



The British & International Pictures Auction

Wed, 19th May 2021

Viewing:

Monday 17th 9am-5pm
Tuesday 18th 9am-5pm
Wednesday 19th 9am-2pm

Lot 89

Estimate: £500 - £800 + Fees

HYDE PARK CORNER, EVENING, BY CAPTAIN WILLIAM FREDERICK LONGSTAFF

* CAPTAIN WILLIAM FREDERICK LONGSTAFF
(AUSTRALIAN 1879 - 1953),
HYDE PARK CORNER, EVENING
watercolour on paper, signed, titled in the mount
17cm x 17cm

Mounted, framed and under glass.

Note: One of the very rare series of London night-time scenes by an artist who achieved international acclaim for his 1927 painting "Menin Gate at Midnight" also known as "Ghosts of the Menin Gate". Will Longstaff truly excelled at night-time scenes with monumental architecture and people portrayed in moonlight and yet he painted only four or possibly five known war memorial compositions and a small series of London night-time scene watercolours, preferring to focus on landscapes, portraits and still lifes. Menin Gate at Midnight was painted to commemorate those soldiers with no marked graves on the Western Front during the First World War. Longstaff attended a ceremony dedicating the Menin Gate memorial to the soldiers of the British empire forces, just outside the town of Ypres, Belgium, on 24 July 1927. The memorial was dedicated to the 350,000 men of the British and Empire forces who had died in battles around Ypres, and bears the names of 55,000 men with no known grave, over 6,000 of whom were Australians. Longstaff was profoundly moved by what he witnessed and that night and on returning to his studio in London he painted 'Menin Gate at Midnight' in a single session. He painted a story of the missing soldiers coming back to rest at last in the memorial at Ypres, not to haunt the living anymore. At last there was a proper place of mourning and a proper resolution of the soldiers' story. The widows, parents and the children could now become fully what they were, and accept the dead men's memories into their own. The painting caused a sensation. People crowded in to see it in London, Manchester and Glasgow. It was shown at Buckingham Palace by royal command. Lord Woolavington, formerly Sir James Buchanan, a wealthy whisky distiller and philanthropist whose wife had nursed wounded soldiers in London hospitals, bought the picture for the remarkable sum of £2,000, perhaps £300,000 in today's money and double the price of comparable works by the best known artists of the day. Woolavington gave the painting to Australia. The painting toured in every Australian State. Every exhibition drew record crowds, and seasons were often extended. In Perth, a city of some 163,000 people, the public art gallery recorded more than 100,000 visits. Today 'Menin Gate at Midnight' has achieved the status of a national icon. One of Will Longstaff's best known collectors was Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle and he bought one of the other three war memorial paintings which Longstaff created. Conan Doyle and Longstaff "had rooms" in the same building on the Buckingham Palace Road and both had a well documented interest in Spiritualism. These four paintings were brought together for the first time as the Australian War Memorial's Exhibition "*Will Longstaff: Art & Remembrance*" (20 November 2001 to 10 February 2002). Will Longstaff died on 1 July 1953 at Littlehampton, Sussex.