

Large Print Guide

Margaret Mellis: Modernist Constructs

16 October 2021 – 30 January 2022

Room 1:

Move round the room in a clockwise direction.

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Self-Portrait in Yellow Dress, 1950

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Untitled, 1937

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Banquet, 1939

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis: Modernist Constructs

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009) was a painter, albeit a painter who would eventually substitute her paints for a colour palette of seaworn wood and her brushes for the art of placement. *Modernist Constructs* reveals and focuses on the driftwood constructions that dominated the final twenty years of Mellis' practice, from the late 1970s (1978-2002).

The first room brings together a selection of works to illustrate how she arrived at making the constructions, from her experiments in collage in the early 1940s, through the vibrant abstracts of the 1950s and 1960s. The strength throughout was her confident and relentless exploration of colour and form.

In *Untitled*, 1937, Mellis captures her own reflection behind a vase of wilted flowers and an overripe banana. This early work introduces her preoccupation with decay, whether in her drawings and paintings of wilting flowers or in the deterioration of the painted driftwood she collected.

Mellis studied at Edinburgh School of Art in 1929, where she met Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and William Gear (Towner curator 1958-

64). Awarded an arts scholarship, she travelled across Europe and it was whilst on her way home, in Paris, that she met art critic Adrian Stokes (1902-1972), whom she married in 1938.

Cross to the other side of this room and continue in a clockwise direction.

St Ives and experiments in collage

In 1939, aware of impending war, Mellis and Stokes relocated from London to Carbis Bay, overlooking St. Ives in Cornwall. Their move would become a significant catalyst in the formation of The St Ives School, as several months later Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and their triplets moved in with them and thereafter followed the Russian constructivist Naum Gabo.

Surrounded by modernist artists, and amidst the chaos of hosting house guests and domestic duties, Mellis struggled to find space to paint. To remedy this, she was encouraged and influenced by Nicholson and Gabo to experiment with abstract collage. She used

card, transparent papers, and household labels to make these small compositions. Her innate skill in placement and humour is evident in Third Collage, 1940 - this considered arrangement evokes a playful narrative referencing the sun, the moon and society. By the end of 1939 the Nicholsons had moved out, having found a place to live close by and in late 1940 Mellis' son Telfer Stokes was born.

Mellis and Stokes' marriage ended abruptly in 1946, and in 1948 she married the artist Francis Davison (1919-1984), to whom she had been introduced by fellow St Ives artist Patrick Heron. The couple left Cornwall to eventually settle in Southwold, Suffolk.

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Third Collage, 1940

Mixed media collage on paper

On loan from Peter and Maria Kellner

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Construction with Yellow Oval, 1941

Mixed media collage on paper

On loan from a private collection

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Collage with Red Oval, 1942

Mixed media collage on paper

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Still Life with Melon, c.1947

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Still Life with Champagne and Tomatoes, c.1952-53

Oil on canvas

On loan from a private collection

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

White Wine Bottle and Candlestick, c.1952-53

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Blind Women, 1954

Oil on board

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Girl and Flowers (Orange and Purple),

1959

Oil on board

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Turn around and walk through to the large white room behind you.

Room 2:

Turn to the left and move round the room in a clockwise direction.

Artworks in the first case:

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Ivory Relief (Skull), 1970

Painted relief on board

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Little Boy: Blue on Pink, 1970

Cardboard and paper relief mounted on card

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Pink and Blue, c.1971-72

Cardboard and coloured paper relief mounted on card

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Artworks above the first and second case:

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Moon Shadow, c.1982-83

Oil on unprimed canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Unripe and Ripe, 1983

Oil on unprimed canvas

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Twenty-Seven, 1981-82

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Artworks in the second case:

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Sixteen, 1980

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Eighteen, 1980

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Driftwood constructions

In the late 1970s Mellis began to make driftwood constructions.

These works were born from a precarious heap of driftwood that occupied one corner of Mellis' studio. She nurtured this wood pile, adding to it after scavenging trips to the Suffolk shoreline – a short walk from her home.

