

COLÁISTE NÁISIÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHÁ

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

A Recognised College of University College Dublin

**An investigation into the effect of an integrated Visual studies and practical
unit of learning on students awareness of Art as social commentary in a
second level deis school in Dublin**

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TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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National College of Art and Design

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School of Education

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a diploma or other degree in any other college or university.

Signed: _____

Liam Doyle

Date: 30/04/25

Abstract

This study investigates whether the integration of Visual Studies, framed around Today's World – Art as Social Commentary (NCCA, 2022), can enhance DEIS students' critical literacy, social awareness, and personal engagement through practical art-making. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006), the research involved seventeen Fifth Year students in a DEIS post-primary school in Crumlin.

The four-week project combined Visual Studies analysis with practical construction using silicone and plaster, encouraging students to explore local issues such as housing decline, elderly isolation, and community neglect. Data collection methods included teacher observations, student written reflections, a group interview, peer critiques, and pre- and post-unit Likert questionnaires.

Findings revealed that grounding the project in students' lived experiences fostered stronger engagement and critical reflection. Students demonstrated increased confidence in discussing art as social commentary, greater conceptual use of materials, and a stronger sense of ownership and agency over their work. Peer critique sessions further developed critical dialogue skills, moving students beyond surface-level description towards thoughtful analysis and evaluation.

The study concludes that integrating Visual Studies with practical making offers a powerful model for critical artistic education within DEIS contexts. It highlights the potential of socially engaged, place-based art education to empower students to reflect on their communities and imagine better futures. The research also acknowledges limitations related to time constraints and varying literacy levels and recommends further embedding of Visual Studies frameworks and differentiated supports in future practice.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Visual Studies Framework (NCCA, 2022) now underpins Irish second-level art education, replacing an older model that separated art history from studio work. It promotes an integrated approach combining conceptual learning, historical context, and practical exploration. One of its three strands, “Today’s World – Art as Social Commentary,” encourages students to examine social, political, and environmental themes through reflective discussion and making (NCCA, 2022, pp. 4–6). This shift positions students as active interpreters of their environment rather than passive recipients of knowledge. In DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) contexts, this strand is particularly resonant, allowing students to explore how housing, community identity, or access to services relate directly to their lived experience.

The researcher, a former pupil of the participating DEIS school and resident of Crumlin, Dublin, completed a Fine Art Print degree at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) before returning as a student teacher undertaking a Professional Master of Education (PME) at the same school. This journey provides the researcher with a dual insight as both being an artist and teacher-researcher, allowing a unique understanding of the educational and social environment being studied. This study investigates how a specific unit of learning, anchored in Visual Studies theory yet appropriately aligned with practical lessons, informs students’ awareness of social concerns within a DEIS school in Crumlin. Crumlin’s built environment has deep historical roots. Many students walk to school amid reminders of mid-20th-century public housing initiatives. Many of their grandparents and great-grandparents lived in these estates, shaped by the architect Herbert Simms’s architectural vision. According to Casey (2005, p. 272), Simms oversaw the design of over 17,000 public dwellings in Dublin. His work sought to replace cramped inner-city slums with safer and healthier suburban areas. Despite this legacy, many present-day students continue to encounter neglected or vacant spaces in their neighbourhoods, visible reminders of stalled development or disrepair. Through the Visual Studies strand Today’s World – Art as Social Commentary (NCCA,

2022), this study examines whether structured reflection and creative tasks can help students interpret these local challenges and develop a stronger sense of civic and cultural understanding.

A central tenet of this research rests on Freire's (1970) argument that education should promote critical consciousness. Freire contends that learners can move beyond passive acceptance of social conditions and begin to analyse the forces that shape their lives. However, recent scholars (e.g., Irwin, 2012) caution that such ideals must be adapted to modern, diverse classrooms with distinct constraints. DEIS contexts often grapple with fluctuating attendance, limited resources, and socio-economic pressures (Smyth and Banks, 2019). However, they also host strong community ties. Students have daily contact with local issues: they notice boarded-up estates, half-finished renovations, and are aware of ongoing debates about services for older residents. By blending reflection and practical tasks, the artist–teacher–researcher invites learners to see art as a means of highlighting such problems and considering innovative solutions.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) informs the methodology employed (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p. 23). PAR promotes a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, guided by the students' voices as well as the teacher's observations. This adaptable model suits a DEIS setting because it can respond to sudden changes and incorporate immediate feedback. Freire's call for education that nurtures critical thinking and civic awareness aligns with PAR by allowing students to shape some lesson content, especially when investigating housing themes or examining historical images. In the DEIS environment, where attendance can fluctuate and resources are often stretched, a flexible approach to curriculum delivery is necessary. Visual Studies, aligned with the practical component, may offer that flexibility, blending art history, critical debate, and practical explorations that allow students to creatively express their concerns in a structured way.

The rationale behind this study hinges on the idea that socially engaged art can help students internalise larger social and global themes. Helguera (2011, p.8) and Mulligan and McGlynn (2020, p. 47) suggest that when students produce art rooted in local contexts, they develop stronger bonds

with their community and become more aware of inherent civic challenges. The new Visual Studies framework encourages this connection through the content area “Today’s World – Art as Social Commentary.” Yet, there is no existing research to date as it is so recent. This project seeks to fill that gap by documenting a four-week unit of learning, observing student engagement, and measuring possible changes in how students perceive social commentary through art.

Within this broader framework, the study addresses the central research question:

Does the integration of Visual Studies, framed around “Art as Social Commentary” with integrated practical classes enhance DEIS students’ social awareness and engagement with local issues?

The study comprises five chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of Crumlin’s social history, the evolution of Visual Studies, and the DEIS context. Chapter Two is a Literature Review that evaluates key scholarship related to socially engaged art, education in disadvantaged settings, and curriculum reform. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, detailing the PAR model and the tools used. Chapter Four presents findings from classroom observations, student questionnaires, and visual outcomes. Chapter Five discusses these findings, interpreting the data in relation to broader educational debates and assessing the integrated approach’s impact. The Conclusion reflects on the research question, summarises key outcomes, and identifies directions for future inquiry. The ultimate goal is to investigate how effectively this combined theoretical and practical model informs students’ social consciousness. Rather than treating Visual Studies and practical work as separate entities, the project underscores their synergy. The short, reflective nature of each class fosters a feedback loop that encourages students to critique their environment and produce tangible art pieces. This approach tests the premise that an integrated Visual Studies framework can catalyse local awareness, particularly in a setting where the physical environment carries a profound historical and social weight, sparking dialogue, expanding empathy, and deepening critical thinking skills in a DEIS art classroom.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines key areas relevant to the integration of Visual Studies and practical art education in a DEIS post-primary context. It focuses on three strands: critical pedagogy and student voice, Visual Studies frameworks, and socially engaged art education. The review also considers the particular challenges and opportunities presented by DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) settings in Ireland.

DEIS schools, introduced under the Department of Education's 2005 action plan, aim to address educational disadvantage by providing targeted support to schools serving socio-economically marginalised communities. Research by McCoy and Smyth (2020) highlights that DEIS students often face structural inequalities inside and outside the classroom, including lower access to cultural capital, reduced opportunities for critical engagement, and lower academic expectations placed upon them. These conditions make it essential that pedagogical approaches are both responsive and empowering.

While existing studies have explored DEIS students' experiences across core academic subjects, limited research has examined how Visual Arts education, particularly through the newer Visual Studies specification can support critical literacy, student agency, and social commentary in these contexts. This study addresses that gap by investigating whether integrating Visual Studies, grounded in critical pedagogy and socially engaged art practice, can enhance DEIS students' ability to reflect critically on their communities and express their experiences through visual forms.

2.2 Understanding Crumlin's built environment and social history.

Crumlin, located in Dublin's south-central area, has a Multi-layered suburban history. Its expansion accelerated during the 1930s, when the state sought to replace overcrowded inner-city dwellings with suburban developments (Casey, 2005, p.271). The Housing Act of 1932 spurred large-scale projects, intending to raise the quality and quantity of public housing. This re-homing process involved relocating families from dilapidated and overcrowded tenements, primarily from Dublin's inner city to estates with green spaces and more modern facilities.



Figure 1.4: Construction of social housing led by Herbert Simms, Dublin. Source: RTÉ (n.d.)

2.3 Herbert Simms's role

Herbert Simms served as the Dublin Corporation's Housing Architect from 1932 until his death in 1948. Casey (2005, p. 272) notes that "Simms oversaw the design and construction of over 17,000 dwellings, including blocks of flats and suburban houses." Influenced by British and Dutch social-housing models, Simms introduced flat-roofed designs, linear façades, and open courtyards that contrasted with the cramped conditions of older Georgian tenements. Many of these estates emerged in Crumlin, Drimnagh, and other suburbs around Dublin.

Simms's vision reached large populations who had previously lived in unsafe conditions. Still, financial constraints and post-independence economic challenges sometimes compromised the overall outcome. Some buildings quickly aged or lacked sufficient community facilities. Students today pass these buildings and see cracked walls or patched repairs, leading them to question if "progress" truly moved forward. Buildings in Crumlin consequently became metaphorical for both achievement and unfulfilled promises.

2.4 Localised Learning and community ties

O'Donoghue, Nugent, and O'Connor (2020, p. 130) argued that tying lessons to the neighbourhood can foster a sense of ownership. Students in Crumlin not only walk past historically significant housing blocks but also have grandparents or great-grandparents who lived there. Bringing these personal narratives into the art classroom helps anchor broader social issues in concrete examples. This fosters a deeper recognition that historical policy decisions still shape their immediate surroundings.

2.5 Social issues as classroom content

In many DEIS contexts, connecting the curriculum to pressing social concerns can spark renewed motivation (McCoy and Smyth, 2020, p. 550). Housing is an obvious example. Students witness the immediate effects of changing rents, minimal social services, and on-going developments near their schools or homes. By exploring these issues through art, students can begin to see themselves as active commentators. Mulligan and McGlynn (2020, p.48) emphasise that this type of localised, socially oriented teaching can boost participation and self-esteem. The role of teacher then becomes more of a facilitator, helping students translate lived experiences into meaningful creative outcomes.

2.6 The Visual Studies Framework - Context for Change

Traditional Irish art syllabi separated art history and studio practice. Previous approaches often encouraged students to focus on memorising information about canonical artworks, with limited

emphasis on connecting this knowledge to their own studio work (NCCA, 2018). Over time, many educators and policy makers argued that such a division limited students' critical thinking. It was felt the subject matter should address contemporary challenges, allowing students to make direct links between the studied artworks and personal contexts.

2.7 New Specification and Debates

In 2022, the NCCA introduced the new Leaving Certificate Art specification (Visual Studies), which adopts a student-centred approach that combines historical and contextual analysis, conceptual thinking, and practical work. One of its three strands, “Today’s World – Art as Social Commentary,” requires students to explore how artists engage with “contemporary issues, concerns, and events,” including those linked to “politics, society, identity, environment or technology” (NCCA, 2022, p. 6). This strand encourages learners to examine the social function of art and reflect on its relevance to their own lives. While some board advisors raised concerns about the challenges of addressing sensitive or complex topics in class, the NCCA proceeded, citing the importance of fostering “critical reflection and local/global awareness” (NCCA, 2022, p. 5–6).

2.8 Scope and Focus

The new framework calls for a shift from repetitious learning to interpretive discussion. Students can examine how local issues such as housing controversies - mirror larger national or global problems. NCCA (2022, p.5) states, “Learners should integrate reflective responses to contemporary social conditions with practical explorations in a variety of media.” This encourages students to question how the built environment frames their day-to-day experiences. This synergy between theory and practice arguably moves the subject towards a more holistic form of art education. It mirrors the working methods of socially engaged artists, who often begin with lived experience or place-based research and use visual processes to critique broader systems. This alignment between student learning and contemporary art practice strengthens the relevance of the framework.

2.9 Socially Engaged Art and Student Agency

Socially engaged art challenges traditional ideas of art-making by placing emphasis on participation, dialogue and social context. When applied in education, it encourages students to act as critical thinkers and active contributors to shared cultural conversations. According to Helguera (2011, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, p. 5), this form of practice views participants not as viewers, but as collaborators who shape the meaning of the work. In a classroom setting, socially engaged approaches can develop student agency by linking creative work to real issues, allowing students to see themselves as capable of affecting change through art. This also aligns Irwin's concept of *artography*, where teaching, research, and art-making intersect through relational and place-based inquiry (Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

2.9.1 Definition and Principles

Bishop (2012, p.17) describes socially engaged art as a collaborative process in which the public, or a community, participates in making or interpreting artworks that address shared concerns. Helguera (2011, p.10) points out that this approach values dialogue over aesthetics. It seeks to spark conversations or relationships rather than produce standalone objects. In schools, socially engaged art can be realised as group installations, murals or design projects that highlight relevant issues such as homelessness or environmental neglect.

2.9.2 Application in DEIS Schools

DEIS classrooms sometimes face limited budgets or additional exam pressures. However, McCoy and Smyth (2020) suggest that socially engaged art can transcend these constraints by tapping into real-life experiences. When learners create artwork linked to the social issues they see every day, they move beyond abstract tasks and engage with local history, policy, and community. Downes and Gilligan (2021, p.95) add that this process can foster emotional resilience, as students learn to express personal or collective worries in a structured, creative environment.

2.10 Crumlin – Past, Present, Future

The “Past, Present, Future” theme emerged from early discussions with students about visible signs of decline and regeneration in their neighbourhood. Many pass buildings daily that trace back to mid-20th-century housing schemes led by Herbert Simms, whose architectural vision reshaped Crumlin under the Housing Act of 1932 (Casey, 2005). Students were introduced to this theme through archival photos, comparative map studies and first-hand family stories. These insights grounded the theme in lived experience, making it more than just a historical reference. Linking these housing histories to current concerns, derelict sites, over-priced developments, or lost care services allowed the project to explore how design decisions from the past still shape students’ present-day environment.

When Crumlin expanded during this mid-20th-century push, it reflected the broader drive to replace slum conditions with modern public housing (Casey, 2005). Linking these historical facts to the “Past, Present, Future” theme allows students to see how design choices made decades ago still shape their daily environment. By studying local blocks or speaking to older residents, learners can grasp both the ambition behind such projects and the realities - positive or negative that followed (Mulligan and McGlynn, 2020).

Helguera (2011) notes that such artistic symbolism can prompt on-going dialogue amongst students. Downes and Gilligan (2021) show that agency over these final pieces fosters a sense of ownership and deeper critical reflection in DEIS students.

2.11 Linking Housing Policy to Artistic Exploration

Students in Crumlin see the tangible outcomes of policy decisions from decades ago. They note the condition of local authority homes, the presence of older residents reliant on limited care, or the tension between rising private rental costs and wage stagnation. Housing is thus more than an

economic matter; it is interwoven with identity, stability, and pride. Through an art lens, exploring these factors can reveal how architecture physically embodies social forces (Casey, 2005).

2.11.1 Herbert Simms as a Symbolic Figure

Simms's approach to mass housing underscores the state's early efforts at social reform. His linear façades, frequent use of flat roofs, and focus on communal yards reflected a belief in functional, modern living. Students who research him might be surprised at how forward-thinking his designs were, yet also startled by how quickly some of these considerations dissipated throughout the millenia. According to Casey (2005, p. 280), "Simms was under constant strain to produce large volumes of housing with few resources." By examining these constraints, students see echoes in the present day, prompting the question: "Has anything changed?"

2.11.2 Buildings as Metaphors

Several scholars view built structures as metaphors for the human condition. Helguera (2011) notes that physical spaces can represent the social and emotional well-being of residents. Cracked walls can symbolise neglect. Graffiti can signal frustration. Bright communal areas can reflect hope. In this project, plaster tiles and silicone-based casts visually represented the textures and shapes of local buildings. Students turned the physical environment into a canvas for commentary. They used repeated historical maps, typography, statistics and half-finished surfaces to echo incomplete renovations.

2.12 Participatory Action Research in Art Education

Action research involves a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.27). In classrooms, it allows educators to adapt lessons on the fly, respond to emergent ideas, and re-design teaching strategies. The DEIS context benefits from this flexibility because attendance, resources, or emotional readiness can shift rapidly (Smyth and Banks, 2019).

2.12.1 Teacher as Researcher

Mertler (2017, p.18) writes that “participatory action research positions teachers to systematically investigate their practice.” This approach suits a project that merges Visual Studies with practical lessons. Each class can be recorded: how students respond to local references, how they refine their sketches, or how discussions about housing link to the final work. Feedback from participants informs the next cycle, ensuring the curriculum remains relevant and accessible.

2.12.2 Participatory action Research (PAR)

PAR extends action research by involving students more actively in decision-making. Freire (1970, p.66) argued that genuine dialogue enables learners to become co-researchers. Instead of passively absorbing knowledge, they shape the questions and reflect on the findings. In a DEIS environment, where life challenges are often immediate, PAR can nurture a sense of shared ownership over the class content. Students suggest sub-themes - youth facilities, older residents, or local green spaces and co-develop the final display.

2.13 Gaps and opportunities

Despite its promise, socially engaged art in DEIS schools has practical limitations. Budget constraints can reduce project time or material choices (Smyth and Banks, 2019). Teachers may struggle to balance creative freedom with content targets in a subject still transitioning to the new specification (NCCA, 2022). Additionally, standard assessments may not capture collaboration or empathy (Helguera, 2011). Professional development is also key, as staff often need support in guiding sensitive discussions on housing crises or family struggles (Mulligan and McGlynn, 2020).

Local partnerships can alleviate some pressures, offering extra resources or expertise. O'Donoghue, Nugent and O'Connor (2020) contend that structured collaborations with community artists foster fresh ideas, though they require coordination and consistent funding. In many cases, teacher adaptability remains crucial (Irwin, 2012). Although the NCCA (2022) the visual studies

framework advocates for integrated theory-practice, there is as yet no published research on how this looks in practice, especially in DEIS schools (Mulligan and McGlynn, 2020). Teachers may be enthusiastic but unsure how to handle local issues or how to balance exam requirements with open-ended explorations. Longitudinal studies could investigate whether these art-based social commentaries yield lasting changes in students' outlooks (Dewhurst, 2014). Comparisons between DEIS and non-DEIS schools might reveal how socio-economic factors shape outcomes (Smyth and Banks, 2019). Additional research could examine how a teacher's personal artistic practice influences classroom culture (Helguera, 2011, p.10). More detailed accounts of action research cycles would provide practical guidance for future educators. Documenting how teachers adapt to fluctuating attendance or minimal budgets might strengthen the evidence base (Arts Council, 2021). Collaborations with local groups could reduce resource gaps while broadening the scope of socially engaged art initiatives.

2.14 Conclusion of literature review

Crumlin's history offers a powerful lens for exploring how architecture and policy shape lives. Herbert Simms's drive to provide functional homes stands as both a landmark achievement and a reminder of ongoing constraints. Bishop (2019) critiques the instrumentalisation of participation, urging for a more nuanced view of socially engaged art that balances both aesthetics and impact. In a DEIS context, merging these local references with the new Visual Studies specification can spark higher engagement. Students who see their own environment in class discussions and artworks form stronger connections between abstract ideas and lived realities (Mulligan and McGlynn, 2020). This literature review suggests that socially engaged art, guided by a Participatory action research framework, fits well with DEIS realities. Visual Studies becomes a space where theoretical insights merge with personal experiences. Students explore how Simms's era parallels current challenges, questioning the extent to which living conditions have improved since the 1930s. They engage in a reflective cycle, emphasising their voice alongside teacher facilitation.

Chapter 3 - Methodologies

3.1 Overview of the Participatory action Research (PAR) approach

This study employs a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design to investigate the Visual Studies Framework with the practical component raises critical social awareness among fifth year students in a DEIS school context. PAR involves collaborative planning, action, observation, and reflection (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.23). Its iterative cycles enable continuous evaluation and real-time improvements to teaching and learning, particularly beneficial in DEIS environments marked by such issues as irregular attendance, socio-economic barriers, and limited resources (Mertler, 2017, p.18). The sample comprised seventeen Fifth Year students in a DEIS post-primary school, with data collected through teacher observations, student reflections, a focus group interview, and pre- and post-unit Likert questionnaires, selected to triangulate qualitative and quantitative insights into engagement, critical thinking, and social awareness.

