

**'The Art I Live With, The Things I Love' by Ansel Krut****Works and objects displayed****1) Saskia Krut-Powell and Felicity Powell, Pirate Ship, c 2000, mixed media, 60 x 43cm**

Saskia is one of my twin daughters. She made this painting when she must have been about five years old and Felicity propped it in its current frame and set the model boats on top. It is a mystery quite why this particular painting of all the hundreds of children's paintings made in my house in those frenetically creative years between the ages of 3 and 14 should have survived, but it has been on the wall for nearly 20 years, and its immediacy and innocence remain as live as ever.

**2) Jane Alexander, Flock, 2018, photomontage, 14 x 19cm**

Jane and I were undergraduates at art school together in South Africa. Even then she had a dark imagination allied to a sense of foreboding, one located in a very South African context. This image, which she gave to me when she was in London in 2019 to install a work at the Tate, shows a bird-like creature with an animal skull worn as a bonnet and fixed in place with a red ribbon. Birds, along with a sinister drone, swarm in a lowering sky and dive towards a leaden ocean. The background view of mountains and ocean is seen from Green Point, very close to where I grew up. The image is apocalyptic, and although small it seems to expand as you look at it, sucking you into a deep, almost cinematic, space. The bird creature is one of Jane's sculptures and is wearing a tabard she made herself.

**3) Neville Lewis (1895-1972), Morris Robinson, c 1940, oil on canvas, 45 x 29cm**

Neville Lewis was a South African artist who trained at the Slade in London. This painting of my grandfather hung in my grandmother's flat where its rather forbidding stare kept us grandchildren in check. I inherited it from my mother in the late-1980s and it now hangs in my living room. Lewis's other subjects included King Sobhuza II of Swaziland; Job Masego, a Black South African soldier who sunk a German supply boat in Tobruk Harbour during World War II; and Lucas Majozi, who received a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery during the Second Battle of El Alamein (the highest medal received by a black person during that war). Lewis's Portrait of Albert van der Sandt Centlivres was burned by demonstrators during the Rhodes Must Fall protests at the University of Cape Town in February 2016.

**4) Kitaj (1932-2007), postcard to Ansel Krut, written 1986, 14 x 8.5cm**

Kitaj sent me this postcard when I was a student. He had seen some of my paintings at the Royal Academy summer exhibition and wrote, in rather beautiful copperplate handwriting, to suggest we meet (at some point when he had finished working towards an exhibition). The picture face of the postcard shows Sholom Aleichem, an Ukrainian

Yiddish language author and playwright. I was too shy to respond to Kitaj, which I now regret enormously, of course, and he must have thought me very rude. But what an act of generosity on his part. He was something of an art god in those days, a superstar at a time when few living artists claimed superstar status. His relevance for younger artists is increasing again, after some years in the doldrums.

**5) Morris Robinson (1890-1947), sketchbook, graphite and ink, c 1920, 36 x 12cm**

My grandfather's sketchbook, which was always in my family's home and then bequeathed to me. Morris left Dublin aged 14, to make a future for himself in South Africa. I never met him, he died long before I was born, but stories have it he was the life and soul of any party. You can see humour and irreverence in this sketch, an acute sense of observation, a sympathy for mood, and a dainty touch. And he loved artists: he was constantly organising artists' parties and getting his portrait painted or sculpted; his own portrait mind you, never my grandmother's as far as I know. One of those painted portraits is also on show here. The figure in the drawing is clearly on a park bench, probably in the Gardens in Cape Town - he drew there frequently; and at the seaside; and at the evening drawing classes he attended (the models heavily clothed, booted and hatted, but posed in the correct art-room attitudes).

**6) Anna Liber Lewis, Word, 2019, oil and charcoal on canvas, 106 x 70cm**

I first got to know Anna's work when she was a student at the Royal College in 2015 and then a few years later at her residency exhibition at the Camden Art Centre. This piece, *Word*, was made when she was struggling with bereavement and, with its illegible letter-like motifs and a loose canvas draped to obscure a conventionally stretched one, it seems redolent of the inadequacy of expression in the face of that experience. The shapes she has used are stained into raw canvas or sketched out in un-fixed charcoal. There is a hidden painting under the draped canvas that no one is supposed to know about.

