Calcium Light Night
Photographs. 1974–1976
Located in the Bramall Concert Hall.
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 whilst working in his studio. In the early 1970s, after discovering a German magazine illustration rendering organ music into pictorial 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 ‘cultural technique’ employed by the composer Charles Ives, whose compositions fused different genres of music, and layered different orchestral sounds and rhythms through random cues from the conductor. The created a melismatic, collaged sound. The grey, black and white fragments of photographically enlarged linear compositions suggest the vibrations, movement and flow of music. Paolozzi found technical engineers who would catalyse his drawings together, creating sculpture with a mechanical undertone. The assembly method may be understood as an industrial collage, with Paolozzi and the visitor immersing together, creating something of the purpose of the University experience.

Faraday
Bronze 2000
Located on the West entrance of the University, near University Station.
Paolozzi’s bronze sculpture illustrates the processes and products of modern technology led to his developing ways of using mass-production methods to create giant 3D forms. His technique, with its foundation in Caledonia, hints at his sculptural process. Pressing diverse items – toys, forks, clock parts, sticks – into soft clay to derive a negative form, many of Paolozzi’s sculptures bear traces of found objects, creating multi-textured surfaces that urge us to touch.

Paolozzi found technical engineers who could catalogue his drawings and models into monumental forms that were then bolted and welded together, creating sculpture with a mechanical undertone. The assembly method may be understood as an industrial college, with Paolozzi narrating the finished creation. Setting over five metres high, the monumental Faraday, the Newton at the British Library, London, is a key example of Paolozzi’s mechanical personalisation 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, as 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 Salvages’, to evoke something of the purpose of the University experience.

Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging. You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.
You are not those who saw the harbour
Here between the hither and the farther shore
And the past with an equal mind.

Here between the hither and the farther shore
And the past with an equal mind.

Paolozzi touched here on different elements of American culture which he came across in California. In 1962 he wrote: ‘Cry on my shoulder, no sad songs’; Jackson titles appear under thumbnails of cars, scenes of combat, pin-up nudes and Bugs Bunny. This created a comic strip sensation of popular imagery being played out over Jackson classical, evolving an American diner experience. A more political commentary is suggested in ‘Human Fate and World Powers’. Paolozzi hints at 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 through a multi-sourced atlas of closely-knit uniform countries brought together by the movement of ideas.
Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005)

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 Hannah (1910–1988), John Minton (1903–1957) and in 1947 he moved to Paris.

In the early 1950s, Paolozzi began to use unconventional materials and to juxtapose images in vibrant combinations that led to the collage. This multimedia imagery became a characteristic.

The Independent Group

Paolozzi’s radical aesthetic combining images of fine art and popular culture brought him into contact with like-minded artists and architects including Richard Hamilton and Peter and Alison Smithson.

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) became a melting pot of innovative 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 images of Disney cartoons, space ships and automobiles, displayed one after another by the near-silent lecturer. For Paolozzi, this alternative culture had more energy and excitement than official culture. Paolozzi’s radical aesthetic combining images of fine art and popular culture brought him into contact with like-minded artists and architects including Richard Hamilton and Peter and Alison Smithson.

The utopias of American mass-advertising are amusingly alluded to through juxtapositions of Hollywood stars, food advertisements and high fashion featuring the viewer a distant amusing of American consumerism. Paolozzi’s 1952 lecture at the ICA, ‘Bunk’, relied on a fast-paced projection of images culled from Paolozzi’s archive, including images of Disney cartoons, space ships and automobiles, displayed one after another by the near-silent lecturer. For Paolozzi, this alternative culture had more energy and excitement than official culture.

BUNK!

‘Bunk’ is the collaged series of the images Paolozzi used in his ICA lecture in 1952. The word ‘Bunk’ refers to American car manufacturer Henry Ford’s statement that ‘History is more or less bunk’. In this series, Paolozzi explores the paradoxes of popular culture. On one hand, it is a bountiful form of entertainment and the disposable culture has shaped our lives. If follows that these series could be understood as a historical record of the 1940s and early 1950s.

Recurring themes of advertisements, mechanical forms, glamorous pin-up girls and Disney characters give us an insight into what was that fascinated Paolozzi. The artist was excited by the glamorous and effusive imagery of American consumerism, and in Paolozzi, these images live on, his images to him by American ex-servicemen in Paris, were ‘a catalogue of an exotic society, bountiful and generous, where the event appears to be an everyday occurrence. Paolozzi makes stylistic jumps which intrigue viewers who become lost in this tangle of words.

The repetition of Disney characters, pin-up girls and film icons, Paolozzi also subverts the jargon of American popular press. Paolozzi’s Mickey Mouse is as identifiable as a hero of modern society as Michelangelo’s David is of the High Renaissance.

Moonstrips

Moonstrips Empire News

Screenprints 1967

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

Paolozzi became increasingly occupied with printmaking in the 1960s. Working at Kelpra Studios, London, with notable presses including studio owner Christopher Prater, he created images that translated collage into screen print. This experimentation led to the series Moonstrips (1967). These screen prints were made up of both random texts and images interspersed with coloured geometric patterns and an idiosyncratic analysis into American jargon.

In this world, our own form of the fifties, a game of chess played by anthropomorphized musical instruments, kitch icons and banal headlines such as ‘Triplets Found in a Baby Buggy’, 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 stylistic jumps which intrigue viewers who become lost in this tangle of words.

Like Moonstrips Empire News, the series does not require a rigid sequence. Assembled in large frames along an upstairs corridor in the Business School, the series presents a vibrant dash of multi-colour to the white walls.