

Exhibition: **John Davies. Drawings 1967–2005. Donation**

from 14th July to 4th September 2005

Organized by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curator: Consuelo Císcar

The exhibition consists of 44 drawings which the artist has donated to the IVAM from his personal collection. This extraordinary group of works enriches the substantial holding devoted to John Davies in the IVAM's collection, with a total of 64 works representative of his long career as an artist. John Davies's drawings clearly illustrate his concerns as an artist from 1965 until the present day: the human condition converted into a kind of staging of theatre of the absurd; the face transmuted into a pathetic mannequin's mask; magic and purifying fire; death and ghosts. A catalogue has been published to accompany the exhibition, with illustrations of the works donated and texts by Timothy Hyman and the Director of the IVAM and curator of the exhibition, Consuelo Císcar.

The artist John Davies (Cheshire, 1946) is one of the greatest exponents of modern British sculpture. The extensive retrospective devoted to his work for the first time in this country, at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Bilbao and the IVAM in Valencia, allowed the Spanish public to discover the enormous fascination that his figurative plastic discourse exercises. Although it is undeniable that his paintings, sculptures and drawings form a complex and coherent whole, from the outset Davies saw his facet as a draughtsman as something that developed in parallel with his three-dimensional work, something intimately connected with it but essentially distinct. For Davies, drawing provides a certain immediacy of execution which sculpture lacks. It is also a medium for describing a space on paper, for creating a "world" in which to introduce his figures. Drawing thus serves and complements his sculpture and offers him a more elevated poetic perspective, capturing man's sensation of

universal solitariness and, like his sculptural work, concentrating on the human figure.

From an ideal viewpoint, Davies says that he prefers his drawings “to exist by themselves. I don’t like seeing them *behind* the sculpture.” He has never drawn in the same room as the one in which he models figures, and his drawings have often been most outstanding at times when sculpture had become impossible for him. For many years, Davies kept pinned to his studio wall a scrap of paper inscribed by Ruth Hopwell, an early teacher at Manchester: *“Drawing is not a record of a thing/face/place. A drawing is a record of THOUGHT ABOUT”* a thing/face/place.

John Davies started his career in the field of painting, studying at art schools in Hull and Manchester and completing his training at the prestigious Slade School in London between 1968 and 1969. In 1972 he had his first solo exhibition, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, to which he returned three years later to present his sculptures: life-size figures with a “realistic” appearance (fitted with fibreglass eyes and wearing outdoor or work clothes and shoes), generally arranged in pairs or groups, accompanied by a series of large heads with masks and other items that distorted their features. The dramatic theatrical effect of the installation surprised the public and the London critics, who discovered the work of a realistic figurative sculptor who kept his distance from the abstract modes that predominated in British sculpture at the time.

His best-known works include numerous series of heads made during the eighties and nineties, ranging from small pieces to gigantic works over two metres high. The colour with which Davies paints his sculptures is an ash grey, sometimes with a little muted red, in which he embeds lines that draw on the three-dimensional surfaces, and the faces are also sometimes adorned with circus make-up. Colour thus becomes a non-realist dramatic element which works on the identification of the natural as a theatrical, distancing element.

It is possible to find links with the work of other recent figurative sculptors, such as Kienholz, Segal or Hanson, although Davies remains isolated within British sculpture, so that it is easier to find parallels with his work in the fields of painting, theatre or performance art. During the eighties his work gradually abandoned the more or less illusionist references to reality and he began to paint his sculptures grey, avoiding giving them a “natural” appearance and even incorporating drawing in them. During this period he worked on several series of small or life-size sculptures, showing self-absorbed nude figures climbing ropes or steps or hanging on trapezes as if they were circus acrobats. In 1970 he won a Sainsbury Award, and his sculptures and drawings have been included in numerous group exhibitions in Europe and the United States. His last major solo exhibition was at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester in 1996. He currently lives and works in London.