







Key Decades

EXHIBITION - BOOK - FILM

GEOFFREY KEY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

PREVIEW EVENING

FRIDAY 13th MAY 2022: 7pm - 10pm

EXHIBITION

14th MAY - 14th JUNE 2022

ALL WORKS ARE AVAILABLE UPON RECEIPT OF THIS CATALOGUE



Cheshire Art Gallery
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ISBN: 978-1-7397060-1-2 © Geoffrey Key - Cheshire Art Gallery.



Intro

We are delighted to present our long awaited Key Decades exhibition, as we have long felt that Geoffrey Key's work demanded a significant retrospective.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Covid to be precise, the curation has taken more than 4 years. However, there have been unexpected benefits, in that we have been able to track down other rare and purportedly lost works which have enabled us to present a more complete and at times, surprising perspective on Geoffrey's work.

Geoffrey Key is an important and highly distinctive artist, as well as a great friend, so it seemed fitting to further mark the occasion by commissioning a book and a film to document Geoffrey's highly individual artistic journey.

Matt and Ella



www.cheshireartgallery.co.uk



Preface

In a career spanning over sixty years Geoffrey Key, one of Britain's most popular and distinctive artists, has created diverse and highly original works of art. He has followed an idiosyncratic creative path and gone to extraordinary lengths to fashion his own particular artistic signature.

The road he has travelled to achieve this included, when already a successful artist, spending a complete year in the painting over and over again of one hill – the Nab, in an attempt to erase his early influences, a feat of individuality mirrored by his subsequent refusal to follow contemporary fashions in art. The dramatic and surprising significance of this daring experiment and the metamorphosis it engendered are writ large throughout the exhibition.

This almost 'Taoist' approach has resulted in both unexpected consequences and a highly distinctive style based on a fusion of line, tone and colour melded by hard-won painterly craft. There are influences, Cubism being a notable one, but the work itself cannot be bracketed by any label. This, of course, will not be 'news' to his legion of admirers but the range of work in this exhibition may, I suspect, deliver surprises even to some of these.

The 'Key Decades' exhibition is the first full retrospective of these sixty-three years, enabling a comprehensive appreciation of three of the most arresting aspects of Geoffrey Key's artistic journey: the continuous development of his distinctive style through line, tone and colour, his interpretation of a particular subject, a single topic which he paints in series, and his constant circling back to re-invent previous themes. However, 'caveat emptor', the journey is far from over.

There are few artists with whom particular artistic tropes are associated as being peculiarly their own original trademarks but with Key there are several, such as his human forms all bearing the impression of his 'Nab' period or his trademark 'Keysian' clouds. In the 'Key Decades' exhibition the ever shifting form of these signatures and their development may be followed decade by decade.

That this is possible is down to an almost forensic feat of detective work undertaken by Matthew Leech and Ella Pemberton of Cheshire Art Gallery. In this, if in nothing else, the recent pandemic has proved an unexpected bonus, in that it led to Geoffrey's 'Isolated Heads' series and afforded more time to track down several rare early works, some of which had been previously considered lost.

Perhaps it is some of these which will surprise even the most ardent Key aficionados, as they challenge the orthodox opinion on the Geoffrey Key canon. The care and passion with which the exhibition has been curated extends to the commissioning of an accompanying book, providing a critical analysis of Geoffrey's life and work and a film in which Geoffrey talks candidly about his journey as an artist.

Enjoy
Nick Brown OBE, FRSA





Cat No: 1
Title: Stage Lights
Year: 2022
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 16" x 12"
Price: £7,199





Cat No: 2
 Title: Hand Jive
 Year: 2022
 Medium: Oil on Board
 Size: 16" x 12"
 Price: £7,199



Cat No: 3
 Title: Dancer in Spotlight
 Year: 2022
 Medium: Oil on Board
 Size: 12" x 16"
 Price: £7,199





Cat No: 4
Title: Chorus
Year: 2021
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 30" x 24"
Price: £15,499



Cat No: 5
Title: Girl with Blue Hair
Year: 2021
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 20" x 16"
Price: £9,599

Isolated Heads

Geoffrey Key's Isolated Heads series must be a contender for the best observed and most acutely felt coverage, in the arts, of the recent pandemic. Isolated himself, Geoffrey created thirty images for company, each one experiencing one of the particularly vivid mood swings we all felt.

The heads sold rapidly with the gallery able to reserve only a single one for the exhibition. Fortunately, Geoffrey commissioned a book to celebrate the series in which all thirty heads could all be seen together in the manner the series intended.



Cat No: 6
Title: Isolated Head 18
Year: 2020
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 12" x 16"
Price: £9,999

