

# DLA PIPER SERIES

## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### HOW IT LOOKED & HOW IT FELT

## Tate Liverpool

# Educators' Resource Pack

## The Display

*DLA Piper Series The Twentieth Century: How it looked & how it felt* is a major display at Tate Liverpool of some of the key works from the Tate Collection. Almost 200 works are presented across three floors in the largest single display of Collection works ever seen at Tate Liverpool. Two parallel displays tell a rich, interweaving story of modern and contemporary art and explore the histories of figurative and abstract art. On the ground floor you can see solo exhibitions by two major British artists, starting with Bridget Riley (until January 2008) followed by Stanley Spencer (from February 2008). On the first floor a series of displays consider representational art and the different manifestations of the figure within modern and contemporary art. The second floor traces the path towards abstraction and explores the variety of abstract art. Popular works include Edgar Degas' *Little Dancer aged Fourteen, 1880-1*, Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* 1937-42 and Pablo Picasso's *Weeping Woman* 1937.

Due to the wide-ranging aspirations of the display, this pack will focus on selected artists and themes. The suggested workshop ideas and activities offer opportunities for making links and exploring the display as a whole. Themes of figuration and abstraction run throughout the pack, as in the display, but students should be encouraged to explore these terms and to find out how the art "looks" and "feels" to them.

Please note: due to copyright restrictions, this pack contains no images, however a majority of the works of art on display may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/QuickSearch>.

Alternatively you may view selected images in the online Exhibition Guide at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/the-twentieth-century/guide.shtm>.

The Collection is displayed in a series of rooms with the following themes:

Bridget Riley/Stanley Spencer

Bathers

Surreal Beauty

Images of Man

Andy Warhol

Artist as Subject

Everyday Circumstance

From Nature

Window to Grid

Web/Gesture/Field

Light and Movement

White Monochrome

Rules and Repetition

Painting to Object

■ More suitable for older students

# Bathers

This section begins the displays on the first floor. Here we find an exploration of different interpretations and representations of the figure in modern art. The nude or semi-clad figure was a favourite subject in traditional Academic painting, yet the theme of the bather also became popular amongst the avant-garde modernist artists. The figure was a vehicle for stylistic innovation and also the expression of new attitudes towards living.

## **Paul Cézanne: *The Large Bathers*, circa 1898**

Cézanne painted compositions of bathers of both sexes and saw himself as continuing in the tradition of masters such as Titian and Poussin. His concern, however, was not with the re-interpretation of classical myths, but to “create as rich a harmony as possible” between figure and nature. This was expressed in *The Large Bathers*, through strong lines and an overall structure dependent on the complex rhythms of his brush-strokes. Cézanne has often been referred to as the “father of modern art” due to this interest in the relationship between form and pictorial space.

*The Large Bathers* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=2118&searchid=41477>

## **Edgar Degas: *Woman in a Tub*, circa 1883**

Degas’s beautifully executed series of pastels of women at their toilette divided critics when they were first exhibited in the 1886. Some praised his realist approach of capturing modern women in real-life situations rather than portraying idealised goddesses. Others saw such representations as degrading and misogynistic. The artist aimed to capture a candid moment in time, “as if you were looking through a keyhole.” The bather’s pose in *Woman in a Tub* may be unflattering but it is a normal, casual position. She is oblivious to the viewer’s gaze, concerned only with her physical occupations.

*Woman in a Tub* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=3706&searchid=41486>

## **Walter Sickert: *Woman Washing her Hair*, 1906**

Sickert painted scenes from everyday life and like Degas, who he greatly admired, experimented with unusual viewpoints and cropping images in order to create a sense of spontaneity. In *Woman Washing her Hair*, 1906, the composition emphasises the figure’s cramped conditions, her head being cut off from view by the doorway as she bends. Traditional female nudes were often placed in contrived situations but this is a daily routine where a woman might naturally be naked. By emphasising the patterns of the wallpaper and carpets, the interior space is flattened and made ambiguous.

