

# **Large Print Guide**

## **Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities**

**6 October – 21 March 2021**



**Gallery 4**

**Please take this guide home.**

This document includes a large print version of the interpretation panel found by the entrance of **Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities** in Gallery 4, as well as a large print version of the exhibition guide which is available inside the exhibition space.

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# **Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities**

**6 October – 21 March 2021**

## **Gallery 4**

Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities this exhibition looks at the development of the community and education programme at the Whitechapel Gallery from 1979 to 1989. It presents rarely seen records from the Gallery's archives which have not been widely researched to date.

Walking through the doors of Whitechapel Art Gallery in the late 1970s, visitors could explore the wealth of arts from Bengal or immerse themselves in the abstract sculptures of American artist Eva Hesse. Facilitating these journeys was the Gallery's pioneering Community Education Organiser Jenni Lomax, who developed a new approach to art and education and later became Director of Camden Art Centre.

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For over a decade Lomax engaged young artists who often lived and worked in the area – including Zarina Bhimji, Sonia Boyce, Maria Chevska, Jocelyn Clarke, Fran Cottell, Sacha Craddock, Jeffrey Dennis, Charlie Hooker, Jefford Horrigan, Janis Jefferies, Rob Kessler, Deborah Law, Bruce McLean, Stephen Nelson, Veronica Ryan, Allan de Souza, Jo Stockham – to act as creative mediators between the Gallery and East End communities, by forging partnerships with teachers, schools and local organisations. Through workshops, tours and off-site projects radical dialogues were established with people of all ages and backgrounds.

From setting up artists' residencies in schools and community centres, to casting audience as participant, this artist-led education programme emphasised the 'work' of art not only as an object but also as a process.

Against the convulsive backdrop of Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s, this exhibition explores a transformative moment in art education.

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It highlights art's continual potential to create spaces of collaborative learning, solidarity and freedom.

Co-curated by Jenni Lomax, Sofia Victorino, Daskalopoulos Director of Education and Public Programmes and Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator: Archive Gallery and Head of Curatorial Studies with Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator. Exhibition archive research by Rose Gibbs, independent curator.

Thank you to all the artists, contributors and lenders to the exhibition.

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# **Exhibition Guide**

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# **Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities**

**6 October 2020 – 21 March 2021**

This exhibition looks at the development of the community and education programme at the Whitechapel Gallery from 1979 to 1989. It presents rarely seen records from the Gallery's archives. For over a decade, Jenni Lomax, Community and Education Organiser at the time, invited young artists who often lived and worked in the area to act as creative mediators between the Gallery and East End communities. Through workshops, tours and off-site projects in schools, hospitals and care centres, radical dialogues were established with people of all ages and backgrounds.

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## **Jenni Lomax and Sofia Victorino**

### **In Conversation**

**London, June 2019**

**SV** From 1979 to 1989 you worked as Education Officer at Whitechapel Gallery. In what way did your arts training shape the work you developed later?

**JL** Going to art school in the late 1960s and early 1970s was an amazing, open-ended experience. The Pre-diploma (Foundation) Course at Rochdale College of Art taught ways of making things while, at the same time, it challenged boundaries and traditions.

Maidstone College of Art at this point had introduced a free-ranging approach to fine art disciplines; although I had originally applied to study painting, during my three years there my fellow students and I were encouraged to realise our ideas in whatever material or form seemed appropriate. What I learnt from art school was to question established conventions, to look beyond the surface and to explore the possibilities of art and its relationship to life.

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Later I did a PGCE in Art Education at Hornsey College of Art. The programmes I developed at the Whitechapel were about looking and questioning, as well as thinking through making.

Like many of my postwar generation, I had benefited from the more open and democratic approach to higher education that had developed from the early 1950s with the need to rebuild society. For the first time, those of us from less well-off families were encouraged to continue studying beyond school leaving age and to take advantage of free tuition and financial support for living costs. At art school I was among a group of students from different social backgrounds, working together, arguing about politics, privilege and class division. The barriers that existed between certain communities and different forms of art were exposed and widely debated, leading to an active interest in the various community arts initiatives that were setting up across the globe. For me, my love of making things and free access to higher education had been the keys that opened up the world of contemporary art – so my...

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...question at the time was – how can others be supported and encouraged to connect with the art of our times?

**Working in adventure playgrounds was a formative experience in the early years of your professional career. In 1961 the writer, social theorist and anarchist Colin Ward published 'Adventure Playground: A Parable of Anarchy'. Have his ideas informed your thinking?**

The idea of adventure playgrounds was again formed after the end of the war, in the new spirit of freedom and democracy. The concept of child-centred learning, that was being developed as an important part of early years education and child development, was at the heart of the Adventure Playground project. Children were invited to create their own play structures – initially from the rubble and ruins on bomb damaged, inner-city sites. While still at Maidstone, I was introduced to the London Adventure Playground Association by a sculptor friend who had a...

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...part-time job helping build large scale structures – mostly using old telegraph poles and railway sleepers. I began working at the playgrounds at Hackney Marshes and Battersea Park during the college holidays, initially helping children build their play environment but then developing alternative arts activities that enabled children to participate in different ways. At this time, I hadn't read anything much about the theory behind the playgrounds but I caught up with people like Colin Ward when I did a PGCE in art at Hornsey a year later. I found the anarchic aspect of Adventure Playgrounds, that Ward wrote about, very appealing.

**You had also been drawn to the work of the Artist Placement Group. When exactly and in what context did this happen?**

When I left art school, I worked on all kinds of projects alongside my involvement with adventure playgrounds and Toynbee Hall. I had been introduced to APG by Stuart Brisley, an ex-tutor from Maidstone, and I assisted him a little on his APG residency in Peterlee.

