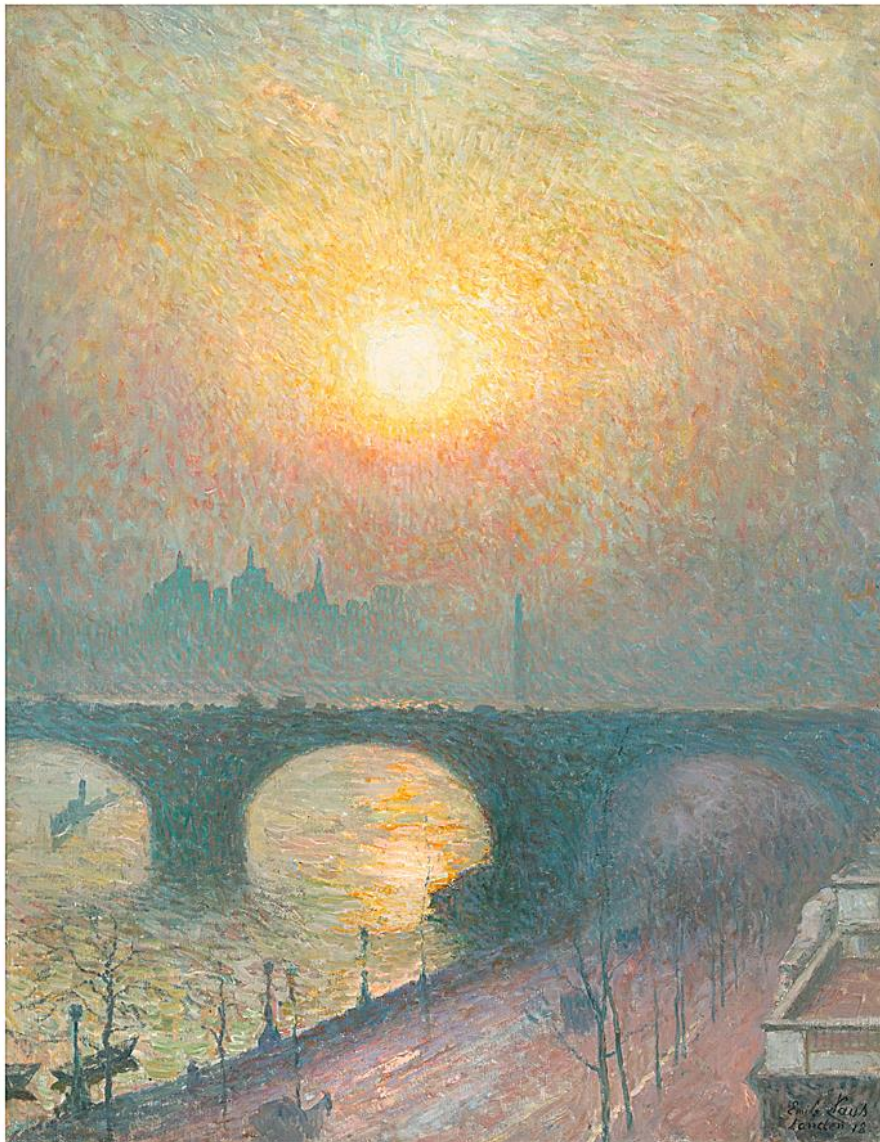


# GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS



## E M I L E C L A U S 1 8 9 2 4

Sunset over the Thames, Waterloo Bridge

Circa: 1918

1918

Oil on canvas

92 x 72 cm (36 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 28 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches)

Signed and dated lower right: Emile Claus / Londen 18

The painting's subject and mood are as arresting as its provenance is compelling. The view from the Embankment towards Waterloo Bridge and the Houses of Parliament is not only a tour de force of impressionist painting but a fascinating document of London's riverscape in 1918. The orb of the late afternoon winter sun pierces the misty sky,

illuminating it with its hazy orange aura and backlighting the Westminster skyline and bridges, casting them in deep blue shadow. In pride of place is the old nine-arch granite bridge designed by John Rennie and opened in 1817, since replaced by the current bridge completed in 1945. On the left of the composition stands the shot factory with its landmark tower, now occupied by the National Theatre.

