

**MAC
BA**

MUSEU
D'ART CONTEMPORANI
DE BARCELONA

EXPRESSART



Teacher's handbook

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Contemporary art is an inexhaustible font of knowledge that we can all learn from. This fact, plus our determination to provide universal access to a project that every participant will benefit from, prompted us to set up ExpressArt, an initiative aimed at children and adults alike, including people with special educational needs. The overall purpose of the project is to take contemporary art as our starting point to provide participants with the tools and especially the skills they need to explore a diverse range of questions and themes.

The project takes the form of a series of classroom and workshop activities based around a selection of materials (three-dimensional objects, images and texts) presented in a wooden artwork crate on wheels with three separate boxes inside.

These activities are designed to be conducted before visiting the museum, giving participants an opportunity to consider in advance a number of key aspects related to contemporary art that cannot be dealt with in depth during the course of a tour of the museum. These preliminary activities cover concepts on how to appreciate and understand artists' work and will enable participants to better observe, recognise and identify works and elements within them and to ask more pertinent questions when viewing artworks at first hand. Nevertheless, the activities can also be usefully undertaken after a visit to the museum, as they enable participants to consider questions that were only hinted at in the exhibition rooms: what it is that artists express through their works, what materials they use, what working methods they employ, etc. Other related issues can also be explored.

The project aims to show that art offers almost infinite possibilities as a means for communicating ideas, feelings, opinions and emotions, and that artists use a wide range of materials, objects and techniques, the meaning and significance of which may vary depending on the artist concerned.

There is no single type of artist, nor is there a single way of working, nor is there even a universally understood code of meanings. Instead, there is an enormous diversity of artists, approaches, individual and group forms of expression, and materials and techniques that can be used. Writers employ the written word to express themselves and musicians apply the language of music. Similarly, artists have their own particular language, one that is constantly growing and that does not have a fixed vocabulary, syntax or grammar that would, if they existed, make artistic expression uniform.

ExpressArt makes no value judgements about artists' work, nor does it consider art from a chronological or historical perspective. It simply aims to raise awareness of the work of a number of contemporary artists included in the museum's collection as a means to whet participants' curiosity and arouse their interest in learning about art, while contributing to enhancing their communication skills and ability to express themselves.

The project requires participants to suspend any judgements **they may have**, as the objective is to open their eyes to contemporary art and to encourage them to set aside any aesthetic, cultural, social or other prejudices they may have, thereby allowing opinions based on the more solid foundations of knowledge and experience to emerge.

“I simply mean that art can be good, bad or indifferent, but whatever epithet we use, we must call it *art*: bad art is still art, just as a bad emotion is still an emotion.”

Marcel Duchamp

We hope that every **teacher, workshop leader and participant** will enjoy the works of art that the artists have produced and that they will be able to engage in a dialogue with them based on their own experience. We hope that this encounter with artworks will give rise to a positive attitude that fosters conversation (shared reflection) and interpretation, while kindling an appreciation of art as a means of expression.

Another of ExpressArt’s goals is to enable participants to become aware of their own ability to express themselves and to help them to develop in this respect as far as possible by encouraging them to use some of the elements or methods that artists use.

While it is true that our starting point is contemporary art, the concepts and techniques can be approached in numerous different ways, as many of the activities suggested are not linked to a particular area of knowledge. What matters is that participants engage with the things that artists express and go on in turn to express their own ideas, opinions and feelings using whatever language they feel is most appropriate, including the language of art.

We are all of us unique. Our physical make-up and cultural background and the different ways we learn, perceive, feel, love and think mean that no two individuals on the planet are alike. ExpressArt fosters this diversity by allowing room for every child and adult taking part in the project to express themselves.

The most important thing is for participants to enjoy the experience and to learn how to interact with others, having contributed to increasing respect for artists and, by extension, other forms of expression.

The ExpressArt project takes contemporary art as its starting point and focuses in particular on the collection of the MACBA (Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art), a collection with an individual character of its own and one that continues to grow thanks to the addition of new acquisitions. This constant transformation enables new connections to be drawn between works and artists and hence enables us to arrive at different visions of the collection

and itineraries through it (not just chronological), as reflected in the exhibitions mounted at the museum.

We are mindful that contemporary art is complex and that it demands considerable intellectual effort. However, ExpressArt is not intended to turn teachers, workshop leaders or participants into experts on the subject. Instead, we see art as a source of assorted kinds of learning that provides an excellent starting point for numerous activities with diverse goals that impact on various areas of knowledge.

