

KUNKEL FINE ART

Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts

Louis Anquetin

1861 Étrépany - 1932 Paris

The son of a wealthy Rouen-based family of master butchers and traders in horses, Louis Anquetin moved to Paris in 1882. He entered the studio of Léon Bonnat and soon moved in circles that included some of the outstanding avant-garde painters of the day, befriending fellow students Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Émile Bernard. All three left Bonnat's studio to enrol at a private art school run by the history painter Fernand Cormon. But having little use for the realism of Cormon's approach they quickly decided to strike out on their own. It was here that Anquetin's predilection for experimentation came into play. With Bernard, he engaged with Impressionist and Pointillist techniques and was one of the pioneers of Cloisonnism, a style of painting distinguished by flat perspective and in which areas of pure, unbroken colour are separated by strong blue or black outlines highlighting their brightness. This new, avant-garde style caused a furore in the Paris art world and was to provide vital artistic impulses for no lesser figures than Van Gogh and Gauguin.



Louis Anquetin, *Self-portrait*

Like many of his friends, Anquetin lived a bohemian life in the vibrant and congenial artists' quarter of Montmartre. When not working on portraits, studies of nudes and street scenes he liked to spend time with Toulouse-Lautrec who would accompany him on regular nightly rounds of their favourite haunts, the city's cafes, cabarets and dance halls. A strong bond based on admiration for each other's work and a mutual passion for women and horses developed between the two very disparate figures – one raw, robust and adventuresome, the other a small-statured, acerbic observer and aristocrat.

The death of his mother in 1889 spelled the end of Anquetin's free-and-easy lifestyle. He used his inheritance to install himself in a handsome studio in a prime location and set out to forge stronger connections to the higher echelons of Parisian society. He grew increasingly alienated from his former circle of friends – with the exception of Toulouse-Lautrec. He was attracted by new subject matter – the theme of horse racing became recurrent in his work. In the early 1890s, he proved anew to be something of a trailblazer, developing a highly expressive visual language that drew on his profound engagement with the work of French nineteenth-century masters such as Daumier, Courbet and

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Manet. But the trend was short-lived. To the astonishment of his contemporaries it was followed almost immediately by a stylistic volte-face difficult to reconcile with his earlier approach. He began to research the techniques of the Old Masters, notably Rubens, on whom he published a book in 1924. This return to a traditional approach represented a radical shift in his oeuvre. In his final years he resolutely distanced himself from contemporary developments. This is largely the reason why his name gradually sank into obscurity although he had once been regarded as one of the most promising painters of his day.