

Peter Gibbard, former Chair of the Friends, continues his occasional accounts of women artists represented in York Art Gallery's permanent collection. 'The Derbyshire Gift' pertains to five paintings by 20th century modernist artists.

Artwork of the Month. July 2024 Five Paintings from the Derbyshire Gift Peter Gibbard

- Monet in York Exhibition: '*Flood Waters, Provence*' by Druie Bowett
(YORAG: 2021.5) [View on Art UK](#)
- Burton Gallery: '*Men and Barges*' by Prunella Clough
(YORAG: 2021.1) [View on Art UK](#)
- 'Treasures from the Stores': '*Tropical Birds*' by Daphne Fedarb
(YORAG: 2021.4) [View on Art UK](#)
- Burton Gallery: '*My Room*' by Marion Grace Hocken
(YORAG: 2021.2) [View on Art UK](#)
- Burton Gallery: '*Vence Landscape*' by Margaret Mellis
(YORAG: 2021.3) [View on Art UK](#)

[Links to Art UK are provided because we are unable for copyright reasons to reproduce images of the paintings]

The background story for these five paintings begins in Derby in 1936. Miss Barbara Winstanley, who managed the Library Services in Derbyshire, had recognised that many children in rural communities would probably never have the chance to visit an art gallery. On her own initiative she was successful in obtaining a Carnegie Trust grant to develop the library service to include the cataloguing, storage, and transport of works of art and museum artefacts to rural classrooms, and in this initiative she was to be supported by the Victoria & Albert Museum's Schools Fund, the County Council, and contributions from the general public.

Known as the Derbyshire Museum Loans Service, the project was the first of its kind in this country, and served as a template adopted by several other county councils to build their own collections for loans to schools.

Based just outside Derby, at its peak the service employed 40 people, and had bespoke storage and a Bedford van for transport. The number of objects in the library's museum collection exceeded 2000, about 30% of

which were paintings, drawings, and studio pottery. The balance included taxidermied animals or birds, native North American 19th- century totems and clothing, Roman and medieval vessels, correspondence to and from explorers, and Derbyshire themed historical memorabilia. A detailed catalogue was distributed to the schools each term; teachers submitted a loan request form, and, on acceptance, the object was despatched to the school in its dedicated shipping container.

Most of the art work had been acquired from living artists who were considered to be up-and-coming at the time. From 1936 until her retirement Barbara Winstanley acquired items during her trips to art colleges, artists' studios, and commercial sales around the country. She also made acquisitions during a visit to North America. The venue for many later purchases was the 'Pictures for Schools' exhibitions, organised by the V&A, the first of which took place in London in 1947.

In addition to the five artists now assigned to York, the Museum Loan Collection included an impressive range of artists who are also represented in the York collection: David Bomberg; Mary Fedden; L.S. Lowry; Paul Nash; John Piper; Fred Uhlman; Bernard Leach; Henry Moore.

Early in the 21st century, while searching for budget economies, the county education authorities identified the Loans Service to be surplus to requirements. Employee vacancies were not filled, the remaining staff were eventually offered redundancy or retirement terms, and all of the objects were returned from the schools and placed in the storage unit founded by Miss Winstanley.

A decision in 2018 by the Derbyshire County Council to disperse this truly unique collection of more than 2000 objects benefitted about 90 institutions in the UK, Europe, and the USA. Having taken the dispersal decision, the Council was soon aware that they had little detailed knowledge of what was there or to whom to offer it. They turned to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for a grant of £120,000, which financed research into provenance and a dispersal communication project staffed by a team from Aberystwyth University.

York Art Gallery's successful application in 2020 for five of these works has served to broaden the Gallery's holding of women artists, as well as adding 20th century modernist art to the collection.

Biographies for the artists:

Prunella Clough (1919–2009): She was born in Chelsea into an affluent, status-conscious family which she largely rejected, educated at Chelsea Art School, and then pursued graphic arts in the Second World War at the War Office. She was attracted in an artistic sense to the gritty industrial world; the colours in *Men and Barges* reflects her chosen pallet. She exhibited widely from 1960. Key mentors were architect Eileen Gray - similar in outlook and lifestyle - who described her as frugal, austere and tremendous fun, and Graham Sutherland. Very generous to emerging artists, she found commercial success comparatively late in life. Her art is to be found in many public collections.

Margaret Mellis (1914–2009): Born in China in 1914 to missionary parents, from 1929 she was educated at the Edinburgh College of Art. She obtained a scholarship to train in Paris, where subsequently she met and married Adrian Stokes in 1938. She and Adrian took the lead in the exodus of artists to St. Ives in 1939, a location chosen in anticipation of the coming war. The marriage failed, but artistically the St. Ives community helped her shape her life. Encouraged by Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, she focused on small canvases, construction, block colours, and abstraction over representational art, as illustrated here in *Vence Landscape*. She also branched out into constructions from found objects and collages, and is today cited by Damien Hirst as a mentor.

Marion Grace Hocken (1922–1987): Born in Zennor, Cornwall, she studied at Redruth School of Art, Brighton School of Art, and St. Ives School of Painting. A keen botanist and Fellow of the Zoological Society, she specialised in paintings of flowers. Along with Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth she founded the Penwith Society. Unfortunately, a painting by Marion satirising the community politics in the St. Ives artistic community, based on the poem 'The Hollow Men' by T. S. Eliot, aroused ferocious animosity, so she withdrew from the community and lived a reclusive lifestyle. Few of her works are in the public domain.

Daphne Fedarb (née Brooks) (1912 – 1992): Born in London, over a ten year period (1928–1938) she studied at Beckenham School of Art, the Slade School of Art, and Westminster School of Art. Teachers she noted as influences were Mark Gertler and Bernard Meninsky. She married Ernest Fedarb, a watercolourist and teacher, in 1935. They remained particularly active in commercial exhibitions between the 1940's and 1960's, and both are well represented in public galleries throughout the UK. They had one daughter.

Druie (Drucilla) Bowett (1924-1998): Born in Ripon, she was educated at Queen Margaret's School in York and Harrogate School of Art. While in Harrogate she came under the influence of a college tutor, Jean-Georges Simon. The bright colours, confident abstractions, and formal discipline of her work can be traced to him. Marion married a veterinarian surgeon, settled in Nottinghamshire, and raised three sons. She aligned with the Midland Group of artists, and identified Evelyn Gibbs, a teacher and founder of the Group, to have also been a major influence in her move in style to abstraction. Her art can be found in many public galleries in the UK.

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