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I was very interested in John Latham and Barbara Steveni's ideas about how artists could contribute new ways of thinking within different institutions and areas of public life. My involvement was very minimal but Barbara and John as artist 'instigators' were very inspirational.

**Can you talk about the experience of working with Tower Hamlets Council and the Arts team, as well as with Toynbee Hall? How do these experiences intersect?**

The Whitechapel Art Gallery and Toynbee Hall were both founded by Canon Samuel Barnett and Henrietta Barnett who believed strongly in education for all and the reduction of the divisions between social classes. The two institutions had remained linked by this founding ethos. In the mid 1970s, an experimental after-school arts workshop for five to 11-year olds was set up in the basement of Toynbee Hall. It was funded and monitored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as part of their research into the relevance and value...

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...of art for underprivileged communities in urban environments. I started to work part-time on the project after meeting the director, Deborah Gardner and co-worker, Lesley Dring. East London was an exciting place to be – organisations such as Space and Acme were helping artists to set up studios in derelict warehouse buildings and to occupy houses in areas earmarked for future redevelopment. Tower Hamlets Arts Officer, Peter Conway, was very active in his support for projects with young people. Together with me and a group of other artists, he helped form an Arts Team that would travel around the borough to work with young people to set up arts activities in local housing estates and youth clubs. Peter was joined in the Arts Office by Sally Williams and later Vivien Lovell, who were both committed to the idea of bringing art into the public realm. Nick Serota had recently become director at the Whitechapel and was determined that the Gallery should be rooted in its locality. The area had changed from being a mixed, working class community into one that was predominantly Muslim.

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This change provided a new cultural dimension to the borough's focus on the arts. Different organisations connected through committee membership and meetings. The Whitechapel offered space to showcase a range of local events and projects and its proximity to Toynbee Hall made it a regular place to visit with the children from the Toynbee Arts Workshop. There was a strong political drive for social change as well as a united front against a resurgence of racism. Funding bodies such as Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), Greater London Arts Association and the Greater London Council (GLC) connected organisations in the borough and beyond. The various collaborations formed during this period were important in providing the way for the future community education programme at The Whitechapel.

**As Community Education Organiser at Whitechapel Gallery what ideas and models were you aiming to develop? Was there a relation with other institutions in the UK?**

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Many of the independent art galleries such as the Ikon, Birmingham, Arnolfini, Bristol and Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, that had been established with a public facing remit in the mid-1960s, had education officers based on the traditional museum education model. MOMA Oxford and Arnolfini particularly, had developed strong working relationships with their local schools but the activities were very much 'on the side'. Nick's vision for Whitechapel was for the whole institution to be engaged with its local communities. Soon after he arrived, he appointed Martin Rewcastle as Community Education Officer – adding community to the title was the difference. Martin was not an educationalist; he had come from art journal Studio International and was interested in the ideas around art and society. These ideas were brought to the fore with the exhibition, Art for Society: contemporary British art with a social or political purpose, which was organised by the Gallery in 1978. Together, Nick and Martin set about building relationships with the key organisations, funding bodies, local activists and politicians.

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I got to know them both through their interest in what we were doing

at the Toynbee Arts Workshop and my interest in taking the children to the exhibitions at the Gallery.

In the late 1970's the Whitechapel didn't have an Education Department. For some time until the early 70's the Upper Gallery had been occupied by The London County Council (that became the Inner London Education Authority) as an arts resource space for London teachers. This moved to Oswin Street at the Elephant and Castle where it had a vibrant role in art education until the demise of the ILEA in the 1980s. The Education Programme began in a project-based way with the programme for schools and colleges that I proposed, together with the educationalist Pat van Pelt, for the Eva Hesse exhibition in May 1979. Pat and I shared an interest in child centred learning and a passion for Eva Hesse's work. She also had valuable experience of working on education programmes in American museums. Our pilot scheme with the Hesse exhibition attracted a lot of interest from local – mostly primary – schools and I was invited to devise another...

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...programme with the Arts of Bengal exhibition in November 1979. Both these projects were funded by Tower Hamlets and the ILEA. The Community Education Department took off from there – though it was more a growing aspect of the Gallery's work rather than a 'department'; the staff team at the Whitechapel was very small at this time.

**Considering the organisational structure of the Gallery how did the education and exhibitions programmes relate to each other? What was distinctive about the approach?**

The fact that the education and exhibition programmes became conceptually intertwined was distinctive. My role was given the same importance as that of the curator and I had a part in shaping and discussing the whole programme together with the Director and exhibitions Curator. It was very unusual at this time for programmes to be integrated in this way. The community education programme included talks, lectures and public events around each exhibition, as...

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...well as audio visual material and written exhibition guides. The Whitechapel recognised the important local community of artists in East London and drew on this valuable resource to shape an innovative approach to looking at and engaging with contemporary art and artists. Over time, artists involved with the residency and gallery education had impacted on the exhibition programme – the annual Whitechapel Open Exhibition, which I selected together with the Director, was an opportunity to bring new artists into the programme and to show work from community education projects; also the relationships developed with different local groups led to important exhibitions such as 'Woven Air and From Two Worlds.

**What about international networks? In our conversations you mentioned École du Magasin, in Grenoble, as a place that was inspiring, and an institution that combined school, studio spaces and exhibitions.**

École du Magasin was founded as a contemporary arts...

