

ANTHONY REYNOLDS GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

IAN BREAKWELL

IMPORTANT WORKS FROM THE '60s AND '70s

21 JANUARY – 21 FEBRUARY 2015

30 years ago, on April Fools Day, Anthony Reynolds Gallery presented the first exhibition in its cavernous Old Street basement space: *New Work by Ian Breakwell*. The series of monumental paintings on display were far from what his many followers anticipated; but then Breakwell was an artist whose championship of the extraordinary in the ordinary was always unexpected. As the late, great commentator Tom Lubbock put it: *'he was a painter, diarist, film-maker, fiction writer, photographer, and broadcaster. His work was a series of one-offs and each one is a surprise...a heartening affirmation of unfathomable ongoing ordinariness'*. Breakwell was indeed all these things and more, a great polymath artist with a roll-call of heart-and-soul-mates that included James Joyce and Robert Walser, Schubert and Thelonius Monk, Goya and Magritte, Ingmar Bergman and Buster Keaton, and who, in the words of Felicity Sparrow, was *'the champion of the underdog. The unseen, the unloved. And the unlovely.'*

Breakwell was and is a unique and hugely influential figure, one of the greatest exponents of the visual language of word and text. Surrealism, Letterism, Fluxus, Happenings, Systems, chance and order are all part of his make-up; even the Kitchen Sink School, but without any of the turgidity. Out of these and his working class Midlands background Breakwell fashioned a brilliant and utterly singular oeuvre. There is certainly a dark side to his work which frequently verges on the repellent but its essential humanity and surreal humour always triumphs. His texts and images weave together the slight with the profound, digging nuggets of gold out of the mud of the everyday. *'Reassuringly familiar starting points, i.e. clichés, are the deliberately chosen basis of most of my artwork, whether writings, drawings, paintings, films or videotapes. Then the way is clear to test and turn that familiarity into unexpected forms which hopefully disturb complacency.'*

Ten years after his death in 2005, Anthony Reynolds Gallery is presenting a selection of major works from the first two decades of Breakwell's career. The exhibition includes the most comprehensive expression of Breakwell's major diary pieces, *The 1974 Diary*. This massive work has not been seen complete in London since his ICA exhibition in 1977. The show also includes important and rarely seen works from the 60's, among them the apparently gruesome diptych, *The Kill* (1969) and the remarkable *Description of a Picture* (1968) which is a long distance forerunner of countless descriptive 'word pictures' of more recent years. Further exhibits include two rare studies for the *Walking Man Diary* of 1975-78 (Tate Collection) a unique large-scale work derived from an early performance piece, *Buffet Car News* (1967), and a series of three sexually challenging collages from 1971.

Breakwell's last major work, *BC/AD*, is included in the exhibition *Self: Image and Identity: Self-Portraiture from Van Dyck to Louise Bourgeois* at the Turner Contemporary in Margate from 24 January to 10 May.

Please be advised this exhibition contains images of a sexually explicit nature.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND IMAGES PLEASE CONTACT DANIEL@ANTHONYREYNOLDS.COM