

# Encounters with the Unexpected: From Holbein to Hirst (and Back Again)

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## Abstract

*Learning through art in the museum* is a Masters' level module established in 2006 through collaboration between the School of Education at Roehampton University, London and Interpretation and Education staff at Tate Britain and Tate Modern. On completion of the module, participants were asked to reflect on how the experience had altered their perspectives on the collection and their strategies for teaching and learning in art and design. The aim of this article is to explore some of the themes that emerged from these interviews and from other dialogue between tutors and students on the module, themes that are then discussed within the wider context of museum and gallery education.

The article concludes by reflecting on broader notions of knowledge and understanding in the context of museum and gallery education. It is argued that the juxtapositions of historical, modern and contemporary art that have been a distinctive feature of Tate's curatorial strategy since 2000 have shed fresh light on older works in the collection and provide opportunities for art

educators to reappraise the emphasis currently placed upon the interpretation of modern and contemporary work. It is suggested that developing knowledge and understanding of art is partly about embracing notions of ambiguity and mystery: that engaging with multiple and shifting interpretations of artworks should play a more central role in art education and that part of the process of engaging with art is the experience of *not* knowing and *not* understanding.

## Introduction

A recent visit to Tate Britain with a group of undergraduate students provided an interesting illustration of the challenges faced by museum and gallery educators. One student arrived almost three hours late, just as the others were leaving. The group had spent the morning exploring a range of artworks with Interpretation and Education staff and each had selected an artist whose work would form the basis for an assignment due at the end of term. There was still time, I suggested to the latecomer, to attempt this task and suggested that he could profitably spend an hour or two exploring the galleries. 'This place,' he said, pointing at the rotunda floor, 'This place – Tate – does it have a website?' 'Yes,' I replied, 'it has a website.' 'It's OK,' he said politely, 'I'll go home and look at the website.'

Why visit a gallery? Why not head home and opt for the virtual equivalent? What is it about *being there* that can make the experience so central to developing a real and lasting capacity for engaging with art? These are some of the questions examined in this article and explored by students on *Learning through art in the museum*, a Masters' level module taught at Tate Britain and Tate Modern as part of Roehampton University's MA Art, Craft and Design Education course. Two cohorts of students, mainly teachers in primary and secondary schools, were interviewed at the end of the module, together with tutor Matilda Pye. Participants were asked to reflect on how the module had altered their perspectives on the collection and on how their experiences might impact upon their subsequent strategies for engaging children and young people with artists' work.

A key issue that emerged from discussions was the impact of Tate's curatorial strategy of juxtaposing historical, modern and contemporary on perceptions of the collection. The experience of encountering the unexpected – visitors engaging with unfamiliar artworks – was explored and recognised as being a central part of the process of visiting a gallery. Students also reflected on issues surrounding the selection of 'suitable' artworks for use in education: would children know what this artwork meant? Would they

*understand* it? There was a growing awareness that part of the process of developing knowledge and understanding of art was engaging with the experience of *not* knowing and *not* understanding: that ambiguity and mystery have important roles to play in the process of interpreting artworks. This issue is explored in depth in the latter part of this article.

## Background

'Knowledge and understanding' of art and design has featured in the National Curriculum for schools in England since the early 1990s, and the ways in which this aspect of the curriculum is taught is the focus of ongoing reflection and debate (e.g. Burgess 2003; Burgess & Addison 2007; Dear 2001; Tallack 2000). Consequently, increasing numbers of children are encountering a wide range of images through artists' work, and a stronger emphasis is being placed upon the development of strategies to support children in thinking about and responding to artworks (e.g. Grigg 2004; Page *et al.* 2006). The range of literature that reports on and evaluates these initiatives provides a sense of movement and expansion from independent localised initiatives (e.g. Taylor 1992) to projects based at national museums and galleries (e.g. Charman & Ross 2006). There is also evidence of an increasing emphasis on engaging pupils with contemporary art (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2008; Downing 2005; Herne 2005; Horn 2006; Illeris 2005) and on projects with a specific cultural focus (e.g. Allen 2009).

The broad context in which *Learning through art in the museum* has been planned and taught is one in which increased attention is being paid towards providing children and young people with access to collections of museums and galleries. In recent years, levels of funding for museum and gallery education projects have increased significantly, with £7 million invested by the Department for Education and Science between 2004 and 2006 (DfES 2005) and a further £9.4 million between 2006 and 2008. Few would challenge the rationale for this initiative: part of the rationale for a national collection of art is that it is preserved for future generations, and it is logical to aim to increase and sustain visitor numbers

by targeting younger visitors through educational initiatives. There is increased determination amongst museums and galleries to make their spaces and collections accessible to children, to encourage them to respond positively to works of art and to provide targeted learning materials aimed at reinforcing an understanding and appreciation of artists' work. Children will, it is hoped, take back to their classrooms experiences that will not only inspire their own creative work but also fuel their enthusiasm for further cultural experiences. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness, particularly amongst primary teachers, that artists' work can be used not only as a stimulus for practical art activities, but also as an instrument for learning across the curriculum.

There is also evidence of ambitious initiatives in museum and gallery education aimed at developing a lasting impact on participants. The National Gallery's Primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Cultural Placement Programme, established in 2003 in collaboration with Roehampton University, aims to build sustainable links between regional museums and galleries, ITE providers and primary schools. The programme is now well established in Oxford, Nottingham and Liverpool as well as London, with over 200 student teachers completing week-long placements in the gallery in 2008–9. Following the placement, students plan schemes of work inspired by the collection and return to the gallery with their pupils, thereby ensuring a degree of continuity between children's experiences in the gallery and in school.

However, this sense of continuity is often absent from the experiences of many children. A museum or gallery visit is frequently a 'one-off', during which education staff are under pressure to ensure that they make the trip worthwhile for their visitors, and have limited time to support teachers in their efforts to extend learning effectively back in the classroom; while other issues prevent schools from maximising opportunities for gallery education. Primary teachers often cite a lack of expertise as an obstacle to building effectively upon the learning that takes place in the gallery, and can become dependent upon work by a relatively narrow range of artists for use

in the classroom. The practicalities of planning a visit – the distance to the museum, the travel costs, health and safety issues – can also be prohibitive and, as illustrated by the comments of the student quoted above, the expansion of web-based provision inclines some to conclude that the internet offers a substitute rather than an extension of the direct experience of the museum visit. And whereas primary teachers might use a gallery visit to reinforce learning across the curriculum, their secondary colleagues often report on the limited levels of communication between subject areas, resulting in issues of equal opportunities – why should the art class be the only one allowed out? Furthermore, the widespread notion that art is essentially about investigating and making rather than knowledge and understanding (the two strands of the National Curriculum for Art in England) leads to increased pressure on secondary students to produce some physical evidence of their visit, leading many to spend their gallery visit concentrating their attention on a narrow range of artworks – often those that can be reproduced with some degree of accuracy within the pages of their sketchbooks.

### Module aims

It is in this context that *Learning through art in the museum* was developed as a taught module on Roehampton University's MA in Art, Craft and Design Education, bringing together primary and secondary teachers to share and develop practice with gallery educators. The module was established in 2006 through collaboration between the School of Education at Roehampton and Interpretation and Education staff at Tate, and built on existing provision within both institutions. Tate has an extensive track record of providing short courses for teachers and ongoing partnerships with Goldsmith's University College and Liverpool John Moores University enabling teachers to study at Masters' level; while a *Critical and Contextual Studies* module has formed part of the MA course at Roehampton since the early 1990s. When Interpretation and Education staff at Tate began teaching on the latter module, it was natural to relocate the module to Tate and develop its content in the context of the collection. Taught

through a series of sessions throughout the year at both Tate Modern and Tate Britain, *Learning through art in the museum* has several key aims: to provide opportunities for teachers to extend their knowledge and understanding of art through investigating a range of works in the Collection and to engage with a range of pedagogical approaches to using works of art with children and young people; to develop a strong personal rationale for the value of gallery education and to explore the wider context of museums and galleries in the twenty-first century. Specifically, the module aims to facilitate students' abilities to:

- adopt non-narrative approaches to engaging with works of art in the collection;
- reflect on museums and galleries as public destinations in the urban environment and interrogate the expansion of twenty-first century museums;
- explore national identities through a national collection (*How does visual culture inform and diverge from complex cultural identity?*);
- examine contrasts and continuity in art education (*How do art schools teach? How do artists learn? Can the critical and self-reflexive framework artists use to assess the success and failure of their own practice be applied in classroom teaching?*);
- develop a cross-curricular approach to learning through using works of art.

