



RWA

Secondary: Activity Pack 01

Inspirational Journeys



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

e: helen.jacobs@rwa.org.uk  [@rwabristol](https://twitter.com/rwabristol)  [royalwestofenglandacademy](https://www.facebook.com/royalwestofenglandacademy)  [rwabristol](https://www.instagram.com/rwabristol)

RWA is Bristol's first public art gallery. It is in a beautiful building on Queens Road built 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, and have huge numbers of visitors to exhibitions, workshops and events.

Our current exhibition is:

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & The Artists of St. Ives

St. Ives is a seaside town in the north west of Cornwall known for its fishing industry. It became famous because, particularly after the Second World War, many artists settled there to live and work. Among these artists were some you might be familiar with:

Alfred Wallis: He earned a living as a fisherman, but he began painting after his wife died, having never had any formal art training at all. He is considered a 'naïve' artist. His way of painting captured how he saw things, it was not concerned with accuracy.

Barbara Hepworth: In the 1930s, she became part of a group of artists who stopped making representational or 'realistic' art and started making abstract art. She made modern sculptures that looked as though they had been formed by the landscape.

Ben Nicholson: While studying art in London, he discovered Cubism – a style of art using geometric shapes to suggest landscapes, objects and people. He mixed figurative (life-like) and abstract (shapes, colours, and textures to represent something), turning what he saw into simple flat shapes.

Sandra Blow: One of the most original woman painters in Britain, she was known for her large paintings made of colourful shapes, some with a lot of surface texture and some unusual materials like liquid cement and charcoal.

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham:

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham was one of the artists who moved to St Ives in 1940 after studying art in Edinburgh. She combined colours and shapes that represented forms in the landscapes that inspired her, as well as sometimes bold lines and patterns over the top. Her work began to incorporate more hard-edged geometric forms and lines, and in 1960 she began to divide her time between Cornwall and Scotland. Maybe that is why she is not among the most well known of the St Ives artists today.

Her paintings are very expressive – experimenting with colour, form and line, sometimes combining viewpoints. She travelled widely, and was greatly inspired by particular natural features in the landscapes of Switzerland, Spain and Italy among others.

Derek Balmer PRWA, *White Beach* (detail), oil, 63.5x76cm



Wilhelmina Barns-Graham should be far better known among the St Ives group of artists. She painted abstract landscapes, looking at geometric form, line and colour. She was so aware of the natural world around her that much of what she saw in landscapes she visited inspired her to paint what she *felt* as well as what she *saw*.

The artists of St Ives are known for their work mostly between the 1940s-60s. They developed modern abstract art inspired by the landscape, shapes, colours and quality of light in West Cornwall.

Internal Patterns

Look at Wilhelmina Barn-Graham's *Glacier Knot* (right). What do you think she is trying to express here? Use a page in your sketchbook to study patterns that intrigue you and look at the work of other artists throughout art history who use lots of lines and patterns, for example Yayoi Kusama, Andy Warhol, Anni Albers and William Morris.

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



Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Glacier Knot*, 1978, Pen, Ink and Mixed Media, Board, 27.2 x 20 cm © The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust. Photo credit Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust



Lines and Patterns

Artists and designers often repeat patterns in their work. Repeat your own patterns. How could you use these designs? Draw what you can imagine them to be used for; garments, furnishings, wallpaper, greetings cards etc.



Duff Pearce, *Projected Hexagon No.1*

Patterns are everywhere

Using the patterns you find on clothing, furniture, plants, utensils etc. around your home, and try putting in place a new discipline of drawing one each day. Keep them small so that it is manageable.

Patterns and Paths

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Write a short critique

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham was inventive when responding to new things that inspired her on her adventurous journeys. She used different experiences and unfamiliar subjects to make new paintings. In what ways was this pioneering?

Look at one of her Spanish Island Series of paintings. Write a critique of the work, comparing and contrasting with two other artists. 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. You could choose to make comparisons with other abstract modernists of the same period in art history, or you could contrast with other artists looking at similar subject matter, such as Constructivism, vast landscape, travel, Abstraction and colour layering.

