



The Taffner Collection (370)

Fri, 7th Sep 2012, Edinburgh

Lot 25

Estimate: £100000 - £150000 + Fees

‡ CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH (SCOTTISH 1868-1928) 'YELLOW TULIPS'

Signed bottom right C R MACKINTOSH, watercolour

47.5 x 47cm (18¾ x 18½ in)

Provenance:

Ronald W.B. Morris Esq., Kilmacolm, an executor of the Estate of Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, acquired after the Memorial Exhibition in 1933

Christie's, Edinburgh 'Fine Paintings and Drawings', November 17, 1994, Lot 814

Exhibited:

Chicago, 4th International Exhibition of Watercolours, 1924

Glasgow, McLellan Galleries 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh: Memorial Exhibition', May 1933, no. 51

Glasgow, Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery 'Flower Drawings by Charles Rennie Mackintosh', November 1977, no. 41

Edinburgh, Glasgow and London, The Fine Art Society 'Glasgow 1900', 1979

London, The Fine Art Society 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition', 1983

Edinburgh, The Royal Scottish Academy 'Mackintosh Watercolours', August 1986, no. 35

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19th - February 16th 1996; Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, March 29th - June 22nd 1997, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum, August 3rd - October 12th 1997, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh', Glasgow Museums Exhibition, May 25th 1996 - October 12th October 1997, no. 285

Literature:

Billcliffe, Roger 'Mackintosh Watercolours', London, 1978, pp. 16-17, 41, ill.102, catalogue 173

Note:

In 1913 Mackintosh dissolved his partnership with John Keppie in Glasgow and set up on his own. There are no records of him gaining any new commissions, however, and in 1914 he and his wife, Margaret Macdonald, set off for Walberswick for what seems to have been a recuperative holiday near to their friends the Newberys. Mackintosh spent much of his time there painting wild flowers, possibly intended for publication. The outbreak of war, however, probably dissuaded him from returning to Glasgow, where the chances of establishing a new architectural practice were somewhat diminished by the hostilities and legislation curtailing new building.

The Mackintoshes stayed on in Walberswick into 1915 and Mackintosh began to make more elaborate watercolours of the village and some of its houses. He must have known that he would have to find new sources of income and this move towards more finished watercolours, suitable for exhibition, was probably part of his strategy. Before he was able to develop the idea beyond three or four finished pieces, he was arrested on suspicion of working for the enemy. His accent,

his persistent visits to the coast (to draw flowers) and his recording of the village in his watercolours were all seen as suspicious at a time when the east coast seemed vulnerable to enemy attack. The discovery in his lodgings of letters from Austria and Germany added to the general hysteria and it was only after the intervention of several influential friends, including Newbery and Patrick Geddes, that he was released, with a recommendation that he move to London. There, the couple took lodgings in Willow Road, Hampstead, and rented two adjacent studios in Glebe Place, Chelsea.

Mackintosh made immediate efforts to extend his income, producing designs for printed textiles for sale to a couple of manufacturers who were interested in modern design, and beginning work on a series of finished watercolours which could be sent to various exhibiting societies in the hope of making sales. The inspiration that the townscape of Walberswick had given him was obviously missing in the heart of London, despite the adjacent charms of Glebe Place, Cheyne Walk and the Thames, so he turned towards finished paintings of cut flowers, arranged in the studio. Some of the earliest of these, such as 'Begonias' and 'Anemones' contain stylised backgrounds formed from pieces of fabric made from the concurrent designs Mackintosh was making for textiles. 'Begonias' is reminiscent of the strong patterns that Mackintosh was making for a house at 78 Derngate, Northampton, while 'Anemones' moves towards a more naturalistic composition, with a white wall for a background on which hangs a piece of Mackintosh-designed cloth, like a picture.

'White Tulips' makes a further move towards this new naturalism. The flowers are arranged on the frontal plane of the painting, with the base of their vase cut off and its supporting table excluded completely from the composition. The curving stems of the flowers fan out across the paper and their blooms are arranged along its top edge, all seen against the white of a wall behind. In the lower half of the painting Mackintosh introduced a simple table, covered in a checked cloth, on which is placed a plain white vase containing four peonies. The checked cloth and the lush blooms of the peonies contrast vividly with the classic elegance of the tulips.

The tulip became a favourite motif for Mackintosh while designing textiles at this time, although its shape probably lay behind some of the more naturalistic curves and blooms of the earlier Spook School designs of the 1890s. And the tulip is the only flower that Mackintosh used more than once in this sequence of paintings of cut flowers. 'Yellow Tulips' is probably one of the later paintings made just before the Mackintoshes left London for France in 1923. Mackintosh chose to send it to Chicago for the 4th International Exhibition of Watercolour Paintings; it seems very likely that he would choose a recent work, especially as most of his other paintings remained unsold and so he would have had a number to choose from. Its setting is unique, showing in the background a wall of his Glebe Place studio. He seems to have made a wall of bookshelves, not unlike the treatment of the fireplace wall of his sitting room in Glasgow, although here the woodwork is stained dark, as opposed to the Glasgow white paint. As in 'White Tulips', Mackintosh has arranged the flowers across the sheet of paper, emphasising the sinuous curves of the stems and contrasting the bright yellow of the blooms against the cool grey-browns of the room.

The flattening of the composition, the emphasis on pattern and shapes, looks forward to Mackintosh's later work in France, where he concentrated on landscape rather than cut flowers such as these. Mackintosh went to France, seemingly with the promise of an exhibition if he could amass enough work. These London flower paintings would have given him the confidence to work towards this new goal and they would have shown to gallery owners that Mackintosh had the necessary skills and imagination to achieve a solo show. But these are not transitional works - a halfway-house between the flower studies of Walberswick and the powerful landscapes of Port Vendres - they are the first fruits of a new career for Mackintosh, one that he was born to, for the bedrock of everything he ever did was the fusion of art and nature.