



GOVERNMENT ART COLLECTION AT WORK

3 June – 4 September 2011



Whitechapel Gallery

With over 13,500 works of art spanning five centuries, the Government Art Collection is the largest most dispersed collection of British art in the world. Placed in offices and official residences, two thirds of the works are on display in British Government buildings in nearly every capital city. Dating from 1898, the Collection helps promote British art and history while contributing to cultural diplomacy.

Government Art Collection: At Work, the first of five displays at the Whitechapel Gallery, is a selection of art from British Government buildings around the globe. Curated by the Government Art Collection in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery, the exhibition features work selected by seven public figures who have worked alongside art from the Collection in various roles:

Lord Boateng

former Government Minister and British High Commissioner to South Africa

Nick Clegg

Deputy Prime Minister

Samantha Cameron

Prime Minister's wife

Lord Mandelson

former Business Secretary

Dame Anne Pringle

British Ambassador to Moscow

Sir John Sawers

Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service

Ed Vaizey

Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries

Introduction

When works of art from the Government Art Collection are ‘at work’, they function on several different levels. All of the pieces in this display help to promote British art and build on the UK’s artistic reputation. Some of the works are placed in locations with which they have a direct historical, geographical or cultural connection. For example *Jazz Singers* by **Edward Burra** has been displayed in New York City (Burra loved New York and lived there in the 1930s) and *I Wonder What My Heroes Think of the Space Race* by **Derek Boshier** has been displayed in Moscow (the painting refers to the 1961 flight by Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin). Historical connections are reinforced by the portraits of Frederick V and Elizabeth, the King and Queen of Bohemia, usually on display in the Ambassador’s Residence in Prague.

Many of these selected works have been in several locations since entering the Collection. For example, *In the Cellar Mirror*, by **Norman Blamey**, has spent time in British embassies in Mexico City and Rome as well as at 10 Downing Street, while *The Doors (LA Woman)* by **Jim Lambie** has been displayed in New York and Los Angeles.

While some works from the Collection move around regularly, others stay in specific locations. **Bridget Riley**’s painting *Reflection* was bought for Cairo in 1998 as Riley was inspired by the colours of paintings decorating the walls of tombs in Upper Egypt.

One recurring theme demonstrated by the selectors’ choices is how important works of art are to the relationship that ministers and diplomats have with those who visit their offices. Commenting on

Bob and Roberta Smith’s *Peas are the New Beans*, Lord Boateng explained: ‘It was a piece of pop art which cast a less than respectful eye on that much-maligned breed “bean counters”. Cast in the role of “bean counter in chief” I welcomed anything that raised a laugh or at least a wry smile on the part of those awaiting scrutiny before they were ushered into my rooms at 1 Horse Guards Road [HM Treasury]’.

Art can be used to diffuse tension and the comments that selectors have made suggest that the works themselves can fulfil an important diplomatic role. As Sir John Sawers remarked about *Ben Nevis on Blue* by **Claude Heath**: ‘I loved the richness of colour... I recall a negotiation on Iran I chaired sitting under this picture. When the going got tough between Americans, Europeans, Russians and Chinese, we took a break for tea and reflected on the art work. Agreement was reached an hour later’.

We hope that this display – the first of five from the Government Art Collection – will make this national collection more widely known and give a sense of its richness and breadth while revealing the subtle and intriguing role that art can play in politics and diplomacy.

Penny Johnson

Director, Government Art Collection

Lord Boateng chose the following three works from those he had selected when Financial Secretary (2001–2002), Chief Secretary to HM Treasury (2002–2005) and British High Commissioner to South Africa (2005–2007).

Edward Burra's drawing of figures lounging in a New York jazz club epitomises the glamorous *bon viveurs* of Harlem speakeasies in the late 1920s. A jazz lover himself, Burra eventually arrived in New York in September 1933 where he lived for three months at the tail end of Prohibition. Fascinated by human eccentricities and popular culture, he was inspired by the characters he encountered in cinemas, music halls, sailors' clubs and bars.



