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ART IN REVIEW

John Walker **'Time and Tides'**

Knoedler & Company
19 East 70th Street, Manhattan
Through March 3

John Walker, the English-born painter whose expressive, unabashedly emotional work has been piling up plaudits in recent years, deals with two very disparate subjects in this robust show: a tidal pool on the coast of Maine and the toll of battle on his father, badly injured as a soldier in the British Army in World War I.

The paintings are the stronger for the figurative impulses that temper his thrust to abstraction. In "Muddy Cove, Incoming Tide," the wonderfully textured water, earth and clouds as well as the light have an abstract force to them, yet the whole is a readable landscape. And the pinched-in oval form of the tidal pool, vaguely resembling the body of a violin, is plainly visible as it is in all the Mainescapes.

In the larger "October Low Tide, Maine," the composition, divided into three parts, is less representational. Two large rectangular blocks infused with the russet colors of autumn represent water and exposed rocks; the third, a dark gray sky. The tidal pool, now almost as big as the body of water it occupies, is also more abstract, divided lengthwise into halves of gray and black-tinged mustard yellow. The scene has a quirky landscape-as-architecture look that sets it apart from the others.

If some of these paintings give a sense of the Maine coast that invites comparison with those by Winslow Homer and Marsden Hartley, the canvases that have to do with the artist's father are less impressive. Their imagery consists in large part of lines of antiwar verse written across their surfaces. The poems are by two British poets who also fought in World War I, Wilfred Owen and David Jones, and by a current writer, Rosanna Warren.

The most striking is the mammoth "Remembrance I, for Rosanna Warren," in which most of the canvas is occupied by black-and-white writing — in Mr. Walker's painterly cursive hand — over a grid of chain-link fence. The figure of the father, in uniform with a grisly sheep's skull for a head, stands against the wall of poetry, seemingly declaiming it. It is a chilling image but weakened by the dense, hard-to-read text meant to bolster it. GRACE GLUECK