

THE DARK MONARCH

MAGIC & MODERNITY
IN BRITISH ART

MICHAEL AYRTON SVEN BERLIN NICHOLAS BYRNE GILLIAN CARNEGIE ADAM CHODZKO STEVEN CLAYDON
CECIL COLLINS ITHIEL COLQUHOUN RICHARD DADD HUBERT DALWOOD KAYE DONACHIE
MEREDITH FRAMPTON BARBARA HEPWORTH DAMIEN HIRST LESLIE HURRY DEREK JARMAN DAVID JONES
PETER LANYON JOHN LATHAM LINDER GOSKA MACUGA JEREMY MILLAR PAUL NASH DAVID NOONAN
AUSTIN OSMAN SPARE SAMUEL PALMER SIMON PERITON JOHN PIPER FAY POMERANCE ERIC RAVILIOUS
EVA ROTHSCHILD JOHN RUSSELL PENNY SLINGER JOHN STEZAKER GRAHAM SUTHERLAND
DAVID THORPE MARK TITCHNER J W TUCKER JOHN WELLS KARL WESCHKE J D WILLIAMS
ADRIAN WISZNIEWSKI CLARE WOODS CERITH WYN EVANS BRYAN WYNTER MADAME YEVONDE

Towner invites you and a guest to **The Dark Monarch**
preview on Friday 22 January, 6.30pm – 8.30pm

Welcome by Cllr Susan Morris, Eastbourne Borough
Council Cabinet Member for Tourism
Introduction by Michael Bracewell, Co-Curator of
The Dark Monarch
Exhibition to be opened by author Philip Hoare

Exhibition continues
23 January – 21 March 2010

Opening hours
Tuesday – Sunday 10am – 6pm
Closed Mondays except Bank Holidays

TATE ST IVES
Organised by Tate St Ives: curated by Martin Clark –
Artistic Director, Tate St Ives with Michael Bracewell –
writer and critic and Alun Rowlands – Head of Fine Art,
University of Reading.
Supported by Tate Members and Tate St Ives Members.



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Towner
the contemporary art museum
Devonshire Park
College Road
Eastbourne BN21 4JJ
www.townereastbourne.org.uk
T: 01323 434 670

Tate St Ives Winter

10 October 2009–10 January 2010

The Dark Monarch Magic and Modernity in British Art

Tate St Ives Winter 2009/10

amongst a group of small, talisman-like sculptures by Berlin is a quartz *Monarch Head*. Berlin saw the 'Dark Monarch' as a force or energy, but personified him as a conflation of his own self-image and that of the biblical King Saul.

Also shown here is Berlin's extraordinary 'key' which describes the source of each of the characters in the novel. Only a few weeks after its publication one of the people represented in *The Dark Monarch* sued Berlin for libel, forcing the book's withdrawal; Berlin produced this document some twenty years later, sealing it in an envelope on which he wrote a moving account of the



Penny Slinger
Love Letters 1977
Courtesy the artist

Gallery 1 / Upper Gallery 2

In the years surrounding the Second World War it became clear that this new vision of the land in British art was haunted by the horrors and devastation of modern warfare. For these artists, the relationship between landscape, supernatural and elemental forces was complex, dealing with both a meditation on the distant past and a sense of foreboding about the future.

Upper Gallery 2 Occult Philosophy

Modern artists have engaged with magic in various ways. For some, such as Austin Osman Spare and Ithell Colquhoun, their art developed directly from a strong personal interest in mysticism and the occult, and describes spirit forces and sexual energy. Ithell Colquhoun's library combines the literature of Surrealism and magic that is vast and varied, stretching from philosophical, theosophical, mystical and religious history, to practical guides to witchcraft, popular astrology and prediction magazines. Her artworks, which can be seen in Lower Gallery 2, developed a conjunction of surrealist practices such as automatic drawing and fumage (moving a piece of paper above a lighted candle to produce a sooty trace or pattern) as a way of unlocking creativity and psychic resonances.

