



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

This presentation uses AI tools including Anthropic's Claude, ElevenLabs, and HeyGen. The art-historical content and editorial judgement remain my own.

- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Claude, Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942)
Girls Running, Walberswick Pier
1888-94

52-01 BRITISH ART 1900-1950

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



British art between 1900 and 1950 follows a distinctive path — absorbing Continental modernism selectively while never entirely abandoning its attachment to the observed world. This talk moves from Steer's Impressionism and Sickert's urban darkness through the shock of two world wars, tracing how painters and sculptors from Gwen John to Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth to L. S. Lowry, negotiated between radical formal experiment and the persistent pull of recognisable human experience.



Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942)
Girls Running, Walberswick Pier
1888-94
Tate Britain, London

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *Girls Running, Walberswick Pier*, 1888-94, Tate Britain, London

British art in this period follows its own trajectory — absorbing Continental influence selectively, and never entirely surrendering its attachment to the observed world. **Philip Wilson Steer** stands at the pivot point of that tension. Born in Liverpool in 1860, he trained at the **Académie Julian** in Paris after the Royal Academy rejected him, and the French experience was formative. By the late 1880s he was painting with a fluency that made him the most committed Impressionist working in England, and a founding figure of the **New English Art Club** in 1886. ***Girls Running, Walberswick Pier***, painted during his visits to the Suffolk coast, is the work that defines his Impressionist moment. At first reading it is radiant — two girls in afternoon light, movement, warmth — but Steer complicates the mood. The three shadows pressing into the foreground create an unexpected claustrophobia. The girls hold hands in shadow, then appear to have separated, and the long evening shadows carry an unmistakable intimation of ending. Yet the heavily worked,

declaratively flat paint surface constantly pulls attention back from meaning to materiality. One contemporary critic condemned the picture as outright 'evil', which tells us precisely how destabilising its formal ambition felt at the time. After 1895 Steer turned increasingly to **Constable** and **Turner**, and his later watercolours edge towards abstraction entirely.

Notes

At the beginning of the 1890s Philip Wilson Steer was the leading follower of French Impressionism in England. However, he has a Post-Impressionistic technique that produced a balance between the formal properties of the surface and the naturalistic representation of the subject. He had been influenced by Whistler and Degas but from about 1895 he began to reassess the work of the Old Masters such as Constable and Turner and he started to paint the English countryside.

Steer made many visits to Walberswick in Suffolk (south of Lowestoft). *Girls Running, Walberswick Pier* was one of the most authentic Impressionist works in Britain and was regarded as either uncompromisingly avant garde and according to one critic 'evil'. The painting captures the warmth of late afternoon sunlight but unlike Monet there are darker elements. At first it appears carefree with two girls dancing down the pier in the sunshine but there is a closeness and a feeling of claustrophobia accentuated by the three shadows in the foreground. The girls hold hands in the shadow but they have parted perhaps signifying a friendship breaking apart. The long shadows at the end of the day suggest night falling and death but the flat perspective and the heavily worked paint surface bring us back from meaning to seeing paint on a flat surface. The painting balances precariously between abstract pattern and profound meaning.

In 1927 he began to lose his sight in one eye and started to paint almost exclusively in watercolour with a looser style sometimes verging on total abstraction. He continued to teach at the Slade until 1930.

Notes

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942)

British landscape and portrait painter and leader of the Impressionist movement in England.

He was born in Liverpool, the son of a portrait painter. From 1880-1 he

studied at the South Kensington Drawing School. He was rejected by the Royal Academy and went to Paris to study at Académie Julian, and then in the École des Beaux Arts under Cabanel.

Between 1883 and 1885 he exhibited at the Royal Academy and in 1886 became a founder of the New English Art Club.

In 1887 he spent some time at the Etaples art colony in Northern France and later painted a number of works at Walberswick.

He was influenced by Whistler, Boucher, Gainsborough, Constable and Turner.

He was a WWI painter of Royal Navy scenes. His self-portrait is in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Wilson_Steer

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/steer-girls-running-walberswick-pier-n06008>

The painting depicts a woman in a bright yellow dress standing on a small stage in a dimly lit, ornate room. The room has dark wood paneling and a high ceiling. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members are visible, some wearing hats. The lighting is dramatic, with the woman being the central point of light.

Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942)
Katie Lawrence at Gatti's
c.1903
84.4 x 99.3 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales

Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942), *Katie Lawrence at Gatti's*, c.1903, 84.4 x 99.3 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Steer's pivot towards Constable and Turner is one trajectory out of Impressionism — **Walter Richard Sickert** takes the opposite route, moving deeper into urban darkness rather than pastoral light. Like Steer, Sickert was a founding presence at the **New English Art Club**, joining in 1888, and his arrival immediately sharpened the fault line between the club's conservative members and those drawn to French example. Sickert had spent the early 1880s as **Whistler's** studio assistant, absorbing his shallow foregrounds and tonal compression, and he had studied alongside **Degas** in Paris, whose café-concert paintings gave him licence to treat popular entertainment as serious subject matter. In London, that licence had no currency whatsoever. When Sickert exhibited **Gatti's Hungerford Palace of Varieties: Second Turn of Miss Katie Lawrence** at the NEAC in April 1888, the response was ferocious. The **Builder** declared it "the lowest degradation of which the art of painting is capable," and **Stanhope Forbes** — a fellow club member — denounced it as "tawdry, vulgar and the sentiment of

the lowest music hall." The hostility was not merely aesthetic. British music halls were understood as sites of alcohol, bawdry, and prostitution, and to paint them was to endorse them. Sickert, characteristically, pressed further in exactly that direction.

Notes

British Figurative Artists

One of the two paintings he exhibited at the NEAC in April 1888, *Katie Lawrence at Gatti's*, which portrayed a well known music hall singer of the era, incited controversy "more heated than any other surrounding an English painting in the late 19th century". Sickert's rendering was denounced as ugly and vulgar, and his choice of subject matter was deplored as too tawdry for art, as female performers were popularly viewed as morally akin to prostitutes. The painting announced what would be Sickert's recurring interest in sexually provocative themes.

Sickert's music hall paintings were inspired by those of his friend Edgar Degas. In Paris, Degas and Edouard Manet's pictures of café concerts were greeted with interest and even respected.

The painting technique used was derived from that used by Whistler and during the 1880s Sickert had been Whistler's studio assistant. The shallow foreground and lack of background recession are typical of Whistler, for example, *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1*, *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, 1871.

By 1887 he had fixed upon the theme which would occupy him intermittently for most of his career, the world of the British music hall, exhibiting his first painting of this subject, *Le Mammoth Comique*, at the Society of British Artists. A natural platform for his work at this time was the recently formed New English Art Club, which Sickert joined that year. His arrival crystallised a split within the group between the more conservative artists and those who looked to the example of French impressionism.

In Britain Sickert faced intense critical hostility when he showed *Gatti's Hungerford Palace of Varieties: Second Turn of Miss Katie Lawrence*, 1887–8 (believed destroyed, possibly similar to the painting above) at the New English Art Club in April 1888. It represented 'the lowest degradation of which the art of painting is capable', according to the *Builder*, while the *Artist*

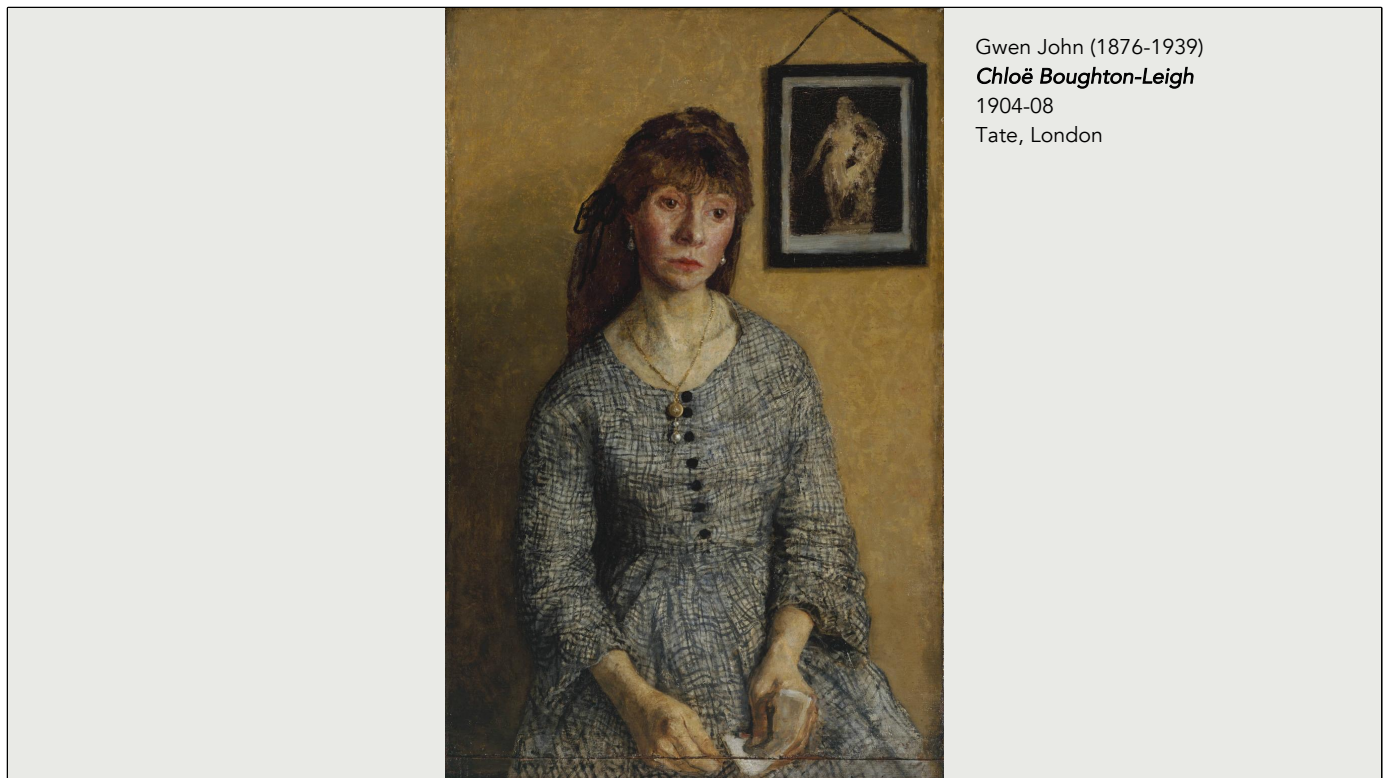
believed it symptomatic of 'the aggressive squalor that pervades to a greater or lesser extent the whole of modern existence.' Even other members of the New English Art Club were shocked, and the artist Stanhope Forbes angrily scorned the picture as 'tawdry, vulgar and the sentiment of the lowest music hall'.

