Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Gunner F. J. Mears (1890 - 1929)

Soldiers with Gasmasks Advancing on the Western Front at Night

Watercolour and silver paint over an underdrawing in pencil.
Signed, dated and inscribed Gnr F J Mears BEF 1916 upside down at the lower left.
114 x 181 mm. (4 1/2 x 7 1/8 in.)

Mear's work is usually signed upside down. When asked why this was so, Mears is said to have replied, "The whole world is upside down. Why should my signature be the right way up?"

Artist description:

Very little is known of the soldier and artist F. J. Mears, who served with the Royal Garrison Artillery in France and Belgium during the First World War, as part of the British Expeditionary Force. In an article published after the war, Mears noted that his watercolours tried to express the horror of warfare as experienced by a soldier in the trenches. Thirty of his works were exhibited at 20 Old Bond Street in London in May 1920, and among the purchasors of his work were Lady Astor, the Duchess of Norfolk and Lieutenant General Hubert Gough, commander of British Fifth Army during the Great War. An article about the exhibition in the Daily News of 7 May 1920 bore the headlines 'Art genius who paints in a garret. Lowly man's pictures bought by aristocracy. Dukes as customers.', and the success of the exhibition is said to have saved Mears and his wife from abject poverty.

Paintings by Gunner Mears are in the collections of the Imperial War Museum in London, the World War History and Art Museum in Alliance, Ohio, and elsewhere.