

Ideas and Studies for Open Hearth Furnace, c1941

Graham Sutherland OM

Sold



REF: 10765

Height: 27 cm (10.6")

Width: 24 cm (9.4")

Description

GRAHAM SUTHERLAND O.M. (British, 1903-1980)
Ideas and Studies for Open Hearth Furnace

Inscribed 'Ideas and Studies/for Open Hearth Furnace/Subject' & sketch verso
Black ink, watercolour, pastel and bodycolour

EXHIBITED: Goldmark Gallery, Graham Sutherland Wartime Paintings, December 2002, no. 8, as 'Mouth of Hot Metal Container'.

RELATED TO : The Wartime Drawings (Tassi) :
96 Flames leaping from furnace 1941.
99 Pouring molten steel into furnace 1941.

120 Iron & container, Cardiff 1942
121 Mouth of hot metal container, 1942. City Art Gallery Manchester

At the age of 16 Sutherland was employed as an apprentice at the Midland Railway Locomotive Works in Derby. Here, he trained as an engineer and he gained an understanding of the machinery, but displayed no aptitude for mathematics. He experienced what it took to beat a rivet, with both power and precision, into the required shape for an engine. After a year's employment, which he later credited with stimulating his lasting fascination with machinery, he enrolled at art school. 'When he later painted furnaces in the steel foundries he was reveling in scenes worthy of Dante's inferno and paying tribute to the endurance and practicality of the human beings who have this primary blaze under control.' Alexandra Harris

Sutherland was one of the first artists 'recruited' by Kenneth Clark into the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) scheme, and like his contemporaries Henry Moore and John Piper, he initially felt slightly uncertain as to how he might apply his own vision to such a programme. However, in the devastated streets and warehouses of the East End of London, he found the sources for a powerful body of work, full of foreboding.

In the Autumn of 1941, Sutherland was sent by the War Artists' Advisory Committee to record steel and ammunition works in Cardiff. Malcolm Yorke comments on Sutherland's series of steelworks, 'Now all his sunset colours could be deployed again in the flow of molten iron, flames belching from furnace doors, glowing crusts of slag and the plop and seeth of boiling metal' (see M. Yorke, *Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times*, London, 1988, pp. 125-126).

The combination of the industrial architecture and the almost alchemical processes involved gave him ample subject matter to create images that are at once factual and fantastical. The technical processes in steel manufacture clearly fascinated Sutherland, and he draws this into the images that he produced. Whilst ostensibly dealing with a depiction of an industrial process essential to the war effort, Sutherland transforms these scenes, the huge furnaces and crucibles taking on a life of their own. Huge tongues of flame leap from the crucibles of molten metal and the hot yellows, pinks and reds add an infernal glow to the whole. The human is reduced to a mere cipher.

Sutherland comments on his furnace work of this period: 'The conception of the idea of stress, both

physical and mental, and how forms can be modified by emotion had been, even before the war, much in my mind. It was crystallized and strengthened by my understanding of Picasso's studies for Guernica. Faces become distorted by te...