

***Spring 2005***

**22 January – 2 May 2005**

**Tate St Ives**

**Notes for Teachers**

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# Introduction

The spring season celebrates the art of St Ives and the language of abstraction with renewed vigour and fresh insight.

The displays present us with the following key points:

- An insight into the paintings and drawings of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham
- An insight into the sculptures of Denis Mitchell
- An insight into the recent work of Callum Innes
- A historic display of artists associated with St Ives
- An insight into the ceramics of Bernard Leach
- An exploration of the experience of landscape in painting and sculpture
- An exploration of the language of abstraction

There are many starting points appropriate to these displays (see Key Themes, page 6) that you could develop according to your groups needs and interests. Consider some of the following,

- Light
- Movement
- Space
- Natural forms
- Landscape and a sense of place
- Painting versus sculpture
- Constructions in space
- Abstract art
- Abstract art today
- St Ives and St Ives artists
- Bernard Leach
- Wilhelmina Barns-Graham
- Denis Mitchell
- Callum Innes

## How to use this pack and structure your visit

The aim of this pack is to provide information about the exhibition, information about key works on display and suggestions of themes and issues to consider and discuss. The pack should help you create an introductory discussion about some of the issues raised by the current displays. The key works cards can be used to help focus work in small groups in the exhibition, and to follow up within the classroom.

## Resources available in the gallery

There is an **Exhibition Study Point** on Level 3 that has a selection of books relating to the exhibitions. You can access the **Tate Collection databases online** at this point. The **Tate Gallery shop** has a selection of books, catalogues, postcards and related materials.

## Websites

Tate online [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

Tate Learning [www.tate.org.uk/learning](http://www.tate.org.uk/learning)

This site includes the Staff Room, a dedicated area for teachers and group leaders.

Teacher resource notes for all major Tate exhibitions including Tate St Ives can be downloaded from the site.

Tate Tools [www.tatetools.com](http://www.tatetools.com) is a growing library of teaching resources for Key Stages 2 & 3 of the National Curriculum. Tate tools offers high quality learning to support the art curriculum. Annual fee of £90 plus VAT.

## Contacts

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## Further Reading

### Wilhelmina Barns-Graham

\*Green, Lynne, *Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. A Studio Life*, Lund Humphries, 2001

\**Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Movement and Light Imag(in)ing Time*, exhibition catalogue with essay by Mel Gooding, Tate St Ives, 2005

### Callum Innes

\**Callum Innes Resonance*, exhibition catalogue with essay by Keith Hartley, Tate St Ives, 2005

\**Callum Innes*, exhibition catalogue, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 2004

\**Callum Innes Exposed Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 2001

### Denis Mitchell

\**Denis Mitchell Ascending Forms*, exhibition catalogue with essay by Sara Hughes, Tate St Ives, 2005

\**Denis Mitchell Sculptor*, Penwith Galleries, St Ives, 1992

Tucker, William, *The Language of Sculpture*, Thames & Hudson, 1976

### Bernard Leach

\**Bernard Leach Come to the Edge*, exhibition publication with an essay by Emmanuel Cooper, Tate St Ives, 2005

\**Bernard Leach, Hamada and Their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection*, Marston House, 1992

\*Blackie, Sebastian, *Dear Mr Leach*, A & C Black, London, 2004

\*Cooper, Emmanuel, *Bernard Leach, Life and Work*, Yale University Press, 2003

\*Waal, Edmund de, *Bernard Leach*, Tate Gallery Publishing, 2003

## Websites

[www.leachpottery.com](http://www.leachpottery.com) The Leach Pottery

[www.studiopottery.com](http://www.studiopottery.com) Further information on Bernard Leach

## Video

\**Leach and Hepworth*, South West Film and TV Archive

## St Ives Artists

\**Homecoming The Pier Arts Centre Collection at Tate St Ives*, Essay by Andrew Dalton, 2003

\*Axten, Janet, *Gasworks to Gallery: The Story of St Ives*, Tate Gallery, 1995

\*Berlin, S *Alfred Wallis: Primitive*, London, 1949

Cross, Tom, *St. Ives and British Modernism*, 1999.

