

Exhibition education resource
Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium

Dates: 5 November 2022 – 13 March 2023
Heide Venue: Main Galleries
Curators: Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan

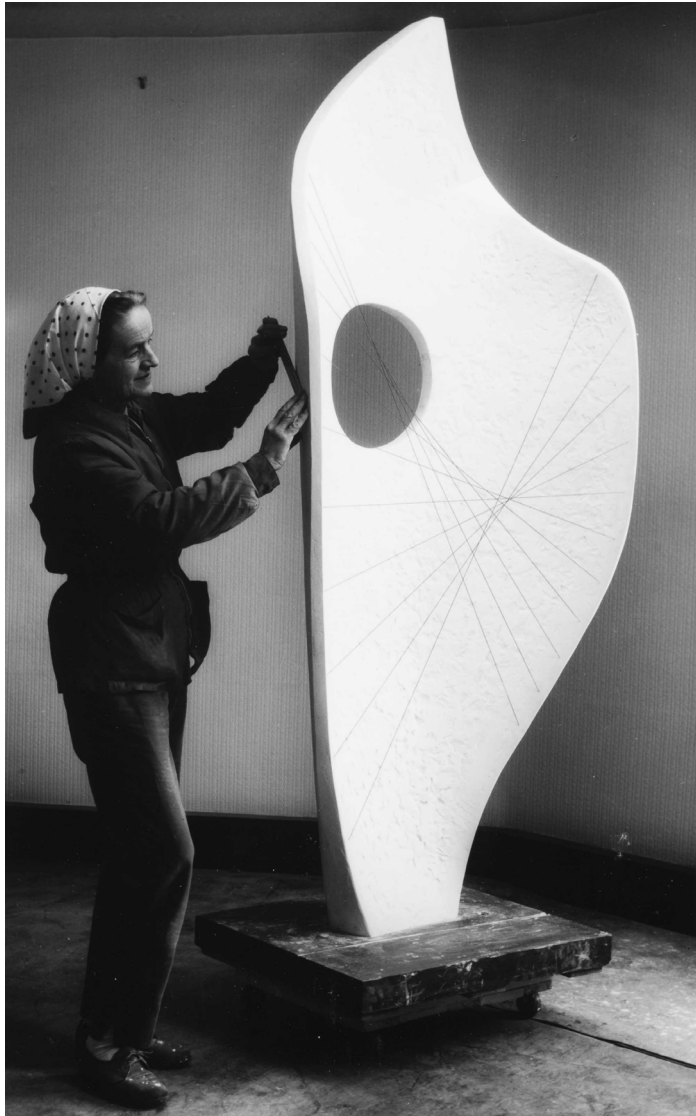
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Barbara Hepworth
Corinthos 1954–55
guarea wood and paint
on wooden base
104.1 × 106.7 × 101.6 cm
Tate, London
Purchased 1962

Overview

INTRODUCTION



Caption: Hepworth with the plaster of *Curved Form (Bryher II)* in the Palais de Danse, 1961.,
photograph: Studio St Ives

A key figure of the abstract art movement in Britain, Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) is best known for her pioneering method of ‘piercing’ the form. Her innovative practice enriched the language of modernist sculpture.

Heide’s exhibition *Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium* is the first survey of her work in Australia and pays tribute to her ground-breaking achievements.

The exhibition demonstrates the shift in Hepworth’s approach from figurative and naturalistic to increasingly simplified and abstract forms.

Hepworth was inspired by nature and the world around her. Rather than making art that looked like people or things, she began making non-representational sculptures and drawings based on real world objects. Even though she used abstract shapes, Hepworth created work that was predominantly about relationships, whether between human beings, between people and the landscape, or between forms.

Who is the artist?



Caption: Hepworth carving *Head*, 1930

Barbara Hepworth was born into a middle class family in Wakefield, Yorkshire in 1903 at the turn of the century. Her father was a civil engineer who went on to become county surveyor and as a child she spent a lot of time travelling the countryside with him, becoming inspired by the distinctive local landscape. Hepworth claimed that all her early memories were of 'forms and shapes and textures'.

