A Teachers’ Guide to:

Franciszka & Stefan Themerson
Books, Camera, Ubu

Karl Holmqvist
READ DEAR

24 March — 5 June 2016

#CACeducation
This guide aims to engage and support teachers to explore and develop practical responses to the current exhibitions at Camden Arts Centre.

Outlined are exhibition notes, exhibiting artists' biographies and short gallery-based activities which can be adapted for Primary, Secondary and SEN groups.

Camden Arts Centre offers Ceramics and Mixed Media workshops for all age groups. Schools can also book the Drawing Studio at the Centre.

See the Planning your Visit section at the back of the guide for more details.
Books, Camera, Ubu

Books, Camera, Ubu is an exhibition that focuses on three main areas of the Themersons’ creative body of work: their influential experimental films; their publishing house, Gaberbocchus Press; and their work relating to Alfred Jarry’s radical play Ubu Roi.

Books - Gallery 1 presents material from the Themersons’ publishing house the Gaberbocchus Press (founded in 1948), through which they published more than sixty wide-ranging titles. The name ‘Gaberbocchus’ was taken from a Latin translation of Lewis Carroll’s ‘Jabberwocky’, reflecting a surreal and often absurdist sensibility running through the publications. The Gaberbocchus Press provided a platform through which the Themersons felt free to publish their own work in whatever form they wished; they collaborated on children’s books, semantic poetry and an opera, and Stefan published his own philosophical essays on art, film, semantics and ethics, as well as novels and poems.

Camera - Gallery 2 focuses on three films – The Adventure of a Good Citizen (1937), Calling Mr. Smith (1943), and The Eye and the Ear (1944/45) – alongside other photograms and stills from earlier works. Many of the screened images were ‘moving photograms’, created by filming up through Stefan’s ‘trick-table’ and recording the kinetic effect of moving lights (hand-held candles or light bulbs, moved by Franciszka) upon objects isolated above on a transparent table.

Ubu – Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry was first performed in Paris in 1896, and a Polish translation appeared in 1936. The absurd nature of the play immediately attracted the Themersons and they soon created a rendition which became one of their most celebrated books. In Gallery 1 you’ll see the puppets, stage designs, drawings, storyboard and comic strips that Franciszka created in relation to the play.

The Reading Room contains many of the Gaberbocchus publications as well as The Gaberbocchus Independent, the single issue of a 12-page broadsheet about their books and authors, published for the Sunday Times Book Exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall, 1956.

Key Themes

Avant-garde
Archive
Concrete Poetry
Publishing
Dada
Collaboration
Illustration
About Franciszka & Stefan Themerson

Franciszka (b.1907, Warsaw) and Stefan Themerson (b.1910, Plock) were partners and creative collaborators from 1929 until their deaths in 1988. They played a major role in the history of experimental cinema in the 1930s and were considered pioneers of the Polish cinematic avant-garde. They were driven by a dedication to defy convention and their art spanned painting, photography, film, theatre, literature, concrete poetry, book design, and satirical drawing. Throughout their careers, and across all their art forms, they focused on issues of ethics, language, freedom, conformism, dignity and the human condition.

Examples of the Themersons work are in the public collections of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the British Museum, British Film Institute, Imperial War Museum, Royal Holloway College (University of London), Victoria and Albert Museum, and Tate Britain. Their work is represented in several public collections in Poland.
**READ DEAR**

This exhibition comprises new printed canvases, a knitted blanket, concrete poetry published as leporellos, wall drawings and a video. Collectively, these works unpack the many operations of language, how it can occupy space and provoke images within the viewers’ imagination. The title READ DEAR is a visual word game and a playful command that invokes Gallery 3’s previous function as one of Hampstead Central Library’s reading rooms, before the Victorian building was repurposed as an art centre in 1965.

Some of the works suggest a relationship between the built environment and the structures of language and thought. A short film, OUR HOUSE, 2007, made in collaboration with Jay Chung (b. 1976, USA) is a dizzying montage of architectural images that proliferate in seemingly endless succession, just like the facades of social housing in less affluent neighbourhoods.

