

Joe Tilson (1928 - 2023)

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Joe Tilson, who died peacefully at home in London with his family in the early hours of the morning on Thursday 9 November 2023.

One of the greatest British artists of the last 60 years, Tilson was a founding figure of Pop Art in Britain. His early work explored political activism and social change. In the 1970s, disillusioned with the consumer society that Pop Art had done so much to highlight, Tilson relocated to the British countryside and his subject matter changed radically as he turned towards cultural history as a source of inspiration. Throughout his career, Tilson lived between Britain, Venice and Tuscany, eventually returning to his native London, where he remained until his death.

Alan Cristea, who knew and worked with Tilson for over fifty years comments:

"In 1969, having graduated from university, I joined Marlborough New London, the part of the business which dealt with contemporary art and limited edition prints by living artists. Joe Tilson was very much the rising star and I was a little bit in awe of him, as he sought to break every printmaking rule in sight. I need not have been. He was the most convivial, generous and hospitable person, happy to spend time imparting his knowledge to the very junior member of staff that I was.

Three years on and I had moved on to Waddington Galleries where I was joined a year later by Joe. In the interim he had left London and had abandoned Pop and political art in favour of longer lasting themes, embracing the cultures of Roman and Greek antiquity – the eternal rather than the ephemeral. I used to love visiting him at the Old Rectory near Chippenham in Wiltshire where his wife, Jos, made the most wonderful meals and where he and I had long discussions about the relevance of art and where I garnered so much information from his in-depth knowledge of literature and history.

When I started my own gallery in 1995, he was the one constant reference point. We continued to publish his editions together, still as technically inventive and gloriously colourful and exuberant. His love of printmaking never ebbed and his generosity never waned. He was one of the most inventive printmakers with whom I ever had the privilege to work with but, more than that, he was the most wonderful friend. I will miss him greatly and I send my heartfelt condolences to his wife Jos and to his children and grandchildren all of whom, I am delighted to say, have inherited his artistically creative genes."

Tilson was born in London on 24 August 1928. From 1944 to 1946 he worked as a carpenter before serving in the R.A.F between 1946 and 1949. After leaving military service in 1949, he returned to London to study at St. Martin's School of Art, later attending the Royal College of Art from 1952 to 1955. During his studies, he met Peter Blake, Allen Jones, Patrick Caulfield and David Hockney, who alongside Tilson were instrumental in the birth of British Pop Art. In 1955 the Royal College awarded Tilson the Rome Prize, taking him to live in Italy for a year, a country which provided him with a lifetime of inspiration. His first solo show was at Marlborough New London Gallery in 1962. Following this in 1964, Tilson went on to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale.

Major solo exhibitions of Tilson's work have taken place at the Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2002); Plymouth City Museum, Plymouth (1991); Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol (1984); Tate Gallery, London (1978); Stadt Museum, Recklinghausen (1965); Venice Biennale, Venice (1964).

From 1957 to 1962, Tilson held teaching positions at St Martin's School of Art and the Slade School of Fine Art in London as well as The School of Visual Arts in New York. Tilson was elected a Royal Academician in 2001, becoming a Senior Academician in 2003 when the Royal Academy presented a major retrospective of his work.

In 2023, Tilson enjoyed major retrospectives at Cristea Roberts Gallery and Marlborough Gallery to commemorate the event of his 95th birthday and the publication of the first monograph of the artist published by Lund Humphries.

His paintings and prints are held by major museums and galleries around the world including Tate, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Cristea Roberts Gallery

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About Cristea Roberts Gallery

Cristea Roberts Gallery is a leading international contemporary art gallery with a particular focus on original prints and works on paper. Since its inception, the gallery has commissioned a significant number editions by a wide range of artists, whilst also representing others for their unique works. The underlying ethos of the gallery has always been artist-led. It was originally founded in 1995 as the Alan Cristea Gallery and changed its name in September 2019 to Cristea Roberts Gallery.

Acknowledged as one of the leading galleries in its field of specialty, the gallery's programme is dedicated to publishing, cataloguing, exhibiting and dealing in original prints and drawings by its roster of over 30 important international artists and Estates. It participates in all the major international art fairs and has a dynamic programme of exhibitions hosted in its bespoke space in Pall Mall, London.

The gallery works closely with international museums on acquisitions and loans, and examples of its editions are held in major public collections around the world including Tate, London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Visitor information:

Tues - Fri 11am - 5.30 pm
Sat 11am - 2pm
Closed on Mondays, Sundays and public holidays

Travel: Piccadilly or Green Park underground station
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X (formerly Twitter): @CristeaRoberts
Instagram: @cristearoberts
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