



# Resource for Teachers:

## An Introduction to Modern Art

This resource pack was made in 2023 as a collaboration between the University of Reading Art Collection and Anna Church, a MA student in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester

# Key Information

## Age range:

- Key Stage 3 (Upper Primary/Lower Secondary)

## Themes covered in this pack:

- \* An introduction to the concept of 'modernism' and 'modern art'.
- \* What are the main types of modern art?
- \* Examples of famous modernist artists.
- \* Examples of the methods and techniques used.

## Objectives of this resource:

- \* Learn about modernism, why it emerged and what influence it had on society.
- \* Learn how some major modernist artworks are created and make some unique artworks.
- \* Explore the artworld in the 19th and 20th centuries.

## Additional information:

- \* All words in **Bold** are explained in the Glossary on pages 16-17.
- \* There is a list providing details of all the images on page 18.
- \* Many of the activities outlined within this pack are suitable for students working towards their 'Discover' Arts Award.

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# What is Modern Art?



The term '**Modern Art**' is used by art historians to describe a wide variety of artistic styles developed in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

Unlike art from before this period, which focused on the direct representation of beauty, modern art experiments with the implied or emotional beauty of a subject.

Much of this transformation can be attributed to the wider social changes which took place during the **Industrial Revolution**. Before this period, the production and distribution of art was tightly controlled by **Art Academies** (see Page 7).

Afterwards, artists started moving away from styles taught by formal art academies, and experimented with shape, line and colour.

'Modernism' was not limited to artists. Many other creatives embraced this exciting new world. The author, James Joyce (depicted in this drawing), wrote several revolutionary novels during this 'Modernist' period, including 'Ulysses', which is still seen as a prime example of modernist literature today.

## Activity!

'Modernism' is a name which can be applied to a wide range of artistic movements from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Take five minutes to create a list of every type of art you can think of.

Share your thoughts with the class, how many different styles can you name together?



# The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution took place in the UK around 1750-1900. Fuelled by a need to support the rapidly expanding **British Empire**, developments in industry, technology and science transformed society.

This ever increasing demand for products and commodities meant that some of the biggest changes during this period were around working practices. Traditional crafts roles decreased and more jobs were created in urban areas, where new machinery enabled the mass-production of objects. New laws which regulated working conditions for the first time meant that these new employees suddenly had more free time and disposable income.

A population shift began with people moving from rural areas looking for work. The UK was becoming an **urban society**.

## Activity!

Take some time to research the Industrial Revolution.

- Imagine the sudden increase in air pollution and the mass movement of people to cities.
- How do you think people would feel seeing these new machines and factories?
- Would they enjoy having more free time and more disposable income?

In pairs, create a five minute role-play of how you think people would have felt during the Industrial Revolution.



# Leisure and Entertainment

## *The Dance Hall in Modern Art*

With reduced working hours and an increased income, people actively began searching for new and modern ways to be entertained.



Designated buildings such as **dance halls** were built. These venues would become the destination of choice for many who wanted to drink, dance and enjoy a good time. New dance halls rapidly started appearing across Europe as their popularity as entertainment spaces grew.

Loud and bustling, these new dance halls had live music which was inspired by **jazz** artists from the USA. The vibrant atmosphere of these locations attracted many artists. Artists such as **Spencer Gore** (who created the artwork above), often chose to recreate scenes of people interacting and moving around these dance halls. Many of these artworks created captured the happiness and excitement of the revellers.

### Activity!

Listen to a jazz song.

- Think about what you hear and how it makes you feel.
- In a society which had never heard music like this, why do you think it was so influential in the inter-war years?
- Next, take a short amount of time to sketch what you imagine a dance hall to look and feel like. Focus on the lively atmosphere, the people and the decorations



# Art Academies

## *The Schools of Old*

First established in Italy during the **Renaissance**, art academies were fundamental to generations of hopeful artists. They provided formal teaching and a forum for artists to produce and sell their work without relying on the patronage of royalty, the church or private funders. The **Royal Academy**, the first art academy in the UK, opened its doors in 1768.

