

Helen Rousseau

The guide takes you through the processes Helen uses when creating both her own work and preparing her public workshops.

The Guide is based on a workshop Helen ran with residents at Comb Court, Stowmarket. Using conversation and shared memories as a starting point, the participants went on to create their own dining table, complete with favourite food and special guests, after which they constructed an entire tabletop landscape, including a road that led to the restaurant ... that led to the table.

The Guide also draws on many of the examples you will find in the MORAG website, and is intended to give you an easy, downloadable resource to inspire and support your own creative work.



Think about it

Word, lists and phrases

Make lists of things that are on various tables in your home. For example, on the hall table ...

- Lamp
- Keys
- Telephone
- Shopping list
- Placemat

Make a list of all the things that happen on or around your kitchen table. Think about:

- Birthdays, holidays, festivals, religious celebrations
- Conversation, exchange, sharing
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper, coffee breaks

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Treasure Hunt - things around you

Collect all the flat objects you can find in your home.

Collect flat objects you would use to lay a table ready for a meal.

How do these feel?

- Soft
- Squishy
- Textured
- Hard?

Materials, patterns and textures

You will need: -

- A large piece of paper that will cover your table. If you can't find one big enough a paper tablecloth would also work
- Chunky crayons or graphite pencils
- Various drawing materials – pens, coloured and drawing pencils
- Masking tape
- If you can find it, big sheets of tracing or greaseproof paper.

You may need to collect other materials as you develop your ideas.

Make yourself at home

Creative activities can use the things around you and everyday experiences as a starting point

Can you remember the last conversation you had around your kitchen table?

Read the poem *The Table* by Edip Cansever. What would you bring to the table?

<http://www.aprweb.org/poem/two-poems-2>

Find a table you can work on over a period of time and where you can work with a variety (sometimes messy) of materials.

The last thing you did

Think about the things you have already done today that are creative; choosing what to wear, deciding how you want to decorate a room, arranging flowers, all of these things are creative activities.

Feelings

Have a cup of tea with a friend or family member. Discuss meals you have had in your home. Which feelings would you connect with these meals?



Get going

Warm up

Arrange the flat objects you collected on the table.

You could lay the table as if you were getting it ready for a meal.

Use bits of blue tack or masking tape to lightly fix these objects to the table.

Make a mark

Use the side of your crayon or pencil and rub across the surface of the objects and the paper.

You should see the outlines and textures of the objects emerging.

Play

Test, try out, imagine, guess and follow your nose.

Enjoy the process.

Experiment with different drawing materials and colours.

Start anywhere

Start anywhere and let the process suggest what to do next.

Avoid making judgments, let lots of possibilities develop.

What's in your space?

Lay the paper or tablecloth over the objects and lightly tape it to the table so that it doesn't move when you work on it. Gently run your hands over the covered objects – can you remember what you put where? Does your sense of touch tell you what's where?

Don't know?

It's very important to keep possibilities and options open.
It's fine to not know what's going to happen and what you're going to end up with.
Enjoy the journey through the process and ideas.



Keep going

Add in and take away

Introduce drawing to the image.
Can you draw a favourite meal, or people you remember sitting around this table?
Let your drawing develop over a few weeks. At the end of each week cover the table with a new piece of tracing paper or greaseproof paper.
Allow the layers of the table's history build up but remain visible.
Do you need more materials? What might be good to use? Transfer lettering, paper letters, text from magazines and newspapers?

Chop & change

Make several rubbings:

- Use different types of paper, try coloured or transparent paper
- How can you improve what you're doing?
- What's working well – focus on developing this
- Take some objects away
- Add more objects
- Create different arrangements of objects

Select and develop the most interesting ideas.

Questions?

- What would happen if.....?
- Which other materials and processes do you want to explore?
- What gets put on the table day to day – how could you record this?
- How can you map what moves across the table – words, conversations, objects?

Don't stop

Every time something is put on the table, draw it, or a make a rubbing of it.
Collage onto the table fragments of conversations, names, words which describe an atmosphere or feeling.
Take photos of the work as it develops.

Emergency restart

Isn't looking quite right? Stop and take a look. What could you change or improve?
Are the materials you're using working for you? If not what might be better?
Take a break – go and make a cup of tea and come back to what you're doing later.

Remember accidents and mistakes are unavoidable and are all part of the process.



How did it go?

How do you know when it's over?

Is the idea completely exhausted?

Has a new starting point appeared?

Any surprises?

Have you ended up with things you're not sure work? Keep these; they may be useful in the future.

Did you enjoy it?

What have you been able to do that you thought you couldn't do?

What were the best bits?

What was it that you liked most? It might have been: -

- The thinking
- Experimenting with materials
- Problem solving
- Expressing yourself
- The process
- The happy accidents
- The thing you ended up with
- Or perhaps other people's reaction?



What next?

Choose another starting point

Use what worked well as the starting point for something new.

Think about what you did and how you did it.

Give yourself a challenge

When you feel you have created something you'd like to share, or show to, other people, look for opportunities to exhibit your work.

Tell a friend

Do you have friends who like to paint, draw or make things? Perhaps you could form a group to meet and discuss ideas?