

PRESS RELEASE 2012

# R.B. Kitaj: Obsessions

**The Art of Identity (21 Feb - 16 June 2013)**  
Jewish Museum London

**Analyst for Our Time (23 Feb - 16 June 2013)**  
Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, West Sussex

**A major retrospective exhibition of the work of R. B. Kitaj (1932-2007) - one of the most significant painters of the post-war period – displayed concurrently in two major venues for its only UK showing.**

This international touring show is **the first major retrospective exhibition in the UK since the artist's controversial Tate show** in the mid-1990s and the first comprehensive exhibition of the artist's oeuvre since his death in 2007. Comprised of more than 70 works, **R.B. Kitaj: Obsessions** comes to the UK from the Jewish Museum Berlin and will be **shown concurrently at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester and the Jewish Museum London.**

The presentation of the exhibition over the two venues will enable different facets of Kitaj's identity to be explored in depth for the first time in the UK. **Both venues share links to the artist** – Kitaj's London studio was designed by the American architect M.J. Long, whose practice Long & Kentish also designed the extensions to **Pallant House Gallery** and refurbishment of the **Jewish Museum London.**

The exhibition further returns the American-born Kitaj to the UK, his country of residence from the 1950s until his abrupt departure in the 1990s. In 1994 the great retrospective of his work at the Tate triggered a flood of negative reviews, which Kitaj termed the **"Tate War"**. This, combined with the sudden death of his second wife, painter Sandra Fisher, led him to leave London for Los Angeles in 1997.

Born Ronald Brooks in Cleveland, Ohio Kitaj grew up in the left-wing intellectual milieu of his parental home. His mother, Jeanne Brooks, was the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, and his stepfather Walter Kitaj fled Nazi persecution in Vienna to the United States. Following a spell as a merchant seaman Kitaj's formal art schooling began the 1950s in New York and subsequently Vienna .



R.B. Kitaj, Juan de la Cruz, 1967, Oil on canvas, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo; If Not, Not, 1975, Oil and black chalk on canvas, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh © R.B. Kitaj Estate.

Later he enrolled at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford, and then, in 1959, he went to the **Royal College of Art** in London, where he was a contemporary of artists such as **Patrick Caulfield** and **David Hockney**, the latter of whom remained his closest painter friend throughout his life.

During the 1960s Kitaj, together with his friends **Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach** and **Lucian Freud** were instrumental in pioneering a new, figurative art which defied the trend in abstraction and conceptualism. Known collectively as the **'School of London'** – the term Kitaj had first proposed in his seminal exhibition **The Human Clay** in 1976 – most of them were cultural 'outsiders', who remained fiercely loyal to the human figure.

From the mid-1970s, Kitaj began to position himself explicitly as a Jewish artist coupled with his study of role models such as **Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, and Walter Benjamin**. In 1989 he published the **First Diasporist Manifesto**, the longest and most impassioned of many texts discussing the Jewish dimension in his art and thought. Confronting the history of the mass murder of Europe's Jews, and reflecting on his identity as an outsider, he created a Jewish modern art, which he termed "diasporic", with a rich palate of colour and enigmatic, recurring motifs.

For Kitaj, art was a medium of emotional and intellectual exploration. An avid collector of books, his work frequently referenced themes and motifs in intellectual history and literature. The exhibition at Pallant House Gallery, subtitled **'Analyst for Our Time'**, will feature over 50 major paintings, sketches and prints presenting an overview of all periods of Kitaj's extensive oeuvre from the 1960s to his death in 2007.

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It will consider Kitaj's early presentations of a fragmented world, reflecting his interest in art history and intellectuals such as **'Aby Warburg'**, and his paintings and collages addressing issues of European politics, philosophy and literature such as **'The Murder of Rosa Luxembourg'** and **'The Rise of Fascism'**.

It will also include Kitaj's remarkable portraits of personal friends and figures he admired such as his portrait of David Hockney, **'The Neo-Cubist'**, and fictional characters from literature such as **'The Arabist'**. His fascination with the relationship between the body, sexuality and history is presented in a series of powerful paintings of bathers including **'Self-Portrait as a Woman'** and **'The Sensualist'**.

The exhibition at the **Jewish Museum London**, subtitled **'The Art of Identity'** will focus on how Kitaj explored and expressed his 'Jewishness'. The exhibition will feature over thirty works, including iconic paintings such as **'If Not, Not'**; **'Cecil Court, London W2 (The Refugees)'**, **'The Wedding'**, and **'The Jewish Rider'**. It also includes Kitaj's portrait of the author Philip Roth, **'A Jew in Love'**.

**Notes to Editors:**

For press information and images about the Pallant House Gallery exhibition contact **Emma Robertson** on [e.robertson@pallant.org.uk](mailto:e.robertson@pallant.org.uk) or +44 (0)1243 770841.

For press information and images about the Jewish Museum London exhibition contact **Carrie Rees** on [carrie@reeshutchinson.com](mailto:carrie@reeshutchinson.com) or +44 (0) 77 63 70 83 46.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication by Cilly Kugelmann, Eckart Gillen, Hubertus Gaßner (eds.) with essays by Tracy Bartley, Inka Bertz, Edward Chaney, Martin Roman Deppner, Michal Friedlander, Eckhart Gillen, Cilly Kugelmann und Richard Morphet, David N. Myerswhich.

**RB Kitaj: Obsessions** is curated by Dr Eckhart Gillen for the Jewish Museum Berlin and owes thanks to the generous support of many lenders, among them international institutions including the The Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art Oslo, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, and Tate London. After its presentation in the UK, the exhibition will tour to the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany

**About Pallant House Gallery**

Located in the heart of historic Chichester on the South coast, Pallant House Gallery is a unique combination of a Grade One Listed Queen-Anne townhouse and an award-winning contemporary extension, housing one of the most significant collections of Modern British art in the country. Widely acclaimed for its innovative temporary exhibitions and exemplary Learning and Community programme which has inclusion at its heart, the Gallery has won numerous awards since re-opening in 2006. For more information visit [pallant.org.uk](http://pallant.org.uk).

**About the Jewish Museum**

The Jewish Museum was founded in 1932 by Professor Cecil Roth, Alfred Rubens and Wilfred Samuel. Originally located in Woburn House in Bloomsbury, the museum moved to an elegant early Victorian listed building in Camden Town in 1994. In 2010 it reopened after a £10 million transformation, creating a landmark Museum that celebrates Jewish life and cultural diversity as part of the wider story of Britain. For more information visit [jewishmuseum.org.uk](http://jewishmuseum.org.uk).