

Rachel Whiteread

ArtSpark

GOV/ART/COL



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Look out for the below symbols!
They flag up prompts that work especially well with those areas of the curriculum.



ENGLISH



MATHS



SCIENCE



HISTORY



ART



COMPUTING



DIVERSITY



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

MENTAL HEALTH
& WELLBEINGPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR YOUNG PEOPLECREATIVE CAREERS
IN THE ARTS

When you see this icon (hand symbol),
you can click on an external link to provide
you with more information.

This learning resource is
intended to bring you closer
to the series of prints
commissioned through the
TenTen Award.

.....

Bursting with information, you'll find suggestions on how to engage students with the artwork in a whole range of ways – from exploring the artist's themes and techniques, to pointers on curriculum links. The wide variety of prompts are intended to ensure the artwork is approachable and relevant, no matter what your teaching specialism. You are encouraged to run with whichever activity you choose.

Each resource kicks off with 10 interesting facts about the artwork – but you don't have to become an expert on everything. Facts have their place, but so do feelings, and one of the most valuable things about art is it gives us space to play, explore and feel.

Anything you think about the artwork and the words you use to talk about it, it's all good.

10 facts about Rachel Whiteread

- 1 Rachel Whiteread (b.1963 London) is one of the most established artists of her generation. She was the first woman to win the Turner Prize in 1993, and in 1997 represented Britain at the Venice Biennale. Her work is represented in international public collections, from London to Sydney.
- 2 Whiteread only started to study art at A-Level, which meant she had to do her Art GCSE and A-Level all in the same two years.
- 3 Alongside Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and Tacita Dean, Whiteread was one of the up-and-coming artists who became famous in the 1990s and were labelled 'YBAs' or 'Young British Artists' by the media. Like other YBAs, Whiteread's art was initially scorned by many reviewers.
- 4 Whiteread works with the idea of negative space – the area inside, underneath, or around an object. Using materials like concrete, resin, and even snow, her sculptures take the shape of everyday objects such as mattresses, hot water bottles, bookcases, swimming caps, stairwells. By showing us things that we normally take for granted, she makes us see them in a new way.
- 5 Although she is best known for her sculpture, Whiteread has always loved drawing, too. She describes drawing as being like a diary – a core activity to which she continually returns.

- 6 The work that first brought Whiteread into the public eye was *Untitled (House)*, a life-sized cast of a condemned terraced house in London's East End. Set next to an old Roman road, with a view to the rising skyscrapers of Canary Wharf, *House* told the story of redevelopment in this part of London. In November 1993, on the same day that Whiteread won the Turner Prize, the local council agreed to demolish the work following a heated public debate. Three months later, *House* was destroyed by a bulldozer over the course of two hours. Today, nothing remains but it had a profound impact on British art and sculpture.
- 7 London, and the politics of urbanisation, is at the heart of much of Whiteread's work. *Room 101*, for example, is the cast of a room at the BBC's Broadcasting House in London, a room said to have inspired the torture chamber in George Orwell's *1984*.
- 8 When Whiteread moved into her north London studio in 2016, she resolved to rid herself of all unnecessary ephemera. A plan chest of drawings were shredded and turned into papier mâché, some of which she cast on sheets of corrugated iron and had framed.
- 9 Whiteread's mother, Patricia Whiteread was a feminist artist whose mixed media works explored the degradation of the natural world and her father, Thomas Whiteread briefly ran an art school. Rachel's older sister Karen runs the charity Pram Depot, which provides recycled baby clothes and equipment to mothers in need. and her other sister Lynne, who is an art teacher has recently won a Primary Fourth Plinth Teachers Award.
- 10 When asked what she would do if she weren't an artist, Whiteread chose psychoanalyst, environmentalist or doctor. 'Basically, fixing the brain, fixing the world and fixing people', she said 'and that's why I think making art is important, because that helps do this and if we can get everyone to understand this we'll be set for life.'

