

Serpentine Gallery

Teachers' Resources

Marcus Coates: The Trip 3 March – 2 May 2011



Marcus Coates
The Trip 2010
Documentary photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Part of *Serpentine Gallery Skills Exchange:*
Urban Transformation and the Politics of Care

Commissioned in collaboration with
St. John's Hospice



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Introduction

These notes are designed to support your visit to the Serpentine Gallery, including planning prior to your visit and suggestions for discussion and follow up activities. They are aimed at all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

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Background information

The Serpentine Gallery, in collaboration with St. John's Hospice, London, launches a major new project by UK-based artist Marcus Coates. The film is produced as part of the Serpentine's ongoing Skills Exchange project and is the result of a long-term residency by Coates at the hospice.

St John's Hospice is the only independent hospice in central London. Day and night, the specialist staff at St John's Hospice deliver extraordinary care, compassion and expertise in the field of palliative medicine. Skills Exchange begins with the premise that people in the later stages of life possess skills, insights, memories and ideas that not only have a practical use but are also vital to our understanding of, and planning for, the future.

Skills Exchange: Urban Transformation and the Politics of Care is a collaborative project in which artists, designers and architects swap skills and develop ideas for social and architectural change with the older people, care workers, young people and activists to exchange skills and develop ideas for social and architectural change. Previous Skills Exchange projects include Åbäke & Markus Miessen with Westmead Care Home, Barby Asante with Inspire, Southwark, Beatrice Gibson with Camden Homes Eranda Foundation for Older People and Tom Hunter with Age Concern, Hackney.

Artist

Marcus Coates creates rituals and mythologies that examine the role of the imagination and its possibilities for unconscious reasoning, often questioning the relationship between critical rationalism and belief. He seeks to test the pragmatic and uniquely useful potential of the artist within contemporary society.

Born in 1968 in London, lives and works in London.
1990-1993 Post Graduate Diploma, Royal Academy of Art.
1987-1990 BA Fine Art, Kent Institute of Art and Design.

Coates' work questions how the artist can be socially useful. Using his skills and position in society as an artist, as well as his ongoing interest in the natural world, the artist seeks resolutions to social issues for a range of people through informal processes, often informed by the rituals of traditional cultures. He has performed 'consultations' with a variety of people and organisations including Tokyo City Council in Japan, The Mayor of Holon in Israel, the City Council of Stavanger in Norway and a residents' association in Liverpool. Issues taken on by the artist range from illegal cycle parking and prostitution through to the politics of Israel and Palestine. The resulting videos, performances and installations have been shown internationally, with recent exhibitions including: the Sydney Biennial, 2010; Milton Keynes Gallery, 2010; Altermodern: Tate Triennial, London, 2009; Kunsthale Zurich, 2009; Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo; Lisson Presents 2, Lisson Gallery, London, 2008; Manifesta 7, Trento, Italy, 2008.

Coates received the Paul Hamlyn Visual Arts Award in 2008 and the Diawa Foundation Art Prize in 2009. He was the Calouste Gulbenkian Artist in Residence in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, in 2008.

Exhibition

Marcus Coates began the project by asking hospice outpatients to suggest ways that vicarious action could enrich their experiences and offered to enact unfulfilled dreams on their behalf. Suggestions ranged from the creation of an exhibition of photography, to a parachute free-fall, to a trip to the Amazon. The last of these requests, made by the late Alex H, was realised by the artist in 2010.

Coates was given precise instructions for the trip. He was asked to travel to an isolated village in the Amazon jungle and to ask the indigenous people a set of prearranged questions. The project was an exchange, Coates offered a way of expanding Alex H's imaginative world beyond the hospice and in return Alex H. offered Coates a challenge to see the world for someone else.

The Trip presents audio recordings of the conversations between outpatient and artist firstly as they plan the journey and then as they share the memories following Coates' return. Coates chose not to film or photograph the experience, but rather to rely on his own memories, impressions and the stories he collected, to enrich Alex's vision of this already imagined trip.

