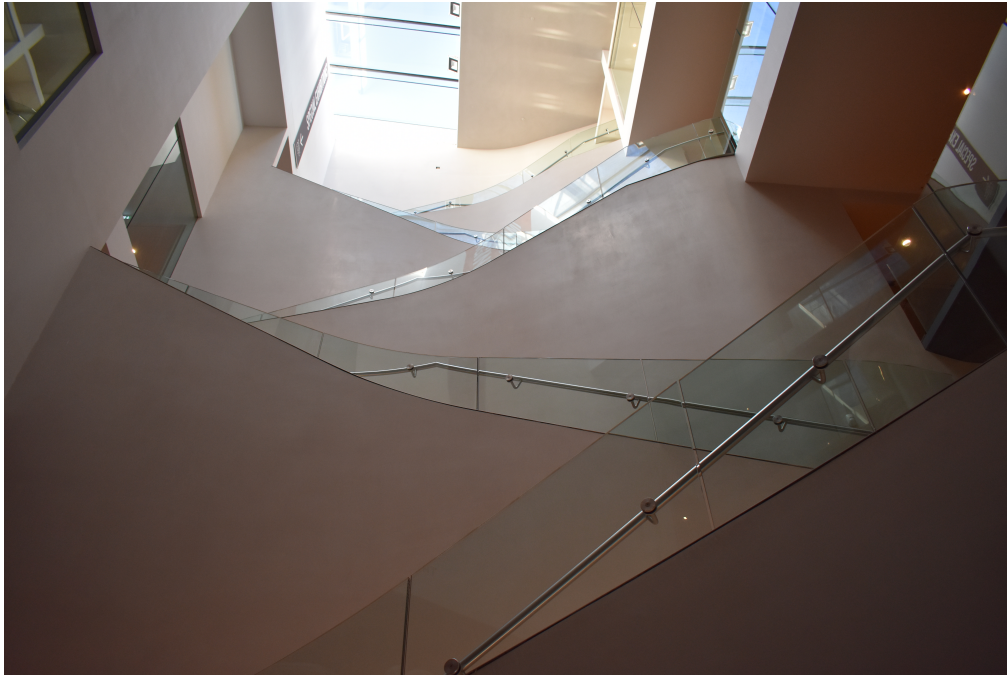


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Own photograph - the staircase in the Ashmolean Museum



Own photograph - the RWA In Relation: 'Nine Couples who Transformed Modern British Art' exhibition

Rationale

My intention in this Personal Study is to analyse three artworks by both of the artists **Ben Nicholson** and **Barbara Hepworth**. I intend to compare and contrast their works through three decades (1930s, 1940s, 1950s) and explore their ideas and how they have influenced each other artistically, throughout their oeuvres and lives.

In my Art A Level last year, I focused on abstract art. This came from an initial site visit to Oxford where I was intrigued by the renowned staircase in the Ashmolean Museum. From this point I developed my ideas, discovering my fascination for interesting abstract compositions consisting of lines, shapes and angles. I was fascinated by and researched the abstract artists **Terry Frost**, **Ben Nicholson** and **Wilhelmina Barns-Graham** (who are all associated with the St Ives School group) and I used their work to influence my own studies. To further my knowledge on, and to enhance my passion for, abstract art, I have based my study on the analysis of **Ben Nicholson** and **Barbara Hepworth**, artists that I have grown to love through my abstract journey.

As a starting point, I visited the RWA In Relation: 'Nine Couples who Transformed Modern British Art' exhibition, at The Royal West of England Academy in Bristol. This gave me great insight into how a variety of artists as couples have inspired and influenced one another, and it enabled me to see those leading Modern artists whose relationships had an effect on their practices. Although there was only a small selection on display, from what was there excited me, as I knew I could develop my initial thoughts from this visit into a larger project, specialising in one couple. It lead me to consider and subsequently explore, what happens when art, life and creative energies combine.

To expand my knowledge on abstract art and artists, I undertook a site visit to St Ives, Cornwall in the Summer. Having already studied **Nicholson** and enjoying his work, I was then encouraged to study the work of **Barbara Hepworth**, so I knew my visit to St Ives would be successful. My intention was to not only come away with effective photographs which I could later use for my practical work, but to also gain an insight into what inspired the artists who lived and worked there; why St Ives was such a magnificent place to be, regarding art. I wanted to see if my observations and thoughts reflected those of the artists I have studied and will study. I visited the Tate Gallery, which I found rather fascinating seeing a range of works in person, including **Nicholson's**. I also visited the **Barbara Hepworth** Museum and Sculpture Garden. It provides the perfect place for her sculptures and when visiting I could really gain a feel for the bright, natural environment she liked working in, as the sculptures, tools and raw blocks waiting to be carved appeared just as she left them. It was an open space that had a maze of narrow paths surrounded by her sculptures, and there were green plants that



Own photograph - Tate St Ives



Own photograph - Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden

co-existed next to the sculptures. I took photographs of everything possible, and I knew once edited they would be really successful photographs to inspire my own work. I was able to look at and appreciate the work from direct observation. I wanted to come away from these locations being inspired by their art works, and I wanted to have a much larger understanding of them, considering I was in the location of which they were influenced by to produce them.

Besides the exhibition and my St Ives visit, I will collect my research and information from a variety of resources including websites and books. The Tate website and the Art UK website will be useful for analytical points, such as specific pieces of work or particular art terms. There is a variety of books as well that I know will be very useful. An example is Norbert Lynton's *Ben Nicholson*, which will be efficient for information and references for **Nicholson**. Another example is Abraham Marie Hammacher's *Barbara Hepworth*, which undoubtedly will be useful for information and references for **Hepworth**. Both of which include information on the other artist so the identifiable links will be effective for me when writing this.



Ben Nicholson in his Hampstead studio, 1935



Barbara Hepworth, place and date unknown

Introduction

Ben Nicholson was ‘an English painter of abstract compositions (sometimes in low relief), landscape and still-life’¹. He was born near Uxbridge, England on April 10, 1894. ‘His father, **William Nicholson**, and his uncle, **James Pryde**, were both leading painters of their generation in England, and his mother was also a painter’². **Nicholson** was given little artistic training. Due to his dissatisfaction with this, he left the art school he was attending and wanted to find his own way, although whilst he was there he ‘began working with jugs, cups, mugs and bottles; frequent subjects of his later work’³. It was also at this school where he discovered Cubism. Cubism inspired him to start experimenting with new Modernist ideas. **Nicholson** created paintings inspired by **Mondrian** and his use of primary colours and tones of blue, grey and white. It was in the 1920s where he started to paint figurative and Abstract works. He produced his first geometric and Abstract reliefs in 1933, and from then on produced masses of work that were very successful, allowing him to become a well-known, talented and influential figure.

Barbara Hepworth was a British sculptor who transformed three dimensional art works into greater Abstraction. She was born in Yorkshire, England on January 10, 1903. She went to Wakefield Girls' High School, where she won a scholarship to study at the Leeds School of Art from 1920. It was there that she met **Henry Moore**⁴. For her earlier sculptures she created work of figurative forms with elements of Abstraction. She soon progressed to creating works almost entirely Abstract and non-representational, which is now what she is predominantly renowned for. Rather than moulding the material she was working with ‘to fit some pre-determined shape’⁵, she responded to the physical characteristics of it, ‘in order to resolve appropriate forms for the finished works’⁶. This is one of the reasons why **Hepworth** was and still is a key figure among modern sculptors.

Both **Nicholson's** and **Hepworth's** names are still intertwined with the history and culture of St Ives. **Hepworth's** own sculpture garden remains one of the town's most popular destinations, as

¹ Wikipedia (Last edited 02.18) *Ben Nicholson* https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Nicholson [Accessed 29.11.18]

² Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/european-art-1600-present-biographies/ben-nicholson> [Accessed 29.11.18]

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wikipedia (Last edited 10.18) *Barbara Hepworth* https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Hepworth [Accessed 02.12.18]

⁵ Elms and strings on oak base - Tate Gallery, London (n.d.) *The Art Story Barbara Hepworth* <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-hepworth-barbara.htm> [Accessed 02.12.18]

⁶ Ibid.



Alfred Wallis
St Ives, 1928



St Ives railway station, early 1950s

well as the Tate St Ives where both of the artists' works are displayed for public viewing. St Ives was the location that they moved to at the outbreak of World War II. Although **Hepworth** did not initially want to move, they immediately fell in love with it. It was, and still is, an undeniable contrast between the fast paced, complex city of London, which they must have seen as a positive change. It was the Cornish light that they were particularly attracted to as well as the art historical links that the town and Cornwall had to offer. This contributed towards them creating a range of successful art works.

Although parts of their lives and artistic journeys have no reference to St Ives (for instance, before their move to the town and also after the war, when **Nicholson** moved away altogether from St Ives), it was the time spent here that they are mostly associated with.

Considering the platform **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** built for themselves due to their talents, it is hard to believe that they were not the first artists to have founded and based themselves in St Ives. The war began in the year of 1939, and the couple relocated to Cornwall with their triplets just before the outbreak of the war, on 25 August. By then they were both fully fledged Abstract artists. **Nicholson** had visited St Ives prior to their permanent relocation in 1928, with **Christopher Wood**, where they met **Alfred Wallis**, 'whose painting was to have a profound impact on **Nicholson**'⁷. However, art production in Cornwall had existed throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, which 'developed in a way characteristic of many regions of Britain'⁸. These consisted of 'indigenous practising artists, locally trained successes who found their way to London, and well-known visitors alighting in the region for sketching forays'⁹.

An extension was made to the Great Western Railway in 1877, easing access to the town, which supposedly made St Ives 'even more appealing as a destination for artists'¹⁰. The change made to the railway resulted in the town seeing other developments such as the building of Tregenna Castle Hotel as well as 'the spacious terraced housing in the higher reaches surrounding the

⁷ Tate. (n.d.) *St Ives School* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/st-ives-school> [Accessed 04.12.18]

⁸ The Tate. (01.10.93) *Tate Gallery St Ives, An Illustrated Companion* Place of publication: unknown. Publisher: Tate Gallery Publications. Pg 15 [Accessed 28.11.18]

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tate. (n.d.) *St Ives School* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/st-ives-school> [Accessed 04.12.18]



St Ives Harbour, 1925



Own photo - St Ives Harbour, 2018

harbour'¹¹. All of which resulted in St Ives receiving an 'influx of visitors' that reported that 'on clear sunny days, the green and purple sea reminded them of the Bay of Naples'¹².

The artists **Whistler** and **Sickert** were the first early artists to have made the long journey west in the winter of 1883/84. 'By the end of the decade St Ives had become a popular destination for wealthy professional landscape and marine artists'¹³. It is said that the fishing and mining industries were struggling at this time, so their arrival and desire to rent accommodation meant that much needed new income was brought into the town. 'They took over the rapidly emptying fish lofts for studio spaces where they displayed their work'¹⁴. A couple of years later, a group including **Louis Grier** and the American E.E. Simmons arrived. 'They established the St Ives Arts Club in 1888, opening a permanent building for it in 1890'¹⁵. Then by 1902, the colony in St Ives was 'sufficiently well established to be included in a survey of art from West Cornwall in the opening exhibition programme of the new Whitechapel Art Gallery in London'¹⁶.

Over time, St Ives was the place to be for aspiring artists, both locally and from abroad. It was between 1900 and the 1920s that the town 'gradually came to terms with its status as a resort and working base for artists'¹⁷. At this time, 'traditions grew up within the artistic community'¹⁸ and it was recognised that 'art was becoming an integral part of the economy in the region'¹⁹.

