

22 April 2024

Press Release

Vuillard painting allowed to remain in the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss!

Ceremonial handover on Monday, 22 April 2024 at 11 a.m. at the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss

The painting “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles”, 1898/99 by Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940), was handed over to the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss on 22 April 2024 in a symbolic act by Francine Kahn and Raphaël Falk, heirs of Armand Dorville. Following restitution of the painting to Dorville’s heirs in 2021, a compensation agreement has now secured its keeping in the museum’s collection. The event was attended by Ina Brandes, Minister for Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Dr Stephanie Tasch, Head of Funding, Kulturstiftung der Länder (Cultural Foundation of the Federal States), Reiner Breuer, Mayor of the City of Neuss and Dr. Uta Husmeier-Schirlitz, Director of the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss.

Uta Husmeier-Schirlitz, Director of the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss, along with her team are very grateful for the constructive behaviour of the heirs of Jewish lawyer and art collector Armand Dorville and are very pleased that the painting “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles” by Édouard Vuillard can remain in the collection of the museum. Thanks to the concessions of the heirs, the city of Neuss was able to successfully reach an agreement concerning compensation. With the support of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Kulturstiftung der Länder, compensation totalling 300,000 euros was paid.

Thousands of works of art owned by persecuted and deported Jews ended up in the art trade or at auctions, either out of necessity or coercion, as a result of the anti-Semitic laws passed by the Vichy government in France in 1940 and subsequently enforced. The painting “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles” by Édouard Vuillard was one of around 400 works of art from the collection of Jewish lawyer and art collector Armand Dorville (1875-1941) that were auctioned in 1942 at Nice.

Unaware of the injustice suffered by Dorville’s heirs in the context of the auction of the collection, the painting was acquired for the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss in 1962 by the then director, Dr.

Irmgard Feldhaus, from the Berri-Lardy et Cie gallery in Paris and with the support of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

QUOTE

Ina Brandes, Minister for Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia: *"Injustice cannot be undone, but new injustice can be prevented. This applies in particular to the seizure of cultural assets as a result of Nazi persecution, and restitution is still one of the major tasks of our times. The return of the painting "La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles" is a compelling example of how it is possible to come to a fair and equitable solution, and at the same time ensure that the painting remains accessible to visitors to the Clemens Sels Museum."*

QUOTE

Professor Dr. Markus Hilgert, Secretary General of the Kulturstiftung der Länder: *"The Clemens Sels Museum fulfils its responsibility with these restitution and compensation proceedings to come to terms with historical injustice and to make the work and fate of the antisemitically persecuted art collector Armand Dorville tangible within the public sphere. For these reasons, the Kulturstiftung der Länder was highly pleased to support the repurchase of this painting by Édouard Vuillard, so important to the collection of the museum."*

QUOTE

Reiner Breuer, Mayor of the City of Neuss, adds: *"It is highly commendable that the painting "La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles" could be returned to the heirs of Armand Dorville in 2021 as a result of extensive research into the history of the painting. I am now delighted that the painting can continue to be exhibited at the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss thanks to open dialogue with the heirs, and that it is therefore accessible to the general public."*

QUOTE

Uta Husmeier-Schirlitz, Director of the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss, emphasises: *"Thanks to the willingness of the heirs of Armand Dorville, it has now been possible to secure the only painting by Vuillard in the collection of Symbolist art of the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss to be known beyond the borders of the country. In keeping this work for the public, we are also committed to rendering its special history conspicuous to make it an example of a living culture of remembrance and reappraisal."*

THE PAINTING

Édouard Vuillard painted “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles”, also known under the title of “Femme dans un Parc”, with distemper on canvas in the years 1898-1899. The painting, which measures 189 by 84.6 centimetres, is signed “E. Vuillard” at bottom right. In the 2003 catalogue raisonné of Vuillard’s body of work edited by Antoine Salomon, Guy Cogeval and Mathias Chivot it is listed in the second volume with the number VII-1.

Along with Pierre Bonnard and Maurice Denis, Édouard Vuillard was one of the main representatives of the “Nabis” (Hebrew: prophets) group of artists which was founded in 1889 in Paris. They were critically influenced by Japanese colour woodcuts, French Symbolist paintings and the English Pre-Raphaelites. The aim of the Nabis was a form of art unshackled from academic conventions in order to renew the art of the time via a planar simplifying of forms and the use of more or less unrealistic colours. Typical of Édouard Vuillard was his choice of everyday motifs which he depicted from unusual angles and with remarkable pictorial framing.

Vuillard’s painting “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles” is limited to a yellow, green and brown colour palette. At the centre of the portrait-format is a female figure facing away from the observer and a girl at her side, also painted as a figure seen from the rear. Both look out from a terraced area onto the park in front of them with tall trees and red flowers at the edge of an area of grass. A further child on the right along with a figure intersected by the left edge of the picture lend the image a moment of fleetingness and hint at photographic imagery. The ornamental conception and narrow vertical format of the painting closely relate to the decorative surface-based works of the Nabis and their orientation towards Japanese scroll painting.

With the loose painting style extant in “La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles”, the artist anticipates his late post-Impressionist work.

PROVENANCE

Following purchase of the work directly from the artist by the French art critic and writer Octave Mirbeau, the painting had at least two previous owners prior to Armand Dorville being finally mentioned as the owner in 1938. Dorville is specified as the lender of the painting in the catalogue of the extensive retrospective organised in 1938 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in honour of Vuillard’s recent appointment to the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The exhibition catalogue lists the painting as no. 104, “Square des Batignolles”.

