

# Balancing Observational & Experimental Drawing

By [Paula Briggs](#).

Drawing takes many forms, and facilitating drawing encompasses a wide variety of activities. To ensure that learners receive a varied and balanced art education, it's important to introduce them to different ways of drawing. We would recommend a balanced approach between activities that develop observational drawing skills and activities that promote more experimental, explorative activities.

It can seem like these two areas, observational and experimental drawing, are opposites, but you will quickly see that actually, one feeds into the other, and very soon, pupils will be drawing on *all* the skills you have taught to develop their drawings.



## Observational Drawing

When children (and adults) say they can't draw, or that their drawing isn't going well, they are often making that judgment because they imagine drawing is about accurate representation. As we will see, drawing is also about experimentation and expression, but to help those who would like to develop observational drawing skills, we need to teach skills in developing how they see the world around them.

Seeing and drawing are closely linked, and we need to help learners slow down and really see, to enable them to draw.

Explore [drawing activities](#) that help learners develop their observational drawing skills, hand-eye coordination, and build an understanding of what drawing can be.

These activities can be revisited time and again (much like a warm-up exercise in a PE lesson), and can be adapted for all year groups.

We'd also strongly advise that you try the activities yourself.



## Experimental Drawing

From a child's first scribbles as a toddler, their drawings are experimental. Continuing to feed this natural impulse is vital. Many of our resources help facilitators and learners continue this exploration. You can visit a list of some of our

[experimental projects here.](#)

Our experimental drawing projects are generally about enabling learners to develop a personal drawing language and to make and follow their own drawing decisions. This can only begin to happen when learners begin to build familiarity with materials and techniques and develop an understanding of what each medium can do for them. So for this reason, we advocate enabling learners to explore media from a very young age, in a loosely structured session.



**Which Comes First: Observational or Experimental?**

We would suggest weaving activities that support the two types of drawing amongst each other, as both activities will help develop skills in the

other. Try to fit in activities from [Ten Minutes, Five Times a Week](#) in the morning, or use key drawing exercises to [warm up](#) before a more experimental drawing session.

Generally, experimental activities will take longer, so plan for these to take place during art-based projects.



---

**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.**

---

**Teaching for the Journey not the Outcome**

---

# A “Wallpaper” Sketchbook – Enabling Drawing by Getting Rid of the White page

---

## The Geometry of Chickens!

See This Resource Used In  
Schools...





---

# **Graphite Sketches of Artist Retreats**

**You May Also Like...**

**Pathway: Mixed Media Land and city scapes**



[This is featured in the 'Mixed Media Land and City Scapes' pathway](#)

**Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner**



**Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher**



## Talking Points: Kittie Jones



---

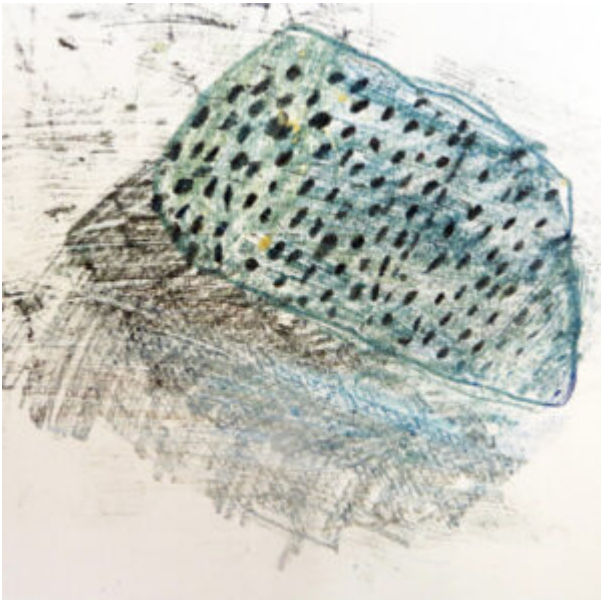
**Using Colour to Develop  
Gestural Drawing**

---

# Backwards Forwards Drawing Exercise

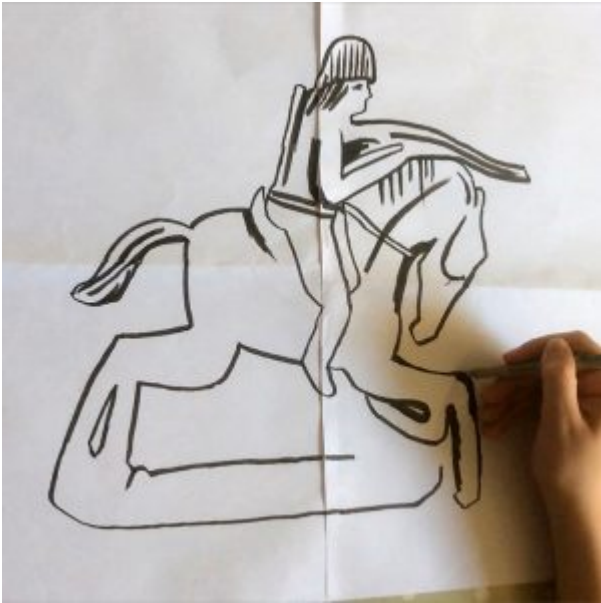
## You May Also Like...

