3 Developing practical work through art appreciation

In this section, I want to explore the visual language of art. Art appreciation is most successful when linked to the practical work pupils produce themselves. Below I suggest artists and types of art that you could study in order to broaden your appreciation of the artistic processes you practised in Section 2.

The work in pencil that you did in Activity 2 can be compared with the drawings of natural forms by Leonardo da Vinci (see Figure 17). Look closely at his interpretation of curving and straight lines, how they are sometimes delicate, sometimes more emphatic and, on occasions, blurred and indistinct. Similar comparisons can be made with the drawings of Dürer (see Figure 18) whose use of line is very different from that of Leonardo. A study of the work of both these artists reveals much about the potential of line to express content.

In Activity 3 you experimented with three-dimensional forms in clay. By looking at the pottery of Bernard Leach (see Plate 1) or the sculptures of Barbara Hepworth (see Plate 2), you can explore further the arrangement of forms in space, their relationship to each other and their backgrounds, and their changing nature as the viewer moves around them, which is vastly different from the relationships formed between lines and colours on a flat, two-dimensional confined surface. Consider the shape of one of Bernard Leach’s pots, in relationship to its function. Compare this to Barbara Hepworth’s experiments with the expressive qualities of line and form. The ceramics and sculpture of Egypt and the neighbouring Minoan

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FIGURE 17
‘A Horseman Trampling on a Fallen Foe’ by Leonardo da Vinci
civilisation of Crete can also be a source of inspiration; the magnificent temples at Luxor in Egypt, for example, show column and surface decoration of a very high order (for example, see Figure 19).

In Activity 4 we looked at the impact of colour as an expressive aid to realism or as an entity in itself. We can heighten our awareness of the potential of colour by exploring the landscapes of Constable and Van Gogh. Whereas Constable exploits the descriptive qualities of colour, particularly in a finished painting like ‘The Haywain’ (see Plate 3), Van Gogh stresses the emotional impact of colour and paint surface, for example in ‘Cornfield and Cypress Trees’ (see Plate 4).

FIGURE 18
‘The Rhinoceros’ by Albrecht Dürer (1515)

FIGURE 19
‘Soldiers with the hounds of the dead’, from the temple of Rameses II, Alydos
You could gain further inspiration for your collage work in Activity 6 by looking at the still-life creations of Picasso or Braque, or any other of the many twentieth-century artists who have incorporated pieces of newspaper, coloured materials, sand, sawdust and discarded household objects into their work to convey the surface 'feel' of objects (see Plate 5). Kurt Schwitter's 'Merzbau' creations translate these surfaces and texture into abstract forms, in which he explores the relationships between rough and smooth, shiny and dull (Plate 6).

Children learning about the influence of traditional African art on Western art forms such as Cubism.

An understanding of how mood and expression can be conveyed by the use of colour, shape and texture can be found in the masks that are made in many parts of Africa and in the puppets used in the Japanese Noh plays (see Plate 7). This can then feed into your own ideas for making puppet heads in Activity 8.

The woven carpets of the Islamic world provide wonderful examples of the uses of colour, patterns and woven texture.

The national curriculum offers helpful guidelines for the appreciation of the work of artists through the ages, and many books provide excellent introductions to the history of art. A list of further reading in art appreciation is provided at the end of this Module.

**Activity 10**

1. Select an artist whose work relates closely to one or more of the practical activities that you have just completed. What can you learn from his/her work that can extend your understanding of the materials used?
Plate 3  ‘The Haywain’ by John Constable, 1821

Plate 4  ‘Cornfield and Cypress Trees’ by Vincent Van Gogh, 1889