Hello my name is Tessa Asquith-Lamb. I'm one of the artists that works on the Gallery Social programme for the National Galleries of Scotland. In the first of my two videos today I'm going to be showing you a painting called Walton Wood Cottage No.1 made in 1928 by the artist Ben Nicholson, and in my second video showing you an art activity you might like to try at home inspired by that picture.

But first, have a cup of tea and look at the picture. This painting shows the landscape around Bankshead in Cumbria, very close to Hadrian's Wall, where the artist Ben Nicholson and his wife Winifred had a house. They would go out painting most days, but because their painting equipment was quite heavy they wouldn't stray too far from home. They would paint the landscapes and the farms around where they lived and that's what this painting is about.

We can see a white cottage, some fields, some animals and trees of different types against a greenish background. One of the best ways to start looking at a painting is to imagine painting it I find, and the background of this painting has an olive green colour that's been kind of swooshed all over the picture. So we can have a go at that.. If I get a rag and some paint I can try and sort of replicate the kind of swooshing background in this picture.

And what that does is two things, It gives a a kind of airy feel of breezes moving through the landscape and also gets rid of the stark white background of the picture before you start a painting.

Now we can start almost walking into the picture by looking at the tree on the right-hand side. This is a tall tree with really finger-like branches that reach up to the sky, and in the crook of one of those branches is a delightful detail that I really like in this picture, a little red squirrel.

Moving into the middle of the picture are two tall pine-like trees that remind me of the way I used to paint Christmas trees when I was little. There's one big tree in the middle and a smaller one behind it. Those do give you a sense of scale like you're moving into the picture with their difference in height.

Behind them are two fields, a yellow field and a green field. Now the artist's work was becoming more abstract at this time and he had looked at some cubist artworks and there's a sense of that in the way these two rectangular fields are flattened against the landscape. The yellow field might be a crop called oil seed rape, or it might be golden corn ripening in the sun. The way the fields are delineated reminds me of when I was a child growing up, where I knew where all the boundaries of all the farms were and it has that kind of sense of kind of delineated spaces in a landscape.
The actual cottage itself is painted white and sort of stands out against the green background. It's quite a low, hunkered down building with two dormer windows, and it has kind of like a little outhouse at the back.

In front of the house and the fields is a little brown horse with a black mane and he's laid down in the field and he reminds me very much of this little wooden horse (artist holds up small toy horse to camera) who came from a nineteenth century Noah's ark set, and has the same kind of qualities about him, which reminds me of him.

Further on in the background of this painting is Walton Wood itself, I presume, and this is up in the top left hand corner, and the trees in this area are really densely packed together in a kind of lovely little, almost like a little cameo in the corner. But how do you paint a wood? It’s such a kind of complicated thing to sort of put down onto a piece of paper or canvas. The trees reach up together and what the artist's done is he's left the gaps visible in between the branches to give a sense of all the different trees together in the wood and overarching over the top, a soft greenish canopy of leaves.

Down at the bottom of the painting a curved line leads the eye into the composition. This might be where a crop has been harvested or some sort of feature of the geology, but any line that leads your eye into a picture is always useful in a composition and that's what that kind of curving line does in the picture.

It feels to be like a kind of slice of summer life, and I'm recording this in summer and it does feel like that kind of time of year.

So I hope you’ve enjoyed looking at this picture with me today and I hope you’ll join me for my second video where we have a go at doing a bit of printmaking inspired by this painting.