

Paul Signac

His life & work

* 11 November 1863 Paris

† 15 August 1935 Paris

One of the principal neoimpressionist painters, Paul Signac, worked with Georges Seurat in creating pointillism. Unlike Seurat, he had virtually no formal training; he taught himself to paint by studying the works of Claude Monet and others.

Signac published "From Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism (1899)", explaining their theories. Signac's prosperous shopkeeping family gave him financial independence. Unlike Seurat, he had virtually no formal training; he taught himself to paint by studying the works of Claude Monet and others. After he and Seurat met in 1884, they developed their technique of painting with dots--or "points" in French--of color, which led to the name pointillism. As Signac explained, they used the pure impressionist palette but applied it in dots that were to be blended by the viewer's eye. What Signac called "muddy mixtures" were to be banished from painting and replaced by luminous, intense colors. Many of Signac's works are landscapes, inspired by the bright sunlight of southern France.

The neoimpressionists influenced the next generation; Signac inspired Henri Matisse in particular. As president of the annual Salon des Independants (1908-34), Signac encouraged younger artists by exhibiting the controversial works of the Fauves and the Cubists.

Biography

Paul Victor Jules Signac was born in Paris on November 11th 1863.

He followed a course of training in architecture before deciding at the age of 18 to pursue a career as a painter after attending an exhibition of Monet's work. Through Armand Guillaumin he became a convert to the colouristic principles of Impressionism.

In 1884 he met Claude Monet and Georges Seurat. He was struck by the systematic working methods of Seurat and by his theory of colors. Signac was a founding member of the Salon des artistes Indépendants together with Seurat, Dubois-Pillet and Redon.

Under this influence he abandoned the short brushstrokes of impressionism to experiment with scientifically juxtaposed small dots of pure color, intended to combine and blend not on the canvas but in the viewer's eye, the defining feature of pointillism.

In 1886 Signac met Vincent van Gogh in Paris. In 1887 the two artists regularly went to Asnières-sur-Seine together, where they painted such subjects as river landscapes and cafés. Initially, Van Gogh chiefly admired Signac's loose painting technique. In March 1889, Signac visited Vincent van Gogh at Arles.

The next year he made a short trip to Italy, seeing Genoa, Florence, and Naples. Signac's prosperous shopkeeping family gave him financial independence.

Signac loved sailing and again began to travel in 1892, sailing a small boat to almost all the ports of France, to Holland, and around the Mediterranean as far as Constantinople, basing his boat at St. Tropez, which he "discovered". From his various ports of call, Signac brought back vibrant, colorful watercolors, sketched rapidly from nature. From these sketches, he painted large studio canvases that are carefully worked out in small, mosaic-like squares of color, quite different from the tiny, variegated dots previously used by Seurat.

Signac himself experimented with various media.

As well as oil paintings and watercolors he made etchings, lithographs, and many pen-and-ink sketches composed of small, laborious dots. The neo-impressionists influenced the next generation:

Signac inspired Henri Matisse and André Derain in particular, thus playing a decisive role in the evolution of Fauvism.

As president of the Société des Artistes Indépendants from 1908 until his death, Signac encouraged younger artists (he was the first to buy a painting by Matisse) by exhibiting the controversial works of the Fauves and the Cubists.

Personal life

On 7 November 1892 Signac married Berthe Roblès at the town hall of the 18th district in Paris; witnesses at the wedding were Alexandre Lemonier, Maximilien Luce, Camille Pissarro and Georges Lecomte.

In November 1897, the Signacs moved to a new apartment in the Castel Béranger, built by Hector Guimard, and a little later, in December of the same year, acquired a house in Saint-Tropez called La Hune; there the painter had a studio constructed, which he inaugurated on 16 August 1898.

In September 1913, Signac rented a house at Antibes, where he settled with Jeanne Selmersheim-Desgrange, his new girlfriend from about 1909 on, who gave birth to their daughter Ginette on 2 October 1913. In the meantime Signac had left La Hune as well as the Castel Beranger apartment to Berthe: they remained friends for the rest of his life.

On 6 April 1927, Signac adopted Ginette, his previously illegitimate daughter.

His granddaughter, Françoise Cachin, was an art historian, well known for her books and catalogs on Signac.

At the age of seventy-two, Paul Signac died on 15 August 1935 in Paris from septicemia.

On August 18 he was buried at the Père Lachaise Cemetery.

Paintings in museum collections

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum,
- Harbour of Saint-Tropez, 1895
- Railway junction near Bois-Colombes, 1885

Basel, Kunstmuseum , Switzerland

Besançon ; Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'archéologie
- Venise, la voile jaune, Inventarnummer Da.970.1.100 ; AM 4224 P(100)

Bloomington , Indiana University Art Museum, USA
- Bridge over the River Seine

Boston ; Museum of Fine Arts, USA

Bruxelles ; Musée des Beaux-Arts
- La Calanque (1906)

Chicago ; Art Institute, USA

Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, USA

- Le Pont des Arts, 1927

Essen, Germany, Museum Folkwang

- Pont sur la Seine, 1912

Glasgow ; Art Gallery and Museum

- Herblay. Coucher de soleil. Opus 206 (1889),

Grenoble ; Musée de Grenoble

- Le sentier de douane / Bord de mer, Saint-Tropez , Inventarnummer MG 2225

- Saint-Tropez. Soleil couchant sur la ville. Etude, Inventarnummer MG 1995-2-4

Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts

Helsinki, Finland, Valtion Taidemuseo (Finnish National Gallery)

