Some of the elements presented are art objects, some are not. And that might be the key philosophical problem: what is the status of what is in front of us, things or objects? Most of the thirty works are installed inside the Ballroom space, and a few are in the courtyard. In the main room, a huge white wave looks like a piece of icy ground. The first impression is of snow-white images of polar ice, melting in an accelerating manner. When we approach, we discover that the work is made from hundreds of white plastic cups, like the ones we use daily in coffee and water machines. This piece, by Tara Donovan, illustrates perfectly our unconscious use of plastic that is then thrown into the oceans, destroying the planet. What we lose in ice, we gain in plastic. Donovan's work is a "warning piece," corresponding to Morton's "global warning."

In one corner is a small bronze piece on a shelf, a mini baroque column that is part of a huge project by the Long Now Foundation, which is drilling a tunnel somewhere in West Texas to welcome a clock that will chime through a mountain and will work in ten thousand years. The idea is to make us think about the state of the earth in ten thousand years, a period based on the span of our culture, which emerged five thousand years ago. To be able to think of this immense time, the *Equation of Time Cam* is a handy piece of bronze that marks the years from 10,000 until 2014. The clock project combines many layers of projections—one being a "white man's" attitude in drilling the biggest hole on earth. And one could wonder about the destructive impact of such an enterprise on the ecosystem of a West Texas mountain.
Other objects in the exhibition make us think about periods when humans were not there, such as *West Texas Geological Samples Spanning from Precambrian to Present Day, Fossils from the Cretaceous or Permian…* The organizers have included the location of the Ballroom in the show, with artifacts from the region. What impressed me regarding botanical collections borrowed from the Sul Ross Herbarium was the fact that some were installed approximately forty-five centimeters above the floor. Morton believes that we shouldn't always install at human-eye level. This raised a new question, confirmed by objects that are not artworks, like the *Adobe* (2017) bricks, by Rafa Esparza, or the *Reposited Core (Byproduct)* (2014-2015), by David Brooks, a core sample representing nine million years of sedimentation extracted from the Texas oil basin. If not for human beings, visitors to the art center, for whom was the exhibition displayed?

Rereading Morton's text, and thinking about the Anthropocene and the Speculative Realism bubble, I start to consider this approach strange. What is a thought without a subject? Even to think the unthinkable, one needs to be a subject—a human who knows what is a thing, what is an object, and who is the human. I say so because somehow, in the past century and maybe in our century, there are humans who are considered things, and they are not the same. The Postcommodity group, with *Coyotaje* (2018), confronts us with this fact. Touching the interactive touchscreen of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, *50 Big Things In West Texas* (2018), we hear whispers: recordings of Mexicans, trapped by the Border Patrol and forced to call other Mexicans, pretending it was a safe spot so as to trap them. This is more frightening than the earthquakes that we can feel through *Intimate Earthquake Archive* (2016–ongoing). Wearing neoprene jackets that make us look like ground surfers, we hang around in the courtyard, where Sissel Marie Tonn and Jonathan Reus have installed a series of core samples, and feel the earthquake waves, recorded by the Bureau of Economic Geology, through this basic apparatus.

In Megan May Daalder's *Mirrorbox* (2013), a double helmet with half-mirrored glass, I became Laura Copelin, who kindly experimented with me. The principle is simple: as one stares at the mirror, one sees first oneself, then the face of the person behind the glass. Literally, one becomes the other. And indeed, most of the works in *Hyperobjects* address the question of the other. The other side of the border, the other dimension of time and space, outer space… Emilija Skarnulyte's *Sirenomelia* (2018) is an example of a superbody experience, diving deep in the freezing Arctic waters. Fascinated by this cross between man, nature, and machine trip, Morton expresses that "we are all mermaids, but that most of us don't know." At this point, the exhibition takes a turn; I realize that it is mostly a fantasy, like the old cabinet of curiosities, where a siren made from a platypus and a raccoon can appear near a unicorn made from a narwhal's tusk.

A life-form comes from the hybridization of several dimensions, and humans are one part, microscopic in the universe, right? We are trapped like neutrinos in the CERN tube, agitated by entropic movement, and there will always be another level that we can't see. We have known this since the time of Epicurus and of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. Think about it: can we experiment with things, taken from different fields and brought to an art center, or can we look around at works that have been conceived, layer by layer, to be thought about, thought *with*, at a human scale, in a hyper-human scale—the nature of the Chihuahua desert of Marfa, the fields of Chinati, coming from a library, a kitchen, and a studio? At *Hyperobjects* I couldn't avoid thinking about Donald Judd. The specific object is neither painting nor sculpture but a call for an experience of a form. Color, light, shape, and surface are the main elements but always in relation to nature, place, the horizon. Judd collected Navajo blankets, he was a huge reader of philosophy, he built a place using what he found around him. It was an ecological economy and a human perspective, aware of the immensity of earth and sky. He was living with his works and addressing the political choice of doing so in a world where it is still hard to find a good lamp.

