



Francis Newton Souza, *Mr Sebastian*, 1955.
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Postwar Modern

New Art in Britain 1945–1965

Learning Resource

Introduction to the resource

This resource is for all key stage curriculum teachers and education leaders to help aid and inform their visit to the exhibition. It can be used to support a self-guided group visit or inspire ideas and activities for the classroom. The resource selects areas of focus within the exhibition, exploring curriculum-linked creative activities and discussion points for your students.

Please use the Gallery Guide to support your visit.

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The Exhibition

Postwar Modern explores the period after the Second World War between 1945-1965. The exhibition focuses on new art that was being created in Britain during this time, and how artists attempted to make sense of the new altered world.

The art in *Postwar Modern* was being created by the very people who had experienced the war and its aftershocks. In many of the artworks on display we see the horror of the past and yet we also glimpse the promise of the future.

Post Atomic Garden

(Lower Gallery area 2)

Curriculum links: History, Art, English

Many artists photographed the damage caused by the war with bombsites, areas of slum clearance and building sites being a constant topography.



Bert Hardy, *Betty Burden chats with some little friends on a bombsite in Edgbaston, Birmingham*, published in 'Millions Like Her', *Picture Post*, 13 January 1951

Discuss:

- The idea of image making, presenting a more favourable view, is one that most of us are familiar with in our daily interactions with social media. Explore the photo of Betty. What kind of scene can you see? How has the artist created the image? What choices has the photographer made? Why has the photographer made these choices? What story is the photograph trying to tell?

Create:

In the Gallery:

'Telling a Story'

- What words would you use to describe this photograph?
- Fill your page with these words.
- Write a Persona Poem inspired by the image using your words – writing from the perspective of someone else (a persona) and imagine you are the photographer.
- Your poem should reveal why the photographer was drawn to take the photograph.

Back at school:

'Social Media Portraits'

- Social media portraits are an example of how we might curate an image to tell a story, carefully framing the subjects.
- Explore symbolism in portraiture and pose for a portrait outside of school.
- Think about the composition, including background and framing.
- What story is your portrait trying to tell about you?

Strange Universe

(Lower Gallery area 3)

Curriculum links: Art and Design, Design Technology, History

While many wanted to forget the horrors of the past in order to move forward, the artists included in *Postwar Modern* wanted to document what had happened whilst making a commentary on the changes they saw.

Create:

In the Gallery:

'Stream of Consciousness'

- Before anything is discussed, observe the painting and then write down your first impressions or what you noticed about the artwork in a stream of consciousness.
- Share your impressions.

Back at school:

'Movement in art'

- Try a sketching exercise using oil pastels.
- Make 3 quick sketches and experiment with the pastel - using the tip or side to create different marks and textures.
- Combine this with a 'gesture drawing', don't think about the detail of the sketch, just the motion of the body to capture that movement.

During this period many artists were attempting to forge a new path from all the devastation. This led them to repurpose the destruction they saw, and to turn found objects into something new.

Discuss

- Take a moment and look closely at this piece. What do you notice? What materials have been used? How might the artist have made this piece? Does this shape remind you of anything?
- Explore the name of this piece. (Fact: St Sebastian was a martyr and a symbol of survival and resilience in the face of persecution).
- Why might Paolozzi have chosen this saint to depict? Why might he have chosen to paint this piece gold?



Eleven Persons and One Donkey Moving Forwards, Franciszka Themerson, 1947

Create

In the Gallery:

'Three Perspectives'

- Using an A4 piece of paper, draw out three sections.
- Sketch the artwork in each section of the paper for 2 minutes, each time moving closer to it.
- Try to pick out new elements of the artwork as you move closer.

Younger students: roll up the paper like a telescope and look at the sculpture again. What new details do they notice?

Choreography of the Street

(Upper Gallery Room 9)

Curriculum links: History, Art

Artists like Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi used the dereliction of the city as source material for their work. Paolozzi made art using found items, he called his method the 'metamorphosis of rubbish' and referred to bombsites as his 'hunting grounds'.

The artists also worked together on their design company Hammer Prints. Henderson's photos provided much of the source material, the images were copied and distorted to create patterns.



Eduardo Paolozzi, *St Sebastian IV*, 1957

Discuss:

- Look at the print and describe what you see. What elements stand out to you? Where is your eye drawn to? Why might the artist have called it *Newsprint*? What similarities or differences can you find?
- In *Newsprint* the artist has used photographs of hoardings and wall drawings taken during a visit to Paris. Can you make out the city of Paris in this print? What does Henderson seem drawn to?



Hammer Prints Ltd [Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi] *Newsprint*, c. 1955

Create:

In the Gallery:

'Sketching as Note-Taking'

- Sketch 3 details you are curious about.
- As you travel back to school through the city, add more 'notes' by drawing what stands out to you.

Back at school:

'Block Printing'

- Create your own wrapping paper.
- Using the sketches from your trip, create patterns by repeating some of the 'notes' on your page.
- If you like, create new sketches around a theme (city, family, home).
- Copy two or three of your ideas onto Styrofoam blocks using pencils.
- Choose a colour palette and paint the blocks.
- Transfer onto paper as many times as you like to fill it to create your final design.

Many artists at the time were also documenting the changes they saw in society, such as the emergence of teen culture. Social attitudes towards the rights of young people started to shift in many Western nations, with their wishes and values being listened to much more than they had been before.

Discuss:

- What do you see? What is happening in this scene? Where are these people? Roger Mayne's work has an ambivalence - you don't know if you're looking at play or aggressions with violence below the surface. Consider in what ways is being a male being coded here. How is masculinity or manhood being socially constructed?

Create:

In the Gallery:

'A Photograph Captures a Moment in Time'

- Create a simple storyboard responding to the photograph.
- Consider what might have just happened before the image was taken and what might have happened next.

Back at school:

'Digital Storytelling':

- Create 3 photographs that tell a story.
- Consider the sequencing of the photos, including a beginning, middle and end.
- Print out the students' photos to create a gallery in the classroom.



Roger Mayne, *Men and Boys in Southam Street, London, 1959*



Eva Frankfurter, *West Indian waitresses*, c.1955

Create:

In the Gallery:

- Work in pairs to create an imagined dialogue between the characters.
- Imagine a possible scenario; what are the ladies doing in the moment? What might they be thinking about? What might their experiences of London be as new arrivals?

Back at school:

'3x3 Portraits'

- Start by drawing a shape for a face on a sheet of paper. It can be round or more of an oval.
- About a third of the way down, lightly draw a horizontal line across the face.
- Draw two more lines, equally spaced between your first line and the bottom of the face.
- Add features to the lines. The eyes go on the top line. The nose goes on the middle, and lips on the bottom line. This technique helps you to think about the spacing when drawing a portrait.
- Combine this with a shading technique activity and imagine a lighting source. How will this affect the way they shade their portrait and light the subject?

Two Women

(Upper Gallery Room 10)

Curriculum links: Art, History, Literacy

Britain, and especially cities like London, became more ethnically diverse due to migration following the Second World War and the fall of the British Empire. Many of the artworks on display depict first person accounts of the experiences of migration after the war.

Discuss:

- Looking at this artwork, what words would you use to describe what you think the artist is trying to communicate to us?
- Let's explore the composition further and zoom in on the faces. How would you describe the facial expressions? Where is the light source coming from in this painting? What mood does it create?

Frankfurter depicted her fellow workers at the Lyons Coffee House in Piccadilly and her neighbours in London's East End.

This resource was written by Neysela da Silva-Reed in partnership with 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 2020/21, we delivered 20 digital and physical programmes with over 200 partners, engaging 2,400 participants and reaching an audience of more than 50,000.



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