

## Heinz Koppel

### Teachers' Notes

This lesson explores the Berlin-born Jewish artist Heinz Koppel, who lived in Wales. Students explore different sources to gain an understanding of the artist's life and artistic style. This lesson uses elements of Drama and Movement, so is best delivered in a large space such as a Drama studio.

**Content warning:** the resource used in this lesson mentions the murder of Heinz Koppel's mother in the Treblinka Extermination Camp.

### Curriculum links

#### Key Stage 4

History, Art and design

## Lesson Plan

### LEARNING AIMS:

- To explore a painting through physical theatre and movement.
- To be able to draw together a range of sources to understand some of the complexities of living in Wales as a Jewish refugee artist.

### EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:

- Transcript of the audio clip<sup>1</sup> (see page 5).
- Heinz Koppel's biography (see page 4).
- Whiteboard.

### STARTER

To warm the group up and to introduce the practical task in the main activity, students are to walk about the space. You call out a number and the students are to form a group of that number (anyone spare can join a group as an extra). Once the students are in the group, you call out 'M' and the students are to find a way to create the shape of that letter with their bodies. This continues until M-E-R-T-H-Y-R B-L-U-E-S is spelt. You may wish to speed up as time goes on to keep the energy flowing. Ask the group – what does this spell? What do you think it might relate to?

### DEVELOPMENT

[Listen to Harry Weinberger's oral history talking about his cousin and fellow artist Heinz Koppel.](#)

Read Heinz Koppel's biography and look at his artwork ['Merthyr Blues'](#).

Discuss the group's responses to these sources. What things stood out to them?

You may wish to highlight:

- Heinz Koppel's feelings as an 'outsider'.
- The trauma of losing his mother and fleeing his home.
- His life as a teacher as well as an artist.
- His focus on local Welsh landscapes and towns.
- The 'psychological and analytical slant' he had to his work.

### MAIN

Project the *'Merthyr Blues'* painting on the whiteboard.

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<sup>1</sup> We added the audio clip's transcript, which you may choose to share with your students if you think it would be helpful. The transcript is in English and Welsh whilst the clip is in English only.

As a whole group, students are to recreate the *'Merthyr Blues'* painting. This can be done with students entering the space one by one or in small groups and adopting a position. For example, the first student could take the position of the woman pushing the pram. Next, a group of four or so students could create the shape of the building behind her using their bodies. This process continues until all the students have joined the image. There is no right or wrong here. Let the students creatively explore the painting with their bodies in the space and encourage observation and interaction with others.

The next step is to bring the image to life with ten seconds of movement. How might the different parts of the painting interact? You could perhaps play some classical music here to accompany the movement, e.g., Władysław Szpilman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOC2Clisyzk0> – or another suitable example.

For information on Władysław Szpilman see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C5%82adys%C5%82aw\\_Szpilman?msclkid=d2695a4db7f211ec9ffd01d2318afee0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C5%82adys%C5%82aw_Szpilman?msclkid=d2695a4db7f211ec9ffd01d2318afee0).

#### PLENARY

Ask the group to reflect on their experiences in this lesson:

- What have they learnt about Heinz Koppel?
- Can they see examples where his life experiences might have been explored in his art?

## Heinz Koppel - Biography

Artist Heinz Koppel was born to Jewish parents in Berlin in 1919. After the Nazis came to power in Germany, they emigrated to Prague, Czechoslovakia, and later fled to the United Kingdom in 1938. His father, Joachim Koppel, founded and worked at the Aero Zipp factory at Treforest and Heinz studied art in London. His mother, Paula, had severe arthritis and was unable to leave with the rest of the family; she was eventually murdered in the Treblinka Extermination Camp. His cousin, Harry Weinberger, who had also fled Czechoslovakia, was also an artist and they had the same teacher in London.

From 1944, Heinz lived in Dowlais near Merthyr Tydfil where he taught art to children and adults. His artworks were inspired by the surrounding countryside and the industrial areas of Wales. In 1949, he married fellow artist Renate Fischl and they lived with their children in London and Liverpool before finally settling in Cwmerfyn, near Aberystwyth. He was one of the founding members of the 56 Group Wales, an artists' organisation with the aim of promoting Welsh Modernist art and artists. Heinz died in 1980 aged 61.

The painting, [Merthyr Blues](#), by Heinz Koppel is a portrait of Merthyr Tydfil in 1955. "The style prompts comparison with newspaper cartoons. A woman pushes her pram past the old bus depot, a man on a ladder pastes up an advertisement for Daz washing powder, whilst dogs behave badly on the street. The local blues singer, who hovers above the town accompanied by the lyrics of her song, offers a sense of hope and salvation to the everyday world below."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Art UK, *Merthyr Blues*, Heinz Koppel (1919-1980), National Museum Wales, National Museum Cardiff  
<[https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/merthyr-blues-162225/search/actor:koppel-heinz-19191980-68749/page/1/view\\_as/grid](https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/merthyr-blues-162225/search/actor:koppel-heinz-19191980-68749/page/1/view_as/grid)> [accessed 9 April 2022].

## Transcript

### [Harry Weinberger talking about his cousin and fellow artist Heinz Koppel](#)

Heinz [Koppel] was always far more interested than I in analysing work and his always had a psychological slant that had to reflect some very conscious... consciously inner states of mind—that sounds ghastly if I say it like that—but he was very introspective and very analytical about everything, not just his work.

And he had very delicate hands and delicate fingers, and his work had the same delicacy. And I thought it was quite unique.

[...]

We both felt that because of our background and everything that had happened, that we were outsiders and that we couldn't somehow be accepted by the art establishment.

[...]

And then he bought an old farm in Wales, and finally he left teaching and settled in Wales in that farm, and turned it into his own little empire, where he produced very interesting and intricate paintings that I liked very much.