*Woman Washing her Hair* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=13396&searchid=41492>

## Work in Focus

### *Bathers at Moritzburg, 1909/1926,* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

In the years before the First World War, Kirchner spent his summers in the resort of Moritzburg with friends, fellow artists and models. This Lakeland area near Dresden was popular with naturists. Nude bathing and the relaxed communal lifestyle of this resort, provided the subject matter for many paintings by Kirchner and Die Brücke – the group of artists that he was associated with. Die Brücke took their name from the German for “bridge”, a metaphor suggesting escape from decadent, bourgeois society. They were a young, idealistic group with controversial and anti-establishment views. Their art was concerned with technical radicalism, freedom of expression and a re-evaluation of “primitive” sources. The nude in the landscape was for them, representative of release from inhibitions and a return to the natural.

A number of artists at this time were painting the nude in landscape – a traditional genre revisited most noticeably by Cézanne, but whereas his figures were classically inspired, monumental and timeless, Kirchner’s figures are very much of their time. They are *naked people* – ugly, graceless, scrawny and REAL. There is a sense of freedom and casting off of inhibition that is lacking in Cézanne’s grand bathers.

The squatting figure in the centre of the painting is particularly crude and is the one who makes eye contact with the viewer, drawing us into the scene.

The painting almost certainly dates to Kirchner’s first visit to Moritzburg in 1909, though it was over-painted – probably in 1926. It is typical of his work of the later 1920s, when he tended to mix all of his pigments with white, resulting in a creamy texture. This over-painting has the effect of obliterating detail and emphasising the flatness of the picture surface.

The thick outlines struggle to contain the patches of loosely applied colour and this transgression of boundaries between flesh and the landscape contributes to the sense of these bodies being at one with nature. The roughness and spontaneity of technique also adds to the primitive quality of the work.

Besides African and Oceanic art, Kirchner was also influenced by the traditional German woodcuts and this is evident in the angularity of his line and simplicity of colour.

The frame was almost certainly designed by the artist as it is of a type he consistently used, made of flat wood painted in bronze with a green tone.

**Discuss** different representations of bathers in the Display. Choose one painting to focus on in detail and answer these questions:-

- **Personal** responses – write down your first thoughts on this work. What does it remind you of? How does it make you feel?
- **Context** – consider when it was painted. What period is represented? Where is it set?
- **Subject** – What is happening? Does the artist tell you anything about the person/people in the painting?
- **Object** – how is it painted? Describe the artist’s use of paint, brushstrokes, composition, use of colour, style. Does it remind you of any other artist’s work?

- **Look** at other examples of bathers in this display and discuss the artists' different approaches to this traditional subject.

# Surreal Beauty

Surrealism approached notions of beauty through the language of dreams and imagery intended to evoke the subconscious. The Surrealists employed a diverse range of formal strategies from hyper-realist painting to assemblages of found objects, collage and various forms of photography. Each has had a profound impact on Modern Art and influences can be detected in the work of subsequent generations.

## **Giorgio De Chirico: *The Painter's Family*, 1926**

De Chirico's works bring together unrelated objects in unnatural, dreamlike spaces. The idea of using faceless mannequins came from a play by his brother, Alberto Savini, "*Les Chants de la Mi-Mort*" where the main character is "*a man without voice, eyes or face*". The setting of this painting also resembles a stage. Artists' materials, such as easels, dummies and architectural building blocks, are stacked up like props in a configuration which suggests a family group. He said that the idea was inspired by "*certain Gothic figures (apostles and saints) which are seated*".

*The Painter's Family* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=2202&searchid=41508>

## **René Magritte: *The Spirit of Geometry*, 1937**

The title of this work was originally "*Maternity*" and the bizarre interchanging of heads in this painting perhaps indicates the inter-dependence of roles in their relationship. While the baby totally depends on the mother, equally the parent is controlled by the continuing needs of the child. The artist's revised title implies that the situation can be described in mathematical terms. Like De Chirico, Magritte often chose a stage setting in order to detach the subject from reality. His paintings are made even more unsettling by the hyper-realism of his representation.

