



JOHN NASH

THE FARM POND

1940 • oil on canvas • 64.1 x 76.8 cm

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MEMORIES, SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS

STAGING THE RWA EXHIBITION

BY GEMMA BRACE

Staged at the Royal West of England Academy in the summer of 2014 the exhibition ‘Brothers in Art: John and Paul Nash’¹ asks ‘how is landscape remembered?’ and ‘how do we remember through landscape?’ Bound temporally and experientially by the trauma of not one, but two world wars, the exhibition weaves its narrative between the divergent paths of two brothers, John (1893–1977) and Paul Nash (1889–1946). Nestled between Paul’s monumental hilltops and John’s swaying corn sheaves, the English landscape becomes the focus; a place for remembering and forgetting, where memories converge framed by the cultural and social reverberations of conflict. Within these landscapes lie spaces for reflection and resolution, where fragments can become whole. Here, amongst painted shadows and reflections, individual and collective memory resides, immortalised and memorialized in drawings and paintings whilst ‘people remember as they are remembered by things.’²

The Brothers Nash are always interesting, Paul with his head, where a poet’s should be, in the clouds, and John, like the child that the painter should be, putting his hand in his mouth to tell us what he has seen in the field and on the farm that afternoon.³

John and Paul Nash were landscape painters in the purest sense. They shared a unique way of looking at the land, shaped by childhood pastimes, constant and close study, and the travesty of war. Their primary concern was always for nature and the countryside around them, depicting the fields and shorelines of their native land. They belong to a group of artists who attempted to balance the radicalism of their European contemporaries with a particularly English sense of Modernism. Stylistically they trod two very different paths, veering between the literary and the lyrical, surrealism and traditionalism. In the exhibition ‘Brothers in Art’ we are confronted with a panoramic vision of the British countryside, both imagined and real.

Landscape forms the underlying thread of the exhibition. However, it is not only presented as the soil and stone that constitutes our geographical

1. Exhibition developed from an original idea by James Russell, writer and curator.

2. Andrew Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 223.

3. Walter Sickert, ‘Review of The London Group’, *Burlington Magazine*, January 1916 reproduced in Anna Gruetzner Robins (ed.), *Walter Sickert The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 401.

understanding of the term. It is also a psychological concept, as James King suggests in his insightful biography of Paul Nash, in which it is applied to our interior vision or landscape: our ‘memory-scape’. This internalized account contributes to the suggestion that both brothers’ work can be understood as acts of commemoration. Programmed in 2014 to coincide with ‘Back From the Front’⁴ at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, it highlights the integral role played by landscape in ‘defining post-war realities, materialities, and the human experiences of them’⁵ utilising the notion that commemorative spaces and sites provide a framework for remembering.

SIDE-BY-SIDE

‘Brothers in Art’ begins its narrative in 1913, a year that had brought the brothers’ mixed fortune. Paul was struggling to find direction following his first one-man show at the Carfax Gallery, London, 1912, yet in contrast, John, who had no official training in art, experienced a hugely industrious summer in which Paul found him ‘so extraordinarily productive’ that he could only stand by ‘to amaze and envy.’⁶ In the autumn the opportunity arose to hold a joint exhibition⁷ at The Dorien Leigh Gallery, a grand name for what proved to be little more than a lampshade shop on Pelham Street, South Kensington, London. Twenty-five drawings were exhibited, John sold seven and Paul five, leading the latter to declare that it had been ‘a success beyond our highest hopes.’⁸ The drawings exhibited were mainly of landscapes, although whereas Paul’s literary absorption was still apparent with *Lavengro and Isopel in the Dingle*,⁹ John favoured an illustrative approach, populating the rural idyll with figures and farm-life such as in *About a Pig*.¹⁰ Whilst John was painting what he saw, Paul was ‘still making art from art, rather than from life.’¹¹

The exhibition was a moderate success, attracting interest from amongst others Roger Fry (1866–1934), William Rothenstein (1872–1945) and Michael Sadler (1861–1943), resulting in a modest degree of critical acclaim for the young artists. A consequence of this was that both brothers were invited to show in the ‘Exhibition of the Work of English Post-Impressionists, Cubists and Others’, Brighton Art Gallery, 1913–1914, organized by Spencer Gore (1878–1914) and The Camden Town Group. This was in addition to invitations from The Friday Club, The London Group and Roger Fry’s Omega Workshops. To echo Paul’s own words, they were ‘quite the rising young men.’¹² If there was rivalry between the brothers it is hard to glean. In Paul’s insightful, yet highly stylised, autobiography which finishes mid-1913 John appears infrequently, cast as a peripheral figure.¹³ Yet perhaps there was an initial frustration on Paul’s part towards his younger, untrained brother. Suddenly he was not only sharing the limelight but their reputations had

4. ‘Back From the Front’ encompasses a series of exhibitions and events at the RWA in summer 2014.

