



RWA

Secondary: Activity Pack 02

Inspirational Surroundings



This Activity Pack was created by: Royal West of England Academy, Queen's Road, Clifton Bristol BS8 1PX
The RWA is a self-supporting, independent charity (1070163). If you have enjoyed this activity please consider making a donation to support the RWA by visiting rwa.org.uk/support-us

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RWA is Bristol's first public art gallery. It is in a beautiful building on Queens Road build in 1858 with a legacy from Ellen Sharples – an artist herself – for the promotion of fine art. Today we showcase the work of world-class, high profile artists in our main exhibitions, workshops and events.

Our current exhibition is:

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & The Artists of St. Ives

In Activity Pack 01, we looked at Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and the artists of St Ives in the 1940s-60s. Wilhelmina Barns-Graham moved to St Ives in Cornwall in 1940 after studying art and travelling the world. Long before the 1940s, however, there were already artists living and working in St Ives, including:

Albert Julius Olson: With his artist wife Kathleen he designed a hotel that became a studio and art school in St Ives. He was a maritime artist who was inspired by the sea. During WWI he was in the (volunteer) navy, which gave him the opportunity to paint naval ships in action.

Adrian Stokes: He used atmospheric effects in his landscape paintings and was well travelled (like Wilhelmina Barn-Graham was, years later). He married the artist Marianne Stokes and spent time in France, Denmark, Slovakia and Hungary.

Elizabeth Forbes: Going against roles for married women at the time, Elizabeth Forbes continued to be an active and successful artist after her marriage to painter Stanhope Forbes, and she had a national reputation. Her work is mainly figurative (meaning she painted the real world, particularly people).

William Holt Yates Titcomb: As a figurative oil painter, he was known for his pictures of Cornish fishermen. He moved to Bristol in 1909, where he was already an elected Academician of the Bristol Academy of Fine Art – which later became the RWA!

The first recorded artist visit was from JMW Turner in 1811. Following the development of the railway, in the mid-1800s other artists started visiting St Ives, including the American artist James McNeill Whistler, the English painter Walter Sickert and Henry Moore the English marine and landscape painter. At this time, 'Impressionism' and 'en plein air' painting was popular (outdoors in the open air) and artists were depicting changing light with freely brushed colours. St Ives is known for its quality of light and clean air.

Even today, artists still try to capture the special light of St Ives in their artwork. You might like to look up *Tate St Ives in Colour*, which was an interactive light installation created by Peter Hudson in 2019 as alternative example of this: peterdavidhudson.com

Arthur Homesshaw RWA, *Nightwave*,
Linocut, 30.5x62cm, RWA
Permanent Collection



Lines and Patterns

Like many of the artists living and working in St Ives over the centuries, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham is an artist who sketched and painted all sorts of features in the landscapes, which were often then worked and re-worked into additional artworks.

In this painting, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham has used gouache to create the colours in washes. Gouache is an opaque watercolour paint made using natural pigments. She has then drawn over the top in chalk using minimal marks to great effect. Some of the chalk marks in the mid-ground of the painting are very light and gestural. It is as though they are just suggesting forms that might be there.

What could you do to make a layered and earthy feel to a painted page in your sketchbook? Give it a try. If you have watercolours, you can paint with those and then draw over the top. If not, you could tear up different coloured papers, layer those up and then draw over the top with a light pen, pencil or chalk.

The exhibition was curated by the Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust.



Patterns are everywhere

Look at the patterns that occur in nature, like spirals, waves, tessellations and stripes. The same patterns appear in many natural forms such as a pinecone, an uncurling fern, a sunflower head, flowers and shells, for example.

Leonardo of Pisa (known as Fibonacci) was a 13th century Italian mathematician who discovered a pattern we know as the Fibonacci sequence. It is a series of numbers that starts with 0 and 1. After that, each number that follows is found by adding the two previous numbers (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55...) The sequence just keeps going on and on.

Something very special about Fibonacci's number sequence was discovered – the numbers appear everywhere in nature. See what you can find out about it.

Perhaps it will inspire some drawing...



Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Volcanic Island (Near Montana del Fuego II)*, 1989, Gouache and Chalk, 79 x 97 x 3 cm, © Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust. Photo credit Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust

Patterns and Paths

Write a short critique

Take some time to study this Wilhelmina Barns-Graham painting carefully. Look at the patterns and the paths. Where is your eye led? What draws you in and around the painting? If you can zoom in, look at the brushstrokes used in different areas. For example, there is thicker paint (applied with a pallet knife) for floorboards, but she has hardly used any paint on the rug and the artist has rubbed much of it away.

Write a critique of this painting. Take into account its title, when it was painted, and how it fits within her wider body of work. Remember how inventive Wilhelmina Barns-Graham was when responding to new things that inspired her on her adventurous journeys. Compare and contrast this painting with two of her others. You can challenge yourself to write this as a short essay, or just one or two paragraphs – but if you get absorbed in the work, just keep writing.

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Studio Interior 1947 II*, 1947, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 60.1cm. Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust © the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust



St Ives and the Great Western Railway



St Ives

The town's first School of Art was established in St Ives in 1888. When the Great Western Railway connected St Ives to some significant places like Penzance and London, new artists began to arrive. In the early 1900s this coincided with the decline of the fishing and mining industries, so artists took over sail-lofts for studio spaces and started living in the town.

By the end of the First World War a generation of painters had either moved away or died. In the 1920s, artists and craftspeople started settling in St Ives, and poets and writers were drawn to this community full of avant-garde ideas (new and experimental).

In 1927, St. Ives Society of Artists was formed (some of the members are listed on page 2) and then in the 1930s the St Ives School of Painting at Porthmeor Studios was established. This was in the area where most artists worked.

At the outbreak of WW2, artists Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson moved to St Ives along with their friend Naum Gabo to develop their 'abstract' or 'constructive' art. The high point for the St Ives School of artists was the 1950s-1960s when a group of younger artists together with Hepworth and Nicholson used the shapes, forms and colours of St Ives as a source for much of their work.

Between the war years, the big railway companies commissioned the finest commercial, landscape, seascape and documentary artists of the age (including some St Ives artists) to make colourful paintings for them to use as posters to advertise holiday destinations on their routes.

Strong images were created particularly during the 1920s and 1930s with distinctive styles making the most of colour, detail, boldness of design and often simple, stark contrasts. Not only were good artists needed for the poster illustrations but also for typeset. Creative, imaginative and stylish railway posters and branding had far greater impact than any single photograph would have done.

Design a painting for a poster - in the style of the St Ives rail travel posters. It can be of an imaginary destination or a real one. Make it bold, colourful and eye-catching and remember to show what makes your destination desirable. Is it secluded? Are there some recognisable or distinguishable features? What can people do at the destination?

Look at the Science Museum Group website for some great examples of the old railway posters for Cornwall_ <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co227918/cornwall-great-western-railway-poster>



Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Three Rock Forms*, 1951, oil on canvas, 45.2 x 60.5cm. Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust © the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust

An Artists' Town

St Ives became known as an artists' town and somewhere all sorts of creative people wanted to visit.

The influence of others

Who influences whom? You will find throughout art history that artists have influenced one another's practice.

For example, in St Ives in the late 1800s, artists such as Julius Olsson and Louis Grier painted the sea. Olsson's influence as a teacher spread over a generation or more of young painters, including Robert Borlase Smart who was a founding member of the St Ives School and secretary of the St Ives Society of Artists following the First World War.

Later on, Borlase Smart persuaded the Society to accept new artists as members, and he gave the up-and-coming young Wilhelmina Barns-Graham his old studio.

Other influences included Naum Gabo's (Constructivism) on Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. Can you see other connections between the artists highlighted in these activity packs?

