

A STROLL THROUGH TATE BRITAIN



This two-hour talk is part of a series of twenty talks on the works of art displayed in Tate Britain, London, in June 2017.

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- The talk is given to a small group of people and all the proceeds, after the cost of the hall is deducted, are given to charity.
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A STROLL THROUGH TATE BRITAIN

- The Aesthetic Movement, 1860-1880
- Late Victorians, 1880-1900
- The Edwardians, 1890-1910
- The Great War and After, 1910-1930
- **The Interwar Years, 1930s**
- World War II and After, 1940-1960
- Pop Art & Beyond, 1960-1980
- Postmodern Art, 1980-2000
- The Turner Prize
- Summary



West galleries are 1540, 1650, 1730, 1760, 1780, 1810, 1840, 1890, 1900, 1910

East galleries are 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000

Turner Wing includes Turner, Constable, Blake and Pre-Raphaelite drawings

Agenda

1. A History of the Tate, discussing some of the works donated by Henry Tate and others.
2. From Absolute Monarch to Civil War, 1540-1650
3. From Commonwealth to the Start of the Georgian Period, 1650-1730
4. The Georgian Period, 1730-1780
5. Revolutionary Times, 1780-1810
6. Regency to Victorian, 1810-1840
7. William Blake (1757-1827) and his Influence
8. J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851)
9. John Constable (1776-1837)
10. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 1840-1860
11. The Aesthetic Movement, 1860-1880
12. The Late Victorians, 1880-1900

13. The Edwardians, 1900-1910
14. The Great War and its Aftermath, 1910-1930
15. The Interwar Years, 1930s
16. World War II and After, 1940-1960
17. Pop Art and Beyond, 1960-1980
18. Art in a Postmodern World, 1980-2000
19. The Turner Prize
20. Summary

THE INTERWAR YEARS: 1930S

- Realist painting
- Depression and prosperity
- Rise of Fascism
- 1936 Surrealist Exhibition, London



Harold Williamson, *Spray*, 1939, 60.5 x 85.8 cm, Russell Coates Gallery



Harold Williamson (1892-1978), *Spray*, 1939, 60.5 x 85.8 cm, Russell Coates Art Gallery

- The 1930s is a **decade of contrasts**. The UK's terrible financial situation following the First World War led to the General Strike of 1926. In 1929 the **Wall Street Crash** threw America into depression. There was a **panic reaction** and overseas loans were called in and **customs barriers erected** which created **depression across the rest of the world**.
- A depression is caused by **people spending less** and the solution is to get them to buy more. The depression resulting from the Wall Street Crash was made worse in the **UK by import duties** which discourage trade, an increase in people saving 'for a rainy day', unemployment, **out-of-date practices** and a **lack of investment** and **incorrect Government action** including cutting unemployment pay and **increasing import duties**. The UK Government **also did some things correctly** – it came off the gold standard, it reduced interest rates, it tried to attract light industry to distressed areas and it built 500,000 new council houses.
- In the **north** heavy-industry collapsed throwing millions out of work. In **Jarrow the Palmer's shipyard closed** and every single man in the town was made redundant. They **marched on London** but the Government did not have a clue about how to

deal with the problem.

- In the **south-east new light industries expanded and families were affluent**. In fact, people **with jobs benefited** from the Depression as **prices fell**. Hire-purchase was introduced for the first time, family size fell, working hours were reduced, paid holidays were introduced, more people took holidays at the seaside, three million new homes were built, there was a huge increase in car ownership, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, radios and the first televisions. Diet improved and free school milk was introduced and people became healthier.
- **Artists responded** to the depression and the rise of Fascism **in different ways**. There were two main approaches to art, the conventional realistic painting and avant garde art which was a mixture of abstract art and Surrealism.
- There was a strong theme of **hard-edged, sharp-focussed realist painting** which was later largely forgotten with the **rise of abstract art after World War II** and **Pop Art in the 1960s**. Such artists favoured subjects that embraced the **modern experience** and referenced topical issues such as the changing role of women, new technologies, the rise in commercial culture and popular entertainment, and the growing interest in recreation. Pictures depicting travel, sports, holidaymakers, picnics, and country walks were particularly popular, reflecting the greater provision of leisure time and paid holidays.
- The reaction to the **horrors** of the **First World War** prompted a **return to pastoral subjects** as represented by **Paul Nash and Eric Ravilious**, mainly a printmaker. **Stanley Spencer** painted **mystical works**, as well as landscapes, and the sculptor, printmaker and typographer **Eric Gill** produced **elegant simple forms** in a style related to **Art Deco**.
- The **Euston Road School** was a group of "**progressive**" **realists** of the late 1930s, including the influential teacher William Coldstream and Victor Pasmore, who reacted against the avant garde styles in favour of traditional subjects painted in a realist manner. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant were among visiting teachers to the School. Many of the members were Communists and naturalism was seen as an attempt to make art more relevant and understandable to the general members. To this end Coldstream visited Bolton, Lancashire, to paint the local factories but the paintings were not highly regarded in Bolton. Later, to engage the general public, they held an exhibition of views of London and sent invitations to everyone called 'Brown' in the telephone directory. The School closed at the start of the Second World War and its members joined the Armed Forces with some working as war artists except for Victor Pasmore who was imprisoned for being a conscientious objector.
- There was a strong figurative element in 1930s British art. **The 'London School'** of figurative painters including **Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff**, and Michael Andrews have received widespread international recognition, while other painters such as John Minton and John Craxton are characterized as

Neo-Romantics. **Graham Sutherland**, the Romantic landscapist **John Piper** (a prolific and popular lithographer), the sculptor **Elisabeth Frink**, and the industrial townscapes of **L. S. Lowry** also contributed to the **strong figurative presence** in post-war British art.

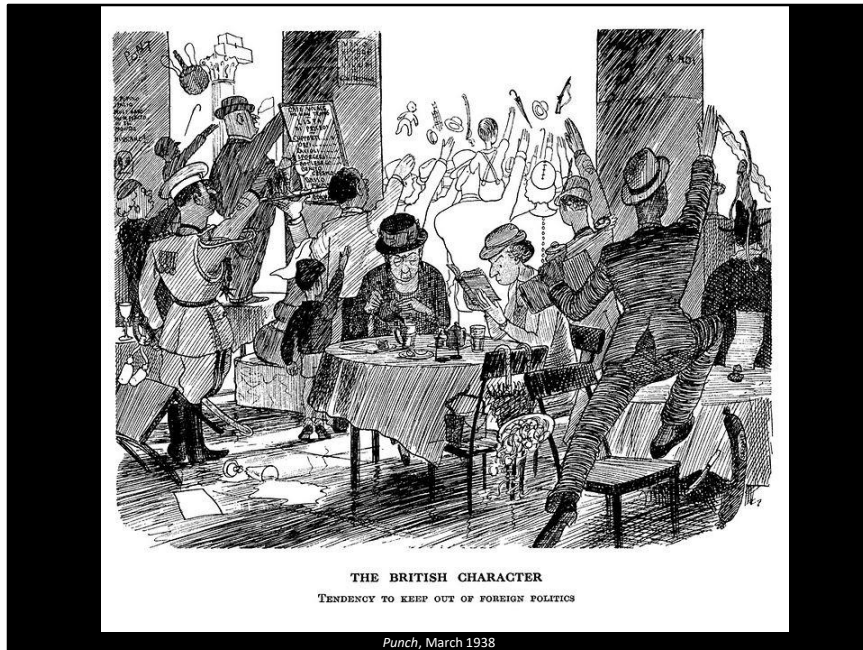
- Other artists were influenced by **abstract art and Surrealism**, with artists including John Tunnard and the **Birmingham Surrealists**, was briefly popular in the 1930s, influencing Roland Penrose and Henry Moore. **Henry Moore** emerged after World War II as Britain's leading sculptor, promoted alongside Victor Pasmore, William Scott and Barbara Hepworth by the Festival of Britain.

Bio:Williamson

- **Harold Sandys Williamson** (1892–1978) was a British painter, poster designer and teacher. Williamson fought on the Western Front in World War One and also worked as a war artist, both later in that conflict and, on the Home Front, in World War Two. He **designed posters for the London Underground**, London Transport and other organisations between **1922 and 1939**. Appointed Head of Chelsea School of Art and he recruited Henry Moore and Graham Sutherland. Was Chairman of the London Group. Exhibited at the new English Art Club and the Royal Academy.

Notes

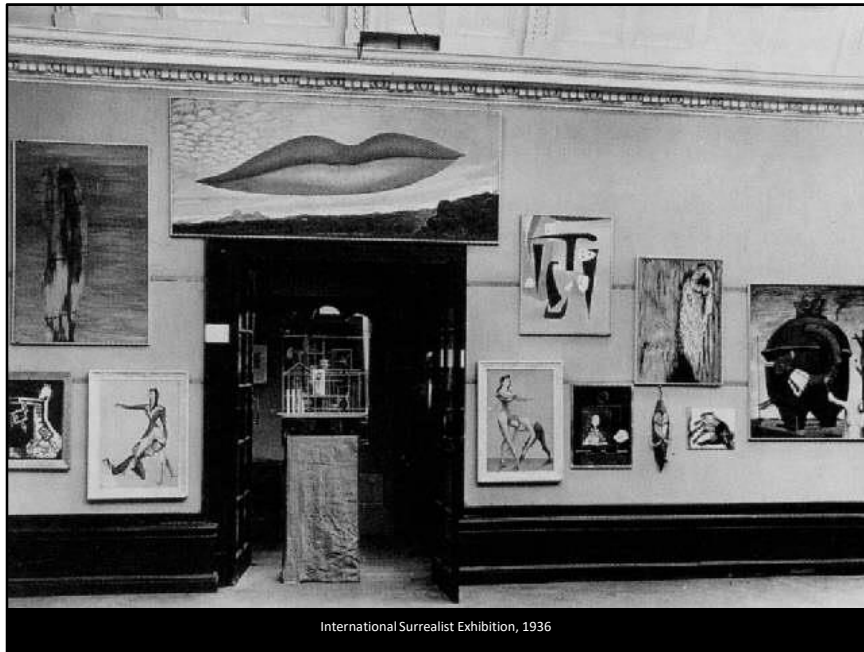
- **The London Group** is a society based in London, England, created to offer additional exhibiting opportunities to artists besides the Royal Academy of Arts. Formed in 1913, it is one of the oldest artist-led organisations in the world. It was formed from the merger of the **Camden Town Group**, an all-male group, and the **Fitzroy Street Group**.



Punch, 'The British Character. Tendency to keep out of foreign politics', 2 March 1938, p. 237

- During the 1930s Britain avoided many of the political developments taking place on the Continent although Oswald Mosley (1896-1980) formed the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s.
- The early twentieth century was a period of wrenching changes in the arts in France and Germany. In the UK, such innovations as Fauvism, Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism—following Symbolism and Post-Impressionism—were not universally appreciated.
- Art in Britain was roughly divided between the avant garde who were influenced by Cubism, Dada and Surrealism, and those who painted conventional subjects in a realistic style. A good example of the split is shown by the history of the Seven & Five Society.
- **Note:Seven and Five Society** was an art group of seven painters and five sculptors created in 1919 and based in London. The group was originally intended to encompass traditional, conservative artistic sensibilities. The first exhibition

catalogue said, "[we] feel that there has of late been too much pioneering along too many lines in altogether too much of a hurry." Abstract artist **Ben Nicholson** joined in **1924**, followed by others such as **Henry Moore** and **Barbara Hepworth**, and changed the society into a modernistic one and **expelled the non-modernist artists**. In 1935, the group was renamed the Seven and Five Abstract Group. At the Zwemmer Gallery in Charing Cross Road, London they staged the **first exhibition of entirely abstract works in Britain**.



