

# RICHARD SMITH AT 80

2 NOVEMBER - 26 NOVEMBER 2011  
PRIVATE VIEW 2 NOVEMBER 6 - 8PM

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Untitled 2011 Acrylic on linen 101.5 x 106.5 cm / 40 x 42 in

*RICHARD SMITH IS AN ARTIST OF HIS TIME NOT OUT OF CONSCIOUS OR PROGRAMMED VOLITION, BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE HE CANNOT HELP LOOKING AROUND*

BARBARA ROSE

This exhibition of new works will mark Richard Smith's eightieth birthday. Born in Hertfordshire in 1931, Smith studied at the Royal College of Art, London from 1954-57 and his life's work now spans over sixty years.

In 1959 Smith was awarded the prestigious Harkness Fellowship which facilitated his move to New York. During this time, Smith was able to observe form and colour featured in the iconography and consumerism of the 1960s, branding works with titles such as *Panatella* and *Revlon*, 1961.

*Dick Smith was an amazing artist, very talented; the best painter of that time. When I first went to New York, I was on a Ford English-Speaking Scholarship and Dick Smith was on a Harkness Scholarship. We stayed at the Biltmore Hotel in little rooms that were \$2.50 a night. We met up with Ken Noland and went to the infamous Cedar Bar together. It was a very exciting time. It is terrific to see that Flowers are showing his recent work.*

Anthony Caro, 2011

*To have worked in New York made a tremendous difference. It set you at a certain distance from other English painters. You could never pick up again with artists who hadn't been there, except as friends. You had a different set of references.*

Richard Smith, Time, 1975

Throughout his career Smith has been an observer, consistently attuned to his surroundings. Although Smith was fascinated by everyday imagery, he was not seduced by pop culture mentality. Advertising and packaging motifs and logos are represented in Smith's early works; these serve to explore the techniques of reproducing graphics through mechanical processes. Cigarette packets, slot machines and wrapping paper form the basis of large canvases. Furthermore, the distortion of colour through mass reproduction allowed Smith to explore vivid purples and mint greens. Colours are replaced by imagery from artificial sources; images generated and subsequently imitated through reproduction.

*It meant that one could no longer be authentically inspired by nature because the landscape image with which one was most familiar .....*

Barbara Rose Richard, Smith Seven Exhibitions 1961-75, Tate

Smith began to challenge the structural properties of stretching canvas, expanding the frames into three dimensional structures by building extensions which punctured the gallery environment. *Panatella*, 1961 is one of the most prominent examples of this format. Gold, red and orange allude to the colours associated with cigar branding, mimicking the photography used in the advertisements for this product. Smith produced these works on a large scale, alluding to the monumentality of the billboards that surround the landscape of America.

*The scale of the painting is often physically related to hoardings or cinema screens which never present objects actual size; you could drown in a glass of beer, live in a semi-detached cigarette pack*

Richard Smith

The twelve panels that make up *A Whole Year and Half a Day* were exhibited at the Kasmin Gallery, New York in 1967; they form one of the most extensive series created by Smith at this time. The pieces are sequential; the frames bend away from the wall progressively referring to the passing of time and each panel bears a corner tear usually found in a calendar or diary.

*Each canvas has a past and a future; even the first and the last connect in an eternal return, if we think of their relationship as that of the crescent moon to the full moon which inevitably succeeds each waning crescent.*

Barbara Rose,

Richard Smith Seven Exhibitions 1961-75, Tate



A Whole Year and Half a Day XI 1966

Large solo shows at Green Gallery 1961, Richard Feigen Gallery 1966, Kasmin Gallery 1963 and Tate in 1965 became environments sculpted by the innovative reworking of the canvas. Such shows contributed to Smith exhibiting at the Venice Biennale as the official British artist in 1970.

A Butterfly Collection comprises work made by Smith in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Originally exhibited in Oxford at the Museum of Modern Art in 1972 they were the last of his three-dimensional paintings, the format for his canvases since 1962.

Following the Biennale, the construction of Smith's canvas evolved once more. Aluminium rods were added to the works to enable Smith to hang lengths of canvas together at increasingly tilted axes and create a layered arrangement. During the 1970s and 1980s the canvas was taken off the usual wooden stretchers, with strings hung from the edges or tied in knots; these works were coined the 'kite' pieces and were no longer restricted to hanging rigid on the wall.

*By contrast, the "kites" are economical; even the strings they hang from act as drawing. They are perfectly suited to Smith's restrained temperament as an artist; he is always at pains to avoid the bribes of visual overstatement.*

Robert Hughes, Time, 1975



Flowers, Kingsland Road 2008



Untitled 1980

At 80 years of age Smith is still painting with ever present vibrancy, continuing to use a fluent emphatic expression. British abstraction played a major role in defining his career as an artist but Smith's ability to blend diverse styles effectively can be considered one of his greatest contributions to the art world.

Recent exhibitions include *As Dreamers Do*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2010; *V22 Contemporary Art Collection*, 2009; *Paintings from the Noughties*, Letterkenny Arts Centre Donnegal, 2007 and *Pop Art Portraits*, 2007 at The National Portrait Gallery. It was at the National Portrait Gallery that Smith once again exhibited with Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton, Patrick Caulfield and Eduardo Paolozzi, among others. *Drawing Distinctions* and other group exhibitions have also toured internationally across the last fifteen years.

Richard Smith has had extensive solo shows at institutions such as the ICA, Tate, Whitechapel Gallery, The Jewish Museum, New York and the Hayward Gallery, as well as participating in group shows at the Royal Academy London, Guggenheim NY, Tate London, Barbican London and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. His work is featured in various public collections including the Museum of Modern Art New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Hirshhorn Museum and the Sculpture Garden Washington, DC, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Tate Gallery, London (96 works), the British Council (84 works), The British Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.