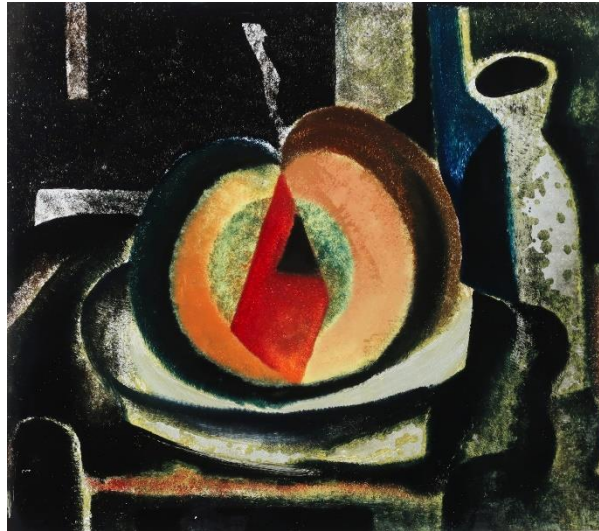


Floris Jaspers

Borgerhout (Antwerp), 1889 – Antwerp, 1965



Still Life with Melon, 1925

Églomisé, 44.5 x 50.5 cm

Signed and dated lower centre / Countersigned and located in Antwerp on the back



Still Life with a Coffee Pot, 1948

Églomisé, 40 x 55 cm

Signed and dated lower left

An emblematic subject of Cubism, still life also interested Floris Jaspers throughout his life. These two *églomisés*, one of his favorite techniques, demonstrate the painter's interest in Cubism and more particularly in the figure of Picasso.

Floris Jaspers



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 églomisés¹, 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.

Still Life with melon, 1925 / Still Life with a Coffee Pot, 1948

From his Fauvist beginnings on, Floris Jaspers was interested in still life. His first examples clearly demonstrate his admiration for the work of Rik Wouters (fig.1). The latter admiring Cézanne (1839-1906), we logically find Cézanne motifs in Jaspers's work. This reference is also relevant for the Cubism of Braque, Picasso and Gris, which interested Jaspers around 1920. It was also in 1920 that the *Sélection* gallery organized an exhibition in Antwerp dedicated to Cubist artists, in which Jaspers participated (fig.2). Some of his cubist works experiment with an abundance of colors, while others are limited to black and white (fig.3). In these works, the subject tends to disappear, only to resurface in the mid-1920s.

Although stylized, the subject is clearly identified in the *Still Life with Melon* dated 1925². Its dominant black color is typical of many works from the first half of the 1920s (fig.4). An open melon occupies the center of the composition, providing a strong contrast of colors, in a way that we also observe in several works of the period (fig.5). An atypical element, this melon can recall

¹ Paintings under glass therefore produced in a succession of layers opposite to the usual pictorial practice. This popular traditional technique was rediscovered in Murnau by Munich expressionist artists (Münter, Jawlensky, Kandinsky).

² In 1925, Floris Jaspers became a member of *Kunst van het heden*. It was also that year that Paul Van Ostaijen bought fifteen works from him and published *Notes sur Floris Jaspers* (Notes on Floris Jaspers) in the magazine *Sélection*.

the still lifes of Frans Snijders (1579-1657) (fig.6), one of the stars of the genre in Antwerp in the 17th century. The simple composition with clear lines and well organized with the table and the dish folded into the plan, on the other hand, clearly comes from the work of Cézanne seen through the prism of Cubism (fig.7). On the right, the juxtaposition of the pitcher and the bottle, two motifs typical of Cubism, receives a treatment that we find in the works of Synthetic Cubism. These different elements that we also find in Picasso's art appear in numerous still lifes created by Jaspers during the 1920s, whether in his paintings, his églomisés or his engravings (fig.8).

This still life was made using the églomisé technique, that Jaspers had been using for only two years. Jaspers leaves certain patterns in reserve, such as the stem of the melon or its contours, which are filled in with the next layer. Note the use of a vibrant material and the use of silver powder.

In the 1940s, Jaspers returned to motifs from Cubism but in a range of browns typical of this period (fig.9). Some still lifes are more textured, while others from the early 1950s are more graphic, using a more simplified line close to that used by expressionists like Permeke (fig.10).

