

TEACHERS' NOTES

Fabian Peake an eye either side

Hauser & Wirth Somerset, 1 October 2022 – 2 January 2023



Fabian Peake, 1971 © National Portrait Gallery London. Courtesy John Malcolm Couzins Estate.
Photo: John Malcolm Couzins

About Fabian Peake

Fabian Peake emerged as a painter in the London art scene of the late 1960s. In the decades since, he has expanded his practice across multiple mediums, incorporating tailored textile wall pieces, cut-out reliefs, sculpture, drawing, photography and poetry. To mark Peake's 80th birthday, this landmark exhibition celebrates his broad and multifaceted career, showcasing his use of a wide range of styles and approaches.

Peake was born in 1942 in Rustington, Sussex. His parents were the writer and illustrator Mervyn Peake (1911 – 1968) and the painter Maeve Gilmore (1917 – 1983). He studied painting at Chelsea School of Art (1958 – 1963) and later at the Royal College of Art (1963 – 1966). As a student he met his wife, the artist Phyllida Barlow, with whom he has five children, including the artists Eddie Peake and Florence Peake. From 1977 onwards, Peake taught painting as a Senior Lecturer in the Fine Art Department of Manchester Metropolitan University, while continuing his own career as an artist. He has had numerous solo exhibitions, the most recent at the Kunstmuseum, Luzern in 2019, and has been included in various group exhibitions in the United Kingdom, Europe, United States and South America. Peake plays the saxophone and has a love of jazz music. He lives and works in London.



Pierrot's Message, 1971, oil on canvas © Fabian Peake. Courtesy the Artist. Photo: Fabian Peake

What are the major themes within Peake's work?

Language

Peake is fascinated by language, the act of writing as well as the appearance of poetry. He arranges his poetry in unusual formations across the page and plays with language by removing words, reordering sentences, or introducing line breaks and punctuation. He makes up words and has even taught himself to write backwards. Peake often performs his poems aloud as spoken word, experimenting with the intonation of the words and the impact this can have on meaning. Peake's painting and sculpture also incorporates words and sentences, often using his own handwriting, as seen in 'Street Shadows' (2012 – 2013).

Play

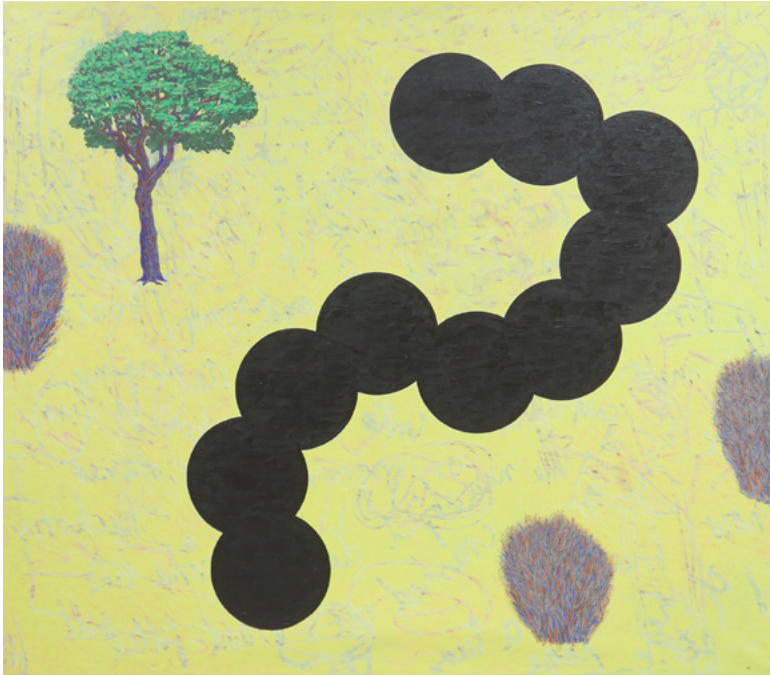
In an ongoing series of photographs taken in his studio since 2005 entitled 'Scenes', Peake playfully captures himself performing within hand constructed settings, bringing together miscellaneous props, colourful backdrops and elements of his own sculpture, painting and writing. Peake experiments with different materials, images and ideas to create work that values the notion of creative play. Many of his sculptures could be children's toys like a dolls house, a toy boat, or a tank. He explains that his interest in working with wood emerged when making toys for his children to play with.

Material

Peake is interested in the equivalents that can be made across different mediums, investigating how the properties of each material shift the concepts and ideas he is exploring. An idea could work in one material yet become nonsensical or awkward in another. Peake values the skill of crafting things out of different materials; he builds, carves, tailors and paints. Since studying painting at Art School, he has also taken courses in boat building and tailoring.

Irrationality

Peake's poetry has a neo-dada sensibility. Irrationality was key to the DADA movement. During the First World War, artists created art, poetry and performance that rejected reason and traditional values by apparently embracing nonsense. In his writing, painting and sculpture, Peake celebrates moments of subversive irrationality. He draws together unexpected words, images and ideas, and enjoys the breakdown of traditional structures and forms.



The Thought, 2021 – 2022 © Fabian Peake. Courtesy the Artist. Photo: Fabian Peake

What does Peake's work look like?

Peake's art is bold and colourful. In both painting and sculpture, he references the everyday things that he sees around him: cars, trees, combs, houses, shop signs or manhole covers. Peake sometimes reduces these familiar forms to abstracted shapes and blocks of colour, as seen in 'Dance of the Ribbons' (1995 – 1996) and 'He was here too' (1983 – 1984). In his early paintings from the 1970s, such as 'Pierrot's Message' (1972) and 'The Orange Horse' (1972 – 1973), Peake constructs surreal scenarios, combining animals, humans and nature, distorting scale, within brightly coloured patterned spaces.

