



Fear No 25171541, Oil on linen, 200 x 144 cm

JOHN KEANE

FEAR

19 October - 23 November 2013

Private View

Friday 18 October 6 - 8pm

Flowers

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Following from the success of *Scratching the surface*, *joining the dots* which served as a response to the Leveson and Chilcot inquiries. John Keane's new series *Fear* sees his attention turned to the Moscow show trials that took place during the great Stalinist terror of the 1930's.

Keane uses source material obtained both from documentary film grabs of the trials and mug shots of the accused. These large-scale works emanate a dark and eerie menace. At this time no one, from the top of the Bolshevik hierarchy to the humble factory worker, was safe from denunciation as either saboteur or political deviant. In remembrance, these paintings resurrect the core emotion of those on trial. They seek to tease out the essence of the most fundamental driver of human reaction, usually found at the root of all violence - fear.

In that time of extremes, those who fell foul of the authority could expect a bullet in the back of the head. Whilst these paintings refer to a specific and extraordinarily terrifying moment in modern history, they allude to the universal human emotion of fear, which determines human behaviour in all walks of life whether it relates to community, corporation, religion or state.

Keane has produced a series of haunting portraits based on NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) mug shots, in which the subjects range from a denounced member of the ruling Politburo to an anonymous student. In contrast to the criminal mug shots we see today, which might have the look of a rabbit-caught-in-headlights, these faces seem to stare out in existential contemplation of the fate that awaits them, regardless of guilt. In what he admits may be a futile and impossible attempt, Keane also tries to imagine himself faced with those circumstances in a self-portrait: *Fear No 1*.



Fear No. 59744 2012, Oil on linen, 200 x 150 cm



Fear No. 191037 2013, Oil on linen, 200 x 150 cm

Three other large canvases evoke the Kafka-esque menace of the courtroom. Faces are as blurred and impenetrable as the charges against the individual unfortunate enough to be accused. Due to the overtly public nature of these trials, these works are meditations upon the power of the crowd to subsume the individual and make heretics of those who dare to deviate.

Whilst the paintings offer a bleak and sombre reflection on the collective fear which dictates the structures of societies, Keane offers a coda of hope in the contemporary world. *Fear Not*, 2013 addresses the Pussy Riot performance on February 21, 2012 where five members of the group took stage on the soleas of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior: this work serves as a tribute to personal courage in our own age. Pussy Riot's actions were stopped by church security officials. By evening, they had turned it into a music video entitled "Punk Prayer - Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!" The protest at the autocratic alignment of Russian church and state resulted in the demonstrators own show trial and incarceration.

This collection of paintings, though rooted in specific historical context, offer a chastening reminder of the dangers inherent in a casual attitude to mass surveillance, even in our own age.



Fear No. 1325 2013, Oil on linen, 210 x 280 cm



'Fear Not', 2013, oil/gold leaf/inkjet transfer/jute. 200 x 280cm

John Keane was born in Hertfordshire in 1954 and attended Camberwell School of Art. His work has focused on many of the most pressing political questions of our age, and he came to national prominence in 1991 when he was appointed as official British war artist during the Gulf War. His work has always been deeply concerned with conflict - military, political and social - in Britain and around the world and his subjects have included Northern Ireland, Central America, and the Middle East, sometimes working with organisations such as Greenpeace and Christian Aid. More recent subject matter has addressed difficult topics relating to religiously inspired terrorism such as Guantanamo Bay, the Moscow theatre siege, and home-grown acts of violence against civilians. In recent years he has also become known for commissioned portraits of notable individuals such as Mo Mowlam, John Snow and Kofi Annan. This year he has also created a well received film for Benjamin Britten's Canticale III in a theatrical production commissioned by Aldeburgh Music and the Brighton Festival. He lives and works in London.

For further information and images please contact Ewan Eason on 020 7920 7777 or email ewan@flowersgallery.com