

Artreach - KNMA Teaching Fellowship 2020-21



Final Report

by Pragya Bhargava

Introduction

Art and science are often considered as two ends of the spectrum. With the fellowship and through this report I hope to be able articulate what I think is a middle-the bridge that traverses the spectrum and brings together two ways of understanding our universe a little better. It details my structure, aims, methodology, strategies, observations and challenges over the course of the workshops from November 2020 to April 2021. The report discusses insights and reflections on the workshops and my experience with individual participants. Further, it hopes to cover the complexity of working with a few different conceptual concerns, techniques of art making and the approaches to working online with a care home space.

Overview

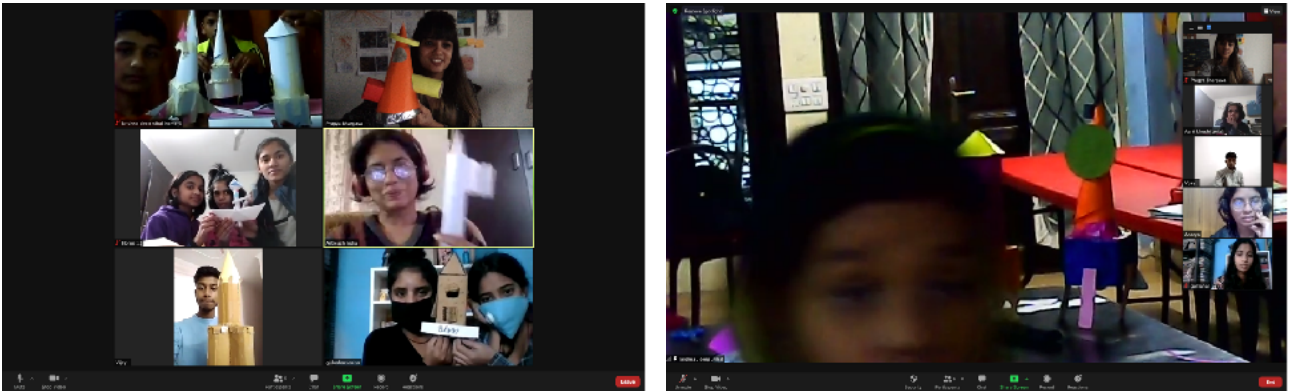
As a part of the fellowship, I worked with nine children from Udayan Care. Over a period of six months, 12 online workshops were held every alternate Saturday on Zoom. Each workshop was two to two and a half hours long. During the December holidays, I conducted one two day workshop and the last two sessions were also on consecutive days. On the final day we concluded with a showcase, titled *Multiverse: ख्याबों के ब्रह्मांड*, of presentations and selected works led by the children.

The workshops were modified through the course of the six months to practice strategies that worked best in an online set up but the aims anchored the vision and execution. Some of these aims were

- Interdisciplinary learning to understand the essence of astronomical concepts and apply them through the use of materials in drawing, sculpture and painting practices
- Creating a safe space for open discussions on outlandish and radical ideas for a utopian universe
- Questioning, imagining, expressing and skill building through discussions and tacit learning
- Focussing on the process and having fun while creating one or more works by the end of every workshop.

