



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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98-04 98-04 TATE MODERN ARTIST AND SOCIETY

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This talk asks a deceptively simple question: what is the relationship between an artist and the society they inhabit? To explore it, we move through works once displayed at Tate Modern — a building that is itself a monument to industrial power, opened in 2000 inside the former Bankside Power Station. From Whiteread's demolished homes to Shonibare's library of immigration, from Malevich's revolutionary geometry to Margolles's forensic witness, we find art insisting it cannot stand apart from the world.

Tate Modern, London



Tate Modern, London

This talk uses works once displayed at Tate Modern as a way into a larger question: what is the relationship between the artist and the society they inhabit? Before we reach that question, the building itself demands attention. **Tate Modern** opened in **2000** inside the former **Bankside Power Station**, designed by **Giles Gilbert Scott**, whose other works include Liverpool Cathedral and those iconic red telephone boxes. He was the grandson of the great Victorian architect **George Gilbert Scott**, responsible for the Midland Hotel at St Pancras and the Albert Memorial. The conversion was carried out by **Herzog and de Meuron** at a cost of £134 million, and the result is extraordinary: a turbine hall 155 metres long and 26 metres high. The **Blavatnik Building** extension, also by Herzog and de Meuron, opened in **2016**, adding sixty percent more display space. The Tate name comes from **Henry Tate**, the sugar refiner who built his fortune on a German patent for sugar cubes he purchased in 1872. By 1897 he had spent £150,000 funding what became the National Gallery of British Art, endowing it with 65 paintings from his personal collection. The wing we're exploring today addresses a direct and urgent premise: that art holds a mirror to society, raises awareness, and argues for change.

Notes

I start with the building. Tate Modern is one of four Tate galleries. It was

opened in 2000 in a converted power station called Bankside that was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott. The Len Blevatnik extension was opened in 2016.

The Tate is named after its founder Henry Tate (1819-1899). He was the son of a clergyman and set up his own grocery shop when he was 20. He expanded this to a chain of six shops which he sold and became the owner of a sugar refinery in 1859. This was 26 years after slavery had been abolished in the British Empire (1833) and 52 years after Britain had abolished the slave trade (1807). In 1872, Tate bought a German patent for making sugar cubes from Eugen Langen and it was this that made his fortune. The same year he opened a refinery in Liverpool. Towards the end of his life he gave money to many colleges, hospitals and founded Streatham, Balham, South Lambeth and Brixton libraries. By 1897, he had spent £150,000 (initially £80,000) on building the National Gallery of British Art ('Tate Gallery' in 1932). He then endowed it with his personal art collection of 65 contemporary paintings and gave it all to the nation. The famous portico was designed by the architect Sidney Smith who is also known for various libraries in south-east London funded by Henry Tate. It was separated from the National Gallery in 1954. Tate Britain was extended twice by Joseph Duveen, an art dealer who also paid for an extension at the British Museum, and in 1987 Charles Clore funded the Turner wing.

Bankside power station was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960) who designed Liverpool Cathedral and many of the red telephone boxes. He was the grandson of the prolific Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) who designed the Midland Hotel at St. Pancras and the Albert Memorial. The façade of the building is made from 4.2 million bricks. The chimney is 325 feet (99m) and was designed to be lower than St. Paul's Cathedral opposite (365 feet, 111m). At its peak, the power station generated 300 megawatts but it became uneconomic and too polluting and was closed in 1981. The turbine hall is 509 feet (155 m) long, 115 feet (35 m) wide and 85 feet (26 m) high. The conversion was carried out by Herzog & de Meuron at a cost of £134 million of which £50 million was from the Millennium Commission. Tate Modern opened in 2000 and had become one of the most visited museums of modern and contemporary art in the world.

Extension. Within four years of opening Tate Modern our success meant we started planning to expand the gallery. This new extension, again designed by Herzog & de Meuron, cost £260 million and opened on 17 June 2016. This

ten-storey extension, now called the Blavatnik Building, increases the display space by 60%. Len Blavatnik is the UK's richest person and has been a UK citizen since 2010.

Management. The Director of the Tate is Maria Balshaw who was previously Director of the Whitworth (University of Manchester) and Manchester City Galleries, and Director of Culture for Manchester City Council. The previous Director, since 1988, was Sir Nicholas Serota (b. 1946). The Director of Tate Modern is Frances Morris and of Tate Britain Alex Farquharson.

Artist and Society. 'This wing is concerned with the ways in which artists engage with social ideals and historical realities. Though some artists associated modernism with a utopian vision, art has also provided a mirror to contemporary society, sometimes raising awareness about urgent issues or arguing for change. Whether through traditional media or moving images, abstraction or figuration, militancy or detached observation, all the artworks in this wing highlight aspects of the social reality in which they were made, and try to generate a reaction and convey a more or less explicit message to their publics.'



Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963)
Demolished
 1996
 12 screenprints
 49 x 74.3 cm

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), *Demolished*, 1996, 49 x 74.3 cm

The building that houses this collection was itself a monument to industrial power. Now we turn to an artist who has spent her career memorialising what power leaves behind. **Rachel Whiteread** was born in Ilford in 1963 and has lived in East London for much of her adult life. She is best known as a sculptor of what she calls negative space — casting the interiors of everyday objects: baths, sinks, chairs, entire rooms — fixing in solid material the voids that human bodies once occupied. She describes these casts as carrying "the residue of years and years of use." In **1993** she became the first woman to win the **Turner Prize for House**, a concrete cast of the interior of a condemned Victorian terrace in Bow. Characteristically, she also won the **K Foundation** award for worst artwork of the year, accepted it, and gave the money to Shelter and young artists. **Demolished**, dated **1996**, is a portfolio of twelve duo-tone screen-prints documenting three separate tower-block demolitions across **Hackney** between **1993 and 1995**. Whiteread photographed each demolition in three stages from a fixed vantage point. The enlargement of the black-and-white originals into screen-prints amplifies the grain, and the B and C series carry an unmistakeable resemblance to war photography — rubble, dust clouds, skeletal structures mid-collapse. These were people's homes.

Notes

Description. The two works in this room are about the tower block in different

social situations. The first is a set of twelve screen-prints of tower blocks being demolished in East London. The artist is Rachel Whiteread and she photographed each of three separate demolitions as a series of three stages from a single spot and, in addition, she took a single photograph of the context. The work is called *Demolished* and the photographs were taken between 1993 and 1995 [and the artwork is dated 1996].

The artist. Whiteread has always been a controversial artist. She lived and still lives in East London; a historically poor area and she became the first woman to win the Turner Prize [of £25,000] for *House* [in 1993]. This was a concrete cast of the inside of a Victorian terraced house and, for the same work, she also won the £40,000 K Foundation art award presented to the 'worst artist of the year'. *House* symbolised the people who formerly lived there prior to the increasing gentrification of the area. She is well known as a sculptor who creates casts of the spaces inside, under or around many everyday objects such as baths, sinks and chairs.

The meaning. Multi-storey buildings were introduced by urban planners in the 1950s as a utopian dream to replace sprawling slums with clean, modern places to live. By the 1990s there was an economic recession, high unemployment and social unrest and a wave of rioting took place in 1991 and 1992. It was a period known as Thatcher's Britain. Whiteread is recording the end of a failed urban experiment but she is also recording the destruction of people's homes. Some of the photographs remind us of a war zone but the beauty of the screen-prints suggests hope for the future. Like her sculptural casts, they serve to record what she has referred to as 'something that is going to be completely forgotten ... the detritus of our culture'. She is creating a memorial to the past in the hope of generating something better for the future.

Can art change the world? As a pragmatic artist Whiteread said, 'I don't think art changes the world in terms of stopping people dying of Aids or of starvation or being homeless. But for an individual ... it can enhance daily life, reflect our times and, in that sense, change the way you think and are.' The images could be from any city and stand for social planning for the poor world-wide. I mentioned that some of these photographs remind us of a war zone. Let us turn to a work that represents an iconic tower block at the centre of a real war zone.

Notes on Rachel Whiteread, *Demolished*, 1996

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) was born in Ilford, Essex and studied at Brighton Polytechnic and the Slade (1986-87). Her mother was an artist and her father a geography teacher and lifelong supporter of the Labour Party. She began to exhibit in 1987 and had her first solo exhibition in 1988. She lives in a former synagogue in east London with the sculptor Marcus Taylor and they have two sons.

Whiteread employs casting methods using plaster, rubber and resin which are typically used as part of the process of making sculptures rather than in the finished work. She makes sculptures of the spaces within, around and under everyday objects from baths and sinks to houses, so called 'negative spaces'. This draws our attention to the forgotten spaces around and within our everyday world and fixes them in time as public monuments. The spaces around objects are normally occupied by human beings and so the solidified spaces become symbols for our human presence while refusing us entry. By removing the object and refusing its function the shapes express absence and loss. She says the casts carry 'the residue of years and years of use'. Her early work was personal and biographical, but her later works have become universal and their titles have become straightforward, down-to-earth and descriptive. For Whiteread her sculptures are metaphors for the neglect of people.

Whiteread was the first woman to win the Turner Prize in November 1993 for *House*, a life-sized replica of the interior of a condemned terraced house in Bow in London's East End. It took two years to plan and was made by spraying liquid concrete into the building's empty shell before its external walls were removed. *House* was completed on 25 October 1993 and demolished eleven weeks later on 11 January 1994. *House* also won the K Foundation award of £40,000 for the worst work of art of the year. K Foundation threatened to burn the money unless it was accepted so she gave some of the money to Shelter and the rest was allocated to young artists based on a competitive submission. K Foundation burned £1 million the following year.

Demolished is a portfolio of twelve duo-tone screen-prints. The one shown is called 'B: Clapton Park Estate, Mandeville Street, London E5; Bakewell Court; Repton Court; March 1995'. The screen-prints are divided into three groups, A (A: Clapton Park Estate, Mandeville Street, London E5; Ambergate Court; Norbury Court; October 1993), B and C (C: Trowbridge Estate, London E9; Hannington Point; Hilmarton Point; Deverill Point; June 1995). The prints were

scanned from photographs of the demolition of tower blocks on three separate estates in Hackney, East London. Whiteread took the photographs between October 1993 and June 1995. The transfer to screen-prints involved enlarging the black and white photographs which has increased the grain. The stages of the demolition are recorded in the form of three photographs taken from the same spot. A fourth photograph on each site records a pile of rubble (A), a dust-filled stormy sky (B) and tower blocks on a sunny day (C). The A-series is visually neutral, but B and C are reminiscent of war photographs. In the early 1990s Whiteread lived in East London, a historically poor area.

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990 and when this work was produced John Major was Prime Minister (1990-97), followed by Tony Blair from 1997 to 2007.

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Mitch Epstein (b. 1952)
Biloxi, Mississippi
 2005
 Colour photograph
 Tate, London

Mitch Epstein (b. 1952), Biloxi, Mississippi, 2005, Tate, London

From the void spaces of Whiteread's demolished homes, we move to another artist reckoning with what industrial power destroys — this time across the American landscape. **Mitch Epstein** was born in **1952** in Massachusetts and emerged as one of the first photographers to use colour as a serious fine-art medium in the **1970s**, at a moment when the photography world still largely treated colour as commercial rather than artistic. His project **American Power**, made between **2003 and 2009**, began with a commission from the New York Times to photograph **Cheshire, Ohio**, a small town being poisoned by the adjacent **American Electric Power** coal plant. Residents sued and won twenty million dollars; most left, and the town's population collapsed to just over a hundred. The photograph of the plant is taken from directly below the chimneys, so the smoke appears to pour downward — a formal inversion that makes the image feel threatening rather than merely industrial. Epstein himself acknowledged the compositional echo of the **World Trade Centre** towers, and that resonance is difficult to avoid: post **September 2001**, he was arrested multiple times photographing power infrastructure. He wrote, "the open society that I took for granted for 33 years is no longer a given." The **Biloxi, Mississippi** photograph of **2005** shows Hurricane Katrina's aftermath — clothes, blankets, and a mattress snagged in a tree's branches, shot six weeks later in warm evening light that makes devastation unnervingly beautiful.

Notes

These are two colour photographs by Mitch Epstein, an American photographer who was one of the first to use colour photography for fine art pictures in the 1970s. His work is known for its social and political comments. These works are part of a series called American Power. The series started in 2003 when he was commissioned by the New York Times to photograph Cheshire, Ohio. This first photograph is of a power station outside the town. He shows smoke pouring from two chimneys into a grey sky. It is taken from near the base of the chimneys looking upwards with the smoke appearing to pour downwards thus emphasizing its threatening impact. The image is both formally elegant with an abstract beauty but at the same time is menacing and repulsive and it even suggests smoke billowing from the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

The power company was American Electric Power and the power station was polluting the town. The residents sued the company and won \$20 million to be bought out and leave the town. Some stayed and the population is now 132.

From this assignment Epstein began to make pictures of the production and consumption of energy in the United States and he spent the next five years travelling around America documenting the relationship between American society, the landscape and coal, oil, natural gas, nuclear, hydroelectric, fuel cell, wind, and solar power stations.

After a while he also began to document natural power and this other photograph of Biloxi Mississippi in 2005 shows the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Biloxi is on the coast and is a former holiday resort known for its lighthouse. Following the Katrina and the flooding the population decreased to 45,000.

He encountered many obstacles including being arrested a number of times. Following the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 local police were wary of someone taking photographs of power stations. Epstein commented 'With my new project I am pressed up against the edge of America's fundamental freedoms. The open society that I took for granted for 33 years is no longer a given.'

He did not set out to be an environmental activist but that is what he became. He became concerned about the impact of America's consumption of energy. He wrote, 'These pictures question the human conquest of nature at any

cost'. He was troubled by the indifference and 'corporate avarice'. He added 'With "American Power" I am trying to find and convey truth about how we Americans live, what we want, and what it costs to get it'.

In Biloxi, Mississippi 2005 we see a tree whose branches are littered with sheets, blankets, clothes and plastic bags. A large mattress has become impaled on one of the lower branches. Behind this tree, there is a damaged building and the overturned wreck of a car. Taken at a moment of near calm six weeks after the hurricane had passed, the photograph presents the aftermath of the storm as a way of evoking the chaos of the event itself. Epstein took the photograph in the early evening, and the entire scene is bathed in a warm, orange glow. This lighting creates an eerie beauty that is at odds with the subject of the scene.

Notes

Mitchell "Mitch" Epstein (born 1952) is a fine art photographer who was one of the first to use colour in the 1970s. He has published ten books of photographs including American Power. He was born and raised in a Jewish family in Massachusetts and studied in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York. By the mid-1970s he was travelling America taking photographs which were well reviewed. In 1978 he travelled to India with his future wife and worked on several films.

From 1992 to 1995 he photographed in Vietnam and the pictures were exhibited in New York and well received, enhancing his reputation as an 'extremely intelligent and gifted photographer'.

He spent more time in New York and in 1999 produced a series of photographs called The City. The same year he returned to his family home to record the demise of his father's furniture store and real estate business. The pictures were published as Family Business and the book won a best photography book of the year award.

From 2003 to 2009 he worked on a series which became American Power during which he was often stopped by security guards and was once interrogated by the FBI. One critic wrote 'Epstein has made clear that his intention is neither to illustrate political events nor to create persuasive propaganda. Rather, he raises the more challenging question of how inherently abstract political concepts about the nation and the culture as a whole can be represented photographically...But equally significant is the

unique form of documentary storytelling that he has invented in American Power—colorful, sweeping, concerned, intimate, honest.’

In 2008 he spent six months in Berlin and published Berlin.

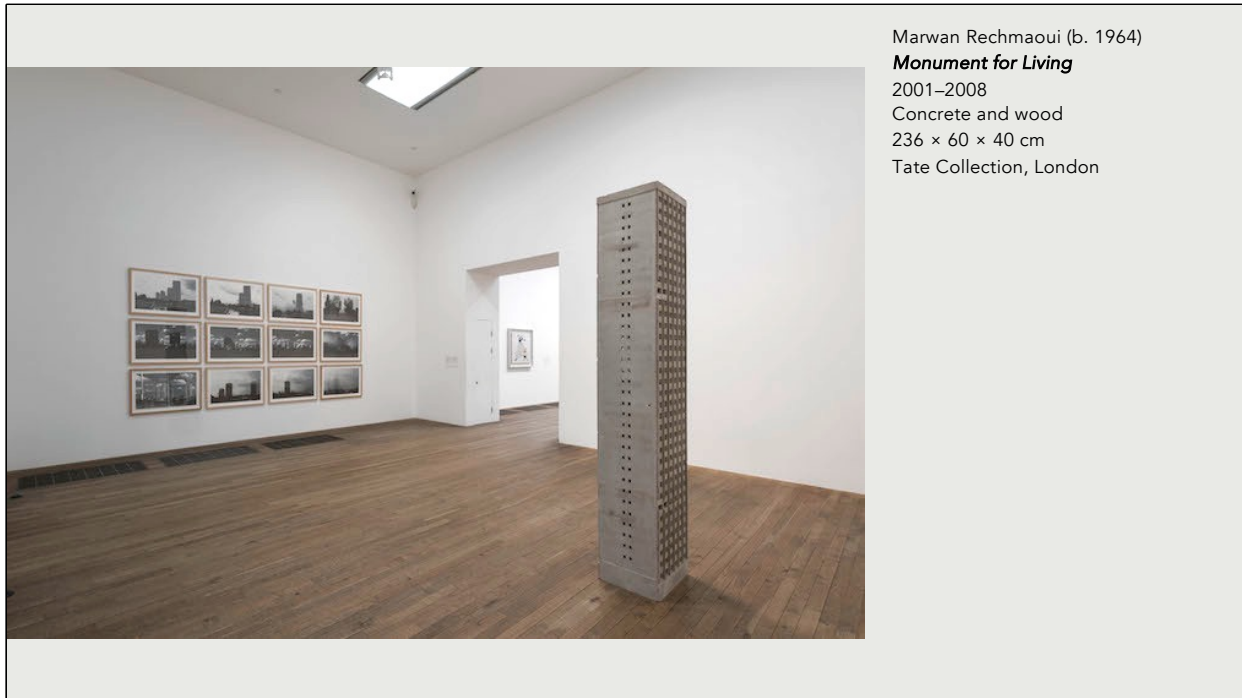
In 2009 he worked with his second wife on a public art project and website based on American Power in order to inspire and educate people about environmental issues. In 2013 he was commissioned to produce a theatrical performance of American Power. In recent years he has held many international exhibitions.