¹¹ The Tate. (01.10.93) *Tate Gallery St Ives, An Illustrated Companion* Place of publication: unknown. Publisher: Tate Gallery Publications. Pg 16 [Accessed 28.11.18]

¹² Axten, J. (n.d.) *The St Ives Art Colony: 1880-2004* http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/cornwall/article_1.shtml [Accessed 04.12.18]

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

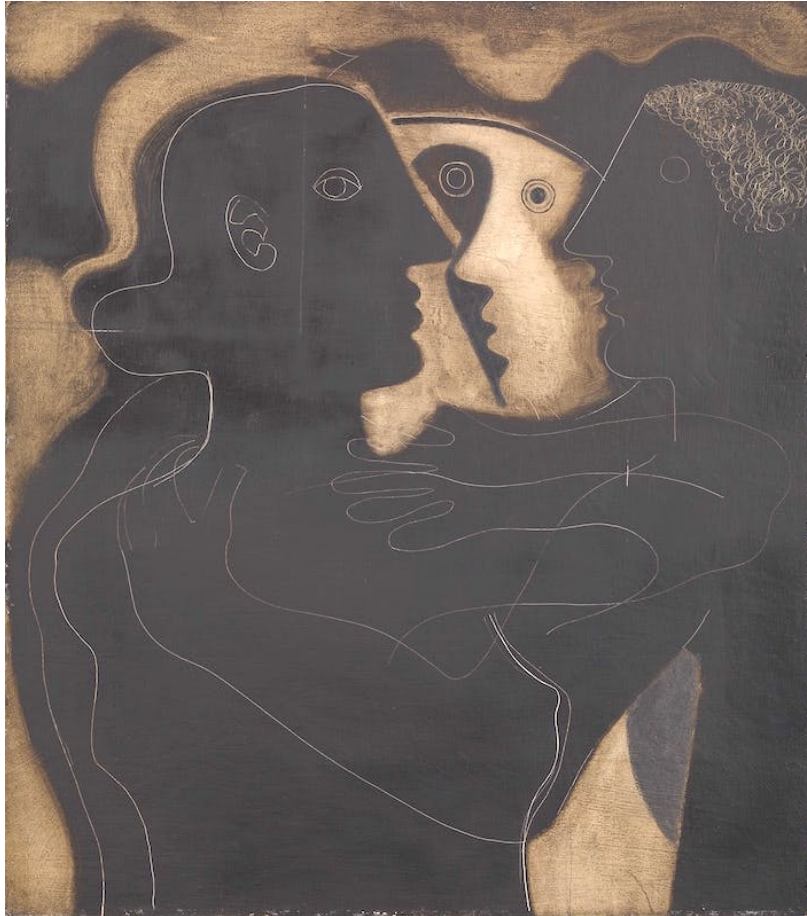
¹⁵ The Tate. (01.10.93) *Tate Gallery St Ives, An Illustrated Companion* Place of publication: unknown. Publisher: Tate Gallery Publications. Pg 17 [Accessed 28.11.18]

¹⁶ Ibid.

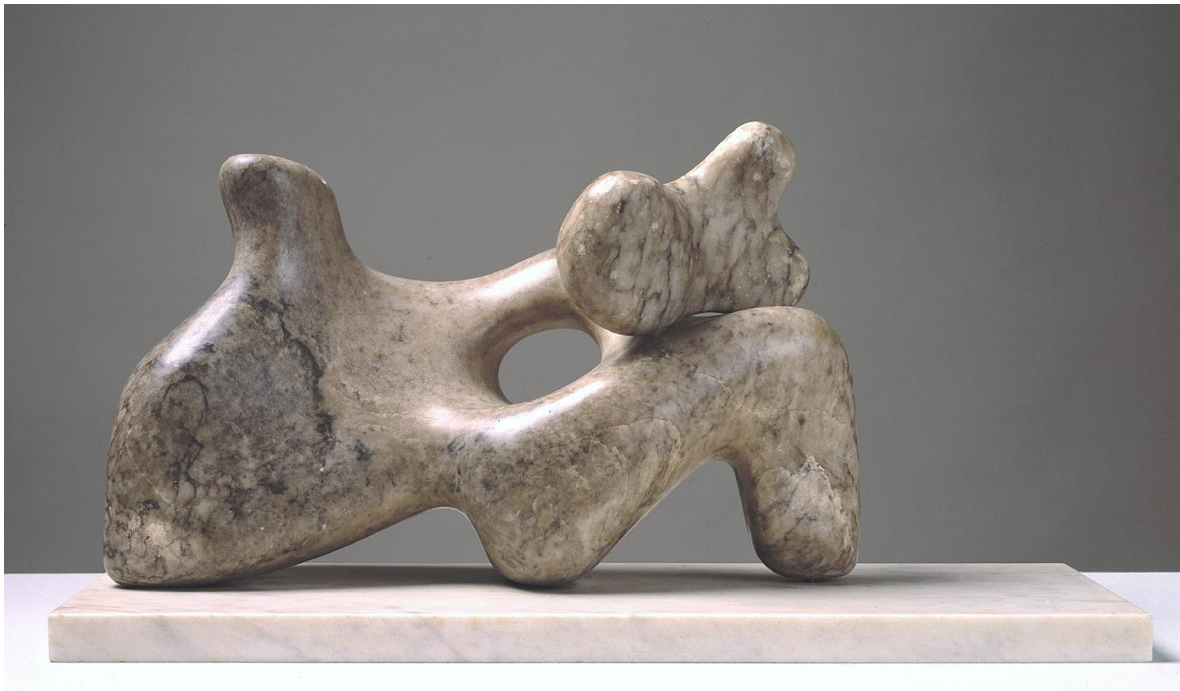
¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.



Ben Nicholson
St Rémy, Provence, 1933



Barbara Hepworth
Mother and Child, 1934

Critical Analysis 1

Introduction

The first pieces of art works I am going to study to compare and contrast are **Ben Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence*, 1933 and **Barbara Hepworth's** *Mother and Child*, 1934. The vast majority of **Nicholson's** 1932-3 paintings signify his honeymoon period with **Hepworth**²⁰, and also with Paris, which was where they spent their summer of 1933 and where they became friends with the painter **Jean Hélion**²¹. He introduced them to the artist **Mondrian** and invited them to join Abstraction-Création, an association formed in 1931 as a successor to Cercle et Carré which was dedicated to promoting truly abstract art²².

The Summer of 1931 was when **Hepworth** invited a number of friends to join her for a working holiday on the Norfolk coast²³. Among the invitees were **Ben** and **Winifred Nicholson**, but **Winifred** couldn't come²⁴. **Skeaping**, **Hepworth's** husband at the time, did not turn up either, and a year later she and **Nicholson** were living together in her Hampstead studio²⁵, (which is where she produced her *Mother and Child* sculpture)²⁶. They travelled around Europe, meeting modern artists, and **Nicholson** made a series of paintings and prints that celebrated their relationship.

At this stage in **Hepworth's** life, being in a married couple with another male artist, she probably did not foresee the outcome. It is interesting to note that **Skeaping's** artistic views were very different to hers. His work tended to stay closer to idealised Naturalism, what he had inherited from his painter father²⁷, which **Hepworth** did her best to draw him away from. This potentially could

²⁰ Lynton N. (1955) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: Madrid. Publisher: Galeria Jorge Mara. Pg 52 [Accessed 25.09.18]

²¹ Ibid. Pg 48

²² Ibid. Pg 48

²³ RWA In Relation: 'Nine Couples who Transformed Modern British Art' Exhibition, The Royal West of England Academy, Bristol. Exhibition duration: 16.06.18 - 09.09.18 [Accessed 01.09.18]

²⁴ Ibid. As above

²⁵ Ibid. As above

²⁶ Wilkinson, J. (2014) *Dame Barbara Hepworth, Mother and Child* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-mother-and-child-t06676> [Accessed 09.10.18]

²⁷ Lynton N. (1955) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: Madrid. Publisher: Galeria Jorge Mara. Pg 46 [Accessed 25.09.18]



Ben Nicholson
Profiles, 1933



Barbara Hepworth
Pierced Form, 1963-4

have been one of the main reasonings behind why **Hepworth** very quickly gravitated towards **Nicholson**; because of their similar artistic views, ideas and preferences.

The subject matter of **Nicholson's** piece certainly incorporates a portrait of his lover, **Barbara Hepworth**. Her profile features frequently in his works of this period, but interestingly this is the last time the human image is found in his paintings. His *St Rémy, Provence*, 1933 consists of more than one portrait. I believe the subject is both a representational and abstract idea. It is considered to be celebrating a couple, however it is done so in numerous terms. Rather than simply including two figures (himself and **Hepworth**) he has included a third figure as well as an extra eye, but still representing himself. Similarly, **Hepworth's** *Mother and Child*, 1934 incorporates two people, but the title certifies that it is not a romantic couple, like **Nicholson's**. In *St Rémy, Provence*, **Hepworth** is represented on the left hand side of the painting, in profile. **Nicholson** has included limbs as well as facial features. They appear to be stretched out in front of his self portrait, also side profile, and reaching towards his lover, suggesting they are embracing one another as a result of their newly found romance. The third figure within the piece appears to represent more of a shadow, or a spirit, as opposed to a solid, real life figure like the other two portraits. The lighter shadow-like portrait is more central, and is closer to **Hepworth's** portrait. The noses are touching, thus representing the genuine nature of their love. However, this makes me question why **Nicholson** did not represent his darker, real-life figure making the physical contact with **Hepworth** (the other figure in his piece).

Comparing this to **Hepworth's** *Mother and Child*, there are also two figures embracing each other, but they are not lovers. I also believe this work is a representational and abstract idea. It is an abstract piece of work, but its form is 'biomorphic and undulating', and the title suggests a 'figurative interpretation'²⁸. The sculpture is fundamentally made up of two parts; the larger shape representing a reclining figure of a motherly figure, the smaller shape representing a child, resting upon the mother²⁹. The mother and child as subject matter becomes a reoccurring motif in her work during the late 1920s and early 1930s³⁰. **Hepworth** has incorporated a pierced form (a hole at the centre of the composition), which was a technique that she first adopted in 1931 with *Pierced Form*³¹. This was common in her work and also the work of the renowned artist **Henry Moore**. In

²⁸ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Important Art by Barbara Hepworth* <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-hepworth-barbara-artworks.htm> [Accessed 10.09.18]

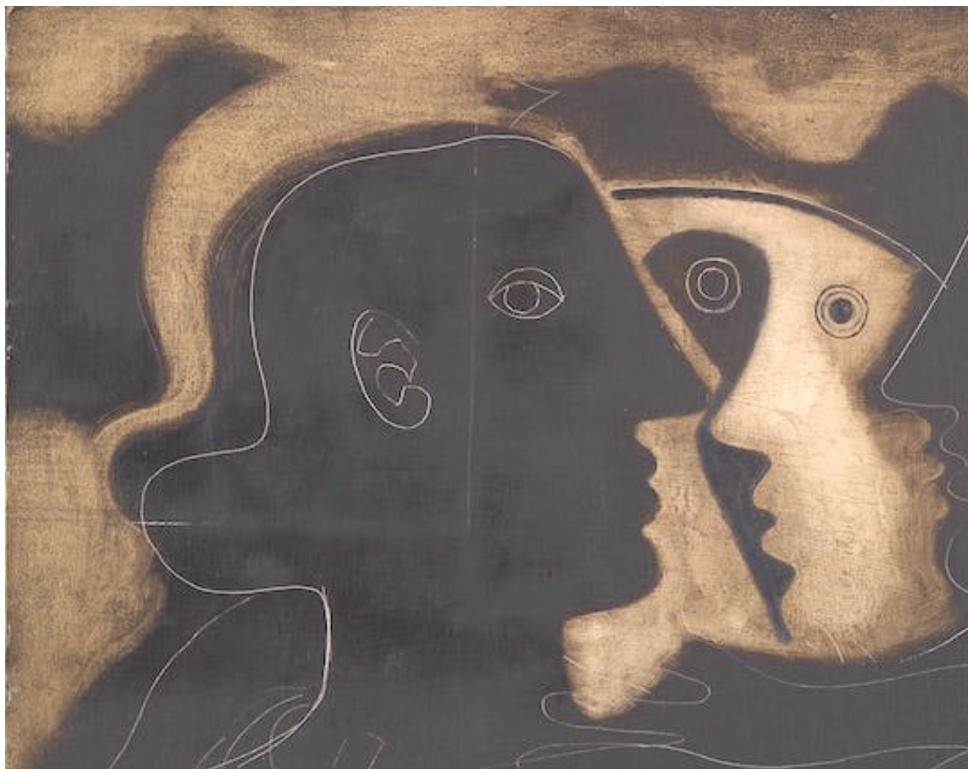
²⁹ Wilkinson, J. (2014) *Dame Barbara Hepworth, Mother and Child* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-mother-and-child-t06676> [Accessed 09.10.18]

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.



Hepworth Nicholson triplets, 1937



**Close up - Ben Nicholson
*St Rémy, Provence, 1933***

this case the pierced form suggests that the child has evolved from the now empty womb, but has also been linked to organic forms such as pebbles and shells. In addition, it has been considered and interpreted that this sculpture possibly reflects changes that were occurring in her life at the time. The same year that she made this sculpture, 1934, was the year she gave birth to her three triplets with **Nicholson**: Simon, Rachel and Sarah³². In 1943, **Hepworth** commented “*There was a turbulent period 1933-4 but I stand by [the works]*”³³. This provokes the idea that this period in her life was considerably distressing, possibly due to the understandable stress of giving birth to triplets, but there was also the long disruption of the war, which could also have had a negative impact on her attitudes. Also, quoted in **Gale and Stephens** 1999: “*So poignant are these shapes of stone...*”, which emphasises that same interpretation³⁴. **Nicholson’s St Rémy, Provence** represents his personal love with **Hepworth**, and **Hepworth’s Mother and Child** represents a mother and child relationship. However, through the close composition between the two forms, it is evident that **Hepworth** was passionate about expressing the love she had for her children, in a complementary way to how **Nicholson** represented his personal love. **Hepworth** becoming a mother was only made possible with her partner. Therefore, although the sculpture is not showing her and her lover physically, it may be, but through an underlying, hidden meaning. It was possibly created to express her appreciation for the love and life that **Nicholson** provided her.

Analysis

When considering how the artists have composed the work, I think that they both must have considered very seriously the proportions of the figures that they incorporated in their work, and also their colour palettes. In *St Rémy, Provence*, **Nicholson** has created illusion of space and depth. The subjects, being two separate portraits, have been executed differently for each layer. More specifically, the first layer of the left-hand figure is a light colour wash, overlaid with a darker block layer (like the figure on the right). Then there is a light outline on top of both dark figures. These definite outlines simply represent the most principal parts of the face and body, in a reduced geometric form³⁵. Due to this effective layering technique, this leads the work to appear three-dimensional but on a two-dimensional surface. Interestingly though, typically,

³² Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Barbara Hepworth Biography* <https://barbarahepworth.org.uk/biography/> [Accessed 12.10.18]

³³ Wilkinson, J. (2014) *Dame Barbara Hepworth, Mother and Child* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-mother-and-child-t06676> [Accessed 29.10.18]

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Author: unknown (2015) *Ben Nicholson (1894 - 1982) - Bio - Selected Works and Influences* <https://historiarumblog.wordpress.com/2015/01/14/ben-nicholson-1894-1982-bio-selected-works-and-influences/> [Accessed 10.10.18]



George Braque
Bottle and Fishes, 1910-12



Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden, Trewyn Studio

lighter shades are used in the foreground and darker shades in the background to make subjects seem three-dimensional, but **Nicholson** has appeared to do the opposite. He has created the foreground figures the darkest which subsequently dominate. Considering the artist and his partner's romance was recent at the time of the creation of the piece, I feel that he would have created the piece to be bright and full of spirit, to represent their love, but this painting suggests different. For **Hepworth's** *Mother and Child*, she has also created an effective composition, but because the work is a sculpture, it is inevitable that it will be three-dimensional. In terms of proportion, she must have considered very carefully the size differences of the two parts of the sculpture, in order for it to represent a mother and child bond effectively.

Nicholson's *St Rémy, Provence* has a simplistic aesthetic, and the use of minimal lines to outline the figures was a common style he used in a variety of his works. The media is oil on canvas, and the dimensions are 27.3 x 16.8 cm³⁶. There are evident links to the work of **Picasso's** neo-classical drawings of the late teens and early twenties³⁷, nevertheless, he took some inspiration from **Braque**, a fellow sculptor and painter from France, with regards to the flatness of the piece³⁸. Referring back to the lighter face that is in the centre, it could be interpreted as '**Nicholson's** soul and energy between the two', as interpreted by *Past Times, An Art History Blog*³⁹. They have also interpreted the 'dark, almost dirty, colours' as an uncommon palette used for a piece that is supposedly representing love and joy⁴⁰.

Hepworth produced *Mother and Child* using a sculptural practice called direct carving, which is 'an approach to make curved sculptures where the actual process of carving suggests the final form rather than a carefully worked out preliminary model'⁴¹. The sculpture is made from Cumberland alabaster on marble base, and the dimensions are 230 x 455 x 189 mm, 11.1 kg⁴², a

³⁶ Lynton N. (1955) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: Madrid. Publisher: Galeria Jorge Mara. Pg 52 [Accessed 25.09.18]

³⁷ Ibid. Pg 52

³⁸ Author: unknown (2015) *Ben Nicholson (1894 - 1982) - Bio - Selected Works and Influences* <https://historiarumblog.wordpress.com/2015/01/14/ben-nicholson-1894-1982-bio-selected-works-and-influences/> [Accessed 10.10.18]

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tate. (n.d.) *Direct Carving* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/direct-carving> [Accessed 10.10.18]

⁴² Wilkinson, J. (2014) *Dame Barbara Hepworth, Mother and Child* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-mother-and-child-t06676> [Accessed 09.10.18]



Henry Moore
Four-Piece Composition: Reclining Figure, 1934



Pablo Picasso
Three Women at the Spring, 1921

medium used by both **Hepworth** and **Henry Moore** for their work during the period of 1930-4⁴³. The aesthetic of her work is simplistic, like **Nicholson's**. The colours of both parts of the sculpture are the same, being a 'warm brown-ish grey colour', whilst incorporating 'black, grey, white and brown veining'⁴⁴. The work presents a pure and natural feeling. **Hepworth** consciously respected the material's she used, and she worked it so it brought out particular properties, the beauty of colours and the smooth surface of the marble base sculpture⁴⁵.

My analysis of the colours of **Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence*, contradicts my analysis of the composition, which is what makes studying the work of his, in relation to his marriage, so interesting. I interpreted the composition of the lovers within his work as reflecting their intense feelings for each other, which many people would undoubtedly interpret it as also, but the colour palette of the piece suggests the opposite. This could show an underlying meaning of their love maybe not being as passionate and genuine as it was initially made out/thought to be. In contrast, my analysis of the colours and the composition of **Hepworth's** *Mother and Child* complement each other.

Context

Nicholson's *St Rémy, Provence*, 1933 coincides with an interest in Classicism. Particularly in France, some people saw the renewed interest in the traditions of the ancient world as a 'betrayal of modernist values'⁴⁶. Referring back to **Picasso's** neo-classically inspired portraits, they were thought by many as a shocking abandonment from Cubism⁴⁷. Although these views have persisted to some extent in art-historical writing, it can be seen that Classicism was a way of stimulating and refreshing Modernist expression through art⁴⁸. I believe **Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence* combines Modernism as well as Classicism. Through analysing the work, it seems that **Nicholson** used his creativity whereby he wanted to experiment with ways in which he could combine both art movements. Combining both helped him in the long run to be successful, when he would choose to solely use Modernism to represent his work

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hallett, F. (04.1.16) *How classicism took hold of the modern age* <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/mythic-method-review-pallant-house/> [Accessed: 29.11.18]

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.



Ben Nicholson
Feb 1960 (ice-off-blue), 1960



Barbara Hepworth
Oval Sculpture (No. 2), 1943

(evident in later works such as the 1960s, where the art is solely abstract and no subject can be identified; there is no evidence of any other art movements.)

The references to Classicism can be identified, with evident links to **Picasso's** neo-classical drawings, such as the 'simplification of form through the sharp delineations of classical portraiture'⁴⁹. However, there is evidence of Modernism within the piece also. There are a variety of underlying principles that define Modernist art, according to the Tate website⁵⁰. These include: 'A rejection of history and conservative values (such as realistic depiction of subjects); innovation and experimentation with form (the shapes, colours and lines they make up the work) with a tendency to abstraction; and an emphasis on materials, techniques and processes'⁵¹. In **Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence*, the parts that can be linked directly to Modernism, is for example, the position of the figures. Not only are they fixed in profile, but there are also multiple figures that represent a single person. This is very abstract, and therefore can be classified as Modernistic.

Hepworth distinguished herself as a world-recognised sculpture, in a time where it was rare to be a successful female artist⁵². She worked crucially in areas of greater Abstraction through the making of her sculptures, and a significant concept of her work was the investigation of "*absence*" in sculpture as well as "*presence*", which relates back to the pierced form within her *Mother and Child*, 1934⁵³. Her *Mother and Child* piece can be classified as Modernistic, complementary to **Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence*. For example, the forms in their larger outlines can be seen to possess the clean lines of Modernistic aesthetics⁵⁴. The material she uses creates a smooth finalised feel, thus emphasising the cleanliness of the work and therefore the link to Modernism.

As my first analysis, I chose to study and compare work that they produced early on in their relationship, because I suspected to find similarities within their work that I could draw upon and discuss.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Tate. (n.d.) *Art Term Modernism* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism> [Accessed 29.10.18]

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Elms and strings on oak base - Tate Gallery, London (n.d.) *The Art Story Barbara Hepworth* <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-hepworth-barbara.htm> [Accessed 29.10.18]

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.



Ben Nicholson
1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall), 1943-45



Barbara Hepworth
***Landscape Sculpture*, 1944**

Critical Analysis 2

Introduction

The second pieces of art works I am going to study to compare and contrast are **Ben Nicholson's 1943 - 45 (St Ives, Cornwall)**, 1943-45 and **Barbara Hepworth's Landscape Sculpture**, 1944. These pieces of art were produced during World War II. Just before the outbreak of the war, on 25 August, **Hepworth** and **Nicholson** arrived in St Ives with their triplets⁵⁵. They were invited by **Adrian Stokes** and his wife **Margaret Mellis. Naum** and **Miriam Gabo** soon joined them, and they stayed until 1946⁵⁶. After Christmas, the **Hepworth-Nicholson** family moved to Dunluce, a nearby house in Carbis Bay⁵⁷. In these cramped conditions, and with little time to work, **Hepworth** drew and made plaster sculptures at night; she was unable to produce major work until the year of 1943⁵⁸.