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. *Spanish Coast No. 3 (Spanish Island Series)*, 1958-59, oil on canvas, 67 x 84.5 cm
© The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust. Photo credit Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust



A journey



St Ives

Take an online journey to St Ives. Self-led research: find out what you can about the artists who came to St Ives from abroad, such as Naum Gabo and Mark Rothko. What drew them to St Ives, and how did it affect their work? How did their work influence other artists such as Wilhelmina Barns-Graham?

Out of the window

The views from the windows in our homes may seem as though they do not change very much from one day to the next. Use what you can see out of a window to make your own abstract drawings and work one of them up into a painting. Reduce familiar objects to basic shapes, simplifying colours and light and dark.

As you draw different versions of the view, keep refining and abstracting it. When you are happy with the rough composition, get stuck in with colour and make a painting.

Ben Nicholson, 11 November 1947 (Mousehole), oil on canvas mounted on wood, 46.5 x 58.5cm © Angela Verren Taunt. All rights reserved. DACS 2020. Courtesy of the British Council Collection. Photo © The British Council



The area where the land meets the sea or a line that forms a boundary between land and ocean (or lake) where the possibilities are endless. Why do you think artists such as Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and the St Ives artists moved to work near the sea in West Cornwall?

Natural Forms

Look at Wilhelmina Barns-Graham's *Formentera* (right).

Find other artists whose inspiration comes from land, rock formations, layers – look at artists including James Turrell, Peter Randall-Page and Richard Long and draw from the images of their work that you find. What can you learn from their work, and how might it inform your drawing, painting or sculpting?

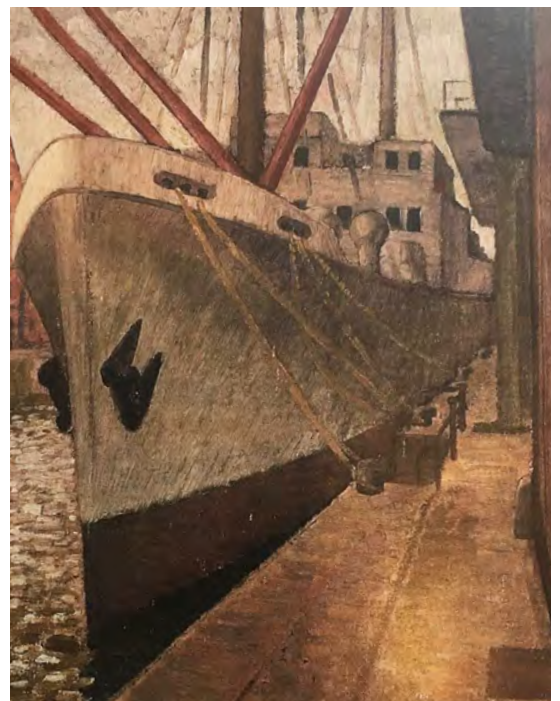


Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Formentera*, 1958, Pen, Ink and Wash on Paper, 42.7 x 54.5 cm © © The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust. Photo credit Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust

Docks

Think about ways that people travel and how goods enter and leave the country. Where does this happen? Artists have long been interested in busy, bustling places associated with travel and movement.

Self-led research: Find out about artists who have used Bristol's docks, quay or harbour in their work. (examples to get you started; John Nash, Eric Ravillious, Nicholas Pocock)



Charles Andrew, *Ship in Dock*

Conclusion

Look back over all the images in the activity pack. Take some time to consider the breadth of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham's work represented here; detailed patterned painting, ink wash with pen drawing over the top, bold abstract and expressive oil painting.

Self-led research: Look at the development of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham's work over her lifetime and compare it with that of another artist whose work was influenced by the art styles of Cubism, Constructivism and Modern Abstraction (for example Ben Nicholson, Terry Frost or Peter Lanyon)

How do you think that her inspirational journeys made her work unique?

Try to find out what you can about the art styles and try some of the techniques for yourself.

Let us know how you get on!

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

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