

Large Print Guide
The Return of the
Spirit in Painting

5 February – 23 August

2020



Gallery 4

Please return

This document includes a large print version of the interpretation panel found within **The Return of the Spirit in Painting.**

Continues on next page.

The Return of the Spirit in Painting

Gallery 4

This exhibition focuses on the Royal Academy of Arts' seminal *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981) and its connections with important solo shows that took place at the Whitechapel Gallery during the 1980s.

A New Spirit in Painting, co-curated by Christos M. Joachimides, independent curator, Norman Rosenthal, Exhibitions Secretary at the Royal Academy and Nicholas Serota, then director of the Whitechapel Gallery, brought painting to the forefront of contemporary art discourse. Including works by three generations of Western European and American artists, it featured mostly figurative painting after a decade of conceptual art. The exhibition's curators were criticised at the time, both for showing artwork perceived as commercial, and for the unconventional nature of the paintings on display. *The Return of the Spirit in Painting* brings together five of the 38 artists from the influential exhibition.

Continues on next page.

During his tenure at Whitechapel Gallery, between 1976 and 1988, Serota invited 14 artists including Georg Baselitz, Philip Guston, Anselm Kiefer, Malcolm Morley, Julian Schnabel and Cy Twombly to have their first major solo shows in the UK. These presentations played a crucial role in attracting international attention to their work.

The absence of women and the narrow geographical focus of the Royal Academy exhibition has since raised strong criticism. Important archive material from both institutions accompanies the exhibition and reveals the processes, tensions and successes of these concurrent curatorial visions. Artists included are: Frank Auerbach, Georg Baselitz, Bruce McLean, Mimmo Paladino, Julian Schnabel.

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