Anna Boch

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Prefaces

Dominique Savelkoul

Director of Mu.ZEE,
Ostend

It is with great pride and pleasure that we present this catalogue as the crown upon the exhibition *Anna Boch: An Impressionist Journey*. For the first time in almost a quarter of a century, this extraordinarily interesting artist is receiving the attention she deserves. For Mu.ZEE in Ostend it was only logical to give Anna Boch that attention. The concrete starting point is her intriguing Pointillist painting *Pendant l'élévation* (During Ascension) that we are particularly fond of here at Mu.ZEE. It depicts the little church of Mariakerke near Ostend – much beloved by James Ensor, Willy Finch and many others. Even more important than this artwork from our collection is the fact that Anna Boch was the most prominent female artist in Belgium around 1900. That time period, encompassing both the *fin de siècle* and the *belle époque*, is precisely the chronological starting point of Mu.ZEE's area of interest. As a museum for Belgian art from 1880 to the present, Mu.ZEE is the obvious place for Anna Boch to come home.

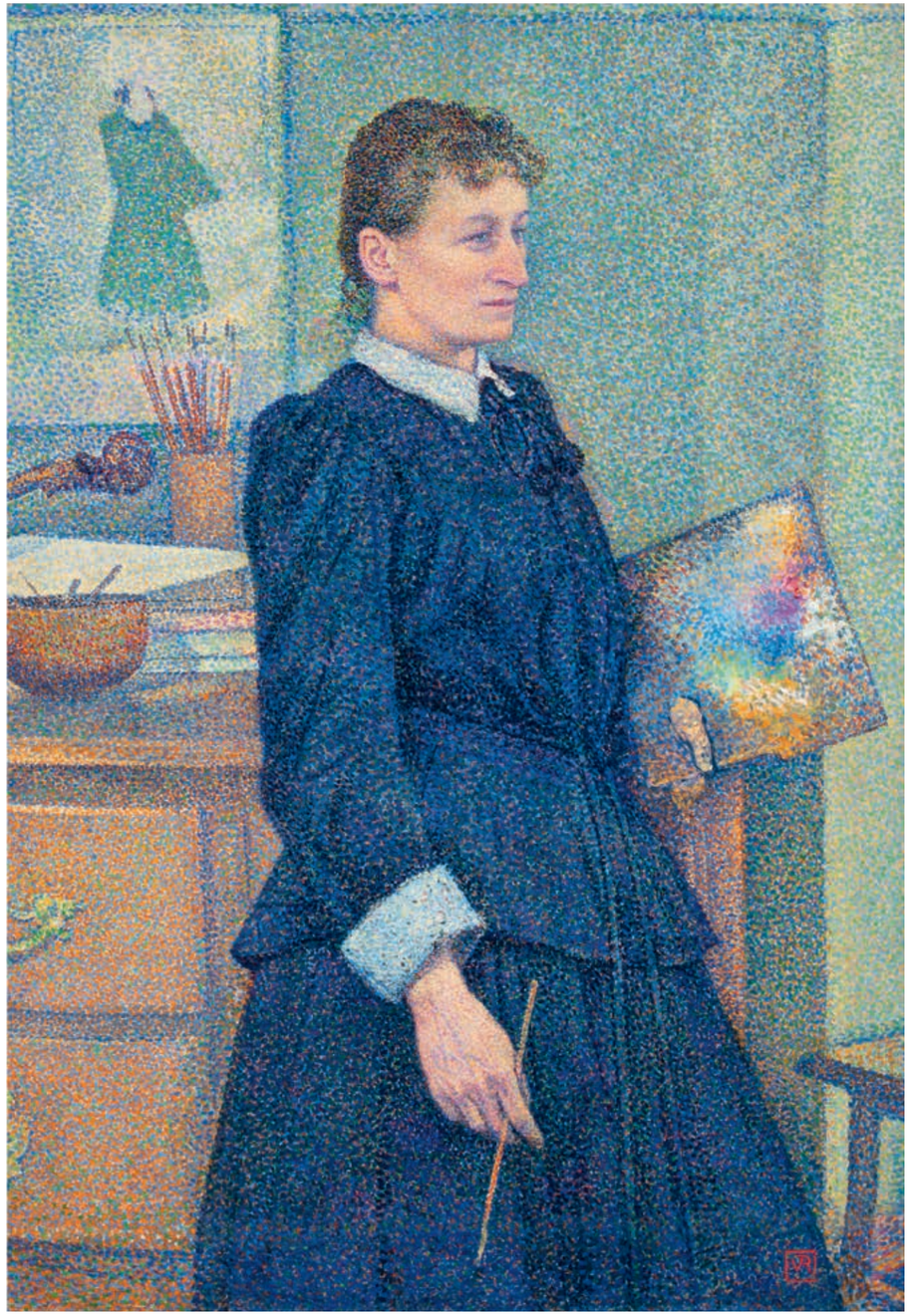
Anna Boch lived a rich life, in more than one sense. As the privileged heiress of wealthy ceramics industrialists, she enjoyed financial independence and this gave her the freedom to develop her passions and talents fully: travelling, music, interior design, collecting and making art. In all her ventures, moreover, she overcame the obstacles inherent to being an unmarried woman in the late 19th and early 20th century. These constraints did not stop her from becoming a skilled *plein air* artist and Neo-Impressionist who developed her own style, sparked by her contact with *compagnons de route* such as Isidore Verheyden and Théo van Rysselberghe and her meetings with fascinating contemporaries within the art societies Les XX and La Libre Esthétique. She was the only female member of these societies. She also met James Ensor there, one of the monographic heavyweights of Mu.ZEE.

