

Exploring Black history in art for families

Liz Johnson Artur - Top Shelf, 2018



Liz Johnson Artur is a Ghanaian-Russian photographer, who captures the lives of Black people. She has lived and worked in London since the 1990s and her recent work focuses on Black British communities in London.

This piece was created especially for the Guildhall Art Gallery and was inspired by its collection. The 20 photographs help start to represent the Black communities which were missing in the Gallery's story of London.



Liz's work shows lots of different stories of community, family, love and friendships.

Can you take a series of photographs or draw a series of pictures that represent your communities, family, love and friendships?

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Uzo Egonu - Tower Bridge, 1969



Uzo Egonu came to Britain from Nigeria in 1945 and lived and worked in London from 1948 until he died in 1996. London and its landmarks were often included in his works.

Uzo's style was unique. You can see that he has painted Tower Bridge, but it doesn't look like it would if you took a photograph of it. His style mixed ideas from European modern art with the traditions of West African art.

Look at the patterns, the colours and the curved lines. They all add a part of Uzo's culture to his painting.

Uzo also painted other London Landmarks including St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square.

Can you paint one of these landmarks in your own unique style?

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Ronald Moody - Portrait sculpture of actor Terry Thomas, c. 1952



Ronald Moody is one of Britain's best modernist sculptors. He was born in Jamaica but lived and worked in London for most of his life.

This sculpture is of the actor Terry Thomas. Ronald's wife Helene was a friend and personal assistant to Terry, which meant Ronald had got to know him well. Because Ronald knew Terry in an informal, everyday way, rather than just through his work as an actor he showed him in a more personal way, a way others were not used to seeing him.

Find something at home to make a sculpture out of. Artists make sculptures out of all of different kinds of things - it could be clay, salt dough, plasticine, tinfoil, paper, or it could even be real dough, food, recycling or objects found around your house.

Create your sculpture of someone you know really well, perhaps somebody in your family. Don't worry if your sculpture doesn't look exactly like the person, but try to make something that reminds you of them.

If it is made of found objects or food remember to take a photograph because it won't last forever.

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Sir John Gilbert – Girl with Fruit, 1882



This painting was made by John Gilbert. John Gilbert was an English artist. Little is known about the person in this portrait. Sadly, we often don't know the name of models for artworks unless they were considered to be notable at the time.

We do not know how accurate the portrait is, or how well the person and their culture is depicted. We do not know if the person was painted in their country wearing their clothes and carrying their own belongings, or whether it was staged in England with a Black model and the artist's own props. Artists often painted Black people as they imagined them to be.

We do know that the artist travelled, but it is not clear where this person is from. We also know that the artist made at least three other versions of the same picture before this one, and that in each new version the costume, props, and even facial features were changed.

When we do not know somebody or their culture it is hard to create a portrait that represents them. Think about a country you have never visited and imagine a person who lives there. Draw a portrait of them. You will have probably used stereotyped ideas. Think about where these have come from. How could you find out more about their culture?

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James Holmes – Charring Cross, 1832



Many of the artworks in the collection at Guildhall Art Gallery are about 150-200 years old. The Black population of London at this time was small but present, yet there are not many pictures of Black people in our artworks. Some artists did include Black people, particularly in crowd scenes, to help show London's diversity.

This painting by James Holmes shows a dispute about the cost of a carriage journey. You can see two boys working on the left-hand side of the painting. One is kneeling to lift the baggage, while a Black boy in a smart coat and hat stands taking note of the carriage. On the other side of the picture more children can be seen laughing and playing.



When we look at a picture it is easy to focus on the story at the centre, but the artist has carefully chosen each person and detail they include to help tell you something more.

Find an artwork you like that shows a crowd (a good place to look is artuk.org where you can even type the word 'crowd' in to search bar). How many people and things can you notice in the picture? Write a story about what is happening in the picture.

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