# Denzil Forrester

GOV/ART/COL

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

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



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

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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 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 you choose.

Each resource kicks off with 10 interesting facts about the artist – 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 Denzil Forrester

- Born in Grenada in 1956, Denzil Forrester moved to London in 1967. He received a BA in Fine Art from the Central School of Art, London in 1979 and an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London in 1983. He was awarded a scholarship by the British School at Rome in 1983–5 and a Harkness Fellowship in New York in 1986–8. He received the Morley Fellowship from Morley College, London, in 2019, and was awarded the decoration of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in December 2020. He now lives and works in Cornwall, UK.
- 2 Music and dance are Forrester's main sources of inspiration. His works immortalise the dynamic energy of the London reggae and dub scene during the early 1980s, a subject that has endured throughout four decades of his practice.
- 5 Forrester is less interested in accurate representation than in capturing rhythm, form and feeling. It was purely by chance, when he was in New York, that he discovered an old book, Kimon Nicolaides' *The Natural Way to Draw*, and learned that the name for what he was doing was gestural drawing.
- Forrester was three years old when his mother, who was part of the <u>Windrush Generation</u> of migrants, moved to London. He was raised in rural countryside by a local schoolteacher and her husband, as depicted in Reading with Ma Pets, 2018, until he
- joined his mother and siblings in 1967.

- Arriving in London and unable to start school for six months, Forrester helped his mother sew the shopping bags she made in their cramped basement. He would continue this work after school for years – a memory he's revisited in numerous paintings, including Family Living, 2004.
- Forrester met his wife, the artist Phillippa Clayden, when he was 16. Phillippa's parents (her mother a dancer and her father an artist) founded the Islington Arts Factory, a multi-arts community centre in North London providing artists including Forrester with affordable studio space and storage.
- Forrester often revisits his paintings and generates alternative versions. Some figures are repeated and used multiple times, so that the final works are never literal depictions. Forrester sees similarities in his approach and the way dub music is produced. The structure is kept, but the song is altered through new sounds and effects.
- Shaken by the brutal death in police custody of his friend Winston Rose in 1981, for some years Forrester focused on 'police paintings' portraying a community under the constant threat of violence and persecution. In <u>Funeral of Winston Rose</u> (1982) Forrester reworked a composition to include Rose lying in a coffin in one of the dub clubs Forrester visited, surrounded by Rastafarians and others who came to listen and dance.
- 9 For his Art on the Underground commission 'Brixton Blue' (2018) Forrester reinterpreted 'Three Wicked Men' (1982). Made during his time at Royal College of Art, Forrester has returned to his groundbreaking work several times over the decades, including in 'From Trench Town to Porthtowan' (2017).
- After moving to Cornwall in 2015, Forrester was contacted by the artist Peter Doig, who tracked him down, having followed his career for 35 years. Doig championed Forrester, kickstarting a surge of interest in his work. Within a few years Forrester found himself with gallery representation for the first time in his life, as well as a retrospective at Jackson Foundation, St Just, England.

# About the print



The print depicts a scene in a dance hall. The drawing was made in 2023 at the Princess Pavilion, a Victorian building in Falmouth, during the Falmouth Reggae Festival; an annual event attracting world class DJs and musicians. Having moved from London in 2016, this was his first time at the festival.



Denzil Forrester (b. 1956) *Altar*, 2024 Etching

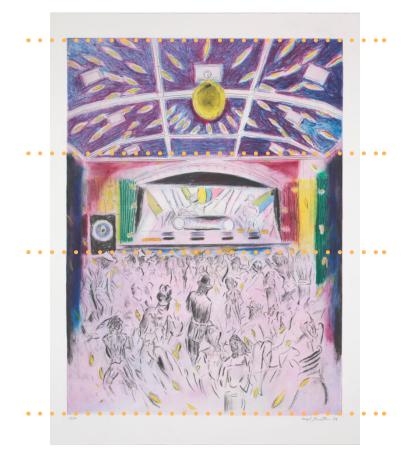


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Divide the space up vertically: how much of the print is dance floor, stage and ceiling?



