

Press Release

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## Nottingham Castle Celebrates Nottingham-Born Artist Dame Laura Knight in Brand-New Exhibition



Laura Knight, *Motherhood*, c.1922, 77.5 x 66cm, oil on canvas, Nottingham City Museums NCM 1923-19



Caroline Walker, *First Nappy Change*, 2021  
Oil on linen  
105 x 80cm (41 3/8 x 31 1/2in)  
Framed: 108.4 x 83.4cm (42 5/8 x 32 7/8in)  
Copyright Caroline Walker. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.  
Photo by Peter Mallet.

## Laura Knight & Caroline Walker: A Female Gaze Nottingham Castle 19 March to 5 June 2022

Nottingham Castle Trust is delighted to announce the arrival of a brand-new exhibition, examining the roles and lives of women over the past 100 years. Titled *Laura Knight & Caroline Walker: A Female Gaze*, this unique, home-grown exhibition features work by two important female British artists, brought together for the first time in an ambitious new presentation. Although born decades apart, both artists examine through paint the

remarkable lived experiences of women, while individually celebrating subjects as varied as ballet performers, motherhood, and modern-day NHS heroes.

The exhibition celebrates the remarkable achievements of Nottingham artist Dame Laura Knight R.A (1877 - 1970) by highlighting over 80 much-loved and critically lauded paintings and drawings. The selection features works made in Nottingham, her well-known behind-the-scenes portrayals of circus and ballet performers, officially commissioned portraits, her work as an appointed war artist, and intimate portrayals of friends and communities with whom she built close relationships. There is an observational, sometimes voyeuristic, nature to these works, but also a social commentary on travelling and marginalised communities, the working and entertainment classes, as well as the broad (and changing) role of women and women's rights in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Being a highly accomplished woman of her time, Knight's depictions of other women from across the spectrum of social class always shows the dignity of the feminine form, as well as the innate power of the working woman.

In contrast, the work of critically acclaimed British contemporary artist, Caroline Walker, is presented in her first museum solo show within the UK. A selection of works from the past four years, along with new, large-scale paintings, drawings and sketches, provide a fascinating insight into the artist's processes.

Caroline Walker's (b. 1982) rich, atmospheric and often ambiguous oil paintings reveal the diverse social, cultural and economic experiences of women living in contemporary society. Blurring the boundary between objectivity and lived experience, Walker highlights often overlooked roles performed by women and the psychologically charged spaces they inhabit.

Walker explains: "The subject of my paintings in its broadest sense is women's experience, whether that is the imagined interior life of a glimpsed shop worker, a closely observed portrayal of my mother working in the family home, or women I've had the privilege of spending time with in their place of work. From the anonymous to the highly personal, what links all these subjects is an investigation of an experience which is specifically female."

For Nottingham Castle, Walker also features recent works based on time spent within the maternity ward where her daughter was born, focusing on the midwives, NHS workers, nurses and doctors. Walker now observes the calm energy of dedicated health care professionals, where the women and midwives are often disguised behind PPE and scrubs, as well as charging the canvas with the heightened emotion that depicts the pain (and joy) of labour, but also the anxieties of giving birth during a viral pandemic.

With exclusive loans from Tate, the Royal Academy, the Imperial War Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, as well as Nottingham City Museums & Galleries own collection, including some rarely seen works from private collections, and exclusive works straight from Caroline Walker's studio, the shared title, *A Female Gaze*, is a comment on the

dominant 'male gaze' in the art world which Laura Knight rebelled against, also the unique perspective of Caroline Walker and where she draws her subject matter from.

By pairing Laura Knight's work with Caroline Walker's, the exhibition not only looks at developments by women artists over the past 100 years, but also considers the themes shared by both artists and examines why the female figure and the role women serve in society – the key protagonists in these works – is still such a strong and rich subject matter. These artists focus on the female experience, both in domestic settings and in the workplace, painting women from varying social classes and utilising an inquisitorial lens through which to paint their subjects.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of Caroline Walker's paintings and drawings, published by BEAM Editions, and featuring a specially commissioned essay by Jennifer Higgle.

## ENDS

### Images and Press Requests

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### Notes to Editors

**Nottingham Castle**, operated by not-for-profit charity Nottingham Castle Trust, is a historical landmark which has recently undergone a £30m conservation, renovation, and redevelopment, including the creation of new galleries housing permanent collections of fine-art and temporary exhibitions, mixed reality games, a new Visitor Centre and an outdoor family adventure playground, Hood's Hideout.

Nottingham Castle Trust has worked in close co-operation with MK Gallery, Milton Keynes and Penlee House Gallery & Museum, Penzance, on a year-long celebration of the work of Dame Laura Knight. Each venue has presented a unique exhibition and exploration of Laura Knight as part of this partnership.

Dame Laura Knight, (1877 – 7 July 1970), born in Long Eaton, was an English painter in the figurative, realist tradition who embraced English Impressionism. In her long career, Knight was among the most successful and popular painters in Britain. Her success in the male-dominated British art establishment paved the way for greater status and recognition for women artists, and later in 1936 (aged 59), she became the first woman elected to full membership of the Royal Academy. Her large retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1965 was the first for a woman. And a significant showing of her works was staged here at Nottingham Castle in 1970;

sadly, she died aged 93 three days before this show opened.

Born in Long Eaton in 1877, she moved to Nottingham with her mother, Charlotte, who worked part-time at the Nottingham School of Art.

Laura enrolled at the art school at the age of 13 and later took over teaching duties after her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Here she became friends with a young Harold, later her husband, another Nottingham-born artist who had a very successful career as a painter. Nottingham Castle Trust currently has four paintings by Laura Knight on display in the new Art Gallery.

Caroline Walker was born in 1982 in Dunfermline, Scotland. She lives and works in London. KM21, The Hague hosted *Windows*, a significant solo exhibition in August 2021. An expansive show of Walker's preparatory studies and large-scale paintings titled *Women's Work* opened in May 2021 at Midlands Art Centre (MAC), Birmingham, UK. Walker featured in the touring group exhibition *British Art Show 9* in 2021.

Walker obtained an MA in painting from the Royal College of Art, London in 2009 and a BA (Hons) from Glasgow School of Art in 2004. She is represented by Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, GRIMM, Amsterdam / New York and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh. Recent solo exhibitions include *Nearby*, GRIMM, New York, USA (2021); *Janet*, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (2020); *Actions Part 2: Home*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK (2018); *Sunset*, Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles, USA (2018) and *Painted Ladies*, Space K, Gwacheon, South Korea (2017).

Her work can be found in numerous international collections including Arts Council Collection, UK; Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague, Netherlands; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands; Government Art Collection, UK; National Museum Wales, UK; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway and De Ying Foundation, South Korea.

A Female Gaze is the first UK Museum solo presentation of Walker's work, and the first to be examined alongside a historical painter. Walker will present *Lisa*, her first solo exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery, 29 April – 28 May 2022.

Jennifer Higgie is an Australian writer who lives in London. Her latest book, *The Mirror & The Palette: Rebellion, Resilience and Resistance: 500 Years of Women's Self Portraits* is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. She is currently working on a book about women, art and the spirit world. She also writes screenplays.

With special thanks to the support of Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; Katie Herbert, Director of Penlee House & Art Gallery, Penzance; and especially to Fay Blanchard, Head of Exhibitions at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, for her invaluable contributions.