

*Bryan Wynter*  
*A Selected Retrospective*

**Tate St Ives**  
**15 September – 2 December 2001**

**Notes for Teachers**

# Contents

Introduction

Bryan Wynter: A brief biography

Inspiration and Influences

The Artist's Studio

St Ives in the 1940s, Gallery 1

Early Gouaches, Apse

Painting and Natural Process, Gallery 4

*IMOOS*, Gallery 3

Late Paintings, Lower Gallery 2

Drawings, Education Studio

Thomas Joshua Cooper, Gallery 5

Themes and curriculum links

Further Reading

Glossary

Texts by Bryan Wynter

Poems by W S Graham

## Introduction

The autumn season at Tate St Ives is devoted to landscape with a special focus on the work of Bryan Wynter (1915-75). *Bryan Wynter: A Selected Retrospective* has been curated by Chris Stephens and presents four key moments in Wynter's artistic career. Early small gouaches from the 1940s, abstract paintings from the 1950s, the *IMOOS* constructions (Images Moving Out Onto Space) made in the 1960s, and a series of rarely seen large-scale paintings inspired by light and water made in the 1970s.

At the same time, the Gallery is also exhibiting the work of American artist Thomas Joshua Cooper who presents large-scale atmospheric photographs of the Atlantic Ocean made at the edges of the land in Scotland and Cornwall.

In Upper Gallery 2 visitors will be able to see a new display of ceramics focusing on the work of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. The writer and ceramist Emmanuel Cooper has been invited to curate a new 'craft showcase' offering a reinterpretation of the Wingfield Digby Collection.

### **Why bring your students to *Bryan Wynter: A Selected Retrospective*?**

*Bryan Wynter: A Selected Retrospective* is an exciting and challenging exhibition that will appeal to all ages. It presents the work of an important post-war British artist who was based in St Ives providing a fresh insight into the concerns and development of his work. This exhibition provides a powerful introduction to St Ives art, landscape and abstraction and could provide many starting points for curriculum work.

So how do we approach and talk about the art of Bryan Wynter? The aim of this pack is to provide information about the works on display, trigger questions and further points for discussion. The pack also explores key themes within Wynter's work that could be directly linked to curriculum studies. Wynter's interests, influences and studio practice are also discussed. This pack includes a biography of the artist, suggestions for further reading and a glossary of art historical terms. A plan of the galleries and a list of works are available on request to help you plan your visit.

### **Note**

If you have booked a gallery talk or artist-led activity please discuss all practicalities with a member of the Tate Education team by calling 01736 791113/791114.

### **Resources available in the Gallery**

There is an [Exhibition Study Point on Level 3](#) that has a selection of books relating to the exhibition. You can also access the Tate Gallery [Collection Database](#) online at this point. Also on view in this area is a [short film](#) that captures the movements and optical effects of Wynter's *IMOOS* series entitled, *Bryan Wynter: Windows Through Silence* (By Reg Watkiss, approx. 15 minutes, no sound).

The Tate Gallery shop has a selection of books, catalogues, postcards and related materials, including broadsheets on Bryan Wynter and Thomas Joshua Cooper (£1 each).

## **Bryan Wynter (1915 – 1975)**

### **A brief biography**

Bryan Wynter was born in London on 8 September 1915. He studied at the Slade School between 1938 and 1940. A conscientious objector during the war, Wynter worked on the land around Oxford as well as assisting Solly Zuckerman's research at the Department of Primates, Oxford University. Depressed by his menial work and his involvement with Zuckerman's vivisection experiments, Wynter moved to St Ives in 1945. He settled at the Carn, Zennor, a run-down rustic cottage on the harsh moors of the northern Cornish coast. On arriving in Cornwall, Wynter immediately immersed himself in the natural environment, pursuing activities such as walking, climbing, canoeing and swimming. This deep involvement with landscape and natural process would remain with him throughout his life.

Wynter involved himself with the artistic community in Cornwall, and in 1946 he co-founded the Crypt Group, so-called because they exhibited (in 1946 and 48) in the basement of the deconsecrated Mariner's Church, beneath the St Ives Society of Artists. He later became a member of the Penwith Society of Artists.

Wynter worked on small-scale gouaches during the 1940s, his first solo exhibition taking place at the Redfern Gallery, London, in 1947. He married Susan Letherbridge in 1949 and between 1951 and 1956 taught at Bath Academy of Art, Corsham. Wynter took advantage of a legacy to give up teaching in 1956 and rented a studio in London for ten months. It was during this period that Wynter began his first non-figurative paintings, perhaps influenced by the show of American Abstract Expressionism at the Tate. In 1959 he married Monica Harman. In 1960 he began to translate his concerns into three-dimensions, creating his *IMOOS* (Images Moving Out Onto Space). These kinetic constructions did not replace Wynter's two-dimensional work, but rather can be seen as an extension of it.

Wynter suffered a heart attack in 1961 and in 1964 moved off the moors to Treverven at St Buryan, a village between Penzance and Lands End. He continued to create art until shortly before his death in Penzance on 11 February 1975.

## Inspiration and Influences

Bryan Wynter lived and worked in Cornwall from 1945 until his death. His earliest paintings are representational but later he made works which are essentially abstract. Whichever, all his paintings looked to the natural world as a source and a model. This exhibition shows how Wynter's art developed and changed: from representational depictions of the landscape, through the first abstract paintings and movement of the *IMOOS* to the boldly coloured late works. The exhibition shows how nature was the source but not the subject of his work.

Wynter's art derived from his belief in the power and value of nature and his move to Cornwall at the end of the war can be seen as an attempt to find reparation in art and nature. Wynter's profound connection with his environment, especially water, provided both inspiration and imagery for his art. His works are fundamentally concerned with man's inner relationship with nature.

Wynter is often associated with the 'Middle Generation' of St Ives artists. He was part of a group of painters which included Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, Peter Lanyon, Terry Frost, William Scott and John Wells, who lived or spent time in St Ives, many of whom also taught at the Bath Academy of Art, Corsham in the 1950s. However, Wynter's work and development toward abstraction really evolved out of his initial interest in Surrealism and a Neo-Romantic approach to landscape, rather than the Constructivism of St Ives artists such as Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo.