Plan and Strategies

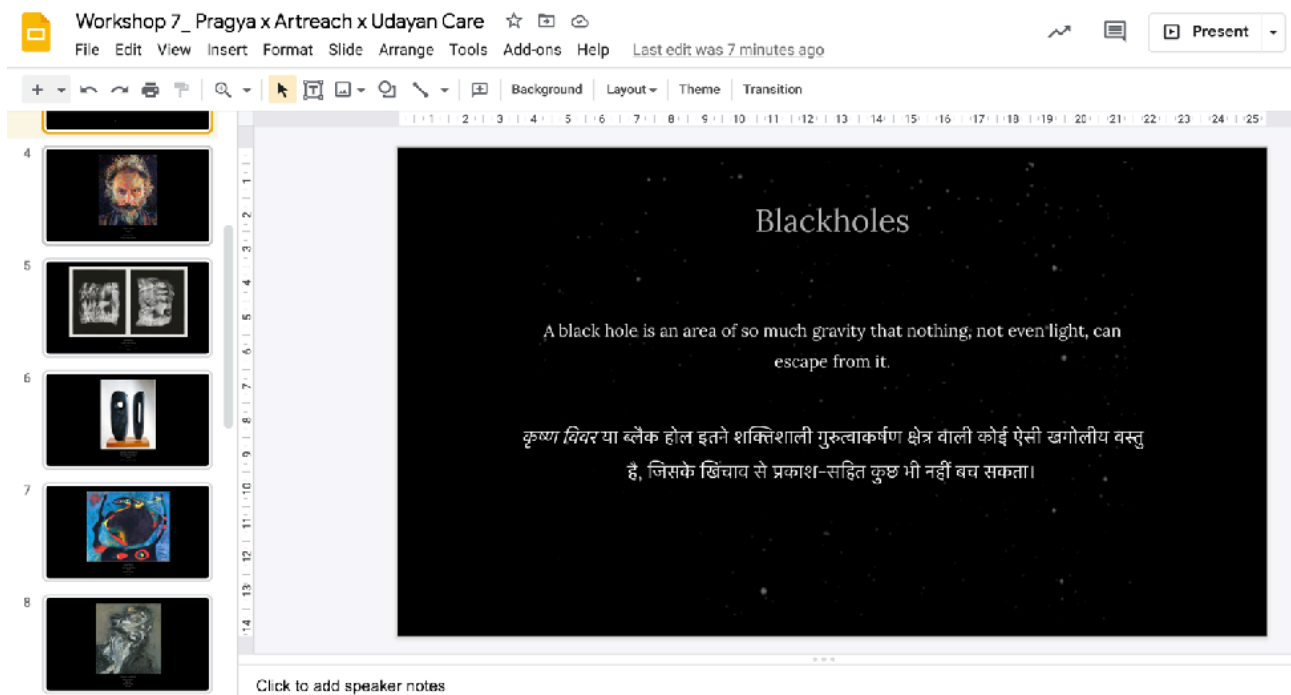
The workshops were envisioned as an adventure through outer space where the participants encountered otherworldly phenomenon, life, and objects. The plan was to introduce one key concept from astronomy through drawing, sculpture or painting techniques in each session. This was anchored by the vision of giving participants the required toolkit and support to visualise their ideas about a utopian universe. Adaptability and flexibility in the overall structure and within each workshop was important because some activities, tried and tested offline, would not have worked in an online set up. This proved useful as some sessions met with challenges like access to outdoor space, materials or other resources and in modifying workshops based on the methods that were working better.



Each workshop was centred around one scientific concept, like gravity or dark matter, that was made accessible through hands-on exercises. We began with warm up activities that led to a final drawing. Games and quick drawings were integral for bonding online and for our sessions to start on an energetic, fun and lively note. It also prepared children for the activities that followed. The next exercise would introduce an art making technique to explain the astronomical concept for the session. For instance the idea of time dilation or time travel was paired with the study of light through doodling, hatching and stippling. Participants were encouraged to observe an object, that they would like to time travel with, under different lighting conditions. Sometimes the instructions were precise and detailed that they could follow and other times loose and abstract prompts were given.



This was supported by a slideshow of various references from Indian and international artists, animations, sounds, interactive websites, videos other sources for inspiration. Demonstrations and conversation fostered visual stimulants. We also looked at space programme websites from different agencies and watched animations in different languages, making sense of it together. Positive affirmations, periodic checkins, constant feedback, discussions and sharing of works were also some of the strategies adopted.



