



# Tickets for British Art

We took advantage of the guided tours in English that the Miró Foundation runs to take a group of students to the exhibition 'Let Us Face the Future'; a great opportunity to practise English outside class at an exhibition of British Art from the two decades following World War II.

### Let Us Face the Future

The exhibition's name is an allusion to the Labour Party's slogan when they defeated Winston Churchill's Conservatives in the 1945 general elections, immediately after the war. The new government set up a national rebuilding programme that would instil a sense of energy and optimism into the country, and ultimately lead to the explosion of creativity that took hold of London in the 1960s.

### The Miró Foundation

It opened in 1975 as the city's first contemporary art museum. This was the birth of an avant-garde structure that made a perfect showcase for the Catalan genius' works because of its excellent lighting and its layout around a central courtyard. It was designed by the architect Josep Lluís Sert, a personal friend of Joan Miró, who is considered a major exponent of rationalist architecture. An additional attraction is the splendid garden (which we also looked round), which blends into the natural surroundings of Montjuïc Park, providing a beautiful panoramic view of the city of Barcelona. Today, the building still stands as an architectural reference point.



**“Excellent. I liked the bright colours of the Pop Art works. This is a good way to become more involved with teachers and classmates”**

**Úrsula San Gil**  
Assistant. Cuatrecasas Gonçalves Pereira



**“I love history so I enjoyed the way the works were explained within the context in which they were painted”**

**Silvia Cobo**  
HR Manager. Akzo Nobel Car Refinishes



**“It was a good experience. You can learn new vocabulary on a topic in context and practise it”**

**Laura Terribas**  
IT Worker. Roca



**“Useful for learning not only language but also English culture in a different atmosphere to the classroom”**

**Francesc Rubio**  
Teacher. Colegio Mare de Déu del Carme



**“It is very positive to be in contact with English in a real situation. The guide was especially good”**

**Xavier Franquesa**  
Engineer. Roca



**“Very interesting. It was a new way to learn English”**

**Anna Muni**  
Graphic Designer. Morillas

**“I have discovered how interesting it is to know about the painter’s feelings. This kind of activity helps you to find out more about your classmates”**

**Sergi Castellà**  
Tax Advisor. Ernst & Young



**“Well explained and very well organized. It was interesting to see the influence of history on British Art”**

**Andrea Castaño**  
Industrial Engineer. Arbora & Ausonia



## Art in Context

Looking at contemporary art is not always easy, so we chose an exhibition which, as well as showing the way British culture has evolved, also explained the art works within the historical context in which they were created. The exhibition consisted of 88 works created from the end of World War II, a time when the effects of the war were still very evident and a huge amount of reconstruction work lay ahead, up to the 1960s, the legendary decade of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, of free love and social revolution, when London was the creative capital of the world; the city where every artist wanted to live. As Andrew Dempsey says in the exhibition catalogue, the exhibition clearly illustrates the contrast between the beginning and the end of this period of history, two moments that can be symbolised respectively by the grey submarines that prowled the North Atlantic during the war and the Yellow Submarine of the famous Lennon and McCartney song.

So we set off on a fascinating voyage through two decades of history, beginning with the great masters like Henry Moore, whose works still evoked the horrors of the Blitz years after the war, continuing through the

first signs of optimism seen in Roger Mayne's street photography, and finally opening out into the freedom and permissiveness of Pop Art with all its bright colours and immediacy, brought to us by Richard Hamilton and others. Along the journey we stopped to look at the personal works of Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud, we learnt how to explore the palette of the St. Ives painters in order to really appreciate the greyish atmosphere overhanging the coastal Cornish town, we came to a better understanding of the constructivists, led by Victor Pasmore, experimenting with new techniques and materials such as plastic, and were dazzled by the optical effects created in Op Art.

By the end of our particular journey, we had time-travelled through the works of great British artists, learning new terms to expand our vocabulary, we had fine-tuned our hearing to the museum guide's explanations as we came to understand the various pictorial techniques, and we had also got to know our colleagues and teachers better, thanks to the relaxed atmosphere there is whenever the class leaves the confines of the classroom.

## Looking at a Masterpiece

Knowing about artists and their creative context, their inspiration and the techniques they used all helps us towards a better understanding and fuller enjoyment of the aesthetic pleasure of looking at the work. The Falling Warrior is the opening piece of the exhibition.

### Historical Context

Henry Moore is one of the great sculptors of the last century. The artist had personal experience of the disasters of the war, with his house being bombed and having to shelter several times in the tube stations of London to escape the Blitz. It was within this environment that he filled a sketchbook with the scenes before him of people frozen in fear, and these air-raid shelter drawings were a great success when they were exhibited at the National Gallery. The war remained a visible presence in his works years after it ended, and in a way, the figure of the warrior is a homage to those who fell during the conflict.

### Inspiration

"The idea for The Warrior came to me at the end of 1952 or very early in 1953. It was evolved from a pebble I found on the seashore in the summer of 1952, and which reminded me of the stump of a leg, amputated at the hip. Just as Leonardo says somewhere in his notebooks that a painter can find a battle scene in the lichen marks on a wall, so this gave me the start of The Warrior idea."

Henry Moore in a letter dated 15 January 1955; quoted in Philip James (ed.), Henry Moore on Sculpture: a Collection of the Sculptor's Writings and Spoken Words, Macdonald, London 1966, p. 250, both cited on the Henry Moore Foundation website.



Henry Moore. Falling Warrior, 1956-1957

### Meaning

To sculpt the figure of the Falling Warrior, Moore turned to the tradition of ancient Greek art, which had always fascinated him. The sculpture shows the exact moment of the warrior's death throes, just as he rests his shield on the ground before finally dying. Some are reminded of the heroes who fell in the Trojan wars, others think of the life-moments captured in the lava when Vesuvius erupted over the Roman city of Pompeii.

### Technique

The sculpture is a mixture of abstract and figurative art. Its surface alternates smoothness with areas of roughness. Moore first worked on a plaster mould, using that to create a sculpture in bronze. He then treated the metal with chemicals to give it a green patina that makes it look as if it is covered in mould and moss, giving the impression of organic decomposition. ●