

# Great Fairground art



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Warm up: Children to listen to Fairground noises  
<http://www.soundsnap.com/tags/fairground> and think about all of their senses –  
what do you see, hear, smell, feel, taste at the fairground?

# Learning objectives



- To celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller History month by learning about Fairground Travellers ('Showmen') and their distinctive culture.
- To discover the art of the Fairground and of Fred Fowle ('The Master') in particular.
- To re-create our own artwork in the style of great Fairground artists.

# Groups of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

There is not one big group of Gypsies Roma and Travellers. Each group is different – you might say like ‘tribes’ – with their own history, culture and traditions. The people that operate travelling fairgrounds are ‘Showmen’ or Fairground travellers.

Often ‘Showpeople’ settle for the winter months, and in the spring and summer months they travel around the country setting up their fairs.





In the thirteenth century, the creation of fairs by royal charter was widespread. The Showmen's Guild was founded in 1889 to protect the interests of travelling showpeople. In Victorian times fair grew in popularity. Inventor Frederick Savage revolutionised the fairground by producing steam powered rides. The fun fair as we know it today was born!

# Fair at 'The Level' Brighton, 1844



# Fair at 'The Level' today



Even though their work was seen by thousands of people visiting the fairs, many great fairground artists are unknown.

**Think –pair-share**  
What words would you use to describe this piece?



The first fairground art was fabric banners – this was because they could be rolled up and easily carried. Then came great carvings on wood.

Have a look at some fairground art.  
What words would you use to describe this piece?





What words would you use to describe this piece?



What words would you use to describe this piece?  
Think about the writing too...



Heavily ornate and lusciously visual rides and attractions were used in order to entice customers.

# Fred Fowle

‘Futuristic Fred’ used striking, futuristic looking 3D lettering and images. It was an almost comic book style – he loved comics. Fowle used traditional scrollwork, lettering and more abstract designs. He worked with the talented artist Edwin Hall – another fairground artist.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FRQoT1jBdU>

**Lightning Skid built by Hayes for Tom Smith & Sons in 1965 and decorated by Hall & Fowle. Now owned by Carters Steam Fair.**



# Fred Fowle's artwork



The seasonal (spring and summertime) nature of the work meant that the bulk of the work had to be carried out in the winter months and Fowle worked long hours. For many years Fred Fowle's workshop was an old tram shed in London. It was during this time that he worked on his signature style, which featured expressive swirls and curvy, freehand letterforms. His high standards meant that he insisted on using the best quality paints, and applying no less than twelve coats!



Later in the 1960's he used images such as a winged Mercury and a leaping tiger to show speed and danger, and his designs became more elaborate and adventurous. His colours became brighter and more intense, he used aluminium leaf (which was often painted over with colour) and he began to experiment with Glitterite, a type of metallic sequin.



Fowle had a long brush and a very steady hand. While his technical skills were second to none, it was his imagination that really singled him out from other fairground artists. Fowle's lettering also became more elaborate, with shimmering 3D forms, picked out in black outlines that were applied in one sweep.



While his work was worth millions, he was not generally known outside the fairground community.

Fairground art often doesn't last. Unless the ride itself is closed down, it tends to get repeatedly painted over with new designs over the years.

People today are still copying his style:

<http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/>



# Can you create a piece in this style?



**Will you use:**

- Curvy swirly scrolls?
- 3D lettering?
- Bright colours?
- Something to suggest speed or danger?

What could you use to make this? What medium will you work in – paint? Digital?  
How would you begin?



# Plenary

- Discuss constant themes in the work
- Children to critically assess self and others work against these themes – did they work?
- What have you learned about this group of travelling people?

