

Sue Dunkley

21 September – 3 November 2023

Private View: 20 September, 6–8pm



Our forthcoming exhibition presents the vibrant Pop Art paintings from the 60s and 70s by British artist Sue Dunkley (b. 1942 Leicester - d. 2022 London, UK). Born to publican parents Dunkley moved around frequently when young, before studying at Bath Academy of Art (1959-61), Chelsea (1961-63) and the Slade, winning scholarships to visit Australia and Italy, and began teaching at art schools shortly after graduating in 1965.

On view will be several paintings and intimate pastel drawings produced between 1968 and 1975; an extraordinary series deeply immersed in the culture and politics of the time, now startlingly fresh and contemporary. Taking as her subject contemporary icons of celebrity at the time such as John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, the female body and the male gaze, her paintings are striking works of colour and cultural commentary. Often autobiographical, Dunkley was deeply affected by her divorce in 1974, and raising two children, she wrestled with the challenges of being a woman, an artist and a mother. Her work explores violence, sexuality, and the role of women in changing eras. A feeling of haunting tension and melancholy is juxtaposed with the playful, bright primary colours. Parallels have been drawn with the work of Alex Katz, Allen Jones and Pauline Boty in particular.

Dunkley lived and worked in a large beloved family house in Islington for over 50 years. Surrounded by artists, musicians and actors, her parties were legendary, and friends often spoke of her sense of humour with regular visitors including neighbours Rogers Waters and Howard Hodgkin. During this period, she repeatedly painted the artist duo Gilbert and George, fascinated by their 'stone' like appearance, masculinity and violence are presented along with the Kennedy assassinations.

Outspoken, beautiful, young, and dressed in Mary Quant, Dunkley appeared in fashionable magazines such as Nova in 1966 and was spoken about in the same breath as Twiggy as part of the new, swinging, cultural set at the time. Collectors and friends included Harold Pinter, Seamus Heaney, Salman Rushdie and Julie Christie, who she became close with after working as an advisor for her role in *The Railway Station Man* where she portrayed a painter.

Dunkley throughout the early 70s exhibited annually with the artists collective the London Group and had her first solo exhibition in 1973 at Bolsover Street Gallery, London. A series of well-received exhibitions at the Thumb Gallery in Soho followed in the late 70s and early 80s. Works joined public collections at Leicester Museum and elsewhere, but Dunkley was uncompromising about her art and refused to take direction. Latterly she exhibited at Connaught Brown, London in 1993, and had a solo show in 2017 with Alison Jacques Gallery, London.

Image: Sue Dunkley, *Bikini Nudes*, 1973, oil on canvas, 183 x 153 cm, 71 7/8 x 60 inches
High-res images available on request

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10 am – 5.30 pm
Press enquiries: Amy Baker: amy@mayorgallery.com

THE MAYOR GALLERY

21 Cork Street, First Floor, London W1S 3LZ
+ 44 (0) 20 7734 3558 | mayorgallery.com | info@mayorgalley.com | [@mayorgallery](https://www.instagram.com/mayorgallery)