Hepworth's artistic talent was obvious from an early age, and she was encouraged by her teachers and her family to study art. She studied sculpture at Leeds School of Art (1920–21) and the Royal College of Art, London (1921–24).

Hepworth was runner up to John Skeaping in the Royal College's Prix de Rome competition. Although she didn't win the competition, she was awarded a county scholarship to travel abroad and left for Italy, where she married Skeaping in Florence in 1925 and studied figurative marble carving under master carver Giovanni Ardini in Rome. Her trip also included visits to the Carrara marble quarries and the study of Romanesque and Renaissance sculpture.

After her art studies Hepworth returned to London in late 1926 and became a pivotal figure in London's progressive art scene and part of a network of international artists working abstractly.

Hepworth's carving developed and strengthened, and she broadened her focus from stone to wood and simplified her forms, inspired by non-Western sculpture in collections such as the British Museum. You can see this shift in her striking sculpture *Kneeling Figure*, 1932 which is carved in rosewood. This is a very hard wood, and it required a lot of skill and strength to create the work.

In the 1930s Hepworth's approach became increasingly abstract as she liberated herself from the idea that the material should dictate the sculpture's shape.

Pierced Hemisphere, 1937–38, a symbolic head with an off-centre 'eye', evidences her new approach. By piercing the form she initiated a dialogue between volume and void and gave attention to the 'negative' space within. *Figure*, 1933, on display here, is her earliest surviving pierced sculpture.

In 1932 she began a new relationship with abstract painter Ben Nicholson and began travelling regularly to France to connect with other avant-garde artists. In 1934 Hepworth and Nicholson had triplets, and maternal references and the gestational form of the ovoid gained significance in her work, seen in for example, *Mother and Child*, 1934, *Conicoid*, 1937, and *Three Forms (Carving in Grey Alabaster)*, 1935.

Despite family demands she was energised by exhibiting and publishing opportunities with international figures with whom she was aesthetically and philosophically aligned, such as Piet Mondrian, Naum Gabo, Jean Arp, and Alexander Calder, some of whom fled to England in the late 1930s as the political situation in Europe deteriorated. For these artists, as for Hepworth, working abstractly was 'a completely logical way of expressing the intrinsic "will to live" as opposed to the extrinsic disaster of world war'.

From 1939 Hepworth was based in the creative community of St Ives, Cornwall. She relocated to the coastal area with Ben Nicholson and her four children to escape the air bombing over London during the Second World War. Hepworth was inspired by the natural environment and the ancient landscape around Cornwall for the rest of her career.

Artist statement – 'Approach to Sculpture'

Hepworth drew inspiration from the landscape, and after moving to Cornwall she began to understand the figure in relation to the landscape anew, with her sculptures embodying a feeling of unison with the natural environment: '*I wanted to make forms to stand on hillsides and through which to look at the sea*', she observed, '*Forms to lie down in, or forms to climb through*'.

Hepworth wrote of her excitement in carving her large work *Corinthos* (1955), declaring '*Sculpture to me, is primitive, religious, passionate and magical—always, always affirmative*'.

She also wrote about the use of string in her sculptures: *'I used colour and string in many of the carvings of this time ... The colour in the concavities plunged me into the depth of water, caves, or shadows deeper than the carved concavities themselves. The strings were the tension I felt between myself and these, the wind or the hills.'*

Later in her life Hepworth articulated her continuing desire that a sculpture should be *'A totem, a talisman, a kind of touchstone for all that is of lasting value ... something that would be valid at any time, or would have been valid 2,000 or even 20,000 years ago'*.

Art Practice



Caption: Hepworth in the Palais de Danse studio with unfinished wood carving *Hollow Form with White Interior*, 1963, photograph: Val Wilmer.

Hepworth used a technique known as 'direct carving' to create both her figurative and abstract shapes. In this process, the initial carving produces the final form, rather than creating preparatory maquettes and models. In her works made with this method you can see the marks of the tools she used on the surface of the sculptures.

In 1931, in what is considered her most important contribution to abstract art, Hepworth pierced her first carving and introduced the 'hole' to British sculpture. She sought to use the negative space to explore balance in forms. It was a way to show the insides of the sculpture as well as the outside. It also let light through heavy blocks of stone, wood and metal.

In 1949 Hepworth acquired Trewyn Studio, a cottage and walled garden in the heart of St Ives, Cornwall, where she would be based for the rest of her life. She could work unrestrictedly in the open air, enabling her to increase the scale of her work and secure public commissions with the help of studio assistants.

Later in her career in the 1950s and 1960s, Hepworth's work increased in scale and complexity as she began casting her works in bronze. This enabled her to secure public commissions and she was acknowledged on the world stage with numerous major exhibitions and awards.

After long feeling that she had been overlooked for civic and exhibition opportunities because she was a woman, a mother, and an abstractionist, she was invited to represent Britain at the XXV Venice Biennale in 1950, and awarded a major outdoor commission for the 1951 Festival of Britain. Public sculpture was an important part of the postwar government's reconstruction agenda and it aligned with her aspirations for the democratisation of art.

Further accolades were to follow. In 1953 Hepworth was awarded a second prize in an international sculpture competition titled *The Unknown Political Prisoner* that attracted more than 3500 entries. While a number of finalists proposed cerebral and boldly futuristic works, she entered a maquette of three wooden figures, on display here, infused with a humanist, emotional quality. She conceived the completed three-piece installation as a 12-foot-high prisoner carved in limestone flanked by two guards of granite, representing truth and knowledge.

In the same year as the competition Hepworth's son Paul Skeaping, a RAF pilot, was tragically killed in a plane crash, not long before she was honoured with a vast retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

After the exhibition closed in June 1954 she took a restorative trip to Greece. Sailing through the Aegean, she kept annotated sketchbooks noting the colour and forms of the islands, coastal villages, sunsets and remnants of classical culture, gathering material that would sustain her practice for years to come.

Upon her return to Cornwall, she received a substantial consignment of centuries-old scented guarea wood from Nigeria and commenced a series of large-scale carving with classical titles. *Corinthos*, 1955, in the nearby side room, was the first of the group, its deeply hollowed-out interior bearing the artist's hand-worked chisel marks and painted white, evoking the light of the Mediterranean.

Themes and concepts

Hepworth often made sculptures with separate parts that sit together. She liked the relationships between the individual forms and shapes, and was very interested in the human figure and the landscape; between forms presented side-by-side; between colour and texture; and between individuals and groups of people.

In the exhibition, you will see a selection of works that reflects Hepworth's lifelong concern with three forms in particular:

1. **the standing form** - representing the 'feeling towards the human being standing in landscape'
2. **the two forms** - signifying 'the tender relationship of one living thing beside another'

3. **the closed form, such as the oval, spherical or pierced form** - indicating 'the feeling of the embrace of living things' such as a mother and child



Caption: Barbara Hepworth, *Spring*, 1966, bronze and string, edition 1/6. 76.8 x 50.8 x 38.1 cm. Arts Council Collection, London.

Sculptures with Strings

In August 1939 Hepworth and her family left London for the relative safety of Cornwall. Initially she had no studio and due to domestic responsibilities could only make art in the evenings, when she drew and carved small scale plasters such as *Sculpture with Colour (Deep Blue and Red)*, 1940, displayed here.

