

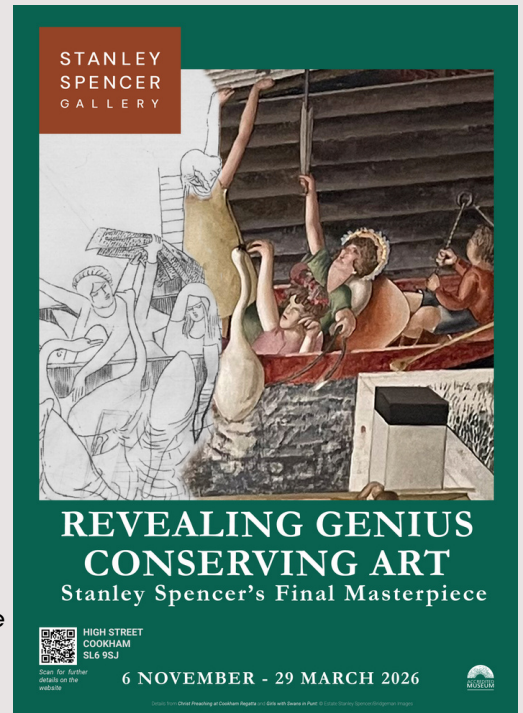


During the Winter Exhibition, a professional paintings conservator will work in the gallery, examining Spencer's work in detail. Visitors will see conservation in action – from close analysis of pigments, brushwork, and materials, to understanding how Spencer transferred his meticulously planned sketches onto the canvas. These investigations not only inform the ongoing care of the painting but also provide an intimate window into the artist's creative process.

As an unfinished work, *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta* offers a rare glimpse into Spencer's working methods. Viewers can follow the section-by-section progression of his composition – a disciplined approach inspired by Renaissance fresco painting, developed during his time at the Slade School of Fine Art.

Spencer first began exploring ideas for this composition in the 1920s, but it wasn't until Christmas 1951 that the vision truly crystallised. He sketched late into the night, producing hundreds of preparatory drawings in pencil and coloured crayons, often on whatever paper came to hand – from fine art stock to humble butter paper. The sheer ambition of the work required him to paint in cramped conditions in his Cookham Rise home, working on small, unrolled sections of the canvas while perched on a stool atop a trestle table.

Winter 2025 Exhibition



REVEALING GENIUS, CONSERVING ART: STANLEY SPENCER'S FINAL MASTERPIECE



Conservator Melanie Cauldwell



Courtauld Institute Conservation Department

It has been many decades since *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta* has been displayed in the lower Gallery and I am really looking forward to getting stuck in to some of those details that are simply not visible from the upper Gallery. I am most looking forward to getting up close to the gaggle of figures, sketched out but not painted, on the river bank. They must have been inspired by the Indian sculptures at Khajuraho (C9th – 11th) which had come to fascinate Stanley. These sculptures have become famous for their sexual content, but in fact, these themes only cover one tenth of the temples' surfaces, and the rest depict scenes from everyday life and mythical events – sounds familiar? This is an under-researched area of Stanley's work should anyone have the appetite to pursue it.

Stanley's Indian influences will, however, have to wait for another exhibition, for this autumn we're focussing on Stanley's working method. We are lucky to be working with a student from the Courtauld Institute of Art, Olivia Leake, who is in the final year of her Masters degree in conservation and is studying *Christ Preaching* for her thesis. I have already delivered one of Stanley's palettes to the Courtauld for examination, and it is hoped that by analysing the paint we will have more information to inform future conservation projects.

Before the picture comes down, Olivia will spend two days in the Gallery conducting some initial analysis, which will involve taking paint samples.

This will take place in October after the Gallery has closed. In November, once the painting is down Olivia will use digital microscopy to look at the exposed drawing and take detailed photographs of the painting. All this work is not only useful for us to understand better how Stanley worked, but it is also necessary if we have to do any conservation work in the future. Olivia has promised that she will do a talk for us to explain her methods and findings, and this will be advertised as soon as we have more information.



Stanley's palette for analysis

We have planned an exhibition which builds on our summer display, which explored the spiritual themes of *Christ Preaching* and the importance of the Cookham Regatta in Spencer's personal and communal vision.