Untitled (Bubble)




Why Bubble?

During the pandemic, the term ‘support bubble’ was formally adopted in the UK, as the government faced the necessity for physical distancing and self-isolation. Laws defined who could be part of your ‘bubble’. At different times it would have been your class or your entire year group. All of this was very recent history when Whiteread was making *Untitled (Bubble)*.

Bubbles: A short history



Before we focus on *Untitled (Bubble)* let's rewind to 2011, when Rachel Whiteread was commissioned to create a print for London's Summer Olympics which took place the following year in 2012.

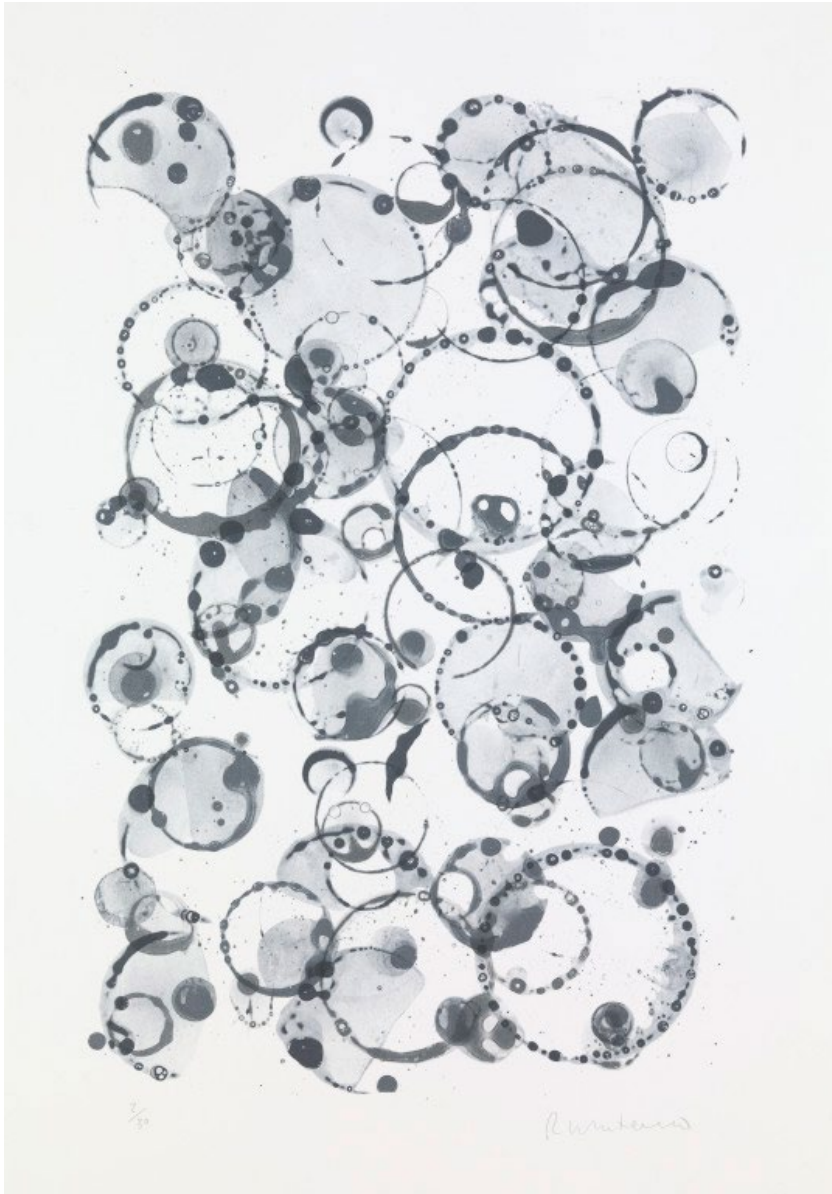
 **LondOn 2012** was a celebration of people coming together, the familiar Olympic rings turning into a pattern of overlapping circles that suggested marks left by the bottoms of bottles or glasses at a party.

