

Practising Freedoms

Embodied and creative enquiry into justice and freedom

Renee Odjidja

As the world faces increasingly complex and interconnected global challenges, the need for nuanced, personal, and critical reflections on justice and freedom is more urgent.

How do we develop an understanding of ourselves as embodied beings within broader social, cultural, historical and political contexts? How do we identify and critically interrogate the systems of power, privilege, oppression, resistance and liberation that shape our everyday lives?

The renowned feminist writer and educator **bell hooks** encourages us to look inward and outward by recognizing ourselves as **already knowers**: to value our lived and embodied experiences (memories, feelings, thoughts, histories and identities) as essential sources of knowledge. These forms of knowledge become the foundation to cultivate the critical awareness needed to challenge dominant systems such as patriarchy, sexism, classism and racism.

In next week's workshops, we will explore how embodied and artistic processes can foster our personal exploration of justice and freedom.

Using processes such as body mapping and object elicitation, along with multiple languages, collective sharing and discussion, we will examine the body as a site of lived and situated knowledge.

We will consider how emotions, sensations and experiences are felt within the body and how these extend outward to connect with broader structures of power, freedom, (in)justice, social norms and expectations.

These workshops are not intended to cover all aspects of justice and freedom. Instead, they are facilitated sessions that offer prompts and creative methods for self-inquiry. Your explorations should continue well beyond the workshops, guided by your own interests and experiences. You will receive a link to a Padlet resource to extend your enquiry and to which you are invited to contribute.

These workshops form part of Renee's PgCert in Academic Practice and Action Research Project (see next page).

What is the PgCert



Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Art, Design and Communication

A one-year course where UAL staff learn from each other whilst interrogating and enhancing our own teaching and learning practice.

Teaching qualification in Higher Education

Lead a small-scale inclusive research project with the potential to transform student experience.