Now, we turn our attention to his studio practice – from early student sketches to the bold experiments of his later years – and how these drawing habits shaped one of his most ambitious canvases. The other works on show will demonstrate Stanley's working method, from sketch to finished work. There will also be some highlights on show from our own collection – *The Last Supper*, *Neighbours* and *Englefield House*, which serve to demonstrate the evolution of Stanley's working method and the shift from the imaginative to the photographic. It is quite moving to think that at the end of his life he returns to his youthful evocations of religious visions in Cookham and creates a work that is both triumphant and nostalgic.

P.S. I have just read a brilliant novel, by Pat Barker called *Life Class*. It is set at the Slade before WWI and follows the life of a young artist who is called up as a medical orderly. Henry Tonks features, as does an artist called Neville, who is a thinly disguised CRW Nevinson. It is a really good read and elegantly captures the spirit of the Slade just before the war and the devastation that followed. It has certainly given me a more rounded understanding of some aspects of Stanley's life.

Amanda Bradley Petitgas

LOVE & LANDSCAPE: STANLEY SPENCER IN SUFFOLK

An exhibition in partnership with Gainsborough's House



Close up of Self Portrait by Stanley Spencer 1923

The most ambitious exhibition dedicated to Stanley Spencer in a decade will open at Gainsborough's House, Sudbury this autumn, before transferring to the Stanley Spencer Gallery, Cookham from April 2026.

The partnership between the two museums will feature over 20 works from the Stanley Spencer Gallery presented alongside major loans from Tate, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Leeds Museums and Galleries, and other public lenders, as well as rarely seen works from private collections.

Continued...

Like the Stanley Spencer Gallery, Gainsborough's House is dedicated to the life and work of one of Britain's greatest painters, Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88). It combines his childhood home - a Grade I-listed eighteenth-century Merchant house and its historic garden - with impressive new exhibition galleries and visitor facilities, opened in 2022 following a major capital redevelopment.



Southwold Suffolk 1937 at Aberdeen Art Gallery

Love & Landscape: Stanley Spencer in Suffolk, which will be held in the new Clore Galleries, is curated by us - Dr Amy Lim, Curator at the Stanley Spencer Gallery, with Emma Boyd, Keeper of Art and Place, Gainsborough's House.

Although Spencer's life and career are largely synonymous with his native village of Cookham, he also spent a great deal of time in Suffolk, most notably Wangford and Southwold on the coast.

His association with the county spanned four decades, initially through the experience of his first wife, Hilda Carline, who had worked as a Land Girl in Wangford during the First World War. In 1924, Spencer, Hilda and other members of her family stayed in Wangford for a painting holiday, and a year later, Stanley and Hilda returned there to be married, returning again the following year.

As a man whose art was deeply informed by memories of people and places, Stanley's time with Hilda in Suffolk laid down happy associations for him. When his marriage to Hilda ended in 1937, quickly followed by the collapse of his second marriage to Patricia Preece, he returned to Suffolk, seeking solace in the landscape.

The exhibition will include several important paintings made during or inspired by Spencer's visits to Suffolk, including the loans of *Gardening* (c.1945) from Leeds Museums and Galleries and *Southwold* (1937), one of his most popular paintings, from Aberdeen Art Gallery.

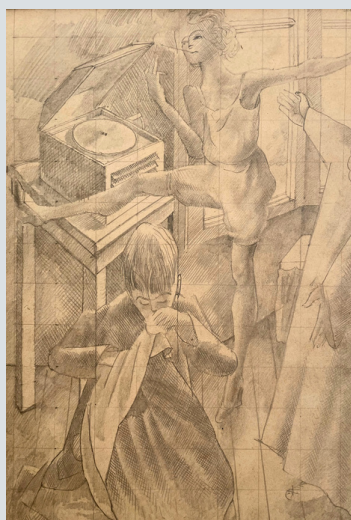
Other loans include *Hilda Carline's* 1923 *Self-portrait* from Tate, and Stanley Spencer's mesmerising *Nude portrait of Patricia Preece* (1935) from the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, along with *The Red House*, Wangford (1926), and Richard Carline's enormous group portrait, *Gathering on the Terrace* (c.1924), which shows members of the artistic circle that congregated at the Carline family home in Hampstead.

Paintings from the Gallery's collection will illustrate Spencer's vast imaginative project for a Church-House, and show how he fused biblical stories, childhood memories, romantic relationships and his beliefs about heavenly and earthly love. The exhibition is being generously supported by the artist's family with the loan of personal items that have never been previously displayed, including Hilda Carline's wedding suit.

