Laura Knight (1877-1970)

Spring

Oil on canvas, 1916-20

Tate: Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1935

Laura Knight was inspired to begin work on a large canvas while living at Staithes in Yorkshire: 'There was going to be everything I knew of spring in that big picture'. She recalled picking primroses in a nearby valley: 'Sheltered there, one learnt that the long winter was nearly over, in some patches of sunlight between the tracery of pale shadow it was almost warm. No one could take a step without crushing the virginal green and yellow that was springing from the black earth.' However, poor weather meant she only managed some preparatory drawings.

Work on *Spring* really began in Cornwall in 1916 when Britain was at war and painting outdoors was banned. Knight hid in bushes to make sketches, fearful that she would be imprisoned if caught. The setting was the Lamorna Valley and the models Ella and Charles Naper. She later painted out the man and replaced him with a boy. When the painting was damaged and she had to strip off the varnish the man was reinstated. Knight achieved her ambition to capture the spirit of the season: bad weather departs and the couple enjoy the sunshine among the lambs, may blossom, birds and gorse flowers. However, the primroses that first inspired the painting did not find a place.

Kurt Jackson (b.1961)

Dancing caddis, dancing water reeds

Mixed media on canvas board, 2019

Private Collection

A delicate landscape, you can feel the fragility around you gently awakening. The stream threads its way through, murmuring beneath my overhanging feet and under my gaze. I use vivid greens, leaf greens, spring greens studded with golden kingcups and dandelions, blue sky blues reflected in the chalky waters, gin clear where even the trailing pond weeds are now awake; soft watercolour washes diluted by spring water, trickle to flow to trail across the page between kingfishers and roach.

Kurt Jackson

Allan Gwynne-Jones (1892-1982)

Spring Evening, Froxfield

Etching, 1928

Stuart Southall Collection

Spring Evening, Froxfield was produced when Allan Gwynne-Jones was living in a modest cottage in Froxfield, a small hamlet also known as Little Switzerland in the South Downs close to Petersfield. Gwynne-Jones was educated nearby at Bedales, the progressive and first co-educational school to be established in England which moved to its present site in Steep, Petersfield in 1900.

The drawing was made in early spring when Gwynne-Jones could observe the rooks returning home while the branches were still bare. He learnt to etch at the Saturday morning engraving classes his Royal College of Art colleague Malcolm Osborne offered. From the outset Gwynne-Jones acknowledged his debt to Samuel Palmer and John Linnell. The closely observed barns and pond in this tranquil contemporary rural scene were a short walk from Froxfield, at the top of Stoner Hill.

Monica Poole (1921-2003)

Spring After the Hurricane

Wood engraving, 1988

Stuart Southall Collection

Monica Poole was born in Canterbury and in 1945 went to London to study illustration at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Despite the emphasis of the course Poole only illustrated one book and instead concentrated on producing exhibition engravings on a larger scale. For a time her somewhat unsettling portrayals of the Kent landscape aligned her with the wartime Neo-Romantic spirit.

Poole was inspired by the curious and intricate structures of the natural world, her engravings tease out the inherently strange beauty of trees, plants, rocks and shells. An intense connection with nature meant that she was attuned to seasonal changes such as the flowering times of plants: magnolia, primrose, teasel, ripe corn and the humble dandelion all feature in her work. *Spring after the Hurricane* or *Spring 1988* was commissioned by the National Trust and the Society of Wood Engravers to commemorate the Great Storm of 1987 which felled some 15 million trees. Poole's engraving shows splintered beech trunks and yet there is hope of renewal as despite the damage one tree is coming into leaf.

James Lynch (b.1956)

The Ladder and the Moon, Spring Equinox

Egg tempera on gesso coated wood panel

Private collection

I walk and cycle through the Somerset lanes and further afield over the Wiltshire Downs. Long walks and rides at the end of the day or weekends, all through the year, all seasons, all weathers. Often I will see a painting I might make in the future, or there will be just the germ of an idea. This garden is at the foot of the hill above the Somerset Levels where we live, and I pass it several times a week. Here it is late afternoon in March. The giant leeks and spinach are the tail end of winter's vegetables and about to make way for new planting. Compost bin full of rich decay. Rotavator at the ready. A ladder against the tree running up to the full moon. Endings and beginnings. Seasonal journeys.

