

# Serpentine Gallery

## Teachers' Resources

### Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow

8 May – 13 June 2010



Phyllida Barlow

*Untitled: double act* 2009

Bonding plaster, cement, PVA,  
plywood, wire and scrim

2 works, each 30 × 30 × 30 cm

Private collection

© 2010 Phyllida Barlow

The exhibition is made possible by

**The Council of the  
Serpentine Gallery**

with support from

The Henry Moore  
Foundation

and

The Kensington Hotel  
LONDON

## Contents

- **Introduction to artists Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow**
- **Themes, ideas and questions to explore:**

These include useful cross curricular links, classroom discussions and activities

  1. Materials
  2. Site specific
  3. Boundaries and interruptions
- **Further reading and related links**
- **Planning a visit to the Serpentine Gallery**

These notes are designed to support your visit to the Serpentine Gallery, including planning prior to your visit and suggestions for discussion and activities back at school when you return. They are aimed primarily at Key Stage 3 and 4 but include activities that can relate to all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

## Introduction to artists Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow

The Serpentine Gallery presents an exhibition of the work of artists Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow. The exhibition presents two positions on sculpture in the 21st century.

**Nairy Baghramian** (b. Iran, 1971) is a Berlin-based artist known for her sculptural installations and photographs. Her complex work encompasses questions of context, institutional framing and the production and reception of contemporary art. It also includes elements of re-worked minimalism, design history and modernist architecture. Well represented in Europe, this is Baghramian's first exhibition in a major public institution in the UK.

**Phyllida Barlow** (b. United Kingdom, 1944) is a pioneering English artist whose sculptural installations are characterised by their large scale, often made quickly in the same place that they are to be shown with materials that are subsequently recycled for future use. Their often rough appearance conveys the urgency with which they are produced. In addition to being a practising artist since the 1960s, Barlow has had a long teaching career, tutoring several generations of students who have gone on to become distinguished artists.

Baghramian and Barlow's installation will include rooms displaying solo presentations of their work as well as spaces where works are placed in dialogue with each other. This exhibition offers a new perspective on these two artists.

Although strikingly different in their approach, a number of key concerns are addressed by both artists. For instance central to Baghramian's work is how art historical debates around minimalism, literature, design and politics are translated into specific decisions about materiality, manufacture and display. Whilst Barlow's work engages with related questions, it reaches contrasting conclusions.

Responses to context are also a shared interest; Barlow often uses a work's location as a starting point for its dimensions and form, as well as actually

constructing some works in situ, whereas Baghramian's work deals with the relationship between sculptural forms the spaces they inhabit.

# Themes, ideas and questions to explore

## 1. Materials

### Phyllida Barlow



Phyllida Barlow

*Untitled: balcony* 2009

Installation view *The Real, V22 Sculpture Exhibition*, The Almond Building, London, UK

Plywood, canvas, cement, polystyrene and wire netting

350 × 400 × 300 cm

© 2010 Phyllida Barlow

#### Keywords

**Raw – everyday – domestic – brutal – concrete – polystyrene – timber – not precious – accessible – strong – fragile – unruly – building – construction – paint – tarpaulins – lumpy – untreated – rough – tactile – dangerous – glossy – grids structures**

#### Cross-curricular links

**Art and Design – Design Technology – Geography**

Barlow has created *Untitled: balcony* piece that is mounted on to the wall in the North Gallery echoing elements seen in the image above. Working with a wide range of materials that are chosen for numerous reasons, Barlow works on site and in intense bursts of labour to produce the pieces in the spaces she is provided with. Because of the impulsive nature of her practice, materials are often selected for ease of accessibility, and resources such as palettes, concrete, timber, foam boards and paint are frequently sourced from builders'

merchants, thus giving them a sense of domesticity and familiarity. Although materials are often painted over or wrapped with other materials, they are not intentionally disguised or camouflaged. Because of the raw nature of the materials the works often have a certain look; slightly dishevelled or damaged, and are often quite brutal looking. The rough appearance of the pieces also helps convey the urgency in which they were produced.

