

Picking up the Pieces

Collage in Post War Britain

PRESS RELEASE

Grosvenor Gallery is pleased to announce its upcoming Exhibition titled **Picking up the Pieces: Collage in Post War Britain**. The exhibition opens with a private view on **Thursday, 25 February 2016, 6-8pm** at our **new address on St. James's Street**.

In this exhibition we aim to highlight how collage was used in Post war Britain as a metaphor for a broken society. Despite emerging victorious from the 2nd World War Britain was severely weakened. It's economic and financial strength were destroyed by the War. This was followed by the erosion of its Empire; first India declaring Independence in 1947, followed by the Suez Crisis of 1950. The collapse of British Imperial power was all but complete by the mid-1960s.

The British Landscape, especially the cities, had been scarred from the bombing and the terrible economic reality left large neighbourhoods deserted. Rationing was still in force, and poverty was abject, inner cities were deserted except for the poor and gangs. Amongst the new settlers into these areas were artists and new immigrants, encouraged to come from former colonies. The artist FN Souza who emigrated from India in 1949: *"He chose England because at the time it seemed to him the most civilised place in the world... Souza found a very different country from the one he had expected... he found the average Englishman even less concerned with art than the people of Bombay. There was not even a Minister for Culture! What was more, food was rationed! [i]"*

Politically, the country voted in Attlee's Labour and in 1956 the National Health Service was established. It was a period of consolidating and rebuilding.

This period provided a harsh and challenging backdrop for the artists. It also provided an opportunity for a new generation of young thinkers to change the course and landscape of British Art. Paolozzi described Henry Moore in 1954 as; "a continual source of visual surprise and inspiration.... However he is still a man of the 1930s and the idea of holes in wood is not for us today.[ii]"

Collage as a technique was used widely and taught in art schools, however for this group of artist's its practical and conceptual factors made it relevant.

As a vehicle for conceptual work they looked back at history to the influence of Dada, and especially Kurt Schwitters. He was a key figure in European Dada, who invented the concept of 'Merz', 'the combination for artistic purposes of all conceivable materials[iii]' Schwitters, of German origin, was a 1st WW refugee in Britain and spent his last years in the Lake District in isolation, painting figurative landscapes. However his art and practice was being re-evaluated through the form of publications and posthumous exhibitions in London. Schwitters's collages were a radical departure from the grand, classical, imperial art of the then German establishment. They were progressive and anti-establishment, and appealed to the young British artists.

Practically, collage appealed because it was inexpensive. Like Schwitters, this generation of young artists were working with little or no resources. Scraps of photographs, magazines and newspapers were all readily available and it became their calling card.

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Eduardo Paolozzi used the collage technique in his two dimensional works as well as his sculptures. He was extremely critical of the pompous and hypocritical classical sculpture of the supposed high art of the then German, but also British and European artists. Metaphorically the world was bleeding, wounded by war, mentally scarred by the sights of Auschwitz and Dachau. Paolozzi's sculptures of the 1950's are broken, smashed and hollow, they are wounded. They are existential beings, the martyrs, realistic icons of this generation.

Nigel Henderson, along with Paolozzi was a member of the Independent Group and his works, again created in poverty, broke down the boundaries between high and low art, beginning the crossover between experimentation, photography and performance art.

William Turnbull, another member of the Independent Group, questioned the existence of a society whose pillars of strength had been destroyed. His work such as Broken Heads subverts the classical with a new order.

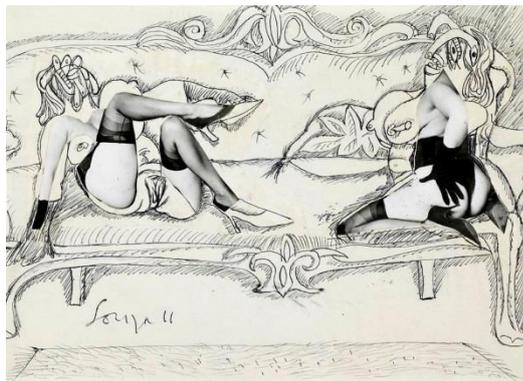
Francis Newton Souza was of Indian origin and arrived in the UK on a Portuguese passport, eventually gaining British citizenship. Pornographic black and white images of women from Soho emerge in his work of the 1960s, replacing the Madonnas of his 1940s Goan imagery.

Rasheed Araeen covers his self-portrait in brilliant white emulsion paint, a critique of the whitening beauty products but also the predominantly white establishment against whom he campaigned for equal rights for Blacks and Asians in the 1970s, and still is.

This exhibition is not a survey of Collage in Post-War Britain. The selected artists all share an expressive element, and although some worked together, it was their differences that brought them together.



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Images:

1. Eduardo Paolozzi | Robot, c.1956 | Bronze | Unique | Height: 48.5 cm.
2. F. N Souza | Untitled (Two women on a sofa), 1966 | Black and white photograph collage & pen on paper 23.5 x 33 cm
3. Nigel Henderson | Untitled, 1976 | Collage with hand colouring on board mounted on cardboard | 50 x 40 cm

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Gallery Timings:

Mon – Fri: 9:30am – 5:30pm

Saturday (During Exhibitions, BY APPOINTMENT ONLY) 12 – 4pm, Sundays closed

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