

PINKING INDEX

HANNAH JICKLING + REED H. REED



Zigzag Impressions between the Classroom and the Gallery — On Reed and Jickling’s *Pinking Index* at the KAG

by Clare Butcher

AN INTRODUCTION

There is a secret history of exhibitions. These exhibitions sit in plain sight, often on the brightly painted wall of an arguably very relevant space; they are seen by many and rotate content with a dynamism that would impress even the most productive artists and curators. They are usually very well signposted, contain multiple access points, and are often made of sustainable materials that reuse structures from previous projects as a scaffold. The absence of this ilk of exhibitions from the agreed-upon canon of art history is perhaps due to their very particular makers and audience. In the exhibition-making of the classroom, the artists displaying work are also the technicians, the mediators, the critics — all of their roles demonstrating that showing and telling, making things and sharing them, are essential acts towards collective learning.

Classrooms might seem like pretty unglamorous exhibition sites, but since the advent of what’s come to be called “socially engaged artistic practice” — which moves beyond the artist’s studio into communal and institutional spaces — you might have seen evidence of that secret history creeping into view on gallery walls or in publications in the form of participatory products and process documentation. Usually presented within the context of a broader project by a professional artist or artists who act as conduits or translators, these process-based displays signal that the traces included are worthy of attention by others, even if not always legible as “artworks” in the way that we might understand a painting or sculpture.

And indeed, this movement of material between the classroom and gallery could be read as a simple lateral one, with school systems being part of the same enlightenment framework as galleries, museums, archives, libraries, prisons... all designed to construct a certain kind of social being. As cultural theorist Tony Bennett reminds us in his now well-worn text “The Exhibitionary Complex,” these interconnected infrastructures form a certain curriculum of “object lessons” through which we might be disciplined into becoming behaving citizens. In this complex, art exhibitions stand as extracurricular classrooms that keep minds and bodies active in the seemingly noble pursuit of knowledge.ⁱ

Importantly, this enlightenment conception of knowledge in the context of exhibitions often resides in “facts” and forms — measurable, observable, easy-to-capture things that get stripped of context when put on display. “That’s the formula,” says Kim the cat to Pinky the cat in the online *Pinky Show* episode where Kim reflects on her visit to an exhibition. “Blank walls + nice tidy labels + maybe even shining a light on the object = guaranteed to make any object look extremely important.”ⁱⁱ

However, as Peggy Phelan, Claire Bishop, Vesna Krstich, and others have written, when traces of artistic endeavours with non-art-professional collaborators circulate within the exhibitionary complex — and in that sense an assumed economy of knowledge production — the fragmented outcomes need to work quite hard to hold their ground, to be seen as little more than a leftover. The kind of collective learning that happens in the classroom exhibition is less identifiable, less measurable, more speculative than factual, and often doesn’t even resemble art with a capital A or knowledge with a capital K.ⁱⁱⁱ



But what does learning even look, feel, and smell like? The recent “educational turn” in art discourse asks us to think about this question in response to a proliferation of reading rooms and softly furnished gathering spaces popping up inside exhibitions of contemporary art. Focusing attention on the often undervalued methodologies involved in (and not only the final objects of) so-called knowledge production, this “turn” in the field brought to the fore the non-results-oriented, ethically complex, and process-based quandaries of artists working within educational contexts. In particular, these not-so-pretty or sometimes plain, undramatic spaces offer a vital opportunity to reconsider the ways in which we acknowledge knowledge,^{iv} accredit research, and attribute authorship.

It is between and beyond these entangled curricula of art histories, pedagogical practices, and economies of visibility that artists Jickling and Reed are, as they say, “zigzagging” playfully here at the Kelowna Art Gallery.^v

INTO THE WEEDS — IMPRESSIONS AND PRESSURE POINTS

As a duo, Reed and Jickling’s curriculum vitae is a moving one. The two have worked together since 2006, and their roles as educators and as artists are often intertwined. More recently, through a platform entitled Big Rock Candy Mountain, the duo have intentionally coloured outside the lines of educational structures with after-school programs and long-term inquiries in contexts like Queen Alexandra Elementary in East Vancouver.^{vi} In these contexts, they aim



to collaboratively create projects with students that connect in-classroom activities with artisanal processes and in-the-world discussions around key issues such as food security in an age of late capitalism, the importance of play as a learning methodology, how to challenge power relations, and where ideas of taste and value come from.

Students working with Jickling and Reed have created series of edibles and drinkables with local producers, which have been shown in brightly lit school foyer vitrines and print or digital publications before being distributed and consumed. While these outcomes may tie into the formal learning requirements of the provincial curriculum — box ticked — there are other “chewy,” challenging physical and methodological “spin-offs” that need more time to digest.

Over the years, the duo have wrangled with the often less visible struggles that come with process-based work in non-professional-art contexts, such as school system administration or parental permission for field trips. They have also encountered the sticky ethics of co-authorship and consent as their temporary groups of collaborators grow older, leave their schools, and shift their relationship to the shared archival fragments of their learning processes. All of these challenges, the artists have determined, are food for thought. And rather than disposing of or filing away these

seemingly “peripheral material” outcomes of decisions made and steps taken, Reed and Jickling are drawing what remains out and drawing it into the focus of a more internal reflective exercise as a working exhibition, *Pinking Index*, here at the KAG.