- Where has the artist positioned himself in order to achieve this perspective?
- Why do you think he chose this position?
- How bright is the room?
   Where is the light coming from?
- Describe how the dancers have been drawn. Can you spot any people who have been included more than once? What effect does this use of repetition have?
- Why do you think Forrester called the print *Altar*?



If you were in this scene, what would it be like?

Imagine arriving at the festival on an October night in Cornwall, the sea close by. Inside, there are stalls serving Carribean food. Passing through a couple of smaller dance halls, you reach this room. Choose a point in the print and imagine yourself in that spot –

What can you see?

How does it feel?

What can you hear?

What can you smell?

DENZIL FORRESTER

Similarities and differences

Take a look at Forrester's *Night Strobe*, 1985.



The painting depicts a similar scene at The All Nations club in Hackney almost 40 years earlier.

- Compare Night Strobe with Altar what's similar, and what's different?
- Why do you think Forrester returns to the same subject in multiple works over time?

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#### Take a look at Forrester's *Family Living*, 2004.



Although the subject is very different, there are similarities: consider the composition, the artist's viewpoint, the light and space.

- How many adjectives describe both artworks?
- How many are the same for both?

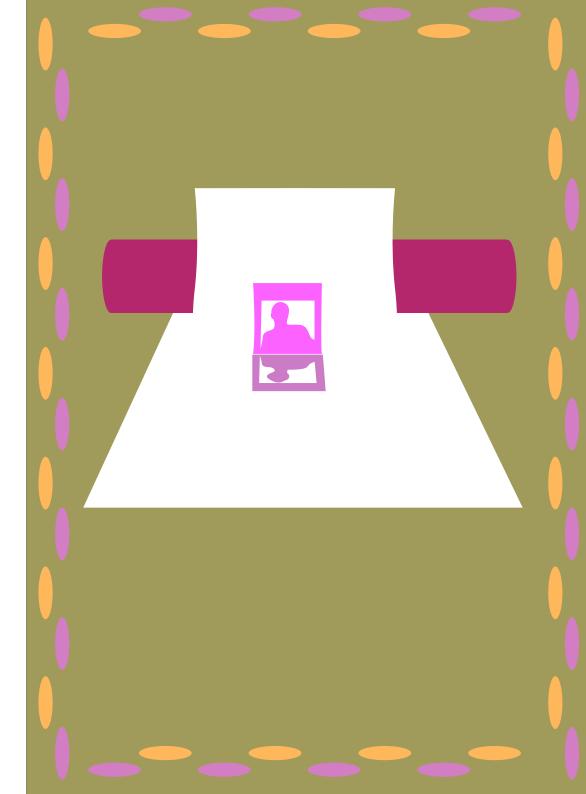


# The print

Photopolymer etching produces prints of drawings in a way that keeps them close in quality to the original but also adds some of the character of an etching.

<sup>(3)</sup> This film shows the printing of a four-plate polymer etching.

Work out which three colours were used alongside black to create *Altar*.



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# Activity: Explore gestural drawing

Using a method applied by Denzil Forrester, you'll be moving and drawing simultaneously.

'We are at a party, so we have to dance. You cannot draw just by using your eyes. You've got to draw what you feel, so hold that pose. How does it feel to be in that pose? What does it feel like physically to be doing that pose? Stay in it for 30 seconds. Enjoy it. Now draw it from the inside out.'

-Denzil Forrester

Prepare your materials:

Attach drawing paper to easels, or the walls. You'll be using both hands to draw, with a different material in each hand – for example, a stick of charcoal on its side, and a pencil clenched in your fist; or one pencil held by the very end and another close to the lead.

