

# Mu. ZEE

Press release

29.6.2023

## *Anna Boch, an Impressionist journey*

1.7.2023 - 5.11.2023



Anna Boch, *En juin*, 1894, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi. On loan from the French Community of Belgium

Mu.ZEE pays tribute to Anna Boch (1848-1936) on the 175th anniversary of her birth.

*Anna Boch, an impressionist journey*, focuses on Anna Boch: artist, philanthropist, patron, music-lover, and woman living in late nineteenth-century Belgium. In doing so, Mu.ZEE co-steers the (inter)national trend to showcase more women artists, ensuring they enjoy the same appreciation as their male artist counterparts. Mu.ZEE recruited curator Virginie Devillez for the job. Over two years of preliminary research went into this exhibition. Mu.ZEE curators Dr Stefan Huygebaert and researcher and project manager Wendy Van Hoorde joined her on this heady task.

### **Dominique Savelkoul, director Mu.ZEE and Permekemuseum, on Anna Boch**

*It is to the credit of Virginie Devillez and the team behind this exhibition that one well-known and endlessly rehashed fact about Anna Boch – that she was the only person ever to acquire a painting by Vincent van Gogh during his lifetime – has been superseded. The exhibition and this accompanying book show her both as an artist and as a collector, demonstrating her love of music, architecture and travel. As befits a Wagner fanatic – she visited the Bayreuther Festspiele several times – her life reads like a Gesamtkunstwerk, in which multiple art forms and interests are interwoven and enhance each other.*

*As a female director of Mu.ZEE, I am therefore very moved to be able to present this exhibition at long last*

The concrete starting point is her intriguing pointillist painting *Pendant l'élévation* (During the Service) that we are particularly fond of here at Mu.ZEE. It depicts the little church of Mariakerke near Ostend – much beloved by James Ensor, Willy Finch and many others. Even more important than this artwork from our collection is the fact that Anna Boch was the most prominent female artist in Belgium around 1900. And that time period, encompassing both the fin de siècle and the belle époque, is precisely the chronological starting point of Mu.ZEE's area of interest. As a museum for Belgian art from 1880 to the present, Mu.ZEE is the obvious place for Anna Boch to come home (From the catalogue's foreword - Dominique Savelkoul)

Like her Impressionist contemporaries Berthe Morisot (1841-1985) in France or Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) in the United States, Anna Boch was born into an incredibly affluent milieu, waar de liefde voor kunst en muziek met de paplepel werd ingegeven. Her family owned the Royal Boch factory (later Villeroy & Boch) in La Louvière. Anna's brother Eugène Boch (1855-1941), also a painter, was friends with Vincent van Gogh. Her cousin, lawyer and writer Octave Maus (1856-1919), founded the important artist societies *Les XX* and *La Libre Esthétique* in Brussels. Anna Boch enjoyed international acclaim. She was an insatiable lover of music and collected works by Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Signac, among others. She could also spot young talent from miles away. As with her fellow French artists for whom she had the deepest admiration, seascapes, nature, and travel play a major role in her oeuvre. Another subject, the North Sea, also appears in her body of work. She was no stranger to the Belgian Coast and Ostend – the habitat and purview of James Ensor. Boch acquired his masterpiece *La Musique russe* and others, evidencing her profound affinity for Ensor's work.

The exhibition recounts a fantastic journey through Anna Boch's impressionist oeuvre, cleverly complemented by exceptional loans from, e.g. her own collection of works by Vincent van Gogh, Paul Signac, Paul Gauguin, Théo van Rysselberghe, Victor Horta, Maurice Denis, and many other contemporaries, in addition to works from public institutions and private collections. The exhibition is the result of a collaboration with the Musée de Pont-Aven in Brittany, and will travel to the Breton Museum after 5 November.

### **Anna Boch's connection to Mu. ZEE's permanent collection**

Mu.ZEE always forges a link between temporary exhibitions and the permanent collection on display. This time, the connection to Anna Boch has been threaded throughout the collection. The current programme showcases a few powerful women artists, e.g. Berlinde De Bruyckere and Ria Pacquée, as well as Liliane Vertessen – who occupies an entire space populated by a series of self-portraits from the 1980s. The work of Jacqueline Mesmaeker and Lili Dujourie is displayed next to Ada Van Hoorebeke's collaborative *Rose Family Factory* project – a veritable batik studio and jam factory. And recently acquired work by Marthe Donas also demonstrates how this artist rightfully claims her place within abstract modernism in the first half of the 20th century. Alice Frey has also become a lauded member of the line-up.

Needless to say, there are also modest allusions to Anna Boch. For example, these include a gorgeous series of works by contemporaries Anna De Weert and Juliette Wytsman-Trullemans. Their work – like Boch's – is drenched in vibrant light and colours. Lastly, a selection of work by 19th-century Ostend painter Euphrosina Beernaert hints at how she – as one of Boch's first teachers – introduced Anna to the technical aspects of painting, in particular.

### **Catalogue**

*Anna Boch. An impressionist journey*, published by Hannibal.

With contributions by Virginie Devillez, Stefan Huygebaert, Wendy Van Hoorde, Dominique Savelkoul, Sophie Kervran, Thérèse Thomas, Sylvie Patry, Laurence Brogniez, Barbara Caspers, Eric Min, Mireille de Lassus, Marjan Sterckx and Linda Van Santvoort, Dominique Bauer and Stijn Paredis, and Benoît Goffin and Ludovic Recchia.

Available in Dutch, French, and English.

Sale price: €49.95

### About the curators

Virginie Devillez (b.1973) holds a PhD in philosophy and literature (ULB) and launched her curating career at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, where she was project manager of the Magritte Museum, which opened in 2009. She later went on to manage Daniel Templon and Micheline Szwajcer's galleries in Belgium before becoming Specialist Director of Impressionist, Modern, and Contemporary Art at Sotheby's (2016-2023). A freelance curator and researcher, she is currently an independent expert and art consultant. Virginie Devillez has authored countless publications and articles on Belgian art and Surrealism, among others, and is a member of the Magritte Committee.

Stefan Huygebaert (b.1988) holds a PhD in art history. In Ostend, he is a Mu.ZEE curator, focusing on exhibitions and research projects on late 19th, early 20th-century art, especially that of Léon Spilliaert. Prior to this, he spent a decade at Ghent University as a pre- and postdoctoral researcher. He studies, teaches, and publishes on various aspects of the long nineteenth century (1789-1914).

Wendy Van Hoorde (b.1984) has a master's in art history and has been active at Mu.ZEE since 2019, first as valuation process coordinator for the collection and later as collection researcher.

### *Meet Anna Boch & the artists*

Mu.ZEE appealed to three inspiring women artists and collectors to be the exhibition's ambassadors: **Joëlle Dubois, Nadia Naveau, and Marie Cloquet**. Like Anna Boch, they are all artists *and* avid collectors. Mu.ZEE joined them and Generation WOW to develop the *Meet Anna Boch & the artists* digital campaign. In this campaign, they each share a powerful perspective on the past and present inspired by Anna Boch's life story. This campaign officially launched on 12 June during **Generation WOW's 'Create & Elevate'** conference at **Kursaal Oostende**. But the digital campaign runs from 1 June to the end of the exhibition on Mu.ZEE's [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) pages.

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### Practical details

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