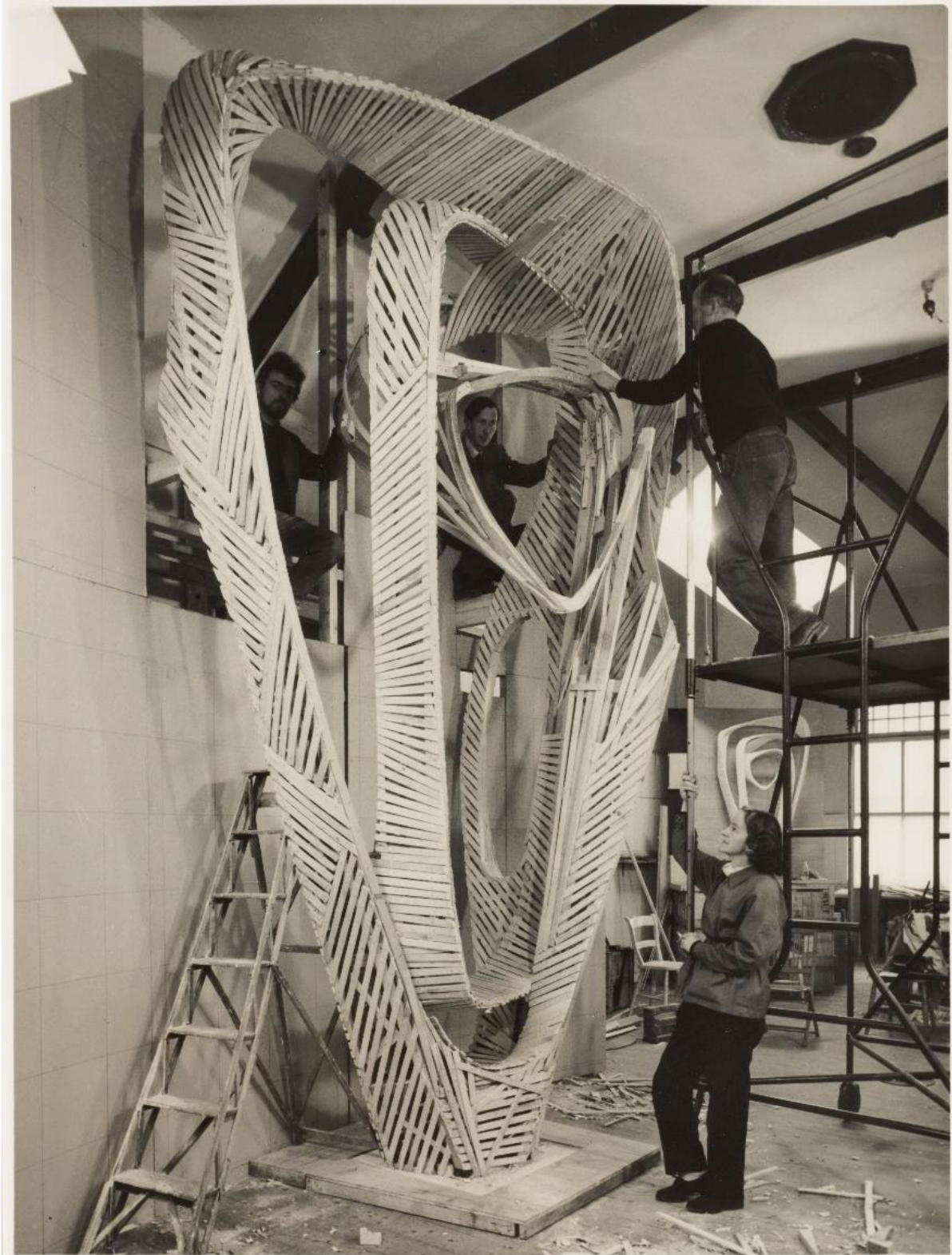


HEPWORTH AND THE *TACHE*: DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS 1957-58

Stephen Feeke, Curator and Art Historian

In 1956, Barbara Hepworth made the decision to start re-using metal for her sculpture, a medium which she had not used since her juvenilia of the 1920s. First she began utilizing sheet materials, such as copper and brass, before concentrating on bronze which subsequently became a significant aspect of her output for the next nineteen years. The advent of Hepworth's own 'bronze age' represented a seismic shift in her practice and she not only developed new techniques for making sculpture but also transformed the way in which she painted and drew. Hepworth used terms like 'painting' and 'drawing' quite indiscriminately throughout her career; largely, but not exclusively so, the new style of drawings she started making in 1957 were ink on paper, whilst her paintings were often on prepared hardboard and have a more finished appearance. The stylistic changes she adopted in both two and three dimensions owed much to her interest in Tachisme, and its influence arguably found most conspicuous form in Hepworth's first public commission, the monumental bronze *Meridian, Sculpture for State House* (BH 250), 1958-60, as well as the series of drawings and paintings most closely associated with it. It may sometimes feel as if painting and drawing were tangential to Hepworth's main practice and that they still exist in the kind of 'critical limbo' Alan Bowness identified in 1966.¹ Working in two-dimensions, however, was fundamental to her: 'When I start drawing and painting abstract forms I am really exploring new forms, hollows, and tensions which will lead me where I need to go'. Indeed, she regularly described in her published texts the intersection of her different, parallel practices which I shall discuss in due course. What also follows is a sometimes more venturesome thesis which aims to reconsider a particular group of works and the factors which may have contributed to their manufacture.

Having committed to using different metals with considerable success, Hepworth initially appeared to enjoy an exhilarating period of increased activity; casting – though not without its difficulties – proved comparatively quicker than labour-intensive carving.² However, only a year later, the headway Hepworth had made with bronze slowed down and only eight new works emerged in 1957 (compared to twenty-three sculptures in the previous year). It is possible Hepworth had found the transition in her practice more difficult than she had expected; after all, the use of metals had meant a total change in the ways she both conceived and made sculpture – a practice she had honed over the previous thirty years – and it was not without considerable risk to her status and her career. However, another possible reason for this deceleration is found in Hepworth's personal life and is evidenced by her private correspondence.



