

Basic Detail Report



No. 1 "The Freedom of the Seas"

Date

c1917

Primary Maker

Sir Frank William Brangwyn

Medium

Lithograph on paper

Dimensions

50.9 x 76.3 cm

Description

This is a three colour planographic print (lithograph) on paper, and is part of a series entitled 'The Great War: Britain's Efforts And Ideals shown in a series of lithographic prints: 'The Ideals' 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 1. The Freedom of the Seas From very early on in his artistic career Frank Brangwyn was greatly inspired by seafaring themes so it was natural that the theme of The Freedom of the Seas as part of the Ideals series and Making Sailors as part of the Efforts series should fall to him. Brangwyn was for a time the President of the Senefelder Club, an organisation founded by Francis Ernest Jackson to promote the art of lithography, and Brangwyn's work here demonstrates his immense facility with the medium. This work depicts in allegorical form the threat posed by German battleships and U-Boats, here represented by a flailing and monstrous octopus, to the safe passage of allied and neutral marine traffic. The development of submarine technology meant that the threat of an unseen enemy suddenly emerging from the deep was an ever-present danger to all shipping whether civilian, merchant or military. The torpedoing of civilian liners such as the Lusitania in 1915 did much to turn public opinion against Germany and ultimately resulted in bringing neutral countries such as the United States into the War, which it did in 1917. Here Brangwyn highlights the dignified bravery of the ordinary person in the face of such a fearsome adversary. In a heavy sea, a band of fishermen-cum-sailors in a small wooden boat, armed only with their oars and small knives, grapple with the creature. Brangwyn's skill in graphic art is clear by his use of strong outlines and bold simple colours. By bringing all the action to the foreground he adds immediacy to the scene and gives the sense that the viewer is participating in the dramatic struggle. Brangwyn's 'vigorous imagination', praised by The Studio in 1917 with reference to this work, is much in evidence here. Jessica O'Donnell 2014 Four hardy fishermen in a rowing boat battle with a large octopus. The entire action is seen close up, with a dark green stormy sea visible between the flailing tentacles of the octopus and the heads of the fishermen. Presumably this is an allegorical composition discussing the great struggle associated with keeping the sea free from threats during the First World War, such as German submarines, perhaps represented in this case by the octopus,

through the valiant efforts of ordinary men, such as fishermen conscripted into the Royal Navy, with their courage being their best and most reliable asset. Welsh painter, etcher and designer of furniture. Born in Bruges, Belgium, on 13 May 1867. His father was a church architect. When he was eight, Brangwyn and his family moved to London. From 1882, he spent two years working in William Morris's workshop; his childhood experience of his father's workshop for ecclesiastical furnishings in Bruges may well have appealed to Morris's artistic doctrine. Subsequent to this enlightened training, Brangwyn travelled to Paris where he became an active champion of the blossoming Art Nouveau movement. He experimented introducing the sinuous lines characteristic of Art Nouveau into his paintings of galleons and shipping scenes. He specialised in painting large mural cycles, such as those for the Royal Exchange (1906), for Skinners Hall (1909) and even for the Empress of Britain (a Royal Mail liner), which later sank, taking Brangwyn's murals with her. In 1919 he was elected a Royal Academician, having exhibited regularly there since 1885. Knighted in 1941, he died in Ditchling, Sussex, on 11 June 1956, having bequeathed most of his works to the City of Bruges, where they remain on display in a museum bearing his name.