5. Nicholas Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), p. 143. In this text Saunders notes that human interaction with the landscape was at an unprecedented level during WWI, provoking a need to renegotiate the social construction of landscape.

6. Quoted in Ronald Blythe, *First Friends* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 41.

7. Ronald Blythe suggests that there had originally been talk of Dora Carrington sharing the exhibition with the brothers in Blythe, 1997.

8. In a letter dated c. mid-November 1913, reproduced in Claude Colleer Abbott and Anthony Bertram (eds), *Poet and Painter, Being the correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 67.

9. *Lavengro and Isopel in the Dingle*, 1912–13, ink, graphite and gouache on paper, 46.4 x 37 cm, Tate, London.

10. *About a Pig*, c. 1913, pencil and watercolour, 28 x 38 cm, private collection.

11. Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London: Constable, 1988), p. 35.

12. Quoted in Abbott and Bertram, 1955, p. 67.

13. Paul does appear supportive of his brother’s artistic ambitions sharing his circle of friends from the Slade and introducing him to collectors and patrons.

now merged. In a letter from Paul to John, dated 9 December 1922, the elder brother wrote ‘I know most people think of us as one flesh – John painting with the right hand, Paul with the left, or at least as being in the same house, eating out of one bowl and having our wives in common.’¹⁴

Despite this initial tendency to view the brothers as one talent, as Paul Gough states in his introduction to this book, the brothers’ subsequent reputations grew to differ greatly. Whereas Paul’s work has become synonymous with British modernism, in contrast, John’s work is often portrayed as less imaginative, less ambitious, and ultimately less modern. John’s marginalisation can clearly be seen in the tangential role he has played in popular accounts of modern British art, popping up in the chorus line, but seldom the star of the show. His work is often described in more lyrical than critical terms, a result perhaps of his apparent lack of interest in new artistic movements.¹⁵ John Rothenstein recalls John’s enthusiasm for the East Anglian countryside which he declared was ‘compared with the West ... it’s more brilliant in atmosphere, and it’s subtler, less obviously dramatic.’¹⁶ This phrase could just as easily be used to sum up John’s artistic career in comparison to Paul’s.

The Dorien Leigh exhibition can be seen as the precursor to this separation. Now looking back, the year 1913 also clearly holds great historical significance. It was the eve of war and the psychological effect it would come to have on the brothers was tangible. In the years leading up to their first experience of active combat their work grew in competency, with John frequently noted as the more technically proficient artist. Rothenstein notes the rapidity of John’s progress,¹⁷ getting to grips with colour and oil whilst Paul is still playing with his sombre nocturnal palette of blue and green washes. *A Gloucestershire Landscape*¹⁸ painted in 1914, demonstrates the painterly control that John maintained throughout his lifetime, marrying form and colour in harmonious tension. It bears the early hallmarks of *The Cornfield*¹⁹ coming close to achieving pastoral perfection with the sun streaming through the verdant landscape and its glimmering sheaves of corn. However, upon reflection the black cloud which casts its bulbous shadow across the lush green grass now appears rather ominous.

REMEMBERING – PLACE AND GENIUS LOCI

Focusing the start of the brothers’ tale in 1913 allows us to identify the early landscapes that first came to inspire the two artists. The poster for the exhibition ‘Drawings by Paul and John Nash’²⁰ features the brothers standing side-by-side, Paul in bohemian attire and a more traditionally besuited John. In the background are the Wittenham Clumps – the hill-top that Paul grew to revere – and in the foreground John’s swaying corn

14. Quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd, 1987), pp. 62–63.

15. In ‘The Art of John Nash’, *The Lady*, 10 January 1957. Ronald Blythe suggests that John’s work belonged to a tradition of artists who have freed us from fussiness, offering an unsentimental beauty.

16. John Rothenstein, *John Nash* (London: Macdonald and Co, 1983), pp. 72–73.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *A Gloucestershire Landscape*, 1914, oil on canvas, 51.2 x 61.5 cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

19. *The Cornfield*, 1918, oil on canvas, 68.6 x 76.2 cm, Tate, London.

