

THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD

PRESS RELEASE

Caroline Walker: Mothering 17 May - 27 October 2025

"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", says Scottish artist Caroline Walker.

Caroline Walker (b. 1982) is known for her accomplished paintings that offer a lens into the everyday lives of women. This major solo show at The Hepworth Wakefield brings together works created over the past five years, including new paintings commissioned specially for the exhibition, that explore themes of motherhood and early-years care.

Walker studied painting at Glasgow School of Art (2004) and the Royal College of Art, London (2009). Her large canvases, intimate panels and ink drawings portray diverse female subjects in settings that blur the boundary between public and private life. Her works reveal the complex social, cultural and economic experiences of women living in contemporary society, highlighting the overlooked work they perform and the psychologically charged spaces they inhabit.

Drawing from photographic source material, her paintings bring objective documentary into dialogue with personal experience. Walker begins her artistic process by shadowing her subject and photographing distinctive moments from their daily life. Using these images for reference, she creates loose pencil and charcoal drawings, technical compositions and oil sketches. Her paintings are then produced by working freehand to underpaint in acrylic from the drawings and photographs, before then working over in oil paint.

In recent years, Walker's art has been concerned with the subject of care-giving. The exhibition opens with the concurrent series *Birth Reflections*, made in 2021 following a residency at UCL Hospital's maternity wing and *Lisa*, paintings of the daily life of the artist's sister-in-law becoming a mother. In the series *Lisa*, Walker observes her subject as an expectant mother four weeks before giving birth and then up until the baby reaches three months old, a period often referred to as 'the fourth trimester' when parent(s) and baby are adjusting to their new lives. While *Birth Reflections* focuses on the predominantly female workforce of an NHS maternity ward, the *Lisa* paintings

highlight the interconnectedness of unpaid domestic labour and childcare, the repetitiveness of night feeds, and the claustrophobic sense of being at home 24 hours a day with a newborn baby.

The earliest work in the exhibition is *Daphne* (2021), a painting featuring Walker's own daughter as a toddler. Originally shown as part of the body of work *Nearby* that explored Walker's hyper-local neighbourhood in London, *Daphne* marks a significant shift towards a more autobiographical approach to image-making. As she notes, "Daphne was just one at the time, and she had totally changed my relationship to that neighbourhood...so it felt relevant to put her into that show. And once I'd done that, I'd opened this door to making my own life a subject for painting." Developing this approach further, after the birth of her second child Walker made two paintings including a rare self-portrait which will be shown for the first time at The Hepworth Wakefield.

Following the family move to Scotland in 2022, Walker's attention turned again to her immediate environment, reflecting on her life with two young children and the many people involved in their care. This became the focus of the ongoing series, *Nurture*. The series depicts Little Bugs, the outdoor nursery attended by her daughter, alongside various extra-curricular activities supported by family members and a wide array of working women. It was a member of the team at Little Bugs who inadvertently coined the title of The Hepworth Wakefield exhibition. They noted that 'mothering' the children attending the nursery was a significant aspect of their training, effectively pluralising definitions of motherhood and connecting the term more closely to the socio-economic structures of labour that are a central concern of Walker's practice. This idea is further explored in a new series of work included in the exhibition depicting scenes from nurseries and focusing more specifically on the daily activities and routines of the women caring for children in these settings.

The exhibition concludes with a painting from Walker's new series exploring the unique labour ecology of a holiday park the artist visited with her family, and the women working there, fusing her own personal narrative with her ongoing interest in women's work. Throughout the exhibition, Walker's intimate and often joyful paintings continue an exploration of the complexities of women's position in society, capturing contemporary experiences of womanhood and frequently exposing the gap between lived reality and societal expectations.

Eleanor Clayton, Head of Collection and Exhibitions and curator of *Caroline Walker: Mothering* notes: "Walker's paintings present everyday moments in the lives of women, bearing witness to otherwise unacknowledged, or overlooked, yet vital, labour. Both monumental and intimate, in both literal and metaphorical terms, her works offer portals to empathy with other lives. The paintings reconnect with subjective experience that is so often glossed over; enormous labours – like childbirth or nurturing small children – otherwise forgotten in a whirl of sleep deprivation and life moving on. Walker's paintings have long addressed the multifaceted roles and labours of women in contemporary society. The works in this exhibition connect us to essential human experiences, celebrating the fleeting moments that make up our lives, and those we care for."

Caroline Walker: Mothering is accompanied by an illustrated monograph of the same title, published by Lund Humphries (September 2025). The exhibition will travel to Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, from 22 November 2025 – 10 May 2026.

A special limited edition by the artist will be released for sale to coincide with the exhibition opening in May, available to buy exclusively from The Hepworth Wakefield.

The Hepworth Wakefield has collaborated with bio-based paint company Atelier Ellis to produce a bespoke set of colours for the exhibition, created in response to Caroline Walker's work. The colours form part of a special collection of paints created to accompany the gallery's spring/summer 2025 season and will be available to purchase from the Atelier Ellis website, with 10% of proceeds going to support The Hepworth Wakefield.

Caroline Walker: Mothering is generously supported by Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For media enquiries and hi-res images please contact:

Emily Gates, Rees & Co.
0782777 9170
emily.gates@reesandco.com

Web-ready images can be downloaded from The Hepworth Wakefield's media centre at hepworthwakefield.org/press

THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD

Designed by the acclaimed David Chipperfield Architects, The Hepworth Wakefield is set within Wakefield's historic waterfront, overlooking the River Calder and The Hepworth Wakefield Garden designed by Tom Stuart-Smith. Named after Barbara Hepworth, one of the most important artists of the 20th century who was born and brought up in Wakefield, the gallery presents major exhibitions of the best international modern and contemporary art. It is also home to Wakefield's growing art collection – an inspiring resource comprising outstanding works of modern British and contemporary art. The gallery runs engaging programmes for schools, families and local community groups to provide inspiring creative learning opportunities and a vibrant workshop, talks and events programme, including regular art fairs and markets.

hepworthwakefield.org