

# An Artist in a Research Context



<sup>1</sup>For information about Valérie Mréjen see  
<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/cote.court/2001/mrejen.htm>

<sup>2</sup>For information about the exhibition see  
<http://www.balticmill.com/whatsOn/past/ExhibitionDetail.php?exhibID=104>

<sup>3</sup>For information about Darlene Clover see  
<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/eplsfaculty/clover/clover.htm>

For more information about Cathy Wilkes see  
[http://www.themoderninstitute.com/artists/c\\_wilkes/index.php](http://www.themoderninstitute.com/artists/c_wilkes/index.php)

The care and support needs of male survivors of childhood sexual abuse project was a collaboration between CRFR, University of Edinburgh, and Health in Mind, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. For more information see  
<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Research/malesurvivors.html>

## References

O'Sullivan, S (2006) *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari, Thought Beyond Representation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

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# Reflections on the residency

Rosie Gibson was Artist in Residence at CRFR for a year from January 2008. The project was funded by the Leverhulme and the open ended brief included interacting with CRFR staff and researchers and contributing to several research projects.

A focus of the residency was collaboration with researchers who had an interest how to use visual methods in research.

Rosie led a series of drawing workshops for CRFR staff and students. These sessions became a springboard for conversations about different way of approaching research and also laid the foundations for collaboration. This briefing will investigate Rosie's reflections on the residency, present some of her work at CRFR and outline two of her research collaborations.

## Key reflections

- Being in a research environment that facilitates discussions based on facts and clear thinking rather than opinions has been great.
- Having the time to reflect with PhD student Caroline King as our collaboration developed was very important. Caroline's skills of analysis contributed greatly to our ability to reflect as we worked together.
- The scope of the residency expanded from developing visual methodologies to developing methodologies which take into account the emotional and affective dimensions. Artists are used to working at the level of emotions and feelings. Social scientists are working at rational and representational levels. During the residency it became clear that bringing the two sets of skills together has the potential to create more rounded work.
- Some contemporary artists are concerned with the same issues and questions as social scientists but from radically different perspectives. Engaging with artist's work could bring another dimension to CRFR researchers understanding of their subject and act as a resource for their work.



## Case Study 1

Rosie's closest collaboration was with PhD student Caroline King. Caroline's PhD investigates how the change in policy and practice of health visiting is experienced by health professionals and parents.

### ■ Drawing and creativity



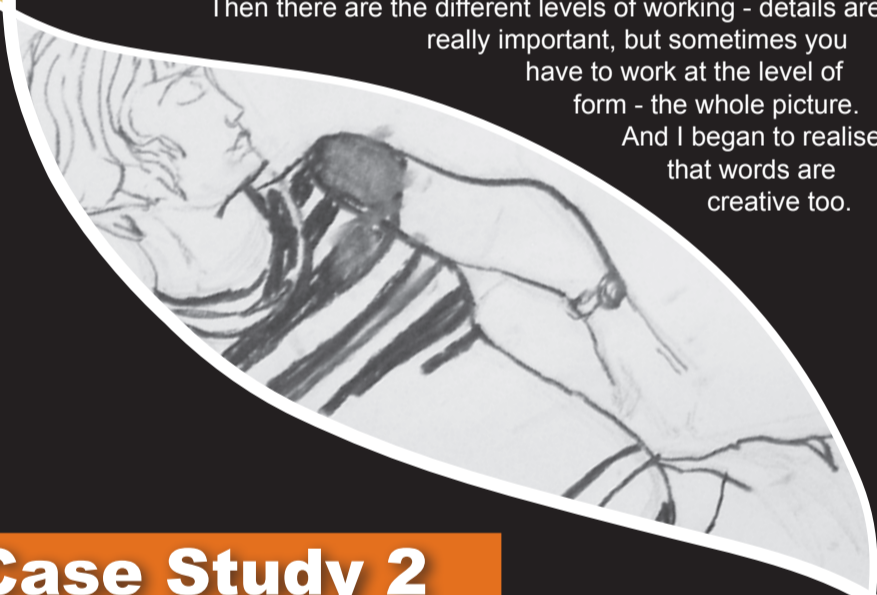
**Rosie:** I remember Brenda, who works at CRFR, suggesting I do a drawing class. It fitted with the Leverhulme remit of interacting and contributing and also coincided with an idea I had had for a while - to teach drawing to people who use words and writing in their work. It was a really good way to get to know people and people to know me, in a relaxed and different atmosphere. Maybe one of the benefits was that the sessions were an input to CRFR which by its nature is very focused on outputs.