20. Anstice Shaw, writer and friend of the brothers, recalls seeing the poster in 1942 hanging on the wall next to the fireplace at Paul and Margaret’s home in Oxford. She describes it as looking ‘faded and dingy’ yet the brothers looked so ‘spry and young’ in ‘Paul Nash and John Nash: as remembered by Anstice Shaw’, September 1983, audio recording, Tate Archive.

sheaves. Dancing a merry line across the outlying fields are the figures of Rupert Lee, Margaret Odeh (soon to become Nash), Rosalind Pemberton and possibly Ruth Clark following a white stag.²¹ King notes how it rather succinctly encompasses their mutual concern as landscape painters whilst also offering a point of separation with Paul's Clumps reaching skywards for the clouds like the poet, and John's sheaves firmly planted in the ground.²²

These two landscapes are returned to time-and-time again throughout the brothers' work, creating touchstones that act as memory-markers. The discovery of the Wittenham Clumps is frequently discussed as one of the great 'events' in Paul's artistic career. Located several miles from Sinodun House, his uncle's home near Wallingford, South Oxfordshire, the Clumps provided an endless source of fascination – a 'talismanic' site, to borrow Gough's phrase.²³ Reflecting on the discovery of the Clumps in his autobiography *Outline*²⁴ Paul describes the event as a pilgrimage in which he determinedly sets out to capture and contain the very spirit of the place. And it did not disappoint – upon arrival he was faced with the fundamental realisation that what lay before him was 'the life of a landscape painter.'²⁵ Examples of the Clumps are present throughout the RWA exhibition creating chronological bookends demarcating the beginning and end of Paul's life. They reflect the central position that he himself attributed to them: 'For although in my mind they stood apart from other symbolism – for Sinodun and all the pleasures that implied – it was the lack of them that told most, whether on site or in memory. They were the pyramids of my very small world.'²⁶

It is 'the lack of them' that we first experience in 'Brothers in Art'. The vibrant *View from Wittenham Clumps*²⁷ depicts the fields and farmland that lie beyond. Portrayed from this perspective the Clumps are only present through their absence. It is worth noting that the work bears certain stylistic similarities to John's work *Haymaking*²⁸ produced in the same year. The geometrical form of the cornstacks loom large in the foreground of both works, splaying out in perfect symmetry to the fields beyond. However, whereas John's landscape is rife with activity, Paul relies on the poetics of place to make its presence felt.

The Clumps are revisited towards the end of the exhibition in the sketch *Landscape of the Wittenham Clumps*.²⁹ Dated 1946, the year of Paul's death, it bears testimony to the fact that they were indeed 'the guardians of the last stage of his life.'³⁰ In this particular sketch the Clumps appear somewhat fragile and it is productive to pause and consider the structural resemblances between Paul's chosen medium and the concept of memory. Here, depicted in pencil (and a loose grey wash) the Clumps face imminent erasure, fading with time like a distant memory. In contrast to the concrete finality of oil,

21. Identified by King, 1987, p. 62.

22. Although the exhibition focuses on John's drawing and painting it is important to remember that he had a long and highly successful career as a book illustrator receiving particular acclaim for his botanical drawings and wood engravings. For examples see the second edition of White, Gilbert, *The Natural History of Selborne* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).

23. Gough, this volume, p. 77.

24. Paul Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 121–123.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

27. *View from Wittenham Clumps*, 1913, pencil on paper and watercolour, 60.3 x 68.5 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

28. *Haymaking*, 1913, tempera on panel, 39.3 x 48 cm, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

29. *Landscape of the Wittenham Clumps*, 1946, pencil and grey wash on paper, 17 x 25 cm, The British Council Collection, London.

30. David Fraser Jenkins, *Paul Nash: The Elements* (London: Scala Publications Ltd. 2010) p. 26.

they are in danger of disappearing before our eyes. Cultural historian Simon Schama suggests that memory is first the work of the mind: 'Its scenery built up as much from the strata of memory as from layers of rock.'³¹ In the final stages of life, Paul's memory of the Clumps supersedes any physical experience. The drawing can be seen as a culmination of the strata of memory, layer upon layer, slipping away.

CAPTURING THE LANDSCAPE

Both Paul and John experimented with a number of different mediums with which to capture the landscape, achieving their greatest successes in watercolour and oil. John learnt his early technique of watercolour washed over waxy crayons from his friend, the artist Claughton Pellew-Harvey (1890–1966), but it was Harold Gilman (1876–1919), a member of the Camden Town Group, who taught him how to master oil paint.³² Gough defines this method as the application of single layers of opaque paint 'dry in texture but saturated in colour.'³³ This technique was to serve him throughout his career and there is little difference between the treatment of pigment in *The Edge of the Plain*³⁴ painted in 1926, and *The Farm Pond*³⁵ in 1940. Rothenstein suggests that understanding John's method is essential for appreciating his work, referring to the notion that he made things legible (whilst maintaining complexity), although John himself bemoaned his critics who, to paraphrase, declared his style as 'trivial and conventional.'³⁶ In comparison, Paul was a relative latecomer to oil, only truly realizing its potential with his Great War memorial paintings such as *The Menin Road*.³⁷

