

Jean Dubuffet

Brutal Beauty

Teachers' Resource



barbican

J. Dubuffet
54



Jean Dubuffet, *Landscape with Argus (Paysage aux argus)*, August 1955, Collection Fondation Dubuffet, Paris © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London

Using this Resource

This Teachers' Resource complements the Barbican Art Gallery exhibition *Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty* but can also be used for exploring both the work of Jean Dubuffet and Art Brut artists without visiting the exhibition in person. This resource is:

- **Divided into thematic sections** that reflect key aspects of Dubuffet's creative life and work. These sections can be used as starting points for the exploration of thoughts and ideas centred on Dubuffet's work, with example questions for discussion with students. Inspired by Dubuffet's endlessly playful and experimental spirit, each section includes ideas for students' own creative work, self-expression and imaginative enquiry – as Dubuffet believed, an artist can be anyone who can communicate their feelings or ideas well.
- Has **Ask and Explore sections** that give questions and creative activities to explore in the Gallery itself or in the classroom.
- **Aimed at primary and secondary school teachers, further education tutors, and leaders of arts and youth groups.** It is appropriate for Key Stages 2–5 with links across the curriculum including **Art and Design** (in particular), **Literacy, PSHE, Citizenship, History, Drama**. Suggested links to curriculum areas are marked at the beginning of each section. We have highlighted questions and activities in each section that are particularly suitable for certain Key Stages. These are clearly coded to help guide you through.

KS 2–3 Particularly suitable for Key Stages 2 & 3

KS 4–5 Particularly suitable for Key Stages 4 & 5

KS 2–5 Suitable for all Key Stages 2–5

- **Responsive to the 5 levers of the Recovery Curriculum** developed by Professor Barry Carpenter CBE, which focuses on **Relationships, Community, Transparent Curriculum, Metacognition and Space** to help support children and young people to re-engage with their learning, their wider community and their own confident sense of self. The resource complements most areas of the Recovery Curriculum but suggested links to one or more of the 5 levers are also marked at the beginning of each section.

Contents List

Introducing Dubuffet

Street Art

Alchemy and Enchantment

Art Brut

Bodies and Landscapes

Fantastical Creatures

Doodles and Parallel Universes

Examples of further resources

Your Visit

Art Gallery, Barbican Centre
Mon 17 May–Sun 22 Aug 2021
10am–7pm daily

Entry to Barbican Art Gallery is free for all students in Key Stages 1–3. A discounted group booking rate of £3 per student is available to students in formal education groups up to the age of 19.

For bookings and enquiries please contact the school groups booking line.

Tel: 020 7382 7211 (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm)
Email: groups@barbican.org.uk

If you would like a free introduction to the exhibition, please let us know.

Introducing Dubuffet

Art and Design

Recovery Curriculum (Lever 5: Space)

Jean Dubuffet was born in 1901, in the coastal town of Le Havre in France. His family were wealthy, with a successful wine business. Dubuffet's father had a fierce temper and placed high expectations on his son to excel academically. As a refuge, the young Dubuffet created his own museum in a wardrobe, where he displayed an eclectic assortment of valued objects: beach finds, beetles, exotic nuts, minerals and fossils. See how his interest in materials and collecting continued throughout his life in different forms!