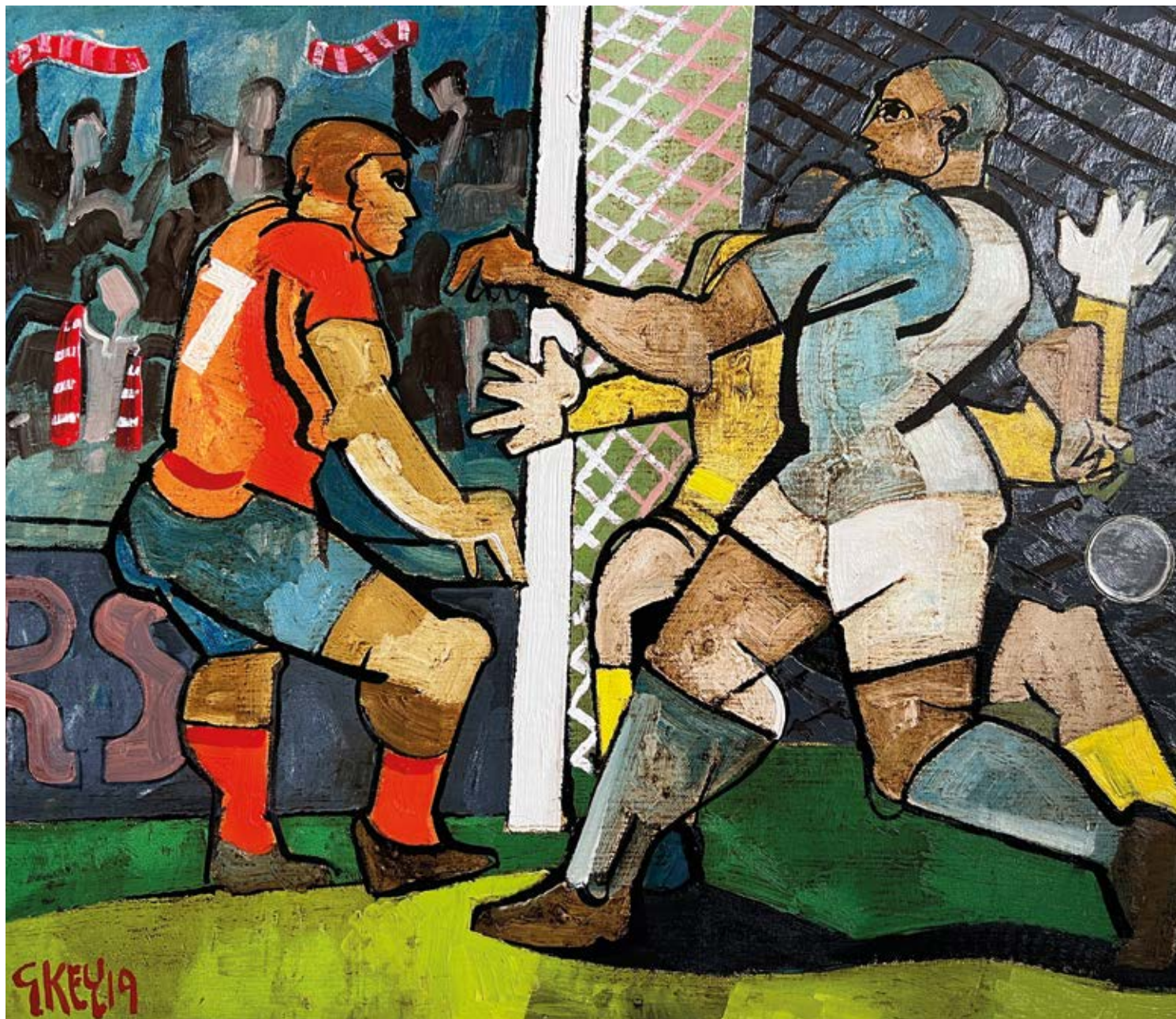


Cat No: 7
Title: Jester Jug
Year: 2020
Medium: Work on Paper
Size: 23" x 24"
Price: £6,499



Cat No: 8
Title: City Skyline
Year: 2019
Medium: Work on Paper
Size: 15" x 21"
Price: £4,999





Cat No: 9
Title: Goal
Year: 2019
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 20" x 24"
Price: £11,999





Photo: Evolution of woman
with white bird



Cat No: 10
Title: Woman with White Bird
Year: 2019
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 37" x 30"
Price: £24,999



Cat No: 11
Title: Garden Figure
Year: 2018
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 16" x 12"
Price: £7,199





Cat No: 12
 Title: Over the Jump
 Year: 2018
 Medium: Oil on Canvas
 Size: 20" x 24"
 Price: £11,999



Cat No: 13
Title: Entertaining the Queen
Year: 2017
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 24" x 36"
Price: £17,999





Cat No: 14
Title: Cloud Rhythm
Year: 2016
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 20" x 24"
Price: £11,999



Cat No: 15
Title: Road to the Wood
Year: 2016
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 20" x 36"
Price: £16,499



Cat No: 16
 Title: Jester
 Year: 2016
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 17" x 12"
 Price: £4,499

Cat No: 17
 Title: Chamber Stick
 Year: 2015
 Medium: Oil on Canvas
 Size: 30" x 20"
 Price: £13,499



Cat No: 18
Title: Window King & Queen
Year: 2015
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 30" x 20"
Price: £13,499





Field Dancers

The enigma that is 'Field Dancers' certainly should stop you in your tracks, this is a Geoffrey Key masterpiece in which story and myth are interlinked in a way which constantly draws the viewer back to look again. Who are these strange creatures dressed and undressed as if for summer dancing in these winter fields? What manner of ritual is this in which they appear to be dancing the dormant landscape back to life in their own rite of spring? An amazing and arresting painting.

Cat No:	19
Title:	Field Dancers
Year:	2014
Medium:	Oil on Canvas
Size:	36" x 36"
Price:	£23,999



Cat No: 20
Title: Embrace with Flowers
Year: 2014
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 24" x 20"
Price: £11,999





Cat No:	21
Title:	Blue Chair Figure
Year:	2011
Medium:	Oil on Canvas
Size:	24" x 20"
Price:	£11,999



Cat No:	22
Title:	Sky Rider
Year:	2004
Medium:	Oil on Canvas
Size:	24" x 20"
Price:	£11,999



Cat No: 23
Title: Road & Clouds
Year: 2001
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 16" x 20"
Price: £9,599



Cat No: 24
 Title: Clown
 Year: 2001
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 8.5" x 7"
 Price: £2,199



Cat No: 25
 Title: Beach Figures
 Year: 1996
 Medium: Oil on Canvas
 Size: 20" x 30"
 Price: £13,499



Cat No:	26
Title:	Hillside Figure
Year:	1994
Medium:	Oil on Canvas
Size:	16" x 12"
Price:	£7,999



Cat No: 27
Title: Poppies
Year: 1994
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 20" x 16"
Price: £9,749



Cat No: 28
Title: Garden Figures II
Year: 1993
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 21" x 16"
Price: £10,999



