

# Beings at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery

A new exhibition of recent artwork by young people from across Scotland, which explores the many ways in which creativity can help us to understand and express our emotions, is now open at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.

*Beings* brings together the young people from Lanarkshire, Fife, Ayrshire, Lothian and the Scottish Borders, and addresses a number of themes that have a significant impact in their lives: identity, emotional health, happiness, resilience and self-worth.

Thirteen groups, from youth clubs, schools, kinship care groups and employability projects, have run free with works from the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) collection, using them as springboards to create their own work, and their own exhibition, working closely with NGS staff to design way the *Beings* is laid out.

The exhibition forms a 'mind map' of thematic displays, in which new works made by participants are shown alongside the works in the NGS collection that inspired them. Drawings from *Five Minutes about Surrealism*, a film scenario by the world-famous Spanish artist Salvador Dalí (1904-89), are displayed alongside artworks by students from North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Edinburgh, who used techniques developed by Dalí and his fellow Surrealists to tap into the subconscious mind.

Performance videos and sculptures by young people from Works + (Galashiels) and Inverkeithing High School respond to a poignant work by Scottish contemporary artist and Turner Prize nominee Christine Borland (b.1965). *Twin, hand-made, child-birth demonstration model* (1997) was made by Borland to replicate an eighteenth-century medical teaching aid she came across in her research – a hand-stitched leather and sawdust baby, which in the original enclosed a real foetal skull.

Students from Waid Academy in Anstruther were inspired by the work of Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti (1901-66) to create a series of beautiful shadow projections, presented in a mysterious fairground booth.

All of the NGS works included in *Beings* were chosen to reflect the ways in which we process and understand our thoughts and feelings, each providing the young people with a different approach. Participants also explored the visually rich imagery of contemporary fashion photographer Viviane Sassen, the power of abstract art to convey complex emotions, and the attempts of the Victorian pseudo-science of phrenology to map out the human mind on the surface of the skull.

Interactive elements in the display will encourage visitors to respond to the exhibition, in much the same way *Beings* participants responded to works in the NGS collection. Visitors can take part in automatic drawing (a favourite Surrealist technique); find their own way around the shadows made by etched perspex artworks by lighting them up with their phones; and map their emotional journey around the exhibition using a 3-D paper phrenological head.

*Beings* forms part of a wider outreach program run by the National Galleries of Scotland, which aims to provide disadvantaged young people across Scotland with opportunities to develop their skills and their creativity, so they can represent their own point of view, inspired by the national art collection.

Speaking about the project, Robin Baillie, Senior Outreach Officer at NGS, said: “We wanted our participants to explore their emotions, and maybe find ways to cope with the issues that affect them. Could art help? Our idea was for participants to look at our art, and then respond spontaneously. They learned how to create art without worrying about the result, free from pressure to succeed. By doing this, they have shown that (like us all) they are vulnerable, in need of safe spaces to explore their personal and shared identities, but also that they can imagine a more joyous world of free expression and connection with others. They have produced a compelling body of work that is touching, honest and arresting. Life is strange ... some of our art is strange and challenging, but the art that the young people have created for this exhibition is brave and bold, and totally unique.”

Laura Chow, head of charities at People’s Postcode Lottery, said: “It’s fantastic that so many young people from across Scotland have produced artwork for this emotive exhibition. We are delighted that the support from players of People’s Postcode Lottery has enabled the National Galleries of Scotland’s Beings project to take place.”

## BEINGS

2 February 2019 – 28 April 2019  
1 Queen Street, Edinburgh, EH2 1JD  
Scottish National Portrait Gallery  
0131 624 6200 | [nationalgalleries.org](http://nationalgalleries.org)  
Admission FREE  
#NGSBeings