As the contribution of Virginie Devillez, celebrated guest curator of this exhibition, makes clear, Anna Boch made bold choices by including contemporary artists when building her impressive art collection. It is to the credit of Virginie Devillez and the team behind this exhibition that one well-known and endlessly rehashed fact about Anna Boch – that she was the only person ever to acquire a painting by Vincent van Gogh during his lifetime – has been superseded. The exhibition and this accompanying book show her both as an artist and as a collector, demonstrating her love of music, architecture and travel. As befits a Wagner fan – she visited the Bayreuther Festspiele several times – her life reads like a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which multiple art forms and interests are interwoven and enhance each other.

As a female director of Mu.ZEE, I am therefore very moved to be able to present this exhibition at long last. I am also terribly pleased that, like Anna Boch, this exhibition will be travelling from the Belgian coast to Brittany, where it will be welcomed by Sophie Kervran and her colleagues at the Musée de Pont-Aven. This kind of international collaboration is a first for Mu.ZEE and realises my ambition to put artists from our country on the international map, but also to enter into more collaborations – here in Belgium as well as abroad. After all, in this interesting and challenging post-Covid-19 era, it is more important than ever to give some serious thought to how we function as a museum. Ecological, economic, social and political challenges are always with us and must not be used as an excuse to do nothing. We must dare to rethink the role of Mu.ZEE. By building innovative bridges, by being entrepreneurial.

I would like to thank Virginie Devillez, the entire Mu.ZEE team – Stefan Huygebaert and Joost Declercq in particular – and Sophie Kervran for the wonderful collaboration, our subsidies and sponsors for making this type of wild dream come true, and our many public and private lenders, including Anna Boch's family, for their willingness to entrust their works to both our institutions for several months. I am happy to invite you to join us in getting to know Anna Boch better.

Welcome!



Théo van Rysselberghe
Anna Boch dans son atelier (Anna Boch in Her Studio), 1892
Oil on canvas, 95.2 × 64.7 cm
Springfield (Massachusetts, USA), The James Philip Gray Collection, Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 70.04

Laurence Brogniez

Anna Boch and Marguerite Van de Wiele Face to Face
The Artist in the Writer's Mirror

'I want to be something, and the end justifies …'[1]

Rosiane Meyse, Jenny Winge, Lily Briscoe, Caroline Berteaux, Olivia Hayne … These names could be those of nineteenth-century artists, figures who have been pushed into oblivion by art history and our collective memory, until recently rather unwelcoming to women. The major exhibitions recently devoted in France to Toyen, Georgia O'Keeffe, Rosa Bonheur and Joan Mitchell[2] lead us to imagine ourselves (re)discovering Jenny's Italian views, Lily's 'sea stretched like silk', Olivia's fresh watercolours, Rosiane's Impressionist views, Caroline's gusty seascapes, and other 'unknown masterpieces'. Except that the works of these prodigious and talented artists, whose destiny was often thwarted, are … works of paper. These artists are in fact fictional beings, heroines imagined by novelists of greater or lesser renown. With the exception of Lily Briscoe, the protagonist of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), none of them, despite a few reprints, has as yet earned her place in literary memory. Their lives and destinies, even if they are fictional, are not lacking in interest, however, and constitute precious accounts of the way in which women – writers and artists – represented themselves, according to the norms of their time, between aspirations and constraints, emancipation and submission.