Houston, Texas ; Museum of Fine Arts

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana, USA

Köln, Stiftung Couboud, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum

- Samois Studie Nr.8

- Fischerboote

Kopenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst (National Gallery of Denmark)

Liège ; Musée d'Art moderne et d'Art contemporain

- Château de Comblat (1887)

Little Rock, Arkansas Arts Center, USA

- Antibes, le marché (The Market), 1919

Lodz, Poland, Muzeum Sztuki

- View of Golden Horn in Constantinople, 1907

Londres ; National Gallery

- Les Andelys, Les Lavandières (1886)

Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza MuseumPort-en-Bessin

- The Beach, 1884

- Paimpol, 1925

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota, USA

Nantes ; Musée des Beaux-Arts

- Le phare d'Antibes, Numéro d'inventaire 3538 ; 949.2.2.Q

New York City ; Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA

- The Jetty at Cassis, Opus 198

Date: 1889 , Inventarnummer: 1976.201.19

- Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde (La Bonne-Mère), Marseilles

Date: 1905-6 , Inventarnummer: 55.220.1

- Lighthouse at Groix , Date: 1925 , Accession Number: 1998.412.3

- Evening Calm, Concarneau, Opus 220 (Allegro Maestoso)

Date: 1891 , Inventarnummer: 1975.1.209

- The Town Beach, Collioure, Opus 165 (Collioure. La Plage de la ville. Opus 165)

Date: 1887, Inventarnummer: 1975.1.208

- Place de Clichy, Date: 1888, Inventarnummer mber: 1975.1.210

New York City ; Museum of Modern Art, USA

- Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890. 1890

- Setting Sun. Sardine Fishing. Adagio. Opus 221 from the series The Sea, The Boats, Concarneau. 1891

Oklahoma, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, USA

- Coast Scene

Ohio, Cleveland Museum of Art, USA

Otterlo ; Musée Kröller-Müller, Pays-Bas

- Le Déjeuner (1885-1886), 111,8 x 186 cm

Paris ; Musée Carnavalet

- Le moulin de la Galette, à Montmartre , Inventarnummer CARP1938 ; P 1938

- Le pont des Arts , Inventarnummer CARP2286 ; P 2286

Paris ; Musée Marmottan Monet

- Venice, 1908

Paris ; Musée d'Orsay

- FEMMES AU PUIITS, ETUDE PREPARATOIRE 1 , Inventarnummer RF 1979 2

- FEMMES AU PUIITS, ETUDE PREPARATOIRE 2 (doppelseitig) , Inventarnummer RF 1979 3 A-

- FEMMES AU PUIITS, ETUDE PREPARATOIRE 3 (doppelseitig), Inventarnummer RF 1979 4 A-B

- FEMMES AU PUIITS , Inventarnummer RF 1979 5

- L'ENTREE DU PORT DE LA ROCHELLE, Inventarnummer RF 1982 59

- L'ENTREE DU PORT DE MARSEILLE, Inventarnummer RF 1977 324 ; 6725 (1920) ; LUX 1316 P

- LA BOUEE ROUGE , Inventarnummer RF 1957 12

- LE CHATEAU DES PAPES A AVIGNON, Inventarnummer RF 1977 323 ; LUX 968 P

- La berge ; Les Andelys, Inventarnummer RF 19996 6

- ROUTE DE GENNEVILLIERS , Inventarnummer RF 1968 3

Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Carnegie Museum of Art, USA

Prague, Czech Republic, Jewish Museum

- L'Hirondelle Steamship (Seine near Samois), 1901 (Inventarnummer 60.608)

- River Landscape, 1927 (Inventarnummer 60.691)

Saint-Malo ; Musée d'Histoire de Saint-Malo

- Saint-Malo, le pardon des terre-neuvas , Inventarnummer 1975.7.2 ; 75.4.2

Saint Petersburg, Russia, Hermitage Museum

- Grand arbre de pin à St Tropez, 1892-1893

Saint-Tropez ; Musée de l'Annonciade

- ETUDE POUR"LE TEMPS D'HARMONIE" , Inventarnummer 1965 1 1

- Marseille, barques de pêche ou le Fort Saint-Jean , Inventarnummer 1936.29

- Saint-Tropez, l'Orage , Inventarnummer 1993.2.1

- Saint-Tropez, le quai , Inventarnummer 1942.1.1

- Saint-Tropez, les pins parasols aux Canoubiers, Inventarnummer 1942.1.2
- Vue de Saint-Tropez, coucher de soleil au bois de pins , Inventarnummer 1942.1.3

Strasbourg, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg

- Antibes Le Soir, 1914

Tennessee ; Dixon Gallery and Gardens

- St. Briac, La Croix des Marins, 1885

Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art,

- The Port of Saint-Tropez, ca.1901

Victoria, Australia, National Gallery

- Gasometers at Clichy

Wuppertal, Germany, Von der Heydt-Museum

Exhibitions

(work in progress)

Bibliography

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F. Cachin. *Paul Signac* (Paris, 1971)

E. W. Kornfeld. *Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié de Paul Signac* (Berne, 1974)

Post-Impressionism: Cross-currents in European Painting (exh. cat., London, RA, 1979–80)

Van Gogh à Paris (exh. cat. by B. Welsh-Ovcharov, Paris, Mus. d'Orsay, 1988)

Signac & Saint-Tropez, 1892–1913 (exh. cat. by J.-P. Monery, M. Ferretti-Bocquillon and F. Cachin, St Tropez, Mus. Annonciade; Reims, Mus. St-Denis; 1992)