



THE FRALIN
MUSEUM OF ART
— AT THE —
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

SPECIAL EXHIBITION LABELS

ÉMILIE CHARMY

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Thomas H. Bayly Building
155 Rugby Road, PO Box 400119
Charlottesville, VA, 22904-4119

www.virginia.edu/artmuseum

Émilie Charmy

Émilie Charmy (1878–1974) charted a remarkable course in the world of French modern art in the first half of the twentieth century. During an artistic apprenticeship undertaken in the city of Lyon between 1898 and 1903, Charmy explored the legacy of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting. In 1903, she relocated to Paris, beginning her public career. There, an engagement with the avant-garde circle of Fauve painters defined Charmy’s art in the years leading up to the First World War. Afterward, her mature style was characterized both by an adherence to the traditional genres of portraiture, the nude, landscape, and still life, and a modernist notion of direct, vigorous paint application as a mark of artistic sincerity. This attitude found its ultimate expression in Charmy’s numerous renderings of the female nude which, by virtue of their intense sensuality, confounded prevailing expectations about the nature of women’s art.

The Fralin Museum of Art is pleased to present this first United States retrospective of paintings by Émilie Charmy.

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Labels

Beginnings

Charmy was born Émilie Espérance Barret on April 2, 1878, in the city of Saint-Étienne, located in the Rhône-Alpes region of eastern France. Around age twenty she moved with her elder brother Jean Barret to Lyon, the regional capital. There she adopted her pseudonym and found a mentor in the painter Jacques Martin, a leader on the local progressive art scene.

Charmy explored a set of overlapping subjects that included individuals and groups in domestic interiors, the nude, and fruit and flower still lifes. *Girl with a Fan* (c. 1898–1900) demonstrates Charmy's interest in strong color and ornamental visual pattern. Both the atmospheric *Interior in Saint-Étienne* (c. 1897–1900) and the more roughly rendered *Card Players* (c. 1898) indicate her strong interest in scenes of female cultural accomplishment and sociability in the domestic interior. *Woman in an Armchair* (c. 1897–1900) melds the seated portrait with the more decadent subject of the morphine addict, a theme that had a certain fascination in both the art and literature of the day.

Her signature composition from this early period, *The Salon* (c. 1900), similarly blurs boundaries, fusing the setting of a middle-class domestic interior with a population of nine vigorously sketched nude prostitutes. By taking up the brothel subject that had been out of bounds, due to its low connotations, for women artists in France of previous generations, this work announces Charmy's determination to explore the legacy of Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and other innovators in the genre of the modern nude and signals the enduring importance for her of female flesh as subject matter.

***Girl with a Fan*, c. 1898–1900**

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

***Interior in St. Etienne*, c. 1897–1900**

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of HRH Prince Khaled Bin Sultan Bin Abdulaziz

***The Salon*, c. 1900**

Oil on canvas laid down on Masonite

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Card Players, c. 1898

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Young Girl in an Armchair, c. 1900

Oil on board

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

Woman in an Armchair, c. 1897–1900

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Paris and the Avant-Garde

Upon moving to Paris in 1903, Charmy made her first forays in the public proving grounds, showing her works at the city's two large, annual, aesthetically progressive art exhibitions, the springtime *Salon des Indépendants* and the *Salon d'Automne*. Charmy came to the notice of the innovative dealer Berthe Weill at the *Indépendants* in 1905, and Weill became both Charmy's conduit to the core of the city's avant-garde art community and a lifelong friend.

For several years, Charmy would travel in the extended circle of Fauve painters led by Henri Matisse. The key works of this period are landscapes of France's Mediterranean coast and Corsica. Some of these compositions present seaside tourist sites; a fine example is *Corsican Landscape* (c. 1910), which takes as its subject the picturesque masses of rocks in steep-walled inlets of the Corsican central west coast known as calanques. Other examples hew more closely to the historical subgenre known as the decorative landscape, which modern painters had reconceived as a vehicle for radical pictorial abstraction. Though we recognize the view over low roofs and down to a bay in *Piana, Corsica* (1906) and *L'Estaque* (c. 1910), Charmy's rendering of trees and vegetation as sinuous, decorative pattern enhances the self-consciously abstract character of these images.

These and similar landscapes were featured in Charmy's first one-artist gallery show, staged by the Paris dealer Eugène Druet in early 1911. *L'Estaque* was also among the four paintings by the artist that Druet sent for exhibition at the New York and Chicago venues of the legendary Armory Show, the milestone presentation of modern art in the United States, in 1913.

