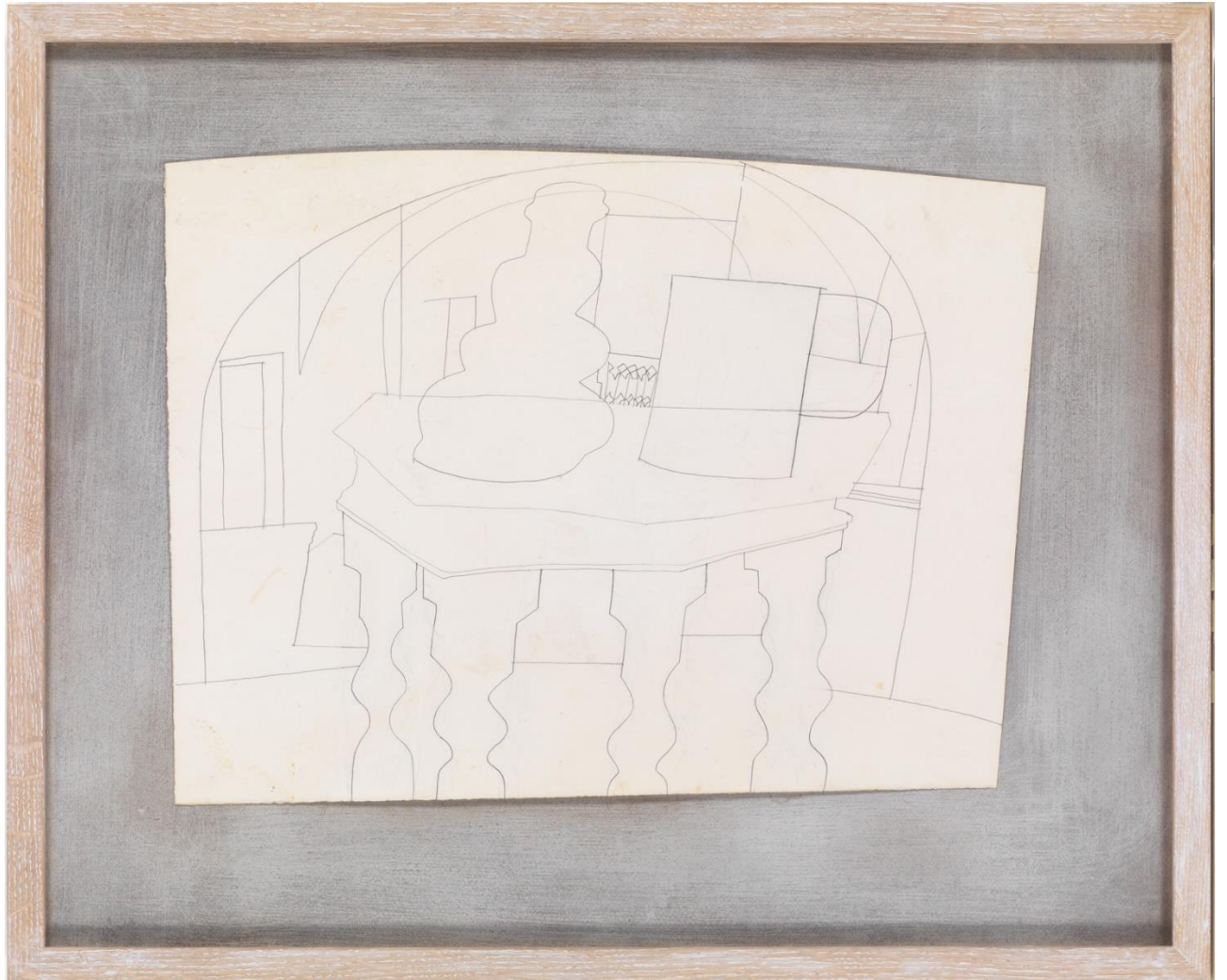


LE CLAIRE

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BEN NICHOLSON

1894 Denham, Bucks. – London 1982

Still Life Malcontenta

Pencil on paper laid down on prepared board, in the artist's frame; 1962.

Signed and dated on back of board *NICHOLSON June 62*, and inscribed: *Malcontenta still life*.

348 x 476 mm (paper), 500 x 615 mm (board)

PROVENANCE: Marlborough Fine Art, London – Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen, Dortmund – Private collection, Berlin – ARTAX Kunsthandel, Düsseldorf – Private collection, Germany

LITERATURE: *I. Internationale der Zeichnung*, exhib. cat., Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt, 1964, p. 184 (ill.) – *Künstlerinnen und Künstler in der Overbeck Gesellschaft 1918-2018*, Overbeck-Gesellschaft, exhib. cat., Kunstverein Lübeck, 2018, p. 275

EXHIBITIONS: *I. Internationale der Zeichnung*, 12 September until 15 November 1964, Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt – *Künstlerinnen und Künstler in der Overbeck Gesellschaft 1918-2018*, 17 November 2018 until 13 January 2019, Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck

Still Life and landscape were the two main sources of Ben Nicholson's inspiration throughout his career. Among his earliest surviving works are not very convincing attempts to rival his father William's highly accomplished paintings of bowls, goblets and jugs. Ben Nicholson was himself a lifelong collector of jugs and mugs.

Our beautiful drawing is the depiction of a still life of a bottle and a jug on a table, on a room of the villa La Malcontenta [Fig.1]. Nicholson was invited to draw at La Malcontenta, which belonged at that time to the English architect Claud Phillimore. Nicholson found the servant's hallway [Fig.2] more compelling than the grand, frescoed rooms.

La Malcontenta, formally called Villa Foscari, located on the river Brenta near Venice, was built around 1560 by the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, for brothers Nicolò and Alvise Foscari, members of a patrician Venetian family. With the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797, the Foscari dynasty was bankrupt and lost ownership of the villa. They did not return to the house for almost two centuries. The Malcontenta had been vacated in the early 19th century, the surrounding stables and other buildings had fallen apart and were demolished by Austrian troops during the 1848 uprisings. In 1924, Albert "Bertie" Clinton Landsberg found La Malcontenta while on a Grand Tour trip along the Brenta, and purchased the villa together with his friends Paul Rodocanachi and Catherine, Baroness d'Erlanger. These three friends would dedicate years to the villa's restoration, entertaining the *beau monde* and intellectual avant-garde of their era until the advent of the Second World War would bring it all to a close. Landsberg passed the house to the English architect Claud Phillimore. In 1973, Phillimore returned La Malcontenta to the Foscari Family.¹

¹ <http://theartoftheroom.com/2015/08/la-malcontenta> (Posted August 19, 2015. Filed in *Italian Villas, Palladian-Style*), cited 15 September 2025

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At the time he made this drawing Nicholson was living on a hillside overlooking Lago Maggiore, a few miles south of Ascona, on the border of Switzerland and Italy. He had moved to the Ticino some years earlier and the escape from St Ives in Cornwall, with all its constraints and past history, released in him a flood of creativity, which continued steadily until his eventual return to England in 1971. With the assurance and authority of full maturity, he was to produce some of his finest works in both genres.



Fig.1: *Villa La Malcontenta*, Mira (Venice).
Photographer unknown.



Fig.2: *View of the ground floor at Villa La Malcontenta.*
Photograph from the archives of the Villa Malcontenta
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