scary – but with good advice, training, a coherent strategy, and clear support systems in place it is possible to create a safe and secure environment to make projects like this happen."*

## The key take-aways

*Steve, James and Anna's reflections point to their own interest in reflecting on their practice and the strategies their respective organisations pursue. When considered side-by-side what do their thoughts tell us, overall, to keep in mind about future work?*

### **The clarity, quality and scale of the idea matters**

Schools are looking for an engaging idea, but a manageable one, so ensure that there is purpose and value for them at the centre of the work, even when the project stretches beyond their comfort zones. At the same time, think big. Embrace the concept of scale, ambition and fearlessness and do not be afraid of unknowns. Trust a great idea and believe in its potential.

### **Embrace challenge and the ideas of others**

Partnerships that are most effective are not guaranteed to be punctuated by milestone moments of unalloyed consensus – expect disagreement and work through challenges by hearing and respecting one another's views.

### **Take risk assessment seriously but do not be overawed by it**

Working with young people in such a way that their participation is also a form of representation means that safeguarding becomes hugely important with expert input from organisations like the NSPCC invaluable. Risks of identifying young people are logistically and legally complex and for Year 3 were significant but not insuperable hurdles.

### **Identity and community are vital**

Year 3 worked because it was about the 7- and 8-year-olds of London today, but it carried within it, teachers' and parents' own memories of their schooling; it was an authentically connective concept that drew all participants in, but placed children right at the centre.

Equality is important; participants were co-creators of Year 3.

Visibility is important; the artwork was revelatory; a re-evaluation of who we are.

Agency is important; participants were in control of their own journeys as part of the project.

### **The commitment and visibility of the artist are crucial**

The role of the artist in Year 3 was essential. Steve McQueen's voice and energy were present in all aspects of the project. He was visible, and the children, staff and parents had an extraordinary connection with him. His ambition and aspiration for the piece was inspiring and energising to all involved.

### **Trust schools and teachers to locate themselves within large-scale work**

Year 3 framed and conceptualised an idea; it provided stepping on points for schools in the form of workshops and follow-up resources, but it did not over prescribe, and a school's own agency was therefore privileged. As a result, schools' and children's enjoyment as well as the benefits they felt, were more profound. Schools valued being invited to collaborate rather than be told what to do. ■

**[www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections)**

*A New Direction's Year 3 team:  
Steve Moffitt, Rebecca Branch,  
Naraneeruthra-Rajan, Marina  
Lewis-King, Steve Woodward  
and Jim Beck.*

**A New Direction** is an award-winning non-profit organisation working to enhance the capacity and agency of children and young people in London to own their creativity, shape culture, and achieve their creative potential.

We do this by working with a diverse range of partners, making connections, sharing practice, influencing change, improving the ecology that surrounds children and young people, and by providing real and transformative opportunities - from childhood, through school years and into employment.

**[www.anewdirection.org.uk](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk)  
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*Image: Steve McQueen Year 3 ©Tate*