Victor Pasmore: Towards a New Reality

Nottingham Lakeside Arts Resource Pack
This resource pack is designed for teachers and educators planning to visit the exhibition Victor Pasmore: Towards a New Reality with groups of learners. Broken into three main themes present in the exhibition, this pack contains an introduction and outline to each theme, along with stimulating discussion points and complementary learning activities.

The discussion points and activities contained in the pack can be adapted to suit the needs of educators and learners from a broad range of learning environments. The pack is designed to be used while visiting the exhibition as well as beyond the gallery to support and facilitate longer term projects and creative dialogues.

Nottingham Lakeside Arts is also offering a range of creative workshops for school and college groups, the details of which are contained within this pack. Workshops can be adapted to suit the needs and skills of learners at any level. In these fully facilitated sessions students are encouraged to engage with the work of Victor Pasmore to create artworks, articulate responses and develop personal visual ideas. These dynamic and practical workshops provide students with a cross-curricular experience that complements the national curriculum and extends students art, design and literacy skills.

Contents

1. Introduction

2. Theme One // Realism and Figurative Art

3. Theme Two // Constructed Abstraction

4. Theme Three // Urban and Outdoor works

5. Workshops at Nottingham Lakeside Arts
Introduction

Victor Pasmore was a British artist who pioneered the development of abstract art in post war Britain. Pasmore began his career as a talented figurative painter to become an internationally recognised leading figure in the abstract art movement. Curated for the Djanogly Gallery by Anne Goodchild with Neil Walker (Head of Visual Arts Programming), this exhibition Victor Pasmore: Towards a New Reality documents the fascinating journey of Pasmore’s work from realism to abstraction.
Pasmore began his artistic career when working as a clerk for the London City Council and attending evening classes at the Central School of Art. His early figurative and representational works reflect his engagement with the formal skills of the old masters and art movements such as Fauvism and Impressionism. For example, his interest in the work of J.M.W Turner and James Abbott McNeill Whistler inspired his early landscape paintings and his portraits echo the Impressionist style of Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas. Pasmore’s paintings from this period are traditional in style and the artistic influences that shaped these pieces reflect the conservative spirit of the time.

Pasmore’s paintings depict his everyday surroundings: portraits of his wife alongside still lives made up of domestic objects and the urban landscape of London. These early works allowed Pasmore to refine his traditional painting skills whilst also developing his own visual language. Within works from this period, Pasmore starts to deconstruct forms by using geometric shapes, line and colour to represent the finer details in his still lives, landscapes and portraits.
Objects and Symbolism
Which objects have been used in the still life pieces?
What is a symbol?
What do you think the objects symbolise?
Why do some artists like symbolism?

The Urban Landscape
A lot of Pasmore’s landscape pieces depict the urban landscape of London in the 1930’s. Which London landmarks can you spot in the paintings?
Can you tell what sort of city London was at this time?

List the differences between rural and urban landscapes.
How do you think artists represent these differences? (through colour selection, textures, mark making etc.)

Portraits
Why do artists paint portraits?

Do you think that the sitter’s mood is conveyed in each portrait?

Describe the emotions in the portraits.

What can we learn about the characters of the people in the portraits?
**Learning Activities //**

**Still lives**
Students could create a collaborative still life by bringing in an object that is meaningful to them. The idea of objects as symbols could be explored by getting students to tell the story of the object they have brought in. Students can then work together to put these objects into a grouped composition and draw from observation. Students should be encouraged to think about how they can represent the meaning behind the objects in the still life through colour choice, size, mark making etc.

**Abstracting Urban Landscapes**
Learners could investigate the theme of landscapes by taking photographs of the urban environment and collecting images of urban landscapes from books, magazines or the internet. As a group lay out all of the images on a large table and collectively list nouns, verbs and adjectives in response to the images. Learners could then select an image of an urban landscape from the assortment they have bought in to inspire an abstract composition, learners should also choose a ‘city word’ from the brainstorm list. Students can sketch the image with pencil on paper, and then begin to reduce the picture to a few large forms. Discussions around the important role of negative spaces between forms can help to develop work. Learners could then begin to add colour to the work using paint or collage and consider how they can convey their ‘city word’ through formal aspects such as colour, shapes and scale.

