



GEOFFREY KEY

– Our Collection –



Foreword

Demonstrably recognised as one of the nation's most important contemporary artists, Geoffrey Key is a master of line, form, colour and tone, who expresses with eloquent artistic language a vision shot through with perception, wit, joy and beauty.

Since our Retrospective Exhibition in 2010, which saw the majority of paintings form new and enrich many existing collections, his work has set record auction prices for Northern Contemporary art and his two London shows have helped to build on his international standing.

So it is with great pleasure that we are showcasing **Geoffrey Key - Our Collection** - in this our celebratory 25th anniversary year. A selection of over forty oils, works on paper and sculpture which have been thoughtfully chosen over a period of two years dating from 1963 to the present day. Covering many themes including two works from the very successful *Clown* series and the magnificent bronze sculpture *Reclining Figure with Bird*.

We are immensely grateful to the artist & art historian, Michael Howard, author of many books including *L.S. Lowry: A Visionary Artist*, for kindly providing a most interesting and informative commentary on the work of Geoffrey Key, an artist who, in Michael's own words, has 'kept the faith'.

We would also like to thank all the collectors who have taken time to offer an appreciation allowing us valuable insight into why they admire and collect Geoffrey's work.

From comment it is clear that Geoffrey's work reaches out to all ages at many levels.



Art Decor Gallery Retrospective Exhibition, 2010

Sometimes no reason can be given why a work is liked, sometimes that time is needed to unravel the deeper meanings within. Interestingly, reference is often made to how the paintings encourage examination and allow the finding of hidden detail. This is something Geoffrey invites the viewer to do. By introducing tension within a painting, creating linkages to 'hold the eye' resolving a painting essentially becomes something akin to solving a mathematical problem .

We now invite you to take time to enjoy and reflect on - *Our Collection* - and hope you find a connection.

Ultimately, we feel, the art will speak for itself!

Chris & Julie McCabe

Art Decor Gallery

June 2015

Front cover:

1 Reclining Figure with Bird, 1978

Bronze, edition 2/4

30½ x 24½ x 18½ ins (77.5 x 62 x 47 cms)



2 Beyond Pierrot 1, 2001
 Oil on Canvas
 16 x 20 ins (41 x 51 cms)

Keynotes

Geoffrey Key is a high octane painter – his work is unmistakable. It burns, gleams, shimmers and smoulders on the walls of any gallery with the intensity of stained glass. His exuberant and energetic canvases conjure up a richly textured dreamscape of superabundant richness.

His artistic language is nurtured by the physical impact of the thing seen, recalled and then re-invented through the filter of his imagination and bears a familial relationship to artists such as Rossetti, Paul Delvaux, Marcel Gromaire and Picasso – a list as inspirational as it is various. Indeed, his art finds its genealogy in the painting that has come out of France over the last one hundred and fifty years or so. There he would be called an *artiste-peintre* or perhaps an *artiste-décorateur*, like Georges Braque, though many might prefer the designation of *artiste-magicien*, a perseverer and purveyor of mystery and magic.

Key's paintings are well-crafted, tightly structured and sensuous. They are also inescapably theatrical. Even when, as in landscapes, he is referencing observed reality, his lyrical and decorative sensibility moves his paintings away from anything directly topographical or overtly descriptive into the world of the imagination and performance.

Though possessing a natural facility, Key's manner of working is distinctly personal and was hard-won: 'The structure of a picture', he has said, 'is more important than the subject matter, whether a figure or a landscape – it's the same problem.'

This is, if I may coin a phrase, one of the key elements of any painting by this artist. Each one depicts the solving of a problem – the resolving of the tensions of line, form, tone and colour into a dynamic whole, like a piece of music will carry the receiver of the work into a world of their own as they trace and re-trace the endless permutations of a few simple elements – colour, line, tone and texture.

On occasion, behind these decorative surfaces, a dark shadow may be glimpsed. In a recent interview Key has said, "My work is based on memory. With the clown series, well, I was force fed circus as a child because I lived opposite Platt Fields Park in Manchester and the circus used to be there. I loved the circus, the horses, the lasses in spangles. But the clowns – they put the fear of God up me. That series was me fighting back!"

Something of that emotional struggle can be seen in the haunted eyes that stare out from the grease-painted face of the clown in *Beyond Pierrot 1* (illustrated opposite) and on p.63 of the *Clowns* book (published 2001).



Photograph of Whitley Nab, Glossop

Geoffrey Key was taught by Harry Rutherford, a pupil of Walter Sickert. 'If Sickert was a firework rocket, I was the stick that fell to earth' said Rutherford. To discover his own identity as an independent artist, the young Key spent a year painting the Whitley Nab that overlooks the Derbyshire mill town of Glossop – painting out all his preconceptions of what art should be and painting himself into somewhere new, developing his own language out of the rich mix of experience, knowledge, memory and the infinite possibilities that may happen when a brush or knife, loaded with colour, hits the canvas.