The showcase features items relating to Sven Berlin's novel *The Dark Monarch*, from which the exhibition takes its name —

Upper Gallery 2

book's autonomy and integrity as a work of art. Instructions state that it must not be opened until 14 September 2011, the date of his 100th birthday.

There is an intense romanticism in much of the art which has been inspired by the supernatural and the occult. Leslie Hurry's work invokes a particularly sinister air and atmosphere. Hurry spent the war years of the 1940s at the Dorset country retreat of his mortally ill patron, Grace Sholto Douglas. His art describes a private, mystical world in which he makes a fantastical cult of his patron. Both his *Self Portrait* (1944) and his portrait of *Grace Sholto Douglas* (1940) show white-faced, unsmiling figures, like the aristocratic inhabitants of a world between the living and the dead. There are strongly gothic overtones to Hurry's work, but it also continues modernist themes such as subconscious investigation and presentiments of a future shaped by war. Hurry's work, like that of many Neo-Romantic artists with an interest in mysticism and the occult, seems to shuttle between the past and the future.

Occult, supernatural and mystic influences were continually reinvented throughout the 1960s and 1970s, becoming even more visible through a counter-culture heavily influenced by music, feminism, psychedelia, drugs, reclaimed Edwardian and Art Nouveau styling, and the New Age spirituality of the hippy movement. These influences can be found in the work of British feminist and surrealist Penny Slinger, who used collage, assemblage, sculpture and cut-up techniques to explore her interest in identity, spirituality

THE DARK MONARCH

MAGIC & MODERNITY
IN BRITISH ART

TATE ST IVES

MICHAEL AYRTON SVEN BERLIN NICHOLAS BYRNE GILLIAN CARNEGIE
ADAM CHODZKO STEVEN CLAYDON CECIL COLLINS ITHELL COLQUHOUN
JOHN CRAXTON RICHARD DADD HUBERT DALWOOD KAYE DONACHIE
MEREDITH FRAMPTON BARBARA HEPWORTH DAMIEN HIRST LESLIE HURRY
DEREK JARMAN DAVID JONES PETER LANYON JOHN LATHAM LINDER
GOSHKA MACUGA JEREMY MILLAR HENRY MOORE PAUL NASH
DAVID NOONAN AUSTIN OSMAN SPARE SAMUEL PALMER SIMON PERITON
JOHN PIPER FAY POMERANCE ERIC RAVILIOUS EVA ROTHSCHILD
JOHN RUSSELL PENNY SLINGER JOHN STEZAKER GRAHAM SUTHERLAND
DAVID THORPE MARK TITCHNER J W TUCKER JOHN WELLS KARL WESCHKE
J D WILLIAMS ADRIAN WISZNIEWSKI CLARE WOODS
CERITH WYN EVANS BRYAN WYNTER
MADAME YEVONDE

"This was a terrible landscape, where the paramours of evil walked on the bare hills,
lichen-haired, hands twisted like old thorn trees and the smouldering dull red of dead fern
burning in their hearts; hearts that had known the bombardment of radium for centuries."

The Dark Monarch Sven Berlin

The Dark Monarch – which takes its title from the infamous 1962 book by the artist and writer
Sven Berlin – explores the influence of folklore, mysticism, mythology and the occult on the
development of art in Britain, from the beginning of the twentieth century to today.
The Dark Monarch considers the emergence of Surreal and Neo-Romantic trends in British art,
as well as the reappearance of esoteric and arcane references in a significant strand of
contemporary art practice. The essays and contributions in this publication examine magic as a
counterpoint to the liberal understanding of modernity's transparency and rational progress,
drawing out the links modernity has with notions such as fetishism, the occult, totem and taboo.
Often thought of as antithetical to Modernism, these products of illusion and delusion that
were thought to disappear through secularisation are here seen to belong to modernity.
Signposting the way will be artworks, drawn from the Tate Collection and other major
collections, that define a restless territory of knowledge that seeks to confront
the absent fiction at the heart of Berlin's novel.

Edited by Michael Bracewell, Martin Clark and Alun Rowlands.

