

# Themes and Variations

Ceri Richards at the National Museum  
and Gallery Cardiff

*27 July - 27 October 2002*

## Education Pack

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NATIONAL MUSEUMS & GALLERIES OF WALES



## Ceri Richards

Ceri Richards was born in Dunvant near Swansea in 1903. His father was a tin plate worker and music and poetry formed an important part of every day life. His father conducted the local choir and Ceri Richards was taught to play the piano.

Aspects of this Welsh childhood, of music, poetry and nature influenced his art throughout his life. It became the source of inspiration for his painting, drawing, printmaking and constructions.

On leaving secondary school he was apprenticed to an electrical engineer. He attended evening class to study engineering drawing. He soon realised that drawing not engineering was his main interest and became a full time student at the Swansea School of Art in 1921.

It was during a Summer School in 1923 at Gregynog that Ceri Richards encountered for the first time modern art. Gregynog was the home of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies. It was there that he saw for the first time works of art by great European artists. He was especially drawn to the work of Claude Monet. He then moved from Swansea to the Royal College of Art.

He lived in London for the rest of his life except for 4 years during the Second World War when he was Head of Painting at Cardiff School of Art. By the 1920s his reputation as a painter was becoming known and he had his first one-man exhibition at the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery, Swansea in 1930. In 1929 he married Frances Clayton who was his contemporary at the Royal College.

While at the Royal College he read Kandinsky and became increasingly interested in the work of Picasso and Matisse. By the 1930s he became interested in the work of the Surrealists especially their automatic techniques and the use of chance. Ceri Richards himself was not afraid to change his subject and to experiment with style and technique.

The 1930s was a period of experimentation and he made a number of relief constructions and paintings that reflected his interest and understanding of cubism and abstraction.

1943 saw the beginning of work relating to the theme of the cycle of nature. This theme was related to the poetry of Dylan Thomas, in particular *'The Force that through the green fuse drives the flower.'* By the end of the 1940s he was exploring a different subject matter, the music room interior, usually with a piano and female pianist. This was an expression of Richard's great love of music. The mood of these paintings is not always calm. Reference to the legend of the Sabine Women was often suggested by paintings of the sabinas on the walls of the interiors. By 1950s a number of paintings appeared where Ceri Richards is paying homage to his favourite composer, Beethoven.

During the 1950s and 60s Ceri Richards created paintings, collages and constructions on the subject of the submerged cathedral. Music was still prevalent since this subject was taken from Debussy's prelude *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. During the 1960s he won many prestigious prizes and was awarded some important commissions. He died in London on 9 November 1971.

The exhibition is divided into 5 themes.

## **Relief Constructions and Paintings 1934-39**

During the 1930s Ceri Richards often experimented with new ways of working. Paper collages and constructions, first in metal, which he destroyed and then in wood were made during this period. These were inspired by the early constructions of Picasso. He was interested in giving raw materials new life. His relief constructions are mostly monochrome and reflect his interest in Cubism and abstraction. Aspects of objects would be taken and rearranged without regard to the limitations of perspective or naturalistic colour.

## **The Cycle of Nature 1943-1969**

By the end of 1943 the poetry of Dylan Thomas was the major theme of his work.

The lyric of 1933 *'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower'* became the source of inspiration which Ceri Richards returned to periodically until the end of his life.

Images with reference to sex, natural violence, procreation, growth, destruction and death are all evident in this work. The changing of the seasons, the passage of day and night all correspond to the cycle of human life - from conception to birth, to summer flowering in the bright air, to death and of return to the dark earth. The paintings, drawings and prints could also be said to reflect the mood of the period.

Ceri Richards is juxtaposing images of life / birth and death. This free association of images shows the influence of Surrealism on his work.

### **"Do you work from nature?"**

*"I have to refer directly to nature for stimulus before I can start my painting. Once I have transferred to the canvas an expression of this stimulus, the painting grows on its own as an entity."*

### **"Have you a clear conception of the picture before you begin. Does it grow while working?"**

*"If by clear conception is meant clear mental image, then no. But I think a mental conception puts one 'in countenance' for painting. When actually painting, the concept and representation work almost simultaneously, each qualifying and reorganising the other."*

(Ceri Richards 1933)

## **Music, Light and Colour 1949 - 1953**

At intervals throughout his life Ceri Richards returned to the theme of music. In the early pictures the music room and its piano are the focus of the works. Latter the images become less representational. Light and colour are important elements of the work and often the brightness of light entering and illuminating a room becomes the focus for the work.

