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July 28, 2015

## Objets Trouvés: At Nasher Sculpture Center, Contemplating a Barbara Hepworth Monolith

*FOR THOSE WHO THINK MUSEUMS ARE FOR PINKIE-RAISERS, IT'S TIME TO THINK AGAIN.*

<http://www.papercitymag.com/arts/objets-trouves-at-nasher-sculpture-center-contemplating-a-barbara-hepworth-monolith/>

BY [PATRICIA MORA](#) 07.28.15



Barbara Hepworth's "Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)," 1963 (cast 1964), at the Nasher Sculpture Center.

If you have easy access to the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#), consider yourself profoundly fortunate. Its dedication to a quality art trove assembled on a hugely imaginatively scale sets a high bar — frankly, it's far more rewarding than a prissy stroll through Versailles. If the Nasher's veritable excess of elegance doesn't make you happy, well, that's unfortunate; however, surely there must be another species of delight that will thaw your heart.

If one doubts the Nasher's power to deliver a depth charge, it's time to consider an artist in the permanent collection: Barbara Hepworth. Firstly, she's actually a Dame. More importantly, Dame Jocelyn Barbara Hepworth DBE was an English artist who's considered a peer of Constantin Brancusi, Piet Mondrian, Hans Arp and Henry Moore. She did much to establish Modernism as a powerful movement in British sculpture, and the majority of her work was done in her studios in St. Ives, a seaside town and port on the Celtic Sea. The space was ideal for Hepworth ("It is completely perfect for me"), and she worked there until an evening in May 1975 when an accidental fire tragically took her life. According to her wishes, the location is now the site of the [Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden](#), which has been owned and maintained by the Tate since 1976.

The influence of Cornwall on her work is pivotal; some critics believe that the full range of her art began to emerge in 1939 when she moved to the Cornish countryside with its watery borders and Camelot-laden history. For the uninitiated, the locale is widely known for its uniquely gorgeous terrain and exotic lore rife with Arthurian legend and archaeological finds that date from the Early Stone Age. Hepworth admitted to finding the setting both "barbaric and magical" — language that characterizes her work as well.



Barbara

Hepworth's "Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)," 1963 (cast 1964), at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Photo Tim Hursley.

Despite its name, *Squares with Two Circles* is actually two rectangles, each shot through with an aperture. The cast-bronze piece has aged into a gorgeous stage of mottled verdigris. Everything about it intimates an ancient power that's both prehistoric and totemic. It's powerful enough to act as a reminder of a time when he-goats and bullocks were sacrificed, yet elegant enough to perform resonantly as a cosmic mystery, ancient beyond imagining. If we succumb, it constellates a new center for the world, an *axis mundi* around which we circulate. It's our new sun, and we are remade as travelers, vagabonds — and seers.

As one approaches the piece, the view on the opposite side of the sculpture — glimpsed through the apertures — shifts. One can opt to "curate" the ratio of greenery and sky and form new arrangements sympathetic with an interior and morphing psychic lode. Or it's possible to simply drift and revel in a

rare moment of stillness. As the poet T. S. Eliot reminds us, stillness is a metaphor for all that is, for everything that exists.

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

— From *Burnt Norton*, *The Four Quartets*

Hepworth's monolith seems to hold the remnant warmth of hammered and scorched metal. Most other sculpture comes across as tepid rather than fiery — a mere bain-marie compared to Dame Barbara's inferno. Thus, cast off notions of museums being places for stodgy sorts who return home to dine on watery aspic. There's channeled power in *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*. And if you miss it, you're missing something grand.

[Nasher Sculpture Center](#), 2001 Flora St., 214.242.5100.