

>> OBITUARIES

■ IAN HAMILTON FINLAY 1925-2006

Ian Hamilton Finlay, the poet, publisher, sculptor and gardener died on March 27. He attended Glasgow College of Art before being called up for war service, after the war he worked as a shepherd on the Orkneys where he dreamed of a 'visionary happiness in discoursing with classically clad philosophers in a kind of bright green-grassed grove'. It was at this time that he first started to write seriously – short stories for the *Glasgow Herald* in the main – although his first book of poetry was not published until 1960. Though it was highly regarded by American poets, such as Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, it was virtually ignored by the Scottish poetry establishment in thrall to the calculated Scottishness of Hugh MacDiarmid. In 1961 Finlay co-founded the Wild Hawthorn Press, initially to publish the work of his peers as well as his own work, but within a few years it became, with the help of fully acknowledged collaborators, the vehicle solely for his own prolific printed and editioned output in the form of poem cards, poster prints, pamphlets, books and small objects. If the Wild Hawthorn Press was the means whereby much of his work as a poet has been disseminated, the garden of his home since 1966 in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh became the focus for his move from concrete poetry to a form of environmental poetry through which he elaborated on his major subject: the clash between nature and culture, the wild and the cultivated.

His garden at Little Sparta (named in contrast to nearby Edinburgh, the 'Athens of the North', and in recognition in 1983 of his ongoing battles with the Scottish Arts Council) defines the nature of Finlay's art. The visitor, walking down its pathways is continuously ambushed by the evocative positioning of inscribed words, neo-classical architectural elements or sculptures conveying war and terror. For Finlay gardens were privileged places, and Little Sparta, consistently transformed over almost 40 years, was the realisation of an idealised space of radical thought. For Finlay nature is shaped by culture, an idyll coloured by terror, and accordingly he developed an iconography drawn as much from the mechanisms of modern warfare, Nazi insignia, the French Revolution and the philosophy of Saint-Just, as from reflections on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, pre-Socratic philosophy, Poussin or Cubism. Thus his 1981 book *Taschenbuch Der Panzer* presents images of pansies that evoke Panzer tanks. Similarly, the cultivation of Little Sparta is represented by its massive inscription 'The Present Order is the Disorder of the Future, Saint-Just', which reflects Finlay's belief that 'certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks'.

Finlay could at times seem foolishly stubborn and pugnacious, if also unworldly, over his feuds with the poetic and artistic establishment. In 1969 he launched a rancorous dispute with the Fulcrum Press because it claimed that its edition of a book of poems by Finlay was a first edition (it was actually a third edition). Among those drawn into the dispute over a two year period were the then Arts Council of Great Britain, the Scottish Arts Council, the Association of Little Presses, the British Library, the National Library of Scotland and the Consumer Protection Department before a court ruled in his favour. His disputes with other bodies were similarly heated and included Strathclyde Regional Council (over non-payment of commercial rates for what it believed to be a commercial gallery and what Finlay held was a Temple), the Scottish Arts Council (over removal of work from an exhibition in the Council's gallery and for failure to support his feud with the local council), and the French Ministry of Culture (over a commissioned garden to celebrate the bicentenary of the Revolution that was cancelled because of a furore over his use of Nazi SS insignia in the work *Oso* as a way of highlighting the unfathomable terror within nature – two years later Finlay was awarded damages of one Franc by the French government). Nevertheless, many of these and other feuds enacted by the softly-spoken artist provided material and subjects for further works.

Finlay exhibited widely since his first solo exhibition of toys at John Calder's house near Edinburgh in 1963. In an interview ten years ago he characterised his work as being concerned essentially with composition: 'what you compose with is neither here nor there, you compose with words, or you compose with stone, plants and trees, or you compose with events, the Sheriff's officer, or whatever. It is all a matter of composing and "order".' Finlay was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1985 and awarded a CBE in 2002. ■

■ ALLAN KAPROW 1927-2006

Allan Kaprow, the pioneer of Happenings, a painter and sculptor who worked with found objects as much as with found events and was fond of calling himself an 'un-artist', died on April 5 in San Diego where he had lived for many years. In 1958, while teaching art history at Rutgers University in New Jersey, Kaprow also attended John Cage's class in experimental music composition at the New School for Social Research in New York. In an article about Abstract Expressionism, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock' published in 1958, he talked of giving up painting in favour of action in such a way that reflected both the character of Cage's class and

the ways in which his own work was soon to develop. He stated that 'we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms or, if need be, the vastness of 42nd Street ... We shall utilise the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odours, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things that will be discovered by the present generation of artists.' His first happening – *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery the following year – set the pattern for Happenings as an art that celebrated immediacy and visceral intensity. For all that, it was also tightly scored – six participants moved through three 'rooms' as members of the audience moved through the rooms too, following a timed score and occupying numbered seats – it being impossible for any one spectator to experience the totality of the Happening. Through the 60s, his pursuit of the immediacy of daily life continued, emphasised by his belief that the Happenings should not, by their very nature, be repeated.

Part of the Neo-Dada generation – between the high seriousness and aesthetic portentousness of the Abstract Expressionists, and the Pop Art celebration of the high standard of living delivered by the American dream – Kaprow inevitably measured himself more by his antecedents. For *Yard*, 1961, he filled the courtyard of the Martha Jackson Gallery with tyres, but it is often forgotten that alongside this installation was one of Hans Namuth's photographs of Pollock. Once a student of Hans Hoffman, for the 1963 survey exhibition 'Hans Hoffman and his Students' at MoMA New York, Kaprow installed two furnished rooms that could be rearranged by visitors, under the gently mocking title of *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hoffman*. The move from the detritus of everyday life to natural process in retrospect seemed inevitable, and in 1967 Kaprow made *Fluids*, in which eight-foot-high walls of ice were installed in the streets of Pasadena and left to melt. That same year he moved to California, impatient with the Happenings label he had acquired but found virtually impossible to shake off. Yet as time passes, the impact on recent art of the Happenings of Kaprow and his contemporaries, and its blurring of the boundaries between art and life, continues to grow. Essentially, however, Kaprow's is an inquisitive art. He stated in 1966 that 'contemporary artists are not out to supplant recent modern art with a better kind. They wonder what art might be. Art and life are not simply commingled; the identity of each is uncertain.' ■