Man-Ray, *Observatory Time: The Lovers (The Lips)*, 1932-34, 91 x 244 cm
 Max Ernst, *The Elephant Celebes*, 1921, Tate
 Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4am*, 1932, Museum of Modern Art, New York

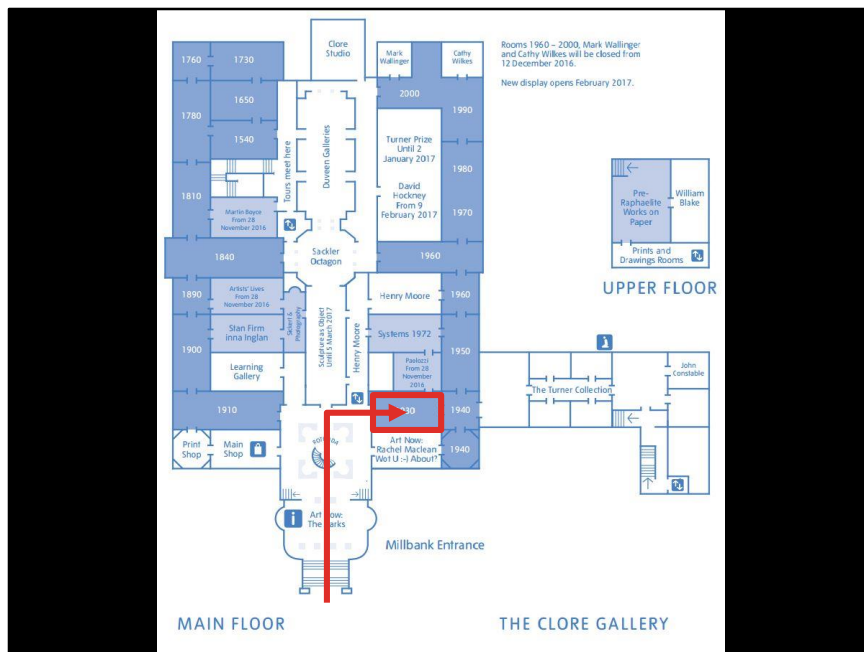
- The most significant artistic event in 1930s Britain was the **International Surrealist Exhibition** that was held from 11 June to 4 July 1936 at the New Burlington Galleries, near Savile Row, London. It **established Britain as a centre for avant garde art**. The organisers were from England, France, Belgium, Denmark and Spain and most of the leading avant garde artists in Europe exhibited. Dalí's lecture was delivered whilst wearing a deep-sea diving suit but he nearly suffocated during his presentation until rescued by a poet with a spanner. Danish painter Wilhelm Freddie's entries never made it to the exhibition, as they were confiscated by British Customs representatives for being pornographic. According to ruling law at the time, the works had to be destroyed, but this was avoided at the last minute and they were despatched back to Denmark. During the exhibition, Welsh poet Dylan Thomas carried around a cup of boiled string, asking visitors would they rather it 'weak or strong?'"
- The following year the **Nazi Party in Germany held an exhibition in Munich called 'Degenerate Art' (Entartete Kunst)**. Modern art and music had been rejected by

the Nazi Party since the 1920 although during the 1920s Germany emerged as a leading centre for modern art. Hitler's rise to power on January 31, 1933, was quickly followed by actions intended to cleanse the culture of degeneracy: book burnings were organized, artists and musicians were dismissed from teaching positions, and curators who had shown a partiality to modern art were replaced by Party members. In the following weeks Goebbels seized 16,558 works of art. Avant-garde German artists were now branded both enemies of the state and a threat to German culture. Many went into exile.

- **Note:International Surrealist Exhibition, 1936** at which Salvador **Dalí** attempted to deliver a lecture whilst wearing a **deep-sea diver's suit** and holding two hounds on a leash, but he had to be rescued after **nearly suffocating**. The art works from **Denmark** were **impounded by the police as obscene** and they were eventually sent back.
- The exhibition brought **Surrealism to London**. It was well received by artists as **Britain** had always had a **tradition of whimsy, fantasy and dreams** through artists such as Fuseli, Dadd, Burne-Jones and Lewis Carol. The exhibition was **very influential** but although **Surrealism** was the **longest lived and most influential** movement of the twentieth century it could be said to have **quickly died away in Britain**.
- At the time it caused an immense stir and it is often quoted by art historians but it not change the approach of many artists. Like an **exploding rocket** it was bright and entertaining for a short period but **quickly died away**. One reason is that **many artists left Europe** in 1938-40 for America.
- **Franco launched his coup** in July 1936 after a left-wing Government was elected and Communists took over organisations across the country, scaring the middle classes. The coup started the **Spanish Civil War** which began with horrific killings of men, women and children.
- Surrealism was a **reaction against the 'return to order' and classicism** and it was inspired by the work of Sigmund Freud.
- Automatic art took root in the US which later gave rise to action painting.
- Andre Breton wrote *What is Surrealism* in 1924 and in the UK David Gascoyne organised Surrealism with Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, Henry Moore and others.
- Some of the more well known artists and art works are:
 - Man-Ray, *Observatory Time: The Lovers (The Lips)*, 1932-34, 91 x 244 cm, private collection. The lips are those of his departed lover, Lee Miller. The canvas was eight feet long and over three feet high, and it took Man Ray two years of meticulous, daily work to get it right.
 - Max Ernst, *The Elephant Celebes*, 1921, Tate
 - Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4am*, 1932, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Giacometti said the work relates to "a period of six months passed in

the presence of a woman who, concentrating all life in herself, transported my every moment into a state of enchantment. We constructed a fantastical palace in the night—a very fragile palace of matches. At the least false movement a whole section would collapse. We always began it again.”

- Francis Picabia, *Spanish Night*, 1922, 150 x 186 cm, private collection. Picabia changed his ideas as often as he changed his shirt. He was regarded as uncategorisable.
 - Pablo Picasso, *The Studio*, 1934, 128 x 159.4, Indiana University Art Museum
 - Miro, *Harlequins Carnival*, 1924
 - Magritte, *On the Threshold of Liberty*, 1930. He disagreed with the Surrealists over their rejection of religion.
 - Pablo Picasso, *The Woman with the Golden Breasts*, 1914 The Surrealists tried to claim Picasso but he was in a category of his own.
 - Giorgio de Chirico, *The Philosophers Conquest*, 1914, 125.1 x 99.1 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago
 - Giorgio de Chirico, *The Child's Brain*, 1914
 - Salvador Dali, *The Dream*, 1931
 - Salvador Dali, *Paranoiac Face*, 1935
 - René Magritte, *The Annunciation*, 1930, 113.7 x 145.9, Tate
 - Man-Ray, *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows*, 1916, Museum of Modern Art, New York
 - Paul Klee, *The Mask of Fear*, 1932, 100.4 x 57.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York
 - Paul Klee, *Siesta of the Sphinx*, 1932
 - Dora Maar, *Le Simulateur* (The Simulator or The Pretender), 1936
- The exhibition was well attended, there were **traffic jams in Piccadilly** for the first time.
 - Penrose bought several of the works afterwards.
 - The exhibition was educational and there were lectures.
 - **Dylan Thomas walked around** offering people cups of string and asking if they wanted it ‘weak or strong’.
 - **Many critics did not like it**, nice boys but immature.



1930-1940

1. Christopher Wood, 'Church at Tréboul' 1930
2. Thomas Lowinsky, 'The Breeze at Morn' 1930
3. Edward Burra, 'The Snack Bar' 1930
4. Eileen Agar, 'Three Symbols' 1930
5. Henry Moore OM, CH, 'Figure' 1931
6. John Skeaping, 'Akua-Ba' 1931
7. Gerald Leslie Brockhurst, 'Portrait of Margaret, Duchess of Argyll' c.1931
8. Sir Jacob Epstein, 'Sun God (verso: Primeval Gods)' 1910, 1931-1933
9. Ivon Hitchens, 'Autumn Composition, Flowers on a Table' 1932
10. Ben Nicholson OM, '1932 (Auberge de la Sole Dieppoise)' 1932
11. Walter Richard Sickert, *Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Isabella of France*, 1932
12. David Bomberg, 'Lilian' 1932
13. Winifred Nicholson, 'Sandpipers, Alnmouth' 1933
14. William Roberts, 'Skipping (The Gutter)' 1934-5
15. Sir Stanley Spencer, 'St Francis and the Birds' 1935
16. Ben Nicholson OM, '1935 (white relief)' 1935
17. Ronald Moody, 'Johanaan' 1936
18. Dame Barbara Hepworth, 'Ball, Plane and Hole' 1936

19. Jessica Dismorr, 'Related Forms' 1937
20. Ceri Richards, 'Two Females' 1937–8
- 21. Dame Barbara Hepworth, 'Forms in Echelon' 1938**
- 22. Julian Trevelyan, 'The Potteries' c.1938**
- 23. Naum Gabo, 'Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre' 1938–40**
24. John Tunnard, 'Fulcrum' 1939
25. COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS Sam Haile, 'Surgical Ward', 1939



- John Skeaping (1901-1980), *Akua-Ba*, 1931, acacia wood, 111.7 x 56 x 56 cm, 200 kg
- Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942), *Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Isabella of France*, 1932, 245.1 x 92.1 cm
- Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979), *Autumn Composition, Flowers on a Table*, 1932, 78.1 x 111.1 cm
- Julian Trevelyan (1910-1988), *The Potteries* c.1938, 60.4 x 73.5 cm
- Christopher Wood (1901-1930), *Church at Tréboul*, 1930, 73 x 91.6 cm

No longer on display:

- Edward Burra (1905-1976), *The Snack Bar*, 1930, 76.2 x 55.9 cm, not on display
- Eileen Agar (1899-1991), *Three Symbols*, 1930, 100.3 x 55.9 cm
- Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939), *Related Forms*, 1937, 55.6 x 65.7 cm

Not discussed:

Bio:Gordine

- Dora Gordine (1895-1991), *Javanese Head*, 1931, bronze on wooden base. Described by the *Evening Standard* as 'a girl sculptor genius', Gordine travelled to Singapore to work on a commission for the city authorities to produce six sculpted

heads representing people of different ethnic backgrounds living in the Malay Peninsula. *Javanese Head* was modelled there, and its form sits between artistic styles in British art of the period, as the critic Arthur Symonds defined, a 'profound sense of pure form... heedless alike of realism and of exaggerated abstraction'.

- Gordine was born in Latvia to Jewish parents. We know little of her childhood or her parents or even her year of birth as she changed the story about them through her life. Through a series of exaggerations her father became a Tsarist General and her mother a Princess. Between 1914 and 1920 she learned sculpture and in 1924 went to Paris where she worked as a painter and sculptor and added an 'e' to the end of her name to make it sound more exotic. In 1928 she held an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, very unusual for an unknown artist and demonstrating her ambition and her talent. The *Evening Standard* hailed her as a 'Girl Sculptor Genius' adding '**Her bronze heads are most sensitively seen and they are also more like real sculpture than anything I have seen at the Royal Academy**'. She returned to Paris and was supported by a famous German art impresario. She left for Malaya and was invited by the British Governor to parties where she met Noel Coward and Cole Porter. She married **Dr. George Herbert Garlick** in 1930 in Singapore giving her birth year as 1898 and became a British Citizen renouncing her Estonian citizenship. In 1935 she suddenly left her husband and travelled to London where she sought a divorce. She was seen having dinner in the Ritz Hotel with **Richard Hare** (the second son of a Viscount, later an Earl, and a Russian scholar) who she had met in Malaya. He bought a plot of land on Kingston Vale in south-west London. This was the site for **Dorich House** (DORaRICHard), which was completed in October 1936. Hare paid just over £2,500 for the house - about £25 million at current UK prices. A month later, in November 1936, Dora and Richard Hare were married and she was now the Honourable Mrs. Richard Hare. She gave her birth year as 1906 - 11 years younger than she really was - and described herself on the wedding certificate as not having been married previously. She had several very successful exhibitions and was proclaimed by some as '**very possibly ... the finest woman sculptor in the world**'. She never seems to have shown any interest in the fate of her brother and sister in Estonia and they were both probably killed by the Nazis. Richard Hare was a shy, gentle person who lived for beauty, art and his writing and he died at Dorich Ouse in 1966. Gordine died there in 1991 leaving some of her work and her husbands Imperial Russian art to the nation. The house has now been restored as a museum by Kingston University.



- Sir Jacob Epstein, *Sun God* (verso: *Primeval Gods*), 1910, 1931–1933
- William Roberts, *Skiping (The Gutter)*, 1934–5
- Sir Stanley Spencer, *St Francis and the Birds*, 1935



Ceri Richards, *Two Females*, 1937–8

Dame Barbara Hepworth, *Forms in Echelon*, 1938

Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), *Ball, Plane and Hole*, 1936, 21 x 61.1 x 30.5 cm

Naum Gabo (1890-1977), *Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre*, 1938–40, 32.4 x 47 x 22 cm

Not discussed:

Statue on left, part hidden, Ronald Moody, *Johanaan*, 1936. Moody was born into a prominent Jamaican family and came to England to train as a dentist. After he established a dental practice he took up sculpture and without formal training taught himself. Here he has directly carved into a single block of elm using the grain of the wood to form part of the figure. The avant-garde fashion for direct carving emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as a reaction against academic sculpture which was based on modelling and casting, which was seen by some to be mannered and superficial. Direct carving was associated with Pre-Renaissance and non-European sculpture and was seen as natural and authentic.

