

The Douglas Kagi Gift in Context

Contemporary Australian and International Prints

Introduction

This exhibition acknowledges the generosity and support of Melbourne scientist and art collector Dr Douglas Kagi. In 2001, Dr Kagi gifted to the Art Museum an important collection of contemporary Australian and international prints.

Dr Kagi's gift comprises forty-one works by many influential and highly acclaimed artists including Ron B. Kitaj, Henry Moore, Sidney Nolan, Eduardo Paolozzi, Victor Pasmore, Pierre Soulages, Graham Sutherland and Joe Tilson. These practitioners, together with the eight other artists included in the exhibition, made a marked impact on printmaking during the last four decades of the twentieth century.

Embracing the new technological possibilities offered through processes such as photo-screenprinting and offset lithography, these artists created images that were remarkably innovative and challenging for their time. Encompassing stylistic directions ranging from figuration, Pop art and Op art to pure abstraction, and extolling the high-tech, mechanistic look that characterised so many prints from the 1960s onwards, these works articulate an individual sensibility that is in keeping with the buoyant and optimistic mood of the era.

In addition to the twenty-four prints selected from the gift for display, the exhibition includes a number of related works drawn from the Museum's existing print holdings and from other public collections. Providing points of connection and continuity within the exhibition, these latter works offer a broader and more meaningful context through which to appreciate the printed image.

Dr Kagi's gift provides a unique insight into the graphic work of the period. It is a vital and enduring record, not only of the creative achievements of significant artists recently working in the field of international printmaking, but also of the taste and acumen of a leading Australian collector, to whom the Museum is greatly indebted.

Stephen Rainbird

Senior Curator
QUT Art Museum



Colin Lanceley born 1938
Australia

The miraculous mandarin suite 1966
(Entrance of the thugs)
Colour screenprint
Sheet 78 x 56cm
Gift of Douglas Kagi under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2001



The Douglas Kagi Gift in Context
QUT Art Museum 3 May–30 June

Expatriates and the London scene

London was the magnet for young Australian artists in the mid-twentieth century. Sidney Nolan first arrived in London in 1951 and lived there from 1955. He continued to exploit Australian history as source material for his paintings and prints. A major survey of Nolan's work was held at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1957; the same year saw Ray Lawlor's 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' successfully produced in the West End; and Patrick White's *Voss* a literary hit. By the time a younger group of artists arrived in the 'swinging sixties', the British public was aware of the strength and vitality of Australian talent.

In 1961-62 Colin Lanceley, based in Sydney, formed the Annandale Imitation Realists with fellow artists Ross Crothall and Mike Brown. Their interest in combining everyday objects with streetwise humour and a strong graphic facility had brought them notoriety. In 1964 Lanceley won the prestigious Helena Rubinstein travelling scholarship. Travelling first to Italy, where he met with art critic Robert Hughes, he arrived in London in 1965 and stayed for the next fifteen years. Shortly after his arrival, he exhibited with Marlborough Fine Art. It was under the gallery's auspices that *The miraculous mandarin suite* was printed at the famed Kelpra Studios and then published. The series, based on Hungarian composer Béla Bartók's pantomime-ballet, won a prize for the best suite of prints at the 1968 Cracow International Print Biennale. *Liebestod*, the last image in the series, also received a prize for the best individual print.

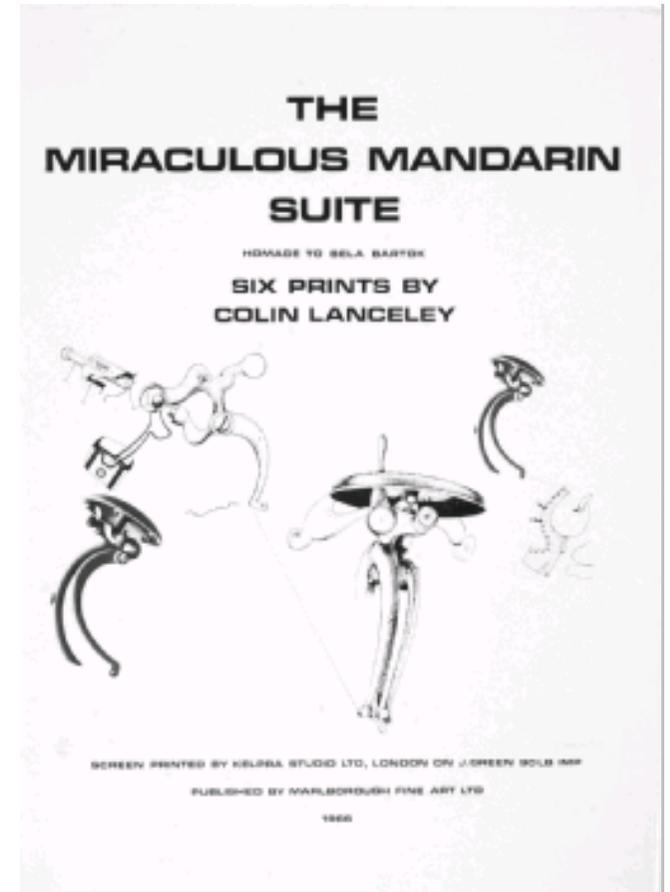
The miraculous mandarin suite

Left to right:

Arrival of the mandarin
Chase
Entrance of the thugs
Embrace
Strangulation
Liebestod (Dear death)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) wrote the *Miraculous Mandarin* in 1918-19, but it was not performed until 1926. It tells a sordid modern story of prostitution, robbery and murder. After its première, the audience stormed out in anger and further performances were banned. The composition was written for pantomime and reflects the violence and cruelty of the era in which Bartók lived. The hero of the story, the miraculous mandarin, is cold-bloodedly hunted down by a band of murderers.

The story tells the tale of a young girl forced into prostitution by three thugs. She has to seduce men so that the thugs can rob and humiliate them. Their plan works well until a strange and wealthy Chinese man (the miraculous mandarin) arrives. He is aroused by the girl's erotic appeal that has violent repercussions. The thugs kill him once, twice, three times, but to no avail. The miraculous mandarin has fallen in love with the girl and will not die until he has taken her. His passionate love cleanses the girl and, with his desires fulfilled, he finally dies in her arms. Lanceley's suite of prints follows the trials of the miraculous mandarin, seen in each image along with the young girl and the thugs.



Colin Lanceley born 1938
Australia

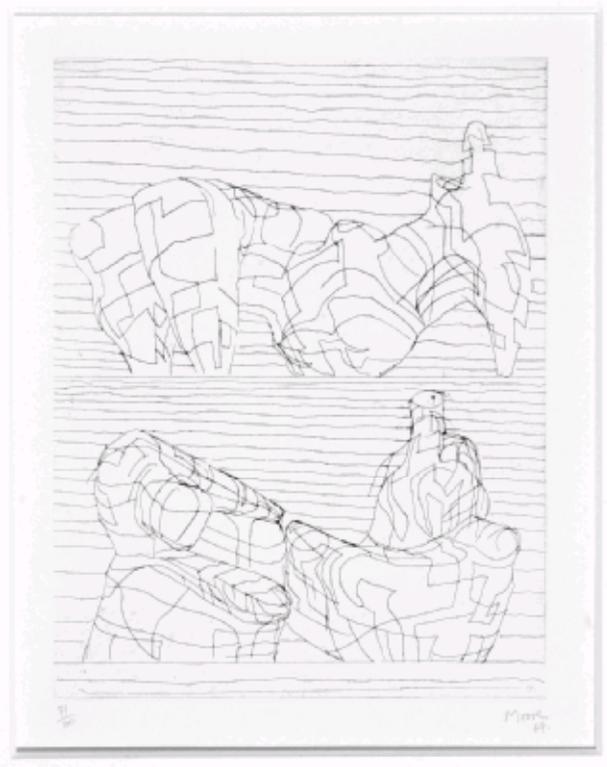
The miraculous mandarin suite 1966

(Title page)

Colour screenprint

Sheet 78 x 56cm

Gift of Douglas Kagi under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2001



Henry Moore 1898-1986
Great Britain

Two reclining figures, linear 1969
Etching
Sheet 66 x 50.5cm
Gift of Douglas Kagi under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2001

Henry Moore: The search for form and space

Henry Moore was born in the coal mining town of Castleford, Yorkshire. Moore's family resisted him working 'down in the pits' as his father had done, and similarly thought sculpture was too much like manual labour. They encouraged him to take up teaching as a profession. However, Moore's talent and commitment led him to become one of the pre-eminent sculptors of the twentieth century.

Moore's challenge to the figurative sculptural tradition and his breakthrough approach to form and space are central to the development of British sculpture. His sculptures simultaneously appear as solid, resistant masses surrounded by space, and yet the space also penetrates the form. In *Reclining figure: Prop* 1975 the metal's absence has given shape to a series of voids. These assist in animating and informing the otherwise inanimate mass.

Moore was also a master printmaker, using prints to further elaborate his themes and to work out ideas for his sculpture. His graphic work discloses a similar search for form, volume and density, as in his sculpture. *Two reclining figures, linear* 1969 is a recurring theme in the artist's oeuvre, suggesting two solid, angular forms that lie prone in contrast to the simple linear background.

Moore's quest was shared by fellow sculptor Barbara Hepworth, and artists such as Graham Sutherland and John Piper, both of whom are represented in this exhibition.

Morphologies of Graham Sutherland

'Out of the thousand things I see – one juxtaposition of forms – above all others seems to have a meaning. I don't always understand what I am doing – or what I am likely to do'.

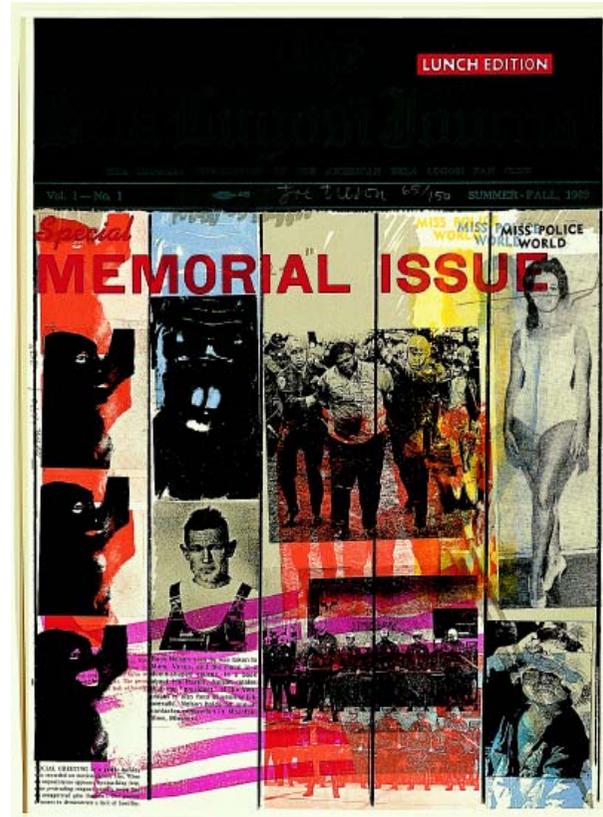
Letter from Graham Sutherland to G.
(Giorgio Soavi), 11 March 1972

In the late 1960s, Graham Sutherland returned to observing the natural world for his subject matter. During the previous decade he had been preoccupied with overseeing the tapestry commission *Christ in glory*, based on his design and woven for the reconstructed Coventry Cathedral. Its massive scale – the largest tapestry in the world at the time – and singular religious subject were an enormous task. In 1967, after a twenty-year absence, he revisited Pembrokeshire in Wales, a place he had previously found filled with dark, metamorphic forms that inspired his imagination. Around this time he produced the series *A bestiary and some correspondences* comprising twenty-six colour lithographs of insects and animals. The 'correspondences' refer to Sutherland's transformation of rock forms into anthropomorphic or human-like images on the page. The indecipherable scale, colour and biomorphic structure employed by the artist suggest an experience beyond the familiarity of the human world.

Hot-houses of pop: The Royal College of Art and the Institute of Contemporary Art

In postwar London, two institutions – the Royal College of Art and the Institute of Contemporary Art – attracted young artists wishing to pursue contemporary issues and ideas in their work. A vital and discursive environment emerged that engaged with youth-oriented mass media and popular culture. This proved central in the development of what we now recognise as Pop art. Several artists in the 'Douglas Kagi Gift' were at the forefront of this new approach. Eduardo Paolozzi based his 1952 lecture 'Bunk!' at the ICA on his proto-pop collages. Joe Tilson made a series of brightly painted wooden constructions at the RCA in the mid-1950s. At the end of that decade, the American-born Ron B. Kitaj arrived in London at the height of Pop art's popularity. Already an artist with several years' experience, Kitaj enrolled at the RCA in 1959 where he met up with an influential group of students including David Hockney.

While not embracing the 'pop' idiom, Kitaj's work shares many similarities of style and imagery. He often draws from an array of sources when constructing his layered narratives, including historical and contemporary politics, art and humanitarian issues. In this exhibition, he has based his colourful screenprints on objects found in popular culture. The typography and design of each printed book cover reflects a time that, even in the 1960s, would have been perceived as nostalgic. There is a curious paradox in the prints. While quite clearly depicting book covers, as prints, the books can never be opened and so their contents remain a mystery.



Joe Tilson born 1928
Great Britain

Bela Lugosi Journal A 1969
Colour screenprint
Sheet 81 x 59.5cm
Gift of Douglas Kagi under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2001

Still reveries of Victor Pasmore and William Scott

Both Victor Pasmore and William Scott commenced their artistic careers as figurative painters in the realist tradition, but eventually became two of the leading abstract painters in Britain. Pasmore's early style, stemming from an admiration of the French artists Degas and Manet, formed the basis for the quiet realism of the Euston Road School that he helped found in 1937. Although Pasmore had produced (and destroyed) several abstract paintings in the 1930s, in 1945 a major exhibition of work by Picasso and Matisse reinvigorated his love of abstract art. He then embraced this style and became a seminal influence on its teaching. After moving to the island of Malta in the mid-1960s, his paintings and prints became saturated with rich colour reflecting the Mediterranean light. His lyrical, meandering line suggested eroded, organic forms or reflections on water.

