Opening to a Palm Plantation

Graham Sutherland (1903-1980)

REF:

Description

Gouache & Crayon on paperSigned & dated ‘Sutherland/1963’ (upper right)Titled ‘Opening to a Palm Plantation (on sheet verso)33 cm x 22 cms (13 x 9 ins)
ProvenanceWith the Marlborough Gallery, London, where acquired by the family of the present owner and thence by descentPrivate Collection UK
“Sutherland’s eye was caught by pomegranates bursting their tough skins, the ripe maize cobs casting off their sheaths of foliage, the delicate undulations of banana leaves, the tough bottle-like gourds and the sinuous vines tying themselves in curves to the framework of the pergola”.An extract from “The work of Graham Sutherland” by Douglas Cooper, Lund Humphries, London 1961, page 43.This beautiful gouache and crayon work by Sutherland is almost certainly inspired by the exotic natural scenery and landscape surrounding Sutherland’s beloved home, La Villa Blanche at Menton in the South of France. Sutherland first visited the region in 1947, having visited Paris in 1944 and commented “it was the first time I had been abroad in my life. Before the war I hadn’t been able to afford it and before that I was leading a really insular English life”. He returned to the Midi in the autumn of that year, to visit both Picasso & Matisse. He made this trip every summer until in 1955 when he and his wife Kathleen bought the villa. It was a modernist building echoing Le Corbusier and designed by the Irish architect Eileen Gray. It was named after their home in Kent which was called The White House.During this period, he adopted a number of mediterranean motifs, particularly the cultivated vegetation of the area and embraced a shift in palette in response to the vivid colours enriched by the sunlight. Sutherland produced several notable works of palm trees, which were reproduced as lithographs and often used for travel publicity for the region. Despite his wealth of a new subject matter, pictures from this period can be considered relatively rare as the body of work produced was not substantial. Sutherland remarked “It has been very lovely down here…in spite of this, I do not seem to have produced much work, although I have been working regularly every day.” The South of France period resulted in some of Sutherland’s happiest days and most vibrant work. He would frequent the Monte Carlo casino with Francis Bacon and regularly saw Picasso who had become a friend and inspiration. It was through his mutual friendship with Kenneth Clark that Sutherland met Somerset Maugham and began work on one of his most famous and vibrant portraits, now in the collection of the Tate Gallery. The inclusion of palm leaves above the sitter’s head is a fitting tribute to a recurring and important motif to Sutherland during this time.Graham Vivian Sutherland was born in Streatham, London on 24th August 1903. He was the eldest of three children to parents who were both amateur painters and musicians. He attended the Homefield Preparatory School in Sutton and then Epsom College, Surrey until 1919. Following family tradition, he began an engineering apprenticeship at the Midland Railway Locomotive Works in Derby but quickly realised this was not his destiny. He attended the G...