Edward Burra (1905–1976)
Jazz Fans c. 1928–29
pen and ink on paper



Painted in bold text in **Bob and Roberta Smith's** distinctive graphic style, *Peas Are the New Beans* is one in a series of paintings evoking the vernacular of both street vendors' and protest signs. Vigorously proclaiming two vegetables to be the same thing, the work is a pun on the idea of the bureaucratic 'beancounter' as well as a critical comment on the fleeting nature of artistic fashions.

Bob & Roberta Smith
(born 1963)
Peas are the New Beans
1999
vinyl paint on wood panel



The soldiers depicted here were sketched by Manchester-born painter **Osmund Caine** in barracks in Aldershot, Surrey, where he trained before serving in the Second World War. This painting, with its awkward sense of space, works on many levels, and comments on the tension implicit in the impending war as well as the often uneasy relationships forged during war time.

Osmund Caine (1914–2004)
Spider Hutments, Mychett Barracks, Aldershot, 1940–89
1940–89
oil on canvas

This is a striking and unsettling picture that operates on so many different levels. As a reminder, still necessary, that the war against Fascism in which Caine served was fought by soldiers of many races. At the same time, what's actually going on in the artist's mind and what went on in the Spider Hutments? Caine came to tea with me in HM Treasury – an elderly, delightful man – he could remember little of the times although he did acknowledge the influence of [Stanley] Spencer. He had written earlier of the Hut 'it was a nice life but we were all strangers'. This is for me a wondrous and ambivalent picture, a commentary on war, sexuality and race.

— **Paul Boateng**

Samantha Cameron, the Prime Minister's wife, has selected the following four works reflecting displays at 10 Downing Street since 2010.



Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Homme Libellule II 1965
bronze

This is one of several studies the sculptor **Elisabeth Frink** made in 1965, inspired by birds of prey and ancient Greek and Roman figures. The daughter of a cavalry soldier, Frink's obsession with birds and winged figures stemmed from childhood memories of seeing airmen on the RAF airbases near her Suffolk home. To her they epitomised heroism and bravery. Later, as an adult, her realisation of the horrors of war informed the tense contradiction between courage and violence shown in her work.



Laurence Stephen Lowry
(1887–1976)
*Lancashire Fair: Good
Friday, Daisy Nook* 1946
oil on canvas

L.S. Lowry's painting depicts visitors at the annual Easter Fair at Daisy Nook, a rural beauty spot on the River Medlock near Oldham. His figures intermingle with each other, yet remain strangely isolated. Lowry once said: 'All my people are lonely. Crowds are the most lonely thing of all'. He painted continuously throughout his adult life, keeping this activity secret for over forty years while working as a rent collector in Salford. Recognition came late in life, fuelled by the popular misconception that he was an amateur artist.

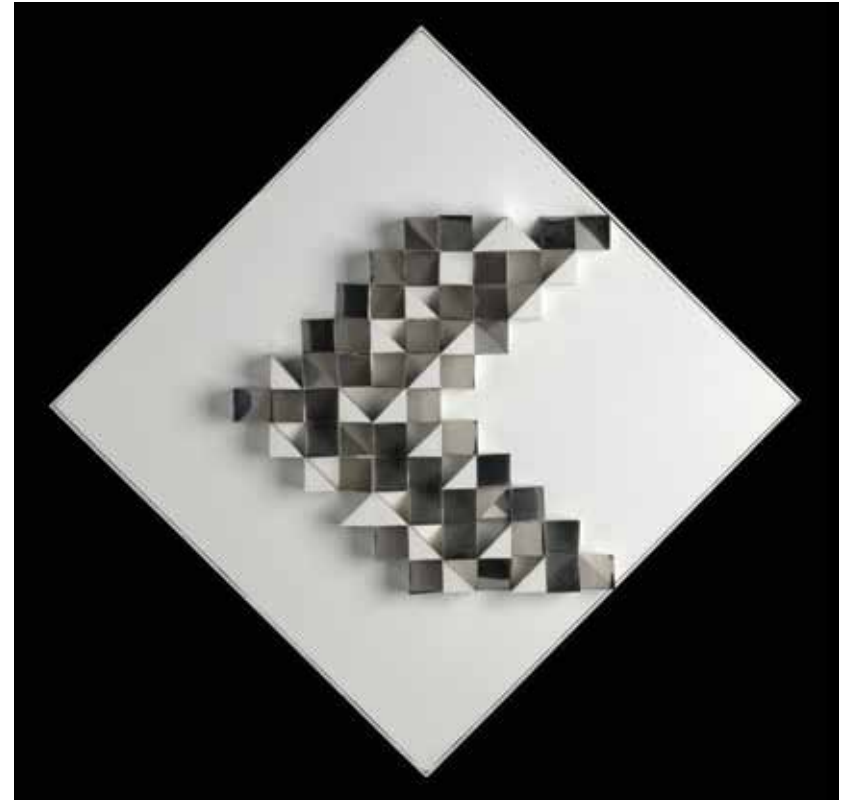
This view of London by the landscape painter **William Marlow** includes the first Blackfriars Bridge (built 1760–69). Most of Marlow's works are scenes along the River Thames or Italian views, the latter resulting from his tour of Italy in 1765. Marlow repeated popular views many times, generally with slight alterations on each occasion. He exhibited in London from 1762 to 1807 and produced at least five paintings of Blackfriars Bridge.