Notes

'No painter before Sickert had dared to consider the music hall as a fitting subject for art, and his production of such pictures was considered wilful and provocative. In Britain the music hall held distinct connotations of immorality. Many of the acts, Minnie Cunningham included, dealt in the currency of ribald, vulgar or suggestive humour, and it was just this waywardness that partly made the music hall so popular. But the halls themselves were considered dens of dissolution by the moral majority. Alcohol was served throughout performances, and volatile audiences were encouraged to join in singing the often bawdy song choruses. Additionally, many of the halls were believed to be venues where prostitutes plied their trade. The Empire in Leicester Square was particularly notorious as a place where, away from the auditorium in its promenade area, clients could meet prostitutes.' (Tate website)

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/walter-richard-sickert-minnie-cunningham-r1139296>



Gwen John (1876-1939)
Chloë Boughton-Leigh
1904-08
Tate, London

Gwen John (1876-1939), Chloë Boughton-Leigh, 1904-08, Tate, London

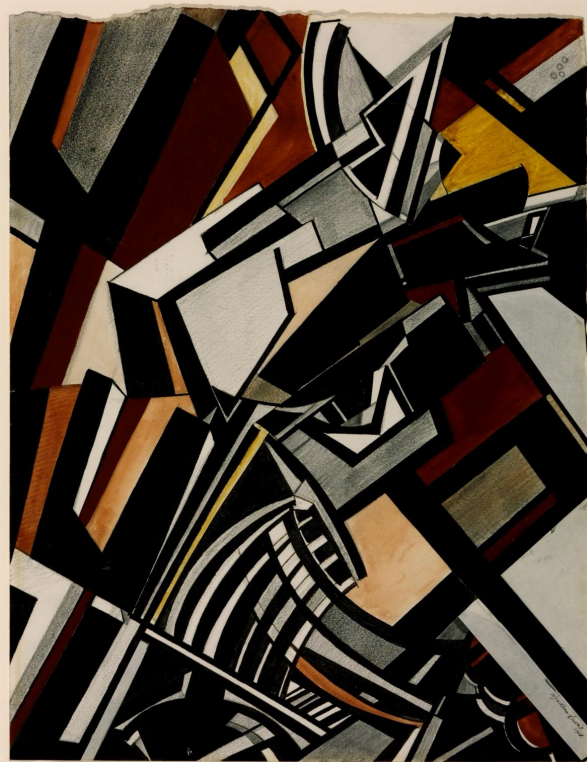
Sickert's music halls thrived on spectacle and crowd — **Gwen John** works at the opposite extreme, reducing the world to a single figure in a quiet room. Born in 1876, she trained at the **Slade School of Fine Art** and then in Paris under **Whistler**, where she absorbed his disciplined tonal restraint. She settled permanently in France in 1904, and that self-imposed distance from the London art world shapes everything about how her reputation developed. The portrait shown here is of **Chloë Boughton-Leigh**, a Paris friend and, like John herself, a Catholic convert. The subdued palette, compressed foreground, and the sitter's downward gaze — absorbed in an open book — generate an atmosphere of intense interiority. John exhibited it at the **New English Art Club**, that same London forum we have already encountered, though her relationship to the British art world was always oblique. During her lifetime she was habitually overshadowed by her brother **Augustus John**, whose public reputation was vast and assertive where hers was private and concentrated. Augustus himself anticipated the

reversal, saying "In fifty years' time I shall be known as the brother of Gwen John." **John Rothenstein**, writing in **Modern English Painters** in **1952**, called her "one of the finest painters of our time and country." Critical consensus has settled firmly in that direction.

Notes

The solitary figure, her downward gaze and the open book in her hand produce a sense of calmness and intensity that was typical of her work. Gwen John's quiet art with its subtle colour relationships, stands in contrast to her brother, Augustus John's, far more assertive work. She was once overshadowed by his work and his enormous reputation at the time but critical opinion now tends to view her as the more talented. Augustus predicted this reversal, saying 'In 50 years' time I will be known as the brother of Gwen John.' And in 1952 she was described as 'one of the finest painters of our time and country' [John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters*].

The portrait shown here is of a Paris friend, Chloë Boughton-Leigh. The subdued colouring, short foreground and self-absorption of the sitter create a deeply intense atmosphere. John showed it in London, at the New English Art Club. Ellen Theodosia Boughton-Leigh (1868–1947), known by her family as Chloë, was, like Gwen John, a Catholic convert and latterly she and her sister Maude (q.v.) lived on Canvey Island. Maude was Gwen John's friend; both had studied at the Slade and probably met in Paris.



(Percy) Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957)

Composition

1913

ink, watercolour and graphite on paper

34.3 x 26.7 cm

Tate

(Percy) Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), *Composition*, 1913, 34.3 x 26.7 cm, Tate

From Gwen John's concentrated solitude, we turn to one of the most combative figures in British modernism. **Wyndham Lewis** arrived at the **Slade School of Fine Art** — the same institution that trained John — before spending the 1900s moving across Europe and absorbing the radical energies circulating in Paris. He settled in London in 1908, and within a few years had made himself indispensable to every significant avant-garde development, and impossible for nearly everyone involved. He co-founded the **Camden Town Group** in 1911, exhibited at **Roger Fry's** second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912, then promptly fell out with Fry over the **Omega Workshop** and established his own **Rebel Art Centre** in 1914. That quarrel crystallised his ambition: to forge a British modernism harder and more machine-conscious than Fry's decorative instincts allowed. The result was **Vorticism**, named by his friend **Ezra Pound**, which Lewis conceived as combining the structural rigour of Cubism with the dynamism of Futurism. The movement's journal, **BLAST**, launched in 1914,

announced itself with characteristic aggression. Lewis is also one of the most significant portrait painters of the period — a claim his own ferocious polemics consistently obscured. We will return to his war work, including **A Battery Shelled**, shortly.

Notes

Wyndham Lewis was an English painter and author. He co-founded the Vorticist movement and was editor of the Vorticist magazine BLAST.

He said he was born on his father's yacht off Nova Scotia and he went to Rugby School following his parents separation. He later went to the Slade School of Art and then spent most of the 1900s travelling around Europe and studying art in Paris. He lived in London from 1908 and was a founder of the Camden Town Group in 1911. In 1912 he exhibited at Roger Fry's second Post-Impressionism exhibition. He met Roger Fry and Clive Bell but soon fell out with them. In 1913-15 he developed a form of geometric abstraction that his friend Ezra Pound called 'Vorticism'. He wanted to combine the solid structure of Cubism with the liveliness of Futurism. He joined Roger Fry's Omega Workshop but fell out with him and created the Rebel Art Centre and although this only lasted three months it gave rise to the Vorticist Group and BLAST.

In 1917 he was posted to the front in a forward post directing artillery fire. IN December he was made an official war artist. One of his best known works **A Battery Shelled** (1919, Imperial War Museum) which we will look at later.

Lewis had what has been called a thorny personality and he managed to offend all those who might have helped his career. Lewis went to war unlike the other literary men, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce and the experience embittered him. During the 1920s he developed a public persona, known as The Enemy, who shot at popular ideas and art, left-wing artists and intellectuals. He even went so far as to state the case for Hitler, a position he later recanted after visiting Berlin in 1938, but only after the damage had been done. Few understood that his motivation at the time was avoidance of another war. Lewis attacked everyone, Virginia Woolf (for copying James Joyce), the Bloomsbury set, the Sitwells, the 'romantics' D. H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein and even Joyce and his close friends Pound and Eliot. He wrote 23 books between the wars and was one of the foremost portrait

painters. However, his attacks meant he had no steady employment and he suffered from a stream of libel actions.

References

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/apr/17/wyndhamlewis/overlookedscour>



Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson
(1889–1946)

Dance Hall Scene

c.1913–4

gouache and graphite on paper

22.2 x 19.7 cm

Tate

Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889–1946), *Dance Hall Scene*, c.1913–4, 22.2 x 19.7 cm, Tate

Lewis's combative modernism found an unlikely ally in **Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson**, who shared the Slade's corridors with Lewis between **1909 and 1912**. Where Lewis forged Vorticism, Nevinson threw himself into the arms of **Futurism** — and he remains the only British artist to have done so wholeheartedly. The painting before you was almost certainly inspired by the **Albert Hall Ball of December 1913**, and its method is inseparable from its subject. Nevinson was absorbed by the Futurist concept of **simultaneity** — the idea that a painting should not merely depict an event but reconstruct the sensation of living through it. The composition does not show dancers; it delivers the disorientation of dancing. That commitment became doctrine when Nevinson co-signed the **Vital English Art manifesto**, which condemned what it called "the pretty-pretty, the commonplace, the soft, sweet, and mediocre" in British culture. The manifesto irritated Lewis enormously — he resented Futurism's Italian dominance over British avant-garde conversation, which partly explains Vorticism's

aggressive assertion of independence. The **Futurist Exhibition of March 1912** at the Sackville Gallery had proved the decisive catalyst for Nevinson. Within two years, the movement had become, as contemporaries noted, a catchword in London for anything new and outrageous.

