



24 Sir Winston Spencer Churchill

1874 – 1965 British

Marrakech

oil on canvas, initialed and on verso inscribed 15,
circa 1935
24 x 20 in, 61 x 50.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Gifted by the Artist to his wife, Lady Clementine Ogilvy
Spencer-Churchill
Gifted by Lady Churchill to the Hudson's Bay Company, 1956

LITERATURE

David Coombs, *Churchill: His Paintings*, 1967, reproduced
page 130, catalogue #124
David Coombs and Minnie S. Churchill, *Sir Winston Churchill:
His Life and His Paintings*, 2004, reproduced page 169 as
figure 334 and listed page 251, catalogue #124
James W. Muller, "Two Churchills and the Hudson's Bay
Company," paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Political Science Association, Toronto, September 3,
2009, mentioned page 5

BATHED IN MOROCCAN sunlight beneath a canopy of slender palms, *Marrakech* captures a moment of quiet retreat—intimate, radiant and far from the global stage. The canvas glows with warm pink ochres, green palm fronds and an expansive azure sky, drawing the viewer into a scene both timeless and deeply personal. Widely celebrated as one of the most consequential figures of the twentieth century, Sir Winston Churchill is remembered first and foremost as a statesman, war leader and orator. Yet beyond the realm of politics, Churchill found deep solace and creative renewal in painting. *Marrakech* stands as a rare and intimate expression of that private world, where he laid down the burdens of leadership and picked up the brush in search of colour, peace and personal meaning.

In 1935, Churchill undertook a journey through North Africa, traveling from Cairo to Tunis and on to Marrakesh via Casablanca. The trip was undertaken during his years out of office and served primarily as a painting holiday. It was his first encounter with Morocco, inspired in part by the painter Sir John Lavery, who had praised the region's exceptional light. Upon arriving in Marrakesh, Churchill was instantly captivated by the city's colours, radiance and charm. He later wrote, "Here in these spacious palm groves rising from the desert, the traveller may rest assured that he will never find the world dull."¹



Churchill at his painting easel at Chartwell, as appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, January 7, 1946
Photo: Fremantle/Alamy Stock Photo, HGF9JF

That sense of wonder and renewal permeates *Marrakech*, painted during this formative visit. The canvas captures the ethereal beauty of the city's landscape. It represents a turning point in Churchill's artistic development—moving away from the muted tones of his earlier European scenes towards a richer, more saturated palette influenced by Morocco's warmth and light.

In visual terms, *Marrakech* reveals Churchill's confident yet unpretentious hand. The composition is anchored by warm, sun-drenched buildings, rendered in thick, assured brush-strokes that blend softly into the distant horizon. Three small figures appear



Churchill painting in Marrakesh, Morocco, February 1935
Photo: Fremantle/Alamy Stock Photo, HGF9DJ

in the foreground, offering a sense of scale and a quiet narrative that gently draws the viewer into the scene. Towering palm trees rise with graceful verticality, their shadows disrupting the horizontal rhythm of the architecture and lending the work a further sense of regional vitality. Beyond, a wide expanse of sky—clear yet understated—floods the background, creating an atmosphere of openness and calm. The handling of light is particularly striking: golden sunlight washes across the facades, casting elongated shadows and infusing the painting with a subtle interplay of movement and timeless stillness. Churchill's palette is rich yet restrained—ochres, siennas, dusty pinks and azure—evoking both the physical heat and psychological serenity of the Moroccan landscape.

Unlike his more tentative early works, here Churchill demonstrates not only a technical evolution but a deepening sensitivity to mood and environment. He paints with clarity and conviction, embracing contrast and compositional rhythm with an artist's eye and a statesman's poise. This artistic evolution aligns Churchill with the work of Henri Matisse, a painter he admired, who also found inspiration in Morocco's luminous aesthetic during his visits to Tangier in the early twentieth century. Though their approaches were stylistically distinct—Matisse's rooted

