



PRESS RELEASE

Monnow Valley Arts Centre (registered charity no 1123483) announces a major exhibition:

Cecil Collins 1908-1989

The Great Happiness

A CENTENARY EXHIBITION

Paintings, drawings and prints drawn from major private collections

Open Thursday and Friday 11 am to 6 pm and Saturday and Sunday 2-6 pm

Exhibition runs from 19 July to 14 September 2008.



Daybreak, 1971, Oil and other media on board, 75 x 85 cm

Collins had a profound effect on those who came in contact with him either through his art or his teaching.

He attended *Plymouth School of Arts* from 1924-7 and the *Royal College of Art* from 1927-31. In 1931 he married Elisabeth Ramsden and in the same year they settled into Monk's Cottage, Highwood Bottom near Speen in Buckinghamshire.

In the early years of his marriage to Elizabeth, Collins read the mystical poetry of Thomas Traherne (1637-1674) and Henry Vaughan (1622-1695) and the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) and Meister Eckhart (c1260 - 1327/8). These writings helped Collins formulate his unique visionary approach to painting. While teaching at Dartington Hall during the war years, Collins was exposed to Eastern Philosophy through his friendship with Mark Tobey. This helped him further develop these theories.

Following a brief flirtation with Surrealism in the 1930s, Collins developed his own visionary style of painting allied to neo-romanticism. Collins explored within his work many spiritual and metaphysical ideas. He embodied these ideas in archetypal figures such as the Fool; the Angel and the Soul or Anima. He wrote a meditation on the nature of the Fool which was published in 1947 under the title *The Vision of the Fool*.

After the war, Collins lived in Cambridge and then London where he taught at the *Central School of Art*. He had a loyal following of students at the Central School who were profoundly appreciative of his innovative approach to teaching.

The first retrospective exhibition was held at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1959, a second at Plymouth Arts centre in 1983 and a third, just before he died, at the Tate in 1989.

This exhibition is drawn from three private collections in the UK. The collectors have a passionate respect for the works of Cecil Collins. The extreme tenderness and humility of the Angel figure, the sympathetic almost child like nature of the Fool; the Pilgrim and the Poet: all appeal to our inner soul.

Collins wrote in the introduction to the catalogue of the Tate retrospective " *The Saint, the Artist, the Poet and the Fool, are one. They are the eternal virginity of spirit, which in the dark winter of the world, continually proclaims the existence of a new life, gives faithful promise of the spring of an invisible Kingdom, and the coming of the light*".



The Angel with Adam, 1950, oil on canvas, 80 x 61 cm

The exhibition consists of 38 works, ten paintings in oil including some highly important works, 15 works on paper and 13 prints.

There is a fully illustrated 72 page colour catalogue accompanying the exhibition with a previously unpublished essay by Bryce McKenzie-Smith written in 1976. This essay explains the profound impact the discovery of Collins' work had on the collector and is a significant contribution to our understanding of Collins' art and life. Brian Keeble, the founder of the Golgonooza Press and co-founder of the *Temenos Journal* and friend of Cecil Collins has kindly provided commentaries on the paintings in the exhibition. (Catalogue price £10 + p/p).

On 6 and 7 September a *Cecil Collins Study and Film Day* will be held chaired by Nomi Rowe, editor of *In Celebration of Cecil Collins*, with Oliver Fairclough, Keeper of Art at National Museum and Galleries of Wales and Bryce McKenzie-Smith. Price £30 including lunch.

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