

Milton Keynes Gallery

Press Release

James Lee Byars

4 April – 21 June 2009
Milton Keynes Gallery
Admission free

*Presented in collaboration with the Kunstmuseum Bern
Supported by The Henry Moore Foundation*



James Lee Byars: *The Perfect Epitaph*, 1975 © Photo: Balthasar Burkhard. © Estate of James Lee Byars.

Milton Keynes Gallery presents a comprehensive exhibition of work by the late artist James Lee Byars (1932 – 1997). Milton Keynes Gallery will also be presenting a complementary exhibition of work by the artist in Venice this summer at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, during the 2009 Venice Biennale.

Byars was one of the twentieth century's most enigmatic artists. This exhibition presents a succinct overview of Byars' practice, including sculptures, works on paper and film documentation of his performances. Bringing together many different strands from all the periods in his creative life, it provides an opportunity to engage with the remarkable richness and breadth of his work. The majority of works will be presented in the UK for the first time.

Byars questioned the boundaries between art and life as demonstrated through his prolific letter writing to his friends and compelling performances. Byars' letters, sometimes adorned with gold dust, brought together everyday anecdotes with his idiosyncratic philosophical musings. In his performances and everyday actions, Byars dressed in incredible outfits made of fabric such as gold lamé and red silk. His performances focused on the fleeting and immaterial, for example, in 1972 Byars let a drop of perfume evaporate in the air in front of a department store in Bern (*The Perfume Show*). His constant articulation of man's mortality is both poetic and profound.

The works selected for this exhibition come from the Kunstmuseum Bern's recent survey exhibition of Byars' work: *"Im full of Byars" James Lee Byars - A Homage*. Works include important loans from the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Toni Gerber Archive and the Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and IVAM, Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia and Marie-Puck Broodthaers. The UK presentation will also be supplemented by additional loans from public and private collections.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue *"Im full of Byars" James Lee Byars – A Homage*, co-produced by the Kunstmuseum Bern and Milton Keynes Gallery. The exhibition will subsequently tour to MOCAD, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, in Autumn 2009.

The related talks and events programmed to accompany the exhibition in Milton Keynes includes an 'In Conversation', a 'Talkback' tour on Saturday 25 April, 1–2pm, Family Day on Saturday 30 May, holiday workshops and a 'What is Art' series of talks supported by the Open University and the University of Northampton.

In Conversation

Monday 27 April, 6.30–8pm, free

Join Vicente Todolí, Director of London's Tate Modern and Jon Thompson, artist and Head of MA Fine Art at Middlesex University as they discuss the work of James Lee Byars with Michael Stanley, former Director of Milton Keynes Gallery. Booking is essential on 01908 676 900. Supported by The Open University.

What is Art? Talk Series

- 14 May, 7 – 8pm *What is Modern/Contemporary American Art?*
- 21 May, 7 – 8pm *What is Performance Art?*
- 28 May, 7 – 8pm *What is an Artist?*

All talks are free, booking is essential on 01908 676 900

James Lee Byars

Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, Venice

4 June – 5 July 2009

Milton Keynes Gallery will present an accompanying exhibition of work by the artist during the Venice Biennale 2009 at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava in central Venice.

For further information or images please contact Rosie Jackson on 01908 558 302 or email r.jackson@mk-g.org, or visit the website at www.mk-g.org.

Ends

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