

CONNAUGHT BROWN

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Raoul Dufy: A Spectacle of Society

20th October - 25th November 2016



Raoul Dufy, *Le casino de Nice aux deux vasques*, c.1930, signed lower left, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 21 3/4 in, 46 x 55.4 cm

Celebrated as one of the great colourists of the 20th century, Raoul Dufy forged his career with vibrant images of the bourgeoisie at play. While rejecting the strict rules of the Paris Salon, Dufy's radical treatment of everyday scenes such as regattas, horse races, receptions and orchestral recitals is often overlooked. This exhibition looks beyond the joie de vivre of Raoul Dufy's bold colour and calligraphic brushstroke to expose the true genius of this painter of interwar society and his revolutionary take on modernism.

A keen observer of contemporary life, Dufy can be seen as the inheritor to Charles Baudelaire's 'flâneur', drifting through the boulevards and crowds of Paris in the canvases of Manet and Degas. Fascinated by this spectacle of the new bourgeoisie in images such as Georges Seurat's 'La Grande Jatte' (1884-1886), Dufy recorded the kaleidoscopic sections of society, and their desire to see and be seen. Focusing on the group rather than individual, these playful and witty images act as a crucial insight into the burgeoning middle class between the First and Second World Wars.

Moving beyond the interiors of Matisse and the Fauves, Dufy's group subjects also offer a sense of optimism in the shadow of the First World War. Into the roaring twenties and jazz era Dufy shifted his attention to wistful images of life in the Third Republic that mirrored his wealthy clientele's taste for the glamorous casinos and shaded coastlines of the French Riviera. Critic Louis Vauxcelles described these hopeful works saying, "In a time when one lives in fear of the next day, or the newspapers are full of horrible killing, here is the singer of joy, the painter of mild grace, freshness, of cheerfulness". Dufy's images created a decorative mosaic of modern life.

Raoul Dufy is regarded as one of the most important artists of the Modern period, adding a unique sense of design and clarity of colour to the Fauve palette. In 1937 Dufy was invited to create the vast 'Electricity' mural for the Paris International Exhibition and awarded the Grand Prix for painting at the Venice Biennale in 1952. Following the major retrospective at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid last year, Connaught Brown will devote their second solo exhibition to this master of colour and joy.

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