COUNTERPOINT
Modern Realism 1910 - 1950
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The story of modern art in Britain was often presented traditionally as a narrative journey towards abstraction or gestural expression, exemplified by the work of Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, or the St Ives painters. But alongside this brilliant burning path ran many other contrapuntal threads, each of them distinct and defined in their own terms. Looking not at the French avant-garde but to more native sources, each was characterised by an individual and more personal form of modern expression. Such artists did not resist or abandon the traditions and achievements of the past, remaining figurative rather than abstract, valuing the primacy of line and draughtsmanship, but expressing their art in a no less modern or original idiom that acknowledged both past and present. The figure that exemplifies some of these qualities most strongly is Stanley Spencer, an artist who for much of the post-war period was typically viewed as eccentric and unconnected with mainstream movements in modern art. This is undoubtedly true to some degree and is his strength, and yet recent market corrections indicate a new appreciation of his originality. Spencer's artistic heroes partly came from the past – Giotto and the Italian ‘Primitives’, famously, and partly from more modern painters such as Maurice Denis. A less well-known influence was the Pre-Raphaelites Brotherhood, from whom partly he derived his practice of treating each area of the composition, however marginal, with equal attention and tonal value, creating a patchwork pattern of abstract satisfaction. From Giotto and the Early Italian painters he derived the emotive potential of the set of the figure, or the way gesture, or the degree of proximity or separation between figures, could communicate emotion and feeling. Yet this underpinned a wholly original approach to figure composition that was all Spencer's own - the intertwined conjunctions and exaggerations of limbs and bodies, the simplification of forms and the florescence of pattern speaking of their own time, not of the past.

Ultimately modern art in this country began with Whistler in the 1860s, who attracted both fame and notoriety by arguing for the primacy of purely formal values in judging a work of art. Under the motto 'Art for Art's Sake', he produced delicate harmonies of tone and colour in which any narrative or moral content was entirely suppressed in favour of a subtle invocation of mood or atmosphere. Whistler titled his pictures 'Symphony', 'Harmony' and 'Nocturne' to emphasise their abstract qualities, implying that like music these images should affect the viewer's emotions directly, without the intervention of any explicit meaning. In effect this was the essence of all abstract art. Some similar emotional impact is propagated in the landscapes of Bertram Nicholls and the portrait studies of Algernon Newton. Nicholls's poise and balance is distinctly classical in temperament, but his subdued tonality and roughly-textured canvases, and the pervasive stillness of the scenes he shows, again create a distinct but indefinable sensation in the viewer. While looking to the past - the paintings of Claude or Poussin perhaps - Nicholls's work has a wholly personal character and presentation that connect it with the present. Gerald Leslie Brockhurst's pictures contain a number of characteristics we tend to associate more with abstract painting - the satisfaction of surface, both of the skin, fur or silk he depicts and the actual enamel-like surface of the picture itself; the relationship of forms, one to another; and a certain intense mood or emotion that arises from this ensemble and from the experience of viewing it, that operates directly on the senses. His sitters catch eye strongly and directly. There is no narrative; instead, the effectiveness of the pictures, and the strength of viewers' responses to them, lie with the complex emotions they evoke.

Such expression or creation of indefinable mood is a central element of much of what we might term 'modern realism' and it is in itself some form of abstraction. In the second half of the twentieth century 'modern' has often equated abstract, and abstraction in turn is now understood to mean the...
friing of painting and sculpture from representation. But earlier in the century artists and critics brought very different and actually more complex and sophisticated meanings to these terms, and they have a much longer heritage and evolution than we often recognise. For such writers a range of figurative artists might also be classed as modern, and their work could also concern the abstract.

There is a tendency to see such painters set in direct opposition to their modernist counterparts, and in some cases this was certainly true. An ideological battle took place between advocates of the continuity of established artistic values and those new ones being established by modernist and abstract artists. At certain points these disagreements would hold explicitly political undertones, with one camp linked to the world of the past and the other struggling to break with it to build a new society.

Ultimately these and the other artists exhibited are each highly individual in their style and subject matter, but they are united in their demonstration of inherited artistic values, recast and adapted to their own age. From the position of our new century we can take a more independent view freed from the doctrinaire distinctions of an age that now is gone, and traditional values have become better understood and appreciated.
GERALD BROCKHURST
1890–1978

1. Woman in Black c.1935
Oil on canvas • 27 x 24 inches (68.5 x 61 cm)
Inscribed ‘Brockhurs’
Provenance: The Fine Art Society; Christie’s, November 1982; James Birch; Private Collection

Brockhurst is best-known for his depictions of women, particularly those of his muses: his first wife Anïas Folin, and his second Kathleen Woodward, whom he renamed ‘Dorette’. Though many of these depictions are of recognisable subjects, his models exude an air of flawless serenity. They are idealisations, glimpses of perfection, creating a tension between reality and Brockhurst’s imagined world. The same can be said of his society portraits. In this portrait, whose sitter remains unknown, the tight, flawlessness of her skin and the luscious dark of her hair, eyebrows and eyes, so typical of Brockhurst’s women, indicate an element of idealisation.

The portrait is veiled by psychological obscurity. Like many of his sitters there is an unsettling mystery, tinged with melancholy. Brockhurst has presented his subject for scrutiny but does not attempt to penetrate her character. She is aloof and contained. Some of this aura of ambiguity might have been learnt from his study of Italian Renaissance portraiture, especially the work of Leonardo da Vinci, which he directly references in the compositional structure.

The Fine Art Society back label from 1954 names the sitter as Miss Van Damm. It has been suggested that this refers to Sheila Van Damm, the socialite and racing driver.
2. **Charles Carpenter** 1925

Oil on panel • 23 7/8 x 19 3/4 inches (60.6 x 50.1 cm)

Provenance: Mr and Mrs Alan Fortunoff, USA


Having first gained a reputation as an etcher, Brockhurst became a much sought-after portrait painter of high society and the fashionable rich in the 1930s. By 1939, when he left London for the United States, his popularity was so great that he could ask 1,000 guineas for a portrait and he limited the number of commissions he undertook to twenty a year. His most famous subjects included the beguiling Duchess of Windsor, Marlene Dietrich and Merle Oberon. He also painted J. Paul Getty, Mrs Paul Mellon, and then a succession of other wealthy, powerful Americans following his arrival on the other side of the Atlantic.

