



Eric Gill: The Body

with Cathie Pilkington:
Doll for Petra

Curated by Nathaniel Hepburn
and Cathie Pilkington RA

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Exhibition curated by Nathaniel Hepburn and Cathie Pilkington

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Front and back cover: Eric Gill, Doll, 1910
Courtesy of Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft
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Study for Gladys Panel, 1912
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private

Introduction

Eric Gill lived in Ditchling between 1907 and 1924; while in this village he secured his status as one of the country's most important artists. Depictions of the human form were central to Gill's art, yet knowledge of the artist's disturbing sexual conduct raises questions of how much we can separate the biography of an artist from the works which they produce.

Gill recorded every aspect of his artistic and family life in his diary, and excerpts which revealed his sexual abuse of two of his daughters were included in a biography published nearly 30 years ago. Eric Gill was an artist of great innovation and a master of his craft; he had an exceptional sense of design and his depictions of the human form are often very beautiful. The exhibition *Eric Gill: The Body*, held at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft in 2017, invited each visitor to consider how much our knowledge of Gill's biography affects our enjoyment and appreciation of the drawings, wood-engravings and sculpture which he created. The response will be a personal one, and may vary from one work of art to another.

The exhibition was co-curated by Cathie Pilkington, Royal Academician and Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools. As an artist and an admirer of Eric Gill's sculpture, Pilkington selected a grouping of the works which emphasises their formal, artistic qualities, rather than encouraging us to read stories about Gill's life into the works. Yet within many formal groupings are works which, like 'emotional bombs', remind us that the biography is never far behind some of the art. Throughout the exhibition, the dual process of enjoying the work aesthetically and considering the complicated facts of Gill's life were in constant competition.

**We suddenly
packed up and
went to Ditchling
in Sussex**

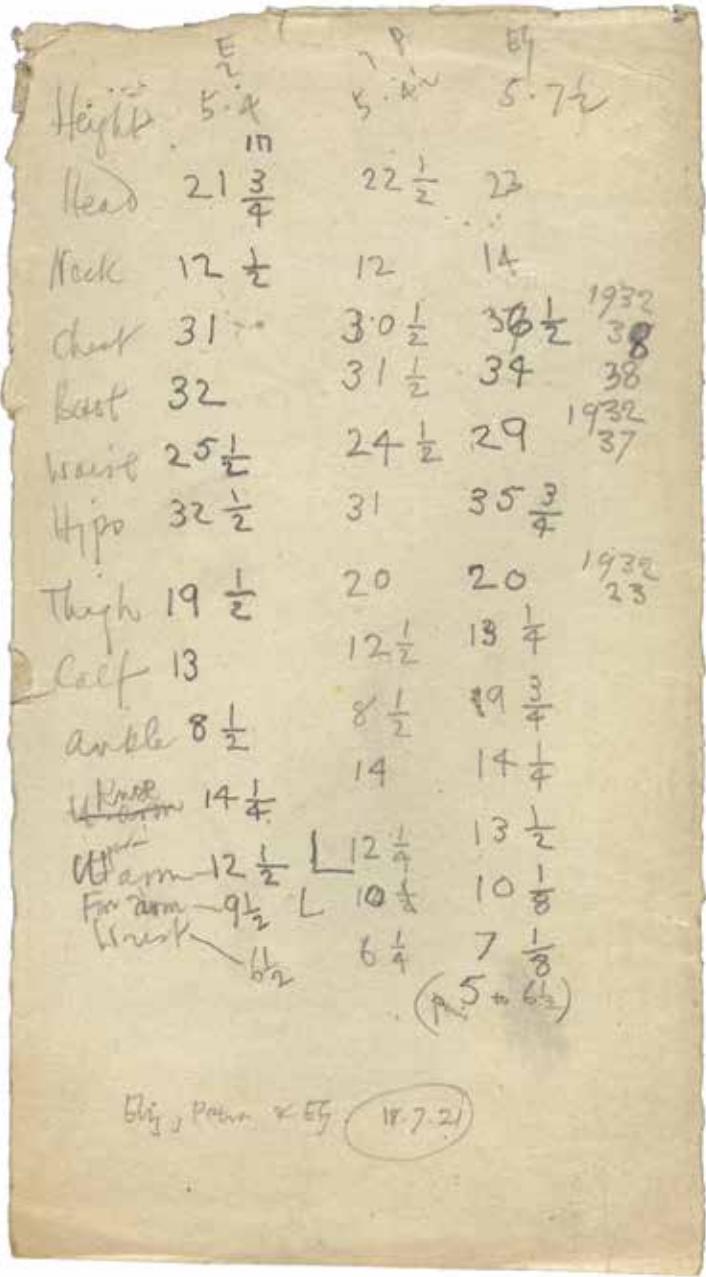
Many museums and galleries across the world show Eric Gill's art without mentioning the disturbing elements of his biography. However, this museum tells the stories of the artists and craftsmen who lived in Ditchling — their beliefs, their families, their homes — not just the art which they created.

Eric Gill is of central importance to the story of art in this village. He was one of the first artists to arrive and attracted many others to follow him here; he was one of the founders of the Catholic Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic; and his artistic legacy is more wide-reaching and enduring than any other in the community. Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft has a growing collection of Eric Gill's art as well as an internationally significant archive of his papers.

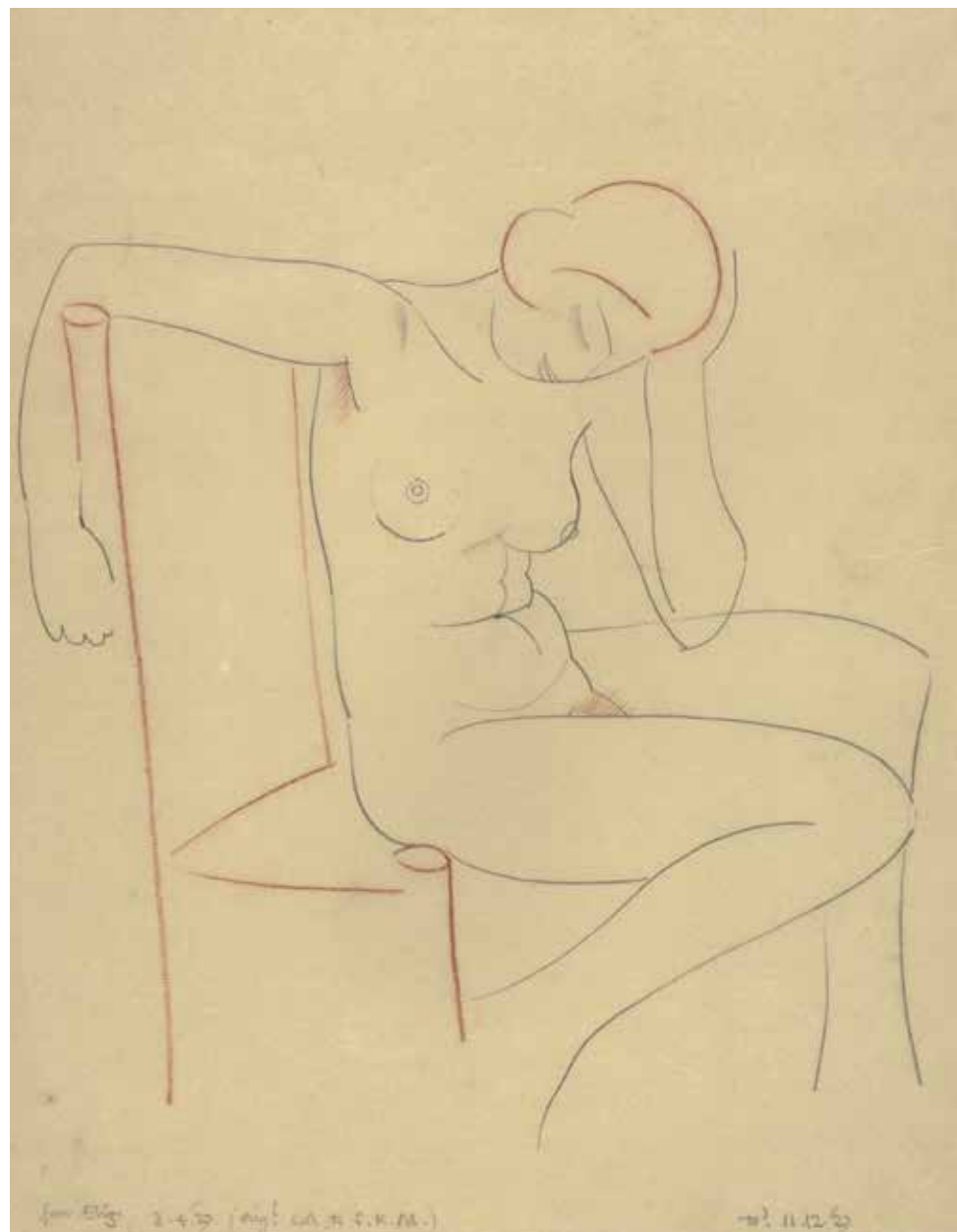
Within the museum's permanent collection are drawings, carvings and wood-engravings of two of Gill's daughters, Elizabeth and Petra, who he had sexual contact with. In the archive, amongst tracings around his children's feet, is an envelope on which Gill records his body measurements, as well as those of these two daughters.



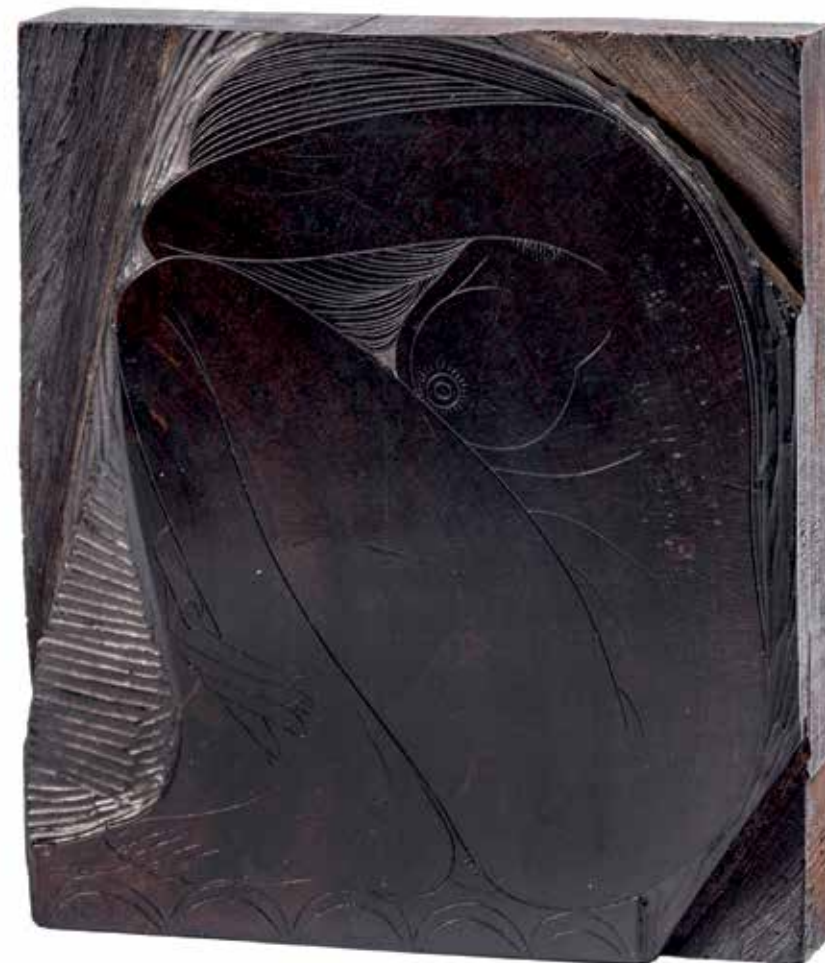
Eric Gill's smock, date unknown
Cotton
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Eric Gill, Envelope containing measurements of Elizabeth, Petra and Eric Gill, 1921
Pencil on paper
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Eric Gill, *From Elizabeth*, 1927
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private