\*Cross, Tom, *Painting the Warmth of the Sun, St Ives Artists, 1939-1975*, Alison Hodge, Penzance, 1984

\*Davies, Peter, *St Ives Revisited – Innovators and Followers*, Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994

\*Gale, M & Stephens C, *Barbara Hepworth: Works in the Tate Collection*, Tate Publishing 1999 Gardiner,

M *Barbara Hepworth, a memoir*, Salamander Press, 1982

\*Hammacher, AH, *Barbara Hepworth*, Thames and Hudson, 1968 Revised Edition, 1987  
*Barbara Hepworth, A Pictorial Biography*, Tate Publishing 1970. Reissued 1985

\*Mullins, E, *Alfred Wallis: Cornish Primitive*, London 1994

Lax, Julian, *St. Ives. Eighty Years of Modernism*, 2001

\*Phillips M & Stephens C, *Barbara Hepworth Sculpture Garden*, Tate Publishing 2002

Oldham, Alison, *Everyone was Working, Writers and Artists in Post War St Ives*, Tate St Ives/Falmouth College of Art, 2001

\*Rowe, Matthew, *John Wells*, Tate Gallery publication, 1988

\*Thislewood, D (Ed), *Barbara Hepworth Re-considered*, Liverpool University Press & Tate Liverpool, 1996

\*Val Baker, Denys, *Britain's Art Colony by the Sea*, Samson and Co, 1959

\*Whybrow, Marion, *St Ives: 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony*, Antique Collectors Club, Woodbridge, 1994

*St Ives 1939-64, Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery*, Tate Gallery, 1985

\*The St Ives artists Series, Tate Publishing includes: *Terry Frost, Barbara Hepworth, Peter Lanyon, Patrick Heron, Bernard Leach, Alfred Wallis, Bryan Wynter and Christopher Wood.*

\* Available in the shop at Tate St Ives

Tate publications have produced a series of **Key Work Cards for Teachers** including one on *Landscape and Environment*. For an order form call 01736 791114

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The **St Ives Archive Study Centre** holds a range of material about artists associated with St Ives. Tel: +44 (0) 1736 796408, e-mail: [archive@stivestrust.co.uk](mailto:archive@stivestrust.co.uk)  
[www.stivestrust.co.uk/archivesite](http://www.stivestrust.co.uk/archivesite)

### The Leach Pottery

Higher Stennack  
St Ives TR26 2HE  
+44 (0) 1736 796398  
Open 6 days a week 10-5pm

### Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden

Tel: +44 (0) 1736 796496  
Barnoon Hill  
St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 1AD  
Group bookings: +44 (0) 1736 791114,  
[tsi.education@tate.org.uk](mailto:tsi.education@tate.org.uk)

## Key themes

**Abstraction.** Consider how many of the artists on display explore an abstract language. The displays provide a good introduction to the ways artists use line, colour, transparency, layering, texture, surface, shape and form to play with the illusion of space. Compare and contrast the paintings of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham with the sculptures of Denis Mitchell. Both artists are associated with the St Ives School of Moderns, many of whom explored abstraction in the late 1930s, 1940s and post war period. Callum Innes belongs to a younger generation of British artists who continues to explore the possibilities of abstract painting. He talks about emptying out the figure to invite the viewer to engage with the work.

**St Ives artists.** Many of the artists on display are historically linked with St Ives. Consider what story it tells us about St Ives and its art. Do artists associated with St Ives share certain shared interests and concerns? How does a detailed study of Barns-Graham, Bernard Leach or Mitchell's art affect the way we view the art of St Ives as a whole? You might like to use the displays for the focus for a wider project looking at the history of St Ives and include a visit to the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden.

**The Cornish landscape.** Consider how works on display reflect a sense of place and interest in the Cornish landscape. Artists such as Barns-Graham, Mitchell, Sandra Blow, Barbara Hepworth, Peter Lanyon and John Wells were strongly influenced by their experience of Cornwall. These sensations of the landscape are captured in different ways within their work. Explore these works, which capture an evocative response to the atmosphere of this particular landscape.

**Sensation/contemplation of place.** Many of the St Ives School of Moderns were interested in capturing their sensation of place or what Barns-Graham called 'the total experience'. Many works demonstrate an emotive response to the colour, light, textures, surfaces and materials of the natural world. Whether Porthmeor Beach or a Swiss Glacier, Barns-Graham sought to respond and express empathy with her environment. Mitchell's sculptures related to his experiences of mining, gardening and fishing.

**Space and movement.** These artists explore and describe space in different ways. Many of the 2-D works play with pictorial space and illusionism often denying traditional perspective and depth. They create a sense of space, movement and surface tension. 3-D works by artists such as Mitchell challenge ideas about volume and mass and encourage us to explore space in different ways. Innes' paintings are created through a process of addition and subtraction. Through surface grid and faint traces he can create a painting with extraordinary energy and/or stillness. Look at how all three artists use line, and the movement of line, in their work.

**Light.** Barns-Graham was preoccupied with the contrasts between solid structure and the fluxes of nature. She liked to paint water and the intangibility of atmosphere and light. Her black and white paintings and drawings show bold contrast between light and dark. Mitchell's polished bronzes gleam as the light hits their surfaces. Each sculpture explores and articulates space through line, form and surface. Innes' paintings change and interact with the space and light of the gallery. We are encouraged to feel the space both physically and visually as we explore his work.