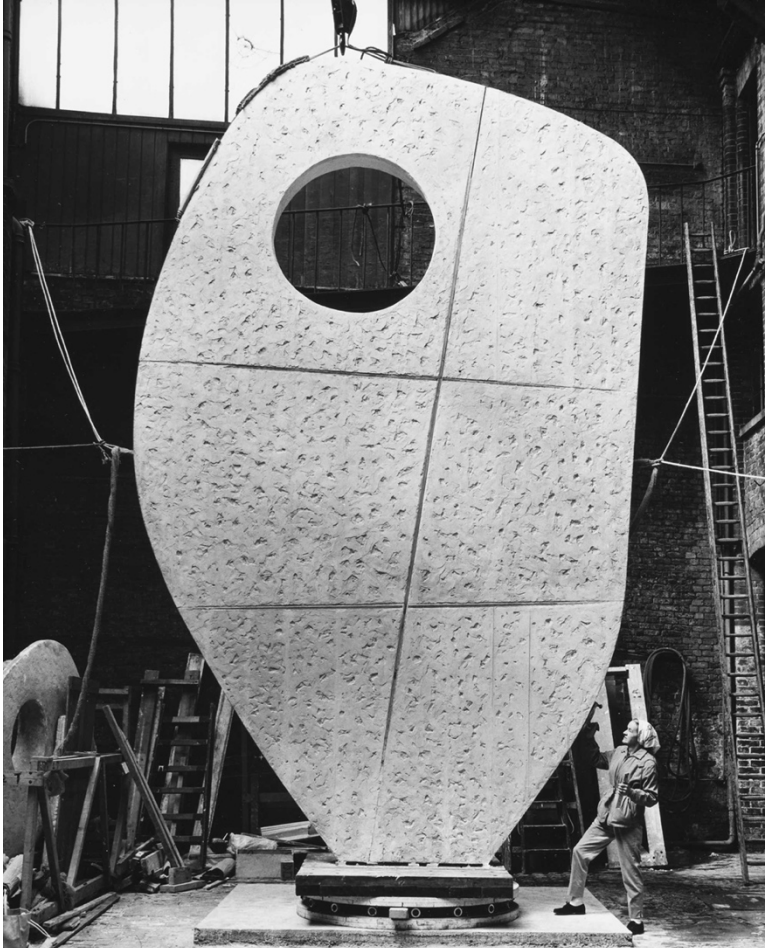
Sensitive to the coastal landscape and lives of the local fishing community, Hepworth incorporated cotton fisherman's line strung across and into the recesses of the works.

The curved horizontal form of *Landscape Sculpture*, 1944 (cast 1961), alludes to the 'pull' existing between two hills in Uny Lelant near Hepworth's home, while the arc and soft blue-green interior of *Sculpture with Colour and Strings*, 1939 (cast 1961), suggests a gently rolling wave.

The exploration of counterpoise, tension and balance inherent in these works also characterises Hepworth's later stringed sculptures in cut metal, with the tensile brass whorl of *Stringed Figure, Curlew*, 1956, for example, appearing drawn into place by the complex network of thin cord.

Spring, 1966, marks a high point in the trajectory of this aspect of Hepworth's practice, with its sensuous ovoid form, subtly hued, stringed interior and evocation of rebirth and renewal epitomising her search for equilibrium and essence.

Later Works: Figures in the Landscape



Caption: Hepworth with the prototype of *Single Form* at the Morris Singer foundry, London, May 1963, photograph Morgan-Wells.

In the 1950s Hepworth's immersion in the Cornish landscape—its forms, colours, textures, terrains, and Neolithic remains—provided limitless inspiration.

This expansion of Hepworth's creative vision was made possible by her use of bronze, enabling larger scale pieces and bolder profiles, and the ability to make editions. *Sea Form (Porthmeor)*, 1958, and the majestic *Oval Form (Trezion)*, 1964, both evocative of foamy ocean waves, exemplify these advancements, as does *Two Forms in Echelon*, 1961, which encapsulates the elemental, timeless and arcane nature of the standing stones on the Cornish moor; to Hepworth symbols of continuity and endurance, of 'survival and security'.

