



# The moderns

The Arts in Ireland from the 1900s to the 1970s

## **EXHIBITION NOTES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC**

*The Moderns* is the most extensive exhibition to date from the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). The exhibition explores the development of modernity in Ireland through the visual arts in the period 1900 to 1975. Focussing on the innovative and the experimental, the exhibition brings together drawings, paintings, sculptures, photographs and film, as well as the architecture, literature, music and design of the period.

Although selected mainly from IMMA's Collection, the exhibition also includes loans from public and private collections in Ireland and beyond.

*The Moderns* explores many of the key art movements of the period, including the paintings of Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone and other supporters of European Modernism, in the context of the iconic achievements in design and literature of Eileen Gray and James Joyce. *The Moderns* reflects the work and influence of John Millington Synge, Paul Henry and the Yeats family, along side the external forces of international artists like Klee and Picasso. Also examined are the significance of the ground-breaking ROSC exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s, and of Minimalism and Conceptual Art in the works of Brian O'Doherty, Barry Flanagan and Michael Craig-Martin.

The exhibition is open to the general public from 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010 until: 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011 (East Wing Galleries, first floor); 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011 (West Wing Galleries, first floor); and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2011 (West Wing Galleries, ground floor).

**The IMMA Primary School Programme will focus on *The Moderns* from 26<sup>th</sup> October 2010 until 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011.**

The exhibition is sponsored by **BNP PARIBAS**

The exhibition media partners are **EBOW, THE IRISH TIMES, RTÉ**

## **EXHIBITION INFORMATION FOR PRIMARY TEACHERS**

The exhibition *The Moderns* offers a substantial cross-section of Irish visual arts activity during the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century. For children, this is a great opportunity to look at, think about and respond to a wide variety of art ideas, practices, styles and media. For primary teachers, the exhibition represents a substantial resource as an experiential reference point for the children's learning back in the classroom. The exhibition contains many artworks that will provide teachers with strong links to the various strands of visual arts education in the primary curriculum. Throughout *The Moderns*, the visual arts elements can be explored with the children: colour and tone; spatial organisation; pattern and rhythm; and texture.

## **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MODERN? WHO ARE THE MODERNS?**

For the purposes of working with the under 12s, we will talk about *modern* as being the latest or newest idea or thing. We often speak of modern ideas, modern inventions, modern tools, and modern ways of doing things. Before, or after, visiting IMMA, children might be encouraged to look at examples of a car or a building that looks new or modern. What makes it different from a car or building that looks old fashioned? Other examples might be used, such as phones or clothes. These discussions might lead to the children considering aspects of history, design and the visual/ built environment around them.

In the context of this exhibition, we will refer to 'The Moderns' as being those artists who were thinking and doing something new or different. Even though many of those artists lived years ago, their art is still considered 'modern' today because it was new or different when they were alive. Also, this exhibition can provide a basis for older children to discuss concepts of modernity in relative/ comparative terms – e.g. something from the past can be *more modern* than something else from that same period.

## **GEOMETRIC SHAPES**

Geometric shapes are essential building blocks or compositional elements in many of the images in *The Moderns*. Throughout the exhibition, many of the artworks clearly feature shapes such as squares, rectangles, circles and ovals (particularly in the West Wing first floor, where the children will mostly visit). Specifically, the square appears over and over again, either as a two dimensional shape, or as a 3D cube.

Throughout this exhibition, it can be an interesting exercise to look out for the various appearances of the square/ cube. One work in particular is called 'Homage to the Square'. The painting is by **Josef Albers** and the title describes the artwork very well: the painting shows squares-within-squares, coloured blue-grey, ochre, brown and orange.

### **LIST OF ARTWORKS**

*Please note: A substantial number of the following artworks will be visited during a guided tour of The Moderns. However the number visited will vary according to circumstance on the day. Additionally, other artworks not covered here may be included in any given tour.*

#### **On the landing at the top of the glass stairs (until 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011)**

**Sean Scully** is well known for using only blocks or stripes of colour in his paintings. The two paintings in *The Moderns* are earlier artworks. The shape of one of his paintings on the IMMA Landing ('Brennus') is a square with dark lines running across it horizontally. The other painting, 'East Coast Light I', has a rectangular top but the bottom points to the floor like a triangle. Because of the way the artist has applied the paint, there is an illusion that some lines are behind or in front of other lines.