Left of door, sculpture, Maurice Lambert, *Head of a Woman*, exhibited 1938

Right of the door, painting, Thomas Lowinsky (1892–1947), *The Breeze at Morn*,

1930, 43.8 x 91.4 cm

Top right, painting, John Tunnard, *Fulcrum*, 1939



- Ben Nicholson, *1935 (white relief)*, 1935, 101.6 x 166.4 cm

Not discussed:

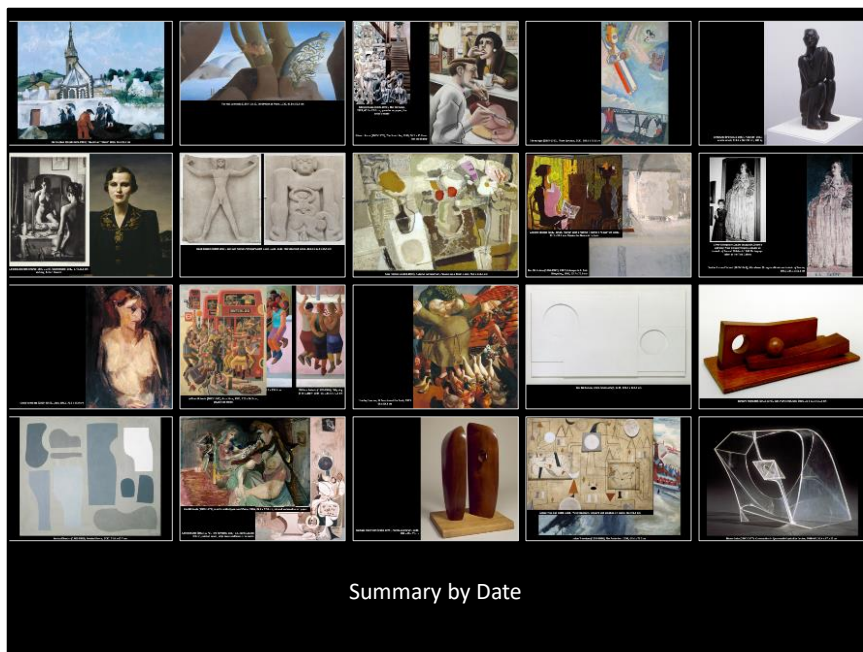
- Henry Moore OM, CH, *Figure*, 1931. *Figure* is an early example of Moore's development towards abstraction in the first half of the 1930s.

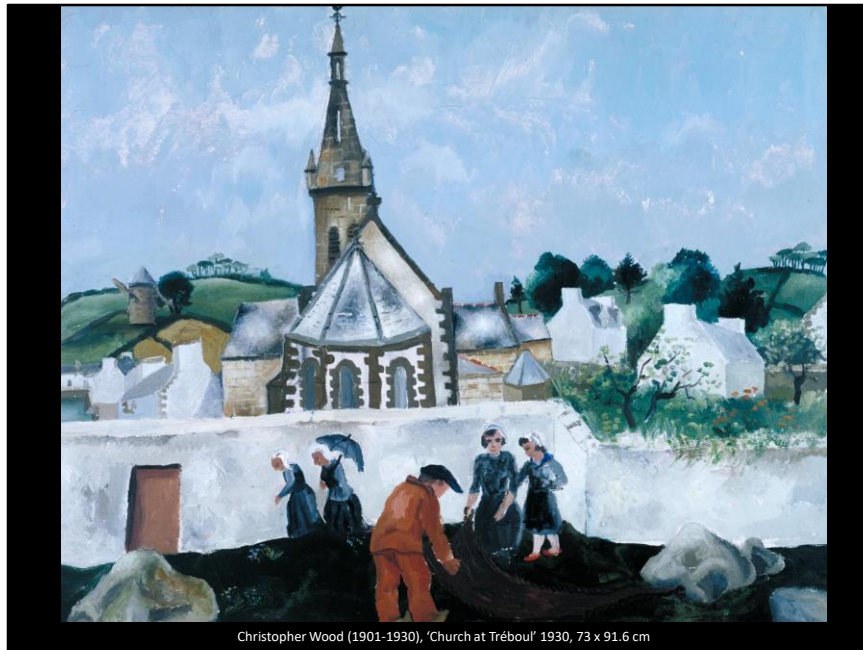


- Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890-1978), 'Portrait of Margaret, Duchess of Argyll' c.1931, 76.2 x 64.1 cm
- Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), *1932 (Auberge de la Sole Dieppoise)*, 1932, 93.7 x 75.9 cm
- David Bomberg (1890-1957), *Lilian*, 1932, 76.2 x 55.9 cm

Not discussed:

- Winifred Nicholson, *Sandpipers, Alnmouth*, 1933
- John Skeaping (1901-1980), *Akua-Ba*, 1931, acacia wood, 111.7 x 56 x 56 cm, 200 kg
- Dora Gordine (1895-1991), *Javanese Head*, 1931, bronze on wooden base. Described by the *Evening Standard* as 'a girl sculptor genius'. She married Richard Hare, her second husband, and lived in Dorich House, Kingston Hill. She had several very successful exhibitions and was proclaimed by some as '**very possibly ... the finest woman sculptor in the world**'.





Christopher Wood (1901-1930), *Church at Tréboul*, 1930, 73 x 91.6 cm

- 'Wood spent June and July 1930 painting in **Brittany**, basing himself in Tréboul, close to Douarnenez. This **area was popular** with both British and French painters and was **close to Pont-Aven**, which had been **made famous by Gauguin** whose work, together with that of **Van Gogh**, was **important to Wood**. In the space of **40 days** Wood painted some **60 canvases** both from life and, at night, from postcards, mostly depicting scenes from the daily lives of the fishing community. Moving from the depiction of boats to architecture he claimed helped him to paint a 'quieter composition'' (Tate display caption)
- It was painted on soft millboard and so is damaged at the edges.
- The simplicity of style and subject in Wood's Breton paintings made them easily acceptable to a broad audience. *Church at Tréboul* entered the collection in the year of his death, as a gift from his parents. It is a public memorial to the young painter.

Bio:Wood

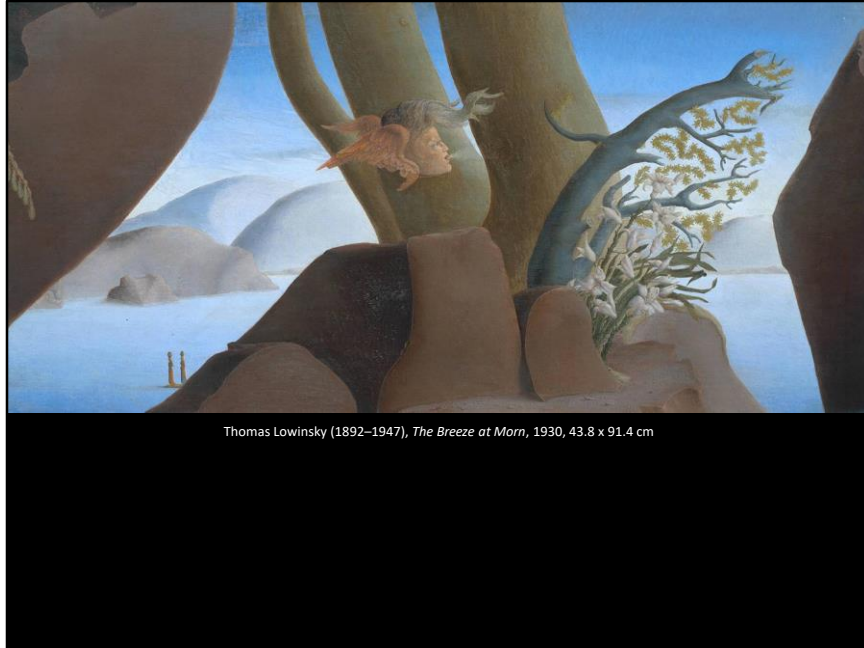
- **(John) Christopher Wood (1901-1930)** was born near **Liverpool** and started to **draw** during a period of **convalescence**. He **studied architecture** briefly at

Liverpool University (1919-20) but was invited to **Paris** to study at the Académie Julian. He entered the **fashionable social life** and met **Augustus John, Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau** and he **lived with a Chilean diplomat** who introduced him to **opium**. His painting was **seemingly untutored** but it incorporates elements of the artists he met. Insecure, compulsive, bisexual, and probably depressive, Wood craved both stability and the stimulus of emotional and physical excess. His closest relationship was with his mother and he wrote to her that he intended '**to try and be the greatest painter that has ever lived**'.

- In 1926 he was invited to design the set for *Romeo and Juliet* for **Diaghilev's** Ballets Russes but the designs were **abandoned**. He returned to England and joined the **London Group** (1926) and the **Seven and Five Society** (1926-30). He became close to **Ben and Winifred Nicholson** and exhibited with them. He **failed to elope** with the painter and heiress Meraud Guinness. In **1928**, on a trip to St Ives, he and **Ben Nicholson** met the fisherman painter **Alfred Wallis**, whose work answered a shared interest in 'primitive' expression and helped Wood to establish a personal style. In 1929 in Paris he exhibited paintings made in Brittany. The results of a second stay in Brittany (June-July 1930) were intended to open an exhibition in October. Wood met his mother in Salisbury on 21 August 1930. Possibly believing himself pursued (an effect of withdrawal from opium), he **threw himself under the London train**. In deference to his mother, his death was often subsequently described as accidental. Posthumous exhibitions were held. In 1938 Wood's paintings were included in the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wood-church-at-treboul-n04552>



Thomas Lowinsky (1892–1947), *The Breeze at Morn*, 1930, 43.8 x 91.4 cm

Bio:Lowinsky

- **Thomas Esmond Lowinsky** (1892- 1947) was an **English painter** of Hungarian and South African descent. He was **born in India** and grew up in England and was educated at **Eton** and at **Trinity College, Oxford** before studying at the **Slade School** of Fine Art from 1912 to 1914. Following service in France during **World War I**, Lowinsky continued painting, holding his first **one-man exhibition** at the **Leicester Galleries** in 1926. He was a member of the **New English Art Club** from 1926 to 1942. Lowinsky's work was **primarily portraiture**, but he also painted **fantasy scenes**. Amongst the books for which he provided **illustrations** was Edith Sitwell's *Elegy on Dead Fashion*.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lowinsky-the-breeze-at-morn-n05322>



Edward Burra (1905-1976), *The Snack Bar*, 1930, 76.2 x 55.9 cm, not on display
 Edward Burra (1905-1976), *The Tea Shop*, 1929, 60.3 x 47.6 cm, gouache on paper, the artist's estate

- “An odd **tension** exists between the barman, the customer and the slicing of the ham in Burra’s painting. The woman eats distractedly, while the man cuts with enjoyment and a **sideways glance** at her. Violence and **sexual tension** seem to be at play. Burra was an **acute observer** of the everyday, often **exaggerating it into caricature** in order to comment on society. He was familiar with the similarly critical work of German artist **Georg Grosz** and the heightened atmosphere of surrealist painting, **contributing works** to the 1936 ‘**International Surrealist Exhibition in London**.’” (Tate)
- At first sight we see a café with a woman eating a sandwich that has just been prepared by a bartender. Women had achieved more freedom in the 1930s and ‘**In big cities the single woman - the car-driving, tennis-playing office employee with bobbed hair and fashionable clothes, who initiated relationships and broke them off - came to be taken as a matter of course**’ (Günter Metken, ‘Cafés of the Twenties’, *The 1920s: Age of the Metropolis*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Fine

Arts, Montreal 1991, p.150).

- However, there is a darker interpretation suggested by certain details and by Burra's '**sustained interest in potential violence and shady pleasure**'. The scene is set in the Continental Snack Bar in Shaftesbury Avenue in London, and the woman is probably a prostitute. One critic wrote, '**Soho tarts were mostly French around 1930 and dressed and made up just like that, I can remember well**'. George Melly was more direct, '**Have you ever seen a more phallic sandwich?**' he asked. In the doorway, is another woman whose legs, 'with their recognizable splayed position and ankle-chain', also indicate she is a prostitute. The **barman** is a **type** that was shown in **German films** and **French pulp-fiction** and his attributes were described in sociological theories of criminality of the nineteenth century written by **Cesare Lombroso** and Johann Kaspar Lavater. His **archetypical flaws**, the **protruding lower lip** and the **enormous hands** label him as a '**degenerate**' and in particular a **strangler**. One term used for a brothel was a meat house so his carving suggest the possibility of a Jack the Ripper sex murderer.