The bronze *Single Form (Chûn Quoit)*, 1961 is one of the artist's most significant works, later translated into a monolithic memorial in New York to her friend Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary General of the United Nations who was killed in an air crash. Its dark, enigmatic shape looks dense from the front but almost linear from the side, suggesting at once a shield and a weapon, or protection and vulnerability, while the inscribed circle lends it an anthropomorphic quality. The

work's subtitle is the name of a Cornish dolmen that, appositely, may have served as a burial chamber.

In her later career Hepworth also worked in other metals, such as the copper sheet of *Forms in Movement (Galliard)*, 1956, which enabled a greater fluidity of form. The mysterious silver elements of *Group of Three Magic Stones*, 1973, also encourage the viewer to see the intangible, in this instance conveying a sense that cosmic or invisible forces are at work. This piece relates to Hepworth's last major multi-part outdoor work *Conversation with Magic Stones*, 1973, its geometric elements laid out to echo an ancient stone circle.

Style/ material/ techniques/form

Style

Abstract / Avant-garde

- art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect using lines, forms, shapes, colours, and textures.
- existing in thought or as an idea - abstract concepts such as love or beauty
- new and experimental ideas and methods in art, music, or literature.
- favouring or introducing new and experimental ideas and methods

Material

- Wood –Beech, Ebony, Rosewood, Mahogany, Teak, Guarea (tropical hardwood from Nigeria)
- Stone –Ancaster, Hoptonwood and Portland Limestones, Alabaster, Marble, Slate
- Metal – Aluminum, Brass, Bronze, Copper, Silver
- Plaster
- String (fishing line)
- Oil paint
- Gouache

Techniques

Carving, Filing, Sanding, Sawing, Drilling, Polishing plaster, wood, stone

Bronze (6 steps in the construction)

Cutting, welding brass and copper

Drawing, sketching, painting

Threading, running stitch, knotting string

Form + Colour + Line

Standing form – the feeling of a person/object standing in the landscape

Two forms – the feeling of tender relationships eg: mother and baby

Closed form – oval, sphere with pierced opening and colour – the feeling of embracing living things and the natural world, eg: seasons, tides

Size of work -

- Hand – small, intimate, appealing to touch
- Arm – span of arms, the height and position is important
- Large – Static and viewer must walk around it. Ideally it is site specific in a landscape or in an architectural setting

Lines – ancient musical instruments, the wind, movement of sun/moon light

Painted Colour – White, Blue, Yellow

Patina on bronze – colours in nature, water, caves, mosses

Glossary

Abstract:

- art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect using lines, forms, shapes, colours, and textures.
- existing in thought or as an idea - abstract concepts such as love or beauty

Avant-garde:

- new and experimental ideas and methods in art, music, or literature.
- favouring or introducing new and experimental ideas and methods

Humanism:

- Hepworth had an outlook that attaches prime importance to human ideas rather than religious belief.
- She largely turned away from medieval and Renaissance sculptures and studied ancient Greek and Roman thought.
- Hepworth also turned her back on traditional realistically represented forms and concentrated on abstracting and how people connect with their physical world and experiences

Biomorphic Forms:

Humans, animals, stones, shells, hills

Geometric Forms:

- Sphere, cone, pyramid, cube, oval

Exhibition title: In Equilibrium

Equilibrium: a state of physical balance

symmetrical / asymmetrical

solid form / space

harmony / tension

smoothness / texture

stability / instability

counterpoise / imbalance

stability / movement

plastic / rigid

organic / geometric

Equilibrium: a state of mind

simplicity / complexity

calmness / energetic

fragile / forceful

collectiveness / independence

ordered thought / random thought

passive / aggressive

control / freedom

tranquillity / excitement

serenity / agitation

cool / edgy

Exhibition Design



Caption: Installation image, Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 5 November 2022- 13 March 2023. Photograph Clytie Meredith.

Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium has been developed in consultation with the Hepworth Estate and designed by award-winning architecture firm Studio Bright.

The design of the exhibition subtly references Hepworth's preference for ovoid shapes and attention to textured finishes. Sensitive to her exploration of weight, space, colour and form, the design also plays on the productive tensions found in Hepworth's sculptures in her search for a sense of unity, harmony and equilibrium.

