How to Research

Drawing as Research
Sovay Berriman
Developed in conversation with artists and teachers, *How to Research* invites consideration of the meaning and value of research within art practice. By championing research as an integral tool for developing students’ individual voices and lines of enquiry, this resource aims to support engaged, contextualised, thoughtful investigations into and alongside art and artmaking.

A series of booklets, *How to Research* is designed as a collection of prompts to inspire ideas for research in the gallery, classroom and everyday life. Each booklet is devised by a different artist with a specific focus that shares their particular thinking and approach to research in response to a brief posed to them by the Tate London Schools and Teachers team. This booklet, devised by artist Sovay Berriman, takes ‘drawing’ as the focus for how to research.

*How to Research* booklets provide clear yet in-depth examples of what research might look like for artists and students. The booklets offer creative strategies to support a broad range of Art & Design curriculums at GCSE, BTEC, AS and A Level. They allow space for you to use your expertise to adapt the activities to suit the needs of your students, and to expand the ideas within them in ways most relevant to their chosen subjects.

The contents page of each booklet contains the original brief, which we invite you to set for your students as a way for them to generate their own research – with the booklets modelling a variety of artists’ responses. Alongside providing artistic inspiration for completing the brief, we hope that the artists’ responses will also act as springboards for further research exercises in the classroom. We have included discussion points and activities to support students to expand their research in this way.

By celebrating research as rhizomatic¹, non-linear, formless and continually forming – we want to position research as characterised by the process of ceaselessly establishing connections between ideas, individuals, artworks, experiences, materials, text and images. By advocating that these connections are different for every individual, we hope to support students to engage in forms of research that are unique, responsive, useful and exciting to their own development as artists.

¹ Referencing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome – “the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight.” (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). The rhizome presents itself as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.” (p.25)

The following is the brief we set artist Sovay Berriman and it structures this resource:

- An image of something you have in your studio, something that you are currently using to make art
- An image of your work
- An image of an artwork in the Tate collection
- The connection between the three images you have chosen – this could be a written explanation, an annotation, a drawing, another image etc…
- A process that you undertake to help you think/research/progress ideas
- A quote or textual reference that informs your approach to making art
- A question you would like to pose to students/teachers to initiate research
An image of something that you have in your studio, something that you are currently using to make art

I rarely have any visuals around me while I am working, apart from past works of my own that I am referencing. I like to work in quite a bare and not particularly comfortable space; I find that this helps me to concentrate on the work. However, I always have a notepad next to me, to write down any words that help me grasp what it is that I am trying to identify visually in the work I am making, i.e. the texture, surface, feel, weight.

I also often listen to music while I’m working, although might also work in silence. I’m quite strict about what music I listen to when I do, and do not listen to much C20th & C21st music with clearly discernible lyrics – I find that they can become too influential to the work. So I tend to listen to music that helps to create the atmosphere of the work.

Presently I am listening to a lot of Mongolian Horse Head Harp and Throat Singing music, and music that references landscape, for instance Nick Cave or Brian Eno.

TO DO: What do you think is going to happen next on Berriman’s desk? Use this image as a starting point for the next drawing you imagine the artist might make, or that you might make sitting at their desk. Berriman talks about how the ‘atmosphere’ of a space can affect productivity. Do you agree that restricting the comfort of your environment induces focus? Experiment with your own workspace to create different atmospheres to work in. What atmosphere do you prefer and why?
An image of your work

I consider much of my sculptural work to be drawing; *Entertainment Suite* highlights this as I draw it line by line. The timber lines build up to create the correct balance and composition for the work.

The weight of each line is considered in the decision to use 2”x2” carcassing timber, but also in the positioning of each line in relation to the different perspectives of the viewer, and in the introduction of acrylic sheet forms at different moments in the work. Where additional elements, such as the wrapped cloth ball, are introduced, I’ve considered a shift in mark-making for the work. This again affects balance of composition, view and focal points for the audience.

TO DO: Is this a drawing? The artist says it is, but what do you think? Try to make a three dimensional drawing using things around you. When describing the artwork above, Berriman uses language familiar to the medium of ‘drawing’ e.g. weight, line, direction, perspective, but she also uses language less familiar to the medium e.g. movement and moment. These add a sense of rhythm to the artwork and reveal something of the artist’s process. Spend three minutes describing your three dimensional drawing to someone else. Think carefully about what vocabulary to use and how this affects how you and others may perceive your work.
Sovay Berriman, 
*Entertainment Suite*, 2010-ongoing. 
Installed at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery as part of Oculist Witnesses: according to Duchamp. Timber, wire, acrylic sheet and cloth.
I found it very difficult to choose, but settled upon *The Pit of Disease: The Falsifiers*, From *Illustrations to Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’* (1824–7), by William Blake.

William Blake,
Ink and watercolour
on paper.
I have been looking at Blake’s work since my mid-teens. I love the scale, the awkward forms and how the composition oscillates between something flat and something with perspective. The remarkable journey of Dante that Blake depicts, with its associated trials, sparked my interest in survival in extreme situations, determination and human endeavor.

Blake represents a starkness in his imaginings of the landscapes of hell, which are often presented as dry, harsh, environments. Lacking in comfort and often populated by tortured souls, his depictions suggest the struggle, or extreme effort, that must be made by the living to traverse these terrains.

I had two other choices in mind…


TO DO: Make a list of other artworks where the material seems incongruous, or strange, in relation to the content. What might the artists’ intentions be in creating this incompatibility in their work? In a series of drawings, experiment with how you record the sensation of a material, an atmosphere, or a form. If your drawings are on paper, try to turn them into sculptural objects, or vice versa.