Eric Gill, woodblock for *On the Tiles*, 1921
Boxwood
Collection: Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

Nature and nakedness

Across many books, essays and pamphlets, Eric Gill sought to reconcile his thoughts about clothes and therefore his view about men and women. However, Eric Gill was a man of deep contradictions and, like his views on sex and religion, sometimes a theory was developed to fit his behaviour. In many instances Gill made multiple versions of the same image — one which was published and a second or third version for himself.

Gill liked women to dress modestly in plain clothes, preferably black, yet he also noted 'nothing is more pleasing when seen than the nude human body clothed in its variously tinted skin, decked out with its four or five bushes of hair'. This tension within Gill is expressed formally throughout his work with images of undressing, half-dressing, and contrasts between dressed and undressed as a constantly recurring motif.

Throughout this group the details of Gill's biography can feel very far away, and his great skill and design come to the fore. However, in his autobiography, Gill does not allow this separation of life and art. Recording his first ever stone carving, produced while his wife was heavily pregnant: 'I fashioned a woman of stone ...so my first erotic drawing was not on the back of an envelope but a week or so's work on a decent piece of hard stone... But there it was; it was a carving of a naked young woman, and if I hadn't very much wanted a naked young woman, I don't think I should ever have done it.'



Artist and Mirror II (illustration for Sculpture and the Living Model), 1932
Wood-engraving
Collection: Private



Design for Church Statue BVM of Annunciation, 1935
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private



Nature and Nakedness (illustration from Clothes), 1930
Wood-engraving
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft

Not a portrait otherwise



Eric Gill's exceptional craftsmanship is perhaps most evident in his ability to carve flowing and cascading hair in the hard surface of stone. This skill is shown in many of the sculptures on display in the exhibition, particularly *Mary Magdalen* (1926), *Nude Girl with Hair* (1925) and *Headdress* (1928). This skill, and a seeming delight in mastering whatever material he is working in, is also apparent in the wood-engravings which Gill made.

Gill was a proficient portrait artist, usually working in pencil although occasionally transferring these drawings to wood-engravings. A number of these portraits are included in the museum's permanent collection display. The wood-engraving of *The Plait* is usually labelled as being a portrait of Petra. The discovery of Gill's original drawing for the work during the research for this exhibition, and now purchased for the museum's permanent collection, casts doubt on this labelling. Gill has written on the bottom: 'Drawn for the hair (not a portrait otherwise)'.

Within this group of wood-engravings and drawings is the widely known, and frequently reproduced *Girl in Bath II*. The letter 'P' indicates that this drawing depicts Petra. Gill drew a sketch for this wood-engraving on 24.2.22, two days after his fortieth birthday and six months before Petra's seventeenth.



Above: Letter to David Kindersley, (Drawing describing the carving in-situ of St John the Baptist at Guildford Cathedral), 1939
Pencil on paper
Collection: Cardozo Kindersley Workshop

Opposite: *The Plait*, 1922
Pencil on paper
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Girl in Bath II, 1923
Wood-engraving
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Hair Combing, 1922
Wood-engraving
Collection: Private

Opposite: *Woman Bending/Bath Mat, 1923*
Bath stone sculpture with added colour
Collection: Private



Headdress, 1928
Beer stone with added colour
Collection: Private (courtesy of Daniel Katz Gallery)



Nude Girl with Hair, 1925
Capel-y-ffin stone relief
Collection: Private



Mary Magdalen, 1926
Caen stone relief with added colour; on ebony base
Collection: Private (courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)



The Soul and the Bridegroom (from *The Song of the Soul*), 1927
Wood-engraving
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft

We forget the divine image and see only dimples

When describing his life drawings, Gill wrote that 'men are prone to idolatry and forgetfulness and are constantly liable to seduction. We forget the divine image and see only the lovely dimples; we forget the mother of God and see only a 'glamour girl'. ...why be so uncharitable as to suppose that all nakedness, whether in the flesh or in pictures, is pornographic?'

The pewter sculpture called *Icon* is derived from a wood-engraving called *Divine Lovers*, which is one of many drawings, sculptures and wood-engravings by Gill's where he depicts the Church and Christ in a sexual embrace. The motif of the heart-shaped arms and heads locked together appears time and time again. It is of much greater importance to Gill than the detailed sexual anatomy that he sometimes includes. Whether a work is a depiction of real lovers, or of spiritual embrace, was of little concern to Gill who rejected the Catholic division of spirit and flesh.

Gill's sexual appetite was well known and his wife, complainingly, accepted his infidelity from the beginning of their relationship. Almost certainly no-one knew about Gill's abuse of his daughters, but when Gill produced an image of the Church being 'fucked by Christ', his fellow members of the Ditchling community expressed their concern. His increasingly controversial religious and erotic works, including *Song of Songs* and *Procreant Hymn*, were produced in the increased isolation of Capel-y-Ffin.



