

RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

EDWARD SEAGO

Norwich 1910 - 1974 London

Ref: BM 51

Storm Clouds over the Orwell



Signed lower left: Edward Seago; title inscribed on the reverse:

STORM CLOUDS OVER THE ORWELL

Oil on board: 26 x 36 in / 66 x 91.4 cm

Frame Size: 33 x 43½ / 83.8 x 110.5 cm



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Provenance:

P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., Ltd., London, UK
Private Collection, UK

Exhibited:

Kingston-upon-Hull, Ferens Art Gallery Ltd., 'Collectors Choice 1970' exhibition, cat. no.150

Born in Norwich on 31 March 1910, Edward Seago, the son of Brian and Mabel, and the younger brother of John, was inextricably linked to the counties of East Anglia by virtue of his life and ancestry. His father Brian, was the Norfolk area manager for a Norwich based coal merchant, his mother Mabel, a governess to the elder daughters of Mr Nicholas Bacon of Raveningham Hall, Norfolk.

Seago resided in East Anglia for the first 21 years of his life, returning periodically for the 15 years thereafter, between 1930 and 1945, and finally in 1945 after the Second World War, settling in Ludham where he purchased the 17th century residence known as the 'Dutch House'. The close ties Seago established and maintained with East Anglia throughout his life played a fundamental role in shaping and influencing his art.

Throughout his life, Seago was consistently plagued by the effects of a rare and mystifying condition of the heart, paroxysmal tachycardia, with which he was first diagnosed as a young boy of eight. Ironically, it was during the extended periods of 'forced leisure' when the boy was rendered house bound that he was able to realize his great passion and potential for painting. Seago later reflected upon these periods as being 'spells of sheer delight' as he was able to practice his precociously sensitive observation of nature and the countryside. Left to his own devices, he learned how to extract from his environment much of the subject matter for his art.

As his poor health prevented a regular art school training, Seago was largely self taught. He was privileged however in that throughout his life several artists took a personal interest in his work and development, their encouragement and advice proving invaluable to Seago, who inevitably incorporated their suggestions into his art. Sir Alfred Munnings, with whom Seago was invariably compared throughout his career was one, as was Bertram Priestman the East Anglian landscape painter with whom Seago regularly corresponded for most of his life. Priestman encouraged Seago to paint quickly a skill he developed into a virtuoso talent, but above all, to hold nature as the ideal, receiving inspiration from its beauty rather than copy it directly.

John Masefield, Poet Laureate was another with whom the artist maintained lifelong contact, and together they collaborated on several publications including the commercially successful *The Country Scene* of 1937 and *Tribute to Ballet* of 1938, Seago providing the illustrations, Masefield the poems. It was Masefield also who encouraged Seago to broaden his interests in all aspects of English country life as he felt the artist had an extraordinary feeling for landscape.

Seago's style took inspiration from other influences also, including 17th century Dutch landscape painting, the East Anglian landscapes bearing many similarities to Dutch topography. He was inspired by other

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English painters, particularly John Constable, John Crome, and Richard Parkes Bonnington, by 19th century Norwich school painters, and by 20th century painters including Arnesby Brown, Wilson Steer and Richard Sickert. Elements of the paintings by French Impressionist Eugene Boudin influenced his mature style as did the work of American artist James McNeill Whistler.

Seago's prodigious activities in the years prior to 1945 were fueled by the eclecticism of his interests. During the 1930's, he lived an unconventional, somewhat bohemian existence, living, traveling and working amongst circus folk, gypsies and ballet dancers whilst simultaneously mixing in aristocratic circles and accepting their generous patronage. Henry Mond, 2nd Lord Melchett, art connoisseur, patron and friend commissioned Seago to paint several portraits whilst living at Woodfall's, the Melchett family home. It was with Melchett the artist first traveled in 1933 to Venice and was exposed to the art of the great Italian Masters, igniting Seago's artistic passions and immense attachment to this extraordinary city which he later captured in many of his most successful oil painting and watercolours. During this time also Seago drew an income from the many portrait and equestrian paintings he undertook in the UK and abroad.