*With essays from Paul Bayley, Toni Carver, Cecil Collins, Ithell Colquhoun, Ilsa Colsell, Brian Dillon,
Ed Halter, Jennifer Higgin, Philip Hoare, Paul Nash, Jon Savage, Chris Stephens,
Marina Warner and Morrissey.*

ISBN 978-1-85437-874-3



9 781854 378743

TATE

FOREWORD

MARTIN CLARK
MARK OSTERFIELD

The Dark Monarch - which takes its title from the infamous 1962 book by the artist and writer Sven Berlin - explores the influence of folklore, mysticism, mythology and the occult on the development of art in Britain, from the beginning of the twentieth century to today; with particular emphasis on the landscape and legends of the British Isles.

Focusing on the way the British landscape is encoded with various histories - geological, mythical and magical - it reveals how artists have used these ideas to express the anxieties, trauma and instability of a turbulent and uncertain world. Featuring works from the Tate Collection, and major loans from private and public collections, the exhibition considers the emergence of Surreal and Neo-Romantic trends in Modern British art, as well as the reappearance of esoteric and arcane references in a significant strand of contemporary practice. It goes on to examine magic as a counterpoint to the liberal understanding of modernity's transparency and rational progress, drawing out the links modernity has with notions such as fetishism, the occult, totem, mana and taboo. Often thought of as antithetical to modernism, these products of illusion and delusion that were thought to disappear through secularisation are here seen to belong to modernity.

The Dark Monarch brings together over 160 works - as well as books, manuscripts, and other ephemera - by artists active throughout the

Foreword

twentieth century. It reaches back - through the inclusion of two works by Samuel Palmer and Richard Dadd - to the mid-nineteenth century, as well as forward into the twenty-first century with works by Steven Claydon, Clare Woods, Nicholas Byrne and others. Included in the show are some of the most important and influential, as well as some of the most marginalised and obscure artists, active in the UK over the last 150 years. Rather than following a chronological or art historical format, the exhibition has instead been arranged thematically, across all of the galleries at Tate St Ives, setting up a dialogue between artists and across generations.

Inevitably, any exhibition like this becomes as much about who and what one leaves out, as it does about what one includes. It became clear very early on that this was a vast, complex and extraordinarily rich subject, with each tentative step offering ever more numerous, labyrinthine and alluring paths. At some point though a route must be taken - a selection made and a structure agreed upon. This exhibition, then, offers a journey - we hope scenic - through a terrain as sweeping and mysterious as that of any folk story or fairy tale. We hope that in doing so, it goes some way toward opening up that rich and pervasive seam of influence that has run through the art and history of Britain for centuries.

This project has developed over the last 2 years with the support and involvement of many people. Michael Bracewell and Alun Rowlands accepted the invitation to co-curate the show and have worked closely on every aspect of the project, shaping the exhibition and publication, and bringing their own particular and very considerable knowledge, research and enthusiasm to the process. In addition they have each contributed an insightful new essay to the publication. Working with Michael and Alun has been hugely pleasurable, we want to thank them sincerely for their unwavering generosity of time, intellect and spirit.

During our research we have uncovered some extraordinary works and made some unexpected discoveries. Alongside lesser known artists like Ithell Colquhoun, Austin Osman Spare and Hubert Dalwood, special mention must be given to the work of Fay Pomerance - a close friend of Michael Ayrton for many years - whose *Sphere of Redemption* (1967) was a truly startling and very exciting revelation. We are extremely grateful to both Jill Pomerance and Henry Dyson for all of their assistance in making it possible to bring this work into the show. Through conversations with Linder, the work of Penny Slinger also came to our attention. In particular the photo-collages, book-works and sculptures made throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This somewhat overlooked body of work amounts to a major contribution to feminist art practice and late British Surrealism: it is a privilege to have the opportunity to re-present a small selection here.