Whilst the sturdy nature of the materials being used might suggest strong structures, there are elements within the works that can appear quite unstable, almost fragile.

Certain elements are often repeated in Barlow's work and some shapes and motifs can be seen again and again in her sculptures. In this case the 'balcony' type structure is repeated from previous works.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How many different materials can you identify in Phyllida Barlow's *Untitled: balcony* piece?
2. Why do you think Barlow chooses to use materials that you might find on a building site?
3. How does this affect the way you engage with the works?
4. What elements can you see that recur in the image pictured above and in the gallery piece?
5. How do the materials Barlow and Baghramian use differ and how does this change the way you view each of the works?

### **Activities**

1. Create a sculptural piece using only found materials. These could be recycled cartons, bottles, card etc or to make a more ambitious piece of work, materials could be re-used from skips or by using unwanted furniture, wood, plastic, building materials and old paint. This could be a collaborative/class piece in order to produce a piece on a larger scale. Consider whether the final piece will have some recognisable elements, whether it is figurative or abstract.
2. Make a sculpture that has repeated elements. Many of Barlow's artworks use the idea of one single element being repeated in order to make a whole object. Again, you could use recycled materials in order to produce this piece. Try collecting a large number of any one thing such as corks, bottle tops, cans, CDs in order to build your sculpture. Again, consider the final outcome – do you want the piece to be a recognisable shape? Should it have a purpose? Will it be painted or covered with another material once made?

## Nairy Baghramian



*Butcher, Barber, Angler & others* 2009  
Installation view Studio Voltaire, London  
© 2010 Nairy Baghramian  
Photograph Andy Keate

### Keywords

**Hard – shiny – sleek – clean – sharp – dangerous – metal – resin – familiar – rubber – anthropomorphic – functional/non-functional – hybrid – design – architectural – form – sculpture**

### Cross-curricular links

**Art and design – Design Technology – History of Design**

The installation pictured above was shown as part of an exhibition at Studio Voltaire (November 2009 – January 2010) and comprises a number of sculptural pieces that reference modernist abstraction, minimalism and interior and furniture design.

Taking on the feel of a film set or stage it is unsurprising that Baghramian frequently refers to the objects as protagonists. Walking round the installation, the sculptures take on human like qualities and there is a deliberate ambiguity between the abstract and figurative qualities of the pieces.

Often referencing the language of design, the sculptures used in this installation become like hybrids of familiar objects. Part lamp, part chair, it is difficult to decipher whether they are multifunctional or indeed do not function at all. Stools that have only one leg and would collapse if sat upon stand alongside fragile looking structures with long spindly legs.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Look at all Nairy Baghramian's exhibits, how many familiar looking objects can you see in her sculptures? What do they resemble?
2. Why do you think she uses familiar looking shapes and materials in her work?
3. Baghramian talks about her work referencing architecture as well as design. How does this manifest itself in the works on display in the exhibition?
4. Baghramian also refers to the figurative qualities of the sculptures. Why do the shapes and forms she uses relate to the figure? What human qualities do they have?

### **Activities**

1. Using old, broken or unused objects, create a new sculpture or perhaps a functioning object. For example a bucket could be used to create a lampshade or an old drawer could be placed on the wall to create a frame for an artwork.
2. Research the use of the found object in contemporary and twentieth century art. See if you can discover when it was first used and how it has played an important role in the development of sculptural art practice. How was it received initially and how does this differ now?

## 2. Site Specific

### Phyllida Barlow



Phyllida Barlow  
Installation view STINT Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre  
Polystyrene, cement, paper, padding and assorted materials  
Dimensions variable  
© 2010 Phyllida Barlow



Phyllida Barlow  
*Untitled: ramp* 2009  
Installation view *BRAKE*, One in the Other Gallery, London, UK  
Plywood, timber and paint  
300 × 300 × 120 cm  
© 2010 Phyllida Barlow

## Keywords

**Precarious – overwhelming – architectural – structures – large – unfinished – ramp – aggressive – absurd – obstacles – wooden – sculpture – assemble – recycle – installation**

## Cross-curricular links

**Art and Design – Design Technology**

Barlow's previous incarnations of *Untitled: ramp* that can be seen on the previous page share common elements with the piece she has produced for the exhibition. The high gloss treatment of the ramp is echoed, and resting gingerly on its edge is a large drum-like structure.

