

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Pierre Paulus de Châtelet
(Châtelet 1881 – 1959 Brussels)

Portrait of a fisherman smoking

Signed and dated lower left: *Pierre Paulus / 1921*

Ink and gouache on paper
59 x 49 cm (23 ¼ x 19 ½ in.)

Provenance:
Private Collection, Brussels



This depiction of a fisherman smoking is an exceptional example of Pierre Paulus de Châtelet's graphic work, embodying the dark, gritty working-class scenes with which the artist made his name in early 20th-century Belgium. Though fatigue is etched into the fisherman's face, he is not depicted as bowed or broken; instead, he radiates a quiet strength and dignity. Building on the work of Constantine Meunier (fig. 1), Paulus sought to capture not only the harsh realities of manual labour but also the profound humanity – and even nobility – of working men and women.

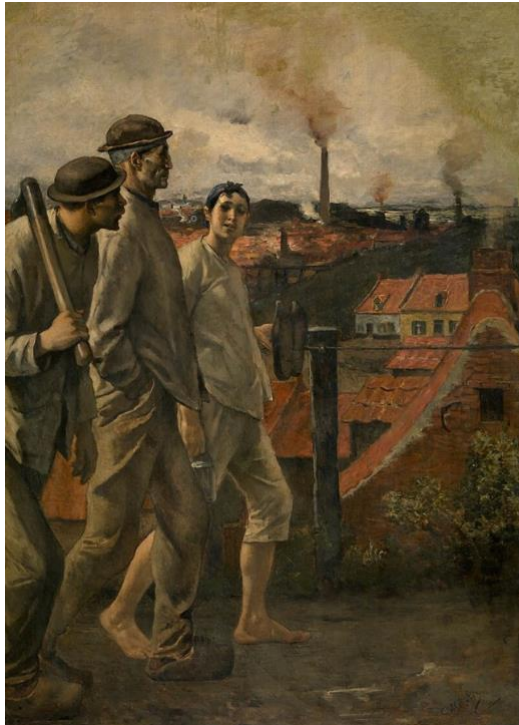


Fig. 1, Constantine Meunier, *Return from the mine*, oil on canvas, 159 x 115 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp

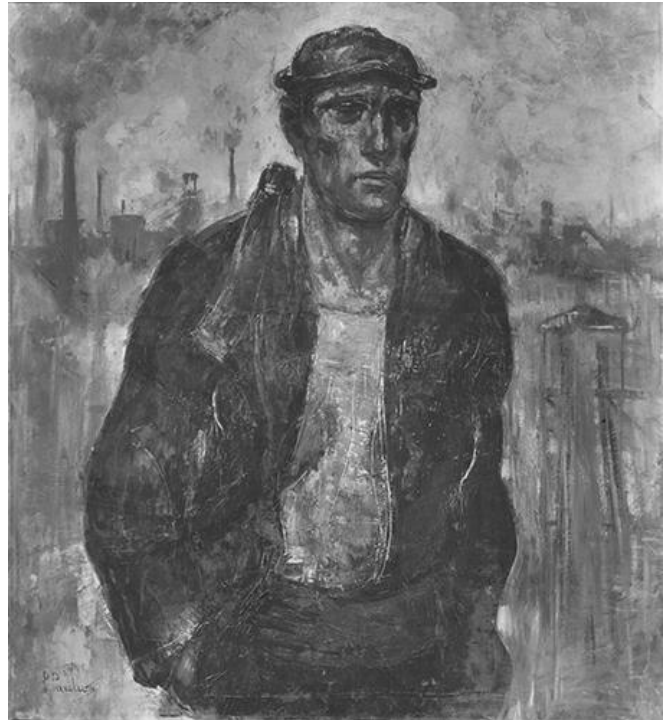


Fig. 2, Pierre Paulus de Châtelet, *The miner*, oil on canvas, 110 x 100 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Brussels

Paulus was born in Châtelet in 1881 into a family of artists. He studied architecture at the Academy of Brussels, but after graduating, he devoted himself entirely to painting—his true passion. By the age of 15, he had already developed remarkable technical skill. It was not until he turned 25, however, that he emerged as the painter we recognize today: the chronicler of the Black Country, known for his powerful depictions of industrial and post-industrial landscapes - mines and islets along the Sambre, steelworks belching flames and smoke into the sky – as well as the people who populated them (fig. 2).

Paulus also painted nature, still lifes, and everyday scenes, revealing a versatility beyond his industrial subjects. He gained public recognition in 1911 at the Charleroi exhibition, marking the beginning of his rise to prominence. During the First World War, he sought refuge in London though in 1916 Paulus was mobilized by the Belgian Army's documentation service and joined the Artistic Section of the Army in the field. In 1918, he was exposed to gas on the Yser front and sent to Bormes-les-Mimosas to recover. During his convalescence, he created several works capturing the landscapes of southern France.

Throughout the interwar period, Paulus exhibited widely across Europe and the United States. He was a member of the Groupe Neria and, alongside Maurice Langaskens, Kurt Peiser, Armand Rassenfosse, Émile-Henry Tielemans, and Louis Titz, served on the Committee for Original Belgian Printmaking, active between 1924 and 1939.

In 1929, Isidore Opsomer invited him to join the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp as a professor of animal art—a position he would hold until 1953. His last important retrospective took place in 1955, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.