Scott shares with Pasmore a late commitment to abstraction. Although he was well aware of the radical artists and paintings of the Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1950s, Scott belonged to the European tradition of Chardin, Cézanne and Bonnard. His paintings and prints, depicting flat lozenge shapes and lines on a plain coloured ground, maintain a strong connection to his early interest in the still life genre, maritime landscape and the figure, and reflect the pared-down elegance of his European artistic forebears.



Yaacov Agam born 1928
Israel, France

Summer 1971
Colour screenprint
Sheet 56.5 x 71.5cm
Gift of Douglas Kagi under the
Cultural Gifts Program, 2001

Reflecting black light: Pierre Soulages

It was Cézanne who, according to tradition, said black could not be found in nature. In the paintings and prints of Pierre Soulages black is the predominant colour. Where other artists may use nature as a starting point from which to create abstract forms, Soulages's paintings and prints pay scant attention to nature. Instead, he uses the colour black as a medium to pursue an extreme expression of abstraction.

In the late 1940s Soulages began working with black, initially inscribing black symbols onto a white ground. He then gradually developed an expansive repertoire of gestures and rhythms reflecting his interest in the physical properties inherent in black paint. He employs a variety of tools in creating his *outré-noir* (more-than-black) paintings: fine and coarse brushes, trowels, knives and spatulas. Each tool produces a mark in the thick impasto with characteristic striations that affect the paint's reflective potential. Soulages's paintings depend on the orientation of these striations, the different qualities of the materials used, the luminosity absorbed by the black paint and the position of the spectator to produce compositions that seem, paradoxically, filled with light. Paintings by Soulages do not imitate light, but create their own light where the spectator reflects into and out of the vivid blackness.

Robyn Daw
Curator (Public Programs)
QUT Art Museum

For further information and school enquiries, telephone
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The retinal dazzle of optical art

Victor Vasarely was at the forefront of what was to become known as Op art, a predominantly European movement that explored the illusory or optical effects in visual art. Other Op artists included Bridget Riley and Yaacov Agam. Op art had precedents in the pointillism of post-impressionist artist Seurat, where pure colours were used side-by-side on the canvas to be blended optically with the eye. It also drew on the experimental work of Dada and Bauhaus artists, who were interested in the interaction between visual phenomena, physiology and psychology.

Op artists exploited the physical aspect of visual stimulation, how the retina reacts to strong patterns using colour, line and contrast. Many of the artists took an almost scientific approach to construct their images using mathematics and contrasting colour in an almost formulaic fashion. Vasarely, for example, relied upon geometry in equal measure to any hint of intuition. Agam's screenprint *Summer* 1971, while not as obviously geometric as Vasarely's prints, nevertheless achieves a sense of grid-like order. Within this arrangement the charged colour seems to swell the surface, pushing and pulling the flat chromatic planes and creating visual tensions that stimulate the eye.

Glossary of print techniques

Some of the following print techniques (marked with an asterisk*) were used by artists whose work is on display in the Kagi Gift.

Intaglio prints*

With intaglio prints the image is built up by gouging or etching grooves into the surface of a metal plate, usually copper or zinc. To print the image, ink is pushed into these grooves, and the surface of the plate wiped clean. The plate is then placed on the bed of a press with dampened paper and a felt blanket on top and run through the press under pressure. This draws the ink out of the grooves and onto the paper. The image appears in reverse. Intaglio prints are often characterised by an embossed line around the image, which is made by the edges of the plate. Types of intaglio prints include the following:

Etching*

A print taken from a plate into which the image has been bitten with acid. The plate is covered with a wax or resin ground, which is scratched away to reveal areas of metal. Acid bites into these exposed areas leaving a surface that holds ink.

Aquatint*

A process where the plate is etched through a porous ground of powdered and melted resin, so as to produce a texture when printed.

Engraving

An intaglio print taken from a metal plate into which the lines forming the image are cut with a wedge shaped tool called a burin.

Drypoint

Lines are gouged directly into a soft metal plate using a sharp instrument. The metal displaced by the gouged line forms a sharp ridge that traps the ink, giving a velvety line when printed.

Mezzotint

The surface of a soft metal plate is evenly indented by rocking it with a serrated tool. The image is then scraped away. When inked the surface prints a rich black.

Collogravure

The plate is covered with glue, and drawn into with any implement. When dry, it is inked, wiped and printed.

Carborundum printmaking

In carborundum printmaking, the areas in the plate that are to print black are covered with a mixture of carborundum, an industrially produced substance, and a binding agent. When dry, that area retains ink just as in any other intaglio process. Carborundum printing gives a rich velvety surface.

Screenprints*

A screenprint is made by forcing ink or paint through a screen of fine silk or nylon, onto which a stencil has been fixed. The stencil may be made of adhesive paper or film that has been cut by hand or prepared photographically. Alternatively the stencil may be brushed or sprayed on in the form of a coating. The image is usually built up using a number of screens with different stencils, each one used to print a separate colour.

