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| Artist | Graham Sutherland (1903-1980) |
| Title | The Crucifixion |
| Date | 1946 |
| Medium | Oil on hardboard |
| Scale | H2.75m W2.62m |
| Scope | Divine – Post 1850 |
| Style | British 20th century – ‘Neo-Romantic’ |
| Patron | Sir Walter Hussey |
| Location | Northampton Church |
| Function | Part of a series |

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| Formal features | |
| Composition | The use of distortion is shown in terms of outstretched arms nailed to the cross, with hands open and facing upwards, slumped head, ribs and sunken, emaciated torso which emphasises the suffering of Christ. |
| Colour or texture | The strong orange rectangular shape at the base of the composition forms a dynamic contrast with the complementary blue of the background, symbolising hope through the heavens and skies. Touches of lilac are scumbled over the blue background in places and is dominant next to the right leg of Christ, emphasising the verticality of the figure. |
| Light & tone | The dark black shadows behind the white figure of Christ and parts of the cross, pushes the agonised figure forward. This, and the slight use of perspective seen at the top of the cross, gives the sense of limited space in the composition. |
| Form | Emaciated and skeletal, Sutherland reflects the cruelty of mankind. The figure is abstracted as he did not wish to idealise the figure. |
| Line or  brushwork | Strong directional lines are evident on both the orange rectangle and blue background. These also tend to flatten the space. The figure is devoid of life and outlined boldly in black – the geometry is harsh and unforgiving, reinforcing his suffering. |

Stylistic comment and artistic influence:

By the 20th century artists had their own control, especially with status. Sutherland had been strongly influenced by Grünewald’s Crucifixion for the Issenhiem Altarpiece (1512-1516) in which Christ is shown anguished and blistered. and its symmetry, touches of white, limited colour palette and the shape and form of Jesus.

Critical text quote: ‘The sordidness and the anguish implied by some of the scenes of devastation will cause one to invent forms which are the pictorial essence of sordidness and anguish’ – Sutherland

Influence from technological factors:

Photographs and eyewitness accounts were broadcasted, meaning that the whole world became aware at once.

Influence from political factors:

Spring 1945: Photographs and eyewitness accounts from the liberation of camps like Bergen-Belsen afforded the disbelieving world outside of Europe its first glimpse into the abyss of Nazi depravity.

Faced with this symbol of endless cruelty of human beings to each other, Sutherland’s Christ seems close to these victims which must have added hugely to the impact of this work at the time it was unveiled.

Influence from cultural/social factors:

Religion played a big part in people’s hope for survival, and life after death for those who were to die. The emaciated body of Jesus alludes to those starved of life in concentration camps.

Image:

