

Valda Jackson

Biography

Place of birth: St. Thomas, Jamaica

Date of arrival in Bristol: 1986

Valda is a gifted artist who makes paintings in oils and beautiful sculptures from her art studio in Bristol. Her strong and graceful images are usually of African-Caribbean people.

Valda and her two sisters travelled to Birmingham, England from Jamaica in 1964 to join their parents. She remembers that school in the 1960s and 1970s was frightening and that some of the teachers and children were racist. They were not used to having Black pupils in their classes. All of the teachers and most of the children in her school were white.



Valda Jackson
Photo courtesy of Valda Jackson

In contrast, Valda says that the Pentecostal Church that she attended at the time gave her a sense of belonging and a feeling of safety within a Black community. This helped her to cope with the isolation she felt in school.

Although she enjoyed drawing, painting, music and dance as a child, she did not begin to study art until she left school. She attended evening classes in Birmingham taking 'A' levels in Art and Art History.

In 1986 Valda came to Bristol to study Fine Art at Bower Ashton College of Art and Design, now the University of the West of England. She lived in Hartcliffe for the whole of her first year in Bristol.



Self portrait of Valda – pictured as child and adult
Photo courtesy of Valda Jackson

However, Valda was dismayed by the way that Black people were represented in art. Paintings, sculpture, and films usually showed them in a serving role or entertaining others. As a visual artist, Valda understood very well how much these images could influence people's lives.

She realised how important it was for her to make real and honest pictures of herself and other Black men, women and children. Valda successfully fought the college to have a Black model for the students to draw and paint. From then on Valda was able to make the sort of work that was important to her.

Valda's first exhibition was at the Malcolm X Centre in Bristol, but her artwork has now been shown in exhibitions throughout the country, including the famous National Portrait Gallery in London. Her sculptures can also be seen in several places in England and Wales.

In 2002 Valda was invited by Bristol City Council to create an artwork for the new Family and Learning Centre in St. Paul's. She decided to create an artwork with bricks rather than a painted mural. This can be seen on the outside end wall and is called *All Our Tomorrows*. It is a tribute to the importance of education and celebrates the diverse cultures within St. Paul's and Bristol as a whole.

Valda has taught drawing, painting and sculpture in schools and colleges and universities. More recently, she has worked throughout the South West region, for example as a resident artist in Millpond Primary and Filton Avenue Nursery Schools.



Father and Child, a detail from the relief seen on the outside of the St. Paul's Family & Learning Centre
Photo courtesy of Valda Jackson

Valda quotes a message written in the 'comments' book by a visitor to her first solo show in St. Paul's which strengthened her decision to make art:

“ I feel that the portrayal of the women on the canvas has captured the whole history and feeling of our race. I found it deeply moving. ”

Valda Jackson

■ Teachers' Background Notes

Valda is a gifted artist who makes paintings in oils and beautiful sculptures from her studio in Bristol. Her subjects are mainly people of African-Caribbean heritage who are represented with honesty and grace.

Valda travelled with her two older sisters from Jamaica to Birmingham, England in 1964 to join their parents who were invited along with many other people from the Caribbean to work and help build the Britain that we live in today.

She remembers that school in the 1960s and 1970s was, for her, frightening and racist. All of the teachers and most of the children in her school were white. Many teachers were not used to having Black children in their class and some were racist. She says that one teacher physically and verbally abused her. Valda remembers that when her sister complained to a teacher about a girl who kept on calling her an insulting and racist name, the teacher's response was "Well, you are!"

In contrast, for Valda, the Pentecostal Church that she attended provided a more balancing influence on her life. It gave her a sense of belonging and a feeling of safety within a Black community and this environment helped Valda to cope with the isolation experienced in school.

Valda was not encouraged to have a career in art, and although she enjoyed drawing, painting, music and dance as a child she did not actually begin to study art until she left school. She attended evening classes at Bourneville College of Art, Birmingham, taking 'A' levels in Art and Art History.

In 1986, Valda came to Bristol to study Fine Art at Bower Ashton College of Art and Design, then part of Bristol Polytechnic now the University of the West of England. In her first year she lived in Hartcliffe. As a newcomer to Bristol, Valda felt protected by her landlady, neighbours, and bus drivers from any racial tension which existed and she remained in the neighbourhood for the whole of her first year of studies.