This portrait of Charles Carpenter (1858–1938), President of the South Metropolitan Gas Company, is one of few commissioned male portraits from this period; another version, three-quarter length in an identical pose, now lost, was illustrated in Apollo in August 1930. On first appearance this portrait appears to be a straightforward and conservative portrayal of a successful businessman. However, an etching based on the painting issued in 1931 shows the subject in his study surrounded by books and artwork. Both props reveal his passionate tastes and an intellectual life aside from his profession, particularly the sensual nude statuette. Returning to the painting, Brockhurst’s hyperrealist rendering of Carpenter’s sober frown might be better interpreted as the knowing yet quizzical gaze of a connoisseur.

3. **Jenny** 1925

Drawing on paper • 15 1/8 x 11 3/8 inches (38.4 x 28.9 cm)

Provenance: Mrs Gerald L. Brockhurst; Hatay Stratton Gallery; Daniel and Rosalyn Jacobs

4. **Pink and Grey Still Life 1942**

Oil on panel • 32 x 36 inches (81.3 x 91.4 cm)

Inscribed ‘Anne Redpath’, b.r.

Provenance: Private collection; The Fine Art Society; Private Collection

Exhibited: Glasgow, The Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, 1942 (716)

Redpath’s still lifes of the 1940s represent some of her best work. They have balance, authority and inventiveness. *Grey and Pink Still Life* is a natural extension of her studies in painting in various shades of white. In an interview with the poet George Bruce for a BBC film in 1963 Redpath comments on ‘this love of whites and greys and, as far back as I can remember, I have loved painting white ... you use black because it makes the white more intensified, or gives it more quality.’

Time spent around the Mediterranean and, formatively, Siena in 1919, developed a deeply held regard for surface texture. The old plastered walls that she saw there held a fascination for her and led her to develop her own methods to achieve it, such as scraping the canvas with a piece of chain mail. She also wanted to emulate the chalky surfaces of white-washed plaster and the dry, flat quality of the frescoes of the Italian Primitives in Siena, for which she soaked the oil out from her paints. This is one of the best examples of her vision of still life, with its white-on-white aesthetic and superbly subtle paint surface. The simplicity of Redpath’s work from the 1940s recalls aspects of Matisse, whom she greatly admired. The embroidered pattern of the blue cloth in the painting illustrated here shows an indebtedness to his development of flat patterns with arabesques and his use of pure colour separated by fine lines. Like him, she exploited flattened form and a clear linear structure: a careful balance of shape and colour.
AMBROSE McEVOY
1878–1927

5. A Society Beauty 1927
Oil on canvas • 68 x 39 3/4 inches (173 x 100 cm)

The son of a Scottish engineer, Arthur Ambrose McEvoy was born in Crudwell in Wiltshire. Encouraged by Whistler, who spotted his talent early on, McEvoy enrolled at the Slade School of Art when he was just fifteen. At the Slade he was part of the group that gathered around Augustus John and William Orpen. McEvoy had the reputation for a fine technical skill in oils, learnt from study with Whistler, in particular his ability to paint ‘alla prima’, with speed, looseness and complexity. Later McEvoy worked with Walter Sickert in Dieppe. While at the Slade he was fellow pupil of Gwen John, with whom he had an unhappy affair. From around 1915 McEvoy devoted himself to making portraits, most often of female sitters whom he depicted with a subtle mixture of elegant glamour and visual panache. His loose, broken strokes of colour and Whistler-like shadowy backgrounds gave these images a sense of vibrant modernity and contemporary insight, while simultaneously placing them as successors to the traditions of Velasquez and seventeenth-century painting.

In A Society Beauty - a ravishing, elegant full-length - there is a facial resemblance to Xenia, Countess of Lathom (1893-1974), who had sat to McEvoy previously in a painting that may be a sketch for the present work. The orphan daughter of a Russian nobleman who died in the Great War, Xenia was a woman of great beauty with a penchant for smoking cigars, well known in 1920s society. She went on to write a book about Monet (1931) and another about modern French painting with P.G. Konody (1932). Xenia was married to the Earl of Lathom the same year this portrait appears to have painted, so it is likely it was commissioned to mark their marriage.

McEvoy’s loose and ethereal style of painting is well suited to the sitter and the glamour of her presentation. It is, in essence, a modern rendering of a ‘Grand Manner’ full length. But Xenia’s short-cut hair and daringly low-cut, diaphanous, short-sleeved gown place her at the forefront of modern fashionable society life - part a new jazz-age generation that wanted to forget the horrors of the Great War and shed the stuffiness of Edwardian convention that had preceded it.
Nicholson was one of the most singular artists of his generation, distinctive and highly original in the manner in which he approached painting albeit conservative in his subject matter - his work encompassed still life, landscape and portraiture. Common to all his work is supreme sense of visual élan, of style and stylishness and which is mostly concerned with the abstract sensations evoked by surface, texture and form. In this he appears wholly modern in his sensibility, more linked - in his liking of curves and ellipses, the round forms of jugs and jars, his devotion to the potential of surface expression - to the work of his son Ben Nicholson, than either might have felt comfortable recognising.

