

Pillard-Verneuil and Larsson:

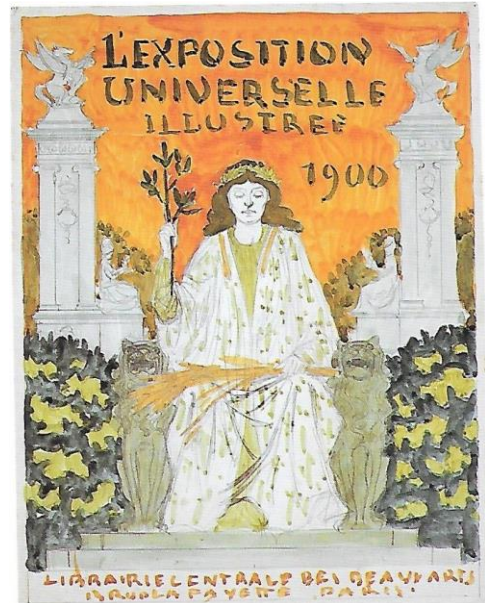
Two artists, two remarkable houses, two friends

We recently discovered a personal connection between two painters who lived in our region and shared an interest in architecture: Maurice Pillard-Verneuil and Carl Larsson.

Maurice Pillard-Verneuil (1869-1942)

Under family pressure, Maurice Pillard-Verneuil studied architecture for three years, but it was the Fine Arts that really interested him and at the age of 23 he enrolled at the Guérin school and became a student of Eugène Grasset, a master in all areas of decorative arts and one of the founders of Art Nouveau. Verneuil began his career as a poster artist and book illustrator, while writing art critiques and numerous articles for the periodical *Art et Décoration*. His creativity then focused on textiles and furniture, thus contributing to the enrichment of the Art Nouveau movement.

It was towards the end of the 1900s that he settled in Marlotte, first in the villa *Les Tilleuls*, while the “country house” for which he had designed the



Study for the 1900 Paris Exposition, by Pillard-Verneuil



Les Fées in Bourron-Marlotte

guidelines was built by the architect Louis Sézille. Around 1910, the Verneuil family moved into this superb house, named *Les Fées*, where two twin babies were born in 1913. During the years that followed, Verneuil traveled a lot and stayed in his Marlotte residence mainly during the summer months. His divorce from his wife, in 1920, marked his departure from our village to Switzerland, where he would spend the rest of his life.

Carl Larsson (1853-1919)

Carl Larsson remains to this day the most internationally known and acclaimed Swedish painter. After training at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, he moved to France in the mid-1870s, where he became part of the Scandinavian art colony

established in Grez-sur-Loing. A few years later, he settled in Paris, then in Grez, where he met his future wife and became a leading figure in the village's group of painters. During these years, his technique evolved from oil painting influenced by Impressionism to watercolor and the light tones that brought him fame.



Carl Larsson's house in Sundborn

In 1888, the Larsson family returned to Sweden and gradually established themselves in an inherited family home in Sundborn, in the central province of Dalarna. Carl and his wife Karin, herself an artist, made it an



Figure 1 In the drawing room by C. Larsson

iconic place, still attracting visitors from all over the world. Karin created textile motives and interior decoration patterns, while Carl devoted himself to furniture design and wall paintings: everything in this magical place reflects their intimacy, family happiness and the abundance of colors and light.

Two friends

During a visit to the Larsson house, our attention was drawn to a decorated box bed enclosed by two red doors, on which close to a hundred names of visiting friends were inscribed. What a surprise it was to decipher the inscription "M.P. VERNEUIL, MARLOTTE", indicating that Verneuil indeed belonged to the circle of friendly relations of the Swedish painter. We can establish that this visit to Sundborn occurred between August 1907, the date of a visit by Spada (pseudonym of Johan Kristian Janzon, 1853-1910, Swedish art writer), four lines above, and 1915, the year of the visit by animal painter Bruno Liljefors, five lines below. It should be noted that in 1919, Maurice Pillard-Verneuil gave lectures entitled *A few Swedish artists*.



Door to the bed recess in the Old Room

Given the time difference between Larsson's stay in Grez-sur-Loing and that of Verneuil in Marlotte, it is unlikely that these two artists crossed paths in the Fontainebleau area. Although we do not know the precise context of that encounter between these two brilliant men, we do not despair of discovering it upon future research!