Still Life, c. 1904

Oil on canvas

Gift of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr., 2011.17.3

Flowers and Fruits, c. 1904

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Corsica, 1907

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

Seated Figure, Corsica, c. 1907

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Piana Corsica—Stone Pines, c. 1907–10

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

L'Estaque, c. 1910

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Arthur Jerome Eddy Memorial Collection, gift of Elizabeth Day McCormick, 1931.518, The Art Institute of Chicago

Piana, Corsica, 1906

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Musée Paul-Dini, Musée municipal de Villefranche-sur-Saône

Corsican Landscape, c. 1910

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon

Bananas, c. 1914

Oil on board

Courtesy of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon

The Path toward the House, c. 1913–15

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Landscape, c. 1913–15

Oil on board

Courtesy of Private Collection

The Female Form

Charmy's landscape style shifted on the eve of the First World War. This shift is visible in *Landscape* and *The Path toward the House*, both dated c. 1913–15, which are less picturesque, but more intimate in feeling than the earlier Mediterranean pictures. The palette narrows to tones of middle-light and dark value, and the pictorial surface is very vigorously brushed. The likely setting of both pictures is the village of Marnat in a forested and mountainous part of the Auvergne region in central France, where the painter George Bouche had a property. Charmy and Bouche had recently begun a long professional alliance and personal relationship; their son Edmond would be born in 1915, and they would marry in 1931.

The early 1920s were the high-water mark in Charmy's public career. She developed her mature style based on optical realism and respect for the legacy of the French masters of the past, two principles that were widespread in modern French art during the interwar years. Charmy's achievement in painting the human form, and in particular her painting of women, often elegant and vivacious women of fashion, was much noticed. Almost invariably the figure is shown singly in a minimally defined setting, sometimes with a piece of furniture to signify an interior but often highlighted against nothing but the contrasting tones of a background of eye-catching color.

One kind of figure painting, in particular, became Charmy's calling card: the female nude. Here her overriding concern is the bond between vision and touch, or the presentation of the body in terms of the inherent sensual qualities of the oil paint medium. Charmy's observers always used the language of gender to situate such work within a system of aesthetic value, lauding her as remarkable for combining purportedly masculine and feminine qualities in her paintings of nude women: power and firmness on the one hand, charm and seductiveness on the other.

Berthe Weill, c. 1910–20

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Self-Portrait, c. 1910

Oil on board

Courtesy of Private Collection

Self-Portrait in an Open Dressing Gown, c. 1916–18

Oil on canvas

Gift of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr., 2011.17.1

Self-Portrait, 1908–12

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Large Nude, c. 1912

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Nude, 1921

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Self-Portrait with an Album, c. 1907–12

Oil on canvas

Gift of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr., 2011.17.2

Nude Holding Her Breast, c. 1920–25

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Nude on Red Sofa, c. 1925

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Portrait, 1921

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr.

Large Nude, c. 1920–30

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

View of the Seine at Ablon, 1926–30

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Musée de Grenoble

Banks of the Seine at Ablon, c. 1926–30

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

Later Works

The interwar period was an era of prosperity and social success for Charmy. She divided her time between her Paris studio-apartment and the impressive villa that she shared with Bouche in the town of Ablon-sur-Seine, some ten miles south of the city; this site was the subject of many landscapes of the period. Charmy also gained a number of influential patrons and collectors. These accomplishments did not translate into appreciably greater renown in the art gallery circuit, however. She experienced a gradual slowing of both gallery exhibitions and press notices over the course of the later 1920s and the 1930s. During the latter decade, Charmy was an active member of *Femmes Artistes Modernes*, an exhibiting society of women artists in Paris.

World War II concluded this long period of success. Bouche died in 1941, and Charmy lived out the hostilities in isolated circumstances in Marnat with her son Edmond. She returned to Paris in 1945 to find her sustaining network of contacts largely gone. Yet, even though she gradually fell out of public view, Charmy continued to paint into her nineties.

Her late works emphasize austere painterly sensation with suggestively muted nuances of tone. A mid-1940s series of still lifes focuses the eye on gradations of light and shadow on a white tablecloth. The large *Nude*, completed in about 1947, is rendered in an earthy brown ocher that merges the summarily painted figure with its shadowy atmosphere. *Self-Portrait in a Mirror* (c. 1950–55), the painting that concludes this exhibition, stands for an entire stream of late self-depictions that present a complicated account of self, simultaneously mysterious and inscrutable in facial expression and immediate and self-revelatory in their bold painterly touch.

Portrait of Edmond as a Child, c. 1926–29

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Self-Portrait, c. 1930–35

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Still Life with Hare II (Ochre Background), n.d.

Oil on board

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon

Tablecloth, c. 1945–50

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Nude, c. 1947

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Still Life with Tablecloth, c. 1945

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Private Collection

Self-Portrait in a Mirror, c. 1950–55

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Galerie Michel Descours, Lyon