

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Paul Nash (Kensington 1889 - Boscombe 1946)

The Bridge, Romney Marsh

Circa: 1924

1924

oil on canvas

63.5 x 76.2 cm (25 x 30 inches)

Signed and dated 'Paul Nash/1924' (lower right)

In a letter from July 1911 to the poet, Gordon Bottomley, Paul Nash wrote 'Something about the trees and the light across shorn fields is always making me wonder ... In fact I do nothing but walk about marvelling at the wonder of the world in general – perhaps I shall paint a picture or write a poem one day'.

And indeed he did. Nash's paintings express a deep, mystical attachment to the English countryside and to the places in which he lived. The present work is one of contemplative repose and harmony, expressive of a time of personal equilibrium for the artist as he recovered from his experiences on the frontline during First World War.

Nash's work produced immediately following the War is visceral in its depiction of the scarred landscape that he witnessed. Having settled in Dymchurch, he found a renewed serenity in his surroundings, and began to depict the British landscape in a way that resembles his work before the war. The artist's childhood spent in the Buckinghamshire countryside inspired his love for this landscape. Indeed, Nash's early shows in 1912 and 1913 were largely devoted to drawings and watercolours of landscapes, influenced by the poetry of William Blake and the paintings of Samuel Palmer and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. There is a discernible, perhaps somewhat childlike, innocence in the early works' outlook on nature. A similarly romantic image of the landscape is seen in the present work's softly curving arches of the stone bridge, reflected in the quiet ribbon of water, and echoed by the organic curves of the clouds and tree foliage. The river is still; the wind has dropped; it is a scene of peace.

Studying at the Slade alongside other artists at the vanguard of British Modernism such as Ben Nicholson and Stanley Spencer, Nash had remained unmoved by the contemporary clamour surrounding Post-Impressionism. However, his work during the 1920s developed independently in a manner parallel to that of the great French Post-Impressionists. The present work reveals this changing theory and practice in Nash's rendering of the deciduous tree's boughs weighed down with leaves. The voluptuous foliage is not composed of individual leaves as in earlier work, but of solid forms that create an almost abstract design. The richly textured chestnut compliments the icy blue sky, and is mirrored by the soft pink shadows beneath the arches. Commenting on Nash's work of the mid-1920s, artist Albert Rutherston notes: 'we have reached the period in Nash's life where all that he has done before is being gathered together in unified expression' (A. Rutherston, *Contemporary British Artists: Paul Nash*, London, 1923). Indeed, the artist's show at the Leicester Galleries in the following year, where the present work was first exhibited, was met with immense critical acclaim and attracted a number of new collectors.

Devoid of figures, the painting hints at Nash's continuous drawing of the analogy between human life and that of trees, and, consequently, the expression of human emotion in nature. *The Bridge, Romney Marsh* is an engaging painting that speaks of Nash's enduring interest in ambiguity and mystery, poetry and literature, and, most importantly, his love for the British countryside.

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Provenance

With Leicester Galleries, London, where purchased by Desmond Coke in 1929

His Sale; Sotheby's, London, 23 July 1931, lot 153, where purchased by Arthur Tooth and Sons, London

Purchased at the 1932 exhibition by Miss Gladstone

With Arthur Tooth & Sons, London, where acquired by;

Royan Middleton, and by descent to;

Mrs Constance J.W. Fettes, Scotland, and by descent to the previous owner, to 2022

Exhibitions

London, Leicester Galleries, *Paintings and Watercolours by Paul Nash*, June 1924, no. 115, as 'Bridge over the Dyke'.

London, Arthur Tooth & Sons, *An Exhibition of Pictures for Collectors of Contemporary British Painting*, January 1932, no. 18.

Johannesburg, Kunstgalerie, *Empire Exhibition*, 1936, no 583, as 'A Landscape with Bridge'.

London, Leicester Galleries, *An Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture and Prints by Modern Artists*, Summer 1938, no. 110, as 'The Bridge'

London, National Gallery, *British Painting since Whistler*, 1940, no. 151

New York, The Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, *A Sense of Place: The Paintings of Edward Burra*

