



Conversations and Actions Whitechapel Gallery

**The Bloomberg Commission:
Claire Barclay: Shadow Spans**

Conversations and Actions

This booklet has been written to help you explore the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition *Claire Barclay: Shadow Spans*.

It begins with a conversation between two artists, **Rebecca Greathead** and **Daniel Wallis**, and Whitechapel curator **Kirsty Ogg**.

This conversation outlines key ideas and concepts in Claire Barclay's work and introduces you to different aspects of the show. It is designed to support your exploration of the exhibition and give you ideas to share with others in your group, be they children or adults.

Throughout the booklet are *Actions* (These appear in the boxes with the wavy lined edge) that you can do in the Gallery. These are designed to help you consider the artists ideas, working processes or themes of the exhibition. There are guidelines to make the actions easily adaptable to suit a wide-range of people.

Also within the booklet are *Actions* (These appear in the boxes with the diamond patterned edge) that can be used away from the Gallery. They too can be adapted to suit your own needs.

Spread throughout, are images that you can use to act as prompts or reminders of the exhibition.

Have fun!



Claire Barclay: Shadow Spans

.....

Rebecca The space feels completely different to when the last commissioned artwork was in here.

Daniel Yes, it seems bigger and lighter and the bricks look a different colour.

Rebecca The artist Claire Barclay has made the work in response to the space and worked right here in the Gallery to realise the finished piece.

Daniel Is it made from found objects? I can see doors and hats and other things I seem to recognise.

Rebecca All the objects have been either made by the artist, or by crafts people working closely to her specification.

Daniel I think these large metal frames are like doorways. Were they specifically made so they can be arranged in different positions?

Rebecca Yes, they're hinged and can be moved around, a bit like a stage set.

Daniel Hey, wait a minute these hats have got no brim on them.

Rebecca They're not hats, they have a bottom.

Daniel But they look like they are made using traditional hat making techniques though. I'll ask Kirsty Ogg the Curator.

Kirsty Yes, the objects were made by the last top hat-maker in London.

Daniel These gold doorknob type things wouldn't actually open a door either!

Rebecca Kirsty, they're sculptural objects aren't they, not working objects?

Kirsty They're not functional objects, but they make reference to familiar things.

Rebecca So it is not wrong for Daniel to call them doorknobs?

Kirsty Absolutely not! Any connections you make to these objects you make are equally as valid. That same doorknob becomes a curtain rail from a different view of the work.



Dance Events

.....

Rebecca Kirsty, I understand there are dance events planned to take place in the space, how will this work?

Kirsty Three choreographers from different dance companies will be creating dance pieces in response to *Shadow Spans*.

Daniel But how will they be able to dance with all this sculpture in here?

Kirsty The work creates a tension within the space that the dancers will use. They will have to move around and maybe through the work, responding and reacting to it.

Daniel I can't see how dancers and an audience will fit in this room.

Kirsty Each choreographer will design a separate piece, which will be performed over a couple of weeks during normal Gallery visiting time.

Rebecca So it'll be like a normal viewing of the work, but with dancers in the space?

Daniel I can't wait to see it!

Activity in the Gallery

Imagine you're a dancer, walk carefully around the Gallery 2 thinking about which areas you might need to move in very carefully and where you could move a little faster.

If you're in a large group, choose a few members at a time to act this out while the rest observe.

Add some movements – are there places where you feel like stretching up high or crouching down low?

Use elements of the work to act as prompts for actions. Pretend to:

Look through a telescope...

Put on a hat...

Open a door...

Activity outside the Gallery

Design a dance individually or in groups:

By moving furniture, change the space you normally work in. Make obstructions, shapes to move through, under and around.

If you're in a space with no furniture, use people as the obstructions. Join hands, lie down, crowd together or spread out randomly.

Use props distributed around the space to act as prompts for ideas about different ways to move.

Process

Rebecca So did Claire actually make this work especially for the Whitechapel?

Kirsty Yes. Claire came into the Gallery a week before the exhibition opened, to experiment with the different elements she'd already made and work out how they fit in the space. Making the work actually in the Gallery allows her to have the opportunity to look at the process, the time to rethink and restructure.

Daniel Does that mean she changed her mind about anything?

Kirsty Yes, not everything she had made is included, and some new parts were made in the Gallery while setting up. Gallery staff helped out. I even stitched some of the fabric panels together.

Rebecca Being around other people can be helpful to. I find the more I talk to people, the more it helps me refine my ideas.

Kirsty Claire found the same when discussing ideas with the choreographers who are developing dance events to take place around this work.

Activity in the Gallery

Look for interesting elements of the Gallery architecture.

Claire Barclay liked the pillars, which reminded her of a nineteenth century town house. Describe the elements you have chosen.