Still Life with a Coffee Pot is dated 1948³. On a patchwork of solid colors, which we find in several works of the period (fig.11) and which comes from synthetic cubism, Jaspers presents with a simple and lively brown line a series of objects from everyday life, among which we can clearly see the coffee pot in the center of the composition, as well as the cup with its saucer and spoon, which clearly evoke the work of Picasso (fig.12). These typical elements of Cubist still lifes also appear several times throughout Jaspers' work (fig.13).

Jaspers' admiration for Picasso also materialized the following year, in 1949, in a work inspired by the master which we know as the *Ode to Picasso* (fig.14), while Jaspers jokingly named himself *the Picasso of Antwerp*.

Laurent Stevens, Art historian, 2024
laurentbela@yahoo.fr

³ In 1948, the Belgian state bought two works from Jaspers (*Wallonia* and *Haymaking*) so that he could take a trip to Congo which ultimately did not take place before a few years.

Illustrations

In the text: photograph of Floris Jaspers.



Fig.1 : Floris Jaspers, *Still Life with apples*, 1915, private coll.



Fig.2 : *Salon des cubistes*, Antwerp, 1920.



Fig.3 : Floris Jaspers, *Composition*, 1921.

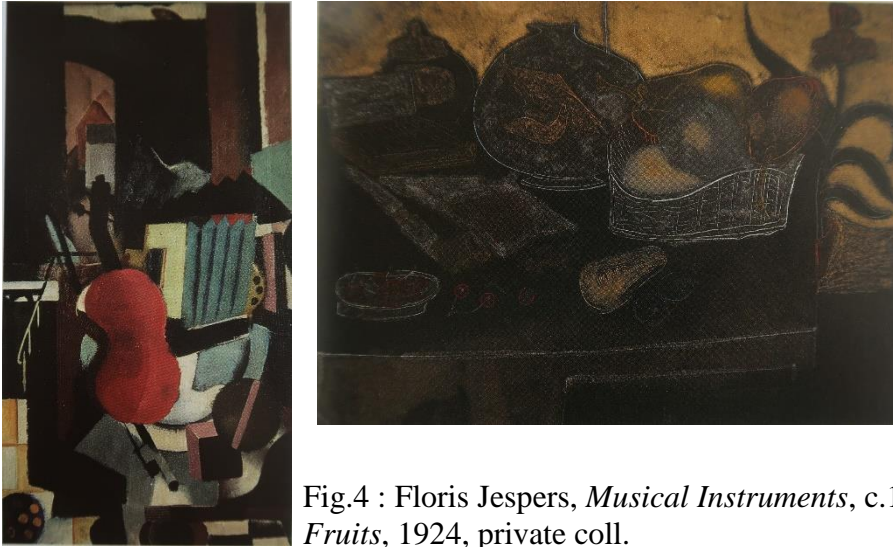


Fig.4 : Floris Jaspers, *Musical Instruments*, c.1921 / *Still Life with Fruits*, 1924, private coll.

