

PASTORAL  
LEAVES

# Pastoral Leaves

Virgil and the *livre d'artiste* in France

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## The Roman poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.) wrote three major

works – the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, both pastoral poems, and the *Aeneid*, a heroic epic – all modelled on Greek originals. The *Eclogues* (also known as the *Bucolics*) and the *Georgics* (from the Greek *georgos*, “farmer”) are considered pastoral because they deal with life in the countryside. The *Eclogues* concern rural leisure, the *Georgics* rural labour.

According to Paul Valéry, translator of the *Eclogues*, Latin is “a language to which the French owe all that is most solid and dignified in the monuments of our own tongue.” France, poised between two devastating world wars, was seeking inspiration from its classical heritage, and at the bi-millennial of Virgil’s birth in 1930, it was understandable that his peaceful pastoral works were preferred. “Hardly anyone thinks of illustrating the *Aeneid* nowadays,” wrote André Mary in his preface to the *Georgics*. A central character in the *Eclogues* is the shepherd Tityrus, who has regained his farm and rustic contentment after the Roman Civil War through the favour of the Emperor Augustus. Often identified with Virgil himself, Tityrus had a symbolic appeal for French writers, but he can also be seen as a type of political complacency. One might compare the predicament of Valéry himself, who ended his days as the leading man of letters in Vichy France under Nazi rule.

The *livre d'artiste*, a book whose illustrations have been executed by the artist directly onto the support from which they were printed, was an early twentieth-century French invention. In the exhibition are examples by Aristide Maillol (1861–1944), André Dunoyer de Segonzac (1884–1974), and Jacques Villon (born Gaston Duchamp, 1875–1963). In addition, several *livres d'artistes* of the *Eclogues* were published in France, with etchings by André Beaudin (1936), and lithographs by the Nabi artist Ker-Xavier Roussel (1943) and by René Demeurisse (1946). Lucile Passavant, Maillol’s former pupil, model, and lover, executed wood engravings for a 1951 edition of the *Eclogues* by Philippe Gonin, who had

printed the *Georgics* with illustrations by Maillol; both editions used an early nineteenth-century translation by abbé Jacques Delille. Gonin had remotivated Maillol to illustrate the *Georgics* as a sequel to the *Eclogues*, after the original publisher, Count Harry Kessler of the Cranach Presse in Weimar, fled Germany in 1931.

## The books

Editions were limited; of the 225 copies of Dunoyer de Segonzac's *Georgics*, number 154 is exhibited. Maillol's woodcuts for the *Eclogues* were also published in German and English editions. Of the four *livres d'artistes* on view here, three remain unbound in fascicles as supplied by the publisher in plain slipcases. The purchaser had the option of commissioning an original binding. Jacques Villon's personal copy of the *Eclogues*, which he illustrated, had a decorative binding incorporating the letters VVV – for Virgil, Villon, and Valéry.

The edition of the *Eclogues* illustrated by Maillol is dedicated "To the master printer Emery Walker, the one who was the adviser of the great Artist William Morris, as a token of profound gratitude HK" (Count Harry Kessler; Walker had been associated with Morris's Kelmscott Press in the 1890s). Kessler and Maillol took extreme pains with the book, devising their own handmade paper and casting a new font of type by the fifteenth-century Venetian Nicolas Jenson, which was reused by Philippe Gonin for the *Georgics*. The English typographer Eric Gill carved the initial letters. For his *Georgics*, Dunoyer de Segonzac chose a traditional Garamond typeface, printed on Vélin d'Arches wove paper watermarked with two symbols from the poems – an ear of wheat and a bee. The same kind of paper was used for Villon's *Eclogues*, with a newly cast font of Didot type.

## The illustrations

"I detest illustrated books." What Maillol detested, following William Morris and the Nabi artist Maurice Denis, were illustrations foisted onto the text without regard for aesthetic harmony. By contrast, Maillol regarded the woodcut – the only type of engraving that can be printed simultaneously with the text – as a continuation of typography. His images were always conceived with the precise page layout in mind. Woodcuts appealed especially to sculptors like Maillol, who worked with only a knife, chisel, and small metal rule. Later in life, when he was illustrating the *Georgics*, eye troubles forced him to draw compositions on the block and to delegate the actual engraving to others.

