

TOM PHILLIPS 1937 - 2022

Wednesday 30th November, 2022

82 Kingsland Road
London E2 8DP

T: +44 (0)20 7920 7777

F: +44 (0)20 7920 7770

info@flowersgallery.com

www.flowersgallery.com

It is with great sadness that we announce that British artist Tom Phillips, CBE, RA died on 28th November 2022, at the age of 85.

Tom Phillips was a renowned artist, opera composer, librettist, and concrete poet. Throughout his life Phillips engaged in a broad scope of experimental practice, incorporating amongst other things, painting, sculpture, ornamental text, photography, music, and site-specific designs for public tapestries and mosaics.

One of his most well-known and influential works *A Humument* is a book project that extended over fifty years, in which every page of a second-hand Victorian novel bought in a London junk shop was transformed by painting, collage and cut-up techniques. *A Humument* was published in its sixth and final edition by Thames & Hudson in 2016. It was exhibited widely during his lifetime, most recently in a dedicated room at the Royal Academy during the 247th Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 2015.



Tom Phillips, photograph by Antonio Parente

Phillips worked on numerous other durational projects, extending in some cases over many decades. This includes *20 Sites n Years*, a photographic project beginning in 1973 that documented specific locations on the streets of South London at a set time and date on an annual basis, which became the subject of a film by Jake Auerbach in 2018.

Phillips was also well known for his site-specific public works, including tapestries made for St. Catherine's College, Oxford, street mosaics for Peckham in South London, and ornament and memorials for sacred spaces, including both Westminster Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. As a respected portrait painter, his subjects included Samuel Beckett, Iris Murdoch, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, and the Monty Python team. Phillips received the Frances Williams Memorial Prize in 1983 for his illustration and new translation of Dante's *Inferno*, and co-directed a television adaptation of the *Inferno* with Peter Greenaway. His work was also encountered by many in the form of coins produced for the Royal Mint, including the 2011 Olympic Kilo coins designed alongside Anthony Caro, and could be seen on the covers of albums by Brian Eno and King Crimson.

Music formed an integral aspect of his experimental output, and he was initially most well-known in the 1960s for his involvement with Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, and his own conceptual music scores performed by the pianist John Tilbury. In 1969 he created the opera *Irma*, a 'chance' composition based on the characters of *A Humument*, and the most recent score *Opus XIIB* was performed at the South London

Gallery to mark his 80th birthday in 2017. Phillips also devised the libretto for Tarik O'Regan's operatic version of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which premiered at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre in 2011, and had its US premiere at San Francisco's Opera Parallèle in 2015.

Born in London in 1937, Tom Phillips attended St. Catherine's College, Oxford and Camberwell School of Art. He was elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 1989 and was Chairman of the Royal Academy's Exhibitions Committee from 1995 to 2007. There he curated the exhibition *Africa: The Art of a Continent* in 1996, which travelled to the Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1996. He had retrospective exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery, London; The Royal Academy, London; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and The Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. He was awarded the CBE for services to the Arts in 2002.

An avid collector, much of Phillips's interest in the collating and classification of objects and images would make its way into his work in the form of sculpture and painting, text, and music. This also extended to his curatorial interests, curating an exhibition of his large collection of postcard photographic portraits at the National Portrait Gallery titled *We Are The People*.

His last completed project *Humbert*, was published by Talfourd Press in association with Blundell Studios in September 2022. Produced over several decades Phillips had been working on a parallel project to *A Humument*, altering and disrupting the pages of a dozen second-hand copies of Humbert Wolfe's 1927 *Cursory Rhymes*. During the Covid lockdown, Phillips selected characteristic examples to indicate a variety of processes from completed collages to sprawling ideas for works in progress. The resulting collection of creative interventions is a testament to Phillips's unrelenting experimental approach to his life and art.

Tom Phillips is survived by his wife Fiona Maddocks, his children Ruth and Leo, and Fiona's two children.

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