

John Tunnard, Two Heads, Watercolor and Gouache, 1950s,
Picture, Surrealism

£36,000

John Tunnard



REF: 11139

Height: 25 cm (9.8")

Width: 35 cm (13.8")

Depth: 2 cm (0.8")

Description

JOHN TUNNARD, A.R.A. (British 1900-1971) : Two Heads Executed in 1955 Signed and dated ' John Tunnard / 55 ' lower right and on the reverse Titled, signed & dated verso Watercolor and gouache
Provenance: Private collection. Exhibited: McRoberts & Tunnard, John Tunnard, 26 November-23 December 1959, no.19, illustrated. Hartnoll & Eyre Gallery, John Tunnard, 6 - 30 April 1971, no.18
Literature: John Tunnard, His Life & Work, pp.185-6, no.649, illustrated 49, (Peat & Whitton) Related to: Head, 1950, P&W no 600, Witt Collection. Untitled (head with bird), c1955, P&W no 650. Apollo, 1952, P&W catalogue 614. Portrait, c 1958, P&W no 683, Leeds Museums & Galleries. Self portrait, 1959, P&W no 711, National Portrait Gallery. Sheet height 25 cm., 9 ¾ in., length 35 cm., 13 ¾ in., Floated in a painted, moulded frame Frame height 54 cm., 21 in., length 64 cm., 25 in.,

Two Heads is a gouache and watercolor work on paper that Tunnard completed in 1955 and that shows two highly stylised heads, one white, one red, superimposed over what appears to be a view of the sea from a high vantage point. The view is likely to have been inspired, if not directly taken from, by the actual views from Tunnard's home in Lamorna not far from St. Ives.

The sea is also rendered in a stylised succession of waves while the sky is depicted in red tones, implying perhaps sunset or sunrise. The ship motifs have been placed over the sea in a playful, hardly naturalistic fashion, adding to the dreamlike atmosphere of the picture. The heads appear to depict two female figures with slightly exaggerated features: elongated noses that seem to extend to the eyebrows under which Tunnard has added large prominent eyes.

The heads however do not look at us, their gaze appears to be as lost in space as they are in time. They could be mythical characters from a long lost time (the features are not unlike those found in the Egyptian or Greek sculpture) or, considering the seaweed or coral motifs that run over the faces as if indicating that these are underwater creatures. The white head is particularly striking giving such an illusion of three-dimensionality that it seems to come off the surface as if it was a marble or a plaster bust.

A painting by John Tunnard begins in the order of nature; it traverses the phantasms of the imagination; and then ends in the order of art, which is an analogy of the mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven.' (Herbert Read)

The death of Tunnard's mother freed him from financial insecurity which had a significant impact on his artistic development in the 1950's. In 1952 he bought Trethinick which is on the Penwith peninsula four miles south of Penzance situated in the dense woodland of the Lamorna Valley, an area of outstanding natural beauty. Lamorna itself is a picturesque Cornish cove with a small granite harbour, nestling within granite cliffs to the East and West and a row of granite cottages. The seascape in Two Heads is a typical view that Tunnard could have seen from the cliffs around Lamorna.

The house was surrounded by 6 acres of 'impenetrable jungle' which the Tunnards transformed, ' Near the house he made a lawn, herbaceous bord...