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Tony O'Malley HRHA (1913-2003)

THE ISLAND OF ARAWAKS, 1982

oil on board

signed with initials and dated lower right; signed again, titled, dated and with artist's archival number [521] and address [St. Ives, Cornwall] on reverse
48 by 36in. (121.92 by 91.44cm)

Provenance:

Taylor Galleries, Dublin;

Private collection

deVere's, 12 June 1996, lot 119;

Private collection

Exhibited:

'Tony O'Malley', Taylor Galleries, Dublin, from October, 1986

When, in 1974, Tony O'Malley began winter visits to his wife's family in the Bahamas, its warmth and sunshine led to paintings that celebrated the sea, sun, exotic birds and foliage of this tropical paradise. He continued to go there yearly until 1987, leaving a body of upbeat work that is quite distinct in feeling from his Irish contemporaries.

O'Malley's work is always permeated by a strong 'sense of place' but not in an obvious way. Paintings like *The Island of Arawaks* go beyond a mere literal description. He draws on the totality of his experience, the seeing plus the feeling, and works like a poet to distil this into a concise abstract composition.

The glorious colour of this painting has the lightness and luminosity associated with O'Malley's Bahamian works. It has a bold vertical composition with an intricately patterned central panel set between calmer blue bands. One can imagine the artist's experience of the island with all his senses bombarded by the novelty and strangeness of exotic birds, butterflies, flowers and fish. O'Malley has taken bits from all of these and has woven them into the surface of the painting. He was also inevitably influenced by the bold, colourful fabrics worn by the locals, the brightly costumed festival dancers and the music, which uses cowbells, drums, horns and whistles. The central panel expresses the cacophony of noise, colour, pattern and movement that epitomises island life. And, against all that is the liquid calmness of the sea, suggested by ethereal blue bands at either side.

There is a sense of internal harmony in O'Malley's work which he achieves by subtle repetition of shapes. An orange leafy shape punctuates and animates the main panel in several spots. This shape is expanded and reappears throughout the composition, most noticeably in the centre as pale, fish-like lozenges. A kind of feathered wing motif appears all three sections. Although the painting is made up of three dramatic vertical columns, O'Malley softens the composition by the repetition of sinuous curves. He forces the eye to wind through the painting, in and out of all three sections in fluid curvilinear paths.

Frances Ruane HRHA

April, 2013

€12,000-€15,000 (£10,080-£12,610 approx.)