Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



John MINTON (Great Shelford 1917 - London 1957)

Derelict Farm Machinery

Pen and black ink and watercolour, with touches of white heightening.
Signed and dated John Minton 1948 at the lower right.
280 x 381 mm. (11 x 15 in.)

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Many of John Minton's drawings and watercolours of the late 1940's depict farms and record farming practices that were soon to be mechanized, or pieces of farm machinery that were no longer in use. The actual type and purpose of the machine depicted in this large watercolour cannot easily be determined; it appears to be a sort of drill or perhaps a fertiliser distributor. The artist may have chosen to draw only parts of the machine, or else may here depict a piece of equipment which may have been adapted by a farmer for a specific purpose.

Among several comparable studies of farm machinery by Minton, all dating from 1948, is a watercolour of a Farm Machine, of similar dimensions to the present sheet, which was on the London art market in 2006. A related drawing of Farm Machinery from 1948, also of similar dimensions, was in the Oliver Brown collection, and another of a Derelict Farm Machine was, like all of these drawings, at one time with the Lefevre Gallery in London. Also related to these watercolours, although earlier in date and without colour, is a pen and wash drawing of Agricultural Implements of 1945, in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Provenance:

Possibly The Lefevre Gallery, London, in 1949
Anonymous sale, London, Christie's, 5 June 2007, lot 211
W/S Fine Art, London.

Exhibitions

Possibly London, The Lefevre Gallery, New Paintings and Water Colours by John Minton, February 1949, no.42 ('Farm Equipment'); London, W/S Fine Art Ltd., British Watercolours and Drawings 1750-1950, November-December 2007, no.70.

Artist description:

Although he had only a relatively brief career before his death at the age of thirty-nine, John Minton was enormously prolific and achieved a great deal of success in his lifetime. Between 1945 and 1956 he had eight one-man shows, mainly at the Lefevre Gallery in London, as well as taking part in a number of group shows and the Royal Academy Summer exhibitions. Alongside his output as a painter and draughtsman, he provided numerous illustrations for books, book jackets, magazines and advertisements, and also designed posters, wallpaper and stage sets.

While he enjoyed considerable early success, by the 1950's Minton's work was becoming overshadowed by that of other artists in his circle, notably Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon. As a friend of his later wrote, 'He saw himself as overtaken by fashions in art – abstract expressionism among others – for which he had no liking. While others of his contemporaries – Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan - held their ground and came through, Minton saw himself as obsolete, as eccentric and old-fashioned as Edward Lear. He could not come to terms with new developments and he lost faith in his own talent…He was, I suppose, one of those kingfisher-like specimens whose bright plumage briefly glinted then was gone. It might, perhaps, have been different in other circumstances; a little more patience and he could have survived the disorienting shifts in taste.'

Minton devoted much of his later career to teaching, in particular at the Royal College of Art, and was a popular and inspirational figure among his students. As Frances Spalding has written of him, 'Minton's virtuoso performances with pencil or pen and ink commended him as a teacher. His students aspired to his dexterity and adopted his devices.' Minton died, by his own hand, in January 1957.