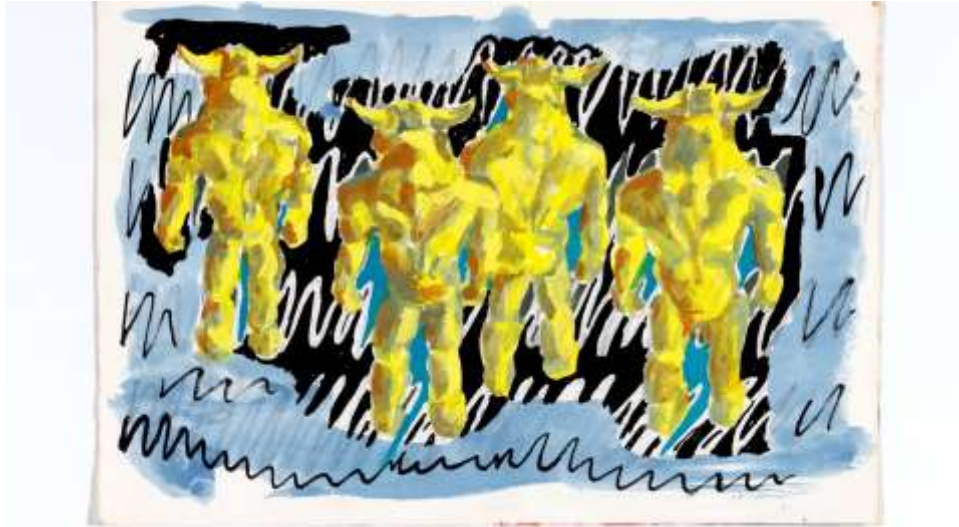


'Richard Patterson: The Kennington Drawings, 1988' revisits the birth of a movement



Richard Patterson's "Kennington Drawing 7," a 1988 gouache-and-graphite-on-paper work, features four imposing Minotaur figures. The work is one of 15 drawings from the artist's early sketchbook being shown at Cris Worley Fine Arts through Nov. 13. (Kevin Todora)

A core member of a legendary group of artists that came to be known as the Young British Artists, or YBAs, has lived and worked in Dallas since 2004. Now, 15 drawings chosen from his early sketchbook make up "Richard Patterson: The Kennington Drawings, 1988," at Cris Worley Fine Arts, in Patterson's first Dallas solo exhibition with a commercial art gallery.

Six drawings from the sketchbook were included that year in "Freeze," a groundbreaking exhibition held in Surrey Docks, London, that launched the YBA movement in the United Kingdom.

By subverting convention at the time and exhibiting outside of the sanctioned art world channels, "Freeze" planted the seeds that launched Patterson's career as well as peers like Angus Fairhurst, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas and Fiona Rae.

This was the start of a momentous time that put a spotlight on contemporary art produced in the United Kingdom and launched the artists on a path to stardom. Ambitious art and ideas need promotion, so it was no surprise that by 1991, an edgy new contemporary art magazine called Frieze had begun publication.

Later in the decade, Patterson was included in "Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection," an internationally significant exhibition that traveled to several locations between 1997 and 2000.

Its last stop was the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York. In no time, the transformation of London's derelict Bankside Power Station into the now world-famous Tate Modern occurred in 2000, as well as the establishment of the Frieze Art Fair in 2003.

Since then, Patterson has been widely collected, with a long list of solo exhibitions held around the world, solidifying his reputation as an artist.

These events, and the part played by Patterson in them, set forth the essential art-historical context through which to examine and appreciate the "Kennington Drawings" as part of history, and a view into the mind and creative process of a 24-year-old artist on the way to establishing a signature style.

Patterson became known for his large-scale paintings. The drawings paved the way toward his maturation and led him through a time, he recalls, "when there was a very specific dialogue in art about painting: Had it died?"

This was a time period dominated by postmodern theory, which Patterson had embraced to a point, while rejecting some of its decidedly anti-painting rhetoric.

Specifically, he was attracted to the interweaving of high and low culture and an inversion, or perhaps elimination, of social, cultural and political hierarchies expressed through a famous postmodernist metaphor, the palimpsest.

A palimpsest is usually understood as the continued accumulation and erasure of text on a parchment or document of some kind. This intermingling and layering, even bleeding through, of text continues up to a point where the idea of truth itself is called into question, revealing a realm of plurality.



British artist Richard Patterson has lived and worked in Dallas since 2004. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

For Patterson, it supplied a method through which to “develop a structure and find uses for it.” This can be seen clearly in the drawings. For example, in the compelling “Kennington Drawing 14”, numbers run across the surface in two rows, overlaid within a colorful matrix of layered gouache that fills the image with energy. It almost pulsates.

Numbers in themselves may remind viewers of Jasper Johns’ encaustic number paintings, but these drawings also suggest a wide range of artists who inspired Patterson. He cites “Brice Marden, Picasso, Picabia, even Baselitz, though it may not be as obvious.”

In “Kennington Drawing 6”, blue outlines delineate a pink horse in the center of the image. Abstract shapes in black and yellow add color to a matrix that swirls around the horse, confining the animal.

Here, texts in the form of expressions punctuate the image with “Horse not dog” and “Coal Not Dole.” The latter reads as a political reference to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s policies during the era, presenting a timely context.

It’s through figuration in tension with abstraction that Patterson came to be known, and this early inclusion of the horse, and a sculptural human figure in “Kennington Drawing 1”, lead us to the prophetic “Kennington Drawing 7”, where four imposing Minotaur figures, drawn from Greek mythology, fill the page.

They look like modeled sculptures in yellow, their muscles bulging, surrounded by light and dark blue swaths of color accented with waves of line.



Richard Patterson's "Kennington Drawing 11," a 1988 gouache-and-graphite-on-paper work, is among the abstract drawings in the exhibition.(Kevin Todora)



Richard Patterson's 1988 drawings such as "Kennington Drawing 4" laid the groundwork for his later paintings. (Kevin Todora)

Many years later, Patterson executed several large-scale, full-figured Minotaur paintings that became signature images in his oeuvre, some as busts, in a kind of critique of masculinity and, conversely, as a recognition of the pathos present in the creature's ultimate demise. They may also serve as a reference to Picasso's use of the Minotaur in several series of etchings.

These drawings document Patterson's early technical skill, intense curiosity and determination to find his own way. He remembers at the time how he sought out the "sense of space and solitude you need in order to work," something he fears our younger generation of artists may have lost.

Now, over 30 years on, we have the opportunity to examine and investigate an earlier time with the benefit of our experience in a very different world.

Looking closely at this body of work reminds us of the changing nature of art and its discourses, worthy topics of interest to both enthusiasts and experts alike.

— John Zotos