



EXPO SITION EMILE VERHAEREN

Lumières de l'Escaut, Lumière des Arts

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Explanatory Texts

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(translation Emily René Nagel)

A Life in a Few Dates

1855: Birth at Saint-Amand, along the coast of the Scheldt River.

During the 1880s: Regular collaborations with the magazines *La Jeune Belgique* [Young Belgium] et *L'Art moderne* [Modern Art].

1883: Publication of his first work of poetry: *Les Flamandes* [The Flemish Women] (Bruxelles, Hochsteyn).

1885: Publication of *Les Moines* [The Monks] (Paris, Lemerre).

1887: First art monograph: *Quelques notes sur l'œuvre de Fernand Khnopff* [A Few Notes on the Works of Fernand Khnopff] (Bruxelles, Veuve Monnom).

1888-1891: Publication of *Les Soirs* [The Nights], *Les Débâcles* [The Debacles] and *les Flambeaux noirs* [The Black Torches], the Black Trilogy published by Edmond Deman.

1889: Met Martha Massin whom he married in 1891.

1893-1898: Publication of the so called « social » trilogy, *Les Campagnes hallucinées* [The Hallucinated Countryside], *Les Villes tentaculaires* [The Sprawling Towns], and the play, *Les Aubes* [The Dawns] (Bruxelles, Deman).

1895: Publication of *Les Villages illusoires* [The Illusory Villages] (Bruxelles, Deman).

1896-1911: Publication of the love poems: *Les Heures claires* [The Sunlit Hours], *Les Heures d'après-midi* [The Afternoon Hours] (Bruxelles, Deman) and *Les Heures du soir* [The Hours of the Night] (Leipzig, Insel-Verlag).

1900: The first theatrical performance of *Cloître* [The Cloister].

1902: Publication of *Les Forces tumultueuses* [The Tumultuous Forces] (Paris, Mercure de France).

1904: The beginning of the publication of the five volumes *Toute la Flandre* [All of Flanders] (Bruxelles, Deman).

1904: *Rembrandt* (Paris, Laurens).

1908: *James Ensor* (Bruxelles, Van Oest).

1910: *Rubens* (Bruxelles, Van Oest).

1911-1914: Lectures on *La Culture de l'enthousiasme* [The Culture of Enthusiasm].

1914: World War One. The beginning of tours of patriotic lectures abroad

1915: *La Belgique sanglante* [The Bleeding Belgium] (Paris, NRF). On the Yser Front accompanied with King Albert the First and Queen Elisabeth

1916: Death at Rouen Station. Burial on Belgian soil.

1927: Transfer of his body to St-Amand.

1955: Martha and Émile Verhaeren reunite in the tomb in St-Amand.

From Glow of the River to the Light of Painting

The connection to native land goes hand and hand with a passionate commitment to contrasting forms of modernity, in Verhaeren's work. This clash is shared by the most talented minds of his generation. This dialogue is put into resonance between the works of art, for you.

Revealing Encounters

The poetic work of Verhaeren, along with his work as an art critic, began to take shape in the early 1880s. As a young lawyer working in the firm of Edmond Picard, hired to run the exhibition column in the magazine « L'Art moderne » [Modern Art], Verhaeren visited workshops, exhibits, and museums throughout Europe. The discovery of Eduard Manet's paintings created an initial revelation to modern painting in him. This discovery renewed itself a few years later with the work of Seurat and Neo-impressionism. He became an ardent defender of Impressionism and Neo-impressionism within the XX group, the top place in Brussels for the annual state-of-the-art exposition.

In doing so, Verhaeren created a profound relationship with remarkable artists of the time. His out of the box curiosity lead him with clear view to the obscure, trancelike symbolist Redon, the feverish humanism of Rodin, or the radiant waves of colors by Cross and Signac, who would become his friends. In defense of these audacious works, which gave symbolic meaning to the ethereal contrasts when he lived along the coast of the Scheldt River during his early childhood, he put into sync his worries as a poet to the struggle of the fin-de-siècle generation for the triumph of lighting in painting and the abandonment of historical grandiose painting.

Verhaeren in Private

The symbolist, and then expressionist fin-de-siècle poet, tireless worker editing without ceasing his manuscripts and publishing, outraged whistleblower of the horrors of World War I, Verhaeren progressively gained a great reputation for poetry nationwide. This is reflected in the innumerable portraits he inspired as well as the intensity of the commemorations that followed his accidental death at the Rouen Station, and his burial along the coast of the Scheldt River. The poet, who sang of modernity, died crushed by the progress itself that he had made roar in his verses.

In his personal offices in Brussels, in Saint-Cloud near Paris, or in Caillou-qui-Bique in the countryside of Hainaut, the friend of painters and sculptors lived surrounded by works representative of his ideals, such as sculptures by Georges Minne and Antoine Bourdelle, and paintings by Constantin Meunier or Paul Signac. An admirable portrait signed in 1892 by Théo Van Rysselberghe gave great homage to the clairvoyance of the man who converted him to Neo-impressionism.

Martha: Balancing Point

At the end of the first decade of poetic creation dedicated to the colored outpouring of Naturalism, then to the torments described in the Black Trilogy, Verhaeren met the person who would become his partner in life, Martha Massin. A painter herself, his wife, gentle and discreet, left behind, over the years, a large number of daily portraits, intensely sketched, of Verhaeren, as well as canvases representing their livelihood. From the dawn of their meeting, they began a moving and tireless correspondence, in which Verhaeren was aware that his beloved was a knowledgeable confidant to whom he could pour out in total confidence his intuitions as a writer and his preoccupations with art.

Illustrator of numerous poetry collections of his friend, for the Brussels editor Edmond Deman, Théo Van Ryssleberghe also undertook a portrait of her to which Verhaeren devoted his moving love poems *Les Heures [The Hours]*.

The Belgian Efflorescence

The modernity that Verhaeren passionately defends is many sided. It does not allow itself to be locked up in the form of one single aesthetic and roots itself in the past. His monographs of painters are eloquent. In 1887, *Quelque notes sur l'œuvre de Fernand Khnopff* [*Some Notes on the Works of Fernand Khnopff*] developed a meticulous analysis of the modernity of the symbolic values, although they are anchored in myths and legends. In 1904 and 1910, two contrasting, patrimonial, biographies celebrated the « ideal light » of *Rembrandt*, an aching and misunderstood genius, and the outgoing joy of the colorist *Rubens*. In his study devoted to *Ensor* (1908), he applauds to the triumph of the untamable combatant in the fight for Art.

Therefore, so different were the temperaments and the works of Constantin Meunier, Willy Finch or Willy Schlobach had become, the devotion of Verhaeren had spared them no praise. The severity of the art critique was matched only by his friendly generosity. It was an exercise of creative empathy that calls to us all.

The Volume of Space

Verhaeren's artistic critique has never overlooked sculptures, or decorative arts, even if he devoted only a few pages to it. It is not surprising that Victor Horta had considered, for the Tournai Museum, a central section reserved for the sculptures.

In the art of his contemporaries, Constantin Meunier or Jef Lambeaux, Charles Var der Stappen or Jacques de Lalaing, the critic sees embodied the pulsing power which is at work in his poems as well as the rigor that continues to haunt him. Minne's art overwhelms him just as much, which illustrated his works as well as those of Maeterlinck.