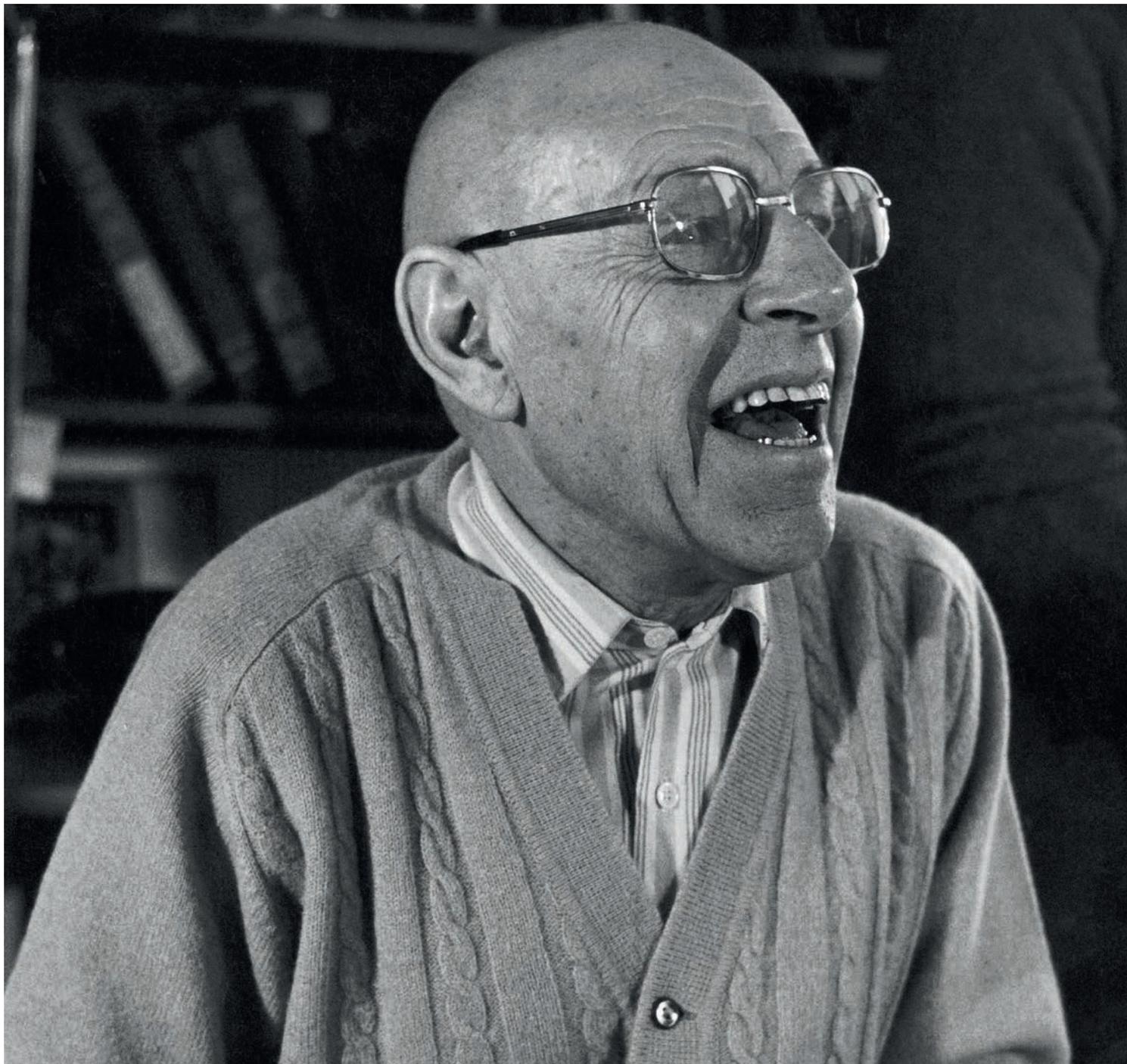
Ask and Explore **KS 2–5**

Q What do you collect for interest or inspiration? How does this collecting and researching feed into and inform what you create yourself? Could you create a 'Museum of Me' e.g. showcasing objects that reflect your personality or things that have particular significance to you?

Dubuffet's rebellious streak meant he was determined to break free from his father's control. He wanted to become an artist and although he started at art school in Paris, he became disillusioned with the teaching, which he found intellectual and old fashioned. He yearned for an art based more in everyday life and personal experiences. Mounting debts and the outbreak of the Second World War postponed Dubuffet's artistic career, but in his forties the time finally came for his experimental spirit to take off. Adopting what he described as an 'anti-cultural position,' and inspired by artists from all walks of life, Dubuffet went on to challenge expectations of what art should look like and who might be allowed to make it.

Ask and Explore **KS 4–5**

Q What do you think Dubuffet meant by 'taking an anti-cultural position?' Do you think his work swept away previous conventions of taste and beauty in art? Look at examples through art history and explore this idea further.



Jean Dubuffet in Paris, France, 1972, Photograph by Francis Chaverou © Archives Fondation Dubuffet, Paris / © Francis Chaverou

Street art

Art and Design, History, Literacy

Recovery Curriculum

(Lever 1: Relationships and Lever 2: Community)

Just after the Second World War, amid the destruction of Paris, Dubuffet felt it was a time for new freedoms and possibilities. It is interesting to note that the Barbican Centre itself was built on the ruins from the London Blitz – a hopeful new form of Brutalist architecture providing homes, gardens and cultural spaces for the next chapter of life.

Ask and Explore **KS 2–5**

Q How do we find inspiration and growth after a time of difficulty and restrictions such as, historically, after the Second World War, or in contemporary times after the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Look at some of Dubuffet's wall works such as *Passing through the Wall*, *Dance on the Wall* or *Man and Wall* (all from 1945).

Dubuffet was fascinated by the messages and images covering the streets of post-war Paris and felt that the 'very basic... scribbles traced on a wall have more precious meaning than most ... large pretentious paintings.' Look at how this belief and interest fed into Dubuffet's own art making – his images of walls, their messages and the way he made marks often scratching, scraping or scrawling to create a similar effect.

Ask and Explore **KS 2–5**

Q In the streets around you – what marks, words and images do you see? What do they signify or say to you? What are your views on graffiti – is it an essential and skilled outlet for self-expression and comment or can it have other associations? When is it art and when is it vandalism?

Inspired by what they see, students can create a mini graffiti 'wall' on paper using lettering and designs that express their own unique style. These drawings can then be swapped with a number of other students and they can draw onto each other's 'walls' responding to and adding their own ideas in a spirit of community.