Nicholson’s painting holds greatest stylistic connection to the artists closely studied in England in the 1890s when he was learning his craft - Whistler, Manet and Corot. Yet his modernity and identity is highly personal and distinct, looking forward as well as back. In recognition of this, when Tate Modern opened in 2000, tracing the evolution of twentieth-century art thematically rather than chronologically, Nicholson was represented in the suite devoted to ‘Still Life/Object/Real Life’, and hung in a room alongside Cézanne, Bonnard and Morandi. Indeed, the particular timbre of Nicholson’s work was recognised by certain Modernist artists, his son Ben noting in a letter written in 1956 to Rupert Hart-Davis: ‘I have been particularly pleased to find that continental artists like Gabo and Maholy-Nagy, and a Czech writer like Paul Hodin etc, have off their own bat spoken of their admiration for the poetic idea in certain works of WNi’.
William Nicholson 1872 - 1949

Oil on panel • 14 x 18 inches (35.6 x 45.7 cm)
Inscribed with initial ‘N’, l.l.
Provenance: Bought at the Leicester Galleries 1938 by Syrie Maugham (1879-1955); Mrs Harry Sacher by 1941; donated to the Red Cross Sales, Christie’s, 9 Oct. 1942 (15); Sotheby’s 1947 (142), bought Roland, Browse & Delbanco; Robert Mosley (1908-92) 1948, and thence by descent; Sotheby’s 2003 (3); Richard Green Gallery; Mrs Joyce Wood; Private Collection

Nicholson painted this magical canvas while he was staying at the Grand Hotel Excelsior on the Lido in Venice. The Lagoon whipped by the Sirocco wind has put seaweed onto the beach, which two uninformed figures from the hotel rake up. Yachts skid across the choppy water, which glistens with the reflection of the sun.

Essentially this is a composition divided equally between the blue of the sea and the sky, and the ochre of the sand. Nicholson creates a scene of almost minimalist simplicity by adapting the texture of the paint in each area, and lending it a sense of absorbingly abstract satisfaction.

William Nicholson 1872 - 1949

7. THE LITTLE FLOWER PIECE - FREESIAS AND PRIMULAS c.1924
Oil on panel • 10 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches (26.7 x 19 cm)
Inscribed with monogram ‘N’, b.l.
Provenance: (1879-1955), probably acquired at the Beaux Arts Gallery; by descent to her daughter Liza Hope, later Lady Glendevon (1915–98); Sotheby’s, 13 March 1974 (24, as ‘Flowers in a Glass Jar’), bt Roland, Browse & Delbanco; Roland Gough, 1974; Kasmin Knoedler Gallery; Private Collection; Jonathan Clarke; Private Collection

This succulently beautiful still life belonged first to Syrie Maugham, the interior designer, and wife of novelist Somerset Maugham. Maugham’s trademark style was the creation of very modern-looking, stylishly art deco interiors where everything was white – walls, carpets, curtains, furnishings. One can imagine how well this painting by Nicholson - which is essentially constructed from shades of white, cream and grey with the central focus of pastel colour - would have looked hung in such an environment. In a painting of such predominantly restricted palette, Nicholson skilfully modulates the paint to provide texture and abstract visual satisfaction. The way in which he achieves successfully the difficult challenge of painting the transparent view through the glass jar is evidence of Nicholson’s complete mastery of his materials.
Nicholson painted this picture in 1908, the year before he moved into the Old Vicarage in the village of Rottingdean in Sussex amongst the South Downs. Here he discovered landscape painting, even calling himself ‘The Painter of the Downs’. Simplifying the dominant shapes in the landscapes and minimising human elements lent his landscapes a transcendent quality. Ignoring this, his son Ben once remarked that the key to his father was that ‘he merely wanted to paint’, and whilst this remark may seem oddly dismissive, it may also be rather acute: there is sensual enjoyment in the rich green of the rain soaked grass, the drizzle in the air above, and the slick ribbon of the white chalk track that unrolls over the undulating Downs. Sea and sky blend together in a harmony of misty grey, recalling the crepuscles of Whistler. On the skyline is the old windmill above Rottingdean that Nicholson was to immortalise as the logo for his friend the publisher William Heinemann.

Between 1904 and 1906 Nicholson lived at 1 Pilgrim’s Lane, Hampstead, just a short distance from White Stone Pond on Hampstead Heath, one of the highest points in London. By 1909, Nicholson and his family had moved to Rottingdean in Sussex but he continued to maintain a studio at the Pheasantry on the King’s Road in London. This picture of one of the few views of Hampstead he painted during this period.
Shingle Street lies at the very end of Orford Beach in Suffolk, between Felixstowe and Aldeburgh. It is an isolated spot where the buildings appear to stand out against the horizon and, as Nicholson has emphasized here, the expanse of sky seems immense. Nicholson’s low horizon allows the clouds to dominate, perhaps in conscious memory of Constable’s painting of the Suffolk landscape. This too accentuates the line of houses, which act as a division between shingle and sky. Using a restricted palette and making use of the texture of the canvas board on which it is painted, Nicholson creates a deceptively simple but immensely skilful composition of great subtlety and ingenuity.

Nicholson was famously reticent to speak about his painting or to intellectualise it in any way. However, in 1934 he wrote to the editor of The Artist about another landscape, from 1912, which gives a sense of how he approached his pictures. Nicholson noted first how he used the horizon to divide up the picture space harmoniously, before going on to discuss how unified tone and intensity of colour combined to create a satisfying whole. ‘Simplification in tone’, Nicholson wrote, ‘is a secret of great value, and the difference between colour and tone is of equal importance. The knowledge of both these subjects adds enormously to sight enjoyment. Have you noticed how subconsciously grateful one feels to the masters for their simplification of line, tone and colour?’

Nicholson is known to have visited Norfolk in September 1907 and it is likely this picture was partly painted before the subject using his travelling painting box.
This picture first belonged to Winston Churchill. Nicholson was first introduced to Churchill and his wife Clementine in 1933, and they became friends. He was a regular weekend visitor at Chartwell in the '30s, and encouraged and instructed Churchill in his own painting, and was referred to by the Churchills as 'Cher Maître'. Churchill was full of praise for his artistic mentor, frequently referring to Nicholson in letters to his wife, and he went on to tell Sir John Rothenstein, then Director of the Tate Gallery, 'I think the person who taught me most about painting was William Nicholson'. Nicholson in turn referred to Churchill as his 'most ardent pupil'. Having sent Christmas greetings to Winston and Clementine Churchill in 1934, Nicholson departed for Spain where he spent the holiday in Malaga. His host was the distinguished zoologist Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell (1864-1945), whose house Villa Santa Lucia was in the hills outside the town. Nicholson was delighted with the drama of the landscape - deep gullies, soaring hillsides and rocky promontories. While he was given a studio at the villa, Nicholson more often worked around the house and countryside, drawing with pencil and coloured chalks and painting oil sketches directly from nature. He returned to England late in January and the Churchills are thought to have acquired this picture from him soon after.

The view depicted is thought to be looking south-east, towards the sea, with the Camino Nuevo in the foreground and the centre of Malaga out of the picture to the right. The hill at the centre of the present picture's composition was first the site of a lighthouse and then a castle. Neither of these buildings remains but they are commemorated by the name, Castillo de Gibralfaro - 'Castle of the Lighthouse'. The walls of the later Moorish Alcazar, which was built to the west, can be seen silhouetted on the right of the painting.
13. An English Holiday - The Puncture -
Lady Louise Mountbatten c.1928
Tempera on canvas • 85 1/2 x 47 inches (217.2 x 119.4 cm)
Exhibited: Peter Jones department store, London, Peter Jones department store,
An English Holiday, 1930

14. An English Holiday - Village Inn
c.1928
Tempera on canvas • 85 1/2 x 38 inches (217.2 x 96.5 cm)
Exhibited: Peter Jones department store, London, Peter Jones department store,
An English Holiday, 1930

The Puncture and The Village Inn were two of eleven scenes in the series An English Holiday commissioned by the British-Canadian business tycoon and politician Lord Beaverbrook early in 1928. They were intended for his dining room at Calvin Lodge, Newmarket. But after it was completed, the commission for An English Holiday was refused by Beaverbrook in August 1928. His socialite friend Lady Diana Cooper had advised him not to accept the panels, on the grounds that Beaverbrook would likely quarrel with his friends and acquaintances who had served as models for the scheme and who might be unhappy with their portrayal. There is perhaps some substance to this – the overall theme is a day out at the races in Newmarket, but in these two panels at least, there is an underlying theme of flirtation. One must imagine that there are a number of ‘in’ jokes and allusions to indiscretions. The notoriously priapic Augustus John looms predator-like over a lady whose car has a puncture, his fingers pointing downwards, looped into the band of his trousers. The lady changing the tyre may be Diana Cooper, a notoriously poor and dangerous driver who was the model for Julia Stitch in Evelyn Waugh’s novel Scoop (1938), in which the irascible press baron Lord Copper was a parody of Beaverbrook himself. In Adshead’s Village Inn panel a gentleman cyclist flirts with a demure country maiden, evidently based on one of the Beaverbrook circle. Elsewhere in the sequence Winston Churchill imperiously sits astride an elephant, Arnold Bennett appears as a gypsy musician with a monkey; Sir Mathew ‘Scatters’ Wilson – who claimed proudly to be the cause of more divorces than any man in England – elopes with a gypsy on horseback; and in the corner of the panel depicting the Winner’s Enclosure at Newmarket, Reginald MacKenna, Chancellor of the Exchequer, is a despairing man who has lost all his money in gambling.

Beaverbrook’s refusal of the panels - which must have been both dismaying and financially stressful for her - led Adshead finally to exhibit the series in 1930 at Peter Jones, the department store in Sloane Square. As recently as 2005 when the University of Liverpool Art Gallery exhibition of Adshead’s work was staged, both these panels were believed erroneously to have been destroyed.

The model for the standing woman in The Puncture was Lady Louise Mountbatten, the Crown Princess - and later Queen - of Sweden. Much liked but of a nervous and eccentric disposition, she was famed for her lack of road sense. Later in life she carried a small card with her on which were printed the words: ‘I am the Queen of Sweden.’ When her brother, Lord Louis Mountbatten, asked for an explanation of this, she replied simply: ‘Well, if I was to get knocked down in the street, nobody would know who I was. If they look in my handbag, they’ll find out.’
Badmin was a print maker and illustrator who was capable of rendering complex topographical and urban subjects in minute and fastidious detail. His quality of line is unwavering, and his compositions can take broad, panoramic perspectives. Born in Sydenham, Badmin attended Camberwell School of Art before winning a studentship to the Royal College of Art. Here he transferred from the painting to the design department to be taught by Professor Ernest TRistram (1882-1952). Interestingly it was the design school that fostered the greatest innovative talent in this period – when Badmin arrived, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden had just left, and all three were taught by Paul Nash, who had taken up his appointment in 1924. Badmin gained success early and in 1933 was awarded his first solo exhibition, at The Fine Art Society. The distinguished and influential critic Frank Rutter who wrote rapturously in The Sunday Times of the discovery of a major new talent, describing Badmin as a young artist with very remarkable gifts. At the early age of 26 he has won his way, by sheer merit, into the ranks of two important royal societies, the Painter-Etchers and the Old Watercolour Society. But while he is a valuable new recruit to their ranks, the peculiar virtues of his art can be seen to much better advantage in his first one-man show at the Fine Art Society. His watercolours and etchings are distinguished by a thoroughness which is as refreshing as it is rare ... he has a passion for enriching the content of his compositions by a multitude of detail; but the most wonderful thing about his work is that, while he is scrupulous – but not too over-scrupulous – in his precise drawing of minute detail, he contrives to combine this quality with breadth and simplicity of effect. (12 February 1933)
Perched on a tall mound of earth in the heart of the city of York, the imposing four-lobed design of Clifford’s Tower is almost all that remains of York Castle, originally built by William the Conqueror in order to strengthen his military hold over the North of England. After serving as a key stronghold throughout the medieval period the tower ended its military career in 1684, later adapted and incorporated into the city prison until 1935, at which point the nineteenth century additions were removed revealing the impressive medieval scene to the public once more.

