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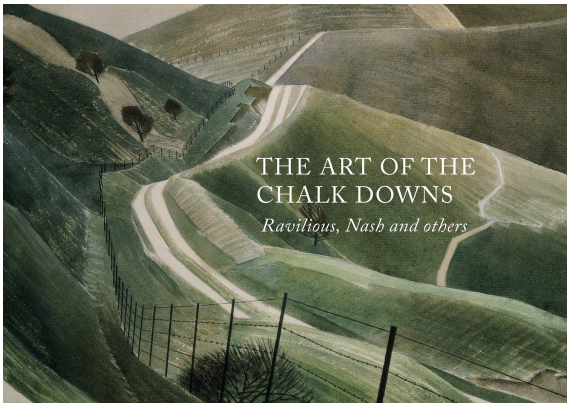


The Art of the Chalk Downs

Ravilious, Nash and Others

James Russell

Chris Stephens

ISBN	9781843682943
Publisher	Pallas Athene
Binding	Hardback
Territory	World
Size	205 mm x 255 mm
Pages	176 Pages
Illustrations	75 color, 10 b&w
Price	£35.00

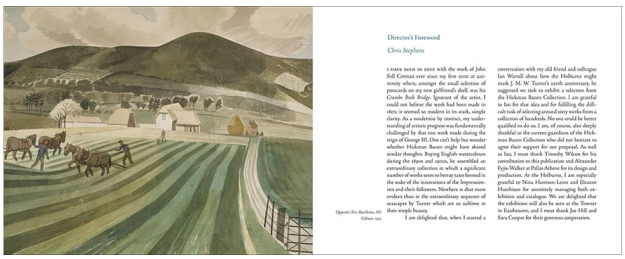
- Major new title on Ravilious, Nash, and their times
- Artists exploring some of Britain's best-loved landscapes
- Extensively illustrated, many lesser-known artworks
- Essay by leading expert James Russell

In the 1910s and 1920s the unique landscape of the chalk downs of southern England began to exert a new fascination on writers, historians, archaeologists and artists. Modernists such as Paul and John Nash, Eric Ravilious and William Nicholson immersed themselves in exploring these enigmatic, ancient places. The stark, rolling forms of the downs suited the modern aesthetic, offering a place where prehistory and modernity could converge.

With the growing political tensions of the 1930s, this modern engagement with ancient landscape took on a symbolism that still resonates. Images of Britain evolved as the downs became both symbols of wartime vulnerability and resilience and the site of machine gun emplacements and crashed aeroplanes.

Art of the Chalk Downs investigates this extraordinary collision of ancient and modern, idea and place, and the network of artists who worked and lived there. Seventy-five plates of paintings, watercolours, prints and photographs are accompanied by texts written by leading art historians James Russell and Stephens.

James Russell is an art historian and exhibition curator, most recently of *Tirzah Garwood: Beyond Ravilious* at Dulwich Picture Gallery, and *Undersea* at Hastings Contemporary. His many previous exhibitions include *Changing Times: A Century of Modern British Art* at the Higgins, Bedford, *Extraordinary Everyday: The Art and Design of Eric Ravilious*, and *Eric Ravilious: Downland Man*. Russell's books include titles on Ravilious, Paul Nash, Edward Seago and Edward Bawden. **Chris Stephens**, Director of the Holburne, has written extensively on modern British art, especially the St Ives painters, Francis Bacon and David Hockney.

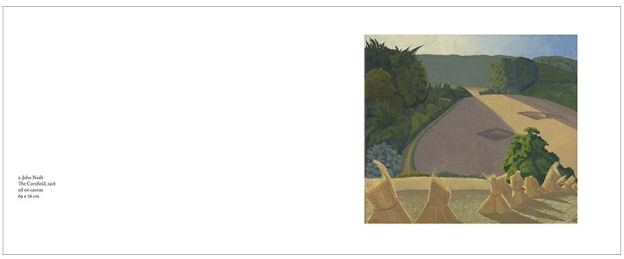

Director's Foreword

Chris Stephens

I HAVE BEEN IN LOVE with the work of John Sell Cotman ever since my first term at university where, amongst the small selection of postcards on my new girlfriend's shelf, was his *Coombe Bridge*. Ignorant of the artist, I could not believe the work had been made in 1800; it seemed so modern in its scale, simple clarity. As a modernist by instinct, my understanding of artistic progress was fundamentally challenged by that one work made during the reign of George III. One can't help but wonder whether Hickman Bacon might have shared similar thoughts. Buying English watercolours during the 1890s and 1900s, he assembled an extraordinary collection in which a significant number of works seem to betray taste formed in the wake of the innovations of the Impressionists and their followers. Nowhere is that more evident than in the extraordinary sequence of seascapes by Turner which are so sublime in their simple beauty.

I am delighted that, when I started a conversation with my old friend and colleague Ian Worrell about how the Holburne might mark J. M. W. Turner's 250th anniversary, he suggested we seek to exhibit a selection from the Hickman Bacon Collection. I am grateful to Ian for that idea and for fulfilling the difficult task of selecting around sixty works from a collection of hundreds. No one could be better qualified to do so. I am, of course, also deeply thankful to the current guardians of the Hickman Bacon Collection who did not hesitate to agree their support for our proposal. As well as Ian, I must thank Timothy Wilcox for his contribution to this publication and Alexander Fejo-Walker at Pallas Athene for its design and production. At the Holburne, I am especially grateful to Nina Harrison-Lavin and Eleanor Hutchinson for sensitively managing both exhibition and catalogue. We are delighted that the exhibition will also be seen at the Towner in Eastbourne, and I must thank Joe Hill and Sara Cooper for their generous cooperation.

Opposite: Eric Ravilious, *Bo Calvert*, 1935


9. John Nash
The Cornfield, 1918
oil on canvas
82 x 78 cm

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