

# SIR GEORGE CLAUSEN

## STUDIES FROM ARCADIA

Works on Paper by Sir George Clausen, RA, RWS, NEAC (1852-1944)

HARRY MOORE-GWYN

BRITISH ART

exhibition as part of stand A2, The Art & Antiques Fair, Olympia (26th June-2nd July 2017)

Olympia, London, Hammersmith Road, London W14 8UX

## Works on Paper by Sir George Clausen, RA, RWS, NEAC (1852-1944)

Since his death at the age of 92 in 1944, George Clausen, one of the most influential and visionary British painters of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, has enjoyed in equal measure periods of huge interest and unjust neglect. His nostalgic world of late nineteenth century rural life, its grind and toil, as well as its idealised sun-drenched beauty, recalls both the French work of Clausen's great hero Jules Bastien-Lepage and the rustic heroism of A.E.Housman's poetry in *A Shropshire Lad*. With both Housman publishing that work in 1896 and Clausen discovering his artistic voice in the 1880s and 1890s, it is the sense of an innocent world soon to be lost that is an obvious appeal in their work to us today.

Clausen as an artist was an undoubted product of his cosmopolitan background: a child of a decorative artist of Danish descent, he was trained both at the South Kensington Schools and the Académie Julian in Paris. Here he assimilated the influence of great French painters of his era including not just Bastien-Lepage, but also Jean-François Millet. He also learned a freer, *plein-air* style of painting that would always characterise his greatest work, one that was at odds with the rigid studio painting of late Victorian England. He excelled not only as a painter in oils, but also as a draughtsman, printmaker and water-colourist. Above all, Clausen was one of the great practitioners in pastel of his era. Spurred on by the introduction of specialist pastel papers and by exhibitions of the medium at the Grosvenor Galleries from the



George Clausen *Self Portrait* from 1882 (Royal Academy of Arts)

1880s, it proved the perfect means by which he could evoke the particular effects of nature that appealed to him: the swift changes of weather, the mottled effect of sunlight through trees and the features of the working men and women out on the fields.

This group of work on paper covers a wide span of Clausen's career, from the mid-period subject pictures of the 1880s to his very late

works. As well as a strong group of earlier pastel drawings and studies, there is a substantial collection of his work in watercolour. A medium he turned to in the latter part of his life, he proved remarkably adept at handling it, always alive to its ability to convey the subtle abstract qualities of nature that at times recalls the tonality of Whistler, an artist he had always hugely admired.

The collection comes from a variety of sources, the most significant two of which are Ralph Fastnedge, DFC (who had been curator of the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight) and Sir John Stirling Maxwell Bt.. For the Fastnedge group in particular we have relied heavily on research undertaken by the great Clausen scholar, Kenneth McKonkey and the notes he assisted with on the Bonhams sale of 19th Century European Art on 28th September 2016 (lots 88 & 89) and from which several of the works come. Here he noted in particular the quality and range of the Fastnedge group which (it is speculated) Jack Palmer Wood of the Arts Council may have had a role in selecting.

Today Clausen's work represents astonishing and sometimes perplexing value for money. There can be few artists of his stature whose work on paper can at once command both in excess of half a million pounds (for a portrait of a young girl at auction) to under a thousand pounds. An opportunity exists to collect this remarkable artist at almost any budget.

## CATALOGUE

*Selected Literature:* K.McKonkey, *George Clausen and the Picture of English Rural Life*, 2012

K.McKonkey, *Sir George Clausen, RA, RWS, 1852-1944*, 1980 (exhibition catalogue, Bradford and Tyne and Wear Museums)

All works in this catalogue are by Sir George Clausen, RA, RWS (1852-1944)

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CAT. 1.

### *Head of a Young Girl, c. 1897*

Signed with initials l.r.: GC

Black and white chalk, 30.5 by 20.5cm (12 by 8 ins)

*Provenance:* Mr. Ralph Fastnedge, DFC (Curator of the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight); Thence by descent (also cat nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 16, 18 & 19)

This arresting portrait is one of a number of studies for Clausen's work *Summer in the Fields* which underwent a long period of development before its completion in around 1897. Its subject of a farm girl at rest during harvest is a central theme in the artist's work upto his move to London in 1905. It has been suggested that the sitter could be Emmy Wright, a Widdington girl who posed for the painter within a year or so of his arrival in the Essex village. There are other studies for this work in the Victoria and Albert Museum which hint at a level of indecision from the artist as to the exact pose of the girl (with some studies showing her facing right and others left).



CAT.2.

