

W Barns-Graham



WBG portrait for Art First, 2000, photo Simon Norfolk

Education Pack (Secondary)

produced by Fife Contemporary Art & Craft
for the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust

W Barns-Graham

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Welcome to an education pack on the life and work of the artist Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. It has been produced by Fife Contemporary Art & Craft (FCA&C) on behalf of the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust (BGCT).

Barns-Graham had a long and highly productive career and is now rightly regarded as an influential British artist. This pack demonstrates the breadth of her artistic ability through a series of short projects which pupils may expand in order to study aspects of her work and career in more depth. In this way, she is an ideal artist to learn about in order to fulfill aspects of secondary art & design, found within experiences and outcomes of levels 3 & 4 as well as within the Intermediate 1, 2 and Higher programmes.

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You can also find FCA&C on the Creativity Portal (for link to website, please click on logo below).

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Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

1a Observational drawing small scale

Art & Design EXA 3-03a

I can use and combine the visual elements and concepts to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings in expressive and design work.

Art & Design EXA 3-04a

Through observing and recording, I can create material that shows accuracy of representation.

Technology 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Analytical drawing from first-hand sources

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Background

"I have always been interested in drawing - it is a discipline of the mind. I seek to discover abstract shapes, accepting the subject's demands often touching different moods."

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham

Throughout history artists have looked to nature for their inspiration and Barns-Graham was no different. During her long artistic career, detailed observational drawing was an important process to her, even if the final results developed into abstracted or manipulated forms. It allowed her to record what she actually saw, and although she saw herself primarily as a painter and printmaker, she never underestimated the importance of being able to draw. She was interested in all kinds of natural forms - from the miniature (eg mushrooms growing wild) to the large-scale (such as rock formations in Lanzarote).

For the drawing, each object should be given its own sheet of paper, ie this is not about putting together a still life of sorts, but rather to appreciate all the qualities of the individual object that make it unique. Choose a simple material to make the drawings with - a soft pencil or charcoal stick. It is important to take time and observe in detail the subject matter in order to capture it carefully. Such acute observation is a useful skill to develop for future work.

Pupils could also be given different time periods in which to complete a drawing and differences noted. Is a more fully worked up drawing 'better' than one finished in 15 minutes? The class's drawings of the same type of natural objects could be looked at together and compared - it would be interesting to discuss different drawing styles.

Aims

To learn to look at objects carefully before drawing them and to practise the skill of using simple materials to achieve impressive results - to practise shading, foreshortening, scale etc.

Objective

To create a fully worked up drawing of something collected from nature (eg pebbles, shells, feathers).

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts

Info sheets on W Barns-Graham's drawings/early influences

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings

Resources from you

Collect portable objects to draw in advance (eg pebbles, stones, shells, small sticks)

Soft pencils, pencil sharpeners, or charcoal sticks

A5 sheets of white cartridge-type paper

Time scale

Approx 1.5 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

1b Observational drawing of landscape

Art & Design EXA 3-03a

I can use and combine the visual elements and concepts to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings in expressive and design work.

Art & Design EXA 3-04a

Through observing and recording, I can create material that shows accuracy of representation.

Art & Design EXA 4-03a

I can use the visual elements and concepts with sensitivity to express qualities and relationships and convey information, thoughts and feelings. I can use my skills and creativity to generate original ideas in my expressive and design work.

Technology 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity

Analytical drawing from first-hand sources

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Background

"It seemed to breathe!...This likeness to glass and transparency, combined with solid, rough ridges made me wish to combine in a work all angles at once, from above, through, and all round, as a bird flies, a total experience..."
W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham wrote this enthusiastic statement after visiting the Grindelwald Glacier in Switzerland in 1949. In many ways, it was a life-changing experience for her, combining a powerful, natural beauty with transparency and glassy colours. It affected how she viewed natural phenomena in the future - whether wave or rock formations, or more general landscapes.

This second observational drawing exercise is based on some kind of landscape or feature of landscape. Ideally, pupils should photograph and print out the example they want to work from. Close-up of waves would work well, or wind moving the branches of trees; or a series of hills or bumpy land taken from a distance.

As before, the drawing should be done using simple materials - pencils or charcoal. The purpose is to try and really understand the natural force beneath the drawing, so that some of its energy is brought out by the drawing. Barns-Graham was extremely interested in the mathematical rhythms found in nature and many of her drawings illustrate this. She drew in this way as she truly felt the natural subject had these properties. So, to succeed at this exercise in a way that Barns-Graham would approve, pupils should do a series of drawings of the same subject in order to try and incorporate its different aspects.

Aims

To practise looking more deeply at a subject before drawing it, in order to understand it better.

Objective

To create a series of landscape-based drawings which focus on one area of nature.

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts

Info sheets on W Barns-Graham's drawings/early influences

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings

Resources from you

Photographs of the subject matter (taken in advance)

Soft pencils, pencil sharpeners, or charcoal sticks

A4 sheets of white cartridge-type paper

Time scale

Approx 1.5 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

2a Colour exercise using paint

Art & Design EXA 3-03a

I can use and combine the visual elements and concepts to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings in expressive and design work.

Art & Design EXA 3-04a

Through observing and recording, I can create material that shows accuracy of representation.

Art & Design EXA 4-03a

I can use the visual elements and concepts with sensitivity to express qualities and relationships and convey information, thoughts and feelings. I can use my skills and creativity to generate original ideas in my expressive and design work.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli
Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Background

"The discipline used [in drawing] releases me in my paintings to work more freely, expand with ideas and imagination involving joy in colour, texture and harmony, [to] start creating."

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham used colour confidently in her artworks and it was a skill she had learned from her tutors at Edinburgh College of Art, many of whom were the product of the so-called 'Scottish Colourist' movement. In other words, they understood how to use colour to create movement, texture, depth and mood in their paintings and this knowledge was transferred to their students.

Use some of the drawings from the early exercises as the starting point for the following two exercises using colour. Pupils should select a favourite drawing from their series, but like Barns-Graham, not use it as a study for a painting, but instead allow the painting to be an expansion of the drawing. Choose bold colours and strokes if appropriate, or equally, use softer washes of colour if that seems to fit the purpose better.

Barns-Graham was acutely sensitive to the meanings of colours as she had 'synesthesia'. In other words, she associated all sensory perceptions - taste, smell, things she saw etc - with a specific colour. While to some people this would be a major drawback, she saw it as an attribute to be embraced and enjoyed.

Aims

To practice an enjoyment of using appropriate colour in painting.

Objective

To make a painting which takes a drawing of a natural subject as a starting point, but explores more nuances through the careful use of paint and colour.

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts
Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's paintings
Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings
Info sheet on the basics of colour theory

Resources from you

Original drawings from earlier exercise/s
Variety of paint/brushes
Paper to paint on (plus drawing boards, masking tape etc)

Time scale

Approx 2 hours (including preparation and tidying up time)

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

2a Colour exercise using digital media

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 4-03a

I can approach familiar and new situations with confidence when selecting and using appropriate software to solve increasingly complex problems or issues.

Technology TCH 3.09a

Using appropriate software, I can work individually or collaboratively to design and implement a game, animation or other application.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity

Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Background

"In my paintings I want to express the joy and importance of colour, texture, energy and vibrancy, with an awareness of space and construction. As a celebration of life - taking risks so creating the unexpected."

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham did not use digital technology to create her paintings, but pupils could experiment with their newly created painting more quickly by using digital cameras, scanners and computers. Make a digital image of the painting at reasonably high resolution (eg 300 dpi), in order to blow it up quite large on the screen. Using a software programme like Adobe Photoshop or Corel Draw, try and select areas of the digital painting and change their colours. By doing this using a variety of different colour combinations, pupils can watch how the use of different colours changes the mood and appearance of their painting.

Barns-Graham would have painted a series of works using different colour combinations, and perhaps changing small details on each work; but by applying digital technology, time and materials can be saved. In order for the experience to be remembered, pupils should write down brief notes about each colour change - how was the appearance of the painting changed? Was a more intense (or less intense) artwork created? If wished, the whole series could then be printed out in a long line, showing the progression between colours.

Aims

To learn more about the use of colour through the practical experience of using it repetitively.

Objective

To create a series of digitally manipulated images, based on an original painting, that plays with colour.

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts
Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's paintings
Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings
Info sheet on the basics of colour theory

Resources from you

Original painting from the earlier exercise
Either a digital camera or scanner, plus computer with image manipulating software, and a printer if wished

Time scale

Approx 2 hours (including creating the digital image)

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

2c Colour exercise using abstraction

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 4-03a

I can approach familiar and new situations with confidence when selecting and using appropriate software to solve increasingly complex problems or issues.

Technology TCH 3.09a

Using appropriate software, I can work individually or collaboratively to design and implement a game, animation or other application.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Background

"The positive aspect of working in an abstract way, for me, is the freedom of choice ie medium, space, texture, colours..."

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham created in the language of the representational and abstract artist with equal ease, moving fluidly between the two. She believed both styles existed on a continuum - they weren't contradictory and neither one was better than the other; it was just that a certain style of creating art was more appropriate for her purpose at a given time.

With that in mind, pupils can take their digitally manipulated artwork even further by playing with abstraction. Choose the most striking image and zoom in - the act of creating pixels is a form of abstracting: distorting the original image, so that its appearance is no longer so obvious. Pupils could then try using some of the drawing tools within their software programme to highlight certain elements within their digital image. Is it possible to see geometric patterns - circles, triangles, diamonds, squares, etc - within the work? Draw them in a different outline colour on a separate layer if possible. Once the main features have been recreated using simple shapes, try deleting the original layer (ie the original digital image), and see what kind of image is left. There should be some sort of reference to the original work as the new one is based on it, but the end result will be quite different. Different colours can be tried until pupils are happy with the final solution. (Remember to keep saving the different versions of each digital file!)

Aims

To experiment further with digital image manipulation.

Objective

To create one if not two digital files that have their origins in the original painting, but stand alone as digital artworks.

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts
Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's paintings
Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings
Info sheet on the basics of colour theory

Resources from you

Original digital image from the earlier exercise
Either a digital camera or scanner, plus computer with image manipulating software

Time scale

Approx 2 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

3 Collage exercise

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli
Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques
Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Background

"... the challenge of feeling out the truth of an idea - a process of inner perception and harmony of thought on a high level..."

W Barns-Graham

For Barns-Graham, travel was always an important source of inspiration. Trips to Switzerland, Spain and Italy provided her with new ideas which led her work in different directions. Closer to home, a trip to Orkney from 1984-85 encouraged her to bring collage into her work, using this additional technique to create artworks that are painterly equivalents to the geological rock formations found on the Orcadian shoreline, and the layout of fields across the countryside. These works have strong, geometrical elements, heightened by the use of 3D collage which translates well to abstracted landscape views.

