

themes such as swimming or activity on the canal and towpath that ran behind the Robertses' Camden Town home.

Some major compositions were present in very early form, such as a drawing that was developed into *The Chess Players* 1929–30, sold for £1,161,250 at Sotheby's in 2012, and an early study for *Spanish Beggars* 1934, now in King's College, Cambridge. Other drawings are carefully composed but, as far as we are aware, were never developed as a watercolour or an oil.

The day a week that Roberts spent teaching life drawing at the Central School of Art between 1925 and 1960 was reflected in several fine life studies as well as fragments of others which had been cut up to use the other side of the paper. There were also many self-portrait drawings – notably from the



A life study

1960s – as well as portrait drawings of Sarah and the young John.

It is expected that the works seen will enter the Tate collection once 25 years have elapsed from John's death; but we hope their details and images will appear on the WRS website before then.

Things are quiet on the Roberts front at present, so this newsletter is in a rather attenuated format. We hope that normal service will resume with the next issue.

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Scene in a Restaurant – a composition from c.1930 that seems not to have been developed further

WILLIAM ROBERTS SOCIETY

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Newsletter, May 2014

A VISIT TO THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

The next WRS event will be a visit to the Imperial War Museum on Saturday 9 August to see the exhibition 'Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War', which will include three works by WR: *The Gas Chamber* 1918, *Tommies Filling Their Water Bottles with Rain from a Shell Hole* 1918 and 'Feeds Round!' *Stable-time in the Wagon-lines, France* 1922.

We will meet inside the main entrance to the museum, in Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ, at 11.30. Admission to the exhibition (which opens on 19 July and will run until 8 March 2015) is free.

WILLIAM ROBERTS IN THE 'ATOMIC AGE'

A few copies are still available of *William Roberts in the 'Atomic Age'*:

Publicity, Patronage and Paranoia, an expanded version of David Cleall's 2013 William Roberts Society lecture. Praised in this month's *Burlington Magazine* as 'a clear account of William Roberts's work and preoccupations in the 1950s', this 52-page pamphlet costs £4.50 (inc. p&p) from Marion Hutton – address above.

WR ON DISPLAY

At the Ulster Museum, Belfast, WR's 1930 paintings *Les Routiers* and *Sawing Wood* are part of the 'Highlights of the Modern Collection' display until 21 September.

At Leeds City Art Gallery, *The Dance Club* 1923 and *The Family* 1924 are included in the gallery's new hanging of twentieth-century British art.

In the Straight, a horse-racing scene from c.1949, will be part of a mixed show at Richard Green, 33 New Bond Street, W1, from 4 June to 11 July.

WR's watercolour *La Nature Morte*, in which a desiccated-looking bald old man sits painting a still life of a skull and a bottle in front of a painting of a naked couple embracing, will be featured in Swindon Museum and Art Gallery's summer exhibition 'About Face' from 11 June to 27 September.

The Crucifixion c.1922 will probably be part of an exhibition of works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection at Tennants Auctioneers, Leyburn, from 17 August to 21 September.

AUCTION NEWS

At Duke's, Dorchester, on 10 April *Gas Alert* 1919, a watercolour previously unknown to us, sold for £27,808.

On 3 July WR's oil *Swimmers Resting* c.1925 will be included in Christie's sale of modern British and Irish art (estimate £40,000–£60,000).

WR IN THE TATE STORE

When William Roberts's son, John, died intestate in February 1995 the Tate Gallery kindly agreed to store for safe-keeping all the works by WR that were then in what had been the Robertses' home. In 2007, 117 of these pictures were allocated to the Tate collection in lieu of inheritance tax, and in late January this year David Cleall and Bob Davenport spent three days in the Tate store cataloguing and photographing the other 430-odd works.

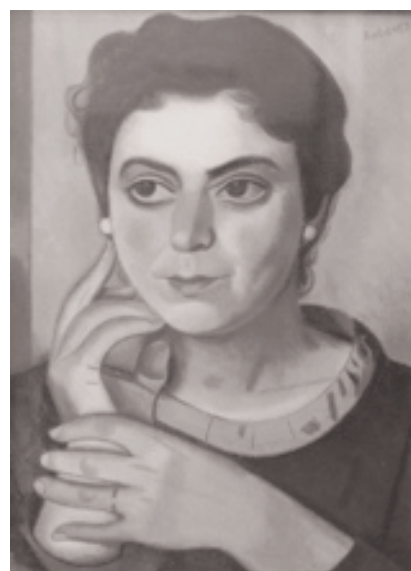
Both the number and the quality of



Gas Alert 1919, auctioned on 10 April



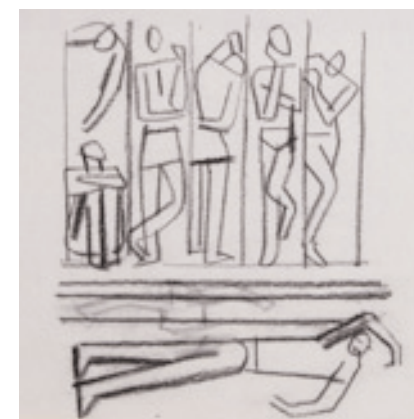
Examining *Donald Wolfitt as King Lear at the 'Old Bedford'* 1949 in the Tate store



A portrait (here cropped) of Sarah Roberts from c.1934

the works came as a surprise. Though a falling-off in power was evident in some very late works, many of the drawings were at least the equal of several of those 'accepted in lieu', and there were some fine oils, including a couple from the Robertses' war years in Oxford as well as stunning portraits of Sarah Roberts.

What were particularly interesting, given WR's reputation for tight-knit compositions, were the dozens of spontaneous small drawings made on notebook pages or scraps of paper as he was out and about, ranging from a scarf around a woman's shoulders to a (well-composed) group of draymen delivering beer. These, like so many others of the works, display an affectionate fascination with human activity and



The Swimmer c.1927-9



An early study for *The Chess Players*

human relationships that belies the popular image of Roberts as reclusive if not misanthropic. Though these could not be linked to specific finished compositions, several relate to recurring