Some of these pieces celebrates the joy of performing music while others celebrate the joy of composing. The mood of *Homage to Beethoven* is more silent and contemplative in comparison to the joy and movement captured in *The Pianist*.

The Trafalgar Square paintings continue with the theme of light and colour but this time out side in the open air. Light and shadow becomes dynamic elements in a conservatory room in *Sunlight in a Room* (1952).

Reading Kandinsky's essay "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" 1912 while at the Royal College influenced Ceri Richards's thinking about the relationship of music and art.

*"Colours are a keyboard, the artist is the hand that plays on them... A painter who finds no satisfaction in representation, but who wants to express his internal life, and who envies the ease with which it can be done by music, applies the means of music to his own art. And from this results the modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematic abstract construction, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion."*

## **Music and Nature (La Cathédrale engloutie) 1957 - 1962**

This work is a series of semi-abstract seascapes. The work was made as a direct response to the music of Debussy. Debussy had been inspired by the legend of a submerged cathedral at Y's on the coast of Brittany. At moments of calm the cathedral was said to rise from the depths of the sea and the bells could be heard ringing.

Fragments of the cathedral itself can be seen under the water. Columns, domes and windows can sometimes be recognised amongst rocks, shells and stones. The sea is always present often reflecting the sun and the moon. The contrast of light and dark, movement and stillness and surface and depth is evident in the work.

*"I am not illustrating, I am reacting in a whimsical manner to a vital piece of music that I sincerely admire."*

### **Encore**

After *La Cathédrale engloutie* Ceri Richards worked on other series of paintings inspired by the piano music of Debussy: *Clair de Lune*, *Jardins sous la pluie* and *Poissons d'or*. In these works reference is made to the light of the moon on sea and canal, gold fish in a pond and cloudbursts of rain on a Gower garden. Events in nature contribute to creating truly atmospheric works.

## Ideas for Practical Work back at school

THEMES - Nature, Music, Poetry

TECHNIQUES - Painting, Printmaking, Collage

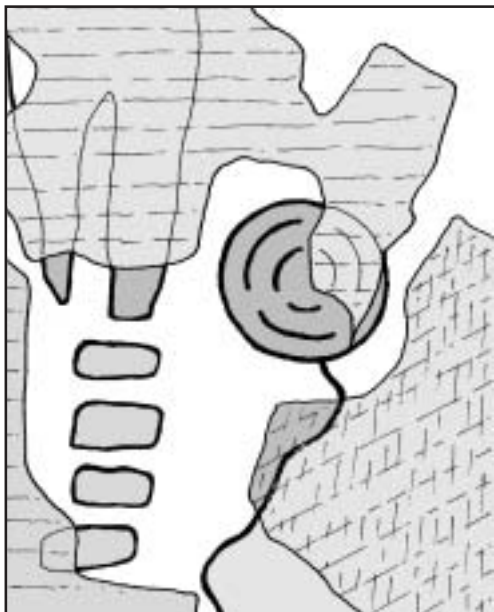
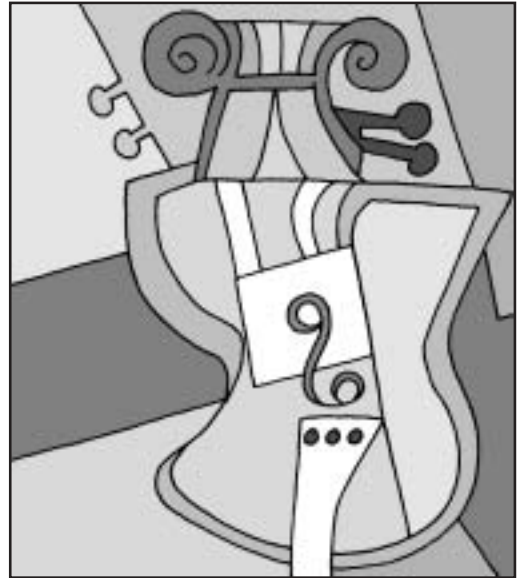
Make work inspired by the constructions of Ceri Richards e.g. *Man with Pipe* 1934 and *White and Dark* 1936

From a collection of musical instruments make simple drawings focusing on shape.

Cut out the shapes from a range of papers. Work in monochrome exploring tone and texture.

