



Evarist De Buck (Sint-Amantsberg 1892 - Ghent 1974)

The Siren

Circa: 1918
1918

Oil on canvas

117 x 145 cm / 35.5 x 163 cm

Signed and dated lower right: Ev. De Buck / 1918

'I saw the sun sink into the arms of a blue ocean, and I heard the song of sirens calling me.' (Arthur Rimbaud)

Evarist De Buck's painting *The Siren* is an exceptional and monumental work that combines the mysticism of the sea and women with an innovative approach to colour and composition. This painting is a highlight of De Buck's oeuvre and illustrates the transition to a modernist visual language, in which symbolism, luminism and pointillist techniques merge in a unique way.

In *The Siren*, De Buck depicts a mythical creature: the siren, floating between two worlds, that of the water and that of the sky. Her almost transparent, bluish skin merges with the surrounding water, while her hair spreads like a shadow over the undulating surface. The siren seems to surrender to the current,

her head gently bowed, her eyes closed. Her melancholic pose evokes an atmosphere of dreamy contemplation, as if she is caught between desire and surrender. The background, with its vivid red-orange rock formations and deep blue water features, creates a powerful contrast that draws attention to the central figure. The warm, earthy tones of the rocks and the intense cool colours of the water are evidence of a conscious colouristic experiment, with De Buck playing with complementary colours to evoke tension and harmony.

The painting shows a clear influence of Luminism and late Symbolism, but at the same time bears characteristics of modernity beckoning on the horizon. De Buck employs a refined pointillist technique, in which the water surface appears vibrant and alive through a subtle mosaic of dots and short brushstrokes. Reminiscent of the luminist tendencies developed in Flanders by Emile Claus and his followers, De Buck goes further by intensifying his colour palette and easing his lines. The composition is extremely thoughtful: the siren assumes an almost sculptural pose, with a graceful, wavy line merging her body with the water. Her figure forms a diagonal axis that draws the viewer into the depths of the painting, towards the horizon where sky and sea meet.

The motif of the siren is a powerful symbol often used in European art and literature to represent the dangerous, seductive and elusive aspect of the female figure. With De Buck, however, the siren takes on a more introspective and melancholic character. She is not a seductress who plunges passing sailors into ruin, but a creature who herself seems lost in her own world. This interpretation is in line with the broader symbolist tradition in which women were often depicted as mysterious and elusive creatures.

At the same time, *The Siren* announces modernity. The vibrant colours, dynamic brushwork and the way the figure fades into its surroundings show a shift from traditional academic painting to a more expressive, emotional and experimental approach. De Buck manages to capture the transition from 19th-century symbolism to the early avant-garde in a subtle but powerful way.

The siren is a masterpiece that brings together the mysticism of the sea, the poetry of the female figure and the innovation of painting. The work reflects both the fascination with the mysterious and the drive for a new, expressive language of form. With this painting, Evarist De Buck confirms himself as an artist who not only continues tradition, but also opens the gate to a more modern, intense experience of colour and composition.

Literature

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Artist description:

Born in Ghent, Evarist De Buck studied at the Ghent Academy for the Fine Arts between 1904 and 1914, where he had among others George Minne as instructor. His debut was also disrupted by the beginning of the First World War.

Evarist De Buck took up residence in Sint-Martens-Latem only in 1917. In the same year, the zaal Taets in Ghent invited him for an individual exhibition. He in fact exhibited primarily in Ghent. He was repeatedly the guest of the local Cercle Artistique et Littéraire. He even received an individual exhibition in 1925. At the same time, he exhibited in the Galerie d'Art. Sporadic individual exhibitions in Brussels and Antwerp followed.

Traumatised by the death of his son during the Second World War, he devoted his full attention to managing the art gallery that he had founded, and where he exhibited primarily his own works. Shortly before his death, the municipality of Sint-Martens-Latem honoured the artist by organising an individual exhibition of his work.

He remained an outsider to the Latem scene. While he remained in the village until his death, he participated little in the local artistic life. His work does betray the influence of fellow Latem villagers, particularly Valerius De Saedeleer and Albert Servaes.