



Virginie Demont-Breton

1859-1935

Young woman with geranium

Charcoal on paper signed, situated and dated 'Courrières 6 février 1877' lower left

Dimensions : 64,5 x 49,5 cm

Dimensions : 25.20 x 19.29 inch



Dimensions with frame : 90 x 65 cm
Dimensions with frame : 35.43 x 25.59 inch

Virginie Breton was only 17 when she made this drawing on February 6th 1877 in Courrières. We can see her great sense of technique, her sure and precise line that allows her to already explore naturalism.

Seated on a bench, a young girl with dreamer's eyes holds in her hands a young geranium plant, symbol of consolation and affection. Like many women in the artist's world, we can see a kind of melancholy on the face of the model. She wears her hair braided around her head and seems to restrain herself from moving in order to focus on her thoughts.

The strength of youth and a soft determination are both visible on the resolute and graceful face of the girl. In a pot near her feet, there is another geranium, but an adult plant, strong and robust. It contrasts with the young plant in the girl's hands that can be seen like the source of a new life. This moving time is also a reality for the

very young fiancé Virginie Breton, who is soon going to discover the life of a woman and drop the little girl's one.

Biography

Born in Courrières in the department of Pas-de-Calais on the 26 July 1859, Virginie Demont-Breton is the daughter of painter Jules Breton and Elodie de Vigne (daughter of Félix de Vigne a Belgina painter from Ghent). Virgine is also the niece of Emile Breton, known landscape painter. She grew up inside this artistic area and showed talent for drawing very young. She received near her father an artistic teaching half academic and half naturalist that stimulated her sense of observation.

At the early age of 17, she get engaged with Adrien Demont (1851-1928), a landscape painter from the city of Douai who was a pupil of Camille Corot and Emile Breton. She exhibited for the first time at the 1879 Paris's Salon and gained, one year after, an honorable mention for her painting titled "April flowers". This reward marked the beginning of her career and the recognition of her work, that will be awarded with many official prizes. In 1883, she gained a Gold Medal during the Universal Exhibition in Amsterdam with "The Family", a monumental painting, destroyed in Douai during WWII. On the same year, she entered the Union of Women Painters of which she will be president from 1896 to 1901. In 1894, she has been nominated Knight of the Legion of Honor, a reward that only one woman painter gained before her : Rosa Bonheur.

From 1880, Virginie Demont-Breton found her inspiration in the Britain region, near Wissant where she used to settle with her husband. In this village, she immediately liked the hard life of fishermen and also their families at earth. She identified herself to local life and get her inspiration inside delights and pains given by the waves lightened by the opaline light of the North. Her canvases are animated by sailors' women and children that she painted with a great naturalism, sometimes tinged with melancholy.

Near her husband, she used to receive many friends and painters sensitive to the landscapes of the Côte d'Opale. "The Wissant's school" gathered a group of artists like Georges Maroniez, Valentine Pèpe, Félix Planquette, Marie and Henri Duhem, or even Francis Tattegrain and Paule Crampel. In love with the changing lights and the specific atmosphere of this region, many artists used to come at this time, putting their easels outside, in the nature, or in the studio of the house named Typhonium, built by the couple Demont in Wissant in 1890. This unique Egyptian style villa was designed by Virginie's uncle, architect Edmond de Vigne, and allowed the couple to settle definitively in Wissant from 1892.

The influence of "Wissant's school" stayed alive until 1914 and allowed Virginie Demont-Breton to make the status of women artists evolved. When she became president of the Union of Women Painters in 1896, she desired to see women fulfill themselves as well as wife, as mother and as artist too. Thanks to her action, she managed to convince Jules Ferry to open the Fine Arts School to women and allow them to participate at the Great Prize of Rome.

Virginie Demont-Breton's often monumental work follows in the footsteps of realist painters, particularly the naturalist movement of the late 19th century.

Museums

Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Arras

Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer

Bibliography

Bénézit, Dictionnaire peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs, Paris

G.SCHURR, Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres du 19e siècle

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Demont-Breton, V, Les maisons que j'ai connues, Ed.Aubier Montaigne 1926.