



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

***Country Landscape, c.1925***

Oil on canvas, 42 x 60 cm (unframed)

Signed lower left : *Jaspers*

On the back: two labels from Auction House Guillaume Campo, Antwerp

This rural landscape painted by Floris Jaspers around 1925 shows his links with other Flemish Expressionists and more particularly Gus De Smet.

### 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 *églomisés*<sup>1</sup>, a technique that would run throughout his career, with the figure of the Harlequin as a recurring motif. Floris Jaspers

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

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.

### *Country Landscape*

Haystacks and a few farmhouses with tiled or thatched roofs at dusk. This timeless rural subject has been typical of Belgian painting since the end of the 19th century when artists left industrial cities for the countryside in search of truth. This is the case, for example, of the painters of the first School of Sint-Martens-Latem. The end of the day chosen by Jaspers evokes the atmosphere of the works of some of the painters of this school such as Valerius de Saedeleer. But it is obviously with the expressionist painters of the Second Latem school that there is the most affinity. The brightness and colours of the end of the day and especially the simplification of the motifs (haystacks, farms) clearly evoke the rural landscapes of Gus De Smet (1877 - 1943) (fig.1). Just over ten years older and an important figure in Flemish Expressionism, De Smet must have influenced Jaspers. Later, in some landscapes of the 1940s, Jaspers' aesthetics would come closer to that of Constant Permeke (1886 - 1952) (fig.2).

Our painting dates from the mid-1920s. At that time, Jaspers created several rural scenes, paintings and engravings, marked by the art of Gus De Smet (fig.3). The color range with its browns and dark oranges is also found in several paintings from this period (fig.4).

The back of the painting has two labels from the Antwerp Auction House Guillaume Campo<sup>2</sup> (fig.5). The first label was stuck for the sale of the work (then sold for 50,000 Belgian francs). The second label was stuck for a Floris Jaspers exhibition in the auction house, probably during the exhibition dedicated to the artist in 1966. On this label, the title given is : ‘Walloon Landscape’. It is possible that the painting is inspired by a Walloon landscape but it is more likely that it is a Flemish landscape, perhaps from the hinterland of Knokke, a municipality that Jaspers frequented in the mid-1920s. Indeed, in 1926, Jaspers signed a contract with the art dealer Paul Gustave Van Hecke, who improved the painter's daily life. From then on, the family spent their summers in Knokke. Jaspers was supported there by the doctor and collector Reimond De Beir, who in 1934 found him a plot of land to build a house (*De Vijf Ringen*), in the middle of the polders (fig.6).

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<sup>2</sup> Auction House Guillaume Campo was founded in 1897.

Illustrations

In the text: photograph of Floris Jespers.

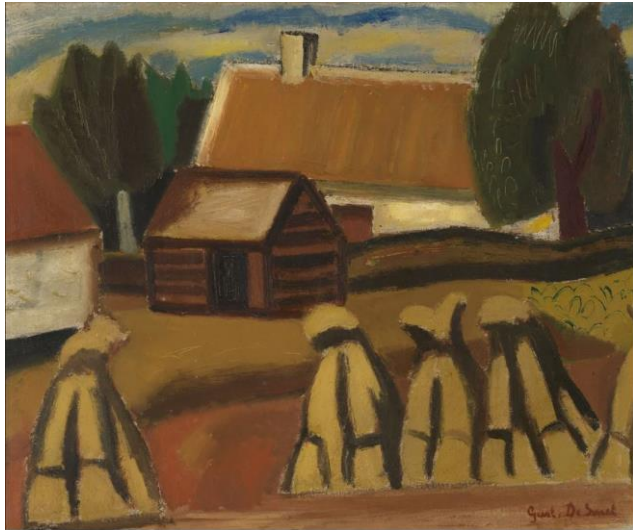


Fig.1 : Gus De Smet, c.1929, Ghent, MSK / c.1936, Ghent, MSK.



Fig.2 : Floris Jespers, *Grain Harvest*, 1943, private coll.



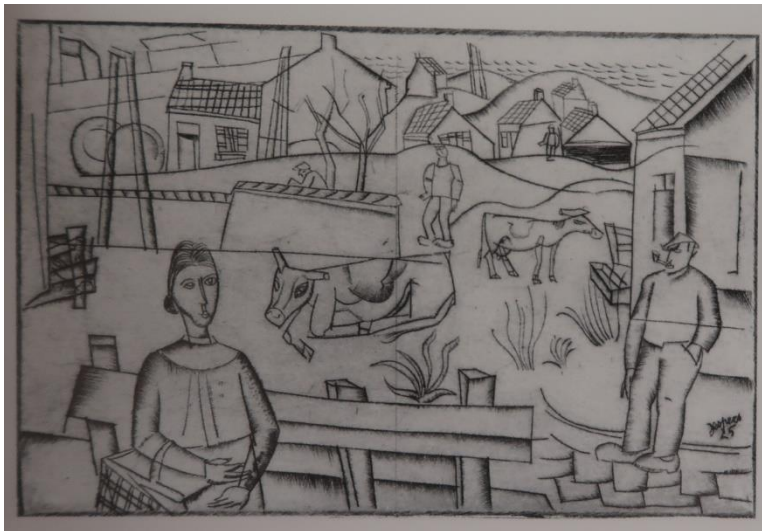


Fig.3 : Floris Jaspers, 1926, private coll. (whole and detail) / dry point, 1925, Antwerp, Stedelijk Prentenkabinet.



Fig.4 : Floris Jaspers, *The Attic*, 1926, private coll. / *Chickens and Woman*, 1926, private coll.



Fig.5 : Labels from Guillaume Campo on the back of the painting.



Fig.6 : Floris Jaspers, 1937, private coll. (formerly de Beukelaer Fine Arts).

Resources used

BUYCK (Jean), *Oscar & Floris Jaspers de moderne jaren*, Antwerp / Ghent, Pandora / SDZ, 1996.

BUYCK (Jean), *Retrospectieve Floris Jaspers*, Antwerp / Ostend, Pandora / PMMK, 2004.

FREDERICQ (Louise), *Floris Jaspers, Achterglasschilderijen – Peintures sous-verre*, Brussels, Lamandart, 1989.

FREDERICQ (Louise), *Floris Jaspers*, in : *Le Dictionnaire des peintres belges du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, Brussels, La Renaissance du Livre, 1995.

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

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

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