*The Spirit of Geometry* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9159&searchid=41513>

## **Dorothy Cross: *Virgin Shroud*, 1993**

Influenced by Surrealist artists such as Meret Oppenheim, Cross explores the cultural and symbolic significance of animal hides.

The title suggests that a statue of the Virgin Mary could be beneath this cow skin veil or shroud, with udders arranged around the head to look like a crown. The incongruous combination of dead beast and satin wedding dress provokes questions about the role of woman, wife and mother. The responsibility of providing, nurturing and protecting could also be interpreted as a dead weight suffocating the woman underneath.

*Virgin Shroud* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=21259&searchid=41519>

## Work in Focus

# *Weeping Woman*, 1937, by Pablo Picasso

You may view this work of art online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=11871&searchid=41444&tabview=work>

Picasso said “*For me, Dora is always the Weeping Woman.*” While Marie Thérèse, appeared in the art of his Surrealist period as uncomplicated and fun, Dora Maar was dark and emotional. As a part of the Surrealist circle, Maar was a respected artist in her own right when she met Picasso. She shared his anguish following the bombing of Guernica and inspired numerous studies of distressed women made for his painting of the horrific event. Picasso became fascinated with the theme of the weeping woman and continued to make paintings and sketches in different media well after the mural was completed. Dora Maar also provided invaluable documentation of Picasso’s working methods in a series of photographs of the various stages of *Guernica*.

*Weeping Woman* is one of the most powerful depictions of emotion in art history. Her face is literally fragmented and furrowed with grief. Lines are angular and exaggerated and this clash of forms is echoed in the artist’s strident use of colour. The painting also contains numerous visual puns that are typical of Picasso’s work, including one of his favourite devices – the double profile, which allows two simultaneous views of the subject. The style of this painting combines a visual language derived from Cubism with imagery that allied his work to Surrealism though he never officially joined the group. Surreal elements here include fingernails that are also tears, fingers that also allude to a handkerchief and a hairgrip that resembles a claw. Eyes appear to be overflowing from spoon-shaped sockets. The images of pain are appropriate not only in the *Guernica* context, but also as a reference to their complicated relationship.

He said “*For years I’ve painted her in tortured forms not through sadism, and not with pleasure, either; just obeying a vision that forced itself on me. It was the deep reality, not the superficial one.*”

**Other useful resources:**

<http://web.org.uk/picasso/guernica.html>

Caws, Mary Ann, *Picasso’s Weeping Woman: The Life and Art of Dora Maar*, Bullfinch Press, 2000

### Activities

**Paint** your own weeping figure. What colours evoke sorrow or grief? How can you distort features in order to depict emotion? Would you incorporate images as Picasso has in *Weeping Woman*?

You could also try portraying other emotions eg anger, joy, fear, jealousy, contentment etc

**Compare** with other representations of women by Picasso in the display – What does the style of each painting tell you about the model?

**Research** Picasso's *Guernica*. Can you see any figures in *Guernica* that could be related to *Weeping Woman*?

**Look** at other images of weeping figures eg Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, c 1424, Man Ray's *Tears*, 1932, Roy Lichtenstein, *Thinking of Him*, 1963, Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* c 1944.

Compare these to *Weeping Woman*. How does each artist convey grief? Which in your opinion evokes the most genuine emotion? What makes your choice so powerful?

**Dora Maar** was an artist in her own right. Look at some examples of her work. She also did her own version of this painting. Compare it to the original. Why do you think she painted a copy?

# Images of Man

This section looks at post-WWII approaches to the figure. In the aftermath of Second World War, the Holocaust and Hiroshima, the human figure remained a central concern for artists. We see a progressive obliteration of the figure in many works. This tendency has been linked to a wider questioning of the nature of existence in philosophical thought through movements such as existentialism.

During this period, many artists were also questioning the nature of art. Many, such as Dubuffet felt a need to return to basics in order to re-invent art. He experimented with different materials and studied children's painting. (See "Work in Focus"). Francis Bacon taught himself to paint, and invented his own techniques in order to convey emotion through the expressive use of material. Giacometti worked and reworked his sculptures, building up the fragile figures with layers of plaster and then paring them away to almost nothing, and his drawings show a similar obsession.

