

**Pine trees, pine cones and gentians: while the boys were playing,
Marie-Louise Goering was silently redesigning La Chaux-de-Fonds**

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Abstract

As La Chaux-de-Fonds' Art nouveau movement gradually takes its place in the realm of Art History, some of its main actors, such as Marie-Louise Goering (1876-1973), remain unknown. As a student and artist, Marie-Louise Goering played an active part in the town's particular Art nouveau "experiment" led between 1905 and 1914 by the local Art school and the professor Charles L'Eplattenier. Her batiks, embroideries, paintings, designs for canvasses, frescoes and other architectural decorations show a great sensitivity to the Jura forests and prairies and ability to transform their elements into delicately stylized motifs. Though she is lesser known than some of her classmates (Le Corbusier, Charles Humbert), one of the last surviving sites decorated by the *Cours supérieur* will soon be opened to the public. The study of its decorative elements, most of which were designed by Goering, gives an opportunity to (re)discover one of La Chaux-de-Fonds' Art nouveau artists.

Key Words: Marie-Louise Goering, Style sapin, Spillmann, Doubs 32, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, Charles L'Eplattenier, Ecole d'art, Charles Humbert, Cours supérieur

La Chaux-de-Fonds is known as the only town in Switzerland to have created an original style of Art Nouveau. In the late 19th century, the nation created its own constructive style (*Heimatstil*) based on the use of local materials and the reinterpretation of vernacular architecture. The *Style sapin* (Pine Tree Style), that developed within the walls of La Chaux-de-Fonds' local Art School (*Ecole d'art*) under

the supervision of the professor Charles L'Eplattenier between 1905 and 1914, is the country's only example of a local endeavour to create a new form of art based on the observation and stylisation of nature. This educational experiment opened new horizons to a bevy of young artists who became pivotal figures of the canton of Neuchâtel's cultural scene.¹ Two names, however, have outshone all others: Charles L'Eplattenier, the professor, and his favourite pupil, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier.

In terms of research, crumbs of interest have been thrown to the smaller birds: the lesser known students of L'Eplattenier's *Cours supérieur d'art et de décoration*² and *Nouvelle Section*, that created a dozen *Gesamtkunstwerken* under L'Eplattenier's eagle eye. The lack of archives and the destruction of most of these works of art have also played a role in this discrepancy. L'Eplattenier's boys are not unknown, but what of the girls, whose careers are, as always, much harder to trace?

The Town of La Chaux-de-Fonds' recent acquisition of one of the *Cours supérieur*'s last remaining creations has opened new perspectives: hand-painted on the wall of a decorated living room, soon to be opened to the public, two small words "Marie Goering" bring new life to one of L'Eplattenier's most unknown and yet undoubtedly most prolific pupils.

Marie-Louise Goering was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1876. Little is known of her childhood³, but archives indicate that her father, the watchmaker Louis Jules Goering, died at an early age leaving behind his wife, Juliette Goering née Jacot-Descombes, and three children. The family lived on the first floor of their apartment building on rue de la Paix.⁴ Though the *Ecole d'art*'s registers have not been preserved, it is probable that Goering followed classes (or evening classes) at the school during her studies. Though women did not frequent most of the lessons, one course was geared to teaching drawing to young ladies, mainly those destined to enamel watchcases professionally. Unlike many women of the time, especially in industrial La Chaux-de-

¹ La Chaux-de-Fonds is the largest city in the Swiss canton of Neuchâtel. The canton's capital is also called Neuchâtel. La Chaux-de-Fonds, situated high up in the Jura Mountains, is an industrial center whose economy rests principally on watchmaking.

² Hereafter referred to as the *Cours supérieur*.

³ Marcel JACQUAT, « Marie-Louise Goering », in Marcel JACQUAT [ed], *Le bestiaire de Louis Pergaud et son époque (1905-1915)*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, La Girafe, 2005, p. 65-70.

