

THE PAINTER GERARD SLUYTER AND HIS WORK

If we are to assume that only those who, by purely technical means, have attained to a measure of virtuosity, and who, by virtue of their academic training, have acquired the necessary "slickness", can achieve perfection in the plastic arts, then we must surely make an exception in the case of the paintings by Gerard Sluyter.

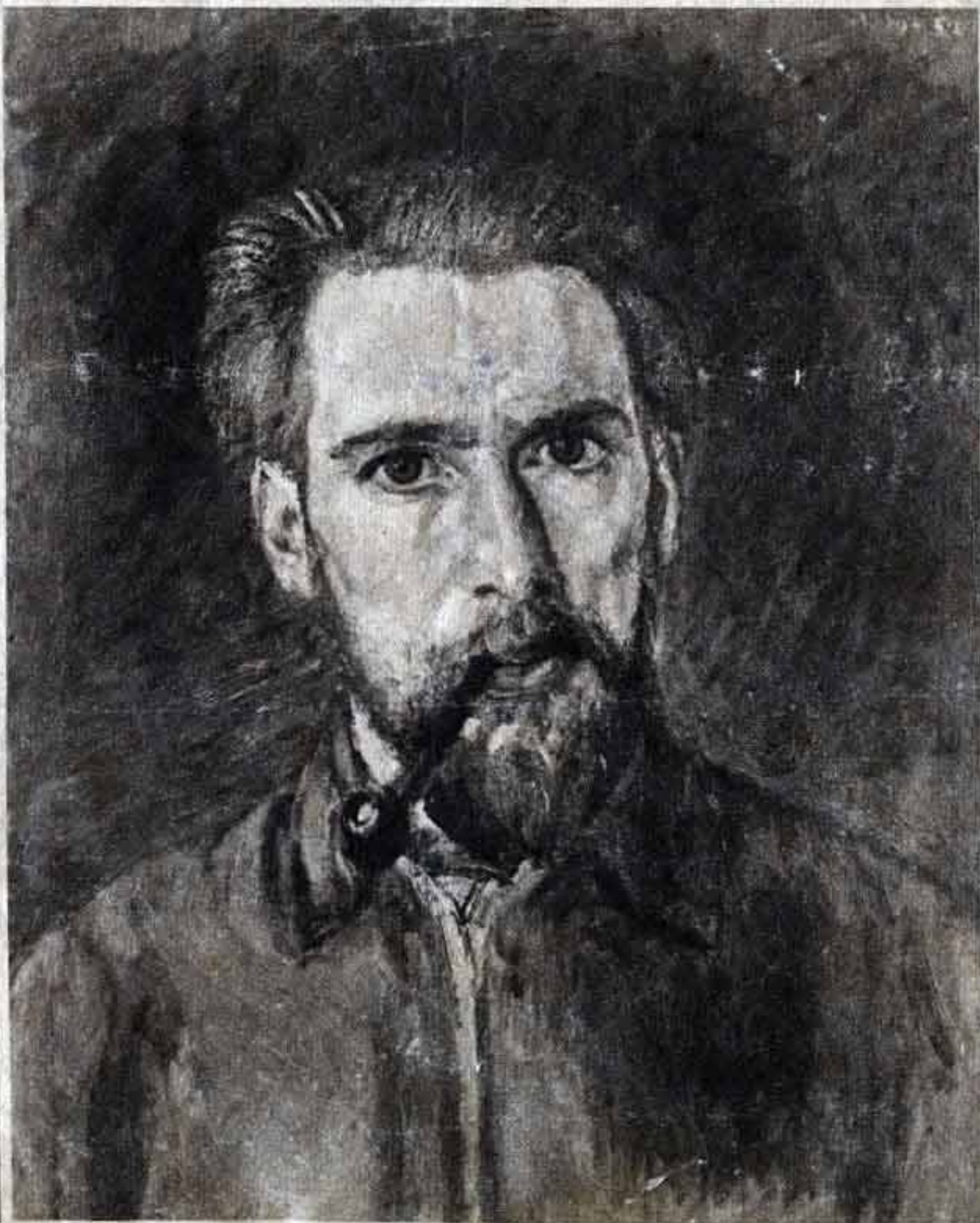
This painter did not attend the State Academy at Amsterdam for more than a few days; but whatever may have been the reason for the brevity of his tuition at that venerable institute, one thing we may confidently say about his work: his non-academic attitude to his art has at any rate enabled him to remain true to himself, from the very beginning of his career as a painter - and as a man.

