

# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**Graham Sutherland (London 1903 - 1980)**

## **Armoured Form**

Circa: 1950

1950

167.5 x 83.5 cm (66 x 32 7/8 inches)

Sutherland's major preoccupation during the first half of the 1950s was the Standing Form series of which Armoured Form is an early and significant work. The tone of the series was set by its first major masterpiece, the British Council's Standing Form against a Hedge, 1950, a similarly large and powerful picture.

When asked about his Standing Forms, Sutherland said, 'People ask about my "Standing Forms". What do they mean? They do not of course mean anything. The forms are based on the principles of organic growth, with which I have always been preoccupied. To me they are monuments and presences. But why use these forms instead of human figures? Because, at the moment, I find it necessary to catch the taste - the quality - the essence of the presence of the human figure: the mysterious immediacy of a figure standing in a room or against a hedge in its shadow, its awareness, its regard, as if one had never seen it before - by a substitution. I find at the moment that I can make these qualities more real to myself in this way. It happens that I find these organic forms best for my purpose. They themselves are emotionally modified from their natural prototype. They give me a sense of the shock of surprise which direct evocation could not possibly do. Also in these pictures, I am trying to return these forms after drastic rearrangement and emotional and formal modification to the field of purely visual response – to throw them back, as it were, into the original cradle of impact' (G. Sutherland, quoted in J. Hayes, Graham Sutherland, Oxford, 1980, p. 30).

Armoured Form signals a change in palette that emerged in the mid-1940s, becoming more apparent after Sutherland started working in France in 1947. Sutherland commented on the change in colour and its importance: 'Colour has two major functions. It is form and mood. That is to say that by its warmth or coldness it can create form; it can also create a mood; it is fascinating to make complete changes of colour in the background of a painting and see how the whole atmosphere changes. Colour can suggest depth and shallowness, hot and cold – it can even suggest sound'.

Dominated by bold primary colours of azure, burnt orange and white, these combine to give the central form a mechanised, man-made, even alien presence, less anthropomorphic than other Standing Form figures. Starkly highlighted before the abstracted orange and white background, its overall shape resembles a partly-humanoid, partly-alien form of the imagination. At its base sit a jumble of sharp forms, reminiscent of vines, thorns and pre-historic forms he used in his Origins of the Land series.

Although Armoured Form recalls the sci-fi visions of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds and de-humanisation in Huxley's Brave New World, the bold colours paint seem to indicate a progressive and positive image of the future, in tune with the prevailing attitude at the time, which spoke of the progress through science, mechanisation and the world beyond in space. However, both the title and the shadow hint at an altogether more uncomfortable emotional sub-conscious.

In 1950, Armoured Form was exhibited in the opening exhibition titled Aspects of British Art at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, whose aim was to showcase the many varied styles in which artists were working, with at least a third being artists under 30. The following year the ICA held a retrospective selection of his work, and in 1952 Sutherland was honoured with three rooms in the British Pavilion at the 1952 Venice Biennale, which subsequently toured to major museums in Paris, Amsterdam and Zurich. In 1952, he was also given an exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris.

## **Provenance**

Provenance:

with the Redfern Gallery, London, where purchased in October 1980

by descent until 2017

## **Exhibitions**

### Exhibited:

London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1950: Aspects of British Art, December 1950 - January 1951, n. 30, as 'Armoured Figure'

Bristol, Arts Council of Great Britain, City Museum and Art Gallery, A Festival of Britain Exhibition, Loan Exhibition Contemporary British Painting, May - June 1951, n. 72, as 'Standing Form'

Florida, The Society of the Four Arts Palm Beach, February 1954 (catalogue not traced)

Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, n. 321 (catalogue not traced)

London, Redfern Gallery, Summer Exhibition, 1964, n. 711