

OUT OF THIS WORLD

The Art of Josh Kirby at Walker Art Gallery

15 June to 30 September 2007

Explore a colourful world teeming with other-worldly characters, creatures, fantasy cities and landscapes in *Out of this World: the Art of Josh Kirby*. The first major retrospective of the Liverpool-born artist opens at the Walker Art Gallery from 15 June to 30 September 2007.

Out of this World: the Art of Josh Kirby spans Kirby's artistic career from his early days as a freelance artist to his famous cover illustrations for Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* and *Eric/Faust* fantasy series.

Kirby's work has adorned the covers of some of the most iconic science fiction and fantasy novels, as well as famous film posters such as *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. The exhibition displays his best-known work alongside the less familiar. Not to mention a unique opportunity to view Kirby's often highly complex paintings un-cropped and in their original format.



Detail of Reaper Man (1991) used with the permission of the Trustees of the Josh Kirby Estate

Ann Bukantas, curator of fine art at the Walker Art Gallery says: "Josh Kirby possessed one of the most creative visual imaginations to come out of Liverpool in the 20th century. People may be familiar with some of his more commercial work, but may not be aware of the incredible talent and the long, wide-ranging career of the artist who created them. Whether making a painting for a book cover, a film poster or even a jigsaw box, Kirby's exceptional skills in figure drawing, perspective, composition and the rich use of colour - and frequently a wicked sense of humour - are always to the fore".



Unseen University Challenge (1995) used with the permission of the Trustees of the Josh Kirby Estate

Kirby named Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the elder as key influences on his work, and the covers for Terry Pratchett's novels in particular reflect this. Featured in the exhibition is Kirby's first Pratchett cover painting for *The Colour of Magic* (1984) – at this point Kirby was unclear whether further commissions would follow. The rest is history.

Other highlights from this section include the painting *Discworld I* (c.1990) which shows Pratchett's legendary giant space turtle, *The Great A'Tuin*, carrying an entire civilization through a cosmic landscape of stars and swirling clouds, and is typical of Kirby's approach in combining vast, panoramic views with minute detail. Another painting, *Maskerade* (1995), an extremely complex composition, shows a wild theatre full of memorable characters. *Hollywood Chickens* (1998) is an energetic image laden with Heath Robinson style humour, charting the elaborate efforts of a flock of fowl to safely cross the road.

Kirby's name is now synonymous with illustrating fantasy and science fiction, yet from the 1950s and into the 1980s he worked on a variety of publishing genres, from romance through to westerns including covers of books *Moby Dick* and *The Vikings*.

But it was from the late 1950s onwards, with the rise in popularity of science fiction literature, that Kirby found his true vocation, gradually making his mark as a leading science fiction artist. From his early covers for the seminal *Authentic Science Fiction Magazine*, and throughout his long career, Kirby produced endlessly imaginative works for many renowned science fiction authors including Ray Bradbury, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard. The exhibition features surreal paintings of grotesque aliens, gleaming cyborgs and eerie scenes of a scientific utopia.

Another section features portraits of the film director Alfred Hitchcock from the late 1960s and early 70s. The portraits, used as cover illustrations for a series of horror anthologies, capture Hitchcock's dark imagination and some, having skulls and other sinister forms covering Hitchcock's face, are inspired by Kirby's fascination with the Ray Bradbury classic, *The Illustrated Man*.

The exhibition also includes some of Kirby's more personal work, most notably his paintings for the *Voyage of the Ayeguy* series. These paintings, a selection of which were published as a portfolio in 1981, pursue a spiritual, biblical theme and reflect an interest in renaissance art. The images feature scenes of crucifixion and ascension in an extraterrestrial world populated with spacemen and aliens.

Out of this World: the Art of Josh Kirby opens at the Walker Art Gallery, William Brown Street, Liverpool from 15 June to 30 September 2007

Admission FREE Open Daily 10am-5pm

Information 0151 478 4199 www.thewalker.org.uk



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