

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Tom Fairs
Special Online Presentation
April 1-15, 2020



Tom Fairs, Untitled, c. 1990's, Oilstick on cardstock, 6 3/4 x 5 1/6 inches

Tom Fairs (b. 1925-d. 2007) was a British artist who lived and worked in north London in proximity to his beloved Hampstead Heath, a large ancient open area of land encompassing forests, ponds, and meadows. Though the artist traveled extensively to other countries, he found inspiration within walking distance of his home in and around the village of Hampstead and in the Heath. His daily habit was to rise, have breakfast, and then depart with pencil and pad in his pocket. He'd alight on a view or scene not because it was a destination but because he saw something in the way forms struggled against one another, or because there was a certain kind of light that caught his eye. His vertical and horizontal works on paper, many of them measuring as small as 4 x 5 ½ inches, are noteworthy for their quiet, skillful sense of urgency. The myriad marks that he coaxed out of his pencil are vastly different but seen together tell the viewer something about place.

Fairs studied stained glass design at the Royal College of Art, which contributed to his awareness of structure and light. The artist said his work is “primarily in things seen: landscape, interiors, still life where, in the light of the imagination, the commonplace may be transformed into the extraordinary.” He also worked inside the home he shared with the novelist Elisabeth Russell Taylor. Through the living room window of their attic flat, he could see the skyline of London, which often appears in his drawings, oils, and paintings on paper. The artist's lush, verdant works in color made during the last twenty years of his life suggest a similar stillness as that of the black and white pencil drawings. An untitled mixed media on paper, pictured, made with oilstick and crayon on paper reveals Georgian houses nestled into nature as if glimpsed through a veil of trees. *Park Bench* is a bright and glowing mixed media drawing on paper mounted on cardstock, a frequently employed technique the artist used to give sturdiness to his drawings. Whatever the medium, his drawings evoke a visual acuity that is palpable.

This special online presentation follows an exhibition of the artist's rarely seen oils and paintings on paper, *Tom Fairs in Color: Paintings and Drawings 1997-2007*, on view at Van Doren Waxter in 2019.