Valda was not the first Black student to attend Bower Ashton, but she was the only Black student studying Fine Art in her year. It was quite an isolating experience for her and she struggled with her own feelings of exclusion and the lack of awareness in other people.

Valda was dismayed at how Black people were represented in art. Paintings, sculpture, and films usually showed them in a serving role or entertaining others. As a visual artist, she understood very well the power of these images to influence lives.

She realised how important it was for her to make real and honest representations of herself and other Black men, women and children. She decided to spend less time drawing the white models provided by the college. As a fee-paying student, Valda thought that the college should provide at least one Black model. When she put this to her tutor, he said that the request was “perverse”. However, during her third and final year, Valda managed to find herself a young Black model and the college agreed to pay for her, as they did for the other models. From then on Valda was able to make the sort of work that was important to her.

Valda’s work has been exhibited throughout the country. Her first exhibition was in 1990 at the Malcolm X Centre in Bristol. She exhibited at the Morley Gallery, Westminster in London and was a prizewinner for two years running in the Millfield Open Art Exhibition, in 1991 and 1992. She has also exhibited work at the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Valda’s public art sculptures can be seen in several places in England and Wales. In 1995 she produced a life-size carving called *Mare and Foal* in Newmarket. In 2000 she created a public sculpture of a steam engine, which is sited at Station Approach in Newport City Centre, Wales.

Valda was invited by Bristol City Council in 2002 to create an artwork for the end wall of the new Family and Learning Centre in St. Paul’s. She decided upon a permanent brick relief rather than a painted mural. The artwork can be seen on the outside wall and is called *All Our Tomorrows*. It is a tribute to the importance of education and celebrates the diverse cultures within St. Paul’s and Bristol.

Valda has taught drawing, painting and sculpture in a number of institutions. She was a tutor at Cardiff Institute of Art and Design, and she lectured in Fine Art at the University of Central England in Birmingham.

More recently, Valda has worked in schools and colleges throughout the South West region including being resident artist at Millpond Primary School, and drawing and portrait workshops at Sea Mills Primary School.

Valda is currently resident artist at Filton Avenue Nursery School working with the children and staff to help them to explore and develop their creativity.

A visitor to Valda’s first solo show in St. Paul’s, Bristol wrote a message in the comments book that encouraged Valda and strengthened her decision to make art. The message read:

“I feel that the portrayal of the women on the canvas has captured the whole history and feeling of our race... I found it deeply moving.”

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■ Suggested Activities

These are suggested activities based on Valda Jackson's biography. The activities in bold print have a detailed lesson plan on following pages.

| Foundation Stage/ KS1 Activities | KS2 Activities | KS3 Activities |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Visit Valda's sculpture on the side of St. Paul's Learning Centre and/or look at pictures of her other sculptures.* Make our own sculptures.</p> | <p>Portraits Use different mediums to create portraits of each other. Discuss different effects and pupils' preferences. Visit National Portrait Gallery website http://www.npg.org.uk</p> | <p>Pentecostal Church Compare Pentecostal beliefs with those of the Church of England/Roman Catholic e.g. style of worship, music, membership, celebrations. Invite leaders from the above movements to be interviewed.</p> |
| <p>Investigate art Look at art in the local area. Take pictures and use to discuss what we like and what we don't. Visit or look at an example of Valda's work. Describe the style. Would it improve our local area?</p> | <p>Art project Invite an artist into school to interview or work with the pupils on a project.</p> | <p>Portrait gallery Visit National Portrait Gallery website http://www.npg.org.uk (Art)</p> |
| <p>Portraits Provide pencils, pens, chinks, pastels, paints etc including skin colour sets and mirrors to encourage pupils to make a self portrait. Discuss skin colour, and use as opportunity to make accurate representations of skin colour in a variety of mediums.</p> | <p>Asking Questions Read biography. Pupils to underline where they want to ask a question. Groups to discuss and choose one question to ask the class. Share questions from groups and discuss.</p> | <p>Sculptures Visit or look at photo of Valda's sculptures. Look at statue of Nelson Mandela. Research different materials from which sculptures are made. Share personal preferences. (Art).</p> |

