

IN MEMORIAM: KEITH CRITCHLOW
(March 16, 1933 – April 8, 2020)



‘A Geometer and Contemporary Pythagoras’

Keith Critchlow’s publications include *Order in Space* (1969), *Islamic Patterns* (1976), *Time Stands Still* (1979), *The Hidden Geometry of Flowers* (2011) and *Golden Meaning* (2014).

In 1981 Keith Critchlow was, along with Brian Keeble, Kathleen Raine and Phillip Sherrard, a founder of the review *Temenos*, out of which grew the Temenos Academy, established in 1991. He was President, and later President Emeritus, of the Temenos Academy; he was also a Fellow, served for a time on its Academic Board and its Council. All of those involved in Temenos looked up to him as a source of inspiration.

Professor Critchlow founded the Visual Islamic Arts Studio with Paul Marchant in 1984 at the Royal College of Art, which developed into the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts (VITA) department; it later moved to The Prince of Wales’s Institute of Architecture, with Keith as Professor and Head of Research, and is now incorporated into The Prince’s Foundation School of Traditional Arts, in Shoreditch, London. He was awarded a Higher Doctorate by the Royal College of Art in 1991.

Critchlow was the architect of the Krishnamurti Centre, Brockwood Park, Hampshire, and the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, India, a hospital that is free to all inmates. Another important project was the charity KAIROS, which organised visits to sacred sites such as Chartres Cathedral and published a newsletter, full of Critchlow’s ideas and research, and worksheets of practical geometry.

Thoughts on the Passing of Keith Critchlow

By Ian Skelly

Like so many, my first introduction to the work and energy of Keith Critchlow was via one of his dazzling lectures on Chartres Cathedral, the building he had studied for more than 40 years. I had never experienced anything like it. It was the speed of it, for one thing; his breathless enthusiasm delivering a stream of ideas and details as slide after slide bounced onto two large screens, fired from two rapidly clicking projectors behind us. In less than hour he had flung open all the doors for me on a cavernous treasure trove of learning which I had no idea had existed. It was the most wonderfully energized blizzard I have ever been caught up in.

The focus of his lecture was the precision of the geometry that underpins every inch of the Cathedral's architecture and how that geometry is drawn completely from the careful observation of the patterns and processes displayed in Nature. What it also revealed, and I am sure this was Keith's ultimate intention, was how this complex but simple geometry was used to reflect a profound symbolism that is mostly forgotten today or ignored, even by modern Christians. It is a symbolism that encompasses far more than Christian ideals or its particular theology.

Keith was a master at 'revealing' rather than 'explaining' and what he revealed to me that night were the foundational tenets of the so-called 'perennial philosophy.' This is the perception of reality best explained, in Keith's view, by Plato's philosophy of unity. As Plato puts it in *Timaeus*, the universe is "one whole of wholes... a single living creature that contains all living creatures within it" - a "creature," moreover, that has Soul. Keith would often speak about The World Soul being the intelligent and harmonious principle of proportion or relatedness. It exists, he told me once, at the heart of the cosmic pattern and it allows the

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