**7) Rhoda Robinson (1931-1988), District Six, c 1955, lithograph, 18.5 x 23.5cm**

Rhoda Robinson (Krut) was my mother. She must have made this lithograph a few years before I was born and it has always been with me. The population of District Six, an inner-city area of Cape Town, was largely Muslim "Cape Malays", until the area was declared "whites only" and demolished around 1966. The Apartheid-era Group Areas Act had been passed in 1950, so the imminent displacement of the non-white community and the razing of the buildings must already have been in my mother's mind when she made this image. The preliminary sketches for this lithograph would have been made on site, and then redrawn onto lithographic stone in the print studio. The dark building in the foreground with its even darker window 'eyes' and tooth like railings has a troubled aspect. A path from the left hand corner leads uphill past a minaret and there is a suggestion of the slopes of Table Mountain beyond.

**8) Matthew Burrows, from the 360 series, 2018, watercolour on Saunders Waterford paper, 22 x 14.8cm**

Having watched the evolution of Matthews painting over 20 years, from his deep investment in figuration to his more recent abstract work, I feel I can trace something of that journey in this particular watercolour, it's a work that situates itself nicely between these two positions, looking back and forwards simultaneously. Using the simplest of contrasts - blue to orange, vertical to diagonal, triangle to circle - this image is a play on poise, form and equilibrium, tempered by a very plausible wobble - as if the whole painting was holding a position against gravity, slightly off balance but smiling through it. I can't help reading into it a Modernist acrobat standing on a ball, on a stage, with a stage-set seascape behind it. The sharply folded form that angles in from the left disrupts the picture plane, and nudges at the 'acrobat' with mischievous, unbalancing, intent.

**9) Hannah Krut-Powell and others, String puppets and balance toy, Varied dates, mixed media**

Two of these were gifts and the third was made by Hannah, one of my daughters, aged around six. They group together with a perfect logic; a balancing horse toy, a horse marionette, and a zebra string puppet. The zebra was made by Hannah out of corks and pipe cleaners and a toilet roll. As a group they are entirely about play and playfulness, sharing a sense of wonder (how does that horse balance on the tips of its hooves?), and crossing over easily into an imaginative world, ready-made for adventures.

**10) Richard Nielsen, Self Portrait in Covid Mask, 2021, acrylic on paper, 33 x 25cm**

Many years ago, Rich let me spend hours in his print studio in Los Angeles and introduced me to the mysteries of traditional lithography. He was working primarily in print and photography then. More recently he has returned to painting, and last year he asked me to send him a photograph of myself in my Covid mask so that he could use it as the basis for a painted portrait. The finished painting was shown in his exhibition of masked portraits at MASSMoCA in 2020. His self-portrait here is a study for a larger painting for that same exhibition, the immediacy of the study is wonderfully direct and engaging, but there is an ambiguity in the expression, focused of course around his eyes, and it's difficult to tell whether it is a wry humour expressed there or if his eyes are shadowed by anxiety. Perhaps a little of both. Rich is wearing his Canadian flag mask (he is Canadian and the exhibition is touring to Vancouver). Appending a familiar image onto a mask (until recently an unfamiliar thing) is an acknowledgement of the strangeness of the Covid situation, but it also echoes the way Rich's paintings work with conflicting adjacency. He often paints from CCTV footage, making us covert observers of both the commonplace and the extraordinary, frequently in juxtaposition.

**11) Dillwyn Smith, Take the Kettle Off, Maggie, 1986, oil on canvas, 170 x 180cm**

Dillwyn made this painting when we were students working alongside each other at the Royal College. It shows a protester confronting a policeman during the unrest after the miners' strike and the anti-Thatcher protests that year. You can make out a helmeted policeman behind a riot shield on the left and a protester on the right (for which Dillwyn got me to stand against the painting as he drew round my profile). The painting has got richer with age, the paint seems to have settled into itself, as oil paint seems to do, yet the colours are as vibrant now as they were then. Even though he made it as a student, it's an incredibly sophisticated work. Dillwyn has colour sense the way some musicians have perfect pitch.

