



**Left:** Henry Moore, *Shelter Scene*, 1941. Pen, ink and wax crayon on paper. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Ninfa Valvo in memory of Donald Bear. © The Henry Moore Foundation. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2016

**Right:** Cecil Beaton, *St. Paul's seen through a Victorian Shopfront*, 1940. Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Ala Story. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's

## *British Art from Whistler to World War II*

Also Featuring Photographs from  
Sir Cecil Beaton's *London's Honourable Scars* Series

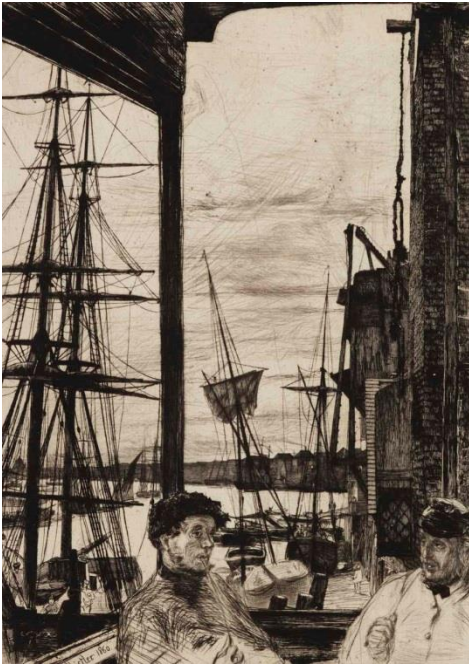
On View September 18, 2016 – January 8, 2017



George Frederick Watts, *Whisper of Love*, n.d.  
Oil on canvas. Santa Barbara Museum of  
Art, Suzette and Eugene Davidson Fund.

*August 4, 2016*—“Brexit” is not unique in the ongoing question of national identity that has always placed the vexing consideration of what it means to be British at the fore. A related story could be said to be told by the history of 19th- and early 20th-century art in England. Curated by art historian Peyton Skipwith and featuring some 70 paintings, drawings and sculpture drawn entirely from the permanent collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *British Art from Whistler to World War II* explores the specifically English response, both positive and negative, to the so-called “advances” of continental modernism in the visual arts.

In the face of crisis and fast-paced change that were the hallmarks of the Industrial Revolution, 19th-century Victorian art reveled in the obsessive articulation of the surfaces of people and things, often idealizing the quality of modern life while editing out the maleffects of the rapid embrace of industrialization (poverty, urban squalor, pollution, etc.)—especially in urban centers such as London. The relative conservatism of Victorian-era art can be seen in the work of George Frederic Watts (1817–1904) in his attraction to allegorical subjects, still uncynically steeped in the classical tradition.



James McNeill Whistler, *Rotherhithe*, 1860. Etching, 3<sup>rd</sup> state. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. John Jay Ide in memory of William Henry Donner.

However, a new and grittier realism began to take root with the arrival of French-trained American artist James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) during the late 1850s. Whistler, like the French artists he emulated, Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, gleaned inspiration from the class-shifting urban landscape that he observed so acutely. In the etching *Rotherhithe* (1860), two men smoking long clay pipes sit before the River Thames, which is littered with the urban detritus of modernity and commerce: warehouses, docks, and pollution. Whistler examined, drew and painted the river—a major shipping way—obsessively every day for nearly 40 years of his career. His unambiguous windows into modern existence gained the attention of up-and-coming British artists, restless for new alternatives to the Victorian emphasis on the familiar language of the classical tradition.

Certainly, the arrival of modernism could no longer be denied with the organization of the first and second Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London by English painter and art critic Roger Fry (1866–1934) in 1910 and 1912. Featured works by Kandinsky, Picasso, Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, van Gogh and

Manet—many paintings 20 or even 30 years old at the time—were nonetheless new to most Londoners. The shows introduced an insular audience brought up on the figurative idealism of the classical tradition to the abstract, anti-naturalistic and anti-narrative visions of the greater European art world. In particular, the abstraction of Cubist artist Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) can be clearly detected in the fractured and increasingly nonfigurative work of Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), who was featured in the second exhibition. Just as captivated as Picasso by non-Western source materials, such as Oceanic, Cycladic, and African art, Lewis delighted in the expressive deformation of the body.

Freed from the constraints of traditional figuration and opened to the radical currents swirling around the continent since the heady days of the Impressionist exhibitions held between 1874



Eileen Agar, *Swanage, Dorset*, 1935. Collage, pen and ink, watercolor, and pencil on pressed board. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, London Collectors' Group Fund. © Estate of Eileen Agar /Bridgeman Images.

and 1886, British artists began to drink deeply of the avant-garde art movements that so rapidly unfolded during the subsequent decades of the early 20th century. London artist Eileen Agar (1899–1991), inspired by a visit to Paris, where she saw her first Surrealist work in 1929, moved away from her initial interest in straightforward portraiture towards creations with more lyrical content. In her quirky collage *Swanage, Dorset* (1935), Agar gathers the fragments of her experience in the coastal town of Swanage, which her contemporary, the better-known artist Paul Nash (1889–1946) described as the Surrealist dream. Like Nash, she deployed the laws of chance through collage to create an image that suggests the unconscious impulses of her inner, emotional landscape. Alongside Surrealist titan Salvador Dalí, Agar, in 1936, was featured in the International Surrealist Exhibition in London.

Energized by the new forces of continental modernism while still clinging to a stubborn devotion to figuration and landscape, the eccentricity of English modernism struck a chord with certain American collectors. With their many significant gifts to the Museum, Wright S. Ludington (1900–1992), who was stationed in London towards the end of World War II, and the late Will Richeson and his wife, Mary Richeson, who frequented London during the 1960s and 70s, have graced the Santa Barbara Museum of Art with what is, arguably, one of the finest collections of 20th-century British Art in America.



Wyndham Lewis, *Red and Black Principle*, 1936. Oil on canvas. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Wright S. Ludington. © The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust /Bridgeman Images.



Left to right: Cecil Beaton, *Bloomsbury Square*, 1940. Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Ala Story. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's. Cecil Beaton, *St. Andrew by the wardrobe*, 1940. Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Ala Story. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's. Cecil Beaton, *Dr. Johnson Outside His Church*, 1940. Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Ala Story. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's

### Also on View: Cecil Beaton's *London's Honourable Scars: Photographs of the Blitz*

Adjacent to *British Art from Whistler to World War II* is a series of dramatic World War II photographs by Sir Cecil Beaton (1904–1980). Best known for his iconic images of royalty and movie legends and multi-award winning designs for such films as “*My Fair Lady*,” Beaton created extraordinary photographs during World War II’s cataclysm. Already established in the 1930s as a major fashion, society and Hollywood photographer, Beaton was hired by the UK’s Ministry of Information at the war’s outset to persuasively reflect the hardships and spirit of the British nation during this legendary time of trial.

This installation in Davidson Gallery consists of 15 images belonging to Beaton’s *London's Honourable Scars*, a series that pictured the devastation and resilience of London during the Nazi Blitz of 1940–41. Capturing an era poetically summarized by Winston Churchill as Britain’s “finest hour” when Britain stood alone against the German onslaught, these riveting evocations of London’s destruction and persistence were given to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art by one of its former directors, Ala Story, in 1958. Among the earliest photographs to enter the Museum’s collection, they have seldom if ever been on view in such a concentrated group at SBMA, and provide a fascinating endpoint to the works from decades earlier seen in the accompanying galleries. They also offer a rare chance to experience a seldom-seen facet of the art and life of one of the 20th century’s most mythic photographers.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.  
Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm, Free Thursday Evenings 5 – 8 pm  
805.963.4364 [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net)