

The Hepworth Wakefield

Wakefield, UK 2003–2011

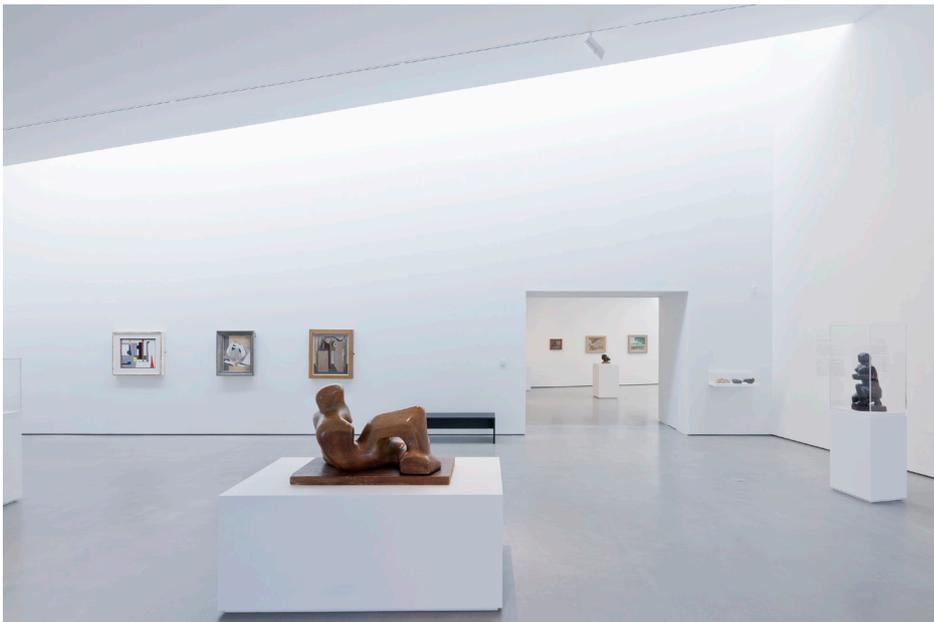
The Hepworth Wakefield is named after the late English artist Barbara Hepworth, who was born in Wakefield in 1903. It is a purpose-built art gallery, located within the Wakefield waterfront conservation area, which protects a number of significant industrial buildings that once housed the town's cloth and grain industries. The new building sits on a sharp bend in the River Calder with the immediate surroundings dominated by a twentieth century road bridge and a series of locks known as the Calder and Hebble Navigation.

At the tip of the headland, the site of the new building is exposed on all sides without being defined by either river or road. These particular conditions led to a building form without a dominant façade. The almost geological composition is a conglomerate of diverse irregular forms tightly interlocked. Each single volume represents and coincides with a single space, unique in size and shape. To the north, where the river level drops at the weir, the building steps into the water like many of the old mills and warehouses. The monolithic appearance and composition is accentuated by the use of pigmented in-situ concrete.

The programme is split horizontally between the ground and first floors, the latter exclusively used as exhibition space. The ground floor contains the reception, shop, cafeteria, auditorium and learning studios, as well as offices, archives and storage. The cafeteria has a generous terrace near the main reception area and all public areas enjoy exterior views. At the core of the building is a naturally lit central staircase leading to the galleries on the upper floor.

Most of the rooms on the upper level house the gallery's permanent collections, which range from large-scale sculptures and plasters by Barbara Hepworth and others, to highly light-sensitive works on paper from the city of Wakefield's collection of British art. The remaining rooms host a programme of temporary exhibitions. All of the galleries use the same neutral language, allowing for future reinterpretations and representations of artworks. Open doorways link the gallery spaces into fluid and varied sequences, offering inviting glimpses of other works and the outside world.

From within the individual blocks, the outer morphology can be clearly seen in ceilings that slope parallel to the outer roofs, and rooms in which no two surfaces lie parallel to one another. Walls meet at diverse angles, and the variations in size and ceiling pitch give each room a unique character. The main source of light in each gallery is a slot running the full width of the ceiling at the highest end of the space. The varying angles of each block's ceiling have been calculated to admit and diffuse light in the most effective way, complementing the artificial lighting system. Louvres allow the light to be regulated or even completely blocked out. In addition, several of the galleries feature a picture window framing an aspect of the surroundings, linking Hepworth's sculptures to the landscape in which she grew up.



Project start	2003
Completion	2011
Gross floor area	5,232 m ²
Client	Wakefield Council
Architect	David Chipperfield Architects
Landscape architect	Gross Max
Structural engineer	Ramboll UK Ltd
Services engineer	Ramboll UK Ltd
Facade consultant	Ramboll UK Ltd
Project management	Turner & Townsend
General contractor	Laing O'Rourke Northern Limited
Fit out contractor	Realm Projects
Exhibitions contractor	Wood Mitchell, Museums Technik
Images:	Simon Menges and Iwan Baan