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Jack Butler Yeats RHA (1871-1957)

THE PONTOON, 1947

oil on board

signed lower right; with typed Waddington Galleries, London, label on reverse

9 by 14in. (22.86 by 35.56cm)

Provenance:

Waddington Galleries, London where sold in 1947 to an unknown collector;

Sotheby's, 11 May 2006, lot 70;

Private collection

Exhibited:

Waddington Galleries, London, 1947

Literature:

Pyle, Hilary, *Jack B. Yeats A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings*, Vol. II, p.775, no. 861

The painting depicts a pontoon or temporary floating platform at the edge of a quayside. The background is dominated by grey industrial buildings which Yeats has created by leaving the canvas unpainted. The red of the metal gangway is echoed across the composition, in the structure of the shelter, an archway in a warehouse wall and in the rosy tones of morning sunlight reflected on the standing figure and the pontoon itself. Blues and greens predominate. Their varied hues and textures evoke the movement of the water, the coldness of the dawn light against the stone buildings and the murky shadows beneath the gangway.

The two figures on the pontoon, one old and one young, are carefully observed. They wait separately for the day's work to begin and the next boat to arrive. A suggestion of other figures is evident in the dark forms in the interior of the structure. The boy stands shivering, his arms crossed in a pose suggestive of tension and eagerness while the older man sits against the shelter of the hut. His face, lost in contemplation, looks out of the painting. This subtle contrast of youth and age is a recurring theme in Yeats' later work as he recognised the changing perspectives of age. (He was in his seventies when he painted this). It adds a note of poignancy to the painting elevating the subject to a philosophical comment on human nature while providing a remarkable vignette into the transient world of the river and its workers.

Dr. Róisín Kennedy

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€50,000-€70,000 (£40,983-£57,377 approx).