**12) Lauren Bon, Catalogue for Not A Cornfield, 2005**

This double volume catalogue documents *Not a Cornfield*, the first of Lauren's major social practice art works. I remember standing with her and Felicity on a rise in Elysian Park in LA overlooking the future location as she outlined her plans for the project. The site was historically significant to the now displaced Native American population but had become industrially poisoned and unusable. Lauren's project was to plant it with traditional corn that would decontaminate the soil, irrigate it with waste water from the LA river, and return it healthy to the public. The logistics were complex and the resistance from state authorities was intense. As in much of her work, Lauren was something of a pioneer with *Not a Cornfield*, blending social concern with a sensitivity to local needs and historical awareness of the locality. The site is now a well-used and well-maintained state park that has revitalised the surrounding area. In 2006 Felicity and I each gave a lecture in the cornfield on the subject of corn in European art. And once I watched as two Native American Indians ceremonially buried a dead coyote there at night. The site had (re)assumed huge symbolic significance for them.

**13) Ansel Krut, Cycling and Whistling, 2021, oil on canvas, 100 x 90cm (Ref. CR-AK01)**

I remember that when one of my daughters learned to cycle we went up to the park to ride around the ponds, and she remarked happily that she had always wanted to cycle and whistle, which she did. The charm of that realised ambition stayed with me. This image takes that as its starting point, but then it swerves into much darker territory. The painting took me nearly two years to complete; the body that is at once a dress and a road receding into the distance was there from the start, as was the tricycle. The matchstick arms and the origami sleeves appeared fairly early too, but the head and the background gave me huge problems, and it was only when re-orientating the head so that it looks away from the direction of travel, that the figure got the required torque, became nervous and alert. And it was only when the background had thickened up into a crepuscular murk, dense enough to have a shadow cast on it, impenetrable and a little sinister, that the feel of fragility under threat came into focus as the true subject of the painting.

**14) Felicity Powell (1961-2015), Bronze Spheres, c2008, 40cm diameter**

Felicity was my wife. The Bronze Spheres have been features in our back garden for a decade. The motifs on these balls, tears and flames, are ones that Felicity used repeatedly in her work. The flames are taken from Botticelli's drawings for Dante's *Inferno*. The story she told about tears was a childhood memory of how, in some forgotten upset, her tears salted the mashed potatoes she was eating at the time - sadness and nourishment together. And, as revealingly, the story throws light on how the artist in her was always a dispassionate observer of her own emotions. Informally she called these bronze balls "Hairy" and "Sweaty".

**15) Margot Krut (1964-1991), ceramic vase, 1990**

Margot was my sister. We were close as children but lost touch when I went to university, and subsequently left for London. I think we were both looking forward to making up that lost time when she came to the UK too. Her training was in piano and in classical music, and she had enjoyed some success with public and radio performances in South Africa. Many of our conversations about art touched on the differences and similarities between our two disciplines, and especially the fine balance between the rigours of form and the possibilities of expressiveness within that. This vase was one she made at an evening pottery class. I don't recall her having any previous experience with ceramics, I think she went more for the social side, being new to the city, but I love its lack of symmetry, the wonky lip and the splattered glaze. It feels to me a little like those conversations, as if she was keeping one eye on the rules of the craft, but relaxed enough not to be inhibited by her lack of experience as a potter. It has a wonderful insouciance. This is one of the few personal items she left after her death.

**16) Felicity Powell, Running Tree, c 2012, wax on reversed mirror, 19cm diameter**

A tree has been upended, inverted, so that its leafy branches point downwards and the base of its trunk skywards and that, in turn, is topped by a head in profile. The branches appear to be running like cartoon legs, shown repeated to indicate great speed, while the head is elegantly poised with a near regal air of superiority. The white wax on dark ground technique was used by Italian medal makers in the 17th century to present their ideas to clients prior to casting them, but Felicity has used it here as the final work. This piece is modelled in minute detail and with consummate skill.

**17) Unknown photographer, The Venus of Cyrene, black and white print, Alinari edition no 36084a, 22 x 16cm**

Originally from the Fratelli Alinari workshop, Felicity and I bought this photograph in a flea market in Rome around 1988. The subject is the Venus of Cyrene, a Greco-Roman sculpture previously housed in the Museo delle Terme, but returned to Libya after an Italian court ruling in 2008. The sculpture has been lit to emphasise the fleshiness of the stone and that, together with the subtle shifts of weight in its contraposto stance, gives it a lithe sensuality. The image has been hanging in my kitchen for many years and the

subject forgotten so that its gender has been contentious amongst my friends. This was only recently resolved when I took the photograph out of the frame ahead of this exhibition and found it labelled.

