

aspex portsmouth

Getting started with art:

A resource for carers of people with dementia

Commissioned by Aspex



HM Government

In partnership with

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND

Supported by



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL



Supported using public funding by

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

Aspex has been running *Generate*, a programme for people with dementia and their carers since 2015. The programme provides people with dementia weekly visual arts workshops at the gallery in Portsmouth, with a self-run carers support group taking place simultaneously in our cafe.

Over the past five years we have seen such wonderful benefits from this group and the impact it has had on so many people. Many of our participants join us with no arts background and those who do have some experience, may not have participated in many years, or due to their condition may no longer be able to participate in the same way. However, we see how quickly people can develop their skills and gain such confidence and enjoyment through arts activities and as a group they produce some outstanding work.

Up until March 2020, our carers group was very much focused on providing some respite and opportunity to chat and share experiences. However, when we went into lockdown things changed dramatically. While we wanted to remain in contact with all our participants and encourage them to keep being creative from home, we had to be much more reliant on carers for communication and support and we know how difficult this can be, particularly at a time when carers are already under so much pressure.

In response to this, we have developed a series of resources which we hope will support carers in feeling confident to instigate arts activities with those they are caring for. We don't expect you to be artists - we have provided really simple practical advice and ideas of activities which you can adapt and try at home.

Thank you to our wonderful *Generate* artists Abi Wheeler & Roy Eneas, as well as guest artist Kim Whitby, for sharing their knowledge and experiences to enable us to create these resources.

Funding from the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, has helped us to deliver this work. Thanks to the Government for making this possible.

Vicky Chapter
Learning Programme Manager
January 2021

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED pages 2-6

CHAPTER 2: DRAWING AND PAINTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES pages 7-12

CHAPTER 3: A VIRTUAL TRIP TO THE BEACH pages 13-15

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

Getting started can often be a challenge for some of our Generate participants. This section will look at how to support your partner or parent to engage with some creative work. We'll look at the basics of setting up a space, selecting inspiration and the tools that you can use to encourage engagement and development. The content for this section draws on our experience differentiating support and resources for each individual depending on their interests, the physiological impact of dementia on how they work, and their emotional state of being on that day. Obviously, everyone is different so I've tried to provide a range of approaches that allows for varying degrees of creative confidence and experience, and some common stumbling blocks.

Created by Abi Wheeler

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Over the years, feedback from our participants and carers has highlighted that the routine of Friday mornings provides structure to the week. For our participants, the association of the physical space at Aspex and the time slot, provides a trigger for doing a creative activity.



Most of the group don't do any creative work outside of this place and time. With this in mind, it might be helpful to create a space that you always use for creative work and try to do this at the same time every week. It can be tiny. Think of the small work areas that each person has around the table at Aspex!

- If you have an easel or a recipe stand or even a bit of board to tape some paper to, this can be a more comfortable way of working than leaning over to work on a flat surface. It's entirely personal preference but most participants like a tilted surface with any inspirational resources also propped up for better visibility.
- The scale of working is also a personal preference. Barbara for example, likes to work BIG! but this is a bit overwhelming for most people and A4 is generally a comfortable size. Some of our participants have experienced changes to their perception and will start in one corner of a page, often working outside of the paper onto the surface underneath. This was true of Martin for example, and we started to use old picture mounts, in stronger contrast colours that we taped onto the paper. This creates a working area that could be identified through touch as well as easier to see visually.
- Having said that, there's much to be said for going with the natural changes in perception and an alternative can be to watch the progression of work and as the drawing or painting nears the edge of a page, slide a sheet of paper underneath so that it overlaps the first one and this will extend the drawing space. This is what we did for Gill and the end result was a beautiful line drawing that spanned several pieces of paper taped together as the work evolved.



