

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

IVON HITCHENS (1893-1979)



Yellow Autumn from a Terrace, 1948

Oil on Canvas
52.1 x 107.2 cms
(20.48 x 42.13 in)

Signed 'Hitchens' (lower right); further signed and inscribed 'IVON HITCHENS/Greenleaves Lavington Common/Petworth Sussex/Yellow Autumn/from a Terrace' (on a label attached to the stretcher)

Provenance:

The Leicester Galleries, London, 2 February 1962
Private Collection, U.K.

Woodland became a key feature of Hitchens' paintings from the early 1940s onwards, following the family's move to Lavington Common, Sussex, after his studio in Belsize Park was badly damaged by a bomb. This was a turning point for the artist, having escaped London to the seclusion and tranquillity of the countryside and surrounded by nature, his work took on a fresh spontaneity that is particularly evident in this painting.

Peter Khoroché noted:

About *Yellow Autumn from a Terrace*—there is a note in IH's Despatch Book, under Summer 1949, to the effect that certain pictures from the Leicester Galleries were transferred to the Leger Galleries at this time. Among these was *Yellow Autumn from a Terrace*. So we can be sure that it was painted before Summer 1949. I think 'ca.1948' would be a reasonable guess as to when it

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was painted.

Taking a horizontal canvas, often propped low in front of him, Hitchens worked in the open air from landscapes hemmed close by foliage, bracken and the dank mass of water. He had moved to Greenleaves, six acres of woodland in Lavington, Sussex, following the bombing of his London studio. Never finding a reason to leave, he continued to paint its seasons, finding infinite variety where others might hardly register change.

Hitchens frequently drew analogy with music to describe his approach to painting, referring to the instruments in the 'painter's orchestra', a picture's rhythm and harmony, or the notation of tones and colours necessary to its 'visual music'.¹ Yet if his canvases are scanned, in the same way as musical scores, the attentive viewer soon notices that Hitchens' calligraphic strokes are precise rather than *bravura*, the balancing of tone to unpainted canvas as calculated as that of an experienced orchestrator.

In *Yellow Autumn from a Terrace*, Hitchens creates a foreground scaffolding of tree trunks, arched brambles, shrubs, the suggested curlicues of ironwork, letting the eye find its own way towards chinks of cerulean-grey. As Christopher Neve wrote, "...nature seemed to consist to [Hitchens] more of spaces than of objects, and it often appears that he instinctively drew the air and light that vibrates in the interstices of the view rather than the view itself."²

1. Ivon Hitchens, Statement in *Ark* (1956), based on notes made a decade earlier.

2. Christopher Neve, 'Ivon Hitchens: Music', in *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Ideas in 20th Century English Painting* (Faber, 1990), p. 139.