



# Frank Bowling on the most random object that has ended up in his paintings

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Presenting everything you need to know about the life long friend of Francis Bacon, Frank Bowling now at Tate Britain

Frank Bowling isn't a name that's spent much time in the spotlight of the public art world. But over the past 60 years he has been working alongside

contemporaries such as Patrick Caulfield, David Hockney and Pauline Boty. It is only now, after his current exhibition at Tate Britain, that Bowling is getting the focus that he deserves. Bowling's work predominantly consists of pop-inflected canvases with a hint of expressionism that some may associate with the style of the late Basquiat. However, during the Sixties, when Bowling moved from England to New York, he soon learnt what he was missing and found himself restricted by the stereotype that art needs to tell a story. Instead, Bowling drifted to create works touched by personal memory and history. "I was the stool pigeon to help the necessary pacifying for the awfulness of colonialism," he says. "I represented the black world, so to speak." One can get lost in his figurative pop art, which portray all sorts of textures. Read on to find out the most random object that has ended up in one of Bowling's paintings...

### **1. Where were you born?**

I was born in Bartica, in what used to be British Guyana, at the confluence of the Cuyuni, Mazaruni and Essequibo rivers.

### **2. What did you want to be when you were growing up?**

When I first moved to England I wanted to be a poet.

### **3. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received? What is the worst?**

When I was having such trouble finding representation, my friend, Clem Greenberg, gave me the best advice when he said, "You'll get there. Don't

worry about it.” When I asked where “there” was he didn’t reply. Now I feel like I got “there”! The worst was when I was told that I shouldn’t bother with painting and that painting was only for rich people!

**4. Who is the one person, dead or alive, that you would like to have dinner with and why?**

Rembrandt. His ability to represent light in his work is so incredible and I’d love to find out more about how he did things.

**5. Where is your favourite place on this planet?**

London. It’s the city I feel most at home in. I’ve lived in London since 1953 and this place is more important in my life than any place I’ve ever been in.

**6. What is one thing that takes you back to childhood?**

Food, especially pig's trotters, remind me of my childhood in New Amsterdam when my mother would cook for me.

**7. What did you love most about working in the Sixties?**

Freedom to do whatever one wanted. Everything was happening with all the pop art. It seemed a free time.

**8. What is the most random object that has ended up in one of your paintings?**

My acupuncture needles and medical equipment. When my diabetes took hold, I was taking so many tablets and constantly testing with dipsticks that changed colour depending on my blood sugar levels. Rather than throw them out, I put them in the painting to get new and interesting textures into the work.

**9. What gives you inspiration?**

I'm inspired by the materials that I'm using. Paint can be used in so many ways. I'm always looking for something new and interesting to do with the things around me.

**10. What is your favourite book of all time?**

*Art And Culture* by Clement Greenberg.

**11. What is your favourite art gallery in the world and why?**

The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. It was there that I first got to know "The Jewish Bride" even before I went to the Royal College Of Art.

**12. If you could collaborate with anyone, who would it be and why?**

Cézanne, because of his intentful structuring of his pictures. He really made structuring a must if you were going to paint.

**13. What is your favourite sandwich filling?**

Jewish salt beef. You don't really get it anymore. There was a place named Bloom's, up in Whitechapel, that made these amazing sandwiches and the bread was made with caraway seeds.

**14. If you could visit any artist's studio, whose would you visit and why?**

Barney Newman. He seemed to be a great technician when it came to painting. He knew how it was to go around making a painting. He always wore elegant clothes and his shoes were always polished.

**15. What was the last thing you bought?**

I just bought a hat for my grandson.

**16. What is your favourite piece of clothing you own?**

My hat. I always wore a hat because of my family. "Put on your hat when you go out. Take off your hat when you come in." If you hung up your hat it meant that you were trying to stay with people. If you went to visit a girl's family and the father noticed that you were hanging your hat up when you came, they knew you had the right intentions. It was a symbol of how comfortable you were in the world.

**17. What is hanging on your walls at home?**

Lots of paintings. Some of my own, some by gifted artists who I've had the pleasure to meet over the last few years.

**18. What is one item all men should own?**

A hat.

**19. Who is your favourite fictional character and why?**

Jean Valjean, because he survived. He was defined as a malcontent but throughout his life he kept himself upright and honourable.

**20. So, what is next for Frank Bowling?**

I am continuing my work. I am on a journey to turn colour into light.

**Frank Bowling is at Tate Britain until 26 August. [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)**