

## Two-Step

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As suggested in an article in the August 2022 edition of Tate Magazine artist-duo Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings, who have a collaborative painting practice developed in their London studio, say that their practice is 'harmonious'. This harmony can also be found in the work of *Two-Step*, a Glasgow-based printmaking artist duo consisting of Beth Shapeero and Fraser Taylor. Like Quinlan and Hastings, Shapeero and Taylor's way of working is graceful in the way quick decision-making takes precedence over hard-won negotiation and debate – they work as a flowing team, in tandem, ever evolving. What signifies and shapes Shapeero and Taylor's work as an artist team is the way their process is 'collaborative', 'generous' and 'inviting'.

These qualities of working and of being together is engaged between each other and extends out to their audiences and to the students and communities with whom with they teach and lead workshops. Another word that might sum up their work would be 'cooperation'. Such cooperation can be traced back to early forms of art making and communal artisanal practices that are making a return today in an interest to move beyond and to interrogate hierarchical and competitive art markets. At the end of the article put out by Tate, it states that '[a]rt can't heal the past or absolve it of its violations and abuses, but it can help to reimagine the future" (2022: 48). How does the artisanry of *Two-Step* reflect this potentiality? What might their creative practice and ways of working together teach us in the way we might reimagine new futures both in art making and for our times? I am particularly interested in focusing on the relational aspects of their work to suggest a way of being with and within the art making process and a means by which artists might reside in collective actions of practice.

### Artisanal Practice

If we think about art making within a broader art context, we can see early practices of artmaking were highly communal. According to the August 2022 edition of Tate Magazine article, '[g]roups of artisans would work together under the control of a master to produce works: one artisan would specialise in painting flowers, while another would paint the architecture' (2022: 53). Shapeero and Taylor work like artisans, but they are not under the guide of a master. Together, their two individual practices merge and evolve another language on paper and through colour and textile. This language is only possible through an equitable, interactive and highly permissible approach that is made manifest through their working as a collective artist pair. In this way *Two-Step's* process can be argued as a political statement making claim for more than one way to work as an artist. In today's world of divisiveness and binary thinking the collective artist pair stand as an example of co-creating generous spaces for being with (each other and processes of decision-making) that are democratic and necessary. *Two-Step* work together and with others in group-like scenarios and through that mode of operating a much-needed insight into collaboration emerges both for art and for our times. The art market is set up to encourage competition between individual artists and neglects to remember that creativity, emanating from childhood, a time when we cooperated in play. In

her studio, Shapeero discusses her interest in play and inviting that into the practice. To work without judgement in her work with Fraser and in her teaching and facilitation activities. I turn now to a further discussion on childhood and notions of cooperation through play.

#### Rehearsing and Returning to a Playful Cooperative Practice

In a rehearsal there is an element of repetition that provides a disciplinary structure. Mechanical repetitiveness is also an element of play in childhood. For example, hearing the same story or playing the same game over and over is pleasurable. It is also noted that at some point in a child's development, usually around the age of five according to Erik Erickson (Sennett 2012:13) the child begins to negotiate in their playing with others and becomes aware of their individual self. Therefore, Erickson points out, 'cooperation precedes individualisation'. And that 'cooperation is the foundation of human development; in that we learn how to be together before we learn how to stand apart' (13). From this understanding we can begin to reflect on cooperative artistic practices, such as *Two-Step's*, and hold such practices up to a reflective framework to begin to question the notion of the individual in artmaking by looking at the collaborative. If, indeed, both early artistic practices (as mentioned earlier) and childhood development include working with and alongside others in creative endeavours how might we, consider the work of *Two-Step* as a process of learning and a way of doing together? How might what they do reflect the potentialities of new forms of making and of socialisation? These approaches begin to feel political in their insistence on cooperation and making.

#### Value of the Relational in and out of Making

There is value not only in what is made by *Two-Step* but in the *way* they make. If we take a moment to stand back and observe their practice what we see are two distinctly different artists and people working together and in equal relation. Relational artistic practice is often reserved for the performing arts in which dancers, actors and musicians rehearse together in a studio and perform in ensembles and companies to produce a co-created piece of music, choreography or play. Within the visual arts the value of relationality as an aspect of making is lesser known and discussed. This is where *Two-Step* comes to the foreground to shed light on what working in relation might mean when co-creating material objects – in their case graphic images on paper and other two-dimensional materials.

Aiding in the discussion of making and relations, Sennet (2008) suggests that '[t]he craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experience that can shape our dealings with others. Both the difficulties and the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationships.' (289). I wonder, then, how decision making with another in the creative process might be one of the 'techniques of experience' that Sennett is referring to and how an understanding of *Two-Step's* methods can help us unpack that a bit further.

#### Pace of Decision Making

I wish to pick up on Sennett's use of the words 'difficult' and 'possible' regarding what I have observed of *Two-Step*. To do that I return to one of Taylor's comments shared when I was in the studio with him and Beth, that the interest in an efficient process is (and as Shapeero reiterates often) with a sense of urgency. There is something about quick decision making in their process

that leans into instinct, into not over thinking and towards what feels easy. By easy I am not suggesting lazy or not informed, on the contrary it is precisely the expertise of Shapeero and Taylor – gained from their many years working as solo artists – that these kinds of body-based, lightning-fast agreements are made possible. And within that approach the possible is made manifest. Their lack of tension in working together sheds light on the potential of graceful cooperation that resides in the act of material making. Again, Sennet, describes somewhat the opposite approach in which ‘[m]aterial challenges like working with resistance or managing ambiguity are instructive in understanding the resistances people harbour to one another or the uncertain boundaries between people’ (ibid). Perhaps, what *Two-Step* teach us is that in making there is a practice of togetherness, a sociality, that has been lost to our contemporary moment of division and blame across politics, media and journalism and other areas of our society where we try and work together for the greater good. It might be worth considering looking to artistic practices, such as *Two-Step’s*, and witness how positive, open roles and practices of play in their shared labour of making of physical things and what that kind of interaction and collaboration might tell us about the need for people to, according to Sennet, ‘practice their relations with one another, learn the skills of anticipation and revision to improve these relations’ (ibid).

*Two-Step* describe their temporal processes as a kind of ‘rhythm of working’, ‘not overthinking ways of working’, ‘speedy, repetitive, and responsive through time to the moment’. In a somewhat gently urgent way, not lingering on decision making, going on instinct and as their title suggests – evolve a succinct process of ‘one step, two step, done’ – Shapeero and Taylor manifest a dance of thought processes moving between them to animate their work forward. In a field of promoting artists as autonomous and mastered the work of *Two-Step* feels refreshing in that refuses to be overwrought in thought and more interested in the dance between two people that can occur when co-creating over any individual personal gain. There is a give and take mindset that allows for an easy meeting in the middle. For them, this dance is best done in motion. One of them quickly placing a hand to take the fresh, off-the-press artwork, standing back for the other to see and then moving on. As they show their work one gently, but without lingering, turns a stack of prints, one-at-a-time, placing them downside in a stream of film-like animation controlled through the hand while the other looks on. These movements are at once playful while also fused in expertise through quick decision making and timely viewings that have a flow, rhythm and grace to them.

#### Embracing Mistakes and Activating Error

Through their practice of printmaking *Two-Step* are making a statement on the traditions of their craft. By allowing for what they call ‘mistakes or areas on the paper where ink seeps through, makes a mark and leaves behind a trace of the human hand’ that many artists would wish to leave out, erase or cover up. The mark as a kind of echo or displacement that serves as a communicative tool to the viewer that human error made visible reminds of us of our own vulnerability and vanity.