

Hyacinths in Pots in Hove

John Bratby (1928-1992)



REF:

Description

Acrylic on Board Signed John Bratby upper right. Titled on label verso "Hyacinths in Pots in Hove" John Bratby 121 x 90.5 cm (48 x 36 ins) Provenance With Century Gallery, London, where acquired by the present owner 4 August 1988 Private Collection, UK

John Randall Bratby was born on 19th July 1928 in Wimbledon, South-West London. His childhood was chaotic and unhappy. He went to the Tiffin Boys School, Kingston, where he indulged in various schooltime enterprises such as re-selling buns during break. He was conscripted but discharged due to extreme myopia and managed to obtain an ex-service grant to study at Kingston College of Art between 1949 -1950. He then attended the Royal College of Art until 1954, studying under mentor Carel Weight, who claimed he was the most talented student he ever had. He had his first solo exhibition during that year at the Beaux Arts Gallery, London. He was awarded a bursary during his college years to travel to Italy, but the experience did nothing to inspire him socially, artistically or to continue any future travelling of note. John Bratby, quite simply, was a British man, whose work was prolific, colourful, as was he and his lifestyle, recording everyday life in an autobiographical way, painting portraits of himself, his family and celebrities who flocked to him, attracted by his unconventional approach to life so prevalent in the fifties and the sixties. He was the founding member of the Kitchen sink Realism style. This term is applied to a group of British artists working in the 1950's who painted ordinary people in scenes of everyday life. Other exponents were Edward Middleditch, Jack Smith and Derrick Greaves. It was a derogatory term, coined by the art critic David Sylvester who suggested that there was nothing to suggest "the man about the house is an artist or anything but an ordinary man". Bratby was far from being an ordinary man although his subject matter was completely ordinary, he was skilful in creating publicity for himself as he exposed his personal life to promote his work. His treatment of his autobiographical work could woo and shock the public but was news-worthy for the journalists. At the height of Bratby's career, social values were changing and gaining more exposure, his art mirrored this change. This can be seen in the form of heavy impasto paint on his canvases, gaudy colours, distorted shapes, indifferent perspectives and subject matters that were of everyday life of the time. There were no politics or class divisions in his work which were marginally more middle class than his associates working class subjects. This could be cornflake packets strewn across the kitchen table, a pull chain toilet or a still life with chip fryer (acquired by the Tate), and less than modest portraits of his first and second wives. Bratby has often been paired with Walter Sickert or Stanley Spencer, but he did not practice their imagination or exploration in their artistic development, but he simply portrayed what was set before him. He was more influenced by Van Gogh or Soutine. The kitchen sink style is an accurate description of an artist who recorded social realism of the time, who lived life to the full in an age which was repressed in the fifties and started...