

# The unknown radical

A champion of some of the most compelling political issues of her day, Gladys Hynes (1888–1958) was a remarkable artist. Sacha Llewellyn brings her back into the public gaze

**G**LADYS HYNES was a committed feminist, suffragist, pacifist and supporter of the Irish Republican movement, whose work engaged with some of the most pressing and controversial issues of her time. She exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Venice Biennale, the Paris Salon and the International Society of Sculptors and yet, today, she is almost unknown. Hynes was born in India in 1888, where her father was an agent with the Bank of Bombay. The family moved to London when she was three and, in 1908, she began her artistic education at Brangwyn's London School of Art, where she found herself among a group of talented students, including Nina Hamnett, who would become a lifelong friend.

## 6 Hynes found inspiration in Cornwall's cliff tops and views

In 1911, Hynes moved to Penzance and enrolled at the painting school in nearby Newlyn, founded in 1899 by Elizabeth and Stanhope Forbes, advocates of the *plein-air* tradition of French naturalism. Described by her fellow student (and future brother-in-law) C. E. Vulliamy as 'the most beautiful as well as the most promising student', she became part of a thriving community of second-generation Newlyn painters that included Laura and Harold Knight, Dod and Ernest Procter, Gertrude and Harold Harvey and, later, Cedric Morris and Lett Haines. In common with these artist-friends, Hynes found inspiration in Cornwall's pools and rocks, cliff tops and ocean views for her



Set in Lamorna Cove, *Morning*, about 1916, is the earliest of Gladys Hynes's Cornish paintings. With a youthful, witty exuberance, she has transposed her own features onto the principal figure and makes a nod to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*

compositions, such as *Morning*, *Chalk Quarries* and *Cornish Boxers*. Describing Cornwall as 'a holy land', she also used its landscapes as the backdrop for two religious pictures, *Noah's Ark* and a panel depicting scenes from the life of the 12th-century Saint Morwenna, painted for the choir stalls of St Hilary's in Marazion. During the war years, Hynes commuted to London to work for Roger Fry's Omega Workshops, joining an itinerant population of female labourers who translated Omega designs onto textiles, ceramics and furniture. In 1919,

she moved permanently to London, taking lodgings in South Hampstead with the novelist Mary Butts and her husband, the poet John Rodker, whose Ovid Press was publishing graphic work by former members of the Vorticist group. Under this influence, her pictures, including *Escalator* and *Strap-Hangers*, evolved towards a Vorticist aesthetic, a stylistic change that affronted *The Daily Mail's* critic, who lamented that she 'had turned away from all that is beautiful and soulful'. In 1927, Hynes received what was to be the most important

commission of her career, to illustrate a special folio edition of Ezra Pound's *Cantos 17–27*, published by Rodker. (Pound had originally requested Fernand Léger, but Rodker's budget was not large enough to accommodate him.) Working to Pound's instructions, Hynes used a similar format to Frederic Eden's *A Garden in Venice* (1903), but she did not hesitate to subvert Eden's more conventional presentation when treating contemporary subjects, such as the evils of capitalism or the military-industrial complex. Three decades of unpublished



Above left: *A Penny for the Guy?* (1940). A mechanical city gent in a military jacket sits astride a cannon holding a grenade and religious insignia and flanked by two weeping seraphim in perhaps the most powerful of Hynes's wartime paintings, which is subtitled 'the thought that all war is caused by the faceless money men of the city'. Above right: Moving towards a Vorticist aesthetic: *The Strap-Hangers*, 1922

correspondence records the personal and professional relationship between Hynes and Pound, who described her as 'having spread much love and affection in my hardened boozumm'. Once in London, Hynes allied herself to many radical causes, including the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, for whom she designed a richly embroidered street banner. Deeply proud of her Irish roots, she became an enthusiastic member of the London Gaelic League. There, she struck up a close friendship with Mabel and Desmond FitzGerald, both prominent nationalist activists, and became passionately involved in the Republican movement in England, which supported Ireland's claim to sovereignty. In 1925, through the advocacy of Desmond, Hynes was commissioned to design a stamp for the Irish Post Office—it depicted a woman holding in her hands



*Noah's Ark*, 1919, includes unsettling references to the First World War, such as Brodie helmets and the marshalling of troop-like insects by a child's over-sized hand

The outbreak of the Second World War led to a burst of creativity in painting, through which Hynes posited a radical pacifism and found a natural outlet for her interest in Surrealism. In *Crucifixion*, a pilot is splayed across his fated light bomber aircraft, a poignant memorial to her younger brother Patrick, who died in 1916, days after receiving his pilot's licence. *The Eyes that Guard Us*, an Orwellian vision of eyes sprouting from lamp posts

Where to study the work of Gladys Hynes  
Only a fraction of Hynes's oeuvre is held in public collections—in the UK, solely at the RAF Museum, which owns *Crucifixion* (1939); in the US, at The Wolfsonian in Miami, which holds three paintings and a drawing. Short biographies of Hynes are included in *50/50; Fifty Works by Fifty British Women Artists* edited by this article's author (2019) and in *Voyaging Out: British Women Artists from Suffrage to the Sixties* by Carolyn Trant (2019). Sacha Llewellyn is working on a biography and exhibition, so she is keen to track down additional work and to discover more about her life as a sculptor. If you can help, email [sacha@lissllewellyn.com](mailto:sacha@lissllewellyn.com)

Sacha Llewellyn/Gladys Hynes Estate; The Mitchell J. Wolfson Jr. Collection/Gladys Hynes Estate; Liss Fine Art