



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by *HE Bernard Emié*

Ambassador of France to the United Kingdom

Inauguration of Adolphe Valette Exhibition

The Lowry

Salford, 14th October 2011

Mr Mayor,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chers amis de Manchester,

Let me say how very pleased I am to be with you this evening.

This is my first visit to this great city of Manchester since I took up my post as French Ambassador to the United Kingdom in April, and my first in England outside London.

I wanted to ensure that my arrival for the inauguration of the Alliance française at its new premises in Manchester coincided with the launch of this magnificent exhibition, “Adolphe Valette: a Pioneer of Impressionism in Manchester”.

These two events are very clear demonstrations of the historic ties uniting Manchester and France.

I’m delighted to discover this French artist, who is – unjustly – little known in France but who worked in Manchester and won the artistic recognition here that he deserves.

Adolphe Valette was born in Saint-Etienne, France, on 13 October 1876. Today we celebrate the 135th birthday of a first-rate artist, a pioneer of French impressionism this side of the Channel and a witness to Manchester’s industrial splendour. If Adolphe Valette never really got the artistic recognition in France that he deserved, it’s doubtless because he was very young when he chose to leave his country and pursue his art in very different surroundings, far from Parisian life. So the geographical and social borders he imposed on himself led him to be recognized on British soil alone.

This evening we're seeing the first major Valette exhibition to be held in the UK for more than 15 years. It sheds light on the artist's special relationship with his student Lawrence Stephen Lowry, who later became famous for his paintings and drawings of industrial districts in northern England. And in particular, it highlights Valette's remarkable work, in Manchester and then in the city of his birth, Saint-Etienne in France, where he returned in 1928.

Adolphe Valette introduced impressionism to Manchester very shortly after arriving in 1905. Between 1908 and 1913 the artist produced, among other works, his famous series of "Manchester-scapes", depicting with exceptional colour and technique the industrial city's foggy streets, and its squares and canals. Nobody had previously painted the city in this way, and Valette's work had an extraordinary impact on Lowry.

So Valette left an invaluable record of a past that shaped your city's identity.

However, his work isn't limited to canvases of Manchester. His portraits, domestic scenes and dazzling watercolours painted in the UK and France also show the range of this artist's talents.

I'd also like to pay tribute to the remarkable work of Mme Cécilia Lyon, the exhibition's curator, who for many years has dedicated herself to researching Valette's work and ensuring it is presented in the best way possible and gains the widest recognition in both our countries.

I have the honour of declaring the exhibition "Adolphe Valette: a Pioneer of Impressionism in Manchester" officially open.

Je vous souhaite une agréable soirée et vous dis à bientôt à Manchester./.