The painting below is of Harriet Wantage, a British benefactor and art collector. She invested heavily in the University of Reading and built Wantage Hall, the first hall of residence at the university. The painting is realistic, and reflects the academic style of academies in the 1700s and 1800s.

However, by the late 1800s, some artists were beginning to disapprove of the rigid, conservative teaching. They began to experiment outside of the Academy with new styles, techniques and media. This led to the development of many different forms of 'Modern Art'.

Art Academies would also evolve over time. The academies which exist today offer a wider curriculum and a less strict views of what is an artwork at the time it was painted.



### Activity!

- Study this artwork carefully. Focus on the realistic style and the naturalistic colours.
- Next, study the images found on Page 18 onwards in this pack.
- Compare the styles and the colours and identify some differences between the image to the left and those found in this pack.
- Consider which style you prefer and why. Discuss this with your class.

# Women Artists

While the Industrial Revolution brought many women into the work force for the first time, it was in the 20th century when the lives and rights of women improved dramatically.

Education for women became more widespread, with women finally able to attend university from 1867. Access to education widened the prospects and careers available to women.

Art education followed a similar trend. While women have always produced art, they were only allowed to enrol at art school in England in 1860. Once women were able to formally study art, it became easier for women to work as artists and to sell or display their work.

This pencil drawing on the left was completed by Minnie Jane Hardman and was used to secure her acceptance into the Royal Academy.



## Activity!

Take some time to research:

- The lives of women during and immediately after the Industrial Revolution
- A female artist who was active during this time (e.g. Minnie Jane Hardman)

What can your research tell you about the different lives of men and women at the time?

## Extension Activity!

- Select a form of modern art mentioned within this booklet.
- In pairs take turns to draw your friend in the artistic style which you have selected. Don't forget to display it afterwards!



# Two Modern Artists

*Gwen John (1876-1939) and Augustus John (1878-1961)*

Siblings, Gwen and Augustus John both studied at the **Slade School of Fine Art** in London around the same time in the 1890s. However, their fortunes after art school diverged dramatically.

During their lifetimes, vivacious younger brother Augustus was the better known artist. He drew portraits of Canadian soldiers during the First World War and by the 1920s he had established himself as a famous portrait painter, creating portraits of celebrities. He became a member of the prestigious Royal Academy in 1928.

In contrast, his talented older sister, Gwen John, was often unappreciated as an artist. After leaving the Slade in 1898, she studied under James McNeill Whistler (see Page 13), learning techniques which allowed her to exhibit her first painting in 1900 at the **New English Art Club**. Gwen had several long term relationships with men and women, including a decade-long relationship with the French sculptor, **Auguste Rodin**. This relationship has sometimes overshadowed her art.



It was during this period that Gwen developed her signature art style, characterised by a range of delicate tones and simple forms. Unlike many modernist artists, Gwen did not identify with other groups of artists or styles emerging at this time, but she was a sociably artist at the heart of the London and Parisian artworlds.

# Types of Modern Art: Fauvism



Most popular between 1905 and 1910, the term 'Fauvism' is used to describe a style of painting where the artist focuses on using bold colours and striking brush strokes to create 2D images.

The name of the style comes from a French word 'Fauves', which translates to 'wild beasts'. This was a derogatory term used by critics due to their use of unnatural colours and swift painting style.

Fauvist artists like **Henri Matisse** used scientific **colour theory** to make their artworks stand out. For example, by deliberately placing colours from opposite sides of the colour wheel together, artists could make both appear brighter and more striking.

Over the years, Fauvism has inspired multiple generations of artists. This image on the left, by John Bratby, was made years after the end of the Fauvist

movement came to an end. However, it demonstrates the influence which **Fauvism** had on art, with artists still recreating the bold and distinctive style today.

## Activity!

- Place an object in front of you. This could be an apple, book or any other small object. Create your own fauvist painting of this object. Pay particular attention to colour, brushstrokes, and shapes.
- Create your own mini art gallery with your class to display these artworks. We would love to see your artwork! Share it with us at [@artcollection@reading.ac.uk](mailto:@artcollection@reading.ac.uk)!