**Resonance.** *Resonance* is the title of Innes' display of newly commissioned work for Tate St Ives. It suggests the idea of vibration and reverberation and encourages us to explore how Innes' technique of adding and subtracting paint creates a dynamic composition. Resonance also suggests the ability to evoke images, memories and emotions. This idea could be applied to many of the abstract works on display. In particular, Barns-Graham's later

abstract works have been described as 'irrepressibly lyrical...breathing in harmony with the rhythmic pulse of the natural world'.

**Constructions in space.** Gabo and Mitchell's works are often described as 'constructions in space'. Look at how they explore space and form, articulating weight and mass through line and plane and the interplay of light and surface. Mitchell's tall 'ascending' sculptures reach up into the space denying their real weight and solidity because they are so highly polished. These sculptures have been created with a strong understanding of balance and tension, just as paintings by Terry Frost, Ben Nicholson, John Wells and Patrick Heron (see Gallery 1) experiment with rhythm and balance through shape and colour.

**Inside out.** Barbara Hepworth said there is an inside and outside to every form. Many of the artists on display are preoccupied with exploring internal and external space and form. Gabo's *Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre* exemplifies his interest in describing internal space and structure through line and plane rather than solid mass. Barns-Graham's glacier paintings explore a massive natural structure, which is transparent, thereby revealing its internal structure. The Bernard Leach display highlights the simplicity and strength of his understanding of form and his awareness of inner and outer space. The colours in Innes' paintings advance and recede as we move around the display creating a strange sensation of spatial depth.

**Art and architecture.** Tate St Ives is a fascinating building for visitors to explore. The spring displays offer different opportunities to explore the relationship between art and architecture. Consider how, for example, the displays encourage you to explore space both within and outside the building. How does the Gallery and location affect the way we see the paintings of Barns-Graham? And how might a visit to the exhibition affect the way we look at the landscape around St Ives? How do Callum Innes' paintings relate to the space around them? How do Denis Mitchell's sculptures interact with the architecture – and why are some described as architectural in scale?

**Scale and balance.** Consider using the building to explore a sense of scale, proportion and balance. One of the Tate St Ives architects talked about the concept of this building being based on a response to the Ben Nicholson white relief series (see gallery one). There are lots of opportunities to experience two and three dimensional space and to talk about scale and balance within the building. Barns-Graham was interested in the Golden Section and explored this system of proportion and harmony in a number of works.

**Art and science.** The spring displays provide a range of opportunities to consider links between art and science. Many of the artists on display have focused on their relationship with the natural world. This not only includes an interest in our changing environments but also a fascination with materials and physical processes. For example, Barns-Graham was interested by geological structures, water, weather and light.

# Links to the curriculum

This season's displays could be the focus for a range of curriculum work. Any of the art works could be used as a starting point for the discussion of issues in almost any subject (see key themes section). Suggestions are made below for links with a range of different subject areas, but all activities could relate to Art and Design. Suggested activities are included with each key work card. The following are just some additional ideas.

## Art and Design

The exhibition could be the focus for any of the following topics or themes:

- Investigating materials and processes
- What is sculpture? (constructing sculpture)
- Exploring buildings (art and architecture, exploring Tate St Ives)
- Investigating pattern
- Journeys
- Objects and meaning
- Containers
- A sense of place (landscape and environment)
- Visiting a museum, gallery or site

## English

There are many opportunities for language work which encourages children to develop their verbal and written language skills:

- Storytelling and memories
- Creative writing
- Developing vocabulary – for example, 'contemplating art' - words to describe paintings and sculptures (could compare to listening to music)
- Writing to describe and explore
- Writing to analyse and comment (students could write exhibition reviews)
- Writing to persuade and argue (link to a group debate about a particular artist or work)

## Science

As discussed above there are many opportunities to explore scientific ideas and the links between art and science. The spring displays could provide a springboard for the following topics:

- Characteristics of materials (including sorting and using)
- Plants and the environment
- Rocks and weathering
- Movement and growth
- Light, dark and shadows
- Solids and liquids

## Geography

You could extend work to link to the geography curriculum with the following topics:

- Going to the seaside
- Water (and ice)
- Mountains (and glaciers)
- Exploring England

## **Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (1912-2004)**

### **Glacier Crystal, Grindelwald 1950**

Oil on canvas 51.4 x 60.9 cm

Tate, © Barns-Graham Charitable Trust

#### **Background**

This is one of a series of paintings made by Barns-Graham following a visit to the Grindelwald Glacier in Switzerland in 1948. The painting combines the angular and curved shapes of the glacier in a complex geometry with the horizon line at the top of the painting. She has chosen a subdued palette of blues, greens, yellows and whites. The paint surface has been scraped and rubbed and the artist has used both pencil and paint.