Influenced by writers such as Carl Jung, Henri Bergson, Robert Graves and Aldous Huxley, Wynter was interested in the idea that he could free his art from conscious will. He held the essentially romantic view that somehow he could explore and recreate the innocence of nature and an innocence of vision. He used to put paintings in his bedroom so that he could wake up and take a 'fresh look' at his work. He wrote of the unconscious vision at a moment of waking:

*I find it helpful to think of that moment at which the eye looks out at the world it has not yet recognised, in which true seeing has not yet been translated into the useful concepts with which the mind immediately swamps it (1957).*

Wynter was fascinated by methods that stimulated the imagination and creative process of the subconscious. He had read Aldous Huxley's Doors of Perception (1954) that described the visual and perceptual effects of the hallucinogenic drug Mescaline. Wynter took part, as a volunteer, in a series of scientific experiments in London with the drug and later went on to use the drug with his friends before it became illegal. **NOTE : This information has been included because it constitutes an important aspect in which to understand Wynter's work in the context of its time. We would suggest that this material may not be suitable for younger students and we are sensitive to the issues which any reference to drugs may present. In the case of more mature students it may be valuable to explore this issue not only in relation to the art history but as a social studies issue. In any discussion surrounding this issue with older students in the gallery space, staff would be careful to stress the negative aspects of this type of experimentation to provide a balanced viewpoint. If you are planning a visit and have any concerns or queries about this please talk to gallery staff who will be happy to discuss further.**

## Influences on Wynter's work

- Surrealism Art by Max Ernst and other key Surrealist artists played a significant part in Wynter's work during and after the war.
- Neo-Romanticism Much of Wynter's post-war work is associated with British Neo-Romantic artists such as Graham Sutherland and Michael Ayrton.
- Cubism Critics have often referred to Wynter's 'cubist-draughtsmanship', and many of his paintings share certain qualities with those of Georges Braque.
- Water Water and the environment played a key role in Wynter's work throughout his career, providing both inspiration and imagery for his art. The behaviour of water is particularly evident in his paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- Abstract Expressionism & Tachism 1956 saw the introduction of these styles into Britain, and their influence can be clearly seen in Wynter's paintings of the late 1950s, for example *Seedtime* (1958-9), and *Mars Ascends* (1956).
- Psychoanalysis Wynter read C G Jung, Aldous Huxley, and Henri Bergson among others, and this provoked an interest in the unconscious that is reflected in his art.

Note: for further information please refer to the Glossary.

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### **Henri Bergson**

In Time and Free Will Bergson put forward a theory of duration that had a significant impact on Wynter. In this theory he proposed that there is a distinction between the concept and experience of time, and that human experience perceives reality as a continuous flow of duration.

### **Aldous Huxley**

In 1954 Aldous Huxley recorded his experience of using the drug Mescaline under supervision in Doors of Perception. Read by Wynter, this book opened up the idea of using Mescaline as a way of accessing the subconscious, as well as exploring the effect and characteristics of the drug.

### **C G Jung**

Wynter read Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious in which the author added to the Freudian idea of the 'personal unconscious'. He put forward the notion of the 'collective unconscious' as the unconscious part of the mind that holds common inherited cultural experience.

## The Artist's Studio

Bryan Wynter was a great inventor and collector. The study of the observational world around him, which fed his painting, embraced his studio and home. He was always experimenting. For example, Wynter often hung objects from walls and ceilings, enjoying a fresh approach to familiar things. Just as he explored the landscape around him through direct physical experience, he created a studio full of ideas and improvisations that could inspire his painting.

His widow, Monica Wynter, has recalled how he used to keep a large collection of slides in his studio based upon the world around him. She said,

*His paintings were very much a response to the landscape in which he lived and moved...His was not a static view of it...he took numerous colour slides, not so much of views, more in the nature of records of different textures and colours to be found in his surroundings – close-ups of things found on the shore – pools, pebbles, seaweeds, water in movement – and on the land – mosses, lichens, rocks, stone walls, the growth of grasses, hedges, and the movement of these in contrast to the immovability of the underlying rock. It seems to me that his paintings record what it felt like to be moving in the landscape.’(1984)*

Wynter's informal experiments with objects hanging in space in the studio developed into something more like 'studies' when he began to experiment with coloured cards, eventually leading to the creations of the *IMOOS*. He kept a huge parabolic mirror from a disused wartime searchlight above the fireplace at the Carn and he had always been fascinated by its peculiar distorting effects.

Wynter's studio, seen in photographs emphasise a working process that was particularly inventive. His approach to the creative process was all-embracing - paintings, drawings, studies, and collections are all interconnected. This photograph shows a work in progress which gives the sense of the process of layering in the painting as well as describing the environment in the studio space.

## St Ives in the 1940s, Gallery 1

In Gallery 1 there is a display of work focusing on St Ives in the 1940s. Artists included are Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, Peter Lanyon and Margaret Mellis. Also included are paintings by Robert Colquhoun, Graham Sutherland, John Minton, Prunella Clough and Robert MacBryde.

St Ives's links with modern art was confirmed in the immediate post-war period when artists such as Hepworth, Nicholson and Gabo emerged from wartime restrictions to establish themselves at the forefront of British modern art. At the same time, a younger generation of artists was drawn to the evocative beauty of Cornwall as the unspoiled nature of the landscape offered possibilities of new subject matter. For some this visit was temporary, whilst for others, such as Bryan Wynter, the stay became permanent.

The display creates a context for Wynter's first explorations into landscape and abstraction. It highlights two aspects of British art in the 1940s. On the one hand, you can see the Constructivist approach championed by Hepworth, Gabo and Nicholson. On the other you can see the Neo-Romantic work of artists such as Sutherland and Minton which looked to the Surrealists and the work of Samuel Palmer.

### Key works

Wynter's *Cornish Farm* (1948) can be seen on the far right as you walk into the Gallery. This painting shows a cottage set within a moody, wind-swept landscape. The dark colours, strong black lines and mottled surfaces create an eerie quality. It is interesting to compare this work with John Minton's *Children by the Sea* (1945) in the centre of the room. Minton visited Cornwall at the invitation of his friend, the poet, W S Graham and this painting is thought to be inspired by a scene in Penzance. *Children by the Sea* also has a dark brooding quality emphasised by the use of dark colours and the strange angle of the composition. The children are caught in a dream-like space, Minton's attention to surface and detail give the painting a jewel-like quality, rather like an illustration for a macabre fairy tale.