Gerardus Hermanus Johannes Sluyter, born at Amsterdam on the 16th of September 1901, is practically self-taught.

This highly-gifted painter, whose fate it was to experience the serious side of life right from his early youth, is not at all the typical artist full of playful enjoyment and funny stories. From early youth his mind was engaged in profound philosophic thought; his spirit is that of a seer who, with exceptionally true insight, knows how to hold on to first principles. It is not only the act of "noting down" what he sees, that gives him artistic satisfaction; the most common, everyday things are brought, in his works, to a higher spiritual plane, with the result that his work acquires a far greater significance.

Gerard Sluyter's power lies in the fulness of conscious understanding which he bestows upon the objects around him and depicted by him.

If, in the case of the honest-to-goodness impressionist, accidental factors often play their part, in



Self-portrait

Zelfportret

trait painter, has made a number of portraits of his own children, which strike one by their sensitive colour-values as well as the resemblance. I remember one of his works, exhibited some years ago at Van der Meer's Galleries, Rokin, Amsterdam, and entitled "Mother and Child": this was a composition so "clean" in its conception that one cannot appreciate it merely because it represents the painter's own wife and child. What appeals to one in this portrait is that it radiates the intimate oneness ever existing between mother and child, no matter where or when.

When we come to examine — on the basis of the above considerations — the evolution which the work of this gifted artist is going through, we shall make some surprising discoveries.

We shall see that Sluyter, during his Paris period, living and working in the midst of the great French masters, did actually come under their influence to some extent, but only as regards style; his colour, however — although slightly brighter here and there — remained what it was. By this I mean that Sluyter's colour is such a true indicator of his personality that any actual influence from outside is out of the question.

In his later work, however, a renewal of his palette may be noticed; especially in his still-lives a more brilliant range of tints is beginning to appear. Whereas, formerly, tranquil brown, ochre, and sober green shades combined to create the tonality of his paintings, a brightening of his colour scheme may now be observed, which definitely brings his work to a still higher level.

Gerard Sluyter, who, during t

attempt to class Gerard Sluyter with a given
nters may fail, for the simple reason

Sluyter, we may be sure that nothing is left to chance, but that he builds up his compositions with the greatest care and earnest judgement. This does not imply that it is mere knowledge and scientific exactness that guide this judgement; for that, Sluyter's works are far too laboriously evolved.



Child's portrait

Kinderportret

It is his extraordinary intelligence, coupled with inspiration, that shows him the way; indeed, one may say that this artist is inspired before and above everything else; with complete calm, almost ingenuously, he receives and assimilates the impressions the object gives him, and, through the crystalline essence of his being, renders them, as it were, in a filtered state.

It is a remarkable thing that Gerard Sluyter's work appeals to us immediately, and that it awakens at once in us the emotion which the painter felt on seeing the object.

Sluyter's art rises above the conventional; never did he allow his true feeling to make any concessions to either school or fashion. When he paints a landscape, he creates a synthesis of the total view, thus revealing the impression which he, as a hypersensitive being, experienced.

On the other hand, one must not think that there are a few younger men who are following in his footsteps. But these, too, are exceptional, because Sluyter just cannot be imitated technically. It is, therefore, only on the basis of pure artistic emotion that he might, together with a few similarly-attuned painters, be said to represent a "trend" in art.

A personality like Gerard Sluyter, whose extremely simple way of life has become proverbial in Amsterdam; who, apart from the satisfaction of his most elementary needs, asks nothing more than to retain the serenity or his spiritual and mental balance, is able in all sobriety to give expression to his artistic emotion. Without the slightest vestige of swaggering, he also lacks the cuteness to go out of his way in order to "please" the spectator.

His paintings, some of them so laboriously constructed, are deeply moving; one feels that, here, an artist addresses us who, being averse to all conventionalism, has won the victory over his material.

This painter, who, thanks to his keen psychological vision on his subjects, is bound to be a good por-

had to go into hiding on several occasions, being generally tucked away in a tiny island in the neighbourhood of Nieuwkoop, has managed to survive, also in his art, the terrors of this period, be it not without considerable difficulty. During these hard times, his work was his consolation; and, although he was frequently unable, owing to the violence of the events happening all around him, to handle his brushes as he would have wished, this has in no way affected either the purity of his artistic conscience or the clarity of his thought.

We may expect that an exhibition of this artist's works will be held before very long. It will be the return of the master, Gerard Sluyter.

JOHN VAN DEVENTER.

Calf in a meadow

Kalf in de wei

