



Jean Isy de Botton (French 1898 - 1978)

Jean Isy De Botton was part of the Ecole de Paris or School of Paris, a group of both French and non-French artists living in Paris between the two world wars. He had a long and prolific career as painter, illustrator and muralist. His successful career started in the 1920s and continued for four decades. He received a degree in Philosophy from the Lycée Rollins in Paris he went on to travel extensively and become a well-established artist. De Botton's early paintings display many of the characteristics of the age of Art Deco, incorporating romantic, allegorical, and historical themes with a modern technique. In a career that spanned five decades de Botton's early work reflected a love of pageantry—perhaps this was the reason he was the only non-British painter officially invited to attend and paint the Coronation of King George VI in 1937—and his late paintings were abstract. Born in France in 1898, Jean de Botton enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1920 to learn fresco painting. On a trip to Spain in 1925 he encountered the art of Zurbaran and El Greco; then on his return to Paris he discovered Cezanne and began an intensive study of Impressionism, Post Impressionism and early 20th century art movements. From 1932 to 1939 de Botton taught at the Academie Montmartre. De Botton participated in the important yearly Paris exhibitions: Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Independants; he was included in the 1934 to 1938 Carnegie Institute Internationals in Pittsburg, Boston and Chicago; and in 1936 he was included in official exhibitions of French art in Tokyo, Brussels and Antwerp. De Botton served on the jury of the Salon d'Automne and was a member of the Salon des Tuileries, Salon des Indépendants, Salon des Humoristes. He was Vice President of the Salon and President of the Salon France Nouvelle. Solo Exhibitions between 1936 and 1942 include the Marie Harriman Gallery, New York; the Rockefeller Center, New York, Carol Carstairs Gallery; Leger & Co. Gallery, London; Seattle Museum; San Diego

Museum; Philadelphia Art Gallery, Grace Gallery, Boston; Galerie du Livre, Casablana; Santa Barbara Museum; Pearl Gallery, Hollywood; Vista del Arroyo, Pasadena; Francis Taylor Gallery, Beverly Hills; Courvoisier Gallery, San Francisco; and the Knoedler & Co. Gallery, New York. In 1925 de Botton exhibited a mural at the Salon d'Honneur des Beaux-Arts, Paris and in 1937 at the Palace of the Navy, Paris. Book illustrations include *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Baudelaire, 1936; *Claude* by Fauconnier, edition Firenczi; *La Maison du Quai* by Caston Cherau, edition Firenczi; and a children's book entitled "Fou Fou Discovers America". In 1942 de Botton designed a poster for the California National Guard as well. He delivered a lecture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1941 on the subject of Chiaroscuro and his theory of its detrimental effect on modern painting. In June of 1944 the California Palace of the Legion of Honor held a retrospective de Botton's paintings, frescoes, murals, drawings, tapestries and book illustrations. The same year he had written the ballet; *Triumph of Hope*, which was performed at the San Francisco Opera House. Museums in Luxembourg, Versailles and Royan have collected his work. In 1938, Jean de Botton traveled with the paintings from the Coronation of King George VI to New York for an exhibition at Rockefeller Center; then he went across the country and added to his growing reputation with one-man shows at museums in Seattle, San Diego and Philadelphia. World War II soon broke out; he was called back to France and sent to Morocco where he fortuitously discovered the Arabian colors that had seduced Matisse. Upon his release from the military he accepted an invitation from President Roosevelt's mother and Knoedler Galleries to come back to New York for a one-man show that opened in 1942; next he went to California where he exhibited, worked in Hollywood and painted murals. The rest of his life was spent living between Paris and New York. With one foot in the new world and another in the old, de Botton was able to remain aloof from art fashions, refine his aesthetic and focus his aspirations. From the 1930's into the 1950's his love of the figure and pageantry is present in his art. By the late 1950s de Botton was only painting imaginary landscapes, still lifes and abstracts with elusive, elegant forms. He could finally say he had achieved his own style, something he viewed as the crown of artistic pursuits. De Botton's paintings were acquired by the Albertina Museum in Vienna, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Dallas Museum, Dallas, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Musée National d'Art Modern, Paris, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Norton Museum, Palm Beach, San Diego Museum and the Museum Richartz, Cologne.

Chronology

Early life

Studied Classics at the Lycée Rollin, Paris. Obtained a degree in *Philosophics* under Jules Romains.

