



Exhibition Resource Pack

14 April – 26 May 2018

Mary Griffiths: Wild Honey

This resource pack has been designed for teachers and educators. It can be used as part of pre-visit preparation or to support post-visit learning back in the classroom. The pack includes a short introduction to the artist and their work, including key themes and suggested activities.

Wild Honey is accompanied by our schools offer of tours, object handling and workshops. For more information or to book at visit please contact:

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About the Artist:

Mary Griffiths (b. 1965) is an artist and curator based in Manchester. Her practice focuses on abstract graphite drawings inspired by engineering, architecture and geometry. Griffiths artworks are created through an intensely laborious process, whereby she covers surfaces with dense layers of graphite and polishes them before carving precise lines and shapes with a sharp tool. In 2015 Griffiths was commissioned to make a large permanent work for the new National Graphene Institute in Manchester, depicting the story of graphite and graphene – its geography, geology and development in the North West of England.



Mary Griffiths working on her installation at The Turnpike, 2018. Image: Livia Lazar

About the Exhibition:

Over the past year, Mary Griffiths has been artist-in-residence at Lancashire Mining Museum's Astley Green site, a significant colliery on the former Lancashire Coalfield. Through sketching, photography and conversations with ex-miners, Mary Griffiths has observed how nature has reclaimed the industrial site, considered the brilliance of mining engineering and explored the connection between the local community and the colliery. The exhibition title *Wild Honey* is a reference to the discovery of a number wild beehives across the colliery site; drawing parallels between the tirelessly productive honey bees and industrious work ethic of local coal miners. A number of Griffiths' sketched observations have been transformed into abstract graphite drawings, including a new large-scale work which covers the entirety of The Turnpike's longest gallery wall. Along with found materials from the colliery, the exhibition also includes a display of fossils collected by local miners, on loan from Wigan Museum.

Key themes:

geometry
industrial heritage
geology
pattern
drawing
nature
process
engineering
abstraction

Related Artists:

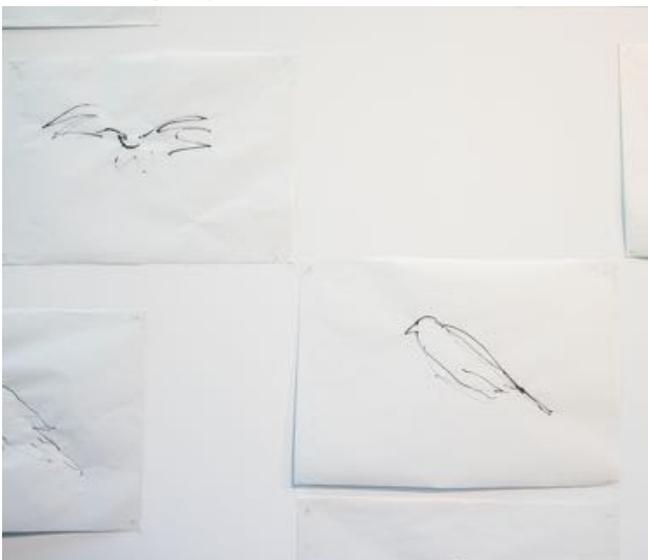
Carl Andre
Anna Barriball
Vija Celmins
Nick Crowe & Ian Rawlinson
Dave Musgrave
Theo van Doesburg
Pavel Buchler
Haris Epaminonda
Sol LeWitt
Richard Serra



Upcast I (Inscribed graphite on gesso on plywood) 2018

Explore the Exhibition

1. *Colliery Pigeons*



Colliery Pigeons (ink on paper) 2017-18

When first visiting the colliery, Mary Griffiths was amazed to see how quiet the site was in comparison to its former life a busy industrial workplace for so many local people. However, after spending more time there, the artist soon realised that plants, bees and birds had taken over the space and were bringing new life and activity. In particular, a large number of pigeons were constantly flying through the space. Mary Griffiths tried to draw the fleeting movement of these birds, sketching quickly with black drawing

ink and sticks. The selection shown here is a just small portion of a large number of similar sketches the artist produced.

Discuss:

- *Do you think these drawings effectively capture the movement of pigeons?*
- *How would the artwork change if just one of these drawings was displayed? Or more of them, filling the gallery wall?*
- *Why do you think the artist chose to draw with ink and sticks, and not a pencil or paintbrush?*
- *Do any of the drawings here depict something other than a bird?*

2. *Wild Honey*

The exhibition is dominated by the large drawing *Wild Honey*, which Mary Griffiths created with help from four assistants, over four weeks. The graphite surface was applied by hand, and then burnished and polished to make it highly reflective – like a mirror. Abstract straight lines running the length of the wall were then cut into the surface using a sharp tool to reveal the white plaster wall underneath. These precise lines represent the Lancashire coal seam underground, mine shafts, and the transport networks that connected Astley Green Colliery to the rest of the North West such as the canal, railway and roads.



Wild Honey (detail, inscribed graphite on wall) 2018

Discuss:

- *The artist could have painted the wall in metallic paint, or used a machine to apply the graphite. Why do you think Mary Griffiths chose to create the artwork in this way, applying graphite and polishing by hand?*
- *If it took 5 women, working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week over 4 weeks, can you work out how many hours in total it took to complete the wall drawing?*
- *Why do you think the artist was so interested in coal mining?*
- *Do you think it's important to learning about our mining industry heritage? Is there anything you would like to find out more about?*

3. *The Ancient Forests of Lancashire*



The Ancient Forests of Lancashire (carboniferous fossils from the Lancashire coalfield) 2018

Alongside Mary Griffiths' sketches and drawings are a number of objects, including parts of machinery from Astley Green Colliery and a display of fossils. These fossils were discovered by mine workers as they inspected the coal that had come out of the mine. These fossils are over 300 million years old, and are parts of plants and animals that lived here then when Lancashire was mostly a swampy forest. They're from deep underground, and would never have been discovered if the coal mine had not brought them up to the surface.

