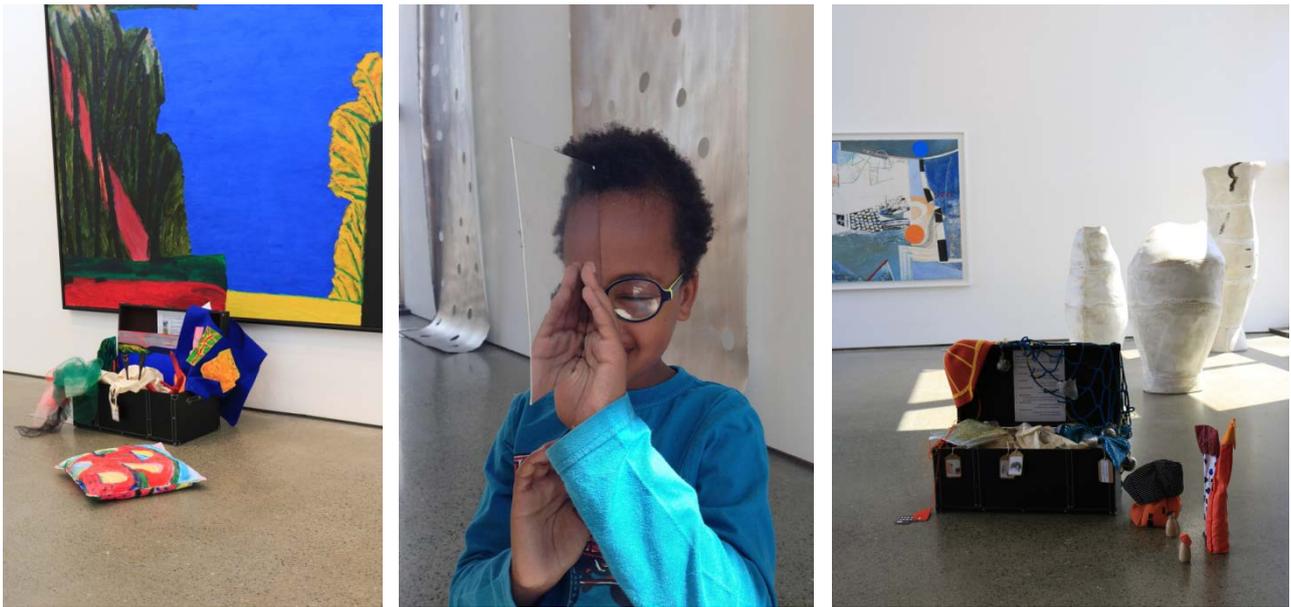


## What is Discovery Box?

Discovery Box is a free, self-directed gallery resource for parents and carers to use with their young children in the gallery. It encourages adults and children to engage with the exhibition, see and interact with the artwork and gain insight into the exhibiting artists' practice.

The Discovery Box is not about making art and does not include art materials. Rather, it is a series of imaginative tools to employ the creative mind and to investigate the artwork through play and conversation. By participating, it creates a space for people to spend more time with the artwork and the exhibition.



l-r: William Crozier: *The Edge of the Landscape* (15 July to 31 August 2017), Commissioned artist: Toma McCullim. Image by Zenda Williams. Laura Gannon: *Silverhouse* (18 July to 10 August 2015), Commissioned artist: Sarah Ruttle. West Meets West: Philip Booth, Matthew Lanyon, Tony Lattimer (3 June to 8 July 2017), Commissioned artist Sarah Ruttle. Image by Zenda Williams. Images courtesy of Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre.

## Who is it for?

Discovery Box is specifically designed for young children aged 18 months to 6 years and their parents / adult carers to use autonomously, both one to one or as groups of friends.

A child psychologist was consulted to advise on understanding the experience from a child's perspective particularly the 18 months to 3 years age group. How do children make meaning of their experience? When do they begin to conceptualise? How best to communicate the activities?

Children between 18 months and 2 years enjoy touching and handling the objects, taking them in and out of the Box and the containers within, stacking and building towers and responding to their parent or sibling. Older children engage in imaginative play and story-telling. While simple instructions are provided, they are presented as cues and ideas to help the parent to engage with the activities. The focus is on enabling a child-directed experience.

