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| Jennings, Humphrey (1907-1950) |
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| Remembered as one of England’s most dynamic documentary filmmakers, Humphrey Jennings was also at the centre of key cultural and artistic movements in the 1930s. In 1934 Jennings began work with the nascent documentary film movement, producing and directing films and designing sets. Surrealism made a significant and enduring impact on Jennings’ aesthetics. Attracted to surrealism’s interest in the unfamiliar and extraordinary dimensions of everyday life, Jennings pursued these ideas in his painting and poetry. The influence of surrealism permeates within his genre-bending prose poem series *Reports*, which were published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. With André Breton, Herbert Read, and others, he organised the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in June 1936.  Late 1936 and early 1937 marked the high point of Jennings’ engagement with surrealism. In December of 1936 he laid the groundwork for Mass Observation with Charles Madge, Stuart Legg, Kathleen Raine, and David Gascoyne. The organisation’s increasing sociological focus lead to his departure in 1937 shortly after the publication of Mass Observation’s *May the Twelfth*. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Jennings continued writing poetry, painting, and delivered BBC broadcasts about poetry. It was during the war years, however, that Jennings created his most lasting works. Wartime films such as *Listen to Britain* (1942), *Fires Were Started* (1943), and *A Diary for Timothy* (1945) showcase Jennings’ continued interest in the strangeness at the heart of everyday life — an aesthetic principle that guided his interest in surrealism and early Mass Observation. Jennings died from an accidental fall in Greece in 1950 while doing preparatory work for a film. |
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| Further reading:  (Beattie)  (Jackson)  (Jennings)  (Logan)  (Remy) |