Like Claude Monet who sought exile in London during the Franco-Prussian War, Claus, together with several of his Belgian artist compatriots, moved to England at the outbreak of the First World War. Settling first in Rhubina in Wales, he returned to London in 1915 and painted Kew, Upton Grey, and Hampstead. But it wasn't until 1916 that he found a subject he felt truly worthy of painting: the Thames. He took a studio on the fourth floor of Mowbray House on the corner of the former Norfolk Street and the Embankment at Temple, and from here painted a series of views which he titled *Réverbérations sur la Tamise*.

In his article, 'The Thames from my Tower Windows', published by *The Studio* in May 1917, Claus described his view as follows: 'on my left is Blackfriars Bridge; to the right, I see Waterloo Bridge and the silhouette of Westminster. These are the views which, day after day these past months, have provided me with varying and ravishing impressions of the River.' His acknowledged inspirations were the works of Turner, but they clearly echo the work of his contemporary Claude Monet, who painted similar views from his room at the nearby Savoy Hotel (fig. 1). While the latter's Thames views were almost abstract in feel, Claus never completely abandoned verisimilitude, with buildings, boats, and figures still clearly recognisable. Close inspection of the present work even reveals the rigorous line drawing underpinning the composition.

His exploring days over, de Gerlache immersed himself in artistic pursuits, in particular in promoting Belgian art in the Nordic capitals, including in Christiania (modern-day Oslo). Johan de Smet believes it is likely that de Gerlache received the present work from Claus as a gift, in recognition of the sale of one of his works at an exhibition that de Gerlache organised, and which de Gerlache mentions in a letter to Claus, dated 6 August 1919: 'My wife and I are more enchanted by the day by your admirable effet de brume (impression of mist) on the Thames. And I would like to seize this occasion to thank you again from all my heart.' (translated from the French, Archives d'art contemporain. MRBAB, Bruxelles).

This view of Waterloo Bridge is very characteristic of Emile Claus's London views, when he took refuge in the city during World War I. During this time he painted many views of the Thames and the Embankment at different times of the day. Like Monet, whom he had met in Paris in the late 1880s, Claus abandoned academic naturalism in favour of plein air painting and his work became preoccupied with the rendering of atmosphere and light. In the present work Claus captures the effects of the sun rise through the famous London smog, the 'pea souper', from his position above Victoria Embankment. This painting may be compared to Waterloo Bridge in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.

#### Exhibitions

- 1997, *Retrospectief Emile Claus*, Ostend, PMMK, 14.06-05.10.1997, no. 151.

- 2013, *Emile Claus and Belgian Impressionism*, Japan, Himeji City Museum of Art, Tokyo

### Literature

- Claus, E., "The Thames from my Tower Windows," in: *The Studio. An illustrated magazine of fine and applied art*, vol 70 (London: The Studio, 1917), p. 175 (ill.).
- De Smet, F., *Gand Artistique*, no. 4, 1923, p. 85-99.
- Sauton, A., *Un Prince du Luminisme Emile Claus* (Bruxelles: J. Lebègue & Cie, 1946), p. 54.
- Boyens, P., *Sint-Martens-Latem. Kunstenaarsdorp in Vlaanderen* (Tielt/ Sint-Martens-Latem: Lannoo/ Art Book Company, 1992), p. 540 (ill.).
- De Smet, J., *Retrospectief Emile Claus* (Gent: SD&Z, 1997), p. 221, no. 151 (ill.).
- De Smet, J., A. Tomita, A. Yuzuhana e.a., *Emile Claus and Belgian Impressionism* (Japan: Himeji City Museum of Art, Tokyo Station Gallery, Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art & Hekinan City Tatsukichi Fujii Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013), p. 72-73, no. 26 (ill.).
- Pauwels, P.J.H., *Als een fonkelenden spiegel* (Sint-Martens-Latem: Galerie Oscar De Vos, 2019), p. 164 (ill.).