William Marlow
(1740–1813)
*A View of St. Paul's
and Blackfriars Bridge*
c.1775–76
oil on canvas

I've selected this work because it is displayed in the White Room that is often used to welcome guests to 10 Downing Street. One of my earliest meetings in here was with the Sarkozys. The painting is displayed in a central position above the fireplace and I particularly like its oval composition. Another draw of this painting is the River Thames which is hugely important to London and has become so for our family, now that we are closer to it and can walk along it more often.

— **Samantha Cameron**



Mary Martin (1907–1969)
White Diagonal 1963
stainless steel, formica
and wood

White Diagonal is a striking wall relief in the modernist tradition, based on the principles of a grid, with positive and negative areas created by the reflections of the bisected cubes. Simultaneously conveying a sense of movement and infinity, **Mary Martin's** sculpture has a handmade quality that gives the work its expressive power. Believing that art had a social role to improve life, she and her artist husband Kenneth Martin also worked on a series of public commissions in the 1950s and 60s.

Nick Clegg has chosen the following three works from those he selected as Deputy Prime Minister at the Cabinet Office (since 2010).



Zarina Bhimji (born 1963)
*Howling like dogs, I
swallowed solid air*
1998–2003
colour transparency
in light box

Here, in an empty room, the image of redundant fans evokes an atmosphere of abandonment. The enigmatic title of **Zarina Bhimji's** image heightens its ambiguity and sense of displacement. It is one of several photographic works that she made from 1998 after her first trip back to Uganda, from which she and her family had fled in 1974 as political refugees.

The painter and photographer **David Dawson** has documented Queen Elizabeth II sitting for his close associate the artist Lucian Freud. Resting on an easel is a small canvas revealing Freud's close-up portrait of the Queen. Taken from the perspective of the artist-photographer, this intimate image captures an unusual juxtaposition of the grand and the mundane in the surprisingly modest-looking surroundings of St James's Palace.



David Dawson (born 1960)
*Lucian Freud painting
the Queen* 2001
C-type photograph

Also selected by
Lord Mandelson, see p19

David Tindle, painter, printmaker and teacher, was born in Yorkshire. The subject of this painting is a picnic on Hampstead Heath in London. Commenting on his work in 1979, Tindle said 'The images I paint are of things that I know or can remember best... It is not a question of painting them as realistically as I can, but to get the right tonality, so that memory and presence are very close'.



I love this picture. Firstly because of how incredibly textured it is. But also because I find it so curious. In my mind picnics are, by definition, messy: crumpled rugs, spilt drinks, food everywhere. Yet this scene is so ordered. There's not a soul in sight and the dead straight horizon has an eerie feel. There's definitely a story here.

