

HAYHILLGALLERY

MASTER WORKS AND CONTEMPORARY ART

John Speirs

The Pillow Books Revisited

Hay Hill Gallery presents the latest collection of art works by John Speirs, Inspired by the erotic Pillow books of Japan, his work reflects the spirit of Shunga prints and poetry and each of his paintings have taken their title from one of these Japanese poems.

This is the 5th time John Speirs has exhibited at the Hay Hill Gallery and probably the most exiting yet. His paintings have taken on completely different direction; Speirs has left the African Continent, and for the moment, has turned his back on the sea whilst setting his sights across the oceans to Japan, in an exploration of The Pillow Book. His paintings are patterned abstracts rather than narratives, all evoking the distinctive mood of the Shunga.

Originated in Japan in the 990's, a pillow book is a collection of notebooks and poetry, which have been collated to show a period of someone's life documented on Japanese woodblock prints. These beautiful hand scrolls known for there vibrant and explicit depictions of sexual couplings, were designed as thrilling entertainments full of unexpected richness and variety. This widely circulated erotic imagery, formed an important output for many artists of that time.

Once Japanese prints, including Shunga, were introduced to the west, artist here became avid collectors. Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet, Picasso, Toulouse de Lautrec and Degas found themselves deeply influenced by the unusual framing, arbitrary colours and textures of these highly idiosyncratic prints. Rodin too found the Shunga to be a liberating form in his candid line and wash drawings. Klimt and Schiller drew heavily upon Japanese prints and particularly Shunga in their profoundly erotic and sensual paintings. These artists depiction of The Pillow Book and Shunga are what first drew Speirs' attention to Japanese prints and poetry, igniting new possibilities of how he could further peruse his use of colour, pattern and texture in his paintings.

Originally born in South Africa, John Speirs was educated at the University of Cape Town - Michealis School of Art. His talent was recognised by mentor and fellow artist Irma Stern and he soon received a scholarship to continue his education at the Slade School of Art in London. Later residing in New York, John went to work as a catwalk designer with Bill Gibb and Kate Franklin for British Fashion Week in 1978. Throughout his career John was a leading graphic artist with J Walter Thompson and became a trouble-shooter for the advertising world, often 'parachuted' into companies to salvage many a campaign. In Speirs' paintings classical draughtsmanship, the Slade tradition meets extremely rich and vibrant colour palette making his works both aesthetically pleasing and collectable.

