



René Guiette (Antwerp, 1893 – Wilrijk (Antwerp), 1976)

Composition, 1939

Oil on canvas, 72 x 92 cm

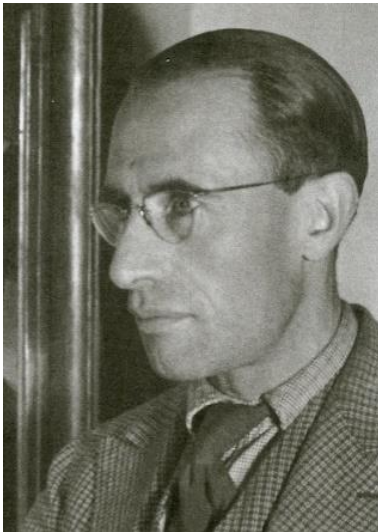
Signed and dated lower right : *René Guiette 1939*

Catalogue raisonné :

DE KERCHOVE D'OUSSELGHEM (Manuela), GOYENS DE HEUSCH (Serge), n°272

This painting was created 1939 by René Guiette, a member of the Antwerp avant-garde. This is a typical work from this period of the artist's career, inspired by Cubism, distinguished by the power of its color.

René Guiette (Antwerp, 1893 – Wilrijk (Antwerp), 1976)



Born in Antwerp in 1893, René Guiette came from a family of artists¹. His father, whom he lost when he was still a child, was Luminist painter Jules Guiette (1852-1901), while his mother, Louise Pecquereau, was the daughter of painter and watercolorist Alphonse Pecquereau (1831-1917). Although he still received some lessons as a child from Antwerp painter and engraver Walter Vaes (1882-1958), he began painting essentially as an autodidact from 1919. While his first attempts were made in a post-impressionist aesthetic, it was Expressionism, and more particularly the works of Gus De Smet and Frits Van den Berghe, that would mark his beginnings (fig.1). Staying regularly in Paris from the 1920s onwards, Guiette became involved in avant-garde artistic and literary circles there. His pictorial work was then strongly influenced by Picasso and Synthetic Cubism. (fig.2). He also studied the works of Lhote, Gromaire and Zadkine. At the same time, he signed a contract with the famous Brussels gallery *Le Centaure*, where he exhibited regularly from 1926 onwards. He also worked as an art critic for the avant-garde Brussels magazine *Sélection*. Finally, at the 1925 Decorative Arts Exhibition, he admired the *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau* designed by Le Corbusier. He then contacted the Swiss architect to build his studio house in Antwerp. (fig.3). This is the only Le Corbusier building in Belgium.

After the Second World War, René Guiette's work was transformed into a materialist work. In oil paint often laden with sand, Guiette engraved or painted in a primitive manner (fig.4). He then joined Jean Dubuffet's *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* in 1948. Interested in esotericism and Eastern philosophy, from 1955 onwards, under the influence of Zen philosophy, his painting

¹ His brother, Robert Guiette, (1895-1976) was a Romanic philologist, poet and French-speaking Belgian writer.

became more stripped down and calligraphic (fig.5). His painting was then promoted by the Parisian Stadler gallery, where Guiette met Antoni Tapiès, Marc Tobey, Sam Francis, and Georges Mathieu. It was also during this period that Guiette became a professor at the *École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre*².

Suffering from stomach problems, René Guiette died in Antwerp in 1976, just ten days before his wife³.

Composition, 1939

Painted in 1939, this painting was created while the artist was influenced by the avant-garde movements he encountered in Paris. Although simplified by an avant-garde language derived from Synthetic Cubism (play of planes, flat surfaces, etc.), the painting clearly recognizable its constituent elements: a tree, a door, a trunk, and a flower in a vase, all depicted without concern for scale. Like Picasso, Guiette thus chose simple, everyday elements as the pretext for his composition. These elements, which appear several times in his work at that time (fig.6), stem from his interest in landscape, which he developed from the 1920s onward (fig.7).

Several of these 1920' landscapes were painted in Capellen, where the family of Marie Tinchant, who would become René Guiette's wife in November 1922, lived at the time. These landscapes all share a rather naive aspect with a strong poetic value. The volumes are simplified. The colors are primary and used in contrast. This naive aspect also appears at the same time with Flemish expressionists like Gus de Smet or Frits Van den Berghe (fig.8), who influenced the work of René Guiette. We must also undoubtedly see in this the influence of the naive aesthetic of Douanier Rousseau (1844-1910) (fig.9) which also fascinated Picasso and his friends⁴.

Some elements may also be derived from Surrealism. Guiette indeed creates a sense of the strange with simple, everyday objects, such as the oversized flower or the enigmatic tree trunk. Moreover, the motif of the open door on a small section of wall unmistakably recalls the same motif in Magritte's work (fig.10).

² He taught photography from 1946 to 1947 and then color harmony from 1953 onwards.

³ He married Marie Tinchant in 1922. The couple had three children.

⁴ DE KERCHOVE D'OUSSELGHEM (Manuela), GOYENS DE HEUSCH (Serge), p.21.

It should also be noted that Guiette's work is sometimes monotonous in its color palette. However, the works from the 1930s stand out for their interest in color (fig. 2), often treated in flat planes, a technique derived from collage. Here, he uses a strong orange that gives warmth to the work and contrasts with the green of the tree and the flower.

The painting is listed under number 272 and reproduced in the catalogue of René Guiette's work by Manuela de Kerchove d'Ousselghem, the artist's granddaughter and an expert on his work, and Serge Goyens de Heusch (fig.11).

Laurent Stevens, Art historian, 2026

laurentbela@yahoo.fr

Illustrations



Fig.1 : René Guiette, *Le Bateau de Sainte Anne*, 1926.



Fig.2 : René Guiette, *Le Fleuve*, 1928, Brussels, Fine Arts Museum of Belgium / c.1938, Antwerp, Verbaet collection.



Fig.3 : Le Corbusier, *Les Peupliers*, 1926-27, Antwerp.



Fig.4 : René Guiette, *Le Grand Port*, c.1948, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre George Pompidou / *Bateau rouge*, 1952 ? Antwerp, KMSKA.

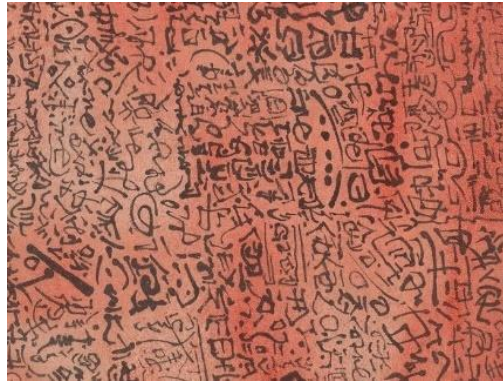


Fig.5 : René Guiette, 1968, Antwerp, Verbaet collection / *Ainsi*, 1964, Anvers, KMSKA (whole and detail).



Fig.6 : René Guiette, 1939.



Fig.7 : René Guiette,, *La Villa rose*, 1922, formerly de Beukelaer Fine Arts.



Fig.8 : Gus De Smet, *Feast day in Deurle*, 1930, Ghent, MSK.



Fig.9 : Le Douanier Rousseau, *La Scierie de Bièvre*.

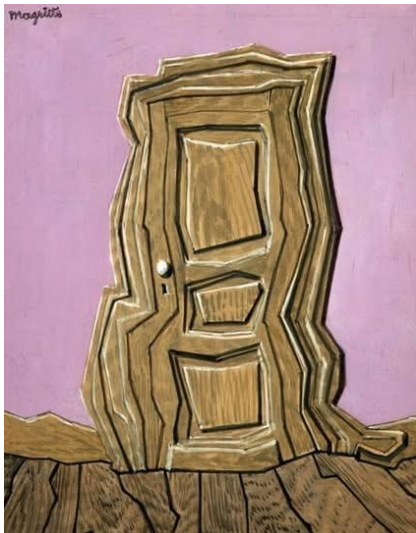


Fig.10 : René Magritte, *Le Modèle vivant*.

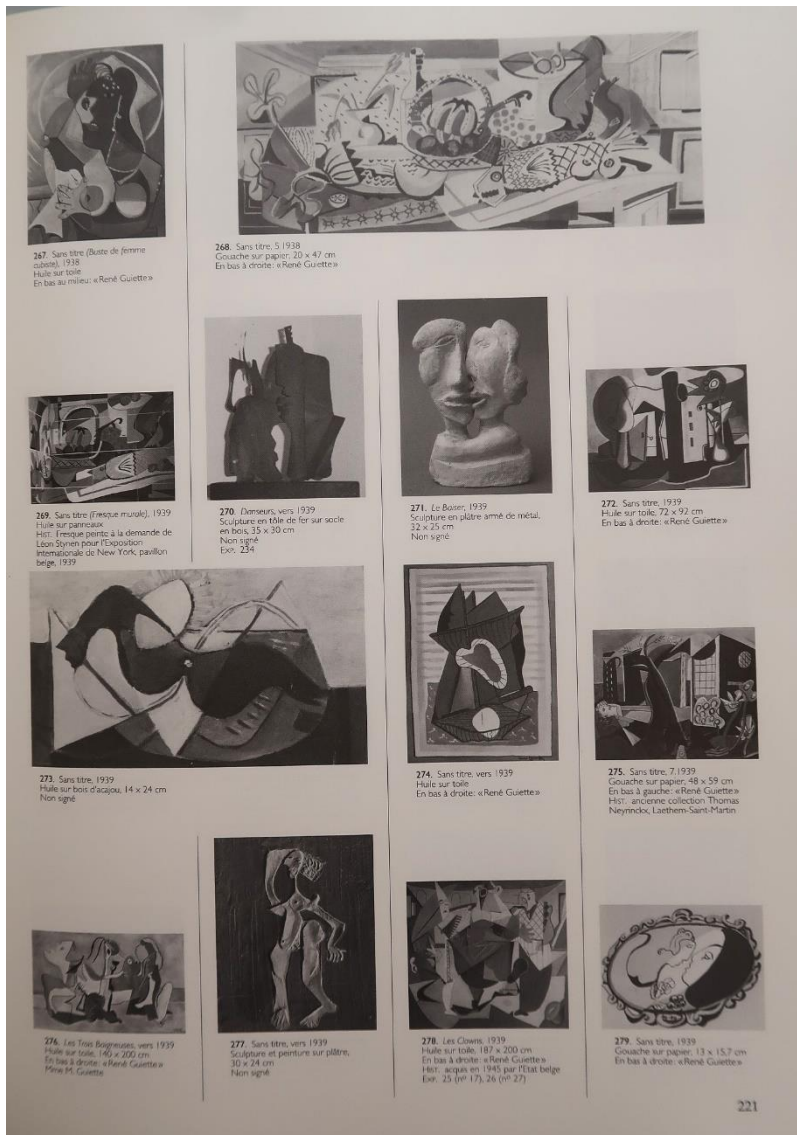


Fig.11 : DE KERCHOVE D'OUSSELGHEM (Manuela), GOYENS DE HEUSCH (Serge), p.221.

Ressources used

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