### *Study for "Bird Scaring", 1887*

Signed with initials l.r.: GC

Watercolour and bodycolour, 23 by 22.5 cm (9 by 9 ins)

The painting *Bird Scaring* (Private Collection) was one of Clausen's most direct early rural social-realist works. In it a young farm boy, armed with slabs of wood (to be clattered together to ward off the crows) makes his way out into the fields in his tattered clothes. This small but intense watercolour is a study for the final work. Clausen was drawn to the subject again in 1896 in a version which places the young boy head-on in a more extensive landscape (Harris Art Gallery, Preston, no.P74).





CAT.3.

### *Study of Two Farm Girls*

Verso: a study of farm workers in the fields

Signed with initials l.r.: GC

Coloured chalks with pencil, 37 by 24cm (14 ½ by 9 ½ ins)

In the late 1880s Clausen produced some of his most exquisite rustic portraits many of which are head studies of the young farm girls who sat for him in Hertfordshire and later in Essex. The end of the decade also saw the inauguration of pastel exhibitions at the Grosvenor Galleries (from 1888) and Clausen acquired newly-available buff-coloured sketchpads (as in the present work) for use in his constantly inventive work in this medium. In 1889 he also executed one of his most celebrated and controversial subject pictures *The Girl at the Gate* (now in the Tate) which depicts Polly Baldwin, his children's nursemaid and favourite model. It has been suggested that this pastel, probably drawn in the same year, depicts one of Polly's sisters.



CAT.4.

### *The Cottage Garden*

Signed with initials l.r.: GC

Coloured chalks on buff paper, 23 by 35cm (9 by 13 ¾ins)

This lively pastel drawing (together with the following landscape *Haystacks*) was probably executed shortly after Clausen's move to Widdington in Essex in 1891. Similar studies of a near identical size and technique are in the Royal Academy Collection.



CAT.5.

## *Haystacks*

Coloured chalks on buff paper, 20 by 29cm (8 by 11 ½in)



CAT.6.

*Study of Trees in the Artist's Garden,  
Duton Hill, Essex*

Coloured chalks on brown paper

20 by 23 cm (11  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 9 ins)

*Provenance:* By descent from the artist to his daughter-in-law Mrs Hugh Clausen; Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, 30th September 1992, lot 7

This striking example of Clausen's slightly later work in pastel was probably painted some thirty years after *Haystacks* (cat.5). It shows how the artist had maintained his natural facility and flare for the medium lending a more graphic structure to his approach in its execution. This drawing shows trees in his garden at Hillside in Duton Hill in Essex, a house he had acquired as a country retreat in 1917.





CAT. 7.

“*Study for “Gleaners Coming Home”,  
1904*

Coloured chalks, 39 by 28cm (15 ¼ by 11ins)

The monumental subject painting *Gleaners Coming Home* of 1904 (Tate Gallery, on loan to Compton Verney House Trust) is one of the artist's great valedictory rural works, painted just before his move from Essex to London in the following year. As so often with Clausen it is a return to a subject he had tackled in previous years, in this case with *Gleaners* in 1882 (Private Collection). In the intervening years, the naturalism of Bastien-Lepage so evident in the early 1880s had given way to a dynamic impressionism as demonstrated in the 1904 Tate painting. This fine pastel drawing is a study for the figure to the right hand side of this painting. Other studies are in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



CAT.8.

### *Haystack by Morning Light*

Signed and dated l.r.: *G.Clausen/1923*

Watercolour over pencil, 21 by 27.5 cm (8 by 11 ins)

*Provenance:* Sir John Stirling Maxwell, Bt. (also cat nos.9, 10, 11, 15)

Clausen's evocative sunrise subjects are a constant in his work of the 1920s with the presence of a desolate receding road a regular motif. The present work can be seen to anticipate his celebrated painting *Sunrise in September* executed in the following year (Ferens Art Gallery, Hull)





CAT.9.

*Downland landscape with billowing clouds*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour, 24 by 33 cm (9 ½ by 13 ins)

Clausen wrote in 1930: "I think there is nothing so beautiful as a clean tint in watercolour that is exactly right...the quality of the colour has something of the spontaneity and effortless rightness that one finds in nature itself - a quality that is always lost by labouring and stippling a drawing." (quoted in McKonkey, op.cit. (1980), p.97).





CAT. 10.

*The Old Pier at Walberswick*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour over pencil, 21 by 28 cm (8 ¼ by 11 ins)



CAT. 11.

*The Receding Lane*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour, 21 by 29 cm (8  $\frac{1}{4}$  by 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  ins)

*Exhibited: Sketches in Watercolour by Sir George Clausen, RA, RWS,*  
Barbizon House, 1933 (according to an inscription), possibly no.10



CAT. 12.

