



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

HA 14199D.001

BERNARD BOUTET DE MONVEL (French, 1881–1949)

Tennis Allegory of Love 1900, 1929

Oil on canvas, 125 1/2 x 93 1/2 in.

Signed (at lower right): BERNARD B. DE MONVEL



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RECORDED: Stéphane-Jacques Addade, *Bernard Boutet de Monvel* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, 2001), p. 274; cf. watercolor versions, pp. 276, 277 illus. in color

EX COLL.: Mrs. James Cox Brady, Hamilton Farm, Peapack-Gladstone, New Jersey, until 1961; to her estate; private collection until 2014; to [Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, 2014]; to private collection, until the present

In the first half of the twentieth century, Bernard Boutet de Monvel cut a dashing figure, a painter, etcher, sculptor, fashion illustrator, commercial artist, and interior decorator whose patrons constituted

the cream of society in France and the United States. Already an established artist, in 1914, Boutet de Monvel interrupted a burgeoning career to serve with the French forces in World War I. Wounded at the Battle of the Marne, he returned to combat and was decorated for his heroism and daring and made a member of the French Legion d'Honneur for his service as a bombardier. With peace, he resumed and expanded his multiplicity of activities.

In the post-war period, Bernard Boutet de Monvel counted among the international set of artists and writers whom Wanda M. Corn, describes in her cultural history, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and Cultural Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), as:

a new genus born during World War I, *le type transatlantique*. Made up of writers and artists who crisscrossed the Atlantic and worked both in Europe—usually Paris—and in New York, the *transatlantiques* were ... in the visual arts ... most often French and American.... Among the American artist *transatlantiques* were Gerald Murphy, Marsden Hartley, Alexander Calder, Man Ray, and Stuart Davis; among the Europeans were Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Albert Gleizes, Jean Crotti, Bernard Boutet de Monvel, and Fortunato Depero.... *Transatlantiques* ... were migrant artists, moving back and forth across the Atlantic, carrying the ideas and values of one culture into the heart of another (p. 90).

This pair of oil paintings go far to explain the source of Boutet de Monvel's popularity. Technically adept, they straddle the borders of portraiture, genre, illustration, and interior decoration. Painted for a wealthy patron, Mrs. James Cox Brady, to decorate the tennis courts of her New Jersey hunt country estate, they offer an elegant visual gloss on the enduring qualities of the games of tennis and love as well as a witty and perceptive commentary on changing social mores.



Bernard Boutet de Monvel was born in Paris, heir to a century-long family tradition of artistic endeavor in theater, opera, literature, and publishing. His father, Maurice Boutet de Monvel (1850–1913), was a well-known painter and watercolorist who was much beloved for his work as an illustrator of children's literature. Initially tutored at home, Bernard began his academic study in 1897 with the painter Luc-Olivier Merson (1846–1920) and the sculptor Jean Dampé (1854–1946). He took up etching in 1898 and achieved immediate success and recognition in that medium. In 1903, he sent canvasses to the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts (The New Salon) and in subsequent years, to the Salon des Indépendants (The Independent Artists Show) and the Salon d'Automne (the Autumn Salon). A trip to Florence in 1904, where he admired the Italian primitive painters, particularly Giotto,

persuaded him that the distinction between fine art and decorative art was a fallacy. By 1910, Boutet de Monvel had established himself as a painter of portraits and genre subjects. His 1910 portrait of Prince Léon Radziwell, a dedicated sportsman who was heir to a Lithuanian title and a French fortune, announced in no uncertain terms this artist's mastery of society portraiture. At the same time Boutet de Monvel continued to work in watercolor and illustration as well as color etching. Beginning in 1907, he participated frequently in the Carnegie Institute International Exhibitions in Pittsburgh, laying the foundation for his American reputation. In 1912, the Art Institute of Chicago hosted a retrospective exhibit of his etchings. In that same year that he took a position in Paris at the *Gazette du Bon Ton*, where he produced humorous drawings and fashion illustrations in a strongly linear style that would become his trademark. In 1915, he sent two works to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

