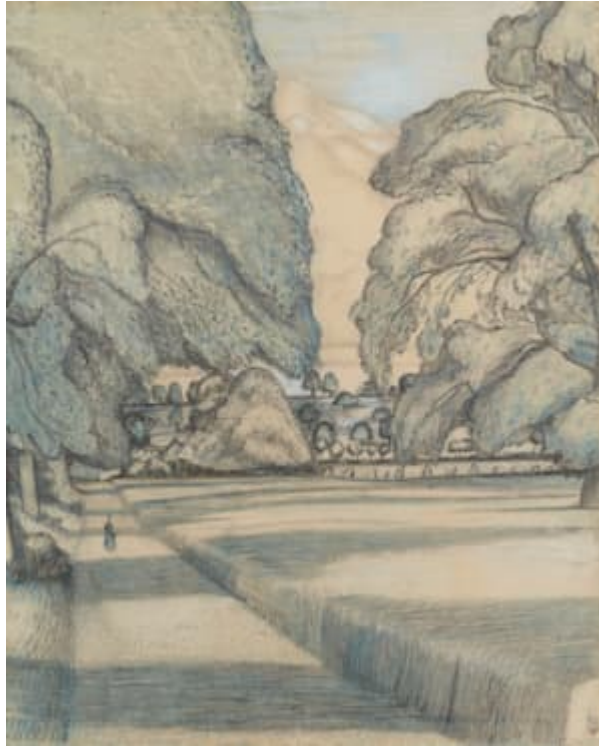


# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**Paul Nash (Kensington 1889 - Boscombe 1946)**

## **The Peacock Path**

Circa: 1912

1912

45.7 x 38.1 cm (18 x 15 inches)

Signed 'Paul Nash' and with monogram

During his time at the Slade between 1910-11, Paul Nash became frustrated with the development of his landscape art. The tutorship of acclaimed names such as Philip Wilson Steer and Derwent Lees failed to impress with the former's fondness for Constable providing little inspiration and the artist noting that he had 'explored the Constable country. It held no terrors for me; I did not want to paint landscape like Constable' (Paul Nash quoted in Andrew Causey, Paul Nash, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p.24). However, as a friend of Ben Nicholson he had direct access to probably the only landscape painter in England who could inspire him and during April 1911 was invited to spend time at Rottingdean, the family home, where father William was creating landscape paintings of the South Downs. Despite their size, these oils featured open skies with wheeling birds, little in the way of landscape features and the occasional single person (albeit not prominently positioned) or animal. They incorporated modest design and subtle control of colouring to create a subdued mood which brought a 'new kind of silence' and led to Nash's first en plein air studies of trees.

It was shortly after this in the Spring of 1912 that Nash received further encouragement from Sir William Richmond R.A. who, in response to works such as Vision at Evening (1911, Victoria and Albert Museum), declared 'My boy you should go in for nature' (quoted in Causey, Loc.Cit) With Richmond's advice in mind Nash left his rooms in Chelsea for the parental home, Wood Lane House at Iwer Heath in Buckinghamshire. The property had been specially built for the family in 1901 and included a plot of about an acre and a half, bordered by great elm trees and carefully planted with maturing shrubbery.

The morning room, which Nash used as a studio, looked over what became known as the 'Bird Garden' and has been described by Roger Cardinal as 'where it all began' (R. Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash*, London, 1989, p.63). Nash's intricate knowledge of the garden and surrounding area quickly led to seminal works such as *The Three* (1912, Private Collection) which was sold in these rooms for £86,000 on 8 March 2005 (see fig.1) and the simply titled *A Drawing* (1913, Private Collection), which at £212,500 set a new world auction record for work on paper by the artist on 17 November 2014 (see fig.2).

