

Patrick Caulfield: Educator's Pack

The display at Tate Liverpool brings together key paintings and a selection of screenprints from the Tate Collection by British artist Patrick Caulfield who died last year. Caulfield found inspiration in everyday life, in capturing a moment in time and a mysterious sense of place. Often referencing art history, Caulfield offers an opportunity to review and discuss topics such as genres, "high art" and "low art", and to compare his work with a range of artists from Delacroix and Chardin, Gris and Picasso, Blake and Hockney or Opie and Hume. The series of prints that Caulfield produced to accompany the poems of Jules Laforgue invites inter-disciplinary discussion about art and poetry. This pack contains contextual information on the Caulfield display along with ideas for educators planning a trip to Tate Liverpool.



Pottery, 1969

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"One's always been taught in art school that all relationships and colours should blend, affected by one light. But that can make for a very dull painting. Does nature blend?"

Patrick Caulfield: Paintings



"I was aiming at reducing the means by which one described things"

Still Life with Dagger 1963

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Born in London in 1936, Caulfield studied at Chelsea School of Art, continuing at The Royal College of Art (1960-63), where fellow students included David Hockney and Peter Blake. Through his participation in the *New Generation* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 1964, he became associated with pop art, though Caulfield disliked being identified with any art movement. His paintings of the 1960s shared pop art's interest in everyday life, but owed more to artists such as Juan Gris and Fernand Léger than Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein. He was less interested in mass-consumerism and advertising than in exploring modern ways of painting traditional genres, such as still life and interiors. Rather than painting popular culture, Caulfield endowed the everyday with an atmosphere that was remote, alien and mysterious.

He rejected gestural brushstrokes for the more anonymous technique of sign-writers or house-painters, using commercial gloss paints such as Crown or Dulux, on board rather than oil on canvas. His early works, such as *Vases of Flowers, 1962* or *Still Life with Dagger, 1963*, are characterised by flat areas of colour bound by simple black outlines. Objects are reduced to their most basic form, stripped of all unnecessary detail.

During his final year at the Royal College of Art, Caulfield was given the assignment of making a transcription of a famous painting. He chose *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* by Delacroix. As with his still life paintings, Caulfield eliminated all distracting detail in his version and reduced Delacroix's political statement, essentially to a propaganda poster.



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Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi (after Delacroix) 1963 with the original painting by Delacroix (1827) on the right

Delacroix created his painting in support of the Greeks in their war of independence in 1927. It focuses on a woman in traditional dress, representing Greece. Her arms are raised in a gesture of horror and helplessness as she surveys the scene of mass suicide of her patriots who chose death rather than surrender to the Turks. The painting commemorates the people of Missolonghi and is symbolic of freedom against tyrannical rule.

Caulfield deliberately chose to work from a black and white reproduction of the Delacroix painting so that the colours would be left to his imagination. He used a limited range of household gloss paints, substituting flat areas of colour for Delacroix's more emotive brushstrokes.

Activities

Compare and contrast Caulfield's painting *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi (after Delacroix)* with the original by Delacroix

- Talk about the differences between these works
- Discuss the effect of Caulfield's simplification of colour, line and detail
- Trace your own line drawing from a black and white reproduction of a famous painting and paint it in the style of Caulfield.

Towards the end of the 1960s Caulfield began to paint on canvas, purely for practical reasons, as using hardboard restricted the size of his works. *Pottery, 1969*, was one of his first large scale paintings on canvas and also one of his first works to be executed vertically, rather than flat on a table. This, perhaps, explains a new interest in perspective.

"Pottery was an excuse for me to use a lot of colour...it is simply an extravagant elaboration of the pottery still lifes that I had done previously. It should be hung up so that the pots described at eye level are at eye level..."

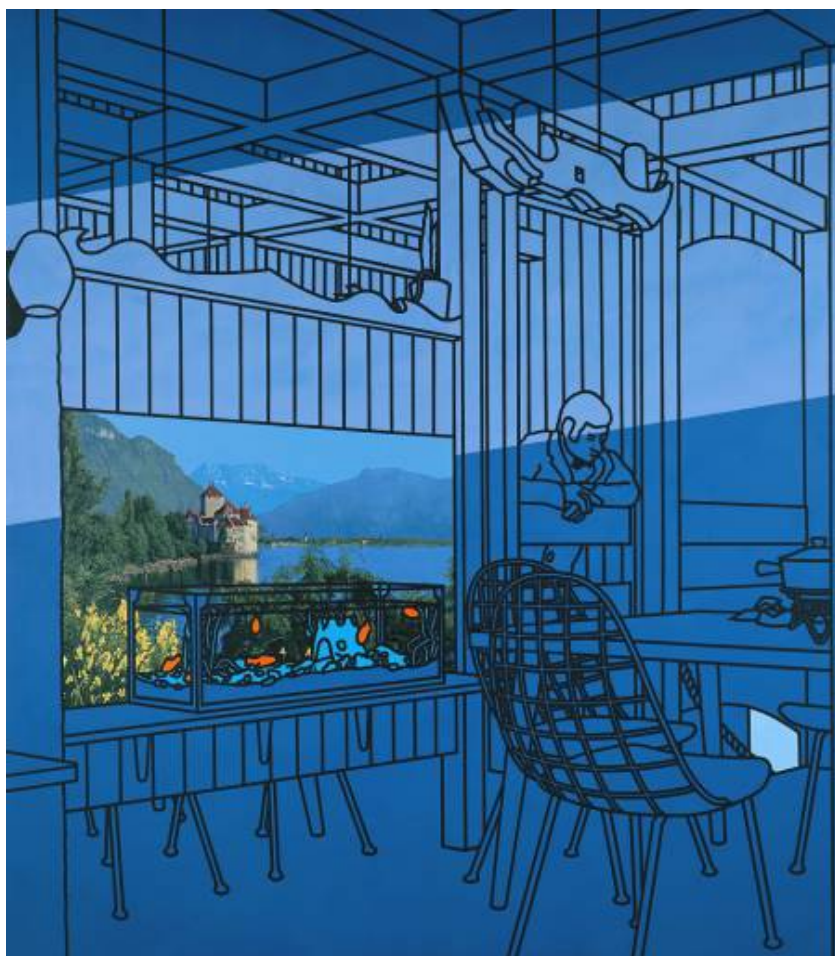
The pots in this painting have been depicted from different perspectives according to where they are placed in the overall composition. Those at the bottom of the work appear to have been painted from above, so that the viewer is looking down over their open rims. Those in the middle of the canvas are viewed from eye level and those at the top of the painting from below, so that they appear stacked up above the spectator.

The strong colours and simple outlines are characteristic of Caulfield's early work. The artist claimed that these qualities "knitted the surface of the painting together". He said that, "whether an object was depicted in the foreground or the background, the evenness of the line was the same, so it rather denied the illusion of space, although it represented it".

Activities

- Look at some other examples of still lifes eg Chardin, William Nicholson, Paul Cézanne, Juan Gris. Compare them to Caulfield's paintings.
- Discuss *genres* and find examples of still life, landscape, interior, portrait etc in the *International Modern Art* display at Tate Liverpool.
- Discuss Caulfield's work in relation to works in *The New Realism* section of the *International Modern Art* display at Tate Liverpool. How does his art differ from his contemporaries? Are there any similarities?
- Make tracings of your own drawings of objects and transfer them to a large sheet of paper to create an image similar to *Pottery*.
- Look at the work of some contemporary artists such as Julian Opie or Gary Hume. Do you think that they could have been influenced by Caulfield?
- Caulfield reduces objects to their most simple form. Write a piece of prose describing one of his paintings in at least fifty words. Delete words until you have a description of ten words or less.

Work in Focus: *After Lunch*, 1975



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"I like a very structured painting.... I simply try to make a logical, a seemingly logical, space that could exist."

"One reason I chose restaurant interiors is that they give more scope to introduce space and objects than in a normal domestic setting."

In the 1970s, Caulfield began painting interiors, often combining different styles of representation. *After Lunch* features a photo-realist image of the Chateau de Chillon, hanging in a restaurant interior that is depicted in simple black outlines against a flat, two-toned background. The variation of tone contributes to the atmosphere of the scene by suggesting a shadow, thrown across the imaginary space. The scene takes place in the afternoon when the lights have been turned off, and the waiter surveys the empty restaurant.

As with many of Caulfield's larger scale paintings, a life-sized object is placed in the foreground, in this case a chair, in order to draw the viewer into the scene. The artist chose a style of cane chair, not usually found in restaurants, in order to allow a view through its structure rather than create a visual block.

The inclusion of the tank of goldfish could refer to a motif common in the interiors of Matisse, an artist who Caulfield greatly admired. It also serves as a visual pun, placing "real" water in front of "photo-realist" water.

The featured landscape was copied in minute detail from a poster that Caulfield bought from a photo-mural supplier. He initially intended to stick the poster onto the canvas but found that it caused it to buckle badly. He said, "Somehow, I managed to get it off then I painted it instead – it took me ages".

The choice of scene, the Chateau of Chillon on Lake Geneva, was significant. Its associations include the fact that Courbet had painted the location and Byron had written a poem about

it. Many of Caulfield's paintings would subsequently feature a photo-realist passage (eg *Interior with a Picture, 1985/6*).

In the 1970s, Caulfield abandoned his use of household paints for the new medium of acrylic. He had previously been reluctant to experiment, but found that acrylic paint offered him much more freedom and flexibility:

"It had a really good colour range – decorator's colours have an odd range. It was very dense and covered well and would dry quickly – all good things! I remember people would complain about the shiny plastic surface. I thought I could live with that".

He admitted that his preference for household paint as a student owed much to his rebellious "attitude". The use of "non-art" materials was common in the 1960s as a way of demonstrating against consumerism, and in destroying the traditional barriers between "high art" and "low art". As a mature artist, Caulfield developed a different approach:

"I use paints I think are good on supports I think are good. My attitude is in my mind its not to do with the materials".

Activities

- Discuss Caulfield's use of colour in *After Lunch*. How would other colours affect the mood of the painting? Suggest different shades for conveying other moods.
- Look at artists who use colour to evoke mood eg Gauguin, Van Gogh, Munch, Matisse. Discuss the emotions conveyed through their use of colour.
- Make an outline tracing of a modern interior from an advertisement, paint catalogue or your own photograph. Copy it onto different coloured paper as backgrounds. Discuss the moods evoked by each colour. You could also include a photo-realist passage.
- Find other examples of Caulfield's interiors in the display at Tate Liverpool. Note any differences between *After Lunch* and his later paintings.
- Write a short story that begins or ends in the restaurant depicted in *After Lunch*. Try to capture the mood of the painting in your prose.

Patrick Caulfield and Jules Laforgue

Caulfield was introduced to the poetry of Laforgue by a fellow student at the Royal College of Art who suspected that the 19th Century French poet would appeal to him. Caulfield kept hold of the college library's translation long past its return date. The qualities that he particularly admired in Laforgue's poems could also, perhaps, describe Caulfield's art – "wonderfully concise, managing to be both romantic and ironic".

When invited to produce a limited edition book, Jules Laforgue was Caulfield's natural subject choice.



“The images I produced are complimentary images, not illustrations. Some of the connections are a bit tenuous, others are obvious. I tried to imagine what Laforgue might have been looking at when he thought of the poems, knowing, of course, that certain of the images are totally of another period to Laforgue’s lifetime: poetic licence with poetic licence”

She fled along the avenue'1973

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Jules Laforgue

Laforgue was a pioneer of what we now refer to as free verse. He experimented with vocabulary, structure and rhythm, and his poetry had a considerable impact on 20th Century Imagist poets such as Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot. His books of verse include *Les Complaintes* (1885) and *Imitation de Notre Dame la lune* (1887).

He spent much of his short career entertaining the Francophile Empress Augusta at the German court, touring Europe and writing verse which was often accompanied by music. This experience was possibly a factor in the development of his innovatory style of poetry.

Laforgue was also interested in art criticism and was an early supporter of the Impressionists. Although his verse probably had more in common with Symbolist art with his extensive use of imagery and interest in the sub-conscious, he admired the anti-academism of these young Parisians. He felt that he shared a common aim in his own artistic endeavours as he too was pursuing new ways of expressing life in the modern age. Laforgue was also an early supporter of women’s liberation. He died at the age of 27 from tuberculosis.

Caulfield’s “Complimentary Images”



Watch me eat, without appetite, à la carte'
1973

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Much of Laforgue's poetry attempts to capture the banality of everyday life. In *Complaint about a certain Sunday*, for example, there is an underlying tension between the need for outward repose and the inner hysteria that the poet is experiencing through sheer boredom. One of the line's Caulfield chose to accompany is "*Watch me eat, without appetite, à la carte*". Here is a verse from the poem:

In this distant cliff-bound village, towards the bells
Once again I come down, through the piercing stares
Of children out for blessings on tepid rolls;
And then, at home, my wretched heart despairs.
The old roofs' sparrows chirping at my window
Watch me eat, without appetite, a la carte;
Perhaps they house my dead friends' souls?
I throw them some bread; as if wounded, they depart!
Ah! Until nature has pity on us,
I'll take my life monotonous.

Some of the key words here for setting the tone are: bound, piercing, tepid, wretched, despairs, old, dead, wounded, pity, monotonous... The poet's only actions are to "come down", to "eat without appetite" and to "throw...some bread". The only positive sign of life is the sparrows and they arrive "chirping", but leave "wounded". The exclamation mark following their departure indicates the poet's desperation as his only hope of relief from this endless boredom goes with them.

There is no person in Caulfield's image. There is no action. All we are presented with is a blank card placed on the corner of a starched table-cloth, and yet this simple drawing, outlining three colours, captures the mood of the poem. You could write a list of words suggested by this print: formal, starched, upright, blank... bored stiff! The red background dominates the image and contributes to the sense of mental torture or inner turmoil that the poet is experiencing.

Activities

- Invite your pupils to illustrate lines from Laforgue poems (eg " *She fled along the avenue*", " *And I am alone in my house*" or " *All the benches are wet, the woods are so rusty*") and then compare their results to Caulfield's images for the same lines.
- Discuss Caulfield's choice of images for Laforgue lines – how appropriate do you think they are?
- Choose lines from a TS Eliot poem (eg *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*) or a Bob Dylan song (eg *Highway 61 Revisited*) for the class to depict in Caulfield's style
- Look at the Tintin illustrations by Hergé. Compare and contrast with Caulfield images. Do you think he was influenced by the French artist?

Glossary

Acrylic Paint - Type of paint in which the pigment is bound by synthetic resin. It is soluble in water but more flexible than watercolour.

Canvas – strong woven cloth made from linen, cotton or man-made materials such as polyester.

Genre – Term used to describe different types of subject matter eg landscape, still life, portrait.

Oil painting – a technique where pigment is mixed with oil, and a solvent such as turpentine. It dries slowly allowing flexibility. It is usually applied to canvas or board.

Screenprint – reproduction made using a screen made from fabric (silk or synthetic) stretched over a frame. The non- printing areas are blocked out on the screen and ink or paint is forced through the fabric using a rubber squeegee onto the paper.

Further Reading:

Caulfield, Patrick: *The Poems of Jules Laforgue*, Arts Council, 1995

Crook, Jo and Learner, Tom, *The Impact of Modern Paints*, Tate Publishing, 1999

Dale, Peter, *Poems of Jules Laforgue*, Anvil Press Poetry, 1986

Finch, C, *Patrick Caulfield*, Harmondsworth, 1971

Livingstone, Marco, *Patrick Caulfield: Paintings*, Lund Humphries, 2005

Robertson, Bryan, *Patrick Caulfield: Prints 1964-81*, Waddington Galleries, 1981

Other Resources

<http://www.tate.org.uk/imap/imap2/pages/caulfield.html>

http://www.abraxaspress.co.uk/TZ_fr_laf.htm (Laforge poems)

Julie Robson 2006