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ALICE BAILLY
LA FÊTE ÉTRANGE
Paul-André Jaccard

A cubist since its inception, Alice Bailly (1872–1938) at last has the monograph that has long been awaited.

Bailly turned to art relatively late in life. She was born in Geneva and was thirty-two when she moved to Paris. Her talent was recognized in 1912, when the works she contributed to the Paris Salons were praised by Apollinaire, and especially in 1913, when her first solo exhibition enabled her to rightly claim to be a member of the international avant-garde. Her art displays an imagination, exuberance, and expansiveness closely matched by cubism and futurism. But while Bailly rejected their discipline, she wholeheartedly embraced their freedom of form and colour, which enabled her to give full rein to her creative impulses. Between 1917 and 1923, Bailly produced around fifty “wool-pictures,” in which multicoloured threads are sewn in parallel on a cotton canvas to produce a brush-like effect; for her there was no difference in status, still less in artistic merit, between these works and paintings.

The book traces the extraordinary development of this artist, who liked to remind her colleagues that “art is not a matter of wearing a skirt or trousers.” Her first trip to Paris in 1906 led to her palette becoming lighter after her exposure to fauvism, an influence reflected in her paintings until 1910, when her work began to evolve towards a colourful cubism, a tendency that would lead her to be included among Apollinaire’s orphists. This was followed by an interest in the “universal dynamism” of futurists. Forced to return to Geneva in 1914, her work underwent a noticeable stylization, and she produced her first collages and “wool-pictures” in 1918. Back in Paris in 1920, she began to paint in darker colours. This was another interlude, as she eventually settled for good in Lausanne in 1923, from where she made trips to Italy and where she executed important commissions, such as the decoration of the foyer of the theatre in Lausanne.