In addition to the exhibition itself, a programme of events, screenings, talks and tours has been organised, including the production of a major new

INTRODUCTION

MARTIN CLARK

Cornwall has an attraction for the 'seeker', bearing as it does traces of those sunken countries, Lyonesse and Atlantis, which are lost in the depths of every mind.
ITHELL COLQUHOUN *The Living Stones: Cornwall* (1957)

The Dark Monarch began with a very particular response to a very particular place. Tate St Ives stands in the heart of West Penwith, a tapering, almost tree-less strip of land on Cornwall's rugged north coast, bounded by rocky cliffs and coves, stretching west to the tip of Lands End. Mythologized throughout the twentieth century as a wild but beautiful landscape, it has attracted artists and writers for over a hundred years; and it is the quality of its light, the shining bright sand of its quartz beaches and the temperate climate of its sub-tropical gardens, warmed by the Gulf stream, with which it has become more or less synonymous.

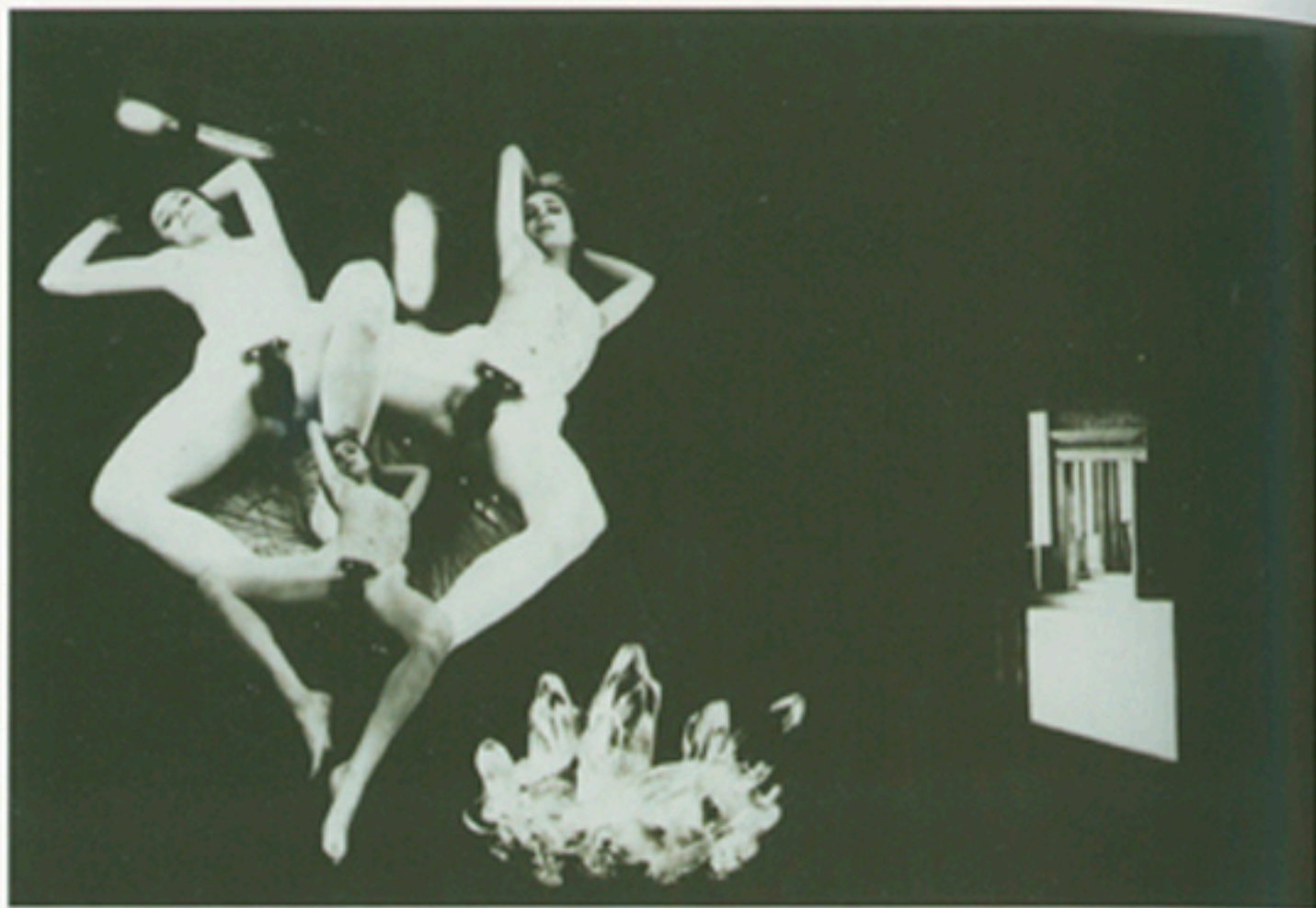
What strikes one about this place though, if you are inclined to wander off the tourist trails and away from the surfers and sun seekers, is less the quality of light, than the quality of dark. St Ives itself is surrounded by moors. Travelling west toward Zennor one encounters a bleak and sweeping scrubland, torn open by the ominous granite outcrop known as the Carn, finding its limit at the ragged ocean. This is a primordial, primitive landscape; from the iron-age field systems, to the menhirs, cromlechs, circles and barrows that are scattered across its surface. It is a place at the edge; a place of edges; where one might lose oneself completely - voluntarily or otherwise - in an old and indifferent nature.

