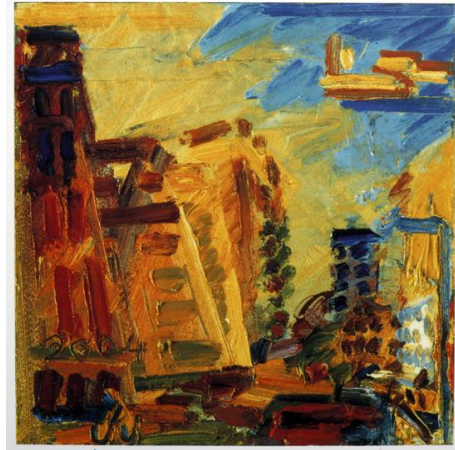


CITY SIGHTS



Frank Auerbach
Sketch for Mornington Crescent – Summer Morning II
2004



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CONTENT AND IDEAS

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Artists make a sketch, a small drawing, to record the broad outlines of a whole composition without much regard for detail.

What has Auerbach shown in his sketch for Mornington Crescent?

- The position, outlines and windows of tall buildings of different shapes and sizes
- A wide road and pavement in the foreground
- An aeroplane in the sky overhead
- A lamp-post on the right-hand side
- A single car on the road
- A tree in the distance
- a rough colour scheme

Auerbach talked about his drawings (in an interview on BBC Radio 3 on October 21st, 2001):

I do drawings... every day before I start, so that they're scribbles really but they're drawings of a different sort. At the beginning, I simply record and find how many windows there are in the building, and where exactly the chimneys are situated and all sorts of things of that sort because I don't know them, and it seems to me to be more interesting...Well it's all chance if you go out and draw, you don't know anything's going to be...then buses come across and people move and then you do more drawings and all sorts of sensations about pace and speed and the plastic coherence of the material that you're dealing with, and people walking across begin to appear in space, and you just make these drawings

and take them back to the studio and it gives you an impetus to do something with the painting you're working on.

Share this information about the subjects that Auerbach paints:

Auerbach paints the same small area of north London, around Camden Town and Mornington Crescent, over and over again in different weather and in different seasons. These places are a short walk from his studio.

He once said, 'This part of London is my world. I've been wandering around these streets for so long that I have become attached to them.' He also said, 'If you pass something every day and it has a little character, it begins to intrigue you... We (painters) make them (pictures) with the ordinary, everyday things, whatever greets us when we wake up in the morning, whatever we're hoping for. I am just recording what I see on my daily round.'

FORM AND COMPOSITION

How has Auerbach used the sketch to create his painting?

- He has used the lines showing the shape, size, angles, arrangements and positions of the buildings as the basis for his composition.
- He has included the aeroplane in the same position in the sky.

How does the painting differ from the sketch?

- He has used broad slashes of paint to define the outlines of the buildings and windows.
- The road is painted with a series of different coloured horizontal strokes, which seem to jostle for position and makes it seem busy compared with the emptiness of the road in the sketch.
- The aeroplane has become bigger and less recognisable.
- The sky in the sketch was indicated with blue scribbles. The sky in the painting is both yellow and blue.

Compare Mornington Crescent with how other artists have interpreted cityscapes:

Stuart Davis *New York under Gaslight* circa 1941

House and Street 1931 (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Hot Still Scape for Six Colours – 7th Avenue Style 1940 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Davis turned American city landmarks into flat patterns and abstract shapes. The grids, stripes, zig-zags, lettering and signs in vivid, sharply-defined colours suggest the bright lights, sights and sounds and vibrancy of urban life. His pictures have the energy of jazz music which Davis was passionate about.

Claude Monet *Boulevard des Capucines* 1873 (Pushkin Museum, Moscow)

The dabs and dashes which Monet used to capture this crowded, tree-lined Parisian street give a strong impression of hustle and bustle.

Piet Mondrian *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* 1942-3 (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

This abstract geometric work, painted in bright primary colours suggests the grid-like arrangement of streets, the vivid sights and colours of New York.

Romare Beardon *The Dove* 1964 (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

The figures in Beardon's crowded collage, made with fragments cut from photographs and magazines, vary in size and scale, giving this scene a sense of vibrant activity.

