



## Exhibition Study Pack

This pack is intended for use primarily with pupils at Key Stage 3 & 4.

It should serve as an introduction to Norman Cornish's work for those who do not know his work, and help those who do to a further understanding of it. Students should be encouraged to investigate his recurring use of themes and to examine their own reactions to the themes and ideas.

Where possible, Norman Cornish's own words have been used as he describes his own work.

This narrative may be used as a starting point or as a point for discussion.

He is very articulate about his own work and speaks of it in a way that is easy to understand.

Some of his subjects include:

1. Examples of his life as a miner, both underground and on the surface.
2. Pub scenes
3. Streetscapes
4. Portraits
5. Observations of everyday life in and around Spennymoor

Some of the themes in the work of Norman Cornish transcend different generations. You may wish to explore the following themes and think about their relevance today and their impact on your own experience of life.

- Community
- Families
- Citizenship
- Identity
- Relationships

These pictures are just a small sample of his work and may or may not be included in the exhibition. If you would like to do some more research about Norman Cornish visit [www.normancornish.com](http://www.normancornish.com) to discover more!

# Pit Gantry Steps

Dean and Chapter Colliery Ferryhill



Norman started work at the age of 14 in 1933. As he signed on for his first shift at 2am he was greeted by the man in charge who said, **“You have just signed your death warrant son”** He discovered later that the colliery was known as the ‘butchers shop’ because there were so many accidents.

**NC** *I went through the door and the first thing I saw was the gantry scene. The men were there with their orange oil lamps and they looked like fire flies. Then I saw all of these steel railings, steps, girders and steel wires. I thought it looked like a great steel spider’s web and when I saw the colliery behind. I thought it was like a big spider – moving towards us and then going to drop us down a great hole. The picture is about **feeling**, what I felt and saw as a boy.*

Points for discussion

- What does this image tell you about going to work in a coal mine?
- What does art tell us about the past?
- How does this compare with your first day of work experience?

Norman Cornish painted many street scenes at different times of the year in a variety of locations around Spennymoor. The Norman Cornish Trail is to be announced shortly!

# Mount Pleasant

## Snow scene



**NC** *This picture has a lot of things I feel about it. Kiddies playing in the snow for instance .The church crowns the whole thing and is symbolic of the whole area in a non religious kind of feeling. Compositionally, take the roof of the row on the right and move left across the picture in a long diagonal – from one side to the other – if you look at the other side, another long diagonal – two diagonals across a rectangular theatre of operations. People playing echo the diagonal shapes. Look at the lady in blue on the right echoing that shape, another diagonal. This is how I felt about it, for instance, the lady with two little ones, one a bit bigger than the other. She has a hand reaching out and has obviously seen all of this activity with snowballs and she knows the little one is going to get hit, so she says bring that little one here .On the other side these two are looking back into the picture which is interesting as it is part of the diagonal as well. In the main part front right are older boys playing snowball fights and the little dog excited and barking. All sorts of little things in the composition. All in all I could just call it people and feelings. **It is an interesting picture, interesting to see ourselves and respect ourselves and people who are interesting.***

### Points for discussion

- How does Norman Cornish represent community in this image?
- What does community mean to you?
- How can this painting and the artist's description of his composition help you to think about composition in your own work?



# The Busy Bar

The largest version of this is 9 feet in width and was eventually bought by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries



**NC** Again, the bar is a big diagonal shape – wide bar coming along half way up the right hand side down to the section area of the base. Then of course there are other shapes teetering away from his hand, down to under the bar. It's not too obvious but it is two diagonals, one against the other – rather like when you see someone playing a violin. You need a violin and you need a bow to cross it to get music – if you don't do that you don't get a lot of music – very similar, it helps to create feeling. Of course the actual men themselves tried to create circular rhythms within the group, not just to draw men in a certain position – so that's like circular rhythms knitting all together like in a jersey.

## Points for discussion

- How does Norman Cornish capture the atmosphere in this busy bar scene?
- Many of the men in this painting are miners. What does art tell us about the past?



## Sarah

**NC** *This one is of my wife Sarah knitting .Forget about the knitting and in your mind think about the hands clasped together as if she was praying. In a sense she is praying by using her hands in that way. So it's her way of praying, to do something practical. This pose is very similar to that of thousands of women across Durham of a certain generation.*



## Man and Dog

**NC** *This is more than a man and dog really because the composition is fitted very carefully within a rectangle and my feelings about it are put in that rectangle. First of all the dog and man, well they are, both to be blunt, animal life on this planet. The man is an animal and the dog is an animal too – and funnily enough, very similar, arms, legs, heart and chest. So how do I get that across ? Well, I notice that the man is full of curvilinear shapes, and I find that if I start at the right side, the mans coat and bottom of his trousers in a big curve come around it, continue and reverse and come along with the curve of the dogs chest then down his leg to create a lovely curvilinear shape which is marrying the two figures together aesthetically. Also if you come from left side from halfway up the picture the middle of the man's leg is doing the same – which gives great strength. The right lower corner up the man's shape to the top comes to what we know as the golden section – this is a specially sensitive area which people have a feeling of rightness about and can be discussed. Then come straight down the picture and pass something very interesting – down the man's leg and the dog's two front legs. These are echoed with the two beer pumps. Not just a man and dog but an arranged man and dog upon a theatre of operations, that's how my pictures have been done.*

### Points for discussion

- This is an iconic pose. Which other images in this exhibition create an identity of people and places across Durham ?
- Does art have to mean something?