— **Nick Clegg**

David Tindle (born 1932)
Tea 1970–71
acrylic on canvas

Lord Mandelson has chosen the following five works from those he selected when Minister at the Cabinet Office and Secretary of State at the Department of Trade & Industry (1997–1998) and when Secretary of State for Business, Lord President of the Council and First Secretary of State (2008–2010).



John Michael Rysbrack
(1694–1770)
Sir Peter Paul Rubens
(1577–1640) 1743
bronze

Flemish sculptor **John Michael Rysbrack** moved to England in 1720, aged 26, where he remained for the rest of his life. According to George Vertue, in the early 1740s Rysbrack made a series of three full-length terracotta statuettes representing the Flemish painters Rubens, van Dyke and Fiamingo. This bronze is a cast after a plaster version of the original statuette of Rubens, now in a private collection. Peter Paul Rubens spent only nine months in England from June 1629, during which time he was commissioned by King Charles I to paint ceiling canvases for the Banqueting House, Whitehall.



**Unknown 16th-Century
British Artist**
Queen Elizabeth I
(1533–1603) c.1585–95
oil on panel

Queen Elizabeth I wears a rose in her hair – a symbol of both beauty and the House of Tudor – and holds the Lesser George, emblem of the Order of the Garter. Elizabeth sat for her portrait at least eight times during her reign. However, this work is not painted from life but follows a pattern derived from earlier portraits, which is the basis of several similar works by different artists. Such portraits are commonly listed in contemporary inventories as the property of wealthy merchants, the gentry and members of the nobility.



David Dawson (born 1960)
*Lucian Freud painting
the Queen* 2001
C-type photograph

Also selected by
Nick Clegg, see p15



With its pattern of curved triangular shapes based on musical rhythm and notation, this dynamic composition shows the influence of **Cecil Stephenson's** early training in music. Stephenson was one of a small group of artists, including Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson, that pioneered abstract art in England in the 1930s. It is one of three paintings based on Stephenson's original design for a large ceiling mural for the Festival of Britain. Held on the South Bank, London, in 1951, the festival was designed to boost public morale and remind the world of Britain's contribution to culture and technology, an achievement celebrated in 2011 with its 60th anniversary.

Cecil Stephenson
(1889–1965)
*Painting: Design for the
Festival of Britain 1950*
egg tempera on canvas
on board

I admired Hugh Casson and his colleagues' modern design of everything in the Festival of Britain. It was chic and edgy for the time. It was also nice to be reminded of my grandfather Herbert Morrison's deep personal involvement in the controversial Festival – echoes of the Dome? When I came back to government in 2008 I was rather pleased to discover the painting hanging in 10 Downing Street, in Jeremy Heywood, the permanent secretary's room.
— **Peter Mandelson**

Dame Anne Pringle has chosen the following four works reflecting her time as British Ambassador to Prague (2001–2004) and British Ambassador to Moscow (since 2008).



Walter Richard Sickert
(1860–1942)
*La Giuseppina leaning
against a Chaise-longue*
1903–04
oil on canvas

'La Giuseppina' modelled for **Walter Sickert** while he was in Venice from 1903 to 1904. La Giuseppina, a Venetian prostitute, worked as an artists' model to supplement her earnings and frequently posed for Sickert in his studio, a top-floor flat above a bar. Sickert painted other female models here – both singly and in pairs – creating scenes in which the models were shown posing in austere and dimly lit spaces.

This painting refers to the heroic flight on 12 April 1961 of Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin – the first person to enter space and orbit the Earth. One of a group of emerging British Pop artists of the early 1960s, **Derek Boshier** was enthralled by the space race – the ideological battle for space exploration that dominated American and Russian politics for over two decades. Amid the clouds in this painting are Boshier's tragic 'heroes' all of whom died prematurely: Lord Horatio Nelson, Abraham Lincoln, Buddy Holly and Yuri Gagarin.



