

his reputation experienced a posthumous partial eclipse, it was re-established by the publication of a monograph by Mark Haworth-Booth in 1979 (reissued in 2005).¹ In 2007 Kauffer found his place in the compact 'Design' series published by the Antique Collectors' Club, with a text by Peyton Skipwith, and in an associated exhibition at the Estorick Collection, London, in 2011.² The latest book, larger in size than its predecessors, was published to coincide with an exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt, *Underground Modernist: E. McKnight Kauffer*, curated by the book's editors and due to open early in 2020. Postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it opened on 10th September 2021 (closed 10th April).

Born in Montana in 1890, Kauffer rose by talent and an appealing personality from a desperately poor background to receive sponsorship from a patron, Joseph McKnight, who enabled him to study in Europe before the First World War and whose surname he added to his own. While in Paris shortly before the war's outbreak he married Grace Ehrlich, an American piano student, with whom he then fled to England. Kauffer, who had caught the 1913 Armory Show of modern art while passing through New York and had gathered first-hand experiences of Modernism, was soon afloat in what remained of London's pre-war artistic avant-garde. He joined the more advanced exhibiting societies, showing paintings influenced by Post-Impressionism. His 1916 woodcut *Flight*, a chequerboard pattern that resolves into a flock of birds, was turned into a bold bright yellow poster for the left-wing pacifist *Daily Herald* – one of the key figures in Kauffer's circle of London connections, Francis Meynell, was a backer of the newspaper. Henceforth, Kauffer allowed poster art to take precedence over painting, a result both of his need to avoid penury and a just estimate of where his real talents lay.

Since his first days in London, Kauffer's art had caught the attention of Frank Pick, the publicity manager of the London Underground, who saw the potential of his simplified brightly-coloured landscape images for posters. Retailers and manufacturers also commissioned Kauffer, and in his early years he produced the most clearly abstract and modernist work of his career, including vivid Cubist-inspired imagery that would have startled millions of travellers with their first encounter with non-literal representation. Percy Bradshaw, a commentator of the time, noted how the

public bought these posters themselves from a shop specially set up by London Underground in response to demand, and imagined them trying to 'puzzle out the meaning of the adventurous Kauffers' (p.47).

Over the decades, Kauffer's representational techniques changed, becoming generally less puzzling. The airbrush became one of his standbys and he incorporated photography and what the author and graphic designer Steven Heller has called a 'space frame', a linear perspective shape that creates depth although not in an illusionistic way, touching on Surrealism. Kauffer's ability to make an arresting image out of simple ingredients never failed him, whether the subjects were such unpromising ones as Eno's Fruit Salts (Fig.6) or Shell petrol and lubricating oil. He understood the potential as well as the limitations of lithographic printing. In his own words, Kauffer saw his role as a socially responsible one, 'constantly to correct values, to establish new ones' and to make advertising 'something worthy of the civilization that needs it' (p.61). As the critic Geoffrey Grigson wrote in 1935, 'His posters are made up of familiar elements [. . .] just separated enough from familiarity, just heightened and stylized enough to make them strange and attractive.'³

The book under review was researched with devoted energy on both sides of the Atlantic. Looking for needles of evidence in the haystack of disparate archives and publications has resulted in a comprehensive bibliography and many references to the contemporary press. The text comprises eleven topic-based essays by specialists rather than a single synoptic narrative. These include themes of current concern such as gender and race, which emerge, perhaps rather tangentially, from certain of Kauffer's commissions. In view of the book's subtitle and given that there is still no easily accessible source for this background, more coverage might have been expected on how advertising was organised in his lifetime and who were its key figures. Only two of the catalogue essays are directly concerned with advertising, and although we may be grateful for factual and visual information about Kauffer's other fields of operation, such as interior design, book illustration and designs for the stage, these texts are brief and as a result there is a fragmented quality to the whole. The essays are generously illustrated and there is a plate section of over 150 items that benefits from the book's quarto format. Given this spaciousness, however, it is maddening

that the references, although conveniently hanging in the margins, are printed in a small size in an eccentric typeface in red and are consequently almost illegible. The captions, in grey, are not much better.

Finally, given that for the majority of Kauffer's career he was in London, prior to scrambling back to New York in 1940, it is disappointing that none of the many English museums and galleries approached by the curators agreed to provide a venue for the exhibition.

¹ Reviewed by Richard Shone in this Magazine, 122 (1980), pp.512–13.

² See B. Webb and P. Skipwith: *Design: E. McKnight Kauffer*, Suffolk 2007. The exhibition was reviewed by Richard Shone in this Magazine, 153 (2011), pp.757–58.

³ G. Grigson: 'The evolution of E. McKnight Kauffer, a master designer', *Commercial Art* 18 (1935), pp.202–06, at pp.202–03.

