

Early Years Coalition



Showcasing Marks

CURATING YOUNG CHILDREN'S
ART EXHIBITIONS

TASMANIAN
GOVERNMENT
INITIATIVE





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Insights have been drawn from:

Kolbe, U. (2007). *Rapunzel's Supermarket: All about young children and their art*, 2nd edn. Byron Bay, NSW: Peppinot Press.

McArdle, F. (2003). The visual arts: ways of seeing. In S. Wright, *Children meaning-making and the arts*, pp 35-63. French's Forest, NSW: Pearson.

Pelo, A. (2007). *The language of art: Inquiry-based studio practices in early childhood settings*. St Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

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Vecchi, V. (2010). *Art and creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the role and potential of ateliers in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.

Wright, S. (2012). Ways of knowing in the arts. In S. Wright, *Children meaning-making and the arts* (2nd edn), pp 1-29. French's Forest, NSW: Pearson.

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This booklet was written by Di Nailon OAM, B4 Leader & Bronwyn Tamplin, B4 Leader.
Production Designer: Annette Fuller, B4 Senior Project Officer

This is a companion resource to *Making Marks: The Development of Children's Drawing*.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Why hold children's art exhibitions | 6 |
| Curating starts with the end in mind: Dressing art exhibitions | 8 |
| More exhibition dressing practices | 12 |
| Curatorial judgements: Choosing artworks for the exhibition | 14 |
| The nitty-gritty of curating | 16 |
| Curating the viewer | 21 |
| Critiquing Art | 22 |



Introduction

As adults, we often visit galleries to see exhibitions from artists whose works fit into past and contemporary art traditions, such as – classical, impressionism, abstract, surrealism, cubism, pop art, minimalism, fauvism, and art nouveau among others.

We believe that it is time to celebrate and showcase an art tradition we call “Young Children’s Mark Making.” Our aim is to take children’s marks to galleries and display spaces throughout the wider community.

Children’s marks represent their unique ways of seeing the world and provide a way of voicing their ideas. Therefore, we need to exhibit their works in ways that allow viewers (adults) to see beyond the marks and focus instead on what the child intended when they were drawing.

Presenting carefully curated displays of children’s art differs from what we often see - rows of unacknowledged (sometimes tattered) examples of works on walls or refrigerator doors. Although such efforts of display are attempts to say to a child “we appreciate what you have done by making it visible to others”, curating their works takes adult appreciation further.

As a curator, the adult (or ideally, adults and children together) make deliberate selections of artworks to invite viewers into children’s experiences, relationships, and views of their world.

This booklet offers some thoughts about why and how to curate and display young children’s art. It is a guide for re-visiting how we best celebrate and awaken new understandings of exhibiting children’s artworks. As a companion resource to B4’s *Making Marks: The Development of Children’s Drawing*, we deliberately focus on the display of 2-dimensional works by young children.



Coen Boehm,
3 years
Acrylic paint
on paper
"Land before time"

Isaac Van Den Berg,
2 years
Texta on cardboard
*"Up, down, round
and round"*



*The intention of display is to create a visually
beautiful presentation that invites viewers to
look closely at children's work and that awakens
new understandings of the meaning
of children's work.*

Ann Pelo, 2007

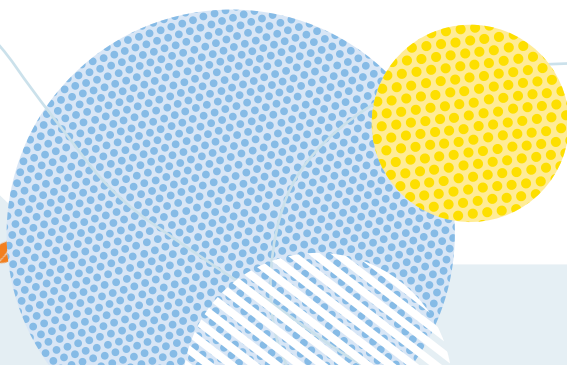
Why hold children's art exhibitions

Every art exhibition (and display) fulfils a purpose. Children's art exhibitions provide opportunities for children to share their emerging skills as practicing artists and introduce us to their interpretation of lived experiences and their imaginary worlds.

The art exhibition can feature a collection by a single artist (much like a collection by Monet) or by several young artists. Viewers are given the opportunity to look closely at children's relationships with materials, people, and place (including, objects and nature). Therefore, to honour the work of our youngest artists, our goal is to curate exhibitions sensitively and in ways that clearly illustrate why artworks are being displayed.

