

THE SOUL AS SPHERE

Opening Reception: Thursday 3 March, 6 – 8pm
Exhibition Dates: 3 March – 16 April 2022

'I don't see with my eye I see through my eye' – William Blake

The Soul as Sphere exhibits the work of the late artist, professor of architecture, writer and geometer, Dr Keith Critchlow – curated around Critchlow's paintings made during his formative years as an artist. The exhibition pays a small homage to his life's work, situated amongst his contemporaries as a painting student. It also considers the ongoing impact that he has had as an artist, and through his philosophical reflections, on exploring the patterns that occur across nature and in the interplay between humans and the natural environment.

Throughout the historical trajectory of painting, intrinsic to drawing and draughtsmanship, artists have explored the human condition, depicting this figuratively and abstractly, chronicling both personal experience and the times we live in and have lived in. Artists such as Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff offer us an impression of personal relationships to the sitters in their paintings, time and space, and scenes of life in London. All three artists, Critchlow, Auerbach and Kossoff, studied under David Bomberg at Borough Polytechnic. As painters, Auerbach and Kossoff employ a thick impasto use of paint, a precursor to the later more painterly built up works of Lucian Freud. Like Auerbach and Kossoff, Freud's paintings and etchings offer a generally pensive and at times sombre psychological penetration of the world around them, visions in and of a post-war world, though there are also notions of hope and intrigue in the form of existence upon the picture plane, using colour, shape, and light.

The artist Frank Bowling's paintings reveal his interest in geometry, 'no doubt inspired by conversations with Keith'.¹ Critchlow and Bowling met during their time in the RAF and maintained a lifelong friendship from Keith's days as a painter through to becoming a geometer. Bowling's work has focused on formal geometric devices, most frequently the circle and the square, which relates pictorially back to the title of the exhibition *The Soul as Sphere*, lifted from Critchlow's book *The Soul as Sphere and Androgyny*.

This exhibition examines a back-and-forth of representation within paintings, drawings and etchings. It looks at light on surface and the intentions behind mark making, observation and technique, from World War I, when the artist Käthe Kollwitz was alive and working, through World War II, to now. Kollwitz's prints and drawings evoke an emotional depth through a dense network of lines that depict universal human experiences. Keith often spoke of these ideas and of Kollwitz's draughtsmanship with his granddaughter, painter Somaya Critchlow, and it is through these conversations and his connections that the show unfolds.

The sphere is the surface of a round solid figure, of which every point on its surface is equidistant from its centre. One *sees* the world through the eye, shaped like a round ball, circle, or sphere. In a lecture on 'The Art of the Ever-True', given by Keith Critchlow towards the end of his life, he talks of embodying the wisdom that we learn from different traditions. While referring to Plato's *Timaeus*, which talks of light leaving the eye, Critchlow qualifies light itself as attention: 'we seek with our eyes, we go out looking, and that intention, that need to find things and to seek things is that "light" Plato spoke of, "leaving the eye"'.¹

¹ Frank Bowling, personal correspondence.

Dr Keith Critchlow (1933 – 2020, b. London, UK) was an artist, writer, geometer and professor of art and architecture. After studying painting at St Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art, his academic interests turned to the field of sacred geometry in art and architecture, and he taught at the RCA as professor of Islamic art. Author of several books exploring the inter-relationship of art, nature and geometry, his artwork is held in collections including Tate, London.

Somaya Critchlow (b. London, UK, 1993) is a London-based contemporary artist. Critchlow's work explores self-perception and othering, suffixing the tradition of figuration with a considered examination of nudity and atmosphere. She obtained a BA in Painting from the University of Brighton before earning a Postgraduate Diploma from the Royal Drawing School in London. Her work is featured in collections including the Baltimore Museum of Art; RISD Museum, Providence; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; ICA Miami and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich.

Frank Auerbach (b. Berlin, Germany, 1931) is known for his depictions of people and urban landscapes. He studied at St Martin's School of Art before continuing at the Royal College of Art. In 1986, Auerbach was selected for the British Pavilion at the XLII Venice Biennale, winning the Golden Lion Prize, whilst 2016 saw his major retrospective at the Tate Britain. His work is held in numerous international collections including Tate, London; Royal College of Art, London; National Gallery of South Africa, Capetown; MoMa, New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Leon Kossoff (1926 – 2019, b. London, UK) is known for his highly worked, gestural portraits and cityscapes. Sense of place was central to his practice, and he returned continuously to public spaces to capture scenes from everyday life. He attended St Martin's School of Art and continued his studies at the Royal College of Art. In 1996, he was the subject of a Tate Gallery retrospective, and his work can be found in several international collections including Tate, London; National Portrait Gallery, London; Yale Center for British Art, New Haven; MoMA, New York and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Lucian Freud OM CH (1922 – 2011, b. Berlin, Germany) is known for his starkly honest portrayal of the human body, rendered in a fleshy, painterly style. He studied at the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing in Dedham, and later at Goldsmiths, University of London. There have been several major retrospectives of his work, including at the Hayward Gallery in 1988, Tate Britain in 2002, and the Museo Correr in Venice in 2005. His work is held in numerous international collections including Tate, London; Pompidou Centre, Paris; MoMA, New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Sir Frank Bowling Kt OBE RA (b. Bartica, Guyana, 1934) studied at the Royal College of Art, London, in 1959. Beginning as a figurative painter, Bowling incorporated personal and political imagery, before moving to New York in 1966, where he made a decisive turn towards large-scale, gestural abstraction. In 2019, he had a major retrospective at the Tate Britain, and his work is featured in international collections including Tate, London; V&A Museum, London; Guyana National Collection, Georgetown; MoMA, New York and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867 – 1945, b. Kaliningrad (Königsberg), Russia) was a painter, printmaker and sculptor who developed an aesthetic vision centred on women, the working class and victims of war. She studied at the Academy for Women Artists in Munich, and her work is held in multiple international collections including the Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Cologne; British Museum, London; MoMA, New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

'The circle is not only the perfect expression of justice – equality in all directions in a finite domain – but also the most beautiful 'parent' of all the polygons, both containing and underlying them ... the circle has always been regarded as a symbol of eternity, without beginning and without end, just being.' – Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns*