

Sailboat with brown sky, 1930

Alfred Wallis

Sold



REF: 10871

Height: 18.4 cm (7.2")

Width: 22.2 cm (8.7")

Description

Signed 'Alfred W' (upper right).
Signed on the reverse and numbered 250

Oil on board

Painted in 1930.

'About Alfred Wallis: the essential part of his idea was that he worked naturally like the first man will have worked, using the materials to hand (a cave or a cardboard) in order to make an experience. To Wallis his paintings were never 'paintings' but actual events.' Ben Nicholson

Wallis began to paint after his wife's death (1922) , 'for company' as he said and painting became his all absorbing passion. There was no problem about what to paint, ' I do most what used to be what we shall never see no more as everything is altered', he wrote to Ede in 1934 and again in 1935 'what I do mosley is what used to be out of my own memery what we may never see again as things are altered all together'. The history of Wallis collecting makes an interesting study, his pictures were bought by artists (as with this work) collectors and the cognoscenti, and the ownership and provenances are always revealing.

This is an early work (Ben Nicholson bought his first painting in 1928) with a classical simplicity of design which makes some later pictures appear cluttered as if Wallis was trying to fit too much into them. It depicts one of the small, inshore fishing boats that worked the around St Ives, Penzance and Newlyn, and as Wallis's paintings rarely depict people it is quite charming to the fisherman and the tiller and the other working the bow. Wallis had worked in such boats in the 1880's and knew them well, and you can feel the expression of his experience. It is painted with exactness of detail with a sure sense of relative proportion and the palette that is associated with him, lovely dark browns, shiny blacks, fierce greys, strange whites and the particularly pungent Cornish green.

Alfred Wallis is now recognized as one of the most original British artists of the 20th century. After he met Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood, his pictures of boats and harbours, produced on odd-shaped boards with the use of ordinary ship's paint, were an inspiration to artists seeking a new approach. The directness of his "primitive" vision and the object-like quality of his paintings were highly influential in the development of British Modernism. He was not an isolated and eccentric figure, but someone who was every bit as necessary to English painters as the Douanier Rousseau was necessary to Picasso and his friends. When art reaches an over-sophisticated stage, someone who can paint out of his experience with an unsullied and intense personal vision becomes of inestimable value. The way in which he used the simple means at his disposal - yacht paint and odd, irregular scraps of cardboard and wood - is an object lesson to any painter. Wallis shows such easy natural mastery of colour and forms that one can only look with delight and astonishment. It must be enough to make the 'real' artists (which Wallis always said he was not) despair.