Notes

This scene of wild partying was probably inspired by the Albert Hall Ball, held in London on 3 December 1913. Nevinson was fascinated by the idea of 'simultaneity'. His composition here not is just depicting dancers, but conveys the experience of dancing. He was the only British artist to wholeheartedly embrace futurism, co-signing the manifesto *Vital English Art* which rejected 'the pretty-pretty, the commonplace, the soft, sweet, and mediocre' in English culture, in favour of the modern and dynamic.

Notes

Nevinson was the son of a war correspondent and was a student at the Slade School of Art between 1909 and 1912. The Futurist Exhibition of March 1912, held at the Sackville Gallery, London, proved decisive for his development. Futurism had by now become a catchword in London for anything new and outrageous, and the British avant-garde grew resentful of its influence. Nevinson continued to make Futurist paintings of machine-age London, celebrating the dynamism of the underground Tube trains, the traffic in the Strand, and a Bank Holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. The advent of World War I changed his mind. Having gone to France with the Red Cross and been invalided home soon afterwards, he announced that he would be using 'Futurist technique' to express the reality of war in his new work. In subsequent paintings Nevinson confirmed that he saw the Great War essentially as a tragic event. Bleak, outspoken and often angry, his paintings of 1915–16 are among the masterpieces of his career, bravely opposing the prevailing jingoistic tendency. By 1919 he had given up Futurism. Retreating instead to a more traditional vision, he painted lively interpretations of New York, which fuse a lingering love of Futurist angularity with a new respect for naturalistic observation. Nevinson was at his best when dealing with the dynamism and vertiginous scale of big-city life. In later years he concentrated more on pastoral scenes and flower pieces, where a gentler mood prevailed. In 1918, Nevinson was the person who showed Paul Nash how to produce

lithographs.

References

Tate website



Paul Nash (1889-1946)
The Menin Road
 1918
 Oil painting
 182.8 × 317.5 cm
 Imperial War Museum, London

Paul Nash (1889-1946), *The Menin Road*, 1918, 182.8 × 317.5 cm, Imperial War Museum, London

Where Nevinson brought Futurism's velocity and noise to the pre-war city, **Paul Nash** turned the same fractured visual language to entirely different ends — not celebration, but elegy. **The Menin Road**, completed in **1919**, is among the most unflinching images of industrialised warfare ever made. Nash had served in the **Ypres Salient** and knew the ground intimately. He described the area around **Tower Hamlets**, a cluster of German pill boxes the British forces dreaded above almost any other position, as "perhaps the most dreaded and disastrous locality of any area in any of the theatres of War." That personal authority saturates every inch of the canvas. Commissioned by the **British War Memorials Committee** for a Hall of Remembrance that was never built, Nash worked on the large canvas in a herb-drying shed in **Chalfont St Peter**, then completed it in a Gower Street room so confined he had to climb out of the window to view the whole composition. The picture reads in three horizontal bands: a foreground of debris and flooded craters, a middle road punctuated at

intervals by shell holes, and a far distance of stunted trees and seven zigzag streams that fail to reach the horizon. Two soldiers at centre appear not so much to walk the road as to be held by it. Nash himself considered it his finest work.

Notes

The Menin Road is a large oil painting by Paul Nash completed in 1919 that depicts a First World War battlefield. Nash was commissioned by the British War Memorials Committee to paint a battlefield scene for the proposed National Hall of Remembrance, which was never built. The painting is considered one of the most iconic images of the First World War and is held by the Imperial War Museum.

He decided to paint the Ypres Salient (a technical term for an area surrounded on three sides by the enemy) as it had been devastated during the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge where there was a cluster of German pill boxes the British called Tower Hamlets. He was originally going to call it A Flanders Battlefield but eventually decided on The Menin Road. Nash knew the area well as he had served there. He considered Tower Hamlets to be 'perhaps the most dreaded and disastrous locality of any area in any of the theatres of War'.

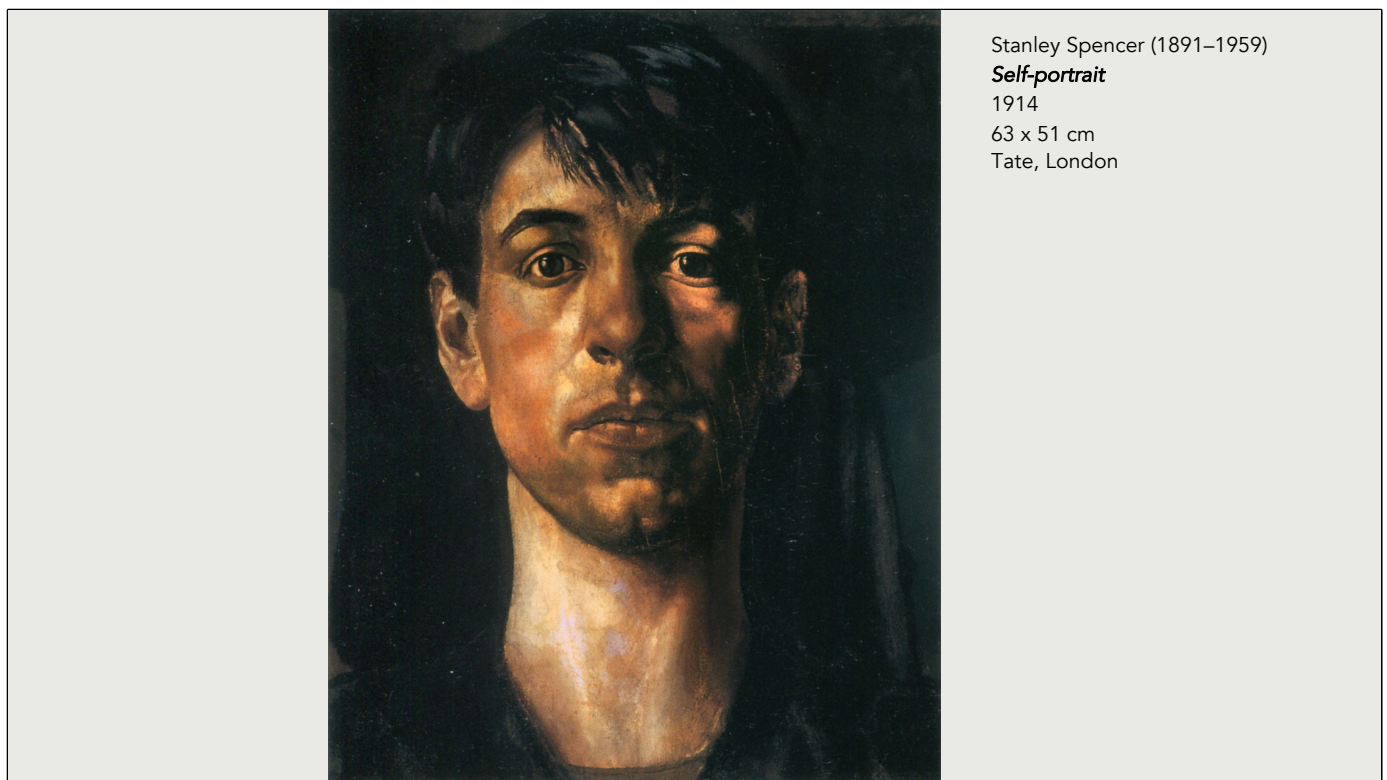
Nash started worked on the large painting in a herb drying shed in Chalfont St Peter and when he had to move out he had difficulties finding a studio and eventually completed the work in Gower Street, London. The room in Gower Street was so small Nash had to climb out of the window to see the complete picture.

"The Menin Road depicts a landscape of flooded shell craters and trenches while tree stumps, devoid of any foliage, point towards a sky full of clouds and plumes of smoke, bisected by shafts of sunlight resembling gun barrels. Two soldiers at the centre of the picture attempt to follow the, almost, unrecognisable road but appear to be trapped by the landscape. Nash composed the picture in three broad strips. The foreground is filled with shell craters and debris, which block access to the road in the middle of the picture. The only possible path, to the side of one of the mud pools, is blocked by a fallen board. Across the centre of the picture, shell holes punch into the road at regular intervals, while debris further breaks up the road, as do the shadows from a line of trees alongside it. Beyond the trees, the battlefield stretches to the horizon, with a wood of stunted trees on the right

hand side and to the left a series of seven zigzag streams, that also fail to reach the horizon and escape. Nash came to consider this painting to be his finest work."

References

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Menin_Road_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Menin_Road_(painting))



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959)
Self-portrait
1914
63 x 51 cm
Tate, London

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), Self-portrait, 1914, 63 x 51 cm, Tate, London

Paul Nash, who called Spencer 'the last of the Pre-Raphaelites', was a Slade contemporary — and that Slade generation is precisely where **Stanley Spencer's** story begins. Spencer was born on **30 June 1891** at Fernlea on Cookham High Street in Berkshire, the eighth surviving child of a piano teacher and organist who distrusted formal schooling. Spencer was educated by his sisters Annie and Florence in a garden shed next door, and since he resisted conventional lessons, they let him draw. The **Bible**, solitary walks along the Thames, and the enclosed village world of **Cookham** shaped his imagination more than any classroom. In **1908** he entered the **Slade School of Art** under **Henry Tonks**, alongside Nevinson, **David Bomberg**, and Paul Nash. He loved Cookham so deeply he took the train home for tea each day — a habit so remarked upon that his nickname simply became '**Cookham**', one he embraced himself. At the **Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition** of 1912, Roger Fry showed Spencer's **John Donne Arriving in Heaven**. When asked about Picasso, Spencer replied: "I haven't got past Piero

della Francesca yet." His **1914 Self-Portrait**, painted in a rented Cookham studio, is bold and austere — the head, one and a half times life size, meets the viewer with unnerving directness. The collector **Edward Marsh** bought it immediately, calling it "masterly... glowing with genius."

Notes

1. Spencer's Early Life, 1891 to 1914, Self-Portrait (1914)

Spencer was born in Cookham the son of a piano tuner and organist who did not believe in universal education. Spencer was taught by his sister Annie in the shed at the bottom of the garden next door but as Spencer did not like school work so she allowed him to draw instead. Spencer was stimulated by reading from the family bible and enjoyed taking long, solitary walks. He spent time drawing with the wife of a local landowner, Lady Boston who, in 1907, arranged for him to go to Maidenhead Technical Institute.

From 1908 to 1912 he studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks with Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash and David Bomberg. However, he so loved Cookham that he would come home for tea on the train. This was noted and gave rise to the nickname, 'Cookham', which Spencer himself used.

In 1914 he began work on a self-portrait which was painted in Wisteria Cottage, a decaying Georgian house Spencer rented, from the local coalman in Cookham, for use as a studio. Painted with a mirror, the painting is bold and austere with a direct and penetrating gaze, softened by the deep shadow on the right hand side – the head fills the picture space and is painted one and a half times life size. The art collector Edward Marsh bought Self-portrait and considered it to be "masterly...glowing with genius."

Notes

Spencer's Early Life, 1891 to 1914

1891, A crow fell down the chimney at Fernlea on Cookham High Street, flapped around the room, flew out of the window and Stanley Spencer was born. The date was June 30th 1891 - and the family thought it was a good omen. He was the eighth surviving child of Annie and William Spencer, a piano teacher, and he was joined a year later by his younger brother Gilbert. This is a picture of the house today and this is how the High Street looked in the 1880s. The Kings Arms Hotel is four houses away from Fernlea.

1891-1907, his father did not think the local school was satisfactory and could not afford a private school so Spencer was educated by his sisters Annie and Florence in the shed at the bottom of the garden next door but as Spencer did not like school work so they allowed him to draw instead. Painting was not an important subject for the Spencer family but there were a number of reproductions on the walls and when he was old enough his mother took him to the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy.

1907, Spencer was stimulated by reading from the family bible and enjoyed taking long, solitary walks. He spent time drawing with the wife of a local landowner, Lady Boston who, in 1907, arranged for him to go to Maidenhead Technical Institute.

1908-12 he studied at the Slade under Henry Tonks. Contemporaries included Christopher Nevinston, David Bomberg, and Paul Nash. 1912 he exhibited John Donne Arriving in Heaven at Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition. He was considered to be influenced by Gauguin. However, he was more influenced by Giotto and Mantegna and when asked what he thought of Picasso he said 'I haven't got past Piero della Francesca yet'. Paul Nash called him 'the last of the Pre-Raphaelites'. He so loved Cookham that he would come home for tea on the train. This was noted and gave rise to the nickname, 'Cookham', which Spencer himself used.

This first self-portrait is a drawing was done while he was at the Slade. It was the year of the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries.

World War One, 1914 to 1918

1914 he began work on his second self-portrait which was painted in Wisteria Cottage, a decaying Georgian house Spencer rented, from the local coalman in Cookham, for use as a studio. Its dark, rich colours and strongly modelled form was inspired by a reproduction of the head of Christ by the Italian Renaissance artist Luini.

1915-18 he attended the Slade School of Art between 1908 and 1912 and so his career started at the same time as the First World War. During the war his poor physique caused him to apply for ambulance duties. He enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corp and was sent to Bristol and later Macedonia. He requested a transfer to the infantry in 1917.

1918, he returned to Cookham in December 1918 to hear his brother Sydney had been killed in action three months previously and he lost 'the all

pervading joy I felt as a child' and the 'serenity of spirit'. His much loved brother had been killed in the last few weeks of the war and returning to the work after the war he found it difficult to continue, often stating "It is not proper or sensible to expect to paint after such experience." Many artists felt the same and although in Europe some artists reacted against the slaughter by rejecting all social, cultural and artistic standards in Britain and among many artists in Europe there was what has been called a "return to order". The excesses of modernism we rejected and there was a return to more conventional figurative painting. Cubism was partially abandoned even by its creators, Braque and Picasso, and Futurism, which had praised machinery, violence and war, was rejected by most of its adherents. The return to order was associated with a revival of classicism and realistic painting.

1920 to 1927, The Resurrection, Cookham

1919 lived and worked at Cookham. He became a member New English Art Club until 1927.

1920-21 he lodged with Henry Slessor and his wife at Bourne End near Cookham.

1922 he accompanied the Carline family on a holiday to Yugoslavia, became engaged to Hilda Carline and moved to Hampstead.

1925 married Anne Hilda Carline and had two daughters Shirin (1925) and Unity (1930). When he first met Hilda he became a changed man in his own words the old Stanley Spencer 'was now no longer so' and the new 'lust or what you will was sweeping me along'.

1926 completed The Resurrection, one of his 'major, most memorable achievements'. The Times critic would call it 'the most important picture painted by any English artist during the present century ... What makes it so astonishing is the combination in it of careful detail with modern freedom in the treatment of form. It is as if a Pre-Raphaelite had shaken hands with a Cubist.'

The Sandham Memorial Chapel. Burghclere, 1926-32 (National Trust)

1927 Spencer received commissions including the Sandham Memorial Chapel (1927-1932). It was in 1927 that he held his first one-man exhibition at the Goupil Gallery. The centre piece of the exhibition was The Resurrection, Cookham.

Cookham, 1932-1935, The Church House Project

1932 moved to 'Lindworth', a large house in Cookham. Began work on 'Church-House' idea. Elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. Dudley Tooth became his sole agent.

Divorce and Remarriage, 1935-1938

1935 resigned from the Royal Academy after the rejection of *The Dustman* and other works from the Summer Exhibition and the controversy resulted in his popularity declining.

1937 he was divorced by his wife Hilda Carline and immediately married Patricia Preece. His second marriage was a disaster, never consummated and his wife manipulated and exploited him. Spencer tried to win back Hilda but never succeeded. He began work on the *Beatitudes of Love* series.

1938 in financial difficulties, left Cookham and went to stay with the Rothensteins in London. Dudley Tooth took over managing his business affairs. Began *Christ in the Wilderness* series in bed-sit in Swiss Cottage.

Port Glasgow, World War Two, 1935-1945

1939-41 stayed at the White Hart Inn, Leonard Stanley, Gloucestershire, with George and Daphne Charlton. In March 1940 the War Artists Advisory Committee commissioned Spencer to paint the Port Glasgow shipyards, which occupied him until 1946. Went to live in Epsom with his children and then moved back to Cookham.

Resurrection Pictures, 1945-1950

1945 began *The Resurrection*, Port Glasgow series (1945-1950). His reputation improved as a result of his war commissions

1949, this sixth self-portrait shows just before the scandal of the obscenity charge and the death of Hilda.

1950 Alfred Munnings, the President of the Royal Academy, initiated a prosecution against Spencer for obscenity but Munnings then resigned and the new President persuaded Spencer to re-join the RA. Hilda died of breast cancer in November. This followed years of mental health problems during which Spencer visited her weekly and sent long letters, some of over one

hundred pages. He continued to send letters after her death.

Final Years, 1951 to 1959

1954 he visited China as a guest of the Chinese authorities.

1955 there was a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery.

1959 seventh and his final self-portrait was painted from 12 to 16 July. He was knighted in 1959 and died of bowel cancer on 14 December aged 58 at the Canadian War Memorial Hospital, Cliveden, Berkshire. His last years until his death in 1959 were financially successful although his reputation and his sale prices did not soar until after his death.

References

<http://www.christies.com/features/Stanley-Spencer-A-Primer-6261-1.aspx> a good summary of his life, personality and work



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959)
*Travoyes Arriving with Wounded at a
 Dressing-Station at Smol,
 Macedonia, September 1916*
 1919
 182.8 x 218.4 cm
 Imperial War Museum

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Travoyes Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916*, 1919, 182.8 x 218.4 cm, Imperial War Museum

The **1914 Self-Portrait** announced Spencer as a painter of startling psychological force — and then the war arrived to test that force against reality. Spencer was initially turned away from active service on account of his slight build, and worked instead at **Beaufort War Hospital** in Bristol, a sprawling Victorian Gothic building that immersed him in the daily machinery of suffering and survival. In **1916** he sailed for the Balkans and eventually volunteered for infantry duty in **Macedonia**, spending two and a half years on the front line against German and Bulgarian forces. Malaria invalidated him out. His brother **Sydney** did not survive, and that fact — the randomness of who lives — never left him. Near the war's end the **British War Memorials Committee** commissioned Spencer for a proposed Hall of Remembrance that was never built. The result was **Travoyes Arriving with Wounded**, completed in **1919**. A travoy is a frame dragged by horses — here loaded with men wounded in the previous day's assault,

queuing outside a Greek church converted into a dressing station. Spencer refused the committee's suggestion of a religious service; he wanted a true event. Writing in **1938**, he was explicit: "I meant it not a scene of horror but a scene of redemption." The surgeons are his secular Christs, the broken men their congregation.