Love & Landscape: Stanley Spencer in Suffolk will open at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury from 15 November 2025 to 22 March 2026. The exhibition will travel to the Stanley Spencer Gallery where it will be on display from 4 April to 1 November 2026.



Hilda farming at Wangford 1917



Patricia and Gramophone

This leg of the exhibition will offer a unique opportunity to explore Spencer's deep emotional and artistic ties to Suffolk in the heart of his beloved Cookham. The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue co-written by the curators with contributions from guest writers.



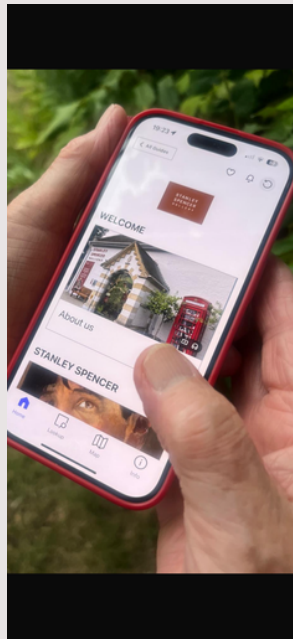
The Stanley Spencer Gallery is now part of a global arts community through **Bloomberg Connects - an app for smartphones.** The app is designed to connect galleries in an effort to support Arts and Culture around the world. From Cookham to Korea, over 1000 galleries have signed up to the app which is free to join and free for visitors to use.

It was brought to the table by Amanda Bradley Petitgas (Chair of Exhibitions Committee and Trustee) initially through Art UK. There was a discussion about if we could manage it. Whether we could sustain staffing and provide enough material.

Following a visit to MK Gallery at Milton Keynes and a talk with their curator, a working party set out from Cookham to visit the River and Rowing Museum in Henley (now sadly closed). Their curator convinced us it was worth joining the Bloomberg Connects app. The Bloomberg Connects app is part of Bloomberg Philanthropies, a large American organisation set up by Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York and at one time possible presidential candidate.

I've got a date of June 2nd in my diary which simply says 'Bloomberg meeting: Bel and Dragon' - when Roger Kirby, Pauline Elliott and I met for a friendly cup of coffee and a general discussion. We decided we would "go for it" highlighted some of the works we felt we should add - and agreed the mantra "keep it simple". One email later and we became part of the "June 2025 Training Cohort" and were signed up to Zoom calls, webinars, the Slack communication platform, the Bloomberg CMS (collections Management System), Rev.Com, given our "minders" at Art Uk and enrolled in the programme.'

We decided the app would be static. To offer information that would intrigue and stimulate an interest in Spencer's work, offer material which wouldn't need to be changed very often and so not need as much attention and staffing as the website, with its constant updates. Concentrating on the Gallery's own core collection rather than loan paintings (with a few notable exceptions) would alleviate the danger of works leaving the Gallery and so having to be deleted from the app.



Next step, how would we function as a team and play to our strengths? We all have access to upload and change material.

Having worked for the Gallery for many years, I was able to dump a mass of material in the Content Management System. Pauline is the most forensic proofreader, Roger great on techs links and I am the inveterate tinker. Ann Danks, keeper of the archives, provided photographs and images and kept us straight on copyright issues.

Bloomberg Connects encouraged us to create visual descriptions for the visually impaired, which Dennis Jeffrey had already been working on. This work continues. We've made video captions and Bloomberg paid for [rev.com](https://www.rev.com), a transcription service for audio inserts. Alt text on each image can be picked up with special equipment used by people with disabilities. Through Google translate the whole app can be read in over 50 languages.

It is still new and we will see whether most people bring their own headphones as requested or whether they listen without them or if they will linger too long in one place whilst listening to audio or watching a video. We will rely on feedback from Custodians and from Bloomberg on QR usage and number of views.

We finally launched it on the 12th of September 2025. The process of editing, proofing and complying with Bloomberg's template and strict visual instructions was long and sometimes frustrating. Download the app, if you haven't already, and see if you agree with us, that it was worth it in the end.

Chrissy Rosenthal

We are still in desperate need of an **Events Manager** to oversee our events programme for the coming year and beyond. No special expertise needed - just reliability, good organisation and an interest in Stanley Spencer.

If you can help, please contact Alison McKendrick at friends@stanleypencer.org.uk.