⁴ WOLFF [ed.], *Annuaire des adresses pour La Chaux-de-Fonds et Le Locle 1899*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Wolff, 1899, p. 72.

Fonds, Marie-Louise Goering chose to lead an artistic career and sought to obtain adequate training with that intent. In 1899, she was already referred to as an *artiste-peintre*.⁵ Photographs indicate that, in May 1905, she was studying in Paris in the atelier of Luc-Olivier Merson and in contact with Pierre Puvis de Chavannes “fig. 1”.⁶ Charles L’Eplattenier, who strongly encouraged his students to gain experience abroad and had himself been taught by Merson, may have introduced Goering to his former professor. A note signed by Merson even recommends that Goering be hired as a model at the Vitti Academy, boulevard Montparnasse!⁷

After 1905, Goering’s path becomes easier to follow as she started attending L’Eplattenier’s newly created *Cours supérieur*

La Chaux-de-Fonds’ *Ecole d’art* was founded in 1870 with the purpose of offering the best training possible to future watchcase decorators (engraving, enamelling, setting, engine-turning, etc.). By the turn of the 20th century, the decline of the pocket-watch, and with it the professions linked to their decoration, made it necessary to open the town’s economy (and the school’s curriculum) to other forms of art and industry. L’Eplattenier, whose own schooling abroad had familiarised him with the Art Nouveau movements of Budapest, Paris and Germany, offered to create a class in which a select number of students would be learn new trades and various forms of applied arts. Ornamentation would be the key word, and all would be taught to invent patterns based on the rigorous observation of nature and the stylisation of its various components. Within the class, each person was to specialise in a specific form of industry (architecture, sculpture, ironwork, etc.) and all were to work together, as a form of practical exercise, on various large-scale projects. Leaving behind 19th-century “sterile” considerations on decorative art, which L’Eplattenier despised, the students would become artisans: their varied talents, unique creations inspired by local flora and fauna would enable them to make a living in new fields, including interior design and architectural ornamentation.

⁵ Documents divers, Bibliothèque de la Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

⁶ Based on a note by a member of Marie-Louise Goering’s family. These facts have been impossible to verified, but are plausible as many young students of the *Ecole d’art* studied in Paris, often in the workshops of the same artists.

⁷ Documents divers, Bibliothèque de la Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

The *Cours supérieur* opened to the fifteen best and most promising students of both sexes, as the 1904 annual report specifically announces.⁸ For admission, three conditions had to be met: success in the entry examination, a demonstrated intent to pursue a career in the arts, and submission of previous work to prove it.⁹ At almost thirty years old, Marie-Louise Goering passed with flying colours. By then, and unlike her classmates (most of whom were between fifteen and twenty years of age), she had already exhibited at three successive *Expositions de la Société des Amis des Arts*, the biennial salon that showcased not only regional creators but also confirmed artists from Geneva, Lausanne, Paris, Neuchâtel and some of the German-speaking cantons. In 1899, Goering submitted four oil paintings and two drawings with titles such as *Musketeer* and *Young Girl Reading*. Two years later, landscapes and flowers had caught her fancy. Perhaps the most interesting change appears in 1904, one year prior to her joining the *Cours supérieur*, when in addition to her usual oil paintings, she displayed two repoussé leather objects in the decorative arts category, a subsection of the Salon since 1897.¹⁰

In 1906, L'Eplattenier's students started work on the Villa Fallet, their first joint venture that became the manifesto of the *Style sapin*. For the first time, a multitude of patterns inspired by the pine tree (the most common tree in the region) adorn most of the house's elements. The *Cours supérieur* would subsequently work on the decoration of bourgeois salons, music rooms, a chapel, a crematorium and an observatory. Today, only the crematorium, the Villa Fallet and a reception room remain.

