

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

PRUNELLA CLOUGH



Barrels in a Yard, c.1955

Oil on Canvas

47.5 x 35 cms

(18.67 x 13.76 in)

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Signed lower right

Provenance:

Osborne Samuel, London

During the mid-1950s Clough's renowned interest in industrial themes dominated her subject matter. Working harbours such as Lowestoft, lorry drivers, print making technicians at the London art schools where she taught, and manual workers peopled her compositions. These labourers were however generic, rather than individualistic and were intimately connected with their working environments. The solitary figure in *Barrels in a Yard* focuses attention at compositional mid-point and acts as guardian of the encased freight being processed in the yard. Further site-specific details are absent, so we could be at a dockyard, a pub, a factory or an unloading bay. The palette is similarly restricted, in this example to a dirty cream and blue-grey scheme that tonally unifies the picture, the sole chromatic highlight provided by the circular acid yellow of one of the barrels. The spatial context is also established through a dark grey foreground column at right that pushes the rest of the picture back into a distanced atmospheric recess.

It is clear that Clough commonly subjected the thematic material of her art to a stringent formalist criterion; in other words specific figurative sources were almost afterthoughts – a kind of iconographic camouflage – grafted onto the main abstract idea. The interplay between the mysterious and the overtly commonplace gives a compelling ambiguity to Clough's work, the popularity of which continues to grow with time. Perhaps this appeal is based on Michael Harrison's contention that Clough's, painting language was not just that of a painter, but also of a wartime cartographer, a graphic designer in her youth and a life-long printmaker.
P.D.