

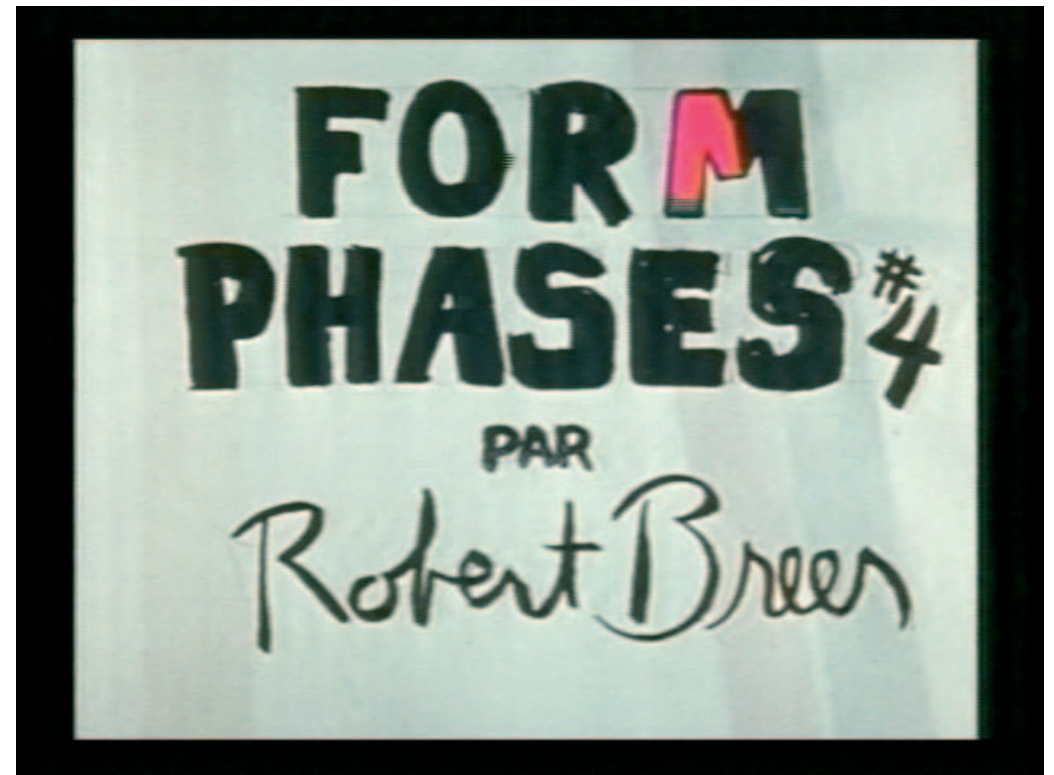
ROBERT

BREER

PART ONE

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Breer was born in Detroit, America, in 1926. He studied Fine Art at Stanford University before moving to Paris in 1949. After starting his career in abstract painting, Breer made his first film in 1952, and had stopped painting by 1959. Breer returned to America in the 1960s. He is now widely considered to be a very important and influential figure in experimental animation. Breer lives and works in Tucson, Arizona.