Jean Dubuffet *Business Prospers from the 'Paris Circus' series* 1961 (Museum of Modern Art, Paris)

This box-like patchwork of vehicles, shops with wares and signs, people in buses, cars, offices and cafes pulsates with activity and suggests the complexity and crowdedness of Paris life. People are depicted sideways and upside down, as well as upright making your eyes roam over every inch of the canvas.

How has Auerbach shown that it is a 'summer morning'?

- There is a yellow glow of the sun in the sky, set against a brilliant blue sky.
- Most of the buildings and the aeroplane are bathed in bright yellow light.

How would you describe the atmosphere of this picture?

- Cheerful, energetic, busy, enticing, uplifting, vibrant, bright, vivid, exciting, sizzling.

MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUE

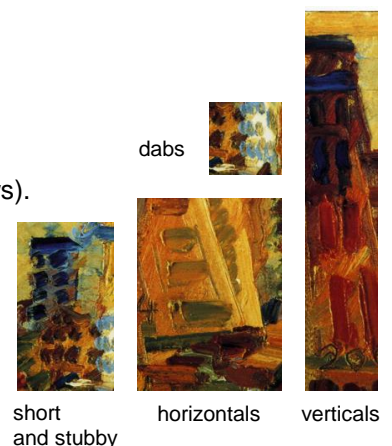
What sort of brushstrokes has Auerbach used for his painting?

- **Auerbach** has used fat, thickly paint-laden brushstrokes of oil paint.
- Some brushstrokes are short and stubby (for example look at some of the windows).
- Some brushstrokes are dabs.
- Some brushstrokes are long horizontals, diagonals and verticals.

Ask children to spot examples of different brushstrokes in the picture.

Share this information

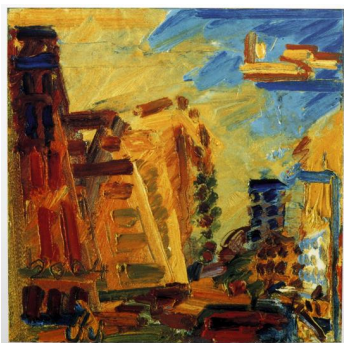
In his early paintings, **Auerbach** piled on paint so thickly that it seemed to have been sculpted rather than brushed on. If a work dissatisfied him, he would paint on top of it until, after a succession of



alternative versions, he arrived at a final one. At his first solo show, some of his paintings were displayed flat rather than hanging, for fear that the paint would fall off from its own weight!

Later, **Auerbach** changed his technique. He scraped off each version of a painting that he rejected and created a new one on top, until having looked ever longer and harder, he was finally satisfied. The completed pictures, painted with fluent brushstrokes, benefit from all these previous attempts.

A gallery guide to **Auerbach's** 2001 Royal Academy retrospective says that, 'The physical effort required to produce the large works is enormous. Painting the ultimate version of the composition, laid over the scraped-off remains of so many predecessors, frequently demands six or more hours of intense activity.'



Frank Auerbach
Mornington Crescent Summer Morning II
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Joseph Oppenheimer
Piccadilly Circus

Compare Mornington Crescent with Oppenheimer's view of Piccadilly Circus.

What is similar and what is different?

Similarities

- Both pictures show buildings of a variety of shapes, sizes and heights in London.
- Both have a blue sky.
- Both have a tall building on the left-hand side.
- Both show traffic.
- Both have lamp-posts.
- Both include accents of red across their paintings.

Differences

- **Auerbach** used colour to outline the buildings, whereas Oppenheimer used pen and ink to draw the outlines of the buildings and shape of the windows, arches, domes, towers and parapets and then filled these outlines with colour.

- **Oppenheimers'** picture is crowded with people, whereas Auerbach's picture is not.
- **Auerbach's** colours are brighter, bolder and more vivid than Oppenheimer's.
- **Oppenheimer's** buildings are recognisable landmarks, whereas Auerbach's buildings are not.
- **Oppenheimer** used lines and shading to suggest light and shade, whereas Auerbach changed colours to suggest light and shade.

Where do you think the artists were standing to depict these points of view?

- **Auerbach** was probably standing on the pavement some way back from the buildings.
- **Oppenheimer** was probably on a first or second floor of a building, since his view looks down on the scene. You can tell because you can see the roof of the buses, which you cannot see at ground level.

Which picture do you prefer and why?

