



Anto Carte (Mons 8 décembre 1886 - Ixelles 13 février 1954)

Self portrait

1921

Artist description:

Antoine Carte was born in Mons on 8 December 1886, the son of a master joiner and cabinet-maker. On all occasions, the artist would point out that it was to this craftsman father that he owed his taste for "fine work", for a job well done and for beautiful materials.

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In 1897, at the age of 11, he left secondary school and enrolled at the Académie de Mons, where he studied under Antoine Boulard and Émile Motte, who introduced him to easel painting, and Arthur Claus, who taught him wood and marble techniques.

His teachers were quick to point out his talent for drawing.

In 1902, for financial reasons, he was forced to give up day classes in favour of evening classes, which enabled him to earn a living by working as an apprentice for a neighbour, Frantz Depooter, a painter and decorator and father of the painter Frans Depooter.

His work in a building painting and decorating company brought him into contact with a wide range of craftsmen and enabled him to acquire a solid grounding in many techniques.

It was at the Académie de Mons, in Emile Motte's class, that Antoine Carte (who adopted the pseudonym Anto Carte at the age of 20) met the man who was to become his closest friend: He also met Victor Regnart, Alfred Moitroux, Arsène Detry and Alex Louis Martin, with whom he maintained friendly relations. But it was Buisseret who encouraged him to believe in himself and to exhibit his work.

In fact, Anto Carte was an anxious person, always dissatisfied with his work.

He then received a grant that enabled him to attend classes at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels until 1910, where Louis Buisseret also attended. His teachers, Constant Montald, Émile Fabry and Jean Delville, were Symbolist idealists who taught him a sense of colour, drawing and composition.

In 1912, Anto Carte, encouraged by Jean Delville, discovered and illustrated Verhaeren's poems. Verhaeren was one of the great encounters of Carte's life, and he never stopped talking about it. His enthusiasm for the poet was so great that it determined the choice of subjects for his early works ("Le Pêcheur", "Le Fossoyeur", "Le Passeur d'eau").

Anto Carte's works have a poetic and fantastic atmosphere. The colours are brilliant and the artist explains that he scratches the different layers of paint with a knife in order to increase their luminosity.

Between 1910 and 1913, he went to Paris, to the studios of Cavaillé-Coll and Léon Bakst, who were working for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, in order to get in touch with the Parisian avant-garde, having received a scholarship from Montald.

Anto Carte was fascinated by Bakst's work and this influence would later be felt in his costume designs, notably for

the dancer Akarova.

Although Anto Carte acquired valuable skills in costume and stage design, this did not detract from the natural simplicity of his painting.

His first serious contact with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian painting (which taught him so much about composition and style) was at the Louvre, which he visited assiduously. On the other hand, he retained little of Impressionism, whose last fires he saw, nor of the Fauvists, whose first roars he heard, and before him, indifferently, Symbolism (to which his Brussels masters had sacrificed themselves) collapsed.

In 1914, we discover Anto Carte working under the dark shadow of the enemy occupation; he had a small studio called "le plancher à sonnette", where only those who knew the password could enter.

Imprisoned for a time and then released under supervision, he carried out domestic decoration work, but never stopped painting "for himself".

At this time, he had a lot of support, especially from Canon Puissant, who introduced him to ceramics. Anto Carte's already skilful hands learned to work with clay, adding another string to his bow.

After the war, he illustrated other works such as Maeterlinck's "Le Massacre des Innocents" and Marcel Wolfers' "Les écrits de novembre".

1917 : Encouraged by Louis Buisseret, he participates in the Salon de l'Illustration in Brussels, which later takes him to Pittsburgh (USA).

In 1923, he joined the group of Belgian Ymagiers who exhibited in Paris at the Salon d'Automne. Among his colleagues were his older brothers in the Brueghelist movement, Valerius, de Saedeleer and Gustave van de Woestijne.

It is therefore likely that Anto Carte was friends with Gustave van de Woestijne and that each of them was influenced by the other.

He came into contact with the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in the United States, where a large retrospective was held in 1925: he exhibited 60 works and sold all of them, which brought him great success with the American public. Before the 1940s, he became a member of the jury of the Carnegie Institute and travelled frequently to the United States.

At the same time, he won his first gold medal at the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris.

His many trips to Italy, including Florence, introduced him to the art of fresco painting.

In 1928, together with his friends Louis Buisseret and Léon Eeckman, he founded the "Nervia" group, which was often presented as the Walloon counterpart to the Laethem-Saint-Martin school in Flanders.

Like the XX group, Nervia aimed to encourage the new generation of artists such as Frans Depooter, Léon Devos, Léon Navez, Taf Wallet and Jean Winance, who were joined by their elders, Rodolphe Strebelle and Pierre Paulus.

This movement followed in the footsteps of an intimate human art influenced by Italian art and symbolism - something they were criticised for during the Second World War for being apparently close to the German order, when in fact they were not - the "Nerviens" simply expressed what they felt, and abstraction did not suit them.

Anto Carte was the soul of the group. He was the "master", very proud of his reputation, demanding and even authoritarian towards his fellow students: he liked to direct the work of the young people. In a letter to Frans Depooter, for example, he advised him to abandon classical and academic painting so that the qualities of his own personality could finally be expressed.

In 1929, Henry Van de Velde, the founder and first director of La Cambre, offered Anto Carte the post of director of the decorative and monumental art studio, which he left in 1932 (probably because he did not agree with his director's ideas). He was then appointed professor of decorative and monumental art at the Académie de Bruxelles.

Between 1935 and 1939, he undertook a number of commissions for stained glass windows, which he created with the glassmaker Florent-Prosper Colpaert, including the stained glass window for the church of Saint-Philippe de Neri in the abbey of La Cambre.

It was only natural that Anto Carte should ask Colpaert to create the stained glass windows, since it was Colpaert who had taught him the art of stained glass in 1920.

At that time, although their correspondence reveals minor disagreements about techniques and costs, they worked together in an excellent manner.

In 1938, the Nervia group broke up, mainly as a result of a misunderstanding with Louis Buisseret over the placement of works in an exhibition.

He then created the Stations of the Cross for the Cambre church (completed in 1945). In this work, Anto Carte did not seek innovation, but rather created a harmonious and well-crafted work.

The war of 1940-45 and the German occupation took Anto Carte by surprise. He was finishing the stained glass windows and the Stations of the Cross at Notre-Dame de la Cambre, but this did not affect his work (unlike the war of 1914-18 with "Le village détruit") because, indifferent to the world conflict, he retired to his house in Wauthier-Braine where he found peace and quiet.

In 1949, he painted the great hall in Orval, where he had already painted the frescoes in the chapel.

The National Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Koekelberg was inaugurated in 1952.

Tired, Carte had commissioned the painter Jacques Maes to complete the stained glass windows.

On 15 February 1954, he died in his apartment in the rue de l'Ermitage in Ixelles.

To sum up Anto Carte's work, some of his paintings are decorative and mannerist, while others develop a sense of the monumental.

Many of his paintings are religiously inspired and he often combines the mystical with the everyday. He was as impressed by his meeting with Dom Martin, a Benedictine monk who led La Croix latine (a group of artists interested in the renewal of Christian art), as he was by Émile Verhaeren..

As we have seen, Anto Carte was a jack-of-all-trades, a complete artist who, throughout his life, tried his hand at painting, drawing, engraving, lithography, frescoes, stained glass, ceramics, sculpture, theatre sets, illustration, tapestry, woodcarving, decoration, and so on.

All his researches show his desire to experiment with new techniques and new disciplines. His nimble fingers took up the brush, the paintbrush, the chisel, the potter's clay, the upholsterer's needle and thread, the glassmaker's diamond and the carpenter's plane.

An artist known and recognised all over the world, from Riga to Brooklyn, via Cleveland, Mexico and Brazil, his personality remains a mystery: sometimes he laughs and jokes, sometimes he becomes thoughtful, fragile and depressed, shunning all society.

Personally, I knew him to be restless and withdrawn, but now, looking back on his life, I understand better that he was a prisoner of the image people had of him: they praised him as a jovial Walloon, a mischievous friend, a storyteller, a clown, a mime and a prankster... "Only Youl, his wife and his close friends - Buisseret, Eeckman, Depooter, Devos, Navez and Wallet - could tell us to what extent the man was ultimately a prisoner of his legend.

In fact, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, of this friendly banter in his art.