Pathway: Exploring the world through mono print



[This is featured in the 'Exploring The World Through Mono print' pathway](#)

Drawing Large



**Drawing small**



---

## **The Anatomy of a Pencil**

**AccessArt has over 850 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.**

## **You May Also Like...**

**USING SKETCHBOOKS, DRAWING AND REFLECTIVE TOOLS IN THE 20TH CENTURY GALLERY**



**Beginner's Guide to Drawing Materials**



## **Drawing Insects with an H Pencil**



---

## **Animated Walk Cycle**

---

# Animating with Charcoal

---

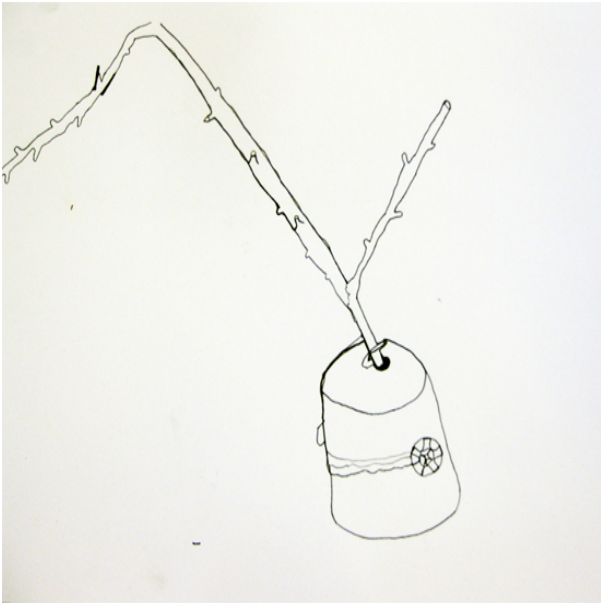
## Drawing with Objects by Melissa Pierce Murray

Teenagers explore ideas of placement with artist Melissa P Murray by arranging or assembling objects to make compositions or maquettes.

---

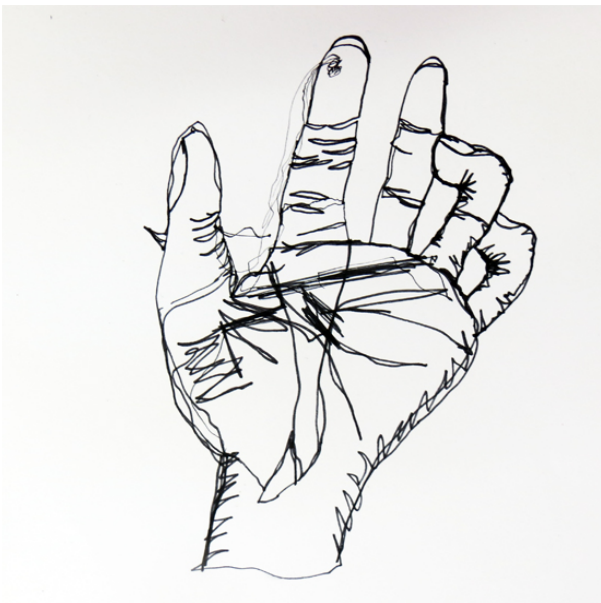
## Visual Arts Planning: Exploring Line

Continuous Line Drawings (Squiggle Drawings) of Sticks



A great warm-up exercise for all ages – whatever their level of experience, continuous line drawings are a very useful way to get children (and adults) to tune into their subject matter and quieten ready for drawing.

## **Drawing hands**



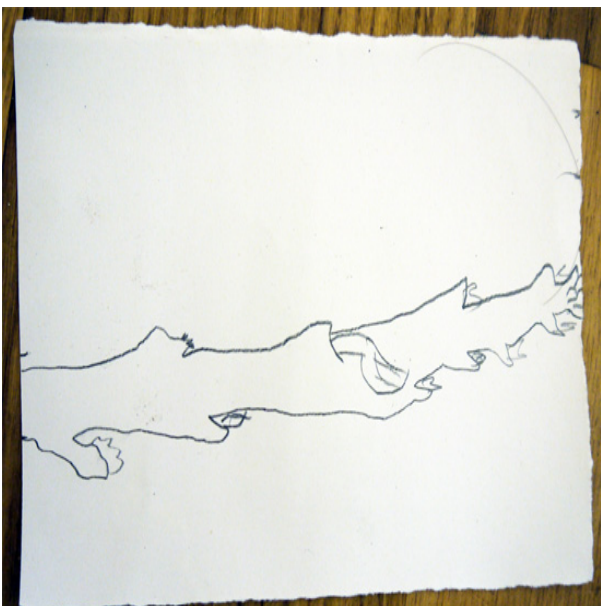
Another warm-up exercise that can be done anywhere! Drawing your own or someone else's hand in continuous line can be a very useful way to explore concave shapes for sculptural/making projects such as nests and bowls.

## **Warm-Up Drawing Exercise: Drawing Spirals**



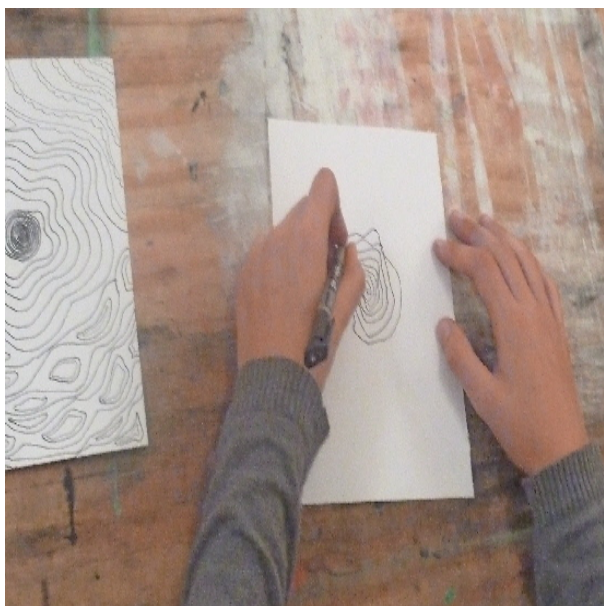
\_A great warm-up/ice breaker to use at the start of a drawing workshop for both adults and children. As well as getting participants to start making marks on the paper without worry or mental blocks, this simple exercise aims to introduce participants to the idea that drawing and mark making comes from the finger tip, wrist, elbow, shoulder and whole body.