Bio:Burra

- **Edward John Burra** (1905–1976) was an English painter, draughtsman, and printmaker, best known for his depictions of Paris nightlife in the 1920s, the black culture of Harlem in the 1930s and the horrors of the Spanish civil war followed by the Second World War. He was born in London but his lifelong home was his parents house, **Springfield Lodge**, Rye, East Sussex. His father was a barrister and later Chairman of East Sussex Council so Burra never suffered from financial problems. The family had eight servants and 11 acres of land overlooking Rye. Burra suffered from the age of five from **acute rheumatoid arthritis** and a genetic blood defect that caused pernicious anaemia and because of his illness Burra was educated at home. He later attended Chelsea School of Art and then the **Royal College of Art** and travelled round Europe where he met **Paul Nash** who became a good friend. In the **1920s**, despite the pain of his illness he painted many scenes of **Paris nightlife**. On his return he exhibited at the New English Art Club. At this stage of his career his work was sometimes humorous, such as his painting *The Tea Shop* (1929) showing naked and scantily dressed 'flappers' serving tea in a typical British tea shop. His first solo exhibition was at the Leicester Galleries in 1929. In the **1930s** he visited **New York** and painted scenes of **Harlem and the jazz world**. In the **mid-1930s** he visited **Spain** and his work took on a darker tone. In 1935 he witnessed a church being burned down a year before the start of the **Spanish Civil War** and Burra painted it as a crowd with bloody weapons with a devilish monster encouraging them. His work became increasingly surreal and **disturbing** during the **Second World War**. In the **1950s** he turned away from the human form to paint **luminous landscapes** and powerful **flower paintings**.

Notes

- **Jack the Ripper** is the best-known name for an unidentified serial killer generally believed to have been active in the largely impoverished areas in and around the Whitechapel district of London in 1888.
- **Flappers** were a generation of young Western women in the 1920s who wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, listened to jazz, and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered acceptable behaviour. Flappers were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual manner, smoking, driving cars and flouting social and sexual norms.

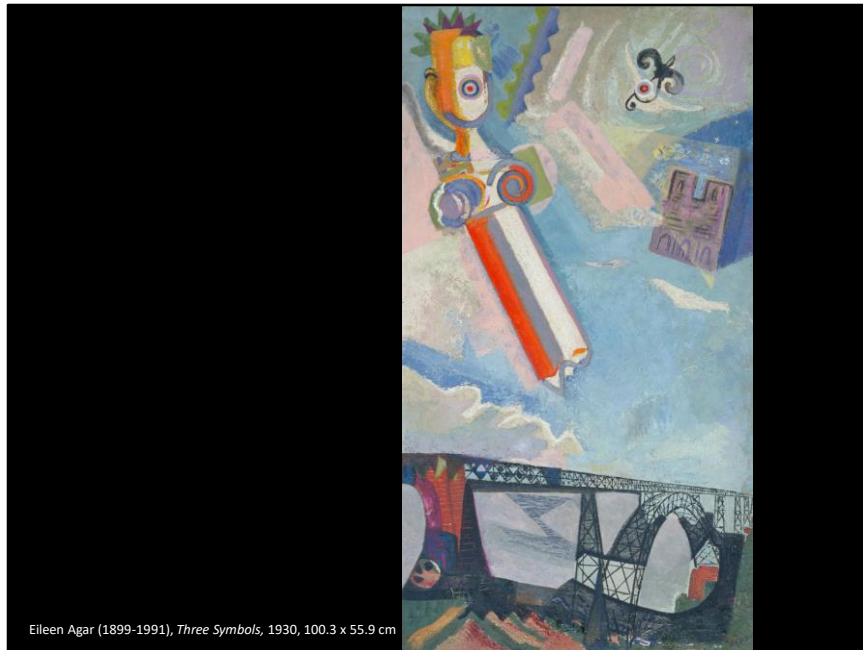
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<https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2012/04/25/edward-burra-exhibition-in-nottingham/>

<https://youtu.be/4BoLh8xgOdI> one hour Andrew Graham Dixon BBC programme on Edward Burra called 'I Never Tell Anybody Anything: The Life and Art of Edward Burra'.



Eileen Agar (1899-1991), *Three Symbols*, 1930, 100.3 x 55.9 cm, not on display

- 'This painting includes structures from three eras: a **Greek column**, a **Gothic cathedral** (Notre Dame) and a **modern bridge**. Agar claimed that this flight of the imagination was the **first work** in which she began to move towards a **more surrealist style**. She and her future husband, the writer Joseph Bard, were **living in Paris** at this time. It was there that they **met André Breton and Paul Eluard**, who, she later recalled, were among the poets and painters giving the 'kiss of life' to **surrealism, 'that sleeping beauty troubled by nightmares'**' (Tate display caption)
- In 1964 she described it as representing the three cultures, the ancient Greco-Roman world, medieval Christianity and modern technical inventions.

Bio:Agar

- **Eileen Forrester Agar** (1899–1991) was a British painter and photographer associated with the Surrealist movement. She was born in **Buenos Aires** to a **Scottish father** and **American mother**, Agar moved with her family to **London in 1911**. She attended the **Slade from 1925 to 26** and then **studied in Paris**. She met the Surrealists **André Breton** and **Paul Éluard** with whom she had a friendly relationship. She was a member of the **London Group** from 1934 onwards and

became a **Royal Academy Associate in 1990**.

- In the mid-1930s Agar and Joseph Bard, who she had met in 1926, began renting a house for the summer at Swanage in Dorset. Here she met **Paul Nash** and the two began an intense relationship. In 1935 Nash introduced Agar to the concept of the '**found object**'. Together, they collaborated on a number of works, such as *Seashore Monster at Swanage*. Nash recommended her work to Roland Penrose and Herbert Read, the organisers of the 1936 '**International Surrealist Exhibition**' and she became the **only British woman to have work**, three paintings and five objects, **included** in that exhibition.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/agar-three-symbols-t00707>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/mar/05/art.surrealismatthevan-da>



John Skeaping (1901-1980), *Akua-Ba*, 1931, acacia wood, 111.7 x 56 x 56 cm, 200 kg

- 'The title of this work refers to the **Ghanaian legend of Akua**, in which an **infertile woman** was instructed by a **priest to care for a wooden doll** as if it were a real child so that she might conceive. The acacia is native to Africa but **this piece of wood** supposedly came from a tree that had been felled on **Acacia Road near Skeaping's studio** in north London. The use of non-indigenous materials was fairly common for Skeaping and artists such as Barbara Hepworth at this time and was thought to add to the exoticism of the work.' (Tate display caption)
- *Akua'ba* figures were important fertility aids among Akan-speakers in Ghana in the past. They depict an abstracted female form in wood and were created by male carvers. They were always mature figures in their prime of life and always female as the Akan culture is matrilineal.

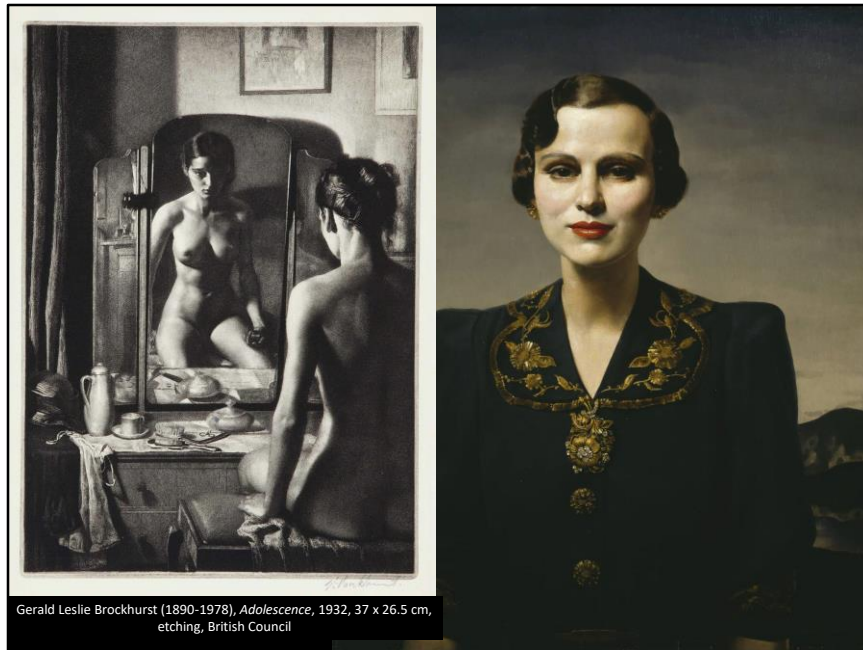
Bio:Skeaping

- **John Skeaping** (1901-1980) was born in South Woodford, Essex, Skeaping studied at **Goldsmith's College**, London, and later at the **Royal Academy**. In 1924 he won the **British Prix de Rome** and its scholarship to the British School at Rome. Skeaping was the **first husband** of the sculptor **Barbara Hepworth**, with whom he

exhibited during the 1920s. He was a member of the **London Group**, and later worked for a period in **Mexico**. He was elected to the **Royal Academy in 1960**. He latterly lived in Devon near the village of Chagford and moved to the Camargue, France in 1959.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/skeaping-akua-ba-t07862>



Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890-1978), *Portrait of Margaret, Duchess of Argyll* c.1931, 76.2 x 64.1 cm

- Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890-1978), *Adolescence*, 1932, 37 x 26.5 cm, etching, British Council
- 'In the **1930s** Brockhurst became a **sought after portrait painter**. Paintings such as this represented a fashionable assimilation of past with present, a **modern expression of traditional artistic values**. Combining rich decoration with subtle assessment of character, Brockhurst specialised in **painting rich, famous and often highly independent women**. This is a portrait of the **socialite Margaret Sweeney, Duchess of Argyll**. The dramatic landscape background of volcanic mountains and **loch** allude to the sitter's **Scottish heritage** of which she was intensely proud.' (Tate display caption)

Bio:Brockhurst

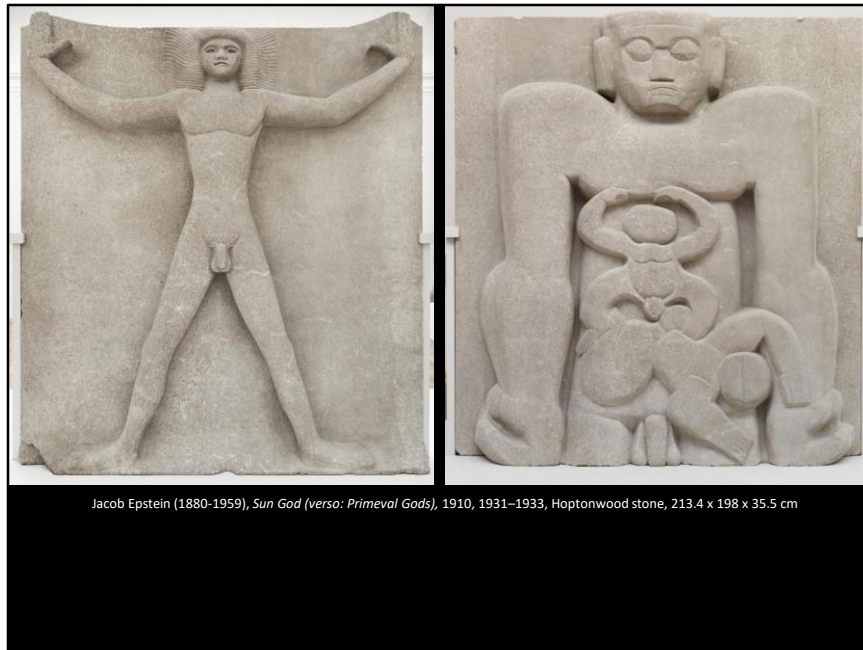
- **Gerald Leslie Brockhurst** (1890–1978) was an English painter and etcher. He was born in Birmingham, the **son of a coal merchant** and showed **extraordinary drawing skills** and entered the **Birmingham School of Art at the age of twelve**. His headmaster announced he had discovered '**a young Botticelli**'. He won a **gold**

medal at the **Royal Academy School** and a travelling scholarship. During the 1930s and 1940s he was **celebrated** as a portraitist, painting society figures such as **Marlene Dietrich** and the **Duchess of Windsor**. Today he is best known for his small **etched prints** of beautiful, idealized women - many of them modelled by his first and second wives. The etching that is considered his masterpiece is *Adolescence* (1932, 37 x 26.5 cm, etching, British Council) of Kathleen Woodward, a 16-17 year-old model at the Royal Academy School who he met in 1929 when he was 39. He rechristened her Dorette and they eloped to America amidst great scandal. In 1939 at the height of his career he moved to America where he stayed for the rest of his life. He married Dorette in 1947 after he had divorced his first wife Anaïs, *née* Folin, a Frenchwoman he had married in 1911.