The methodology draws on Paulo Freire's (1970, p.66) concept of critical pedagogy, which advocates for students' active participation in shaping their educational experiences. Contemporary scholars, however, caution about directly applying Freire's principles without adaptation to modern, diverse classrooms (Irwin, 2012, p.213). This study uses Freirean ideals flexibly, focusing on empowering students as active co-researchers who directly inform lesson content and project outcomes through ongoing feedback.

3.2 Rationale for using PAR

Participatory Action Research was chosen due to its compatibility with DEIS contexts, characterised by fluctuating attendance, economic instability, and variable family circumstances (Smyth and Banks, 2019, p.554). Unlike traditional research methods that often assume stable settings, PAR embraces uncertainty, allowing immediate pedagogical adjustments based on real-time observations and feedback (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.41-45).

The participatory nature of PAR aligns with the unit of learning's emphasis on art as social commentary and promotion of student voice. It allows students to directly contribute insights about local issues, ensuring the curriculum reflects their lived experiences. This dynamic and flexible approach makes it particularly suited for examining how Visual Studies (Art as Social Commentary section of focus) can promote critical thinking and social awareness within this student cohort.

Additionally, PAR facilitates timely intervention, allowing mid-cycle modifications to maintain student engagement or address emergent topics, thus providing immediate practical benefits (Mertler, 2017, pp. 89-90). This also aligns with formative assessment best practice, which highlights the importance of teacher adaptability and responsiveness to student needs (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

3.3 Research objectives

This study addresses the following objectives:

- To explore how linking local history and lived experience to practical art-making impacts student engagement in a DEIS context, in line with the Visual Studies focus on personal and societal relevance.
- To evaluate how effectively students communicate local social issues, particularly housing and care - through final artworks, considering the Visual Studies emphasis on audience, message, and context.
- To reflect on the artist teacher-researcher's role in facilitating critical thinking, peer discussion, and social awareness through an integrated unit that aligns theory (Visual Studies) with practice.

3.4 Participants and context

The research took place in a DEIS secondary school in Crumlin, Dublin, with a mixed-gender senior-cycle fifth year art class consisting of 17 students, predominantly aged 16. The school's

catchment area includes estates built by Herbert Simms, creating a significant historical and socio-economic context for student exploration. The diverse housing conditions in this locality provide rich material for engaging students in reflective and critical conversations through art.

3.5 Research design and procedures

The PAR cycle spanned four weeks, structured around four main stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. (appendices: F/G)

Planning (Week 1):

- Developed a structured six-week unit of learning titled “Crumlin – Past, Present, Future,” integrating the Visual Studies Framework and practical art activities.
- Selected historical references (support studies), specifically Herbert Simms’ architectural contributions, to ground the study contextually.
- Designed and piloted data-collection tools, including pre-unit Likert questionnaires, structured observation templates, and semi-structured interview prompts, ensuring clarity and suitability for student participants.

Acting (Weeks 1–4):

- Delivered weekly integrated lessons that combined Visual Studies discussions on local historical and contemporary housing issues with practical art-making sessions (drawing, sculpting, and casting).
- Encouraged students to actively and critically engage in class discussions and peer critiques, linking theoretical insights directly to hands-on creative processes.
- Administered pre- and post-unit questionnaires to capture student perspectives on social issues and the role of art in social commentary.

Observing (Continuous):

- Maintained detailed teacher observation logs recording student engagement, collaboration dynamics, spontaneous discussions, and emerging themes from class interactions and creative output.
- Collected completed questionnaires to track shifts in student attitudes and understanding.

Reflecting (Weekly):

- Conducted weekly informal focus-group discussions, allowing students to articulate their experiences, identify challenges, and suggest possible improvements to classroom practices.
- Used insights from these reflections to adjust subsequent lessons, such as modifying task complexity, altering discussion prompts, or revisiting historical content for clarity.
- Artist Teacher-researchers documented reflections through weekly memos, refining teaching strategies to maximize student engagement and deepen their exploration of social commentary.

3.6 Data collection instruments

To capture comprehensive student insights, the study employed primarily quantitative data with some numerical data. Pre- and Post-unit Likert questionnaires used for data collection are provided in Appendix H.

Likert questionnaires:

- Pre and post-unit questionnaires measured student attitudes toward the efficacy of art in addressing social issues. Responses to statements such as “Art can highlight issues in my community” and “I feel comfortable sharing personal stories in art class” were quantified, providing comparative baseline and outcome data.
- Open-ended response sections offered qualitative elaboration on student views, enhancing interpretive depth.

Structured observations:

- Artist Teacher-researcher observations systematically documented indicators such as student participation, collaborative interactions, and connections drawn between personal experiences and art activities.
- Observations captured spontaneous student comments and behaviours not readily apparent in formal questionnaires. (appendix F/G)

Focus Groups:

- Semi-structured group interviews held during the final week enabled deeper reflection from student participants. (appendix K)
- Open-ended prompts facilitated discussions around the impact of local housing history, personal experiences, and Herbert Simms' legacy on student artwork and social awareness.

Artistic artifacts:

- Students' final artworks, predominantly plaster casts, included symbolic references such as local maps, personal quotes, and visual motifs representing housing conditions. These artifacts provided tangible evidence of students' conceptual understanding and thematic engagement. The collaborative final artifact was the realisation of the integrated VS/practical UoL titled - 'Crumlin: Past, Present and Future'.

3.7 Sampling strategy

A purposeful convenience sample was used, comprising the artist teacher-researcher's fifth-year DEIS art class. The selection offered direct researcher access, ensuring practicality and logistical feasibility (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018, p. 297). The deliberate focus on this demographic - arguably underrepresented in educational research allowed for in-depth exploration of how a

socially engaged art curriculum impacts students experiencing socio-economic disadvantages (Smyth and Banks, 2019, p. 42-44).

3.8 Data analysis

Data analysis used both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with coding and theme generation central to the qualitative process.

Quantitative analysis:

- Questionnaire responses were grouped into descriptive statistics (mean and frequency counts) to show changes in students' views on the role of art as social commentary before and after the unit of learning.

Qualitative analysis:

Thematic analysis was used on observation notes, focus group transcripts, and open-ended questionnaire responses.

Initial open coding helped identify repeated phrases and ideas in student reflections.

- These codes were then grouped into broader themes such as:
 - Connecting personal stories to place
 - Learning local history through art
 - Perceiving art as activism

The coding process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, moving from surface-level observations to more interpretive themes that reflected student engagement and conceptual development. Artistic work (plaster tiles) was also reviewed. Recurring visual motifs-cracks, unfinished textures, grid structures, were coded and interpreted to support or extend the verbal data.

Triangulation:

Themes were cross-checked across all data sources: questionnaire responses, teacher logs, focus group discussions, and student artworks. to ensure robust conclusions (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018, pp. 408-410).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical protocols were rigorously followed, including Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal (Appendix A), obtaining informed consent from parents/guardians. Students were informed clearly about the study's purpose, voluntary participation, their right to withdraw, and confidentiality assurances through a plain language statement (appendix C). Discussions on local issues were managed sensitively, with appropriate referrals to support services if necessary. Data was securely stored and anonymized to protect participant identities. Full ethical approval was granted by the NCAD Ethics Committee (Appendix E).

3.10 Trustworthiness and limitations

Trustworthiness was supported by transparent PAR processes, allowing student participation and feedback to visibly shape lesson content. Continuous observation and triangulation across data sources further enhanced trustworthiness. However, limitations included the small sample size and time constraints that prevented extensive community engagement or deeper historical collaborations. The dual role of the artist teacher-researcher posed potential biases, mitigated through reflexivity and ongoing self-examination (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, pp 165-167).

3.11 Summary of methodologies

Employing a PAR approach enabled the study to dynamically integrate theory with practical art-making, reflecting student insights and adapting in real time. This methodological choice effectively supported the research objectives within the unique DEIS school environment. The comprehensive analysis of diverse data sources provided nuanced insights into student attitudes and creative outputs, laying the groundwork for the subsequent chapter detailing study findings.

Chapter 4 - Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from a four-week integrated Visual Studies and Practical Unit of Learning delivered to a Fifth Year DEIS group in Crumlin. Data was gathered through teacher observations, student written reflections, a group interview, peer critiques, and pre- and post-unit Likert questionnaires. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model identified four key themes:

Theme Code	Theme Title
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1	<i>Developing awareness of Art as Social Commentary</i>
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2	<i>Connecting local change to personal experience</i>
---	---

3	<i>Material process as conceptual expression</i>
---	--

4	<i>Growth in peer dialogue and reflective thinking</i>
---	--

Each theme is presented using direct evidence from classroom practice, preserving the authentic voice of both students and teacher reflections. These themes were refined through repeated cycles of coding, comparison, and triangulation across observations, student reflections, interview transcripts, and questionnaire data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase models of thematic analysis.

4.2 Theme 1: Developing awareness of Art as Social Commentary

4.2.1 Initial engagement with Visual Studies framework

Initially, students showed limited understanding of how art could address social issues. Pre-unit Likert questionnaire results indicated that 8 out of 17 students agreed with the statement “I understand how artists use their work to comment on social issues.” Observations during Visual Studies Lesson 1 confirmed this gap, where students struggled initially to grasp how contemporary artworks could function as critical commentary .

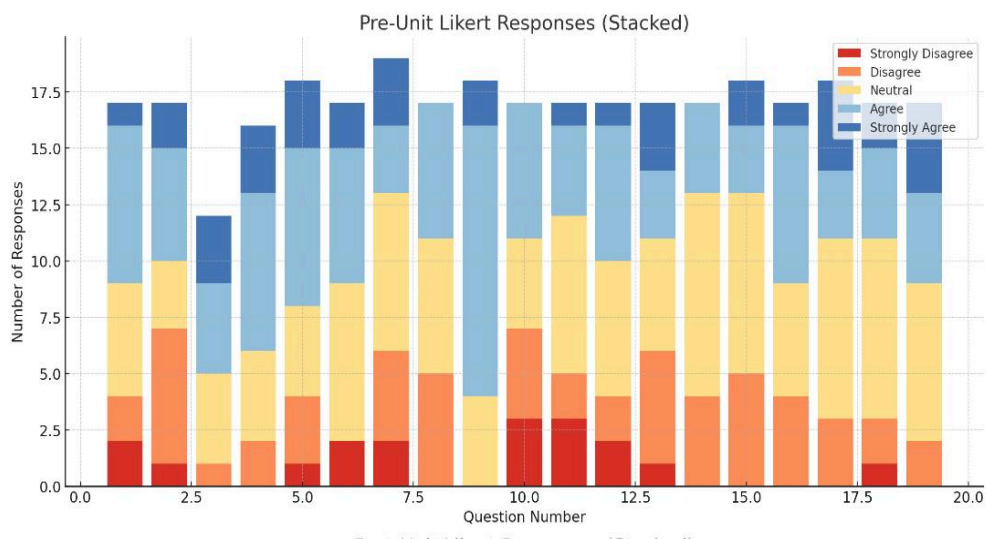


Figure 1.1: Pre- unit of learning student responses (Doyle, 2025)

Teacher reflection (Visual Studies Lesson 1) recorded:

“Students initially struggled with interpreting conceptual artworks and found it difficult to apply the Visual Studies Framework beyond basic description.”

Despite these early challenges, scaffolding activities helped develop student confidence. Analysis of Rachel Whiteread’s House during Visual Studies Lesson 2 prompted more engaged discussions. Students related Whiteread’s work to their own experiences of abandoned or repurposed buildings in Crumlin.

Student comment during class discussion:

“Imagine if that was a place here, people would probably wreck it or it would just be left there to rot.” (Student A, Visual Studies Lesson 2)

By connecting unfamiliar artworks to their local environment, students began to move beyond surface-level responses towards critical interpretation.

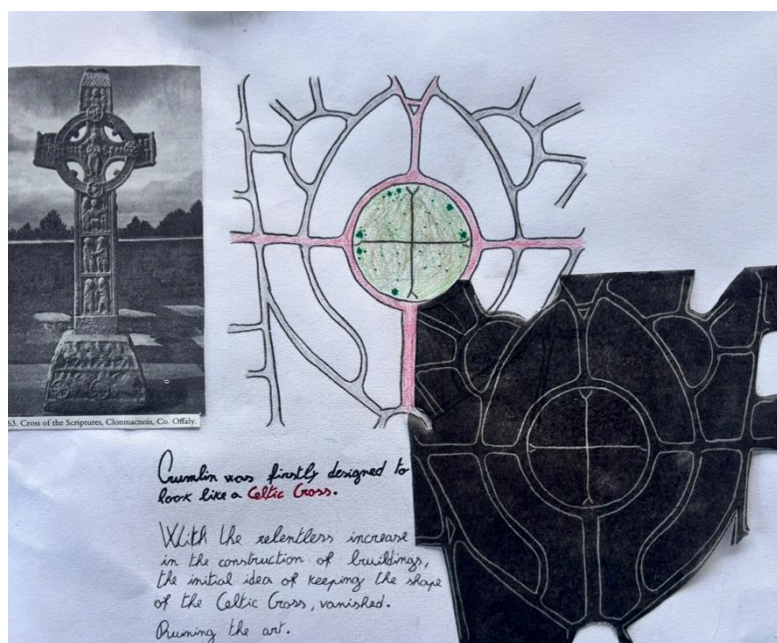


Diagram 1.1: Visual mind map featuring symbolic map of crumlin (student work, 2025)

4.2.2 Shifts observed through Visual Studies sessions

Teacher Observation (Visual Studies Lesson 3) noted growing critical literacy:

“Students increasingly questioned the intentions behind public artworks. They moved from asking ‘What is it?’ to ‘What does it say about the place?’

In class discussions, students recognised that art could reveal social tensions without needing to be explicitly political. Reflecting on work by artists dealing with memory and place, one student commented:

“It makes you think about what’s missing more than what’s there.” (Student B, Visual Studies Lesson 3)

This shift towards interpretative analysis directly aligns with the Visual Studies Framework aim that “students will engage critically with artworks and visual culture in historical and contemporary contexts, developing their ability to interpret, analyse and reflect” (NCCA, 2017, p. 18).

Post-unit Likert questionnaires showed 14 out of 17 students agreed with the statement “I feel confident discussing how art can show social or political issues,” representing a clear improvement from baseline responses.

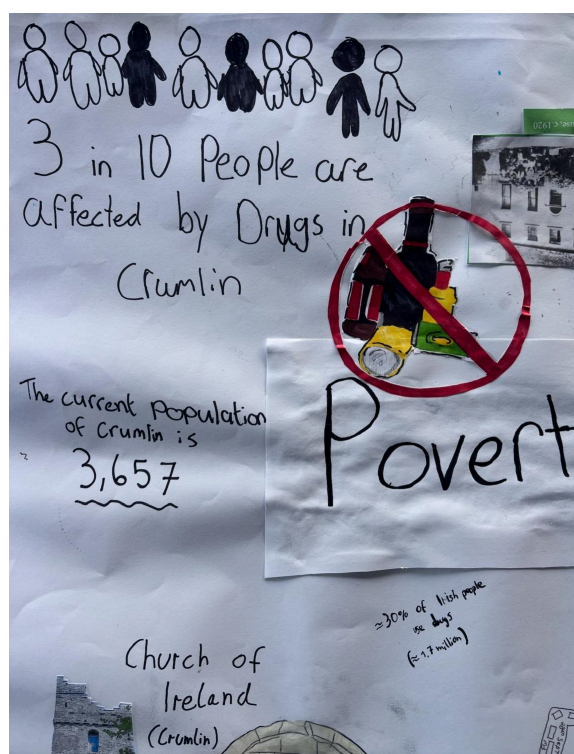


Diagram 1.2: Visual Mind map featuring statistics (Student work, 2025)

4.3 Theme 2: Connecting local change to personal experience

4.3.1 Crumlin as subject matter

Students responded most strongly when discussions and artwork connected directly to their lived experiences of Crumlin. Research tasks and mind mapping activities revealed recurring themes including: the decline of the Primary Care Centre, elderly isolation, drug use, and the lack of youth services.



Diagram 1.3: Student Design plan exploring themes of housing, primary care centre
(student work, 2025)

Teacher observation (Practical Class 1):

“Students immediately related to the closure of the Primary Care Centre and spoke about how their grandparents used to rely on it for services beyond basic medical care.”

During the group interview, students stated:

- “They built new housing for old people but didn’t leave anything for them to do except stay inside.” (Student C, Group Interview)
- “It’s like they pretend to fix things but don’t fix anything properly.”
(Student D, Group Interview)

This demonstrated that students were able to critically reflect on local infrastructural and social changes through both verbal discussion and visual response.

4.4 Theme 3: Material process as conceptual expression

Material exploration in Visual Studies is intended as a means of developing and communicating ideas, not as an end in itself (NCCA, 2022, p. 10).

4.4.1 Experimenting with silicone and plaster

Practical sessions introduced students to working with silicone piping and plaster casting, encouraging exploration of how material choices could symbolise social realities. The materials mirrored themes of construction, repair, and deterioration discussed in earlier Visual Studies lessons.



Diagram 1.4: Students preparing silicone linework for casting, commemorating
Herbert Simms (student work, 2025)

Teacher observation (Practical Class 3) recorded:

“Students grasped the symbolic link between the act of sealing cracks and the attempt to ‘paper over’ social problems in Crumlin.”

Students showed creativity in using material imperfections as part of their conceptual narrative:

- “I’m leaving the holes because that’s what it’s really like—nothing is perfect.” (Student E, Practical Class 3 Reflection)
- “The bits that cracked when I pulled it out made it better. It shows things breaking.” (Student F, Practical Class 5 Peer Critique)

This approach aligns with the aims of expanded art practice, where material process is not incidental but central to meaning-making.

4.4.2 Embracing accidents as critical statements

During the casting phase, many students experienced technical challenges such as incomplete casts and fractured edges. Instead of viewing these as failures, most students integrated them into their final pieces.

Teacher reflection (Practical Class 5) noted:

“Students reflected positively on accidents, identifying fractures and surface damage as symbolic of the incomplete or broken services in their community.”

In peer critiques, students encouraged each other to embrace rough textures and imperfections:

- “Don’t sand it too much, it shows it’s wrecked, like some of the streets are.” (Student G, Peer critique, Practical Class 5)
- “If you fill every hole it won’t make sense, leave it showing.” (Student A, Peer critique, Practical Class 5)

These discussions illustrate that students understood not only technical aspects of material manipulation but also how visual and tactile decisions could deepen the political and emotional resonance of their work.



Diagram 1.5: Students experimenting with embossed map forms to express spatial memory and disruption (Student work, 2025)

4.5 Theme 4: Growth in peer dialogue and reflective thinking

Both the Art Practical Senior Cycle Framework and the Visual Studies Framework encourage the role of collaborative dialogue and reflection in deepening students' critical engagement. Structured peer critiques and reflective discussions enabled students to move beyond technical description towards more thoughtful analysis of meaning, material process, and intent (NCCA, 2022).

4.5.1 Developing critical vocabulary

The project also fostered growth in students' ability to discuss and critique artworks critically, both their own and others'. Peer critique sessions revealed an evolving use of evaluative language, through structured Visual Studies activities, including repeated use of the Art elements and Design Principles and sentence starters handouts (Appendix K) during class discussions and peer critiques. This Scaffold - Learning method supported students in building a more confident and purposeful visual language to describe and analyse the social themes within their work. Pringle (2021) states, participatory art practices encourage a shared ownership of meaning making, where critical reflection becomes integrated in the process, not just the outcome.

Herbert Simms' architectural legacy acted as an early conceptual anchor, providing students with both visual material and a social lens through which they began to engage critically with housing, planning, and inequality - themes that sustained and deepened throughout the project. His relevance to their immediate environment allowed students to connect historical design values with current socio-political issues, supporting the development of both symbolic visual responses and personal reflection.



