



Ernest-Pierre Guérin

1887-1952

Cottage, Brittany

Watercolor on paper, titled and signed lower right

Dimensions : 26,5 x 34,5 cm

Dimensions : 10.24 x 13.39 inch



Dimensions with frame : 32 x 40 cm
Dimensions with frame : 12.60 x 15.75 inch

Biography

Ernest Guérin's work occupies a singular place in the artistic landscape of Brittany. Seashores, watery expanses, and the Breton countryside succeed each other at the core of the painter's production, which strives to convey the authenticity of this harsh and wild region. Still preserved from the modernity driving this end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Brittany seduces by its romanticism, and attracts a large number of artists in search of realism.

Born in Rennes in 1887, Ernest Guérin chose to enter the École des Beaux-Arts of Rennes. The artist was introduced to the practice of painting by Jules Ronsin, portrait painter and director of the Rennes Regional School of Fine Arts. In this privileged setting, Guérin also trained with Jean Lafon, a landscape painter specializing in marine figures. Like his master, he chose his native region as his favourite subject. At the end of his apprenticeship, the artist chooses to leave his hometown for the capital. He joined the studio of a Parisian decorator and architect.

Throughout his training, Ernest Guérin was particularly attracted to the work of the Flemish primitives, as well as ancient techniques. Indeed, the artist, in addition to his practice of oil painting, gouache and watercolour, chose to study medieval illumination, which he implemented in his work.

The art of the Middle Ages, which had fallen into disuse at the time, was brought up to date by the painter. This influence can be seen in his production of particularly delicate illuminations: pages from missals-the liturgical book of the Catholic rite and figures of saints decorated with Gothic frames are at the epicentre of his work. This influence can also be seen in the choice of his subjects: illustrations of the history of the court of Brittany, landscapes of legends of yesteryear, knights and saints follow one another in his work. From 1913 to 1925, he was invited to produce the illustrations for the Book of Hours of the Count of Calan, a historian specialised in Brittany.

From 1921 onwards, Ernest Guérin took over the triptych format, which he restored in the manner of medieval altarpieces. These tripartite works, imbued with a form of nostalgia, are composed of scenes of forgiveness and pilgrimages. On the other hand, in spite of this traditional medium, his brushstrokes remain particularly marked by a form of modernity, inspired by Japonism, which can be found more specifically in his landscape figurations.

Progressively his compositions became broader, the horizons of his canvases occupying almost all of his creations. The simplification of his backgrounds and this way of defining his figures is reminiscent of Hokusai's work. Indeed, small figures appear, walking through landscapes lined with paths - where, on either side of the compositions, oversized dwellings and a very imposing nature can be found.

A painter particularly marked by his native region, Guérin chose to multiply his representations of the Brittany province. He thus translates a multitude of scenes of rural life and testifies to the traditions of village life and traditional festivals that animate this authentic Brittany. The artist also chooses to depict poverty and misery, still very present in this French region. Moreover, his work shows the vast panoramas of the Finistère moorland, the rolling waves, the restless skies and the chapels of the Bigouden country. These subjects, borrowed from a form of romanticism, are supported by his frequentations. Indeed, Ernest Guérin frequented Anatole Le Bratz, a French literature professor, writer and folklorist, who wrote unpublished poetry. The latter occupies a very important place in the regionalist movement in Brittany. Ernest Guérin, encouraged by his friend, developed a very nostalgic vision of this singular region.

The artist quickly gained international recognition. Obtaining a number of important commissions, both in France

and abroad, Guérin received commissions from the wealthiest social classes, as well as from the English crown. Only 26 years old, he was also chosen to exhibit at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1913. His fame also enabled him to create large decorations for the Hôtel Moderne in Rennes. As a result, he exhibited his work everywhere in France, but his love for his native region pushed him to leave the capital. Abandoning the effervescence of Paris, he opted for a peaceful life in the village of Dinard at first, then later settled in Quiberon. At this occasion, he opened a gallery in these two cities to show his work. He finally passed away in 1952 in the latter town of Quiberon.

His work, which was particularly appreciated, was presented in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes, as well as in the Musée Départemental Breton in Quimper.

Museums

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes

Musée départemental Breton de Quimper

Bibliography

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