

BEAUX ARTS

Peter Lanyon

Saltillo

1963

Oil on canvas

91 x 122 cms (35.8 x 48 inches)



Provenance

Gimpel Fils, 1963. Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 1998. Austin Desmond Fine Art, 2005. Private Collection, UK, 2012.

Exhibited

London, Gimpel Fils, *Summer Exhibition, 1963*, cat no.17, entitled '*Saltillo, Mexico*'
London, Tate Gallery, Arts Council, *Peter Lanyon*, 30 May - 30 June 1968, cat no.82, not illus, touring to:
Plymouth, City Museum and Art Gallery, 13 July - 3 August 1968
Newcastle, Laing Art Gallery, 10 - 31 August 1968
Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, 7 - 28 September 1968
Liverpool Walker Art Gallery, 5 - 26 October 1968

Birmingham, Ikon Gallery, *Peter Lanyon: Later work*, 16 September - 14 October 1978

London, Gimpel Fils, *Peter Lanyon: Selected Works 1952- 1964*, 27 October - 21 November 1987, cat no.14

New York, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, *The British Imagination, Twentieth Century Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings*, 10 November 1990 - 12 January 1991, cat no.46, illus colour

London, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, *Peter Lanyon: Landscapes 1946-1964, 2 - 27 April 1991*, cat no.24, illus colour

Sydney, Annandale Galleries, *David Bomberg, Peter Lanyon, Ivon Hitchens*, 19 July – 12 August 2000, cat no.2, illus (rotated 90 degrees clockwise)

London, Sclar Fine Art and Berkeley Square Gallery, *20th Century British Art: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture*, 2004, cat no.24, illus colour

St Ives, Tate St Ives, *Peter Lanyon*, 9 October 2010 - 23 January 2011, unnumbered, p95, illus colour

Literature

Andrew Causey, *Peter Lanyon*, Aidan Ellis Publishing Ltd, England, 1971, cat no.197, not illus

Andrew Lanyon, *Peter Lanyon 1918-1964*, St. Ives Printing and Publishing Company, Cornwall, 1990, p256, illus colour

Pablo Lafuente, 'Thoroughly Modern British,' *Art Review*, vol.53, September 2002, pp80-1, illus colour

Andrew Lanyon, *Peter Lanyon: The Cuttings*, Helston, 2006, unpaginated, illus colour

Toby Treves, *Peter Lanyon: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings and Three-Dimensional Works*, Modern Art Press, London, 2018, cat no.536, illus colour p579

Description

Having completed work on the enormous Porthmeor Mural in Frenchtown, New Jersey in late February of 1963, Peter Lanyon travelled onwards to Texas in March, where he taught for a few weeks at the San Antonio Art Institute. During this period he moved around considerably - the 9th and 10th March were spent at Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras - two towns on opposite sides of the U.S. and Mexico border – and he visited Mexico once again on the 15th, stopping at Saltillo 1, the capital of the Coahuila state, before returning to San Antonio, where he departed on the 29th for New York. The present work, along with *Pony and Mexico* (coll. Arts Council of Great Britain), is one of just three oil paintings Lanyon made inspired by his time in Mexico. In the catalogue raisonné of the artist's work, Toby Treves suggests that, as with his other two Mexico paintings, Lanyon likely made *Saltillo* in the months following his return to St Ives on 10th April. Lanyon's time in the U.S. provided both clarity and inspiration for his painting and indeed, in a letter to Catherine Viviano dated 29 June (Viviano Archive), Lanyon enthused: 'The Texas/Mexico trip was a help I think and I feel painting is more certain.' 2

Lanyon's Mexico works define the direction his painting was taking towards the end of his life. Each displays strong colours, sharper-edged forms, is less concerned with the effects of weather and is less tied to Cornwall. However, while *Pony and Mexico* are both characterized by bold black lines

and feature highly similar palettes of warm, earthy tones that more obviously evoke the location, Saltillo, dominated by cool tones of blue, remains visibly distinct. Given that the painting was made back in St Ives it is reasonable to suggest that this particular work is a hybrid of both Mexican and Cornish influences.

Characteristic of Lanyon's works from this period, Saltillo combines a variety of different painterly marks: from long strokes of red and blue which span the width of the bottom of the canvas and extend upwards on the right hand edge, to flatly painted, block-forms, to loose zig-zag strokes in the centre of the composition. The juxtaposition of hard and soft edges is also a new development in Lanyon's painting. In tandem with painting in this period Lanyon was also making far more constructions: both free-standing objects and assemblages intended to be hung on the wall. He started incorporating three-dimensional objects into his paintings and the distinction between painting and sculpture began to blur.

Looking closely at the surface of Saltillo one can see that the paint has been applied in thin layers, the weave of the canvas visible throughout the composition. This is typical of the manner in which Lanyon was working in 1963 and 1964 (his life was tragically cut short on 31 August 1964 by a gliding accident) and may relate to the prevailing trend at the time towards acrylic paint – a medium he had tried, tested and rejected. In this period Lanyon tended to make most of the detailed decisions for his compositions before he began painting and, as such, the surfaces are often less worked, as Andrew Causey suggests, 'The powerful underworking which gives the sense in the earlier paintings of a final image thrown up from underneath, from the body of the paint itself, is gone.'³ Despite its thin application, the colour of the oils that make up Saltillo retain their intensity.

Lanyon's work from 1963-4 cannot be considered simply in the context of British painting. He was travelling more and more and in 1957, whilst in New York for his first solo exhibition in the United States at the Catherine Viviano Gallery, he became acquainted with American abstract painters including de Kooning, Motherwell and Rothko. By 1963, Lanyon had visited America four times. His regular trips to New York coincided with the growth of the Pop Art movement and this may have also been a driving force behind the newly brightened range of colours he began to employ in his increasingly abstract compositions. Although landscape remained Lanyon's chief source of inspiration, other influences came to the fore, including man-made objects. Coloured photographs taken on his travels played a new and important role – see *Eagle Pass*, 1963, which has been linked to a coloured photograph of a red and yellow playground slide taken by Lanyon in Mexico. Although the present composition calls to mind landscape seen from an aerial perspective, the image is ambiguous and the colours and forms may instead reference photographs he took in Mexico, or may relate more generally to his memory of the place.

¹ Saltillo is a city situated on a high desert plain, surrounded by mountains

² Toby Treves, *Peter Lanyon: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings and Three-Dimensional Works*, Modern Art Pres, London, 2018, p578

³ Andrew Causey, Naum Gabo (intro), *Peter Lanyon, His Painting*, Aidan Ellis Publishing Ltd, England, 1971, p29