

Fully Awake 5.6



An Introduction





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An Introduction

'An Introduction' is a series of educational resources offering teachers thematic points of entry for exhibitions at Freelands Foundation Gallery.

These notes highlight some of the artists in our current exhibition, *Fully Awake 5.6*, and explore some of the key themes running through a selection of the artists' work.

This resource will also pose the question: 'How do we talk about painting?', offering practical activities and additional talking points to inform discussions within the classroom and beyond.



What is the exhibition about?

Fully Awake 5.6 is an exhibition that considers new ways of exploring the development of contemporary British painting. The exhibition looks at how painting is taught and how skills and interests are shared through the practice and teaching of painting. It features artists from a broad range of backgrounds and styles, and discusses the impact and influence that different generations of artists have upon one another.

The exhibition is part of a UK-wide project, *Fully Awake*, comprising 72 artists who teach painting in the UK. Each participant has been invited to select one artist they have previously taught, and one artist who has previously taught them, to exhibit alongside each other. By adopting this perspective, the public has the opportunity to observe a lineage of influence among artists that is not normally visible.

Thanks to its unique approach, the *Fully Awake* exhibition series brings together artists from different stages in their careers, giving younger artists the opportunity to have their work shown alongside established artists with international reputations, such as Basil Beattie, Sonia Boyce, Terry Frost, Andrew Grassie, Alexis Harding, Dan Hays, Vanessa Jackson, John Stezaker and Estelle Thompson. Below we have highlighted three of the artists who are featured in the *Fully Awake 5.6* exhibition.





Rivoli Rose, 2017, acrylic on canvas

Mali Morris

Mali Morris (b.1945, Caernarfon, UK) is a British painter who has held over 35 solo exhibitions across the world and is best known for her vibrant and abstract paintings, which explore how colour can give structure to light and space.

Suggested words to use when discussing Morris's work with students:

Abstract
Composition
Colour Wheel
Layering
Brushstrokes
Gestural





Metamorphosis, 2019, Oil on board

Mike Knowles

Mike Knowles (b.1941) is based in North Wales and is heavily influenced by the landscape around him, even stating that he feels trees can assume anthropomorphic characteristics. His work is predominantly figurative, but also contains abstract features created by layering paint. He typically uses a fairly warm colour palette.

Suggested words to use when discussing Knowles's work:

Landscape

Oil

Layering

Composition

Palette

Impasto





Pods, Rebecca Sitar, 2018 , Oil on panel

Rebecca Sitar

Rebecca Sitar, (b.1969). Her work is not completely figurative as she sometimes plays with abstract shapes and doesn't seem to follow particular styles. She uses a fairly muted and simple colour pallet with pared-down backgrounds. Sitar is interested in how paint (as a liquid) can offer a moment of 'stillness' in her work. She also works with photography where she plays with the scale and form of objects to make them unfamiliar, this heavily influences her paintings as well.

Suggested words to use when discussing Sitar' work:

Still Life
Oil
Figurative
Panel
Form
Scale
Background



Here are some suggestions for how to use and interpret this research with your group:

1 — Take your eyes on a walk...

When you're first looking at a painting, ask everyone in the group to take their eyes on a walk:

- What is the largest thing they can find in the painting?
- What is the smallest thing in the painting?
- Can each person identify an aspect of the painting that they don't think anyone else will notice?
- How would each person feel if they were 'inside' the painting?
- Thinking about what they've found, ask the group to use descriptive words to explain these discoveries.

Is this a Landscape painting?

- How has the artist conveyed a sense of place, atmosphere or environment in this painting?
- How has the artist used painting techniques to express mood and interior feelings in their landscapes?
- Ask each person to imagine that they were physically present in the landscape:
 - What time of day is it?
 - What might you be wearing?
 - What smells and sensations might you experience?
 - Would you be warm or cold?
- Always remember to question group members on the decisions behind their answers and encourage them to consider the hints and suggestions offered by the painting.



Activities

Would you call this painting Abstract?

- What might the colours and shapes tell you about the artist?
- What do you think was the emotional state of the artist when they painted this? Why do you think that is?
- Are there any clues as to how it was painted? What techniques and materials do you think the artist used (see Activity 4 and the Dictionary/Glossary for possible suggestions).

