

# GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS



## E M I L E C L A U S 1892 4

Hydrangeas on the Lys

Circa: 1898

1898

Oil on canvas

46.5 x 55 cm (18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 21<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches)

Framed: 71.8 x 63

Signed lower left: Em. Claus

Inscription on reverse of the canvas (date and monogram): Oktober / IH / E.C.

Villa Zonneschijn and the surrounding garden were given an important place in the work of Emile Claus from around 1895 onwards. In his time, the garden on the street side consisted of an area of wild grasses that were 'cultivated' as such, as contemporary photographs and postcards show. Around the house were flower bushes with anemones, azaleas, dahlias, hydrangeas, poppies, nightshades, as well as wild flowers, including yarrow and star flowers. Camille Lemonnier, who spent an annual holiday in Astene, loved waking up in Villa Zonneschijn because the house:

*'[...] semble un bouquet qui, dans l'heure fraîche, palpite et se volatilise au vent léger des rideaux, devant les grands horizons vermeils. Et les arbres imperceptiblement agitent leurs feuilles comme les mains d'une foule [...].'*

Claus verwerkte deze bloemenweelde herhaaldelijk in schilderijen. In oktober 1898 schilderde hij de hortensia's aan de achterzijde van het huis, waarschijnlijk vanop een roeiboot of een pont op de Leie. In het schilderij herinneren de focus op de bloemen, de abstracte massa en het spel van uitdijende reflectie onwillekeurig aan het werk van Claude Monet. Meer nog dan de Fransman herleidde Claus de bloemenpracht tot een kleurmassa, die in de reflectie in het water een eigen leven gaat leiden. Het Franse tijdschrift *Art et Décoration* had in 1902 een dergelijke scène voor ogen:

*'un Paradou (...), où les fleurs se pressent d'éclater, des coulées de soleil dans les jardins encombrés d'arbres et d'arbustes. C'est sain, clair, vigoureux, fanfarant [...].'*

### Exhibitions

- 2013, *Emile Claus and Belgian Impressionism*, Himeji City Museum of Art, Tokyo Station Gallery, Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art & Hekinan City Tatsukichi Fujii Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan, 2013, no. 15.

### Literature

- "Catalogue des oeuvres d'Emile Claus ayant fait partie du Musée d'Astene, Galerie de l'Art Belge, Bruxelles 1942, et Vyncke-Van Eyck, Gand, 1943," in: A. Sauton, *Un Prince du Luminisme Em. Claus* (Bruxelles: Lebègue, 1946), p. 57.
- Haesaerts, P., *Sint-Martens-Latem. Gezegend oord van de Vlaamse Kunst* (Brussel: Arcade, 1966), p. 54-58.
- Boyens, P., *Sint-Martens-Latem. Kunstenaarsdorp in Vlaanderen* (Tielt/ Sint-Martens-Latem: Lannoo/ Art Book Company, 1992), p. 19-21, 197-201.
- De Smet, J., *Retrospectief Emile Claus* (Oostende: PMMK, 1997), p. 51-52.
- De Smet, J., *Sint-Martens-Latem en de kunst aan de Leie* (Tielt/ Sint-Martens-Latem: Lannoo/ Art Book Company, 2000), p. 61-62.
- De Smet, *Emile Claus en het landleven* (Brussel: Mercatorfonds, 2009), p. 45.
- De Smet, J., A. Tomita, A. Yuzuhana e.a., *Emile Claus and Belgian Impressionism*, exh. cat. (Japan: The Kobe Shimbun, 2013), p. 60, nr. 15 (ill.).
- Ekonomidès, C., *Emile Claus (1849-1924)* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'image, 2013), 100-101 (ill.).
- Pauwels, P.J.H., *Als een fonkelende spiegel* (Sint-Martens-Latem: Galerie Oscar De Vos, 2019), p. 88 (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.