

# Conversations and Actions Whitechapel Gallery

Government Art Collection  
At Work

[whitechapelgallery.org/education](http://whitechapelgallery.org/education)

L S Lowry, Lancashire Fair, Good Friday, Daisy Nook, 1946, Oil on canvas, 72 x 89 cm  
© The Estate of L S Lowry, 2010, courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection



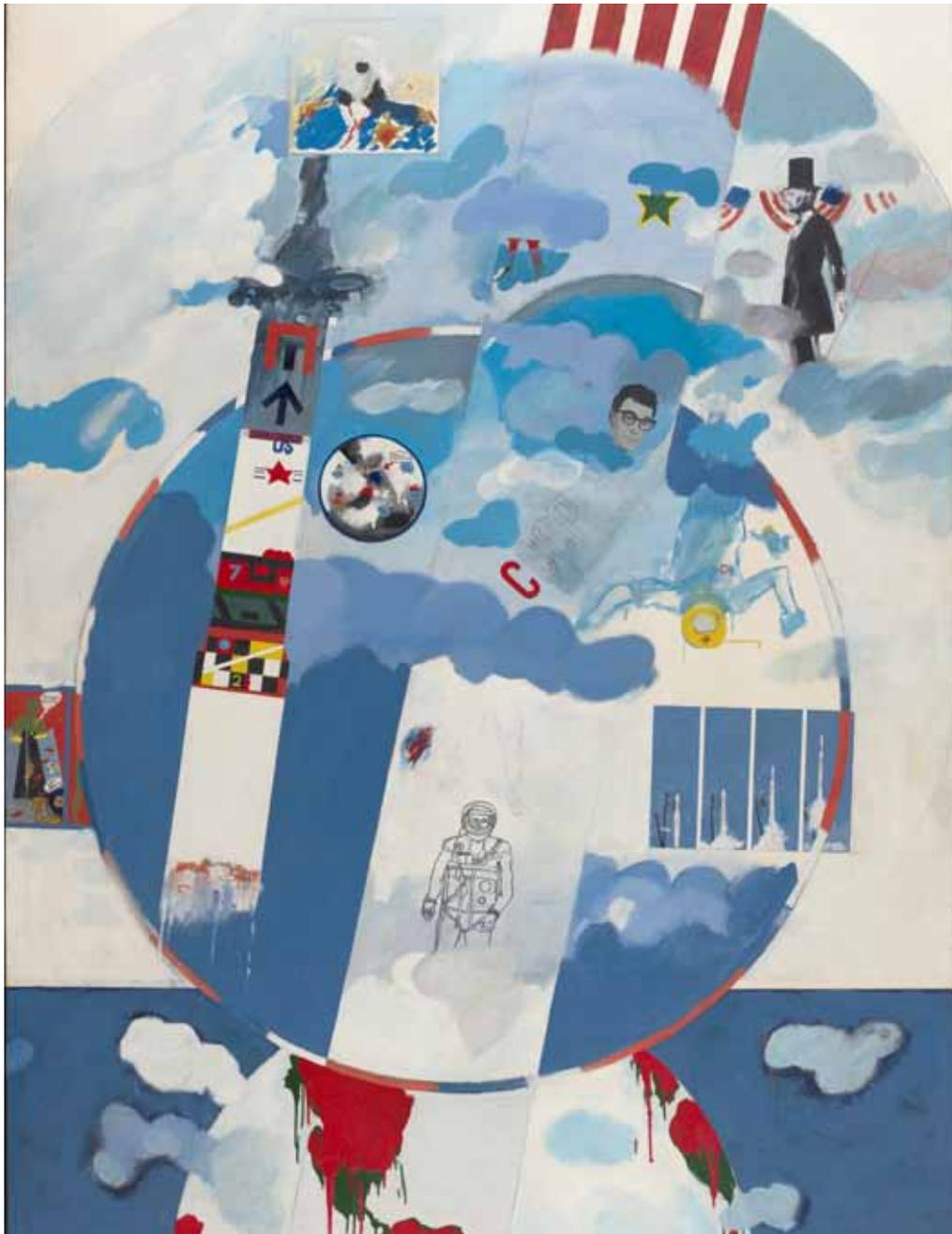
At Work  
3 June – 4 September

Richard of York Gave Battle  
In Vain  
16 September –  
4 December

Travelling Light  
16 December – 26 February

12 From No 10  
9 March – 5 June

Commissions: Now and Then  
18 June – 2 September



Derek Bohler, *Wonder What My Heroes Think of the Space Race*, 1962, oil on canvas,  
© the artist/courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection.