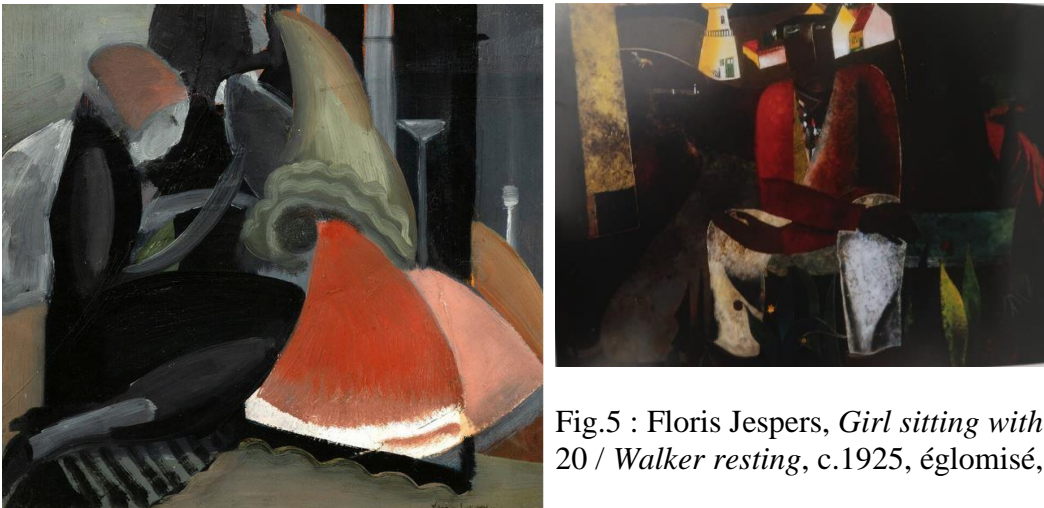


Fig.5 : Floris Jaspers, *Girl sitting with Shell*, c.1918-20 / *Walker resting*, c.1925, églomisé, private coll.



Fig.6 : Frans Snijders, *Still Life*, 1616, Antwerp, Snijders Rockoxhuis.



Fig.7 : Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Onions*, between 1896 and 1898, Paris, Musée d'Orsay / Pablo Picasso, *Large Still Life*, 1917, Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie.



Fig.8 : *Still Life*, 1924 / *Guitar and Fruit Bowl*, 1926-27, drypoint / *Still Life with a fish*, églomisé / *Still Life*, c.1925, églomisé, private coll.

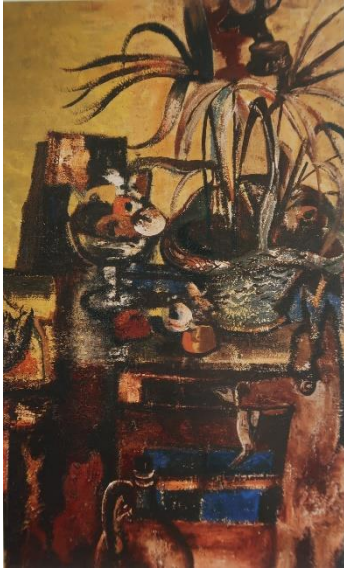


Fig.9 : Floris Jaspers, *Still Life with a dog*, 1946, private coll.



Fig.10 : Floris Jaspers, *Still Life with Lamp*, 1950 / *Dead Rooster*, c.1950, private coll.



Fig.11 : Floris Jaspers, *Seated Nude*, 1948, private coll.



Fig.12 : Picasso, *Cup*, 1908-1909, Francfort, Städel Museum.

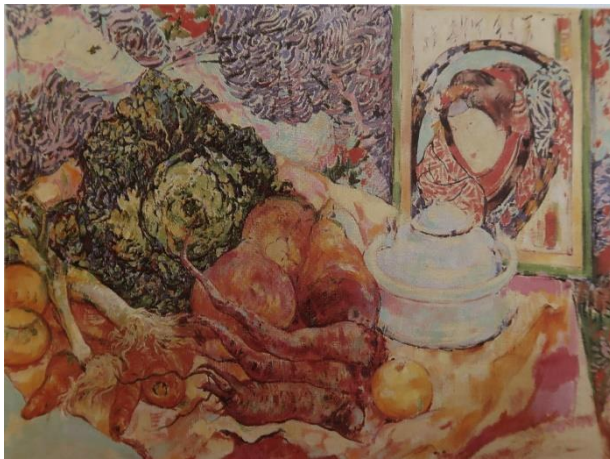


Fig.13 : Floris Jaspers, *Still Life with Kettle*, 1915 / *Still Life with a Coffee Pot*, 1950, private coll.

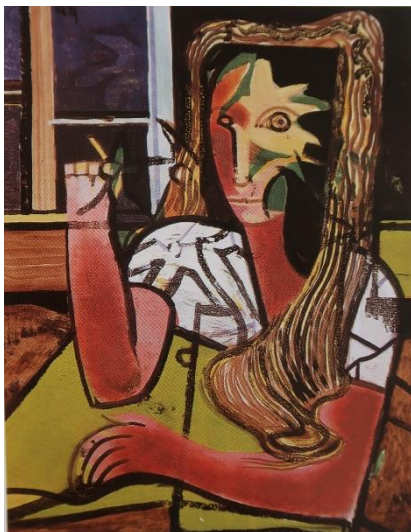


Fig.14 : Floris Jaspers, *Girl reading* aka *Ode to Picasso*, 1949, private coll.

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