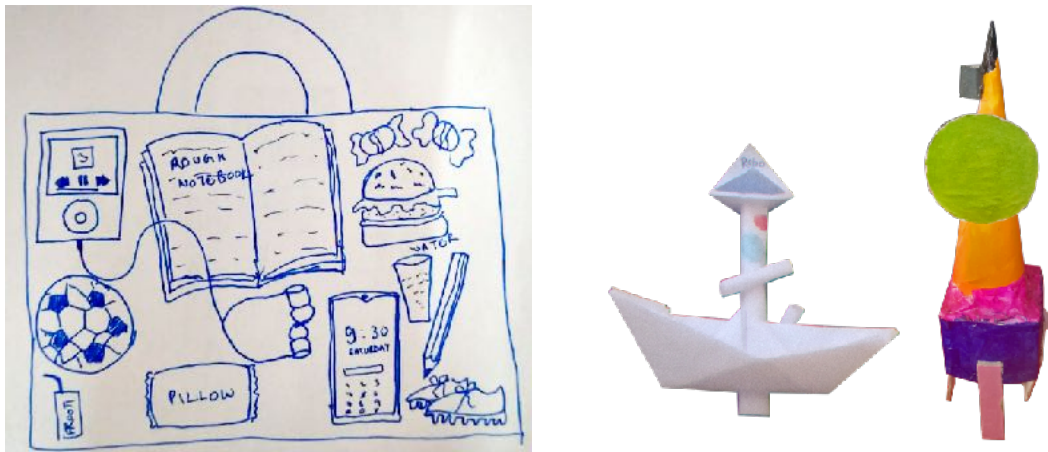
In this manner, we dismantled, questioned and formed new narratives using material explorations. For example the idea of a black hole and questions around what happens when we enter one were addressed through portraiture. Participants imagined being inside a black hole and applied the idea of spaghettification and other distortions while drawing their self-portraits.

Sessions

With each workshop, children used their agency as creators to built an element of a new imagined universe. They thought about extraordinary qualities they would ascribe to its components, often as responses to things they found unsatisfactory in the universe we inhabit. They not only re-considered political, social, environmental and economic structures but also engaged with questions about dark matter and black holes. Their nine unique universes, one by each participant, together formed the final showcase of a multiverse: ख्वाबों के ब्रह्मांड.

Their space exploration began with a warm up where participants were asked to use line drawings to make a suitcase fill it with the things they would need in outer space. This was followed by making a cardboard spaceship sculpture using complex 3D geometric shapes. For the next workshop, we built paper folding rovers and studied them spiral down to the ground to understand gravity. For the final artwork, participants were encouraged to imagine floating in space without gravity and to rediscover a familiar space. They described and drew their respective rooms from strange angles, sometime lying

down other times looking upside down, and finished the works with colouring, shading and paper collaging.



Workshop 1: Works by Vijay, Krishna, Aarti, Anjali and Khushi



Workshop 2: Works by Krishna, Aarti and Vijay

The third and fourth workshops were based on solar systems and kinetic sculptures. Participants used textures and patterns to create planets of different shapes and sizes and assembled them to make kinetic solar systems.



Workshop 3: Works by Anjali, Aarti and Khushi

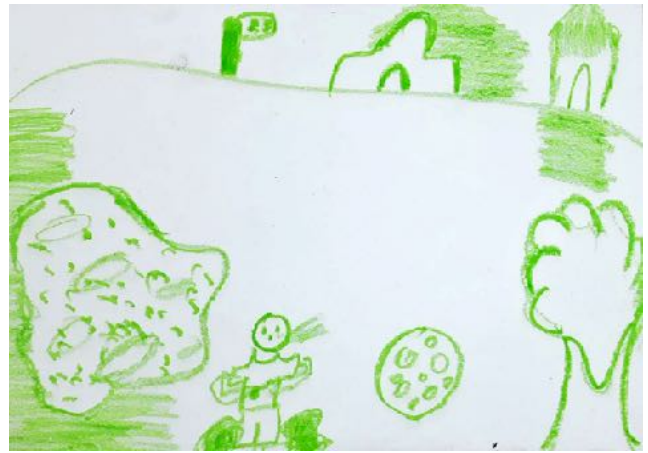


Workshop 4: Works by Anjali, Aarti, Krishna, Nihal and Khushi

With the fifth workshop we explored exoplanets and landscapes. They learnt principles of landscape drawing and applied them to design their own exoplanet landscapes. The sixth workshop progressed to imagining extraterrestrial lifeforms for their planets. We discussed character design and each participant thought of unique characteristics and features to draw and paint their lifeforms.



