



Inclusion in the arts:
Race.Gender.(Dis)ability

art trail 2019-20

Text by Jennifer Wilbur, University of Birmingham ©2019



Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu is a highly significant figure in the development of Nigerian modernism. Through her teaching, she influenced future artists and helped to lay the foundation of modernist practice in post-colonial Africa.

Ugbodaga-Ngu (1921-1996) was a pioneer of Nigerian modernism, and helped to influence a generation of African artists. Her long career featured many standout moments. In 1955 she became the only Nigerian teacher in the Fine Art Department of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria. Throughout her teaching career, she taught members of the Zaria Art Society - a group of young Nigerian artists who helped to establish post-colonial modernism. In 1958, she became the first female Nigerian artist to have a solo exhibition in London. In 1975, she began serving as state advisor to the Festival of Arts and Culture, a pioneering festival that celebrated black artists from across Africa and beyond.

Her work in the University of Birmingham's Research and Cultural Collections is notable for its blending of traditional Nigerian styles with European modernism. Ugbodaga-Ngu takes influence from early 20th-century cubism, although the painting appears to be entirely abstract and is not based around real-life objects. The rich, earthy colour palette and sculptural forms are reminiscent of traditional African art. This highly textual work boldly explores colour and shape. The thick application of paint creates an image that is connected to the Nigerian landscape while referencing the Modern European painting.

Image: © The copyright holder/RCC

Clara Ugbodaga-Ngu, *Abstract* (1960)
Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham



This work by Eileen Agar subtly explores the feminine psyche and draws from the Surrealist interest in psychoanalysis.

Agar was a British artist whose work is most commonly associated with the Surrealist movement. She was notably one of the few female artists included in the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London, in which she had three paintings and five objects on display. Agar was a highly successful female artist whose work is now featured in collections internationally.

Double Take is part of the collection at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent. The piece is a collage which shows two female profiles in the outer thirds of the canvas facing the same direction. A painted column separates the figures, and a dolly - a symbol of femininity and female labour - has been placed on top. While the outline of the two figures is identical, they have been painted differently. The left one is light and white and light blue in colour, while the other is much darker, earthy in colour, and has been distressed more by the artist.

Psychoanalysis was an important influence for Surrealism, and the presentation of two identical figures in this work links to new understandings of the psyche and the Freudian idea of the conscious and unconscious self. It could be argued that the brighter figure represents the conscious self while the other represents the unconscious, which contains all the repressed memories and traumas of the individual. The dolly connects this to the identity and traditional roles of women. This work could be interpreted as a depiction of the psychological struggle of the individual woman against socially constructed ideas of femininity.

Image: © The Estate of Eileen Agar / Bridgeman Images.

Eileen Agar, *Double Take* (c.1936)
The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent



This drypoint etching by renowned Austrian artist Egon Schiele depicts a seemingly distressed woman, partially-clothed and crouching uncomfortably. The depiction of hysteria as seen in this work is a common feature of Schiele's art. It was also a popular topic in fin-de-siècle Vienna, where this work was made.

Hysteria was recognised in Vienna in the 1900s as a 'female' illness that was believed to be caused by repressed trauma. It manifested through physical symptoms, including hysterical outbursts during which the affected patient would have fits and seizures, although it varied as each case was unique. It is no longer a recognised illness and was most likely to have been caused by varying mental health illnesses experienced by different patients. However, during the fin-de-siècle, people were fascinated with hysteria; photographs of hysterical women were widely circulated, and this widespread curiosity bled into the art world. The visual language of hysteria was created - images of weak and childlike women with wiry hair, thin limbs and spindly fingers, and often an arched back, were common-place at the time and can be seen in the work of famous Secessionist artists including Gustav Klimt.