After their relocation to Cornwall (who's scenery 'dominated artist's subject choices'⁵⁹) at the war outbreak, '**Hepworth** increasingly discussed her work in relation to the landscape'⁶⁰. She was initially unhappy about leaving London, but she later recalled: "*It was during this time that I gradually discovered the remarkable pagan landscape ... which still has a deep effect on me, developing all my ideas about the relationship of the human figure in the landscape*"⁶¹. At the same time, **Nicholson** abandoned his white reliefs which was what he was producing throughout the 1930s, and returned to painting landscapes⁶². **Nicholson's 1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)**, 1943-45 is one of a series begun in 1939⁶³. This particular series enabled him to develop ideas of the previous decade, in particular 'his experimentation with the positioning of objects in space'⁶⁴.

⁵⁵ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Barbara Hepworth Biography* <https://barbarahepworth.org.uk/biography/> [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lynton N. (1955) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: Madrid. Publisher: Galeria Jorge Mara. Pg 100 [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁶⁰ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Barbara Hepworth Biography* <https://barbarahepworth.org.uk/biography/> [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tate. (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson OM 1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1943-45-st-ives-cornwall-n05625> [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.



Winifred Nicholson
Window-Sill, Lugano, 1923



Close up - Ben Nicholson
1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall), 1943-45

The subject matter of **Nicholson's** piece evidently incorporates the St Ives landscape, but also elements of still life, which was supposedly reworked in 1945⁶⁵. This was one of **Nicholson's** first landscapes since 1930, possibly influenced by **Hepworth's** newly found love for landscapes. This artistic approach of incorporating two classic genres was not new. Interestingly, it had been seen before; it was frequent in **Nicholson's** ex wife, **Winifred's** work in the 1920s⁶⁶. **Nicholson** had used it occasionally and so had some of their associates in the Seven and Five Society⁶⁷. However, the fact that he resulted back to old artistic ways influenced by his ex wife, and also after having found a solid artistic ground with his white reliefs, raises questions. I interpret the painting as a view through a window, with parts of a curtain either side of the painting, framing the image. The still life elements can be identified in the foreground. One can see there is approximately three white and cream mugs with handles propped on top of a windowsill. The Union Jack can be seen on the smallest mug furthest to the right, which was included as a gesture to celebrate V.E. Day and the end of the war⁶⁸. Outside of the painted window is the Cornish landscape. One can see boats in the harbour, the hills beyond the ocean and a collection of houses and rooftops. The hills are very much in the distance and have near to no definition. They are simply outlines and they exist to fill the bland sky space. Presented in a similar way is a white Cornish house of two stories, to the left of the hills. This house is painted on a small scale in proportion to the distant hills, also with thin outlines, again to fill the space. The darkest parts of the painting are the boats on the harbour. These are slightly closer to the window frame than the hills, but are still in the distance. There are approximately five boats with large sails and masts. Finally, in front of the boats and just beyond the still-life in the window is the flat sides of houses. They lack simple architectural detail, such as window and door outlines, like the distant house. The outlines of their chimneys and rooftops make them identifiable as houses.

Hepworth's *Landscape Sculpture*, 1944 differs very much so from **Nicholson's** piece, but the commonality that can be discussed is the landscape ideas within their work and the perceptions they have of it. Although at first sight one would not see this sculpture as a representation of a landscape, once the ideas behind it are known, the landscape idea can be understood and appreciated further. Nevertheless, the title in itself gives it away anyway; *Landscape Sculpture*. This sculpture consists of a curved bottom that rests upon the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Close up - Barbara Hepworth
Landscape Sculpture, 1944



Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden

rectangular base, a flat slanted top as if the sculpture has been sliced in half, two pierced forms with only one penetrating through to the other side, and nine traversed strings that are discoloured. The strings 'emerge from holes along the edge of the right' pierced form and converge into the left pierced form⁶⁹. They then 'pass down through' and back out of the wood, and travel across to a 'further sequence of holes' along the edge of the left pierced form. They then cross back to the right hand side, through the opening and 'terminate in a single hole at the back'⁷⁰. All of the knotted ends of the strings can be seen.

Opposed to **Nicholson's** realistic *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)*, 1943-45, **Hepworth's** *Landscape Sculpture*, 1944 is very much abstract, thus making it hard to identify elements within it that directly relate to landscapes. All of her art works and sculptures are predominantly abstract, which re-emphasises the difficulty in seeing landscape features. **Hepworth** wrote in 1943, "*All my sculpture comes out of landscape. I'm sick of sculptures in galleries & photos with flat backgrounds... no sculpture really lives until it goes back to the landscape, the trees, air & clouds*"⁷¹. This quote certifies the fact that her work was influenced by landscapes, but it also informs that she was passionate about her creation reflecting where it was later placed for public viewing. She lived and worked in Trewyn studios, which is now the **Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden**⁷². It provides the perfect foil for her sculptures and one can really gain a feel for the bright, natural environment **Hepworth** liked working in. The open-air garden has a maze of narrow paths surrounded by her sculptures and the green plants that co-exist next to the sculptures. The general aesthetics of the environment in which her sculptures are displayed echo the initial inspirations and influences she had for her art.

Evidently, **Hepworth's** and **Nicholson's** art works vary greatly in terms of their aesthetics, due to their different individual artistic grounds and pathways. However, there are still links that can be made. It is their inspirations and influences that is the commonality within their works. Another link that I personally made, is the fact that **Hepworth's** *Landscape Sculpture* subtly imitates the shape of a boat, and **Nicholson** in fact incorporated multiple boats of a similar shape in his painting. The boat shape of **Hepworth's** is due to the curved bottom and the

⁶⁹ Tate. (n.d.) *Dame Barbara Hepworth Landscape Sculpture 1944* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-landscape-sculpture-t12284> [Accessed 07.11.18]

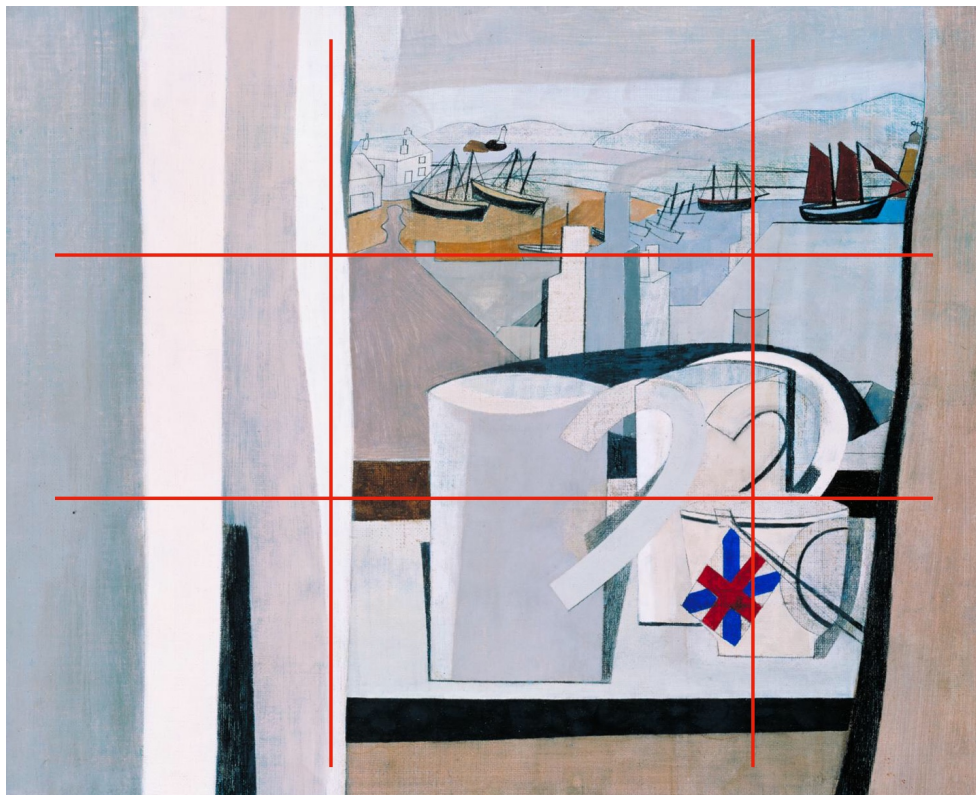
⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Elms and strings on oak base - Tate Gallery, London (n.d.) *The Art Story Barbara Hepworth* <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-hepworth-barbara.htm> [Accessed 08.11.18]

⁷² Tate (n.d.) *Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden* <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-st-ives/barbara-hepworth-museum-and-sculpture-garden> [Accessed 08.11.18]



Chy An Kerris, Carbis Bay



**Rule of thirds - Ben Nicholson
1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall), 1943-45**

flat sliced top. One can see that there is a slight dip in the sculpture, supporting my boat shape interpretation. The use of thin strings that stretch vertically across the middle of the sculpture could suggest horizon lines, which **Nicholson** physically presented in his painting. But E.H. Ramsden, who was a close friend of **Hepworth's** in the 1940s, had the ability to associate the work with a specific place⁷³. 'She described it as "*a transcription of the felt "pull" existing between two hills, in Uny Lelant, near the Cornish coast*"⁷⁴. Uny Lelant is close to Chy an Kerris, the house in Headland Road, Carbis Bay, which is where the sculpture was carved'⁷⁵. **Hepworth** also told E.H. Ramsden the meaning of the strings. **Hepworth** wrote: "*The strings were the tension I felt between myself and the sea, the wind or the hills*"⁷⁶, which differs from my own interpretation.

Analysis

When considering how the artists composed the works, I believe they would have had to think about different aspects due to the variance in the nature of their work. For instance, **Nicholson's** is a painting with identifiable elements whereas **Hepworth's** is a very abstract three-dimensional sculpture.

Considering that **Nicholson's** *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* takes the viewpoint of one looking out of a window onto the St Ives harbour scenery, he must have thought significantly about the foreground, middle ground and background. To ensure that he achieved this, he painted the still life on a considerably large scale to signify it being in the foreground, and the hills in the background a lot smaller in the distance. It is also evident he has considered the rule of thirds, which involves mentally dividing up your image using two horizontal lines and two vertical lines. The curtains take up approximately two vertical thirds of the piece, and the open scenery in the centre takes up the remaining centre. Horizontally, the hills and the boats on the harbour fill the top third, the houses fill the middle third, and the still life mugs take up the bottom third. 'There is a remarkable freedom in the treatment of scale and perspective in his work, and the forms evidently have a playful, toylike character'⁷⁷, emphasised by the fact they are not presented immensely realistic and are drawn frequently with simple outlines. The colour scheme used appears very muted. With an exception for the brightly coloured Union Jack at the front, the curtains and mugs

⁷³ Tate. (n.d.) *Dame Barbara Hepworth Landscape Sculpture 1944* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-landscape-sculpture-t12284> [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁷⁴ Ibid.

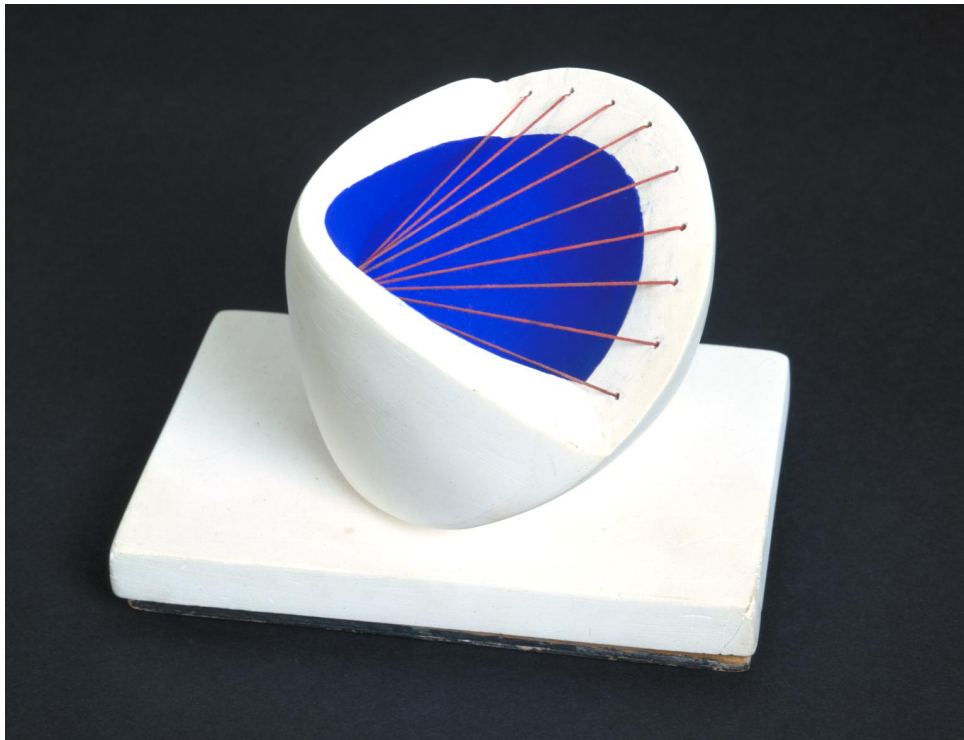
⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Encyclopedia of World Biography (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/european-art-1600-present-biographies/ben-nicholson> [Accessed 10.11.18]



Pablo Picasso
Three Musicians, 1921



Barbara Hepworth
Sculpture with Colour (Deep Blue and Red), 1940

are the most limited in colour, consisting of whites and creams. The middle ground and background subjects are relatively bolder, consisting of pale blues, mustard-toned yellows, browns and blacks. On returning to St Ives and seeing it again, it was the light that **Nicholson** was touched and influenced by. His fondness for the Cornish light reflects his colour choices in his piece. **Nicholson** created this piece using oil paint and graphite on canvas, and its dimensions are 406 x 502 mm (frame: 440 x 535 x 65 mm)⁷⁸. This piece is a representation of Cubism, which leaves the art work looking considerably fragmented and abstract, but a reality can still be identified. The demand **Nicholson** had to paint a landscape painting enabled him to reveal the poetic feeling he had for nature, which was an important element in his work.

Hepworth also would have had to consider her composition and proportion carefully, but in a different way to **Nicholson**. **Hepworth's** piece is a sculpture, which meant that it was essential for her to get the composition and dimensions right to ensure the sculpture would stand securely without aid. Although it was probably within her intentions to make the sculpture abstract, like all of her other works, it still would have to have one or two elements that the viewer can interpret and consider as representing landscapes. The fact that it is landscape in its composition; that it is long and wide as opposed to tall and narrow, reflects this idea. The sculpture's dimensions are 320 x 680 x 290 mm and it was carved from elm. The material supposedly has no significant splits, despite it looking slightly dry in appearance. 'Filler has been applied to a knot in the left hand opening and around the strings'⁷⁹. I have not been able to see the back due to lack of photographs of the sculpture, but the back right of the sculpture has been supposedly bleached by the sun, and the back left consists of a 'group of dark markings'⁸⁰. The use of elm is effective as it reflects nature, which fundamentally is associated with landscapes. Discussing her use of pierced forms, the sculptures she produced in London (1937-39) can be contrasted against her St Ives work (1940-44). In London, her pierced forms were 'fairly small in relation to the volume and the mass. Sometimes they were a complete penetration, sometimes merely a hollow'⁸¹. Then the work that she produced from 1938 onwards, she 'broke the forms right open, introducing cords and colour'⁸². Her introduction of colour was

⁷⁸ Tate. (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson OM 1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1943-45-st-ives-cornwall-n05625> [Accessed 08.11.18]

⁷⁹ Tate. (n.d.) *Dame Barbara Hepworth Landscape Sculpture 1944* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-landscape-sculpture-t12284> [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Hammacher, A. M. (1987) *Barbara Hepworth*. Place of publication: unknown. Publisher: Thames and Hudson. Pg 89, 90 [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁸² Ibid. Pg 90



George Braque
Glass on a Table, 1909-10



Constantin Brancusi
Fish, 1926

seen as a 'third component', which she became increasingly conscious of and continued to experiment with in the work that followed. This development in her artistic journey meant 'she had ripened and was now conscious of the constant influence nature exerted on her life as a sculptor'⁸³.

Context

During the periods 1943-5, 'England was no longer remotely a part of a 'Modern movement'⁸⁴. The people that were keen to continue to see the future of art were once again separated from the majority who liked the recent change of art movement. **Nicholson** was very much part of this change, and this was considerably due to 'his geographical situation in Cornwall' and 'the different preoccupations of wartime' that caused his isolation during the forties. During this period he began to turn away from the severity, purity, and strictly rectilinear structure of his works. **Nicholson's** frequent trips to Paris in 1931 allowed him to visit the studios of **Piet Mondrian**, **Georges Braque**, **Constantin Brancusi**, and other leading artists. These artists prompted his conversion to abstract art. As a result, 'his works of this period consist of geometrical abstract paintings composed of rectangles and circles of clear, uniform and of carved white reliefs of extraordinary purity, made from wood and synthetic board'⁸⁵. Then when he moved from London to Cornwall, he painted and drew the amazing scenery, *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* included, which represented another slight change in art movement. The art works he created of this period are known to represent an abstracted form of late Cubism; 'the objects are indicated by overlapping linear silhouettes, with silvery tones enlivened by small patches of brilliant colour'⁸⁶.

Hepworth's *Landscape Sculpture* fundamentally does not fit into a particular category regarding art movements. However, she did still take inspiration from and was constantly being influenced by, the popular art movements occurring around her. At the time of the war, everyone was experiencing the same trauma, horror and fear. Undeniably this was prime time for artists to express their emotions and observations, of particularly the war. 'You see art made during the war, scenes of devastation and of mutilation...we see images of pessimism, optimism, horrific scenes and utopian idealism, all different responses to the same horrific historic situation'⁸⁷. Due to

⁸³ Ibid. Pg 92

⁸⁴ Harrison, C. (19.06.69 - 27.07.69) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: London. Publisher: Tate Gallery London. Pg 40 [Accessed 07.11.18]

⁸⁵ Encyclopedia of World Biography (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/european-art-1600-present-biographies/ben-nicholson> [Accessed 10.11.18]

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Tate; Stephens, C. (n.d.) *Tate Britain 1940 Main Floor* <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain/display/walk-through-british-art/1940> [Accessed 15.11.18]



Francis Bacon
Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, 1944



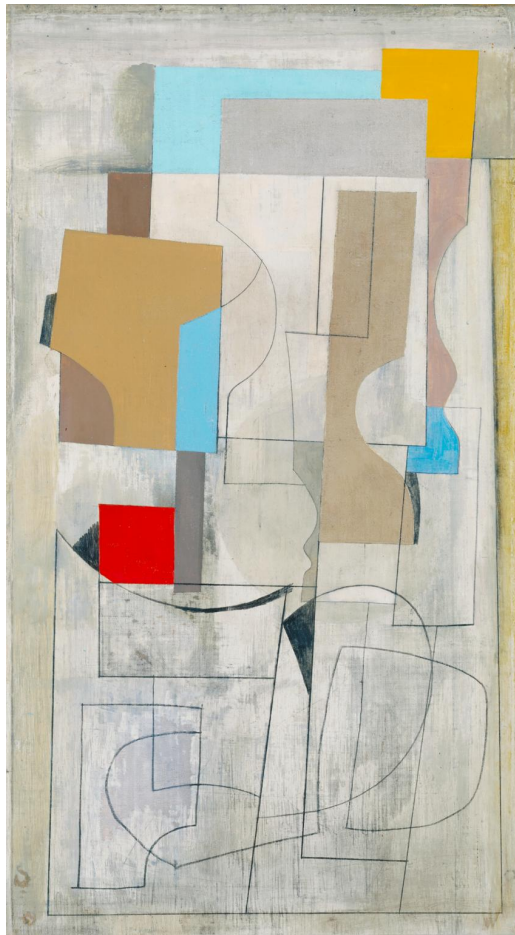
David Bomberg
Bomb Store, 1942

Hepworth's individuality, it is evident that she worked in comparative isolation. Both **Hepworth's** and **Nicholson's** art pieces do not portray negativity with reference to the traumatic war. They were both in fact fairly geographically removed, having moved purposely away from London, so they were not living in constant fear. As a result, they presented their war thoughts and ideas in a much more indirect way. This can be compared to other artists of this time, who produced pieces known to represent the uncomfortable and horrifying scenes of war. For instance, **Francis Bacon's** *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, consists of 'three pallid, isolated figures on pedestals' against 'a hot orange background in a triptych of canvases'⁸⁸. Each of their necks appear distended, they all lack limbs, and their bodies as a whole appear 'otherworldly and nightmarish'⁸⁹. This work can immediately be identified as representing the artist's horrible thoughts of the war. Another example is **David Bomberg's** *Bomb Store*, 1942, which was painted to show activities in one of the underground bomb stores constructed at sites around Britain, after he gained a commission from the War Artists Advisory Committee. Although the subject here is not as easily identifiable as **Bacon's**, one can still gain the impression that it conveys a pessimistic, gory atmosphere associated with war, through the dark colour palette and distorted composition.

Hepworth's *Landscape Sculpture*, 1944 as well as **Nicholson's** *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* contrastingly could be considered the result of idyllic existences. **Nicholson's** calming harbour landscape and his use of bright, refreshing colours portray a calming scene, the kind that would have no associations with or links to war. The works portray a kind of pure, content atmosphere. This is as opposed to one that provokes unpleasant thoughts for the viewer. It seems as though he wanted to distance himself from the war emotionally, like he had done geographically, through his painting. The only reference to war is the Union Jack in the foreground, included as a gesture to celebrate V.E. Day and the end of the war. This celebratory inclusion emphasises his positive outlook to the war. For her *Landscape Sculpture*, **Hepworth** evidently used wood, and she worked cleverly with this organic material to show the fluidity of the smoothly flowing grain. Her subject matter here, the subject matter of other sculptures she has made, and the use of natural materials all contribute to the idea of her work portraying a sense of permanence. This suggests, similar to **Nicholson**, she wished to see the positivity within this situation; she liked to dedicate her thinking to the things that will always exist, war or not.

⁸⁸ Holtham, S. (22.10.12) *Work of the Week: Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion by Francis Bacon* <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/work-week-three-studies-figures-base-crucifixion-francis-bacon> [Accessed 15.11.18]

⁸⁹ Ibid.



Ben Nicholson
Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds), 1953



Barbara Hepworth
Two Figures (Heroes), 1954

Critical Analysis 3

Introduction

The third and final pieces of art works I am going to study to compare and contrast are **Ben Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)*, 1953 and **Barbara Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)*, 1954. The years of which these paintings were produced were two to three years after **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** divorced; their marriage dissolved in October of the year 1951⁹⁰. After the deterioration of their relationship, **Hepworth** remained in St Ives and established herself there, whilst **Nicholson** moved to Switzerland with his third wife Felicitas Vogler⁹¹. However, the two art works that I have chosen to study as a final comparison are similar, and it is significant to note that at this stage their marriage had dissolved. This phase of **Nicholson's** artistic journey, he was now producing large abstract and powerfully abstracted paintings, two of which were in response to commissions⁹².

