

Logs, Chichester, c1939

Sold



REF: 10872

Height: 35.5 cm (14")

Width: 45 cm (17.7")

Description

JOHN CRAXTON, R.A. (British, 1922-2009)
Logs, Chichester

Inscribed 'Logs/Chichester' (lower left) & signed 'John Craxton' (lower right)

Circa 1939/40

Sketch verso

Pencil, wash, pen and ink

EXHIBITED : John Craxton, Works on paper, hand coloured linocuts & prints,
Osbourne Samuel, 17 May-11 June 2011

Sheet length 35 ½ cm., 14 in., Height 45 cm., 17 ¾ in.

In a handcarved and gilded frame

Frame Height 58 cm, 23 in., Length 66 cm., 26 in.,

Craxton's Sussex connections are significant to his artistic development. At the age of seven he was sent to a Sussex farm near Pulborough for makeshift lessons. When he became a choirboy at Chichester Cathedral, Craxton discovered he wanted to become a painter. 'Two bas-reliefs in the cathedral were important in my life. They were Saxon/Norman. I used to see them every day and I realised that art was not copying nature but recreating it. It was the road to Damascus for me. I saw then how vital the imagination was.'

Unhappy attendance at the Prebendal Choir School in Chichester at the age of 9 was relieved by holidays at Selsey Bill in the ex-Army hut purchased by his father with royalties from his song 'Mavis', made popular by the Irish tenor, John McCormack. Craxton loved exploring the surrounding countryside and the nearby city of Chichester. 'I owe it to Chichester for helping me to become a pagan but, above all, I owe to Chichester a Pauline conversation to what I most emphatically call art'.

He adored Chichester's Roman street layout, the Gothic crown of the central Market Cross which was 'a joy to go around and round in an open car and watch the arches merge into themselves,' and the 'huge pale olive green stone' cathedral. Inside the historic beacon he relished the low early 12th century Romanesque bas-reliefs depicting Christ arriving at the Bethany and The Raising of Lazarus. They provided a constancy in his shifting life. The two panels showed him that 'great art from the distant past could be without epoch, it could look fresh and immediate and modern and clearly didn't have to mimic nature to look real'. And he added 'these sculptures were my talisman, for their astonishing dramas and great presence were there to see every day even when the heavy noxious smoke from my censer made me feel faint'.

In 1939 aged 17 John was lodging at Tenterden when he turned to depicting dead, split and toppled trees. Influenced by Paul Nash's monster field images from 1938 he became fascinated by the drama when they

fell, leaving stumps like the broken columns he had admired in churchyards as symbols of premature death. Logs at Chichester includes a church to reinforce this message as well as possibly symbolising the strength of the human spirit faced with the adversity of war and the importance of faith. The image of the tree stumps piled up on top of each other in disarray is most likely a metaphor for the dislocation and destruction of war, particularly as the outlines were to be echoed in the contours of crashed and burned out planes. During the Second World War there were 3 bombing raids on Chichester. Bombs were dropped on Basin Road in 1941, on Chapel Street...