

ArtSpark

ignite ideas and imagine



Discover **‘Male Standing Figure - The Priest’**
a wood figurine from 1939 by the artist
Ronald Moody.

This is one of 14,000+ works of art from the
Government Art Collection which are displayed in
UK Government buildings in over 130 countries;
that is nearly every capital city around the world!

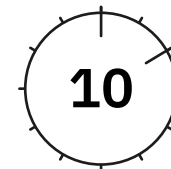


Ready to find out more?

Read online, download or ‘pick and mix’
any activities that you like. Try them at
home, at school or with friends.

You don’t have to do them all in one go!

**Look out for this icon for 10-minute quick
and easy activities...**

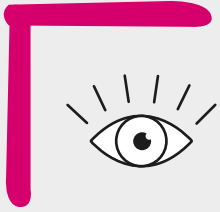


Ronald Moody (1910–1984)
‘Male Standing Figure – The Priest’ 1939
wood figurine
palisandre (rosewood)
© Estate of the Artist



10 facts about... Ronald Moody

- * Ronald Moody was described as ‘the most important Black artist in London of the interwar decades’ by art writer, Jean Fisher.
- * His wood carvings, inspired by the human form, were not realistic. Simplified forms, they may have held symbolic meaning.
- * Arriving in London from Jamaica in 1923, Moody originally studied dentistry - a career he followed alongside being an artist until the 1970s. Lacking funds and time for art college, he began sculpting with plasticine, then dental plaster. By 1930, he had produced striking works, but having to earn a living, grudgingly set up his dental practice. For three years, he worked by day in his surgery dashing home to sculpt at night.
- * Moody carved ‘Male Standing Figure - The Priest’ while living in Paris. A year after the Second World War began he fled just before Paris fell to the Nazis, travelling through occupied France, across the Pyrénées into Spain, arriving in England in October 1941. The sculpture remained hidden in a friend’s studio until Moody organised its return to London in 1949.
- * Moody’s career as a sculptor owes a lot to chance. Turning left instead of right one day in 1928 at the British Museum (BM), he walked into the Egyptian Room. He later described the moment: ‘... a sudden revelation came to me and I felt that sculpture was my real medium.’
- * The BM was an important space for many people of African and Asian heritage in London at that time. Its famous Reading Rooms were used by Black activists including Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay. In 1931 Ronald’s brother, Harold, founded The League of Coloured Peoples in London to combat racial discrimination.
- * In London after 1941, Moody lacked studio and tools, and suitable wood was difficult to find. Friends scavenged a railway sleeper, an oak beam from a cider press and a slender piece of golden oak for him - all were later transformed into sculptures.
- * Moody was deeply interested in the cultures indigenous to the Caribbean. His 1963 commissioned sculpture for the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, was inspired by West Indian folklore stories on the origins of the world.
- * After his death, Moody’s niece Cynthia, a film-maker and editor, devotedly documented and promoted her uncle’s work, securing his reputation in the art world. [Cynthia Moody obituary](#).
- * The Moody Crater on Mercury is named in Moody’s honour.



Starter questions to help explore the artwork



Say what you see

Sculptures are made by adding, moulding, or removing material:

- How was this one made?

Rosewood is a very hard, precious wood also used for making guitar fretboards, marimbas, black chess pieces and furniture.

- What does the choice of rosewood suggest about this sculpture?

Moody made this sculpture in 1939

- What else happened that year?

Think about the title:

- Is the Priest a specific person?
- Why do you think Moody chose this title?

Does size matter?

- Measure out the space that this sculpture occupies (height: 75cm, width: 27cm)
- Is it smaller or larger than life?
- What effect does this have?

How do you think being a dentist influenced Moody as a sculptor?

- Think about materials he used, his anatomical knowledge and daily routine.

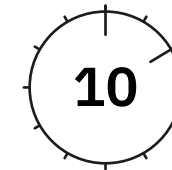
Remember his chance discovery at the British Museum?

- When has something unexpected happened to you?

Tree story

Imagine the journey of this sculpture. Carved from a rosewood tree (perhaps grown in Brazil, India or Madagascar), it was hidden in Paris, before arriving in London. Since the Collection bought it in 1950 it's been shown in many different Government buildings.