Bernard de Monvel's early career was characterized by a great deal of energy, numerous exhibitions and a very wide focus including print and popular media. Although trained in academic practices, like his father he chose not to follow a narrow academic path. His work reflected a variety of stylistic influences and he moved easily among the worlds of high culture, high style, and high society. Notably, in 1909, he began to employ a "rectilinear" composition mode characterized using the ruler and compass in his drawing. This placed him among the earliest of the developers of what evolved into Art Deco. Boutet de Monvel's work as a fashion illustrator, particularly for the famed Parisian couturier Paul Poiret, further lent itself to a modern, streamlined style that was an aggregate of interrelated geometries.

World War I brought this phase of de Monvel's career to a dramatic halt. From 1914 to 1917, he gave up art. From 1917 to 1919, he was stationed in Fez, Morocco, where, encouraged by his commanding general, he resumed his career as an artist. In North Africa, Boutet de Monvel painted a series of views of Fez, Rabat, and Marrakesh, reinterpreting landscapes, architecture, and people in a stripped-down style that departed from the familiar images of nineteenth century orientalism.

After the War, Boutet de Monvel returned to Paris and to his busy practice as an artist and decorator. In 1919, he joined with his wartime friend, the architect Louis Süe, and was among the founders of La Compagnie des Arts Français, an architectural and interior design firm dedicating to producing simplified and modern buildings and interiors in the tradition of the combination of fine and decorative arts pioneered in 1861 in England by William Morris and his circle. Throughout his career, Boutet de Monvel recorded himself in a series of self-portraits, most notably perhaps in a striking canvas of 1932 where he appears as a dandy and man-about-town, seated against the backdrop of the Place de Vendome. He did as well for his portraiture clientele, among them Bobby Jones, the golfer; the Maharajah of Indor and his wife; the general manager of the Citroen motor company; Mrs. Payne (Helen Hay) Whitney; Lady Charles Mendel; Elsie de Wolfe; and Mrs. Millicent Rogers (in a spectacular Charles James gown). These forerunners of the international jet set, he recorded amidst the settings most congenial to their glittering lifestyles—hunting, polo, golf, riding, evening glamour, palatial residences.

As with many of the French tastemakers of his generation, Boutet de Monvel was drawn to the speed, the dash, and the wealth of America in the 1920s, as embodied in New York City. He made his first trip to the United States in 1926 for an exhibit of his oil paintings at the Baltimore Museum of Art and returned frequently thereafter. To fill the gap when the Great Depression of the 1930s diminished his portraiture business, Boutet de Monvel continued with fashion illustration and advertising work. Inspired by the soaring linearity of the modern skyscraper as well as the austere geometry of the industrial landscape, he also produced, in the 1930s, a series of beautifully realized, totally accomplished precisionist drawings and paintings, unlike anything else in his oeuvre. The artist was reported to dislike hotels. By 1936, he was a regular enough visitor to decide to build an American home. Boutet de Monvel chose Palm Beach, Florida, a strategic decision that offered him a society whose interests and habits meshed ideally with his own, and a constant source of patronage. He commissioned a noted architect, Maurice Fatio, to build a unique home whose octagonal great room radiated spokes of four rectangular wings, each separated by landscaped patios. In recognition of the unusual configuration and the whimsy it involved, the artist named his house La Folie Monvel. Much photographed, the house survived until 1990. Boutet de Monvel chose to spend the years of World War II in Paris, where he concentrated on painting the bookstalls along the river Seine. He resumed his career after the War but was killed in a plane crash in the Azores in 1949.



