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Marie Vassilieff
(Smolensk 1884 – 1957 Nogent-sur-Marne)

Paysage Cubiste

Oil on carton paper
46 x 56 cm
18 1/8 x 22 in.

Provenance

English art market;
With Ruprecht Stolz, 2001;
Michel Dutilleul Francoeur (d. 2018);
By descent to current owner

Exhibitions

Basel, Art Basel 32, Galerie Stolz, *Paris - Moskau - Petrograd - Kiew. 1910 – 1970*, Art 32 Basel 13. -18, June 2001, p. front cover

Literature

Galerie Stolz, *Paris - Moskau - Petrograd - Kiew. 1910 - 1970. Art 32 Basel 13. -18. Juni 2001*, 2001, Berlin

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Marie Vassilieff was born to a wealthy family in Smolensk, Belarus. Her parents encouraged her to study medicine, but her imaginative nature quickly drew her to the arts. She attended the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg followed by the Munich Free School where she studied under the Hungarian artist Simon Hollósy. Her subsequent move to Paris in 1905 would prove to be a defining moment in her career. Her first stage in the French capital was to become a pupil of Henri Matisse. Under the tutelage of the modernist master, Vassilieff saw a natural connection between Matisse's unique use of colours and Picasso's deconstruction — a connection which had a profound impact on her style. She was, however, not restricted to cubism nor Russian Suprematism, best exemplified by her artistic doll making venture starting in 1915. Vassilieff made her first doll for a Russian girl she nannied, after which she continued the endeavour for her son before successfully exploring the artistic merits of dolls. Expanding the artistic field to include doll making was a bold move, especially as her "portrait-dolls" were often caricatures and effigies of major figures in the Parisian art world. During the second world war Vassilieff ran a canteen for poor artists earning her the nickname "Mère courage de Montparnasse".

The cubist landscape in the present picture was painted around 1914. In the work, Vassilieff displays a supreme awareness of form and perspective; the seemingly chaotic placement of the buildings surreptitiously hides a conscientious arrangement within the picture. The flat primarily blue geometrical shapes in the lower section gradually develop into the imposing buildings — like a wave drawing the water away from the beach just before returning in a cascade. The sense of motion and disorder is counteracted by schematic diagonal quadrants. Each quadrant is reaching away from the centre, creating a dynamic push and pull. The fields of dark green representing trees and parks are at times placed higher than the buildings, suggesting a hilly landscape. Two towers in the middle section anchor the viewer's vantage point, letting the surrounding buildings and greenery rise and fall on the hillsides. The interplay of the vivid colours, redolent of Vassilieff's contemporary Robert Delauney,

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moving away from the centre creates the sensation of watching a firework display. The present picture is a particularly vivid example of Vassilieff's ability to imbue a static landscape with motion and life, simultaneously invoking the power of nature and human prowess through investigating perspective and form.

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