Workshop 5: Works by Deep and Khushi

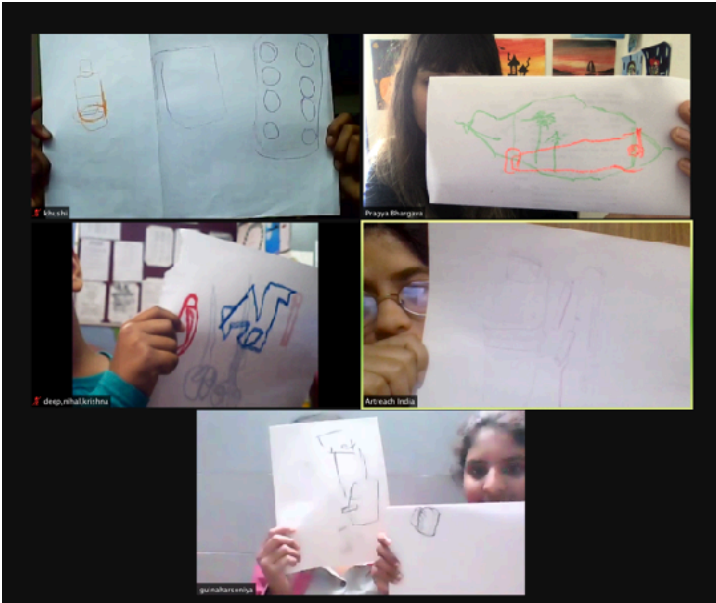


Workshop 5: Works by Aarti, Krishna, Anjali and Nihal

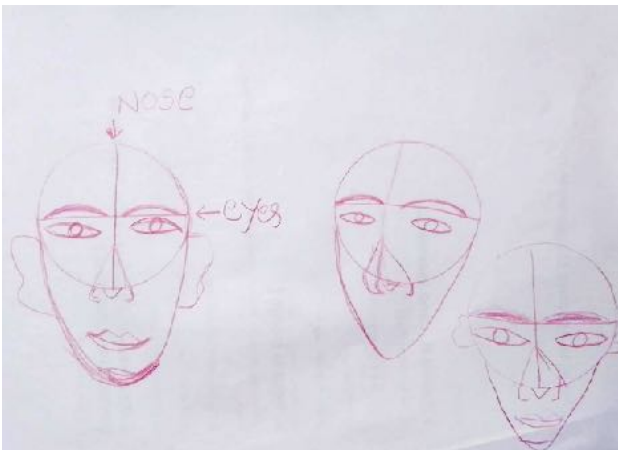


Workshop 6: Works by Deep and Aarti

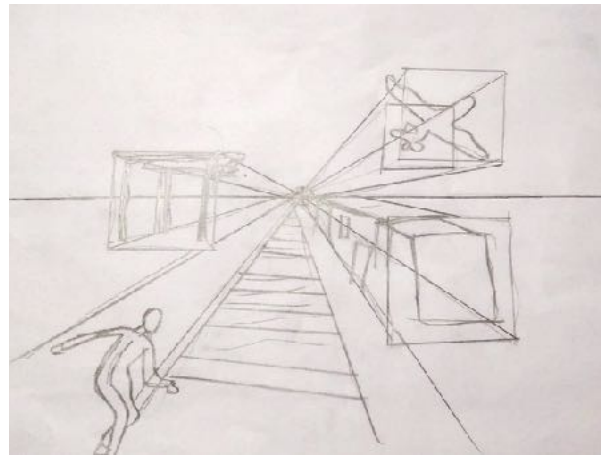
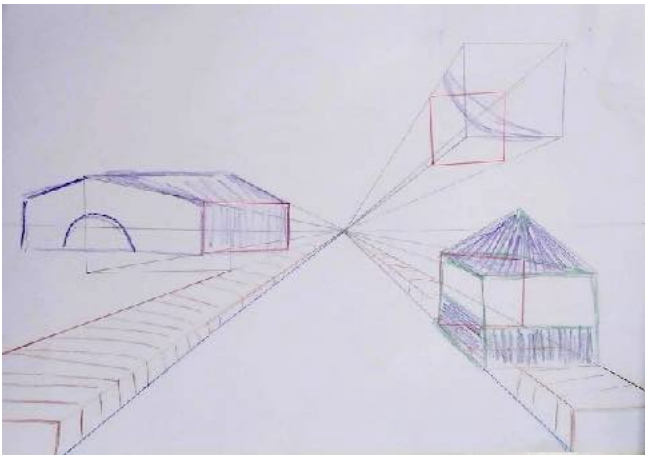
The next three workshops on blackholes, parallel universes and time travel focussed on skill building through portraiture, one point perspective and shading techniques respectively. We also played a game of Simon says, and made blind drawings and shape doodles as warm up exercises.



