

Basic Detail Report



No. 45 "Burning couch-grass" [From 'The Great War: Britain's Efforts And Ideals shown in a series of lithographic prints: 'Work on the Land' series]

Date

1917

Primary Maker

William Rothenstein

Medium

Lithograph on paper

Dimensions

35.8 x 46.4 cm

Description

This is a 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: 'Work on the Land' 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 45. William Rothenstein presented a number of works to Hugh Lane's proposed Gallery of Modern Art as early as 1905 and he is represented in this collection by a number of works including George Bernard Shaw (1907) and W.B. Yeats (1898). His work *Feeding the Chickens* (1904), also in this Gallery's collection is an idyllic and intimate view of rural life showing a mother and her young child in a farmyard and is in contrast to the industriousness recorded in his scenes of rural life made for the Efforts series. As an island nation, Britain was dependent on merchant ships for the importing and exporting of goods and supplies. However, as the war progressed these ships were increasingly seen as legitimate targets. This led to a greater recognition of the importance of the Home Front for ensuring sufficient agricultural production and the harnessing of natural resources. With so many men being called up for active service, others not traditionally engaged in farming, including many women who had formerly worked as domestic servants, answered the call to tend the land. The Women's Land Army (WLA) was established by the British government during the First World War. Working outdoors for at least fifty hours per week, and often more during harvest time, the women in the WLA were paid a wage and given a uniform although it was essentially a civilian organisation. Here Rothenstein's delicate drawings show people working together with a common purpose as trees are being felled, seeds are being sown, crops are being harvested and fields are being ploughed. This physically demanding work is achieved by the use of both farm machinery and traditional beasts of burden such as draught horses. The drawing, *Burning Couch Grass*, refers to a pernicious weed which looks like grass, but whose wiry and

dense network of roots can quickly overwhelm more necessary crops such as fruit bushes. In a way it could be viewed as a metaphor for the threat of the unseen infiltration of the enemy on home ground and the necessity for constant vigilance to root out any such danger before it spread. On Armistice Day 11 November 1918, during celebrations marking the end of the war, the artist Augustus John recalled how the 'land-girls in leggings and breeches... brought a fresh feeling of the country into the overheated room.'

Jessica O'Donnell 2014 Rothenstein was born in Bradford and studied at the Slade School of Art (his teachers including Alphonse Legros) and in Paris, where he met and was encouraged by Rex Whistler and Edgar Degas. He became known for his portrait drawings of famous individuals and was an official war artist in both World War I and World War II. He was a member of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters & Gravers.