

Basic Detail Report



[Untitled]

Date

1942-1945

Primary Maker

Okubo, Benji

Medium

oil, canvas

Description

Image of a nude man holding a flaming tree slung over his proper left shoulder as he runs on top of clouds in the night sky. The tree (possibly a pine) is alight with red flames which consume its branches. The scene is illuminated by the light of a crescent moon. Dark clouds roll in the sky which is painted a watery blue-green. The central figure of the painting, the nude man, is placed diagonally in the foreground of the canvas, giving the painting a sense of dynamism. He is powerfully built, and his muscles are rendered with short, round brush strokes. The sky and clouds are also painted loosely, with the curves of the brush strokes lending a rhythmic flow to the undulations of the clouds. The stylization of the clouds are reminiscent of the clouds depicted in Japanese woodblock prints. The colors are muted primaries -- coral red tree, brownish yellow skin, aqua blue sky and pale gold moon. These colors effectively lend the painting a feeling of otherworldliness

since it denotes a time neither day of night but of a perpetual dusk. The style is naturalistic surrealism -- a 20th century art movement in which recognizable scenes are transformed into a dream or nightmare image.; Stretched and unframed.; The painting is identified as a "comment on war". The man is naked, stripped down to his bare essence. He is running blindly, with his head tossed back and his eyes closed. He steps off a cloud into the unknown. It appears that the tree he grasps is a pine which in Asian iconography represents longevity of life. But flames eat away at the tree. In Japan, the pine (matsu) is a symbol of strength challenged by a lifetime of struggle. The ravages of war can destroy even the long-living pine tree. The moon in Japanese culture symbolizes truth, based on the fact that it always remains in the sky, though ever waxing and waning. In Buddhist tradition, it represents enlightenment. In both readings, the moon reinforces the artist's desire to enlighten the viewer about the truth of war. The artist effectively and symbolically comments on the blindness in which men go into war, full of ideology without understanding the consequences and the terrible carnage and war of war, destroying life.

Dimensions

H: 16 in, W: 12 in