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Marwan Rechmaoui (b. 1964)
Monument for Living
 2001–2008
 Concrete and wood
 236 × 60 × 40 cm
 Tate Collection, London

Marwan Rechmaoui (b. 1964), *Monument for Living*, 2001–2008, 236 × 60 × 40 cm, Tate Collection, London

Epstein's photographs showed how power infrastructure can become a site of trauma — and that tension between a building's function and its psychological weight is exactly what drives the work we turn to now. **Marwan Rechmaoui** was born in Lebanon in **1964** and trained in Boston and New York before returning to live in Beirut. His work **Monument for the Living**, made between **2001 and 2008**, is a precise scale model in concrete and wood of the **Burj el Murr**, a thirty-four-floor tower with seven basement levels and five hundred and ten windows. Construction began in **1974**, but the **Lebanese Civil War**, which broke out in **1975** and lasted until **1990**, left it permanently unfinished. During the war it became the centre of the so-called **War of the Hotels**, changing hands repeatedly, used by snipers, as a torture prison, and as a site for killings by being thrown from the roof. The name Burj el Murr translates literally as Tower of Bitterness. It cannot be demolished — too tall to knock down, too structurally dense to implode — so it stands, an unwilling monument. Rechmaoui saw the tower's persistence as a wider political metaphor: "The whole world is moving in this direction. This is why Beirut is important. It's the future." The war killed an estimated **250,000** people and drove nearly one million from the country.

Notes

Description. The second reference to a tower block is this accurate scale model of a tower in Beirut called Burj El Murr (see Visual Aids). The tower has thirty-four floors, seven basement levels and 510 windows. Construction started in 1974 but it was not finished when the Lebanese Civil War started the following year. It was the tallest building in Beirut and during the war it was the centre of the 'War of the Hotels'. It changed hands many times and was used by snipers, as a prison for torture and many 'tossings' from the roof. Although the rest of Beirut was flattened by the war this tower remained. It is now uninhabited, too tall to knock down and too dense to implode, and so it continues to dominate the skyline. It is known as the 'Tower of Bitterness' and has become a memorial to horrors of war and a reminder to try to resolve the internal conflicts that still remain.

The civil war. The artist Marwan Rechmaoui has created a monumental work that highlights this enduring and sad memorial to the war. The war lasted from 1975 to 1990 and there were an estimated 250,000 deaths and almost one million people left Lebanon.

All cities. But the work is not just a monument to the war. Rechmaoui sees Beirut as divided by the same political and ethnic differences that drive conflict in all modern cities. He said, 'The whole world is moving in this direction. This is why Beirut is important. It's the future. Populations are moving wholesale into cities, and bringing with them their issues, their problems, which puts pressure on the city as a space ... All these issues about security and terrorism mean that Western societies, which believe they are free, are starting to lose the benefits of being free.'

Tolerance. Rechmaoui remains positive, he said 'We are all strangers in the city,' he says. 'That affects people's behaviour; they become more tolerant, more accepting of new ideas.'

Notes on Marwan Rechmaoui, Monument for Living, 2001-8

Marwan Rechmaoui was born in Lebanon in 1964 and trained in Boston and New York.

He lives in Beirut and is annoyed by the sudden gentrification of the area he lives in. He spends his time observing the complex social and political dynamics of Lebanon and what they reveal in a country where propaganda and censorship are typical. Following the end of the war, he and other artists wanted to change society but by the end of the 1990s they had become

disillusioned. Rechmaoui began to make semi-abstract works in which the shapes were ordered according to random rules, mirroring the chaos in society. He chose cement, tar and rubber; the materials of a country under reconstruction. Slowly his paintings became structures.

Monument for the Living is a scale model of the Burj el Murr building in Beirut, Lebanon, made from concrete and wood. The building has thirty-four floors, seven basement levels and 510 windows.

The tower was owned by members of the el-Murr family, a prominent political clan. Construction began in 1974 but it was left unfinished after the outbreak of civil war in 1975. Originally built to become the Beirut Trade Centre its name literally means 'tower of bitterness'. It was the tallest building in Beirut and during the war it was the centre of the 'War of the Hotels'. It changed hands many times and was used by snipers and for torture and many 'tossings'. The tower is now too tall to knock down and too dense to implode, and so continues to dominate the skyline. It is now seen as a memorial to the internal religious conflicts that have never really been resolved.

Although most of Beirut was destroyed during the war this building remained standing. It cannot be converted and is not eligible for demolition. It has become a terrible memorial of war which reminds the inhabitants of Beirut of the horror of the confrontations, Marwan Rechmaoui has created a monumental work highlighting the persistence of this sad vestige within the urban development of the Lebanese capital.

The Lebanese Civil War was a multifaceted civil war in Lebanon between Sunni, Shia, Christian and other groups. It lasted from 1975 to 1990 and there were an estimated 250,000 deaths. Almost one million people left Lebanon because of the war and, as of 2012, about 76,000 people are still displaced. Today Lebanon's population is estimated to be 54% Muslim (27% Shia; 27% Sunni), 5.6% Druze, who do not consider themselves to be Muslims, 40.4% Christian (21% Maronite, 8% Greek Orthodox, 5% Melkite, 1% Protestant and 5.4% other Christian denominations).

Sunnis make up about 90% of Muslims worldwide and their name is derived from 'People of the Tradition' which is based on the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. Shia Muslims make up only about 10% of the total but they are the majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan and, some say, Yemen. They are the 'Party of Ali' who, they claim, was the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammed and there are three main branches that differ in their view of the true path of succession.

Sandra Rishani Richani is a Beirut-based practicing architect who proposes planting a tree at each window so that the tower becomes a green space that gradually decomposes over the next 50 years.

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Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
Dynamic Suprematism
 1915–16

Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), *Dynamic Suprematism*, 1915–16

From the psychological weight of Beirut's unfinished tower, we move to a different kind of utopian ambition — the belief that abstract art itself could reshape society. **Kazimir Malevich** was born in **1879** to a Polish family living in Ukraine and died in **1935**, his career broken by Stalinist repression. He founded **Suprematism** in **1915**, the same year he published his manifesto **From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism**, declaring the movement's governing principle: "By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art." For Malevich, abstraction was not decoration — it was a spiritual language capable of liberating humanity from what he called "the dead weight of the material world." **Dynamic Suprematism**, painted around **1915 to 1916**, places multi-coloured geometric forms along a diagonal axis — no horizontals, no verticals, everything in motion. That instability is deliberate: Suprematism rejected both academic portraiture and the utilitarian design culture of **Constructivism**. His most radical statement, the **Black Square**, was exhibited high in a room corner — precisely where Russian households placed religious icons — proposing pure geometry as a secular object of contemplation. Stalin ended all of this. By the mid-**1920s**, **Socialist Realism** was the only permitted style, and Malevich's influence moved westward — towards **Mondrian**, whom we turn to next.

Notes

Abstraction and Society. You might wonder why there is a room containing abstract paintings when the theme is Artist and Society. The connection is that many artists painted abstract art as a representation of a higher, spiritual realm whose contemplation could lead to peace, harmony and a Utopian society.

Description. Look at this example by Kazimir Malevich called Dynamic Suprematism. We can see three groups of carefully delineated, multi-coloured objects at the corners of a grey-white triangle. If you look closely the objects have been carefully marked using pencil and there are no horizontals or verticals, everything is placed on a diagonal which gives it a feeling of instability and action. Malevich was working in Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution and he and other artists wanted to discover a new form of art that was free from what he called 'the dead weight of the material world'. He rejected capitalist art, such as portraits of wealthy people and thought that art should represent the spiritual, higher realms.

Suprematism. The diagonal lines give a feeling of dynamism but what about the other part of the title, 'Suprematism'? It was an art movement founded by Malevich two years before he painted this work. He wrote, 'By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art' rather than the visual depiction of objects. He created a type of language or grammar of abstract objects, such as triangles, squares and circles and he was reacting against both academic art and the utilitarian art that had come before [called Constructivism]. This was the time of revolutions in Russia and Malevich wanted a complete break from the old world of bourgeois art and imagined a world of pure feeling where people would live in harmony with nature.

Rejects 'bits of nature'. It was a revolutionary time in art. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had developed Cubism in Paris a few years earlier and in Italy, the Futurists were excited by modernity as represented by mechanical power and speed. Malevich believed he had gone beyond both Cubism and Futurism by developing a world of pure abstraction. He believed only the cowardly base their art on the forms of nature and that reproducing little corners of nature was like a thief being enraptured by his leg irons. Malevich thought that 'pure painting' required the rejection of what he called 'bits of nature, Madonnas and shameless nudes'.

Black Square. His most famous work was a white canvas which was largely occupied by a black square. This work was exhibited in the corner of the room, high up, in a position typical of religious icons in many Russian homes.

The implication being that the works should be considered as the secular equivalent of a religious icon—worthy of meditative contemplation.

Socialist Realism. This form of abstract art did not last long in Russia as by the mid-1920s Stalin had taken absolute control and abstract art was denounced as bourgeoisie. Artists had to produce art that glorified Russian history and its working-class heroes (see Visual Aids). The style was called Socialist Realism. However, abstract continued elsewhere. Let us look at another of the founders of abstraction, Piet Mondrian.

Notes on Kazimir Malevich, Dynamic Suprematism

Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (pronounced 'Malayvitch', 1879 1935) was born Kazimierz Malewicz to a Polish family who moved to Ukraine and Russified their Polish names. Kazimir was born in a sugar beet growing region close to Kiev and his father was the manager of a sugar processing factory. Malevich studied drawing in Kiev (18956) and from 1904 at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. His father died in 1904. Malevich, up to his mid-thirties was interested in peasant art and became a member of the Moscow avant-garde, although he was not at the leading edge, and he collaborated in a successful cubofuturist opera called 'Victory Over the Sun' in 1913.

In 1915, Malevich published his manifesto 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism' and he participated in an exhibition entitled the 'Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10' (Zero-Ten) in St Petersburg. He declared the Suprematist experiment was finished in 1919 but published 'The Non-Objective World' in 1927. His career languished following Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death in 1924. Stalin promoted Socialist Realism as the only permitted form of art. The Agitprop movement started in the 1920s in communist countries and it urged (agitated) people through propaganda to do what their leaders expected them to do. Malevich prudently left his works in Switzerland after an exhibition there, possibly saving them from obscurity or destruction. Allegedly a handsome man who had a wide, popular following. When he died, he was exhibited with Black Square above his grave. Communist critics derided abstract art as bourgeois as they felt it could not express social realities. Malevich was derided [by Western critic Alexandre Benois] for negating everything good and pure: love of life and love of nature. Malevich responded that art can advance for art's sake alone, regardless of its pleasure: art does not need us, and it has never needed us

since stars first shone in the sky.

Malevich contemporaneously influenced major artists such as El Lissitzky and Olga Rozanova. She in turn is thought to have influenced Mark Rothko, eight of whose works have a room to themselves on the other side of this level. His legacy continues with the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. On the wall over there we can see his *Metaesquema* (1958) which was inspired by Malevich.

Malevich wrote, 'To the Suprematist the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless: the significant thing is feeling' and 'I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is to Suprematism'.

Constructivism was an artistic philosophy that originated in Russia in 1913 with the work of Vladimir Tatlin. It rejected the idea that art is independent from society and was involved in design for industry, public festivals, posters and all aspects of public life—'the streets our brushes, the squares our palettes'. Constructivism influenced many modern art movements such as the Bauhaus and De Stijl. The term Construction Art was first used as a derisive term by Malevich to describe the work of Alexander Rodchenko in 1917. Constructivism first appears as a positive term in Naum Gabo's *Realistic Manifesto* of 1920. Constructivism was a post-World War I development of Russian Futurism.

Malevich, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky are regarded as the fathers of abstraction and competed to show they were first. It is believed Malevich backdated some 1915 works to 1913 in order to establish his primacy. However, the earliest abstract artist may, in fact, be Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) a previously unknown Swedish artist who started painting abstract art in 1905.

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Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)
Swinging
 1925
 oil on board

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Swinging*, 1925

Where Malevich pursued abstraction as a spiritual declaration, **Wassily Kandinsky** pursued it as a spiritual conversation — one conducted through colour, form, and sound. Kandinsky was born in **Moscow in 1866** and began his career not as an artist but as an academic, teaching law and economics. At thirty, he visited an exhibition in Munich and stood before a **Monet** haystack. He could not identify the subject, and the experience unsettled him profoundly. As he later wrote, "Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendour." He abandoned his academic post and moved to Munich to study painting. His treatise **Concerning the Spiritual in Art**, published in **1911**, argued that art must be cleansed of all reference to the material world. "Colour is the keyboard," he wrote, "the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings." The painting before us, **Swinging**, dates from **1925**, when Kandinsky was teaching at the **Bauhaus** in Weimar — a school whose ambition to unify art, craft, and society directly echoed his own. The geometric circles and triangles here reflect ideas he was simultaneously developing in his book **Point and Line to Plane**. The Nazis closed the Bauhaus in **1933**, forcing Kandinsky into Parisian exile, and killing the institution that had briefly made his vision institutional reality.

Notes

This is by Wassily Kandinsky, one of the founders of abstract art. It is called

Swinging and the shapes and colours suggest movement and maybe modern dance, which in 1925 was jazz. Kandinsky was one of the few artists who created abstract art around 1915.

He did not start as an abstract artist, in fact he did not start as an artist but as an academic teaching law and economics in Moscow, where he was born. When he was 30, he attended an exhibition where he saw a painting by Monet of a haystack. He could not recognise what it was and this disturbed him particularly as he could not erase the image from his mind. As he put it, "Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendour". As a result, he gave up his career and moved to Munich to study art.

His early work was representational, one of his best-known works was *The Blue Rider* [see Visual Aids]. He was influenced by a spiritual philosophy called theosophy which teaches that creation is a geometric progression starting with a single point and he wrote a book called *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910). His work gradually became more abstract and within a few years (by 1915) any reference to material objects had gone.

He wrote, "Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul".

Swedish female artist Hilma af Klint may be the first abstract artist as her first abstract work was painted in 1906.

Notes on Wassily Kandinsky, 'Swinging', 1925

Swinging suggests movement and the rhythms of modern jazz. Kandinsky was a pioneer of abstract painting and regarded it as a mystical approach to art. His treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911, argued that art must be cleansed of all references to the material world. He felt that colour was essential for liberating art from naturalistic appearances.

This picture is No.291 in Kandinsky's hand-list, with a note that it was painted in February 1925. It was therefore executed at Weimar, before he moved with the Bauhaus to Dessau in June that year. Its emphasis on regular geometric forms such as circles and triangles is related to the ideas set out in his book *Point and Line to Plane* which he wrote in its final form in the latter part of 1925 and which was published in 1926.

The original German title 'Schaukeln' has sometimes been translated as 'Shaking' or 'Rocking', but the most accurate English equivalent would seem

to be 'Swinging'.

When World War I started he returned to Moscow and following the Russian Revolution he worked in the cultural administration. However, his spiritual approach was at odds with the materialism of Soviet society and he returned to Germany in 1920. In Germany he taught at a famous school of art and architecture called the Bauhaus until the Nazis closed it in 1933. He moved to France where he lived for the rest of his life.