Notes

World War One, Travoy's Arriving with Wounded (1919)

At the start of the war Spencer was keen to enlist but because of his weak physique his mother persuaded him to enter the ambulance service. He worked at Beaufort War Hospital, Bristol, a large Victorian gothic building. He left in 1916 for overseas duty and following ten weeks training he was sent to Macedonia (a Balkan nation north of Greece and between Albania and Bulgaria). In 1917, he volunteered to join an infantry unit and he spent two and a half years on the front line fighting German and Bulgarian troops. He was eventually invalided out following persistent bouts of malaria. His survival while so many of his fellow soldiers, including his brother Sydney, were killed marked his attitude to life and death for the rest of his life.

Towards the end of the war Spencer was approached by the British War Memorials Committee to complete a commission. It was commissioned for the proposed Hall of Remembrance, which was never built. The Commission suggested a religious service at the front but Spencer wanted to show a real event. This shows the wounded from the previous day's attack queueing to be treated by the surgeons in an old Greek church that was used as a dressing station and operating theatre. Spencer wrote that the men were calm and peaceful despite their wounds and he saw it in religious terms as like Christ on the Cross and the Resurrection through the efforts of the surgeons. In 1938, Spencer wrote, 'I meant it not a scene of horror but a scene of redemption'.

Notes

A travoy is a frame structure used to drag loads across land using horses.



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Resurrection, Cookham*, 1924–1927, 274.3 x 548.6 cm, Tate Britain, London

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *The Resurrection, Cookham*, 1924–1927, 274.3 x 548.6 cm, Tate Britain, London

From the secular redemption of a Macedonian dressing station, Spencer spent the following years preparing for something far more ambitious — a vision of resurrection set not in Jerusalem but in his own back garden. The itinerant quality of the early nineteen-twenties is worth noting. Spencer moved between **Bourne End, Steep in Hampshire**, and **Poole**, sustained by friendships with patrons and fellow painters including **Henry Lamb**. It was Lamb's Hampstead studio, rented from October **1923**, where Spencer began *The Resurrection, Cookham*, completing it in **1927**. The painting's scale alone — over five metres wide — signals an act of total artistic commitment. The scene is **Cookham churchyard**, where the dead rise unhurried and content from their graves. Christ sits in the church porch cradling three infants; God stands behind him; Moses lines the churchyard wall. Spencer himself appears near the centre, naked against a gravestone, while his fiancée **Hilda Carline**, whom he married in **1925**, lies sleeping in ivy nearby. Risen souls depart for heaven

aboard Thames pleasure steamers. When shown at the **Goupil Gallery**, the **Times** critic declared it "the most important picture painted by any English artist in the present century." Even **Roger Fry**, habitually hostile to narrative painting, conceded "a very personal conception carried through with unflinching nerve and conviction." The **Tate** acquired it immediately for one thousand pounds.

Notes

1920 to 1927, *The Resurrection*, Cookham (1927)

Spencer stayed in Cookham until 1920 when he moved to Bourne End, just over a mile away, to stay with the trade union lawyer Henry Slesser and his wife. He worked on a series of paintings for them before moving to Steep in Hampshire where he worked on murals for the village hall. In 1923 he stayed in Poole, Dorset, with Henry Lamb (1883-1960, British painter and founder of the Camden Town Group) and worked on another mural scheme. This work convinced the Behrend's to commission Spencer to design murals for a chapel at Burghclere in memory of Mary Behrend's brother, Lieutenant Henry Willoughby Sandham.

In 1925, Spencer married Hilda Carline, then a student at the Slade and daughter, Shirin, was born in November of that year and a second daughter, Unity, in 1930. In October 1923, Spencer started renting Henry Lamb's studio in Hampstead where he began work on *The Resurrection*, Cookham.

The Resurrection is perhaps Spencer's most famous painting. The resurrection is one of the most challenging of all traditional Bible subjects but Spencer, by the power of his personal approach, has created a triumphant masterpiece. The picture created a sensation when shown in his one-man exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in London in 1927 and was bought immediately for the national collections for £1,000.

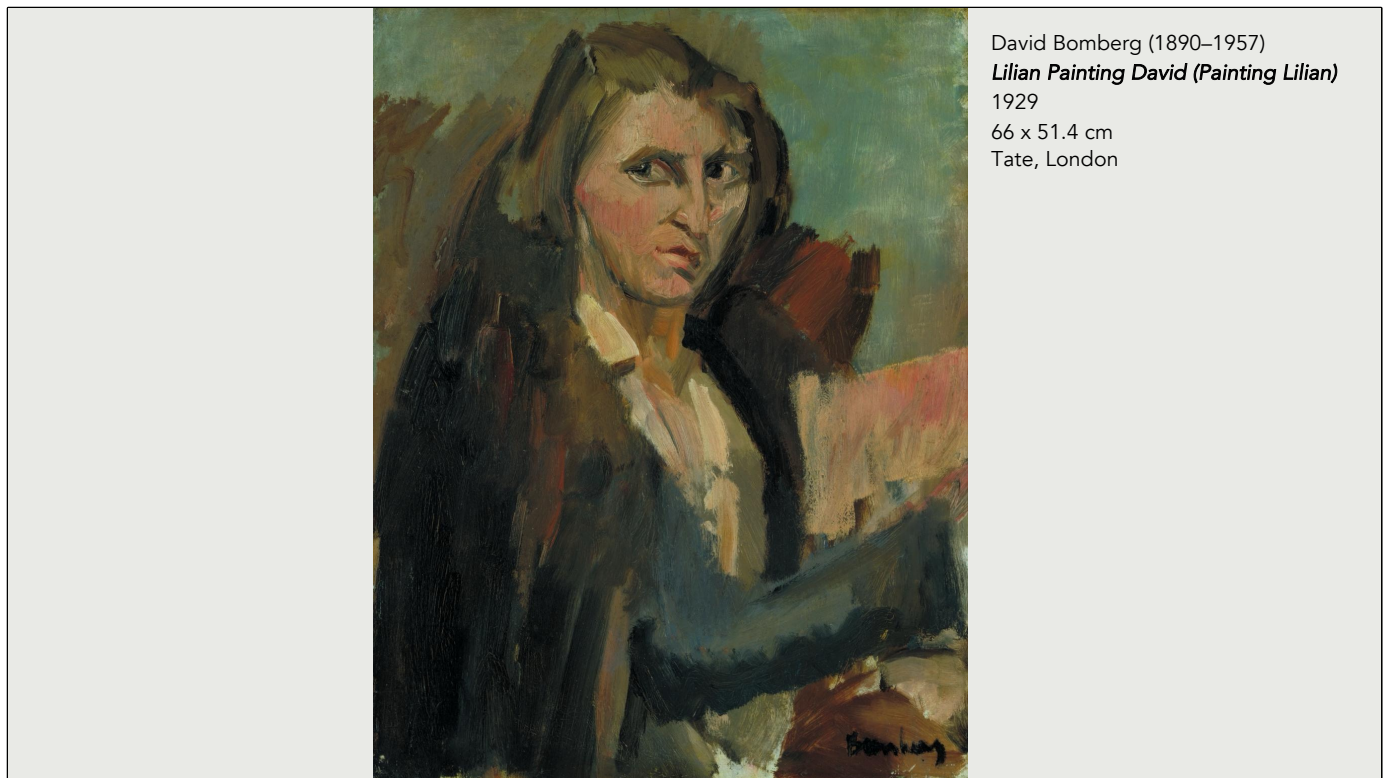
The critic of *The Times* called it '... the most important picture painted by any English artist in the present century ... What makes it so astonishing is the combination in it of careful detail with the modern freedom of form. It is as if a Pre-Raphaelite had shaken hands with a Cubist.' and even the Bloomsbury critic Roger Fry, who generally disapproved of narrative painting, wrote 'it is highly arresting and intriguing ... a very personal conception carried through with unflinching nerve and conviction.'

Spencer believed that the divine rested in all creation. He saw his home town of Cookham as a paradise in which everything is invested with mystical significance. The local churchyard here becomes the setting for the resurrection of the dead. Christ is enthroned in the church porch, cradling three babies, with God the Father standing behind. Along the wall of the church is a row of prophets including Moses, with a dark beard, holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The rest of the churchyard is filled with people resurrecting from their tombs. The group of black people emerging from sun-baked soil implies that Spencer's conception embraces the whole of humanity. Spencer made it clear that his Resurrection was a joyous event and that the resurrected are already in Heaven: '... in the main they resurrect to such a state of joy that they are content ... to remain where they are.' Even 'the punishment of the Bad', said Spencer, 'was to be no more than that their coming out of the graves was not so easy as in the case of the Good'.

Spencer himself appears near the centre, naked, leaning against a grave stone; his fiancée Hilda lies sleeping in a bed of ivy. At the top left, risen souls are transported to Heaven in the pleasure steamers that then ploughed the Thames.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/spencer-the-resurrection-cookham-n04239/text-illustrated-companion>



David Bomberg (1890–1957), *Lilian Painting David (Painting Lilian)*, 1929, 66 x 51.4 cm, Tate, London

The contrast with Spencer's visionary stillness is sharp. Where Spencer rooted everything in a single beloved village, **David Bomberg** spent his career in restless, sometimes anguished motion — and that motion shaped every mark he made. Bomberg was born in **Birmingham** in **1890**, the seventh of eleven children of a Polish-Jewish leatherworker, and grew up in **Whitechapel** after the family moved there when he was five. **John Singer Sargent** helped fund his place at the **Slade**, where he won the Tonks Prize for draughtsmanship — the same **Henry Tonks** who taught Spencer, **Mark Gertler**, **C. R. W. Nevinson**, and **Dora Carrington**. Bomberg absorbed the geometric energy of Futurism and Cubism through **Roger Fry's** Post-Impressionist exhibitions and direct encounters with Picasso and Modigliani in Paris, before being expelled from the Slade in **1913** for the very radicalism those exhibitions had encouraged. He fought at the Somme, and that experience broke any residual faith in the machine aesthetic. His later work turned towards landscape and portraiture, shaped by travel through Palestine, Spain,

Cyprus, and Cornwall. A loose, expressionist handling — deepened by study of **El Greco** in Toledo — came to define his mature style entirely.