Nash spoke of the 'Bird Garden' in his autobiography *Outline*, for which Sir Herbert Read wrote the foreword prior to its publication in 1949. His words leave us with little doubt of the impact this room had and the catalyst it was in encouraging him to transpose his ideas on nature and the natural world into clear pictorial terms. He describes how 'its magic lay within itself, implicated in its own design and its relationship to its surroundings. In addition, it seemed to respond in a dramatic way to the influence of light. There were moments when, through this agency, the place took on a startling beauty, a beauty to my eyes wholly unreal. It was this "unreality", or rather this reality of another aspect of the accepted world, this mystery of clarity which was at once so elusive and so positive, that I now began to pursue and which from that moment drew me into itself and absorbed my life' (quoted in R. Cardinal, *Loc.Cit.*)

Away from the sanctuary of the family home, other natural influences purveyed during this time. In 1912, the same year that *The Peacock Path* was executed, the Nash family visited relatives who lived close to Wittenham Clumps, an easterly outcrop of the Berkshire Downs which were formed of twin hills, each hosting beech woods. A group of related works duly followed with Nash commenting that 'Ever since I remembered them the Clumps had meant something to me. I felt their importance long before I knew their history. They eclipsed the impression of all the early landscapes I knew. This, I am certain, was due almost entirely to their formal features rather than to any associative force. They were the pyramids of my small world' (Paul Nash quoted in Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash, Landscape and the Life of Objects*, Lund Humphries, Farnham, 2013, pp.29-30). Several of the Wittenham pictures such as *Under the Hill* (1912, Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery) mark the landscape around and descent from the Clumps and, as in the present work, incorporate a path into the pictorial structure.

David Fraser Jenkins has spoken of 'a path through the elements' and the reoccurring importance of this motif within the artist's work during his formative years. As early as 1911 he had executed *The Wanderer* (The British Museum) depicting a solitary figure, possibly Nash himself, disappearing into the woods through a distinctive yet subtle central path cut through the grass and he would continue to use it as a compositional structure throughout his career, perhaps most powerfully in the war image *Marching at Night* (1918, Victoria and Albert Museum). The uniform and man-made path that has been cut through the long stalks of summer grass in the present work dominates the foreground of the composition with a sense of intimacy created by the low viewpoint that is enhanced by the dramatic shadows cast by the trees. Trees, which had held a spiritual quality for Nash since childhood visits to Kensington Gardens, dot the landscape with the branches and canopies of those on the left and right akin to a curtain waiting to be pulled back and reveal the enchantment that lies beyond. The peacock with its extravagant plumage and strong posture makes its way into this mystical world, a graceful bird whose presence seems almost to be a metaphor for the artist's free spirit which seems to inhabit the landscape. The artist was sparing with colour at this point yet the blue and green wash that permeates the work serves to accentuate the feeling of magical complicity.

*The Peacock Path* demonstrates the exquisite ability of Nash as an artist to inscribe human emotions and sensitivities into the landscape. While the human figure is absent from Nash's landscape, the work itself is nevertheless 'saturated with human presence and meaning' (R. Cardinal, *Op.Cit.*, p.7). This work was exhibited as part of Nash's first one-man show of drawings at the Carfax Gallery in 1912 and was

subsequently included in two Tate Gallery exhibitions dedicated to the artist in 1948 and 1975 respectively. Having originally been acquired by Mrs J L Garvin, it was bequeathed to Benedict Read and bears the inscription 'For Benedict Read, son of Herbert Read and my godson' (on the backboard).

### **Provenance**

Provenance:

The Artist, from whom acquired by  
Mrs J L Garvin, by whom bequeathed to  
Benedict Read, to 2017

### **Exhibitions**

Exhibited:

London, Carfax and Co., Drawings by Paul Nash, November 1912, cat.no.19  
London, Tate Gallery, Paul Nash, A Memorial Exhibition 17 March-2 May 1948, cat.no.72 (as Peacock Walk)  
London, Tate Gallery, Paul Nash: Paintings and Watercolours, 12 November-28 December 1975, cat.no.9  
Arts Council Touring Exhibition, 1976, cat.no.9

### **Literature:**

Literature:

Poet & Painter, 1946  
Margot Eates, Paul Nash, John, Murray, London, 1973, p.17, p.20 & p.29, pl.4  
Andrew Causey, Paul Nash, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p.349, cat.no.48