What is striking about these stories is the recurrence of a disheartening scenario, dramatic even. Thus Jenny, the eponymous heroine of Norwegian author Sigrid Undset's novel (1911), has broken with her family to fulfil her vocation in Rome. Gifted with a promising talent, she nevertheless renounces her career in favour of 'the monstrosity that is love',[3] yielding to the advances of Helge Gram, a young man she meets in Italy, and then to those of Gert, his father. Pregnant, Jenny gives birth to a child who dies in infancy. Her dual failure, as both mother and artist, leads her to commit suicide. Olivia, the eponymous heroine of Madeleine Ley's novel (1936), a talented watercolourist, goes through a similar ordeal, except for the tragic outcome. Although Rosiane and Cabert, the artists portrayed respectively by Marguerite Van de Wiele (*Fleurs de civilisation*, 1901) and Julia Frezin (*La Chimère ennemie*, 1936), are not wounded to the core in the same way, they nevertheless pay for their total commitment to art by losing their femininity.

At the end of the nineteenth century – and even beyond – if the woman artist is no longer either a marginal or exceptional fact,[4] she remains a figure that stirs debate and discussion: the inflections given by women to the genre of the 'artist novel'[5] reveal the complex situation of women creators – both painters and writers – who find in literary representation a space in which to reflect, but also a space under pressure in which to express the paradoxes they face in their respective practices.
In the literature on art – art criticism, essays and manifestos, private writings (diaries, correspondence, studio notes, etc.) – the art novel conveys a particular knowledge and experience. Unlike evaluative or private discourses, fiction proposes a modelling of reality. For both characters and readers, it defines a space of strategic possibilities delimited, in this case, by the different ways of being a woman artist in a given period. As Nathalie Heinich points out in *États de femme* (1996), far from being a simple document about an era, the novel (by fashioning an imaginary world) contributes to women's questions regarding identity, more particularly at moments of crisis or when the paradigms contributing to the elaboration of gendered identities are challenged. As such, the novel is a tool that makes it possible to reflect on, reinforce or challenge assigned roles:

> 'A passive representation of the pre-existing imaginary, [the novel] is also an instrument active in identity construction insofar as it proposes objects of identification and/or differentiation, models or anti-models of behaviour, typical situations, and phantasmatic resolutions.'[6]

In this perspective, Marguerite Van de Wiele's novel is particularly interesting, especially if we choose to read it as a form of dialogue between a woman writer (the author), a fictional artist (Rosiane Meyse) and a real artist who probably inspired her in part (Anna Boch). Without claiming that Van de Wiele's story is a *roman-à-clef* (even though further research would

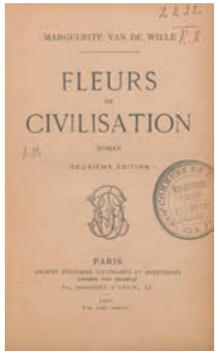
likely justify such a reading), it will be of interest to us here as a mirror that enables the writer to question her identity and her place as a woman creator in the confrontation with an artist model – in the dual sense of inspiration and example.

Marguerite Van de Wiele I Anna Boch: resemblance

Marie Marguerite Amélie Van de Wiele (1857–1941)[7] is an author who has long been forgotten, even though part of her work is now available.[8] Born in the Brussels municipality of Ixelles, she came from a liberal, free-thinking background. Like many Belgian women authors of her time, she benefited from the progressive teaching of the *Cours d'éducation pour jeunes filles* (Education course for young girls) run by the feminist Isabelle Gatti de Gamond. Following a well-tried strategy used by women writers, she entered the field of literature under the patronage of prominent mentors: Louis Hymans, editor-in-chief of *L'Office de Publicité*, who published her first short stories while introducing her to the world of the press, and Charles Potvin, the founder of *La Revue de Belgique*, who welcomed her into his salon. After her first success (*Lady Fauvette*, 1879), she became friends with several Parisian writers, including Maupassant and Zola. Alongside her literary career, she contributed to a number of Belgian and French periodicals (including *La Vie moderne, Le Voltaire, Le Petit Bleu, L'Indépendance belge*), in which she published, among other things, art criticism articles, but also a number of texts dealing with the lot and future of women. In 1883, after the death of her father, she committed herself more actively to her literary career, to the extent that she became the first Belgian woman to earn a living from her writing. Widely seen in her time as a bluestocking, the discourse she conveyed in her novels was far from feminist, however, despite her active presence in women's movements and networks, such as the *Conseil national des femmes belges* (National council of Belgian women), of which she was president from 1919 to 1935. After being honoured for the first time in 1903 by her writer and artist friends, she celebrated fifty years of literary activity in 1929 at an official ceremony organised under the auspices of the City of Brussels. On this occasion, a triennial prize bearing her name was instituted. Lastly, she was honoured as a Knight (1908) and then as a Commander of the Order of Leopold (1935).