Jean Dubuffet, *Passing through the Walls (Passant dans le Murs)*, January – March 1945, Collection Fondation Dubuffet, Paris © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London

Beyond the Gallery **KS 2–5**

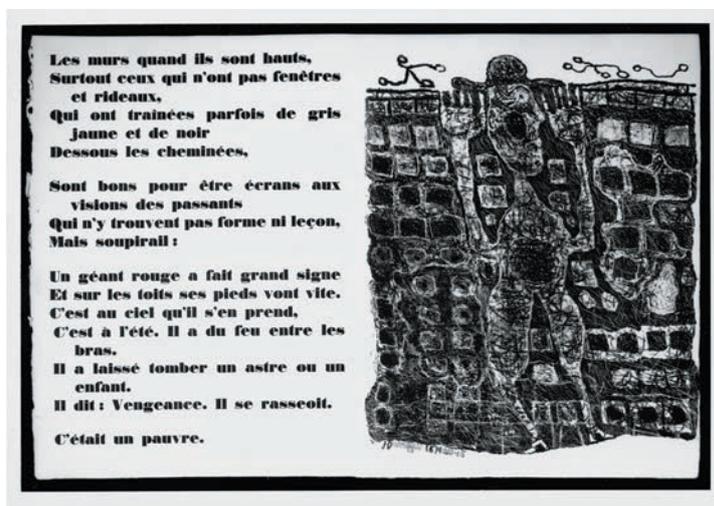
Using large rolls of paper create some roll-out graffiti walls of text and image. Students can write quotes from books they are reading to inspire others or write about people or ideas that mean something to them. Interact with each other's ideas and allow one comment to spark another in visually exciting ways using metaphors and symbols. Students could also create and design their own code name or tag to represent, express and explore an aspect of their own identity.

Maybe you can you get permission to design a permanent mural expressing some of the students' interests and thinking (or those of the wider community)?

Students can create an illustrated piece of creative writing or a poem from the perspective of a city wall – what has this wall witnessed and experienced over the years and how does it feel?!

Explore Further **KS 4–5**

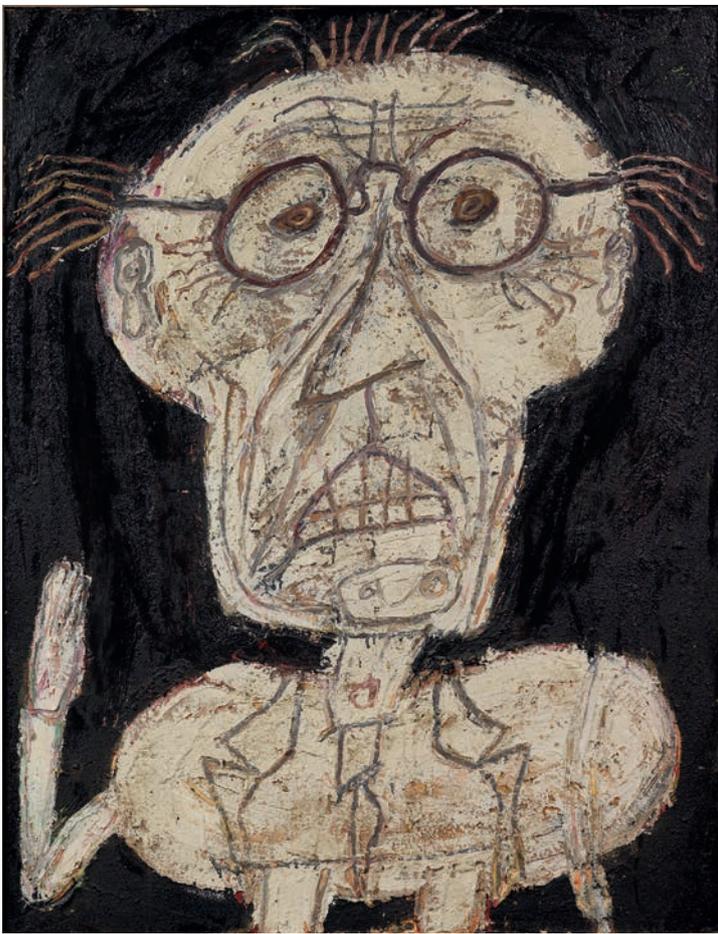
Look at the work of other well-known street artists e.g. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jenny Holzer or Banksy. Is the street art of the 20th and 21st centuries like a modern equivalent of prehistoric cave paintings? Look at the famous Lascaux cave paintings which were discovered in 1940 and which also inspired Dubuffet and his work.



Jean Dubuffet, *Dance on the Wall (Danse au Mur)*, 17 March 1945, Collection Fondation Dubuffet, Paris © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London



Jean Dubuffet, *Man and Wall (Homme et Mur)*, 12 March 1945, Collection Fondation Dubuffet, Paris © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London

