

Gustave De Smet (Ghent 1877 - Deurle 1943)

Landscape with church
Circa: 1930
1930

Oil on canvas

66 x 81 cm / 82 x 98 cm

Signed lower left: Gust. De Smet

In the years 1929-1936, the color range of Gustave De Smet's works, relying mainly on earth and autumn tones, acquires a rare richness and a great warmth. Nevertheless, with this 1930 painting Landscape with Church, De Smet manages to surprise us with an anomalous palette. The free approach reveals an unusual color expression: ivory white, dove gray, ultramarine and velvet black alternate with pale pink, burnt sienna, ochre and sea green. This unusual harmony lends the village scene at night an unexpected, almost ghostly enchantment. A rich imagination and a successful sense of color lead to an unusual, sophisticated tone.

In conception and composition, Landscape with Church is related to previously realized village scenes from 1928-1929. Through the method of composition, the viewer's eye is once again led to the character at the bottom center, where a lady is taking a walk. The connection to the earlier Cubist style is evident: the forms are condensed into geometric figures. A certain nature-like atmosphere is poetically depicted in an interplay of cubist elements.

Exhibitions
1936, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Gustave De Smet, no. 115.

1961, Antwerp, KMSKA, Gust. De Smet Retrospectieve, no. 147.

1973, Sint-Martens-Latem, Gemeentehuis, Latemse kunstenaars in Nederlandse verzamelingen, no. 13.

1978, Warmenhuizen, Oude Ursulakerk, Gustave De Smet.

1989, Ostend, PMMK, Retrospectieve Gust. De Smet, no. 120.

1993, Kortenhoef, Kunst aan de dijk, Vlaamse expressionisten, 31.

2003, Deinze, MuDeL, De maat der dingen, no. 39.

Literature

Haesaerts, L. & P., Gustave De Smet, exh. cat. (Bruxelles: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1936), cat.no. 115.

Langui, E., Gustaaf De Smet. De mensch en zijn werk (Brussel: Manteau, 1945), 239, exh. no. 432.

Van Hecke, P.-G. & E. Langui, Gustave De Smet. Sa vie et son oeuvre (Brussel: Manteau, 1945), 249, cat.no. 428.

Vanbeselaere, W., Gustave De Smet. Retrospectieve tentoonstelling, exh. cat. (Antwerpen: KMSKA, 1961), 75, no. 147.

Kikkert, K., Gustave De Smet 1877-1943, exh. cat. (Warmenhuizen: Oude Ursulakerk, 1978), cat.no. 32.

Milo, J., Vie et survie du Centaure (Brussel: Editions Nationales d'art, 1980), 105, no. 76.

Boyens, P., Retrospectieve Gust. De Smet, exh. cat. (Oostende: PMMK, 1989), 166, cat.no. 120 (ill.).

Boyens, P., Gust. De Smet (oeuvrecatalogus) (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 1989), 229, 399, cat.no. 846 (ill.).

Denninger-Schreuder, C., Vlaamse expressionisten, exh. cat. (Kortenhoef: Kunst aan de dijk, 1993), 31 (ill.).

Boyens, P., E. Doove & R. Jooris, De maat der dingen, exh. cat. (Gent: Ludion, 2003), 30 (ill.).

Artist description:

Born in Ghent, Gust. De Smet became familiar with the painting profession via the house-painting atelier of his father. His brother, the artist Leon De Smet, was born four years later. In the 1890s, Gustave was involved with the decoration of the exterior of the Spitzner museum, a famous fairground attraction of the time. Between 1889 and 1897, the young man was given the opportunity to attend school at the Academy for the Fine Arts of his native city. In contrast to Valerius De Saedeleer and George Minne, he was not a part of the anarchistic and socialist movement. In these early years, he worked to earn a living, a living provided by the bourgeoisie. He married Augusta van Hoorebeke on 19 February 1898; their son Firmin would later die in a train accident during the First World War.

Around 1906, he became friends with Frits Van den Berghe and Constant Permeke in the Ghent working-class district of Patershol. These friendships would last for life. At the beginning of July 1908, he settled in Sint-Martens-Latem with wife and child. De Smet had worked in the region already in 1906, and he was undeniably lured to the village by his Ghent friends. Earlier the same year he had worked with Permeke in the harbour area of Ostend. He primarily spent his time in Sint-Martens-Latem; the young impressionist was a regular resident of the village until 1912.

In August 1914, the De Smet family fled to the Netherlands, in the company of Frits Van den Berghe. The confrontation with modern art in Amsterdam quickly brought about his affiliation with the international avant-garde and specifically with expressionism. Together with Van den Berghe, he lived in Amsterdam and then in Blaricum.

De Smet returned to Belgium only in 1922, where he lived for a time with Permeke. His following

residences were in Bachte-Maria-Leerne and Afsnee. Especially Villa Malpertuis, the country house of Paul-Gustave van Hecke in Afsnee, met with his approval. In 1929-1930, he finally had a villa built on Pontstraat in Deurle, a house that he would be forced to sell in the crisis years.

When his most important source of income, the Galerie Le Centaure, went bankrupt in 1932, 10 years of history were squandered in a few days time. The gallery's collection was auctioned off without limit. With Hubert Malfait and Frits Van den Berghe, De Smet was among the worst affected. No less than one hundred and five top works by De Smet were auctioned for a trifle. In fact, the conservative press used the economic crisis and the bankruptcy of the modernistic galleries to announce the end of expressionism, the prevailing movement of the 1920s.

In 1936, he settled in a simple house in Deurle, the present Gust. De Smet Municipal Museum. It was there that he died on 8 October 1943.