- **Margaret Sweeney**, Duchess of Argyll (1912-1993) was a society beauty best known for her celebrated divorce case in 1963. The Duke of Argyll alleged she had had 88 lovers including David Niven, the future Edward VIII, Duncan Sandys (a Cabinet Minister) and Douglas Fairbanks, Jnr. She was the daughter of a wealthy American woman and a Scottish textile millionaire. When she came out in London in 1931 she was named debutante of the year and photographed by Cecil Beaton. She married an Irish-American stockbroker called Charles Sweeney in 1933 and did not become Duchess of Argyll until 1951. When this was painted she was Margaret Whigham.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/brockhurst-portrait-of-margaret-duchess-of-argyll-t12796>



Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), *Sun God (verso: Primeval Gods)*, 1910, 1931–1933, Hoptonwood stone, 213.4 x 198 x 35.5 cm

- ‘The two sides of this sculpture were **carved at different times**. *Sun God* (left) was **carved in 1910** when Epstein and Eric Gill were planning what Gill described as a ‘**sort of twentieth-century Stonehenge**’ of monumental sculpture at Asheham House, Sussex. Probably intended for this unrealised project, it is one of several works influenced by Egyptian art, exploring the power of the sun. **In 1931 Epstein carved *Primeval Gods* on the reverse**. Although the massive square shouldered figure is inspired by African sculpture, Epstein’s work in the 1930s also shows his engagement with younger British sculptors, including Moore and Hepworth.’ (Tate display caption)

Bio:Epstein

- **Jacob Epstein** (1880-1959) helped pioneer modern sculpture. He was born in America and spent his childhood drawing the people who flocked to New York from all over the world. When he was **22 he moved to Paris**, the world capital of art, to study in the studios there. **In 1905** a trip to the British Museum with its art from all over the world persuaded him to **stay in Britain**. He **married** Margaret

Dunlop in 1906 and had **many affairs** and fathered five children. His longest relationship with **Kathleen Garman** lasted from 1921 until his death. Margaret tolerated all his affairs except that with Garman **who she shot** and wounded in 1923. Margaret died in 1947 and **Epstein married Kathleen**. Their **eldest daughter**, also called Kathleen or 'Kitty', **married Lucien Freud**.

- His **first major commission** was **18 large nude sculptures** made in 1908 for the façade of Charles Holden's building for the British Medical Association on **The Strand** (now Zimbabwe House) were initially considered shocking to **Edwardian sensibilities**, again mainly due to the perception that they were over-explicit sexually. In art-historical terms, however, the Strand sculptures were controversial for quite a different reason: they represented Epstein's first thoroughgoing attempt to break away from traditional European iconography in favour of elements derived from an alternative sculptural milieu – that of **classical India**. In the **1930s** some **pieces fell off** the figures and they were all mutilated allegedly to protect the public but it is not clear whether it was from falling masonry or from the naked figures.
- Between 1913 and 1915, Epstein was associated with the short-lived Vorticism movement and produced one of his best known sculptures *The Rock Drill*.
- **Epstein's second commission** was the Tomb of Oscar Wilde. His original sketches, which he abandoned, show two young men mourning Wilde's death. new focus on Wilde's poem *The Sphinx*. However, a number of influences began to play on Epstein around this period, including that of fellow sculptor **Eric Gill**. The two artists were deeply interested in what they saw as the more **primal sexuality of Indian** and Egyptian art, as opposed to British art. Pennington refers to this period in the Epstein's work as the Sun Temple period and claims that, having been unable to follow this path with some of his works in Britain, Epstein transferred his new passion onto the Wilde tomb. It has also been claimed that the work was partly inspired by the **Winged Assyrian Bulls** in the British Museum.
- *Rima*, his memorial to W. H. Hudson in Hyde Park drew 'gasps of horror' from the crowd when it was unveiled by Stanley Baldwin. A media campaign followed that saw the Morning Post describe Rima – or "the **Hyde Park Atrocity**" as it was quickly dubbed – as "**Mr Epstein's nightmare in stone**", and the sculptor as "**the most famous example of a great sculptor who has sold his soul to the devil**". The sculpture was daubed in green paint. Epstein was baffled by all the fuss and visited Hyde Park a number of times to try to see what all the fuss was about.
- In 1929, his sculptures **Day** and **Night** above **55 Broadway**, St James's Park were considered indecent and his commissions for public works ended.
- He created **busts of many famous people** including **Albert Einstein** in 1933.
- Between the mid-1930s and 50s other works by Epstein (for example, this work *Jacob and the Angel*, 1940-41) were **exhibited at freak shows** and fun fairs alongside diseased body parts and Siamese twins in jars. His carving of *Rima* (1924) in Hyde Park was tarred and feathered. Epstein was **too poor to protest** and

eventually they were displayed in **Blackpool's Tussaud's**. It was a time of increasing hostility towards the Jews and he received no more large-scale commissions.

- Epstein's art started to be sold all over the world and he became **highly influential** particularly on the younger artists **Henry Moore** and **Barbara Hepworth**.
- He reacted against ornate and pretty art and often made **bold, harsh** and massive forms in bronze and stone. He often **shocked** his audience because of the **explicit sexual content** and his experimentation with **non-Western** sculptural traditions. His **male nude** over **John Lewis's** department store in Liverpool was called 'Dickie Lewis'.
- **Epstein** is one of the **leading British sculptors** of the twentieth century. Throughout his life he derided and accused of creating **ugly, deformed and obscene figures** yet he always insisted on his deep respect for tradition although, as is seen in this work, he **respected art from all over the world**. His belief in **universal ideals of beauty** ran counter to the aggressive nationalism, belief in racial purity and fascism of the period. The work is directly carved from the stone and, like Eric Gill, and later Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, he **did not copy a clay model** but created forms that respected and followed the grain and form of the stone block.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/epstein-sun-god-verso-primeval-gods-l03237>



Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979), *Autumn Composition, Flowers on a Table*, 1932, 78.1 x 111.1 cm

- 'In this painting **Hitchens used a palette knife**, rags to wipe away paint and **vigorous brush strokes** to create an **active surface**. Painted in his Hampstead studio this work 'dates from the kind of surroundings and the period of [Hitchens's] urban life - from about 1920-40 before the full impact of nature and country living.' The **shallow space** and **overlapping forms** suggest the influence of the **post-cubist still lifes of Braque**. So does the use of **accents of colour** that punctuate an otherwise sombre painting. The strength of the colour, however, is more suggestive of Matisse.' (Tate display caption)

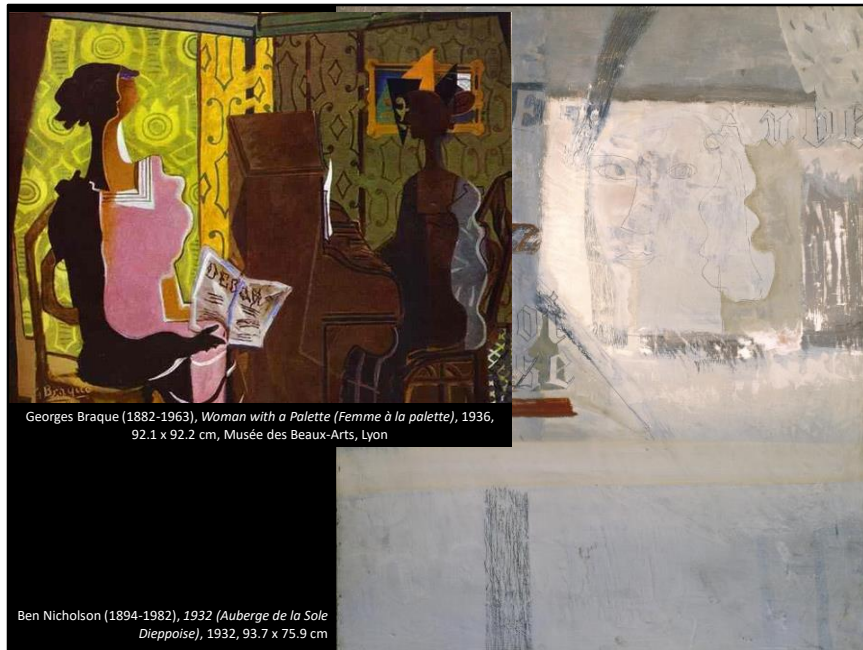
Bio:Hitchens

- **Ivon Hitchens** (1893-1979) was born in **London**, the **son of a portrait painter**. His father was modestly successful and won gold medals in national competitions and his mother was a gifted amateur artist. Ivon was sent away to school when he was 7 and had the dubious distinction of **acting as the go between** for one of his **school mistresses** and the sexually promiscuous **H. G. Wells**. Ivon's education was cut short by **acute appendicitis** and his parents sent him on a **trip around the**

world. He was **not healthy enough to serve in the war** and did two years war service in **hospital supply**. In 1918–19 he studied at the **Royal Academy Schools**, where his instructors included Sir **William Orpen**, **John Singer Sargent**, and George Clausen. He started exhibiting in the 1920s and joined the **London Group** in the 1930s. His house was bombed during the Second World War and he **moved into a caravan** where he stayed for the **next 40 years**, gradually **adding buildings** around it. The caravan was in a **large secluded wilderness** with a **lake** and **rhododendrons** and the caravan acted as temporary accommodation for guests including the occasional model for his figure painting. He is known for his landscape painting, his figure painting, his nudes and his murals. His son and grandson are both artists.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hitchens-autumn-composition-flowers-on-a-table-t02215>



Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), 1932 (*Auberge de la Sole Dieppoise*), 1932, 93.7 x 75.9 cm

Georges Braque (1882-1963), *Woman with a Palette (Femme à la palette)*, 1936, 92.1 x 92.2 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

- 'This painting depicts the **likeness of Barbara Hepworth reflected in the window** of a **modest hotel-restaurant**. In the summer of 1932 Nicholson and Hepworth **visited** cubist painter **Georges Braque** (pronounced 'brahk') **in Dieppe**. The use of words to emphasise the **flatness of the picture surface** was a device employed by Braque between 1910 and 1920, but the **sparseness** of the composition and lack of tangible objects was **particular to Nicholson**. He wrote that the paintings' roughness was a forerunner of his first abstract relief, made at the end of 1933.' (Tate display caption)
- Filets de sole Dieppoise is a traditional dish of Dieppe consisting of sole in white wine sauce.

Bio:Nicholson

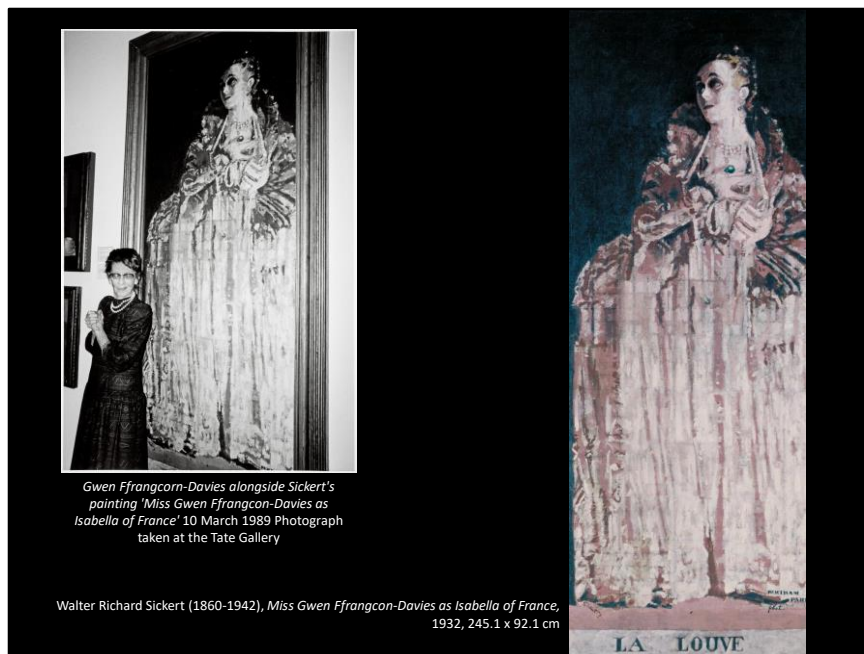
- Benjamin ('Ben') Lauder **Nicholson** (1894-1982) was born in Buckinghamshire, the **son of two painters**. He described his **mother** as '**the rock on which my whole**

existence has been based'. He recalled that she told him that after a lot of art talk with visitors she wanted to go down and **scrub the kitchen table** and he remembered this during his career. He had a mixed education but went to the **Slade in 1910-11** where he **befriended Paul Nash**. He went to **France** and spent a year learning French and then Italian. He was **asthmatic and was unfit for military service** and travelled to **America** for his health. He **married** the painter **Winifred Roberts** and **later Barbara Hepworth** and he said he learned a lot from both artists. He visited **Paris in 1920** where he **encountered Cubism** for the first time and it informed his work for the rest of his life. In **1924** he painted some **experimental abstract works** but this isolated development was **not taken further for ten years**. He bought a **house on Hadrian's Wall** and in 1928 **visited St Ives** with his **friend Christopher Wood**. It was here they **discovered** the fisherman turned painter **Alfred Wallis** whose '**primitive**' style **inspired** them both. He had his first **one-man exhibition in 1924** and joined the **Seven & Five Society** and became a leading member.