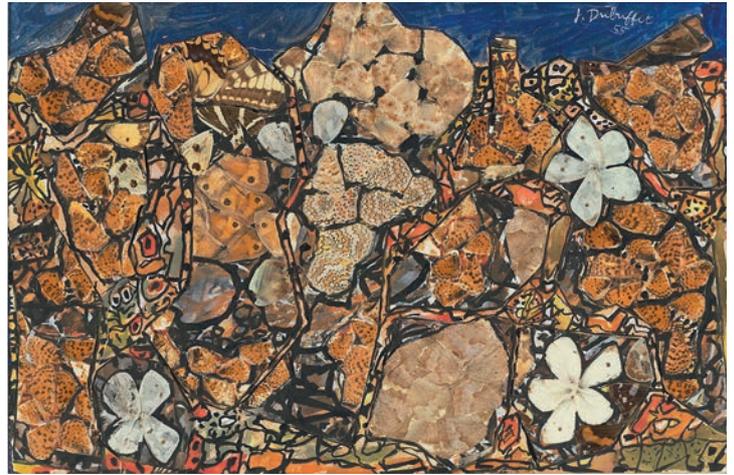


Jean Dubuffet, *Dhôtel*, July–August 1947, Private Collection, Courtesy Gray, Chicago/New York © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London Courtesy Private Collection

Beyond the Gallery **KS 2–5**

Students can try creating their own *high pastes* mixing paint with other common, found materials, just as Dubuffet did. See how three-dimensional and sculptural they can make them. Surfaces can be built up in impasto, which may then evolve more into relief works.

Students can become art alchemists like Dubuffet, making a series of processed pieces where they allow the materials and tools to take on a life of their own. Encourage students to get messy, be very playful and really expressive. Emphasise process and a lack of attachment to the outcome of the final piece. Ask students to try not to think, plan or analyse – or to create something ‘normal’ or predictable. As Dubuffet said, ‘normal means lack of imagination, lack of creativity!’ Instead, just see what emerges and what magic happens! Try this individually, in pairs or in groups working on huge rolls of paper or even newspaper (which Dubuffet often used). Respond to the marks, colours and gestures made by yourself and others – as Dubuffet showed, sometimes great artwork can be the result of some happy accidents or playful experiments!



Jean Dubuffet, *Landscape (Paysage)*, 1953, Collection of David and Ezra Nahmad © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London Courtesy David and Ezra Nahmad

Alchemy and Enchantment

Art and Design **KS 2–5**

Recovery Curriculum (Lever 3: Transparent Curriculum)

Dubuffet worked like an inventor or an alchemist in his laboratory. He concocted unusual and unique mixtures of paint combined with sand, gravel, plaster, coal dust, asphalt, string and shards of mirror, and transformed them into thick textured substances he called *hautes pâtes* (high pastes).

Ask and Explore

Look closely at any of the works where Dubuffet incorporates a variety of mixed materials in this way e.g. *Landscape* (1953) or *Garden with Melitea* (1955) or portraits he made, such as *Dhôtel* (1947).

Ask and Explore

Q Why do you think Dubuffet chose to use everyday, ordinary materials such as those used in construction – rather than expensive specialist artist materials?

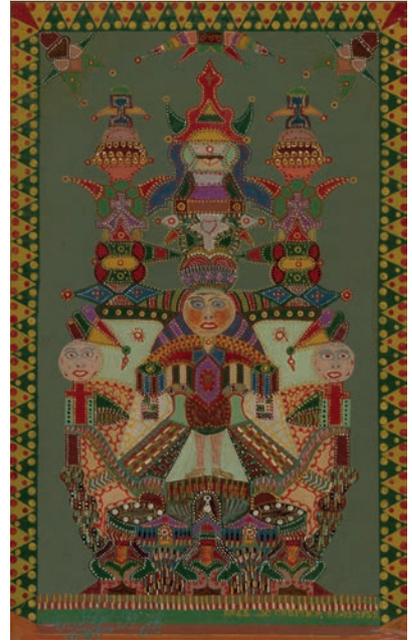
Students can draw each other without looking at their paper. Or they can look at a classmate then draw them from memory. Either activity would encourage a freeing engagement with, and exploration of, their subject – similar to Dubuffet’s approach of looking at his subject and drawing their portrait from memory at a later point.



Jean Dubuffet, *Garden with Melitea, (Jardin aux Mélitèes)*, 4 September 1955, Collection Fondation Dubuffet, Paris © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London



Laure Pigeon, *11 December 1953* (11 décembre 1953), 1953, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Photograph by Marie Humair, Atelier de numérisation – Ville de Lausanne. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



Fleury-Joseph Crépin, *Composition No. 43*, 1939, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Photograph by Marie Humair, Atelier de numérisation – Ville de Lausanne. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Art Brut

Art and Design, PSHE, Citizenship Recovery Curriculum (Lever 1: Relationships and Lever 5: Space)

Early in life, Dubuffet developed a fascination with art created by people who were not trained, professional artists, those he felt were 'untouched by artistic culture' – for example, psychiatric patients, visionaries, prisoners, untrained or naive painters and children. Dubuffet called this work 'Art Brut', meaning 'raw' or 'crude' art. Dubuffet's huge Art Brut collection was eventually housed in a gallery he set up in Paris in 1962.