Barlow often makes all her works on site and works very quickly in response to the space. Materials are often changed or substituted through this process, allowing a sense of spontaneity to mould her work.

The sense of scale in the work is important and Barlow is literally stretched to edge, making structures that physically push her beyond the limits of the work – sometimes she is unable to reach parts of the sculptures. Because these pieces are made specifically for the spaces, they rarely exist outside of the gallery and are not usually preserved after exhibition. The exhibits are disassembled and materials sometimes recycled in other works.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think the artworks would look different if they were made outside of the exhibition space and then placed in the gallery? In what ways do you think they might look different?
2. How do the sculptures work with the white walls of the gallery and the views of the outside space? Are there any similarities or contrasts?
3. In what ways do the two artists treat the spaces differently? How does this affect the way you view the work?
4. What do you think Barlow is trying to convey in her work?
5. Does the scale of the work affect the way you view it? Imagine how different they would be if they were tiny and you could step over them.

## Activities

1. Using photoshop, create a visualisation of a site specific sculpture. Consider a space or room that you would like to make a sculpture for; this could be in your home, at school or a well known building, space or monument. Make a small model of your design using whatever materials you feel are appropriate. Photograph your small sculpture and use photoshop to superimpose your piece into its new surroundings. You can also experiment with scale and colour on the computer. How does your sculpture work in its new environment? Does it change the feel of the space?
2. In small groups, list as many different public artworks you can think of. Try to come up with sculptures from cities all over the UK and the World, not just London. Consider the following questions:

- How do they work with their surroundings, natural or otherwise?
- What sort of scale are they approximately?
- Do they detract from or enhance their environment?
- Have they brought publicity to the area? Has that been positive or negative?
- What type of materials have been used?
- What message or story, if any, do you think the artist is trying to convey?
- Is the work controversial? If so, does this help or hinder the discussion about the work?

Finally, each group should choose one of the public artworks they have discussed that they believe to be the most successful. An elected spokesperson will tell the other groups their choice of artwork and their reasons why.

## Nairy Baghramian



Nairy Baghramian

*Klassentreffen (Class Reunion)* 2008

Installation view *The Walker's Day Off*, Staatliche Kunsthalle  
Baden-Baden, Germany

Coloured cast rubber, painted metal and coloured epoxy resin

18 works, dimensions variable

Heins Schürmann Collection, Herzogenrath

© 2010 Nairy Baghramian



Nairy Baghramian

*Aufsicht (Invigilator)* 2008

Installation view *The Walker's Day Off*, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany

Polished aluminium and rubber

55 × 50 × 44.5 cm

© 2010 Nairy Baghramian

Photograph: Wolfgang Günzel

## **Keywords**

**Walking devices – crutches – props – support – multiples – freestanding – delicate – spindly – hard – linear – non-functioning – design – precarious – anthropomorphic**

## **Cross-curricular links**

**Art and Design – Design Technology – Politics - English**

*Klassentreffen (Class Reunion)* 2008 was previously shown as part of a solo exhibition entitled *Walkers Day Off* in Baden Baden, Germany in 2008. The installation is made up of a series of 17 individual objects that are based on different walking devices such as walking sticks and crutches.

In the case of *Klassentreffen (Class Reunion)* 2008, Baghramian likes to permeate the sculptures with anthropomorphic qualities; that is to imbue inanimate objects with human-like qualities. In this piece, she imagines a group of old people gathering in a room for a reunion.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Do you feel the objects Baghramian uses to conjure an image of an old class reunion are successful? Explain your response.
2. How does the artist use the space in order to display the works? How would they differ in a more enclosed space?
3. How do you feel as you move through the work? Do you feel as though you are intruding?

## **Activities**

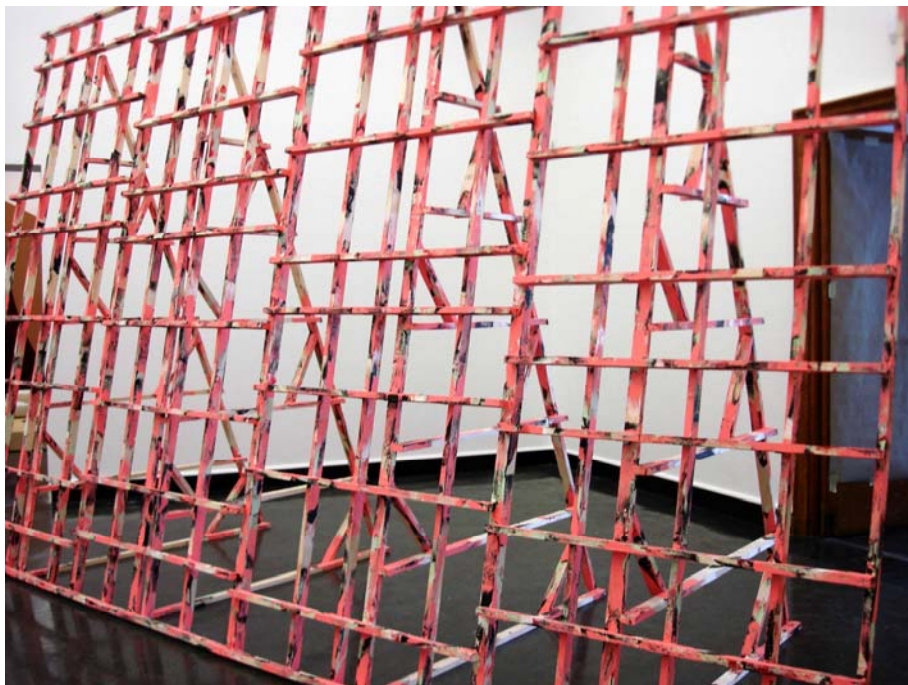
1. List as many different words that have double meanings, e.g. complex. Using photography, collage or found imagery, create an artwork that plays around with those double meanings. You could also incorporate text in work. Give your artwork a title that reflects this play on words.
2. Considering the term, *anthropomorphic*, what other objects can you think of that might have human characteristics? List as many of them as you can. Think about how these could be used to create your own installation or sculpture. If possible try and make your artwork using these objects. Photograph the resulting work to document.

### 3. Boundaries and Interruptions

#### Phyllida Barlow



Phyllida Barlow  
*Fence* 2008  
Timber, cement and paint  
240 × 700 × 500 cm  
© 2010 Phyllida Barlow



Phyllida Barlow  
*SPLIT* 2010  
Wood and paint  
460 x 300 cm  
© 2010 Phyllida Barlow

## **Keywords**

**Barrier – interruption – structure – grid – fence – boundary – obstruction – hindrance – barricade – unexpected – bound – railing – enclosure – hurdle – wrapped – folding – intrusion – stoppage – covering – casing – protection – casing**

## **Cross-curricular links**

**Art and Design – Design Technology – Politics – Economics**

*Untitled: fences* 2010 is a large scale installation in the East Gallery that comprises a wrapped grid structure that leans against a more solid wall like piece. Almost spanning the length of the gallery space, this piece is a good example of the barrier pieces that Barlow frequently makes.

A barrier being an object or form that exists in the world in order to block a space or an area, in the gallery its purpose is redundant, as there is no reason for the gallery space to be hindered, making the installation seem almost absurd. In this context, *Untitled: fences* 2010 is a decorative piece, which also marks it out as being different from its counterparts in the real world.

The enormity of the constructions helps convey the sense of an obstruction or interruption in the gallery space further. The larger they become the more aggressive and overwhelming they feel to the viewer, tipping into the realms of absurdity, an aspect that is of great interest to Barlow.