**Portraits and Moods**
Responding to Pasmore’s portraits students could create a series of self-portraits that represent different emotions. They could research the history of portraiture by looking at traditional and historical portraits and comparing these to contemporary self-portraits. Thinking about physical and facial expressions learners can document the ways in which humans are able to perform and convey different emotions through photographing themselves and each other. Learners could then pick two contrasting moods or emotions to make self-portraits, working in an abstract or realistic way through being encouraged to think about how mood or emotion can be conveyed in a portrait. Teachers can acknowledge the important role that formal aspects, such as colour and posture, can play in a work of art.
KS1&2: Drawing skills, drawing from observation.

KS3: Portraiture, landscape, still life, drawing techniques, art history.

GCSE: Portraiture, drawing techniques, response to artists’ work, art history, the urban landscape, traditional landscape, still life, painting techniques, photography.

A-LEVEL: Art history, art appreciation, natural and urban landscapes, photography, portraiture, painting and drawing techniques, representation of forms, figurative work, realism, impressionism, artistic and thematic links.

POST 16: historical narratives in artistic pieces, refining traditional techniques, art history, natural and manmade landscapes, the power of portraiture, artistic and thematic links
Inspired by the work of Pablo Picasso, by the late 1940’s Pasmore was making a radical transition towards abstract art. His early abstract paintings reference his landscape pieces with their rich colour and painterly textures. For example Pasmore’s spiral series are powerful images; these abstract pieces loosely relate to the natural world, with the dense spirals and swirling lines echoing natural patterns found in waves and skies. In relation to these spiral works, reference is often drawn to Pasmore’s trip to Cornwall in 1950 when he visited the artist British abstract artist Ben Nicholson.

Influenced by the work and writings of other pioneering abstract artists including Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian Pasmore’s exploration into abstract art led him to experiment with collages and paintings alongside constructions and installations. In his more three dimensional works Pasmore’s abstract forms were created from industrial materials such as painted plywood, plastic, glass and aluminium.

These materials enabled Pasmore to move off the canvas to create ‘relief constructions’ using different sized planes of wood and plastic which he mounted onto clear Perspex. These constructions are three dimensional and protrude forward, creating shadows and shifts in perspective as the viewer walks around the pieces. Pasmore’s installation pieces also allowed viewers to experience his geometric forms through a physical encounter by inviting the viewer to walk into and between geometric shapes and layers of industrial materials. Exploring concepts of construction, space, balance and form these constructed and installation pieces bought Pasmore work into close relation with modern architecture.
Abstraction through Geometry
Abstract art seeks to break away from traditional representation of physical objects by exploring the relationships of forms, lines and colours. To open up initial discussions learners could describe what they understand by the term ‘abstract.’ Can you see abstract shapes in nature? In the city? What is the most common geometric shape that Pasmore uses in these abstract pieces? What does the composition of these shapes evoke for you as a viewer? For example does the collection of shapes remind you of something else?

Colour Associations
Looking at the colours within Pasmore’s abstract pieces what associations do you make with certain colours? Does this affect the way you view the piece? For example red can be used to communicate anger or danger, whereas blue is often used to depict calmness and tranquillity.
Mixed Media
Which materials has Pasmore used in his more three dimensional works? Where are these materials normally found and what are they used for? (Glass is used in the windows of buildings, wood is used in the construction of buildings etc.) Considering these material associations what links can you make between Pasmore’s abstract works and modern architecture, such as skyscrapers that climb up towards the sky, or contemporary minimalist buildings?

Learning Activities //

Geometric Still Lives
Responding to the way Pasmore used shape and line in his work, students could think about using geometric shapes to represent objects in a still life set up to create abstract artworks. The pieces could be developed by mixing media and bringing collage and textural elements into the artwork.

Pattern and Printing
Focusing on Pasmor’s spiral series, learners could be encouraged to make linear observations on patterns they find in nature and the elements such as the veins of leaves, the lines in a sunset or the textures of tree trunks, etc. These linear patterns could form the starting point for a design of a lino print. Learners could repeat print these patterns using different colours, or add colour and shapes to the prints once they are dry.