## Conversations and Actions

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This booklet has been written to help visiting groups explore a series of five displays curated by the Government Art Collection in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery.

It contains a series of conversations between an artist, **Rebecca Greathead** and a visitor, be it a teacher, another artist, a community leader or a young person. The artist also discusses each show with the curators to get essential factual information for this resource.

The conversations outline key ideas and concepts from some of the artworks that appear in each display, as well as discussing the relationship between the Whitechapel Gallery and public collections.

It aims to support your exploration of the displays and gives you ideas to share with others, in your group, whatever their age. The five displays will be spread over the period of a year so as each display opens, an extra section will be added to this document.

The five displays are:

**1. The Government Art Collection  
At Work  
3 June – 4 September 2011**

**2. The Government Art Collection  
Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain  
Selected by Cornelia Parker:  
16 September – 4 December 2011**

**3. The Government Art Collection  
Travelling Light  
Selected by Simon Schama  
16 December 2011 – 26 February 2012**

**4. The Government Art Collection  
12 From No 10  
Selected by Downing Street Staff  
9 March – 5 June 2012**

**5. The Government Art Collection  
Commissions: Now and Then  
18 June – 2 September 2012**

Throughout this booklet are actions that you can do in the Gallery (in boxes with a wavy lined edge) that will help you consider the artists' ideas, working processes or more directly the work and themes of the exhibition. These actions are easily adaptable to suit a wide-range of visitors.

Also, within the booklet are actions that can be used beyond the Gallery (in boxes with a diamond patterned edge). They too can be easily adapted. Spread throughout, are images that you can use to act as prompts or as a reminder of the exhibition.

We hope you enjoy using this resource.

## **Government Art Collection At Work**

This conversation is between artist Rebecca Greathead and an art Teacher at a local school.

**Rebecca** The works in this exhibition have been selected from a collection normally used for display in British Government buildings all over the world.

**Ben** And they've been selected by public figures?

**Rebecca** Mostly government ministers; Samantha Cameron appears to be standing in for her husband, the Prime Minister.

**Ben** Wow! I recognise quite a few works in here.

**Rebecca** Yes, the Government Art Collection has a lot of works by major British Artists. They have something like 13 500 works altogether.

**Ben** How did the group choose from that many works?

**Rebecca** They chose works previously seen in one of the buildings they had worked in.

**Ben** Hence, the title of the exhibition At Work!

**Rebecca** If you look in one of these little red booklets that accompany the exhibition, you can read quotes by each of the selectors as to why they made their choices.



David Dawson, *Lucian Freud painting the Queen*, 2001, C-type photograph  
© the artist/courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection.



Anonymous 16th Century British Artist, *Queen Elizabeth I* (1533-1603) Reigned 1558-1603, Oil on panel  
53.5 x 42 cms, © Crown Copyright: UK Government Art Collection

Ben Oh yes, in the beige boxes.

Rebecca Some choices reflect personal relationships, for example if the selector has met the artist or are familiar with a location.

Ben Nick Clegg has chosen that rather bleak photograph with the broken ceiling fans. Maybe he is feeling a bit depressed about the state of the country!

Rebecca He has also chosen the David Tindle piece with the giant Thermos in the foreground.

Ben He mentions its “eerie feel” in his quote. It’s an interesting choice!

Rebecca Sir John Sawers as Chief of the Intelligence Service seems to have made choices appropriate to his current role. Things are seen through mirrors, half open doors or in mysterious half-light.

Ben I love this photograph of Lucian Freud painting the Queen, it was chosen by two selectors.

Rebecca It looks as though they are down in some old basement, nowhere glamorous or stately!

Ben What a contrast with those huge gilt framed royal portraits hanging on the same wall.

Rebecca As well as the one Lord Mandelson also chose, a painting of Queen Elizabeth I. She was very careful and particular about how she was represented and didn’t have many portraits painted of her from life.

Ben Lots of paintings of her exist though?

Rebecca Most are copied from an approved original!

Ben So, she had full command over her image – I bet some contemporary public figures would love to have that much control over theirs!

