



**Floris Jespers (Borgerhout (Antwerp), 1889 – Antwerp, 1965)**

***Seated Nude, 1916***

Watercolor and gouache on paper, 100 x 100 cm (unframed)

Signed and dated lower right

Exhibition :

*100 jaar Campo, Antwerp, Campo-Campo, 1997*

(label on the back)

Painted in 1916, this large female nude seated in an interior bears majestic and fresh witness to Floris Jaspers' Fauvist period, even though he was influenced by the work of Rik Wouters, whom he discovered in 1914.

Floris Jaspers (Borgerhout (Antwerp), 1889 – Antwerp, 1965)



An important figure of the Antwerp avant-garde, Floris Jaspers, unlike his father, Emiel (1862-1918), and his brother, Oscar (1887-1979), was not a sculptor, except on rare occasions, but a painter. He trained at the Antwerp Academy (1900-1909), then at the Antwerp Higher Institute of Fine Arts (1909-1914), where he was a student of landscape painter Franz Courtens (1854-1943), who inspired his first landscapes and seascapes. At the same time, he studied music, which allowed him, in the company of his brother, to earn a living as a cellist in theaters and music halls in Antwerp.

Two artists marked the beginnings of Floris Jaspers. The first, Rik Wouters (1882-1916), whose work he discovered in 1914 at the exhibition of *L'Art contemporain / Kunst van Heden* (Contemporary Art), inspired his first Fauvist period until 1918. The second, poet and critic Paul Van Ostaijen (1896-1928), encouraged him until his death by dedicating several articles to him or by commissioning illustrations for his works. But Van Ostaijen above all introduced him to the international artistic avant-gardes. It was also around Van Ostaijen that, from 1917 on, a group of Antwerp artists came together: the Jaspers brothers, painter Paul Joosten (1889-1960) and designer Jos Léonard (1892-1957) formed the first Belgian modernist circle : *De bond zonder gezegeld papier* (The federation without stamped paper). In a desire for fusion and experimentation, Floris Jaspers explored at the beginning of the 1920s the possibilities offered by Cubism, Abstraction, Constructivism and Expressionism which he claimed to be a part of (he also used themes close to the painters of the Second School of Laethem-Saint-Martin). Following the example of German painter Heinrich Campendonk (1889-1957), whom Van

Ostaijen introduced to him, in 1923, Jaspers began to paint églomisés<sup>1</sup>, a technique that would run throughout his career, with the figure of the Harlequin as a recurring motif. Floris Jaspers also participated in the activities of various Belgian avant-garde magazines and circles (*Le Centaure*, *Sélection*) and maintained links with European modernist circles. In the years following the First World War, Floris Jaspers found himself at the heart of the Belgian and international avant-garde.

In the 1930s, Floris Jaspers' art calmed down. He then painted landscapes, seascapes and portraits. He also participated in the revival of monumental art with his tapestry cartoons for the universal exhibitions in Paris (1937) and New York (1938). He was then influenced by the art of Picasso at the end of the 1940s, while the 1950s were marked by his enthusiasm for Congo, which he discovered during three stays between 1951 and 1957. He then painted numerous friezes of stylized African women, which reached their peak with a 40-meter wall frieze for the Congo pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Brussels in 1958.

### Seated Nude

In an interior with walls covered in floral striped wallpaper and equally floral curtains, a young woman has just placed her clothes on a chair in the foreground. She sits naked in profile on a white drape. She looks at herself in a mirror while a ceramic pitcher in her basin evokes her washing. The moment is particularly intimate.

This kind of intimate scene is typical of the Fauvist aesthetic and more particularly of the work of Rik Wouters (1882 - 1916) who represented the intimacy of his companion Nel in numerous works (fig.1). For his part, Floris Jaspers would have his companion, Olympe, pose<sup>2</sup>. It should also be noted that the mirror appears several times in Wouters' work as an element allowing the elements to tumble down for decorative purposes (fig.2). The scene therefore testifies to Jaspers' admiration for Wouters, whose work he discovered in 1914 in Antwerp at *L'Art contemporain*

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<sup>1</sup> This popular traditional technique was rediscovered in Murnau by Munich expressionist artists (Münter, Jawlensky, Kandinsky).

<sup>2</sup> After : DE BUYCK (Jean), SCHOETERS (Geertrui), p.68.

exhibition (Kunst van Heden)<sup>3</sup>. The war period would henceforth be for Jaspers that of Fauvism, like a carefree and colorful counter-effect of the war.