His early work is earthbound – his colours, his arcing brushwork and his layering of paint seem to be engaged in a stubborn struggle with the forces of gravity. The restricted colour range of his earlier work was blown apart by the intense light and vibrant colour of the Far East. Since then, it seems, he has never looked back and colour reigns supreme.

Key's discovery colour parallels Van Gogh's sudden explosion in chromatic splendour; for the Dutch painter it was Rubens, Delacroix, the Impressionists and Japanese prints; for Key it was the impetus arising from

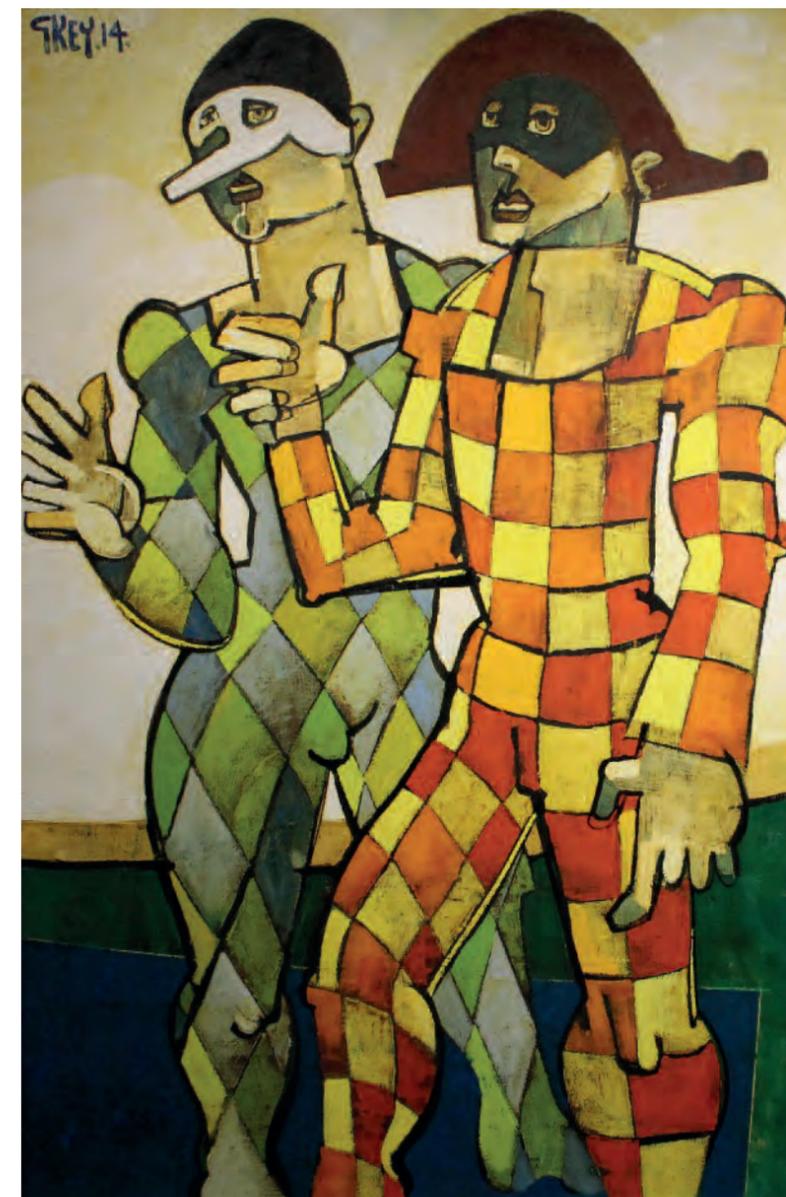
his direct observation of the impact of the intense light in the lower global latitude of Hong Kong. Landscapes formerly only seen veiled in softening Northern European light were suddenly seen afresh in a new and dramatic way – this seminal experience was to result in a step change resulting in the vibrant works that has become his trademark.

He is a compulsive worker. From his studio he generates a prolific output of works – each one immaculately crafted, each one part of a series of works that centre around a particular set of ideas: nudes in a landscape, clowns, commedia dell'arte, horses and riders – the common subject matter of European art of the last two or three centuries – and beyond. So, it is evident, here is no *avant-gardiste* flash in the pan, but an artist, who, in the vein of Degas or Picasso, Delacroix or Matisse, is consumed by the need to look to the past, but equally to paint for the present. As the young Degas once noted 'O Giotto, let me see Paris, and you Paris, let me see Giotto.' – Dare we paraphrase this wonderful piece of painterly wisdom? Probably not – it speaks for itself. But the spirit behind his aphorism informs a masterly early drawing, *Death of a Gardener* (illustrated below).



3 Death of a Gardener, 1976

Ink on Paper
10 x 8 ins (25.5 x 20 cms)



4 Harlequins Meeting, 2014

Oil on Canvas
24 x 36 ins (61 x 91.5 cms)

Though unmistakably visceral, Key's players act out their roles in theatre of dreams, to which we, the viewers, are invited to share and 'to suspend all disbelief': to enjoy, at a remove, a riotous imagination at play; one which is recorded and given vigorous life in assured calligraphic lines, and furrowed fields of textured colour, deep and resonant.

