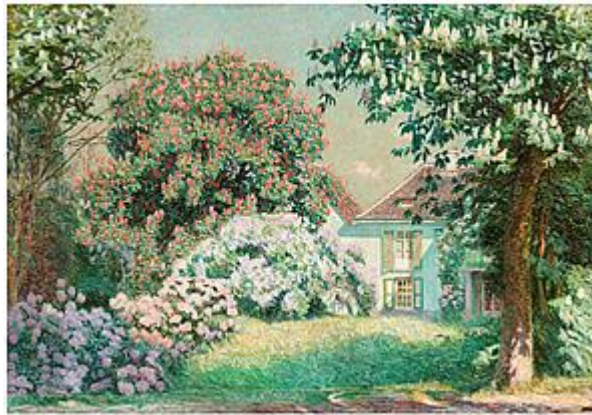


GALERIE OSCAR DE VOS

SINT - MARTENS - LATHEM



Emile Claus (Sint-Eloois-Vijve 1849 - Astene 1924)

Villa Zonneschijn in spring

Circa: 1910

1910

Oil on canvas

140 x 202 cm

Signed lower left: Emile Claus

Villa Zonneschijn and the surrounding garden were given an important place in the work of Emile Claus from around 1895 onwards. In Claus' day, the garden on the street side consisted of an area of wild grasses that were 'cultivated' as such, as contemporary photographs and postcards, as well as this painting, show. Around the house were flower bushes with anemones, azaleas, dahlias, hydrangeas, poppies, nightshades, and also wild flowers, including yarrow and star flowers. The garden was dominated by an impressive chestnut tree, some beeches and an old fir tree. To the right of the house was an orchard, with a vegetable garden and a meadow behind it. The garden was the domain of Charlotte Claus-Du Faux, the painter's wife, assisted by a gardener.

In this view of Villa Zonneschijn, Claus focused on the spacious garden around his house, which stretches between the Leie and the Gentse steenweg (the present Emile Clauslaan). The wealth of flowers provided a welcome opportunity for the painter to combine a particularly free touch with an unprecedented wealth of colour and a somewhat unusual perspective view. The flower bushes give rise to various plans. In the foreground on the left, they form an introduction, and in the further perspective, they are presented as a screen that partly hides the house and almost completely the studio on the left. Another typical feature of Claus' luminism is the play of light. The sunlight comes from the right and here a tree forms the backdrop. The foliage of the trees to the right of the house casts a wide shadow. The gabled roof of the porch casts a straight line of shadow on the façade and creates an imaginary triangle which, in addition to the line of shadow, is further formed by the eaves and closed off, imaginary, by the wildflower bush painted in delicate purple in front of the studio. That flower bush gives a small view through to the wall of the studio in which one of the painter's peacocks can be seen. It is clear from the above that Claus paid particular attention to the composition. It makes the painting one of the most successful views of his Garden of Eden.

Description on frame: Maison printemps

Description on reverse of the canvas: meij - A.J. / E.C.

Exhibition label

Exhibitions

- 1911, *Salon de Paris*, no. 287.

- 1974, *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Emile Claus 1849-1924*, Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, cat. p. 58, XXVII, cat. no. 111.

Literature

- Delen, A., "Emile Claus", à: P. Buschmann, *L'Art Flamand & Hollandais*, jrg. 8, nr. 11 (Bruxelles: G. Van Oest, 1911), p. 140, 194 (ill.).

- Buysse, C., *Emile Claus, mon frère de Flandre* (Gand: Van Rysselberghe & Rombaut, 1926), p. 56 (ill.).

- *Kunst*, no. 1 (Gand: André Vyncke, 1930), p. 9-23 (ill. p. 20).

- Eeckhout, P., *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Emile Claus 1849-1924*, exh. cat. (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1974), cat.no. 111 (ill.).

- Boyens, P., *Sint-Martens-Latem: Kunstenaarsdorp in Vlaanderen* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1992), p. 538 (ill.).

- Pauwels, P.J.H., *Comme un miroir étincelant* (Sint-Martens-Latem: Galerie Oscar De Vos, 2019), p. 87 (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.