Working in small groups, half the group will begin by moving and the other half drawing them. At a given signal, switch – those who were moving will draw, and those who were drawing, move. Once you have had a couple of turns drawing and moving, try both drawing and moving at the same time. Try using different drawing materials. Start quickly – don't waste any time! Poses are super-short, so move and/or draw as soon as you are given the signal to begin, switching immediately from drawing to posing/posing to drawing. You'll have 30 seconds for the first drawing, a minute for the next few, building up to 2 minutes.

You might want to add music and experiment with lighting – if you have a mirror ball [see activity on page 40] use that.

Don't forget to draw with both hands, feeling the different materials expressing different energies. *And stop thinking about it* – because, as Forrester says, 'once you start thinking, it's not going to happen, it's gone.'



# Activity: Play sketch bingo

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Drawing a crowd that is moving or a busy environment demands fast sketching.

Visit somewhere where you can stay undisturbed and observe people moving about – a shopping centre, a park, a playground, an ice rink, a swimming pool, the foyer of a cinema...

Before you start, create a sketch bingo card – use this <u>template</u> and write in the grid descriptions of subjects to spot and sketch. You can repeat a few.

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Tick off the squares once you've found and sketched them.

Your subjects will change depending on where you choose to sketch, but here are some suggestions of subjects you may spot if you're drawing in a shopping centre or on the high street.

Someone....

with children, with a dog, with two dogs, in a hurry, with lots of shopping, taking a break, lost, playing, having fun, having a bad day, relaxing, stressed, old, young.

#### Viewed...

from above, at eye level, from ground level. You can either stop after an agreed time (in which case, the pressure is on to be speedy), or when you have completed a certain number, or after you have completed the entire grid. Once you return with your sketches, spend some time looking through them. Are there any you are particularly pleased with?

Develop this activity by working up a composition: incorporate the sketched subjects into a location (will you use the same place where you originally sketched them, or choose somewhere totally different?)

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# 2 Capturing motion

Done quickly on dark dance floors, Forrester's drawings capture energy and rhythm as much as form and colour. The following activities explore a range of ways to capture movement.

# Activity : Draw with light (and count some elephants)

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Did you know 'photography' is derived from the words 'light' and 'draw'? This article shows Picasso literally drawing with light – which is exactly what you'll be doing. Work with a partner, taking turns to be the artist and the technician.

You'll need a camera with long exposure capabilities (the longer the better). This can be SLR but it doesn't have to be – you can get great results with a phone camera; a source of light (a torch works well), and a darkened room.

Position the camera about 10 feet away, ensuring the artist is in frame, with enough room to swing their arms and draw. Take the picture in daylight to make sure the spot is in focus.

Set the shutter speed: for a camera with manual mode, use 30 seconds on f2.5; for a phone camera, experiment with the longest available shutter speed. Grab your torch and switch off the lights.

Take the Picture – The technician counts down and presses the capture button. At a given signal, the artist draws in the air, using a torch or other light source. It can help if the technician counts out the seconds available (traditionally, seconds are counted in elephants: '*One elephant, two elephant*', etc.) Try not to shine the light source directly at the camera, as this will produce a 'twinkle'.

If you want to stop a line segment and start a new one, you can cover the light source with your hand and move it over to where the new line segment will start. (If you have a torch, just turn it off, move, and turn it back on).

> DO NOT TURN THE LIGHTS BACK ON UNTIL YOU'RE SURE THE CAMERA HAS FINISHED TAKING THE PICTURE!

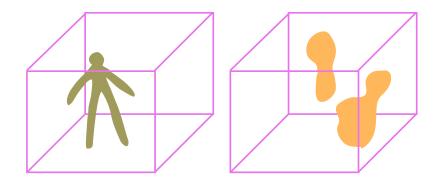


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# Activity : Capture motion (and emotion)

Motion capture – or mo-cap – is the name for technology that records the movement of people or objects. The motion is captured by the tech and the data is transferred to a computer programme to enable photorealism in a virtual environment. To become a motion capture artist, it helps to have a degree in computer animation, graphic design or a related field. The artist must be both skilled with technology and talented in art to turn creative ideas into digital. While the technology is expensive and difficult to access, you can get an idea of what's involved from this free app and the tutorial that allows you to create 3D motion capture animation without a suit or tracking devices directly from video.

