

An abstract painting featuring large, organic, overlapping shapes in shades of brown, blue, and green. The brushstrokes are visible, giving the artwork a textured, painterly quality. The composition is layered, with some shapes appearing to be in front of others.

# BRAFA ART FAIR 2026

VIRGINIE DEVILLEZ

· FINE ART ·



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From Khnopff to Magritte  
A selection of 19th- and 20th-century avant-garde artworks

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For its first participation in BRAFA, Virginie Devillez Fine Art presents a carefully curated selection of works reflecting its deep expertise in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century avant-gardes.

The founding currents of modernity emerge with Symbolism, through figures such as Xavier Mellery, Fernand Khnopff, and Léon Spilliaert. Their introspective and solitary works are shown alongside one of the final still lifes by Rik Wouters, the Fauvist artist whose promising career was tragically cut short in his youth. This late painting is paired with a pastel alive with vitality and joy, depicting his lifelong companion, Nel.

The theme of the woman as model and muse is further explored through a group of works on paper by Amedeo Modigliani from the prestigious collection of his principal patron, Dr Paul Alexandre. These nudes, revealing subtle Cubist echoes, are presented alongside a major early canvas by Paul Delvaux, influenced by Expressionism, created shortly before his turn toward Surrealism. A monumental female portrait further reveals the course his work would later take under the influence of Giorgio de Chirico and René Magritte.

From the latter, Virginie Devillez Fine Art has selected a gouache from the so-called "Période vache", an iconoclastic tendency that continues to inspire the contemporary art scene. The selection concludes with rare and pioneering paintings by Pierre-Louis Flouquet and Victor Servranckx, evoking a period when Belgium's artistic avant-garde of the 1920s was engaged in close dialogue with the Bauhaus and De Stijl.

These artists created works at the cutting edge of modernity, profoundly shaping their era and generation. Virginie Devillez Fine Art aims to highlight the enduring contemporaneity of these so-called historical pieces through a current approach to their presentation — both linear and refined.



# XAVIER MELLERY

(1845–1921)

## Intérieur à Marken, c.1878–79

PENCIL & BLACK CHALK ON PAPER  
25 × 33 CM  
MONOGRAMMED “XM” (LOWER RIGHT)

The son of the royal gardener at the Palace of Laeken, Xavier Mellery began his artistic training in 1860 at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. In 1870, he won the Prix de Rome, which allowed him to travel to Italy via Germany. Upon his return, he rented a studio in Brussels from Félix Mommen, a patron and supplier of artists' materials. Known as the Ateliers Mommen, this remarkable complex — combining studios, exhibition spaces, a frame workshop, and a shop — provided a vibrant environment for artistic exchange.

Mellery's early ambitions were oriented toward decorative and allegorical painting. He sought to revive the tradition of Renaissance fresco painters, drawing inspiration from Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and the Pre-Raphaelites. This aspiration gave rise to his finely crafted allegories set against gold backgrounds. He later distinguished himself through his remarkable drawings — positioned at the crossroads of Symbolism and pure poetry — through which he intended to express “the soul of things”.

He strove, often with a certain anxiety, to convey the inner life or psychic essence of the objects that surrounded him. Mellery had a particular fascination with the interplay of light and shadow, which played a central role in this search. His works, imbued with a Symbolist spirit and a quiet sense of the sacred, made a lasting impression on Fernand Khnopff, who began studying under him at the Ateliers Mommen in 1875.

*Intérieur à Marken* (Interior in Marken) dates from Xavier Mellery's stay in Zeeland around 1878–79, where he settled thanks to the Belgian novelist Charles De Coster (1827–1879), who had invited him to illustrate his story about the island of Marken for the journal *Le Tour du Monde*. At that time, still modest and deeply rooted in its traditions, the isolated island struck the artist with its introspective and melancholy character. This fishing village, seemingly frozen in time, became

a recurring subject that Mellery revisited over the years. The traditional costumes — reminiscent of sixteenth-century dress and worn by the island's secluded inhabitants — fed into an idealised vision of life, similar to the one he would later encounter in Bruges and among the Beguines.

*Intérieur à Marken*, also known as *Conversation*, captures a timeless moment in the lives of two women engaged in domestic tasks while talking, as children play with the kittens of a sleeping cat. The arrangement of the interior — the porcelain plates decorating the walls, the delicate veil stretched across the window — evokes a life seemingly suspended in time, continuing unchanged and already reflected in the next generation. It was during this stay that Mellery's art became more pared-down and introspective. He would travel very little thereafter, spending most of his life in a secluded house surrounded by gardens on the edge of the Royal Palace of Laeken. There, he sought to recreate the formative experience of Marken, drawing inspiration from his immediate surroundings.

### PROVENANCE

Galerie Royale, Brussels, *Catalogue des Tableaux, Aquarelles, Dessins et Sculpture de Xavier Mellery* – Expert: Jef Dillen, 18–19 December 1922, lot 124 (“Marken. La conversation, lavis”); Willems; Campo Frères, Antwerp, 9–10 October 1962, lot 248; Private collection, Belgium; De Vuyst, Lokeren, 15 March 2003, lot 214; Private collection, Belgium

### EXHIBITIONS

Antwerp, L'Art contemporain, *Salon 1922*, 1922, cat. no. 47 (“Marken. La conversation”); Antwerp, Guillaume Campo, *Salon Campo 78*, 1978, cat. no. 118





# FERNAND KHNOPFF

(1858–1921)

## À Fosset. L'entrée du village *ou* Le pont de Fosset, 1897

OIL ON CANVAS  
46.5 × 65.5 CM  
SIGNED "F. KHNOPFF" (LOWER RIGHT)

Bruges and Fosset are two central themes in Khnopff's work: his youthful years in Bruges and summer holidays in Fosset had a profound impact on the artist's personality. He translated these impressions into a highly personal figurative language. It is not the depiction of reality that takes precedence, but rather its sublime and poetized memory. Views of Bruges appear relatively late in his oeuvre, whereas his landscapes recur throughout his career, from beginning to end.

These landscapes are always set in Fosset or its immediate surroundings, an isolated hamlet in the Belgian Ardennes, between Bastogne and Saint-Hubert, where the Khnopff family owns a country house. Khnopff has been visiting it since childhood for long holidays, during which he appreciated the locale as a silent landscape of heather and woods stretched over rolling hills.

Between 1880 and 1897, Khnopff produced more than forty landscapes there, not including the drawings in his sketchbooks. The relatively limited number of motifs can be grouped into two main iconographic categories. The first comprises views of villages and agrarian scenes, where only the presence of farm buildings hints at human life. The second offers more direct impressions of nature: landscapes with still waters and their reflections, solitary woods, and vast, almost empty expanses.

Little is known about Khnopff's working method for his landscapes. Did he paint them outdoors and later complete them in his studio? Could this explain why the vast majority of the Fosset landscapes are so small in scale? Their modest for-

mat would indeed have made them easy to carry on his walks.

*À Fosset. L'entrée du village ou Le pont de Fosset* (At Fosset. The Entrance to the Village or The Bridge of Fosset) is quite exceptional in its dimensions, ranking among the largest landscapes Khnopff ever painted. He is thought to have executed it from a photograph, as a contemporary postcard seems to correspond point for point to the natural scene depicted in the painting: the trees are the same size, only the angle of view appears slightly altered and cropped.

It is known that Khnopff often worked from photographs to capture the subject's inner life without losing the emotional precision of memory. *À Fosset. L'entrée du village* also stands out for its remarkable use of color: warm ochre underlayers emphasize certain compositional elements, revealing a carefully constructed vision in which every tree, house, and path is deliberately placed. Mauve and lilac tones bathe the scene in an unreal light, blending impressionistic touches in the foliage with the static presence of the architecture. Khnopff heightened this dreamlike quality by leaving the canvas unvarnished, its matte surface later protected by a pane of glass.

One year after completing *À Fosset. L'entrée du village*, Khnopff continued his rise on the international stage. Already recognized by the Munich Secession, his 1898 participation in the first Vienna Secession exhibition was particularly notable, with an entire room dedicated to his work. Several pieces were acquired by Austrian collectors, and the young Secessionists welcomed him enthusiastically, even dedicating an

issue of *Ver Sacrum* to his work, with Khnopff designing the layout himself. On this occasion, he significantly influenced Gustav Klimt, whose later landscapes reflect Khnopff's framing and meditative atmosphere. *À Fosset. L'entrée du village* remains arguably Khnopff's most Symbolist Fosset landscape, its chromatic harmonies recalling the work of Gustav Klimt, as well as Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, and William Degouve de Nuncques.

### PROVENANCE

Marguerite Fréron-Khnopff, Liège; Galerie Georges Giroux, Brussels, 9 February 1935, lot 108; Pierre Babut du Marès, Wépion; Private collection, Belgium

### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Musée d'Art Moderne, *La Libre Esthétique*, 1910, cat. no. 114; Liège, Palais des Fêtes / Parc de la Boverie, *Triennale*, 1921, cat. no. 243;

Brussels, Cercle artistique et littéraire, *Exposition jubilaire*, 1922, cat. no. 108; Antwerp, Galerie Campo, *75 jarig bestaan van de Galerie Campo*, 1972, cat. no. 184; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *L'Art en Belgique. 1880–1950. Hommage à Luc et Paul Haesaerts*, 1978, cat. no. 25 (ill. p. 76); Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique – Salzburg, Rupertinum, Museum der Moderne – Boston, McMullen Museum of Art, *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, 2004, cat. no. 150 (ill. p. 215); Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, *Verhaeren Verbeeld: De schrijver-criticus en de kunst van zijn tijd (1881–1916)*, 2016–17, cat. no. 128 (ill. p. 199); Paris, Petit Palais, *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921). Le Maître de l'Énigme*, 2018–19, no catalogue published

### LITERATURE

Louis Dumont-Wilden, *Fernand Khnopff*, Brussels, Librairie nationale d'Art et d'Histoire, G. Van Oest & Cie, 1907 (ill. pl. 8); Edmond-Louis de Taeye, "Le Salon de La Libre Esthétique", in *La Fédération artistique*, no. 28, 10 April 1910, p. 219; Robert L. Delevoy, Catherine De Croes & Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque, *Fernand Khnopff: catalogue de l'œuvre*, Brussels, Lebeer-Hossmann, 1979, CR 284 (ill. p. 301); Michel Draguet, *Fernand Khnopff*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator, 2019 (ill. p. 87)



Postcard of Fosset, a small settlement near Bastogne, with its Roman-era bridge, c. 1900







# LÉON SPILLIAERT

(1881–1946)

## Petite chaise, 1917

CONTÉ CRAYON, GREASY & COLORED GREASY PENCIL ON PAPER

25.4 × 17.7 CM

SIGNED “L SPILLIAERT” (UPPER RIGHT) & “L SPILLIAERT” (ON THE REVERSE)

Léon Spilliaert entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Bruges in October 1899, but he stayed for only three months, leaving formal instruction behind to pursue an independent path. Around 1902, he became close to the Brussels publisher Edmond Deman, who employed him until 1904 and introduced him to his avant-garde circle of Symbolist poets and painters. At Deman’s request, Spilliaert produced illustrations for the works of Émile Verhaeren and illustrated the complete theatrical works of Maurice Maeterlinck in 1903. These early commissions revealed the singular universe of the young artist: a world of ghostly faces, shadowy shores, and deserted rooms.

A profoundly solitary figure, Spilliaert drew much of his inspiration from his nocturnal walks through Ostend, his hometown. He favored ink wash and watercolor to capture the fleeting impressions of these nights. His deep sensitivity and inner melancholy are evident in a letter to his friend Jean De Mot, dated 6 February 1909: “Until now, my life has been solitary and sad, with an immense cold around me.” Fiercely individualistic, Spilliaert never aligned himself with any formal group of artists. Yet from 1908 onwards, he exhibited regularly in Ostend, Brussels, and Paris, where the dealer Clovis Sagot displayed his works alongside those of Picasso. Within the literary circles of Brussels and Paris, he found enduring friendships with figures such as Émile Verhaeren, Fernand Crommelynck, and Stefan Zweig, all of whom acquired some of his works.

This prolific period, extending into the 1910s, is often associated with his dark, nocturnal views of Ostend, its light-house, the seafront, and the beach. Yet Spilliaert was equally drawn to still lifes, finding in ordinary objects — bottles, small statues, books, wooden blocks, or gloves — the means to evoke entirely new moods and emotions. He captured

each object’s spirit, its vitality, and its resonance with human presence. His compositions reveal a mind perpetually alert and a highly sensitive soul, tempered by a certain austerity: objects are rendered with candid precision, in short, deliberate strokes that leave no room for sentimentality.

These intimate works were most often set within his family home on Kapellestraat. Still lifes, interiors, and self-portraits created before 1916 offer a glimpse of bourgeois domestic life: tall mirrors, wood paneling, a sloping glass roof, houseplants, a mantelpiece crowned with a clock under a glass dome, and Thonet chairs, occasionally repurposed as makeshift easels. Even his bedroom — with its metal bed and sturdy wardrobes — appears in his compositions. *Petite Chaise* (Little Chair), a work on paper from 1917, exemplifies these silent, contemplative still lifes. The piece evokes interiors reminiscent of those by the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi, where the presence of the inhabitant still lingers, as if they had only just left the room.

### PROVENANCE

Campo, Antwerp, 26 April 1988, lot 238; Galerie Luc van Middelém, Ostend; Galerie Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp; Private collection, Mazenzele

### EXHIBITIONS

Antwerp, Ronny Van de Velde, *A selection of 19th and 20th Century Paintings – Drawings – Watercolours*, 1997, cat. no. 27, dated c. 1909–10 (ill. n.p.)

*This work will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue raisonné of Léon Spilliaert, currently in preparation by Anne Adriaens-Pannier.*





# GEORGES LEMMEN

(1865–1916)

## Marine soir [Heist], c. 1891

OIL ON WOODEN PANEL  
12.3 × 21.7 CM

MONOGRAM LOWER LEFT; HANDWRITTEN LABEL ON THE REVERSE READING  
“PEINT PAR GEORGES LEMMEN 96 AVENUE COGHEN À UCCLE”

This important early composition by Georges Lemmen offers a fascinating insight into the artist's working methods, elegantly combining his modernist exploration of Divisionist theories with a distinctly nineteenth-century interest in recording natural phenomena, including notes on the time and place of each observation.

Lemmen's use of a small format for this work would have made it particularly suited to sketching in oil on site. Such materials could be easily purchased and conveniently fitted into a hand-held painting box (“boîte à pouce”). These compact boxes provided a practical means of transporting materials to and from the motif — a method employed by many nineteenth-century artists before Lemmen, who followed this approach for working outdoors directly in front of his subjects.

The artist's use of a Divisionist palette reflects his interest in the modernist color theories of the period, in the years immediately following his election to Les XX at the precocious age of twenty-four. The most active and influential artistic circle in Belgium at the end of the nineteenth century, Les XX had introduced Divisionist principles to a sceptical Belgian public when Georges Seurat exhibited with them in 1887.

Lemmen must have been familiar with the small wooden panels used by Seurat for his oil sketches. Seurat's influence is also evident in his practice of painting directly onto

the wood — rather than onto a prepared white ground — and in his exploitation of the panel's natural grain for textural effect.

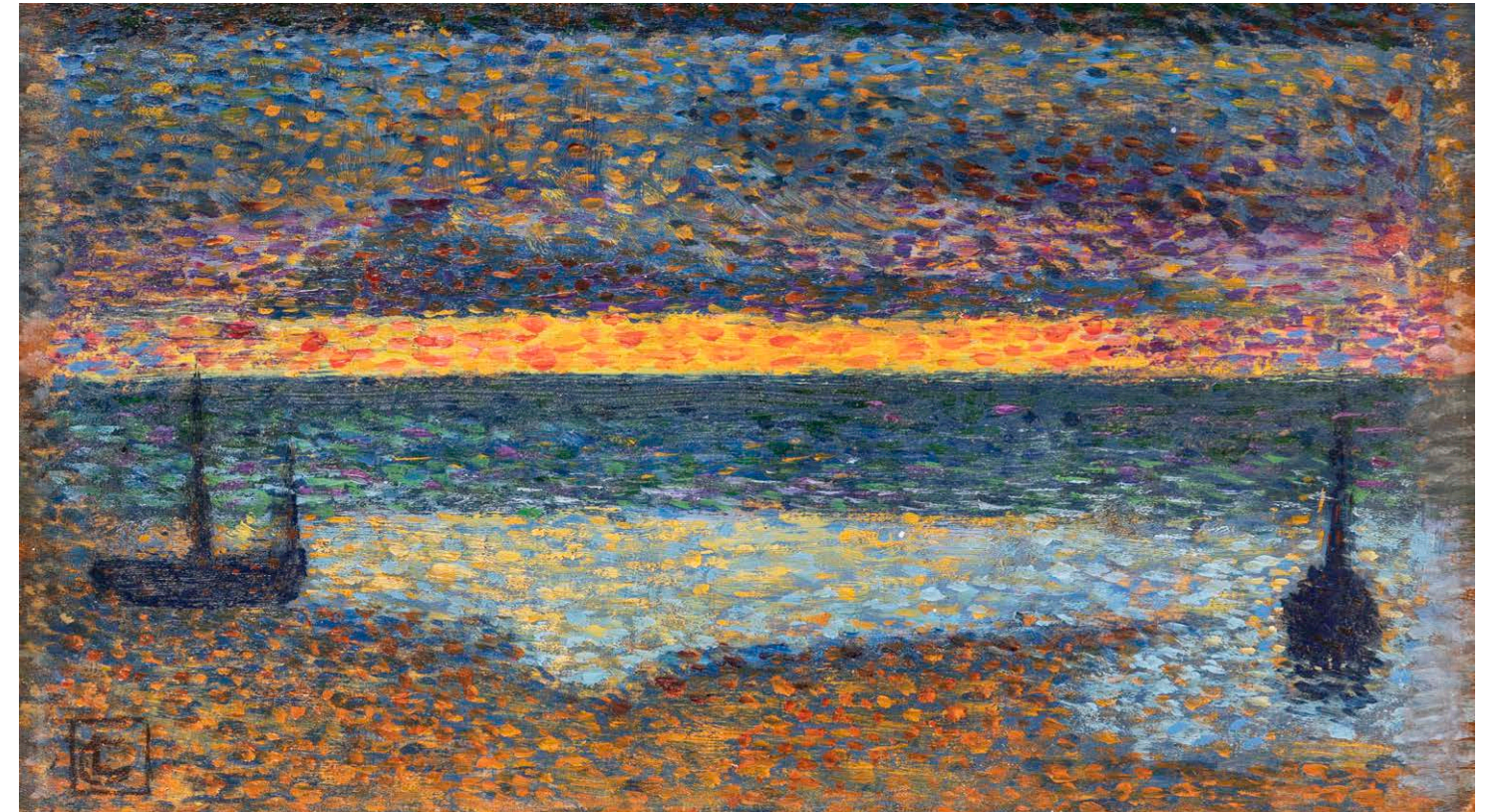
A number of marine views of this type are known, each with nearly identical dimensions. Most of these Pointillist oils were painted at Heist, on the edge of the North Sea, during the summer of 1891. Some bear both the date and the precise location of execution. The whole group of sketches produced at Heist would likely lead the artist to create his *Coucher de soleil sur la plage*, an oil on panel measuring 38 × 46 cm, now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and generally identified with *Soir sur la plage*, exhibited at Les XX in 1892.

Lemmen would return to the seaside several times during his Neo-Impressionist period. The theme of marine views then disappeared from his work, only to reemerge much later, often combined with the motif of bathers.

### PROVENANCE

Monica Perls (widow of Hugo Perls), New York; Private collection (by descent); Sotheby's Amsterdam, 25 October 1999, lot no. 175 (“Marine soir”); Private collection, Belgium; Lancz Gallery, Brussels; Private collection, Belgium (acquired from the above in 2007)

*This work will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue raisonné of Georges Lemmen, currently in preparation by Olivier Bertrand.*







Rik Wouters's apartment in Amsterdam, 1916. On the left side of the wall hangs the painting *Nature morte (Le Saladier)*

# RIK WOUTERS

(1882-1916)

## Nature morte (Le Saladier), 1915

OIL ON CANVAS  
85 × 102 CM  
UNSIGNED

Painted in 1915, *Nature morte (Le Saladier)* (Still Life – The Salad Bowl) is one of Rik Wouters's final still lifes, completed just months before his untimely death. At the peak of his career, the young artist had gained widespread recognition in 1914, following his solo exhibition at Galerie Georges Giroux in Brussels and his participation in the Salon de l'Art Contemporain in Antwerp, where his works were shown alongside those of James Ensor and Vincent van Gogh. In October 1915, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam also organized an exhibition of his works on paper. Critics responded with particular enthusiasm, praising his youthful energy, inventive spirit, and exceptional creativity — hallmarks of an artist distinguished by candor and daring originality.

A versatile artist equally skilled in drawing, sculpture, and painting, Rik Wouters was largely self-taught, having learned his craft while assisting his father in the family workshop, which produced the carved furniture typical of his native Mechelen. His first formal training began around the age of fifteen, when he enrolled in evening classes at the Mechelen Academy, studying drawing from classical antiquity — a discipline that would remain central to his artistic process. Although his early studies emphasized sculpture and drawing, it was the latter that ultimately led him to painting, the medium in which he would excel. His oil paintings remain relatively rare, as Wouters died young, at just thirty-three, from aggressive jaw cancer.

His earliest canvases reveal a thick impasto applied with a palette knife. Yet his familiarity with Indian ink later allowed him to loosen his hand, achieving an economy of gesture and fluidity in his color application — a mastery he fully realized between 1912 and 1915.

*Nature morte (Le Saladier)* was likely painted in late 1915, shortly after *Humeur sombre*, now held by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. Both works rank among the final pieces Wouters created while battling illness, spending his days between the studio and hospital visits. Neither canvas is signed or dated; in the final months of his life, confined to bed, Wouters meticulously reviewed and signed his drawings and watercolors one by one, but the heavier canvases were simply too cumbersome for him to manage.

Despite his illness, these two still lifes retain remarkable vigor and vibrant color. As Roger Avermaete noted, even throughout a period of suffering, Wouters “remained true to himself” and still possessed the energy to celebrate life through his art.”<sup>1</sup>

An emblematic work, *Nature morte (Le Saladier)* exemplifies Rik Wouters' art at its height. Through the richness of his palette, the vibrancy of his tones, and his extraordinary sensitivity to light, the painting reveals the dazzling talent of an artist often considered the founder of Belgian Fauvism. Wouters' admiration for Cézanne is clear: he first encountered the French master's work in 1911 through his friend Simon Lévy, who showed him black-and-white reproductions. From that moment, Wouters longed to see the paintings in person — a wish he fulfilled with a visit to Paris in May 1912. Cézanne's influence is evident both in Wouters' layering of translucent paint and in his handling of light, which sculpts the forms with remarkable subtlety. The apples seem to emerge, transfigured by the inimitable luminosity that lies at the very heart of Wouters.

1. Roger Avermaete, *Rik Wouters*, Brussels, L'Arcade, 1962, p. 46.



#### PROVENANCE

Galerie Georges Giroux, Brussels; Daems, Brussels; Jean Grimar, Brussels; Christian Fayt Art Gallery, Knokke; Private collection, Belgium; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

#### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Galerie Georges Giroux, *Rik Wouters*, 1922, cat. no. 56; Antwerp, Stadsfeestzaal, *Salon de L'Art contemporain*, 1922, cat. no. 147; Frankfurt, *Frankfurter Kunstverein, Zeitgenössische Belgische Kunst*, 1929, cat. no. 117 (ill. n.p.); Amsterdam, Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker, *Het stilleven*, 1933, cat. no. 355; Rotterdam, Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, *Tentoonstelling van 115 stillevens 1480–1933*, 1933, cat. no. 111; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *L'Art contemporain*, 1935, cat. no. 490; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *Rik Wouters*, 1935, cat. no. 119; Charleroi, Salle de la Bourse, *Cercle artistique et littéraire. XXI<sup>ème</sup> salon. Rik Wouters*, 1947, cat. no. 19; Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, *Rik Wouters*, 1957, cat. no. 106; Paris, Musée national d'Art moderne, *Rik Wouters*, 1957, cat. no. 52 (ill. pl. 19); Amersfoort, De Zonnehof, *Rik Wouters*, 1961, cat. no. 51; Mechelen, Cultureel Centrum, *Rik Wouters*, 1966, cat. no. 96; London, The Royal Academy of Arts, *Ensor to Permeke, nine Flemish painters. 1889–1950*, 1971, cat. no. 327; Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, *Veertig kunstenaars rond Karel Van de Woestijne*, 1979, cat. no. 163 (ill. p. 90); Knokke, Christian Fayt Art Gallery, *Exposition n° 3*, n.d.; Paris, location unknown, *La Modernité dans l'Art flamand*, n.d.; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *Rik Wouters*, 2002, cat. no. 158 (ill. n.p.)

#### LITERATURE

A.-J.-J. Delen, *Rik Wouters, zijn leven, zijn werk, zijn einde*, Antwerp, Lod. Opdebeek, 1922 (ill. cat. no. 54); Paul & Luc Haesaerts, *Flandre. Essai sur l'art flamand depuis 1880*, Paris, Chroniques du jour, 1931 (ill. p. 640, detail); Jules-François Elslander, *Figures et souvenirs d'une belle époque*, Brussels, La Renaissance du Livre, 1944 (ill. n.p.); Nel Wouters, *La Vie de Rik Wouters à travers son œuvre*, Brussels, Lumière, 1944 (ill. pl. xcvi); Paul Haesaerts, *Histoire de la peinture moderne en Flandre*, Brussels, L'Arcade, 1959 (ill. p. 114); Roger Avermaete, *Rik Wouters*, Brussels, L'Arcade, 1962, pp. 148 & 211 (ill. p. 158); Adriaan Vennema, *De balingen*, Baarn, Het Wereldvenster, 1979 (ill. n.p.); Olivier Bertrand, *Rik Wouters. Les peintures. De schilderijen. Catalogue raisonné*, Antwerp, Petraco-Pandora, 1995, CR 196 (ill. p. 226)





# RIK WOUTERS

(1882–1916)

## Femme au châle vert, c. 1913

PASTEL ON PAPER  
43.5 × 57.5 CM  
UNSIGNED

Rik Wouters, a leading figure of Brabant Fauvism, entered in 1912 the most fruitful phase of his career — one that, sadly, came to an end just four years later with his premature death. Initially trained as a sculptor, he turned to painting during his studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, where he fell under the influence first of Émile Claus and later of James Ensor. Gradually he abandoned chiaroscuro in favor of a luminosity that arose from the very structure of the composition rather than from any identifiable light source.

In the spring of 1912, he travelled to Paris, where he was profoundly impressed by the works of Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne — admiring color in the former and construction in the latter. The discoveries he made in Paris encouraged him to lighten his palette, to use pure, vibrant colors, and to dare stronger contrasts. From Cézanne, Wouters drew the abstraction of reality and its translation into geometric forms, which appear in his works from 1913 onward and are clearly present in *Femme au châle vert* (Woman with a Green Shawl).

Like Renoir, Wouters shared a predilection for portraying women. Yet unlike the French painter, he invites the viewer into an immediate, unmediated encounter with his sitter — no doubt because his model was almost always his lifelong companion, Hélène Duerinckx, known as Nel, whose portraits lay bare the deep bond between them. After their marriage in 1905 and several moves, they eventually settled in Watermael-Boitsfort, where Wouters's art will reach full maturity. And a few years later, in 1912, he joined the newly founded Galerie Georges Giroux in Brussels, which provided him with financial support and enabled him to become the natural leader of the Brabantine painters.

The theme of Nel with a shawl recurs throughout the work of Rik Wouters, marking the transition from his engagement with Cézanne to the full maturation of his own style. *Femme au châle vert* appears to go even further: its compo-

sition, radicality, and colors recall the German Expressionists Wouters encountered in Cologne in 1912 at the *Internationale Kunstausstellung des Sonderbundes Westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler*. This period also reveals Wouters's growing fascination with color in his works on paper, as watercolour would soon give way to pastel — the medium closest to painting — which Wouters embraced with particular sensitivity. These works should therefore be regarded as autonomous creations, enabling Wouters to produce true masterpieces in their own right.<sup>1</sup>

*Femme au châle vert* embodies all the contrasts typical of Wouters's work, with colors that are at once Expressionist and Fauvist, and a composition enlivened by abstract touches that give rhythm to the scene. The portrait captures the essence of Nel, revealing her intimacy and daily life, while draperies, fabrics, and tapestries hover gracefully between abstraction and figuration.