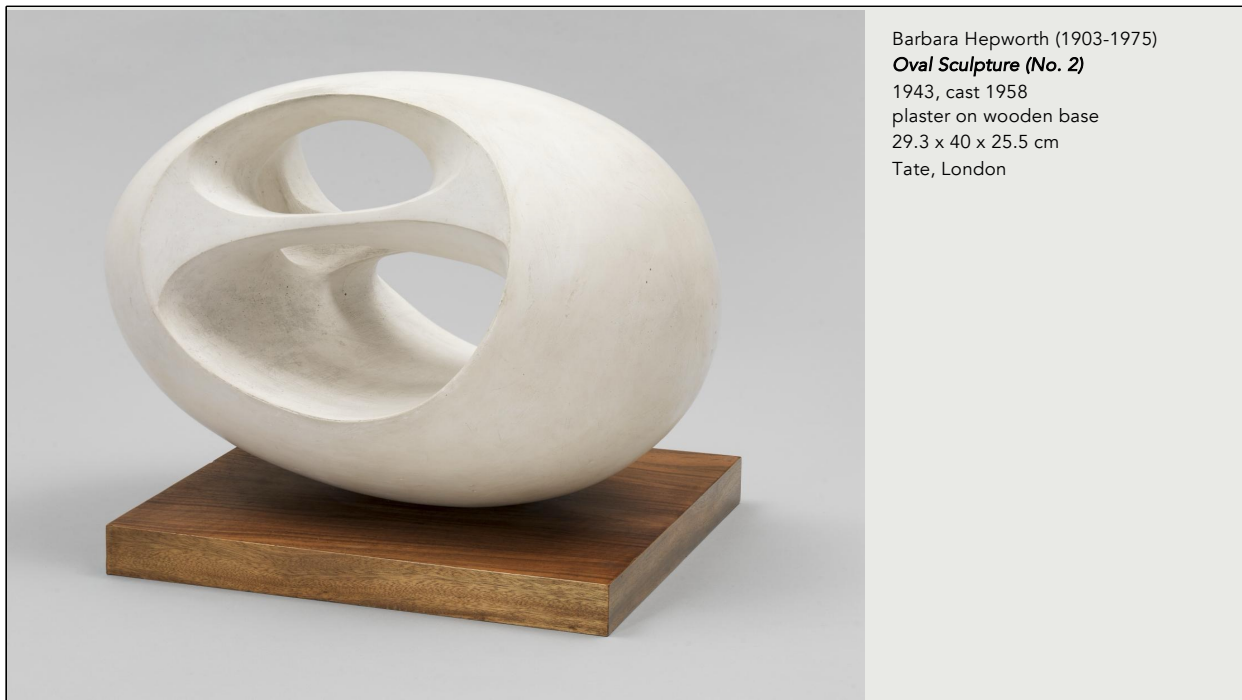
Kandinsky knew Malevich in Moscow and lived in the same apartment block as Alexander Rodchenko.

Swedish female artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) may be the first abstract artist in 1806. In Sweden women could enter art school. Like Kandinsky she studied theosophy, the first religion that did not discriminate against women.

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Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975)
Oval Sculpture (No. 2)
1943, cast 1958
plaster on wooden base
29.3 x 40 x 25.5 cm
Tate, London

Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), *Oval Sculpture (No. 2)*, 1943, cast 1958, 29.3 x 40 x 25.5 cm, Tate, London

From the institutional ambitions of the Bauhaus, we turn to the Cornish coast — and to **Barbara Hepworth**. Hepworth was born in Yorkshire in **1903** and trained at Leeds School of Art, where she first encountered **Henry Moore**. Their relationship was one of genuine creative friction: Hepworth carved the first pierced figure, her **Pierced Form** of **1932**, and Moore himself later called that year "The Year of the Hole." The credit, and the timeline, belong to her. ***Oval Sculpture No. 2*** dates from **1943**, made shortly after Hepworth fled wartime London for **St Ives** with Ben Nicholson. The Cornish landscape — its sweeping bays and hollowed sea caves — pressed directly into her work. The ovoid form here carries multiple resonances: she traced it to **Brâncuși**, whose studio she visited in Paris in **1933**, and who had long reduced the head to an egg-like abstraction. But Hepworth extended the form into something more intimate. She wrote that such carvings opened "an infinite variety of continuous curves in the third dimension." She also connected the oval explicitly to birth, eroticism, and what she called "prenatal dreams" — a dimension of meaning Moore never pursued. Seasoned wood was unobtainable during the war, so she used what she could find, the work split, and the plaster cast that followed required forty separate pieces to resolve.

Notes

Cornwall. This small sculpture was produced in 1943 by Barbara Hepworth. She moved to St. Ives, Cornwall with her husband Ben Nicholson and her children just before the Second World War started and her work began to reflect the forms she found along the Cornish coast such as the sweep of the bays and the hollow caves. This was one of the first works she produced after moving to St. Ives and she has started to use the oval rather than the figures, circles and spheres that dominated her earlier work.

Wood. Hepworth originally wanted to make it in wood, but well-seasoned wood was unobtainable during the war and she was concerned it would split. In the event she used wood and it did split. So, she called in a well-known expert in producing plaster casts. At first, he thought it too difficult, but he finally found a solution by casting 40 separate pieces of plaster from which he made two casts. This one was donated by Hepworth to the Tate and the other is in the Barbara Hepworth Museum, St. Ives. Four polished bronzes were cast from the mould the following year.

The Oval. It is an ovoid open in four places to give views of the interior and Hepworth was excited by the possibilities. She said, 'The carving and piercing of such a form seems to open up an infinite variety of continuous curves in the third dimension, changing in accordance with the contours of the original ovoid and with the degree of penetration of the material'. There was some rivalry with other artists such as Naum Gabo who had used similar forms and there was some concern about mutual influence which culminated in a split between Hepworth and Gabo after he accused her of stealing the oval. This seems unlikely as it was used much earlier by Constantin Brâncuși. He used it as an archetypal form derived, in part, from the human head and we know Hepworth saw his work in his Paris studio in 1933.

Women artists. The oval is also related to the shape of an egg, the exemplar of the organic form and Hepworth wrote about how ovals suggested a foetus, eroticism, prenatal dreams and the primitive. The ovoid or egg-shaped form could therefore be associated with childbirth. Her first son was born in 1929 and she had triplets in 1934. She came to see that the female experience extends women as artists. She wrote, 'A woman artist, is not deprived by cooking and having children, nor by nursing children with measles (even in triplicate) - one is in fact nourished by this rich life, provided one always does some work each day; even a single half hour, so that the images grow in one's mind.' It was her misfortune to have her work defined in relation to men close to her: her husbands, John Skeaping and Ben Nicholson, and her

(according to him) sometime lover Henry Moore. She wrote, 'Apart from being a woman, it has not been easy always having great bears breathing down one's neck!' For example, in 1950 her contribution to the Venice Biennale was dogged by comparisons with Moore who had exhibited there two years previously. She was seen by some as his student and a cheaper alternative which was demeaning and demoralising. She used the hole, string and the oval in her work before Moore.

Notes on Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), Oval Sculpture (No. 2), 1943, cast 1958 (Room 2)

Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) is an English artist and sculptor and one of the few internationally significant women artists in the early and mid-twentieth century. She was born in Yorkshire to a middle-class family and won a scholarship to study at Leeds School of Art (1920-21) where she met fellow student Henry Moore (1898-1986). There was a friendly rivalry and Hepworth was the first to sculpt the pierced figures that became the hallmark of both of their works. She won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art (1921-24). She travelled to Italy on another scholarship and married John Skeaping in Florence. They had a son, Paul, in 1929. She became associated with the 'new movement', direct carving, abstraction and precise forms and she joined the London Group and the 7 & 5 Society. In 1931, Hepworth met Ben Nicholson who was then married. He joined her on a holiday to Happisburgh, Norfolk. She divorced Skeaping in March 1933, gave birth to triplets with Nicholson in 1934 and married him in 1938. Hepworth's first 'holed' sculpture, Pierced Form, was carved in 1932 and exhibited in 1934. Henry Moore took up the idea immediately and he called 1932, 'The Year of the Hole'. Her move to abstraction took place in 1932 and 1934 epitomised by the pioneering piercing of the block and experiments in collage, photograms and prints. They visited the Parisian studios of Jean Arp, Constantin Brâncuși, Piet Mondrian, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and joined Abstraction-Création, and were major figures in Paul Nash's Unit One group.

After the war she was in great demand and employed assistants. Hepworth's first public commissions were for the Festival of Britain. Contrapuntal Forms was commissioned by the Arts Council to stand on the South Bank during the Festival. Hepworth carved the two monumental figures in Irish blue limestone with the help of assistants she took on for the first time, Denis Mitchell, John Wells and Terry Frost. In 1953 the Arts Council presented Contrapuntal Forms

to the new town of Harlow in Essex. It is sited at Glebelands in Harlow. She divorced Nicholson in 1951 and visited Greece in 1954 to try to recover from the sudden death of her son in 1953.

Hepworth was a skilled draughtsman and her work includes 80 drawings of surgical procedures and operating rooms after she struck up a friendship with the surgeon Norman Capener in 1944. During World War II she was a leading figure in the St Ives School with Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo and her international standing was confirmed by the Grand Prix of the 1959 São Paulo Biennale, a Whitechapel exhibition and a European tour.

In 1964, she attended the unveiling of *Single Form* at the United Nations in New York, which was commissioned in memory of her friend Dag Hammarskjöld (pronounced 'Hammer-shold'), Secretary General of the United Nations, who was killed in 1961. A second cast was made in 1963, bought by London County Council for 6,000 guineas and installed at Battersea Park in 1964, where it remains on the south shore of the lake. Hepworth served as a Tate trustee (1965-72), donating six works in 1964 and a further nine in 1967. She fought a long battle with cancer but died at home in 1975, aged 72, in a horrific fire.

Hepworth was criticized for lacking Moore's 'tumult' (see Adrian Stokes) but that critic went on to admire her serenity and the way her works 'evade disputations of power or of antagonism'. Her forms appear slow, smooth and subtle. Jeanette Winterson (Tate) describes the hole as a form of focused energy, a 'still point of the turning world' (a quote from T. S. Eliot's poem 'Burnt Norton', one of *The Four Quartets*). The centuries old assumption has been that hard objects are positive and underpin the world and are associated with energy and masculinity and space, the 'hole', is negative and associated with femininity. However, this belief was undermined by quantum mechanics which teaches us that physical objects are largely empty space with particles whose location is uncertain.

Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957) was a Romanian sculptor, painter and photographer who made his career in France. Considered a pioneer of modernism and one of the most influential sculptors of the 20th-century. His *Danaïde* (c.1918, pronounced 'Dan-i-eed') reduces the head to an ovoid.

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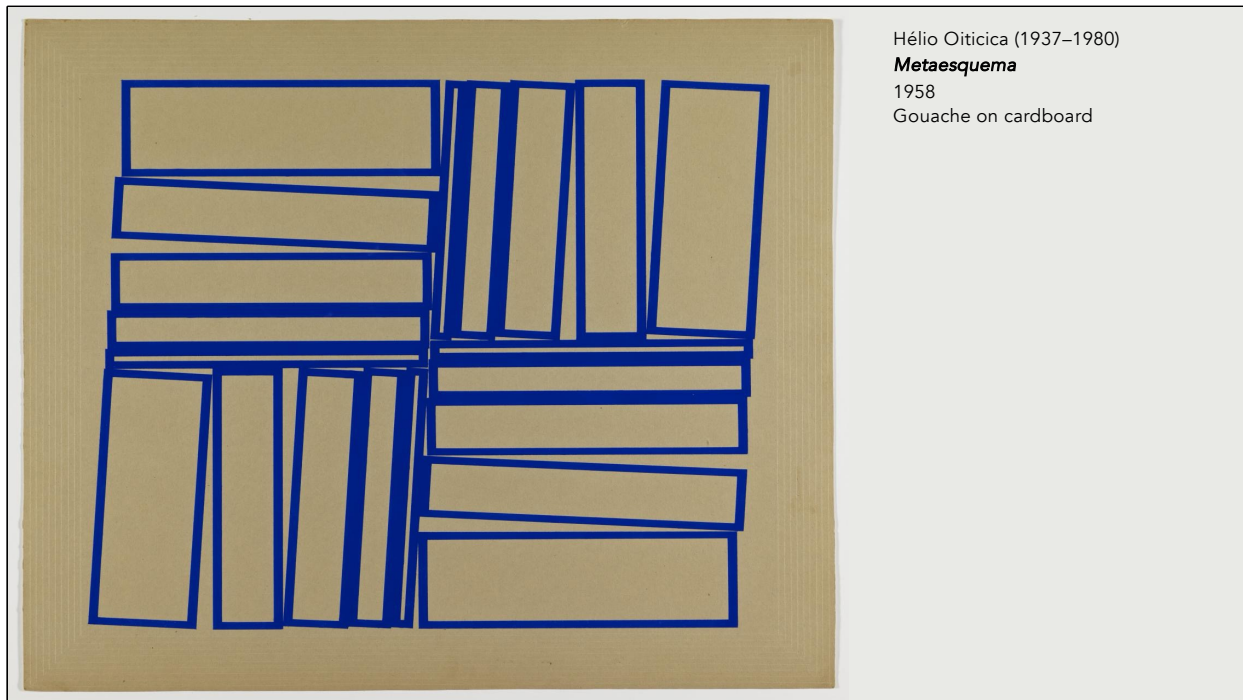
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Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980), *Metaesquema*, 1958

From the carved hollows of Hepworth's St Ives studio, we move to Rio de Janeiro — and to **Hélio Oiticica**. Oiticica was born in 1937 into a family already steeped in radical thought: his grandfather was an anarchist, his father a painter and entomologist. From the age of eighteen he was working within **Grupo Frente**, the Rio-based collective founded by **Ivan Serpa** in 1954, which rejected representation in favour of pure form. This led him to the **Neo-Concrete Movement** of 1958, and to an intense engagement with **Piet Mondrian**. The **Metaesquema** series — all 350 works produced in 1958 — are gouache on cardboard, and they show Oiticica absorbing and then destabilising Mondrian's grid. The rectangles tilt and jostle; Oiticica called them "something in-between, neither painting nor drawing." His **mirror effect** — repeating a rhythmic sequence on both sides of the composition — dissolves the boundary between figure and ground, making the eye unable to settle. This instability is entirely deliberate. By the end of 1958 the rectangles had dissolved into white-on-white paintings, and Oiticica moved toward three dimensions. His **Parangolés** of 1964, coloured drapes worn by samba dancers from the **Mangueira** favela, made colour itself move through a room — painting, finally, liberated from the wall.

Notes

Description. These three works are part of a series of 350 works called

Metaesquema by Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980, pronounced 'ay-lio o-chi-see-ka'), which he produced in 1958. They are all opaque watercolour paint, called gouache, on cardboard. The series are all monochrome, geometric forms, often in primary colours and they were inspired by the abstract art of Piet Mondrian. In the case of this blue painting the flatness of the simple, two-dimensional rectangles is energised by the tilt of some of the shapes, which suggest piles of books on a shelf. Oiticica often introduced elements of instability into his works in contrast to the rigorous order and structure of both European artists. The forms appear to jostle and bump together as though they are moving.

The series. The title of this series, Metaesquema, comes from the Portuguese meaning meta-schema, a higher-level scheme that was used to produce the complete set of paintings. Oiticica considered these works as 'something that lies in-between that is neither painting nor drawing. It is rather an evolution of painting'. Oiticica was seeking, in his own words, to 'escape the constraints of painting while remaining in dialogue with it'. By reducing his work to a series of squares and rectangles in a single colour he creates an interplay between shapes and their background that generates a sense of instability and movement, challenging their two-dimensionality. This is partly achieved using the 'mirror effect'. Whatever rhythmic sequence the artist achieves on one side of the grid he repeats on the other side. This creates a dynamic composition, and a sense of ambivalence as to which are the painted forms (the 'figures') and which are the in-between areas (the 'background'). By the end of 1958, this series evolved into even simpler forms in which the squares and rectangles had been eliminated. A series of white-on-white paintings were the end of this investigations and the beginning of a new series of works by the artist.

Art as play. Oiticica was born in Rio de Janeiro and spent most of his life there. His early work was produced before the military coup [in 1964] but from the age of 27 his artistic life was part of a utopian counterculture that was opposed to the military dictatorship. His aim was to remove the division between high art and popular art by deconstructing the art object. This is demonstrated by Oiticica's work Parangolés (1964-79, pronounced 'par-an-go-lay') which was shown at the Tate in 2007. These brightly coloured forms show the wide variety of his art and the way he broke away from the conventional art object. He had become involved with a famous samba school in [Mangueira] a favela [a shanty town] in Rio and he combined colour,

form and dance in a way that involved the viewer in the action. The word means 'habitable paintings' and it consisted of coloured materials that were worn by visitors in the Turbine Hall who danced to the rhythm of the samba. They are the culmination of Oiticica's exploration of colour and the environment; the dancers wearing the cloth appeared as 'colour-in-motion' to the spectators. His intention was to use his art to bring people together in a collective, playful event that had a mystical element. His interest in dance was a way to liberate our capacity to play.

Notes on Hélio Oiticica, *Metaesquema*, 1958 (Room 2)

Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980) was a Brazilian visual artist, best known for his participation in the Neo-Concrete Movement, for his innovative use of colour, and for what he later termed 'environmental art'. Oiticica was one of the most important exponents of contemporary art in South America. He created multimedia room installations which intertwined social themes, experimental elements, and appropriations from popular culture, film, and music.

There was a military dictatorship in Brazil from 1964 to 1985 and there was censorship and the torture of dissidents.

