

# FRESTONIAN GALLERY

## ADRIAN BERG

### PAINTINGS 1964-2010

Exhibition: 6th May – 3rd July 2021

Frestonian Gallery is delighted to present a retrospective exhibition of major paintings by **Adrian Berg RA** in celebration of the publication of the first major monograph on his life and work, written by **Marco Livingstone** and published by Lund Humphries. Both the publication and the exhibition offer an examination and reappraisal of a painter of rare talent whose influence was highly significant, both to his peers, as well as to several generations of his students at the Royal College of Art and beyond.

The exhibition begins in the mid-60s with Berg's first forays into the reimagining and critical abstraction of the landscape, before moving through the meticulously constructed topographical works of the 70s & 80s, and finally on to the extraordinarily colourful and vivid canvases that marked his highly successful late style, spanning the final two decades of his life.

The beginning of Berg's 50-plus year engagement with the natural world as muse and subject began shortly after his graduation, in 1961, from the Royal College of Art. At the RCA he found himself as an integral part of a generation of young artists who would define the British art scene for years to come, most notably his close friends **David Hockney** and **R.B. Kitaj**. Hockney in particular being influenced by Berg's introduction to him of the poetry of Whitman and Cavafy, and by Berg's social ease as an openly gay man in London, at a time when homosexuality had not even been partially decriminalised.

Having mostly engaged with either the urban landscape and classical motifs until this point, it was Berg's move to a studio and home in the John Nash designed terraces overlooking London's **Regent's Park** that inspired his move in earnest to engage with what would become his lifelong subject – nature as reconstructed and reimagined by humankind. The fractured and bisected pictorial plane as seen in *Untitled* (1964) and *March Landscape* (1966) show an immediate fascination with, and reverence for, colour and form, as well as inventive and systematic early methods in capturing the passage of time and the changing of the seasons.

These early investigations were clearly successful in Berg's estimation, leading to an extraordinary output of intricate yet bold, often large-scale, works detailing and reworking the park's ever-changing landscape. This rich wellspring of imagery was to become Berg's sole obsession for nearly 25 years, for which he received wide acclaim in the London artworld, with numerous solo exhibitions at Arthur Tooth & Sons, Waddington Galleries and the Piccadilly Gallery. His work was included too in prestigious institutional exhibitions alongside his contemporaries, as organised by the British School at Rome (1961), the John Moores prize (1969, 74 & 80) and the British Council (touring to the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum), but perhaps most significantly with solo exhibitions at the **Serpentine Gallery** (1986), **Barbican Centre** (1993) and the **Royal Academy** (1999 & 2009).

A towering example of the mid-periods work – *Regent's Park, Dusk* (1982) – features in the exhibition, a tour-de-force of exquisite painting and compositional vision that belongs in the same series as his two works held in the collections of **Tate** and the **Arts Council of England**.

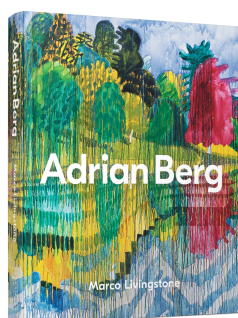
In 1986, circumstances compelled Berg to move from his then home at Cambridge Gate and brought to an end the intensely singular relationship he had held for so long with Regent's Park. Although initially somewhat traumatised by the move, this separation from his muse forced Berg to look for fertile new territory. He found these in abundance, first in the Royal Botanical Gardens at **Kew** and at **Syon Park** and subsequently in the magnificent gardens at **Stourhead**, **Sheffield Park**, **Wakehurst Place** and along the Sussex coast near his new home in Hove.

Impressively, Berg also took the opportunity to progress the form and the scope of his painting, introducing bolder and more geometrically constructed elements, and in so doing created a triumphant late style that he honed over the last 25 years of his life. The paintings in the exhibition from this period span from the compositionally superb (and as ever, unapologetically beautiful) *Beachy Head* works (1995 & 1996), through to his joyous renderings of the glasshouses at Kew Gardens, and finally to his stellar *Stourhead 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> June* (2000), a triptych uncompromising in scale, colour and showing definitively Berg's utter mastery of the medium.

The final painting in the exhibition is entitled, fittingly, *Enter the Garden* (2010), finished a year before Berg's death in 2011 at the age of 82. A celebration, as ever, of colour and demonstrating methods of abstraction that were technically rigorous yet maintained a light and even playful touch, Berg's love affair with the natural world clearly endured. In concluding the newly published monograph's essay on Berg's practice as a painter, Marco Livingstone writes:

*Today, with ecological concerns at the top of the agenda and a new generation desperately demanding measures to save the planet from damaging climate change that would irrevocably risk the long-term survival of our species and all manner of living things, Berg's implicit insistence on humanity's responsibility for treating nature respectfully could not be more urgent or necessary.*

*Within the narrower but important issue of the future of art itself, Berg's constant reinvention of the terms of painting, his repeated demonstrations that as a medium it remains as alive as ever and as pertinent a means for communicating a coherent world view, is a matter for celebration. Berg's paintings, a decade after his death, return us time and again to the here and now, to an intense appreciation of our surroundings and to the joy to be discovered in looking very closely at the world and reshaping it, as he did, according to our own eyes and temperament.*



Adrian Berg – by Marco Livingstone, published by Lund Humphries  
with contributions by Paul Huxley RA and Samuel Clarke

For advance copies please contact:  
[gallery@frestoniangallery.com](mailto:gallery@frestoniangallery.com)

Hardback • 248 Pages • Size: 290 × 249 mm  
20 B&W illustrations and 200 colour illustrations • RRP £40  
ISBN: 9781848223943

### **Adrian Berg (1929-2011) – Notes on the artist**

Adrian Berg was born in London in 1929. He was educated at Charterhouse and Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge. He studied art in London, first at Central St Martin's, then Chelsea College of Arts and finally at the Royal College of Art, later he would go on to teach at the Royal College, becoming senior tutor in 1987. Berg's paintings have been exhibited in all major UK institutions including, amongst many others the Tate, Hayward Gallery, Royal Academy, Victoria & Albert Museum, Fitzwilliam and Pallant House Gallery. In 1986, The Serpentine Gallery and the Arts Council held a major retrospective of Berg's work which subsequently toured the country. He has also exhibited extensively internationally.

In 1992, he was elected as a Royal Academician, and in 1994 he became an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Art. His work is held in many private and public collections, including the Arts Council Collection, the Tate, the Government Art Collection, the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum.