

EXIT GHOST

a novel by PHILIP ROTH

with sixteen artworks by R. B. KITAJ

The Arion Press is proud to announce its one-hundred-thirteenth publication, *Exit Ghost*, by the great American writer Philip Roth. The last of his nine novels about Nathan Zuckerman, it is presented alongside artwork by the author's close friend, the painter R. B. Kitaj. The edition features sixteen illustrations by Kitaj, including two portraits of Philip Roth, and a note on the origins of the project by publisher Andrew Hoyem.

Philip Roth was a novelist the Press had wished to publish for decades, but we did not manage to approach him about an Arion edition until his friend Judith Thurman, the *New Yorker* writer, interceded and suggested the idea to Roth in January 2018. When we told the author of our shared friendship with the artist R. B. Kitaj, who had done four books with Arion Press, it was agreed that the illustrations would come from Kitaj's work. Roth would have signed the edition, had he not died on May 22, 2018.

Exit Ghost is the work Roth himself wished us to publish. Its title comes from a stage direction in the first act of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where his father's ghost refuses to answer questions and then disappears. The novel's protagonist Nathan Zuckerman, elderly and debilitated by prostate surgery, is also leaving the stage.

In the *New York Times* obituary for Philip Roth, critic Charles McGrath hailed him as, "a prolific, protean, and often blackly comic novelist, a pre-eminent figure in twentieth-century literature" who won every prize except the Nobel. Throughout the English-speaking world, critics called him both the most serious writer of his generation and the funniest. His work had always been read as autobiographical, despite his denials, but at the time of his death Roth was praised for his universality: "One doesn't have to be Jewish, male, sexually ravenous, consumed by rage and love for one's mother to empathize with Alexander Portnoy, Nathan Zuckerman, or David Kapesh."

THE AUTHOR AND THE ARTIST

Philip Roth (1933-2018) was born in Newark, New Jersey. An outstanding student, he excelled at Bucknell University and then as a doctoral candidate in literature at the University of Chicago, until he dropped out to try his hand at fiction. Roth's prolific career as a novelist and short story writer began with the

publication of *Goodbye Columbus* in 1959 and was followed by such works as *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Counterlife*, *The Ghost Writer*, *American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*, and *The Plot Against America*, in which he envisioned the course of history as if the pro-Nazi Charles Lindbergh had been elected U. S. president. Known for his irreverent humor and frank exploration of male sexuality, he was a leading literary figure in the era that included Norman Mailer and Saul Bellow.

Ronald Brooks Kitaj (1932-2007) was born in Cleveland, Ohio into a family with roots in Russia and Middle Europe. He left school at seventeen to join the merchant marine and was later drafted into the U. S. Army. In 1958, he moved to England, where the G I Bill enabled him to attend the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford and the Royal College of Art in London, where he formed a friendship with David Hockney. A virtuoso draftsman and one of the "School of London" painters, Kitaj championed figurative art at a time when abstraction was the rule. His deep interests in philosophy, literature, and Jewish history underlie paintings such as "The Autumn of Central Paris" portraying the philosopher Walter Benjamin. In 1985, he became the first American elected to the Royal Academy since John Singer Sargent. A 1994 retrospective travelled from the Tate Gallery to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum. In 1995, Kitaj settled in Los Angeles, where he died in 2007.

Philip Roth refers to his friendship with Kitaj in his last published interview, a January 16, 2013 piece in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled, "No Longer Writing, Philip Roth Still Has Plenty To Say". When asked what he was reading, Roth replied, "Just in the past week, I read books by two friends, Edna O'Brien's wise little biography of James Joyce and an engagingly eccentric autobiography, *Confessions of an Old Jewish Painter*, by one of my dearest dead friends, the great American artist R. B. Kitaj."

The two met in the early 1980s, when Roth was living for part of each year in London with his future wife, the English actress Claire Bloom. Kitaj and his wife, the artist Sandra Fisher, happened to be their neighbors in Chelsea. In the recollections of Kitaj's dealer Stephen Ongpin, "Roth became a good friend, and his writings influenced and inspired much of Kitaj's thinking, particularly on the question of Jewish identity. As Kitaj wrote in his *First Diasporist Manifesto* in 1989, 'One outcome of my study of this strange people of mine is that my painting "Diasporist" begins to assume some of the Jewish attributes or characteristics assigned to that troubled people. The listing of traits would be endless and funny. For the moment I will leave all that to my buddy Philip Roth and his great book *The Counterlife*'."

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The thirteen paintings of R. B. Kitaj reproduced in color in *Exit Ghost* were chosen for their resonance with themes in the novel, which was published after the artist's death. However, Roth may have been quoting the title of another Kitaj painting "He and She", in the headings he gave to Zuckerman's imagined dialogues with the character Jamie Logan. The order of illustrations relates to the storyline of *Exit Ghost* and possesses a formal symmetry. It begins with a portrait of the author and ends with a self-portrait by the artist. The four details from *Erasmus Variations*, based on doodles by the philosopher, suggest the mental disorder of Zuckerman and Amy Bellet in old age; *The Sniper* refers to the threatening postcards Zuckerman receives; *Books and the Ex-Patriot*, in which the artist alludes to the library of Walter Benjamin, relates to the libraries of Zuckerman and the Logans; *Baseball* references the sports career of George Plimpton, whose funeral is described by Roth's character Richard Kliman. The portraits of Philip Roth were drawn by Kitaj in London in the late 1980s. Kitaj's self-portrait is from the same period. This is the fifth Arion Press book with artworks by R. B. Kitaj, following *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* by John Ashbery in 1984, *Kaddish* by Allen Ginsberg in 1992, *A Coney Island of the Mind* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 2005, and *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot in 2007.

THE EDITION AND ORDERING

Exit Ghost is printed by letterpress, with offset lithography for the illustrations, and bound by hand in a full cloth binding with a cloth-covered slipcase. The front cover features a black-and-white portrait of Philip Roth by R. B. Kitaj. The page format is large octavo, 9-3/4 inches x 7 inches, 264 pages. The paper is Italian mouldmade Magnani Revere. The text type is Helvetica in Monotype composition, with Helvetica and Agency Gothic handset for display.

The edition is limited to 275 numbered copies for sale and 26 lettered copies for distribution to participants in the project. The price is \$800. A portion of the edition is reserved for Arion Press subscribers, who receive a 30% discount. Terms of subscription are available upon request.

THE ARION PRESS

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