Consequently, there is no need to be a specialist in contemporary art in order to make the most of ExpressArt. All that is required is a willingness to engage with a selection of contemporary artworks and artists in the MACBA Collection and to set aside any prejudices or pre-judgements. All the project asks is that we open our eyes and minds to the works of art and that we embrace any sensations, feelings, ideas, memories and associations that may arise without dwelling upon the appropriateness of what we feel or think. There will be plenty of time for this later on.

Contemporary artworks contain references. To discover what these are, we must look in artists' inner and outer worlds. We will find it difficult to enter artists' inner world, unless they themselves choose to show it to us, but we can always study their concerns, fears, longings, passions, etc. for insights, and there is of course our own experience which may in some respects resemble that of the artist. With regard to the outer world, this may be more familiar because we share it or because our knowledge of history allows us to reconstruct the past. In many instances, the challenge lies in finding the connections between the works and the circumstances in which they were made. These links are often indiscernible at first sight, but they do exist.

Art is not self-contained. Artists are not hermits who have withdrawn from the world and live outside of society but quite the opposite: they are immersed in the reality we all share and express what they feel, think and believe. We too are members of this shared world and hence we are in a position to understand and grasp artists' views so long as we are prepared to make the attempt to do so, despite the difficulties that we know lie ahead.

ExpressArt **promotes research** and is intended to foster open-minded, questioning, critical, respectful and participative attitudes that can, if so desired, be expressed through art.

As Robert Filliou, an artist whose work is included in the collection, says:

“Engaging in research is not a privilege for the erudite but quite the opposite, it is the remit of the ignorant.”

Description of the project material

Contents of the crate

Large box divided into 30 compartments that contain various items (every day, industrial, natural and other objects) with a methacrylate lid and handle.

Small box divided into 15 compartments that contain cubes of different materials and in different sizes with a methacrylate lid and handle.

Small box, not divided into compartments, with a wooden lid and handle that contains:

Jute bag containing a hundred glass marbles.

Thirty black foam mats measuring 12 × 12 cm.

Activity guide.

A CD-ROM.

A plastic-laminated photograph of each of the boxes with compartments so that the objects and cubes can be put back in the right place.

A black mat measuring 37 × 44 cm that is placed on top of the large box.

The educational material

The educational material supplied is sufficient for groups of up to 30 participants and consists essentially of:

Materials, objects and various three-dimensional items that can be used in a wide range of exercises and activities.

A CD-ROM that contains: an interactive program, a folder containing printable images of artworks, and a PDF file that can be used to print images of the objects in the large box. The interactive program was designed specifically for ExpressArt and contains information (images and texts) on 29 contemporary artists included in the museum's collection and on some of their works.

The accompanying **Activity Guide** gives advice on how the materials can be used and suggests numerous innovative activities and exercises intended to motivate participants. These activities and exercises have been designed to take into account the various different ways people have of learning.

The complete Guide (currently available in Catalan and Spanish) can be downloaded as a PDF document from the MACBA website: www.macba.cat/educacio

The supplied material must be treated with care. Everyone, including participants, needs to be aware that this **material has been designed to be shared**, not just with fellow participants but with others on future courses.

Importance of the three-dimensional objects

The items inside the boxes are **especially intended to be handled**. This physical contact with the objects is particularly interesting in that it allows participants to observe the items for themselves using all their senses. Touching, moving and examining these real objects aids learning. Looking at images of these selfsame items would provide a different experience, as images are incapable of reproducing attributes such as texture, temperature, hardness, weight, etc., qualities that we can go on to discuss with others, experiment with and investigate, and which will be the subject of some of the exercises and activities. Firsthand contact with these items is a crucial aspect of the design of this project. We perceive objects better by handling them than by talking about them or by viewing reproductions, regardless of the reproduction method used.

Touching artworks is impossible in a museum environment and it is hoped that allowing the objects to be handled will to a certain extent make up for this. Some of the objects and materials in the boxes will be on display in the museum and participants will be able to view them **as they** tour the gallery. **Course participants who have** seen **these objects** in the classroom or workshop will unquestionably recognise them in the museum, even though they may be on a very different scale.

The idea behind the materials is very simple: it is much easier to remember something you have experienced than something you have imagined.

The activities

The activities detailed [in the Guide](#) are flexible and can be adapted to the particular context in which they are to be conducted. The material itself may suggest other uses as well.

The proposed activities are divided into three groups, each of which calls for different materials and covers different aspects of meaning or expression. The concepts gradually emerge and become more complex as the exercises advance. Consequently, it is advisable to progress through the activities in the order they are presented.

The first set of activities deals with objects in different shapes, sizes and materials ([Objects Box](#)).