Select a simple action – a sports celebration, or simple dance move. Follow the tutorial to render your movement in the virtual world.



# Activity:

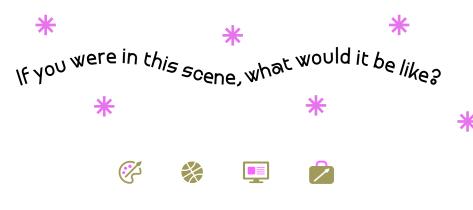
# Create patterns using salt and sound waves

Vibrations from sound waves create beautiful patterns, which you can see, using a few simple pieces of equipment.

- This Resonance Experiment shows you how to build a Chladni plate that visualises energy, frequency and vibration. Substitute a metal plate and tone generator with a flat black baking tray (or stiff black card), a mobile phone, a small portable bluetooth speaker and this free online sound generator (does not require installation).
- \**The sound produced is loud, so use earplugs!*\* Place the speaker on a flat surface, balance the tray or card (large enough to cover the speaker) on top. Sprinkle the plate with salt (or you could try couscous, or fine white sugar).

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Increase the frequencies through the sound generator. As the pitch of the tone increases, geometric patterns will form and become more complex.



# Dub

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Dub started life as a subgenre of reggae in the 1960s. The style is named for the dubplates used in the manufacture of vinyl records. Dub music is traditionally created by taking an original track and stripping it back by emphasising the bass lines and taking out the vocals. This is then augmented with a combination of effects — echo, reverb, vocal samples, etc.



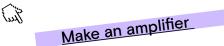
What's the connection between dub music and Forrester's visual art practice? Forrester likens his approach to dub music, with its culture of remixes:

'You can do all sorts with a good record, and it's the same thing with painting. It's quite exciting when you're doing a painting you've done three or four times before.'

# Activity : Build a cardboard sound system

Create simple speakers

This link demonstrates how to make a variety of simple speakers from everyday items that can be built to investigate how speakers work: a simple coil glued to a piece of paper, conduction speakers that only you can hear, how to turn any surface into a speaker, and paper plate speakers are all demonstrated and explained.



This link demonstrates how to build a simple cardboard amplifier for use with a smartphone. Once you've built your sound system, play some tunes through it.

Here's Denzil Forrester's playlist





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Activity : Explore dub – from no-tech and low-tech to multi track



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#### Minimal technology?

To create some human dub, you'll need at least three people and up to a class.

Each person creates a different repeatable sound – it could be made on an instrument, or with your voice, or using a smartphone as a recorder. One person is the controller. They bring the sounds in, one at a time, until everyone is included. Follow the controller's instructions to drop out, until just one or two sounds remain. Come back in when the controller instructs. ARTSPARK

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#### Volume control

Play a song on whatever device you have. During the tune drop down the volume and make some noise over the top, keeping an awareness of the song's original rhythm. Bring the volume back up: have you kept true to the timing?

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#### Fancy some toast?

Toasting is a form of rapping that is improvised over a dub record.

Take a karaoke version of a song.

Ignoring the provided lyrics and melody line, use it as backing for your own toasting.

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Access to a computer? Download a free multi-track audio editor to try out these simple dub experiments: Explore importing and combining two or more sounds, then drop out one of them. Get two distinct sounds to run in parallel. For more advanced mixing, take a look at What Dub Mixing Is & How To Do It Solution





Time, space and place

'The paintings mean a lot to me because I captured the energy of a time and space that simply doesn't exist any more.'



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In <u>*Night Strobe*</u>, 1985 Forrester captures the night life in The All Nations club in Hackney, London, which used to be the oldest Black nightclub in the country but no longer exists.

*Altar* depicts a reggae festival in a Victorian dance hall: imagine what Victorians would make of the scene, if they returned today?

Take a look <u>at this article</u> and imagine someone from the Black community living in Victorian England visiting the dance hall and glimpsing into the future.

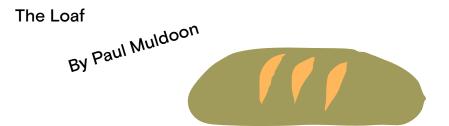






Imagining – asking '*what if?*'– is one of the tools writers use. Old buildings can tell us a great deal about the past. Take a look at how two poets use specific buildings to uncover the histories of earlier inhabitants.

1. Paul Muldoon, a poet originally from Northern Ireland and who now lives in the United States, is exploring an old house that is about to be modernised. The loaf of the title, we learn, is baked by an Irish immigrant labourer on the Raritan to Delaware Canal in New Jersey. These men, many of whom had fled famine in Ireland, worked for next to nothing, in wretched conditions.



When I put my finger to the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch in a wall of plaster stiffened with horsehair it seems I've scratched a two-hundred-year-old itch

with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick.

When I put my ear to the hole I'm suddenly aware of spades and shovels turning up the gain all the way from Raritan to the Delaware

with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click.

When I put my nose to the hole I smell the floodplain of the canal after a hurricane and the spots of green grass where thousands of Irish have lain

with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick.

When I put my eye to the hole I see one holding horse dung to the rain in the hope, indeed, indeed, of washing out a few whole ears of grain

with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick.

And when I do at last succeed in putting my mouth to the horsehair-fringed niche I can taste the small loaf of bread he baked from that whole seed

with a link and a link and a linky-lick.

The Loaf by Paul Muldoon on Poetry Foundation website

# Activity : Discuss the poem, considering the following

- How do we learn that the house is old and about to be modernised?
- How does Muldoon use the senses to connect us to the past?
- What does the way in which the loaf of bread was made tell us about this time in history?
- Why do you think Muldoon used the nursery rhyme lines between each stanza? What effect do they have on the poem as a whole?

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Analysis of The Loaf from The Friday Poem website 2. The poet Kim Moore is charged with writing a poem inspired by the Seamen's Orphan Institution, in Liverpool, later a hospital for people suffering with mental illness, and now a site for ghost tours. (listen to Kim's poem: 25.15 - end)

Out of Abandonment (30 minute radio programme)

#### Liverpool Seamans Orphanage

By Kim Moore

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Now the rain has made its way inside to gather in puddles in the dormitories, or seep through soaring wooden beams, now the wet-rot and the dry-rot has taken hold, now the roof of the swimming pool has fallen in, dragged down by weather or unseen hands, now the paint is peeling from the walls, the stained glass in the chapel gone, now that the parade of wooden benches where 400 children sat and ate have been carried off. now the building has been given only the language of ghosts and sadness, the suicide grills fixed on stairways, and doors left to fall from hinges, now all the places words were kept have disappeared - the bookshelves gone,

documents lost or under lock and key elsewhere now there is no Matron's Daily Occurrence Book, no Lady Visitor's book, no House Rules, no School Master's Log Book, no Inventory of Furniture or of Linen, no Applications to be read by a committee, no committee to sit in judgement, no mothers waiting to be judged – are they clean and godly even in their abjectness, even in their poverty? No fifty beds per dormitory, no organ in the dining hall, no hymn books in the chapel, no orphans brass band, no women in the kitchen to take pity on the fatherless and sneak them an extra hunk of bread. Floors scrubbed by hand will never be touched that way again. The needle in the sewing machine, still poised and waiting for whoever left it to return if I put my finger to the tip will I bleed, and fall asleep, or wake the building from its slow decay? No, the launderette will not fill with steam. The blank-eyed windows boarded up. The ghost tours leave, and then return.

This poem was commissioned by BBC Radio 4 for the programme Out of Abandonment.



