

Press Release: February 2025

BARBARA WALKER | BEING HERE

8 March to 25 May 2025



Barbara Walker, *End of the Affair*, 2023. Graphite, charcoal, pastel and conte on paper.
Photo by Chris Keenan @primeobjective. Courtesy of the artist.

Following a hugely successful inaugural run at the Whitworth in Manchester, Arnolfini presents *Barbara Walker: Being Here* for Spring 2025.

Described as one of the most important British artists working today, *Being Here* charts Walker's compelling figurative practice, from the 1990s to today. Walker's wide ranging formal experimentation in painting, drawing and embossed print techniques critically engages with social justice and belonging, transforming Black presence in contemporary society and throughout history.

Walker is celebrated for her sensitively rendered drawings, grounded in extensive periods of research. From delicate pencil drawings on archival documents to monumentally scaled wall charcoal drawings, she uses the most traditional of techniques to give powerful presence to the conditions of our time and the histories they are rooted in. Playing with techniques of visibility and erasure, such as enlarging, cutting, obscuring and blanking out, she challenges conventions of representation to ask what it means to be seen and who and what is remembered. Intensely observed and empathetic, her work brings forth themes of body politics, power and citizenship.

The exhibition brings together all of Walker's major series of works beginning with early vividly coloured paintings from *Private Face* (1998 to 2002) depicting intimate moments of her family and wider communities in Birmingham; to *Louder than Words* (2006 to 2009) which presents a tender series of mixed media drawings on police dockets and newspaper articles made in response to her son being repeatedly stopped and searched by police.

Reflecting Walker's research driven practice, *Shock and Awe* (2015 to 2020) foregrounds the overlooked contributions of Black servicemen and women to contemporary and historic war efforts, using techniques of erasure such as blind embossing to disrupt the archive. *Vanishing Point* (2018 to present) and *Marking the Moment* (2021 to present) engage with European Old Master paintings, transforming the historic image to spotlight the once marginalised Black figure, creating alternative ways of seeing for a new generation.

Walker's Turner Prize nominated series *Burden of Proof* (2022 to 2023), commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation with the support of the Whitworth, imbues a sense of humanity and reverence to the Caribbean-born individuals impacted by the Windrush scandal.

A major wallpaper installation, *Soft Power* (2024) further spotlights these histories and the artist's continued experimentation with materials. Inspired by the Whitworth's internationally renowned collections of textiles and wallpapers and the history of French Toile de Jouy design, Walker has created an enveloping patterned wallpaper environment featuring Windrush communities in Manchester alongside landscape and decorative elements.

The exhibition is supported by the Whitworth Art Gallery, the University of Manchester and is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue generating new research and understandings of Walker's celebrated practice.

Barbara Walker, artist, says: "To be an artist to create in times of adversity, is, I believe to be optimistic. In my work as an artist, I have sought to make 'positive images', or perhaps images that will have a positive impact. I love working with people who are not used to having their voices heard. People who are often made visible in only the worst ways. I want to help make people visible in the best ways possible, by creating affirming images that speak of and to humanity."

Barbara Walker: Being Here is accompanied by a programme of workshops, community and live events. The exhibition runs from 8 March to 25 May 2025. Open Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm. Entry is free, with a suggested donation of £5 welcomed.

- ends -

For further information please contact Sara Blair | sara.blair@arnolfini.org.uk

Additional images are available [here](#)

@ArnolfiniArts Instagram / Threads / LinkedIn / Facebook / Bluesky

www.arnolfini.org.uk

Image credit:

Barbara Walker, *End of the Affair*, 2023. Graphite, charcoal, pastel and conte on paper. Photo by Chris Keenan @primeobjective. Courtesy of the artist and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London.

Additional images [here https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniBarbaraWalker](https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniBarbaraWalker)

LISTINGS

Barbara Walker: *Being Here* | 8 March to 25 May 2025

A monumental retrospective exhibition of artworks by acclaimed British artist, Barbara Walker including rarely seen paintings, her Turner Prize nominated drawing series *Burden of Proof* (2022 to 2023) and newly commissioned printed wallpaper *Soft Power* (2024).

Arnolfini, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA

Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm. Free entry, donations appreciated.

arnolfini.org.uk @arnolfiniarts

Related publication

An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, edited by Whitworth curators Poppy Bowers and Hannah Vollam, with contributions from Mora Beauchamp-Byrd; Eddie Chambers; Alice Correia; Leanne Green and Rianna Jade Parker. It includes an introduction by Sook-Kyung Lee, Director at The Whitworth, and Suzanne Rolt, Director at Arnolfini, and will be available to buy from **Arnolfini Bookshop** throughout the exhibition.

