

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Not Vital

Underground Gallery, Garden Gallery and open air
21.05.16–02.01.17

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is for teachers and group leaders visiting the Not Vital exhibition with their students. It provides questions and ideas for creative activities which can be completed in the gallery or back at school. Teachers can adapt and select from these suggestions as appropriate to their group.

There is also the Not Vital **Exhibition Guide** and **Resource Pack** which provide more information about the artist and his work. A **Family Activities Leaflet** includes talking points and child-centred activities which can also be used by school groups.

All resources can be downloaded from the YSP website at yssp.co.uk/NotVital. The Exhibition Guide and Family Activities Leaflet can also be picked up at YSP Centre and in the Underground Gallery.

THE ARTIST

'I think if you grow up in surroundings where you have snow for six months of the year, your eyes are naturally sensitive to white. Then when the snow melts, the mountains turn grey...So I became accustomed to these nuances in grey and white and not so much colour. Even now, my favourite material is plaster, not only because of the colour, but also because of the speed. It dries quickly. You have to work fast'

Not Vital

Born in 1948 in Sent, Switzerland, Not Vital grew up amongst the mountains and forests of the lower Engadin valley. His first language is Romansch, the rarest of Switzerland's dialects. Today he speaks six languages and is very much an explorer and global citizen. He works with craftsmen from around the world, from steel chasers in Beijing and glass blowers in Murano, to silversmiths in Agadez and papermakers in Bhutan.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Not Vital is from the tiny Swiss village of Sent in the mountainous region of Engadin, which borders Austria and Italy. Today, Not has studios in Beijing, Rio de Janeiro and Niger. This exhibition reflects Not's nomadic and diverse art practice which includes sculptures made from plaster, silver, gold, marble, glass and coal as well as paintings and large, outdoor sculptures in stainless steel and bronze.

The main exhibition is presented in the Underground Gallery and 43 works on paper, called *The Laos Series* (2016), are on display in the Garden Gallery. There are large stainless steel sculptures outdoors, including *Tongue* (2010) in the Bothy Garden, *Let 100 Flowers Bloom* (2008) on the Formal Terrace and *Pelvis* (2008) in the Country Park; and five new ceramic *HEADS* (2016) outside the Underground Gallery.



Many of Vital's projects and artworks involve a communal experience of people interacting with the sculptures or being involved in their making. Often combining art with architecture, Vital creates sculptures from which to experience the world. Travel, geography, animals, community, identity and nature are all part of Vital's work and his view of the world.

IDENTITY

'What I like about these paintings is that they're an inner vision of yourself and other people. It's like taking an x-ray to see what's inside' Not Vital

- ♦ Which works in the exhibition do you think are portraits?
- ♦ How do you think they have been made?
- ♦ What is unusual about them?



Not Vital, **HEADS**, 2013. Stainless steel. Courtesy the artist. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Self-portraits show Vital inhabiting another identity or being someone or something else. These could be his 'alter-egos', his 'other selves'. In some self-portraits he imagines himself from a different country or as a completely different person.

- ♦ What other roles or identities do we have?
- ♦ Think of an identity which is far away from who you are now
- ♦ Imagine yourself with a different nationality
- ♦ What person would you be from the past?
- ♦ Invent your alter-ego or your own disguise
- ♦ Draw a picture of yourself as someone or something else
- ♦ Do ever feel differently about yourself at different times?
- ♦ How would your 'alter-ego' change with how you feel?

In *The Last Supper* (2015), in **Gallery One**, painted shapes suggest faces. It alludes to famous paintings of Christ's Last Supper. Even though we can't see their features, each face is different. In **Gallery Two**, *HEADS* (2013) are based on real people but are pared back into simple forms.

- ♦ How do you think the heads in *HEADS* have been made?

- ♦ Look carefully at the reflections. Are we and the gallery, within or outside the *HEADS*, or both?
- ♦ Imagine who you think the heads could be portraits of
- ♦ Draw the outline of one of the heads as one continuous line. Can you capture the sense of it being a portrait?

In the **Foyer** is *Self-portrait* (2006), made up of two silver boxes. The dimensions of *Self-portrait* relate to the artist's birthdate: the main rectangle is 19cm x 48cm (1948, the year Vital was born) and the top section is 2cm x 15cm (15 February, the day he was born).

- ♦ When were you born?
- ♦ Try and draw your date of birth as a shape, just as Not Vital has

BACK AT SCHOOL

- ♦ Find out the birthdays of your family or friends
- ♦ What would their 'birthday shapes' be?
- ♦ Use rulers and scale to draw your birthday shapes
- ♦ What happens if you add all your shapes together?
- ♦ Using paper or card transform your designs into 3D

ARCHITECTURE

Vital travels and has homes across the world.

'The first home or hut I constructed was as a child, during those long summer vacation months in Sent. It was phenomenal to be able to build your own house at such an early age and live in it, and in such a harsh environment.'