Very much embedded in the word “educate” are fragments of older terms meaning “to tug at, to draw out.” And it’s the remaining “danglers,” as Jickling and Reed would call them — those unresolved questions and possibilities — that compel this current index of collagraphy and monoprints. The series on display carefully and playfully collates and transforms the refuse retrieved from school grounds during the duo’s on-site projects. Ranging from discarded wrappers to bent straws, “slick plastics, crushed foils, zig-zag cuts, urgent tears, and hard-pressed folds,” the visual compositions the duo presents are brandless, quite opaque really, and avoid offering themselves as legible object lessons at all. The jagged pattern of pinking shears is perhaps all the connective tissue we might see on the surface of their puzzling categorization system.

Reed and Jickling have drawn inspiration from other artists who work through and with printmaking as a processing methodology rather than an illustration of process. Alexa Hatanaka’s ongoing work around the historical Japanese practice of gyotaku is one example, and Yvonne Mullock’s X-ray-like monoprints another.^{vii} The images created within these prints are more diagrammatic than representational. And in Jickling and Reed’s case, the *Pinking Index* series is not here to teach you something in particular. These materials, we might say, have left an impression on the artists — and, by extension, us.

But no production or reproduction process is neutral. And to continue nerding out about certain histories of terms and creating tangential associations, I’d ask us to consider the advent of the printing press. In many discussions, especially within academia, the arrival of this technology is associated with mass empowerment, access to and circulation of knowledge — creating ever -widening communities of thought and learning. However, designer Chris Lee in his recent publication *Immutable: Designing History* reminds us that when we reflect on the phenomenon of the printing press, we also need to consider all the bureaucratic and administrative forces it put to work more efficiently than ever.^{viii} Less aesthetically intended printed matter — be that logbooks, passports, criminal and medical records, academic transcripts, registration forms, waivers, or report cards — has a way of impressing upon us the power of the institutions it represents.

And to that point, Jickling and Reed’s removal of any trace of the branding, logos, or “Nutrition Facts” from the detritus they press into place on their print series reminds us of the ideological impressions already made on us, the willing and unwilling, students of another kind of exhibitionism: that of late capitalism. Press, impressions, pressure.

AN INCONCLUSION

What happens when the supposed by-products of a pedagogical artistic process are put under pressure? What are the protocols for their ordering, evaluation, and accreditation between the playground and the gallery? How do we understand their authority, their artistry, their anxieties?

A dear colleague of mine used to say that it’s okay to be on the same page, but at different corners.^{ix} And perhaps this is where the final component of this exhibitionary process gets to work. An editioned print entitled *ZIG ZAG ZILLIONAIRES* has been created by Jickling and Reed in collaboration with the KAG’s education team: comprising a visual activity menu, workshop outlines, and a program guide for the team and others to put to use. Hardly ancillary or support structures, this set of tools is the “zag” in the “zig” — reconnecting the gallery exhibition with the classroom in the ongoing ecology of showing and telling. All of these not-so-secret textures, patterns, and impressions of real-time pedagogical artistic practice *Pinking Index* brings to the surface, brings to the gallery wall, brings to our shared experience, as Jickling and Reed invite us to learn *with* rather than *from* them.

GARBAGE PRESS



MOUTH SCULPT



ZIG ZAG ZILLIONAIRES



BUBBLE SCORE

SODA STUDY



POP SOUND

SOUR BLAST





ENDNOTES

- i. See Tony Bennett's article "The Exhibitionary Complex" (1994) here: https://www.academia.edu/3212620/The_exhibitionary_complex.
- ii. See *The Pinky Show*, "We Love Museums ... Do Museums Love Us Back?," November 8, 2008, online video, <https://www.pinkyshow.org/projectarchives/videos/we-love-museums-do-museums-love-us-back>. With thanks to Galit Eilat for first recommending this video, which has become a part of my personal curriculum.
- iii. See Vesna Krstich's text "Multiple Elementary, Multiple Leftovers, Multiple Learning," in *Multiple Elementary* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2017), eds. Helen Reed and Hannah Jickling, 12–21, which cites Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012).
- iv. With thanks to Bonnie Devine and Luis Jacob for their generosity of thought around this particular question in their conversation "Everything Is Nerve for Us," in *This Is Not An Archive* (Toronto Biennial of Art, 2021), <https://thisisnotanarchive.ca/#text-73>.
- v. All direct quotes, unless otherwise cited, are from Jickling and Reed's correspondence and texts shared with the author.
- vi. This work was initially framed as a multi-year residency under the umbrella of the arts collective Other Sights for Artists' Projects from 2016 to 2018, which was supported by producer Vanessa Kwan. For more information, see Big Rock Candy Mountain, <http://bigrockcandymountain.ca/category/about>.
- vii. See Hatanaka's paper garments and further research on her website: <https://www.alexahatanaka.com/kamiko-project-page/yoshitaka-boiler-suit>. More information on Mullock's series is available at Norberg Hall's 2021 exhibition webpage: <https://norberghall.com/yvonnemullock-thewelcomestranger/>.
- viii. See more on Lee's research in *Immutable: Designing History* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe Projects / Library Stack, 2022).
- ix. Shout-out to the artist who LARPed as an education staff member for almost two years of documenta 14's program — the one and only Anton Kats.

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