For this project, pupils should go back to their earlier landscape drawing and consider how it could be simplified, so that only the important features appear. Start by re-drawing these, then using basic collage materials (different textures of paper and card), try and create a new work that has the addition of three dimensional components. Barns-Graham used paint on her collaged work to bring colour into them. This enabled her to keep to a very specific palette which she felt suited the purpose and feel of the work. Pupils can either do this, or can work with coloured materials.

Aims

To experiment with simple materials to create a more complicated 3D artwork.

Objective

To take a pared down drawing and enrich it by using collage techniques.

Resources in the pack

W Barns-Graham chronology & 23 facts
Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's collaged works

Resources from you

Earlier drawings by pupils
Selection of different cards/papers for collaging
Glue/scissors
Paint if required

Time scale

Approx 2 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

4a Printmaking exercise - offset drawing

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Background

"You black a piece of tracing paper with printing ink, or I used oil paint, and when it's in a particular condition, sticky but dryish, you can draw through with a knitting needle or a nail or whatever sharp instrument you like. You take a tracing of your drawing on the other side of the tracing paper so that will give you the form that you want to draw through...And sometimes the accidental smudge is useful."

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham had tried various kinds of printmaking sporadically throughout her career. It tended not to be taught in art colleges but an interest in it had been revived with the arrival in Britain of emigré artists after the war. Making monotypes was therefore an ideal medium to experiment with as it was relatively straightforward, didn't require a lot of equipment, and the results were often unexpected. They could also be worked on after printing to create more intense images.

For this first exercise, pupils should try and create a monotype using the offset drawing technique that Barns-Graham described. With many of Barns-Graham's ones she used an existing pencil drawing, inked up the reverse, and when the ink was 'sticky', placed the drawing on another sheet of paper, and then used a knitting needle to draw over the lines. She sometimes applied oil colour, not just black, and was able to take more than one impression of each image. Pupils should have a clear sense of purpose before they begin work: try looking back at the earlier abstract project for inspiration and imagine how to create a bold image. Don't worry if the final result is a little smudgy - as Barns-Graham herself said, these unexpected additions were often bonuses! If offset drawing seems quite complicated to start with, do a basic monotype first and work up to the offset drawing technique.

Aims

To experiment with a basic printing technique which doesn't require a lot of complex equipment.

Objective

To create an offset drawing that is inspired by the earlier abstract project, but which explores a different way of working.

Resources in the pack

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's printmaking
Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints

Resources from you

Earlier abstract colour exercise work for inspiration & original drawing to work from

Either ink or oil paint, tracing paper/paper, paper to print onto, sharp instrument (eg knitting needle!) to draw with

Time scale

Approx 2 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

4b Printmaking exercise - single screenprint

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Background

"I am thinking nearly all the time about work in the print shop - shapes, ideas, colours, and I go upstairs to rest and think and think and I find it difficult to sleep! I wish I'd done this years ago, on the other hand I'm at a stage in life and work that I can be adventurous and bold!"

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham was a late convert to the magic of screenprinting, but when she realised the potential of it for creating artworks, she used it consistently as part of her regular practice. She worked with various printing workshops depending on where she was working: sometimes they were based quite far from where she lived and this proved untenable in the end. Although interested in the complexities of the technique, she usually worked with specialist artists to get as much expertise on side as possible. Barns-Graham had a clear idea from the start of each process of how the end result should look - something for pupils to bear in mind - and she also would use as many colours as needed to achieve this - sometimes as many as 15 plus.

For this first screenprinting exercise, pupils should aim to make one satisfactory print, using only 2 or 3 screens. Choose your colours carefully and for inspiration, look back at the colour abstract exercise. Another thing to bear in mind is that latterly, Barns-Graham stopped using printing ink as the main medium to create screenprints. Instead, she used various different, high quality artist's paints in order to get the variety and depth of colour she wanted. While using expensive pigments may not be realistic here, it may be possible to try using some kind of paint alternative to ink and see what the differences are.

Aims

To think carefully before starting to work in order to get the first print as 'right' as possible.

Objective

To create a screenprint based on the earlier abstract colour exercise.

Resources in the pack

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's printmaking
Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints

Resources from you

Earlier abstract colour exercise work
Screenprinting materials/equipment, paper

Time scale

Approx 2 hours

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

4c Printmaking exercise - screenprinting series

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Technology TCH 3.15b

I gain inspiration from natural forms, the built environment or imagination to develop a creative idea which could be realised using computer aided manufacture.

Technology TCH 4.15b

When developing or enhancing representations of ideas or items, manually or electronically, I can apply my knowledge of colour theory, justifying the choices I make.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity

Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Background

"I was absolutely overwhelmed with excitement at Curwen because of all the new technologies and so on...I realised it was such an exciting medium I wish I'd gone into this years ago."

W Barns-Graham

Having made a single successful screenprint, move onto making a small, editioned series of them. By working in a series, the artist can express an evolving pattern of ideas, showing how one print develops into the next. It can also be used as a way of trying out different combinations of colour within the layers - the main features of the work don't have to change at all in fact, just the colours used.

Starting with the original print, pupils should move in two directions: the first, creating a small number of the same print design but using different colours (try a 'hot' palette for one, then a 'cooler' palette for another, for example); the second direction is to keep the same colours for each layer as used in the original print, but vary small details within the print's actual structure (such as moving elements within the work around, or omitting them altogether).

At the end of the exercise, pupils should have a range of prints, all originating from the same point, but which should show stylistic developments in two directions.

Aims

To learn more about how to vary work within screenprinting by experimenting with different objectives.

Objective

To create small series of prints based on the original one.

Resources in the pack

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's printmaking

Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints

Resources from you

Earlier screenprint

Screenprinting materials/equipment, paper

Time scale

Approx 3 hours (including clearing up)

Expressive Arts (Art & Design)

5 Colour/pattern in textiles

Art & Design EXA 3-02a

I have experimented with a range of media and technologies to create images and objects, using my understanding of their properties.

Art & Design EXA 4-02a

I have continued to experiment with a range of media and technologies, handling them with control and assurance to create images and objects. I can apply my understanding of the properties of media and of techniques to specific tasks.

Art & Design EXA 3-06a

While working through a design process in response to a design brief, I can develop and communicate imaginative design solutions.

Art & Design EXA 4-06

By working through a design process in response to a design brief, I can develop and communicate imaginative and original design solutions.

Art and Design: Expressive Activity
Investigating and responding to visual and/or other stimuli

Developing media-handling skills and creative techniques

Developing and attempting to resolve personal ideas and interpretations creatively

Art & Design: Design Activity

Investigating the requirements and constraints of a design need or problem
Developing and considering approaches and possible solutions.

Background

"I want my work to be a simple statement. To have an atmosphere and integrity - this is a presence...To have interesting space relationships, relationships of colour, and colour to form - that is form suggesting colour and vice versa. One plane over the other in a totality of image, with something of the fun of the unexpected. A world in itself - of small area against large masses."

W Barns-Graham

Barns-Graham suffered from bronchial illness during her life, during which time she was often unable to do her usual art activities. While recuperating from one bout of illness, it was suggested to her that she used knitting to make artworks with. In typical fashion, Barns-Graham set to and created a series of highly coloured and patterned knitted ties - each one a miniature artwork in wool.

It was not uncommon for artists to create designs for textiles. Other well known names like Pablo Picasso, Raoul Dufy, Fernand Leger, Henri Matisse, Henry Moore and Ben Nicholson, to name a few, all created textile designs during the 20th century. An exercise undertaken by Barns-Graham at art college was to design a repeat pattern for textiles. She also took part in a collaborative project with other St Ives based artists to create a set of abstract designs printed onto linen tablemats which were then sold in Heal's department store, London.

Inevitably, the textile designs created by all these artists is distinctively theirs in style and feel. Based on some of the earlier exercises, pupils can create a simple design that is repeatable. If appropriate, they can do the single motif, then either photograph or scan it to make a digital file. By using image manipulation software on computer, pupils can multiply it in order to create the repeat pattern effect. Try placing the original image at a slightly different angle to see if the result is more visually appealing. By the end, everyone should have a design that would work if printed onto textiles (think about the current fashion for brightly printed fabrics).

Aims

To practise manipulating a simple image as a repeat pattern.

Objective

To create a successful design that could be transferred to textiles.

Resources in the pack

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings, paintings, prints
Info sheet on late 19th/20th century textile designers

Resources from you

Drawing/painting/computer equipment, as required

Time scale

Approx 2 hours

Art & Design Studies

7 Comparative studies

Art & Design EXA 3-07a

I can respond to the work of artists and designers by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work.

Art & Design EXA 4-07a

I can analyse art and design techniques, processes and concepts, make informed judgements and express considered opinions on my own and others' work.

Art and Design Studies

Research and investigate selected areas of Visual Arts and Design within any period(s) from 1750 up to the present. Demonstrate a critical awareness and communicate personal views, opinions and judgements.

Literacy & English

Writing LIT 3-29a

I can persuade, argue, evaluate, explore issues or express an opinion using a clear line of thought, relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.

Writing LIT 4-29a

I can persuade, argue, evaluate, explore issues or express and justify opinions within a convincing line of thought, using relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.

Background

Barns-Graham had an amazingly long and prolific career. In using different artforms, she examined the world around her in minute detail. Throughout her career she remained focused - motifs from early works reappear in later ones, and subject matter was continually re-examined with changes in outcomes.

As a result, there are many opportunities for comparative study within her work which would be useful for pupils: choose an example or examples of work from her early period (1940s and '50s) to contrast with an example (or examples) from her late period (1980s and '90s); compare her use of different techniques to depict the same theme - eg drawing vs painting of the Grindelwald Glacier; her use of geometric motifs in different series of works - circles vs lines.

Looking out from Barns-Graham's work, it would also be useful to consider how her late flourish of exuberant printmaking was typical of a certain kind of artist. Matisse, for example, created colourful, exuberant paper cut-outs in the last years of his life which, while reflecting earlier work, are a complete body of work in their own right. Did Barns-Graham feel a similar strong desire to keep creating, more or less up to her death, in the same way as he did? Towards the end of her life she said "At my age, there's no time to be lost. I say to myself, 'Do it now, say it now, don't be afraid'. I've got today, but who knows about tomorrow? I'm not ready for death yet, there's still so much I want to do. Life is so exciting; nature is so exciting. Trying to catch the one simple statement about it. That's what I'm aiming for, I'll keep on trying." In her later years, she was reinvigorated by seeing work (in Spain) by Picasso and Miró (of whose work she was already aware) - both these artists also had 'later flowerings' in their artistic careers and could be studied.

Pupils should perhaps do 3 small comparative studies - eg one comparing 2 individual artworks by Barns-Graham from different periods; one comparing her use of different techniques to achieve similar ends; and one, comparing a period of her career with that of another major European artist of the 20th century.

Aims

To undertake a short programme of comparative studies.

Objective

To learn more about Barns-Graham's work overall by studying small details of it comparatively.

Resources in the pack

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings, paintings, prints

Resources from you

The use of computers for doing searches online; also library resources

Time scale

At least 4 hours, depending on time available

Cross-curricular links

Literacy & English

Listening & Talking LIT 3-10a / 4-10a

Reading LIT 3-16a / Reading 4-16a

Writing LIT 3-25a / Writing LIT 4-25a

Writing LIT 3-28a / Writing LIT 4-28a

Creative writing 1

Barns-Graham was an avid reader and had a strong interest in contemporary writing. The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust now funds residencies for writers to spend time at Balmungo to work on a project. Pupils could choose a topic close to them and try and write a few paragraphs or short poem about it, paying close attention to the language they use and trying to think imaginatively. An important aspect of writing is also discussing your writing with fellow writers: a secondary part of the exercise could be to have a sort of 'critique' of each pupils piece of work with their fellow pupils. This would not be meant as pointless criticising, but rather supportive and useful, aiding development. It's also a good way to gain confidence.

Literacy & English

Reading LIT 3-16a / Reading 4-16a

Writing LIT 3-25a / Writing LIT 4-25a

Writing LIT 3-28a / Writing LIT 4-28a

Creative writing 2

Following on from the first writing exercise, ask pupils to focus on a small detail of what they were writing about, and write a short piece of work based on that. If they chose to write about something outdoors, for example, they could concentrate on a single leaf from a tree; or if they wrote about a car they admire, they could write a short piece on its colour only. The point of this is to hone their skills at really getting to the heart of what they're writing about, and the key is being as succinct as possible in what they say. Barns-Graham realised this with her artwork - she could put across her message using carefully placed colours and forms.

Music EXA 3-19a / 4-19a

Numeracy & Mathematics MTH 3-13a /

MTH 4-13a

How do different musical styles relate to mathematics and art?

At the core of music is mathematics. The way in which scales and chords combine to produce music all reflect basic mathematical rhythms and the intervals between notes. It also explains why some music sounds 'major' in key to our ears and some 'minor', why some musical combinations sound 'off key', and why music is so good at conveying moods of different sorts. Barns-Graham enjoyed listening to a wide range of music - from classical (and very mathematically precise) like Mozart and Bach, to more contemporary like jazz and Philip Glass. Pupils could listen to short examples of several different kinds of music, from different stylistic periods, and try and explain how they sound different - and how they are similar too. Moreover, Barns-Graham did not just create her artworks in a random fashion. She was acutely aware that mathematical patterns lay at the heart of much of nature (eg repeating cellular structures etc), having read Prof D'Arcy Thompson's book 'On Growth and Form' early in her career. She had also read books about the 'Golden Section', a geometric way of dividing up elements of an artwork when creating it in order to create the most harmonious and balanced composition. Pupils could try experimenting with different variations of the 'Golden Section'.

Cross-curricular links

Sciences:

Processes of the planet SCN 3-05a

Earth's materials SCN 3-17a /SCN 4-17a

Geological formations

Barns-Graham was fascinated by the world of nature in general, but she had a particular interest in the formation of landscape: the Grindelwald Glacier in Switzerland was a continual source of inspiration to her, but so too were the lava flows which had hardened into rock formations in Lanzarote, or the slab-like rocks that made up some of the coastal seascape of Orkney. Examine different geological formations, trying to understand which period of evolution they come from and how they were created. Choose two examples which have very different physical appearances, such as glacial valleys and a coastal cliff. Also consider how the vegetation on each differs and why.

Social Studies: People, past events & societies SOC 4-05a / SOC 4-05c / SCN 4-17a

Modernism - examine some of its facets

Modernism was a term used particularly in the first half of the 20th century to describe anything that was seen as non-traditional. It described visual art, but also writing, music and the performing arts. It's a broad term and had many variations, some according to the medium it describes, others related to geography.

Pupils could do a brief online search in order to grasp the basics of what is meant by Modernism, and then choose a Modernist poem or artwork and compare it with another. They should be looking for similar motifs or beliefs that the writer/composer/artist is trying to get across, whether there are links with the history of the time (eg post First or Second World War), and how successful the end result is today.

Barns-Graham would certainly have been seen as a Modernist painter in so far as her abstract work was viewed, especially by some of the more conservative members of the St Ives art scene, and was very aware of her place in it.

Resources



Information on W Barns-Graham Charitable Trust

In 1960 Barns-Graham inherited a family home, Balmungo House, by St Andrews. In the years following, she divided her year equally between St Ives and St Andrews. The house lay at the heart of her working career, affirming her Scottish background.

A Resource Centre

Balmungo House provides public access to Barns-Graham's life and work and practice. The house contains the artist's library and part of her archive which are available for research purposes by appointment (her main archive is held at the University of St Andrews on behalf of the Trust and is available for study). Besides acting as the Trust's administrative centre, schools and colleges are invited to use the house as a place of learning.

The Collection

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham bequeathed to the Trust a significant collection of paintings, drawings and prints. The conservation of the collection is one of the Trust's principal tasks. The extent of the collection offers a unique opportunity for students and art historians to develop a fuller understanding of the evolution of Barns-Graham's art and her contribution to 20th century British contemporary art.

The ground floor rooms hold a programme of changing displays of paintings, drawings and prints.

The Trust facilitates the loan of artworks to public institutions, arranges touring exhibitions of her work, and assists the inclusion of works in appropriate collections.

Artist in residence

To continue Balmungo's role as a creative centre, the Trust has initiated a programme of residencies. These are generally in partnership with external arts or educational organisations; however, the Trust is developing more flexible short-term options, on a rental or invitation basis, and details can be found on the Trust website, which also hosts information about past residencies.

www.barns-grahamtrust.org.uk

(Information taken from the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust's information leaflet)

Resources

W Barns-Graham chronology

1912	Born 8 June, St Andrews, Fife	1949	Worked in Paris Founder member of the Penwith Society of Artists Resigned from the St Ives Society of Artists with 16 others
1924	Family moved to Stirlingshire	1950	Visited Italy; attended Hepworth opening at Venice Biennale
1930	Visited Paris and Rouen	1951	Worked in Italy and Scilly Isles
1932	Edinburgh College of Art, Diploma course (Painting) DAE	1954	Travelled to Paris with David Lewis and Roger Hilton. With Nicholson, visited the director of Aujourd'hui at his glass-walled house Visited Veira de Silva
1933-34	Studio at St Andrews, while recovering from illness	1954	Travelled to Venice, met Peggy Guggenheim Worked in Tuscany
1934-37	Continued at Edinburgh College of Art	1955	Worked in Tuscany, Calabria and Sicily Met Poliakoff, Istrati and Michel Seuphor, visited studios of Brancusi, Arp, Giacometti and Pevsner On staff of Leeds School of Art
1936-40	Studio at 5 Alva Street, Edinburgh	1956-57	Worked in Spain, France and the Balearics
1937	Awarded ECA Andrew Grant Vacation Scholarship to study at the International Exhibition Paris. Travelled to Paris and the South of France in the company of Margaret Mellis.	1958	Inherited Balmungo estate, near St Andrews
1939	Worked in Scotland (Aviemore and Rothiemurchus)	1960	Rented studio in London
1940	Went to Cornwall with award as recommended by Hubert Wellington. Met Adrian Stokes and his wife Margaret Mellis, with whom she had been at art college in Edingburgh, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Naum and Miriam Gabo, Herbert Read, Borlase Smart, John and Elizabeth Summerson, Margaret Gardiner, Bernard Leach and Alfred Wallis. Moved into No. 3 Porthmeor Studios	1961-63	Returned to St Ives
1942	Became member of Newlyn Society of Artists and St Ives Society of Artists. Met John Wells	1963	Worked in Scotland and St Ives
1943	Introduced Borlase Smart to Nicholson and Hepworth	1963-65	Visited Amsterdam, The Hague, Delft and Rotterdam
1945	Private teaching (1945-47) Moved to No. 1 Porthmeor Studios First met David Haughton, Bryan Wynter, Guido Morris	1966	Visited America
1946	First meetings of Crypt Group in her studio	1967	Worked in St Ives and St Andrews
1947-48	Crypt Group second and third exhibitions Met David Lewis (married 1949, annulled 1963)	1973-92	Worked in Orkney
1949	Worked on glacier drawings and gouaches in Switzerland	1984-85	Worked in Lanzarote
		1989-90	Visited Barcelona
		1991	Worked in Lanzarote
		1991-92	Received Honorary Doctorate, University of St Andrews
		1992	Made Honorary Member Penwith Society and Newlyn Society
		1987-04	Worked in St Ives and St Andrews
		1987	Established the Barns-Graham Trust (activated upon her death in 2004)
		1999	Made Honorary Member RSA and RSW and Scottish Arts Club
		2000	Received Honorary Doctorate, University of Plymouth
		2001	Awarded CBE
		2003	Awarded Honorary Doctorate, University of Exeter
		2004	Awarded Honorary Doctorate, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh
			Died 26 January

Resources

23 facts about W Barns-Graham

- 1 Wilhelmina Barns-Graham was born in St Andrews, Fife in 1912; so 2012 marks the centenary of her birth.
- 2 She was interested in drawing and painting from a very young age, already creating 'secret rooms' using coloured geometric shapes from about the age of 8.
- 3 She moved with her family to Carbeth in Stirlingshire when she was about 12. They continued to live there, although her later schooling was undertaken at St Hilda's School in Edinburgh.
- 4 She was naturally left-handed but was taught to use her right hand - the 'correct' hand. In the end, she used both and was skilled at not just mirror writing, but also writing with both the left and right hands simultaneously.
- 5 Perhaps linked to this, she also had synesthesia, the ability to link all sensory perceptions with a colour. Even letters of the alphabet all had their own colour
- 6 And again, perhaps linked to this, she also had a very mathematical approach to creating paintings, seeing patterns and rhythms in the placing of colours and forms.
- 7 Despite a lack of support, particularly from her father, she finally attended art college in Edinburgh (1931-37). Bouts of bronchial illness caused her to take longer than usual to complete her diploma and post-diploma qualifications.
- 8 Her teachers at Edinburgh included many highly regarded artists, such as William Gillies and John Maxwell.
- 9 In March 1940 she arrived in St Ives, a place chosen partly on health reasons, but also because a colony of artists already worked there. Her friend from college, Margaret Mellis, and her husband Adrian Stokes, had arrived there the previous year.
- 10 During her early years in St Ives, she was to meet and become friends with many artists and writers who are now well known names - Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Sven Berlin, Bernard Leach, Alfred Wallis to name a few.
- 11 In 1942 she joined the Newlyn Society of Artists, continuing to exhibit with them until her death.
- 12 In 1946 is the first exhibition of 'young moderns' in the crypt of the St Ives Society of Artists' New Gallery.
- 13 In 1949 a small number of moderns, including Barns-Graham, resign from the St Ives Society of Artists. A couple of months later, the Penwith Society of Arts in Cornwall is founded with Barns-Graham as a founder member.
- 14 Also in 1949, Barns-Graham visited the Grindelwald Glacier in Switzerland which was to hold a lifelong fascination for her.
- 15 In 1952 she attended the Penzance School of Art in order to learn etching and engraving.
- 16 She continued to exhibit work in the UK and abroad during the 1950s, making repeat visits to France and Italy.
- 17 In July 1956 she had her first solo exhibition in Scotland at the Scottish Gallery (Aitken Dott & Son), Edinburgh.
- 18 In 1960 she was left Balmungo House near St Andrews by her late aunt. In the last decades of her life, she tended to spend 6 months at her studio in St Ives, and 6 months at her Balmungo studio.
- 19 During the 1960s and 1970s, she continued to exhibit her work in the UK and abroad, visiting among other places Holland and the USA.
- 20 In 1982 she had her first solo exhibition at the Crawford Centre for the Arts, St Andrews. Its building was formerly St Katherine's School where she went to school as a young child. In 1986 she became Honorary President of the Friends of the Crawford Centre for the Arts, a position she held until her death.
- 21 In 1989 'W Barns-Graham Retrospective 1940-89' opened at the City Art Centre, Edinburgh. This marked the beginning of her work at last receiving the critical acclaim it deserved.
- 22 During the 1990s and early 2000s she was awarded 4 Honorary Doctorates from UK universities, including St Andrews, and in 2001 she received a CBE.
- 23 Wilhelmina Barns-Graham died in 2004 in her 92nd year.