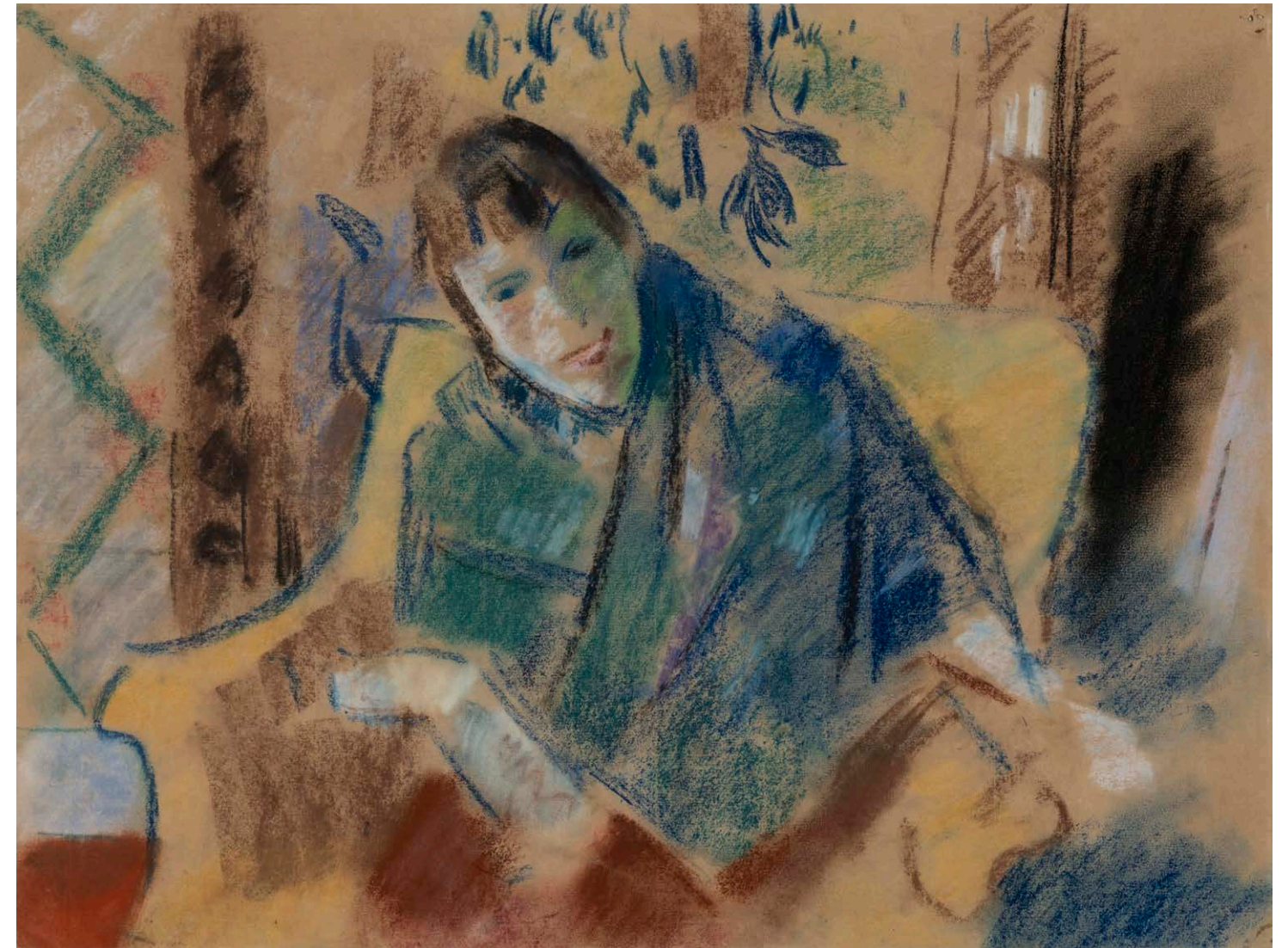
1. Inga Rossi-Schrimpf, "Ligne, forme et couleur. Introduction à une sélection d'œuvres sur papier", in *Rik Wouters. Rétrospective*, cat. exh., Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, pp. 129–133: 131–132.

### PROVENANCE

Nel Wouters, Overijse; Mr and Mrs Vandenkerckhove, Belgium; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *Rik Wouters*, 1935, cat. no. 77; Ostend, Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst; Venlo, Museum Van Bommel Van Dam, *Rik Wouters (1882–1916)*, 1994–95, cat. no. 8 (ill. p. 132); Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *Rik Wouters*, 2002, cat. no. 119 (ill. n.p.)





# PAUL DELVAUX

(1897-1994)

## Portrait de femme, 1932

OIL ON CANVAS  
120 × 100 CM  
SIGNED & DATED "P DELVAUX 12-32" (LOWER RIGHT)

Although Paul Delvaux briefly studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, he consistently preferred to take up his easel and set out to explore the fringes of the Sonian Forest at Rouge-Cloître, a favored gathering place for plein-air painters. By the late 1920s, his interests increasingly turned toward James Ensor and the Belgian Expressionists, including Gustave De Smet and Constant Permeke, whose work shaped his artistic production at that time. During this same period, Delvaux developed a close relationship with Claude Spaak, the Belgian playwright, poet, and collector who attempted, though unsuccessfully, to introduce him to the work of René Magritte.

In the early 1930s, the main center of artistic life and avant-garde activity in Brussels shifted to the Palais des Beaux-Arts, where Claude Spaak, then responsible for programming, frequently invited his friend Delvaux to exhibit. E.L.T. Mesens, the great promoter of Surrealism and a close friend of Magritte, worked there as well and would later emerge as an important figure in Delvaux's artistic career.

This period proved pivotal for the artist, at a time when he was far from satisfied with his work and openly acknowledged his own lack of originality. *Portrait de femme* (Portrait of a Woman), painted in December 1932, belongs to a series of transitional works in which Delvaux frequently introduced the motif of a curtain — a hallmark of Magritte's imagery. Already in November 1932, *Nu au lever* anticipates this approach: through the window of a bedroom adorned with conventional drapery, a classical vault of unexpected presence emerges, establishing a striking and deliberate contrast.

The same effect is present in *Portrait de femme*, where the red curtain, opening onto a barely sketched classical house, creates a sense of strangeness — an impression further amplified by the uniform reddish background. Is the model seated indoors or outdoors in the armchair? This deliberate ambiguity would become a recurring theme in Delvaux's later work, where his nudes are depicted in settings that are

simultaneously open and enclosed. Here, Delvaux seems to be reassessing his relationship to Magritte, choosing to forge his own path toward mystery. *Portrait de femme* also reflects Delvaux's engagement with the classical academic style, emphasizing compositional balance and visual harmony in service of the figure's monumentality.

Delvaux's journey toward Surrealism reached a decisive moment in 1934, when he visited the exhibition organized by the periodical *Minotaure* at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. There he encountered the work of Giorgio de Chirico: "The empty cities, the silent figures of De Chirico impressed me because I found in them a correspondence with something that was within me... It is an entire poetic program."<sup>1</sup> *Portrait de femme* (1932) already hints at this unconscious desire to move beyond painting to express a profound inner feeling.

1. Barbara Emerson, *Delvaux*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1985, p. 60.

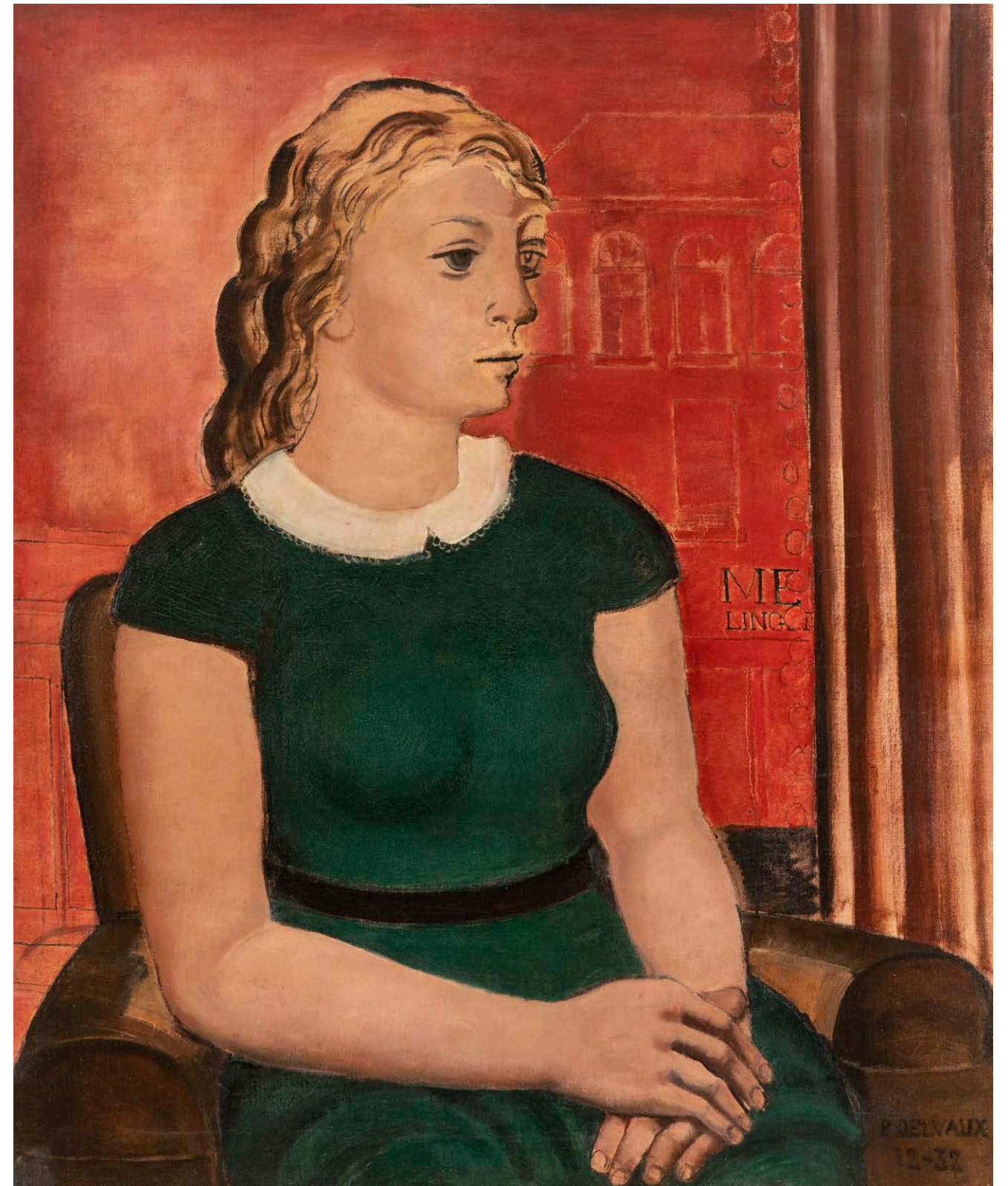
### PROVENANCE

Raphaël Vynckier, Roeselare; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Osaka, Daimaru Museum of Art, Umeda – Himeji, Municipal Art Museum – Tokyo, Isetan Museum of Art, Shinjuku – Toyama, Museum of Modern Art, *Paul Delvaux*, 1983–84, cat. no. 5 (ill. n.p.); Brussels, Crédit communal, *Expressionnisme wallon*. Anto Carte, Marcel Caron, *Paul Delvaux*, Victor Leclercq, Jean Leroy, Auguste Mambour, 1993, without cat. no. (not illustrated, cited p. 96); Saint-Idesbald, Musée Paul Delvaux, *Paul Delvaux. Odyssée d'un rêve*, 2007–08, without cat. no. (ill. p. 24)

*This work will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue raisonné of Paul Delvaux, currently in preparation by Camille Brasseur and the Paul Delvaux Foundation.*





# PAUL DELVAUX

(1897–1994)

## Avant le bain, 1933

OIL ON CANVAS MOUNTED ON PANEL  
120.5 × 96 CM  
SIGNED & DATED "P DELVAUX 5-33" (LOWER RIGHT)

The beginnings of Paul Delvaux's artistic journey were marked by numerous explorations that would ultimately lead him to the recurring motifs that, from one painting to the next, create a continuous pictorial conversation: antiquity, death, women, trains, and the world of Jules Verne.

After a brief period at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, Delvaux began painting from life, outdoors, driven by a desire to capture the immediacy of light. Although solitary in his creative process, he was also shaped and inspired by both his predecessors and his contemporaries. Toward the end of the 1920s, he discovered the Expressionists who distorted reality to convey emotions such as anxiety, solitude, or melancholy. Delvaux admired the painter Gustave De Smet — whom he met and whose paintings he owned — as well as Constant Permeke, whose direct vision of nature left a lasting impression on him.

As his style evolved, the depiction of women became central to Delvaux's art. Although often portrayed nude or partially undressed, his women embody dignity and reverence rather than eroticism — they are idealized figures. Painted in 1933, *Avant le bain* (Before the Bath) marks a turning point in his career. Delvaux revisits one of art history's timeless themes: the bathing of Venus, or the Birth of Venus. Two monumental nude figures fill the entire height of the canvas — the bun of one even rising above the roof of a small red-brick country house. She recalls a provincial woman, wearing a long black skirt and a white slip, standing next to a chair that holds a basin. To her left, a young nude woman with long brown hair stands with her hands on her hips, a bath towel lightly pressed against her thigh. Like her companion, her legs are cut off at the calves, a device that amplifies the monumentality of her form. The nude figure seems at once to gaze toward her companion and to drift into a dream, while the woman in the white slip appears equally withdrawn, absorbed in her own silence.

The scene is realistic yet marked by an Expressionist distortion of scale and proportion. There is no attempt at embellishment: neither the clothing nor the nudity evokes a courtesan or a classical Venus. Set in an ordinary, domestic space, the scene resists idealization. The way the two women gaze and hold themselves transforms the moment, lending it a quiet, dreamlike intensity. Already here, Delvaux moves between the real and the imaginary, anticipating the approach he would later develop to distance and reshape reality. *Avant le bain*, with its Expressionist structure, treatment of the body, and subdued palette, reveals the first traces of the mysterious atmosphere that would reach its full expression in *Le Paravent* (1935), marking his first steps toward Surrealism.