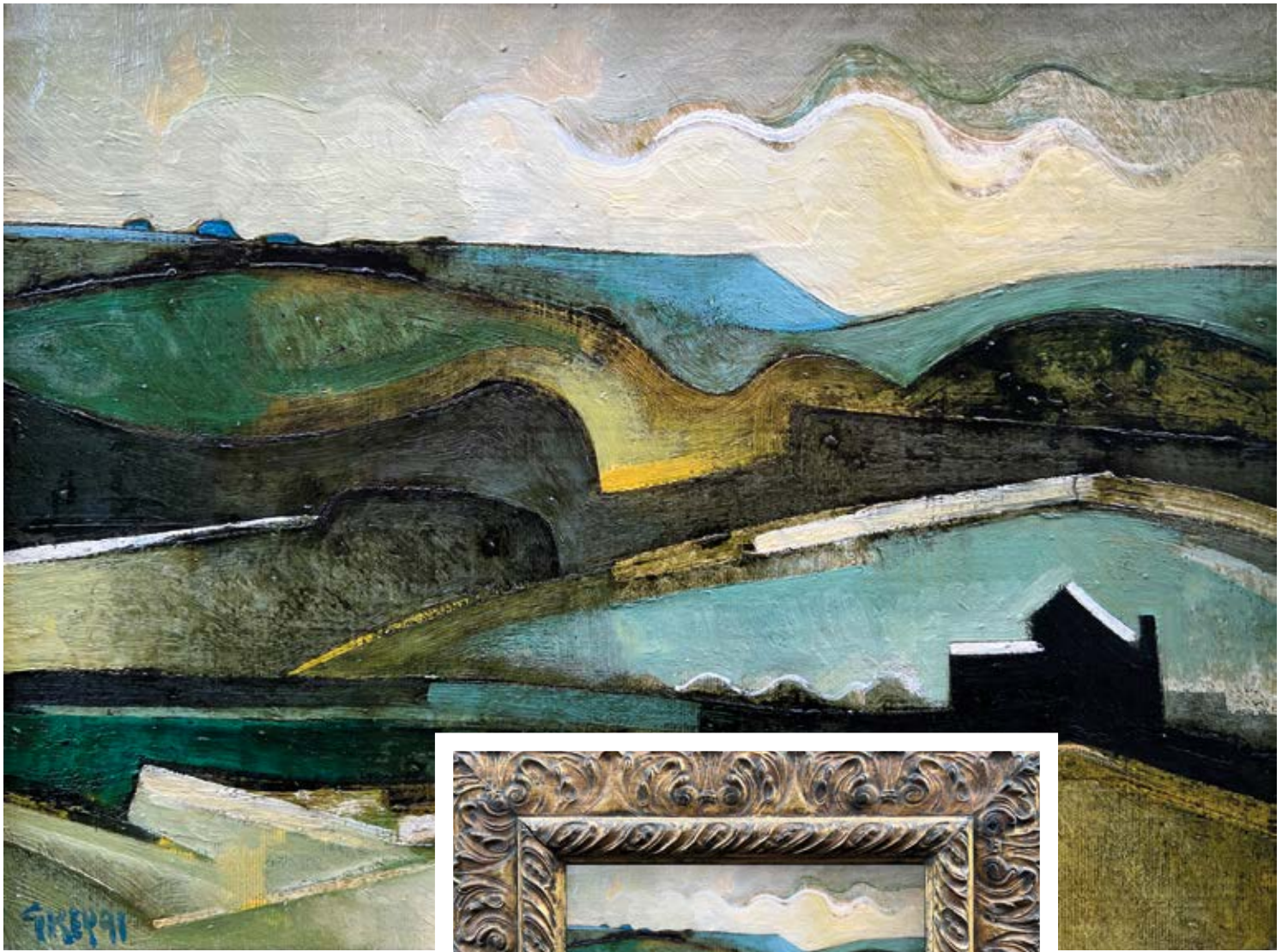
Cat No: 29
 Title: Figure Study
 Year: 1993
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 11" x 11"
 Price: £3,249



Cat No: 30
 Title: White Bird
 Year: 1992
 Medium: Painted Papier Mache Dish
 Size: 16" x 3"
 Price: £2,499



Cat No:	31
Title:	Shuttered Window
Year:	1992
Medium:	Oil on Board
Size:	14" x 16.5"
Price:	£7,749



Cat No: 32
Title: Black Farm
Year: 1991
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 12" x 16"
Price: £7,199





Standing Woman

'Standing Woman' exactly captures a mood of pensive reflection tinged with melancholy in a work of delicate beauty. But look again and wonder how the artist achieves this, it is more abstract than figurative and borrows heavily from Geoffrey's cubist influences. The stomach is distorted and displaced, the shoulders are misaligned, the heavy limbs bear their 'Nab' origin whilst the powerful column of the neck ends in the delicate minimalism of the face. Described as such it sounds a mess and yet in the artists hands it is a work of sensitive beauty and grace.

Cat No:	33
Title:	Standing Woman
Year:	1987
Medium:	Oil on Canvas
Size:	30" x 20"
Price:	£12,999