1920 Left home and abandoned the diplomatic career planned for him by his parents. Became a painter.

1920 Became a pupil of Antoine Bourdelle and Bernard Naudin. Studied fresco painting.

1924 First sojourn to Spain where he studied the work of Zurbaran and El Greco.

- 1925 Worked as assistant to his art master Paul Badouin. Traveled throughout France studying French Cathedral architecture, the French Gothics and Primitives.
Participated in the Paris International Exposition: awarded first prize in the national competition and received the Gold Award from the Paris Chamber of Commerce Packing Industries section. Received a fresco mural commission for the *Salon d' Honneur des Beaux-arts*.
- 1925 Exhibited at the *Paris Salon d'Automne* and *Salon des Indépendants*. Worked as a painter and illustrator for the International Federation of the Technical Press, France.
- 1926 Influenced by the compositional discoveries of the Impressionists. Experimented with several different styles that were part of the Ecole de Paris: Post Impressionism, Futurism, Expressionism, Symbolism and Abstraction.
Instrumental in creating the young artists movement "Evasion," a monthly gathering of artists and intellectuals seeking "to avoid 'professional deformation' at any cost."
Created posters and interior decorations influenced by Cubism and abstraction.
- 1928 Awarded the "Grand Prix du Dessin" in a national competition. Spent time in Corsica where a simpler lifestyle influenced his work and ushered in a new compositional austerity.
- 1929 Became a member of the jury for the *Salon d'Automne*, Paris.
- 1930 Sent to attend the Spanish International Exposition in Madrid, Barcelona and Seville by the International Federation of the Technical Press. Became Art Director at the *Grand Negoce Magazine*, a publication devoted to high-end French products.
- 1931 First visit to Portugal, Madeira and the Azores where he studied traditional Portuguese ceramics and is influenced by drama, Portuguese Primitive artists and local gypsy culture.
- 1932-39
Appointed Chef d' Atelier and lecturer at the Academie Montmartre where Gauguin, Toulouse Lautrec and Degas worked, and Van Gogh painted "Les Godillots." His lectures were titled *The Vanity of Teaching Art* and *Art Teaching is but the Seeking of Revealing Personalities*.
- 1932 Exhibited the painting "La Femme á la Tasse" at the Musee de Luxembourg, Paris.
Made his first trip to Italy, where he visited Verona, Venice, Florence and Mantua, and became passionate about the works of Tintoretto, Giotto, Carpaccio, Paolo Ucello and Simone Martini. After his return to Paris, he presented a lecture titled *Lesson of Tintoretto's Dynamism – Tintoretto of Today would have Directed a Motion Picture*.
- 1933 Made his second trip to Italy and visited Arezzo, the realm of Piero Della Francesca, who earned de Botton's adoration and made him aware of the triumph of color over chiaroscuro (one of de Botton's lectures included a segment titled *Chiaroscuro Killed Painting*). De Botton was so taken with this realization that when he returned to Paris he destroyed his entire past production of art, burning about three hundred and fifty paintings. From this point onward he eschewed the romanticizing of either subject or technique.
- 1933 Visited Belgium where he helped organize the official *Exhibition of French Art* in Brussels and Antwerp. He also studied the works of Lucas Cranach and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who influenced him to reduce the scale of the figures within his compositions.
- 1936 Participated in *Jeune France* exhibition in Geneva. He is impressed by the Holbein portraits in the Museum in Basel and the depiction of personality in Ferdinand Holder's paintings.
Arrangements were made with Marie Harriman Gallery in New York for an exhibition of ten small paintings as de Botton's introduction to the United States of America.
Traveled to England as the lead artist in an exhibition titled *France Nouvelle*, organized by the French government, aimed at the expansion of French arts to foreign countries. The enthusiasm engendered was responsible for his future opportunity as a painter of the English Royalty.

- 1937 De Botton became the only official non-English painter invited to attend and paint the coronation of King George VI, father of the current Queen Elizabeth II. The artist documented the pageantry and painted several portraits, including of the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, as children, and some of the Court of St. James. De Botton travelled extensively in England and Scotland, embracing the softer, brighter colors the Thames Valley and the tender tones of Scotland. His portraits from this period were first and foremost focused on being beautiful and successful compositions, rather than psychological explorations of the sitters.
- 1938 Made his first visit to the United States. His sketches of the Royal Coronation are exhibited in a show of British Pageantry at Rockefeller Center and at the Carol Carstairs Gallery in New York. Another exhibition is arranged under the auspices of the Association of Western Museums.
- 1938 Returned to England to prepare for the opening of his official exhibition titled *King George VI and His Court*, a series of paintings depicting court ceremonies and the pageantry of St. James, as well as throughout the country and the Empire. Sixty compositions were proposed to the King's Council; thirty two were completed when war broke out, putting an end to the project.
- 1939 Exhibited at the *Salon des Tuileries*, *Salon des Humoristes* and *Salon des Artistes Decorateurs*. Participated in official exhibitions of French art throughout France and in several foreign countries.
- 1940 De Botton is conscripted into the French army and sent to Morocco. In late 1940, he returned to the United States and traveled to a number of states, producing an exhibition titled *Synthesis of American States*, exhibited at the Courvoisier Gallery in San Francisco.
- 1942 Returned to New York for an exhibition at Knoedler Galleries. While in New York he worked with Michael Fokine to write the libretto and design the costumes for the ballet *The Triumph of Hope*. He also wrote and illustrated the children's book "Fou Fou Discovers America," about a French poodle discovering the United States.
- 1943 Returned to San Francisco.
- 1944 Directed six performances of the ballet *The Triumph of Hope* and painted a large mural "America at War" depicting American life and industry. A *Jean De Botton Retrospective Exhibition* is held at the museum, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, June 1944.

Catalogues & Books

Jean De Botton, Hardcover, 1968, by Frank Elgar, edited and published by Georges Fall, Paris, France

Jean De Botton Retrospective, The Museum of California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, June 1944

Alfred Frankenstein et alii. "Jean De Botton: Retrospective". Museum of California, San Francisco. Exhibition Catalog.

Public Collections Include

Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria
 Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
 Dallas Museum, Dallas, TX



Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; Cambridge, MA
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Musée National D'Art Moderne, Paris, France
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany
Norton Museum of Art, Palm Beach, FL
San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, CA