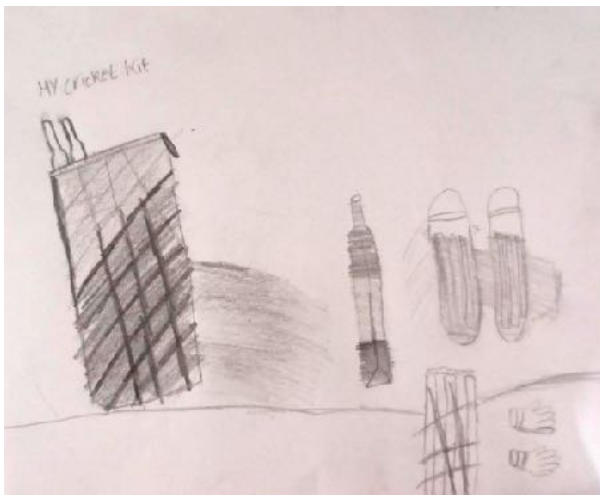
Workshop 7: Screenshot of warmup activity and work by Khushi



Workshop 7: Works by Khushi, Deep and Krishna

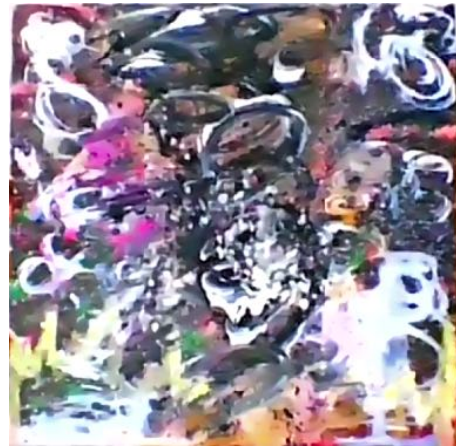
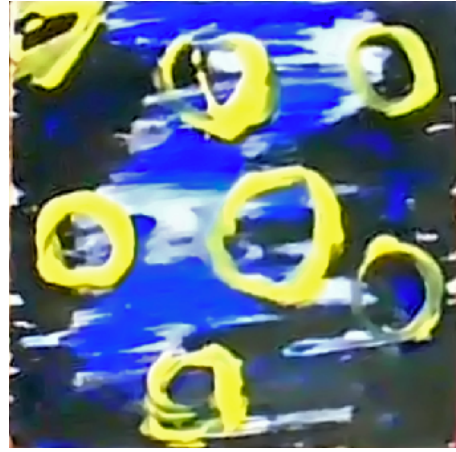


Workshop 8: Works by Anjali and Gulnihar



Workshop 9: Works by Anjali, Deep, Krishna and Nihal

Workshop ten on dark matter was more experimental. I introduced my own research and practice on the subject and we followed some of the techniques I use in my works. The session focussed on translating sensory prompts like sounds, images, words to visuals and finding a vocabulary to depict abstract concepts through paint on paper and canvas.



Workshop 10: Works by Anjali, Gulnihar, Krishna and Sonia

Workshops 11 and 12 were on curating, describing and presenting their artworks. We did artist statements, mock presentations and discussed the flow and format of the showcase. The final showcase was led entirely by the children where they presented their works online to a small audience.



Final Showcase

Observations, achievements and challenges

Participants were quick to learn, question and respond to tasks. I would gradually step up the difficulty through the sessions and they would rise to the challenge. They followed online learning, often with one screen amongst two or three participants, with ease. They were open to different ways of learning and followed skill and technique based workshops as comfortably as abstract prompt and imagination led workshops. This was reflected not just in the works they produced but also in their engagement with content during the workshops.

It was fulfilling to see them break through traditional modes of thinking to express radical ideas for their novel universes. Their thoughts on the problems in contemporary society and solutions for a more utopian universe was a marker of success. There was also significant development in expressing abstract concepts as we moved from pattern making for planets terrains to painting sounds from outer space and visualising dark matter.

Finally, the showcase was a reflection of the journey we had taken together. Each participant shared their works and process with pride and confidence. They retained the concepts from astronomy, recalled the techniques used and they enjoyed making the works. With that session of sharing, I felt we had truly met the objectives set out for the workshops.

