Still Life with Yellow 2, 1991

Rachel Nicholson (born 1934)

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Description

Acrylic on canvas board17.5 x 25 cm (7 x 10 ins)Provenance:The Artist's Studio90th Year Retrospective Exhibition at Dartington Hall 24th February - 5th April 2024 Rachel Nicholson was born in 1934, one of triplets, born to parents Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth, major exponents of the Modern British art movement. They were close friends of Dorothy & Leonard Elmhirst, pioneers, inspired by many innovative thinkers of the time and who had purchased the neglected 14th Century Dartington Estate in 1925. Ben Nicholson wrote to Dorothy Elmhirst two weeks after the triplets were born saying “Do you know Barbara Hepworth and I have not 1, not 2, but 3 babies arrived a fortnight ago. This looks promising for Dartington if they arrive in 3’s like this”.The family moved from Hampstead to St Ives 1939 and Rachel and her siblings attended the Dartington Hall School in the 40s & 50s. The estate buildings had been restored by this point, setting up a host of farming, forestry & educational projects which was formalised in 1952 with the creation of the Dartington Hall Trust. Early initiatives included the School, Tweed Mills and later Dartington Glass. It became a magnet for artists, architects, writers, photographers and musicians from around the world. Some of the outstanding people associated with Dartington includes Rabindranath Tagore, Igor Stravinsky, Benjamin Britten, Ravi Shankar, T E Lawrence, Bernard Leach, George Bernard Shaw, H G Wells, Yehudi Menuhin, Ben Nicholson (Rachel’s father), Aldous Huxley & Walter Gropius.Rachel had no formal art training and only started painting in her early 40s once her youngest child went to school and her mother, Barbara Hepworth had passed away. This was in the mid 1970s. Rachel married Alzheimer’s researcher Dr Michael Kidd and had three children. She began her career with still life compositions. She had inherited her love of still life and objects from her father, Ben Nicholson and grandfather, William Nicholson. Rachel remarked that “Still life was more inbuilt, more inherited”. A sense of placement and relationship of the objects to one another is of prime importance to Rachel as well as her desire to create and convey a sense of peace for the viewer.She had her first solo exhibition in 1979 at the Field Gallery in Nottingham. Her first London exhibition was in 1980 at the Montpelier Studio and Ben Nicholson is known to have remarked “I never realised she could paint so well. I would have been happy to have painted that one myself” referring to one of the still life compositions on show. She continued to exhibit at the Montpelier Studio for the next 20 years and also at the Beaux Art Gallery in Bath, Crane Kalman in London and at the Tate, St Ives.Rachel quickly adopted her own style, freeing herself from her famous parents’ shadow. She painted a range of landscapes, images from Cumbria, Derbyshire and the West Country plus seascapes and interior exterior views which created a very distinctive style. This work, Still Life with Yellow 2 painted in 1991 came from the Artist’s Studio for a 90th Year Retrospective Exhibition held by the Dartington Trust. It is possible that this work has not been seen outside of ...