Throughout his life Oiticica pushed the limits of art. He was born in Rio de Janeiro and spent most of his life there until he died of a stroke caused by hypertension when he was only 43. His father was an entomologist and painter and his grandfather an anarchist. From the age of 18 he was a member of the Neo-Concretist group, Grupo Frente (pronounced 'Frenchy'), that sought to reject realistic and representational art and, in particular, he was influenced by Piet Mondrian. Grupo Frente was founded in 1954 by Ivan Serpa in Rio de Janeiro. There was no single style only a rejection of contemporary Brazilian art. Some of the artists in the group, such as Lygia Clark (whose first name is pronounced the way Americans say 'leisure'), went on to form the influential neo-concrete movement in 1958, which Oiticica joined in 1960. The neo-concrete artists were a splinter group of the concrete art movement and called for greater sensuality, colour and poetic feeling. It was inspired by the new Brazilian capital, by cybernetics and gestalt psychology. Oiticica produced his ground-breaking series of red and yellow painted hanging wood constructions.

Concrete is art that is entirely free from any basis in observed reality and has no symbolic meaning. The term was first used by Theo van Doesburg in his *Manifesto of Concrete Art* (1930). He stated that there was nothing more

concrete or more real than a line, a colour, or a plane (a flat area of colour). Concrete art is very close to constructivism, an art movement founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia in 1913-15. They believed art should be completely abstract but made from industrial materials. It was the technical mastery and organisation of materials. It was suppressed in Russia in the 1920s but brought to the West by Naum Gabo (pronounced 'now-m garbo', he changed his name from Pevsner to avoid confusion with his brother). Gabo knew Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, the de Stijl group and the Bauhaus.

Metaesquema (pronounced 'metaskema') means meta-scheme, i.e. a higher-level scheme or structure that was used to produce the three hundred and fifty individual works.

An unknown amount of Oiticica's work and his correspondence, notes and sketches were lost in a fire in his brother's flat in 2009. The fire was investigated by the Government, but its cause is still unknown.

Oiticica was frustrated with painting and wanted to take colour off the walls of the gallery. In 2007, Tate held a major exhibition Helio Oiticica: The Body of Colour. In the Turbine Hall, Oiticica's Parangolés (habitable paintings, pronounced 'par-an-go-lay') was performed. Visitors dressed in brightly coloured drapes and danced to the rhythm of the samba. This work came out of his involvement with the famous samba school in the Mangueira Hill favela in Rio de Janeiro.

Oiticica's work Tropicália was a series of enclosures that involved the viewer with the work. It gave rise to the Tropicálismo cultural movement that emerged from a liberal period in Brazil's history, a period that was abruptly cut short by a military coup in 1964. Tropicália, Penetrables PN 2 'Purity is a myth' is a reference to Mondrian's hope of understanding reality through pure colour and geometric forms. Oiticica engages the viewer by combining art and lived experience to achieve political change. Tropicália is now on display in the Tate Blavatnik Building.

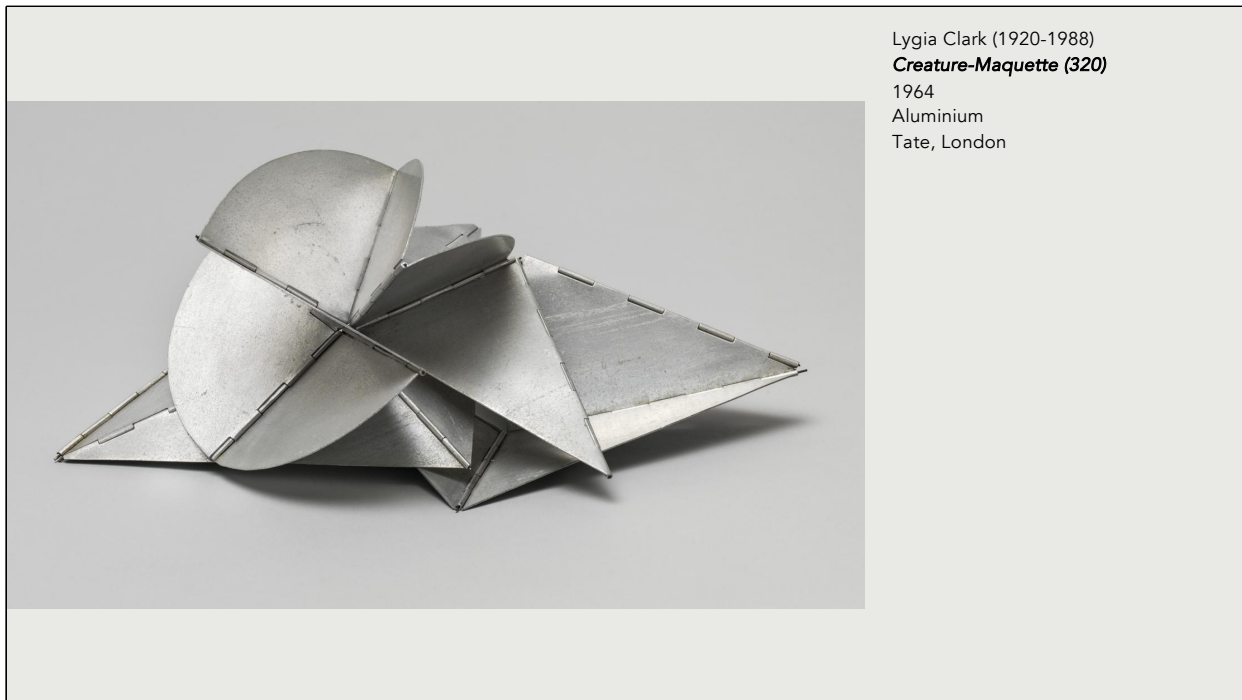
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tropicalia-movement



Lygia Clark (1920-1988)
Creature-Maquette (320)
1964
Aluminium
Tate, London

Lygia Clark (1920-1988), *Creature-Maquette (320)*, 1964, Tate, London

Oiticica was not alone in dismantling the boundary between art object and human body — **Lygia Clark** was working through the same questions, and the two were close allies within the **Neo-Concrete Movement**. Clark was born in Belo Horizonte in 1920, moved to Rio de Janeiro in her late twenties, and later studied in Paris before returning to exhibit across Brazil. The work on this slide is ***Creature-Maquette***, or ***Bicho-Maquette***, made in 1964 — one of a series of hinged aluminium sculptures she called **Bichos**, meaning Creatures. Clark described the hinge as the backbone of each piece: the work is, in her view, essentially organic. But crucially, no single form is fixed. The viewer manipulates the planes by hand, and the sculpture becomes whatever configuration that contact produces. Clark put it plainly: "The Bicho has its own and well-defined cluster of movements which react to the spectator's promptings." After Brazil's **military coup of 1964**, Clark spent years teaching at the Sorbonne in Paris, gradually abandoning the art object altogether. By **1979** she was working directly with psychotic and disturbed patients, using sensory materials — touch, smell, sound — as therapeutic tools. She died in Rio de Janeiro in 1988. The hard, cool aluminium of the Bichos, then, marks the precise pivot between sculpture and something more like clinical care.

Notes

This is a folding aluminium structure called *Creature-Maquette* or *Bicho-*

Maquette by Lygia Clark. From 1959 to the 1960s she made a series of geometric hinged aluminium sculptures which she called Bichos, a Portuguese that means Creatures. She saw these works as essentially organic with the hinge acting as the backbone. She was also interested in the model as an architectural piece and the hinge as a fundamental element between doors and windows. The works were intended to be manipulated by hand to form multiple possible forms determined by the viewer.

Clark was not pushing the boundaries of art but returning art to the people. In 1964, there was a coup d'état in Brazil and the military dictatorship took over. Many artists joined a counterculture movement that grew in response to the government's increasing totalitarian rule. When the military introduced laws that overrode the constitution and legitimized torture many artists fled the country. Clark spent these years in Paris where she taught at the Sorbonne. She abandoned the production of art objects in order to create art that was rooted in the senses. Many of the works were soft objects that could be manipulated by the spectator but here we have hard planes of metal joined by hinges so that the object can be manipulated.

She became increasingly interested in the sensory experience of art including touch, hearing and smell and from 1979 she worked in art therapy and worked with psychotic and disturbed patients. She died of a heart attack at home in Brazil in 1988 aged 68.

Notes on Lygia Clark, 'Creature-Maquette (320)', 1964

Lygia Clark was born in Belo Horizonte the sixth largest city in Brazil in 1920 and she moved to Rio de Janeiro when she was 27 and became an artist.

Later she studied in Paris and exhibited her painting and sculpture in Brazil.

Clark, along with other Brazilian artists such as Hélio Oiticica, formed the neo-concrete movement in Brazil in 1959, and her abstract sculptures of the 1950s and first half of the 1960s, such as this one at Tate, reflect these new concerns while also indicating Clark's transition from her previously more representational work towards abstract spatial arrangements

At Sotheby's in 2014, Clark's aluminium folding sculpture Bicho-Em-Si-Md (No. IV) (1960) was sold for \$1.2 million, doubling its high estimate of \$600,000.



Victor Pasmore (1908-1998)
**Abstract in White, Green, Black,
 Blue, Red, Grey and Pink**
 c. 1963
 Wood, Perspex
 Tate, London

Victor Pasmore (1908-1998), *Abstract in White, Green, Black, Blue, Red, Grey and Pink*, c. 1963, Tate, London

The pivot Clark made — from hinged aluminium to human touch as therapy — finds an unexpected echo in the work of **Victor Pasmore**, another artist for whom handling an object was never incidental, but the whole point.

Pasmore's **Abstract in White, Green, Black, Blue, Red, Grey and Pink**, made around **1963**, consists of twenty-three painted wooden blocks apparently threading through a sheet of **Perspex**, held in place by dowels, with a single black horizontal strip running just below centre. Most blocks are rectangular; one is curved. The Perspex stands in for the canvas — Pasmore's way of insisting that abstract art need not abandon painting's inheritance, only transform it into a fully three-dimensional object in space. He was explicit about why this mattered. In **1961** he wrote that in representational art the spectator is always kept at a distance, but in abstract form, "he must handle, feel, move around and get into the work if he is to fully apprehend the intentions of the artist." **Herbert Read** called Pasmore's turn to abstraction "the most revolutionary event in post-war British art." Pasmore had come from the **Euston Road School** of the **1930s**, trained through figuration, Impressionism, and Post-Impressionism, before arriving — decisively, in **1947** — at pure abstraction.

Notes

Description. This is Victor Pasmore's *Abstract in White, Green, Black, Blue, Red, Grey and Pink* from 1963. It consists of 23 wooden blocks apparently passing through a Perspex sheet. The blocks are arranged asymmetrically, and most are rectangular, but one is curved. The blocks are painted white and their ends are painted in one of the colours mentioned in the title. One long thin wooden strip is painted black and runs horizontally across the sheet just below the centre of the Perspex. The wooden blocks do not actually pierce the Perspex but are held by wooden dowels. The horizontal strip is held in place by hidden nails. Pasmore made many such works between 1951 and 1966. Most were made to hang on the wall, but this is one of a small group made to be seen from all sides. The title conforms to a formula he often used at this time with 'Abstract in' followed by the colours used. There is a consistency in his figurative and abstract art based on geometry and the golden mean (also called the golden section).

Artist. Pasmore started as a figurative painter, one of the most talented of his generation. In the 1930s he briefly experimented with abstract painting but was dissatisfied. From 1947 he pioneered abstract art in Britain and was interested in the way in which abstract art simply represents itself. In 1954 he explained that he worked in relief because abstract works stress their own status as objects whereas representational works refer to other objects. Two-dimensional abstract works can only suggest a third dimension through illusion. Abstract art, like this one, are actually three-dimensional; they are fully fledged objects in space. In 1961, Pasmore added, 'Whereas in representational art the spectator is confined to a point which is always at a distance from the object, in abstract form he must handle, feel, move around and get into the work if he is to fully apprehend the intentions of the artist.' As Pasmore wanted to retain a reference to painting he transforms the canvas into this Perspex sheet. After the Second World War Pasmore taught at Camberwell School of Art and in 1951 he contributed to the Festival of Britain. In the late 1950s the art course he developed while teaching at Durham became the basis for higher art education across the UK. He later began to combine sculpture and architecture and he represented Britain at the 1961 Venice Biennale.

Reputation. He is now little known internationally as he is difficult to pigeon-hole into a single role or style. When Pasmore looked back on his career he said that he felt he had witnessed the 'revolution of Painting ... (when) the naturalist painter has been forced to start completely again'. The art historian

Herbert Read described his abstract art as 'The most revolutionary event in post-war British art'.

Notes on Victor Pasmore, Abstract in White, Green, Black, Blue, Red, Grey and Pink, c. 1963 (Room 2)

Edwin John Victor Pasmore (1908-1998) was a British artist and architect who pioneered abstract art in Britain in the 1940s and 50s. He was born in Surrey and with the death of his father when he was 19 he was forced to take an administrative job while he studied art part-time. He painted in a figurative manner in the style of Turner and Whistler and he was one of the most talented figurative painters of his generation. In the 1930s, he helped found the Euston Road School which emphasized working directly from nature and he was inspired by the work of Walter Sickert. In the Second World War, he was a conscientious objector. He was initially refused and was called up but refused to obey orders and was court martialled and imprisoned. This enabled him to appeal and he was then exempt from military duty. From 1943-49 he taught at Camberwell School of Art and he promoted abstract art. From 1947 he pioneered abstract art in Britain, and he brought about a revival of interest in Constructivism. He was influenced by Ben Nicholson and Herbert Read described his new style as 'The most revolutionary event in post-war British art'. In 1950 he was commissioned to design a mural for a bus depot in Kingston-upon-Thames and in 1951 he contributed a mural to the Festival of Britain. From 1954-61 he developed an art course at Durham inspired by the basic course of the Bauhaus. He began to synthesize sculpture and architecture and his 'Apollo Pavilion' in Peterlee, County Durham proved controversial. He represented Britain at the 1961 Venice Biennale and became a trustee of the Tate.

Victor Pasmore is difficult to pigeonhole. He seemed straightforward but was described as very eccentric and his verbal descriptions of his art people found very difficult to understand. An important figure in British art but virtually unknown internationally. In the late 1940s he went abstract and this was described as one of the great moments in the development of British art. He had worked his way through impressionism and post-impressionism before reaching abstraction. He was very left wing and his utopian ideals led him to seek ideal, abstract forms. He was interested in organic growth and the forces that determine how they grow.

He met Kenneth Clark who was the most important collector of modern art in

Britain. He saw Passmore's inherent talent. Clark helped him become a full-time painter and he was associated with the Euston Road School. A collection of artists who wanted to paint the real world as they found it without their personality introducing. They often used the golden section and Passmore would apply this to his work. A friend said that he discovered late in life he had been using the wrong ratio all his life. This did not upset him and it is typical of Passmore to add a slight twist to an accepted formula, a touch of whimsy.

In the 1950s and 60s his work was often assembled rather than moulded or carved which broke with the tradition established by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth.

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Peter de Francia (1921-2012)
The Execution of Beloyannis
1953-54
124.5 x 307.5 cm



Peter de Francia (1921-2012), *The Execution of Beloyannis*, 1953-54, 124.5 x 307.5 cm

The work on the adjacent wall could hardly be more different in feeling. Where Pasmore dissolved the human figure entirely, **Peter de Francia** plants it at the centre of catastrophe. De Francia's subject is the execution of **Nikos Beloyannis** on **30th March 1952**, shot before dawn alongside seven other men on charges of espionage that many, then and since, have regarded as a pretext for eliminating a popular communist leader. **Jean-Paul Sartre** and **Pablo Picasso** led international protests demanding the sentence be revoked. A photograph of Beloyannis holding a red carnation — pressed into his hand by a supporter — circulated worldwide and gave him the name by which he is still remembered: the man with the red carnation. De Francia's painted response is both brutal and elegiac. Two of the condemned men clasp hands in their final moments; the carnation lies open in Beloyannis's fingers. The painting refuses sentimentality while insisting on solidarity — a distinction that mattered deeply to de Francia, who was born in France in **1921**, trained at the Brussels Academy and the **Slade**, and spent a formative period in post-war Italy absorbing the political commitments of Italian neo-realism. His entire practice was shaped by the conviction that figurative painting could, and should, bear witness to state violence.

Notes

The subject depicted is an infamous event in post-civil-war Greek history. On 30th March 1952, Nikos Beloyannis was executed before dawn along with seven other men, on the dubious charge of espionage involving high treason. International protests over Beloyannis's sentence were led by Jean-Paul Sartre and Picasso, as claims were made that he was being executed simply for being a communist to remove a popular and charismatic potential leader. A picture of Beloyannis holding a red carnation that had been handed to him was reproduced around the world in an attempt to have his sentence revoked and he became known as the 'man with the red carnation'. Peter de Francie's response to this event is both horrifically brutal and tragically beautiful with two of the men clasping hands in their final moments and the carnation resting poignantly between Beloyannis's open fingers.

Born in 1921 in France, Peter de Francia studied at the Brussels Academy and the Slade, and for a brief but formative period lived in post-war Italy.



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
Weeping Woman
1937
Tate, London

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Weeping Woman, 1937, Tate, London

De Francia's witness-bearing through figuration leads us directly to the artist whose shadow falls across this entire room: **Pablo Picasso**. The painting before you is the **Weeping Woman**, completed in **October 1937**, and it begins with an act of violence: **General Franco's** request that German and Italian air forces bomb the Basque town of **Guernica** on market day, **26th April 1937**. An estimated ten thousand people were in the town. Five waves of bombers arrived from half past four in the afternoon; survivors who fled into the fields were strafed from the air. Picasso's response was immediate. He had rarely painted political subjects before, but he now declared, "Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of offensive and defensive war against the enemy." **Guernica** itself now hangs in the **Reina Sofía** in Madrid. This painting is its final, anguished coda — the last in a series of weeping women Picasso produced across that year, all radiating outward from the larger work. Look at what he does to the face. The jagged black lines suggest bone forcing through skin; the handkerchief crushed between her teeth reads less like cloth than splintered glass. The model was **Dora Maar**, photographer, poet, and the person who documented **Guernica's** creation — Picasso called her, with chilling flatness, "always a weeping woman."

