

---

Rose Finn-Kelcey, *Here is a Gale Warning*, 1971 (Alexandra Palace, London). Silver gelatin print mounted on aluminium, 53.2 x 75.2 x 4 cm. Courtesy the Estate of Rose Finn-Kelcey

---

# Rose Finn-Kelcey

## *Power for the People*



---

### Information

2 December 2017 – 4 March 2018

Launch Event

Friday 1 December 2017, 6 – 9pm

---

Firstsite, Colchester, is delighted to present *Power for the People*, an exhibition of works by the highly acclaimed and influential British artist Rose Finn-Kelcey.

Finn-Kelcey (1945 – 2014) first came to prominence in the early 1970s as a central figure in Performance and Feminist art. This presentation, which is comprised of more than thirty works charting her forty-plus year career, highlights some of the recurring themes in Finn-Kelcey's work, in particular empowerment, voice, faith and spirituality, and explores the conceptual strategies she employed to illuminate them.

If Finn-Kelcey's artistic practice can be characterised at all, it would be by its unpredictability: each new work routinely defied the expectations created by its predecessor. *It Pays to Pray* (1999), originally in four parts and shown outside London's Millennium Dome, is illustrative. It consists of vending machines selling prayers viewed on an LED display screen. Each prayer is named after a chocolate bar, bidding users, 'the hungry souls', to make their choice and get a quick, spiritual fix, as they might from a chocolate bar. A similar dry wit is at play in *Jolly God* (1997), a hand-tufted woolen rug work based on a Vatican airmail stamp showing God as a piratical figure with an eye-patch. This enlarged representation literally brings the religious patriarch down from the heavens, back to earth to be used as a floor-covering for mankind.

The show also features two of Finn-Kelcey's performance-based films, each a documentation of the artist's investigations into the construction and presentation of the personal and political self. *Bull's Eye* (1985) centres around the figure of the matador. Over several years Finn-Kelcey insinuated herself into the lore and costume of the bullfighter and that of a flamenco dancer, engaging with concepts of control and precision, male/female ambiguity, ritual, and slaughter.

Also on display, *Cutout* (c. 1982) is a precursor performance of Finn-Kelcey's seminal work, *Glory*. First performed at the Serpentine Gallery, London, in 1983, this is the first time this film has been shown. In it, Finn-Kelcey acts as both animator and controller of 100 surrogate performers arranged on a large table. Conceived as a personal response to the Falklands War, the artist takes on the role of puppeteer, commanding various cardboard cut-out generals, dictators, political leaders and weapons with a rake. Mimicking the actions of the battlefield planner or casino croupier, Finn-Kelcey takes control from those who normally hold the reins of power. In her terms, 'playing God' in this way is a metaphor for the activity of the artist, and a means of questioning art's patriarchal associations with authority and mastery.

A unique work in her practice, *Truth, Dare, Double-Dare* (1994) encouraged Finn-Kelcey to relinquish control and authorship in order to create a collaborative work with fellow artist Donald Rodney (1961 – 1998). Both artists knew they took a risk in this commission by Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, but were keen to test the boundaries of collaboration and the delicate balance of individuality and ego involved. The resulting sound installation is the outcome of a painful process of confronting their own differences and incompatibility, challenging each other to say what they really thought of one another as in the children's game of the same name. Uncomfortable yet compelling in its rawness, this very personal work is as difficult to hear as it was to make.

The show's title comes from one of Finn-Kelcey's most notable public interventions, a word-based flag work sited at Battersea Power Station. Rich in nuance and ambiguity, *Power for the People* (1972) puns on a popular protest slogan of the time, and, of course, what the building generated. The flag works are both objects (in the artist's terms, 'wind-dependent sculptures'), and messengers – tools of communication. To underscore the importance of the flag works, Firstsite will show a number of preparatory collages which offer insight into the way Finn-Kelcey explored site and language, as well as filmed documentation of a range of other flag works in situ – *Fog*, 1971 (Nottingham Castle, Nottingham), *Here is a Gale Warning*, 1971 (Alexandra Palace, London), and *Variable Light to Moderate*, 1971 (Funkturn Tower, Berlin).

In response to these works and others that were not realised in her lifetime, two contemporary artists, both friends of Finn-Kelcey, will show works alongside the exhibition. Peter Liversidge (b. 1973) will make a giant flag for the gallery's entrance with the word 'HELLO' stitched in black on a white background, ushering visitors into the show. Simon Moretti (b. 1974) will show a neon work depicting a lightning strike taken from an eighteenth century Indian painting, an image often used as a symbol of divine intervention.

Says Firstsite Director, Sally Shaw: 'We are truly honoured to be showing this extraordinary body of work by Rose Finn-Kelcey. The exhibition, which is being staged during Firstsite's year-long exploration of identity, underlines not just Finn-Kelcey's enduring relevance and influence on contemporary art, but her formidable intelligence, wit and originality.'

---

**For more information, please contact  
Albany Arts Communications**

Mark Inglefield,  
mark@albanyartscommunications.com

t: + 44 (0) 20 73 88 09 97  
m: + 44 (0) 75 84 19 95 00

Carla von der Becke,  
carla@albanyartscommunications.com

t: + 44 (0) 20 73 88 09 97  
m: + 44 (0) 79 74 25 29 94

---

**Notes to Editors:**

**About Rose Finn-Kelcey:**

Born in 1945, Finn-Kelcey studied at Ravensbourne and then at Chelsea College of Art, before embarking on one of Britain's most significant post-war artistic journeys. She continued to live and work in London from 1968 until her death in 2014.

Over the course of her career Finn-Kelcey exhibited at numerous galleries in the UK including, in London, the Royal Academy of Arts, Whitechapel Gallery, Chisenhale Gallery, Matt's Gallery, the Serpentine Gallery, the Hayward Gallery, the Saatchi Gallery, Camden Arts Centre and Tate Britain; also at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. Worldwide, Finn-Kelcey exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, The British School at Rome, and at Documenta IX, Kassel. Most recently, she was the subject of a major show at Modern Art Oxford, *Rose Finn-Kelcey: Life, Belief and Beyond* (2017).

Her work can be found in national and international collections, most notably within the Tate Collection, The Arts Council Collection, The British Council Collection, The Victoria & Albert Collection, the Weltkunst Foundation and the Bernard Starkman Collection.

**About Firstsite:**

Firstsite is a public contemporary art gallery in Colchester, Essex. Over the last fifteen years it has gained a strong reputation, presenting ambitious work to new audiences in the East of England and beyond. Situated in Colchester's 'cultural quarter,' the present building was designed by Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly, and opened in 2011. Firstsite is a partner of Plus Tate, which uses Tate's resources to contribute to a network of arts organisations across the country, and to increase public access to the national collection of British and international modern and contemporary art. In November 2017, it will also stage *Grayson Perry: The Life of Julie Cope* (18 November 2017 – 18 February 2018), as well as the ongoing display *Wunderkammer*, a cabinet of curiosities drawn from the Ipswich and Colchester Museums.

---

Firstsite opening hours:  
Monday – Sunday, 10am – 5pm

---

Please visit the Firstsite website for more  
information: [www.firstsite.uk](http://www.firstsite.uk)



#RoseFinnKelcey  
#Firstsite



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