Monika Baer: Die Einholung

Text by Milan Ther

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Through June 16

I propose reading *Die Einholung* as s a complex and tightly choreographed excursion into mourning and loss, both somber and humorous, featuring internally divided characters. It is a staged three-part ensemble about gesture as the site of a fading index between artist and work as a type that takes the form of severance or departure.

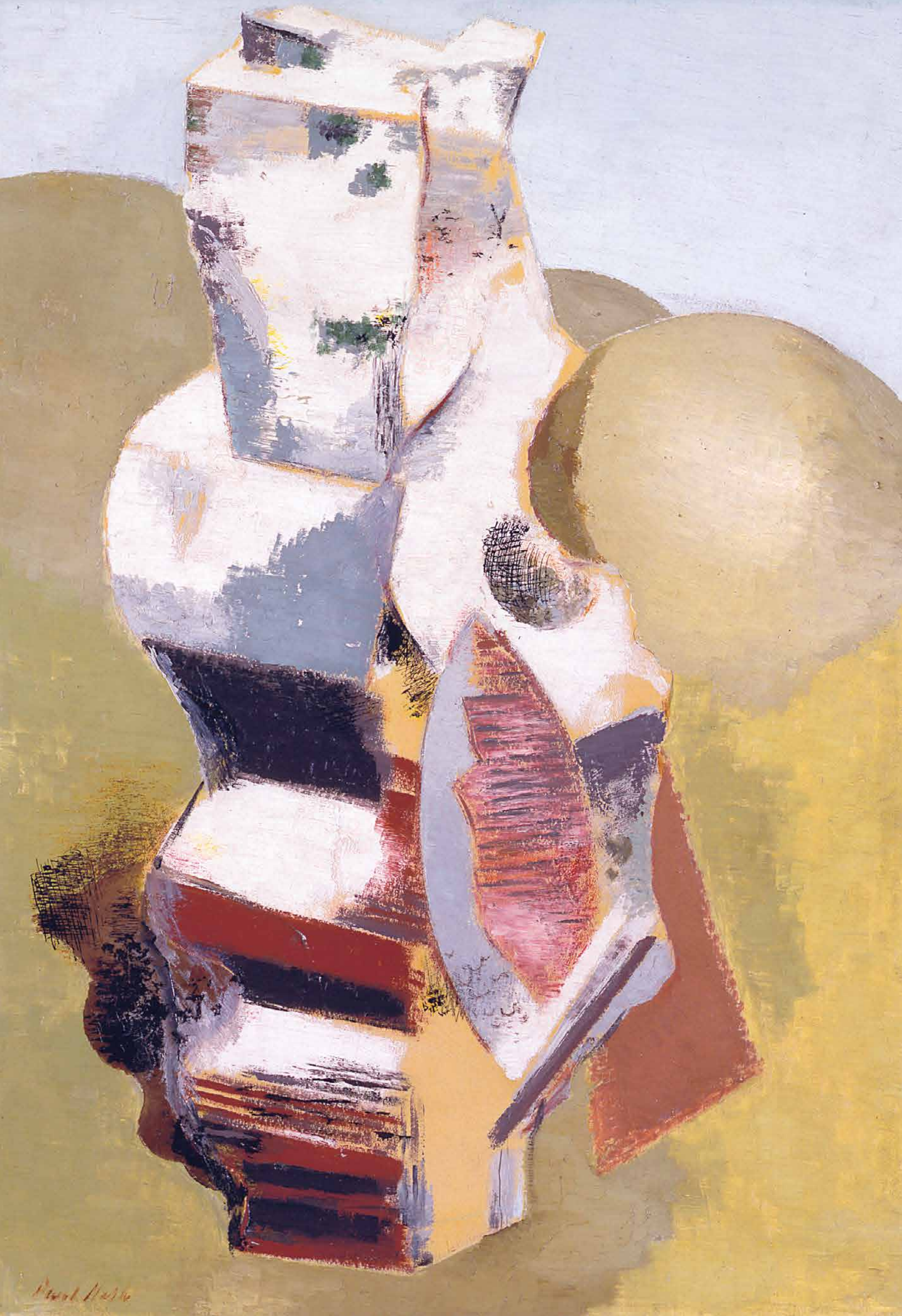
The first of three groups in this ensemble of work consists of large seemingly abstract paintings that unfold the traditional index of abstract expressionism in which the artist's agency is embodied by the work. These three large paintings in pale gray and rose oscillate between that which is visually recognizable as haze and abstraction, while material elements such as sculpted drops or a curved line in relief *Barely titled (day)* (2017-2018), both in hard foam, break up their flat surface. The title may jokingly suggest that the process of naming is one of exhaustion, that the physical extremity of producing painting leaves little room for language. Another work from this group, *Untitled* (2017), has a small mirror placed in the top left corner, staging the difference between the literal reflection of a mirror and the projected reflection, underlining the beholders' ability to see themselves in an abstract painting. This group of paintings appear as—but simultaneously expose the notion of—the pure indexical gesture of the artist's bare agency. In them, the visual signification of what has been interpreted as ecstasy and authenticity on the artist's part and as pure immersion on the onlooker's is juxtaposed with alien elements that offer other forms of legibility and visual identification.