## **Quick Drawing Exercise: Helping Children to Draw Larger!**



\_A quick 5minute drawing exercise to encourage children to work large and make their drawing fill the page.

## Right Hand, Left Hand – Non Dominant Hand Drawing Exercise



[\\_](#)Practising drawing with your 'none dominant' hand, (right hand if you are left handed, left hand if you are right handed), can be a useful strategy for loosening up and for experimenting with the potential of mark making without worrying about the outcome. Another excellent ice-breaker for accessing drawing processes across all mediums.

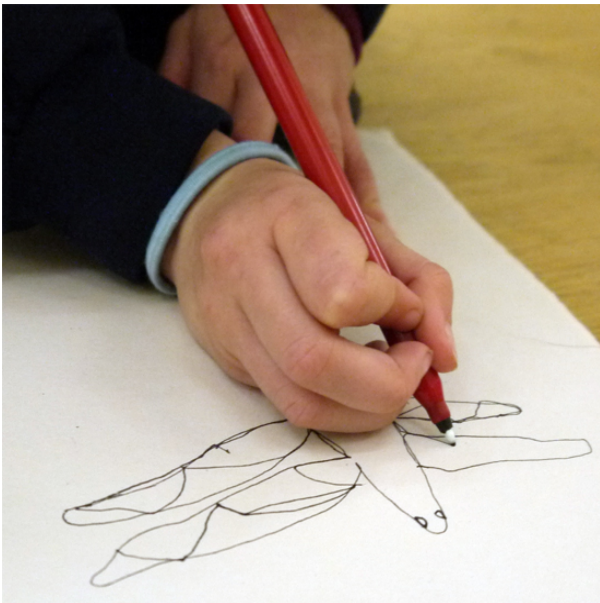
## Making a Shy Drawing – Drawing Exercises for Beginners



[\\_](#)This resource shares unusual yet

accessible drawing exercises for beginners. How can we change the nature of the drawings we make – how would we make a “shy” drawing? These exercises and suggestions provide a focus which enables pupils and teachers to explore different aspects of making a drawing, including sound, action and intention.

## **Drawing Minibeasts – using a continuous line, graphite and oil pastel**



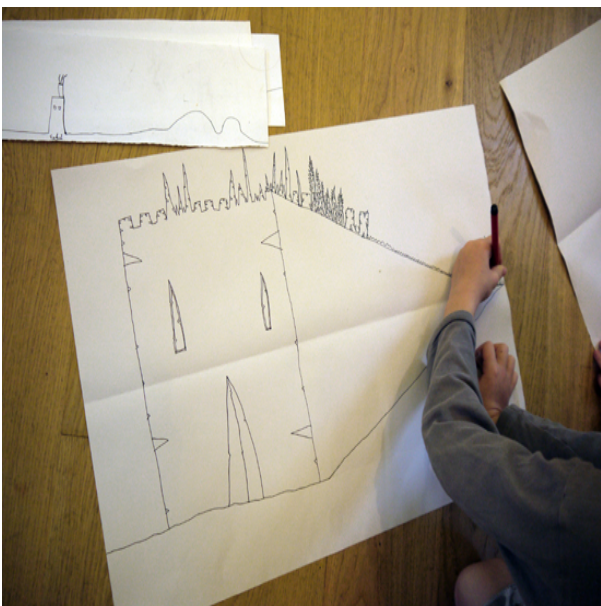
Using images of insects as inspiration, children make 4minute continuous line drawings in pen as a warm-up exercise to encourage close looking and to get their fingers moving.

## **One Line Street Scene: A Visualisation Warm Up Drawing exercise**



Another fun variation on the continuous line warm-up exercise: children made a drawing consisting of a single line, which started at the left hand side of the page, and finished at the right hand side. The subject matter was a street scene, which they visualised by listening to details of the buildings/objects that they would meet. The results were beautiful and the children enjoyed their journey!

## Simple Perspective Art Lesson for Young Children



Following on from the above exercise, this resource introduces children (aged 6 to 10) to the basics of perspective in relation to drawing architecture.

They learn some simple rules of perspective drawing, before being given plenty of opportunity to develop their drawings on their own.