Your turn: write a travel diary from the point of view of the sculpture as it moves around the world.



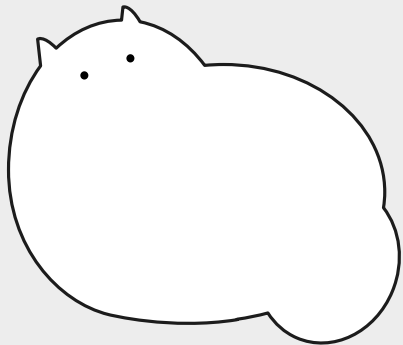
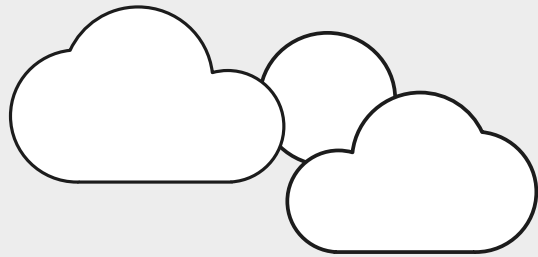
Musical inspiration

In 1934, Moody created his first wood sculpture, called 'Wohin' after a song of that name by the famous Austrian composer, Franz Schubert.

Your turn: doodle a tune

- Find any piece of music you enjoy.
- Listen to it carefully as you doodle.
- Give the doodle the same title as the piece of music.
- Display the drawing with the title.

Finding figures and faces in the everyday



'Found' materials

'Found' materials were important in Moody's work (see '10 Facts').

Take a look at his sculptures, 'Vision' and 'Anima' (right). Think about how the found material (a dark oak beam of a cider press) might have inspired Moody to carve out the sculptures.

- Did he 'see' figures and faces in the wood grain, or in the shape of the beam?

'Pareidolia' is the name given for finding figures and faces (amongst other things) in the everyday world around us. Enjoy [these photographs](#) of figures and faces people have found in the everyday world.

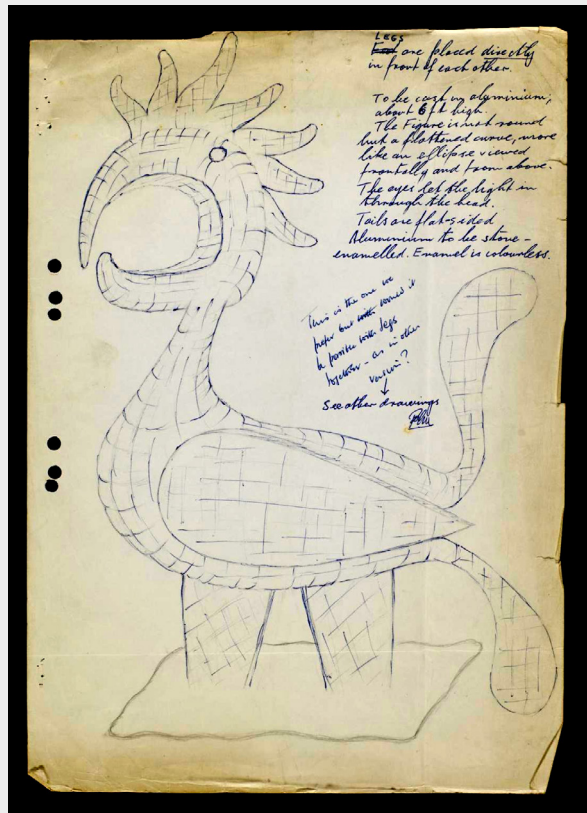
Your turn: find faces and figures

- Take a walk, looking with fresh eyes at the everyday world around you - buildings, cars, trees and clouds.
- Can you discover faces or figures in the shapes and patterns around you? Windows and doors on houses looking like eyes and mouths. Clouds shaped like animals. When you spot something, take a photo.
- Show it to someone. Can they spot the same thing?
- If you don't have a camera, walk with a partner, pointing out things you spot together.



