

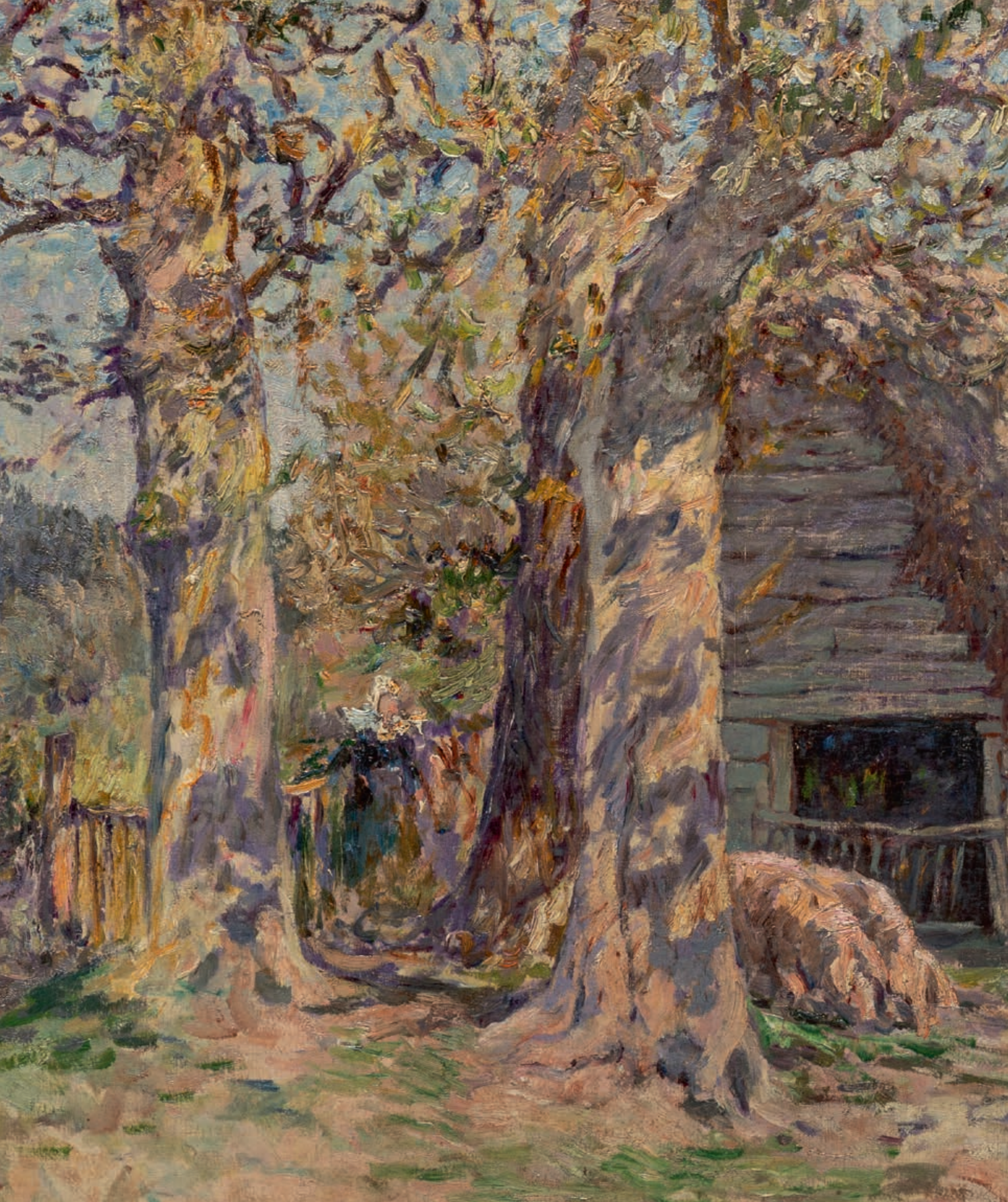
Anna Boch

An Impressionist Journey

HANNIBAL

- pp. 8–17 **Prefaces**
Dominique Savelkoul, Sophie Kervran, Virginie Devillez & Thérèse M. Thomas
- pp. 20–37 **Morisot, Cassatt, Boch and the ‘Circle of New Art’**
Sylvie Patry
- pp. 40–57 **‘Vingtiste, confettiste, méridionaliste’
Evolution of Style Through the Eyes of Art Criticism**
Stefan Huygebaert & Wendy Van Hoorde
- pp. 60–73 **Anna Boch and Marguerite Van de Wiele
Face to Face
The Artist in the Writer’s Mirror**
Laurence Brogniez
- pp. 88–107 **The Collection as a Reflection of Elective Affinities**
Virginie Devillez
- pp. 110–127 **Anna and Eugène Boch: The Entwined Paths of Artist Siblings**
Barbara Caspers
- pp. 130–147 **Landscapes and Light
Travels with Anna Boch**
Eric Min
- pp. 150–159 **In Brittany**
Mireille de Lassus

- pp. 172–191 ***À la recherche des maisons perdues***
Looking for the Lost Houses
Marjan Sterckx & Linda Van Santvoort
- pp. 192–205 **'It's a party for everybody'**
Anna Boch and Music
Dominique Bauer & Stijn Paredis
- pp. 208–219 **The Keramis Earthenware Factory,**
a Cultural Presence in La Louvière
Benoît Goffin & Ludovic Recchia
- pp. 228–234 **Biochronology of Anna Boch**
Wendy Van Hoorde
- pp. 238–256 **Catalogue**
Bibliography
About the authors
Index
Colophon





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!

Sophie Kervran

Chief Curator and
Director of the Musée
de Pont-Aven

The Musée de Pont-Aven is overjoyed to be able to collaborate with Mu.ZEE. Sharing working methods, visions and competences across borders is essential for the dynamism and open spirit of our cultural institutions. I therefore want to extend my warmest thanks to the Ostend team, whose flexibility and professionalism ensured a smooth and enjoyable realisation of this exhibition.

Without Virginie Devillez, art researcher and advisor, who contacted me early in 2022 to propose this project, there would not have been an exhibition. She has succeeded magnificently in illuminating the close links between the Belgian artist Anna Boch, the artistic history of Brittany, and the objectives of our municipal museum.

