

Sargy Mann - Light and Space - 11th -29th May 2021

This exhibition of work by the late painter Sargy Mann (1937-2015) looks back on an artistic journey of constant evolution. Mann's life-long fascination with the nature of visual perception and the changes to his own sight throughout his career fueled a varied yet consistently acclaimed output. Mann was a painter who was not easy to place in relation to his peers, but with the benefit of hindsight there is a clarity to the evolution of his work which can be seen via the selected works presented at Cadogan. The exhibition also celebrates the unusual relationship between the artist and his gallerist, which dates back to 1987, and how that allowed the artist to develop.

Between 1960 and 2015 Sargy Mann created a hugely diverse body of work, always pushing the limits of his experience and challenging many assumptions about the artistic brain and the visual mind. His quest was always to make a two dimensional pattern that conveyed a believable light and space. The late 1970's and early 1980's was a period where Mann's vision - and as a result his paintings - went through many changes. His work from this period reveals a struggle, as if he was simultaneously trying to make sense of the new ways in which he saw the world whilst also deconstructing the language of painting. Looking now at the work from this period, it is clear that this dialectic pushed him to form his own language of expression.

In 1986, Mann was introduced to Christopher Burness, founder of Cadogan Contemporary. Mann had not shown significantly in 10 years, but when Burness saw the work at the artist's house in Peckham, he offered him a show on the spot. His first solo exhibition at Cadogan in 1987 was a success and turned out to be the first of eighteen solo exhibitions with the gallery. The ongoing relationship between Sargy and Christopher Burness helped define both Mann's career and Cadogan Contemporary's aesthetic identity. Burness was still relatively new to the art world at the time and adopted a hands-off approach that allowed artists like Mann a freedom to create with no external pressure. The mutual trust, respect and friendship between the artist and the dealer was rewarded by commercial success and an ever-growing number of avid collectors. Running the gallery now for 40 years, Christopher Burness continues with this instinctive approach to working with artists, rarely trying to influence their work. He explains: *'I think I've always had an informal approach with my artists that isn't like the 'usual' dealer artist relationship, I've always just been interested in artists making work about what was less easy to verbalise.'*

From 1987 until his final exhibition of new work at the gallery in 2015, Mann's vision, and in tandem his work, continued to evolve. In 2005 he permanently lost sight in both eyes but far from being the end of anything, this new change in his experience led to what many people believe to be his best work. Writing in 2019 for an exhibition of this work curated by Chantal Joffe (a former student of Mann), Olivia Laing describes *'...the closeness of bodies in Mann's late paintings also carries an emotional charge for the viewer, since we do not normally come so near to people, especially practically naked, unless we are intimate with them. At the same time, a possible overspill of tenderness is resisted by the featurelessness of the figures..... It's this weird warmth/coolness as much as the stupendous palette, the deft unseeing strokes of a master colorist, that accounts for the depth charge of these paintings.'*

Biography

Sargy Mann was born in 1937 and was educated at Dartington Hall School. He left school at 16 and was apprenticed as an engineer at the Morris car factory in Oxford but as a keen jazz musician, he made friends in Oxford University playing drums in the university jazz band. In 1960 he enrolled at Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts to study painting, where he stayed on as a teacher until 1988 alongside teaching at Camden Arts Centre. Emerging from Camberwell School of Art in the mid-Sixties, Mann is often mentioned alongside his teachers Frank Auerbach, Dick Lee and Euan Uglow, as well as Leon Kossoff.

Although Mann's paintings shared some of the characteristics of his contemporaries his particular preoccupation was in colour perception and this obsession led him to the work of French Impressionist and Post Impressionist painters. He spent years studying in particular the work of Pierre Bonnard culminating in his curation of the exhibition 'Bonnard at Le Bosquet at the Hayward Gallery and his book on Bonnard Drawings published by John Murray.

In the early part of his career Mann's work found passionate collectors in a social circle that included many of the 20th century's greatest literary names. As a part of the household of Kingsley Amis and his wife Elizabeth Jane Howard, Mann became something of a well kept secret amongst discerning circles, with Iris Murdoch, John Betjeman and Cecil DayLewis amongst his collectors. At the time he defined himself mainly as a landscape painter, and his work shows his constant preoccupation with the perception of light and colour .

Mann met Christopher Burness in 1987 and began to exhibit regularly at Cadogan Gallery (now Cadogan Contemporary); together they staged 18 exhibitions over 30 years.

Notes to Editors

About Cadogan Contemporary

Cadogan Contemporary is an independent family-run art gallery based in South Kensington, London. Founded by Christopher Burness in 1980, for forty years the gallery has worked closely with generations of collectors and represents artists including: Elise Ansel, Janette Kerr, Sam Lock, Sargy Mann and Deborah Tarr.

Artist: Sargy Mann

Title: Light and Space

Dates: 11th - 29th May 2021

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