The way we display children's work needs to capture the viewer's attention and provoke conversation in ways that inspire new insights into what Susan Wright calls "children's meaning-making through their art".

When children's drawings are aesthetically displayed in public spaces it shows that their efforts are valued by their community. There is personal and public recognition of the art and the artists. Ursula Kolbe tells us that displaying art also reminds children of what they have done and can inspire further ideas about the topic of interest or how to use materials and techniques. At a personal level, children, like adult artists, can revisit their work from different vantage points. They have the chance to vary how they use art to tell their stories.





Spencer Terry,
18 months
Acrylic paint
on paper
"Bodgee"

Spencer chooses the purple paint, *dab, dab, dab* on the paper with the paint brush.
He sees the orange paint, *dab, dab*.

Spencer – "Mum" as he looks back at the purple paint tray.

Spencer paints choosing, purple, orange, purple, and orange.

Spencer - "bll-iiii" as Spencer's finger begins to explore the purple paint on the tray.

Spencer – "Ahhhhhhhhh" as he excitedly looks at his purple finger. "ooo" as his finger moves closer to his mouth Lick!

Spencer – "uck!"

Dab, dab, dab, dab with the paint brush in the right hand

Splat! Goes the left hand on the paper, *Splat!*

Spencer – "bodgee, bodgee"



Curating starts with the end in mind: Dressing art exhibitions

Ok, so you want to curate an exhibition. Our curatorial role and practices start with the 'big picture' – what might a children's art exhibition look like from the perspectives of the artists and viewers? Knowing about how to 'dress' an exhibition can help us change our perspectives about what needs to be done - even before we (as educators) set up materials and spaces for art, observe, capture stories and collect drawings from children.

There are ways of creating displays that can do justice to children's lively minds. When a display reveals something of the thinking, making and sharing of ideas that went into the work it tells a story.

Ursula Kolbe, 2007

From our experience, dressing exhibitions involves tapping into our own creativity and intuition to present an aesthetic and compelling visual display of children's investigations, discoveries, and exploration of ideas.

The purpose of an exhibition is reflected in its title and is evident in the selection of the representative pieces on display. Choose with care the title of every display you curate, no matter where the exhibition is located – in museums, the local shop, or in the foyer of a children's service.

Exhibition titles must capture viewers' interest, enticing them to see and learn more about individual artworks that are displayed. Rather than using topic titles that represent activities, such as, excursion titles, try more experiential titles which illustrate what evolved through children's artistic experience of

the excursion. For example, change 'Our visit to the ducklings' to a more global representation of children's inquiry, such as, *'Exploring the gentleness of things'*. Alternatively, one child's remark about their mark making may capture the story of the exhibition and become a compelling title *'This is being gentle'*.

Provide opportunities for children to own the exhibition by asking them for a title that describes what they were exploring or focusing on when they were mark making. When one child described what they had been doing as *'Walking with colour'*, the title for the exhibition emerged.

Curating formal exhibitions in galleries and museums will require creativity to capture general interest by adults not familiar with children's artistic explorations. You may need to add a brief explanation to the title to make the purpose of the exhibition both inviting and compelling - *'Walking with colour: How colour impacts on child artists' story-telling'*.

Give viewing audiences the best experience possible, as well as the young artists and supporters of formal exhibitions the respect they so richly deserve, by making visible upon entry to the display:

- Exhibition Title Panel, alongside a Champion (or Hero) artwork - used in marketing the exhibition
- Acknowledgement Panel - Acknowledgement of Country, artists and supporters
- Information Panel - Shares the purpose, major features and children's insights
- Room Brochure - Shows groupings of works and locations



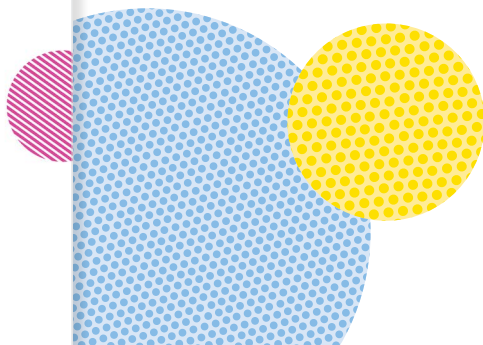
Example of Information Panel - overall exhibition

Making Marks: A Celebration of Children's Art

Making Marks showcases artworks from all regions of Tasmania created by artists from birth to four years of age.