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...centre in 1986. It is housed in an industrial hall built by Eiffel originally for the 1900 Paris World's Fair and later dismantled and reassembled as a factory in Grenoble by a large-scale manufacturing company. The founding Director, Jacques Guillot, saw the vast, industrial space as an opportunity to create studio/workshop space for artists to make work on site, on a scale appropriate and in relation to the spaces allocated for public exhibitions. Inspired by The Whitney Independent Study Programme – and the Whitechapel's integrated, artist centred approach to gallery education, Guillot aimed to bring together exhibition making, public programmes and education through interaction with artists. École du Magasin was a precursor to the MA curating courses that burgeoned in the 1990s, though much more grounded in practical experience and apprenticeship within the whole Magasin as an institution. I was invited by the École's Director, Victoire Dubruel, to talk to students about the Whitechapel's Community Education Programme and my particular approach to connecting a diverse public with contemporary art and artists.

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The scope and scale of the Magasin was unique and impressive. Our discussions led to the European symposium 'Making a Place for Art' which was held at the Whitechapel in 1988. Victoire and I co-organised the symposium together with Shireen Akbar (co-curator of Woven Air) and Janis Jefferies (an artist and academic teaching at Goldsmiths). Participation was by invitation, with the expectation that everyone would contribute to the roundtable discussions and workshops on the role of art institutions. The two keynote talks by the artists Michelangelo Pistoletto and Michael Craig-Martin were open to students and others. Both artists spoke of the importance of 'the audience' in the presentation of their work and how for them, art existed outside of the museum as well as within it. However, there was a strong difference of opinions between delegates, with some people defending the 'sanctity' of the gallery space whilst others embraced the possibility of more open and 'porous' public arts institutions. This symposium, in particular the talk by Pistoletto, was important in helping me form a vision for Camden Arts Centre when I became director...

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...there in April 1990.

**The idea of experimentation has significantly informed the programme at Whitechapel. What were the practical aspects of working within and beyond the Gallery, both in the exhibition space and in schools and the wider locality?**

All the education activities – on and off-site – were devised together with artists. Artists invited to work on the programme brought elements of their own practice into the discussions. We always started from the exhibiting artists' conceptual premise and their working processes. Before 1985, the programme mostly operated within the exhibitions in the galleries.

Learning to take care of the work, as well as respecting the space of other visitors, was part of the experience. In 1978, the old primary school building adjacent to the Whitechapel, in Angel Alley was acquired by the Gallery. 84A, as it became known, was connected to the main space by a doorway from the coffee bar and was made usable as a lecture theatre on the ground...

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... floor. On the next floor up there were workspaces for longer-term projects, where ideas developed and expanded by thinking through making and experimentation with materials. The Director and the whole team supported the programme's proximity to the artworks and visibility within the public space of the galleries. Exhibiting artists were encouraged to talk with the education artists and to the teachers who attended the special preview before the general opening event.

Working outside the Gallery, particularly with the Artists in East London Schools Scheme, a strategy was needed that connected back to the Gallery in some way. It was crucial to be clear what the Gallery's role was in the exchange between artists and those who lived and worked in its locality. Initially the schools that were part of the residency scheme were ones that had already been encouraged to participate in the Gallery programme. Sometimes the artist a school chose to take up residence was one they had worked with in the gallery or whose work they had seen in a Whitechapel Open Exhibition.

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Later, as the programme expanded, schools were encouraged to welcome a resident artist by inviting teachers to visit projects in other schools and arranging for different artists to go into the school for one-off sessions. These off-site residencies were given visibility within the Gallery and publicised widely through the printed leaflets. The Director and other staff members visited the exhibitions and special events that took place in the schools.

**Researching Whitechapel's archive I was able to read the documentation related to three exhibitions that have come to define the education programme in terms of relationships with local communities: Eva Hesse, Arts of Bengal and later Woven Air. Can you expand on how these projects came about?**

Both the Eva Hesse and Arts of Bengal exhibitions took place at the Whitechapel in 1979. They were strikingly different exhibitions; one of contemporary sculpture by an American artist and the other an exhibition of...

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...historical artefacts from the ancient and historic region of Bengal, organised in partnership with the V&A.

I have already described how the education programme with the Eva Hesse exhibition came about as the starting point for future activities. The Arts of Bengal provided an opportunity to invite schools back to experience looking at art from the past in relation to the present. Recognising that its immediate neighbourhood had become home to many people from Bangladesh, the exhibition had been programmed with the aim of welcoming this new community to the Gallery. Modern Bangladesh had only recently (in 1971) become an independent country and many of those migrating to Britain had suffered poverty and famine as a result of the struggle for liberation from Pakistan. An interesting aspect of the Arts of Bengal exhibition was how much of this complicated political and colonial history was conveyed through the different cultural artefacts. The education programme received a huge response from the local schools – some of which had visited the Hesse exhibition.

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There was also a particular interest shown by youth and community workers in the area who were supporting new initiatives in the area for Bangladeshi children and young people. Significant links were made with individuals who were active within the Bangladeshi communities as a direct outcome of Arts of Bengal. In particular, Shireen Akbar and Henna Nadeem who had set up an after-school literacy project for Bangladeshi girls at Mulberry Secondary School on Commercial Road. Shireen used her own background in art and textiles to engage the girls and young women in language and literacy. Working with her, we relocated the group to the workshop space in 84A for the duration of the exhibition. They used their time in the galleries discussing various pieces in the exhibition and creating an embroidered and collaged wall hanging, based on the Bengali alphabet with English equivalents. The textile hanging was later displayed at the V&A. Shireen became a regular collaborator at the Whitechapel and also at the V&A. It was through discussions with her about how important textile weaving and kantha embroidery was to the culture...