Minor challenges arose along the way. Attendance was wavering as Ganga did not join, Khushi was restored after the seventh workshop and Vijay had college commitments. Internet in one care home was unstable during a lot of sessions. Lastly, documentation was a key concern. Most images of works were low quality and not every care home shared images regularly. On reflection, it would have been useful to take screenshots when participants shared their works at the end of each session.

Feedback for Artreach

The Artreach team was very supportive and accommodating throughout the fellowship. Initially, the sessions and meetings were scheduled at short notice and overlapped with other commitments that were organised months in advance. Within a few weeks we were able to resolve this and by the last few workshops the flow was seamless.

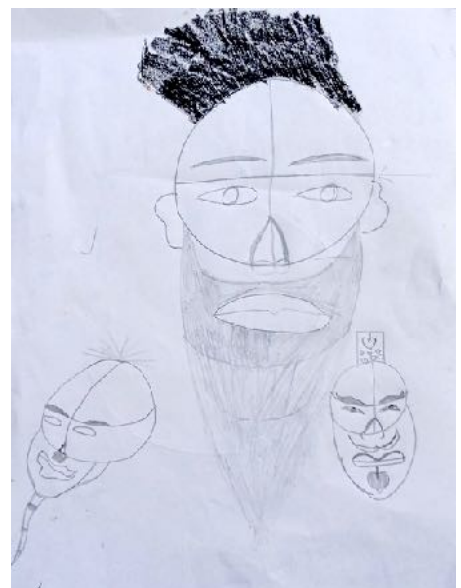
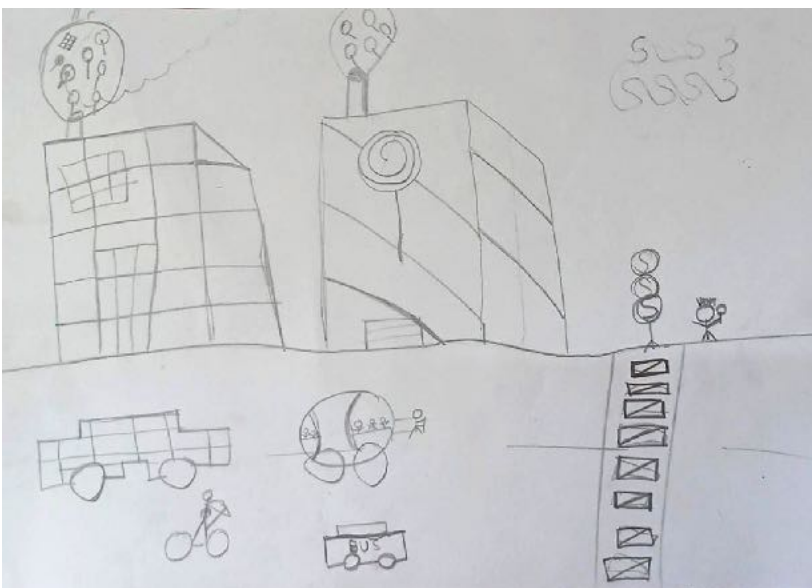
The team was able to advice on what methods of learning proved useful in the past and offered guidance to make the sessions smooth and functional. With Anarya's invaluable support and feedback I was able to constantly fine tune my methods and strategies. In some sessions, I felt it would have been useful to allow experimental approaches and new strategies rather than always following tried and tested methods.

Overall, I feel that the Artreach team has an intimate understanding of the care home ecosystem and were able foresee and avert many challenges. They always had the best interest of the children at heart and their guidance came from a place of care and desire to give them the best experience possible.

Individual responses

All the participants were very involved, vocal and expressive through the sessions. They were quick to respond to prompts and follow cues despite the online setup.

Deep is very creative and was invested in the tasks that had lose prompts. His energy level was always high and he worked faster than other participants. This would lead him to be restless by the end of the sessions. His exoplanet landscape and blackhole portrait were very well thought through. He imagined a lava creature in his exoplanet drawing that even featured in his later works.



Nihal's strength is sketching and he spent a lot of time and effort on his sketches. This would sometimes leave little time for him to finish the works that needed colour or other finishing touches. His most successful works were also drawing led like the study of one point perspective and time travel drawings.