Notes

Whether because his faith in the machine age had been shattered by his experiences as a private soldier in the trenches or because of the pervasive retrogressive attitude towards modernism in Britain Bomberg moved to a more figurative style in the 1920s and his work became increasingly dominated by portraits and landscapes drawn from nature. Gradually developing a more expressionist technique he travelled widely through the Middle East and Europe.

Tate, "This portrait shows Bomberg's second wife, Lilian, painting him at the same time as he is painting her. She later wrote, 'We recognized the total commitment to art in each other'. The portrait that Lilian Bomberg was painting at the same time no longer exists. Portraits of artists' lovers abound in art. But here Bomberg chooses to portray his wife as a working artist, rather than as his muse. Bomberg had recently returned from Toledo where, influenced by El Greco, a sixteenth-century Greek artist who worked in Spain, he developed a loose and expressive style which characterised his later work."

Bomberg was one of the most audacious of the exceptional generation of artists who studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks, and which included Mark Gertler, Stanley Spencer, C.R.W. Nevinson and Dora Carrington. Bomberg painted a series of complex geometric compositions combining the influences of cubism and futurism in the years immediately preceding World War I; typically using a limited number of striking colours, turning humans into simple, angular shapes, and sometimes overlaying the whole painting a strong grid-work colouring scheme. He was expelled from the Slade School of Art in 1913, with agreement between the senior teachers Tonks, Frederick Brown and Philip Wilson Steer, because of the audacity of his breach from the conventional approach of that time.

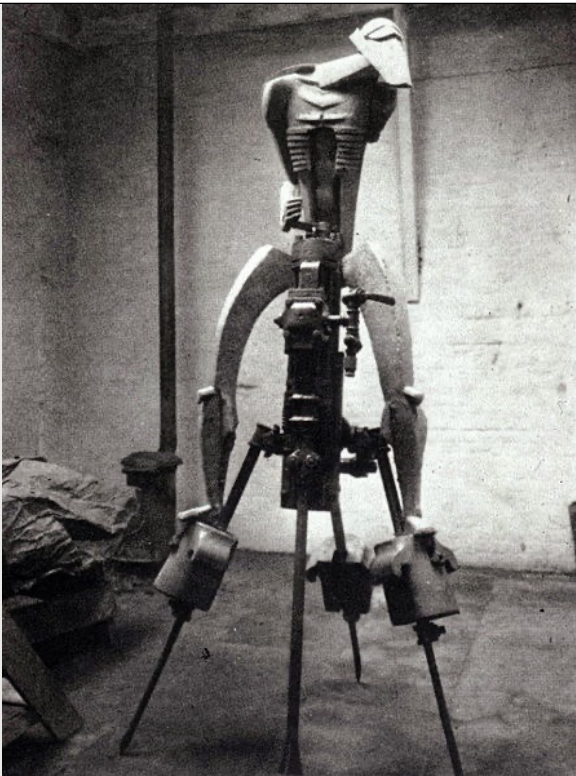
Bomberg is now recognised as one of the most exceptional and original artists of his generation, but he died in 1957 in near obscurity. Son of Jewish immigrants from the East End of London, he was one of the pioneers of early modernism. During the First World War Bomberg fought at the Somme and,

having witnessed the atrocities, he spent the rest of his artistic career trying to find or create order, moving frequently, painting and drawing the landscapes of Palestine, Spain, Cyprus, Cornwall and London.

Notes

David Bomberg (1890-1957) was born in Birmingham, the seventh of eleven children of a Polish-Jewish leatherworker. When he was 5 the family moved to Whitechapel where he spent the rest of his childhood. He studied art at City And Guilds and returned to Birmingham to train as a lithographer but quit to study under Walter Sickert at Westminster School of Art from 1908 to 1910. Sickert was an early influence alongside Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition Manet and the Post-Impressionists, where he first saw the work of Paul Cézanne.

Bomberg had financial difficulties but with the help of John Singer Sargent he was able to attend the Slade School of Art. The emphasis in teaching at the Slade was on technique and draughtsmanship to which Bomberg was well-suited—winning the Tonks Prize for his drawing. He rapidly moved away from traditional techniques under the influence of the Futurists, Francis Picabia and Gino Severini, and Fry's Second Post Impressionist Exhibition in 1912, which displayed the works of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and the Fauvists alongside those of Wyndham Lewis, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. He was expelled from the Slade because of his radical approach but was noticed by Wyndham Lewis and Filippo Marinetti and he then travelled to France with Jacob Epstein and met Amedeo Modigliani, André Derain and Pablo Picasso. On his return he exhibited at the Camden Town Group (1913) and the London Group (1914). He refused to join the Vorticists or submit an article for their magazine BLAST.



Jacob Epstein (1880-1959)
The Rock Drill
c. 1914
destroyed

Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), *The Rock Drill*, c. 1914, destroyed

From painting to three dimensions now, and the shift is a dramatic one. **Jacob Epstein's** **The Rock Drill**, first exhibited at the **London Group** exhibition in **1915**, is among the most unsettling works produced by any British artist in the entire first half of the twentieth century. Epstein was born in **New York in 1880** to Polish-Jewish parents — the same immigrant milieu that shaped Bomberg's Whitechapel childhood — and settled permanently in London in **1905**. By 1913 he had aligned himself with **Vorticism**, and **The Rock Drill** was the movement's most visceral statement: a sharp-edged, visored, mechanised figure, its torso encasing an embryonic form, mounted atop an actual **Pneumatic Rock Drill** manufactured in America, the whole assemblage standing over three metres tall. Epstein described it himself as "the armed, sinister figure of today and tomorrow — no humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into." Then the Somme happened. By **1916** Epstein had dismantled the work, discarded the drill, and cast only the truncated torso — initially in **gun metal**, later in **bronze**. The gesture of violent

self-censorship transformed aggression into mutilation, and the sculpture became something altogether more haunting. His influence on **Henry Moore** and **Barbara Hepworth** proved enormous.

Notes

British Sculpture

Between 1913 and 1915, Epstein was associated with the short-lived Vorticism movement and produced one of his best known sculptures *The Rock Drill*.

This is a photograph of *The Rock Drill* in its original form. This work appeared at the London Group exhibition in 1915. By the time of its second outing in summer 1916, however, he had dismantled it. He discarded the drill, dismembered the figure and cut it in half, leaving a one-armed torso which was then cast, initially in gun metal and ultimately in bronze. Epstein, it seems, took an expression of masculine aggression and then emasculated it. Obvious conclusions may be drawn from the fact that he is doing this at the time of the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Verdun.

Epstein later said "Here is the armed, sinister figure of today and tomorrow. No Humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into... later I lost my interest in machinery and discarded the drill. I cast only the upper part of the figure."

Epstein often produced controversial works which challenged taboos on what was appropriate subject matter for public artworks. He also made paintings and drawings, and often exhibited his work.

The figure is sharp-edged, its limbs square in profile, and its head is a long beak-like armoured visage. The torso has what looks like armoured ribs, and in the abdomen area is an indentation containing an embryonic form. The extraordinary thing about this mechanised abstracted human figure is that it sat on top of a real miner's rock drill, with the name of its American manufacturer emblazoned on its side. The whole assembled sculpture was over three metres tall, giving it an amazing brooding and threatening physical presence. Of course, with the enormous drill jutting out from the figure's loins, it has an extraordinary phallic power about it. Writing about the piece in his autobiography Epstein said: "I made and mounted a machine-like robot, visored, menacing, and carrying within itself its progeny, protectively ensconced. Here is the armed, sinister figure of today and tomorrow. No

humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into..." (Tate)

Epstein was a British sculptor who was born in America and moved to Paris when he was 22. He became a British citizen in 1911. His parents were Polish Jewish refugees who lived in New York's Lower East Side. His parents were middle class and he learnt to draw during long periods of illness as a child. In New York he worked in a bronze foundry. He used the money from his first major commission to move to Paris to continue his studies. In 1905 he moved from Paris to London and he married the following year. He had many extra-marital affairs that brought him five children. His wife Margaret tolerated these except for his affair with Kathleen Garman whom she shot and wounded in 1923. His eldest daughter also called Kathleen married Lucian Freud in 1948. He lived in Loughton from 1933 to 1950 and is buried in Putney Vale cemetery. He was very original for his time and influenced many sculptors including Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/story-jacob-epsteins-rock-drill>



Henry Moore (1898-1986)
Family Group
1950
Bronze
Barclay School, Stevenage,
Hertfordshire, England

Henry Moore (1898-1986), *Family Group*, 1950, Barclay School, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, England

Epstein's shadow falls directly over the next figure we need to discuss — **Henry Moore**, whose debt to that generation of sculptors who forced primitivism and modernism into collision was substantial and openly acknowledged. **Family Group**, cast in **bronze in 1950** for the **Barclay School in Stevenage**, represents a fascinating intersection of public ambition and practical constraint. The commission originated with **Impington Village College** in Cambridgeshire, where the subject — interlocking parental and child forms — was designed to reflect the village college philosophy of education as a communal, lifelong endeavour. When Impington withdrew for want of funds, **John Newsom**, Chief Education Officer for the new town of Stevenage, rescued the project, persuading the council to allocate money for public art across its new schools. Moore completed the work for the price of materials and transport: **£750**. It is now valued at approximately twenty million pounds. The work sits within Moore's sustained investigation of the **reclining figure**, a form he developed

under the influence of the **Toltec-Mayan Chacmool** he had encountered in the **Louvre**. His earlier figures emphasise mass; the later ones pierce the forms with openings, setting solid against void. *Family Group* balances both impulses — monumental weight softened by the tender enclosure of one form within another.