Compare the artwork on the next two pages and discuss what they have in common and what's different. (You might want to consider Whiteread's use of colour, the titles, the quality of the lines, or your own associations).

In *Untitled (Bubble)* Whiteread's subject is COVID-19.

- Does she make the microscopic form of the virus visible and if so, how?
- How does she capture the time during the pandemic when we were reduced to only having close contact with those within our ‘bubble’?





Untitled (Bubble)



LONdOn 2012

Whiteread is known for making the invisible visible

I think it's up to the person
to take what they can from it.


— Rachel Whiteread

- What do the marks and textures in 'Bubble' remind you of?
- Find 'a bubble within a bubble within a bubble' – what does it make you think and feel?
- Identify parts of the print that suggest the following: celebration, ecstasy, fragility, uncertainty. How has Whiteread evoked these 'invisibles'?



Recording History:

Whiteread's work is one of ten artists' prints commissioned over a decade for the Government Art Collection.

In this short film, [Introduction to Bubble](#)  the series is described as 'an important time capsule'.

'I suspect that this body of work in time will become more and more important as people look back at it as a window into what that decade really meant.'

—Matthew Orr, philanthropist

- How far into the past do you believe history starts?
- Give an example of events from your own life that you think will live on in history.
- Think of something that will only be remembered if you record it.
- Who decides what makes history?

Visualising Information

Humans have always sought ways to visualise complex information. One early pioneer in this field was Florence Nightingale.

[Article on Nightingale as a data visualisation pioneer.](#)



[Florence Nightingale, data journalist: information has always been beautiful.](#)

COVID-19 generated a growth in information design as we tried to understand what was happening around us.

Here's a link to an article about this:

[The pandemic that launched a thousand visualisations](#) and [here](#) a collection of visualisations created during the global COVID-19 pandemic.



→ *Untitled (Bubble)* borrows from the language of information visualisation: what's the effect of an artist rather than a scientist referencing Venn diagrams?



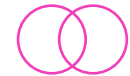
What does your data look like?

Working in pairs or small groups, talk together to identify:

- 1 Something you share in common.
- 2 Something that makes you unique.

Use this data to:

- 1 Create your own Venn diagram.
- 2 Develop it into a dance.
- 3 [Take a look at this illustrated lecture by Mona Chalabi on finding the perfect match of visuals to illustrate data.](#)



→ Can you now experiment with other ways of visualising your own data? Identify forms that are relevant to your information.

Negative Space

Negative space is the space around, within or inbetween the subjects of an image.

Take a look at Whiteread's ***Water Tower Project, 1998***.



- How has she used negative space in this sculpture?
- What is the effect of making the invisible visible?



Water Tower Project, 1998



Understanding how to use negative space is an important part of composition, as well as a fundamental aspect of printmaking.



5-minute exercise

Sketch some solid objects – a table and chair, or a still life of bottles, cups, fruit.

Instead of drawing the objects themselves, focus on recording the spaces around, within, and inbetween them.



Team challenge

Working in teams and against the clock, find a way to represent the negative space underneath identical school desks.

You can use a variety of materials – scraps of cloth, cardboard and polystyrene packaging, string, tape, tracing paper, crayons, pencils etc.

You may choose to use mathematical equations (volume, Pythagoras...)


You may take impressions (trace, rubbing, plasticine...)

You can take photographs, write, sew, even use your own bodies.




Negative space sells!

Graphic designers employ negative space to neatly illustrate what their clients want the world to know about their products and services.

Take a look at [these logos](#). 

- What's the negative space telling us about the products?

Animators use negative space to tell complex stories. Take a look at this 30 second campaign for the [World Food Programme](#). 

- How many transitions of image can you count?
- How long do you reckon this same film would be if it were made using a live action or documentary style?