Is the painting a Still Life?

- Who do you think the items in the painting belong to?
- Do the items give any hints as to how old the painting is?
- What items would the group paint if they had the opportunity, and why?

Is it a Portrait?

- Who is the person in the painting and what is happening to them?
- What do you think they would say to us if we were present?
- What does their body language or facial expression tell us? What mood is being conveyed?
- What do you think the relationship is between the painter and the subject? Is there anything about the painting itself that informs your answer?
- How has the painter conveyed the personality and spirit of the person using the portrait format?
- Would the mood of this painting be the same without the figure? Why do you think that is?
- Are portraits still important today?



Activities

Talking about the language of Colour:

- What do different colours make you think of?
- How do different colours make you feel?
- Which colours do you think go together? Or which ones don't go together?
- Why is colour important in a painting?
- Can colour tell a story?



2 — Reading a painting

If it's possible, try and view the original painting with the group. If not, use a printout or a projected image. Ask the group to examine it carefully for one minute and to remember its key attributes, such as size, composition, colour and scale. Get the group to turn around and draw (or paint, depending on materials and location) what they remember. Then let the group consider their work together and discuss which of the elements they all recognised. This is a chance to translate their thoughts into key terms and to introduce some of the language in this resource that might help them develop an informed response to the painting.



3 — Describing a painting

Dividing your group into pairs, get one of each pair to turn around so that they cannot see the painting; give them some pens and paper and something to lean on. Ask the people facing the painting to describe it to their unsighted partner, who will then draw it.

This is another chance to translate the group's thoughts into key terms and to introduce some of the language in this resource to help them better interpret the painting and develop their communication skills.



4 — Understanding painting materials and how they differ from one other

Set up some tables, each with a different painting material and some paper or canvas (see the list below for examples of possible materials). Organise the group so that each table has an equal number of students. Each table will offer the students a chance to experiment with how each material works and its capabilities. You may want to do this in a rotation so that everyone in the group gets to experience all of the materials.

This activity will allow the group to understand the principles and attributes of different materials and, due to these experiences, will help make it easier for them to discuss artists' techniques in the future.

Suggested materials:

- **Acrylic:** On this table you might want a variety of acrylic paint, PVA, water and brushes. With these materials you can show how acrylic paint can dry quickly and how easy it is to build up layers and create glazes (you can do this by mixing PVA with the acrylic).
- **Egg Tempera:** You will need some powder paint (which is cheaper than pigments), eggs (the fresher the better), water and brushes. Demonstrate to the group how to use egg tempera and let them experiment with it. You can find lots of example videos on YouTube, but the trick is to pierce the yolk membrane with a pin to make a smoother paint! Try not to include any of the membrane or egg white in the mix.



Activities

- **Oil:** Experimenting with oil paint might be trickier as you will first need to check your school's policy around the use of chemicals. Once you have got the necessary permissions, you will need oil paints, brushes, palette knives, oil-binding mediums (such as linseed or walnut oil) and solvent. Let the group mix colours using palette knives and explore a range of techniques (such as glazing or impasto). This will further the students' awareness of how oil feels compared with other paints, as well as the different types of texture you can create when using it.
- **Watercolour:** Set up the table with watercolour paints, brushes, water and watercolour paper (if possible). Let the group experiment with how controlling the use and amount of water affects the paint and how these techniques can be used to create 'looser' or less clearly defined images.
- **Collage:** Provide the students with a variety of images, textured papers and glue. Let them explore how to combine existing imagery, textures and shapes to create entirely new compositions.

As a group, consider the work that has been created and hold a discussion about how everyone felt using each material and how they would describe the qualities of the different materials. Which ones would they use in the future? How do the different materials portray a range of feelings and emotions?



5 — Thinking, discussing and experimenting with layers and opacity

We've worked with artist Ellie MacGarry (www.elliemacgarry.com) to devise a series of different activities in response to the work of Mali Morris – you can find lots of images of Morris's work online. Some of these activities are age-dependent, so you should select the ones most appropriate to suit your group. The activities will give the group opportunities to not only explore the paintings through experimenting with how colour and light can affect paint, but also how to analyse and discuss these elements.

