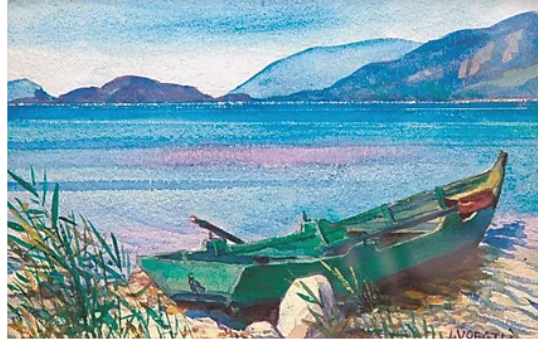


A SWISS PAINTER COMES TO LIGHT

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A recent exhibition of paintings at the Dounan Art Museum in Kunming, China, has shed new light on the previously underrecognized Swiss painter, Julius Voegtli (1879-1944). The exhibition was the result of a continued multi-cultural exchange program between Kunming and Zurich, its official sister-city.

Trained in traditional 19th century academic schools, Voegtli would later embrace the modernist trends of his day, producing colorful, vivid portraits, landscapes, and still life paintings similar to that of Cezanne, Pissarro, and Renoir, often working in pastel, watercolor and oil (see fig. 1 left).

The son of a country doctor, Julius Voegtli was born on March 29, 1879 in Malters, a rural agricultural community located in central Switzerland. Voegtli was exposed to the arts early in life, studying architectural decorative painting and design in secondary school in the nearby town of Biel, then to the cities of Basel and Bern for extended apprenticeships. Voegtli would eventually form his own successful business in the architectural arts which allowed him to pursue drawing and painting without financial stress or constraint.

He continued his studies at the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, enrolling at the age of 23 and studying under the renowned landscape painter Karl Raupp (1837-1918). (Benezit Dictionary of Artists lists Voegtli as also teaching at the Munich academy). Raupp's work reveals a combination of exact observation of landscape, as practiced in the Biedermeier era, and the conventional genre painting so popular in the 1870s boom years. Voegtli certainly mastered



Raupp's technical draftsmanship, as evidenced in his drawings and graphic work depicting everyday laborers, farmworkers, and animals (see fig. 2 right). But he decidedly turned away from the worn-out genre painting of the late 19th century, instead adopting the numerous modernist currents of the time into his oeuvre, such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Expressionism.



In rejecting traditional academic styles, Voegtli embraced a vivid, exaggerated use of color in his portraiture, still life compositions, and landscapes (see fig 3 left).

Throughout his lifetime, Voegtli created over 400 works of art, many of which were created in his studio on Lake Biel. Not appreciated during his lifetime, today Voegtli's work reaches new audiences with the assistance of his grandson, Hans Voegtli, who is dedicated to researching his grandfather's career and making his work accessible to a new generation. Voegtli's work is represented in the Neues Museum Biel, and can be viewed online at: www.julius-voegtli.ch.

