



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

Seated Arlequin with Daisy, c.1928 - 1929

Églomisé, 110 x 78 cm (unframed)

Signed lower right : *Jaspers*

On the back: certificate from the artist's grandson.

A harlequin in love holds a daisy. This very large églomisé, one of Floris Jaspers' favorite and iconic techniques, is typical of the seated harlequins painted by the Antwerp artist in the late 1920s.

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.

Seated Harlequin

Since approximately 1923, Floris Jaspers paints églomisé. This painting under glass is produced in a succession of layers opposite to the usual pictorial practice. The technique would run throughout his career, with the figure of the Harlequin as a recurring motif since 1926 (fig.1). Jaspers particularly appreciates the colorful costumes of the harlequin. Harlequin, or Arlecchino in Italian, is the best-known character from the Italian commedia dell'arte. He will also later be a circus character. Thanks to the taste of the Avant-garde for the circus, harlequin will appear in many modern artists like Cézanne or Picasso (fig.2). Picasso's painting influenced Jaspers who jokingly named himself *the Picasso of Antwerp*.

Jaspers normally uses a gold or silver background which is visible through the scratches he makes on his painting. Gold or silver give a different atmosphere to the works. Here he chose the use of gold which gives majesty to the work. The size, quite large for an églomisé, also contributes to this grandeur. Jaspers combines gold with greens, blacks, browns, blues and white. This rather dark range of colour is found in several of Jaspers' works from the late 1920s.

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

This is the case in another églomisé, two harlequins, which was sold by the gallery de Beukelaer Fine Arts (fig.3). It should also be noted that the two églomisés represent Harlequins at night, with the motif of the moon and a star clearly visible. This is also a typical element of this period.

Another typical element of the end of the 1920s is the melancholic aspect that emerges from this harlequin. This atmosphere of melancholic reverie has developed since 1929 in the églomisés and drypoints of Jaspers². However, it should be noted that the harlequin is ostentatiously holding a daisy which occupies the centre of the composition. He probably plans to give this flower to his lover. His emotion is evident on his face, with red cheeks and the red tip of his nose. This motif is also found in love scenes painted by Jaspers at the same time (fig.4).

Illustrations

In the text: photograph of Floris Jaspers.

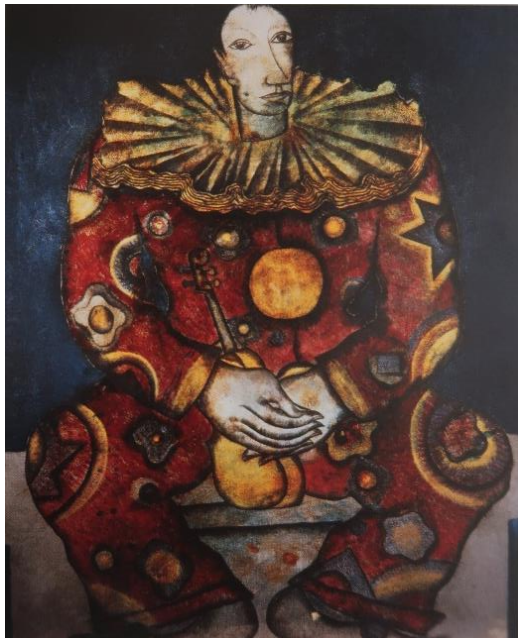


Fig.1 : Floris Jaspers, *Seated Harlequin*, 1928, églomisé, private coll.

² See : FREDERICQ, 1989, p.130.



Fig.2 : Pablo Picasso, *Seated Harlequin*, 1923, Basel, Kunstmuseum.



Fig.3 : Floris Jaspers, *Two Harlequins*, c.1928-1929, églomisé, private coll. (formerly de Beukelaer Fine Arts).

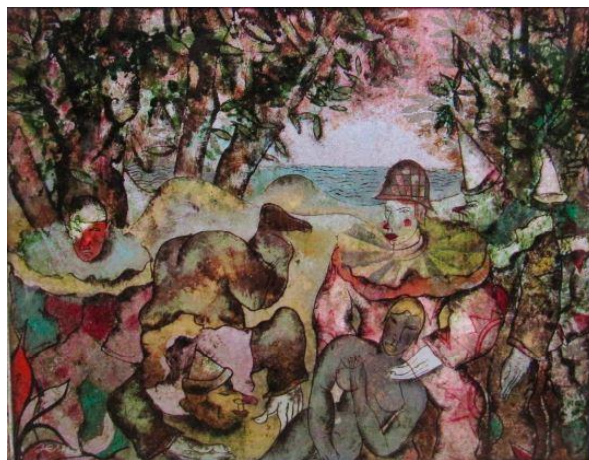
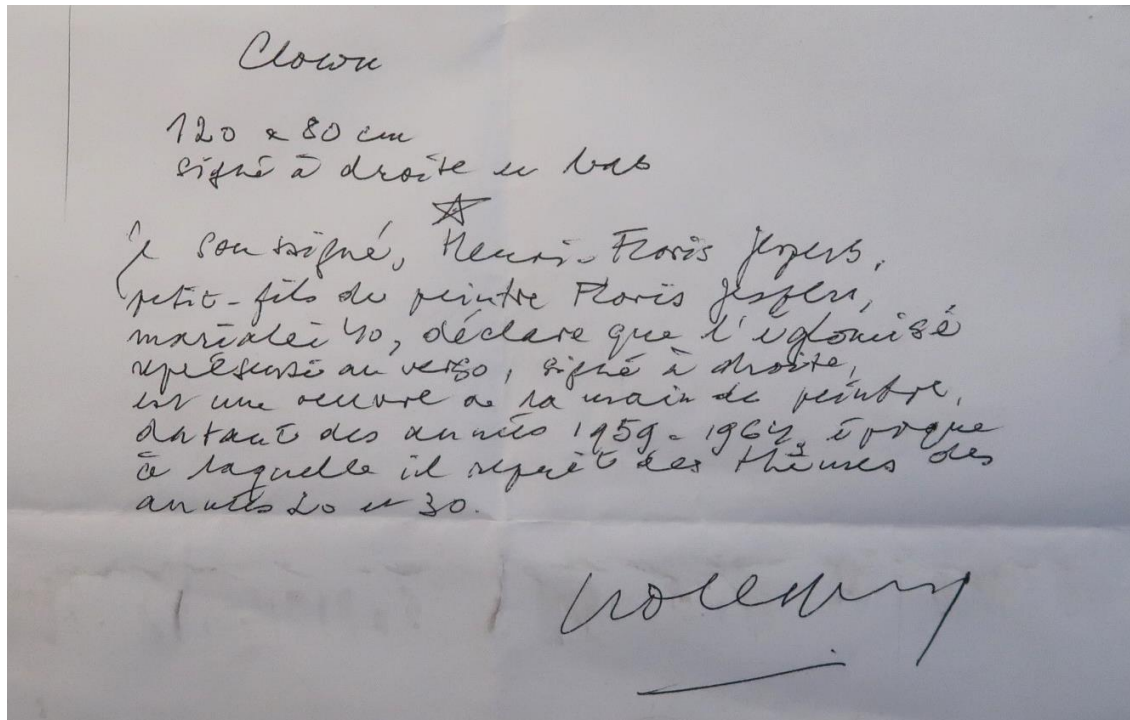


Fig.4 : Floris Jaspers, *Harlequins*, c.1932, églomisé, private coll. (formerly de Beukelaer Fine Arts) (whole and détail).

Certificate from the artist's grandson



Resources used

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LUST (Jacques), *Floris Jaspers*, in : *L'Art et la banque, une sélection de Rubens à Magritte*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator, 1997, pp.228-229.

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