Example of Gill's extended paper artwork

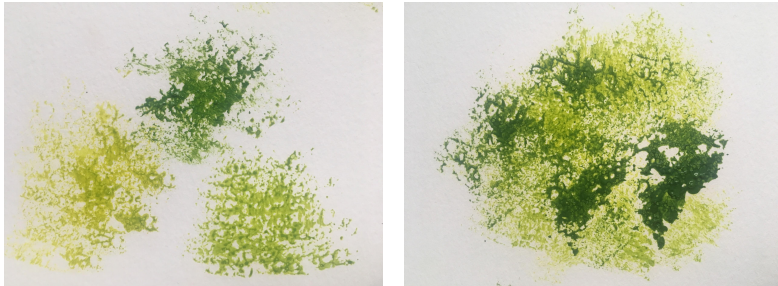
MATERIALS

Most people that have been attending for some time have a preference on the materials that they want to use. What can be overwhelming is too much choice, so Roy and I prepare the work areas with a small selection of materials based on how people like to work.

- For most, a soft B pencil is used regularly. For those who like to work with acrylic paint, we usually pre-prepare a palette of colours. If someone is using an image or photo as inspiration, we pick out one area of that image and select the colours for that area first, rather than getting all the colours in the whole image ready at once. This helps keep focus and it's not overwhelming when it comes to making selections. Of course, there are other participants that can make confident selections of colour and are happy with an entire pack of paints from which to make their own choices.
- Gill, Len and Roger are examples of people that have developed a strong sense of creative style through their choice of materials. Although we experimented with a range of drawing implements, Gill's preference was for soft pencil as it could be erased, was dense in colour and provided a bold contrast to the white page underneath. Len faced some challenges with dexterity and found it hard to hold a narrow pencil or fine-liner pen. We swapped these for a chunky black marker pen which enabled Len to draw with far more confidence and fluidity. Although Roger has experimented with all sorts of media over the years, he returns most frequently to a set of coloured marker pens which enable him to work with more precision.
- For painters, sometimes there are more interesting alternatives to a brush and some participants find these more engaging to use. If you're using an image as inspiration look at the textures in the picture and see if there's something else to use that might create that effect. Ray was struggling with painting trees and so we found a small selection of different textured sponges that created the impression of foliage. Ray then worked on top of that effect to add in branches and a little more detail. Sometimes the suggestion of something is far more effective and satisfying than trying to reproduce a subject ever so accurately.

EXAMPLE

In this image, taken from a newspaper, the foliage in the foreground is full of textures. Look for something around your home that can give a speckled texture when paint is applied. Below you can see how I've used a sponge to create a similar texture.



After letting it dry, I then used a little less paint and a lighter colour to add the highlights and different tones within the planting.



INSPIRATION

There are some members of our group who have an inexhaustible imagination. Ray conjures up English pastoral scenes and seascapes that are entirely his own creations. Roger's intricate line drawings often reveal a subject as they are being created.

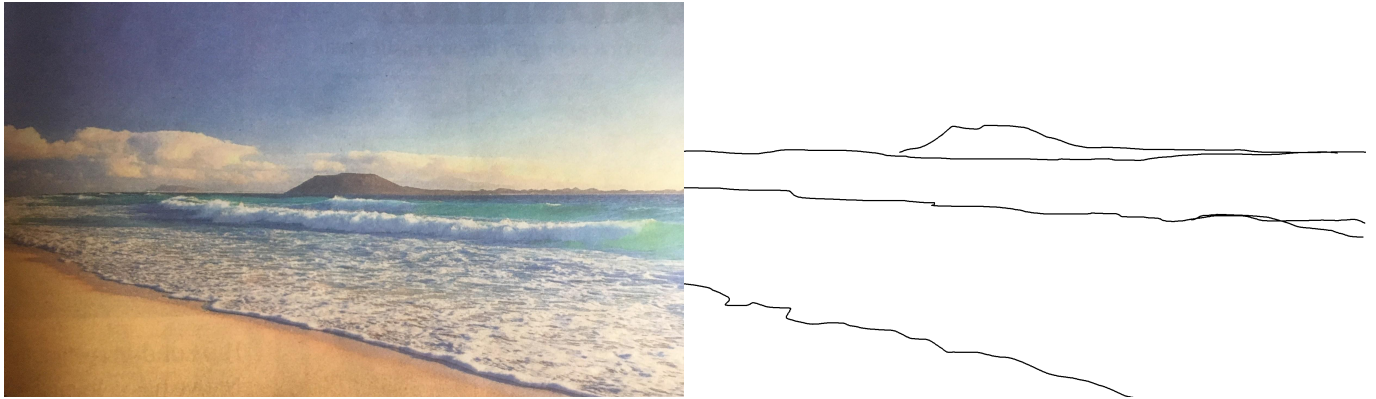


Most of the group however, prefer to have a visual resource to work from and this can be someone else's painting or drawing, a photograph, a sketch, a picture from the newspaper etc.

- Making a decision about what to draw or paint can be the biggest stumbling block for some people. Selecting something from a book or even choosing between two types of subject like a still life and a landscape can feel completely overwhelming. If this is the case, choose an image that has clearly definable areas that can be worked on in sections.

EXAMPLE

If you are working with someone that lacks confidence or needs some support putting pencil or paint to page, draw in the main lines of the image for them. Instinctively, we tend to make these faint but in most cases you'll need to make these lines bolder so that the sections of the image are clearly marked out. It does not matter at all if your lines are a bit squiffy!



To get someone started, select one area of the image to work on first, using the colour palette or single colour ready prepared. For most this is enough, but if someone needs either a bit more encouragement or even a push to be slightly more ambitious, you could demonstrate how to use the brush or pencil to create a certain texture. I often have a scrap of paper to one side to try things out first before showing someone else. This makes it less confusing and means that the instructions you give are clear and uncomplicated. Below are examples of tests with oil pastels and watercolour pencils.



WHEN TO STEP IN AND WHEN TO STEP BACK

Over the last few years, we've witnessed some recurring reasons for difficulty starting or continuing with work and occasionally, reasons for distress. Here are some common reasons why people are unable to engage with their work:

- Difficulty making decisions
- Impermanence of media
- Too much space to fill
- Forgetting what they are doing or why they are doing it
- Needing the physical presence and encouragement of someone else
- Frustration at not being able to do things with precision or to a perceived standard

In most cases there's always something you can try to help get over a momentary stumbling block and enable the person in your care to continue with what they are doing.

- Always try and demonstrate and then ask the person to have a go themselves. This builds confidence and in turn, a sense of independence.
- If you've carefully shown someone how to do something and then they go at it in a different way but they are happy, try to avoid correcting them. Our perceptions of the world are different person to person and this is acutely pertinent with dementia. Creative outputs are a means of communicating about the way we experience the world and this is a liberating thing when written and verbal communication becomes a challenge.

CHAPTER 2: DRAWING AND PAINTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

This section covers some of the materials needed, basic techniques and aids you could use to help your Artist with dementia with their painting and drawing.

Written by Roy Eneas

MATERIALS

BRUSHES, PENCILS AND AIDS

Brushes: A good 'Student' set of brushes, consisting of; large brush size 12, medium size 8 or 6, fine size 2 or 3. These brushes will be suitable for watercolour and gouache paints.

Pencils: Soft pencils in the 'B' range, HB, 2B, 4B, 6B or pure Graphite pencils.

Marker and Gel pens: Great for 'colouring' and for line drawings, clean to use, nice bright colours, huge range of colours.



HELPING DEXTERITY

Sometimes the artist will have a problem with holding and controlling a pencil or paintbrush. With Vascular dementia the artist may have suffered a stroke, which makes holding a paintbrush, at first, difficult again, with that in mind, there are small things to do to improve ease of holding and handling a pencil or paintbrush. Pushing a paintbrush or pencil into an appropriate size polystyrene ball, not only allows the pencil or brush to be easily seen and picked up, but the whole hand can hold the brush or pencil and guide it with more confidence.