### Trigger questions

- ◆ Look around the room and find a work that catches your eye – look at it closely. Why do you think you noticed it more than the others? Can you find words to describe it.
- ◆ Now glance around the whole room again. What sorts of things are these artists interested in? Make a list.

### Things to think about:

- ◆ The works in this room are all quite **small**. They reflect the immediate post-war period when materials were still scarce.
- ◆ **Dark mood**. The majority of works in the room have a sombre, and in some cases, quite dark mood. Why do you think this might be?
- ◆ **Approaches to landscape**. Consider the range of approaches to landscape in this display. From the depiction of Cornish cottages to darker subterranean scenes.
- ◆ **Man and nature**. Explore the different ways artists tackle this subject.

- ◆ **Interior and exterior.** Contrast the sculptures of Hepworth with the strange setting for Clough's *The White Root* ((1946) or John Tunnard's *Tol Pedn* (1942).
- ◆ **Theatre and fiction.** Look at the way artists such as Minton and Colquoun create strange theatrical settings for their figures, or the way Sutherland dramatises the landscape to create strange, disturbing scenes.
- ◆ **Surrealism.** Many of the artists in this display were influenced by Surrealism. In particular, the idea of automatism, whereby artists employed a so-called 'free' drawing style to create a composition. Another idea is that of the 'surrealist object' whereby an ordinary object such as a tree or stone takes on strange, disturbing associations by the way it is presented and juxtaposed to other objects.
- ◆ **Constructivism versus Neo-Romanticism.** Contrast the work of artists such as Nicholson and Hepworth with Neo-Romantic artists such as Minton and Sutherland. (See Glossary for further information).

## Early Works, Apse

In the Apse you will find a small display of Wynter's gouaches from the 1940s. These paintings are part of a series that Wynter began soon after he moved to Cornwall and they are based on the landscape near to his new home. Wynter settled at the Carn, a simple cottage high on the moors above Zennor, north of St Ives. The landscape around the Carn is bleak and barren and his paintings focus on the small settlements, ruined tin mines and animals and birds that he saw around him in West Penwith.

The paintings reflect Wynter's love and knowledge of the landscape and life that it supports. The history of a place from earliest times, through past human occupants to the immediate life and death struggles of plants and animals is evoked in these brooding landscapes. He said in 1962,

*Am I still a landscape painter? The landscape I live among is bare of houses, trees, people; is dominated by winds, by swift changes of weather, by the moods, of the sea; sometimes it is devastated and blackened by fire. These elemental forces enter the paintings and lend their qualities without becoming motifs.*

The paintings were made using a monoprint technique whereby a design is painted on a surface using gouache, and sometimes a wax crayon, onto which he pressed paper, then, while the paint is still wet, he peeled the paper off. This gives the paintings their particular glutinous, blotchy surfaces and textures. Wynter liked the way the surfaces created through this technique seemed to mimic the actual textures of the landscape. He would then rework the painting adding washes, bold lines and little details.

### Key work

*Birds Disturbing the Sleep of the Town*, 1948 shows some gulls above a Cornish harbour at night. On the far left an old pump house is silhouetted against the dark sky.

The painting has an eerie quality – the birds are huge and menacing – they appear to be swooping down over the buildings rather like bombers. Wynter plays on the contrast between the birds and the picturesque buildings below. He uses the monotype technique to draw out these qualities – washes of white and black are combined with bold lines and textured surfaces.

### Trigger questions

- ◆ Describe the sorts of things you can see in the paintings in this room.
- ◆ They are all paintings of landscape. What aspects of the landscape is Wynter most interested?
- ◆ Look closely at the way they have been painted. Describe the textures and surfaces.
- ◆ Describe the colours in these paintings.

### Things to think about

- ◆ The paintings have a **dark, brooding** quality – describe some of the ways Wynter achieves this. They also have quite a **magical, dream-like** quality to them. Notice how often a moon appears in them.
- ◆ Wynter was interested in **Surrealism** and in particular the work of Max Ernst. Wynter's monoprint technique is derived from the automatist method known as 'decalcomania' whereby the fantastic textures and mottled surfaces are created by pressing paint between two surfaces and pulling them apart.
- ◆ **Neo-Romanticism**. Wynter was influenced by the Neo-Romantic painters (see Glossary).
- ◆ **Picasso & Cubism**. Wynter was interested in Cubism. The strange angular shapes, broken viewpoints and menacing birds can be linked to the work of Picasso.

## **IMOOS (Images Moving Out onto Space), Gallery 3**

Between 1960 and 1965, Bryan Wynter made a group of six kinetic works of art (mobiles) which he called *IMOOS* (standing for Images Moving Out Onto Space). He later made a second set. Painted cards are suspended in front of a parabolic mirror. As the cards move from the heat of the lamp their reflections are broken up, reform, merge and loom out at the viewer.

The first set of *IMOOS* were exhibited in 1965 and proved a great success. All six were sold to British public collections. In 1970 he was invited to make a large site-specific work for an advertising agency in Dallas, Texas.

Although three-dimensional the *IMOOS* are closely connected to Wynter's paintings of the same time. He was concerned with illusionistic space and the idea of creating a visual flux; a surface pattern that seemed to be always moving. Wynter said,

*My painting has long been concerned with metamorphosis and movement. My kinetic [The IMOOS] work extends but does not replace it. It is a matter of submitting to the necessary mechanical restrictions to gain a new particular freedom because no other way is open. (1970)*

The original idea for the *IMOOS* works came from an old parabolic mirror from a disused wartime searchlight that Wynter had in his cottage. At first he simply experimented with strips of card, painted with gouache and suspended. He then built an open-fronted box in which to enclose the mirror. The mobile was suspended from the top of the box and he used an electric motor to turn a magnet which in turn pulled and repelled the thin wire rods from which the cards hung. He later replaced the motor and installed a tungsten quartz light, the convection of which was used to move the cards.

