

## Erik Werenskiold, a Norwegian painter in Marlotte in the 1880s

At the beginning of the 1880s, the international reputation of the artistic communities of our region was well established. Barbizon first attracted painters breaking with classical norms, followed by several villages located at the south of the Fontainebleau: Marlotte, Moret, Montigny, then Grez-sur-Loing, particularly known for the influx of foreign artists, including many Scandinavian painters. Naturally, some of them explored the surroundings of Grez, particularly the hamlet of Marlotte, part of the town of Bourron, made famous by Henry Murger for its bohemian lifestyle in the 1850s<sup>1</sup>.

In this short article<sup>2</sup>, we will mainly talk about Erik Werenskiold<sup>3</sup>, renowned painter and illustrator in Norway and Scandinavia.

Born in 1855 in a municipality east of Oslo, his attraction to drawing was already clear during his high-school years and later confirmed at university, where he attended the studio of the painter Axel Ender<sup>4</sup>, with whom he spent the following years at the prestigious School of Fine Arts in Munich.

In 1881, he headed to Paris, where he quickly met people who reinforced his belief that the future of painting lays in naturalism, executed on an outdoor motif. It is in this context that he found himself at the Hôtel de la Renaissance, in the heart of Marlotte, in June of that same year. Werenskiold documented his stay there in letters addressed to his fiancée, who had remained in Norway<sup>5</sup>. These precious documents provide a description of local



*Erik Werenskiold*

landscapes and vegetable crops of the time and are above all living testimonies of the atmosphere which prevailed within the small cosmopolitan artistic community, gathered around the hotel table. These letters sometimes become strong ethnographic analyses of the various cultures present, where the appreciation of the behavior of French painters by Werenskiold is not always positive!!

Erik Werenskiold came several times to Marlotte, where he appreciated so much the setting that he made several paintings, including *Picking Flowers in Marlotte*, in appreciation of the abundance of poppies which had so enchanted him upon his arrival,

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Murger (1822-1861) – *L'esprit de la bohème* – by Dominique Bonnot ; Ed. Sabot Rouge, 2022

<sup>2</sup> A more complete article was published in *Bulletin des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte*, N°65, 2023

<sup>3</sup> The life and work of Erik Werenskiold are the object of *Erik og Sofie Werenskiold: Ungdom og eventyr, 1849-1889* par Marit Werenskiold: (2 vols.), Solum Bokvennen, Oslo, 2022.

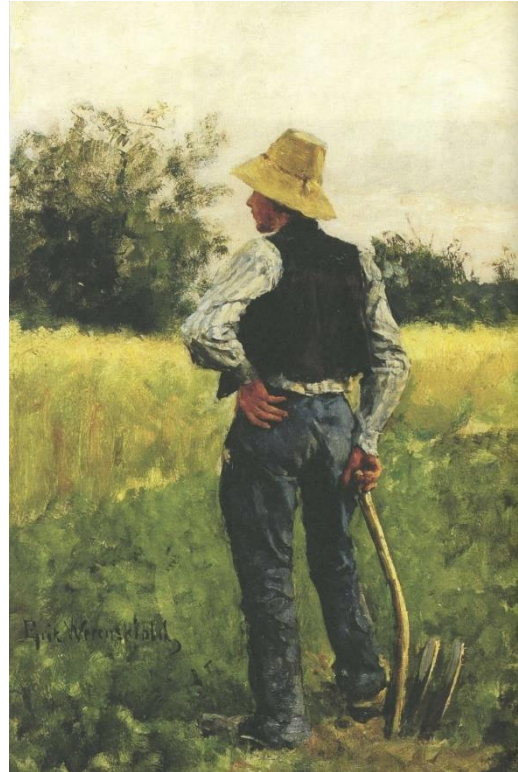
<sup>4</sup> Axel Ender (1853-1920) – Norwegian painter and sculptor

<sup>5</sup> Marit Werenskiold, personal communication

or the *Little Girl with a Basket*, now on display at the Royal Palace in Oslo. As he explains in some of his sketches, it was also in our small village that he designed several of his works, such as *Boy with a Hoe* and *Summer Day*. Charmed by the children's games in the fields of Marlotte, they were the ones he chose as models for his painting *Children playful screams*<sup>6</sup>.



*Cueillette de fleurs - Marlotte, 1881 (collection particulière, USA)*



*Garçon à la houe*

During his evenings at the Renaissance hotel, Werenskiold was struck by the numerous paintings which decorated the wooden walls of the dining room. In one of his letters, he also shared his intention to paint one himself someday, when the weather would be bad... However, we do not know if the weather turned that way and if he was able to create a painting on the walls of the hotel!

Back in Norway, he remained attracted by France, to the point that he returned to Paris to get married in May 1882. The wedding took place in Montmartre in the presence of other Scandinavian painters and was officiated by the mayor, a man named Emile Bin, politician, as well as... resident of rue Marceau in Bourron! The following month, Werenskiold presented *The Promenade* at the Paris Salon of 1882, one of his major works, painted in Norway before his return to France.

In 1883, after the birth of their son in Paris, the young couple returned to Norway, where Erik Werenskiold would become one of Scandinavia's major painters, introducing French trends in modern art, starting with Impressionism.

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<sup>6</sup> On display at [National Museum of Art d'Oslo](#)