While Coates' work is well known for questioning the role of the artist in relation to a range of social issues or problems – often in conjunction with official governmental organisations – in The Trip he develops this central concern through exchanges between individuals, bringing a level of sensitivity and intimacy to the resulting presentation.

Themes, ideas and questions to explore

- As a viewer of the piece, *The Trip 2010*, discuss the visuals of the film and question why you never see the faces of the people talking.
- Look at images of archaeological objects and as a groups guess what they are. Ask each student to bring something unusual in to class and see what people think it could be used for. This could be made into a time capsule for future members of the school, what would you put in it and why?
- Create a toolkit for an imaginary trip with instructions, use everyday objects and a give them a new life by creating your labels describing their new purpose and name.
- In pairs one person describes something and the other person draws it from their descriptions, does their picture look like what you had imagined? This idea can be tried with story writing also. One student writes 10 points for a story and gives them to their partner and asks them to create a story including these 10 parts, they then discuss how the story changed.
- What ways can you describe things without words?
- Tell a story to a friend and ask them to then tell it to another friend and so on, eventually when the story comes back to you has it changed?
- In groups discuss a country and see if anyone you know has visited or even lived there. What is the country famous for internationally? What part does the Media play in shaping people's perceptions? Why do you think people have such different perceptions?
- Ask your group to draw the first thing that comes to their head when you say a word, (eg: tree) then as a group compare and see if there are any similarities or differences in the drawings? (Does anyone draw the roots? what angle if it drawn from?)
- Do something new every day for a week (eg: new place, word, or skill) then share your thoughts as a group. Then set yourself a bigger task to do something new this month (eg: start learning another language) what expectations did you set yourself and were these archived?
- Ask your group to each write a simple quick task, that can be done at school, (eg: write backwards, go behind the cupboard) leave clear instructions with it and then put it in a lucky dip box and pick out a different one. Discuss what it was like to do the task, what questions do you have for the person that wrote it?
- Work in groups and play the role of the director, actor or audience? Then swap around so everyone has tried all three. How are they different and which do you prefer?

Transcripts

A = Alex H

M = Marcus Coates

M *I think that's good, just as much as you need challenges in your life, I think you need to challenge other people.*

A *So it was hide and seek?*

M *It was hide and seek, but also an ambush, I realised that, all the time, while the children are playing, they're practicing hunting skills.*

A *Is there any kind of formal education?*

M *It's interesting- there are school. Some of these were set up by missionaries. But recently there has been a huge pressure from oil companies like Texaco to set up more.*

A *As an incentive for what?*

M *Well, as an incentive to use their land maybe...But the Huaorani are quite savvy about this now.*

A *Oh yes. It isn't so much about overcoming fears, it's trying to prove to yourself whether you could cope or not. It's about trying to find out something about yourself or your personality; how far you can push yourself. If you did this trip – you would have to overcome some of your own basic fears.*

M *I don't think I have any particular fears. Rather, I have more basic, human fears about getting ill, and the unknown.*

A *Don't we all – where do you think I'm going! I think we all need a bit of a challenge in life, and when you know it's not going to be that long, maybe even more of a challenge.*

M *Yes, I do think I want to be challenged by it. For me, it's just as much about giving you the opportunity, as it is, for me, about having the opportunity to go and do this. That's quite important: the privilege to be able to explore your imagination, and enrich it.*

A *To do it with someone else's eyes and mind.*

M *That's the slight fear for me: to go and do all this, and risk that what I tell you might be inadequate for your imagination.*

M *Exactly, yes. It was open at both sides. There were lots of families there just sitting and chatting, with a fire going in the corner. There I was introduced to Moi's mother, she's in her eighties, and she only speaks Wao, the Huaorani language. So I asked her your question. This was translated for me into Spanish by my Ecuadorian guide, who then asked a Huaorani man in Spanish, and he translated that into Wao for the woman. So there were four of us in this chain of questions!*