Negative space hunt

Take a look at the logos around you - from trainers to delivery companies to pizza boxes.

- Which use negative space in their design?
- Is it instantly identifiable, or does it take a while to spot? What's the message?



Brand-New YOU

Using your own name or initials, design a logo that incorporates negative space.

- What does the logo tell us about you?

What do artists do all day?

Take a look at [How it was printed – Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled \(Bubble\)*](#)



- What skills and personal qualities does Whiteread demonstrate in this film? (You might want to include communication, technical knowledge, delegation.)

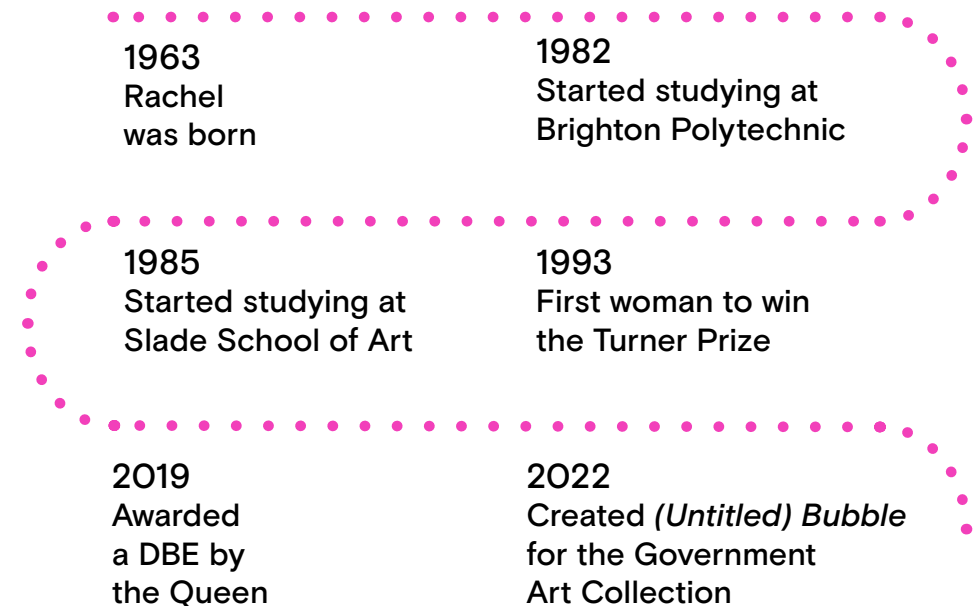


How many people do you think have been involved in the making of *Untitled (Bubble)*?

Create a list, starting with the artist, printers, framers, right up to the print in front of you.

- Can you take the starting point even further back?
- What about Whiteread's previous works that led to her creating this print?

Draw a timeline (like the one below), charting the key moments in Whiteread's education and career leading up to this print. You can give a fuller story by adding all the people involved and what skills they required.



Feeling inspired?

Here are some suggestions for extending the themes you've been looking at. These can be done outside school, and work equally well as solo activities or with friends and family.



Walking like Whiteread

Go for a walk - it might simply be from school to home. Look around you for hidden stories - things that make the invisible visible:

You might notice a **desire path** or a flattened can (how did it get to be like that?),



- You might spot a ghost sign on the wall of a shop or some graffiti.
- A lost mitten or a curious shopping list.
- Look up and down, behind and inbetween.

Find a way to record what you discover. You might try:

- A series of photos or sketches
- Written descriptions
- Rubbings and tracings
- Sound recordings

Make an exhibition, or a zine, or a poem from your finds. Create a group poem, each adding a line describing something you have found.



