SEVEN OAKS SCHOOL

IB Art Exhibition 2017
Welcome to Sevenoaks School’s IB Art Exhibition 2017

There is nothing quite like exhibiting your work in a public arena for the first time. It is both hugely intimidating and exciting. As an artist your relationship to your work has suddenly changed – you have other people looking and bringing their experiences and judgements to what has been so personal and so important to you for the months it has taken to create.

For the first time you have, perhaps, a glimpse of what it is to be an artist – to understand that it is not simply about your own creative process but that your work seeks a symbiotic relationship with an audience. What is extraordinary about the IB art show is that for the student, it is not only a display of your creativity but a kind of final performance; you become a spectator both of your own work and of your viewers’ reactions to it. Eyes are not on the artist, but the art. The prospect of an exhibition is an important catalyst – a finishing line – pieces have to be completed and perhaps when they stand together they achieve for the first time a sense of coherence and wholesomeness that can be a personal revelation. While each student starts at the same point at the beginning of the Sixth Form, each ends with their own style. It is very much a process of going through a refiner’s fire.

My own IB exhibition work focused on the power of dress, with the centre piece a handmade newspaper suit. This theme evolved from my love of clothing and eventually led to a dissertation on the power of brocade in Renaissance dress, which in turn led to the founding of my own online t-shirt label and an MSc in Entrepreneurship, where I was given the chance to work at Nottingham University’s Incubation Lab on an online art sales platform. None of this would have happened without the IB Exhibition.

For the first time students are removed from the safety of the studio and are asked to test their ideas in an unfamiliar and very public setting. What an opportunity – intimidating certainly, but ultimately exhilarating, and you never know where it will lead.

Joshua Henshaw (OS 2010)
Armaan Bansal

Travelling back and forth between home in Nigeria and school in England has left me susceptible to a large dose of culture shock which my work is centred on. I return to Nigeria questioning all the traditions I’ve blindly followed all my life. This inquisitive view has led me to interrogate aspects of my culture as an outsider, whilst mixing symbols and techniques of both African and Western descent. Subsequently, a recurring motif in my work is the fabric called ankara. This fabric has become a symbol of African culture but was originally manufactured by the Dutch for the Indonesian market. Hence I decided to use ankara as a symbol of cultural diffusion. Furthermore, I’ve experimented with different ways of layering and weaving in order to replicate the merging of the two cultures I’ve experienced over the past year and a half.

The strokes on a canvas make the painting what it is and similarly, every little experience in my life shapes my perception of the world and Art. The world is my canvas, my studio and my inspiration. In India, I lived a chaotic jumble of social moralities, yet astonishing aesthetics. I have seen Manhattan’s brightest lights, roamed the Avenue Winston Churchill, walked the same ground that Puente de Diablo was built on and seen Shanghai at the peak of its procession. Recontextualising cultures and juxtaposing the world is essentially my art. I developed an obsession for eclecticism of extremities in eras and cultures. Whilst my etching and drawings focus majorly on presenting modern elements in a gothic style with ink, my prints and sculptures aim at presenting old paintings, Renaissance elements in a modernist style. My work ultimately aims at presenting the appeal and diversity of the world.
In my work I am especially interested in using oil paints on various textured surfaces – I originally pursued the idea of stillness and motion within the same setting, creating a series of textured wooden squares using Sellotape or glue for smooth surfaces and sand or torn, aggravated paper for rough ones, intrigued by both man-made and natural architecture. My large-scale pieces aim to interweave themes and ideas and again depicting the contrast between organic places with human interference using images of barbed wire and a skeleton.

This year my exploration of texture has evolved and so after taking photographs of the coast of Finland in October I created the basic ‘shadows’ of the seascape’s shape in thick glue and sand to imitate rocks. When painting the scenes I incorporated them into the texture as I aimed to blur the lines between 2D and 3D, abstract and realistic set.

My initial idea was to work on sensations we experience based upon our changing environments, this then developed into how our environments shape us. This development was mainly due to the Geography trip to Morocco; an immense and awe-inspiring experience which has shaped many of my final pieces; in particular my collage portraiture where I created a Moroccan silversmith out of collagraphs from Morocco. I have also created many sculptural responses to this idea, as shown through my forest of figures, where I focused more on distortion. My later pieces then focused on animal figures as opposed to humans which led to my final idea – how we shape our environments. Again developing from geography, I have created responses to an oil spill as well as the creation of warped urban environments. This art is designed to show the impact we have on our world and hopefully dispel the apathy towards such topics which is seen far too regularly in today’s society.
I like to keep my pieces as organic and realistic as possible. I have constructed this project around the idea of the manipulation of the human form, through both painting and sculpture work. With an initial focus on portraiture, I enjoyed experimenting with different scales and angles in an attempt to combine contemporary composition with a classical style, whilst challenging myself to paint fine details on a notably small scale. Towards the end of the course, I shifted my attention outwards towards the entire human form in the nude, to the likes of Degas and Goya. In the way that I added contemporary elements to my portraits, I wanted to do the same thing here, and realised that due to the tranquil simplicity of the images used, I had the flexibility to use modernism more directly through the adaptation of the backgrounds.