As **public figures**, the selectors for this exhibition knew that the works they chose would be scrutinised by the media in order to comment on their **taste** and aspects of their **personality**. Perhaps aspects they do not want revealed.

In the **booklet** that accompanies this exhibition are **quotes** by each of the selectors about their choices. **Use these to help you** think about **what attracted them** to certain works and what the works as a whole might tell you about the person who chose them.

**Lord Boateng** – former Government Minister and British High Commissioner to South Africa

**Nick Clegg** – Deputy Prime Minister

**Samantha Cameron** – Prime Minister’s wife

**Lord Mandelson** – former Business Secretary

**Dame Anne Pringle** – British Ambassador to Moscow

**Sir John Sawers** – Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service

**Ed Vaizey** – Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries

Either:

**Divide your group into seven** so that each group can look at the choices of **one** of the selectors.

**Or** choose **one public figure** and look at their selections with the whole group.

(Your choice is dependent on the size of your group and space available to do this activity).

Things to think about:

– Has the selector chosen **contemporary** or **historical** works? Do any depict **famous** or **important** people? (look at the labels if you are not sure)

– Do you think they want to be seen as **fashionable** and **up to date** or to show they are **knowledgeable** about the **past**?

– Have they chosen works that are **beautiful, gloomy, funny, thoughtful, clever** or **something else**? What might these qualities say about the selector?

– Might **you** have chosen any of the **same** works? Why?

It is rare for these works in this exhibition to hang in a **Gallery**. Normally they would be placed in a setting where they might have to **compete with lots of other decorative elements** for example: in a grand **stateroom, corridor** or **private office**. Historically many of the works were bought for the collection because they would be the right objects to decorate an **important official** room creating the required **impression**. Later works were acquired rather because they represented great **examples of British Art** or because they could **stimulate political discussion**.

**If you were Prime Minister** which work or works would you choose to hang in your office?

**Think** carefully about your choice and **give reasons**

Do you want to appear?:

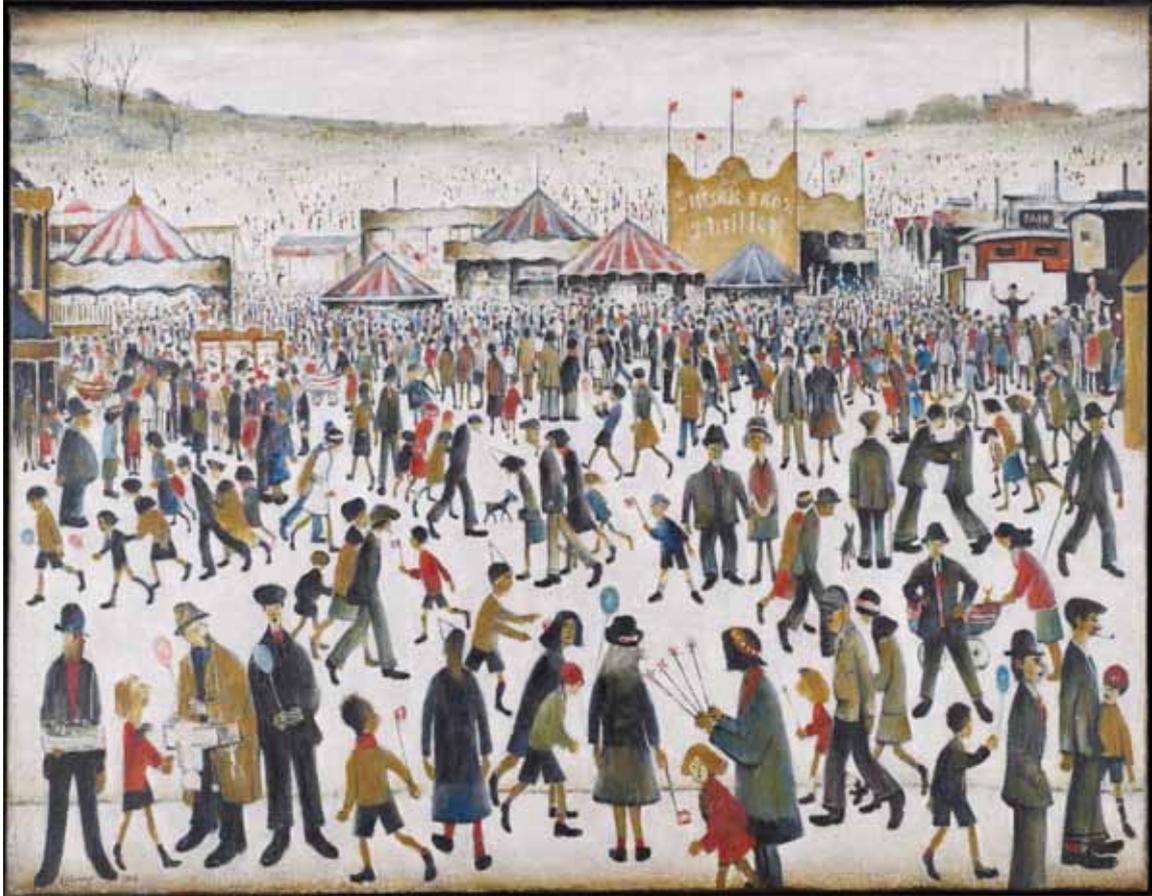
- impressive
- sophisticated
- ordinary
- humble
- wise
- powerful
- thoughtful

