

EDMUND BLAMPIED

1886–1966

COLOUR SYMPHONY

Watercolour and ink on paper
350 x 250 mm; 13 ¾ x 9 ⅞ inches
Painted 1928



Collections: Wheelock Whitney;
Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd acquired from above, 2024.

Literature: Marguerite Syvret, *Edmund Blampied: A Biography of the Artist, 1886-1966*, Jersey, 1986, p.90.

Exhibition: Possibly, New York, Schwartz Galleries, 507 Madison Avenue, 1932, cat. no's 43-47.

This watercolour is one of a remarkable series produced by the British artist Edmund Blampied, the abstract compositions were made whilst Blampied was convalescing from a serious illness in 1928. These innovative works were made by placing damp paper on glass and allowing watercolour pigment to diffuse through the substrate to create organic compositions of powerful abstraction. Blampied called these watercolours 'Colour Symphonies' or 'Colour Poems', signing them prominently and exhibiting five at Schwartz Galleries in New York in 1932.

Edmund Blampied was born in Jersey in the Channel Islands and trained in London at the Lambeth School of Art under the Royal Academician, Philip Connard. In 1905 Blampied transferred to the London County Council School of Photo-engraving and Lithography at Bolt Court, where he became close friends with the commercial artists Solomon van Abbe and John Nicolson. At Bolt Court Blampied learnt to etch and he formed a relationship with the art dealers and publishers Ernest Brown and Wilfred and Cecil Phillips who ran the Leicester Galleries in London. In 1915 Blampied showed three prints at the Leicester Galleries in the first of a series of exhibitions called *Modern Masters of Etching*. Blampied's most celebrated print, *Driving home in the rain* was shown to great critical and financial success at the Leicester Galleries in 1916. In 1920 Blampied started to experiment with lithography, taught by Archibald Hartrick, a founder member of the Senefelder Club. In 1925 two of Blampied's lithographs were part of a group submission to the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, this was the exhibition which gave rise to the term 'Art Deco' and the submission including Blampied's works was awarded a gold medal.

Blampied was notable for the diversity of his work and its technical facility. As a printmaker Blampied occupies a key place in the final generation of artists associated with the etching revival; his prints combining the rich tonality of earlier artists such as Muirhead Bone and David Young Cameron, with an incisive graphic line. His prints were widely collected, particularly in North America where Blampied showed at galleries in New York and Boston throughout the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, impressions of Blampied's most famous prints are found at museums across America. In 1938 Blampied had been commissioned by members of the Print Club of Cleveland to design an etching for its members. Blampied submitted three sketches in early 1939 and *A Jersey Vraic Cart* was chosen and the print was duly issued to members in 1941. As a result, Cleveland Museum of Art hosted Blampied's first retrospective in 1941.

Blampied was noted for his consummate technique as a watercolourist and his most celebrated exhibition works were in considerable demand. Malcolm Salaman wrote in a review of an exhibition of Blampied's works at the LeFèvre Galleries in *Apollo* in May 1929 that: 'with a palette limited to six colours but with infinite range of tones he has painted with a masterly command of both mediums, pictures, all varied in their artistic motives, which are significantly pictorial.'¹ Influenced by his etching technique, Blampied clearly worked on damp paper, producing highly atmospheric works in which forms emerge from – and are modelled by – the shadowy depths of watercolour.

In 1928, whilst recuperating from illness, Blampied experimented with the medium, using damp paper as the vehicle for receiving watercolour and inks; floating pigment on sheets of glass and blotting them on the damp paper producing a complex series of abstract designs which he variously described as 'Colour Symphonies' or 'Colour Poems'. Blampied had spent the previous year travelling extensively on the Continent and Africa and it is possible he was aware of European abstraction. Given the date of these works, Blampied may have known the work of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

Whilst completely abstract, the sheets are not wholly organic or accidental. Blampied has clearly manipulated the paper to cause liquid paint to run in different directions; added inks of differing viscosity and density and introduced a careful range of colours. Most of the sheets are carefully signed and dated by Blampied indicating their orientation and underscoring their status as completed art works. The title Blampied gave the works when he exhibited them in New York in 1932 'Colour Symphonies' suggests a powerful analogy with music, a trope that was being actively pursued by European abstract artists at this date. We know that at least one Blampied 'Colour Symphonies' was sold at the New York exhibition in 1932, it was acquired by Moore Achenbach (1878-1963) and is now in the collection of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco.

¹ Malcolm Salaman, *Apollo*, vol.9, issue 53, (May 1929), p.281.



Edmund Blampied (1886–1966)
Colour Poem
Watercolour
Painted 1928
207 x 253 mm; 8 1/8 x 9 15/16 inches
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts