

Hans Theys clearly sees things differently, tending rather to place the emphasis on the objects and the associated 'Closed System Theory' which the artist had developed. The style of the book probably fits well with his temperamental argumentational style, something which is illustrated by a fragment from the final chapter of the book: 'Panamarenko? Sheer irresponsibility. Amusement. Sheer amusement. None of these preoccupations with the deeper sense of the concept of experience or the dilemmas of Form, at least not when he is working or playing – which is the same –, only when he is made to think about the horror world of art, which, by the way, I wouldn't recommend to anybody (to think about art, I mean). Amusement! New amusement! And whether there is any weight, one has to *feel* for oneself. And those who don't feel it: get lost!'

JOOST DE GEEST

Translated by Julian Ross.

Panamarenko. A book by Hans Theys. Exhibitions International, Tervuren, 1992; 288 pp.

Flemish Art Symbolism to Expressionism

The outbreak of the First World War drove several Belgian painters to the United Kingdom, where they found a safe haven thanks to the mediation of the art-loving British government minister David Lloyd George. The artists George Minne, Gustave van de Woestijne and Valerius de Saedeleer ended up at various places in Wales (Llanidloes in the Cambrian Mountains and the seaside resort of Aberystwyth, Rhyd-Y-Gelyn in Cardiganshire, Llandinam), while Emiel Claus, Jules de Bruycker, Leon de Smet, Baertsoen, Daeye, Opsomer and many others settled in London. Constant Permeke, called to arms and seriously injured in the siege of Antwerp, was also evacuated to England (via London he arrived at Stanton Saint Bernard in Wiltshire, and from 1916 onwards he lived in Chardstock in hilly Devon). Over a period of four to five years, these places together saw the development of an important slice of Flemish art, whose history has yet to be studied with any degree of thoroughness. A great deal of research remains to be done even on the individual artists themselves.

In the meantime, other Flemish artists had fled to neutral Holland. The most important of these – Gustave de Smet and Frits van den Berghe – found shelter there (first in Amsterdam, later in the heathland village of Blaricum in the Het Gooi area) and did not return to Belgium until the end of 1921.

The majority of the artists named above – all of whom, with one or two exceptions, were born in Ghent – had lived and worked between 1898 and 1913 in a small village on the River Leie near Ghent, Sint-Martens-Latem – which since then has rightly gained fame as an artists' village, comparable with Barbizon in France, Bergen in the Netherlands or Worpswede in Germany.

Several other important artists lived in Sint-Martens-Latem, who had not fled from the violence of war; among them artists such as Albijn van den Abeele and Albert Servaes.

These 'Latem' artists, as they later became widely known, came to the village in two groups, one following the other. In the first 'core' group were – to name only the most important of them – the sculptor / drawer George Minne and the painters Van de Woestijne and De Saedeleer. The poet Karel van de Woestijne also belonged to this first group, who can be categorized as 'symbolists'. The second, younger group consisted of Permeke, Gustave de Smet and Van den Berghe. Albert Servaes, who was a contemporary of the last three (all were born between 1877 and 1886), but had not enjoyed an academic education, remained somewhere between these two groups.

The entire, fascinating history of artistic life in this quiet, still (at that time) rural artists' village between around 1900 and 1930 has recently been written by the Dutch art historian Piet Boyens. Or, rather, *rewritten*. For there were already a number of older studies about 'Sint-Martens-Latem, village of artists' in existence (Paul Haesaerts, 1940, 1945 and 1965; André de Ridder, 1945-46). These authors, who were contemporaries and friends of the second core group, presented a certain picture of Sint-Martens-Latem, one which, from an art-historical perspective, had gained almost universal currency during the previous half century. And this picture, at least in part, was incorrect, as is now apparent.

Dr Boyens, with the unprejudiced gaze of someone examining the subject again from a distance (both in time and space), has made important corrections and added significant nuances to that 'Latem-image' which had gradually become accepted as fact.

