ISAAC ROSENBERG
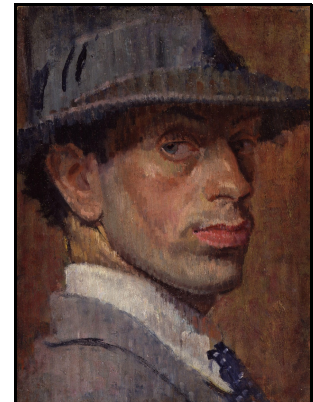## (25 November **1890**–1 April **1918**)

English poet Isaac Rosenberg's *Poems from the Trenches* is recognized as containing some of the most outstanding poetry written during the First World War. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell's landmark study of the literature of WWI, Fussell identifies Rosenberg's "Break of Day in the Trenches" as "the greatest poem of the war."

Isaac Rosenberg 1916

Isaac Rosenberg was born in Bristol, 2nd of 6 children and eldest son of his parents, Barnett (formerly Dovber) and Hacha Rosenberg, who were Orthodox Jews of Russian descent from Dvinsk (now in Latvia). In 1897, the family moved to 47 Cable Street in a poor district of the East End of London, one with a strong Jewish community. He attended St. Paul's School Whitechapel (around the corner in Wellclose Square), until his family moved to Stepney in 1900 so he could experience Jewish schooling. He attended the Baker Street school, leaving it at the age of 14 to apprentice at a firm of engravers in Fleet Street. Interested in both poetry and visual art, Rosenberg attended evening classes at the Birkbeck College art school. He completed his apprenticeship in 1911 and then scrambled to finance his attendance at the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art at University College, London, where he studied alongside many who went on to find notable success in their fields, among them Dora Carrington, David Bomberg, Paul Nash, Edward Wadsworth, and Christopher Nevinson. He became the protégé of Laurence Binyon and Edward Marsh, and, despite suffering from ill-heath, began to write poetry seriously, publishing a pamphlet of 10 poems, *Night and Day*, in 1912. He also exhibited paintings at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1914.

I. Rosenberg *Self Portrait*

Fearing that his chronic bronchitis would worsen, Rosenberg tried to cure himself by emigrating in 1914 to the warmer climate of South Africa, as his sister Mina lived in Cape Town. While others wrote about war as patriotic sacrifice, Rosenberg was critical of the war from its onset. However, needing employment to help support his mother, he returned to England in October 1915, where he published a second pamphlet of poems *Youth* before enlisting in the British Army. He was assigned to the 12th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, a bantam battalion for men under the usual minimum height of 5-foot-3-inches. After turning down an offer to become a lance corporal, Pvt. Rosenberg was later transferred to another bantam battalion, the 11th (Service) Battalion of The King's Own Royal

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Lancaster Regiment, which was sent in June 1916 to the Western Front in France. He continued to write poetry while serving in the trenches. He was killed at dawn on 1 April 1918 in Fampoux, northeast of Arras, having just finished night patrol; there is a dispute as to whether died at the hands of a sniper or in close combat. He was first buried in a mass grave, but in 1926, his remains were identified and reinterred at Bailleul Road East Cemetery, Plot 5, Saint-Laurent-Blangy, Pas de Calais, France. On 11 November 1985, Rosenberg was among 16 Great War poets commemorated on a slate stone unveiled in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner. His self-portraits hang in the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate Britain.