What is Action Research

A process where teachers

Identify an educational situation or challenge in our teaching practice

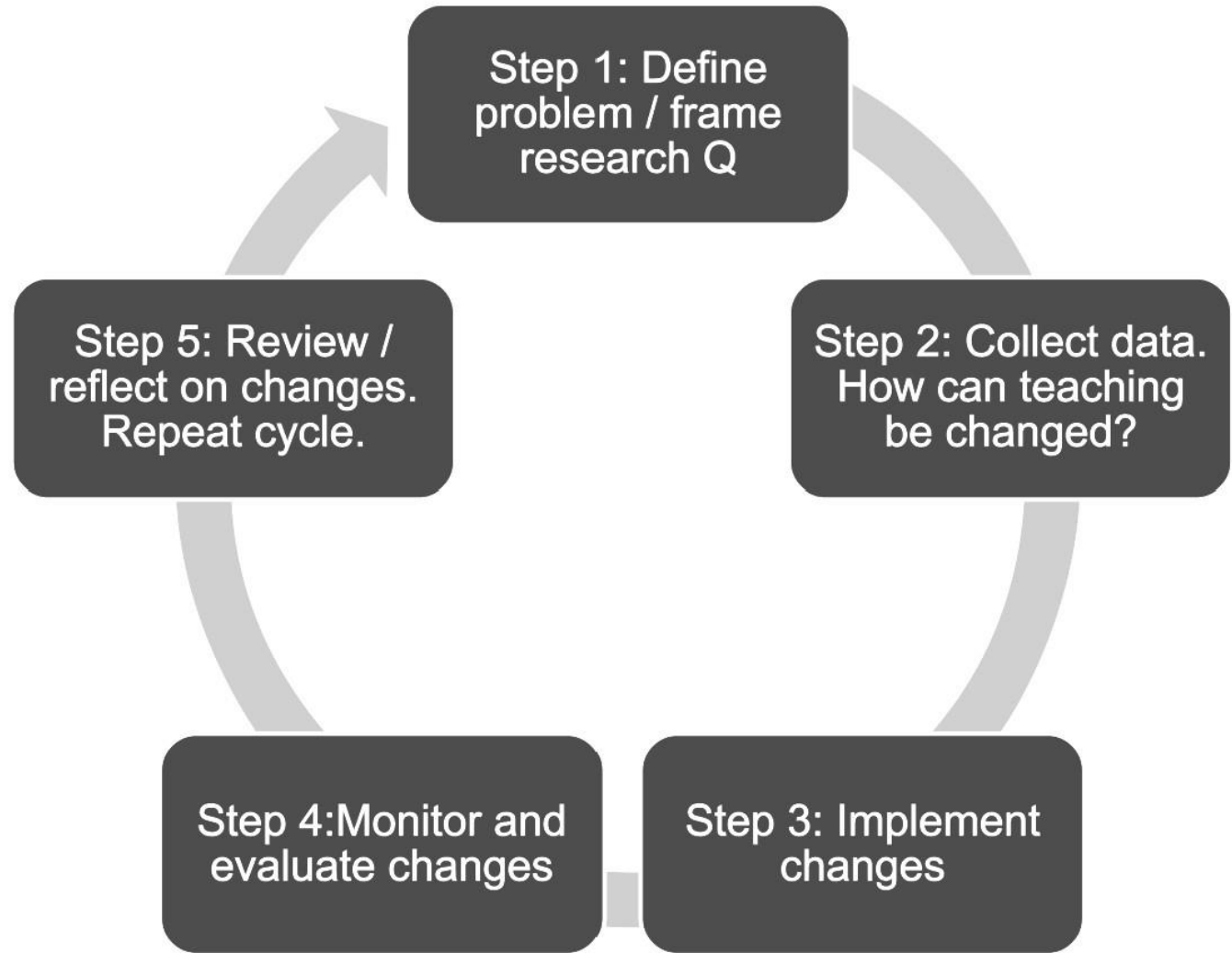
Investigate it and take an action

Observe and evaluate

Use findings to improve our teaching and our students' learning.

We all do some form of action research in our lives

Action Research Cycle



1. Define the problem

Considering social, racial, and/or climate justice

Within UAL's curriculum, students are expected to consider and engage critically with questions of social, racial and/or climate justice. This aligns with the university's 2022-2032 Strategy and Educational Ethics Code, both of which emphasize the development of ethically engaged and socially responsible creative practitioners.

In Year 1 Drawing, the justice considerations were first introduced two years ago in Unit 3, where students were required to write a 1000-word exhibition review and to consider questions of social, racial, and/or climate justice when doing so. After assessing student work across this period, I have observed that **many students treat the justice considerations as a surface-level, passive, or “tick-box” exercise** rather than as a meaningful, reflexive and personally relevant component of their learning.

1. Define the problem

Considering social, racial, and/or climate justice

Why might this be?

Little time given to introduce it (2-3 hours)

Students may not put in or have the time to research

Have an expectation of what they think tutors want to see rather than what is of interest to them

Do not really care and just want to write about art – it feels like an add-on

May not know how to engage with justice personally

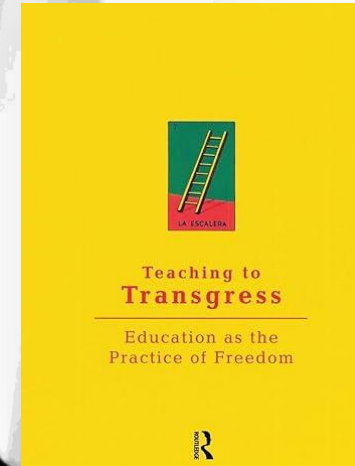
Struggle with their own sense of ethics not aligning with UAL's ethics

The traditional 'banking' teaching model: teachers deposit knowledge through demonstration

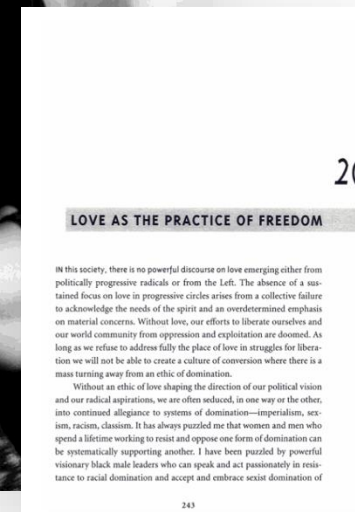
This frames justice as content to learn about not something that is felt, lived or experienced

2. How can teaching be changed?

bell hooks



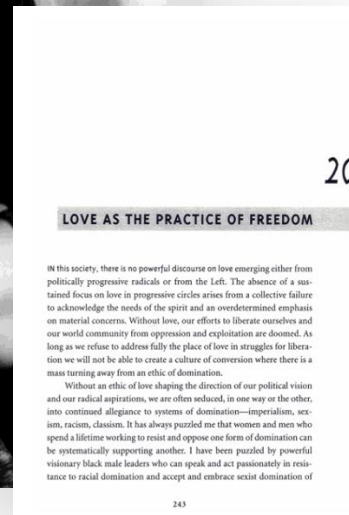
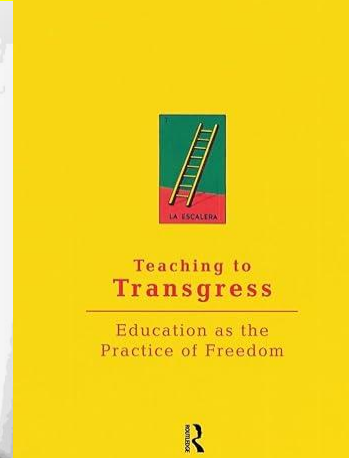
Engaged Pedagogy



