



FS Colour Series: Pale Green Inspired by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes' Quiet Wonder

Description



Inter artes et naturam (Between Art and Nature) Detail, ca. 1890–95

There is a quiet, understated elegance in the art of French painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, whose dreamlike paintings and murals came to encapsulate the spirit of late 19th century Symbolism. His timeless models,

adorned in drapes and gowns, drift through panoramic scenes, where muted shades like [PALE GREEN](#) spill out onto the ground or stretch out along the horizon. These simplified, flattened panels of colour form subdued stage sets for his fantastical stories to play out. He wrote, “To simplify, that is to release the thought; the simplest conception proves to be the most beautiful.”

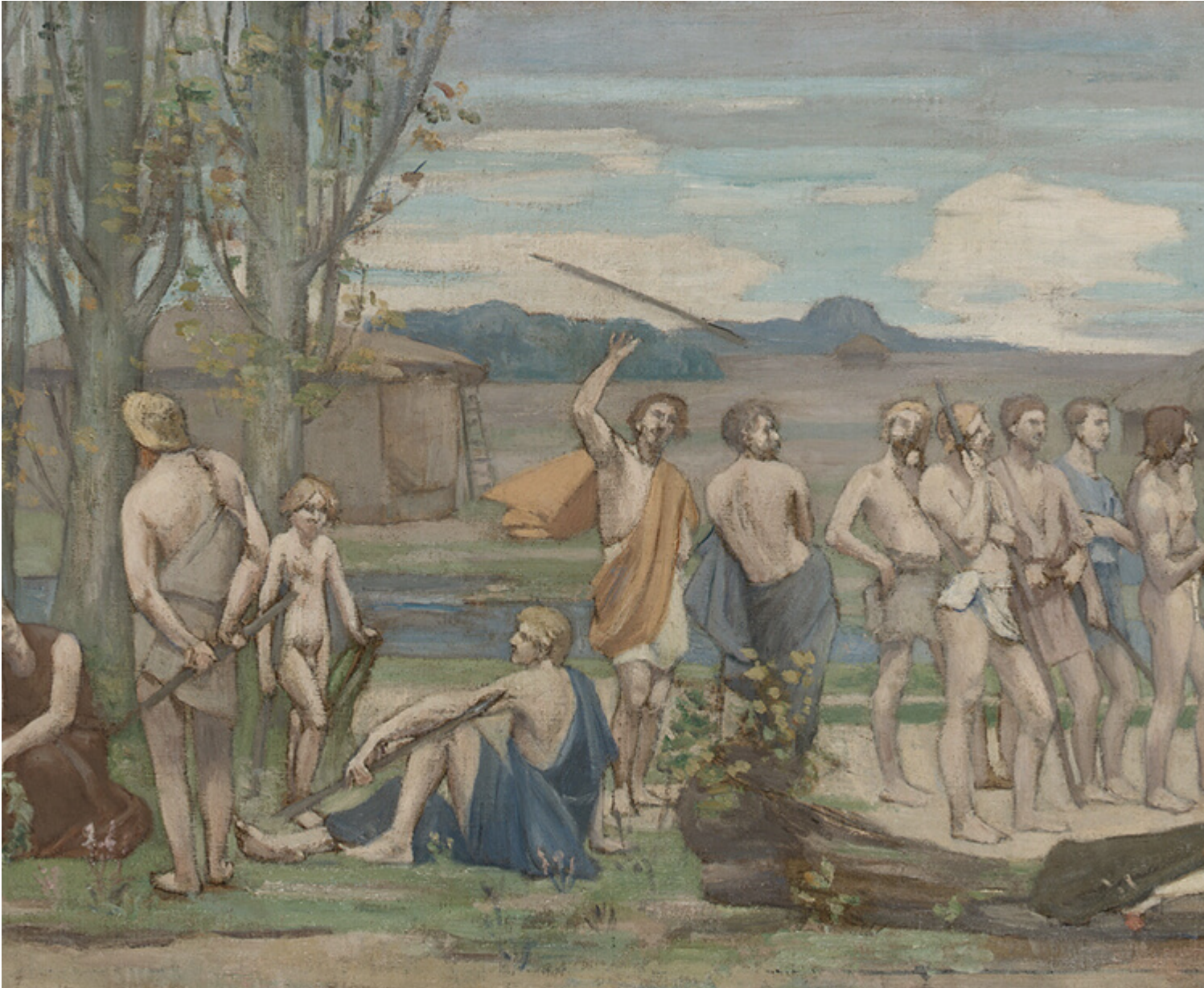
Youngest of four children, Pierre-Cecile Puvis (who later became Pierre Puvis de Chavannes) was born in 1824 in Lyon, France. He initially set out to train in the Faculty of Law at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris, but changed track before completion, choosing instead to travel and make art. He trained for brief spells with various artists including Henri Scheffler, Eugene Delacroix, and Thomas Couture, but De Chavannes was largely self-taught, learning through itinerant friendships and copying the art of the old masters.



FS Pale Green Heavyweight Premier Finish linen

During the 1850s De Chavannes embarked on his first mural painting on his brother's estate at the chateau Le Brouchy. From this point forth his paintings were more ambitious and monumental in scale, and he went on to create murals for many of France's most prominent public spaces, including the Sorbonne and the Hotel de Ville in Paris. De Chavannes also made easel versions for many of his most popular murals, particularly towards his later career.

Stylistically, De Chavannes adopted a style that blended together references from the past and the present. He was fascinated by Roman wall paintings and the murals of Giotto which he encountered while travelling in Italy, adopting the same chalky colour schemes and complex tableaux within his own art. He often painted classical, allegorical, and Biblical themes, yet he was a progressive visionary, exploring shallow, collapsed spaces and flat planes of colour in line with the Japonisme of his friend, Edgar Degas. De Chavannes also infused his art with the ambient, transcendental properties of European Symbolism, working with subtle shifts in tone and light that suggest the ghostly, spectral light of a dream.



Patriotic Games (detail), 1883-89, Met Museum

In *Rest*, 1863, De Chavannes paints a complex group of figures amidst a pastoral scene, adorned in draped, classical clothing. He contrasts the modulated forms of his silent, statuesque figures with flattened panels of understated colour across the background, rendering them like actors on a stage set. Pale, sage green spills out across the grassy embankment and into the trees beyond, giving the whole scene an air of restful ease and tranquillity.

The later panoramic *Patriotic Games*, 1883-89, invokes ancient France, depicting an arrangement of young athletes in training while peaceful onlookers gaze lazily in their direction. The painting in the Met Museum collection of New York (pictured) is a replica of a mural completed by the artist in 1882 for the Musee de Picardie in Amiens. By now confident in his mature style, the artist populates his scene with scattered passages of sage green that ripple through the background trees and leaves, forming a cool counterpoint to the sandy beige and brown hues across the foreground.



The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and Muses, 1884-89, Art Institute of Chicago

De Chavannes continues with his trademark complex, theatrical scenes in *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and Muses*, 1884-89, one of his most admired works of art. He made two versions of this artwork – one as a mural for the stairway of the Musee des Beaux Arts in Lyon, France, and another, smaller easel version first displayed at the Paris Salon of 1884. A cool passage of sage green stretches out across the horizon, forming a cool,

crisp area of shadow. This soft and subtle hue brings out the tart apple green of the foreground, whose warm, glowing yellow spills out into the still, luminescent water beyond.

CATEGORY

1. COLOUR SERIES
2. TEXTILES

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Date Created

June 21, 2024

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