

Experiences and Engagement: An Investigation of Young Persons' Visits to ARTIST ROOMS on Tour

ARTIST ROOMS (AR) seeks to engage new, young audiences with contemporary art by touring round the UK the work of important post-war artists, including Andy Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe and Damien Hirst. The AR tour began in 2008 as a result of Anthony d'Offay donating the collection to the nation, care of Tate and National Galleries of Scotland (NGS), on the condition that it would be shown in regional museums and galleries. Each room is devoted to the work of one particular artist, with the aim that audiences will be able to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of that artist's work.

My research will look at how young people (aged 13–25) respond to AR. It will investigate whether, through being faced with a room of art reflecting a worldview that is not their own, young people's identities may be transformed. My research will also examine variation amongst young people's experiences. I shall work with Tate, National Gallery of Scotland and partner galleries to identify the different categories of young people who visit, the different methods of engagement used by these young people, and the impact of the frequency and duration of young peoples' visits on their experience.

I will conduct ethnographies in a small number of the regional galleries, observing and talking to young people about their experience. Semi-structured interviews will be used as a way of guiding the conversation towards the gallery experience but not giving directions as to how the experience should be spoken of. Rather, the meaning that the experience for the young people will be allowed to emerge. Although experience of art can be felt deeply, it also can be elusive and difficult to talk about. For this reason, research which looks in depth at people's experience of art has been rare, and this project will be challenging. The pilot study will be a particularly useful learning exercise for refining the research techniques.

As a collaboration between Tate, NGS, and regional galleries, AR forms a network of galleries within which knowledge and learning can be shared. AR is therefore seen as a resource from which galleries can learn and in looking at audience experience my research is an important aspect of this resource.

As Tate and NGS administer AR jointly, the team is split between London and Edinburgh. I work with Christopher Ganley (NGS), the AR Learning Co-ordinator, and Lucy Askew (Tate), Curator of AR. I am also supervised by Emily Pringle, Head of Learning Practice, Research and Policy.

So far I have been studying the policy and the philosophy of people's experience in galleries. This means looking critically at how policymakers conceive of galleries as places for learning and 'social inclusion' and considering alternative ways of understanding experience in galleries.

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