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...and history of the region that had become Bangladesh, that the idea for the Woven Air exhibition came about. In 1987, Shireen and I made a research visit to Bangladesh and West Bengal, where her family, in Dhaka, and museum and academic contacts throughout the regions helped us make visits to rural villages in Sylhet where there was a strong textile tradition, as well as to museums that held textile collections. The subsequent exhibition focussed on the story of Jamdani (muslin) weaving, that was produced only by master weavers – the Jamdani saris, it was said, were made from 'woven air'. Once they were worn out and discarded as garments, the sari fabric was layered and stitched together with tiny running-stitches to form quilts and coverings. The village craftspeople who made the kanthas were skilled embroiders who used their art to create picture stories of village life on items of everyday use. Woven Air was a very significant exhibition for the Whitechapel; not only did it genuinely engage visitors from the immediate neighbourhood; it was successful in raising the status of the textile tradition. Two Jamdani weavers were invited to travel...

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...from Dhaka to set up their loom in the Gallery, they were amazing at sharing their knowledge and skills with visiting groups and individuals.

Both Woven Air and the earlier From Two Worlds exhibition (1986) came about directly from relationships that had been made and nurtured through education projects; Woven Air came out of the Arts of Bengal programme and From Two Worlds from conversations with artists such as Sonia Boyce, Gavin Jantjes and Veronica Ryan who had been involved in residencies and public programme activities through the 1980s.

**The direct experience of art and a 'child centred learning' were ideas that informed your approach to exhibitions and to art making; and the wider discourse on art and education in museums and galleries. Would you like to discuss this further?**

Child centred learning was a key element of primary school and early years teaching at the time but this approach had not been widely developed through the...

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...museum education sector. The artist led approach at the Whitechapel was very much about looking at and discussing what was there in front of you in the galleries; participants were invited to relate their own experience of the world to the artworks they were looking at. Discussions arising from direct observation would reveal the underpinning concepts, which could be further developed through practical activities. These activities allowed an experiential exploration of the artist's ideas and a deeper understanding of how the work had been realised – they could include movement, word play, performance as well as experimentation with materials and making. There were a significant number of teachers in local schools who valued and supported our approach, which they felt was relevant for pupils for whom English was a second language – including those who used different forms of sign language as their primary means of communication. Much of what was offered in museum education programmes at the time was information-led rather than experiential and discursive. One notable exception was Southampton Museum and Art Gallery...

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...where Helen Lockett worked with school pupils to develop inventive ways of looking at art. Her Through Children's Eyes exhibition in the early 1980s comprised exhibits selected by the children from the museum's collection, which were displayed together with their suggested ways of looking at the works.

### **When did the residencies in schools start? What inspired its model?**

The Whitechapel's Artists in East London Schools Scheme began in early 1980 following a conference organised by the Gallery and the Arts Council in 1979. Jennie Lee's 1965 white paper: 'A Policy for the Arts- First Steps' had set out the arguments for the arts to be embedded in the educational system in order for them to have a central place in everyone's life. This objective was pursued by teachers and educationalists in the 1970s, some of those who attended the conference seeking good examples of how to make art core to the curriculum in an inclusive and experiential way. The enthusiastic response from teachers led...

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...to the Arts Council offering funding for two pilot projects in Tower Hamlets – Bob Russell at Woolmore Primary School in autumn 1979 and Eva Lockey at George Green's Secondary School in autumn 1980. The success of these two residencies – both of which received additional funds from Tower Hamlets Arts Committee (THAC) to extend each residency – led to a substantial commitment from the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) who supported the model of two residencies, in primary and secondary schools, for the next nine years. The interest and demand were such that other funding bodies came on board and more schools were included each year. Sir John Cass's Foundation and Aldgate and Allhallows were consistent supporters who made far reaching changes to their grant giving policy, which had not previously included grants to arts organisations or prioritised arts education in schools. Their enthusiasm, in turn, encouraged other educational grant giving trusts to the same. The Whitechapel was also able to develop its model through collaboration with other local organisations including Homerton Hospital Artworks Committee, Bethnal...

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...Green Museum of Childhood, The Geffrey Museum and Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as well as continuing to work in partnership with THAC and Greater London Arts.

**The Gallery closed for a major refurbishment in 1983, did new partnerships and collaborations develop then?**

The Gallery closed between 1983 and 1985. It was important to keep the Whitechapel alive and active during this period. With the Artists in Schools Scheme and The Whitechapel Open at its core I developed the Around the Whitechapel programme. New partners included the newly opened Spitalfields Health Centre, Homerton Hospital, The London Hospital, Shoreditch Day Centre and The Crypt Day Centre at Aldgate and Allhallows Church. We worked with these institutions to organise exhibitions of work by East London based artists, some of which were toured on a circuit of mental health and care centres.

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The 1984 Whitechapel Open took place in five places in Tower Hamlets; Chisenhale Works, Montefiore Centre, Bishopsgate Institute, Wapping Sports Centre and Island House Church Community Centre. In March 1985 it was shown across two venues; Bishopsgate Institute and Christ Church Spitalfields. The Sir John Cass School of Art (City of London Polytechnic) became a venue for artists talks and Tape/Slide presentations – an additional grant from the ILEA had enabled us to work with Audio Arts to commission artists to make Tape/Slide works for educational purposes, initially to work alongside the gallery exhibitions, but during closure we invited artists to make these as works in themselves. Richard Wentworth, Hamish Fulton and later, Susan Hiller all produced pieces that were then shown in educational institutions and later seen as important artworks. Many of these partnerships were continued after the Gallery reopened and we had been successful in creating some new networks that supported arts activity across the local boroughs.