Diagram 1.6: Embossed plaster tile using portraiture (Herbert Simms) to symbolise visibility and erasure in public memory (student work, 2025)

Teacher observation (Practical Class 4) recorded:

“Students initially gave basic feedback (‘it looks good’) but by the second critique session, comments focused on emotional impact and thematic clarity.”

Student feedback during critiques included:

- “The cracks show it’s still broken, even if you try to fix it.” (Student B, Practical Class 4 Peer critique)
- “Yours feels lonely, the way it’s empty at the side.” (Student C, Practical Class 4 Peer critique)

This indicates a transition towards reflective dialogue, consistent with Visual Studies Framework goals (NCCA, 2022) of fostering critical interpretation skills.

4.5.2 Reflection on visual choices

Students increasingly articulated how specific visual elements in their work connected to the social issues identified in research stages.

Written reflection excerpts include:

- “I left some spaces empty because not everything is filled in Crumlin, some places get forgotten.” (Student, Practical Class 6 Reflection)
- “I didn’t try to make it perfect, it’s supposed to show things left messy.” (Student E, Practical Class 6 Reflection)

Such reflections demonstrate that students had internalised key concepts and could apply critical thinking independently through their aesthetic choices.



Diagram 1.7: Students design sheets showing symbolic simplification and personal responses to local issues (students work. 2025)

Rachel Whiteread's House (1993) served as a conceptual catalyst for dialogue, prompting students to reflect critically on ideas of erasure, memory, and contested space. While Simms' housing legacy was introduced as a symbol of civil ambition and public stability, Whiteread's cast sculpture offered a contrasting reflection on what happens when these values decline. This juxtaposition sparked vigorous class debate. Students questioned, "Why didn't the funding actually go into building houses instead?" and "It would probably be used as a hangout for illegal stuff." These responses reflected a wider distrust of the possibilities of public art in their own community, while still acknowledging the power of art to provoke. Several students initially described House as "a waste of money" or "just a block of concrete", but when prompted to consider its symbolism, many re-considered their stance. Whiteread's 1993 'House' became a springboard for symbolic design thinking, guiding students to embed social concerns like housing loss and systemic failure into their

own visual responses. In this way, Whiteread's practice connected past and present, offering a critical lens that complemented and challenged the legacy of Simms.



Figure 1.3: Image of Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993. (Hubbard, n.d)

4.6 Analysis of pre- and post-unit questionnaire data

Pre- and post-unit Likert questionnaires were used to measure changes in students' attitudes towards Visual Studies, critical thinking, and their understanding of art as a form of social commentary. Seventeen students completed both questionnaires. (appendix H)

4.6.1 Growth in confidence and understanding

Pre-unit results showed that fewer than half the students felt confident discussing how art can address social or political issues 47% agreed (8 out of 17 students). After the four-week unit, 85% (14 out of 17) students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Similarly, agreement with the statement “I feel comfortable using art to express my own experiences” rose from 41% (7 out of 17 students) pre-unit to 76% (13 out of 17 students) post-unit.

This indicates a substantial positive shift in students’ perceptions, aligning with observed growth during practical critiques and written reflections. (Appendix I)

Teacher Reflection (Post-unit review) noted:

“Students who struggled to link their personal experience to art at the beginning showed noticeable confidence by the final critique, explaining their material choices with critical awareness.”

4.6.2 Critical awareness of local issues

Pre-unit of learning responses suggested that only 53% (9 out of 17) students saw a clear connection between art and raising awareness of community issues. Post-unit of Learning, this figure had risen to 88% (15 out of 17 students).

This mirrors the qualitative data gathered during peer critiques, written reflections, and the final group interview, where students demonstrated deeper critical thinking about Crumlin’s social changes.

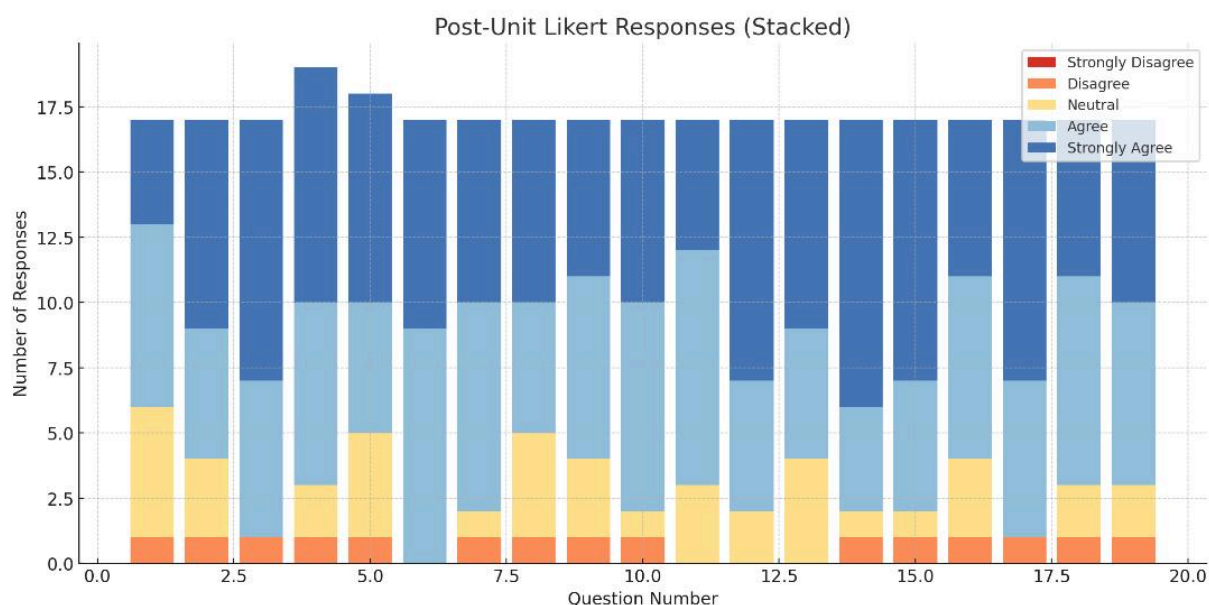


Figure 1.2: Post- unit of learning students responses (Doyle, 2025)

Group Interview quotes:

- “When you make it in art, it’s like showing people what’s wrong without just giving out.”
(Student F, Group Interview)
- “If you just write about it people might not listen, but art gets them thinking without being told off.” (Student G, Group Interview)

These comments show that students not only grasped the communicative power of art but also appreciated its potential to influence themselves and others' perception.

4.7 Student reflections on the process

4.7.1 Ownership of voice and story

Students reflected on the value of making artwork rooted in personal and communal experience, particularly around spaces like the Primary Care Centre and local housing schemes.

Student written reflections include:

- “I liked that we picked our own ideas from Crumlin instead of doing something random.”
(Student A, Practical Class 6 Reflection)
- “It made me notice stuff in my area that I didn’t really think about before.” (Student E, Practical Class 6 Reflection)

Teacher Observation (Final Practical session) also confirmed this sense of ownership:

“Students articulated stronger emotional investment in their work because it reflected real places and real experiences, not generic themes.”

4.7.2 Changes in peer dynamics

Throughout the unit, students became increasingly comfortable offering critique and receiving feedback. Peer-to-peer dialogue shifted from hesitant or superficial comments to thoughtful, theme-driven analysis.

As one student remarked during the group interview:

“At the start, you don’t want to say anything in case you sound stupid, but then when you know what your piece is saying, it’s easier to talk.” (Student B, Group Interview)

This development reflects a growing sense of confidence in both artistic expression and verbal critical thinking, supported by scaffolded Visual Studies lessons where students were consistently introduced to the language and structure of critical analysis.

4.8 Summary of key findings

The findings presented across this chapter demonstrate that integrating Visual Studies with practical making significantly enhanced students’ critical awareness, confidence, and engagement with social

issues rooted in their local environment. Thematic analysis across qualitative and quantitative data revealed four key areas of development:

- Increased understanding of Art as Social Commentary:

Students progressed from limited descriptive engagement to critical interpretation of artworks and their own practical responses. Pre- and post-unit questionnaire results demonstrated a notable rise in students' confidence to use art for social commentary.

- Connection to personal and local experience:

Grounding the study in the context of Crumlin allowed students to critically examine the social changes and inequalities they observed daily. Reflections and group interviews indicated that students valued the opportunity to explore real issues affecting their community.

- Material process as a means of critical expression:

Working with silicone and plaster allowed students to materialise the concepts and themes such as Housing and Local infrastructure, which had arisen over the course of this study. Embracing imperfection and texture as symbolic strategies. Technical accidents were reframed as authentic parts of the narrative, allowing students to reflect physically the brokenness or neglect they perceived in their environment.

- Growth in peer dialogue and reflective thinking:

Throughout the study, students developed greater confidence in critiquing their own and others' work. Peer critique sessions evolved from superficial technical observations to deeper conceptual discussions about meaning, representation, and audience impact.

4.9 Overall impact on students' social awareness.

Student reflections, teacher observations, and questionnaire results all point to the success of this integrated approach in fostering critical literacy, artistic agency, and social awareness. Students not only produced visual work that reflected local social realities but also developed the language and confidence to articulate these realities critically and shifting perceptions of Art as social

commentary, Focus group responses indicated a notable shift in how students perceived the purpose and power of art in the context of social commentary after the unit.

Many described a new understanding that art can convey important social messages rather than existing solely for aesthetic pleasure. One student explained that “it has changed how I look at art and that art doesn’t have to be a pop of colour or a starry starry night, it can be a slab with a meaningful message printed in the middle.” (Student A, lesson 4 Visual Studies reflection sheet) Similarly, another noted “after this project I realised how important and useful art can be to communicate a message or an issue universally regardless of language, which I didn’t fully realise.”(Student B, lesson 4 - Visual Studies reflection sheet). Another Student noted “it changed how I thought about the role of art in society. This project highlighted the importance of commenting on issues in my community in a way that was understandable and not pretentious like some other artist/art pieces can be.” (Student C, Lesson 4 Visual Studies reflection sheet) These reflections suggest that students came to see art as a form of communication and social commentary, accessible to everyone, rooted in meaningful content rather than just superficial aesthetics. Not all students reported a complete change in perspective, but even these participants experienced a reinforcement of their prior beliefs about art’s societal role. For example, one student said “it hasn’t but instead strengthened what I thought I knew. It showed me that art holds more to it than just drawing with a pencil or using a brush. It looks deeper into a bigger picture.” (Student D, lesson 4 Visual Studies reflection sheet) Another concurred: “I always thought art could, but now I’m certain of it.” (Student E, lesson 4 Visual Studies reflection sheet) Whether their views were transformed or affirmed, the overall outcome was a heightened confidence in art’s capacity to engage with social issues. Students ended the project more convinced that art can “communicate a message” about their community and effect change, reflecting a deeper appreciation of art’s role beyond the classroom.



Diagram 1.8: Students A2 Mindmap - Lesson 1-2 Practical, (students work, 2025)

Teacher reflection (Final Practical Class):

“Students demonstrated that when provided with a meaningful connection to the theme, space to explore materials, and structured dialogue, they could produce sophisticated conceptual work beyond initial expectations.”

Group Interview comments reinforced this impact:

- “It feels better when you’re making something real about your life instead of doing random stuff.” (Student, Group Interview)
- “It makes you think about where you live in a different way.” (Student, Group Interview)

This outcome suggests that combining Visual Studies frameworks with project-based, material driven practice offers an effective model for DEIS students to engage critically and creatively with

the world around them. The final tiles, installed as a temporary intervention in the school garden, visually captured the students' individual responses to social issues affecting Crumlin. Designs ranged from broken urban maps and abstracted housing symbols to portraits, street numbers, and references to local landmarks. One tile featured the word "CRUMLIN" rendered in worn, eroded stencil typography, echoing themes of loss and neglect. Others included depictions of Herbert Simms, fragmented visualisations of the Celtic Cross street plan, and protest-style iconography referencing gentrification, boarded-up homes, or local addiction statistics. These resolved pieces demonstrated how students successfully transferred critical research and personal insight into symbolic, textured forms, showing a clear link between Visual Studies discussions and material outcomes. An anonymised transcript of the focus group discussion is provided in Appendix L.



Diagram 1.9: Installed student tiles featuring symbolic embossing and site specific display in school garden (student work, 2025)

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter critically interprets the findings presented in Chapter Four, supporting them by referencing directly to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It considers how the integration of Visual Studies, framed around the section of focus Today's World - Art as Social Commentary (NCCA, 2022) the practical art-making, on enhancing students social awareness, critical literacy, and personal engagement in a DEIS context. The discussion is grounded in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methodology (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) and informed by critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and socially engaged art education theory (Helguera, 2011).

Students investigated pressing social issues in Crumlin, including housing, mental health challenges, substance misuse, and gentrification. Students also expressed pride and a sense of solidarity within their community. Discussions surrounding the work of architect Herbert Simms (Casey, 2005) prompted comparisons between the intention behind mid-20th-century public housing, built to support dignity and stability and the current housing crisis arguably characterised by shortage and insufficiency.

By the end of the unit of learning, students created plaster tiles with a re-producible quality, drawing on basic casting methods to produce reproducible visual statements. Though technically simple, the tiles were conceptually loaded, functioning as accessible forms of social commentary. "We see the effects of drugs every day" (Teacher Observations, Lesson 1) reflected shared frustration, while others balanced this with local solidarity: "Crumlin isn't just negativity, we look out for each other" (Teacher Observations, Lesson 1). This interplay of critique and community pride demonstrated how conceptual insights learned from the Visual Studies framework can meaningfully inform material process and personal expression in the practical component of the senior cycle art curriculum.

The chapter is organised around three key areas:

- Developing critical awareness through place-based learning.
- Material process and conceptual thinking.
- Growth in student voice, agency, and peer dialogue.

5.2 Developing critical awareness through place-based learning

Charman (2019) asserts that place-based art education fosters emotional attachment and political awareness, both of which were central to student reflections in this study. The findings clearly demonstrate that anchoring the project within the local context of Crumlin significantly enhanced students' engagement and critical understanding. Students demonstrated greater motivation and deeper reflection when responding to real issues they had experienced (such as the decline of the Primary Care Centre and concerns about elderly housing) .

(Teacher observations recorded in Practical Class 1) confirmed that students engaged much more readily when the discussion centred on familiar places:

“Students connected emotionally when discussing the Primary Care Centre and the closure of services relied upon by older residents.”

This supports McCoy and Smyth's (2020) argument that DEIS students respond most meaningfully to curricula that recognise their lived realities. By rooting the project in familiar social structures and changes, the Visual Studies component moved beyond classical art norms and gave students a platform to articulate observations often ignored in mainstream narratives.

Student comments, such as “They built new housing for old people but didn't leave anything for them to do except stay inside” (Group Interview), highlight an emergent critical literacy grounded in personal experience rather than detached theory.

The effective use of place-based inquiry also echoes Freire's (1970) emphasis on problem-posing education, where learning is generated through dialogue about real-life situations. Rather than passively consuming information, students interrogated their environment, questioned decisions made by authorities, and this informed students' final artifacts.

5.3 Visual Studies framework supporting critical engagement

Application of the Visual Studies Framework (description, analysis, interpretation, evaluation) structured students' engagement with challenging artworks and supported their development of critical vocabulary. Although initially students offered surface-level observations, repeated scaffolding led to greater interpretative sophistication by the end of the unit of learning.

Teacher reflection (Visual Studies Lesson 3) noted:

"Students moved from asking 'what is it' to questioning 'what does it represent about this place or issue?'. "

The move towards questioning and interpretation shows a successful embedding of the Visual Studies Framework into practical learning and vice versa. Students' own reflections reinforced this progression, with comments such as "It makes you think about what's missing more than what's there" (Student, Visual Studies Lesson 3), indicating that students began to appreciate the subtextual power of visual forms.

This outcome aligns with the aims outlined in the Visual Studies specification. To cultivate critical visual literacy and prepare students to engage thoughtfully with contemporary cultural production. (NCCA, 2022)

5.4 Material process and conceptual thinking

As Gauntlett (2018) argues, the act of making is not just expressive but reflective, objects then become containers of thought and dialogue. The use of expanded materials particularly silicone and

plaster, played a critical role in developing students' conceptual thinking. Students' willingness to embrace imperfection and technical accidents as metaphorical outcomes was a significant marker of their critical development. (appendix J)

Teacher observation (Practical Class 5) recorded:

“Students reflected positively on accidents, identifying fractures and surface damage as symbolic of the incomplete or broken services in their community.”

This approach aligns with Helguera's (2011) model of socially engaged art education, which prioritises conceptual resonance and social relevance over technical perfection. Students' understanding of materials as carrying meaning mirrored wider debates in contemporary art practice around process and critique.

Student reflections during peer critiques reinforced this conceptual shift:

- “I'm leaving the holes because that's what it's really like nothing is perfect.” (Student, Practical Class 3 Reflection)
- “It kind of broke off but now it looks more real, like how they leave stuff half-fixed.” (Student, Practical Class 5 Peer Critique)

Rather than treating accidents as failures, students saw them as authentic representations of Crumlin's social landscape and formed part of their learning outcomes and finished artifacts.

5.5 Critical interpretation over technical skill

One of the project's key successes was shifting students' emphasis away from polished outcomes towards meaningful content. Early frustrations with silicone manipulation and plaster casting gave way to acceptance that flaws could potentially carry emotional and political weight .

Teacher Reflection (Practical Class 6) stated:

“Students internalised that art doesn’t have to be perfect to communicate. They began discussing what the materials represented, not just how they looked.”

This shift aligns with the emphasis placed in the Visual Studies Framework (NCCA, 2022) on moving beyond surface description towards deeper levels of evaluation and critique. Students’ final artworks reflected both individual interpretation and collective social commentary, demonstrating their ability to merge technical experimentation with conceptual ambition.

This experience helped address wider challenges identified in DEIS contexts, where access to traditional art-world capital and exposure to conceptual art practices can be limited (McCoy and Smyth, 2020). Through hands-on, critically framed engagement with materials, students were supported to become producers of meaning rather than mere reproducers of established forms.

5.6 Growth of Student Voice, Agency, and Peer Dialogue

A significant finding was the growth of students’ ability to articulate critical ideas, both verbally during critiques and through their written reflections. Early in this study, teacher observations noted superficial or hesitant feedback during peer critiques . However, by Practical Class 4 onwards, students demonstrated increased willingness and ability to offer conceptually driven observations.

Teacher observation (Practical Class 4) stated:

“Students’ feedback moved from simple aesthetic comments to discussing emotion, symbolism, and social meaning.”

Peer critiques reflected a deeper understanding of the social commentary embedded in their work:

- “The cracks show it’s still broken, even if you try fix it.” (Student, Practical Class 4 Peer critique)

- “Yours feels lonely, the way it’s empty at the side.” (Student, Practical Class 4 Peer critique)

This growth illustrates the development of critical literacy, a key goal of Freire’s (1970) pedagogy of critical consciousness. Rather than accepting visual culture passively, students questioned, analysed, and constructed meaning collaboratively.

5.7 Ownership and personal investment

Findings also indicated that students felt a strong sense of ownership over their projects. The local focus on Crumlin, coupled with freedom to select personally meaningful issues, encouraged emotional investment and authentic voice .

Teacher reflection (Final practical class) captured this clearly:

“Students were proud to discuss their work as representations of real experiences and real criticisms of their area, not just decorative outcomes.”

Student written reflections reinforce this observation:

- “I liked that we picked our own ideas from Crumlin instead of doing something random.”
(Student C, Practical Class 6 Reflection)
- “It made me notice stuff in my area that I didn’t really think about before.” (Student A, Practical Class 6 Reflection)

These comments align with Helguera's (2011) belief that socially engaged art education empowers students to act as narrators of their own experiences. Rather than working to abstract prompts or purely technical exercises, students created work embedded in lived knowledge and personal insight. This sense of ownership supports McCoy and Smyth’s (2020) assertion that DEIS students thrive when curricula validate their realities and offer opportunities for authentic expression. The combination of Visual Studies analysis and hands on making created a framework in which students could develop both technical skills and critical, personal voice.

5.8 Summary of key insights

The integration of Visual Studies and practical making significantly enhanced Fifth Year DEIS students' critical literacy, social awareness, and sense of agency.