Barns-Graham was deeply inspired by the massive glacier and she spent time sketching the spectacle. She was fascinated, not just by the expanse of the ice field, but also by the detail of the crystalline structure and the fractured light of the transparent surfaces. Over the next decade Barns-Graham produced a series of works in which observed form became more and more abstracted. As you can see in the display in Gallery 3 there is clear progression towards simplification in the later works (see *Upper Glacier* 1950 or *Glacier Vortex* 1951).

Born in St Andrews, Scotland, Barns-Graham travelled to St Ives in 1940. She became an active member of the artistic community and was soon associated with the so-called St Ives School of Moderns. Like many of these artists, Barns-Graham was inspired by the landscape and geology of Cornwall and her work links to the tradition of painting out of doors directly in front of the subject. But also like many of these artists, she pursued an idea of abstracting from nature or in her own words 'a process of laying bare'.

As her work developed Barns-Graham became preoccupied with form and structure within the landscape and with the abstract geometry of line. Her visit to the glacier appears to have been a pivotal moment for her. Here was the perfect subject – where she could explore the skeletal qualities of structure and the relationship between interior and exterior, the interplay of rectilinear and circular form and the effects of movement and light. Using multiple viewpoints she attempted to convey her sensory experience of the place. Later she wrote about the *'Massive strength and size of the glaciers, the fantastic shapes, the contrast of solidity and transparency, the many reflected colours in strong light... This likeness to glass and transparency, combined with solid rough ridges made me wish to combine in a work all angles at once, from above, through, and all round, as a bird flies, a total experience.'*

Barns-Graham was influenced by Cubism\* and the idea that an object can be rendered as a series of interlocking elements across the picture surface. She was also influenced by the St Ives painter Alfred Wallis. Wallis' unusual techniques and materials encouraged her to experiment and, as can be seen here, layer her paint often scratching and scraping into the painted surface.

Another influence was the work of the Russian Constructivist\* artist Naum Gabo, whose transparent constructions she saw in St Ives in the early 1940s. Gabo rejected the idea of sculptural mass in favour of space and he experimented with new materials such as plastic to explore the internal space through line and structure.

Barns-Graham was interested in Gabo's idea that you could construct a sense of volume and internal space through linear geometry and the optical effects of colour. She, like Gabo, wanted to combine organic form with geometric shape in order to express the 'hidden forces of nature'. The glacier offered the perfect illustration of how internal forces determine external form.

### For Discussion

- Compare this painting with others in Gallery 3. This is the first time that such a large group from this series have been shown together. What particular aspects of the glacier was Barns-Graham most interested in? What happens in the later works?
- Barns-Graham's glacier paintings have been described as 'some of the most beautiful meditations on natural structure in twentieth century art'. Would you agree?
- Compare and contrast *Glacier Crystal, Grindelwald* with Naum Gabo's *Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre* 1938-40 in Gallery 1.

### Activities

**Drawing.** Barns-Graham made drawings throughout her life. She said that drawing was a way of refreshing her mind. The energy and clarity of her line is often admired. Encourage students to make bold line drawings from direct observation. Ask them to imagine the idea of taking a line for a walk – using it to meander over the landscape or objects in view. This activity works well in Lower Gallery 2 where students can look at the view from the huge curved window.

**The natural world: structure, form and colour.** Develop drawings and collage work based on observation and collection of materials and objects from the natural world.

**Shape designs.** As an extension of collage work students could create shape designs using coloured paper shapes, pencils, crayons and strings placed onto a cardboard base. Encourage students to arrange and re-arrange the shapes to contrast colour and shape and to combine geometric with torn and more organic forms. Encourage them to think of ideas such as 'fast' or 'slow' forms and 'light' or 'precarious' shapes. They could then make rubbings of their compositions.

**Water and ice.** Explore different ways to record the effects of ice and water. Experiment with painting, print making, photography, collage and even 3-D construction.

**Written meditations.** Barns-Graham's paintings have been described as intense meditations on the fundamental structures of landscape. Develop written work based on a focused look at a particular place and/or landscape. Explore all types of sensory experience of the place and discuss what this place suggests and evokes for the students.

### Links

Compare this painting with earlier (Lower Gallery 2) and more recent work (Studio) by Barns-Graham. Look also at her drawings (Apse). Link to **Denis Mitchell's** small bronzes which were inspired by natural forms (also on display in Gallery 3).