Look at some of the Art Brut works that fascinated Dubuffet. For example, Gaston Dufour and his fantastic hybrid creatures, and Auguste Forestier and his carved wooden toys; the mysterious worlds created by those who worked with 'spirit voices' such as Laure Pigeon, Fleury-Joseph Crépin or Augustin Lesage; the inventive sculptures of Jan Krizek made from demolition site rubble or Gaston Chaissac's works using natural materials and old doors or planks.

Ask and Explore KS 4–5

- Q** Dubuffet was inspired by what he called the strange and unfamiliar in the work of Art Brut artists -where do you see the influences of this in his own work? What overlaps do you find in mark making, materials, subject matter, ideas between his work and that of the Art Brut artists?
- Q** What meanings and beauty do you find in the works of the Art Brut artists? Do you feel (like Dubuffet did) that their works possess a special vibrancy, purity or indeed a raw, brutal beauty?
- Q** In championing these artists, do you think Dubuffet helped challenge the stigma that sometimes exists around mental health?
- Q** In what ways does making art improve our emotional wellbeing and mental health? Can all art be viewed in some way as a form of art therapy?
- Q** How do you feel about hierarchies, judgements and preconceptions that often exist in art? Is it fair that people and indeed their art are judged on various factors such as their education, mental health or role in society?

Beyond the Gallery KS 2–5

Students can look at some of the Art Brut artists collected by Dubuffet and explore the unusual materials and methods sometimes used. Taking inspiration from these artists, students may try making their own fantastical, imaginative pieces from found materials e.g. tree bark, wood, rocks, shells, corks, discarded objects. Encourage a focus on creating expressive art that reflects their inner voice and allows for free exploration of ideas and materials. For wellbeing, some non-judgemental 'art as therapy' can be a natural part of the process! Maybe like some of the artists looked at, students can create other magical worlds, dream-like images, hybrid figures or mysterious creatures.

Explore Further KS 4–5

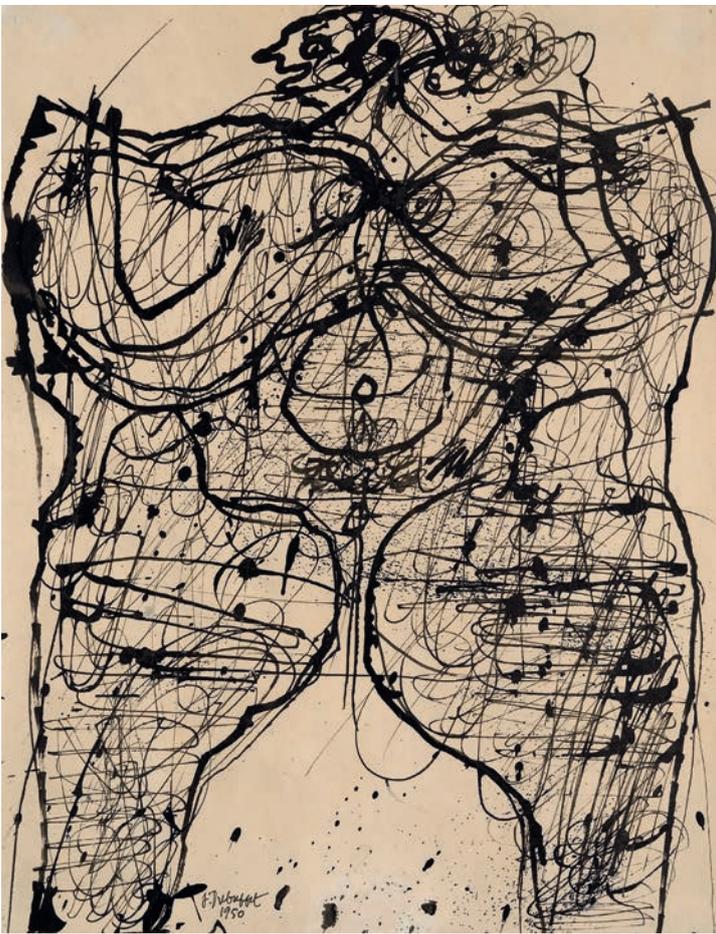
Students may wish to look at two British artists from London and Scotland:

Madge Gill, who was born in Walthamstow, London. Her husband described her as 'queer in her mind' but progressive doctor Helen Boyle encouraged and championed Gill's unique work of intricate portraits and textiles. Gill said that her work was guided by her invisible spirit guide, Myrinerest, who she considered to be the true author of her work.