Several key findings emerged:

- **Place-Based Inquiry Deepened Critical Engagement:**

Grounding artistic exploration in students' own community fostered immediate relevance, in line with McCoy and Smyth's (2020) findings on DEIS engagement.

- **Material exploration fostered conceptual thinking:**

Students' deliberate use of silicone and plaster imperfections to symbolise broken social structures confirmed the power of expanded material practice, supporting Helguera's (2011) socially engaged art education principles.

- **Peer dialogue developed critical literacy:**

Structured critique sessions allowed students to grow beyond technical commentary into critical reflection, demonstrating Freire's (1970) vision of education as dialogue.

- **Ownership and authentic voice were strengthened:**

The freedom to select personally resonant themes encouraged students to move beyond compliance into self-expression, fulfilling key goals of the Visual Studies specification (NCCA, 2022).

These insights demonstrate that Visual Studies, when aligned with the practical component in a carefully considered way, with practical making and critical pedagogy, can foster progressive conceptual growth among students who may not initially view art as a tool for social commentary.

5.9 Broader implications

This project supports the idea that integrating Visual Studies within DEIS art education is not only possible but highly impactful. Rather than isolating theory and practice, merging them allowed students to bridge analysis and making, thought and action. Recent Irish scholarship highlights the

value of student-led critique in disadvantaged settings, particularly where curriculum flexibility allows responsiveness to lived experience (Quinn, 2022).

Findings suggest that expanded materials, place-based inquiry, scaffolded critical vocabulary, and peer dialogue all contributed significantly to students' personal and artistic development. As McCoy and Smyth (2020) emphasise, engaging students where they are - and with what matters to them is key to promoting equality of opportunity. Applying a contemporary understanding of critical pedagogy principles (Irwin, 2018), in the Visual Arts classroom allowed students to reframe themselves not merely as learners but as critical observers and communicators within their own social contexts. This model offers a potential pathway for broader curricular development in DEIS art education, suggesting that greater integration between research, theory, and practice can empower students to engage meaningfully with both art and society. The next chapter will conclude the study by revisiting the primary research question, summarising how the findings contribute to existing knowledge, reflecting on limitations, and offering recommendations for future practice in a closely aligned visual studies and practical class in a DEIS context.

6. Conclusion of the discussion

Over four weeks, this DEIS class engaged with "Art as Social Commentary" by combining Visual Studies and practical sessions to craft conceptual plaster tiles. Despite challenges like resource limitations or fluctuating attendance, action research cycles (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) encouraged continuous adaptation. Early comments ("We see the effects of drugs everyday," "What's the point if older people have no services?") highlighted frustration and disappointment, yet many also underlined strong communal bonds - "We look out for each other" (Lesson 1 Observations). Over time, intentional imperfections in the plaster signified local challenges, while smoother sections signaled optimism. In Lesson 5, one group used a "half-finished surface" to convey partial solutions.

By Lesson 7, researcher observed, “We do want to fix it, but we also love it here,” capturing genuine investment in the area’s future. By the final lesson, students proposed displaying tiles publicly, aiming to show “the balanced truth of Crumlin”, serious challenges combined with unwavering loyalty. Such an outcome supports Helguera’s (2011) idea that socially engaged art should spark broader dialogue. The synergy of conceptual conversations, hands-on making, and ongoing reflection produced a candid yet hopeful commentary on Crumlin’s realities: “We see it, but we also care enough to represent it.” That captures the essence of the Visual Studies section of focus “Today’s World – Art as Social Commentary” (NCCA, 2022), encouraging critical awareness and understanding within a DEIS context. In future iterations, expanding upon this project through additional community collaborations, refined casting techniques, or alternative media could further deepen both social engagement and artistic development, ultimately enabling students to move beyond passive observation toward active, locally grounded citizenship. This gradual shift from detached? isolated complaints to collective action demonstrates the transformative power of art in education, particularly within DEIS contexts. These resolved pieces demonstrated how students successfully transferred critical research and personal insight into symbolic, textured forms, showing a clear link between Visual Studies discussions and material outcomes. This aligns with the NCCA’s guidance that “students should be given opportunities to explore personally relevant themes and translate their ideas into realised work” (NCCA, 2018, p. 24).

This study also had a significant impact on the researcher, not only in developing classroom strategies but in deepening professional understanding of what it means to teach through a socially engaged lens. Returning to the area where the researcher grew up and now teaching in the same DEIS school, added a personal and ethical weight to the study. Navigating the roles of teacher, artist and researcher within an already familiar community revealed how place-based learning and lived experience can enhance the relevance and urgency of both Visual Studies and practical art-making. The study underscored how students’ voice, material process, and local context can be integrated meaningfully when practical art classes are informed by the Visual studies section of focus - Art as

social commentary. It has also reshaped the researcher's perspective on professional practice, particularly the value of listening, co-creating, and stepping back to allow students' lived realities to shape the trajectory of the work. This reflection will continue to inform the researcher's future professional development beyond the scope of the study.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This research study investigated how fifth year students in a DEIS school completed an integrated visual studies and practical art unit of learning with a view to investigate social realities in their local surroundings, including housing, youth provisions, and mental health services. By pairing concise theoretical lessons in the section of focus ‘art as social commentary’ with a practical unit of learning, participants evolved from generalised observations to specific critiques and reflections. They conceived, designed and executed collaborative plaster tiles that featured thoughtful designs based on individual and collaborative research, anchored in the work of architect of early 20th century social housing Herbert Simms, revealing both concern about neglected facilities and hope for improvement in their immediate environment, Crumlin.. This outcomes aligns with Helguera’s (2011) emphasis on socially engaged practice and Freire’s (1970), reconsidered in a contemporary context by Irwin (2018) premise that Education should link to genuine experiences. A Participatory Action Research design (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) made it possible, in a DEIS school, to take into account inherent challenges such as irregular attendance, resource shortages, or shifting student interests. Each lesson built on feedback and observations from previous sessions, so emerging concerns such as lack of youth clubs or poor mental health support could be addressed in subsequent lessons. Smyth and Banks (2019) indicate that practical projects grounded in local relevance often capture student interest more effectively in DEIS schools, which was evident in this study, as learners contributed detailed insights about social challenges in their neighbourhood/ community.

The Visual Studies lessons promoted the examination of critical social consideration, referencing the “Art as social commentary” strand of the syllabus (NCCA, 2022). Students considered how public funding, shifting policies, and prior housing developments shaped their area over time. Materials such as Casey’s (2005) discussion of Dublin’s earlier public housing programmes suggested reasons for incomplete or abandoned estates, and similar patterns emerged for other

missing services such as community centres or mental health clinics. Students then drew on this theoretical foundation in their practical work, reinforcing Helguera's (2011) point about the power of material choice: plaster hinted at damaged spaces and interrupted building efforts. As the sessions advanced, students began integrating the knowledge from Visual Studies with practical techniques in a natural, reciprocal manner. Concepts introduced during classroom debates, such as the importance of depicting overlooked social issues, directly influenced each stage of the plaster-making process. Likewise, the physical outcomes of these classes prompted deeper in-class discussions about the parallels between cracked tiles, neglected infrastructure, and the emotional weight of living with limited community support. Through this back-and-forth exchange, participants engaged in more honest dialogue, honing their analytical skills and translating their growing insights into tangible artistic statements. Several themes emerged from the final evaluation.

First, linking theoretical ideas with hands-on art sessions appeared to maintain stronger engagement. McCoy and Smyth (2020) suggest that, without a practical anchor, discussions on social policy might remain abstract in a secondary school context. Here, relevant research and debates were always paired with opportunities to explore those themes through material experimentation. This ensured students who had a history of absenteeism remained more consistent in attendance and collaborative efforts.

Second, the Participatory action Research cycle supported adaptation in real time. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) highlight the value of reflective practice that allows flexibility and incorporates new findings. For example, When student conversations revealed an interest in mental health provision, upcoming lessons shifted to spotlight that subject. Smyth and Banks (2019) note that DEIS schools require this kind of responsiveness, given the variability of funding, attendance, and pressing local issues.

Third, the resulting plaster tiles showcased a meaningful shift in perspective. Early work was relatively explorative, while later casts displayed greater detail and complexity, combining both critique of the lack of facilities and their appreciation for the area's supportive, vibrant community spirit. Mulligan and McGlynn (2020) claim that art linked to an immediate setting can merge critical views with pride, a duality evident in these students' final pieces. There was a shared recognition that, despite many obstacles, the neighbourhood represented a vital source of identity.

Fourth, brief reflective tasks at the end of each class fostered open and confident communication. Some students noted that discussing topics like drug misuse or insufficient youth amenities helped them relate to one another's experiences. Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue as a path toward critical awareness came through in these post-lesson check-ins, where participants saw that Social commentary through art could raise shared concerns in a safe, creative environment.

Fifth, Students were keen to exhibit their plaster works outside the confines of the art room. Some suggested organising a small show for younger students or local residents, reflecting Dewhurst's (2014) assertion that socially engaged art encourages dialogue in wider contexts. Future steps may include inviting community members, youth workers, or policymakers to respond to these pieces, aligning with McNiff and Whitehead's (2006) emphasis on collaborative and ongoing action research. Despite these successes, the project faced a few limitations. The cost of plaster and other materials required careful consideration and the school timetable left limited flexibility for greater development of explorations. Smyth and Banks (2019) point out that resource constraints and rigid scheduling can hamper creative initiatives in DEIS contexts, yet the group found ways to keep the momentum by working at smaller scales and sharing resources.

Will these fifth year students, who have learned to critically reflect on their community through socially engaged art, experience the same level of housing and care that earlier generations have, or

will they come to accept an environment where continued decline is seen as normal? Casey (2005) refers to gaps in earlier public building initiatives, and minimal policy changes in recent years may mean that these learners and others in their area see minimal improvement. The plaster tiles stand as an honest portrayal of how they identify and represent overlapping issues such as housing, local services, and mental health supports. Balancing hope and frustration in equal measure, this study has shown that short, context-specific lessons, combined with purposeful practical activities and collaborative reflection, can deepen awareness of multiple social issues beyond housing alone. By effectively integrating Visual Studies and the practical element, students began to connect theoretical insights with tangible art, leading to work that reveals both critical analysis and ownership. The DEIS setting inspired an adaptable Participatory action research approach, with each session building on the last. The NCCA (2022) specification affirms, art can be a powerful lens for students to assess and question the world around them. Even within tight restrictions of time and budget, this socially engaged, student-centred method points to meaningful learning outcomes that extend far beyond the classroom walls.

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Appendices

Appendix A Letter to Principal

Date: 15 January 2025

To: The Principal

Rosary College

Armagh Road

Crumlin

Dublin 12

Re: Request for Permission to Conduct Research Study in Rosary College

Dear Principal,

I am currently completing my second year of the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Art and Design at NCAD. As part of my final year dissertation, I am conducting a small-scale action research project exploring how Visual Studies and practical art-making can support students' engagement with social commentary, particularly within a DEIS school context.

I am writing to formally request permission to carry out this study with a 5th Year class in Rosary College, where I am currently on school placement. The research will involve integrating Visual Studies lessons with a practical art unit. Data will be gathered through classroom observation, student artwork, anonymised written reflections, and pre/post questionnaires. All participation will be voluntary and student identities will remain anonymous throughout.

The study has been approved by the NCAD Research Ethics Committee. Copies of the student and parental consent forms will be provided. Findings will be used solely for academic purposes and pseudonyms will be used in all written outputs.

I would greatly appreciate your support and approval to proceed with this work. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Kind regards,

James Doyle

PME2 Student

National College of Art and Design

20333086@student.ncad.ie

Appendix B Informed Consent Form

Researcher: James Doyle

Email: 20333086@student.ncad.ie

School: Rosary College, Crumlin, Dublin 12

Date: January 2025

Project Title:

Exploring Social Commentary Through Visual Studies and Art Practice in a DEIS School Context

Purpose of the Research:

You are being invited to take part in a research study exploring how art can be used to talk about social issues. This will involve participating in Visual Studies lessons and art-making activities as part of normal classwork.

What the Research Involves:

- Taking part in art lessons and discussions on themes like housing, place, and memory
- Optional reflection writing or answering questions about the lessons
- Use of artwork, writing, or feedback (anonymised) in the final research write-up
- No names or identifying details will be shared at any point

Participation is voluntary and you can stop taking part at any time without any consequence.

Student Declaration:

I understand what the project is about. I agree that my artwork and responses can be used in the research anonymously. I know that my name will not appear in any report.

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C Plain Language Statement

School of Education National College of Art and Design

Plain Language Statement Researcher:

James Doyle

Date:

This research is part of my Professional Masters of Education program at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin. The aim of this study is to understand how engaging in socially-themed art can influence students' awareness of social justice and global citizenship issues. By exploring topics like equality, human rights, and community through creative projects, this research hopes to learn how art might encourage students to think critically about these important issues.

The study will take place over a 4-week period starting in January, within the secondary school where I am currently teaching. During this time, students will participate in a series of art lessons focused on creating work inspired by social themes.

Information will be gathered through short interviews, group discussions, and reflections that students will complete at the end of each lesson. All participation is voluntary, and students are free to share only what they feel comfortable with.

All information gathered will remain confidential. The names of students and the school will be kept anonymous in the final report, which will only be accessible to students and staff in the NCAD library. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without any impact on their education.

If you or your student has any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me using the details provided above. For further independent advice, you may also contact the NCAD Research Ethics Committee through the details provided below.

Thank you for considering participation in this research.

It is likely that the information will be collected through anonymous comment boxes, teacher observations and reflective diaries. Some or

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, National College of Art and Design Research Ethics Committee, c/o Head of Research and Postgraduate Development, National College of Art and Design, 100, Thomas Street, Dublin

Appendix D Semi-Structured Interview Questions

00:00 – Start of Recording

Researcher: Thanks for sitting down with me today. I'll just ask a few questions about the project. There are no right or wrong answers. Let's start simple — what part of the project did you enjoy most, and why?

00:30

Student A: I liked making the tiles because it was hands-on and different from normal class. It felt like we were actually building something about Crumlin, not just talking about it.

Student B: Same for me. I liked being creative with the designs. And because it was about Crumlin, it felt more personal.

01:30

Student C: I enjoyed the discussions, like when we talked about Herbert Simms and the housing. It made me think about where I live a bit differently.

Researcher: Great. Next — we combined social issues with making art. Did that change how you think about art?

02:00

Student D: Definitely. Before I thought art was just painting pretty pictures, but now I see it can actually be used to say something important.

Student E: Yeah, like when we talked about housing. I didn't think that art could be used to show problems in a community before.

03:00

Student F: It made it more serious in a way. Like your artwork can have meaning, not just look nice.

Researcher: We also talked about Crumlin's history and Herbert Simms' designs. Did that change how you see your neighbourhood?

03:30

Student G: Yeah, I didn't know about all the history before. Like, I didn't know the flats were part of a plan to give people better homes.

Student A: Same. I used to think of it all as old and boring but now I get why it was important.

04:30

Student B: It made me think about how housing is still a big issue today, even after all that work back then.

Researcher: Was there anything that surprised you about Crumlin's past, present or future?

05:00

Student C: I was surprised how much of the area was planned properly, like with green spaces. I thought it just kind of happened randomly.

Student E: I didn't realise how many people struggled to get decent housing before. It made me wonder about what's happening now.

06:00

Student F: Same. And I never thought about how the church owned so much land. That was new for me.

Researcher: Let's talk about art and issues. In your view, how can art help people talk about problems like housing or the environment?

06:30

Student G: It gives people a different way to see the issue. Like, you notice it more when you see it in a sculpture or picture.

Student D: It's easier to start a conversation when you show something, rather than just saying "this is a problem."

07:30

Student B: And it sticks in your head more. Like I still remember the designs we made, and what they meant.

Researcher: Do you feel more aware of local issues after this project? Can you give an example?

08:00

Student A: Definitely. I didn't know much about the old hospitals and schools closing down until we started talking about it.

Student E: Yeah, same. I pay more attention now when I hear news about Crumlin or the city in general.

09:00

Researcher: Did the project make you question anything unfair happening today?

Student C: Yeah, like how hard it is to get a house now. It feels like the same problems are coming back.

Student F: I didn't really think about it before but now when I see empty spaces or boarded-up places, I wonder who owns them.

09:30

Student G: It's unfair that some people still live in bad conditions while other areas are getting fancy upgrades.

Researcher: Were there times when you or your classmates took the lead, instead of just following instructions?

10:00

Student D: Definitely. In our group, we decided ourselves what to put into our designs.

Student A: We had loads of ideas at the start and had to vote on what we wanted to show.

11:00

Student B: It made the project feel like it was ours, not just a school project.

Researcher: How did sharing ideas and choosing what to make help you understand local problems better?

Student E: Because we all had different ideas based on where we live. It showed how people see Crumlin differently.

12:00

Student F: It made me think about problems I didn't even notice before, like places without enough green space.

Researcher: Was it easy or hard to show social issues through your artwork?

12:30

Student G: Hard at first because we weren't sure how to show things like 'housing problems' without writing.

Student A: But when we used symbols, like cracks or empty houses, it got easier.

13:00

Student C: It was easier once we realised it didn't have to be too complicated to make a point.

Researcher: After doing this project, do you see art differently?

13:30

Student D: 100%. Now I see it as something that can talk about real problems.

Student E: I feel like art can actually make people notice things they would ignore otherwise.

14:00

Student B: Yeah, it's not just decoration. It can be a message.

Researcher: Last question — if you could plan the next project, what parts would you keep, and what would you change?

14:30

Student F: I'd keep the part where we design everything ourselves.

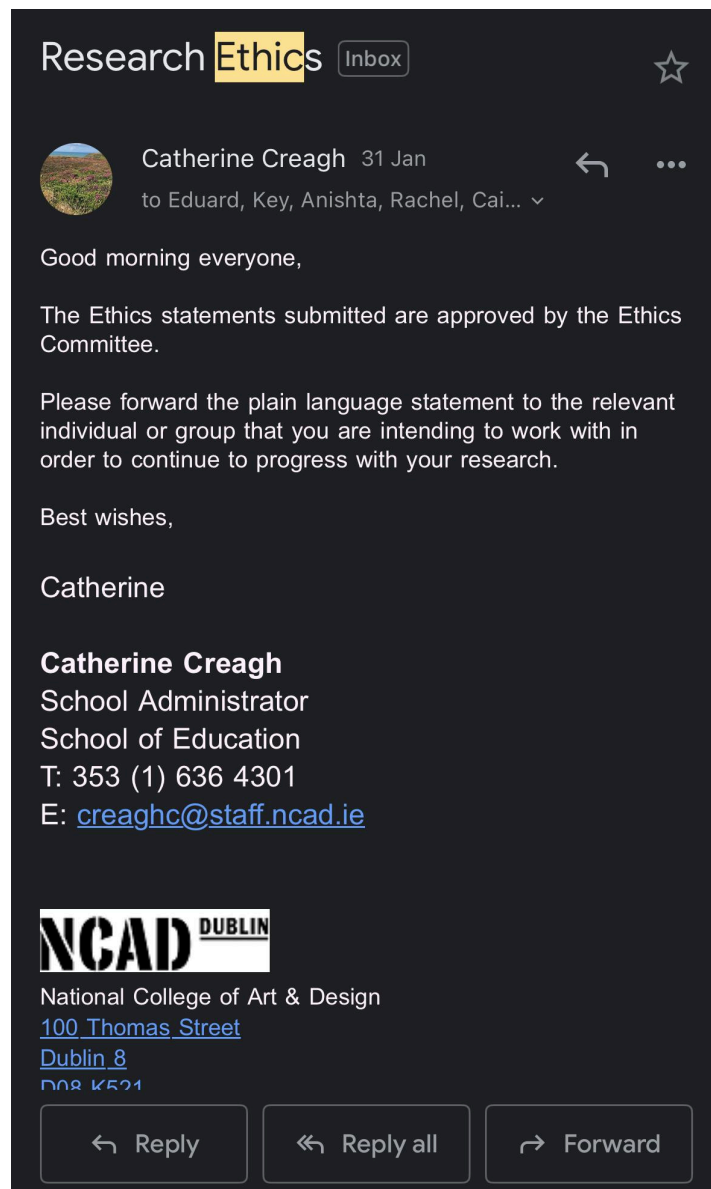
Student G: I'd add more time to actually build stuff. The making was the best part.