The physical quality of different materials is very important in Berriman’s work. She carefully considers the effect of one material on another as she builds up compositions. How important are materials in your work? What materials do you enjoy working with most and why?

Little Dancer Aged Fourteen is a small sculpture that caught my imagination when I was a similar age to the dancer. The perfection of the form, particularly its miniature scale, intrigued me. But also the material. The weight of the bronze – how could a small girl be made of heavy metal? The cloth of the ballet dress seems to emphasise the weight of the bronze. The incongruity of these materials being together posed a conundrum to my younger self that remains puzzling to me now.

I nearly chose Woman Seated in the Underground because I have always been fascinated by the two World Wars. The proximity of the catastrophe, the fact that my own grandparents were involved, allows me a chance to touch it even though it is so far away from anything of my own experience. This drawing again introduces the notion of something stark. It explores something of the struggle to survive that humans, and other creatures, exhibit.

It seems to me that each of these three works carry a sense of perseverance, determination and beauty. They all share a sensitivity to material. I am interested in the bare bones of things, of getting to the nub of a thing. What exactly is the sensation of a material, of an atmosphere, of a form, of a colour?
The connection between the three images you have chosen

STARK.

In thinking about the connection between my responses to these three questions, my first thought is: stark. The works of William Blake can be stark, or suggest stark places. I like to work in a stark space. The work I make is often visually stark.

To me, stark is something that is exposed. It might be a situation that does not provide cover, or that tries to get to the heart of a matter. It does not wend its way around by-lanes and houses stopping for tea, it goes directly to where it needs to be, or by the only way it knows how to get there. It might only give you the information that it thinks you need, building blocks, bare bones, the nub... It can be a crystallised moment that sheds light upon all the moments around itself, or a vast wide horizon that seems to offer very little at all. It could be hot or cold, feel hard to the touch, but emotionally very giving. Stark is attempting honesty, from its perspective, and is supportive, because it is without fuss.

An aspect of my research is to look at fragmented narratives and how parts of a whole can be connected in different ways. To do this I look at each fragment as a heterotopic site¹, an autonomous site in its own right. To be able to view these fragments clearly I need space around them. As if one were taking apart a watch, or dismantling a mountain grain by grain.

I consider starkness to enable a reduction in confusion. I can’t say if Blake intended the same, in fact his starkness seems to suggest struggle and discomfort, but at the same time maybe this is where he imagines truth is to be found.

I like the idea that starkness might give room for our imagination to complete the picture.

TO DO: This resource has been designed with starkness in mind. What does the term starkness conjure up for you? Use the empty spaces in the resource, or in your surroundings, to experiment with ideas of starkness, and space. How does a drawing, an image, an object or a sentence change if there is space around it? What does it mean to leave empty space on a page, or around an artwork?

Berriman discusses starkness as a form of honesty or truth, a form that allows the artist or viewer of the artwork to see something more than what is there. As a group, hold a debate about how important honesty and truth are in art. Record how this debate might inform your own way of working going forward.

¹ For a definition of heterotopia see page 20
Making work itself is the main process I use to progress my ideas.

Drawing helps me to find forms and make decisions regarding all aspects of the work I make. A work, or body of work, evolves through laying line upon line, adjusting the weight and pressure depending on the emerging form and character of the piece.

I have developed a way of studio working whereby one piece of work informs the next. So a drawing may be made that imagines a sculpture, which itself is informed by an existing object or event I have made. I will then make another work, perhaps a flat or sculptural drawing that conceives another side or aspect of the object or idea. Together these individual works layer, piece by piece, to make a body of work and fulfil an idea. No work in the body of work stands alone, it is a mark, or a line, within the whole.

I also walk as a way to process my ideas. For me the action of walking itself – progressing from one point to another, traversing different terrain – encourages the development of an idea or thought. By engaging the body, walking allows the mind to be freer to concern itself with whatever problem you put in front of it.
TO DO: Go for a walk. As you are walking, think of a question or a problem you are trying to resolve in your art and see if you can generate any new answers. Does the physical process of walking stimulate your thought process in the same way it does Berriman’s? Make a drawing that explores your original question or problem, and any new ideas generated. Think about how you might relate this drawing to any other drawing, or artwork, you have made previously. Use this connection to make a new work, and so on. Record the connection between the works as you go.

By walking to produce ideas, Berriman might be considered to be engaging with a ‘non-art’ process to generate art. Are there any non-art processes that help you think through ideas, and if a non-art process generates ideas for artworks, is it still a non-art process?
First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places — places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society — which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.

Michel Foucault’s *Des Espace Autres*, 1967¹

¹ This text, entitled “Des Espace Autres,” and published by the French journal *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault’s death. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec.
Sovay Berriman, *Trying to explain the supple boundaries of experiential heterotopic spaces, and how we enter and exit them* (2015) – made in response to the above quote.
A question you would like to pose to students/teachers to initiate research

Where would you like to be, right now?
Create this place using the following questions...

How warm or cold is it?
What is the light like –
warm and golden or stark and blue or…?
Can you smell anything?
Is there a draft, breeze, or gale?
What shapes can you see around you?
Can you see a horizon line and how close is it?

Now that you have thought of your place in
your mind, how and where can you draw it?

TO DO: Use these questions to engage in more abstract,
non-representational drawing. How might form, colour, line
and composition be used to show the space you are
imagining? What materials are the perfect materials to
describe this place in 2 or 3 dimensions?

What do these questions reveal about Berriman’s
interests as an artist?
SOVAY BERRIMAN makes work that explores the correlation between landscapes and personal human narratives. Working across sculpture, drawing, text and event, Berriman explores how moments of experience become form, and in turn how these forms can instigate or suggest moments of action or experience.

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