No figure suits Key's sensibility so much as the players of the commedia dell'arte and of those, it is Harlequin who keeps centre stage.

Harlequin's original rags become, over time systematically stylised into triangles and then lozenges of alternating colour – his costume alone making him the doyen of so many artists. Watteau, Daumier, Cézanne and Picasso all paid homage to this enigmatic player. Shape-shifter, acrobat, trickster, part fool, part victim, (most often to unrequited love), he is above all, a figure of mystery, his face and feelings masked. A perfect symbol of how each of us play our parts in this theatre that is the world, for we are nothing, if not performative creatures.



5 The Gift, 2014

Oil on Canvas
24 x 36 ins (61 x 91.5 cms)

Though there are hints of the dark side of life in Geoffrey Key's art, it is in essence essentially celebratory – it documents the delight of a painter, lost in his subject matter, willingly seduced by his chosen metier and caught up in the thrill of improvisation and performance. After all, painting is a private, even selfish, activity at heart – and isn't this a crucial element of any successful painting? – but the trick is to harness that private pleasure and transmit it to others. His paintings excite and inspire – perhaps, dare we hope, to the extent of encouraging the viewer to begin to paint for themselves – even if only in their imaginations.

Focusing on one area of the painting illustrated opposite (detail below) gives some idea of the qualities of the canvas surface, we see here bare canvas, a single looping line and opaque areas of flat colour all interacting to create a witty and convincing image of a the hat. We are aware of the thing depicted (a hat) and the means by which the thing is conjured up through line, paint and the virgin canvas.



Detail of hat from The Gift, 2014

D.H. Lawrence who describes better than anyone else the "sheer fun of covering a surface . . . I disappeared into that canvas. It is for me the most exciting moment – when you have the blank canvas and a big brush full of wet colour, and you plunge. It is just like diving in a pond – there you start frantically to swim. So far as I am concerned, it is like swimming in a baffling current and being rather frightened and very thrilled, gasping and striking out for all you're worth.'

Brilliant.

All the forms in Key's paintings interlock and intersect constructing and defining his subject – he uses a large but finite vocabulary of forms which make his work immediately recognisable – and bring a unity to his oeuvre. Despite the emphatically graphic element that underlines all his work, his figures, objects and landscapes have a heft and weight, an earthiness. His lines and forms swoop, ricochet and flow, making visual rhymes across the canvas, forming rhythms that are enhanced by the impastoed paint surface. Whether picturing landscapes, people or objects, the elements of his canvases are constructed on strict geometrical lines counterpointed by sharp angles or dancing arabesques.

Key enjoys getting up close to his subjects, cutting into them with a line that not only describes the object or person in the foreground, but also often 'signs' the objects behind. Sometimes he will obscure these areas differentiating them by slightly different tones of the same colour, or indeed, of vividly contrasting colours. This gives a strong sense of modelling, and pays direct homage to the Cubists masters of the early twentieth century.

His paint is alternatively caressed, coerced, occasionally harassed into place, sometimes it is rubbed away or scored and often scumbled – overlaid with further layers of paint which are then sometimes further modified in various ways using techniques we associate with Cubism and Surrealism, frottage, for example. This is no more evident than in his painting of *Guitar Duo, 2013* (illustrated on the next page) in which lines have been scored through paper laid over the wet paint surface and then peeled off to create this fascinating texture



Detail of fretboard from Guitar Duo, 2013



6 Guitar Duo, 2013
Oil on Canvas
30 x 20 ins (76 x 51 cms)



7 Attic Figure, 2012
Oil on Canvas
16 x 20 ins (41 x 51 cms)



1 Reclining Figure with Bird, 1978

(front view)

Bronze, edition 2/4

30½ x 24½ x 18½ ins (77.5 x 62 x 47 cms)

or in *Attic Figure*, 2012 in which the texture of a rough woven fabric is clearly visible appearing and reappearing at intervals within the variegated layering of paint. A figure that suggests the proud androgynous and yet paradoxically, highly feminine figures by Rossetti. This painting is a veritable compendium of technical procedures including scraping, scratching out and *grattage* – a technique developed by the Surrealist painter Max Ernst, in which textured material is laid over the wet paint and drawn or pressed into to create a distinctively patterned surface.

Such practice makes his surfaces a rich territory for exploration. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, he encourages us to follow him willy-nilly and enjoy all the endless permutations of the alchemy of painting.