Vital has created structures and homes which are both architecture and sculpture. A naturally formed marble island in Patagonia was transformed into a sculpture by excavating a large underground chamber. In Niger, Vital built a tall narrow platform, accessed only by a ladder called *House to Watch the Night Skies* (2006).

'I would have a house to watch the sunset even if I could only spend one night there. Next day it could have crumbled, and it would have been fine, because I had this one night of an experience.'

Outside the Underground Gallery is a model of *House to Watch the Sunset* (2005).

- ♦ How is this house different to other houses?
- ♦ How would it feel to explore it?
- ♦ Use a compass to find out where the sun would set and where it would rise. Imagine the sun setting as if seen from the house. What would it be like?
- ♦ While in the park, find a place where you can lie on the grass and watch the clouds. Close your eyes and listen to the sounds in the park, feel the breeze on your skin. Try and be silent for a few minutes with your friends. Pay attention to the sensations around you. Imagine how the park changes from morning to dusk to night-time

In the **Project Space** (the final room of the Underground Gallery), there are models and films of some of Vital's designs for bridges, towers and structures, such as the *Disappearing House* (2003); a remote-control operated house which disappears underground.

- ♦ Imagine walking through these bridges. How would it feel? What would you see or hear?
- ♦ Draw some of these shapes. Use tone and shading to capture their 3D structures
- ♦ Cut, tear, fold and bend paper or card to create similar shapes. What could your paper sculpture be? A house, a bridge, a tower?
- ♦ Use reflective, transparent or textured material. How does your sculpture change?



Not Vital. House to Watch the Sunset, 2005. Courtesy the artist. Photo © Jonty Wilde

- ♦ Draw any shape on a piece of paper. Transform your shape so it looks three-dimensional, i.e. by shading or adding perspective to your shape
- ♦ How could your 3D shape become a building?
- ♦ Add details, draw people or an environment around it to give a sense of scale
- ♦ What could your building be?
- ♦ Create your own 'house' where you and your friends can have an adventure or see the world in a different way. You could live high in the trees, deep inside a mountain, beneath the sea, anywhere!

Being part of, and contributing to the local community is important to Vital. In 2003, he created *Makaranta* in Agadez, Niger. This is a pyramid structure, on top of a hill, upon which children can sit and play and learn. Built in one of the poorest countries in the world, the pyramid has become a school and playground for 600 children; and when full is transformed into a mountain of children.

'They don't go to school – they go on the school. It's the best sculpture I've done – it's a kinetic sculpture which moves.'

- ♦ What would you like to change in the community where you live?
- ♦ What would make it better?
- ♦ What could you do or make for where you live?

MATERIAL

Vital works with plaster, stainless steel, marble as well as paint and organic materials such as dried animal flesh, cow dung and camel remains.

'The physicality with which he works with materials, the respect he has for the craftsmen who have perfected their techniques, his admiration for the beauty of materials, and the way he challenges their boundaries...'

Alma Zevi

- How many different materials has Vital used in the exhibition? Try to work out what the materials are by looking closely, before checking the labels
- What words would you use to describe the different materials? Think about how they would feel to touch, their weight, colour and how they make you feel
- How do you think the sculptures have been made? Do you think Vital worked with other people to make his sculptures? Do you think they look difficult to make?

Vital's choice of material is connected with his experience of the world. The nuances of the colour white, and his choice of 'white' materials such as marble and plaster, reflective and transparent materials relate to his experience of snow and landscape.

- Use different white materials i.e. chalk, crayons and white pencils to create a white drawing on white paper. Try using different papers, such as tracing paper, greaseproof paper and graph paper
- The natural markings of marble can look like a drawing or a landscape. Take rubbings of trees or parts of YSP's landscape. Do your rubbings suggest an image or scene? Can you 'draw into' the rubbing to 'pull out' an image?



Not Vital, Moon, 2015. Courtesy the artist. Photo © Jonny Wilde

Hunting was a way of life in Sent, where Vital grew up, and people lived in close proximity with animals. Camels are a necessity of life in Niger, Africa; a place where Vital has lived and worked. Vital uses animal matter and images of animals as part of his work.

- Which art works use or represent animals in some way? How do you feel knowing that animal matter has been used as a material to make art with?

Visit the **Garden Gallery** which shows some of Vital's works on paper. Vital has made paper from paper pulp into which he sandwiches organic matter and natural objects.

- Can you make traces of natural objects? Collect natural objects from the floor. What can you do with them so they become a 'material' for making marks with?

Vital enjoys the physicality of playing and working with different materials. He indulges in their innate qualities, whether that's the 'splatteriness' of wet plaster or the immense reflective possibilities of stainless steel.



Not Vital, Snowball, 1999. Courtesy the artist. Photo © Jonny Wilde

BACK AT SCHOOL

- Find different man-made materials: gaffa tape, silver foil, card, paper, fabric, plastic, glass, string, elastic, rubber, balloons. What can you do to transform the materials so they have different qualities? Try smoothing, wetting, scrunching, pulling apart, tearing. Make observational drawings, take photographs, make films of what happens
- Make hand-made paper with paper pulp. Add natural objects or organic materials into the layers of pulp to create your own sculptural paper
- Draw with water – dribble, splatter, pour and throw. Use different instruments such as watering cans, bottles and brushes. Take a photograph of your drawing before it disappears.