- In **1931** he **met Barbara Hepworth** and they lived in Hampstead and **joined Unit One** with **Paul Nash and Henry Moore**. In **1934** **Barbara had triplets** and Ben made his **first all white abstract works on which his international reputation is based**. Winifred moved to Paris with their three children and he and Barbara visited them between 1932 and 1936 and developed **close friendly relationships with Picasso, Braque, Miró, Arp, Calder, and Mondrian**. Nicholson was a vital link between Paris and London, and his **advocacy of abstract art** was **crucial** in **establishing London** as a **centre of the international avant-garde in the 1930s**. He and Hepworth **married in 1938** and the following year they **moved to St. Ives**.
- He had a flair for ball games of all sorts and loved **practical jokes**. His dedication to his work was absolute and he had a great admiration for craftsmanship. He avoided formality and **disliked personal publicity**. He was **critical of intellectual approaches to art** that lacked intuitive feeling and poetry.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1932-auberge-de-la-sole-dieppoise-t00944>



Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942), *Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Isabella of France*, 1932, 245.1 x 92.1 cm

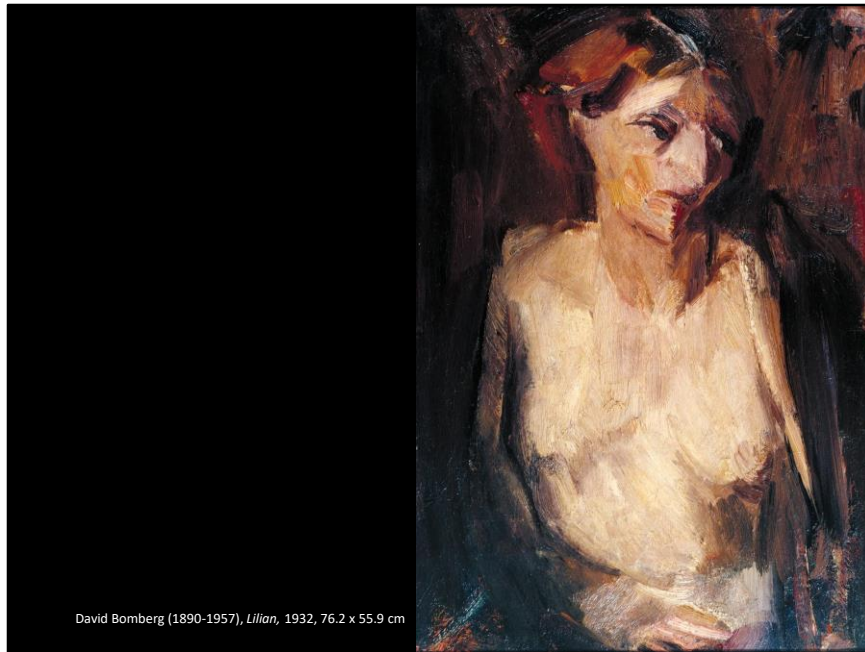
- 'Sickert loved the theatre and became a friend of the actress Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies after writing her a fan letter in 1932. This painting shows her in the role of **Queen Isabella of France in Christopher Marlowe's 16th-century play *Edward II***. The name 'La Louve' means '**she-wolf**', a hostile title given to the historical Isabella. The production had taken place nine years earlier, and Sickert painted this picture from a **small photograph**, taken by Bertram Park, of the actress on stage. The painting was an immediate success and the *Daily Mail* described it as 'Mr Sickert's Best Work'.' (Tate display caption)
- This was **painted when Sickert was 72** and in later years he had **become eccentric and unpredictable**. He would **wear slippers** and a **loud jacket** on **formal occasions** and first insisted on being called by his full name and he then dropped the 'Walter' and was known as Richard Sickert. He would **adopt roles**, **shave his head bald** or grow a **full beard** and would **move around relentlessly** renting studios in different towns and countries. He would also **change his friends and lovers frequently**. His only **unchanging core was his art** to which he was absolutely devoted. He would

tirelessly promote colleagues art but was also boundlessly egotistical, sometimes cruel and often a hypocrite. In the mid-1920s he **abandoned drawings** as the basis of his portraits, landscapes and theatre paintings and switched to using **photographs**. Photographs influenced Sickert's art in practical ways. He could paint **portraits without sittings or commissions** and produced royal portraits painted from newspaper photographs. His flamboyant life-size, full-length portraits became the talking points of Royal Academy summer exhibitions between 1925 and 1935 and a stream of one-man exhibitions kept him in the public view. Throughout the **1930s**, using press and publicity photographs, he was able to depict his favourite players, for example **Peggy Ashcroft** and **Gwen Ffrangcon Davies**, in their classic roles. There is a **long list of societies** to which he was **elected** and from which he **resigned**. For example, he was elected a Royal Academician in 1934 and resigned in 1935. He has inspired successive generations of British painters. His work is always brave, his subject matter various, his experimental techniques searching and his range of styles daring so that few British figurative artists can be discussed without reference to Sickert.

- **Bio:Davies. Gwen Ffrangcon Davies** (1891-1992) made her stage debut in 1911 in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. She sang the soprano lead in choral dramas and early in her career was known primarily as a singer. She later worked at the Old Vic and with the Birmingham Repertory Company. In 1924, Ffrangcon-Davies first played **Juliet to John Gielgud's Romeo**, thereby starting a stage partnership that was to last for almost half a century. She **lived to 101** and played Madame Voynitsky in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Royal Court when she was 79.
- Sickert **saw her perform in 1932** and **invited her to dinner** with his wife. She had never heard of him but her mother encouraged her to go as she knew he was a famous painter. She later wrote, '**He spoke much and very flatteringly of my work, for which he professes an extravagant admiration, but was very disappointed, so he said to find me so young! ... He is an old man 72, but full of life and sparkle tho' I fear he drinks too much – consuming the best part of two bottles of champagne at lunch**'. They had a close friendship lasting two years during which Sickert would write to her nearly every day. He wished to paint a portrait but did not want her to pose so he selected one of her publicity photographs. She had **performed the role in 1923** and it was a quick snapshot taken during a dress rehearsal while she was waiting in the wings for her stage entrance.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sickert-miss-gwen-ffrangcon-davies-as-isabella-of-france-n04673>
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/walter-richard-sickert-miss-gwen-ffrangcon-davies-as-isabella-of-france-r1139306> a long and detailed analysis of the painting



David Bomberg (1890-1957), *Lilian*, 1932, 76.2 x 55.9 cm

- 'David Bomberg produced **many portraits of his partner, artist Lilian Holt, during the 1930s**. These are notable for their use of vigorous brushstrokes. Holt recalled that, for this half-length portrait, she sat with a **black satin dressing-gown** around her shoulders and arms because she was **shy of posing completely nude**. Bomberg required her to pose **quite still and in silence**, in order that nothing should interrupt his concentration.' (Tate display caption)
- Painted at 10 Fordwych Road, NW2 (near Kilburn underground station, there is a blue plaque on the house), where the artist was then living. Lilian Mendelson (née Holt) first met him in 1923 and he encouraged her to become a painter. She posed for a number of works and later became his second wife in 1941. They had one daughter, Diana, born in 1935.
- **Bio:Bomberg**
- **David Bomberg** (1890-1957) was **born in Birmingham**, the son of a **Jewish Polish immigrant leather worker**. He was apprentice to a lithographer and attended **evening classes** given by **Walter Sickert**. Motivated by Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* he entered the **Slade with the help of a**

scholarship. He was a **forceful member** of the avant garde and on leaving the Slade exhibited six works in Brighton.

- **1914** was Bomberg's **best year** as exhibited five works including ***In the Hold*** broke away from **Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist group**, held his **first one-man show** and his ***The Mud Bath*** literally **stopped the traffic** when it was hung outside the Chenil Gallery, Chelsea. However, his work started to **displease his patrons** with his **cubist style** and choice of subject, such as painting Arab villages for the Zionist Organisation.
- He **enlisted in the Army** and was sent to the front line which inhibited his painting. After the war he **rejected** machine-age **abstraction** and turned to a more traditional style and to landscape painting. **He travelled to Palestine and then Spain** but on his return **his one-man show in 1932** (the year he painted *Lilian*) **was not as well received**.
- He **joined the Communist Party** and **visited Russia** but by 1939 he was a **neglected** artist and was initially **rejected** by the War Artists' Advisory Committee. He received **one commission** which inspired some of his finest work but only three drawings were accepted. He was continually **rejected** during WWII and only Borough Polytechnic accepted him as a **teacher**. Although his classes were small he became a **legendary teacher** and his students included **Frank Auerbach** and **Leon Kossoff**. Some of **finest landscapes** were inspired by visits to Cornwall and Cyprus. He tried to establish a school in Malaga, Spain but fell ill and was transferred to Gibraltar and then England where he died at St Thomas's Hospital in 1957.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bomberg-lilian-t00318>



William Roberts (1895-1980), *Skipping (The Gutter)*, 1934-35, 144.5 x 70.5 cm
 William Roberts (1895-1980), *Playground (The Gutter)*, 1934-35, 143.2 x 159.4 cm
 William Roberts (1895-1980), *Rush Hour*, 1971, 122 x 96.5 cm, private collection

- 'This painting was originally **part of a larger work entitled *The Gutter***. It formed the right side of the **canvas**, which was **divided after the Second World War**, having been **exhibited in the USA and damaged**. Roberts explained that he had made the **unusually large picture** after hearing that artists were being commissioned to produce work for a **new Cunard or P&O ocean liner**, and hoping to be considered for the project. The subject is characteristic of Roberts's depictions of city life, especially working-class protagonists.' (Tate display caption)
- '**Playground (The Gutter)**' was originally the **left section** of a larger picture titled 'The Gutter'. The right part, '**Skipping (The Gutter)**' is displayed alongside. The canvas was divided into two after the Second World War and a strip of canvas a foot wide removed from the centre. Photographs reveal the **removed image as three boys** playing with tops and whips. Roberts said that he painted 'The Gutter' because he had heard that artists were being commissioned to paint pictures for a new Cunard or P & O liner. The picture was painted at Haverstock Hill, NW3, which Roberts left in **1935**, and signed and incorrectly dated 1936 when later divided.'

(Tate display caption)

Bio:Roberts

- **William Roberts** (1895-1980) was born to a **working class family** in the **East End** of London and he showed an **outstanding talent** from an early age. He started an **apprenticeship** as a poster designer but **won a scholarship to the Slade** where he won the **prize for figure composition**. He travelled to **France** and became a **pioneer in abstract art** before the First World War. He became **friends with Roger Fry and Wyndham Lewis** and signed the **Vorticist Manifesto** although he called his own work **Cubist**. He enlisted as a **gunner** and went to the front. He successfully applied to become a **war artist** on the condition he did not paint Cubist works. His work *The First German Gas Attack at Ypres* shows the horror of a gas attack. After the war he married and became a **successful portrait painter**. In the 1930s he was at the peak of his career and exhibited regularly and internationally but he always struggled financially.
- He is remembered for his large, complex and colourful figurative compositions he exhibited annually at the Royal Academy from the 1950s to his death. He had a major retrospective at the Tate in 1965 and was elected as an Academician in 1966.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/roberts-skipping-the-gutter-t02347>

<http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/william-roberts-england-at-play>



Sir Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), *St Francis and the Birds*, 1935, 66 x 58.4 cm

- ‘**St Francis of Assisi**, the founder of the Franciscans, is popularly remembered for being able to **talk to birds**, and pray with them. Here he is shown as an old man, dressed in a Franciscan robe, talking to birds on a farm. Stanley Spencer intended to display this painting in his **ideal gallery**, which he called ‘**Church House**’, though it was **never built**. The **strangeness** of his paintings in the 1930s implies some personal interpretation, perhaps here in the way the saint separates the boy and girl. This was one of two paintings **rejected by the Royal Academy** in 1935. ’ (Tate display caption)

Cookham, 1932-1935, The Church House Project

- Spencer married **Hilda Carline** in **1924** and they had two children Shirin that year and Unity in 1930. In **1929 he met Patricia Preece** and became infatuated despite her being a lesbian. Hilda divorced him in **1937 and he married Preece** a week later. She continued to live with Dorothy Hepworth and refused to consummate the marriage or grant him a divorce. Spencer would often visit Hilda through her mental breakdown until her death from cancer in 1950.
- In **1934** the Royal Academy accepted all the paintings Spencer submitted and the

reception was excellent. It was described as '**Stanley Spencer's Year**'. Spencer resigned the following year when the RA rejected this and *The Dustman* even though it accepted three others.