The aesthetic of this nude painted in watercolor and gouache also masterfully demonstrates Wouters' great influence on the young Floris Jaspers. With a free and light touch, sometimes short and repetitive, sometimes long and sinuous, Jaspers constructs a particularly decorative work. Like Wouters, he uses the white of the paper, here a beige, which gives a colorful unity to the work. It is also this color that serves as a basis for the young woman's complexion. Brought by the gouache, the white, luminous by nature and all the more in contrast with the color of the paper, is very present in the work and particularly around the nude that it highlights. Like Wouters, Jaspers uses the primary colors red-green and blue-yellow in opposition to reinforce their colorful strength. It is through this touch and this color, and not through drawing, that Jaspers, like Wouters, constructs his work. This manner, coupled with a composition cutting several elements by the frame, gives the work a particularly decorative aspect that moves away from reality in certain places. One clearly feels that the artist sought the decorative, the joy of the touch and the color. It can also be noted that, as is often the case with the Fauvists (fig. 3), Jaspers used the motif of the wallpaper, the curtains or the jug as so many additional decorative elements. The repetition of these elements opposed to more blank areas contributes to the rhythm of the work.

Floris Jaspers's corpus contains few similar scenes, which testifies to the importance of this nude. It can particularly be compared with another, much smaller watercolor (45.5 x 56.7 cm), painted the previous year, in 1915 (fig. 4). Here too, Jaspers shows himself indebted to the work of Rick Wouters both in theme and aesthetics. It is interesting to note that in this last watercolor, Jaspers is close to Wouters' watercolor and ink work, while in this nude, although done in gouache and watercolor, Jaspers shows himself to be closer to Wouters' oil on canvas paintings in the density of his brushstrokes.

During his Fauvist period, Floris Jaspers produced a few nudes, but above all still lifes and portraits in interiors, as well as a few landscapes (fig. 5). Jaspers later moved away from the

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<sup>3</sup> The exhibition included works by Van Gogh, among others.

Fauvist aesthetic, but the theme of the nude would return several times in his work, this time transformed by the contributions of Cubism (fig. 6).

This large nude was exhibited in 1997 in Antwerp during the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Campo gallery<sup>4</sup>. It was surrounded by the great names of Belgian painting of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Laurent Stevens, Art historian, 2025  
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<sup>4</sup> The exhibition took place from November 7 to 30, 1997 and was accompanied by a catalog featuring our Nude.



Illustrations



Fig.1 : Rik Wouters, *Naked Woman Washing*, 1914, Brussels, Fine Arts Museum of Belgium.



Fig.2 : Rik Wouters, *Lady in Blue in Front of a Mirror*, 1914, Brussels, Fine Arts Museum of Belgium.

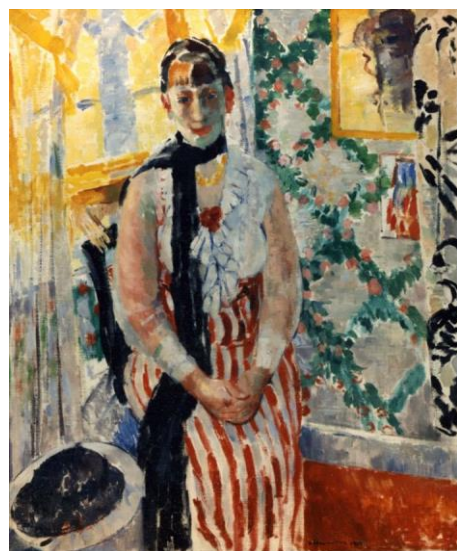


Fig.3 : Rik Wouters, *Madame Rik Wouters*, 1912, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne / *The Red Curtains*, 1913, private collection.



Fig.4 : Floris Jaspers, *Nude in an Interior*, 1915, private collection.



Fig.5 : Floris Jaspers, *The Green Mirror*, 1917, private collection. / *The Steen*, c.1914, private collection, formerly : de Beukelaer Fine Arts.



Fig.6 : Floris Jaspers, *Shell (Coquillage)*, 1924, private collection, formerly : de Beukelaer Fine Arts.

Ressources used

DE BUYCK (Jean), SCHOETERS (Geertrui), *Retrospectieve tentoonstelling Floris Jaspers 1889-1965*, Antwerp / Laren, KMSKA / Singer Museum, 1990.

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*Floris Jaspers*, in : *Abstract Modernism* ([abstractmodernisme.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be](http://abstractmodernisme.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be)).

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