In Crouching Woman, this debilitated female body is shown to be vulnerable and uncomfortable, she is entirely exposed to the viewers gaze. The sexualisation of child-like ailing female bodies is a regular occurrence in Schiele's work and many of his contemporaries. These images can be hard to look at due to the unsettling nature of their subject. They showcase an unfortunate truth about the sexualisation of young female bodies at the turn of the twentieth century.

Image: © The Henry Barber Trust

Egon Schiele, *Crouching Woman* (1914)
Barber Institute of Fine Arts

Ernst Neuschul, *Black Mother* (1931)
The New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester

Black Mother by German Expressionist artist Ernst Neuschul is an intimate portrayal of a mother breastfeeding her child. The work treats the subject with great dignity, belying the extreme difficulties faced by people of colour in inter-war Germany.

Neuschul created this painting in 1931 whilst he was living in Berlin, a time when the Nazi party was making significant gains in elections. People of colour were highly persecuted under the Nazi regime, and many African-Germans were forcibly sterilised. In *Black Mother*, Neuschul instead celebrates the central figure, although the way she stares at the viewer is ambiguous. Is she alert and on edge, feeling threatened? Alternatively, is she defiant and proud, determined to stand her ground in front of the intruding viewer? The baby similarly acknowledges our gaze but does not seem scared, instead comforted by their mother's protection.

Neuschul himself was a Jewish artist whose work was targeted by the Nazis. He was removed from his teaching post as Professor of Fine Art at the Berlin Academy of Fine Art in 1933. That same year an exhibition of his work was shut down, and many of his works were vandalised with swastikas. Neuschul is noted for his provocative paintings of people of colour and ordinary workers. His work is socially conscious and celebrates humanity.

Black Mother makes a strong statement celebrating black mothers in Nazi-controlled Germany. Neuschul was keen to treat the subject with respect and to honour motherhood. His work venerates an oppressed figure and gives the black mother the dignity and respect she deserves.