As Mireille de Lassus writes in one of the essays in this catalogue, Anna Boch really was able to capture the essence of the Breton coast, which she discovered with her brother at the beginning of the 20th century. She did so with ‘a keen sense for the colours, for the solidity of the rocks, the exquisite finesses in the skies and the crashing waves and, I don’t know how, but the airiness, in which the whole poetry of this proud region is wrapped up.’¹

But the patron Anna Boch has also been important to us. Anna Boch acquired several paintings from the Pont-Aven school. Gauguin exhibited six Breton works at the 1889 Les XX salon and, despite the ‘mocking laughter of the people’, Anna Boch picked his *Conversation. Bretagne* (Conversation. Brittany), which he painted in Pont-Aven in 1888. *Vision après le sermon* (Vision after the Sermon), which was also exhibited, was quite probably still considered too radical at the time (incidentally, Gauguin did not exhibit it at the Café Volpini in 1889), while today it is seen as a key work in the genesis of modern art; and it was, as I love to point out, painted here in our little artist town of fewer than three thousand souls. In 1895, Anna Boch hung the painting *Falaise, Ouessant* (Cliffs, Ushant) by Henry Moret above the canvas of the master of Pont-Aven. She also ordered a folding screen with Breton motifs from Émile Bernard, the other creator of syntheticism...

Undoubtedly, these works that proudly decorated her home prompted her first journey to southern Finistère in 1901, following in the footsteps of these painters.

1 ‘... un sentiment parfait des valeurs, de la solidité dans les masses, des finesses exquises dans le ciel et dans les vagues mourantes et je ne sais quoi d’aérien, d’enveloppé, qui est toute la poésie de cette contrée fière.’ Pierre Verhaegen on the oil painting *Côte de Bretagne* (Breton Coast), which Anna Boch exhibited in 1902 at the salon of La Libre Esthétique, quoted in Brussels 1993, p. 183.

This exhibition also represents a next step in our reflection on the position of women in art. Following on from *Artistes voyageuses, l'appel des lointains* – which included work by Lucie Cousturier (Anna Boch, herself a frequent traveller, owned two of her paintings) – and preceding *Femmes à l'œuvre chez les Nabis*, which we are organising for the summer of 2024, this presentation dedicated to Anna Boch marks a new stage. Drawing from different genres, this series intends to yield new insight into the power mechanisms within art history, on which Sylvie Patry has written an essay in this catalogue.

Finally, devoting an exhibition to 'Anna the Vingtiste', as Van Gogh called her, is also a way of recalling the famous salons of Les XX. The Les XX art circle, founded in 1883, played a pivotal role in Belgium, comparable to that of the Impressionist exhibition ten years earlier in Paris. Thanks to an exceptional partnership, the Musée de Pont-Aven was able to include this exhibition in the programme *150 ans de l'impressionnisme avec le Musée d'Orsay (1874–2024)*.

Thanks to the generosity of public institutions and private collectors, Belgian and French visitors can embark on this beautiful (Neo-) Impressionist journey in the company of an artist who championed the avant-garde and was one of them.

In recent years, a great deal of research has been devoted to women artists, whether they are renowned (Berthe Morisot, Joan Mitchell, etc.) or largely unknown to the academic world and the general public. The latter were seldom studied because they had already been ignored by critics of their time (who paid more attention to their male counterparts) and/or because preconceived ideas about women artists (who were seen as dilettantes rather than professionals) were still prevalent. The (re)discovery of these creators was in part driven by the current historiographical trend of re-evaluating the avant-garde, whose predominance had the effect of obscuring the reality of an often more mixed and heterogeneous artistic scene.

Whether abroad or in Belgium, women's careers were hindered for a long time by their being denied access to the Academy and the Beaux-Arts. This had a major impact on their training but also on the reception of their work, which was considered amateurish as a result. In the nineteenth century, the discrepancy between the large numbers of women artists participating in the salons and their recognition by the legitimating bodies confirmed that prevailing view. Recent studies have therefore put the spotlight on those artists who had a very active social and artistic life at the time, such as Jenny Montigny, Yvonne Serruys, Marguerite Verboeckhoven, Anna De Weert, Marie Danse and Louise Danse, among others.

Until recently, however, the participation of women artists in the salons of the nineteenth-century avant-garde was limited to a single name: Anna Boch.¹ Indeed, she was the only female member of the important circles Les XX and La Libre Esthétique, led by her cousin Octave Maus, where she positioned herself as an equal to her peers who, unusually for the time, reciprocated when they embarked together on the adventure of Neo-Impressionism. She was quickly recognised by the group for her strong views and the way she shone as a patron, collector, musician, and host of a prominent salon, enjoying a highly privileged position compared to her female counterparts. Her paintings were also acquired early on by the State, which bought *En juin* (In June) (1894) in the wake of the 1895 Salon de La Libre Esthétique.

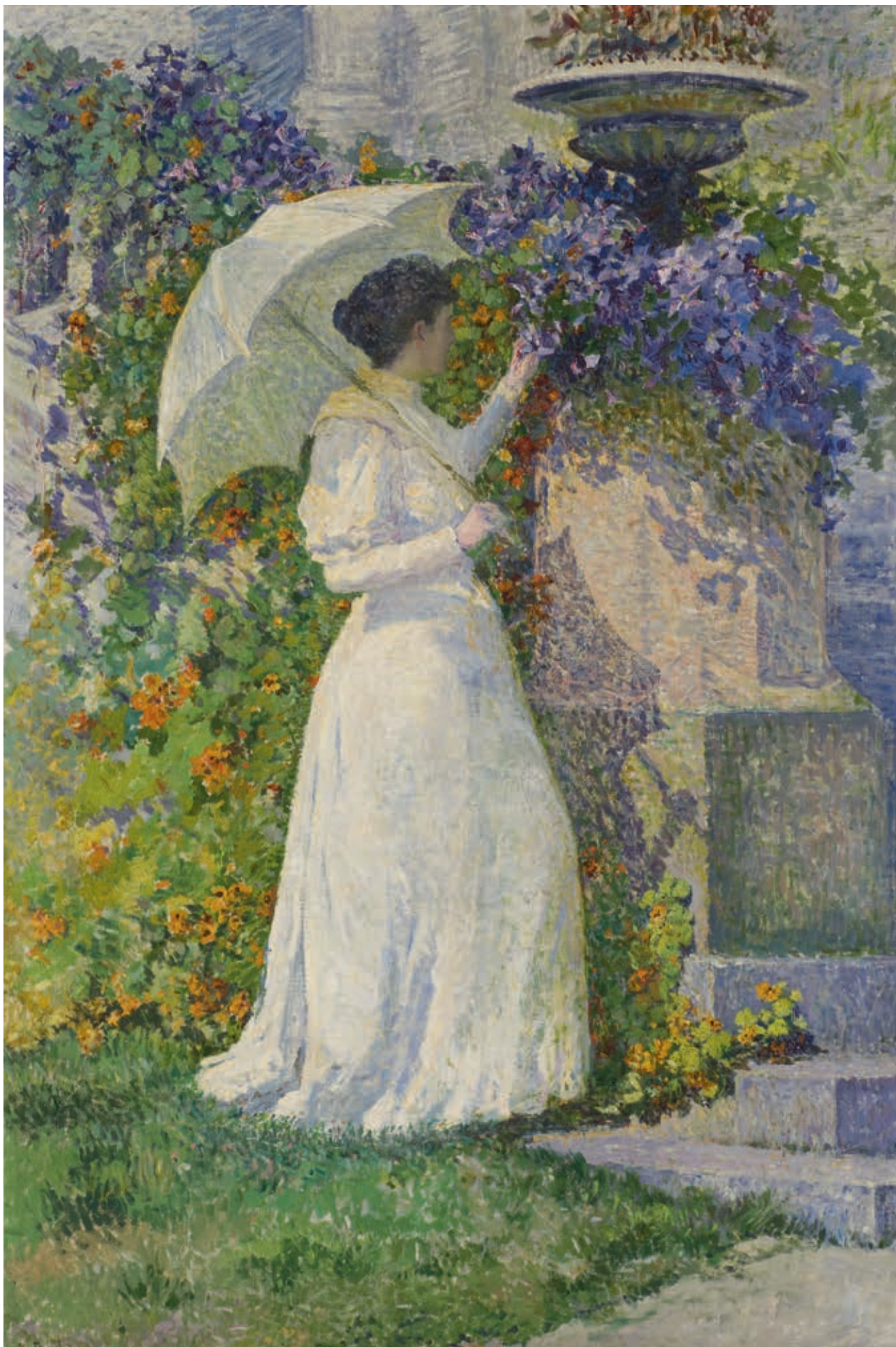
Employed by the Royal Museum of Mariemont from 1958 to 1969, I was enthusiastically involved in the study of regional ceramics. After all, doesn't the city of La Louvière owe its origins to this industry which was set up in 1841 by the brothers Eugène and Victor Boch (from Luxembourg and the Saarland) in association with their brother-in-law, J.-B. Nothomb, then prime minister of the young Belgian state? Boch ceramics would spread around the world. Although all manufacturing ended in the province of Hainaut some twenty years ago, the other branch of the Boch family, in association with the Villeroyes, continued and even intensified its production, particularly in Germany.

