

sfa advisory

## Adrian Berg

### Moments in Arcadia: Late Watercolors, 1988–2010

45 White Street, New York

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**SFA Advisory**, in conjunction with **Frestonian Gallery, London**, presents the first dedicated exhibition of sketches and watercolors by British artist Adrian Berg since his passing in 2011.

One of the most innovative and ultimately influential landscape painters of his generation, Berg has long been underserved and underrecognized outside of the circle of those variously inspired by or taught by him. Berg dedicated a great deal of his professional life to education – serving as a tutor in painting at London art schools such as Chelsea, Central and Camberwell, as well as – most notably – the **Royal College of Art**, his own alma mater, where he was a mentor and champion of such key latter day figures as **Tracey Emin**, as well as a respected colleague of significant painters including **Paul Huxley** and **Peter Doig**. However, it was in his own studies at the RCA in the early 1960s that Berg first found attention as an artist of rare talent and vision – and where he first became a prominent influence on his peers, including **R.B Kitaj** and **David Hockney**. In Hockney, Berg found a close friend and a mind receptive to both the importance of culture (Berg introduced Hockney to the poetry of Cavafy and Whitman, whose works inspired many of Hockney's earliest etchings) and the primacy of painting. The friendship and respect endured a lifetime, with Hockney and Berg both citing each other as influences – especially in the rendering and re-imagining of the English landscape – with Hockney giving the eulogy at Berg's memorial dinner at the Royal Academy of Arts on London's Piccadilly in 2011.

Berg's exhibition at SFA Advisory centers on perhaps the most liberal and vitally immediate output of Berg's career: the sketches and watercolors that he produced *en plein air* while immersed in the parklands, gardens and coastlines that were the entire subject of his life and work. Berg's well-known, grand-scale compositions in oil (examples of which can be found in every major museum and institutional collection in the UK) were constructed meticulously at his studio often well after the initial contact with the subject – much in the manner of Pierre Bonnard, one of the great pillars of Berg's extensive artistic frame of reference. His watercolors provided both a memory and visual for his works on canvas.

*Moments in Arcadia* begins with works from the late 1980s – following Berg's move to Hove, Sussex (from London, where he had lived alongside Regent's Park, which he held as his sole subject for nearly 25 years). By this uprooting, Berg was half-inspired, or half-forced, to refocus his artistic lens on fresh subjects – an initially dislocating experience that quickly became a joyous one and ultimately resulted in the entire body of extraordinary late works for which he is now as well-known as for the intricate Regent's Park works that reside in the Tate, Arts Council and Government Art Collections.

The two great gardens most accessible, and most often returned to, in his later years – Sheffield Park in West Sussex and Stourhead in Wiltshire – are well represented, as are the Arcadian English landscapes of Highdown, Wakehurst and Kew Gardens. Outside of these sculpted pastoral idylls we also glimpse hints of architecture – both man-made (Brighton Pavilion) and forged by nature (the striking white cliffs of Beachy Head).

The works themselves are a testament to Berg's love for both the landscape itself and his craft as a painter. Delicate under-drawing in pencil is occasionally visible in the tighter compositions, but by and large, it is purely the fluid and fickle watercolor in suspension that Berg employs to both carefully map (he was a cartographer in his youth while serving in the British Army) and lyrically convey the sense of light, air and color in the landscape(s) before him. In all of these works, which were accompanied by copious written notes dictating the quality of light, the weather and time of day, Berg sought to balance the extraction of the maximum fidelity to the landscape and the true power and range of color available.

In the summer of 1888, almost exactly one hundred years before Berg settled with his palette at the lakeside of Stourhead, **Paul Sérusier** had painted *The Talisman* under the friendly tutelage of **Paul Gauguin**. Gauguin instructed Sérusier to paint not as one would expect to explain a landscape but as the eye truly saw it – and thus where a bank of trees may appear, in early dusk light, to be a counter-intuitive blue rather than a more 'sensible' mix of brown and green. If a particular bush or rock appeared to be aflame in crimson as the sun caught it, then Berg – as Sérusier before him – would let it be thus. The resulting works, captured in the seemingly genteel yet stubbornly difficult to master medium of watercolor, leave us with the most remarkable record of Berg's own vision for the breadth of exuberant color, light and beauty in the English landscape. These are a series of jewel-like works in their own right, each a celebration of a life's work and dedication to the act, and the possibilities, of painting.

#### **About Adrian Berg:**

Born in London, Adrian Berg (1929-2011) 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. His work will be the subject of a solo show at Frestonian Gallery in 2023 and a major museum retrospective in the UK in 2024/5.

#### **About SFA Advisory:**

SFA is an art advisory specializing in modern and contemporary art. Founded by Lisa Schiff in 2002, SFA serves a select group of dedicated collectors around the world. SFA is made up of experienced art professionals able to assist in every aspect of collecting with the utmost confidentiality and discretion. SFA strategizes all aspects of building a fine art collection, from education and acquisition to installation and collections management. SFA prides itself on making the art world transparent for its clients, helping them navigate the complex web of relationships and platforms. SFA engages with artists, non-profits and museums and participates in curatorial and special projects. SFA principal, Lisa Schiff, is frequently called upon to share her expertise and provide in-depth analysis to the press. Lisa makes a point to speak regularly on panels and to engage in public discussions, covering a variety of art related topics.

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#### **Press Inquiries:**

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Image: Adrian Berg, *Stourhead*, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1990. Watercolor, 12 x 16 inches. Courtesy of The Adrian Berg Estate and Frestonian Gallery.