



Jack Simcock (1929-2012)

Nationality

British

Education

1949: Stoke-on-Trent College of Art

Taught

1965: a private school and at Stoke-on-Trent

1967: retired from teaching



Background

Born into a mining family, Simcock left school and, with only the vaguest idea of what he wanted to do, entered a drawing office dealing with coalmining machinery, one of several jobs during which he also attended night school. Long private studies in pursuit of a career in architecture led him close to a breakdown. He was conscripted and, during national service, started painting; on demobilisation he began working in oils. He joined the Burslem part of Stoke-on-Trent College of Art but, despite the purchase of one of his pictures for the City Art Gallery, Simcock twice failed to gain the national diploma.

Simcock is noted for sombre landscape paintings of his home village. In 1958 the artist, son of a miner, descended from a line of dissenting small farmers and labourers, bought West View, built originally for the businessman who had set up quarrying on the top of Mow Cop, a ridge of millstone grit between the Cheshire plain and the Staffordshire moorlands.

In 1979 ill health obliged him to stop painting, but he resumed in 1980, painting bright coloured abstracts these were notable for a distinct shift from his rural landscapes.

The artist

Despite the preponderance of abstract works in this collection, it includes some notable figurative images. Simcock's quiet visual exploration of a particular place and its cultural roots, and the harnessing of form to those ends were seen by the officers assembling this collection as exemplary. In a long series of bleak, sombre oils on board, he claimed Mow Cop, the hillside village bordering Staffordshire and Cheshire where he lived for more than half a century, as his particular territory. He had more than 50 solo shows worldwide and is represented in numerous British and overseas public and private collections.

The Piccadilly Gallery took some of Simcock's pictures and, after one of the largest was purchased by a millionaire collector from Los Angeles, the artist was offered a one-man show. The Piccadilly Gallery remained his agent for the next 30 years.

On a foggy day in 1959, Simcock viewed 13 Primitive Street, Mow Cop, where 'houses were like large tombs, the roads like paths through a graveyard'. It was, he wrote, as if he 'had stepped on to a Dracula film set. I was frightened, but I had a premonition that I would live and die in that house.'

His one-man shows made his name, but he also took part in group exhibitions and received wide press coverage. His old art school invited him back as a visiting lecturer in 1965, but he gave up teaching two years later.



Simcock's Mow Cop pictures can impress as monochromes, but his artist friend Reginald Haggard pointed to "the richness of colour that underlies the seemingly black and white effects, glints of terracotta and old gold through steely grey".

It is easy to miss the poetry in the work, poetry that was in the man, too. This emerges from his singular autobiography (Simcock, *Mow Cop*, 1975), in which he reflected on his life, his family background, his environment, beliefs and artistic preferences. In that year he also published a slim volume of sensitive poems, *Midnight Till Three*.

In 1980 Simcock changed style, producing small, brightly coloured abstracts that caused longstanding admirers much confusion. His new London agent, John Hunt, first exhibited them in 1997. When his wife died suddenly in that year, Simcock in his grief began to put virtually all his time into the changed style. Latterly, he drew a lot when he lacked the energy to paint. His drawings have a sculptural quality. The artist wrote that he enjoyed "looking at sculpture more than I enjoy looking at paintings".

Landscape with Cottage



Demand for millstones had led to prosperous quarrying as early as the 14th century, while traditional cottages were built from quarried or gathered rubble stone and developments from these reflected the activity of an extended family. Simcock focuses on these unassuming dwellings, accentuates the tonal bleakness of their settings, and manipulates the impasted paint in relation to the material being depicted, coarse grass, dry stone wall or the roughly coursed material of the cottages. A significant relationship between locale, motif and painting practice was clearly being sought from within the bounds of topographical representation.

Metadata

Accession number:	N011
Artist:	Jack Simcock
Artwork type:	painting
Material:	oil on board
Measurements:	45.7 x 76.2 cm
Technique:	painting
Date:	1974
Rights owner:	estate of the artist
Rights status:	UK HE use only
Institution:	Council for National Academic Awards/University of London