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Léon Berthoud: Frohnalp 1865

Neuchâtel and alpine painting

Neuchâtel et la peinture alpestre — Neuenburg und die Alpenmalerei — Neuchâtel et la pittura alpestre
Exposition d'été du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Neuchâtel

«Art is at an end where the last flower dies quivering...» Such was Theophile Gautier's pronouncement, with weighty assurance.

And so the Alps, in view of the terror which their dizzy walls, their altitude, the rarefied atmosphere of their crests inspired, were not deemed to be pictorial subjects. Those natives of the Netherlands, the Ile de France, could paint landscapes freely; not so the alpine population, the Swiss in particular who were prohibited from gaining inspiration from nature unless they were prepared to place themselves outside the domain of art!

Now, for the last hundred years or so, a cohort of talented men have ventured to scale the heights. So the determination of one or two of them, real leaders and men of genius, victory was due. As distinguished from the Fontainebleau woodland, the Dutch lowland or the Provençal landscape, the loftiest mountain ranges, the Central Alps accrued at last to universal art. Among those who took part in this conquest, the Swiss are in the majority and foremost amongst the Swiss, the Neuchâtelois.

As no other contains such a wealth of alpine paintings as the Neuchâtel museum — the pictures which mark an epoch figure in its collections — it was befitting that the Neuchâtelois should have the privilege of presenting alpine art to the XIVth International congress of the History of Art which, as one knows, is holding its sessions from Bâle to Geneva from the 31st of August till the 9th of September.

Grouped in central show cases, prints, portraits, reproductions introduce the precursors and «initiateurs», from this extraordinary Conrad Witz, in the XVth century, to the XVIIIth century Bernese or Zurichois «petits maîtres» such as Wolf, Hess, Aberli, Lory the father, Biedermann, Lafond, König and finally at the beginning of the nineteenth century; to those artists who settled down in Neuchâtel: Lory, the son, Baumann and Moritz supported by the Osterwalds, father and daughter, from the small art of whom great art was to originate.

1825: Maximilien de Meuron who likewise till he reached the age of forty, turned out «Swiss views» and albums, exhibits in Geneva that «Big Eiger», still a small size picture but a first high altitude canvas which R. Toepffer praised to the skies. — 1843: Here is the huge Monte Rosa by Alexandre Calame, an outstanding work of art which just lacks the freedom of treatment that would have made it a masterpiece. Opposite this desolate and motionless scene, throbs in a strange manner that impassioned symphony of Léon Berthoud, the «Frohnalp» which dates from 1865 and that fair and noble Bernina of Albert de Meuron, Maximilien's son. Then with Auguste Henri Berthoud, we have an impression of very solid ground whilst Gustave Jeanneret conjures up mighty visions scarcely less virile than those of Blanche Berthoud, Auguste-Henri's daughter.

But let us leave the «minore» to recall that the Vaudois with Bocion or Hermanjat, played on the whole a masterly game and that the Genevois can be proud of a remarkable «initiateur» in the person of de la Rive and of such men as Diday, Castan, Lugardon, de Beaumont, Baud-Bovy and Giron. More or less talented, the nevertheless prepared the way for the first artist of genius who, with almost playful imagination, succeeded in discovering the structure and rhythm of the Alps. Indeed, Ferdinand Hodler, a Bernese who became a citizen of Geneva, had in some degree an innate knowledge of the capital lesson in style imparted by the great Alps: geological structure with its latent parallelism, powerful delineation, harsh and vigorous colouring. And furthermore, is not Hodler, unique as an artist in the world, and with a deep sense that is truly universal, the most Swiss of all our painters?

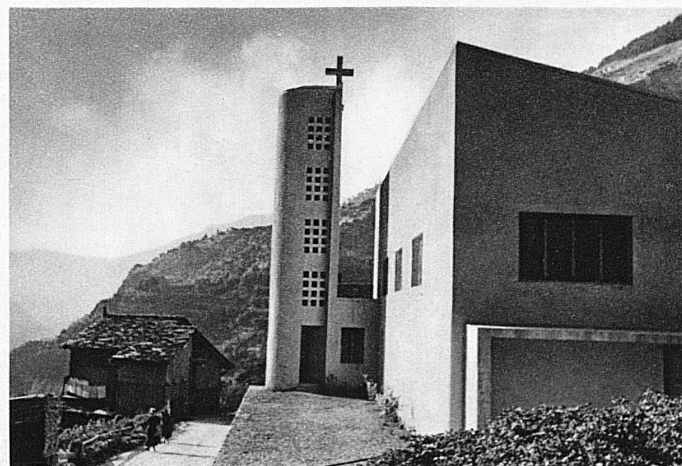
And so that is, roughly outlined, what the Neuchâtel exhibition teaches us. Temperaments and a diversity of expressions are also to be found which our hosts will appraise. But in order that our foreign visitors should not be alone in availing themselves of this history and that we should all become acquainted with it, the exhibition which opened on the 20th of July will be prolonged till the 30th of September.

Maurice Jeanneret (Trad. Tremlett)

Le Congrès international d'architecture moderne au Château de La Sarraz (Vaud)

du 9 au 12 septembre

C'est dans le décor médiéval du Château de La Sarraz, présentement affecté en partie au Musée romand, que se sont réunis pour la première fois en 1928 les chefs de file du mouvement rénovateur de l'architecture. Depuis lors le mouvement s'est vigoureusement affirmé. Les grands congrès de Francfort, Bruxelles et Athènes ont tour à tour éclairé les problèmes les plus actuels de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme; les expositions itinérantes ont touché les villes du monde entier. La réunion qui groupera cette année sous les ombrages de La Sarraz environ 80 représentants de tous les pays est chargée d'élaborer le programme du prochain congrès qui se tiendra l'an prochain à Paris.



Effet d'architecture moderne dans le site alpin: l'église de Lourtier (Valais) par l'architecte Albert Sartoris

Phot.: Budry, Sauser