'Vision & Anima' 1943-44
© Cynthia Moody, The Artist's Collection, Bristol, England
Photo: © VADS
(African and Asian Visual Artists Archive)

Moody's mythical menagerie



Sketch of 'Savacou' on two legs 1963
© The Estate of Ronald Moody

Photo © Tate Image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

'Savacou' is a sculpture by Moody inspired by West Indian creation mythology - stories featuring the moon and sun, stars and weather types. He created two birds, 'Savacou' and 'Couroumon', representing different weather gods or stars. In the myths, Couroumon controlled tides and caused heavy waves which upset canoes, and Savacou controlled thunder and strong winds.

Here's part of a letter that Moody wrote in 1964 to Professor A. L. Cochrane, who had invited him to make 'Savacou':

'On Friday afternoon, August 21st, Savacou, covered in cellophane, arrived for his installation on the sacred lawn of the Commonwealth Institute to the clicking and mewing of innumerable cameras. (I am not sure that he approved of his new-fangled, modern covering!) It was brilliant and hot and, after he was divested of his 'alien' covering, shone in all his glory, arrogant, self-confident and spurning his surroundings...'

Tate Gallery Archive TGA ref# 956/2/2/13/78

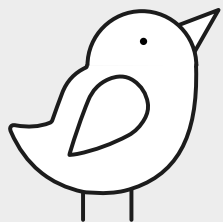
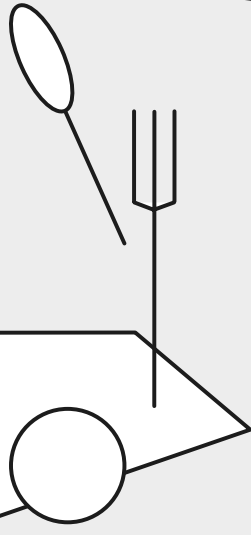
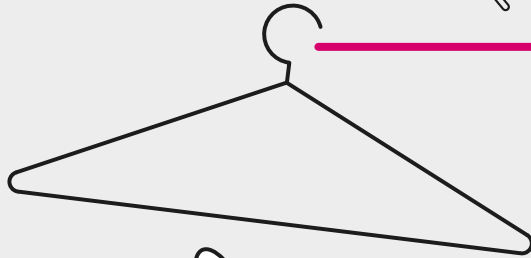
In 2014, the UK's Met Office began naming storms alphabetically. This makes them easier to talk about. Each season, popular names are chosen from public suggestions and names reflecting the culture and diversity of Britain and Ireland.

Your turn: make a storm creature

Use the Met Office storm names to collage a fantastical storm creature of your own.

- What will it look like?
- How will it move?
- Will it speak or make a noise?
- Will it have feathers or fur? Wings or legs? Scales or a beak?
- Give it some powers: what can it do?
- Now imagine where to display your creature - outside a famous building? In a garden? How big or small will it be, compared to its surroundings?
- Cut out your creature, and collage it onto a new setting which can be drawn or painted, or a photograph of a place.

Mythical birds



The phoenix, or the goose that lay the golden egg, are two examples of mythical birds.

Your turn: make a mythical bird

Choose a mythical bird, reading the story and discovering the culture it comes from.

- What elements are the birds associated with? Where are they found?
- How can you recognise your bird?
- What are its magical qualities?
- Make your bird out of scrap materials
 - pipe cleaners and tissue paper, or
 - plasticine and scrap paper.

Developing the idea

This 'Clangers' - inspired bird is welded from scrap metal.

- Can you (carefully!) experiment with everyday metal objects such as old cutlery and wire coat hangers to make a metal bird? You can ask someone to help you construct your bird.
- Find out how birds get their names (this is called 'taxonomy')
- Invent an amazing name for your bird.

Carry on with this idea: weathervanes

Weathervanes, often on roofs or church spires, show the direction of the wind. But why do they often feature birds? The answer is a mixture of meteorology and mythology! Weathervanes were important across Europe for weather forecasting, and in the 9th century AD the Pope declared that every church must have one featuring a cockerel, as a reminder of St Peter's denial of Christ. They became known as 'weathercocks'.
Discover more about weathervanes

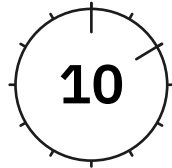
The artist Maggi Hambling chose to make her weathervane, the 3-metre high 'Brixton Heron', when she was commissioned to celebrate Lambeth Council's local regeneration project. One-time Brixton resident herself, Hambling said, '...one of the things I always loved was the diverse community in Brixton. So that's why I immediately thought of a weathervane because it reflects the many directions from which the town's residents have come.'