### PROVENANCE

Raphaël Vynckier, Roeselare; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Newport Beach (California), Newport Harbor Art Museum, *Flemish Expressions. Representational Painting in the Twentieth Century*, 1986–87, cat. no. 15; Brussels, Crédit communal, *Expressionnisme wallon: Anto Carte, Marcel Caron, Paul Delvaux, Victor Leclercq, Jean Leroy, Auguste Mambour*, 1993, without cat. no. (not ill., cited p. 97); Bielefeld, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, *Paul Delvaux. Das Geheimnis der Frau*, 2006–07, without cat. no. (ill. p. 36)

### LITERATURE

Jacques Sojcher, *Paul Delvaux ou la passion puérile*, Paris, Éditions Cercle d'Art (ill. 43, p. 40)

*This work will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue raisonné of Paul Delvaux, currently in preparation by Camille Brasseur and the Paul Delvaux Foundation.*





# PAUL DELVAUX

(1897-1994)

## Étude pour “L’Âge du fer”, 1950

PENCIL, INDIAN INK & WASH ON PAPER  
29.5 × 47 CM  
SIGNED & DATED “P DELVAUX 1950” (LOWER RIGHT)

### PROVENANCE

Campo & Campo, Antwerp, 23-24 April 2002, lot 103 (“La gare”);  
Robinsons Art Gallery, Knokke; Robert Van Droogenbroeck, Brussels;  
Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

*The work is accompanied by a certificate issued by the Paul Delvaux Foundation, dated 8 June 2002.*



Paul Delvaux, *L'Âge du fer*, 1951, oil on canvas, 152 × 240 cm.  
Collection Mu.ZEE, Ostend





# AMEDEO MODIGLIANI

(1884-1920)

## Femme nue de trois quarts, bras droit vers le haut, c. 1908

PENCIL ON WOVE PAPER, FROM A NOTEBOOK

43 × 27.8 CM

STAMPED DR. PA, NUMBERED 17, UNSIGNED

The French collector Paul Alexandre provides valuable testimony indicating that, during his early years in Paris, Modigliani regularly attended life-drawing academies, notably the Académie Ranson in Montmartre around 1908. During these sessions, as the model held each pose for ten to fifteen minutes, Modigliani produced multiple drawings whose speed and precision of line, assured hand, bold compositions, and inventive variations on a single pose elevate them beyond mere academic studies.

In the swift lines of these drawings, the artist's hand and determination become visible. Modigliani almost always used the entire sheet, and the model often exceeds its edges: as if zooming in with a camera, he would bring certain parts of the body closer for focused study. These works function like visual notes, grounded in a primarily descriptive observation of the model. While Modigliani sought technical mastery, a distinct sensitivity also emerges.<sup>1</sup>

The drawings from Dr. Paul Alexandre's collection challenge the legend shaped over three decades by critic André Salmon, who depicted Modigliani as a genius suddenly revealed through drug-induced exaltation.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the rapid, assured line reveals an artist engaged in sustained, disciplined practice.

*Femme nue de trois quarts* (Nude Woman in Three-Quarter View) perfectly embodies this search and rigorous work. It

reflects Modigliani's serial and precise approach — a mastery of line in pursuit of the elongated contours of the female body.

1. Noël Alexandre, *op. cit.* (below), 1993, p. 305.
2. André Salmon, *Modigliani. Sa vie, son œuvre*, Paris, Édition des Quatre Chemins, 1926.

### PROVENANCE

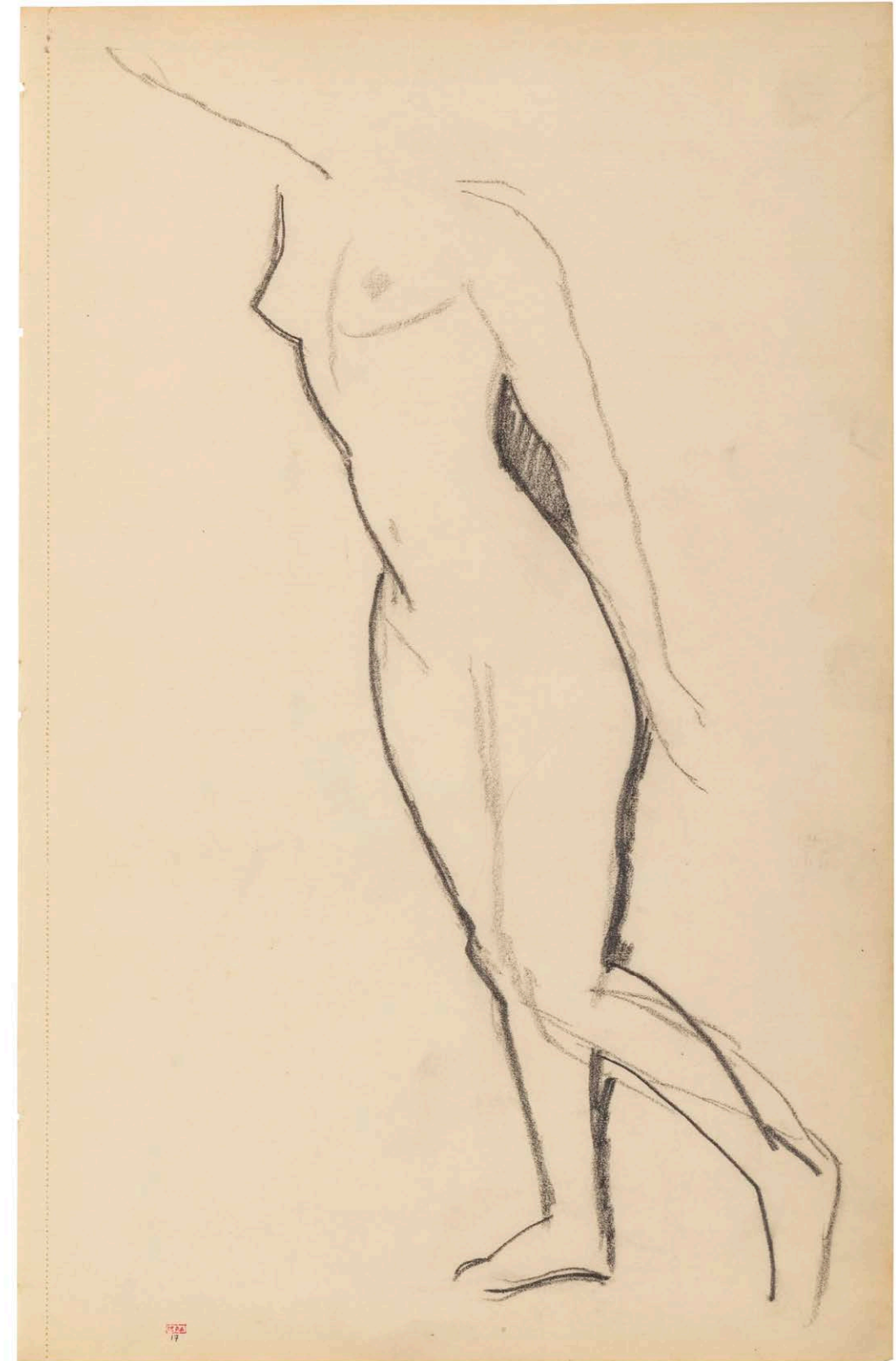
Dr Paul Alexandre, Paris (acquired directly from the artist); Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Venice, Palazzo Grassi – London, The Royal Academy of Arts – Cologne, Ludwig Museum – Bruges, Kunstcentrum St. Jan – Tokyo, The Ueno Royal Museum – Lisbon, Culturgest – Madrid, Museo Reina Sofia – Montreal, Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, *Modigliani inconnu. Dessins de la Collection Paul Alexandre*, travelling exhibition, 1993–96

### LITERATURE

Noël Alexandre (Preface by François Bergot), *Modigliani inconnu. Témoignages, documents et dessins inédits de l'ancienne collection de Paul Alexandre*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1993, cat. no. 252 (ill. 285, p. 320)





# AMEDEO MODIGLIANI

(1884–1920)

## L'Amazone, tête et haut de buste de trois quarts gauche, 1909

PENCIL ON GRID PAPER, FROM A NOTEBOOK  
20.8 × 13 CM  
STAMPED DR. PA, NUMBERED 4,24, UNSIGNED

Before 1914, Modigliani's drawings reveal a rare spontaneity, a freedom not yet reflected in his paintings. According to letters from Jean Alexandre, brother of Dr. Paul Alexandre, he would have his models pose as often as needed, undeterred by fatigue, and he would not hesitate to destroy any work that fell short of his inner vision. "With great difficulty I managed to stop him from [...] setting fire [to my portrait]", Jean recalled in a letter to his brother Paul on 26 March 1909. Painted portraits from this period are therefore rare, each completed with great care.

Modigliani's first official portrait commission came from the Alexandre family, prompted by Jean-Baptiste Alexandre in response to his son Paul's requests on behalf of his painter friend. This took place in late 1908 or early 1909. Around the same time, Jean Alexandre — whose own portrait Modigliani was preparing — asked the artist to portray one of his lovers, Baroness Marguerite de Hasse de Villers. A passionate admirer of cavalry, she chose to pose in an Amazon costume.

The preparatory drawings for the painting *L'Amazone* (The Amazon) reveal several phases in its development. First, Modigliani familiarized himself with the Baroness through two descriptive, "well-posed" drawings that emphasized her elegance, as is the case with the one presented here.<sup>1</sup> Next, enhanced with ink, he explored her character further — proud, stubborn, seductive — through a brilliant composition that was ultimately abandoned. Even at this early point, Modigliani began to accentuate the angularity of her face. In the final drawings, both pose and figure are fully resolved: the body upright, one hand on the hip, head slightly tilted, gaze directed downward.

A few hours before delivering the painting to its intended owner, in April 1909, Modigliani decided to make final re-

touches. To create a stronger contrast, he altered the color of the jacket — red or green according to different sources — to the hue seen today, one not traditionally worn by riders. Dissatisfied, the original buyer refused the canvas, which was ultimately acquired by Paul Alexandre.

After 1914, Modigliani increasingly painted with speed. Some works were executed in just a few hours, almost without preparation, directly on the canvas. This approach resulted in a notably larger output, while retaining the spontaneity, vivacity, and technical mastery already evident in the drawings collected and preserved by Paul Alexandre.

1. Noël Alexandre, *op. cit.* (below), pp. 413–414.

### PROVENANCE

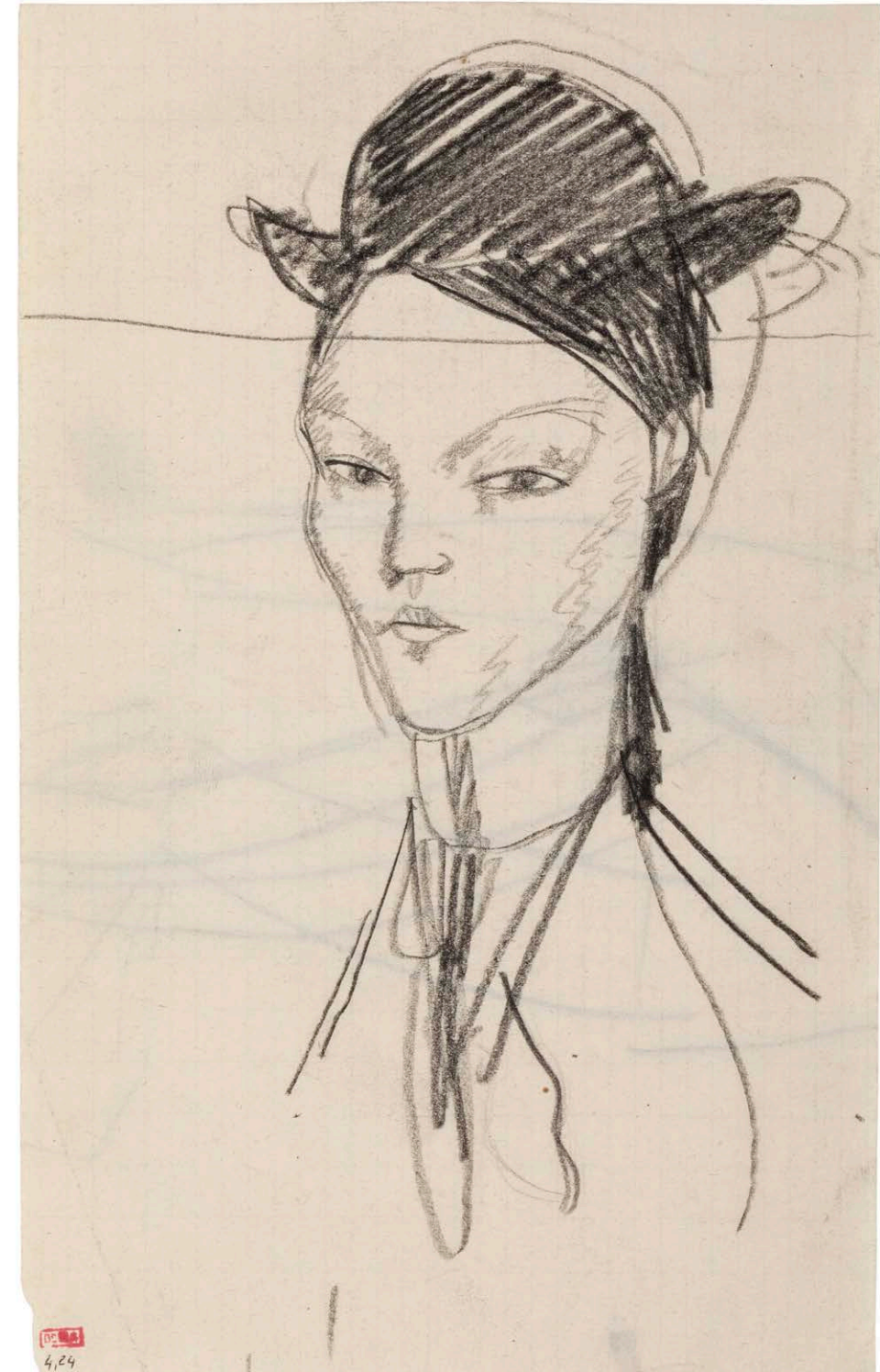
Dr Paul Alexandre, Paris (acquired directly from the artist); Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Venice, Palazzo Grassi – London, The Royal Academy of Arts – Cologne, Ludwig Museum – Bruges, Kunstcentrum St. Jan – Tokyo, The Ueno Royal Museum – Lisbon, Culturgest – Madrid, Museo Reina Sofia – Montreal, Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, *Modigliani inconnu. Dessins de la Collection Paul Alexandre*, travelling exhibition, 1993–96; New York, Jewish Museum, *Modigliani Unmasked*, 2017–18 (ill. p. 133)

### LITERATURE

Noël Alexandre (Preface by François Bergot), *Modigliani inconnu. Témoignages, documents et dessins inédits de l'ancienne collection de Paul Alexandre*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1993, cat. no. 338 (ill. 416, p. 425)





# AMEDEO MODIGLIANI

(1884–1920)

## Femme nue s'appuyant sur l'avant-bras gauche, c. 1910

PENCIL ON WOVE PAPER, FROM A NOTEBOOK  
43 × 26.7 CM  
STAMPED DR. PA, NUMBERED 86, UNSIGNED

This drawing predates the famous nudes that Modigliani would create a few years later, yet it already displays many of their characteristic features. It highlights the artist's inventive approach, showing how he reinterpreted the feminine ideal with his own unmistakable style.

