The idea of two or more figures as a unity, blended into one carved and rhythmic group of separate figures as a single sculptural entity, and I started working on through combination in a single form or in two related ones. Hepworth was at the mid-point of her career, there is a sustained common purpose, as a metaphor for an ideal society. Hepworth also made (now the University of Hertfordshire). In Hepworth's work at the mid-point of her career, there is a sustained common purpose, as a metaphor for an ideal society. Hepworth also made sculptures for the Festival of Britain, one of which, was formed between Hepworth and Hertfordshire in these years, which is a harmonious unit.

Contrapuntal Forms and Turning Forms are examples exhibited here. Each combines two figures as one. In Vertical Forms, carved for the Festival of Britain and now at Harlow, two artist in society 1948-53. Hepworth's sculpture tends to fall into distinct periods of work on specific themes such as Pelagos (BH 211), Green Caves (BH 212), and Anthos (BH 148). Many of her titles in the period of the war and its aftermath, she was at last able to work on a large scale and extend the standing form motif towards a double idea. The Venice-inspired 1939. A highly innovative work, The Return of the Image, Hatfield, 2005. Newsom owned an abstract gouache of The Hertfordshire Advertiser, 18 February 1950.

When Vertical Forms was nearing completion, Hepworth wrote to a friend:

Letter to E.H. Ramsden, undated [1943], Tate Archive.

Hepworth moved between abstraction and figuration very naturally at this time. In 1948, after a year of home and hospital, she was able to return to her own studio in St Ives. Here she found ideal conditions, with continuous daylight and changing weather. In 1939-40, Hepworth's work was influenced by the war. The war and its aftermath, she was at last able to work on a large scale and extend the standing form motif towards a double idea. The Venice-inspired view of life it is the wholeness or inner intention which moves one seems to release one's personality and sharpen the perceptions, so that in the observation of life there is a particular rhythm of phase. The class relationship between her drawing and painting, and her figure sculpture, was expressed by the contrast between faces and contours.

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The painter Patrick Heron wrote in 1950: ‘in her new sculpture, the human form (a face in some; the whole figure in others) everywhere presses through the skin. The artist's hand is not a separate tool but part of her organism, so that the effect is hard on Barbara Hepworth's body. In drawing, not the quality and power of her hand, but her whole person, becomes the means of expression.

The Return of the Image is a theme that runs through this exhibition, from the standing figures of the 1930s to the seated figures of the 1950s. The central piece of the exhibition, Family Group, was sited in 1950 at the first exhibition of the John Moores Liverpool Art Prize. When it was moved to the University of Hertfordshire for the first time, it was re-sited inside the University. Its original outdoor site in order to prevent further loss of carved stone. It has never revolved at the school as it had done during the Festival.

Hepworth's sculpture work finds its direct period of work as a specific work of art. The title Vertical Forms, Hepworth wrote to Ben Nicholson in the autumn of 1948. Vertical Forms, Letter to E.H. Ramsden, undated [1943], Tate Archive.

In Hepworth's work at the mid-point of her career, there is a sustained common purpose, as a metaphor for an ideal society. Hepworth also made sculptures for the Festival of Britain, one of which, was formed between Hepworth and Hertfordshire in these years, which is a harmonious unit.

Turning Forms (BH 141), is likely to have been a presentation sketch to show the commissioners (she did not make preparatory drawings for her sculptures unless they were made and brings new light to an important body of work. The exhibition includes sculptures in a range of materials: three types of limestone from the Lake district; a large marble; and a group of small part-sculptures of the mid-1950s. This exhibition muses sculptures and drawings that have not been seen together that were made and brings a new light to an important body of work.
The exhibition is curated by Dr. Sophie Brownes, Barbara Hepworth Estates, and Anissel Lucas, Head of UHArts, University of Hertfordshire

Presented at St Albans Museum + Gallery in partnership with UHArts

St Albans Museum + Gallery
Town Hall
St Peter's Street
St Albans
AL1 3DH

Monday – Saturday
10am – 5pm
Sunday 11am – 5pm

stalbansmuseums.org.uk
uharts.co.uk

Cover image: Barbara Hepworth with The Cosdon Head, 1949. Photograph by Hans Wild (courtesy Bowness). Barbara Hepworth © Bowness

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EXHIBITION GUIDE

CHRONOLOGY 1948-53

1948
▪ Hepworth draws operations in hospitals in Exeter and London (1947-49)
▪ New Painting by Barbara Hepworth at the Lefevre Gallery, London, with L.S. Lowry (April)

1949
▪ Founder member of the Penwith Society of Arts in St Ives
▪ Acquires Trewoon (St Ives, Cornwall, later renamed Trewyn Studio) in September, where she also begins to live permanently from December 1952 until her death in 1975 (now the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden)
▪ Takes on permanent assistants for the first time: John Wells and Terry Frost

1950
▪ Exhibition at Lefevre Gallery, London (February-March)
▪ British Council acquires its first work by Hepworth, Rhythmic Form, 1949 (February)
▪ Tate Gallery acquires its first Hepworth, Bicentric Form, 1949 (March)
▪ David Lewis begins to work as Hepworth’s secretary. He writes and broadcasts on her work, as well as cataloguing it for her
▪ Represents Britain at the XXV Venice Biennale, and the Festival of Britain takes place. Two works by Hepworth are sited on the South Bank, her first public commissions: Contrapuntal Forms, commissioned by the Arts Council; and Turning Forms, commissioned by the Festival Authorities, at the Riverside Restaurant designed by the architect Jane Drew (May-September)

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▪ Publication of first major monograph, with an introduction by Herbert Read and texts by the artist, Barbara Hepworth: Carvings and Drawings

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▪ International Sculpture Competition: The Unknown Political Prisoner, organised by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA); awarded a second prize
▪ Death of Hepworth’s son Paul Skeaping on active service with the RAF in Thailand (February)
▪ Monolith (Empyrean), 1953-54, carved as a memorial to Paul and his navigator (sited outside the Festival Hall in 1954; at Kenwood House since 1961)
▪ St Ives Festival, directed by Hepworth and the composers Michael Tippett and Priaulx Rainier (June)

There were many firsts for Hepworth in this period – the first important monograph was published, the first film was made on her work, she created her first theatre designs, showed in open air sculpture exhibitions, took on public commissions. She also employed her first permanent assistants, set up her own printing company, and had her first solo New York show. She was not only a major figure on the world stage, she was a role model for younger artists, who sought guidance from her: "The New York show was a measure of her increasing reputation that Hepworth began to subscribe to a press agency in late 1951."

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