Notes

Description. The paintings in this room are all connected with civil wars. This is Pablo Picasso's Weeping Woman, one of the most famous paintings in the Tate. I would like to start by asking you how it makes you feel? Despair? Sadness? Misery? Many people still find it upsetting. Picasso's distortion of her face accentuates the pain and anguish. The jagged black lines seem to be revealing the bones underneath the skin and the handkerchief she stuffs in her mouth could be a shard of glass. Picasso uses slightly repellent, acidic colours that make us feel uncomfortable and, to me, her clothing looks like the black mouths of hell we find in medieval religious paintings. Her eyes have even left their sockets in horror at what she has seen and float in little boats.

Guernica. But what has she seen and why is she weeping? The clue is the year it was painted, 1937. It was the year after the Spanish Civil War started. Picasso had just heard that General Franco had asked the German and Italian air forces to bomb the quiet Basque town of Guernica in northern Spain on market day. There were about 10,000 people in the town which was destroyed by the bombing. Later women and children were machine gunned as they tried to run away. If you look closely at her pupils, they are an odd shape and some think they show a reflection of the German bombers.

Can art change the world? Before the bombing Picasso rarely painted in response to political events but once he heard the news he responded by painting Guernica, now in the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid. He wrote, 'Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It is an instrument for offensive and defensive war against the enemy.'

Weeping women. After finishing Guernica, Picasso became obsessed with images of weeping women as a symbol of suffering Spain, of which this is the last and the most famous. The weeping Virgin has always been a traditional image in Spanish art. The model for the painting was his lover Dora Maar who was a gifted photographer, poet and artist who helped Picasso paint parts of Guernica. Picasso said 'Dora, for me, was always a weeping woman...And it's important, because women are suffering machines'. I am reminded of a line from a Victorian poem [by the poet, Charles Kingsley], 'For men must work, and women must weep'. Both sentiments express a particular Victorian attitude—that women are emotional creatures whose role is in the home—and this reflects another way 'art can change the world', by reinforcing stereotypes.

Is there hope? One puzzle presented by this weeping woman is whether

Picasso intended there to be any sign of hope. The ear, for example, is represented by a tiny bird, possibly a symbol of hope and the flower on her hat could be another indication of a hopeful future. However, I think it is more likely that she is wearing a hat because it is market day and she wants to look her best, making the image even more poignant and hopeless.

Donations. When the dealer Roland Penrose (on 9-10 November 1937) first saw it he was so keen to acquire it that he agreed the price immediately and rushed down the street with it while it was still wet in case Picasso changed his mind. Penrose kept it all his life and gave it to his son who donated it to the Tate. The Tate still depends on donations both large and small, even buying a cup of coffee helps us.

Background Notes Pablo Picasso, Weeping Woman, 1937

Pablo Ruiz y Picasso (Málaga 25 Oct 1881 - April 1973). First trip to Paris in 1900. His friend Carlos Casagemas (1881-1901) shot himself after failing to kill Germaine, the girl he loved. Blue Period (1901–1904), Rose Period (1904–1906), African-influenced Period (1907–1909), Analytic Cubism (1909–1912), and Synthetic Cubism or Crystal Period (1912–1919). Picasso met Fernande Olivier, a bohemian artist who became his mistress, in Paris in 1904. Picasso left Olivier for the frail and enigmatic Eva Gouel, who called herself Marcelle Humbert when she arrived in Paris, and he was devastated when she died of tuberculosis or cancer in 1915 aged 30. After the loss of Eva Gouel, Picasso had an affair with Gaby Depeyre (later Lespinasse) and, in 1918, he married the respectable and elitist Ukrainian ballet dancer Olga Khokhlova and they had a child Paulo. In 1927 Picasso met 17-year-old Marie-Thérèse Walter and began a long affair and fathered a daughter Maya. To avoid splitting his estate he never divorced and was married to Khokhlova until her death in 1955. In the 1930s and 40s the artist Dora Maar (born Theodora Marković) was a constant companion and lover and she documented Guernica. In 1944, aged 63, he began an affair with Françoise Gilot aged 23. Dora Maar famously said, 'After Picasso, only God' and when he left her in 1946 she became a Roman Catholic. Their split was painful and Picasso found ways to inflict pain but she outlived Picasso and continued to paint into the 1990s and was still exhibiting two years before she died aged 89. When Picasso grew tired of Dora Maar he and Gilot began to live together. They had two children: Claude, born in 1947 and Paloma, born in 1949. She described his abusive treatment and many affairs including Geneviève Laporte. He met Jacqueline Roque in 1953 and she became his second wife in 1961 until 1973

when she killed herself by gunshot aged 59. He created over 400 portraits of her, more than any of his other loves.

In 1937, Picasso was working on an assignment to produce a work for the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition (June 1937). On April 26 1937 during the Spanish Civil War General Franco asked the Italian and German air forces to bomb the peaceful Basque town of Guernica. Guernica was revered as Basque's Holy City and guardian of liberty and democracy. It was Monday which was market day and there were an estimated 10,000 people in the small town. Official Basque figures say 1,654 people were killed although German air force figures put the number at 300. Reports of the damage vary but this photograph from the German Federal Archives shows the total destruction that took place. The number of deaths is now estimated to be between 170 and 300 people. There were five waves of 21 German and 3 Italian bombers from 16:30 to 18:30 followed by 29 planes that bombed from 18:00 to 18:45 and strafed civilians in the fields fleeing the town.

Dora Maar was his tragic muse. She couldn't have children, and they had many rows. She was often depressed and had to have electro-convulsive treatment. She was however a photographer, poet and artist who assisted Picasso with Guernica and she was the official photographer who recorded its production.

There are 9 paintings, 21 drawings and 6 small drawings on matchboxes of single female heads expressing anguish produced by Picasso between May and the end of October 1937 but the Tate's version is the last and the most famous.

Picasso's mother wrote to him from Barcelona telling him of the burning of a local convent which had produced acrid, eye-watering smoke. The weeping Virgin (Mater Dolorosa), a traditional image in Spanish art, is often represented in sculptures with glass tears, like the one that flows towards this woman's right ear. 'The Weeping Woman' (La Llorona) is a legendary ghost in the folklore of Hispanic America. According to this tradition, she is the ghost of a woman who lost her children and cries while looking for them by the river, often causing misfortune to those who hear her.

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catalogue-entry



André Fougeron (1913-1998)
Martyred Spain
 1937

André Fougeron (1913-1998), Martyred Spain, 1937

The Weeping Woman's anguish finds a direct echo in the painting now before you, produced in the same extraordinary year of **1937: André Fougeron's *Martyred Spain***. Fougeron came to painting without formal training — he had studied political science and worked as a metallurgist at a Renault factory — and this rawness is visible in the work. A prone, faceless female figure lies raped and abandoned; beside her, a **green horse** with buckled limbs and a decayed head collapses into the same earth, its form dissolving into the landscape of Spain itself. The horse's black and white hoof is positioned deliberately over the woman's sex, binding the title's word "martyred" to an act of sexual violence. Fougeron revised the composition five times, each time adjusting that hoof until the connection was unmistakable. The painting made his debut at the **Salon of Independants in Paris**, and declared his allegiance unambiguously. He was part of the younger generation committed to **Socialist Realism**, recently designated the official style of the **International Communist Party**. He may well have visited the Spanish Pavilion and seen **Guernica** that same summer, revising his canvas in response. As **Barnet Newman** observed caustically, artists are treated "not as original thinkers" but as "instinctive, intuitive executants" — a condescension Fougeron spent his career refusing.

Notes

Description. This is André Fougeron's *Martyred Spain* and shows a raped female body alongside a dead horse whose hoof is in front of her vagina. This is one of the paintings with which he made his debut at the Salon of Independents in Paris in 1937. This painting positioned him on the political left in the Spanish Civil War. The horse and the woman embody Spain. The green horse takes on the form of the landscape into which the faceless and prone woman is plunged. The horse has buckled limbs and a decayed head suggesting a grim struggle. The horse's black and white hoof covers and points to the woman's sex and links the title 'martyred' with the woman's rape. The painting went through five revisions when he changed the position of the horse's hoof to clarify the link.

Background. The painting was produced at the same time as *Guernica* and Fougeron may have visited the Spanish Pavilion and revised his work afterwards. Fougeron was a political science student with no artistic training and this is an early painting when he was just learning to express himself artistically. He was one of the younger generation committed to Socialist Realism recently declared the official style of the International Communist Party.

Picasso. After the war Fougeron became the official Communist Party artist. In 1953 he exhibited *Transatlantic Civilization*, a caricature of the Americanisation of Europe which was then a major target of Communist Party propaganda. However, he became embroiled in internal Party struggles and with Joseph Stalin's death the same year he lost the internal battles and the Communist Party decided to support the more famous Communist, Pablo Picasso.

Notes

André Fougeron (1913-1998) was born to a working-class family and was trained as a metallurgist at a Renault factory. Like many left-wing intellectual Fougeron welcomed the 'Maison de la Culture' which was founded after the riots of February 1934 and whose aim was to make art accessible to the people. His work at this time was influenced by Andre Masson, German expressionism and Pablo Picasso. He joined the Communist Party and during the war printed clandestine journals criticizing Hitler and the concentration camps.

After the war Fougeron became the official Communist Party artist. In 1953, he exhibited *Transatlantic Civilization*, a massive canvas exhibited only once

at the Salon d'Automne which marked both his apotheosis and downfall. The Communist Party realized that Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger were its keys to intellectual acceptance and Fougeron tumbled from grace. The painting is dominated by an electric chair used to execute the Soviet spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. A dialogue between left and right, male and female, good and evil, joy and despair, new life and death revolves around a blue American car. Fougeron specifically tries to connect American capitalism and the Nazi occupation of France. In the background the American NATO building in Paris is plastered with recruitment posters for the Korean war; French mothers mourn their dead babies, children play in polluted fields, pensioners sit on a bench after being evicted while an American soldier lounges reading a salacious magazine.

Pablo Picasso joined the French Communist Party in 1944 and never left. Artists, such as Fougeron and Picasso, are rarely seen as having a valid political viewpoint. As Barnett Newman, the anarchist and abstract expressionist, noted caustically, 'The artist is approached not as an original thinker in his own medium but, rather, as an instinctive, intuitive executant, who, largely unaware of what he is doing, breaks through the mystery by the magic of his performance to "express" truths the professionals think they can read better than he can himself.'

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Malangatana Ngwenya (1936–2011)
Untitled
1967
Oil on hardboard
109.5 x 190.2 cm
Tate, London

Malangatana Ngwenya (1936–2011), *Untitled*, 1967, 109.5 x 190.2 cm, Tate, London

Fougeron's commitment to political art as direct witness finds a powerful parallel in the work now before you — **Malangatana Ngwenya's** **Untitled**, painted in **1967** in **Mozambique**. Malangatana, as he signed his canvases, came to painting through remarkable determination. He left his village at twelve to work as a ball boy at a tennis club in Lourenço Marques, taking night classes and finding early supporters among the club's members. He first exhibited publicly in **1959** and held his debut solo show just two years later. By **1964** he had joined **FRELIMO**, the communist guerrilla movement fighting Portuguese colonial rule, and was subsequently imprisoned by the Portuguese secret police for eighteen months. This painting was made almost immediately after his release. The canvas is dense and unrelenting. Writhing figures fill every inch of the surface, outlined thickly in black and painted in fierce, jarring colour. Sharp white teeth and claw-like hands dissolve the boundary between individual bodies, creating a single mass of suffering. The effect is not symbolic in any detached sense — it is visceral testimony. These are the violences endured by ordinary Mozambicans under colonial occupation. **Mozambican independence** came in **1974**, and with it Malangatana's role shifted toward statecraft; the paintings grew fewer, the later palette cooler, the subject matter quieter — but this canvas holds the full heat of the struggle.

Notes

This work is by Malangatana Ngwenya and is called 'Untitled'. It was produced in 1967 shortly after he had been released from prison after being arrested as a member of FRELIMO, a communist liberation movement. He is usually known as Malangatana, the name he uses to sign his pictures.

In this painting the whole surface is covered with writhing figures outlined in black and painted in bright colours. Many of the figures have sharp white teeth and claw-like hands and they merge into one another. Most of Malangatana's paintings from this period depict the concerns and struggles of ordinary people and the violence and barbarities they endured when his native Mozambique struggled for independence from Portugal.

At the time he was a well-known artist in Mozambique and his work was political during the struggle leading up to independence in 1974 and during the civil war of 1977 to 1992.

Four years after painting this work he was awarded a grant by the Gulbenkian Foundation to study in Portugal. He continued to depict the tragic consequences of war – violence, hunger and death – and produced many works that were frequently exhibited. After independence in 1974 he became politically active and produced fewer artworks. After the civil war in 1992 he started to produce landscapes and work with a cooler palette.

Notes

Malangatana Valente Ngwenya (6 June 1936 – 5 January 2011) was a Mozambican painter and poet. He frequently exhibited work under his first name alone, as Malangatana.

He went to mission school and helped his mother on the farm. When he was 12 he went to the city and got a job as a ball boy for a tennis club. He took night classes and developed an interest in art and was assisted by members of the tennis club. He first exhibited publicly in 1959 aged 23 and his first solo exhibition was two years later. In 1964 he joined a guerrilla movement called FRELIMO and was subsequently jailed by the Portuguese secret police for 18 months. He was given a grant to study engraving and ceramics in Portugal and was exhibited in Lisbon. After independence in 1974 FRELIMO became the single-party communist organization that ruled the country. After 1981 he worked full time as an artist and exhibited internationally. He was a founder of

the Mozambican Peace Movement and in 1997 he was named a UNESCO Artist for Peace. He died in 2011 aged 74 following a long illness.

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David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974)
Cosmos and Disaster
1936
Cellulose car paint mixed with sand
on copper mesh, with embedded
wood splinters

David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), *Cosmos and Disaster*, 1936

From the heat of colonial Mozambique, we move to another artist whose work fused radical politics with radical technique — **David Alfaro Siqueiros**, and his painting ***Cosmos and Disaster***, made in **1936**. Siqueiros was a Mexican muralist and committed Marxist-Leninist, and along with **Diego Rivera** he defined what became known as **Mexican Muralism** — state-sponsored, deliberately propagandising, painted on a monumental scale for a mass public. The two men were fierce rivals: Rivera aligned with Trotsky, Siqueiros with Stalin, and their political antagonism ran as deep as their artistic partnership. This painting was made in New York, at Siqueiros's **Experimental Workshop**, which a young **Jackson Pollock** visited regularly. Siqueiros believed revolutionary art demanded revolutionary materials. He used fast-drying cellulose car paint mixed with sand, applied to fine copper mesh rather than canvas. He rejected brushes entirely, working instead with an airbrush, dripping paint, pouring thinner onto the flat surface and swirling it by hand. He fixed stencils to produce the thin triangular forms; the red drop was likely released from a stick. Pollock absorbed all of this, and the **drip technique** that defines his work from **1947** onward owes a direct debt to Siqueiros. The result is a dark, syrupy surface — apocalyptic in mood, and entirely appropriate. In early **1937**, Siqueiros left for Spain to fight Franco with the International Brigades.

Notes

The artist. This is *Cosmos and Disaster* by David Siqueiros and it was produced in New York as a comment on the Spanish Civil War. He was a revolutionary Mexican artist and activist in the first half of the twentieth century. With Diego Rivera he was one of the leading muralists. The murals they produced were sponsored by the Mexican government and were deliberately propagandising. There was political and artistic rivalry between the Trotskyist Rivera and the Stalinist Siqueiros.

Description. Siqueiros was a radical Marxist who believed revolutionary art should use revolutionary materials and so this picture is painted with fast drying cellulose car paint mixed with sand and painted on fine copper mesh because of the weight. The mesh and the grit are clearly visible as are the splinters of wood he embedded in the paint surface. He avoided paintbrushes and used an airbrush and dripped paint. This results in a syrupy surface with complex suggestions and allusions. He would also put the painting flat on the ground and pour thinner on the paint which he then swirled around, a technique we see used on the left. The thin triangles were produced by spraying paint after fixing stencils to the surface. The red drop was probably produced by dropping red paint from a stick. All these techniques were being used to fulfil his political purpose.

Influenced Pollock. The painting was produced in New York in his Experimental Workshop which was regularly visited by Jackson Pollock. Some say that it was Siqueiros that introduced Pollock to the idea of drip painting. Siqueiros also pioneered the use of spray painting which inspired many later graffiti artists.

Went to fight. *Cosmos and Disaster* has a rich, dark quality appropriate to its apocalyptic vision which reflects the artist's response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War that year. Its near abstraction adds to the horror and despair. The glued-on wood in the foreground conveys the picture of a shattered world. It is possible that photographs of First World War trenches were a point of reference. The following year, in early 1937, Siqueiros volunteered for the International Brigade fighting Franco in Spain.