The module provides a suitable focus for participants' reflection on their changing relationships with artists' work and with the galleries themselves – particularly during sessions at Tate Modern, where the session is timetabled after hours and behind closed doors, allowing unparalleled opportunities to engage with the displays. The inception of Tate Modern in 2000 prompted a division of the collection between the two London sites, prompting innovative curatorial strategies that have since proved to be influential on other institutions. Principally, the practice of presenting the collection thematically rather than chronologically has produced many memorable juxtapositions in the galleries: Giacomo Balla's *Speed* alone in a room with Lichtenstein's *Wham!*; a Richard

Long wall drawing next to Monet's *Water Lilies*. Such juxtapositions not only challenge the viewer to recognise connections between works made across different times and places but also invite an engagement with works other than those that might ordinarily have been selected: visitors engage not only with what they came to see, but also with what they *did not* come to see. For the students on *Learning through art in the museum*, the process of being placed in front of the unfamiliar and set task of formulating and articulating a response has often taken them beyond their comfort zone and formed a central element to the experience on the module.

Students begin the module with varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of art, and a significant feature of each cohort that has so far completed the module is the diversity of their experiences of teaching and learning. Some teach in early years' settings, some in primary schools, others in secondary schools or higher education institutions. Some have a degree in an aspect of art and design, while others have no specific art qualification but have found through experience that art forms an increasingly central element of their practice. While most students are from the UK, others originate from a range of countries including Nigeria, Taiwan and Cyprus. A key principle of the module is that, whatever their background or area of expertise, it offers participants opportunities to engage with artworks on their own terms rather than as teachers; they are encouraged to challenge their assumptions about museum and gallery education and about the practice of using artists' work in schools.

### Reflections on the module

Several themes emerged from interviews carried out with students at the end of the module: firstly, the impact of having time and space with the collection and the impact this experience had on students' perceptions of individual works, of the collection as a whole and the gallery itself; secondly, conceptions of their identities as teachers and thirdly, the issue of communicating to children and young people the importance of the notion of *being there*. These themes are explored below and illustrated with comments from students.

### Time and space: changing relationships

All students commented on the way time and space in the gallery altered their relationships with the collection. While most were reasonably familiar with the galleries and with certain works before beginning the module, several commented on feelings of discomfort and dissatisfaction with the 'typical' gallery experience: specifically, the pressure to have 'meaningful relationships' with artworks in a crowded 'blockbuster' exhibition often resulted in diminished levels of engagement:

*One of the things I love most about this module is that we've been visiting in the evenings and practically having the whole gallery to ourselves, with that feeling of the space and the quiet. The experience of being almost alone in a large space with the collection fills you with such energy that, even if it's difficult to communicate that energy or to replicate that situation, that you've still got the motivation to explain to people that this is an exciting place to be.*

This opportunity to connect with the collection on personal level led to students altering their perspectives and changing their minds about individual artworks. The process of interrogating specific works in depth was challenging for some but it led others to reconsider value judgements that, consciously or otherwise, they had previously made. Through discussion it emerged that a key aspect of the importance of repeated encounters with the same artworks over time enabled students to appreciate more fully the extent to which their relationships with artworks were in a constant state of flux. There was a growing awareness that the process of discussing an artwork – or making practical work inspired by the artwork – led towards a shift in the perception of the original work. Certain works that were once regarded as peripheral were now central, while others that were previously regarded as significant were reassessed.

There was also evidence that artworks that had previously, for various reasons, been considered 'off-limits' by some students were reconsidered through the parallel processes of group discussion and individual reflection:

*I didn't do an art degree – and in the past I've would have limited my responses to looking at things and saying 'I like that – nice colours.' But doing this module has really made me look and look and look again and look in other ways. It happens outside the gallery too. I look at things differently.*

This process of 'looking differently' was regarded as particularly important in the context of a national collection of British and contemporary art that, for some students, could sometimes be a little too familiar. Those who knew the collection talked of how certain rooms were marked in their minds as having little to offer or unlikely to provide a challenge, and early on in the module several students indicated assumptions that the older works in the collection were the least likely to interest them or their pupils: the Pre-Raphaelites, the Tudor portraits were, it was felt, easily overshadowed by the high-profile contemporary work. There was an assumption that a Holbein portrait, for example, would be less likely to engage or sustain children's attention than a Damien Hirst installation. While the former may be more instantly recognisable to children as an artwork, the latter, it was felt, had the 'wow factor' increasingly sought by younger visitors.

