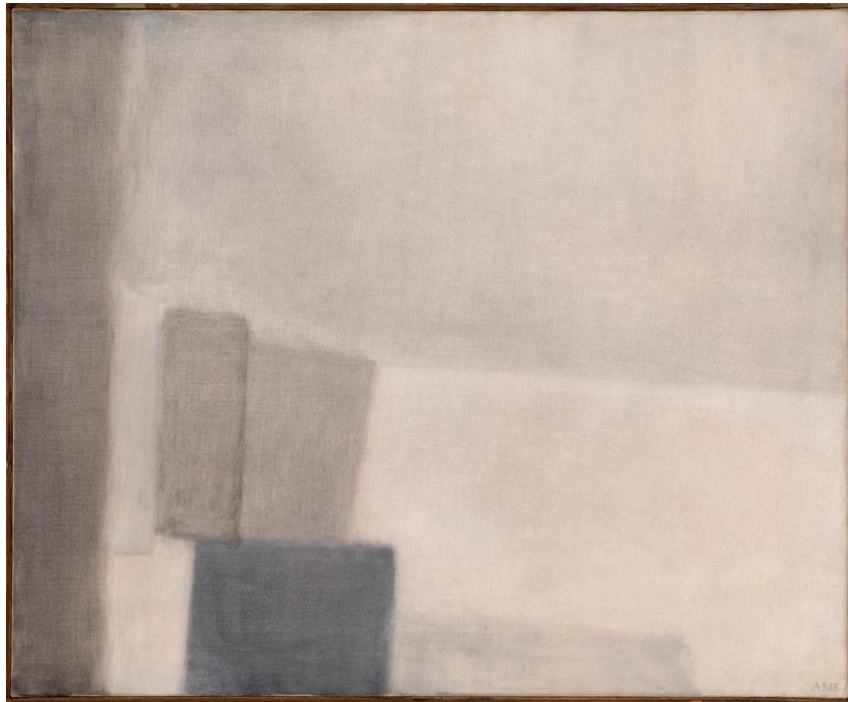


CHARLES EDE





Geneviève Asse (French, 1923-2021)

Untitled, c. 1958

Oil on canvas

Signed 'ASSE', lower right

60 x 74 cm

This work is listed T.58011 in the online catalogue raisonné
of Geneviève Asse compiled by Mr. Antoine Laurentin.





Fig.1. Geneviève Asse, circa early 1940s on secondment as an ambulance driver in the 1st Armoured Division, in the campaigns of Alsace and Germany.



Fig.2. Rosine Crémieux (nee Bernheim), c. 1940

Two Modern Women

This early work by Geneviève Asse (1923–2021) is now available from the private collection of Rosine Bernheim-Crémieux (1914–2001) and her husband Claude Crémieux (1917–1996). Painted in 1958, *Untitled* is an important example of her mature artistic approach. It was around this time that Asse transitioned into full abstraction, moving away from early figurative influences and infusing her canvases with soft diffuse light. With its minimalist approach, its meditative and introspective feel, and focus on the lyrical nature of light and space and subtle tones of blue, white and grey, inspired by the atmosphere that the coastline of Brittany evoked in her.

The Crémieux Collection was meticulously assembled by Rosine and Claude Crémieux after the Second World War and garnered considerable interest from an early stage amongst peers. Their wartime experiences and involvement in the French Resistance profoundly shaped their perspectives and, by extension, their approach to collecting art. The Crémieux Collection was regarded for its desire to embody an optimistic spirit, and a vision of the future, shaped by human connections and the desire to promote artistic human endeavour after such loss and also advocating bold, often radically new artistic expressions. It focuses on artists, including pioneering women like Asse, who were at the forefront of modernism and innovation. As the French curator and museum director Suzanne Pagé has noted, the Crémieux Collection epitomises the audacity and passionate engagement of French post-war collectors.

Aside from being a beautiful early example of Asse's mature work the present painting captures the innovation and introspection that the collectors sought to champion. It also tells the story of a deep connection between a female artist and collector, both of whom shared the experience of serving as nurses during the years of the French Resistance. Both women had brothers who inspired them to join efforts in

the French Resistance during World War II. Geneviève Asse played a vital role in the French Resistance, serving as a nurse and ambulance driver with the 1st Armoured Division. She participated in key campaigns in Alsace and Germany and volunteered in the evacuation of the Terezin labour camp in Czechoslovakia, which must have been a harrowing experience. For her efforts, she was awarded the Croix de Guerre in Karlsruhe in 1945. Whilst Asse's role in liberating the Terezin camp and her award for bravery are known, there is little more information available beyond that.