My work started with imagery of bed sheets in response to the theme of Sensation. I was intrigued by the idea that our beds can give us the sensation of safety and security yet being simultaneously vulnerable. I took inspiration from the way Peter Paul Rubens depicts drapery for narrative effect with Samson’s deceptive sense of security as Delilah seeks his downfall. I decided that my main theme in experimenting with this imagery would be contrast.

Through the contrast of light and dark, I observed that a fragmented look had arisen. I explored these ideas through paintings, small sculptures, and printmaking. My paintings explore how we paint things to seem alive or inanimate through contrasting techniques/imagery. My sculptures explore whether the nature of softness can be expressed through hard materials. My prints explore transparency and structure. I went on to create a film of my hand moving through water to show the sharp contrast between the still water and the waves/bubbles/ripples that my moving hand makes.

Clare Cooke

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Mhairi Fenton

In my work, I link the physical natural landscape and my emotions. I find that my emotions towards landscape cannot be satisfied by just one medium so I challenge my creative process by experimenting with opposing media. In recent work, I have experimented with the scraped background of relief prints and how they effect the mood of that location. I have found that the explosion of colour seen beneath the narrative of the scene conjures up different emotions depending on who you are. For me these prints are suspicious and uneasy.

Furthermore, to explore the depth of some locations I have visited, I am printing photographs with a low opacity onto acetate and layering them to become an installation which will be seen from different viewpoints, thereby mirroring the confusion and disorientation I felt surrounded by similar looking landscapes. I have also explored how texture effects a scene, which can be seen in the scratched painting montage and textured train painting.

James Headington

Clay can be unpredictable in that it warps and it has its own texture; it shrinks as it dries – there is almost literally a living quality to it.

In the summer of 2015 I travelled to Costa Rica and much of this was spent driving, within terrain which changed quite radically. We visited a volcano range. The volcano itself is huge but the crater is at the top of a very long slope along which there is a lot of vegetation. There is real texture and comparatively little of it is crater. Everything you traditionally associate with volcanos is within the crater but this part seems so much less significant. When you get to the top it is slightly surprising: as though the walk to the crater and the crater itself are distinctly different. The inside of the crater was surprising for the same reasons. There was lava and steam but I was surprised by how much greenery existed within the crater.

Clay allowed me to get a feel for the textures involved, literally and psychologically. The sculptures have a permanence; the media seems to lend itself to this, to a sense of belonging and lasting. The clay is solid, less transient, like the volcano itself in many ways: it is the bit that will stay for a long time.
By exploring both the natural landscape and human expressions I aim to be able to capture emotional responses to landscapes. In focusing on portraiture I have been able to experiment with different emotions and the way that they can be manipulated by colour and texture. I have then expanded my study into developing the ways in which figures in motion can be expressed; I found that painting in oil with palette knives also allowed me to emphasise the incomplete air of the paintings that is exaggerated by movement. The contrasting backgrounds reinforce the sense that nature is ever present and illustrated how we drew our emotions from our surroundings. I have been able to manipulate the appearance of my work by combining different types of paint as well as using different tools. I found that it has only been possible to create varied effects by using assorted techniques; this reflects the instability and incomprehensibility of nature itself.

The idea of the material and the organic working to evoke opposing ideas prompted me to explore the differences between the two, using opposing colours and styles. I focused on colour to represent an emotional response to visual objects, employing a variety of different media to better display the nature of the chosen images. Through my painting, I sought to explore both the differences between the natural and man-made as well as the inevitable union of the two in our daily lives. My series of coloured lino prints further develop these ideas as a natural landscape is transformed into a series of more calculated patterns and again revived with splashes of colour: a mechanism attempt to recreate the sensation of nature under human terms. Similarly, a subtler etching technique followed by a geometric display of softer colours is employed to represent a more delicate image of an organic object.
"Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." Pablo Picasso

Visual art evokes something innate and grounded within every being; the search for meaning and purposes intrinsic to human nature. One is able to look beyond the surface; art is an equalising force which strips individuals of the superfluous to the emotional bones they carry.

