

# GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS



## V A L E R I U S   D E   S A E D E L E E R

Country road through a winter landscape

Circa: circa 1930

circa 1930

oil on canvas

44 x 81 cm (17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 31<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches)

signed lower right: Valerius de Saedeleer

Valerius De Saedeleer was one of the artists who, in the period from 1898 to 1914, were the first to settle in the rural village of Sint-Martens-Latem in the surroundings of the river Leie; Together with this particular group of artists, also referred to as the First Group of Sint-Martens-Latem (Albijn Van den Abeele, George Minne, Gustave Van de Woestyne and Albert Servaes), De Saedeleer reacted artistically to the dominating impressionism and plain-airism within Belgian painting of around 1900. Influenced by the revaluation of the painters of the Flemish Primitive School it was his ambition to realise more intimate, idealizing and spiritualizing sort of painting of synthesis and pure forms.

De Saedeleer's choice to move to Sint-Martens-Latem in 1898 also signified a break with his past of experiment, licentiousness and poverty. Next to his career as a painter he tried his luck in dommed failures like a grocery shop and a poultry farm. Once settled in the Leie-area he quieted down, both as painter and as human being, or, as he once stated about the village: "Latem, where the storms of my youth died down".

Between 1900 and 1903 De Saedeleer transformed his artistic vision and technical design drastically. Paul Haesaerts supported in 1964 the underlying reasons for this transformation: "The weariness of an eventful existence, the aversion he felt for the life of the bohemian he led, always misunderstood and being in a wax, the literature of the smooth and calming Guido Gezelle, the dreamy work of George Minne, the humble labour of Albijn Van den Abeele, the hidden and accurate work of Karel Van de Woestyne, the contact he had with mystical writers like Ruusbroec de Wonderbare and sister Hadewych, the acquaintance with the canvases by Ménard in Paris and the visit to the exhibition of the Flemish Primitives in Bruges, the admiration of the work of

Pieter Brueghel the Elder, the continuing association with the simple farmers and finally the untouched and marvellousmy calming nature of Latem" (P. Haesaerts, *Sint-Martens-Latem. Gezegend oord van de Vlaamse kunst* (Antwerpen: Arcade, 1982).

The above transformation marked the beginning of the famous river and (winter)landscape panoramas on large canvases, almost instantly followed by national and international recognition, resulting in exhibitions and mainly positive press reviews.

His work was admired above all for the qualities of its contents, regarding the characterizations one can frequently find in contemporary descriptions, in which one speaks in terms of solemn, conscientious, dreamy, composure, oppression, atmosphere, etc. Already in 1906 Karel Van de Woestijne described the works of De Saedeleer as following: "...loyalty to his own feelings, honesty to his own observation by means of the deeper laying eye of his heart (...), modesty therefor, me-art (...); noble and very truesubjectivism, giving nature a different meaning than we know."

For De Saedeleer himself, composition and the construction of the image were the central themes within his art. He worked slowly and with scrupulous care on his canvases, as becomes clear in an interview he gave just before he died: "Painting was always a great strain to me. I had to have a clear image of the composition first before capturing it in detailed drawings, reworking and changing thm over and over again untill they satisfied my wishes completely. Only by then I thought of colour". After finding a suitable subject in nature he frequented the spot several times to make sketches: "On the spot I executed seperate studies, colour-mosaics really, usually not related to the subject at all. These documents served to help me with the final production of the painting, to which I could spend months. Some of my larger canvases took two years of labour".

The ultimate goal of the above procedure was the rendering of what the artist called 'the character': "Once you are stuck by a motif, it has to be very clear to you why. What is important is to see, being all ayes, to analyse the tension of that glorious moment and to hold on to it. This understanding what you observe can take place in several ways. The character! Capturing it should be always the main purpose..."

The technical perfection De Saedeleer pursued, his search for a balanced composition, his knowledge of the overwhelming nature of the surroundings of the Leie and the stylistic influences of Pieter Brueghel the Elder all come together in the painting "A road through a winter landscape".

### Literature

- Pauwels, P.J.H., *Als een fonkelenden spiegel* (Sint-Martens-Martens: Galerie Oscar De Vos, 2019), 201 (ill.).

### Artist description:

As son of a soap-boiler, De Saedeleer was born in the folk district De Kat in Aalst. His father tried with little success to engage him in the family business. Without consulting anyone, he registered at the Ghent Academy for the Fine Arts, where he met George Minne and Théo van Rysselberghe. Ultimately-barely twenty years old-he would escape the parental home and move to Brussels, where he frequented the atelier of Franz Courtens. De Saedeleer would work more than fifteen year under the supervision of Courtens.

Of major importance was his marriage in 1889 to his childhood girlfriend from Aalst, Clementine Limpens. After wandering for some time together, 'Clemmeke' and 'Valleke' would settle in Sint-Martens-Latem. It was probably the far-sighted Albijn Van den Abeele who brought them to the village in 1893. However, turbulent Ghent beckoned, and together with Minne he steeped himself in socialism and anarchism. They returned to the village in 1898; Van den Abeele had found accommodations for them at the bend in the Leie in the centre of the village. The drifter stayed in the village for almost ten

years. De Saedeleer in turn probably expedited Minne's Latem sojourn. At that moment, he was barely able to make a living as painter. De Saedeleer unsuccessfully tried to survive as chicken farmer.

Important was the psychological catharsis that De Saedeleer underwent in the village. Mentors such as George Minne and Karel van de Woestijne certainly played a role in this. On the other hand, via his Latem friends he also discovered medieval art. The 1902 exhibition of Flemish Primitives was certainly the particular impetus for an artistic turnabout. 'Valleke' came to repentance in Latem. Perhaps thanks to Minne, he gradually received the opportunity to display his work in the international avant-garde circuit; the Berlin, Munich and Viennese Secession presented his work.

The purifying influence of Latem notwithstanding, in 1908 his drifter's blood again brought De Saedeleer to other places. The hilly country around Tiegem beckoned to him. He had his house, 'Ten Berge', built on the crest of a hill. He encountered his friends, the writers Stijn Streuvels and Hugo Verriest, in the immediate vicinity.

De Saedeleer and his family spent the war years in Welsh Rhyd-y-felin. His wartime work was a modest success in Great Britain. In February 1916, he was even given the chance to organise an individual exhibition in Aberystwyth. Via Gustave Van de Woestyne, he came into contact with the Dutch couple De Graaff-Bachiene. The collectors-who owned works by Constant Permeke, Van de Woestyne and Minne-would also purchase paintings by De Saedeleer. Just before his return to Belgium, the Burlington Gallery organised an exhibition of his work in 1921.

Back in Belgium, De Saedeleer settled in Etikhove, near Oudenaarde. His adult daughters put their British education to use and established an atelier for hand woven carpet in Oudenaarde.

In the 1930s, De Saedeleer disappeared from the artistic scene. Withdrawn in the Flemish Ardennes, he would emerge again one more time. In 1940, the Dietrich Gallery in Brussels organised a retrospective of his work.

Barely a year later, on 16 September 1941, De Saedeleer died in Leupegem. Thus, two leading figures of the first Sint-Martens-Latem group disappeared in the same year; George Minne died in February at the Witte huis in Sint-Martens-Latem.