Painted on the eve of the Second World War, Eurich’s painting seems to hint at the uncertainty of the moment – dark clouds gather over the castle, and a crow, harbinger of ill omen, struts across the foreground, which is dominated by a black, Classical funerary urn. Eurich’s precision of draughtsmanship, clever lighting, and the disjunction of buildings cut off or partly obscured by the Castle and its mound, produces an image laden with a subtle, indefinable but brilliantly disquieting mood. In this, Eurich’s work of the Thirties has to some slight degree a certain affinity with the anxious townscape of the Surrealist artists Giorgio de Chirico and Max Ernst, a character in Eurich’s pictures perhaps encouraged by the International Surrealist Exhibition held in London in 1936.
JOHN DUNCAN FERGUSSON
1874–1961

17. THE QUAY AT DINARD c. 1920
Oil on canvas • 25 1/2 x 21 1/4 inches (64.7 x 53.9 cm)
Inscribed 'J.D. Fergusson' verso
Provenance: Alex Reid & Lefevre, Glasgow; Private Collection; Christie's, 19 April 1974 (63); The Fine Art Society; Mr and Mrs Alan Fortunoff, USA

Fergusson was the most international of the four Scottish Colourists. Born in Edinburgh, he studied at the Edinburgh School of Art before moving to Paris in 1885 to study at the Académie Colarossi. However, the artist was frustrated by the conservative teaching and benefited more from the stimulation of Paris’s lively café society and street life. He returned to Paris every year for the next 10 years and eventually moved there permanently in 1907, exhibiting works at the Salon des Independents and at the Salon D’Automne. The last two years before the First World War were spent in the South of France with fellow Colourist Samuel Peploe.

In the years following the war Fergusson spent most of his time in London. His trip to Dinard in 1930 is a notable exception. This elegant, fortified town in Brittany was France’s top summer resort – attracting wealthy businessmen and celebrities, along with European royalty – before being surpassed by The Riviera during the 1930s. The paintings Fergusson produced on this visit show a return to the intensity of his pre-war work, which the artist never quite achieved again.

Early on, Fergusson’s artistic inspiration included artists such as Manet and Whistler, but perhaps the largest impact on his work was visiting the 1905 Fauve Exhibition at Salon D’Automne. In this work the intensity of colour learnt from the Fauves still persists in his rendering of the quay, supposedly at sunset, where pink light bathes every surface. After 1912 the influence of Cézanne and Cubism crept into his work, perceptible here in the sketchy geometric forms.
18. Young Fisherman by a Window 1919
Pencil and watercolour • 18 1/4 x 12 inches (46.3 x 30.5 cm)
Provenance: Cornelia Dobson; The Fine Art Society; Mr & Mrs Alan Fortunoff, USA

19. Cap d’Antibes c.1925
Oil on panel • 16 x 11 3/4 inches (40.7 x 29.8 cm)
Inscribed ‘C.R.W. Nevinson’, b.r.
Provenance: Mrs Davies
Nevinson's standing in the history of Modern art is almost entirely built on the reputation he built in the First World War as a war artist. He served in France with the Red Cross and the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1914-16 and exhibited his images of war in a celebrated show at the Leicester Galleries in 1916 and 1918. There is little academic literature on the work Nevinson produced after the war. His output during this period is very difficult to define and is stylistically disparate.

This piece was one of several exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in 1930 in the artist's eighth one-man show. It depicts sunbathers presumably in a Mediterranean setting, although the exact whereabouts is unknown. The title suggests Nevinson intended an ironic reading of the painting. The view through the tent curtains, which frame the scene, evoke a stage set. The most defined bodies in the foreground are displayed to the viewer. One male bather is reminiscent of Michelangelo’s dying slave, and the form of a female bather could be based on an ignudo from the Sistine Chapel. With the central figure, hands-on-hips, both inviting and returning the viewer’s gaze, the piece could be a commentary on vanity and spectacle.

Several of Nevinson's pieces from the 1920s and 1930s are views through windows, or from balconies, looking on to the wider world, particularly the ‘massed human activity’ of cities. T. W. Earp described Nevinson's 1930 exhibition as portraying ‘the peculiar and varied features of his present-day environment…which definitely captures a beat in the rhythm of time’. Following the tenth anniversary of the end of the First World War and the Wall Street crash, the image might be read as a judgement on the frivolity of the era. The fun and carefree behaviour of the middle classes would not last the decade.
JOSEPH SOUTHALL  
1861–1944

21. SIRMIONE 1927
Watercolour and gouache • 9 1/2 x 8 1/4 inches (24 x 21 cm)

22. PONT NEUF, PARIS 1933
Watercolour and gouache • 10 1/4 x 15 inches (26 x 38 cm)  
Inscribed with monogram and ‘1933’, l.r.
In 1935 Trevelyan joined the English Surrealist Group, and showed his work in the important International Surrealist Exhibition in London the following year. Trevelyan’s main concern in his Surrealist work was the construction of a new collective myth of the city, a theme that had fascinated him from childhood. He described how he ‘had invented a sort of mythology of cities, of fragile structures carrying here and there a few waif-like inhabitants’. Trevelyan was engaged by his old student friend Humphrey Jennings to contribute to Mass Observation (1937–8); the urban images which resulted utilised collage and torn shreds of newspaper in an attempt to express his personal myth of the gritty urban working-class environment.
24. The Harbour at Night 1933

Oil and collage on board • 20 x 24 inches (51.5 x 61.5 cm)

Provenance: Myfanwy Piper, Jonathan Clark; Private Collection

Exhibited: Durham, Grey College, University of Durham, John Piper: A Retrospective, April-May 1999 (1, repr.); London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, John Piper in the 1930s: Abstraction on the Beach, April-June 2003 (7, repr.)


Piper’s Harbour at Night is one of the most captivating images of his early career. The shimmering moonlight, the sea, and the harbour free of the bustle and clamour of the daytime makes this simple view one of quiet magic. Whilst there was a strong tradition in British painting of night-time scenes, from Palmer and Pether through to Whistler and Grimshaw, it was not often treated by twentieth century artists. Bomberg had tried night paintings in Jerusalem in the mid-1920s, and would again in Ronda, but The Harbour at Night gives us a very modernist influenced approach to the subject. Perhaps initially drawing on European examples such as the work of Matisse, Picasso and Dufy, the view out of a window onto an unpeopled landscape or view became very much part of the imagery of British painting in the inter-war period, and whilst it was used by artists as varied as C.R.W. Nevinson and Duncan Grant, it was very much a theme explored by those in Piper’s circle in the early 1930s, most notably Ben and Winifred Nicholson, Paul Nash and Ivon Hitchens. Piper’s use of collage within the painting is, however, quite radical amongst his peers and allows him a great deal of scope to extend the power of the image.

Like his later collages, Piper incorporates everyday and distinctively non-art materials into the picture, using paper doilies to create the lace curtains and silvered paper for the sea, as well as incorporating a piece of old Wills tobacco advertising directly into the image. Piper had a strong interest in old advertising material and signs, and such a use gives the setting an immediate sense of the kind of nostalgia that one often finds in his work at this time, sitting cheek by jowl with a wonderfully simple and notational handling of paint.

This apparent contrast between the new and old is a very distinctive hallmark of modernism in Britain, and Piper’s work is no exception. The Nicholsons lived in an ancient farmhouse on Hadrian’s Wall, Mondrian paintings hanging by a nineteenth century cast-iron range, Nash infused his painting with the air of the metaphysical writers of the seventeenth century, and the celebration of the work of Alfred Wallis was based on his remembered vision of a maritime world lost to the present but rendered in an untutored and thus ‘authentic’ manner. In fact, although The Harbour at Night is through its manner of making very clearly a painting of its time, it exudes the Romantic sensibility, and thus perhaps gives us an early indication of the way that Piper would return to such a source in his later work. The short but highly influential volume that Piper published in 1942, British Romantic Artists, does a great deal to expand his ideas on the influence of this strand in British art. His opening paragraph provides as near an encapsulation of the ‘romantic’ idea as one could hope to find, and could indeed be describing just such an instant as is captured in The Harbour at Night, and bears quoting in full,

Romantic art deals with the particular. The particularisation of Bewick about a bird’s wing, of Turner about a waterfall or a hill town, of Rossetti about Elizabeth Siddall, is the result of a vision that can see in these things something significant beyond ordinary significance: something that for a moment seems to contain the whole world; and, when the moment is past, carries over some comment on life or experience besides the comment on appearances. (John Piper, British Romantic Artists, William Collins, London, 1942, p.7)
In his pastel portraits drawn during the Second World War Eric Kennington attempted to use a visual language that would render the heroism of those he portrayed. Like many other British artists working at the time he realised that to discuss the issues of modern war, the painter must turn to a style and subject matter that was appropriate in the works depiction of soldier’s ‘common sense of duty, [and] determination to endure’. Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, summed up the feeling in 1942 saying: Eric Kennington gives his portraits something of his own clear and noble vision of life and, if he draws us as he would have us be, then let us try to be as he sees us.

Kennington had direct experience of war and soldiering. He had joined up immediately in August 1914 and served as a private in the 3rd Battalion, The London Regiment, Princess Louise’s Own Kensingtons. He was shot in the foot in 1915 while helping a comrade clear a jammed rifle and, after his toe was amputated, was given an honorable medical discharge. Kennington’s famous painting of his exhausted company resting at Laventie, now in the Imperial War Museum, caused a sensation when it was exhibited and he was later recruited as an official war artist. Writing to the Ministry of Information in support of his appointment, John Lavery stated: ‘Mr Kennington, in my opinion, has painted in “The Kensingtons”, the only picture of the Great War that I have seen so far that will actually live.’

His images of the both wars were greatly admired. The poet and critic Laurence Binyon wrote in The New Statesman of Kennington’s ‘genius for reality. He has not only the gift of exact and faithful record, but the power of giving expression to the latent vehemence, energy and passion that make up the controlled strength of a man. If a foreigner wished to see the British soldier, he could not do better than see him with Mr Kennington’s eyes.’
Appointed as an Official War Artist, Eric Ravilious was assigned to the Admiralty and the submarine base at Gosport was among the places where he worked. He wanted to make a series of lithographs, and at one stage tried to gain support for the publication of them as a book, however funding was not forthcoming. The committee did, however, decide to purchase the original drawings.

The lithographs were printed by W.S. Cowell of Ipswich. There were ten subjects in the series, to be published in an edition of 50, however it appears that some are more common than others, and some show variations within the edition. The majority of the subjects are documents of life in a submarine and in the training of submariners. Two of them are imaginary, the *Introductory Lithograph* and *Different Aspects of Submarines* which incorporates a view of the vessel in section submerged, on the surface, and viewed from the stern and below.

This piece was a study for the lithograph of the same title. It emphasises the gloomy and claustrophobic working environment on the submarines. Describing his experience onboard Ravilious explained: 'It is awfully hot below when submarines dive and every compartment small and full of people at work... There is something jolly good about it, if I can only manage it, a blue gloom with coloured lights and everyone in shirts and braces. People go to sleep in odd positions across tables'. The figure in the foreground of both this drawing and the print is depicted slumped over a bench catching some much-needed sleep. The piece poignantly demonstrates to the viewer the often bizarre reality of life at war.
HARRY VAN DER WEYDEN
1868–1952

27. Desolation: Trenches North of Lens
1919
Oil on canvas • 26 x 45 1/2 inches (66 x 115.5 cm)
Exhibited: London, Royal Academy, Works by Camouflage Artists with Examples of Camouflage, Oct.-Nov. 1919 (145)

Born in Boston, van der Weyden won a scholarship to the Slade School in London at age nineteen, and studied at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1890-1891. Until World War I he lived near Etaples at Montreuil-sur-Mer. During the war Van der Weyden worked as a camouflage officer with the British Royal Engineers from 1916 to 1918 when Etaples was a major transit point and storage depot for the British Army.

This evocative painting depicts the aftermath of the Battle of Hill 70, between the Canadian Corps and five divisions of the German Sixth Army in August 1917. It was a bloody and inconclusive fight, in which both sides used poison gas, initiated to draw German troops away from the main fight at Ypres. Five Victoria Crosses were awarded to Canadian soldiers, and one to a Ukrainian serving with them. Nearly 10,000 Canadians were lost in the battle.

British artists commissioned by the War Propaganda Bureau to paint the Great War found that massive battles seemed to defy dramatic representation and instead looked for new ways of depicting them that avoided conventional narrative. The most popular was to paint the apocalyptic aftermath of the action, relying for effect on the memory of those who were there and the imagination of those who were not. There are many paintings of the battlefields around Lens in the Imperial War Museum in London. The mud is a particular light color because of chalk in the ground.

