

*Hidden in
Plain Sight*

*British Abstract Art
from the Collection*

Teacher's Pack



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About the Teachers Pack

The aim of this pack is to provide a way to look at, learn from, and engage with the various themes, characters, and artworks included in the exhibition **Hidden in Plain Sight** at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 26 October 2013 to 11 January 2014.

Elements of this pack can support your visit to the exhibition, and can also be adapted for use in the classroom pre- or post- visit.

Please refer to page 11 for guidance on how to book a visit.

Introduction to the exhibition

The term 'abstract' can mean many things – to remove, to summarise, to be difficult to understand, to be impersonal – all of which can apply to abstraction in art. It can refer to art that has an object or landscape as its subject or starting point, or it can use forms that have no source from the visible world.

In this exhibition you will encounter art made in the South West between 1960 and 1970, alongside more recent examples from further afield. Some are works that invoke associations with the natural world through form and colour, others are hard-edged or geometric, and some are more elusive works that fall somewhere in-between.

To 'hide in plain sight' is to conceal something through exposure. Abstraction is all around us - in letter forms, architecture, furniture, music – not hidden at all.

Artists included in the exhibition

Lar Cann / Beryl Clark / Ian Davenport / Barbara Hepworth / Patrick Heron /
Derek Holland / Justin Knowles / Julian Lethbridge / Margaret Lovell /
Alexander Mackenzie / Keith Rowe / Michael Snow / Peter Thursby /
Peter Tysoe / John Wells / Bryan Wynter / Marie Yates

Justin Knowles (1935–2004)



Three Reds with White

1967

Oil and acrylic on linen and wood

Knowles was born in Exeter, and decided to become a painter at the age of 30. In just two years, Knowles was included in various major group exhibitions, and solo exhibitions in Milan, New York, and London and in 1967, here at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

Knowles referred to the paintings he made at this time as 'dimensional paintings'. In the late 60s, painting started to go out of fashion in favour of minimal or conceptual art. Some artists became interested in paintings as 'objects', rather than as a 'window onto the world'. Knowles would soon move away from the idea of a painted canvas to pursue sculptural and wall-based works.

*Vertigo*

1965

Oil on canvas

Marie Yates was an elected member of the Penwith Society of Artists. She helped to install the exhibitions there between 1963 and 1966, and was also curator of the gallery for a time. This painting was bought from a Penwith Society exhibition in 1966.

Yates was influenced by American artists such as Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly, describing her own work as hard-edge abstraction. The large flat forms are not intended to be representative – in fact Yates, through her use of colour and form, was aiming to “challenge people's perceptions without offering any apparent meaning or context”.

Ian Davenport (b.1966)



Untitled

1989

Oil on canvas

Ian Davenport studied at Goldsmiths' College of Art in London, graduating in 1988. He participated in Freeze, the now legendary exhibition curated by Damien Hirst, and he was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1991.

His paintings are made by pouring or applying paint to a surface, allowing gravity and the consistency of the paint to determine the final appearance. This process-led approach allows for variations within his paintings, dictated by chance.

1992.1.2

Gift from the Contemporary Art Society, 1992

Ideas for activities

Writing in Plain Sight

Below are some adjectives that can be used to describe colours. While visiting the exhibition, ask your pupils to use this list to describe the paintings and sculpture on display. Can they write a short descriptive paragraph about the things they see?

ablaze bright and full of light or colour

bold very bright, clear, or strong in colour and therefore easy to notice

brash big, bright, or colourful in a way that is not attractive

bright bright colours are strong but not dark

clean clean smells, tastes, and colours are light and fresh

colourful something that is colourful has bright colours or a lot of different colours

colourless something that is colourless has no colour

cool cool colours, such as white and blue, give an idea of cold instead of heat

dappled covered with or forming areas of lighter and darker colour or light and shadow

dark strong and not pale in colour

deep a deep colour is dark and strong

delicate a delicate colour is pleasant and not too strong

discoloured something that is discoloured has changed in colour and no longer looks new or clean

dusty used for describing a colour that is not bright because it has some grey in it