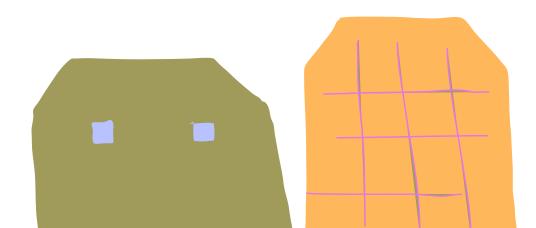


# Activity : Once you've listened to the radio programme (and read the poem) discuss:

What do we discover about the building – both now and in the past – through Moore's poem?

How does Moore use the sewing machine needle to take us into the world of her poem?

Moore uses lists and repetition: what effect does this have?



'Unfortunately, lots of these places are disappearing. Four Aces is now luxury flats.' - Denzil Forrester

# Activity : Write a gho*s*t play



Take a look at the <u>history of The Four Aces Club</u>. Imagine someone who once lived there returning from the past, visiting the luxury flats they have since become. Working in a group, devise a short ghost play, where you are each a character who previously had a connection to the old building.

Hint: think about how the two poems we've looked at use specific detail, and try to include some in your play.

- If you prefer, choose a different old building, perhaps somewhere in your local community. It needs to be somewhere with a history you can research, and a variety of changes of use.



# What do artists do all day?

# Go with the flow

'l'll just find my space, stay there and draw all night.' - Denzil Forrester

Have you ever been so absorbed in what you're doing that you've lost all sense of time? If you watch or play sport you're probably familiar with athletes describing being 'in the zone' – they tune out any distractions and play to the utmost of their ability. And not just athletes: artists, authors, musicians, composers, engineers all experience this. It's what has been called *a state of flow.* 

Flow is more than just concentrating or paying attention: Denzil Forrester, teaching gestural drawing, advises: 'once you start thinking, it's not going to happen, it's gone.'

How can you find flow in your daily life, and in your learning? Take a look at this Ted-ed: <u>How to enter flow state</u>

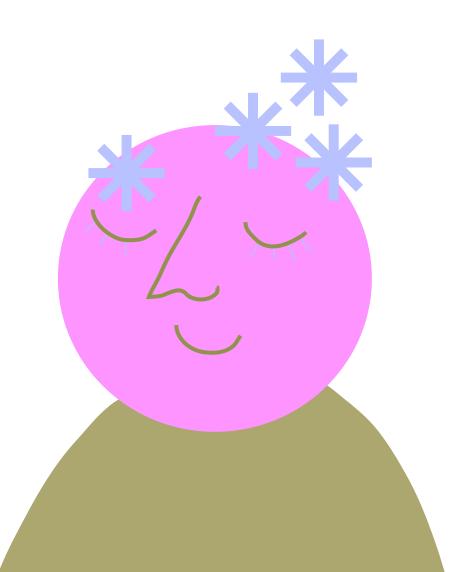
Thinking about tasks you're given at school, consider -

- What motivates you?
- Can you choose your learning?
- Are you studying at the right level for you? (If your tasks are too easy you may feel bored, but if they're too hard you might become anxious).
- Can you concentrate without distraction?
- Do you need fewer tasks, and more time to achieve?
- Can you assess your own learning, and reflect on your progress?
- Who can you talk with to ensure you're supported in having these conditions?



Thinking about times when you've experienced being in the zone, consider – What were you doing when you achieved this state? Describe all the conditions that enabled you to perform at your best.

What can you learn from this to apply in the future?





Here are some suggestions for extending the themes you've been looking at. These can also be done outside school, with friends and family.

> Fill a place with light and sound

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DENZIL FORRESTER

# Activity: Make a mirror ball out of an old football and some CDs

No dance hall in the 1980s was complete without a <u>mirror ball</u>. Forrester gives it star billing, not just in *Altar* but in many of his paintings and drawings.