## **Making a Blind Contour Drawing**



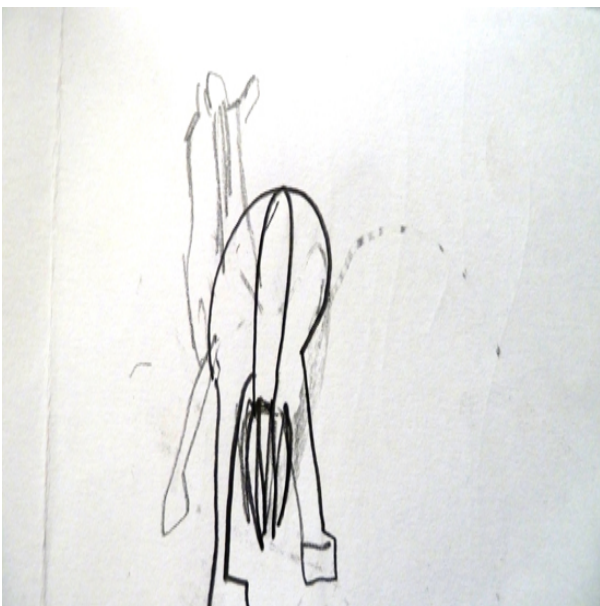
\_This is a classic drawing exercise to use with all ages & all abilities and helps you focus upon careful looking, without the worry of what your drawing looks like. In this resource we describe the process and suggest some suitable subject matter and drawing materials.

## **Minimalising: Using Simple Line Drawings to Explore Sculptural Form**



Teenagers explore form using a reductive or minimalising approach to drawing. They were encouraged to create a series of drawings in quick succession, using a limited number of lines to record their objects. For each subsequent drawing, they dropped a line, starting with a seven line drawing and working down to a drawing in one line. This exercise was to get students thinking about essential, sculptural elements in their constructions and drawings.

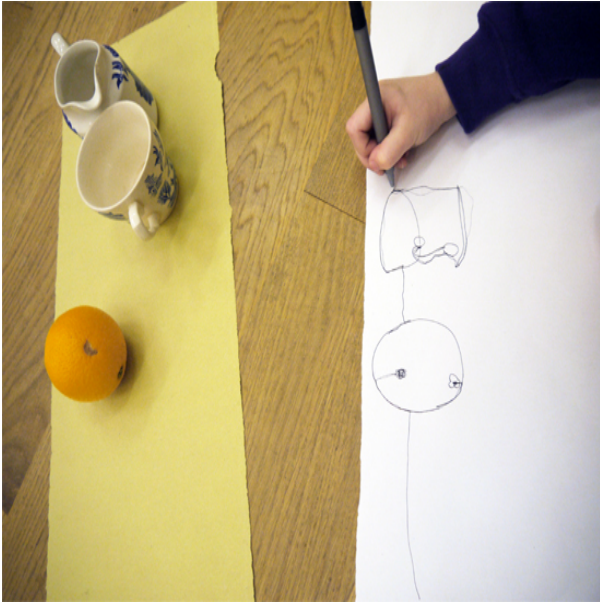
## Exercise to Introduce Foreshortening and Volume in Line Drawings



This workshop introduces children aged 10 to 13 to foreshortening but can be adapted for groups or individuals and is appropriate for all age

groups. The activity enables students to find a way to facilitate the development of volume in their line drawings. They work 'small and quick' to encourage 'doing without thinking' (and worrying!).

## **Tackling Still Life for Children Part 1 – Continuous Line Drawing**



In the first of a three part workshop on painting a still life, children gain familiarity with the objects by making continuous line drawings. As well as tuning into the subject matter, the drawing exercises also encourage the children to consider the shape and dimensions of the canvases right from the start.

## **Drawing Skulls in Black Pen**



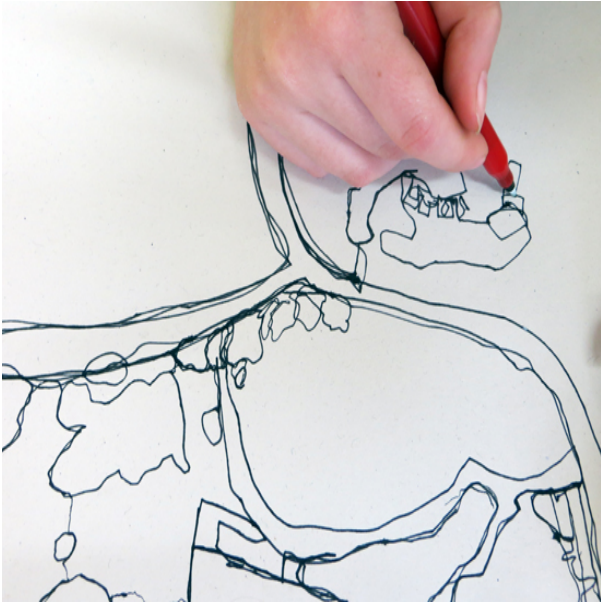
This workshop on drawing skulls was about looking and the re-examination of marks and lines. Students used black pen to create continuous line drawings on A1 paper.

## **Still Life Drawing in a Cubist Style Using Carbon Paper**



A fun workshop and a great way to study still life and explore Cubist ideas of 'temporal frames' and drawing 'time and space'. Different views of the same glass objects are captured through drawings made with carbon paper, to produce a composite drawing of a still life.

## Inspired by Google Earth: Drawing



A session suitable for all ages, continuous line drawings are used to gather information taking inspiration was taken from Google earth images. A variety of media were then explored to extend and develop the drawings,

## Drawing and Making Flowers



A beautifully structured resource which shares how drawing can be used to enable children to familiarise themselves with flower anatomy. Children are given the opportunity to develop their observations and ideas in three dimensions by making flowers with paper and wire.

# Quentin Blake's Drawings as Inspiration!



\_\_Taking Quentin Blake's drawings as a starting point for simple exercises, children make drawings from life using line and explore how they might use exaggeration as a tool to help them convey the intention of their drawing. During the session, the children are encouraged to take risks and try new ways of working.

