

Press Release

## KEN KIFF: THE SEQUENCE



Ken Kiff, *S113 Talking with a psychoanalyst: night sky*, 1975-80 © Estate of Ken Kiff

**Ken Kiff: *The Sequence***: 17 November 2018 – 21 April 2019

**Press View**: Friday 16 November 2018

**High-resolution images available for download**: <http://bit.ly/2QzupEZ>

This winter, the Sainsbury Centre will present an important reappraisal of the work of Ken Kiff (1935–2001), one of the most original artists working in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. In the first museum exhibition of Ken Kiff for almost 25 years, *The Sequence* focuses on a unique series of almost 200 acrylic paintings on paper, which he began in 1971 and continued to work on intermittently until his death.

The Sainsbury Centre's exhibition will bring together 60 of *The Sequence* paintings, in the largest ever presentation of works from across the series. Hung sequentially, the installation will reveal the evolution of Kiff's ideas from their tentative beginnings to the expansion of key themes as the series progressed.

Kiff compared *The Sequence* to a musical symphony, structured by interconnected themes and rhythms. It was a construct through which he could explore ways of thinking about reality and about how painting might express the paradoxical and arbitrary experiences of life. Working on an extended body of related images, he was able to follow ideas intuitively, developing the fusion of abstract and figurative imagery that would come to define his art.

*The Sequence* series explores collisions of fantasy with everyday, lived experience. Kiff drew from a wide variety of sources in order to bring what might be called a form of 'poetic primitivism' to the work. The paintings' motifs referenced stories from the myths and folktales

of many different cultures and he used his own experience of psychoanalysis to explore multiple facets of the human psyche. The figurative elements of the images were fluidly combined with abstract forms and ways of using colour that were a response to ideas found in Modernism and Abstract Expressionism. It was an approach to painting that resulted in an utterly distinctive visual language, which brought Kiff to prominence during the 1980s – 90s.

The exhibition will feature a number of important works that were included in Kiff's 1986 Serpentine Gallery solo exhibition. Amongst these are the first from the series, *Something unknown has to be eaten or drunk* (1971). The painting introduced ideas about a divided self and a sense of journeying into the imagination which were major themes throughout the series. Also featured will be the early painting *Echo and Narcissus*, (c. 1973) – a lyrical image which illustrates Kiff's use of classical subject matter. Later works, including *Spitting Man* (1976–80), *The poet: Mayakovsky* (1977) and *Talking with a psychoanalyst: night sky* (c. 1975–80) will reveal how the work extended into far more subjective and disturbing territory.

Also included in the exhibition will be a number of previously unseen and unfinished paintings from late in the series which were found in Kiff's studio at his death. These will be hung in counterpoint to a triptych he began during his National Gallery Residency in 1991, to reveal how ideas explored in *The Sequence* related to his entire oeuvre. The triptych carries a great many references to the later *Sequence* paintings in its imagery of anthropomorphic landscape, a radiant female figure and a strange encounter that takes place between two gnarled figures in a black cave-like space.

Kiff was elected a Royal Academician in 1991, and from 1991 to 1993 worked as Associate Artist in Residence at the National Gallery. His work was exhibited internationally and was included in major public collections including Tate Britain; The British Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and MOMA, New York. Kiff was also acknowledged as a great teacher and worked for many years in the painting department at Chelsea School of Art and Royal College of Art, in addition to other British art schools. His approach to painting was enormously challenging to a dominant, critical hegemony that viewed painting primarily through the prism of theoretical standpoints, rather than as a form of affirmative visual poetics – one made apparent through thoughts and objects engendered by the processes of painting itself.

Exhibition Curator: Emma Hill  
Project Curator: Monserrat Pis Marcos

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication *Ken Kiff: The Sequence* edited by Emma Hill with essays from Emma Hill and thoughts from artists who knew and worked with Kiff

Supported by Marlborough Fine Art

– ENDS –

## Notes to Editors

Press Enquiries:  
Alice Evans | Rees & Co | [alice@reesandco.com](mailto:alice@reesandco.com) | 020 3137 8776

Sainsbury Centre:  
Penelope Lucas | [p.lucas@uea.ac.uk](mailto:p.lucas@uea.ac.uk) | 01603 593649

### **About Ken Kiff**

Ken Kiff was born in Dagenham and trained at Hornsey School of Art (1955–61). He came to prominence in the 1980s thanks to the championship of art critic Norbert Lynton, and a cultural climate intent on re-assessing figurative art following the Royal Academy's 'New Spirit in Painting' exhibition in 1981. He started exhibiting at Nicola Jacob's Gallery, moved to Fischer Fine Art in 1987 and finally to the Marlborough Gallery in 1990, by which time he had begun exhibiting internationally and had work in major public collections. He was elected to the Royal Academy in 1991 and became Associate Artist at the National Gallery 1991-93. His 30-year teaching career at Chelsea School of Art and the Royal College influenced a generation of students.

### **About the Sainsbury Centre**

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most important public university art galleries in Britain. It was founded in 1973 at the University of East Anglia (UEA) with the support of one of the nation's great philanthropic families, Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury who donated their extraordinary art collection which includes works dating from prehistory to the late twentieth century from across the globe. A radical new building by Norman Foster was designed to house the collection and was his first public work.

The Sainsbury Centre holds one of the most impressive art collections outside of the national institutions. It includes a significant number of works by modern masters of European art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Jean Arp, Chaïm Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani. There is also a remarkable collection of art and antiquities dating from prehistory to the late twentieth century from across the globe. There are major holdings from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, Asia, the ancient Mediterranean cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as Medieval Europe. Alongside these permanent collections, it hosts a range of exhibitions in the largest suite of temporary exhibitions galleries in Eastern England.

[scva.ac.uk](http://scva.ac.uk)

### **Also at the Sainsbury Centre**

#### **Elisabeth Frink: Humans and Other Animals**

Until 24 February 2019

A major exhibition of Suffolk-born artist Elisabeth Frink (1930-1993).

*Elisabeth Frink: Humans and Other Animals* features over 150 works by the artist, and is the largest showing of Frink's work in 25 years. The exhibition will explore Frink's enduring preoccupation with human and animal forms and the symbiotic relationship between them. It provides new perspectives on the key themes found in her work, from responses to the Second World War and the Cold War climate of fear, to the role of man as both aggressor and victim.

*Humans and Other Animals* examines Frink's radical and bohemian beginnings in 1950s London and trace the evolution of her practice over all four decades of her career, as well as juxtaposing her work with that of contemporary artists, ancient art and other modern masters including Rodin, Picasso and Bourgeois