

JOHN KIRBY

BOY

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19 March - 18 April 2026

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Flowers Gallery is honoured to present *John Kirby: Boy*, a dedicated exhibition of works by the late British artist John Kirby (1949 – 2025). This presentation marks the Gallery's first exhibition of Kirby's work since his passing, offering a reflection on the artist's singular voice within contemporary painting. Centred on *Boy* (2013), a painting that resonates with Kirby's sustained exploration of identity, vulnerability, and the ambiguities of the self, the exhibition presents a selection of key works drawn from across his remarkable career.

Born in Liverpool and educated at Central Saint Martins and the Royal College of Art in London, Kirby's practice was shaped by a rich life experience that ranged from social work and time spent with Mother Teresa's children's home in Calcutta to a profound engagement with questions of faith, sexuality, race, and belonging. Regularly cited alongside artists such as Magritte, Balthus, and Hopper for his haunting visual language, Kirby's paintings are characterised by solitary figures in still, enigmatic settings - worlds that are at once familiar and unsettling. His doll-like subjects are often sublimated self-portraits, in which themes of isolation and repression are examined through symbolic narratives and childlike figures, capturing the liminality of youth, the intensity of early emotion, and the fragile thresholds between innocence and the emerging self. Gender is represented as both fluid and equivocal, where boys and young men explore gendered motifs and formalities such as the doll's house, black-tie suit, and bridal gown. Traditional roles and ceremony are subverted and rendered ambiguous, destabilising fixed notions of identity along with religious and social expectations.



John Kirby, *Boy*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 152 x 122 cm

The exhibited works trace Kirby's distinctive visual language: meticulous compositions in which figures often appear suspended within pared-back interiors or stark, indeterminate landscapes, charged with symbolic detail yet resistant to fixed narrative. Kirby's smooth, flat, and deliberately controlled surfaces heighten the psychological intensity of his subjects, while subtle distortions of scale and perspective alongside a muted palette introduce a disquieting, dreamlike register.

In *The Company of Strangers* (1998), his definitive study of the artist, Edward Lucie-Smith observed that Kirby's paintings possess a rare ability to balance classical restraint with emotional immediacy, drawing the viewer into spaces that feel at once intimate and estranged. Across these works, themes of solitude, spiritual inquiry and the fragile theatre of human relationships unfold with a clarity that is both austere and profoundly humane.

John Kirby's work has been exhibited internationally and is held in major public collections, including Tate and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and the René Magritte Foundation, Brussels. In 2012, Kirby was the subject of a major retrospective at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool - a homecoming for the artist who began his life in the city.

John Kirby: Boy is presented in partnership with the artist's estate.

Exhibition Opening Hours: Monday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm

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PRESS ENQUIRIES: For more information and images please contact Emily Flowers:
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