

Bechtler Museum of Modern Art Presents

Alfred Manessier

(January 19, 2018 – July 8, 2018)

(CHARLOTTE, NC) – From January 19, 2018 through July 8, 2018, the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art will present *Alfred Manessier*, an exhibition of paintings and prints by an artist who sought to create contemplative images where the natural and spiritual realms would converge, offering spaces for both respite and resistance. In addition to landscape-inspired paintings, the show includes Manessier's illustrations for *St. John of the Cross' Spiritual Canticles*, Eugène Guillevic's *Cymbalum*, and the elephantine portfolio *Presentation of the Beauce at Notre-Dame of Chartres*.

ALFRED MANESSIER

Alfred Manessier did not describe his work as “**abstract**,” refusing that adjective as it implied a dislocation from the physical world. He would accept “nonfigurative,” but he preferred “**intériorisation**,” his neologism that can be literally translated as “interiorization” or “searching internally for ways to represent the external.” And Manessier searched extensively, both through his travels and his art, which encompassed painting, printmaking, tapestries, and stained glass.

Born in 1911, Manessier moved to Paris in 1929 to study architecture at the École des Beaux Arts. He spent much of his time copying the Louvre's Rembrandts and Tintoretts and finally made a decisive switch to painting in 1938. Initially he followed the Cubists, constructing latticed compositions that incorporated the ordered structure of architecture. His style changed, however, as Europe inched closer to war. Seeking to represent the fear and tension rapidly spreading throughout the continent, Manessier moved towards Surrealism and his work became, in his words, “**desperate and catastrophic, apocalyptic**.” He remained politically active throughout the war, but he moved to Mortagne-au-Perche in Normandy, hoping to find a quieter space to work.

In 1943, in the artist's words, “**it fell from above**.” His friend, the poet and writer Camille Bourniquel, came to visit and invited Manessier to a monastery of Trappist monks nearby. The monks' harmonious relationship with nature—their quiet integration with their surroundings—transformed Manessier:

I do not know what happened: I found myself in front of a peasant who only cared for the cows, who smelled of fresh milk...for three days, I did not understand anything of my revolt, of my negation, it opened a path for me, the path of...grace. After three days and three nights, I left with a grace, a grace that has never left me a single moment these 44 years. Voilà, I didn't look for it, it fell from above. It completely transformed me and my painting. Only then did it become personal.

The rigid structures in Manessier's compositions became softer; the color, more radiant. Light, the electromagnetic radiation that so often stymied painters and served as a symbol for religious manifestations, seemed to simultaneously infuse the work and burst from within. The contemplative and the physical merged.

Manessier explained at the end of his life: **“The man that I was did not change, the struggles, the revolts did not stop. They just took another form, more interior.”** He often worked with writers—the French poet Eugène Guillevic, the 16th-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross—who used nature as a symbol for spirituality or meditation. His palette would continue to change over the decades, influenced as much by his travels—time spent in the Nordic region had a particular effect—as his subject matter.

Manessier chose religious subjects because they seemed as elusive and vast as the natural world. Towards the end of his life, he reflected on his 40 years of painting spiritual themes, saying they **“were at my fingertips and at the same time, infinite.”**

SOCIAL MEDIA

When posting about *Alfred Manessier* on social media, please use the official hashtag: **#ManessierAtTheBechtler**. Follow the Bechtler on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, **@theBechtler**.

ABOUT THE BECHTLER MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art is dedicated to the exhibition of mid-20th-century modern art. It is named after the family of Andreas Bechtler who assembled and inherited a collection created by seminal figures of modernism. The museum is located at Levine Center for the Arts, 420 South Tryon Street, Charlotte 28202. Operating hours are Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday 12 p.m. – 5 p.m.; closed Tuesdays. For museum details visit bechtler.org.

ARTWORK IMAGES: Artwork images from *Alfred Manessier* are available upon request. Contact, Sharon Holm, Bechtler Museum of Modern Art Director of Marketing and Communications at sharon.holm@bechtler.org or office 704.353.9204 / mobile 704.975.2363.

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