Christopher Huxley

John Hedgecoe

Not on display

Title/Description: Christopher Huxley

Artist/Maker: John Hedgecoe

Born: 1955

Object Type: Photograph

Materials: Photograph

Measurements: 515 x 415mm (framed)

Accession Number: 50226

Credit Line: Donated by the Hedgecoe family

John Hedgecoe (1932–2010) was one of the leading British photographers of the twentieth century. He was known for his exceptional portraiture, and it is these that largely make up the 478 photographs by Hedgecoe in the Sainsbury Centre collection, shot between 1953 and 2003. Hedgecoe photographed many famous sitters, including artists, writers and politicians. He captured their character, often presenting them in dynamic poses or in their own surroundings. Some of the photographs in the Sainsbury Centre collection are of artists whose work is also included in the collection. These include Francis Bacon, Lynn Chadwick, Elisabeth Frink, Bernard Meadows, Henry Moore, Eduardo Paolozzi, John Piper and Lucie Rie.

In 1966, Hedgecoe photographed Queen Elizabeth II for a new set of stamps (50307 and 50308). This portrait was used as the basis for a plaster relief by the sculptor Arnold Machin. Hedgecoe then photographed the plaster, which became the image on the stamps. It is credited as being the most reproduced image in the world. [1] He went on to photograph the Queen again two years later (50309 and 50310).

Hedgecoe was given a camera by his father at the age of fourteen, instantly sparking an interest that led to his lifelong career. His professional career as a photographer began during National Service in the Air Force. After Service he received a scholarship to study photography at the Guildford School of Art where he was trained by Ifor and Joy Thomas, whose unique teaching was inspired by the Bauhaus. [2] Whilst still a student, Hedgecoe began working as a photographer for the Daily Express. In 1957, he started working for Queen magazine. Queen's Editor, Jocelyn Stevens found out that Hedgecoe knew Henry Moore, and suggested he started photographing the sculptor. Hedgecoe had first met Moore in 1956, when the older sculptor had encouraged the aspiring photographer to shoot his work. [3] But it was Stevens' suggestion that led him to begin some of his most iconic photographs of the sculptor who became his most consistent subject. By the 1960s, Hedgecoe was shooting portraits as a freelance photographer for The Observer, The Sunday Times, The Sunday Telegraph and Tatler. Hedgecoe started the Photography department at the Royal College of Art in 1965. Ten years later he was made the first Professor of Photography in the UK, and he taught there until 1994 when he was made an Emeritus Professor.

Hedgecoe published over 30 books about photography. Many of them were manuals with guidance on how to take photographs using his own work as examples. His 2000 book Portraits featured his photography of famous sitters, with short captions explaining the context of the image. [4] The book features a number of the photographs that are in the Sainsbury Centre collection.

478 photographs by Hedgecoe were generously donated to the Sainsbury Centre by his family after his death in 2011. As well as portraits, there are some surreal photo-collages, such as Scylla (50471) and Helen Rose (50466). There have been a number of displays dedicated to these works, including The Face of the Artist in 2011, to celebrate the gift.

Tania Moore, April 2023

[1] Amanda Hopkinson, John Hedgecoe Obituary, The Guardian, 29 June 2010 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jun/29/john-hedgecoe-obituary accessed 29 January 2023.

[2] Rita & Jack Tait, The Life and Work of Ifor and Joy Thomas (Clyro: Bronydd Press, 2015), p.5.

[3] Tania Moore, 'Portrait of a Friendship: John Hedgecoe's Henry Moore' in Tania Moore, Henry Moore: Friendships and Legacies (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2020), pp.62–88.

[4] John Hedgecoe, Portraits (London: Collins & Brown, 2000).