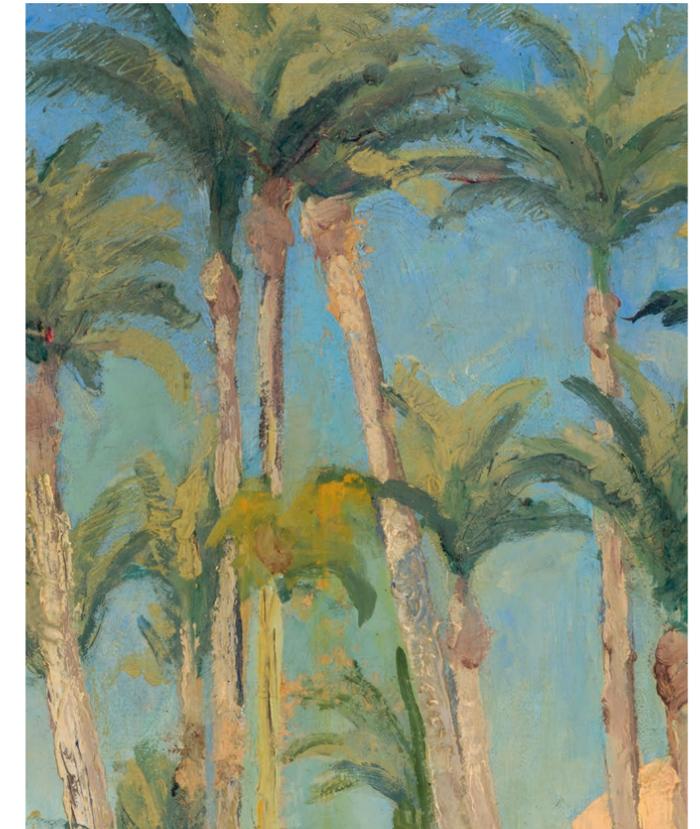
in Fauvism and abstraction, Churchill's grounded in representational realism—both artists were captivated by the region's saturated colours, intricate architecture and incandescent light.

Matisse's Moroccan sojourns significantly influenced the development of modernist painting, encouraging a move towards expressive colour and simplified form. While Churchill did not seek to innovate in the same way, his Moroccan works reflect an openness to bolder palettes and atmospheric composition—subtle echoes of the broader aesthetic shifts that defined early modern art. For Matisse, Morocco was a catalyst for emotional liberation; for Churchill, it was a sanctuary—a place of mental clarity and visual inspiration away from the burdens of political life.

Churchill's Marrakesh paintings are few in number and each holds exceptional significance, offering rare insight into a deeply personal facet of his life. In contrast to his earlier compositions, which often carry a sense of contemplative restraint, *Marrakech* radiates with sunlit intensity and emotional clarity, capturing not only the city's physical splendour but also the artist's profound sense of renewal. It is a painting not merely of a place, but of a moment of personal restoration, rendered in colour and light by a man temporarily freed from the weight of global affairs.



details



Among these Moroccan works, the most historically significant is undoubtedly *Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque*, painted in 1943 during the Casablanca Conference—a pivotal wartime summit with the US president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Uniquely, it was the only painting Churchill completed during the entirety of the Second World War, and he later gifted it to Roosevelt as a gesture of personal friendship and diplomatic symbolism. Like *Marrakech*, that canvas immortalizes the Moroccan landscape not just as visual inspiration, but as a psychological haven—a place where Churchill could simultaneously reflect, strategize, and reconnect with his creative self in the midst of global conflict.

The journey of *Marrakech* to the Hudson's Bay Company adds another compelling chapter to the story. In 1954, Churchill was appointed Grand Seigneur of the Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay, an honorary title awarded in recognition of his international stature.² As a gesture of appreciation, Sir Winston agreed to donate a painting earlier gifted to his wife, Lady Clementine Ogilvy Spencer-Churchill, despite his well-known reluctance to part with his canvases. Such donations were exceedingly rare, underscoring the esteem in which Churchill held the Company and the symbolic weight of this canvas.

Today, *Marrakech* is a powerful reminder of Churchill's multi-faceted legacy. It offers a rare window into the inner life of a man more often seen at podiums than palettes, capturing a period of joy, stillness and quiet artistic triumph. With its luminous palette, emotive depth and distinguished provenance, this remarkable canvas is not only a work of art but also a singular piece of twentieth-century history.

We thank Barry Phipps, art historian and Fellow of Churchill College, University of Cambridge, for contributing the above essay.

1. Winston S. Churchill, "Marrakesh: The Most Lovely Spot in the World," *Daily Mail*, January 18, 1936. Churchill's travel dispatch reflects on his impressions during his first visit to Morocco in 1935, part of a broader North African journey. The quote underscores his lasting fascination with Marrakesh's landscape and cultural vibrancy.

2. Churchill also had family ties to the HBC through his ancestor James Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, who had served as the Company's third governor.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000