Suggested materials:

- Coloured paper – primary colours, bright colours, black and white
- Coloured acetate – provide a selection of different colours
- Tape
- Scissors
- A4 clear acetate

Light: If you have windows in your space (you could even use the classroom doors for this), the group can experiment with how light passes through the acetate. Using tape to stick the acetate sheets up, consider how light can have an impact on the process of painting. If you don't have a window, A4 pieces of clear acetate or even thick tracing paper, will also work.

Transparency and opacity: If you lay a yellow acetate shape over a piece of black paper, as opposed to white paper, the result is totally different. Layer coloured acetates on top of one another to demonstrate how one colour mixed with another changes the end



result, i.e. overlapping blue and yellow to make green, or adding another colour on top to create a different tonal range.

- How can you make paint appear to be thicker/thinner or more/less opaque?
- Do some colours let more light through than others?
- What happens if white is added?

Layers: Select a variety of different paintings for the group to look at. How many layers of paint have been applied to each of the paintings? By looking at them, is it possible to tell whether there's something underneath the top surface layer? Did the artist do this intentionally in a way that was planned to maybe hide something, or is changing/covering up a part of their process and they enjoy layering in their work?

Colour: Using a variety of strips of coloured paper, move the shapes around to see how different colours react to one another – for example, if red is surrounded by blue, does it look different to when it's surrounded by pink? Consider talking about Josef Albers's renowned book *Interaction of Colour* as a reference point. Albers was well known for his research around colour theory. *Interaction of Colour* analyses the principles of colour, looking at how colours can change when put together and the feeling they can give, or about colour illusions. He gives many examples of this through images and exercises.



Books

Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art, Terry R Myers (2011)

Teaching Painting: How Can Painting Be Taught in Art Schools?, Ian Hartshorne, Donal Moloney and Magnus Quaife (2016)

Interaction of Color, Josef Albers (1963)

YouTube

Tate 'How to Paint Like...' series, for example, *How to Paint Like LS Lowry*, *How to Paint Like Frank Bowling*

MoMA 'At the Museum' series. Some look at painting techniques and include conversations about paintings: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfYVzk0sNiGF8ZYj6TZPvLyiUWRHp-d76>

MoMA 'In the Studio' series, for example, *How to Paint Like Yayoi Kusama*, *Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction*, *How to Paint Like Pablo Picasso*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGZYfSzvPvs&list=PLfYVzk0sNiGEZXIIIltPP7Yy_s5gTM7hf8



Different types of paintings

Collage: Work created by sticking different materials, such as photographs, pieces of paper or fabric, on to a surface.

Diptych: A painting, traditionally an altarpiece, on two hinged wooden panels that can be closed like a book, or two panels that have been conceived and made to be viewed together.

Landscape: An artwork which primarily focuses on natural scenery or the physical world around us. Landscape can also denote the opposite to 'portrait' in regards to the orientation of an image.

Still life: The subject matter of a still life painting or sculpture is anything that does not move or is not living.

Triptych: A picture or relief carving on three panels, typically hinged together vertically and used as an altarpiece, or an artwork made of three panels that are intended to be shown together.

Painting materials

Acrylic: Acrylic paint is fast-drying paint that can be diluted with water, but which becomes water-resistant when dry.

Oil: Oil paint is a slow-drying paint that consists of particles of pigment suspended in a drying oil to form a tough, coloured film on exposure to air.

Tempera: The technique of painting with pigments bound in a water-soluble emulsion, such as water and egg yolk, or an oil-in-water emulsion such as oil and a whole egg.



Words to use when talking about the painting process?

Application: The process in which paint or materials have been put on to a surface, for example, 'The thick application of the paint.'

Canvas: A traditional fabric surface to paint on.

Coat: A layer or covering of a material (this could be paint or a varnish).

Colour wheel: A circle with different coloured sectors used to show the relationships between colours.

Composition: The structure, placement or arrangement of a painting.

Figurative: A form of modern art that retains strong references to the real world and particularly to the human figure.

Middle ground: The middle distance of a painting or photograph, for example, 'There was a tree in the middle ground of the painting.'

