

Onward from Tonality

Sullivan Goss presents *In Defense of Beauty: Leon Dabo's Floral Oils* featuring 38 still lifes by the artist

Through February 2

Sullivan Goss, An American Gallery

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In 1933, at an exhibition at New York's famous Knoedler & Co., tonalist landscape painter Leon Dabo (1864–1960) unveiled a

collection of still life floral paintings that revealed another facet to his complex and mysterious persona.

"He was exclusively a landscape painter—exclusively tonal and gray—and here he was a bright and cheerful still life painter. And he was exceptional," comments Frank Goss, owner and founder of Sullivan Goss, An American Gallery in Santa Barbara, California. "He had the most number of favorable reviews I've ever seen; nine reviews praising his new pieces were printed. At that

time, there was something like seven newspapers in New York, so someone wrote about it twice or more."

The floral prints were discovered almost accidentally when a guest of Dabo's nearly tripped over them during a tour of his studio. Dabo, hesitant to exhibit them, had to be convinced to put them on display at the Knoedler exhibition.

It was not the first time his works were nearly lost to the public. Years later, in 1940, Dabo watched in stunned disbelief as German soldiers



Leon Dabo (1864–1960), *Flowers on the Hudson*, ca. 1900. Oil on canvas, 28 x 21¼ in., signed lower left.



Leon Dabo (1864–1960), *Study of Flowers (Two Vases and a Box, One Apple)*, 1929. Oil on board, 20 x 16 in., signed lower left.



Leon Dabo (1864-1960), *Vase Blanc*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 34 x 30 in., signed lower left.



Leon Dabo (1864-1960), *Roses Sauvages*, 1939. Oil on panel, 18½ x 14¾ in., signed lower left.



Leon Dabo (1864-1960), *Garden Flowers in Still Life*, ca. 1918. Oil on Masonite, 30 x 24 in., signed lower left.



Leon Dabo (1864-1960), *Untitled (Still Life with Brown Vase)*, ca. 1930. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in., signed lower left.

marched into Paris, where he was living and painting at the time. Dabo had seen the horrors of German soldiers during World War I—in 1914, at the age of 50, he volunteered to fight and later went on to be a decorated intelligence officer—so he immediately began plotting his, and his Jewish wife's, exodus out of the country. It took several months, but eventually, Dabo, with nearly 300 images rolled together, made it out for another post-war period of painting.

Sullivan Goss purchased 38 of his

floral oils, along with many other Dabo materials, in 2010. The gallery will display their collection in the show *In Defense of Beauty: Leon Dabo's Floral Oils* through February 2. All of the pieces will be for sale. For collectors familiar with Dabo's tonalist landscapes, the floral still lifes—with their delicate colors and moody tones—will reveal another side of the artist.

"One of my favorite pieces is *Vase Blanc*," Goss says. "The background is kind of a fog. It's all very surreal, but

this isn't a surreal painting—it just exists in a dreamlike state."

Goss continues, "The still life paintings of the 1800s look terribly studied—drops of dew on leaves, ladybugs on plant leaves, all that extra detail. Dabo's still life pieces were about his mood. Certainly all still life paintings are artificial, but Dabo's appear to be driven by the nature and spirit of the thing as opposed to an accurate rendition of the thing. I think they're simply wonderful." ■