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HOLBEIN

IN ENGLAND

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TEACHER AND STUDENT NOTES WITH KEY WORKS

A4 PDF WITH INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION, FULL COLOUR IMAGES, DISCUSSION POINTS, LINKS AND ACTIVITIES.
FOR USE IN THE GALLERY OR CLASSROOM. SUITABLE FOR TEACHERS OF ALL KEY STAGES AND OLDER STUDENTS.

BY MIRANDA MILLWARD

Introduction to Holbein In England

This major exhibition at Tate Britain presents the work which the German artist Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8–1543) carried out in England in 1526–8 and 1532–43.

Holbein's extraordinary talents as a painter and designer made him one of the greatest artists of sixteenth century Europe. King Henry VIII appointed him his court painter, and his work was in demand among the courtiers, merchants and others living in and around the City of London.

The exhibition explores the impact of Holbein's presence on the commissioning and enjoyment of works of art in England during an increasingly prosperous but also turbulent period. In the 1530s Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and embarked on a series of marriages in search of a male heir, actions which changed the course of English history.

The exhibition also examines the ways in which Holbein built on traditional Northern European procedures for the preparation of works of art of all types, not just portraiture, and produced a wide range of designs and paintings.

Visiting the Exhibition

Exhibition tickets for school groups of more than ten students are available in advance only at a cost of £4 per student and teacher (we ask for payment to be received two weeks before the visit). As tickets are limited it is essential to book well in advance.

To book a group in, please call the Education Bookings line on 020 7887 3959.

To avoid overcrowding, all groups with more than thirty students will be split and entry to the exhibition will be staggered at one-hour intervals.

You are welcome to use the Schools Area to have lunch or to use locker spaces; please book these at the same time as your tickets (there is limited space available).

As all exhibitions at Tate can get busy, you cannot lecture in the exhibition rooms, but you can discuss works in a conversational manner with groups of no more than six students at a time.

If possible, brief your students before they enter the exhibition, and if you have a large group, we recommend that you divide them into smaller groups and perhaps follow the suggestions in this pack.

About the Teacher and Student Notes

This short pack is intended as an introduction to the exhibition, and it covers three works in depth. It offers ideas and starting points for visiting teachers to use with all age groups, as well as for A-level and GCSE students to use on their own. Some of the activities or discussion points can be used as preparation for a visit, some are for use in the exhibition itself, and others will be more suited to class work after your visit.

The works discussed are reproduced at A4 size so you can print them out and use them as a resource in the classroom. The notes aim to give a few jumping-off points to explore not only the featured works but also the exhibition as a whole.

Other Resources

There will be a Key Stage 5 Study Day on 20 November 2006.

In addition to the exhibition leaflet, there is also an audioguide which gives further information about the works on display.

The catalogue, priced at £19.99, is available in the Tate shop, which also has a range of books, journals, postcards and other related materials.

The Key Work Cards for Teachers, *Portraits and Identity*, available for £9.99 from the Tate shop, might also be a useful complement to this exhibition.

Websites

Tate Online www.tate.org.uk

Tate Learning www.tate.org.uk/learning

This site includes a dedicated area for teachers and group leaders as well as similar resource notes for other major Tate exhibitions.



Hans Holbein the Younger

Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Milan 1538

The National Gallery, London

Photo © The National Gallery, London

Background

Hans Holbein the Younger was born in Augsburg, Germany in 1497/98. He is best known for his work as the court artist during the reign of King Henry VIII, having created many famous portraits of the Tudor court. Holbein's training within the workshop of his artist father gave him knowledge and skills in painting as well as other artistic techniques such as jewellery and metalwork design, glasswork, printing and mural painting. This variety of skills helped him secure and consolidate his position within Henry VIII's court.

Holbein was one of the first painters to give later generations a thorough visual record of the important historical figures of the day. He also painted less famous people who were of contemporary importance such as the courtiers of Henry VIII and prominent merchants, lawyers, scholars and diplomats. Holbein lived in a time of spiritual change – the religious Reformation, and also in a time of intellectual change – the Renaissance.

After the death of Jane Seymour (Henry VIII's third wife) the King began to consider who within European aristocracy would make a suitable fourth wife. Diplomats investigated potential spouses and Holbein was sent to make portraits of them for the King's consideration. Christina of Denmark (1522–1590), niece of Emperor Charles V, was one such potential bride. Christina was 16 at the time of the portrait but was already a widow from her marriage to the Duke of Milan.

These portraits of potential brides acted as a type of 'dating portrait' from which the King could decide, on the basis of appearance, whether to consider further the prospect of marriage. The portrait of Christina is full-length, unlike most other portraits by Holbein, which show the traditional head and shoulder pose. Christina posed for Holbein for three hours in Brussels in 1538. During this time he made preliminary sketches for his final painting. Holbein used a new technique for his portrait sketches using pink coloured paper and chalks to make quick accurate sketches.

Christina is dressed in black as she is in mourning for her dead husband. Although her clothes are plain, Holbein's painting dwells on the lavish and luxurious fabrics. Holbein paid close attention to detail when creating a portrait, carefully recording the exact shape of the face and facial features. Holbein also captures the detail of the ring (a mourning ring) on Christina's hands, which clutch her gloves.

