

# RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

IVON HITCHENS CBE

London 1893 - 1979 Petworth

Ref: CA 141

*Landscape, spaces of woods and hills*



Signed lower left: *Hitchens*; signed, dated and inscribed on the artist's label attached to the stretcher: *Landscape. Spaces of Woods and Hills / 1963 / by Ivon Hitchens / Greenleaves . Petworth . Sussex*  
Oil on canvas: 18 x 46 in / 45.7 x 116.8 cm  
Frame size: 26 x 54 in / 66 x 137.2 cm



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FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

*Provenance:*

Waddington Galleries, London;

Mr Barnetts, acquired from the above *circa* 1965, then by descent

*Exhibited:*

Southampton City Art Gallery, University of Southampton Arts Festival, *Paintings by Ivon Hitchens*, 29<sup>th</sup> Feb–22<sup>nd</sup> March 1964, cat. no.35

Eastbourne, Towner Art Gallery, *Ivon Hitchens* (with Merlyn Evans, Robert Medley and Ceri Richards), 28<sup>th</sup> November–27<sup>th</sup> December 1964, cat. no.9

Worthing Art Gallery, *Ivon Hitchens*, 7<sup>th</sup> May–4<sup>th</sup> June 1966, cat. no.13

Ivon Hitchens' one-man show at the Waddington Galleries in April 1964 comprised twenty-three paintings, all painted in the previous year. Six of these were versions of the same landscape motif under the title *Land and Sky Spaces*. Though not one of the numbered series, *Landscape, spaces of woods and hills* is, in fact, a further variation on the theme and was painted at the same time as the others.

Since the 1940s Hitchens had often painted in series, sometimes producing as many as twenty or more versions of a landscape subject. The fact that he did so gives us an insight into his aims as an artist. Paradoxically, it was not the motif itself that interested him—he was not a topographical painter—so much as the opportunities it offered to explore its structure in terms of varying combinations of colour and shape in an ordered composition on canvas.

Those who had the privilege of being invited into his studio would inevitably find themselves in front of a recently completed canvas and be asked for their reactions. This could be daunting were it not for Hitchens' genuine humility and curious objectivity, as though it were someone else's painting under consideration. He hoped that a fresh, even if untutored, eye might spot some defect that he had failed to notice, while he himself seemed to enjoy testing the work, like an inventor his newly created machine.

It might seem surprising that in his analysis of a painting Hitchens never spoke about his choice of colour, since colour is the most obviously striking aspect of his work. But his exceptional sensitivity to colour was something purely instinctive. How could he even begin to explain it? Similarly, the actual meaning of a painting, its emotive appeal—what it was about—was left to each individual viewer to decide, depending on what in his own personal experience the painting evoked.

By 1963, the year of his major retrospective at the Tate Gallery, Hitchens had left truth-to-life, naturalistic description well behind him. His formal language had moved decisively from the descriptive to the expressive and his use of colour was becoming progressively more bold and more complex as it freed itself from the literal copying of appearances. Yet the vital connexion with landscape, however allusive, persists, while the dynamics of brush mark and colour shape lead the eye over the canvas in continuous excited exploration.

Peter Khoroché

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