

[Begin with the small text panel on the teal wall]

## Paule Vézelay: Living Lines

Paule Vézelay was born in Bristol in 1892 and became an important figure in the Parisian avant-garde of the 1930s. Her groundbreaking art spanned painting, sculpture, textiles and writing. This exhibition, her largest retrospective to date, explores the range of her artistic career, from early figurative painting to the transformative abstract works for which she is best known.

Paule Vézelay

Impressions of an Evening Party, 1918

Oil on canvas

Estate of Paule Vézelay

“I hope to give intense pleasure to the eye of the beholder... (with) colours and forms more pleasing than can easily be found in actuality...”

Paule Vézelay, Paris, 1933

[Turn around, move to the nearest text panel]

Paule Vézelay: Bristol to Paris

Paule Vézelay (born Marjorie Watson-Williams) grew up in Clifton, Bristol. In 1910, aged 18, she began to study painting and etching at the Bristol School of Art. Her talent was clear from the start. She went on to study at the Slade School of Fine Art and the London School of Art but found the British art scene of the time stuffy and unwelcoming. On her first visit to Paris in 1920 she was captivated by the progressive energy of the city.

In 1926 she moved to Paris, on her own, to establish a new life as an independent artist. This bold and liberating step led to a radical transformation of her life and work. She chose to launch herself into the city's international art scene under a new French name, which she would keep for the rest of her life: Paule Vézelay.

In Paris, Vézelay developed her own original approach to fresh artistic ideas. Situating herself at the junction of two revolutionary movements, abstraction and Surrealism, she exhibited with dynamic artist-led groups such as Abstraction-Création and staged groundbreaking solo shows at Galerie Jeanne Bucher. She became friends with a stellar list of artists, among them André Masson, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Hans Arp, Alexander Calder, Wassily Kandinsky, Marlow Moss and Joan Miró.

At the heart of her practice was her lifelong exploration of the drawn line, something that she connected to the ‘language of the artist since primitive man’.

[On the wall, move right to left]

Top:

Paule Vézelay

Bristol Hippodrome, 1918–19

Watercolour

University of Bristol Theatre Collection

Bottom:

Paule Vézelay

In a Theatre, 1919

Lithographic crayon

## University of Bristol Theatre Collection

[Small text panel]

### Vézelay and Performance

As a young artist in Bristol, Marjorie Watson-Williams (later Paule Vézelay) was fascinated by the theatre. The grand Bristol Hippodrome which opened in 1912 was still new. In two works from 1918 on display, Vézelay focuses on the audience and the light from the stage.

Later, in 1920s France, she made frequent visits to the circus and travelled to the south of France with the pioneering Margaret Morris dance troupe. In the prints on display, Vézelay captures the lines formed by dancers and performers in movement.

Paule Vézelay

La Danseuse à la Corde [The Tightrope Dancer],  
1923

Linocut on paper

Vézelay wrote in a 1974 letter to Tate, 'I made La Danseuse à la Corde [while] I was staying at the Hôtel du Quai Voltaire... opposite the Louvre.

At this time I made many drawings of cafe, theatre and circus scenes, and like many artists, I visited the Cirque Medrano to watch the famous Fratellini clowns.'

Tate: Presented by the artist 1973

Top:

Paule Vézelay

Summer in the south of France, 1924

Woodcut on paper

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Bottom:

Paule Vézelay

Two Women, 1927

Drypoint on paper

Towner Eastbourne

Paule Vézelay

The Bathers, 1923

Linocut on paper

Tate: Presented by the artist 1973

[Next wall]

Paule Vézelay

Nudes, 1930

Oil on canvas

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay

The Sunbathers, 1929

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Marjorie and Albert Scardino

[Small text panel]

Vézelay and André Masson

Vézelay's intense relationship with French surrealist artist André Masson from 1929-32 would influence the style and subject matter of her art. Works such as '*The Sunbathers*' (1929) are filled with sensuous lines, light and optimism, but later works including '*Walking in the Wind*' (1930) are characterised by sharp and spiky lines which tell a darker story.

Masson's behaviour was self-destructive and occasionally violent. He had suffered shell shock during World War I (1914-18) and tried to control his behaviour with the barbiturate Luminal. Vézelay's empathy only went so far. She would write to her friend Gertrude Stein, describing how she struggled with her 'double life' as both partner and artist.

Paule Vézelay

Composition, Objects and Sun, 1930

Oil on canvas

Collection of Catherine Petitgas, London

[Rotate to view sculptures in the case]

Vézelay's lasting friendship with artists Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Hans Arp included a fruitful exchange of ideas. Arp's abstract 'Concretion' sculptures, which had moveable parts,

provided inspiration for a series of sculptures which Vézelay began around 1935. Detachable pieces feature in these white plasters, Dish and Little Boat, and Garden, with its arrangement of sand, shells, sea urchins and starfishes found on French beaches.

Paule Vézelay

Garden, 1935

Plaster, paint, sand and shells

Tate: Lent from a private collection, 2016

Paule Vézelay Dish and Little Boat, 1935–36

Plaster

Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)

[Move to the wall to the right of opening, with two paintings]

Paule Vézelay

Strange Landscape, 1933

Oil on canvas

Tate: Lent from a Private Collection, 2016

Paule Vézelay

White Shapes in Movement, 1930

Oil on canvas

Tate: Lent from a Private Collection, 2016

[Move to the left side of the small space, move left to right in a clockwise direction]

Paule Vézelay

Walking in the Wind, 1930

Oil on canvas

Courtesy England & Co., London

Paule Vézelay

Youth Leaving Old Age, 1934

Oil on canvas

Collection of Heloisa Genish

By 1934 Paule Vézelay had ended her four-year relationship with André Masson. Her style would soon change. She would leave behind the jagged and spiky lines that characterised her intense and troubled times with Masson to be replaced by softer shapes and forms, and brighter, more optimistic colours, as seen in this work.

[Next wall]

Paule Vézelay

Composition, 1936

Oil paint and wire on canvas

Courtesy of England & Co., London

Paule Vézelay

Grey Picture, 1935

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, courtesy of England & Co.,  
London

Paule Vézelay

Grey Forms on Grey, 1935

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

[Next wall]

Paule Vézelay

Three Forms (one sewn on canvas), 1935

String and charcoal on canvas

Private Collection, courtesy England & Co.,  
London

Paule Vézelay

Object in Three Dimensions, 1935– 36

Leaves, dry flies, fishing line, sand, pebbles and  
other materials on canvas

Object in Three Dimensions is the first in a series of three-dimensional abstract pictures that Vézelay titled 'Lines in Space'. These feature threads, nylon or thin wire strung across the picture frame and set in shallow boxes. Fishing line and flies from her supply of fishing tackle find their way into this early work.

On days off from her studio, Vézelay enjoyed trout fishing expeditions and walks outside Paris.

Tate: Lent from a private collection, 2016

Paule Vézelay

Lines in Space No.3, 1936

Cotton threads and canvas on board

Tate: Purchased 2000

[Turn left into the next space. Start with the large text panel on the back wall. Move round the room in a clockwise direction]

Paule Vézelay: Paris to Bristol, and London

After the outbreak of World War II (1939-45), Vézelay reluctantly left behind her friends and her working life in Paris and returned to Bristol to care for her elderly mother. Keen to contribute to the war effort, she was given a permit to document wartime Bristol in photographs and drawings. The years she spent

depicting the aftermath of the bombing led to a visceral body of work that reflected the destruction many had witnessed in the city.

After the war, elements of this experience would feed into works such as 'Flying Forms' and 'Growing Forms'. Both were painted soon after Vézelay had moved from Bristol to settle near London, where she remained until the end of her life in 1984.

In the 1950s she introduced more angular forms into her work, elements of which would occasionally find their way into her numerous textile designs. Other pieces from the 1960s reflect her lifelong interest in shadows, lines and movement, such as 'Construction No.43 Four Silhouettes' and the three-dimensional wire sculpture 'Lines in Space, No. 53'.

Paule Vézelay

Silhouettes, 1938

Oil on canvas

Vézelay was fascinated by silhouettes and shadows throughout her life. As she wrote: 'I had first used cut silhouettes for book illustration, also using them as collages on charcoal; I had varied the tones of silhouettes in order to give them the illusion of a third dimension . . . I had made silhouettes in two and in three dimensions as an integral part of my constructions'.

Courtesy England & Co., London

Paule Vézelay

Construction Grey Lines on Pink Ground, 1938

Oil on canvas

Tate: Purchased 1973

[On display in the corner]

Alexander Calder (1898–1976)

Maquette for a mobile, 1938–39

Painted metal, wood, wire and string

Alexander Calder arrived in Paris in 1926, the same year that Vézelay settled in the French capital. Vézelay was probably introduced to Calder through André Masson and Joan Miró. She shared with Calder a fascination with movement in space explored through abstraction. Both would join the international artist group Abstraction-Création, with Vézelay exhibiting paintings inspired by natural forms while Calder featured coloured mobiles.

Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)

[Next wall]

Paule Vézelay

Bomb Damage at Bristol, 1942

Pastel

Courtesy England & Co., London

Paule Vézelay

Barrage Balloon at Balloon Centre, 1941

Charcoal and graphite on paper

Tate: Lent from a Private Collection, 2016

Paule Vézelay

War Damage in Bristol, 1941

Charcoal and graphite on paper

Tate: Lent from a Private Collection, 2016

[Small text panel]

## Vézelay as War Artist

Vézelay drew the destruction caused by bombing in Bristol during World War II (1939-45). She made many drawings of the twisted bars of metal and ruined buildings across the city and experienced bomb damage to her family house as well. She was fascinated by the organic shapes of barrage balloons, that she described as 'tough monsters'. Her wartime effort also went beyond art. With help from Frome MP Mavis Tate, Vézelay set up the first branch of the Women's Defence Corp in Bristol, after the central War Office had refused women's offer of help.

[In the case opposite the war works]

Paule Vézelay

Sketchbook of war damage in Bristol, About  
1942

Ink and graphite on paper

Courtesy England & Co., London

Paule Vézelay

[bottom left] Photographs and [bottom right]  
sketch of bomb damage in Bristol, 1941–42

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Newspaper cuttings top right]

[left] Paule Vézelay (pictured left, kneeling) and  
the Bristol branch of the Women's Defence  
Corps,

Bristol Evening World & Evening Times & Echo,  
5 September 1940

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[right] Paule Vézelay (pictured standing at front) and the Bristol branch of the Women's Defence Corps,

Bristol Evening Post, 3 September 1940

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Wall to the right. Start with the object in the plinth]

Paule Vézelay

Lines in Space no.53, 1965

Wire

In the 1960s Vézelay continued with her 'Lines in Space' series, this time taking the sinuous lines beyond the confines of her boxed works begun in the mid-1930s, to a three-dimensional sculptural form made from a twisted length of wire set on a base.

Private Collection, courtesy England & Co.,  
London

[On wall above]

Paule Vézelay

Lines in Space no.51, 1965

Mixed media construction

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Right]

Paule Vézelay

Lines in Space no.9, 1942

Wire construction

Private Collection, James Trotman

[Move to the next wall past the opening]

Paule Vézelay

Growing Forms, 1946

Oil on canvas

Collection of Heloisa Genish

Paule Vézelay

Eight Curved Forms and Two Circles, 1946

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, James Trotman

[Small text panel]

Vézelay and the Natural World

From her early years in Bristol, Vézelay maintained a deep attachment to nature. In her

unpublished memoir she recalls how, as a child, she ‘was free to wander along on the miles of Downs, that stretched far away over the top of the high cliffs which shelter part of the River Avon’. She would credit the ‘superbly beautiful’ Somerset landscape with, in part, making her an artist. Despite the abstract nature of much of her work, she often depicted organic forms, sometimes literally as in ‘Object in Three Dimensions’ or in more imaginary ways, as in ‘Growing Forms’ or ‘Eight Curved Forms and Two Circles’ (both 1946).

[Next wall, move left to right]

Paule Vézelay

Flying Forms, 1948

Charcoal

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay

Eight Forms and Three Circles, 1959

Oil on canvas

Tate: Bequeathed by the artist 1985

Paule Vézelay

Grey and Yellow, 1953

Oil on canvas

Pallant House Gallery, Chichester (Donated in  
Memory of Khaled Al Bahar 2022)

[Case on the floor]

Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975)

Disc with Strings (Moon), 1969

Aluminium and strings

Hepworth's aluminium and string sculpture reflected her fascination with the moon and space exploration. She first used string in her works in 1939, three years after Vézelay begun her 'Lines in Space' series. Vézelay regarded her own works as a radical departure from two-dimensional space, a key element of which included the shadows cast by the threads and wires that she incorporated into the constructions. An idea that Hepworth also explores through her string sculptures.

Private Collection, via Towner Eastbourne

[Leave this space, turn left into the third space. Start with the text panel opposite the opening. Move round the room in a clockwise direction]

[Small text panel]

## Vézelay's Textile Designs

Vézelay began designing textiles in the late 1940s to supplement her modest private income. Her early designs included commissions from La Société Industrielle de la Lys, Ascher and Metz & Co, but it was with Heal's that she had her most fruitful period. Of the 27 designs Vézelay sold to Heal's between 1954-67, fifteen went into production. The designs were often worked out in advance using paper cutouts, tracing paper or balsa wood, several of which echoed the forms found in her paintings of the period. Vézelay enjoyed the nuanced complexities of textile design, noting: 'if it's well done, when the curtains are drawn ... it breaks up the design in a most interesting way.' She continued to paint alongside her textile design work and shapes that appeared in

the paintings would often feature in the textiles too.

[Textiles, left to right]

Paule Vézelay

Harmony furnishing fabric Designed by Paule Vézelay for Heal & Son Ltd., 1955

Roller-printed cotton

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay

Perception furnishing fabric Designed by Paule Vézelay for Heal & Son Ltd., 1961

Roller-printed cotton

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay

Modulation fabric Designed by Paule Vézelay for  
Heal & Son Ltd, 1963

Roller-printed cotton

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Case in front of textiles]

From the 1950s onwards Vezelay's practice expanded beyond fine art to include applied art and design. She diligently made preparatory drawings for textiles, as she had always done for paintings and sculpture, and kept these in her archives for future reference. There is a continuity of form and colour between the paper cutouts she used for textile designs and her paintings of the period, which unites these facets of her work.

1. No.1 Design, Black and white, Undated

Tate Archive

2. Paper cut outs, 1950s–60s

Estate of Paule Vézelay

3. Garden design, 1958–67

Pencil and ink on paper

Tate Archive

4. Transitional Bricks, made for the exhibition of artist-made toys, Play Orbit, ICA London, 1969–70

Painted wood

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Back wall, move left to right]

Paule Vézelay

Seven Forms on White, 1963

Oil on canvas

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Marlow Moss (1889–1958)

Spatial Construction in Steel, 1956– 57

Steel

Marlow Moss was a friend and contemporary of Paule Vézelay. They met and exhibited together in Paris and, later, in London. Both artists developed a lasting interest in line, space, movement and light. Moss developed their idea of the 'double line' (two lines in proximity, later adopted for a while by Mondrian), while Vézelay

worked with threads and cords to create serpentine as well as linear forms.

Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)

Paule Vézelay

Two Red Forms, 1968

Oil and mixed media on canvas

Collection of Heloisa Genish

[Next wall, left to right]

Paule Vézelay

Construction No.43 Four Silhouettes, 1964

Oil on board, copper wire and thread

Collection of Catherine Petitgas, London

Paule Vézelay

Construction with Nine Forms in Wood on  
White Ground, 1964

Wood construction

During her lifetime, Vézelay's work was acquired by many prominent art historians, collectors and fellow artists worldwide. This piece was gifted by Vézelay to former Tate director Sir Norman Reid, a cultural figure who understood the importance of Vézelay's contribution to international modernism alongside fellow British artists Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.

Private Collection, courtesy England & Co.,  
London

Paule Vézelay

Light and Space, 1978

Pastel on canvas

In the 1970s Vézelay continued to experiment with her painting in a series of delicate, luminous pastel abstractions that were, in part, inspired by her fascination with the art of JMW Turner. She was pleased with the results, noting, 'these pure colour compositions are miraculous and unhampered by objectivity... they might have fallen upon the canvas or paper from some magic and inexplicable source.'

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Turn right to view the archive material in the tall case. Use the numbers on each item for the description.]

Vézelay kept a large personal archive of photographs, letters, and other memorabilia spanning her life and career. This selection includes a photograph of her as a sporty teenager at Clifton High School, an early work from her time at the Bristol School of Art, and her first published illustrations, as well as pieces relating to her friendship with the Belgian refugee artist Léon de Smet.

1. Clifton High School Cricket Club 1st XI

About 1909

Photograph featuring Paule Vézelay, standing far left

2. Mary

Paule Vézelay

About 1912

Etching

3. A Diary of the Great Warr by Samuel Pepys

Illustrated by M. Watson-Williams

(later Paule Vézelay)

1916

4. Portrait photograph of Paule Vézelay

About 1919

5. Portrait photograph of Léon de Smet

About 1916

6. Colour magazine, front cover: Portrait of Paule Vézelay by Léon de Smet, 1919

7. Letter from Léon de Smet to Marjorie  
Watson-Williams (later Paule Vézelay), 1926  
Tate Archive

Vézelay met the artist Léon de Smet when he escaped from war-torn Belgium to London in the 1910s. Smet painted Vézelay's portrait at least three times, helped to stage her first solo exhibition at the Galerie Louis Manteau, Brussels, and kept in frequent correspondence with her. His persistent amorous attentions may have influenced her decision to settle in France in 1926, the year of this last farewell letter.

8. Exhibition catalogue, Galerie Louis Manteau  
1924

9. Group of Margaret Morris dancers in Antibes, 1920s Margaret Morris at Eden Roc, 1920s Tate Archive

In 1923 and 1925 Paule Vézelay joined her friend, the choreographer Margaret Morris, with her dance troupe on the French Riviera. Here Vézelay spent the days watching the dancers, taking photographs and notes for future artworks. During her 1925 trip she met Picasso through Morris's husband, the Scottish colourist painter JD Fergusson.

10. Photograph of lost work Three Clowns at Medrano Paule Vézelay, 1921

Tate Archive

11. Photograph of Paule Vézelay in the sea at Cagnes, France, 1926

Tate Archive

All works are on loan from the Estate of Paule Vézelay except where noted.

[Move to the other side of the tall case]

In the 1930s Paule Vézelay became an internationally recognised figure among European avant-garde artists. These pieces from her personal archive illuminate her many friendships with important writers and artists of the day, her formative relationship with André Masson, and her lasting connection to her Paris gallerist, Jeanne Bucher.

1. Paule Vézelay in her Paris studio, 1934

Photograph by Hugo P. Herdeg (facsimile)

Tate Archive

2. Portrait photograph of Paule Vézelay, 1930s

3. Abstraction-Création no.3 journal,  
featuring Paule Vézelay 1934

4. Paule Vézelay exhibition card, Galerie  
Jeanne Bucher, 1934

Paule Vézelay exhibition catalogue, Galerie  
Jeanne Bucher, 1937

Vézelay's friendship with the enterprising gallerist Jeanne Bucher led to two exhibitions of her work at Bucher's Paris gallery in the 1930s. The second, in 1937, included examples of her ground-breaking 'Lines in Space' series.

5. Paule Vézelay and artist André Masson

About 1930

Tate Archive

6. Letter from writer Ernest Hemingway to Paule Vézelay 1933

7. Letter and note from sculptor Alberto Giacometti to Paule Vézelay, 1930s

8. Note from artist Alexander Calder to Paule Vézelay, 1930s

9. Letter from artist Joan Miró to Paule Vézelay 1935

10. Letter and calling card from artist Henri Matisse to Paule Vézelay, 1936

11. Letter from artist László Moholy-Nagy to Paule Vézelay, 1936

12. Letter from Sophie Taeuber-Arp to Paule Vézelay, 1938

Tate Archive

13. Postcards from artists Wassily and Nina Kandinsky to Paule Vézelay, 1939

14. Letter from Paule Vézelay to Oliver Brown of Leicester Gallery, London 1954

Tate Archive

In this extraordinarily candid letter, Vézelay outlines the emotional distress that she suffered during her tortuous, yet inspirational, relationship with André Masson, and its subsequent impact within their circle of Parisian friends. During their respective lifetimes the artists mutually agreed not to discuss their relationship publicly.

## 15. Letter to Paule Vézelay from Sonia Delaunay 1956

In 1953 Paule Vézelay was asked to set up a branch in Britain of the French artists association Le Groupe Espace. She organised a group exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall, London, which included work by her friends and fellow members, Sonia Delaunay, Ithell Colquhoun, Marlow Moss and others. This letter from Delaunay also mentions a possible connection to the Tate gallery.

All works are on loan from the Estate of Paule Vézelay except where noted.

[On the wall to the right of the tall case, move left to right]

Paule Vézelay

M. Fratellini in his dressing room, 1923

Linocut on paper

RWA Collection

Paule Vézelay

Two Men and Two Women, 1923

Woodcut on paper

Estate of Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay

In a Theatre, Paris, About 1926

Woodcut on paper

RWA Collection

Henry Moore (1898–1986)

Elephant Skull Album, 1970

Left to right:

Plate I: An elephant skull was recently added to Moore's maquette studio

Plate XVII: The elephant is the most remarkable living link we have with the prehistoric world

Plate XXVIII: Skull back view - Tunnels, regressions, dark depths

Etching; ink on paper

Gift through the National Art Collections Fund,  
in memory of Bernard Smartt. Towner  
Eastbourne

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

The Dream and Lie of Franco I, and II, 1937

Etching and sugar-lift aquatint

Towner Eastbourne

[Fabric hanging on the far wall]

Paule Vézelay

Parade fabric curtains

Designed by Paule Vézelay for Heal & Son Ltd.,  
1956-57

Roller-printed cotton

Estate of Paule Vézelay

[Please take some time to enjoy the Towner  
Collection Library]