Using a marker pen, Holmqvist has written words on the walls, imitating the subversive agency of graffiti; a subcultural means of expression. Four text-based, digitally printed, canvases use repetition to destabilise specific meaning, allowing tongue-tied slippages to occur amidst optical art patterns. These poetic compositions play with linguistic conventions and demonstrate how we are complicit in reproducing the structures we inherit, sometimes to the point of obsession.

**Key Themes**

Language
Concrete Poetry
Semantics
Site-specific
Performance

**About Karl Holmqvist**

Karl Holmqvist (b. 1964, Sweden) lives and works in Berlin. Holmqvist is interested in language and considers this to be his primary material. His artworks often appear in various forms including artist’s books, posters, wall drawings, sculpture, videos, and live performances. Borrowing from generic types of speech or written word, ranging from common sayings to literary references, from popular music to political activism, Holmqvist repositions these sampled fragments in new contexts, allowing for ambiguity and double meanings to emerge.
Questions & Activities

Books, Camera, Ubu

Explore the exhibition and use the below points to start a conversation.

• Look around the exhibition. How do you think some of the works you see were made? How many different art forms can you recognise? Describe the techniques the artists have used, you can refer to the key words page.
• The Themersons published more than sixty titles, described as 'best lookers rather than best sellers'. What importance do books have? Why? Discuss what place books have in art.

Activities

Draw

Find a newspaper, magazine article, essay or other piece of text that you can draw on. Place a piece of tracing paper over the text and begin crossing out or ‘erasing’ words to make a poem. Use this poem as the starting point to make an experimental work in a different medium e.g. performance, photography, drawing or sculpture.

Think about your favourite book, find an old paperback book and re-design the front cover. Would your new design change the meaning of the story? What would the characters look like? How does thinking about a reader change the way you create the cover?

Perform

Take a look at the Ubu Roi characters in Gallery 2 and consider making them come to life. Move through the space thinking about how the character makes you feel. How fast would they move, how slow would they use their whole bodies to move, slouch or wiggle? Would they whisper, mutter or shout? You could recreate a scene from one of the storyboards you see.

Collaborate

In small groups take a piece of paper and a drawing tool, take it in turns to each write a sentence, fold down the paper to hide and pass along. Once everybody has done this, unfold the paper to reveal a collective story.
Questions & Activities

READ DEAR

Explore the exhibition and use the below points to start a conversation.

- Think about the title of the exhibition, READ DEAR, does the title explain anything about the work you see?
- In small groups, discuss the differences between the words you see. Are there any connections between them?
- How does putting text into a gallery space change its meaning? How does putting artwork in a public sphere change its meaning and its function?

Activities

Draw

Concrete poetry is a poem that looks like the thing that it’s about. This could be described as drawing with words. Think of the words you use every day, to talk to your friends, when you’re describing something you like, or when you ask for something. Now imagine seeing the words, create an image by drawing the words in lots of different ways, think about the shape of the words and turn them into a pattern. How does this affect the way you read them now? Stick it up somewhere, project it on a wall. Can you make your own exhibition display?

Perform

‘I like to play with words and I like it if sentences have multiple meanings, and a way of doing that when you read them out loud is through not using intonation.’

Pick a word you see in Holmqvist’s work and form a circle in the gallery. Take it in turns to say the word aloud, now say it backwards, sing the word, say it as fast as you can and repeat the word three times. How does your individual voice, your character or your way of speaking change the meaning of the word? Has the word changed and does it have more than one meaning? Can you film your performance?

Collaborate

As a class, or in smaller groups, think of a quote, song lyric or word that relates to what you see in the exhibition or how you feel. Collect the words and lines together, write them down, combine each other’s words, and rearrange the letters. Could you use this as a new title for the exhibition? Does it make sense? Does it make no sense?
Exhibition related
Events

Our programme of events expands on ideas within the exhibitions, residencies and projects. Events are free unless stated; please book a place online or by calling +44(0)20 7472 5500.