Resources

Photos of W Barns-Graham



WBG with Margaret Mellis, Edinburgh College of Art, 1930s



WBG in her Alva Street studio, Edinburgh, 1937



A meeting of the Crypt Group, 1947 (WBG standing)
Photo Central Office of Information, London



WBG sketches from a vantage point above Porthgwidden, 1947
Photo Central Office of Information, London



Grindelwald Glacier, Switzerland, 1949; with the Brotherton Family, WBG second from left
© PN Brotherton



WBG in her Porthmeor Studio, 1962
Cornish Magazine

Resources

Photos of W Barns-Graham



WBG drawing on the beach, Fife, 1982
Photo Antonia Reeve



WBG in Barnaloft Studio, 1980s



WBG working on Eight Lines, St Ives, 1986; photo David Crane



WBG painting at Balmungo 1992
Photo David Roche



WBG receiving her Honorary Doctorate from St Andrews University, 1992



WBG on the occasion of receiving her CBE, Buckingham Palace, 2001; with Geoffrey Bertram & Rowan James
Photo Charles Green

Resources

Information sheet on W Barns-Graham's drawings

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham loved drawing from a young age. One of her early memories was having a drawing in coloured chalks of a character from a jam pot advert pinned up on the school wall! She used to create series of geometric shapes in colour which she called her 'secret rooms'. By the time she was in her teens, she was already a fairly skilled draughtswoman and was desperate to become an artist, much to the displeasure of her father. Fortunately support came from her Aunt Mary Neish - from whom she was later to receive Balmungo - and in 1930 she started at Edinburgh College of Art.



Portrait of Allan Barns-Graham, 1932-3; charcoal on paper, 48.5x31.6cm; BGT2301

Drawing remained part of her artistic practice from these early days to the end of her life. She saw it as an intrinsic element in helping her to understand nature and the natural world around her, spending many hours drawing, and called it 'a discipline of the mind'. Nor did she see drawings as purely source material for her paintings. She believed acquiring and practising the skill of drawing was important to her ability as a painter, but that the one did not necessarily influence the other.



Torcello, 1954; pencil and wash on paper, 45.7x55.5cm; BGT6210

Many of her drawings appear on first sight to be quite representational - particularly those of landscapes or architectural views; others, from the same approximate date can appear quite abstract - landscapes made up of squares or repeated patterns. Her choice of materials varied according to the mood she was trying to achieve - from neat pencil and wash drawings to bold ink and oil. She studied nature in great depth in order to be able to draw and paint it: "I've studied cloud formations, wave movements, the effect of water and heat on clay country, ice and so forth...I was interested in bird flights, the design of foxglove leaves, the backs of fern leaves... There is great order and disorder in cell formations, in personal relationships, in rush hour crowds...".



Rocks, Formentera, 1958; India ink on paper, 42.4x54.5cm; BGT 751

Barns-Graham's attitude to studying and portraying nature was learned from her art college tutors, following a pattern of art training that had been done for generations. From Naum Gabo, whom she had met early on in St Ives, she learned to be a committed artist and he had a lasting intellectual influence on her as well as deeply impressing her with his transparent sculptures. In 1956, he wrote "There is nothing in nature that is not in us", and in 1957 "Our thinking and perception are creative acts". Like many of her fellow 'moderns' in St Ives, Barns-Graham believed that only abstraction could convey this sense of the outer and inner eye. This explains why she was so entranced by the Grindelwald Glacier - its natural power being apparently at odds with its transparent glassiness - and why the glacier motif reappears in her work throughout her career.



Glacier Study, 1948-9; mixed media on paper, 40.1x58cm; BGT2304

Another influence here was the book 'On Growth and Form'

Resources

Information sheet on W Barns-Graham's drawings

by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, a professor at St Andrews University who would definitely have been a familiar figure to her in her youth. Her drawings - and indeed all her art - always tried to show the viewer more than just what is seen with the eye; to understand the hidden forces that underpin nature. D'Arcy Thompson believed that 'The form, then, of any portion of matter, whether it be living or dead, and the changes of form which are apparent in its movements and in its growth, may in all cases alike be described as due to the action of force'.



Glacier Knot, 1978; mixed media on card, 26.6x20.3cm; BGT76



Against the Wind, 1980; mixed media on card, 33x24cm; BGT123



Stromness, Orkney 1, 1985-6; pencil and oil on paper, 53.5x75cm; BGT676



Ruta de los Volcanos, Lanzarote, 1989; pencil and wash on paper, 57x75.5cm; BGT1142

From the 1970s she created series of drawings that explored the movement of wind and waves, as well as the formation of ice. These tight, line drawings can be seen on the one hand as geometric exercises, but on the other as an attempt to convey the experience of nature in a linear way. By using short lines that changed direction and cool greeny washes of colour, Barns-Graham suggested jagged planes of ice in 'Glacier Knot'. Two years later, in 'Against the Wind', the use of more circular whorls suggesting a turbulent sea against a leaden sky are clear depictions of stormy weather, but in a pared down way. In these rhythmic drawings, there is a meditative feel and the notion that much contemplative study has gone into them - watching the sky and seas over seasons in order to try and understand them; continuing to think about effect of ice and rock within the glacier in order to find new things to draw or paint.

In the last few decades of her life, Barns-Graham continued to use drawing as a means of depicting what she saw and felt about a landscape or a series of buildings. Comparing her drawings of, for example Italy in the mid-1950s, with those she did in Orkney in the mid-1980s show the same strong and confident line. She was able to suggest accurately the topography of a landscape and the placement of buildings within it, but even in those more representational drawings, her use of lines is kept simple and not overworked. Her drawings of the Lanzarote landscape with its stark, rocky hillsides created over millenia by erupting volcanoes, evoke a sense of hard rockiness but also show the patterns and rhythms that have occurred naturally in the rock formations.

Her quality as a draughtsman was much admired by many of her fellow artists and there is no doubt that this ability also enhanced her skill as a painter. With a clarity of view and a sense of purpose, she never stopped being entranced by nature and tried to capture its vitality till the end of her life.

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings (inc mixed media)



Portrait of Allan Barns-Graham, 1932-3; charcoal on paper, 48.5x31.6cm; BGT2301



Old Mill, 1938; pen and mixed media on paper, 27x38cm; BGT9459



Mevagissey I, 1948; pen, ink and wash on paper, 41x49cm; BGT1395



Glacier Study, 1948-9; mixed media on paper, 40.1x58cm; BGT2304



Torcello, 1954; pencil and wash on paper, 45.7x55.5cm; BGT6210



St Martins Lower Town, 1951; pencil and oil on board, 32.8x50.8cm; BGT581

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings (inc mixed media)



Monte Olivetti, 1954; pencil and tempera on paper, 39.5x43cm; BGT1083



Rocks, Formentera, 1958; India ink on paper, 42.4x54.5cm; BGT 751



St Ives from Salubrious House, 1968; pencil and oil on paper, 69.5x82cm; BGT673



Glacier Knot, 1978; mixed media on card, 26.6x20.3cm; BGT76



Snow Shelf, Fife, 1978; mixed media on card, 29.5x20.7cm; BGT1902



Against the Wind, 1980; mixed media on card, 33x24cm; BGT123

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's drawings (inc mixed media)



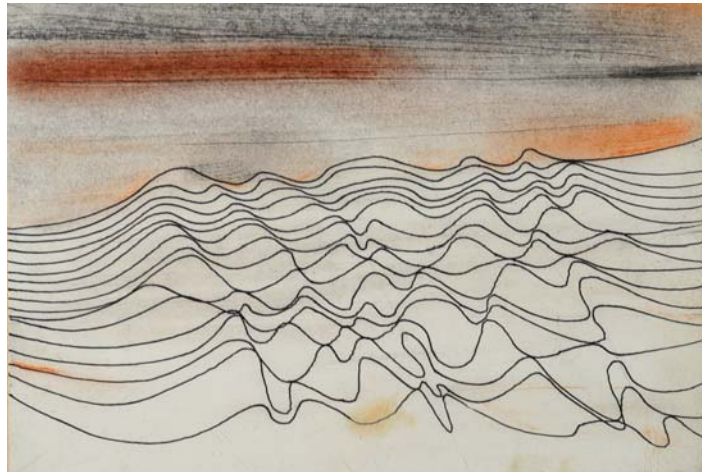
Deodar Tree, 1980; pencil on paper, 55x76.3cm; BGT654



West Sands (St Andrews) July, 1981; acrylic and pencil on card, 27x38cm; BGT760



St Monans, 1982; pencil and oil on paper, 76x104cm; BGT6203



Seventeen Lines, 1982; ink, oil on card, 13.2x19.3cm; BGT166



Stromness, Orkney 1, 1985-6; pencil and oil on paper, 53.5x75cm; BGT676



Ruta de los Volcanos, Lanzarote, 1989; pencil and wash on paper, 57x75.5cm; BGT1142

Resources

Information sheet on some early influences on W Barns-Graham's work

The following people were influences on Barns-Graham's early artistic development and as such are worth mentioning here. Only brief details are given, but interested students could research specific areas in greater depth.

Naum Gabo

In 1948, Barns-Graham wrote "One of my biggest experiences was seeing Naum Gabo's 'Construction in Space: Spiral Theme' 1941, at the London Museum Exhibition, 1942." He was a Russian artist and sculptor, well known for his 'Constructivist', kinetic sculptures which experimented with early plastics, amongst other materials. The point of them was to go beyond exploring the outer surface of a sculpture and suggest volume through the juxtaposition of transparent linear planes. His paintings from the early 1940s tried to do the same using colour and these were also influential on various artists working in Cornwall at that time. However, it was his sculptures that particularly influenced Barns-Graham. Gabo and his wife moved to the USA in 1946.

