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Musée d'Art du Valais, Sion

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DIE SCHULE VON SAVIESE

EINE KÜNSTLERKOLONIE IN DEN ALPEN UM 1900

Pascal Ruedin

“This is how interest in rural life spread among us at the same time as rural life itself was in decline, and how a taste for our peasants’ customs and costumes found its way into our art, just as those very customs and usages were vanishing. There’s the appeal of things we are about to lose, or at least that we’re in danger of losing.”

Robert de la Sizeranne, “Les paysans aux Salons de 1899,” *Revue de deux mondes*, Paris, May 15, 1899

“These people, in their rusticity, have retained the flavour of good fruit, they have tough skin, keen eyes, a fresh soul, they stay close to hearth and home, and their vices, innocent in their artlessness, look like the cracks in stones and the knots on tree bark.”

Marguerite Burnat-Provins, *Petits tableaux valaisans*, Vevey, 1903

The Savièse School attracted several artists who were anxious to escape city life and the press of modernity and were seeking the traditional, reassuring ways of a pastoral setting. Taking its name from an artists’ colony that had established itself in a village, it has become a shorthand term encompassing the way the whole of rural Valais was depicted by a number of different artists: Ernest Biéler (1863–1948), Edmond Bille (1878–1959), Marguerite Burnat-Provins (1872–1952), Raphy Dallèves (1878–1940), Albert Muret (1874–1955), Édouard Vallet (1876–1929), and others. Selecting, reframing, aestheticizing, and idealizing the world they found, these artists painted the habits and customs of the simple mountain communities they regarded as a lost paradise.

The book explores this example of rural primitivism—a phenomenon that from Pont-Aven to Worpswede affected a large number of regions in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century—from three points of view: artistic, historical, and ethnographic. Intended as a reference work, this is also an extremely beautiful book, which re-evaluates a heritage of startlingly high artistic quality, giving regional iconography its due weight in comparison with international models.

The project was headed by **Pascal Ruedin**, an expert in Swiss art and Director of the Musée d'Art du Valais, in Sion.