**Michael Craig-Martin's** 'On the Table' features four buckets of water which are attached to a legless tabletop via pulleys on the ceiling. The immediate visual image is that the buckets are resting on a table top which hovers over the floor. However this illusion is created by the weight distributed between the four buckets, which keeps the tabletop level and suspended through the pulleys and ropes. There are several visual elements in the form of this artwork, along with the **triangle** shapes made by the lines of the ropes, the **circle** shapes in the bucket tops and the **square** shape of the tabletop itself.

#### **In the corridor to the East Wing first floor (until 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011)**

In *The Moderns*, there are interesting examples of **Eileen Gray's** designs: a chair, a cabinet, a lamp and a model of her seaside house. The children can discuss how comfortable and useful these objects might be. They can identify how shapes, lines, colours, textures and materials are used. In particular, they can look out for simple rectangle, square and rounded lines throughout her designs.

The beautiful model of her house (called E-1027) can allow for a discussion about what the children might need to think about if they were designing their own homes. This might develop into a project through which the children use drawing or construction to show what their ideal living space might look like. Eileen Gray also designed furniture to go into her house. What kind of things would each child specially design to go into his or her ideal living space? A verbal or written activity might accompany their designs and constructions, articulating their choices and decisions.

Eileen Gray was assisted in creating the house by Jean Badovici. The name of the house, E-1027, is her code for their names mixed together: 'E' is for Eileen; J is the tenth letter of the alphabet, so '10' for Jean; B is the second letter, so '2' for Badovici; and G is the seventh letter, so '7' for Gray.

There is more information Eileen Gray on the website of the National Museum of Ireland - Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks, Dublin: **www.museum.ie**  
<http://www.museum.ie/en/exhibition/eileen-gray-introduction.aspx>

In one room of *The Moderns* there is an opportunity to see the 1934 film, 'Man of Aran', directed by **Robert Flaherty**. A synopsis of the film is: "A group of people living on a desolate island struggle to survive."\* Flaherty was attempting to show the life of a pre-modern people. Although the film was an inspiration to the British documentary movement, it is a mixture of fact and fiction (in the 1930s, shark hunting and potato planting were not practiced by the islanders in the way depicted in the film). During a guided tour of *The Moderns* the children may see a short section of this film.

\*From the British Film Institute's **screenonline.org.uk** by Lou Alexander  
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/480287/>

There are also black and white photographs of life in Connemara, the Aran Islands, Wicklow and Kerry taken by the writer **John Millington Synge**, between 1898 and 1905. There is an opportunity here to talk about how photographs, particularly ones at home, can mark the passage of time. For instance, comparing photos of ourselves now to photos of ourselves when we were younger ...

Further on in the exhibition *The Moderns*, there are colour photographs by **Bill Doyle** which document a funeral on Inis Oirr. Because the photography is in colour, children have remarked that these photographs are *more modern* than the black and white

photos by John Millington Synge. This distinction, *more modern*, is interesting because Bill Doyle's photos were taken nearly 50 years ago. Also, despite the vivid colour photography, the islanders' traditional dress indicates a difference between their time and culture and ours in the here and now.

### **The West Wing first floor (until 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011)**

Sometimes artists use very few colours in a painting. Each of the paintings by **William Scott** in this exhibition focus on one of the **primary colours: red** in 'Red Brown and Black'; **yellow** in 'Parallel Forms Orange'; and **blue** in both 'Blue Still Life' and 'Berlin Blues I'. Working with the dark and light tones of a single colour, or working with a limited range of 'warm' or 'cold' colours only, can be an interesting way of exploring and learning about colour and paint in a classroom activity.

**Brian O'Doherty/ Patrick Ireland** made a long rectangular aluminium sculpture which hangs upright on a wall. There are thin lines on the aluminium's surface which are an old Irish way of writing called Ogham.

Individually, two artists, **Patrick Scott** and **Cecil King**, used the same brown and red colours in their separate artworks: Patrick Scott's 'Small Rosc Symbol' (featuring a large irregular red **O** shape on a brown background), and Cecil King's 'Sounion' (featuring four ruler-straight **U** shapes). In the same room, there is a yellow sculpture 'And if Because' by **John Burke**, standing on the floor, that looks like a propped-up **Z** or **N** shape.