Junior/senior infant school groups have also used the Discovery Box with the aid of a Gallery Educator and young teenagers have used it independently with their friends. Further investigation is underway to understand and respond to the potential for all ages.

From time to time, Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre presents once-off Discovery Box events where small groups of children, or children and their parents, are guided through the exhibition by a gallery educator, using the objects and ideas in the Discovery Box.



*Curiosity Club* with Zenda Williams at William Crozier : *The Edge of Landscape* (15 July to 31 august 2017). Image by Kevin O'Farrell. Image courtesy Uillinn West Cork Arts Centre

In March 2017, *Curiosity Club* was launched as a gallery-based, facilitated weekly programme for children aged 4 to 6, encouraging playful interaction with the artworks, nurturing confidence in navigating contemporary art spaces and utilising the Discovery Box as a key tool.

## Background

West Cork Arts Centre began this programme during an exhibition by Graham Crowley in 2008 and since then, more than a dozen other Discovery Boxes have been commissioned to engage with specific exhibitions. As each box is created, more is understood about the process of engaging with very young children.

In 2010, WCAC convened an advisory group in order to draw in local resources and learn more about working with very young children, and to support the development of an Early Years' Programme through a strategic partnership approach. The Arts and Early Childhood Partnership, West Cork included the HSE

South Community Work Department; County Cork ETB's Community Education Programme; Cork County Library and the Cork County Childcare Committee.

The Discovery Box is a significant and successful aspect of this work with young children and is supported by events, workshops and performances.



*Landmarks and Lifeforms*: Frieda Meaney and Danny Osborne (10 March to 20 April 2017). Commissioned artist Toma McCullim. *Curiosity Club* with Zenda Williams, image by Toma McCullim. Image courtesy of Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre.

## Touring Discovery Box

While a number of exhibition-specific Discovery Box commissions had taken place, an award to document the process from the Arts Council, combined with the playful potential of Mikala Dwyer's *Panto Collapsar* exhibition at WCAC in 2013, gave the Discovery Box a new impetus. The additional support from the Arts Council allowed for a deeper reflection on both the process and the engagement, and facilitated more time to discuss, reflect on, and understand what we were trying to achieve.

An added bonus was that the *Panto Collapsar* exhibition was supported by the Project Arts Centre, Dublin and an Arts Council Touring and Dissemination Award to tour to 6 other venues across the nation over a year. The *Panto Collapsar* Discover Box, developed by West Cork Arts Centre toured with the exhibition. This meant that the additional time and resources invested in the development of this Discovery Box had added value. It also meant we had to consider the robustness and longevity of the contents and the utilisation of the Discovery Box within venues without the on-site support on the artist creator.

Four other Discovery Boxes have since toured to various venues. Where a venue has a dedicated person responsible for education or public encounters, the Discovery Box has added value and a stronger impact.

## Acknowledgements

Discovery Box was devised, and is managed by Justine Foster, Programme Manager: Education & Community, West Cork Arts Centre.

Discovery Box Witness Writer: Toma McCullim

Discovery Box Consultant: Jo Boniface, HSE Senior Clinical Psychologist.

Documentation and development of the Discovery Box concept was funded by The Arts Council in 2013 and involved Justine Foster, Toma McCullim, Susan Montgomery and Sarah Ruttle. WCAC was one of six organisations involved in the research project - *Documenting Early Childhood Arts Practice*, whose aim was to contribute to the development of a repository of good practice resources and demonstrations to promote the development of high quality early childhood arts practice in Ireland as well as to demonstrate effective methods of enabling access to high quality arts experience to this age cohort.

The artists who contributed to the development of the Discovery Box concept: Tomasz Madaczak, Toma McCullim, Susan Montgomery and Sarah Ruttle.

Arts and Early Childhood Partnership, West Cork (2010 - 2015): Justine Foster, WCAC; Teresa O'Sullivan, ETB BTEI Coordinator; Michael Plaice, Executive Librarian, West Cork; Gina Kelly, HSE Community Worker; Sonia Caldwell, Artist and Parent Advocate and Noreen Brazier, Cork County Childcare.

#DiscoveryBox

#CuriosityClub



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