Erró: Art History - Politics - Science Fiction

Exhibition 2 April – 14 May 1994
Free Admission

Born Gudmundur Gudmundsson Olafsvik in Iceland in 1932, Erró trained first at the Icelandic College of Art, where he specialised in drawing. At the age of twenty he left Iceland to continue his rat studies, first at the Oslo Academy, where he studies fresco painting and graphic art, then to the Academia in Florence, and finally in Ravenna, where he studied mosaic art. Since then he has travelled extensively in Europe, North America and the Far East. He currently lives and works in Paris, Thailand and Spain.

Erró has exhibited worldwide since his first exhibition at the Galleria Santa – Trinita in Florence in 1955, showing at Louisiana (1975), the Venice Biennale (1975 and 1986), the Pompidou Centre (1978), the Cite des Sciences, Paris (1990), the 1991 Biennale de Lyon and in the French Pavilion at Expo'92 in Seville. In 1982 he executed a 180m mural commission in Angouleme and in 1988 paintings for Lille City Hall.

His method of working is to search for pictorial information relevant to his theme – books, magazines or any other press / media related material – and then to collage it together so that the subject of the paintings begins to emerge. The finished collage is scaled up into a much larger work: The Fruitmarket Gallery will be exhibiting his *Science Fiction Scape* 220cm x 1320cm which will fill one of its longest walls.

In paintings such as *Ghost Rider*, *Otto Dix*, *Matisse* Erró uses computer-generated grids to structure the paintings, not unlike stained glass, giving the paintings a distorted perspective, which creates a remarkable effect.

The exaggerated style, colour and scale of his work is dazzling. The powerful cartoon images can lead to the immediate assumption that his work is light-hearted, but on closer inspection one realises that underneath the apparent humour lies an intense commentary of the upheaval in the world we live in today.

Erró has honoured Reykjavik by presenting the city with the greater part of his own private collection. Some of the works have been specially painted for the new Erró Museum and Cultural Centre, which the City of Reykjavik is planning to set up by renovating the large farmhouse at Korpulfsstadir, which is now on the outskirts of the capital.

A Pantheon of Images

It was my pleasure, during a respite from the January blizzards of 1993, to visit the large farmhouse at Korpúlfsstadir on the outskirts of Reykjavik, which is the proposed site of the new Erró Museum. The building is situated near the head of an estuary, with a backdrop of mountains apparently of Tibetan proportions. In a previous year I had travelled around Iceland visiting its spectacular glaciers and volcanic structures, and became aware of the magical, dream-like aspects of this elemental world. The setting for the entrance of the Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth,* it is a land of great mythologies and vibrancy of atmosphere.

In his capacity in invent and to compose his cosmology of images, taken from the world bank of comics and picture books, I find Erró's work similarly fascinating. Whereas the comic strip tradition originated in Britain about 1900 with children's humour, it was distinctly different in the States. 1929 saw the creation of *Tarzan of the Apes* and 1938 the Superhero comics and science-fiction. The 1950s saw the creations of Jack Kirby and, as exemplified in our exhibition image *Science Fiction Scape* 1992, it is from Kirby's work that Erró has drawn many of his comic images.

I am reminded of my first pleasure in reading Dan Dare in *The Eagle,* and the classic science-fiction comics with their futuristic plots and painstakingly drawn pictures and composed pictures. It is this nostalgic pleasure which is re-encountered as one experience of Erró's works, and the reminder of an evolved shorthand style of pictorial representation which relies upon the onlooker to fill in the gaps imaginatively – one of the differences from the fine art tradition, and one ot the attractions to children.

When it comes to his political works, however, it becomes apparent that Erró has also exploited and developed the theme of the megalomanic – another aspect of the comic strip tradition. In *Motorscape* and *Renaultscape* 1984 we are presented with the logical conclusion of Henry Ford's dream: a junk-yard landscape of broken-up cars, stretching beyond the horizon. Erró's paintings function, therefore, on various levels: as comic and artistic visions, futuristic science-scapes and political commentaries.

Erró has shown regularly since 1955 with major presentations in Munich, Paris New York and Tokyo. It seems suitable that Erró's first showing in the

United Kingdom should be in Scotland where, through the work of a number of talented artists (most notably Sydney Jordan, best known for the *Jeff Hawke* comic strip which appeared in *The Daily Express*) comic art is already well established.

It gives me great pleasure to present this unique and exciting exhibition in Edinburgh. I would like to thank Gunner Kvaran of the Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum for introducing me to Erró's work, and for his help in making this exhibition possible. I would also like to thank Erró for honouring The Fruitmarket Gallery with his first UK show.

Graeme Murray
March 1994

Born in Olafsvik, Iceland in 1932, Erró trained at the Icelandic College of Art in Reykjavik, and continued his studies in graphic art, fresco painting and mosaic in Norway and Italy.

Taking images collected on his travels, Erró uses computer-generated grids and an epidiascope projector to scale-up and collage these, and to distort their perspective. After making initial drawings based on this process, he adds colour and completes the work with the application of oil-based enamel paint.

He has exhibited and travelled worldwide, and currently maintains studios in Paris, Bangkok and Formentera, south of Ibiza.

'I always collect material when I travel round. In my Paris studio I have fifty drawers on one wall, and each drawer has a different subject. So I have all the sunsets in one drawer, all the mountains in another, all the hands, all the medical references, in another. This is the source of my work.'

'The illustrations of the Icelandic sagas, from around the ninth or tenth centuries, were pure comic strip, black outlines and flat colour surfaces. The influences of the Surrealist artists, Dalí, Magritte, Matta and Lam might have helped me, but the Icelandic sagas created my later style. My training as a Byzantine mosaic artist in Ravenna helped as well. And of course there are the modern comic books, with so many different styles.'

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Lindsays WS in the sponsorship of the ERRÓ exhibition. As one of the country's leading law firms, Lindsays WS believes that lawyers must communicate effectively, in a manner that

values each client's unique personality. By supporting this exhibition, Lindsays aims to highlight this relationship, and show that lawyers can be colourful too.

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