

# ARTISTS OF ST IVES AND THE SOUTH WEST



Teachers Pack  
2008/9

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In the South Gallery you will find a selection of important paintings made in the South West during the 20th Century.

The paintings in this gallery are not hung in chronological order, though this pack will lead you from left to right around the gallery. The idea for this pack is to introduce the various styles and techniques used by some of the artists associated with the South West, and to provide activities or questions for your class or group.

All guided sessions are **free of charge**. If you would like to book a guided session for your group, please telephone Charlotte Gunn or Adam Milford on **01752 304774**. We are able to tailor sessions to meet your needs. You are also able to visit the exhibition as a self-guided group. Please book all visits in advance, using the telephone number above.

## Mount's Bay

Oil on board

Collection Number: Plymg 1971.19



Alfred Wallis was born in Devonport in 1855. At 9 he made his first trip across the Bay of Biscay in a schooner. At 18 he was making trips to and from St. John's, Newfoundland on schooners, the cargo being cod caught off the Newfoundland coast. Wallis, by now an experienced mariner, moved to St Ives in 1890 to open a marine rag and bone shop, collecting marine scrap with a horse and cart to sell on from his shop. After the death of his

wife in 1922, Wallis began to paint. He had no prior training, and developed his skills through practice. In 1928, the artists Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood chanced upon Wallis in St Ives. They immediately took to his work, and encouraged him to make more by buying him paint, and by buying his work. Wallis regularly painted pictures on odd shaped supports, including bottles, jam pots and bellows.

## Mount's Bay

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- Many of the artists in this gallery will have been influenced by Wallis. Look for paintings in the room that might have been made after seeing the paintings by the artist.
- Wallis enlarged parts of his paintings he considered important – can you see any signs of this on the paintings here?
- Using your sketchbook, make a drawing of the Wallis painting.
- Using a piece of odd shaped card, now make a painting of a scene from your imagination; remember to include a boat!

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Naïve, or primitive, artists have long been held in high esteem by trained artists. Research Outsider Art and Art Brut by using books and the internet. Compare paintings associated with these movements with paintings by Wallis. Make notes in your sketchbook, and try imitating the style yourself.
- Much of Wallis' work is based on his memories of his sea voyages. Make studies in your sketchbook that concern your memories of a past journey.
- Wallis used materials that were easily available to him, including enamel and household paints. Do you think these had an effect on the paintings he produced? Try experimenting with different materials in your work.

## Queen of the Isles - first visit to St. Ives

Oil on board  
1965

Presented by the Contemporary Art Society  
Collection Number: Plymg 1968.58



Bryan Pearce was born in St Ives in 1929, suffering from the then unknown condition Phenylketonuria, which affects the normal development of the brain. His mother encouraged him to become an artist. He attended St Ives School of Painting from

1953 to 1957 developing his skills in oil painting. Pearce began painting scenes of St Ives in his unique style – yellow ochre outlines of buildings, boats, flowers and people. He would usually fill in these outlines with flat areas of colourful paint.

## Queen of the Isles - first visit to St. Ives

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- Look at the yellow ochre outlines used by Pearce. Can you make a painting using an outline? Don't use black! Using brightly coloured paints (poster paints will be ideal) fill in the gaps.
- Try and use an interesting view, maybe take some digital photographs as a source, or make some drawings over the roof-tops of buildings.
- Do you think Pearce's paintings have more in common with Alfred Wallis, Peter Lanyon, or Patrick Heron?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Look at the painting. How does it fit into the art history of the 20th century?
- Can you see any elements of the work that are similar to, or influenced by, other artists in this gallery?
- In the past, Pearce's work has been described as 'childlike'. Do you think his work is childlike in appearance?
- Look at the composition and colour in particular. Could a child have painted this? Try making a picture like this yourself, and evaluate how difficult it was to create.

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## March Sky, Cape Cornwall

Oil on canvas  
1962

Purchased with the financial assistance of  
the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation  
Collection Number: Plymg 1964.33



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Karl Weschke came to England as a German prisoner of war and remained here for the rest of his life. In 1955 he moved to Cornwall, initially based in Zennor, and later to Cape Cornwall, an isolated headland near Lands End. Weschke quickly developed friendships with other artists in the area, particularly Bryan

Wynter, and shared their interest in the landscape as a subject for his work. His later work was mainly concerned with figures in landscape settings, mainly in the area surrounding his house and studio – Cape Cornwall, Kenidjack, and Priest's Cove.