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## **Who were the artists you were working with and how transformative was the programme during those years?**

It has been interesting over time to understand how transformative certain aspects have been. Even after three or more decades I still hear that schools and teachers involved have kept in touch with 'their' artist in residence – even when the schools have changed name or constitution – for example, Blue Gate Fields with Shanti Panchal, Columbia Primary school with Deborah Law. John Bangs, who had been a teacher at Templars ESN School and later an arts and ESN advisory teacher, continued to cite Jefford Horrigan and Veronica Ryan's residencies at Templars as having added enormous value to the teaching and learning in the school. The residencies and projects at Amherst Junior School (now The Bridge Academy) supported the school in making art central to the whole curriculum. Over a nine-year period, starting with visits to the Arts of Bengal exhibition in 1979, the school worked with...

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...artists Kate Blacker, Charlie Hooker, Bruce McLean, Shanti Panchal, Terry O'Farrell and Sonia Boyce. They also made studio visits to locally based artists including Albert Irving and Veronica Ryan. All these projects connected beyond the classroom and involved families and other places in the locality of the school, such as St Leonard's hospital where Sonia Boyce worked with Amherst pupils to create artworks for the hospital that celebrated Edith Cavell, who had been a nurse at St Leonard's. Charlie Hooker and Bruce McLean worked in collaboration with the ENO; their work with Amherst culminated in a multi-media performance, 'Deep in Fishy Waters', that was produced and organised by the pupils and presented publicly in the Whitechapel's Upper Gallery.

Other residencies, like Rose Garrard's at Central Foundation Girl's School, had an enormous impact in raising the status of art and women artists within the school. Vivien Blackett's commission for The London Hospital in collaboration with Mulberry Secondary School, made a strong case for the value of art as a subject to the families and friends of pupils whose...

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...work was exhibited alongside Vivien's in the hospital's Dental Institute. 'Touch' workshops for people who are blind or with sight impairment were developed by sculptors Jefford Horrigan and Stephen Nelson with exhibitions including those of Jacob Epstein and Lucio Fontana. Permission was sought from lenders for the works to be touched (under art-handling conditions), within focussed, artist led sessions.

Being part of that on-going forum was as energising for the artists as for the Whitechapel. Many formed lasting relationships and have continued to contribute to the field of art education. Among those artists who were regularly involved throughout the 1980s were Jeffrey Dennis, Stephen Nelson, Jefford Horrigan, Kathy MacCarthy, Fran Cottell, Rob Kessler, Vivien Blackett, Sacha Craddock, Sonia Boyce, Jocelyn Clarke, Jo Stockham and Keith Wilson.

Exhibition co-curated by Jenni Lomax, Sofia Victorino, Daskalopoulos Director of Education and Public Programmes and Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator: Archive Gallery and Head of Curatorial Studies with...

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...Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator. Exhibition archive research by Rose Gibbs, independent curator.

Thank you to all the artists, contributors and lenders.

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# **Exhibition Wall**

## **Labels**

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This guide follows the wall labels for **Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities** in a clockwise direction around the space, beginning with the first wall label outside the entrance to Gallery 4, and then continuing in a clockwise direction inside the space. This document concludes with the four vitrines in the centre of the room.

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Contact sheet from schools workshop led by Jenni  
Lomax and Pat Van Pelt during Eva Hesse exhibition

Whitechapel Gallery, 1979

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## **Encounters with Artists**

The section brings together key exhibitions that have shaped the development of the community and education programme at Whitechapel Gallery: Eva Hesse (1979), Arts of Bengal (1979) and Woven Air: The Muslin and Kantha Tradition of Bangladesh (1988).

Featuring documents, pamphlets, posters, photography, children's artwork and film, it highlights the role of artists in developing innovative approaches to collaborative learning. Presented alongside the vitrines containing related material, is a selection of images from workshops devised by artists for other historical exhibitions such as Bruce Nauman, Mario Merz and Cy Twombly. Under the leadership of Jenni Lomax, Whitechapel's Community Education Organiser from 1979 to 1989, the programme developed and expanded into a pioneering initiative. Lomax focused on artists and their work in the context of Whitechapel's locality, combining exhibition-related workshops in the Gallery and artists' residencies in...

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...local schools, hospitals and care centers.

The fact that the education and exhibition programmes became conceptually intertwined was distinctive (...) It was very unusual at the time for programmes to be integrated in this way. The Whitechapel recognised the important community of artists in East London and drew on this to shape an innovative approach to looking at and engaging with art. Jenni Lomax, June 2019

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## **Eva Hesse and Arts of Bengal, 1979**

The first exhibition-related education project was initiated in collaboration with the educationalist Pat Van Pelt in 1979. It focused on two exhibitions: one contemporary, Eva Hesse, and one historical, Arts of Bengal.

Exploring the concepts and physicality of the works on display, workshops and tours for children and young people encouraged looking and discussion as well as thinking through making. In addition, inventive resources were developed for use by schools and families.

Jenni Lomax points to three important ingredients when working within the gallery space: the artwork itself, the experience people bring with them and the understanding and knowledge that the artists bring to the work through their own practice.

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## **Woven Air: The Muslin and Kantha Tradition of Bangladesh, 1988**

This section highlights activities and research developed for Woven Air, an exhibition that celebrated the textile traditions of Bangladesh. The craftspeople who made the kanthas were skilled embroiderers. Through their art, they created picture stories of everyday life in the village. Woven Air was a direct response to the Arts of Bengal exhibition (1979). It was proposed by Shireen Akbar, a youth and community worker in Tower Hamlets, who had been involved with the Arts of Bengal education programme.

Acknowledging the importance of textiles in the lives of people in Bangladesh, Akbar aimed to establish a connection with those who had migrated and had now settled in East London. Two Jamdani weavers travelled from Dhaka to set up their loom in the Gallery. They shared their knowledge and skills with visitors of all ages. Shafique Uddin worked as Artist in Residence in the Gallery's education studio.

