



Untitled

Ceri Richards

Not on display

Title/Description: Untitled

Artist/Maker: Ceri Richards (Artist)

Born: 1939

Materials: Paper, Pencil

Accession Number: 50804

Ceri Giraldu Richards CBE (1903-1971) is acknowledged as Wales' most important artist of the mid-twentieth century. [1]

Richards was born in 1903 in the village of Dunvant, near Swansea, the son of Thomas Coslett Richards and Sarah Richards (born Jones). He and his younger brother and sister, Owen and Esther, were brought up in a highly cultured, working-class environment. His mother came from a family of craftsmen; his father, an employee of a tinplate foundry in Gowerton, was active in the local chapel and wrote poetry in Welsh and English. For many years he conducted the Dunvant Excelsior Male Voice Choir, which would become the Dunvant Male Choir. All three children were taught to play the piano, and became familiar with the works of Bach and Handel in the cycle of Christian celebration. In later years music would be an important stimulus to Richards's painting - as would his youthful sensitivity to the landscapes of the Gower Peninsula and the cycles of nature. [2]

At Gowerton Intermediate School he drew constantly and won local competitions. When he left school to become apprenticed to a firm of electricians in Swansea, he devoted his evenings to studying engineering draughtsmanship at Swansea College of Technology and drawing at the Swansea School of Art (both are now part of University of Wales Trinity Saint David). [3]

In 1921, at the age of 18, Richards enrolled full-time at the Swansea School of Art, then under the direction of William Grant Murray. During his time at the art school he spent less time in painting than in drawing from classical casts and studying industrial design and graphics. The strongest impact on him during these years appears to have been the week's summer school in 1923, which he spent under the direction of Hugh Blaker at Gregynog Hall, the country house of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, where he first saw the canvases of Renoir, Van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, Corot and Daumier, the sculpture of Rodin and sheets of old-master and modern drawings. The experience confirmed him in his vocation; and in the same year he applied for, and won, a scholarship to study in London at the Royal College of Art. Richards entered the Royal College of Art in 1924. [4]

Afterwards Richards spent most of his life in London, apart from a period teaching art in Cardiff, where he was head of painting at Cardiff School of Art during World War II. In 1929 he married Frances Clayton, a fellow artist. They had two daughters - Rachel (born 1932) and Rhiannon (born 1945).

Richards was a painter, printmaker and maker of reliefs. A contemporary of, and frequent co-exhibitor with Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, John Piper and Graham Sutherland, he represented Britain in many international touring exhibitions. His work gradually moved towards surrealism after exposure to the work of Picasso and Kandinsky. Richards was also a talented musician, and music is a theme for much of his artwork. An accomplished pianist, his work notably includes his series based on Debussy's Preludes, as well as his 'Hammerklavier Suite' and his 'Beethoven Suite with Variations'. In Wales he is, perhaps, best known for his paintings and drawings based on Dylan Thomas's poetry. [5]

One of the high points of Richards' career was the Venice Biennale of 1962, where he was a prizewinner. He designed stained glass windows for Derby Cathedral (1964-5), and for the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (1965). Richards is represented in many important museums worldwide, and the Tate Gallery has a collection of over 90 works. The Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea (where Richards' first solo exhibition took place in 1930) also holds a collection. Good examples of his work are also to be found in the gallery of the National Museum Cardiff and the Pallant House Gallery, Chichester. [6]

Katharine Malcolm, January 2023

[1] <https://www.artwales.com/artists-detail-mtg-en.php?artistID=46>

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceri_Richards

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

[5] <https://www.artwales.com/artists-detail-mtg-en.php?artistID=46>

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceri_Richards
