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Press Release

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MICHAEL ANDREWS: EARTH AIR WATER

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Gagosian, Grosvenor Hill, London



Gagosian London is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by the late Michael Andrews (1928–1995).

For the last twenty-five years of his life, Andrews was preoccupied with four series of landscapes—*Lights*, *Scotland*, *Ayers Rock/Australia*, and *English Landscape*—as well as *School*, a series depicting different groups of fish. In this exhibition, selected works from the five related series will be presented under three elemental themes: earth, air, and water.

Though associated with painters of the so-called School of London, such as Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff and Frank Auerbach, for exploring the human form and eschewing abstraction, Andrews's work is radically different. With a few exceptions, his paintings after 1970 are devoid of people, though not without an implied human presence or drama.

The heightened or dreamlike realism that Andrews achieved after 1970 was partly the result of his painting with a spray gun and water-based acrylic paint, allowing him to cover the canvas with large expanses of a single colour, from airy and atmospheric to intense and saturated. No other British artist in the second half of the twentieth century immersed himself in the elements of

landscape to such an extent. "It seems to me impossible not to paint religious landscapes of aboriginal Australia," he wrote in 1986, "just as it is almost impossible not to paint historical landscapes in Scotland."

The exhibition begins with a small section devoted to the Colony Room, the private members' drinking club in Soho frequented by Bacon, Freud, Andrews, Auerbach and other bohemians, with a late 1950s large landscape mural that Andrews painted for the club, which appears alongside the celebrated 1962 work *The Colony Room*.

At the core of the exhibition are paintings from the seven-part cycle of the 1970s that Andrews called *Lights*. Here, the viewer observes or imagines a gas balloon floating over a succession of landscapes, from field to sea, from Waterloo Bridge to Brighton Pier--in search of an ideal resting place. The title of the series derives from Arthur Rimbaud's famous suite of prose poems, *Les Illuminations*. Influenced by his reading of Zen Buddhist thought and the ideas of sixties countercultural figures such as R.D. Laing, Andrews interpreted the balloon as a symbol of the ego encased in a bag of skin and its search for a landing place as a quest for unselfconsciousness.

In the *School* paintings, magically luminous depictions of fish in water contain metaphor for human interdependence, continuing Andrews's interest in group behaviour as first seen in his "party" pictures of the 1960s, *The Deer Park*, *All Night Long* and *Good and Bad at Games*.

During his lifetime, Andrews disdained publicity, coming to prominence with an Arts Council exhibition in 1980. This is the first substantial exhibition of Andrews's work in over fifteen years, and contains more than sixty works, borrowed from private and public collections, including twenty large canvases and an exceptional group of watercolours. "Michael Andrews: Earth Air Water" is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue written by the exhibition's curator, Richard Calvocoressi, Director and Senior Curator at Gagosian London, who knew Andrews and organised two exhibitions of his work during his lifetime.

Michael Andrews was born in 1928 in Norwich, England, and died in London in 1995. He gained a BFA from the Slade School in 1953, and was a member of the "Norwich Twenty" group. Institutional collections in which his work features include Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; The Whitworth, The University of Manchester; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London; Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; National Museum of Australia, Canberra; National Museum Wales, Cardiff; Norwich Castle Museum; Pallant House Gallery, Chichester; University College London; and Tate, London. Solo institutional exhibitions include "Michael Andrews" Tate Britain (2001) and "Michael Andrews: Lights," Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2000).

Image: *Lights VII: A Shadow*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 72 × 72 inches (182.9 × 182.9 cm)

(C) The Estate of Michael Andrews. Courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London.
Private Collection

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