Van der Weyden exhibited this painting in the Camouflage Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1919. He joined the British Army at the advanced age of 46, serving with the Royal Engineers as Camouflage Officer (an art that the Allies learned belatedly from the Germans). Both his sons joined up with him. One of them was awarded the Military Cross in 1918. There are two watercolour studies in the Imperial War Museum for the painting, one inscribed 'Chicory Trench, N. of Lens 1918', the other dated 1919. Both are close to the finished painting, suggesting it was completed early in 1919.

HILDA CARLINE
1889–1950

28. Wartime Garden, Finchley Road, Hampstead
Oil on canvas • 22 x 26 inches (56 x 66 cm)
Provenance: by descent from the artist family
Painted in vivid, post-Impressionist colours, Spencer made this painting of a hay cart in the farmyard of Garsington Manor near Oxford. Dating back to the Tudor period, Garsington had been bought in 1914 in a state of some disrepair by the Bloomsbury hostess and patron Lady Ottoline Morrell. Through the 1920s she completely renovated it and constructed elaborate gardens.

Gilbert and Stanley Spencer had met Morrell as early as 1914 at Cookham, when she photographed them (NPG collection). After Gilbert’s service in the RAMC in the First World War they met again at his first solo exhibition, at the Goupil Gallery in 1923. ‘Thereafter’, Gilbert wrote, ‘if my reputation was not established, my domestic predicament was settled for Lady Ottoline said she would find me rooms at Garsington, and did so at 4 Blenheim Cottages’ on her estate. Spencer had the run of the estate and became part of the group that gathered around Morrell, which included Lytton Strachey, Mark Gertler, Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, Siegfried Sassoon and other members of the Bloomsbury circle.

This painting was in the possession of Gilbert’s brother Stanley, presumably a gift to him, and has remained in his family ever since.
30. JOSPEH AND POTIPHAR’S WIFE
1924
Pencil, pen and ink • 22 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches (57.2 x 52.1 cm)
Inscribed ‘Gilbert Spencer 1924’ b.r.

This drawing’s subject is the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. Genesis 39:1-20 relates how Joseph was bought as a slave by the Egyptian Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce the virtuous young man: ‘And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out’ (Genesis 39: 11–12). Producing his coat as evidence, Potiphar’s wife falsely accused Joseph of having assaulted her, and he was sent to prison.

Spencer made an oil version of the composition - about half the size of this detailed drawing, and more broadly executed - which is now in the Museum of Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.

Gilbert Spencer, like his brother Stanley, was rooted in the mythology and stories of the Bible and each boy had read it closely and in its entirety. Their mother gave them each a tick card to complete - usually sent by her Methodist church to children in Africa - to record their progress in reading through the testaments. At the Slade, Professor Tonks would set his students Biblical subjects to make large-scale drawings of, and these often contained modern day elements, a practice both Spencer brothers continued in their subsequent pictures. Joseph and the Israelites were set to work by Pharaoh to build the pyramids in the desert in Genesis. There is a wonderful logic in the present drawing in imagining they would sleep in tents, and portraying the type of British bell tent that Gilbert had experience of himself while serving in the Great War in the Royal Army Medical Corps. The fleeing Joseph’s deft step over the guy rope suggests Spencer’s direct experience of their hazards.

31. VICOLO DEGLI ABBANDONATI, VOLterra
1929
Oil on canvas • 26 1/4 x 22 inches (68.5 x 91.4 cm)
Inscribed ‘Nicholls, 1929’ l.l.
Provenance: With Barbizon House, London; P.H.Padwick; The Hon. David Bathurst; his [anon.] sale, Christie’s, London, 7 November 1983, lot 69 (purchased by the present owner)
Newton had originally been taught plein-air painting when he was at art school in 1906-7 but it was a method he struggled with for some years. Eventually he gave it up after spending two years studying the Old Masters in the National Gallery, particularly Canaletto. Newton now painted from carefully detailed drawings, squared up for transfer in the academic manner. In his landscape of Chilham Valley in Kent he records with an almost super-real faithfulness the form and texture of the trees and turf, but it is the effects of light contrasted with the threatening clouds of the sky that is the true subject of the picture. Reviewing his career, Newton observed: ‘I felt I had to try to create something in every picture I painted, a mood, a mental atmosphere, a sentiment.”
JAMES BATEMAN
1893–1959

33. A Westmorland Farm 1935
Oil on canvas • 35 x 42 inches (88.9 x 106.7 cm)
Exhibited: London, The Royal Academy 1935 (478)

Following his exhibition of this work at the Royal Academy in 1935, Bateman was elected an Associate member in recognition of his talents. He was born into a farming family in Kendal, so the scene he represented was based on his own experience of farm life and there may be the possibility that it was his parents’ farm in the picture. The composition is characteristically inventive, with the two cows in the foreground truncated by the wall to form an unusual visual conjunction.

Bateman’s working method was fastidiously academic, and his widow explained that for a large-scale composition ‘the most careful studies and drawings from Nature were always made’ (letter 9 September 1959, Tate Archive). Bateman achieved considerable success with his canvases of cattle, and on three occasions - in 1928, 1935 and 1936 - the Chantrey Fund purchased one to present to the Tate, an almost unequalled honour.
34. Piebald Pony and Beehives c.1910–12
Oil on paper laid on board • 6 x 5 inches (15.2 x 12.7 cm)
Provenance: Given by the artist to Richard Carlile after the First World War, by descent
Exhibited: London, Hampstead Town Hall, Hampstead Artists, 1960; Plymouth, City Museum & Art Gallery, Sir Stanley Spencer CBE RA, 1963 (1); Cookham, Odney Club, Spencers and Carlines in Hampstead in the 1920s, 1973; on loan to Tate Gallery

This is one of Spencer’s earliest paintings in oils, a medium that he taught himself how to use, it not forming part of his training at the Slade – ‘In the four years I was at the Slade’, Spencer recalled, ‘I did about three days’ painting from one model – three days out of four years!’ Tonks taught me how to draw and was very critical of it’ (Richard Carlile, Stanley Spencer at War, 1978 p.29).