Armand Isaac Dorville, born in Paris in 1875, was a lawyer and passionate art collector. Exposed to persecution due to his Jewish origins, Dorville fled to his castle situated near Cubjac in the Dordogne in June 1940 shortly before the Germans invaded Paris, where he had previously transferred his art collection in 1939. He died here due to illness in 1941. In his will laid down in 1939, the childless collector had named his siblings and their children as his heirs. As Jews, they were also persecuted under the Vichy regime. The Vichy government authorities appointed a receiver on the first day of the auction in Nice from 24 to 27 June 1942, resulting in the proceeds of the sale being confiscated. The family's notary received the auction proceeds in the form of government debt obligations or payments into frozen accounts. This meant that the heirs were denied any payment of the proceeds. It is possible that, with this money, the family would have been able to flee abroad. Five members of the family, including one of his two sisters and two of his nieces, were arrested in 1944, deported and murdered in Auschwitz. The auction proceeds were only paid to the surviving heirs after the end of the war, in 1948.

At the auction in Nice the painting was listed under the title "Les promeneurs au parc" with lot number 401 and was bought for the price of 200,000 French francs by a bidder from Aix-en-Provence. Subsequent provenance literature to the Vuillard painting name the Galerie Allard in Paris as the owner.

In 1962, Dr. Irmgard Feldhaus, the director of the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss, acquired the painting from the Galerie Berri-Lardy et Cie in Paris for the museum for 200,000 German marks with support of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

RESTITUTION

In a letter dated 10 June 2020 from lawyer Corinne Hershkovitch on behalf of the heirs of Armand Dorville, the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss received a request for the painting to be restituted. Throughout the proceedings, the heirs of Armand Dorville were represented by the Paris genealogy law firm ADD Associés.

In the course of careful provenance research with the support of the Coordination Office for Provenance Research in North Rhine-Westphalia, it was established that the painting was auctioned with other works from the collection of Armand Dorville at an auction held in Nice from 24 to 27 June 1942. The city council of Neuss was recommended that the painting be restituted by the city administration.

The council decision to restitute the painting to the heirs of Armand Dorville was taken on 17 December 2021.

COMPENSATION AGREEMENT

The following year in 2022, the city of Neuss negotiated with Armand Dorville's heirs on the basis of a value appraisal of the work in order to secure the painting for the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss. The work became the property of the city of Neuss upon payment of compensation totalling 300,000 euros, which was made possible due to support by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Kulturstiftung der Länder.

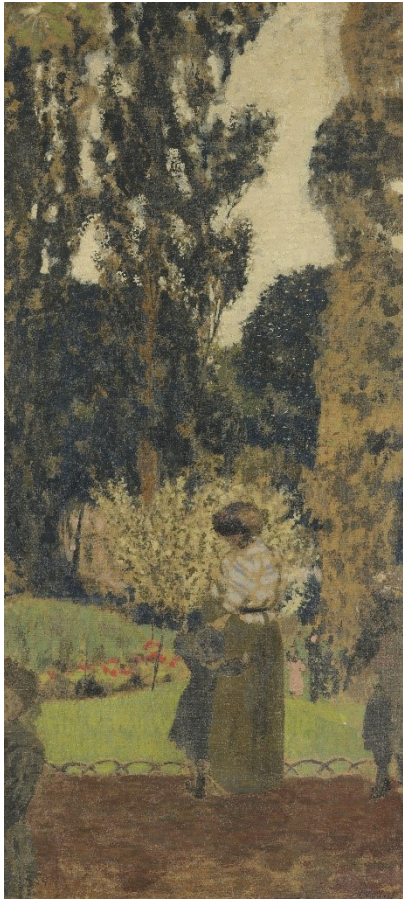
With symbolic handover of the painting on 22 April 2024 by the heirs of Armand Dorville, the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss celebrates the retention of the painting "La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles" by Édouard Vuillard, once again making it accessible to the public.

With "La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles" and the etching "Petites Études dans le square" from 1937, the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss has two works by Édouard Vuillard in its collection. Vuillard is represented in only a few museum collections in Germany, including the Kunsthalle Hamburg, the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, the Städel Museum Frankfurt and the Wallraf Richartz Museum & Fondation Corboud Cologne.

"La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles" has always been shown at the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss in the company of important works by Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, James Ensor and Fernand Khnopff, as well as works by Vuillard's artist colleagues Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Félix Vallotton and Paul Ranson who also belonged to the Nabis fellowship. The painting will continue to be given a prominent place in the museum's permanent collection in the future.

INFORMATION:

There have already been two other cases of restitution at the Clemens Sels Museum Neuss in the past: with involvement of the Advisory Commission for the painting "Macabre Scene" by Joachim Ringelnatz, a settlement was reached with the beneficiary of the estate in 2013, resulting in the work remaining in the collection. In 2014, two drawings were also returned to the heirs of Dr. Michael Berolzheimer, "Count Siegfried Finds Genoveva, Mourned as Dead" by Joseph von Führich and "The Little Schoolmaster" by Theodor Mintrop.



Édouard Vuillard (1868 - 1940)

"La Promenade. Le square des Batignolles"

around 1898/1899, distemper on canvas, 189 x 84.6 cm

Acquired after restitution in 2023 with support of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Kulturstiftung der Länder

Clemens Sels Museum Neuss

Photo: Carsten Gliese, Cologne

PRESS PORTAL – text and image material available online until 25 May 2024 at:

<https://bit.ly/3JhgDU3>

Password: Vuillard_2024