

Elena Cogni
on WYA July 2012

1. What do you feel WYA might've taken away from the workshop?

My aim to share a conceptual method, which involves taking them through a thinking and making process. I introduced the workshop titled *The Mirror And Self Portraiture (By The Other), Hystory, Psychology And Art Strategies*. My initial thoughts were that the group would engage in a collaborative process of inquiry, reflection, and creation by using writing, drawing, performance to experiment with responses to personal histories. Self-portraiture allows for a personal way to examine multiple global and local issues of identity and power relations. This terrain also allows the examination of how different ways of knowing and seeing the world impact how people understand each other and themselves.



Cogni with WYAs introducing the workshop

From a few thoughts and concepts also coming from other disciplines around the idea of the mirror, and looking for a definition together, these were then experienced through two practical exercises which were based on working in pairs. The latter was a way to make them think at placing themselves in the position of the other: "*The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror*" (Michel Foucault. *Of Other Spaces* (1967), *Heterotopias*).

The artists were first asked to draw their own self portrait as directed by the other person sitting in front of them. We then all heard the talking about their experience of doing this: 'I had to listen to the person in front of me and try to forget what I remembered/thought I looked like when looking at myself in the mirror'; 'this was a very intimate exercise'...



Cologni explains to (and practices with) the WYAs the self-portrait (by the other) exercise.

Below group critique of the results



The second exercise involved using a long roll of paper, onto which I asked them to locate themselves, again in pairs, and discuss a strategy whereby one person would move in the space and the other would document it using pencils. An interesting and unpredicted element was to have a group of three working on this and the way they negotiated their working method, breaking the mirror, one-to-one I gave and creating a necessarily more open way of working.



above and below pictures of Cologni and WYAs investigating mirror as the double and copy: how to direct the other to document the presence of the body in space



2. Did you learn anything from the process of working with the young artists?
 One of the reason I very much enjoy this opportunities is because being a research-artist, I can share my current thinking with the young artists, allowing them into my process. I always welcome unpredicted interruptions and remarks there might be about assumptions I may have in preparing the workshops. These are more likely to happen with this age group than with younger participants. For me, this time as I was thinking back at some issues around the mirror I had engaged with sometime ago, this practical work with them opened up renewed thoughts which will feed into more creative work to come. Furthermore the social element of group work is also source of inspiration for my upcoming artwork (MK gallery in October and November).