WATER POTS

- Try not to use a drinking Glass, Mug or Cup as a water pot, better to use a water pot designed for younger artists, not only are they colourful, wide mouthed, non spill, but are significantly different from a drinking vessel, so as to hopefully not be confused with something to drink from.

PAINT PALETTES

- Large, individual well paint palettes are the ideal thing for mixing and holding paint colours from tubes or bottles. Colours can be easily identified and seen, we use these with our Generate Artists - there is nothing like a large splodge of colour ready for their brush.

APRON

• An apron is not only useful to protect clothes from paint spills, but can help the artist to get into 'Artist' mode, Abi and I find with the Generate group that laying out aprons for participants encourages the initiation of getting into 'Art mode' and being prepared to start their artwork. Participants tend to prefer a certain apron to wear, which becomes important to them.

WATERCOLOUR PAINTS

Watercolour paints come in either tubes or pans. A watercolour box of half pans, is a great place to start as they are easier to use, store, and need less preparation than tubes. They are also more cost effective.

Suggested Colour Palette if choosing tubes of watercolours:

Cadmium Red, Cadmium Yellow, Cobalt Blue, Prussian Blue, Viridian (Green), Ivory, Black.



PAPER & DRAWING SURFACES

Depending on what medium is being used, there are several suitable surfaces for drawing and painting.

WATERCOLOUR PAPER

• For watercolour paints and gouache, watercolour paper is the most suitable, as it has high absorbency, the paints tend not to run as much, and it will dry faster. It is available in pads or blocks of several sheets, A4 is a popular size. Watercolour paper can also be used for pencil drawing, has a slightly rough surface, which can give a less defined pencil line if needed.

CARTRIDGE PAPER

• For pencil drawing, gel pens and marker pens, cartridge paper is a good all round surface.

SUGAR PAPER

• This paper is good for pencil drawing and pastels, it can come in various colours, is inexpensive, and can come in large sheets.

TRACING PAPER

• Tracing paper is useful for laying over a favourite picture to either trace the picture onto for transfer, or can be painted on directly. This method will be explained in more detail in the Painting Techniques section. Tracing paper usually available in A4 and A3 pads.

CANVAS OR CANVAS BOARD

• This surface is used for oil paints and acrylic paints either as a stretched canvas on a support frame, or as canvas that has been stuck to cardboard. This is the traditional 'Artists painting surface' and is usually ready 'primed' for oil paints or acrylic paints. It is a hard wearing surface, and can be painted over again once the oil or acrylic paint is dry.

TECHNIQUES

PAINTING WITH BLOCKS OF COLOUR

In this section we shall cover painting using either gouache paint, acrylic or poster paints, all of which are paints with a solid colour, are mixable and quick drying.

This is a technique of painting with bands of colour, either blended or as solid stripes



Using paper or card to mask off areas



Blending solid colours: while the paint is still wet, you can use a dry brush to blend bands of colours, this can be used either as an abstract painting on its own, or as the basis of a more detailed painting, by overlaying details to form a landscape painting to convey distance within the painting



Adding details



Completed painting



TRACING PAPER

Tracing paper is very useful for laying over a favourite picture and either tracing the picture or for direct painting or drawing onto.



Placing Tracing Paper over selected picture: choose a picture that has a lot of contrast in it, with many colours within it.



Watercolour paint is probably the better medium to use for this technique, as the original picture can still be seen through the tracing paper, and you can overlay washes of watercolour.



You can also add in details using a pen, pencil or watercolour pencil.
The tracing paper can either be left attached to the original picture to give a very detailed completed painting, or attached to a plain paper background.

CHAPTER 3: A VIRTUAL TRIP TO THE BEACH

The aim of the activity in this section is to make observational drawings and paintings using water-based media whilst using ourselves as life models. A fun activity and opportunity to take a virtual trip down memory lane - and have a paddle at the beach!

Created by Kim Whitby

YOU WILL NEED...

