

Art, perception and space – Third Space workshop

- This session will look at portraits and creating poetry, both of the self and of how subjection and orientalism affect perceptions of racialised individuals, to illustrate a narrative outside of the subject's mind and of the subject's mind, as well as the interruptions and doubts that swerve from the image a poet is initially convincing us to see.

Free Write exercise:

5 minutes – just a quick exercise to get started. Listen out to the words I'll be dropping to include and help shape the free write itself.

Self portrait poems:

- One example of a self-portrait poem that isn't limited to the self but has voices interrupting and further shattering the perspective of the poet is Will Harris's 'Self-portrait in front a small mirror'. A poet of Chinese Indonesian and British heritage, Harris writes extensively on encounters, misunderstandings, racism and mixed-race heritage.
- Have a read of his poem and take 7 minutes to write ourselves as if looking in a small mirror. What features are you bringing out? Which ones are you being warm/cold towards? Are there other people entering your moment of reflection? Is the mirror cracking, or will you be the one to put it aside?

Self-portrait in front of a small mirror - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU0xOUZJDls>

I pay close attention to the shape of my eyes, how my eyelids slope down towards the ridge of my nose—that fold of skin, which I will learn is the epicanthic fold, no more an indicator of race than my stubby little fingers or the mole at the centre of my chest. Just different. I am making a self-portrait in front of a small mirror propped up on my pencil case. How can I know that when I put aside the mirror, as I must, to encounter the world *with* and *through* those eyes, there will be questions: *where are you from? are you Korean? Speak Chinese?* At seventeen, at Borders, I will say my books are for an English degree and the man behind the counter will grin, call me a bright boy, and though it may be nothing—as he says it, I see myself reflected in the glossy wall display behind him—I will feel accused. When I open my mouth in shops, though my voice shrinks into a weird RP, I will accept the illusion of the colonial elite, other in blood and colour but English in taste. The illusion will remain intact long after I am presumed foreign, after a stranger tells me to *fuck off back home*, after a barman—standing in front of a row of spirits, endlessly mirrored—asks for my ID, refuses to accept my name as my own. *Will Harris?* My nasal bridge which, being lower-rooted, draws a fold of skin over the corners of my eyes, marks me out—as it does these words—for special treatment. But I must, and will, put aside the mirror.



Edwin Lord Weeks (working in the 19th century)

- Moving away from Renaissance to French realism style, but was the move to realism, to create 'realistic' interpretations of India, the real case?
- These images played to the curiosity of the masses in Britain, France & other European countries. These orientalist painters like Weeks presented images in a certain light and at a certain angle. These paintings reveal, not the life of colonized people but the colonial gaze.
- The important details that are missing from these paintings; when Edwin Weeks travelled across India, the power of British Raj was at its peak. But there is no sign of British influence on society in this painting. for that matter, any of his 90 or so paintings in India. They are both removed but undeniably subject to the colonial context these pieces are being created.



Perceptions and objectification – the artist’s eye

- Choose a painting of Week’s and a particular figure to focus on and write an ekphrastic poem – we usually do this from a perspective of the modern-day, present viewer but we’re going to subvert this for now. Embodiment the mind and actions of this painter; how is he accentuating and objectifying certain aspects of the figure, can you imagine him altering colours, reimagining clothes and body parts, quieting the subject metaphorically through this snapshot

How do we reclaim?

- Now write a poem in argument and response as either the figure or a modern-day viewer – maybe you want to directly address the painter in the setting of the painting, or are entering his studio or a gallery and coming across the painting. Be cruel and battle against even the lack of historical and colonial presence here – against the ‘romanticism’ and exoticism of these spaces.
- An idea to consider: maybe take a phrase from the poem you wrote before and create a dialogue with the subject (you) and the artist.