

Sometimes, when we look back at a series of art-works, their significance for us seems even greater than when they were first produced. This is true of a series called *Of The Times*, large paintings dating between 1983 and 1996 by the Israeli-British artist Amikam Toren, one of the UK's leading conceptual artists. For these paintings, the artist pulverised a single issue of the United Kingdom's most respected daily newspaper, *The Times*. All that he preserved was part of the masthead and date, with a fragment of the headline from a particular day. He ground up the rest of the newspaper, to use it as pigment, mixed it with PVA as the medium and painted it onto a large canvas in the form of a single letter in a unique letterform. The masthead, signed by Toren and mounted on card, stands beside each painting as gallery label and authenticating witness simultaneously.

The *Of the Times* series is of fundamental importance to Toren. In 1984, when he had painted ten of them, Toren declared: 'These are probably the first paintings that I have done – the others were pictures. The difference is qualitative. A picture is content to be a partial statement, a painting is a different kind of endeavour – it is more ambitious.' For Toren, these paintings are defining statements about art, and about his own vision and position as an artist. For the Biennial, I have selected a dozen of them, ranging from some of the earliest to some of the latest in the series, together with half a dozen preparatory drawings.

In English, the 26 individual letters of the Latin alphabet are arbitrary signs. For Chinese viewers, the profundity and resonance of Toren's individually-designed letters will, I am sure, be easy to grasp, because Chinese characters, unlike letters of the English alphabet, are inherently imbued with multiple layers of meaning. The richly historic and revered art of calligraphy attests to the crucial importance of both the written word and its visual form in China.

From the perspective of 2023, the *Of The Times* paintings have gained an additional level of meaning. It is this which gives them their landmark significance. During the years in which Toren produced the paintings, the world was shifting from an analogue print culture into a digital one. The world-wide-web, invented by Tim Berners-Lee, was released to the general public at the end of 1991 and a new Information Age began. Today, billions of people interact on the Internet and derive their news from it. Now, the *Of The Times* paintings can be seen as standing at an intersection point which they help define: the period in which the fundamental transition was made between the analogue print technology of the past and the modern digital world.

A fully-illustrated catalogue written by Professor Lindley, in English and Mandarin Chinese, will be available from mid-April.

Born in Israel, 1945, Toren has lived in London since 1968 and has had UK solo exhibitions at The Serpentine Gallery, 1976; The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1979; Chisenhale Gallery and Arnolfini, 1991. His work has been included in the Paris Biennale, 1967; Venice Biennale, 1982; Tyne International, 1993 and the 4<sup>th</sup> Guangzhou Triennial, 2012. Other exhibitions include the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2008; Neuberger Museum of Art, New York, 2009; Jerwood Drawing Prize, 2011; Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2010, 2012 and 2015; John Moores Painting Prize, 2012; The Hite Foundation, Korea, 2013 and solo shows with MOT Brussels, 2014 and Art Seen Projects, Nicosia, 2015. Toren was awarded the Bryan Robertson Trust Award in 2012 and the David and Yuko Juda Art Foundation Grant in 2021. His first solo exhibition in the USA was at the Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco, 2013 where he showed again in 2017. He was included in the exhibition *Unorthodox* at the Jewish Museum, New York, 2015 and Anthony Reynolds Gallery staged a solo presentation of Toren's work as part of *Back to the Future* at Artissima, Turin in 2015. Further recent solo exhibitions were *Framework/Ossatura* at FL Gallery Milan in collaboration with Anthony Reynolds Gallery in 2017, *Safe City* at Matt's Gallery in 2018 and two curated by Phillip Lindley at Wolfson College, Cambridge and Loughborough University in 2021 and 2023 respectively, both accompanied by illustrated catalogues. His most comprehensive survey exhibition to date *This Way Up* launched in 2020 on [www.pataphysic.com](http://www.pataphysic.com) remains live. Toren also exhibits regularly at the Noga Gallery, Tel Aviv and has been represented by Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London since 1985.