Krishna showed interest in concepts from astronomy and asked pertinent questions. He spoke more freely only when older participants were absent. He took particular interest in the workshop on exoplanets and dark matter. Krishna also took responsibility for documenting his own works as well as works by Nihal and Deep and shared them promptly and regularly.



Gulnihar was very warm from the first session itself. She was quick to comment on techniques and reference materials shared in the session with insightful observations. However, she was self-conscious and critical with her own work which would keep her from sharing her work and ideas with others. She enjoyed the shorter warm up activities and games that had clear instructions.



Sonia was welcoming and expressive. She asked questions throughout the sessions to make sure she could follow but was hesitant to share her works. She loves using lots of colours and uses them well in her works. Her exoplanet drawing and black hole portrait exemplify her skilful use of colours.



Sonia and Gulnihar did not share images of their works regularly. This could be due to patchy internet connectivity. Regardless, they showed up to the sessions and tried to follow despite the network issues.

Vijay took interest in the convergence of art and science. He asked questions and had ready answers for questions posed. He was not regular due to conflicting commitments but when he attended he was very involved. He volunteered to lead a drawing activity for the guests attending the showcase event, which reflected his learning curve through the sessions. He was confident and took complete ownership of the exercise.

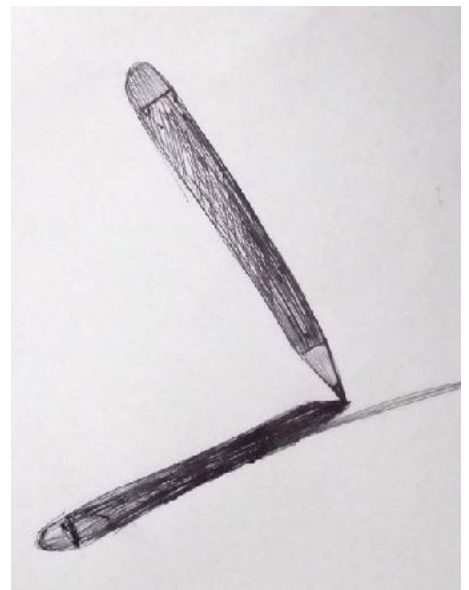
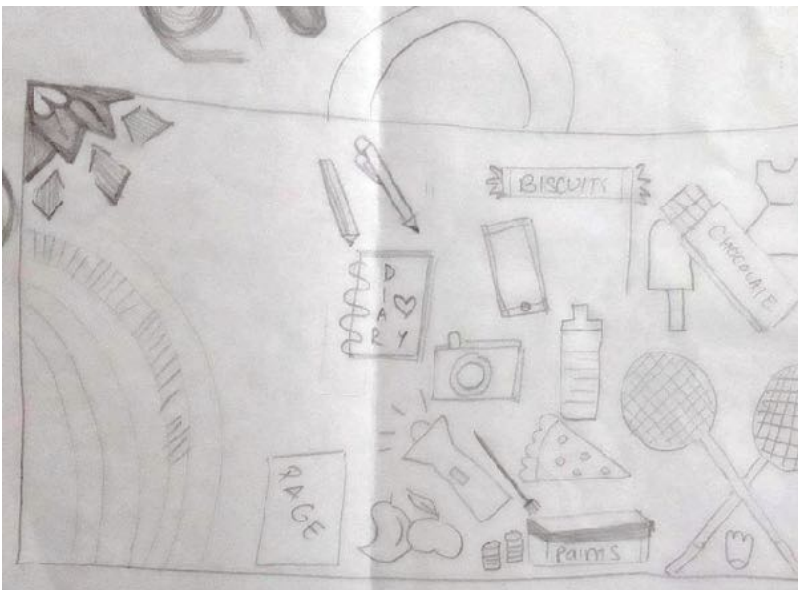


