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Primary school protest: Children work with London artist to explore the art of demonstration



Peter Liversidge's exhibition runs from 17 March to 14 June 2015

What happens when you ask 60 children, aged between 8 and 9, what they want to protest against?

The answer: "I Don't Like Cooked Tomatoes".

Well, that was just one reply among many in a new exhibition by Peter Liversidge, whose work at the Whitechapel Gallery sees the British artist explore ideas about demonstration and protest with primary school children in east London.

Working with kids from Marion Richardson Primary School in Tower Hamlets, Liversidge and the children composed lyrics for protest songs as well as creating banners and placards.

Liversidge held workshops with the 60 children over the course of four months, asking them to describe their views on community and the power of their collective voice.

Liversidge told London Live that the workshops began very simply, letting the children freely discuss ideas about rules.

"I worked with them on the idea of rules, what rules are, if you want to break the rules, rules for the home, rules for school, rules for cities, rules for countries," he said. "The piece came out of wanting to encourage children to have a voice and as a group they obviously have a single voice."

"It wasn't about me going in there and saying, as school children, this is what you should be doing. It was entirely of their making. The idea of starting with rules was how you change things. It's a very gentle introduction to the idea of demonstrating."



Marion Richardson Primary School in Tower Hamlets.

Liversidge also felt that such an introduction to protest was much more positive, what with violent images of protests in Syria and the Middle East possibly giving protest negative connotations.

"At first we talked about art in general and what work can be, from sculpture, painting, photography, video and then talked about performance and the performance itself and the exchange between the performers, in this case 60 children and the audience," Liversidge explained about the process.



"We got together and looked at what they wanted to protest about. It was very open, things like homework... 'I Don't Like Cooked Tomatoes', that came from three or four different class groups."

Liversidge explained that for that song, he set the chant to the tune of Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me".



Some of the other songs include: "Clean up after your dog", "I Want to Change my Confidence", "No More Homework", "Shh-Shh", and "United Nations".

Another song chants, "We are busting, We are busting, We are busting, Give us more toilets, When do we want them? Now!"



Liversidge found that the children "were much broader in their concerns" than he had assumed before, and that some of their work is "really insightful and heartbreaking." In one song, the children give thanks for their parents, their siblings, their teachers and...the iPad and how wonderful it is for children.

Liversidge will be staging a live performance with the children on 1 May 2015 at the Whitechapel Gallery.

"Peter Liversidge: Notes on Protesting" runs between 17 March – 14 June 2015, Galleries 5 & 6, Whitechapel Gallery.



<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/primary-school-protest-children-work-with-london-artist-to-explore-the-art-of-demonstration-10106364.html>