



No. 31 "A Ship-yard"

Date

c. 1917

Primary Maker

Sir Muirhead Bone

Medium

Lithograph on paper

Dimensions

50.8 x 40.6 cm

Description

This planographic print (lithograph) is part of a series entitled 'The Great War: Britain's Efforts And Ideals shown in a series of lithographic prints: 'Building Ships' series. There are a total of six lithographs in this particular series,

and in total there are ten series. The lithographs are numbered as if the entire ten series are one, so this print is number 31. This lithographic print depicts a shipyard during the First World War (1914-1918). There are three cranes stretching upwards into the sky surrounded by wooden scaffolding, while tiny figures work in and around them. Long ropes anchor the cranes and the scaffolding to the ground. At the base of the cranes is a building, with smoke billowing out and appears to be a workshop, with a conveyor belt attached to it. There is a small crane on rails in front of the workshop. On the right behind the scaffolding is a ship under construction with tiny figures arduously working to complete the ship. The son of a printer, Bone was born in Glasgow and trained initially as an architect, later going on to study art at Glasgow School of Art. He began printmaking in 1898. After the outbreak of the First World War Bone was appointed as Britain's first official war artist in May 1916. Commissioned as an honorary Second Lieutenant, he arrived in France during the Battle of the Somme, serving with the Allied forces on the Western Front and also with the Royal Navy for a time. He produced 150 drawings of the war, returning to England in October of that year. Over the next few months Bone returned to his earlier subject matter, drawing pictures of shipyards and battleships. In 1916, Bone was initially given a six months contract from Wellington House and a salary of £500pa. In France, he saw at first-hand the troops and war-torn landscape at the Front and his prolific and quick working method saw him send many sketches and watercolours back for publication. However, as with other Official War Artists, Bone was not part of the protracted and heavy offensives of the War per se. Rather, the army put a car and a chauffeur at his disposal placing him at a remove from those who lived in the trenches. As the artist Christopher Nevinson remarked, they were 'in' the war but never 'of' the war. The six lithographs on the theme of Building Ships formed part of the Efforts series. Rather than cloak the images in allegory which suited the sentiments of

those lithographs in the Ideals series, the artist aimed at presenting in an impressive and realistic manner the vital contribution of the skilled shipyard workers and what was actually taking place in the busy yards. This was achieved by his emphasising the enormous scale of the ships being built and the exceptional equipment and infrastructure needed to build them. The artist also used unusual vantage points such as birds-eye views as well as dramatic contrasts of light and shade to create an atmosphere of exceptional industriousness. Of these lithographs by Muirhead Bone, The Studio remarked in 1917: 'Nothing, perhaps, conveys the idea of colossal power more impressively than the building of a mighty ship of war, and the series of magnificent drawings in which Mr. Muirhead Bone has brought this home to us must surely rank with the greatest achievements in graphic art.'¹⁶ This maritime theme was not a new one for Bone. In 1913 Hugh Lane had presented to this Gallery a drawing by Bone of a sail boat being unloaded on the banks of the Thames at Chiswick.