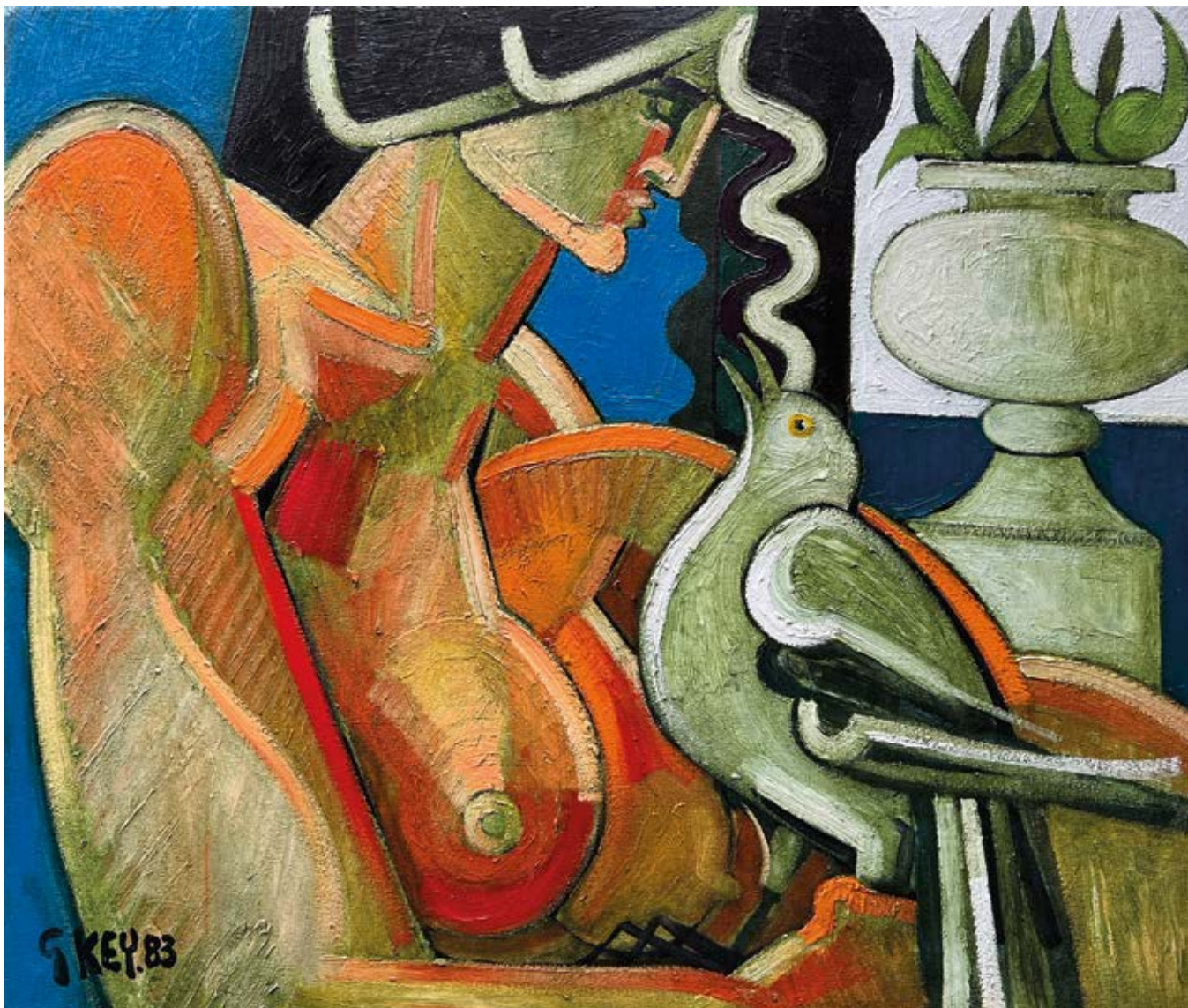
Cat No:	34
Title:	Moon Figure
Year:	1985
Medium:	Oil on Board
Size:	24" x 36"
Price:	£19,999







Cat No: 35
Title: Field Riders
Year: 1985
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 32" x 28"
Price: £17,999



Cat No: 36
Title: White Bird
Year: 1983
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 24" x 28"
Price: £14,749





Cat No: 37
 Title: Cumbrian Church
 Year: 1982
 Medium: Hand painted Vase
 Size: 8" x 6.5"
 Price: £1,999



Cat No: 38
 Title: Cumbrian Landscape
 Year: 1982
 Medium: Hand painted Vase
 Size: 10" x 5"
 Price: £1,999



Cat No: 39
 Title: Leaping Rider
 Year: 1981
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 15" x 15"
 Price: £3,999

Cat No: 40
Title: Aluminium Nude Torso
Edition: 1 of 2
Year: 1981
Medium: Aluminium
Size: 6" x 4"
Price: £8,499



Cat No: 41
Title: Bronze Nude Torso
Edition: 1 of 3
Year: 1981
Medium: Bronze
Size: 8" x 5"
Price: £8,999





Cat No: 42
 Title: Running Figure
 Year: 1974
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 6" x 3.5"
 Price: £1,249



Cat No: 43
 Title: Reclining Figure
 Year: 1974
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 3.5" x 6"
 Price: £1,249



Cat No: 44
 Title: Nab Hill Under Snow
 Year: 1974
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 4" x 9.5"
 Price: £1,799



Cat No: 45
 Title: Self Portrait
 Year: 1973
 Medium: Oil on Canvas
 Size: 10" x 7"
 Price: £4,499



Cat No: 46
 Title: Manchester Street Scene
 Year: 1971
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 20" x 30"
 Price: £6,999

Both the above paintings exemplify the artist's ability to impart a subject's essence in the way a literal portrayal could not. In 'Self Portrait', the thick swirling brush strokes create an air of pensive restlessness, suggesting an artist wrestling with the questions his art poses. 'Manchester Street Scene', with its teasing subtle cubism, grants us a definite feel of the place without us actually seeing anything concrete. Shapes swirl and shift aided and abetted by the subtle, fluctuating greys and blues, nothing fully exists but nevertheless it feels real.



