

Max Ernst's paintings at Tate: innovation and imagination

Joyce Townsend

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Dr Joyce Townsend is senior conservation scientist at Tate. She has concentrated for over 30 years on the identification and deterioration of artists' materials and on the interpretation of artists' techniques in both oil and watercolour, mainly for 19th-century British and earlier 20th-century international art, including studies of Turner, Blake, the Pre-Raphaelites, Whistler, and Sargent, and Picasso and Picabia. She is co-author of *The Tate Watercolour Manual* (Tate 2014) and author of *How Turner Painted: Materials and techniques* (Thames and Hudson, October 2019).

The talk will present a technical study of 6 very different works by the modern master, showing how standard methods of technical examination can generate understanding of an artist's working methods, even when advanced analytical techniques are not used.



Max Ernst, 1920, *Punching Ball ou l'Immortalité de Buonarroti*, Photo-montage, gouache, ink on photograph (self-portrait)

Max Ernst (2 April 1891 – 1 April 1976) was a German (naturalised American in 1948 and French in 1958) painter, sculptor, graphic artist, and poet. A prolific artist, Ernst was a primary pioneer of the Dada movement and Surrealism. He had no formal artistic training, but his experimental attitude toward the making of art resulted in his invention of frottage—a technique that uses pencil rubbings of objects as a source of images— and 'grattage', an analogous technique in which paint is scraped across canvas to reveal the imprints of the objects placed beneath.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Ernst.