**Compare** Giacometti's drawing with his sculpture. How do you think they were made? Does he tell you anything about the model? Write down some words that you think could describe how they look and how they might feel

**Look** at other representations of the figure. How were they made? Do they look real? Why do you think the artist has chosen to paint/sculpt them the way he has? Does the material tell you anything about the person?

**Write a story.** Pretend that one of the people portrayed in this section is telling you about their life. Describe the character, how he/she feels and what has happened in his/her life.

**Discuss** war. What effect does it have on civilians? (You could also discuss Picasso's painting *Guernica* and look at Picasso's *Weeping Woman* in the *Surreal Beautyroom*).

## Work in Focus

### *Spinning Round*, 1961, by Jean Dubuffet

You may view this work of art online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=4020&searchid=41448>

*Spinning Round*, in the *Images of Man* section on the first floor, reflects Jean Dubuffet's excitement on returning to Paris in 1961, after living in the countryside for seven years. His sense of wonder and bewilderment in the city streets is conveyed with childlike enthusiasm. He believed that materials played an active and expressive role in art and the whole surface of this painting teems with activity – with energetic brushstrokes, scratched lines and smeared paint, inscribed with colourful figures in a shallow space.

"Savage" is a word often applied to Dubuffet's paintings. His attitude was anti-art. He disliked intellectuals and refused to be constrained by labels or "isms". His work attacked the conventions of "high" culture and demonstrated a desire to go back to basics in order to re-invent art in a simple, accessible form that everyone could understand.

He became interested in the art produced by patients in psychiatric hospitals and other social outcasts. Their spontaneous creativity offered an exciting alternative to Dubuffet, who had become disillusioned with the confines of accepted culture. In 1948, he founded the *Art Brut* Society with the aim of promoting artists such as Wolfi, Aloise and Muller, and his own work displays the influence of these marginal or "outsider" artists.

Dubuffet was not only interested in psychotic art, but any form of untrained or primitive creativity.

*"For a long time I have been attracted by the idea of composing large finished pictures using only the most inadequate means, the way people draw who have had no training at all, like careless scribbles on barrack walls – seeking an equivalent way of painting, just as rude, just as free from the methods of professional artists. I feel that the elements thus depicted acquire, or at least might acquire, because of being drawn in this negligent manner, a much greater dynamic power".*

This desire to return to basics and create art from primitive instincts was by no means Dubuffet's innovation. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, avant-garde artists had turned to non-western cultures for inspiration, though their interpretations of the "primitive" had, in painting at least, still employed traditional fine art materials. Dubuffet's desire to be "*free from the methods of professional artists*" led him to abandon every technique, style and use of material that he had ever been taught. He invented new methods through experimentation and instinct.

He was also fascinated by the graffiti that was inscribed and daubed on different facades of the Paris streets. He imitated the scratching and scribbling of graffiti and also the urban

surfaces that were defaced. He built up the ground of his works with a thick layer of paint mixed with other materials such as dust, grime, tar and soot to produce a gritty, muddy texture which he called haute pâte (literally "high paste"), and then cut through this messy impasto with the outlines of his figures.

*"I have always tried to represent any object, transcribing it in a most summary manner, hardly descriptive at all, far removed from the actual objective measurements of things, making many people speak of children's drawings"*

Drawing played an important part in his re-invention of art. Making a mark, inscribing or describing with lines, using implements or fingers, is instinctive to all humans. Drawing is the most direct and democratic form of art. You do not need expensive materials. Anyone can do it.

Dubuffet's works were ridiculed when first exhibited, but the characteristics that provoked derision - namely their childlike simplicity, brutal surfaces and deliberate artlessness - are qualities that have led to his universal acclaim. *Spinning Round* is an instantly recognisable image of everyday, urban existence presented in terms and a language that is accessible to everyone.

## Activities

**Look** at pictures of petroglyphs or pictographs. How do you think they were made? What materials have been used?

**Draw** objects, people, places using as few lines as you can. Try using different drawing materials such as crayons, pastels, thick pencils or charcoal. Use different surfaces to draw on. How does the choice of material affect your image?