Imagine you (still as the Prime Minister) want the Curators at the Government Art Collection to help you find artworks for your office. Write a shopping list of five words describing what you need. For example:

- colourful
- huge
- lively
- joyful
- unusual



Zarina Bhimji, *Howling like dogs, I swallowed solid air, colour transparency in light box*  
© the artist/courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection.



LS Lowry, *Lancashire Fair, Good Friday, Daisy Nook, 1946*, Oil on canvas; 72 x 92 cm  
© The Estate of L S Lowry, 2010/courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection

The works that have been chosen for this exhibition are **very different**, but by finding **similarities** there are many alternative ways they could be grouped. Choosing **themes** is one way to do this.

**Either divide** into pairs or groups and **investigate the works listed** under each one of the themes, or **choose one or two** themes and work with your whole group (depending on space)

**Landscapes** – (e.g. Marlow, Goodwin, Heath, Emin)

**Objects** – (e.g. Bhimji, Tindle, Stephenson, Lambie, Landy)

**Relationships** – (e.g. Burra, Caine, Lowry, Dawson)

**Portraits** – (e.g. Blamey, Rysbrack, Unknown Artist of Elizabeth I, Dawson, Sickert, van Honthorst)

Discuss **why** the artworks listed **fit** with each theme.

Think about the different methods used by each artist.

You might consider:

**Size** of the work?

**Style** and **medium** (photograph, painting, sculpture or something in between)?

**Colours**?

**Where** might it have been intended to be **seen**?

Was it **commissioned** or made for a **specific purpose**?

Does it **relate** to specific **person, place** or **event** or a more **abstract idea**?

Is it intended to communicate a **message** to the viewer?

**Does the work fit** into the category suggested; could it **also** be in **others** or not in any? **Why**?

**Where** might you put the *Derek Boshier* painting entitled, *I Wonder What My Heroes Think of the Space Race*?

Another way to divide the works into themes might be:

**Mundane/everyday**

**Grandeur/power**

**Humour**

**Historical record**

**Choose** works to fit one or more of these themes.

Discuss your choices. As with professional curators there may be some heated discussion!



Bob and Roberta Smith, *Peas Are The New Beans*, Vinyl paint on panel, 61 x 60.4 x 5 cms  
© Bob and Roberta Smith / courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection

Look at the work by **Bob and Roberta Smith** entitled *Peas Are the New Beans*.

The lettering is that of an **old-fashioned, handmade shop sign** or a **protest placard**.  
The colours are strong and **modern**.

The work plays with **media sayings** common when it was made, regarding **rapidly changing public tastes**, for example in the fashion world: Brown is the New Black. Now we tend to see magazines listing: What's Hot and What's not, telling us what **latest trend** people are embracing and those which are losing popularity - That's so last year.

Other works by **Bob and Roberta Smith** include: *Leeds is the New Hull and Left is the New Right*.

*Lord Boateng* who chose this work, liked the idea that bean counter related in an amusing way to his time working in the **Treasury** counting and distributing the **nation's wealth**.

**Make a text work** to hang in the **Prime Minister's** or other Government figures' office. You could work on paper, card or even a piece of board. Use a **handwritten** style of lettering as **Bob and Roberta Smith** has done and make the words fill the space.