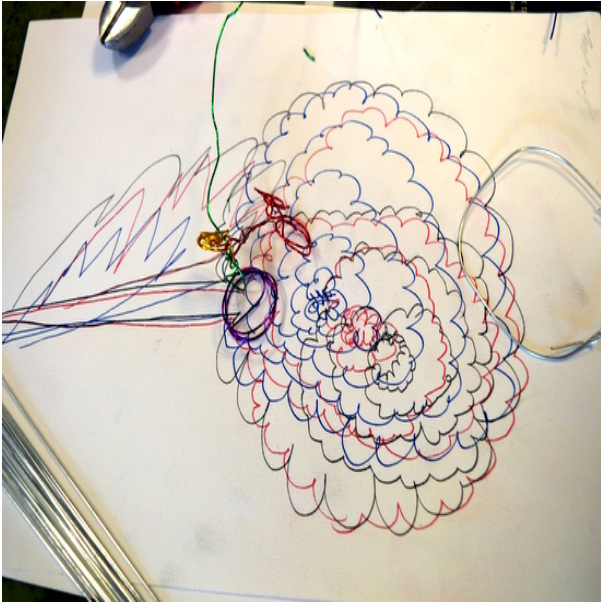
## Inspired by Henri Matisse – Repetitive Life Drawing Exercise



\_\_This workshop encourages students to challenge pre-conceived ideas of what a drawing should be or what finished drawings should look like. By

making drawings of each other they can experiment with line and expression, inspired by the working practice of Henri Matisse, who often drew an object or life pose many times in succession.

## **Red to Green: Patterns in Nature, Line and Wire**



One of a series of workshops by Accessart at Red2Green using drawing to explore designs and patterns in nature, followed by a making session using wire to extend ideas into 3D.

## **Drawing Insects in Wire and Tracing Shadows in Black Pen**



Students use modelling wire to 'draw' an insect from their first drawings in black pen. The purpose of this exercise was to help them see and draw form and to think about the quality of line achievable in black pen. It was also an exercise in simple abstraction or simplification of subject matter.

## Drawing with Wire



Teenagers in AccessArt's Experimental Drawing Class explore drawing their bodies with wire. They were asked to think about how they feel physically from within and try and find a way of expressing that with wire. The exercise was about finding a way to 'represent' physical sensations using form.

## **Drawing with Wire like Calder, and Backwards Forwards Sketching**



An exciting resource based on the work of Alexander Calder. Children make drawings of their own toys, which are then interpreted in fine wire – an introduction to the tricky business of drawing in space!

## **Standing Up! – Making Vertical Sculptures and Working from the Base**



Teenagers are challenged to create sculpture that was able to stand up and to explore how tall the sculpture could be before it fell down. They experimented with elegant solutions to make their wire forms

stand, considering also the relationship between its base and the surface it was standing on.

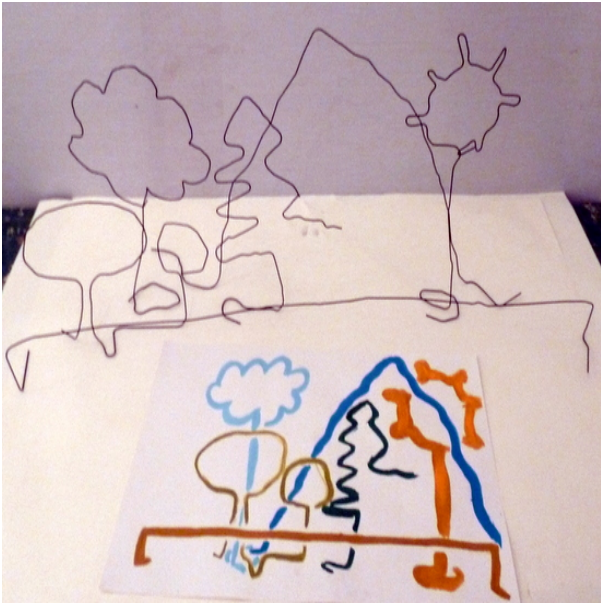
This was also an opportunity to explore construction materials and finding the right materials for the job.

## **Reaching the Limit: Making Tall Sculptures and Stretching Materials**



Following on from working with the vertical in *Standing Up!* – *Introducing the Vertical and Working from the Base*, students were pushed to further develop their understanding of sculptural relationships such as balance, the object's relationship with the ground and how to build elegant, vertical structures. They were set the challenge of building a sculpture or structure, which was as tall or taller than themselves, working with basic (and quite flimsy) construction materials, in an hour.

## **Landscape Sculptures in Wire and Mixed Media: Working Through Ideas**



Teenagers work from the theme of landscape exploring rhythm and movement in wire, drawing from their sculptures and making simultaneously. They were introduced to modelling wire and modroc as construction materials – paper, drawing and collaging materials were also readily available.

## Withy Sculptures



Traditionally used for basket weaving and garden sculpture, withies, or willow sticks, are a versatile construction material, ideal for exploring sculptural form and 'drawing in space' with line.

## Drawing with Wire: The Polymeric Approach by Julie de Bastion



Artist Julie de Bastion shares a wonderful workshop that enabled participants to create a “drawing within a drawer” making delightful “Story Boxes” involving 3D drawing with flexible black wire, and drawing with mono-printing.