The exhibition features the ideas of very young children, making marks with the earth, exploring materials and tools, bringing shapes together, creating representations and combining music, movements and marks.

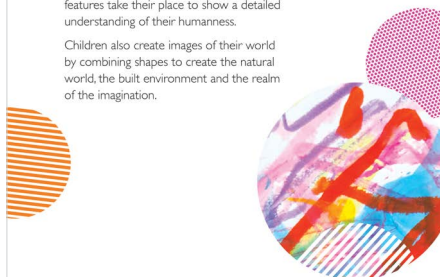
The exhibition celebrates, nurtures and supports the voice of the child through art.



Creating Representations

As children gain experience with drawing and painting, they begin to represent ideas in ways that become recognisable to others. Early on, children make human forms – first placing eyes and mouth inside a circular form. Later, limbs appear and then other features take their place to show a detailed understanding of their humanness.

Children also create images of their world by combining shapes to create the natural world, the built environment and the realm of the imagination.



Example of Information Panel - grouping of works

Example of room brochure - front and back page



Example of room brochure internal pages

More exhibition dressing practices

Depending on the purpose and focus selected for the children's exhibition you (or if possible, you and the children) will need to choose a 'Champion' artwork from the collection to sit alongside the title of the exhibition.

The artwork and Exhibition title are located together on all exhibition products and 'marketing' media (social and hard-copy) to generate interest and provide a go-to point in the exhibition itself.

Here's what our B4 *Making Marks Exhibition* title and Champion piece looked like.

Making Marks A celebration of Children's Art Exhibition



Arlo Highton
Age: 3
Paint Stick and pencil
on paper:
*Squiggles: a car in the
woods 2019*

Still thinking as a curator with 'the end in mind', you will need to plan how to hang the children's artworks. The best approach is to group selected works in ways that reflect the purpose of the exhibition and make sense to the viewer. There may be themes that emerge from the artworks themselves showing common stories, or use of media and materials, or cultural and place-based explorations. Create a brief simple text (large font) that gives viewers a context for the exhibition.

The B4 *Making Marks Exhibition* had five developmental groupings adapted from the [*Making Marks: The Development of Children's Drawing*](#) booklet. Explanatory boards were located beside each grouping and provided a brief overview of the focus of children's mark making during a developmental phase and what viewers can expect to see.

One of the explanatory boards in the *Making Marks Exhibition* described a grouping we called 'Taking Shape'.

Taking Shape

At some magical moment, young children begin to pull their random marks into shapes that have meaning. The narratives that accompany their work tell personal stories about the way's children view the world and how they make sense of their life experiences. Sometimes adults consider these early works to be worthless, but these explorations are the beginning of the child's creative journey as an artist, a storyteller and a writer.

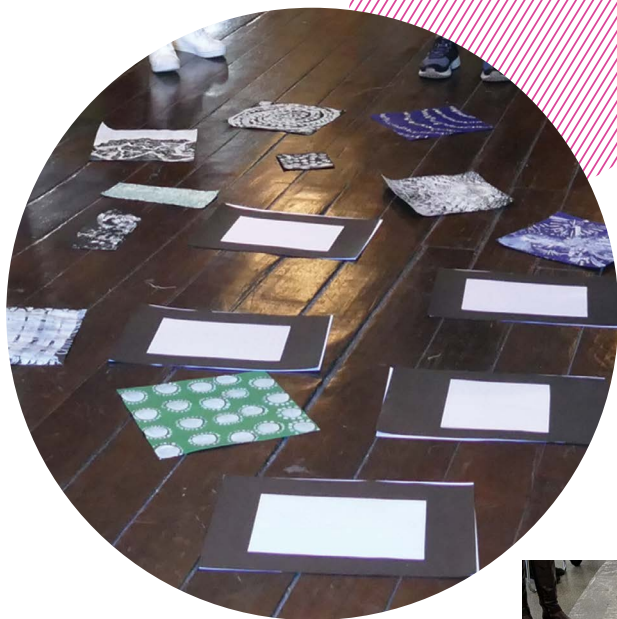
Curatorial judgements: Choosing artworks for the exhibition

Any pieces selected for an exhibition must provide a meaningful contribution to the bigger story being told about children's meaning-making and artistic expression. Making a representative selection avoids taking a 'competitive skills' approach (comparing best – worst; realistic - nonrealistic); rather, pieces that best represent the purpose of the exhibition are displayed. Children themselves are often able to distinguish which artworks best represent the purpose of the exhibition; and how each piece plays its part in the story being told.