# Types of Modern Art: Cubism

Cubism emerged in the early 20th century, and was initially developed and popularised by artists **Pablo Picasso** and **Georges Braque**.

Like many new art movements throughout history, Cubism was a revolutionary approach to art. It uses several different views of the same subject to form a single **abstract** piece of artwork.

These artworks often leave the artwork open to interpretation, which encourages discussion.

There is no one way to interpret a Cubist artwork and different people react with various thoughts and feelings.

Originally dismissed by many people, Cubism slowly grew in popularity. By the end of the 20th century, it had become one of the most widely respected styles of Modern art in Europe and North America.



## Activity!

Take a look at the image on this page by Max Weber (see Page 27 for a larger version).

- What do you think it shows?
- How does it make you feel?
- Does it remind you of any memories or specific thoughts?
- In pairs, discuss your answers to these questions.



# Modernist Artists

*Max Weber (1881-1961)*

Although he emigrated to the USA as a child, the Jewish artist Max Weber had no intention of remaining in New York. By 1905, he had saved up enough money to move to Paris. Whilst there he studied at the famous **Art Academy**, Académie Julian, and with the world renowned artist, Henri Matisse.

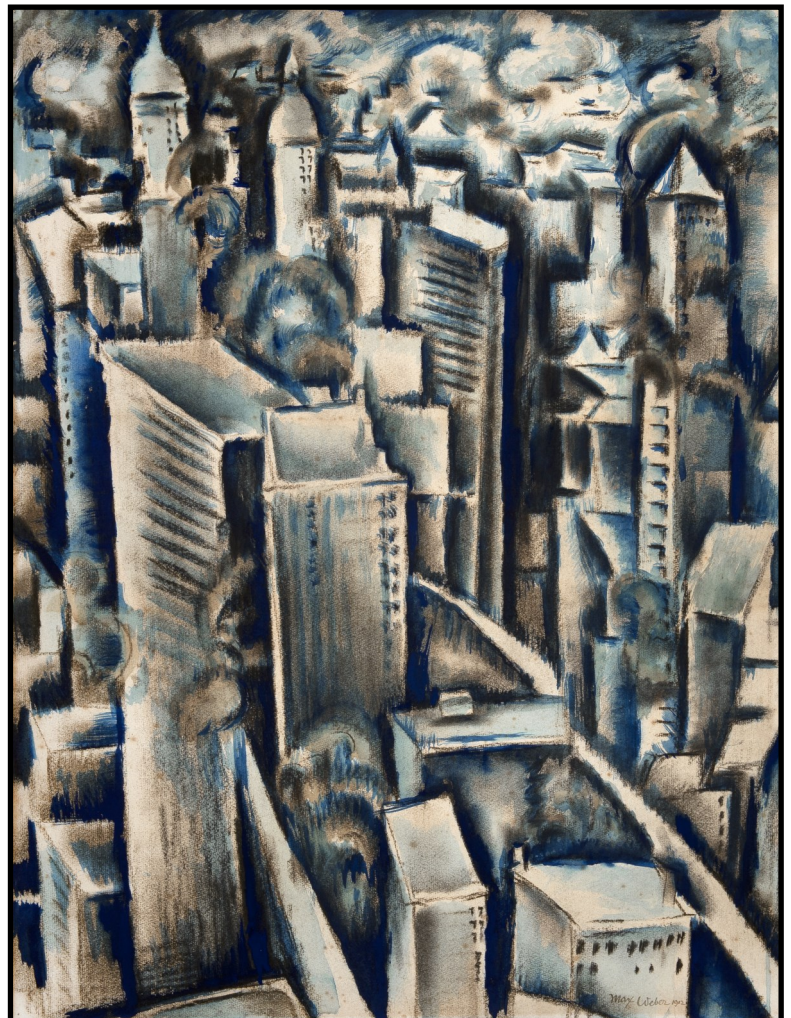
The four years he spent in Europe would prove to be formative to Weber's future art career. This period coincided with the development of several important modernist artistic styles, including **Fauvism** and **Cubism** (See Page 10 and 11).