Top: *Lovers on a Bank*, 1924
Wood-engraving
Collection: Private

Bottom: *Lovers*, 1924
Wood-engraving
Collection: Larkhall Fine Art, Bath

Opposite: *Divine Lovers*, 1922
Pewter
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft





Young Lovers, 1917
Ink and watercolour with gold paint on paper
Collection: Private



The Lovers, 1938
Pencil and crayon on paper
Collection: Private

Drawings from life

As one of the most important artists of the 20th century, Eric Gill had very little formal art education. It was not until May 1926, when Gill was 44 years old, that he did his first life drawing while at a Paris academy. Gill preferred to draw people he knew and many of these drawings depict people who Gill lived and worked with.

In his introduction to *25 Nudes*, Gill wrote: 'What is wrong with your friends and relations? Perhaps they haven't specially perfect figures; but that is not the point; for in any case it is what is in your own head that matters most and not what the model has in his or her own body.' The sitters for these drawings include Gill's mistress Beatrice Warde (American publicity manager for Monotype), Daisy Monica Hawkins (a 19 year old servant girl with whom Gill had an intense two year love affair), Gill's daughters, as well as his publisher Douglas Cleverdon.

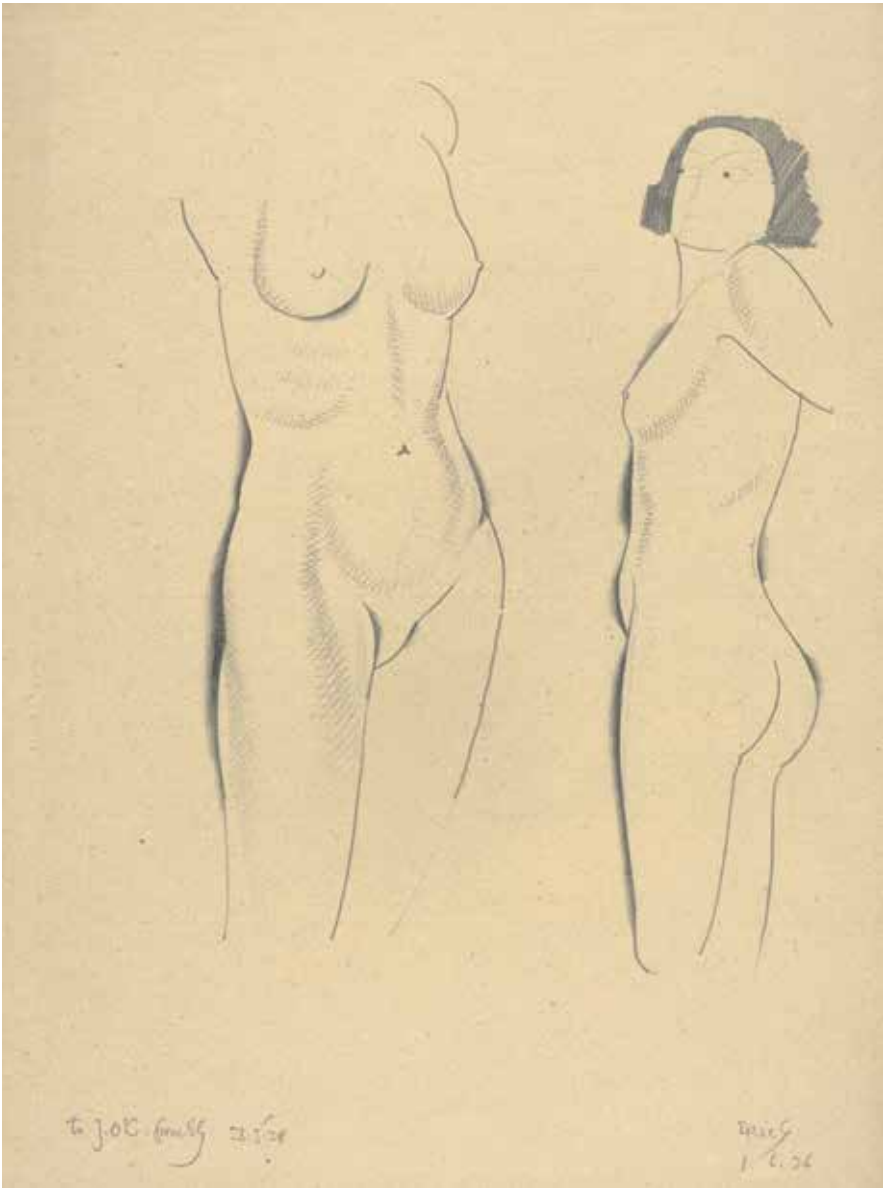
Gill's life drawings are within a long tradition of depicting the nude human figure yet because of our knowledge of his biography, particularly his sexual liaisons, the name of the sitter can sometimes seem more important than considering the drawings as works of art in their own right. Eric Gill wrote of his life drawings that there are 'two chief things to be considered: the thing seen, and the thing — the drawing — made, and both these things must be considered in all their causes.'

