

# ArtSway

Contemporary Visual Art in the New Forest

## Teachers Pack

### Bob Parks: The Rhythm and Blues Feeling 2 September – 1 October 2006

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SWAY PARISH COUNCIL



# **Bob Parks:**

## **The Rhythm and Blues Feeling**

**2 September – 1 October 2006**

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## **Exhibition Information for Teachers**

### **Bob Parks: The Rhythm and Blues Feeling**

Bob Parks' eclectic career stretches back almost 40 years and is rooted in the experimental performance art of the 1960s and early 1970s. He has been connected to Sway for many years and has a studio in his mother's house, who lives very close to ArtSway. This exhibition gives just a glimpse into the spectrum of work that he has created during his lifetime.

Parks' work aims to bring together a wide range of sources and influences such as blues music, spirituality, sexuality, gospel singing and Tantric sound alongside his own pioneering performance work. His first art performance was in the mid-1960s as a contributor to Mark Boyle's seminal performance at the ICA, London. Parks' performances seek to confront and challenge the viewer, and can be compared and contrasted against more deeply personal work that explores his relationship with his Church Starlight COGIC (Church of God in Christ), a black congregation based in South Central Los Angeles who he regards as his friends, brothers and sisters.

These influences have inspired Parks to create work which attempts to capture the passions and pains of Rhythm and Blues - a term propagated by his friend Johnny Otis, with whom he has worked collaboratively for many years. It is here that music becomes so important to Parks – particularly R&B and the gospel singing of COGIC – and it is ultimately sound that informs every facet of his oeuvre. The resulting exhibition - *the Rhythm and Blues Feeling* is the culmination of Parks' exploration of a vast range of genres that includes poetry, photo-realistic and other portrait paintings, music, video and installation works as well as site-specific performances. In the exhibition we see bodies falling and flailing in ecstasy or uncertainty, and hear voices that call out in word and song.

Parks' commitment to represent spirituality, his own and others, is in evidence in every facet of his life and work. The installation in Gallery 3, to the left, is a recreation of his gallery at his mother's house, which features sketchbooks, notes, diaries, and cuttings that have inspired or influenced him, as well as the shrine-like installations and paintings with which he surrounds himself. Parks works with young offenders in Southall, who are vulnerable and likely to re-offend. Among the installation are newspapers that relate the story of one of his pupils who was killed in a drug-related crime, and sculptures that the artist made in response.

**Images of Works by Bob Parks**



*Self Portrait (detail)*, oil on plasterboard with Swarfega, 1974-75



Bob Parks' studio



*Starlight COGIC (Church of God in Christ), each image oil on canvas, 1982-84*



Bob Parks' performance at ArtSway



## **Themes for Lessons and Workshops**

### **Statement by Bob Parks:**

*A current concern of mine is Destabilization, a psychotherapeutic approach which draws upon physical and mental release (usually in the form of loud activity). Blues, Gospel and rock and roll all include audiences and participants exhibiting destabilization. The psychotherapeutic approach aims to utilize destabilization as a positive activity in the therapy of anxiety and stress.*

*My musical development, informed by the gospel singing of COGIC has directly influenced my painting and poetry. In my work I aim to bring together these various sources and influences, producing work which reflects a highly personal engagement with these popular sources. My practice over the last twenty years has included performance art in Los Angeles, paintings (portraits of congregations) and music performances.*

As described above and in the **Exhibition Information for Teachers** part of this booklet Bob Parks' works contain varied themes and ideas – many of which could be adapted for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum for Art.

### **Some Themes and Ideas to Consider for Lessons:**

- **Autobiography.**
- **Use of Unusual Materials.**
- **Research and Developing Ideas.**

#### **Autobiography**

Bob Park's work is intensely personal. The title of his exhibition at ArtSway is *The Rhythm and Blues Feeling* and is made up of works that are intended to link to each other and to be experienced as a whole. Included in the exhibition are a portrait of his parents, numerous self-portraits, photographs of his friends and photographs of places he has visited. Also included are drawings and letters from his friend Johnny Otis – who is considered the first to use the term 'Rhythm and Blues'. At the entrance to the exhibition is a painting entitled *New Forest*, which Parks' painted when he first moved to the New Forest from London in the 1960s. All of these works – and the many others that are included in the exhibition – hold deeply personal meaning for the artist and are imbued with his sincerely held Christian faith. In essence, Parks' work deals with his own conscious view of the world, filtered through his faith and love of music.

#### **Use of Unusual Materials**

Bob Parks' work is made up of many styles and influences; and is realized using a range of eclectic materials. Even a painting such as *Self-portrait (detail)* (1974-75) has been created using not only traditional materials such as oil paint, but also with a lubricant called Swarfega. The lubricant has been

mixed into the paint – and although not intended to be seen, alludes to certain sexual practices that Parks' draws upon to inform his work.

Parks uses a broad range of materials in the works in his studio, and in particular a shrine he constructed in memory of one of his students who recently passed away. In this shrine Park's has used old coffee tins to form a rudimentary crucifix, and has also included glass chippings from his grandmother's grave, old newspapers and various objects – ornaments – that the artist has collected to complement the shrine. On the floor of his studio are piles of sketchbooks, newspaper cutting, toys, photographs, etc. that refer to each decade stretching back to the 1960s; each of these decades are full of objects that describe Park's life and work.