The two Boch brothers were fine draughtsmen, and in around 1960 I discovered that Anna Boch, Victor's daughter, had inherited her father's gifts. And she has stayed with me ever since! Over the years, I have been lucky enough to meet some of her nephews and nieces who had known her well and had even stayed with her. I became friends with her god-daughter, Ida Van Haelewijn, who was born in Anna's beautiful house in the Rue de l'Abbaye. She accompanied the artist on many trips as well as on visits to exhibitions in Brussels, and she was by her side when Boch passed away. These precious accounts helped me better understand the personality of this artist, and to appreciate her.

Anna Boch was strong and led an independent life in Brussels whilst keeping a close eye on her father who lived in La Louvière until he was 103. Family loyalty was important to her, and she watched over her younger siblings with care, especially her 'little brother' Eugène, who was not in good health but who lived to be 86! How she worried about him! She was a faithful friend, as shown by the letters kept in the family and among the descendants of her friends. Even though she was rather isolated in her final years on account of her deafness, she maintained an intense correspondence. She possessed a healthy curiosity and set out to discover regions that few women travelled to at the time: for example, Spain and Algeria in 1878 and 1879 with her brother Eugène, and Greece and Turkey in 1900 with her cousin Madeleine de Saint-Clair. Didn't her longing for discoveries lead her to buy a car in 1907? At her father's house, on the second floor of La Closière,







Anna Boch
En juin (In June), 1894
Oil on canvas, 139 × 92 cm
Collection of the Belgian State, placed on deposit by the French-speaking community
of Belgium at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, inv. 1028

Morisot, Cassatt, Boch and the 'Circle of New Art'

At the end of their landmark study on the place of women in the movements Les XX and La Libre Esthétique, Laurence Brogniez and Vanessa Gemis underlined 'the multiplicity and complexity of relations woven between women and the artistic avant-garde at the start of the twentieth century'.¹ These women were present as exhibitors, collectors, organisers and visitors, accepted and sometimes welcomed by critics and amateurs. In this respect, independent exhibitions held alongside the official circuits seem to have been favourable to women. Except, as Brogniez and Gemis point out, that they only very exceptionally occupied the front ranks and were ultimately 'invisibilised' in the grand narrative of modern art, until recently.

Anna Boch did not escape a pattern that we wish to put into perspective here with the example of her contemporaries – primarily the Impressionists active in France and of the same generation as her, in particular Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. To our knowledge, the Belgian artist had no direct contact with her two elders. However, all three chose a common career path, thus contributing to the essential phenomenon that is the affirmation of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements which, in the words of Émile Verhaeren, made up the '*cercle de l'art neuf*'² (circle of new art) at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, a preamble to the proliferation of avant-gardes at the start of the twentieth.

At first sight, the renown of Morisot and Cassatt contrasts with Anna Boch's relative anonymity outside her own country: one could even go so far as to say that Cassatt and Morisot's fame has overshadowed many other women artists in France and Europe, as Charlotte Foucher-Zarmanian has shown in her study of 'women artists in France in symbolist circles'.³ Impressionism even appears as a new 'enchanted interlude'⁴ for women aspiring to work and develop a professional career. It is therefore interesting to explore whether Anna Boch and Les XX helped to open up this interlude in Belgium and beyond Impressionism.

Parisian 'Vingtistes'?

The exhibitions (the first was held in Paris in 1874) and dissidence of the Impressionists constituted a precedent and a reference point for the founders of Les XX,⁵ even though in Brussels the Société libre des Beaux-Arts (active between 1869 and 1876) had opened the way to independence, or at least to complementarity with the three-yearly salons. The Société libre had only one woman member, Marie Collart, who was hardly visible as she did not take part in any of the Société's four exhibitions. In 1884, the year of the first exhibition of Les XX at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, seven so-called Impressionist exhibitions had already taken place in Paris and, although reactions were mixed – ranging from support to rejection – they had imposed what was, from then on, perceived in France and abroad as a group, even an avant-garde.

From the first exhibition in 1874, Morisot's works were widely commented upon, and more favourably so than those of her colleagues: *Le berceau* (The Cradle) (1872, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) in particular was highly regarded. Thus, Jules-Antoine Castagnary, who included Morisot among 'the leaders of the new school', 'could hardly find more graceful works, more deliberately and delicately touched than *Le Berceau* and *Cache-Cache* (Hide and Seek) (private collection), and I would add that here the execution is in perfect keeping with the idea to be expressed'.⁶ Although sexist, the compliment is nonetheless an acknowledgement, by an eminent critic, of Morisot's pioneering and central place. The last so-called Impressionist event took place in 1886. It gathered, in addition to a few historic Impressionists, the new Symbolist and Neo-Impressionist guard, with Gauguin, Redon, Seurat and Signac. The event was also the most feminine, along with that of 1880: of the five female exhibitors in the history of the Impressionist group, Morisot, Cassatt and Marie Bracquemond were the only three to exhibit there under their own names.