Fig.3. Geneviève Asse (pictured far right) with her ambulance crew during the Germany campaign

Rosine Crémieux's involvement in the Vercors Uprising and the Luire Cave is well-known and is the subject of an extended text at the end of this entry. Born into an Alsatian Jewish family, she was deeply committed to the French Resistance during WWII, spurred by family losses in both World Wars. During the German occupation, her family sought refuge in Lyon, where she trained as a nurse, serving in the Vercors Health Service in 1944. When German forces closed in, Crémieux and her colleagues were forced to take refuge in the Luire cave, where they treated wounded resistance fighters with minimal supplies. Discovered on July 27, 1944, the Doctors and soldiers were executed, but the nurses were arrested and taken to Montluc prison. On August 11, she was deported as a member of the Resistance, her Jewish identity unknown to the Germans—a factor that likely saved her life.

Crémieux endured a harrowing journey on a transport train to Ravensbrück, where she was assigned to forced labour. In October 1944, she was transferred to the Abteroda commando for sabotaging machinery in an aircraft factory. In March 1945, she was sent to Markkleeberg, a sub-camp of Buchenwald. As Allied forces advanced, she escaped during a death march and was rescued by a former German communist. Eventually, she encountered American troops and made her way to safety.

This shared experience of survival undoubtedly created empathy between Crémieux and Asse, though neither focused on it in their lives—Crémieux dedicating herself to pioneering child psychiatry, and Asse pursuing an optimistic, light-filled approach to her art.



Fig.4. Photograph of wounded French Resistance fighters, doctors and one of the seven nurses in the Luire Cave, 1944

A Note on the Artist

Geneviève Asse (1923-2021) was a French painter and printmaker whose work is celebrated for its delicate abstraction and exploration of light and space. Born in Vannes, Brittany, Asse grew up surrounded by the natural beauty of the French coastline, which profoundly influenced her artistic vision. Her work is often described as a meditation on light, silence, and the vastness of space, qualities that are reflected in her restrained use of colour and form.

Asse's early artistic education was interrupted by World War II, during which she served as a nurse in the French Resistance. After the war, she returned to Paris and immersed herself in the vibrant post-war art scene, studying at the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs. Her early works were influenced by the figurative tradition, but she soon gravitated towards abstraction, inspired by the works of Paul Cézanne, Piet Mondrian, and Nicolas de Staël. These influences, combined with her personal experiences and the landscapes of Brittany, led her to develop a unique style characterised by its minimalism and subtle gradations of colour.

Asse's work is often associated with the School of Paris, a group of artists who, from the early 20th century onwards, were central to the development of modern art in Paris. While the School of Paris was diverse, encompassing various movements such as Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism, Asse's work is most closely aligned with the Lyrical Abstraction movement. This movement, which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, emphasised the emotional and expressive potential of abstract art, often through the use of colour and light. Unlike the more gestural forms of abstraction, Lyrical Abstraction is characterised by its emphasis on subtlety, nuance, and the personal, poetic expression of the artist.

Geneviève Asse was known for her disciplined approach to painting, often working with a limited palette dominated by shades of blue, white, and grey. These colours, particularly her iconic use of blue, became a signature element of her work, symbolising infinity, the sky, and the sea. Her canvases, though minimalist in appearance, are deeply layered and carefully composed, inviting viewers to experience a sense of calm and contemplation.



Fig. 5. Geneviève Asse, c. 1960s



Fig. 6. Geneviève in the atelier, Montparnasse, 1943

Throughout her career, Asse received significant recognition, including exhibitions at major galleries and museums across Europe. Her work is held in numerous public and private collections, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In 2017, she was awarded the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, one of France's highest honours, in recognition of her contribution to art.

As a female artist in a predominantly male-dominated art world, Asse's success is particularly noteworthy. She carved out a space for herself through her unique artistic voice, remaining true to her vision despite the shifting trends in the art world. Her legacy is one of quiet strength, subtlety, and profound depth, qualities that continue to resonate with audiences today.

The Rosine Crémieux Story

Rosine Crémieux's involvement with the famous Vercors Uprising and the Luire Cave is more well known. Born into an Alsatian Jewish family that had settled in Normandy after choosing to remain French during the Franco-Prussian War, was deeply committed to the French Resistance during World War II. Her dedication stemmed in part from family losses: an uncle and two cousins had died in both World Wars, spurring her to join the Resistance movement. During the German occupation of France, her family sought refuge in the Lyon region. While her brothers joined the Free French Forces, Rosine trained as a nurse, taking first aid courses in Lyon, which prepared her to serve in the Vercors Health Service during the summer of 1944. This region became a critical stronghold for the French Resistance. At the Saint-Martin-en-Vercors field hospital, she and other nurses cared for wounded resistance fighters, including four captured German soldiers. As the German offensive on the Vercors intensified in July 1944, the hospital staff attempted to flee south, taking 122 people, including nurses and patients, in trucks and buses.



Fig. 7. Photos of Rosine Crémieux, prior to the Second World War



Fig. 8. Rosine Crémieux photographed immediately after liberation, and her long and arduous escape from a forced march, in 1945

However, German forces were closing in from the Drôme Valley, forcing them to take refuge in the Luire cave. In this dark, cold cave, the nurses, including Crémieux, worked tirelessly with minimal equipment to treat the wounded who lay scattered among the rocks - some dying whilst in hiding there. On July 27, 1944, the Germans discovered the cave. The Doctors and wounded soldiers, some of whom tried to escape, were executed, but the seven nurses, including Rosine, were arrested. They were first taken to the Bonne Barracks in Grenoble, then to Montluc prison in Lyon. On August 11, 1944, as the liberation of Lyon loomed and the city lay under bombardment, a transport was prepared at Montluc prison to take the nurses further East. Rosine was fortunate in one critical way: she was deported as a member of the resistance, not as a Jew. The Germans were unaware of her Jewish heritage, a stroke of luck that likely saved her life.



Fig. 9. and 10. Interior of the Luire Cave, filled with wounded French resistance fighters, doctors and the seven nurses (one of which was Rosine Cremieux)

Train no. 14 166, consisting of nine overcrowded third-class carriages with eight-seater compartments, left Lyon-Perrache station. The prisoners aboard were largely resistance fighters from Montluc, arrested in the Rhône, Isère, and Drôme regions. Men and women, Jews (in the front carriages), and non-Jews were

crammed into the train under the close watch of armed guards posted at both ends of each carriage. The windows were sealed with wire, and the curtains were drawn tight, blocking any view of the outside world.

Although initially planned to pass through Paris, the rapid advance of Allied forces rendered that impossible. The train, slow and halting, wound its way through Mâcon and Chalon-sur-Saône. At Chalon, the prisoners briefly received food from the Red Cross, though they could see nothing due to the shuttered windows. Forced to detour through Is-sur-Tille when a bridge was destroyed, the train came to a standstill for two days near Vittel. Four days into the journey, the starving prisoners finally received soup, thanks to the efforts of the Red Cross and a local restaurateur, who also brought whispers of hope: the Allies were closing in on Paris, the landing in Provence had succeeded, and the maquis were said to be preparing to liberate the train. But these hopes would prove false.

Despite sabotaged tracks and numerous stops for repairs, the train crept onward, passing through Épinal, Belfort, and Strasbourg. In neighbouring carriages, Rosine and her fellow nurses, defying their grim circumstances, made an impression. Béatrix de Toulouse-Lautrec, a fellow prisoner, recalled hearing them singing scout songs and old French tunes: "They were the nurses from Vercors: there were eight of them... All these girls were cheerful, took things on the bright side, determined not to let anything get them down. They sang..."

As the train crossed into German-occupied Alsace-Moselle, the carriages were split. Around 350 Jewish prisoners were sent on to Auschwitz. The remaining men were taken to the Natzweiler-Struthof camp, while 64 women, including Rosine and the other nurses, remained aboard. After a difficult search for a viable route, the train finally crossed the border into Germany at the Kehl bridge on August 18. Béatrix later wrote, "I believe that the nurses from Vercors sang *La Marseillaise* and *Ce n'est qu'un au revoir* before leaving French soil."

After eleven harrowing days, the train reached Berlin, and on August 22, the prisoners arrived at the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Upon arrival at Ravensbrück, Rosine was assigned to forced labour. In October 1944, for refusing to work, she was transferred to the Abteroda commando, where she worked in a factory producing aircraft engine parts for BMW. Alongside other prisoners, she sabotaged the machinery, subtly damaging parts to disrupt German war production. As a result of this sabotage, she was sent to a harsher forced labor camp in March 1945 at Markkleeberg, a sub-camp of Buchenwald.

In early 1945, as the Nazis began evacuating camps in the face of advancing Allied forces, Rosine was forced onto a "death march" with other prisoners. She managed to escape under cover of darkness amidst the chaos of machine-gun fire. Alone in war-torn Germany, she was rescued by a former member of the German Young Communists who had experienced persecution under the Nazi regime. With his help, she made her way west and eventually encountered American troops, covering nearly 100 kilometres on foot.

Undoubtedly it is this harrowing shared experience of death, despair, and also determination that resulted in empathy between the French artist and her patron, however, what is interesting is that neither women chose to focus on this in their lives, Asse choosing an optimistic and modern approach to her art, filled with light, and Cremieux choosing to dedicate her life to pioneering Child and Adolescent Psychiatric studies.