Cat No: 47
Title: Bank Street, Salford
Year: 1971
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 24" x 30"
Price: £15,499



Cat No: 48
 Title: Broughton
 Year: 1971
 Medium: Oil on Board
 Size: 10" x 12"
 Price: £5,999



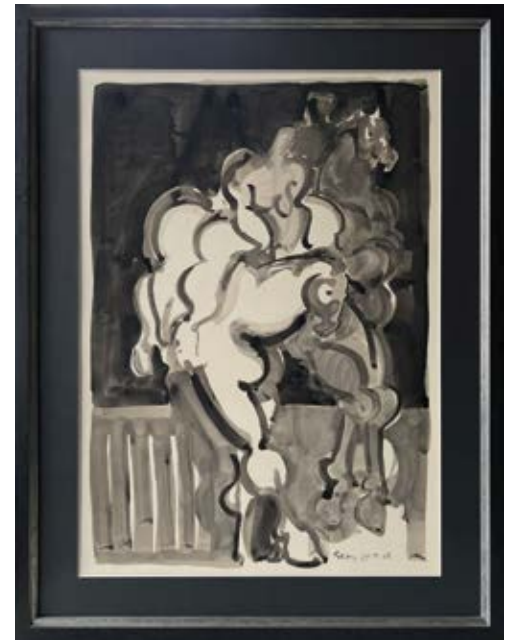
Cat No: 49
 Title: Broughton with Smoke
 Year: 1969
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 11" x 15"
 Price: £3,499



Cat No: 50
 Title: Albert Park, Broughton
 Year: 1969
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 12" x 16"
 Price: £3,799



Cat No: 51
 Title: Two Jumping Horses
 Year: 1968
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 28" x 20"
 Price: £5,999

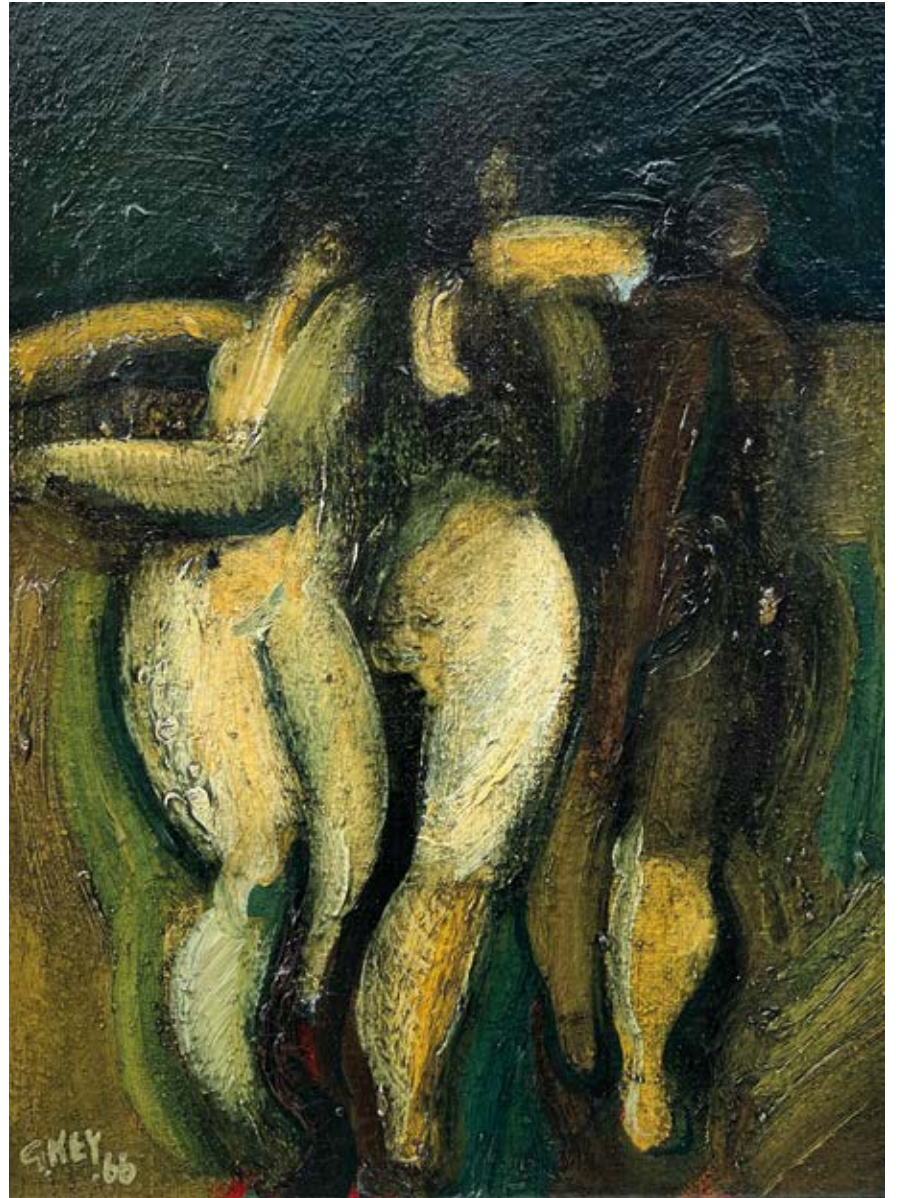


Cat No: 52
 Title: Terracotta Head
 Year: 1967
 Medium: Ceramic
 Size: 9.5" x 5"
 Price: £1,799





Cat No: 53
Title: Nab Figures
Year: 1966
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 18" x 14"
Price: £10,999