Despite the ten-year gap between the creation of the two groups, there was much interaction between the Impressionists and the Belgians:

starting in 1886, the French Impressionists were regularly invited by Les XX to show their works in Brussels, to such an extent that the Brussels newspaper *L'Art moderne* referred to the invited Impressionists as the 'Parisian Vingtistes'. It thus established an equivalence between the two movements, whose surprisingly decentralising perspective should be emphasised, as it went against the traditional centre/periphery relationship. There is hardly a mention of the anteriority or pre-eminence of Paris ('there') over Brussels ('here'). 'Impressionists' and 'Vingtistes' are two coinages that designate a 'common emancipation of art from established formulas; the sincere expression of a felt emotion'.⁷

In these exchanges, women seem to have occupied a place of choice: the first invitation of 1886 is, one might say, defined by parity, for out of the four Impressionists approached, two (Cassatt and Morisot) were women. Only Monet and Pissarro appeared in the catalogue that year, although Morisot may have sent in paintings. In 1887, the latter participated with five works (as did Renoir) when Cassatt again declined on the grounds that her available works were in New York and that she had sold those she had in Paris. A refusal due to her success. A new invitation reached Morisot in 1891, but she had to decline for health reasons.⁸ Thus, Morisot was solicited as many times as Monet or Renoir, and more than Degas, Cézanne or Sisley for example. Circumstances above all seem to explain why fewer than a dozen works by Morisot and Cassatt were exhibited at Les XX, whereas Monet, Renoir and Pissarro were more widely exhibited in Brussels (in 1886, eleven works by Monet were exhibited there).

'Opening up the day'; 'Staging a figure in the open air'⁹

The Belgian reception of French Impressionism seemed almost to acknowledge the contribution of women, and especially of Morisot, to the movement. Was this visibility, which cannot be explained by any particular personal links with the Vingtistes, intended to reflect the artist's cardinal role in the group? Even before the first so-called Impressionist exhibition in the spring of 1874 in Paris, Morisot was actively involved in the artistic exchanges that paved the way for the emergence of what is sometimes also called the '*Nouvelle peinture*' (New painting) in the second half of the 1860s. This was the title of a text that the critic and novelist Edmond Duranty published in 1876, the year of the second Impressionist exhibition. In it,

Duranty set out some of the movement's aesthetic precepts. He highlighted a generation of artists born, like Morisot, around 1840, who wanted to challenge the organisation of the Beaux-Arts system in France and profoundly renew the painting of their time. This renewal consisted, as Duranty put it, in 'removing the partition that separates the studio from everyday life and opening up to the street',¹⁰ that is to say, painting the open air and the 'real sun',¹¹ representing 'modern life' and not studio reconstructions.

This is what Morisot applied herself to from the start in the mid-1860s, with the support of her parents, which was essential at the time for the pursuit of an artistic career for any young girl like her from the *grande bourgeoisie*. Morisot worked in the open air: what was an accepted practice for women in the context of the 'pleasure arts' (i.e. an amateur practice that was part of a proper education) was for her and, more generally in the writing of modernity, a key issue. She very quickly asserted her ambition by choosing, like Pissarro, Corot as her master. Until her death in 1895, Morisot never abandoned the open air, which was inseparable from the light that bathed her paintings as well as from her sketchy, free and scriptural touch. The 'real sun' and the chromatic revolution it triggered, at the heart of the 'modernities' of the end of the century, were thus accessible to women who contributed fully to the development of new visual practices and grammars beyond Impressionism. Boch, like Morisot, Bracquemond and the Neo-Impressionist Lucie Cousturier, but also Scandinavian artists such as the Norwegian, Kitty Lange Kielland, made it one of the means by which they recomposed the art of their time. For Boch, as for Morisot, open-air subjects made experiments in colour and composition possible: the traditional distinction between figure and background, the construction of depth according to the laws of perspective – all traditional rules of landscape – are called into question here in favour of an overall effect in which women and children find themselves as if immersed in a proliferating, enveloping and covering nature.

'Everyday life' and self-narration

'Removing the partition between the studio and everyday life' was both simpler (ironically) and more complex for women. Like many women artists of the time, Morisot rarely had a studio or 'a room of her own', as Virginia Woolf advocated (along with a source of income), which was essential for creation. In fact, Morisot painted in and from 'everyday life' because she worked in the spaces of this everyday



Berthe Morisot
Le berceau (The Cradle), 1872
Oil on canvas, 56 × 46.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, inv. RF 2849

Berthe Morisot
Eugène Manet à l'île de Wight
(Eugène Manet on the Isle of Wight), 1875
Oil on canvas, 38 × 46 cm
Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet, bequest
by Annie Rouart 1993, inv. 6029





