

PRESS RELEASE

CHARLESTON PRESENTS *DOROTHY HEPWORTH AND PATRICIA PREECE: AN UNTOLD STORY*

27 March – 8 September 2024
→ Charleston in Lewes

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- **A previously untold story of artists Dorothy Hepworth and Patricia Preece, who fooled figures including Virginia Woolf, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry with an elaborate pretence**
- **Lifelong artistic and romantic partners, Dorothy Hepworth and Patricia Preece are recognised for the first time as collaborators and co-conspirators – with artworks attributed anew to Hepworth’s hand**
- **Paintings borrowed from private collections are exhibited publicly for the first time since the artists’ lifetimes**

Charleston presents *Dorothy Hepworth and Patricia Preece: An Untold Story*, the first major exhibition to explore the extraordinary story of Dorothy Hepworth’s life through her paintings - paintings that have previously been exhibited under the signature of her lifelong partner, Patricia Preece. Exhibited at Charleston’s new space in Lewes, the artists are recognised for the first time as collaborators and co-conspirators, and their enduring partnership in art and in life is showcased.

During their lifetimes, works signed by Patricia Preece, but made by Dorothy Hepworth, were highly regarded. The couple fooled patrons and fellow artists including Virginia Woolf, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Augustus John, and Kenneth Clark. Bloomsbury group members and Charleston inhabitants Vanessa Bell and Clive Bell both referred to Hepworth's practice in their writings (although they thought they were referring to Preece). Clive Bell described Hepworth's paintings as 'psychological rather than decorative', and Vanessa Bell declared that the artist was 'gifted and very serious and needs encouragement badly.'

In this exhibition, Hepworth's exceptional talent is explored through portraits, self-portraits, still lifes and drawings, many imbued with rich symbolism, attributed to her hand for the first time. The exhibition explores the nature of the women's collaborative approach to making and selling work. The contextual story of their extraordinary partnership is told through archival objects which document their lives together; from early drawings to archive photographs, letters, and paintings by Stanley Spencer where Preece is subject.

Dorothy Hepworth and Patricia Preece met whilst studying painting at the Slade School of Art from 1918-1921. Soon after the women started sharing a studio they became romantically involved and began an artistic collaboration that lasted a lifetime. Where Hepworth was shy and prolific in the studio, Preece was charismatic, and together they agreed that Preece would exhibit Hepworth's paintings under her own name, selling the works to sustain their life together.

After their time at the Slade the women travelled and studied in Paris together, later settling back in Britain in Cookham, a small village in Berkshire in 1927. They lived and worked a stone's throw from painter Stanley Spencer, who became infatuated by Preece, using her as model and muse, and would go on to marry her. While Preece agreed to the marriage, she never lived with Spencer, taking Hepworth on their honeymoon and initially leaving her new husband at home. Preece later used his pension to support her life and artistic practice with Hepworth. Spencer's growing suspicions of Preece and Hepworth's relationship and his subsequent public denigration of Preece meant that her (Hepworth's) reputation as an artist dwindled after the 1930s. Regardless, Hepworth continued painting, and still signed her work 'Patricia Preece', even after Preece's death.

Hepworth and Preece's work received major attention between the Wars. They exhibited widely in London, under Preece's name, including at Dorothy Warren's gallery (1928), the LeFevre Gallery (1936) and at Leger Galleries (1938) – they were often praised in the press, and catalogues for these latter exhibitions carried introductions by Duncan Grant and Clive Bell, respectively – many of these exhibited works will be on display at Charleston for the first time since the artist's lifetimes.

Hepworth showed early aptitude as a painter, regularly exhibiting and selling work before her partnership with Preece was established. As well as painting, she excelled at drawing and continued both practices throughout her life. It was during her time in the early 1920s at the Académie Colarossi in Paris – whose notable students included Henry Moore, Cedric Morris, Samuel Peploe and Dod Procter - that she refined her unique sharp line and concise sinuous style. The influence of French Post-Impressionism can be seen in her still life

paintings, with their distinct modernist style and use of vivid colour and bold brushstrokes. And, particularly drawn to the female form, Hepworth's portraits are often darker, and razor sharp in their depiction of women in moments of contemplation.

Nathaniel Hepburn, Director at Charleston, says: "We are excited to be telling the compelling, and rather romantic, story of the partnership between artists Dorothy Hepworth and Patricia Preece. It's an unusual and previously untold tale of creative collaboration, and queer love, which we think will capture the imagination of our audiences for its resonance with the Bloomsbury group – to whom these artists were known. We're thrilled to be presenting this exhibition as part of our second season in our new space in Lewes. We'll soon be announcing the second exhibition – it continues the theme of artistic partnerships and will feature some familiar artist duos."

The exhibition takes place at Charleston in Lewes from 27 March – 8 September 2024.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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Patricia Preece (22 January 1894 – 19 May 1966), was an artist who exhibited widely during her lifetime, she was well known in Bloomsbury circles, and enjoyed London and Paris's artistic and cultural life in 1910s and 1920s, she was described by Augustus John in *Vogue* as one of the six greatest women artists in England. After her death in 1966 it was discovered that nearly all of the art exhibited and sold under her name was painted by her lifelong partner Dorothy Hepworth.

Dorothy Hepworth (30 September 1894 – 8 September 1978) was a Slade graduate who made prolific work as an artist for most of her life. She showed her work at a couple of small scale exhibitions during her early years studying at the Slade, where she garnered a Distinction and considerable admiration for her skills, but didn't exhibit under her own name after 1921. Hepworth signed her life-partner Patricia Preece's name in her paintings from then on, even after Preece's death. The women lived and worked together for nearly 50 years, and are buried together in Cookham Churchyard.

Charleston is a place that brings people together to engage with art and ideas. The modernist home and studio of the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Charleston was a gathering point for some of the 20th century's most radical artists, writers and thinkers known collectively as the Bloomsbury Group. It is where they came together to imagine society differently and has always been a place where art and experimental thinking are at the centre of everyday life. Today, we have two locations, the house, garden and galleries at Firle and our new venue in Lewes, and present a dynamic year-round programme of exhibitions, events and festivals. Charleston believes in the power of art, in all its forms, to provoke new ways of thinking and living. Charleston.org.uk