Notes

This statue was Moore's first large scale commission for a bronze and his first commission following the Second World war. It was originally intended for Impington Village College in Cambridge and the Family Group subject fits in with the village college philosophy of life-long education. However, after Moore had designed the maquette, Impington cancelled the sculpture due to lack of funds.

The project was revived a few years later when the new town of Stevenage was being designed. The Chief Education Officer, John Newsom, persuaded the council to allocate funds for public art works at each of the new schools being built, allowing Moore to complete Family Group for the Barclay School in 1950. He kept the cost down to £750, the price of the materials and transport. Today it is worth about £20 million. Four copied were made, and a fifth later, one of which is owned by the Tate.

Moore's signature form is a reclining figure. Moore's exploration of this form, under the influence of the Toltec-Mayan figure he had seen at the Louvre, was to lead him to increasing abstraction as he turned his thoughts towards experimentation with the elements of design. Moore's earlier reclining figures deal principally with mass, while his later ones contrast the solid elements of the sculpture with the space, not only round them but generally through them as he pierced the forms with openings.

In May 2010 thieves tried to steal the sculpture for scrap. Police only found out later when reviewing CCTV footage and in February 2011 the School moved it inside.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/henry-moore-om-ch-family-group-r1172198>



Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975)
Figure (Nyanga)
1959–60
Elm on a plywood base
90.8 x 57.1 cm
Tate, London

Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975), *Figure (Nyanga)*, 1959–60, 90.8 x 57.1 cm, Tate, London

Moore's preoccupation with the human form as a carrier of universal feeling connects directly to his near-contemporary **Barbara Hepworth**, though the two arrived at abstraction by distinct routes despite their shared origins at **Leeds School of Art** from 1920. **Figure, Nyanga**, carved in **elm on a plywood base**, rewards close looking. The warm honey colour and broad grain are not incidental — Hepworth worked with the material's own character to enhance the modelling. Read as a head, the form offers a jaw line, a shoulder, a profile tilted upward in a pose that invokes spiritual longing without representing any specific figure. A spiral accentuates what reads as an eye, and the interior of the pierced void is whitened with paint, setting it in sharp contrast against the waxed outer surface. The title anchors the work in specific human suffering. In March **1960**, South African police opened fire on demonstrators protesting the Pass Laws at **Sharpeville**, killing sixty-nine people. Weeks later, at **Nyanga** near Cape Town, five more died, among them a young child shot in her mother's arms. The Afrikaans

poet **Ingrid Jonker** responded with **The Child Who Was Shot Dead by Soldiers at Nyanga**, beginning with Christ's words from Mark's Gospel: "The child is not dead." **Nelson Mandela** read the poem at the opening of South Africa's first democratic Parliament in **1994**.

Notes

This is Figure (Nyanga) by Barbara Hepworth. It is elm on a plywood base and is a warm honey colour and a broad grain that she uses to enhance the modelling. The sculpture is called Figure which encourages us to read the form as a head, particularly if consider what could be a shoulder, a jaw line, an eye and a profile. The eye is accentuated by a spiral form and the interior of the hole is slightly whitened with paint to form a contrast with the main waxed surface. If the front edge is a profile, then the face is turned upwards in a pose that reminds us of religious saints looking up to heaven. I do not mean it represents a saint but that it invokes spiritual feelings.

Hepworth believed that art could play a powerful role in community activity, and ardently supported the United Nations as it attempted to maintain peace during the international tension of the 1950s. She saw this abstract sculpture as a response to the racial violence taking place in Africa. Hepworth said that when she was carving this sculpture she was preoccupied with 'thoughts about Africa and the United Nations', explaining that her concern for human suffering and dignity had on occasion lent a certain poignancy to her works. Hepworth associated the sculpture retrospectively with the efforts of Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary General of the United Nations, to establish peace in Central Africa. Hammarskjöld was a close friend of Hepworth and he was killed in a plane crash [in 1961] on his way to negotiate with a rebel leader.

This work was linked more specifically to her sense of sorrow after the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, when South African police opened fire on demonstrators, killing 69 people. The demonstrators were objecting to 'Pass Laws' that restricted their freedom of movement. The Sharpeville massacre focused international attention on the apartheid system of racial segregation in South Africa and it initiated three decades of protest.

A few weeks later, and a thousand miles from Sharpeville, five people were killed in Nyanga [near Cape Town]. One of those killed was a young child shoot in her mother's arms. Ingrid Jonker wrote a poem in Afrikaans called 'The Child who Was Shot Dead by Soldiers at Nyanga' which starts with a line

from the Bible, 'The child is not dead', and includes the line 'The child who just wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga is everywhere'. The late Nelson Mandela read her poem at the opening of the first democratic Parliament in South Africa [on 24 May 1994]. The statue could therefore be about a single child's death but represent the universality of suffering.

Notes

Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) is an English artist and sculptor and one of the few internationally significant women artists in the early and mid-twentieth century. She was born in Yorkshire to a middle-class family and won a scholarship to study at Leeds School of Art (1920-21) where she met fellow student Henry Moore (1898-1986). There was a friendly rivalry and Hepworth was the first to sculpt the pierced figures that became the hallmark of both of their works. She won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art (1921-24). She travelled to Italy on another scholarship and married John Skeaping in Florence. They had a son, Paul, in 1929. She became associated with the 'new movement', direct carving, abstraction and precise forms and she joined the London Group and the 7 & 5 Society. She divorced Skeaping and had triplets with Ben Nicholson in 1934 and they married in 1938. They visited the Parisian studios of Jean Arp, Constantin Brâncuși, Piet Mondrian, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and joined Abstraction-Création, and were major figures in Paul Nash's Unit One group.

Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) was a French-Romanian founder of modern sculpture who introduced abstraction and primitivism for the first time. His works were as important as Picasso's paintings to the development of modern art. His simplification of form suggests spirituality, integrity and the innate beauty of materials but above all he pursued 'the inner, hidden reality'. Hepworth was a skilled draughtsman and her work includes 80 drawings of surgical procedures and operating rooms after she struck up a friendship with the surgeon Norman Capaner in 1944. During World War II she was a leading figure in the St Ives School with Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo and she divorced Nicholson in 1951. After the war she was in great demand and employed assistants. She produced two sculptures for the Festival of Britain (1951). Her son, Paul, died in a plane crash in 1953. In 1964 she attended the unveiling of Single Form at the United Nations in New York, which was commissioned in memory of her friend Dag Hammarskjöld (pronounced 'Hammer-shold'), Secretary General of the United Nations, who was killed in

1961. Hepworth died in an accidental fire in St. Ives in 1975 aged 72.

Ingrid Jonker (1933-1965) wrote 'The child is not dead' following a visit to the Philippi police station to see the body of a child who had been shot dead in his mother's arms by the police in the township of Nyanga in Cape Town. It happened in the aftermath of the massacre of 69 people in Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg, on 21 March 1960. The poem starts with a line from the Bible, 'The child is not dead' (Mark 5:39, Christ says, 'The child is not dead but sleeping'). Note, The Tate website says 71 were killed at Sharpeville and other sources, including the BBC, say 69.

Apartheid is an Afrikaans word meaning 'separateness', or 'the state of being apart' and it was a system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced through legislation by the National Party, the governing party from 1948 to 1994.

Nyanga is elm on a plywood base, 90.8 x 57.1 cm, and was presented by the artist to the Tate in 1969. Such large blocks are prone to splitting and a substantial crack on the rear face has been carefully filled with matching wood.

The 7 & 5 Society was founded in 1919 and was originally seven painters and five sculptors and was traditional and conservative until Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth joined in the 1920s when it became modernistic and the non-modernists were expelled.



Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887–1976)
The Pond
 1950
 114.3 x 152.4 cm
 Tate, London

Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887–1976), *The Pond*, 1950, 114.3 x 152.4 cm, Tate, London

Hepworth's political engagement in the 1960s reminds us that British artists were never insulated from the wider world — and that observation sits equally at the heart of our next figure. **L. S. Lowry** was born in **1887** and spent the greater part of his working life in **Pendlebury, Lancashire**, collecting rent by day and painting through the night. His mother, a talented pianist, wanted a daughter and made little secret of her disappointment in him. Lowry nursed her through decades of ill health, painting between ten at night and two in the morning once she had fallen asleep. She died in **1939**, the same year **John Rothenstein**, then Director of the **Tate Gallery**, attended Lowry's first solo London exhibition and wrote that he stood marvelling at "the accuracy of the mirror that this to me unknown painter had held up to the bleakness, the obsolete shabbiness, the grimy fogboundness, the grimness of northern industrial England." Lowry himself was characteristically deflecting: "I am not an artist. I am a man who paints." Yet that self-deprecation conceals real formal intelligence. He

understood that "natural figures would have broken the spell of it, so I made my figures half unreal" — a deliberate, considered choice, not naïve accident. He became an official **war artist** in 1943.

Notes

World War II Artists

I begin today with a range of artists, presented in chronological order of their birth date, with a representative example of the work they were producing in the 1930s.

The 1930s was a period when a great deal of British art was figurative, uncontroversial and little influenced by developments on the Continent. I have selected artists who were more controversial for a variety of reasons.

The biggest event of the 1930s regarding the influence of modern art from the Continental was the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936.