In 1909, a rich gold watchcase maker, Charles Rodolphe Spillmann, chose to entrust L'Eplattenier's students with the decoration of a newly-built extension of his already opulent apartment. The extension, consisting of two reception rooms, was meant to connect Spillmann's building (rue du Nord) with his watchcase factory established on the neighbouring plot of land (rue du Doubs).¹¹ Unlike the crematorium

⁸ ECOLE D'ART [ed], *Ecole d'art, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Rapport de la Commission 1904-1905*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, National Suisse, 1905, p. 23.

⁹ ECOLE D'ART [ed], *Ecole d'art, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Rapport de la Commission 1904-1905*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, National Suisse, 1905, p. 23.

¹⁰ Analysis based on the catalogues edited by the *Société des Amis des Arts (Catalogue des ouvrages d'art exposés à La Chaux-de-Fonds)*, 1864 to 1919.

¹¹ Until recently, the apartment was privately owned and has never been studied. The two rooms decorated by the *Cours supérieur*, as well as the adjacent watchcase-making atelier (now

and the Villa Fallet, on which most of the students worked together anonymously, various contributions to the Spillmann apartment are signed. The ceiling of the main reception room (the *Salon bleu*), painted blue and covered with stylised clouds and flying doves, is by André Evard. Louis Houriet designed and made the chandelier and the chimney's repoussé copper plaque. The masterpieces of the room, the marouflaged canvasses on the walls, are signed Marie Goering "fig. 2". These wall decorations epitomize the *Style sapin*. In varying hues of green and turquoise, enhanced with subtle touches of orange, yellow and gold, an array of original motifs inspired by the local flora are combined to create a harmonious ensemble that covers the walls above the ornate wood-panelled baseboard "fig. 3". First, a succession of stylised pine trees creates the impression of a forest. Amidst the trees, tall great yellow gentians grow profusely. In the Jura Mountains, legend has it that the height of these hardy flowers, that grow on the sunny side of the pastures each Spring, indicates the amount of snow to be expected come Winter. At the foot of these emblematic plants, a bed of yellow thistles completes the main part of the design. In between, a myriad of small flowers and a backdrop of lush vegetation, stencilled onto the walls, invade the background. Each element is embellished by hand to add detail and colour to every tree and wildflower. The same subjects, stylised differently, can also be found in Louis Houriet's repoussé metalwork: birds, pine trees and thistles, along with other motifs such as bats and a hungry fox, adorn the chimney and chandelier. Goering also conceived a frieze to frame the marble (ornamental) chimney that was installed against the wall where the architects originally placed the door linking the apartment to the factory. Last but not least, on the eastern wall of the reception room, surrounding an ornate stained glass window, the young woman designed small squirrels, frolicking in the branches, two by two "fig.4".

The second room is smaller and more difficult to attribute to one particular artist, as some parts, where a signature could have been, have since been demolished or covered up by shelves. Instead of a wooden baseboard, an ornate varnished repoussé wallpaper covers the lower part of the walls. Its elaborate pine tree and pine cone pattern points more towards an industrial production than to a student's endeavour, but

empty) were acquired by the Town of La Chaux-de-Fonds in 2014 in the aim to open them to the public as an important component of the town's Art Nouveau heritage.

the wall-paintings above, that consist of an intricate play on triangles, can only be of the hand of one of L'Eplattenier's pupils.

Since the beginning, the triangle had been hailed as the most stylised possible representation of the pine tree and, as such, had become the symbol of La Chaux-de-Fonds' Art Nouveau movement. In a letter to L'Eplattenier, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret wrote to his master in 1908: "Where the Parisians put a leaf modelled after nature, and the Germans a square polished like a mirror, well, we will put a triangle with pine cones and our taste will be safe, and we will learn our trade and we will not ruin our short years of study".¹²

And so, the walls of the second room are covered with rows of triangles, each one hand-painted with small designs that transform it, on closer look, into a pine tree. The similarity between these patterns and those of Marie-Louise Goering's cushions made at approximately the same time is striking, and suggests that she is also the author of this second version of a domestic Jura forest.

The Spillmann apartment of the rue du Doubs is the only existing testimony to Goering's activity within the *Cours supérieur*. The music room designed for the Mathey-Doret family as well as most of the other projects L'Eplattenier obtained for his pupils are long gone. The Villa Fallet and the crematorium bear no trace of Goering's passage, nor does her style appear in their respective decorative schemes. But it is not so of the student's masterpiece, the chapel in Cernier-Fontainemelon, whose interior was completely decorated by the *Cours supérieur* in 1907. Only photographs of the décor remain, as the chapel has since undergone heavy transformations. But the patterns these pictures reveal have a strong resemblance with those of the Spillmann apartment. The 1908 annual report gives a description of the interior:

"On entering this little chapel, the harmony of the tones make the best impression. The ensemble, in clear and warm tints, contains the whole range of yellows, blues, greens, browns. (...) The parameters chosen by the student who conceived the decoration is this: in the middle of a forest, all is calm and quiet, only when you raise your eyes do you see

¹² Marie-Jeanne DUMONT [ed], *Le Corbusier – Lettres à Charles L'Eplattenier*, Paris, Linteau, 2006, p. 129.

the sky; all around the pine trees form, thanks to their branches, a rich tapestry of drawings and colour, linked to the earth by the columns [and] the verticals of the tree trunks; down below, the plants [and] their flowers form the most delightful bedding.”¹³

The resemblance with the Spillmann reception rooms is surprising. The painted forest on the wall, the bed of flowers, and the general impression created by the play on colours and light reappear two years later at the rue du Doubs apartment. Could it be that Marie-Louise Goering, the talented and experienced artist, was the “student who conceived the project” mentioned in the report? As of yet, attribution of the different elements created in Cernier-Fontainemelon seems impossible, and the rendering of the school commission’s visit to the chapel is the only known description the *Cours supérieur’s* work, as, except for the town’s crematorium, most of the exercises were private commissions. On the other hand, only a few of L’Eplattenier’s pupils specialised in wall decoration; Louis Houriet and Charles Reussner worked on metal, Jeanne Perrochet and Léon Perrin (to name a few) worked on stone, and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret was the architect. To this day, the only known wall decorations are Marie-Louise Goering’s, though the young Georges Aubert painted the ceiling of the crematorium, in a very different style. André Evard, author of the designs on the ceilings and whose drawings are very similar to Goering’s (they were all taught in the same way by L’Eplattenier), is the only other serious contender. It is highly unlikely that Marie-Louise did not work at Cernier-Fontainemelon, in which case the similarities between the chapel and the Spillmann apartment cannot be overlooked. In addition, old photographs of the Mathey-Doret music room, a project about which hardly anything is known, show tapestries on the wall that seem identical to a preparatory project designed by Marie-Louise Goering conserved at the *Musée des beaux-arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds*.

These mysteries may never be solved, but the “rediscovery” of the Spillmann apartment, and especially of the signatures on the wall and ceiling, raise new questions that require further study. It is obvious that the students worked in similar ways and in

¹³ Ecole d’art [ed], *Ecole d’art, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Rapport de la Commission 1904-1905*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, National Suisse, 1908, p. 8.

similar groups on their various projects, and most certainly, Marie-Louise Goering played a more important part in them than will ever be known.