The heap consisted of wood discarded at sea from fishing vessels and small boats. Each piece was imbued with the action of the time, from the relentless tides that washed them ashore to the indents and marks of their former function. A paddle shaped board became a motif that Mellis re-used in many works such as, Resurrection, 1985 and Evening Walk, 1986 amongst others. The paddle, or kipper basher, a by-product of the fishing industry, was re-purposed to embody and represent the essence of a figure.

She intuitively arranged and rearranged these wooden fragments on the floor of her studio until there came a moment when they were 'right' and fixed into place. The spaces, cracks and gaps left between the different parts of the composition directly related to her early collages.

The first constructions were numbered successively such as, Sixteen, 1980 or Twenty-Six, 1981. Thereafter narrative titles emerged for each arrangement, Cloud Cuckoo Land, 1991 or a title referenced a residue word or symbol, F, 1997.

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Heap, 1991

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Toy Cupboard (Thirty), 1983

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Thirty-Two, 1983

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Green Heart, 2002

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

In the Night, 1993

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Five Boats, 1989

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Collection of Julia Muggenburg

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Fisherman, 1990-91

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

F, 1997

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Cloud Cuckoo Land, 1991

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Room 3

Enter the pink room, start on your left:

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Flowers: Black and White 1958

Oil on board

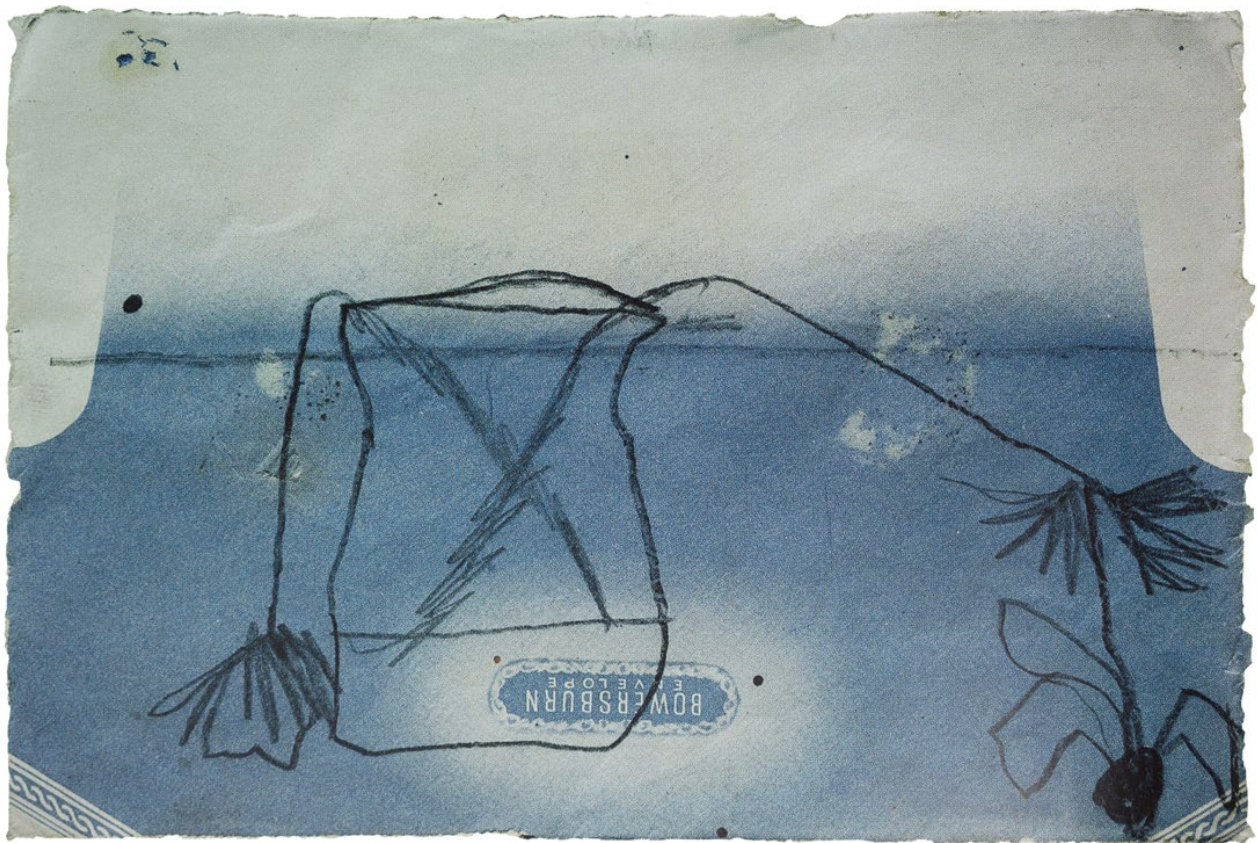
On loan from a private collection

Envelope flower drawings

Mellis' compulsion to re-purpose materials extended beyond the use of driftwood. She would diligently collect and store materials in her studio. Just as the driftwood was swept onto the Suffolk shore by the

tide, post was delivered to her door, the envelopes becoming a valuable resource.

Anemone, c.1956, was to be the first of many envelope drawings. A simple pencil sketch shows the bent stems of the anemone drooped over the sides of a jar, its flower heads too heavy for the stems, one rests suspended on the edge of the paper.



This insignificant sketch - for what was to be a painting - was kept and rediscovered by Mellis decades later. The mix of the patterned paper, the edges of the open envelope defining the composition and her swift mark making were to be a combination that she would continue to explore. She documented the colour and vibrancy of the

flowers both freshly cut and as they withered - often keeping them past the point of being discarded. The title of each work was taken from either the name of the floral specimen or the owner of the cut flowers.