**Reinvent Art!** What new materials could you use for painting? Try coffee, beetroot juice, ketchup, boot-polish, make-up, flour and water. Use toothbrushes, sticks, keys, sandpaper, cocktail sticks...

**Try *sgraffito*!** This term comes from the Italian word *sgraffire* meaning "to scratch". One coat of paint is left to dry on a sheet of paper. Another coat of a different colour is painted on top of this first layer. You can continue to build up several layers before applying the final top coat. Then take a brush handle or other implement to scratch out a drawing, leaving behind an image in the colours of the base layers. You can vary this technique by using crayons for the bottom layer.

**Discuss** the title of this painting. Why do you think it is called "Spinning Round"? Which words would you use to describe the sights and sounds of a busy city street? Write down as many words as you can then try to use them all in a poem titled "Spinning Round".

**Look** at other works by Dubuffet in the gallery and compare them to *Spinning Round*. How have they been painted? What materials has the artist used? How have other artists in the display represented the figure?

# From Nature

The first decades of the Twentieth Century witnessed an unprecedented transformation of artistic styles and practices. Though rooted in representation, the sculptures in this room demonstrate a new concern with form and materials rather than in making realistic descriptions of the visible world. Many of these artists also strive towards an economy of expression, reducing a figure to its basic characteristics and thus to a universal form.

Despite moving towards abstraction artists still borrowed from nature for their subjects. Through sympathetic carving of his materials **Henry Moore** sought to invest his sculptures with energies and rhythms found in natural forms such as pebbles, bones and driftwood. **Constantin Brancusi** also looked to nature with a limited number of themes such as birds, fish and heads. He understood that part of a body could stand for the whole and focussed on the head, condensing and defining facial features within a pure basic ovoid.

The art of other cultures, particularly Africa, was appropriated purely for its formal qualities with no interest in its ethnic origins. The stylised and rhythmic representation of the body in African and Oceanic carvings offered artists a non-naturalistic alternative to the Western tradition and a direct means of expression that transcended visual accuracy.

Cubist sculpture analysed and interrogated form in order to recreate and redefine it. **Alexander Archipenko** combined concave and convex forms to create a new visual language while **Oto Gutfreund** rebuilt anatomy in terms of architectural planes rather than organic shapes. The resulting works are often more mechanical in appearance than human. A pioneer of welded sculpture, **Julio Gonzalez** used industrial shapes and techniques to create his figures while **David Smith** actually incorporated real tools and implements into his metal sculptures.

**Discuss** the meaning of the word "abstract". Which of these sculptures would you describe as abstract and why?

**Look** around the other sections and find more examples of abstract art. Discuss why these works are abstract.

**Discuss** the different methods and materials used by artists to make a figure. How do you think they were made? How do you think they would feel?

**Look** around the other sections and discuss how other artists have represented the figure.

### Activities:

- **Collect** shells, pebbles, driftwood etc and make drawings or rubbings from them looking for interesting textures, marks and shapes. Use these drawings to compose figures or faces with the characteristics of your objects, eg. "shell woman" or "stone man".
- **Draw** a self portrait. Make a tracing of this drawing retaining only the outlines of facial features. Make a further copy of this tracing, reducing features to as few lines as possible. You should be left with an essential head in the style of Brancusi! Does it still look like you?
- **Cut out** architectural shapes, eg arches, windows, columns etc in cardboard and glue them together to make a model of a head or figure. You could also do this with car parts, musical instruments, kitchen utensils etc. Be inventive!

## Window to Grid

Artists throughout history have used geometry in order to create the illusion of space, but in the Twentieth Century, they realised that it could also be employed to deny space. Flat lines and areas of colour emphasise the surface of the painting. However, they can also suggest depth. We tend to see stronger colours as being closer to us and lighter shades as being further away. By overlapping lines and colours, depth can also be implied, however shallow.

By examining the works of Hammershoi, Delaunay, Mondrian and Morris, students can see for themselves a development towards abstraction as the grids used to describe perspective of a room, windows or architectural features become a means of expression in their own right – rather than serving a descriptive purpose, the lines and geometric shapes become the subject of the painting.

### **Vilhelm Hammershoi : *Interior, Sunlight on the Floor*, 1906**

This painting displays two of Hammershoi's favoured motifs: the window and the empty room. Both motifs relate to traditions found in Romanticism and Symbolism: the window refers to a world beyond from which the viewer, the artist and the space are separated, and the empty room emphasises a retreat from society. Confined within this closed space, sunlight casts a grid-like shadow on the floor, creating a quiet composition of horizontal and vertical lines. As Hammershoi commented, "... when I choose a motif I think I mainly look at the lines."

### **Robert Delaunay: *Windows Open Simultaneously (First Part, Third Motif)*, 1912**

Delaunay's cubist painting suggests a view of the Eiffel Tower seen from a window. We see the tower integrated with the rooftops of Paris. As the title suggests, Delaunay was interested in the idea of simultaneous perception: the idea that the eye does not take images in simply or singly, as through a window or photograph, but rather our eyes filter, distort and interpret the image. He believed, as a result, that only when objects are given an illusion of movement, do they become representative of life.

*Windows Open Simultaneously (First Part, Third Motif)* may be viewed online at:  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=3713&searchid=41550>

### **Piet Mondrian: *No. VI/Composition No.II*, 1920**

Mondrian's work rejects the conventional idea that a painting offers a window onto an external world. In its place he offers the canvas as a new reality worthy of our attention and interest. Rather than representing nature, Mondrian created "pure forms": using vertical and horizontal lines and primary colours. His abandonment of artistic tradition was part of a larger disillusionment with the European social order after the catastrophe of WWI. Mondrian believed that this new form of painting could lead the viewer to a better, purer sense of reality.

*Mondrian's No. VI/Composition No.II* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9604&searchid=41552>

### **Sarah Morris: *Rio (with Palms) [Las Vegas]*, 2000,**

Morris's painting, based on the exterior of a Las Vegas hotel, refers back to the famous grids of Mondrian and the minimalists. Morris playfully, or perhaps troublingly, suggests that the radical techniques of these earlier twentieth-century artists have now been absorbed into the blank, glossy exteriors of contemporary corporate architecture. The appealing immediacy of Morris's use of colour may remind us of advertising imagery or computer graphics, but the unnatural, hovering vantage point makes our relation to this world of consumption and commerce uncertain.

Morris's *Rio (with Palms) [Las Vegas]* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=158&searchid=41557>

## Activities

### Abstract art

**Take** a dictionary definition of the word "abstract" and find a work in the *Window to Grid* section that you think fits this description. Find a work that does not seem entirely abstract according to your description. What do you think "abstract" means? Look at the works in the *Web/Gesture/Field* section. Would you describe them as abstract? How are they different to those in *Window to Grid*?

### Windows and Grids

**Create** your own window or grid from cardboard and hold it up over an area of a room or against a real window. Draw whatever is framed by your grid. Make a second drawing from this, reducing everything that falls into each "pane" to a block of colour. You are only allowed to use squares to describe the views in each window. You can make the resulting abstract work more intense by increasing the number of squares in your grid (or panes in your window)

### Architecture

**Photocopy** a picture of a building – preferably a modern one, for example a skyscraper, housing block, school or hospital. Draw over all the horizontal and vertical lines of the building using a ruler and marker. Now trace the lines made by your marker onto a new sheet of paper and use the resulting grid as a basis for an abstract painting in the style of Sarah Morris.

# Web/Gesture/Field

The title of this section refers to different forms of abstraction and expressionism that emerged in post war Europe and America: the “webs” created by Jackson Pollock in his action paintings, the gestural works of Fontana and Hartung and the treatment of the canvas as a field of colour by Rothko and Klein.

Abstract Expressionism was the first movement to have roots either side of the Atlantic. The rise of fascism in Europe persuaded many artists to flee to America, including Max Ernst. His influence was felt amongst a generation of young artists, who as a reaction to a world in conflict and to McCarthyism in America, began to turn away from the external world and to search within themselves for a more spiritual, timeless means of expression. They were fascinated with the psychological unconscious and how this could be translated directly to the picture surface. Paintings were often made on mural sized canvases and became a record of physical gestures and psychological presence.