After running out of money, Weber was forced to return to New York in 1909. Inspired by both the artists that he had met during his trip and the new modern art styles emerging in Paris, Weber began creating and exhibiting new works. Typically these works were **Cubist** in style. At the time, this was a revolutionary art style and people in the USA had never seen art which looked like these pieces.

Because of their originality, these artworks attracted a great deal of criticism. However, Weber inspired other artists, including his friend **Alvin Langdon Coburn**. Coburn was a photographer, whose abstract style mirrored Weber's .

Coburn was also responsible for promoting Weber's work in the UK, displaying several pieces in the first **Grafton Group Exhibition**. He donated his collection of Weber artworks to the University of Reading.

By 1929, Weber was praised as a 'pioneer of modern art in America'. Today, he is known as the first Cubist artist in the USA.



# Modernist Artists

## *James McNeill Whistler (1834– 1903)*

James McNeill Whistler began his artistic career at the young age of 11, enrolling at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg, where he lived with his family.

After his father's death and his return to the USA, Whistler joined the West Point Military Academy, which eventually led to a job drawing maps for the military. It was during this period that Whistler realised he wished to devote his life to being an artist.

In 1855, he moved to Paris and attended classes at the famous art school known as the Ecole Impériale et Spéciale de Dessin. However, whilst Whistler enjoyed the Parisian lifestyle, he preferred self-study to formal teaching.

Over the next few years Whistler began exhibiting works in London, but it was not until 1871 that he painted his most famous artwork. This was a portrait of his mother titled 'Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1' and is now in the Musée D'Orsay in Paris.

Whistler's status within the art community was recognised when he became President of the **Society of British Artists**. During his elected term, Whistler set new standards of acceptance and was in post when the society was granted a royal title in 1887.

In 1898, Whistler opened his own art school, where various and soon-to-be-famous artists, including Gwen John, studied (see Page 9). Sadly this school was short lived and it closed after a few years due to Whistler's poor health.

During his lifetime, Whistler moved between various art styles. He became known as one of the most famous 'modern artists' working in Europe and is celebrated today for his daring and innovative styles.



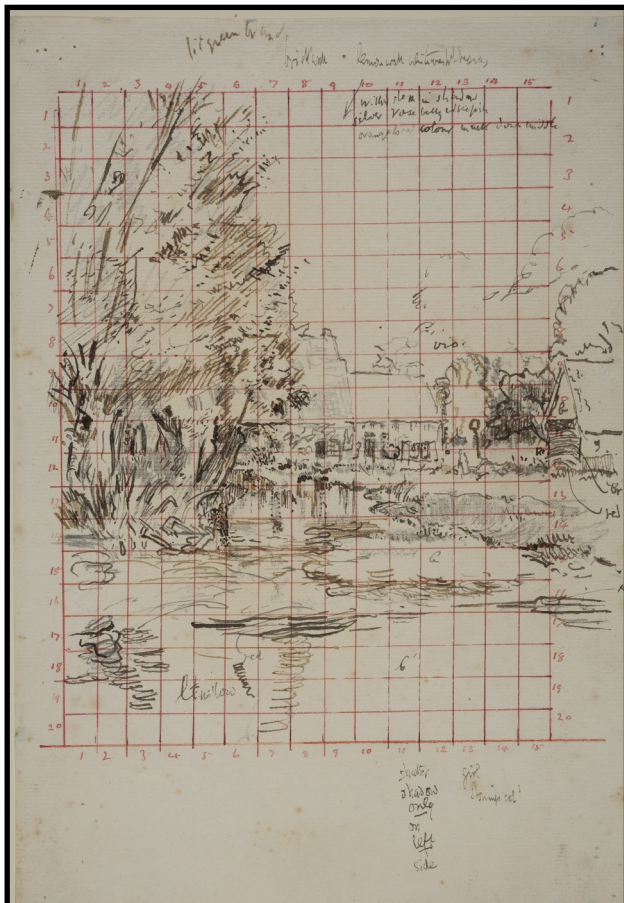


# Types of Modernism: Impressionism

The term 'Impressionism' is typically used for the style in which the artist paints 'on the spot'. Impressionists were not trying to paint a reflection of real life, but an 'impression' of what they could see or feel. Any mistakes were embraced and not corrected.