Notes

David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974, pronounced 'si-care-os') was a revolutionary Mexican artist and activist best known for his large murals.

Along with Diego Rivera (1886-1957) he established 'Mexican Muralism'. He was a Marxist-Leninist in support of the Soviet Union and a member of the Mexican Communist Party who participated in an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Leon Trotsky in May 1940.

Like Picasso he adopted his mother's name and he was born José and changed it to David when his first wife used it to compare him to Michelangelo's David.

He travelled to New York in 1936 and has been credited with teaching drip and pour techniques to Pollock that later resulted in his "all over" paintings, made from 1947 to 1950, and which constitute Pollock's greatest achievement.

The Mexican Revolution lasted from 1910 to 1929 and in that year the National Revolutionary Party took power. This one party ruled the country through the 'Mexican Miracle' (1940-1980), the 1982 crisis and economic collapse and the total economic collapse in 1994 when Mexico had to be rescued by Bill Clinton.

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Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965)
Bird in Hand
 2006
 oil paint, ink, paper, polymer, salt
 and gold leaf on canvas
 238.3 x 307.2 cm

Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965), *Bird in Hand*, 2006, 238.3 x 307.2 cm

From the politically charged surfaces of Siqueiros, we turn to an artist equally preoccupied with history's violence — **Ellen Gallagher**, and her painting **Bird in Hand**. Gallagher was born in **1965** in Rhode Island, to a West African father and an Irish Catholic mother. She trained in the United States and now divides her time between New York and Rotterdam. She describes her method, with characteristic wit, as "the airplane-model school of painting" — layering, drawing, carving, and scratching to build a richly tactile surface. At the centre of **Bird in Hand** stands **Pegleg**, a recurring figure in Gallagher's work — a black sailor or pirate, masked, one-eyed, surrounded by swirling seaweed-like forms that place him unmistakably beneath the ocean. This undersea world is **Drexciya**, a mythology developed by the Detroit electronic duo of the same name, who imagined it as a submarine nation populated by the unborn children of pregnant African women thrown from **Middle Passage** slave ships — babies who had adapted to breathe underwater in their mothers' wombs. Gallagher describes the work as "an origin myth of sorts, with a kind of evil doctor, perhaps related to Doctor Moreau or Frankenstein, at its centre." Pegleg grips a dark emerald parrot — caught, she explains, just a little too tightly.

Notes

This is *Bird in Hand* by Ellen Gallagher, an African American artist who has

had a long-standing interest in the slave trade. The figure in the centre is a black sailor or pirate with a peg-leg and a mass of swirling hair. His face is partially obscured by a mask, and one eye is covered. The swirling shapes around the figure look like seaweed and suggest the figure is under the sea, in Davy Jones's locker. Many of Gallagher's work invoke an undersea Black Atlantis populated by mythical creatures who are the descendants of drowned black slaves. The undersea world is called Drexciya, the name of an American electronic music duo who revealed that Drexciya was an underwater country populated by the unborn children of pregnant African women who were thrown off slave ships; the babies had adapted to breathe underwater in their mothers' wombs. Gallagher describes the pirate as Pegleg, a character she has used in other works, that reminds her of Captain Ahab in Moby Dick, and which to her 'implies travel and worldliness'.

The title Bird in Hand refers to the proverb 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' and the pirate holds a dark emerald-green parrot. Gallagher explained 'The bird has just been caught, its expression felt in the plasticine eye closed in that way birds do when you hold them a bit too tightly'.

Many slaves drowned during the part of the Triangular Trade known as the Middle Passage. Goods would be transported from Europe to Africa to be exchanged for slaves who were taken to the Caribbean, the Middle Passage. From there sugar and rum would be taken to Europe to be sold. Slaves were crowded onto ships and many died during the voyage. One foot of space was allowed for each slave and there were no toilets. If a slave fell ill, which many did because of the insanitary conditions, they were often thrown overboard so the company could claim compensation on their insurance policy.

She has written about this piece 'I think of this painting as an origin myth of sorts, with a kind of evil doctor, perhaps related to Doctor Moreau or Frankenstein, at its centre'.

Gallagher was born in Rhode Island and trained in the US and now lives and works in New York and Rotterdam.

Notes

Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965) is an African American artist who was born in Rhode Island. Her father was of West African heritage and her mother Irish Catholic. She studied in Ohio and Kentucky before earning a degree in fine arts in Boston. She has been influenced by the paintings of Agnes Martin and the

writing of Gertrude Stein. Some of her works involves modifying advertising found in magazines aimed at African Americans such as Ebony, Our World and Sepia. The artwork Deluxe (2004-5) is a grid of 60 prints from these magazines. She also uses signs, symbols and codes related to race and she often places these on grids to highlight the restraints society imposes by the use of racial stereotypes. She sometimes depicts an undersea world, a Black Atlantis, populated with mythical creatures who are the descendants of drowned slaves. She exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2003 and lives and works in New York and Rotterdam. She describes her art jokingly as 'the airplane-model school of painting' as she layers, draws, paints, carves and scratches to create a tactile 3D surface.

The Middle Passage was the second leg of the triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. It involved tightly packing captured Africans in ships that crossed the Atlantic on a three-month voyage. It is estimated about two million Africans died on the journey, about 15-20% of the total. In addition, about 40% of the captured Africans died while being transported across land in African. About 10.5 million slaves were transported, from 1440-1640 Portugal had a near monopoly and during the 18th century about 6 million slaves were transported, about 2.5 million by British slavers. Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1807 and slavery in 1833.

'Davy Jones's Locker' could be a corruption of 'duppy', a ghost or spirit among West Indian negroes and the Bible prophet Jonah who was thrown into the sea. A locker is a seaman's term for private storage.

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Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953)

From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried

1995–96

34 chromogenic colour prints framed with etched glass

28 elements: 67.9 x 55.8 cm, 4

elements: 55.8 x 67.9 cm, 2

elements: 110.4 x 85 cm

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, 1995–96, 28 elements: 67.9 x 55.8 cm, 4 elements: 55.8 x 67.9 cm, 2 elements: 110.4 x 85 cm

Where Gallagher mythologises the trauma of the Middle Passage through invented underwater worlds, **Carrie Mae Weems** confronts it head-on, using the archive itself as her medium. ***From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried***, made between **1995** and **1996**, consists of thirty-four photographs selected by Weems from historical archives, covering images taken between **1850** and **1950**. She rephotographed the originals, enlarged them, tinted them a deep red, and had text etched directly onto the framing glass — transforming documents of record into something lyrical and accusatory at once. The sequence opens and closes with a portrait of the wife of a **Mangbetu** chief, photographed in the **1920s** in the **Belgian Congo** — a region synonymous with what contemporaries called the Congo Horrors under **King Leopold II**, atrocities that cost an estimated ten million lives. Within the sequence, African Americans appear in servile roles, as subjects of pseudo-scientific scrutiny, and as sexual objects. Weems wrote that "black folks operate under a cloud of invisibility — this too is part of the work, is indeed central to my photographs." She was born in **Oregon** in **1953**, and from her earliest work — a documentary series on a black family migrating from South to North — she said she had been interested in "the idea of power and the consequences of power."

Notes

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, 1995-96

34 chromogenic colour prints framed with etched glass, 28 elements: 67.9 x 55.8 cm, 4 elements: 55.8 x 67.9 cm, 2 elements: 110.4 x 85 cm, sold at Christies in 2011 for \$206,500, the Christies work is number two from an edition of two

Introduction. This first photograph contains the first part of the title of the piece, 'From Here I Saw What Happened' and the other version completes the title with 'And I Cried'. The images were selected from archives by the artist Carrie Mae Weems and were taken between 1850 and 1950. The sequence begins and ends with this image of the wife of a Mangbetu chief taken in the 1920s in the Belgian Congo. The Mangbetu were known for their art and music and the Belgian Congo is known for what were called at the time the 'Congo Horrors'. These horrors included hacking off the hands of victims. It is estimated that 10 million Africans died in the Congo many from human rights abuses.

The Artist. The artist is Carrie Mae Weems an American artist who has worked with fabric, digital images and video but is best known for her photography. She has been displayed in over 50 exhibitions internationally and her primary focus is the status and place of African-Americans in America although she has recently expanded her activities to include other socially excluded groups. She was born in Oregon and moved to San Francisco as a teenager to study dance. She was given a camera for her 21st birthday and this was a turning point in her life. She graduated in art when she was 28 and within two years she had completed and exhibited her first collection. This told the story of a black family moving from the South to the North of America. She said, '... from the very beginning, I've been interested in the idea of power and the consequences of power'.

To produce these images, she rephotographed the originals, enlarged them and tinted them red. They were then mounted and the text you see was etched on the glass. We see African Americans in servile roles, including being used as sexual objects, being used as evidence to back up pseudo-scientific theories and as stereotypes from novels. (Walk over to the

photograph of the lashed back) In this case Weems has included a photograph of the back of a man who has been brutally whipped. This is a slave called Peter Gordon or 'Whipped Peter' who escaped from a Louisiana plantation in 1863 to the North where this photograph was taken. On the forty-mile journey he used onions to hide his scent from the bloodhounds tracking him. This photograph was seen to make the case against slavery in a powerful way and so was distributed across the United States and internationally and it appeared in Harper's Weekly the most widely read journal during the American Civil War. Gordon joined the Unionist army and was captured by the Confederates who tied him up, beat him and left him for dead. He survived and escaped back to the Union lines again.

Weems is using these photographs to bring the history of African-Americans into the open, she wrote, 'It's fair to say that black folks operate under a cloud of invisibility - this too is part of the work, is indeed central to [my photographs] ... This invisibility - this erasure out of the complex history of our life and time - is the greatest source of my longing.'

Notes

The Belgian Congo was ruled by King Leopold II of Belgium and the atrocities were committed by Africans and sadistic white administrators. Some people put the population fall as high as 15 million although most Africans died from disease and famine.

The Tate Americas Foundation is an independent charity formed in 1987 to purchase works from North and South America to donate to the Tate. Since it opened offices in New York in 1999 it has raised over \$100 million.

Gordon escaped in March 1863 from the 3,000-acre plantation of John and Bridget Lyons, who owned him and nearly forty other slaves at the time of the 1860 census.

She works with Rick Lowe, Mark Bradford and Theaster Gates. She had her hair done in Mark Bradford's mother's hair salon. They are all buying entire blocks and transforming them for the community. She said, 'art actually does have the power to transform your life.' In the talk 'Carrie Mae Weems—Can an artist inspire social change?'

The poem "Black and Tanned Your Whipped Wind of Change Howled Low Blowing Itself - Ha - Smack into the Middle of Duke Ellington's Orchestra Billie Heard It Too & Cried Strange Fruit Tears" refers to Billie Holiday's song

'Strange Fruit' which concerns the victims of lynching in the American South.

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Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)
Lightning with Stag in its Glare
 1958-85

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), *Lightning with Stag in its Glare*, 1958-85

From Weems's confrontation with human history through photography, we turn to an artist who used sculpture, performance, and myth to diagnose what he saw as society's deepest wound: its estrangement from nature. **Joseph Beuys**, born in Germany in **1921**, created **Lightning with Stag in its Glare** across a long gestation running from **1958 to 1985**. The work fills a room with distinct presences: a massive bronze form cast from a clay mound — the lightning strike itself — suspended from a girder and barely touching the floor; an aluminium structure originally an ironing board, now the stag, gleaming as if caught in a sudden flash; a cart standing in for a goat, one of humanity's oldest domesticated companions; and lumps of bronze representing primordial, worm-like creatures at the threshold of life. To the far left stands **Boothia Felix**, a mound of earth on a tripod topped with a compass, named after the peninsula where **James Ross** charted **magnetic north in 1831** — another invocation of the earth's invisible energies. Beuys said that objects were not his concern: "I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it." The stag carried particular weight for him — drawn from shamanism and Christian iconography alike — as a guide appearing, in his own words, "in times of distress and danger," bringing "the warm positive element of life."

Notes

Description. This is called Lightning with Stag in its Glare by Joseph Beuys. The title is slightly misleading as it suggests we should find a realistic stag with antlers lit by a bolt of lightning. However, objects were not important to Beuys who wanted to represent the elemental forces of nature and our relationship to them. The large bronze object at the back is the lightning strike and, like lightning, it is powerful and potentially dangerous. The lightning is an elemental force and illuminates a group of creatures. The stag is the silver object which was originally made from an ironing board, but Beuys remade it using cast aluminium to suggest the glare. Since childhood, Beuys had been interested in northern European folklore, in which certain animals are endowed with mystical power. The stag had particular significance for him as a spiritual guide that appears in times of distress and danger. Its annual shedding and regrowth of its antlers made it a symbol of rebirth and renewal. The cart represents a humble goat, one of the first animals to be domesticated and the lumps of bronze on the floor are primordial, blind worm-like creatures. The box with a small compass on top is mounted on a tripod and is called 'Boothia Felix'. This is the northern most part of Canada as was named after Felix Booth and was the location of magnetic north – another reference, with the lightning flash itself, to the natural energies of the earth

Meaning. To understand Beuys work it is necessary to know more about Beuys. He said that 'Everybody is an artist' and what he meant was that the way we choose to live our lives is our artistic statement. He felt that all art is intrinsically revolutionary, and he wrote 'The revolution is us'. If we could pay attention to our relationship with nature, then it would transform society. Our lives all depend on vast forces of nature that are completely outside our control. If a tsunami hits our shores, or an earthquake destroys our buildings or a volcano erupts then we are powerless to control or resist it.

History of this work. In 1982, Beuys took part in an exhibition in Berlin, where he installed a huge mound of clay and surrounded it with sculptures as well as furniture and tools from his studio. Afterwards he made casts of some of the elements to create Lightning with Stag in its Glare 1958-85. The bolt of lightning itself was a bronze cast from a section of the clay mound, while the stag was cast in aluminium as if illuminated by a sudden flash of light. Made towards the end of Beuys's life, this major installation could be a scene from a primordial jungle or a nightmare future world. It addresses themes of finality and death, but also ideas of regeneration and the transformative power of

nature.

Influence. Beuys is now regarded as one of the most influential artists of the second half of the twentieth century. He was one of the founders of the Green Party in Germany and he wants us to appreciate the interconnectedness between all life forms and so create a path towards an ecologically sustainable future. He founded the Organization for Direct Democracy which believes that all political decision should take place using referendums.

Notes

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986, pronounced like 'Boyce') was born in Germany in 1921 and so his teenage years were overshadowed by the rise of the National Socialist Party and Hitler youth. According to Beuys, when the Nazis burned books in his schoolyard he rescued Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*. In 1941 Beuys volunteered for the Luftwaffe as a radio operator and he later became a rear gunner and was shot down over the Crimea. This became a defining moment in his life as he claimed he almost died and was saved by the nomadic Tartars who covered him in fat and wrapped him in felt. Some people claim that although the pilot died shortly after the crash, Beuys was conscious, recovered by a German search team, and there were no Tatars in the village at that time. Nevertheless, the incident was traumatic for Beuys and was a defining moment in his life.

After the war he had a nervous breakdown and dedicated his life to healing society as he had been healed. He turned himself into a work of art and was one of the earliest performance artists. He always wore blue jeans, a white shirt, a fishing vest covered in useful pockets and a felt trilby hat from Lock & Co of St James to insulate the two metal plates in his skull from extremes of temperature.

From 1947 to 1951 he studied at the Düsseldorf Academy and was interested in Rudolf Steiner, Christianity, mythology, botany and zoology. This led him to evolve a rich and complex symbolism, including archetypal animal images of hares, sheep, swans, and bees. His first one-man exhibition was at the Städtisches Museum, Kleve in 1961. He moved from Kleve to Düsseldorf in 1961 and became professor of sculpture at Düsseldorf Academy. He participated in the Fluxus movement from 1962 and started in 1963 to give action-performances using such elements as dead hares, fat and felt. A conflict developed over his teaching methods and he was dismissed in 1972 leading to student strikes and widespread protests. Beuys said, 'teaching is

my greatest work of art' and 'Objects aren't very important any more. I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it'.

Beuys was a member of Fluxus, an international network of artists, composers and designers in the 1960s. It was anti-commercial and anti-art and was influenced by John Cage. Cage said that the process of creating was more important than the finished product. Another important influence was Marcel Duchamp, a French artist who was active within Dada and whose 'ready-mades' influenced Fluxus.

Beuys first public performance in 1965 was 'How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare'. He spent three hours explaining his art to a dead hare that he carried round the exhibition. Beuys wrote, 'everyone consciously or unconsciously recognizes the problem of explaining things, particularly where art and creative work are concerned ... even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality. The problem lies in the word "understanding" and its many levels which cannot be restricted to rational analysis. Imagination, inspiration, and longing all lead people to sense that these other levels also play a part in understanding ... my technique has been to try and seek out the energy points in the human power field, rather than demanding specific knowledge or reactions on the part of the public. I try to bring to light the complexity of creative areas'. Beuys argued that social decision-making should be made by the people through referendums rather than elected political parties. It was this concept of 'direct democracy' that he explored in his Information Action at the Tate in 1972, from which three of the blackboards shown here are taken.