### Teacher identities

Teacher identities were also regarded as a problematic issue. One unusual feature of the module is that it is not targeted specifically at either primary or secondary teachers, but both (some students were early years specialists, one taught in higher education). At the start of the module some primary teachers expressed concern at their limited expertise, their perception of themselves as 'generalists' compared to their specialist secondary colleagues. As the module progressed, these concerns became less pressing and a clearer awareness of the common ground shared between teachers of different age groups emerged:

*My perspective on myself has altered – I'm not so concerned about my overall knowledge of who made which painting and when – I'm more inter-*

*ested in looking at each picture on its own terms and working out what my own response is. I feel more confident about introducing artworks to children in school and encouraging children to ask questions of the work.*

This process mirrored, to some extent, a broader picture in which shared interests and issues across different phases of education are often obscured: opportunities for communication across phases of education are, students agreed, severely limited. Each became increasingly aware of the diversity of their individual responses to specific artworks within the group and several made frequent references to their personal experiences outside of their professional role. Essentially, the process of engaging with the work was more about participants' individual personalities than the contexts in which they worked as teachers. The notion of common ground between different age groups also prompted reflection on some ingrained assumptions about the selection of certain artworks that were thought to appeal to specific age groups and on the relationship between the teacher's personal tastes and their understanding and expectations of pupils' preferences. The former, it was felt, was often sidelined in favour of the latter, resulting in certain works – Matisse's *Snail* being an obvious example – occupying an almost unassailable position as a focus for young children. This notion of certain works being appropriate for specific age groups of pupils was one challenged by tutor Matilda Pye:

*The further up the school you get there's a sense of what you should look at and what you shouldn't look at. Why is it that so many young people look at Pop Art or Gilbert and George, the same things over and over again? What are the conventions that set that? Why does every primary school try to look at the Henry Moore sculpture? Everything works on the basis of this is what other schools have done. I don't think that there's a restriction on what the younger children can look at and what you can get out of it with them. I think that we could have exactly the same discussion that we had in the gallery this morning with four-year-olds.*

Discussion led to reflection on the extent to which artists visualise audiences for their work, and the nature of those audiences. Contrasts were drawn between literature and the way that that age or gender-specific audiences were targeted for certain books. Whereas an author or illustrator may create texts or images suitable for a specific age-range, artists do not make artworks for children. Some students suggested that children, unburdened by pressures to appreciate artworks that carry specific status to more 'informed' viewers, could even be better placed to engage with artists' work than adults. This notion of a democratic process, in which children and young people are encouraged to articulate their own readings of artworks, was one that several students found initially daunting yet ultimately liberating:

*I came away thinking more clearly about how my students might feel and what they would understand. Specifically, when we were asked how we would discuss Ofili's *No Woman, No Cry*, with its images of Steven Lawrence, I simply said I'd have to tell them who Steven Lawrence was and why this image was possibly used by the artist, etc. When the tutor asked me why, I realised I wasn't sure. She went on to say 'But why do you feel that is important?' I still wasn't sure. Why have I felt compelled to try and put all the images I had used in my lessons in some sort of perspective? Surely this is what we should be teaching our students to do for themselves?*

### **Being there**

The key issue that students on the module agreed about was the importance of *being there* – there was no substitute, online or otherwise, for first-hand experience of artworks in a gallery. It was also acknowledged, however, that simply getting children through the gallery door was not enough. Several experiences of teacher-directed school visits were discussed, highlighting a range of problems that emerged from teachers of different age groups. Primary teachers, for example, were concerned that children's experiences in the gallery were often over-directed:

*If you give children a worksheet telling them to Now look at painting 118, etc. – they'll look at the photocopied pictures on the worksheet rather than the painting on the wall and we might as well not be in the gallery at all. It's all tied up in the whole notion of providing evidence that we took them – here are the worksheets, with ten identical questions producing ten identical answers. I can understand how teachers become consumed by that process and find it difficult to get children engaged in just being in the gallery.*

Conversely, secondary teachers acknowledged that their pupils often had insufficient direction. It was perceived that there was a greater reluctance on the part of secondary teachers to plan extended structured sessions with groups of pupils directed by gallery educators. For older pupils there were tensions between being perceived as a pupil – dependent on guidance and taught in a group – and a young adult in a public space. The tension often led, it was felt, to a lack of connection with the work, an absence in the gallery rather than a presence:

*Some think that they don't need to engage with the collection. They'll just get the postcard or, even worse, don't even get to the building. They could take tours of the gallery online and they'd have no idea about the scale of a work or the materials used to make it – it's just an image.*

This was a point elaborated on by Matilda Pye, who highlighted how a limited engagement with real artworks leads inevitably towards a superficial response from the student:

*It's difficult to explain this to an A level student who presents you with his or her research on Jackson Pollock – when they've never even seen or thought about the paintings and they only have the narrative of how the work was made. It severely affects their abilities to do anything with the work because they don't actually understand what it is they're looking at. They're just taking the words 'it's a drip painting' and thinking 'I could do that.' They're not doing it by looking, they're doing it by instruction.*

The recurring theme of 'being there' is interesting on several levels. As adults, our encounters with artworks can be complex: we know that, having booked our ticket and queued for admission to a 'blockbuster' retrospective exhibition, the time we are allocated to stand face-to-face with the highlights of the show is not only strictly limited, but is also likely to be shared with a crowd of headphone-clad colleagues. The stress generated by this experience is rooted in our awareness of the rarity of the object on view: we are looking at the *original*. This notion of the original is, arguably, increasingly difficult to communicate to children. Whilst technology offers us instant access to a proliferation of visual images – few schools in the UK are now without access to interactive whiteboards linked to the internet – it is arguably harder than ever to teach children *why* some of these images are regarded as being of great value, or to provide them with strategies for disentangling these images from the visual cacophony that surrounds them. Film director Wim Wenders, as far back as the late 1980s, observed in an interview that 'Images are beyond our control: they are like a currency of which an entire suitcase is needed in order to buy a loaf of bread' (Malcolm 1988). Wenders' concern is one that is particularly relevant to teachers working with children and young people in the twenty-first century: how do we explain to children that a Rembrandt portrait justifies our attention more than an advertisement for a mobile phone?

### Encounters with the unexpected

A third cohort of students has now completed *Learning through art in the museum* and the module continues to attract students from diverse educational contexts. As Programme Convener for Roehampton's MA Art, Craft and Design Education, I have found that the themes for discussion identified by students on the module over the past three years continue to resonate, prompting me to reflect on broader yet related issues.

I recently received a birthday card that featured photograph of a Banksy artwork. I liked the card, yet suddenly realised what it was about Banksy's work that troubled and irritated me. Greetings

cards may deliver a range of messages, but the images that decorate them are all similar in that each message is invariably and intentionally unambiguous: these flowers are pretty, this bear is warm and cuddly, this person is enjoying drinking beer. The picture on my Banksy card fitted seamlessly into this limited repertoire of images. A photograph showed a street corner with a double yellow line on the road that had been extended vertically to create the shape of a flower on a nearby wall, where a stencilled man posed with a paint roller. Like the flowers and bears, the message could be understood at a glance: this man does not want to conform to rules, he wants to rebel and make the dull city into a brighter place.

What I found problematic about the image was that it left the viewer with little to do. In the process of interpretation there was no room for *ambiguity* and, as such, the image was perfect for a greetings card. Banksy is, of course, hugely popular with young people. And while there is no doubt that many are excited by the rebellious, under-cover aspect of his work, its appeal arguably lies in its accessibility, its obviousness. You don't need to look at a Banksy for very long before feeling that you've exhausted its possibilities – ambiguity is not on the agenda. One of the key features of discussions during *Learning through art in the museum* is that students on the module are encouraged to accept and embrace ambiguity in artworks rather than search for specific meanings and fixed interpretations. Students became increasingly aware that ambiguity is a notion that can be troubling for young people, located within an educational system that places a great emphasis on examinations. In this context, how prepared are children and young people to engage with the notion that there are multiple interpretations of artworks, that these interpretations are not fixed but change over time? Ambiguity is arguably the antithesis of learning in schools.

In recent years, contemporary artworks have been increasingly widely regarded as offering a relevant and important focus for work with young people (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2008; Downing 2005; Herne 2005). This is a notion that was by no means rejected by the students on the module, but was also increasingly challenged through

discussion. There was a growing sense that, by concentrating attention on modern and contemporary art, older works were being overlooked, partly due to their complexity, partly their perceived lack of relevance to modern life and partly their inability to impose themselves in the face of contemporary work that assumed an increasingly higher profile in the gallery spaces.