'Peinture 16 Nov.' by **Pierre Soulages** has big black paint strokes across a white surface. Some of the paint is thick, some thin. How might the artist have made this painting: with a broad, swinging gesture; with a big brush?

The effects of 'watery' thin paint or poured paint can be seen as splashes, drips, blobs and puddles in artworks by Anne Madden, Charles Tyrell and Patrick Scott.

**Anne Madden's** work, 'Quadripartite Mountain', is in four individual rectangle parts which are joined together to form a single, larger rectangle. The four parts look like they were originally painted separately or in some other formation. The rhythm and flow of the paintwork doesn't match-up across the surface of the whole artwork. In some parts, the paint looks like it has dried in a puddle after being poured onto the

surface. In other parts, the paint is thin like a stain. **Charles Tyrell's** 'Untitled' artwork has two sets of lines which form half-squares. One half-square is coming down from the top of the image and the other is coming up from the bottom. Green and wine-red colours splash out of both sets of lines. **Patrick Scott's** 'Purple Device' features two canvases joined together, one above the other. In the top canvas there is a round shape of blobby colour, looking like a cosmic tie-dye, which is surrounded by radiating drips of paint: some of these drips fall down in streaks onto the bottom canvas.

Across from Josef Albers' 'Homage to the Square', there are some examples of modern Irish architecture. Buildings by the company **Scott Tallon Walker** are represented in this exhibition as a set of models and drawings. Their 'Goulding Summerhouse' shows a modern box-like building which juts out over a river bank. There are photographs of the actual building. Looking at the model, the windows are composed of square shapes. Also from Scott Tallon Walker is a model of a bird's eye view of the 'Carroll Factory'. This model shows that the whole building is based on a series of square shapes put together and arranged in a particular pattern. Similar to the discussion of ideal living spaces based on the work of Eileen Gray, these models also can also generate conversations with the children about what people need and want from their living and working environments.

**Noel Sheridan's** 'Information for the People' features two encyclopaedia-thick books (Volume I & II of 'Information for the People') locked in a block of transparent material. It is like the books have been frozen in ice. How did they get in there? What use are books that cannot be opened or read?

**Dennis Oppenheim's** 'Reading Position for Second Degree Burn' shows two photographs, one above the other. You can see the artist in both photographs: he looks like he is sunbathing on a beach. Both photographs are very similar. Can we name the differences between the two photographs? In the top photo he has an open book resting on his chest. In the bottom photo the book is gone, but it has left his chest with a pale patch of skin where it once was. The artist has been sunburned in between the top and bottom photographs. The artist's sunburn tells us that time has passed by in between the points when the top and bottom photographs were taken.

**François Morellet's** 'Sphère-Traume' hangs from the ceiling and looks like a silver ball/ globe from a distance. Straight steel rods of varied length run across each other at right angles to create the three dimensional round form (close-up we can see the round shape is actually made from a matrix of individual square/ cube shapes formed by the rods).

**Antonio Dias's** 'The Tripper' is a black and white artwork. From a distance, the image looks like it is a picture of the stars at night. Up close, each of the many stars is actually a little splat of white paint. Four of the 'stars' are joined together by ruler-straight white lines, which form a diamond shape.

In the same room as 'The Tripper', there are many artworks that are considered to be **Op art**.

*From the Tate Collection On-line Glossary:*

Op art was "A major development of painting in the 1960s that created optical effects for the spectator. (...) Op painting used a framework of purely geometric forms as the basis for its effects and also drew on colour theory and the physiology and psychology of perception. Leading figures were **Bridget Riley**, **Jesús Raphael Soto**, and **Victor Vasarely**. Vasarely was one of the originators of Op art. Soto's work often involves mobile elements and points up the close connection between Kinetic and Op art."

"The word kinetic means relating to motion. **Kinetic art** is art that depends on motion for its effects. Since the early twentieth century artists have been incorporating movement into art. This has been partly to explore the possibilities of movement, partly to introduce the element of time, partly to reflect the importance of the machine and technology in the modern world, partly to explore the nature of vision."