You could use the **same format** at the artist to create your message, for example :... is the New ..., or decide on **your own**.

You might **remind** your politician about what priorities are up or in for the country or you personally at the moment or about those that are down or out.

**Use strong, contrasting colours**. Try experimenting with **complementary colours** to make some of the letters stand out more than others.

Research the artist (it is actually one person) **Bob and Roberta Smith**. He has made a lot of work using comments and opinions from the general public.



Elisabeth Frink, *Homme Libellule II*.  
© the artist/courtesy of the UK Government Art Collection.

Look at the work by **Elisabeth Frink** entitled *Homme Libellule II*. It is inspired by **Ancient Greek** and **Roman** figures, as well as **birds of prey**. **Frink** was the daughter of a soldier but was also fascinated by the airmen from bases near her Suffolk home. The figure she has sculpted and cast in bronze could be seen as winged and **heroic** but also **mutilated**.

Create a **war sculpture**, which has the **legs of a man** but the **body of something else**.

You could use clay, modelling dough, cardboard or Modroc.

(Older groups might carve from plaster and perhaps model the legs from life or from anatomical drawings)

**Think** about what you want to **represent** with your piece – **heroism, fear, strength, courage** or **inhumanity**? This will help you to choose how to create the top part. It might be **machine** or **animal** like, depict an **object** or a more **abstract** form.

**Find images** of the following art works – they may help to give you ideas

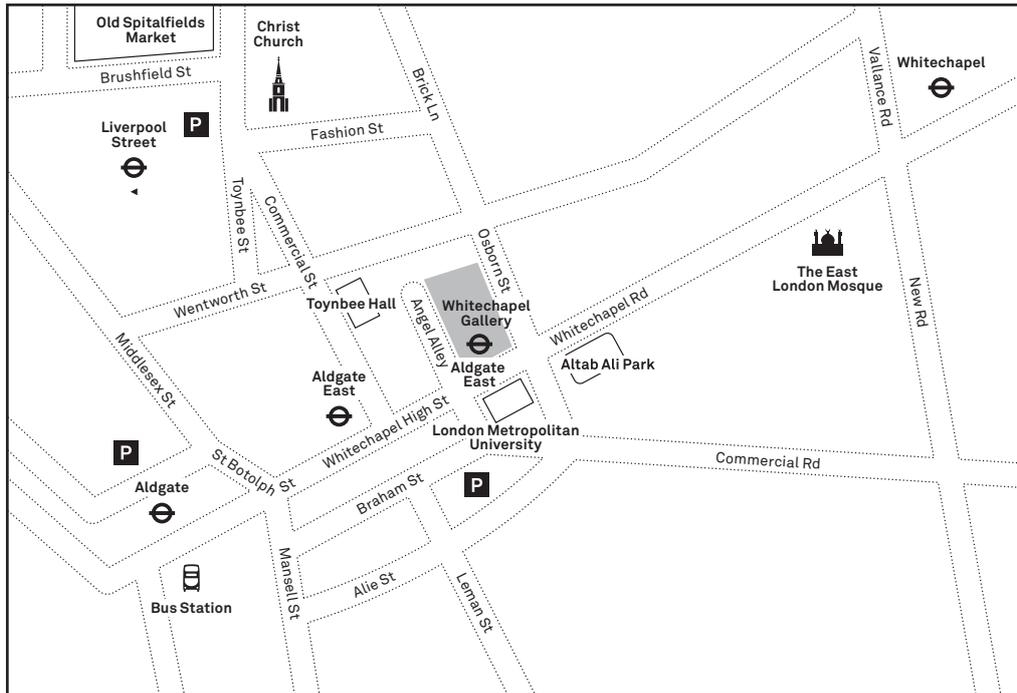
**Jacob Epstein** - *Rock Drill*

**Eric Kennington** – *War God*

**Auguste Rodin** – *The Call to Arms*

**Max Ernst** - *Capricorn*

**Pablo Picasso** – *Massacre in Korea*



## Find out more

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To book your free group visit and use our Education Space (available Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during term time) please call Education on **020 7522 7888** or email: [education@whitechapelgallery.org](mailto:education@whitechapelgallery.org)

If you have enjoyed this *Conversations and Actions* or have any other feedback please do contact us.

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