Sir William Gillies

Barns-Graham described William Gillies as 'a wonderful teacher' (at Edinburgh College of Art) who 'taught students to use paint with sensitivity'. He also believed artists should paint with enjoyment, not struggle, and that it was important to recognise when a painting was finished and not keeping overworking it. He had travelled in France and Italy in the 1920s and was deeply impressed by an exhibition of work by Paul Klee in the early 1930s. He concentrated mostly on still-lives and landscapes and was an influential figure in the Scottish art scene.

Barbara Hepworth

Yorkshire born Barbara Hepworth trained first at Leeds School of Art (where she became friends with Henry Moore), then the Royal College of Art in London. Thanks to a scholarship in the mid-1920s, she moved to Italy to study sculpture. With her second husband, Ben Nicholson, she spent a lot of time in the 1930s in France, joining the Abstraction-Création group, and moved to Cornwall in 1939. Barns-Graham would meet her soon after her own arrival in Cornwall the following year. Hepworth too was influenced by the writings and sculpture of Gabo.

John Maxwell

Another of Barns-Graham's Edinburgh teachers, John Maxwell taught general drawing and still-life, and like Gillies, his close friend, had great technical skills. According to Barns-Graham, 'the proper physical treatment of pigment always obsessed him'. In the 1920s he had travelled and studied in Europe and was himself influenced by the dreamlike works of Chagall and Klee.



'Spiral Theme', Naum Gabo, 1941
© National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh



'The Harbour', Sir William Gillies, 1934
© National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh



'Pelagos', Barbara Hepworth, 1946, © The Tate Gallery, London



'Night Flowers', John Maxwell, 1959
© The Tate Gallery, London

Resources

Information sheet on some early influences on W Barns-Graham's work

Ben Nicholson

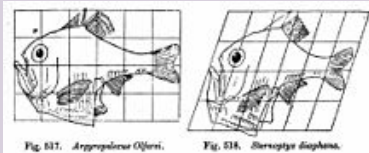
Ben Nicholson was an influential artist who had become interested in abstract art in the early 1930s after meeting artists like Braque, Brancusi and Mondrian in Paris. He joined the group Abstraction-Création in Paris and was an important link to developments in abstraction in Europe. In 1939 he moved to Carbis Bay near St Ives and started painting in a late Cubist style, moving away from the Mondrian-influenced style of some of his earlier works. Like Barns-Graham, he was a founder member of the Penwith Society of Arts. She was struck by his 'dedicated rhythm of work' and he did have a profound effect on her work of the 1940s and '50s. He left Cornwall in 1958.



'1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)',
Ben Nicholson, 1943-45
© The Tate Gallery, London

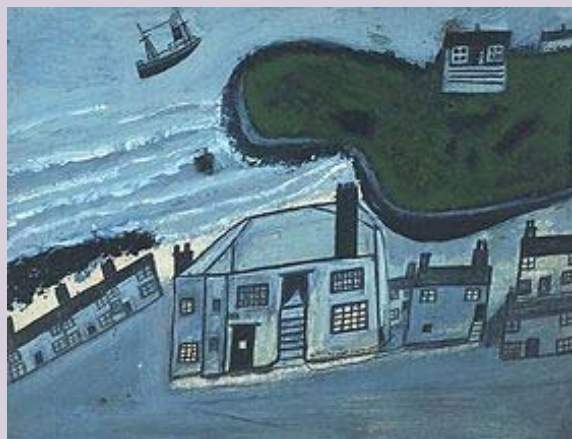
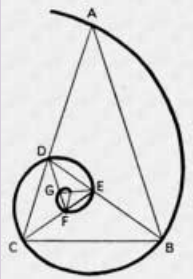
D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson

D'Arcy Thompson was a well known scientist and academic, first at University College, Dundee, where he founded an impressive zoology museum, filled with specimens from all over the world, and then at St Andrews University where he took up the Chair of Natural History in 1917. The same year saw the publication of his book 'On Growth and Form' which was to be so influential to artists like Ben Nicholson and Barns-Graham when it was revised in 1942. In this work, Thompson wrote about morphology, the way in which one creature could be changed into another similar one by the application of simple mathematical transformations. Barns-Graham would have been aware of him in St Andrews while she was growing up and almost certainly read the revised version of his book. When discussing harmony and proportion within the natural world as created by mathematical laws, Thompson discussed the proportion of the 'Golden Section' and the Fibonacci Sequence, a long understood sequencing of numbers where each new number is the sum of the previous two. This changing of one organism into another by simple cellular multiplication, 'morphology', became an important concept for many artists of the time.



The growth of a shell as underpinned by geometry (left), and (above) the 'morphing' of one species of fish into another by using a simple mathematical transformation.

From 'On Growth and Form' by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, 1917, rev 1942



'Hold House Port Mear Square Island',
Alfred Wallis, c1932
© The Tate Gallery, London

Alfred Wallis

Alfred Wallis was a mariner and fisherman who was born in Penzance, Cornwall. In the 1870s he was working as a deep-sea fisherman, sailing to Newfoundland, but by 1890 he and his family moved to St Ives where he started a scrap metal and marine stores business. After his wife died in 1922, he took up painting 'for company', using scraps of cardboard and basic paints bought from ships' chandlers. He painted seascapes from memory with the most important subjects being largest in size - proportion and scale were ignored. When artists like Ben Nicholson arrived in the St Ives area, they found Wallis already creating artworks that had an almost naïve abstraction about them. This wasn't what Wallis's intention had been in creating them, but it fitted well with the beliefs of the 'modern' painters recently arrived in Cornwall and as such was influential.

Resources

Information sheet on W Barns-Graham's paintings

Barns-Graham was a competent painter from a young age. An early still life shows that she had a keen eye for tonal colour as well as composition. She viewed drawing and painting as separate but linked disciplines, tending not to make lots of preparatory studies but rather to work out her ideas within series of paintings (this can often be seen in the numbered titles of works). Throughout art school her skills were honed by a series of teachers many of whom had 'colourist' leanings. Through this, Barns-Graham learned to have a deep appreciation of colour - not to be afraid of it but to use it to give depth and form to a painting.

The 1940s was when many important relationships in Barns-Graham's life were formed, as well as a lifelong, self-imposed regime of investigation into creating art: "...painting is pattern and paintings should be just as good upside down, sideways, in a looking glass". The visit in 1949 to the Grindelwald Glacier in Switzerland was a key moment in her development as an artist - her fascination with the subject continued to be revisited throughout her life.

From the early 1950s her paintings became simplified, influenced partly by the sculptures of Gabo and later Hepworth, but these were nonetheless Barns-Graham's own attempts at creating an inner and outer balance in a work. This period was also a time of consolidation and artistic recognition. Travel to new places continued to feed her imagination - in 1953 for instance, she and her husband travelled to Paris, meeting the artists Alberto Giacometti and Jean Arp as well as Antoine Pevsner, Gabo's brother; and the following year, they were in Italy.

The geometric possibilities of circles and squares were the focus of a series of works in the 1960s and '70s ('Things of a King in Order and Disorder') - examining their relationships physically while uniting them through her use of colour. She saw an infinite number of variations and was 'intensely interested in the square as a form. It typifies the miraculous and seemingly limitless inventiveness of nature, with its underlying structure or order and the fundamental need of any attempted disorder to return ultimately to ordered wholeness...'. At the same time as creating such controlled paintings, she also re-examined the glacier theme, looking closely at the appearance of splintered ice for example by adding scratched underdrawing to the painting to give an almost tactile sense of its roughness - a good example of how her drawing and painting often came together.

In the 1980s and '90s, she continued to create works on the theme of the glacier and splintered ice. The glacier paintings of the 1980s, for example, are perhaps more purely geometric than some of the earlier ones and there is



[Still Life, Yellow], c1936; oil on hardboard, 52x74.8cm BGT1063



Lilac and Green, 1957; oil on canvas, 50x76cm; BGT335



Assembly of Nine, 1964; oil on hardboard, 58.5x91.5cm; BGT558



Glacier Snout (Pink), 1978; gouache on paper, 57.2x77.5cm; BGT6393

Resources

Information sheet on W Barns-Graham's paintings

quite a strong resemblance to the offset drawings she did of the glacier in the early 1950s. The splintered ice series, based on her examination of a puddle of broken ice, is another exercise in geometric workings-out. The lines that cross-hatch the top half of the work are drawn with a mathematical precision, giving the sense of sharpness and fragmentation. This is then continued in a more subtle way by the pale yellows, whites and greys of the paint. The result is both beautiful and fascinating.

Barns-Graham continued to explore 'Things of a Kind', the repetitive, geometric placings of shapes on canvas or board heightened by her careful use of colour to give a sense of dynamism or movement across the painting. In 'Expanding Forms (Entrance)', Touch Point Series No 1' the broken, elongated triangles are bunched up at the left side of the work and the rest is just space. Yet there is a feeling of the kind of movement found in a mathematical graph: that knowledge that the pattern continues to repeat itself forever but only a small portion of it is visible.

Much later, in 2003, Barns-Graham was still working on that theme. In 'Wait' the triangles have been replaced by just 3 brushstrokes, each one getting stronger as it moves from left to right, changing from a slight curve to a broad, straight stroke. The visual connection with the earlier 'Expanding Forms' series is clear, albeit in an even more pared down and confident way. For any painter, it would be a boldly formal statement, but for someone in their early 90s, it is astonishing, and in the vibrant choice of colour and painterly use of colour, also relates to the exuberant screenprints she created in the last years of her life.

Another link to the late screenprints is the actual way Barns-Graham made her paintings on paper. Right from the start she worked in series, usually working on more than one work at once. In late series, like Scorpio I and II, she would have several prepared canvases in front of her and would move between them adding complicated washes of colour. In the same way, her late screenprints often had more than 10 different layers in order to achieve the ideal colour. Barns-Graham remained true to her interests and beliefs all along and her thirst to examine and understand the details of the natural world around her was unquenchable till the end.