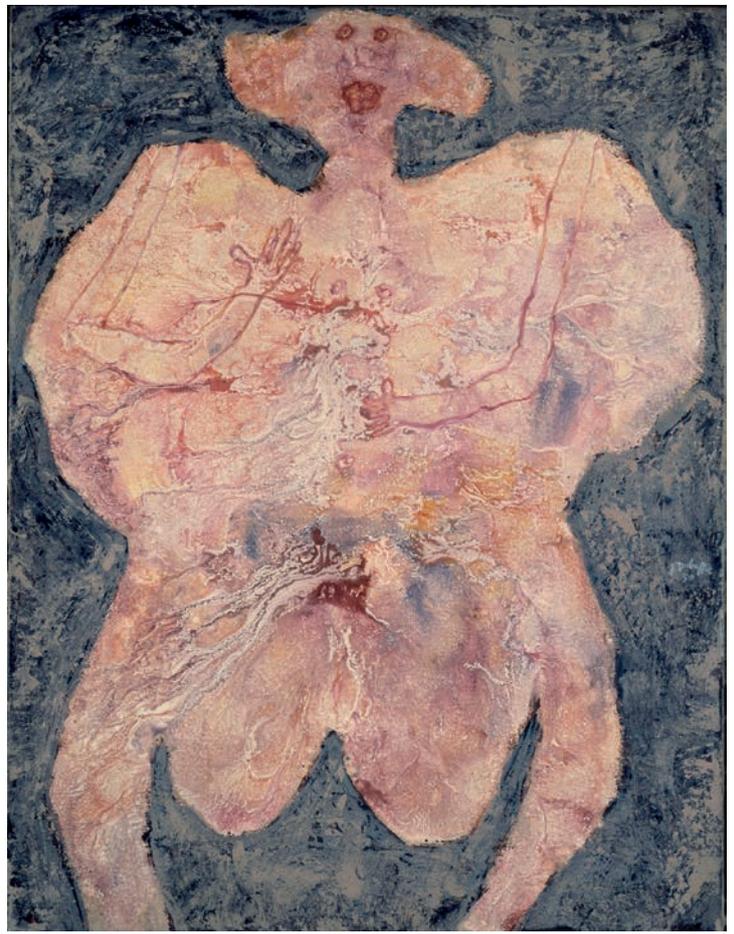
Scottie Wilson, who was from Scotland. He was illiterate and took up art in his forties after doing some doodles. He said of these doodles, 'the pen seemed to make me draw, and the images, the faces and designs just flowed out. I couldn't stop – I've never stopped since that day.' His intricate works in pen, featuring a cast of unusual characters were collected by both Dubuffet and Picasso.



Gaston Dufour, *Rinauserose viltrities*, 1950, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Arnaud Conne / Photograph by Amélie Blanc, Atelier de numérisation – Ville de Lausanne. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



Jean Dubuffet, *Lady's Body (Corps de dame)*, June–August 1950, Galerie Natalie Seroussi © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London Courtesy Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris



Jean Dubuffet, *The Tree of Fluids (L'Arbre de fluides)*, October 1950, Tate © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London © Tate

Bodies and Landscapes

Art and Design, PSHE

Recovery Curriculum (Lever 4: Metacognition)

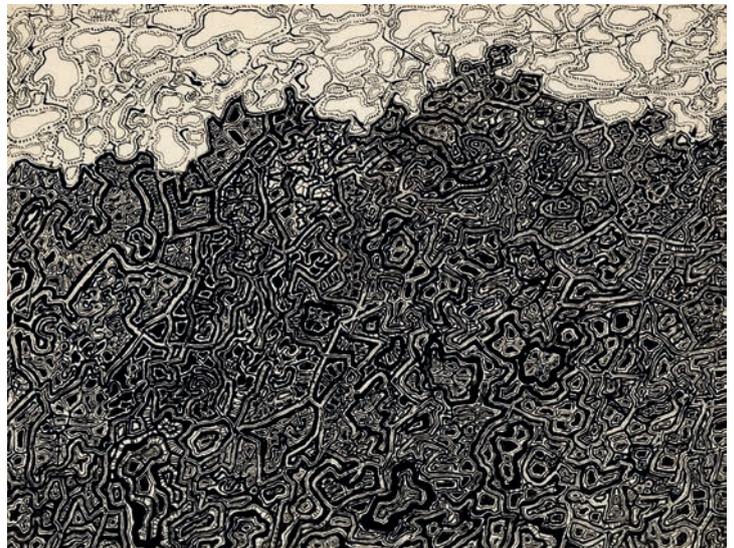
Look at the many overlaps between Dubuffet's paintings of bodies and landscapes – in both, the surfaces are highly textured and tactile with splotches, impasto and seeping marks, but the sense of depth/perspective, on the other hand, is flattened.

Ask and Explore **KS 4–5**

Look at the *Lady's Body* works from 1950 and landscape works; some good examples are *Dazzling Glory of Earth and Sky / Sun without Virtue* from 1952 and the *Texturology* series from 1958. Look at how the bodies seem to have fault lines and crusts much like geological forms. The landscapes in turn can look like both geological and biological cross sections. As his work developed, Dubuffet began to blur the lines even further, with the earth, organic and living forms and even the inner mind, sky and stars seeming to merge together.

Students may select a work of Dubuffet's to do some drawings from, emphasising texture and line in their own responses. Students may want to make successive, follow-on drawings that continue to really echo Dubuffet's way of thinking and working.

Q How do you feel about Dubuffet's representation of the female form? Do you think he celebrates and liberates the female nude from traditional expectations and notions of beauty in a new feminist reality or do you see something else?