As for the rest of her career, in 1912, Goering joined the *Nouvelle Section* – the continuation of the *Cours supérieur* organised by L’Eplattenier. Lessons were given by L’Eplattenier himself, with the aid of Goering’s old classmates, Georges Aubert, Léon Perrin and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. Jealousies, rivalry and political opposition cut the adventure short and in 1914 L’Eplattenier resigned, soon followed by his former protégés. Incomplete archives show that Marie-Louise Goering was enrolled in 1912; whether she continued lessons till 1914 can only be speculated upon.¹⁴ In 1912, an announcement in *L’Impartial*, the local newspaper, reads: “A pupil of the *Ecole d’art*, Mlle Marie Goering, is currently exhibiting at the Leuzinger shop, rue de la Balance, remarkable embroideries and leatherwork: wall-hangings, cushions, satchels, blotters, purses and wallets.”¹⁵ Surprisingly, an announcement published in the *L’Impartial* in 1914 indicates that Marie-Louise Goering received a diploma in music teaching¹⁶ – a pastime or potential source of income of which there remains no other trace, though her later drawings sometimes depict her husband playing the flute. The local address book from that year still refers to her as a painter.¹⁷

In the early years of the *Exposition de la Société des Amis des Arts*, just under a quarter of the artists were women, often well-to-do ladies belonging to the Neuchâtel bourgeoisie. But at the turn of the 20th century, as the number of professional artists seems to have increased, the number of women decreased accordingly. Whereas those who continued to participate often displayed enamelwork, which indicates a close relationship with the local watchmaking industry, Marie-Louise Goering continued to submit artistic oil paintings and, as of 1904, arts and crafts. Though her bent for batiks and embroidery (cushions, carpets, etc.) relegates her to the realm of the female world, the gouaches and frescoes by André Evard, conserved at the *Musée des beaux-arts de*

¹⁴ A list of students of the *Nouvelle Section* published in April 1914 do not indicate Goering at all, though her name appears in a list transmitted to the local authorities in 1912. See Georges AUBERT, Léon PERRIN, Charles-Edouard JEANNERET, *Un mouvement d’art à La Chaux-de-Fonds, à propos de la Nouvelle Section de l’Ecole d’art*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1914, p. 45.

¹⁵ *L’Impartial*, 17 December 1912, p. 5.

¹⁶ *L’Impartial*, 8 October 1914, p. 3.

¹⁷ A. GOGLER (ed), *Annuaire des adresses de La Chaux-de-Fonds et du Locle 1914*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Gogler, p. 256.

La Chaux-de-Fonds and in the Spillmann apartment are proof that her many designs and decorating activities within the *Ecole d'art* did not differ from those conceived by her fellow (male) classmates.

The sketches, drawings and aquarelles that have been kept¹⁸ show that Marie-Louise Goering had a great sense of observation and was an excellent colourist. Her Spillmann designs and execution as well as the various reviews of her exhibits (though written by friends) show that she was an accomplished artist who, along with her female classmates Jeanne Perrochet and Madeleine Woog, could genuinely aspire to earn a living from her artwork. During the Cours supérieur years, her ability to stylise elements of the Jura flora earned her the confidence of Charles L'Eplattenier, who entrusted her with the lion's share of the important Spillmann project. Her evolution from oil paintings to aquarelles, frescoes, batiks, embroidered cushions and leatherwork, and transition from classical painting to Art Nouveau and then to a different, more personal style, as well as her wish to travel, learn and design show determination and a love of art that she chose to pursue professionally, not only as a young girl but as a single woman in a man's world. From 1899 to 1919 (possibly 1921)¹⁹, she diligently submitted paintings and hand-made objects to the Salon, and specialised in the depiction of flowers. She also organised her own exhibits. Glowing reviews by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret himself (though he was a harsh critic) applauded her "little exhibition" that left the viewer with an impression of "calm and delicate work, a soft and fine sensibility; no weighty effort, measure, a simple harmony".²⁰ Jeanneret's article reveals that to set off her paintings and floral batiks, Goering chose to decorate the venue with real roses and fresh carnations, an endeavour, according to the young Le Corbusier, that was risky but a success as it placed side by side both the cause and the effect, the model and the work. In Marie-Louise, the architect, who had long lost faith in Art Nouveau, saw the future of decorative art, an art that left behind excessive ornamentation and made way to the quest of simplicity and light. Though his terms are elegiac, the juxtaposition of real and painted flowers and Marie-Louise Goering's love for them indicate that she may – though she left the stylisation of nature behind at about

¹⁸ Fonds Emilienne Farny, Musée des beaux-arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

¹⁹ Possibly till 1921, but the archives are missing.

