



Hepworth, Dorothy (1898-1978), and Patricia Preece (1900-1971)

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British artist Dorothy Hepworth may have produced most of the art sold under the name of her partner and collaborator Patricia Preece, which received major attention between the World Wars.

The two women met while they were students at the Slade School of Art in London in 1917. They shared a studio in London until 1921, when they moved to Paris to study, Hepworth at Colarossi's studio and Preece at the more experimental André L'hôte.

The two women returned to England in 1925 and became part of the Bloomsbury circle. Hepworth was diffident, retiring, and mannish in her style of dress. In contrast, Preece was fashionable, attractive, and social.

Although they signed all of their paintings with Patricia Preece's name, Hepworth may have produced most of the art. Because of Hepworth's diffidence, Preece dealt with the public and with art galleries and dealers.

The couple had some fear of being known as lesbians and, at times, claimed to be sisters. Preece was known to refer to herself as "née Hepworth."

In 1927, for Hepworth's health, they settled in Cookham on Thames, Berkshire, England, a country village where, with Hepworth's father's help, they purchased a house. Hepworth's father sent monthly checks to supplement the women's meager income; however, on his death in November 1930, it was learned that he had lost his fortune in the stock market crash of 1929. Hepworth's mother struggled to help the couple keep up the mortgage payments on their home.

In 1929, Hepworth and Preece met Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), a painter who had also studied at the Slade and who lived with his wife and two daughters in Cookham. In the early 1930s, Spencer developed an obsessive passion for Preece, who frequently modeled for him in the nude.

Spencer went into debt giving Preece money, clothing, and jewelry. His wife separated from him in 1934 and divorced him in 1937. Spencer then married Preece, but when he attempted to consummate the marriage, Preece immediately fled to Hepworth. Although Spencer and Preece never lived together as man and wife, they never divorced.

Hepworth and Preece's work received major attention between the World Wars. Exhibiting under Preece's name, they showed at Dorothy Warren's gallery, London, in 1928. In 1936, they exhibited at the Lefevre Gallery, London, with a catalogue introduced by the gay male painter Duncan Grant, a central figure in the Bloomsbury group. The catalogue for their 1938 exhibition at the Leger Galleries, London, was introduced by Clive Bell, Virginia Woolf's brother-in-law.

Two of their major shows took place the year before and the year after Preece married Spencer in 1937.

Following this flurry of activity, the women virtually disappeared from the art scene, though Hepworth lived 40 more years and Preece 33.

In 1991, a posthumous exhibit of their paintings and drawings was held at the Bloomsbury Workshop, London.

Hepworth and Preece's art is almost unknown today, although a quite beautiful, undated drawing of Preece by Hepworth was published in Emmanuel Cooper's *The Sexual Perspective* (1974). The women have entered history primarily because of Preece's relationship with the much better known Spencer.

Although in this relationship Preece is sometimes portrayed as a con artist taking advantage of a naive and infatuated artist, the truth of the matter is undoubtedly more complicated.

Hepworth and Preece are of great significance to gay and lesbian art history because of their long-lasting relationship and because of the ways they used their personal strengths to create a public life together. Collaborators in life, the women are fittingly buried together.

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About the Author

Tee A. Corinne was a photographer and writer. Her articles about lesbian art and artists appeared in numerous journals and encyclopedias. Her books include *The Cunt Coloring Book*, *Yantras of Womanlove*, *Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex*, *Courting Pleasure*, and *Intimacies*. She was the editor of *FABB: The Feminist Art Books Bulletin*, co-editor of the *Queer Caucus for Art Newsletter*, and member of the editorial advisory board of www.glbtc.com.