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Press Release

## Dulwich presents first major Vanessa Bell retrospective

Dulwich Picture Gallery will present the first major monographic exhibition of work by Vanessa Bell (1879-1961). Widely acclaimed as a central figure of the Bloomsbury Group, Bell also stands on her own as a pivotal player in 20th century British art, inventing a new language of visual expression.

Arranged thematically, the exhibition will reveal Bell's pioneering work in the genres of portraiture, still life and landscape and will explore her fluid movement between the fine and applied arts, focusing attention on her most distinctive period of experimentation in the 1910s. Approximately 100 oil paintings as well as fabrics, works on paper, photographs and related archival material will deliver Bell in full force, boldly experimenting with abstraction, colour and form while developing her own distinctive way of seeing the world.

Bell's reputation as an artist has been habitually overshadowed by a preoccupation with her family life and romantic entanglements. She has often been seen in a supporting role to her sister, Virginia Woolf, as wife to the noted art critic, Clive Bell and as muse and confidante to her lovers, friends and fellow artists such as Roger Fry and Duncan Grant. The exhibition will present Bell for fresh consideration as an artist on her own terms, charting her move from the refined Impressionism of her early training to a more radical, experimental style stimulated by her many visits to Paris and by the post-Impressionist exhibitions held in London in 1910 and 1912.

"Unconventional in her approach to both art and life, Bell's art embodies many of the progressive ideas that we still are grappling with today, expressing new ideas about gender roles, sexuality, personal freedom, pacifism, social and class mores and the open embrace of non-British cultures. This is the perfect moment in which to re-evaluate Bloomsbury, and Bell's legacy within it, and we look forward to affirming her importance to a contemporary audience."

- Sarah Milroy, Exhibition Curator

Bell's artistic training was rich and wide-ranging. She studied under varied teachers, including Arthur Cope, Henry Tonks and John Singer Sargent, attending classes at both the Royal Academy and the Slade School, and received emboldening encouragement from the influential painter, Walter Sickert. She pioneered a new, modern vision in British art, in which meaning and emotion were conveyed through the deployment of what her husband, Clive Bell, described as 'significant form': the arrangement of shapes, colour and line to capture and convey the sensations and emotions of human experience.

Bell's portraits are intense with bold colour, her sitters anchored in space in adventurous ways. The genres of still life and landscape were likewise daringly revamped, as Bell incorporated Fauvism and Cubism into her evolving vision. One of the first artists in Britain to experiment with abstraction, in 1914, Bell soon returned to figuration, but incorporated her strengthened understanding of composition and colour into her later work, which featured daring new ways of seeing and picturing the female subject.

"No British artist of Bell's generation so instinctively understood and reflected the radical new artistic developments unfolding in Paris. Her resolute de-skilling, her vibrant embrace of colour, the sheer brutality of her brushstrokes – as if hacking at the canvas with the brush – and her bold rejection of traditional notions of the beautiful, are truly brave and can astonish even today."

- Ian A C Dejardin, Co-curator and Sackler Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery.

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The exhibition will open with a display of portraits, considered by many to be Bell's most accomplished works, including paintings of her sister Virginia Woolf, the writer Lytton Strachey, the poet Iris Tree, art critic and art historian Roger Fry, and Bell's own self-portrait from the collection of the Yale Centre for British Art.

It will go on to cast light on Bell as innovative homemaker and bohemian mother, breaking free of the repressive Victorian standards in which she was raised. At her farmhouse at Charleston, East Sussex, home was reimagined by Bell as a place of freedom and unbridled creativity, rather than conformity and constraint. Focus will also be given to her experimentation within the decorative arts, specifically her work with the Omega Workshop, with a display of her designs for interiors, fabrics and furnishings.

Bell's pioneering evocation of the female subject will be explored in the final room, which will highlight her complex and ground-breaking vision of modern womanhood. Landmark works such as the *Tents and Figures* (1913, Victoria and Albert Museum) and *Studland Beach* (c.1912, Tate) will be presented in the context of related works, allowing for a deeper understanding of these classic modern masterpieces. The exhibition will also include two of Bell's remarkable self-portraits, demonstrating her sense of herself as an artistic force to be reckoned with, even in her final years.

The exhibition is curated by Canadian writer and curator Sarah Milroy, and Ian Dejardin, The Sackler Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery. Loans have been secured from a number of British and US private lenders, as well as a wide range of institutions, including Tate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, National Portrait Gallery, The Charleston Trust and Yale Center for British Art. An extensive full colour catalogue will accompany the exhibition, with essays by a host of established Bell scholars and emerging voices.

Vanessa Bell continues Dulwich Picture Gallery's ongoing series of exhibitions dedicated to Modern British art, providing greater insights into significant yet often undervalued artists.