Use a range of papers of various textures and tones but of one colour. You may wish to look at a range of white papers such as cartridge, newsprint, woodchip wall paper, embossed wallpaper, hand made paper...

Play with arranging the shapes onto a background while talking about composition. Encourage the pupils to experiment with different arrangements before glueing them down.



Make work inspired by the series of work *La Cathédrale engloutie*

Language as the inspiration for visual images.

e.g. cold, wet, tired, fun, loud, sad, mad, quiet...

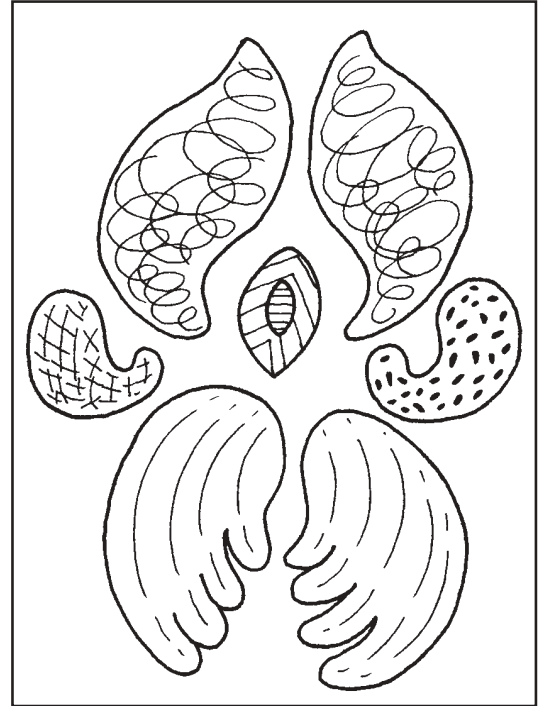
Present the pupils with individual words or sentences. They could be descriptive or even evoke a mood. Ask the pupils to think about and to draw shapes, which are suggested by the words. Look at a range of transparent materials e.g. tissue paper, net fabric, tea bag paper, tracing paper... Cut out some of the shapes and trap them behind the transparent materials. You may even wish to include some words with the shapes.

## Make work inspired by the *Cycle of Nature* series

Natural objects as the inspiration for printmaking.  
Collect a range of natural forms for the pupils to work from. Remember the words of Ceri Richards: "I have to refer directly to nature for stimulus before I can start my painting."

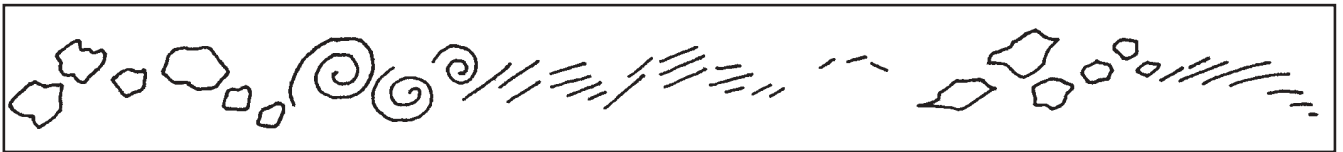
Ask the pupils to take rubbings and to make drawings of some of the objects.

- 1 The actual objects could be used for printmaking.
- 1 Build up the design on a piece of card. Glue (pva) card shapes onto a piece of card. Old cereal packs work really well. Take a rubbing of the block before it is used for printmaking.
- 1 Collograph printmaking. For this technique the block is built up from a range of different textured surfaces. Each shape is glued (pva) onto the block. Once the block is finished the surface should be sealed with a mixture of pva and water. When dry the block can be used for printmaking. A rubbing could also be taken.

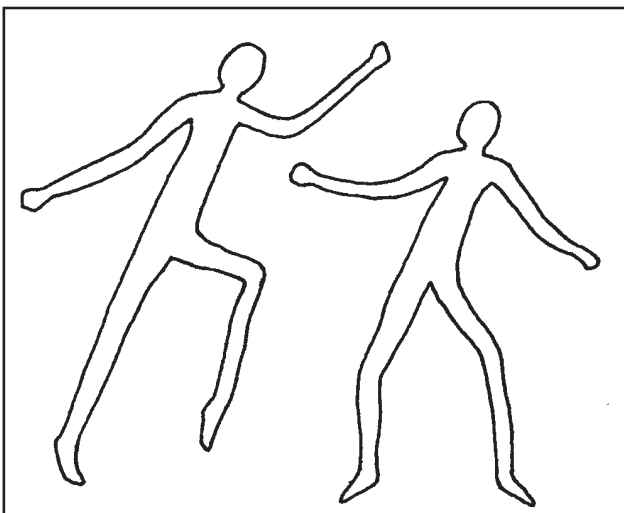


## Make work inspired by *La Cathédrale englouti* series

Music as the inspiration for painting.



