

Deptford Church Street Hoarding Engagement Activities

Introduction

Hidden in the Tide, 2018

A collaboration between Madeleine Waller and pupils from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School commissioned by Tideway



Hidden in the Tide, installed on the hoarding at Putney Embankment Foreshore. Photo: Bridget Sawyers

Hidden in the Tide is an artwork made for the hoarding at Tideway's Deptford Church Street construction site. It was made by merging photographic self-portraits of eighteen pupils at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School with cyanotypes made from objects found in Deptford Creek and developed in the Creek water.

The pupils, aged between 7 and 10 years old, made self-portraits of each other using a medium format camera and film, carefully choosing their clothing, background and props. Each image has a story behind it revealed in the writing about themselves and their identity using the river as a metaphor.

Extracts from the children's words include:

*I move the water swiftly through a vast land just to get it over with,
My colours are dark like the city, navy blue and black with little streaks of light blue*

Lina

*I hear the woman wring her tears
Men trashing cans here and there*

Olivia

*I will be free in the big city
I will be parted for everyone to have a piece of me*

Delilah

The images of found objects carried by the river tide are laid over the pupil's portraits to give an ethereal quality to the images. They include bricks, bottles, crabs, and fragments of mysterious objects offered up from the creek bed. Together with the text, the images blend to form a tangible and physical bond between the pupils and elements of their environment.

As well as providing the pupils with a hands on opportunity to work with two remarkably different types of photographic processes – medium format and cyanotype – Madeleine encouraged the group to think critically about their artwork and participate in an in-depth analysis of their creations.

Credits

Madeleine Waller in collaboration with Apinaya, Aziyah, Kene, Charles, Chioma, Chloe, Holly, Dani, Delilah, Desmond, Emilia, Kim, Lina, Melody, Michale, Olivia, Sonia and Yvana from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Deptford.

Thanks due to

Allicia Stephens and Louise Blyde of St Joseph's, The Creekside Educational Trust, and Liz May of A.P.T Gallery & Studio Manager and Charley Whitelock, Community Liaison, Contractor CVB as members of the artist selection panel

About the Artist

Madeleine Waller is an Australian artist living in London who develops series of photographic portraits based on identity. She describes her approach to making work as '*drawing out the human, quirky and noteworthy in everyday communities.*'

Madeleine has had two books published 'East London Swimmers' portraits of swimmers who brave London Fields Lido in the winter and 'Portraits' as part of year long Artist in Residence at the Swedenborg Society.

