

DELLSCHAU charles august albert

1830 . allemagne

1923 . texas . états-unis

Originaire de Prusse, Charles Dellschau émigre au Texas dans les années 1850. Il aurait aussi vécu en Californie (Sonora et Columbia), où il aurait été dessinateur pour une société secrète, le Sonora Aero Club, réunissant des inventeurs d'avions, cinquante ans avant le premier vol des frères Wright. Pendant la guerre civile, il se marie avec une jeune veuve, dont il a deux enfants ; si l'on ne sait presque rien de ses activités antérieures, il est alors boucher à Fort Bend County, près de Houston. 1877 voit la disparition de sa femme puis celle de son tout jeune fils. Il travaille un temps pour un fabricant de selles pour chevaux. À l'âge de la retraite, sans rien dire à personne, il crée douze livres composés de collages, d'écrits et de dessins d'aéronefs – les inventions, dit-il, de ses collègues du Sonora Aero Club. À partir de 1914, ses collages et dessins aux couleurs flamboyantes, dans le style des affiches du cirque Barnum, inspirés par des almanachs et des Kalender Bilder de l'époque, s'assombrissent et deviennent plus graves, mettant en scène les catastrophes de l'actualité. Ces livres ont refait surface au cours des années 1960 dans une brocante. Malgré le démembrement de trois d'entre eux, les neuf autres, conservés dans des musées texans et dans la collection abcd, sont intacts.

Born in Prussia, Charles Dellschau immigrated to Texas in the 1850s. He also lived in California, where he may have been the draftsman for a secret society for airplane inventors, the Sonora Aero Club, fifty years before the Wright brothers' first flight. During the Civil War, he married a young widow, with whom he had two children. Although there is scant documentation on his activities before this time, we know that he was a butcher in Fort Bend County, near Houston. His wife died in 1877, followed by his son. For a time, he worked as a saddle maker. When he retired, he quietly began to create twelve books of collages (composed mainly of articles and press photographs about aviation), writings, and pen drawings of aircraft enhanced with gouache or watercolor—inventions, he said, of the members of the Sonora Aero Club. Dellschau clipped pictures out of newspapers to use them for purposes quite different from the original intentions. They seemed to become a direct trace of his personal mental reality as he integrated them with the heterogeneous fragments of world history in his works. Like a film editor, he linked the images to each other on one or several pages, bringing out analogies, tensions, and sometimes contrasts or contradictions. Each book is bound with a system of tabs composed of press clippings, on which the pages are mounted. It was thus through newspapers that Dellschau connected the wide variety of events that were the subject of his drawings and collages—as if the thread of his life was inextricably tied to the current events that they depicted. Starting in 1914, Dellschau's compositions, which had been flamboyantly colored and are reminiscent of circus posters (inspired by almanacs and Kalender Bilder of the time) became more somber and serious, featuring the catastrophes of his time. Dellschau's books resurfaced in a flea market in the 1960s. Three of them had been taken apart, but the other nine, which are conserved in Texas museums and by Collection abcd in France, are intact. The binding of the last book inevitably refers to the idea of the secret: the artist sewed the front and back covers together with thread not only at the spine but also along the fore edge, preventing it from being opened. It is thus a radically strange object, a sort of enigmatic last will or reliquary.



TECHNIQUE: livre de 158 pages reliées sur onglets en journal, gouache, encre, vernis, ficelle et collage

DIMENSIONS: 53 x 43,5 cm

DATE: 1921