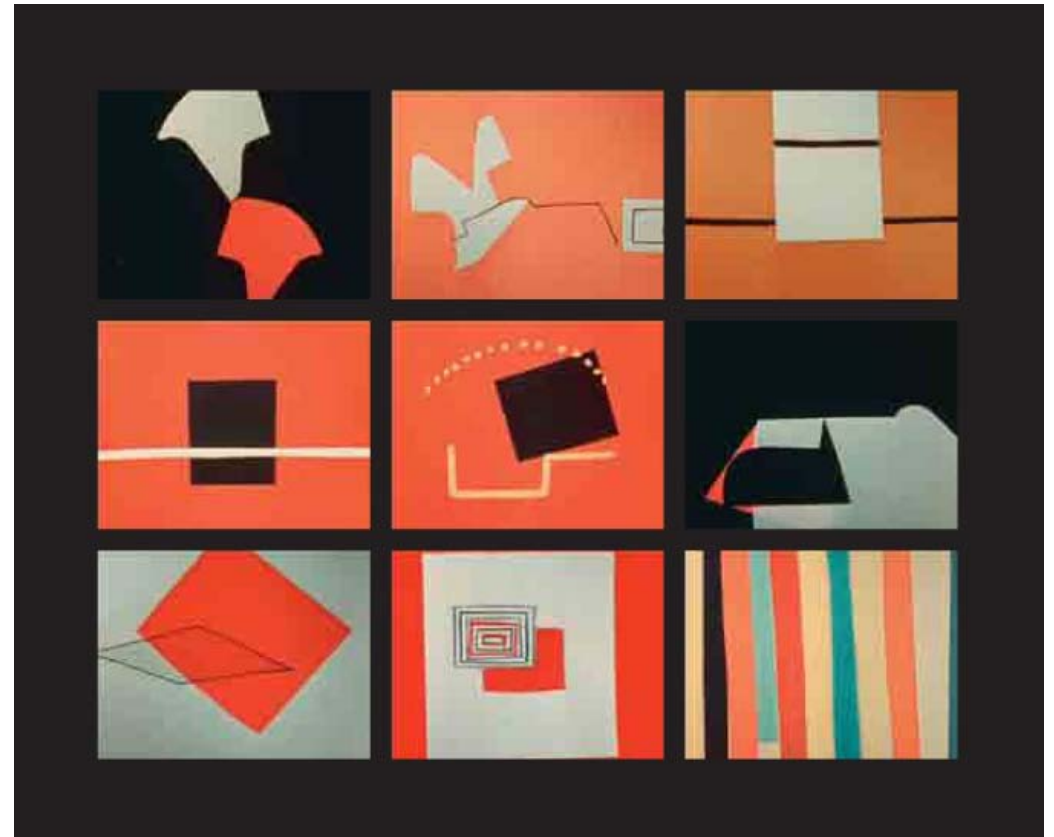


ABOUT THE WORK

During his career, Robert Breer has created paintings, films and sculptures. His work displays a concern with movement and the play between abstract and figurative forms. Breer produced his paintings while he lived in Paris in the 1950s. Inspired by the work of Mondrian and other abstract painters, Breer combined lines, colours and geometric shapes. In Breer's paintings, these elements often appear to fight against each other, suggesting tension or movement.

In 1952, Breer made his first short animated film; a medium which made it possible for him to fully capture movement and change. The film was called *Form Phases I* and was created by producing parts of his paintings on a series of frosted slides, which were recorded with a movie camera, one at a time, to create a sequence of frames. The finished film played back 24 frames every second. Using the same principle as flipbooks the still images created the illusion of movement when played in succession. Film was not a widely used medium within the fine art world at the time and Breer's films, which were original and radical, were later regarded as highly influential and significant. His films did not have traditional narratives or stories like many other films and animations, nor did they attempt to create realistic, continuous movement. Instead Breer deliberately used rapid changes in his film sequences that revealed the handmade element of the process.

In contrast with the fast speed of his films, Breer creates sculptures which move very slowly. His ongoing series of sculptures called 'floats' are objects that move around the space and change direction when they collide.



ABOUT THE WORK

This major exhibition of Robert Breer's work at Baltic includes paintings, films and sculptures from 1950 to the present day. The exhibition includes a wide selection of Breer's animated films, ranging in length from 30 seconds to eleven minutes and, with the exception of his earliest films, all are accompanied by sound. Breer's animation deliberately uses handmade imagery and is created from footage of drawings, paper collages, photographs and found objects. This exhibition includes Recreation I, a two minute colour film made, in part, using footage of real objects such as a mechanical mouse, a glove and a cat!

The 'float' sculptures in the exhibition are made from a variety of materials including painted styrofoam, plastic sheets, resin and wood. All of them contain small motors which enable them to move around the gallery space. Whilst many of the sculptures are purely abstract forms, some resemble real objects. In 1968 Breer made several sculptures each called Rug, constructed from sheets of plastic and aluminium, which look like scrunched up rugs moving across the floor.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Robert Breer's first animated films, produced in the early 1950s, are silent. Those produced since are accompanied by sound. Watch one of the films in the gallery space that has a soundtrack.