As they often preferred to paint outdoors, many Impressionists focused on scenes of nature and everyday life. Painting quickly, these artists usually favoured short,

frequent strokes of paint to create the illusion of the movement of light, allowing for the creation of realistic paintings and drawings. The work in the top right is by the British artist, Walter Bayes, who was inspired by Impressionism.



## Activity!

Go outside and find somewhere quiet to sit. Using whatever medium you like, create an 'impressionist' image of what you see outside.

- Pay attention to the movement of any leaves or animals around you. Can you find a way to reproduce this movement in your artwork?
- Can you use short and frequent brushstrokes or pen-strokes to create the illusion of moving light?



# Modernist Artists

*Walter Sickert (1860-1942)*

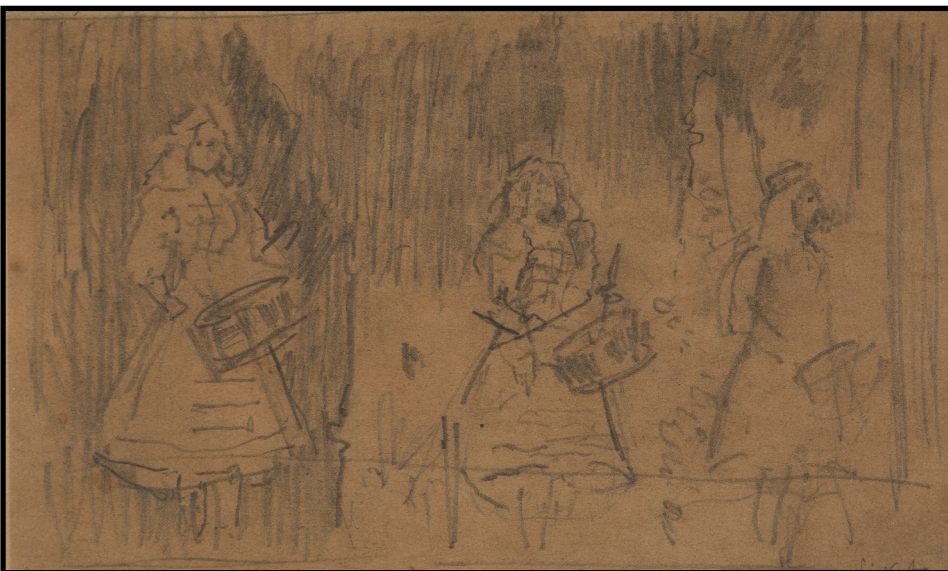
After moving to London in 1881 to attend the Slade School of Art, Walter Sickert promptly left the school a year later. This was to become the apprentice and etching assistant of James McNeill Whistler (see Page 13).

Initially inspired by Impressionism, Sickert began to move away from Whistler's style of painting in favour of **Post-Impressionism**. Moving away from the naturalism found in Impressionism, this new style was more interested in using colour and form in expressive ways.

Sickert's interest in form and expression can be seen in his subject matter. He became interested in the new music and dance halls and began to use them as inspiration for his artworks (see Page 6.)



From 1906, Sickert began to host visitors to his studio in Camden Town. This informal group eventually became known as 'The Camden Town Group'. Like Sickert, other members of this group were influenced by the modern city evolving around them.



Sickert was praised as an artist during his lifetime. This was reflected in the 1930s, when he was made a member of the important Royal Academy and received honorary degrees from both the University of Manchester and the University of Reading.

# Glossary of Terms

**Abstract:** This term is used for art which uses colours, shapes, forms, and marks to create an image rather than creating a realistic depiction of a subject. Since the early 1900s, abstract art has formed a central stream of modern art.

**Academies:** First established in Italy during the 16th century, art academies were centres for teaching and exhibiting art.