Derek Boshier (born 1937)
*I Wonder What My Heroes
Think of the Space Race*
1962
oil on canvas



Flemish painter **Gerrit van Honthorst** carried out several portrait commissions for Frederick and Elizabeth of Bohemia in the early 1630s, continuing to work for the Queen after her husband's death in 1632. From 1637 to 1652, Honthorst resided in a large mansion in The Hague, where his students included Elizabeth and her daughters. The presence of royal insignia in both these paintings refers to Frederick's claim to the crown of Bohemia, which he maintained throughout his years in exile.



Gerrit van Honthorst
(1590–1656)
*Frederick V, King of
Bohemia (1596–1632)*
*Elizabeth, Queen of
Bohemia (1596–1662)*
c.1630
oil on canvas

The portraits of the Winter King and Queen (so called because it was predicted that their rule would last little more than one winter) usually hang in the main reception room of the Residence in Prague. Elizabeth and Frederick in fact reigned in Bohemia for a year, from 1619–20, before being driven into exile. She was the daughter of James VI of Scotland who, in 1603, became James I of England. Elizabeth was idolised in Scotland and England as a young princess. I particularly like her portrait, both as a stunning painting and for its connection to Scotland, my native country.
— **Anne Pringle**

Sir John Sawers has chosen the following five works from those he selected when British Ambassador to Cairo (2001–2003); Director General of Political Affairs at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London (2003–2007); UK Representative to the United Nations in New York (2007–2009) and Chief of the Intelligence Service (since 2009).



This work was painted in 1876, during **Albert Goodwin's** first visit to Cairo. The vivid colour of the sky continued to preoccupy the artist on a later visit of 1909, as he noted in his diary: 'Tried to get hold of some of the blue sky as seen behind minarets and mosques of Sultan Hussan [sic]. How illusive that blue is, how difficult to get it and avoid the look of paint.' A larger version of this work was exhibited at the Society of Painters in Water-colours, in 1877.

Albert Goodwin (1845–1932)
An Arabian Night, Cairo 1876
oil, watercolour and body
colour on paper



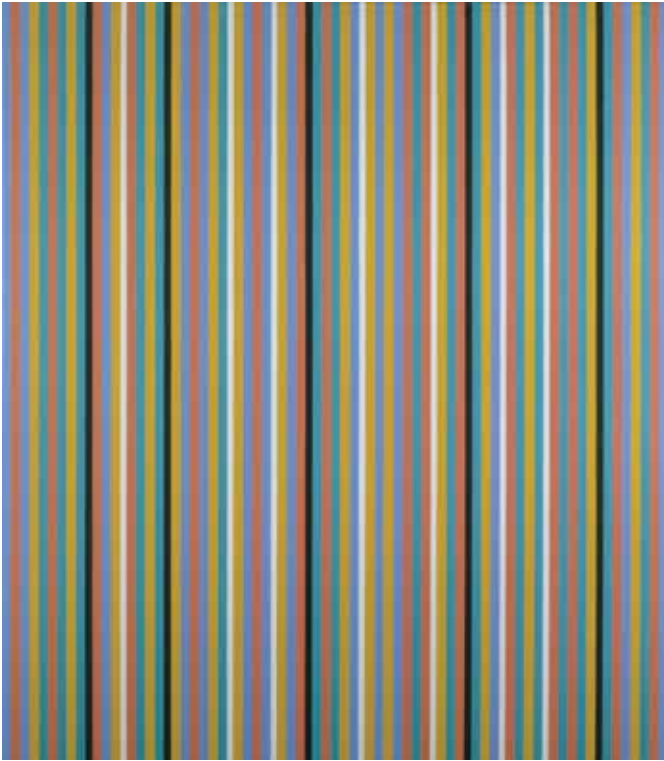
Norman Blamey
(1914–2000)
In the Cellar Mirror 1971
oil on board

Reflected in a mirror are two figures, the artist, **Norman Blamey**, and his wife, Margaret. This painting depicts the couple standing in the cellar of their home in Lyncroft Gardens, North West London. During the 1970s, Blamey often used the reflective surfaces of windows and mirrors as visual metaphors for the picture plane of his paintings. Creating a reversed image of the scene, the reflections distance us from the figures shown in the painting.