Variation on a Theme Splintered Ice No.1, 1987; oil on canvas, 91.5x122cm; BGT6463



February Painting (Winter Series No 1), 1994, oil on canvas, 68x93cm; BGT1158



Expanding Forms (Entrance), Touch Point Series No 1, 1980; acrylic on canvas, 122x122cm; BGT389



Wait, 2003; acrylic on canvas, 76.5x101cm; BGT1020

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings



[Sketch of Iona Cathedral],
c1935, oil on wood panel,
45.7x35.5cm; BGT1057



[Still Life, Yellow], c1936; oil on hardboard,
52x74.8cm; BGT1063



Island Sheds, No 2, 1940; oil on wood panel,
33x40.5cm; BGT1072



View of St Ives, 1940; oil on canvas,
63.5x76.5cm; BGT3271



White Cottage, Cornwall, 1944; gouache
on paper, 44x58cm; BGT6401



Sleeping Town, 1948; oil on canvas,
56x76cm; BGT711



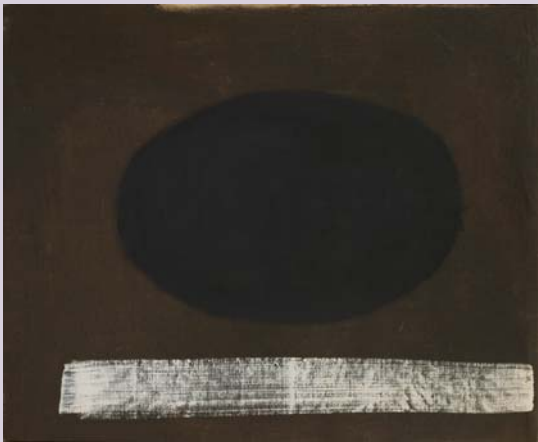
White Cone, 1953; oil on board, 51x94cm;
BGT6204



Lilac and Green, 1957; oil on canvas,
50x76cm; BGT335

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings



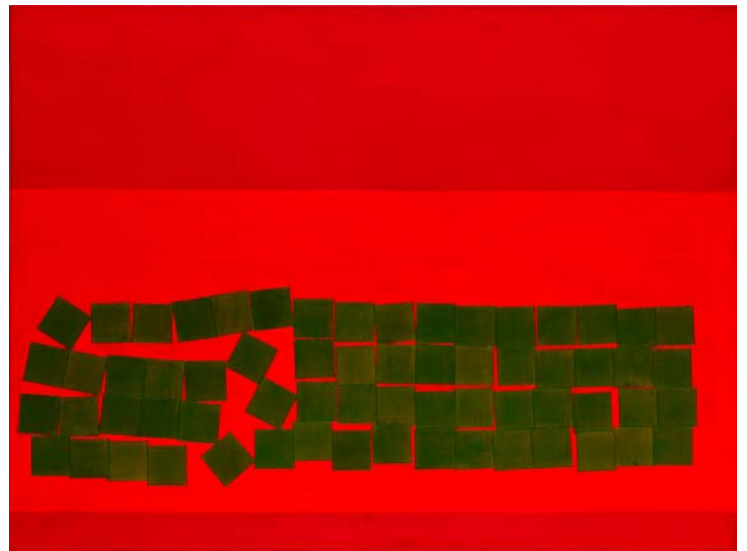
Black Oval, 1957-9; oil on canvas, 84.2x102.8cm; BGT6465



Spanish Coast No 3 [Spanish Islands Series], 1958-9; oil on canvas, 67x84.5cm; BGT6406



Assembly of Nine, 1964; oil on hardboard, 58.5x91.5cm; BGT558



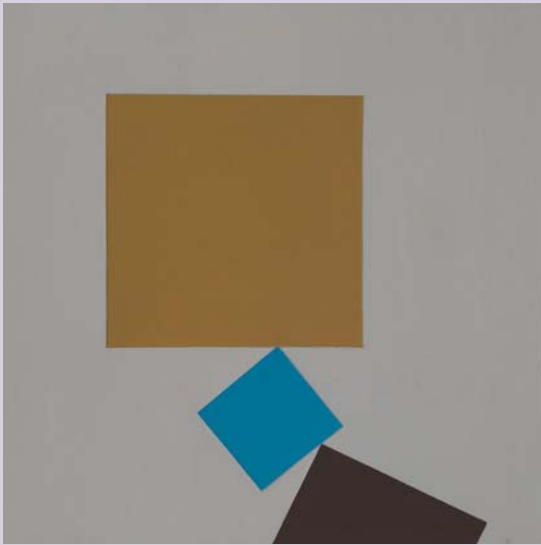
Olive Green Squares on Vermillion, 1968; oil on canvas, 90.7x121cm; BGT1307



Yellow Painting, 1966; oil on canvas, 105x152cm; BGT6458

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings



Three Squares (Mustard, Turquoise and Brown on Grey), 1968; oil and acrylic on Hardboard, 5.6x50.9cm; BGT413



Mirage, 1976; oil on hardboard, 81x58.3cm; BGT376



Glacier, 1978; gouache on paper, 77.3x57.3cm; BGT529



Glacier Snout (Pink), 1978; gouache on paper, 57.2x77.5cm; BGT6393



Summer Painting Series, 1986; gouache on paper, 56x76cm; BGT651



Expanding Forms (Entrance), Touch Point Series No 1, 1980; acrylic on canvas, 122x122cm; BGT389

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's paintings



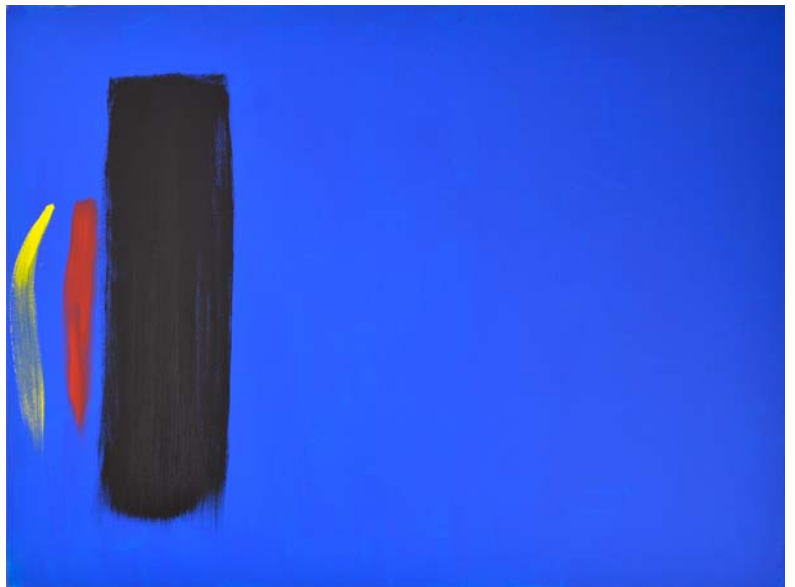
Variation on a Theme Splintered Ice No.1, 1987; oil on canvas, 91.5x122cm; BGT6463



February Painting (Winter Series No 1), 1994, oil on canvas, 68x93cm; BGT1158



Scorpio Series No 1, 1995; acrylic on paper, 56x76cm; BGT 948



Wait, 2003; acrylic on canvas, 76.5x101cm; BGT1020



Untitled (April), 2001; acrylic on paper, 56x76cm; BGT523

Resources

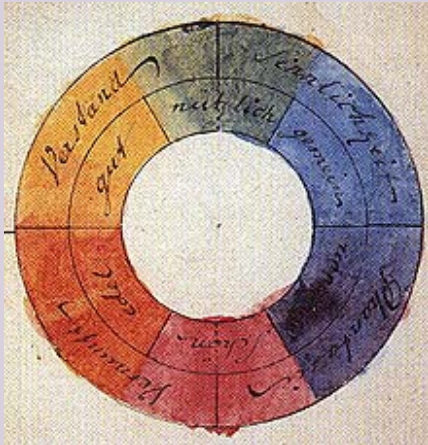
Info sheet on the basics of colour theory

Ideas about colour were first written about in the 15th century during the Italian Renaissance by Alberti and then Leonardo da Vinci. By the 18th century, when science and the study of optics were becoming more advanced, discursive writings appeared (such as Isaac Newton's 'Opticks', 1704) which explored the notion of 'primary' colours.

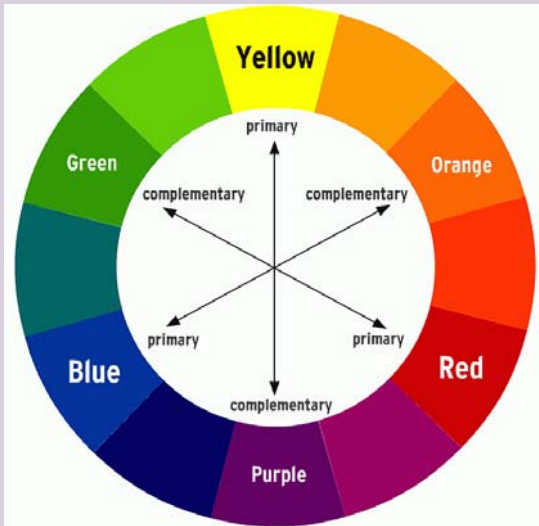
'Primary' colours were seen as being red, yellow and blue - in other words, the three colours believed to be capable of mixing all other colours. During the 18th century, further experimentation with complementary colours was undertaken, for example by German poet Johann Goethe in 1810 in 'Theory of Colours', and in 1839 by French chemist Michel Chevreul in 'The Law of Simultaneous Colour Contrast'.

Since then, German and British scientists realised that more accurately primary colours should be described as red, green, blue. With the development of chemical printing (first in ink printing and later in photographic) a further adaption to this was the CMYK system - cyan, magenta, yellow and black which is still used in process printing today.

A modern version of Goethe's colour wheel shows the way that by mixing colours to get tonal variation, secondary and even tertiary colours are created. Barns-Graham would undoubtedly have been well versed in the theories behind colour. Throughout her artistic career, she had great confidence in using colour, sometimes choosing colours which at first sight were not harmonious and yet which still work in her composition. In 'Olive Green Squares on Vermillion' her apparently dull green used in the squares actually 'sings' off the canvas because it's placed on a brighter background of red, its opposite colour on the colour wheel. The same great understanding of colour and how to use it can be seen in Barns-Graham's late screenprints with Graal Press.



Goethe's colour wheel from 'Theory of Colours', 1810



Example of a contemporary colour wheel showing primary & complementary colours



Olive Green Squares on Vermillion, 1968; oil on canvas, 90.7x121cm; BGT1307

Resources

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's collaged works

The use of collage within abstract works was not an uncommon one in modernist art - artists like Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso used it to great success. Barns-Graham's earliest ones, from the 1950s, are actually reliefs carved out of the base board and bear a striking resemblance in form to earlier painted works by Piet Mondrian and later, Ben Nicholson. The colours used are very minimal and pure with large areas of white, allowing the carved shapes to remain prominent.



Relief: Yellow, Red and Blue, 1956; oil on carved board, 19x19cm; BGT6212



Collage 183, 1983; acrylic on card on board, 13.5x19.9cm BGT 6144



Warbeth I, 1985; collage - acrylic on card on hardboard, 78.1x25.4cm; BGT754



Warbeth 7, 1985; collage - acrylic on paper on hardboard, 25.6x25.5cm; BGT6163

Much later, in the 1980s and following a prolonged bout of illness, Barns-Graham used collage or painted relief in an large series of mostly small works in which she continued to explore the geometric positioning of shapes on a flat plane, but this time with an actual added depth thanks to the relief technique. They were seen in public for the first time during a major Scottish touring exhibition, and for many people were a revelation. Many have subtle, jewel-like colours and their visual impact belies their scale.

A visit in the mid-1980s to Orkney was the stimulus for a series of more collaged works, inspired by the layout of the rural Orcadian landscape, and also by rock formations she saw along the coastline. While some of these remain quite small in size (such as 'Warbeth 7'), others were significantly larger (such as 'Warbeth 1'). Again, she played with geometric shapes, this time rectangles, which were overlapped and juxtaposed, combined with carefully gradated colours.

