

Airs

An exhibition by Mhairi Hall and Beth Robertson Fiddes

An Lanntair is currently showing the exhibition *Airs*, a collaboration between musician, Mhairi Hall and painter, Beth Robertson Fiddes.

In 'Airs' Mhairi composed new pieces of music inspired by traditional Scottish songs and Beth has created accompanying artworks.

Scottish pianist Mhairi Hall brings together layers of warm harmonium, synergising ambient sounds from nature and archive recordings to present a special collection of historic Gaelic and Scottish slow airs, beautifully interpreted on the piano.

Landscape artist Beth Robertson Fiddes accompanied her throughout the development and recording of the *Airs* album in Crear, Argyll. Listening and absorbing Mhairi's work and drawing inspiration as she composed her evocative mixed media paintings, which so vividly complement and visualise the music.

This gallery pack is made to accompany the exhibition and has suggested activities and tasks that you may wish to complete with your class.

We hope that these activities will assist you and your pupils to engage in looking and thinking about the artworks both artists have made. Where possible, join in on the activity yourself and allow the pupils to see how you engage with the tasks.

An Lanntair is happy to supply your school with materials should you require them.

Curriculum for excellence areas

Expressive Arts

I have the opportunity to choose and explore a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, discovering their effects and suitability for specific tasks. **EXA 1-02a**

I have the opportunity to choose and explore an extended range of media and technologies to create images and objects, comparing and combining them for specific tasks. **EXA 2-02a**

Inspired by a range of stimuli, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through activities within art and design. **EXA 1-05a / EXA 2-05a**

I can respond to the work of artists and designers by discussing my thoughts and feelings.

I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work. **EXA 1-07a / EXA 2-07a**

Health and Wellbeing : Mental and emotional wellbeing

I know that we all experience a variety of thoughts and emotions that affect how we feel and behave and I am learning ways of managing them. **HWB 1-02a / HWB 2-02a**

I understand that my feelings and reactions can change depending upon what is happening within and around me. This helps me to understand my own behaviour and the way others behave.

HWB 1-04a / HWB 2-04a

Literacy : Listening and Talking

When I engage with others, I know when and how to listen, when to talk, how much to say, when to ask questions and how to respond with respect. **LIT 1-02a**

When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking. **LIT 2-02a**

Literacy : Writing

I can describe and share my experiences and how they made me feel. **ENG 1-30a / GAI 1-30a**

As I write for different purposes and readers, I can describe and share my experiences, expressing what they made me think about and how they made me feel. **ENG 2-30a / GAI 2-30a**

Activity – Making to music.

In this activity we will explore some of the processes the artists used to create these artworks. We will try listening deeply and responding to what we hear without the intention of trying to create something 'lifelike' and instead reacting intuitively to the music.

Start by letting your class walk around the exhibition looking at the paintings and listening to the music before settling down in a space. Then follow the instructions below.

Materials required

Pencils, charcoal, crayons or colouring pens and paper (any size, but the bigger the better!).

Task

The type of music you can hear is called an 'air'. An air is a tuneful song that is often quite slow and doesn't necessarily follow a steady beat.

Some of these are old tunes made-up a long time ago, but they are no longer the same as the original tunes that Mhairi first heard – they have changed. By playing them in her own way, Mhairi has made them into her own, new version. We can call this interpretation.

If you listen carefully you will hear Mhairi playing the piano, but there are also other sounds too.

Take a piece of paper and on the back write your name and the number 1.

Close your eyes.

What can you hear?

If you keep your eyes closed what do you see in your imagination?

Opening your eyes and taking up the pencil or crayon, we are going to try drawing what you are hearing?

Try closing your eyes again. What does the music look like when your eyes are closed?

Can you find words or colours to describe it – maybe warm or cold, dark or light? Is it a soft sound?

Maybe you can move your body as the music moves. Does the music sound like a block or a scribble? Does it make your hand fly across the page or move slow like a snail leaving a trail?

What story is the song telling you?

(When the music finishes get the pupils to keep their eyes closed and collect the artworks in)

Take another piece of paper – again write your name on the back, this time write the number 2.

Listen to another tune, or air. What does this one look like? Can you find shapes or colours or words?

Try moving your pencil with your eyes closed again for the whole tune.

Move and make to the music.

(Again, when the music finishes collect in the pieces without the pupils opening their eyes.)

Repeat the process as many times as you wish.

Lay out the artworks on the floor in groups (eg all the number one responses, and in another group all the number two's).

Ask the pupils to walk around the two groups and see if they can guess which piece is theirs.

Questions.

You've all been listening to the same music. So did you think the artworks will be similar or different? Why?

Now having looked at each other's pictures, are they all the same?

If not, why not? If there are similarities, what are they?

Do you have a favourite?

Can you pick out the work you made?

(Now turn over the pieces of paper and hand them back to their owners)

What do you like about the art you made?

Looking around the gallery, are there any paintings which you think were inspired by the pieces of music you listened to?

Observations.

There is no right or wrong way to hear, feel or respond to art.

Because we are all different, we would expect our art to be different too.

It might be super messy! Or teeny weeny! OR BIG AND BOLD. It's ok, it records whatever you heard and saw and most importantly, what you felt.

This is one of the ways both Beth makes her paintings and Mhairi makes her music- they mix memories of places they've been and journey's they've been on to create their artworks.

Beth always listens to music when she's making. She listened to the same music you've been listening to today while she was painting some of these artworks.

Extension to the activity.

When back in your school you can try making in response to different types of music. Keeping your eyes closed can be a great way to listen deeply. Try listening to different styles of music and see if that changes the art you produce. Try using other materials like paints or clay.