Listen to a piece of music and encourage the pupile to explore mark making, shapes, lines and colours. Questions can be asked to encourage imaginative thought. If this music was a shape what shape would it be? If this music was a colour what colour would it be? A very long and narrow group painting work could be produced, each section representing a different section of the musical composition.



## Make work inspired by *The Pianist*

Music and movement as the inspiration for figurative three dimensional work.

Ask the pupils to work in pairs and to take it in turn to sketch each other while one is performing some type of movement. Stress the importance of not worrying about making the figures look realistic but rather to convey the feeling of motion. A photograph could also be taken of the pose.

The shape of the moving figure can then be built out of wire and covered with small pieces of Mod-Roc.

## Useful Vocabulary

### **Abstract Art**

Art which does not try to represent people, animals or objects in the real world. Colour, line, tone and texture are arranged within the work for their aesthetic value.

### **Collage**

A picture made wholly or partly from paper, cloth or other material stuck onto a base.

### **Composition**

How elements in a work of art are arranged to create a visually satisfactory image.

### **Cubism**

Work which explored the idea of representing the 3 dimensional world on a two dimensional surface. A single viewpoint was rejected and actual objects and materials were sometimes placed in the work.

### **Frottage**

Rubbings made of different textures, which can be used in collage.

### **Representational Art**

Objects being portrayed as they appear in the real world.

### **Surrealist Art**

To move beyond or above reality. Linking the world of dreams and real life. Work which brings together unlikely objects.



## Education / Public Events Programme

### See it first

Wednesday, 4 September - 4.30 - 5.30pm

Special preview of the exhibition for primary, secondary and college teachers. This exhibition provides an unique opportunity to study the work of Ceri Richards and in doing so meet the requirements of The Curriculum Cymreig.

Please phone 029 20573240 to reserve your place.

### Artist Led Gallery Sessions

Gallery sessions for educational groups are available every morning in the exhibition space. Individual pieces of work will be explored in some detail and sessions can be tailored according to the age of the students. These 45 minute sessions must be pre-booked through the Education Office on 029 2057 3240. Maximum group size:30

### Special Art Week

Musical Madness

24 - 27 September 2002

10.15am - 12.15pm and 12.45pm - 2.45pm

Space available for 30 pupils per workshop.

Make your own work inspired by music. This workshop will start in the exhibition where pupils will explore the work of Ceri Richards which has been inspired by music. The pupils will then work with an artist producing their own work in response to music. Suitable for KS2 and KS3 pupils.

### Art Cart

Families visiting the exhibition can make their own work of art inspired by the work of Ceri Richards. The cart will have a range of 'making' activities for parents and children of all ages. Each activity will relate to individual works in the exhibition and will help families to look at pieces of work together.

Activities will be available 12.30pm - 4.30pm each weekend and during the school holidays for the course of the exhibition.

### Walk and Talk

Take a walk around the exhibition with one of our guides. These informal sessions will be available each afternoon during the exhibition.



## Where to find further information

[www.atticgallery.co.uk](http://www.atticgallery.co.uk)  
[www.welshartsarchive.org.uk](http://www.welshartsarchive.org.uk)  
[www.artwales.com/artistcri](http://www.artwales.com/artistcri)  
[www.keithchapman.homestead.com](http://www.keithchapman.homestead.com)  
[www.gallery4wales.com/CeriRichards](http://www.gallery4wales.com/CeriRichards)

## Books and Exhibition Catalogues

*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, National Eisteddfod, 1961  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, University College of Swansea, 1984  
*Ceri Richards Memorial Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue,  
National Museum of Wales, 1973  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, Royal Scottish Academy, 1975  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, The Tate Gallery, 1981  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, Martin Tinney Gallery, 1999  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, Marlborough Fine Art, 1970  
Roberto Sanesi, *The Graphic Works of Ceri Richards*, Milan, 1973  
*Ceri Richards*, exhibition catalogue, National Museum & Galleries of Wales, 2002  
Mel Gooding, *Ceri Richards*, Cameron and Hollis, 2002