

PRESS RELEASE 2016

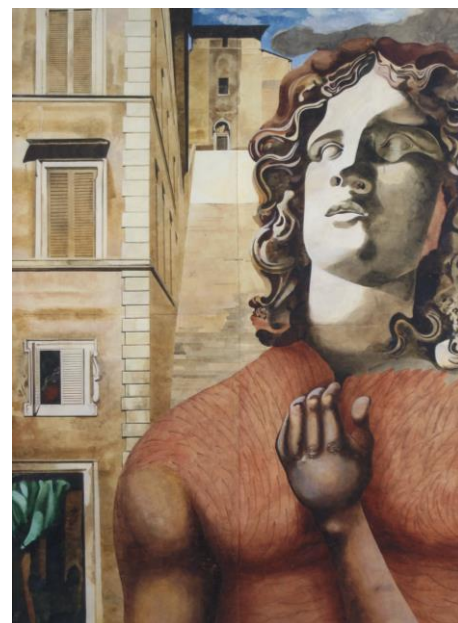
## The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920 - 1950

22 October 2016 – 19 February 2017

Pallant House Gallery is pleased to announce the first major exhibition to consider the subject of classicism and myth in Modern British art between 1920-1950. Featuring 80 works and objects, including paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, photography and illustrated books, the exhibition will include works by well-known artists such as Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Madame Yevonde and Wyndham Lewis, whilst exploring the contribution of largely forgotten figures from British art including Edith Rimmington and John Kavanagh. The exhibition will provide a new perspective on British art in the early 20th century, challenging the view of modern art as a succession of avant-garde movements and styles, and instead showing how these movements engaged with tradition and myth as a way of dealing with an uncertain present.

The exhibition will begin in the aftermath of the First World War, during which many artists sought to reassert the perceived virtues of order and civilization associated with ancient Greek and Roman societies. Writing on James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922, the year of its publication, T.S. Eliot described his use of the 'mythic method', which employed a structure taken from Homer's *Odyssey* to gain new perspectives on the modern world. This 'method' will unite the many artists in the exhibition who sought to understand the changing world of the early 20th century through the classics.

The exhibition will take as its starting point a war memorial by Frederick Cayley Robinson, painted in 1919 for the Heanor Grammar School and last publicly exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1923. The tempera wall painting depicts Greek gods in



Edward Burra, *Santa Maria in Araccoeli*, 1938-39, Watercolour on paper, 155 x 112cm, © Estate of the Artist c/o Lefevre Fine Art Ltd, London

front of an Ionic temple, flanked by images of peace and modern war, surrounding the names of students from the school who were killed in the conflict. A revival in the tradition of mural and tempera paintings, which often depicted classical compositions drawn from mythology and literature, is notable during the period, reinforced in part by the longstanding education in art schools of drawing from the antique and classical.

In the 1920s and '30s continental artists including Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger and Gino Severini turned away from the machine-like and abstract avant-garde forms of the 1910s in a 'return to order' that saw the revival of a classicising and monumental style. In Britain artists including Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Wyndham Lewis, and Edward Wadsworth adopted similar forms of expression,

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referencing the classical to imbue everyday scenes with a noble grandeur. This will be seen in works such as Bell and Grant's *Eight Studies for Murals of the Muses of Arts and Sciences for John Maynard Keynes's Rooms at King's College Cambridge* (1920) and Ben Nicholson's tender portrait of himself with Barbara Hepworth, *1933 (St Remy, Provence)* inspired by the Hellenistic and Roman remains they had visited in the town.

The idealised representation of beauty in the 1920s and '30s which referenced classical motifs will be represented through a series of paintings of female models including Meredith Frampton's iconic portrait *Marguerite Kelsey* (1928), painted in a hyper-real style and showing her reclining in modern yet classically inspired dress. Frampton often dressed his models in copies of dresses taken from *Vogue*, and contextual materials such as the *Vogue Book of Beauty* (1931), featuring a classically draped model in a Madame Vionnet dress, will demonstrate the reach of classical influences on wider culture. Also on show will be Gerald Leslie Brockhurst's celebrated portrait, *Wallis, Duchess of Windsor* (1939) painted as an enigmatic modern 'Mona Lisa' in a traditional style that recalls Renaissance portraiture.

Artists of the period reinterpreted ancient myths for a modern audience, such as the bronze *Echo and Narcissus* (1931-2) by the gay artist Glyn Philpot (showing the Greek youth in love with his own reflection) and Eric Ravilious' *Study for the Morley College Murals* (1928) featuring Olympian gods and goddesses in a design for a canteen. Included in this section will be an important group of works by John Armstrong from the late 1920s depicting myths such as *The Rape of Persephone* and *Psyche on the Styx*. Armstrong's costume designs for *I, Claudius* (1937) a film adaptation of Robert Graves' 1934 novel, which takes the form of a fictional

autobiography of the Roman Emperor Claudius will also be exhibited, alongside illustrated books of Greek and Roman myth illustrated by leading printmakers of the period including Eric Gill, John Buckland Wright and John Farleigh.

In 1935 the cult fashion photographer Madame Yevonde created a remarkable group of otherworldly photographic portraits of society beauties dressed and styled as subjects from Greek and Roman mythology, including Diana Mitford as Venus, Goddess of Love, and Mrs Anthony Eden as the Muse of History, styled as the classical bust beside her. So too the Surrealist artists of the 1930s, influenced by Sigmund Freud's use of ancient myth to explore the subconscious, incorporated classical myth and statuary into their work. A number of such artists will be exhibited, including Ithell Colquhoun, John Banting, Edward Burra and Paul Nash.

Classicism and Romanticism have long been considered opposing traditions in art, but the exhibition will demonstrate classical myth to have been an important source of inspiration for the Neo-Romantics of the 1940s, including Henry Moore, Ceri Richards and Michael Ayrton. A group of works by Moore exemplifies this relationship, in particular *Phemius and Telemachus* (1944), a drawing based on characters from Homer's *Odyssey*, the bronze draped female *Reclining Figure* (1945) and the drawing *Three Women Winding Wool (The Three Fates)* (1948).

Moore was developing a humanist vision for the post-war age for which characters like Prometheus, a mythic protector of mankind, were particularly representative.

The exhibition will show how the instability of the wartime period led to a widespread artistic engagement with the classics in unexpected and

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elucidating ways to gain understanding of a turbulent present. These numerous interpretations will demonstrate the enduring influence of the classics, which since their creation have offered ceaseless opportunity for reinterpretation.

*The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920 - 1950* is curated by Simon Martin, Artistic Director of Pallant House Gallery and is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue written by Martin.

**ENDS**  
**Notes to Editors**

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#### **Artists included in the exhibition are:**

John Armstrong, Michael Ayrton, John Banting, Vanessa Bell, Gerald Leslie Brockhurst, John Buckland Wright, Edward Burra, Ithell Colquhoun, Fred Daniels, Frank Dobson, John Farleigh, Hans Feibusch, Meredith Frampton, Eric Gill, Lancelot Glasson, Duncan Grant, Robin Ironside, David Jones, John Kavanagh, E McKnight Kauffer, Gerald Kelly, Wyndham Lewis, Augustus Lunn, Robert Medley, Bernard Meninsky, Henry Moore, Harry Morley, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Glyn Philpot, Dod Procter, Ernest Procter, Eric Ravilious, Edith Rimmington, William Roberts, Rex Whistler, Madame Yevonde

#### **About Pallant House Gallery**

Located in the heart of historic Chichester on the south coast, Pallant House Gallery is a unique combination of a Grade One Listed Queen-Anne townhouse and an award-winning contemporary extension, housing one of the most significant collections of Modern British art in the country.

Widely acclaimed for its innovative temporary exhibitions and exemplary Learning and Community programme which has inclusion at its heart, the Gallery has won numerous awards since re-opening in 2006. [www.pallant.org.uk](http://www.pallant.org.uk).

#### **Autumn season exhibitions**

##### **Pablo Bronstein**

22 October 2016 – 19 February 2017

##### **Hans Feibusch: The Unseen Drawings**

18 January 2017 – 5 March 2017

##### **Ian Hamilton Finlay: Neo-Classicism and Revolution**

22 October 2016 – 19 February 2017

#### **Pallant House Gallery Opening Hours**

Tuesday-Saturday: 10am – 5pm

Thursday: 10am – 8pm

Sunday/Bank Holidays: 11am – 5pm

Mondays: Closed

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#### **Admission**

Adults £11

Children (up to 16) Free

Tuesdays £6

Thursday evenings (5-8pm) £6

Friends Free

Concessions available for Art Fund Members, Students, Jobseekers, Carers, DLA, ESA, Museums Association, ICOM.