In 1906–07, during his first year in Paris, Modigliani devoted himself intensively to life drawing at various academies. By 1908, his work began to take on a more Impressionistic quality, capturing scenes observed on the streets, in the circus, and at the cabaret. Around 1910, as he fully established his distinctive style, his drawing became closely intertwined with his painting and sculpture, laying the groundwork for his large reclining nudes, portraits of friends, collectors, models, and fellow artists, as well as terracotta and marble heads and caryatids.

In his work, nudes displayed Modigliani's greatest originality in composition, following in the footsteps of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, who freely experimented with cropping, bird's-eye or low-angle views, oblique perspectives, and distortions. *Femme nue s'appuyant sur l'avant-bras gauche* (Three-quarter nude woman, leaning on left forearm) embodies the defining features of Modigliani's major female nudes: almond-shaped eyes, exaggerated volumes, a sense of serenity and sensuality, and a pose entirely free from obscenity. One can still discern his admiration for Cézanne, whose major retrospective he attended in Paris in 1907. From Cubism, he retained a certain geometric rigor. Modigliani's sculptural practice and his interest in non-European art are also evident in the softly rendered, stylized face, structured around an elongated nose. This drawing further reflects a very specific aspect of Modigliani's explorations, seen in a 1911 study for a portrait of Paul Alexandre: the treatment of the arm's curve, rendered in the same delicate and precise manner.

When the collection of Dr. Paul Alexandre was made publicly accessible in 1993, it opened a new perspective on Modigliani's life and work. This nude, like other drawings

from the collection, confirms the prescient observations made by Jeanne Modigliani in 1958: "A glance, unfortunately brief, at Dr. Alexandre's collection convinced me that the usual chronological divisions transitional period marked by the influences of Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen, and Picasso; Cézanne period; sculpture inspired by African art and Brancusi; indecisive and contradictory resumption of painting; fluid and coherent production of the final years — are completely arbitrary. The few reliable biographical facts upset these schemes, and an unbiased examination of the works rather reveals the continuity, until his death, of certain parallel explorations."<sup>1</sup>

1. Jeanne Modigliani, "Modigliani sans légende" (first published in 1958), in *Amedeo Modigliani. 1884–1920*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1981, pp. 57–100: 75–76.

### PROVENANCE

Dr Paul Alexandre, Paris (acquired directly from the artist); Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Venice, Palazzo Grassi – London, The Royal Academy of Arts – Cologne, Ludwig Museum – Bruges, Kunstcentrum St. Jan – Tokyo, The Ueno Royal Museum – Lisbon, Culturgest – Madrid, Museo Reina Sofia – Montreal, Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, *Modigliani inconnu. Dessins de la Collection Paul Alexandre*, travelling exhibition, 1993–96; New York, Jewish Museum, *Modigliani Unmasked*, 2017–18 (ill. p. 67)

### LITERATURE

Noël Alexandre (Preface by François Bergot), *Modigliani inconnu. Témoignages, documents et dessins inédits de l'ancienne collection de Paul Alexandre*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1993, cat. no. 294 (ill. 368, p. 379)





# PIERRE-LOUIS FLOUQUET

(1900–1967)

## Féminités, c. 1923–25

OIL ON CANVAS  
125 × 87 CM  
SIGNED “FLOUQUET” (LOWER RIGHT)

Pierre-Louis Flouquet was born in Paris and moved with his family to Brussels in 1909. Although largely self-taught, he briefly studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, where he met artists such as Victor Servranckx and René Magritte. Flouquet and Magritte would later share a studio, a formative period during which Flouquet developed a pictorial language grounded in geometry and shaped by the intersecting influences of Cubism and Futurism.

In March 1920, Flouquet attended a lecture by the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg, founder of De Stijl. This encounter marked a turning point, as he gradually moved toward “Pure Abstraction”, a conviction shared by many young artists, including Victor Servranckx and Marcel-Louis Baugniat, as well as the poet Pierre Bourgeois and his brother Victor, an architect. Together, the Bourgeois brothers and Flouquet founded the magazine *7 Arts* in 1922, with the ambition of uniting art and society through modernism. One of its most prolific contributors, Flouquet wrote columns and exhibition reviews, while also organizing numerous events to promote the *7 Arts* artists. That same year, architect Victor Bourgeois commissioned him to design abstract stained-glass windows for a group of houses of the Cité Moderne in Berchem-Sainte-Agathe.

Throughout the 1920s, Flouquet exhibited widely on the international stage — in Paris, Madrid, New York, Chicago, Buenos Aires, and Berlin, where he showed at the Galerie Der Sturm. For the gallery’s eponymous magazine, he also designed numerous covers. During this period, Flouquet’s work evolved primarily through a series of themes, including “Paysage plastique”, “Féminités”, “Composition”, “Formes” and “Construction”.

Around 1928, Flouquet turned away from “Pure Abstraction” toward a more figurative art with quasi-Expressionist accents, depicting religious scenes as well as satirical portraits. This phase proved brief: he soon abandoned painting to focus on poetry, literature, and the promotion of mod-

ern architecture. In 1931, he founded *Le Journal des poètes* and, from 1932 onward, directed the magazines *Bâtir* and *La Maison*, the latter established after the Second World War and dedicated to urban planning, architecture, and the related arts and technologies.

The large painting *Féminités* (Feminities) belongs to the series of the same name, initiated in 1922, in which Flouquet explores geometric variations on the morphology of the female body. The rigor and refinement that characterize these anthropomorphic stylizations, as well as their carefully constructed spatial relationships, reveal the artist’s fascination with the formal perfection of the technological creations of the new century. As in Fernand Léger’s work, Flouquet’s confidence in mechanical forms does not lead to an absolute rejection of figuration, but rather to the pursuit of plastic correspondences between the human and the machine. The composition of *Féminités* is particularly harmonious, achieving a subtle balance between line and color, heightened by a marble-like background whose subtle vibration imparts a sense of warmth and vitality to the work.

### PROVENANCE

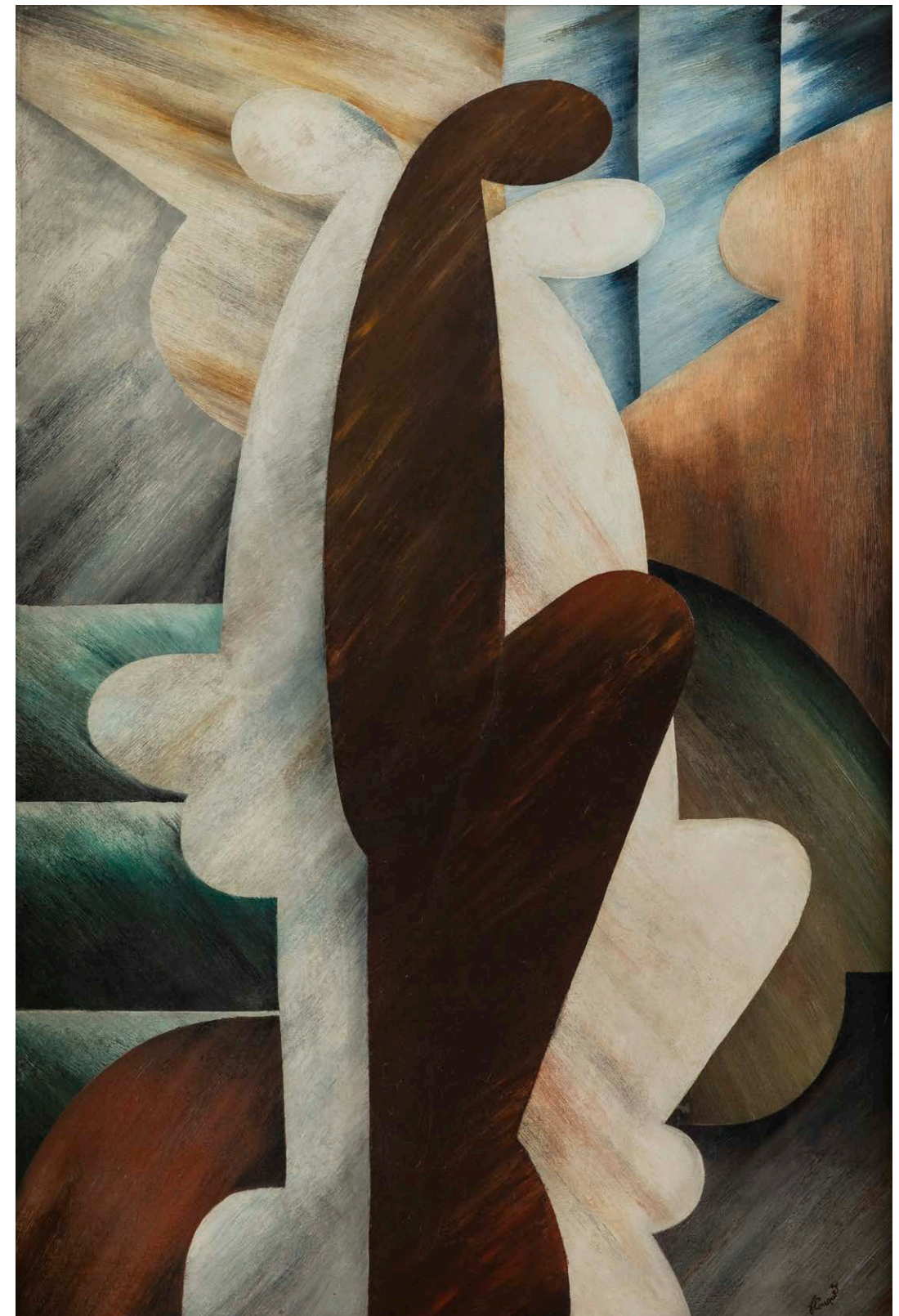
Galerie Patrick Derom, Brussels; Robert Van Droogenbroeck, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels (by descent to the present owner)

### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Galerie Patrick Derom, *The Avant-garde of the 1920s in Belgium*, 1992, cat. no. 12 (ill.); Droogenbos, FeliXart Museum, *L’Équerre / 7 Arts 1923*, scenographic reconstruction of the L’Équerre publishing house fair stand, 2008–11, no catalogue published

### LITERATURE

Serge Goyens de Heusch, *Pierre-Louis Flouquet. 1900–1967*, Brussels, Fondation pour l’Art belge, 1993 (ill. p. 56)





# VICTOR SERVVRANCKX

(1897–1965)

## Opus 68. Paysage de banlieue, 1923

OIL ON CANVAS  
39 × 69 CM  
SIGNED & DATED “1923 SERVVRANCKX” (LOWER RIGHT)

During the 1920s, Victor Servranckx developed a language of geometric abstraction. His fascination with mechanics and the factory, filtered through an artistic vision, extended far beyond the canvas and encompassed a fusion of disciplines. Servranckx exemplifies the versatility of the modern artist: painter, manifesto writer, wallpaper designer, architect, cabinetmaker, and more — demonstrating how the modernism of the 1920s genuinely permeated all aspects of daily life.

During the First World War, while studying at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, Servranckx met René Magritte, Karel Maes, and Pierre-Louis Flouquet. After completing his studies in 1917, he joined the Peters-Lacroix wallpaper factories as a designer, where his father headed the office.

In March 1920, the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg, founder of the De Stijl movement, gave a lecture in Brussels at the Centre d'Art du Coudenberg. The presentation proved revelatory for Servranckx and his circle, including the poet Pierre Bourgeois, his brother Victor, an architect, and the artist Marcel-Louis Baugniet. Inspired by the lecture, the Bourgeois brothers conceived a periodical aimed at promoting “modernist penetration”, which led to the launch of *7 Arts* in 1922, connecting art and society. Initially keeping his distance, Servranckx signed, in the same year, a short manuscript with Magritte entitled *L'Art pur. Défense de l'esthé-*

*tique*, which was never published. He soon became actively involved in the *7 Arts* group, participating in events such as the *Salon de La Lanterne Sourde* in 1923.

Servranckx then worked on numerous projects in Belgium and abroad, combining art, architecture, and applied arts, including the International Decorative Arts Exhibitions in Paris and Monza in 1925. The following year, Marcel Duchamp invited him to participate in an exhibition organized by the American artistic collective Société Anonyme, whose founders included Man Ray and Katherine Dreier. Around the same time, Servranckx began moving away from Constructivism, blending diverse styles and techniques, and combining abstraction with cosmic surrealism in biomorphic compositions.

The purest and most radical paintings of his oeuvre were primarily those produced before this stylistic shift. He nevertheless continued throughout his career to give his works neutral titles — “Opus”, followed simply by a number and a year — as if they were products of a new era, reinforcing their abstract nature. A true pioneer of “Pure Abstraction”, Servranckx developed, between 1922 and 1924, airy creations based exclusively on geometry, conceived as spiritual inventions intended to serve a collective art, accessible and understandable by all.

*Opus 68. Paysage de banlieue* (Opus 68. Suburban Landscape) — the subtitle was added later to distinguish it from

the rest of the “Opus” series — reflects mechanization intended to prevail over sentiment and contribute to a new world, or, in this case, to a renewed urban architecture. This theme was dear to the artist, who designed a Cubist house in Diegem in 1926. In doing so, Servranckx followed his ideal, as stated on 5 February 1925 in the periodical *7 Arts*: “Every aesthetic must serve. Art will situate itself at the very heart of life, without distorting any of its functions, simply illuminating them inwardly with its lyrical light, softly but tenaciously radiant.”

