

8 Paul Nash

Outside In Workshop Pack

As part of the Step Up training scheme for marginalised artists, several people took part in a research programme, to explore in detail a work in the collection at Pallant House Gallery with which they experienced some connection.. Through guided and individual research, discussion groups and creating art in response to their findings, extensive materials were produced to form the basis of a series of workshop packs. These packs are a starting point for workshops delivered by Step Up artists under the umbrella of Outside In.

This pack was compiled from research by artist Jacqui Cavalier who chose to focus on Mark Gertler's painting *Near Swanage* and Paul Nash's *Dead Spring*, whilst examining the conflicts and the parallels in the lives of these two artists.



Paul Nash, *Dead Spring*, 1929
Kearley Bequest, through The Art Fund (1989)

Paul Nash, a reluctant volunteer would also paint landscapes but they would portray devastation on a grand scale. He depicted the ruined countryside as a way of carrying a message to the people of Britain of the stark realities of war.

It took others many years to be able to describe in words the horrifying scenes they were to witness, but Nash managed to convey the stark brutality of the Great War with the bleakness and carnage caused to nature.

Paul Nash was to use this method of conveying emotion throughout his life and *Dead Spring* was painted after the death of his father. It conveys the emptiness of soul and is devoid of life. An expression of emotion perhaps more powerful than any other picture that he could have painted with regard to the loss of his father.

Paul Nash 1899-1946

Paul Nash, the son of a successful lawyer, was born in Kensington, London and brought up in a wealthy, but troubled household. His mother suffered from depression and spent long periods in mental institutions. Nash was often ill as a child. His battle with asthma and its symptoms affected him and in a letter to James Thurber he wrote that he had "an intense hatred of death". This started a lifelong preoccupation with the theme of mortality. As a teenager, he was attracted to the work of the pre-Raphaelites, and especially to their ideas of romantic death. This spell was broken when his mother died in 1910. In the same year, Nash joined the Slade School of Art. A smartly dressed and handsome young man, he felt out of place next to the young eccentric sartorial art students there. Nash eventually made some friends and had one-man shows in 1912 and 1913.

In 1914 Paul Nash married Margaret Odeh, an Oxford scholar and a suffragette. War broke out in 1914 and although reluctant, Nash joined the Artists Rifles. Nash, who took part in the offensive at Ypres, had reached the rank of lieutenant in the Hampshire Regiment by 1916. When possible, Nash made sketches of life in the trenches. In May 1917 he was invalided home after a non-military accident. While recuperating in London he worked from his sketches to produce a series of war paintings, which led to Charles Masterman, head of the Government's War Propaganda



Paul Nash, *Totes Meer (Dead Sea)*, 1940-1 © Tate, London, 2011

Bureau recruiting Nash as a war artist. In November 1917 he returned to the Western Front where he painted several more pictures including *The Menin Road*, *The Mule Track*, *Ruined Country* and *Spring in the Trenches*. Nash was unhappy with his work as a member of War Propaganda Bureau.

Nash began working up his sketches for a one man exhibition of 50 drawings in 1918. His exhibition was called *Void of War*. His landscapes portrayed devastation on a grand scale. He depicted the ruined countryside as a way of carrying a message to the people of Britain of the stark realities of war. Nash used this method of conveying emotion throughout his life and in 1929, following the death of his father, he painted *Dead Spring*, in which a withered potted plant conveys his emptiness of soul.

After the war, Nash experimented with surrealism and abstract

art. He taught at the Royal College of Art and worked as a designer and book illustrator. From October 1934 to early 1936 Nash and his wife lived in Swanage. They moved there in the hope that the climate might improve his asthma. Feeling revived, Nash began a new series of paintings of nature and the landscape, often focussing on what he called the 'object-personage' an object which seemed to resemble or take on the personality of something else.

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939 Nash was employed by the Ministry of Information and the Air Ministry. During this period he painted *Totes Meer (Dead Sea)*, inspired by photographs he took at a dump of wrecked aircraft at Cowley, Oxfordshire.

In 1946, Paul Nash contracted pneumonia and never recovered. He died in his sleep from heart failure on July 11.

⑧ Mark Gertler

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Mark Gertler, *Near Swanage*, 1916, Kearley Bequest, through The Art Fund (1989), © Luke Gertler

The year was 1916; the First World War called The Great War was in full swing. Mark Gertler turned his back on war, he ended his friendship with Edward Marsh with whom he had been staying in London and visited his friend Montague Sherman at his property Peveril House near Swanage.