Create a mirror ball with a few recycled items – an old football (or any other ball) and some old, scratched or broken CDs (data or audio; if you don't have any, ask at your local charity shop). You'll also need heavy duty craft scissors, a glue gun, craft wire, tongs, protective gloves, a hairdryer and fishing line. You'll need access to a hot plate and a pot of water for heating the CDs (ensure you have adult supervision for this) and a bowl wide enough to hold the ball as you're working on it.

Make a hole either end of the football. Fold the craft wire, creating a loop at the folded end. Thread the wire through the ball. Leave about 1 inch (2.5 cm) of loop outside the ball for hanging. Fold over the excess wire on the other end, pushing the loose ends to the left and right. Add a dab of hot glue to the wire ends for a stronger hold.

Boil a pot of water and remove from heat. Use tongs to submerge CDs in the water for a few seconds. Don't let them touch the bottom of the pot. Remove once the edges begin to curl. The CD will become hard again once it cools, so soften them one at a time, and cut while they're warm. Using protective gloves, cut the warm CDs into 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) strips. Trim the strips into 1/2 in (1.3 cm) squares. These will be the 'mirrors' of your ball.

Hot glue the first few tiles around the centre of the ball. Dab a dot of hot glue onto the back of a CD tile piece, and quickly press it against the ball. Start in the centre and work your way around the ball. Cover the folded wire with tiles as best you can. Continue glueing the tiles to the ball in even rows, flipping the ball around in the bowl as you go.

Dry and clean up the finished ball, removing any strings of glue with a hairdryer on a low heat to make sure all the glue is set, then using your scissors to remove any stubborn threads. To hang the mirror ball, thread a length of fishing line through the ball's loop and tie the other end to a ceiling hook. Play around with the drop by using more or less line.

If you want the mirror ball to rotate, it will require a motor. Dim the house lights, and shine a light on your mirror ball.

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### Revive a place with sound

In the Radio 4 programme, <u>Out of Abandonment</u> Kim Moore sounds her trumpet in the derelict orphanage.

Find a building (or an outside space) in your local community.

Choose somewhere that has a long history – perhaps somewhere that is abandoned, or has closed down, or changed its original purpose. If necessary, get permission to visit.

Organise an event to fill the place with sound – it might be a solo trumpet, or a choir, or it could be music played through a cardboard sound system. If you've made a mirror ball, hang it in the space.

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# Further reading and links

Interviews with Denzil Forrester <u>Had to Find Something That Shook Me Up</u> (Frieze Osei Bonsu interview)

This Londoner painted the underground nightlife of '80s Hackney (Layla Haidrani in Time Out)

#### لمَنَّةُ <u>Interview with Denzil Forrester</u> (Gabriel Coxhead, Apollo Magazine)

Artist Talk: Denzil Forrester at Nottingham

<u>Contemporary</u>. The conversation traces 40 years of the artist's work as a painter, as well as educator and curator – from his student days, exploring the nightclubs and sound-systems of East London, his time in New York and Rome in the 1980s, to his more recent relocation to Cornwall.

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Natural Way to Draws A Working Plan for Art Study, Nicolaides, Kimon ISBN 10s Ø3952Ø5484 / ISBN 13s 978Ø3952Ø5488 Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975 Ę

#### The Migration Museum Education Resource Bank

#### 🗇 Studying Empire Windrush and Caribbean Migration

#### Explore the Windrush story through art

This resource uses artworks to explore the story of the people who came to Britain between 1948 and 1972 from the Caribbean. It looks at sculptures made to celebrate and remember their contribution to British society and culture. It also explores artworks made by children of the Windrush Generation reflecting on their experience of growing up in the UK and their sense of identity.

Windrush 70 years on: learning resources

<u>Record labels: the soundtrack to Windrush</u>

Flow Theorys information for teachers

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Content producer Claire Collison

Designed by TACABANDA

The TenTen teachers' resources are generously supported by Sybil Robson Orr and Matthew Orr

