

Hill Farmer 1

Sir Kyffin Williams OBE RA (1918-2006)



REF:

Description

Watercolour and pencil Signed with initials 'KW.' (lower right) 40 x 29 cms (16 x 11 ins)

The name Kyffin Williams is synonymous with the landscape pictures of his native Wales. So much so that they are often just referred to as "Kyffins". He is regarded as one of the defining artists of the 20th century. Williams was born in Anglesey to an old landed family whose ancestry was deeply rooted in the land of Wales. Upon leaving school, his father arranged for him to join a local land agent and whilst there he got to know the landscape of the Llyn Peninsula. Williams also joined the local hunt which allowed him to roam the countryside exploring in all weathers. He had contracted polio at school which led to epilepsy. He joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers in 1937 but after an epileptic fit he was discharged in 1940. He went on to say that this was his "greatest fortune" as the military doctor recommended that he pursue his interest in art. In 1941 Williams joined the Slade School of Fine Art which had been moved to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford during the War. It was here that he had what he called his "road to Damascus" whilst looking at a picture of Piero della Francesca's "Resurrection". He realised that love and mood were essential to the process of painting. He was taught at Slade by Allan Gwynn-Jones among others. Williams went on to teach art at Highgate School where he was Senior Art Master from 1944 until 1973. Williams first exhibition took place in 1948 at the Colnaghi Gallery. In 1968 he won the Winston Churchill Fellowship to record the Welsh community in Patagonia. Whilst there he was determined to achieve something special. He gifted the paintings, colour slides and photographs he did there to the National Library in Aberystwyth. After teaching, he returned to Anglesey and lived in a house belonging to the Marquis and Marchioness of Anglesey who were patrons and great supporters of Williams. Williams preferred to use a pallet knife and liked to paint outdoors in all weathers until his health meant he had to take to the studio. Although primarily known for his landscapes, he is also renowned for his portraits of which this sketch, Hill Farmer No. 1 forms a part. It appears to be the sketch for an oil painting of the same title which was sold at Christies in 2006. Although this particular hill farmer is unknown, Williams wrote "All the hill-farmers I put into my pictures, I name John Jones for sometimes I know who they are and sometimes I don't...to me he is always John Jones whether he be fat or thin, dark or fair, old or young: he is always the man who lived amongst the rocks and valleys of Wales for centuries. He is part of our landscape but I wonder often how much longer he will be there". Interestingly of all his works Williams chose a painting of a farmer and a dog in the snow as one of his favourites. At one stage Williams was the portrait artist of choice for many Welsh institutions. He exhibited extensively including the Colnaghi Gallery, the Thackeray Gallery, the Glyn Vivian Gallery, the Oriel Mostyn, the National Library in Aberystwyth. A major retrospective of 131 of his works took place at the National Museum in Cardiff in 1948. He became ...