Standing Nude, 1927
Pencil on paper
Collection: Daniel Katz Gallery

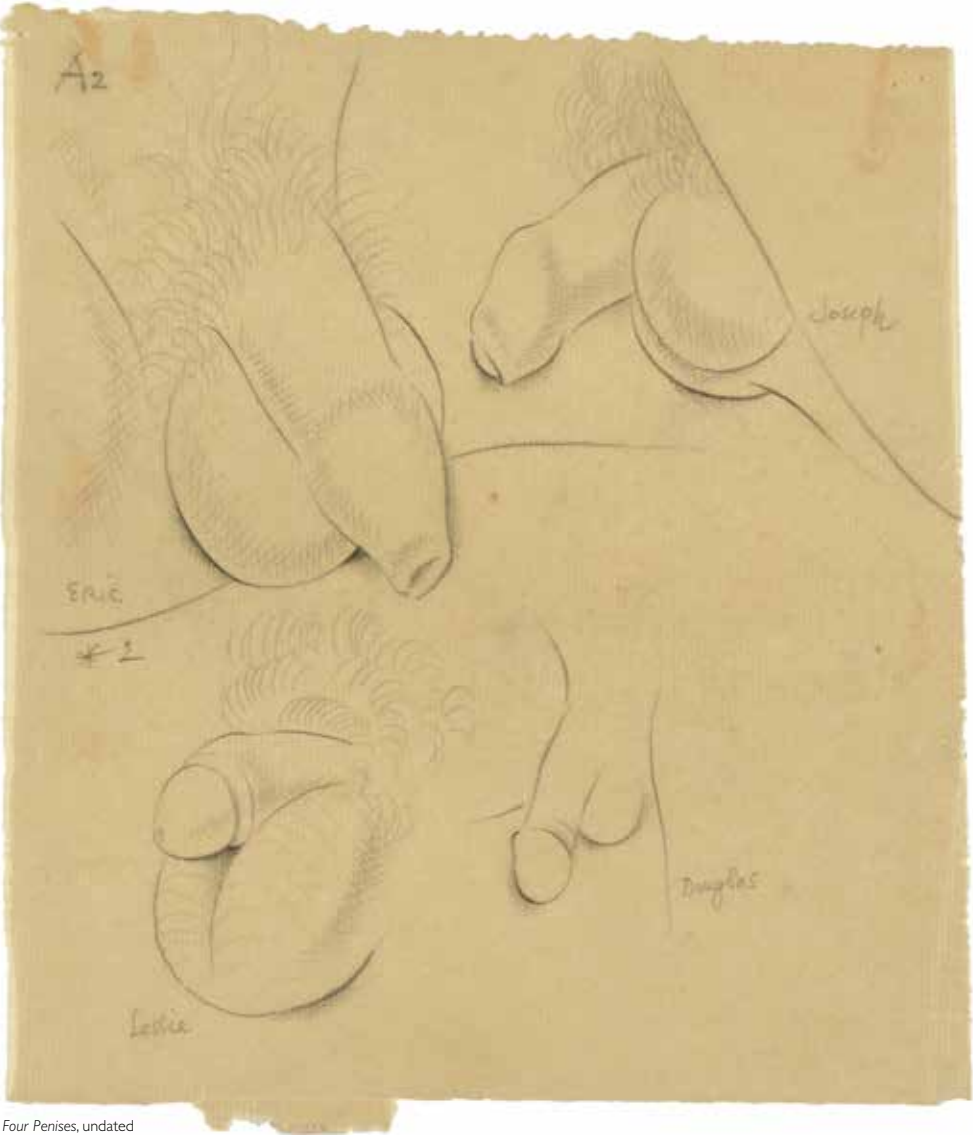




Nude, 1927
Pencil on paper
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Nude Studies, 1926
Pencil on paper
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Four Penises, undated
Pencil on tracing paper
Collection: Private



Douglas Cleverdon, 1929
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private



Left: *Rear View of Torso*, date unknown
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private



Top right: *Woman Bending*, 1926
Pencil on paper
Collection: Private

Bottom right: *Nude*, 1926
Pencil on paper
Collection: Jonathan Clark Fine Art



Small Female Torso, 1924
Plaster
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Nude (from *Drawings From Life*), 1940
Pencil on paper
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Nude, 1926
Pencil on paper
Collection: Jonathan Clarke Fine Art