Further Reading

The Bigger Picture: Women Who Changed the Art World, Sophia Bennett, Tate Books, 2019

Places of Poetry:

project and resources



Content producer:
Claire Collison

Designers:
Barbara Nassisi +
Margherita Sabbioneda

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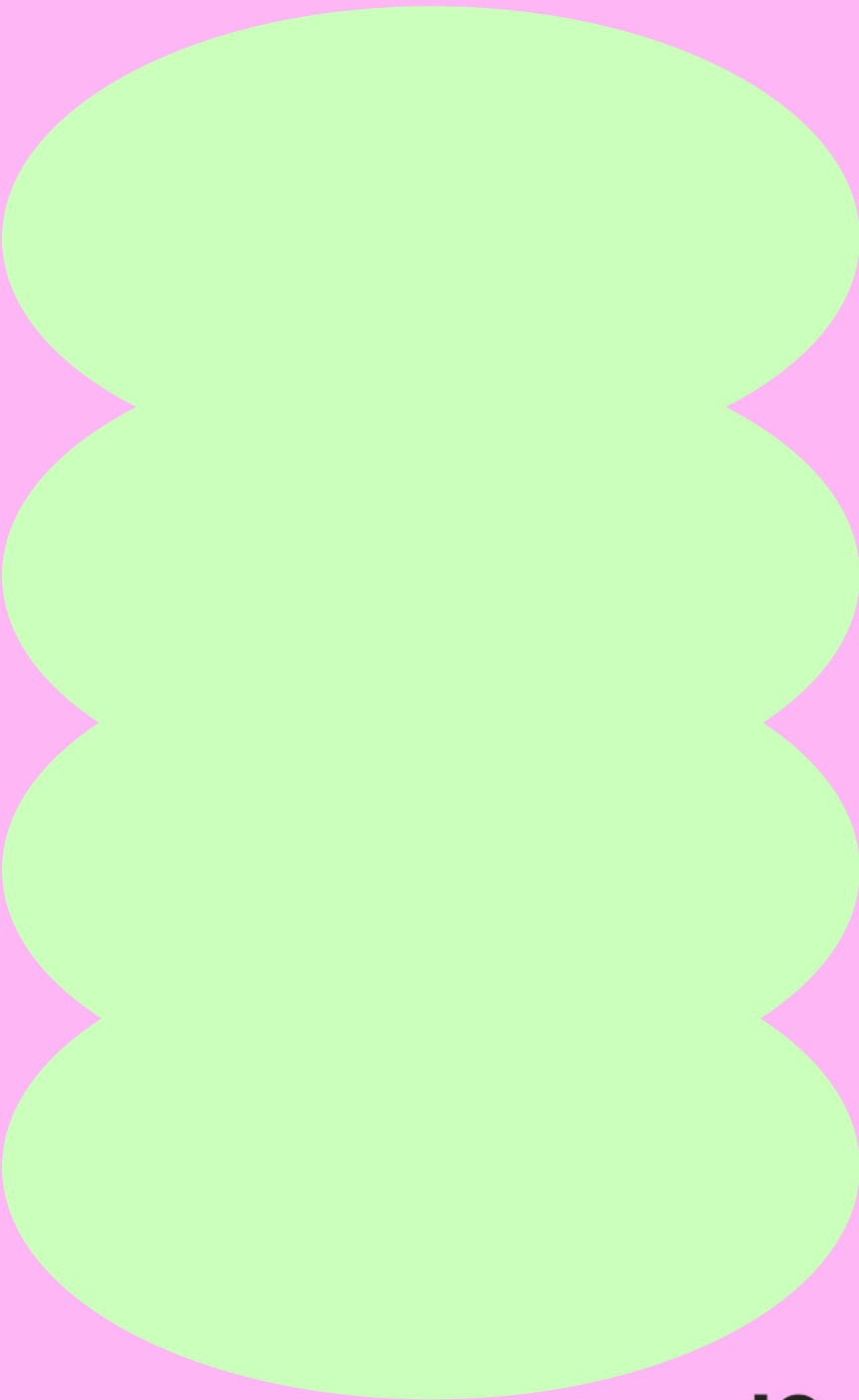
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