

GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS



J E N N Y M O N T I G N Y

The school yard in Deurle in spring

Circa: Circa 1920

c. 1920

Oil on canvas

110 x 150 cm

Framed: 127,5 x 167,5 cm

Signed lower right: J. Montigny

This monumental painting, *The school yard in Deurle in spring*, presents Jenny Montigny at her best, both in subject, composition and coloring. With an eye sympathetic for childhood affection, she tells a personal story in which human interaction is central. Though using a restful and limited palette, she catches the young in a generous light, gathering in fond, peaceful groups. The children's figures follow and recede along a curving ledge, while repetition of orange and pink tinted brown tones shape it to a more compact and rhythmic form. The brighter green punctuates the work, while the halos of light surrounding most figures suggest the particular, brief brightness of the afternoon sun.

This sun-drenched canvas shows the artist at her most inspired. Yet Montigny, who became an active member of the group *Vie et Lumière*, was no unimaginative worshipper and imitator. Her mentor Emile Claus pointed the way, but it were her innate talent and personal response that created such a pleasing image.

Jenny Montigny was a pupil and ever devoted follower of Emile Claus; Claus the luminist

rather than the academic painter. Montigny painted portraits, landscapes and still-lives, but above all, she painted children. She found their youthful enthusiasm and absorption irresistible, and aesthetically, realised the great potential of the shapes and groups they formed, whether at play or rest. In the words of Paul Colin: '*... Elle s'attache volontiers à des sujets mouvementés, qui lui permettent de composer, avec un sens réel de l'arabesque, des rondes et des jeux d'enfants*' (La Peintre Belge Depuis 1830, 1930, pp. 349-350). She painted in softer tones than her master, using mellow shades of blue and green and more grey and brown in her palette. (Sarah Polden)

Her permanent home had become Deurle, on the banks of the Lys. This verdant region and its light, as diffused through the sky and reflected from the river, had appealed more than any other to the much-travelled Claus. Montigny travelled as Claus suggested; their close association is further indicated by their complementary portraits, his of her (1902) in the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and the master by his pupil in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Ghent.

Exhibitions

- Ghent, Salles de Fêtes, *Salon de 1922: 42e Exposition Gand. Triennial du Cercle Artistique & Littéraire*, 25.06-25.08.1922.

Literature

- Deprez, T. e.a., *Impressionism in Flanders* (Gent: 2015), p. 66-67 (ill.).
- De Smet, J., *Sint-Martens-Latem en de kunst van 1870-1970* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2000).
- Lemal-Mengeot, C. e.a., *Jenny Montigny 1875-1937. Lumières impressionistes* tent.cat. (Charleroi: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1997).
- Pauwels, P.J.H., *Comme un miroir étincelant* (Sint-Martens-Latem: Galerie Oscar De Vos, 2019), p. 137 (ill.).
- Van der Stighelen, K. & M. Westen, *Elck zijn waerom. Vrouwelijke kunstenaars in België en Nederland 1500-1950*, tent.cat. (Antwerpen: KMSKA, 1999), pp. 305-307.
- Van Doorne, V., *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Anna De Weert, Jenny Montigny, Yvonne Serruys*, tent.cat. (Deinze: MuDeL, 1988).
- Van Langenhove, J.P., *Huldetentoonstelling Jenny Montigny 1875-1937*, tent.cat. (Deurle: Museum Leon De Smet, 1987).

Artist description:

For the first seventeen years of her life, Jenny Montigny was subject to the typical middle-class upbringing of a moneyed milieu. She had been fascinated since childhood by art and-against the will of her father-did everything possible to achieve this goal. She discovered her great role model at the end of 1892/beginning of 1893 in the Ghent Museum for the Fine Arts: full of admiration, she stood before the painting "De IJsvogels" by Emile Claus that had just been purchased by the City. From 1895, she regularly visited Villa Zonneschijn, Claus' atelier in Astene, to follow free lessons there. In 1904, she exchanged bourgeois Ghent for an independent, uncertain existence in Villa Rustoord in Deurle.

She spent the years of the First World War in London. She was active in among others the Women's International Art Club. The war years, however, were a financial catastrophe; back in Deurle she was forced to sell her house. A smaller house on Pontstraat in Deurle followed; she had to house her atelier on Dorpsstraat. Sint-Jozef school was nearby. Here she was able to study her favourite subject undisturbed: the romping children of Deurle. However, the financial problems continued. Claus helped

her on more than one occasion; after his death, she received support from her sister. In any case, this material uncertainty indicates that there were few buyers available for her work during the interwar period. Montigny disappeared a bit from the Ghent scene in the years between the two world wars; she only sporadically took part in the exhibitions of the local Cercle Artistique et Littéraire. Repeated individual exhibitions indicate that Brussels appealed to her more. Montigny's exhibitions attracted attention and her work was regularly well received in the press. Somewhat estranged from the artistic milieu, in 1937 she has died in her house on Pontstraat in Deurle.