

bernard jacobson gallery

Ivor Abrahams

The Garden and Other Themes

15th March – 18th April 2019

Hello Ivor

13.03.2019

Hello Ivor,

I hope they are treating you well up there.

Recently I just remembered that my fiftieth anniversary was soon coming up, so I decided to make a few shows to record the occasion. Probably the first show I thought I must do would be a retrospective of your work. I'm so sorry that you cannot be here to see this and enjoy the event.

Do you remember, in 1959, my brother Monte introduced us? We were just two streets away from each other in Willesden, Monte and I in our parents' home in Teignmouth Road and you over in Chatsworth Road, a few doors away from Leon Kossoff.

Do you remember, that same year I bought *Gorgophone* from you, paying forty pounds at the rate of five pounds a month? Just about all my pocket money.

Do you remember, you introduced me to the painter John Walker, who you shared a studio with? I would buy drawings from him. He, later on, in 1969, told me to go and see your new work. You were making these collages of garden images and I thought they would make great screenprints. We did a set of five, *The Garden Suite*, and they sold out as fast as lightning strikes. I was now a junior print publisher in my mid-twenties and I had so many contacts and friends in Europe, America, even England. We immediately followed this up with *Privacy Plots* and they sold just as rapidly. Then came drawings and sculptures, even a movie. Wasn't it all so thrilling, Ivor?

The great Rudolph Zwirner gave me a corner, free of charge, of his booth at the Cologne art fair. He had a real soft spot for me, and he loved your work. I think that was in 1970, or was it 1971?

And then my friend Michael Findlay agreed on making an exhibition at his gallery, the Richard Feigen Gallery. It was to be a full show, a big one at that, on Greene Street, downtown New York. I bet you

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remember, the sculptures and drawings got stuck at customs and the work was to go on show at the end of that week. We found you a room and in three days you just sat in that room and made a huge group of works on paper, filled with your wonderful flocking material. You had just enough materials to complete the deadline – enough paper, flocking, glue – and definitely enough marijuana, which you smoked through the whole delightful ordeal. What a great body of work! What a great show! You and I went for dinner in Little Italy with Claes Oldenburg and you two exchanged drawings. Andy Warhol bought a work. Roy Lichtenstein, later on, bought a large sculpture.

Your work was everywhere, and people adored your garden sculptures, drawings and prints. We soon added South Africa, Australia, Japan and especially, and more than ever, Scandinavia.

You may not know all the clients and friends I sold your work to. Cat Stevens bought several and later on David Bowie actually bought six sculptures. I sold them to writers, fellow artists, musicians. I in turn would make many new friends, for being the agent to Ivor Abrahams.

At the height of your initial success you said something to me that I remember so well, although it was something I didn't really understand at the time. You said, in a cloud of marijuana, "You know, we are ALL minor artists." I assumed "we" meant yourself, Robyn Denny, Richard Smith, David Hockney, Patrick Caulfield, Peter Blake and all the others. I only realised, years and years later, that you were referring to you and probably all your fellow twentieth century artists in comparison to Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. My publishing company and my gallery were travelling at a million miles an hour, so I couldn't slow down to sit back and contemplate the full ramifications of what you were indeed getting at. Of course, in time, I would have enough time off to understand. I have gone forward in time, or is it backwards, to Matisse? But Ivor, I still love your work.

One day in the late seventies, after a decade of endless exhibitions, you said you couldn't do those garden images any more and you said you would have to move on. Later on you would spend most of the year near Béziers, in the south of France. You had already moved from Oxford Gardens to Pézenas in the south, and you had added dolphins, fountains, gods, the Mediterranean, seahorses to your work. The magic was still with you, Ivor. You still had that wonderful touch.

I wish you were still alive so I could say I am sorry to have not fully understood. I do now. I miss you a lot. You were a wonderful man, and a great artist.

Bernard Jacobson

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