

Michael Ayrton, White Still Life, 1959, Oil, Board, Matthieson  
Michael Ayrton

Sold



REF: 11300

Height: 101.5 cm (40")

Width: 76 cm (29.9")

Depth: 0.1 cm (0")

## Description

Michael Ayrton (British, 1921-1975)

White Still Life

Signed and dated 'Michael Ayrton 59' (upper left)

Oil on board

Provenance: With Matthiesen Ltd., London, cat. no. 30

Related To: Black Still Life, 1959, a work of the same composition, size & medium but with a black background and possibly intended to pair White Still Life as an opposition. This work also bears a Mathiesen Ltd label.

Measures: Board height 101.5 cm . , 3ft . , 4 in., length 76 cm., 2ft, 6 in.,

In a white bevelled frame,

Frame height 113.5 cm., 44 ¾ in. , length 88.5 cm., 35 in

Ayrton wrote: 'To practice an art is primarily to discover one's relationship with reality an attempt to find what in essence is real [and] communicate part of this experience to others and so enlarge their experience.'

The author and collector J C Leissring wrote: 'There is a peculiar mystery about Michael Ayrton that I am unable to unravel from this position in space and time. It may come to pass that at some future time I will encounter just the person who will tell me why Ayrton has not achieved the kind of artistic reputation he clearly deserves and why he seems to be hidden in the cracks of art history. This will likely not always be so.' Whilst his handsome features, the powerful torso of the sculptor, and the mellifluous voice of a born teacher and conversationalist were compellingly attractive; Ayrton's relentless curiosity, his considerable eclecticism, and his formidable erudition, backed by a strong physical presence intimidated many people of weaker intellect or personality.

For more than three decades Ayrton practised as a painter, sculptor, draughtsman, engraver, portraitist, stage designer, book illustrator, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, critic, art historian, radio and television broadcaster, and cinema and television film-maker. Ayrton was commercially successful, with constant access to the media, but never achieved lasting critical acclaim. This is not solely due to the post-war placing of abstract above figurative art. Despite his resonant subjects, Ayrton's is a private art, the self-expression of a driven man.

When pressed, Henry Moore, whose judgement Ayrton greatly respected, gave a succinct verdict: 'A fascinating side-alley; not mainstream, but a significant eccentric.'

Ayrton's visual work, apart from his portraits, tended to be thematic, with certain ideas and images either obsessively recorded or constantly recurring. In this pairing Ayrton uses the simple imagery of the egg,

flowers and skull as metaphors within a stylised composition to explore the cycles of life, birth, life and death. He pursues this theme using opposition of colour possibly to explore how perception can change from different vantage points.

In *White Still Life* Ayrton uses thick application of paint to create a deep, textural, 'sculpted' surface. In contrast to the heavy texture, a subtle palette of whites, greys, pinks and blues presents the imagery in a delicate manner and gives the painting a masterful, yet soft, spiritual quality. The single red flower, stands out, encapsulating the force of life, the drive that Ayrton himself was either loved or...