Peake describes his paintings as a collaging together of things from different sources, although nothing is cut out or stuck down as in traditional collage. He compares this process of drawing together things from different places with the process of assembling words into sentences. Both can become humorous and nonsensical or provoke deep emotion.

How does Peake make his work?

When arranging the compositions of his paintings, Peake builds up layers of images in oil paint, by scrubbing away or painting over earlier layers. In some paintings, he leaves traces of the images beneath, while in others he hides them completely. Peake sometimes indicates the hidden histories behind the surface layers of his paintings, using small signals such as arrows to point at earlier compositions.

Peake's sculptures start as drawings which are then constructed from pieces of wood. For the plywood sculptures, Peake drills holes around the desired form, which he then cuts out with a hand saw and sands down the edges. In contrast, the limewood sculpture in the exhibition, 'Split Head' (2010) was chiselled by hand. Peake hand paints the surfaces of his sculptures, sometimes building up layers to disguise the surface textures and hand cut qualities of the wood.



Dance of the Ribbons, 1995 – 1996 © Fabian Peake. Courtesy the Artist. Photo: Fabian Peake Fabian

Which artists and art movements does his work relate to?

Peake's painting and sculpture draws from wide variety of artists and art movements. He is influenced by the flattened space and the simplification of composition and form in pre-renaissance frescos. His use of block colour, reduced shapes and gathered images echoes pop art, which emerged in the 1960s, around the same time that he was studying painting at the Royal College in London. His use of expressive colour, abstraction and distorted scale displays the inspiration of surrealism and expressionism. Peake discusses his early influences of 20th century painters Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944), Joan Miró (1893 – 1983), René Magritte (1898 – 1967), Joseph Fernand Henri Léger (1881 – 1955), Paul Klee (1879 – 1940) and Chaïm Soutine (1893 – 1943).

Glossary

Abstraction

Art that does not attempt to directly represent reality.

Collage

An art form in which various materials and images from different sources are combined in one artwork.

Composition

The way that different elements of an artwork are combined or arranged.

Craftmanship

The skill demonstrated in an object or artwork that has been made by hand.

Dadaism

An art movement formed during the First World War, absurdist, playful, and radical art practice that challenged rationalism and social conventions.



He was there too, 1983 - 1984 © Fabian Peake. Courtesy the Artist. Photo: Fabian Peake

Expressionism

A 20th Century art movement in which reality is distorted to be expressive of the artist's emotions or ideas.

Intonation

The rise and fall of the voice to apply stress and rhythm to words in sentences when speaking.

Narrative

A spoken, written or visual story that is made up of a sequence of events or experiences.

Neo-Dada

A term applied to the work of artists in America in the 1950s and 1960s that was similar in method or intent with earlier dada artwork.

Oil painting

A process of painting that uses oil to bind different coloured pigments together.

Plywood

A type of strong wooden board consisting of layers glued and pressed together.

Pop art

An art movement that emerged in the late 1950s that challenged traditions of fine art using imagery from popular culture and mass media.

Pre-renaissance art

Art from the 1300's, that was usually religious in subject matter.

Relief

A wall-mounted sculpture in which three-dimensional elements are raised from a flat base.

Sculpture

Three dimensional artworks created using carving, casting, or modelling techniques.

Spoken word

The performance of written poetry.

Surrealism

A 20th century movement, founded in the 1920s, in art and literature that aimed to release the creativity of the unconscious mind, often incorporating dreams and irrational combinations of images.

Practical activity prompts

Poetry:

- As you walk through the exhibition, write down 10 words that describe what you see. Your words could describe objects, colours, shapes or emotions. You could even take a word that Fabian Peake has included in a painting or sculpture. Can you make a poem using these words?
- Choose your favourite painting from the exhibition. Can you create a shape poem using words or short sentences to describe what you see in the painting and how it makes you feel?
- Choose a sculpture by Fabian Peake. Can you describe the sculpture in three sentences? Try removing any words you do not like. Choose five words to make a new poem from. Can you reorder the words in a sentence so that they no longer make sense?
- Choose an object that you see every day. This could be something from your house, something you see on the way to school, or something from your favourite story. Can you write an acrostic poem about this object, choosing one descriptive word for each letter in the spelling of the object?

Drawing:

- Walk through the exhibition and fill your page with drawings of the objects, people and animals that you find in Peake's paintings and sculptures.
 - o Can you draw with the hand you do not normally use?
 - o Can you draw without looking down at your page?
 - o Can you close your eyes and draw from memory?
- Create a collaborative drawing by taking it in turns to draw on a section of a sheet of paper and then folding the paper to conceal what you have drawn. Once you have filled the page, unfold your paper to reveal a humorous and nonsensical artwork. Can you write a collaborative poem in the same way?
- Find a friend or family member to draw with. Take it in turns to close your eyes and describe a Peake painting or sculpture to one another.
 - o Try drawing what your friend or family member is describing without opening your eyes.
 - o When describing the artwork, what words can you use to explain the shapes, colours and lines that you see?

Supplementary research

Fabian Peake Website

<http://www.fabianpeake.co.uk/>

Fabian Peake, *Loose Monk: Poems by Fabian Peake*. London: Ridinghouse, 2014.

<https://www.karstenschubert.com/publications/118-loose-monk-poems-by-fabian-peake/>