Links to the Curriculum //

KS1&2: Drawing skills, mark making, patterns and shapes in nature, geometric shapes, colour theory.

KS3: abstraction and construction in art, art history, cubism, composition, pattern and shapes in nature, colour theory, drawing techniques, printing techniques, print and mark making, mixed media artworks, differences between 2D and 3D.

GCSE: drawing techniques, response to artists’ work, art history, abstraction through geometry, print and mark making, composition studies, abstract art, mixed media artworks, optical art.

A-LEVEL: Art history, art appreciation, representation of forms, composition studies, abstraction through geometry, artistic and thematic links, installation art, printing and drawing technique exploration and deconstruction, properties of materials,

POST 16: abstract art, British abstract artists, art history, installation art, the power of colour in art, properties of materials, artistic and thematic links, the viewer’s experience of an artwork, abstraction through geometry and pattern.
Alongside his paintings, collages, relief and three dimensional works Pasmore was commissioned to create a number of works for public spaces including murals and buildings. These large scale outdoor works relate to the forms, shapes and colours Pasmore used in his smaller constructed and abstracted works.

In 1950 Pasmore was commissioned to design the ‘Mural Painting’ for the bus depot in Kingston Upon Thames for which he created a plaster relief mounted onto the surface of the building and then painted once it was in place. This site specific nature of the work meant that the piece was subsequently lost when the building was destroyed, leaving only a few photographs to document its existence. Similar to his cubist-like collage works, the abstract piece Pasmore created is made up of irregular geometric shapes which give a sense of movement through their balanced composition. Post war schemes like this sought to make art more widely accessible to the general public.
From 1955 Pasmore was involved in part of the design of Peterlee New Town in County Durham. Pasmore’s involvement with this project gave him the opportunity to design the Apollo Pavilion which still stands today as a Grade II* listed building. Pasmore created models to demonstrate the structure and design of the Apollo Pavilion which are constructed using pieces of painted wood and can be viewed as abstract artworks in their own right. Constructed from large planes of concrete, visual links can be made between this piece of architecture and the smaller works made with wood and acrylic. The geometric construction is made up of linear rectangular forms and acts as a walkway between two halves of the Peterlee estate. It is monumental in scale and encourages people to linger and reflect upon their everyday surroundings and activities.

The Apollo Pavilion received a mixed response, initially it was the focus of complaints from local residents and was even subject to vandalism and graffiti. However the Pavilion was built at the end of the 1960’s making it a significant large-scale public artwork in the UK, paving the way for a boom in public art. Without it we may not have had popular contemporary landmarks such as Anthony Gormley’s Angel of the North.

**Discussions in the Gallery //**

**Art in Public Spaces**

What are the differences between viewing a sculpture in a gallery and outdoors? What new meanings does a sculpture take on when it’s outside? Do you think that more people have access to seeing art if it’s outside? Can you think of any outdoor art, sculptures or landmarks that you see on a daily basis? Perhaps you use these as meeting points, or of a way of mapping out a place in your head?

**Pasmore’s Pieces**

How do you think Pasmore would have reacted to finding out his Apollo Pavilion had graffiti sprayed onto it? In what ways do you think Pasmore’s artworks changed people’s experience of everyday architecture such as bus depots or public walkways?

**Site Specific Sculpture**

Imagine you are the ‘eyes’ of Pasmore’s murals or outdoor sculptures. What kind of change and development do you think these sculptures have ‘seen’ happening around them? What could this tell us about the history and community of a place?
Learning Activities //

Mixed Media Collages
Learners could look at proposing a piece of outdoor abstract sculpture. They might choose a historical site or somewhere personal and use sketching, collage and text to come up with the design proposals. Depending on group sizes, learners could work together to form a large piece to create their proposal, or work on an individual basis. Source materials could include postcards of specific places, maps, images of landscapes and hybrid drawings of humans/birds from previous learning sessions.