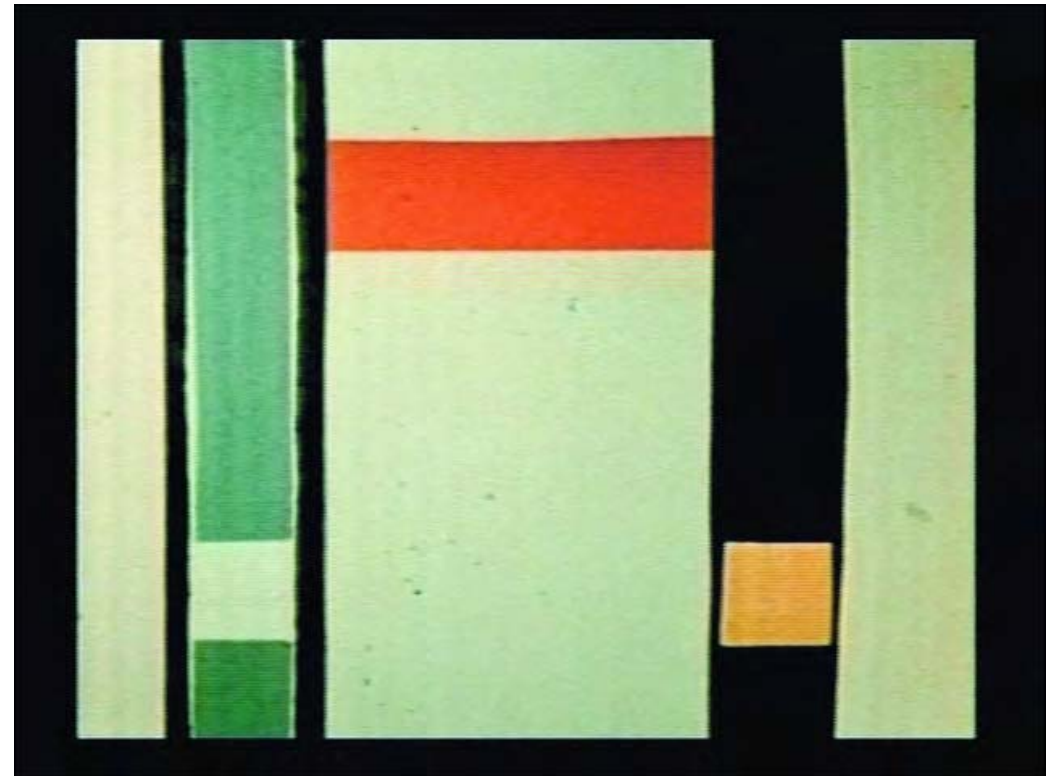
- How important do you think the sound is?
- How do you think the sound affects your experience of watching the film?

Breer uses the technique of stop-motion animation to combine individual frames, presenting the viewer with rapidly changing imagery which can seem jumpy or fragmented.

- Why do you think the artist has chosen to do this?
- How would you describe your experience of watching the films?

Visit the gallery on Level 4 which contains Breer's float sculptures. Move around the space and spend time standing in different places in the room.

- How does the work make you feel?
- How does the movement of the sculptures affect your experience?
- Do they remind you of anything you have seen before?



IN MY OPINION

Breer's films try to overload the viewer's eye with imagery. He has said "I want every square inch of the screen potentially active, alive..."

- How would you describe your experience of watching his films?
- Do you feel that your eye is overloaded when watching them?

People are much more used to watching films or animations, reading text and viewing other imagery on a screen than they were when Breer's films were first made.

- Make a list of all the different places or circumstances when you view images or text on a screen.
- Can you imagine life without screens?

In the 1950s when Breer made his first films, the people watching them were not as familiar with as wide a range of animation as we are today. Breer's films presented imagery in a new and unusual way.

