

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

KEITH VAUGHAN (1912-1977)



Tent Life, 1942

Ink and wash on paper
13.2 x 21.3 cms
(5.19 x 8.37 in)

Ink and wash on paper, signed and dated lower right.

Provenance:

Mercury Gallery, London
TWP Herbert, 1990
Sir Jeffrey Tate

While at Codford Army Camp Vaughan spent most of 1941 in 'misery and discomfort, living in tents. Everything covered in dust and ants.' During the day he 'hailed and hugged and staggered with sacks of coal through continuous rain' and, during the evenings, he filled his sketchbook with

small ink and wash drawings of his comrades and their daily activities. Two journal entries sum up the misery of those days:

June/July 1941:

Codford. The rank smell of grass and canvas and warm men. Two latrine buckets filled to the brim each evening. All our bodily functions are performed communally, a gesture of privacy

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being offered by a thin sheet of canvas. Often I wake with a sense of terror at the sequence of mornings that lie ahead from which there is no escape. One longs to sink back into the oblivion of sleep.

November 1941:

At six o'clock the guard's cane smacks the taut canvas of the tent. Nobody moves but everyone is instantly awake and weighing the agony of getting up against the penalty of staying in the warm cocoon of blankets.

The guard can be heard in the distance thrashing the canvas of the other tents. Presently a tremor passes through the tent like the disturbance of sediment at the bottom of a heated flask. A hand emerges from its blanket and gropes for matches to light a candle. Sleepy but emphatic curses break out. When it is already late everyone gets up together and fights their shivering way into clothes, burrowing into the ruined heaps of kit to find their belongings. With practised skill we knead our blankets into the regulation mould and crawl through the opening, forgetting always the hooks which hoist us back again by the loops on our trousers. Outside the moon is still high and we start the perilous journey over slippery mud and through the minefield of guy ropes and tent pegs to the marquee.

These were Vaughan's lowest days in the army and he consoled himself with the fact that he was part of a company of others who each had to endure the same hardships. This comradeship was something he had not known since his school days. He thought that by making visual records of the life he and his fellow conscripts led during the war, he was contributing to the body of war art

that was being produced not only by official war artists, but ordinary people. Indeed some of his paintings were exhibited in an exhibition of war art held by Kenneth Clark at the National Gallery,

and a handful were bought by the nation as recognised war paintings.