Discuss:

- *Mary Griffiths uses a long process to create her abstract drawings, and fossils are formed over millions of years. Can you put all of the artwork and objects in this exhibition in order, according to how long you think it took them to be produced?*
- *The exhibition brings together the natural world and manmade machines. Why might it be important to consider nature when creating machines and technology? What happens when we don't?*

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Back in the Classroom

Suggested post-visit activities KS1-3

Wild Honey Bee Engineering for KS1

Mary Griffiths was inspired by the honeybees making their nests at Astley Green Colliery. All honeybees build equal-sided hexagonal polygons to store their honey. Mary Griffiths artwork at the National Graphene Institute also used hexagonal tessellation, to reflect the chemical structure of carbon within graphene.

Activity: Build your own 2D and 3D paper models to demonstrate the bee's maths and engineering skills. You'll need strips of paper, a ruler, scissors, tape, and a pencil.



1. Roll the strips into circles and tape them into place. What happens when you collect these together into tessellated formation?
2. Now try making square prisms by dividing the strips of paper into three equal sides, folding and taping into place. Is the tessellation successful? Repeat this for triangle prisms, dividing paper strips into three equal sides and attempting tessellation.
3. Hexagon prisms are more complex. Divide the paper strips into three equal sides first, folding these into place. Then fold these sides in half to make six sides and tape into place. By tessellating hexagons, we can replicate the pattern of a honeycomb.

Find out more: Why do bees use hexagons? Follow this link to explore the science behind this puzzle: <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2013/05/13/183704091/what-is-it-about-bees-and-hexagons>

Create a fossil Key Stage 2

Mine workers often uncovered fossils in amongst the coal. These fossils show us the plants and animals which were alive millions of years ago which have been preserved underground.

Activity: Create your own fossil and explore the shape and texture of natural objects. You will need air drying clay, wooden boards, and a variety of natural materials including gravel, sticks, leaves & shells.

1. Soften your ball of clay between your hands, and then flatten it into a fried-egg shape about as thick as your thumb.
2. Select a variety of natural materials and carefully press these into the clay, removing them slowly to reveal textures in the clay. You can make a pattern, or make it random. If you make a mistake you can smooth this over with your finger and start again.
3. Once you are happy with your design you can press small pieces of gravel into the design to make your fossil more realistic.
4. Leave the clay on the wooden board to dry overnight, it should be dry within 24 hours. Air drying clay can be varnished or painted if desired.

Find out more: How are fossils made? <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z2ym2p3>

Miners' Strike Poetry activity for Key Stage 3

Astley Green Colliery closed down in 1970, and soon other mines began to close across the country, with many miners finding themselves without jobs. In 1984-5, miners protested these closures in the Miners' Strike in which the majority refused to work in order to force the UK government to recognise the importance of the industry. However, this failed and the number of working mines continued to fall until 2015, when the last mine in the country was closed.

Activity: Explore the Miners' Strike through poetry. 'Lines For Striking Miners', written by G. Rangeley is published in 'Against all the Odds' - a book of poems written by miners and their families to raise funds for the Miners' Strike.

I am not a miner,
Only a poet of black ink.
With a few pounds to spare,
Enough for paper, envelopes,
A pint or two with my mates.
But I also have descended,
Into earth's black bowels –
The depths of painful thoughts.
I too know lack of light.
But instead of coal,
I hew Lines in black ink, lines
To invoke a passionate act,
In men unused to feel,
The passion of a poet's pen.
I too know saboteurs, scabs,

Of the mind and emotions.
I reject opportunism,
Which sacrifices tomorrow,
For today's few paltry pounds.
And so I support them,
The striking miners, intent,
On tomorrow's bread, justice.
Fidelity to principle.
For the poet too is a worker,
His lines hewn out with pain,
The use of the mind's muscles,
Inducing black moods, fatigues,
Some joy also in use,
Supported by the unpraised will.

Questions:

1. Who is this poem written by?
2. Why are they writing it? What do they hope the poem will achieve?
3. What does this poem tell us about coal mining?
4. What comparisons does the writer draw between poetry and coal mining?
5. The writer mentions the colour black throughout the poem – what does this symbolise?
6. What does the writer think about the plight of the striking coal miners?

Further Online Resources:

Wigan Museum – Don't go down the mine

<https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Libraries/Schools-Cultural-Service/Workshops/Coal-mine.aspx>

National Mining Museum Scotland – Crafting the Mine

<https://nationalminingmuseum.com/crafting-the-mine/>

National Coal Mining Museum - Art, Music, Poetry Activities:

<https://www.ncm.org.uk/learning/learning-resources/art-and-music>

Museum of Science and Industry - Wonder Materials Exhibition

<https://www.msmanchester.org.uk/what-was-on/wonder-materials-graphene-and-beyond>

Whole Kids Foundation - The Bee Cause Project Resource

https://www.wholekidsfoundation.org/downloads/better-bites/The_Bee_Cause_Projects_Honey_Bee_Hive_STEM_Guide.pdf