My Portfolio is comprised of pieces dedicated to communicating the unspoken and raw human emotion often constrained by language. Through oil painting and graphite sketches, I aimed to encourage onlookers to revise their mentality regarding the abjectly poor and deprived of aspiration.

In depicting poverty-stricken communities for the Save the Children charity, I was inspired by multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, such as the passion of Maasai tribesmen and the ‘fatuous hope’ of rural Mumbai’s youth. Thus, through art I aim to wash away ‘the dust of everyday life’ from impoverished and hopeless souls.

The early works I have produced explore the theme of Human Form, namely through portraiture and life drawing. An etching plate provides the perfect medium to explore this dynamic concept, to a level where every scratch helps convey identity. Trial and error has been a big part of my experimentation with different media. In a way, it has been the catalyst to the second key theme of my work – the reflection of urban surfaces and decay found in street art. Going to Brick Lane in London was my lightbulb moment. There, I decided to feature elements of the graffitied walls and layers created by posters into my work. So my latest work still plays on the theme of Human Form but from the perspective of a street-art-obsessed mind. This extends to the sculptured heads, which could be installed into walls. Perspective changes as the eyes follow your movements.
The aims of my exhibition on the theme of Sensation are to explore the concept of numbness and try to equate modern-day numbness towards religion with medical and artificial numbness. I have noticed throughout the years people around me distancing themselves more and more from traditional views of faith and I thought I could develop that. I also come from a family of medics who have always focused on life as opposed to what comes after, and I metaphorically linked that lack of faith to anaesthesia. I worked with a relatively small palette of cold colours, with dark colours that accentuated the bright ones, mimicking the sickly, plastic atmosphere in a hospital. I created a large-scale painting on wood as well as a number of surreal monoprints of churches and cathedrals, all under a similar blurring technique.

Alessandra Scevola

After an extensive art exploration, I started approaching my artwork not only as a way of artistic expression but also as an opportunity to explore and grasp my attitude towards different settings and subjects. I started the course by depicting different architectural environments using rough textures of oil paint. However, I felt limited by this media and, thus, I shifted my focus from oil paint to metal mesh. This material allowed me to extend my study of texture and achieve a much more dramatic effect. In the process, I have completed numerous drawings and prints attempting to understand my alternating aesthetic responses towards the contrasting settings: the urban environment in Kiev and serene natural environments. The drawings were later on used as a foundation for my metal mesh projects.
Rohan Tolat
My personal artistic exploration began with the visual depiction of emotion through portraiture and the sensations evoked by these emotions in the form of graphical illustrations and mixed media pieces. This evolved, however, into a theme centered around the social impacts upon youth society. Through the visual depiction of my personal experiences that are representative of my generation, I aimed to highlight how our behaviour has changed along with society, and how art can personally affect us. I have discovered, by experimenting with carefully constructed compositions and media, how art can often act as a vehicle to express one’s internal experiences. I aimed to find a balance between art that dictates a story and a message, and that which is equally as visually encapsulating.

Sofya Sudets
My work in this exhibition is about the sensation of moment and place. Neither the most realistic painting nor a photograph can fully convey a sensation one experiences somewhere or sometime. Can an abstract painting do more justice to a feeling, an atmosphere? And what is it about an artwork – form, texture or colour – that enables this transmission? My work is an experiment set to explore that.
Oliver Tushingham

In my work I explore the disruption of space and form. In my 2D work I was really interested in the crafting of pictorial space and use mark making to deconstruct the illusion of depth and admit to the two-dimensionality of the canvas. In my 3D work, meanwhile, I wanted to think about the reduction of form and how we experience the world from different viewpoints. I explored these themes over a range of subject matter, including portrait, landscape and figures. In the last instance, I wanted to explore unconventional artistic perspectives through the adoption of different angles. I use the first-person perspective to create an obscure sense of perspective and to insert the viewer into the experience of the artwork. I further developed this in my lens work.

Katharina Vrolijk

In my work, I explored several themes, including texture, degradation and precision. Connecting all my pieces together is the theme of perspective. Using a variety of media, including etchings, linocuts and painting, I played with the augmentation of perspective, such as in my painting or one of my three-dimensional frame pieces, and conversely the distortion of perspective in another three-dimensional frame piece. My work has been inspired in particular by the strong, centralised perspectives of Anselm Kiefer and John Wonnacott’s art. Indeed much of my work echoes the melancholy felt in their work.