



Images (from left to right): Craigie Aitchison, 'Crucifixion'; 'Vase with Lily Still-Life'; 'Holy Island, Isle of Arran'

Craigie Aitchison: A Private Collection

6 March to 6 April 2013

Private view: Tuesday 5 March, 6–8pm

Waddington Custot Galleries presents a private collection of works by Scottish artist Craigie Aitchison. Irish-born Sheelagh Cluney started collecting these pictures in 1979 and for the next 30 years she enlarged the collection to over 50 works, and became a close friend of the artist. The collection covers Aitchison's main subject matter: Crucifixion scenes; Bedlington terriers; portraiture, and still life. Many of the works were purchased from his studio or galleries and some were gifts from the artist.

Sheelagh Cluney moved to London from Japan in 1978. She was looking for an artist whose work she could collect in depth and discovered Aitchison's work at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge a year later. There is a tradition of in-depth collecting as in, for instance, the Cézannes, Renoirs and Matisse in the Barnes Collection.

Aitchison's technique involved working outwards from the centre of his paintings, pushing the paint towards the edges of the canvas. Aitchison's use of paint appears to parallel what Milton Avery had done in America after the Second World War and Avery also influenced Mark Rothko: Aitchison diluted oil paint so that it was almost like a glaze, allowing the fabric of the canvas to show through. He layered the paint and continuously re-worked the composition by scraping and wiping the paint away, creating outlines around the main forms in his paintings.

After Aitchison's death in 2009, Sheelagh Cluney asked art critic Andrew Lambirth to write a publication in memory of the artist. The project was not completed by the time of Sheelagh Cluney's death in 2011 but excerpts from the interviews she gave are published in the exhibition catalogue which accompanies this exhibition.

Sheelagh Cluney's collection presents a unique perspective on Aitchison's career and offers a glimpse into the relationship between artist and collector.

Biography

Craigie Aitchison was born in Edinburgh in 1926, the younger son of the Lord Advocate for Scotland, Lord Aitchison PC KC. After initially training to become a lawyer, Aitchison abandoned this career and entered the Slade School of Art, London, in 1952; fellow students and friends included Myles Murphy and Euan Uglow.

Aitchison's work was first shown in a group exhibition at Gimpel Fils, London, in 1954, and his first one-man show was at the Beaux Arts Gallery, London, in 1959. He exhibited widely in the United Kingdom and overseas, in locations as diverse as Tokyo, Delhi and Jerusalem. In 1953, during his second year at the Slade, he won the prize for the best still-life and two years later he was awarded a British Council Italian Government Scholarship to Rome. Thereafter, he received further awards, including the inaugural Jerwood Prize for Painting in 1994. Aitchison was elected a Royal Academician in 1988.

Aitchison died in London in 2009.

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Monday to Friday: 10am - 6pm
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