Barbara Hepworth with the second stage of the construction of the prototype for *Meridian* together with her assistants, Brian Wall (left), and probably Keith Leonard and Dicon Nance, January 1959. Photograph by Studio St Ives. © Bowness

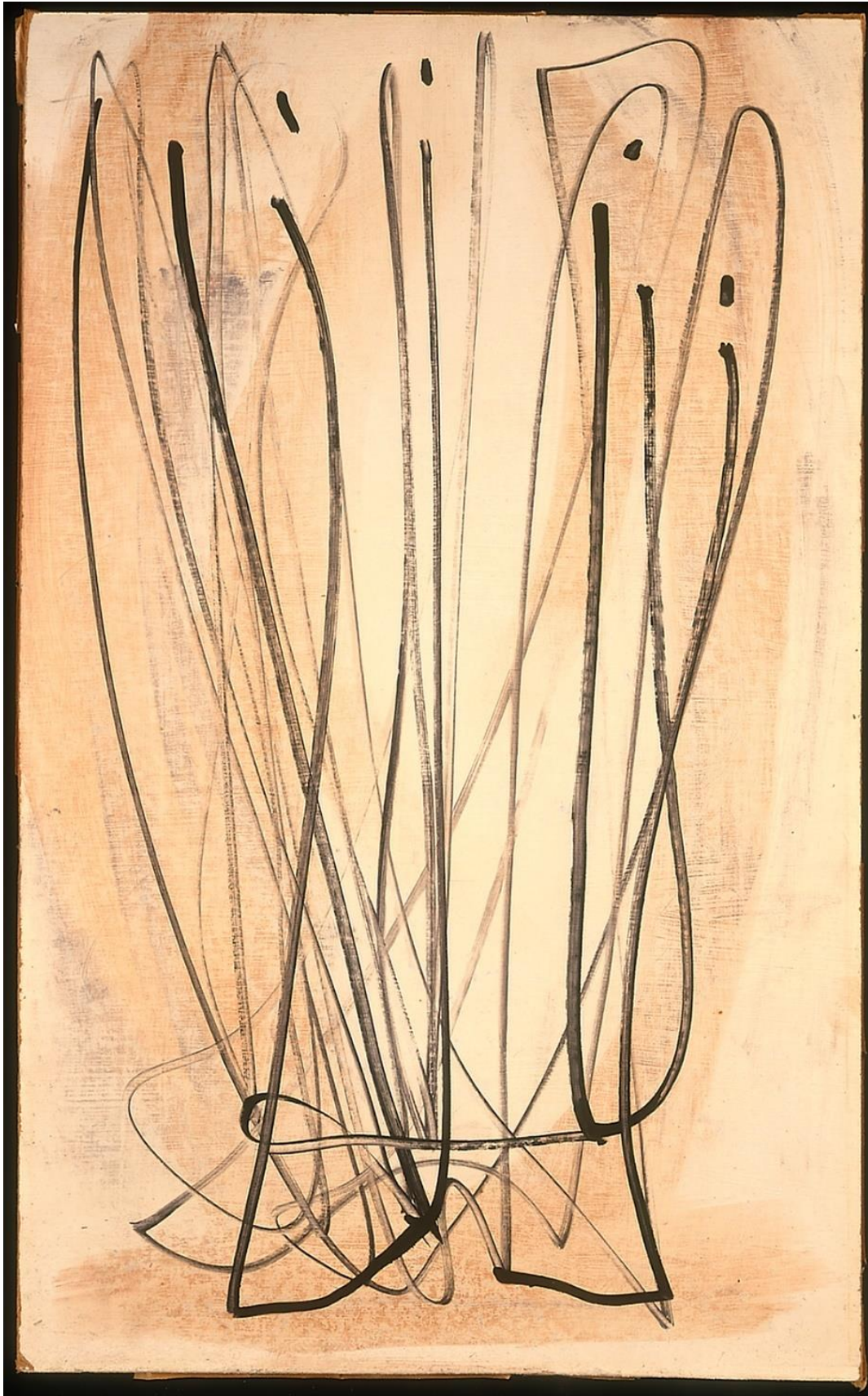
In the voluminous quantity of her letters, Hepworth regularly described the efforts necessary to maintain her career, and likewise recent commentators have ‘totted up anew’ her determination to balance work and life within a psychoanalytical and feminist framework.³ The private correspondence, however, also provides frank accounts of the caesurae, when a variety of different circumstances rendered it impracticable to work or when Hepworth felt physically or psychologically incapable: ‘the dilemma of a woman sculptor’, she wrote to her friend and confidante Margaret Gardiner when she was in her early forties, ‘that at a time when my ideas & conceptions are maturing & forceful I begin to feel less physically strong’.⁴ The circumstances which increasingly conspired against Hepworth’s ability to work – motherhood, ageing, illnesses, deaths etc. – were regularly discussed with Gardiner, alongside shared views on art, politics and world events; these are amongst her most intimate letters and conjure an indelible image of the human being behind the artist’s public persona.⁵

By the late 1940s, the relationship between Hepworth and her husband Ben Nicholson had begun to deteriorate and they divorced in 1951. Accordingly, it has been noted, the human interactions Hepworth regularly explored in her work accrued additional poignancy – most notably in paintings such as *Family Group – Earth Red and Yellow*, 1953 – as her own familial relationships entered a state of flux.⁶ There followed periods of reconciliation between the couple, but in July 1957 Nicholson married Felicitas Vogler and they later left St. Ives. In September of that year, Hepworth wrote to Jim Ede and referred to Nicholson’s re-marriage and her own state of mind: ‘It has been a difficult time. Worse than I even feared. Repercussions & reactions everywhere’.⁷ By the December, she also confessed to Ede that she had been ill and that events had been a terrible strain on her. When she wrote to Ede again in January 1958, shortly after her father had died, Hepworth admitted: ‘altogether things have been very difficult and I have not done any work... forgive this letter – I have really been so terribly sad & physically at zero’.⁸

Work usually provided Hepworth with solace and stability. When one of her daughters was seriously ill, for instance, Hepworth felt an urgency to carve, to make ‘some beautiful object’ as the only way to ‘help’ alleviate an awful situation, and this impulse, Hepworth noted, had ‘happened again and again’.⁹ Instead of focussing on sculpture, however, in the late 1950s she undertook an extended period of drawing and painting, making nearly double those from the previous two years. Whilst Hepworth regularly made two-dimensional works in similar bursts of activity, the quantity and appearance of those which emerged in 1957 were quite unlike any others Hepworth made before or after and are, I feel, to be regarded as significant works in their own right as well as assisting Hepworth re-conceptualize form as she



The Seed (Project for Metal Sculpture) 1957
Ink on paper
Wakefield Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield)



Project (Spring Morning) 1957
Oil on board
Wakefield Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield)

made the transition from carving to casting. I shall also argue that they synthesise a number of Hepworth's concurrent interests from that period, not least the workings of the unconscious mind in relation to making work.