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=206>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=148>

**Julio le Parc's** 'Continuel Mobil Argent' has lines of small aluminium squares hanging down on strings. The squares gently move according to air flow in the gallery. Even the presence of visitors close to the work can affect the metallic

squares, moving them slightly from side to side. The aluminium reflects light as they move.

**Carlos Cruz-Diez's** 'Physichromie No. 226' shows three oval shapes, one above the other, on an almost square background. The artwork is composed of lines of painted wood and perspex. The ovals appear to change colour and hue as you pass the artwork, right to left, left to right.

**Jesús Rafael Soto's** 'Curvas Imateriales' features horizontal metal rods, painted yellow and white, that hang down in front of black and white horizontal lines. The yellow and white rods resonate in front of the static, black and white lines of the background, creating a dazzling, shimmering, even disorienting, effect.

**Victor Vasarely's** artwork 'Lant' displays a grid pattern of squares, shapes, colours and tones which dazzle the eyes.

**Bridget Reilly's** 'from Nineteen Greys, B' is a print featuring a pattern of grey egg-shaped ovals, some of which seem to be closer, and some seem to be further away, all depending on the darker or lighter tones of each oval.

## **PAINT & COLOUR IN THE MODERNS**

The exhibition features many different approaches to using paint creatively, and lays the basis for the following discussions:

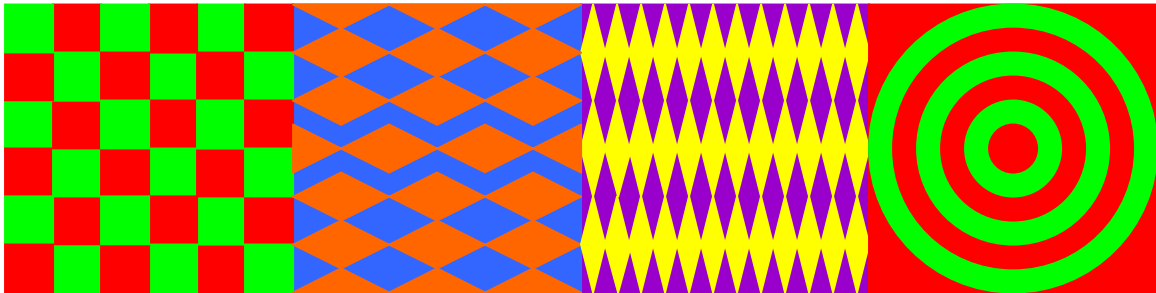
- The difference between a painting that's abstract (geometric lines and shapes, expressive lines and brushstrokes) or figurative (likenesses or similarities to things in the physical world around us);
- How and why we interpret abstract images the way we do: "Does this shape/picture remind you of something? Why?"
- The personal associations we make with colours: what particular colours mean to us, what they remind us of – the colour blue can be associated with a clear sky, a sunny day, heat, or it can be the colour of sadness, the blues, or freezing, turning blue with cold;
- How an artwork's title adds to our interpretation of artworks (**Patrick Scott's** abstract 'Autumnal Landscape', with its watery brown, rusty orange and dark green colours);

- Many artists in this exhibition create additional openness to their artworks by not giving evocative titles. The lack of a title that suggests something can also give people more space in which to really look at the image and appreciate the artwork for what it is (some artworks, like one by **Charles Tyrell**, are simply called "Untitled"). Children can discuss what they think might be a suitable title for a particular artwork, and why.
- As well as comparing the use of paint in artworks, we can look at the difference in the size and scale of artworks: Look at the long, thick brush strokes in **Pierre Soulages'** big 'Peinture 16 Nov.' compared with the smaller 'Homage to the Square' by **Josef Albers**, with its flat paint and pattern of squares within squares);
- How might the paintings have been made? Some drips suggest the paint was a bit thick, like honey; or perhaps 'wet-on-wet' brush strokes suggest that the painting was done quickly, before all the paint could dry, with each fresh layer of paint mixing a little with the other layers of wet colour around and underneath it; or perhaps the paint is thin and blobby, blurring colours together, and suggesting the artist diluted the paint a lot; or perhaps the paint looks like was dragged across the surface, missing patches, and suggesting the artist didn't dilute the paint at all. These experiences of looking at and responding to this variety of painting effects can reinforce (and be reinforced by) the children's practical experiences of playing with the consistency of paint during classroom art activities.