Doll, 1910
English Oak
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft

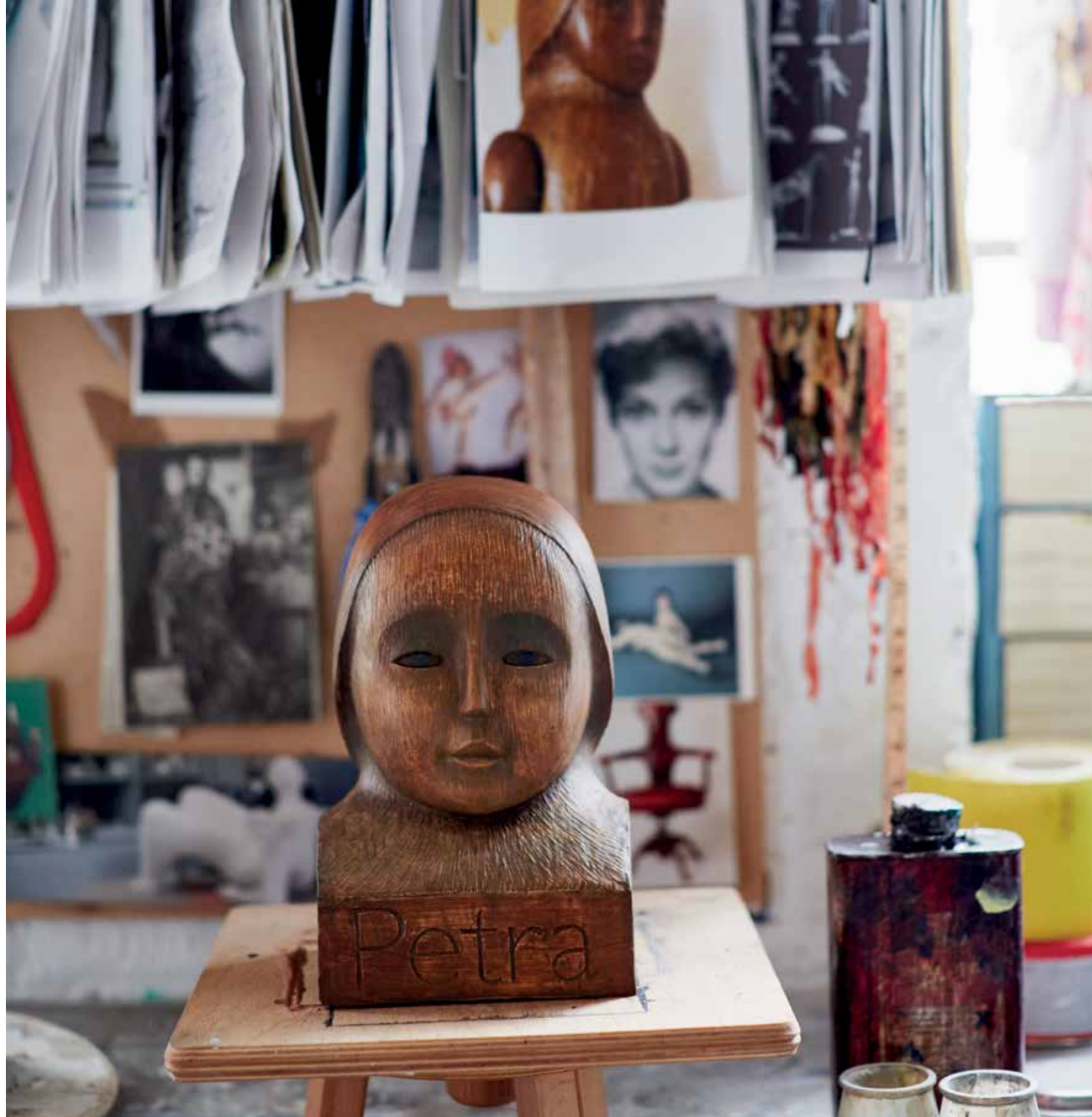
Cathie Pilkington: **Doll For Petra**

Cathie Pilkington uses the figure of the doll as a way of exploring both formal and narrative issues. To accompany *Eric Gill: The Body*, Pilkington created a new work inspired by a carved wooden toy doll which Gill made for his daughter Petra. *Doll for Petra* is an installation of multiple sculpted heads and other objects within which 'Petra' repeatedly appears as an insistent presence.

The Eric Gill doll is a simple, arts and craft object; like many other toys which Gill and his fellow artists made for their children. Pilkington is interested in its awkward beauty which she describes as 'part doll and part sculpture'. Gill made the doll when Petra was around 4 years old, over a decade later, he sexually abused her. With this knowledge, this otherwise unremarkable object becomes potent with projected stories.

Pilkington has transformed the doll's head into a sculpted bust adding Petra's name, directly addressing her story and person. The formal shape of the bust references a series of heads made by Gill and Jacob Epstein based on Augustus John's son Romily John. By painting each head to imitate a wood, stone or polychrome surface, Pilkington engages with different aspects of Gill's multifaceted workshop practise. One of the busts has been decorated by her 11 year old daughter Chloe.

The tension between made, material object and implied subject or person is explored more fully in the painted bronze figure of *Twinkle* (2014) which occupies the central gallery space. Her tiny invented form is at odds with her believable inward strength and presence.



Petra: Doll, 2017
Oil paint on plaster
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



Top and right: Cathie Pilkington's studio, including work in progress for *Doll for Petra*, 2017





Installation shot of Cathie Pilkington's *Doll for Petra* in Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft's 'Wunderkammer', 2017



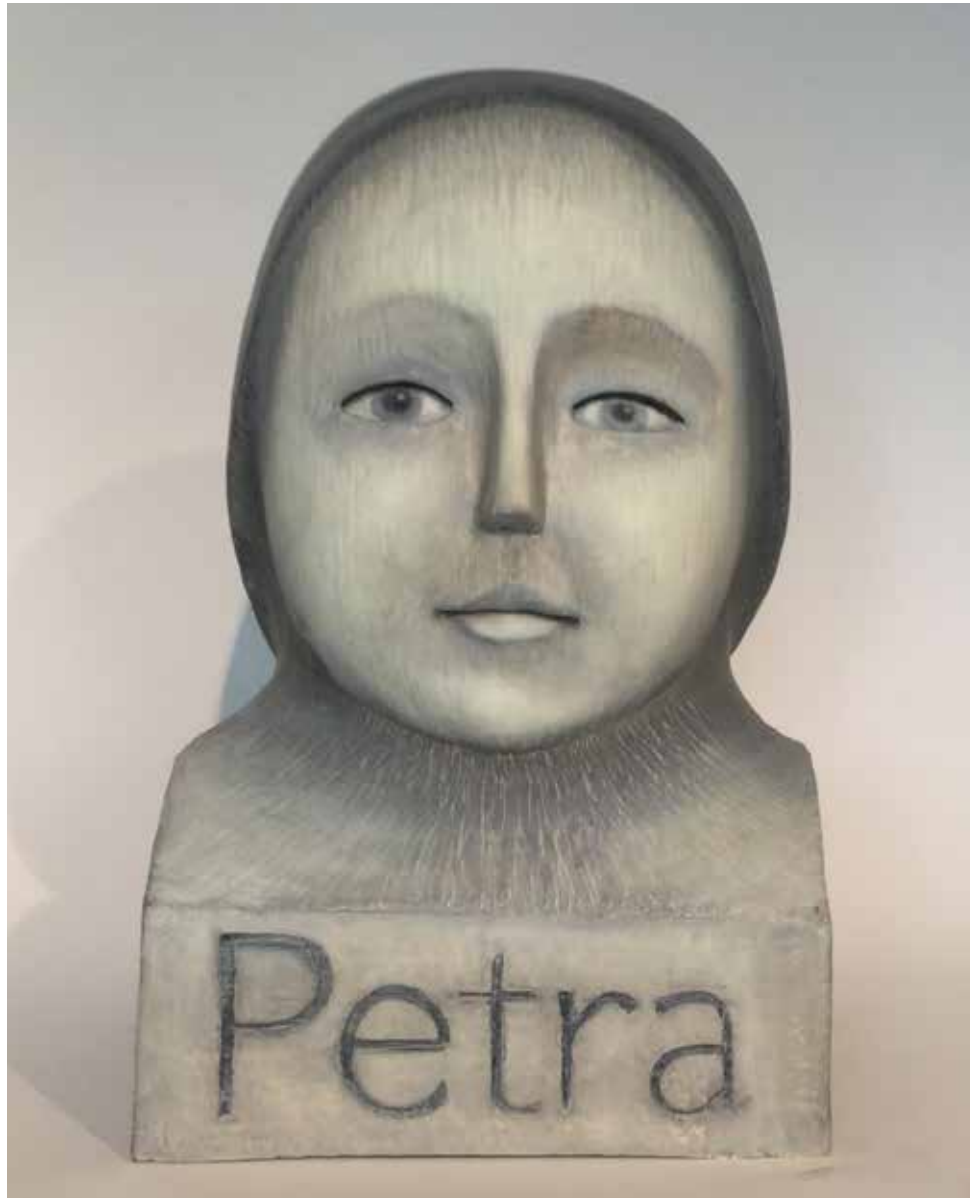
Petra: Doll, 2017
Oil paint on plaster
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



