



Bormes-les-Mimosas (Var) 1898 – Paris 1993

Born on May 21st 1898 at Bormes-les-Mimosas, Alfred Courmes studied in his youth at the Monaco College. His father, officer in the merchant navy, encouraged him in his wish to become an art painter. After the First World War, he meets the painter Roger de La Fresnaye, becoming his only disciple. This joint work shall train his artistic career. They will write each other about the progress of Alfred's work: Master and disciple. These letters are kept in the archives of the Georges Pompidou museum in Paris.

Between 1920 and 1925, he settles at Lavandou, then comes to Paris where he shows his paintings at the "Independents" and "Autumn" exhibitions. In 1926, he paints the portrait of Peggy Guggenheim. Following year, Alfred Courmes settles in Oostend (Belgium) where he meets Ensor, Permeke and Labisse. He studies same wise the works of Van Eyck, Holbein, Dürer, Vinci, Raphael, Brueghel, visiting on a regular basis the museums of Gent, Antwerp, Brussels and Brugges. This confrontation between classicism, surrealism and expressionism shall constitute a permanent reference for Courmes. His first own personal exhibition takes place at the Montparnasse Gallery in Paris the same year.

In 1930, he settles for good in Paris. He is awarded the Paul Guillaume prize, shared with Tal Coat in 1936. This achievement allows him to obtain a commission in 1937, *Le Toucher* (The Touch) for the Sevres Pavillon during the Paris International Exhibition.

In 1938, Albert Sarraut, Minister of Education, makes him a proposal to paint the walls of the French Embassy in Canada (Ottawa) under guidance of the Architect Eugene Baudoin, together with four other artists, all four having been awarded the "Grand Prix de Rome" after their admission at the Villa Medici : Louis Leyge, Charles Pinson, Robert Cami, Andre Lizete-Lindet. Eugene Baudoin asks him a painting, to be wax covered, totalling 120 square meters, on the subject of Happy France. This work shall require close to two years, and will be signed on the eve of the Second World War outbreak. This fresco has been restored by Jean-Paul Ledeur, between 1982 and 1984, thanks to the initiatives and enthusiasm of Ambassadors Beliard and Cabouat, with the support of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

In 1941, Courmes organizes conferences and exhibitions for account of the association "Travail et Culture" together with Rene Huyghe, Germain Bazin, Picasso, Leger ...

At War end, he shows his work at the "Autumn" and the "Independents" exhibitions; in 1946 at the Surrealists exhibition in Lille with Magritte and his friend Clovis Trouille, then as from 1957 on a regular basis at the "May" exhibition, invited by Gaston Diehl. In 1965, one of his paintings is shown at the "Biennale" of San Paulo (Brazil) and he is also exposed at the exhibition "Les Autres" organized by Yves Hamon, in Bordeaux.

Courmes is recognized as forerunner of a young painters generation showing their works with him at the National Gallery of Grand Palais in 1972, in the exhibition devoted to twelve years of contemporary art, where he is awarded the prize Panique. He will be shown at the exhibition "Daily Mythologies" at the Paris museum of Modern Art in 1976, also at the "Realisms between Revolution and Reaction" exhibition 1919 – 1939 at the Georges Pompidou museum.

It is not before 1977 that his art can be seen in his first own exhibition at the Jean Briance Gallery. He is awarded the Dumas-Millier prize by the Institut de France in 1978, before new exhibitions of his own art: Paintings Museum in Grenoble in 1979, Serpentine Gallery in London; in 1982, 1986 and 1987 at the Jean Briance Gallery; in 1986 and 1988 at the Berggruen Gallery; in 1989 in Roubaix and Poitiers museums, in Saint Roch museum in Issoudun and at the Georges Pompidou museum. He is awarded the French Legion of Honour in 1991.

His paintings are shown, among other places, in the museums of Poitiers, Roubaix, Georges Pompidou, Issoudun, Algiers, Boulogne-Billancourt ...

He continues to paint up to his death on January 8th in 1993.

“Keeping together realism and humour, his paintings, influenced firstly by the Cubism of de La Fresnaye evolve towards an unexpected outbreak, often contesting, enriched by designs borrowed from various sources ranging from advertising to mythology, with borrowings from religious themes” (1)