3D Sculptures
Using found objects or waste materials such as pieces of wood and brick alongside wrappers and food containers students could begin to explore the ways these objects can be appropriated and reused to make maquettes of sculptural shapes and buildings.

Links to the Curriculum //

KS1&2: 3D forms, shape and composition, drawing from observation.

KS3: shapes in architecture, mixing of media, place and landmarks, environmental issues in art, the role of public art, 3D forms, construction and composition.

GCSE: understanding artworks, responding to artists work, mapping places, understanding public art, shapes in architecture, the urban landscape, the role of public art, 3D forms, construction and composition.

A-LEVEL: Art history, design and architecture, site specific art, prototyping and maquette making, place, space and time, life drawing, environmental issues in art.

POST 16: Conceptual response to artworks, historical narratives in sculpture, the role of art in public spaces, user interaction in art, the history of social and political art.
Workshops available at Nottingham Lakeside Arts //

Nottingham Lakeside Arts offer a range of creative workshops for school and college groups. Workshops can be booked in advance (to suit teaching timetables) and take place in the Djanogly Art Gallery at Nottingham Lakeside Arts. Workshops can be tailored to suit the needs and skills of learners at any level. These fully facilitated, dynamic and practical sessions provide students with a cross-curricular experience that complements national curriculums and extends students art, design and literacy skills.

Nottingham Lakeside Arts are offering the following workshops for the exhibition Victor Pasmore: Towards a New Reality:

**Shaping Spaces**
Pasmore was fascinated by modernist architecture and much of his later work was designed for public spaces, or had an architectural presence in the gallery. In this workshop participants will be able to learn about the artist’s approach and create their own architecture-inspired relief art.

**Spirals and Swirls**
Make connections between the energetic paintings and relief sculptures of Victor Pasmore and our own bodies by observing the lines and forms present in the exhibition. Learners will be encouraged to create a performance by translating the abstract elements into movement and then drawing the shapes we create.

**Transforming Figures**
Students will closely scrutinise the early figurative work of Victor Pasmore and then take these paintings as a starting point to go through the process of abstraction, finally observing the artist’s own transition into abstraction as evidenced in this exhibition.

**Mixing Media**
This is a workshop designed to explore Pasmore’s geometric and abstract work. By working in teams and discussing the significance and arrangement of shapes and layout, participants will learn about composition and how to manipulate a wide range of materials.

**Drawing with Tape**
In this workshop students will explore the ways in which we experience space and the built environment by tracing their movements around the gallery and responding to the geometric shapes in the exhibition. Linear based artwork will be created by the students using coloured electrical tape.

**Patterns in Nature**
In this workshop students will study the paintings in the Victor Pasmore exhibition which relate to patterns in nature and explore the ways in which artists use organic forms to produce motif and pattern in their work. Each student will go on to produce their own pattern inspired by nature.
Finger Print Landscapes
This is a chance for the youngest gallery visitors to look at pointillist paintings, learn about artists' approaches to landscape painting and then have a go themselves, using finger tips and colourful paints. Inspiration will come from the exhibition and, if the weather is suitable, the Highfields Park landscape.

A Big Relief!
Responding to Pasmore’s work, students will have the opportunity to create a large-scale and collaborative artwork using industrial materials such as metal, wood and perspex. Students record their creation through photography, drawing and words.

Fun with Sand and Clay
Young children will enjoy seeing the shapes and patterns in Pasmore’s exhibition and then have a go themselves using sand and liquid clay. They will be encouraged to make connections with the earliest forms of art such as cave and Aboriginal mark making because these inspired Pasmore to make his spiral series.

In all of these workshops students are encouraged to engage with the work of Victor Pasmore to create artwork, articulate responses and develop personal visual ideas.

To book a workshop, please contact:
Emily Dawkes
0115 8467185
emily.dawes@nottingham.ac.uk

For more information on any of these sessions please contact:
Ruth Lewis-Jones, Learning Officer (Galleries)
0115 823 2218
ruth.lewis-jones@nottingham.ac.uk
This resource pack was written and compiled for Nottingham Lakeside Arts by Lauren Squires, Associate Artist at NLA