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## **The Field of the Embroidered Quilt, 1988**

Tape-slide transferred to DVD, 25 mins.

A rarely-seen film conceived by artist and writer Janis Jefferies and Shireen Akbar. With images by artist Saleem Arif and produced by artist Michael Archer, it charts Bangladesh's traditional weaving practices and women's creativity, labour and contribution to the industry.

Please feel free to use your personal headphone. New headphones are available upon request from a member of staff.

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## **Artists and Schools**

The Artists in East London Schools initiated in 1979 by Whitechapel Gallery with funding from the Arts Council and Tower Hamlets; and later by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and Sir John Cass's Foundation. This section showcases material documenting a selection of artists' residencies that took place throughout the 1980s. The first pilot projects were with artists Bob Russell at Woolmore Primary and Eva Lockey at George Green's Secondary. The scheme lasted for nearly a decade.

Many artists were living and working in East London at this time and studio visits were arranged so that school teachers could get to know their work. No two residencies were alike as schools selected the artist who felt relevant to them. Schools were also asked to dedicate a studio space for the artist. Residencies lasted from one to three terms and often funds would be raised to acquire a work by the artist. The work created with children and young people was shown to...

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...the wider community, both at the schools and at Whitechapel.

The collaborative ethos developed between teachers, artists, and the Gallery during these years highlights the central role art can play across the curriculum and in activating creative dialogues between local communities, organisations and institutions.

A list of all the artists who were involved in the education programme is displayed on the right hand glass panel of the archive gallery.

**Document continues.**

## **Jo Stockham, John Scurr Primary School, 1987**

During her residency, Jo kept a diary and notebook where she highlights the working process, the ideas and the responses of students to the residence: 'we made large scale wooden sculptures, monoprints and stencils. Teaching and showing work are both amazing ways to test the limits of what art practice can be. But also to have conversations about things that are often difficult to talk about.'

Jo Stockham's interview can be accessed online and in the exhibition.

**Document continues.**

## **Maria Chevska, Hackney Downs Secondary School, 1983-1984**

The subject of Chevska's work with the pupils centered around the swimming pool in the school's old Victorian building. Working with the movement of figures in water and the forms revealed by light, the artist reflected concerns in her own painting at the time. Together with the group, they created a mural installed in a concrete staircase in the school.

## **Veronica Ryan, Templars Secondary School, 1984**

Ryan worked in the school making large sculptures inspired by the fruit of her native island, Montserrat. The pupils experience with clay and plaster was invigorating and Ryan's approach encouraged an inquisitive relation to materials and making, considering their own emotional responses.

**Document continues.**

## **Jefford Horrigan, Templars Secondary, 1984**

Horrigan led a series of clay workshops with the pupils which resulted in the making of a large sculpture by the artist. Investigating the proportions of the hand through drawing and sculpture, Horrigan explored the allegorical meanings of the hand, inviting the children to use it both as a tool and a subject.

**Document continues.**

**Allan de Souza, Daneford Secondary Boys School  
1986-1987 [below left in display case]**

De Souza worked with the students to explore self-representation and male identity and encouraged the pupils to make portraits from memory and experience.

**Rob Kessler, Holy Trinity Primary School, 1984**

Kessler worked with the pupils to make large pastel drawings and sculptures based on a diverse range of found objects whilst encouraging them to add ideas drawn from memory and personal experience.

**Zarina Bhimji, Culloden Primary School, 1989**

Bhimji ran photography workshops without cameras or darkroom to break down the technical barrier of the medium. Building up confidence and encouraging active participation, the outcome of the residency was a series of colour self-portraits, drawing attention to clothing traditions.

**Document continues.**

## **Deborah Law, Columbia Primary, 1988 [below right in display case]**

Law worked with the pupils on workshops inspired by creation myths. The project resulted in a large sculpture titled The Tree of Life hung with paper animal cutouts and placed in the school hall. This residency initiated a long-term relationship between the artist and Columbia which continued for many years.

**Document continues.**

**Veronica Ryan**

Layered Section

1981-82

Plaster, silk thread

Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**Document continues.**

## **Charlie Hooker and Bruce McLean with Amherst Junior School, 1987**

Installation view, layout, programme, maquette,  
soundtrack to performance

Deep in Fishy Waters was a performance held at Whitechapel Gallery in 1987. Charlie Hooker was Artist in Residence at Amherst Junior School (1985) working across visual arts and music. The results of the project led to a collaboration with ENO (English National Opera) to produce an opera-performance. Artist Bruce McClean visited Amherst School and worked with the children to create paintings that formed the slides used in the event.

The maquette by Charlie Hooker shows the installation plans for the set. Displayed on the wall is the programme that was distributed to the audience. Each leaflet had the children's illustrations of fish, water snakes, sharks and other sea creatures.

**Document continues.**

Live action, slide-projection, wall paintings and shadow-puppets created an immersive and epic environment, choreographed to the sound of a minimalist score.

Whitechapel Art Gallery and Amherst Junior School had a long lasting association initiated by teacher Rosemary Phelps.