Geneviève Asse Selected Biography



- 1923** Geneviève Asse was born in Vannes (Morbihan, Brittany) on January 24th, 1923 and was raised by her maternal grandmother at Bonnervo manor on Rhuys peninsula.
- 1932** After her parents' divorce, 10 years-old Geneviève and her twin brother Michel joined their mother in Paris. In her company, she visited numerous museums in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Paris Universal Exhibition in 1937.
- 1937-39** She goes every week to the Louvre to admire, among others, Chardin's still lifes.
- 1940-42** She attends the National School of Decorative Arts. She enrolls in UNEF (French students national union) to act against the German occupiers. Her mother remarried surgeon Etienne Le Sourd, owner of Delalain editions.
- 1942-43** She exhibits for the first time at Salon des moins de trente ans where she is noticed by industrialist and collector Jean Bauret who points her out to Jeanne Bucher. At his place, she meets Beckett, Charchoune, Lansky, Poliakoff, de Staël, Bram and Geer van Velde.
- 1943-44** Geneviève Asse lives in Montparnasse and meets Othon Friesz; Paints objects with Atelier de l'Echelle group and draws nudes.
- 1944** Joins her brother in the FFI (French Resistance). Joins the 1st DB as an ambulance driver, participates in the Alsace and German campaigns, and volunteers for the evacuation of Terezin camp (Czechoslovakia). She is awarded the Croix de Guerre in Karlsruhe (1945).
- 1946** Back in Paris, Geneviève settles in Saint-Germain des Prés and designs for the fabric houses Bianchini-Ferrier, Flachard, Paquin, and for her friend and collector Jean Bauret.
- 1946** and **1947**, she exhibits still lifes at Salon d'Automne.
- 1948** Geneviève Asse discovers Italy during a trip to Sicily and Calabria.
- 1950** Installation of her workshop on Boulevard Blanqui.
- 1953** Meets poet and publisher Pierre Lecuire, who buys her paintings and introduces her to engraving.
- 1954** First solo exhibition in Paris at Galerie Michel Warren.
- 1957** She works near Saint-Tropez, in a small cabin facing La Treille Muscate, where Colette had stayed. Her research tends to make the object disappear.
- 1958** Participates in Salon des Réalités nouvelles.
- 1960** Large white canvases "iridescent with light". First exhibition in Geneva, Galerie Benador.
- 1961** Exhibition at Lorenzelli Gallery in Milan. On this occasion, she meets Giorgio Morandi in Bologna. She meets writer Silvia Baron Supervielle who arrives from Argentina.
- 1963-64** Goes to London, where she admires Turner's paintings.

Rosine Crémieux Selected Biography



1924 Rosine is born.

1943 Joins the French Resistance in the Vercors region, a hub of resistance activity during World War II. Rosine, in her early twenties, quickly becomes an active member, aiding in efforts to support the maquis (rural guerrilla bands) and resist the Nazi occupation.

May 1944 Works at the hospital of Saint-Martin-en-Vercors. During this time, Rosine assisted doctors and nurses in treating wounded Resistance fighters. As German forces closed in, she and others took refuge in the Luire Cave, a temporary shelter for the Resistance hospital.

August 21, 1944 The Germans discover and surround the Luire Cave. The doctors and wounded fighters were executed, while Rosine, aged 20, and the six other nurses were arrested and deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp.

October 1944 Having refused to work at Ravensbrück she is sent to the BMW Eisenach- Abterode, a BMW 003 jet engine production line to salt mines in Heiligenrode, Abterode. She was assigned there as a lathe-miller to the manufacture of aircraft engine parts, which she sabotaged.

Early 1945 She is sent to Markkleeberg, a forced labour camp annexed to the Buchenwald camp

May 1945 With the advance of the Soviets, the Nazis decided to evacuate the camps towards the centre of Germany. Most often on foot, in "death marches". Rosine Crémieux, who was able to escape by taking advantage of the darkness and machine-gun fire, wandered through war-torn eastern Germany before being rescued and hidden by a German former member of the Young Communists who had experienced the camps at the beginning of Nazism. Then she headed west to the Americans, "covering about a hundred kilometres on foot."

1953 Marries Claude Crémieux, lawyer, intellect and women's rights advocate

1959 Co-founds the journal *Child Psychiatry* with René Diatkine and Serge Lebovici

1994 Returns to the Luire Caves for a Documentary Television Programme

1999 Publishes her book, *"La Traine-Sauvage"* reflecting on her wartime and psychoanalytic experiences.