This exhibition brings together for the first time the work of five powerful, individual, figurative painters working in Britain in the 1950s: Joan Eardley (1921–1963), Sheila Fell (1931–1979), Eva Frankfurther (1930–1959), Josef Herman (1911–2000) and L S Lowry (1887–1976). Spanning the years 1945-64 and featuring some 50 works including paintings, works on paper and related ephemera from more than 20 lenders, both public and private, it showcases the range, inventiveness and often widely differing approaches to figuration and practice by these five painters in this pivotal postwar period.

Each artist had a strong identification with the place (and its people) in which they chose to live and work and which formed, for a significant part of their careers, the primary focus of their practice: Eardley, the Townhead area of Glasgow; Fell, the mining community and landscape of her native Aspatria, Cumbria; Frankfurther, London’s East End, as well as the multi-cultural working-class communities whom she worked alongside in the West End at Lyons Corner House, Piccadilly; Herman, the Ystradgynlais mining community in South Wales; and Lowry, the people of his industrial hometown of Manchester. Each produced a concentrated and coherent body of work imbued with this strong sense of place and the largely working-class people associated with it.
Work is shown across a range of themes uncovering often surprising narratives: the strong single portraits which open the exhibition include Lowry’s mask-like Portrait of Ann (1957), which caused a stir when first exhibited at the Royal Academy among a public more accustomed to his large-scale industrial scenes. It contrasts with Fell’s spare, sculptural portrait of her mother, Ann (c. 1955), which was included like a mascot in all her subsequent exhibitions. Among the double-portraits Frankfurther’s carefully composed West Indian Waitresses (c. 1955) move as one in a scene slowed for our contemplation, while Eardley’s haunting Brother and Sister captures a poignant moment before the little girl was adopted and the siblings were separated for 27 years. Mother and child studies include Frankfurther’s tender Couple and Infant (c. 1956), with its warm, feminine interior contrasting with the raw vitality of Eardley’s Townhead children, often depicted against graffiti-covered backgrounds in a Fauve palette. Lowry in this period narrows his focus from large industrial scenes to smaller, more focused groups including lonely, outsider figures, occasionally, as in Portrait of a Young Man (1955) and The Professor (1963-4), against vibrant blue backdrops. They contrast with Herman’s empathetic miners, heroically portrayed, returning home in the setting sun and Fell’s timeless figures closely embedded within the rural landscapes with which they clearly identify.

A network of relationships, both personal and professional, links all five artists: Herman and Lowry twice exhibited together in 1943 and 1955; both were included in a number of important group exhibitions in this decade including John Berger’s much-discussed 1952 Looking Forward show at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Eardley met and was influenced by Herman in wartime Glasgow; similarly, Fell met and was briefly mentored by Herman in 50s’ London, while Lowry attended Fell’s first exhibition and became a lifelong friend. Fell and Frankfurther overlapped at St Martin’s School of Art; and Herman and Frankfurther were exhibited together in a group show at the Ben Uri in 1956. In bringing together these five painters working within the realist tradition, the exhibition aims to present a compelling alternative vision of postwar Britain in all its complexity.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art with contributions from leading scholars in the field including Christopher Andreae, Dr. Margaret Garlake, Cate Haste, David Herman, Claire Stewart and Dr. Judith Walsh.
**Image Credits**

1. Josef Herman, The Welsh Miner, 1948, Oil on board, Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. © Estate of Josef Herman. All Rights Reserved


3. L S Lowry R.A., Figures in a Street, 1960, Oil on board, Royal Academy of Arts, London
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4. Eva Frankfurther, West Indian Waitresses, c. 1955, Oil on paper, Private Collection. © Estate of the Artist

5. Sheila Fell, Dorothy Hodgkin (1910-1994), Fellow and Member of Council (1936), Professorial Fellow, Nobel Prize, OM, 1962, Oil on canvas, Somerville College, University of Oxford. © Estate of the Artist

**Editors notes:**

**Dates:** 14 November 2014 – 22 February 2015

**Gallery:** Ben Uri, 108a Boundary Road, off Abbey Road, St John’s Wood, London NW8 ORH

**Open:** Mon: 1–5.30 p.m; Tues–Fri: 10–5.30 p.m.; Sat–Sun: 11–5 p.m.

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**Artists:** Joan Eardley, Sheila Fell, Eva Frankfurther, Josef Herman and L S Lowry

**Lending partners:** Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collection; Arts Council; Ben Uri, The London Jewish Museum of Art; City Art Centre, Edinburgh Museums and Galleries; Anna Fell; Cyril Gerber Fine Art, Glasgow; Flowers Gallery; Government Art Collection; Gracefield Arts Centre, Dumfries; The Lowry Collection, Salford; National Library of Wales; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Somerville College, University of Oxford; the book library, Courtauld Institute of Art; the Frank Cohen Collection; Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust; and other private lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

**Writers:** Christopher Andreae, Dr Jörg Garbrecht, Dr Margaret Garlake, Cate Haste, David Herman, Andrew Kalman, Agi Katz, Sarah MacDougall, Ann Steed, Claire Stewart, Steve Swallow and Dr Judith Walsh

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