The second group, made up of versions of untitled monochrome paintings in dry pastel yellow, with occasional thick layers of sculpted paint, are quietly luminous against the gallery's black lacquered floors. Throughout the series, these works develop a type of formal language in which these paintings are almost able to speak or express themselves through their material, which in its thick application produces shapes in relief. Before walking off and breaking in to song, however, Baer introduces literal restraint: aluminum fixtures screwed into the stretcher on the painting and the wall and fixed with wire cords hold these works in place. Thus these works stage and critique a gesture in which the artist is able to breathe life into works of art that would go on to become autonomous subjects.

Finally, the exhibition contains five drawings and collages on white, pale turquoise-blue or gray paper showing the traces, folds, and dents of being handled. Each is defined by a motif—a drawn badger mask, Laurel and Hardy on a postcard from the Schwules Museum on another, then a photocopied reproduction of Saint Agatha of Catania (1640-1645) by Francesco Guarino, and finally two pencil drawings of hands. One of these drawings, titled *Die Einholung* (2017), depicts a gloved hand holding up and presenting a scalp wearing a bishop's miter. It was drawn on site at the Scnnütgen Museum in Cologne from a fourteenth century wooden sculpture of Saint Denis, the first bishop of Paris. Saint Denis's iconography consists of showing him partially or fully decapitated, holding his own head or forehead. Baer depicts the moment of contact between the hand, the scalp, and the bishop's miter. This figure thus touches and presents a severed limb to the viewer.

Another work in this series is Baer's collage which features a photocopy of Francesco

Monika Baer, *Dachsmaske*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin. Photo: Jens Ziehe



Guarino's painting in which Saint Agatha determinately gazes out at the beholder while holding a linen cloth to her breast. Santa Agatha is often depicted carrying her severed breasts on a plate, but the small amount of blood in Guarino's version is almost unnoticeable in Baer's black-and-white photocopy. It gives the figure an appearance of confidence and dignity in the light of the violence against her body. She visually shifts the focus with her inward-pointing fingers, which gesture and embody her self-affirmation, owning the inscription against her body.

Both are examples of figures of known or unknown authorship in which their respective gestures lend themselves to the representations self-reflexive autonomy. Bear's works are of course unlike the devotional figure from the fourteenth century or a painting from the seventeenth. They bring into question the gesture as sole property of the artist, without possessing or fully embodying them either, ultimately leaving the gesture in a foregrounded limbo as a site of its own.

The three proposals in this exhibition are different versions of staged material autonomy, thus making *Die Einholung* about presence. As the bond between artist and work is severed, the role of the gesture changes. It is no longer a mystical point of contact in the dialectic between artist and canvas. It is primary material and site of investigation for everyone to see.

Paul Nash: Sunflower Rises

Text by Mike Cooter

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Through October 28

Despite the recent focus on Paul Nash's work (his Tate retrospective closed last year) he remains both under-exhibited outside the UK and somewhat of an enigma even within circles of those that admire his work. To taxonomists he is a vexation—neither emblematic of English Modernism (he lacks true peers in this regard) or "English Surrealist in Chief" as he was proclaimed (Nash baulked at the delimited subconscious as creative resource), nor symbolist or late Romantic (as Herbert Read suggested was the true heritage of British Surrealism). More recently, David Mellor coined "spectral modernity" specifically for him. He was aware of this dissonance, writing eloquently of the struggle to reconcile "internationalism versus an indigenous culture, renovation versus conservatism; the industrial versus the pastoral; the functional versus the futile."[1] Working across painting, photography, sculpture and commercial design, and as an official war artist in two world wars, he was a polymath after a somewhat parochial fashion—here to be taken as a unique compliment.