The subject matter of **Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)*, 1953, is simply an arrangement of geometrical shapes, lines, and blocks of colour. The shapes within the piece vary in terms of their shape and size. They also vary in the sense that some are solidly filled with colour and others are simply outlined with no filling, that overlap with others. This overlapping technique creates other smaller shapes within the piece, and interestingly it is the same technique that he used in his *St Rémy, Provence*. This suggests that his views as an artist may have evolved over time, evident in the way he represents his subjects that reflect possible personal, cultural, social changes, but his fundamental artistic techniques remained similar throughout his artistic journey. **Nicholson** was interested in the ways in which paintings can represent space⁹³. The shapes within the piece differ in that some have straight edges and others are curved. I believe as a combination these differences in shape work successfully together to create space. The ones that have straight edges and sharp points where the lines are adjacent to each other (quadrilaterals) are predominantly at the top. These are also generally blocked shapes. In contrast, further down the painting, the shapes have curved edges and are outlines. This can be compared to other works of

⁹⁰ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Barbara Hepworth Biography* <https://barbarahepworth.org.uk/biography/> [Accessed 12.10.18]

⁹¹ Chow, A and Roche, M (10.07.15) *The personal and professional life of Barbara Hepworth* <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/archives-behind-artist-barbara-hepworth-work/> [Accessed 12.10.18]

⁹² Lynton N. (1955) *Ben Nicholson* Place of publication: Madrid. Publisher: Galeria Jorge Mara. Pg 134 [Accessed 12.10.18]

⁹³ Tate. (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson OM 1934 (relief)* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1934-relief-t02314> [Accessed 12.10.18]



Ben Nicholson
February (contrapuntal), 1953



Close up - Barbara Hepworth
Two Figures (Heroes), 1954

Nicholson's, which were completed in the same time period. For example, *February (contrapuntal)*, 1953 and *May (Delos)*, 1954, to name a couple. The similarities are that of the composition of the pieces; they are all considerably tall, narrow and portrait. Also, they all refer back to the point I made previously about one half of the work consisting of outlined shapes, and the other half consisting of colour-filled shapes. The art that he produced in the 1950s differed to those that he produced in previous years. Comparisons can be made with his 1950s paintings, and his still life work of the year 1945. Although in his early years his art was considerably abstract based, through his artistic journey, he evidently limited his use of incorporating aspects of still life, real life objects, and instead developed his ideas through solely Abstraction and Modernism.

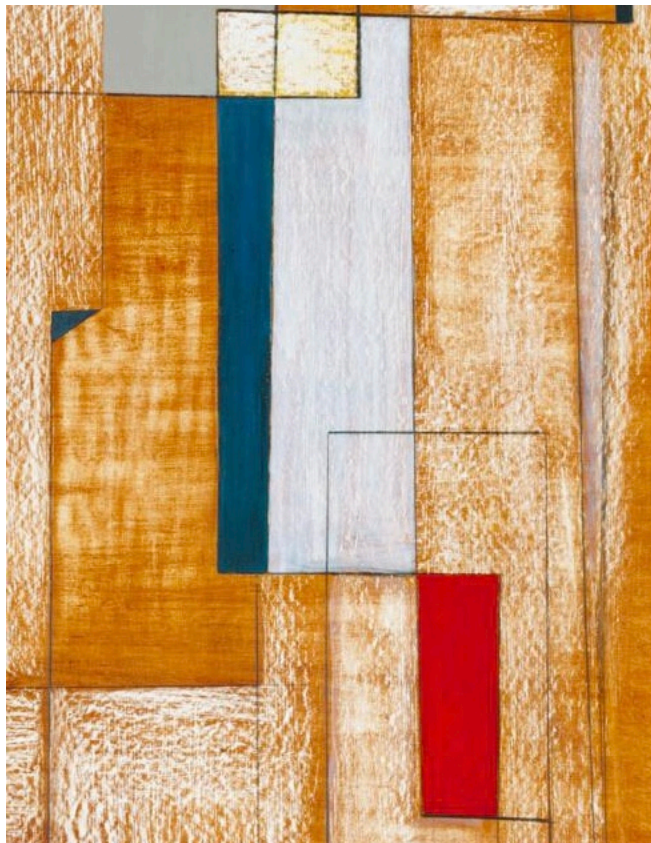
The subject matter of **Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)*, 1954 is incredibly similar to **Nicholson's**. This would undoubtedly be thought as strange, considering the pair had been separated for at least two years, and they had both moved on personally and artistically. **Hepworth** was renowned mostly for her knowledge and talent in the field of modern sculpture and is viewed as one of the greatest sculptors of the twentieth century⁹⁴, so like **Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* where links and comparisons can be made with his previous work, this can not necessarily be done for **Hepworth**. However, I decided to conduct my final comparison and analysis on the pair's work that had clear similarities, showing the influences they had on each others work. It is clear that their works are of a similar nature, however **Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)*, 1954 varies slightly. As opposed to including shapes with different formed edges (such as straight and curved) like her ex-partner had done, she only appears to have included straight edged shapes. This is only a minor variance. The majority of aspects within both pieces are ultimately very similar and complementary, one of which is the idea of overlapping the shapes, which creates smaller shapes.

Another similarity is that in **Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* there is a divide between the outlined shapes and the coloured blocked shapes. **Hepworth** also formed this division, but in a much more direct way. To the left of the piece, she has created a small section that differs from the rest. It is lighter in colour, and consists of solely overlapping, outlined shapes. The rest of the piece consists of thicker, darker lines, larger shapes, and colour blocked shapes. The title being *Two Heroes*, and the commonalities of both artists in terms of the arrangement of shapes within their pieces, suggests **Hepworth** was positively influenced by **Nicholson**. There is potential that his style of art had a significant impact on her as a result of her

⁹⁴ Anirudh (07.12.15) *Barbara Hepworth - 10 facts about the English Sculptor* <https://learnodo-newtonic.com/barbara-hepworth-facts> [Accessed 12.10.18]



Close up - Ben Nicholson
Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds), 1953



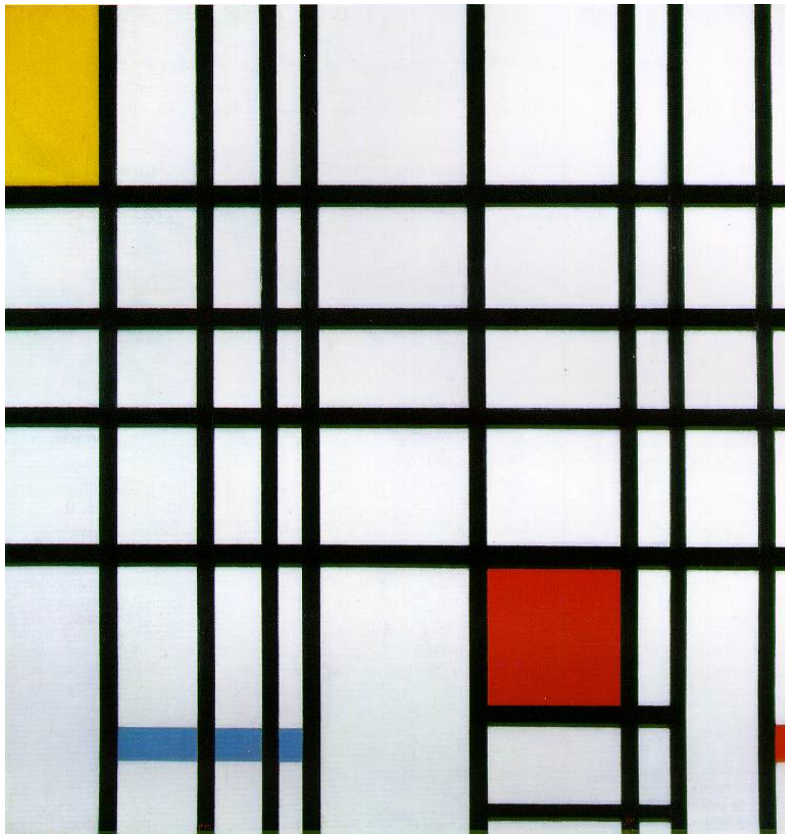
Close up - Barbara Hepworth
Two Figures (Heroes), 1954

experimenting with techniques and materials that he as an artist was very renowned for, other than sculptures which was her talent. Because of this, the smaller section to the left of the piece that is extraordinarily similar to **Nicholson's** artwork, could potentially be a tribute to him. It could represent the idea that she is thankful for what she has learned from him as an artist and what she has learnt about him as a person, and therefore wants to dedicate this piece to him in a subtle way. However, at this stage in their lives, it was unknown how they felt towards each other due to them both moving on swiftly in their lives, doing what was best for them, after their separation. Another way of interpreting the smaller piece to the left is that it could be **Hepworth** trying to prove to the viewer's that she is more accomplished than her ex-partner. The fact that this piece is the smallest part of the whole piece, could show she views **Nicholson** as inferior to her now. In addition, it could represent the certification of their separation, and their works can no longer interlink. It is almost like she has responded to his style of art, by making hers bolder, sharper and subsequently better.

Analysis

When considering how the artists have composed the work, for both of them it was the result of considerable thought. I gain the impression that they were both certain about everything they were going to include in the art works, specifically the sizes and proportions of the shapes, and the lengths and widths of the lines. It is as though there was no experimentation when composing the work like some artists do, but that their initial compositional ideas were very similar, if not exactly the same, to the final compositions of their pieces. The composition of both pieces I can analyse generally. The points that I can draw upon most likely apply for both artists, due to the extremity of the similarity of the pieces, in terms of composition.

Through the organisation of the quadrilateral shapes, both **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** have created illusion of space and depth. This is due to the overlapping of the shapes which gives the impression there are layers to the pieces, suggesting it is three dimensional on a two dimensional surface. Despite the fact that the pieces are abstract, and the idea of foregrounds, middle grounds and backgrounds are typically associated with realistic paintings, of real life objects, these elements can still be identified in both *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* and *Two Figures (Heroes)*. For *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)*, the background is the back washed surface, the grey, beige and white tones, then the middle ground and foreground are the shapes drew and painted on top of the background. There are in fact some focal points within the piece, those being the bright patches of colour, which notably are primary colours, (for example the red square, the yellow square and the blue rectangle). This use of colour can be



Piet Mondrian
Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937-42



Piet Mondrian
Glass on a Table, 1909

compared to the grid-like abstracts of **Mondrian**, whom **Nicholson** admired greatly⁹⁵. These are the aspects that draw the viewer's attention immediately, but it is the other connecting lines within the composition which ultimately help the eye of the viewer to move all around the art work.

Something similar can be said about **Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)*. She has created a backwash for the background, which is a brown/orange tone, then the middle ground and foreground are the shapes drawn and painted on top of. Complementary to **Nicholson's**, **Hepworth** has included the occasional block of colour (for example the red, grey and blue quadrilaterals). These again act as focal points, and like **Nicholson's**, the lines within the piece help to lead the viewer's eye all over the work, encouraging them to look and appreciate all aspects. **Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* is oil paint on canvas and its dimensions are 756 x 419 mm⁹⁶. **Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)* is oil paint and graphite on hardboard, with dimensions of 1850 x 1220 mm. Based on these numerical figures, **Hepworth's** piece is bigger than **Nicholson's**. This could be due to reasons such as **Nicholson's** attention to detail with regards to the accuracy of the proportions of his subject matter. Another reason could be **Hepworth** was very much used to working on large scales because of her sculptures.

