

La Motte

a culture of excellence

Deurdagte Reis – ‘n viering van vrouekunstenaars Thoughtful Journey – a celebration of female artists

Spilhaus is in 1878 in Lissabon, Portugal gebore. Albei haar ouers is gedurende haar kinderjare oorlede en sy het by haar oupa in Lübeck, Duitsland groot geword.

Van 1896 tot 1900 het sy aan die Lübeck Kunsskool, die Kunst Akademie in München en die Sweedse Thanlow Skilderskool in Parys gestudeer. Tydens haar studies het sy hoofsaaklik teken- en etswerke gedoen. In 1900 het sy ‘n folio van etse van Lübeck gepubliseer en in Dachau geskilder. In dieselfde jaar het Spilhaus ook haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Duitsland gehou.

In 1907 het sy na Kaapstad verhuis, waar sy by familie gewoon en lid van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging geword het. In die kringe waarin sy beweeg het, het Spilhaus met Hugo Naudé en sy vrou bevriend geraak.

Spilhaus het daarvan gehou om teken- en etsstudies van plaaslike bome, landskappe en stede te maak – vir die eerste keer is die Kaapse dennebome op Duiwelspiek en die welige groen Kaapse natuurskoon met sy grys skakerings as onderwerpe gekies.

As gevolg van die uitbreek van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog is Spilhaus gedwing om binnenshuis te werk. Hierdie beperking het haar aangemoedig om blomskilderwerk as nuwe tema te kies en sy het roem verwerf as ‘n Suid-Afrikaanse blomskilder.

In 1915 het Spilhaus met die kunstenaars **Ruth Prowse** en Pieter Wenning kennis gemaak – laasgenoemde het haar lewenslange vriend geword en ‘n permanente invloed op haar skilderstyl gelaat. Gedurende 1918 was Spilhaus ‘n prooi van die griep-epidemie en is sy deur haar kunstenaarsvriendin **Florence Zerffi** versorg.

In 1920 het Spilhaus haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Johannesburg gehou. Die jaar daarna is sy met dr. Simon, ‘n Duitse osteoloog, getroud en ‘n paar jaar na hul troue het hulle na München verhuis.

Tydens haar verblyf oorsee het Spilhaus ‘n verskeidenheid van haar werk, wat oliewerke, tekeninge en etse ingesluit het, vir uitstalling by die Lezard Galery in Johannesburg gestuur. In 1923 het sy saam met kunstenaarsvriende **Ruth Prowse** en **Florence Zerffi** uitgestal.

Spilhaus en dr. Simon het in 1938 na Kaapstad teruggekeer en die *Cape Times* het twee folio's van Spilhaus se etse – *Trees en Cape Town etchings* – gepubliseer. In 1952 het sy van haar werke by die Van Riebeeck drie-eeue-fees in Kaapstad vertoon en in 1953 by die Rhodes eeufees-uitstalling in Bulawayo.

Teen die sestigerjare het Spilhaus ernstig siek geword en, as gevolg van daardie terugslag, nie juis meer ‘n aktiewe rol in die kunste aan die Kaap of in Suid-Afrika gespeel nie. Al was Spilhaus nie baie aktief as kunstenaar nie was sy ongetwyfeld een van die eerste vrouekunstenaars wat uitstallings in die land gehou het. Sy is in 1967 in Kaapstad oorlede.

Spilhaus was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1878. Both her parents passed away during her infancy and she was raised by her grandfather in Lübeck, Germany.

From 1896 to 1900 she studied at the Lübeck School of Art, the Kunst Akademie in Munich and the Thanlow Swedish Painting School in Paris. During her studies she worked primarily in drawing and etching. In 1900 she published a folio of etchings of Lübeck and also painted in Dachau. This year also marked her first solo exhibition in Germany.

In 1907 she moved to Cape Town, where she lived with relatives – artist Hugo Naudé and his wife were amongst her circle of friends. The same year she was admitted as a member of the South African Society of Arts.

Spilhaus was fond of rendering drawings and etchings of local trees, landscapes and cityscapes – for the first time the Cape pine-trees on Devil's Peak and the lush green Cape scenery with its grey tones served as subjects.

Due to the outbreak of World War I she mainly painted indoors. This restraint urged her to take up flower-painting as a theme, and she became famous as a South African flower-painter.

In 1915 Spilhaus met fellow artists **Ruth Prowse** and Pieter Wenning, the latter of whom became a life-long friend and had a permanent influence on her painting style. As a victim of the 1918 influenza epidemic, Spilhaus was nursed by her artist friend **Florence Zerffi**.

Spilhaus held her first solo exhibition in Johannesburg in 1920 and, the year after, married Dr. Simon, a German osteologist. They both moved to Munich a few years later. During her time abroad she sent various works, including oil paintings, drawings and etchings, for exhibition at Lezard's Gallery, Johannesburg. In 1923 she exhibited with artist friends **Ruth Prowse** and **Florence Zerffi**.

Upon her and Dr. Simon's return to South Africa in 1938 the *Cape Times* published two folios of etchings – *Trees and Cape Town etchings*. In 1952 she exhibited at the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, Cape Town and, in 1953, at the Rhodes Century Exhibition in Bulawayo.

Towards the 1960's Spilhaus fell ill and was no longer able to play an active role in arts at the Cape or in South Africa. Even though she was not too active an artist, she was undoubtedly one of the earliest female artists to exhibit in the country. Spilhaus passed away in Cape Town in 1967.



Nita Spilhaus (1878 – 1967)

Bronne / Sources:

Berman, E. 1983. *Art & Artists of South Africa*. AA Balkema: Cape Town.
Johans Borman Fine Art website. 2015. Nita Spilhaus page. Available: www.johansborman.co.za
Photo: Nita Spilhaus, December 1896 (Lübeck). Courtesy of Peter Elliott (great nephew of the artist). Spilhaus Family Archive



Spilhaus, Nita (1878 – 1967)
Tokai Landscape, [s.a]
Olieverf op bord / Oil on board

Versameling / Collection:
Rupert Kunststifting / Rupert Art Foundation, Stellenbosch