

KISLING – THE PRINCE OF MONTPARNASSE

A necessary requirement for an artist to be recognized is to be talented but, maybe even more important, to be supported by an influential and wealthy patron. **Moïse Kisling** was lucky to have all of it. He was born on January 22, 1891, in Cracow, the son of a tailor.

His father wanted Moïse to study at polytechnic to be able to earn a living, but young Kisling was dreaming about an artistic career... and joined the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow (1907-1911). His mentor Józef Pankiewicz, amazed by new trends in painting, especially French artists, inspired Kisling to continue his career in the center of world art – Paris.

It was probably the writer Sholom Asch who found for Kisling a financial sponsor from Moscow who paid a private stipend of 150 francs monthly. He stayed in Bateau-Lavoir (a building in the Montmartre district of Paris, famous as an artistic colony). Soon, he became a friend of Chaim Soutine, Marc Chagall, and Amedeo Modigliani. Kisling was also active in a circle of Polish artists staying in Paris, including Tadeusz Makowski, Eugeniusz Zak, Mela Muter, and Roman Kramsztyk, just to mention a few.

In his early paintings, Kisling was influenced by Paul Cézanne who was also admired by his master Józef Pankiewicz. Kisling's paintings *Tyniec* (1912), depicting the colorful Polish landscape, or *Portrait of Andre Salmon* (1912), and *Portrait of Adolphe Besler* (1914), art merchants promoting Kisling's works, are examples of Cézanne's style used by the Polish artist.

When Picasso rented a studio in Cerét (a town in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains, in southern France) and invited his friends to work on the “analytical theory of Cubism,” Kisling also joined them and stayed for about a year. Picasso tried to persuade him to adopt cubistic aesthetics.



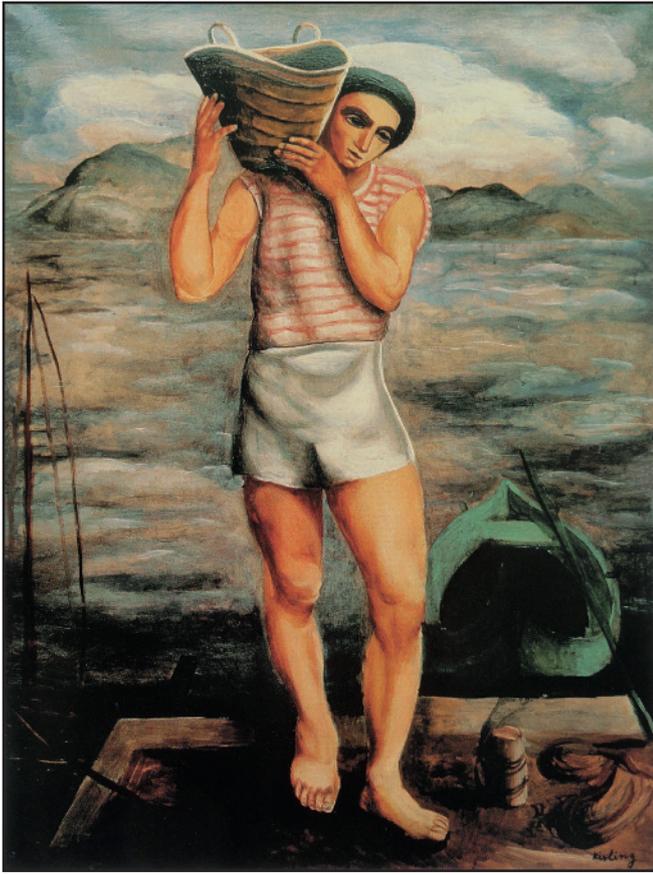
La Sieste à Saint-Tropez (Kisling with Renée, 1916)

Moïse played with Cubism, as in *Nu sur un divan noir* (1913), depicting a naked woman, from a high point, in a lying position in a “geometric surrounding” of the room... but he was searching for his own style one not dominated by Cubism.

With the outbreak of WWI Kisling volunteered for the French Foreign Legion (in the Polish Unit within the Legion). However, a year later he was seriously wounded during the Battle of the Somme. His bravery was rewarded with French citizenship granted to him by the French government. The death of his friend Victor Chapman-Chandler in an air battle (1916) brought Kisling an unexpected inheritance of 5,000 francs.

His artwork was in great demand. So, he became accustomed to a bohemian life. His marriage to the daughter of a French military officer – Renée Gross (a Catholic) – was a big social event... but it didn't change the lifestyle of Moïse as his wife shared his desire for partying.

Kisling established his own studio where his friend Modigliani, whose art aesthetics inspired him, also worked as a guest. The studio was visited



Le pêcheur (The Fisherman, c. 1920)

by famous artists and writers, including: Jean Cocteau, Charlie Chaplin, Arthur Rubinstein, Ernest Hemingway, and Henry Miller. They often became Kisling's clients. *The Portrait of Jean Cocteau* (1916) is a beautiful example of his Cézanne-like style.

His artwork was in a process of evolution. The Naïve style of his landscapes as *Provence Landscape* (1918), *Contrasting Sounds* (1918), *Reclining Nude in the Leaves* (1918), or *Eucalyptus and Palm* (1935) remind viewers of the style of Henri Rousseau. After 1914, Kisling created melancholic and colorful portraits of women with characteristic big eyes, like in *Portrait of a Dark-haired Woman* (1918) or *Portrait of Marie Laurencin* (1920). With the passing of time his portraits of ladies or nudes became more influenced by the style of the Old Masters (Raphael or Ingres) as in: *Kiki de Montparnasse* (1927), *Portrait with a Collar* (1930), *Ingrid* (1932), and *Grand nu au canapé* (1950).

However, he experimented with various techniques as in *Reclining Nude* (1919) showing a body of a woman hardly defined by colorful spots. On the other hand a painting *Nude Woman with Blond Hair* (1942) looks almost like a photograph of a standing female model, washed by red light with a shadow on a background curtain. *The Ms. B. Dunn Portrait* (1943) also explores a semi-photographic technique but is saturated with a dark blue color in the background. It shows a sitting woman whose body "emerges" from that overflowing blue color. Kisling's still lifes exemplify changes in the painter's style from Cubist *Still Life with Fruit* (1913), Postmodernist *Flowers and Shells* (1919), Secession-like *Tulips* (?), Symbolic and Coloristic *Grand Bouquet of Mimosa* (1942), to Realistic *Bouquet of Flowers* (1947).

During WWII, Kisling again volunteered for the French Army to fight against Germany, but after France surrendered he managed to escape through Spain and Portugal to the United States. He lived in New York City and in Hollywood (as a guest of Arthur Rubinstein). In 1946, however, he returned to his beloved France and settled in Sanary-sur-Mer. He passed away there on April 29, 1953.

His paintings are very trendy. It is worth noting that Kisling's works influenced Polish artists such as Eugeniusz Zak and Tamara Łempicka.

A biography and slide show of Kisling's works is available at: <http://modernartconsulting.ru/en/2011/03/moise-kisling-bio/>



Pablo Picasso and Moïse Kisling in Paris, photographed by Jean Cocteau, August 12, 1916.