Antony Gormley said, 'he realized that art was about in a way understanding who we are, by understanding our roots' and 'we only understand who we are through the making of these otherwise useless objects that in someone chart our passage through time'.

The long date range of the piece is because it is based on ideas he started to develop in 1958. It is based on a work he produced for the 1982 exhibition *Zeitgeist* but in that exhibition he used a mound of clay and furniture from his studio. He cast the bronze representation of lightning from the clay he used and the rough texture of the clay can still be seen. The work is suspended from a girder and just touches the floor but is not resting on it. It represents elemental forces and energy. The aluminium structure represents the stag and was originally an ironing board. The stag is a symbol from Christian

mythology and from shamanism, both areas of deep interest to Beuys. It represents the initiation of the hunter/gatherer, life itself and stag act as guides through the spirit world. The stag was also used as a symbol for Christ. Beuys said that when he was in trouble he was visited by a stag which gave him hope and inspiration. The lumps of clay represent primordial creatures, tools and the earth and civilization. Beuys wrote that the stag appeared 'in times of distress and danger' bringing 'the warm positive element of life.' He concurred with earlier Christian myths that it was 'endowed with spiritual powers and insight.'

On the left is a cart with a pick axe on top that is referred to by Beuys as a goat, one of our oldest companions and a source of food and clothing. The goat, for Beuys, represents technology and nature, which he believed must be balanced.

On the far left is the Boothian Felix, a pile of earth on a tripod with a small compass on top. This represents elemental forces and the human part of the artist. Boothia Felix was named in honour of Sir Felix Booth the financier of an exhibition headed by James Ross in 1829. In 1831 Ross charted the location of the magnetic north pole on the west coast. It is now called the Boothia Peninsular and the magnetic pole has moved further north.

Beuys was part of the Fluxus movement that involved the inter-relationship of music, art and literature with daily life.

The Ja/Nein poster rejects the party state (he grew up in Nazi Germany) in favour of democracy through referendums. Another poster shows he stood as candidate for a political party, the Organisation for Direct Democracy.

One of his last projects was the planting of 7,000 oak trees and there is a photo at the end of a pile of 7,000 stones which were moved when each tree was planted. The project took five years and the idea spread around the world. The myths associated with the artist, such as the Crimea/Tartar fat and felt myth should be treated as part of the identity of the artist rather than factual stories.

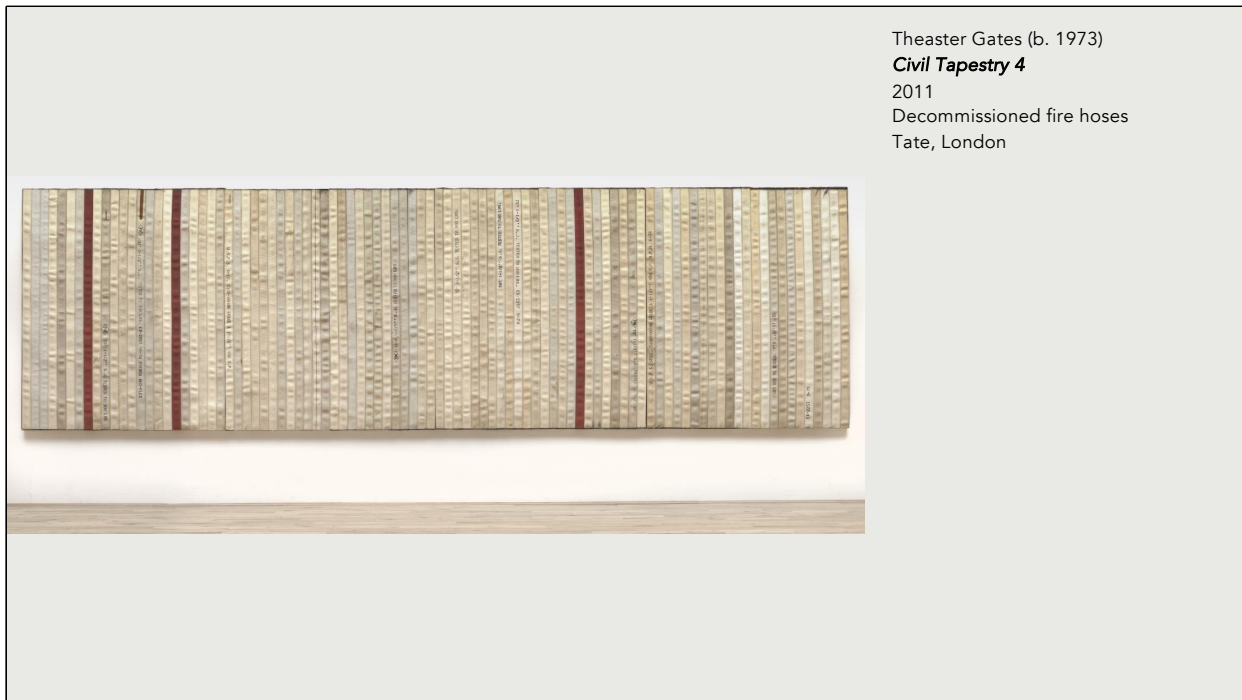
The other work in the room is *The End of the Twentieth Century*, 1983–5. Thirty-one roughly cut basalt rocks have a cone shaped plug removed and reinserted using felt and clay. It is the third and last in a series of similar works. The arrangement is uncertain but based on installation Beuys helped install. The work can be seen as pessimistic and reflecting 'the haphazard aftermath of a calamity', we see the representation of geological time and Beuys described it as an allegory between the past and the near future. Beuys

said, 'This is the end of the twentieth century. This is the old world, on which I press the stamp of the new world. Take a look at the plugs, they look like plants coming from the stone age. I took great pains to drill them out of the basalt in a funnel shape and then set them back into the hollows using felt and clay so they cannot do each other harm, and can keep warm. It is something agile, eruptive, lively in this solidified mass – in the same way that the basalt itself was once pressed out of the earth's interior.'

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Theater Gates (b. 1973), *Civil Tapestry 4*, 2011, Tate, London

From Beuys's mythic reckoning with humanity's estrangement from nature, we move to an artist who addresses a different wound — the unfinished business of racial equality in America. **Theater Gates**, born in **1973** in Chicago, made **Civil Tapestry 4** from **94 strips of decommissioned fire hoses**. The material is not incidental. In **May 1963**, police turned high-pressure hoses on Black schoolchildren and students marching peacefully for civil rights in **Birmingham, Alabama**. The brutality was a turning point in the **Civil Rights Movement**, and Gates has never let that history go quiet. He reflects that in the decades since, "some of us are slightly better while others are a great deal better, but... things are far from equal." Formally, the work echoes **Barnett Newman's** stripe paintings — flat, vertical bands of colour, what Newman called "**zips**" — a movement that famously turned inward rather than engaging with the convulsions of American society happening around it. Gates makes that silence pointed. Beyond the gallery, Gates runs the **Rebuild Foundation**, funding it through art sales. His **Dorchester Project** on Chicago's South Side has converted abandoned buildings into libraries, archive spaces, and performance venues — what he calls "**real-estate art**", using sculpture to literally rebuild a neighbourhood.

Notes

Description. What do you think this work is made from? Look closely and you

will see writing on these beige coloured vertical stripes. This may give you the clue to what they are. They are decommissioned fire hoses. The work is called Civil Tapestry 4 and is by the Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates.

Why fire hoses? In 1963, a group of black school children and students were marching peacefully for equal rights in Birmingham, Alabama. Police used powerful fire hoses to break up the march, injuring many of the young protestors. The police brutality was widely condemned, and this has been seen as a pivotal moment in the struggle for Civil Rights. Gates believes that things have improved but he says, 'Some of us are slightly better while others are a great deal better, but over the last six decades, things are far from equal.'

Abstract. We can also look at the whole work as an abstract painting. As such it looks like the work of the artist [and abstract expressionist painter] Barnett Newman. Newman's paintings are often one overall colour with a 'zip' of another colour going from top to bottom. Although the combination of shades and colours creates a harmonious wall covering the message behind this piece is far from harmonious.

The artist. Gates is an American artist who studied in Japan and made his name by holding soul food dinners in Chicago in honour of a Japanese potter who he claimed had come to America, married a black woman, and created a unique Asian and African-American ceramics style. However, Gates had invented the potter to raise the profile of his project to revitalize Chicago. Gates's aim is to bridge the gap between art and life by selling his work to fund the Rebuild Foundation in his home city of Chicago. This is a non-profit organization whose aim is to rebuild and refit unused facilities in deprived areas to create cultural spaces. He lives in one of the poorest area of Chicago and spends the money he makes from art on renovating the area.

Can art change the world? We have been considering the question 'Can art change the world?' Gates is one artist who is literally changing the world. His most ambitious project is the Dorchester Project which has converted old buildings into cultural institutions. Gates purchased an abandoned bank on Chicago's South Side and created 100 works of art in marble that he sold for \$5,000 each to help raise the money to renovate the building. His buildings have become a hub for cultural activity and house a book and record library that he bought when the stores went bust. He has also built venues for dinners, concerts and performances. Gates describes this project as 'real-estate art' since the renovations of the buildings are financed entirely by the

sale of sculptures and artworks that were created from the materials salvaged from their interiors.

Notes

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) was born in Chicago and is an installation artist. He has exhibited internationally and deals with urban planning, religious space and craft issues. He is committed to the revitalization of poor neighbourhoods through combining urban planning and art practices.

In May 1963, a group of black school children and students were marching peacefully for equal rights in Birmingham, Alabama. Police used powerful fire hoses to break up the march, injuring many of the young protestors. Gates has arranged 94 strips of decommissioned fire hoses to resemble the composition of a 1960s American abstract painting – a form that pointedly failed to engage with the Civil Rights movement. Gates also questions whether the protestors' goals have been fulfilled. 'Some of us are slightly better while others are a great deal better', he has reflected, 'but... things are far from equal'.

Gates is the founder of the Rebuild Foundation and one of its most celebrated projects is the Dorchester Project. This includes the Archive House holds 14,000 books on architecture and the Listening House holds 8,000 records. In 2013, he purchased the Stony Island State Savings Bank from the city of Chicago using an art work consisting of 100 'bond certificates' which were engraved marble slabs pulled from the bank that he sold for \$5,000 each. This was part of a \$3.5 million campaign to turn the 1920s building into a thriving cultural hub.

In 2007 he arranged a dinner for 100 guests. Gates then regaled his audience with the story of how in 1985 he met a master Japanese ceramicist, Shoji Yamaguchi, who had settled in Mississippi after WWII, married a local black woman and civil rights activist, then developed a plate especially suitable for the preferred cuisine of black people. The Yamaguchis died in a car accident, leaving their pottery collection to their son, who founded the Yamaguchi Institute to carry on his parents' work. However, the whole story was a fabrication to expose the artifice of art and reveal the world as it is rather than as we wish it were.

In January 2014, he designed a million-dollar installation for a subway terminal. It is the largest public art project in the history of the Chicago

Transit Authority.

In October 2015 he created an installation called Sanctum in the bombed-out shell of Temple Church, Bristol with English Heritage that provided 24 hours of music and performance continuously over a 24-day period.

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Gordon Bennett (1955–2014)
Possession Island (Abstraction)
 1991
 Museum of Contemporary Art
 Australia, Sydney

Gordon Bennett (1955–2014), *Possession Island (Abstraction)*, 1991, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney

Gates used art sales to rebuild physical neighbourhoods; **Gordon Bennett**, born in **1955** in Monto, Queensland, used painting to rebuild — or rather, to rupture — historical memory itself. **Possession Island (Abstraction)**, made in **1991**, shows **Captain James Cook** planting a flag to claim the eastern coast of Australia for the British Crown in **1770**. Bennett drew directly on **Samuel Calvert's** etching of that title, which was itself a copy of a now-lost painting by **John Alexander Gilfillan**. History, in other words, already arrives at several removes — copied, filtered, idealised. What Bennett does is lay a grid of bold geometric shapes over that colonial image, in the manner of **Kazimir Malevich**, coloured red, yellow, and black — the colours of the **Aboriginal flag**. Beneath those abstracted forms, the Indigenous servant visible in the Calvert etching disappears entirely. The erasure is the point. Bennett called this a "**field of disturbance**". Writing in his Manifesto in **1996**, he described his entire practice in one word: "question." His own biography made that questioning inescapable — he had an Indigenous Australian mother and an Anglo-Celtic father, and negotiated that double inheritance throughout his career, refusing any fixed, comfortable identity.

Notes

This is *Possession Island (Abstraction)* by an Australian artist called Gordon

Bennett. It shows Captain Cook planting a British flag and claiming British ownership of Australia. The black and white image is based on an etching called Captain Cook Taking Possession of the Australian Continent on Behalf of the British Crown, AD 1770. This is itself a copy of a painting with the same title that is now lost.

Bennet conceals the indigenous servant shown in the original etching beneath the abstract image in the style of Kazimir Malevich. The abstract shapes are red, yellow and black referencing the Aboriginal flag and hiding the servant represents the loss of one of the oldest cultures in the world. Bennett is commenting on the devastating effects of colonialization on Australia's indigenous population.

Notes

"In Possession Island (Abstraction), Gordon Bennett creates what he calls a "field of disturbance" in an image that presents a particular historical perspective. The work shows Captain James Cook planting a flag to claim the eastern coast of Australia for the British Crown in 1770. Bennett directly references Samuel Calvert's (1828–1913) etching Captain Cook Taking Possession of the Australian Continent on Behalf of the British Crown, AD 1770, which is itself a copy of John Alexander Gilfillan's (1793–1864) earlier, now lost, painting of the same title. Possession Island (Abstraction) is the first of three works entitled Possession Island that Bennett painted following Australia's bicentennial celebrations in 1988." Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

Writing in his 'Manifest Toe' in 1996, Bennett said "If I were to choose a single word to describe my art practice it would be the word question. If I were to choose a single word to describe my underlying drive it would be freedom ... To be free we must be able to question the ways our own history defines us."

Bennett had an indigenous Australian mother and an Anglo-Celtic migrant father, and his work challenges the concept of identity. He borrows from other artists and sets their work in a new context. Bennett directly referenced the work of many other artists throughout his career, including Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich and Vincent Van Gogh. To avoid being typecast as another professional Aborigine he invented an identity 'John Citizen' intended to represent the average Australian. Using this identity, he painted in the style of Paul Caulfield but with works by the 'real'

Bennett displayed on the walls in his paintings. In the late 1990s Bennet wrote an open letter and produced a series of paintings referencing the then dead Puerto-Rican Haitian-American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. He highlighted the similarity of their shared experience as human beings living in a world that seeks to exclude, objectify and dehumanize the black body and person. His work questions accepted versions of history often using historical artworks as a starting point.

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Flag I (Bandera I)
2009
Fabric, blood, earth and other
substances
298 x 188 cm
Tate Americas Foundation, London

Teresa Margolles (b. 1963), Flag I (Bandera I), 2009, 298 x 188 cm, Tate Americas Foundation, London

From Bennett's excavation of colonial history, we move to an artist who makes the buried present literal — who brings the dead physically into the room. **Teresa Margolles** was born in **Culiacán** in **1963**, in the heart of Mexico's narco economy. She trained as a forensic pathologist and worked in a city morgue, and those experiences became the raw material — in some cases quite literally — of her practice. Her early work produced confrontational images of corpses. Over time, contact with victims' families drew her toward something more restrained and, for that reason, more devastating. **Flag**, shown at the **2009 Venice Biennale**, looks, at first glance, like a soiled piece of fabric. It is soiled: the cloth contains traces of blood and soil from murder sites along Mexico's northern border. At Venice, Margolles also had workers mop the pavilion floors with water mixed with victims' blood, so visitors walked unknowingly through those remains. The exhibition was titled **What Else Could We Talk About?** — a question directed squarely at a government ignoring its own citizens. Her other works extend this logic with terrible quietness. In **In the Air**, soap bubbles drift pleasantly through a gallery — made from morgue water. The aesthetic seduction is the trap. Margolles forces beauty and horror to occupy exactly the same space.

Notes

Description. We see what looks like a dirty flag. The flag is dirty because it contains traces of human blood and soil from the sites of murders around the northern border of Mexico. It represents the thousands of murdered citizens the Mexican government ignored.

The artist. Teresa Margolles, is a Mexican artist who investigates the social causes and consequences of death. She was trained as a forensic pathologist and worked in a morgue. Her art is made from materials from the morgue and from crime scenes and she was born in one of the major drug areas. This flag was exhibited at the 2009 Venice Biennale when she paid workers to mop the floor with water mixed with the blood of murder victims so that visitors were obliged to walk through the remains of the killings.

Monument. Originally her work symbolised the horror and violence of the Mexican drug trade. It set out to shock and it used our squeamishness to gain our attention. Her work is now less symbolic as it contains the actual remains of those she honours and mourns. It has become a monument to the dead.

Other work. A lot of her work appears, initially, to offer a pleasant aesthetic experience. For example, in another work, called *In the Air*, soap bubbles float across the room but they are made from water used to wash the corpses in the morgue. Another work consists of bloody floor tiles from a building in which one of her friends, a promising young artist, was murdered and a third work has water which was used to clean bodies in a morgue dripping and hissing on to hotplates. In 1999 she created a video, *Bathing the Baby*, of her tenderly washing a foetus donated by a friend who had miscarried but could not afford a funeral. She later buried the foetus in a white cement block making the child's grave into what appeared to be a work of minimalist sculpture [called *Burial*].

