

# London Landmark

The London Group has attracted a who's who of contemporary art over the past century. Former president **Peter Crossick** looks back at its famous alumni and forward to 2013's centenary celebrations



Paula Rego, *Prince Pig and the Second Sister*, lithograph, 101x61.5cm

After myriad prestigious members and exhibitions, the London Group celebrates its centenary year in 2013. From painting to performance, the London Group members span generations and genres, backgrounds and continents, coming together to form a democratically-run collective that self-finances exhibitions through annual subscription.

Formed in November 1913, the original members included painters Walter Sickert, Wyndham Lewis and Mark Gertler, alongside sculptors Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein. They merged under the name London Group to include visual artists of any nationality, with the mission statement: "To advance public awareness of contemporary visual art by holding exhibitions annually."

Belying this apparently prosaic statement, the group immediately courted controversy with a provocative show at the Goupil Gallery in 1914, which brought together a dramatic clash of style and principles. "We want to shock the senses," Wyndham Lewis told the press. The group did just that at subsequent exhibitions, showing Epstein's robot-like *Rock Drill* in 1915 and Gertler's anti-war painting *Merry-Go-Round* in 1917, two of the many London Group works unlike any seen before.

Throughout the 20th century, the London Group's membership reads like a roll call of influential British artists. Members of the Bloomsbury Group joined, leading Roger Fry to call it: "The freest and least academic group in England". The 1930 sculpture show on the roof of Selfridges department store featured works by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, while the group would later include such great names as Augustus John, Graham Sutherland and David Hockney.

In 1964, Andrew Forge wrote of the London Group show at Tate, "The common interest has not been one of style or aesthetic direction so much as the desire to exhibit freely and without strings", a précis that holds true to this day, with existing members including Dame Paula Rego, Anthony Eyton RA, Frank Bowling RA and many other Royal Academicians. There is hardly a name that has not at least shown with the London Group: even Tracey Emin displayed her work as a student.

Throughout its distinguished history, the group has held annual members' exhibitions and, more recently, smaller shows, too. Meanwhile, the biannual open exhibitions provide opportunities for non-members and younger artists to exhibit – the 1995 installment was even held at the Barbican Centre.

The London Group's original mission statement is still pertinent in the 21st century, and its diversity remains its strength with the sheer variety forever changing its shape. Although it tends towards the representational, members engage in diverse creative activity, from traditional to contemporary, from hard-edge abstraction to landscape and narrative works. The London Group is exhibiting throughout 2013 as it goes from strength to strength under current president Susan Haire.

**The London Group Centenary Members' Exhibition runs from 23 January to 9 March at PM Gallery and House, London W5. For details of other group exhibitions in 2013, please visit [www.thelondongroup.com](http://www.thelondongroup.com)**