Today these works require a considerable amount of conservation and maintenance due to their fragile nature. In this display you can see five, each very different in scale and composition, and each within their original boxes, mirror and light fittings.

### Key work

*IMOOS I* is the largest work. Consider the strange and mysterious effect of the mirror on the simple painted shapes. As the mobile turns the images are enlarged, distorted and reversed – sometimes they recede, sometimes they extend. The images are constantly changing and as the mobile moves the shapes are reflected in unexpected ways. Notice how suddenly one of the shapes will loom and fill the lens.

### Trigger questions

- ◆ Describe what you see as you look into the holes?
- ◆ What happens to the shapes and colours as they move?
- ◆ Can you think of words to describe the effect?
- ◆ How do *you* feel looking into the mirror? Can you see yourself?
- ◆ Why do you think Wynter made these mobiles?
- ◆ In what ways are these mobiles similar to some of Wynter's paintings?

### Things to think about

- ◆ **Movement and light.** The *IMOOS* works explore ideas about the visual perception of movement and light. Compare and contrast these works with his paintings. The heat of the light inside the works causes the mobiles to move. The mobiles also move due to the air currents in the room. As more people enter the space, the mobiles move even more.
- ◆ The effect of the *IMOOS* is quite **magical**. This same magical feeling can be seen in both his early landscapes and his later abstract paintings.
- ◆ **Op Art.** The painted cards within the *IMOOS* are bright and bold. Wynter uses strong lines and colours and sharp geometric shapes. The *IMOOS* relate to the Op Art artists such as Bridget Riley, whose paintings sought to create a similar sense of physical and sensory disorientation and play with optical illusions.
- ◆ **Kinetic Art.** Wynter's work can be seen within this history of kinetic sculpture and it is interesting to make comparisons to Calder's mobiles, for example.
- ◆ **Ourselves as part of the visual experience.** As you look into the boxes, you see yourself reflected and distorted. We become part of the visual experience – another layer of the moving image.
- ◆ The painting *Hostile Tribe (1956)* has been hung on the wall opposite the *IMOOS*. Consider the ways in which this painting relates to them. Notice how

Wynter creates the same feeling of movement and flux but this time with paint on a flat surface.

## Painting and Natural Process, Gallery 4

This display focuses on a series of more abstract paintings Wynter made between 1956 and 1962. In these paintings long strokes and short dabs of paint are built up in layers so that they become like screens offering glimpses into shallow space below. The fragmented patterns of paint have been described as 'a grille, or network of brushsigns'. You can see how these paintings developed from the dense surfaces of the earlier landscapes (in the Apse), but they also anticipate the larger, brighter water-derived works in Lower Gallery 2.

In 1956, Wynter radically changed his painting style when he made his first completely non-representational works. 1956 saw some changes in his life that resulted in a surge of creative energy. He received a financial legacy that enabled him to give up his teaching and he rented a studio in London where he was able to concentrate on his painting.

As titles such as *Riverbed* (1959), *Sandspoor V* (1963), *Firestreak IV* (1962), *Seedtime* (1958-9) and *Kayak* (1961) suggest, these paintings still look to nature for their inspiration. Wynter described the gradual building up of the image as similar to the way wind and rain carve shapes in the landscape, or streams of water leave a pattern in the sand, or how fire may blacken the moors.

*My paintings are non-representational but linked to the products of nature in as much as they are developed according to laws within themselves and are a static record of the processes that have brought them about.*

*A stream finds its way over rocks. The force of the stream and the quality of the rocks determine the stream's bed. This in turn modifies the course of the stream, channelling out new sluices and hollows. The stream erodes the rock, the rock deflects the stream, until, at some high point, the stream bursts its banks and falls into a ravine. The dry stream bed, carved and hollowed, remains. Its form contains its history.*

*There are no rocks or streams in my paintings but a comparable process of dynamic versus static elements has attended their development and brought about their final form.*

Bryan Wynter, Unpublished Note, 10 January 1960

### Key work

If you look closely at the brushwork of *In the Stream's Path* (1958) you can see how Wynter builds up a sense of flux and movement. The composition fills the canvas to the edges but without making any focus - there is a feeling of balance. His marks seem to mimic the idea of water flowing over and around stones in a stream. The paint literally seems to flow down and to the edges of the canvas. Notice also how he contrasts the deep colours with dabs of white and paler colours to create patterns - almost as if you are looking down at the surface of the water.

### Trigger questions

- ◆ As you come into this room, which paintings do you find yourself drawn to?
- ◆ What do the paintings make you think of? (don't look at the titles straight away)
- ◆ Describe the surfaces, textures and layers of paint.
- ◆ Can you think of words to describe the movement of the brushstrokes and the mark making?

### Things to think about

- ◆ **The elements: fire, water and air.** These paintings are inspired by the elemental forces of nature. Their colours and brushwork reflect these sources. For example, *Firestreak IV* relates to the periodic burning of the moorland heather and gorse near Wynter's home that lit up the sky and left the land blackened and bare.
- ◆ **Weaving a path through nature.** Wynter was interested in the way history is recorded in the landscape. The way the shape of the rock tells you about the water currents that have flowed around it or how marks in the sand record the path of an animal, or the ripples of the tide. Just as landscape is the embodiment of its own history Wynter saw his paintings as a record of a process of making.
- ◆ **Mark making and calligraphy.** Wynter's brushwork has a rhythm and intensity. At a distance some of the marks seem to dance across the canvas rather like intricate calligraphic writing.
- ◆ **Taschism and Abstract Expressionism.** Wynter was familiar with the European style of abstract painting known as Tachism and he had also seen work in London in 1956 by the American Abstract Expressionists. The emphasis on spontaneity of expression, non-illusionistic surfaces and gestural brush stroke was common to these artists and the influence of these styles is evident in Wynter's work.
- ◆ **Mood and atmosphere.** Consider how Wynter creates contrasting moods and atmospheres with each painting in this room. Just as in his earlier representational landscapes, he uses colour and texture to great effect. Compare and contrast these paintings with the **photographs of Thomas Joshua Cooper** in the next room (Gallery 5). Consider how each artist creates a mood and atmosphere. How does each artist explore ideas about surface, light and shadow?

