HARVESTING ART: REAPING

DAILY BREAD

Wheatfield with a Reaper 1889 Vincent Van Gogh

This wheat

bristles with life; demands to be the subject of the artist's passion, pushes the one human off-centre, middle distance,

a reaper clad in the receding violet of the hills who stands no chance against this whirl and thrust of sun-coloured energy,

which disrupts the very surface of the canvas, thicked with brush-swirls and made three-dimensional with paint-gobs.

Hidden from our view is a man considered mentally unsound; supervised, locked up, viewing the wheat through iron bars, mixing his 'smiling' yellows inside a hospital cell. He sees that reaper as 'the image of death', our own death.

Also unseen

Is mechanised death which roars, accelerates even as Van Gogh pauses to pick up a finer brush:

tractors advance to crush the wheat-crop, which slowly turns to uniformed flesh; death on industrial scale reaps its bloody harvest in a field bordered by trenches.

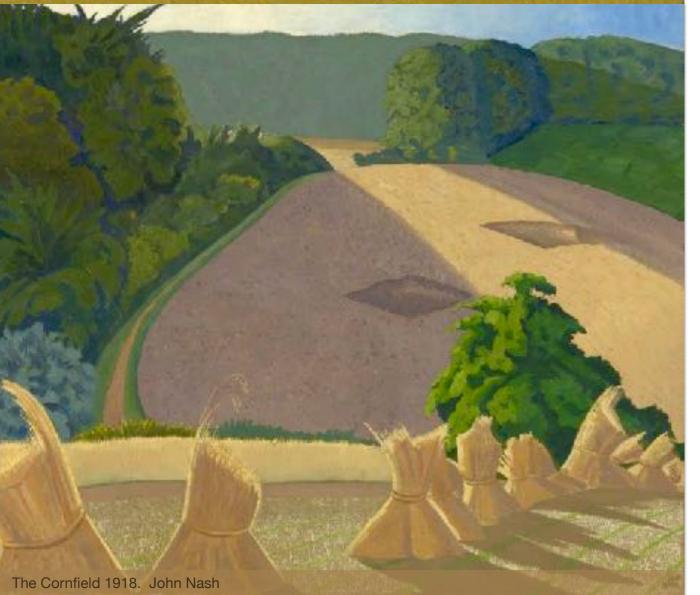
Diane Pacitti, 2020

The Cornfield 1918 John Nash

if his work as a war artist had not clawed and plucked at his day, until evening started at six, he would not have looked at this field when sun-glitter gives way to diffused light, when shadows are long;

If his brush was not imposing the stark lines of trench ladders, splintered tree-trunks, guns, he might not have felt the subtle curves of this land, seen how the field is cupped by protecting trees;

Wheatfield with a Reaper 1889. Vincent Van Gogh



If his palette had not been crowded with dark blobs: khaki, earth brown; or white with the shock of snow, he might not have seen how a shaft of golden light falls like a blessing over the darkening field;

If he had not witnessed a land defaced and gouged, an earth gashed by a human-crawling trench, he might not have shown these corn-stacks elongated by pointing shadows as mysterious beings;

If he had not been one of the few to survive when they climbed from the trench and walked forward as targets,

he could not have lingered in this healing space between sun and dark, and made it a painting.