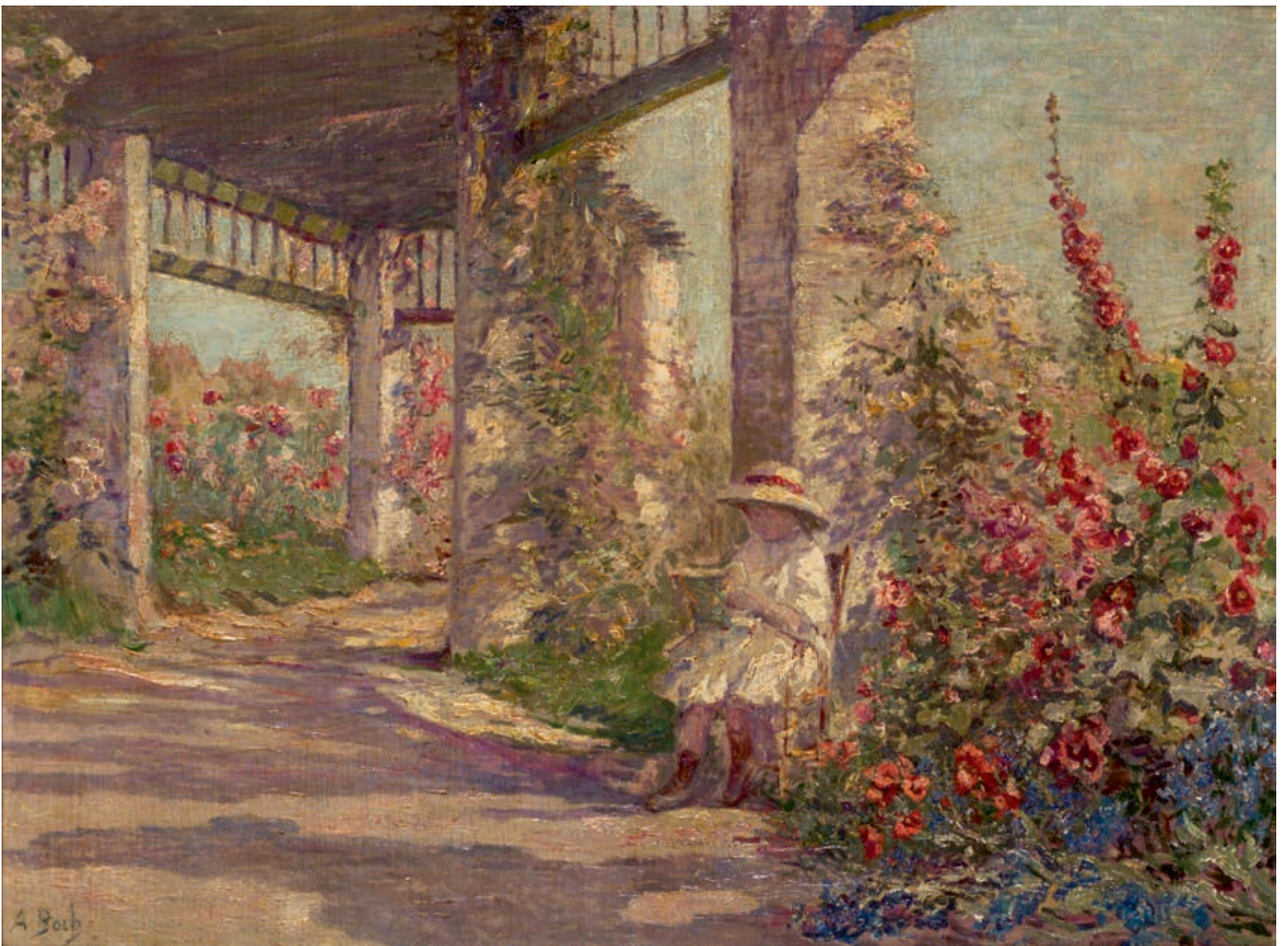
Berthe Morisot
Autoportrait (Self-Portrait), 1885
Oil on canvas, 61 × 50 cm
Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet, bequest by Annie Rouart 1993, inv. 6022



Anna Boch, c. 1880
Private collection



Ida Van Haelewijn, Anna Boch's god-daughter, under the Garden Pergola in Ohain, 1912
Private collection



Anna Boch
Sous la pergola à Ohain (Under the Pergola in Ohain), 1912
Oil on panel, 58.5 × 78.5 cm
Villeroy & Boch AG, inv. 35



Isidore Verheyden
Anna Boch peignant sur la plage (Anna Boch Painting on the Beach), 1885
Oil on canvas, 32 × 40.5 cm
Villeroy & Boch AG, inv. 19



Berthe Morisot
Enfant dans les roses trémières (Child Among the Hollyhocks), 1881
Oil on canvas, 50.5 × 42.5 cm
Cologne, Wallraf Museum, on permanent loan from the Fondation Corboud, inv. FC 614

life, her flat, her house, her living room and her bedroom. This was not the case with Anna Boch, who was photographed several times or portrayed in her studio. By contrast, there is no depiction of Morisot at work, with the exception of a portrait of her by her sister in their early days, (which is still in a private collection), and a self-portrait in which only the (work) dress and perhaps a brush and palette, sketched very allusively, refer to the subject's profession. There is also that magnificent self-portrait, now considered a masterpiece, which she never showed during her lifetime. Morisot and Boch both posed for the great painters of their time (think of the twelve portraits of Morisot by Manet between 1869 and 1874), but only Boch was depicted as an artist.

This difference in the work environments and degrees of self-assertion between the two painters does not erase the gendered partition of spaces to which men and women were subjected in the late nineteenth century. Boch, Cassatt and Morisot share an iconography of 'privacy'. Boch, however, does not limit herself to this and, like Marie Bashkirtseff, Virginie Demont-Breton, Anna Klumpke and Elizabeth Nourse, she explores a naturalistic register that takes her outside the domestic sphere and her social environment. In this respect, naturalism, and the examples of Bastien-Lepage and especially Jules Breton, undoubtedly offered a space of pictorial freedom to women artists at the end of the nineteenth century, at least as much as Impressionism did.

For men, the public space and, as a result, modern subjects such as cafés, the street and crowds; while for women, the domestic sphere and its outdoor extensions, the garden and the park, and the 'home', whose models (often non-professional) were its main protagonists, women, children and servants, constituted the essential subjects for Morisot and many other women artists of the nineteenth century. This limitation allowed Morisot, Cassatt and Bracquemond to contribute only in part to the representation of 'modern life' and, given the modesty of their subjects, played a role in undermining their contribution and marginalising them from the history of modernity. Morisot, Cassatt and Boch's paintings were quickly compared, in praise as well as in criticism, to diary entries, the writing of the self which was practised so widely by amateur women in the nineteenth century: 'her work makes one think of what the diary of a woman would be whose means of expression were colour and drawing',¹² wrote Paul Valéry about Morisot.

Of significance is the painting Morisot chose for her participation in Les XX in 1887, *Intérieur de cottage*

(Cottage Interior). In it, the artist paints her own family intimacy, in this case a moment during a stay on the island of Jersey. The girl is her child, Julie, born in 1878, and her favourite model. She is turned towards the bay window that gives onto the sea. The composition, carefully meditated and preceded by a preparatory pastel, offers a subtle embedding of successive frames, a process used quite frequently by the artist. Partitions between wall and window, new divisions introduced by the mullions of the bay, then by the piers in the background. Should we see this as the aesthetic translation of the confinement of women and girls to the interior, whose contact with the outside takes place from a threshold (a window, a balcony)?¹³ The grid thus subtly sets up contrasts with the freedom of the brush: the strokes ignore the difference between curtains and tablecloth, for example. The dominance of whites and blues lends unity to the composition and gives it a poetic dimension. Morisot's gaze is not without ambiguity. This is a happy moment, that of a lunch, in the very privileged setting of a family holiday in Jersey. Like Boch and Cassatt, Morisot belonged to the upper-middle class of the late nineteenth century, to whom travel and a life of leisure were accessible. Poetry, the refinement of light, the tenderness of the mother's gaze on her child do not prevent melancholy.

Was it the artist's melancholy at the passing of time, to which Morisot was particularly sensitive? Here Julie has taken the place of her father Eugène Manet (the painter's brother), who had posed for his wife ten years earlier in front of the bay window of the house they had rented in the Isle of Wight on the occasion of their honeymoon. Morisot had casually reversed the traditional nineteenth-century relationship between the observer (the wife) and the object being observed (the husband), between work (Morisot) and leisure (Eugène Manet), and also between public space (a woman and a child are walking outside) and private space (Eugène occupies the place traditionally assigned to women in painting: that of the threshold, in the background, behind the window). By reactivating this composition, as it were, ten years later, Morisot measures the passage of time. Is it the model's melancholy, so idle does Julie seem in this *Intérieur de cottage*? Idle or absorbed? Julie, who received artistic training from her mother and also became a painter,¹⁴ seems to be drawing against the window. Does this scene, which recurs in Morisot's work, exalt the capacity of children to let loose their imagination, the beauty of their reverie, or does it express a form of obstruction and boredom which were also the fate of young girls in the nineteenth century and which the painter often suggested in her paintings?