A *Do they smoke in any form?*

M *They weren't smoking, no. I don't know if they smoke anything. All I saw in terms of stimulants was the chicha, in the village. But once we got to the village of the oil company, everyone was spending their money on beer. From there onwards, the road was a two-hour drive to the main town. The oil company's wells and pipes lined the road and you could see considerable leakage and pollution. All the tributaries around there are polluted and therefore*

A I can understand that. Did you find that doing this on my behalf, sometimes you wanted to dominate and take over? I don't think one could have resisted it, and I can't imagine that you are that self-controlled. I could be wrong.

M Yes, I kept thinking, 'Is this something that Alex would be interested in, should I focus on this, or this over here? I'm getting really interested in this, but would Alex get interested in it?' In the end I had to just go with what I would do, in a way, and just imagine that whatever sparked my imagination, those would have to be the bits that I brought back to you in the end, because those are the bits that are most lived through, and the things that are the most vibrant for me. I just assumed that I would be able to talk to you in a way that transmitted that vibrancy and that life. I thought that, because I couldn't help living it for myself, this would be the best way to live it for you, and that hopefully it would inform your own imagination, and you going up this river into the unknown.

Artists' note

"Alex died not long after this interview. In our last conversation we continued to talk about our trip. He said that he often went down the river and into the jungle when he needed to" Marcus Coates

Keywords

Vicarious – Interpretation – Realisation – Story telling – Imagination – Strict parameters – Choice – Different perspectives – Empathy – Communication – Observation – De-naturalising – Describe – Consumer – Archiving – Collect – Experience – Trust – Animal – Transform – Film – Improvisation – Perform – Act – Direct – Travel – Systems – Politics – Psychology – Changing – Openness – Manipulating – Imagination – Escape – Re-thinking – Re-telling – Space – The physical world – Psychology – Reality – Imaginary – Fact – Fiction – Audience Experience – Cinema – Theatre – Exhibition – Space – Control – Time – Portraits – Characters – Dialogue

Cross-curricular links

Design technology – Art and Design – Political studies – Sociology – History – Geography – Creative and Media Diploma – Drama – Design and Technology – Political studies – Photography – Media Studies – Film Studies – Anthropology – English Literature

Further reading and related links

www.serpentinegallery.org

<http://www.katemacgarry.com/marcuscoates.php>

http://www.workplacegallery.co.uk/artists/_Marcus%20Coates/

http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/focus_marcus_coates/

<http://www.mkgallery.org/exhibitions/psychopomp/>

<http://www.balticmill.com/>

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/video/page/0,,1997689,00.html>

<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/28211824001>

Saturday Talks

Every Saturday at 3pm at the Serpentine Gallery

Katy Deepwell, Writer and Editor, 5 March
Claire Pajaczkowska, Art Historian, 12 March
Mike Cooter, Artist, 19 March
Sophie O'Brien, Exhibition Curator, Serpentine Gallery, 26 March
Tamar Garb, Writer and Curator, 2 April
Coline Milliard, Art Critic, 9 April
Rachel Taylor, Curator, 16 April
Marcus Coates, Artist, 23 April
Joanna S. Walker, Art Historian, 30 April

Planning a Visit to the Serpentine Gallery

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Transport

The nearest tube stations are South Kensington (1.25 km walk), Knightsbridge (1.25 km walk) or Lancaster Gate (1 km walk) Bus routes 9, 10, 52, 452, 94 and 148 stop near the Gallery

Group Visit Guidelines

To make your visit as enjoyable as possible, please read the following:

Before your Visit

- Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times, including in the shop. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5's, 1:10 for 5 - 11 year olds, 1:15 for 11 - 16 year olds and 1:20 for 16 - 18 year olds is required.
- We recommend a preliminary planning visit, as for some exhibitions there may be works that you consider unsuitable for your group.