Visit the **Barbara Hepworth** Museum and Sculpture Garden in St Ives. Many of Hepworth's sculptures explore the idea of enfolding forms and the theme of birth or regeneration. Look at work by other artists associated with St Ives such as Ben Nicholson, Peter Lanyon John Wells and Alfred Wallis and Naum Gabo (Gallery 1).

Look at the work of other **landscape artists past and present.** The work of artists such as John Constable, Claude Monet and Paul Cezanne evolved from a deep contemplation of particular places. Look also at the photographic work of Thomas Joshua Cooper or Jem Southam, recent exhibitors at Tate St Ives.

Look at abstract artists such as Georges Braque, Sonia Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Joan Miro, Piet Mondrian and Pablo Picasso. Further information on Tate works can be found at [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

\*For further information on Cubism and Constructivism please refer to the Tate website glossary [www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary](http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary)

## **Denis Mitchell (1912-93)**

### **Turning Form 1959**

Bronze, 142.2 x 17.8 x 29.3cm, on wooden base

Tate © The Artist's Estate

#### **Background**

This polished bronze sculpture has a strong vertical thrust to it. The undulating polished surfaces interplay line, space, light and form suggesting, as the name implies, a moving, twisting form.

*Turning Form* was sand cast in solid bronze in a foundry in St Just, Cornwall. It is one of the first abstract bronze sculptures Mitchell made using this method. Only simple shapes can be made in this way and the casts were initially rough, but this enabled Mitchell to hand-work the surface ensuring that each cast was, in effect, unique. *Turning Form* was cast in an edition of three plus one for the artist. Another cast of this work belongs to Manchester University. *Turning Form* was based on a drawing, as are most of Mitchell's sculptures.

Denis Mitchell moved to Cornwall in 1930 and became an active member of the artistic community in St Ives following the Second World War. He was a founder member of the Penwith Society of Arts and was an assistant to Barbara Hepworth from 1949-59, working on many of her sculptures.

At one point Mitchell was described as 'Hepworth's hands' and he learnt from her a love of pure form and a strong attachment to carving. Hepworth always maintained that purity of form could only be realised by an understanding or 'truth' to one's materials - it was only 'by the constant exchange of touch and perception and not by mechanical means'. Mitchell followed Hepworth's principle, giving great attention to the materials and always hand finishing his bronzes.

Like many of the St Ives artists, Mitchell pursued an abstract language for his art, although it was always rooted in the landscape around him. Mitchell said this particular work was partly inspired by John Well's painting *Aspiring Forms* 1950 (on view in Gallery 1). The corkscrew forms in Well's painting, which are very similar to *Turning Form*, were apparently based on the movement of birds in the air currents along the cliffs.

Mitchell was also influenced by Constructivist ideas of engaging with movement, light and space and works such as *Turning Form* activate the space through balance, line, curve and angle and through its highly polished reflective surface.

#### **For Discussion**

- Why do you think Mitchell chose to use such a rough-cast method to make his bronze?
- Mitchell explored an abstract language for sculpture. He tried to get to the essence of things or what he described as 'inspired simplicity'. When you look at his work, what do you think this could mean?
- Mitchell had a strong relationship with the landscape of Cornwall. This was not just through painting and drawing but also through gardening, working in the tin mines and fishing. Many of his sculptures suggest figures, forms or tools from his various trades. How do you think his experience of the landscape is expressed in his work?
- What happens when Mitchell changes the scale of his works? Compare and contrast some of his early small sculptures with the later larger works. See also other works by Mitchell including works in wood, slate and stone in this exhibition.
- This exhibition of Mitchell's work is designed to complement the paintings of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. What links can you make between the two artists' work?

You might like to extend this to an exploration of Mitchell's role within the so-called 'St Ives Moderns' (See Gallery1).

- Mitchell was interested in non-western art and he built up a collection of curios and African masks as well as visiting Columbia in 1970. Why do you think he was interested in this art and in what ways might it have influenced his own work?

## Activities

### Drawing sculpture.

Encourage students to make quick bold drawings with activities such as,

**Memory Drawings.** Choose your favourite sculpture. Have a good look at it and then turn away and make a quick drawing of it from memory. When you have done this, have another look at the sculpture – did you remember it well? Make a second drawing looking at it.

**Lining up a sculpture.** Choose one sculpture and make a drawing in your sketchbook of all the shapes in it without lifting your pencil from the paper. See if you can do it without going over any lines twice.

**Negative Shapes.** Look carefully at some of the sculptures that have holes or spaces through them. These are called negative shapes. Look at the shadows and reflections that they make. Find some negative shapes that you like and draw them in your sketchbook. You can draw them separately or together, side by side or one on top of the other as one big shape.

### Constructing sculptures

You can make simple 3-D constructions using thin card and scissors. Encourage students to explore shape, weight and balance by making the sculpture stand up. You can make more elaborate constructions using materials such as string, acetate, foil, card and paper. Choose materials with contrasting colour, surface, texture and transparency to encourage students to think about the qualities of sculpture.

## Links

See works by **other St Ives artists** in Gallery 1, especially John Well's *Aspiring Forms* and Bernard Leach's display in Upper Gallery 2. Explore other artists interested in the abstract language of sculpture such as **Constantin Brancusi, Anthony Caro, Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Matisse, Henry Moore, David Smith or Jean Tinguely**. Further information on Tate works can be found at [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk).

Visit the **Barbara Hepworth** Museum and Sculpture Garden in St Ives where Mitchell worked as Hepworth's assistant for a number of years (see page 5).

Consider researching examples of public sculpture near you or perhaps visiting a sculpture park, such as the Forest of Dean or the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. For further information visit the following website [www.artnut.com/intl.html](http://www.artnut.com/intl.html).

## **Alfred Wallis 1855-1942**

### **Houses at St Ives, Cornwall**

?circa 1928-42

oil on board 26.7 x 31.8 cm

#### **Background**

This painting shows cottages and terraced houses in St Ives. Wallis has not used conventional perspective – the houses are all of a similar size regardless of position and some curve round as if to indicate a change of view. Colours are limited to black, white, blues and browns, and some areas of the brown card support have been left unpainted.

Wallis took up painting in his late 50s after his wife died. He had worked as a fisherman before setting up as a marine-scrap merchant in 1890 in St Ives. His principle subjects were ships, shipwrecks and landscapes with trees and houses. This painting shows houses typical of the Downalong area, a district close to the harbour and where Wallis lived.

Wallis regarded his paintings as expressions of his experiences. He was unaware of linear perspective but arranged the objects in terms of relative importance, determining their sizes accordingly. Here, Wallis' use of shifting perspective and scale leads your eye around the picture. He conveys his memory of St Ives in a very direct way. Wallis would use any available surface to paint on - building up layers often scratching and scraping into the surface. This image is painted on an irregular shaped board.

Wallis' paintings were admired by younger artists such as Ben Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Barbara Hepworth and Wilhelmina Barns-Graham who came to St Ives in the 1930s. *Houses at St Ives, Cornwall* was originally purchased by Ben Nicholson from the artist. These artists found a so-called 'primitive' or freshness of vision in Wallis' work and his informal approach and unusual handling of paint appealed to them. He seemed to emphasise the painting as an object first and foremost.

Wallis' ability to describe his subject simply and directly had a profound influence. Hence his principle importance lies in his relation to these prevailing interests in English art at the time. However, his work has come to symbolise something quintessentially about St Ives and its visual heritage.

#### **For discussion**

- What do you think Wallis meant by his paintings 'being expressions of his experiences'?
- Why do you think artists such Nicholson, Hepworth and Barns-Graham were so interested in Wallis. What did they learn from him?
- The writer Mel Gooding describes Wallis as the 'St Ives old master'. What do you think Gooding means by this?
- What do Wallis' paintings say about St Ives and its art, past and present?
- Wallis' work is often described as 'primitive' or childlike. What do you think is meant by this? Consider the difference between childlike and childish. You might like to extend this discussion by looking at other artists who have been described as 'primitive' such as Henri Rousseau.

#### **Activities**

**Memory paintings.** Students could create paintings based on places or experiences they remember. Ask them to choose places or events that have a particular resonance for them. Alternatively you could ask students to make sketches from observation during their visit to St Ives that could then be combined with sketches from memory when they return to school.

**Storyboards.** Use material gathered during a visit to the Gallery and/or St Ives to develop visual stories and poems. You could extend this work to link to projects on the idea of

memories or journeys. Children could also design card and/or board games that encourage matching and identifying links and simple memory tasks.

**Bird's eye views - fantastic maps.** Wallis includes views from a number of different angles. Encourage students to make their own drawings or fantastic maps based upon a bird's eye view. Students could develop stories and poems based on their maps. A large-scale group map could also be developed back at school, combining all the preparatory work.

**Techniques and materials.** Experiment, like Wallis, with different paint materials and supports. In many of Wallis' paintings, the base colour of the support becomes an active part of the composition because he left areas unpainted. Explore how a different base colour will affect the overall composition. You could simply use coloured pencils and a selection of different coloured papers.

