

Whitechapel Gallery Youth Forum: Duchamp & Sons

Founded in 1901, Whitechapel Gallery¹ is one of the UK's leading not-for-profit galleries, attracting over a quarter of a million visitors every year. The Gallery presents modern and contemporary art to local, national and international audiences, and provides a platform for creativity, free thinking and learning. International in scope and reputation, the Whitechapel is at the heart of East London. Historically a deprived area, East London remains home to some of the most marginalized communities in the UK with high levels of social and cultural exclusion. One of the borough's greatest challenges is to develop services that meet the needs of young people. A significant percentage of young people are not in education, training or employment and one in sixteen young people leave school without qualifications each year. Young people aged 16 and over are the largest demographic in East London, yet have been historically underrepresented in terms of visitor attendance figures at the Gallery.

The Whitechapel Gallery has always placed access and education at the centre of its mission, and believes that art has transformative potential. The Gallery has pioneered many education and cultural learning methods such as artists in residence in schools, which have since been adopted by other museums and galleries. Stretching through all levels of learning and critical engagement the programme aims to reach a wide and diverse audience working with Schools & Teachers, Families, Young people and Communities. The education team is also responsible for curating the Gallery's project spaces which offer an integrated platform of visibility for the work being done within programming strands.

The Youth Programme works with people aged 15 to 21 outside formal education, encouraging young adults to visit and make use of the Gallery independently. The programme aims to overcome social, cultural and economic barriers and provides sustained access to the Gallery. It offers a balance of long and short-term opportunities to encounter contemporary art, artists and creative professionals. The short-term opportunities include weeklong artist-led projects during school holidays, daylong masterclasses with creative professionals and live events (art, music and performance festivals) curated by young people. These projects and events are targeted to young people from the Gallery's neighbourhood but also attract a wide and diverse young audience from across London. In 2009 the Gallery started a youth forum, with the aim of engaging more in-depth and over time with young people. Today the Youth Forum creates a platform for young people's voice within the institution and encourages peer-led participation in programming.

The name Duchamp & Sons was conceived in 2010 by the group in collaboration with the artist Lady Lucy, acknowledging young people's agency and encouraging them to take ownership of the forum. Since then, its ethos and identity have been shaped by the successive generations of members, some of whom have re-engaged with the group as artists or as gallery staff. Central to the youth forum is responding to the demand

¹ <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/>

from young people to provide a space to think, make and learn creatively, outside of formal education. Participation is also stepping stone into adult employment, raising aspirations and highlighting possible career avenues in the creative industries.

Duchamp & Sons strategy for recruitment draws on existing partnerships with local secondary schools, youth centres, community organisations and social agencies. However, any young person living in London is eligible to join and interest often spreads through word of mouth recommendations. Recruiting through multiple streams enables young people from different backgrounds to come together who would not normally meet. The age range of the members, 15 to 21, instigates collaboration across academic levels, something which does not happen within mainstream education structures. In summer, the Gallery runs artist-led projects to attract new young people and encourages Duchamp & Sons members to collaborate as peer motivators. Members also volunteer on workshops and other Gallery events, giving them hands-on, practical experience that is useful for their future professional careers.

The programme runs across the academic year (September – July) through bi-weekly meetings. The group uses the Gallery and its education studios as a space to meet, socialise and collaborate. The decision behind each project and how it is shaped is made in dialogue with members. Sometimes projects link to exhibitions in the Gallery or take their starting point from outside interests that are pertinent to young people. Projects have materialised as exhibitions, radio broadcasts and public events or have increasingly taken form online through web platforms such as Tumblr². Social media is essential to the group's identity with collective Twitter³ and Instagram⁴ accounts shared among the group for live tweets and posts during sessions. Both of these forms offer a direct voice for young people to a wider audience and document projects as they develop.

The Youth Forum meetings are organised and delivered by the Curator: Youth Programmes. Communication with the group between meetings is essential to ensure attendance and is done through text messages and email. As many of the projects are open ended, planning and preparation happens between meetings to assess the current direction and how it can be shaped. The role of Youth Programme Curator also requires advocacy with external organisations to engage new young people and develop partnerships. Throughout the year Duchamp & Sons meet with staff from across Whitechapel Gallery, calling on specific areas of expertise to help and inspire their own projects. Equally these encounters offer core staff a chance to engage in critical debates with the group. Integral to Duchamp & Sons is also researching and visiting other galleries and museums, often forming dialogues with other youth forums across the UK.

² <https://duchamp-and-sons.tumblr.com/>

³ <https://twitter.com/duchampandsons>

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/duchampandsons/>

Programmed by the education team since 2009, the Project Galleries at Whitechapel Gallery are dedicated to showing innovative collaborations between artists and local schools, young people and community groups.

Alone Together: Seth Pimlott with Duchamp & Sons

Together with artist Seth Pimlott (b. 1990, UK) Duchamp & Sons explored the theme of transition and turnings through yoga sessions, workshops on memory and sensation, performance and film. Considering the strange allegiance between mind and body, the exhibition Alone Together invited visitors to imagine the body as the centre of all change and a resource for artistic exploration. Alongside a narration drawn from the group's personal experiences, a chorus of sounds and rhythms provides the soundtrack for the film installation.

- <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/exhibition-alone-together/>
- <https://dandsalonetogether.tumblr.com/>