Or perhaps this child drawing as close as possible to the light of day is a meditation on the act of painting and creating, like some of Chardin's works, which Morisot greatly admired, and therefore goes far beyond a simple and pleasant family memory.

Feminisation and sisterhood

By considering Morisot and Cassatt as representatives of Impressionism in the same way as Renoir, Monet and Sisley, for example, Les XX seem to have acknowledged what might be called a feminisation of Impressionism. Feminisation through the participants (three women in 1886); feminisation of the iconography, with the importance given to the representation of the domestic sphere as an integral part of the representation of modern life, and which is of course not the prerogative of the group's female artists: 'Our existence takes place in bedrooms and in the street',¹⁵ wrote Duranty. If women could not go out into the street, male artists took over the street but also the bedroom. Think of some of Monet's family scenes, but above all of Renoir, for example, for whom the public space was a fairly occasional source of inspiration, concentrated in the 1870s with the great manifestos of the *Bal du Moulin de la galette* (Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette) and the *Déjeuner des canotiers* (Luncheon of the Boating Party). At the beginning of the 1880s, Renoir mainly exhibited female portraits or portraits of children, sometimes executed in pastel, thus combining a subject and a technique considered feminine in the nineteenth century. Feminisation of the very act of painting with the emphasis on emotion, impression and sensation, categories that were often perceived as feminine in the nineteenth century: this is why Morisot increasingly appears in the 1880s as the Impressionist artist *par excellence*. Tamar Garb has shown, however, how ambiguous this 'feminisation' of Impressionism is and how it could also prove to be depreciative when the movement was challenged by emerging 'circles of new art' in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁶

In this context, what are we to make of the invitations extended to Morisot and Cassatt at Les XX? Even if circumstances (unavailable works, illness) reduced their participation in Les XX to less than a dozen works, as we have seen, no other artistic sensibility was as well represented at Les XX by women as French Impressionism, despite the even stronger proximity of the Vingtistes to the French Neo-Impressionists. The only exception is the main painter, promoter and historian of Neo-Impressionism, Lucie Cousturier. However, any programmatic dimension must be ruled out, from the



Mary Cassatt
La cueillette des coquelicots (Picking Poppies), 1875
Oil on canvas, 26.6 × 34.3 cm
Private collection



Anna Boch
Intérieur (Interior), 1906
Oil on canvas, 70 × 60 cm
Private collection, Brussels



Anna Boch
Cueillette (Picking), 1890
Oil on canvas, 74 × 107 cm
Private collection





Berthe Morisot
L'enfant à la poupée (ou Intérieur de cottage) (Child with Doll [or Cottage Interior]), 1886
Oil on canvas, 50 × 61 cm
Museum of Ixelles, bequest by Frits Toussaint 1920, inv. F.T. 104

viewpoint of both the definition of Impressionism and the place of women in the 'circles of new art'. Thus, the first woman artist invited by Les XX was Louise Breslau in 1885, the year in which Anna Boch also participated for the first time. Breslau, born in Germany in 1856 and raised in Zurich, was invited as a Swiss artist but, from the 1870s, she spent her entire career in France, where she died in 1927. In the mid-1880s, after a successful debut in Paris, she reoriented her painting towards a lighter palette and outdoor scenes, so much so that critics of the time associated her with Impressionism. In the early 1880s, she was a regular contributor to the newspaper *La Vie moderne*, whose title was programmatic and which, although very eclectic in its choices, defended and exhibited the Impressionists, thanks in particular to Edmond Renoir, the painter's brother. The meaning of the term 'impressionist', initially derived in 1874 from the title of a painting by Monet, *Impression, soleil levant* (Impression, Sunrise) (1872, Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet), and used to deride him and Cézanne, Degas, Pissarro and Morisot, among others, at the first exhibition in 1874, quickly became a broad and rather indeterminate label. In the 1880s, the term came to designate artists halfway between Impressionist inspiration (Breslau was marked in particular by Manet and Degas), and triumphant naturalism in the wake of Bastien-Lepage or Jules Breton. Breslau's subjects are modern, as in one of her works depicting an artist painting outdoors (Lausanne, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts): the colours are luminous, and the brushstrokes are more supple, making the work a little more vibrant than a more academic technique would suggest. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the term impressionist thus often came to refer, by extension, to a simple, settled and acceptable modernity. The invitation extended to Breslau, a renowned artist who was considered modern (and later to Marie Cazin), can be understood in this context. Les XX, like the Impressionists, were not united by a standardised and partisan definition of modernity, nor by the desire to combine modernity with the affirmation of the place of women in the artistic field.

Despite the shared determination of Morisot, Cassatt and Boch to pursue the path of independence, the invitations extended to the women Impressionists by a society of which Anna Boch became an important member in 1885 did not create a network of women among themselves, a sort of International of modern and independent painters. In November 1886, Boch even declared herself in favour of 'remaining among Belgian colleagues in our little circle of Les XX'.¹⁷ As it was to Morisot, the idea of sisterhood was foreign to

her. Morisot certainly read Marie Bashkirtseff's diary, which caused a stir when it appeared in 1890, and commented on the career of Nélie Jacquemart, whose spectacular career ended with her marriage. Morisot maintained a close relationship with Cassatt who, like her, came from the upper-middle class. Their artistic exchanges were rich and nourished, whether it be common themes such as women and children, or their admiration for Japanese art. Little is known about the relationship with Marie Bracquemond, the third woman artist to take part in Impressionist exhibitions under her name. They seem to have been distant. However, their works share certain concerns and themes, such as the question of the figure in the open air – except that for Bracquemond, the affirmation of drawing and contour, qualities considered masculine at the time, represent the antidote to a 'feminine art', which she summarised as 'painting flowers'.¹⁸ At no time do these three artists seem to have considered forming a separate group and developing their own strategy within the Impressionists.

At a time when the first feminist movements were taking shape, another strategy was possible, that of separatism and female solidarity. In 1881, the sculptor Hélène Bertaux created the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs (Union of women painters and sculptors), the first society of women artists in France, which was active until 1994. Similar initiatives flourished in Europe and the United States;¹⁹ for example, Morisot, who, unlike Boch and Cassatt, never asserted a feminist position or commitment, appeared in an exclusively female exhibition, that of the Woman's Art Club in New York, founded in 1889 to affirm the professional status of women artists. In February 1895, the press noticed Morisot's *Jeune fille assise* (Young Woman Seated on a Sofa) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Cassatt's *Dans la loge* (In the Loge, also known as At the Opera). Morisot's presence at the Woman's Art Club a few weeks before her death was certainly due to Cassatt or to her gallery Durand-Ruel, which had the work in stock in New York at that time.²⁰ Two years earlier, Morisot had in fact not participated in the 'Women's Pavilion' at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair: decorated by Cassatt, among others, it offered a complete panorama of the condition of women in all countries of the world at this time and gathered works by women artists, such as Louise Abbéma and Sarah Bernhardt. There is no aesthetic agenda that brings together the contributions of both. In the 1880s, separatism, feminist demands and the quest for artistic modernity did not overlap.







Anna Boch in her living room at Villa Anna in Ixelles, close to the Art Nouveau fireplace by Victor Horta and Godefroid Devreese; on the left, works by Paul Gauguin and Henry Moret, placed one above the other, n.d. [after 1903]
Private collection

The Collection as a Reflection of Elective Affinities

From diligent student to discerning collector

Anna Boch grew up in a privileged environment that was open to music, art and travel. She frequently travelled with her family, each member capturing in their sketchbook the memories of their excursions with varying degrees of success. Boch was among the most gifted and she aspired to progress at an early age. During a stay on the river Ourthe, she found herself standing 'before the most charming scene one could imagine', but felt that 'it is too beautiful because my brush is not up to these kinds of things'.¹

During the 1870s, she attended various painting classes for women, who did not have access to the Academy at the time. She was tutored by Euphrosine Beernaert. A trait shared by the two painters is that they did not hesitate to contact artists whose work appealed to them, forging links with these creators that departed from the traditional concept of the master–student relationship.² This is how Anna Boch developed her interest in the most innovative trend of her generation, embodied at the time by pleinairism, which was developing in the Sonian Forest with Hippolyte Boulenger and Théodore Baron. These elective affinities are reflected in the first purchases of her collection, which also includes Louise Héger and Louis Artan de Saint-Martin.

Her meeting with Isidore Verheyden, initially her teacher, was to leave a precious mark on the growing collection. This led to an intense and exuberant friendship, which is reflected in the portraits of the two artists who painted together here, there and everywhere:

'I'm constantly working with Verheyden and we're getting a lot of work done! I have a lot to learn when I see these charming studies that he dashes off ... Verheyden advises me above all to do only simple pieces, but to observe closely the relationship of one tone to another and to make everything lively and luminous.'³

Verheyden produced five portraits of Anna Boch, including one of the few busts he made: his collection would include no fewer than thirteen works by his fellow artist.

Besides her outings with Verheyden, Anna Boch also took part in the artistic life of Brussels by attending, among others, L'Essor, the Salon triennial and the Cercle Artistique et Littéraire, where she both exhibited and made some purchases. Her cousin Octave Maus boasted that he got her to buy 'a fine painting by Baron which is currently on display, a landscape of the Campine'.⁴ It was also in the company of this dear cousin that she went out socially, as he was as passionate about painting and music as she was.⁵ As editor of *L'Art moderne* since 1881, Maus extended his contacts to the new generation of Belgian artists, including Théo van Rysselberghe, Fernand Khnopff, Willy Finch, Jef Lambeaux, Frantz Charlet, Constantin Meunier and James Ensor.

Anna Boch was therefore in an ideal position when the Groupe des Vingt (or Les XX) was founded in October 1883 and Octave Maus accepted the post of secretary: 'We want to make proud and independent art.'⁶ Anna Boch was not among the first members, which seemed wise to her given the scandalous reputation of the new group:

'Things are beginning to calm down here regarding Les XX. Chic society doesn't want to admit them and Octave is under heavy criticism for being part of such a world! Listening to them, you'd really think that all these young people are to be avoided at all costs! What will they say of me if I accept this vile title?'⁷

Although a few weeks later, at the end of March 1885, she, along with Félicien Rops, accepted.

Anna Boch met regularly with Les XX, even bringing them together in La Louvière for parties where they dined, went for walks and played billiards.⁸ At other times she invited them separately, in small groups. Her network expanded and this had an influence on her collection, with the entry of new names: Dario de Regoyos, Périclès Pantazis, Willy Schlobach,

Guillaume Van Strydonck, Guillaume Vogels and Rodolphe Wytman. She frequently bought paintings during the Salons des XX, as in 1885 with *Une panique* (The Arrest) (1885),⁹ a work by Jan Toorop which seems to have inspired her for her composition *Marché de Moret* (Moret Market) (1887).

The following year was marked by the purchase of James Ensor's *La musique russe* (Russian Music) (1881), which she seemed to relate to her painting *Femme écrivant* (Woman Writing) (1888). Years later, Ensor recalled how the purchase of this emblematic painting gave him 'strength and courage'.¹⁰

Indeed, this work, which represents Willy Finch and probably Ensor's sister, had been the cause of a heated argument between Khnopff and Ensor, who had accused the former of plagiarism. Although personally acquainted with both artists, Anna Boch's collection never included works by Khnopff. Did she side with Ensor? Or is this merely proof of her lack of interest in Symbolism, which is absent in her collection?

In 1887 she lent a work from her collection to Les XX, a practice that would grow more common over time: the bronze *Hiercheuse* (Mine Carter) by Constantin Meunier, some of whose paintings she also owned. Anna Boch's tastes and her collection were then undergoing a major change, to the point where she reproached her former master, Verheyden, for being 'immersed in unfortunate portraits of a most bourgeois nature – he is very set in his ways'.¹¹

It is true that 1887 was also the year of Anna Boch's aesthetic shock when she discovered the Pointillist work *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte* (Sunday Afternoon on the Île de La Grande Jatte), exhibited at Les XX in the presence of Georges Seurat and his friend Paul Signac. Finch was the first to embrace this new technique, soon followed by Van Rysselberghe, who wondered whether 'our charming *Vingtiste* Anna [...] is also so obsessed with that infernal light?'¹² In turn, in 1889, Boch tried her hand at the Divisionist touch in a freer, more Neo-Impressionist vein: 'I am no longer mentioned, as I was last year, among the old, but at the forefront, which gives me great pleasure', she wrote to her brother.¹³

Anna Boch chose her side in a series of acquisitions from artists dedicated to this new touch: Finch, Van Rysselberghe with the portrait-manifesto he made of her in 1892, but also Georges Lemmen and Armand Guillaumin. The momentum of an entire generation was interrupted by the news of Seurat's unexpected death on 29 March 1891. The following

year, Les XX exceptionally paid him a vast posthumous tribute, an opportunity that Anna Boch seized to buy the Pointillist painting *Bords de la Seine à l'Île de la Grande Jatte* (Banks of the Seine at l'Île de la Grande Jatte) (around 1887).¹⁴

Anna and Eugène Boch, the complicity of two amateurs and patrons

The beginnings of Anna Boch's collection are inextricably linked to her apprenticeships and friendships, and later to her involvement in Les XX. In the late 1880s, her closeness to and confidence in her brother Eugène also played a decisive role. Having encouraged Eugène in his budding career, the elder sister now listened to the voice of her younger brother, who had become a bridge between Brussels and Paris.

