



## unfolding and revelation, browsing and serendipity

### Sonia Boyce, For You Only You

Mikhail Karikis and Alamire choir perform under the direction of David Skinner at Madgalen Chapel, Oxford (April 2007)

*the music is a fusion of*

Tu solus qui facis mirabilia (You alone can do wonders) by Josquin Desprez (16<sup>th</sup> century)

&

contemporary sound art by Mikhail Karikis



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jsku8VeQHpg&feature=related>

film by David Bickerstaff

Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

A symposium at Kettles Yard in Oxford in 2009\* **about how artists think** looked particularly at the role of **'not knowing'** within the creative process.

Many artists talk about a sense of **discovery and revelation** being the dominant driver to their work. For example: the very material they are using to make art might react in a surprising way and they will allow this to drive the outcome of their artwork. Alternatively the starting point of the artwork might be a concept and this concept too may well change radically over time as the process of art making unfolds. **Sonia Boyce an artist who spoke at the** symposium related how collaboration with musicians led to a work 'For You only you', the meaning and narrative drift of which only became clear to her **once the work was finished**. In the work she brings together the world of early Renaissance music with the contemporary voice of the Greek sound artist Mikhail Karikis. This composition imagines a dialogue between two characters: the voice of an old master and a contemporary troubled voice.

### PLAY VIDEO

- She wrote **'.....(It was a full) Two years after completing the project....(before I ) recognised that 'For you, only you' demonstrates the negotiations of the stranger to create a space for themselves and to confront the host... In that sense, it could be seen as a utopian work, optimistic about the negotiation of different agendas.**
- She also has said she **was not after a finished work** but rather was looking out for where something 'became interesting'.

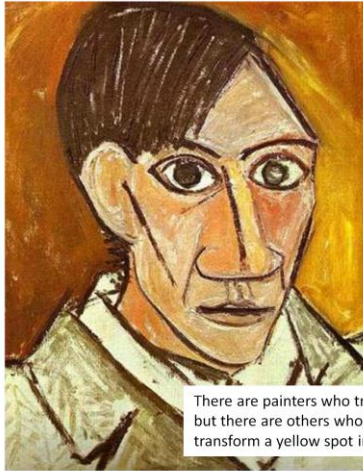
**This kind of exploratory unfolding of the creative process in artistic practice with an open mind as to where it will lead and what it might produce** is often mirrored by the way our student artists proceed when researching a topic for a seminar presentation or essay. **Their starting point may be all they have and their ultimate intention for an outcome unplanned and they allow browsing, serendipity and surprise and discovery to guide them forwards. They often find things of use this way because they remain open to all possibilities.**

of course we do encourage the gathering of keywords, use of the catalogue, literature searches on our e-resources and essay planning so that they produce something that

will get a good mark but it can be quite a change of approach for them!

**\*On not knowing: how artists think 29 June, 2009**

short attention span , disorganised , poor short term memory, tend to avoid reading and writing and may try to conceal difficulties, poor spelling, poor time management and organisational skills, rely on memory and verbal skills, rather than reading or writing



There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are others who, thanks to their art and intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the sun

Image: Bridgeman Education/Pablo Picasso 'Self Portrait', 1907 Narodni Galerie, Prague

One of the most quoted differences about artists is their dyslexia. It is generally accepted that there are more dyslexic students on art and design courses than the national average would lead one to expect . Depending on the type and degree of dyslexia being measured **between 10 % and 30 % of the art and design population** are dyslexic.

**Dyslexics will also tend to have a short attention span , be disorganised and have a poor short term memory. They may tend to avoid reading and writing and may try to conceal difficulties, their spelling will be poor and they will also have , poor time management and organisational skills relying on memory and verbal skills, rather than reading or writing .**

If you read lists of dyslexic artists you will find they include big names like Picasso (pictured), Andy Warhol, Vincent Van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. This somehow leads you to believe that being dyslexic might make you a better artist. This may not actually be the case.

A much cited article from 2001 fails to find evidence that dyslexics in art and design automatically have superior visual spatial skills. In other words artists may well be more likely to be dyslexic but they are not necessarily better at art. What is certain however is that , given their difficulty with the written word they are **going to be happier 'reading' images than they are reading text.** And this may explain why so many are drawn to art and art schools where the language is visual .

Wolff, U. & Lundberg, I. (2002), 'The prevalence of dyslexia among art students'. *Dyslexia*, 8, 1, pp. 34-42  
Padgett, I (ed.) & Steffert, B. (1999), *Visual Spatial Ability and Dyslexia, a Research Project* (London: Central St Martin's College of Art and Design, Research Centre)  
E Winner et al Dyslexia and visual spatial talents : Compensation versus deficit model' (2001) *Brain and Language* 76 (2) pp81-110)

## So ....our users (and that includes the teaching staff)

- are interested in anything and everything but may not know what they are looking for until they find it
- may be thinking in pictures not words
- **and they tend not to see themselves as academics and may be scared of librarians**



The School of Art and Design Library at Howard Gardens comprises 64,000 items including DVD's

Between Aug 2011 – end of May 2012 circulation figures show Issues 17,868, Returns 19,501  
There is also a Slide Library in a separate room containing over 90,000 slides

The atmosphere in the Main Library is as friendly and as visually appealing as we can make it. Like many other libraries a few years ago we bought beanbags and set up areas where groups could meet and work together informally.

