



Still life

Jean-Marie Calmettes

Not on display**Title/Description:** Still life**Artist/Maker:** Jean-Marie Calmettes**Born:** 1953**Object Type:** Painting**Materials:** Canvas, Oil paint**Measurements:** h 408 x w 330 x d 19mm (frame: h 469 x w 488 x d 76mm)**Accession Number:** SAC 6**Production Place:** France**Credit Line:** Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

Still Life by Jean Marie Calmettes (1918-2007) is a great example, not just of Calmettes stylistic shift of the 1940s and 1950s, but also of the lasting impact of Cubism on European painting.

The painting itself depicts a jug and accompanying glass placed on a flat surface. The work has been largely completed using a variety of grey shades, but also includes some highlights of bright yellow and two patches of a very thick dark green wash. This colour combination, particularly that of grey and yellow, is common in Calmette's work of the 1940s and 1950s, a period in which he also produced a number of other still life works. Still life arrangements are often used as neutral compositions on which artists can carry out stylistic experimentations. This piece by Calmettes is no exception with the commonplace image of a jug and glass being used to produce an abstracted Cubist work.

Cubism, developed by the artists Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) in the early 1900s was an already well-established form of artistic representation by the time Calmettes came to produce this still life in 1953. The aim of these cubist portrayals was to construct two-dimensional planes from different viewpoints that alluded to their three-dimensional form. Calmettes reflection on Cubism during this period stemmed from an interest in the work by Roger de La Fresnaye (1885-1925) whose individual response to cubism has been noted as more naturalistic than purely structural. [1]

Calmettes boasts a number of achievements in the French art scene of the 1940s and 1950s. In 1942 he helped to establish the alternative figurative *Groupe de l'Echelles*, meaning "ladder" due to the fact that they would climb a ladder from their studio to admire the rooftops of Paris. [2] He also won the second prize for *Jeune Peinture* in 1947, a Hallmark Prize in 1949, and became part of the second group of the *Nouvelle Ecole de Paris* in 1952. [3] Despite this Calmettes and many of his contemporaries did not achieve the same long-lasting acclaim as their post-Impressionist

predecessors, caused by the dominance of new American art in the mid-twentieth century which thrust many French artists from the spotlight. [4]

Regardless, Calmettes did achieve international reach with his involvement in the *Exposition Internationale de Jeune Peinture* of 1955. The selection for this *Exposition* was decided by a group of curators from major European national museums who selected artists from their respective countries as representatives. The French selectors, Jean Cassou and René Huyghe, selected seven painters whose artwork 'was either fully abstract or displayed a definite distance from naturalism'. [5] Calmettes, while evidently retains an allegiance to figurative themes, fitted securely in the desired domain of abstraction, and enjoyed exposure from the exhibition throughout Europe and the United States.

Jemma Nicholls, May 2022

[1] Lydia Harambourg, *L'Ecole de Paris, 1945-1965: Dictionnaire des Peintres* (Lausanne: Ides et Calendes, 1993) p. 83.

[2] Thomas Dufresne and George Viaud, *Abécédaire de la Couple* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2007) p. 62.

[3] Harambourg, *L'Ecole de Paris, 1945-1965* (1993) p. 83.

[4] Catherine Dossin, 'Beyond the Clichés of "Decadence" and the Myths of "Triumph": Rewriting France in the Stories of Postwar Western Art', in *France and the Visual Arts since 1945: Remapping European Postwar and Contemporary Art*, ed. by Catherine Dossin (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019) pp. 1-22, p. 7.

[5] Natalie Adamson, 'An ambiguous meaning links us to history' Reconsidering the Situation of la Jeune Peinture in Paris, 1956', *Third Text*, 20:2 (2006) pp. 141-150, p. 144.