Let us look at the two most important ways in which Boyens has 'retouched' this picture: on the one hand there is the 'regrouping' of the two core groups (Minne – Van de Woestijne – De Saedeleer / Gustave de Smet – Permeke – Van den Berghe), and on the other hand the exploding of the myth that 'Flemish Expressionism' was originally a (purely?) Latem phenomenon. Using clear arguments, Dr Boyens asserts that the true expressionists among these artists developed their expressionism *after* and *outside* Latem: Permeke virtually under his own steam and without any direct influence from elsewhere during his banishment in England, and the other two, Gustave de Smet and Van den Berghe, through their international contacts in the Netherlands (with the influence of Le Fauconnier and the Dutch artists Jan Sluyters, Leo Gestel and Piet Mondrian, as well as their acquaintance with German expressionism, which had a distinctly urban character). During their 'Latem period' (before World War I), Permeke, Van den Berghe and Gustave de Smet were all disciples of the impressionist master from the nearby village of Astene, Emiel Claus. In fact Leon de Smet, Gustave's brother, remained an impressionist all his life; in London he was a very successful portraitist, his subjects including George Bernard Shaw, John



Gustave van de Woestijne, *The Bad Sower*. 1908. Panel, 56 x 46 cm. Private Collection.

Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and the rest of England's high society. Only Albert Servaes appears to have arrived at a sort of idiosyncratic pre-expressionism – for totally different reasons – around 1909.

For this corrective re-telling of the artistic history of Latem Dr Boyens possessed a number of important trump cards: an unprejudiced distance in his approach, the completeness of the factual material he had collected and, finally, the scientific meticulousness with which he pursued the analysis of the works of art themselves – virtually year by year and artist by artist; it was on this foundation that he based his conclusions and brought them together in a thorough synthesis. The result is a new, re-new-ing Latem-book. It is also a very attractive, not to say luxurious edition, with a beautiful, balanced layout, and an exquisite choice of illustrative material (180 selected works of art reproduced in colour), which provides evidential support for the written text. An exhaustive bibliography with no gaps and a catalogue section (1870-1970) reproduced in miniature, complete this masterful study by Dr Boyens. The book deserves to receive a lot of attention, and its author is worthy of a plaudit. This Dutchman has done Flemish art (history) a splendid service.

PAUL HUYS
Translated by Julian Ross.

Piet Boyens, *Flemish Art: Symbolism to Expressionism*. Lannoo / Art Book Company, Tiel, 1992; 640 pp.

Old Masters from the Low Countries in American Collections

In 1889 James E. Scripps, who was born in England and whose family started the first US newspaper chain, donated seventy paintings of Old Masters to the Detroit Institute of Arts. He must have thought something like 'Why should not Detroit aspire to the honour of becoming the Florence or Munich of this continent?' The history of American museums is unthinkable without these benefactors. The owners of sometimes phenomenal collections which perpetuated their names found it easy to find homes for donations beyond European curators' wildest dreams. The amazing story is told by Walter Liedtke in the 560-page catalogue edited by Ben Broos for the exhibition *Great Dutch Paintings from America* held in 1990-1991, first in the Mauritshuis in The Hague, and later in the San Francisco Fine Arts Museum. In 'The Battle Against the Dollar' in the same volume Edwin Buysen tells the other side of the story: the opposition in the Netherlands to American 'raids', an attempt to keep the heritage of Dutch art at home. That opposition was rarely blessed with success and the Netherlands even lost experts into the bargain. The American predilection for old Dutch Masters is a matter of taste and therefore also of the education that helps define that taste. Susan Donahue Kuretsky analyzes the phenomenon, which reminds readers in the Low Countries of their own eighteenth-century Art Academies with their collections which were to prove the cradles of many museums. The pedagogical concept behind both is similar: education demands examples. The first US museums were founded on university campuses in 1785 and 1811; the great public museums were founded later, from 1870 onwards. American patronage proved astute at all times. In the Spring of 1933 the Nazis had decimated Jewish civil servants in Germany. In 1937 Harvard 'acquired' Jacob Rosenberg from the print cabinet of the Berlin Kaiser Friedrich Museum. Peter C. Sutton tells the story of recent acquisitions in the US. The 1986 tax laws strongly influenced art collecting. Prices skyrocketed and not everyone is able to do what the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu did. Attention is therefore focused on less well-known work, partly influenced by monographs like the one devoted to Uytewael. These four essays make up about a quarter of the catalogue. The rest, from p. 128 to p. 560, describes seventy-three items to perfection, concentrating on the sometimes stormy pedigree of some paintings, and supplying an abundance of illustrations.

At about the same time as the Mauritshuis published this catalogue, the Antwerp Mercatorfonds published *Flemish Paintings in America*. The Antwerp book harks back to the grandeur of Plantin which is the hallmark of all art books published by the Mercatorfonds. This monumental volume represents the other side of a diptych devoted to the art of painting in the Low Countries. Once again the reader encounters Walter Liedtke as the author of the introductory essay explain-