
ART STEPS BY VIVIENNE BINNS

NOTES FOR ARTIST EDUCATORS FOR ONSITE ACTIVITY

PROGRAM DETAILS

Notes for Artist Educators

Context

Mothers' memories, others' memories, 1979–81 was a community arts project developed by Vivienne Binns while artist-in-residence at the University of New South Wales. She later continued the project in the western Sydney suburb of Blacktown. She made a poster inviting people to take part in the work, which she described as follows:

A project for the participation of students, staff and other men or women to recall the lives of women and their means of expression in the domestic sphere. This will be done through the collection of memories, family albums and through the discovery of those activities, practised in the home, which provide a medium for creative expression. This material will be placed in a social & historical context. It will also be extended into other art forms. You are invited to join the project...

The focus of this project was for individuals to explore and share memories of their mothers, grandmothers and other women in their lives, and to remember and document how they expressed themselves creatively. Vivienne felt that sitting down and having a relaxed, authentic chat over a cup of tea was key to having a meaningful interaction in which participants felt comfortable to share thoughts, memories, and family photographs.

At Blacktown, some of the participants' memories were developed into 'postcards' through screen-printing family photographs with vitreous enamel onto steel. This part of the project, *Mothers' memories, others' memories: postcard rack*, is exhibited in *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists*.

An interview with Vivienne Binns by National Gallery Head Curator, Australian Art, Deborah Hart, gives further context and insight into the artist's practice: <https://nga.gov.au/on-demand/artists-in-conversation-vivienne-binns/>.

Key Themes

- Community
- Family
- Memories
- Relationships
- Truth, authenticity & real-life experience.

**Art steps
Activity**

This activity is based on *Mothers' memories, others' memories: postcard rack*. Like this work, the activity encourages the 'drawing out' of memories relating to the special women in our lives, and the ways these women express themselves creatively.

The activity is process-based and focuses on a communal sharing of memories, rather than a concrete outcome. However, a print may also be considered in steps 6–9 if a venue would like to expand on the activity.

Note: Steps 1–6 are appropriate for children of all ages. The extended activity included in steps 6–9 can be facilitated for all ages but may be more appropriate for children ages 6–12 years of age.

Step 1. Sit down in a group and introduce yourself to one another to create a connection (a child appropriate 'tea' party will facilitate relaxed discussion if this is an option for the venue).

Step 2. Collect paper and pencils ready to draw memories as they arise.

Step 3. Artist Educators should facilitate a discussion with the group using the following guiding questions (examples only):

- Do you have a mother, grandmother or woman in your life who is very special to you? What is their name? What do they look like?

Step 4. Artist Educators and participants should deepen the discussion with the following guiding questions (examples only):

Think about your mother/grandmother/special person:

- What makes this person special to you?
- How do they like to be creative?
- Do they like growing plants? Cooking? Building things? Sewing? Fixing things?
- What materials do they like to create with?
- What kind of things do they make?
- Where is that art now? Where has it been kept or displayed?

The goal of this activity is to share memories of the special women in our lives. It also gives an opportunity to think about how women have been creative in the past and the present, and to consider what makes something 'art.'

Vivienne feels that art can be created by anyone, not only 'artists', and this has been the focus of many of the community art projects undertaken in her life. Much of women's creativity in the past was not valued as 'art.' This *Art steps* activity encourages us to think about, and value, diverse creative expression.

Step 5. Share your drawing with others in the group. Describe the person you have drawn, a memory about this person, and how this person expresses themselves creatively.

Note: This activity is complete at step 5 but if the venue would like to expand it further, steps 6–9 can be followed to create a print of one of the memory drawings. If the venue chooses to include the expanded activity, skip step 5.

EXPANDED ACTIVITY

Step 6. Take a shiny piece of cardboard such as a cereal box packet. With a pen, draw a memory of this special person onto the shiny side of the cardboard. Re-draw over this line 2 times to create an embossed indent (embossing on a soft surface such as a piece of fabric or an additional sheet of cardboard is useful for definition).

Step 7. Place some printing ink onto a flat piece of plastic/glass and spread it out with a roller. Then roll the ink onto the shiny side of your cardboard.

Step 8. Place a piece of paper over the painted side of the cardboard and rub the back of the paper. Carefully lift the paper off the cardboard to reveal a print of the memory of a special woman in your life.

Step 9. Share your drawing with others in the group. Describe the person you have drawn, a memory about this person, and how this person expresses themselves creatively.

Materials & Tools

- Pencils
- Paper

If you choose to create a print:

- Printing Ink (or acrylic paint)
- Spoon (to get ink onto plastic sheet)
- shiny piece of cardboard, such as a cereal box packet or shiny envelope
- Pen
- Rubber roller
- Flat sheet of plastic/glass
- Paper - Cartridge or other

Key ideas

The predominant focus of this activity is;

- **Community**
- **Conversation**
- **Gently** drawing out **memories** of mothers, grandmothers, or special women in our lives
- **Genuine** human **connection**
- **Authenticity** and **real-life experience.**

This activity can be approached as an intergenerational activity that is equally engaging and fulfilling for parents and carers as it is for children.