Relief prints

Relief printing is the most direct form of print making. It is not even necessary to have a press. The image can be cut away or built up using a wide variety of objects pasted onto a board in low relief, the surface of which is inked. A print is taken by placing the paper on top and either rubbing the back or by running through a press. Types of relief printings are as follows:

Woodcut

A relief print taken from a block of wood, often pine, where the areas that are to remain uninked are cut away from the image using a sharp knife or gouge. The natural grain of the wood is often a feature of woodcut prints.

Linocut

A print taken from a block of linoleum cut in the same way as a woodcut, using a knife or gouge to remove the uninked areas. The printed surface has less texture than a woodcut because of the homogenous nature of the linoleum.

Wood engraving

The end grain of a block of wood is used and the image is produced by cutting out fine lines from the surface of the block. When inked, and a print taken, the lines appear as white areas describing the image.

Lithographs*

Lithography is based on the antipathy of grease and water. The image is drawn directly onto a special stone or metal plate with a grease-like substance that can be in the form of either crayon or ink wash. After chemical treatment, the stone or plate is dampened and then inked with a roller. The ink adheres to the greasy surface of the image. Paper is placed onto the inked stone or plate and rolled through a press and a print taken. A different stone or plate is drawn for each colour that makes up the finished image. In offset lithography the ink is transferred from the stone or plate onto a uniform rubber surface and thence to paper, so the image does not appear reversed.

Monotypes and monoprints

Although monotypes and monoprints involve distinctly different processes, the two terms are often used erroneously as synonyms, or are mistakenly used for each other. A monotype is a single print pulled from a glass or metal plate onto which ink or paint has been applied. The image can be transferred to paper by hand rubbing or with a press. A monotype remains one of a kind because it contains no repeatable matrix in the image from which a perfect second impression can be made.

A monoprint begins with a repeatable image, such as an etched plate, that could, if desired, be editioned to produce a series of like impressions. What gives the monoprint its singularity is the process of subsequent hand colouring or doctoring to make it uniquely different or a 'one of a kind' print. A series of monoprints – all derived from the same plate, but then individually hand manipulated – is often called a unique edition and is signed and numbered accordingly.

Computer generated prints

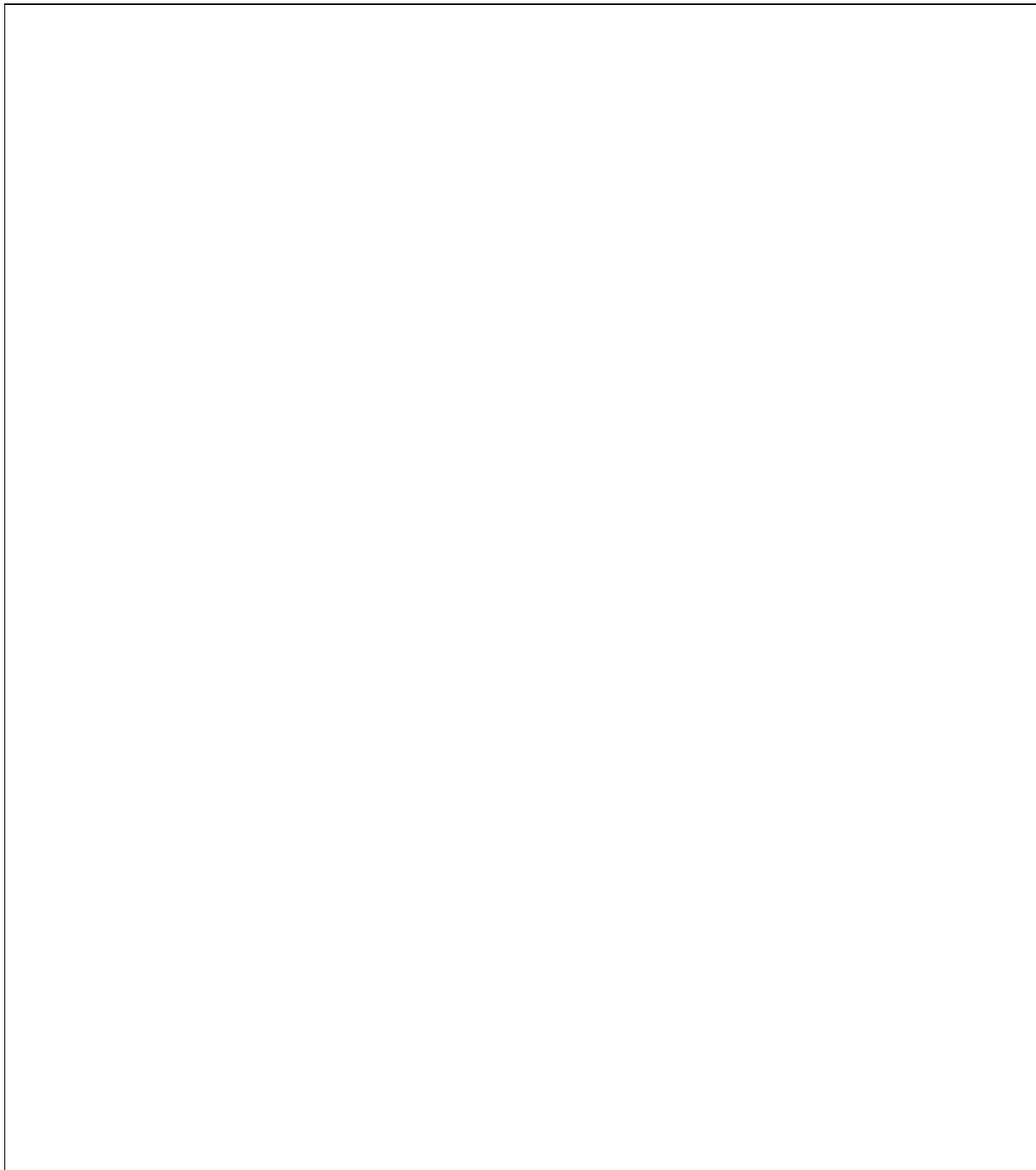
Digital information from a computer can be used in various ways by the artist. Illustration programs use 'line and fill' and painting programmes are pixel-based. Both allow the user to make composite images on a number of layers. To print this information, computer files can be written to colour separation films and the image transferred to an etching plate or screen. Alternatively, and more commonly, prints can be made directly using high-resolution ink-jet or laser printers capable of printing onto art papers or other suitable materials that will absorb the water-soluble inks.

