

ART AND CULTURE

EXHIBITIONS &amp; SHOWS

## Never-before-seen Barbara Hepworth works go on show in landmark exhibition

In 'Barbara Hepworth: Strings', various Hepworth sculptures will be exhibited in public for the first time, at Piano Nobile, London

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Piano Nobile exhibition  
(Image credit: Piano Nobile)

BY ANNA SOLOMON PUBLISHED 2 HOURS AGO IN NEWS

A new exhibition at [London](#) gallery Piano Nobile will feature works by English artist and sculptor [Barbara Hepworth](#) that have, up until now, only been viewed as part of private collections. *Barbara Hepworth: Strings* coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the artist's death.

The presentation will focus on Hepworth's use of string. Even if you haven't heard of the artist, you may have seen her 'string' work in the form of the sculpture mounted on the side of John Lewis in [Oxford Street](#): featuring huge aluminium rods, *Winged Figure* has been displayed in London since 1963.

This is one of dozens of string sculptures that Hepworth created during her five-decade career, which range from large to small, rendered in materials including plaster, wood, metal, bronze and stone. She would also use string-like motifs in her paintings and drawings. *Barbara Hepworth: Strings* is the first exhibition dedicated to this aspect of Hepworth's oeuvre.



Barbara Hepworth at Trewyn Studio, 1958  
(Image credit: Michel Ramon, Courtesy Bowness)

The exhibition features works that span three decades, including rarely-exhibited stringed sculptures from a tiny 'hand sculpture', as Hepworth called her smaller works, to the vast *Winged Figure I*, which is coming to London for the first time in a generation.

*Barbara Hepworth: Strings* will delve into the stories surrounding Hepworth's sculptures. For example, *Theme on Electronics (Orpheus)*, inspired by the mythological bard playing his lyre, was a 1956 commission from electronics company Mullard for its head office. It was placed on a motorised pedestal which, somewhat embarrassingly for an electronics company, didn't work. This bothered Hepworth so much that she sent a series of letters to Mullard, one of which stated: 'During the last decade, I have often been very dismayed to find that either the work was not moving around, or, if it did, it jerked'. She later proposed that *Theme on Electronics* should 'stand quite still so there is no more fuss about its electronics motor'.



Barbara Hepworth, *Theme on electronics (Orpheus)*, 1956  
(Image credit: Courtesy of Piano Nobile, Private collection)



Barbara Hepworth, *Small stone with black strings*, 1952  
(Image credit: Courtesy of Piano Nobile, Private collection)

When Mullard closed down in the late 1970s, the sculpture transferred to Phillips, which had absorbed the smaller company. It was bought in the 2000s by a private individual, who is now loaning the work to Piano Nobile to be displayed for the first time.

Also being exhibited for the first time: the aforementioned *Winged Figure I*, a brass work with twine strings from 1957. David Hitchcock, an art student at St Martin's Teacher Training College in Lancaster, wrote to Hepworth to say that his 'college would be honoured to have a piece of [her] work on [its] new campus'. However, he only had £250, which was not enough to purchase *Winged Figure I*. Hitchcock eventually raised £1,000 (the work is now estimated to be worth six figures), which Hepworth agreed to. The sculpture soon had to be returned to the artist's studio to be 're-stringed', however, as it had been placed outside; it was kept inside thereafter at Hepworth's insistence.



Barbara Hepworth, *Forms in movement (circle)*, 1942  
(Image credit: Courtesy of Piano Nobile, Private collection)

It may not have been the most durable of materials, but Hepworth favoured in her fisherman's twine above it all else, and regularly this humble, domestic material and some of her loftier interests is one of the major draws of her work: she was fascinated by space exploration – *Pierced Hemisphere (Telstar)*, for example, whose appearance at Piano Nobile will be its debut in the [UK](#), was inspired by the 1960s tracking satellite.

Hepworth is arguably one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century. She led the charge of modern art, reflecting her passionate interest in technological and political change. Her sometimes abstract, sometimes figurative work expanded the possibilities for sculpture and other mediums; this exhibition represents a rare opportunity to see it in public.

'[Barbara Hepworth: Strings](#)' at Piano Nobile, London, February – 2 May 2025, [piano-nobile.com](#) ★

### TOPICS

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