

JOHN KEANE

IF YOU KNEW ME. IF YOU KNEW YOURSELF.
YOU WOULD NOT KILL ME.

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Flowers Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by former official British War Artist John Keane. On view will be a series of new paintings produced in response to the commemoration of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, following Keane's recent investigations of the country's Lieux de Mémoire or Sites of Memory.

John Keane visited Rwanda in 2015 with a group of staff and postgraduate students of Peace and Conflict Studies from the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, where he was invited in the role of Artist in Residence by the late Alex Danchev. The visit, which was designed to examine the causes and legacy of the genocide, took Keane to several of the many locations around the country where more than 800,000 people were slaughtered in the space of 100 days, to meet both survivors, and perpetrators still serving their sentences in prison.

Large numbers of Lieux de Mémoire, present throughout the Rwandan countryside, serve as both formal and unofficial public memorials to the victims, often in the form of visceral displays of human remains, or clothes and personal possessions. Working in response to the imagery found within the sites, Keane has developed a body of work that reflects upon the role of collective memory in the recovery of a post-conflict society.



If you Knew me, If you Knew Yourself (2), 2015, Oil on linen,
200 x 200 cm , 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in

A small series of paintings incorporating fabric continues a method of practice that Keane first developed during a period spent working in Southern Africa ten years previously, when he visited projects within the war-torn country of Angola with the international development agency Christian Aid (which resulted in a 2006 touring exhibition *Children in Conflict*). In the present paintings, items of clothing are pressed against the canvas, collaged from scraps of brightly-printed textiles, their two dimensional forms addressing the haunting absence of the human figure. Swathes of thickened, semi-translucent oil paint appear to encase the fabric, as though applied as a preservative, gathering and congealing in dark pools that heighten the emphasis of folds and creases within the cloth.

Keane has sought to reflect on the disparity between the outward appearance of life in the countryside, known as Le Pays des Mille Collines (Land of a Thousand Hills), and the atrocities that have shaped its recent history. The painting *Neighbour*, which is based on an arbitrarily-composed snapshot captured from the window of a bus, depicts the lush vegetation surrounding an ordinary rural Rwandan house. The surface of the work, which is scraped with a layer of dark oil paint, suggests the effects of ink seeping through a newspaper image, filling the everyday scene with an uneasy tension.

The words "*If You Knew Me. If You Knew Yourself. You Would Not Kill Me*", which lend the show its title, were found on a banner suspended within a church memorial site, reflecting the country's ongoing observation of its shared loss as part of the process of rehabilitation from a formerly divided society.

Keane has said: "*During my visit to Rwanda I was deeply impressed by the way it has sought to come to terms with the appalling events of 1994. Partly this is through commemoration, which takes many forms, and does not seek to hide or shrink from the enormity of what happened. The legacy of these events is fundamental in driving the imperative that such things should never happen again in Rwanda or indeed any other country.*"



Neighbour, 2016, Oil on linen,
200 x 200cm, 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in



Obedience, 2016, Oil on linen,
200x 200cm, 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in

To coincide with the exhibition, a selection of recent monoprints by John Keane will be on display in the upstairs gallery.

ABOUT JOHN KEANE

John Keane's reputation as a political artist has been established through a sustained artistic inquiry into the horrors of military and social conflicts around the world, and the effects of media distortion. His subjects have included Northern Ireland, Central America and the Middle East; and has involved working with organisations such as Greenpeace and Christian Aid. Keane first came to prominence when he was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum in 1990 to be the Official British War Artist of the Gulf War. In recent years he has also become known for commissioned portraits of notable individuals such as Mo Mowlam, Jon Snow and Kofi Annan. He has exhibited internationally and his work is in public collections including Chase Manhattan Bank, New York; Christie's Corporate Collection, London; Detroit Institute of Fine Art, Michigan; Glasgow Museums: Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow; and the Imperial War Museum, London. John Keane was invited to be the inaugural Artist in Residence at the School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews, Scotland in 2014, and was the winner of the Main Prize for the Aesthetica Art Prize in 2015. He was the subject of a book by Mark Lawson, *Troubles My Sight: The Art of John Keane*, published by Flowers Gallery in 2015. He lives and works in London.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Exhibition Opening Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 6pm

For further information and images please contact Hannah Hughes - Hannah@flowersgallery.com / 0207 920 7777

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