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**William Conor OBE RHA RUA ROI (1881-1968)**

DOCKERS, c.1920s

crayon and pastel on buff-coloured card

signed lower right

22 by 27in. (55.88 by 68.58cm)

**Provenance:**

Emer Gallery, Belfast;

Where purchased by the present owner

In the 1920s William Conor was a member of the Dublin Painters' Society and held one-man shows there in 1924 and 1925. This picture, with its prominent tricolour flag flying in the background, may date from those years. Certainly the subject matter and its handling, with its evident debt to Conor's early work as a lithographer in David Allen & Sons in Belfast, are characteristic of the artist's mature style, which compels one to read the image in almost purely *malerisch* terms. Conor's view of art was that the artist should interpret 'his own epoch and give expression to that which is happening around him', as Máirín Allen recorded ('Contemporary Irish Artists XIV, William Conor', *Father Mathew Record*, October 1942).

Some years later, writing in the catalogue of Conor's retrospective exhibition at the Belfast Museum & Art Gallery (later Ulster Museum) in 1957, John Hewitt, who at the time was Keeper of Art at the Museum, saw Conor 'placed with Paul Henry and Jack B. Yeats, as one of the first to record the life of the people in painterly terms, without the trappings of stage-Irishry.' George Russell (Æ) in the 1920s also saw him as 'a Belfast counterpart to Jack Yeats' (*Irish Statesman*, 3 May 1924, p. 242). Conor, Hewitt noted, 'was the first exponent of the same kind of material Sean O'Casey used in his *Juno* period; without the political passion or the tragic sense, but with as warm a humanity and as kindly an eye.' As Hewitt detected, *Dockers* is rich in its suggestion of observation, character and dialogue among those depicted drinking by the Dublin docks. Yet, too, as with O'Casey there is in their jollity a sense of the tragic stasis of the times in Ireland. Commenting on the characteristics of art such as Conor's, Kenneth Clark said that it always 'tells a story, takes pleasure in facts, is lyrical and achieves a visionary intensity.' *Dockers* well illustrates his thoughts.

Dr. S.B. Kennedy

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€25,000-€35,000 (£20,491-£28,688 approx).