## Drawing Space/Drawing in Space



In Western art, we use the term ‘negative space’ to talk about the areas between objects on the page/canvas but this tends to convey quite a static idea of space. There is a Japanese word, ‘ma’ (間), that suggests a

more evocative and dynamic spatial experience and it was this concept that inspired this workshop, in which teenagers made three dimensional line drawings to explore the space around them.

## **Teachers Explore 'Line and Shape' at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge with AccessArt**



  In the spring and summer of 2016, Paula Briggs and Sheila Ceccarelli from AccessArt and Kate Noble from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge to create and deliver a series of InSET sessions (in-service-training) for primary school teachers.

The aim was to fuse top Museum Education practice with practical, hands on learning in Fine Art disciplines including: drawing, printmaking, sketchbooks, collage and sculpture.

---

# Review: Scolaquip Canvas Effect Frames



Every now and again we come across a product which we've not seen before but which makes perfect sense, and when we first saw these amazing foldable art canvases from [Scolaquip](#) we knew a lot of people would love them!

The market is flooded with canvases at accessible prices, which is great, and children and teenagers really enjoy using them. The problem especially for schools, is that they are bulky and take up precious storage space. So whoever thought of creating a canvas which is flat but which folds to a durable frame is a genius!

UK manufacturer Scolaquip is the only supplier of these nifty canvases. They come in two sizes: A4 and A5, and packs of 30.

AccessArt has trialled the canvases with different age groups and they have been a real hit with everyone who sees them. They have lots of great features, including:





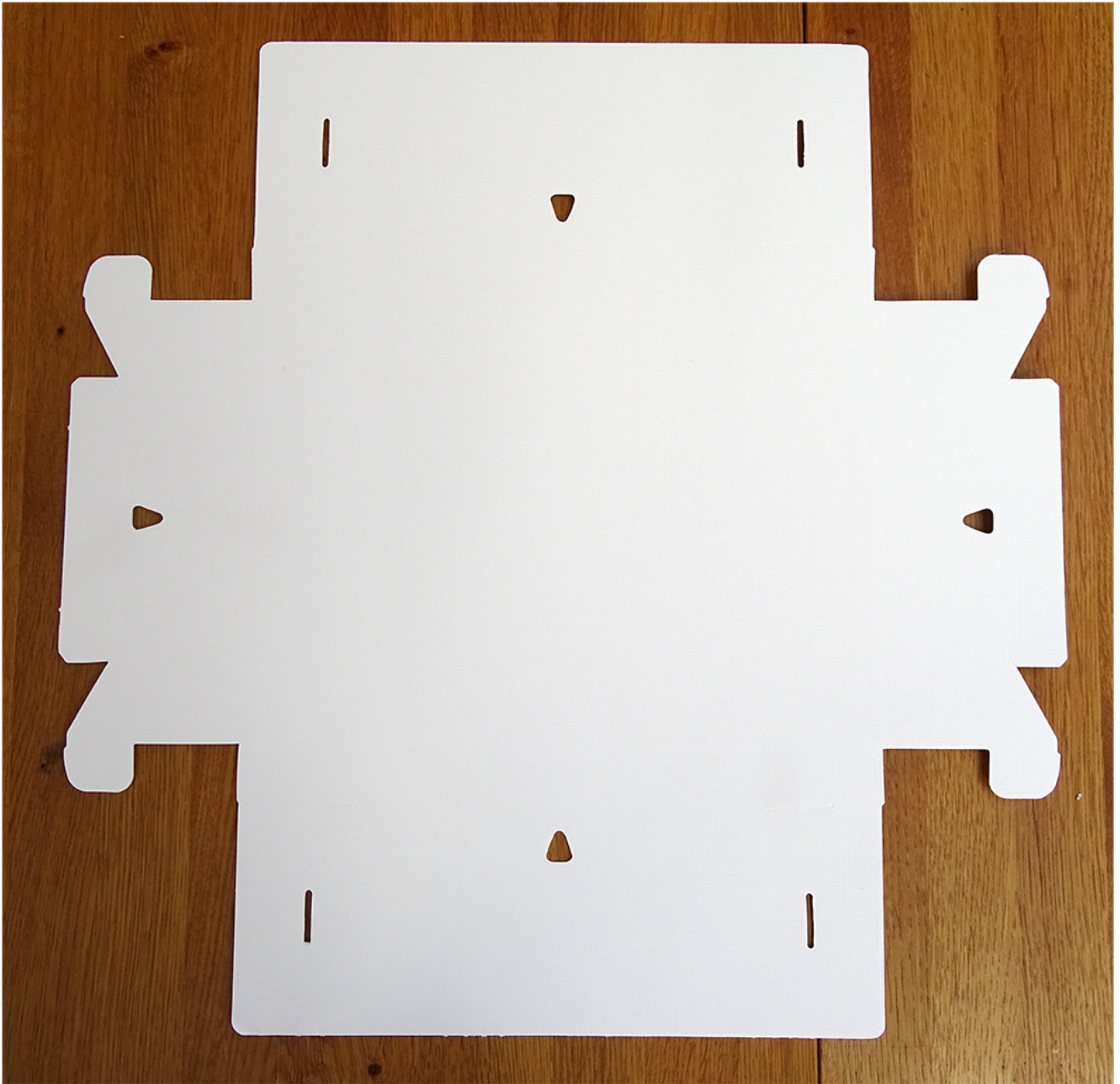
- They are so solid. Even when unfolded, they can be used to draw or paint upon without the need for any kind of drawing board behind, even when drawing at an angle. When folded they feel substantial and strong.



