

COLLABORATORY is a series of exhibitions that La Trobe Art Institute will present every second year. The series will explore various working relationships and the impact that collaboration can have across a variety of creative practices and disciplines.

For the first iteration, LAI presents two collaborations: one between established artist Jon Cattapan and emerging artist Ben Aitken, the other between sisters Pip and Natalie Ryan.

COLLABORATORY

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Jon CATTAPAN + Ben AITKEN

The RYAN SISTERS

• education resource

What type of collaborator are you?

When large groups work together some interesting dynamics emerge. Bringing together a diverse group of personalities with various levels of experience can be an enriching and often challenging experience for those involved. Some people naturally lead in collaborative situations, others are less confident and might prefer to follow. The best collaborations take place when everyone is comfortable, feels respected and listened to.

Group Activity:

Place several found objects down the centre of a large length of paper. All participants in the group can begin drawing the object closest to them. After a short time participants may move to a different section of the paper and begin to draw connections between the various observational drawings until the group has covered the entire length of paper.

Materials:

- A large length of drawing paper
- Drawing materials (crayons, pencils, pastels charcoal etc)
- A selection of found objects

Image: Jon Cattapan & Ben Aitken, Painting 3 (detail), 2018, oil and acrylic on canvas. © courtesy of the artists. Jon Cattapan is a Professor and Director of the Victorian College of the Arts. His research is supported by the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne

Jon CATTAPAN + Ben AITKEN

Circling

Jon Cattapan and Ben Aitken have worked together over the past year to create this series of collaborative paintings. Jon is a renowned Australian artist who exhibits widely and has won loads of prestigious awards. He is also a Professor at the Victorian College of the Arts. Ben is an emerging and largely self-trained Melbourne based artist. He has developed his painting skills informally rather than through art school education, but like Jon he exhibits his work regularly. Both artists are highly productive and dedicated painters who constantly seek out new ways to develop their practice.

This collaboration is interesting, because while Jon's wealth of experience naturally places him in the role of mentor, the paintings suggest that the collaboration has been mutually beneficial. As the exhibition title suggests, the interaction between the two painters has been circular – with each responding to the mark making of the other, sometimes disrupting and at other times, resolving the evolving composition. As a result, the finished paintings are not immediately recognisable as the work of either artist. Instead the duo have found a third identity with its own unique and somewhat quirky style.

Working with a peer is different to working with family. Perhaps you don't know them quite as well as your family and so you might be more shy or polite. Collaboration can be a great way to get to know someone. You can learn from their strengths and experiences or perhaps you might even be able to share your own knowledge. Working together, you might create something completely new and unexpected.

Does your collaborative style differ when with peers to when you are with your family?

The RYAN SISTERS

Is anybody there?

Melbourne based artists Pip Ryan and Natalie Ryan work individually and as a collaboration. The sisters have been working together for a number of years to produce artworks that are often humorous and at the same time strange and unsettling. They use a combination of *spatial installation* and *intervention*. This means that the space surrounding the objects is equally important to how visitors will experience the artwork. The darkened space, clever lighting and velvet curtain create an eerie atmosphere in this exhibition, drawing attention not only to the objects in the room, but also the empty void surrounding them.

The sisters often use their own bodies in the casting of their sculptures, creating installations of objects that are at once life-like and fantastically absurd. It is possible to pick out their individual particularities (the shape of the wrists; Pip's broken finger) but at the same time their identities merge in the fragmentation and distortion of the forms. Through collaboration they leave their egos behind.

Collaborating with family has its own particular set of advantages and challenges. Siblings are likely to interact with each other on a more intimate level than peers might. Family members have a shared history that informs their understanding of the world. There are often unspoken 'rules' at play, set up by the family dynamics.

Can you think of some advantages and disadvantages of making things with your family?



Family Activity:

Sit with a family member/s around a large square canvas (or piece of paper). Invite the youngest family member to start a painting in the middle of the canvas. The painting might be representative of a family experience, or simply a favourite colour or shape. The next family member may then respond to the marks on the canvas, instinctively building on the original painting. Continue to alternate among family members, covering the entire canvas.

Materials:

- A square canvas (or sturdy piece of paper)
- Acrylic paints
- Brushes

Activity in Pairs:

Flip a coin to decide who will start. This person may then take a piece of charcoal and repeatedly draw their favourite shape for two minutes. The drawn shapes may vary in size, orientation and density; shapes may overlap or smudge and may cover a small section of the paper or the entire surface. The second person may then take up the eraser and erase any part (or even the whole) of the drawing. After around two minutes of erasing, the second drawer can exchange the eraser for a piece of charcoal and draw their favourite shape repeatedly for two minutes. Continue this process for at least thirty minutes, then stop and discuss your work. Are there any marks you could add or subtract to improve your drawing?

Materials:

- A large, sturdy piece of paper
- Willow charcoal sticks
- Erasers