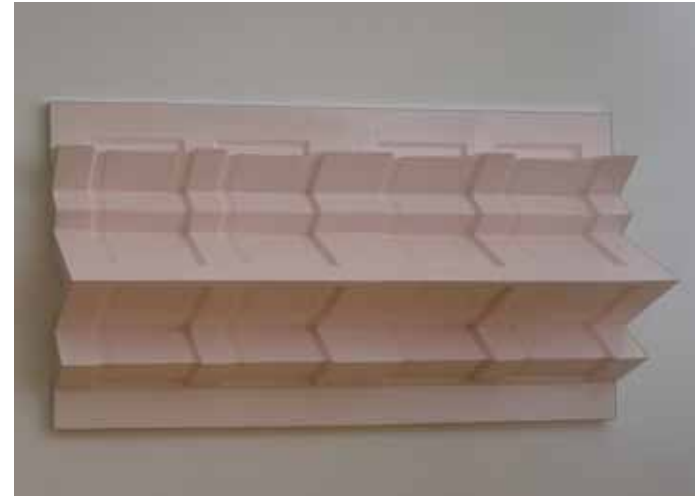
Claude Heath (born 1964)
Ben Nevis on Blue 2004
acrylic on polyester

Ben Nevis on Blue is based on two aerial photographs of the Scottish mountain as seen through a stereoscope. This instrument allows you to see images in relief and **Claude Heath** experimented with it while artist-in-residence at Christ's College, Cambridge (2002–03). This work is characteristic of Heath's working practice in which he often draws an object without directly looking at it, or draws from touch rather than sight.



Bridget Riley (born 1931)
Reflection 1982
oil on linen

While visiting Egypt for the first time in the winter of 1979–80, **Bridget Riley** was struck by the vibrancy of the colours she saw used in ancient artefacts on display in the Cairo Museum and on the wall paintings in the dark tombs of Luxor. On her return to the UK she began to incorporate these colours into her characteristic ‘stripe paintings’. This coincided with her switch from acrylic to oil paint in 1980, a medium which enabled her to fully explore what she calls the ‘plastic’ or spatial qualities of colour.



Jim Lambie (born 1964)
The Doors (LA Woman)
2005
wood, acrylic mirror and household gloss paint

This work is one in a series of door sculptures by the Glaswegian artist **Jim Lambie**. Painted in bright colours, these works appear to move and morph out of shape, divorcing them from their everyday function. The title refers to the 1970s American rock group, The Doors, and their acclaimed album *LA Woman*.

My most radical choice. I selected it with the GAC for the Residence in New York when I was Ambassador to the United Nations. We had a steady stream of international and American visitors and I told the story of the sculpture to all and sundry. The Doors took their name from Aldous Huxley’s book *The Doors of Perception*, the title of which was a reference to a William Blake quotation: “When the doors of perception are cleansed, things will appear to Man as they truly are ... infinite.” A bit like the ambition of the UN itself.

— **John Sawers**

Ed Vaizey has chosen the following three works from those he selected as Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (since 2010).

Using her life history as inspiration, **Tracey Emin's** work encompasses painting, drawing, video, installation, photography, needlework and sculpture. Emin was born in London and grew up in the British seaside town of Margate. These expressive monoprints look back to a time in the late 1970s when, as 'a teenager experimenting with love', she was always 'out on the town'.