**18) Max Beckmann (1884-1950), Self Portrait, 1914, drypoint etching, 24 x 20cm**

I had been eyeing up this Beckmann self-portrait in a friend's house for some years, and eventually plucked up the courage to ask if I could live with it for a time. So while it is not strictly part of my collection, I feel I have taken ownership of it in some way. But it's not an easy image to live with. The painter Anne Sassoon wrote to me to say: "I always look at it but can hardly bear to really get into it - it has a piercing interrogatory focus which puts you/me/them/us and ultimately himself uncomfortably on the spot." That just about sums it up.

**19) E J Bellocq (1873-1949), Storyville Portrait, photograph c1912, printed by Lee Friedlander 1966, 19 x 23cm**

This photograph was left to me by a friend, David Schorr, who died some years ago. It's from the Storyville portraits taken by Bellocq in the red-light district of New Orleans around 1913. It's not known if Bellocq ever printed them in his lifetime but Friedlander acquired the glass negatives and printed them in 1966. The glass plate has clearly been damaged, cracked and abraded through wear and tear, but it seems that Bellocq himself scratched at many of the images, often scraping out the faces of his subjects. The subject matter, a naked young woman, raises questions around consent and the agency of the model. In the MOMA catalogue that accompanied a 1970 exhibition of these photographs, people who knew Bellocq personally are quoted in interview as saying that the models posed as they chose, some clothed, others in costume, some nude. The image itself is very potent and short-circuits the relationship between the supposed objectivity of the camera and the sympathetic response elicited by the image. I think of Diane Arbus and Nan Goldin as near equivalents; photographers who must have identified closely with the marginalisation of the individuals they photographed in order to evoke the experience as strongly as they do.

[https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_2678\\_300299020.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2678_300299020.pdf)

**20) Walter Swennen, 2007, ink drawing, 28 x 21cm**

I was introduced to Walter's work by Gerry Smith in 2005 and was immediately captivated. I invited him to London to give a lecture at Wimbledon Art College, where I was the Drawing Fellow, and showed his drawings in an exhibition called *Maybe a Duck, Maybe a Rabbit*, the co-existence of contradictory subjects being a very Walter sort of thing, as in this piece. The drawing itself is made with one of those pens with four-coloured inks, and it offers four different views, each in a different ink, each labelled S (for south, or maybe Swennen), each showing a room with a chair or stick figure seen from its own vantage point, with a light beam coming from that direction too. It's chaos masquerading as an explanatory diagram. The drawing was actually a gift from Walter

to Gerry, who has allowed me to live with it on a long loan which is incredibly generous of him.

**21) Nick Goss, *Suya*, watercolour, 2020, 34 x 29cm**

Nick has a studio in the same building as I do, and over the last few years we have started to drop in on each other at work. The proximity of the studios means our visits are generally spontaneous and informal and sometimes happen at those moments of uncertainty or despair when a painting seems irretrievably lost. He was actually very encouraging about *Cycling and Whistling*, the work I am showing here. This watercolour by Nick is, I feel, very typical of him as an artist. The apparent conventionality of the scene is quickly displaced when you look closely at it and, as in much of his work, you are offered several possible narrative threads at once: pockets of incidence pop up, figures on balconies, washing on a line, irregular spaces that don't quite align. It has a very English-Surrealist feel to it, not least because of the delicate treatment of surface and colour. There is a sense of the incredulous underpinning the construction of the image, as though he has surprised himself. It's actually based on an Edward Burra stage set.

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Not included in the exhibition and on view on the lower level of the gallery:

**22) Ansel Krut, *Prisoners*, 2021, oil on canvas, 70 x 60cm (Ref. CR-AK02)**

A figure, constructed out of plank-like elements, has taken two other plank-figures captive. Clearly he is going to use bits of them to further build himself up. The image is very matter-of-fact, flat and graphic and unembellished. The background has been abraded and mistreated, so that it compounds the banal brutality of the scene. The volition of the two captive figures has obviously been stripped away, but the central figure is not as much in charge as he likes to think: puppet-like, he too is subject to the strictures of a deterministic universe.

**23) Ansel Krut, *Back from the Woods*, 2021, oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm (Ref. CR-AK03)**

This little narrative painting has a folkloric feel to it, a cautionary tale. The larger figure is carrying the small green boy back to the village. The boy is obviously very excited and happy, bursting to tell of his adventures; clearly he hasn't realised that he is missing his legs. The larger figure is more cognisant, so much so that his own legs have turned to jelly in sympathy. The village houses look shocked.

Exhibition floor plan

