Basic Detail Report



Marshalling Yard, Trappes. 1945

Date

1945

Primary Maker

Graham Sutherland

Medium

Oil and gouache

Description

Graham Sutherland was employed an Official War Artist between 1940 and 1945. Sutherland was commissioned by the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC), a government agency set up in 1939, to produce artwork that documented Britain's national war effort and the experiences of Britons during wartime. As a war artist Sutherland's work engaged with subjects ranging from the harrowing aftermath of enemy bombing raids in London and elsewhere, the industrial efforts of Britain's metal and mining industries, to the results of allied bombing raids on enemy locations in France. In November 1944 Sutherland made his first ever trip abroad, documenting Britain's war now engaged on the ground in northern Europe; after the Allied success of the Normandy landings in June of that same year. Sutherland's brief was to record the decay and destruction of specific enemy locations that had been heavily bombed by the RAF in the spring of 1944, under a campaign called "Operation Transportation Plan". Sutherland experienced bureaucratic difficulties throughout much of his time in France, however he did find opportunity to execute a series of drawings and paintings of locomotives at a severely bombed Marshalling Yard in Trappes on the outskirts of recently liberated Paris (of which this work is an example), and of V1 flying bomb depots at Saint-Leu-d'Esserent. Here, Sutherland depicts the powerful, beast-like locomotives as fallen warriors. They appear crumpled, twisted and lie awkwardly in a state not dissimilar to rigor mortis. Sutherland's bold treatment of colour is hellish, whereby he scorches the landscape and sky with exaggerated and unearthly effects. Such evocative images are instilled with both pain and pathos at the same time and are typical of Sutherland's work as a war artist. Sutherland is unrivalled in his ability to render in paint the emotional horrors and suffering associated with conflict, and, whether of twisted bodies, thorns or machinery, their ability to communicate the sacrificial human cost made during wartime remains as powerful today as they did then. Other examples of Sutherland's bombed Marshalling Yards include 'The Marshalling Yard at Trappes, France: Damage Done by RAF', 1944, oil and gouache on board (Leeds Art Gallery); and 'Marshalling Yards Trappes', 1944, gouache on paper (Christopher Kingzett Fine Art)

Dimensions

Object/Work: 412.75 x 336.55 mm Frame Size: 670 x 580 x 40 mm (26 3/8 x 22 13/16 x 1 9/16 in.)