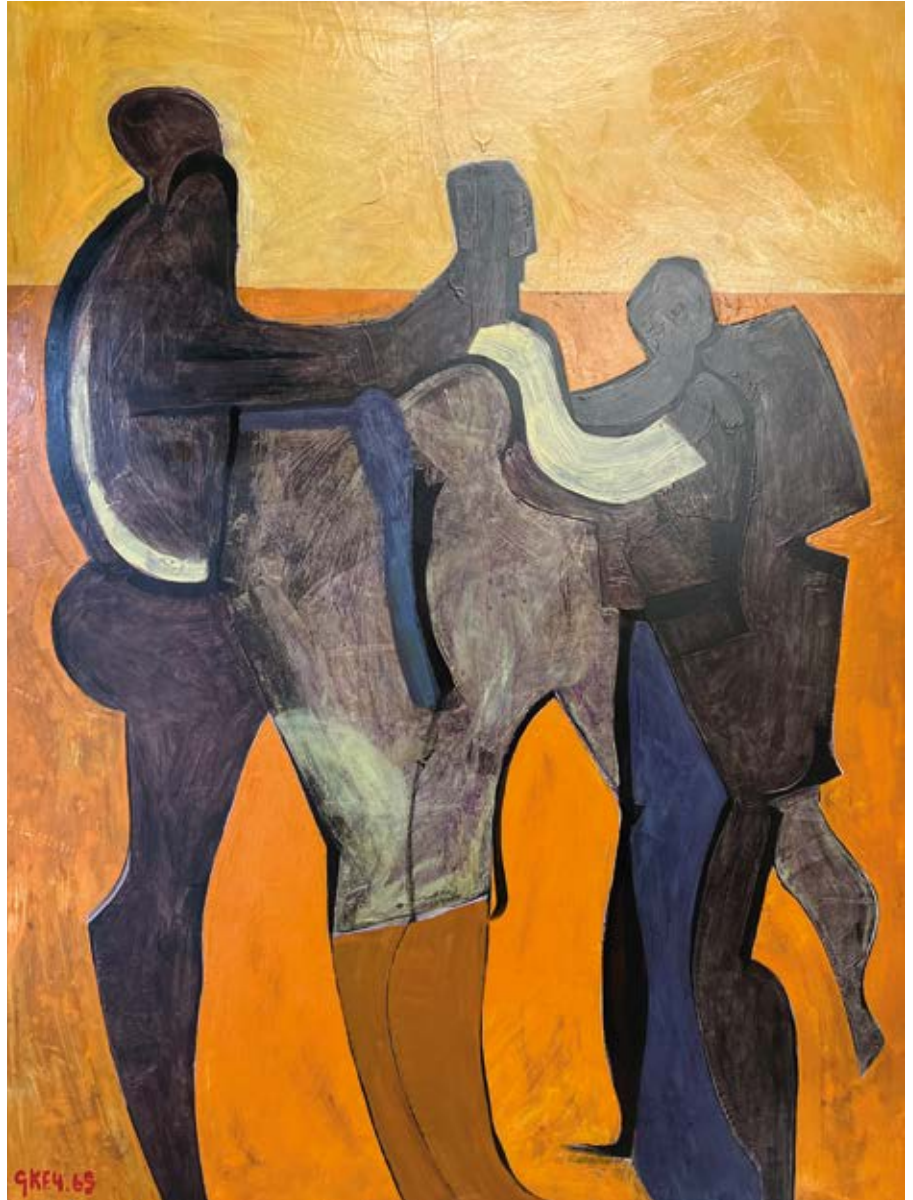
Cat No: 54
Title: Nab with Steps
Year: 1965
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 13" x 20"
Price: £8,499

Prodigal Son

The Prodigal Son is one of the pieces with which the exhibition challenges the orthodox view of Geoffrey Key's art. This is an unusual early piece, portraying a group of bulky figures who are gathered in a group in a flat, desert landscape. The colours are not at all what we expect from an early Key. The predominate colour is a vivid orange which merges in to a lighter, ochre sky. This work stands out almost as an outlier, pointing the way to later works both in the brilliance of the hues but also in tone and in the composition and heft of the figures. It effectively makes the point that even in his early years, it is a mistake to attempt to bracket Geoffrey's work. The range and variety has always been there.

The Prodigal Son featured in Geoffrey's first solo exhibition curated by the Salford Art Gallery and Museum, it had in fact been sold prior to the exhibition in 1966 and up until its recent discovery had remained, below the radar, unseen. It is the largest painting in the exhibition.

Cat No:	55
Title:	Prodigal Son
Year:	1965
Medium:	Oil on Board
Size:	48" x 36"
Price:	£34,999







Cat No: 56
 Title: Winter Nab
 Year: 1965
 Medium: Oil on Board
 Size: 18" x 29"
 Price: £12,999



Cat No: 57
 Title: Bird Shoot
 Year: 1965
 Medium: Oil on Board
 Size: 22" x 15"
 Price: £9,499



Cat No: 58
Title: Eccles Church
Year: 1965
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 25" x 36"
Price: £17,499