Henry is said to have been so pleased by Christina's appearance when he first saw Holbein's portrait that he made his musicians play for him all day long. The marriage did not take place, but the portrait remained in Henry VIII's private collection.

Discussion

- Research how people would have looked in Tudor times. How accurate and realistic do you think Holbein's portraits are? What do you think about Henry's decision to look at a portrait before meeting a potential bride? In what ways might a painting of someone be an unreliable representation of how they look? In what ways are photographs true or false representations of how someone looks?
- How would you describe the expression on Christina's face? Does it fit her black costume?
- Christina was supposed to have responded to Henry's marriage proposal by saying, 'If I had two heads I would willingly give you one!' Why is it historically unlikely she said this? (Think about when this is supposed to have been said).
- A number of artists have been commissioned to paint the current Queen Elizabeth II. Why do you think the Queen still has her portrait painted rather than just having a photograph taken? Research artists who have painted the Queen recently, such as Lucien Freud and Rolf Harris, and discuss their portraits in terms of their realism and style.

Activities

- Holbein's 'dating portrait' of Christina served as a way of introducing Christina visually to Henry. Work in a pair with another member of your group. This could be someone you know well or someone you want to know more about. Find out about them and their identity – what they like and dislike, where they live etc. Create a presentation for the rest of your group about who this person is and what they look like. You could make a painting, a photomontage or a video piece.
- Look at different types of portrait by Holbein commissioned for different occasions. Find images of yourself that commemorate different times and events in your life or are for different purposes. Consider why these have different compositions. Experiment by creating portraits using a range of materials such as graphite, chalks, charcoal, photography, printing etc... Which materials do you feel are most flattering? Create a portrait or self-portrait that is for a purpose.
- It is said that when Holbein painted Anne of Cleves (1539?), another potential wife for Henry, he painted her in a flattering way. Henry initially agreed to marry her, but had the marriage annulled when he saw how she really looked. Manipulate images using a computer to alter their appearance – try making the subject look older or younger, change their hair-style or the scale or colour of features, or combine images. How do people respond to the altered images? Alternatively you could use wigs, make-up, props and poses to transform yourself into another character and take on a new identity.



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Hans Holbein the Younger

Design for a cup for Jane Seymour 1536

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Douce Bequest 1834

© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford 2006

Background

Although Holbein is most famous for his paintings, to succeed as a court artist he would have needed to be equally skilled as a designer. The training he received in his father's workshop had given him skills in design and metalwork, as well as helping him form relationships with other European craftsmen, metalworkers and designers such as the goldsmith Hans of Antwerp, Cornelius Hayes and Peter Richardson.

Holbein was able to create a network of German and Netherlandish metalworkers to work in collaboration on his designs. The work of these northern European craftsmen was greatly prized in London and Henry VIII employed a number of metalworkers as clockmakers and armourers. Holbein designed a great many decorative items such as pendants, metal book-covers and caskets, ornate cups, table ornaments and also jewelled dagger and sword hilts. Holbein's designs were often based on Renaissance-style designs.

Henry VIII gave his third wife, Jane Seymour, an ornately designed cup to celebrate their marriage, on their wedding day, 30 May 1536. Holbein reflected the magnificence of the occasion as well as the importance of the people involved in his elaborate design.

The Queen's motto 'bound to obey and serve' is repeated on the lid and foot. The King and Queen's initials are intertwined with love knots. On the top, two putti (cherubs) hold a shield with the Royal Crown. In 1621 King Charles I sold the cup; the following lavish description of it dates from that time:

'a fair standing cup of gold, garnished about the cover with eleven diamonds and two pointed diamonds about the cup, seventeen table diamonds and one pearl pendant upon the cup, with these words BOUND TO OBEY AND SERVE, and H and J knit together...'

(Taken from Hans Holbein: Derek Wilson 1996: p.251)

It was important for Henry VIII and his court to have luxurious and ornately-designed metalwork. The quality and quantity of jewellery and metalwork reflected a monarch's status amongst their European rivals. Little of Holbein's original metalwork has survived but his designs have and these often show the various stages of production.

Discussion

- Why was it important for Henry VIII to have elaborate metalwork such as jewellery or table ornaments to reflect his status? Which elements of Henry's outfit/jewellery do you think make him look important? Would you wear any of them?
- What items do people wear or have in their homes that reflect their real or desired status? What are you wearing now and why? What do you want it to say about you?
- Have you ever had anything designed especially for you? What processes would you need to go through with a designer if you were commissioning an item for yourself? What item would you commission and why? Are there any contemporary designers or craftspeople whose work you admire and, if so, what do you like about it?

