Oscar Domínguez (Spanish, 1906-1957)

Retrato de Roma (Portrait of Roma), 1933
Oil on canvas
Anonymous Loan; L2014:19.1

Oscar Domínguez painted this portrait of his lover, the Polish pianist Roma Damska, in 1933 while the two were visiting his family home on the Spanish island of Tenerife. Although he completed this work before he was formally introduced to André Breton (French, 1896-1966) and his circle in Paris the following year, the surrealist influences he had already absorbed during his time in the French capital are undeniable. Damska’s static poise and empty gaze, which recall ancient statuary such as the Venus de Milo, belie the disturbing, violent gesture of her dismembered hands hovering over the keys of the piano. Although the instrument references Damska’s occupation, it may also point to one of Domínguez’s compatriots—namely Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904-89). His recent work Hallucination partielle: Six images de Lénine sur un piano had garnered much attention; Domínguez may have attempted to capitalize on the success of Dalí’s composition. The piano and severed hands may also refer to Dalí’s 1929 film Un chien andalou, which he completed with Luis Buñuel (Spanish, 1900-83). One scene features a piano laden with the corpses of beasts of burden; another depicts someone prodding an amputated hand in the street. Further, the so-called Dragon Tree—a species native to the Canary Islands—pictured on the sheet music, is connected by a thin line to other Dragon Trees through the door, creating a link between the dark interior and the dreamlike landscape beyond. Domínguez featured Dragon Trees in his works to such an extent that Breton came to call him the “Dragonnier des Canaries.”

Soon after his 1933 trip to Tenerife with Damska, Domínguez settled permanently in Paris. Through his association with the Surrealists, he began experimenting with automatism, a practice intended to tap the creative possibilities of the unconscious. Although his later paintings are sometimes criticized as being derivative, he is best remembered for inventing “decalcomania,” a process wherein pigments are spread on paper and then covered by a second sheet, resulting in crystalline surfaces and atmospheric patterns evocative of Surrealist landscapes.

Tamara de Lempicka (Polish, 1898-1980)

La Chemise Rose II (The Pink Slip II), 1928
Oil on panel
Anonymous Loan; L2014:19.3

Tamara de Lempicka was raised as the privileged granddaughter of a wealthy Polish banker, dividing her time between family homes in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw. As a young girl, she traveled with her family to see the great masters of
Western painting in Italy, an experience that would have a lasting impact on her. Although many of Lempicka’s works are described as neo-cubist, she rejected much of what her contemporaries produced; the Renaissance masters she so admired during her youth influenced her style a great deal more than the artists of the European vanguard. In contrast to many of her avant-garde contemporaries, she was a fashionable socialite and a commercially successful portrait painter. Still, one of her mentors was André Lhote (French, 1885-1962), an advocate of synthetic cubism. He gave his pupil the tools to merge the style with her more neo-classical aesthetic, resulting in Lempicka’s uniquely modern sensibilities built on traditional modes of representation. She once commented that she “aimed at technique, métier, simplicity and good taste...colours light and bright.”

*La Chemise Rose II* depicts a hazel-eyed woman with cropped, dark hair crowning her thin face. The woman, who appears more frequently than any other model in Lempicka’s paintings (even including her daughter, Kizette), is Ira Perrot, a young married woman who became a particular friend of the artist. Mme. Perrot is featured in at least seven paintings from 1922-32, including two versions of *La Chemise Rose*. In the first iteration of 1927, the model’s breasts are exposed, uncovered by the strip of sheer lace, and her expression is frankly seductive. In the second, shown here, Mme. Perrot’s body is decorously covered by a more opaque band of lace, and her look is demure, even submissive. The relationship between the artist and Mme. Perrot, believed by some scholars to be romantic, ended abruptly in the early 1930s for unknown reasons; the two never saw one another again.