## March Sky, Cape Cornwall

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- What do you think the weather was like when Weschke made this painting?
- If you look at the bottom of the painting, the artist has included the outline of Cape Cornwall. What do you think the other brushstrokes on the canvas represent?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Gestural paintings such as this were at the pinnacle of modern painting during the 1950s and 60s. Can you find any American or European paintings that are similar in style to Weschke's painting?
- Look at the wide brush strokes, and the marks made by wiping paint with a rag. The artist used his whole arm using huge 'arcing' movements when making this painting. Try making a painting of your own using these marks on large sheets of paper with paint.
- How do these marks and brushstrokes convey meaning and subject matter?

## High Field

Oil on board

1957

Presented by the Contemporary Art Society

Collection Number: Plymg 1962.51



Peter Lanyon was born and raised in St Ives, Cornwall. In his early years he studied under the artist Ben Nicholson, who nurtured Lanyon's skills as an artist. He served in the Royal Air Force as an engineer during World War II, travelling to areas such as Palestine and Italy. The landscape of Cornwall became the main inspiration for his paintings soon after his return from war, with mining, fishing and coastal themes featuring heavily in his work. Lanyon taught at Corsham Court, Bath from

1950 to 1957, and at St Peters Loft, St Ives from 1957 to 1960. In 1959, Lanyon began gliding around the South West region, an experience which began to influence his paintings. Aerial views of the landscape, combined with first-hand knowledge of the weather, became the main focus of his work. In 1962 he said, *"It is impossible for me to make a painting which has no reference to the very powerful environment in which I live"*

## High Field

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- This painting was made before Lanyon started to glide. Do you think the artist started to 'imagine' looking down onto the landscape whilst making these paintings?
- Find aerial photographs of Devon and Cornwall by searching the internet. Can you see any shapes in these photographs that might be similar to the shapes in this painting? Glue these into your sketchbook, and draw the shapes next to the photograph.

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Both this painting, and 'Saracinesco' by the same artist, were painted before 1959, and therefore before Lanyon started gliding. Can you see any evidence that the artist was interested in using the idea of an 'aerial view' before he started to glide?
- Lanyon was friends with artists such as the Abstract Expressionists Marc Rothko and Willem De Kooning, both major international artists of the 1950s. Rothko even visited Lanyon in St Ives during 1959. Can you see any similarities between the three artists' work?
- Find examples of the three artists' work by searching the internet. Add copies of these to your sketchbook, and add your thoughts on the similarities or differences of these artists alongside.
- These paintings could be described as 'experiential'. Explore how this differs from traditional studio based working practice. Consider taking your students outside the classroom to produce drawings and sculptures in the landscape.

## Rectilinear Reds and Blues

Acrylic on canvas

1963

Collection Number: Plymg 1968.15



Patrick Heron was born in 1920 in Leeds. He moved permanently to Cornwall in 1956, buying a house named Eagles Nest outside of Zennor. As well as being a painter and printmaker, Heron was one of the most highly respected art critics of his age, writing for international art magazines and newspapers. Through his role as an art critic, Heron was able to invite other critics and gallery owners to St Ives and the area, introducing many artists to them and helping their careers.

He is best remembered for his large, colourful abstract paintings. He took inspiration from the forms and colours from both the surrounding landscape and his colourful flower garden. From early on in his career he painted directly onto the canvas without planning his composition in advance. This painting was the first in which he drew charcoal lines onto the bare canvas before applying paint, making it an important work in his development as an artist.

## Rectilinear Reds and Blues

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- Look closely at the painting. Is the paint completely flat, or can you see brushstrokes on the canvas?
- Think about the other paintings in this gallery – are they similar in colour to this one?
- Why do you think Heron used such bright colours?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Although this painting appears to be completely abstract, we know that Heron was influenced by his surroundings. Can we consider this painting as a 'pure abstraction'?
- Explore avant-garde painting in the 50s and 60s, in particular artists such as Mark Rothko, Sam Francis and Morris Louis. How does this painting compare in terms of approach to paint application and surface?
- How does Heron's use of colour and technique compare to other artists' work in this gallery?

