

## The Abbey Art Centre as Postwar Refuge, 1946–56

Ben Uri Gallery, London NW8 0RH (7 October – 18 December 2026)



Robert Klippel *Untitled*, 1948, pen and black ink with wash on paper, Private Collection, London © Andrew Klippel. Courtesy of Robert Klippel Estate, represented by Annette Larkin Fine Art, Sydney

William Ohly in his Abbey Studio, c. 1950, silver gelatin print, Papers of Bernard Smith, National Library of Australia

Peter King *Untitled (Standing Figure, One Arm Up)*, c. 1951–57, Private Collection, London © Mike King

Ben Uri is delighted to announce the upcoming exhibition, *The Abbey as Postwar Refuge, 1946–56*, marking the simultaneous publication of *The Abbey Art Centre in postwar London 1946–1956*, eds., Jane Eckett, Ian McLean and Sheridan Palmer (Routledge), this autumn.

The exhibition unfolds the remarkable story of the Abbey Art Centre, a cosmopolitan art colony established at New Barnet in 1946 by charismatic artist, gallerist and world art collector, William Ohly (1883–1955). A crucible of creativity on London’s northern edge, the Abbey was a postwar haven for stateless Jewish refugees, as well as artists from Australia, Britain and continental Europe. Ohly’s openness to outsiders extended to his dealings at the Berkeley Galleries in Mayfair, which opened in late 1941 during the Blitz and where Abbey artists occasionally exhibited, as well as Commonwealth artists and artists from Ohly’s own world art collection. The Abbey was an important seeding bed for cross-cultural and transnational modernism that proved pivotal to the careers of many artists, as they navigated the seismic political and cultural shifts taking place in the postwar and postcolonial artistic landscape in Britain and beyond.

Featuring paintings, sculpture, drawings, monotypes, lithographs, puppets and related photographs, books and archival materials, the exhibition includes artworks by Abbey residents Scottish painter Alan Davie, English sculptor Peter King, English painter Lilian Colbourn, German émigré painters and printmakers Marcel Frishman, Margret Kroch-Frishman and William Ohly, Austrians Helen Grünwald and Angela Varga, sculptors Inge King and Gudrun Krüger, pioneering German animator Lotte Reiniger, Ukrainian painter Stacha Halpern, Australian constructivist Robert Klippel and painters James Cant and Mary Webb. Narrative sub-themes include the impact of African and Indigenous Australian art on emerging artists and socially conscious painter-printmakers working in London’s East End.

The exhibition also features a small number of artists associated with the Berkeley Galleries including Nigerian modernist Ben Enwonwu, German sculptor Fred Kormis and Prussian-born graphic artist Katerina Wilczynski, as well as related photographs, books and archival materials.

A book launch and a related series of events will accompany the exhibition.

Co-curators: Simon Pierse, Jane Eckett, Sheridan Palmer and Sarah MacDougall

**Open:** 7 October – 18 December 2026, Wednesdays to Fridays: 10am – 5.30pm

### **Notes for Editors**

This exhibition reflects Ben Uri's core research focus on the Refugee and Immigrant contribution to British visual culture since 1900 – see [buru.org.uk](http://buru.org.uk) & [diaspora-artists.net](http://diaspora-artists.net)

**External artists featured:** Wood carver from the Belgian Congo (now DRC) in collaboration with tribal *nganga* (ritual specialist), Wood carver from the Idoma people (Nigeria), Kofi Antubam (1922–1964), James Cant (1911–1982), Lilian Colbourn (1897–1967), Alan Davie (1920–2014), Marcel Frishman (1900–1952), Helen Grünwald (1925–1988), Inge King (1915–2016), Peter King (1928–1957), Robert Klippel (1920–2001), Margret Kroch-Frishman (1897–1972), Gudrun Krüger (1922–2004), William F. C. Ohly (1883–1955), Lotte Reiniger (1891–1981), Angela Varga (1925–), Mary Webb (1917–1958).

**Ben Uri artists:** Milein Cosman (1921–2017), Ben Enwonwu (1917–1994), Fred Kormis (1897–1986), Stacha Halpern (1919–1969), Katerina Wilczynski (1894–1978).

The Ben Uri Collection was formed in 1915 in London's East End to support Jewish artists working outside the cultural mainstream. In 2002 the remit widened to include all first- and second-generation immigrant artists, irrespective of national, ethnic, and religious/ non-religious origins, who have helped to enrich Britain's visual culture. The Collection today reflects three waves of migration: first- and second-generation Eastern European Jewish migration prior to 1914; the so-called 'Hitler émigrés', both Jewish and non-Jewish (1933–45), and wider multicultural immigration after the Second World War.

For further information on Ben Uri: see [www.benuri.org](http://www.benuri.org)

**For further information on this exhibition please contact:**

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