Spencer evolved a sense of immediacy and transcendent intensity in these early paintings. They invariably present his home village of Cookham – from which he commuted to the Slade every day – and the feelings of connection that it evoked in him. The piebald pony grazed in a field adjacent to a spot featured in another early painting by Spencer, Two Girls and a Beehive (c.1910) which, he wrote, depicted ‘more or less the fields on the right at the bottom of Mill Lane’ in Cookham.

Spencer’s intense, visionary connection to Cookham did not however make him isolated from avant-garde developments in the London art world. Spencer attended the lectures given by Roger Fry at the Slade from 1909, and it is almost certain that he saw the exhibition of modern French painting Manet and the Post-Impressionists that Fry staged at the Grafton Gallery in November 1910. Indeed for his second exhibition of advanced art, staged two years later, Fry selected Spencer’s John Donne arriving in Heaven to exhibit. In The Piebald Pony Spencer places the paint with a slightly fuzzy-edged touch that is somewhat reminiscent of works by Cézanne that Fry included in 1910 such as The Viaduct at L’Estaque (c.1883) or, perhaps more strongly, the pictures of Maurice Denis, such as Ulisses and Calipso (1908). Spencer’s attention to Denis, not least the other artist’s own transcendent subject-matter, was noted by Tonks in connection with his picture in the second Post-Impressionist exhibition, albeit a comment Spencer greeted with outrage as he always saw his own work as wholly original. Spencer merged this plethora of influences into a distinctive, individual style, and in a letter to the Spencer family his tutor Henry Tonks wrote: ‘In some ways he has shown signs of having the most original mind of anyone we have had at the Slade and he combines this with great powers of draughtsmanship’ (quoted in Maurice Collins, Stanley Spencer: A Biography, London 1962, p.39).
Stanley Spencer (1891 - 1959)

35. Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta c.1935
Pencil and watercolour • 13 3/4 x 22 inches (40 x 56 cm)
Provenance: Sir Stanley Spencer, by descent

Spencer had frequently used his native Cookham as the setting for miraculous scenes from the Bible. In the 1930s he conceived the theme of Christ appearing on regatta day, preaching to those gathered there. In 1950 he returned to the idea, intending a sequence of canvases to form the river aisle of 'Church House', the architectural setting for his paintings Spencer hoped might one day be realised, that were partly inspired by the presentation of Giotto’s frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. The Church House scheme laid out the themes of sexual and religious love, and of domestic harmony. The Regatta series fitted easily into the notion of Church House since it placed the celebration of the Resurrection in the context of Cookham Regatta. Here we see the villagers and visitors down from London for the day listening as Christ preaches from the horse ferry barge on the Last Day. The present work is related to one of three paintings that depict the onlookers on the river, the others being Listening from Punts and Punts Meeting. The other paintings in the series - Girls Listening and Dinner on the Hotel Lawn - show the activities on the riverbank.

The high viewpoint of the present drawing is as if looking down from Cookham Bridge. As children Stanley and his brother Gilbert had stood on the bridge with their older sister Annie to listen to their brother Will and others singing popular songs from the nearby horse-ferry barge, after the boat races were over — ‘Looking down from the bridge’, Gilbert wrote, ‘we could just see him, surrounded by boats and punts full of people’ (Gilbert Spencer, Stanley Spencer, 1961 p.86)

36. A Ship’s Figurehead
Pencil and watercolour • 20 x 35 3/4 inches (51 x 77 cm)
Provenance: Sir Stanley Spencer, by descent
Elsie Munday joined the Spencer family as a maid in 1928 when they were living at Chapel View, Burghclere, while Spencer was working on his murals in the Sandham Memorial Chapel. She moved with them to Cookham in 1937. Elsie formed the subject of Spencer's portrait Country Girl: Elsie (1929). He was extremely fond of her and intended to devote a separate chapel to her in his proposed 'Church House' designs, a never-realised decorative scheme devoted to love and life.

In this drawing Spencer depicts himself giving Elsie a ride on his back, like a young child. It is a scene of unselfconscious playfulness, and one that ignores any social division between employer and employed. In the background, by the kitchen fire, Spencer's wife Hilda lies naked in a tin bath.

Spencer was introduced to the Carline family by his brother Gilbert, who was a student at the Slade with Hilda Carline; later she became Stanley's wife. The Carlines were an extraordinary group of creative and intellectual talent. George Carline (1855-1920) was a successful portrait painter, with several painters and sculptors as his forebears, although his father had practiced as a solicitor in Lincoln. In 1885 George married Annie Smith (1862-1945) while working on a portrait commission in Essex. They produced five children, three of whom became painters – Hilda, Richard and Sydney. The Carline's home in Hampstead - first at 47 Downshire Hill, and from 1936 onwards at 17 Pond Street - was densely hung with paintings of all periods by all the members of the family and their friends, as well as with numerous artefacts from different cultures collected on their travels abroad. A 'museum' of curiosities was installed in the basement. In this stimulating (but never luxurious or chic) setting, the Carlines and their friends met to discuss art, religion, and politics, for discussion was another fixture of their daily lives. In the 1920s and 1930s the Carline family home in Hampstead became a noted meeting place for artists, writers, and intellectuals of independent and radical tendencies, to the extent that the Carlines themselves tend to be remembered for their relationships with more prominent artists, such as Stanley Spencer, William Roberts, and Charles Griner, rather than for their own achievements (see Elizabeth Cowling, Dictionary of National Biography).

Annie was very much the matriarch. In 1927 Annie took up painting in watercolour herself and proved to have an innate talent. Her sharply observed landscapes and figure scenes delighted the artists who foregathered in the Carlines home, and she was persuaded to exhibit them publicly, mainly with the London Group and the Artists’ International Association. The cult of naive painting was at a height in the 1930s and in 1939, on the initiative of the cubist painter and theorist André Lhote, she held an exhibition at the Galerie Pittoresque in Paris.

This fine pencil portrait by Spencer, in which the head fills almost the entire picture space, gives a sense of Annie's strength and resilience.
39. Little Miss Muffet c. 1936
Oil on panel with articulated eyes • 14 x 12 inches (35.5 x 30 cm)
Provenance: Colonel Reggie Cooper; by whom given to Lawrence Whistler, the artist’s brother, and by descent; The Fine Art Society 2003; Private Collection
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