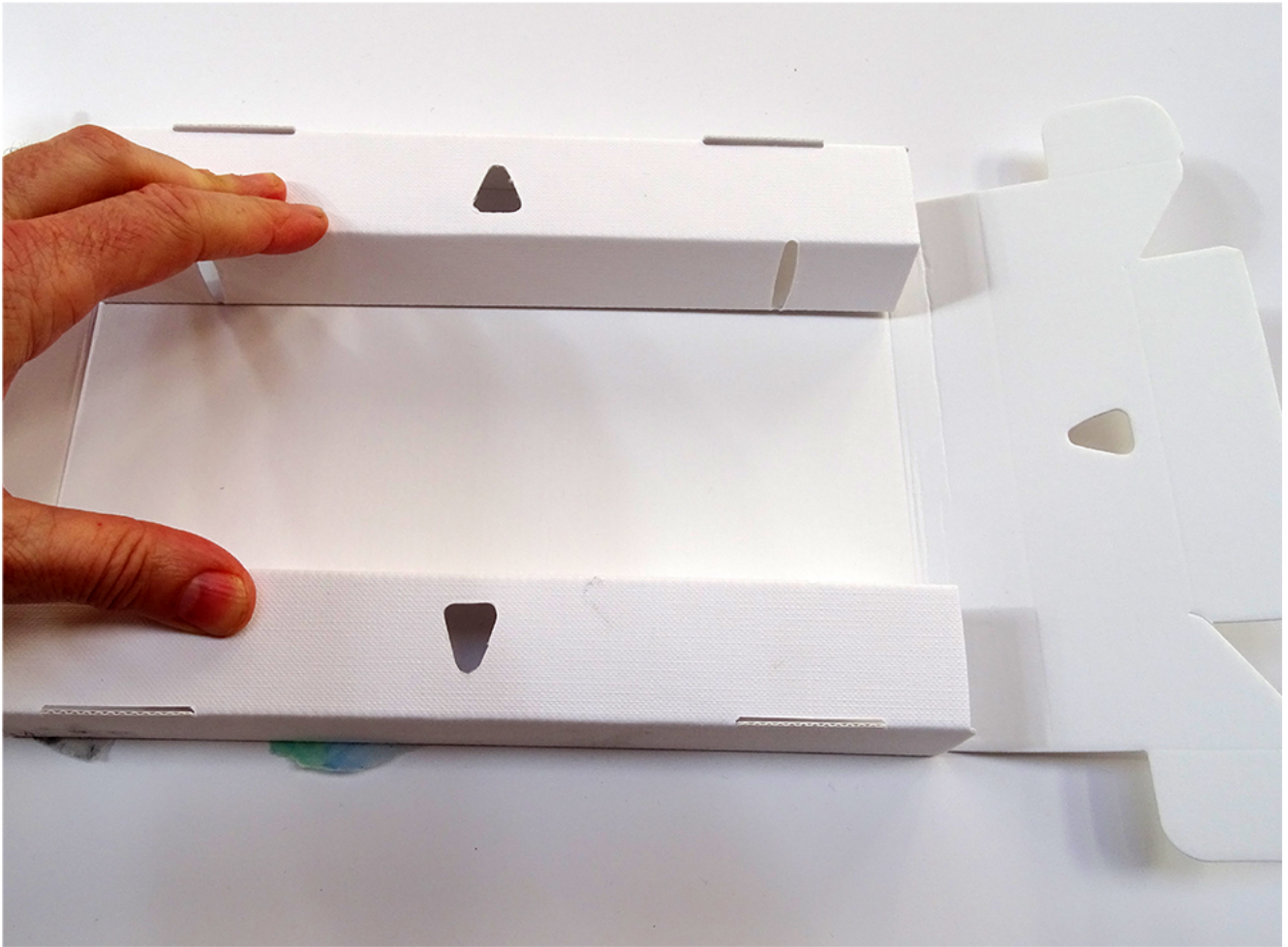
- They have a lovely textured surface



- They don't buckle even with wet paint.



- Easy to store due to their flatness. Light weight.



