



Learning Resource Notes

Summer Season 2010

Lily van der Stokker
No Big Deal Thing

Tate Collection
Object: Gesture: Grid
St Ives and the International Avant-Garde

Season Overview

This show represents Lily van der Stokker's most significant solo show in the UK and exhibits her contemporary large wall paintings and installations, together with many smaller drawings made in colour pencil and felt tip. Lily van der Stokker works in the perceived gap between the elitist art world, galleries and the creativity of ordinary people, drawing on personal and anecdotal themes of family and mundane domestic life, and representing these in an exuberant, patterned and colourful style.

The Summer Season also shows three new historic and thematic displays from the Tate Collection; Object, Gesture and Grid, in the context of the impact of late English Modernism in St Ives and the shared art languages, revivals and continuities across the USA and Europe. The displays bring together international art from the 1930s to the late 1970's. This includes work by Hepworth, Wallis, Nicholson, Blow, Brancusi, Morandi, Picasso, Rothko, Pollock, De Kooning, Hofmann, le Witt, Judd and Mondrian.

Lily van der Stokker



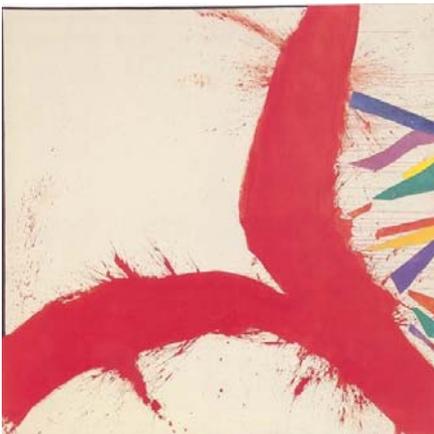
Lily van der Stokker (b.1954)
Art is Easy 1988
Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam
© the Artist, courtesy Air de Paris, Paris

OBJECT



Eileen Agar (1899-1991)
Fish Basket c.1965
Tate
© The estate of Eileen Agar

GESTURE



Sandra Blow (1925-2006)
Vivace 1988
© The estate of Sandra Blow

GRID



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)
No. VI / Composition No. II 1920
Tate © 2010 Mondrian/Hotlzman Trust
c/o HCR International, Warrenton, VA

Walking through the galleries

This section draws out key themes from each display space and is designed to give a flavour of individual rooms and possible approaches to working in these spaces with students

Lily van der Stokker *No Big Deal Thing*

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies this exhibition (available from July 2010)

Short Introduction

Lily van der Stokker's work can be found in the Heron Mall, Galleries 1, Upper 2 and Lower 2 and on Level 4, close to the café. **These galleries, although not officially open until 21 May, offer a unique opportunity to see site specific work in progress.**

Lily van der Stokker firstly makes small drawings in colour pencils or felt tips on A4 paper, and then projects these, sometimes years later, very precisely with a slide projector onto gallery walls, and sometimes external walls, to make the final large scale acrylic paintings, often incorporating furniture into the installation.

Van der Stokker and her team of technicians work in situ on the paintings, boxes and sofas, painstakingly mixing colour matches to the small drawings. Fabric is screen printed to cover upholstery and wool is specially dyed for the rugs.

Van der Stokker's work explores themes about family and everyday life, presenting them in a decorative and child-like manner which relates to a feminist challenge of subject matter for works of art.

Mall – ground floor

We are going to Sleep in our pyjamas Lily van der Stokker

Colour. Discuss the impact of large scale, decorative, exuberant, syrupy colours. What mood do these colours create and can you relate them to 1960's Pop art and psychedelia?

Importance of titles. How important is the title? Can you think of a different title? If the title was not so sweetly innocent would you respond in a different way?

Art of ordinary lives. Do you think this work challenges ideas about art being grand, solemn and serious? What is an appropriate subject for art and can ordinary events be worthy subjects? Does this painting remind you of particular bedtimes in your family life?

Decorative art. Discuss how the language of 'decorative' art is perceived. Does 'decorative' challenge your expectations of what art should be displayed? Is decorative always accessible?