### PROVENANCE

Victor Servranckx, Brussels; Paul Servranckx, Brussels; Galerie Patrick Derom, Brussels; Robert Van Droogenbroeck, Brussels (acquired from the above in 1997); Private collection, Brussels (by descent to the present owner)

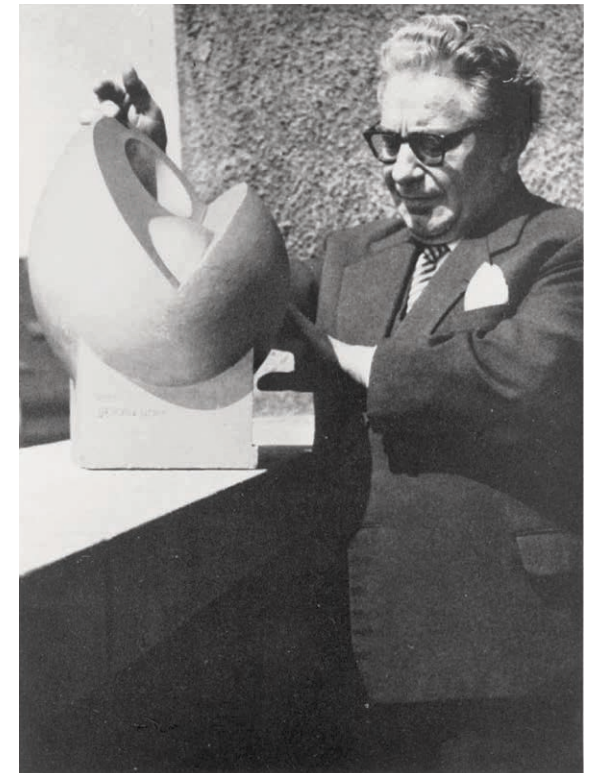
### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Galerie royale, *Exposition Victor Servranckx*, 1924, cat. no. 101; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, *Servranckx*, 1947, cat. no. 27 (“Paysage urbain”); Ixelles, Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles, *Servranckx*, 1965, cat. no. 79; Knokke-Het Zoute, Studio Prisma – Galerie Rivage, *Retrospectieve Servranckx*, 1967, cat. no. 27; Hasselt, Provinciaal Begijnhof, *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Victor Servranckx. 1897–1965*, 1970, cat. no. 34; Knokke-Heist, La Réserve, *Victor Servranckx (1897–1965)*, 1988, cat. no. 6; Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, *Victor Servranckx (1887–1965) et l'art abstrait / en de abstracte kunst*, 1989, cat. no. 69 (ill. p. 79); Brussels, Galerie Patrick Derom, *L'Avant-garde des années 20 en Belgique*, 1992, cat. no. 23 (ill.); Drogenbos, FeliXart Museum, *L'Équerre / 7 Arts 1923*, scenographic reconstruction of the L'Équerre publishing house fair stand, 2008–11, no catalogue published; Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, *Modernisme, Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa / Modernisme, l'art abstrait belge et l'Europe*, 2013, cat. no. 4.47 (ill. p. 101)

### LITERATURE

Michael Palmer, *Belgische kunst van Ensor tot Panamarenko*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2004 (ill. p. 177); Jos Gysbrechts, *Servranckx' Mysteries. Constructivist surrealist abstract belgian artist 1897–1965*, Kortenberg, Jos Gysbrechts, 2005 (ill. p. 19b)

*This work will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue raisonné of paintings and sculptures by Victor Servranckx, currently in preparation by Xavier Tricot.*



Victor Servranckx with his sculpture *Opus 1* (1922)





1923 SERVFRANCKX



# FELIX DE BOECK

(1898–1995)

## Naissance (recto), c.1927–28 Ecce Homo (verso), c.1924–25

OIL ON LAMINATED CARDBOARD PAPER  
69 × 57 CM  
UNSIGNED

After studying art history at the Université libre de Bruxelles as an auditor, Felix De Boeck began painting as a self-taught artist, first under the influence of Fauvism and later Expressionism. In the early 1920s, he discovered abstract painting and the independent power of color. He soon became associated with the “Pure Abstraction” movement in Brussels and Antwerp, while also forming ties with members of the avant-garde groups 7 Arts and Het Overzicht. As Pierre-Louis Flouquet noted, “light, sound, movement — everything he borrows from nature [...] seems suspended, frozen in the inner revelation of a moment of grace.”<sup>1</sup> In March 1927, De Boeck exhibited with the group L'Assaut at the Salle Le Fauconnier, where his series *Naissance* (Birth) was hailed as one of his finest achievements.

The series *Naissance*, also referred to as *Autour d'une naissance* (Around a Birth) by the French poet Henri Pichette, was initiated around 1926 and continued until about 1929. This cycle transposes into art the personal tragedies that marked the painter's life, notably the birth and premature death of his children. Over the course of a decade, De Boeck endured the loss of four children, while a fifth remained chronically ill.

At first, De Boeck depicted the moment of birth in light, luminous colors. The series gradually shifted toward darker tones. The artist combined colored circles to suggest the form of an infant's head — an image that evokes both the

act of birth and the pain of separation. From a formal standpoint, De Boeck here reconciles his aspirations from the “Pure Abstraction” period with a renewed interest in figuration.<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect of the work recalls the circular masks painted by Felix De Boeck as early as 1924 under the title *Ecce Homo*, a series in which a man, marked by suffering, embodies the full tragedy of the human condition. This approach arises from a process of remembrance, referring to his father, who died shortly after his mother.

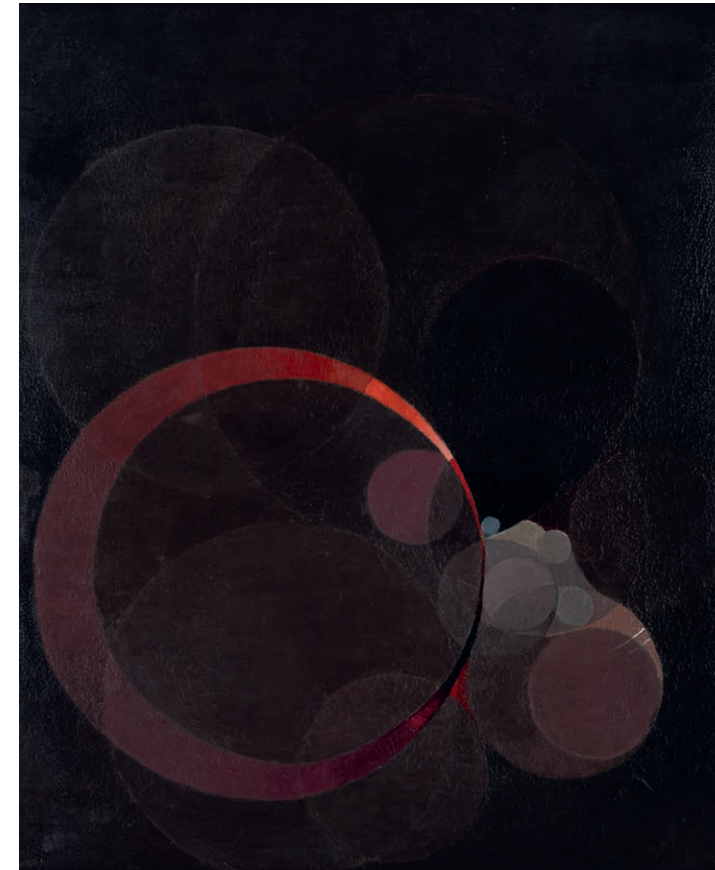
The works painted on both sides of the laminated cardboard display marked stylistic affinities, situating them within Felix De Boeck's transition from “Pure Abstraction” toward a renewed interest in figuration. Although *Naissance* was executed after *Ecce Homo*, it is considered the recto, in accordance with the artist's own intention.

1. 7 Arts, no. 9, 16 January 1927.

2. Sergio Servellón, “Felix De Boeck”, in *Grenoble 1927. A Panorama of Belgian Art*, exh. cat., Drogenbos, FeliXart Museum, 2012, p. 338.

### PROVENANCE

Josse Franssen, Brussels; Galerie Moderne, Brussels, 19 January 2010, lot 204 (triptych “Naissance. Abstraction linéaire”); Robert Van Droogenbroeck, Brussels; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)





# MARCEL LEMPEREUR-HAUT

(1898–1986)

## Composition, n.d.

PENCIL & RED, YELLOW, BLUE COLORED PENCIL ON PAPER  
14.5 × 8.8 CM  
MONOGRAMMED "LH" (LOWER RIGHT)

Born in Liège, where he studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Marcel Lempereur-Haut was one of the founders of the Groupe Moderne d'Art et de Littérature de Liège and of the review *Anthologie* in 1921.

Lempereur-Haut worked exclusively with pencil and oil paint. As early as 1921, he had already reduced his palette almost entirely to the three primary colors — red, yellow and blue — enhanced only by black and white. This disciplined chromatic vocabulary reflects his early engagement with avant-garde theory.

Around 1923, he settled in Lille, where he collaborated with the journal *Vouloir*, published between 1924 and 1927. The ambition of this periodical was to offer a platform to regional artists while introducing international avant-garde movements. In 1925, its artistic director, Félix Del Marle, translated into French Vassily Kandinsky's seminal text *Du spirituel dans l'art et dans la peinture en particulier*. First published in German in 1911, Kandinsky's book assigns both physical and psychological qualities to color. Across several pages, he analyses the effects of primary colors on the viewer and their respective vibrations. *Vouloir* also showed a keen interest in Dutch Neoplasticism, developed by Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg, who contributed

an article in 1926 stating that "color has no form in itself. Color is a constructive element in painting".

Marcel Lempereur-Haut was undoubtedly receptive to these various theories. Yet, unlike Kandinsky, he did not approach his art from a spiritual perspective, nor did he follow the strict rules of Mondrian and Van Doesburg. His works are meticulously constructed compositions, aiming to reveal the timeless beauty of geometry. Through his use of black, grey, and colored pencil, he evokes a powdery, dreamlike atmosphere, with subtle plays of shadow and nuanced hints of primary colors. He produced a substantial body of abstract, idiosyncratic works that drew inspiration from the international avant-garde while remaining freely on its periphery.<sup>1</sup>

1. Laura Kollwelter, "Marcel Lempereur-Haut", in *Be.paper. Exploration et innovation dans l'art sur papier (1918–1950)*, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 2025, pp. 108–109.

### PROVENANCE

Mercier & Cie Art, Lille, 26 October 2024, lot 167





# RENÉ GUIETTE

(1893–1976)

## Danseurs, c. 1939

SHEET-IRON SCULPTURE ON A WOODEN BASE  
35 × 30 CM  
UNSIGNED

René Guiette, born in Antwerp, was the son of the luminist painter Jules Guiette (1852–1901) and the brother of the poet Robert Guiette (1895–1976). During the First World War, he produced a series of portraits while cultivating a profound fascination with Eastern civilizations, philosophies, and esoteric thought. After the Armistice, he pursued a career as a self-taught painter, guided by an independent and inquisitive spirit. Guiette spent extended periods in Paris, where he developed close ties with literary figures such as Blaise Cendrars and Max Jacob, the latter observing: "It is indeed rare that plastic invention should unite with such qualities of heart and spirit on the canvas..."<sup>1</sup>

In November 1925, René Guiette commissioned Le Corbusier to design a house for him, modeled on the Paris residence of the painter Amédée Ozenfant. Constructed in 1926 at 32 Avenue des Peupliers in Antwerp, this house-studio — the only building by Le Corbusier in Belgium — would leave a lasting imprint on Guiette's exploration of pictorial space.

During this period, Guiette entered into a contract with the Galerie Le Centaure, which represented, among others, leading Expressionist and Surrealist artists. From 1932 onward, he also turned to photography, capturing reportage and intimate scenes while exploring plastic and expressive experiments, some of which would later inform his paintings.

In October 1948, Guiette joined the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, founded by Jean Dubuffet. From that point on, matter became a central element in his work, serving to reveal the subject in a primitive form. His art moved toward an informal style, and the sign gradually took on a calligraphic quality, reflecting the influence of Zen philosophy through the 1960s and beyond.

Another significant phase in Guiette's oeuvre, leading to his sculptural work, was marked by a curvilinear figuration reminiscent of Picasso. For roughly fifteen years, he pursued his pictorial explorations alongside Picasso's evolving styles, adapting them to the demands of his own artistic vision. It was during this period, in 1939, that Guiette created two sculptures — the only ones in his entire body of work.

The first, a plaster work titled *Le Baiser*, demonstrates a formal mastery that evokes both Picasso and André Derain, combining a neo-primitivist style both delicate and raw. The second sculpture in his oeuvre, *Danseurs* (Dancers), recalls the work of Julio González, widely regarded as the inventor of modern iron sculpture. *Danseurs* continues Guiette's exploration of the fusion between solid and void, synthesizing abstract geometry with three-dimensional figuration, and treating space as an integral element of the plastic process. The work illustrates how, in the tradition of Picasso and González, Guiette conceived sculpture as a form of drawing in space.

1. Max Jacob, *René Guiette*, exh. cat., Antwerp, Salle Renis, 1924.

### PROVENANCE

Private collection, Belgium

### EXHIBITIONS

Brussels, Galerie M.M.H., *Le Corbusier-Guiette*, 1987

### LITERATURE

Manuela de Kerchove d'Ousselghem & Serge Goyens de Heusch, *René Guiette*, Antwerp, Fonds Mercator, 1991, CR 270 (ill. pp. 75 & 221)





# JAMES ENSOR

(1860–1949)

## Rendez notre ancienne face fors les chers faux nez burlesques, c.1923

PENCIL ON PAPER  
21.5 × 14 CM  
SIGNED "ENSOR" (LOWER CENTER)

At the beginning of the 1920s, James Ensor, then over sixty, was an artist recognized not only by official institutions and his peers, but also by the new postwar generation, who identified with both his art and his attitude. As early as 1918, the young Antwerp Dadaist Paul Van Ostaijen had dedicated a poem to Ensor in his collection *Het Sienjaal*. By that time, Ensor was no longer solely a painter: he had also established himself as an author, with the publication of his writings by Éditions Sélection in 1921, and as a composer. The previous year had seen the premiere of his ballet-pantomime *La Gamme d'amour*, confirming the Ostend master as a true polymath, whose iconoclastic personality and oeuvre were defined by irreverence.

It is therefore unsurprising that the young poet Paul Vanderborght (1899–1971) felt a particular affinity for the multifaceted Ensor. Together with his friend, the writer Pierre Bourgeois, Vanderborght founded the journal and artistic circle *La Lanterne sourde* at the Université libre de Bruxelles in November 1921. Their aim was to rejuvenate the cultural life of a country scarred by war, while opening the Belgian artistic scene to the emerging modern spirit embodied by the new avant-gardes. Initially praised by figures such as André Gide, the small review soon evolved into a movement characterized by cultural and humanist openness, and a unifying dynamic that was simultaneously apolitical and utopian.

Although the journal itself was short-lived, its forum welcomed an impressive array of figures from the worlds of art, literature, and music, including Erik Satie, Le Corbusier, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Stefan Zweig, Georges Bernanos, Jules Romains, Blaise Cendrars, and Paul Valéry — and among the Belgians, E.L.T. Mesens, Paul Neuhuys, André Baillon, Géo Norge, August Vermeylen, and James Ensor.

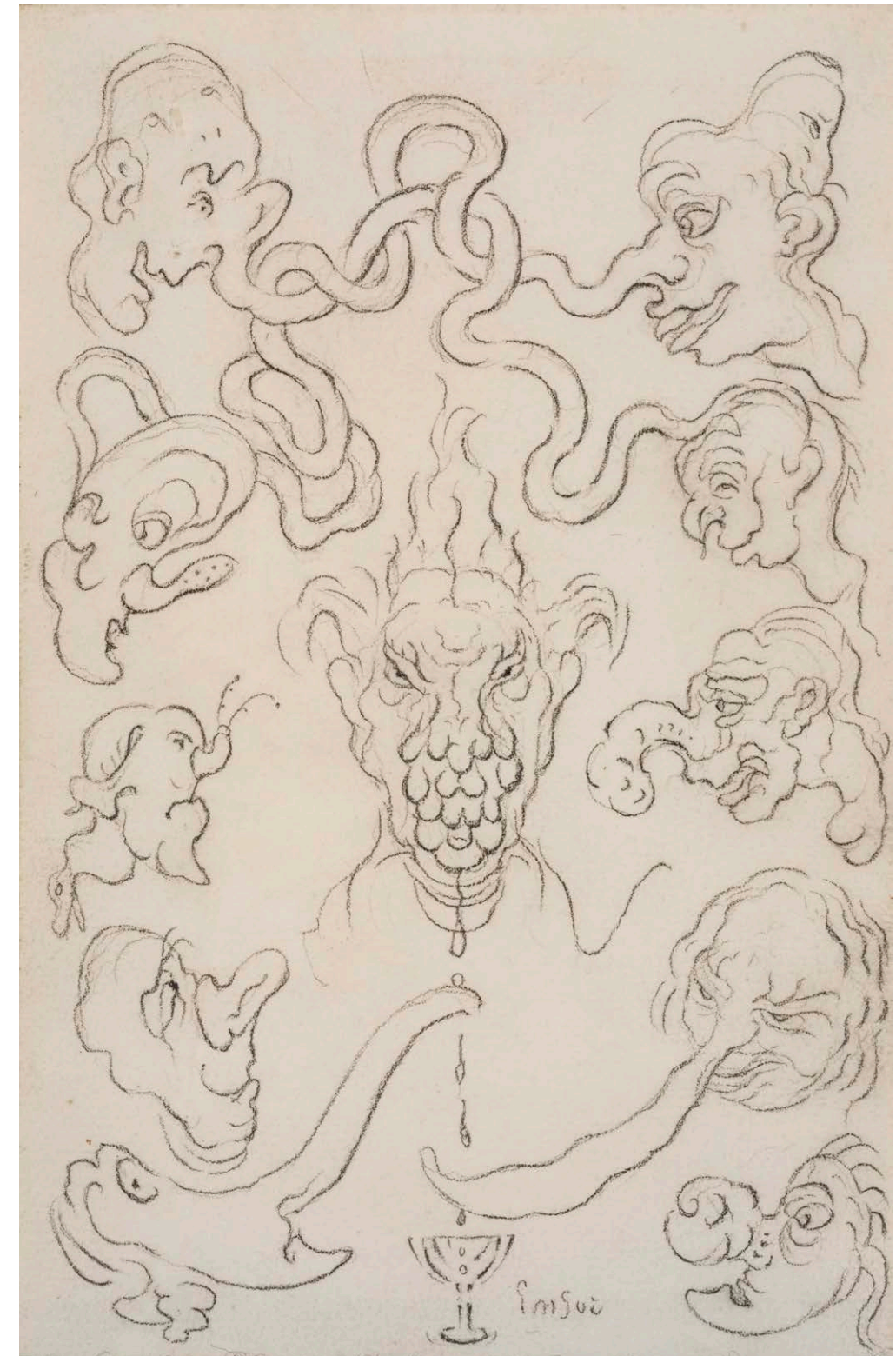
Paul Vanderborght had by then become close to Ensor, and in 1923 he naturally asked him to create the frontispiece for his poetry collection *Images du Rallye*.<sup>1</sup> *Rendez notre ancienne face fors les chers faux nez burlesques* (Restore Our Former Face, Except for the Beloved Burlesque False Noses) is the original drawing made for this edition. Its technique and composition testify to Ensor's virtuosity in works on paper — a medium he had placed at the very heart of his artistic practice from the outset.

*Rendez notre ancienne face fors les chers faux nez burlesques* stands among Ensor's most subversive works on paper, bordering on eroticism when considering some of his later drawings, in which the nose appears as a phallic substitute. The title's reference to Old French also evokes Rabelais's outrageous universe, where the nose recurs as both a literary and visual motif, representing both humanism and the grotesque. Ensor here creates a drawing of an almost surreal character, which can be seen as a precursor to Magritte's "Période vache" since he was aware of these excessive, carnival like works.

1. Paul Vanderborght, *Images du Rallye. Petite prose en trois chants commentée par un dessin original de James Ensor*, Brussels, Éditions du Rallye, 1923.

### PROVENANCE

Paul Vanderborght, Belgium; Private collection, Belgium (by descent to the present owner)





# JAMES ENSOR

(1860-1949)

## Avenue de la Chasse, Bruxelles, c.1938

COLORED PENCIL ON PAPER  
20 × 14 CM  
SIGNED "ENSOR" (LOWER LEFT)

### PROVENANCE

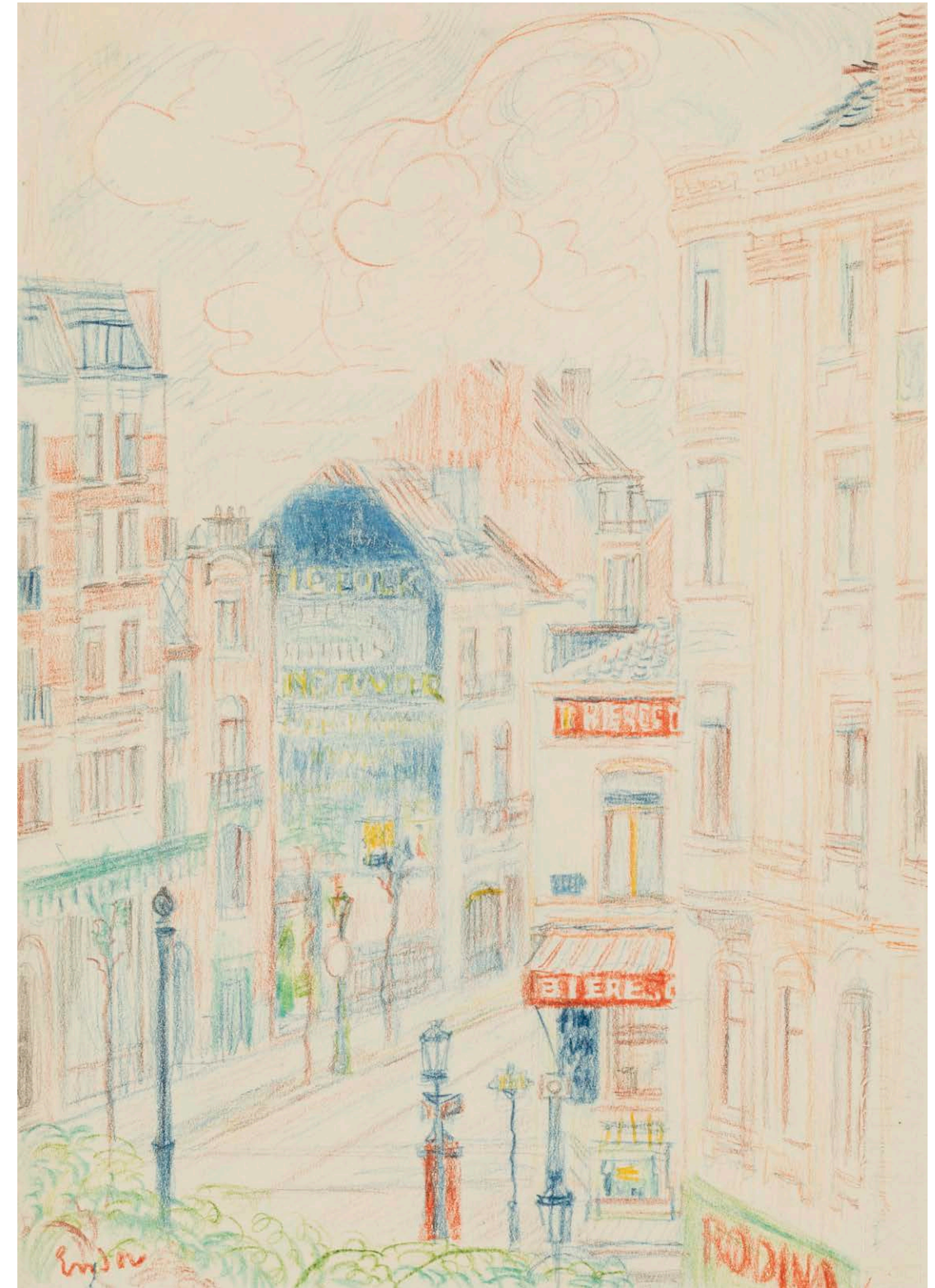
Augusta Boogaerts, Brussels; Claes-Boogaerts, Brussels; Private collection, Brussels; Ronny Van de Velde, Knokke-Het Zoute; Private collection, Mazenzele

### EXHIBITIONS

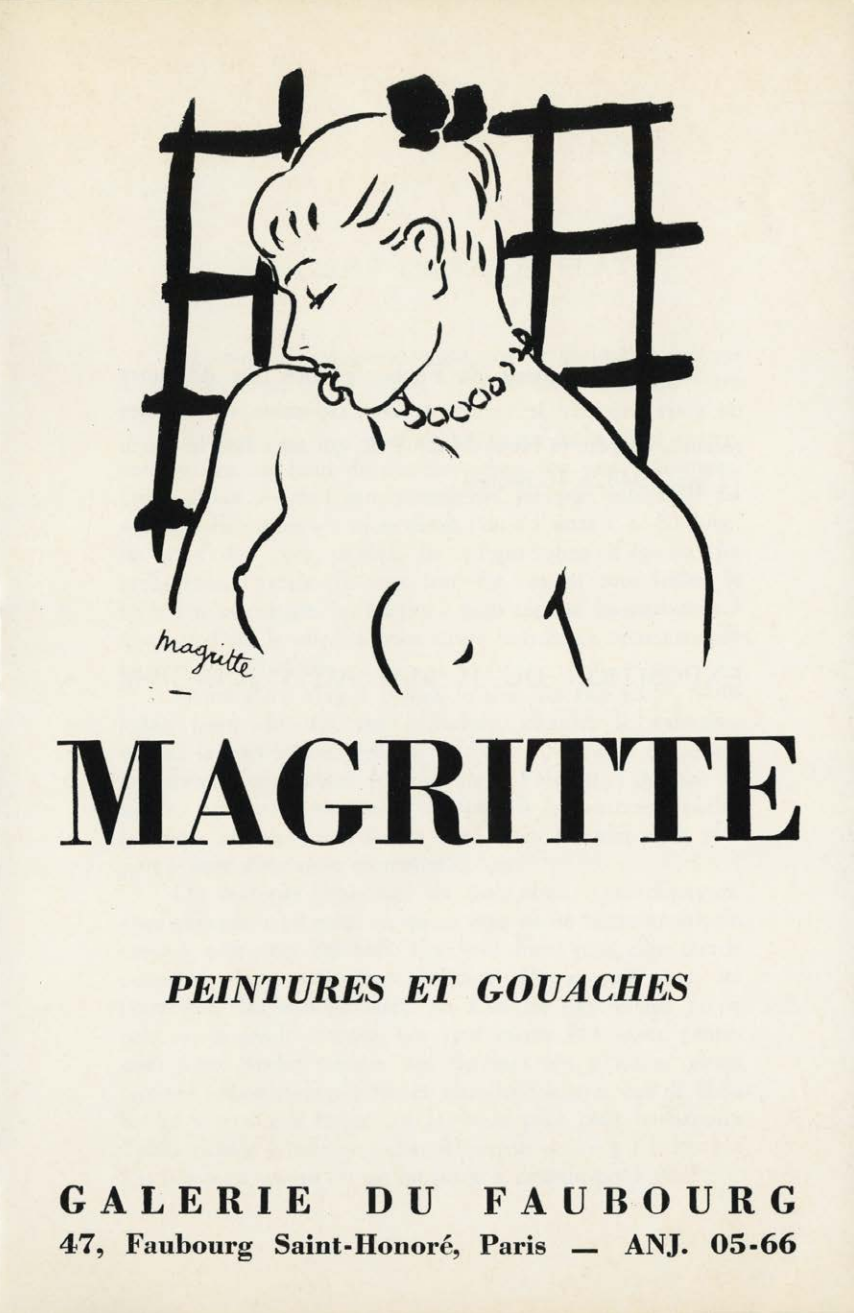
Knokke-Het Zoute, Galerie Ronny Van de Velde, *James Ensor. Fragmenten en echo's. Tekeningen 1873-1885*, 2017-18, without cat. no. (ill. p. 143)

### LITERATURE

Paul Haesaerts (Preface by Jean Cassou), *James Ensor*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1959, cat. no. 86 (ill. 474, p. 311)







Cover of the Magritte exhibition catalogue, Galerie du Faubourg, Paris, 1948

# RENÉ MAGRITTE

(1898-1967)

## Le Prince charmant, 1948

GOUACHE ON PAPER  
37 × 46 CM  
SIGNED “MAGRITTE” (LOWER LEFT)

In 1948, Magritte held his first solo exhibition in Paris, at the Galerie du Faubourg. The year was marked by tension: his relationship with André Breton had deteriorated, as Breton firmly rejected Magritte's recent shift toward a more impressionist interpretation of Surrealism. Magritte also turned fifty that year, at a moment when financial stability was still far from assured. Recognition from many of his Parisian peers remained minimal. These circumstances left Magritte profoundly resentful.

