

Biography of Ricco Wassmer 1915–1972

1915

Born as Erich Hans Wassmer on October 13 in Allschwil near Basel, as the second of four children of chemist, industrialist, and patron of the arts Max Wassmer and his first wife Tilly, née Zurlinden.

1918

The family moved to Bremgarten Castle near Bern, where artists, poets, and musicians were frequent visitors. Hermann Hesse idealized the ambience there as a «magic circle» in the novel *Journey to the East* (1932).

1935

He passed his university entry examinations in Bern; in Munich he visited lectures on art history and Julius Hüther's drawing course. He decided on becoming a painter.

1936–39

In summer military training school as a medical orderly. During the winter months studied in Paris at the Académie Ranson under the tuition of Roger Bissière.

1937

Decided on the artist's name Ricco; solo exhibition and participated for the first time in the Kunsthalle Bern Christmas exhibition. His parents divorced.

1939

When World War II broke out he returned to Bremgarten and military service.

1940–45

In winter and in the ensuing years attended Max von Mühlenen's painting school in Bern.

1942

In May visited a painting course given by Cuno Amiet in Oschwand. In Oberramsern near Solothurn, decorated the mill purchased by Viktor Kleinert, where Ricco lived and worked during the summer months. Specialized in still-lives.

1945

On the invitation of Arnold Rüdinger, he participated in the exhibition *Junge Berner Künstler* (young Bernese artists) at the Kunsthalle Bern. Member of the GSMBA. During a grave existential crisis he wanted to enter a monastery.

1946

Resided for two summers in the newly built sailing yacht Nave Nave Mahana moored at Morges on Lake Geneva. Nude drawings of the Baschmakoff brothers on the boat. Added an anchor to his signature.

1947

In Paris and on the Côte d'Azur; executed first paintings of sailors.

1948/49

Trip to Tahiti, then assistant chef on a freighter, which traveled from Hawaii to Bombay, Arabia, Sicily, Japan, and Canada. Returned home with a sailor's tattoo on his upper arm.

1950

In spring in Cannes, executed paintings after travel photographs; from September on rented Château de Bompré in Barberier near Vichy, where he spent spring and autumn each year. Maintained contacts to the art scene in Bern. Friendship with Meret Oppenheim, whom he had already met prior to 1939 in Paris.

1951

Encounter with François Mignon, who was to become his model. From 1952 used self-staged photographs as image sources and material for his paintings.

1955

The son of a farmer Jean Baudet posed as a model, later his brothers Alain, Michel, and Daniel did too. Received the City of Bern art prize for the painting *Jean du carrousel*.

1962

Trip to Tunisia, subsequently rehabilitation for asthma.

1963

On January 12 arrested in Bompré. Prison sentence for organizing so-called «ballets bleus», morals offense involving minors, and possession of erotic photographs. After his release in October he moved to a grand country residence in Ropraz in the French part of Switzerland. Suffered from chronic pulmonary emphysema.

1965

Stéphan and Alain Gilliéron posed as models. First trip to Thailand.

1966/67

Trips to Thailand, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

1969

Retrospective at the Kunsthalle Bern together with M. C. Escher. Publication of a small monograph. Executed his last painting.

1971

Short film *Der Vogel Fleming* (The bird Fleming) by Anton Grieb, film script by Ricco who has the role of the narrator.

1972

Ricco died on March 27 in Ropraz.