His friendship with Princess Mary, Countess of Harewood, proved another important association and following the Second World War, developed into a close association with the Royal Family, particularly Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales who admired and collected his paintings, and received many as gifts from the artist. Seago had also previously made the acquaintance of George VI during the war years on his expedition as an unofficial war artist with Lieutenant-General Harold Alexander on the Italian campaign, years vital in formulating the parameters of his later style.

After the Second World War, with a new stability in both his private and professional lives, a coherent direction to Seago's painting emerged as he channeled most of his creative talents into landscape painting. He developed numerous motifs synonymous with East Anglia, the broads, mudflats, barges, oaktrees, cattle, climatic and meteorological effects. A great traditionalist, he was interested in the natural and human history of East Anglia, its villages and farms, their owners. Seago's paintings often denote an appreciation of the harmonious co-existence of man and nature, the vast and atmospheric landscapes glorifying the marvels of earth and sky, whilst man made constructions, windmills, churches and marshland farmhouses mark the existence of a human presence. Acutely aware of the impending redundancy and dereliction facing many of these edifices due to technological advance, these paintings were a tribute to their enduring charm and Seago's own yearnings for the return to a simpler way of life.

His language of motifs was further developed during the 1950's and 60's on his numerous travels abroad at first aboard his ketch *Endeavour*, then his yacht *Capricorn*, to Northern France and Holland, and later by air to more remote destinations, which he called 'far off painting grounds'. In 1956, an invitation from His Royal Highness Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh took him on board the Royal Yacht *Britannia* on its world tour across the Antarctic, the south Atlantic and West Africa, to record the landscapes of these unfamiliar places. At each destination Seago found inspiration in their 'otherness' in the strange and unusual light, the atmospheric effects and new environments, the sheer blue cliffs of the Antarctic glaciers, the stark monumental peaks of South Georgia, the majestic Gothic splendour of the Doges' Palace in Venice, the tropically coloured crowds of the Gambia. Consequently, Seago adapted his artistic

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techniques to develop a new visual language to express this in his painting, continually modifying his palette, balancing light and dark and reconciling a multiplicity of shapes.

However it was to his beloved East Anglia he continually returned 'Perhaps one has to be born and bred there for it to really get into ones blood. But it has a powerful hold on me, and whenever I go, I feel a longing to return there' p 95

Throughout his life Seago remained susceptible to nature's manifold manifestations. He was intensely interested in the transformation of the landscape by the 'in-between' stages, sunrise, early morning, late afternoon, evening and dusk, by the rain, mist, fog, and snow, and by the seasons. He was fascinated with the sky, studying the ephemeral changes of its moods and movements, and the extremes of light created by the multi faceted cloud formations. Seago painted the Broads with an endless range of atmospheric effects, and an eclecticism of subject matter he found in this world of water and sky.

Commercially, the most important developments for the artist occurred in the post war years where he began important relationships in 1945 with P.&D.Cornaghi Galleries, London and in 1950 with the Laing Galleries, Toronto. Both galleries held regular successful exhibitions, as did the Kennedy Galleries in New York which held five important exhibitions between 1952 and 1961, and Everard Read in Johannesburg where his work was exhibited from 1968. The artist developed a strong and dedicated following throughout his career; the popularity of his paintings was the stuff of legend. Well dressed, eager purchasers would queue from 6.30am along Old Bond Street in anticipation of having the first pick of the 50 or so hitherto unseen paintings on offer. The lunacy gained momentum and numbered catalogues were then issued in order of ones arrival at the gallery. His paintings were also exhibited at the Royal Academy, other British exhibiting societies and the Paris Salon. He was elected RBA in 1946, ARWS in 1957 and RWS in 1959.

Seago was the epitome of artist as existentialist, refusing to conform to conventional social mores. His attitudes to life were also reflected in his art, choosing to ignore the dictates of contemporary critical wisdom about what was innovative, and avant-garde in art, preferring instead to follow his own convictions and paint only what was important to him. Painting was his *raison d'être*. This all came to an end however whilst on a painting trip to Sardinia, when Edward Seago succumbed to the effects of a brain tumour. After months of illness, he died in London on 19 January 1974.