**British Empire:** This term is used to describe a group of countries, including Canada, India, Australia, and parts of Africa and the USA, who were ruled by Britain. Initially established in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the British Empire was at its largest in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Colour Theory:** This term refers to the concept where colours are organized on a colour wheel and grouped into 3 categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary colours. This allows the identification of complementary colours.

**Cubism:** Developed in France in the early 1900s, this style is characterised by an emphasis on the flat surface of the picture, and by making several sides visible simultaneously.

**Dance Hall:** A precursor to nightclubs in the early 20th century, dance halls were designated buildings for people to dance with their friends and almost always featured live musicians.

**Fauvism:** The first modern art movement of the 1900s. This was a style of art characterised by bold bright colours, strong brush strokes and spontaneous or unfinished looking compositions.

**Impressionism:** Rejecting traditional academic teaching, this style of art was focused on exact representations of colour, tone and light. It is characterised by small delicate brush strokes, and painting outside to capture the time of day.

**Industrial Revolution:** This term is used for the period of British history between 1760 and 1840, which is characterised by increased mechanisation and emerging methods of mass-production.

**Jazz:** This is a music genre which began in the African-American communities of New Orleans in Louisiana, USA, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was brought to the UK through recordings and performers after World War I. Jazz was often played in the newly emerging dance halls.

**Modern Art:** This term refers to a series of artistic movements and styles which were predominantly developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Artists used new imagery, materials and techniques to create artworks that they felt better reflected the realities and hopes of modern societies.

**New English Art Club:** Founded in 1885 as an alternative exhibition venue to the more conservative Royal Academy of Art. The New English Art Club was also a space for artists influenced by Impressionism.

**Post-Impressionism:** Derived from Impressionism, this style retained similar techniques and colours. The main difference being the Post-Impressionists focus on surface and structure.

**Renaissance:** This term is broadly used to describe the historical period starting in the early 15th century and ending in the late 16th century. During this time there was a revived interest in the arts.

**Royal Academy of Arts:** Based in London and founded in December 1768 as an independent and privately funded institution. Its original mission was “to establish a school or academy of design for the use of students in the arts”.

**Slade School of Fine Art:** Established in 1871, the school was more liberal than other art schools of the period. They allowed admission to female students, which was revolutionary at the time.

**Tonalism:** A similar style to Impressionism, this movement is characterised by the use of neutral palettes and its contemplative nature.

**Urban Society:** Within this resource, this term is used to describe the city or town communities which emerged following the Industrial Revolution.



# List of Images

1. *Portrait of James Joyce*, Wyndham Lewis, lithograph on paper, 1920, UAC/11538
2. *Portrait of James Joyce*, Augustus John, red chalk on paper, 1930, UAC/11536
3. *The River*, Cyril Pearce, oil on board, 1981, UAC/10372
4. *Sketchbook (Dancing Figures)*, Spencer Gore, pastel and chalk on paper, UAC/10747
5. *Lady Wantage*, Sir William Blake Richmond, oil on canvas, 1885, UAC/10059
6. *Discophoros Study (The Discus Bearer)*, Minnie Jane Hardman, graphite on paper, UAC/10610
7. *Study of a Seated Woman*, Gwen John, pencil on paper, UAC/10567
8. *Welsh Landscape*, Augustus John, oil on board, UAC/10544
9. *Brian Aldiss*, John Bratby, oil on canvas, c.1980, UAC/10260
10. *Dancing Figures*, Max Weber, pastel on paper, 1912, UAC/10418
11. *New York*, Max Weber, watercolour, pastel and charcoal on paper, 1912, UAC/10412
12. *The Fellow Traveller*, James McNeill Whistler, ink on paper, 1900-1901, UAC/10519
13. *French Garden*, Walter Bayes, watercolour on paper, UAC/10572
14. *Auberville*, Walter Sickert, pen, ink and pencil on paper, c.1919, UAC/10528
15. *Woman Lying on a Couch*, Walter Sickert, pen, ink and crayon on paper, 1912, UAC/10524
16. *Study for the Three Drummers*, Walter Sickert, graphite on paper, c.1890, UAC/10532

This list is in the same order as the artworks appear in this resource