The Seed (Project for Metal Sculpture), 1957, was one of the series of drawings in black ink (and sometimes thinned oil paint) Hepworth made in the period around 1957-58, and which are united by a distinct calligraphic appearance. For these, Hepworth often applied the medium to paper with a brush or a pen and occasionally a combination of the two.¹⁰ She also used gesso-prepared boards, first treated with household paint, often scoring the smooth surface to create 'bite' before applying pigment. It has been suggested that she may have also used a hollow implement like a straw for some of these works.¹¹ However, I suspect she may have utilized a bamboo cane since it is the right diameter to leave the parallel lines evident in such drawings and paintings as *Project (Spring Morning)*, [*Spring, 1957 \(Project for Sculpture\) 1957*](#) and [*Périgord 1958*](#). A hollow cane has a suitable length, strength and flexibility, and presumably there were numerous canes in Hepworth's garden at Trewyn, since she also used them to draw the outlines for forms on large blocks prior to carving and they were used to build temporary shelters for working outdoors.¹² Whilst Hepworth was known to use a traditional easel for painting and drawing, she may also have utilised a flat surface like a table top.¹³ Presumably, standing above the paper or board provided the physical distance from the support, allowing Hepworth to apply pigment with a suitably physical and fluid flourish, loading the bamboo cane or other implement with ink or paint, and turning the paper or board for each successive stroke.

Looking at the resultant works today, each has a spontaneous-looking, gestural freedom and one has a great sense of the physical act of drawing and the rhythmic application of paint. Hepworth was frequently eloquent on the physical rhythm (not strength) required for stone carving; it is unsurprising perhaps that an artist accustomed to the act of carving adopted a similarly physical and rhythmic way of drawing and painting. She often repeated the same black 'tache' in these works: a simple plant-like form comprising looping lines, which is narrow at the base, and appears to grow upwards and broadening outwards. Whilst Hepworth regularly explored specific forms and themes in her drawings and paintings – her depictions of hospital operations say, or her use of crystalline or geometric forms – many of the tachiste-style works are almost identical. The consistent and repeated use of this single leitmotif is therefore more unusual within Hepworth's two-dimensional oeuvre and it can, as we shall see, be linked directly to her subsequent bronze sculptures. Other paintings from this period, however, are quite different and works such as *Night Forms*, *Fantasie (Black and Grey)* and *Two Forms (Blue)* seem entirely like exercises in the possibilities of paint.



Fantasie (Black and Grey) 1958
Oil on board
Private Collection

Typically, the drawings and paintings Hepworth started making in 1957 are understood to illustrate her ambitions for an increased scale, openness and complexity of form in three dimensions that would, in theory, only be possible in metal – and not in stone or wood – and which ultimately found form in her monumental sculpture *Meridian, Sculpture for State House* (BH 250), 1958-60.¹⁴ Indeed, as Alan Bowness has described, they only made sense once they had been

translated into the bronze. Prior to that, however, their unprecedented expressive informality seemed 'totally unrelated to everything that had gone before and a contradiction of much that the artist stood for'.¹⁵



Meridian, Sculpture for State House (BH 250), High Holborn, London, 1960

Originally commissioned for State House, High Holborn, London, *Meridian* was Hepworth's first major public sculpture in bronze and, at 4.6 metres, it was her then largest work to date. The sculpture was sold when the building was demolished in 1990 and it is now in the Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at the PepsiCo headquarters, Purchase, New York State. It is a unique bronze but there are smaller versions regarded as intermediary stages towards the monumental sculpture and yet also independent of it. These include *Maquette for State House (Meridian)* (BH 245), *Garden Sculpture (Model for Meridian)* (BH 246) and *Maquette (Variation on a Theme)* (BH 247) all made in 1958.¹⁶ The basic V-shaped form which characterise these sculptures is found in the 'growing form' in the drawings and paintings which precede them. The 'V' also characterises other early bronzes including: *Torso I (Ulysses)* (BH 233), 1958; *Torso II (Torcello)* (BH 234), 1958; *Torso III (Galatea)* (BH 235), 1958; and *Figure (Archean)* (BH 263), 1959 amongst others. Arguably, more

complex variations are also found in *Ascending Form (Gloria)* (BH 239), 1958 and *Cantate Domino* (BH 244), 1958.

In addition, these works on paper and board are often linked to Hepworth's interest in Tachisme – not least, as we shall see, by Hepworth herself – because of the lyrical and expressive use of speedily-applied materials that characterise the drawings and paintings at this point.¹⁷ There has been little or no discussion, however, as to why Hepworth alights on Tachisme in 1957, the actual extent of her interest, or indeed why the same 'tache' appears so often. Hence, the reference to Tachisme can seem like simple shorthand, used to differentiate those works Hepworth made around 1957-58 from the planar 'cubist' structure of her drawings which immediately precede them. Before further analysis here, it will be useful to consider what the particular British manifestation of Tachisme was, since its influence did not endure here having been superseded by Abstract Expressionism from America, 'a movement with which it shared many stylistic similarities'.¹⁸

In Paris in the 1940s, a 'new' style of painting started to emerge amongst a disparate group of artists associated with the École de Paris, who were linked loosely by the freely expressive ways in which they applied their paint. In 1951, the term Tachisme was first coined to describe this phenomenon; *tache*, from French, meaning a stain, spot, blob, blur or patch.¹⁹ After World War II, the fledgling British art world still looked to Paris for inspiration, and it found in Tachisme an apparently intuitive, impulsive approach to art making with no dogma, manifesto or strict affiliations, which promised a fresh alternative to geometric abstraction.²⁰ After World War II, such so-called rational systems of thought had become tainted with negative connotations of pre-war, ostensibly fascistic, cultural values. Part of the appeal Tachisme had for British artists was therefore that it offered an escape from the trauma of the recent past. It represented a new freedom and form of expression, without a dominant apologist, manifesto or ideology, and this chimed with the initial optimism of the post-war age.²¹

Hepworth situated herself within recent developments in painting in December 1956, when she wrote to Herbert Read stating that 'I belong to the present – apart from Ben's ptg it is Sam Francis, Soulage [sic] etc who move me most'.²² Despite the geographical remoteness of St Ives, Hepworth kept herself very well informed; she was often in London and, at this stage, travelled further afield for work before ill-health and age rendered her reluctant and sometimes incapable of making trips. Certainly, she would have easily known that a number of artists associated with Tachisme showed at the gallery Gimpel Fils – Hepworth's principle commercial dealer from 1956 – including Sandra Blow, Alan Davie, Sam Francis, William Gear, Georges Mathieu and Nicolas de Staël, as well as Sam Francis and Pierre Soulages.