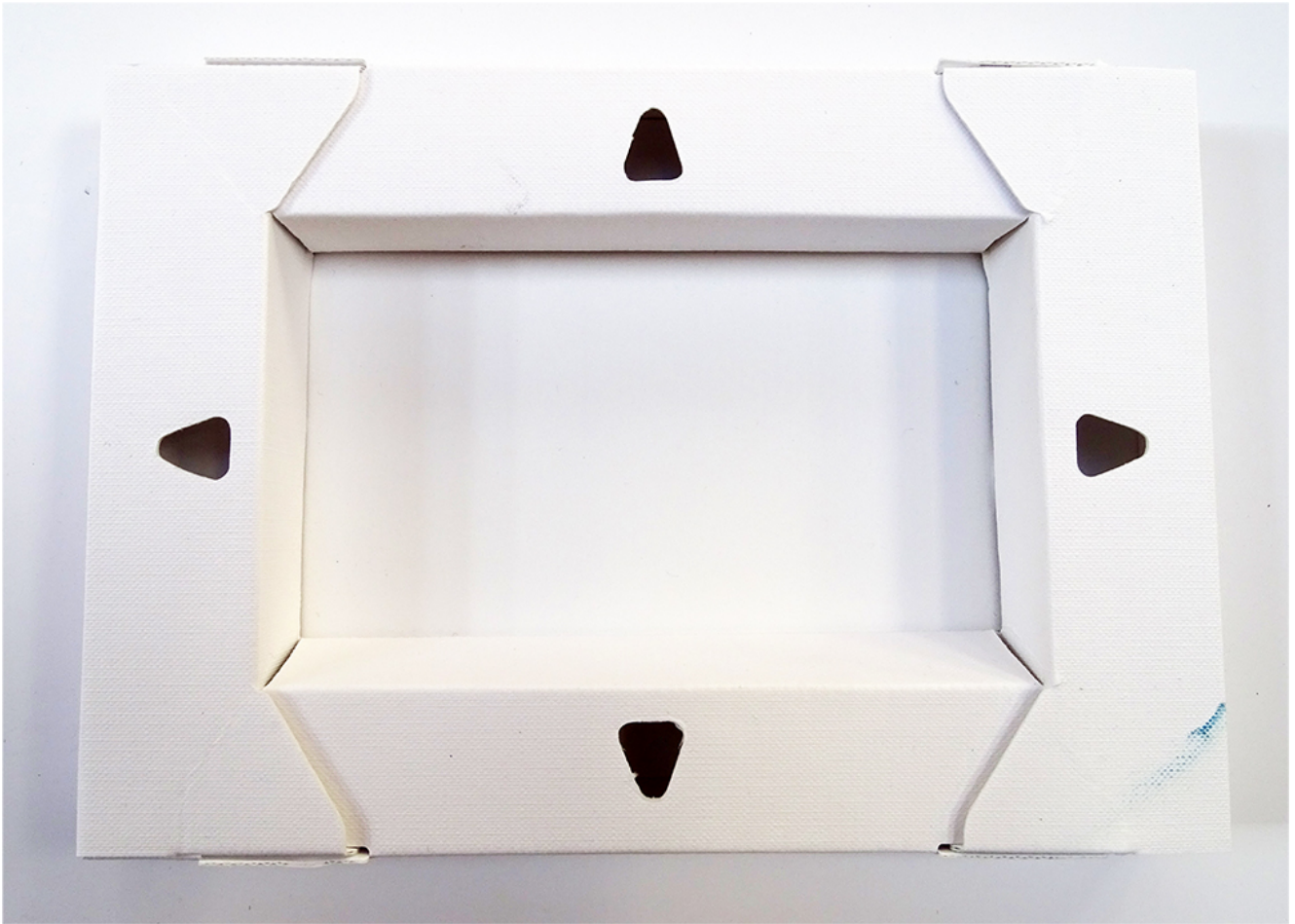
- Easy to fold – there's even a video to help you along.







- They bring with them lots of creative potential. You can paint on them before or after you fold them. Use the “canvas” side, or reverse it and use the interior as a frame. Make 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional work. You can also of course paint the edges of the canvas.



- They have ready made holes for hanging.
- 100% recyclable



---

# **Teenagers Experiment with Glow in the Dark Paint and Rice with Artist Melissa Pierce Murray**

teenagers at AccessArt's Experimental Drawing Class, I brought in UV reactive paint and markers, and surprised students by turning off the lights and shining a UV torch on the palates.

---

# AccessArt helps teachers at Belvue School to get ready for a Drawing Week

[Back to InSET & CPD](#)

## Teachers Battle it Out in Conversation with Marks on Paper



Teachers embarked on an exercise whereby they made marks on paper to have a conversation with a partner. This was a playful and fun exercise and teachers very much enjoyed both the process and outcomes.

## Teachers Explore Pattern, Shape & Texture with Charcoal, Graphite, Masking Tape and

# Pastels



This was the second session in the series and an introduction to pattern, shape and texture with charcoal and graphite, and an opportunity for teachers to break down any preconceived ideas about what drawing is and who drawing processes is for.

## **Play and Placement: Teachers Explore Approaches to Drawing**



This was the third and final session in the series, and an opportunity to play with creative mark-making and explore context and placement as an introduction to larger scale

drawing and concepts around installation art.

**UK Charity 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.**

**Join AccessArt from only £3.50 per month and enjoy full access to hundreds more resources!**

---

## **Teachers Battle it Out in Conversation with Marks on Paper**

After a series of warm up exercises which introduced drawing through feel, teachers embarked on an exercise whereby they made marks on paper to have a conversation with a partner.

---

# Landscape Painting: Tone in the Landscape

---

## Landscape Painting: A Collection of Resources by Hester Berry



Explore these resources created by artist [Hester Berry](#), to develop your develop technique, observation, and good practice in painting and drawing when approaching the landscape as a subject.

The series begins with suggestions for how to keep

a sketchbook followed by exercises in drawing and painting.

We hope that these exciting resources will inspire you to experiment with materials and techniques and enable you to discover your own visual language for drawing and painting the landscape.

Explore Hester Berry's resources to help build upon [drawing and painting from life](#).

**Explore the basics....**

**Develop your understanding of landscape painting**

**Introduction to Landscape by Hester Berry**



[An exercise in looking and discovering](#)

**Landscape Painting: Tone in the Landscape**



## Explore tone in the landscape

**Landscape Painting: Plein Air Painting**



## Explore what 'Plein Air' means

**Landscape Painting: Colour in the Landscape**



[Simplify colour by breaking it down](#)

**Landscape Painting: Expressive mark Making**



[Practice and hone technical skills](#)

---

# **Arts and Minds: Drawing for Mindfulness**

---

## **Arts and Minds: Feeling Through Drawing**