Horse and Rider

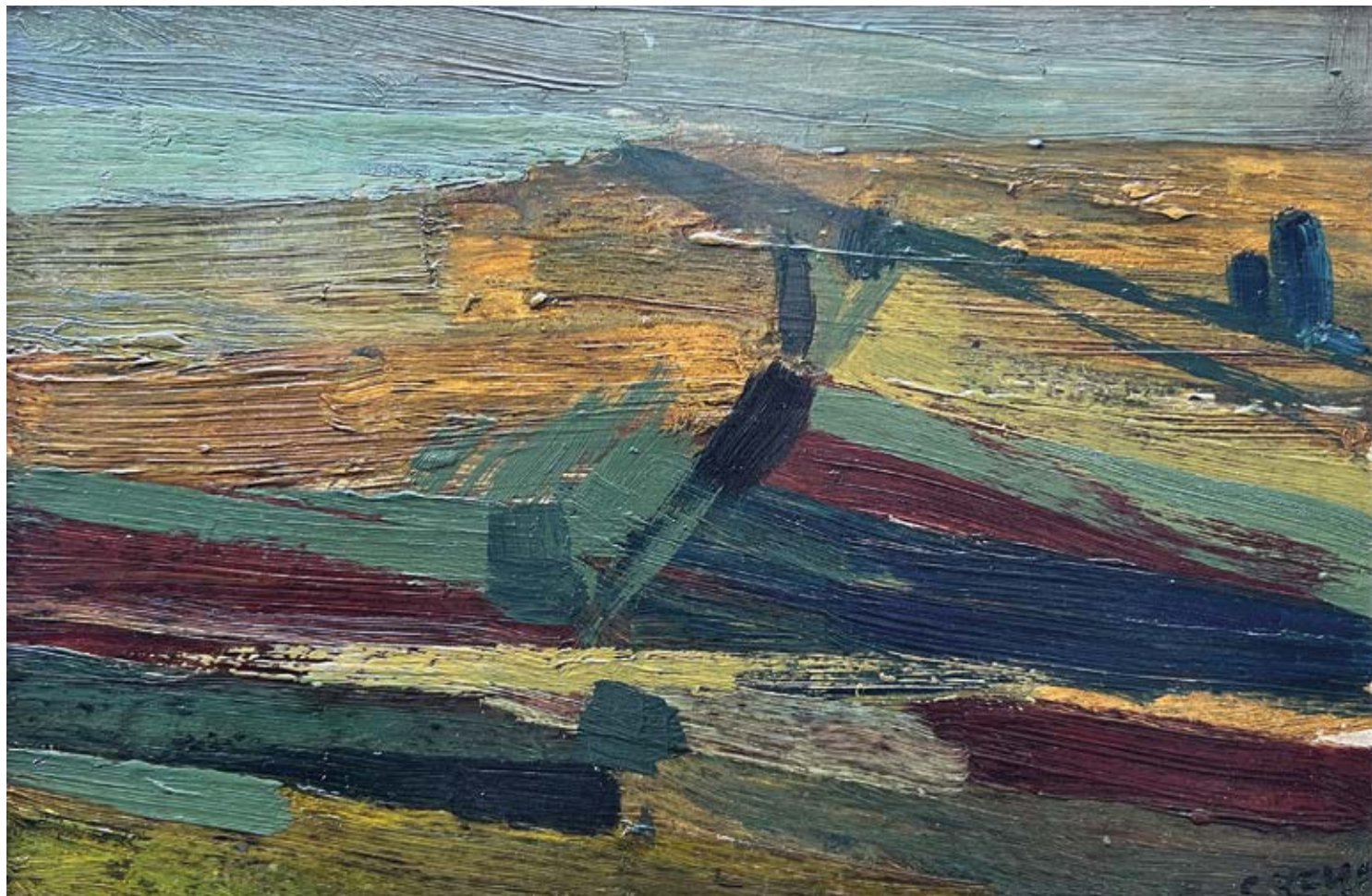
A fascinating and historic work, this sculpture from 1963 was the focal point of Geoffrey Key's post graduate degree and as a consequence is accompanied by a series of, rare, preliminary sketches giving us an insight into its aspirations and development.

Key wanted to work in three dimensions, not only to work with different materials but also to give depth, or in his own words, 'a sense of what lies behind the surface' to his painting. There is a feel of movement and tension in this piece caused in part by the differing angles of the horse and rider. This is particularly acute at the point where the rider has to adjust his posture as the horse lowers its neck to graze. 'Horse and Rider' was sold early as Geoffrey had no space to store it and it was believed to have disappeared, so we are fortunate that it has been tracked down and brought to light once again.

Cat No: 59
 Title: Horse & Rider - Original
 Year: 1963
 Size: 42h"x 36" x 14"
 Price: £39,999







Cat No: 60
Title: Nab Green
Year: 1963
Medium: Oil on Board
Size: 8" x 12"
Price: £5,499

Still Life 1959

This is a particularly interesting painting unearthed and acquired, through detective work, for the exhibition. Still Life 1959 is unusual, being oil on blackout curtain. The latter was provided by Geoffrey's mother, Marion, and had to be stretched by hand onto a picture frame.

It was the first Key painting ever to be sold and given its ad hoc construction is a most unusual, if not unique exhibit. Look at the patina of the paint for hints of the unusual background. A particularly mature study for one so young whose talent was recognised, even in those early years.



Cat No:	61
Title:	Still Life
Year:	1959
Medium:	Oil on Blackout Blind
Size:	18" x 23"
Price:	£12,999



Cat No: 62
 Title: Oxford Road Bar
 Year: 1959
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 7" x 6"
 Price: £1,749



Cat No: 63
 Title: Lyons Coffee House Albert Square + Sketches verso
 Year: 1958
 Medium: Work on Paper
 Size: 7" x 8"
 Price: £1,999



Cat No	Title	Year	Medium	Size (Inches)	Price
1	Stage Lights	2022	Oil on Board	16 x 12	£7,199
2	Hand Jive	2022	Oil on Board	16 x 12	£7,199
3	Dancer in Spotlight	2022	Oil on Board	12 x 16	£7,199
4	Chorus	2021	Oil on Canvas	30 x 24	£15,499
5	Girl with Blue Hair	2021	Oil on Board	20 x 16	£9,599
6	Isolated Head 18	2020	Oil on Board	12 x 16	£9,999
7	Jester Jug	2020	Work on Paper	23 x 24	£6,499
8	City Skyline	2019	Work on Paper	15 x 21	£4,999
9	Goal	2019	Oil on Canvas	20 x 24	£11,999
10	Woman with White Bird	2019	Oil on Board	37 x 30	£24,999
11	Garden Figure	2018	Oil on Canvas	16 x 12	£7,199
12	Over the Jump	2018	Oil on Canvas	20 x 24	£11,999
13	Entertaining the Queen	2017	Oil on Canvas	24 x 36	£17,999
14	Cloud Rhythm	2016	Oil on Canvas	20 x 24	£11,999
15	Road to the Wood	2016	Oil on Canvas	20 x 36	£16,499
16	Jester	2016	Work on Paper	17 x 12	£4,499
17	Chamber Stick	2015	Oil on Canvas	30 x 20	£13,499
18	Window King & Queen	2015	Oil on Canvas	30 x 20	£13,499
19	Field Dancers	2014	Oil on Canvas	36 x 36	£23,999
20	Embrace with Flowers	2014	Oil on Canvas	24 x 20	£11,999
21	Blue Chair Figure	2011	Oil on Canvas	24 x 20	£11,999
22	Sky Rider	2004	Oil on Canvas	24 x 20	£11,999
23	Road & Clouds	2001	Oil on Canvas	16 x 20	£9,599
24	Clown	2001	Work on Paper	8.5 x 7	£2,199
25	Beach Figures	1996	Oil on Canvas	20 x 30	£13,499
26	Hillside Figure	1994	Oil on Canvas	16 x 12	£7,999
27	Poppies	1994	Oil on Canvas	20 x 16	£9,749
28	Garden Figures II	1993	Oil on Board	21 x 16	£10,999
29	Figure Study	1993	Work on Paper	11 x 11	£3,249
30	White Bird on Papier Mache Dish	1992	Original Painting	16 x 3	£2,499
31	Shuttered Window	1992	Oil on Board	14 x 16.5	£7,749
32	Black Farm	1991	Oil on Canvas	12 x 16	£7,199