### **Research and Developing Ideas**

Although Bob Parks' work is inspired by biographical events, much of it is also informed by intensive research. Parks' visits many art lectures and events in London, parts of Europe, and in the US (for instance he saw a major Dada exhibition in Paris recently) – all of which serves to add to his knowledge of modern and contemporary art practices and ideas.

Parks recently embarked on a research trip to Canada and the US to complete works in progress and to gather new images for his exhibition at ArtSway. One highlight from this trip was his visit to his Church in Los Angeles, where he recorded members of the congregation singing, as well as completing some of his own musical works.

## **Guided Tours and Workshops at ArtSway**

ArtSway is always keen to welcome school groups visiting the gallery. Please see the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet for more information. **Please note:** we would only be able to accommodate between 20 and 25 children in the galleries per visit.

### **Guided Tours**

One of the best ways to experience an artist's work, as opposed to looking at images in books or on the Internet, is to actually visit a gallery to see their work in the flesh. ArtSway has hosted many school group visits in the past, offering **Guided Tours** around the gallery by the Exhibition and Education Officer and Audience Development Officer.

The tours sometimes involve power point presentations, but usually consist of ArtSway's Officers taking the students from work to work, explaining the origins and content of the works on display. A tour will usually end with a question and answer session.

On some occasions it may be possible to have the artists present for a school visit.

### **Workshops**

ArtSway employs a wide range of artists to lead workshops. However, they are all professional artists who will charge a fee to lead a workshop. If a school is interested in scheduling an artist to lead a workshop, please contact the gallery. Contact details are in the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet.

There are a series of one-hour workshops available, taking place after the tour of the exhibition that are lead by ArtSway's Exhibitions and Education Officer. These workshops, that will involve simple drawing and paintings techniques, will be based on the themes outlined in the **Themes for Lessons and Workshops** section of this booklet. These themes will be relevant to the exhibition *Bob Parks: The Rhythm and Blues Feeling* and are: **Autobiography; Use of Unusual Materials; Research and Development of Ideas.**

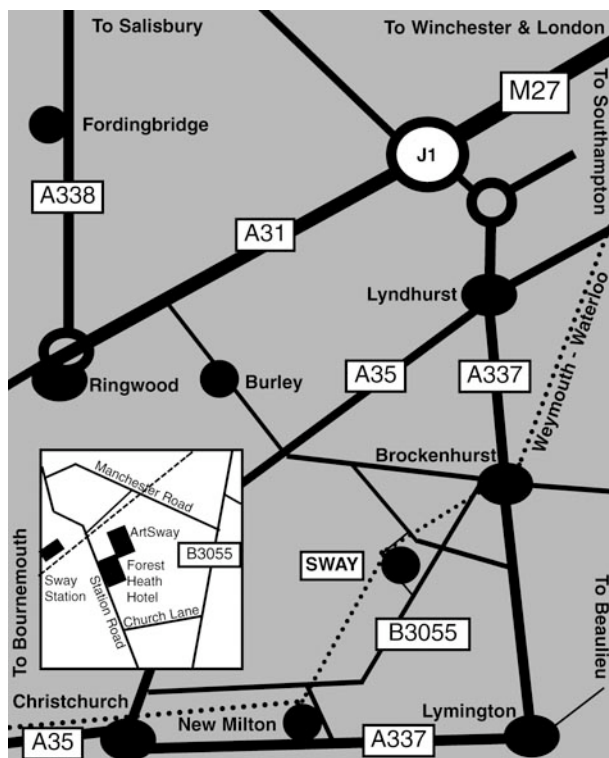
### **A Timetable of a Typical School Visit to ArtSway**

- 10.00am – 10.10am: **Introduction and welcome to ArtSway.**
- 10.10am – 10.30am: **Tour of the exhibition.**
- 10.30am – 11.30am: **Workshop activities.**
- 11.30am – 11.45am: **Discussion and round up of activities.**
- 12.00pm: **End of workshops and school visit.**

## Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway

The following is information for school groups visiting ArtSway for **Guided Tours and Workshops**.

### Getting to ArtSway



**By Rail:** Sway Station is on the London Waterloo to Weymouth Line.

**By Car:** Follow signs to Sway from Brockenhurst, Burley or Lymington, and then follow signs for Village Centre & Train Station. ArtSway is just behind the Forest Heath Hotel on Station Road.

**Access:** All parts of the gallery are accessible via level access.

**Parking:** ArtSway has its own car park that is reached along the access drive between the surgery and chemist on Station Road in the centre of Sway

### In the Galleries

Works of art, especially Bob Parks' paintings and sculptures, are very fragile and cannot be touched. We ask that children visiting the gallery take care both of their own safety and of the artworks on display. Teachers and their assistants are responsible for their groups. At the beginning of the tour the relevant ArtSway Officer will give a brief explanation to the visiting children of what they can and cannot do in the gallery.

### Contact Details for ArtSway

If you would like to discuss a visit to ArtSway, or what we could offer in terms of educational resources, please contact:

**Exhibitions and Education Officer Peter Bonnell on Telephone: 01590 682260 (extension 14), or Email: [peter@artsway.org.uk](mailto:peter@artsway.org.uk)**

**Address:** ArtSway, Station Road, Sway, Hampshire, SO41 6BA  
**Telephone:** 01590 682260 **Fax:** 01590 681989

**Email:** [mail@artsway.org.uk](mailto:mail@artsway.org.uk) **Web:** [www.artsway.org.uk](http://www.artsway.org.uk)

**Opening Times:** Tuesday to Sunday, 11am – 5pm. **Admission is FREE.**