Think about the texture, colour, material, size... do they remind you of something or somewhere else?

Why did you pick a particular part of the Gallery? Tell a friend about what you have observed.

Working in pairs or small groups, imagine your chosen part of the Gallery is really in another building. Sketch, draw, write about or act out a scene that could take place in your reimagined space.

What five objects could you bring into the Gallery to change it into the place you have imagined?

Activity outside the Gallery

Think about a space you know really well –
Perhaps your home, a classroom or an outdoor play space?
Describe it in as much detail as you can.

You can use words, or a mix of words and sketches.

Think about what happens in the space, what it looks like, who uses it, how old it is..?

Make a sculpture that would feel at home in your chosen space.

Does it represent anything or anyone, or is it more abstract?

Is there an object missing from the space that you want to put in it?

Think carefully about size, colour and material.



Inside outside

Daniel It has an inside-out feeling in here. From certain angles, with the sun shining through the skylights, it's a bit like I'm in an alley way and the brick gallery walls are the exterior walls of buildings.

Rebecca And the artwork feels like doors into something or somewhere. The grey panels remind me of the front doors of the Whitechapel Gallery. Other elements make me think about the past, one part feels a bit like the home of a mourning Victorian widow.

Kirsty To me it reflects the structure of a city, with all its layers and history.

Rebecca I can't help thinking about stories from the East End, and imagining the artwork as reaching back to the past and telling these stories.

Daniel And the title, *Shadow Spans*, sounds to me like shadows of the past spanning time to reach us in the present.

Kirsty Or even architecture spanning from place to place. From outside on the high street, through the front doors and into the Gallery.

Action in the Gallery

Look closely at the structures of *Shadow Spans*.
It may help to think of the work in four sections - pick one.

Sketch it, but replace parts of the sculpture with those things they remind you of.
Perhaps the sewn black objects hanging on the grid by the grey doors remind you of gloves, or birds or flies? Draw these instead. Can you find a telescope, a shower curtain, or some keys?
Does your imagination show you things that no one else has seen? Share your ideas and find out.

If you could display *Shadow Spans*, or parts of it, somewhere outside the Gallery, where would you put it?

Action beyond the Gallery

Look for things in the street/outside that interest you.
Photograph them, sketch them, or note down a reminder of what they are. Can those elements tell us anything about what may have happened in the street before? Are there stories to be told?

Pick two elements you are interested in. For example Claire Barclay's work seems to have doors and window frames. Perhaps yours will be traffic cones and post-boxes.

Draw two or three simplified versions of each of these on thin card. Try to get two on a page of A4.

Cut out and assemble all your parts to make a 3D object by leaning them against each other like a house of cards, or perhaps slotting them together.

Find other materials to add to your sculpture. Paper, tissue, string, earth, paper clips...
Keep thinking about what you have seen outside and what *Shadow Spans* looks like.

Put your sculpture together with a friend's. Find a space in which you think these sculptures might belong.



Spanning a year

.....

Kirsty Claire Barclay's exhibition is the second year-long site-specific commission for this Gallery.

Rebecca You asked her to make a work for the space, similar to how artists make work specially for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall or the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square.

Kirsty Yes. What's exciting is how different the space feels and how it might change in the future.

Rebecca A year-long exhibition means that I can keep coming back to see this work, each time I visit one of the changing exhibitions.

Daniel A bit like catching up with a friend!

Rebecca Yes, and I think I'll see it in a new way each time.

Daniel So, what will happen to the work when the year is up?

Kirsty When a site-specific artwork such as this is shown in another site or gallery it can take on a new meaning. But, we don't know yet what will happen when *Shadow Spans* leaves here. Sometimes Claire uses parts of old sculptures to make new ones, perhaps parts of this artwork will get a new life elsewhere.

Find out more

.....

For visitor information please go to our website: whitechapelgallery.org/visit

A video interview with Claire Barclay is being screened in the Screening Gallery next to the Café.

Information on the first Bloomberg Commission by Gohska Macuga can be found here: <http://whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/the-nature-of-the-beast-meetings-archive>

To book your free group visit and use our Education Space (available Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during term time) please call Education on 020 7522 7888 or email: education@whitechapelgallery.org

If you have enjoyed this resource or have any other feedback please do contact us. For more *Conversations and Actions* visit whitechapelgallery.org/education/schools/teachers

Supported by:

Bloomberg

The Bloomberg Commission invites an international artist to create an annual site-specific artwork inspired by the rich history of the former library. Bloomberg's support reflects its commitment to innovation, and its ongoing efforts to expand access to art, science and the humanities. Additional support provided by the Wingate Scholarships. Claire Barclay is the Wingate Artist-in-Residence at the Whitechapel Gallery

All images © Patrick Lears, 2010.