Tate website: 'Like many of Lowry's pictures this is not a depiction of a particular place, but is based on recollections of a school seen in Lancashire. Lowry's combination of observation and imaginative power often produced images which capture a deeply felt experience of place, with which others could identify. For example, in 1939 John Rothenstein, then Director of the Tate Gallery, visited Lowry's first solo exhibition in London and later wrote: 'I stood in the gallery marvelling at the accuracy of the mirror that this to me unknown painter had held up to the bleakness, the obsolete shabbiness, the grimy fogboundness, the grimness of northern industrial England.' This work was then purchased by the Trustees.'

Notes

Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887-1976) lived in Pendlebury, Lancashire, from the age of 22 and the area around was the subject of many of his paintings for more than 40 years. He painted mysterious unpopulated landscapes, urban landscapes populated by 'matchstick people', brooding portraits and the unpublished 'marionette' works that were only found after his death. His father was a clerk and a 'cold fish' and his mother was a talented pianist but in poor health. She wanted a daughter rather than a 'clumsy boy' and she was controlling and intolerant of failure. He had an unhappy childhood and his parents never appreciated his artistic talent. He made few friends at school

and showed little academic aptitude. After school he started work as a rent collector and spent his evenings learning to draw and in 1905 he attended Manchester School of Art where he came into contact with French Impressionism. Between 1915 and 1925 he studied at the Royal Technical Institute, Salford. He had to care for his mother as she became more ill and painted between 10pm and 2am after she had fallen asleep. She died in 1939 and during the war he was a volunteer fire fighter and he became an official war artist in 1943. He became depressed after his mother's death and neglected the house to such an extent that the landlord repossessed it. However, he had money and bought another house which although he found it ugly and uncomfortable he remained in it until his death 30 years later. In 1962 became a Royal Academician aged 74.

He went on holiday in the Seaburn Hotel in Sunderland and sketched everywhere. When he had no other material he sketched on serviettes which he gave to young people around him. These serviette sketches are now worth thousands of pounds. He collected amusing stories whether true or not and often set out to mischievously deceive. He had a collection of clocks in his living room all set to different times. He had many long-lasting friendships and made friends throughout his life. As his celebrity grew he disliked being approached by strangers, particularly at home and there is a story that he kept a suitcase by the front door so that he could make an excuse to leave as soon as anyone arrived. He discontinued this practice when one young man offered to take him to the station and he had to buy a ticket to the next station to get rid of him.

He claimed he was a simple man who could not appreciate modern art but he admired René Magritte and Lucian Freud, although he admitted that he "didn't understand" Francis Bacon's work. When he became more wealthy he acquired paintings and drawings by Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti who he described as his chief inspiration.

Lowry was a shy and secretive artist who remained unmarried until his death, at the age of 88, Lowry once admitted that he had "never had a woman". He was a keen ballet-goer who regularly attended performances by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden and in his home city of Manchester. He rejected five honours in his life including a knighthood and so he holds the record for the most rejected British honours. There was a major retrospective at the Tate in 2013 and his first solo exhibition outside the UK in China in 2014.

Quotations:

I wanted to paint myself into what absorbed me ... Natural figures would have broken the spell of it, so I made my figures half unreal.

You don't need brains to be a painter, just feelings.

I am not an artist. I am a man who paints.

This art is a terrible business.



Laura Knight (1877-1970)
A Balloon Site, Coventry
1943
102.5 x 127 cm
Imperial War Museums

Laura Knight (1877-1970), *A Balloon Site, Coventry*, 1943, 102.5 x 127 cm, Imperial War Museums

Lowry's unsentimental eye for industrial Britain finds an unexpected counterpart in **Laura Knight**, who brought equal rigour to the worlds of circus, theatre, and — crucially — wartime service. Knight was born in **1877** in Derbyshire, her father dying shortly after her birth and leaving the family in persistent financial difficulty. That early experience of precariousness seems inseparable from her lifelong fascination with marginalised communities — Romani travellers, circus performers, people living outside respectable society's frame. In **1936** she became the first woman elected as a full member of the **Royal Academy** since its foundation in **1768**, a fact that speaks volumes about the institution's pace of change. During the Second World War she worked as an official **war artist** under the **War Artists' Advisory Committee**, and her painting **A Balloon Site, Coventry**, completed in **1942**, is one of the period's most compelling pieces of directed propaganda. A team of women haul a barrage balloon skyward, the chimneys of industrial Coventry and the spire of the old cathedral

rising behind them. The **WAAC** commissioned it specifically to recruit women into **Balloon Command**, and Knight's composition delivers precisely that — heroism and glamour held in careful balance, without any of the sentimentality that could so easily have smothered it.

Notes

Laura Knight (1877-1970) was an English artist who worked in oils, watercolours, etching, engraving and drypoint. Knight was a painter in the figurative, realist tradition who embraced English Impressionism. In her long career Knight was among the most successful and popular painters in Britain. In 1929 she was created a Dame, and in 1936 became the first woman elected to the Royal Academy since its foundation in 1768. Her large retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1965 was another first for a woman. Although Knight was known for painting amidst the world of the theatre and ballet in London, and for being a war artist during the Second World War, she was also greatly interested in, and inspired by, marginalised communities and individuals, including Gypsies and circus performers. Her success in the male-dominated British art establishment paved the way for greater status and recognition for women artists.

Laura Johnson was born in Derbyshire and her father died shortly after she was born so she grew up in a family struggling with financial problems.

Her husband, Harold Knight registered as a conscientious objector, and was eventually required to work as a farm labourer. Wartime censorship included restrictions on painting around the British coastline, which caused problems for Laura Knight.

In September 1939 Knight was asked to produce a recruitment poster for the Women's Land Army. Knight hired two Suffolk Punch horses and a plough from a farmer and painted them outdoors in a cherry orchard on the Averills' farm in Worcestershire. Her original design for the WLA poster was rejected for placing too much emphasis on the horses rather than the women working. A new design, with a single woman, was accepted. Knight painted her 1940 Royal Academy entry, January 1940, showing a similar scene at the same time. During the Second World War, Knight was an official war artist, contracted by the War Artists' Advisory Committee on short-term commissions.

A Balloon Site, Coventry (1942) – shows a team of women hoisting a barrage

balloon into position with the chimneys of industrial Coventry in the background surrounding the spire of Coventry Cathedral. WAAC commissioned the work as a propaganda tool to recruit women for Balloon Command, and Knight's composition succeeds in making the work appear both heroic and glamorous.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laura_Knight

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/15503>



John Piper (1903–1992)
*Interior of Coventry Cathedral, 15
 November 1940*
 1940
 51 x 61 cm
 Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

John Piper (1903–1992), *Interior of Coventry Cathedral, 15 November 1940*, 1940, 51 x 61 cm, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

Knight's work for the WAAC had a direct parallel in **John Piper**, who was recruited into the same programme by **Kenneth Clark** and produced some of the most emotionally charged architectural painting of the entire war. Piper's route to that point was characteristically circuitous. Born in **1903** in Epsom, the son of a solicitor, he spent three reluctant years in the family law firm before his father's resistance finally broke him free. Disinheritance followed, but so did the **Richmond School of Art** and then the **Royal College** in **1928**. His friendship with **John Betjeman**, who drew him in to write and illustrate the Shell Guide to Oxfordshire, deepened his already instinctive feeling for the English landscape and its built fabric — old churches, ruined abbeys, the marks time leaves on stone. That feeling became urgent under wartime commission. Working on short-term contracts for the **WAAC** between **1940** and **1944**, Piper persuaded the committee to let him concentrate specifically on bombed churches, arriving at sites as soon as possible after raids — often, in his own words, "the following

morning, before the clearing up." He reached **Coventry** the morning after **14 November 1940**, the night that killed a thousand people and destroyed the medieval cathedral.

Notes

John Piper (1903-1992) was born in Epsom, the son of a solicitor. As a child he explored the countryside and painted pictures of old churches and started making illustrated guide books. He had two older brother one of whom was killed at Ypres in 1915. After attending Epsom College he wanted to become an artist but his father insisted he join the family law firm. He worked there for three years and took his articles but refused an offer of a partnership. His father disinherited him but it enabled him to attend Richmond School of Art where he prepared for his entry into the Royal College of Art in 1928. He married a fellow student in 1929. He held a joint exhibition with his wife and wrote art and music reviews. One review led to an invitation to join the Seven and Five Society. In 1935 his wife left him for another artist and he moved in with Myfanwy Evans, the art critic, in a farmhouse near Henley. Piper met John Betjeman who asked him to write and illustrate the Shell Guide to Oxfordshire.

At the start of World War Two Piper was persuaded by Kenneth Clark to work as an official war artist for the War Artists' Advisory Committee, which he did from 1940 to 1944 on short-term contracts. Piper was one of only two artists commissioned to paint inside of Air Raid Precaution control rooms. In November 1940 Piper persuaded the WAAC committee that he should be allowed to concentrate upon painting bombed churches. This may have reflected both his pre-war conversion to the Anglican faith as much as his previous interest in depicting derelict architectural ruins. The terms of this commission meant Piper would be visiting bombed cities, and other sites, as soon as possible following an air raid often "the following morning, before the clearing up". He arrived in Coventry the morning after the air raid of 14 November 1940 that resulted in 1,000 casualties and the destruction of the medieval cathedral.



John Piper (1903–1992)
Interior of Coventry Cathedral, 15 November 1940
1940

52-01 BRITISH ART 1900-1950

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



British art between 1900 and 1950 refused any single identity. We have traced how Steer and Sickert diverged from Impressionism, how Gwen John cultivated solitude while Lewis and Nevinson pursued aggressive modernism, how Nash and Spencer transformed wartime experience into enduring images, and how Bomberg, Epstein, Moore, and Hepworth remade sculpture. Lowry, Knight, and Piper remind us that British art remained insistently grounded in its social world, even as it reached towards abstraction.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