## Late Paintings, Lower Gallery 2

### Water Series 1969-75

This display shows a series of large paintings inspired by air and water. They are larger and more brightly coloured than any Wynter had made before. Although they are essentially abstract, like all his work they are inspired by his close observation and intimate knowledge of nature. These late paintings have rarely been seen since Wynter's retrospective exhibition in 1976 and seen today they seem to take on a particular power and resonance.

As titles such as *Confluence VI* (1966), *Meander I* (1967) and *Red River* (1974) indicate, these paintings relate to the behaviour and forms of water. Wynter's knowledge of water derived not only from close observation, but his physical involvement with it through swimming, diving and most especially, canoeing and white-water rafting. In the early 1950s Wynter made a glass-bottom boat so that he could study life beneath the water's surface. Later he went on a number of canoeing holidays and a trip to Northern Spain in 1969 was especially inspirational. The Spanish rivers Deva and Saja and such local places as Fuente De provided titles for paintings.

These paintings are striking in their use of strong colours – rich ruby red, hot oranges and virulent greens – these choice of less natural colours emphasise that although inspired by nature, these paintings are first and foremost abstract. They are about the harmonious interaction of colour and form. Water is the source but not the subject.

Wynter's actual painting technique is also much bolder and less detailed compared to his earlier paintings. The rhythms and textures created through the brushwork are less intense. These large works, which are all oil on canvas, appear to have been carefully planned beforehand. The marks are precise and there is little evidence that he re-worked areas. In some, you can see that he started by outlining the composition in pencil before applying the paint.

#### Key work

In *Red & Black Streams* (1973) painted lines and forms converge and interact in ways that mimic both the winding path of streams and also the ripples and currents within the stream. The larger forms curl down the canvas just as a river winds its way through a landscape.

#### Trigger questions

- ◆ What are your immediate reactions when you look at these paintings?
- ◆ Describe the colours and shapes?
- ◆ What do they all have in common?
- ◆ What do they remind you of?
- ◆ Why do you think they are so big?

#### Things to think about

- ◆ Wynter's late paintings are larger and bolder than any he had made before. They reflect a response to the **large-scale abstract painting** that emerged in Britain and America in the later 1950s and early 1960s.

- ◆ The rich and exciting colours in these paintings also relate to **Psychedelia** (posters and paintings with vivid colours and designs) that was popular at this time.
- ◆ Wynter was interested in the **archetypal forms of water** which he described as the wave, the eddy and the meander. He was fascinated by the patterns of water, how these archetypal forms are in fact always changing – the behaviour of water is both predictable and endlessly varied. He was also interested in the way a river contained both large movement and form (the river carved through the landscape) and small (the ripple and flow of individual currents with in it).

## Drawings, Education Studio

Wynter's late paintings, as seen in Lower Gallery 2, were developed through working drawings, In these, he experimented with the patterns of lines and more solid forms that characterise the paintings. A selection of these drawings can be viewed in the Education Studio, adjacent to Lower Gallery 2.

The drawings were made in series, using a pentel fibre tip pen, with the use of a tabletop lightbox. The patterns could be reused and developed by placing the drawing on the lightbox and tracing through onto a new piece of paper. In this way, Wynter was able to add and remove different sections of the composition, creating variations and developing the complex interaction of different lines.

### Trigger questions

- ◆ How would you describe the way Wynter uses the pen in his drawings?
- ◆ Why do you think he chose to use a pen rather than a pencil?
- ◆ What sorts of links can you make between Wynter's drawings and his late paintings?
- ◆ Do you think there are also links between these drawings and Wynter's earlier paintings and *IMOOS*?
- ◆ Consider the way shape and space created in the drawings are translated into colour and form in his paintings.

### Things to think about

- ◆ **Why is it interesting to look at the drawings of a painter?** Wynter's drawings are like the thought process that fed his paintings – you can see him trying out ideas and compositions that were later developed on a larger scale and in colour.
- ◆ **Repetition of pattern.** Look at the way Wynter develops and repeats patterns in both his drawings and paintings.

# Thomas Joshua Cooper, At the Very Edges of the World, Gallery 5

In Gallery 5 the contemporary American artist Thomas Joshua Cooper presents large-scale atmospheric photographs of the Atlantic Ocean made at the edges of the land in Scotland and Cornwall. These remarkable photographs were made with a large-format camera which is over 100 years old, working outdoors in the landscape. Each photograph is developed from a single exposure making it unique. In the image *The Swelling of the Sea*, what the camera allows us to see is an instant of time, where a slow shutter speed offers a subtle transformation of the surface of the sea. In this way our eye reads soft grasses or in another work, fire or where land and sea appear to shift and change and read as either element.

Over the past fifteen years Cooper has worked with water as a primary source of inspiration, looking at oceans, rivers, lakes, streams and seas. He has photographed the extreme north of Scotland, the extreme south at Bumble Rock, the Lizard Peninsular and western and eastern points in continental Europe.

Born in California in 1946, Cooper studied photography in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is currently based in Glasgow where he is Professor in the School of Fine Art, Department of Photography, Glasgow School of Art.

Cooper's photographs are made in the grand tradition of American landscape photography. His work can be compared to famous photographers such as Alfred Steiglitz and Edward Weston who were largely responsible for raising the status of photography as fine art. You could also compare his atmospheric images to painters such as Turner or Monet, as well as the American Abstract Expressionists such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko whose work he loved and informed his own practice.

Seen here at Tate St Ives, Cooper's images take on a particular resonance and some interesting connections can be made to Bryan Wynter. Consider, for example how both artists explore landscape and more particularly the subject of water. Consider also the way both artists, each within their chosen medium, disturb and challenge our visual perception of landscape, horizon and edges.

## Key work

*Arrival – The English Channel, at the hour of the total solar eclipse, but the day before*, (1999) is a photograph of Bumble Rock at Lizard Point in Cornwall. The swell of the calm sea fills the foreground as the viewpoint is tipped up so that Bumble Rock is half caught at the top edge of the photograph. The image has a softness and subtlety as the feathery surface of the water pans out in front of us. The dark tones of land to the right contrast with the bleached tones of Bumble Rock – almost as if land is fading into sea.