This discussion of medium is useful in providing us with a more abstract understanding of the relationship between landscape and memory. Memory is a fragile concept. It balances delicately between absence and presence, its reflection often obscured and transfigured. It is at once both subjective, belonging to the individual, yet it can also create a deeply resolute wide-ranging cultural sense of sharing. If Paul's pencil drawing of the Clumps (1946) marks a tentative half-stage or half-memory that is caught between being and disappearing, then with watercolour this metaphor can be extended. Watercolour as a medium possesses an innate duality, encompassing light and shade, transparency and opacity. Water-colour floats, bleeding and overlapping, creating tributaries and pathways across the paper. From fragile beginnings it rushes forwards, merging into a watery 'other' world where memories bleed and amalgamate with one another. Compared to the opaque solidity of oil where images become concrete, set and placed in time, it lacks permanence, locked somewhere between past and future. It mimics the impermanence of landscape as a concept and memory as a cognitive act.

31. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Harper Collins: London, 1995), pp. 6–7.

32. See Frederick Gore's introductory essay in *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by John Nash RA*, exh. cat (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1967) for a detailed discussion of Gilman's influence on John's work.

33. Gough, this volume, p. 24.

34. *The Edge of the Plain*, 1926, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

35. *The Farm Pond*, 1940, oil on canvas, 64.1 x 76.8 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

36. Blythe, p. 72.

37. *The Menin Road*, 1919, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 317.5 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2242.

*The Avon Gorge, Clifton*³⁸ embodies this transitory quality, loosely portrayed in watercolour, ready to slip off the page at any moment. Paul refers to this landscape as the mythical sounding ‘Giants Stride’ describing in *Outline* how the intriguing scenery put him under one of his spells.³⁹ A similar sense of being caught somewhere between an imagined place and reality is captured in *Folly Landscape, Creech, Dorset*,⁴⁰ a location Paul described as a ‘lost place’.⁴¹

IMAGINING THE REAL – MEMORY-SCAPES

In Paul’s notes for *Outline* he sketches out chapter abstracts for the years following 1913 giving them titles such as *Making a New World, Old World Revisited, Searching* and *Finding*, listing within each chapter events such as his first sight of Dymchurch and the discovery of Mimosa Wood. His choice of language implies the joy of discovery shared by both brothers who employed a similar technique of scouting the countryside for new locations (John also utilized the help of his wife Christine Nash in this endeavour). Working outdoors they would sketch in pencil or create quick pen-and-ink or watercolour washes,⁴² producing small studies from which to work from upon returning to the studio. John referred to these sketches as ‘midges’ but they could also be considered memory-markers in their own right. This habit of recording and then re-imagining provides a useful point at which to consider the difference in the brothers’ unique way of picturing the landscape. Despite sharing similar methods they translated these memories of scenes and places into finished works rather differently. Ronald Blythe (born 1922), writer and close friend of John and Christine, defines this in his suggestion that even during childhood, they translated Wood Lane House and the surrounding Buckinghamshire countryside ‘into two kinds of imagery ... Paul’s symbolic and poetic, John’s botanic and agriculturally influenced.’⁴³ Paul is frequently referred to as an ‘imaginative artist’. Certainly his earlier literary drawings, combining poetry and art in a Blakeian fashion, and then his later pre-occupation with surrealism support this claim. Yet John was also capable of capturing the landscape in a manner that owes more to the imagination than to realism.⁴⁴

A number of places held a bewitching draw for Paul throughout his life time including the garden at Iver Heath;⁴⁵ Hawks Wood; the Avon Gorge, Bristol; Romney Marsh and Dymchurch, on the Kent Coast; Ballards Head, Swanage in Dorset; and the Avebury stone circle, Wiltshire. These locations became internalised for Paul, creating a series of memories upon which he could draw, weaving and overlapping memory-scapes into landscapes. His work can be viewed as a painterly equivalent to the ‘memory theatres’ of the Renaissance, or the *ars memoria* of the Ancient Greeks before them.

38. *The Avon Gorge, Clifton*, 1939, watercolour, 49.8 x 59 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

39. Paul Nash, ‘The Giant’s Stride’ first published in *The Architectural Review*, September, 1939; reproduced in *Outline*.

40. *Folly Landscape, Creech, Dorset*, 1935, watercolour, 66.5 x 83 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

41. Paul Nash, ‘Swanage or Seaside Surrealism’ originally published in *The Architectural Review*, April 1936; reproduced in *Outline*.