James Lynch

Keith Grant (b.1930)

Early Spring, Selborne

Oil on canvas, 2017

Chris Beetles Gallery, St James's, London

Keith Grant first visited Selborne in the 1950s, seeing it as an icon of English landscape. For Grant, 'There seems no point to an art which does not have its origins in nature. Without richness of nature all themes are soon exhausted and replaced by cliché and fashion…'.

Grant completed ten oil paintings on the theme of Selborne in 2017, finding that it still retained the power to fire his imagination. Of *Early Spring, Selborne*, he wrote in his journal on 5 April 2017:

> By combining geometry in the landscapes, I am simply alluding to the underlying geometry which exists hidden from immediate apprehension throughout the natural world. My task is to render this harmonising matrix visible whenever I can through a simplification of the complex forms of growth and unifying them with the demands of picture making. Sometimes it is when a form results from an analysis of a natural object or is through abstraction, formalism and simplifying that the best images are achieved. My hope is to reveal the spiritual in nature and not its already catalogued identity.

Annie Ovenden (b.1945)

Lanhydrock Woods

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Artist

In spring the beech leaves burst forth spreading vivid green across woodlands, needing a palette which includes light cadmium yellow, and manganese blue (the coolest range). White blossom highlights many blackthorn spikes, bluebells create mists of cobalt across woodland floors and campions magenta the hedgerows.

Summer brings more palette changes. The sun now high in the sky flattens and dries the gradually ochring landscape, it dapples the leaves which dress every tree in varying shades of phthalo, hooker and sap green, lemon cadmium and even silver pearl.

Autumn is demanding, with its riot of picture book foliage - it's easy to fall into the trap of using every colour available. The cadmiums, crimson lake and venetian red toned down with burnt sienna and Payne's grey now appear in my mix.

The four seasons - winter, spring, summer, autumn - vary significantly in characteristics. My paintings can be a reminder that time marches on and the seasons change but my ultimate goal is to portray the harmony and beauty that abounds in any season.

Annie Ovenden

Frank Sherwin (1896-1986)

Kent - The Garden of England

Poster, 1955

Frank Sherwin was born in Derby and studied at the School of Art there before attending Heatherleys School of Fine Art in London. He was primarily a watercolourist, although he did also paint in oils, but is mainly remembered as a poster designer. The period between the wars is viewed as the golden age of British railway posters but after nationalisation British Railways continued to produce striking colourful designs that encouraged people to go out and experience the beauty of the British landscape.

Sherwin would usually create his designs in gouache and these were then reproduced as lithographic posters. They play to the strengths of the printing process, using the bright, contrasting colours that made these stylised images so appealing. This poster depicts a lane winding through the Kent countryside among spectacular springtime displays of snow-white pear blossom that promises a bumper crop for the autumn. The oast houses, church and solitary horse-drawn cart suggest an idealised landscape unchanged by modernisation, implying that a short train journey could transport you to this timeless pre-industrial idyll.

Duncan Grant (1885-1978)

The Garden Path in Spring

Oil on canvas, 1944

Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery, Helena and Kenneth Levy Bequest 1990

The Garden Path in Spring was painted at Charleston farmhouse, near the village of Firle at the foot of the South Downs. Angelica Garnett, daughter of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, was born there and described it as always being an artist's garden. Grant and Bell transformed the vegetable plots and hen runs, poring over seed catalogues during the winter months selecting plants and flowers that would provide sources of interest for their paintings.

Their dense planting avoided precision and combined Mediterranean influences with an English cottage garden affording impact and inspiration from varied shapes, colours and textures. *The Garden Path in Spring* with trees and plants filling the canvas makes no reference to wartime. It is an oasis of calm and harmony conveying Grant's passion for the flowers he lovingly tended and his skilful use of Impressionist colour and simplified forms. The spring garden did much to restore Grant's spirits having left his London studio for the sanctuary of rural Sussex in 1939.

Charles Tunnicliffe (1901-1979)
Rooks Rebuilding their Nests
Watercolour, 1961
Ladybird Books / University of Reading Special Collections

Tunnicliffe was well established as a children's book illustrator by the time Ladybird commissioned him to work on the *What to Look For* series in 1959. His collaborator for the books was E. L. (Elliot Lovegood) Grant Watson. The combination of Grant Watson's engaging text and Tunnicliffe's beautifully observed illustrations made the books a success with children and parents alike.

This illustration from *What to Look for in Spring* shows rooks at work on their nests at the beginning of March. Rooks are early nesters and the first eggs may even be laid in late February. Grant Watson explains: 'The rook sitting on the nest is displaying to her mate who is bringing an extra twig, giving him a welcome home'. Tunnicliffe has carefully recreated the blue-purple iridescence on the male bird's wings. In the background a heron is being mobbed: a lazy heron will sometimes take over a rook's nest for itself so these birds are chasing it away.

Allen William Seaby (1867-1953)
Nightingale
Colour woodcut
St Barbe Museum Collection

Having spent the winter in West Africa the nightingale arrives in south east England from mid-April. These rather shy birds are not often seen but they can be heard singing by day and at night, often from an inaccessible bush or thicket. They are one of the most musical songbirds found in Britain and inspired Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819) and the popular song *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* (1939). Like the cuckoo their numbers are falling dramatically; the population has shrunk by 90% in the last fifty years. This is probably due to climate change affecting their habitats in Africa and the countries along their migration route. Their preferred environments of scrub and fields left fallow are also disappearing from the British countryside.

Seaby joined the staff at the Reading School of Art and eventually became its director in 1911. There he became a leading exponent of colour woodcuts using the Japanese method. Seaby's woodcut prints are marked by the subdued colours common to Japanese prints, his compositions allowing for large areas of blended colour where the brushing of the pigment onto the block is clearly visible. This view of a nightingale singing in the moonlight was made up from five blocks printed sequentially.

Allen William Seaby (1867-1953)

Cuckoo

Colour woodcut

St Barbe Museum Collection

Perhaps the most celebrated indicator of spring's arrival is the call of the cuckoo being heard once again. The traditional date for its arrival was 14 April and although in recent years one has occasionally been heard as early as January the vast majority do still appear from around that date onwards. Although rarely seen, the cuckoo's distinctive song has inspired a great deal of folklore.

It is the male that calls, usually from a high branch hidden in the leaf canopy as shown in Seaby's print. The female waits for a nearby dunnock, reed warbler or meadow pipit to lay and then adds her own eggs to the nest. Once hatched the cuckoo ejects the other eggs and takes all the food its surrogate parents can provide. Since the 1980s cuckoo numbers have dropped by 65%, this relates in part to conditions at stopover points on its southward migration towards the Congo but also to the declining numbers of the caterpillars it eats when resident in Britain. While this might be a relief to its unwitting victims, its disappearance would end a centuries-long tradition of welcoming in the spring with the sound of the cuckoo's call.

Robin Tanner (1904-1988)

The First Swallow (Alington in Wiltshire)

Etching, 1927

Stuart Southall Collection

The First Swallow was actually made when Tanner was living in London, working as a teacher in Blackheath and studying at Goldsmiths' School of Art in the evenings:

> Alington in Wiltshire was a theme that was very dear to me, and I poured into it all my homesickness and love for the grey stone farms and white lanes of home. Although I used the drawings I had made of the pillared cow byre and thatched walls and mossy-roofed barns and a crude little chapel-of-ease in a hamlet of that name, I could never work with any degree of topographical accuracy. That didn't interest me at all. What I wanted to say was what I *felt* about my countryside, and particularly at that moment of spring when the swallows come back and the naked fans of elm trees begin to thicken.

