
De Groux family

Bernadette Thomas and Danielle Derrey-Capon

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Belgian family of artists.

(1) Charles(-Auguste-Corneille) De Groux

Bernadette Thomas

(*b* Comines, Aug 4, 1825; *d* Brussels, March 30, 1870).

Painter, printmaker and designer. In 1833 he settled in Brussels, where he was a pupil of François-Joseph Navez in 1843 and was advised by J. B. Van Eycken (1809–53), winning the Prix de Rome at the Brussels Academy in 1850. At that time he was painting historical compositions set mainly in the Middle Ages, which had absorbed the flavour of Parisian Romanticism. His copies of the live model and the Antique were unsuccessful, and he distinguished himself only in competitions for good composition.

In 1851 De Groux went to Düsseldorf, which encouraged him to adopt realist subjects and anti-classical ideas. During a particularly fertile period, which began around 1853, he produced pictures in predominantly grey and brown tones showing the grim existence of society's poorest classes: for example *The Drunkard* (1853) and *Grace* (1861; both Brussels, Mus. A. Mod.). He also portrayed the life of the soldier (*Departure of the Conscript*; Brussels, A. Mod.), as well as painting several religious scenes such as *Pilgrimage to Saint-Guidon* (1857; Brussels, Mus. A. Mod.), which earned him a gold medal.

De Groux's melancholy and biting wit was expressed in a series of inscriptions engraved beneath his lithographs for the paper *Ulyenspiegel*. He also did a series of etchings and illustrated a number of literary works, such as Charles de Coster's *Les Légendes flamandes*. He designed cartoons for stained-glass windows in a Neo-Gothic style, which owed much to German art, and was working on the decoration of Ypres town hall at the time of his death. He was wrongly seen as a socialist painter, when in fact he was happy to be merely an interested observer of the human condition.

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(2) Henry [Henri] (-Jules-Charles) De Groux [Degroux]

Danielle Derrey-Capon

(*b* St-Josse-ten-Noode, nr Brussels, Nov 16, 1866; *d* Marseille, Jan 12, 1930).

Painter, pastelist and lithographer, son of (1) Charles De Groux. He studied under Jean-François Portaels from the age of 11 and at the Académie de Bruxelles (1882–3). Until 1890 he participated in exhibitions organized by the avant-garde circles La Chrysalide, L'Essor and Les XX, of which he was a member. He was a close friend of William Degouve de Nuncques, in whose studio he executed the frieze *Procession of Archers* (pastel, 2.5×14.0 m, c. 1886–90; Belgium, priv. col.), first exhibited at Les XX in 1887 and 1889, and the *Mocking of Christ* (1889; Avignon, Pal. Roure), to which he gave his friend's features. Masses of tangled bodies with crazed expressions haunt his considerable oeuvre, marked by literary symbolism and by a tendency towards depicting such renowned figures as Christ, Napoleon and Wagner.

De Groux's highly personal style moved and disturbed as much by its force and ardour as by its 'unfinished' look and awkwardness. These characteristics were already evident in the *Mocking of Christ*, whose presentation at the Salon Triennal of 1890 in Brussels and two years later in Paris, first privately and then at the Salon des Arts Liberaux, aroused the admiration of artistic and fashionable circles. Despite this success and his influential friends, who included Léon Bloy and the art critic and writer Camille Lemonnier (1844–1913), he rejected a life of comfort and respect, spurred by a vital need to express his own physical and moral sufferings, his permanent destitution, his wanderings and fantasies; he remained a painter of the imagination, of the apocalypse and of movement. He continued to paint and draw dramatic and Symbolist subjects until the end of his life, for example the *Death of Andronicus* (c. 1925; Brussels, Mus. A. Mod.). De Groux was also active as an illustrator (e.g. for *Le Fantôme* by Remy de Gourmont; Paris, 1893) and lithographer (e.g. the *Eagle's Nest*; Brussels, Bib. Royale Albert 1er, Cab. Est.).

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