

2026 – Time for a New Relationship?



What can art educators learn from non-extractive practices?

As we welcome in a new year, starting a new term and imagining new ways of being, perhaps we can, as art educators, turn also towards new ways of understanding our relationship with our sense of creative purpose.

It would, of course, be ideal to start the new year with a sense of optimism and energy—and for many, that will be the case—and if so, all good. But we do need to recognise that for many people, both educators and those we educate, we ended the year with a feeling of overwhelm and perhaps even

exhaustion.

If we were lucky, it was great to be able to step off our productivity-driven, daily grind. Returning (and again, lucky us to have something to return to) has made me think about how we might begin to look in on this driven culture from a slightly different angle, especially in the light of learning to re-see what the visual arts can offer us, to help us be happier, healthier, more connected human beings. How can we learn to move forward, incrementally, in a way which is more sustainable, to both ourselves (as cyclical beings) and the planet? How can we help lay the groundwork so that the children and young people we teach and care for can imagine a more sustainable approach to their own lives?

The notion of *non-extraction* comes from a critical understanding of extractive economies, as applied to industry, the environment or colonialism. Any mechanism, organisational structure, or way of being which takes more out than it puts back in (intentionally or otherwise), leaving the source or those in its path depleted, might be seen as extractive. Non-extractive practices on the other hand, attempt to preserve, value, and enhance, helping to sustain energy, resources and ways of being.

As we go about our work as art educators and artists, perhaps 2026 can be the year we examine our current attitude to extractive and non-

extractive practices as they relate to teaching, learning and the visual arts. Let's think expansively and become aware of where we might be guilty of perpetuating the myth that extractive processes *are the only way*. Once we become aware, we can then start to use our creativity to make small (or large) changes to our day-to-day practices, which enable the ecosystems in which we operate to function with kindness, energy and sustainability.

AccessArt will be returning to these themes of course, but for now, a few gentle questions to help us start examining our attitudes to extractive / non-extractive practices as teacher, learner and artist. Some of these questions are deliberately tangled to encourage divergent thinking. They are not intended to be used as tools with which to punish ourselves. Instead, enjoy them as challenges to explore. New approaches - new energy.

Physical

- Where do the materials you use come from? How do you navigate the balance between providing enough materials to aid exploration without encouraging waste? How do the things you make exist in the world? What is material value? How much do you talk about these issues with other makers/learners?

Cultural

- How do you relate to the images and ideas you come across from other cultures? How much do you understand and respect the starting points/legacy which created these works? What does “borrowing” look like for you? Does it feel ok?
- How much do you impose on others? Are there ways you could create space for the cultural experiences of those you work with to be seen and heard?

Creative Process

- Is our creativity endless? Is it cyclical? What does creative rest look like? How do we value intention? Do we need to measure? What does respect to ourselves as creative beings look like?

Enjoy the new year. Gently does it.

Paula Briggs, January 2026

This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire

your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

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Ten minutes, five times a week



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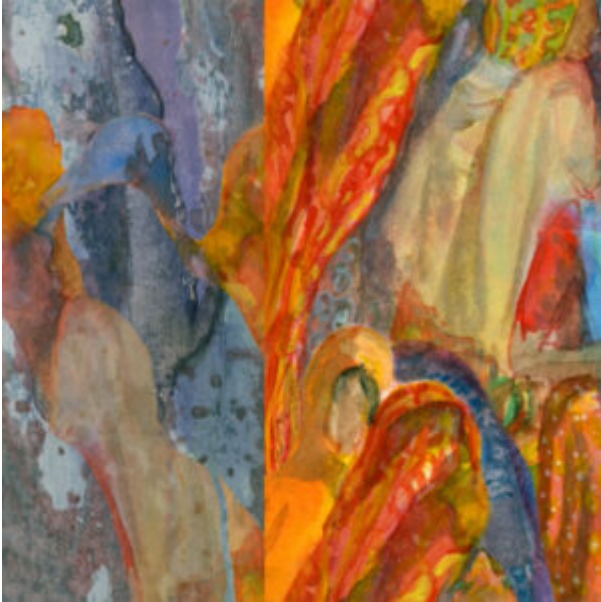
Which Artists: Merlin Evans



Dreaming With Watercolour

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“Acts of Kindness” Workshop

Collage: Deconstructing, Reconstructing and Abstracting

What We Like About This Resource...

