
Luce, Maximilien

(b Paris, March 13, 1858; d Paris, Feb 7, 1941).

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T052308>

Published online: 2003

French painter and printmaker. He was born and brought up in the working-class surroundings of Montparnasse, and an interest in the daily routines and labours of the *petit peuple* of Paris informs much of his art. After an apprenticeship with the wood-engraver Henri Théophile Hildebrand (b 1824), in 1876 he entered the studio of the wood-engraver Eugène Froment where he assisted in the production of engravings for various French and foreign publications such as *L'illustration* and *The Graphic*. He also sporadically attended classes at the Académie Suisse and in the studio of Carolus-Duran. In Froment's studio he came into contact with the artists Léo Gausson and Emile-Gustave Péduzzi (Cavallo-Péduzzi; 1851–1917) and in their company began painting landscape subjects in and around the town of Lagny-sur-Marne.

At the Salon des Artistes Indépendants in 1887 Luce's *The Toilette* (Geneva, Petit Pal.) caught the attention of Camille Pissarro, the critic Félix Fénéon and Paul Signac, who purchased the painting. *The Toilette*, which depicts a man bent over a wash-basin, is typical of Luce's handling of human subjects with a deliberate but impassive eye and is one of the first paintings in which he attempted to apply separate strokes of pure colour in accordance with the divisionist technique developed by Seurat. Henceforth he exhibited annually with the Neo-Impressionists at the Indépendants, and in 1889 and 1892 by invitation at the Salon des Vingt in Brussels.

Unlike most of the Neo-Impressionists, Luce continued to favour urban subjects throughout his career, depicting the animated bustle of streets in the Quartier Latin, construction workers on the boulevards and sweeping views of the rooftops and chimneys of Montmartre. In his portrayals of the Pont-Neuf at various times of the night and day (e.g. *Pont-Neuf*; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) the pure colours and flat modelling suggest a familiarity with Japanese prints. Luce travelled widely during the 1890s: to London with Camille Pissarro and Saint-Tropez with Signac in 1892; to Camaret in Brittany in 1893; and repeatedly from 1895 to the Borinage, the coal-mining district of Belgium, where he painted a number of distinguished scenes, for example *Iron Foundry* (1899; Otterlo, Kröller-Müller). He also painted stretches along the Seine west of Paris; his depiction of a bend in the river, the *Seine at Herblay* (1890; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), is a prime example of his use of stippled brushwork and high-key colour harmonies. In later years he divided his time between Paris and the riverside village of Rolleboise, painting in an Impressionist manner.

When he was 13 Luce was a witness to the Commune and its harsh suppression in the aftermath of the collapse of the Second Empire, an event that he commemorated years later in *Paris Street in May 1871* (1905; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). The bland title of this work belies its stark portrayal of corpses beside a barricade. Luce was a staunch advocate of anarchism and occasionally contributed works of art to political fundraising events and to anarchist publications such as Jean Grave's *La Révolte* (later published as *Temps nouveaux*) and *Le Père Peinard*. In a government crackdown following the assassination of President Sadi-Carnot in 1894, Luce was arrested with other suspected agitators

including Grave and Fénéon and gaoled at Mazas Prison, from which he was released six weeks later. He documented his experience of prison life in an album of ten lithographs with a text by Jules Vallès entitled *Mazas* (1894).

The most extensive collection of Luce's paintings and works on paper belongs to Jean Bouin-Luce, the artist's nephew. There is a large collection of his works at the Musée Maximilien Luce, Mantes-la-Jolie, although it includes few in his divisionist manner.

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Luce, Maximilien: Notre Dame, 1899, Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Minneapolis, MN) <<http://collections.artsmia.org/art/1410>>

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