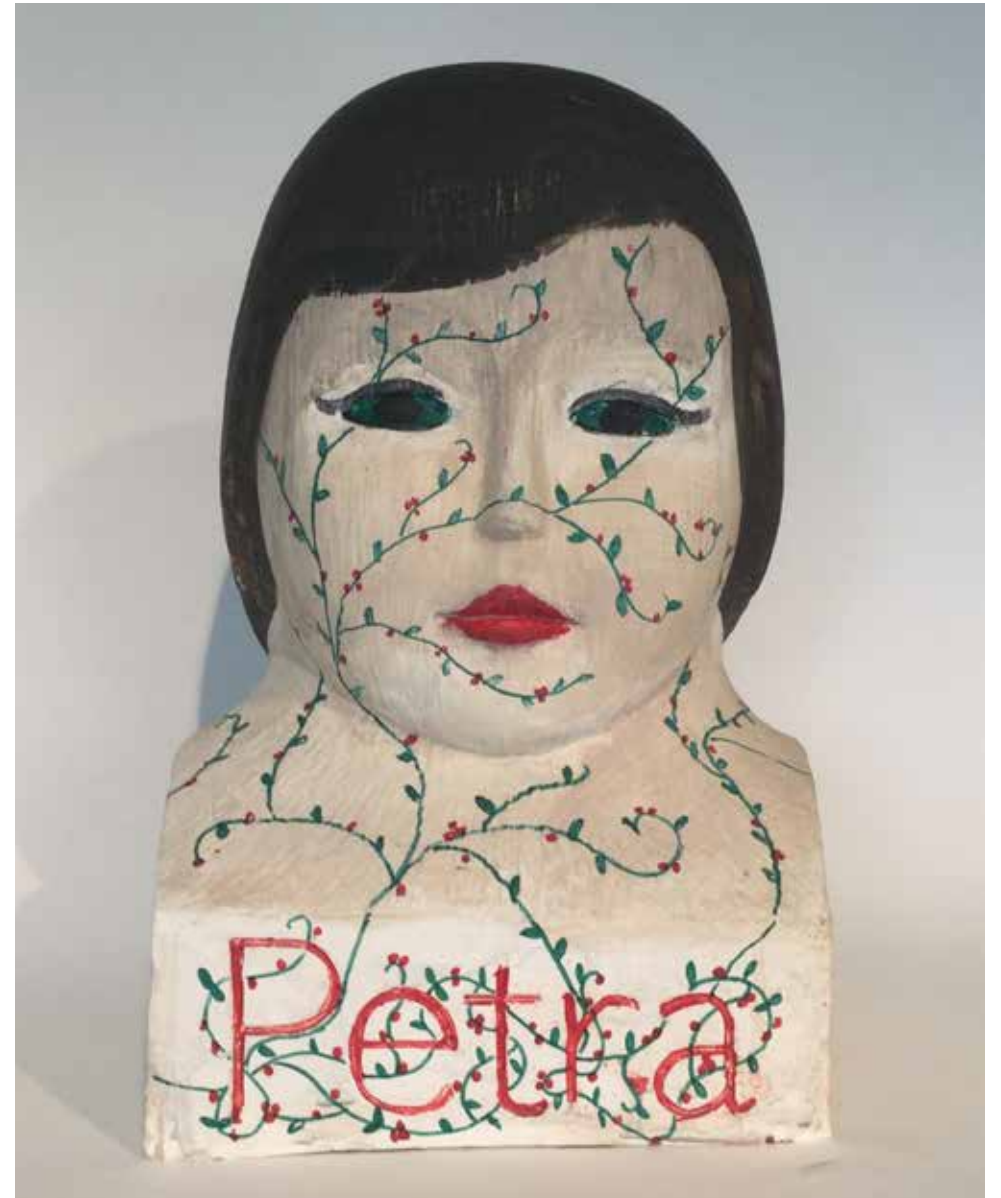
Petra: Clay, 2017
Oil paint on plaster
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



Petra: Icon, 2017
Oil paint on plaster
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



Petra: Ghost, 2017
Oil paint on plaster
Collection: Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft



Petra: Story, 2017
Oil paint and felt tip on plaster
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



Twinkle, 2014
Oil paint on bronze
Collection: Cathie Pilkington



Above and Opposite: Details of Cathie Pilkington's *Doll for Petra* installation in Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft's 'Wunderkammer', 2017



Overleaf: Cathie Pilkington in front of *Doll for Petra*, 2017



List of works exhibited

Doll, 1910 English Oak
Garden Statue – The Virgin, 1911-12 Beer stone with added colour
Study for Gladys Panel, 1912 Pencil on paper
Torso, 1913 Bath stone on a slate base
Young Lovers, 1917 Ink and watercolour with gold paint on paper
Spirit and Flesh, 1917 Various
Dress (Illustration for Dress, Welfare Handbook No.7), 1920 Wood-engraving
Envelope containing measurements of Elizabeth, Petra and Eric Gill, 1921 Pencil on paper
Woodblock for On The Tiles, 1921 Boxwood
Hair Combing, 1922 Wood-engraving
Nuptials of God (Illustration to The Game, January 1923), 1922 Wood-engraving
The Plait, 1922 Wood-engraving
The Plait, 1922 Pencil on paper
Girl In Bath II, 1923 Wood-engraving
Icon, 1923 Pewter
Woman Bending / Bath Mat, 1923 Bath stone sculpture with added colour
Drawing for Dartmoor, 1924 Pencil on paper
Drawing for Naked Girl with Cloak, 1924 Pencil on paper
Elizabeth Gill, 1924 Pencil on tracing paper
Lovers, 1924 Wood-engraving
Lovers on a Bank, 1924 Wood-engraving
Divine lovers, 1922 Pewter
Dryad, c1925 Stone
Inter Ubera Mea (from Song of Songs), 1925 Wood-engraving

Leda Loved (from Leda), 1925 Wood-engraving
Nude Girl with Hair, 1925 Capel-y-ffin stone relief
Stay Me with Apples (from Song of Songs), 1925 Wood-engraving
The Kiss (from Song of Songs), 1925 Wood-engraving
Drawing for The Skaters, 1926 Pencil on paper
Earth Inviting, 1926 Engraving on copper
Earth Receiving, 1926 Engraving on copper
Eve, 1926 Wood-engraving
Mary Magdalen, 1926 Caen stone relief with added colour, on ebony base
Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
Nude Studies, 1926 Pencil on paper
Seated Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
Seated Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
St Mary Magdalen, 1926 Wood-engraving on Japanese tissue
Standing Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
Standing Nude, 1926 Pencil on paper
The Skaters, 1926 Engraving on copper, hand-coloured
Woman Bending, 1926 Pencil on paper
Adam and Eve in Heaven or The Public-House in Paradise, 1927 Engraving on copper
From Elizabeth, 1927 Pencil on paper
Nude, 1927 Pencil on paper
Our Bed is All of Flowers (from Song of Songs), 1927 Wood-engraving
Paris Sketchbook, 1927 Pencil on paper
Standing Nude, 1927 Pencil on paper

Standing Nude, 1927 Standing Nude
Study for Bending Woman – from Betty, 1927 Pencil on paper
The Artist: Man's Peculiar and Appropriate Activity (Illustration for Art & Love), 1927 Engraving on copper
The Soul and the Bridegroom (from The Song of the Soul), 1927 Wood-engraving
Headdress, 1928 Beer stone with added colour
Nude Woman Reclining on a Leopard Skin, 1928 Pencil on paper
Seated Nude, 1928 Pencil on paper
Standing Nude, 1928 Pencil on paper
Belle Sauvage IV, 1929
Douglas Cleverdon, 1929 Pencil on paper
Lovers in a Tent, 1929 Wood-engraving
Nude (the artist's wife), 1929 Pencil on paper
The Chinese Maidservant, 1929 Wood-engraving
Amnon, 1930 Wood-engraving
Clothing without Cloth, 1930 Wood-engraving
Ibo Dabo Tibi (from Canticum Canticorum), 1930 Wood-engraving
Ibo Ubera Mea (from Canticum Canticorum), 1930 Wood-engraving
Nature and Nakedness (illustration from Clothes), 1930 Wood-engraving
Sculpture No.2, 1930 Wood-engraving
Snake with Phallic Head, 1930 Wood-engraving
Trousers, 1930 Wood-engraving
Mary Magdalen (Illustration for The Four Gospels, Golden Cockrell Press), 1931 Wood-engraving
Seated Nude, 1931 Pencil on paper
Artist and Mirror I, 1932 Wood-engraving

Artist and Mirror II (Illustration for Sculpture and the Living Model), 1932 Wood-engraving
Raised Bottom, 1934 Wood-engraving
Design for Church Statue BVM of Annunciation, 1935 Pencil on paper
Trouser & The Most Precious Ornament, 1937
25 Nudes, 1938
The Lovers, 1938 Pencil and crayon on paper
Letter to David Kindersley, (drawing describing the carving in-situ of St John the Baptist at Guildford Cathedral), 1939 Pencil on paper
Drawings From Life, 1940 Pencil on paper
First Nudes, Published posthumously in 1954
Nude Looking Over Shoulder, Undated Pencil on paper
Four Penises, Undated Pencil on tracing paper
Eric Gill's Smock, date unknown Cotton
Rear View of Torso, date unknown Pencil on paper
Small Female Torso, 1924 Plaster [pp33]

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Daniel Katz Gallery: pp. 17, 25, 27
Mark Heathcote: pp. 24
Jonathan Clark Gallery: pp. 2, 35
Alun Callender: pp. 36 – 37, 38, 43, 43, 50
Nathaniel Hepburn: pp. 42 (top)
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Perou: pp. 44, 52, 53, 34 – 55
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