

Mentors' Statements: Write About Art

Teaching writing is a curious thing. I do it everyday and am always surprised by how the mysteries of language remain fascinating, allusive, sometimes downright frustrating. I knew the students engaged in the 'Write About Art' program had big ideas, that they knew where they were coming from and were serious about writing—some of them had given up the first day of schoolies after all—but expressing a vision of art practice and how they saw their chosen subject was a challenge. We can show people how to correct grammar, we can edit a line to make it clearer, we can provide some techniques to allow language to flow—what we can't do is conjure a voice out of thin air. That's why I took my students outside, away from the shiny built surfaces, where I hoped the sensorial elements of the landscape might help them connect to the tangible power of words. Words are ink, are lines on a page, but they also reveal, at their best, striking images, sounds, tastes and textures—the kinds of collective 'real' experiences we recognise as human. I told them to close their eyes and listen. To run their hands over the couch grass because art, whether it's splayed across a canvas, a screen, or between the pages of a novel, is not always about what we can see but what we are encouraged to feel.

*Sally Breen
Mentor, Write About Art*

The 'Write About Art' group have experienced many of the myriad challenges that come with interpreting contemporary art. As writers, we must always aim to say something that the work itself does not already express, and great art works often challenge and overcome our reckoning of them. I have been heartened by the group's willingness to look and think, which are essential for writing about art. The process of working with them was fascinating for me, and I was sometimes jealous of the insights brought by their fresh eyes. Their enthusiasm was great to watch. I hope they'll continue their passion for contemporary art, and continue to write.

*Angela Goddard
Mentor, Write About Art*

It's always a little scary working with people who are a fraction of your age, but seem gifted with a good deal more talent. It makes you wonder how you can possibly compete with them in the future. That was the nub of my experience with the project, a head-shaking disbelief that anyone so young and unwrinkled could have such talent. It was enormous fun to work with them on the day, and then instructive to follow up with them over the next few weeks. It also gave me a greater appreciation for the genre of art critique which I've always dismissed as largely impenetrable babble. I still believe that of a lot of writing about art, but The Kids at least showed me it didn't have to be so.

*John Birmingham
Mentor, Write About Art*

'Write About Art' (2008) provided a rare experience to discuss art writing with students at an early stage in their development. This specialisation within writing genres may easily be overlooked, and the discussions explored what it may offer to extend a professional interest in art and related areas.

The material that these young people brought to the workshop indicated their strong interests, passions and ideas. This was the real revelation! The priority for writers seeking to explore art critically is to have an opinion, and an informal day at the Gallery of Modern Art provided information and further art exposure, refining and shaping the group's ideas, adding definition to their existing written material, and/or inspiring new work. The results, visible in this publication, reflect the commitment of students to both process and the intrinsic individuality of their ideas.

*Louise Martin-Chew
Mentor, Write About Art*