



**Antoine Laurent Joostens (Bruges, 1820 - Bruges, 1886)**

***Écoutant la leçon du maître (Listening to the Master's Lesson), 1876***

Oil on canvas, 74 x 94 cm

Signed and dated lower right : *Joostens 1876*

Exhibition :

Antwerp Salon 1876, n°651

Exhibited at the Antwerp Salon of 1876, this naturalist painting by Bruges painter Antoine Laurent Joostens is undoubtedly one of his master works and an interesting testimony of school life.

Antoine Laurent Joostens (Bruges, 1820 - Bruges, 1886)



Antoine Laurent Joostens was born in 1820 in Bruges<sup>1</sup>, a city where he spent his entire life.<sup>2</sup> It was therefore at the Academy of Bruges that he received his artistic training<sup>3</sup>. From these academic years<sup>4</sup>, the Bruges Museum has a series of studies based on the living model or based on antiquity inspired casts (fig.1). These different charcoal drawings bear witness to his participation in various academic competitions, such as the placement competitions, where he was rather well ranked<sup>5</sup>. Joostens also participated in 1842 in the prestigious Rome competition, organized by the Antwerp Academy. Among the other participants, we can cite the best known: Ernest Slingeneyer (1820–1894), Henri Dobbelaere (1822 - 1885) and Jean-François Portaels (1818 - 1895), who won the competition. Subsequently, Joostens became a professor at the Academy of Bruges and curator of the academy museum<sup>6</sup>.

Knowledge of the work of Antoine Laurent Joostens and its diversity is today quite fragmented. It is mainly through his work as a painter of views of Bruges that we still know him on a local

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<sup>1</sup> He was born on February 28, 1820. His father was Englebert Joostens and his mother was Anna Herpoel.

<sup>2</sup> In his youth, Joostens lived on Wulfhagestraat (according to: Historische weetjes (noeldemey.blogspot.com)). Then, according to the salon catalogs, he lived on rue des/aux Loups n°13 (salons of 1843 and 1851), rue des Carmes n°15 (salons of 1874, 1875 and 1876) and Quai du miroir n°20 (salon of 1878).

<sup>3</sup> The Wikipedia article about the painter also cites training at the Antwerp Academy, which is unlikely. The confusion is perhaps due to his participation in the Rome competition organized by the Antwerp academy.

<sup>4</sup> The drawings made at the academy are dated between 1837 and 1841. Joostens entered the Academy at the age of 12 (i.e. in 1832) according to: Historische weetjes (noeldemey.blogspot.com).

<sup>5</sup> Among other things, he was celebrated for his good results (... *werd hij primus in de Academie*) by the inhabitants of Wulfhagestraat on July 23, 1839. According to: Historische weetjes (noeldemey.blogspot.com).

<sup>6</sup> According to the catalog of the Ghent salon of 1868.

level. The Groeninge Museum also keeps a representative set of eleven paintings (fig.2). By their aesthetic combining precision and Romanticism, we can link them to the Bruges views of François Stroobant (1819 - 1916). His first known painting, painted at nineteen, depicts the fire of the St. Salvator's Cathedral in Bruges in 1839 (fig.3). Also with a Bruges theme, we know of a painting by him representing the former regulars of the Vlissinghe café, a famous and old estaminet in Bruges (fig.4). But Joostens was also a painter of religious subjects and history as well as portraits and landscapes (fig.5).

Although he probably presented his work in Bruges exhibitions, Joostens also participated on a few occasions in general exhibitions of Fine Arts (expositions générales des Beaux-Arts)<sup>7</sup>. He exhibited there at first very irregularly and then more regularly in the 1870s. We find him for the first time at the Antwerp salon of 1843 with probably a genre painting (*Des querelles à la suite de plaisirs* / Quarrels following pleasures), then at the Brussels salon of 1851 with a history painting (*Pierre De Coninck, dans la prison de la Cour de prince, à Bruges* / Pieter De Coninck, in the prison of the Prince's Court, in Bruges)<sup>8</sup>. He then exhibited his views of Bruges at the Ghent Salon in 1868 (*Entrée du bassin de la ville de Bruges ; effet de lune* / Entrance to the basin of the city of Bruges; moon effect) and in 1874 (*Le bassin de la ville de Bruges ; effet du matin à la chute des feuilles* and *Le Bassin de la ville de Bruges* / The basin of the city of Bruges; effect of the morning at the fall of the leaves and The Basin of the city of Bruges ). At the Brussels Salon of 1875, he exhibited an American landscape (*Les Dunes du Lac Chicago (Amérique)* / The Dunes of Lake Chicago (America)). Did he then travel to the United States? He then exhibited at the Antwerp Salon of 1876 a school genre scene (*Écoutant la leçon du maître* / Listening to the Master's Lesson) and finally at the Brussels Salon of 1878 two landscapes of Knokke (*Le Village de Knocke* and *Les Dunes de Knocke* / The Village of Knokke and The Dunes of Knokke), which shows us that he is one of those artists who went to paint at the coast (fig.6).