---

Tamara de Lempicka (Polish, 1898-1980)
*La Chemise Rose I (The Pink Slip I)*, circa 1927
Oil on panel
Private Collection

Auguste Herbin (French, 1882-1960)
*Les Joueurs de Boules, No. 1 (The Boules Players, No. 1)*, 1923
Oil on canvas
Anonymous Loan; L2014:19.2

Auguste Herbin embraced a wide range of styles throughout his life, including such varied approaches to abstraction as cubism and constructivism. *Les Joueurs de Boules, No. 1* represents the artist's interpretation of the *rappel à l'ordre* or the revival of classicism and realism that emerged in the wake of the First World War. This general move away from more experimental styles has been considered by scholars to be a response to the grotesque violence and volatility of Europe in the early 20th century. After such upheaval, the return to realism presented a legible, even reassuring, approach to art.
Les Joueurs de Boules, No. 1 is one of two oil paintings from 1923 in which Herbin depicts a group of well-dressed men playing boules, a ubiquitous pastime among veterans in the years after the war. The pendant work is in the permanent collection of The Centre Pompidou in Paris, although the work on display here is the larger and more complex of the pair. The artist’s deliberate decision to depict ordinary men engaged in an unremarkable activity on such a grand scale is indicative of his political persuasions. In 1920, Herbin had joined the Communist Party; thus his adoption of the norms of history painting for use in depicting the everyman is not merely a stylistic appropriation, but a statement of solidarity.
Auguste Herbin (French, 1882-1960)

*Les Joueurs de Boules, No. 2 (The Boules Players, No. 2)*, 1923

Oil on canvas

The Centre Pompidou, Paris; AM 1980-380
James Tissot (French, 1836-1902)

**A Fête Day at Brighton, 1875-78**
Oil on canvas
Anonymous loan; L2014:19.4

Jacques-Joseph Tissot, who grew up in the seaport town of Nantes, France, began his art training at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1856 or 1857. As a student in Paris he copied works at the Louvre and met Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917), Édouard Manet (French, 1832-83), and James McNeill Whistler (American, 1834-1903); not long after becoming friends with the latter, Tissot changed his own first name to the anglicized “James.” Though his early paintings depicted historical and literary subjects, in 1863 he switched his focus to contemporary portraiture. He was particularly interested in painting images of fashionable women, and high-society patronage made him both wealthy and famous by the end of the decade. In 1871, Tissot left Paris for London, where he quickly established himself as an in-demand artist in the social circles of the upper class.

In **A Fête Day at Brighton**, a well-dressed woman casually walks down the streets of the seaside town in England. Behind her, naval flags representing various European countries wave in the breeze. Brighton was a popular tourist destination for people seeking the health benefits of sea bathing. After the railway connected it to London in 1841, making day trips possible, its status as a resort community was confirmed.

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-90)

**L’Homme est en Mer (The Man is at Sea), 1889**
Oil on canvas
Anonymous loan; L2014:19.5

The narrative implied in Vincent van Gogh’s depiction of a young mother cradling her sleeping baby in the warm glow of firelight evokes feelings of tenderness and introspection. The artist’s version of a time-honored subject—a wife anxiously awaiting her husband’s safe return from sea—was painted five months into the artist’s voluntary stay at the asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, France (where he also painted one of his best-known masterpieces, *The Starry Night*). Van Gogh was familiar with a painting of the same title by Virginie Demont-Breton (French, 1859-1935), which had received positive reviews from critics and attendees at the Salon of 1889. Though van Gogh copied Demont-Breton’s composition, he improvised on the warm, earthly palette of the original, choosing bold blues and violets to offset the hearth in his version. By this time, van Gogh had already been immersed in painting copies of works by both western masters (including Rembrandt van Rijn [Dutch, 1606-69], Eugène Delacroix [French, 1798-1863]), and his contemporaries.

This painting’s storied provenance includes ownership by van Gogh’s last physician, Dr. Paul Gachet (French, 1828-1909), who treated him before his death in Auvers-sur-Oise. Other owners include Hollywood leading man Errol Flynn (American, 1909-1959) and John T. Dorrance, Jr. (American, 1919-1989), the heir to the Campbell Soup fortune.