

Sir Jacob Epstein: Babies and Bloomsbury

30 January - 10 May 2015

This exhibition reveals how babies and children inspired modernist sculptor Jacob Epstein, and explores his unconventional family life in Bloomsbury



Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), pioneer of modernism and distinguished portrait sculptor, made many portraits of children throughout his career. This exhibition brings together a key selection of Epstein's remarkable and moving bronzes and drawings of babies and children, including of members of his own family, which demonstrate his love of children as a subject matter.

Babies and Bloomsbury presents an often-overlooked area of Epstein's work - better-known pieces such as *Rock Drill*

(1915), and his controversial public commissions, have overshadowed his more conventional portraits. Yet he made his first sculptures of babies as a young man in Paris between 1902 and 1904, and became even more compelled by the subject upon becoming a father in 1918.

Epstein's life in Bloomsbury between 1914 and 1927 provided a bohemian backdrop for his work. He worked out of a variety of studios in the area and, from 1916, lived in a house overlooking the Foundling Hospital - nearby his beloved British Museum, a source of inspiration throughout his life in London.

During this period Epstein had a number of extra-marital affairs, three of which produced his five children. His first daughter, Peggy Jean, was born following an affair with Meum Stewart and his last child, Jackie, from an affair with Isabel Nicholas, later Francis Bacon's muse. His first wife, Margaret Epstein, was unable to have children, and endured these indiscretions until her death in 1947, having brought up the eldest and youngest of the children herself. Epstein's relationship with Kathleen Garman, however - who would eventually become Lady Epstein - is thought to have been too much of a threat to Mrs Epstein, as in 1922 she is alleged to have shot Kathleen in the shoulder with a pearl-handled pistol.

Beyond the complexities of his domestic life, there is no doubt that as an artist Epstein loved children. He continued to make bronzes after moving from Bloomsbury to Kensington, working from the children of his contemporaries, which included James Mason and Paul Robeson. Portraits of his own children, those of his grandchildren - including Anne and Annabel Freud, children of his daughter Kitty Epstein and Lucien Freud - and many of his commissioned works, demonstrate how this large, bear-like man was entranced by the challenge of his small subjects.

Image:

Sir Jacob Epstein,
Baby Asleep, 1904,
bronze © The estate of
Sir Jacob Epstein,
photograph: Leeds
Museums and Art
Galleries (City Museum)
UK

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As Epstein said himself:

“To work from a child the sculptor has to have endless patience. He must wait and observe, and observe and wait. The small forms, so seemingly simple, are in reality so subtle, and the hunting of the form is an occupation that is at once tantalizing and fascinating”

Curated by Gill Hedley, this exhibition follows a chronological route through Epstein’s life in Bloomsbury with bronzes, drawings and archive photographs of the artist, his children and their mothers, with the Foundling Hospital as an ever-present feature of the landscape of his life in the area.

Supported by

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Notes to Editors

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of events and exhibitions celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 270 years.

The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged all the leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of the Messiah. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way that the arts could support philanthropy.

Coram has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas.
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