15:00

Student C: Maybe do something even bigger, like a mural everyone can see.

Researcher: Thanks, everyone. You all gave brilliant feedback.

Appendix E Ethics Approval



Appendix F Unit of Learning (Practical - Crumlin: Past, Present and Future)

5th practical Unit of Learning - Crumlin: Past, Present and Future -

Appendix G Unit of Learning (Visual studies - Crumlin: Past, Present and Future)

☰ 5th Visual Studies Unit of Learning - Crumlin: Past, Present and Future

Appendix H Pre- and Post- Unit Likert Questionnaires

Action Research Likert Questionnaire - 5th year

1. I understand how artists use their work to comment on social, political, and cultural issues.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

2. I understand what Art as Social Commentator means.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

3. I am aware of an artist/artists who creates work based on social issues.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

4. "Art can bring awareness to important issues in society."

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

5. Working collaboratively can help me understand social issues in my community.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

6. "Art is an important tool for social change."

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

7. I am comfortable sharing my own circumstances within my Art.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

8. Visual Studies helps me think more critically about social issues.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

9. Researching social issues through art will help me understand them better.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. I feel confident discussing the role of art in activism and social change

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

11. I can identify different methods artists use to communicate social issues in their work

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. I feel confident analysing an artwork and explaining its social, political, or cultural context .

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. Researching artists who engage with social commentary has helped me develop my own perspective on social issues.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I can apply what I have learned from visual studies to create my own artwork that responds to social themes .

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. Visual Studies has improved my ability to discuss my ideas and opinions about art with my peers .

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. I feel confident using different materials and techniques to create an artwork with a social message.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. Art can be a more effective way to communicate certain issues than written or spoken language.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

18. Visual Studies has encouraged me to reflect on my own experiences and how they relate to wider social issues.

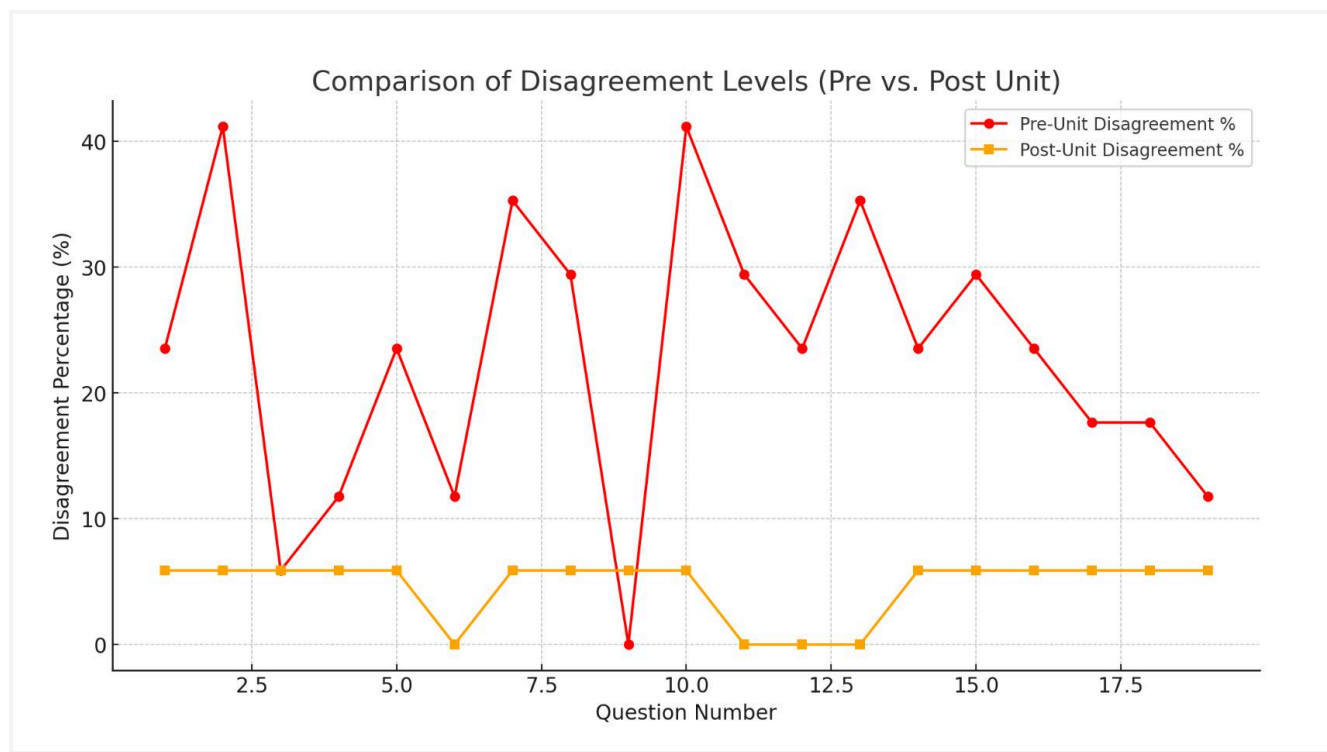
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. I feel comfortable sharing and discussing my own artistic work and others in the class.

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

20. How has this project influenced your understanding of the role of art in addressing social issues ?

Appendix I Likert Questionnaire Results (Graphical analysis)





Who is Rachel Whiteread?

Rachel Whiteread is a British sculptor known for using casting techniques to create sculptures of empty spaces. She focuses on memory, loss, and urban change, often working with architectural structures to highlight what is missing or forgotten.

What Was House (1993)?

- Materials: Concrete
- Location: 193 Grove Road, East London
- Concept: A full-scale cast of a Victorian terraced house that was set to be demolished.
 - Process:
 - Whiteread filled an abandoned house with concrete and then removed the walls, leaving only a ghostly imprint of the rooms, windows, and doors.

WOT FOR

Why Was House Controversial?

- Some saw it as a powerful tribute to working-class housing and urban displacement.
- Others thought it was ugly, unnecessary, and a waste of public money.
- The local council demolished the sculpture after 11 weeks, despite protests from artists and critics.

WHY NOT!

Public Reactions:

- ✓ "It's a memorial to all the houses that have been lost."
- ✗ "It's just a giant concrete block – what's the point?"



Themes in House

1. Memory & Absence – It preserved the empty space left behind when homes are destroyed.
2. Gentrification & Housing Change – It highlighted the loss of affordable housing in London.
3. Public vs. Private Spaces – It made a private home into a public artwork, challenging ideas of ownership.



Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Whiteread chose to cast a house instead of just making a model?
 - How does House relate to issues in Crumlin (e.g., housing, redevelopment, loss of old spaces)?
- Should public art be preserved, even if people don't like it?

Written Reflection on Public Art

- The role of public art is to...
- An artwork should / should not be controversial because...
- One example of a controversial artwork is...
- After learning about House, I think...



Rachel Whiteread - House (1993)

Glebe house, Crumlin



Key Terms & Definitions

1. **Casting** – A sculpture technique where a material (e.g., concrete, plaster, resin) is poured into a mold to create a three-dimensional form. Whiteread used this method to make a solid cast of an empty house.
2. **Negative Space** – The empty space around and within an object. Whiteread's work is unique because she casts the space inside objects, making the emptiness visible.
3. **Public Art** – Art that is created to be displayed in public spaces, often sparking discussion or controversy. House was a temporary public artwork placed in a residential area.
4. **Memorialisation** – The process of preserving or commemorating something to remember its importance. House acted as a memorial to disappearing working-class housing.
5. **Gentrification** – The process where an area is redeveloped, often making it more expensive, which pushes out lower-income residents. Whiteread's work highlighted concerns about gentrification in London.
6. **Urban Development** – The way cities and towns change over time, often due to government planning or private investment. House was built in an area that was undergoing major redevelopment.
7. **Controversy** – A disagreement or debate, often involving strong opinions. House was controversial because some people thought it was important social commentary, while others believed it was a waste of money and space.
8. **Absence & Presence** – Themes often explored in art and history. Whiteread's House represents both presence (a physical object) and absence (a home that no longer exists).
9. **Monument vs. Anti-Monument** – A monument is a structure built to celebrate or commemorate something (e.g., a statue of a famous person). Whiteread's House was an anti-monument because instead of celebrating something grand, it highlighted the everyday and forgotten.
10. **Spatial Memory** – The way spaces hold memories of the people and events that took place there. Whiteread's work forces viewers to think about the past lives within spaces that are now gone.

Sentence Starters for Discussion & Debate

1. Describing Whiteread's Work

- Rachel Whiteread is known for...
- Her artwork House was made by...
- She used casting to...
- One reason why people found House interesting was...

2. Expressing Opinions in Debate

- I believe public art should be controversial because...
- Some people might argue that public art should not be controversial because...
- One reason why House was important is...
- A counterargument to this is...
- I think House is / is not successful as an artwork because...

3. Relating House to Crumlin

- One similarity between House and Crumlin's history is...
- In Crumlin, we can see changes similar to Whiteread's work, such as...
- If I could cast a forgotten space in Crumlin, I would choose... because...
- Whiteread's work makes me think about...

Glebe House, Crumlin Village



Rachel Whiteread's House: Debate Handout

Use this sheet to structure your debate. You will focus on five statements about Rachel Whiteread's House and related issues. Follow each step to organise your thoughts.

Step 1: Prepare

- Read a brief overview of Rachel Whiteread's House.
- Note its size, materials, and any public reactions.

Step 2: Statements

Decide which you support or question:

1. *"The public's negative perception of Whiteread's House was deserved."*
2. *"A project like Whiteread's House at Glebe House, using public money, would be acceptable even if it caused conflict."*
3. *"If an artwork confuses or upsets people, it fails in its purpose."*
4. *"Art should always show a location's history accurately."*
5. *"Controversial public art prompts better discussion than safe, decorative pieces."*

Step 3: Gather

- Move to the statement you most strongly agree with.
- Briefly chat in your group about why you support that view.

Step 4: Use these four steps for each statement you discuss:

1. **Description**
 - What do you see in Whiteread's House?
 - Think about scale, shape, and materials.
2. **Analysis**
 - How do these elements work together?
 - How might they affect people's opinions?
3. **Interpretation**
 - What message might Whiteread share?
 - How could this message change if placed in another location like Glebe House?
4. **Evaluation**
 - Is the artwork or idea successful in its goals?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

Step 5: Debate

- Each group presents one key reason for its stance.
- Other groups respond with questions or comments.
- Keep track of ideas you find interesting or persuasive.

Step 6: Reflection

- Write one sentence on what you learned from another group's point of view.
- Note if your opinion shifted.
- You will use these ideas in your final written response.

Note Taking

--

The public's negative reaction to
House was fair.

S.1

A project like 'House' at Glebe House, using
public funds, would be acceptable even if it
upset people

S.2

If an artwork confuses or upsets people, it fails in its purpose.

S.3

Art should always reflect a location's history accurately.

S.4

Controversial public art creates better discussion than safe, decorative pieces.

S.5

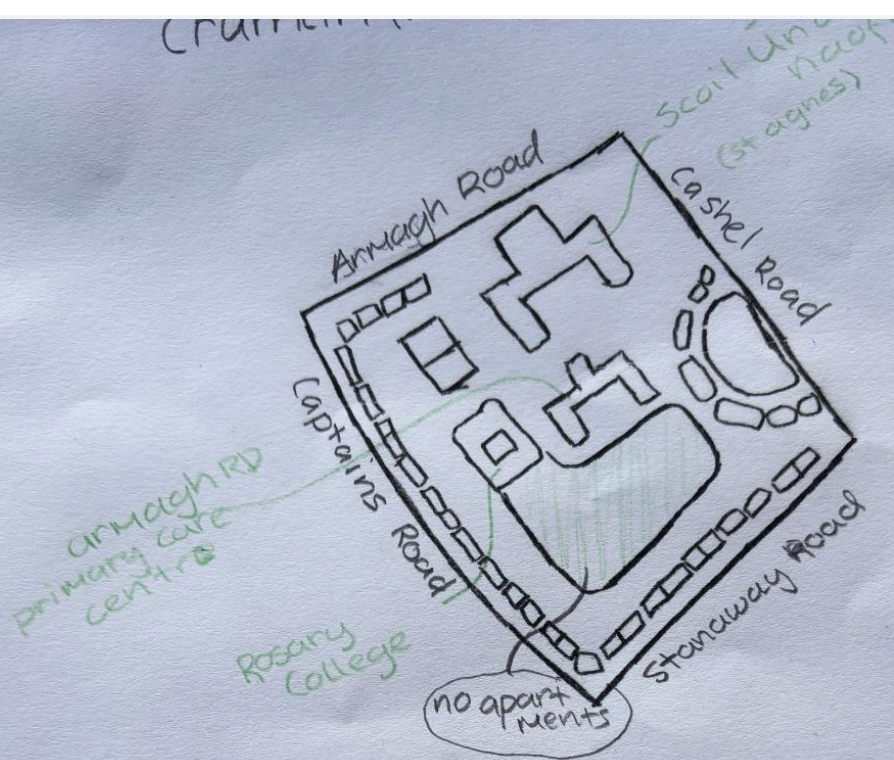
Appendix J - Student work samples











examples of gentrification

as you see behind our school there is no apartments. In 2019 apartments were built for the elderly. But it is a very enclosed area, there is not enough facilities for them. In the primary care centre there was a cafe, a chemist, a therapist, and a restaurant. Now there is only a doctors office. All the facilities are gone. There is nothing left for them. They are left forgotten and enclosed.

History:

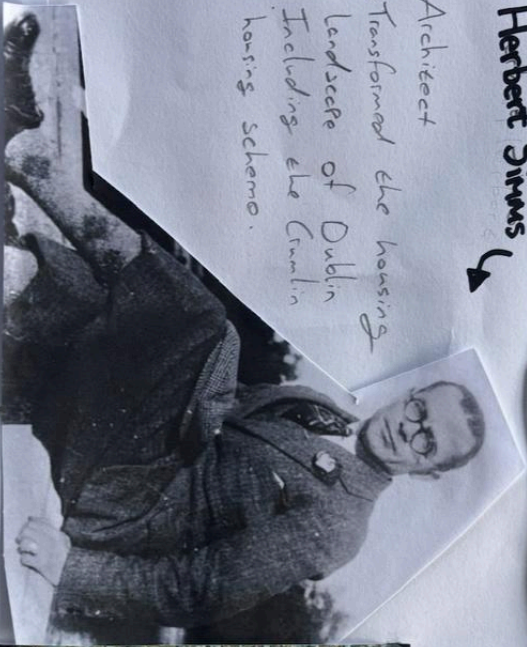
- Crumlin became a residential area in the 1930's.



Fig. 19: Pre-1960s road layout at St. Mary's church. (Crumlin Lodge standing to west side of road). Photo c.1950

• Herbert Simms

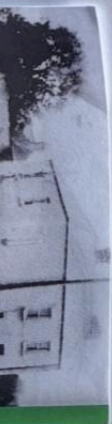
- Architect
- Transformed the housing landscape of Dublin including the Crumlin housing scheme.

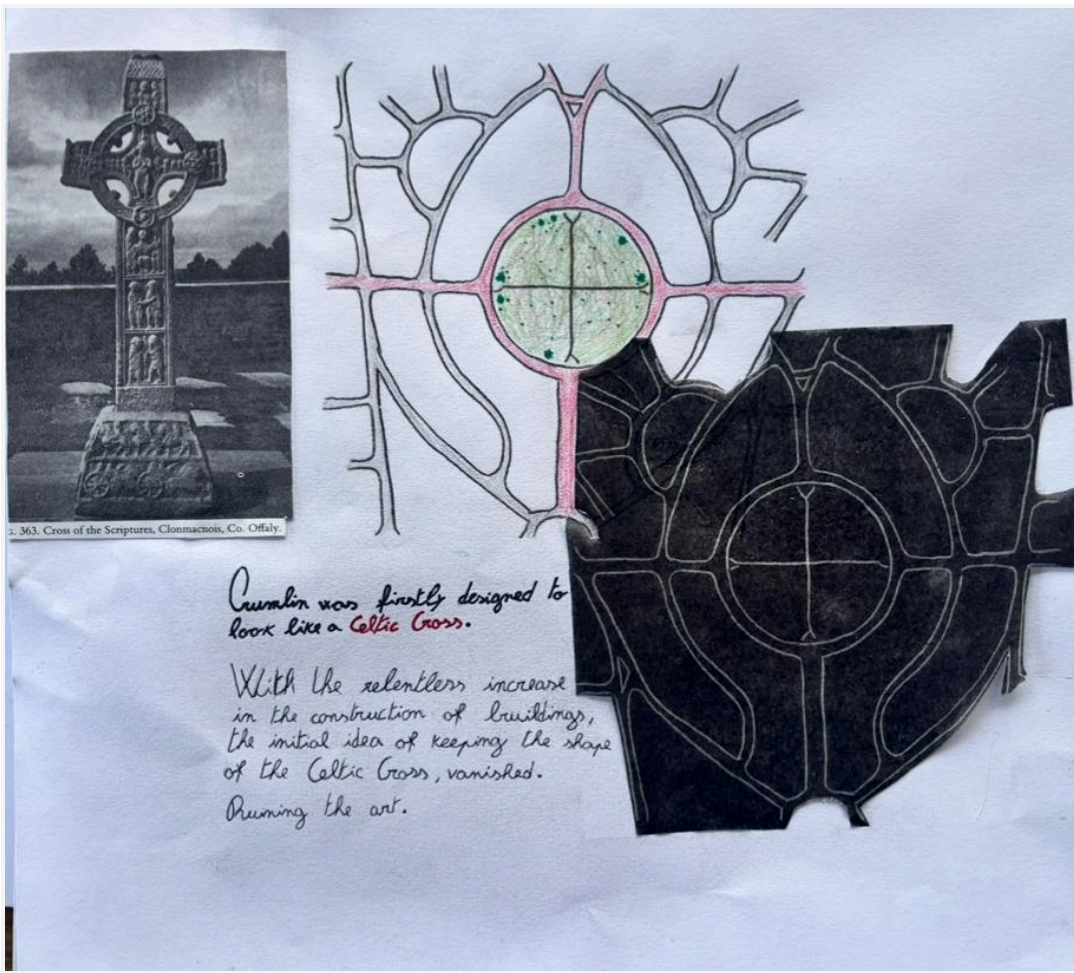


Issue ↓

Gentrification

- In recent years Crumlin is becoming more gentrified as more apartments and buildings are being built in the area.







