

Francis Davison

1919 Born in London



About

Francis Davison was one of the most innovative and inventive artists to work in post-war England. He began as a poet but turned to painting in the 1940s before finding his true metier as a collagist in 1952. Self-taught but encouraged and nurtured by his second wife, the painter and sculptor Margaret Mellis, Davison invented a brand of paper collage using only found colour. Although he cut some of his materials to begin with, his speciality was to tear the paper and orchestrate the pieces in rhythmic abstract arrangements of shapes and divisions, which sometimes recall the turning and coiling of the human internal organs or the maze of the brain. The improvisatory nature of the work was important, but even more so the manner in which it transfigured its raw materials.

During his lifetime, there was one substantial Davison exhibition - at the Hayward Gallery, 10 February- 17 April 1983. Since his death in 1984, there have been four solo shows at the Redfern, including a retrospective in 1986. 'The Experience of Painting', an Arts Council touring show selected by Michael Harrison, included Davison among a group of painters. The show was devoted to 'eight modern artists' - Gillian Ayres, Jennifer Durrant, James Hugonin, Albert Irvin, Edwina Leapman, Kenneth Martin, Bridget Riley and Davison. In 2007, he was the subject of a well-received retrospective at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge.

- 1932 Sent to England from Cannes to attend St George's School, Essex
- 1944-5 Married to Brenda Roberts
- 1945 Moved to London, then Cap d'Antibes, with Margaret Mellis and her son, Telfer Stokes
- 1950 Moved with Mellis back to Suffolk
- 1955 Paper collages entered into mixed exhibition at Roland, Browse and Deblanco, London
- 1979 Selected by William Packer for 'The First British Art Show', an Arts Council touring exhibition of the UK
- 1983 Solo exhibition of collages at the Hayward Gallery, London
- 1986 Posthumous retrospective at the Redfern Gallery, London

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1981 Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield
- 1982 MOMA, Oxford
- 1983 Hayward Gallery, London 'Francis Davison: Paper Collages'
- 1986 Redfern Gallery, London 'Francis Davison, 1919-1984: a retrospective'
- 1988 Redfern Gallery, London 'Francis Davison, 1919-1984, Works with Green'
- 1996 Aldeburgh Festival Exhibition, Peter Pears Gallery, Aldeburgh
- 2003 Austin/Desmond, London 'Francis Davison: Paintings and Collages, 1948-83'
- 2006 Austin/Desmond, London 'Francis Davison: Early Paintings, Late Collages'
- 2007-08 Kettle's Yard, Cambridge 'Francis Davison: Collages and early works'

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- 2010 Goldmark Gallery, Uppingham 'Francis Davison: 1919-1984'
- 2012 Austin/Desmond, London 'Francis Davison: Collages'
- 2017 Redfern Gallery, London 'Francis Davison: Collages'

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1969 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 'John Moores 7'
- 1976 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 'John Moores 10'
- 1973 Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 'The Five Show'
- 1979 Arts Council of Great Britain touring show of UK, 'The First British Art Show'
- 1989 South Bank Centre, London 'The Experience of Painting: Eight Modern Artists'
- 1992 Gainsborough's House, Sudbury 'Margaret Mellis and Francis Davison'
- 1996 Bede Gallery, London, 'Margaret Mellis & Francis Davison, A Drift of Angels'
- 2002 Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London 'Aspects of Modern British and Irish Art'

Collections

Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge
National Library of Australia, Canberra
Museums Sheffield
Tate
Victoria & Albert Museum, London