Zero Energy Experimental Pile/Z.E.E.P.
Screenprints and lithographs. 1969–70
Located in the Arts Building.

In the late 1960s, Paolozzi was a visiting Professor of Art at the University of California. Gaining stimulation from the American environment through trips to Disneyland, L.A. and the computer centre at the University, Paolozzi produced this series of screen prints which was garnered from magazines including Scientific American, Playboy, Astronomy Technical Magazine, and Fortune. Z.E.E.P is one of the artist’s most intricate, busy and brush print series.

Paolozzi touches here on different elements of American culture which he came across in California. In ‘Duck, I am your shoulder, no sad songs’ Jackson titles appear under Thumbnails of cars, scenes of combat, pin-up nudes and Bugs Bunny. This creates a comic strip sensation of popular imagery being played out over Jackson classics, evoking an American diner experience. A more political commentary is suggested in ‘Human Fate and World Powers’. Paolozzi casts political lessons between America and the U.S.S.R. through icons of the Cold War such as the ‘Space Race’, and also hints at Globalisation. Paolozzi hints at ‘no sad songs’ jukebox titles appear under thumbnails of cars, scenes of combat, pin-up nudes and Bugs Bunny. This creates a comic strip sensation of popular imagery being played out over Jackson classics, evoking an American diner experience. A more political commentary is suggested in ‘Human Fate and World Powers’. Paolozzi casts political lessons between America and the U.S.S.R. through icons of the Cold War such as the ‘Space Race’, and also hints at Globalisation.

Music was a central part of Paolozzi’s life. From childhood, his daily routine was played out to the familiar, melodic sound of the radio. His father made radios for each room of their house, and Paolozzi later came to listen continuously to music while working in his studio. In the early 1970s, after discovering a German magazine illustration rendering organ music into pastoral form, the artist began working on collages to evoke the movement and energy of music. This idea informed the series Calcium Light Night.

In this series, Paolozzi has created a visual equivalent of the ‘collage technique’ employed by the composer Charles Ives, whose compositions fused different genres of music, and layered different orchestral sounds and rhythms through random choice from the conductor. The created a meandering, collaged sound. The grey, black and white fragments of photographically enlarged linear compositions suggest the vibrations, movement and flow of music. The mechanical element of the linear compositions might also be interpreted as parts of musical instruments, such as the cutting of brass pipes, or the tubular bells of a vibraphone. The result is compositions suggest the vibrations, movement and flow of music.

Paolozzi’s intensive fascination with the processes and products of modern technology led to his developing ways of using mass-production methods to create giant 3D forms. He inventes sculpture at Central St Martins from 1953 further enhanced his sculptural process. Paolozzi found technical writers who could catalogue his drawings and models into monumental forms that were then bolted and welded together, creating sculpture with a mechanical underpinning. The assembly method may be understood as an industrial collage, with Paolozzi narrating the finished creation. Sitting over five metres high, the monumental Faraday, He Newton at the British Library, London, is a key example of Paolozzi’s mechanical personalities that enhance public institutions in Great Britain.

Faraday was manufactured at The Sculpture Factory, Clerkenwell. It was given to the University by the artist to mark the centenary in 2000. Dominating the crest between the Edgbaston campus and the railway station, Faraday observes the flowing journey of University life, a time of growth, travel and change, but also a time of reflection of the past – and the future. The artist chose to embellish the base of the sculpture with engraved lettering from T.S Eliot’s poem ‘Dry Satyr’, to evoke something of the purpose of the University experience.

Faraday Bronze 2000
Located on the West entrance of the University, near University Station.

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Eduardo Paolozzi was a prolific sculptor, printmaker, collector and teacher, whose work explores a life-long fascination with popular culture, science and technology.

Paolozzi’s association with the University of Birmingham began in 1956, when he was awarded an Honorary D.Litt, joining artists Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) and John Piper (1903–1992), and later Howard Hodgkin (1937), Raymond Mason (2000) and Cornelia Parker (2008) as honorary graduates. Paolozzi gave four print series to the university, and Paradise, his first large-scale sculpture. At his death he bequeathed a series of plaster maquettes to the University.

