

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY

Activity: Put Yourself in the Picture

This activity, created by artist Eva Jonas, invites you to photograph a performance that captures your body responding to two contrasting locations. Inspired by the series of works *Body Configurations* by VALIE EXPORT you will photograph a fragment of your body or its shadow to explore your relationship with the architecture, shapes, forms, and props of urban and natural environments.



Kurt Meterie 1, 1982. VALIE EXPORT, Bildrecht Wien 2024, photo: Hermann Hendrich



Photo: Eva Jonas



Photo: Eva Jonas

Share your photographs #TPGActivity.

You will need:

Camera or Phone with Camera

Tripod (optional)

A friend or family member to work with (optional)

Pen and Paper to make notes

Access to different environments to shoot your images

Pixlr (free Photoshop for Laptops) or VSCO (free editing app for phones)

Printer (optional)

Instructions

Step 1: Explore the work of VALIE EXPORT at The Photographers' Gallery or Online

Either in person at The Photographers' Gallery, as part of the *Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2024*, or online look at VALIE EXPORT's *Body Configuration* photography series.

VALIE EXPORT is known for her work across film, performance and photography. Her series *Body Configurations* evokes the uneasy relationship between the body and the urban environment while interrogating the place of women in public spaces.

With your collaborator (a friend or family member) look at the images and discuss how they make you feel. Is it uncomfortable, energised, does it make you want to stretch your body?

Together, make a list of five different environments and how each makes you feel certain ways. For example, football goals on a sports field might make you feel open and strong, or perhaps public transport makes you feel small and enclosed?

Tip: Share VALIE EXPORT's images with friends or family who don't know anything about the work. Ask how the photographs make them feel and what they think the artist is exploring. Sometimes showing work to others can help you see it anew!

Step 2: Choose your Locations

From the notes you've made on how different environments make you feel, choose two contrasting locations. You will make a series of photos at both.

Your choice of location could be critical (like VALIE EXPORT's) or celebratory. Where do you feel you have the most power or freedom or where do you feel you don't? Where is your body forced to conform to the architecture and where is it unconstructed?

Remember you will have to take photographs at these locations so make sure they are accessible to you, and you feel comfortable and safe when doing so.

Step 3: Shoot at the Locations

Working with your collaborator think about how you can use your body to emphasise the architecture or shapes at the location. Will you move your body to fit or curl around the side of the building or bench or stretch upward to meet a pole on a sports field or whilst on public transport?

If you don't want to include your face in the images, just have your collaborator photograph your body or a part of your body. Try playing with your shadow and the way it falls on the shapes, lines or textures of your chosen locations.

Remember to photograph at both of your chosen locations. It would be good to photograph in different environments for when you reflect and review the images in the next step.

Tip: If you are on your own use your camera or phone on a tripod with a self-timer setting.

Step 4: Edit, review, and share the Images

After you've taken your photographs, you can turn them black and white using VSCO on your phone or Pixlr on your laptop (both free to download). This, like VALIE EXPORT's, will make them feel more like a study or photographic exploration.

Share your photographs – either on your phone, camera or as prints placed together. Discuss if seeing your body in the image makes you or others feel differently about the environment.

Ask someone else to guess how you feel about the environment you have photographed; do they feel your body language is suggesting that?

Other Artists to explore:

Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas Series* saw her imprint her body into natural Mexican and lowland landscapes, filling the outlines with organic materials such as flowers, branches, or moss as a way of reclaiming her heritage and relationship with nature.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya's studio self-portraits explore the relationship between how we see and how we are seen. Often using mirrors, and fabric alongside fragmented body parts, asking the viewer to reflect on representation and identity.