## Elegy

Oil on board

1969

Collection Number: Plymg 1970.23



Alexander Mackenzie was born in Liverpool in 1923. He moved to Cornwall in the 1950s, after serving in World War II and studying at Liverpool College of Art. In 1964, Mackenzie was invited to become Head of Painting at Plymouth Art College (now PCAD). During this

time, Mackenzie taught artists such as Lar Cann. A painting by Cann is included in this gallery. Mackenzie was part of the second wave of modern abstract painters associated with Cornwall.

## Elegy

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- Look at the colours used in this painting. Do you think they are related to colours that you can see in the landscape?
- Look closely at the texture of the painting. Mackenzie would sometimes remove paint from his paintings by using sandpaper. How could you replicate that in the classroom?
- What do you think the pencil lines in this painting represent?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Using a non-paper support such as primed strawboard, use thinned paint and graphite to make a work in the style of Mackenzie. Try sanding back layers of the painting, or scratching the surface with implements.
- How does this technique relate to natural processes? Think of coastal erosion, ploughed fields and mist-engulfed views.

## Botallack

Oil on hardboard

1961/2

Collection Number: Plymg 1969.19



Paul Feiler was born in Germany, but now lives in the small village of Kerris in Cornwall. He has worked in the South West for over 50 years. Initially interested in the landscape as his subject, Feiler has moved towards flat, geometric abstraction since the mid-1960s. The painting on display is from an earlier period, where heavily worked oil paintings dominated

his work. The subject is Botallack, a mining area in the far west of Cornwall. Feiler taught at the West of England College of Art, Bristol, from 1946 to 1975. During this time he became Head of Painting. He would take his students on regular field trips to Cornwall, where they were able to meet some of the artists on display in this gallery.

## Botallack

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- How does this painting make you feel?
- Does the painting remind you of anything?
- Describe the surface of the painting – is it flat or textured? Colourful or not?
- Try using thin slabs of clay to build up a painting in the style of Paul Feiler. Why not make some drawings from nature, and simplify them into shapes for the finished clay picture?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Apart from the title, how can you tell that this painting describes an area of Cornwall?
- Compare the surface of this work with that of Mackenzie. Can the different techniques involved with the application of paint still imply a similar subject matter between the artists?

## Pas

Oil on canvas

1970

Collection Number: Plymg 1970.24



Bryan Wynter was born in 1915. He moved to a cottage named 'The Carn', high on the moors above Zennor, Cornwall in 1945 at the end of World War II. His early work was more influenced by surrealism and the neo-romantic artists of Britain, rather than the constructivist artists associated with pre-war St Ives. He soon became involved with the artists and poets of the area, and also encouraged friends such as Karl Weschke and Roger Hilton to move closer to him in Cornwall. He began to explore the

local landscape using various methods, such as walking, swimming, and canoeing. In 1950 he even made his own glass bottomed boat to study life beneath the water. Landscape became the source for his paintings, though not necessarily the subject. A canoeing trip to Northern Spain in 1969 influenced his later work including 'Pas', named after the River Pas in Cantabria, and many other paintings bear Spanish titles.

## Pas

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- The pattern in this painting is similar to the ripples in a river. Think of some patterns that you can find in nature, and try to make a painting that covers the entire surface of your paper.
- Compare the surface of this painting to Botallack by Paul Feiler. How are they different?
- Do the bright colours give you the impression of a river?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- In what way does this painting differ from the others in the gallery?
- Can you see any other paintings in the gallery that share a common style?
- If you compare this painting to the 1963 work 'Oceanic II', by the same artist, is it possible to see a progression in the artists working practice?
- Is this later style in keeping with the predominant style of art in the country at the time?

## Captain Ahab

Oil on hardboard

1962

Purchased with the financial assistance of  
the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation  
Collection Number: Plymg 1964.32



Francis Hewlett was born in 1930 in Bristol. He moved to Cornwall in 1957, first teaching at Redruth Grammar School, and then at Falmouth School of Art, a post which he held for 23 years. In the early 1960s he worked in a style he dubbed 'thick pop', a reaction to both realist and abstract painting, both of which

were popular at the time. Hewlett made a series of paintings about the story of 'Moby Dick' by Herman Melville, after being told the story by a young girl he met. The subject of all of these paintings is that of Captain Ahab drowning at the bottom of the sea, surrounded by a thick tangle of seaweed.

## Captain Ahab

### ↘ Key Stage 1 + 2

- Why do you think the artist chose to work with such thick paint?
- Can you see the 'Captain' from the title in this painting?
- How can you tell that the painting is of an underwater view?