- The Times reviewer introduced a **cautionary note** about this painting, '... it is reasonably certain that in **fifty years time** he will be recognised as one of the very few contemporary painters who have **really counted** in the history of English art.' But he added, 'Mr Spencer is as unwelcome to contemporary aesthetic opinion as he is likely to be a stumbling block to the general public ... Like all originals Mr Spencer is a **disconcerting artist**, and **neither illustratively nor formally is his meaning always clear**.'

The Church House Project

- During WWI Spencer had conceived of a **chapel of peace** and love based on **cycles of sacred and profane love**. This concept was further developed following his experience with the **Burghclere chapel (1927-32)**. The original layout of the Church House mirrored the **geography of Cookham** with a High Street, School Land and a path beside the Thames. He imagined bedrooms as chapels and fireplaces as altars.
- There would be a **chapel dedicated to Hilda** and another to a family servant, Elise Munday. Spencer had at least **two significant affairs** during his life, one with **Daphne Charlton** while at Leonard Stanley, and the other with **Charlotte Murray**, a Jungian analyst, when he was in Glasgow, and there were to be **chapels dedicated to both of them**.
- Although the **Chapel House was never built** Spencer returned to the idea for the **rest of his life** and many of his paintings were **imagined as forming part** of the decoration of the house. These included the two paintings Spencer submitted for the 1935 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, this painting, ***Saint Francis and the Birds*** and ***The Dustman or The Lovers***. The Royal Academy accepted three other paintings but **rejected these two** and Spencer felt that the Academy was trying to control the direction of his work so he **resigned in protest**. The rejection of the *Saint Francis* picture was particularly galling for Spencer as the model for the figure of Saint Francis had been his own father, wearing his own dressing gown and slippers, which Spencer had intended to hang in the nave of the Church-House.
- One reviewer spoke of the '... **disproportionate cranium** and stone-like beard [of St Francis, which] assume the **grotesque [sic] appearance** belonging to one of the uglier fishes, the **hammer-head shark**. Mr Spencer's St. Francis is a caricature which passes the **bounds of good taste**, [and] which is equally poor in drawing, design and composition'.
- Other reviewers implied mental instability describing St Francis as 'a **distorted doll**' but this was 'a fault not of the painter's hand, but of his head and heart.'
- Other critics **praised Spencer's vision**. One wrote that the Academicians were 'Sub-Realists' who lacked visual vigour but Spencer was a '**Super Realist**' and they

were 'visionary as well as visual, [they] see in one way or another violently or strangely ... under whose contemplation the **form transforms, swells or deflates** ... is given the freedom, even the **irrationality of dreams** ...' **Most of the works** at the Summer Exhibition were '**drenched in the jam of sentiment**' but Spencer's St Francis was 'more like **Giotto's stout friar** than are the sentimentalised figures of non-Catholic fancy.'

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/spencer-st-francis-and-the-birds-t00961>



Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), 1935 (*white relief*), 1935, 101.6 x 166.4 cm

- 'Ben Nicholson was, with his **second wife Barbara Hepworth**, a **leading figure** in the **international modern movement in Britain**. With artists in continental Europe and North America such as Mondrian, Moholy-Nagy and Calder they worked together to achieve and promote an art that was **abstract**, synthesised with architecture and design. In defiance of the increasingly antagonistic nationalism engulfing Europe, position was explicitly internationalist and **utopian**. The **compositional quietude** of Nicholson's white reliefs provided an aesthetic model for a possible **social harmony**.' (Tate display caption)
- Nicholson wrote in a letter '**This relief contains one circle drawn by hand and one by compass and therefore represents the transition between the more freely drawn and more "mathematical" relief**'.
- Nicholson wrote that abstract art does not indicate a mathematical approach as squares and circles are nothing in themselves. They come alive through the poetic idea that inspires the artist. In this relief the circle that exposes the lower plane creates space and '**The awareness of this is felt subconsciously and it is useless to approach it intellectually as this, so far from helping, only acts as a barrier.**'

- In **1931** Nicholson met Barbara **Hepworth** and they lived in Hampstead and joined **Unit One** with **Paul Nash and Henry Moore**. In **1934** Barbara had **triplets** and Ben made his **first all white abstract works** on which his international reputation is based. His first wife **Winifred moved to Paris** with their three children and **he and Barbara visited** them between 1932 and 1936 and developed close friendly relationships with **Picasso, Braque, Miró, Arp, Calder, and Mondrian**. Nicholson was a vital link between Paris and London, and his advocacy of abstract art was crucial in establishing London as a centre of the international avant-garde in the 1930s. He and Hepworth married in 1938 and the following year they moved to St. Ives.
- He had a flair for ball games of all sorts and loved practical jokes. His dedication to his work was absolute and he had a great admiration for craftsmanship. He avoided formality and disliked personal publicity. He was critical of intellectual approaches to art that lacked intuitive feeling and poetry.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1935-white-relief-t00049>



Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), *Ball, Plane and Hole*, 1936, 21 x 61.1 x 30.5 cm

Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), *Ball, Plane and Hole*, 1936, 21 x 61.1 x 30.5 cm

- 'The title of this sculpture draws attention to the relationship between **solid material and empty space**, and to the implied passage of the **ball through a plane to leave a hole**. The **movement is implied here** by the placing of wedge, ball and hole. The natural **warmth of wood** offsets the purity and simplicity of Hepworth's forms. As Hepworth's friend the physicist JD Bernal suggested, it is one of a group of works that 'bring out the theme of complementary forms, each solid structure being contrasted sharply with a hollow smaller, or larger, than itself.' ' (Tate display caption)

Notes (see Bio:Hepworth)

- **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 (her father was a civil engineer) and she 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) which Moore also attended. She and Moore and other students went on trips to Paris to study art.
- She won a West Riding **Scholarship to Florence** in 1924. In 1925 she travelled to Siena with **John Skeaping**, the Royal Academy Prix de Rome winner and they married in Florence. They moved to Rome where Skeaping was a scholar and began to carve in stone before returning to London in 1926. In 1927, Hepworth and Skeaping held a studio exhibition and Hepworth sold two works. They moved to Hampstead (1928 to 1939) and had a son, Paul, in 1929 but the marriage was already deteriorating. She became associated with the 'new movement', direct carving, abstraction and precise forms and she joined the **London Group** and the **7 & 5 Society** in 1930-31. Hepworth and Moore became the leading sculptors in the 'new movement'. **Henry Moore called 1932 'The Year of the Hole'. The previous year his friend and rival, Barbara Hepworth, made her first pierced form, the year she gave birth to her first child.** The hole she carved became the most important formal features of much of her and Moore's later work.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-ball-plane-and-hole-t03399>



Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939), *Related Forms*, 1937, 55.6 x 65.7 cm, not on display

- 'The abstract nature of works such as *Related Forms* was in the mid-1930s associated with the utopian ideas of a European avant-garde, advocating common cause in opposition to an increasingly fractious political environment on the continent. Works by Dismorr entitled *Related Forms* were included in the exhibition 'Unity of Artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development' at 41 Grosvenor Square, London in April-May 1937, though it is not known if this work was among those shown there.' (Tate display caption)

Bio:Dismorr

- **Jessica [Jessie] Stewart Dismorr (1885–1939)** was born in Gravesend, Kent, the daughter of a rich businessman and so she had no financial worries. She attended the **Slade** School of Fine Art in 1902–3 before studying painting at the **Atelier La Palette, Paris**, from 1910 to 1913. There she became a Fauvist, and contributed to several issues of *Rhythm* magazine. Dismorr exhibited at the Stafford Gallery, London, in 1912, and at the Salon d'Automne the following year. At about this time she **met Wyndham Lewis** and by 1914 had become an ardent member of the **Rebel Art Centre**. By the time she signed the **Vorticist manifesto** Dismorr was

working in a **strongly abstract style**. She was described as '**the Edwardian phenomenon of the new woman**'. She was described by Lewis's lover at the time as one of the '**little lapdogs who wanted to be Lewis's slaves and do everything for him**' although Dismorr's close friend described her preference for her own gender. Her difficult sexual relationship with Lewis was given as the reason she once stripped naked in the middle of Oxford Street.

- She was **one of only two women** in the Vorticist movement, the other was **Helen Saunders**. Saunders twice turned down proposals from Walter Sickert and explained later in life that it is not to the woman's advantage when two artists marry as she would inevitably **relegate her own artistic needs** below those of her husband's. Christopher Nevinson had not wanted '**any of these damned women**' in the group.
- Dismorr's work was illustrated in the second issue of ***Blast* (1915)**, where her writings were also published. The girder-like forms of her *Abstract Composition* (1914–15; Tate collection) are suggestive of machinery and architectural forms. She showed in the **Vorticist exhibition in London in 1915**, after which she left to carry out **war work in France as a nurse**. She had a nervous breakdown in 1920 following her war experiences and was advised not to paint although Lewis suspected it was her abstract style that caused the doctors concern and advised her to paint.
- Her work was included at the Vorticist exhibition in New York in 1917, and her first **solo exhibition** was held at the Mayor Gallery, London, in **1925**; the following year she was elected to the **London Group** and the **Seven & Five Society**. Her involvement with the **avant-garde continued** throughout her life: during the **1930s her work became completely abstract**. She exhibited with the Association **Abstraction–Creation**, and in 1937 contributed *Related Forms* (the above work) to *Axis* magazine. At the end of her life Dismorr was living in London and committed suicide by hanging in St Marylebone on 29 August 1939.

Notes

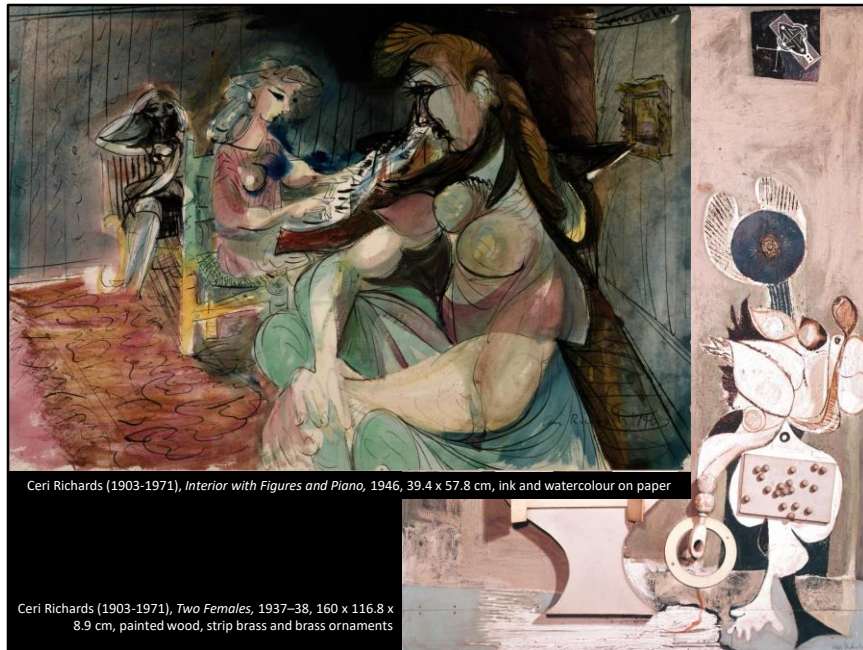
- **Note: The London Group** is a society based in London, England, created to offer additional exhibiting opportunities to artists besides the Royal Academy of Arts. Formed in 1913, it is one of the oldest artist-led organisations in the world. It was formed from the merger of the **Camden Town Group**, an all-male group, and the **Fitzroy Street Group**.
- **Note: Abstraction-Creation** was an association of abstract artists set up in Paris in 1931 with the aim of promoting abstract art through group exhibitions. Every major abstract painter took part including such figures as Naum Gabo, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, and it rapidly acquired membership of around four hundred. In Britain members of the modernist groupings the Seven and Five Society and Unit One, kept in close touch with Abstraction-Création. Their chief members were Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash and

John Piper.

- **Note:Unit One** was a British group formed by Paul Nash in 1933 with an announcement in *The Times*. Its aim was to promote modern art, architecture and design. In the **1930s** the two major themes in **modern art** were seen as **abstract art** and **Surrealism**. Unit One encompassed both and Nash made both abstract and surrealist work and played a major part in organising the '**International Surrealist Exhibition**' which attracted 23,000 visitors to the Burlington Galleries, London in June 1936.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dismorr-related-forms-t02322>



Ceri Richards (1903-1971), *Two Females*, 1937-38, 160 x 116.8 x 8.9 cm, painted wood, strip brass and brass ornaments

Ceri Richards (1903-1971), *Interior with Figures and Piano*, 1946, 39.4 x 57.8 cm, ink and watercolour on paper

- 'The **International Surrealist Exhibition** was held at the Burlington Galleries in the summer of 1936, and for a brief moment, in the words of André Breton, London was '**the centre of the Surrealist universe**'. Richards exhibition gave him an opportunity to study important works by Ernst, Picasso and Miro, among others. Subsequently a pronounced **erotic sensibility** became apparent in Richards's own **loosely surreal work**. Richards has explained that he is showing two contrasting representations of the female form in this relief. On the **right, virginal, though budding and seductive, and on the left, fulsome and latently sexual**.' (based on the Tate display caption)
- This is the last of a series of twelve surviving reliefs.

Bio:Richards

- **Ceri Richards** (1903-1971, pronounced 'Kerry') was born near **Swansea** to a **highly cultured, working-class family**. All three children were taught the **piano and music**

was an important part of Richards work. At school he **drew constantly** and won **local competitions** and when he became an **apprentice electrician** he continued to attend **drawing classes in the evening**. In **1923** he **first saw Renoir, Van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, Corot, Daumier and Rodin** at a country house and applied for and **won a scholarship to attend the Royal College of Art**. In 1929, he **married Frances Clayton** who also won a **scholarship** to the **Royal College of Art** and later became a distinguished painter and graphic designer. They spent the rest of their life in **London** except during **WWII** when Ceri was head of painting at **Cardiff School of Art**. He gradually moved towards **Surrealism** under the influence of Picasso and Kandinsky and he was also a **talented pianist**. One of the **high points** of his career was to attend the **Venice Biennale in 1962** where he was a **prize winner**. In 1964-65 he designed stained glass for Derby Cathedral and he designed other work for churches as well as stage sets and murals for ships of the Orient Line. He was a trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1958 to 1965.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/richards-two-females-t00307>



Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), *Forms in Echelon*, 1938, 108 x 60 x 71 cm, tulipwood on elm base, presented by the artist in 1964

- In 1938-39 Hepworth became **obsessed with the idea of producing large works although, paradoxically she had no money, space or time to produce such works.** *Forms in Echelon* falls between such monumental works and a more intimate work for a garden. She said, '**all good sculpture was, and still is, designed for the open air**'.
- 'Hepworth and her husband Ben Nicholson were key figures in the modern movement in Britain in the 1930s. Their circle became increasingly important as European artists such as Naum Gabo and Piet Mondrian fled to London. This work relates to her interest in situating **sculpture in the landscape**: an early image showed it superimposed onto a photograph of a garden. '**The sculpture has an upward growth but the curves of the two monoliths make a closed composition which, in the open, with light all round, they create a quietness, a pause in the progress of the eye**', Hepworth said.' (Tate display caption)
- The French word echelon means the rung of a ladder, a military formation in which each parallel row projects out further than the previous row and a high-level of command or level of worthiness or reputation. The two forms are distinct, the one

with the hole is larger than the other and they are turned to face each other. They are therefore not strictly in 'echelon' and when the work was first shown it was called *Two Forms (Tulip Wood)*.

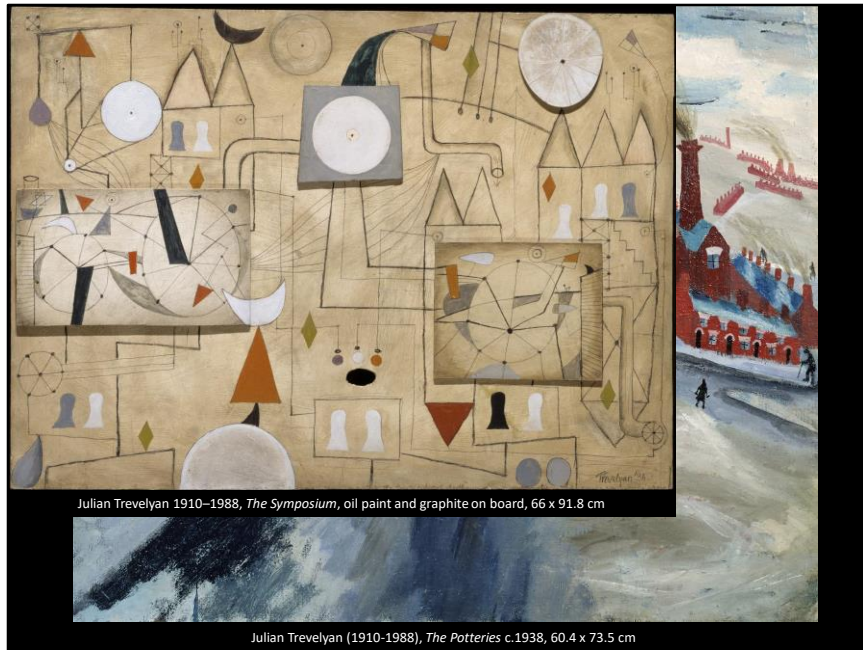
- ***Two Forms in Echelon*** was one of two Hepworths included in *Abstract and Concrete Art* at **Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in 1939**. The threat of war saw the closure of the gallery in June and the relocation of Hepworth and Nicholson to **St Ives**, where they stayed with the writer and painter Adrian Stokes (1902-1972) for the latter part of the year.

Notes

- **Adrian Stokes** (1902–1972) was a British writer and painter, known principally as an influential art critic and a published poet. Twenty three of his paintings are in the Tate.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-forms-in-echelon-t00698>



Julian Trevelyan (1910-1988), *The Potteries* c.1938, 60.4 x 73.5 cm

Julian Trevelyan 1910–1988, *The Symposium*, oil paint and graphite on board, 66 x 91.8 cm

- “Julian Trevelyan worked with **Mass Observation**, which applied anthropological survey methods to **British society**. It was founded in **1937**, the year after the **Jarrow March**, a mass protest against **unemployment**. While the primary tool in gathering information was hundreds of **amateur diarists**, **photography and painting were also used**. After a visit to Bolton, Trevelyan returned home via Stoke on-Trent, describing its industrial area as ‘a landscape full of drama and pathos’, explaining how ‘**human beings seemed to creep about almost apologetically among the manmade disasters**.’” (Tate display caption)

Bio:Trevelyan

- **Julian Trevelyan (1910-1988)** was born in **Leith Hill**, Surrey the son of a classical scholar and poet. He was educated at **Bedales School** and **Trinity College, Cambridge** which he left after two years to study **painting in Paris**. In 1935, he established himself at Durham Wharf in **Brentford** where he remained for the rest of his life. He became a confirmed Surrealist and exhibited at the International

Surrealist Exhibition, held at the New Burlington Galleries in London. In 1937 he held his first solo exhibition.

- Trevelyan became **interested in Surrealism while at Cambridge**, and came to know many of the movement's leading artists when he lived in **Paris in 1931-4**. Influenced by **Paul Klee (1879-1940)** and encouraged by his friendship with **Joan Miró (1893-1983)** and **Alexander Calder (1898-1976)**, he gradually developed his own mode of abstract Surrealism.
- **In the 1930s** there was a clash between the representational images Trevelyan called his '**Jekylls**' (**the good doctor in the Robert Louis Stevenson gothic novella, these pictures sold**) and the Surrealist '**Hydes**' (**which didn't**). One example of his Surreal works of 1936 was *A Symposium* (shown above).
- During the Second World War he served as a **Camouflage Officer** in the Royal Engineers. He worked in North Africa and by 1942 deceived the German forces by creating a dummy army while real tanks were disguised as trucks.
- From 1950 to 1955, Trevelyan taught history of art and etching at the **Chelsea School of Art**. During 1955–63, he was Tutor of Engraving at the Royal College of Art where he influenced the young **David Hockney**. In 1987 he became a Royal Academician.
- 105 of his works are now held by the Tate.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/trevelyan-the-potteries-t07040>



Naum Gabo (1890?-1977), *Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre*, 1938-40, 32.4 x 47 x 22 cm

- 'This construction belongs to a small group of works of the **1930s** that are **among Gabo's finest**. It is based on the juxtaposition of **organic, sweeping planes** which demonstrate the properties of **transparency and flexibility in Perspex**, and a **precise, crystalline centre**. These elements embody **contrasting energies held in counterpoise**: flowing momentum and internal, **cell-like division**. A photograph of this work, taken by Barbara Hepworth during the Second World War, shows it against the background of the sea at Carbis Bay, Cornwall, where Gabo was living at the time.' (Tate display caption)

Bio:Gabo

- **Sir Naum Gabo** (*formerly* Neyemiya Borisovich **Pevzner**, 1890?-1977) was born in **south-west Russia** to the owner of a foundry. His **Jewish parents** may have changed his year of birth later to avoid military service. He was a **rebellious youth** and was expelled from two schools. As a teenager he developed a strong commitment to **radical politics** and it was the times of the failed **1905 revolution**. His interest in **art** was **influenced** by his elder brother **Antoine Pevsner**. His

parents wanted him to become a doctor but at Munich University he switched to studying philosophy, civil engineering and art history under Heinrich Wölfflin.

- Sir **Nikolaus Pevsner** (1902–1983) is not related. He was a German, later British scholar of the history of art, and especially that of architecture and best known for his 46-volume *The Buildings of England* (1951–74).
- At the outbreak of WWI, Neyemiya went to **Denmark** with his brother and started **making sculptures** consisting of flat, planar elements. These works combined ideas from **Cubism**, **Russian icon painting** and **modern engineering practice**. To distinguish himself from his artistic brother **he coined the name 'Gabo'**. The two brothers went to **Moscow in 1917** and **enthusiastically participated** in the exciting developments in modern art taking place. He produced *Kinetic Construction: Standing Wave* (1920, Tate collection) and declared art should be placed in the 'squares and streets' to **communicate to a mass audience**. He was influenced by avant-garde artists such as **Kazimir Malevich** and **Vladimir Tatlin** but **by 1922** was becoming **disillusioned** with the increasingly **authoritarian Soviet regime** and the **preference for realism**. He was able to **travel to Berlin** to organise the first Russian art exhibition and he **stayed there**. There he lived with Elisabeth Richter until her tragic death in childbirth in 1929.
- In the West, **Gabo became a leading representative of Constructivism**, an art aligned with social, political, and scientific **progress**, expressed by precise impersonal techniques, and **geometric forms** and materials suggesting **engineering structures**, machinery, or scientific labs. In 1928 Gabo wrote an article for *Bauhaus* magazine denouncing the growing assimilation and vulgarization of Constructivism by fashion and design. His first **one-man show was in Hanover in 1930**.
- After the **Nazis came to power in 1933**, Gabo decided that it was imperative for him to **leave Germany**, and he subsequently spent **three years in Paris**, in conditions of **profound poverty and depression**, during which time he produced **very little work**. His career and spirits revived when he **moved to London in the spring of 1936**. He soon met and **married Miriam Franklin, née Israels** (1907–1993), with whom he **lived very happily for the rest of his life**. Moreover, England was currently a **principal centre of the modern movement in art and design**. Gabo encountered other émigrés from Germany and also became good friends with the critic **Herbert Read**, abstract artists such as **Ben Nicholson** and **Barbara Hepworth**, and the architect Leslie Martin.
- Gabo's English constructions, such as *Spheric Theme* (1937–8, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) and *Construction in Space: Crystalline Centre* (1938, Tate collection), revealed a **new transparency and curvilinearity**. Both effects depended upon his discovery and aesthetic exploitation of the recently marketed type of plastic known in Britain as **Perspex**, which was less brittle and so more easily malleable than its predecessors.
- **In 1938**, Gabo spent six months in the **United States**. Thereafter he was constantly

thinking about **moving** across the Atlantic, to escape a war which was first imminent and then actual, but he **ultimately stayed in England** until November **1946**. He spent the years of the Second World War in the relatively **peaceful surroundings** of Carbis Bay, Cornwall, in close proximity to Nicholson, Hepworth, the critic Adrian Stokes.

- After the war he **travelled to America** but was **not as successful** as he had hoped but on his **return to England in 1954** he received a commission for an **outdoor sculpture** for a department store in **Rotterdam**. When this was unveiled in 1957 his **fame soared** and during the **last twenty years of his life** he received **prizes and honours** from around the world culminating in the **KBE in 1971**.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gabo-construction-in-space-with-crystalline-centre-t06977>

