

John Bulloch Souter was born in Aberdeen on 4th June 1890, the youngest of seven children of Alexander and Elsie Souter. He was to become best known as an artist for his portrait commissions.

Souter’s mother, Elsie Cruickshank, herself an accomplished artist, encouraged his artistic talent from an early age. Jack, as he was known by his family and close friends, first attended Ferryhill School in Aberdeen progressing thereafter to Robert Gordon’s College- Gray’s School of Art, at that time in Schoolhill. There he excelled in painting, drawing and sculpture and on graduating (P-1) was awarded the Allan Fraser Scholarship for a period of four years at Hospitalfield Art College in Arbroath.

In 1912, on the recommendation of Sir George Clausen RSA, Souter was awarded the Byrne Travelling Scholarship by the Scottish Education Department. Armed with this £120 stipend and an excellent working knowledge of Spanish and French, he travelled to Madrid in May of that year in order to study the works of the Spanish masters in the Prado Art Gallery and Museum. During his time there, he became acquainted with other resident Scottish painters – McLaren Young, Shaw, and Cordrey and etchers, James McBey and Eustace Luton. Cordrey, Shaw and Luton each paid Souter 100 pesetas for paintings by the artist. These unexpected and much appreciated sales helped supplement the monetary awards Souter had received from the Colonel Innes Prize for Sculpture and the Robert Brough Travelling Scholarship, enabling him to extend his time in Spain and Europe.



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The Prado Gallery charged one peseta to allow an artist to copy one of its paintings, but made no charge if only a section of a work was copied. This policy, similar to that of the Louvre, encouraged Souter to copy sections of great masterpieces in meticulous detail . This was of good use to him in his later career when painting copies of major works by his favourite artists, Velasquez, Titian, Chardin and Vermeer.

On completing his time in Spain, Souter then embarked on “ The Grand Tour” which included Italy (visiting Florence, Rome and Venice), France (visiting Paris, Lille, Amiens and St Quentin), then north to Belgium and finally, Holland.

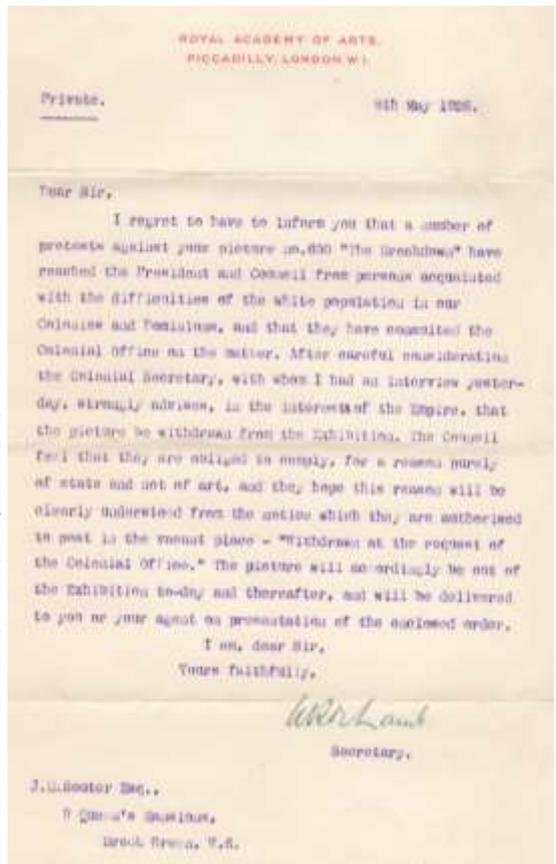


P-2 - Gladys Cooper
Thunder on the Hill (1951) ?

(the Countess of Limerick) , The Countess of Cranbrook , Brigadier General Spiers and numerous others from educational, church and civic institutions. The Paton family of Grandholme, Aberdeen commissioned several portraits, having been introduced to Souter by Mrs Crombie, one of his most enthusiastic Aberdeen patrons.