Barlow is also interested in the activity of making the work being evident in the outcome. Therefore the notion of wrapping, binding, stacking, folding and other active processes are often evident in the pieces. This is clearly illustrated in *Untitled: fences* 2010

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Does it seem strange to see a fence type structure in a gallery space?
2. Why do you think the artist is interested in the sculptures becoming as she describes them 'absurd'?
3. Where would you normally expect to find a barrier? And what is their usual purpose?
4. How does this function change when it is placed in a gallery space?
5. Does the scale of the installation affect the way you feel towards the piece of work? Imagine it was your own height or perhaps even smaller: would that change the way you responded to it?

## **Activities**

1. Create a 'boundary' piece of artwork. If physically possible, work as a group and create a large scale piece, perhaps in an outdoor space. Try to utilise as many found materials as possible, such as branches, old wood, twigs, etc to create a frame. Then use other materials to wrap, wind, bind and hold the piece together. Consider the colours used to make it a cohesive piece. You could also document the piece as it develops, photographing the structure as it builds.
2. Drawing inspiration from Barlow's idea of a structure becoming absurd when out of place i.e. a fence in a gallery, use photoshop or collage to develop this

idea yourself. Consider objects and structures that would lose their purpose once placed in a gallery or other space and try to visualise your idea using an appropriate method. For example, a set of traffic lights lose their function when taken away from the road, but visually are quite striking, sculptural forms, and might look interesting in a gallery space.

## Nairy Baghramian



Nairy Baghramian

*Big Mouth 1* 2008

Installation view *The Walker's Day Off*, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden- Baden, Germany

Polished aluminium and coloured cast rubber

170 x 260 x 65 cm

Photo: Wolfgang Günzel

© 2010 Nairy Baghramian

### Keywords

**Interruption – growth – disturbance – architecture – under siege – curve – smooth – disorder – intrusion – harmonious/ inharmonious – interference – break – reflective – mirror – arc – juxtaposition – doorway – blockage**

### Cross-curricular links

**Art and Design – Design Technology – Politics**

Not dissimilar in appearance to *Big Mouth 1*, pictured above, Baghramian has made a series of four doorway pieces designed specifically for this exhibition which take into account the layout of the gallery and the other exhibits being displayed. Made of polished aluminium and balancing precariously on epoxy resin blocks, the pieces create interruptions in the doorways of the gallery, and in one case blocks the entrance entirely to the gallery space which houses one of Phyllida Barlow's pieces, forcing the viewer to survey Barlow's exhibit from a distance.

Some pieces grow around the sides of the doors leading the viewer into the other spaces whilst others curve vertically nestling inside the frame of the doorway.

The arced surface leads the spectator into an empty gallery space, almost showing them the way to an exhibit that is simply not there.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How does the artist use the architecture of the building to inform her work?
2. Can you see any links between Baghramian's work and that of a designer or architect? If so, what are they?
3. Why do you think the artist has chosen to place her work in the doorway rather than in the gallery space?
4. How do these pieces differ from Barlow's fence pieces in terms of the way they interrupt the gallery space?

### **Activities**

1. Consider where you might find barriers to spaces, rooms or places in the everyday world. Try to think in a more abstract sense as well as physical barriers. For example, you may be judged on appearance or your age in order to enter certain places. List as many as you can and share with the rest of the group or class.
2. Create a sculptural piece that fastens or attaches to a door way or opening in some way to enhance or change the experience of walking through that space. It could force you into turning sideways through the door, crawling through or perhaps you could use strips of fabric or material that fold around you as you walk through.

## Further Reading and Related Links

*Nairy Baghramian: The Walker's Day Off*, Walther Konig, Cologne (2008)

*Phyllida Barlow: STINT*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre (2008)

*Objects For and Other Things: Phyllida Barlow*, Mark Godfrey, Black Dog Publishing Ltd (1 Oct 2003)

[www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org)

<http://www.studiovoltaire.org/exhib-cur.htm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/may/06/artist-week-phyllida-barlow>

# Planning a Visit to the Serpentine Gallery

## Contact Details

Joceline Howe  
Education Curator  
Serpentine Gallery  
Kensington Gardens  
London W2 3XA  
Tel 020 7298 1516  
Email [jocelineh@serpentinegallery.org](mailto:jocelineh@serpentinegallery.org)

Tel 020 7402 6075  
Fax 0207402 4103  
[www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org)