Gallery one

Dreams make the world go forward, Not bad this weather Lily van der Stokker

Plus a selection of small works on paper

Scale. Consider how the size of these works relates to the architectural space and respond to the building – why do you think van der Stokker chooses such large images?

Presentation and Materials. Are the small domestic scale drawings presented like finished works of art or do you see them as studies for the larger wall paintings? Colour pencils and felt tips are sometimes seen as a child-like media; consider what the work would convey in other media and make comparisons with materials used in Object, Gesture and Grid displays.

Hand made for people. Do you think van der Stokker has a desire to build work about people; does it feel like she is inviting you to sit on the sofa? If this work was not in a gallery, would you sit on the sofa? Does the sofa make you feel comfortable? How does the handmade fabric and sewing relate to art; consider interior design, textiles and fashion.

Gender, decoration and dominant discourses. Is it surprising to see this work in a gallery? Consider if there might be a hierarchy between art and decoration. The decorative arts have traditionally been considered the domain of women; does van der Stokker challenge this discourse with decoration, kitsch, and frivolity? Her work has been described as 'non shouting feminism'; consider if this explores stereotypes in art.

Upper Gallery Two

New winter coat Lily van der Stokker

Working in situ. The wall painting and handmade furniture have all been painted at Tate St Ives by van der Stokker and her assistants. Compare the impermanence of site specific art with traditional painting and sculpture in other rooms.

Anti-academic art. Consider whether the artist is mocking abstract and intellectual art. She describes her art as appealing to the heart not the head. What age would you expect the artist to be? Do the images convey a light-hearted subversion and anti-art attitude? Why should van der Stokker want her work to be seen in a public gallery?

Pop art connections. 1960's Pop Art celebrated subjects of mass consumption, communication and celebration of ordinary life rather than the traditional subjects for art; does van der Stokker's work continue these themes?

Lower Gallery Two

Grada and Grada Lily van der Stokker

Families and relationships. Van der Stokker often works in a self-referential way, using events from her own life. Does this work communicate ideas about family that link to your life? How do codes and stereotypes relate to family relationships? Do you think this painting is sentimental?

The passing of time. What pace of time is happening in this painting; sometimes ordinary lives move on slowly, sometimes there is a lot happening. What is in the painting and what does it tell you?

Decoration/style/fashion. Why do you think van der Stokker chooses to work in a childlike way? Bright colour schemes pattern and doodles; where would you see this sort of art outside of galleries? How does van der Stokker's work relate to contemporary life?

Text/Literacy. Van der Stokker often uses text bubbles and snippets of conversation in her wall paintings as part of the image. What information do you think is being communicated here? Her work has been described as; happy, colourful, humorous, crazy, unashamedly decorative, disarmingly cheerful – which adjectives do you think fit? What emotions does the painting create; optimistic, humour, familiarity, comfort, unease?

Level four

There is another work by van der Stokker near the cafe; *The renovation of the kitchen block*.

Object: Gesture: Grid – St Ives and the International Avant-garde

This show explores the shifts in art across Europe and the USA from Constructivism onwards, and how artists in St Ives explored these new languages in art. This represents the largest Collection display at Tate St Ives for ten years.

Object

In 1933 Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson visited Brancusi in Paris and connections can be made between the opening up of interior space in Brancusi's 1926 work, and subsequent explorations of holed sculpture by Hepworth and Moore.

In 1937 Roland Penrose and his Surrealist friends, including Eileen Agar and Max Ernst were in Cornwall for summer. Running parallel to Surrealist themes of irrationality and randomness were the ideals of the Modernists and Constructivists, who were searching for art that 'penetrated nature' in rational forms of universal appeal, often related to science and architecture.

Many works here involve psychological processes in the creation of anti-academic art; but unlike van der Stokker's art, which is firmly grounded in ordinary lives, here parallel worlds of the imagination and dreams are explored.

Serious art? Consider the subject matter in these works; do they appear more serious than the work of van der Stokker? Compare the lack of images about mass consumerism, pop subjects and the banality of ordinary lives.

Reinvented animals. - Make comparisons with the way Brancusi and Scott looked at fish, and the bird sculptures of Frink, Gaudier- Brzeska and Moore.