42. David Fraser Jenkins suggests that Paul in fact considered these earlier watercolours as amongst his best work, 2010.

43. Blythe, p. 18.

44. In Gore (1967) he attempts to define the difference between John and Paul’s translation of the landscape suggesting that ‘Paul is less engaged in the truth of things seen. The visible is beckoned by poetic insight’, p. viii.

45. The garden and surrounding countryside at Wood Lane House provide Paul’s first encounter with the *genius loci* that is so often associated with his work, seen in *The Bird Garden*, 1911, watercolour, ink and chalk, 38.7 x 33.6 cm, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. It was here amongst the flowers and shrubbery that John also developed his botanical fascination with the inner structures of plant life, explored in his woodcuts and illustrations.



PAUL NASH

FOLLY LANDSCAPE, CREECH, DORSET

1935 • drawing and watercolour • 66.5 x 83 cm

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

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PAUL NASH

LANDSCAPE OF THE MALVERN DISTANCE

1943 • oil on canvas • 53.5 x 74.2 cm

Southampton City Art Gallery, Hampshire/The Bridgeman Art Library

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46. Jones, 2007, pp. 166–167.

47. *The Archer*, 1942, oil on canvas, 71 x 91.5 cm, Southampton City Art Gallery.

48. *Outline*, p. 100.

49. Megalithic site in Penwith, Cornwall. Men-an-Tol is Cornish for holed stone.

50. An idea explored further by David Fraser Jenkins in his accompanying essay to the exhibition 'Paul Nash: The Elements', Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 2010. It is also worth considering Hal Foster's meditation on memory and surrealism in which he discusses how a familiar landmark acts as a trigger for memory, concluding that 'If we can grasp this dialectic of ruination, recovery and resistance, we will grasp the ambition of the surrealist practice of history.' Hal Foster, 'Outmoded Spaces', in Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 1993) p. 54.

51. Most memorably Gerrard's Cross, 1919–21 and Meadle, near Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, 1921–44.

52. Allen Freer, *John Nash: 'The Delighted Eye'* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), p. 2.

53. *The Barn, Wormingford*, 1954, oil on canvas, 66 x 82.5 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

54. See works in the exhibition: *The Edge of the Plain* (John Nash, 1926, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge); *Oxwich Burrows* (John Nash, 1938, watercolour, 38 x 55.2 cm, British Council Collection, London); *Deer Park* (John Nash, watercolour, undated, Gibberd Gallery, Harlow); and *Penwalk Cove* (John Nash, undated, watercolour, Gibberd Gallery, Harlow).

55. John Nash, in Rothenstein, 1983, p. 119.

56. Ken Taylor, *Landscape and Memory: Cultural Landscapes, Intangible Values and some Thoughts on Asia*. In 16th ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium: 'Finding the spirit of place – between the tangible and the intangible', 29 September–4 October 2008, Quebec, Canada, p. 2.

Material archaeologist Andrew Jones offers an interesting account of these whereby a memory theatre is described as a physical construction, reliant on the spatial ordering of objects and based on the relationship between memory, image and place. Objects and images activate the memory, aiding recall, often of stories or places that can't quite be grasped by the mind's eye.⁴⁶ In Paul's later work this theory becomes increasingly relevant to understanding his surreal visions, such as in *The Archer*⁴⁷ which he described as 'a private fairytale of my own invention.'⁴⁸ Here, he brings together a number of objects including a model of the Men-an-tol,⁴⁹ a mirror and a screen, like players on a stage.⁵⁰

Certain places and scenes held equal fascination for John, creating a similar indexical register of memories. Less peripatetic than Paul, John settled in several places⁵¹ before making his final home in 1943 at Bottengoms Farm, Wormingford – 'a pastoral dream, at once commonplace, rural, workaday, and yet extraordinary',⁵² portrayed in *The Barn, Wormingford*⁵³ which depicts the view from his top-floor studio in the attic. John was far from sedentary however in his pursuit of new locales and he travelled the country producing a series of works based in Bath in the twenties, and revisiting favourite spots such as the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire, the Gower peninsular in South Wales, the Isle of Skye and Cornwall.⁵⁴ John's portrayal of the landscape relied less on a fusion of the imaginary and the real and more on the exact selection of specific memories: 'In looking at a landscape, its abstract features appeal to me pretty quickly. Although representational I am primarily interested in the structure underneath, though I hope not obviously. In fact such changes as I make are based more on selection than specific alteration.'⁵⁵