Jean Dubuffet, *Dazzling Glory of Earth and Sky (Éblouissante gloire de la terre et du ciel)*, September 1952, Private Collection © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London Courtesy Private Collection

Beyond the Gallery **KS 2–5**

Students can try blending landscape and figures or transforming one into another. Relate contours of the land and the body in new ways. Life drawing could be mixed with inspiration taken from geographical cross sections or formations. Texturally interesting surfaces inspired by the varied surfaces of the earth or skin seen under the microscope and micro/ macro imaging could be developed.

'Look at what lies at your feet!' Dubuffet once said, 'a crack in the ground, sparkling gravel, a tuft of grass, some crushed debris offer equally worthy subjects for your applause and admiration'. Students can measure out a square of ground or pavement with string e.g. 1x1 metre and then really look and observe, perhaps using a magnifying glass. Celebrating what they see and find, they can draw observations or create mixed media responses to mimic the textures. Like Dubuffet, they may want to merge what they see and create with other ideas from their imagination or the wider world and universe.



Jean Dubuffet, *The Astonished Man (L'Étonné)*, October 1959, Private Collection © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London, Photograph by Joseph Coscia Jr, courtesy Pace Gallery



Jean Dubuffet, *Character with Rhinestone Eyes (Personnage aux yeux de strass)*, April 1954, Private Collection, New York © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London, Courtesy Private Collection

Fantastical Creatures

Art and Design

Recovery Curriculum (Lever 4: Metacognition and Lever 5: Space)

Dubuffet moved into creating fully three-dimensional work in the 1950s. Scouring the streets, he found charcoal, rock salt, rope, broken glass, coal, stones, rusty nails, coils of metal and steel wool and much more to work with. He also used natural materials like cork, driftwood, sponges and even butterflies.

Ask and Explore KS 2–3

In 3D works such as *Character with Rhinestone Eyes*, *Astonished Man* or *Witch* (all from 1954), students can examine how ordinary finds were magically transformed into fantastical characters and creatures – e.g. sponges and driftwood become hybrid animals, charcoal sticks form a rugged man, butterfly wings are arranged to become a plant and even an old burnt out car becomes a being with rhinestone eyes.

Students can make consequence drawings of creatures: Each student can draw a head from a sculpture they are interested in onto a piece of paper. They then fold the paper over to cover their drawing and pass it to another student who can then draw a torso drawn from another sculpture. The student then hands the drawing to another student to add the legs, and another the feet. These circular collaborative drawings should yield some interesting co-created bizarre, new beings. These creatures can then be transformed later by adding or changing features further and develop into larger paintings or collage works.

Ask and Explore KS 4–5

Q In these sculptural works, do you think Dubuffet breaks down boundaries between the human, animal, vegetal worlds, allowing magical new possibilities to be expressed?

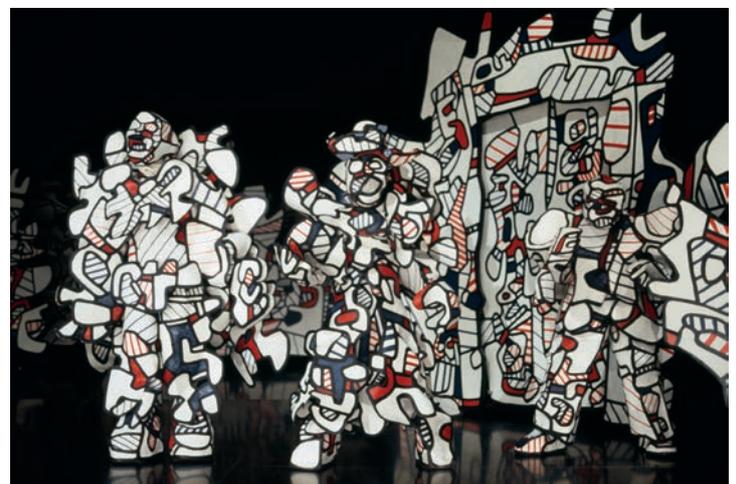
Q What do you think of the sculptures' scale – can small works have the same amount of impact as larger ones? Why do you think Dubuffet chose to make them this scale and with often fragile or ordinary materials?

Beyond the Gallery KS 2–5

Like sorcerers, students can experiment with seeing what magical creatures can be conjured up using found materials, working individually or in groups. Collecting materials from nature, things found lying around, or recycled materials such as card and plastic, they can mix and match their findings, and start to assemble and see what appears. The materials chosen will often suggest ideas and allow for creations to become very strange or unexpected! Students may wish to experiment with a range of scales and be open to creating lasting or ephemeral pieces (photographing any work that may disintegrate rapidly).

KS 4–5

Students could compare Dubuffet's sculptures from the 1950s to his later, towering, public and site-specific sculptures, for example *Coucou Bazar* (1978). Ask your students to examine the radical way he shifted his working practice over time.