3 in 10 People are
affected by Drugs in
Crumlin



The current population
of Crumlin is

3,657

Povert

Church of
Ireland
(Crumlin)

≈30% of Irish people
use drugs
(≈1.7 million)



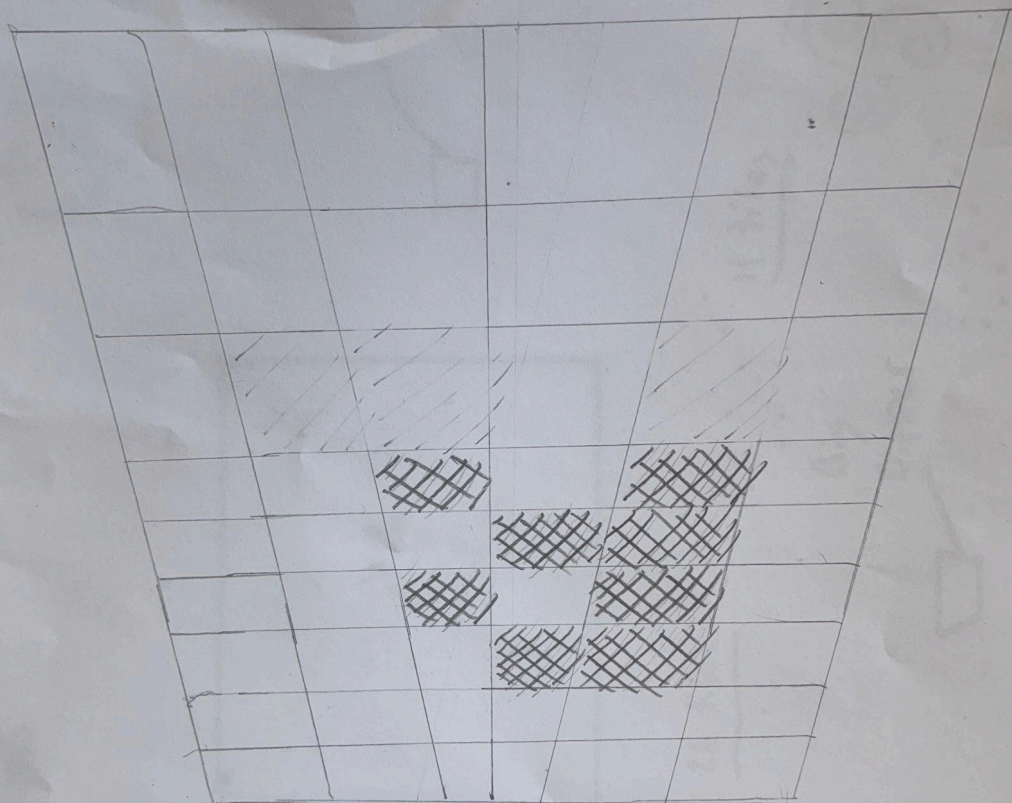
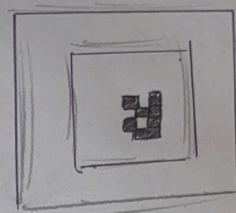






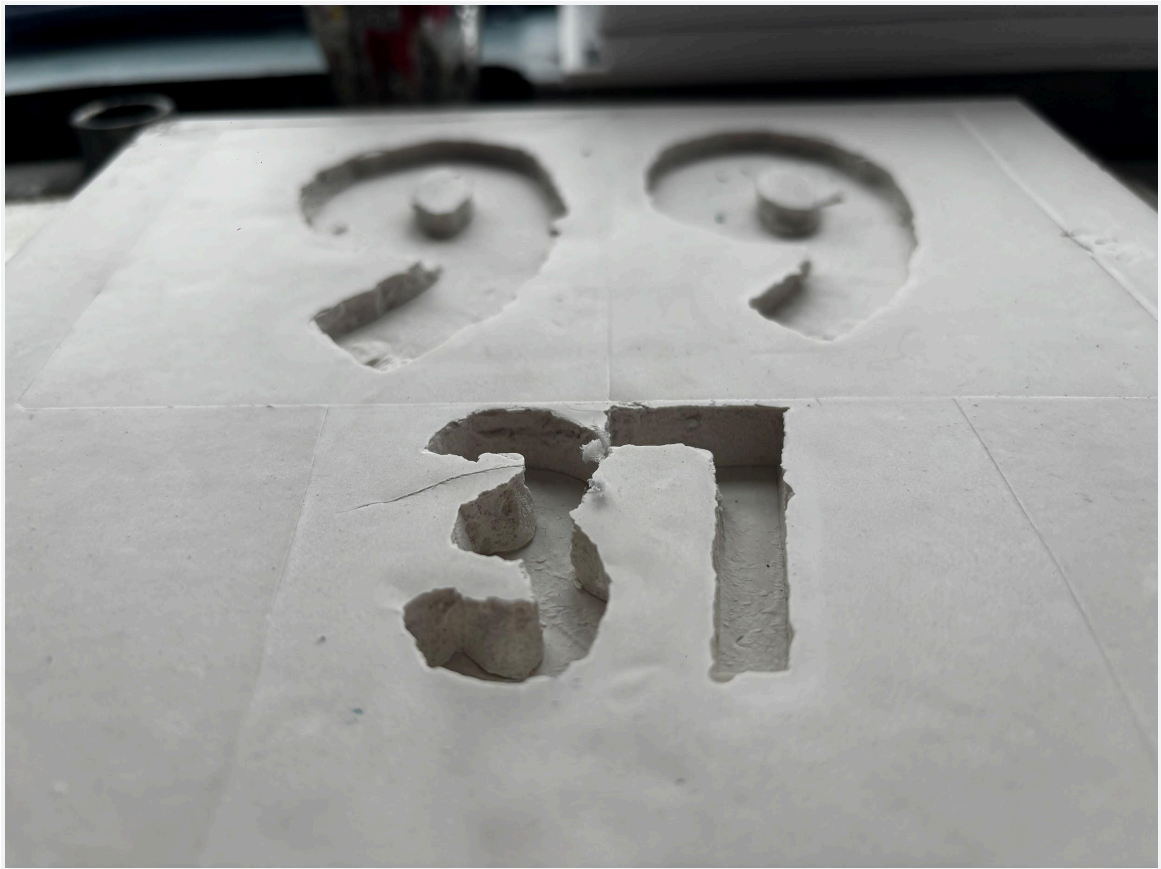


















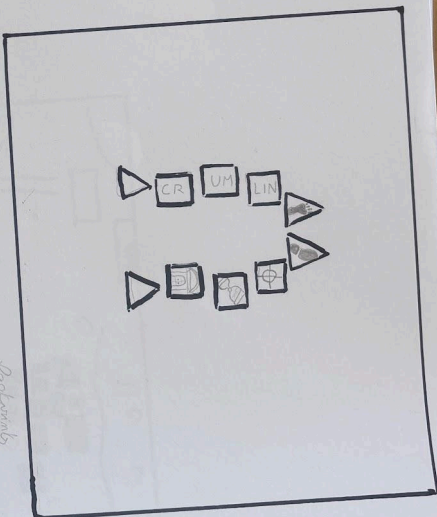




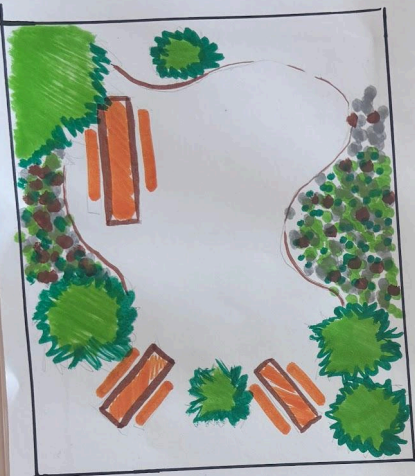
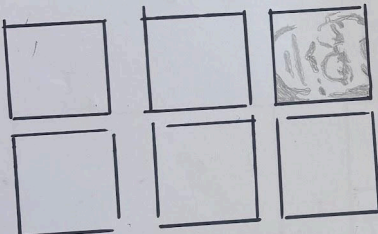


Notes with numbers

5,000 houses
1930-1950
75,000 people

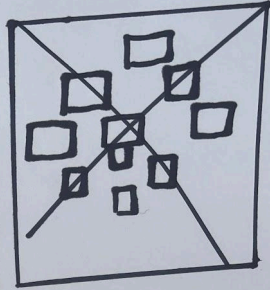
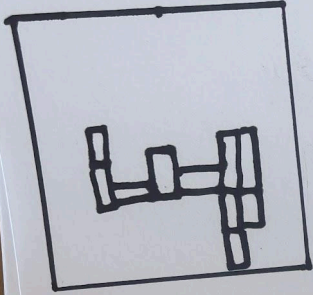
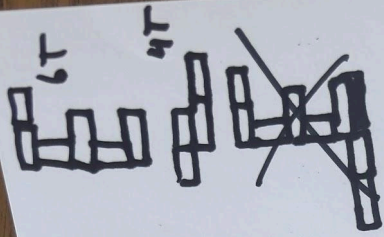


TILES IDEAS



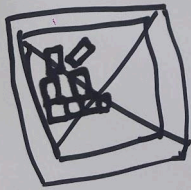
*Footprints
Name of Garden
Calle Cross
Church door
and tower*

How
Shopping



walk on Project ~~Project~~
Garden silos

3 in 10



12 1/2 2000

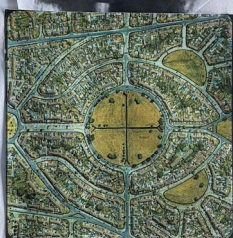
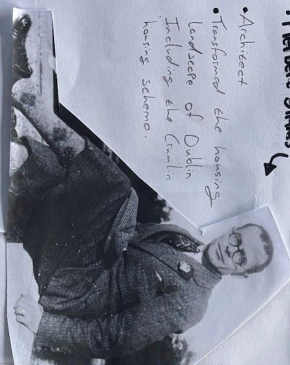
Hosea

- Franklin became a popular area in the 1930's.



• Herbert Simms

- Architect
- Transformed the housing landscape of Dublin including the Crumlin housing scheme.

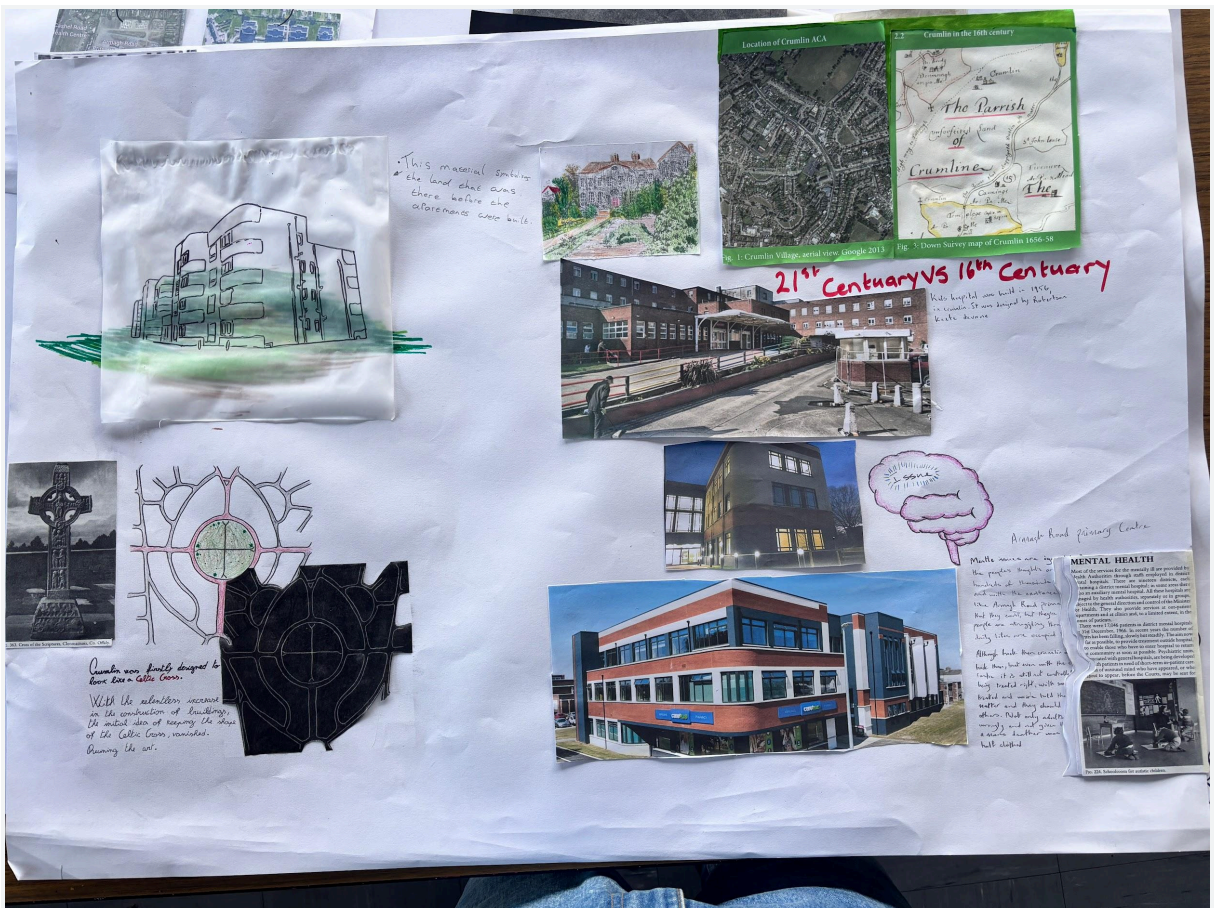


Issue 4

Centrifugation:

• In recent years Franklin is becoming more ghettoed as more apartments and buildings are being built in the area.



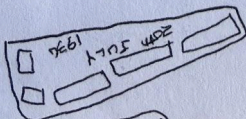


Church of Ireland

(Crumlin)



~30% of
the drugs
(~1.7 million)



This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a textured appearance with visible creases, wrinkles, and some minor discoloration or foxing. The left edge of the page shows the binding of the book, and the overall tone is warm and slightly yellowed, characteristic of old paper.

[illegible]

A hand-drawn sketch of a landscape. On the left, a large, stylized tree with green foliage and a brown trunk stands on a rocky outcrop. A small figure of a person stands on a path leading from the tree towards the center. In the background, a large, abstract structure with a tall, thin tower and a wide, flat base is visible. The structure is drawn with black lines and has some green foliage at its base. The entire scene is set against a white background with some light blue and green washes suggesting water and foliage.



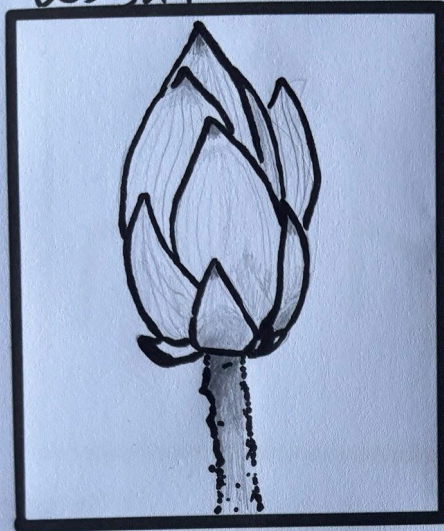
se
ast
developed
use
building



Fig. 8. Glebe House, c.1920

Design 1

Design 1



Annotate - why, how

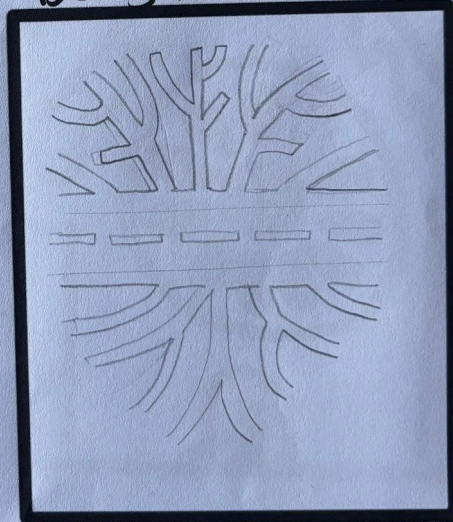
The top middle of one of the main parts of crumlin can be correlated not only with a Celtic Cross, but also with a CLOSED LOTUS FLOWER, symbolizing

JOURNEY TO ENLIGHTENMENT.
It has also different meanings in various cultures and religions.

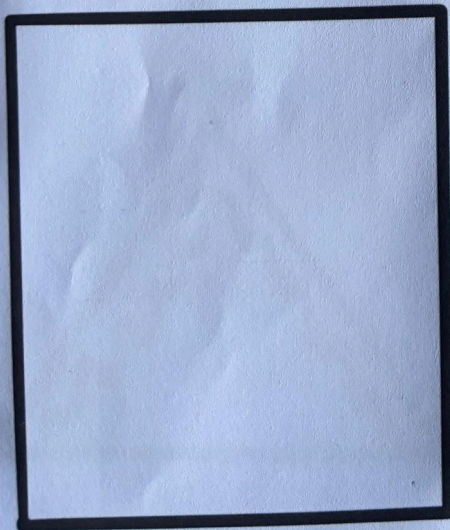
annotate

Roots being cut by a road

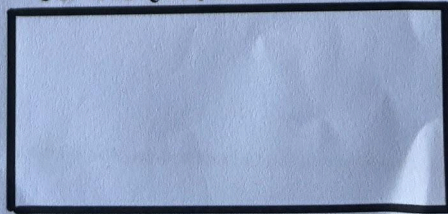
Design 2



Design 3



annotate



Design 1



annotate

It's a simple Design
to address Housing Issues.

Annotate - why, How

The Housing is a
Big Issue in Graphical
Since my work cannot
Find one

Design 2



annotate

This one symbolizes
The Priority of the
Houses.

Design 3



Loneliness

Design 1



Annotate - why, How

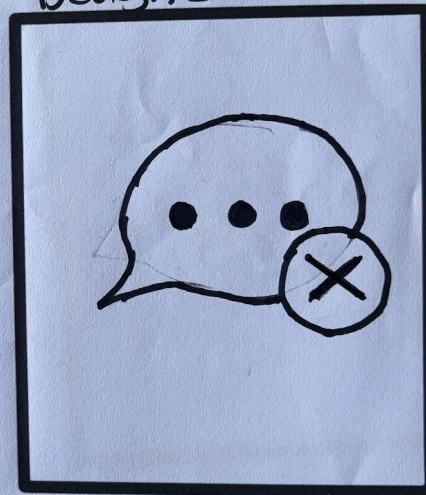
Showing the loneliness of the elderly,

annotate

annotate

represents that there is not a lot of communication.