- Ends

### Media Enquiries:

Further information and high-res images, please visit the Press Site  
<http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/about/press-media/>

Or contact

Louisa Bee, Press and Communications Manager  
[l.bee@dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](mailto:l.bee@dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk) / 020 8299 8710

### Listings Info:

Vanessa Bell (1879–1961)  
8 February – 4 June 2017

### Tickets: (Pre-book online):

£14 Adult  
£13 Senior Citizens  
£7 Unemployed, disabled, students  
Free: Children, Friends

\*Ticket prices include a voluntary Gift-Aid donation

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## Press Release

### Associated Public Events

#### Exhibition Curator's Lecture

Thursday 9 February

12.30 – 1.30pm

£12, £10 Friends

Join exhibition co-curator and Sackler Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery, Ian Dejardin, for an exploration of Vanessa Bell.

#### Exhibition Late: Woolf Works

9 February

6.30pm-9pm

£20 Adults, £15 Students/Concessions

Join us for a special exhibition Late during the opening week of Vanessa Bell. Enjoy the show after hours and see a special performance from Wayne McGregor's critically acclaimed ballet, *Woolf Works*, inspired by the works of Bell's sister, Virginia Woolf. Dancers from The Royal Ballet will perform a dance duet in the Gallery which will be followed by a panel discussion with Uzma Hameed, dramaturg and Sarah Milroy, curator of the exhibition.

### Vanessa Bell

Vanessa Bell was born in London in 1879. The eldest of four children and sister to renowned writer Virginia Woolf, she was encouraged from a young age to pursue her individual talents. In 1901 she began studying at the Royal Academy Schools, under the tutelage of John Singer Sargent, amongst others.

Following the death of her parents, Vanessa and her siblings moved from their family home to Bloomsbury, where regular meetings with other artists and intellectuals lead to the formation of The Bloomsbury Group. In 1907, she married fellow Bloomsbury member Clive Bell, with whom she had two children.

In 1912, alongside such notable names as Picasso and Matisse, Bell exhibited her work in the influential Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, London, a landmark show organised by Roger Fry. Alongside Fry, Bell and Duncan Grant co-founded The Omega Workshop, an artists' co-operative for decorative arts that operated between 1913 and 1919. Bell had her first solo exhibition at the Omega Workshops in 1916, and another at London's Independent Gallery in 1922. She exhibited her work internationally in exhibitions in Paris, Zurich and Venice.

### About Dulwich Picture Gallery:

Dulwich Picture Gallery is the world's first purpose-built public art gallery, founded in 1811 and designed by Regency architect Sir John Soane. It houses one of the finest collections of Old Masters in the country, especially rich in French, Italian and Spanish Baroque paintings and in British portraits from the Tudor period to the 19th century. The Gallery's Permanent Collection is complemented by its diverse and critically acclaimed year round temporary exhibitions.

## Image Sheet

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### Vanessa Bell, (1879–1961)

8 February – 4 June 2017



Vanessa Bell, *The Other Room*, late 1930s, 161 x 174 cm, Private Collection, © The Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett



Vanessa Bell, *Landscape with Haystack, Asheham*, 1912, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. Purchased with the gift of Anne Holden Kieckhefer class of 1952, in honour of Ruth Chandler Holden, class of 1926. © The Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett



Vanessa Bell, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1915, Oil on canvas laid on panel, 63.8 x 45.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund. 5050 - B1982.16.2 © The Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett



Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, oil on board © National Portrait Gallery, London



Vanessa Bell, *Design for Omega Workshops Fabric*, 1913, Watercolor, gouache, and graphite, Yale Center for British Art



Vanessa Bell, *Studland Beach*, c.1912, Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), Tate: Purchased 1976. ©Tate, London 2016

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Embargo: 16 December 2016

## Legacy: Photographs by Vanessa Bell and Patti Smith

8 February – 4 June 2017

Dulwich Picture Gallery will present the first photography display bringing together work by the British modern artist, Vanessa Bell and the American musician, writer and artist, Patti Smith.

'Legacy: Photographs by Vanessa Bell and Patti Smith', which coincides with the Gallery's major retrospective of Vanessa Bell's work, will include 17 photographs by Smith and a selection of Bell's photo albums, displayed publicly for the first time. It couples two artists both known for their pioneering creative drive and defiance of social mores, showcasing two different but compatible artistic visions.

Smith has long been drawn to the work and lives of the Bloomsbury Group, finding inspiration and solace in the rural retreats of these forward thinking artists and thinkers. Charleston, Bell's farmhouse on the Sussex Downs, where she lived with her life companion Duncan Grant, and the neighboring Monk's House, home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, both became sites of pilgrimage for Smith. The display will include a selection of Smith's black and white photographs, the product of her residency at Charleston in 2003, which capture the lingering remnants of Bell's life and chart Smith's ongoing artistic response to the Bloomsbury group.

