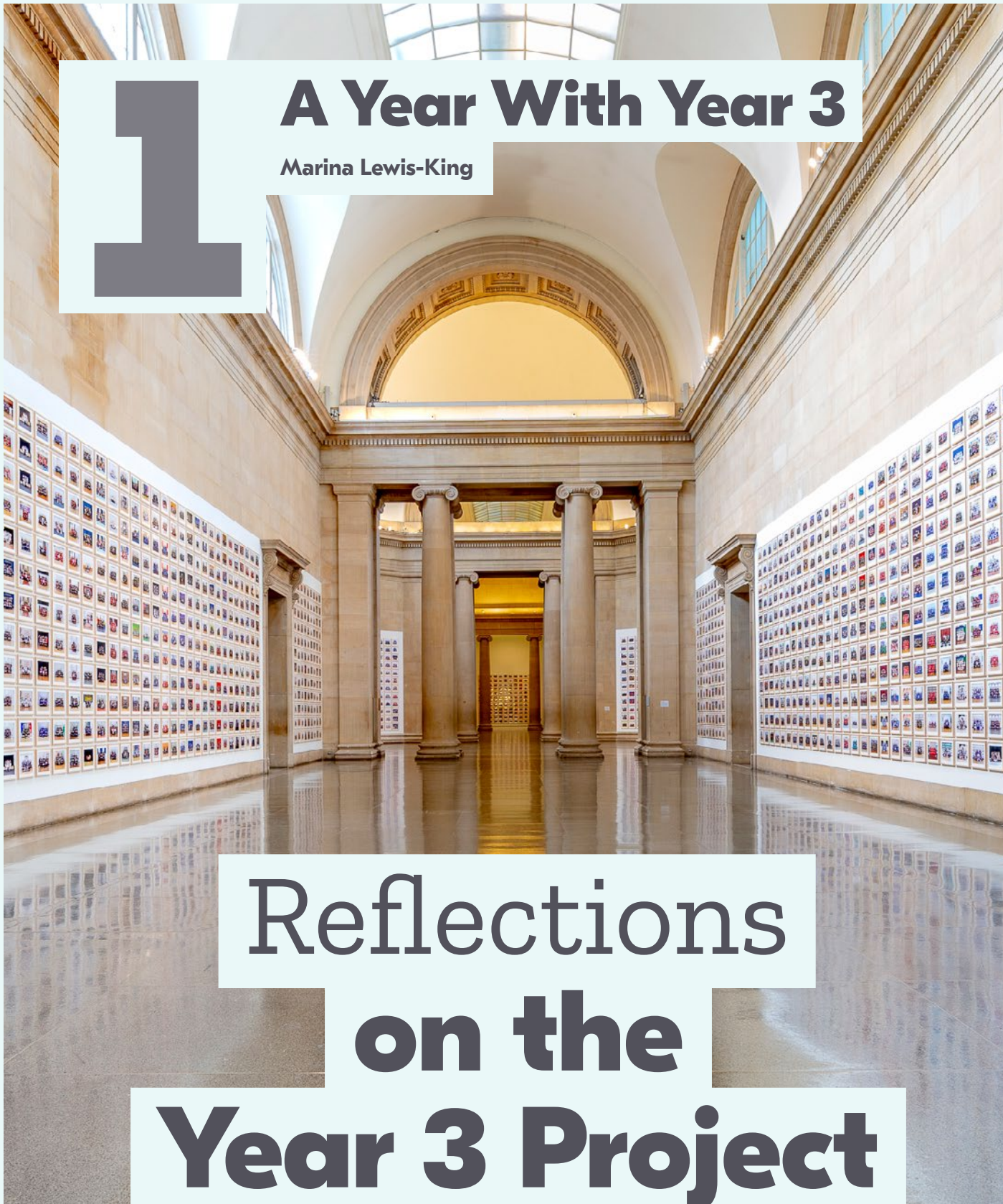




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A Year With Year 3

Marina Lewis-King



Reflections on the Year 3 Project

This essay is one of nine commissioned by A New Direction to reflect on the Tate Year 3 Project and provoke thinking about future projects. For the full set go to www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections

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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

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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.

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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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.

www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections

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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.

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Image: Steve McQueen Year 3 ©Tate