### ↘ Key Stage 3 and above

- Using thick paint (you may need to use a medium with your paint), try to make a painting that includes figures and a setting. How difficult is it to control your paint using different implements (brushes, painting knives, pieces of card etc)?
- Compare the surface to that of other thickly painted work in the gallery, such as the painting by Paul Feiler. How important to the subject is the medium in which the artist chooses to paint?
- Do you think the same emotional content would have come across in the work if the artist had chosen to use watercolour paint, for example?

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Some entries have been adapted for use in these notes from the Tate glossary - <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/>

### **Abstract Expressionism**

A term applied to new forms of [abstract art](#) developed by American painters in the 1940s and 1950s. The [Abstract Expressionists](#) were mostly based in New York City. The name evokes their aim to make art that while abstract was also expressive or emotional in its effect. Within Abstract Expressionism were two broad groupings. These were the so-called action painters led by [Pollock](#) and [De Kooning](#), and the [colour-field](#) painters, notably [Rothko](#), [Newman](#) and [Still](#). The action painters worked in a spontaneous improvisatory manner often using large brushes to make sweeping [gestural](#) marks (see 'Gestural painting'). The colour field painters were deeply interested in religion and myth. They created simple compositions with large areas of a single colour intended to produce a contemplative or meditational response in the viewer.

### **Constructivism**

A particularly austere branch of [abstract art](#) founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia around 1915. The constructivists believed art should directly reflect the modern industrial world. [Constructivism](#) was suppressed in Russia in the 1920s but was brought to the West by [Naum Gabo](#), who was based in St Ives from 1939 to 1946, and his brother [Antoine Pevsner](#). It was a major influence on the [St Ives](#) modernists.

### **Experiential**

An approach to information gathering for a painting that goes beyond making sketches or studies. Experiential painting based on landscape or environment would require direct experience of that landscape or environment. All of the senses are engaged in information gathering.

### **Geometric abstraction**

Geometric abstraction is a form of [abstract art](#) based on the use of simple geometric forms placed in non-illusionistic space and combined into purely abstract compositions. Non-illusionistic space means that the artist would be concerned with the surface of the painting - not implying a depth or recession within the work.

### **Gestural painting**

A term that originally came into use to describe the [painting](#) of the [Abstract Expressionist](#) artists. The idea was that the artist would physically act out his inner impulses, and that something of his emotion or his state of mind would be read by the viewer in the resulting paint marks.

### **Naïve Art/ Outsider Art/ Art Brut**

The word [naïve](#) means simple, unaffected, unsophisticated. As an art term it specifically refers to artists who also have had no formal training in an art school or [academy](#). Naïve art is characterised by childlike simplicity of execution and vision. As such it has been valued by [modernists](#) seeking to get away from what they see as the insincere sophistication of art created within the traditional system. Naïve artists are sometimes referred to as 'modern [primitives](#)'. The category overlaps with what is called outsider art, or in France, [Art Brut](#). This includes artists who are on the margins of society, such as criminals and mentally ill people.

**Neo-Romanticism**

A term applied to the imaginative and often quite [abstract landscape](#) based [painting](#) of [Paul Nash](#), [Graham Sutherland](#) and others in the late 1930s and 1940s. Their work often included figures, was generally sombre, reflecting the Second World War and its approach and aftermath, but rich, poetic and capable of a visionary intensity.

**St Ives Society of Artists and the Crypt Group**

From its foundation in 1927 the [St Ives Society of Artists](#) was the dominating exhibition society of St Ives. From about 1943 the St Ives Society sought to integrate the modern artists into its exhibitions but in practice their work tended to be hung in the least prominent places in the former church used for the exhibitions. In 1947, [Peter Lanyon](#), [John Wells](#), Sven Berlin, [Wilhelmena Barns-Graham](#), [Bryan Wynter](#) and Guido Morris began to organise separate exhibitions most notably in the crypt of the church itself. They became known as the [Crypt Group](#). You can still visit the St Ives Society today, with the crypt renamed the Mariners Gallery.

**Surrealism**

A movement launched in Paris in 1924 by French poet [André Breton](#) with the publication of his *Manifesto of Surrealism*. The aim of [Surrealism](#) was to reveal the unconscious and reconcile it with rational life. The Surrealists did this in literature as well as art.

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