

Modern Art

Alfred Wallis

10 July – 8 August 2015

Stuart Shave/Modern Art in association with Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by Alfred Wallis from the collection of Kettle's Yard.

The exhibition comprises thirty-nine paintings dating from the 1920s - 1940s.

Alfred Wallis was an artist and mariner. He was born in Devonport in 1855, and claimed to have gone to sea at the age of 9, working on vessels that sailed across and fished the Atlantic. He moved to St Ives in 1885 and by 1887 had set up business as a marine merchant, from which he retired in 1912. Wallis took up painting "for company" following the death of his wife in 1922. He painted from the memory of his experiences, depicting ships at sea, wrecked, and at harbour, as well as, less often, houses and landscapes. His paintings are not composed according to perspective but rather instinctively and according to the relative prominence of the subject, painted on salvaged fragments of card, paper and board, typically in a restrained palette of greys, browns, blues and greens. Alfred Wallis and his paintings were 'discovered' by the British modernists Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood whilst visiting St Ives in 1928. Nicholson especially came to hold Wallis' work in high esteem, and he and his circle remained its champions and supporters. Old age and poverty eventually led Wallis to a workhouse in Penzance, where he died in 1942 at the age of 87. He was buried in St Ives, where his grave overlooks Porthmeor Beach.

What I do mosley is what use to bee out of my own memory what we may never see again

I do not put collars what Do not Belong i think i spoils the pictures Their have Been a lot of paintins spoiled By putin collars where they do no Blong

- Alfred Wallis, from letters to Jim Ede, the founder of Kettle's Yard.

The real story about Wallis is written in his work... He enjoyed talking about his paintings, speaking of them not as paintings but as events or experiences.

- Ben Nicholson, 1943

Kettle's Yard is the University of Cambridge's modern and contemporary art gallery. It holds the greatest single collection of paintings by Alfred Wallis. Modern Art is grateful for the generosity of Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, and its Director Andrew Nairne, for the loan of the works in this exhibition.