



Mark:

Hi, I'm Mark Williams from Heart n Soul, and part of the Heart n Soul at The Hub core team. And I was involved at the very early stages of thinking what would be the most useful thing that Heart n Soul could share with our community? So the creative packs were one of the ideas that came out of that thinking.

Sam:

Hi, I'm Sam-Castell Ward. I'm the communications assistant at Heart n Soul at The Hub. And since before having my job at Heart n Soul at The Hub I was a, and still am a Heart n Soul artist, and have also participated in a lot of Heart Soul activities. So I was sent the creative packs, doing them as someone who gets involved in Heart n Soul activities.

Will:

Hi, I'm Will. I'm part of Heart n Soul at The Hub and I'm also a researcher from the Royal College of Art, and I've been involved in the creative packs project, particularly around thinking about how the packs are used as research.

Mark:

Well, I mean, I was just reflecting back on this and it reminded me how early on in the story of COVID that they came together. I mean, I think probably within the first week of lockdown, we were chatting with Ben and I think the first pack went out within two weeks of lockdown.

So the idea that the Heart n Soul community, many of whom at that stage were not feeling very digitally confident, or maybe didn't have access to equipment or knowledge in order to kind of be online,

this assumption that everyone could be online. So the idea of a physical pack that came through the letterbox every few weeks that was a positive invitation and a purpose to respond to how you're feeling and what's going on and to create. It felt a really important thing, and it was great to hear that it actually did mean a lot to a lot of people. And then gradually over time, more and more different kind of, creative collaborations with Ben, with different artists or participants coming through with ideas and kind of co-creating packs, again was just a great development that just was organically happening. And then obviously connecting the packs very much to the hub and the kind of research question around the value of difference, and inviting another group of people who weren't from Heart n Soul also to have the opportunity to respond, and then hearing what that meant to them and being able to sort of look at the different ways people interpreted the same open kind of briefs I think is fascinating.

Will:

It feels like such a big body of work that it almost doesn't work to see it digitally. You need to almost just, I just keep seeing a big wall with lots of it on, or, yeah.

Sam:

Yeah. You can imagine a big sort of about..... I remember making so much stuff. I think I was thinking if I could have almost have a whole sort of exhibition of just the stuff that I've made up now, stuff I've made.

Mark:

Yeah.

Sam:

Yeah. But you could have different exhibitions or galleries or rooms of different people's artwork. The planners and yeah, and showing us a sort of different parts of people's lives and what they were thinking at the time and how they were experiencing stuff such as the coronavirus. Isolation and locked down, or shielding, or showing what people were feeling at the time, how they experienced stuff.

Mark:

Well, I think that's the extra level of interest is that we've all had this shared experience. So the opportunity to have a bit more of an understanding and some insights into how people have been coping with it or dealing with it or thinking about it, and maybe being released to... I mean, there was somebody who said they hadn't, I think it was Ralph was saying he hadn't picked up any colored crayons for 40 years.

So I think that opportunity for people to feel they've got permission to reconnect with maybe something they haven't done for decades. That was a really significant thing I think, to be able to offer people and to share. And I mean, I was very struck by people saying how terrible their work was as we were watching really amazing work.

Sam:

Yes. It shows how unsure of themselves a lot of people are. Maybe if people who's main thing they do isn't art. And if you do something that's not your main thing, you tend to think it's terrible maybe. But yes, I've seen that lots of times. I was thinking, "Wow. That's really good," pretty much about everyone who said their drawing was rubbish.

Mark:

And maybe the thing that's interesting when you're looking at the non learning disabled responses, and I mean, obviously I haven't seen enough of the work, but the notion around play and actually what's, I guess what's Heart n Soul normal is there's regular opportunities nearly every week within the Heart n Soul community where people are making art and having that space to kind of draw or paint or whatever.

And just being able to share that more open, playful space with people who aren't in a culture where that's just what you do was really, I think that's been a great plus actually.

Will:

I think also it's this about fundamentally, why do people make art, or why would someone sit down and do a drawing if someone hadn't asked them to do it? And I think you're right, Mark, in saying that within the Heart n Soul community, people just are creative all the time, every day, every week, regardless of whether it's for an exhibition or to show it to anybody else, just because it's fun and it's interesting. And through expressing yourself, you very often can start to tune into how you're feeling or what's in your head in a way that's easier than sitting down and talking about it.

But I think that societaly, there's this idea that you have to be doing art for the purpose of showing it to somebody else or something, to make a big point. And actually, I think the creative packs showed that when we're all stuck away in our houses and we're really limited, there's a lot to be gained from just allowing yourself, giving yourself permission to be creative for the sake of being creative. And yeah, so it is an interesting idea of why people make art and what people think.

Yeah. I am also fascinated by this idea of everyone thinking that their work is terrible, but then actually if you saw your own work, awesome stuff you'd made alongside lots of other people's, maybe you'd start to realise that actually there's a real value in it and there's lots to be said for just going for it and not worrying too much about how you feel about it or how other people might feel about it.