During your Visit

- The artworks in the Marcus Coates exhibition are extremely fragile. Please take

extra care to follow the Gallery Guidelines at all times:

No running
No touching
No leaning against walls or plinths
No shouting
No photography

- Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group's behaviour whilst at the Serpentine Gallery.
- Many contemporary artworks are fragile and damage easily. Please make sure that your group understands that this is why they are not allowed to touch the art.
- Lecturing: If your group is larger than 30 please split them into smaller groups in the exhibition space and do not lecture in rooms where talks are already in progress.
- Drawing: If you would like to do some drawing please check with the gallery what materials you will be able to use in the exhibition

Education and Family Events

Education is at the core of the Serpentine Gallery's activities. Through practical, artist led workshops and discussion, talks, events and projects the Education Programmes offer a diverse range of innovative ways to engage with modern and contemporary art and architecture for all ages.

Please refer to the Serpentine Gallery Bulletin or www.serpentinegallery.org for information on events and activities taking place as part of the Education Programme during the Marcus Coates exhibition.

The **Marcus Coates** Teachers' Notes are also available to download free at www.serpentinegallery.org along with Teachers' Notes for the previous exhibitions:

Nancy Spero, 3 March – 2 May 2011
Philippe Parreno, 25 November 2010 – 13 February 2011
Klara Lidén, 7 October 2010 – 7 November 2010
Anish Kapoor, 28 September 2010 – 13 March 2011
Jean Nouvel Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2010, 10 July – 17 October
Wolfgang Tillmans 26 June – 19 September
Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow, 8 May- 13 June
Richard Hamilton: Modern Moral Matters, 3 March 2010 – 25 April 2010
Design Real, 26 November 2009 – 7 February 2010
Gustav Metzger: Decades 1959 – 2009, 29 September – 8 November 2009
Jeff Koons: Popeye Series, 2 July – 13 September 2009
Luke Fowler, 7 May – 14 June 2009
Rebecca Warren, 10 March – 19 April 2009
Indian Highway, 10 December 2008 – 22 February 2009
Gerhard Richter, 23 September – 23 November 2008
Richard Prince, 26 June – 7 September 2008
Maria Lassnig, 25 April – 8 June 2008
Derek Jarman, 23 February – 13 April 2008
Anthony McCall, 30 November 2007 – 3 February 2008
Matthew Barney, 20 September – 11 November 2007

Hreinn Fridfinnsson, 17 July – 2 September 2007
Paul Chan, 15 May – 1 July 2007
Allora & Calzadilla, 17 – 29 April 2007
Karen Kilimnik, 20 February 9 April 2007 In the darkest hour there may be light,
works from Damien Hirst's murderme collection, 25 November 2006 – 28 January
2007
Runa Islam, 25 October – 5 November 2006
China Power Station: Part 1, 8 October – 5 November 2006
Uncertain States of America, 9 September – 15 October 2006
Thomas Demand, 6 June – 20 August 2006
Ellsworth Kelly, 18 March – 21 May 2006
Elmgreen & Dragset, 26 January – 26 February 2006
Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, 19 October 2005 – 8 January 2006
Oliver Payne & Nick Relph, 6 September – 2 October 2005
Rirkrit Tiravanija, 5 July – 21 August 2005
Andreas Slominski, 26 April – 12 June 2005
Tomoko Takahashi, 22 February – 10 April 2005
Monika Sosnowska, 5 December 2004 – 16 January 2005
Glenn Brown, 14 September – 7 November 2004
Gabriel Orozco, 1 July - 30 August 2004
Cy Twombly, 17 April – 13 June 2004
State of Play, 3 February – 28 March 2004
Hiroshi Sugimoto, 18 November 2003 – 18 January 2004
John Currin, 9 September – 2 November 2003
Cindy Sherman, 3 June – 25 August 2003
Takahashi Murakami, 12 November 2002 – 26 January 2003
Kutlug Ataman, 11 February – 9 March 2003