Significance in Heide's program and program rationale

- first survey exhibition of Hepworth's work to be presented in Australia
- showcases works from prestigious international collections including Tate, British Council, Hepworth Wakefield, and Kettle's Yard.
- introduces to Australia audiences the first female sculptor to achieve international recognition
- contributes to a greater understanding of Hepworth's influence on the advancement of Australian modernist sculpture

Artists represented

Dame Barbara Hepworth CBE (1903 – 1975)

Number of works and type in *Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium*

40 works including:

- 8 carved stone sculptures
- 6 carved wood sculptures
- 12 bronze sculptures (3 with strings)
- 5 sculptures in cut metal (copper, brass, aluminum, 4 with strings)
- 1 sculpture cast in silver
- 1 plaster sculpture (with strings)
- 7 two dimensional works in a range of materials

Documentary film, *Figures in a Landscape*, 1953, directed by Dudley Shaw Ashton, British Film Institute

Publication

Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium

Edited by Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan

Hardback, 216 pages, colour illustrated throughout with 40 works in plates section

Fully illustrated checklist

Foreword by Lesley Harding, curatorial overview by Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan, selected writings by Barbara Hepworth introduced by Sophie Bowness, essay on Hepworth's international reputation by Henry Meyric Hughes, essay on Hepworth's influence on Australian sculpture by Jane Eckett.

Digital Resources

Heide Learning have developed a series of video resources for students to complement the exhibition. These resources are designed to support school learning levels 7-12 and Heide Connect and Create Tours of the exhibition *Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium*

- Head Curator Kendrah Morgan introduces Barbara Hepworth: In Equilibrium: https://vimeo.com/774059913?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=11670299
- Melbourne sculptor Nasrin Rasoulzadeh, who is also a Heide Guide, explores the different techniques and materials that sculptor Barbara Hepworth used throughout her career: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/nasrinsculpture>

Heide Learning have developed a series of video resources for VCE Art Making and Exhibiting on how *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium* was developed, curated, designed, and documented.

These videos focus on the development and curation of this significant exhibition, including the conservation of artworks on display, implications for the exhibition design, impact on the viewer experience, as well as protocols involved in securing international works and the logistics of exhibiting large scale sculptures.

- Artistic Director Lesley Harding discusses the skills and role of a curator in the exhibition process: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/curator1>
- Artistic Director Lesley Harding discusses the curatorial approach developed for *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium*: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/curator2>
- Artistic Director Lesley Harding discusses the design, conservation, preservation processes and logistics involved in staging *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium*: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/curator3>
- Exhibition designer Mel Bright talks about the exhibition design process involved in *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium*: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/studiobright1>
- Exhibition designer Mel Bright talks about how curatorial considerations influenced the design of *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium*: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/studiobright2>
- Exhibition designer Mel Bright talks about specific design elements used in *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium*: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/studiobright03>
- Exhibition designer Mel Bright talks about how the conservation considerations impacted the *Barbara Hepworth; In Equilibrium* exhibition design: <https://vimeo.com/heidemoma/studiobright4>

Selected sources of further information

Biographical information:

<https://barbarahepworth.org.uk/about-barbara-hepworth/alan-bowness-life-and-work.php>

Eleanor Clayton, *Barbara Hepworth: Art and Life*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2021

Key exhibition catalogues:

Barbara Hepworth, Tate Gallery, London, 1968

Penelope Curtis and Alan G. Wilkinson, *Barbara Hepworth: A Retrospective*, Tate Gallery Liverpool, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1994–5

Chris Stephens (ed), *Barbara Hepworth: Centenary, Tate St Ives and Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, 2003

Penelope Curtis and Chris Stephens (eds), *Barbara Hepworth: Sculpture for a Modern World*, Tate Britain, London, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands, and Arp Museum, Rolandseck, Germany, 2015–16