Commenting on Charleston, Smith said:

***"Art was a part of everyday living. Their cups and saucers were designed by themselves, their utensils, the wallpaper, tapestries. When I first came here I found it just like home [...] I felt a real longing to document this place in the same manner that I document my own home because it is very much how I live: books everywhere, things that seem very humble, very sacred, a simple wooden box, a shell, a paint tube – everything has significance."***

On display with Smith's photographs will be seven of Bell's photograph albums, generously loaned from the Tate Archives, that were carefully compiled by Bell during her lifetime. Bell took pictures from her earliest days - some of the photographs date from her youth at St Ives, where her family spent their summers. Others depict her own young family, her husband Clive Bell and lover Duncan Grant, and the circle of leading intellectuals and artists that surrounded them. The selection also offers an insight into Bell's working process, illuminating how she used the camera to inform her paintings and providing an intimate glimpse of the Bloomsbury members behind closed doors.

***"In our display, these photographs and their makers will be able to speak to each other across the years"*** says curator Sarah Milroy. ***"Bell and Smith are both free spirits that challenged the times they lived in, and epitomised the ideal of creative freedom. We look forward to their conversation."***

While Smith's photographs depict places abandoned to the forces of time, Bell's teem with a host of characters, captured by her sharp eye and framed by her keen compositional instincts. Seen together, these images offer a present and past reflection on Charleston and Bloomsbury, suggesting a lineage of free thought and female creativity that continues to this day.

- Ends

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**Listings Info:**

Legacy: Photographs by Vanessa Bell and Patti Smith  
8 February – 4 June 2017

**Tickets: Entry included with the standard admission charge**

£8\* Permanent Collection

£7\* Senior citizens

FREE Unemployed, disabled, students, under 18s, Friends

\*Ticket prices include a voluntary Gift Aid donation.

**About Vanessa Bell**

Vanessa Bell was born in London in 1879. The eldest of four children and sister to renowned writer Virginia Woolf, she was encouraged from a young age to pursue her individual talents. In 1901 she began studying at the Royal Academy Schools, under the tutelage of John Singer Sargent, amongst others.

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**Biography: Patti Smith**

Patti Smith began as a visual artist and has been making drawings and taking photographs since the late 1960s. In recent years, her practice has expanded to include installation. She was most recently the subject of *Camera Solo*, a survey of her photographs organized by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art (2011), which travelled to Detroit Institute of Arts (2012) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (2013). In 2008, Smith was the subject of *Patti Smith Land 250* at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporaine, Paris, and *Written Portrait - Patti Smith* at Artium Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. *Strange Messenger: The Work of Patti Smith*, a three hundred-work retrospective, was organized by The Andy Warhol Museum in 2002 and traveled to numerous venues including the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Her work has also been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Eki, Kyoto; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Triennale di Milano, Milan; Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels and the Pompidou Center in Paris.

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Just Kids, a memoir of Smith's remarkable relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe during the epochal days of New York City and the Chelsea Hotel in the late sixties and seventies, won her the 2010 National Book Award in the nonfiction category. Her 1975 album *Horses*, established her as one of most original and important musical artists of her generation and was followed by ten releases, including *Radio Ethiopia*; *Easter*; *Dream of Life*; *Gone Again*, *Trampin'*, and *Banga*, her latest. She continues to perform throughout the world and in 2007 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In July of 2005, she was presented with the prestigious insignia of Commander of the Order of the Arts and Letters, an esteemed French cultural honor. In May 2011, Smith won the Polar Music Prize, Sweden's most prestigious music award.

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# Legacy: Photographs by Vanessa Bell and Patti Smith

8 February – 4 June 2017



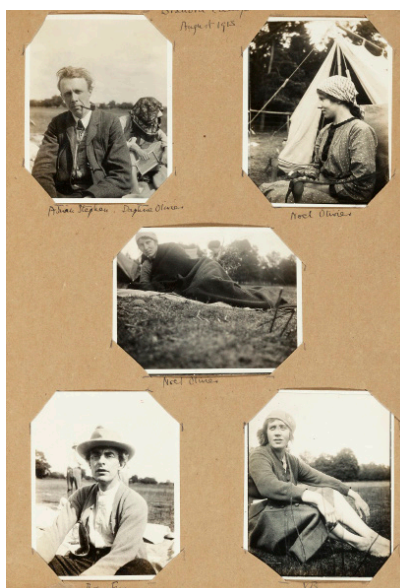
Patti Smith, *Paint brushes*, Duncan Grant's studio, 2008, Gelatin silver print, edition of 10, © Patti Smith. Courtesy the artist and Robert Miller Gallery



Patti Smith, *Vanessa Bell's library*, Duncan Bell's painting of Vanessa Bell in her mother's dress, 2006, © Patti Smith. Courtesy the artist and Robert Miller Gallery



Patti Smith, *Vanessa Bell's bed*, 2003, Gelatin silver print, edition of 10 10 x 8 in (25.4 x 20.32 cm) © Patti Smith. Courtesy the artist and Robert Miller Gallery



Brandon Camp, 1913. Photographs by Vanessa Bell and others, in Vanessa Bell's album, Tate (TGA 9020/3) © Tate Archive, London 2016.