

BEAUX ARTS

Peter Lanyon

Oarscape

1962

Oar, wood, foil on board encased in frame
20.3 x 182.8 cm (71.97 x 7.99 inches)



Provenance

Private Collection, 2006

Exhibitions

London, Gimpel Fils, *Peter Lanyon, Reliefs, Constructions and Related Paintings*, 20 May - 21 June 1975, cat no.24 (dimensions given as 18.25 x 77.5 x 2 inches)

London, Camden Arts Centre, Arts Council, 6 Nov – 20 Dec 1992, cat no. 34, illus colour, touring to:
Mead Gallery, Coventry, 11 January - 13 February 1993
Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield, 20 February - 18 April 1993
Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance, 1 May - 13 June 1993

Bath, Victoria Art Gallery, *Porthmeor: A Peter Lanyon Mural Rediscovered*, 25 October 2008 - 4 January 2009, unnumbered

Literature

Patrick Heron, Margaret Garlake, Martin Holman, *Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea*, South Bank Centre Publications, London, illus colour, p40

Andrew Lanyon, *Peter Lanyon*, Andrew Lanyon and St Ives Printing and Publishing Company, Penzance, Cornwall, 1990, illus colour, p227

Toby Treves, *Peter Lanyon*, Modern Art Press, St James Place, London, 2018, cat no.525, illus colour p562

Description

The structure of Oarscape is more complex than it at first appears. The work's principal component is an oar, whose face Lanyon painted black. The top of the oar shaft, where it first is gripped by the rower's hands, he left unpainted, and the blade he overpainted with thick white paint, which he then partly scraped off, leaving rills of white over the underlying black. The oar is attached to a white laminate board, and sits between a fragment of painted tile and a long ruler-like sliver of painted board that are stuck to it. The laminate board sits on a larger rectangle of board, which is mainly painted blue grey, although glimpses of black and beige break through in places, most noticeably at the lower right and just above the top edge of the oar's blade.

Lanyon seems to have had the idea of an Oarscape as early as 1951. Writing to William Scott on 31 March (William Scott Foundation Archive), he had said that he had "given up painting and am painting my house all over except the roof. I have the front gate in my studio painted fresh cow pat colour. It's wonderful to have a real thing in the studio. I wish I had a big studio so I could have a steamroller inside (for making flat white) or one of those incredible engines that live at fair grounds called 'Perseus' or 'Tilling Stevens'. I think I must get a boat house so that I can paint real things. Think of sending a landscape painted on an oar to the British Council!"

Although this comment does not seem to have been entirely serious, by the late 1950s and early 1960s he was making constructions from objects washed up on local beaches.

The local format echoes Porthmeor Mural and the relative construction Long Coast, which Lanyon may have been working on at the same time as Oarscape. In the 1975 Gimpel Fils exhibition catalogue, the construction is identified as having 'influenced the design of the mural for the Arts Building, University of Birmingham' but how it did so is hard to see.

From the Catalogue Essay that accompanies the Four Giants of British Modernism Exhibition – written by Andrew Lambirth:

Lanyon began to make constructions very early in his career. Ben Nicholson wrote appreciatively of him in a letter to a friend (dated January 11th 1940); 'He has done a good deal of photography & has adapted his knowledge of this in a most interesting way - Barbara [Hepworth] & Gabo say he has solved, in his "ptg-constructions", in a month what Moholy [-Nagy, the Hungarian painter, photographer and Bauhaus professor] has been trying to solve for 20 years.' The constructions were a three-dimensional way of thinking about painting, exploring space and movement, and were part of the scaffolding of a subject, temporary expedients (not intended for exhibition), ways of working out problems, and thus contain some of the most direct statements we have of Lanyon's thought.