

Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945 – 1965

Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK

3 March – 26 June 2022

Media View: Wednesday 2 March, 10am–1pm

#PostwarModern @barbicancentre

The exhibition is generously supported by Cockayne – Grants for the Arts, The London Community Foundation, The Clare McKeon Charitable Trust, and the Henry Moore Foundation.

Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945 – 1965 is an ambitious and timely reassessment of art produced in Britain during the twenty years after the Second World War. In the aftermath of a cataclysmic war that called into question religion, ideology and humanity itself, there followed the consequences of conflict: continued austerity, the Cold War, nuclear threat and the dismantling of empire. These very conditions – of past horror, continued anxiety and future promise – gave rise to an incredible richness of new imagery, forms and materials as artists in Britain sought to establish meaning and purpose and to reimagine the world around them.

This major exhibition brings together around 200 works of painting, sculpture and photography by 48 artists, drawn from public and private collections both international and in the UK. Much of the work is little known, never having been included in an overview such as this, while other works are exhibited for the first time. *Postwar Modern* focuses on the ‘new’ in this period: work created by artists who were shaped by their direct experiences of the war, its global impact and aftershocks, at a formative stage in their development.

Jane Alison, exhibition Curator and Head of Visual Arts, Barbican, says: *‘The postwar period in Britain was crying out to be revisited. I had a strong sense that art in the twenty years that followed the war was more vital, distinctive and important than has been previously appreciated. The key to unlocking that was to focus on “the new”, to pay close attention to a defining sensibility, and to include previously marginalised figures in dialogue with those whose contributions are widely celebrated. I hope that Postwar Modern, which so resonates with a Britain struggling to overcome crisis, will be a revelation. It is certainly an exhibition for our time.’*

Works by **Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Eduardo Paolozzi** and **David Hockney** are shown alongside artists who came to Britain fleeing Nazism, such as **Frank Auerbach, Franciszka Themerson** and **Gustav Metzger**, as well as artists who migrated from Britain’s crumbling empire, among them **Francis Newton Souza, Frank Bowling, Avinash Chandra** and **Aubrey Williams** – each of whom contributed powerfully to forging a distinctive postwar sensibility. The exhibition also foregrounds the work of women artists such as **Jean Cooke, Eva Frankfurter, Gillian Ayres, Kim Lim, Sylvia Sleigh** and **Magda Cordell**, who have been marginalised in previous histories of this period.

Divided into fourteen thematic sections, the exhibition draws out the particular subjects that preoccupied artists in the postwar period, including the body, the post-atomic condition, the Blitzed streetscape, private relationships and imagined future horizons. By reframing the art within thematic categories that reflect and amplify these concerns, well-known figures can be considered in a new light.

The exhibition celebrates an array of artists in both expected and unexpected groupings. ‘Body and Cosmos’, the opening room, is devoted to three very different artists: **John Latham, Eduardo Paolozzi** and **Francis Newton Souza**. In ‘Post-Atomic Garden’, **Bert Hardy**’s photographs of bombed-out Birmingham are found alongside the sculpture of **Lynn Chadwick**, the paintings of **Prunella Clough** and the collages of **Nigel Henderson**. **Shirley Baker**’s iconic colour photography is shown alongside the lesser-known paintings of **Eva Frankfurter**, while the intimate gaze is explored by bringing together **Bill Brandt, Lucian Freud** and **Sylvia Sleigh**. Three paintings from **Francis Bacon**’s *Man in Blue* series (1954) and two early paintings by **David Hockney** (1961–2) are exhibited together in a section devoted to expressions of male same-sex desire. The

exhibition concludes with 'Horizon', given over to **David Medalla's** kinetic sand sculpture and **Gustav Metzger's** *Liquid Crystal Environment* (1965), an immersive installation in which darkness gives way to a vision of light.

Mapping the art in Britain during a period of profound crisis, the exhibition speaks powerfully to the present moment. This contemporary resonance is explored in collaboration with London-based interdisciplinary practitioner Abbas Zahedi, who will respond to *Postwar Modern* in the role of Associate Artist through an accompanying programme of events. Zahedi's work blends social practice, performance, moving image, institution-making and writing and draws connections between the postwar period and the present.

Postwar London, with its emerging arts scene and pockets of progressive attitudes, was an obvious destination for many artists featured in *Postwar Modern* – a magnet for ambitious artists from across Britain as well as those arriving from Europe and from current or former colonies. It was during this period that the Barbican Estate was first conceived, to occupy what was an enormous bombsite in the heart of London. *Postwar Modern* opens as the Barbican Centre celebrates its 40th anniversary, a reminder of the Brutalist spirit that was central to this moment.

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Artists included in the exhibition:

Robert Adams (b. Northampton, England) (1917–1984), Frank Auerbach (b. Berlin, Germany) (b. 1931), Gillian Ayres (b. Barnes, London) (1930–2018), Francis Bacon (b. Dublin, Ireland) (1909–1992), Shirley Baker (b. Manchester, England) (1932–2014), Frank Bowling (b. Bartica, Guyana) (b. 1934), Bill Brandt (b. Hamburg, Germany) (1904–1983), John Bratby (b. London, England) (1928–1992), Lynn Chadwick (b. London, England) (1914–2003), Avinash Chandra (b. Shimla, India) (1931–1991), Prunella Clough (b. London, England) (1919–1999), Jean Cooke (b. London, England) (1927–2008), Hans Coper (b. Chemnitz, Germany) (1920–1981), Magda Cordell (b. Hungary) (1921–2008), Alan Davie (b. Grangemouth, Scotland) (1920–2014), Robyn Denny (b. Abinger, England) (1930–2014), Eva Frankfurter (b. Berlin, Germany) (1930–1959), Lucian Freud (b. Berlin, Germany) (1922–2011), Elisabeth Frink (b. Great Thurlow, England) (1930–1993), Richard Hamilton (b. London, England) (1922–2011), Bert Hardy (b. London, England) (1913–1995), Adrian Heath (b. Maymyo, Burma) (1920–1992), Nigel Henderson (b. London, England) (1917–1985), Patrick Heron (b. Leeds, England) (1920–1999), Anthony Hill (b. London, England) (1930–2020), David Hockney (b. Bradford, England) (b. 1937), Peter King (b. London, England) (1928–1957), Leon Kossoff (b. London, England) (1926–2019), John Latham (b. Livingstone, Zambia) (1921–2006), Kim Lim (b. Singapore) (1936–1997), Mary Martin (b. Folkestone, England) (1913–1990), Roger Mayne (b. Cambridge, England) (1929–2014), John McHale (b. Glasgow, Scotland) (1922–1978), David Medalla (b. Manila, Philippines) (1942–2020), Gustav Metzger (b. Nuremberg, Germany) (1926–2017), Lee Miller (b. Poughkeepsie, NY, USA) (1907–1977), Eduardo Paolozzi (b. Edinburgh, Scotland) (1924–2005), Victor Pasmore (b. Chelsham, England) (1908–1998), Lucie Rie (b. Vienna, Austria) (1902–1995), William Scott (b. Greenock, Scotland) (1913–1989), Anwar Jalal Shemza (b. Shimla, India) (1928–1985), Sylvia Sleigh (b. Llandudno, Wales) (1916–2010), Alison Smithson (b. Sheffield, England) (1928–1993), Peter Smithson (b. Stockton-on-Tees, England) (1923–2003), Francis Newton Souza (b. Goa, India) (1924–2002), Franciszka Themerson (b. Warsaw, Poland) (1907–1988), William Turnbull (b. Dundee, Scotland) (1922–2012), Aubrey Williams (b. Georgetown, Guyana) (1926–1990), Denis Williams (b. Georgetown, Guyana) (1923–1998).

NOTES TO EDITORS

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Press images available online from the Barbican Newsroom

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page at: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/postwar-modern>

Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945 –1965

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS

3 March – 26 June 2022

Box Office: 0845 120 7511 www.barbican.org.uk

Opening times: Sun–Wed: 10am–6pm; Thurs–Sat: 10am–8pm. Bank Holiday times vary, please check the website.

Tickets: Standard: £18; Concs/Students/14–17/Art Fund: from £9; Young Barbican: £5; under-14s go free.

Exhibition

The exhibition is curated by Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, with the support and advice of our in-house curatorial team and graphic design by The Bon Ton. An eminent list of advisors have worked on the exhibition: Indie A. Choudhury, Ben Highmore, Hammad Nasar, Lynda Nead, Gregory Salter and Sarah Turner.

The exhibition is generously supported by Cockayne – Grants for the Arts, The London Community Foundation, The Clare McKeon Charitable Trust, and the Henry Moore Foundation.

Events

A programme of events accompanies the exhibition and will be updated on the website as confirmed. Check the website for full listings: www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Book

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, published by Prestel and designed by The Bon Ton. It includes new essays by Jane Alison, Hilary Floe, Ben Highmore, Hammad Nasar and Gregory Salter alongside a newly commissioned illustrated chronology documenting the period.

Barbican Art Gallery Shop

A selection of exhibition merchandise will be available from the Gallery Shop, including postcards, prints, exhibition book, tote bag, stationery and more: www.barbican.org.uk/shop

Schools Offer

A downloadable and printed Learning Resource, highlighting key themes and questions raised by the exhibition, is available to support school visits. A special school group rate alongside free exhibition tours, suitable for secondary school groups is £3 per student (secondary and sixth

form, up to age 19) and applies to all school groups of 10 or more. Children under 14 are free. To ensure a free exhibition tour as part of the visit, bookings must be made at least two weeks in advance.

We will be running a series of schools-only viewing slots for groups of up to 30 students to view the exhibition and receive a tour with a creative workshop, as well as two CPD workshops for teachers. Please check the website for more details.

For school group bookings, please contact: Tel: 020 7382 7211 (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm)

Email: groups@barbican.org.uk

Activity Sheet

Explore the themes of the exhibition with our activity sheet illustrated by Aleesha Nandhra, featuring artworks by Year 3 students from City of London Primary Academy Islington. Free and available in the gallery. An animated video of these activities will be included on the Barbican's YouTube channel.

Young Barbican

In addition to our regular discounted access for Young Barbican members, we host specially curated events for Young Barbican members through our Young Barbican Nights series. These nights offer young people exclusive after-hours access to the exhibition and the chance to enjoy performances by fellow young creatives and workshops that explore the themes of the exhibition.

Young Barbican membership is free and gives young people aged 14–25 discounted access to unmissable art and entertainment as well as exclusive events and creative opportunities.

www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/young-barbican

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14–25-year-olds for our paid exhibitions and free admittance for under-14s.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](http://www.barbican.org.uk) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms, including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over 1.1 million people attend its events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas One, Two and Three, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, foyers and public spaces, a library, Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten](#)

[Sinfonia](#); Associate Producer [Serious](#); and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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