Design 2



Design 3



annotate

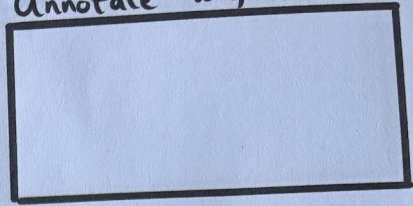
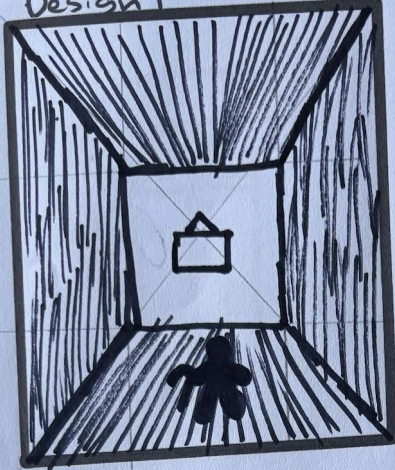
Symbolises loneliness

C&H

M. Curdale

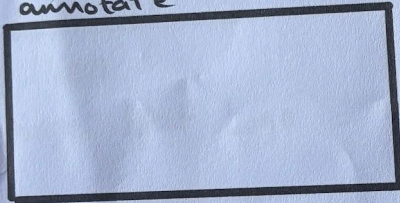
Annotate - why, how

Design 1

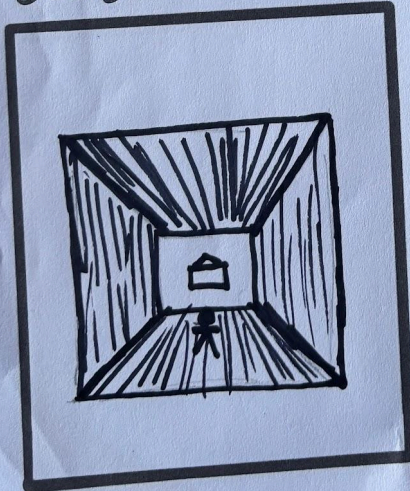


annotate

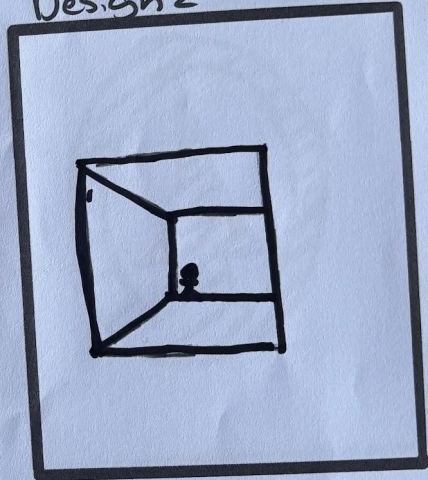
annotate



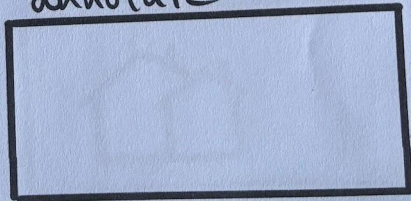
Design 3



Design 2



annotate



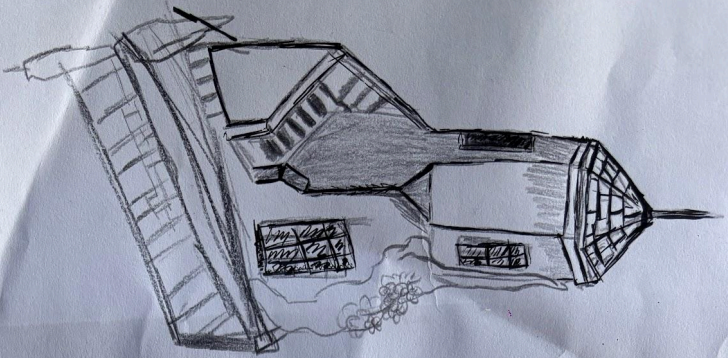


Fig. 40: Detail and inscription above the church entrance

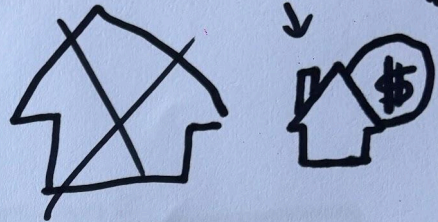
Design 1



Annotate - why, How

Chonches, door

investment in private grow
ths

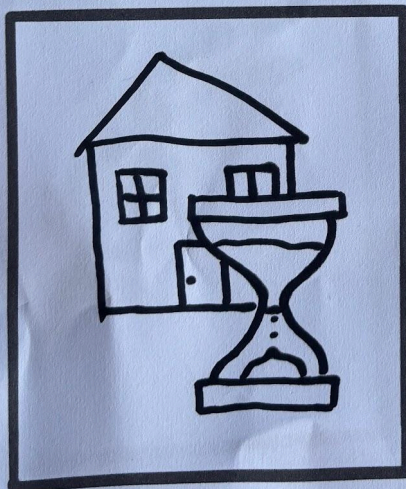


annotate

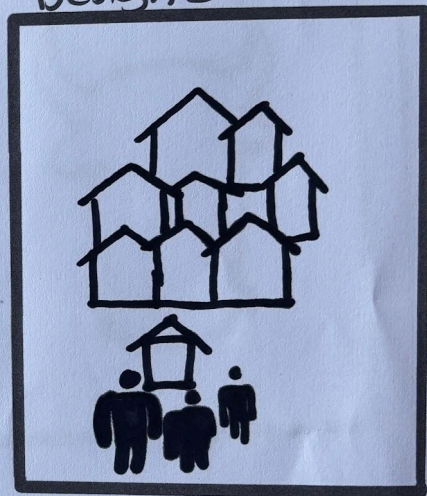
Over housing

Over occupying

Design 3



Design 2



annotate

Housing is being
build and waited to
be occupied

Design 1



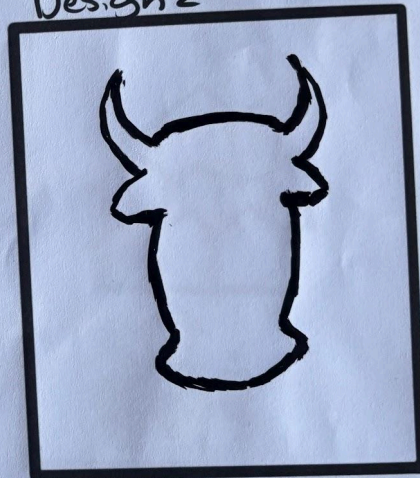
Annotate - why, How

All the livestock that were farms
cultivated in the fields that are
now but built up land at shops
and houses.

annotate

I chose this to show the farms
with their livestock and made it
white to show the peace that was
there. Now in these positions are houses
that are adding ^{noise} and people who are
a problem to society.

Design 2



annotate

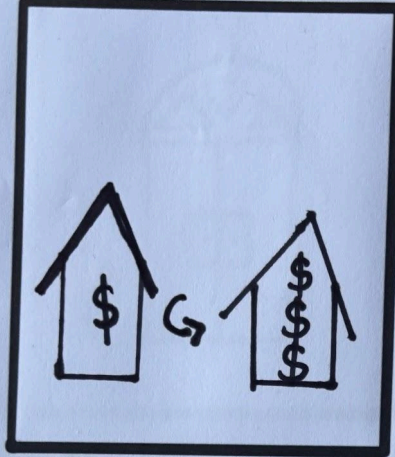
From prosperous fields to vandalized
communities, from clean pathway to
littered streets, Active communities
to unsafe alleyway.

Design 3



Larisa.

Design 1



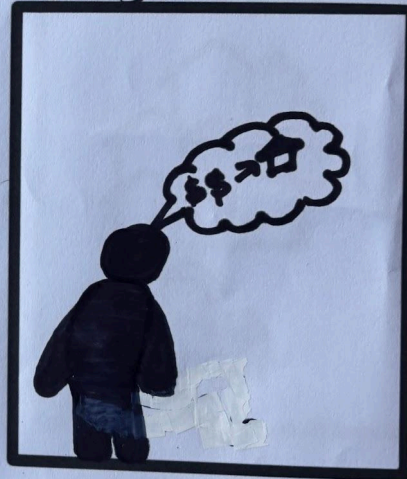
Annotate - why, How

This represents the inflation, and it represents how the price of houses increased.

annotate

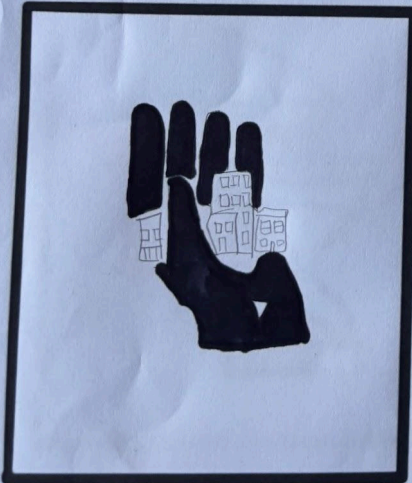
The only thing people think about is money and financial stuff.

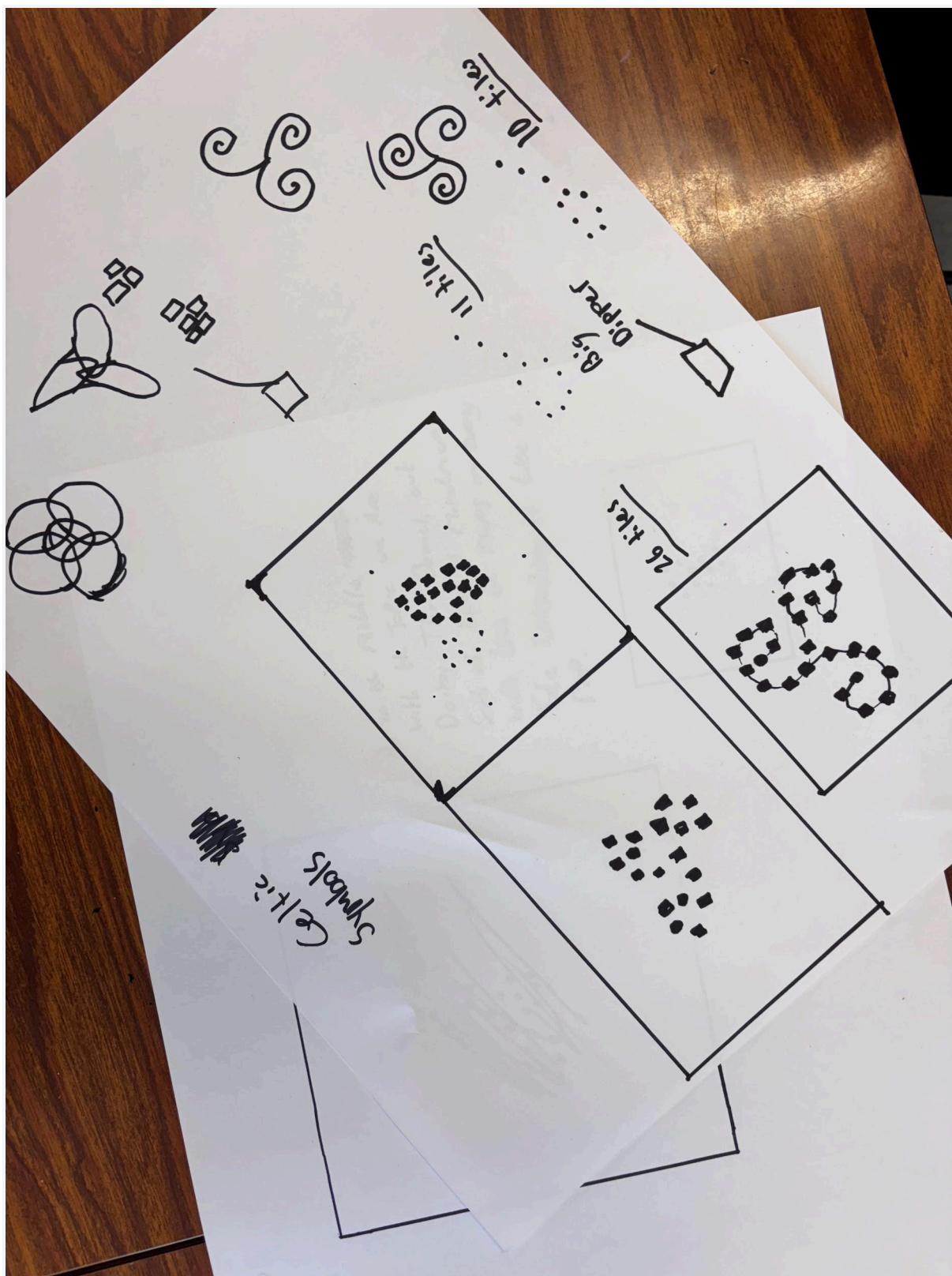
Design 2



annotate

Design 3





Design 1

Rose



Annotate - why, How

The rose is symbol of beauty, love, and optimism representing the joy and hope that the family has for the future.

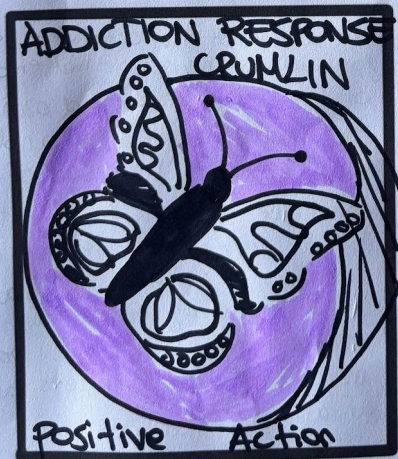
It is a reminder of the strength and resilience of the family bond.

annotate

The End Life Care Committee in Our Lady's Children Hospital Crumlin promotes and supports good practice in end of

life care for children and their families

Design 3 - back



Positive Action

For Positive Change

Design 2



End of Life Symbol

Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin

annotate ^{of its participants} _{at its heart}

"As a Community Drug Project ARC has managed the incredibly challenging task of remaining true to its roots in community development while at the same time

developing a highly professional and well-run organisation with the needs of



Armagh Road primary Centre

Mental issues are big
the people's thoughts on
hundreds of thousands
and with the existence
like Armagh Road primary
that they exist, but they're
people are struggling through
daily lives are occupied!

Although trade then crumbling
back then, but even with the
centre it is still not controlled
being treated right, with so
treated and we're told the
natter and they should
others. Not only adults
wrongly and not given to
a man's daughter was
half clothed

MENTAL HEALTH

Most of the services for the mentally ill are provided by Health Authorities through staffs employed in district mental hospitals. There are nineteen districts, each containing a district mental hospital; in some areas there is also an auxiliary mental hospital. All these hospitals are managed by health authorities, separately or in groups. Subject to the general direction and control of the Minister for Health. They also provide services at out-patient departments and at clinics and, to a limited extent, in the homes of patients.

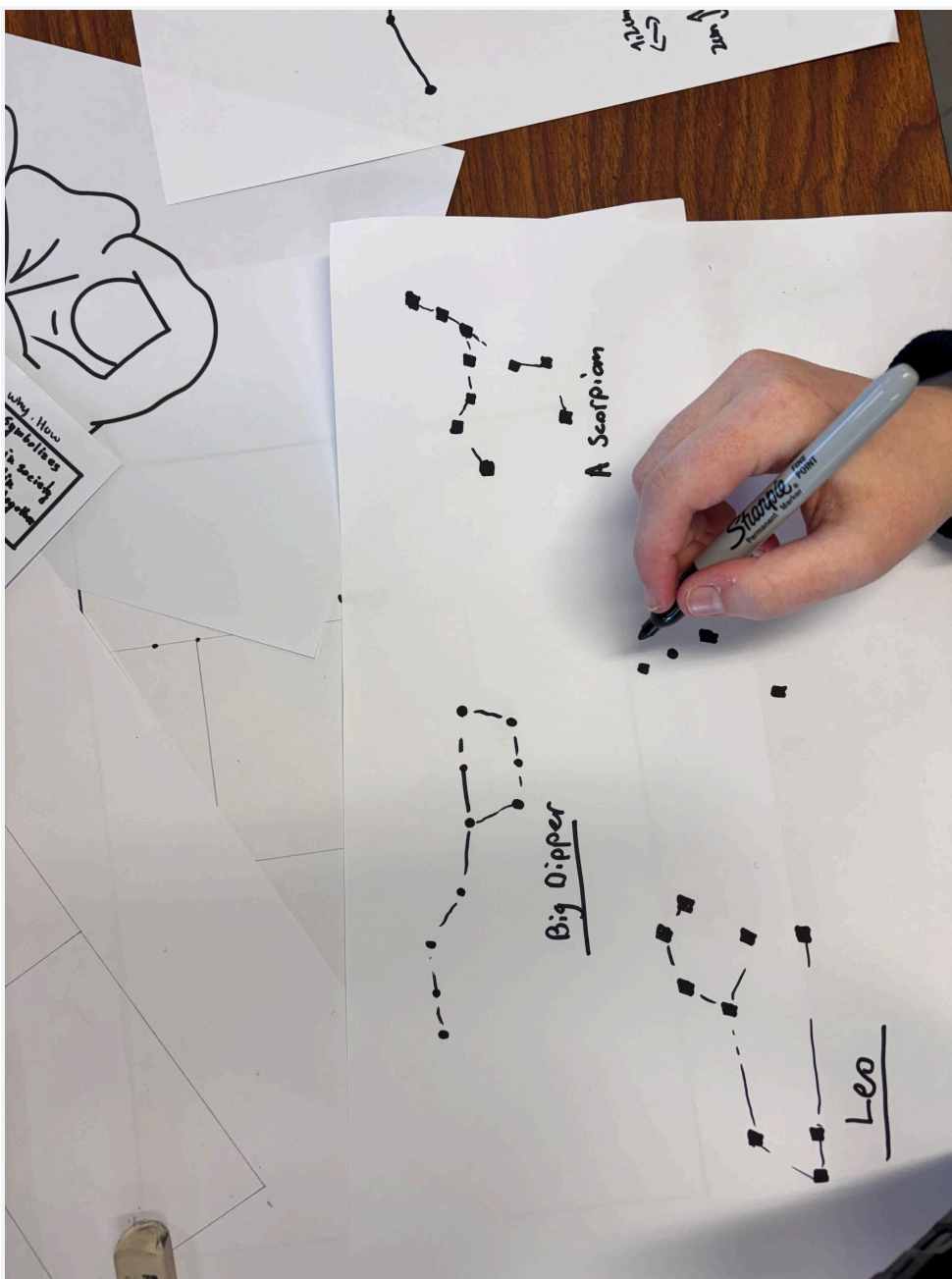
There were 17,046 patients in district mental hospitals on 31st December, 1966. In recent years the number of patients has been falling, slowly but steadily. The aim now is, as far as possible, to provide treatment outside hospital, to enable those who have to enter hospital to return to the community as soon as possible. Psychiatric units, associated with general hospitals, are being developed for patients in need of short-term in-patient care. Cases of unsound mind who have appeared, or who are about to appear, before the Courts, may be sent for

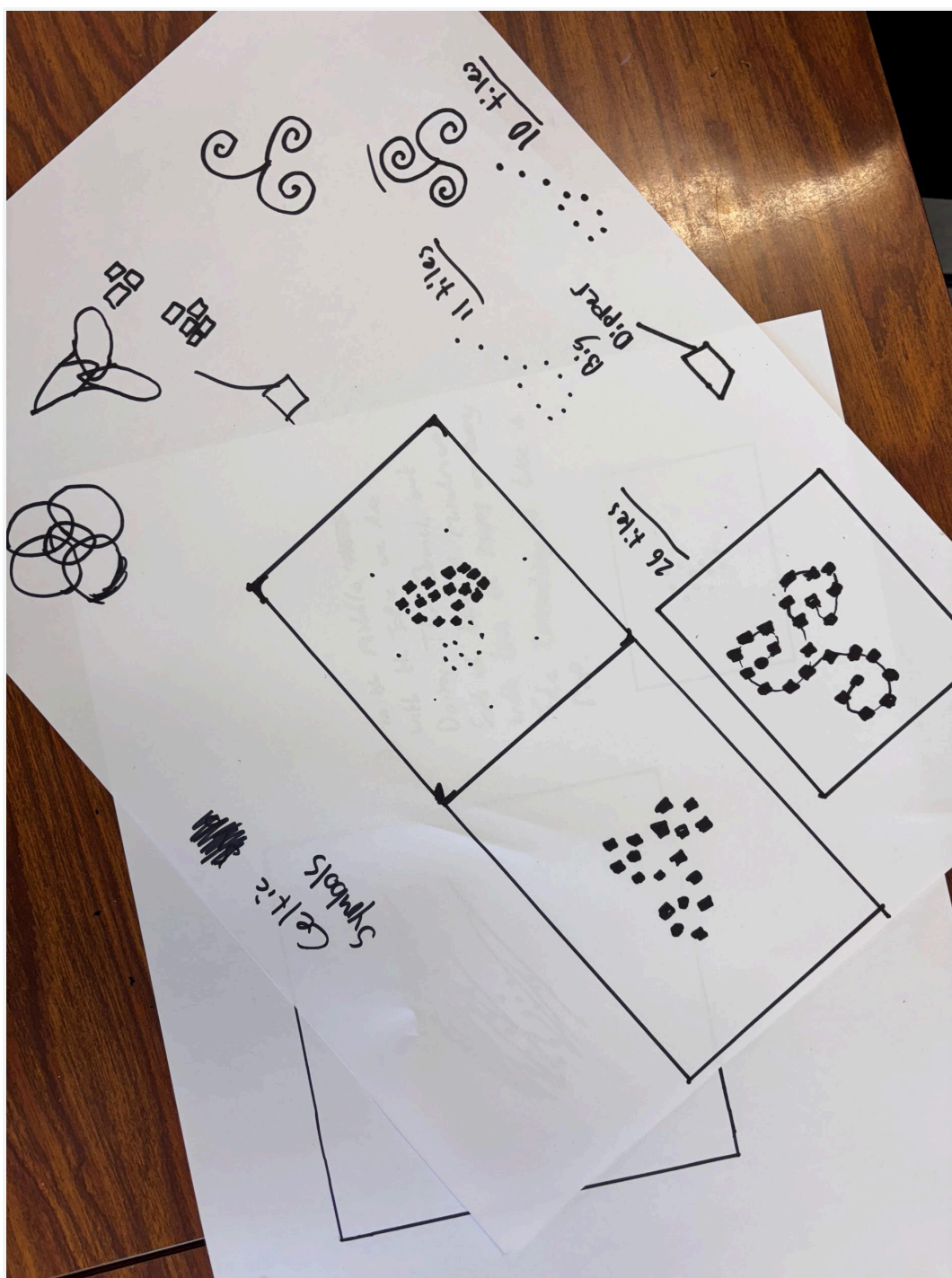


FIG. 224. Schoolroom for autistic children.

