

Press Release 2020

Pallant House Gallery acquires paintings of first gay kiss in British theatre

Marking Pride Month 2020, Pallant House Gallery has today announced the acquisition of a series of paintings depicting the first gay kiss and drag ball in British theatre. The five works by British artist Leonard Rosoman R.A (1913-2012) have been acquired from the estate of the artist's widow Roxanne Wruble Rosoman (1937-2018) through the Acceptance in Lieu Scheme.

Pallant House Gallery Director Simon Martin has commented: "We are thrilled to acquire Leonard Rosoman's *A Patriot for Me* paintings. Not only are they among his finest works, but they have a particular significance to LGBTQ history, to the history of British theatre and visual art, representing a time when Britain's social and cultural history was on the cusp of a pivotal shift."

The five paintings created as part of Rosoman's *A Patriot for Me* series are



Leonard Rosoman, *The Drag Ball, No. 2*
Photograph: Dawkins Colour/John Bodkin/© The Artist's Estate

based on John Osborne's controversial play of the same name, which was first performed at the Royal Court in 1965.

While the play was initially banned by the Lord Chamberlain's office for its homosexual content, a legal loophole was exploited which turned the theatre into a private club for the play's duration. It would help pave the way for the 1968 Theatres Act which abolished censorship of theatre.

For all **PRESS** enquiries please contact:

Hannah Vitos, Rees & Co +44 (0)783 459 3767 / hannah@reesandco.com

Rosoman attended the first performance of his friend Osborne's exploration of gay life – inspired by the true story of the disgraced Austro-Hungarian army officer, Colonel Redl – returning every evening for a fortnight to create drawings by torchlight.

Two years later these drawings would form the basis for Rosoman's series of 40 paintings and gouaches. Dominated by two major paintings on the play's famous 'drag ball' scene, these large canvases show a bustling stage filled with cross-dressed men, a development of Rosoman's interest in multi-figure composition.

With their use of a box-like stage setting, the works continue the tradition of the theatrical conversation piece, a genre most often associated with William Hogarth and Johan Zoffany. Notable British actors of the period are depicted, including the Royal Court's Director George Devine in drag as the aristocratic Baron von Epp, Rosoman's friend Jill Bennet as Countess Sophia and the German actor Maximilian Schell, playing the role of doomed Colonel Redl.

The works from the *A Patriot for Me* series were acquired by Pallant House Gallery through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme from the Estate of Roxanne Wruble Levy Rosoman, a concert pianist and supporter of the arts, who was married to Rosoman until his death in 2012. Pallant House Gallery is grateful to

Christie's for their support in ensuring these works join the collection.

Edward Harley OBE, Chairman, Acceptance in Lieu Panel said: "I am delighted that this series of paintings by Leonard Rosoman has been brought into a public collection through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. These pictures represent some of the most important works from Rosoman's career, based on John Osborne's controversial *A Patriot for Me*, a play that broached the shift of sexual attitudes of the 1960s. I hope that this example will encourage others to use the scheme and continue to support our national collections."

Ruth Cornett, Director, Heritage and Taxation Advisory Service, Christie's said:

"Christie's Heritage and Taxation team is delighted to have worked alongside Pallant House Gallery to secure these important works of art for the nation under the offer in lieu scheme. The paintings by Leonard Rosoman mark a seminal moment in British theatre history and this significant acquisition for Pallant House Gallery means that they can be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone."

The new acquisitions complement Pallant House Gallery's significant collection of British art from the 1960s. Along with works by Blake, Hamilton and Hockney, they reflect changing attitudes towards sexuality along with the wider

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adoption of new artistic materials, including acrylic paints, and the use of source material drawn from direct observation. Both Hockney and Blake were amongst Rosoman's students at the Royal College of Art and he also taught alongside numerous other artists in the collection including John Minton.

Rosoman had a long and varied career spanning over eight decades. During the Second World War he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and this experience would serve as the inspiration for one of his most notable early works, *A House Collapsing on Two Firemen, Shoe Lane* (1940), which was acquired by the Imperial War Museum immediately after its completion. In 1945, Rosoman was one of the youngest artists chosen by Kenneth Clark to become an official war artist. Following the war, he worked as an illustrator before finding success as a muralist creating works for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and for the restored chapel of Lambeth Palace. His permanent mural *Upstairs and Downstairs* (1986) can be found in the Royal Academy's Grand Café. Rosoman was elected as a Royal Academician in 1969 and was appointed an OBE in 1981.

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Notes to Editors:

Pallant House Gallery in Chichester is a leading UK museum that stimulates new ways of thinking about British art from 1900 to now. As well as an original and critically-acclaimed exhibition programme and a public programme with inclusion at its heart, the Gallery houses one of the best collections of Modern British art in the country - all within the distinctive setting of an 18th century townhouse and a 21st century gallery. For more information, please go to pallant.org.uk

The **Acceptance in Lieu** scheme is administered by the Arts Council. The Acceptance in Lieu Panel, chaired by Edward Harley OBE, advises on whether property offered in lieu is of suitable importance and offered at a value which is fair to both nation and taxpayer. ALL allows those who have a bill to Inheritance Tax to pay the tax by transferring important cultural, scientific or historic objects to the nation. Material accepted under the scheme is allocated to public collections and is available for all. In the last decade this important government initiative has brought £378m worth of treasures into public ownership for the enjoyment of all –

see more at:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/tax-incentives/acceptance-lieu#section-1>

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The **Arts Council** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. By 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council has developed a £160 million emergency response package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19

The acceptance of the five works settled £96,600 of tax.

Paintings information

Leonard Rosomon
The Drag Ball, No. 1, Act 2, Scene 1
Dated 1967-1968, completed 1990
Acrylic on canvas
183 x 228.6 cm
© Pallant House Gallery

Leonard Rosomon
The Drag Ball, No. 2, Act 2, Scene 1
Dated 1967-1968, completed 1990

Acrylic on canvas
183 x 228.6 cm
© Pallant House Gallery

Leonard Rosomon
Portrait with Candelabra: George Devine as Baron von Epp, Act 2, Scene 1
1968
Acrylic on canvas
101.6 x 76.2 cm
© Pallant House Gallery

Leonard Rosomon
Study: John Forbes as Susanna Singing, Act 2, Scene 1
1968
Pen, black ink and watercolour wash on paper, laid on board
39.4 x 30.5 cm
© Pallant House Gallery

Leonard Rosomon
Study - Whore on a Bed, Act 1, Scene 4
c. 1968
Oil on canvas
76.2 x 63.5 cm
© Pallant House Gallery

Opening Hours

Due to Covid-19, Pallant House Gallery is currently closed. Please check the website www.pallant.org.uk for the opening date and times.

For **PRESS** enquiries and images,
please contact Rees & Co:
Hannah Vitos | hannah@reesandco.com
| +44 (0) 7834 593767

For further information about the
Acceptance in Lieu scheme please
contact Neish Emich, The Arts Council,
National Communications Officer

Nisha.Emich@artscouncil.org.uk

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