## **Links**

Look at artists who have been influenced by Wallis such as **Ben Nicholson** (Gallery 1) and **Wilhelmina Barns-Graham** (Gallery 2 & 3, Apse and Studio). Wallis' work provided Barns-Graham with an example of the importance of memory and the total experience of a subject. Consider also a visit to the **Barbara Hepworth Museum** and Sculpture Garden in St Ives (see page 5)

Look at **other artists who have painted St Ives** past and present from J.M.W. Turner to John Miller. Extend to look at artists who are interested in **maritime subjects**. You might consider a visit to the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth, [www.nmmc.co.uk](http://www.nmmc.co.uk) +44 (0) 1326 313388.

**Callum Innes (born 1962)**

***Exposed Painting Blue Violet Charcoal Black 2004***

Oil on canvas

227.5 x 222.5 cm

Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London

© The Artist

Photo: Hyjdla Kosaniuk, 2004

### **Background**

At first glance this painting seems rigidly geometric, however the dividing solid colour from the wiped area creates something softer and more organic. Notice, at the edges of the canvas, the traces of paint that had previously covered the surface. Innes says, 'The most interesting part of the painting is the exposed part. That's the active part, where the painting actually exists'.

Based in Edinburgh, Innes studied at the Grays School of Art, Aberdeen and Edinburgh College of Art. Since the late 1980s he has focused on abstract painting, producing various distinctive groups. In the early paintings, or *monochromes*, Innes etched away the surface of a single coloured painted canvas with turpentine. In the recent *exposed* paintings such as we see here, Innes' use of colour and application of paint is more complex. The *monologue* paintings are different again because they simulate a natural process such as dripping or falling water. The *resonance* paintings use the analogy of music. These latter paintings consist exclusively of white paint applied to a white ground. Turpentine is then used to remove thin lines of paint creating a flickering effect as the light hits the surface that can only really be seen by moving around.

*Exposed Painting Blue Violet Charcoal Black* has been created as much through removing paint as applying it. This is a key aspect of Innes' work. He is interested in the tension between subtraction and addition, mark and trace and surface and space. On the one hand the painting is very structured and controlled (there are no accidents in terms of the way he uses paint and turpentine), while on the other there is a sense of mysterious concealment and exposure. It is as if as Keith Hartley writes, the painting suggests exposing something to view, the revelation of something hidden'.

The exposed paintings are hung at a height so that the horizontal line corresponds roughly with the position of our hips, or the mid point of our bodies. This creates a dynamic composition between the 'concealed' and 'exposed' part of the painting, which includes our own physical and visual sense of space.

Innes paintings are often admired for their enigmatic and meditative qualities. The colours and surfaces he creates by layering hold an extraordinary tension between intention and intuition. He says, 'My starting point is a desire to create an image that is somehow natural, that exists in its own right, holds a place for itself'.

### **For Discussion**

- What do you understand by the word 'exposed'? How does it relate to this painting?
- What do you understand by the word 'resonance'? Why do you think the current display of Innes' work at Tate St Ives is called *Resonance*?
- In what ways are Innes' paintings dynamic (active) and in what ways are they static (still)?
- In what ways could Innes' paintings be described as natural?
- A major characteristic of Innes' work is the subtraction or removal of paint. Why do you think this is so important to him? Use this work as the starting point for a wider discussion of the development of European and American abstract art.

## Activities

**Layering paint.** Experiment layering paint on a surface. Try adding and removing paint from the surface in different ways. Contrast pure colours with mixed colours. Contrast sharp geometric shapes with more organic forms and marks. Try creating 'still' and 'dynamic' compositions. Experiment with different types of paint such as watercolour, acrylic or oil.

**Rubbings and erasing.** If paint is not practical students could experiment with pencil by making marks and rubbings and then erasing; exploring ideas of addition and subtraction and surface texture and layering.

**Theme and series.** Develop a series of 2-D or 3-D works based on a theme such as 'exposed' or 'resonance'. Discuss what the theme means to you and consider ways to develop it visually. Display the work as a series and explore the effect/impact this has.

**Words to contemplate with.** Encourage students to contemplate Innes' works slowly. Discuss where they look first and how their eyes explore the surface. Can they find words to describe their journey around the painting? Try creating a word diagram using spontaneous responses to a painting.

## Links

Compare Innes' work to **Wilhelmina Barns-Graham's** paintings also on display at Tate St Ives. Although Barns-Graham's work is more strongly rooted in the observation of the natural world, it is interesting to look at how both artists combine the geometric and organic to create dynamic compositions. Barns-Graham also often worked in series and musical analogies have also been made to her work.

The paintings of the pioneer of abstract art, **Piet Mondrian** appear, at first glance, very austere and mathematical. However Mondrian painted intuitively, feeling his way with his compositions.

Links can also be made to artists such as Joan Miro, Lucio Fontana, Morris Louis, Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. Consider also how Innes' work contrasts to other contemporary artists who work with the language of abstraction such as Ian Davenport or Fiona Rae. See [www.frithstreetgallery.com](http://www.frithstreetgallery.com) and further information on Tate works can be found at [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk).

## **Bernard Leach (1887-1979)**

Tile c. 1925

23 cm square, 2 cm thick

Wingfield Digby Collection

### **Background**

This stoneware tile has the design of a bird feeding its' young painted in iron. It has sgraffito detailing where Leach scratched through the wet clay slip before firing. It is an excellent example of Leach's commitment to quiet, contemplative forms with soft, muted colours derived from the earth. It also shows his powerful sense of composition.

Leach would sketch his ideas before decorating his ceramics. He was an expert at combining pattern and motif with the colour and shape of each work. He had his own favourite decorations such as birds, horses and griffins and he often combined animals and plants with simple patterns and marks. Look here how he fits the curved design with the shape of the square tile. The drawing has a lightness to it that is both playful and energetic.

This tile has the St Ives pottery stamp and another illegible signature in the lower corners and there are eight St Ives seals impressed on the back. Leach set up the St Ives pottery in 1920 with fellow potter Shoji Hamada. With a team of workers and students, Leach made a range of ware that included decorative raku, and functional tableware, souvenirs and large earthenware dishes. He also produced individual pieces in stoneware such as this tile.

Leach spent the first ten years of his life in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan before going to school in Britain in 1897. He studied at the Slade School of Art and in 1909 returned to Japan where he studied traditional Japanese pottery. His experience of both the East and the West meant his work included ideas, aesthetics and stylistic influences of contrasting cultures.

Leach was passionate in his desire to introduce to Britain a feeling for harmony in pottery that he had learned in the Far East. At St Ives he and Hamada built the first oriental climbing kiln in the West. His sources of inspiration were wide; he studied Medieval British and Staffordshire pottery as well as Chinese, Korean and Japanese ceramics.

Leach travelled extensively throughout his life and in 1940 he published his influential *A Potter's Book* outlining his philosophy and methods. He is often described as the 'father of the modern studio ceramic movement' inspiring people all over the world to value hand-crafted work. Leach coined the term 'head, hand and heart' to express the sense of equilibrium and wholeness that he believed industrial societies needed to regain.

### **For Discussion**

- There has been much discussion in recent years as to whether ceramics is an art or a craft. Leach insisted that he was an 'artist-potter' and he always regarded his individual pots as objects of art rather than craft. Why do you think he considered these pots more important than the standard ware (tableware)?
- What do you think the display at Tate St Ives says about the status of these objects? Are they sculptures or domestic objects?
- The Japanese critic Soetsu Yanagi complimented Leach by describing his earthenware as 'born not made'. What do you think he meant by this?
- Leach said he wanted his pots to have 'vitality' – to capture a sense of energy and life. Can you find examples that you feel have this quality?
- The simplified motif of a bird was a favourite for Leach. He considered it a symbol of freedom and peace. Can you find other motifs in his work and what do you think they symbolise?

## Activities

**Everyday objects.** Explore and discuss everyday objects such as tea-cups, bowls, jugs and plates. Build up a collection display of different objects. Get students to find words for shape, texture, pattern and rhythm of these objects.

**Designs for pots.** Students to make decorative designs for pots. Encourage them to combine pattern and form and to think carefully about how the design will suit the particular shape of the pot.

**Ceramic carpets.** Students to design and make individual tiles to create a 'ceramic carpet'. If clay is not available use other materials such as cardboard or wood.

**Experimenting with clay.** Explore different clays (and other materials) and encourage students to experience and describe their individual qualities.

**Firing the imagination.** Look at different kilns and firing methods around the world such as raku kilns, Nigerian bush firing or paper kilns. Explore the different cultural and community contexts for these methods. If there is access to a kiln, experiment with different firing temperatures and glaze materials. Consider also making paper and cardboard kilns. (see Sebastian Blackie's book *Dear Mr Leach*.. listed in the **Further Reading** section)

## Links

Explore work by other **key figures in the story of the Leach Pottery** such as Shoji Hamada, Nora Braden, Michael Cardew and Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie. Visit the Leach Pottery in St Ives, +44 (0) 1736 796398, [www.leachpottery.com](http://www.leachpottery.com).

Link Leach to other artists associated with St Ives such as **Barbara Hepworth**.

Look at contemporary ceramicist such as Richard Slee, Sebastian Blackie and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott .

Look at 2003 Turner Prize winner, **Grayson Perry**, who recently had a display at Tate St Ives. Compare and contrast Leach and Perry. Note how Perry invites us to rethink the hierarchy of fine and applied crafts. See [www.graysonperry.co.uk](http://www.graysonperry.co.uk) or [www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize](http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize).