

Valerius De Saedeleer (Aalst 1867 - Leupegem (Oudenaarde) 1941)

Green Valley (Landscape in Wales)
Circa: 1918
1918

Oil on canvas

26 x 64 cm

Signed lower right: Valerius de Saedeleer

During the First World War, the family of Valerius de Saedeleer stayed in the village Rhyd-y-felin in Wales. Just like Gustave van de Woestyne and George Minne, who both lived not far away, De Saedeleer was also supported by the Davies sisters, who played an important role in the cultural development of Wales. They put their house Ty'n-Lôn at his disposal. In April 1915 De Saedeleer wrote to a friend: 'I am working well here, surrounded by my family in a beautiful region and a beautiful house, far away from beautiful Flanders and the horrible war. De Saedeleer stayed in Wales until 1921.

Although it is generally said that De Saedeleers Welsh years were a decline in his work, they nevertheless occupy an important place in his oeuvre. That he was already 'working well' early on in his exile is evident from this painting *'reen Hills* in Wales. The horizontal panorama of his landscapes of Sint-Martens-Latem and Tiegem made way for wide vistas with an almost surreal character. De Saedeleer applied the paint so thinly that the structure of the underlying canvas gives the composition a special character, for example the meadow in the foreground, but also the panoramic perspective. The meadows in the middle dominate the composition. The surrounding trees in the foreground are sunk into the landscape and become one with the overwhelming nature. *Green Hills* is an ode to 'the beautiful region' mentioned in the letter, an intimate portrait of the region that gave him shelter during the war years.

Exhibitions

Deinze, MuDeL, *Valerius de Saedeleer. De tuin der afwezigen*, 23.09-26.11.2006, cat.no. 60.

Literature

Bourdeaudhui, J., *Valerius de Saedeleer... Achterna* (Maarkedal: Heemkundige Kring Businarias, 2014), 164, cat.no. 9.77 (ill.).

Boyens, P., *Valerius de Saedeleer. De tuin der afwezigen*, exh. cat. (Deinze: MuDeL, 2006), 99, 188, cat.no. 60 (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 in 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 theWitte huis in Sint-Martens-Latem.