

William Rothenstein (Bradford 1872 - Far Oakridge, Gloucestershire 1945)

Portrait of Charles Haslewood Shannon, R.A.

Pencil and coloured chalks on light brown paper.
Signed, dedicated and dated WMR to CIH.S / Jan. 96 at the lower left.
380 x 298 mm. (15 x 11 3/4 in.)

A portrait of the printmaker, draughtsman and book illustrator Charles Haslewood Shannon (1863-1937), at the age of thirty-three. Shannon was a key figure in the London art world between 1890 and 1930 and, together with his lifelong partner Charles Ricketts, designed and illustrated a large number of books, published an art journal entitled The Dial, and in 1894 established the Vale Press, named after their home in Chelsea. It was through Oscar Wilde that Rothenstein first met Shannon and Ricketts in 1893, soon after his return to London from Paris. As he recalled in his memoirs, 'Oscar Wilde had taken me to the Vale to see Ricketts and Shannon before I came to live in Chelsea, when I was charmed by these men, and by their simple dwelling, with its primrose walls, apple-green skirting and shelves, the rooms hung with Shannon's lithographs, a fan-shaped watercolour by Whistler, and drawings by Hokusai – their first treasures, to be followed by so many others.' Ricketts and Shannon formed an impressive collection of Old Master drawings and paintings, antiquities, Persian miniatures and Japanese prints. In 1894 Rothenstein and Shannon shared a joint exhibition of their drawings and lithographs at E. J. van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery on Brook Street, London. This was to be Rothenstein's first major London exhibition, and included thirty-one of his works, mostly portrait lithographs as well as some drawings and pastels.

As William Rothenstein further noted, 'But in those early Chelsea days I was especially attracted by Ricketts and Shannon – they were so different from any artists I had met hitherto. Everything about them was refined and austere...Shannon was as quiet and inarticulate as Ricketts was restless and eloquent. He had a ruddy boyish face, like a countryman's, with blue eyes and fair lashes; he reminded me of the shepherd in Rossetti's Found. Oscar Wilde said that Ricketts was like an orchid, and Shannon like a marigold...I revered these two men, for their simple and austere ways, their fine taste and fine manners. They seemed to stand apart from other artists of the time; and I was proud of their friendship, so rarely

given, and of the encouragement they gave to my work.'

Rothenstein produced a number of portrait drawings and lithographs of Shannon, including examples dated 1894 and 1897, as well as a drawing dated 1903 and also in coloured chalks, which is now in the British Museum. A double portrait drawing by Rothenstein of Ricketts and Shannon together, dated 1894, appeared at auction in 1993. An 1897 lithograph of Shannon is in the British Museum, while of the same year is a lithograph of Ricketts and Shannon together, an impression of which is also in the collection of the British Museum.

Provenance:

Presented by the artist to the sitter in January 1896
Charles Haslewood Shannon and Charles Ricketts, London
Wyndham T. Vint, Bradford, Yorkshire.

Artist description:

Born in Yorkshire, William Rothenstein entered the Slade School of Art in London in 1888, studying there with Alphonse Legros, from whom he gained a thorough grounding in the principles of academic draughtsmanship. The following year he enrolled at the Académie Julian in Paris, where he remained for four years. His time in Paris found the young Rothenstein befriending such artists as James McNeill Whistler, who was to be a dominant influence for several years, as well as Edgar Degas and Camille Pissarro. Rothenstein's growing status as a portrait draughtsman in Paris led to a commission for a set of twenty-four portraits of Oxford academics, and on his return to England he continued to develop a reputation and market for his portraits. Indeed, throughout his career, portraiture – whether in the form of drawings, paintings or lithographs – formed by far the largest part of his output. In 1893, through Oscar Wilde, Rothenstein met the printmaker, draughtsman and illustrator Charles Haslewood Shannon, and the following year the two artists shared a joint exhibition of their drawings and lithographs at E. J. van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery in London. This was to be Rothenstein's first major London exhibition, and included thirty-one of his works, mostly portrait lithographs as well as some drawings and pastels. Rothenstein later served as Principal of the Royal College of Art between 1920 and 1935.