

Treasures in MK

24 January -
30 March 2014



Gawen Hamilton: *Portrait of a Connoisseur* (detail), c.1730. Private Collection.

About this Pack

This pack has been designed to provide background information about the *Treasures in MK* exhibition at MK Gallery.

For more information about our schools programme, contact:

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About the Exhibition

Treasures in MK is MK Gallery's surprising and extraordinary exhibition for the start of 2014. It features almost 200 artworks and artefacts selected from 60 collections in and around of Buckinghamshire.

The works in the exhibition have been grouped into loose themes - portraiture, seascapes and landscapes - but a vast array of connections and stories fill the spaces. Old Masters such as Thomas Gainsborough, George Romney, William Hogarth and John Everett Millais rub shoulders with Modern Masters from Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse to Andy Warhol.

Other extraordinary items include the Boarstall Cartulary from the 11th century which featured in the BBC's *History of the World*; memorabilia from 'godfather of British aviation' Frank McLean's hair-raising flights under the bridges on the River Thames; taxidermied pelicans from a private zoo; an Aston Martin DB4 and a unique self-portrait by musician David Bowie from a private collection.

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Explore

This section contains information and questions to help students explore the exhibition.



Right: Derek Jarman: *Flower Piece* (detail), 1965. Private Collection.

Above: André Derain: *Tête de Jeune Fille* (detail), 1925. Private Collection.



Cube Gallery

The theme of this room is portraiture, but also includes other types of artwork. Looking around, what other themes can you find?

In the past people paid artists to paint and draw pictures of family members, friends and famous people as a way of recording their lives. What has been invented in the last 100 years that has made this a less popular activity?

Can you find an artwork from the Indian School entitled *An Indian groom holding a 'composite' horse*? In this picture you will see that the artist has cleverly hidden lots of smaller animals and people inside the shape of the horse. How many different creatures can you see?

In the middle of the room you will see a collection of pelican birds, which have been preserved after death through taxidermy. This process went out of fashion in Britain, but in recent years contemporary artists have used stuffed animals in pieces of artwork. Can you think why we decided to include the pelicans in our exhibition?

On the wall is a convex mirror, with a surface that bends around to the edges. In the past these mirrors were popular because they allowed people to see almost a whole room at once. When you look at yourself in this mirror, what else can you see? Why do you think the mirror is displayed in this room?

Middle Gallery

The walls are painted blue in this room; what does this tell you about what the theme might be?

In this room we have a selection of sea-themed pictures, from fish and boats to ships at sea. The pictures from the Neapolitan School called *Scenes of the Bay of Naples* were painted so that people on holiday could show everyone where they had visited, like a souvenir. What sort of thing do you take home for family and friends when you've been on holiday?

The cabinet in the centre of the room contains beautiful plates, jugs and household items. What do you think these are made from? Why do you think we displayed them in this room, alongside the ships and seascapes?

We also have a large portrait of Sir Francis Verney, who came from a wealthy family but went out to sea and became a pirate! Is this what you imagined a real-life pirate to look like?

Long Gallery

The first thing to notice in the space is a huge Aston Martin DB4 car. There was an Aston Martin Factory in Newport Pagnell near Milton Keynes, and this car was one of the first ones to be made there. Is there a connection between the car and some of the pictures on the walls?

We have displayed a selection of different types of landscapes. What are the main differences that you notice between them? What are the similarities?

Nearby is the painting *The Proverbs* by Tom Chadwick, which seems to have a lot happening in it! Here the artist tried to show common phrases and sayings that people used in the 1930s, like 'Don't throw stones in glass houses' which means don't be mean or rude to other people, as it could hurt you too. Can you spot any phrases in the picture that people still use today?

We also have a collection of artwork from the 18th century by William Hogarth whose pictures made people think about the problems in everyday life at the time. The pictures are gruesome, but very detailed. What do they tell you about life 200 years ago? Can you imagine what it would have been like to be alive then?

Create

Activities for back
in the classroom



Left: Maggie Hambling: *Wave Roaring* (detail), 2011. On loan from Dr. Ann Limb.

Above: Poul Webb: *Gardens at Mateos I*, 2006. Private Collection.

Keywords

Treasure – A thing or things that are thought to have value

Portrait – A painting, drawing or sculpture that shows us someone's face

Landscape – A painting or drawing that shows us a place

Seascape – A painting or drawing that shows us a scene of the sea

Souvenir – An object or picture that is taken to remind us of a place we visited

Collection - A group of objects that a person has gathered together

Key Stages 1 & 2

Land and Sea collage

This activity is designed to encourage students to think about textures and colours. It might be helpful to divide the materials in to 'land' or 'sea' piles so that children can easily select the colours and textures most appropriate to their picture.

Suggested materials:

Contact paper (sticky-back plastic)

Tissue paper in blues, greens, browns and yellows

Textured papers

Coloured acetate

Tin foil

Magazines/newspapers

Scissors

Plain paper and charcoal or graphite sticks*

*Students can create rubbings of different surfaces first, and use these as an additional material in their collage.

Instructions:

1. Decide whether you are going to create a land or sea picture. Choose 4 materials that you would like to use. What material most looks like the sea? What could you use to make rocks or the sky?
2. Start by sorting the materials into different parts of your picture: think about rocks, hills, trees, rivers.
3. Rip or cut your materials into smaller shapes to create the parts of your picture.
4. Carefully stick the pieces onto the sticky-back plastic.
5. Once the whole picture is covered in materials, use a second piece of sticky-back plastic to cover the whole picture.

An adventure in an Aston Martin

Using the storyboard which can be downloaded here: <http://ow.ly/tiYDA>, students can create an adventure they would like to go on in an Aston Martin. What will the children see out of the window as they travel along? Key landmarks of Milton Keynes could be used as inspiration.

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Treasures in MK, installation view of the Cube Gallery.



Arthur Hughes: *Portrait of Emily Hughes*, unfinished, 1880s. Private Collection.

Key Stage 3 & 4

Blind Portraits

This exercise is inspired by the portraits in the *Treasures in MK* exhibition and Martin Creed's new series of *Blind Portraits* which were created by looking only at his subject and never at the drawing on his paper. The aim is not to create a perfect drawing, but to learn about how to 'draw what you see' rather than 'what you think you see'.

Students can work in pairs to complete this activity, and will need paper, a pencil or pen, and a clipboard to work on.

Instructions:

1. Sit opposite a partner, with your paper on a clipboard on your lap. You must not look at your artwork during this activity (it may help you to resist looking at your artwork if you sit at a table and place the clipboard on your lap so that the table obscures your view).
2. Take it in turns to draw, and be drawn by your partner.
3. When drawing, try to focus on the details of your partners face, as well as the overall shape.
4. Once the drawing is complete, look at your work and consider what parts of the task were difficult or easy. What areas of the face did you find yourself focusing on? Did you miss anything out?

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