



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

***La Nounou* (The Nanny) or *Le Biberon* (The Babby Bottle), 1937**

Gouache and watercolor on paper, 60 x 43 cm

Signed and dated lower left : *René Guiette 11 / XI / 37*

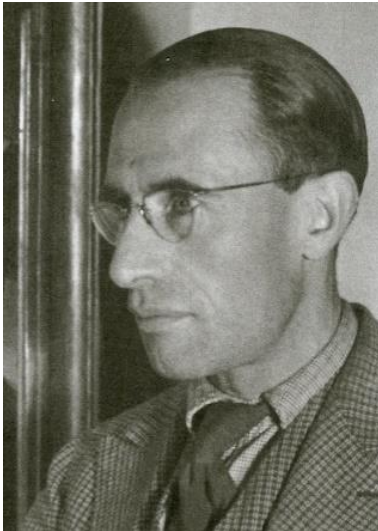
Exhibition :

René Guiette, Brussels, Galerie Dietrich, 1940, n°26

The work was added to the supplement to the catalogue raisonné of Manuela de Kerchove
d'Ousselghem

A baby is being bottle fed on a woman's lap. This classic theme is rendered in an aesthetic reminiscent of Pablo Picasso, René Guiette's greatest influence during the 1930s.

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 became more stripped down and calligraphic (fig.5). His painting was then promoted by the

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

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.

La Nounou (The Nanny) or Le Biberon (The Babbie Bottle)

In his figurative work, René Guiette remained attached to very classical themes: port or rural landscapes, portraits, still lifes... It is therefore not surprising that he was interested in the theme of the baby taking its milk, which was so often represented through the figure of the Virgin and Child or genre scenes, even the allegories of Charity. It should be noted, however, that in most of these works, the baby is fed directly from the breast. Works representing children taking a bottle, as in Guiette, are rarer but nevertheless appear in Pablo Picasso, Guiette's great model during the 1930s (fig.6). This theme must also be linked to the personal situation of René Guiette, who was the father of three children.

From an aesthetic point of view, this large gouache also demonstrates Picasso's influence on Guiette. During the 1930s, influenced by the art of the Spanish master, Guiette's work showed a strong presence of the human figure (fig.7). This is simplified and fragmented, like Picasso's works. Particularly noteworthy here is the nanny's face, separated in two by a line that allows for a frontal and profile view, according to a vision popularized by Picasso (fig.8). Also noteworthy is the influence of Synthetic Cubism, developed by Picasso from 1912 onwards, and especially its impact on Picasso's development from the mid-1920s onwards (fig.9). The color areas are well defined, reminiscent of the collages of Synthetic Cubism, as is the structure that had partly disappeared in Analytical Cubism. This interest in structure is also a fundamental element of Guiette's works during the 1930s and early 1940s. The range of color and its chalky appearance, derived from gouache, are also linked to synthetic cubism.

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.

La Nounou or *Le Biberon* was exhibited with 33 other works by Guiette from March 16 to 30, 1940 at the Dietrich gallery in Brussels, located on Montagne de la cour and founded in 1936 by Walter Schwartzberg, the founder of the famous *Le Centaure* gallery, a gallery with which Guiette had signed a contract in 1926. This monographic exhibition dedicated to René Guiette, with a catalog prefaced by André De Ridder⁴, is part of a series of exhibitions dedicated to several avant-garde artists. We can mention the exhibitions dedicated to Nicolas de Staël in 1936, Raoul Ubac in 1941, Gaston Bertrand in 1942 and René Magritte in 1944 (fig.10). The press devoted several positive articles to this exhibition, noting Guiette's debt to the work of Picasso (see documents).

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⁴ André de Ridder (1888-1961), Antwerp writer and art critic.

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.

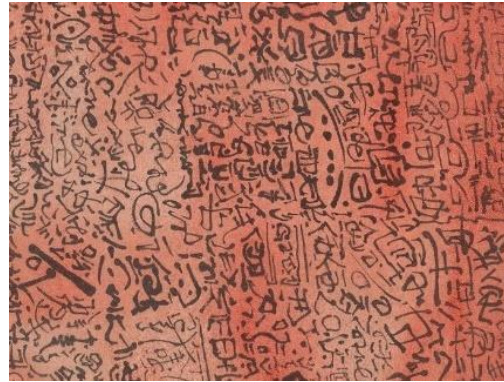
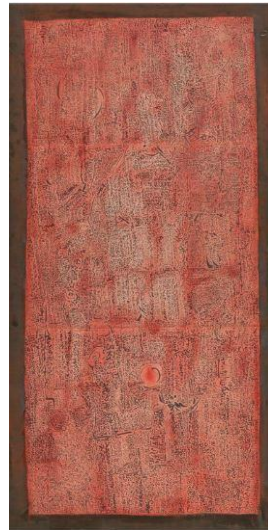


Fig.5 : René Guiette, 1968, Antwerp, Verbaet collection / *Ainsi*, 1964, Anvers, KMSKA (whole and detail).