In 1926, Souter exhibited at the Royal Academy a major work entitled “ The Breakdown” (P-4, P-6). The painting’s subject matter led to considerable controversy and adverse comment, leading to its eventual withdrawal despite its having been viewed by King George V himself. The King refrained from comment but many critical voices were heard in the press and in society in general; a certain “Lady” *, returned from time in India, remarked that “ it would make ruling our natives difficult”. The Colonial Office was prevailed upon to request the painting’s removal from the exhibition for “ reasons of state, not art” and “ in the interest of the empire” (P-3).

On his return to Aberdeen in 1914, two of Souter’s paintings (an Aberdeen street scene and a portrait) were shown in the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. According to his archive, Souter continued to exhibit there annually until 1952 although service in the Gordon Highlanders and the Royal Army Medical Corps during The Great War took precedence over his painting. After the war, Souter’s commissioned portraits became an important source of income. He painted many well known London figures including Gladys Cooper (P-2), Ivor Novello and Fay Compton. Commissions which helped to establish the artist as a noted portrait painter included Sir John Cunningham (Admiral of the Fleet), Mrs Rait-Kerr



Souter, however, stated that his intention had simply been “ to illustrate the tendency nowadays for Jazz influence to permeate our daily lives”. The 1920’s were, of course, The Jazz Age when new found post-war freedoms and ideas clashed with the strictures of contemporary society.



P-4 - Archive photograph - The Breakdown, 1926

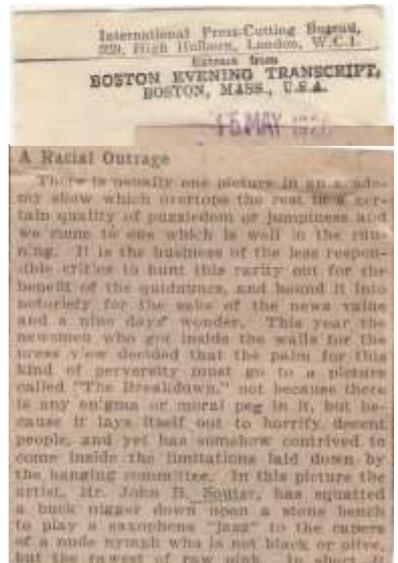
In the extensive, worldwide press coverage (P-5) surrounding the removal of “ The Breakdown “ from the exhibition, we find a virtually identical description of the painting : “this large painting depicted a “Negro” in evening dress playing a saxophone sitting on a shattered statue of the Greek Goddess Minerva. In front of him an un-draped white girl with shingled golden hair was dancing to the music of his Jazz music. On the broken arm of the goddess a flesh coloured stocking was flung haphazardly next to a dainty green slipper” In painting “ The Breakdown”, Souter had utilised knowledge he’d gained from his studies of African Sculpture at the Natural History Museum in London, while modelling the saxophonist’s pose on himself. Marita Ross, a well known artists’ model of the time who had also modelled for Sickert, was the sitter for the naked girl dancer.

Souter himself, however, provided his own explanation of his painting to the London newspaper, The Daily Graphic, published on May 1st 1926 (P-7)

In spite of the artist's apparent insouciance it is evident from his archive that the Royal Academy, the Colonial Office and other pillars of society considered its symbolism a threat to the established order. Viewed from the perspective of the 21st Century, the episode provides an illuminating insight into the racism then prevalent in society worldwide, particularly in the press and among art critics of the time (P-8). All newspaper articles and individuals have here been quoted verbatim in order to give an accurate portrayal of the circumstances of the time and The Rendezvous Gallery would, of course, wish to dissociate itself completely from the vocabulary used and attitudes conveyed.