"I really like how this playful resource helps us to make a creative response inspired by a stimulus, ensuring that the stimulus is only an entry point into an outcome that will look totally different. Exploring the themes of colour, texture and composition through the lens of different artists also helps us see how we can interpret (and re-interpret) colours and materials in a meaningful way. Viewfinders and collage are also great tools for those who experience 'fear of the white page' and will allow learners to make conscious creative decisions as they go." – Tobi, AccessArt

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Cut Paper Collage Still Life



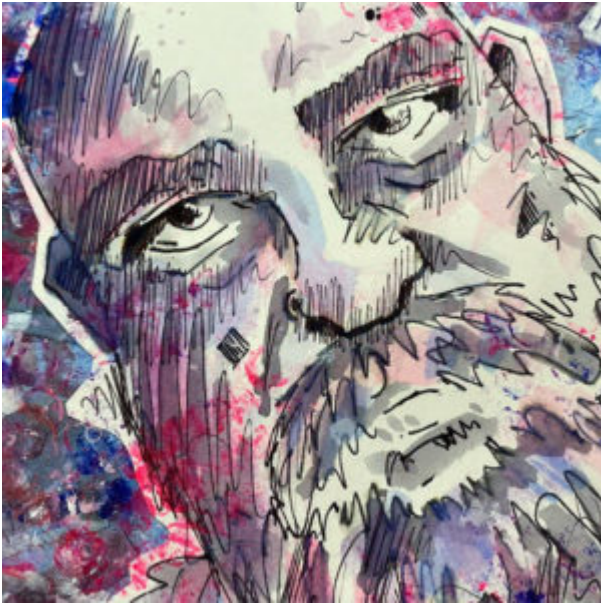
Cooking with collage



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Adapting AccessArt: Colour and Composition



Thoughtful Mark making



Returning to Our Bodies – Poised Between The Slip and The Grub

The Blood Bag Project

What We Like About This Resource...

This project combines art and science in innovative and creative ways. It engages children with simple and more complex sewing skills, both hand and machine. The fact that a

local artist collaborated on this project, bringing her own set of skills and experience is so valuable for any extended art project, and the children were able to connect with the sensitivity of the subject matter and to empathise with it's message.

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Cloth, Paint, Print: Inspired by Natural Objects



Making Painted & Sewn Landscapes



which artists: merlin evans



Which Artist: Leigh Bowser

Which Artists: Merlin Evans

What We Love About This Resource...

So often, we hear talk of the distinction between science and art, and no more so when teenagers proceed through their education and they are encouraged to choose one route or another. In reality, creative thinking helps scientific

understanding and a scientific approach can inform and inspire art.

It's so refreshing to read and see Merlin's experience and understand how she works between these two areas – in her words *"mixing subjects, and seeing how they work and intersect is where inventions take place!"*

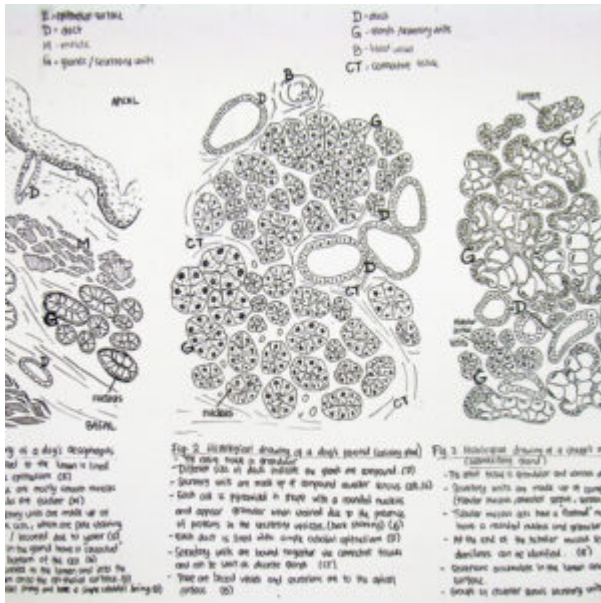
We also love the way her work embraces the *felt* world of being human, as well as the *known* world. We're sure many young people will find Merlin's work of interest and reassuring when they are pressured to choose *"art or science"*.

You May Also Like...

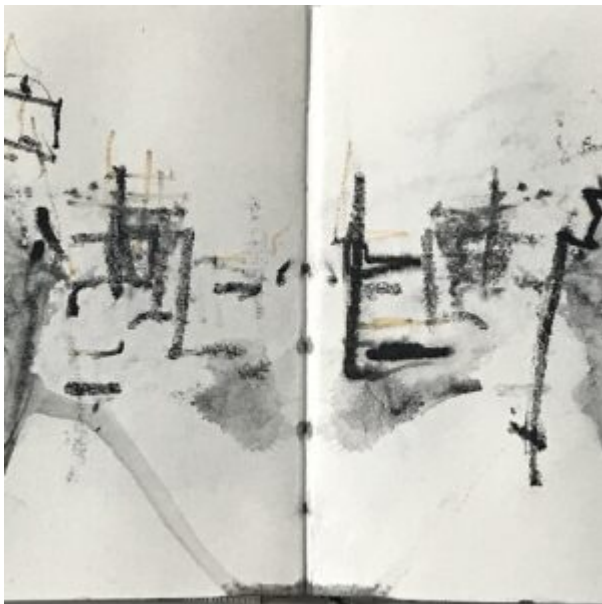
Drawing for Learning



Drawing as a Way of Understanding



Drawing as a Way of Understanding



World War I Mail Art

What We Like About This Resource...

“This project links poignant subject matter with meaningful art processes and local history. What we learn about the re purposing of materials, (in this case spent ammunition) re affirms how we can use what is around us as a starting point to making and creating. You could extend or adapt this project by looking at broken pottery, re purposing that into new sculptures that link with Roman or other local historical cultures” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

You May Also Like...



[Henry Moore's Shelter Drawings](#)



Remembrance Day Soldiers



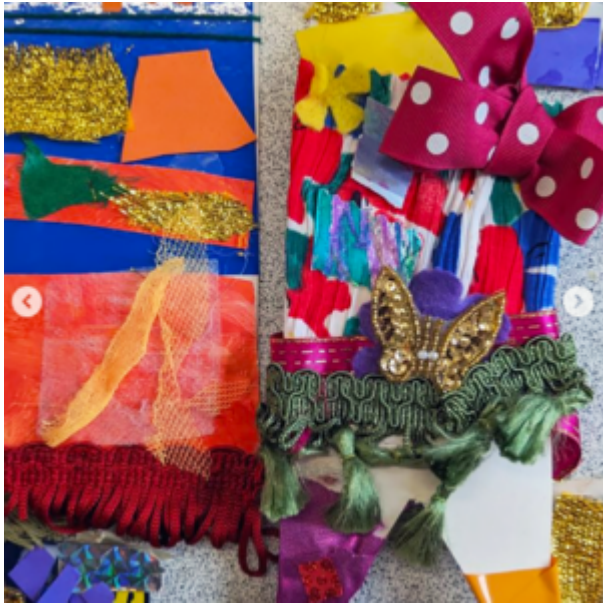
For Remembrance Day

Which Artists: Ava Jolliffe

Creativity Medals

See the Resource Used in
Schools...





What We Like About This Resource...

“The sentiment behind this resource idea is lovely and it provides an opportunity to really develop some fine motor skills as well as independence of approach. Taking ownership of the medal design means the sense of achievement is heightened beyond the children just being given one. You can

really imagine the positive energy that would surround this activity within a classroom, with each child working on a shared project but embarking on their own creative journey.” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

You May Also Like...

Pathway: Playful Making

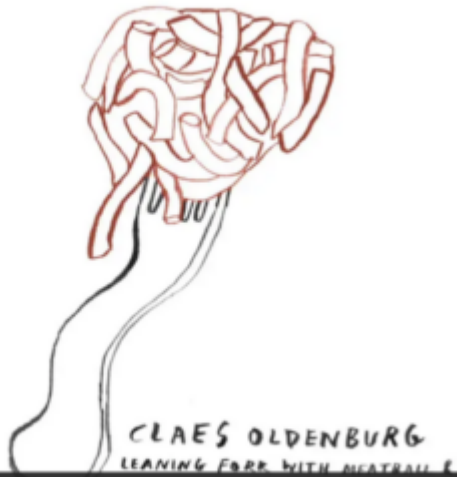


[Featured in the 'Playful Making' pathway](#)

Talking Points: Introduction to sculpture

Sculpture.mp4

1



Clay Art Medals



Talking Points: Nnena Kalu



Talking Points: Linda BELL



Making Musical Instruments

What We Like About This Resource...

“It’s great to see music being explored in this way, and combining it with making creates a really interesting immersive project. This activity would work well as part of an extended project looking at musical instruments around the world and some of the natural materials they are made from.” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

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Pathway: Music and art



[This is featured in the ‘Music and Art’ pathway](#)

Talking Points: Linda BELL



Talking Points: Nnena Kalu



talking points: wassily Kandinsky



drawing source material: orchestras



A Cheerful Orchestra



Touch Wood

What We Like About This Resource...

“You can get a real sense of the environment in this post and how this could provide so much inspiration for creative projects. We are aware there the challenges to exploring the outdoors when many schools are in towns and cities. A way around this could be to have a regular collection of natural objects within the classroom and using them as a stimulus to respond creatively in sketchbooks or in extended projects” – *Andrea, AccessArt*

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Connecting With Nature Through Art

DrawAble: The Secret Powers of Sketchbooks

[By Jo Blaker](#)

Sketchbooks are powerful tools. Enjoy these three

videos in which Jo Blaker shares why sketchbooks have secret powers.

If you are having issues viewing videos it may be due to your schools firewall or your cookie selection. Please check with your IT department.

Sketchbook Powers Number 1 & 2

Secret powers numbers 1 and 2: Jo describes how sketchbooks can be a door into a hidden world, and a place to explore what you feel like as a person.

Sketchbook Power Number 3

Secret power number 2: Sketchbooks can be a weapon; a weapon you can use to fight boredom, ease anxiety, and find gratitude.

Sketchbook Power Number 4

Secret power numbers 4: Sketchbooks can be a laboratory – a safe place to experiment, test and discover.

Be Consistent