Pallant House Gallery

PRESS RELEASE

Barbara Hepworth and Greece

21 November 2026 - 2 May 2027



Barbara Hepworth, *Pelagos*, 1961, Oil and graphite on board. Irene Y. Panagopoulos Collection, Barbara Hepworth © Bowness, Image: 2011 Christie's Images Limited

'I have waited 30 yrs to see Greece.' Barbara Hepworth, 1954.

Pallant House Gallery is pleased to announce *Barbara Hepworth and Greece,* the first exhibition to focus on the celebrated artist's deep affinity with Greece. With over 50 works spanning Hepworth's career, including some not seen in public since the 1960s, it will show the profound impact of Greece on her life and work.

In 1954, Hepworth made her first and only trip to Greece, sailing through the Corinth Canal to the Aegean Sea and Cyclades, a transformative journey at a pivotal moment in her life. First exploring Hepworth's early affinity with ancient Greece, the exhibition will then reveal how the landscapes, architecture, people, colours and light she encountered in 1954 inspired a renewal of her practice, at the height of her international acclaim.

Long before her trip, Hepworth had developed a deep engagement with Greek subjects. In the 1920s, she sought out fine-grained Greek marbles, including Parian and Pentelic marble, whose qualities spoke to her commitment to 'truth to materials'. Her engagement with Greek culture was also shaped by her education, steeped in ancient Greek language, literature and mythology. Early works on display will include *Mask* (1928), which reflects her interest in tragedy, whilst *Pelagos* (1946) borrows its title from the Greek word for 'sea'. A few years prior to her trip, Hepworth worked on the stage and costume design for Sophocles' *Electra* at the Old Vic, which featured Hepworth's first metal sculpture, *Apollo* (1951), an abstract interpretation of the Greek god.

Hepworth travelled relatively little, devoted as she was to her studio in St Ives and to her work. Aged 51 she was invited by her friend and patron Margaret Gardiner on Swan Hellenic's cruise ship *Miaoulis*. Hepworth visited Athens, the ancient sites of Epidaurus, Mycenae and Delphi, and the islands of Crete, Rhodes, Cos, Patmos, Santorini, Mykonos and Delos. The exhibition will trace Hepworth's footsteps through Greece, as recorded in her diary from the trip, where she also made sketches and collected leaves and flowers. Exploring how her work was transformed by the elemental forces she witnessed in Greece, it will feature major works including *Corinthos* (1955), inspired by the feeling of being enveloped in the landscape, alongside *Curved form (Delphi)* (1956), her Greek masterpiece. Both were carved from Nigerian Guarea wood, a new material for Hepworth, who was inspired by its particular scent, patina and feel. Hepworth's Aegean lithographic suite will be shown alongside these wood sculptures, marble carvings, bronze editions, and works on the cusp between drawing and painting.

Hepworth encountered islands that remained largely untouched by tourism. She was fascinated by neolithic and archaic figures, classical and vernacular architecture, and the dramatic contrasts of the landscape: Santorini's volcanic terrain, the indigo and cerulean of the Aegean Sea, the reddish hues of the land, the purple tinge of the mountains at sunset. Though made seven years after her trip and revisiting an earlier subject, the painting *Pelagos* (1961) shows how these colours were indelibly etched in her memory. Likewise, in lithographs and screenprints she was making in the last years of her life, Hepworth responded deeply to these sites.

Hepworth's journey to Greece marked a crucial moment in her life. Following the breakdown of her marriage to Ben Nicholson in 1951, she had suffered the tragic loss of her first son Paul Skeaping in a flying accident while on active duty in the RAF in 1953. Hepworth then threw herself into preparations for her seminal exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in the spring of 1954, bringing her career to new heights and international acclaim. *Barbara Hepworth and Greece* will show the profound and lasting impact Greece and its sacred landscapes had on Hepworth, renewing her creative energy and sense of direction after a challenging period in her life. With her diary referencing moments of solitude, contemplation, and transcendence, the journey also deepened her lifelong investigation of the relationship between the human figure and the landscape. Later reflecting on the sight of a lone priest against the sea and sky, Hepworth wrote that the figure 'seemed to me to give scale to the whole universe … and this is exactly what a sculpture should suggest in its relationship to its surroundings.'

Barbara Hepworth and Greece will also feature photographs by American photographer Robert McCabe from the mid-1950s that capture the same sites she visited, showing the Acropolis empty of visitors, the islands' rugged landscapes, and villages untouched by tourism. These photographs will offer an insight into the places Hepworth encountered and the visual experiences that informed her work. Archival photographs from her studio will show Hepworth with *Corinthos*, *Oval sculpture (Delos)* and other works she carved from 17 tonnes of Nigerian Guarea wood following her return to St Ives.

Melanie Vandenbrouck, Chief Curator at Pallant House Gallery said: 'Barbara Hepworth's life-affirming trip to Greece proved to be of tremendous importance. There, she found light after a period of darkness. Nourished by its sites, colours and the elements, her lifelong artistic vision about the relationship between figure and landscape was renewed. From that short but seminal journey emerged some of her most radical experimentations and accomplished works.'

The exhibition will include loans from public institutions including Tate, The Hepworth Wakefield and National Museums of Northern Ireland, as well as from private collections and The Hepworth Estate.

Alongside *Barbara Hepworth and Greece*, Pallant House Gallery will present ***Alfred Wallis: An Artists' Artist,*** an exhibition exploring the remarkable impact of St Ives fisherman-turned-painter Alfred Wallis (1855-1942) on Modern British art. Wallis started painting aged 70 and despite no formal training, he created bold depictions of his life experiences. His paintings astonished the leading avant-garde artists of the time when they came across him in the 1920s, seeing in their lack of affectation a purity of vision. His work was collected by luminaries including Barbara Hepworth, Ben and Winifred Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Peter Lanyon, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and John Wells. The exhibition will bring together paintings by Wallis which were owned by these artists, alongside key contemporary works by the artists themselves.

Pallant House Gallery will also present ***Howl*****,** a new site-specific commission by Ro Robertson opening this autumn in the Gallery's historic townhouse staircase. Uniting mural and suspended sculpture, this immersive work was conceived in the artist's Porthmeor studio in St Ives – steps away from the former studio homes of both Alfred Wallis and Barbara Hepworth. Grounded in the artist's consideration of Queer Ecologies and the fluidity of the 'almost island' of West Penwith, the commission explores the movements of the Moon, Sun, and their relationship to the sea, creating a contemporary dialogue with themes shared across the season's exhibitions.

Barbara Hepworth and Greece will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, edited by Melanie Vandenbrouck, Chief Curator at Pallant House Gallery. It will feature essays by Vandenbrouck and Hepworth experts Jo Baring and Stephen Feeke, the artist's Greek diary, and a creative response by Ro Robertson.

– ENDS –

NOTES TO EDITORS

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About Pallant House Gallery

Pallant House Gallery in Chichester is a leading UK museum that stimulates new ways of thinking about British art from 1900 to now. As well as an original and critically-acclaimed exhibition programme and a public programme with inclusion at its heart, the Gallery houses one of the best collections of Modern British art in the country - all within the distinctive setting of an 18th century townhouse and a 21st century gallery.
pallant.org.uk

Visiting the Gallery

Ticketing
Visitors are encouraged to pre-book tickets, which include full access to the house and seasonal exhibition programme. Please visit pallant.org.uk to book tickets.

Opening Hours
Tuesday – Saturday: 10am–5pm
Sunday/Bank Holidays: 10am–4pm
Monday: Closed

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