The deadly
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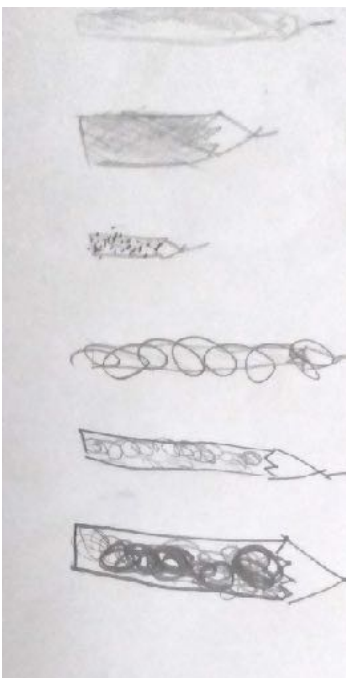
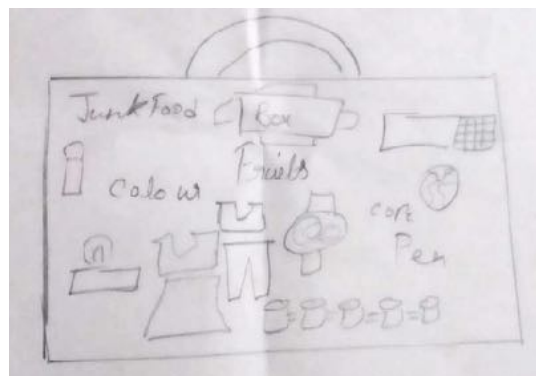
- * Long legs to travel long distances in search of food
- * Transparent body, Red colour of blood of other animals
- * Breathes through black air holes on body
- * Big eyes for long distance sight & small for short
- * Round floating teeth
- * Long tongue to grab the creature
- * Does nothing with hand
- * Walks on ground



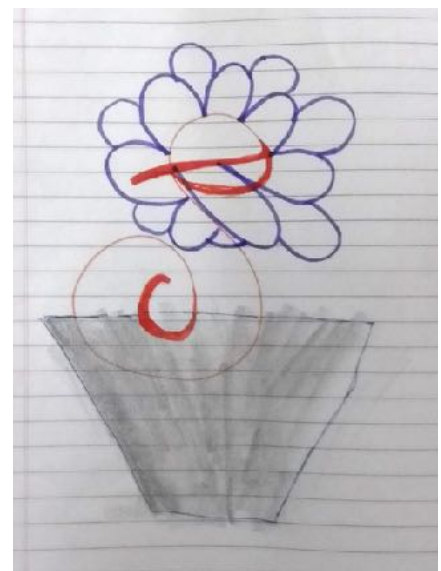
Anjali is very sharp with her responses but she needed a push to share her opinions with others. Her ideas for a utopian universe and the issues, including caste system and economic divide, she sees with contemporary society were not only relevant but also inspired a constructive dialogue in the group. Her extraterrestrial life form drawing was another carefully considered, well executed work. She also took the initiative of designing a digital invitation poster for the showcase.



Aarti was observant and critical with the reference materials. She often pointed out what others missed but she would procrastinate when it came to her own work. Her use of deductive logic was remarkable and could be seen in her ideas of a parallel universe and dark matter painting.



Khushi is very skilled and was able to pick up techniques quickly. She was, however, very quiet and did not join after the seventh workshop. Her black hole portrait and extraterrestrial life form were well done and reflected an understanding of the concepts discussed.



All the participants were very affectionate and welcoming and we formed a bond despite the online setup. I will miss spending my Saturdays with them and I hope to meet them in person someday.

Participants

Aarti, Anjali, Deep, Gulnihar, Khushi, Krishna, Nihal, Sonia and Vijay

References

Websites:

European Space Agency: <http://www.esa.int/kids/en/home>

NASA: <https://www.nasa.gov/kidsclub/index.html>

<https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/alien-worlds/exoplanet-travel-bureau>

<https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/>

Tate Kids: <https://www.tate.org.uk/kids>

Delhi Art Gallery: <https://dagworld.com/>

KNMA: <https://www.knma.in/>

Vadhera Art Gallery <https://www.vadehraart.com/>

Animations:

Strange Creature: <https://allthingsmoving.com/7-hello/99-strange-creature>

A Different Perspective: <https://vimeo.com/120438150>

Tales from the Multiverse: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF9sq_2yPrc

Light: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdyAFuHRayQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW6nnKLtgYI>

Star Wars

Avatar

Star Trek

Monsters Inc

Harry Potter

E-books:

The Little Prince <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APG1upS8LDw>