Hambling's print, 'Heron [Ardea Cinerea]' is in the Collection.

Your turn: make a weathervane

- Watch this video. It is quite tricky, but give it a go.
- Can you add your own mythical bird to the top of it?

An aviary of flower birds

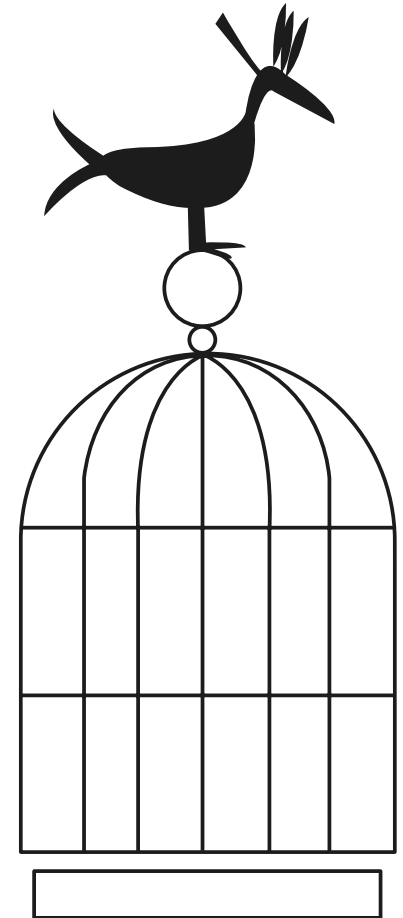


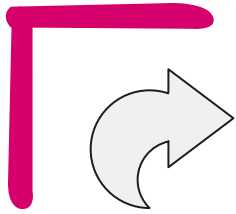
Your turn: make a flower bird

- Look closely at flowers growing in a garden, or a park.
- Select one flower and draw it as accurately as you can.
- Now imagine it as a bird: which flower parts turn into the various parts of your bird?
- Will the stalks be legs, and the petals wings? Experiment with different combinations.
- Give your flower bird a name.
- If you have time, write a full entry about it for an imaginary bird watcher's guide.
- The place where birds are kept in captivity is called an 'aviary': if you do this activity with your friends, how about displaying all of your flower birds together in an aviary? You could draw a large aviary on a piece of paper and add your birds inside.



Orchid Bird' 1968
© Cynthia Moody, The Artist's Collection,
Bristol, England
Photo: © VADS
(African and Asian Visual Artists Archive)





What next?

More to explore

- Discover the [National Portrait Gallery's activity](#) about Ronald's brother, Harold Moody
- Discover [Black art and artists](#) at Tate
- Discover artists in selected British public collections at [Black Artists & Modernism](#).
- [Ronald Moody: a way of life](#)
Caribbean Beat Magazine, Issue 46, Nov/Dec 2000
- [Caribbean Artists Movement \(1966–1972\)](#) British Library
- ['The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain'](#): an important exhibition from 1989–90
- Jean Fisher's article, ['The Other Story and the Past Imperfect'](#), Tate Papers, no. 12, Autumn 2009

Places to visit (in person or online)

These museums/galleries have sculptures by Moody. **Always** contact them BEFORE visiting to check if artworks are on view!

- [National Portrait Gallery, London](#)
- [New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, Leicester](#)
- [Graves Gallery, Sheffield](#)

Other places to visit/online

- [VADS Online Resource for Visual Art \(contains over 100 images of Moody's work\)](#)
- Search for material about Moody at the [Tate Gallery Archive](#)
- [British Museum - Egyptian sculpture online](#)

The Government Art Collection is the most dispersed collection of British art in the world. On show in UK Government buildings in nearly every capital city, the Collection promotes British art and supports British cultural diplomacy, culture and values.

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- / Over 14,000 artworks
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www.artcollection.culture.gov.uk

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