

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Jimmy Wright

After the War

In collaboration with Corbett vs. Dempsey

Private view: Thursday 3 September, 6–8pm

Exhibition dates: 4 September–1 October 2026

Thomas Dane Gallery

11 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1

“These are not flowers as decoration but symbols of a deeper engagement with the vagaries of nature and self.” G. Glueck, *The New York Times*, 2001

In an era of reclaimed bigotry and graceless hysteria, the timing of the first-ever London exhibition of Jimmy Wright's emblematic flowers can only serve as impressive inspiration.

The field of painted flowers in *After The War* confronts and questions our certitudes—on beauty; on Academism; on stereotypes—and reminds us how artists such (and only such) as Wright can seemingly and seamlessly deal with the catastrophes that punctuate our lives.

Catastrophes: in 1966, a twenty-two-year-old Wright, then a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, lost his friend Ken Pullen, who was brutally murdered by a man he met at a bar. The event pushed Wright out of a city he saw then as dangerously homophobic. In 1970, a fire destroyed his house and all the artworks he had made while in Chicago, leaving him with only memories and sketches of his time there. In 1988, the major catastrophe of his life: Wright's partner Ken Nuzzo was diagnosed with HIV, and died three years later, taken by the wildfire that ravaged New York and its artistic communities.

In the years before that, Wright had blended memories of his Baptist upbringing in Tennessee and his later peripatetic existence with his own genre of faux-naïve, cartoonish depictions of motels, backyards, airports, Los Angeles bathhouses and New York gay clubs and nightlife. Once dubbed the ‘Gay Toulouse-Lautrec’, Wright observed and sketched in the ways of an American James Ensor, or George Grosz, whilst partaking in these hedonistic times *à la* David Hockney.

By 1988 Wright was no longer on the run, and the shock was profound; he concentrated almost entirely on still lives. In the final three years of his partner's life, and while he cared for him, Wright worked laboriously on six monumental ‘sunflower’ paintings, *Flowers for Ken*, layered with material, wilting and tilting, poignantly anthropomorphic. From then on, Wright used the motif as the ground for his practice – at the same time camp memento-mori, academic diversions, and crowd-pleasers.

Throughout the nineties, works such as the densely textured, emotionally charged *Sunflower Night* (1992), or *Raft of Medusa* (1996–98/2003–04), paved the way for the more fluid, Gorgon-like *Sun King* (2001) and *Gray Head* (2001), or the pastel nuances of *Pompeii Black No. 3* (2016).

The works assembled in the exhibition span 35 years of tremendous consistency and pathos in Wright's life and career.

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All retain their allegorical and truly original power: fleeting nature, flowers as corpses. In his own words, Wright sees them as the friends he lost to the battle of the epidemic. They remain here, and there, in their harrowing, ethereal beauty; after the dust settles, 'After the War'.

Jimmy Wright (b. 1944, Union City TN) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Down Home*, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago IL (2023); *Flowers for Ken*, Fierman, New York NY (2022), and *LA 73 – NY 74*, M&B Gallery, Los Angeles CA (2019). His work is in the collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA; the Speed Art Museum, Louisville KY; the Center for Book and Paper Arts, Columbia College, Chicago IL; and The Springfield Art Museum, Springfield MO, among other institutions. His most recent monograph, *Jimmy Wright: Bathhouse, Meatpacking District and the Dream Cards: New York Underground 1973-90*, was published in 2016. In 2018 he was named Academician of the National Academy of Design.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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