Coucou Bazar performed at Palazzo Valentino, Turin, 16 June–15 July 1978
Courtesy Fondation Dubuffet, Paris



Jean Dubuffet, *Skedaddle (L'Escampette)*, 31 October 1964, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London, Courtesy Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Doodles and Parallel Universes

Art and Design, Drama
Recovery Curriculum
(Lever 1: Relationships, Lever 2: Community, and Lever 5: Space)

One day, in the early 1960s, Dubuffet was doodling while on the phone. These little doodles using just a four-colour ballpoint pen actually became the basis of his work for the next 12 years! They grew into a fantasy world of paintings, sculpture, performance and architectural environments – blurring the lines between the real and the imaginary in a parallel universe of his imagination.

Ask and Explore **KS 2–5**

Look at works such as *Skedaddle* (1964), *Site Inhabited by Objects* (1965) or *Coucou Bazar* (1978) – or any other pieces from the series he called *L'Hourloupe*. These drawings, paintings and sculptures (that originated in doodling) turned into monumental forms – starting with polystyrene, then foam boards stiffened with polyester and fibreglass. The free-standing pieces could be animated and joined by experimental music and dancers in costumes designed by him, becoming a living painting!

KS 4–5

Q Dubuffet said, 'I believe that in all my works I have been concerned with representing what makes up our thoughts – to represent not the objective world, but what it becomes in our thoughts.' What do you think he meant by this? Can you explain your response with reference to any of the works you see in this section?

KS 2–5

Students can start doodling inspired by some of the works on this page and/or from whatever comes out of their own thoughts and imagination – and see where the lines take them. Ask them to try to ignore their rational thinking, reasoning brain and allow things to just appear and emerge. What strange new worlds or universes of your own can you create with just an ordinary old pencil (or biro after leaving the gallery!)?

Beyond the Gallery **KS 2–5**

Perhaps like Dubuffet, students can develop some of their drawings into paintings and sculptures or even join their creations with those of other students into theatrical displays or some inventive performance art!

KS 2–3

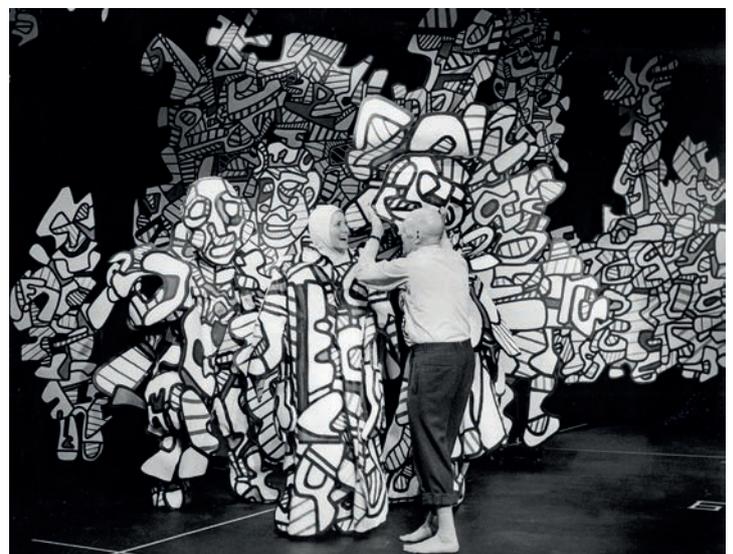
Ideas could extend into virtual worlds or environments – no doubt, something which would have fascinated Dubuffet had he lived into the 21st century! For example, use online programming platforms, e.g. Scratch or Minecraft, to create interactive universes, stories, shows, games, animations and more – collaborating and sharing creations with others.

KS 4–5

Students may wish to try collaborative art fusions e.g. choreograph, perform and film performance art and dance, based on appreciation of and engagement with the forms experienced in the exhibition.

KS 2–5

Students could also try creating some larger and/or collaborative collages where they cut out and arrange the elements in different formats before fixing it down. They could even use Dubuffet's technique of arranging collage pieces on a metal board with magnets until they find a composition they want to finalise.



Dubuffet during rehearsals of *Coucou Bazar* in the auditorium of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, May 1973. Photograph by Robert E. Mates and Susan Lazarus © Archives Fondation Dubuffet, Paris / photograph Robert E. Mates & Susan Lazarus



Jean Dubuffet, *Nuances on the Ground* [Texturology XLIII] [Nuancements au sol [Texturologie XLIII]], 27 May 1958, Private Collection © 2021 ADAGP, Paris/DACS, London Courtesy Private Collection

Exhibition Resources

To learn more about the exhibition through a video tour of the exhibition, a biographical long-read, a series of essays and more please visit www.Barbican.org.uk/JeanDubuffet

Examples of other resources

For more information on Dubuffet, visit Fondation Dubuffet, France:

www.dubuffetfondation.com

For more information on Art Brut, look at the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland:

www.artbrut.ch/fr_CH/auteurs/la-collection-de-l-art-brut

Recovery Curriculum:

www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum

This Teachers' Resource was created by Alison Dunne for Barbican Creative Learning.

Barbican Creative Learning pioneers new models for cultural learning across the art forms. Our mission is **Creative Skills for Life** and in a typical year we deliver more than 40 programmes and events alongside 150 partners to over 29,000 participants.

To find out more see: www.barbican.org.uk/take-part and for any further information please contact: creative.learning@barbican.org.uk