



Let's Talk Art!

Van Dongen and the Bateau Lavoir at the Montmartre Museum ©

by Catherine Sarrazin

This is Catherine Sarrazin and this week on Let's Talk Art we'll go to Montmartre to visit the exhibition on yet another Dutch artist. After the exhibition at the Petit Palais "Les Hollandais a Paris", this collection of 'Van Dongen and the Bateau Lavoir' highlights a short but important period in the career of the artist and his peers.

Kees van Dongen was born in Rotterdam in 1877 and was first influenced by The Hague School and its symbolism. He moved to Paris in 1899 and remained in France for the rest of his life; hence he is sometimes considered as the most French of Dutch painters. He first exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1905, and the years that followed are often considered as the pivot point in his career, when his style became more radical in its use of forms and colours. He settled down in Montmartre and moved to the Bateau Lavoir, where other artists had formed a circle around Picasso and his partner Fernande Olivier.

The Bateau Lavoir was a nickname given to a residence and meeting place for a group of artists in the early 20th century. Painters, but also men of letters, comedians and art dealers would meet, exchange ideas and work in this building close to the Place du Tertre. It became an unofficial club that included renowned and avant-garde artists such as Max Jacob, Modigliani and Otto van Rees, but also passing artists such as Matisse, Braque, Derain, Dufy, Apollinaire and Cocteau among many others. Gertrude Stein among other art dealers was also a regular visitor of the place.

The Montmartre Museum focusses on the artist's early years in Paris to show the evolution and impact of his residency at the Bateau Lavoir. There he found his style and favorite themes of work centered on women and nightlife. He painted dancers, singers and women around him as the 'Semi-nude of Ferdinande Olivier' or the portrait of 'Madame Marie-Thérèse Raulet'. Other important paintings exhibited are the 'Carroussel', which captures the movement of a merry-go-round, the 'Portrait of an Old Clown' and the 'Lieuses', a luminous painting presenting two women binding sheaves of hay in a field, which shows the influence of Van Gogh on the artist, but also his approach to pointillism.

The exhibition comprises more than sixty works by Van Dongen from various museums and private collections around Europe as well as photographs of the Vieux Montmartre Society, but also a few artworks of other painters created at the Bateau Lavoir during the same period.