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EST. 1817

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Algernon Cecil Newton (British 1880-1968)

Landscape with a tree

Signed with artist monogram (lower left)

Oil on canvas

24 x 36 1/8 in. (61 x 91cm.)

Painted in 1963



Provenance:

Royal Academy, London, 1963, no. 459.

Acquired from the above by Ian J. Wallace Esq (original correspondence between Newton and Wallace will be passed onto the buyer).

Thence by descent to the present owner.

Exhibited:

London, Royal Academy, 1963, no. 459.

Born in 1880 into the family that made Windsor & Newton paints in Hampstead, north London, Newton's early artistic life was defined by frustration as he struggled to find recognition and eke out a living from his work. It was not until the 1920s that Newton began to achieve some notable success, exhibiting regularly at the Royal Academy and New English Art Club (NEAC) alongside further exhibitions at the Leicester Galleries. In 1926 and 1934, he was among one of the artists chosen to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. However, even during this period, when his work was selling well, he never quite achieved the appreciation that one might have expected. In spite of being elected to the Royal Academy in 1943, upon his death in 1968, his work passed into relatively obscurity and he was not afforded any significant retrospective until 1980 at the Royal Academy. More recently, a dedicated show at Daniel Katz Gallery in 2012 sought to bring together a cross-section of works, particularly concentrating on the 1930s and 1940s.

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This exhibition gave the opportunity to gain a fuller overview of Newton's work. It revealed an artist whose understated views of both the countryside and the city are imbued with a distinct sense of isolation, almost foreboding. Whilst his paintings do not lack beauty, nor do they romanticise their subject matter. The present work, painted late in his career in 1963, is the culmination of those ideas - an almost featureless landscape lacking any sign of the civilisation which must surely be close at hand. It is not wild, but empty. The single tree the only focus point of the painting stands tall and exposed in this stylised English landscape.

The work also combines an undeniable 20th century modernity with a nod to the classicism of the 18th century. Newton had a long-held interest in painting from that period and particularly that of Canaletto whose work he studied at the National Gallery. His use of translucent glazes and concentration on the minute detail of his subject matter reflect that interest and are a constant thread through Newton's work.