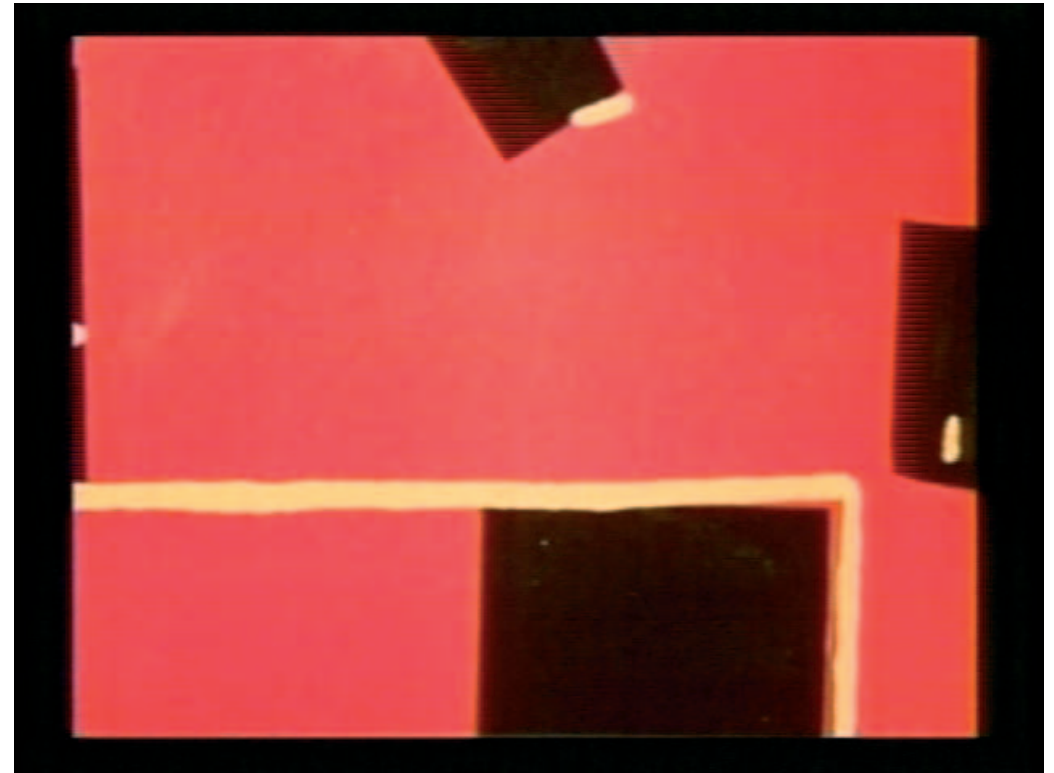
- Think of examples of animations you have seen. How do they compare to Breer's films? In what ways are the techniques used similar or different?



HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

Breer has experimented with optical devices such as flipbooks and mutoscopes (a mechanised flip book with pages arranged around a cylinder). The exhibition includes a drawing of a 'Linear Mutoscope' with individual pages arranged in a horizontal strip which runs around the corner of a wall in a museum.

- Have a go at designing your own variation of a flipbook – a series of images designed to be seen in sequence.
- What size will the pages be? e.g. the size of a stamp, a billboard poster or somewhere in between.
- How could your pages be arranged? e.g. in a line, horizontally, vertically, straight, curved, in a circle or a square.
- Where will they be located? e.g. on the side of a building, around your wrist or in a box.
- How will a person view the pages? e.g. by walking past them, turning a handle, flicking through them, seeing them blow in the wind.
- Make a drawing of your final idea.



HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

Design a sculpture that moves, using Robert Breer's 'float' sculptures for inspiration.

- Can you find examples of any other artists who make sculptures that move?
- Think about the different ways in which a sculpture could be made to move, for example, blown by the wind, powered by a motor, or pulled/pushed/ carried by a human.
- Where will your sculpture be located? Will it be inside, outside, hung up or worn?
- What materials will it be made from? Are they light or heavy materials and how will they affect the movement of the sculpture.
- Think of several different ideas and experiment with materials, before developing your final design.