Maillol worked slowly. He began the woodcuts for the *Eclogues* in the period 1912–14, ceased when publication was interrupted by the First World War, and continued in 1925 when publication resumed. His work on the *Georgics*, which spanned thirty-six years, followed a 1908 visit to Greece at Kessler's invitation. The final blocks were handed to the printer, Philippe Gonin, only months before Maillol's death in 1944. Finding many resonances between ancient Greek and Roman culture and the simple life of the Mediterranean countryside, Maillol used local monuments and models from his native Banyuls in his images.

Dunoyer de Segonzac likewise reproduced the landscape of the Île de France and Provence in his illustrations to the *Georgics*, which he always etched in the open air. His images share the quality of watercolours, for which he was also known, in their immediacy and freedom from cloying detail. He avoided intrusive plate marks by etching plates in larger format than the sheets of paper, the plates being wiped in printing to give a crisp impression.

Dunoyer de Segonzac shared with Jacques Villon the experience of working for a French army camouflage unit during the First World War. Colour had been the reason why Villon was chosen to illustrate the *Eclogues*, after Raoul Dufy, the publisher's first choice, insisted on working in black and white. Geometry and movement were also consistent preoccupations of Villon as an artist, whose work sometimes echoes the famous *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) by his better-known brother Marcel Duchamp. Villon also illustrated Jean Cocteau's translation of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (Paris: Tériade, 1962), Virgil's Greek model for the *Georgics*.

Jonathan Franklin, Head of Collections and Database Management, Library

## Checklist

- 1 John Rewald. *The Woodcuts of Aristide Maillol: A Complete Catalogue with 176 Illustrations*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1943. This volume brought Maillol's work, including all the woodcuts from the *Eclogues*, to a wider public.
- 2 *Les Eglogues de Virgile*. Original text and new translation by Marc Lafargue; woodcuts by Aristide Maillol. Weimar: Cranach Presse, 1926. Colgate History of Printing Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Library.  
Eclogue 4, also known as the "Messianic" Eclogue, was believed by some medieval ecclesiastics to be a prophecy of the birth of Christ.
- 3-7 *Les Bucoliques de Virgile*. Translated by Paul Valéry; colour lithographs by Jacques Villon. Paris: Scripta & Picta, 1953.
- 3 Villon's involvement with Cubism is evident from this "Homage à Virgile."
- 4 This image can be read as an encounter between the shepherd Tityrus and the soldier who had taken over his farm, or between Tityrus after his farm had been restored to him and Meliboeus, another displaced shepherd.
- 5 Villon's vision of the Golden Age foretold in Eclogue 4 is sensual and pagan.
- 6 Silenus the satyr sings the myths of the creation of the world.
- 7 Abstractions representing the incantations of a jealous lover.
- 8-11 *Les Géorgiques*. Translated by Michel de Marolles; etchings by Dunoyer de Segonzac. Paris: The artist, 1947.
- 8 The Roman typeface enhances the elegant simplicity of the title page.
- 9 These images of the sun-baked fields of Provence were etched in the open air.
- 10 Dunoyer de Segonzac admired depictions of rural labour by the nineteenth-century French realist painter Gustave Courbet.
- 11 Virgil draws parallels between bees in the hive and humans in society.
- 12-16 *Les Géorgiques*. Latin text and French translation by abbé Jacques Delille; woodcuts by Aristide Maillol. Paris: P. Gonin, 1950.
- 12 The "Justification du tirage" records the physical making of the book.
- 13 First encouraged to engrave by Gauguin, Maillol admired the naive charm of fifteenth-century French woodcuts.
- 14 Maillol's idyllic image expresses Virgil's theme: country life is less corrupt than city life.
- 15 According to the Nabi artist Maurice Denis, illustrations should be like "an embroidery of arabesques on the page, an accompaniment of expressive lines."
- 16 This image of Orpheus and Eurydice recalls Maillol's many sculptures of the female form.

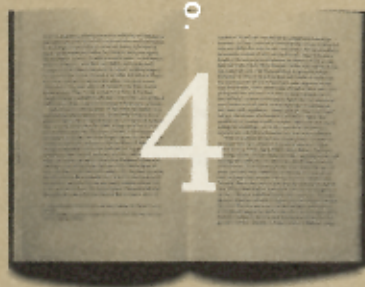
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VIRGIL LIVED IN TIMES RESEMBLING OUR OWN.  
LONG AND CRUEL WARS WERE FOLLOWED BY  
CONFISCATIONS AND EXILES.

– Henry Charpentier, trans., *Les Bucoliques* (Paris, 1946)

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