

# The swiss painter Alice Bailly

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# THE SWISS PAINTER ALICE BAILLY

*Lecture at the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, London.*

On 28th April, Dr. Verena Bodmer (Zürich) gave a talk illustrated by slides on "Swiss Women in the Course of Centuries. She told of many outstanding women who left their mark in the life of Switzerland.

One such woman was the subject of another talk illustrated by slides on 21st July. Again it was at an open meeting organised by the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, once more at the Swiss Embassy Lecture Hall. The woman in question was the Swiss painter Alice Bailly, and the lecturer, Mrs. Judith Butler, M.A., of the Department of Arts at the University of Essex.

Alice Bailly was born in Geneva in 1872 and died in Lausanne in 1938. She was an artist who deserves to be far better known. The speaker became intrigued with the artist's work when looking through an exhibition catalogue from Milan and decided to find out more. She obtained a travel grant from the University and, with the co-operation of the Fondation Alice Bailly in Lausanne she was able to write a monograph on the artist and obtain slides of her work.

Alice Bailly was born at a time which was not exactly *avant-garde*. She grew up in a comfortable family; her mother was a teacher. She was plain and conscious of it. She had difficulties from the start as she wanted to do things her own way. She got a scholarship to Munich, but again was faced with difficulties. She finally got to Paris where she lived with some Swiss and made wood engravings in order to make a living. Those were exciting years just before the First World War, and names like Cézanne, Gauguin, Dufy, Picasso, Braque began to appear in the art world. It was a period which saw the rise of Cubism and Futurism. Alice Bailly exhibited at the *Salon d'Automne* and the *Salon des Indépendants* as a member of the Cubo-Futurist *avant-garde*. She was also an independent character and nobody's girlfriend. At last she was asked to be on the jury for the *Salon* in 1914. But bad luck always followed her — the war broke out, and there was no *Salon*. She settled in Geneva and then moved to Zürich. Reinhart, the Winterthur patron of the arts, became interested in her work which now included collage — she was a pioneer in mixed-media techniques. In Zürich, she

witnessed the beginnings of Dada. The Swiss only gradually woke up to her talents. In order to live, she painted and produced a lot of what was wanted. But she managed at last to go to Italy in the thirties thanks to Prof. Marc Amsler's patronage. In 1937, she was third in a competition for a mural in Neuchâtel station! But she got the commission to do the frescoes in Lausanne Municipal Theatre. She was 64 by then, and when funds had been exhausted, she offered to finish them at her own expense. She caught a chill and died of tuberculosis on 1st January 1938. After the war, the Fondation Alice Bailly was established. At last, the painter is beginning to get her proper recognition, and her works, which are mainly in Switzerland (Reinhart Galleries Winterthur for instance) are increasing in value year by year.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Judith Butler for resolutely putting Alice Bailly back where she belongs. Not only was her talk in July most convincing, but the slides spoke for themselves and clearly demonstrated the great art and talent of Alice Bailly.

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