## Trigger questions

- ◆ What aspect of the landscape or seascape is Cooper interested in?
- ◆ Where is the horizon? Consider the viewpoint from which the photographs are taken.
- ◆ Is Cooper interested in detail and description or mood and atmosphere?

### Things to think about

- ◆ **A sense of place.** What ideas about the places Cooper chooses to photograph does he wish to convey to us? Why do you think he chooses extreme edges? Cooper is not interested in documenting the landscape but rather creating a moment of stillness. Contrast these photographs with works that explore landscape and a sense of place in Gallery 1 (such as Sutherland's *Miner Probing a Drill Hole*, 1942 or Lanyon's *Headland*, 1948).
- ◆ Consider how he explores the more **abstract qualities** of his subjects such as the mist or spray of water, the surface of the sea or the edge of the land.
- ◆ Consider the role played by **light and shadow** and by contrasts of light and dark. Some of his photographs seemed to be veiled in light causing solid rock to look insubstantial, almost transient.
- ◆ Consider the role played by **texture**.
- ◆ **Man and nature.** Cooper's photographs explore man's relationship with nature. They evoke ideas about the sublime and the beautiful. Compare Cooper's way of capturing nature with that of Wynter.
- ◆ **A moment in time or eternal stillness?** At first glance Cooper's photographs seem to capture a fleeting moment. Rather like an Impressionist painting they seem to be about a particular light effect and viewpoint. On closer inspection you realise they are more about a moment of stillness – about making a momentary scene eternally beautiful.
- ◆ **Edges and expanses.** Why do you think Cooper chooses to focus on the edge of sea and land. Why does he focus on the Atlantic coast of England? Often his photographs lose the horizon to an expanse of water or sky.

## Themes and curriculum links

In addition to the points raised in relation to the individual displays, you might like to consider some of the following themes and issues. You could choose to focus your visit on one theme which could link directly to curriculum work but which could be explored throughout the exhibition.

### **Landscape and nature**

Wynter's art was inspired and developed through his love and knowledge of landscape and nature. Use the exhibition to explore Wynter's ideas. Why and how did his work become abstract? What aspects of the world around him was he most interested in? Compare Wynter's work to other artists interested in landscape and nature. For example, contrast Wynter's paintings with the photographs by Thomas Joshua Cooper in Gallery 5.

### **Water**

Wynter was interested in the behaviour of water. He observed it in many different ways and often through direct physical involvement such as swimming or canoeing.

Waves, rivers, streams, springs, torrents, ripples – he was endlessly fascinated by the rhythms, patterns and movements of water. Many of his paintings reflect this interest through their titles. They also demonstrate it through the way he actually applied the paint. His choices of colour, line and brushwork often mimic the behaviour of water.

### **Movement**

Wynter was interested in creating a sense of movement and flux. Through composition, colour and brushwork his paintings evoke a feeling of movement and energy. These ideas were further developed in his three-dimensional *IMOOS*. Wynter was particularly interested in the movement of water. He was also interested in the idea of movement through the landscape. Some of his paintings suggest the actual physical movement of the artist as he worked across the canvas. The *IMOOS* draw us in, as viewer, emphasising our own movement and physical presence within the work.

### **Abstraction**

This exhibition shows the development of Wynter's work from representation to abstraction. But what does abstract mean when applied to Wynter's work? His work from the 1960s and 1970s is primarily about colour, line, shape and brushwork. However, the ideas for these paintings were rooted in nature, in real things. This is emphasised by the titles of the works.

It is interesting to trace the development of abstraction in Wynter's work and to set his work within the wider context of the development of European and American abstract art at this time. It is also interesting to compare his work to that of his contemporaries in St Ives such as Patrick Heron or Peter Lanyon.

### **Mood, magic and theatre**

Each display at Tate St Ives creates a particular mood and atmosphere. Whether it is the early landscapes, the later abstract works or the *IMOOS*, Wynter evokes a sense of magic and drama. Consider how he achieves this. How does he draw us into his world? Compare Wynter with other artists displayed in Gallery 1 such as Minton or Sutherland. Compare Wynter also to the work of Thomas Joshua Cooper.

### **Poetry and writing**

Wynter's work provokes a range of feelings and reactions. What sorts of words best describe his works? Encourage students to write about their ideas and views both during their visit and back at school. Students could develop a poem or narrative about one of the works or about the relationship between works in the exhibition.

Wynter's choice of titles are evocative and thought provoking. Consider how his titles add layers and meaning to the works.

Why not look at writer's inspired by nature? A study of Wynter's paintings could form part of a wider focus on literature and poetry. Consider also looking at writers particularly associated with Zennor and St Ives such as D H Lawrence, W S Graham, Denys Val Baker, Sven Berlin, Norman Levine and George Baker.

Extracts from some of W S Graham's poems are included at the back of this pack. More detailed research on post-war writing and artists in St Ives is due to be published by Falmouth College of Arts and Tate St Ives early 2002. Contact us for details.

### **Mark making**

This exhibition includes the full range of techniques and materials that Wynter explored. Contrast his early monotype paintings with his later abstract paintings. Contrast the brushwork and mark making of his paintings in Gallery 4 with his late paintings seen in Lower Gallery 2. Look also at his drawings in the Education Studio. Wynter's work provides a wonderful focus for students to develop their own mark making, be it drawings or paintings.

### **Music**

Tate St Ives has commissioned composer Graham Fitkin to write a new piece of music in response to the work of Bryan Wynter. This will be presented at advertised times in the Gallery from mid October. The paintings and sculpture could provide a number of starting points for composition or using music as a form for interpretation of the work. Resonance, tone, mark-making, rhythm all provide interesting ways to describe some of Wynter's working processes. It might also be interesting to consider musical or equivalents in sound for the themes and ideas which feature in his work.

## Further Reading

STEPHENS, C: *Bryan Wynter*. London, Tate Gallery Publishing 1999.

BROWN, D (ed): *St Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery*, Tate Gallery, London. 1985.