This pair of paintings were commissioned by Mrs. Helen McMahon Brady for her estate, Hamilton Farm, in Gladstone, New Jersey. James Cox Brady (1882–1927), inherited substantial wealth from his immigrant father, who had begun life in very modest circumstances. The younger Brady greatly increased that wealth. In 1911, he was invited by fellow Essex Fox Hounds member Charles Pfizer to buy acreage in Peapack-Gladstone adjacent to his own. Beginning with 180 acres, Brady ultimately assembled upwards of 5,000 acres where he raised a full range of domestic livestock and

maintained as well a serious thoroughbred horse breeding program. Brady named Hamilton farm for his first wife Elizabeth Jane Hamilton Brady (d. 1912). The property ultimately spanned three New Jersey counties and included a 64 room Georgian mansion and a spectacular stable (now the home of the United States Equestrian Foundation). Mrs. Brady was a widow when she commissioned these paintings from Boutet de Monvel. She continued to live at the farm, and in a residence in Florida with her second husband, the explorer C. Suydam Cutting, whom she married in 1932. During World War II Mrs. Cutting transformed a carriage house on the property into a hospital for injured merchant seamen. Over the years the bulk of the property has passed out of the hands of the Brady family and is now the site of the Hamilton Farm Golf Club, an invitation only membership association.

These murals were installed in the indoor tennis court pavilion at Hamilton Farm. Boutet de Monvel painted two views of the same vignette—a man and a woman about to play tennis with Cupid as the intermediary and love (or at least a romantic flirtation) as the object of the game. Labeled on the pedestal at the bottom, the first shows the scene as it might have been posed in 1900; the second offers a contemporary, that is, 1930, update. With the keen eye of a fashion illustrator and interior decorator, Boutet de Monvel dresses and accessorizes these two—the tennis players and the lovers—appropriately for their periods. Mr. 1900 is natty in a boater and high collar with a handlebar moustache, leaning jauntily on the fluted pedestal that supports cupid who holds a heart in his left hand and a tennis racket aloft in his right. The female of the pair whose long skirt swirls in art nouveau curves, shows lace at her hem, collar, and bodice. She wears archery gloves as she holds an extended bow and its arrow, discretely pointing away from the gentleman. A clipped French poodle, Fido for the symbolism, Fifi for the style, stands between the couple, erect on its hind legs, eagerly offering replacement arrows from a full quiver in its mouth. The backdrop is an arch-shaped flower-entwined trellis set against a blue sky.

Thirty years later things have changed. Once again standing on a dated pedestal, this one inscribed 1930, the couple, who have changed places, have also apparently changed roles. He is dressed in sporty tennis whites, no facial hair, and a short-clipped haircut. Looking remarkably like the artist in his self-portraits, he holds the bow and arrow, positioned less like a weapon than like a violin. Most dramatic is the change that has taken place with Mademoiselle. She is androgynous and severely neo-classical. The hair that in 1900 was formerly piled in curlicues high atop her head is now shorn into abbreviated curls recalling those of a Greek god. Her all-white tank top and skirt reveal athletic arms and legs. Knife pleats in her skirt have replaced lace. In her right hand she holds the tennis racket, while, with her left hand she is squeezing the tip of one of cupid's pointed wings, as cupid looks at her imploringly, hands prayerfully folded, apparently beseeching to be freed from her grip. Cupid's pedestal is now a simple rectangle. The dog is no longer a Fifi, but an elegant, elongated Deco hound, standing at attention to his mistress with a tennis ball in his mouth. The background trellis has been replaced by a profusion of palms arranged in an arch-shaped series of circle segments conforming to the outlines drawn by a compass. But with all the changes in style and gender roles, the nature of the game remains the same.

Boutet de Monvel also painted a version of the same pair in watercolor (private collection, illustrated in color in Addade, pp. 276–77). These are much smaller, almost miniature measuring approximately 12 by 9 inches. While the contemporary 1930's composition is substantially like the larger work, the earlier image differs. It is labeled 1890, not 1900. The gentleman's tie and the band on his hat are black, not red, while the woman does not wear a hat. Instead, she has a large bow atop her head of the type called (perhaps significantly) a fascinator. While it seems likely that the small watercolors may not have been complete works, but perhaps sketches for the commission that the artist could have shown to Mrs. Brady, the change in dates is interesting. Its reason remains unknown.

CONDITION: Each, excellent. Canvases are BEVA relined and re-stretched onto new mechanical wood stretchers. Some minor areas of inpainting to the "1930" composition. Unframed; the canvas edges are lined with decorative tape for aesthetic purposes.