



Jewish Museum Berlin

19th June 2012

Press Information

: “R. B. Kitaj (1932-2007) Obsessions”

A retrospective exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin from 21st September 2012 – 27th January 2013



R.B. Kitaj: Marrano (The Secret Jew), 1976

© R.B. Kitaj Estate. Collection of Michael Moritz & Harriet Heyman

This fall the Jewish Museum Berlin is showing the first comprehensive retrospective exhibition of the American artist R. B. Kitaj since his death five years ago. The exhibition brings together loans of leading museums and private collections from around the world, including the MoMA in New York, the Tate in London and the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Madrid. One hundred thirty paintings, prints and drawings from all periods of his oeuvre are shown together.



For the first time the Jewish Museum Berlin had access to the complete estate of the artist's "Yellow Studio" in Los Angeles. Thanks to the opportunity to view his extensive private archive of texts and pictures, which served as an inspiration for his paintings and collages, the exhibition provides unique insights into his art. R. B. Kitaj's works are considered to be mysterious, multi-layered and provocative. His art is characterized by strong colors and an abundance of pictorial citations. The Jewish Museum shows the elements, examples and inspirations that Kitaj drew on to compose his pictures and reveals how he himself saw them.

The great Jewish artist's body of work is presented in ten theme rooms. Two rooms alone are devoted to his "Circle of Friends", which included the painter David Hockney, the author Philip Roth and the rabbi Albert Friedlander, as well as his intellectual idols, Franz Kafka, Hannah Arendt and Sigmund Freud. Two additional rooms are dedicated to Kitaj's analysis of his Jewish identity – a personal obsession of the artist, which inspired the name for the exhibition.

During the 1960s Kitaj was viewed as the pioneer of a new, figurative art. Together with his artist friends Frank Auerbach, Lucian Freud and Leon Kossoff, the so-called School of London, he initiated the escape of art from abstraction. Some of these artists are among the most famous representatives of British Pop-Art.

Beginning in the mid 1970s, Kitaj positioned himself explicitly as a Jewish artist and viewed his oeuvre as an expression of modern Jewish Art. He captured the fate of the Jewish people in the 20th century in many pictures and considered it his life's mission to create a new Jewish Art.

R. B. Kitaj experienced his biggest triumphs in Europe, but also his deepest disappointment. The great retrospective of his work at the Tate Gallery in 1994 triggered a flood of negative reviews, which Kitaj termed the "Tate War", and which ultimately caused him to return to the US. This great individual exhibition was also shown at the LACMA, Los Angeles, and the



Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. In 1997 Kitaj received the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition "R.B. Kitaj (1932-2007) Obsessions" is an exhibition of the Jewish Museum Berlin in cooperation with the Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH. Commentaries of the artist have been recorded and are available on audio guide, so that visitors will have the chance to hear Kitaj himself speak about his work.

The catalogue to the exhibition will be published by Kerber Verlag in both German and in English. It contains approximately 200 pictures, illustrations and five fold-out panels. It will be 256 pages long.

On the occasion of R.B. Kitaj's 80th birthday this year, the Jewish Museum Berlin is holding a symposium in cooperation with the Academy of the Arts on October 25th/26th with speakers from Germany, Great Britain and the USA.

The exhibition is open from 21st September 2012 to 27th January 2013.

Kitaj press pictures are available on www.jmberlin.de/fotodownload > Sonderausstellungen

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