RYAN, A: *Five Contemporary Painters: Adrian Ryan, Bryan Wynter, Patrick Heron, R.W Treffgarne, Paul Feiler* Arts Council of Great Britain 1950

CROSS, T: *Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St Ives Artists 1939-1975* Penzance & Guildford 1984

HERON, P & BOWNESS, A: *Bryan Wynter 1915-1975 exhibition catalogue* Hayward Gallery 1976

GOODING, M & HERON, P *The Fifties: Art from the British Council Collection*, London, The British Council 1998

VAL BAKER, D *Britain's Art Colony by the Sea* Sansom & Co 2000

MOSZYNSKA, A *Abstract Art* Thames & Hudson London 1995

GOODING, M (ed): *Painter as Critic: Patrick Heron: Selected Writings* Tate Publishing, 2001

GRAHAM, W.S: *Selected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1996

Note: for further research the **St Ives Archive Study Centre** holds a range of material related to Bryan Wynter including a range of articles and exhibition catalogues.

St Ives Archive Study Centre

First Floor

St Ives Library

Gabriel Street

St Ives TR26 2LX

Tel: 01736 796408

e-mail: [archive@stives.trust.demon.uk](mailto:archive@stives.trust.demon.uk)

## Other suggested reading

JUNG, C. G: *Psychology of the Unconscious* London, Routledge 1951

BERGSON, H: *Time and Free Will* Kessinger, Kila 1996

BERGSON, H: *The Creative Mind: an Introduction to Metaphysics* Citadel Press 1992

DUNNE, J.W: *An Experiment With Time* London, Macmillan 1981

YORKE, M: *The Spirit of Place. Nine Neo-romantic artists in their times* London, Constable, 1988

HUXLEY, A: *The Doors of Perception* London 1954

ANFAM, D: *Abstract Expressionism* London, Thames & Hudson, 1990

GOODING, M: *Patrick Heron* London, Phaidon 1994

## **Books about Thomas Joshua Cooper**

Cooper, Thomas Joshua: *An Artist's View*, Salzburg, 1991

Cooper, Thomas Joshua: *A Handful of Stones*, Norfolk, England, 1996

Murray, Graham (ed.): *The Unpainted Landscape*, Coracle Press, Scottish Arts Council, London & Edinburgh, 1987

Murray, Graham (ed.): Thomas Joshua Cooper, *Dreaming The Gostadt*, Edinburgh, 1988

Murray, Graham (ed.): Thomas Joshua Cooper, *Between Dark and Dark*, Edinburgh, 1985

National Galleries of Scotland (ed.): *New Scottish Photography*, Edinburgh, 1991

## **USEFUL WEBSITES:**

**[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) - Tate Gallery on line**

### **Directly relating to Wynter:**

[www.roland-collection.com/rolandcollection/section/34/587.htm](http://www.roland-collection.com/rolandcollection/section/34/587.htm) download a video clip of Wynter's IMOOS

[www.artguide.org.uk](http://www.artguide.org.uk) find out where you can see more of Wynter's work

### **Related to influences on Wynter:**

<http://www.cgjungpage.org> Introduction to C. G Jung & links to other sites

[http://paradigm.soci.brocku.ca/~lward/Bergson/berg02\\_01.html](http://paradigm.soci.brocku.ca/~lward/Bergson/berg02_01.html) Read Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will* online

<http://www.robertgraves.org> Introduction to Robert Graves & links

<http://somaweb.org> Links to Aldous Huxley

### **Miscellaneous**

[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) References to artists and art movements

[www.stivestrust.demon.co.uk/archivesite](http://www.stivestrust.demon.co.uk/archivesite) St Ives Archive Study Centre website

[www.artchive.com](http://www.artchive.com) information on key artists and movements

[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com) information on key artists and movements

[www.britisharts.co.uk](http://www.britisharts.co.uk) gives information on individual artists and galleries

[www.xrefer.com](http://www.xrefer.com) reference search engine

# Glossary

## Abstract art

In its most general sense abstract art is art that does not represent aspects of the visible world. It is also described as non-objective, non-representational and non-figurative art. In the twentieth century many artistic movements (such as Cubism, Constructivism and Abstract Expressionism) explored and developed abstract art. But the term means different things in relation to different artists. Bryan Wynter's later paintings are described as abstract but they are related to natural sources - his titles reinforce this.

## Abstract Expressionism

Usually connected with American artists working in a non-geometric style of abstraction. The term emphasises the spontaneity of expression and the idea of the subconscious. It encompasses a variety of styles, from Pollock's dribbling techniques to Rothko's colour fields. Key artists include Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Mark Tobey and Willem de Kooning.

## Constructivism

Constructivism describes a movement of art in 1920s Russia which included the artists, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Tatlin, Pevsner and Gabo. They emphasised the role of materials and developed a language of abstraction based on ideas of pure form. The Constructivists aimed to make art a detached, scientific investigation of abstract properties (picture surface, construction, line and colour). Gabo and Pevsner left Russia in 1922 after Constructivism had been condemned by the Soviet regime, and they and other exiles helped to spread the ideals of the movement throughout Europe. They were influential, for example, on the Bauhaus in Germany, De Stijl in the Netherlands, and the Abstraction-Création group in France, and Gabo was one of the editors of the English Constructivist manifesto, Circle, in 1937. Gabo spent time in St Ives at the beginning of the war and his presence encouraged artists such as Hepworth and Nicholson to develop abstract art based on Constructivist principles.

## Cubism

An early twentieth century style that developed from the idea that an object should be shown from all angles, not just one point of view. Artists therefore rejected conventional techniques of perspective and dimension, and instead broke their subject matter up and reconstructed it in an abstract form that showed a number of points of view simultaneously. Key Cubist artists include Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques.

## Figurative art

The word figurative is sometimes used in contradictory ways. Traditionally it has been applied to art works that are representational rather than completely abstract. Figurative also means more directly to be about the human figure.

## Kinetic Art

Kinetic art is the term used to describe art that incorporates real or apparent movement. Artists such as Naum Gabo, Marcel Duchamp and Moholy-Nagy all experimented with kinetic works in the 1920s and 1930s. However, it was Alexander Calder who is perhaps best associated with moving sculpture.

### **Neo-Romanticism**

Neo-Romanticism was a British movement that looked back to the Romanticism of artists such as William Blake and Samuel Palmer. It developed in the 1930s and 1940s and saw a revival of the British landscape tradition in painting, focusing on ideas of the sublime and the individual. The Second World War made a significant impact on the movement, encouraging a nationalistic approach to landscape painting. The movement was also inspired by Surrealism, and placed a certain amount of emphasis on the imagination, which accounts for the presence of dreamlike landscapes in the paintings. Key artists include Michael Ayton, John Piper and Graham Sutherland.