Image: © the Norland family

<div data-bbox="0 0 157 159" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="219 79 691 155" data-label="Caption"> <p>Barbara Delaney, <i>Light Gathers</i> (1997) <i>Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 172 1003 270" data-label="Text"> <p>Barbara Delaney’s artistic practice is informed, but not defined, by her experience with visual impairment. <i>Light Gathers</i> is a strikingly visual work that celebrates light honestly and thoughtfully.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 304 1003 504" data-label="Text"> <p><i>Light Gathers</i> is one of three works by Delaney in the Birmingham Museums Trust collection. She has been an exhibiting artist since the 1970s. Her work is abstract and explores colour and light in a unique and highly stylised way. In the 1980s, Delaney suffered from a severe sight injury that prevented her from painting for some time but has subsequently helped to inform her artistic practice. As she recovered from the injury, her relationship with light changed as she experienced a new sensitivity to it.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 537 1003 705" data-label="Text"> <p>Delaney does not identify as disabled, but her work has been informed by her experience with a visual impairment. This is evident in <i>Light Gathers</i>, as the painting makes the viewer experience light as a new sensation. It appears like a sunset through blurred vision, or perhaps reminds the viewer of the feeling of waking up and taking time to get used to the light.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 739 1003 938" data-label="Text"> <p>Through her painting, she explores her relationship with light and invites the viewer to experience this with her. In all three works in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s collection, her exploration of colour is prominent as she contrasts each with its own tones in order to create a vibrant, saturated image. The colours glow out from the canvas, dazzling the viewer. These rich monochromatic paintings emphasis the artists’ interest in light and our relationship with it.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="192 987 388 1016" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © The Artist</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1003 0 1163 159" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="1202 73 1697 149" data-label="Caption"> <p>Alexa Wright, ‘I’ 1 (1998) <i>Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 172 1964 302" data-label="Text"> <p>Alexa Wright is a celebrated British photographer whose work considers disability and the ways in which non-disabled people react towards it. In her photographic series ‘I’ from 1998, Wright collaborated with disabled people to create semi-self portraits.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 338 1964 571" data-label="Text"> <p>In most of these images, Wright subtly superimposed her face on to a disabled body. In the final image however, she superimposed a disabled model’s face onto her body. The images aim to expose how non-disabled people see and focus on disability without considering the individual. Many viewers at first do not necessarily realise that it is the same face in all of the images - until the last photograph in which the opposite is suddenly made clear. It showcases able-bodied people’s discomfort with, and preconceptions of, disability.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 606 1964 770" data-label="Text"> <p>In this work, the first image from the series, Wright has worked with artist and model Catherine Long, who was born without a left arm. In this image, Long’s disability is compared to a classical sculpture, which often features missing limbs. The photograph highlights the disconnect between the veneration of classical sculptures and the treatment of disabled people.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 806 1964 938" data-label="Text"> <p>Alexa Wright’s series ‘I’ asks the able-bodied viewer to challenge their assumptions about disability and to consider the person before the disability. It asks that we remove the negativity around disability and become more open to a dialogue about inclusivity and accessibility.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1202 987 1397 1016" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © The Artist</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1964 0 2125 159" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="2175 79 2703 155" data-label="Caption"> <p>Jacob Epstein, <i>Study for Rock Drill</i> (c. 1913) <i>The New Art Gallery, Walsall</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 172 2926 308" data-label="Text"> <p>With his <i>Rock Drill</i> sculpture, Jacob Epstein created a terrifying mechanised soldier. Following the First World War, however, he broke this work down into a mutilated torso. His <i>Rock Drill</i> reflects the tragic story of war and represents the debilitated, damaged body of the worker-soldier.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 344 2926 609" data-label="Text"> <p>Epstein is one of Britain’s most prominent sculptors and one of his most notable works is <i>The Rock Drill</i>, 1913, depicted in a pencil drawing in the collection of The New Art Gallery, Walsall. This work has a complex story behind it: created c.1913, Epstein eventually disassembled the sculpture and turned it into a new work, <i>Torso in Metal</i> (1913-15). <i>Rock Drill</i> is commonly associated with Vorticism, an English art movement that celebrated machines and war. The original sculpture was a glorification of technology and mechanisation, but the decapitated <i>Torso</i> came to represent a broken Europe and the soldiers who had sacrificed themselves in the Great War.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 644 2926 945" data-label="Text"> <p>The work tells the story of the impact of technological advancement on the human body. It depicts the augmentation of man with machine, in which technology is both an extension but also a constriction of the body. The original version shows the body made machine, elevated to a triumphant, heroic figure of war, while the subsequent broken <i>Torso</i> is the castrated, emasculated body that has been disabled by machine warfare. For the historian Hal Foster, images such as this are ‘haunted by the spectre of the damaged body of the worker-soldier’. <i>Rock Drill</i> is the sculptural representation of this damaged body, initially exploited and made heroic but then damaged and emasculated.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="2184 987 2594 1016" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © The Estate of Sir Jacob Epstein.</p> </div>
