

bernard jacobson gallery

Leon Kossoff

Etchings

1st – 24th September 2022

Bernard Jacobson Gallery will present a selection of etchings from the 1980s by British artist Leon Kossoff. The etchings, which were published by Bernard Jacobson, reveal Kossoff's profound connection to London.

Born in London in 1926, Kossoff spent most of his life in the city and explored its environment, character, and inhabitants at length through his art. Kossoff resided outside of London during only two periods: once from 1939 until 1943, when he evacuated to King's Lynn during the war, and again from 1945 and 1948, for national service. During his brief return to London from 1943 to 1945, Kossoff enrolled in art classes at Saint Martin's School of Art, which he resumed following national service. His studies later led him to evening classes with David Bomberg at Borough Road Polytechnic and to the Royal College of Art, where he completed his education in 1956. At the beginning of his career, Kossoff primarily produced paintings and drawings – which often represented the war's aftermath in London – but by the 1980s he started working in printmaking.

Much like his paintings and drawings, Kossoff's prints depict scenes of London as well as his family and friends. The etchings in this exhibition move from tube stations to private interiors with a sense of rhythm and energy. Even in etchings that unfold in public spaces, such as *Outside Kilburn Underground Station*, Kossoff communicates a deeply personal relationship with the city. Kilburn station – with its proximity to Willesden where Kossoff lived and worked – serves as the subject of several of Kossoff's paintings and etchings. *Booking Hall* and *Going Home* present two additional views of the interior of Kilburn station as figures navigate through crowds, kiosks, and ticket machines. London appears as a city constantly on the go, interconnected and full of motion.

In *Outside Kilburn Underground Station* and *Going Home*, among the anonymous faces that pass through the station, Kossoff inserts figures who represent his parents. Though Kossoff also depicts his parents in domestic spaces, their inclusion in etchings of Kilburn station enables the artist to mark London – both its public and private areas – as his home. Within

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domestic settings, Kossoff remains attuned to his surroundings, as demonstrated in *The Window*, where he captures the leafy views behind his parents.

By portraying his parents in a range of artworks, Kossoff carefully examines their varied gestures, interactions, and spirits. These investigations also unfold when his parents are shown individually, as in *Mother* and *Head of Father 2*. In addition to his parents, Kossoff's model Fidelma recurs frequently in his etchings. A series of Fidelma etchings displays her seated nude, represented from a different angle in each etching, as Kossoff studies her movements through space.

When the same subjects recur in Kossoff's oeuvre, the purpose is not purely to experiment with media but also to thoroughly investigate his subjects. Combined with the rapidity of his lines, then, his compositions appear at once deliberate and spontaneous. And together, these prints provide insights into the habits, memories, and relationships that composed the artist's life in London.

Kossoff remained committed to figurative techniques throughout his career, even when minimal and conceptual art dominated in the 1960s and 1970s. Alongside fellow School of London artists including Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, and David Hockney, Kossoff resisted pressure to abandon figuration in favour of abstraction and by the 1980s benefited from a renewed interest in figurative art. Later in his career, Kossoff represented Britain at the centennial Venice Biennale in 1995 and was the subject of a major retrospective at Tate Gallery in 1996. His work is held in major public collections worldwide, including the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Tate, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, and National Gallery of Australia.

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