To my mind, as an art historian, Key is indisputably a Northern artist – not bound by recent definitions of the term, but rather one who belongs to the Northern European tradition. Perhaps the artist with whom he has most in common is Jacques Lipchitz. Key's work shares with the French painter and sculptor an organic, lyrical, erotic and flowering sensibility. This can be experienced in the sculpture *Reclining Figure with Bird* that reclines, almost nonchalantly amongst his paintings in this exhibition. It is of a young woman reclining, a bird alighting or taking wing from her lap an idea originated in the 1970's (1978). Key remembers: "I was working on a series of drawings and paintings with the theme of figures and birds (a subject I have returned to from time to time); in the course of this series I produced the sculpture in plaster. It was soon acquired by a private collector, and I understand it spent many years in a central Manchester penthouse. It was many years later (2014) that the opportunity arose to have the original work, which was fragile in its plaster state, cast in bronze. Just four were made at the country's leading fine art founders, Castle Foundry, before I gave authority for the mould to be destroyed. I am very pleased with the resultant bronze, which secures the sculpture for the future and gives it new life as its patination develops over time".

For me, *Reclining Figure with Bird* suggests the rich heritage of European sculpture, and has something of the gravitas of a Henry Moore's or Michael Ayrton – but it is completely a Geoffrey Key whose splendid and generous art offers an imperative to free our imaginations to liberate our spirits.

Michael Howard, FRSA,
Author, artist and art historian



8 The Napkin, 1994

Oil on Board

22½ x 28 ins (57 x 71 cms)

Appreciation and Press Comment

To own a Geoffrey Key painting is to own a part of the man's persona. His 'Joie de Vivre' emanates from the superbly coloured canvas's concerning many subjects, Landscape, City life, Figures, Still life, Jesters, Dancers, Horses, Birds, the list is endless. Always the quality and vibrancy shines through, mirror imaging the artist whose work cannot be categorized by national boundaries, external influences, nor casual eyes. Keys paintings are strongly structured and thoughtfully balanced, which forms the basis of all his work. I am extremely proud to own a collection that covers fifty years of Keys life, the North of England is blessed with a singular painter, Geoffrey Key, who is acclaimed much further than the shores of Great Britain.

Terry Mulligan, Collector, 2015

Geoffrey's paintings delve into intimate and sensual relationships exposing their powerful nature in an affectionate and good-humoured way and demonstrating true individuality. Little wonder then that the Mancunian is now widely regarded as one of the most important artists working in Britain today, and a hot tip for investment...

Home Plus Scotland, 2009

Geoffrey Key's works have three key qualities which make them a joy to own and admire. Firstly, he has a very keen draftsman's eye, making superb use of shape and line to depict the subject, whatever it is. Secondly, his use of colour is remarkable, creating pictures which burst off the canvas into any room. Lastly, his paintings encourage you to examine them again and again, allowing you to find hidden detail, seemingly endlessly. To me, he's a true modern master, and a real inspiration when I'm creating my own paintings and drawings.

Dermod Ruddock,
an Artist Collector's Perspective, 2015

Collectors speak of the joy and excitement they find in his work. 'I've followed and acquired Geoffrey Key's work since the eighties - there's a timelessness and integrity about him - his early works are already more than standing the test of time and I predict that his name as a master of his art, in his time, will endure for centuries to come.

Living Edge, 2010

Never been able to analyse why I like Geoffrey's work. He and Van Gogh are my favourite artists.

Pat Parfett, Collector, 2015

Key is a leading figure in northern contemporary art, noted for his realism, his expressive use of bold colour and his graphic, linear style. His striking canvases sit recognisably in the post war British tradition of figurative art.

Platform 505, 2013

The bold colours of Geoffrey's paintings grab your interest, but then the more you look at them, the more you see in them.

Cathy Campbell, Collector, 2015

Geoffrey Key is regarded as Lancashire's greatest living artist yet he still uses empty sardine tins as palettes.

Lancashire Life, 2014

The form of the industrial lines of those ladies that Geoffrey depicts are captivating. You like the picture you buy it, you instantly build a relationship with the character and become attached to the painting.....give it a smile once in a while or study it further to find the deeper meanings of that complex being and its surroundings.

