



Joash Woodrow THE FINE ART SOCIETY 148 New Bond St, London W1

Joash Woodrow is proving to be one of the most original and mysterious figures in Modern British art. After graduating from the Royal College in 1953, Woodrow suffered a nervous crisis, retiring to the family home in Leeds to paint in semi-reclusive obscurity for almost half a century. Rejected once in the 1960s by the John Moores Painting Prize, he withdrew further, nurtured by a small family stipend and his own Modern art library. At once wilful and ultra-vulnerable, secretive to the point of enigma, he was unassailed by the doubts that can be raised by critics, dealers and the public, and so was left blissfully free to mature as a painter.

Woodrow's work first became known by serendipity when, in 2000, he left Leeds – abandoning art altogether – to live in sheltered accommodation in Manchester. His family, unsure what to do with the hundreds of paintings and drawings he left behind, chanced to meet Harrogate gallery owner Andrew Stewart, who embraced the challenge of conserving and exhibiting the collection. In 2005, Joash was taken to see his first retrospective, at Manchester Art Gallery – the first time he'd seen his work on public display.

This exhibition concentrates on Woodrow's dynamic, ambitiously scaled yet ineluctably intimate paintings. In a work of the early 1960s, the image of a white goat – a quizzical but defiant-looking creature, incandescent against a black backdrop –

indicates the nature of his gift. Painted with enchanting simplicity, the figure carries resonances of Jewish folklore (Joash's parents had immigrated from Tsarist Poland) as well as the deliberate rawness of much mid-20th-century avant-garde art.

A similar mix of delicacy and abandon marks Woodrow's portraits: of a young Frenchman (*Portrait of Gilbert Dubrulle Looking Down*, c1955-60), an exquisite vision of handsome reserve; and of the artist's sister-in-law, looking wryly circumspect in a white hat. *Girl on a Yellow Tricycle* is a vivid study of subtle character, with the child propelling herself along on an outrageously clunky vehicle.

A student friend said: 'Joash defied paint... what looks like a careless brushstroke reveals the deepest consideration.' Allotments near his home and panoramas of inner-city Leeds are the subjects of some of his finest, most lyrically combative paintings. Woodrow immersed himself in the rudimentary geometry of ramshackle sheds hemmed in by picket fences. *Spring Blossom in the Allotments* depicts a scene of delicious evanescence, as a solitary white cloud hovers over a riot of linear structures below: a seemingly spontaneous, profusely detailed scene rendered with 'the deepest consideration' and freshness. JOASH WOODROW runs 20 Oct-5 Nov, Mon-Fri 10-6, Sat 10-1 ■ PHILIP VANN is co-author of *Joash Woodrow: Landscapes*, published by Leeds Metropolitan University



Top: *Spring Blossom in the Allotments*, c1985. Above: *Girl on a Yellow Tricycle*, c1965