Not Vital (installation view) 2016
 Courtesy the artist. Photo © Jonty Wilde

ADVENTURE STORIES

Vital is an adventurer-artist exploring the world, becoming part of the places and people he meets. He has bought a castle and an island (*NotOna*, in Patagonia) which he has transformed into a work of art. Vital approaches life as if anything is possible.

- ♦ Explore the different objects in **Gallery Three**. Who do they belong to? Where are they from? What story do they tell?
- ♦ Imagine a mountain that you can hold in your hand. Imagine a snowball that contains the world
- ♦ Where would you go on *A Plane, A Boat, A Car, A Sled* (2009)? Who would you take on your adventure?
- ♦ *Eight Halves* (2015) is of eight camel halves. Where are the lines of symmetry? Have the camels been cut in half and joined together? Is it a trick or magic? Where have they disappeared to?
- ♦ What could be inside the silver box, *Jean Genet* (2006)? How could it get out? (Remember, the box cannot be touched or opened)
- ♦ Create a story map which connects the objects in the room. Decide on a setting, a main character, a beginning, middle and an end
- ♦ In a group, each of you draw a different sculpture in the exhibition on a small square of paper. Collect in the drawings and shuffle them. Tell a story as a group in the order that the sculptures appear
- ♦ Choose one sculpture in **Gallery Three**. Give it a new title then tell its story

RELATED ARTWORKS AT YSP

James Turrell, *Deer Shelter Skyspace* (2006) Country Park

In the Country Park, built within an 18th–Century deer shelter, is a special space made to experience the ever-changing light from the sky above. The artist, James Turrell has said that by creating an aperture, or hole in the ceiling, it not only frames what you see but ‘*The sky is no longer out there, but is right on the edge of the space you are in. The sense of colour is generated inside you. You colour the sky.*’

Look up at the sky and consider how far you can see then close your eyes. Do you see an after-image of the rectangular aperture? What colour is the sky in your after-image?

Asha Munn, *Fly Away Home* (2004) / YSP Learning

Compare Asha Munn’s sculptures of different types of human dwellings: apartment block, terrace, semi-detached and detached houses, with Vital’s *House to Watch the Sunset*. It seems that Vital’s houses are simpler whilst Munn’s houses are busy with satellite dishes, TV aerials, patterned curtains and colourful doors. Why do you think this is?

Ai Weiwei, *Iron Tree* (2013) / Chapel courtyard

Ai Weiwei and Not Vital have studios close to each other in Beijing. Both share an attitude that art can make a difference to peoples’ lives. *Iron Tree* is constructed from casts of branches, roots and trunks from different trees, bolted together and left to rust. Compare *Iron Tree* with Not Vital’s *Let 100 Flowers Bloom*.

Anya Gallaccio, *Blessed* (2006) / Bothy Garden

Anya Gallaccio is known for creating sculptural installations with organic material that rots or changes over time. Here, she has made a work which, by casting the tree and apples, stops that process. Think about where *Blessed* is sited. How would it look if it was inside a gallery rather than outside and close to living trees? By placing a sculpture in an art gallery, consider what the space itself does to how we see and interpret it.

Masayuki Koorida, *Growth* (2007), *Form Twist* (2008), *Flower* (2009), *Kids* (2009) / Formal Garden

Koorida’s highly polished granite sculptures are inspired by tiny biological forms such as molecules and amoebas. Feel how smooth the surface of these sculptures are and look carefully at the patterns in the granite itself. Tear a hole in a piece of paper and use it as a frame to isolate the patterns on the two *Flower* sculptures.



Ai Weiwei, *Iron Tree*, 2013
Private Collection. Courtesy the artist
and YSP. Photo © Jonty Wilde

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

OPENING TIMES

Underground Gallery and Garden Gallery:

10.00–17.00 (until 30.10.16)

10.00–16.00 (from 31.10.16)

Works in the open air:

10.00–18.00 (until 30.10.16)

10.00–17.00 (from 31.10.16)

WORKSHOPS AND TOURS

YSP Learning offers workshops and tours which can include special visits to the Not Vital exhibition. We also offer a limited number of special artist-led workshops around Not Vital, which explore ideas in the exhibition through looking and creative making. Please visit yvsp.co.uk/workshopsandtours for more information.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

A family space, in YSP Centre, opposite the information desk, has drop-in activities inspired by Not Vital for families to enjoy together.

Other Worlds is also open in the Garden Studio at YSP Learning, every Sunday to Tuesday during the summer holidays (31.07.16–30.08.16). Drop in to have a go at Not Vital-inspired creative activities.

There is an extensive family and holiday programme inspired by Not Vital. Please visit yvsp.co.uk/events for more information or pick up a Not Vital Family Activities Leaflet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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