We are familiar with and sympathetic to the typical traits of art students who are happier in the studio than the library, and some of whom will be disorganised or have poor short term memories, we know they may be vague about what they are after so that **they may respond best to an array of possibilities physically laid out in front of them rather than be after a specific item from the catalogue.** We know that they may be nervous of us and **ill at ease amongst books and systems.** We guide them to become more efficient resource users through training and advice, we are patient when they tell us they can't do computers and we persist in telling them how to use the online resources until they realise they can and that they will be rewarded with interesting results.

Yet despite all our best efforts the library is always going to 'feel' very different from the studio....A senior lecturer exclaimed to me the other day that the slide library (pictured) was **"very academic"** this despite my best efforts to make a lovely sunny room attractive colourful and relaxing. I see the paintings, the pot plants and the posters but she is struck more forcibly by the rows of filing cabinets and me bespectacled at my computer. We don't underestimate this barrier. The lecturer may as well have said **"the slide library is very alien"**.

## Putting words to pictures



This lecturer had been in the slide library talking about the PhD research proposal she was about to start writing and I had been showing her our reference databases for her to use to find journal articles.

The next day she sent me an email with this image asking for help as she was drawing a blank with her searches. Upon receipt of this email I spent some considerable time unearthing videos, images and, it has to be said, only a very few articles (it is an obscure subject). I added in references to articles on more general associated subjects like Polish Folk art. I was hoping to prove to her that she should persist with the e-resources. I imagine that **up until she started thinking about her PhD her research involved physical and visual spectacles like visiting the exhibitions and going to puppet theatres she said herself she rarely sits at a computer.**

I also hoped that she would spread the word to students about how the library can help them unearth information and this has already happened. **I aim to help as many students one to one as I can if they need it.**

The student also had an unusual request. She came asking for help finding images that generate a feeling of motion sickness. She showed me something on Youtube that she'd found by browsing, in order to explain what she wanted. I recognized the video as being a reconstruction of a famous dance 'The Triadic ballet' designed by the Bauhaus teacher Schlemmer (she'd never heard of the Bauhaus). I was able to offer this fact which then allowed her to **progress her visual search into the realms of text**-off she went happily to the library to find books on the Bauhaus. She also went armed with the keywords **Visual Perception** and **Optical Illusions**, terms we came to by looking at the pictures she liked on Google Images of the sort to make people feel queasy and putting words to what they were.

This **visual searching -where the** starting point is something the student or staff artist has either actually seen.... or has just visualised in their mind and hopes to see ... or is something someone else has seen and has described to them...is typical of our users and we have set up a few initiatives to support this image based research style.

## The visual and the tangible

- [Jenny's art, design and architecture blog](#)
- [WGSN](#) a very visual resource
- Promoting our collections visually
- Artists books Collection

<http://artdesarc.blogspot.co.uk/>

The blog is a quick fire blast of image and short text designed to be read by those in receipt of my emails (the link is at the bottom of my contact details). The first thing you see is the image-one I try and make so fascinating that the text gets **read...The hope is that staff and students to whom I write will pick up on these stray and random pieces of information in passing. A method of information distribution ideal for busy people with omnivorous interests and an attraction towards images**, the blog also serves me as an aide memoire. The quantity and variety of useful information for art and design is so huge that I can't keep it all in my head. The blog also gets read by fellow librarians, please do consider following it!

**WGSN** <http://www.wgsn.com/>

I was asked to give the Contemporary Textile Practice students (they based on our other site with other Design courses) a talk about resources available at Cardiff Met for **trends forecasting** in the Fashion and Textile industries. Preparing for it I realised we had not got a resource to support that particular information need. The fashion industry works two years ahead of itself and designers need to know what colours and styles are 'in' now, those trending and what is going to be 'the look' up to two years into the future. **Canvassing art librarians in other colleges** we found that the preferred resource to cover trends forecasting was one used by the Fashion and Textile Industry itself called Worth Global Style Network. **The resource is packed full of information , most of it in visual form.** **Staff were thrilled with this visual cornucopia and they intend next year that students will be set loose amongst the pictures, videos and descriptions and whole courses are destined to be constructed around the vast array of pictorial features allied to short and pithy reports** giving insights to our students not just on what is and will be fashionable but also the way the fashion and textile industry works. I have never witnessed such enthusiasm and delight as on the day we demonstrated WGSN.

**Our users get more excited by artefacts than by articles , inspired more by images than by text and that after all is their world.**

Paul will now talk a little bit about how we promote our collection to our users playing to their strengths which are an **openness to browsing and discovery via serendipity, and an attraction to the visual rather than text.** He will then go on to describe a new initiative: The Artists Book Collection : a tactile and visual learning resource which we are currently building.