'Untitled, Painted Relief No 34' is another work from the same period and in the placement of geometric shapes across the painting, there is a clear link back to her early collages from the 1950s. In this work, she has added a pale yellow disk, to hint at a watery sun in a northern sky; yet the work remains distinctively abstract in feel despite this addition.



Untitled, Painted Relief No 34, 1985; oil on card on board, 58.5x76cm; BGT532

Resources

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's prints

Barns-Graham had used printing techniques in her practice from quite early on. By the late 1930s and early '40s few artists practised printmaking in Britain, and few art schools even taught it - Edinburgh didn't when Barns-Graham attended. Any knowledge of printmaking had to be learned by watching friends and then trial and error yourself. In the post-war era, emigré artists arrived in Britain bringing with them a knowledge of printmaking techniques. The simplest form of printmaking, monotype, was popular with various members of Barns-Graham's circle of artist friends. She had tried it from the mid-1940s, tending to use a variation of it called offset drawing which resulted in a scratchy, broken image, well suited to the landscapes, and later glacier images she produced.

Gradually through the 1950s and '60s more traditional forms of printmaking grew in popularity with specialist print workshops, such as the Curwen Press in London, setting up to produce artists' prints. In 1952, Barns-Graham attended the Penzance School of Art with her friend John Wells in order for them both to learn etching and engraving. However, it was still difficult for a St Ives based artist to get prints editioned, so many of her early prints had to be printed by herself or with help from friends. She also made a small number of linocuts in the mid-1950s.

In 1955 Barns-Graham made her first screenprint, the printing medium that was to become her favourite. She used the printing studio that had been set up shortly before above Bernard Leach's pottery in St Ives. In early 1958 Stanley Jones set up a temporary print workshop in St Ives and artists were invited to use it for a small fee. However, it was a shortlived venture with the printer in charge returning to London shortly afterwards and Barns-Graham didn't try printmaking again until 1971. The previous year the Penwith Print Workshop had been set up just round the corner from her studio in St Ives and she attended etching classes there on several occasions. By this time a print workshop had been set up in Scotland - in Edinburgh (1967) - and during the next 10 years, similar workshops were set up in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. It was therefore possible for Barns-Graham to make use of the Scottish facilities when she was living at Balmungo. She also continued to practise etching, attending more classes, this time in Dundee. In 1988 she collaborated again with Dundee Printmakers to make one of a suite of 12 miniature prints to accompany a Scottish Arts Council Travelling Gallery touring exhibition, 'With an Eye to the East'.

In 1991 Barns-Graham was introduced to the printmaker Kip Gresham in Cambridge. They worked together on various ideas as she tried to see the possibilities of screenprinting. Around this time she visited Barcelona and was



Glacier Drawing, 1950; offset on paper, 23x34.2cm; BGT6003



Black and Brown Forms, 1955; offset, monotype and gouache on paper, 25.5x38cm; BGT268



Untitled or Linear Abstract, 1958; lithographic print, proof stage, ink on paper, 51.5x63cm; BGT7374



November V', 1991; screenprint, 5 colours including orange, 89.5x118.5cm, edition of 20, Kip Gresham, Curwen Studio, Curwen Chilford Prints Ltd, WBG1205

Resources

Info sheet on W Barns-Graham's prints

inspired after visiting the Tàpies and Miró Foundations and the Picasso Museum. 'Refuelled' she returned to the UK and was soon working with Kip Gresham and Andrea Bowden on more print ideas. Barns-Graham continued to play a major part in the creation of these prints, overseeing all the proofs until she was happy with the result. However distance was a problem and in 1996 she began working with Rachael Kantaris at the recently set up Porthmeor Printmakers in Cornwall. In 1998 she also began working in Dundee with Alasdair Currie and later in the year, with Carol Robertson of Graal Press. By now she realised that once she and the printmaker understood each other properly, there was no need for her to oversee each stage of the process. The technique of screenprinting was also mirrored in the way she created paintings on paper, working on several works from a series at once.

In the final period of Barns-Graham's printmaking she worked with Carol Robertson, who, with Robert Adam, had set up Graal Press in 1998 with a view to developing methods and materials for making printmaking safer. They used high quality artists' paints in acrylics, gouaches, and liquid watercolour as well as handmade paints instead of printing inks. This also opened up a much wider choice of colour. Certainly the largest and most consistent body of printed work she produced was the series of screenprints Barns-Graham made with Graal Press.

Another important aspect of the process she used with Graal Press was that they had developed a range of tusches (opaque drawing and painting materials used to make positives or separations), which allowed for a far greater degree of technical sophistication than had earlier been possible. It was also important because of Barns-Graham's age as these 'positives' could be used to hold different brushmarks etc which would then be re-used in different works. Barns-Graham found that this new method of working could also be beneficial to her painting.

She and Robertson began working with Lascaux Resonance Gouache, a new paint containing amongst other things sage oil and bioinformation which, according to Lascaux, meant that 'the colours obtain a specific resonance capacity...'. Together with this, they created their own vocabulary to describe shapes, marks and colours and also experimented with conté crayons, markers and even typing correction fluid (the latter used to great effect in the 'Vision in Time' series).

The last few months of Barns-Graham's life were spent busily creating art, particularly screenprints. The 'White Circle' series was one of the last. Altogether she made 12 series of prints with Graal Press, an astounding output.



Just in Time, 1999; screenprint, edition of 75, 58x76cm, Graal Press



Vision in Time II, 1999; screenprint, edition of 70, 76x56cm, Graal Press



White Circle Series 1, 2003; screenprint, edition of 70, 56x56cm, Graal Press



Cobalt Playing Games, editioned posthumously 2006; screenprint, edition of 25, 29.5x40cm, Graal Press

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints



Glacier Drawing, 1950; offset on paper, 23x34.2cm; BGT6003



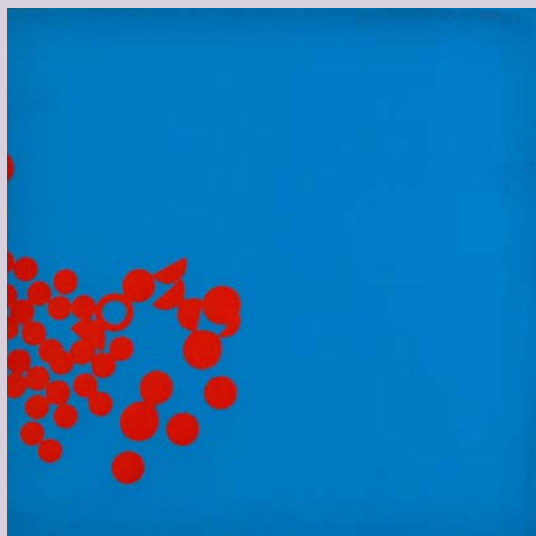
Black and Brown Forms, 1955; offset, monotype and gouache on paper, 25.5x38cm; BGT268



Untitled or Linear Abstract, 1958; lithographic print, proof stage, ink on paper, 51.5x63cm; BGT7374



Peace Bird, 1988; screenprint, 4 colours, 10.2x10.3 image, edition of 75, Fergus McLachlan, Dundee Printmakers' Workshop



Vermillion Discs onto Turquoise Square, 1972; screenprint, 2 colours, 35.7x36cm, edition of 12, Jim Whitlock, Penwith Print Workshop



November V', 1991; screenprint, 5 colours including orange, 89.5x118.5cm, edition of 20, Kip Gresham, Curwen Studio, Curwen Chilford Prints Ltd, WBG1205

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints



Venetian Red, 1995; screenprint, 20 colours, 45.2x33.8 image, edition of 70, Kip Gresham, Ian Wilkinson, Samantha Johnson, Gresham Studio Ltd, BGT4528



Just in Time, 1999; screenprint, edition of 75, 58x76cm, Graal Press



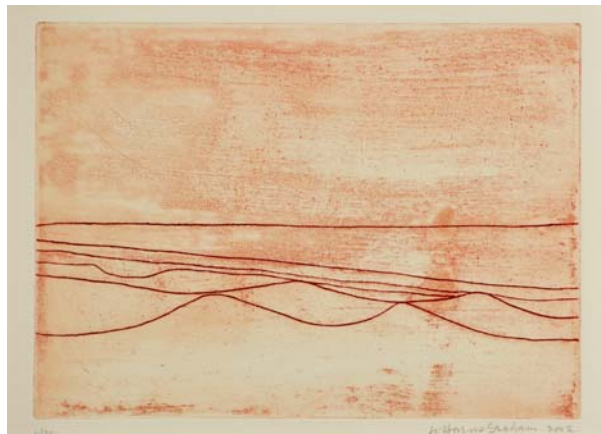
Vision in Time II, 1999; screenprint, edition of 70, 76x56cm, Graal Press



Millennium Series Green, 2000; silkscreen print, edition of 100, 22x28cm, Graal Press



Red Playing Games I, 2000; screenprint, fifteen colours on paper, edition of 75, Graal Press, 29.5x40cm



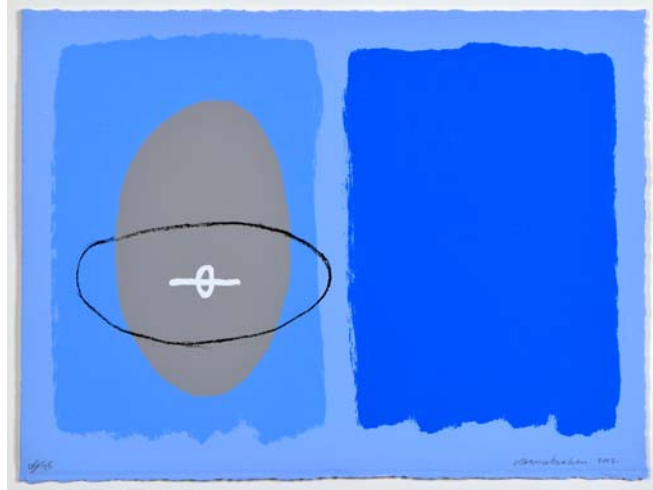
6 Lines, 2002; etching, edition of 70, 37.7x57.6cm, Graal Press

Resources

Examples of W Barns-Graham's prints



Sunghrie III, 2002; screenprint, edition of 75, 56x76cm, Graal Press



Homage to Johnny, 2002; screenprint, edition of 75, 26.6x35cm, Graal Press



White Circle Series 1, 2003; screenprint, edition of 70, 56x56cm, Graal Press



Wind Dance Series No 1, 2004; screenprint, 9 colours, 56x56cm, edition of 70, Graal Press



Cobalt Playing Games, editioned posthumously 2006; screenprint, edition of 25, 29.5x40cm, Graal Press



Two White Brushstrokes, editioned posthumously 2007; screenprint, edition of 25, 58x76.5cm, Graal Press

Resources

Info sheet on late 19th/20th century textile designers

Arguably, one of the most well known designers of the 19th century in Britain was William Morris, who with fellow artists including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Ford Madox Brown (ultimately the core members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood), set up the decorative arts firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co (later becoming Morris & Co). They aimed to provide a complete design service, using their varied skills to create textiles of all kinds, wallpapers, metalwork, stained glass, jewellery etc. The printing technique favoured by Morris was hand woodblock printing as it required none of the 'modern', mechanised equipment which he detested. Their first textile print was made in 1868.