Activities

- Consider special occasions or events in life when people are given gifts of jewellery or items for their homes. Design your own object or piece of jewellery to reflect a special occasion in your own life. Refer to Holbein's designs which show careful mark-making and lots of detail (this was needed so that craftspeople could interpret his designs correctly). Experiment with putting words into your design as well as decorative patterns and motifs. You should also consider what materials you will use to lay out your design, for example, you could use fine pens for detail and elements of collage to show texture. What would your design be made out of and how does this reflect the occasion? If you have time try to produce a prototype of your design to see if it will work or if you need to adapt it.
- Look at Holbein's portrait work. Often the subjects are wearing items of jewellery that reflect their status or position in society. What kind of items do people have today that show their status (eg cars, designer clothes and jewellery, mobile phones or an i-pod...) Create your own portrait or self-portrait where the subject is wearing items that reflect their status, personality, job or something else about them. Your portrait could take any form and be made in any media – a series of quick portraits could be made by using mobile phone cameras to capture people in their chosen or preferred environments for example.
- Look at Holbein and other Tudor craftsmen's designs for jewellery and clothing. Find out about the fabrics, techniques and materials used for production. Consider and discuss what it would have been like to wear clothes from the Tudor period. How would the clothes have been different from today? The British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood often uses historical fashions and fabrics as an inspiration for her clothing and jewellery designs. Find out about her designs and see if you can spot any Tudor influences. You could design your own item of clothing that makes references to Tudor style and design.



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Hans Holbein the Younger

Allegory of the Old and New Law c1533–35

National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Background

A further testament to Holbein's great versatility as an artist is his religious work. Many artists of the time found themselves commissioned by the Church to create sacred paintings. As a young artist and craftsman he produced altarpieces and frescos for the Catholic Church only to have these destroyed by Protestant mobs during the Reformation. Later in his career he worked with commitment for his Protestant masters, producing works that denounced Catholicism.

During the reign of Henry VIII there was great religious turmoil in England and throughout Europe. During Holbein's first period in England (1526–1528) the country had been Catholic. Holbein had been introduced to Henry's court by his first patron, Thomas More – the Chancellor and a devoted Catholic. Holbein painted More's portrait in 1527.

Henry VIII's first marriage to Catherine of Arragon failed to produce a male heir but Henry's divorce from Catherine and marriage to Anne Boleyn did not have the blessing or permission of the Pope. In order to get round this, Henry broke with the Catholic Church in Rome and declared himself Head of the Church of England. Thomas More refused to swear an oath of allegiance to Henry and was imprisoned and executed in 1535. Soon after Holbein's second arrival in England (1532) he painted Thomas Cromwell, the new chancellor and a Protestant, and won the favour of Anne Boleyn, the new queen. He thus secured his place once more in Henry's court.

In the centre of *Allegory for the Old and New Law* there is a 'miserable' naked man who represents mankind. This figure is forced to choose between the Old Law on the left represented by the prophet Isaiah and the 'grace' of the New Law to which John the Baptist points, represented by Christ on the cross. The central tree is partly leafed and partly bare representing redemption and perdition. The Old Testament era is depicted as an age of sin and penitence, whereas the New Testament era is portrayed as an era of grace and charity. The disciples are pictured as a group in discussion.

This imagery and composition was popular in Protestant Germany where a number of similar woodcuts and paintings were produced. The style of image was also popular in the title pages of bibles. A similar illustration by Holbein forms the title page for his Coverdale Bible (1535). It is painted on an oak panel. It was likely to have been commissioned by an English supporter of the Reformation.

Discussion

- What do you think about Holbein working for patrons who had opposing views? Can you understand why he worked for people on both sides of the religious division?
- Can you describe an experience of conversations with or working with people who have opposing religious or political views?
- An allegory is a story, description or picture where there is a deeper meaning underlying the subject. Do you think that the *Allegory for Old and New Law* depicts the struggle between good and evil? Look carefully at the painting and discuss how Holbein has portrayed the old and new. What imagery has he used and why do we associate certain images with positive and negative? Can we understand the underlying meaning from Holbein's depiction?
- Many contemporary artists also work with religious themes and imagery. Find out about Chris Ofili's *The Upper Room* 1999–2002 at Tate Britain. Can you identify any of the religious references made by this piece of work?

Activities

- In Holbein's era the Church would have commissioned a lot of religious images since many people could not read. Choose a story that you are familiar with and try and create an illustrative version, using only pictures. You may want to look at comic books and comic strips for inspiration. What type of images do you have to use to get your message across? What difficulties are there when you convert words into pictures – can you tell the whole story? See if you can make your drawings into a simple animation using appropriate software.
- What law(s) do you disagree with and why? How would you change them? What might happen if there were no laws?
- Visit a local religious building to look at how things are represented visually. Look at any images or artefacts on display and at the architecture and lighting, including designs for windows, murals or mosaics. Record these details by sketching or if possible by using a digital or video camera. Can you see any visual representations of good and evil or see any allegories? You may be able to collect other visual information by creating rubbings of textured surfaces. Create a sketchbook that records aspects of your visit. Try and find out about the history of the building. If you are visiting an older church see if you can find any evidence of the Reformation.
- Many artists have made pictures of religious stories or tales. Find out about how different artists have illustrated scenes from the Bible or other holy books. Choose a story from a religious text or holy book which has significance for you and recreate your own version using drawing, painting, photography or even performance. Then find out if any artists or illustrators have also represented this story. Compare and contrast your piece of work and theirs.