²⁰ Unidentified newspaper clipping dated November 1916, archives of the Musée d'histoire naturelle de la Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

the same time as she left the *Ecole d'art* – not have completely lost touch with the spirit of Art nouveau and the direct study of nature that L'Eplattenier had accustomed them to. But, as with all of L'Eplattenier's former students, in order to make her own way, Goering had to break the ties with her old professor and seek a more personal way of expressing herself.

In 1917, the art critic William Ritter wrote of her work displayed at the salon: “Carnations, primroses, or blue bouquet, I feel [that] more than flowers, they are the deep meditation of a solitary soul on flowers.” and “These flowers twice flowers, since they are also soul flowers, [are] here made batik, made canopy, made cushion as if for the hand and the head of he that will come”.²¹ A year later, when the 1918 Salon opened in Neuchâtel, another observer remarked: “Miss Goering's flowers are surprising. Who says flowers says joy and colour and these are sadness and withering.”²² Her friend and former classmate, Charles Humbert, wrote the same year: “Her work has nothing that has been pinched from someone else, but it is definitely the result of fervent experimentation. (...) Innocence when looking at nature is a gift rarer than the vulgar [person] thinks; it is [innocence] only that conveys, in painting, the emotion of the artisan”.²³ So it appears that as she advanced in years and experience, Goering diverged more and more from L'Eplattenier's teaching and the Art Nouveau movement he hoped to develop, and in the end, left it completely behind. In 1922, she was one of the 276 artists that participated the National Exhibition of Applied Arts, where she displayed some of her batiks, the creations for which she was most renowned.²⁴

During her years in the *Ecole d'art*, and despite her relatively big age difference, Marie-Louise Goering was part of the lively and active cultural circles of the students, who, guided by L'Eplattenier, often met to sketch and study nature, visit exhibitions in other towns and discuss each other's work in progress. Though many of them severed their ties with their former mentor, the group he had created remained united. Many of them came and went, but for many years, they remained close and still often worked and exhibited together. Another collective endeavour in which Marie-Louise Goering

²¹ Unidentified newspaper clipping dated 16 October 1917, Archives of the Musée d'histoire naturelle de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

²² *L'Express*, 14 May 1918, p. 6.

²³ Unidentified newspaper clipping dated 15 November 1918, Archives of the Musée d'histoire naturelle de La Chaux-de-Fonds.

²⁴ *L'Impartial*, 10 May 1922, p. 1.

participated, was the creation of *Les Voix*, an art journal edited and directed by the painter Charles Humbert. The directing committee, including Goering, wished to promote all forms of artistic creation and help develop the cultural taste in the region. The project was not long-lived, and Goering was not one of the main contributors.²⁵ But in the 11th edition, published in July 1920, Charles Humbert dedicated his key article to Marie-Louise Goering. The text, which was published along with reproductions of some of her landscapes and batiks, shows that Humbert applauded Goering's talent and was thankful that she had found her own, more grown-up style and had severed all links with Art Nouveau and the excessive curves that were still being imposed by so many "second-rate Grasset" and the "coarse grammar of Owen Jones".²⁶ He also hails the tenderness, the elegance and the daintiness of her batiks that he considered were real works of art.