The styles of both of these works are abstract, and without the knowledge behind what the artists were initially inspired by to create the pieces, there is a lack of certainty as to what the subject is based upon. Considering the level of detail and accuracy of both art works, there is the possibility that a ruler was used to achieve the precision. Oil paint is a wet media which immediately suggests it can be applied smoothly, especially for blocks of colour and for backwashes. It also would have allowed the artists to experiment with their colour choices, because of the ability to combine colours to achieve the colour intended.

Context

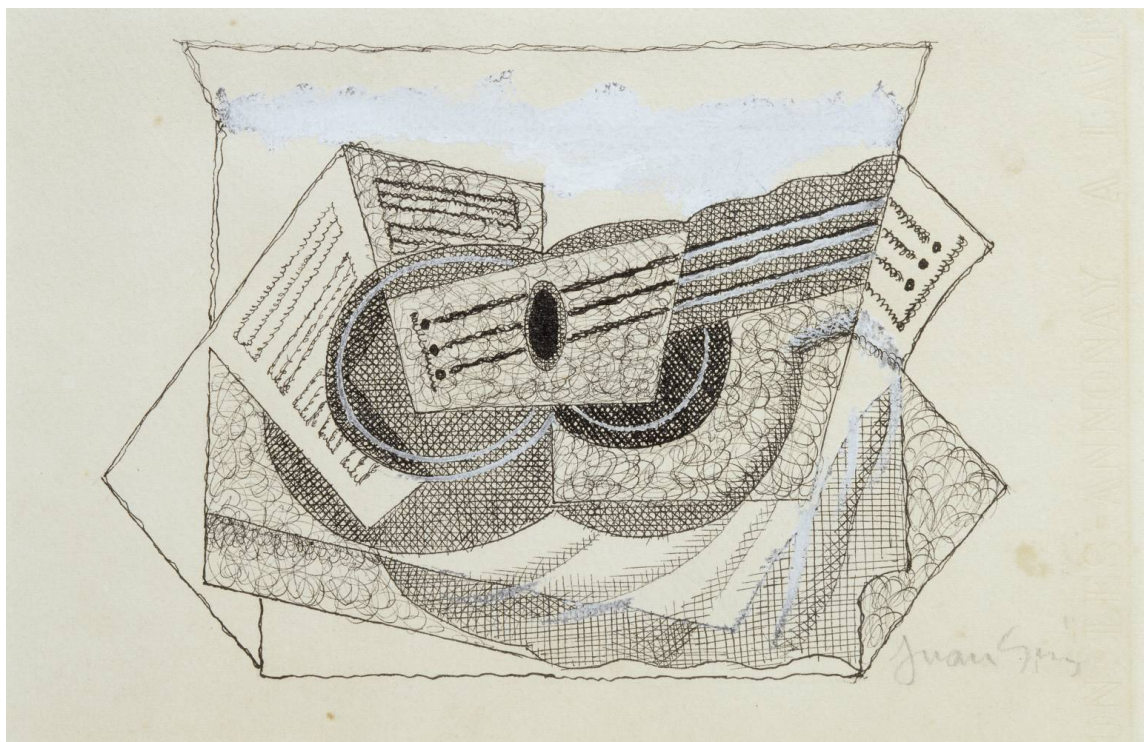
The works of **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** of this period can be identified and certified as Cubism. 'Cubism was a revolutionary new approach to representing reality invented in around 1907–08 by **Pablo Picasso** and **Georges Braque**. They brought different views of subjects (usually objects or figures) together in the same picture, resulting in paintings that appear fragmented and

⁹⁵ Tate Shop. (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson OM Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds) 1953* <https://shop.tate.org.uk/nicholson-feb-28-53-vertical-seconds/bennic1501.html?cgid=still-life-prints> [Accessed 23.10.18]

⁹⁶ Ibid.



Paul Cézanne
Lake at Annecy, 1896



Juan Gris
Guitar and Music Book, 1923

abstracted⁹⁷. Only some parts of this traditional definition of Cubism refer to **Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* and **Hepworth's** *Two Figures (Heroes)*. Moreover, their subjects are evidently not objects nor figures (despite the title of **Hepworth's** being exactly that). Cubism is considered to have begun in 1907, and these art works were produced in the years 1953 and 1954. Due to the art works being produced much later than the time Cubism was new and popular, and that some elements arguably do not relate to the traditional definition, I think it is fair to say the artists have used Cubism, but they have given their own interpretation of it. They have taken the fundamental basics and techniques of Cubism, but added unique qualities to their work, nevertheless, still allowing them to be categorised as Cubism.

It was an essential movement in the development of Modern Art, stemming from **Cézanne's** Post-Impressionist landscapes and leading towards the Abstraction work of **Mondrian**. The fundamental basics and techniques can be referred to in **Cézanne's** *Lake at Annecy*, 1896. Put simply, he wanted to 'achieve a solid structure and harmonious composition', and the scene of a lakeside has been broken down into blocks of colour, 'balancing lights and darks'⁹⁸. Essentially, this is what **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** have done, without representing a real-life scene. Their art works have been divided into Analytical Cubism, which incorporates a reduced colour palette and multi-viewpoints, such as the faded, colour washed background. The works are also representations of Synthetic Cubism, 'a later phase of Cubism'⁹⁹, which incorporates simpler, flatter shapes, and brighter colours. Evidently, the works owe much to Cubism, but they also have links to De Stijl, which was 'a circle of Dutch abstract artists who promoted a style of art based on strict geometry of horizontals and verticals'¹⁰⁰.

Nicholson's and **Hepworth's** pieces can also be compared with the work of **Gris**, who 'first began to paint in a Cubist manner in 1912'¹⁰¹. His influences were interestingly his close friends, **Picasso** and **Braque**, the two remaining most influential Cubist artists. **Gris** 'quickly progressed through Analytical Cubism with its faceted forms and shifting perspectives', to Synthetic Cubism, using overlapping flat planes of colour and texture. Other similarities can be seen between his *Guitar and Music Book*, 1923 and **Nicholson's** and **Hepworth's** art works. In particular, the perception of

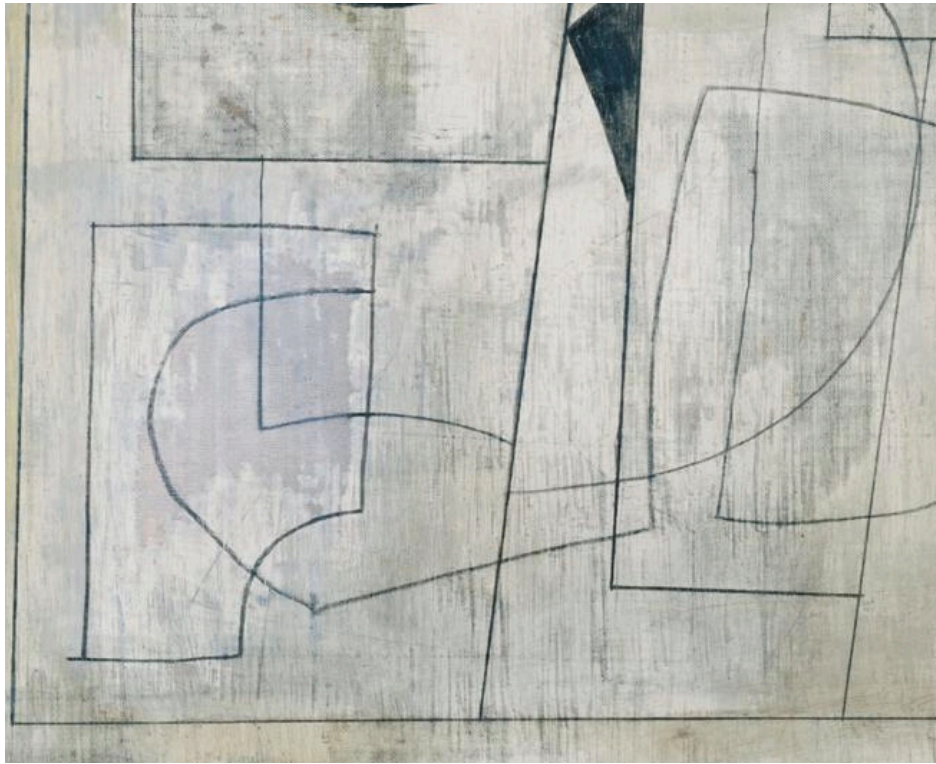
⁹⁷ Tate. (n.d.) *Cubism* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism> [Accessed 18.11.18]

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⁹⁹ Tate. (n.d.) *Synthstic Cubism* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/synthetic-cubism> [Accessed 20.11.18]

¹⁰⁰ Tate. (n.d.) *De Stijl* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/de-stijl> [Accessed 20.11.18]

¹⁰¹ Mundy, J. (22.05.04) *Cubism and It's Legacy: The Gift of Gustav and Elly Kahnweiler Summer* Place of publication: unknown. Publisher: Tate Publishing. Pg 36 [Accessed 20.11.18]



Close up - Ben Nicholson
Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds), 1953



Close up - Barbara Hepworth
Two Figures (Heroes), 1954

texture. **Gris** used ink as the media for this piece, but applied it using certain motions within his arm/hand, creating small overlapping spirals, thus making the art look textured. Also, the backdrop of **Nicholson's** and **Hepworth's** do not consist of one colour. The backwashed backgrounds incorporate a variety of colours to make the piece look textured, and the particular brush strokes appear to have been done in a back and forth horizontal motion. This emphasises the idea that the specific techniques and colours used when applying the media relate to **Gris**, clearly an artist who they were influenced by. Although the artists may not have used materials or specific painting techniques to make the surface look textured/raised, they each had particular painting techniques and methods of applying the media, resulting in the the works being perceived as textured.



**My own drawing based upon Barbara Hepworth's sculptures
Mixed media; graphite, ink, acrylic paint**



**My own drawing based upon Barbara Hepworth's sculptures
Mixed media; graphite, ink, acrylic paint**

Links to my work

Studying the work of the artists **Ben Nicholson** and **Barbara Hepworth** had a profound effect on my own art work, and as well has increased my passion for abstract art. Although the nature of their art and the way they execute their ideas differs, for example, **Nicholson** preferred painting and **Hepworth** was predominantly a sculptor, it was important that when analysing their work I considered all points, whether they referred to sculpting or painting. Despite the purpose of my study being the exploration of how their relationship influenced their art, I analysed their artistic techniques and ideas, simply to influence my own work. The most significant links between these artists work and mine, are the initial inspiration of St Ives, but also the abstract genre; how abstract art can develop from representational starting points.

For many of **Ben Nicholson's** and **Barbara Hepworth's** art works, the original subject matter is indecipherable. However, it is known that they were very much influenced by the landscape, their surroundings, and any particular feelings they felt at the time of producing the work. For example, **Hepworth's** *Landscape Sculpture*, 1944, says it in the title, with the strings representing potential feelings of tension. Also **Nicholson's** *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)*, which is clearly a representation of a stereo-typical St Ives landscape which used a calm colour palette conveying the admired Cornish light. On my visit to St Ives, it was important that I took in my surroundings, gaining a genuine feel for the peaceful location that **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** migrated to at the outbreak of the war. It was essential that the photographs I took depicted the ways that the artists too would have seen and experienced St Ives, so that when I used them for practical work, there was an identifiable link.

