

## General responses to **isay:usay:wesay**

### **The role of visual communication**

As an enquiry based around the making of visual artworks culminating in an art exhibition in a public venue it is important to highlight the role and efficacy of visual communication in general and especially with reference to:

- *the context of each showing (Library/Cathedral)*
- *the presentation (hanging and curation)*
- *the works themselves.*

### **The works and their treatment**

- The way the works were presented was “in your face”: huge pictures, expansive use of space, life size self portraits, provocative thesaurus materials and content.
- Hands on materials using drawing, layering, time-based media that allow for the slow release of ideas and associations. Taking this approach is quite contemporary as many artists concern themselves specifically with drawing:  
**<http://www.jerwoodvisualarts.org/page/3095/Jerwood+Drawing+Prize+2010>**  
Link for Jerwood Drawing Prize, which has been going for a while now.
- Works had conceptual rigour.
- Could this have been improved if their treatment had been more rigorously articulated? For example, we could have considered more carefully the way the students placed themselves on the paper, and the placing of the symbols themselves within the body shape (Mitchell’s cross image was placed awkwardly and drew comments from a senior clerical figure!) We could perhaps have had more research time at the outset of the project to firm theorise the concepts and materials that we had agreed on, and to prepare materials. I think this would have made the isay stage clearer and given more time to develop the final pieces (as above).

### **The exhibition context**

Mr Harris’s letter begs questions about the role of visual communication in the project and, by extension, in the public sphere. This is really, really interesting for artists!

- What is the role of visual communication in this project?
- What is the role of the art exhibition – to entertain, titillate, educate, inform, unsettle, provoke?
- Would these themes have had equal potency in a different cultural (e.g. not an art exhibition) setting? What if the theme had found expression as a (nother) panel discussion? Is live art cutting edge?
- Artists have always been aware of context - how does the context in which we view art inform what we may think of it?
- Consider the role of image size, content and display in this exhibition. What have the artists and youngsters tried to express about their identity?
- What might the way the project was articulated visually have contributed to the way in which it was received? Consider Mr Harris’s letter - would he have been so affronted had the images been smaller and/or less dramatically displayed?

- What is the role of symbol in art? How might it be possible to make Christian art without the use of symbols? The Christian isay works were understandable as works emanating from a Christian worldview because of the exhibition context but would they still have been distinguishable as work enquiring after Christian spirituality given a different frame of reference? What might be the implication for artists working from a Christian worldview today?
- Meanings are slippery things. Very often the context in which an artwork is shown will contribute to the way it is understood, and as a result to its meaning.
- A public body like a library has a responsibility to reflect views however controversial. Any contemporary Western culture has been influenced heavily by Christian views of life - what is the Library doing next to the Cathedral? The relationship between art and the rest of society: what does art do if society's endorsement restricts it to non offensive material. Is the role of art to provoke?
- The Christian youngsters' art rationale started with questions over the relationship of Self to God, albeit differently worded, and this informed the type of image they could consider producing. It is worth remembering Rizwan's comments that Muslims don't ask this question - in Islam a person's relationship to Allah is a given.
- Discuss the relative roles of symbol and other aspects of visual language (e.g. the grammar of line, colour, texture, tone etc.) that artists have had to negotiate whenever they produce an image. How do symbols sit alongside aesthetic issues? How important are symbols to meaning?
- How can one represent the invisible? Relational aesthetics defines the work of art as lying in the encounter between artist and other rather than in the production and consumption of images per se. (Research Nicholas Bourriaud for more information.)

### **Response to Foreword**

When exploring the role of artists in taking the project off the page and giving it life, it should be understood that this is a two-way process between 'ideas' and 'making': a feedback loop, engagement with doing, the finding out of ideas.

Ideas and making: a two way process. The artworks were integral to the generation of ideas in that it is in the process of making that ideas come to the fore. This was the drive behind the formation of the Christian artwork: the emergence of ideas occurs 'at the point of the pencil'. The time it takes to create the art, together with the encounter with others involved in the same process, defines the outcome. Loop and feedback. These processes took place within the large scale Self and Other drawings that the young people were asked to create as their final isay: piece.

#### **Note on worldviews in other artforms**

*Explore other art-forms e.g. the sacred music of Bach, Handel, Mozart. Discuss how Romanticism led to an expanded notion of the individual and how we may now live in a post-Christian culture where the notion of external truth is suspect. (Further reading: Modern Man and His Categories of Thought by CS Lewis, What is Truth? by Peter Vardy.)*