FURTHER RESEARCH

Ellsworth Kelly

Émile Cohl

Fernand Leger

Hans Richter

Jean Tinguely

John Cage

Kinetic art

Len Lye

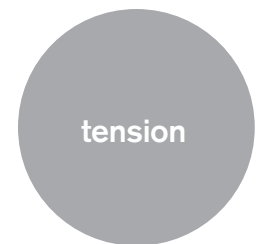
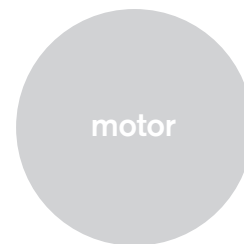
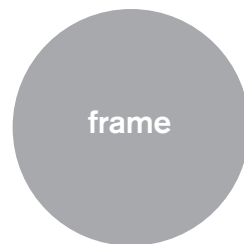
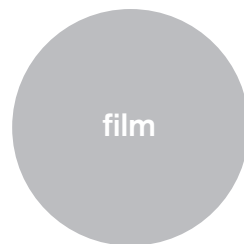
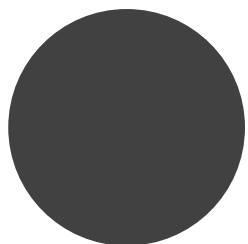
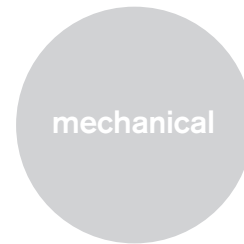
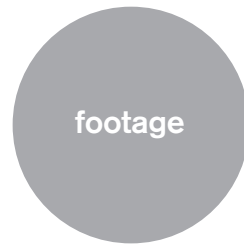
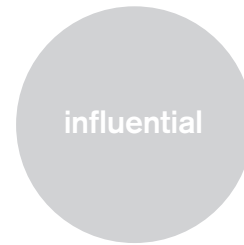
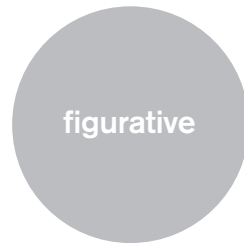
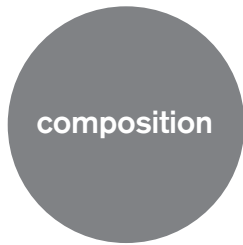
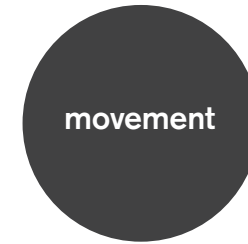
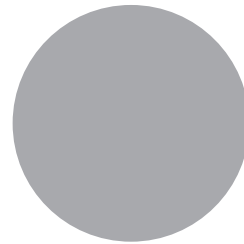
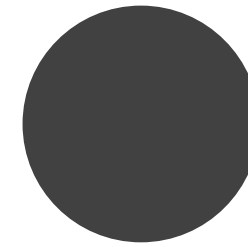
Piet Mondrian

Peter Kubelka

Robert Rauschenberg

Stan Brakhage

LITERACY KEY WORDS



PART TWO

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Contemporary art is incredibly diverse and wide ranging and can be used to support teaching and learning as part of an entire learning experience. It can be used to generate creative thinking in all subject areas and to support learning across curricular dimensions, as well as contribute to personal development and personalised learning.

CROSS CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

- Art and Design
- English
- Geography

USEFUL LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BALTIC

www.balticmill.com

Quay

www.balticmill.com/quay

BALTIC Multimedia Database

<http://archive.balticmill.com>

'In my opinion' toolkit to help pupils approach artwork, formulate questions and contribute opinions

www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php

Blank presentation template: pupils can use this to present their own research and ideas

www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php

BALTIC Secondary Resources Bank: pupils can use this to search for and download images and other information

www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php

IMAGE CREDITS

Slide 3

Stills from the film *Form Phases IV* 1954
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist

Slide 4

Stills from the film *Form Phases IV* 1954
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist

Slide 5

Float 1970/2004
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist

Slide 6

Stills from the film *Form Phases IV* 1954
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist

Slide 7

66, 1966
Courtesy mima, Middlesbrough, UK
© the artist

Slide 8

Stills from the film *Form Phases IV* 1954
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist

Slide 9

Robert Breer
Self Propelling Tanks 1967
Courtesy gb agency, Paris
© the artist