**Jackson Pollock** developed a technique of dripping paint onto a prepared canvas laid on the ground. He referred to “being in the arena” as he built up his complex rhythms of paint almost as a performance or dance.

**Activity:** Create a painting by dripping brushes or trailing different coloured pens, pencils or crayons in rhythmic patterns.

- You could do this to music and let the rhythms dictate the movement
- Try following different pieces of music or songs to see if this affects the character of your “drip” painting.
- Use different colours to represent individual instruments and represent a song in layers or “webs”.

**Lucio Fontana’s** works can also be read in relation to the body of the artist as they record his acts of slashing and puncturing their surfaces. Fontana preferred to describe this art as creative rather than destructive.

**Activity:** Take a lump of clay and see how many different ways you can “leave your mark” on the material as an artist

- Use different implements
- Employ new techniques or gestures – be inventive!
- Repeat the exercise with a sheet of paper, exploring alternative ways of leaving a mark

**Mark Rothko’s** vast paintings are characterised by rigorous attention to the formal elements of painting, as geometric forms loom out and seep into the canvas, suggesting depth and demanding contemplation.

**Activity:** Sit and look at a Rothko painting in silence for five minutes. Write down any words that come into your mind as you contemplate. How does the painting make you feel? What emotions are evoked by the colours? Can you see any forms in the work? Does it remind you of anything?

- Use the words and phrases that you have written down to write a short poem inspired by the painting.

- Repeat this exercise with other paintings in the display.

# White Monochrome

Monochrome means one colour. The total elimination of colour and image can be seen as the ultimate form of abstraction in art. For some, it signals the end of painting, as it would appear to reject representation and seem to resist all meaning. For many, this form of art represents all that is elitist and difficult about modern and contemporary art.

The monochrome was first explored by Kazimir Malevich in the early Twentieth Century but has since been exploited by artists as diverse as Ad Reinhardt, Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, and Anish Kapoor. The monochrome can be interpreted as an attempt to attain spirituality in painting by emptying the canvas in order to achieve neutrality and serenity that can be found in the purely abstract. It can also be interpreted as the reduction of art to its basic elements, form and colour, in order to emphasise its material nature as an object.

In the mid 1930s in Britain, Ben Nicholson began a series of white reliefs and sculptures. His work of this time was intractably modernist, the stark whiteness and simple shapes of works often echoing the forms of modernist architecture. For Barbara Hepworth, working alongside Nicholson, the monochrome allowed her to focus on exploring the relationship of space to form.

## **Ben Nicholson: *1935 (White Relief), 1935***

Although Nicholson has incised lines into previous works painted on board (eg Guitar in the Tate collection) his move into full relief came about by accident when a piece fell out as he was cutting an intersection in a panel. This piercing of the picture surface can be viewed as a parallel development to the sculpture of his close friends Hepworth and Moore, who were also experimenting with interior and exterior space in their works.

In this work by Nicholson, the two circles are played off against each other, and against the structure of rectangles. Nicholson has said that this interplay is central to his art. He said '*you can create a most exciting tension between these forces*', the '*tension*' being created by the relationship of the circles. One has been drawn with a compass in order to achieve a perfect form and the other freehand. There is also variation in depth as one penetrates the layers of relief further than the other.

The colour white is aesthetically significant in Nicholson's work with its associations of health, hygiene and purity.

Nicholson's *1935 (White Relief)* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=10677&searchid=41565>

## **Barbara Hepworth: *Three Forms, 1935***

Prior to 1934 Hepworth's work was predominantly figurative. In the publication *Unit One* she expressed a new interest in creating a purer art - "some universal or abstract vision of beauty". With works such as *Three Forms* she reduced her sculpture to essential shapes and the unadulterated colour of the natural material. With similar aims to Nicholson she claimed that she was absorbed by 'relationships in space' and by 'the tensions between forms'. While the three elements are slightly imperfect in shape, their sizes and the spaces between them are precisely proportional to each other.

