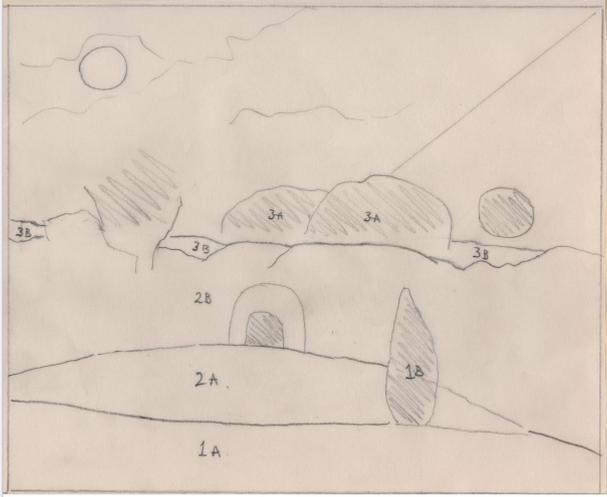


<p>Paul Nash Landscape of the Vernal Equinox (III) 1944, oil on canvas, 64 x 76 cm (25 x 30")</p>	<p>initial analysis</p> <p>It is clear from this analysis and some areas of speculation that the facture of this landscape involves both direct perception and imaginative practice.</p>	<p>Vernal Equinox' in the title refers to the spring equinox which occurs around 20th or 21st March.</p>
<p>The facture of the picture uses fairly dry brushes and and in places appears almost drawn; the white circle on the left, for example, appears to have been guided by a compass.</p>	<p>The limited palette has kept quiet tonal values which have been interrupted by the dark blue-grey, for example the colour of the yew and the hollow archway, and the emphatic and uniqueness of the red sun in the sky on the right. The tones provide a series of short visual <i>passages</i>, first developed by Cézanne. These <i>passages</i> stop short at the dividing edges of the layout, such as between the foreground and middle ground.</p>	<p><i>Vernal Equinox (I)</i> was owned by the Queen Mother who wrote to Kenneth Clark saying that it was 'slightly "magic" and changes manner ... I sometimes expect to see ... a mysterious elemental coming out of the wood.' (William Shawcross. <i>Counting One's Blessings. The Selected Letters of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother</i>, London, 2002, p. xxxii.)</p>
<p>The painting can be said to be divided into four horizontal sections (see my diagram centre below): a foreground (1A) partly marked off at the top edge with a white line and from which grows an evergreen tree (1B); a middle ground also marked at the top edge partly concealed on the right (2A) from which trees and an archway rise (2B); two distinct hills with tree clumps (3A) and grey and green hills on the horizon (3B); a sky marked by the Sun and the Moon and clouds. The sky is divided into two sections, the first, containing the Moon in a mauve and blue sky which is overlapped by white and light brown clouds and a pale cream-coloured section on the righthand side with a red Sun and horizontal clouds, all divided from the left side by a diagonal edge.</p>	<p>In the period leading up to the facture of this painting, there is a considerable amount of interest and engagement by Nash and his friends, such as Eileen Agar, regarding symbolism and the writings and beliefs of W.B. Yeats and Madame Blavatsky, J.G. Fraser, Sigmund Freud and the French Surrealists.</p>  <p>The dark hollow is also a recurrence in Nash's work which can be attributed to a natural phenomena in this garden landscape.</p>	<p>The grass, ground vegetation and trees are all treated with an expressionist flare that summarises the forms into distinct shapes with clear indicators of tree trunks and foliage masses. The two distinctive tree clumps in the centre (3A) are a recurring motif in Nash's work and can be seen to represent a landscape form seen in many parts of England, but for Nash in particular the Wittenham Clumps in Berkshire.</p> <p>The viewer's eye is led back into the painting after an initial read glance emphatically from the righthand bottom corner along the top edge of the foreground (1A) to the yew (1B) and the dark hollow archway on the top edge of the middle ground (2A) and onto the prominent tree on the lefthand side interrupting the horizon line.</p>
<p>The Moon and Sun in the picture do carry a symbolic weight redolent of both their actual presence in the sky at this time of year, during the spring Equinox, and in their associations for Nash with cosmic spiritual ideas. These ideas together with the tree clumps recall some aspects of the work of Samuel Palmer, particularly his sepia paintings in the Ashmolean such as <i>The Valley Thick with Corn</i>. It is just as possible to read both circles as different positions of the Sun.</p>		<p>The dark hollow could also speculatively be thought of as symbolic of an inner life or passage of mystery, reflecting his experience in European battlefields, but also his and Margaret Nash's attention to spiritual ideas and their interest in 'Christian Science'. I am not sure this idea from some romantic writers assists viewing this picture. It is a dark hollow but the viewer cannot be sure of its destination.</p>