

'Spirit in the Mass'

Dennis Creffield's Drawings of Salisbury Cathedral

Exhibition: 20th April – 11th May 2022



To celebrate the publication of the full-length monograph by Richard Cork on the highly-regarded British painter and draftsman, Dennis Creffield, the New Art Centre is delighted to present a group of six large and dynamic charcoal drawings by the artist of Salisbury Cathedral – along with a rare oil painting of the same subject.

In 1987 Creffield set out to draw all the Gothic cathedrals of England – 26 in total. As the artist recalled:

'No artist has ever before drawn all the English medieval cathedrals – not even Turner. I've dreamed of doing so since I was 17 when as a student of David Bomberg I drew and painted in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. This dream finally came true – forty years later – in 1987 when Michael Harrison [of the Arts Council, later esteemed Director of Kettle's Yard, Cambridge], having seen some drawings of mine of Wells Cathedral which the Arts Council had bought, asked me if I would be interested in drawing all of the cathedrals for an exhibition to tour the regions'

The resulting works were shown in an Arts Council exhibition that toured Britain between 1988 and 1990. And whilst a selection of Salisbury images were included in that show, our exhibition is the first time that this entire group of drawings have been exhibited together since they were created.



Richard Cork dedicates a whole chapter of his new book to Creffield's cathedral works and on the Salisbury drawings he writes:

At Salisbury, by contrast, [Creffield] found the interior had a 'grim stovepipe look' which he blamed once again on the unforgivable George Gilbert Scott, 'who darkened all the Purbeck marble columns'. Yet the exterior gave Creffield enormous stimulus. He executed a deft and sprightly drawing of the cathedral viewed from the north-east, and likened it to 'a musical composition. The motifs speaking to and echoing each other – the simplicity and stacked regularity of the lancet windows – a thousand triangles – and all the spires culminating in the Spire.' They prompted him to indulge in an energetic abundance of mark-making.'

Dennis Creffield grew up in London and began his journey as an artist by attending David Bomberg's legendary night classes at Borough Polytechnic. Bomberg's inspirational teaching - not least his advocacy of using heavy, loaded brushstrokes and building up the surface of a painting to unleash what he described as 'the spirit in the mass' – was to influence a whole generation of painters, including Creffield's fellow Borough alumni Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff.

And like Auerbach and Kossoff, one finds in Creffield's works on paper a power that is equivalent to his painting– with hard, energetic marks and deliberate rubbings-out building up on the surface of the paper, creating a vortex of energy out of which the final image emerges.

All works featured in the exhibition are for sale

Richard Cork's monograph – Dennis Creffield: Art and Life – is published by Lund Humphries on the 4th April 2022, RRP £40.00.

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Notes for Editors

The New Art Centre was established in Sloane Street, London in 1958 – before moving to Roche Court in 1994..

From its inception, the gallery championed young and emerging artists, and this remains a core ambition – alongside continuing to show those artists, now in mid- or late- career, who first exhibited with us decades ago.

The park and woodlands that surround the house enable us to focus on exhibiting outdoor sculpture making the New Art Centre a pioneer of the commercially run sculpture park in the UK.

We also commissioned architect Stephen Marshall to add four indoor exhibition spaces that have won several international awards. This expansion has enabled us to stage a closely curated exhibition programme of modern and contemporary painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics and textiles.

From the outset, the New Art Centre has been interested in education and has got a strong programme encouraging people of all ages to look, think and speak about art. Recently, our initiative, Articulation, has been taken on by the National Gallery, London and will now be implemented by them.

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