Leon Kossoff: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings

By Andrea Rose. 640 pp. incl. 566 col. + 69 b. & w. ill. (Modern Art Press, London, 2021), £175. ISBN 978-1-916347-41-0.

by BETH WILLIAMSON

This publication is a landmark study of the work of Leon Kossoff (1926–2019), which brings together the entirety of his oil paintings for the first time. Beautifully produced in grey cloth binding, it includes a commentary that expands on existing criticism and material from the Leon Kossoff Archives. It also draws on conversations between Andrea Rose and the artist, as well as Rose's discussions with his family, friends and sitters. Kossoff was a figurative painter known for his life drawing, portraits and cityscapes of London. Most notably, this book allows the reader to discover the artist's London, its ebb and flow. It was, after all, ordinary suburban scenes that mattered to him. In 1996, on the occasion of Kossoff's Tate retrospective, Lucian Freud described the artist's paintings as celebrations.¹ While he did indeed celebrate the everyday people and places of London, always rooted in reality, time after time he saw the world afresh; familiar subjects were continually made new. This is made abundantly clear in a catalogue that documents more than seventy years of work, in which the earliest painting, made in 1944 when Kossoff was just seventeen years old, depicts a similar subject – a suburban garden in Willesden Green – to one made in 2015. As the artist said, 'I have to



7. *View of Hackney with Dalston Lane, Monday morning, spring*, by Leon Kossoff. 1974. Oil on board, 139.5 by 183 cm. (© Leon Kossoff Estate; photograph Anthony d'Offay, London).

see things anew, otherwise it's just dragging up the past' (p.17).

The unmistakable materiality of Kossoff's heavy impasto paintings sits in opposition to the transitory nature of the scenes he depicted, such as Willesden Junction, York Way railway bridge and Kilburn underground station. This contradiction is at the heart of his paintings and is what lends them such vitality. Kossoff's figures too appear to breathe as they emerge from the mass of paint surrounding them. For his portraits, he did not dress the scenes, depicting only the figure, alone on the canvas, as seen, for example, in the paintings of his father; his friend the artist John Lessor; and Kossoff's wife, Rosalind. During his time as a student, Kossoff visited the National Gallery, London, making drawings of the old-master paintings in its collection, an activity that he continued throughout his long career. In his essay Barnaby Wright suggests this was not an act of homage, but instead a search for something new, arguing that Kossoff's relationship to the old masters sparked shifts in his painting. Wright also looks beyond the National Gallery collection to account for the significance of major exhibitions in Kossoff's development, such as the retrospectives of Poussin at the Royal Academy of Arts

in 1995 or Constable at the Tate Gallery in 1991. While there was, generally, no direct connection between his studies of the old masters and his other work, the energy with which he drew cityscapes was no less than that in his encounters with the work of Titian, Constable or Rembrandt.

Rose's essay on Kossoff's studios, materials and techniques provides a wealth of information. There were, at different times, studios in Mornington Crescent, Bethnal Green, Willesden Green, Willesden Junction and Dalston Lane (Fig.7). In addition, there were various locations for him to draw and for storage. Kossoff preferred Stokes Paints from Sheffield for their plasticity and resilience and it is no surprise to learn that his studio floors oozed with paint: 'My studio is like a field, a field in a house. Muddy hillocks of paint-sodden newspapers cover the floor burying scraped-off images. Derelict boards stand in all corners, remnants of recent activity' (p.46). He drained oil from cans of paint, had a rigorous brush-cleaning routine, practised outdoor drawing in the morning and used an old green Saab as a mobile drawing studio for a period. When working on portraits he worked in the early morning, requiring sitters to arrive at 7 a.m.

These contributions set the scene for the catalogue entries that follow, each of which has been meticulously researched. All of Kossoff's cityscapes depict London and are titled after the relevant districts, street names,

building names or studio addresses. Details of sitters are provided in the first entry in which the sitter appears. Each also details the title, date, support, dimensions, inscription, ownership and provenance, as well as related exhibitions and literature. Furthermore, the catalogue's substantial backmatter is admirably comprehensive. It provides a list of Kossoff's works of art in public collections, a list of solo and group exhibitions, a bibliography, an appendix of destroyed works, an index of titles and a general index.

In her introductory essay Rose writes of Kossoff's paintings: 'In the web and weave of their surfaces they show us that, together with the places we inhabit and the people we know, we are part of a continual process, and that painting still serves as one of the most miraculous ways of defining our particular place and time within it' (p.22). With this in mind, her book is not only a vital point of reference for Kossoff's work, but also one that furthers our understanding of such a process, which is quite an achievement in itself.

1 Reviewed by Richard Kendall in this Magazine, 138 (1996), pp.618-19.

Short reviews

The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History

By James Clark. 704 pp. incl. 32 col. ills. (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2021), £25. ISBN 978-0-300-11572-7.

by MICHAEL CARTER

Between 1536 and 1540 every religious house in England and Wales, some 840 in total, was forcibly closed or submitted its 'voluntary' surrender to Henry VIII. In the space of four years, a way of life stretching back to 597 and the arrival of St Augustine and his fellow monastic missionaries on the Kentish shores was exterminated. The ruins of the Canterbury monastery that bore his name, and countless other monastic remains across the English and Welsh countryside, are enduring witness to the Dissolution of the Monasteries, marked by destruction of buildings and artefacts that even at the time were acknowledged as historical monuments and cultural treasures. It has been credibly estimated that at most five per cent of English medieval art survives; the figure is