Much smaller in scale than the Tate retrospective, this exhibition remains broad in scope and is the largest staged in France of Nash's work. It draws on his small number of trips to the region and his adoption of the sunflower as a resource for a powerful (ultimately unfinished) suite of late works as contextual hooks. These frameworks are both useful and ultimately overrun by the sheer range of his esoteric concerns. Whilst a number of conceptual breakthroughs occurred on these visits (*Harbour and Room*, 1931 and *Voyages of the Moon*, 1934-1937 are both the result of optical effects produced by French mirrors and are included here) his peripatetic lifestyle was largely limited to the south of England and both restricted and extended by fragile health. His key generative references remained a small number of sites in the British landscape. He preferred collections of objects to sketchbooks, re-composing actual physical sites from memory. *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934), depicting the Avebury stones and painted in Nice, is the result of one such Riviera convalescence.

It is hard not to read these transpositions of time and place through his experience of landscapes disordered, disfigured and recomposed by the trauma of conflict. In a letter to his wife from the front at Passchendaele, Nash remarked: "I begin to believe in the Vorticist doctrine of destruction almost…"[2] but the "almost" here is telling. Struggling physically and mentally through the 1920s as a "war artist without a war"[3] (T. S. Eliot was to declare, in 1939, that only around 1926 "did the features of the post-war world begin to clearly emerge"[4]), by the 1930s Nash would increasingly draw inspiration from the liveliness of things and his conception of "object-personages" (a distinction he would draw from the "fetish"). The first, a gnarl of wood he would name the "Marsh Personage", he realized "though dead… was patently quick with a mysterious life of its own."[5] Locations would have their own distinction—his work responding to their *genius loci*, or spirit of place. The ontological challenges he described in *The Life of the Inanimate Object* (1937) were to be taken up through direct observation.

Writing on his work produced during the First World War, Nash revealingly cites Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (1438-1440) as a reference—the "unreal quality"[6] of the personal effects that litter the foreground in bold isolation more evocative of the wage of conflict than the rigorous battle staged above. Micro and macro are compressed into planer relation and juxtaposition. His mission statement for the short-lived collation of a British avant-garde, Unit One (1934), eloquently frames this geometric working practice: "Last summer, I walked in a field near Avebury where two rough monoliths stand up, miraculously patterned with black and orange lichen, remnants of the avenue of stones which led to the Great Circle. A mile away, a green pyramid casts a gigantic shadow. In the hedge, at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation."[7]

His working methods would aid this spatial logic. Compositions would be derived from objects arranged for the camera lens, and when painting from life, field glasses and mirrors would serve to compress depth of field. The "parallogism of a dream",[8] a license he would take from Surrealism, would allow the conflation of landscapes and objects. In *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945), the construction lines of transposition can be discerned, "the sun whipping the sunflower like a spinning top,"[9] unifying metaphor, simile (for the burning wheel of the solstice rites) and direct representation. Though he wrote elegantly about his own work and others, he knew where to draw the line: "I cannot explain this picture. It means only what it says."[10]

1. Paul Nash, "Going modern and being British", *Weekend Review*, March 12, 1932.
2. 1917, cited in *The Modernity of English Art: 1914-30*, D.P. Corbett (Manchester University Press, 1997), 105.
3. Cited in "Paul Nash: A Personal View", Margot Eates, in *Paul Nash: Paintings and Watercolours*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), 42.
4. T. S. Eliot, *Criterion*, January 1939, quoted by Michael Bracewell in "Here Comes the Sun. Paul Nash and Visionary Modernism", catalogue essay for this exhibition.
5. Paul Nash, "The Life of the Inanimate Object", *Country Life*, May 1, 1937.
6. Cited in "Paul Nash: The Elements", David Fraser Jenkins, in *Paul Nash: The Elements*, (London: Scala Publisher Ltd.), 19.
7. Paul Nash in *Unit One*, edited by Herbert Read (London: Cassell), 1934.
8. Paul Nash, describing *Circle of the Monoliths* (1937-8), in "Picture History (1943-5)", quoted in *Paul Nash: Paintings and Watercolours*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), 88.
9. Letter to Richard Smart, June 25, 1946, cited in ibid. 103.
10. Describing *Sunflower and Sun* (1942) in ibid.

Paul Nash, *Druid Landscape*, ca. 1938. Courtesy: British Council Collection