**Caroline:** I thought I didn't have a creative bone in my body. The drawing sessions were an opportunity to revisit something I'd left behind long ago and achieve a level of skill I was really pleased with. And they let me think of myself as 'creative'.



**Rosie:** I remember a really interesting conversation which arose when we were considering 'negative space' in drawing. The exercise was to draw a chair by drawing the spaces in between - in between the arms, the legs, the back. Getting the spaces right is as important as getting the chair right for the drawing to work. We considered how this linked to the concept of 'liminal space' in social sciences - the space in between.

**Caroline:** I was aware how doing drawing was helping me with analysing information for my PhD. For both you have to put in the graft. From drawing I was reminded it was ok to make mistakes because once you've got to grips with your material you can make big adjustments quickly. I remember when we were working with the model and I realised I was way out in some of my proportions. It was a thought to change it, but I did it quite easily. Then there are the different levels of working - details are really important, but sometimes you have to work at the level of form - the whole picture. And I began to realise that words are creative too.



## Case Study 2

For the CRFR Voices of Male Survivors Conference in February 2009, Rosie worked with a group of men to explore how they, as survivors, could input to the conference - to have their voices heard. This conference highlighted the findings of a major Scottish research project, that looked at the care and support needs of male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. One of the key aims of the conference was to ensure that survivors' voices were heard by Scottish policymakers and practitioners, so that proposals for practical change could be discussed.

Over a series of four meetings Rosie collaborated with the group and Christine Stevenson from Thrive, a specialist counselling service in Glasgow. The group created a performance for the conference and a series of nine banners, highlighting quotes from the report. The banners were laid out on the floor of the conference hall in grid formation.



### ■ Collaboration

**Caroline:** I came to see you when I became aware of 'language issues' in preparing for interviewing vulnerable mums and parents about the changes to health visiting. At the time I thought you might be able to produce some graphics for me.

**Rosie:** And I remember thinking 'I'm not an illustrator!' Then we started talking about Valérie Mréjen<sup>1</sup>, an artist, writer and filmmaker who makes work around communication, the spaces in between communication and gaps in communication. We watched some of her work together, then started having meetings to develop a project to create a series of short films of your findings.

But after a couple of meetings we began to feel a bit stuck. I suggested a travelling meeting. When you agreed, I did a quick search to find somewhere to go, and found Double Agent on in the Baltic Gateshead<sup>2</sup>.

**Caroline:** The trip to Newcastle was a eureka moment for me. Double Agent was a group show featuring artists who use other people as a medium. It was the beginning of me having a more enriched understanding of art and artists, at a personal level. And that built on the experience of learning to draw.

There was a piece of work in the exhibition we both remember - the guy sitting at a desk typing on a laptop. Then we saw a screen and realised he was logging what was happening in the gallery. We were pleased when our actions came up on the screen. I remembered that work the other day when we were thinking about ways of working with a group of young mums. How empowering that might be.

We've been able to encourage one another to take risks - to leave our desks and computer screens and still call it work!

**Rosie:** I often have to get over the sense of being a bit weird when I'm making work. Being in a collaborative relationship with you in the residency has helped my motivation. For example I mentioned to you that I wanted to film the sunrise. However when it came to a perfect morning, I could easily have dissuaded myself. But because I had told you I was going to do it, then I did it.



### ■ Creative spaces

**Rosie:** A eureka moment for me was when we realised that what we were doing had more to do with making space rather than making an end product, an object, if you like. We had started discussing the idea of using film as a way of disseminating your research findings, but gradually shifted to focusing more on the process of getting to that end point.

And you identified the possibility of us working with a group of parents - an idea that harked back to our very first discussion. We could make a space that would enable them to engage their creativity in responding to the changes in health visiting policy and practice. I was aware of you pushing me to come up with a strong idea to work with the group.

**Caroline:** You started talking about Cathy Wilkes<sup>3</sup>.

**Rosie:** She is a feminist artist based in Glasgow who was short listed for the last Turner Prize. As a mother of young children she uses domestic everyday artefacts and detritus in her installations. We both had an eureka moment when I mentioned she has used buggies in her work! Buggies are usually a problem rather than a prop!

### ■ Next steps

Rosie and Caroline are currently seeking funding to carry out some of the ideas that emerged from their conversations including running a series of creative space workshops with a group of vulnerable parents. They then want to extend the creative space idea to practitioners and policy makers, working towards an outcome in the form of film, performance, or exhibition.