Since late 1879, Eugène Boch had been living in Paris, frequenting the studios of Léon Bonnat and then Fernand Cormon, where he made friends with Émile Bernard, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Louis Anquetin and the American Dodge MacKnight.¹⁵

The close friendship between Eugène Boch and Émile Bernard takes tangible form in a series of portraits made by Bernard, but also in the purchase of works and in Boch's unfailing support. Together they discovered and commented on the artistic life in Paris, Eugène being one of the first to witness the blossoming of the Pont-Aven school and of Synthetism.

Although Anna Boch did not know these artists personally, she was at the heart of their correspondence and took a close interest in the emergence of the Post-Impressionist currents. A first major purchase, in March 1889, was a painting by Paul Gauguin, *Conversation. Bretagne* (Conversation. Brittany) (1888),¹⁶ which was exhibited at Les XX and was, according to Octave Maus, among the 'most attractive' works.¹⁷ It was bought for 400 francs through the Parisian dealers Boussod, Valadon & Cie, with whom Theo van Gogh also worked.¹⁸

The Boch family's relationship with Gauguin did not end there. In 1890, in order to help the artist, Eugène Boch bought, at a very low price, a lot to be shared out: 'I think this will please this poor fellow who has so much talent! Today I looked over at least thirty paintings at Boussod, Valadon & Cie's, and with Bernard I chose five works'.¹⁹ One of them would remain in the collection of Eugène Boch, another would go directly to his sister Elisa Blondel, and a third would go to Octave Maus.²⁰



Anna Boch
Femme écrivain (Woman Writing), [1888]
Oil on canvas, 104 × 83 cm
Private collection

CATALOGUE

Concept

Virginie Devillez

Realisation

Virginie Devillez
Stefan Huygebaert
Wendy Van Hoorde

Texts

Dominique Bauer
Laurence Brogniez
Barbara Caspers
Virginie Devillez
Benoît Goffin
Stefan Huygebaert
Sophie Kervran
Mireille de Lassus
Eric Min
Stijn Paredis
Sylvie Patry
Ludovic Recchia
Dominique Savelkoul
Marjan Sterckx
Thérèse Thomas
Wendy Van Hoorde
Linda Van Santvoort

Image editing Mu.ZEE

Stefan Huygebaert

Translation

Patrick Lennon
Elise Reynolds
Francisca Rojas del Canto

Copy-editing

Derek Scoins

Project management

Sofie Meert

Design

Jef Cuypers
Chloé D'hauwe

Printing

die Keure, Bruges

Binding

IBW, Oostkamp

Publisher

Gautier Platteau



HANNIBAL
BOOKS

ISBN 978 94 6466 639 7
D/2023/11922/26
NUR 642

© Hannibal Books, 2023
www.hannibalbooks.be

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders for all texts, photographs and reproductions. If, however, you feel that you have inadvertently been overlooked, please contact the publisher.

Frontcover

Anna Boch, *Les falaises de l'Estérel* (The Cliffs at Estérel), 1910, oil on canvas, 86 × 120 cm, HCR, private collection. Photo: Vincent Everarts.

Photo credits

Alain Breyer: 208, 211, 212.1, 212.2
Anja Van Lerberghe: 183
Anton Brandl: 40
Bibliothèque nationale de France: 200
Catalogue raisonné Maurice Denis, photo Olivier Goulet : 95.1, 95.2
Cedric Verhelst: 43, 45
Collections Musées de Verviers, J. Spitz: 172
Courtauld Institute: 98.1
Famous paintings/Alamy Banque d'Images: 98.2
Florent Chevrot: 120
Galerie St-John, Ghent: 93
Hôtel de Ventes Vanderkindere, Brussels: 63.1
J. Geleys: 64, 70.2, 99.1, 103, 128–129, 132.1, 192
Jimlop collection/Alamy Banque d'Images: 30
John Polak: 60
© KIK-IRPA, Brussels, cliché B142250: 101.2
© KIK-IRPA, Brussels, cliché KN007441/Olivier De Pauw: 225
© KIK-IRPA, Brussels, cliché B203693: 63.2
Kunstmuseum Den Haag: 92
L'Atelier de l'Imagier: 117.1
Luc Schrobiltgen: 46
Lucien Arkas Collection. Photo by Hadiye Cangokce: 76–77, 168–169
Lukas - Art in Flanders VZW, Dominique Provost, Michel Burez (1936-O): 130
Musée d'Ixelles: 34, 54.2
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai: 206–207, 224
© Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris : 23.2, 24
Musée royal de Mariemont, P.H.A. 399: 195
Patrice Maurin Berthier: 101.1, 102, 122, 123
Paul Catoir: 84
Photo d'art Speltdoorn & Fils: 99.2
© Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, rba_c011762: 28.2
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay)/Adrien Didierjean: 110
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay)/Michel Urtado: 23.1
Steven Decroos: 20
ULB, Département des Bibliothèques et de l'Information Scientifique: 62
Van Troostenberghe: 176.1
Villeroy & Boch AG: 27, 28.1, 65, 135.2, 157.2, 162, 203.1, 213.1, 213.2, 215
Vincent Everarts: 6–7, 18–19, 25, 26, 31, 32–33, 38–39, 49, 50, 51.1, 51.2, 52.1, 52.2, 54.1, 54.2, 55.1, 55.2, 58–59, 66.1, 66.2, 67, 68, 69, 70.1, 75, 78–79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 88, 105, 108–109, 112.1, 112.2, 113.1, 113.2, 114, 115, 116.1, 116.2, 117.2, 118–119, 124, 125, 132.2, 133, 135.1, 136.1, 136.2, 137.1, 137.2, 138–139, 140, 143.1, 143.2, 144–145, 148–149, 150, 152, 153.1, 153.2, 153.3, 154.1, 154.2, 154.3, 155, 156, 157.1, 161, 163, 164–165, 166.1, 166.2, 167.1, 167.2, 170–171, 174, 175, 176.2, 177, 178, 180*, 181*, 182*, 185.2, 186, 187, 188, 190, 196, 197, 198, 202.1, 202.2, 203.2, 216.1, 216.2, 219, 222, 223, 226–227, 236–237
*© Jean Delhaye Foundation and Horta Museum