VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Gallery Social: Wittgenstein in New York. From As is When by Eduardo Paolozzi

Video one: Artist Duncan Robertson explores Eduardo Paolozzi’s screenprint on paper. 2020

[08:55]

Duncan Robertson:

Hello my name is Duncan Robertson, one of the freelance gallery educators that helps to deliver on the National Gallery of Scotland’s Gallery Social programme. Today we’re going to look at two videos. One talking about that work I’ve chosen, Wittgenstein in New York by Eduardo Paolozzi, and the second video will be a short presentation on a collage inspired by the work of Paolozzi. So, hopefully you can get a cup of tea, and maybe you want to pause to make yourself a cup of tea and have a biscuit. Here I can offer you a piece of virtual shortbread on my Eduardo Paolozzi plate there, a cup of tea and follow this little video.

I have chosen this work Wittgenstein in New York as it’s part of Eduardo Paolozzi’s work from the early 60’s and 70’s - very similar to the print to see behind me here. This is a print that Eduardo Paolozzi gave me as a present when I was in Munich. I was an exchange student in the class of Sir Eduardo Paolozzi in Munich when I was studying at Edinburgh College of Art. I went across to Munich for an exchange program and I was very lucky actually, Eduardo took me under his wing slightly, took me out swimming, he took me to the opera, he took me out for meals. He was very interested, and I was very young at the time, in what I thought and wanted to do. Amazing – I’ve always been kind of a fan since.

And I thought if we looked at this print here Wittgenstein in New York, we could talk through Eduardo Paolozzi’s process. It’s a very typical Eduardo Paolozzi, you don’t need to look at the signature to know it’s one of Eduardo Paolozzi’s prints. It’s his style of collage, taking found materials from magazines and papers, things that people usually throw away. Putting them down onto the paper and using them in the image-making. It’s a silk screen print, very typical of the way he works.

Silk screen printing is a process where you put an image onto a screen, a very thin mesh and you mask off the other areas, then you put the ink down, you pull it across with a squeegee, the ink falls through the white bits, the holes and makes the image at the bottom. This is a process that was more used with industry - it was more used for advertising, film posters, very famously railway posters which are worth a fortune these days!

It was really thought of as an industrial process, not a fine art process. Eduardo Paolozzi was very influential in bringing that process into the fine art world.

In this print here we see his typical bright, joyful colours. We can tell it is New York from these high-rises in the background, reminiscent of the architecture of Manhattan. There is a flag that’s at an obscure angle, it’s reminiscent of the stars and stripes, but somehow inverted colours. And he’s using lots of symbolism that he likes to use in his works.
The title *Wittgenstein in New York* - Wittgenstein did famously visit New York. Wittgenstein was an Austrian philosopher and he was very interested in the ideas of speech, mis-communication and the philosophy of how people live together and how cities work, how culture works and that would have interested Eduardo very much. And there are other elements in the work, like these two crash mannequins that are in the centre of the picture, or anatomical diagrams. I think he might have got the image from something like a medical manual like this one. This is one which is describing the digestive system. Eduardo might have cut out an image like this, cut it out and stuck it onto the image and used it in this print. And he’s added compartments for the brain, different areas and the digestive system’s looking a bit like a machine. He was very interested and fascinated by the idea of the man machine - the robot! In fact, he was very interested in the film, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, he really particularly liked Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. Which is a sort of very early view of what they thought metropolises would be like in the future. The flying plane on the horizon might be symbolic of that. He’s also using a spiral, there in the sky. It’s a very strong geometric shape, used by artists very often in artwork. Perhaps he’s alluding to hypnotic effects as in some films such as *Vertigo* or *Psycho*, though perhaps conversely he’s looking at ancient cultures like Celtic culture or Mayan culture which also used geometric forms in their artwork. Eduardo Paolozzi quite often raises more questions than answers questions in his artwork. He quite often does things that are quite surprising actually in his artwork. For example if we look down the edge, we have these dots and dashes of colour. In the bottom right-hand corner there are little circles of colour. Now they are registration marks for the printer and they are usually hidden and away from the image, so the viewer doesn’t see them, but Eduardo has inverted them and actually put them into the print.

You see them quite often on things like this box here, a corn flakes box and it’s got these registration marks on it and this is to help the printer to know when they’re running out of colour or a colour’s fading during the pool of a colour to help the printing process and usually they’re hidden. And it’s very typical of Eduardo Paolozzi to actually show the ways of making a work. He really liked showing how things were made, the ‘behind the scenes’ part of art in artworks so sometimes he does quite surprising things!

And he was very adventurous in the types of inks he used. For example, we’ve got silver and gold ink within this print, *Wittgenstein in New York*, and these were very cutting-edge techniques at the time. Pulled through the screen, it gives this very metallic and modern feel. If you see the print behind me here it still looks very fresh and modern. It’s actually over 50 years old, but still looks very contemporary, I think! I still think we think of Eduardo Paolozzi being a very contemporary artist.

Eduardo Paolozzi actually is from Edinburgh and he is a very important artist for here in Scotland. He went on to be a big name on the international stage and his work has become quite collectable.

Well, I hope this short talk has helped you to look at and think about Eduardo Paolozzi’s work. And hopefully you’ll be able to join me again to do a quick example of a collage in the second video.

And it just leaves me to say goodbye and it will be nice to see you again in the gallery whenever that may be when we can get back into the gallery, we really hope the gallery socials will go ahead again. And for the time being, just stay well. Thank you, bye!