**Document continues.**

**Saleem Arif and Kathy MacCarthy, St. Paul's Way  
Secondary, 1985**

Photographs, correspondence

**Document continues.**

## **Fran Cottell with Canon Barnett School, 1989**

'The residency included drawing and music workshops followed by walks in the neighbourhood. Exploring food traditions in local shops and restaurants, it reflected the waves of communities in the East End. The final performance - Immigration Game - enacted the journey of the Irish, Huguenots, Russians, Jews, and Bengalis, with relevant obstacles, music and costume'. Fran Cottell

## **Sonia Boyce with Amherst Junior School and St Leonards Hospital, 1988-1989**

The children visited St Leonard's Hospital as part of their study of the local community. They met Pat Marshall director of Nursing Services, who talked about her work. They studied the life of Edith Cavell, assistant matron at the hospital in the early 20th century, and discussed their thoughts on caring and responsibility. Sonia Boyce worked with them to develop ideas through collage and photography to remake the Edith...

**Document continues.**

...Cavell triptych – the original paintings had been missing for some years.

**Document continues.**

## **Artists and Schools publication**

Published in 1998 the book brings together the artist-led workshops and artist residencies in East London schools, organised by the Whitechapel Gallery between 1979-1989. With contributions by arts journalist Andrew Graham –Dixon. Jenni Lomax. Teacher Richards Crawford and artist Deborah Lee.

**Document continues.**

At the same time, education programmes were starting to develop in art institutions across the U.K. At the museum of Modern Art Oxford the exhibition Young in Art, in 1976 showed the works of school children from Oxfordshire and in 1983 the artist Helen Ganly organised workshops that evolved out of MAO's Festival of India.

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham piloted its first teachers packs to accompany their exhibition programme in 1979 and organised an Artists in Schools residency for Hannah Collins in 1980.

**Document continues.**

## **Art, Policy, Education**

In 1978 the Whitechapel Art Gallery held the Artists in Schools conference, organised by Martin Rewcastle and Alister Warman from the Arts Council. In the previous year Rewcastle had been appointed as the Whitechapel's first Education and Community Officer. In 1979 Jenni Lomax takes on that role and further develops the education programme. The conference inspired interest amongst school teachers, who were keen to get involved in the scheme. Pilot residency projects were set up in two local schools with funding from the Arts Council and Tower Hamlets Arts Committee: Bob Russell at Woolmore Primary (1979) and Eva Lockey at George Green's Secondary School (1980).

The exhibition Growing Up with Art in 1980 was organised jointly with the Arts Council and selected by Pat van Pelt. It displayed the Leicestershire Art Collection for Schools at Whitechapel Gallery. Revealing the importance of art in children's daily life, it...

**Document continues.**

...provided encouragement to head teachers and consolidated stronger links with schools.

**Document continues.**

Clockwise from centre:

*Time Out*: 'Far East Enders', by Andrew Tyler, 22-29th April, 1987

*Race Today*, 'East End Housing Campaign', Vol. 7 No. 12, Dec. 1975

*Race Today*, 'A Small Victory in The East End', Vol. 10, No. 7 Nov/Dec 1978

Tower Hamlets Women's Art Forum Newsletter, No. 1 April 1987

Tower Hamlets Women's Art Festival Report 1986

*Brick Lane 1978*, by Kenneth Leech, photos by Paul Trevor

*Race Today*, 'What is Racism? 'The Bengali Experience in the East End' by Mala Dhondy, Vol. 9 No. 3 April/May 1977

*Race Today Collective*, 'Charting the Asian Self-Defence Movement', Vol. 10, No. 6 September 1978

The 8th National Independence Day organised by the Bangladesh Youth Front, Tuesday 27th March 1979

**Document continues.**

## **The East End and Whitechapel**

Migration has always informed the history of the East End and the Whitechapel, from French Protestants in the 17th century to Jewish communities escaping persecution in the late 19th and early 20th century. Bangladeshi migrants arrived in Britain in 1947 and later in 1971 after Bangladesh's Independence.

Political struggle and protest play a key role in the history of the local area. Racism against Asian communities became a major issue. In 1978 the murder of a young Bangladeshi, Altab Ali, prompted the largest Asian Anti-Racist Demonstration in the UK's history with a petition to the Prime Minister to take action.

In the 1970s, Whitechapel remained an area of poverty and deprivation. Many homes were not suitable for habitation, while other buildings remained vacant. This opened up opportunities for artists to live in the East End and find affordable studio spaces.

**Document continues.**

It also provided temporary housing to many communities in need of shelter.

Many activist groups began to take form and self-organise, such as the Tower Hamlets Women's Art Forum. The group brought together women from multiple backgrounds who wanted to raise awareness of gender inequality and social injustice.