bell hooks - Engaged Pedagogy

- Engaged pedagogy is an education philosophy
- Moves from the traditional, instruction model of education
- To co-creating a dialogic (two-way) learning environment
- Recognizes students as active participants and not passive consumers
- Recognizes students as already knowers
- Your lived, situated and embodied experiences matter in fostering critical consciousness of the systems of liberation, power, and oppression that shape our lives
- Values one another's presence and acknowledges one another's voices
- Collaborative process involving mutual vulnerability
- Bring whole selves into the classroom, holistic approach to education (mind+body+spirit)
- Teachers commit to the process of self-actualization

bell hooks - Practising Freedoms



My research title '**Practising Freedoms**' pays homage to the renowned feminist writer, scholar and educator, **bell hooks**.

Her work advocates **education as the practice of freedom** in which teachers and students co-create a dialogic and liberatory classroom community where everyone is empowered to bring their lived and embodied experiences as important sources of knowledge. These experiences serve as the foundation for critically interrogating and transgressing dominant systems like racism, classism, sexism and patriarchy. It encourages embracing the full intellectual and emotional dimensions of education.

3. Action – Next week

In Studio (C216)

Monday 24th Nov, 10.30 – 16.30 = Group 1 (half of Y1)

Tuesday 25th Nov, 10.00 – 16.00 = Group 2 (half of Y1)

At Drawing Room

Thursday 27th Nov, 12.00 – 14.30 = Group 1

Thursday 27th Nov, 14.30 – 17.00 = Group 2



[See schedule here](#)



Joydeb Roaja, *Submerged Dream 7*, 2022, Ink pen on paper, 243 x 152 cm

3. Action – Implement change

Explore: What is justice and freedom?

Artistic and embodied processes: Body mapping, object elicitation, use of multiple languages, storytelling

Dialogue: how do we share the space and relate to each other respectfully and ethically?
Co-create ground rules

Care: how do we create a space to have challenging conversations considering care for ourselves and for others?

3. Action – Artistic & Embodied research methods



Object elicitation

Thinking Feeling Making with Paper

Respond to prompts by using different types and textures of paper to create forms that express, recall, or discuss emotions or experiences.

3. Action – Artistic & Embodied research methods

Body mapping

A method for visualizing a person's body, which is accompanied by texts, drawings and symbols to explore the person's sensations, emotions, lived experience and social contexts.

A method of storytelling and embodied witnessing.



Some examples of body mapping

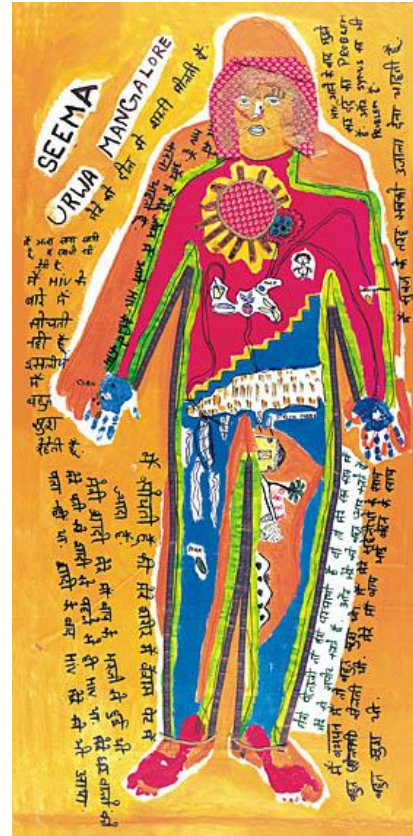
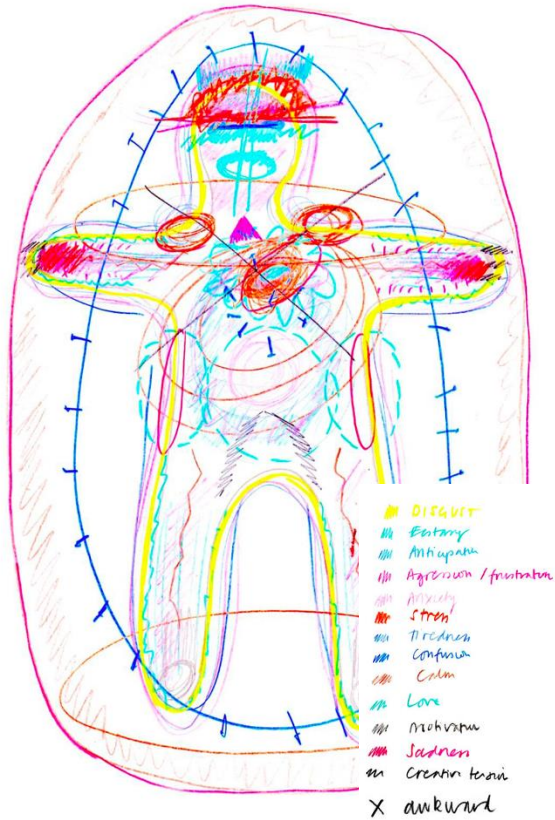