*See the resource list for details

Valda Jackson

■ Lesson Plan: Art in the Local Community

(FS - CLL/CD, KS1 - DT)

FS/KS1

2:7

Valda Jackson Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- To express feelings and preferences in response to own work and that of others.
- To learn about the work of one artist.
- To learn that Black and minority ethnic people have contributed to the field of Art.

| Key words/phrases | Resources | Organisation/Grouping |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Descriptive words | Biography/picture of artist | Whole class |
| Question words | Camera | Groups |
| Why/because | | |

Suggested activities

- Share Valda's biography and show her picture.
 - Take pictures of art in the locality of school environment.
 - Discuss what we like and what we don't like. Encourage pupils to give reason to justify preferences.
 - Visit or look at examples of Valda's work. Talk about her work and discuss whether it would improve the local environment.
 - Create own art piece, building on the discussion about the different styles of Valda's work.
-

Plenary

- Pupils to share work that they have created.
 - Encourage pupils to show and justify preference.
-

Learning outcome/Success criterias

- Pupils can show and justify preference.
 - Pupils have created their own art piece.
 - Pupils know that Black and minority ethnic people have contributed to the field of art.
-

Assessment opportunities

Language of observation.

Homework task/Parent/Carer involvement

To find pictures or works of art from magazines, newspaper etc. liked by family members. Invite parent/carers into class to help create/develop pupil's own art piece.

*See the resource list for details

Valda Jackson

■ Lesson Plan: Portraits (Art)

Learning objectives

- To learn about different aspects of drawing portraits.
- To use a variety of mediums to draw portraits.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contribute to the field of Art in Bristol.

| Key words/phrases | Resources | Organisation/Grouping |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Portraits | Valda Jackson's biography/picture | Whole class |
| Gallery | Collection of portraits | Pairs |

Suggested activities

- Share Valda's biography/pictures and look at her portraits.
- Pupils working in pairs look at a portrait. Discuss aspects of the portrait e.g. pose, what is included in the portrait and why.
- Pupils use a variety of mediums to draw a portrait of each other. Display portraits.

Plenary

- Share portraits with class.

Learning outcome/Success criterias

- Pupils know about different aspects of drawing portraits.
- Pupils are able to use different mediums to draw portraits.
- Pupils know about Valda Jackson and her contribution to art in Bristol.

Assessment opportunities

Artistic skills.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Talk about favourite artist. Find out about parents'/carers' favourite piece of art. Create favourite art database for display.

*See the resource list for details

■ Lesson Plan: Christian beliefs (RE/PSHE)

Learning objectives

- To know about Christian beliefs.
- To learn about similarities and differences between the Pentecostal movement and that of Church of England or Roman Catholic beliefs.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contribute to Bristol.

| Key words/phrases | Resources | Organisation/Grouping |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Christian/Christianity | Valda Jackson's biography/picture. | Whole class |
| Pentecostal | Information on Pentecostal, | Small groups |
| Church of England | Church of England and | |
| Roman Catholic | Roman Catholic beliefs. | |
| Beliefs | Christian church leaders | |
| Faith | Matters of Faith folder – Bristol SACRE* | |
| Movement | | |

Suggested activities

- Read/share Valda Jackson's biography and pictures.
- In pairs talk about beliefs/what shapes our beliefs e.g. family, culture traditions, environment, politics etc.
- Using information provided on Pentecostal, Church of England and Roman Catholic movements devise a survey to interview two Christian church leaders. The following headings could be used: Style of worship, prayer, music/instruments, becoming a member. Work in small groups.
- Interview the church leaders. Make notes and write up for display.

Plenary

- Share main points of group discussion with whole class.

Learning outcome/Success criterias

- Pupils will know about Christian beliefs.
- Pupils will know similarities and differences between different movements in Christianity.
- Pupils will know about Valda Jackson and her contribution to Bristol.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Talk about family beliefs.

*See the resource list for details

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■ Resources

- National Portrait Gallery – <http://www.npg.org.uk>
- Matters of Faith folder – Bristol SACRE in all Bristol schools.

Contact details

Name: Valda Jackson

Tel: 0117 903 8828/0117 944 2004

Email: valdajackson@yahoo.co.uk

Willing to be contacted by teachers for further questions? Yes

Willing to come into school to talk to pupils? Yes
