

Inverleith House is delighted to present Raoul De Keyser: *Paintings 1967–2012*, an exhibition of works by the late Raoul De Keyser (b.1930, Deinze, Belgium, d.2012). As the first posthumous exhibition of De Keyser's painting works in a UK gallery, the exhibition considers the legacy of this prolific artist through an examination of his extraordinary five decade-long career, with particular reference to the artist's late studio activity from 2010 to 2012 and the very last paintings made by De Keyser. The exhibition of 45 paintings includes the screening of the documentary, *Raoul De Keyser: Returning is Also a Journey*, translated into English for the first time.

Raoul De Keyser is often described as an 'artist's artist', denoting a certain level of connoisseurship for his artistic oeuvre. He first gained international attention in the 1980s, was then selected for Jan Hoet's 1992 Documenta IX, and in recent times has been championed by younger Belgian artists such as Luc Tuymans. Perhaps because of his highly experimental and continuously evolving output or more simply due to his lifelong residence in the small East-Flanders town of Deinze, De Keyser's work has always escaped transitory artistic trends and thus the spotlight. Nonetheless, De Keyser is fast becoming recognised as one of the 20th century's foremost proponents of a complex, unique form of abstract figuration inspired as much by everyday reality as by serious aesthetic concerns. It is therefore the purpose of this exhibition to not only focus in on De Keyser's later, 'better known' work but also to consider his early career in the 1960s where he formed the foundations of his rigorous investigations on canvas and in the medium of painting itself.

Perhaps initially something of a dilettante, De Keyser began painting seriously in his mid-30s after a brief journalistic career, becoming associated with the East-Flanders' 'New Vision' group whose proponents drew upon post-war American painting, most notably Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Pop Art. However, post-war Belgian culture differed significantly from the market-driven consumerism of '60s America and De Keyser's application of these styles within his own practice was distinctively down to earth by comparison; his canvases firmly rooted within a more intimate, introspective and domestic reality.

De Keyser painted ponderous and passing observations: the minutiae of the everyday. The garden hosepipe draped languorously across the patio; a canvas tent pitched in luscious green countryside; the monkey puzzle tree outside his studio; landscapes and clouded skies; sports fields and chalk lines – subjects that bear witness to peace, prosperity, leisure time and an unpretentious existence. These simple themes which were constantly revisited and revised throughout the artist's career supported, somewhat paradoxically, an extraordinary artistic rigour and tireless passion for probing the possibilities and limitations of painting – its ability to present the real and express materiality upon the two-dimensional planar surface of a canvas. It is the combination of this fierce aesthetic

and these deceptively simple motifs, that produce a beguiling intensity and an equivocal tension that is characteristic of his work.

De Keyser's unique form of abstraction is perhaps best illustrated by his line paintings such as *Kant Gampelaere*, 1973/1976/1985. The simple chalk lines used to demarcate football fields were the subject of an extended formal study by De Keyser during the '70s and '80s. Depicting nothing more than the straight white lines and wide arks across the blank green expanse of the pitch, these canvases perform a subtle yet playful doubling, as the artist mischievously mirrors the action of the line painter. The flat plane of the field, with its painted boundaries can be seen as a metaphor for the canvas – and in this way the painting becomes self-reflexive and the act of painting itself the true subject of the work, thus demonstrating a clear tension between the image and its reference point. These linear motifs would later evolve from the bold and opaque, to the wavering, irregular and uncertain –as seen in *De Zandvlo*, 1975/ 85, but their subject always remained the same.

Similarly, his clear, bright Pop influenced works of the late '60s express De Keyser's concerns surrounding flatness and materiality. These contradictory concerns were frequently played out within a single work, such as *Camping V*, 1971 (an example of De Keyser's linen box series) – a sculptural painting which, rendered three-dimensional by an interior wooden frame, becomes the very object it depicts; or the extraordinary quartet *Oefeningen (Exercises)* 1967, which uses the linen box as the very subject of the painting, and his 'slices' (one of which forms part of the work *Kant Gampelaere*) which occupy a liminal area between wall and space, one side resting upon the wall and the other stepping into the room.

De Keyser's late works abandoned the assuredness of these earlier years. As before, the canvas was reduced right down to the essential, but the effect was casual and indifferent and works could appear almost spontaneously thrown together or on the brink of collapse. These works reject large-scale formats, and adopt a softer palette and a lighter, increasingly delicate touch which could be likened to a desire to paint with space itself rather than oils. His representational language became increasingly abstracted, autobiographical, private and introspective; yet despite this seemingly formal departure, De Keyser's conceptual approach remained consistent.

On display for the first time in the UK are a selection of works from the artist's so-called *Last Wall* series – the name given to De Keyser's final studio works (2010–2012), and a group from the series *To Walk* named after a painting of the artist's walking stick.

De Keyser's own studio has informed the presentation of these smaller paintings at Inverleith

House. The artist would often develop and conceive such works in context to one another and in homage to this working methodology they are displayed here in close proximity along a single wall, combining new works with older canvases so that they may be considered together. These paintings, some of De Keyser's last, revisit familiar motifs but also continue to probe and test new formal ideas and their integral spontaneity and light-heartedness belie an artist at the end of his career.

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