<div data-bbox="0 1045 157 1205" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="219 1100 878 1176" data-label="Caption"> <p><i>Making Together, RBSA collaboration with Sense and HA</i> (2017- now)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 1215 1003 1381" data-label="Text"> <p>The RBSA is an artist-led society with its own gallery on St Paul’s Square in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter. The RBSA is currently undertaking a collaborative project with Sense a national charity which supports those with complex disabilities. The project - ‘Making Together’- is supported by public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 1417 1003 1751" data-label="Text"> <p>In winter 2019, work from the third phase Re-Use, Re-Store, Re-Tale is on display in Sense Charity shops across the West Midlands at Worcester, Kingstanding, West Bromwich, and Kidderminster. Artists Rob Hamp and Andrea Hannon (who form the art duo HA) have been working with Sense artist Stuart for the past few months. The artists placed bins in 4 different Sense charity shops for people to donate items, and have then created sculptures out of these donated objects. The project aims to inform people about Sense, their charitable work and the services they provide at places like Sense TouchBase Pears in Selly Oak. It also wants to help all involved partners develop new ways to make visual art more inclusive while encouraging others to think more about inclusivity in the art world.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="32 1787 1003 1919" data-label="Text"> <p>The previous two phases of this project have involved RBSA artists conducting workshops at TouchBase Pears to create inclusive art for exhibitions at the RBSA Gallery. This project is ongoing, so keep an eye out for future exhibitions and events associated with ‘Making Together’ on the RBSA website.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="219 2039 427 2068" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © RBSA 2019</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1003 1045 1163 1205" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="1213 1106 1813 1182" data-label="Caption"> <p>Dale Marshall, <i>Beauty is Always With You</i> (2013) <i>Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 1218 1964 1348" data-label="Text"> <p>By embracing his past, Dale Marshall creates raw, powerful works that are open and honest about his mental health and convey his story and struggles to the viewer. He hopes to use his works to start a frank and authentic discussion about mental health.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 1383 1964 1583" data-label="Text"> <p>This striking and colourful work by British artist Dale Marshall is a study in colour and texture. The artist used a variety of different mediums, including oil stick, string, and paint to create a highly textural and bold work. Marshall began as a street artist. While he no longer creates art on the streets, his work pays homage to his background as he creates on canvas images of old-looking walls which are layered with graffiti.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 1619 1964 1852" data-label="Text"> <p><i>Beauty is Always With You</i> was featured in the 2014 exhibition ‘Walls with Wounds’ at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. The exhibition title recalls his graffiti and street art origins, while also referring to his current studio - a former Victorian workhouse which still has inscriptions on the walls created by children over 100 years ago. ‘Walls with Wounds’ also acknowledges his time spent at St Lawrence’s Hospital in Cornwall where he was sectioned in 1999 and received treatment for clinical depression.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1023 1887 1964 2051" data-label="Text"> <p>Dale Marshall has been open about his history of mental illness and drug abuse which triggered psychotic episodes. He views his work as biographical as he documents his journey from poor mental health to good mental health. His work provides ‘the viewer a window to his soul and tormented past’. Through his work, Marshall aims to challenge the stigma surrounding mental health.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1187 2064 1659 2093" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1964 1045 2125 1205" data-label="Image"></div> <div data-bbox="2175 1100 2840 1176" data-label="Caption"> <p>Claudette Johnson, <i>Untitled (Standing Woman)</i> (1990) <i>Wolverhampton Art Gallery</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 1215 2926 1348" data-label="Text"> <p>Claudette Johnson is an important British artist who celebrates black femininity by bringing it to the forefront of her work. She creates honest portrayals of black women, which are informed by her own experiences, and which seek to challenge preconceptions of black femininity.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 1383 2926 1514" data-label="Text"> <p>Johnson is commonly associated with the BLK Art Group - a group of young black artists formed in Wolverhampton in 1979 who challenged ideas about what black art was. Johnson’s art work aims to challenge perceptions about black art and identity, and undermine the negative historical portrayal of black people in art and culture.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 1549 2926 1749" data-label="Text"> <p>This drawing in the Wolverhampton collection is an open and honest portrait of a black woman, typical of Johnson’s oeuvre. A larger-than-life woman dominates the space and looks out to the viewer with an ambiguous gaze. The subject has a firm presence and is given a platform that affords her some control over her own representation. She appears to be standing her ground and unconcerned by the viewers' intrusion. She is not necessarily depicted to be weak or strong - she just is.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1985 1785 2926 1917" data-label="Text"> <p>Through her portraiture, Johnson is keenly interested in giving to black women a presence which they have historically been denied, and that is evident in this portrait. Her work resists traditional depictions of black femininity. She creates a new space for black women to exist in art history.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="2175 2039 2371 2068" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: © The Artist</p> </div>