You can listen to any type of music – here are some links to some music that might be fun and interesting to make to from different countries and across music genres:

National Folk Ensemble of Bulgaria 'Prituri Se Planinata':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HzNVuhPIJo>

Bonnie Rideout 'Macintoshes lament':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUEPJdStnGg>

Steve Reich 'clapping music':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPU5XrmORCQ>

Kraftwek 'We are the robots':

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_8Pma1vHmw

Buena vista social club 'Chan Chan':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5cELP06Mik>

Debussy 'pour le piano 'sarabande':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZjjqDernFc>

Mick O'Brien agus Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh 'Kitty Lie Over, Munster Buttermilk':

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mM2T3YIB_Uc

Ravi Shankar 'Raga Jog' (this track is 28mins long, so good for a longer activity):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNKTWhcw5nI&list=OLAK5uy_mNTHwDN-JPzQufbCbIIA3SE3-P0Rnv-9M

Activity – Journeys and memories, creative writing

In this activity pupils will be invited to explore the painted landscapes closely and create their own imaginary world within it.

Materials required

Paper (lined or unlined), pencils

Task

Invite your class to walk around the exhibition looking at the paintings and listening to the music. Then ask them to choose a painting to write about. They can work alone, in pairs or groups.

Ask pupils to complete the activity sheet questions.

Once pupils have completed the task invite them to share some of their stories or pictures.

Questions:

Did anyone choose the same painting?

Were any of your answers the same?

Have you ever been somewhere that reminds you of one of the paintings?

Observations:

When we look at Beth's paintings from a distance parts of them look real, like the water is really moving or it's deep enough to dive into!

But when we look closely we can see that Beth's paintings are made up of many layers and lots of details.

We can hear a tune when we listen to Mhairi's music, but when we listen closer we can also hear layers of sounds – more than one instrument, or the sounds of waves or wind.

We can make our own layers up of stories – by using our imaginations, we can add in details about places, other living beings and events that could happen.

All our layers and stories are different and unique to us. In the same way that we experience and see the world and landscapes around us.

Making things like paintings or music or stories lets others peek through our eyes into other worlds – it's fun to do the making, but it's also fun to see other people's worlds too.

Journeys and memories activity sheet

Name:

Start by walking around the gallery and looking at the paintings and listening to the music.

Choose one painting to stop in front of.

Why did you choose this painting to look at?

What can you see when you look at the painting when you stand back?

What do you notice if you move closer and look at the details?

Imagine you are in the painting – where is it? Can you give this landscape a name?

Have you been somewhere like this before?

What is the weather like?

What time of day is it?

Are you alone in this landscape or are there other living things?

Are there other things? Magical creatures or plants, watery friends or foes?

What can you smell?

What do you hear?

What is behind you?

How do you move around here? Do you need to swim or fly or do you have a vehicle?

What does it feel like to be in this painted landscape?

Write or draw below what happens next in the painting landscape (does it get dark? Does something bubble to the surface? How do you get home? What will you take to remember your journey)...

Activity

Sense of place – In this activity we will be drawing and sketching, recording what we experience to make a collage and can try constructing mark-making tools.

Beth's paintings are multi media. This means she uses different layers and techniques to create her landscapes.

Beth starts by being outside, recording what she's seeing using photos, sketches and looking closely at her surroundings.

Often she will build many layers up using memories of being outside, up hills or near water too.

Materials required

Paper, pencils, PVA glue (mix 1:2, PVA:water), paints, tracing or tissue paper. If you wish, you can use a digital camera and use print outs too). Recycling bits and pieces – plastic, cardboard, string, feathers, wool etc.

Task

Part 1: Sketching and drawing.

Sketches are rough drawn records. They can be used to record light and shade, shapes or even words or colours. Beth sometimes uses them as tools to remind her of places she's been.

Take your pupils outside for a walk – this could simply be around the playground or further afield. If you are in the gallery at An Lanntair it may be the inside of the building, the stairs, the windows or the gallery itself. Give pupils small pieces of paper – or tracing paper. Invite them to record things that interest them, the net of the football goal, leaves on the ground, a skein of geese... ask them to record things they notice in some way on paper, like a drawing or some descriptive words.

One fun way of doing this is to fold paper into a concertina book and to walk together and every minute or so pause for 30 seconds to make another sketch of what you're seeing before moving on again. It might be your own trainer lace undone, or it could be the person standing next to you. This is about observing what is around you.

If you are outside you can collect a few interesting bits and pieces to incorporate into your collage or to use as mark making tools – things like twigs, leaves, feathers, shells.



Part 2: Collage

On a large piece of paper or card, pupils can make a collage of their journey by ripping up the sketches or writing they made and adding them. If they prefer, they can trace their sketches using tissue or trace paper and adding that instead.

If you have suitable found objects, they can be added too. Use different media like crayons, or different types of paint.

Glue things down well with PVA and as that dries pupils can make some fun mark making tools like the mini paintbrushes or spatulas above. They can then use them to add layers of paint or scrape back to underlayers of their drawings.

Rather than trying to replicate the place itself, this fun montage aims to build up a sense of the place they visited.

Observations.

This is how Beth adds layers to her paintings – adding ripped up sketches or thick paint with bits of plastic, then scraping it back to reveal layers underneath too.

This is also how Mhairi works, adding layers of sound and taking back the bits she doesn't like until it feels 'right'.

There are different ways of recording experiences. These will all be unique.

We are a bit like these artworks, lots of layers of different things built up to make us who we are, all individual, all special.