Design studios regularly continued to employ fine artists to create original textile and wallpaper designs from at least the 1880s. One of the most important in Britain was the Silver Studio, opened in London by Arthur Silver and run by him, then his family, until 1963. From the mid 1890s until the early 1900s they made an influential contribution to the Art Nouveau movement, employing artists like John Illingworth Kay and Harry Napper to execute designs, many of which were then sold to European producers. Arthur Silver was also interested in Japanese art and with Alexander Rottman, pioneered a form of Japanese-inspired stencilling which was used in many of their Art Nouveau designs. By the 1930s their designs were bought mostly by the large textile mills in the Manchester area who created dress fabrics as well as soft furnishings (some of the former were sold to Liberty's in London).

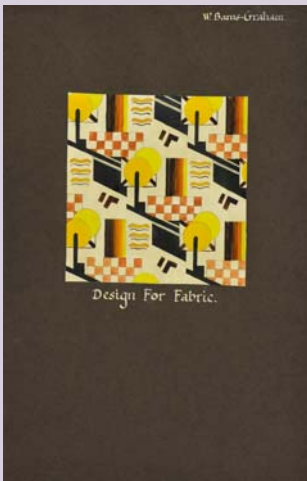
It was therefore not so unusual for Barns-Graham to be set a college exercise of creating a textile design and in many ways, it suited her interest in geometric shapes and patterns. She was later to contribute a design for a set of linen tablemats printed for Heal's Department Store in 1955. Many of her 20th century near contemporaries also included textile design in their oeuvre at some point: in France, Raoul Dufy was encouraged by the fashion designer Paul Poiret to produce designs for fabric, creating more than 2000 between 1912 and '28; in the 1930s, artists like Pablo Picasso and Fernand Leger were influenced by the geometric patterns of woven African Kuba cloth in their textile designs, and their contemporary, Enid Marx, created abstract designs for the seat coverings of trains for the London Underground. Later, Ziska and Lida Ascher launched 'artist's squares' - headsquares with artist designed patterns - which were hugely successful. Ascher also asked Matisse and Henry Moore to create largescale screenprint designs for linen panels to decorate new modernist buildings. Horrockses and Edinburgh Weavers (the latter employing Eduardo Paolozzi) were two important textile producing companies in the later 20th century. Fashion and textiles come together frequently (eg Zandra Rhodes, Celia Birtwell, and even Vivienne Westwood whose designs harked back to historic sources).



Tulip and Willow design, William Morris, 1873; indigo discharge woodblock printed fabric



Cushion cover panel, 1904; Silver Studio, © V&A, London



Design for fabric, 1930s; watercolour on paper, 15.2x15.3cm; BGT2299



Tablemat, 1955; screenprint on linen, 2 colours, printed on Denis Mitchell's press for Porthia Press

Resources

Info sheet on the Golden Section

"I started using the Golden Section, and fitting the glacier experiments into that. So I worked on this scene for many years and it led me on to rock formations, again using the Golden Section and fitting shapes in this [making] single rock forms in very simple colours using black, grey and white."

W Barns-Graham

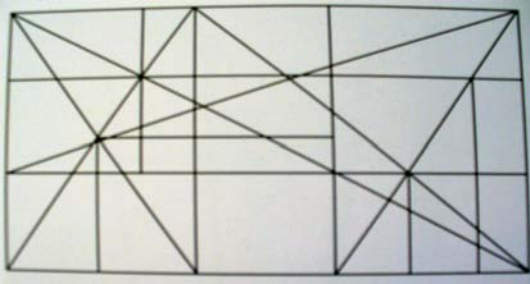


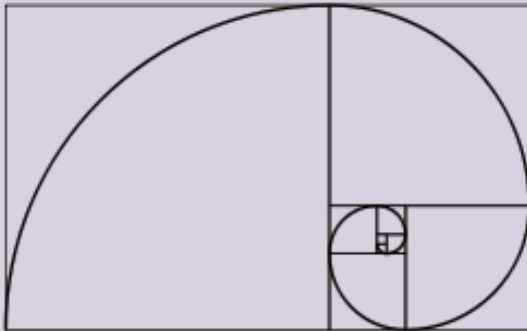
Diagram of the Golden Section rule using rectangles which provide the underlying structure of the WBG painting below

The Golden Section, or Ratio, is a proportional division of a shape, so that the ratio of the smaller to the larger part is equal to the ratio of the larger part to the whole. The rectangular form was particularly popular in demonstrating this. Ancient Greek mathematicians like Pythagorus and Euclid were said to be fascinated by its possibilities and scientists, artists and architects (eg French architect Le Corbusier in the 20th century) through the ages have been drawn to it.



White, Black and Yellow (Composition February), 1957, oil on canvas, 122x198cm; BGT6455

D'Arcy Thompson referred to it (and the Fibonacci Sequence, another mathematical numbering system) in his 'On Growth and Form' book, recognising that harmony in the natural world is created by a set of mathematical rules that can be applied almost universally. The Fibonacci Sequence is made by adding the previous two numbers together to get the next one, ie 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and so on. The shape of a seashell, for example, is said to relate to it.



A Fibonacci spiral which approximates the golden spiral, using Fibonacci sequence square sizes up to 34

From the middle of the 19th century there had been considerable writing on the Golden Section and it became an important element within the study of aesthetics. Barns-Graham was perhaps taught about the Golden Section at Edinburgh College of Art and certainly read books about it from the 1940s, when she applied its theories to some of her work. When she spent a year in Leeds from 1956-7, she came across it again at the art college there (where she taught part-time and encountered the art and teaching of Harry Hubron, himself an exponent of using related, repeated forms within a painting). It is interesting to see how some of her later 1950s' works clearly refer to it in their composition (such as 'White, Black and Yellow (Composition February)'). Her understanding and use of geometry to work out composition had become part of her working practice. It can be seen in her series of works 'Things of a Kind in Order and Disorder' which was started in the early 1960s (eg 'Olive Green Squares on Vermillion') - nothing was random, but carefully worked out. As Barns-Graham herself said, it was a mathematical rule that fitted what she wanted to explore in art, whether glacier images, rock formations, or purely abstracted squares and circles, and it continued to underpin many examples of her work throughout her career.



Olive Green Squares on Vermillion, 1968; oil on canvas, 90.7x121cm; BGT1307

Resources

Info sheet on Modernism

Modernism in the arts (including art, music, writing etc) arose from the shift within industrialised, Western societies, and the growth of cities away from rural populations, as well as the aftermath of all the horrors of World War I. While it looked back at what had been, it re-evaluated them for a 'modern' society, rejecting many of the cultural and religious beliefs that had underpinned earlier society.

The 19th century had seen great turmoil within Europe with wars and revolutions breaking out. This was reflected in changes of attitude within science (such as the anti-Creationist writing of Charles Darwin) and more 'avant-garde' movements in art which veered away from the earlier 'realist' styles. Picasso's 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' caused outrage when it appeared in 1907, and in 1911 Kandinsky painted 'Bild mit Kreis (Picture With a Circle)' which he later called the first abstract painting. Fast forward to around 1920, when the world was trying to recover from the disaster of WWI, and it is no surprise that Modernism was embraced by many of the younger artists of the time.

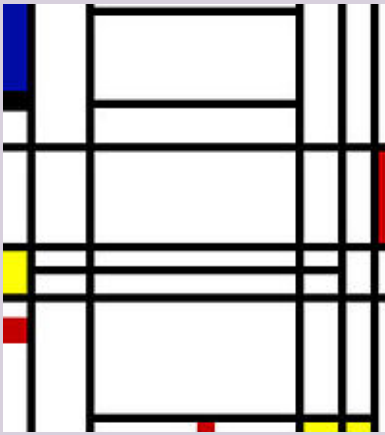
Movements like Dada (including artists like Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst), Constructivism (Naum Gabo and Vladimir Tatlin), Surrealism (Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, René Magritte, and Joan Miró), and Bauhaus (Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee) grew up during this period. The 1920s and '30s saw incredible technological changes for the average person - electricity, cinema, telephone all were easily in reach. The Modernist movement now was more international in feel, seeking inspiration from across national boundaries. In Britain, Ben Nicholson and his second wife Barbara Hepworth became involved with it in Paris and once back in Britain, acted as a sort of conduit to what was going on in Europe. The work of Piet Mondrian, for example, was familiar to them as he spent a short time in London around 1939.

After WWII, the influence of American artists became felt. Barns-Graham considered Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell, so-called American Abstract Expressionists, as worthy of admiration, and significant to some of her later 1950s' work. She continued throughout her life to keep up with new developments in art, visiting exhibitions and galleries in the UK and abroad. In 1965 she visited the USA on a 3 week whistlestop tour of art galleries and cities.

Many stylistic movements grew up post-WWII, each with its own considerations and protagonists. Some preferred to see themselves as 'Postmodern'. The St Ives School, of which Barns-Graham was a vital part, was a major part of British Modernism, including, at different times, artists like Bernard Leach, Ben Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Barbara Hepworth, Margaret Mellis, Naum Gabo, Peter Lanyon, John Wells, Roger Hilton, Bryan Wynter, Patrick Heron, and Terry Frost.



Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, Pablo Picasso, 1907; © Museum of Modern Art, New York



Composition No 10, Piet Mondrian, 1939-42, Private Collection



Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No 57, Robert Motherwell, 1957-60



No 13 (White, Red, on Yellow), 1958, Mark Rothko © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Resources

Suggested Further Reading

The writing of this pack has been greatly aided by the following publications, in particular Lynne Green's 'A Studio Life' and Ann Gunn's 'The prints of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham'. In addition to these major written texts, there are also insightful essays in most of the exhibition catalogues listed below.

BOOKS

- 'A Studio Life' by Lynne Green, 2000, Lund Humphries, updated and reprinted in 2012
- 'The Prints of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham' by Ann V Gunn, 2007, Lund Humphries
- 'Of Divers Arts' by Naum Gabo, 1962
- 'On Growth and Form' by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, 1917, revised 1942, reprinted in 1992

SELECTED EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

- 'W Barns-Graham Retrospective 1940-1989', City Art Centre, Edinburgh, & tour
- 'W Barns-Graham: Painting as Celebration', 2001, Crawford Arts Centre
- 'Elemental Energies - The Art of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham', 2007, Trinity Hall, Cambridge
- 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham - Evolution', 2007, Sherborne House
- 'A Discipline of the Mind - the Drawings of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham', 2009, Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, & tour
- 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham - A Scottish Artist in St Ives', 2012, The Fleming Collection, London, & City Art Centre, Edinburgh

WEBSITES

- www.barns-grahamtrust.org.uk
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/search/painted_by/wilhelmina-barns-graham
- www.darcythompson.org/