Credits

Curated by Poppy Bowers (Senior Curator, the Whitworth) and Hannah Vollam (Assistant Curator, the Whitworth), and adapted for Arnolfini by Gemma Brace, (Head of Exhibitions) and Kiara Corales (Exhibitions Producer). The exhibition was initiated by Leanne Green (Head of Exhibitions & Displays, Tate Liverpool, formerly Curator at the Whitworth). The exhibition is generously supported by Cristea Roberts Gallery.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Barbara Walker

Barbara Walker MBE, RA (born 1964, Birmingham, UK) is a British artist described by art historian Eddie Chambers as “one of the most talented, productive and committed artists of her generation.” Walker studied Art and Design at the University of Central England, Birmingham (1993-96) and Wolverhampton University (2003 to 2004). She has had regular solo shows throughout her career including at Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham (2002, 2007, 2016); Jerwood Gallery, Hastings (2018); and Turner Contemporary, Margate (2019 to 2021). Her work has been included in over sixty group presentations since 1995, most recently: *The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure*, National Portrait Gallery, London (2024); *Black Atlantic: Power, People, Resistance*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2023); *Sharjah Biennial 15: Thinking Historically in the Present* (2023); *Life Between Islands, Caribbean - British Art, 50s to Now*, Art Gallery Ontario, Canada (2023) and Tate Britain (2021) and *Lahore Biennale 02: Between the Sun and the Moon* (2020). In 2023 Walker was nominated for the Turner Prize and elected to the Royal Academy of Arts.

In 2021 the Whitworth acquired three works from Walker’s *Shock and Awe* series (2015 to 2020). Her work is held in public collections including Arts Council Collection, UK; British Museum, UK; Government Art Collection, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA; Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE; Tate, UK; and Yale Center for British Art, USA.

The Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for “the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester” it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.

About Arnolfini

Woven into the fabric of Bristol since 1961, Arnolfini is an international centre of interdisciplinary contemporary arts, presenting an ambitious and wide-ranging programme of visual art, performance, dance, film, and music.

Housed in Bush House, a prominent 19th century former warehouse on the city’s harbourside, Arnolfini is a pioneering, inspiring public space for arts and learning, offering an innovative, inclusive and engaging experience for all.

Arnolfini has welcomed artists from around world throughout its history – sharing works by Paula Rego, Jannis Kounellis, John Akomfrah, Grayson Perry, Rachel Whiteread, Peter Doig, Richard Long, Veronica Ryan, Chantal Joffe, Sonia Boyce, Alice Kettle and Frank Bowling, to name just a few - as well as supporting talent from in and around Bristol.

Alongside its main programme, Arnolfini is a centre of everyday creativity and learning, working with a wide range of community and artistic partners, while continuing to explore and develop new collaborations across the city and beyond. Spaces are used regularly by families, schools and colleges, health and wellbeing groups.

Through sharing a 63+ year archive of exhibition slides, publications and an extensive artist book collection, Arnolfini celebrates its heritage and the wide-reaching impact the organisation has had since its foundation.

The team at Arnolfini strive to honour founder Jeremy Rees' principle to 'Enjoy Yourself', welcoming everyone into the accessible space, and inviting engagement, in any number of ways.

Arnolfini is part of the University of the West of England and a key element of their City Campus.

An independent charity (CIO), Arnolfini is supported by Arts Council England and the Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust. www.arnolfini.org.uk

About The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol)

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) has a global and inclusive outlook, with approximately 38,000 students and strong industry networks and connections with over 1,000 employers. Research at UWE Bristol focuses on real world problems and the University plays a pivotal role in the regional economy. With over £400 million invested in infrastructure, buildings and facilities across all campuses in the past 10 years, UWE Bristol is creating a place for learning that is innovative, ambitious, connected, enabling and inclusive. The University is a '1st Class' university for sustainability, ranked 11th out of 151 higher education institutions in People & Planet's latest sustainability league table. www.uwe.ac.uk

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Our vision, set out in our strategy *Let's Create*, is that by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2023 and 2026 we will have invested over £467 million of public money from Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Until Autumn 2025, the National Lottery is celebrating its 30th anniversary of supporting good causes in the United Kingdom: since the first draw was held in 1994, it has raised £49 billion and awarded more than 690,000 individual grants. www.artscouncil.org.uk.

About Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust

Arnolfini has been supported by a linked charity, the Ashley Clinton Barker Mills Trust (ACBMT) for almost 60 years.

Arnolfini founders Jeremy and Annabel Rees were first introduced to the artists and benefactors Peter and Caroline Barker-Mill in 1963, by the London gallerist Lesley Waddington. It was a fortuitous meeting that was the catalyst in allowing Arnolfini to develop from a small volunteer-run private gallery into a major international arts centre.

The Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust (ACBMT) principle is to work with Arnolfini, primarily by making annual grants from the income earned on its investments, as well as funding modest, one-off capital grants to help the Arnolfini transition to its current financial model. In more recent years members of the ACBMT have become more involved working with Arnolfini to help plan its future. www.arnolfini.org.uk/about/ashley-clinton-barker-mills-trust