Can art change the world? Mexicans are horrified about what is going on in their beautiful country and Margolles work is a scream of despair. Her aim is to expose the social factors that make violent death an accepted normality. She has been praised for her courage and integrity and for speaking truth to power through public exposure of government complicity in violence and poverty, not only in Mexico, but throughout the world.

Notes

Teresa Margolles was born in Culiacán (pronounced 'coolya-can') in 1963. Culiacán was the birthplace of an economy based on illegal drug export to

the United States.

As an artist she researches the social causes and consequences of death. She began by producing gruesome images of corpses in city morgues. Her contact with the families of the victims led her to a deeper social engagement. For Margolles the morgue is an accurate reflection of the local society with its poverty, drug-related crime and brutal military presence. She has developed a restrained approach to speak for the nameless victims counted as 'collateral damage'. Her work is no longer symbolic but contains the remains of those she honours and mourns.

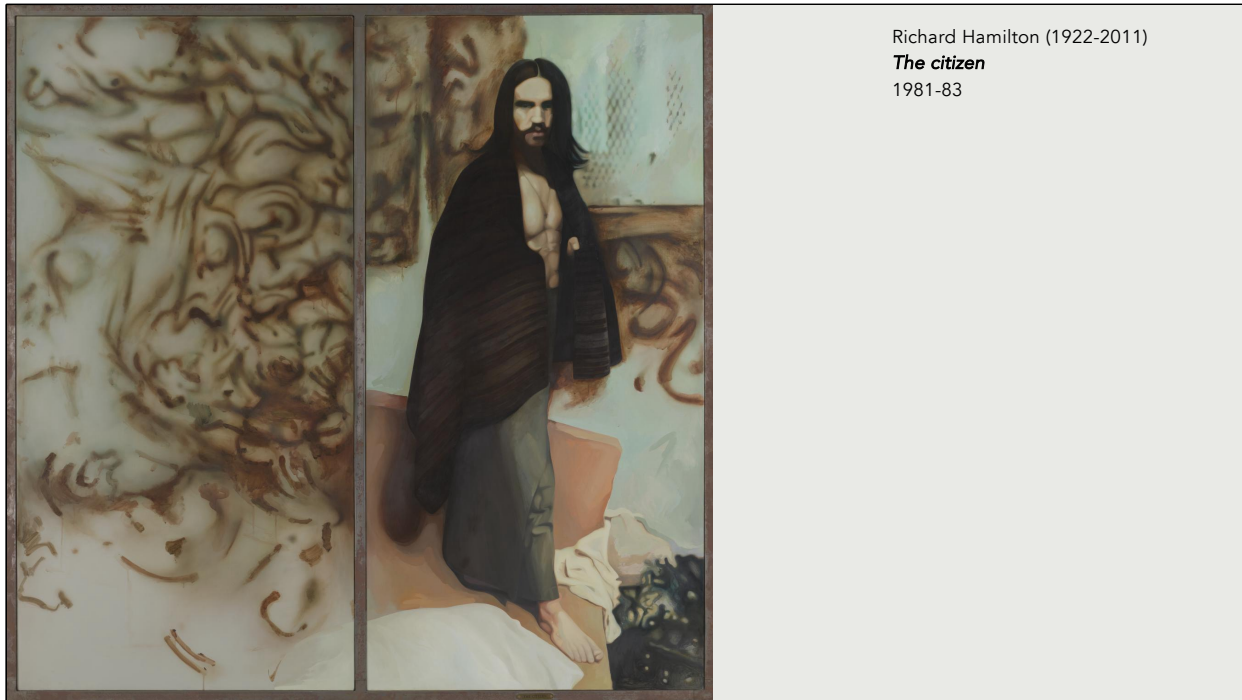
Another version of this work was shown at the Venice Biennial in 2009, where Margolles represented Mexico with an exhibition titled What Else Could We Talk About? As the government failed to intervene in the drug wars, the blood-stained cloth was hung outside the Mexican pavilion as a memorial for citizens that the nation ignored.

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Richard Hamilton (1922-2011)
The citizen
 1981-83

Richard Hamilton (1922-2011), The citizen, 1981-83

From Margolles using the literal residue of death to indict political indifference, we move to an artist who used paint — and the language of religious imagery — to do something structurally similar. **Richard Hamilton** was born in Pimlico in **1922** and studied at the Slade School of Art, going on to become one of the central figures of British Pop Art through his involvement with the **Independent Group** and the landmark "**This is Tomorrow**" exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in **1956**. He was also the man who reconstructed **Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass** under Duchamp's own guidance — a biographical detail that tells you everything about his appetite for art that straddles categories. **The Citizen**, painted in **1982**, is a **diptych** depicting a republican prisoner in **the Maze Prison** during the **dirty protest**, in which around 400 IRA detainees smeared cell walls with excrement and wrapped themselves in blankets. Hamilton described the blanket man as having "the moral conviction of a religious icon." The left panel renders those excrement-daubed walls as near-abstract painting — Hamilton explicitly linked the marks to **the Book of Kells** and ancient Celtic art. The right shows a prisoner in a posture evoking Christ. Hamilton's cool, masklike treatment of that face invites scrutiny rather than sympathy, asking us to examine the politics of martyrdom rather than simply feel them.

Notes

This is one of three paintings that Richard Hamilton made of 'the troubles', the political problems and the bombings in Northern Ireland. This one is called *The citizen* and shows an IRA, that is an Irish Republican Army, prisoner in the Maze prison near Belfast. It takes the form of a two-panel religious altarpiece, called a diptych ('dip-tic').

In 1969 the conflict in Northern Ireland intensified and during the 1970s there were many bombings and deaths on both sides. In 1980 Granada Television and the BBC made documentaries about the troubles and highlighted the demand for the IRA prisoners to be classified as political prisoners rather than criminals as this would have given them better living conditions and more rights, such as the right to wear their own clothes. The British Government refused and the prisoners escalated their protest. They refused to wear prison clothes and, as you can see here, they wore prison blankets and smeared their cell walls with their own excrement to draw attention to their situation.

Hamilton was struck by the human dignity in the midst of squalor which, he thought, had a 'mythic power most often associated with art'. It was called the 'dirty protest' in the British press and involved 400 prisoners over five years. Hamilton obtained a copy of the BBC documentary and went through every image. This example of Hugh Rooney and Freddie Toal in a cell is one of those he used to create the composite image of a prisoner. The protest was ineffective and was escalated to a hunger strike in which ten men died. The best known prisoner who died is Bobby Sands as he was elected as an MP during his hunger strike. The hunger strike ended in 1981, when the Government announced prisoners could wear their own clothes. Mrs. Thatcher has been criticized as intransigent during the strike although we now know that she had started a series of secret negotiations behind the scenes.

This painting consists of two panels. The left panel is abstract and represents the excrement-daubed walls of the cell presented as a work of art. Hamilton points out that the daubs are unique to each prisoner and he links them back to ancient Celtic art such as the book of Kells (see Visual Aids).

The title comes from James Joyce's *Ulysses* where the hero of the book Leopold Bloom comes into conflict with a Fenian heavy drinker known to everyone as 'citizen' (with a small 'c'). The Fenians are supporters of Irish nationalism and the unification of Northern Ireland and Eire.

When the painting was exhibited in 1988 Hamilton created an installation to house the painting with walls decorated in imitation of the cells, a sponge-rubber mattress and a dirty pillow. In the right-hand painting we can see the

sponge-rubber mattress and the pillow. The figure is based on a newspaper photograph and shows a prisoner standing self-consciously evocating images of Christ. Is Hamilton condemning or condoning the prisoner? My view is that his too obvious use of a Christ-like image and the way the face is painted as a mask stress the false notes in the pose and invites us to coldly consider the politics of martyrdom.

Notes

Richard Hamilton (1922-2011) was born in Pimlico, London and educated at Saint Martin's School of Art and the Royal Academy School just before WWI and then during the war he studied at the Government Training Centre and worked as a jig and tool designer. After the war, he re-enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools but was later expelled on grounds of 'not profiting from the instruction', loss of his student status forced him to carry out National Service. He attended the Slade School of Art from 1948 to 1951 and his first exhibition, of engravings, was in 1950. He participated in 'This is Tomorrow' at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956, for which he produced his most well-known work, a collage entitled Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? for the poster and catalogue. He was a member of the Independent Group which contributed to the development of Pop Art and he was one of the main practitioners of the fine/pop art continuum. Hamilton wrote, 'all art is equal - there was no hierarchy of value. Elvis was to one side of a long line while Picasso was strung out on the other side ... TV is neither less nor more legitimate an influence than, for example, is New York Abstract Expressionism'. He taught in London and in Newcastle and gave up teaching in 1966 and he reconstructed Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (The Large Glass) with Duchamp's guidance. He began to create computer-generated art in the 1980s and he was Britain's representative at the 1993 Venice Biennale.

The citizen depicts a blanketman, a republican detainee at the Maze Prison. The subject, 1988-90, represents a parading loyalist Orangeman. The state, 1993, shows a British soldier on patrol in Northern Ireland.

Hamilton wrote in the 1992 Tate catalogue, 'the blanket man as a public relations contrivance of enormous efficacy. It had the moral conviction of a religious icon and the persuasiveness of the advertising man's dream soap commercial - yet it was a present reality.'

The Book of Kells is an illuminated manuscript in Latin of the four Gospels of

the New Testament and it was created in a Columban monastery in Ireland. It is believed to have been created in c. 800 and its extravagance and complexity make it Ireland's finest national treasure.

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Dia al-Azzawi (b. 1939)
Sabra and Shatila Massacre
1982–83
Ballpoint pen on canvas
300 x 750 cm



Dia al-Azzawi (b. 1939), Sabra and Shatila Massacre, 1982–83, 300 x 750 cm

Hamilton used paint and religious iconography to interrogate martyrdom at a distance. **Dia al-Azzawi** works differently — with ballpoint pen, and with the urgency of someone who has personally witnessed what war does to bodies and to silence. Al-Azzawi was born in **Baghdad in 1939** and has lived in London since **1976**. He is widely regarded as one of the most significant figures in the emergence of modern painting and printmaking in Iraq. His enormous drawing "**Sabra and Shatila Massacre**", made between **1982 and 1983**, responds to the killing of Palestinian refugees in **Beirut** by Lebanese Christian militias over three September nights in 1982, while Israeli forces occupied the surrounding area and did nothing. A UN commission concluded the killings constituted genocide. Al-Azzawi based his imagery directly on **Jean Genet's** eyewitness essay "Quatre Heures à Chatila." The work was drawn in six sections in his London home and mounted on canvas — a mural-scaled indictment executed in humble ballpoint pen. Where his other work is typically vivid with colour, this is almost entirely black, grey, and the red of blood. The comparison with **Picasso's Guernica** is frequently made, and it is not unearned: both are monumental acts of witness, insisting that what was done cannot be unseen.

Notes

This mural sized drawing was made by one of the best-known Iraqi artists Dia

al-Azzawi. It was made in response to a massacre of Palestinian refugees that took place in Beirut and was carried out by Lebanese Christians. It is known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre and this work has been compared to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. The number killed is disputed and estimates vary from 460 to 3,500. A UN commission concluded the massacre was a form of genocide and blamed Israel who were the refugee camp's occupying power and who failed to take any action to stop the massacre.

The work is in ball point pen and was drawn in six sections that were then mounted on canvas. Al-Azzawi has lived in London since 1976 and the drawing was made in his London home over several months. The images are based on descriptions in a book written by one of the first observers to enter the camp. The picture is very different from his normally colourful images. It is mostly black and grey with earthy tones and the red of blood.

al-Azzawi was born in 1939 in Baghdad, the third of ten children. His father was a grocer and neither parent was interested in art or politics, but both came to define his future career. He is now considered one of Iraq's most influential living artists and a leading figure for the emergence of modern painting and printmaking in the country. He has been involved with Arab affairs all his life, but it is too dangerous for him to return to Iraq. He was a natural artist and was the best talent in his school. In 1956 at the height of the Suez crisis he was involved in a street demonstration and thrown out of school. Two months later the King of Iraq visited the school and wanted to see the art. Al-Azzawi was brought back to the school and the King so liked his work he was invited to the palace to discuss his future. The King promised to send him to Italy to study but the king was assassinated during a military coup.

Notes on Dia al-Azzawi (b. 1939), 'Sabra and Shatila Massacre', 1982-83

The massacre took place in the Sabra district of Beirut and the Shatila refugee camp between 16th and 18th September 1982. The scenes of the massacre were inspired by reading the essay *Quatre Heures à Chatila* (Four Hours in Shatila) by French writer Jean Genet (1910–1986).

Azzawi served as a reservist in the Iraq army between 1966 and 1973, where he witnessed many atrocities. Through this experience, he learned that he needed to speak for those who have no voice. A number of his works are expressly designed to give a voice to those who have been silenced through war and conflict.

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Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962)
The British Library
 2014
 Batik-bound books with gold leaf
 lettering
 Tate, London

Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962), *The British Library*, 2014, Tate, London

From Al-Azzawi's insistence that the story of displacement cannot be unseen, we move to an artist who asks a different question: who, exactly, counts as British? **Yinka Shonibare** was born in London in **1962**, raised in Lagos, and returned to Britain at seventeen. At eighteen he contracted transverse myelitis, which paralysed one side of his body — a fact worth holding onto, because his subsequent practice, built around assistants working under his close direction, makes collaboration structural rather than incidental. He was elected a **Royal Academician** in **2013**. "**The British Library**", first shown at Brighton in **2014** and later displayed at the **2017 Venice Biennale**, fills three walls with **6,328 books** wrapped in his characteristic Dutch wax batik fabric. On **2,700** of those books, names are printed in gold leaf — first- and second-generation immigrants who shaped British culture and history. The list runs from **Zadie Smith** to **Winston Churchill**, whose American mother qualifies him here, to figures who actively opposed immigration: **Oswald Mosley** sits on these shelves alongside the names he would have expelled. Many books carry no name at all. Shonibare described the work as exploring British identity through, in his own words, "a conceptually poetic lens" — a library whose story, he insists, is still being written.

Notes

Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962) is a British-Nigerian artist living in the United

Kingdom. His work explores cultural identity, colonialism and post-colonialism within the contemporary context of globalisation. A hallmark of his art is the brightly coloured Dutch wax fabric he uses. He was born in London and moved to Lagos, Nigeria when he was three as his father practised law there. He returned when he was 17 to take his A Levels. When he was 18 he contracted transverse myelitis which paralysed one side of his body. He uses assistants to make works under his direction. He was made a Royal Academician in 2013.

This work consists of thousands of batik-bound books celebrating the diversity of the British population.

Three walls of the gallery are taken up with shelves of 6,328 books. On 2,700 of the books are the names, printed in gold leaf, of first- and second-generation immigrants to Britain who have made significant contributions to the country's culture and history.

The diverse list of names ranges from Alan Rickman (1946-2016), actor, director, who is listed as being of Irish descent, and Alesha Dixon (b. 1978, singer, songwriter, rapper, dancer, Jamaican father) to Liam Gallagher (b. 1972, singer, songwriter, formerly lead singer of rock band Oasis, Irish parents) and Lionel Blair (b. 1928, actor, choreographer, born in Canada) to Zadie Smith (b. 1975, novelist with a Jamaican mother) and Zane Lowe (b. 1973, he is a New Zealand born DJ who moved to the UK in 1997). It is an eclectic mix that also features Dido (b. 1971, singer songwriter born in London, with an Irish father and a French mother), Winston Churchill (1874-1965, politician and army officer with an American mother), Mel B (b. 1975, singer songwriter born in Leeds with a Caribbean father), Sid James (1913-1976, comic actor, born in South Africa), Danny Welbeck (b. 1990, footballer born in Manchester to Ghanaian parents) and Mary I (1516-1558, born in Greenwich to a Spanish mother).

There are also books with names of people who have opposed immigration: Oswald Mosley (1896-1980, MP, Anglo-Irish family), for example, alongside Norman Tebbit (b. 1931, MP of working class parents), Paul Nuttall (b. 1976, Leader of the Independence Party), Patrick Moore (1923-2012, astronomer, chairman of the anti-immigration United Country Party) and Richard Littlejohn (b. 1954, Daily Mail journalist accused of homophobia and being racist). Many books have no name – suggesting, the artist said, that the story of British immigration is still unwritten.

The artwork was first shown in the Old Reference Library at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery for the 2014 Brighton festival. Since then it has been seen at Turner Contemporary in Margate and in the Diaspora Pavilion of the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Shonibare said the acquisition was a continuation of Tate's support for artists who "tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time. The British Library is an exploration of the diversity of British identity through a conceptually poetic lens. I look forward to the public engagement with the work."



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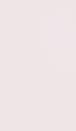
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Yinka Shonibare
(b. 1962)
The British
Library
2014

Chicago, and beyond, this talk has traced what happens when artists refuse to look away from the societies they inhabit. We have seen abstraction deployed as spiritual liberation, photography as political indictment, sculpture as accumulated grief, and painting as direct witness to massacre. Art, these works insist collectively, is never decoration — it is argument, evidence, and sometimes the only memorial the dead receive.



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