This sculpture was made shortly after the birth of her triplets, two girls and a boy. She said, following her enforced break from sculpting, "*When I started carving again ... my work seemed to have changed direction although the only fresh influences had been the arrival of the children*". She made it clear that although her sculpture appeared abstract, the relationships between the forms had a human significance.

*Three Forms* may be viewed online at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=6030&searchid=41569>

## Activities

### Discuss:

- How does "white" make you feel?
- What would "white" sound like?...feel like?...smell like?...
- What do you associate with the colour white?

**Make** a monochrome relief using layers of board or card. Try using different colours to see what effect this has on your work. You could start off with different coloured shapes and then spray paint the whole piece to make it entirely monochrome.

**Write** a white poem – think of as many words as you can to describe "white" and incorporate them into a poem. You could also do this with other colours.

**Collect** white objects or scraps of material for a white collage.

**Paint** everyday objects white and discuss the effect. Does this alter the character of the object? What happens if you use other colours?

**Curate** your own white exhibition with white paintings, reliefs, sculptures, music, poems...etc.

# Rules and Repetition

Rules, logic and mathematics have played a part in the creation of art since the Renaissance in order to achieve compositional harmony. In the early part of the Twentieth Century, this interest came to the fore as movements such as Purism, Orphism, Neo-Plasticism and Constructivism adopted a more formal approach, with the application of geometry, colour theory and science. Theo van Doesburg, Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian employed rigorous systems within their predominantly abstract work. Their ideas had a profound influence on subsequent generations of artists that was global in extent and not just upon their immediate European contemporaries.

Minimalist artists used pre-fabricated units of material that were usually monochrome. They were not concerned with the physical or emotional act of producing art but the application of intellectual and rational procedures. They had much in common with Conceptual, Idea or Process artists whose work was primarily the manifestation of an idea rather than the creation of an object. These artists, working in the 1960s and 1970s, believed that art should represent nothing but itself. Their preferred methods of representation became recorded sequences, plotted grids, graphs and dispassionately arranged geometric forms and boxes. The cube and square were considered ideal units as they were governed by logic and could be infinitely repeated.

## Activities

- Work out a mathematical sequence, eg. 2,4,6,8 etc or 1,2,3,5,8,13 etc. Using basic geometric units such as squares or triangles, express your sequence as a drawing or painting. You could use lined or graph paper. You could use a computer (eg Excel sheet) to work out the design.
- In groups, work out a way of expressing a mathematical sequence as a performance. Try using dance, sound, repeated movements, props, mime, words etc. Be creative!
- Make a sculpture from pre-fabricated units eg boxes, building blocks, tiles, sugar cubes etc.
- How many examples of rules and repetition can you find in everyday life? Some examples are floor tiles, railings, sports pitches, knitting patterns, school timetable... What would happen if there were no rules or repetition? Try drawing an asymmetrical chess board or a building with different shaped rooms. Write a short story about a day without rules and repetition.

## Useful Resources

**Batchelor, David, Fer, Briony, Wood, Paul, Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars** (*Modern Art, Practices and Debates*) Yale, 1993

**Buck, Louisa, *Moving Targets: a User's Guide to British Art Now*, Tate Publishing, 1998.**

**Causey, Andrew, *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford Paperbacks, 1998**

**Curtis, Penelope, *Sculpture 1900-1945: After Rodin*, Oxford University Press, 1997**

**Harris, Jonathan, *Art History: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, 2006**

**Harrison, Charles *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, Yale University Press, 1981**

**Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (eds), *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, 1992**

**Meecham, Pam and Sheldon, Julie, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction (Second Edition)*, Routledge, 2005**

**Morris, Frances, *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, Tate Publishing, 1994**

**Perry, Gillian, Frascina, Francis, Harrison, Charles, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century (Modern Art, Practices and Debates)* Yale, 1993**

**Tucker, William, *The Language of Sculpture*, Thames and Hudson, 1977**

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/BrowseGroup?cgroupid=999999956>

<http://painting.about.com/od/paintingforbeginners/ss/Sgraffito.htm>