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Top, left to right:

Dandelion Clocks, 1987

Crayon on paper envelope

On loan from a private collection

Prue's Poppies, 1989

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Auriculas in Red Glass, 1992

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Bottom, left to right:

Hollyhock, Marigold with Sage, c.1990

Crayon on paper envelope

John's Purple Pansies, 1990

Crayon on paper envelope

Anemones, 1990

Crayon on paper envelope

On loan from a private collection

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Top, left to right:

Barley, c.1995-6

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Fuchsias, 1975

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Green in Green, 1995

Crayon on paper envelope

Two Roses, 1987-8

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Ian's Dried Peony and Hyacinth II, undated

Crayon on paper envelope

Untitled, c.1995

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Bottom, left to right:

Untitled, undated

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Untitled, c.1995

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Dead Tulips, 1988

Chalk on paper envelope

Two Dead Poppies with Shadows, 1987

Crayon on paper envelope

Clematis and Lily, undated

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Matilda's Rosebuds, 1988

Pastel and crayon on paper envelope

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Top, left to right:

Tobacco Flowers, 1990

Crayon on paper envelope

On loan from a private collection

Purple Pansies Pink Envelope, undated

Pastel and gouache on paper envelope

On loan from a private collection

Pansy and Marigold Red Envelope, 1999

Crayon on paper envelope

Bottom, left to right:

John's Red and Purple Anemones (Blue ground), 1990

Crayon on paper envelope

On loan from a private collection

Black Leaves in Blue Bottle, c.1990

Crayon on paper envelope

Auriculas in a pot, 1992

Crayon on paper envelope

Walk out of the pink room, turn left and continue clockwise around the large white room.

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

The Bottom of The Deep Blue Sea,

1996-97

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Evening Walk, 1986

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

The Hermit, 1989

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Resurrection, 1985

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Buffalo, 1990

Driftwood construction

On loan from Austin Desmond Fine Art

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Ribbed, 2002

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Tree, 1992

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Cucu, 1985 (reworked 2001)

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Rust Yellow, 1990

Driftwood construction

On loan from the Margaret Mellis Estate c/o Redfern Art Gallery

Margaret Mellis (1914-2009)

Bogman, 1990

Driftwood construction

On loan from a private collection

Please return this guide to the holder after use. Thank you.