It is on these 'bare hills...scorched black by the breath of the devil' that Sven Berlin's novel, *The Dark Monarch*, opens. Berlin wrote his book in

And it is exactly this kind of collapsing of time, often into and onto place, that occurs across many of the works themselves; from Simon Periton's conflation of nineteenth century motifs found in natural history books and illustrated fairy-tales, with the imagery of post-industrial urban decay; to Derek Jarman's recurrent return to the idea of 'time-travel' and a simultaneous 'correspondence' between late 1970s punk and Elizabethan England. The surrealists were similarly fascinated by the way that objects and places contained the traces of time past and future within them; they would use automatic techniques to produce an 'inner vision' unlocking multiple perspectives, what the Mexican artist Roberto Matta called 'psychological morphology'. This was also a key trait of the Neo-Romantic's who, working through the trauma of their own uncertain era, brought together a collective anxiety toward an apocalyptic future, with a nostalgia for a lost but still present past.

Throughout the exhibition the magical is drawn upon more directly, too, in works that reveal the long relationship between art and the occult. Whilst some of the artists included - notably Austin Osman Spare and Ithell Colquhoun - were practising occultists who can be seen to blur the boundaries between their arcane research and their art, others reference these histories and traditions from a more defiantly secular, though no less serious, position. Artists like Eva Rothschild and Goshka Macuga channel the formal and aesthetic aspects of magical lore, employing the geometries, insignia and apparatus of arcane or 'alternative' knowledge. Others, like Jeremy Millar, Mark Titchner and Adam Chodzko appear to offer more 'active' objects. Their works draw on the tradition of the relic, the totem, or the fetish - again joining up these apparently primitive mythologies with more secular art historical tropes, calling into question the boundaries between 'acceptable' and marginalised or discredited belief systems. In the case of Chodzko, his practice can be seen as comprising the traces or residue of various actions and operations he performs in and on the world. For him, and a number of the other artists here, reality is encountered as a mutable thing, a fragile construction that can be disrupted or broken down through a subtle but persuasive shift in perception.

Collage asserts itself as a recurring motif, a powerful transformative tool and a way of simply but effectively conjoining or 'mixing' together images, ideas, objects and symbols to produce new possibilities of meaning. The Latin motto *Coniunctio oppositorum*: the 'conjunction of opposites', is a central principle of alchemy, and it is perhaps this affinity with alchemical lore which makes it such a pertinent and powerful technique. Artists including John Stezaker, Penny Slinger, David Noonan and Linder all employ collage in its purest form, though it is also present as an expanded influence in much of the work in the show, as well as the curatorial rationale. Jarman's films exploit this practice as well, through the splicing together of footage, sometimes randomly, in a process akin to the cut-up strategies of Brion Gyson and William Burroughs. For Jarman, though, film in itself was a genuinely alchemical process - the literal 'transformation of matter into light'.



[Plate 22]

Penny Slinger
Diamond Sutra
 1977
 50.2 x 33 cm



[Plate 23]

Penny Slinger
Love Letters
 1977
 52.9 x 36.2 cm