fiery very bright in colour, especially bright red, orange, or yellow

flamboyant brightly coloured or decorated

fresh used about colours

glowing glowing colours are bright and look warm

harmonious harmonious colours or parts combine well with each other

harsh harsh colours are not pleasant because they are very bright

light pale in colour, not dark

loud very bright in a way that does not show good taste

matching with the same colour, pattern, or design

mellow soft and warm in colour

monochrome able to show or produce only black, white, and grey

monotone a monotone colour is all the same shade of that colour

multi-coloured consisting of several different colours

muted not as bright or colourful as usual

neutral neutral colours are not very strong or bright

pastel having a pale soft colour

pure a pure sound, colour, light etc is very clear and beautiful

restrained not too bright in colour, or not decorated too much

rich a rich colour, sound, or smell is strong in a pleasant way

showy brightly coloured and attractive

soft a soft light or colour is pale, gentle and pleasant to look at

sombre dark in colour, especially grey or black

tinted containing a small amount of a particular colour

vibrant bright and colourful

violent a violent colour is very bright and almost painful to look at

vivid a vivid colour is strong and bright

warm warm colours have red, orange, or yellow in them. Colours with blue or green in them are called cool colours

Space and depth

Many artists use geometry to create the depth and space in paintings, such as the illusory depth of perspective. In the twentieth century, artists also realised it could be used to deny a sense of space. Flat lines and areas of colour emphasise the surface 'flatness' of the painting. However, they can also suggest depth. By overlapping lines and colours, artists can also imply depth, however shallow. Some artists even break the surface of their work, using an actual shallow space to emphasise this further.

Find an example in *Hidden in Plain Sight* where the artist is emphasising the flatness of the painting by using large areas of colour.

Find another example where overlapping colours or forms have been utilised to create a sense of depth.

Mathematics, images, and sound

Some artists impose strict systems on their work. Justin Knowles is one such artist. His later work used mathematical sequences, geometry, fractions, and intervals in order to develop ideas for large scale work. Often, these ideas were worked out on graph paper.

Decide on a mathematical sequence to use in your drawings, such as 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 or 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32. Using graph paper, use these sequences as a basis for a drawing. You don't have to stick to squares or rectangles – try using triangles. The gaps between (intervals) are just as important as the marks you make on the paper.

If you've used squares or rectangles as a basis for your work, and want to take it further, why not try some system-based music? If you have access to software such as Ableton Live, or other Digital Audio Workstation, load the drum machine sequencer, set the 'swing' and programme samples to different lines of the drum machine. Use your drawings as a basis for the programming.

How does it sound?

Chance

Having explored systems-based drawing and paintings, let's also try making paintings by chance. Look at Ian Davenport's paintings. In *Hidden in Plain Sight*, his painting is made by pouring paint onto the surface, and allowing the paint to dictate its own path. Davenport has applied this paint to 8 areas of the canvas. How has the paint formed on the surface? Do you think it was painted flat on the wall, or flat on the floor, or in another way? In Davenport's later work, he applies his paint with pipettes, allowing the paint to drip in very straight lines, often pooling at the bottom of the work where the canvas has been allowed to rest on the floor.

Try making paintings in school in which you reduce your control of the mark making. You could collect sticks from the woods, lolly sticks, pipettes, or the handles of your school brushes. Dip them into the paint, and make pictures by trailing these implements over the surface, without touching the surface. Try manipulating this by altering the angle of the surface when making the paintings.

What can we do for you?

We are able to offer schools various options when visiting the exhibition. Visits can be arranged for anywhere between **one class** to an **entire school**. In many cases, a member of staff can be present to facilitate your visit. We are also very happy for you to visit as a self-directed group.

The exhibition provides a perfect opportunity for your pupils to experience nationally significant architecture and art first hand – and will act as a starting point for working in sketchbooks, fact finding, and talking about the themes that surround the exhibition.

How to book a visit

We want to ensure your group has the best experience possible when visiting, so please remember to contact us first before organising your trip. We are very popular with schools, colleges and other user groups, so our galleries can get very busy from time to time.

For enquiries for school visits, contact museumvisits@plymouth.gov.uk. Please have a range of possible dates available before contacting us, as it may not always be possible to offer you your first choice date.

Please remember to bring along sketchbooks and pencils for your visit, as wet materials, and also dusty materials will not be permitted in the exhibition galleries. If you have any questions regarding materials, please contact us using the email above.

Further resources

Many of our previous Teachers Packs, Notes, and Resources are available as PDF downloads from our website www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumlearningresources.htm

MP3s

A selection of audio interviews and clips of artists and curators talking about the exhibition, or their work, can be found on our Soundcloud page. Search for 'PCMAG' to find our files.



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