His passion for collecting, which consumed him throughout his life, began in Luton. Paolozzi’s youth was further shaped, and soared, by the Second World War. When Italy declared war in 1940, Paolozzi spent three months in prison, and his father and uncle were sent to Canada on a sea convoy. Their ship was torpedoed, and they were drowned.

Early Years

Eduardo Paolozzi was born in Luton, Scotland in 1924, where his father, an exempted officer owned a confectionery business. This sugar-sweet environment of confectionery wrappers, colourful packaging and the eye-popping exuberance which this stunning visual effect on the young Paolozzi.

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) became a melting pot of innovation and diverse ideas, leading to the creation of The Independent Group (IG). The IG, which argued that images from mass media and popular culture should be regarded as art, celebrated the imagery of science fiction, industrial design, machinery and pulp magazines through seminal lectures and group exhibitions. Paolozzi’s 1952 lecture at the ICA, ‘Bunk’, relied on a fast-paced projection of images culled from Paolozzi’s archive, including many images Disney cartoon, pin-ups and automobiles, displayed one after another by the near-silent lecturer. For Paolozzi, this alternative culture had more energy and excitement than official culture. His ship was tossed, and they were destined for disaster.

Screenprints and photolithographs 1965–1970

Eduardo Paolozzi, a collection of fifty screenprints and photolitographs, was the first major survey to trace Paolozzi’s work from the early 1960s onwards. Located in the Business School, first floor corridor. The sequence provides a vibrant dash of multi-colour to the white walls. Like Moonstrips Empire News, the series does not require a rigid sequence. Assembled in large frames along an upstair corridor in the Business School, the sequence provides a vibrant dash of multi-colour to the white walls.

Moonstrips Empire News

Screenprints 1967

Located in the Law entrance lobby and stars leading up to the Law Library.

Paolozzi became increasingly occupied with pop-inventing in the 1960s. Working at Kelpies Studios, London, with industrial designer Christopher Prater, he created images that translated collage into screen prints. The experimentation led to the series Moonstrips. Empire News (1967). These one-hour long animations made up of both random texts and images interspersed with coloured geometric patterns serve as an idiosyncratic analysis of popular culture. In this world, our own everyday life is seen as a game, a show played by anthropomorphic musical instruments, kitch icons and bizarre headlines such as ‘Triples Found in a Baby Boy’, encapsulating elements of our daily relationship with visual media. The texts used in the series are culled from newspaper articles, story books and novels, and appears in teasing fragments. Using the process of collage, Paolozzi makes styliptic jurgus which intrigue viewers who become lost in this tangle of words. Through the repetition of Disney characters, pin-up girls and film icons, Paolozzi also alludes to the hero worship of modern times. In ‘The Sitten World of Michelangelo’, plastic and Renaissance icons stand together. Paolozzi suggests that Mickey Mouse is as identifiable as a hero of modern society as Michelangelo’s David is of the High Renaissance.

General Dynamic F.U.N. was a series of fifty screenprints and photolithographs predominantly made using images culled from American magazines.

The series could be understood as a visual accompaniment to Paolozzi’s article ‘General Dynamic Fun’ in the magazine Artlink (1967) which paralleled the sugar-coated pepin of American pop culture. The utopias of American mass-advertising are amusingly alluded to through juxtapositions of Hollywood stars, food advertisements and high fashion features offering the viewer a lustrous amusing of consumer culture. With equally eccentric titles such as ‘Tortera and Tabloes of the Nine-To-Five Day’ the series contains the plentiful imagery of American consumerism endowed with irony and wit.

In this series, the viewer revisits in counter-heaven, where cheap cigarettes are smoked, ice cream cakes are pointed, and the show of colour is turned into an avalanche of advertising. In the sequence ‘Moonstrips Empire News’ the utopias of American mass-advertising are amusingly alluded to through juxtaposition of Hollywood stars, food advertisements and high fashion features offering the viewer a lustrous amusing of consumer culture. With equally eccentric titles such as ‘Tortera and Tabloes of the Nine-To-Five Day’ the series contains the plentiful imagery of American consumerism endowed with irony and wit.

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