



Moel Siabod

John Piper

Not on display

Title/Description: Moel Siabod

Artist/Maker: John Piper (Artist)

Born: 1943 c.

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Ink, Paper, Watercolour

Technique: Drawing, Painting

Measurements: Support; h. 485mm x w. 368 mm Frame; h. 567mm x w. 701 x d. 44 mm

Inscription: Moel Siabod

Accession Number: 50634

Historic Period: 1940s

Production Place: Britain, Wales

Credit Line: Gift from a private donor

Between 1943 to 1950 John Piper undertook an artistic journey through the mountains of north Wales and completed *Moel Siabod* during this time. In 1943, the WAAC commissioned Piper to go to the disused slate mine at Blaenau Ffestiniog where the paintings from the National Gallery had been evacuated for safety during the Blitz. He toured North Wales by bicycle, photographing and sketching buildings and views in Harlech, in the Vale of Ffestiniog, on Cader Idris and on Aran Fawddwy. [1] Piper had previously visited Snowdonia in 1939, 1940 and 1941, and often returned there after the war. Given the proximity of Moel Siabod to Blaenau Ffestiniog this work may have been completed in 1943. The painting is largely painted in ink and watercolour with highlights scratched into the surface of the paper, possibly with a dry pen.

Piper is acknowledged as one of the most important British artists of the 20th century. He was a painter, printmaker and designer of stained-glass windows and both opera and theatre sets. In the 1930s Piper was closely associated with the modern movement and abstraction but with the onset of war he focused on a more direct response to landscape.

Piper's approach to painting landscape in North Wales was in one sense a direct response to earlier masters in search of the picturesque and sublime, choosing tones and hues to evoke drama and dramatic effect in these brooding landscapes. The 'sublime' was the eighteenth-century term expressing an awe in the face of the power of nature. In doing so he evoked artists of the romantic period such as Richard Wilson (1714-1782) and J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) who had travelled in North Wales in the 18th and 19th centuries. [2] Piper had written about these artists in his book of 1942, *British Romantic Artists*. [3]

However, his own sensibility and attachment to the idea of genius loci meant that he brought his own poetic vision to these works as well as the underlying wartime anxiety of what was at stake, 'I felt then that I was seeing the mountains for the first time and seeing them as nobody had seen them before.' [4]

The Welsh landscapes were first exhibited in 1948 in the Leicester Galleries and then in the Buchholz Gallery, New York. This coincided with the debate in British art between Abstraction and 'Neo-Romanticism' where Piper was aligned with artists such as Graham Sutherland, John Minton and John Craxton.

Calvin Winner, February 2022

[1] David Fraser Jenkins & Melissa Munro (2012). *John Piper The Mountains of Wales - Paintings and Drawings from a Private Collection*. National Museum of Wales. ISBN 9780720006186.

[2] Melissa Munro, (27 April 2012). *John Piper: A Journey Through Snowdonia*. National Museum Wales. Retrieved 2 February 2022

[3] John Piper, *Romantic Artists* (London 1942).

[4] John Piper quoted in Richard Ingrams and John Piper, *Piper's Places*, London, 1986, 3.
