Scandal ‘63 Revisited:

Reframing the Profumo Affair
via Art and Artefact

Natalie d’Arbeloff, Caroline Coon, Catherine Edmunds, Sadie Hennessy, Marguerite Horner,
Sal Jones, Sadie Lee, Cathy Lomax, Wendy Nelson, Dameon Priestly, Stella Vine, Fionn Wilson, and (the late) Stephen Ward

curated by Steve Chibnall & Fionn Wilson

3 March to 15 April 2023

A blast from the past

At a time when the ‘Cold War’ has frozen on the battlefields of Ukraine and speculation about Tory sleaze is once again a preoccupation of the press, this exhibition marks the sixtieth anniversary of an infamous scandal that involved politics, espionage, sex, class, race, royalty, and almost any other newsworthy ingredient that could be imagined. It sent shock waves through sixties Britain and its Establishment, bringing sexual attitudes into the spotlight and questioning the probity of those in power.

As well as kicking over the traces in the form of surviving materials from the participants and the news media, the exhibition features newly-commissioned artwork that interrogates the gendered interpretations that have dominated public understandings of the tumultuous events that ushered in the ‘permissive society’. In particular, it asks questions about the figures of Christine Keeler and her ‘mentor’, Stephen Ward, and their representation in the dramas and musicals that have periodically revived the scandal since 1963.

‘Iconic’ is an over-used adjective, but Lewis Morley’s photograph of Keeler astride the Jacobsen series 7 chair is the definitive image, and it will feature strongly in the exhibition – both the original signed by the sitter and in various adaptations. Over the years, this image has come to stand for not only the scandal but, more widely, the kind of insouciant, sexually-liberated rebelliousness that became fashionable in the 1960s. Visitors to the exhibition will have the opportunity to recreate the pose in an original 1960s Jacobsen chair.

‘Scandal ‘63 Revisited’ will be open from March until mid-April, a period corresponding to the breaking of the scandal when Keeler fled to Spain and avoided giving evidence in the trial of Johnny Edgecombe, and Profumo lied to the House of Commons about his relationship with Christine. The exhibition, which will be opened by Seymour Platt (Christine Keeler’s son), will be held in the spacious Leicester Gallery, a purpose-built art venue on the De Montfort University Campus in the centre of Leicester.

Exhibition Curators

Steve Chibnall (Professor of British Cinema and Director of Archives for DMU’s Cinema and Television History Institute).

Fionn Wilson (London-based professional painter and curator of the ACE-supported ‘Dear Christine’ exhibition, which toured to Newcastle, Swansea and London in 2019–2020 and paid tribute to Christine Keeler).

‹ Light Years Ahead: Current Exhibition

Past: Atrium Gallery - Traces ›

Leicester Gallery

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