The second set of activities deals with items that are the same shape but in different sizes and materials ([Cubes Box](#)).

The third set of activities deals with items that are the same shape, size and material ([Glass Marbles](#)).

There is no need to complete every activity [or](#) the suggested alternatives. Everyone should feel free to use the resources provided by [ExpressArt](#) as they see fit. [Variations](#) in pace, changes to some of the activities and the inclusion of others, [etc.](#) are all [in keeping](#) with the project's goals.

The factor most likely to affect the [way the project is approached](#) is the age of the participants, especially children, since this will influence the speed and complexity of the activities. Nevertheless, the same activities are proposed for everyone.

To sum up, the idea is to handle objects and materials, play with them and think and talk about them with a view to observing how they are employed by various contemporary artists in their works and allowing participants to use them to express whatever they might wish to say.

Materials employed in the first set of activities

The 30 objects

The 30 objects in the box were carefully selected based on numerous criteria and were created, constructed or acquired in what we might describe as an *artisanal* process.

The main selection criterion for including an object in a box is that it must be directly connected with one of the chosen artworks in the museum's collection.

In other words, each of the objects is present in or forms part of an artwork that can be viewed in the interactive program. This is not to say, however, that the object is identical to the one used by the artist, only that there is an evident link, which is established at different levels depending on the artwork concerned. The differences and similarities between the objects in [the box](#) and those used by the artists will allow interesting comparisons to be drawn.

In most instances, there is a difference in scale between the objects in the box and in the works, but this is not always the case. There are numerous objects that are not quite the same as the thing they represent, though some are.

Some of the connections are straightforward, whereas others more complex and so will be more difficult for young participants to identify. Some require a certain degree of abstract thinking.

Some objects are linked to a work by one artist, while others are linked to a number of works by various artists, in which case the different ways in which these artists employ the same element can contribute to an understanding of the possible alternative uses or meaning of the item.

[We have at the outset established the relationship](#) between each of the objects and the artworks in which they appear. However, this is not to say that there might not be other relationships that remain to be identified. Establishing new associations between the objects and works is an aspect that we think could be profitably [explored](#) with participants.

Another factor affecting the choice of objects was that they should be easily identifiable and recognisable. As a general rule, they are familiar items: toys and everyday objects, some used in the main by adults and others by children. In some instances, some of the objects may be unfamiliar to participants depending on their age or cultural background. However, this provides a good opportunity to discover things that some participants may not know but which others do, leading to a sharing of knowledge between those taking part.

The interactive program

The CD-ROM in the box with the wooden lid contains the interactive program, which [enables](#) participants to familiarise themselves with some of the works by 29 different artists in the MACBA Collection and to see how the objects in the [large box](#), which [they will already](#) have considered (by playing

and experimenting with them, etc.) and discussed (imagined, remembered, etc.), are used by these artists in their works.

The program consists of images and texts that can be accessed in different ways without the need to go through them in a linear manner. At the start, a screen **appears** offering two options: “Artists” and “Works”. Selecting one of these takes you into the program. These two ‘doorways’ into the program lead to the same information, but it is presented in a different order.

If you click on “Artists”, a list of the 29 selected artists, arranged in alphabetical order, appears. If you click on “Objects”, a screen comes up, showing photographs of the 30 objects in the large box with compartments, arranged in the same way.

The information in the interactive program is grouped into three basic units: “Image”, “Artist” and “Work”. These units correspond to the menu **at** the bottom of the screen that appears **when** you click on an artist or object. If the selected artist or object is associated with only one work, the program **takes you** directly to that work. However, if the artist or object is connected with more than one work, an intermediate menu of the works **you can** choose from **appears**. The ‘Back’ button always takes you back to the previous menu.

The “Image” unit **contains** photographs of works with their original title. All the photographs are interactive: run your mouse over them to find the ‘sensitive’ zones and click on them to view an **enlarged** detail of this part of the image. In the case of some works, other options appear when you click on these interactive zones, but we will not tell you what they are to keep it a surprise.

The images contain between one and ten interactive zones. **To ensure** you have identified all of them, you can use the “clue” button in the form of a question mark in the bottom right-hand part of the screen. When you **pass** the mouse over the question mark, the interactive zones you have not yet identified are highlighted, making them easier to find.

The menu at the bottom of the screen allows you to switch between the units (“Image”, “Artist” and “Work”) whenever you **choose** and in the order **you wish**. If you click on “Artist”, this **takes you** to a new screen showing a photo of the artist in question (except one, who did not wish to have her portrait taken) and a brief summary of their life and career to date. If you **click** on “Work”, this **takes you** to another screen that gives full details of the piece, including technical information, an image and an explanation.

Some of the words in the texts are artistic terms and these are highlighted in yellow. If you click on them, a pop-up window **appears**, giving a definition of the term. You **can** close these pop-up windows whenever **you choose**. All the texts

that appear in inverted commas have been written by the artists themselves.

If you [click](#) on “Image”, this [takes you back](#) to the screen showing the photograph or photographs of the works.

The options for navigating your way around the program are [quick and easy to learn](#), as the program is simple in structure, even though there are a number of different routes you can follow to access the information it contains. You can view and read precisely what you are interested in and enter through the screen showing artists surnames or via the objects screen. These two options lead to the same information, as remarked earlier, but using one or the other provides a very different experience, [as described in detail in the activities section in the Guide](#).

The program can be used in different ways and on different occasions by course participants or the teacher or workshop leader. It is essential to look at this program before moving on to the second phase [of the](#) first unit of activities, [as indicated in the Guide](#). Regardless of this, it is hoped that it will contribute to raising participants’, [teachers’ and workshop leaders’](#) understanding and appreciation of contemporary art. Very young children will, of course, be unable to read the texts, but the information they give [can](#) always be adapted to suit them. Older children and adults will be able to use the program on their own.

Materials employed in the second set of activities

The 15 cubes

This block focuses on materials and [hence employs](#) 15 objects that are the same in shape but which are made of different materials. All the objects are cubes, though there are some minor differences between them. Fifteen cubes are supplied as they are intended to be shared one between two course participants.

The cube is a familiar geometrical shape and is present in artworks throughout history. At certain times, it has played an especially important role in art in movements such as Minimalism. It features repeatedly in the work of various artists, some of whom are included in the museum’s collection.

The cube can be described as an especially ‘human’ shape, as it is virtually unknown in the world of nature apart from in the crystals of certain minerals (pyrite, halite, fluorite, etc.) that form at high pressure and temperature. The cube is a regular polyhedron and has six square sides. The square is regard-

ed in psychological terms as a static, severe shape, explaining why it is often used to refer to concepts such as organisation and construction. The cube symbolises the Earth and expresses notions of stability, solidity and permanence.

There are other particular meanings associated with the cube and these can vary widely depending on the material used to make it and on its size. A cube made of marble is, for example, very different from one made of foam or paper. Similarly, a cube measuring a centimetre is very different from one measuring half a metre or 4 metres.

The cubes we supply vary in size from between 2 and 7 centimetres along each edge. They are all made of different materials: **pyrite, wood, plasticine, flexible foam, marble, methacrylate, Rubik's Cube, aluminium, polystyrene, glass, iron, translucent plastic, cork, paraffin and corrugated cardboard**. There are small differences between them: some are a little irregular in shape (pyrite, glass, plasticine, etc.); some are solid and others are hollow; some are made using traditional methods, others industrially. These and other differences will prompt discussion concerning the shape and will encourage participants to see the range of possibilities that also exist when it comes to making a cube.

Materials employed in the third set of activities

The glass marbles

The bag contains a hundred **glass** marbles that are all the same in size. We suggest that the activities begin with a process of substitution by analogy. Participants should be asked to imagine that each of the marbles represents a person. The analogy **could** arise from the shape, since the shape of the human head can be compared to that of a marble. The flashes of colour could be people's thoughts or ideas, which are all different, as are the marbles, since no two are alike even though they are very similar.

It is possible to explore this analogy with course participants by focusing on movement and other details and inviting them to think about and raise other similarities and/or differences between the marbles and people. The discussion can continue by drawing analogies between the marbles and other things, or by imagining possible analogies between people and other elements that could be mentioned.

It may be appropriate to recall with course participants some of the works they **may have** seen in the interactive program and to discuss some of the aspects **they may** have been working on, both as regards the process of

establishing analogies between the objects and elements and certain ideas employed by artists, as well as artists' strategy of using a single item repeatedly in a work.

The large box **can be** used as a surface on which to place the marbles during the various proposed exercises. The artwork crate **contains** a black mat that is the same size as the methacrylate lid of the large box. This mat can be put on top of the box lid **to form** a surface on which the marbles are unlikely to move or fall off, as the material prevents them from rolling about and the frame of the lid acts as a barrier, stopping them from dropping off.

If the marbles **are regarded** as inappropriate for small children, **they can be** replaced by other items, bearing in mind that they must all be the same in shape, size, colour and material, if possible. These replacement objects could be spheres, cubes, pyramids or cylinders, or even irregularly-shaped items of organic origin.