Film Screening: Lyrical Flight From Reality: Playfulness and Humour in Experimental Film Saturday 7 May, 3.00 – 4.30pm
Traversing contexts, national borders and generations, humour and playfulness have been used to create the most appealing forms of visual expression. Writer, filmmaker and curator Kamila Kuc selects a series of films that draw out humour and playfulness in the works of contemporary experimental and historical avant-garde filmmakers, such as Franciszka and Stefan Themerson.
Tickets: £5 (£4 Friends & Conc.)

Talk: Kamila Kuc and Michael Brooke
Sunday 8 May, 3.00 – 5.00pm
One of the most under-explored areas of experimental film is the role of playfulness within it. The Themersons’ ‘irrational humoresque’ film The Adventure of a Good Citizen (1937) serves as a starting point for this illustrated discussion. Writer, filmmaker and curator Kamila Kuc and film critic and producer Michael Brooke, debate ways in which artists and filmmakers have used humour as a subversive tool.
Tickets: £5 (£4 Friends & Conc.)

Live: What is it that comes crawling in the morning?
Wednesday 1 June, 7.00 – 8.00pm
To coincide with his exhibition READ DEAR, Karl Holmqvist organises an evening of talks and spoken word readings in the Centre’s Garden, ‘bringing poetry and thoughts to the flowers and the trees and the people that love them.’

Exhibition Talk: Sophie Williamson
Sunday 5 June, 3.00 – 3.45pm
Join us for a curator-led tour from Sophie Williamson on the final day of both exhibitions.

Youth Collective
Saturdays, 2.30 – 5.00pm
The Youth Collective invites young people aged 15 – 25 years to meet regularly to create, discuss, experience and encounter the visual arts. Young people have the opportunity to gain Arts Award Gold, meet artists and staff, programme events and develop their art practice.

Make & Do
Sundays, 2.00 – 4.30pm
Every Sunday throughout the exhibitions families can drop in to the Drawing Studio to take part in creative and fun activities, led by artist Renata Bandeira. The activities are suitable for all ages, materials are provided.

Family Activity Box
Ask our Front of House Volunteers for a Family Activity Box, full of creative ideas and materials to use in the galleries.
Installation view of Franciszka & Stefan Themerson: 
Books, Camera, Ubu, Camden Arts Centre, 2016
Photo: Valerie Bennett
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CARBON FOOTPRINT
Images

Hampstead Central Library. Reading Room, c. 1949
now Camden Arts Centre, Gallery 3
**Planning your visit**

Camden Arts Centre offers a range of activities for School groups including:

- Ceramic and Mixed Media artist-led workshops for Primary, Secondary and SEN groups
- A Teachers’ Tour or Workshop for each exhibition
- Free 10 minute exhibition tours led by our Education Team
- Use of our Drawing studios free of charge for self-led workshops such as those included in the Teachers’ Guide. (Bookings can be on Tuesdays, Wednesday and Fridays, subject to availability)

**Lunch**

Groups are welcome to use the Drawing Studio (subject to availability) and Camden Arts Centre’s garden to have their lunch.

**Staffing**

Adult to child ratio (not including Camden Arts Centre staff) must be:
- 1:5 for under 5 year olds
- 1:10 for 6-11 year olds
- 1:15 for 12-16 year olds
- 1:20 for 16-18 year olds

**Parking**

Disabled parking is available for disabled visitors. Please telephone the bookshop on +44 (0)20 7472 5500 to book this space.

**How to find us**

Camden Arts Centre is based in North London on the corner of Finchley Road & Arkwright Road
Camden Arts Centre, Arkwright Road, London NW3 6DG
camdenartscentre.org
+44 (0)20 7472 5500

Underground: Finchley Road, Hampstead.
Overground: Finchley Road & Frognal.
Bus: 13, 268, 82, 113

**Keep in Touch**

Join the Teachers’ Information mailing list via our website for regular updates and resources. You can also share images of your visit and the artworks your group make on social media using #CACeducation #themerson #karlholmqvist

**Blogs**

CAC Education Blog: camdenartscentre.tumblr.com
Youth Collective Digital Scrapbook: cacyouthcollective.tumblr.com

For more information and bookings please contact Amelia Martin
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