

Elliott Fine Art

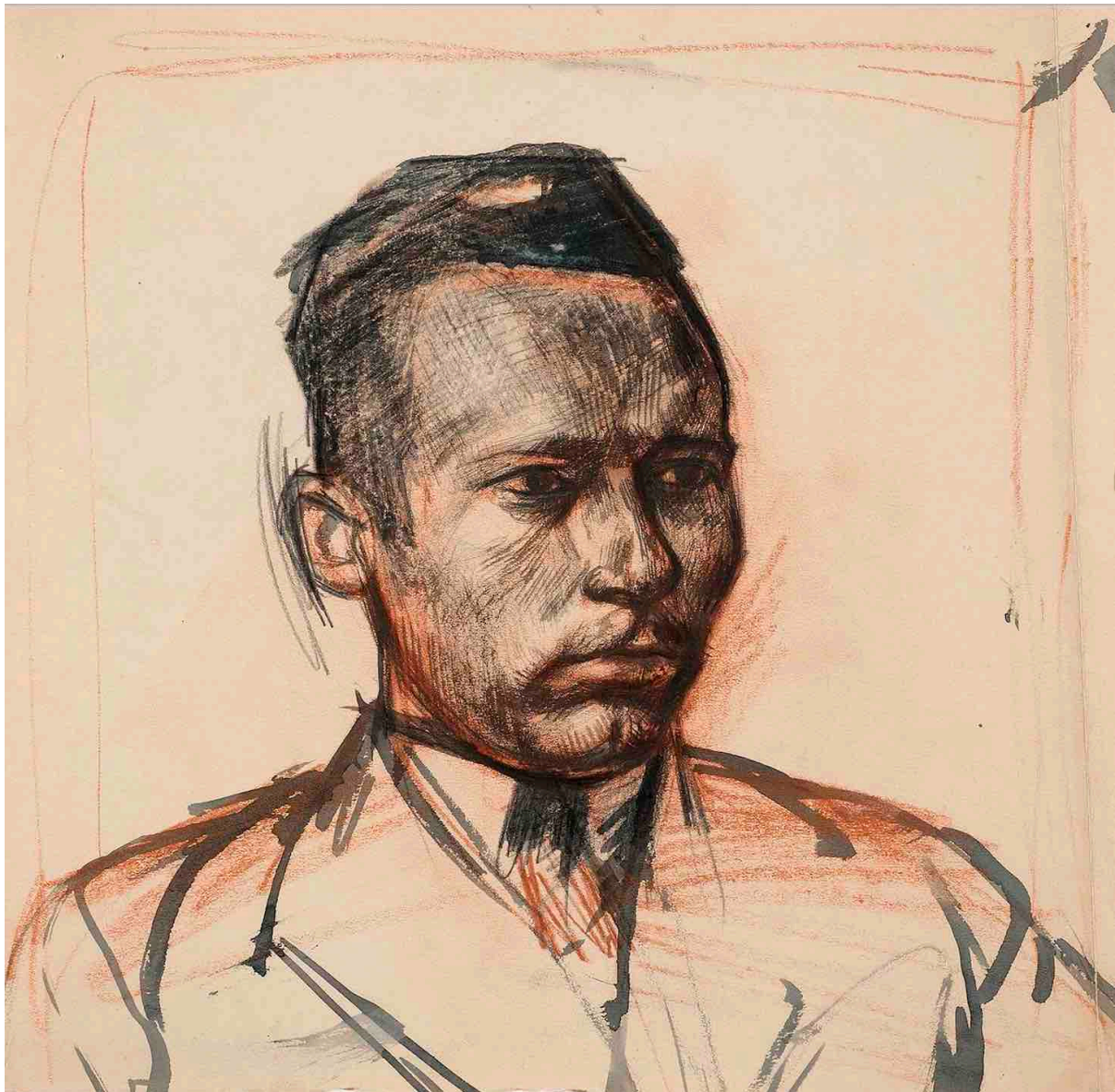
Old Masters to Early Modern

Alan Sorrell
(Tooting 1904 – Southend-on-Sea 1974)

Portrait of Thornton White

Pencil, red chalk and ink on paper, in an antique rosewood frame
28 x 27.5cm (11 x 11 in.)

Provenance:
With the artist's family until 2012;
Liss Llewellyn, 2019.



Though best known for his archaeological illustrations, and above all for his detailed reconstructions of Roman Britain, Alan Sorrell was also an accomplished portraitist, though invariably these he did for his own pleasure, depicting primarily himself, his family and friends.

Sorrell met Thornton White (1901-1965), the sitter in the present work, when both were students at the British School in Rome in 1928. Both were on scholarships, Sorrell for mural painting and White for architecture. They became close friends, collaborating on a project in 1930, and staying in touch for the rest of their lives, with Sorrell writing to his wife in 1944 that he wanted her to meet his 'friend White', who by that time had emigrated to South Africa, acting as the Chair in Architecture at the University of Cape Town.

The present work, characterised by White's powerful presence and executed in a strong graphic style, fits in with a series of portraits, including numerous self-portraits, produced by Sorrell as a young and experimental artist in the 1920s. The forceful outlines, use of wash and hatched areas of shading all accord well, for example, with a Sorrell self-portrait of presumably the same date (fig.1). In fact, the outlines to White's face have been drawn with such force that Sorrell's pencil has scored the paper in several places. The result, combined with a liberal but judicious use of red chalk, is a distinctly modern portrait, certainly at the forefront of the avant-garde in British art of the period.

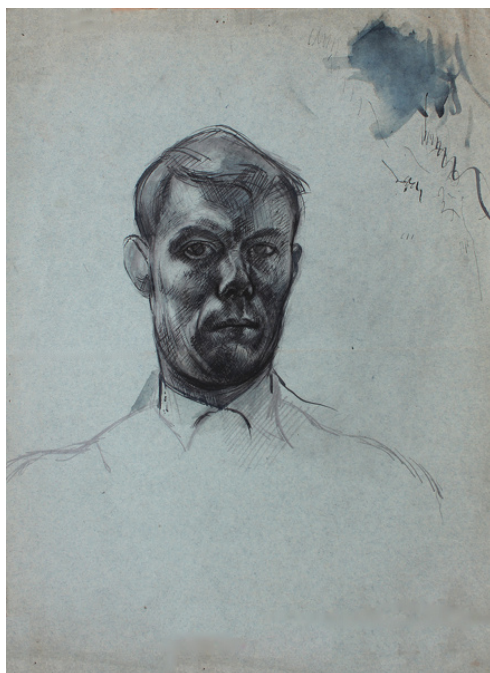


Fig. 1, Alan Sorrell, *Self-portrait*,
pencil, ink and wash on blue paper,
47 x 33 cm, Private Collection

Before Rome, Sorrell had studied at the Royal College of Art, where he met William Rothenstein, who became a close friend and mentor. Upon his return to London in 1931, Sorrell became drawing master at the Royal College, beginning his archaeological drawings a few years later in 1936 after a chance meeting at a Roman dig in Leicester with Kathleen Kenyon, who would ask Sorrell to provide illustrations for an article. Thereafter, other than an interlude during World War Two when Sorrell designed camouflage for aerodomes and terrain and battleship models for bombing campaigns, more and more of his time was taken up with commissions from Britain's leading archaeologists.