Soulages, one of the art movement's greatest exponents, became a friend and Hepworth later acquired an etching by him.²³ He was also cited by Hepworth as one reason her visit to Paris in 1959, to oversee the finishing of *Meridian* at the Susse Frères foundry, was so enjoyable.

Paris was a complete exhilaration after 21 years. And the happiest & most carefree moment for 21 years! I had a good time with Charles Lienhard, [Marcel] Joray, [Michel] Seuphor, Arp & Soulages - & I worked v. hard at the foundry. The large bronze is finished.²⁴

Hepworth's stated admiration for the American-born Sam Francis, the French painter Pierre Soulages *and* Ben Nicholson, however, might seem rather unexpected now; the latter certainly had no obvious stylistic affinities with the other two artists. However, as critics, commentators and dealers of the day attempted to make sense of the tachiste phenomenon, it was not so unusual to find that both Soulages and Francis were regularly associated with Tachisme and their paintings were, for example, shown together in London in group exhibitions of the new kind of work.²⁵

Today, one might more readily refer to Francis as an 'abstract expressionist' rather than a 'tachiste'. All labels are, of course, inadequate, but the loose affiliations to Tachisme and the very freedom of expression it offered, meant it also seemed to defy clear definition. Margaret Gardiner, for instance, confessed to be in a complete 'muddle' to understand the efforts of 'every Tom, Dick and Harry' who that had caught the 'tachist bug'.²⁶ The anglicized spelling, used here by Gardiner, appeared regularly alongside the French, indicating a general sense of confusion. Certainly, it seemed that British critics, writers and curators often struggled to trust something that was so new, and found it difficult to explain something that was, by its very nature, so intuitive and indeterminate. For example, Denys Sutton thought it 'seems to smack of "rock and roll" when "one considers it in cold blood"'.²⁷ For Herbert Read, writing about Georges Mathieu, the painting was as 'unselfconscious as a child's scribble'.²⁸ To others, suspicious that the new forms of painting had no significance at all, Tachisme was 'just a word'.²⁹ Indeed, a number of interchangeable words were used in order to try and pin down what the elusive Tachisme might have been. Hence, *art informel*, *abstraction lyrique*, *art autre*, action painting and even sometimes Abstract Expressionism were used quite indiscriminately, whilst at the same time putative distinctions were being made to try and distinguish between these terms. Whilst there seems to have been a certain amount of confusion, this lack of definition or distinction, suggests that Tachisme also reflected something of the experimental spirit that was possible at the time. With French and American painters showing in post-war London, and British artists showing in New York and Paris there was potential for the cross-fertilisation of developments and ideas.

Over the course of the 1950s, the École de Paris may have gradually lost much of its influence in Britain as the United States came to dominate. Early in the decade, however, Tachisme had a considerable impact on British artists. When, for instance, de Staël exhibited in London in 1952, his thickly-painted canvases created a sensation akin to that which greeted Matisse and Picasso.³⁰ And within the artistic community in St Ives, Tachisme also generated great excitement, and this new variation of abstraction, was taken up as one of a growing number of possibilities for Hepworth and her disparate painter-peers all of whom move in and out of the tachiste orbit with varying degrees of conviction.³¹ For Hepworth – we can tell from her letters as well as her drawings and paintings – its direct influence on her work lasted just over three years and reaches something of an apotheosis when her sculpture *Meridian* was unveiled in 1960. Indeed, by the time the sculpture was completed, Hepworth's drawing style had changed again, though the new-found freedom was 'quickly absorbed into the general drawing style'.³²

Despite its nebulous nature, some common principles account for British artists' interest in Tachisme. On a practical basis, for example, Tachisme changed the way they painted. It did not involve preparatory sketches or drawings and there was no attempt to conceal the process of applying paint. Hence making a painting could be immediate and the end results looked spontaneous and gestural and appeared to lack any traditional kind of finish. Neither did the traditional rules regarding subject matter, representation and composition apply; instead, any meaning was conveyed through the effects of texture and colour. In reality, despite appearances to the contrary, a tachiste-style painting was more likely to be simultaneously aleatory and deliberate. Hepworth's paintings on prepared board, for instance, involved time-consuming preparations and processes made in advance before the more instantaneous-looking, expressive curlicues and arabesques were subsequently added.³³ Lack of restrictions meant Tachisme allowed for these apparent inconsistencies.

As well as a change in 'look', Tachisme involved a change in attitude.³⁴ The artist was regarded as the conduit for a form of self-expression which required the suppression of the ego. The act of painting could therefore be more subconscious than self-conscious and the works which emerged were considered more natural, authentic and true. Credence for this 'truth' was found within writings associated with Existentialism, Jung, and Zen Buddhism, which were 'invoked to provide an intellectual rigour for an art form that was strictly intuitive and subjective, and which might otherwise seem self-indulgent and meaningless'.³⁵ Likewise, the arrival of Tachisme in Britain coincided with published ideas about form and formlessness and the growing interest in the 'morphological point of view' across a wide range of different disciplines.³⁶

Hepworth read widely on these topics and her library included *The Life of Forms in Art* by Henri Focillon, 1934, (Herbert Read introduced her to the book in 1944) along with books on Zen by Alan Watts, Eugen Herrigel and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki amongst others, most of which were published around the same time as Hepworth became interested in Tachisme. Watts, for instance, describes the spontaneity in 'Zen art' in almost entirely Tachiste-terms and this is taken up on a number of occasions by other writers including Read and Alloway (Watts, by his own admission, notes that such secondary sources regarded Zen culture from an entirely Western point of view).³⁷ In the texts by these authors, we can assume Hepworth found both inspiration and validation for the aesthetic choices she was making. More directly, in the book illustrations, she also found precursors for her own depiction of natural forms and the distinctly calligraphic style (notably her use of black ink on white paper) which she regularly employed.³⁸ Indeed, it was probably for stylistic and aesthetic reasons that Hepworth communed intellectually with Eastern philosophy, rather than because of a deep spiritual engagement.³⁹

However, the sheer number of works Hepworth made at this time, suggest an artist that lost herself repeatedly in the meditative act of drawing and that this may have provided her with some kind of catharsis at an emotionally difficult and tumultuous time; Alan Watts called this the 'calm state where the "intuition" is felt to act more effectively'.⁴⁰ And furthermore, he described, that it was only in such a Zen-like state, that the movement of the artist's hand and arm become freer and it appears that 'the brush draws itself; this state 'cannot happen if one does not practice constantly. But neither can it happen if one makes an effort'.⁴¹

Watts gives us one potential reason for Hepworth's drawings being so stylistically similar and why she may have repeated the same motif: it simply took practice to perfect the required co-ordination of the hand and the eye, the brain and the brush. Hence, it is tempting to view Hepworth's tachiste-style drawings as a kind of pictorial mantra: the repetition of the same motifs and forms becoming the visual equivalent to chanting. More usually, these works are regarded as exploring some of 'the most energetic, spontaneous and joyful themes of all Hepworth's drawings and paintings'.⁴² This would be straightforwardly true were it not for the fact that we know from her letters about the developments in Hepworth's private life. I would therefore suggest that a far more complex and confused sensibility is being expressed through the black scribbles and inky daubs of drawings such as *The Nest (Project for Sculpture)* and *Labyrinth (Project for Metal Sculpture)*, both from 1957. Likewise, see her paintings *Night Forms*, 1957; *Fantasie (Black and Grey)*, 1958 and *Two Forms (Blue)*, 1958. And since a basic tenet of Tachisme was the channelling of the subconscious, it seems entirely possible to me that these works by Hepworth emanated from a much darker place. Admittedly, this is my own personal



The Nest (Project for Sculpture) 1957
Ink on paper
Private Collection

interpretation, and speculation aside, the importance of the *tache* Hepworth declared, lay not only in theoretical, philosophical or aesthetic sensibilities, but in the positive impact she felt that such art could have on a wider society. On 15 December 1957, Hepworth wrote to Herbert Read:

This amazing struggle between science & life (in the organic & spiritual sense) is reaching tremendously exciting & very terrifying proportions just now – the tachists understand the present “crucifixion” – they heighten the awareness & give one wings to encompass this new life – but if men are to be born, & women to sustain a normal pregnancy the unique qualities of sculpture, with its mysticism & magic must find their true forms? Lasting forms & ‘still’ forms.⁴³

In another letter to Read, written in 1958, she repeated similar sentiments:

Re tachisme – I have never since 1942, called myself a constructivist (as you know) & therefore I can say that I feel, personally, that of all the ‘pulses’ of creation this has moved me more profoundly than any other. The whole vitality of this stream of painting is incredibly close to research being done by physicists at the moment & by medical research in to the “source of vitality” of healing of wounds etc.... it seems to me, very bound up with the aesthetic perceptions of such fundamental rhythms & impulses of growth & form. This is a personal digression – please forgive me – prompted by reading your fine contribution to the T & H book.⁴⁴

It is typical in Hepworth’s correspondence with Read that she conflated her interests in art and science with her strongly-held belief that ‘good’ art could have a positive effect on society.⁴⁵ It was more typical for Hepworth to focus on the possible improvements sculpture might bring to society at large; it is rarer for her to discuss painting in this light. One feels her conviction, though, and her sense of her excitement for the subject, as she reveals her understanding that, theoretically at least, Tachisme and its associated philosophies had the potential to help make sense of the human condition in the post-war period.

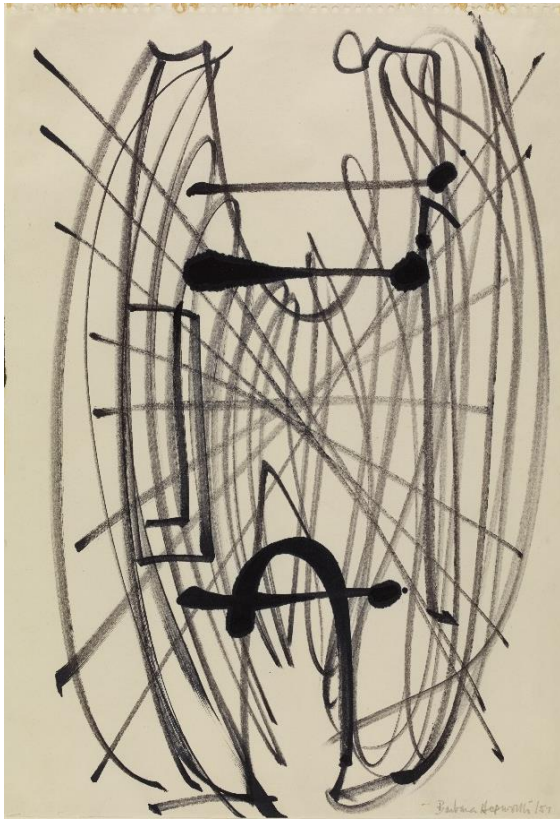
Tachisme was important enough to Hepworth that she travelled to Cambridge to hear Herbert Read lecture on the subject.⁴⁶ And as a result of her enthusiasm, she subsequently invited Read to give the same lecture in St Ives for the Penwith Society.⁴⁷ The event was reviewed at length in the *St Ives Times & Echo*, which provides us with a useful account of Read’s argument.⁴⁸ The anonymous correspondent described in depth how Read explained the paintings of ‘Jackson Pollock, Mark Tobey, Sam Francis, Dubuffet, Soulages, and Sandra Blow’ amongst others and ‘the state of mind of the modern painter’. With references to Kandinsky,

infants' scribbles, Leonardo da Vinci, Cozens, ancient astronomy, and the medieval devotional book *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the author relayed how Read described that the modern creative artist drew images from the deep unconscious levels of 'his' personality (the artist, at this stage, is almost always referred to as male). As Read continued to argue, the process:

...can sometimes be started by automatic scribbling, vague backgrounds, chance markings and pouring of colour, later selected, emphasised, erased and altered, until some fertile form, some presence full of meaning, or 'ikon' as Sir Herbert calls it, is achieved.

The detail offered here, ties the content of the lecture with an earlier text Read wrote for the journal *Encounter* in 1955. Primarily, this article is Read's reaction to an exhibition of painting at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome at the time of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. What he calls the 'various forms of the formless' he notes can be found 'in all countries exhibiting, and in most countries it is the predominant tendency' which included Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Switzerland and the USA.⁴⁹ He notes that: ... the widespread use of the Rorschach test in experimental psychology may have had something to do with the origins of the movement, for that test showed how much (and what various) significance could be read into an apparently meaningless shape – if only we tried'.⁵⁰ Read's thoughts were later recycled in the revised version of his book *Art Now* (published in 1960), in which he adds a new chapter dedicated to 'the final phase of abstraction', though by 1960 interest in Tachisme in Britain was on the wane and Read gives more attention to 'action painting' and Abstract Expressionism.⁵¹

Despite Hepworth's self-proclaimed interest in Tachisme, how are we to assess the strength of her commitment to it? Around 1957-58, as already discussed, there is the evidence to support the idea that contemporary painting did have a far greater significance for Hepworth than contemporary sculpture.⁵² Painting, however – as she explained to Herbert Read – was an 'illusion' whereas sculpture was 'reality' because 'sculpture has its own intrinsic power, it has, natural laws, & bends them & it rises above them – it has power over fields hills & men & the air above & around, & it seems to me that there is no limitation on this power or vitality - contrary to H.M.'⁵³ Hepworth's attitude to her drawing was equally complex. She repeatedly stated throughout her career (in interviews and in her own texts) that she came to a sculpture with her concept fully formed, and that she rarely had the need to make preparatory drawings or advance sketches unless it was on the back of a cigarette packet. Yet, there are still moments within Hepworth's overall career when there is a fascinating interplay between Hepworth's work in two and three dimensions, which I feel is particularly true in the 1950s.



Winged Figure - Brass (Project for Sculpture) 1957
Ink on paper
The British Museum



Maquette for Winged Figure 1957
Brass, Isopon and metal strings on concrete base
Wakefield Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield)

The expressive line Hepworth explored in her 'tachiste' drawings and paintings, and latterly in the bronzes, had already begun to be explored in her use of steel rings for *Form in Tension*, 1951-52, and the metal rods used for *Apollo*, 1951.⁵⁴ There is also a distinct visual correlation between the linearity of the drawings and paintings and the profiles of the sheet-metal sculptures she had started to make in 1957; compare, for instance, the similarities between the drawings *Winged Figure (for Brass)*, 1957, (British Council) and *Winged Figure Brass (Project for Sculpture)*, 1957, (British Museum) and the sculpture *Winged Figure* (BH 228) or indeed its monumental reiteration on the side of John Lewis in London. This synergy between the sculpture and drawings, applies as much to works in progress, in that the inky black lines clearly echo to the contours of the sheet metal and chicken-wire armatures for bronzes, as they do to the finished works made in aluminium, copper, brass and bronze. Together, they suggest that the relationship between her drawings and her sculpture is more overt at this point than at any other time in Hepworth's career, and, it might be tempting to surmise from appearances that they were preparatory drawings. However, as Hepworth explained in 1965, the 'family of drawings' connected to *Meridian* related to the sculpture 'in the exploratory sense'.⁵⁵ An assessment she repeated in 1973, when she described the investigative nature of her

'ink sketches' and their direct influence on *Meridian*, for the Director of the Skissernas Museum.⁵⁶

The invitation to be involved in the commissioning of *Meridian* had been extended to Hepworth in October 1958, by which time she had already been drawing and painting in a 'tachiste' style since the spring of the year before.⁵⁷ Moreover, her painting *Project for Sculpture (Meridian)* is dated 1957 and inscribed on the verso: 'one of the drawings which led towards *Meridian*' (note how it is called a drawing even though it is oil on board). The drawings and paintings existed in their own right, therefore, well before the sculpture was conceived; it was therefore the plant-like forms in the extant drawings which gave rise to the 'growing' form of the sculpture.⁵⁸

In conclusion, my sense of Hepworth's interest in Tachisme, was that it ended with (and was therefore sated by) the sculpture *Meridian*; it became, however unintentionally, a means to this end. Hepworth expressed the strength of her interest in Tachisme on numerous occasions, without actually labelling herself a 'tachiste'. Nonetheless, it almost exclusively dominated her thinking and her practice for an intense – albeit relatively short – period. The act of drawing and painting provided a way forward, providing an opportunity to explore ideas about form. Whilst some of these works in two-dimensions are more allusive, others directly influenced particular sculptures even if that was not their original intention. As I have argued, however, these drawings and painting are more than joyful experiments and that together, they should be considered a significant aspect within Hepworth's overall career. Moreover, Hepworth found in contemporary painting convictions that corresponded with her aspirations for her public sculpture. Tachisme's ability to imply a certain post-war utopian idealism was certainly borne out by Hepworth's hopes for major projects such as *Meridian*. Perhaps inevitably, following the unveiling of the most tachiste of sculptures in 1960, Hepworth's work changed again; Tachisme, we might say, had served its purpose, and its influence in Britain had anyway begun to wane.

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All works by Hepworth illustrated © Bowness.

Image of *Winged Figure – Brass (Project for Sculpture)* 1957 reproduced courtesy The Trustees of the British Museum

¹ Alan Bowness, 'The Drawings of Barbara Hepworth', *Barbara Hepworth: Drawings from a Sculptor's Landscape*, London: Cory Adams & MacKay, 1966, p. 15.

² See Sophie Bowness, 'Hepworth's studio practice: Plaster for Bronze', in Sophie Bowness, (ed.), *Barbara Hepworth: The Plasters: The Gift to Wakefield*, London: Lund Humphries, 2011, pp. 31-95.

- ³ For example: Ann Wagner, 'Miss Hepworth's Stone *Is* a Mother', David Thistlewood, (ed.), *Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered*, Critical Forum Series, vol. 3, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1996, pp.53-74.
- ⁴ Letter to Gardiner, dated 10/11 March 1947 by Alan Bowness, TGA 202016, in Eleanor Clayton, *Barbara Hepworth: Art & Life*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2021.
- ⁵ Hepworth's letters to Gardiner, amongst others, are discussed extensively in Eleanor Clayton, 2021.
- ⁶ Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, *Barbara Hepworth: Works in the Tate Collection and the Barbara Hepworth Museum St Ives*, London: Tate Publishing, 2008 edition, pp. 134-137.
- ⁷ Letter from Hepworth to Jim Ede, 16 September, KYA H35.85. The letter is undated but the archives at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, place it in a sequence of letters received in 1957 and there is no reason to dispute this arrangement. Harold Stanley Ede, (1895-1990) was known as 'Jim'; he moved to Cambridge in 1956.
- ⁸ Letters to Jim Ede, 14 December 1957, KYA: KY/EDE/1/7 H35.86 and 17 January 1958 H35.87 17.
- ⁹ See Cindy Nemser, 'Conversation with Barbara Hepworth', *Feminist Art Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, Spring 1973, p. 5.
- ¹⁰ See: Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, 2008, pp. 166-67.
- ¹¹ Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, 2008, p. 190.
- ¹² See the photographs in Sophie Bowness, *Barbara Hepworth: The Sculptor in the Studio*, London: Tate Publishing, 2017, pp. 37-39.
- ¹³ In the volume above a photograph taken in 1958 shows Hepworth next to an easel: Sophie Bowness, 2017, p. 29
- ¹⁴ For example, see the account in Penelope Curtis, *Barbara Hepworth*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p. 40.
- ¹⁵ Alan Bowness, 1966, p. 23.
- ¹⁶ Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, 2008, pp. 182-86
- ¹⁷ See for instance: Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, 2008, p. 13.
- ¹⁸ Margaret Garlake, (ed.), 'Introduction', *Artists and Patrons in Post-War Britain: Essays by postgraduate students at the Courtauld Institute of Art*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2001, p. 11.
- ¹⁹ Pierre Guéguen first used the term in 1951 at a conference before it appeared in the article 'Le Bonimenteur de l'Academie Tachiste', *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, série 4, no. 7, Oct-Nov 1953, pp. 52-53. See Fiona M. Gaskin, *Aspects of British Tachisme 1946-5*, M.A. diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1996, p. 2.
- ²⁰ The activities of the *Circle* group and Unit One (in which Hepworth had played major roles) sought to formalise artists into groups, though such attempts at affiliation were often short lived. See: Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism: 1900-1939*, New Haven and London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1981, reprint 1994, p.213.
- ²¹ Fiona M. Gaskin, 'British Tachisme in the Post-War Period 1946-57', in Margaret Garlake, (ed.), 2001, p. 21.
- ²² Letter to Herbert Read, HR / BH 169, 15 December 1956, Herbert Read Archive, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Special Collections (all subsequent letters to Read are from the same archives).
- ²³ Hepworth owned the etching *Eau-forte XIV*, 1961 by Soulages (now in the collection of The Hepworth Wakefield) though it is not clear from records whether she obtained it from Gimpel Fils, if it was a purchase or a gift. Hepworth's personal library (now at the Tate Gallery Archive) also contains a copy of the Soulages' exhibition catalogue from his show with Gimpel Hanover Galerie, Zurich and Gimpel Fils, London, in 1967 (TGA 20196/1/338).
- ²⁴ Letter to Herbert Read, 1 December 1959, HR/BH 225-26.

- ²⁵ See Michel Tapié, *Opposing Forces*, trans. by Peter Watson, exh. cat., selected by Michel Tapié and Peter Watson, London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1953, n. p. The exhibition placed paintings by Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis alongside the tachistes Georges Mathieu, Henri Michaux and Jean-Paul Riopelle.
- ²⁶ Letter from Margaret Gardiner to Barbara Hepworth, (dated July 1956 by Alan Bowness), Tate Gallery Archives, TGA 20132/1/65/16.
- ²⁷ Denys Sutton, 'Preface', *Metavisual, Tachiste, Abstract: Painting in England To-Day*, exh. cat. London: Redfern Gallery, 1957, np.
- ²⁸ Herbert Read, 'Mathieu', *Georges Mathieu*, exh. pamphlet, London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1956, np. Hepworth and Read actually took children's art seriously. Letter to Read, HR/BH 18, 8 December (possibly) 1940: I hope to do a book sometime (with an analyst) on childrens [sic] drawings under five years old. I've got lots of material now & it is tremendously exciting – most of the books I know start at 5 or 6 yrs & that seems to me the wrong moment to begin. See also: Herbert Read, *Education Through Art*, London: Faber and Faber, 1943.
- ²⁹ René Drouin defined it as a 'splotch' which suggests something uncontrolled or accidental. See: 'Tachisme is only a word', *Architectural Design*, 26:8, 1956, p. 7.
- ³⁰ Nicolas de Staël (1914-55) exhibited at the Mathiesen Gallery in 1952. See Margaret Garlake (ed.), 2001, pp. 10-11.
- ³¹ They included, amongst others, the painters: Alan Davie; Patrick Heron; Roger Hilton; Peter Lanyon; and Bryan Winter. Margaret Garlake describes them as disparate artists 'united by practice'. See: Margaret Garlake, (ed.), 2001, p. 10.
- ³² Bowness, 1966, p.25.
- ³³ Mary Bustin ACR, 'Barbara Hepworth: Torso', Lot 14, *International Musicians Seminar Prussia Cove online Auction Catalogue*, issuu.com/imsprussiacove/docs/ims_prussia_cove_art_auction_-_cata, pp. 39-41. The painting was donated by the Hepworth Estate and sold at the auction on 18 May 2017. It is now in a private collection.
- ³⁴ Fiona M. Gaskin, 1996, p. 2.
- ³⁵ Fiona M. Gaskin, in Margaret Garlake, (ed.), 2001, p. 21.
- ³⁶ See: Lancelot Law Whyte, (ed.), *Aspects of Form: A Symposium on Form in Nature and Art*, London: Lund Humphries, 1951, revised edition 1968, x. The original edition was a collaboration with the ICA, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Growth and Form*; the wide range of topics addressed in the book, include astronomy, biology, embryology, Gestalt psychology and art. Herbert Read wrote an introduction. Hepworth owned a copy of the first edition.
- ³⁷ '...our interpretations of Chinese philosophy are apt to be a projection of characteristically Western ideas into Chinese terminology'. See: Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1957, p. 4. See also, for example, Herbert Read, *Art Now*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1933, revised edition 1960, pp. 115-16 and Lawrence Alloway, 'Mark Tobey', *Mark Tobey: Paintings and Drawings*, exh. cat., London: Institute of Contemporary Art, May - June 1955, np.
- ³⁸ Hepworth's personal library (see TGA 20196) included copies of D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 1959 (given to her by Herbert Read) and Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* (see above). Hepworth also owned a second edition of *The Life of Forms in Art* published in 1948 (originally published in 1934). See also Clare Nadal, 'Sculpture et lecture: la bibliothèque de Barbara Hepworth', transl. Jean-François Allain, *Barbara Hepworth*, exh. cat. Paris: Musée Rodin and Fine éditions d'art, 2019, pp. 58-65. Suzuki stayed with the potter Bernard Leach in St. Ives, see Chris Stephens, 'The Darkness of Menhirs: Landscape and Mysticism in Post-War Cornwall', in *The Dark Monarch: Magic and Modernity in British Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), p. 82. Also see Stephens *St Ives: The Art and the Artists* (London: Pavilion, 2018), pp. 70-2 and 174.
- ³⁹ Hepworth could be receptive to diverse ideas on a wide-range of subjects and beliefs. Whilst she retained a life-long commitment to Christian Science, for example, and owned several fashionable

books on aspects of Zen Buddhism, her religious faith could also be more conventional and became increasingly traditional after the death of her first son Paul in 1953.

⁴⁰ Alan W. Watts, London, 1957, p. 15.

⁴¹ Alan W. Watts, London, 1957, p. 178 and p. 196.

⁴² Alan Wilkinson, *The Drawings of Barbara Hepworth*, Farnham, UK & Burlington, USA: Lund Humphries, 2015, p. 113.

⁴³ Letter to Read, 15 December 1956, HR / BH 170-71.

⁴⁴ Letter to Read, Wednesday 1958 (no month), HR / BH 201. Read had sent Hepworth a copy of the book *Art Since 1945*, which she erroneously refers to as the 'T&H Painting Since 1945'. See: Grohmann, W., (ed.), *Art Since 1945*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1958. Read's essay is entitled 'Great Britain' even though it focuses entirely on English art. The passage on Hepworth is on p. 230.

⁴⁵ Letter to Herbert Read, 4 December 1956, HR / BH 164-65: 'I became a pacifist two years ago but all this has pushed me into trying to do more by joining the Labour Party. The Toldas Group & United Nations Assembly etc.'... 'one can scarcely look 'earlier sculptures' in the face if one remains politically & socially inactive now'.

⁴⁶ The lecture on 15 February 1957 was organised by the Cambridge Society of Arts, of which Simon Hepworth-Nicholson was President and Herbert Read was an honorary patron. I am grateful to Dr Sophie Bowness for sharing with me a copy of the lecture programme from her father's private papers.

⁴⁷ Letter to Read, 25 February 1957, HR / BH 178-79: I think it might well be one of the most helpful things you could possibly do, to give your lecture on Tachisme here. I shall suggest it at to-nights meeting (my last – as I am stepping down for the younger ones)... you see there are some splendid young people coming along & contact with you might just make all the difference to their future. It may well be that Patrick Heron is to be our next Chairman – nothing could be better than an address from our President!

⁴⁸ Anon., 'Sir Herbert Read Talks on Tachism', *St Ives Times & Echo*, 26 July 1957, p.4

⁴⁹ Herbert Read, 'Art: A Blot on the Scutcheon', pp. 54-57, in Stephen Spender and Irving Kristel, (eds.), *Encounter*, vol. V, No. 1, July 1955, pp. 54-57.

⁵⁰ The Rorschach test may have inspired Hepworth's doubling-up of her plant-like motif in the painting on canvas *High Summer*, 1958.

⁵¹ By 1960, Tachisme is given one mention whilst Read devoted separate sections to Abstract Expressionism and 'action painting'. See 'Superrealism (2)' in Herbert Read, *Art Now: an introduction to the theory of modern painting and sculpture*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1933, revised edition 1960, pp. 102-199.

⁵² See Penelope Curtis, 1998, p. 40.

⁵³ Letter to Read, 14 May 1944, HR/BH 77.

⁵⁴ See *Form in Tension*, 1951-52. Hepworth removed the original steel rings from the Blue Purbeck marble and the sculpture was renamed *Poised Form* (BH 172), Tate. The related work in plaster and lead, *Maquette for Garden Sculpture* (BH 170), 1951, is at Kettle's Yard. Hepworth's *Apollo* (BH 167), 1951, comprises painted steel rods set into a concrete base.

⁵⁵ Letter to Mary Chamot, Assistant Keeper, Tate Gallery, 3 March 1965, Tate Gallery Records

⁵⁶ Letter to Gunnar Bråhammar, Skissernas Museum, Lund, Sweden, 19 April 1973. The museum subsequently acquired *Wind Movement I*, ink on paper, 1957.

⁵⁷ Letter from Lilian Somerville to Barbara Hepworth, 10 October 1958, British Council Archives held at the National Archives, BW 2/682 (GB/652/25). For an excellent account of the commission, see Sophie Bowness, 'Barbara Hepworth's Studio Practice: Plaster for Bronze', in Sophie Bowness, (ed.), 2011, pp. 64-71. Having visited the site, Hepworth apparently made lots of drawings in her studio comprising flowing lines; see Harold Mortimer (architect of State House) quoted in Matthew Gale

and Chris Stephens, 2008, p. 182. Many of these, I am suggesting, existed before Hepworth had started to think about the sculpture.

⁵⁸ Hepworth describes her conception of the sculpture in her conversation with Alan Bowness, see Alan Bowness, (ed.), *The Complete Sculpture of Barbara Hepworth 1960-69*, London: Lund Humphries, 1971, p. 10.