FRAGMENTS – WAR IS UPON US

However, as Ken Taylor reminds us, our memory of landscape is not always pleasing and we cannot simply select those elements that bring us pleasure: 'It (memory) can be associated sometimes with loss, with pain, with social fracture and a sense of belonging gone, although the memory remains, albeit poignantly.'⁵⁶ In August 1914, less than a year after the success of the Dorien Leigh exhibition, war broke out, and by September Paul had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. After periods stationed at home in 1917 he travelled to Ypres Salient for combat, returning injured shortly after. His return to the Western Front in October the same year was as an Official War Artist, an assignment that brought him home for good that December. In contrast, John contributed to a number of domestic war efforts before enlisting in the Artists' Rifles in September 1916, then serving on the front line from November 1916 to January 1918. Alongside their fellow combatants both brothers experienced unimaginable horrors. Arguably John witnessed the greatest atrocities in the

direct line of fire, but Paul's unflinching approach to his official artist duties had also 'put iron' into his 'dainty art.'⁵⁷ There is no doubt that conflict had created a new source of energy for both artists.⁵⁸

Upon their return home the brothers set about re-establishing their artistic practice, working side-by-side in an old potting shed in Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire – a period which Gough refers to as ultimately their final period of 'painterly brotherhood.'⁵⁹ By day the brothers worked on official war paintings including the completion of much lauded works such as *Oppy Wood*,⁶⁰ *Over the Top*,⁶¹ *The Menin Road*,⁶² and *We are Making a New World*,⁶³ a selection of which are represented in the exhibition through reproductions. In these works the relationship between landscape and memory becomes thwarted by trauma and as artists the brothers are faced with the impossible task of how to remember and represent the horrors of war. These enduring images of WWI show the landscape torn apart and contribute to our visual lexicon of conflict. The poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) summed up this fragmentation in his extended poem 'The Wasteland' (1922), describing the world left behind by war as a 'heap of broken images'.⁶⁴ It is from this destruction that John and Paul sought to navigate the blasted fields, and skeletal corpses, renegotiating the very idea of landscape.

57. Yorke, 2001, p. 38.

58. See in this volume, chapters 3 and 4, for a detailed discussion of their experiences on the front line.

59. Gough, his volume, p. 56.

60. *Oppy Wood*, 1918, oil on canvas, 182.6 x 213.3 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2243.

61. *Over the Top*, 1918, oil on canvas, 79.8 x 108 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 1656.

62. *The Menin Road*, 1919, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 317.5 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2242.

63. *We are Making a New World*, 1918, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 1146.

64. T.S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' in *T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

65. *Outline*, p. 218.

66. Paul Gough, *A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War*, (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2010), pp. 135–136.

67. Ysanne Holt, 'An Ideal Modernity: Spencer Gore at Letchworth' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 91.

68. David Peters Corbett, 'The Geography of Blast: Landscape, Modernity and English Painting, 1914–1930' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 135.

RECOVERY – SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS

In 1918 Paul was a 'war artist without a war'⁶⁵ attempting to purge himself of literary frailties in order to create a tougher language befitting in tone with the destruction he had experienced.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, John, despite a positive reception to his own war paintings, had already fallen into Paul's shadow, his elder brother now widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent narrator of modern warfare. However, there was no need for either brother to depart from landscape altogether. Rather the opposite as Ysanne Holt purports when she suggests that the early twentieth century, and in particular post-World War One, marked a return to rural landscape, now seen as 'a site where an ideal modernity can be forged.'⁶⁷ The popular notion that modernism stutters in British art after World War One is contested again by David Peters Corbett who argues instead that artists like Paul were creating a new language, treating landscape in a way that 'both looks away from modernity and attempt[s] to register the presence of the modern within it.'⁶⁸ At the same time the notion of England and Englishness geographically, culturally and artistically, underwent a shift following the Great War. It was under this auspice that the brothers set to work again. By day traumatic memories of war played at the forefront of their artistic practice, but by evening as shadows gathered and nightfall fell upon the now silent countryside a space for creating something new presented itself.

Archaeologist Nicholas Saunders offers a framework by which to understand this, suggesting that ‘Modern war has an unprecedented capacity to make, unmake and remake matter, individuals, cities, nations and continents.’⁶⁹ Following World War One, art played a significant role in the remaking of Britain, and landscape art in particular saw a strong resurgence as a genre in which to examine the past and imagine the future. In some ways it was John who best achieved this with his work *The Cornfield* which Blythe recalls John saying he had painted as a ‘thank-you’ for surviving the Western Front.⁷⁰ It typifies the English countryside, the sun shining down on a bucolic idyll, recalling the very tradition of English landscape painting and conjuring up memories of John Constable’s (1776–1837) own depiction of a cornfield, described as ‘a specimen of genuine English scenery’⁷¹ when exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, in 1826.⁷² In *The Cornfield* the sun hangs low in the sky and half the image is shrouded in shadow, but where the sun still lingers it casts a golden light across the fields, full of hope and promise.