Fig.6 : / Pablo Picasso, *Olga giving Paulo a bottle*, 1921, Paris, Musée Picasso / Georges Lemmen, *The Baby Bottle*, 1893, Brussels, Fine Arts museum of Belgium.

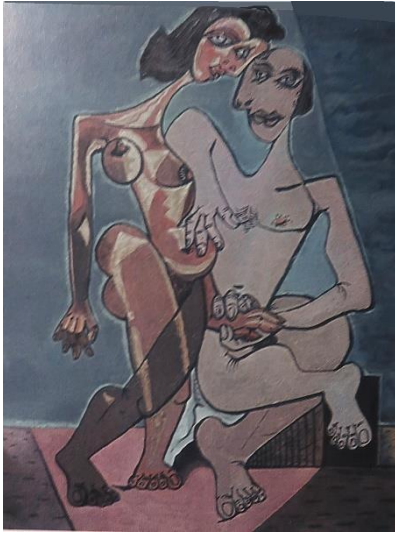


Fig.7 : René Guiette, *Couple cubiste*, 1937 / 1936.



Fig.8 : Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Dora Maar*, 1937, Paris, Musée Picasso.



Fig.9 : Pablo Picasso, *La Muse*, 1935, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre George Pompidou.

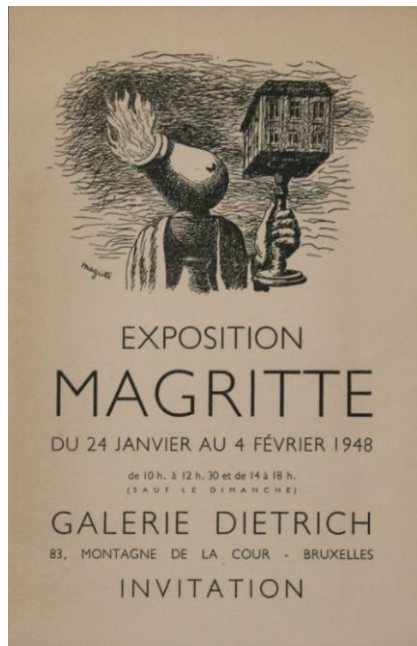


Fig.10 : René Magritte exhibition at the Dietrich Gallery, Brussels, 1948.

Documents

LES EXPOSITIONS

RENE GUIETTE

« Cubisme pas mort » se contentera de noter, à la Galerie Dietrich, le visiteur pressé. Les gouaches que René Guiette y expose, et qui ont été exécutées de 1937 à 1939, répondent en effet aux principes fondamentaux de cette école. Les thèmes traités par l'artiste — figures de danseuses, de clowns, de jeunes mères, paysages champêtres et marines — sont rendus non par les moyens traditionnels de l'imitation, mais à l'aide de procédés purement allusifs. La forme est préalablement disloquée et détruite, pour être ensuite recomposée d'une manière qui peut paraître arbitraire mais qui, dans l'esprit du peintre, donnera à son œuvre une expression infiniment plus intense. René Guiette a recours aux accords les plus sonores : ses gouaches, dans lesquelles les angles aigus et les formes coupantes vont de pair avec des vermillons purs, des bleus et des jaunes qui éclatent comme des cris, ont une vigueur véritablement explosive. Aussi le cubisme de ce peintre est-il très éloigné des natures mortes grises et beige qui se trouvaient, il y a un quart de siècle, à l'origine de cette esthétique révolutionnaire. En réalité les œuvres de René Guiette procèdent en grande partie de la dernière manière de Picasso, qui était elle-même marquée par les déformations imitoyables de certains surréalistes. Les gouaches réunies sous le titre commun *Le Baiser* sont surtout significatives à cet égard : le visage humain y acquiert cette expression terrifiante qui caractérise les masques de l'art africain ou précolombien. On voit par là qu'on aurait tort d'attribuer aux compositions de René Guiette une valeur exclusivement décorative. La technique cubiste lui permet de traduire avec force tout un ensemble de sentiments et d'émotions.

G. M.

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Ressources used

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