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<sup>7</sup> We consulted the catalogs of the salons from 1839 to 1886. Not having been able to consult all the years, we note that Joostens did not exhibit in the following years: 1839, 1842, 1844, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1848, 1850, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1859, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1872, 1873, 1877, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886.

<sup>8</sup> Along with Jan Breydel, Pieter de Coninck was one of the leaders of the Flemish revolt of 1302 against the French.

Married in 1857 to Coralie Anthierens<sup>9</sup>, Antoine Laurent Joostens died in Bruges in 1886<sup>10</sup>, a few days before celebrating his sixty-sixth birthday (fig.7).

*Écoutant la leçon du maître / Listening to the Master's Lesson*

In a school classroom, with walls covered with geometry exercises, a group of young boys are turned towards the viewer who merges with their teacher. The painting is signed lower right by Antoine Laurent Joostens and dated 1876. Considering the subject and its dating, it is undoubtedly the painting presented by Joostens at the Antwerp Salon of 1876 under the number 651 and with the title: *Écoutant la leçon du maître* (Listening to the Master's Lesson) (fig.8). The presentation of the painting at the general exhibition of Fine Arts probably explains its ambitious character, a group portrait, within the artist's work. It can also be compared with another group portrait by Joostens representing the former regulars of a famous estaminet in Bruges, the Vlissinghe café (fig.4). In this last painting, we note numerous blunders and an aspect of collage of the different characters, aspects that are much less present in the painting presented at the show. We also notice the less dry side of our painting compared to the rest of Joostens' corpus.

A naturalist work, the painting carefully describes a contemporary class. We notice the many details of school life: the platform, the benches, the blouses, the writing materials, the wooden pencil cases, the chinks and even the slates with the geometry exercises. The picture also shows a social disparity between the different students through their outfits and especially their shoes, clogs or leather shoes. This naturalistic character but also this frieze of young boys can be compared to the works painted a few years later by Léon Frédéric (1856 - 1940), one of the masters of Belgian pictorial Naturalism. (fig.9).

The school theme seems rather rare in 19th century Belgian painting although it gave rise to some famous works, such as the village schools painted in an anecdotal romantic spirit by Ferdinand de Braekeleer, the famous class review of 1878 meticulously painted by Jan Verhas or the sunny schoolyards of luminist Jenny Montigny (fig.10). This painting by Antoine Laurent

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<sup>9</sup> His wife's full name is Coralie Angelique Isabella Anthierens. The marriage took place on December 28, 1857. The bride's parents were Aimé Désiré Joseph Anthierens and Isabelle Thérèse Maertens.

<sup>10</sup> February 23, 1886.

Joostens therefore enriches this corpus significantly by giving the image of the interior of a classroom in 1876.

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## Illustrations

In the text: Photographic portrait of Antoine Laurent Joostens, Bruges, Stadsarchief.



Fig.1 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, Study from a live model, 1839 / Bust of Diana, 1837, Bruges, Groeninge Museum.



Fig.2 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, Views of Bruges, c.1875, Bruges, Groeninge Museum.



Fig.3 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, *The Fire of the St. Salvator's Cathedral in Bruges in 1839*, 1839, Bruges, St. Salvator's Cathedral.