The intent of any exhibition is not to display all works made by children. Nor is it to select what adults judge as the "best" from a personal preference for a particular style. An exhibition presents depth and diversity of mark making, styles and children's relationships with materials, people, and places. Collectively, the artworks form a united showcasing of the exhibition topic/title.

Adults and children together might form a curatorial panel to select the range of artworks for an exhibit. If you and the children curate regular exhibitions, there is less likelihood that individual artists will miss out. Holding exhibitions featuring individual child artists will ensure no-one misses out. Importantly, we are teaching children moderation skills and to be discerning curators who are working out what they want viewers to see.

If you are seeking a wide range of submissions from across a region or from several organisations you may need to seek digital versions for a panel to review. We suggest providing guidelines for submissions regarding media, size of work, consent and accompanying descriptions, such as those outlined on the curatorial tag example in this booklet (page 5). Selecting the works may become an online task between the curatorial team.



Curating - Making choices, laying out the artworks next to each other can assist you to see what works well together, what's missing and which ones to select.



The nitty-gritty of curating

Now we need to pull the exhibition together. First, children's artworks that are displayed will be based on an initial negotiation between adult and child. The child chooses if their work can be displayed and for how long. Children's permission often depends on their attachment to the piece and any caveats they place upon displaying their work should be acknowledged and accepted. A sample of a written contract/permission/assent form is provided at the back of this booklet. Young children's assent can be made with a mark and witnessed in recognition of their right to have a choice about what happens to their work. Consent forms need to contain information that allows ease of return of works.

After such negotiations and permissions, the curatorial task is to decide how to present the child's work respectfully and in a way that excites interest from viewers. According to Ann Pelo, the aim of such decisions is to bring each child's story to life.



Some examples of framing using simple black paper borders which can be cut to size.



Final framed works from the *Making Marks Travelling Exhibition* in the Queenstown Library, Tasmania. All artworks were surrounded by a mat board, cut to size and shape and displayed in identical frames to promote consistency across the exhibition.

Tips for displaying young children's artwork in exhibitions everywhere:

- Where possible, artworks should be displayed when the works created by children are still meaningful to them. Formal exhibitions may take time to curate – works are presented for broader appreciation and possibly re-visited by children and families.
- Seek locations where purposeful tensions can be created between the exhibition and the viewer. Walk-through spaces provide opportunities for capturing the attention of multiple viewers and generate broad interest. Cubicle spaces provide opportunity for reflection on a small number of artworks.
- Use neutral backgrounds to keep the viewer's attention on the images and texts.

- Frame two-dimensional works with simple borders. This draws attention to the detail and intensity of the child's artistic expression.
- Cluster artworks to create coherence to the collection, as well as an aesthetic balance.
- Locate curatorial tags, descriptive texts and photographic journeys (the child at work, if possible) beside each artwork. These should be easy to read, capture attention, yet not take over from the artwork itself.



Artist: Atticus

Age: 3yrs 6 mths

Media: Texta and oil pastel
on paper

Title of Work: *The Rocket Ship*

Date of Work: 07/05/2019

Artist Statement: *I made
a rocket ship for my mum*

Curatorial labels or tags are traditionally 150X120mm on a medium called Travelsol available through Signarama or Thinkbig. Labels or tags acknowledge who the artist is and supply other details. They can include:

- Artist Name - first name only. Example: **Atticus**
- Age - in years and months. Example: **3yrs 6mths**
- Media - used to create the work. Example: **Texta and oil pastel on paper**
- Title of Work - captures the image, or activity – the title may be decided by the child or in partnership with an adult especially if the child is not yet verbal. Example: **The Rocket Ship**
- Date of Work - when work was made, day/month/year). Example: **07/05/2019**
- Size of Work - height in cms x width in cms. Only include if significant.
- Artist Statement - where possible use the child's voice by selecting a comment made by the child to represent the work. If the child is not yet verbal the adult might create a descriptive sentence in partnership with the child. Example: **Atticus: I made a rocket ship for my mum.**
- Story - here is where the adult describes and interprets what occurred. Including, how the child made marks and any relationships with materials, people and place that were being explored or illustrated by the child. Example: **Young children use mark making to tell stories about imagined worlds. Often the mark making is accompanied by a verbal story as the children act out their imaginings.**

Atticus made different sounds as he drew straight, “whoosh”, waving, “neow”, and circular, “wheeww”, lines. Atticus enjoys reading books with his mum about space; and in this drawing he uses line to show the rocket moving through space.