**Document continues.**

## **Artists' Interviews**

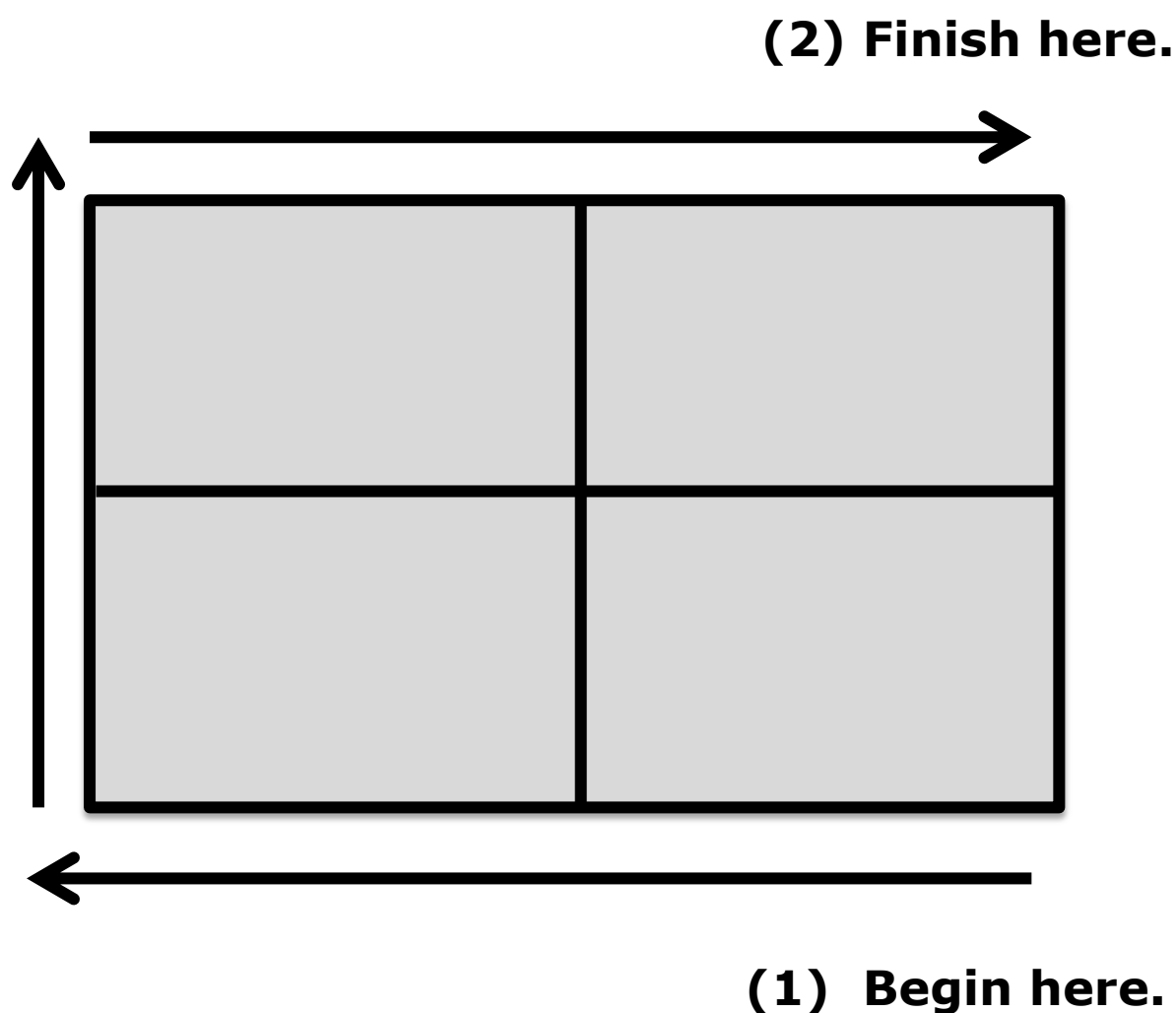
The curators conducted interviews recorded between May and July 2020 with artists whose involvement at the time helped cement the Gallery's vision in art and education.

Please feel free to use your personal headphones.  
New headphones are available upon request from a member of staff.

**Document continues.**

**The following labels can be found in the freestanding vitrine in the centre of Gallery 4.**

**They begin with the vitrine closest to the entrance of Gallery 4 and move in a clockwise direction. Please see the illustration below for clarity.**



**Document continues.**

## **Eva Hesse, 1979**

Education Programming, exhibition catalogue,  
Whitechapel Report on Eva Hesse exhibition, press  
coverage and archive material.

**Document continues.**

## **Arts of Bengal, 1979**

Education pack, exhibition materials, children's drawings, exhibition catalogue, press coverage and archive material.

**Document continues.**

Artist **Shafique Uddin**, whose work was exhibited alongside **Arts of Bengal** was in residence for the duration of **Woven Air**, working in the Education studio and making paintings which relate to the kanthas in the exhibition.

Visitors could drop in and speak to the artist on Friday afternoons with small groups booking guided visits throughout the week.

**Document continues.**

## **Woven Air, 1988**

Education and exhibition materials, public programme, exhibition catalogue, press coverage and archive material.

**Document continues.**

## **Workshops: Cy Twombly and David Smith**

The process of planning workshops was based on spending time as a team directly experiencing the work. Each show demanded a very different approach and usually involved making something that paralleled the artists' thinking process. In Cy Twombly's exhibition, we thought about signs and inscriptions, poetry and history, what was directly communicable and what was evocative. The aim was always to draw out the different responses to the artwork and to talk about how experienced it.

Jo Stockham

Cy Twombly early pieces were about movement and the notation of time. We would have the children doing repetitive words with lines and I remember thinking, 'let's get a string and move it.

Sacha Craddock

Open questions were structured to promote discussion in front of the artworks (...) to encourage close...

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...looking and enjoyment. Teachers often commented that the responses in a gallery environment outside the classroom provided them with a different insight into their pupils.

Jocelyn Clarke

Interviews with the artists recorded in 2020 can be accessed online and in the exhibition.

**Document continues.**

## **Workshops: Bruce Nauman and Jacob Epstein**

The approach was based on looking and being true to the artists' voice and responding to the groups to explore what that could be.

The content of Nauman's work was highly charged and we were dealing with subjects that may have been difficult to approach with schools: death, violence and sex. Our planning sessions [with Jocelyn Clarke] were arduous but we came up with a conceptual framework that revolved around repetition and pattern. We devised games that embodied Nauman's early studio based works, but also embodied the repetition of his video and neon works, where words are reiterated mantra-like, filling the gallery.

Touch workshops started with Jefford Horrigan during the Jacob Epstein exhibition. They were ground breaking in opening access to blind and partial sighted people. The logistics of replacing the works to enable people to touch them were complex but the rewards...

**Document continues.**

...amazing. The whole gallery team working together to provide access.

Stephen Nelson 2020

Stephen Nelson's Interview can be accessed online and in the exhibition.

**End of document.**