### *Red Sunset*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour, 22.5 by 28.5 cm (8  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 11  $\frac{1}{4}$  ins)



CAT.13.

## *Sunburst*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour, 22.5 by 28.5 cm (8  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 11  $\frac{1}{4}$  ins)





CAT.14.

*Farm Buildings, Spring Morning*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen* and inscribed verso: *Spring Morning*

Watercolour over pencil , 22.5 by 30 cm (8  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  in)



CAT.15.

## *A Roadblock at Night*

Signed l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Watercolour over pen and ink, 25.5 by 34 cm (10 by 13 ¼ ins)

Following Clausen's move to St John's Wood in north London in 1905 he embarked on a series of Whistlerian nocturnal subjects, including views of houses at night and atmospheric depictions of the London skyline. It is likely that this unusual roadblock scene is one such London subject and dates from the latter half of the artist's career.



CAT. 16.

### *The Old Tree*

Watercolour, 34 by 42cm (13 ¼ by 16 ¼ ins)

A lifetime admirer of the work of the great French realist painter Jean-François Millet, this late rural subject picture is probably influenced by the French artist's motif of peasants pulling a pig, as seen in *The Pig Killers* of 1867-70 (National Gallery of Canada). Clausen re-invents this idea depicting a group of countrymen removing a dead tree stump. A more finished version of this picture (which probably dates from c.1920), is in the Holburne Museum, Bath (see McConkey op cit (1980) p.101, no.141).





CAT.17.

*Still life with a pink and yellow rose*

Signed l.r.: *G.Clausen*

Watercolour, 23 by 20 cm (9 by 8 ins)





CAT. 18.

### *Portrait of a girl with Long Hair*

Signed with initials under mount l.r.: *G.C.*

Pencil, 24 by 16 cm (9 ½ by 6 ¼ ins)

The present drawing has been dated to c.1912-14 and can be related to a number of classically-inspired figure paintings by the artist, the best-known of which is probably the female nude *Primavera*. It has been suggested that the sitter may be the well-known model from the date, Dolly Henry.



CAT. 19.

### *Study for "The Nativity"*

With a related study verso

Monochrome watercolour over pen and ink,

17 by 22cm (6 ¾ by 8 ¾ ins)

One of the final subjects Clausen worked on was an idea for a Nativity and a number of related works on paper exist, painted around 1940, the most similar to the present study being a drawing in the Holburne Museum, Bath. The drawings were all influenced by Clausen's long-held admiration for Rembrandt's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in the National Gallery, about which he wrote eloquently in his Royal Academy Lectures. For comparable studies see McKonkey (op cit, (1980) p.110, cat.nos.161-163)

CAT.20.



*Study of a young woman for St Stephen's Hall,  
Westminster*

Signed and dated l.r.: *G. Clausen/26*

Pencil, 28 by 23 cm (11 by 9 ins)

A scheme to decorate St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster was conceived in the 1920s and Clausen was one of the eight artists appointed to paint a mural there. The general theme was prescribed as the *Building of Britain* and Clausen chose the reading of Wycliffe's English Bible as his subject. This drawing is a study for the central figure of the girl in the mural, the full title of which was *The English People, in spite of persecution for heresy, persist in gathering secretly to read aloud Wycliffe's English Bible*. A number of further studies for the mural are in the Royal Academy Collection. Clausen received his knighthood on the day of the mural's unveiling on 7th July 1927.

Right:

Clausen's *English People...*  
St Stephen's Hall  
Westminster





CAT. 21.

### *Making Guns: Where the Guns are Made*

Signed in the plate l.r.: *G. Clausen*

Lithograph on hand-made japon paper, 38.5 by 53 cm (15 by 21 ins)

This print originally formed part of a British government commissioned set of sixty-six propaganda prints from 1917 entitled *The Great War: Britain's Efforts and Ideals*. Clausen made six lithographs for this series, all powerful depictions of the British munitions industry, researching his subject matter by working on site at the Royal Gun Factory at Woolwich Arsenal.





CAT.22.

### *A Young Girl Asleep*

Signed with initials in the plate l.l: G.C.

Lithograph on specially prepared brown paper

16.5 by 25 cm (6 ½ by 9 ¾ ins)

This is one of a number of lithographs that Clausen made in c.1895 for the printer Frederick Goulding who had been trying to revive the art of lithography. The lithographs from this series, all executed on special brown paper, were never issued as an edition and are very rare. An example of the present print is in the British Museum (no.1905.0426.6).





