

TATE ^{ET}C.

Graham Sutherland
Black Landscape
 (1939-1940)
 Oil and sand on canvas
 81 × 132.1cm

Clare Woods on Graham Sutherland's *Black Landscape* (1939-1940)

Three years ago I moved my studio from Bethnal Green to Kington, a small market town on the Welsh borders. The general anxiety of living and working in London was expelled within weeks. The fear of leaving the studio late at night and walking to the tube had gone. The frustration of not being able to move freely around the city at any time of day or night had disappeared, and the bombardment of images, news and information had stopped. Only to be replaced with the dark and a new anxiety. Not fuelled by the fear of the person or what the person could do, but a fear of something larger, something less comprehensible and tangible, something more abstract in its form.

A postcard of Graham Sutherland's *Black Landscape* had been packed away with other various postcards and found

images that were once pinned to the studio notice board. The board had been re-hung in the new studio and *Black Landscape* found itself surviving the cull and being stuck to the top right-hand corner. But the image had changed. A vivid pink glow to the left side of the picture had come alive. I had never noticed this menacing, almost face-like aura hovering about the edge of the mountain before.

The dark and light areas of the work fit together, contained by the black outlines of the mountain structure and the field boundaries. These enclosed areas are understood not only in respect to the elements of the painting, but in terms of good and evil, or what can be seen and what is shrouded. But the pink paint is not contained by these dark lines. In fact, it is not static at all, it is free

moving and hard to pin down, both in its relation to the rest of the surface and to its significance in the time that this work was made.

The border landscape of my new home holds an anxiety and a magic for me that is embedded in *Black Landscape*. The painting is dark with areas of excessive light, and this is how I feel about my new surroundings. Overhearing a conversation between two women in the local Co-op recently, one said to the other that Kington had a dark heart, and I have to agree. The tragic idyll of contemporary Britain heading into the unknown with one foot in its rural past – maybe this is what Sutherland saw in the Welsh countryside that allowed his non-scenic vision of the landscape to evolve during the war years.

- Clare Woods's exhibition at Hepworth Wakefield runs from 22 October to 29 January.
- 'Graham Sutherland: An Unfinished World', curated by George Shaw, is at Modern Art Oxford, 10 December – 18 March.
- *Black Landscape* was purchased in 1980. It is not currently on display, but can be viewed online.