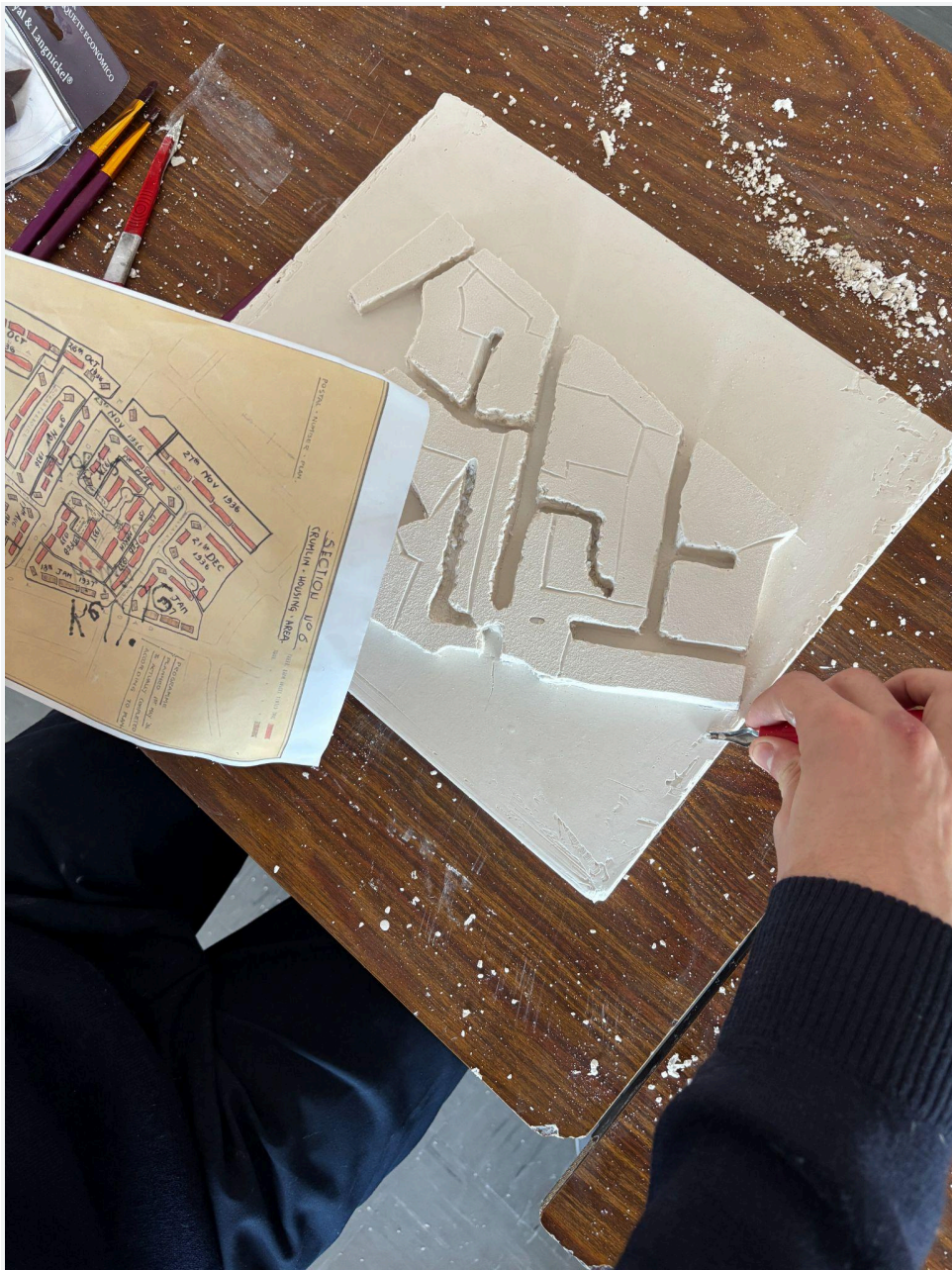












AIM

ENGAGE STUDENTS IN A SOCIALLY DRIVEN CREATIVE PROCESS THAT ENCOURAGES CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE EVOLVING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF CRUMLIN. THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF PRINT AND SCULPTURE, STUDENTS WILL DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ART CAN BE USED AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

BEING CREATIVE

- EXPERIMENT WITH MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES IN CASTING, RELIEF, AND SURFACE FINISHING TO EXPLORE THEMES OF MEMORY AND PLACE. (DEWEY, 1933)

LAYERED LEARNING (INTERNAL)

- ANALYSE HOW MATERIAL CHOICES AND TEXTURES CONVEY SOCIAL ISSUES AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN CRUMLIN. (MEANING MAKING – DEWEY, 1933)

SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP (EXTERNAL)

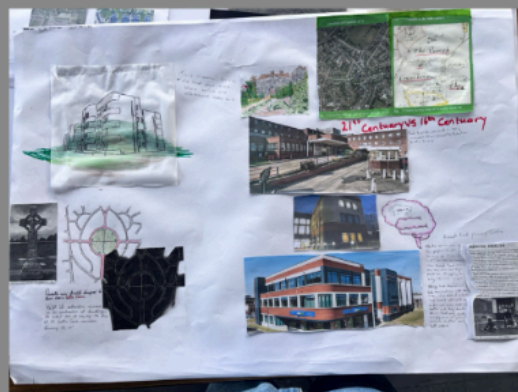
- CRITICALLY ENGAGE WITH CRUMLIN'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE THROUGH ART, REFLECTING ON THEMES OF GENTRIFICATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND PRESERVATION. (CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO SOCIETY – SCHLEICHER, 2018)

KEY SKILLS

- ✓ COMMUNICATING – ARTICULATING IDEAS ABOUT PLACE, HISTORY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH MATERIAL AND FORM.
- ✓ WORKING WITH OTHERS – COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS AND CRITIQUES TO REFINE DESIGN CHOICES.
- ✓ MANAGING MYSELF (REFLECTION) – EVALUATING ARTISTIC DECISIONS IN RELATION TO PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY NARRATIVES.

LESSON 1-2 - MIND MAP/INITIAL SKETCHING

VISUAL AID:

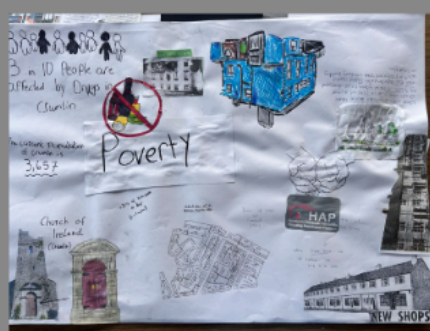
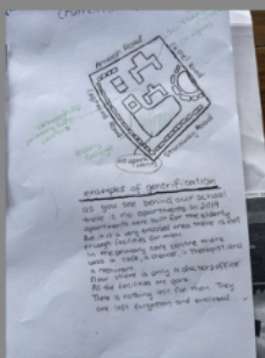


LEARNING INTENTIONS

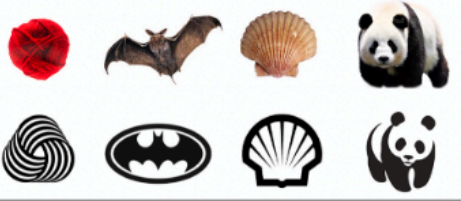
- IDENTIFY SOCIAL ISSUES RELEVANT TO CRIMINAL THROUGH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH.
- CONDUCT INTERVIEWS WITH OLDER RELATIVES TO GATHER COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES.
- DOCUMENT FINDINGS VISUALLY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS AND NOTES.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- A COLLECTION OF RESEARCH MATERIALS, INCLUDING INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.
- MIND MAPS SHOWING KEY THEMES AND POTENTIAL ARTISTIC RESPONSES.



LESSON 3/4 - SYMBOLS - DESIGNS



VISUAL AID:

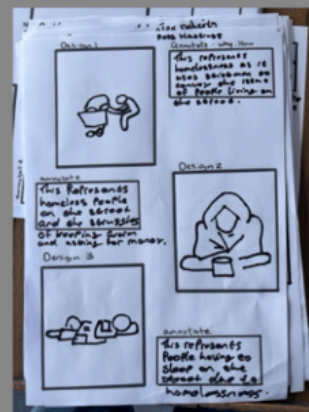
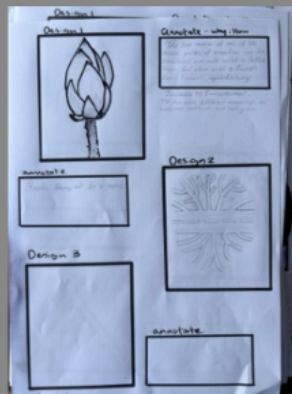
LEARNING INTENTIONS

- IDENTIFY HOW MAPS AND SYMBOLS CAN COMMUNICATE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL NARRATIVES.
- ANALYSE CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORICAL SYMBOLS RELEVANT TO CRUMLIN.
- DEVELOP INITIAL SYMBOL-BASED SKETCHES THAT REFLECT KEY THEMES FROM THEIR RESEARCH.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- SELECT AND DOCUMENT AT LEAST THREE SYMBOLS THAT REPRESENT HISTORICAL EVENTS OR PLACES IN CRUMLIN.
- DESIGN CONTEMPORARY SYMBOLS THAT REFLECT IDENTIFIED SOCIAL ISSUES.
- EXPLAIN HOW THEIR CHOSEN SYMBOLS RELATE TO THE BROADER THEMES OF THE PROJECT.

STUDENTS WORK



LESSON 5 - CREATING SILICONE MOULDS & STYROFOAM MOULDS FOR TILES.



VISUAL AID



LEARNING INTENTIONS

- TRANSLATE THEIR REFINED DIGITAL DESIGNS AND HISTORICAL/CONTEMPORARY MAPS INTO SILICONE STAMP RELIEFS USING A SILICONE GUN.
- CONSTRUCT STYROFOAM MOULDS AS AN ALTERNATIVE RELIEF TECHNIQUE FOR CASTING.
- UNDERSTAND THE EMBOSSED PROCESS BY PREPARING THEIR STAMP OR MOULD FOR CASTING.
- EXPLORE HOW HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MAPS INFLUENCE VISUAL STORYTELLING AND ARTISTIC DECISION-MAKING.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- CREATE A FUNCTIONAL SILICONE STAMP RELIEF OR STYROFOAM MOULD BASED ON THEIR REFINED DESIGNS.
- ENSURE THEIR MOULD IS PROPERLY PREPARED FOR THE CASTING PROCESS, WITH CONSIDERATION FOR DEPTH AND TEXTURE.
- DEMONSTRATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF EMBOSSED BY TESTING AND REFINING THEIR DESIGNS.
- REFLECT ON HOW THEIR SYMBOLS AND TEXTURES RELATE TO HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MAPPING TECHNIQUES.



LESSON 6 - CONSTRUCTING TILES - INTRODUCTION TO CASTING

STAGE: FAMILIARISATION & EXPERIMENTATION WITH CASTING MATERIALS

VA:



LEARNING INTENTIONS

- UNDERSTAND HOW TO PREPARE AND CONSTRUCT A BASIC MOULD FOR CASTING.
- FAMILIARISE THEMSELVES WITH PLASTER/CONCRETE MIXING AND POURING TECHNIQUES.
- RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES WHEN HANDLING MATERIALS.
- EXPLORE HOW RACHEL WHITEREAD'S PROCESS OF CASTING INFORMS ARTISTIC PRACTICE.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- SUCCESSFULLY MIX AND POUR PLASTER/CONCRETE INTO THEIR MOULDS.
- APPLY HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES CORRECTLY.
- REFLECT ON HOW MATERIALS INFLUENCE TEXTURE AND MEANING IN ART.



LESSON 6 - CONSTRUCTING TILES - INTRODUCTION TO CASTING

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LESSON 7 - FINAL TILE CASTING & SURFACE REFINEMENT

LEARNING INTENTIONS

- EXPERIMENT WITH SURFACE FINISHING TECHNIQUES SUCH AS SANDING, STAINING, OR SEALING.
- REFLECT ON MATERIALITY AND HOW PERMANENCE OF IMPERMANENCE FITS INTO THEIR ARTWORK.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- DEMONSTRATE CORRECT MIXING AND POURING TECHNIQUES FOR PLASTER.
- APPLY SURFACE TREATMENTS TO ENHANCE TEXTURE AND AESTHETIC QUALITIES.
- EXPLAIN HOW MATERIAL CHOICES CONTRIBUTE TO THE MEANING OF THEIR ARTWORK.
- ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT EPHEMERAL VS. PERMANENT ART MATERIALS.



AFL: RUBRIC

- **PEER AND SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLISTS.**
- **REGULAR ONE-TO-ONE FEEDBACK.**
- **GROUP CRITIQUES AND REFLECTION EXERCISES.**
- **PACING ADJUSTMENTS: GIVE STUDENTS WHO COMPLETE TASKS QUICKLY ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES, LIKE EXPERIMENTING WITH LAYERED TEXTURES, WHILE ALLOWING OTHERS TO TAKE MORE TIME WITH FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS**

Criteria	Excellent (80-100%)	Good (60-79%)	Satisfactory (40-59%)	Needs Improvement (0-39%)
Concept & Interpretation	Highly developed and original interpretation with strong conceptual depth.	Clear understanding of the theme with some depth.	Basic interpretation with limited conceptual engagement.	Minimal engagement; lacks clear conceptual direction.
Technical Skill & Execution	Mastery of casting and finishing techniques; highly refined.	Competent execution with minor inconsistencies.	Developing skills with some inconsistencies.	Limited skill; needs significant refinement.
Visual Communication & Composition	Strong visual impact; effective use of contrast, texture, and form.	Good composition with attention to contrast and form.	Somewhat effective but lacks strong visual impact.	Composition lacks balance, contrast, or coherence.
Engagement & Reflection	Meaningful reflection; articulates critical insights on materials and themes.	Some analytical engagement with process and themes.	Reflects on process but lacks depth in analysis.	Limited or unclear reflection on process and materials.
Presentation & Installation	Professional presentation; thoughtfully integrated into installation.	Clear presentation with consideration for context.	Functional but could be more refined.	Disorganised or unclear in final presentation.

Appendix - Rachel Whiteread (Student handouts)



Who is *Rachel Whiteread*?

Rachel Whiteread is a British sculptor known for using casting techniques to create sculptures of empty spaces. She focuses on memory, loss, and urban change, often working with architectural structures to highlight what is missing or forgotten.

What Was House (1993)?

- Materials: Concrete
- Location: 193 Grove Road, East London
- Concept: A full-scale cast of a Victorian terraced house that was set to be demolished.
 - Process:
 - Whiteread filled an abandoned house with concrete and then removed the walls, leaving only a ghostly imprint of the rooms, windows, and doors.

WOT FOR

Why Was House Controversial?

- Some saw it as a powerful tribute to working-class housing and urban displacement.
- Others thought it was ugly, unnecessary, and a waste of public money.
- The local council demolished the sculpture after 11 weeks, despite protests from artists and critics.

WHY NOT!

Public Reactions:

- ✓ "It's a memorial to all the houses that have been lost."
- ✗ "It's just a giant concrete block – what's the point?"

Themes in House

1. Memory & Absence – It preserved the empty space left behind when homes are destroyed.
2. Gentrification & Housing Change – It highlighted the loss of affordable housing in London.
3. Public vs. Private Spaces – It made a private home into a public artwork, challenging ideas of ownership.



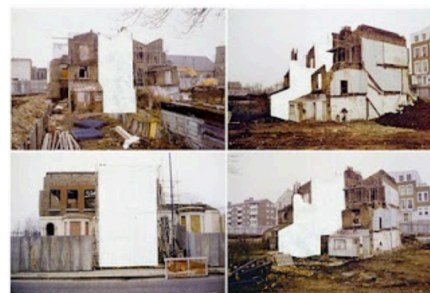
Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Whiteread chose to cast a house instead of just making a model?
 - How does House relate to issues in Crumlin (e.g., housing, redevelopment, loss of old spaces)?
- Should public art be preserved, even if people don't like it?



Written Reflection on Public Art

- The role of public art is to...
- An artwork should / should not be controversial because...



Rachel Whiteread - House (1993)

- One example of a controversial artwork is...

Glebe house, Crumlin



- After learning about House, I think...

Key Terms & Definitions

1. **Casting** – A sculpture technique where a material (e.g., concrete, plaster, resin) is poured into a mold to create a three-dimensional form. Whiteread used this method to make a solid cast of an empty house.
2. **Negative Space** – The empty space around and within an object. Whiteread's work is unique because she casts the space inside objects, making the emptiness visible.
3. **Public Art** – Art that is created to be displayed in public spaces, often sparking discussion or controversy. House was a temporary public artwork placed in a residential area.
4. **Memorialisation** – The process of preserving or commemorating something to remember its importance. House acted as a memorial to disappearing working-class housing.
5. **Gentrification** – The process where an area is redeveloped, often making it more expensive, which pushes out lower-income residents. Whiteread's work highlighted concerns about gentrification in London.
6. **Urban Development** – The way cities and towns change over time, often due to government planning or private investment. House was built in an area that was undergoing major redevelopment.
7. **Controversy** – A disagreement or debate, often involving strong opinions. House was controversial because some people thought it was important social commentary, while others believed it was a waste of money and space.
8. **Absence & Presence** – Themes often explored in art and history. Whiteread's House represents both presence (a physical object) and absence (a home that no longer exists).
9. **Monument vs. Anti-Monument** – A monument is a structure built to celebrate or commemorate something (e.g., a statue of a famous person). Whiteread's House was an anti-monument because instead of celebrating something grand, it highlighted the everyday and forgotten.
10. **Spatial Memory** – The way spaces hold memories of the people and events that took place there. Whiteread's work forces viewers to think about the past lives within spaces that are now gone.

Sentence Starters for Discussion & Debate

1. Describing Whiteread's Work

- Rachel Whiteread is known for...
- Her artwork House was made by...
- She used casting to...
- One reason why people found House interesting was...

2. Expressing Opinions in Debate

- I believe public art should be controversial because...
- Some people might argue that public art should not be controversial because...
- One reason why House was important is...
- A counterargument to this is...
- I think House is / is not successful as an artwork because...

3. Relating House to Crumlin

- One similarity between House and Crumlin's history is...
- In Crumlin, we can see changes similar to Whiteread's work, such as...
- If I could cast a forgotten space in Crumlin, I would choose... because...
- Whiteread's work makes me think about...

Glebe House, Crumlin Village



Rachel Whiteread's House: Debate Handout

Use this sheet to structure your debate. You will focus on five statements about Rachel Whiteread's House and related issues. Follow each step to organise your thoughts.

Step 1: Prepare

- Read a brief overview of Rachel Whiteread's House.
- Note its size, materials, and any public reactions.

Step 2: Statements

Decide which you support or question:

1. *"The public's negative perception of Whiteread's House was deserved."*
2. *"A project like Whiteread's House at Glebe House, using public money, would be acceptable even if it caused conflict."*
3. *"If an artwork confuses or upsets people, it fails in its purpose."*
4. *"Art should always show a location's history accurately."*
5. *"Controversial public art prompts better discussion than safe, decorative pieces."*

Step 3: Gather

- Move to the statement you most strongly agree with.
- Briefly chat in your group about why you support that view.

Step 4: Use these four steps for each statement you discuss:

1. Description
 - What do you see in Whiteread's House?
 - Think about scale, shape, and materials.
2. Analysis
 - How do these elements work together?
 - How might they affect people's opinions?
3. Interpretation
 - What message might Whiteread share?
 - How could this message change if placed in another location like Glebe House?
4. Evaluation
 - Is the artwork or idea successful in its goals?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

Step 5: Debate

- Each group presents one key reason for its stance.
- Other groups respond with questions or comments.
- Keep track of ideas you find interesting or persuasive.

Step 6: Reflection

- Write one sentence on what you learned from another group's point of view.
- Note if your opinion shifted.
- You will use these ideas in your final written response.

Note Taking

Notes/Sketches