This is the second state of the etching that includes the newly arrived swallow captured in the air above the chapel, but the bird was burnished out from the plate before the edition was published in 1927 simply as *Alington in Wiltshire*.

Colin See-Paynton (b. 1946)

The Merry Month of May

Wood engraving

Collection of the Artist

It really is quite marvellous, wild brown hares are resident in my garden! I have been living here in the same house in mid Wales for almost fifty years and the hares will I am quite sure, through many generations, have been here much, much longer. Over time somehow these beautiful and mysterious creatures have reconciled and familiarised themselves with my presence here. I see them regularly and I feel privileged to be able to observe them so closely; through courting, mating and rearing their young, as well as the long periods of relaxation. Hares will spend hours grooming and dozing.

Some of the windows in my house and studio go down to ground level, perfect for hare watching, but still better, when I am outside sitting quietly they will approach to within touching distance. Not that I have ever attempted that. Perhaps then it is not surprising that these wild hares have been an unending source of inspiration and continue to feature in my work. My wood engraving *The Merry Month of May*, depicting a hare together with cockchafers (maybugs), is no more or less than a simple expression of my ongoing enchantment.

Colin See-Paynton

Charles Tunnicliffe (1901-1979)

The Valley

Wood engraving, 1942

Stuart Southall Collection

The Valley was completed when Charles Tunnicliffe was teaching art at Manchester Grammar School having been rejected for active service. During the war he also produced illustrations for the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

The Valley differs in sentiment from Tunnicliffe's earlier etchings of milking, mucking out and pig slaughtering. The peaceful bucolic scene with village church nestled snugly in the valley and weary labourer returning home while sheep and lambs are in the meadow is redolent of the posters designed by graphic artist Frank Newbould for the series *Your Britain: Fight for it Now*. The posters were issued in 1942 to arouse patriotic feelings and nostalgia for the British countryside and the 'worth' of fighting for your country and preserving the unspoiled rural landscape. Tunnicliffe often spoke of his love for the countryside and in his autobiographical *My Country Book* (1942) describes 'a country which is full of variety, and surprises, and which never palls.'

Thomas Hennell (1903-1945)

Weeding Onions

Watercolour with pencil, 1943

Chris Beetles Gallery, St James's, London

Thomas Hennell had a deep-seated knowledge of husbandry and rural crafts having recorded many of the latter for books he wrote or illustrated on agricultural matters. Hennell drew on this rural understanding in 1940 for the *Recording Britain* project contributing 11 watercolours of Kent, Hampshire, Dorset and the Cotswolds.

In June 1943 Hennell was invited by the War Artists' Advisory Committee to replace his friend Eric Ravilious (reported missing off Iceland in September 1942) for a three-month commission with the honorary rank of Lieutenant, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. *Weeding Onions* is well informed and devoid of nostalgia being completed a few weeks before Hennell was sent by troopship to Reykjavik. It was probably executed near his home in Ridley, a small secluded village not far from Shoreham. The women weeding may be Land Girls, albeit not wearing their iconic baggy brown breeches and green jerseys.

Cedric Morris (1889-1982)

Landscape of Shame

Oil on canvas, *c*.1960

Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1987

Cedric Morris had a great love of the natural world, becoming not only an accomplished painter but a prominent expert and breeder of irises. From the 1920s he produced some remarkable paintings of birds in which he sought to capture their essence.

Landscape of Shame with its stark depiction of scores of dead and dying birds including a rook, moorhen, partridge and sparrow hawks littering a barren landscape personifies the depth of Morris's environmental concerns. He had become a vociferous opponent of the damaging impact on birdlife of the use of pesticides and the intensification of agricultural practices. During the late 1950s and early 1960s he had often picked up dead or dying birds in fields around his home at Benton End, near Hadleigh, Suffolk. In the spring of 1960 reports of the death of birds were widespread and Morris wanted to title the painting 'Homage to [named manufacturer of pesticides]' but was persuaded by his partner Arthur Lett-Haines that it might result in a lawsuit. This phenomenon was the subject of the chapter *And No Birds Sing* in Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1963).