## **PAINT & COLOUR EXERCISES**

Try out an **Op art** idea in the classroom: Play with the shimmering visual effect created when **complementary colours\*** are closely arranged beside each other in a sequential pattern. Draw a geometric pattern: it can be as simple as a series of lines, circles, diamonds, or boxes (like a GAA chequered flag of county colours). Or the pattern can be more complex. Then choose one pair of the following complementary colours: light **red** and light **green**; *or* light **blue** and light **orange**; *or* **yellow** and **violet**. Using **acrylic paints**, paint every second line, circle, diamond or box of the pattern with one of the colours. Then paint all the remaining spaces in the other colour. Don't dilute the acrylics too much (if at all possible): use them almost neat, without too much water. Make sure that the entire surface is covered - don't let any

of the original page show through. Try to get the red colour to meet exactly with the green, the blue with the orange, the yellow with the violet ... something like this:



This exercise, using a pair of complementary colours, can also be carried out by cutting shapes out of brightly coloured paper/ card and arranging them into close-knit sequential patterns.

*\*From the Tate Collection On-line Glossary:*

"**Complementary colours** are colours which complete each other - hence the name. The effect of this completing is to enhance the colours - they look stronger when placed together. This is because they contrast with each other more than with any other colours, and we can only see colour by contrast with other colours. The more contrast, the more colour. The complementary colours are the three **primary** colours, **red**, **blue** and **yellow**, and their secondaries. Secondary colours are the colours obtained by mixing the primaries in all their combinations of pairs (yellow + blue = green; red + yellow = orange; red + blue = violet). So, the three **secondary** colours are **green**, **orange** and **violet**. The **complementary pairs** are **red-green**, **blue-orange** and **yellow-violet**. Artists began to become particularly aware of the significance of complementary colours after the development of scientific colour theory in the nineteenth century."

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=468>

## **WATERCOLOURS & INKS**

Some of the paintings in *The Moderns*, with their watery blobs, splashes and drips of colour, suggest an activity in a classroom context that will allow children to experience **watercolours** or **inks**. While there is a cost factor to using these materials, the return in terms of freshness and learning is very rich. Also, remember the tiniest amount of ink or watercolour goes a long way. Soft brushes will add to the effects generated. Brushes will need to be cleaned with water every time a colour is changed, so there is a bit of training and discipline needed before the creative activity starts. But other than that, using inks or watercolours is really special. The

end result will remain light and bright – compare dried ink or watercolour to dried poster paints or acrylic paint. Before a painting is made in these media, try wetting white paper with some big blobs of clean water (even use a sponge). Then when the ink or diluted watercolour on the brush touches the drenched paper, look how the ink spreads out and disperses at the edges. It's even better if this is tried on really thick paper, like watercolour paper.

### **MAKING MOBILES**

An aspect of **Kinetic art** can be explored through constructing a mobile. Collect rings of various sizes, e.g. curtain rings, washers, used sticky-tape centres, and/or plastic security rings from bottle tops. Cover each ring with coloured cellophane/ acetate. Using thin string, attach the coloured rings to short lengths of rod and attach the rods to each other until they form a mobile. The rings and rods may have to be adjusted until the mobile is balanced. Suspend the mobiles near a window. Observe the different colours of cellophane/ acetate as they interact with daylight while the air moves the mobile through rotations. Observe the shadows and colours that are projected by the mobile on sunny days.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

There are many examples of photography in *The Moderns*. As part of the complementary strand of the visual arts curriculum, primary teachers might want to explore photography in the classroom, thus building on the experience of this exhibition. One suggestion is that, through using a camera, the primary class can be involved in documenting and discussing the gradual developments and changes in a local landscape or cityscape over a set period of time. A series of photographs of the same view can be taken at different points throughout the set period of time. The changes could be documented over a long period, such as nature's leaf cycle from autumn to summer; or the changes could be documented over a short period, such as how sunlight and shadows move across the classroom during one day. Either way, when the set period of time has elapsed, the individual photographs can be printed and displayed together, showing the sequence of change in the subject e.g. branches shedding and growing leaves. The project can help establish some of the principles of photography – selecting a subject, freezing a moment in time with visual documentation, selecting what is edited in/out of the picture frame, creating a narrative within one photo or through a series of photos.