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Cat No	Title	Year	Medium	Size (Inches)	Price
33	Standing Woman	1987	Oil on Canvas	30 x 20	£12,999
34	Moon Figure	1985	Oil on Board	24 x 36	£19,999
35	Field Riders	1985	Oil on Board	32 x 28	£17,999
36	White Bird	1983	Oil on Canvas	24 x 28	£14,749
37	Cumbrian Church	1982	Hand painted Vase	8 x 6.5	£1,999
38	Cumbrian Landscape	1982	Hand painted Vase	10 x 5	£1,999
39	Leaping Rider	1981	Work on Paper	15 x 15	£3,999
40	Aluminium Nude Torso	1981	Aluminium 1 out of 2	6 x 4	£8,499
41	Bronze Nude Torso	1981	Bronze 1 of 3	8 x 5	£8,999
42	Running Figures	1974	Work on Paper	6 x 3.5	£1,249
43	Reclining Figure	1974	Work on Paper	3.5 x 6	£1,249
44	Nab Hill Under Snow	1974	Work on Paper	4 x 9.5	£1,799
45	Self Portrait	1973	Oil on Canvas	10 x 7	£4,999
46	Manchester Street Scene	1971	Work on Paper	20 x 30	£6,999
47	Bank Street, Salford	1971	Oil on Canvas	24 x 30	£15,499
48	Broughton	1971	Oil on Board	10 x 12	£5,999
49	Broughton with Smoke	1969	Work on Paper	11 x 15	£3,499
50	Albert Park, Broughton	1969	Work on Paper	12 x 16	£3,799
51	Two Jumping Horses	1968	Work on Paper	28 x 20	£5,999
52	Terracotta Head	1967	Ceramic	9.5 x 5	£1,799
53	Nab Figures	1966	Oil on Canvas	18 x 14	£10,999
54	Nab with Steps	1965	Oil on Board	13 x 20	£8,499
55	Prodigal Son	1965	Oil on Board	48 x 36	£34,999
56	Winter Nab	1965	Oil on Board	18 x 29	£12,999
57	Bird Shoot	1965	Oil on Board	22 x 15	£9,499
58	Eccles Church	1965	Oil on Board	24 x 36	£17,499
59	Horse & Rider 1963	1963	Original	42h x 36 x 14	£39,999
60	Nab Green	1963	Oil on Board	8 x 12	£5,499
61	Still Life	1959	Oil on Blackout Blind	18 x 23	£12,999
62	Oxford Road Bar	1959	Work on Paper	7 x 6	£1,749
63	Lyons Coffee House	1958	Work on Paper	7 x 8	£1,999

Key Decades: The Book

For an artist of Geoffrey Key's stature, it is highly surprising there has never been a biographical and artistic critical study in book form. This is largely explained by Geoffrey's reluctance to engage with the media and its mores. He has preferred to release books on varying aspects of his art with text by his wife, Judith O'Leary, and more recently the 'Isolated Heads' book which covers his work throughout the pandemic.

Key Decades is, therefore, the first full treatment of his life and oeuvre. It includes the fruits of a series of conversations held with the author over a period of four years. In these, Geoffrey 'opens up' and talks candidly about his life, artistic philosophy, influences and the manner in which his painting has evolved.

Geoffrey's is a fascinating story, bookended by the aftermath of the Second World war and the ongoing pandemic, tracing the development of a highly individual artistic style during the most rapid period of change the world has seen. Key's, at times Rabelaisian, love of life, scholarship and refusal to compromise his artistic integrity shines through it all.

Lavishly illustrated, the book is offered in two editions.

Hardback Limited Edition of 500
Signed by Geoffrey and the author - £69

Collector's Edition of 15
Beautifully presented in a handcrafted presentation box, each containing an original Geoffrey Key work on paper (12 x 12 inches). The particular work in each book will not be known until the book is opened but the works include historic sketches underpinning his major series - £999



| Limited Edition of 500



| Collector's Edition of 15



Envoi

We live in a throw-away world of social media influencers earning fame and money by urging us to acquire whatever is currently en vogue but will soon be worthless, inviting us to experience a series of sugar-rush pleasures that may give us a fleeting sense of being part of whatever is deemed to be fashionable. We live with news-bites and instant opinions, governed by a market sufficiently sophisticated to move us remorselessly onto the next thing before, moments later, we throw it away.

Geoffrey's life as an artist spans a period of considerable change, beginning with post war austerity then taking in the surge towards freedom and youth culture of the sixties, economic and social disorder, war, the restructuring of world order, pandemic and lockdown. It will be interesting to see how long the current phase of obsession with personal identity and its concomitant cancel culture lasts.

Whatever the answer it won't change the integrity of the way Geoffrey works any more than its predecessor fads managed to. In fact, I shouldn't imagine Geoffrey would even notice were he to be cancelled.

What a pleasure therefore to be able to spend time with the beauty of something hard won, impossible to imitate and constantly renewing and progressing, something that has endured and will continue to delight and surprise us. Something to cherish. Geoffrey Key.

Nick Brown