In March-April 1948, in just a few weeks, Magritte created seventeen paintings — two of which were ultimately left out of the exhibition catalogue — as well as ten gouaches for the Paris show. For what would come to be known as the “Période vache”, Magritte relied on the close complicity of his lifelong friends Louis Scutenaire and Irène Hamoir. The new works he produced are inseparable from Scutenaire's preface, “Les Pieds dans le plat”.

Magritte alternated freely between gouache and oil, creating no visual distinction across the two media. He revisited earlier themes and redirected them through bold brushwork and deliberate distortions. The jubilation of the “Période vache” was short-lived. André Breton and his circle detested these works, and the press largely ignored them. Magritte found himself standing alone against a united front of critics, intellectuals, collectors, and dealers. Even Paul Éluard — long close to the painter — wrote in the exhibition guestbook: “Rira bien qui rira le dernier”.

Magritte created two “vache” versions of *Le Prince charmant*, playful and vividly colored reinterpretations of his 1947–48 gouache of the same name. One belonged to Louis

Scutenaire and is now held by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium; the other is the one we are presenting here. Both “vache” versions adopt a deliberately fauvist style, with bold yellows and reds and energetic brushstrokes bringing the veiled bird to life. Crowning the bird's head is a tiny fairy-tale castle, further blending the whimsical and the absurd. The image brims with irony, fusing the Prince — embodied by the bird — and the castle into a single, inseparable entity. The veil that the Prince wears also hints at the Princess, adding yet another twist. In this way, Magritte crafts a humorous, imaginative image that tells an entire story in a single frame.

The “Période vache” faced such harsh criticism in 1948 that most of these paintings were never exhibited again, many ending up in the private collection of Louis Scutenaire and Irène Hamoir, while Magritte returned to his 1930s style. It was not until 1981 that these works resurfaced at the *West-kunst* exhibition curated by László Glozer and Kasper König in Cologne. The exhibition aimed to challenge the dominance of Western art while highlighting artistic tendencies that resisted prevailing trends, with the “Période vache” serving as a prime example. The contemporary section featured artists such as David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Jenny Holzer, Roberto Longo, and Franz West, all of whom were fascinated by the rediscovery of the “Période vache”, as well as Martin Kippenberger, whose works echo the anarchic freedom of Magritte in 1948. Since then, this non-conformist style has influenced the contemporary art scene, from German Neo-Expressionism to today's artists, including Sean Landers, Emily Mae Smith, and Hélène Delprat.



#### PROVENANCE

Willy van Hove-Cuche, Brussels; Private collection; Galerie Motte, Geneva, 7 December 1973, lot 30; Margaret Krebs, Brussels; Christie's London, 27 June 1978, lot 145; Sotheby's London, 6 February 2001, lot 157; Beaux-Arts Auction, Brussels, 26 April 2005, lot 51; Private collection, Belgium

#### EXHIBITIONS

Paris, Galerie du Faubourg, *Magritte. Peintures et gouaches*, 1948, cat. no. 24 (or CR 1260); Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, *René Magritte: het mysterie van de werkelijkheid*, 1967, cat. no. 97 (ill. p. 223); Stockholm, Moderna Museet, *René Magritte*, 1967, cat. no. 50; Paris, Fondation Dina Vierny – Musée Maillol, *Magritte tout en papier*, 2006, without cat. no. (ill. p. 160); Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, *Voici Magritte. Gouaches, collages, tekeningen, studies, schilderijen*, 2006, without cat. no. (ill. p. 160); Paris, Centre Pompidou – Musée national d'Art moderne, *Magritte. La Trahison des Images*, 2016–17, without cat. no. (ill. p. 152); Skärhamn, Nordiska Akvarellmuseet, *Magritte. A Lab of Ideas. Works on paper*, 2022, without cat. no. (ill. p. 135)

#### LITERATURE

*René Magritte. Peintures et gouaches*, Antwerp, Ronny Van de Velde, 1994 (ill. n. p.); David Sylvester (Ed.), *René Magritte – Catalogue raisonné. IV: Gouaches, Temperas, Watercolours and Papiers Collés 1918–1967*, Menil-Foundation / Fonds Mercator, 1994, CR 1261 (ill. p. 102); Esther Schlicht & Max Hollein (Ed.), *René Magritte 1948. La période vache*, Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, 2008–09 (ill. p. 45)





# JOAN MIRÓ

(1893–1983)

## Composition, 1945

WATERCOLOR & CHINA INK ON UNSTRETCHED, FRAYED LINEN  
24.1 × 20 CM  
SIGNED & DATED “MIRÓ 1945” (ON THE REVERSE)

In 1938, as the Spanish Civil War intensified, Joan Miró left Barcelona with his wife and daughter, seeking refuge in Paris. The following year, he moved to the “Clos des Sansonnets” in Varengeville-sur-Mer, Normandy, where he met the writer Raymond Queneau and the painter Georges Braque. During the “Phoney War”, Miró withdrew into solitude, devoting himself entirely to painting. In silence and meditation, he embarked on works that required intense concentration. On 21 January 1940, he began the *Constellations* series, which established a new expressive tension and clarified the contradictions inherent in his earlier paintings.

After being displaced once again by Nazi air raids in May 1940, the Mirós settled in Mallorca. There, Miró pursued a four-year odyssey during which he explored a variety of forms, signs, and symbols using gouache, pastel, watercolor, and pencil, prompted by the scarcity and high cost of canvas and the absence of a permanent studio. The early 1940s proved to be a highly productive period, during which he created hundreds of drawings, confronting the perennial horrors of war that haunted him in the two countries he called home.

Finally settled in Barcelona, Miró returned to oil painting with a renewed spirit, demonstrating remarkable ease and productivity. In 1945, he began working on irregularly shaped pieces of unprimed canvas, characterized by uneven textures and frayed edges. Comprising around forty works, this group is notable for its heightened spontaneity, free-

dom, and fluidity of execution — qualities encouraged by the absence of the easel. The pieces display lively animation, a profusion of figures and signs, and a ferocious humor. This phase led directly to the celebrated large canvases of 1945, which secured Miró’s broad international recognition.

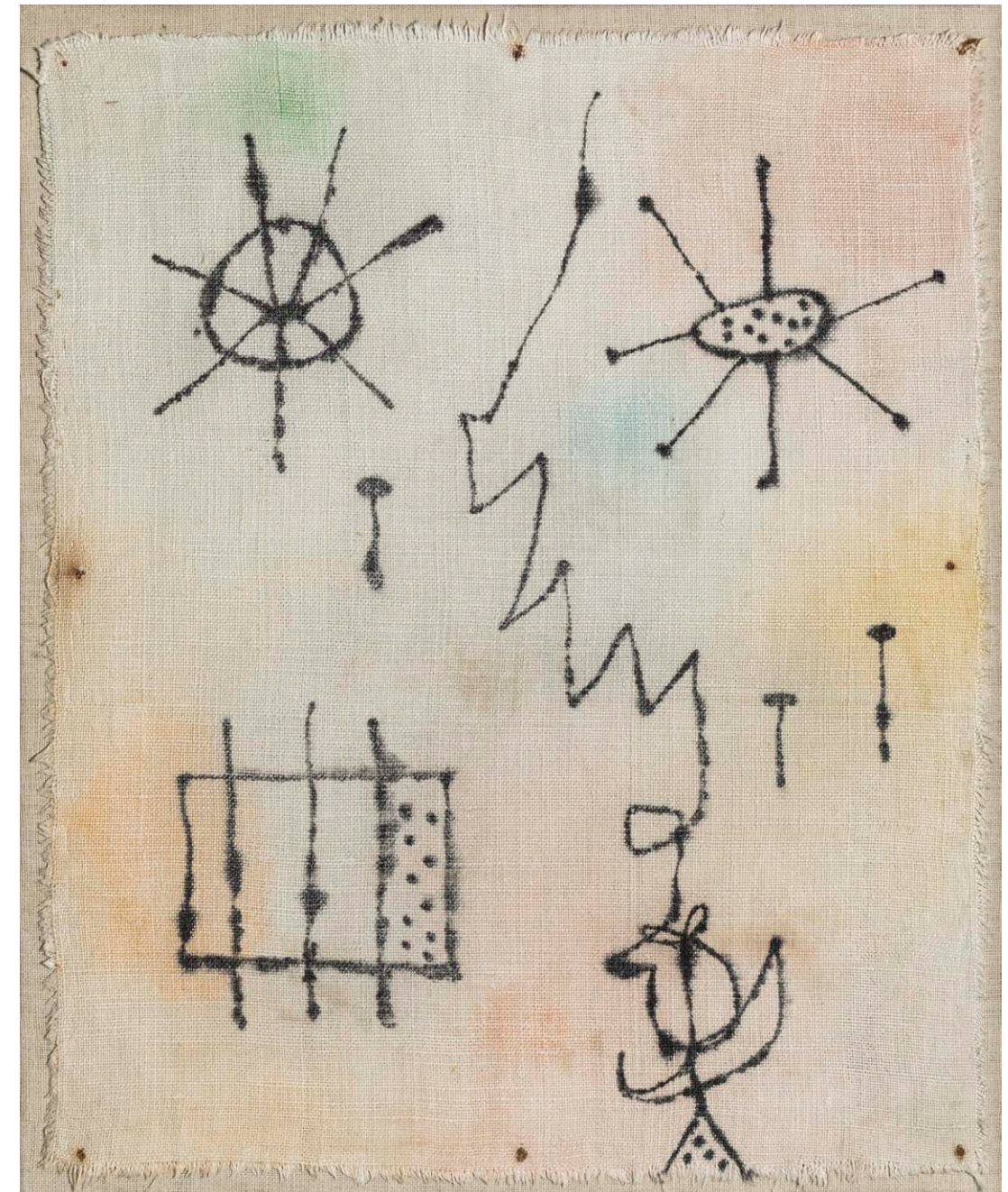
The 1945 *Composition*, executed on frayed linen, dates from this prolific period in Miró’s work, when forms and signs intertwine with an elegant simplicity to create a piece that is both abstract and figurative. Subtle colors cover a lightly mottled background, contributing to the composition sketched in China ink. The work also boasts a distinguished provenance, having been promoted by Pierre Loeb (1897–1964), the historic Surrealist dealer who first exhibited Miró in 1925 at the Galerie Pierre, initiating a relationship that lasted over forty years.

### PROVENANCE

Galerie Pierre, Paris; Zumsteg Collection, Zurich; Christie’s Zurich, 27 June 2006, lot 34; J&P Fine Art, Zurich; Private Collection, Belgium

### LITERATURE

Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, Paris, Flammarion, 1961, cat. no. 677 (ill. p. 535); Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1962, cat. no. 677 (ill. p. 551); Jacques Dupin & Ariane Lelong-Mainaud, *Joan Miró. Catalogue raisonné. Paintings III: 1942–1955*, Paris, Daniel Lelong Éditeur & Successió Miró, 1999, cat. no. 777 (ill. p. 94)





# LUCIO FONTANA

(1899-1968)

## Concetto Spaziale – Natura, 1967

POLISHED BRASS

27 × 22 × 22 CM (EACH)

INCISED “L. FONTANA” ON THE REVERSE; NUMBERED 317/500 ON THE UNDERSIDE (EACH)

Lucio Fontana redefined — and in many ways revolutionized — the art world. He ranks among the most influential post-war artists, active at a moment when advances in science, technology, quantum physics and space exploration were profoundly reshaping everyday life as well as artistic creation. These giant leaps stirred Fontana's imagination and fueled his desire to create an art that would fully reflect the spirit of his time.

Although born in Argentina at the turn of the century, Fontana ultimately established himself in Italy, which became his artistic and personal home. In 1946, he published his first manifesto, the *Manifesto Blanco*, where he articulated his vision for a new medium — an additional dimension that would bring together architecture, painting and sculpture. This text laid the foundations of Spazialismo, a movement aimed at breaking through the traditional two-dimensional picture plane. With a gesture that was both simple and monumental, Fontana opened a space inviting the viewer to confront — and even embrace — the infinite darkness beyond.

Initially trained as a sculptor, Fontana rejected the traditional uses and purposes of artistic materials. He sought a new, deeper meaning that could respond to the possibilities opened up by changing times, technological progress and the principles of science. His aim was to create an art more closely aligned with the needs of a new human spirit — works that would transcend the conventional boundaries between painting and sculpture, between abstraction and

realism. With the invention of his dramatically executed *buchi* (holes), soon followed by the *tagli* (cuts), he broke through all the limitations associated with traditional art-making, shaping what would become the quintessential expression of Lucio Fontana's artistic vision.

“My discovery was the hole, and that's all. I would be happy to go to the grave after such a discovery”, Lucio Fontana declared in an interview in 1968. The previous year, he created the spherical *Concetto Spaziale – Natura* sculptures, produced in a limited edition of 500 each and cast by Berrocal in Verona, Italy. These works belong to the *Natura* series, which had emerged in the late 1950s, when Fontana developed terracotta and bronze sculptures inspired by cosmic imagination and the emerging ideas of space travel. The meticulously crafted spheres are coated with a smooth, golden patina that retains a striking tactile presence. Originally conceived in pairs — one sphere bearing a cut, the other two holes — they invite us to peer into the inner core of these overwhelmingly elegant forms.

### PROVENANCE

John Robert, Brussels; Private Collection, Brussels (by descent to the present owner)

*This work is accompanied by two original certificates issued by Atelier Lucio Fontana, Milan.*





CHAPTER 5  
BRAFA ART FAIR 2026

From Khnopff to Magritte  
A selection of 19th- and 20th-century avant-garde artworks

25 January – 1 February 2026

TEXTS & RESEARCH  
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Front cover: Pierre-Louis Flouquet, *Féminités* (detail), 1923–25  
Back cover: Paul Delvaux, *Portrait de femme* (detail), 1932

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