Image sources

Collective body mapping from *Alone Together: Duchamp & Sons with Seth Pimlott*, Whitechapel Gallery ([link](#))

Exploring Embodied Experience via Videoconferencing: A Method for Body Mapping Online ([link](#))

Our Positive Bodies: Mapping Our Treatment, Sharing Our Choices ([link](#))

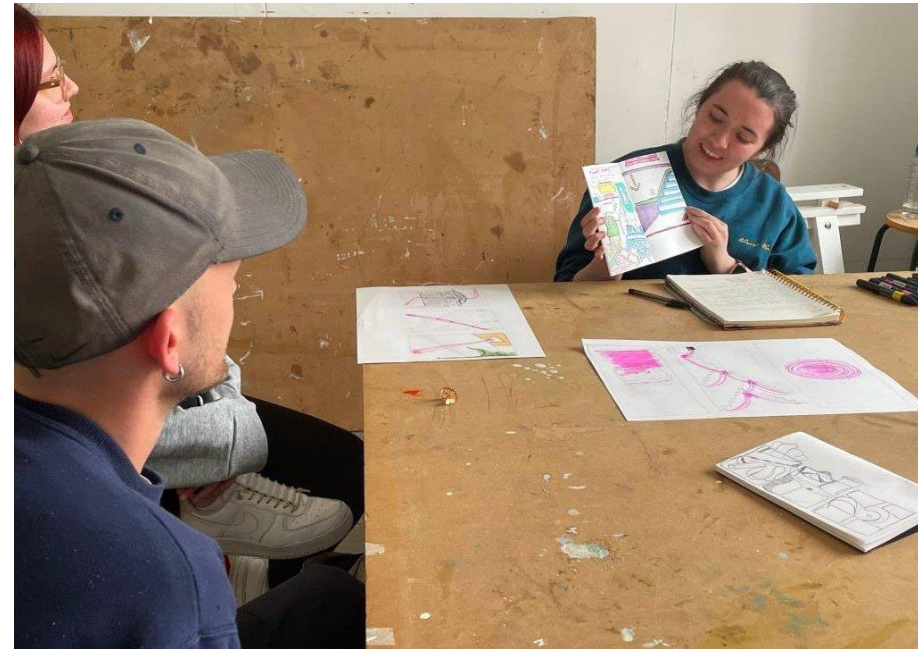
Using our mother tongues
or
the language we know
most intimately

(alongside English)



whose voices and knowledges are being legitimized and communicated?
whose voices are being silenced or left out?

