

DUKE STREET GALLERY

INFORMATION SHEET



MAURICE UTRILLO
LE LAPIN AGILE

12.5" x 9.75"

Gouache on paper,
signed, dated 1938 and titled Montmartre

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MAURICE UTRILLO
French, 1883 - 1955

Born in Paris on December 26, 1883, Maurice Utrillo was the illegitimate son of Suzanne Valadon, the model and painter. She was only 18 when he was born and even she had very little idea of the father's identity. It seems that it could have been any one of several artists in Montmartre, though, the strongest evidence seems to point to a young wanderer cum artist named Boissy.

Suzanne adored her son, but in the early years he inconvenienced her lifestyle and so she often neglected young Maurice. For the most part, his maternal grandmother, Madeleine, raised him. She lived with them and took in washing to add to her daughter's income. At that time, Suzanne was one of the most popular models in Montmartre. Madeleine started giving wine to baby Maurice to put him to sleep, thus forming his future penchant to drink excessively. He was known as a drunk from before the age of thirteen.

Utrillo got his name from Miguel Utrillo, a friend of his mother's, who agreed to adopt Maurice so that the boy would appear to have a father. Maurice became "Maurice Utrillo" on April 8, 1891. At first, Maurice resented this change terribly and he refused to use the name. Eleven years later when he began to paint, he still signed his name "Maurice Valadon." Later, he would sign, "M. U. Valadon," and when he was 27, finally settled on "Maurice Utrillo, V." Maurice, untrained like his mother, had a raw, natural style. He almost always painted Montmartre and often it was from memory. In this, Suzanne did all she could to encourage him, and he gradually developed his own style. The finest examples of this are shown throughout his "White Period."

For most of his life, Maurice would be in and out of hospitals and institutions for drunkenness and mental illness due to drinking. His mother, herself an alcoholic, was a great contributor to the problem. For many years they lived together in Montmartre and in Brittany (where they later had a large country house), the elderly Madeleine, Maurice, Suzanne, and her lover and then husband, André Utter. They drank and fought and scrounged for money, living from the sale of a painting here and there. Utter began to act as agent for both Maurice and Suzanne, and gradually they both became respected artists in Montmartre and with this new found success, life became slightly easier for Suzanne and Utter. Maurice, however, would never lead a stable life. He drank and painted, and when it was very bad would ask his friends to lock him up and not let him drink. He would scream until someone let him out or he could escape.

Maurice had never come close to marriage, and except for the few girls that his mother tried to put him with, he had never even had a loving relationship with a woman. Yet, due to the determination of one woman, Maurice was married in April of 1935. That woman was Lucie Pauwels, an opportunist and social climber, she saw a man who was easily controlled by a firm hand. She even began to paint in later years, though they were very poor in comparison. Late in life, Maurice became very religious and obsessed with the lives of the saints, especially that of Joan of Arc. Though he still painted, he became a kind of recluse, under the thumb of his wife until he died in 1955.