All about them war raged. However, Gertler sought his Oasis of calm and peace, and he found it. In a letter he wrote 'From every window one could paint a splendid picture'.

Everything in this landscape enraptured Gertler – the sea, 'an intense blue with hot green trees silhouetted against it'; the 'crude greens of the earth'; the 'sunlit whites of the cliff, clear cut and solid, like coloured sculpture'; the rocks and quarries – 'chunks of beautiful stone everywhere'. He wished he could carry a lump of stone home, 'for carving in.'

In my opinion, he had found a patchwork of beauty and far preferred this view to the horrible reality of conflict.

Mark Gertler 1891-1939

Mark Gertler was the youngest of five children born to Polish-Jewish immigrant parents in Spitalfields, in the East End of London. He was raised in a loving family, but in severe poverty. He showed precocious artistic talent from a young age and painted his family repeatedly. Gertler entered the Slade School of Art in 1908 with the financial support of the Jewish Educational Aid Society. Gretchen Gerzina wrote, "At the Slade, Mark was at first something of a misfit. He had started school late in life, and had left it at the age of fourteen. His hair was short and his clothes were different... In contrast, his fellow students seemed privileged and rather frivolous." It was at the Slade that Gertler crossed paths with Paul Nash who also felt out of place there. In 1910, Dora Carrington joined the Slade School and Gertler fell in love. For him the friendship would be complicated by sexual frustration while Carrington had no wish to become romantically involved. Gertler continued to paint family portraits and to develop his own style.

Gertler moved in with Edward Marsh, patron, collector and private secretary to Winston Churchill, in 1914, but Gertler refused to support Britain's involvement in the First World War and the two men argued about the conflict. Gertler decided to leave Marsh, explaining, "I am I believe what you call a Passivist. I don't know exactly what that means, but I just hate this war and should really loathe to help in it." Gertler wrote to Dorothy Brett that he was moving to the countryside "to rot away my life until the butchery is completed". He used landscapes as a way of turning his back on the warmongering that surrounded him in London. In 1916, Gertler painted *Merry-Go-Round*, expressing his horror at the war. Considered by many art critics to be the most important British painting of the war, it shows a group of military and civilian figures caught on the vicious circle of the roundabout. In the same year, Gertler painted *Near Swanage*, depicting the view from his room at Peveril House, the home of collector Sir Montague Shearman, also a Jew and devoted friend.

In April 1920, the first symptoms of tuberculosis appeared in Gertler. Although in poor health, he continued to have yearly exhibitions at Groupil Gallery. His work became gentler during the 1920s as he began to concentrate on still lifes and nudes. The early 1920s were his most successful period commercially.

Gertler married Marjorie Hodgkinson also a former Slade School student on April 3, 1930. According to Gretchen Gerzina, "his marriage to Marjorie Hodgkinson was initially a happy one, although marred by ill health. He had tuberculosis, she a miscarriage and when their son Luke was born, he too had medical problems." (2)

Dora Carrington committed suicide on 11th March 1932. Gertler was devastated. His mother died in the same year. Gertler found that family life was a disruption to his work which was not going well. He loved his wife and son, but they agreed to separate. His depression worsened. In May 1939 Gertler had his last exhibition which was not a commercial success. The following month he committed suicide in his studio. Depressed by ill health and the failure to sell more paintings, alone and beset with money worries, Gertler gassed himself in his studio at 5 Grove Terrace, Highgate Road, London, on June 23, 1939. The second world war broke out in September 1939.

1. Gretchen Gerzina, *Carrington: A Life of Dora Carrington: 1893-1932*, 1989.

1. *Ibid.*



Ways of working for a mixed media landscape

Decide what your imaginary/dream landscape would be... Would it be the countryside, the sea, castles, fairgrounds or even a scene from your favourite tv programme? Landscapes are just backgrounds that you view.

Think about a place you would like to be so you can 'leave your travels in your old kit bag'. It could even be the moon!

- You will need a pile of magazines and newspapers or even photographs or images that you may have printed from the internet (be careful of copyright).
- Tear or cut out the images that interest you and that you would find pleasing to be in your landscape. Torn edges work better as it is easier to blend them with pastel colours.
- Place your chosen images on a clean piece of paper and arrange them to form your view.
- Glue down your images using Pritt stick or PVA glue.
- Using pastels colour your landscape appropriately to create a joined up scene.
- When complete your landscape can be protected using fixative or hairspray as a cheap alternative.

