



Paul Sérusier and Brittany, Legends and Spells

June 18-September 30, 2018

National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana

This exhibition is organized by the Réunion des Musées Nationaux-Grand Palais, Paris (France), and the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana.

Paul Gauguin’s challenge to “dare anything” was taken seriously by the French artist, Paul Sérusier (1864-1927).

The new and audacious artistic concepts and strong colors introduced by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) changed the direction of contemporary art in France. It all began in Pont-Aven, a small village in Brittany in western France. By challenging the traditional notions of subject, color, form and composition, Gauguin encouraged artists to consider a painting as simply a flat surface covered with lines and colors, rather than a representation of a realistic scene. Sérusier began experimenting in his paintings with flat shapes, vivid colors and sinuous outlines as he focused on landscapes and Bretons at work. When he returned to Paris, he encouraged his artist friends to not only incorporate these ideas into their own work, but also to study esoteric literature, other religions, and Symbolism, a new artistic movement.

Sérusier established himself in his own house in the Breton village of Châteauneuf-du-Faou. Here, he created a personal and unique world; mural decorations inspired by Greek and Egyptian myths, images of Bacchus and Gargantua which alternated with those of Jesus. On canvas, he concentrated more and more on the Middle Ages, a period in Western art when mythical scenes of music making, reading and dancing were common. In his art, as a result, his Bretons at work were more often replaced by medieval maidens in landscapes inspired by medieval tapestries from Cluny or Angers. In one major image from this unique and personal world, he created a Golden Age where contemporary figures, traditional Bretons, and some from the Middle-Ages gather to celebrate an Arcadia of Abundance, Knowledge and Charity. The landscape in this frieze, however, is simply the view from his own studio. At the same time, the artist also made reference to the theories of the Catholic priest Desiderius Lenz in the use of strict angles that allude to the perfection of God’s creations.

Paul Sérusier died of a heart attack in Morlaix in 1927 on his way to visit his wife hospitalized in an asylum. His last years had been lonely ones, except for the occasional company of Maurice Denis, who spent his summers with his large family only 100 kms away. Sérusier had been close to Georges Lacombe who sculpted a bronze bust which was chosen to mark Sérusier’s grave, for which Denis designed the pedestal. On it, he drew a pentagram, a star with five points which is the emblem of Theosophy, as well as a symbol of several other spiritual beliefs.

This exhibition of fifty works is drawn from both public and private collections in France and is divided into five sections, offering a unique selection of Sérusier’s Breton work.

Curator: Caroline Boyle-Turner, art historian, president of the Comité Sérusier

Open every day except Mondays, from 10 am till 6 pm

Entrance fee: from 300 to 1000 KZT

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