Game

Take it in turns to build up sentences about things in Oppenheimer's picture. The first player says a noun, eg bus. The second adds an adjective, eg A red bus. The third adds a verb, eg, A red bus passes.

A fourth adds something extra, eg A red bus passes a fountain/ a crowd of pedestrians.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Frank Auerbach

Auerbach was born in Berlin, to Max Auerbach and Charlotte Nora Burchardt, a Jewish couple, both of whom had studied art. In 1939, a month before his eighth birthday, his parents sent him to the UK to escape Nazi persecution. This was at the same time that many Jewish children were also being sent to the UK as part of the Kindertransport. Auerbach's parents later died in a concentration camp.

Auerbach was sent to Bunce Court, a boarding school for Jewish refugee children in Kent, where he was recognised as for both his artistic and acting skills. He has remained in England ever since, taking British nationality in 1947. He studied art at St Martin's School of Art in London from 1948 to 1952 and then at the Royal College of Art, where he graduated with a silver medal and first class honours.

However, he was more strongly influenced by lessons with David Bomberg at Borough Polytechnic which he also encouraged his St Martin's classmate, Leon Kossoff to attend.

At 17, while playing a bit part in a play, he met the 32-year-old Estella (Stella) West, a widowed amateur actress who ran a boarding house in Earl's Court. She became one of his three longstanding models. (The others are his wife Julia and a professional model, Juliet Yardley Mills.) His way of working meant that paintings took hundreds of sittings to complete. West recalled that, 'he would spend hours on something and the next time he would scrape the whole lot down. That used to upset me terribly. I wondered what I was doing it all for.'

His first solo show was at the Beaux-Arts Gallery in London in 1956. and he had five solo shows there up to 1963. While still a student, he took over from his friend Leon Kossoff the Camden studio that has been his base ever since. As well as portraits, Auerbach has made a number of landscapes of scenes close to his studio, often taking building sites as the subject. Recurring local subjects are Mornington Crescent and the Art Deco former Carreras cigarette factory, Camden Palace dance club and nearby Primrose Hill.

Auerbach does not use outline sketches for his portraits, relying on his sitters being able to reassume the same pose time after time. By contrast, he sketches landscapes on the spot and brings these back to the studio, sometimes using as many as 200 sketches for a single painting. His work could broadly be described as Expressionist. The predominance of earth colours in his early work was largely a matter of budget. An annuity from the Beaux Arts allowed him to buy more paints and colours such as aquamarine, pink and cadmium red began to appear in his paintings.

Examples of other works by Frank Auerbach in the Ben Uri Collection

Nude Standing

Signed and dated June 1954

Pencil and red crayon

55 x 38 cm

Jake

Signed and dated 1985

Etching A/P

17.6 x 14.7 cm

Examples of works by Frank Auerbach in other collections

Tate Collection

Primrose Hill 1967-8

Oil on board

support: 121.9 x 146.7 cm

painting

Purchased 1971

Tate Collection

To the Studios 1979-80

Oil on canvas

support: 123.2 x 102.6 cm

painting

Purchased 1981

Other examples of work by Frank Auerbach in the Tate collection can be viewed on line at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=643&searchid=9532>

Joseph Oppenheimer

Oppenheimer was born in Wurzburg, Germany in 1876. He studied at the Munich Academy, and did numerous landscape paintings in the area of Munich. He moved to England in 1896 and taught at the London School of Arts until 1910. He set up a studio in Berlin between the wars and was a member of the Berlin and Munich Secession. He returned to England in 1933 and lived in London until 1949. He travelled widely spending time in Italy, France and Canada and briefly had a studio in New York. Between 1949 and his death in Montreal in 1966, he divided his time between England and Canada. His primary reputation was for portraiture, but he also painted landscapes and still-life pictures. He exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Painters. Oppenheimer died in Montreal in 1966.

Further information about the artist is available from the Joseph Oppenheimer Foundation

website: <http://www.josephoppenheimer.com/>

Examples of works by Joseph Oppenheimer

Lawn Tennis, 1898

Oil on Panel

24.9 x 33.5 cm

Sourced from the Joseph Oppenheimer Foundation

Haystacks on English Farm, circa 1902-08

Signed

Oil on canvas

Can be viewed on line at:

<http://www.josephoppenheimer.com/detail/1849>