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*Barbara Hepworth, The Plasters: The Gift to Wakefield*. Edited by Sophie Bowness. Lund Humphries, 2011. 208pp.

In 1997 the Barbara Hepworth Estate offered a large body of the sculptor's plasters and related prototypes to the Wakefield Art Gallery, on condition that 'a building of architectural distinction' would be made available to house the collection. The result, some fourteen years later, is the Hepworth Wakefield, David Chipperfield's pigmented cast concrete waterfront building, which pays homage to its namesake in its cuboid conversations and monolithic character.

At first Hepworth despised plaster, believing it 'a dead material', and preferring the resistance of hard materials; but in 1956, seeking to produce work in metal, she began testing its possibilities, and on finding that the material could be worked both wet and dry, she reconceived it as a means of carving bronze. Not only did plaster offer new textural variety, it allowed for more open, complex forms, that could 'swing up and outwards'. Far from being lifeless in her hands, plaster allowed a new sense of movement to enter her work, as in the involuted sweeping of *Curved Forms (Pavan)* (1956), and the rampant gestural contours of *Meridian* (1958-60).

The majority of the gifted works are these original plasters for casting (a few are plaster casts taken from pre-existing works), and whereas the resultant bronzes are always at one remove, here we gain unique insight into Hepworth's working methods. She compared the processes of assembly to boatbuilding, as well as to the human anatomy, with the armature's 'skeleton' to be clothed with 'its muscles, its skin and its texture.' The plasters are not only an important resource for study, but are also extremely beautiful in their own right, many having been painted to give an indication of the desired patina.

Sophie Bowness's magnificent catalogue richly illustrates the works and illuminates their histories through archive photographs demonstrating everything from the varied tools used by Hepworth to the logistical problems of transporting the monumental pieces through the narrow streets of St Ives. Her essay gives much-needed attention to Hepworth's studio practice, as well as to her relations with foundries, and details the evolutions of her public commissions. It fully demonstrates what a valuable gift this is to Hepworth's hometown.