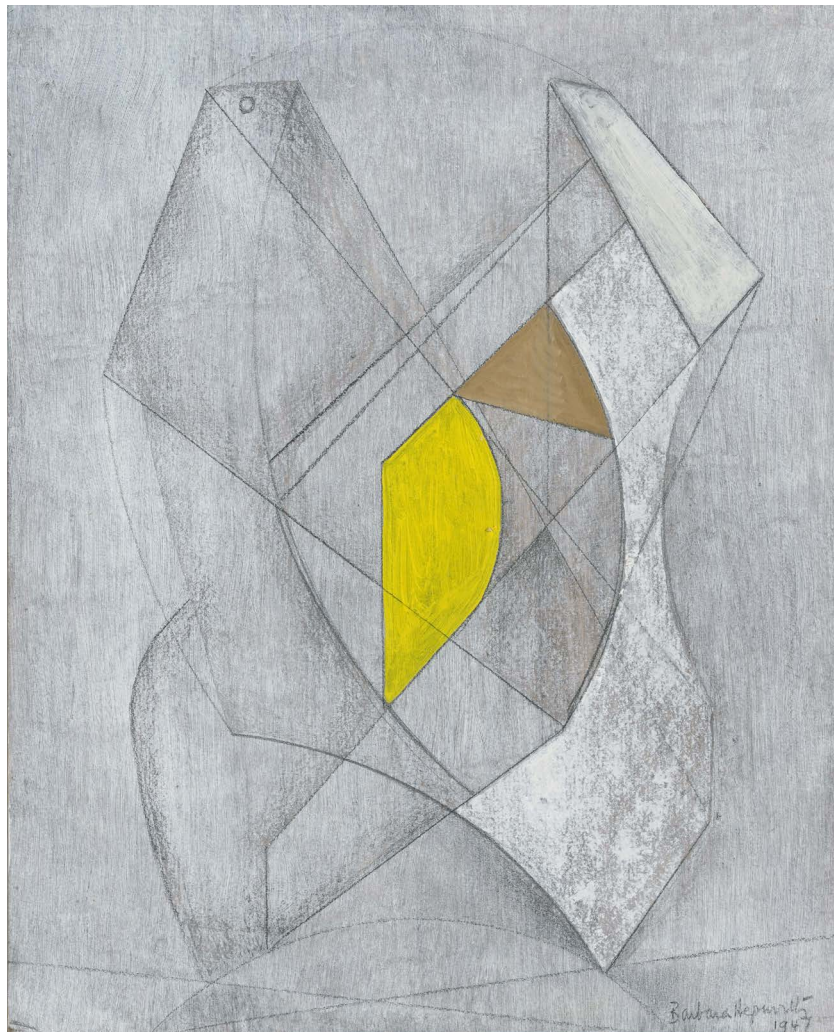
Bristol Artists

Did you know that **Bristol** is full of artists, craftspeople, poets and writers?

Here are some that you can start researching.

Performers/Poets: Helen Dunmore, Vanessa Kisuule, Miles Chambers and Travis Alabanza

Visual artists: Luke Jerram, Alice Cunningham, John Wood and Paul Harrison (collaborative duo), Beth Carter, Emma Stibbon RA RWA, Richard Long RA RWA (hon)



Top right: Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Glacier Study*, 1949, Off-set Drawing and Wash, 22 x 30.9 cm, © Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust. Photo credit Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust

Right: Barbara Hepworth, *Two Forms*, Yellow and Brown, 1947, oil paint and graphite on hardboard, 29 x 23.5cm. Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge © Bowness.jpg

Conclusion

Mountains and Valleys

Over the centuries, the artists of St Ives have painted the sea, coastline, docks, harbours, hills and buildings of the town – as well as the people living and working there. They explored their own means of expression, pioneering the abstract and constructive.

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham created many of her abstract landscape works based on her travels outside St Ives, on her inspirational journeys.

Self-led research: Compare the landscape of St Ives with the landscapes that Wilhelmina Barns-Graham encountered on her trips abroad. Try to find out what more you can about her and the other St Ives artists. What were the (metaphorical) mountains they had to climb? What were the valleys they found themselves in sometimes? How about the Bristol artists you are interested in, have they had ups and downs along their creative journeys? Undoubtedly.

Let us know how you get on!

Post your pictures and use @RWABristol or @royalwestofenglandacademy to connect with us.

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Emma Stibbon RWA,
Diamond Mountain,
woodcut, 98.6x125cm,
RWA Permanent Collection

