

## **Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred**

10 October 2015 – 13 March 2016

Gallery 4, Free Entry

The work of progressive English organisation The Kibbo Kift Kindred (1920-1932) is explored in an archive display at the Whitechapel Gallery opening 10 October 2015.

*Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred* explores the creative output of the group, whose idealistic ambitions for world peace were rooted in a shared appreciation of nature and handicraft. Part of the Whitechapel Gallery's programme of exhibitions curated from archives, the display features rarely seen prints, photographs, woodcarvings and clothing, and revisits the group's major exhibition at the Gallery in 1929.

The Kibbo Kift Kindred was formed in 1920 by commercial artist, writer and pacifist John Hargrave after he became disillusioned with the perceived militaristic tendencies of the Boy Scout movement, of which he was a key figure. Hargrave's new group expressed a complex social, economic and spiritual philosophy based on naturalist principles and committed themselves to the creation of a new world. Their 1929 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery was a means of spreading their ideas and philosophy to a wider public.

A highly original mystical-medieval-modernist style was adopted across the creative practices of Kibbo Kift, from their insignia to their costumes and rituals. Activities such as hiking and camping were pivotal and were given spiritual importance, while the group's aesthetic drew heavily from ancient Egyptian, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Native American styles in craft, dress and language. The art of abstraction, advertising and experimental theatre were also key references. Kibbo Kift presents a forgotten moment in the history of British art and design but their futuristic vision continues to have resonance today.

Unusually for the time, Kibbo Kift was open to all ages and genders and allowed men, women, boys and girls to camp together. Although relatively small in number, the group's notable members and supporters included suffragettes Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Mary Neal, scientist Julian Huxley, social reformer Havelock Ellis, novelist H. G. Wells and surrealist photographer Angus McBean.

This display takes as its starting point the major *Kibbo Kift Educational Exhibition* at the Whitechapel Gallery in the late-1920s, which showcased the group's ambitions and their remarkable body of visual art. Highlights include rarely-seen sculptures, designs for ceremonial dress, and photographs of the group taking part in rituals, parades and camping trips. Drawing from major public and private collections including The Museum of London and London School of Economics, the display offers a new interpretation of Kibbo Kift's unique vision for the present day and sheds light on the diversity of the Whitechapel Gallery's educational ethos in the early 20th century.

## **Press Release**

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**Whitechapel Gallery**  
77-82 Whitechapel High Street  
London E1 7QX

T +44 (0)20 7522 7888

F +44 (0)20 7539 3340

[whitechapelgallery.org](http://whitechapelgallery.org)

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## Notes to Editors

- Dedicated to exhibitions curated from archives, Gallery 4 brings the Whitechapel Gallery's history and other archives to life through rarely seen film, photographs, artefacts and documents. Past displays have revisited the legendary 1956 Pop art exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, the first UK show of Mark Rothko and Stephen Willats' pioneering work in community engagement. Gallery 4 also plays host to guest archive displays, which have included a major survey of the ground-breaking 1960's publication *Aspen Magazine* and *Sculptors' Papers* from the Henry Moore Institute Archive.
- *Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred* (10 October 2015 – 13 March 2016) is co-curated by Dr Annabella Pollen, Principal Lecturer, History of Art and Design and AHRC Research Fellow, University of Brighton and Dr Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator: Archive Gallery, Project Manager: NEON Curatorial Exchange & Award, Whitechapel Gallery.

## Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm. Free entry.  
Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.  
Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR.  
T + 44 (0) 20 7522 7888 [info@whitechapelgallery.org](mailto:info@whitechapelgallery.org)

## Press Information

For further press information please contact: Alex O'Neill on 020 7539 3360 or email [alexoneill@whitechapelgallery.org](mailto:alexoneill@whitechapelgallery.org)