Consent Form example



Image and Media consent Consent Form - Child and Adult

I, the undersigned, agree to and provide permission for the image, artwork, photographic, video, audio or any other form of electronic recording of me for use by B4 Early Years Coalition Department of Education, Tasmania. If signing as a parent or guardian, I have explained this consent form and sought the consent of the child.

I authorise the use or reproduction of any image/recording referred to above for the purposes of publishing materials related to the activities, programs and services of B4 Early Years Coalition Department of Education Tasmania without acknowledgment and without being entitled to remuneration or compensation. The image/recording may appear in print, electronic, or video media, and may be available to a global audience through the internet. Images/recordings may also be provided to other government departments for use in related publications.

I acknowledge that ownership of any image/recording will be retained by the B4 Early Years Coalition Department of Education Tasmania. I understand and agree that if I wish to withdraw this authorisation, it will be my responsibility to inform the B4 Early Years Coalition, Department of Education Tasmania.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| _____ Signature/ Mark of Child | _____ Signature Parent/Guardian |
| _____ Print name | _____ Print name |
| _____ Mobile/email | |
| _____ Date and location of event: | |

Consent form (copy) _____
Name of child/parent or guardian: _____
Date of event: _____
Location of event: _____



If I wish to withdraw permission for use of my image/recording, it will be my responsibility to inform B4 Support Team on 03616 55666 or b4@education.tas.gov.au

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Curating the viewer

Any exhibition is created with the viewer in mind. Capturing the attention of older viewers not familiar with children's art will need the benefit of multiple exposures to exhibitions where their attention to a particular focus is directed through questions, provocations, and specialist information.

Ann Pelo suggests the use of reflective questions beside selected artworks in the exhibition to encourage adults to stop, look more carefully and ponder. You might ask:

- Are there connections between your experiences and the ones that the child artist is sharing?
- Using the same media, how would you approach representing this subject, place, relationship?
- What other media might you use?
- If the child artist were in front of you now, what questions might you ask about the story you see in the artwork?

When viewers are children, the exhibition can be displayed at a lower level for ease of access viewing. It can also be presented for robust sensory exploration, perhaps behind perspex for the very young.

Viewing art can be like seeing the world from the car window, children and other passengers have visual access to different viewpoints and heights. The figure below highlights this.



Critiquing Art

We believe that adults and children can be supported to critique artworks sensitively. Our aim is to build arts literacy in all viewers. Felicity McArdle suggests we invite children and adults take these steps in turn:

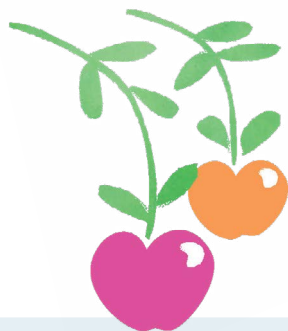
Describe: What do you see – objects, lines, shapes, colours, textures? Tip – try not to interpret what you see when you first view the artwork.

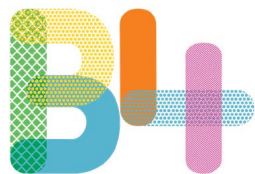
Analyse: How are lines or colours repeated? Are there connections between objects, colours, lines, shapes? What do you notice first, where does your eye move next?

Interpret: Your turn to be creative – draw on what you have seen in the first two stages and attempt to create meaning about what you think the artist is trying to tell us, or what they were trying to explore or achieve.

Judge: This is tricky as it requires an opinion based on what you have seen or interpreted rather than simply on personal "taste". Are you moved by this work? If so, how? Why do you think the artwork has been selected to represent the exhibition topic?

Taking children to galleries to critique adult work and engage in wider cultural experiences helps them become 'cultural citizens'. This term used by Barbara Piscitelli AM, B4's *Making Marks* lead curator represents what we are trying to achieve through our exhibitions. Children are seen and heard. Their opinions matter.





Early Years Coalition