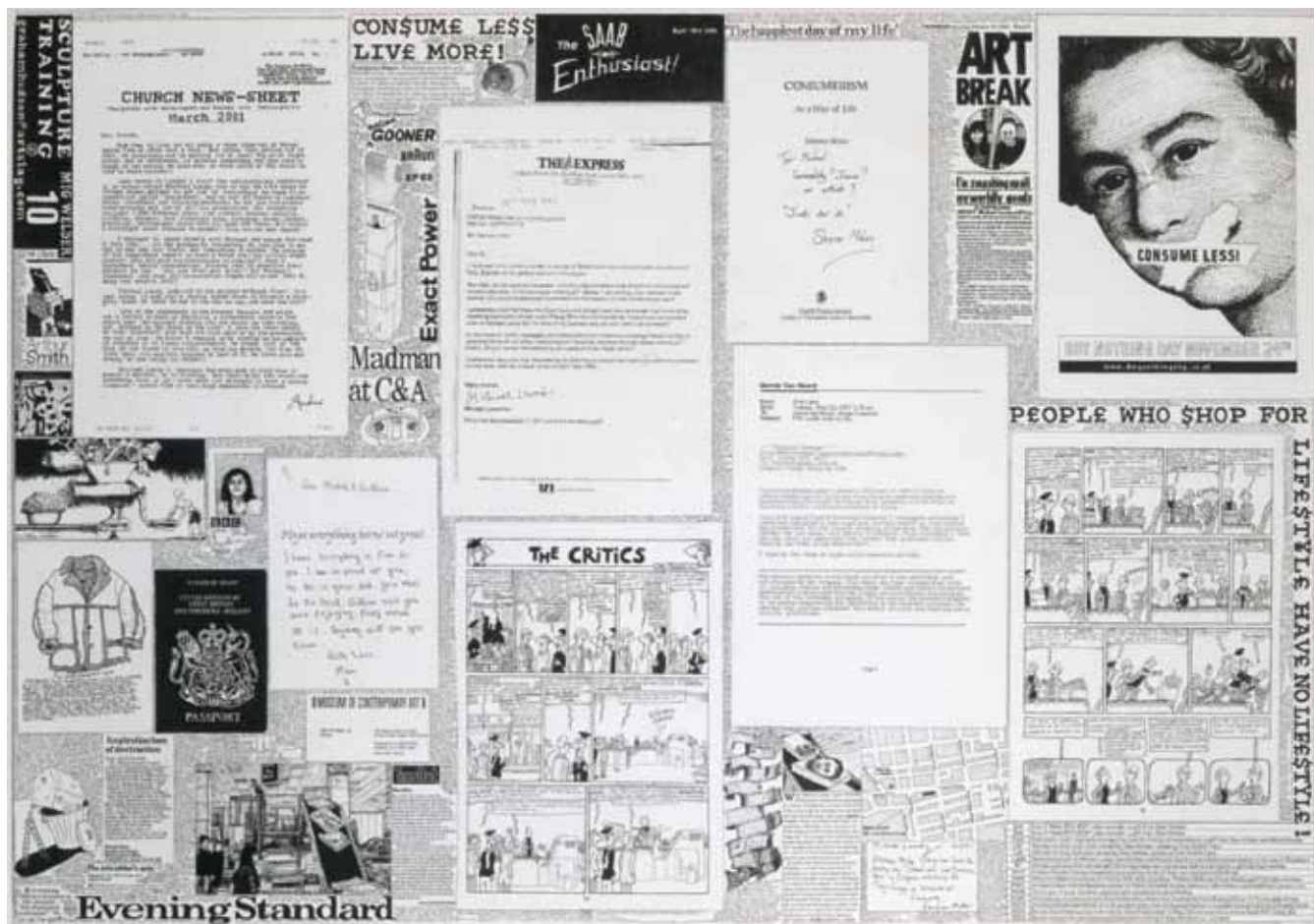
I first met Tracey Emin at a dinner about two years ago. I was terrified beforehand but she couldn't have been nicer. She has since become a great guide to art for me. I chose these pieces not just because I wanted to have some of Tracey's work but also because I spent every summer with my aunty and uncle in Margate as a child, so there is a strong personal connection for me in the pieces.

— **Ed Vaizey**

Tracey Emin (born 1963)
Still Love You Margate and
Margate 1 Sand 2006
monoprints on paper



In February 2001, **Michael Landy** reduced all of his possessions to dust in an event called *Break Down* that took place in the vacant C&A shop building on London's Oxford Street. Listing some of the 7226 items that were destroyed, *Compulsory Obsolescence* was Landy's first work after *Break Down* and is a hand drawn, playful record of the various public and press reactions that the event inspired.



Michael Landy (born 1963)
Compulsory Obsolescence
 2002
 pen and ink on paper

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