

**New Exhibition**

# Richard Pousette-Dart: Beginnings

## A Young Abstract Expressionist in New York

**23 October 2018 – 6 January 2019**

Kettle's Yard is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition in the UK of American artist Richard Pousette-Dart (1916–1992). A key figure of Abstract Expressionism, which transformed American art in the post-war years, Pousette-Dart's contemporaries included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Willem de Kooning. The exhibition will include painting, sculpture, works on paper and photography, revealing Pousette-Dart's significant contribution to American abstraction, as demonstrated by his constant commitment to experimentation and renewal. Despite enjoying a number of museum exhibitions in the United States, the artist has not been the subject of a major solo exhibition in the UK until now.

As its title suggests, *Richard Pousette-Dart: Beginnings* will focus largely on the formative stages of the artist's career, from the mid 1930s to early 1950s, during which time he was at the forefront of the genesis of the New York School and influenced a number of his peers, in particular Jackson Pollock who admired his early work. Kettle's Yard is the only public institution in the UK to hold works by Pousette-Dart in its permanent collection and the exhibition will show a selection of these pieces alongside significant loan works which have never been seen before in the UK. These include loans from the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Richard Pousette-Dart Estate and the artist's Foundation.

Richard Pousette-Dart was born in Minnesota in 1916 and attended Bard College for one semester in 1935, before independently pursuing his career as an artist in New York City. He was one of the youngest members of 'The Irascibles' – a group of artists, led by Barnett Newman, who denounced the Metropolitan Museum of Art in an open letter of 1950 for its failure to recognise abstract art. The letter prompted the now legendary photograph of the signatories, published in *Life* magazine

a year later, that came to define the leading figures in the first generation of Abstract Expressionism. Pousette-Dart was one of the first among his peers to paint on a monumental scale, an approach that was to become a hallmark of the New York School. A number of his large-scale works of the early 1940s predate those of contemporaries.

Jim Ede, creator of Kettle's Yard, met Pousette-Dart in New York in 1940 and thereafter the pair began a long-lasting written correspondence, with the vast majority of their dialogue taking place in the 1940s and 1950s. Through this lively and poetic discourse, they shared thoughts on poetry, music, nature and their mutual admiration for the work of the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915), another significant artist in the Kettle's Yard collection. Over 200 of these letters survive, held between Kettle's Yard and the Richard Pousette-Dart Foundation; this unpublished correspondence informs much of the new research for the exhibition.

Although Pousette-Dart is primarily remembered for his painting, this exhibition will include works on paper, photography and sculpture to demonstrate the fluidity with which Pousette-Dart moved between, and experimented with, different materials. Many of the works in the exhibition illustrate Pousette-Dart's interest in symbols, spirituality and world art cultures. Pousette-Dart built up his work through multiple layers, often altering it numerous times through a process of continual renewal.



Richard Pousette-Dart, *Within the Room*, 1942, Oil on canvas and wood, Overall: 36 x 60 in. (91.4 x 152.4 cm), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; 50th Anniversary gift of the artist. 2014.99

The exhibition will include a number of significant early paintings, such as *Within the Room* (1942), *East River Sun* (1947–9) and *Crucifixion, Comprehension of the Atom* (1944), and works on paper, such as *Undulation Series* (c. 1941–1944), all of which were produced during a period of war-time destruction or post-conflict renewal. These will be joined by exquisite large-scale works on paper in which Pousette-Dart experiments with Surrealist and Cubist-inspired imagery and abstract forms layered over gridded structures that are also often found in his early paintings.

Pousette-Dart also experimented with wire sculptures and an example from 1950 will be on display, alongside a number of early stone works and his carved brass sculptures. Kettle's Yard's own set of brass and jade rings (c. 1940-1951) reflects Pousette-Dart's fascination with the symbolism of the circle. Pousette-Dart's continuing interest in this motif and the spiral as transcendental symbols, often inspired by forms in nature, as well as his fascination with light and space, will be presented through later large-scale and consuming paintings such as *Presence, Ramapo Mist* (1969), which measures over three metres wide and two metres tall.

Pousette-Dart's photographic works will be shown in the Edlis Neeson research space, including portraits of Jim Ede, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, as well as the important art dealer Betty Parsons and the artist William Congdon, who is also represented in Kettle's Yard's collection. Pousette-Dart's photographic techniques share a depth of field, created through a layering of imagery and surface, that is characteristic of his paintings and works on paper.

The exhibition is curated by Dr Jennifer Powell, Head of Collection, Programme and Research at Kettle's Yard and Lecturer in 20th Century Art History at the University of Cambridge. It will be accompanied by an extensive publication containing new research and essays by scholars Lowery Stokes Sims (curator of a major survey exhibition on the artist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1997), Charles H. Duncan (Director of the artist's Foundation), Dr Lucy Kent (art historian) and Patti Trimble (Pousette-Dart's studio assistant in the early 1980s). Richard Pousette-Dart taught at a number of art institutions in the United States and his students included Christopher Wool and Ai Weiwei who have spoken warmly of the artist and of the openness of his teaching style.

## Notes to Editors

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The exhibition is made possible by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art (TFAA).

## About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard is one of Britain's best galleries - a beautiful and unique house with a distinctive modern art collection, and a gallery exhibiting modern and contemporary art. Supporting this is an established learning and community engagement programme, archive, and programme of chamber concerts. In February 2018, Kettle's Yard reopened after a two year development by architect Jamie Fobert. The new Kettle's Yard includes major new exhibition galleries, generous education spaces, a café and new welcome areas. Kettle's Yard's mission is to contribute to society by inspiring and engaging audiences through art, learning and research of the highest quality. We believe that great art should not be the privilege of the few, but for everyone. Our values reflect Kettle's Yard's creator Jim Ede's support for artists and belief in art's power to make us look again and change how we act in the world.

[kettlesyard.co.uk](http://kettlesyard.co.uk)

## About the Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. Recognizing the importance of experiencing original works of art, the foundation provides opportunities for interaction and study, beginning with the presentation and growth of its own art collection in Chicago. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research, and educational programs. Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them.

[terraamericanart.org](http://terraamericanart.org)

## About University of Cambridge Museums

Kettle's Yard is part of the consortium of the University of Cambridge Museums, which also includes the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Museum of Zoology, the Museum of Classical Archaeology, Whipple Museum of History of Science, the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences, the Polar Museum and the Botanic Garden.

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