Watercolour paper and cartridge paper - in a pad or on a drawing board

Pencil

Water-based paint – watercolour or acrylic paint/gouache/poster paint or anything you can dilute in water such as soluble pencil, ink, ink cartridge, tea, coffee - *anything watery will have the advantage of a splashing sound when brushes are washed to add to the multi-sensory activity*

Water

Brushes

Water pot

Mixing palette or plate

Some tissue or kitchen paper

Biro



ADDITIONAL PROPS...

- A chair where feet can paddle in the bowl when seated, and are in view so that they can be drawn. We are going to be our own models.

Alternatively artists may wear sandals or beach shoes with feet raised into view e.g. on the sofa.

- Plastic washing-up bowl

- Warm water

- Beach towel

- Helpers or carers; Please add to this by selecting additional items which make the virtual trip more meaningful to your artist.

For example; shells, stones, scented suncream, picnic items such as a flask, sun hat, flip-flops, deckchair, bucket and spade...or any other items you may have taken to the beach in the past.

Think about things which may have sounds, smells, textures, tastes to help create the feeling of a virtual outing!

If your artist is not a fan of the beach, you could think about a picnic scenario.... A walking holiday and get out the old walking boots.... A gardening session.... some sort of day trip which requires special footwear - as we will be focusing on drawing our own feet!

ACTIVITY 1

2-3 minutes

Single line drawings of feet, shells or any of our props, as a warm up activity drawing using a pen, pencil or anything else that makes marks.

Try to keep the point of the implement on the paper - but you may stop and start whilst you look and draw as long as you make a single continuous line to create the drawing. Don't worry if you have to retrace your steps on the drawing across the page.



ACTIVITY 2

Drawing our own feet. Thinking about gestural lines. Our items are three dimensional and we are trying to turn them into a two dimensional picture; use lines to illustrate the three dimensional shapes and suggest how you see them by drawing over and around to show their form as much as you can. Don't worry too much about the accuracy of the overall shape, but focus on the direction and 'feel' of the form.

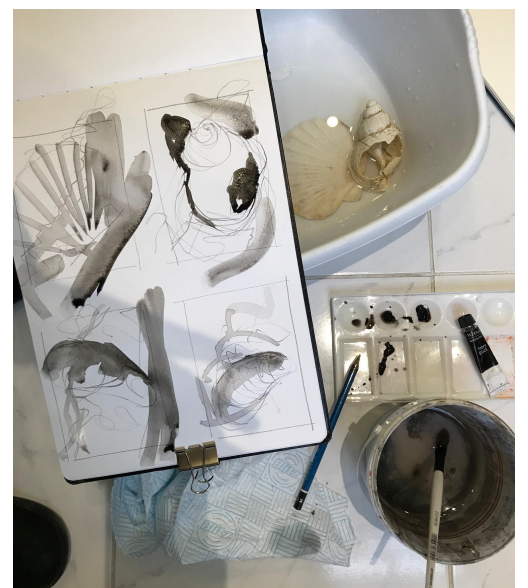


ACTIVITY 3

Exploring water-based paint to represent our feet and items viewed through water.

Watch the water splash and move around the shells, or your own feet. Try to see the shapes the water makes as it travels around your item, and try to replicate these shapes with brush marks and pencil marks. Your eye will need to act as a camera remembering a shape quickly and drawing it rapidly.

My tip is to look for light and darker patches in the water. Make several small sketches.



ACTIVITY 4

Using water-based paint to create a water based painting from observation of our feet having a paddle at the virtual beach.

You may use many colours or just a single tone to show shells and feet partially in the water. Use a mixture of brush strokes and pencil lines to show the shapes of the items and the shapes of the water movement.

Look at what is above and below the surface. Work fast and make your marks quickly to reflect the fleeting quality of the water. Keep looking for the varying tonal areas.



This is a fun multi-sensory session planned to evoke memories as well as develop artistic skills. It is a starting point which may lead you in an alternative direction, if so, follow it. Enjoy!