Charles Humbert, known for his charisma and strong opinions, also reveals a lot about the way female artists were perceived at the time. In *Les Voix*, he continues:

"We [men] are drowning in theory, a sin that women rarely commit ; their little capacity for reasoning keeps them away from such temptation. Though I enjoy cerebral, voluntary art, I do not regret the absence of this aspect in Marie-Louise Goering's work: I like its total femininity, especially in this century of genderless art. (...) Her aquarelles (...) make you think of luminous embroideries and reveal the touch – a very beautiful touch – of a woman, soft as a cat's paw."²⁷

The near tenderness that Charles-Edouard Jeanneret and Goering's friends displayed in their various reviews, and more specifically their choice of words (sensitive, delicate, tender, etc.) show that, despite having worked together on various important projects, studied the same classes and displayed their work in the same exhibitions, the boys considered Goering's work differently. Their point of view was

²⁵ Most of the contributions were written by Charles Humbert himself.

²⁶ Charles HUMBERT, "Marie-Louise Goering", *Les Voix*, 11, July 1920, p. 543-548.

²⁷ Charles HUMBERT, "Marie-Louise Goering", *Les Voix*, 11, July 1920, p. 547.

paternalistic, sometimes protective, but always biased by the fact that she was a woman. This, perhaps, partly explains the lack of interest in her work up till now.

Today, the interest in Marie-Louise Goering's life and career lies mainly in her activities within the *Cours supérieur* – her aquarelles and oil painting appear to be absent from both public and private collections. Though relevant documents are scarce, it seems however that Goering, despite the prerequisites for entering L'Eplattenier's course, did not try to pursue a career in design and ornamentation at the end of her studies. But sketches and drawings dating back to her *Cours supérieur* years indicate that, for a time at least, she enjoyed stylising flowers and inventing series of patterns in the Art Nouveau style she was creating with her classmates. Small, painstakingly framed aquarelles, almost like paper tiles, show an imaginative mind with a great sense of observation. Following the professor's orders, local flora and fauna appear in elegant ways in these near abstract motifs. The great yellow gentian that figures so prominently on the walls of the Spillmann apartment reappears frequently in these designs, as do the branches of the pine tree and the familiar flowers of the dandelion. Leather purses and blotters decorated with repoussé Art Nouveau motifs, and cushions covered with decorative triangles show her allegiance to the *Style sapin*. And though this particular motif never made its way into the students' final designs, two small aquarelles of cows surrounded by gentians and pine needles are a reminder that the subjects of La Chaux-de-Fonds' particular Art Nouveau style were literally a stones' throw away, and that direct observation was at the root of its existence. L'Eplattenier insisted that the study of nature and the faithful copy of local flora and fauna was an essential part of the learning process, for only after could stylisation of these elements become possible. The pages of Goering's sketchbooks retrace this creative process: careful studies of cows and horses or even the flames of a fire are repeated over and over before being integrated into a more decorative and stylised design. Last but not least, handwritten notes on various sketches (possibly preparatory drawings for batiks) reveal that more than the subject, it was often the colours that mattered to her. She remarks on the pink hues of a snapdragon against the grey shades of a rock, or jots down reminders about the colours to use and mix together in order to make them exactly right. Later designs show a more confident and knowledgeable hand.

Here the story stops short, and a change appears. In 1923, she married Dr Georges Robert Roessinger²⁸, a divorced professor and naturalist who taught her Spanish lessons. When Marie-Louise Goering became Mrs Georges Roessinger, Marie Goering, the professional artist, seems to have disappeared. In the Town's registries, the terms "artist" then "housewife" are unequivocal.²⁹ As her husband took the lead, teaching and giving lectures on different aspects of the natural world to local societies, Marie-Louise Goering assumed a new role, that of a wife and homemaker. And yet, she continued to sketch, draw, and sometimes paint, but on a small scale. Sedate portraits of her and her and her husband, now an ageing couple, depict a peaceful, happy life filled with everyday domestic pleasures. Pigeons, pet cats, family members and a multitude of flowers, naïvely sketched on small sketchbooks or loose pieces of paper echo the words articulated decades earlier by Charles Humbert in his portrait of her in *Les Voix*. Notebook-sized landscapes of Mount Salève, near Geneva, to where the couple moved in 1943, show that she always enjoyed drawing – but as of 1923, no trace remains of any further effort to remain an *artiste*.