The Douglas Kagi Gift: Worksheet

Who is that? Identifying characters that don't look like people.

Find Colin Lanceley's *The miraculous mandarin suite*. Look at the prints and read the story. Can you work out which of the characters are the miraculous mandarin, the girl and the thugs?

Draw a picture of each of them here:



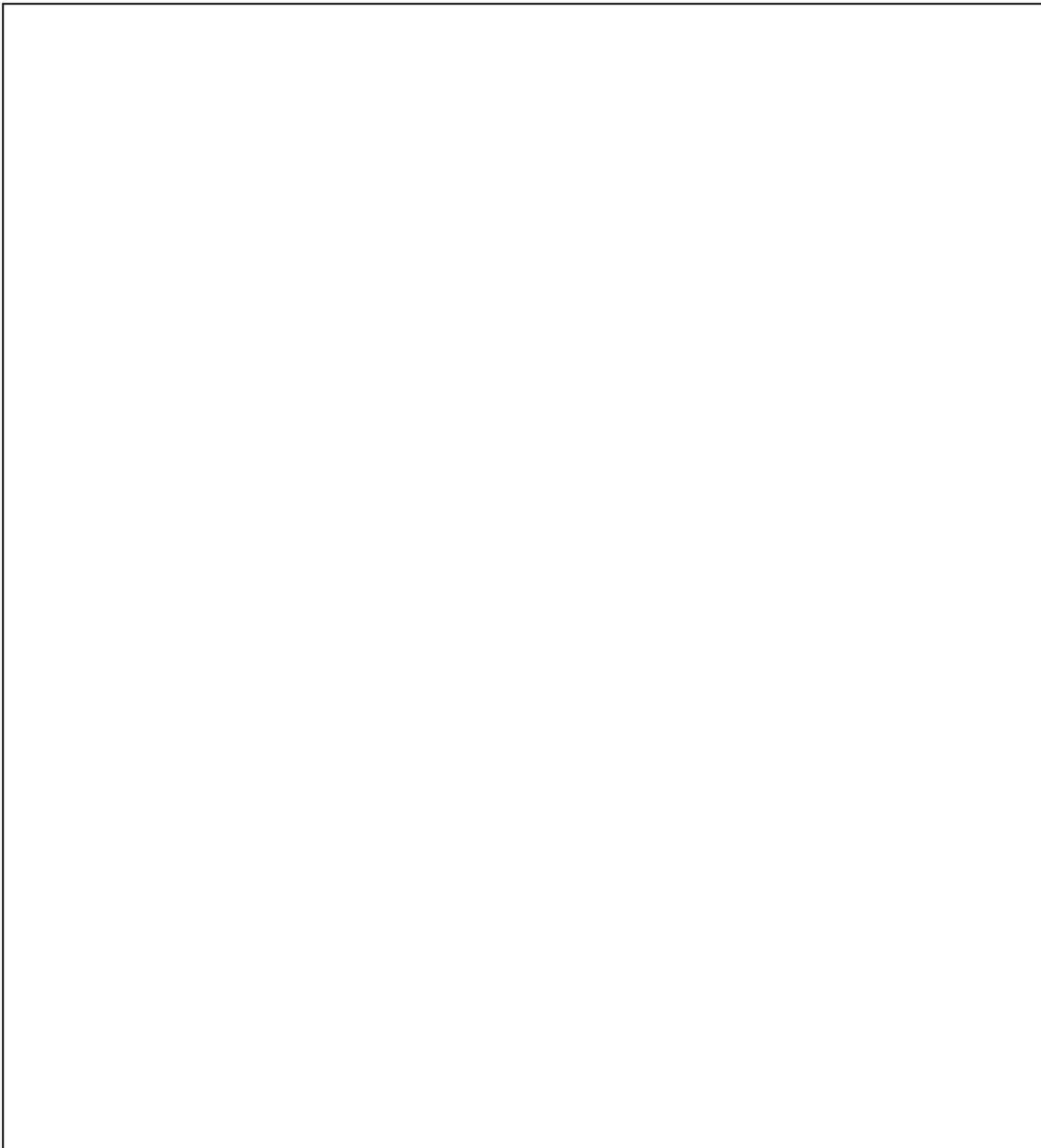
Name:

The Douglas Kagi Gift: Worksheet

Creating form from line.

Henry Moore is well known as a sculptor who creates three-dimensional forms. Find his maquette (model for a sculpture) *Prop*, in the exhibition. It is made of bronze. Nearby is an etching, *Two reclining figures, linear*, where Moore has only used line to express a three dimensional form.

Can you draw a three-dimensional form using just lines? (No shadow effects allowed!)



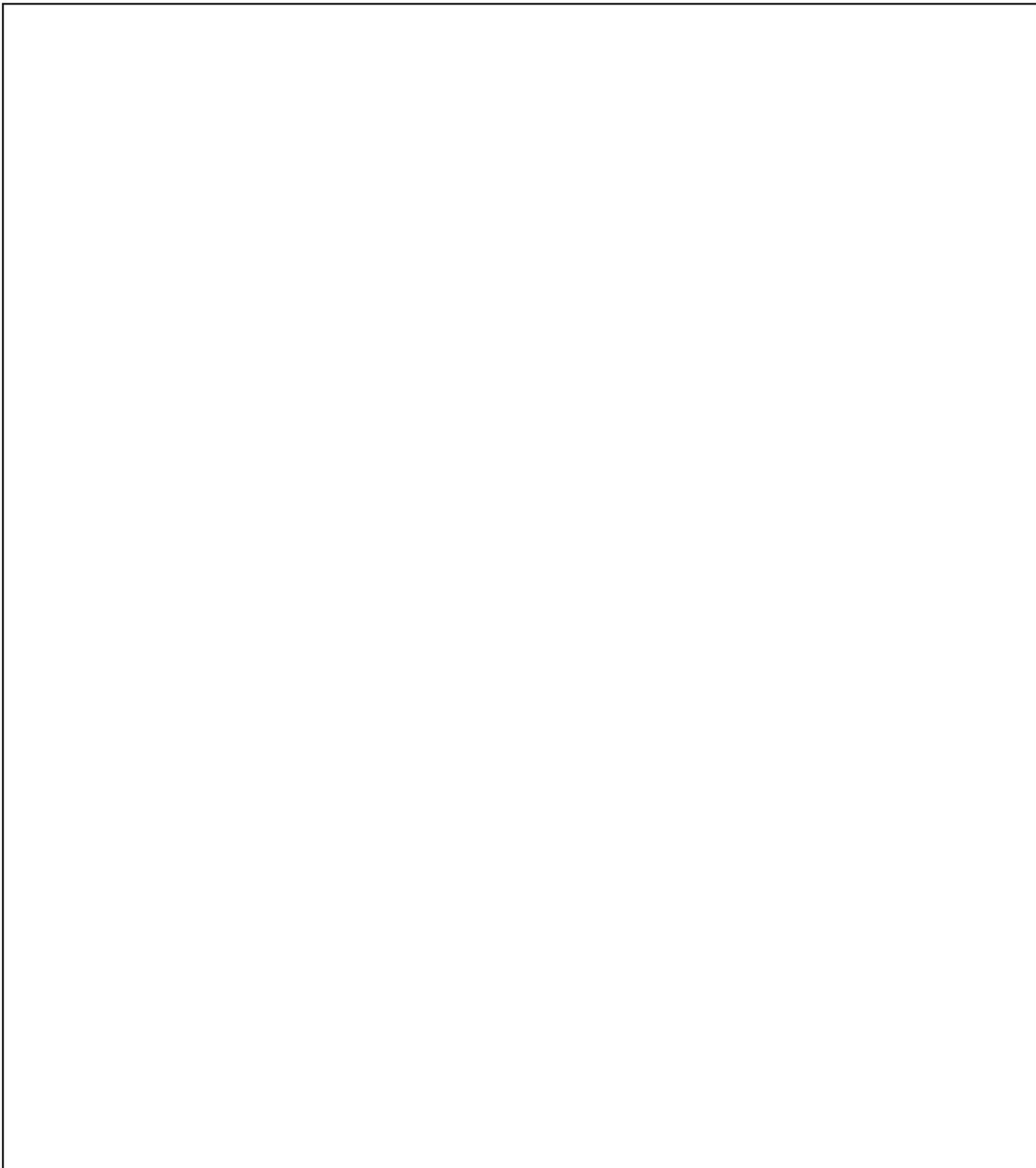
Name:

The Douglas Kagi Gift: Worksheet

Read all about it! Make your own front-page news story.