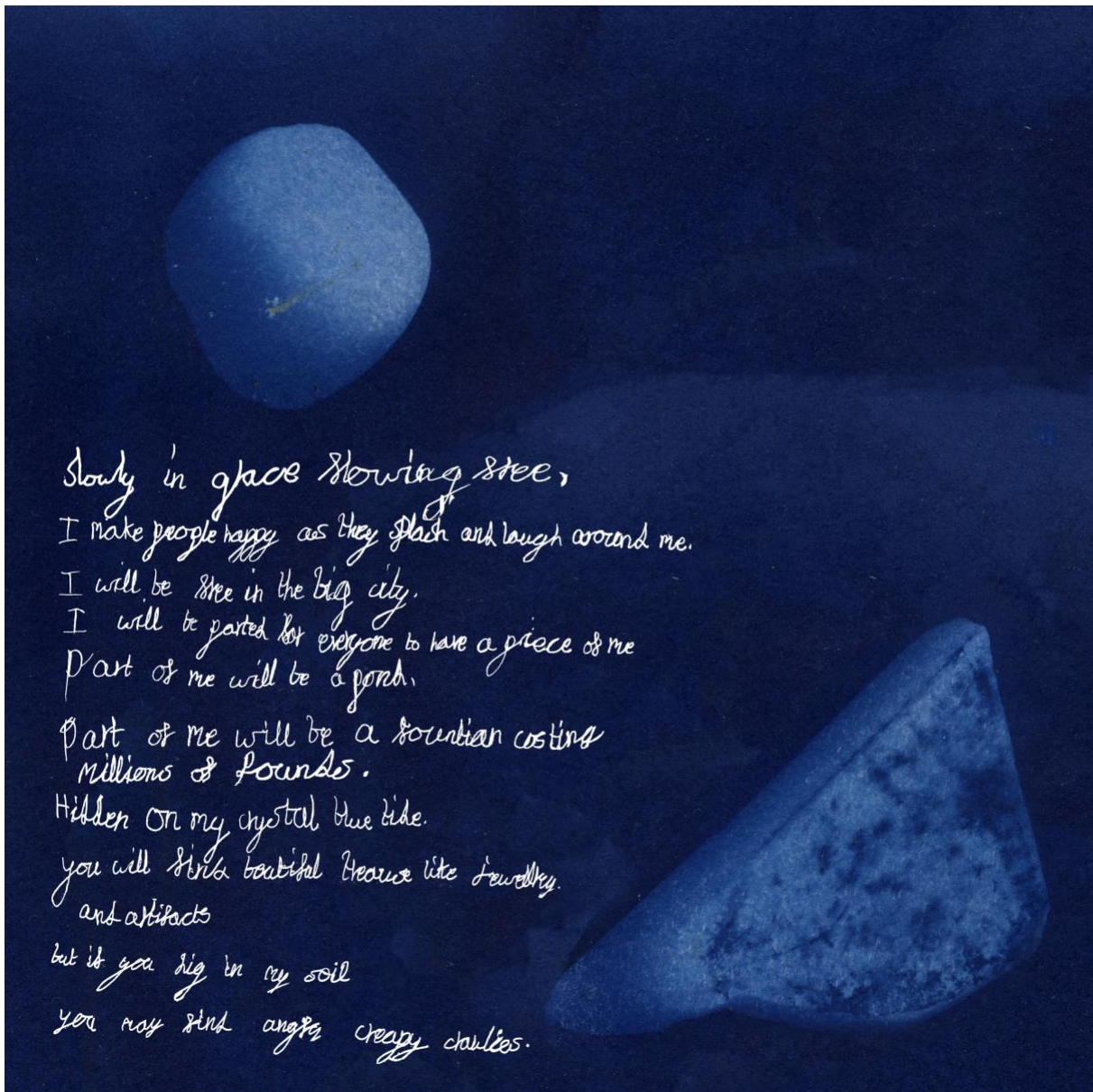
She has exhibited widely including the National Portrait Gallery where a selection of her Portraits of Poets is part of the permanent collection. In 2018 she exhibited *Sister Brother* exploring sibling relationships, at the V&A Museum of Childhood along with the project *Dream on* – a collaboration with primary school children.

She also develops work with schools, art organisations and informal education institutions as well as galleries and private clients

Waller completed a photojournalism course at the London College of Printing.

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Artist's Brief



Cyanotype made using objects gathered from Deptford Creek with words by Delilah

Madeleine Waller's brief was to develop designs for the hoarding at the Deptford Church Street construction site in collaboration with St Joseph's Catholic Primary School pupils.

The school identified the theme of identity as the main focus of this site specific commission and the artist was asked to consider the nature of this topic for the workshops. The artist was also asked to consider project elements or components such as water, movement, time and ecology and place, which may also inform the artwork in addition to the rich historical context.

Development of Artist's Proposal

Madeleine developed her initial proposal and proposed to run six workshop sessions, each looking into a different aspect of the river. The artist was accompanied for two of the sessions by specialists with knowledge of the River Thames: a Tideway engineer and a local historian and archaeologist.

Workshops



Exploring in Deptford Creek with the Discovery Centre. Photo: Madeleine Waller

Madeleine delivered six workshop sessions for 18 pupils from the school between April and June 2017.

The first session took place on 29 April and was held in the classroom. The children had been asked bring in an object from home for this first session that they felt said something about them. Suggestions for objects were an ornament, a photograph, an item of clothing, anything that represents in some way their interests, life and/or background.

Madeleine introduced the project to the pupils and explained what she hoped to achieve. Each pupil would be creating a photographic self-portrait using digital photography and cyanotypes. The group then shared their treasured objects or photographs and discussed their relevance in relation to their own identity, explaining why they chose it and what it represents about them.

The children were given notebooks and asked to write notes about their home, community and culture as if describing it to someone on the other side of the world. They took still

photographs of their objects to paste into their books along with their notes allowing them to make imaginative and sympathetic connections with their past and present.

The group discussed identity and culture, the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular society and the attitudes and behavior characteristic of a particular social group. The group were asked to look up the meaning of identity in the dictionary and discuss and generate their own definition then share this with the rest of the participants.

They then looked at a slide show of portrait photographs taken by a variety of photographers and discussed the language of photography, the use of light, colour and composition and how these techniques can be used to make creative effective and interesting portraits.

They asked the following questions:

- What does each photograph tells us about the person?
- Would we like to know anything else about them?
- What techniques has the photographer used?
- How does this photograph make us feel?
- Do you like this photograph? Why? Why not?



Processing cyanotypes. Photo: Madeleine Waller

For the second workshop on 5 May the group visited the Creekside Discovery Centre. Donning waders, the children trawled the creek, collecting items from the mud while thinking about whom they may have belonged to and why they have ended up in the river or creek bed. The objects were washed and dried in preparation to make cyanotype prints in the following week's workshop.

The third workshop was held on 12 May. Using water collected from the river the group made cyanotype prints from the found objects in the Creek. This was followed by a research walk around the local area while thinking about what they wanted to include in their self-portrait photograph and discover places to use as locations for their final piece of work. They took

digital cameras to take research photographs along the way and reiterated the key words used in photography and the important elements of making a portrait photograph.

The group made lists of the things they felt are important, in order to show something about their identity, encouraging them to think about the photos they will take. They analysed the visual and emotional impact of each requirement. There was a focus on the importance of detail in creating an image, and they explored the value and impact of symbolism and meaning in a visual image.

Each pupil was asked to choose and decide:-

Setting/background – where will the picture be taken and why?

Props – the physical detail, what is important to my identity– what will the eye, be drawn to.

Clothing – what will they wear ?

Actions/Emotions – body language character, how do we portray ourselves. What am I proud of?

Techniques – lighting tone composition.



Portrait merged with cyanotype

For the fourth workshop session on 19 May, the group made their portraits using Madeleine's Hasselblad camera with film. Madeleine facilitated and supported each child to make a portrait, teaching them about basic photographic techniques. The children were encouraged to support, respect and facilitate each other while making their portraits.

On 26 May, the group continued with making portraits in small groups with Madeleine's Hasselblad camera.

Between 5 to 8 June, Madeleine returned to the school to work one to one with each child and edit the portraits, so that each child could select their favourite image.

On the 16 June the children were shown their final scanned portraits. Using Photoshop the children will merged their portrait with their cyanotype image to form the final piece. They were shown a slide show presentation of the finished work and participated in a peer discussion about their technique, their decisions, what they liked about their chosen photograph, what they would have done differently and how they felt about the overall effect. Together they decided on what writing should to be included in their books and chose images for an exhibition of the work to be displayed in the school.

Participants



Exploring in Deptford Creek with the Discovery Centre. Photo: Madeleine Waller

Madeleine engaged with a group of eighteen pupils from across the year groups aged between 7 and 10 and gave them in depth and hand on experience of working in both digital and analogue photographic processes. In addition to this they engaged in valuable discussions about identity as well as learning how to talk about photography by using specific terminology and considering various aspects of photography including composition, lighting, tone, and props.

A self-portrait of each child from the school features on the final design.

Feedback from Passers-by



Hidden in the Tide, installed on the hoarding at Putney Embankment Foreshore. Photo: Bridget Sawyers

“The feelings I get from [looking at the artwork] are proudness – the children are proud to be themselves – and hope and ambition.”

“I think it unites. It gives a feeling of togetherness.”

“I absolutely love it. It's beautiful.”

“It's great, it's bright – a real improvement to what was there before. Bright, diverse, engaging. I like that it's real – and that it shows children.”

“It makes me think of how Deptford has changed over time.”

“I like it, it brings a sense of community seeing the children.”

“It's bright and colourful in what is otherwise a gloomy street.”

“I find it colourful, diverse and interesting. It makes you happy and brightens up the place. Plain hoarding would have been painful to look at.”

“This work makes me think of the future. Makes me happy. It's quite sensory.”

“I love it being so public. Makes this place so beautiful. Every day we go past and stop and look at the photographs.”

“I wish all hoardings could have artwork on it. It attracts so many people. I can see parents coming here to look at pictures. It means a lot to them. It is good to see local people involved in what we are doing.”

“It connects to green areas around here and to the school. What I love most about it though is that it is showing participation in life. Being busy in your own life and being part of something bigger, together.”

“This work brightens up place a lot. It is sending out an important message: be who you are, do what you enjoy. We need more things like this here. Positive things showing our children that they can achieve a lot in their lives. It is good, calming. Sea-like.”

“Stunning pictures. Great display. This used to be my school.”

“This is a positive celebration of individuality.”

Feedback from the Artist

Madeleine greatly enjoyed working on the project with the pupils at St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School:

“Working with the children from St Joseph’s Primary School was a fantastic experience. I really loved the individual ways in which they were able to express how they saw themselves within their immediate environment. Despite living close by many of the children had never visited the creek before. It was wonderful to watch them explore the creek bed at low tide and collect objects they found discarded there. It was a real pleasure to support the children to make extraordinary pieces of work using simple photographic processes.”