Dialogic – sharing and discussing in small groups and with everyone



Only share what you feel comfortable with

Visit + workshop at Drawing Room

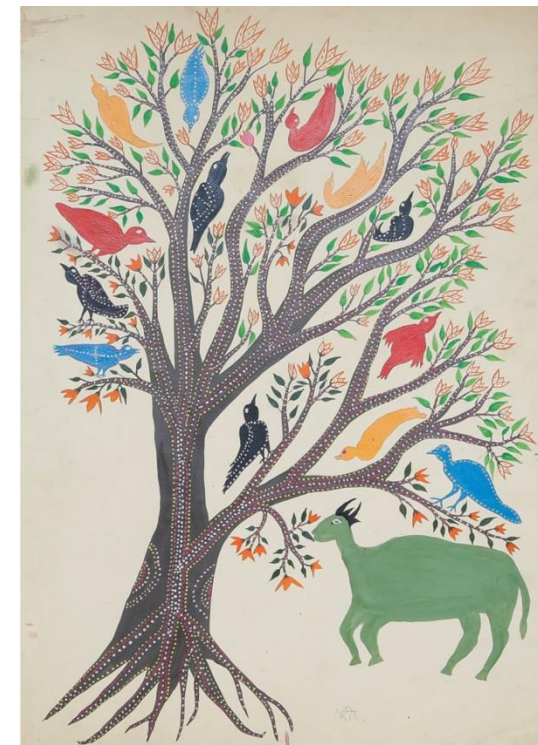
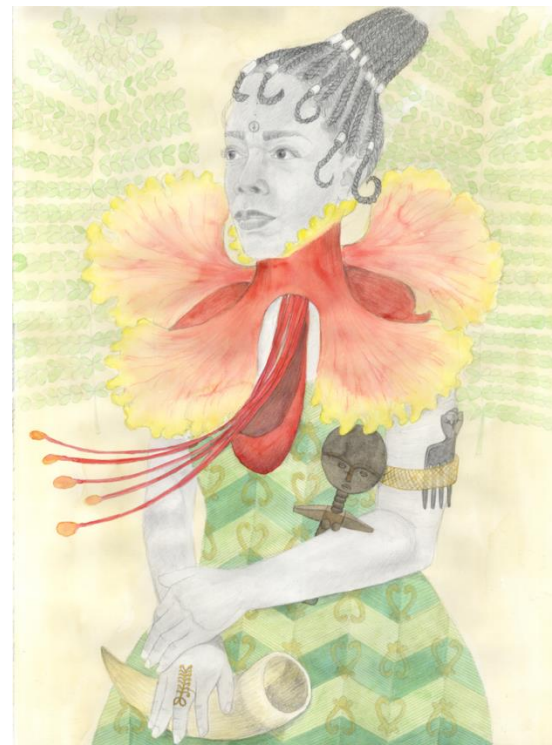


Manjot Kaur, Hybrid Beings 2022, Gouache and watercolour on paper, 46 x 50 cm

Through a lens of environmental justice, [The Land Sings Back](#) approaches drawing as an active agent of social history, Indigenous knowledge and ecofeminist philosophy, rather than as a tool of illustration, classification and conquest.



Some works in the exhibition



Artworks

Anupam Roy, Time is Sloshing 2, 2023, distemper, acrylic & black pigment on tarpaulin, 182.8 x 274.3 cm

Charmaine Watkiss, The warrior exercises the right to dissent, 2025, coffee, water soluble graphite, pencil, coloured pencil, watercolour & shell gold on paper, 76 x 56 cm

Lado Bai, Peele ka ped (Peepal Tree), early 1980s, gouache on paper, 71.5 x 50.8 cm

During the workshops, I will

Facilitate

Observe

Take photos while you work (with your permission)

Make notes before and after

Reflect at the end of each day

Ask you to keep your works

Invite you to give short verbal and/or written feedback on Padlet

Share Padlet resource and invite you to contribute

By the end of the workshops, you will be able to

- **Recognize** the body as a site of lived and situated knowledge.
- **Apply** embodied and creative research methods (such as body mapping and object elicitation) to explore and articulate lived experiences related to justice and freedom.
- **Critically reflect** on your experiences and **connect** these insights to broader structures of power, privilege oppression, resistance and liberation.
- **Recognize** how materials, processes, techniques, and visual elements can bring meaning to artworks.
- **Practice engaged pedagogy** by co-creating knowledge, honouring multiple ways of knowing and participating in dialogic learning.

These align with the Unit 2 Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, you will be able to:

Learning Outcomes	
LO1	Engage in practice informed by the analysis and evaluation of materials, processes, and techniques [Enquiry] .
LO2	Evidence experimentation with materials, processes, and techniques, review the results, and your decisions [Process] .
LO3	Demonstrate a practical and technical knowledge of materials, processes and techniques, recognition of their implications and awareness of their consequences. [Knowledge] .
LO4	Set out intentions, observations, and reflections in relation to materials, processes, techniques and consequences [Communication] .

4. Evaluate changes - I will use

the works, photographs, observations, discussions, interviews and your participation to inform my reflection, analysis and findings.

These will help me evaluate

how dialogic, artistic, and embodied processes can foster students' personal exploration of justice.

4. Evaluate changes - I will

- store data (documentation, feedback, audio recordings) for 1 year to continue to reflect beyond PgCert, after which they will be permanently deleted.
- share my findings with you next year.

Students needed for Focus Group

Date: Wed 3rd Dec 2025

Time: 10.00 – 12.00

Location: Drawing Office in Y1 Drawing Studio

Looking for 10 students to take part in a semi-structured group interview with Renee to discuss your experience of the workshops and visit and help shape future teaching on justice in Y1 Drawing.

You can list your participation in this interview on your CV as a substantive contribution to the Practising Freedoms research project.

Refreshments will be provided!



[Sign up here](#)

Thank you in advance for taking part!

Renee Odjidja