In *Bela Lugosi Journal A*, Joe Tilson collaged illustrations from magazine and newspaper articles to create a colour screenprint resembling a newspaper front page. In it, he commented on many of the issues of the day.

Try creating your own newspaper front page using collaged images:



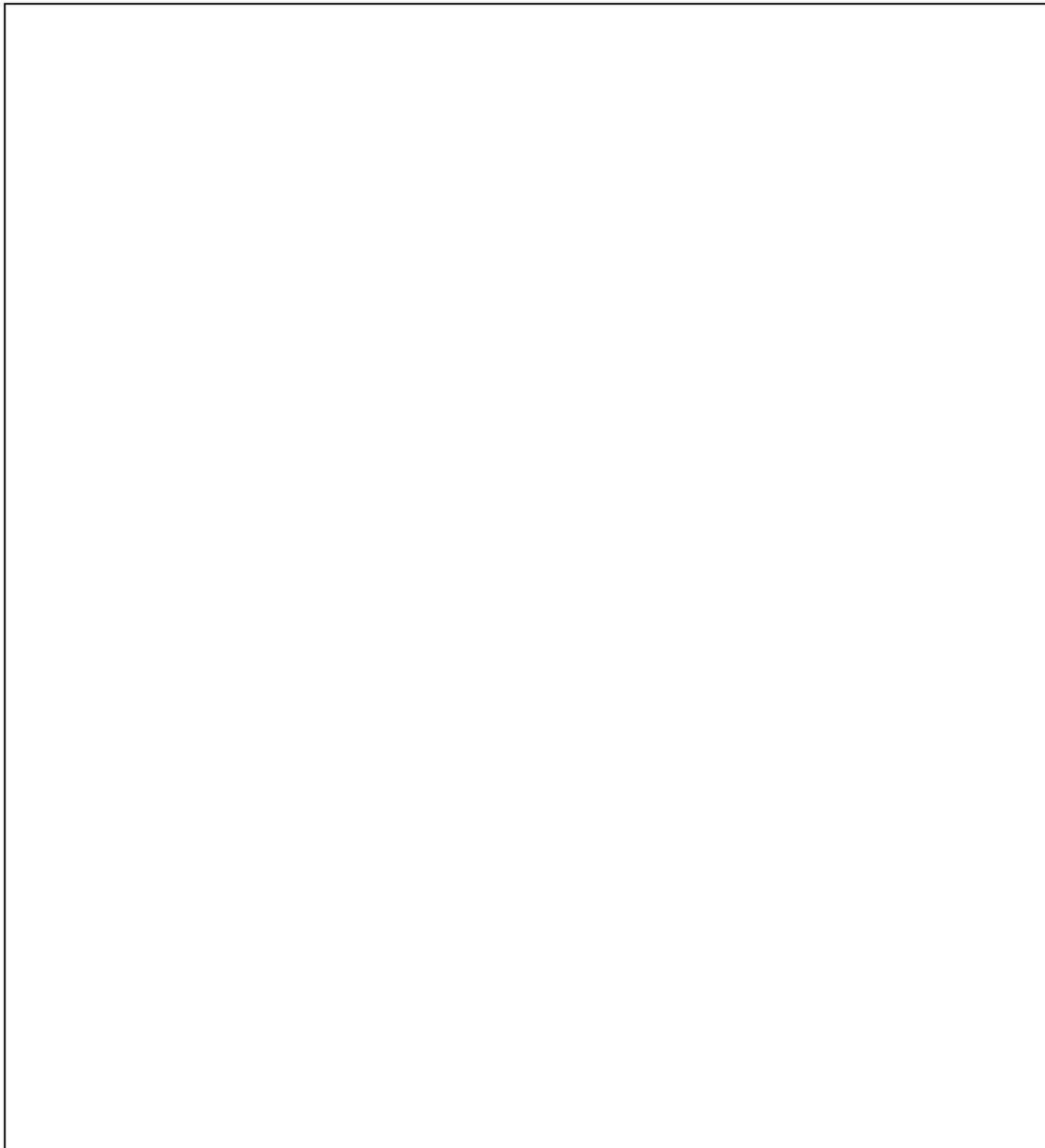
Name:

The Douglas Kagi Gift: Worksheet

Seeing spots (and lines and colours).

Several artists in the exhibition are known as 'Op' artists. Their work is visually stimulating, directly affecting the eye and its physical response to optical patterns. Find some works by these artists – their work is often geometric and uses strong colour, line and contrast.

Try creating your own work of 'Op art':



Name: