



Paul César Helleu

1859-1927

Alice with parasol on a yacht
Oil on canvas signed lower left
Dimensions : 81 x 65 cm
Dimensions : 31.89 x 25.59 inch

Literature : The authenticity has been confirmed by the Association des Amis de Paul Cesar Helleu. Listed under number HU2-8390

Exhibition : Cabourg, Musée du Temps Retrouvé, from March to November 2022 and from March to November 2023

Origin : Private collection, France



Dimensions with frame : 100,5 x 84,5 cm
Dimensions with frame : 39.37 x 33.07 inch

In 1898, Alice, the painter's second daughter, was the victim of a fatal accident in the Bois de Boulogne, struck down at just 18 months by two runaway horses. The painter is devastated by grief, and his sweet wife Alice falls into a terrible depression. To try and distract her, Paul Helleu, who had already been yachting during the summer of 1896, rented the yacht Barbara, the first of many and a source of comfort.

Passionate about the sea and yachting, now spending summers on the water between Deauville and Cowes, Helleu soon bought the Bird, then the Étoile in 1900, before acquiring Brunette in 1908. He devoted himself to yachting with his characteristic elegance, producing some very fine and often little-known Impressionist-style seascapes.

It was aboard the Étoile that the artist welcomed many of his friends. Whenever he had the chance, he painted

Alice, dressed in white, parasol in hand, leaning against the rail or sitting in a comfortable wicker armchair. She seems to be doing better, and the sweet moments with her children and friends on board provide her with precious support.

As is often the case in his scenes of daily life aboard the yacht, Helleu divides his canvas by a large oblique line separating the sea on one side from the boat's deck on the other. This slightly plunging view accentuates the dynamism of his composition. In what appears to be a rapid gesture, Helleu sometimes uses an extremely diluted material, even revealing the prepared canvas, and sometimes a thick, unctuous material, applied with broad brushstrokes creating vibrant impasto.

The spontaneity of this canvas brings to mind Goncourt's subtle formulation of the painter's work as "snapshots of a woman's grace".

Biography

Paul-César Helleu was born in Vannes in 1859. From an early age, he wanted to become an artist. In 1876, he was admitted to the Fine Arts School in Paris, where he studied under the supervision of the painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. He became an apprentice of Théodore Deck, a ceramist who specialized in women's portraits.

In 1886, he met the Comte de Montesquiou who bought several engravings from him and introduced him to the Parisian aristocracy. He became one of the most popular portraitists of the Parisian and Londoner society (he made portraits of the Countess Greffulhe, the Duchess of Malborough, Queen Alexandra, the Princess of Greece, etc.). His drypoint prints representing female figures were very well-known in the United States.

His friend Marcel Proust took him as an inspiration for the character of the painter, Elstir, in "In Search of Lost Time". He was also very close to important artists such as James Tissot, Whistler, Claude Monet, John Singer Sargent, Rodin and Alfred Stevens, who all recognized his great talent and encouraged him to keep engraving.

Paul-César Helleu also painted bright and refined landscapes, influenced by his impressionist friends ("Autumn at Versailles", around 1897, Musée d'Orsay). In 1893, he became a member of the National School of Fine Arts. He was also an honorary member of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers of London and received the Legion of honor in 1904.

Helleu was one of the artists who best synthesized modern elegance in his paintings, etchings and drypoint prints. He represented with talent the feminine grace, giving us an important reflection of the society described by Marcel Proust in his books. His high-society figures, his feminine silhouettes, his sports scenes of the elegant world were among the most remarkable images of the "Belle Epoque". The simple and refined nature of his works was often compared by contemporary critics to that of the works of Lancret and Watteau.

Of all the women he painted, his wife Alice Guérin was the most represented. A unique intimacy and emotion can be seen in these family portraits.

Museums

Boston Museum of Fine Art
Musée Pouchkine, Moscou
Brooklyn Museum, New York
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne

Bibliography

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