

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

JOHN CRAXTON



Autumn Landscape with Hills, Spetse, 1946

Gouache
81 x 121 cms
(31.83 x 47.55 in)
P.O.A.

Signed & dated 16.10.46

Provenance:

Princesse Calimachi
Costa Achillopoulos
Karya Utama Gallery, London
Peter Nahum, London
Private Collection, 2007, UK

Exhibited:

British Council, December 1946, Athens
London Gallery, 'An exhibition of Recent Paintings & Drawings by John Craxton & Lucian Freud', Oct - Nov 1947, cat. no.2 (as Autumn Landscape of Hills), London
Fischer Fine Art, 'The British Neo-Romantics 1935-1950, July-Aug 1983, London

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Literature:

Ian Collins, 'John Craxton', Lund Humphries, Farnham, 2011, ill. pl.83

This large post-war gouache celebrates the London-born neo-romantic John Craxton's early discovery of Greece where he would subsequently base himself for much of his long career. The dark, richly coloured work also reveals his admiration for Picasso (whom he met in Paris through the dealer Pierre Loeb), the crisscrossing lines and superimposed planes of red, ochre, olive and dark green adhering to the picture plane in a faux cubist manner. What the picture loses in terms of conventional spatial perspective and topographical naturalism it more than makes up for with its tactile, schematic and incidental detailing in which spiky trees, field patterns, hill contours and stone walls enliven the otherwise abstract colour zones.

Craxton loved Greece from the off. Through the good offices of Lady Norton the socially well-connected young painter enjoyed two post-war shows with the British Council in Athens. In 1946 he was joined on the island of Poros by Lucian Freud with whom Craxton had visited the Scilly Islands during the war. To celebrate his 24th birthday Craxton took a holiday on the neighbouring island of Spetse. The present work was the happy outcome.

Like Picasso Craxton enjoyed rusticity and in 1948 told Geoffrey Grigson that, I can work best in an atmosphere where life is considered more important than art - where life itself is art. The dry islands of the Mediterranean with their maritime traditions and simple peasant way of life always inspired him as it did his friends Julian Trevelyan and Mary Fedden. Though he kept a London house Craxton declared that, I feel like an