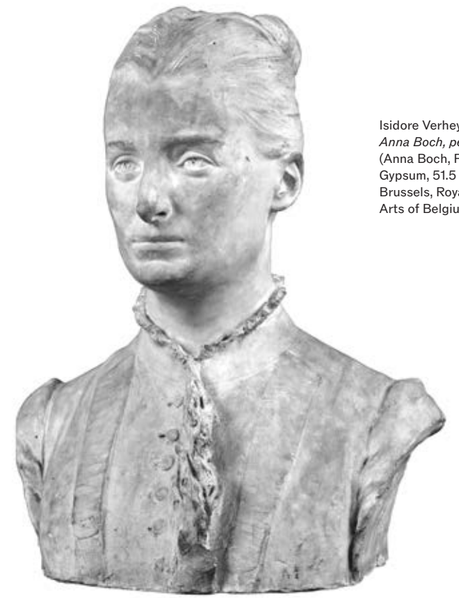
Anna Boch (1848–1936), a few years older than Marguerite Van de Wiele, belonged to the same generation. Both came from the progressive bourgeoisie that contributed to the artistic and intellectual life of the time, even though Van de Wiele, forced to earn her living, did not have the financial means of Anna Boch. Instead of endorsing the cloak of amateur painter, Boch shared with her fellow creator the ambition to build a career: she exhibited actively, was pleased when her works sold, and was involved in various artistic groups. Although she took various formal paths, sometimes daring ones, she did not overlook official recognition. Like Van de Wiele, she was made a Knight of the Order of Leopold in 1903. Although the artist is today more widely recognised than the novelist, it should be noted that the novelist was the first to have a Brussels street named after her: in 1931, the executive council of the Brussels municipality of Schaerbeek named a road after Van de Wiele when new roadways were laid out in the Helmet district. It is only posthumously, in 2019, after a debate on the feminisation of street names, that Anna Boch had a road named after her, one that crosses the Tour & Taxis site.[9]

Both women were prominent figures in Brussels, their respective works being regularly discussed and commented on in the artistic and literary press. They could also be found side by side in the pages of the short-lived illustrated magazine *Bruxelles féminin*, which devoted a series of articles to women artists, beginning on 1 November 1902 with a biographical study of Van de Wiele, followed by the serial publication of *Fleurs de civilisation*.[10] The press did not ignore them: their comings and goings and their presence at evenings and receptions were recorded in the Belgian high-life magazine, *L'Éventail*. It should be noted, for example, that Van de Wiele was among the personalities invited to a reception at the home of Octave Maus, Anna Boch's cousin, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Salon de La Libre Esthétique in 1894. It is conceivable that the writer and the artist crossed paths at such events.[11] Van de Wiele's regular presence at the openings is mentioned in the pages of *L'Art moderne*. At the opening of the 1905 Salon, for example, when Anna Boch was exhibiting successfully with the Cercle Vie et Lumière, Van de Wiele was among the visitors.[12] She was also often seen with the prominent art lover Edmond Picard, with whom she is rumoured to have had a special friendship,[13] at dinners, receptions or initiatives such as the Société des amis de la littérature, founded under Picard's presidency and Octave Maus's vice-presidency.[14] Lastly, the feminist networks of Belgium constitute another setting where Boch and Van de Wiele may have crossed paths: both are mentioned in the contents of the artistically illustrated special issue that *La Ligue, Organe belge du droit des femmes* devoted to women artists and writers on the occasion of the international feminist



Marguerite Van de Wiele,
Fleurs de civilisation, 1901
Paris, Ollendorff & Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques

Gustav Max Stevens
Portrait de Marguerite Van de Wiele (Portrait of Marguerite Van de Wiele), n.d.
Oil on canvas, 101 × 72.5 cm
Private collection



Isidore Verheyden
Anna Boch, peintre
(Anna Boch, Painter), 1886
Gypsum, 51.5 × 40.5 × 26.5 cm
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 7466

Anna Boch
Chaumière en Flandre (Cottage in Flanders), c. 1891
Oil on canvas, 75.5 × 107 cm
Lucien Arkas Collection

Anna Boch
Falaise à Sanary (The Cliffs at Sanary), 1924
Oil on canvas, 81.5 × 61.5 cm
Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Anna Boch, inv. 1936-O

Eric Min

Landscapes and Light
Travels with Anna Boch

The rocks there are steep and high, and covered in dense shrubbery and pines. In the shallows, the waves crash against the cliffs. To the left in the distance, Portissol Bay glistens, and on the right I think I can see the Pointe de la Cride and the small fortress. From the *corniche* you can still catch glimpses of the panorama – villas and high garden walls now block a complete view. Beneath the pines a thick carpet of dry pine needles crunches underfoot: that's the scent of the South. Sanary-sur-Mer is perfectly lovely.

It's not easy to detect the exact places in Sanary-sur-Mer where Anna Boch set up her easel or took the time to make sketches of the landscape. She produced at least six works here: three rocky landscapes in daylight and as many *crépuscules* ('odes to dusk'), and always with the Pointe de la Cride in the background. Boch spent a month in this Mediterranean fishing town between 28 November and 27 December 1924, which gave her ample time to explore the place. Anna Boch already knew the region well: in the spring of 1923 she had spent several weeks in the coastal town of Bandol near Sanary, which was still often written with an 'i' at the time, so that's how the artist spelt it herself, in the bottom right of the watercolour *Crépuscule à Sanary* (Sunset in Sanary). The neighbouring municipality of Bandol did not really appeal to her, as she confided to her brother Eugène, 'The place does not seem very interesting to me'.[1] She did not paint much more than a few fishing boats on the beach.

No, Sanary-sur-Mer is in a different league. Anna Boch could not imagine that even the luxurious Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the Côte d'Azur near Nice, where the Belgian King Leopold II had built a fabulous villa for his mistress, might be more pleasing or more elegant, 'I don't think it could possibly be more beautiful than Sanary. If God gives me more time to live, I will definitely go back there.'[2] She wrote these words to Eugène when he had settled in their beloved town once again in January 1925. His sister cherished treasured memories of Villa La Bastide, where Eugène was again staying, which they had rented together a few months earlier. Although there was no running water, they had had a wonderful time with Anna Boch's companion Laure Van Haelewijn and their driver Albert Lepreux.[3]

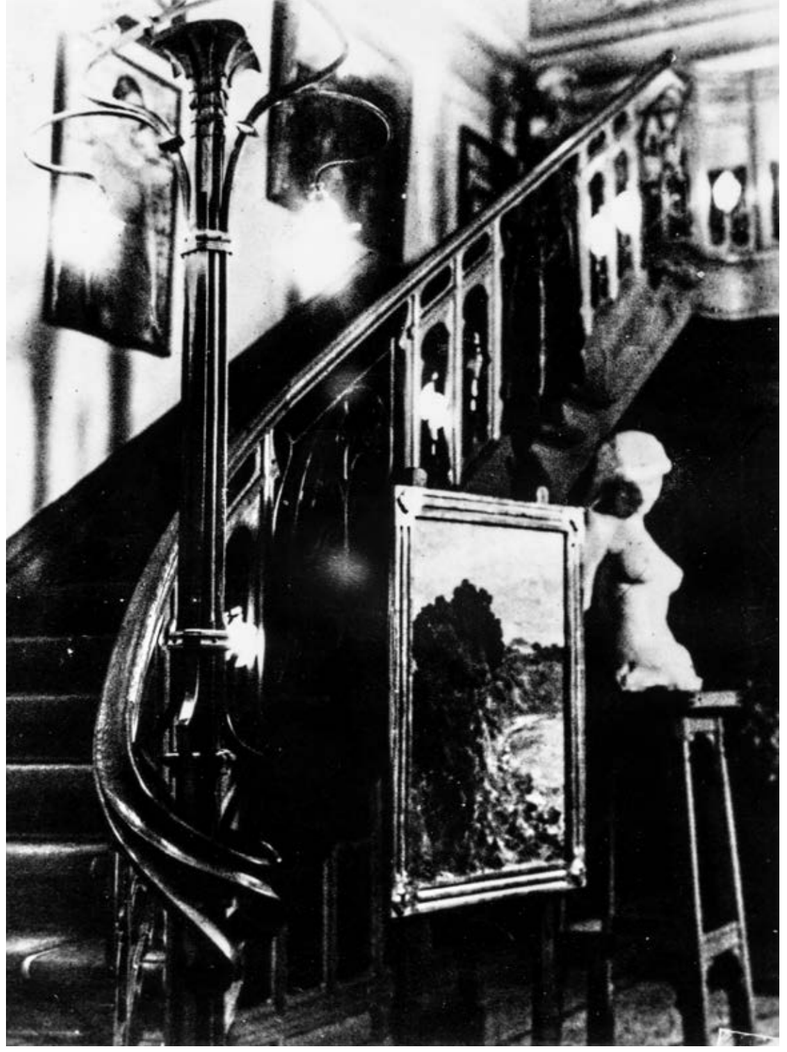
The cliffs at Sanary held a special place in the artist's heart, as can also be seen in the photograph taken a few years before she passed away, in the imposing hall of her house on the Rue de l'Abbaye in Ixelles. At the bottom of the staircase with the slender electric lamps – designed by the architect Victor Horta – the canvas *Falaise à Sanary* (The Cliffs at Sanary) (1924) greets visitors from an easel, flanked by a marble bust of a girl by Marnix D'Haveloose. In the words of the poet Baudelaire, everything here breathes '*luxe, calme et volupté*' (luxury, serenity and voluptuousness), and speaks of the memories of the numerous travels of the lady of the house, very often to the warm South, because that's where the light is most beautiful. From the last quarter of the 19th century until the 1930s, generations of wealthy travellers and artists made the journey there. A time period that dovetails perfectly with the life of Anna Boch.

A love for looking

The coast of Sanary forms the perfect synthesis of what this travelling artist wanted to see, experience and paint on her travels. It is no coincidence that the general public, then as now, knows her oeuvre primarily through a handful of colourful landscapes: the rugged coasts of Brittany (1901), the emblematic *Dunes au soleil* (Dunes in the Sun) (1903) with the bluish shadows on the sand, and the dark brown ochre of the rocks in the cliffs at Estérel (1910).[4] Just as she did in Sanary, Boch produced five variations there with cliffs that rise above the crashing waves – you can taste the salt of the sea. At the prestigious Salon d'Art moderne, an art event during the Charleroi (unofficial) World's Fair in 1911, four of these paintings were exhibited in a room that was dedicated to the oeuvre of Anna Boch to pay tribute to the artist.[5] No less than twenty-five of the twenty-nine paintings mentioned in the list of exhibited works are landscapes or cityscapes; seventeen of them include a geographical reference in the title, usually a town in France or the Netherlands. They show rocky coasts, lakes, marshes, gardens,

Anna Boch
Côte de Bretagne. La falaise
(Breton Coast. The Cliffs), 1901
Oil on canvas, 108 × 146.5 cm
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 3625

Anna Boch
Côte de Bretagne
(Breton Coast), 1901–1902
Oil on canvas, 80 × 100 cm
Private collection



Falaise à Sanary (The Cliffs at Sanary) by Anna Boch and *Torse de jeune fille* (Torso of a Young Girl) by Marnix D'Haveloose in the stairwell of the Villa Anna in Ixelles, refurbished with Art Nouveau elements by Victor Horta, n.d. [after 1924]
Private collection

harbours and meadows. In the catalogue for this Salon, the Brussels art promoter Octave Maus, who was also Anna Boch's cousin, concludes his introduction with a number of verses by the poet Émile Verhaeren who evokes a summer's day in words akin to strokes of paint on a canvas – flower petals shiver, a thousand bees buzz, and a mother-of-pearl sun is shining on the horizon.[6] Two years later, at the twentieth (and penultimate) Salon of his own artistic project in Brussels, La Libre Esthétique, Maus brought together almost three hundred works by some fifty French and Belgian artists with the title *Interprétations du Midi*.[7] The exhibition was an ode to the sun and the sea, with fabulous works by Eugène Boudin, Vincent van Gogh and the representatives of what Maus calls 'chromoluminarism', a collective name for the Neo-Impressionists. Anna Boch was present with paintings from Cassis, Martigues and Cannes, her brother Eugène with work from Gruissan… and the modest Albert Lepreux – their driver, who had also taken up painting himself – with some views of Toulon. String the place names from the titles of the three hundred catalogue items together, and you have a topographical map of the Mediterranean coast.

Today we have a tendency to dismiss artistic motifs such as landscapes and seascapes as conventional, even riskless – after all, do they not fit the unwritten canon of the beautiful and the picturesque, a concept that can be literally translated as 'that which deserves to be painted'? The technique used by Boch could be described as restrained Neo-Impressionism: this artist is not an orthodox Pointillist who blindly follows the formulas of the new revolutionary style and assembles dots of pure colour into mosaics, but a freethinking woman who charts her own course, separate from Seurat's Divisionist theory, and takes what she likes from various styles. On her canvases, dots, commas and long, clearly visible strokes of the brush are arranged into elements of recognisable reality. The way in which Paul Signac, Georges Seurat, Théo van Rysselberghe and their friends brought the light onto the canvas did not escape Anna Boch either. In 1907, she acquired Signac's exuberantly dotted *Saint-Tropez. La calanque* (Saint-Tropez. The Bay) with the proceeds from the sale of her two Van Goghs. She promptly copied the painting; the result looks bizarre and somewhat caricatural – it was done in a hurry. Boch had neither the patience nor talent for pure Pointillism, and she came up with her own formulas to capture the light in paint.

They all did that around 1900, these Luminists and artistic sun worshippers who founded art circles such as Vie et Lumière – the nomenclature

gives away the essence of the programme: light is everything. As early as October 1887, at the height of the Pointillist craze, Théo van Rysselberghe had admitted in a letter to Eugène Boch that he was possessed by '*cette sacrée lumière*' (this sacred light), and he wanted to know whether his sister Anna was also bewitched:

> 'I think our charming *Vingtiste* artist Anna will regale us with beautiful works and I am looking forward to seeing them. Tell me my dear – just between us – is she also so obsessed with that infernal light? It's giving me sleepless nights and if I see a canvas without light, I feel seasick.'[8]

The young Van Rysselberghe goes south in pursuit of that light: between 1882 and 1888 he made three long journeys to Morocco, where he stayed for eighteen months in total – from Meknès he wrote to his 'art brother' Verhaeren, describing the shock of the colour he experienced there, 'stupor, bewilderment, vertigo, madness'.[9] Between trips, Van Rysselberghe became Anna Boch's mentor; together they entered the slipstream of Pointillism. The Brussels painter eventually turned his back on Belgium in favour of Paris, but the southern light kept playing with his mind. In the spring of 1904, when Van Rysselberghe went on a cycling holiday between Hyères and Monaco with his friend the painter Henri-Edmond Cross, he decided to settle in Saint-Clair, near Le Lavandou. There, he found all the colours that had lured his colleague Van Gogh to the south of France in 1888 – the moment when Van Rysselberghe was seeing the light in Morocco – and which inspired an entire generation of artists to drink them in, there, *in situ*. Just hear what Vincent whispered to his sister Willemien:

> 'The colour here is indeed really fine, when the green is fresh it's a rich green like we rarely see in the north, calm. When it burns and pollinates, it does not become ugly, but a landscape then acquires notes of gold of all hues, green gold, yellow gold, rose gold, ditto bronze, copper, in short, from lemon yellow to the dull yellow colour of, say, a heap of threshed grain. The one with the blue – from the deepest king's blue in the water to that of forget-me-nots. Cobalt especially, clear clear blue – green blue and violet blue.'[10]

On the road

Like her fellow artists, Anna Boch plots her landscapes according to a tried and tested formula, with clearly marked foregrounds and backgrounds, sturdy volumes and an intense yet harmonious palette. The horizon is reassuringly high up. The theme? Undiluted nature – with artistic licence, the painter sometimes forgets to depict the harbour in the distance or bathers who are in the way. At most, a white sail on the horizon may accentuate the immeasurable vastness. Rarely does a human figure disturb the idyll: the boats on the beach in Bandol are deserted, and it is strangely quiet, even in the busy ports of Bordeaux, La Rochelle or Martigues. Conflict seems alien to these images. There is a surplus of time – is that why it almost always feels like summer? The view and the overview are essential, and that sensation of freedom that you experience when you enjoy an unencumbered view of the panorama. The postcards passing back and forth in the 1920s all adhere to the same scheme: the cliffs of the Pointe de la Cride in these black-and-white photographs could have been arranged into a landscape by Anna Boch. 'Entire regions became privileged hunting grounds for lovers of the picturesque,' Alain Corbin ponders in *The Lure of the Sea*, a standard work for those who want to understand our fascination with the sea and our addiction to vistas.[11]

To feed her own love for looking, Anna Boch surrounded herself with paintings by the greatest contemporary painters in her Brussels home. We have already mentioned Signac's *Saint-Tropez. La calanque*. The two Van Goghs in her collection, *La vigne rouge à Montmajour* (The Red Vineyard at Montmajour) and *Plaine de La Crau avec pêchers en fleurs* (The Plain of La Crau with Peach Trees in Blossom), were painted in the countryside near Arles. Anna Boch had already bought the beautiful *Conversation. Bretagne* (Conversation. Brittany), a view of a Breton town, by Paul Gauguin, at the Les XX Salon in 1889. Three years later, Seurat's *Bords de la Seine à l'Île de la Grande Jatte* (Banks of the Seine at l'Île de La Grande Jatte) completed her collection. Two thirds of the long list of 431 works left by Boch at her death (half of which are her own productions) are landscapes – of Lepreux's twelve paintings, two were created in Sanary. In the iconic photograph taken in her studio around 1930, the elderly lady poses between twenty canvases; only one portrait among them. When she lets these painted fragments of the world pass through her hands, in her mind she is looking outwards.

Throughout her life, Boch actively sought out that outside world. As a *grande bourgeoise* she always travelled with great enthusiasm, in her own country but also and especially throughout Europe. Piecing together excerpts from correspondence and other archive material has made it possible to produce a list of at least sixty trips abroad between her twentieth birthday and October 1930, when she

Anna Boch
Cannes. Le pêcheur dans sa barque (Cannes. Fisherman in His Boat), 1868
Sketchbook 3
Pencil on paper, 14.6 × 22 cm
Private collection (Kraainem)

Anna Boch
Excursions de Cannes (Excursions from Cannes), 1871–1872
Album of lithographs, 20.4 × 30.2 cm
Villeroy & Boch AG, inv. 180

visited Amsterdam one last time to see Van Gogh's work. Thirty-two (more than half) of those trips have France as their destination, particularly the Midi and Brittany. With a dozen, usually shorter, trips, the Netherlands is a close second; Boch created many genre paintings and landscapes with figures there – something she rarely did in France. Italy follows in third place, but it never became a prominent theme in Boch's work. And of course the painter took her sketchbooks with her when she went on trips in her own country, just across the border or to Switzerland. She was sixteen and seventeen years old when she filled *carnets* with her drawings in Germany, Villers-la-Ville, Blankenberge and Heist. Which is how she practised her hand. In her early twenties, Boch spent a winter in Cannes and the surrounding area, where the family went on a retreat. There was even a privately published edition of a bundle of lithographs from this time: *Excursions de Cannes* (Excursions from Cannes), 1871–1872.[12]

It should not surprise us that Octave Maus characterises his cousin as a '*voyageuse obstinée*' (stubborn traveller).[13] But Anna Boch certainly did not travel exclusively to gain inspiration for her art. Interestingly enough, she barely brought back any sketches or paintings from her trips to Italy – on a tour with her father and brother in 1881, to the Venice Biennale in 1889 and 1907, and to Sicily in 1897 – or from her weeks touring in Greece, Constantinople, Budapest and Vienna in 1900, or from other more far-ranging journeys to Spain and Morocco (1878–1879) and Algeria (1893–1894). At most she took photographs with her little Kodak. In November 1889 she lost this camera in Rome.[14]

We have been able to determine the exact duration of about thirty trips. No fewer than twenty times Boch was away from home for more than twenty days, with a few exceptions closer to seven weeks; one time she was even on the road for sixty-six days without interruption. This tells us something about the social class of the artist. After all, money was no object for this member of the wealthy Boch family, industrialists from La Louvière. When we consider the houses Anna Boch occupied in Brussels, study the circles she moved in, and trace her footsteps through Europe, we find that she was fully a child of her time, but also of a social milieu in which travel was an essential part of the curriculum. Anyone who went travelling in those days was working on his or her cultural development, establishing contacts with like-minded people, and deliberately working on building a reputation that would give them a certain cachet in society. After all, these people not only travelled for themselves, but also to make an impression on their social circles and