### Artist description:

With the help of Peter Benoit, Emile Claus was able to study at the Antwerp Academy for the Fine Arts from 1869 to 1874. Claus came from a modest milieu with only limited appreciation for his artistic ambitions. Yet in a short period of time the young man would win a place in Antwerp's art life. In 1874, barely finished with his studies, he submitted work for the triennial exhibition in Ghent; his entry was immediately accepted. While during the initial years he was chiefly active as portrait painter, he gradually built up a name as landscape painter. Especially after his orientalist journey to North Africa and Spain, and a sojourn in Domburg, he spoke the language of nature. In the meantime, he was extremely active in the Antwerp art world, together with his academy friends Frans Hens and Théodore Verstraete. At the exhibitions of the local Cercle Artistique et Littéraire they reacted against the conservative Antwerp art scene. The artist gradually made a name for himself at the major exhibitions in Belgium and abroad, from Brussels to Paris; around 1889, he was well known in France, Great Britain and Germany.

Until his marriage in 1886, Claus kept a pied-à-terre in Antwerp. He demonstrated his creativity, however, especially in and around Astene, in the immediate surroundings of the country house he occupied from 1881. From this country house, which was later renamed Villa Zonneschijn, he had a panoramic view of the Leie and the forests around the castle of Ooidonk. The monumental paintings that he displayed at the Belgian and Paris exhibitions were created in Villa Zonneschijn. He enjoyed great success with these paintings, yet as artist he did not yet feel mature. He lived in Paris in the winters from 1889 to 1891, where he confronted modern painting head on. Plus, the leading novelist and art critic Camille Lemonnier introduced him to the Paris art milieu, and he made contact with artists residing in Paris such as Henri Duhem, Henri Le Sidaner, Frits Thaulow, Anders Zorn, et al. To his fellow local and friend Albijn Van den Abeele, he wrote from Paris: "Paris is certainly seductive and provides the painter with magnificent scenes: its teeming swarms of people on the streets and boulevards in the rain or in the sunshine, the Seine with its wide flow continuously transected by whistling steamboats, whose black, rusty vapour envelops the numerous bridges in a fog, the countless gigantic buildings. In short, all the churning life in this great world city is a treasure for him who makes of all of this his beloved creations."

From the moment that Claus opted for modernistic impressionism, he was taken note of by progressive circles in Belgium. From 1894, he was a fully-fledged member of the artists' association La Libre Esthétique, which continued the tradition of Les XX in the Brussels Musée Moderne. He was immediately no longer associated with the academicism of

Antwerp, to which he was still considered a part in 1889.

Claus' unexpected choice for impressionism disturbed his Belgian clientele greatly. He nevertheless persevered, and his impressionism quite quickly met with success; in 1892, the Ghent Museum for the Fine Arts purchased the painting *De Ijsvogels*, one of the earliest mature impressionistic works of Claus. The Belgian public would reluctantly follow. Around 1900, Claus was the undisputed leader of Belgian impressionism, crowned with a gold medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle. In Paris, he also had access to the progressive milieus; from 1895, the prominent Galerie Georges Petit was Claus' representative in Paris. Claus had earlier taken up his place in the progressive Champs de Mars circle, the Paris exhibitions that had set themselves up against the official Paris exhibition.

In 1904, Claus was also co-founder of the artists' association *Vie et Lumière* that united the Belgian impressionists. Claus' domestic and foreign successes followed one another, and on the eve of the First World War, he was a celebrated artist in Europe.

At the beginning of the war, he fled to Great Britain. After a short stay in Wales, he returned to London where he would stay until the liberation. Claus also won approval in London, among others at the notable exhibition in the Goupil Gallery in 1917.