After her wedding, Marie-Louise Roessinger seems to have disappeared from public life, in La Chaux-de-Fonds and in Geneva, where she spent many years after her husband's retirement. Some vague traces of her remain; in 1960, back in the canton of her youth, her name (Marie-Louise Roessinger) unexpectedly reappears for the duration of an exhibition in the town of Saint-Aubin, amidst 19 other artists, some of whom had been her classmates many decades earlier.³⁰

Marie-Louise Roessinger née Goering died at the age of 97 on August 31, 1973. Her talent, energy and early ambition have left a mark on her home town that has not quite been forgotten. The recent rediscovery of her work in the Spillmann apartment,

²⁸ Georges Robert Roessinger (1875-1968), teacher of science and knowledge of merchandise at the Ecole supérieure de commerce. The couple lived in La Chaux-de-Fonds till 1943 (rue du Parc 13, La Sombaille 15 as of February 1923) and had no children; Roessinger had three children (Aimée, Madeleine and Antoine) from his previous marriage. The couple traveled together on long trips to Algeria, Morocco and the Canary Islands; a small number of Goering's sketches from these voyages are kept in the archives of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds. See Marcel S. JACQUAT, « Tourbe, grottes et autres paysages. Photographies du Fonds Dr Georges Roessinger (1875-1966) », *Nouvelle Revue Neuchâteloise*, 86-87, 2005, p. 10.

²⁹ Information provided by Maria-Elena Fernandez, Contrôle des habitants, Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, 16 March 2015.

³⁰ *L'Impartial*, 26 February 1960, p. 4.

the growing interest in La Chaux-de-Fonds' Art nouveau heritage and the wish to valorise what remains of the famous *Cours supérieur*'s projects will perhaps, more than a century later, help Marie-Louise Goering at last to float through the glass ceiling that she briefly confronted, but did not choose to break.

A little pine tree was in the woods. It had no leaves. It had needles. The little tree said, "I do not like needles. All the other trees in the woods have pretty leaves. I want leaves, too. But I will have better leaves. I want gold leaves." "No other tree was so bright. Then a wind came up. It blew and blew. The glass leaves all fell from the tree and were broken. Again the little tree had no leaves. It was very sad, and said, "I will not have gold leaves and I will not have glass leaves. I want green leaves. I want to be like the other trees." And the little tree went to sleep. When it woke, it was like other trees. It had green leaves. A goat came by. He saw the green leaves on the little tree. The goat was hungry and he ate all the leaves. Then the little tree said, "I do not want any leaves. Pine Trees, Pinecones and Gentians: While the Boys were Competing, Marie-Louise Goering was Silently Redesigning La Chaux-de-Fonds. Ce panneau rectangulaire s'orne d'une inscription coranique issue de la sourate "le pèlerinage" en kufique fleuri et tressé, sur un fond végétal composé de palmes lisses, nervurées et de pommes de pin. This rectangular panel is decorated with a Qur'anic inscription from the Sura ('the pilgrimage') in flowery and twisted kufic script, on a vegetal ground composed of veined, smooth palm leaves and pinecones. Ce panneau spécial à la farine de Pine trees, pinecones and Gentians: while the boys were playing, marie-louise goering was silently redesigning la chaux-de-fonds. Pinos, piñas y gencianas: mientras los chicos jugaban, marie-louise goering, silenciosamente, rediseñaba la chaux-de-fonds. I asked an expert about these particulars, and he told me that those pine trees have three most special characteristics. Notice This website or its third-party tools use cookies, which are necessary to its functioning and required to achieve the purposes illustrated in the cookie policy. If you want to know more or withdraw your consent to all or some of the cookies, please refer to the cookie policy. By closing this banner, scrolling this page, clicking a link or continuing to browse otherwise, you agree to the use of cookies. OK.