Albert Dubois-Pillet

* 28 October 1846 Paris
† 18 August 1890 Le Puy-en-Velay

Dubois-Pillet was a professional military officer, but being held prisoner by the Germans during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 seems to have provoked his career change to painting.

His life

A close friend of the artist Georges Seurat although fourteen years his senior, Dubois-Pillet was one of the earliest practitioners of pointillism as it came to be called.

He graduated from the École Impériale Militaire at Saint-Cyr in 1867 and fought in the Franco-Prussian war.

In an effort to camouflage his artistic activities from his military career, in 1884 he began to sign his works in the pseudonym, "Dubois" with the addition of his mother’s maiden name, "Pillet." Though the military forbade him from participating in art exhibitions in 1886, he remained active until his death.

He made his early career in the army but, having relegated painting to a pastime, proved to be an unusually talented artist, even exhibited at the Salons of 1877 and 1879.

He moved to Paris to pursue painting full time the following year and while there befriended the fellow artists who had been exhibiting together since 1874.

Dubois-Pillet was one of the founders of Société des Indépendents in 1884, along with Seurat and Paul Signac. Their motto was "No juries, no awards."

The only one-man exhibition of his work held in his lifetime took place at the Revue Indépendent in 1888.

Félix Fénéon, a writer who keeps popping up in these columns, wrote in a review of his paintings: “M. Dubois-Pillet presents ten pictures and we know some others. His vision, not very bold, confers on oil a powdery and velvety delicacy, similar to what is achieved with pastels."

Perhaps because of his defiance he was posted to Le Puy in south central France in 1889 as commander of the local gendarmerie. He died there during a smallpox outbreak in 1890.

The next year 64 of his works were shown posthumously in a show at the Salon des Indépendants, but due to a reported fire his work remains rare today.

His work

Dubois-Pillet was among the first artists using the pointillist technique.

As soon as Dubois-Pillet first met Seurat and Signac they were already labeled Impressionists. Their influence transformed Dubois-Pillet’s work; it also ensured that judges for the Salons of 1880 and 1884 refused his submissions.

Nor did Dubois-Pillet ever exhibit with the Impressionists; his friendship with Seurat and Signac as well as his routine presence at the café La nouvelle Athènes (where the most radical artists of the day were habitués) led Dubois-Pillet to embrace a ‘neo-impressionist’ style of painting instead.

He adopted a pointillism more instinctive than the controlled, precise approach of Seurat. Whilst he sought a means of demonstrating radical colorist theories, Dubois-Pillet saw pointillism as a novel way to portray the effects of light and build form.

Early works in divisionism were a Winter Landscape, 1888 (Geneva, Petit Palais) and Seine in Paris, c. 1888), attention to rare atmospheric effects can be seen in Saint-Michel-d’Aiguilhe, Snow Effect, (1889 Le Puy Crozatier museum). Represented in the Musée d’Orsay: the Marne at dawn.
Paintings in museum collections

Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Musée Crozatier, Le Puy-en-Velay (4 Tableaux); Musée du Petit Palais, Genève; Musée d'art moderne, Saint-Étienne.

Exhibitions

An exhibition dedicated to him took place in 2010 at the Museum of Impressionism Giverny.

Bibliography