## Transport

The nearest tube stations are South Kensington (1.25 km walk), Knightsbridge (1.25 km walk) or Lancaster Gate (1 km walk)  
Bus routes 9, 10, 52, 452, 94 and 148 stop near the Gallery

## Group Visit Guidelines

To make your visit as enjoyable as possible, please read the following:

### Before your Visit:

- Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times, including in the shop. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5's, 1:10 for 5 - 11 year olds, 1:15 for 11 - 16 year olds and 1:20 for 16 - 18 year olds is required.
- We recommend a preliminary planning visit, as for some exhibitions there may be works that you consider unsuitable for your group.

### During your Visit:

The artworks in the *Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow* exhibition are extremely fragile. Please take extra care to follow the Gallery Guidelines at all times:

No running  
No touching  
No leaning against walls or plinths  
No shouting  
No photography

- Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group's behaviour whilst at the Serpentine Gallery.
- Many contemporary artworks are fragile and damage easily. Please make sure that your group understands that this is why they are not allowed to touch the art.
- Lecturing: If your group is larger than 30 please split them into smaller groups in the exhibition space and do not lecture in rooms where talks are already in progress.
- Drawing: If you would like to draw please check with the gallery what materials you will be able to use in the exhibition.

The *Nairy Baghramian and Phyllida Barlow* Teachers' Notes are also available to download free at [www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org) along with Teachers' Notes for the previous exhibitions:

**Richard Hamilton** 3 March 2010 – 25 April 2010  
**Design Real** 26 November 2009 – 7 February 2010  
**Gustav Metzger: Decades 1959 – 2009**, 29 September – 8 November 2009  
**Jeff Koons: Popeye Series**, 2 July – 13 September 2009  
**Luke Fowler**, 7 May – 14 June 2009  
**Rebecca Warren**, 10 March – 19 April 2009  
**Indian Highway**, 10 December 2008 – 22 February 2009  
**Gerhard Richter**, 23 September – 23 November 2008  
**Richard Prince**, 26 June – 7 September 2008  
**Maria Lassnig**, 25 April – 8 June 2008  
**Derek Jarman**, 23 February – 13 April 2008  
**Anthony McCall**, 30 November 2007 – 3 February 2008  
**Matthew Barney**, 20 September – 11 November 2007  
**Hreinn Fridfinnsson**, 17 July – 2 September 2007  
**Paul Chan: The 7 Lights**, 15 May – 1 July 2007  
**Allora & Calzadilla**, 17 – 29 April 2007  
**Karen Kilimnik**, 20 February 9 April 2007  
**In the darkest hour there may be light, works from Damien Hirst's murderme collection**, 25 November 2006 – 28 January 2007  
**Runa Islam**, 25 October – 5 November 2006  
**China Power Station: Part 1**, 8 October – 5 November 2006  
**Uncertain States of America**, 9 September – 15 October 2006  
**Thomas Demand**, 6 June – 20 August 2006  
**Ellsworth Kelly**, 18 March – 21 May 2006  
**Elmgreen & Dragset**, 26 January – 26 February 2006  
**Ilya and Emilia Kabakov**, 19 October 2005 – 8 January 2006  
**Oliver Payne & Nick Relph**, 6 September – 2 October 2005  
**Rirkrit Tiravanija**, 5 July – 21 August 2005  
**Andreas Slominski**, 26 April – 12 June 2005  
**Tomoko Takahashi**, 22 February – 10 April 2005  
**Monika Sosnowska**, 5 December 2004 – 16 January 2005  
**Glenn Brown**, 14 September – 7 November 2004  
**Gabriel Orozco**, 1 July - 30 August 2004  
**Cy Twombly**, 17 April – 13 June 2004  
**State of Play**, 3 February – 28 March 2004  
**Hiroshi Sugimoto**, 18 November 2003 – 18 January 2004  
**John Currin**, 9 September – 2 November 2003  
**Cindy Sherman**, 3 June – 25 August 2003  
**Takahashi Murakami**, 12 November 2002 – 26 January 2003  
**Kutlug Ataman**, 11 February – 9 March 2003