### **Op Art**

Op Art is an abbreviation of 'optical art' used since the mid 1960s to describe art that played with optical illusion through patterns, contrasts of form, tone and hue. Artists associated with Op art include Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley.

### **Surrealism**

Usually dated to 1924, this essentially European movement sought to exercise the unconscious, drawing on elements of dreams and fantasy for inspiration. Many Surrealist works resulted in the juxtaposition of bizarre and confusing imagery often painted in a realistic manner, resembling the extraordinary yet strangely normal nature of dreams. Key artists within the Surrealist movement include Max Ernst, Joan Miro, Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali.

### **Tachism**

This European, mainly French dominated, style of abstract painting emerged during the 1940s. Similar to American Abstract Expressionism, Tachism aimed to communicate expression through the application of spontaneous, gestural brush strokes, that were free from the conscious mind. Key artists include Hans Hartung, Henri Michaux and Pierre Soulages.

## **Texts By Bryan Wynter**

*I think of my paintings as a source of imagery, something that generates imagery rather than contains it. Obviously it is I who have put into them what they contain but I have done so with as little conscious interference as possible, allowing them at every stage in their growth to dictate their own necessities.*

*Discipline is usually associated with conscious method; something learned, mastered, perfected by use. The discipline I cultivate aims in the opposite direction and so has to be constantly renewed at every moment to foil the intention, the conscious ordering; a discipline that will put the eye in a position where it can confront the canvas as it stands at any one moment and act freely without preconception upon it. I think of the eye as standing at the extreme perimeter of its experience to date and letting the painting dictate its own development.*

*I find it helpful to think of that moment at which the eye looks out at the world it has not yet recognised, in which true seeing has not yet been translated into the useful concepts with which the mind immediately swamps it. This moment of seeing is in fact a fragment of a continuous process which underlies and precedes recognition, a kind of "substance" from which we construct our world of human experience. I think of myself as embodying this "substance" in paint.*

*One should be able, ideally, to make paintings which throw off imagery of different kinds at different times to different people, continually unfolding different aspects of themselves, ambiguous and paradoxical paintings with no main "theme", from which the spectator may, by participation, extract his own images.*

### **From 'Statements', Exhibition Catalogue, I.C.A. 1957**

*About 1956 I was trying to create a kind of visual flux, a surface on which the eye found it difficult to rest so that, if it were not rebuffed, it would be compelled to push deeper and come to terms with the forces underlying the painting. This demanded an act of imagination from the spectator.*

*Although, in a sense, this still holds good for my present painting, less demands are made on the spectator in his choice of interpretation. People tend to say: "You are using larger forms." There is a confusion here. "Form", as usually understood, is not at issue. The small brushmarks function as units of energy rather than as separate formal entities. A stream of such marks may enter and leave the canvas as from outside it. It may encounter another similar stream. The turbulence thus set up engenders new forces which in turn hinder or deflect the original paths. So the painting generates its own laws of development. But painting is an imaginative activity. Each development reflects the predilection of the artist and the life that surrounds him.*

*These paintings, then, are not pure abstractions. Nor do I abstract from "nature". I approach "nature" from the other side. I used to be a landscape painter. Am I still influenced by landscape? The landscape I live among is bare of houses, trees, people; is dominated by winds, by swift changes of weather, by the moods of the sea; sometimes it is devastated and blackened by fire. These elemental forces enter the paintings and lend their qualities without becoming motifs.*

### **Notes on My Painting, Lienhard Catalogue, Zurich 1962**

# Dear Bryan Wynter

By W S Graham

1

This is only a note  
To say how sorry I am  
You died. You will realise  
What a position it puts  
Me in. I couldn't really  
Have died for you if so  
I were inclined. The carn  
Foxglove here on the wall  
Outside your first house  
Leans with me standing  
In the Zennor wind.

Anyhow how are things?  
Are you still somewhere  
With your long legs  
And twitching smile under  
Your blue hat walking  
Across a place? Or am  
I  
greedy to make you up  
Again out of memory?  
Are you there at all?  
I would like to think  
You were alright  
And not worried about  
Monica and the children  
And not unhappy or bored.

2

Speaking to you and not  
Knowing if you are there  
Is not too difficult.  
My words are used to that.  
Do you want anything?  
Where shall I send something?  
Rice-wine, meanders, paintings  
By your contemporaries?  
Or shall I send a kind  
Of news of no time  
Leaning against the wall  
Outside your old house.

The house and the whole moor  
Is flying in the mist.

3

I am up. I've washed  
The front of my face  
And here I stand looking  
Out over the top  
Half of my bedroom window.  
There almost as far  
As I can see I see  
St Buryan's church tower.  
An inch to the left, behind  
That dark rise of woods,  
Is where you used to lurk.

4

This is only a note  
To say I am aware  
You are not here. I find  
It difficult to go  
Beside Housman's star  
Lit fences without you.  
And nobody will laugh  
At my jokes like you.

5

Bryan, I would be obliged  
If you would scout things out  
For me. Although I am not  
Just ready to start out.  
I am trying to be better,  
Which will make you smile  
Under your blue hat.

I know I make a symbol  
Of the foxglove on the wall.  
It is because it knows you.

© The Estate of W S Graham  
GRAHAM, W S: *Selected Poems*, Faber  
and Faber, London, 1996

## ***Wynter and the Grammarsow* (extract)**

**W S Graham**

I bow in my disguise  
And give you your titles.

SOUND the water organ  
Of the Greek CUT

Bryan the Spinner  
In endless eddies  
Above the weir  
Of rushing home.

Fibre-glass swiveller  
Over the weaving  
Strands of water  
In an innocent pool.

Scholar King  
Of rare meanders.  
Rider of Rivers  
Undiscovered.

W S Graham's poem *Wynter and the Grammarsow* is a tribute to his painter friend in the form of a verse radio play, complete with sound effects. It lists Wynter's qualities, interests and talents. First amongst these is his fascination with water.

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