P-6 - Original Study, The Breakdown 1926



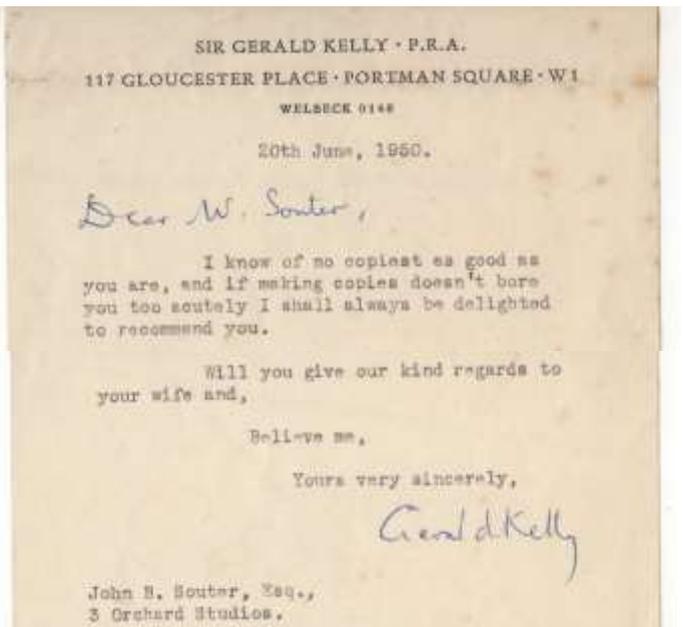
P-5



P-7

The painting ,having been withdrawn from the exhibition , was subsequently destroyed completely by the artist and his wife, Christian Grace Reid, whom he had married in February 1926 in St Paul's Parish Church, Hammersmith. It is evident from their many letters to each other that Christian, the love of his life, proved to be his most ardent supporter following the rejection of "The Breakdown" and their move to Brook Green, where he worked at 3 Orchard Studios. Personally attractive and an enthusiastic subject for numerous paintings, Christian's influence continued throughout Souter's career. She was instrumental in diverting his energies from lucrative, commercial cartoons and illustrations for publications such as Punch by encouraging him to concentrate on portrait commissions. After World War 2 when the couple returned to live in Aberdeen, her influence brought about her husband's change to landscapes and still lifes (especially of roses) at a time when commissions for portraits and copying became scarce.

During World War 2, Souter, with his French and Spanish language skills, served with the Post Office Censorship Department. In 1944, he was given the opportunity to paint what he was eventually to consider the highlight of his career when he was commissioned by Wellington College to copy the Winterhalter painting "The First of May" in Windsor Castle. The painting depicts Queen Victoria with the infant Prince Arthur. He holds in his hand some Lily of the Valley, the flower of the 1st of May. The Duke of Wellington is presenting a casket to the Queen while Prince Albert looks on in the background. Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, was Governor of Wellington College for 40 years. The College was founded in memory of the Duke of Wellington, so it is an Extremely appropriate painting for the College to have and the copy by Souter now hangs there. Subsequently, his reputation as an accomplished copyist secured, he was offered further similar commissions by Sir Gerald Kelly, President of the Royal Academy (P-9), but turned these down, preferring to be known as a painter in his own right rather than as a copyist.



Mr and Mrs Souter returned to Aberdeen to live in 1952 when they inherited "Kinnoull", 19 Anderson Drive from his sister, Anne. They remained there for the rest of their lives. According to the artist's niece, Joan Matthew, "he adored his wife and would address her as "ma chere Angelique" . Christian, for her part, lived for her husband and his art.

Many of J.B. Souter's major works now figure in public and private collections. This exhibition encompasses several studies for important paintings such as the Royal Academy's "Sir Frank Short 1944" and " The Breakdown 1926" along with the Souter's copies of his favourite artists' works, namely, Vermeer's " Head of a Young Girl (P-10), better known to us now as " The Girl with the Pearl Ear-Ring" and a detail of Jean-Baptiste- Simeon Chardin's "Boy with a Top" (P-11). Additionally, remaining works from his studio are featured along with the artist's archive of correspondence, photographs and diaries, much of which has never been on public exhibit.



P-10 Johannes Vermeer - Head of a Young Girl
(the Mauritshuis, the Hague)



P-11 Jean-Baptiste- Simeon Chardin
Boy with a Top (detail)

Extensive research by the Rendezvous Gallery has provided the location for many of the scenes depicted in the works on exhibit, often correcting titles wrongly applied to works sold subsequent to the deaths of the artist and his wife. It is hoped, however, that visitors to the exhibition may recognise and help identify some untitled studies.