

John Blackburn
Revisitation Paintings
13 Jan – 18 Feb 2023

Curated by Jacqueline Creswell



John Blackburn (1932 – 2022)

John Blackburn's artistic reputation was first established in the early 1960s when he was collected extensively by Jim Ede at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. After a long hiatus beginning in the late 1960s, he began exhibiting again in 2006 with a major museum show in Folkestone. It was here his association with Osborne Samuel began, with the gallery going on to show his work in several exhibitions, most recently the retrospective 'John Blackburn at 90: Seven Decades of Painting' in September 2022. This was the last exhibition of his work John got to see before he sadly passed away in October 2022.



Photos © Ash Mills

It was a privilege to meet John, especially so because he was to pass away only a few months later. He was full of energy, painting every day and enthusiastic about all his forthcoming exhibitions. We are delighted to be bringing his outstanding work to Salisbury and we hope visitors will enjoy seeing work of such considerable reputation in the city.

We are grateful to John's family and to Osborne Samuel gallery for their help in producing the exhibition.

David Christie
January 2023

Curator's note

As we finalised preparations for this exhibition we heard the very sad news that the artist John Blackburn had died at the age of 90. I was so privileged to meet him and experience first-hand his energy and commitment to this exhibition at the Vanner Gallery, one of a series of exhibitions marking his 90th birthday. John's family are keen that these shows proceed as planned and fortunately we were able to select the pictures with the artist so this exhibition will hopefully be just as he would have wanted.

When we visited, John was typically kind and generous with his time, inviting me and David Christie into his home and studio in August last year. He could not have been more welcoming and thoughtfully talked us through the diverse aspects of his life's work, in particular his very latest paintings, the REVISITATION series. At 90 years old John still visited his studio every day to paint. He had a restless energy and a constant desire to challenge his practice, as original and creative in 2022 as it was at the outset of his career some 70 years ago.

The themes in Blackburn's REVISITATION paintings and his visual vocabulary have remained constant and consistent over the past seven decades of his practice. Revisiting his work is very much part of his process; he is continually experimenting, taking risks and re-evaluating. He explained that something truly remarkable is revealed in the process of revisitation, as the work is not a recreation, but a revisiting based on a reflection, on his memories, stored images and recorded work. He regards revisiting his work as an act of humility and an opportunity for honest assessment and transformation.

Many of the paintings I selected for this exhibition were created between 2018 – 2022 and will be exhibited for the first time at the Vanner Gallery in Salisbury. Blackburn has refined and distilled his artistic passions without losing any of the tension and structure of his earlier works. The new paintings suggest an increasing focus on finding a way to express a greater spiritual significance in his life, searching for an inner tranquillity and harmony. These paintings on board acknowledge his mature vision, portraying a considered and heightened visual dynamic. There is a distinct energy in the pared-down forms, creating a dialogue between the elements and how they relate to each other, suggesting a contemplative narrative. Human conflict seems to have been if not resolved then reconciled. John's mark making, texture and use of colour are deliberate and cogent. His signature palette of pigments, predominantly with textures of white and grey, is accented by darker, almost black pigments, applied with a clarity free from the found objects that he often incorporated into his earlier paintings.

These revisited works have a delicate fragility, a stillness and purity of line and form, yet they possess an enhanced tension which elevates them to the realms of the ethereal.

Jacquiline Creswell
January 2023

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Purchases may be made in instalments – please ask



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