The Cornfield was purchased by Edward Marsh (1872–1953) an avid patron of young artists, yet despite this positive reception to new work both brothers struggled in this period, with Paul in particular appearing to flounder. Haunted by memories of war, his work became rife with symbols of turmoil. The works *Tench Pond in a Gale*⁷³ and *Palings*⁷⁴ belong to a handful of paintings made after 1918 in which violent weather imposes upon his work producing turbulent landscapes. This is particularly evident in *Tench Pond* in which the swaying branches and driving rain fragment the picture-plane causing our eyes to dart anxiously across the image. Anthony Bertram describes this intrusion as a ‘disturbing stranger’,⁷⁵ intimating a link between its blustery presence and the psychological effect of the war on Paul’s art. In a passage in *A Terrible Beauty* Gough asserts this less cautiously suggesting that he had absorbed the notion of ‘pathetic fallacy into his very being’.⁷⁶

However, both brothers found solace in new ‘places’, both physical and abstract. In 1921 Paul suffered a breakdown, seeking recuperation on the Kent Coast where he discovered Dymchurch.⁷⁷ With its ready-made abstract form in the shape of the long, concrete seawall, it provided a place for recovery. Water also became a significant ‘place’ for John. Ponds, canals, lakes and streams seamlessly connect landscapes across the years creating watery tributaries between the works. In certain paintings water is also a space for reflection, both literally and philosophically. A reflection is a counterpart to an image, it can be exacting or distorted. To reflect is to consider, therefore a reflection can also refer to a thought that has occurred upon careful meditation. Each meaning suggests a two-stage process, the original and the copy, the thought and its revision. Both notions are useful in understanding how landscape is ‘remembered’ in the brothers’ work. In *The Moat, Grange*

69. Saunders, 2003, p. 1.

70. Blythe, 1997, p. 92.

71. BP Spotlight display, ‘Constable’s Cornfield: A Specimen of Genuine English Scenery’, 25 March–29 September 2013, Tate, London.

72. When Paul Nash describes his first visit to Norfolk with Pellew-Harvey in *Outline* he wonders himself that it is not haunted with the memories of past landscape painters such as Constable and John Sell Cotman amongst others.

73. *Tench Pond in a Gale*, Paul Nash, 1920–1, ink, pencil and watercolour on paper, 57.7 x 39.9 cm, Tate, London.

74. *Palings*, 1924–25, graphite and watercolour on paper, 56.5 x 38.8 cm, The Courtauld, London.

75. Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber, 1955), p. 128.

76. Gough, 2010, p. 127.

77. Paul painted numerous variations of the coastal defences at Dymchurch, the following of which appears in the exhibition: *Dymchurch* (Paul Nash, 1920–25, oil on canvas, 53.5 x 75 cm, Dudley Art Gallery and Museum, Dudley).

*Farm, Kimble*⁷⁸ the trees are bowed, their spidery tendrils drooping towards the water's edge, threatening, but not quite managing, to disrupt the surface. The narrow channel of water appears almost stagnant, reflecting the encroaching trees in its glassy surface. We are drawn to this, the reflection, the secondary vision: the memory of a landscape within a landscape. It is seen again in *The Lake, Little Horkesley Hall*⁷⁹ and *The Pond at Souldern*.⁸⁰ The very act of remembering is inherent within the painting.

Shadows are an equally ubiquitous feature of these landscapes. In John's work they are particularly important, stretching out across the canvas as in *The Cornfield* or dancing upon the surface in *A Path Through the Trees*.⁸¹ Like reflections, shadows create copies, distillations tethered to the memory of the original. They are to light, what absence is to presence, a notion of duality played out throughout art history, best encapsulated in the texts of Pliny (23–79 AD) and Plato (429–347 BC) respectively.⁸² In discussing the looming shadow in *The Archer*, King suggests that Paul's real love was the 'shadow world',⁸³ an idea that takes on greater meaning when we dissect the term in a more abstract fashion. In *Equivalents for the Megaliths*⁸⁴ the prehistoric standing stones are replaced with cubic forms. Framed against the background of an ancient hill fort these new shapes possess the outline of the old. They are shadows of their former selves, although in one sense they pre-figure memory, containing the essential shape and structure of their equivalent. These shadow-memories have overtaken the real, supplanting it with a new imagined landscape.⁸⁵

These Megalithic sites were not the only objects to be re-imagined. Both brothers shared a deep love for trees and woodlands, an affinity planted firmly in their childhood. These too had to be remembered and reconstructed after the War. Gough has previously referred to the 'totemic monumentality of trees'⁸⁶ situating them as objects of commemoration in relation to post-war landscapes. He grounds them in the words of the writer and artist Robert George Talbot Kelley (1861–1934): 'I never lost this tree sense. To me the war is a memory of trees.'⁸⁷ He also coins the phrase 'forest trauma'⁸⁸ making direct reference to a particular wound that both Paul and John needed to heal.

For both brothers, but particularly Paul, trees had come to represent human life and human loss. Even before the devastation of northern Europe, Paul had begun to utilise trees to represent people within his work. In *The Orchard*⁸⁹ Paul's work had started to adopt a more rigid form and structure. His subject matter here is of a man-made landscape. The trees stand in straight, ordered lines, enclosed by a ferocious metal and barbed wire fence creating a barrier between viewer and subject. In contrast to the rounded curvatures and rich colour of John's Gloucestershire landscapes (of a similar time), Paul's appear

78. *The Moat, Grange Farm, Kimble*, c. 1922, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.8 cm, Tate, London.

79. *The Lake, Little Horkesley Hall*, c. 1958, oil on canvas, 60.6 x 76 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

80. *The Pond at Souldern*, 1926, oil on canvas, 71 x 92 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

81. *A Path Through Trees*, c. 1915, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, Tate, London.

82. See Victor I Stoichita's *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) for an insightful discussion.

83. King, 1987.

84. *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, 1935, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 66 cm, Tate, London.

85. Although they are not included in the exhibition it is worth noting that Paul also encountered another method of 'remembering' the landscape in his lifetime; photography. In 1931 he discovered the enquiring eye of the camera lens, helping him search out and capture new details and configurations of objects. Gough suggests that through photography Paul also 'mastered the art of the cast shadow', (this volume, p. 89). Stoichita, 1997 provides an interesting discussion on the implicit relationship between photography and shadows.

86. Paul Gough, 'Cultivating Dead Trees; The Legacy of Paul Nash as an Artist of Trauma, Wilderness and Recovery', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 2011, p. 4.

87. Paul Nash, in Gough, 2011, p. 5.

88. Gough, 2010, p. 129.

89. *The Orchard*, 1914[?], watercolour, ink and pencil on paper, 57.5 x 48.2 cm, Tate, London.



JOHN NASH

THE FALLEN TREE

1951 • oil on canvas • 70 x 91.7 cm

photo credit: © Royal Academy of Arts, London; photographer Prudence Cuming Assoc. Ltd
purchased from John Nash, R.A. in 1951

stark, skeletal and cool in tone. The trees stand like tombstones in a graveyard, and from then onwards it is hard not to encode this arboreal anthropomorphism into his later work.

A PATH THROUGH THE TREES

This essay has simultaneously attempted to ask how we remember through landscape, and, how is landscape remembered. It explores the liminal space between the real and the imagined, a realm in which memories flicker and fade, haunting the undergrowth and lurking in shadows. It asks this question in the context of conflict, considering how any artist was able to emerge from the devastation of two world wars. Paul has long been accepted as a 'seminal figure' in any 'appreciation of a land-or-memory-scape touched by war and recovered through peace.'⁹⁰ But here is a place in which John's work too can be reappraised in this context. Whereas Paul carved out his own escape experimenting with abstraction, surrealism and imaginative configurations of pre-history, John remained consistent to one artistic vision throughout his lifetime, developing and honing his craft. It was his complete loyalty to landscape that guided him forward: 'I am convinced now even more than formerly that a strict adherence to nature is the only thing worth doing, even at the risk of being dull? ... But how can nature be dull. What is cubism or anything else to nature ...'⁹¹ 'Brothers in Art' presents the work of each of these artists in a broadly chronological fashion, allowing for two important resting points, commemorating both World War One and World War Two. Within this context the notion of memory takes on a deeper gravitas. These are not simply landscapes 'remembered'. They are landscapes re-membered, re-envisioned and re-imagined. In art we seek to remember through the physical manifestation of events, likenesses, feeling and place, a concept that runs throughout 'Brothers in Art'. Ian Farr suggests that a single memory or experience can only be deciphered through juxtaposition, by seeing it side-by-side.⁹² Indeed as a physical form the exhibition itself acts as a type of memory theatre, a montage of places and images from which memories and landscapes tentatively emerge and the characters of John and Paul Nash take centre stage, and as Gough remembers them in war, here they are remembered in peace.

90. Gough, 2011, p. 4.

91. Letter from John Nash to Dora Carrington, 1914, in Blythe, 1997.

92. Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory, Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2012).