The SS40 'Black Ship' by Norman Wilkinson

Norman Wilkinson

Sold

Christopher Clarke Antiques
The Fosseway, Stow on the Wold, Gloucestershire, GL54 1JS
clarkeltd@btconnect.com • 01451 830 476 • www.campaignfurniture.com

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Height: 13.08 cm (5.1")

Width: 19.04 cm (7.5")

Description

A small watercolour and gouache study on board of the SS 40 Airship by Norman Wilkinson.

The RNAS SS 40 is shown at the height of the white Kent cliffs top at Capel-le-Ferne with the waves coming in below to the beach. The painting is signed to the bottom right corner 'Norman Wilkinson. R.N.A.S. Capel 1917. A Flight.' The back of the board is annotated with SS 40 R.N.A.S. Capel Kent, Lt. Chamber, Off Abrey Cliff. 1917'. The number 67 is also written in large blue marker pen and there is evidence of a previous label to the bottom right, now removed.

The SS 40 airship was built as a trial in stealth warfare. The idea was that the airship, with a silencer fitted to its engine, would carry out night time covert operations behind enemy lines to make observations and drop agents. The black paint work to aid its invisibility earned it the nicknames of the Black Ship and Bertha The Black Blimp. It was tested and piloted by Sub Lt. William Chambers (who is noted to the back by Wilkinson) and Midshipman Victor Goddard. Although its useful was not judged to be a great success, it was used during the Battle of the Somme with Chambers mentioned in despatches by General Haig.

The painting was possible a preparatory work for a larger illustration. Wilkinson is known to have made at least one other painting of the SS 40 although the scene is different to this one. The painting has some foxing to the background. An interesting painting of an experimental airship. Dated 1917.

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