The decision to alternate the taught sessions between Tate Britain and Tate Modern served to foreground this issue. For some time after the division of the Tate collection between Tate Britain and Tate Modern in 2000, I found that Tate Britain slightly resembled a half-forgotten older relative, living in the shadow of its hugely popular younger sibling. Interestingly, despite the familiarity of the works left behind at Millbank, the non-chronological re-hanging in several rooms *a la* Tate Modern provided the works with an unexpected new lease of life. Ivon Hitchens' autumnal paintings from the 1950s suddenly glowed with colour, while the extra space allocated to the tentative English abstractions of the St Ives painters made them look like they were confident steps into a brave new world. The Holbeins and the Holman Hunts that I had learned to hurry past *en route* to the latest Turner Prize show reasserted their roles in the story of British art.

Crucially, the curatorial practice of juxtaposing artworks from different periods mirrors the process through which artists engage with and build upon art from the past, and this is a key lesson for children and young people to learn. The journey from a Velasquez portrait to a Jeff Koons sculpture might seem to be a long and tortuous one. Yet insert Francis Bacon and Damien Hirst between the two and the transition becomes smoother, smooth enough to make us want to return and take the trip back in the other direction. We might arrive at Tate Britain and head for Hirst, yet find ourselves waylaid by Holbein: the gallery is a not only a place where we find what we are looking for; it is also a place where we stumble upon surprises, where we find what we did not know we were looking for. This is a key part of the gallery experience. In no other place are we offered such valuable opportunities to have our lives suddenly enriched by an encounter with the unexpected.

One of the most striking features of the taught sessions on *Learning through art in the museum* was the process by which students' attention was gradually diverted from those artworks that demanded their attention to those that sought it more subtly. It is well documented that the range of artists used in schools is surprisingly narrow and the recent movement towards promoting contemporary art in schools and the ongoing emphasis on making these artworks accessible to children and young people is broadly welcome. However, as art educators we should be cautious to avoid designing an ideological battlefield, with paintbrushes poised on one side, video cameras paused at the other. Take, for example, the proliferation of Julian Opie-style portraits in schools in recent years, images that have become as ubiquitous as drawings of the halved red pepper. The underlying message seems to be that 'We like some contemporary art, especially the bits that are easy to draw on the computer.'

The suggestion that too strong an emphasis is currently placed on contemporary art is one that is increasingly discussed. 'It used to be the case that it was really quite rare for anyone interested in contemporary art not to also be interested in Old Master paintings', observed National Gallery Director Nicholas Penny recently, 'To be just interested in contemporary art is quite an unusual thing' (Akbar 2008, 7). There is, arguably, a parallel here with the teaching of English in schools. It is well established that certain authors are considered appropriate for teaching at GCSE and A level, yet the range of authors is surprisingly wide, with Ian McEwan and Alan Bennett found alongside Chaucer and Shakespeare: there is an implicit understanding that the contemporary complements the historical. Buchanan's (1995) examination of the connections between learning in literacy and critical studies in art and design is a good example of an art educator focusing attention beyond art towards practice across the curriculum. The lesson to be learned is that we should not attempt to construct a hierarchy of artworks that mimics the learning journey from the Gruffalo to Harry Potter, one that begins with Matisse's *Snail* ('ideal for Key Stage 1') and progresses to Henry Moore before landing on Tracey Emin's unmade bed.

Students on the module grew increasingly aware of the fact that, while artists make work for many reasons – aesthetic, political, personal – they do not make work for children, and the process of supporting young people as they engage with artworks need not centre around accessibility. The curriculum may dictate that pupils should develop *knowledge and understanding* of art – but ambiguity and mystery are at the centre of this knowledge and understanding, a notion eloquently expressed by critic Adrian Searle:

*When I was 10 years old, in 1963, I was taken by an enlightened schoolteacher to see a Goya exhibition at London's Royal Academy. I can still see myself standing in front of those paintings, and I can recall my companions sniggering at the naked Maja. Of course, I knew absolutely nothing about Spanish history, even less about art or human suffering. But I think I understood that there was much I didn't know, which was a lesson in itself.* (Searle 2005, 12)

The experience that Searle recalls was perhaps not one that he consciously sought at the time, but one that nevertheless clearly left an indelible mark upon him. As teachers how often do we admit to children that there are things we do not know or do not understand, that there are experiences that we find bewildering, threatening and how often do we acknowledge to ourselves that *not knowing* can be a good thing? A visit to a museum or gallery is not always about finding answers: it can be about coming away with more questions than when you arrived.

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