Sam:

I think even if someone's art, or their drawing, or whatever they created wasn't very good, which is a matter of opinion anyway, but even if it was something that would be thought by most people as not very good, or even if it was just considered not very good when you compare it to other people's stuff that are more practiced at doing art stuff or more natural, have more of a natural talent for it, it wouldn't matter because it's like sort of people expressing how they feel. So it wouldn't matter, even if it was that it wasn't very good.

Mark:

Well, I think there's this very nice non-judgemental space at Heart n Soul where people aren't expressing themselves in order to get a qualification or to hit a certain kind of arts mark. One of the reasons I'm really not very enthusiastic about arts marks generally is I think it kind of constrains people and it inhibits that natural instinct that we all have, that I think was really very evident and is still very evident. Basically, when all the kind of cultural activities that we maybe rely on or are offered are removed, we realise that that kind of creative instinct, if we allow it to show itself, is totally within us.

In fact, one of the things I've been really interested in is how little we need so many of these things that we're kind of fed and we have to buy in order to kind of meet our cultural appetite, whereas we can all be far more self-sufficient. And the creative packs, and actually then opportunities for people to see each other's work and appreciate each other's work feels really vital and really sort of important.

Will:

I love hearing what people think of each other's work as well. You hold up one image and ask five different people what they see or what that means to them and the responses you get are just so different. I could just watch videos, it's like some sort of creative Gogglebox or something where it's like, I could just watch videos of people looking at each other's work and talking about it for hours, I think. Because there's something... If it's true to say that you give 100 people a creative pack and they'll all do something different, then it's also true to say that if you show the 100 people those bits of artwork, they'd all have different things to say.

So it's a real kind of case in point for the fact that all of our brains and our minds and our bodies all work in different ways and it's a beautiful vessel for kind of understanding the differences between people I think.

Mark:

I'm really intrigued by this idea, again, that we were hearing in the videos about people having permission to draw or to be creative. And if you think about it, how rarely are people encouraged just to do something without it being, like going towards a competition or it's

going to be judged, or it's going to go towards some quantification or something? So just that human instinct to express which is so important right now, for that to be available and offered, I think is really important.

And I'm always looking at what are the things that we can be learning from this, from the Heart n Soul community, what are the ways of being and doing that actually everyone should be exploring and engaging with? And that's such a great example of not having the filter that stops you, allowing your natural creativity to come through. And being in an environment actually where that's positively encouraged and supported and not judged.

Sam:

Yeah. Because that's something that I, I mean, when I was a little kid, I used to draw all the time. That was what I tended to, when I was really little, I used to just spend most of my free time, what I'd do, I'd just draw stuff. And then when I got a bit older, I focused on just doing my music and that being the career I wanted to do. And so I didn't really draw anymore. And I would very rarely draw, until I started then going to Heart n Soul's activity, Allsorts. And then I started, that helped me sort of focus back on drawing again, which was really good because that was, yeah, what we were saying about permission, or having a reason to draw something.

With the creative packs, because I would go, "Draw this or draw something," but it didn't, I guess without any sort of direction or a reason to do it, then people wouldn't really get, unless they've set themselves something to do, a lot of people wouldn't sort of draw until there was something saying, "Okay. You can draw this."

So yeah, just having it say, "Okay, draw this." For someone to just think, "Okay. I'm going to draw this," that can be sort of really challenging. I can find sort of that really challenging, until you get into the habit of sort of drawing regularly, making a routine, a routine of it, it can be hard to make yourself sort of draw, or do creative things in general.

Will:

It's also kind of, I think one of the strengths of the creative packs is how flexible they are, each pack. There's so many ways into each pack. If you're a person who loves very intricate ways of drawing or coloring in, there's ways to do that, if you're someone who prefers words, that's great. And so they're incredibly universal, considering that they are just pieces of paper.

It could be for a disabled person, non-disabled, your mum. It could be for someone on the other side of the world. And I think what you see when you look back across the packs is, again, just people using them in different ways. Some people are in the lines, some people are out of the lines. Some people have used one color. Some people have used 100 colors. And so it's this idea of during a time where there's so many additional rules imposed on us, about what we can and can't do and how we can and can't do it, the packs give you a structure to basically do whatever you want.

Mark:

Yes.

Will:



But without just handing you a blank piece of paper and going, "Be creative, it'll do you some good."

Mark:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Will:

And I think every pack has this kind of real core flexibility that it can work in so many different ways. And with the feedback about people's experience of doing the packs changing over time, I think that's another thing. Some people might not do the planners at all for the first three packs that they've received and then suddenly go, "Actually, I'm going to do a planner today and then they'll do the planners in the coming weeks."

And so again, there's no rules about you must do every page or anything like that, but people can choose to do what they fancy doing at any given week or at any given time. And I think that's, yeah, I think that's a major plus of the packs and the way they've been designed, and one of the reasons why they've been so successful.