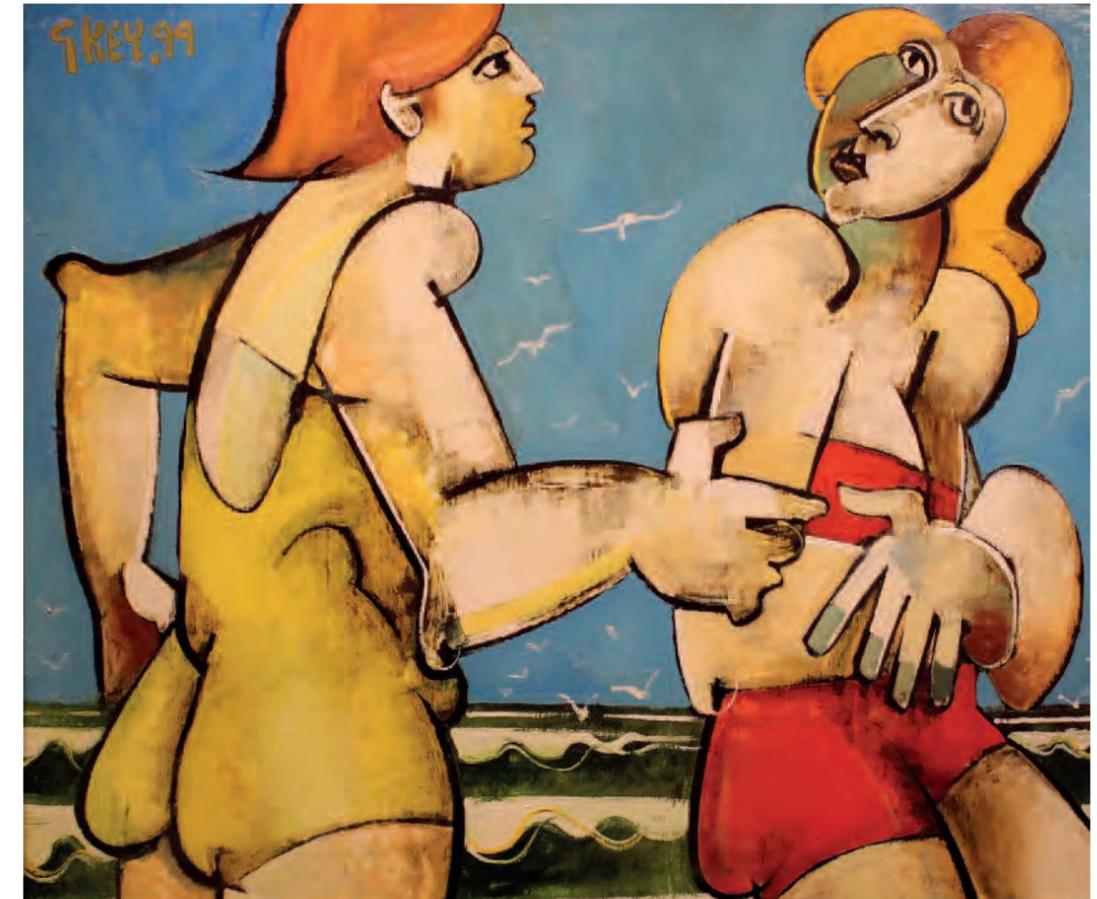
Sean Campbell, Collector, 2015

Geoffrey Key has survived the fads and trends of the art world for decades and is within the first rank of British artists today. There is not a single northern gallery of note which does not sell his paintings and seek to acquire more nor an art collector in Cheshire who does not own a work by him, but not even his most ardent fans realise how significant he actually is.

Cheshire Today, 2015

I find Geoffrey Key's imagery particularly fascinating as his use of form, light and colour requires the viewer to use their imagination. The recurrent themes of landscape, human figures, equine forms and still life soon led me to collecting a piece of work from each theme. The striking pictures easily become the centre piece of any space in my home. I am now the proud owner of several artworks which bring not only immeasurable pleasure but are also appreciating in value."

Rosemary Eastham, Collector, 2015



9 Seaside Girls, 1999

Oil on Canvas
24 x 20 ins (61 x 51 cms)



10 Shoppers, 2014

Oil on Canvas
24 x 36 ins (61 x 91.5 cms)



11 Kitchen Table, 2014

Oil on Canvas
48 x 36 ins (122 x 91.5 cms)



12 Beach Runner, 2013
Oil on Canvas
30 x 20 ins (76 x 51 cms)



13 Morecambe Bay Hills, 2013
Oil on Canvas
48 x 36 ins (122 x 91.5 cms)



14 Winter, 1987

Oil on Canvas

16 x 24 ins (41 x 61 cms)



15 Moorland Road, 1986

Mixed Media on Paper

23½ x 20 ins (60 x 51 cms)



16 Pierrot, 2001

Mixed Media on Paper
8¼ x 11½ ins (21 x 29 cms)

17 Horse and Rider, 2008

Mixed Media on Paper
15 x 22 ins (38 x 56 cms)



18 Night Riders, 1974

Mixed Media on Paper
25 x 18 ins (63.5 x 46 cms)





19 Clouded Landscape, 1987

Ink on Paper
11 x 8½ ins (28 x 21.5 cms)



21 The Fight, 1986

Mixed Media on Paper
8½ x 8½ ins (21.5 x 21.5 cms)

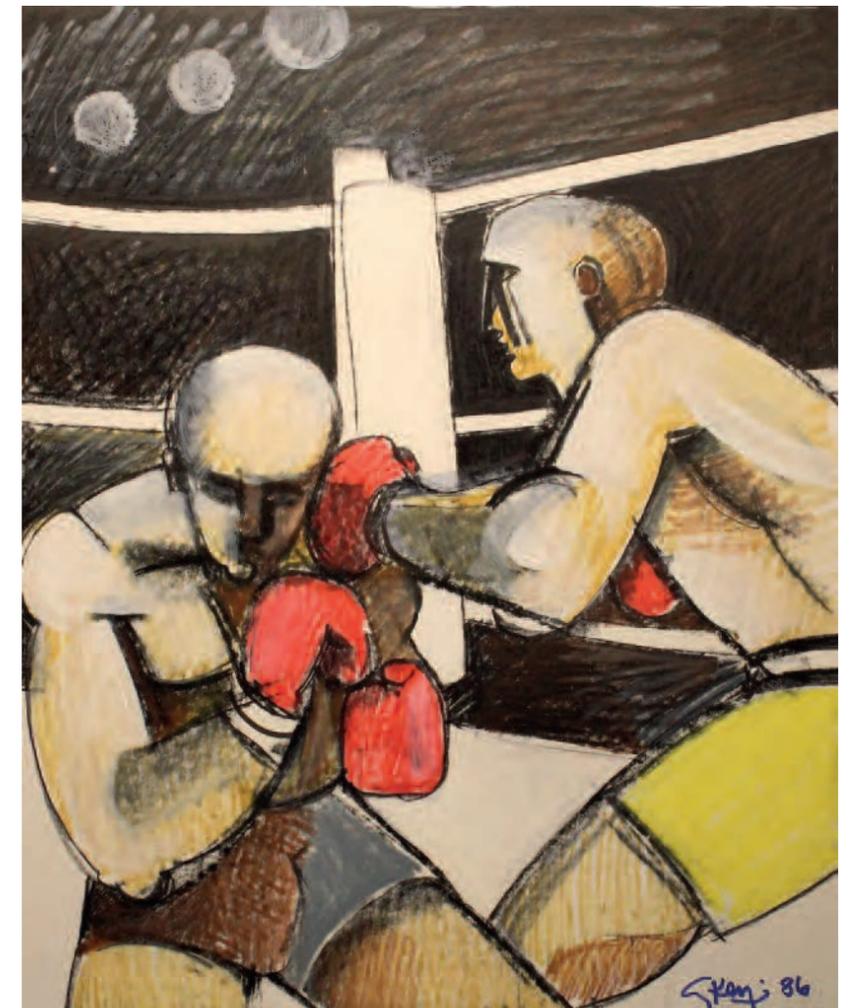
20 Footballers, 1990

Ink on Paper
8 x 11½ ins (20 x 29 cms)



22 Boxers, 1986

Mixed Media on Paper
18 x 22 ins (46 x 56 cms)





23 Mother and Child, 1966
Mixed Media on Paper
20 x 28 ins (51 x 71 cms)



24 Girl in Landscape, 2000
Mixed Media on Paper
14½ x 19 ins (37 x 48 cms)

25 City Meeting, 2012
Ink and Wash on Paper
9½ x 14 ins (24 x 35.5 cms)

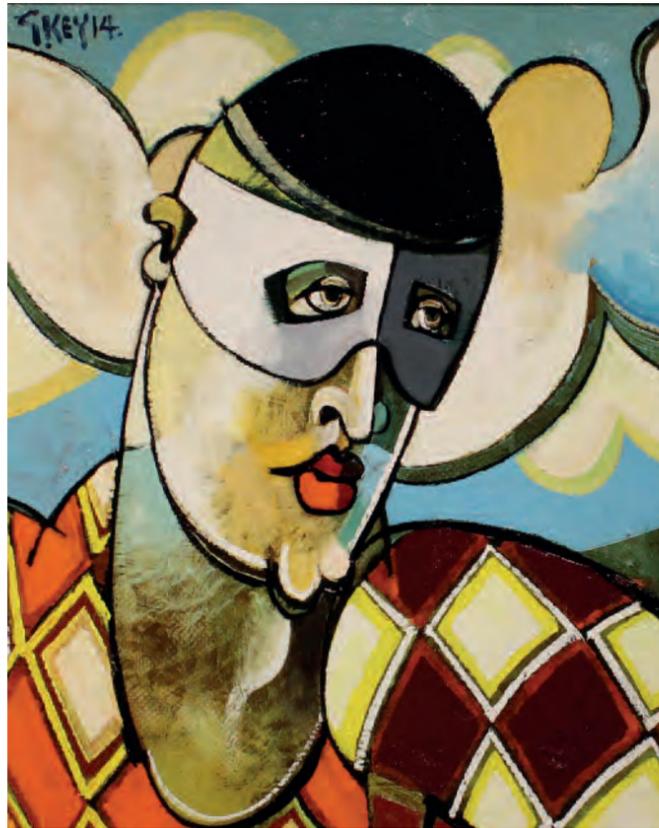




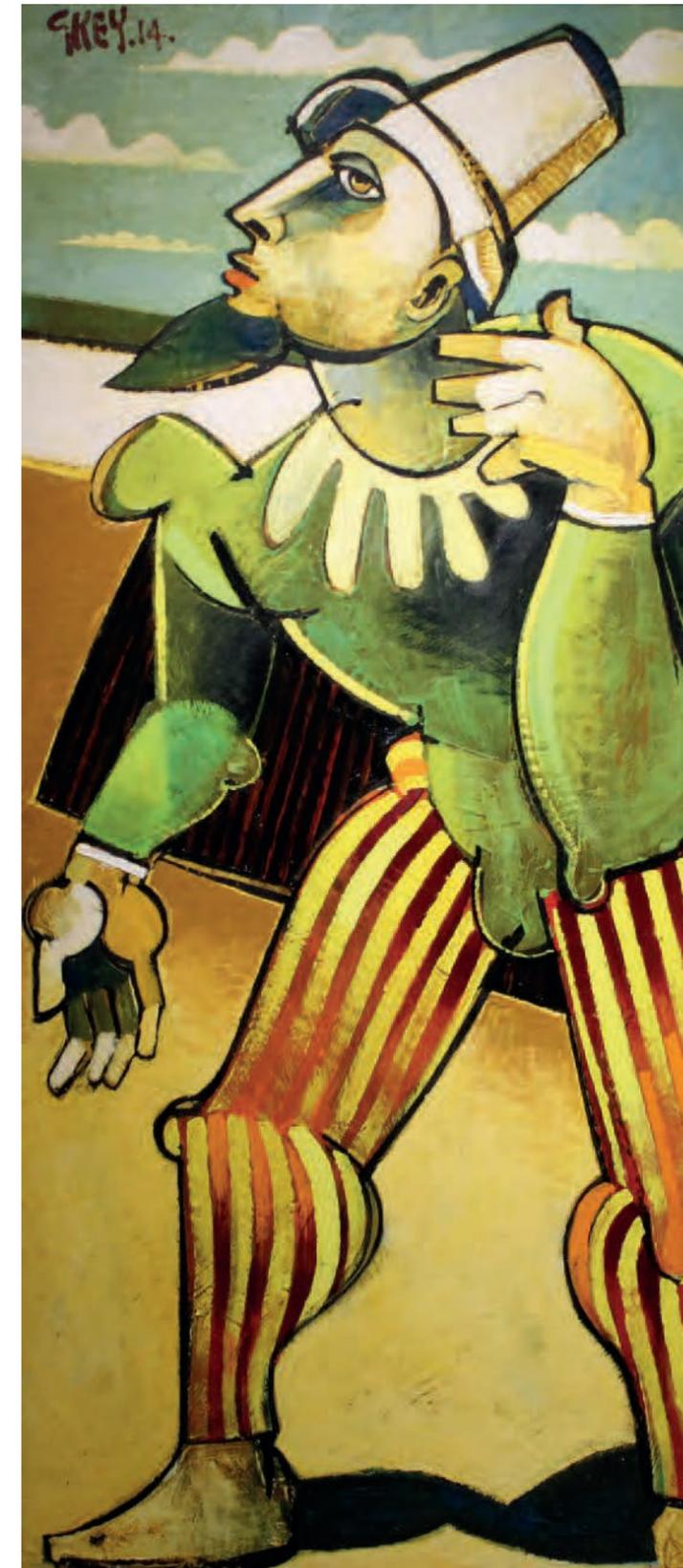
26 Harlequin with Lute, 2014
Ink on Paper
8 x 9 ins (20 x 23 cms)



27 Pantalone, 2014
Ink and Wash on Paper
12 x 20 ins (30.5 x 51 cms)



28 Harlequin, 2014
Oil on Board
14 x 17½ ins (35.5 x 44.5 cms)



29 Pantalone, 2014
Oil on Board
16½ x 36½ (42 x 93 cms)



30 Colombina, 2014
Oil on Board
21 x 26 ins (53.5 x 66 cms)



31 The Trio, 2014
Oil on Canvas
20 x 24 ins (51 x 61 cms)

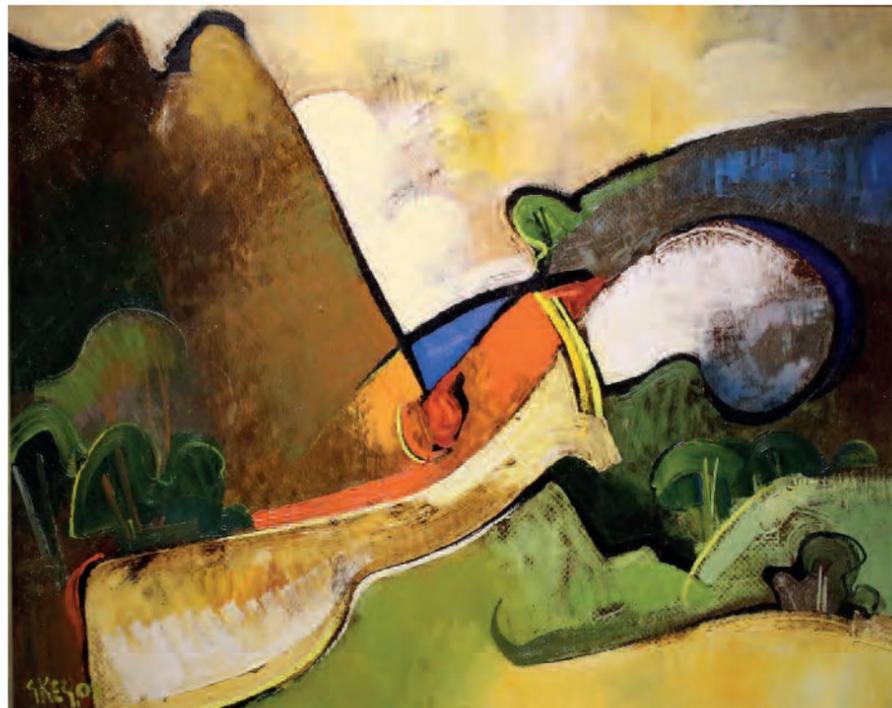


32 Dark Valley, 2002
Oil on Canvas
20 x 16 ins (51 x 41 cms)



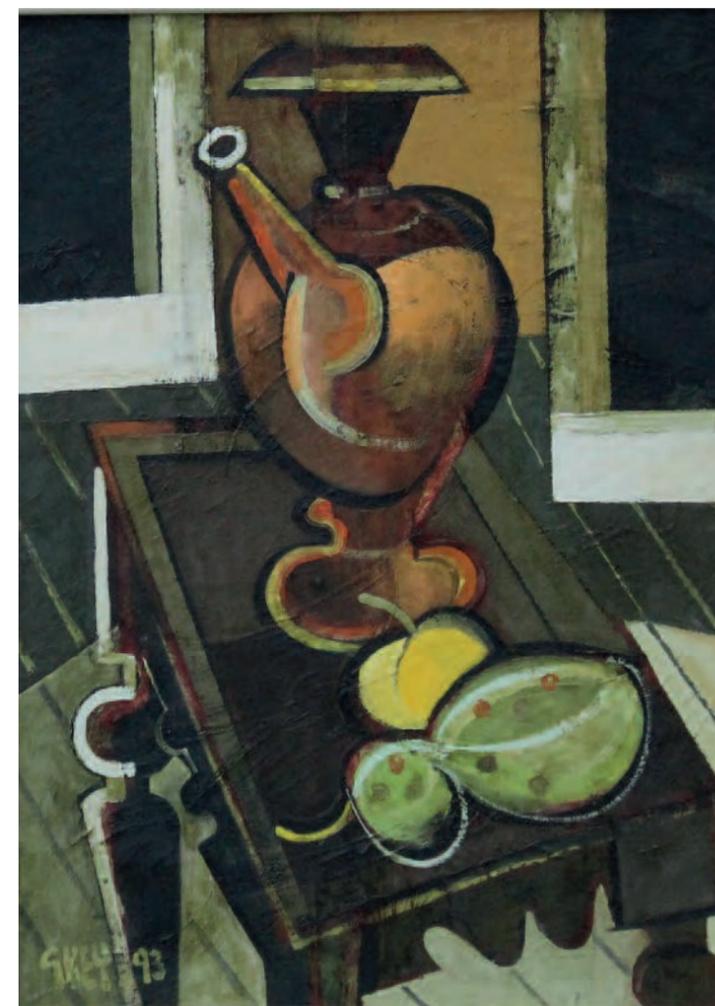
34 Dawn, 2013
Oil on Canvas
48 x 36 ins (122 x 91.5 cms)

33 Limestone Quarry, 2001
Oil on Canvas
20 x 16 ins (51 x 41 cms)





35 Nab from Glossop, 1963
Oil on Board
22½ x 17½ ins (57 x 44.5 cms)



36 Rose Water Jug, 1993
Oil on Board
16 x 22 ins (41 x 56 cms)



37 Still Life with Bellarmine, 2013
Oil on Canvas
36 x 48 ins (91.5 x 122 cms)



38 Head, 1980
Terracotta Plate
12½ x 12½ (32 x 32 cms)



39 Xanthos, 1980

Bronze, edition 2/10

9¼ x 10 x 6 ins (23.5 x 25.5 x 15.5 cms)



40 Trojan, 1986

Bronze, edition 2/10

23 x 26 x 10½ ins (58 x 65.5 x 27 cms)



41 Bird, 1992

Paper Mache Bowl

16½ x 16½ x 4 ins (42 x 42 x 10 cms)

"The bowl is the result of an idea I had concerning distorting perspective to achieve a correct image on a concave surface. I looked upon this optical problem of translating a two dimensional image so it could be accurately shown on a concave surface as a challenge. It is a physical example of the continuum I deal with all the time - questions answered in one work or series of works lead to a new set to be

addressed in the next. I produced a short series of these bowls. A collector living in Hong Kong had acquired a couple of examples, which were seen at his home by the Director of the Mandarin Gallery, who in turn acquired further examples to exhibit at the gallery".

Geoffrey Key



Back cover:

42 Stream with Trees, 2013

Oil on Canvas

24 x 20 ins (61 x 51 cm)

ArtDecorGallery 25
2015 - CELEBRATING YEARS



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