I studied **Ben Nicholson** early on in my abstract artistic journey, amongst **Terry Frost** and **Wilhelmina Barns-Graham**. I discovered that it was particularly **Nicholson's** compositions and the way in which he organised and layered the shapes within his work that I wanted to use as inspiration. It was predominantly his *Feb* series that influenced my own studies. I liked the wash-like backdrops he created for himself, of which he worked on top of, simply drawing and painting shapes, forms and lines. I used this same inspired approach, whilst focusing on similar limited colour palettes as him, but I developed my ideas further by incorporating collage materials and texture.

Progressing through my artistic journey, the fundamental subjects of my works became strong use of shapes and lines. When I visited the **Barbara Hepworth** Museum and Sculpture Garden, I quickly found I was drawn to her sculptures with circular forms. In particular, her *Two Forms (Divided Circle)*, 1969 and *Spring*, 1966. It was also her ideas of pierced forms, inside and out and



**My own collage/drawing inspired by Ben Nicholson's *Feb* series
Mixed media; collage, ink, acrylic paint**



**My own painting inspired by Nicholson, Hepworth and other abstract artists
Mixed media; acrylic paint, oil paint and oil pastels**

views though that I found inspiring. Although I did not produce any sculptures in her style, I thoroughly analysed my favourite sculptures of hers that presented interesting and bold shapes, and produced practical work from the photographs I took of the sculptures. The circular formed sculptures predominantly have hollow aspects, sometimes straight through to the other side and sometimes with intersecting materials, such as string or wire. As I increased the scale of my work, I developed my abstract ideas. From focusing on mainly using straight edged shapes with relatively precise and defined lines (inspired by **Nicholson's** *Feb* series), I began incorporating curved, rounded shapes and lines which added volume and dynamic to my work. I also used the method of overlapping which was made easier using mixed media. Using a range of completely formed shapes as opposed to only lines enabled me to layer the shapes on top of one another, which created perspective and depth. It was important to me that I still had **Nicholson's** precise compositions in mind, but I now started to consider the idea of 'views through', through the technique of layering, using the idea of illusion of depth. Thus I used **Hepworth's** sculptures as predominant inspiration and subject matter.

My own work demonstrates qualities I have learnt from both **Nicholson** and **Hepworth**, and shows that I have not only used similar artistic techniques to them, but I have used *St Ives*, its subject matter and its light in particular, as initial inspiration like the two artists similarly did.



Tirzah Harwood and Eric Ravilious



The Royal West of England Academy in Bristol

Conclusion

My Personal Study was based on the relationship between **Ben Nicholson** and **Barbara Hepworth** for a variety of reasons. Firstly, since finding a passion for abstract art, **Ben Nicholson** was one of my first inspirations. Not long after, I analysed the work of **Barbara Hepworth** whose work I was also influenced by, despite the fact she produced sculptures as opposed to drawings or paintings. I admire both of the artists' work for different reasons, so when discovering that **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** had once been married, this fuelled me with excitement to find out more about their relationship. In particular, I wanted to explore how their love for each other may have effected their working practices. However, this investigation was difficult in terms of accuracy. For each analysis, I only compared and contrasted one of each of their works produced each year. The decision to analyse certain art works was made if I found an immediate link or distinct contrast. My study could have the potential to be more accurate if I compared and contrasted more than two pieces of work for each year, as there may be more similarities and differences, making my study less biased.

The first piece of research I undertook involved visiting the RWA In Relation: 'Nine Couples who Transformed Modern British Art' exhibition, at The Royal West of England Academy in Bristol. This provided me with knowledge about a variety of artists as couples such as **Tirzah Garwood** and **Eric Ravillious**, and **Vanessa Bell** and **Duncan Grant**, but most significantly **Nicholson** and **Hepworth**. Having analysed their work in projects prior to this exhibition visit, I felt more strongly and passionate about researching into their relationship as opposed to any of the other artist couples. With regards to books, there were many that helped with my research. These include Norbert Lynton's *Ben Nicholson*, A.M. Hammacher's *Barbara Hepworth* and the Tate's *Tate Gallery St Ives, An Illustrated Companion*. They were all useful for different reasons, but each provided me with sufficient knowledge. The Tate's books were useful for gaining a better understanding of art history generally in the location of St Ives, and the importance of Cornwall within Art History, and Lynton's *Ben Nicholson* was strategically written in decades (such as 1930s: London, 1940s: Carbis Bay etc), which positively supported my research and analysis. On top of visiting exhibitions and reading books, there were many websites that contained relevant information that also helped me with producing this study.

The first realisation was that both artists were successful and talented, often having the same initial inspirations and influences, for example when they lived in St Ives, but the art work they produced was distinctly different. This goes to show that despite their relationship being intense, they focused on their own artistic ways and kept their individuality. However, interestingly, when they were no longer married, they produced works that were incredibly similar. This is not to say



Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth

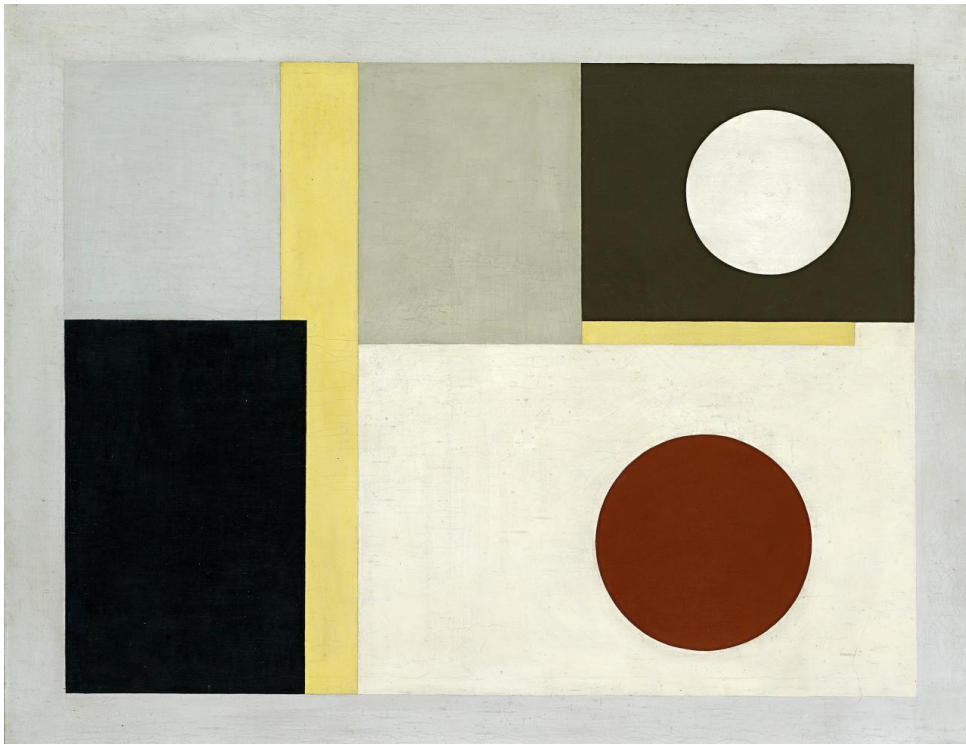


St Ives landscape

Hepworth stopped producing her own, unique sculptures. Another thing that I have learned is that **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** were both fascinated with the representation of love, particularly earlier on in their relationship. For example, in **Nicholson's** *St Rémy, Provence* where he painted him and his lover, and also in **Hepworth's** *Mother and Child* which represents a loving mother and child relationship. It has subsequently lead me to understand that even if their works differ greatly, inspirations can be in a similar vein. The complementary theme of love within their pieces is proof that the feelings they feel for each other are the same, and it is that that influences their art (amongst other themes), and not each other's physical techniques or artistic compositions.

There are significant differences between their works over the three decades. One of the main contrasts is the nature of their works; **Nicholson** was predominantly a painter whereas **Hepworth** was renowned for working in three dimensions. The aesthetics of their art works are evidently different as a result of their artistic techniques being very contrasting. When sculpting, **Hepworth** would have had to consider the properties of the materials she was using, as well as having to understand how the natural force of gravity would affect her sculptures. **Nicholson**, on the other hand, was probably more concerned about his colour choices and ensuring that his compositions were effective, considering he often worked on a two-dimensional surface. In unison, their 1930s works consist of identifiable, representational feelings/subjects, such as love, whereas with their later 1950s work, it is harder to see/understand the artists' intentions. For example **Nicholson's** *1943-45 (St Ives, Cornwall)* represents a landscape, which can be compared to his *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* which is solely abstract. The colours that they incorporated within each of their art works differ. It appears that over time, the artists gained more confidence with their choices of colour. **Hepworth's** 1930s *Mother and Child* sculpture is very plain and simplistic in colour due to the use of the natural stone. Her 1940s sculptures she began introducing colour, evident in her *Sculpture with Colour (Deep Blue and Red)*, 1940, and then in her *Two Figures (Heroes)* painting she expanded her colour palette. This is evidence that the way **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** executed their ideas evolved over time, mostly in parallel with the changing of their artistic ideas.

I have gained the understanding that there are reoccurring themes throughout the oeuvres of **Nicholson** and **Hepworth**. The most significant, identifiable one is the theme of love. Although this is much more evident in their early works of 1930s - the subjects are considerably more representational - their later works still owe much to this theme, despite it being much more subtle and underlying. For example, both artists produced pieces that are associated with the landscape of St Ives in 1940. There is clearly no evidence of the feeling of love within the pieces, nevertheless, they both fell in love with the area. The fact that the theme that stands out the most is love, supports my study. The purpose of my study was to evaluate the extent that **Nicholson's** and **Hepworth's** relationship had on their practices. Through my analysis, there is evidence that



Ben Nicholson
1938



Barbara Hepworth
***Pelagos*, 1946**

they had personal impacts on each other, but in conclusion, I can see that the broad feeling of love has vastly impacted on their work, and not just their own, individual romance. This has conclusively made me see that basic human relationships and the feeling of love can be the foundation of great art.

In terms of the context, both **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** worked in environments that were inspirational and influential, and also close to them emotionally, for instance St Ives, Cornwall. Throughout their oeuvres, they explored a variety of art movements ranging from Neo-Classicism, to Modernism, to Cubism. It can now be said that **Nicholson** is valued mostly for his Abstract art and his Modernistic aspects as opposed to his partly figurative landscapes and still-lives. **Hepworth** distinguished herself as a world-recognised sculptor and was essentially responsible for the shift of three dimensional art into greater Abstraction. The significance though, is that as far as my study is concerned, they briefly say/show how their relationship fits into the context of their lives. Conclusively, the time that they were working together was harmonious, and that they were able to feed off each other's creativity.

This study has enabled me to think about ways that human feelings and relationships impact people's lives. It has also made me realise that it can be felt for anything and expressed in any way. **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** felt the feeling of love many times throughout their lives. The most general, obvious one is the undeniable feelings they had for each other in the time that they were together. Also, their unconditional love they felt for their children, and their strong feelings for particular landscapes; all of which they portrayed through their art. They would have felt a range of other feelings also. These could have been pride, guilt, worry, to name a few. Artists are creative people, so it was most likely easy for **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** to express these feelings without difficulty. After all, art is simply a means of communication, which **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** clearly found easy. In contrast to this day and age, people often do not realise they can express their feelings through so much more than just words. I believe that it is important that people understand the importance of the feelings and emotions they may feel, and that everyone can have their own individual way of expressing it. Putting feelings into words can sometimes be difficult, but just because one may not always be able to explain it in concrete terms, does not mean it is not real or important. Expressing feelings should be more part of today's society, and I fundamentally believe people should take **Nicholson** and **Hepworth** as examples. Their expressions may not be identifiable in their art works, but they have chosen their own way of expressing their emotions, and it is vital that people grow to know their personal ways of doing so with their own feelings.

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