Palette: A smooth, flat surface on which artists set out and mix their colours before painting, which is often designed to be held in the hand. The term is also used to describe the variety of colours in a painting, for example, 'The artist has chosen a warm palette.'

Panel: A painting made on a flat wooden or board panel, for example hardboard such as oak, cedar, birch, or MDF, plywood, etc.

Pigment: The natural or synthetic substances in a paint or dye that gives it its colour.



Scale: The size of an object in relation to another object.

Texture: The feel, appearance or consistency of a surface or substance.

Words to use when talking about techniques...

Blend: Mixing different colours so that they combine together.

Brushstroke: A mark made by a paintbrush drawn across a surface.

Gesture: A quick drawing or brushstroke that captures or hints at something, for example a particular form, object or feeling.

Foreshorten: To draw, paint or photograph people or objects in a way to make them seem smaller or closer together than they actually are.

Glaze: A thin, transparent or semi-transparent layer on a painting, which modifies the appearance of the underlying paint layer.

Glazes can change the colour and texture of a surface.

Impasto: An area of thick paint or texture in a painting.

Primer/Undercoat: A preparatory coating put on the base material (canvas or board) before painting. A primer/undercoat increases paint durability and provides additional protection for the material being painted.

Grisaille: A method of painting in grey monochrome, typically to imitate sculpture.

Layer: A sheet, quantity or thickness of material covering a surface. Typically multiple layers of the material will be applied to a surface.



Ground: The surface of a painting.

Varnish: A varnish is a layer on top of a painting that is normally used to seal the paint. It also creates a finished, glossy look.

Wash: A semi-transparent layer of colour.

Sgraffito: A technique in which the top layer of a material is scratched off in order to reveal a layer of a different colour underneath.

Words to use when describing a painting...

Abstract: Using shapes, colours and textures to create a painting that does not attempt to represent anything in particular.

Expressive: A painting that conveys a particular thought or feeling through the way it has been painted.

Energetic: A painting that conveys a great deal of activity or vitality through the way it has been painted.

Painterly: Referring to the application of paint in a 'loose' or less-than-controlled manner, resulting in the appearance of visible brushstrokes within the finished painting.

Tactile: To connect with something through the sense of touch. A painting could be considered tactile if it has a lot of texture or if it provokes the viewer into wondering what the painting or painting subject might feel like.

Organic: Inspired by nature, organic can be used to describe shapes, lines and curves that could be free-flowing or potentially uneven.



Opacity: Used to describe how thick paint is or whether it is possible to observe the depth of any layers underneath, or to indicate the lack of transparency.

Encaustic: A painting technique involving the use of coloured pigments mixed with hot wax.

Form: The shape or configuration of something.

Liquidity: Used when describing the texture and thickness/thinness of paint.

Narrative: A painting with a narrative tells a story, either as a particular moment in an ongoing story or as a sequence of events unfolding over time.

Non-representation: Something that does not depict any known object (similar to abstract).

Representation: Something that represents a known object or person in a particular way.

Shade: A darker area in a painting.

Tone: The lightness or darkness of the painting, or the depth of colour.



About Freelands Foundation

The Freelands Foundation is a charity that support artists and cultural institutions. Our aims are to broaden audiences for the visual arts and to enable all young people to engage with the creation and enjoyment of art.

Art and culture can provide social and economic benefits to our society. Our goal is to tackle the issues that are limiting our society's access to these benefits. This could be the inequality of access to art education in schools, to the lack of sufficient support for female and emerging artists.

We aim to provoke meaningful, positive change within the visual arts sector via strategic, high-impact programmes, partnerships and activities.

These include a varied portfolio of awards that enable existing visual arts organisations to promote new or under-represented talent and develop pioneering creative projects with artists. We also run a diverse range of events and programmes – partnering with organisations such as Tate Modern and the Institute of Education at University College London, amongst many others.

Across all of our activities we strive to empower not just individual organisations and artists but the broader arts ecosystem – from those supporting children in education, to those working to promote artists and their practice – our mission is to enable this ecosystem to continue to deliver a positive societal and economic impact to the UK.

These notes were produced by Beth Lloyd, Programme Coordinator at Freelands Foundation and designed by UTILE.



