Ben Nicholson (1894 - 1982)

Mar 55 (Sextant)

Signed and titled on the backboard

Pencil and Oil on Card Laid on the Artist's Prepared Board

12¼ x 10¾ in – 31 x 27.5 cm

Exhibitions

Zurich, Galerie Charles Lienhard, Ben Nicholson, January - February 1959, Cat. No.23;

Hannover, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Ben Nicholson, 26 February – 5 April 1959, Cat. No.43, illustrated, with tour to Stadtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim Kunstverein, Hamburg and Museum Folkwang, Essen

Literature:

J.P. Hodin, *Ben Nicholson: the Meaning of his Art*, Alex Tiranti, London, 1957, illustrated fig.46

Artist description:

Ben Nicholson, as he was to become known, was born in Denham, Buckinghamshire on 10th April 1894, the son of the painter Sir William Nicholson (1872-1949) and Mabel Pryde (1871-1918), also a painter. The family moved to London in 1896 and Ben was subsequently educated in Hampstead, Seaford and then at Gresham's School in Holt, North Norfolk.

With both parents being distinguished painters, Ben Nicholson was destined to follow suit, he duly studied at the Slade 1910-11, his contemporaries including Sir Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), Paul Nash (1889-1946), Mark Gertler (1891-1939), Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889-1946) and Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949). He followed this with a period in France 1912-14.

Nicholson was exempt from service in the war due to his asthma, and in 1917-18 travelled in the United States.

His early works were still lifes influenced by the paintings of his father, and in 1919 he exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and Grafton Galleries.

In 1920 Nicholson married Winifred Roberts (1893-1981), whom he was to divorce in 1938 following a relationship with Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), his second wife. With Winifred he spent the first years of marriage wintering in Lugano, Switzerland. In 1923 they bought "Bankside", a stone farmhouse built on Hadrian's Wall in Cumberland and divided their time between there and London. Nicholson's work during the 1920's became more figurative and leaning towards abstraction influenced by the Post-Impressionists and Cubism. In 1924 he held his first one man show at the Twenty One Gallery in London and from 1924-35 was a member of the Seven and Five Society, exhibiting amongst others with Christopher Wood (1901-1930) and Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979).

In 1932-3 Nicholson made several trips to Paris visiting Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Georges Braque (1882-1963), Jean Arp (1886-1966, Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), and at this time produced his first geometric reliefs.

Nicholson's relationship with Barbara Hepworth developed from 1931 leading to the breakdown of his marriage to Winifred. He lived in London and in 1937 was one of the editors, with Naum Gabo, KBE (1890-1977) and the architect Leslie Martin of Circle, a monograph on Constructivism. In 1938 he married Barbara Hepworth and made frequent visits to St. Ives, in 1943 joining the St. Ives Society of Artists, Nicholson had visited St. Ives with Christopher Wood in the twenties.

Nicholson's reputation and stature continued to grow. Following his divorce from Hepworth in 1951, with whom he had three children, he was awarded 1st prize at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh in 1952. In 1954-55 a Retrospective was held at the Tate in London and 1956 saw Nicholson receive the first International Guggenheim painting prize. The following year he was awarded first prize at the Säo Paulo Bienal in Brazil. The same year 1957 Nicholson married for the third time, to Felicitas Vogler (1922-1982) a German photographer with whom he moved to Switzerland in 1958, he was to separate and return to London in 1974, divorcing in 1977.

Further retrospectives were held, at the Venice Biennale; in Berne 1961, Dallas 1964 and Buffalo 1978.

On 6th February 1982 Nicholson died in London. Awarded the Order of Merit in 1968 he was one of the foremost British artists of the 20th century. A major retrospective was held at the Tate 1993-4.

His works can be found in museums in: Aberdeen; Brighton; Cambridge; Edinburgh, National Gallery of Modern Art; Kendall; Leeds; Liverpool; London, Tate Britain; Sheffield; Stromness and York.