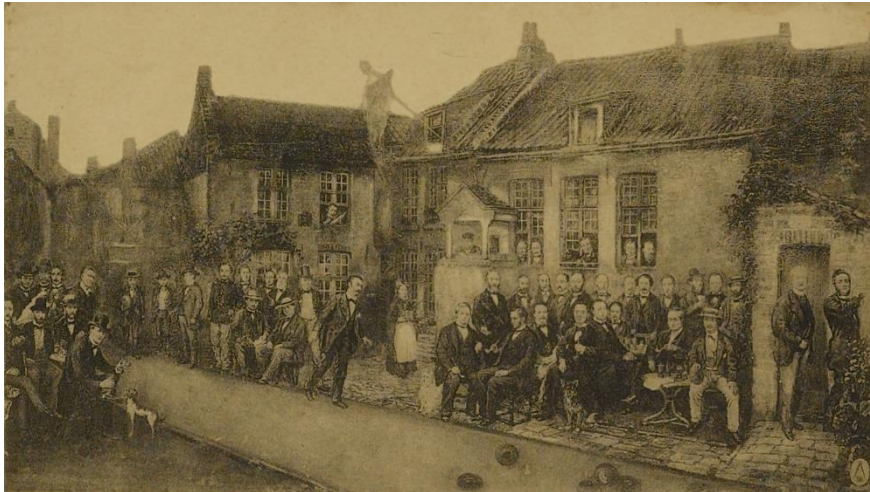


Fig.4 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, *The Former regulars of Café Vlissinghe*, Bruges, Café Vlissinghe.



Fig.5 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, *The Virgin offering the rosary to St Dominic*, 1858, Gullegem (Wevelgem), Kerk Sint-Amandus / *Portrait of François-Xavier Biebuyck*, 1875, Bruges, Klooster van de Zusters van Maria.

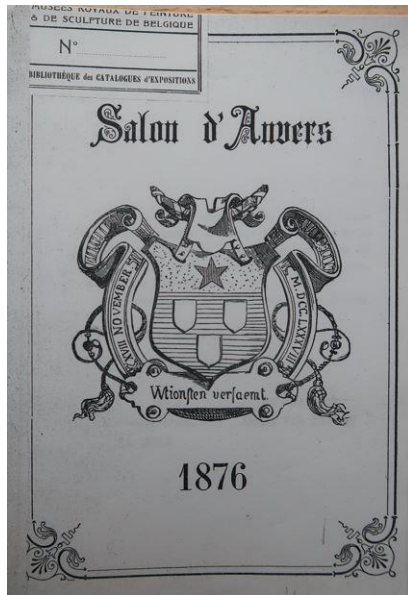


Fig.6 : Antoine Laurent Joostens, *The Dunes at Knokke*, private coll.

Vanjaar achttien honderd zes en tachtig, den drie en twintigsten Februari,  
om tien uren en half Smorgens, zijn voor ons Jides Lonteyne, Scheyen,  
Ambtenaar van den burgerstad en der stad Brugge, hoofplaats der  
provincie Westvlaanderen, verschenen: Gastave Claeys, advocaat, oud  
een en veertig jaren, en Frederik De Bussehere, bediende by het stadsbestuur,  
oud dertig jaren, beide wonende te Brugge, geen bloedverwanten van  
den hierna genoemden overledenen, dewelke ons verklaard hebben dat:  
**Antoine Laurent Joostens**, kunstschilder,  
geboren te Brugge, den acht en twintigsten Februari achttien honderd  
twintig, aldaar wonende, spiegelhuis No 20, (zoon van Englebert  
Joostens, en Anna Herpoel, beide overleden te Brugge, echtgenoot  
van Coralie Angélique Isabella Anthierens, byzondere, oud  
zes en vyftig jaren, geboren en wonende te Brugge, overleden is  
gisteren, om acht uren s'avonds, in voormeld huis; en na voort-  
lezing de comparanten hebben met ons geteekend.

*J. Claeys* *F. De Bussehere*

Fig.7 : Death certificate of Antoine Laurent Joostens (on Familysearch)



**JOOSTENS, A.,** Bruges, rue Carmer, 15.  
651. Écoutant la leçon du maître.

Fig.8 : Catalog of the Antwerp salon of 1876.



Fig.9 : Léon Frédéric, *The Ages of Life: Boys*, 1885-1887, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Fig.10 : Ferdinand Brackeleer, *The Village School*, 1854, Antwerp, KMSKA.



Jan Verhas, *The Review of Schools in 1878, 1880*, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Jenny Montigny, *The girls' school in Deurle*, Deinze, Mudel.

#### Resources used

HOSTYN (Norbert), *Antoine Laurent Joostens*, in : *Le Dictionnaire des peintres belges du XIVe siècle à nos jours*, Brussels, La Renaissance du Livre, 1995.

*Portaels, l'appel de l'Orient 1841-1847*, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 2015.

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*De brandramp van de Sint-Salvatorskathedraal van Brugge in 1839*, in : *Historische weetjes* ([noeldemey.blogspot.com](http://noeldemey.blogspot.com)), 27 janvier 2009.

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