Density of image. Consider how many Collection works are hung together, offering potential for dialogue between works and make comparisons with the space around van der Stokker's work? If you were the curator would you make different decisions?

Surfaces. Identify and discuss the various tactile qualities in this selection of work; consider how some surfaces, like Arp's and Hepworth's are highly crafted, finished and controlled and how others, like Frink, Ernst and Wallis' are irregular, 'primitive' and distressed.

Co-existence/multiple experiences. This room provides an opportunity to discuss the different artistic techniques, styles and subject matter explored here; how many different materials/styles can you identify? Consider how Brancusi chooses to mix materials in a sculpture. Where are the boundaries between, abstraction, figuration and still life? What connections are there? Which artists work with construction, collage, or found objects?

Secret stories. Consider how Agar creates juxtaposition that displaces objects from their original function to create imaginary narratives. Discuss what might be occurring in these landscapes and the stories around the objects; what is about to happen?

Outside/inside. Connections between outside appearances and interpretation of meaning can provoke many varied responses. Does it matter that your response is different to other people who all have different experiences?

Gesture

This gallery presents work from the post-World War II generation of St Ives artists and investigates how they made connections with large scale works from American Abstract Expressionism and European influences such as Tachism, Art Informel and CoBrA. Abstraction from the environment or the imagination is explored by the language of art and artistic mark making, linked to the materiality and physicality of paint or sculptural materials. As with van der Stokker, the work here contrasts emotion/narrative against academic naturalism but approaches this subversion without van derStokker's feminist standpoint.

The importance of titles. How important are the words of the titles to you? Can they provoke

emotional responses? Heron wrote about 'the froth of new buds and leaves' when he described the richness of the surface of his painting.

Drip, splash, scrape. Can you unpack the processes involved in these applications of sometimes visceral paint, or plaster work for the bronze sculptures? Consider how these surface marks were made; were they tiny brush strokes or sweeping full-arm gestures?

Scale. Does this make you feel large or small? Are you drawn close to it – or is viewing it from far away better? Is your viewpoint that of an observer – or do you feel a part of this work?

Colour energy. Discuss the emotional impact the colour has on you, especially making comparisons between tonal landscape palettes and heightened resonant colour.

The experience of space and place. Lanyon described painting the experience of a landscape, rather than an illusory image organised in perspective. Consider how space is rearranged with deep or shallow space. Hofmann wrote about the 'push and pull' of colour planes; which colours come forward and which recede?

Speed/vitality/immediacy. Consider if the artist made this work with quickly made marks, working with randomness and chance, or built it up over a long time.

Gender . Make comparisons between van der Stokker's work which takes a feminine gaze at ordinary lives and the bold, gestural works in Gallery 4, such as De Kooning. Is it easy to guess if work is made by a male or female artist? Would you describe some paintings as 'macho'?

Grid

The grid was a concept important to Constructivist and Modernists through to Minimalists, across painting, sculpture and architecture. International artists used the grid to investigate pure form, spirituality and mathematical order. In making comparison to the other galleries, 'grid' may appear detached and rational, relating to rules and systems rather than chance. Make comparisons between the Constructivist ideal of using ideas from composition limited by geometry, which linked with contemporary architecture, and abstraction from nature.

Materials/technology/sustainability. Mary Martin wrote that if paint does not express what the artist wants to say another medium must be found. Naum Gabo experimented with early plastics as a sculptural material, full of idealism about its potential for new technology in a new society. With plastics now polluting our planet, discuss the ethics of artists' materials, eco art, sustainability and recycling. What viewpoint do you take?

Titles/meanings/references. Consider why some works are left untitled or just given a number reference. Mondrian wrote about how the object must be eliminated from the picture as it obscures the emotion of beauty in the work. How do you interpret this? Is a non-referential title needed for works with no literary or historical allusions?

Absence of colour. Many works have a very limited palette; make comparisons between this and the other galleries. If an artist removes colour where do you then focus?

Mathematics/geometry/ratio/proportion. Many works in this gallery relate directly to the intellectualism of mathematical ideas. Make comparisons between 'gesture' and the investigations here into pattern, precise measurement, geometry, number systems, ratios and the construction of work with mathematical tools. Why do you think some artists work in a very uncontrolled way, whilst others strive for perfect technological precision, industrial materials and machine-like surface?

Curatorial decisions. In hanging this show some works were moved from one gallery to another. Ryman's work is included in 'Grid' but the way the fittings are integral suggests the objectivity of painting. Would you rearrange any works that crossover to another theme?

Ways of Looking

These suggested lines of questioning can be applied to any artwork – not just those you see at Tate St Ives. Having a handful of 'standard' questions can help start discussion and encourage lines of enquiry that might otherwise be closed down if just facts about artist and artwork were retold.

Listening to others/responding personally/sensory experiences

Without knowing anything about the artist or the artwork, a huge amount of information regarding the work can be revealed just by inviting the question 'what do you see?' Once a few ideas are circulated, this often cascades into very imaginative and perceptive ways of viewing the work. Asking 'why do you say that' invites more considerations and sharing of ideas from students.

- What word(s) does the work make you think about?
- Have you seen anything like this before?
- What do the titles tell you?
- What does the colour make you think about?
- Be the curator -select one piece from each display to create a small exhibition and explain why you have chosen them.

Visual experience/what can you see/traditional and new media

What materials and processes has the artist used to make the work? Have you seen this material in art before? Do you think some materials have more relevance to art than others?

- Is the work part of a series?
- Is the work made in traditional or new materials?
- What is it? (Painting, sculpture, drawing, collage etc)
- How is it displayed? What space does it occupy and how does it relate to other work in the exhibition.
- What is the scale of the artwork and how does this affect our relationship to it?
- Does it have a frame or support?
- Is the work made to be permanent?
- What tactile qualities does the work have?

Communication of ideas and meaning?

- What do you think the artist wants to communicate?
- Is it about real life?
- Is there a story or narrative in the work?
- Does it communicate an issue or theme?
- Does it have cultural, social or political meaning?
- Does it relate to contemporary life?
- Does the title affect the meaning of the work?

Art in context/cultures/times. Local/national/global

- Is the work about a particular place?
- Can you tell from the work what nationality the artist might be?
- Who is the artist? Is it important to know who created the work? Does the background of the artist inform the work?
- Is the work site-specific?
- Does the work connect to art from other times and cultures?
- Does the work comment on contemporary society?
- Has the work reinvented art from other times and cultures?

Tate Resources

The Studio Resource Room: located off lower gallery two, this space provides access to Tate online, including the Collections Database and micro-sites for Young People and Children. You can also find accompanying catalogues and texts to support a visit to this show.

Visit www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers for up-to-date listings on CPD opportunities and to download resources – including this one – for free.

For definitions of **key art terms and movements** referred to here please refer to the **Tate Glossary** at www.tate.org.uk/collection

Useful Websites

www.tate.org.uk Tate online

www.tate.org.uk/learnonline Tate E-Learning

www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers Tate resources for schools and teachers

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Tate publications have produced a series of **Key Work Cards for Teachers** which can be ordered online. These include Portrait, Landscape & Prints.

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, or visit www.stivestrust.co.uk/archivesite

The **Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden**, Barnoon Hill, St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 1AD, Tel: 44 (0) 1736 796226, group bookings: 44 (0) 1736 791114. Open October-March, Tues-Sun 10am-dusk

Further Research

Object: Gesture: Grid – St Ives and the International Avant-Garde
A broadsheet (£3.50) is available.

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A fully illustrated catalogue will be available from July 2010 (£24.99)

Bird, M. (2008) **The St Ives Artists, A Biography of Place and Time.** Hampshire: Lund Humphries

Button, V., (2009) **St Ives Artists A Companion,** London: Tate

Remy, M. (1999) **Surrealism in Britain.** Hants: Ashgate

St Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery. (exhib. Cat., Tate Gallery: London, 1985; rev.ed. 1996)

Tate Etc, Spring 2005 p54-57

Tate Etc, Summer 2010, Issue 19, *Toward Friendliness, Childishness and Stupidity* John Waters and Lily van der Stokker