

KMSKA

Royal
Museum of
Fine Arts
Antwerp

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THE FINEST HUNDRED

HANNIBAL

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FOREWORD

This book, *The Finest Hundred*, devoted to the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA), offers an exquisite selection of a hundred masterpieces from a total of over five thousand works of art. In the course of its long history, the museum has assembled an extremely rich and varied collection that includes paintings, sculptures, assemblages, drawings and prints of exceptional and undisputed quality from the fourteenth century to the twenty-first. So it has been a real challenge for the curators to put this selection together.

During the eleven years of construction work (2011–22) our masterpieces continued to make their presence felt around the world. Over eight million visitors in Belgium and abroad had the opportunity to admire Old Masters such as Peter Paul Rubens, Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Jean Fouquet, Jacob Jordaens and Quinten Massys, along with Modernists such as James Ensor, Auguste Rodin, Rik Wouters, Amedeo

Modigliani, Jules Schmalzigaug and René Magritte. Our Flemish masters and other top artists were able to return to the KMSKA on 24 September 2022.

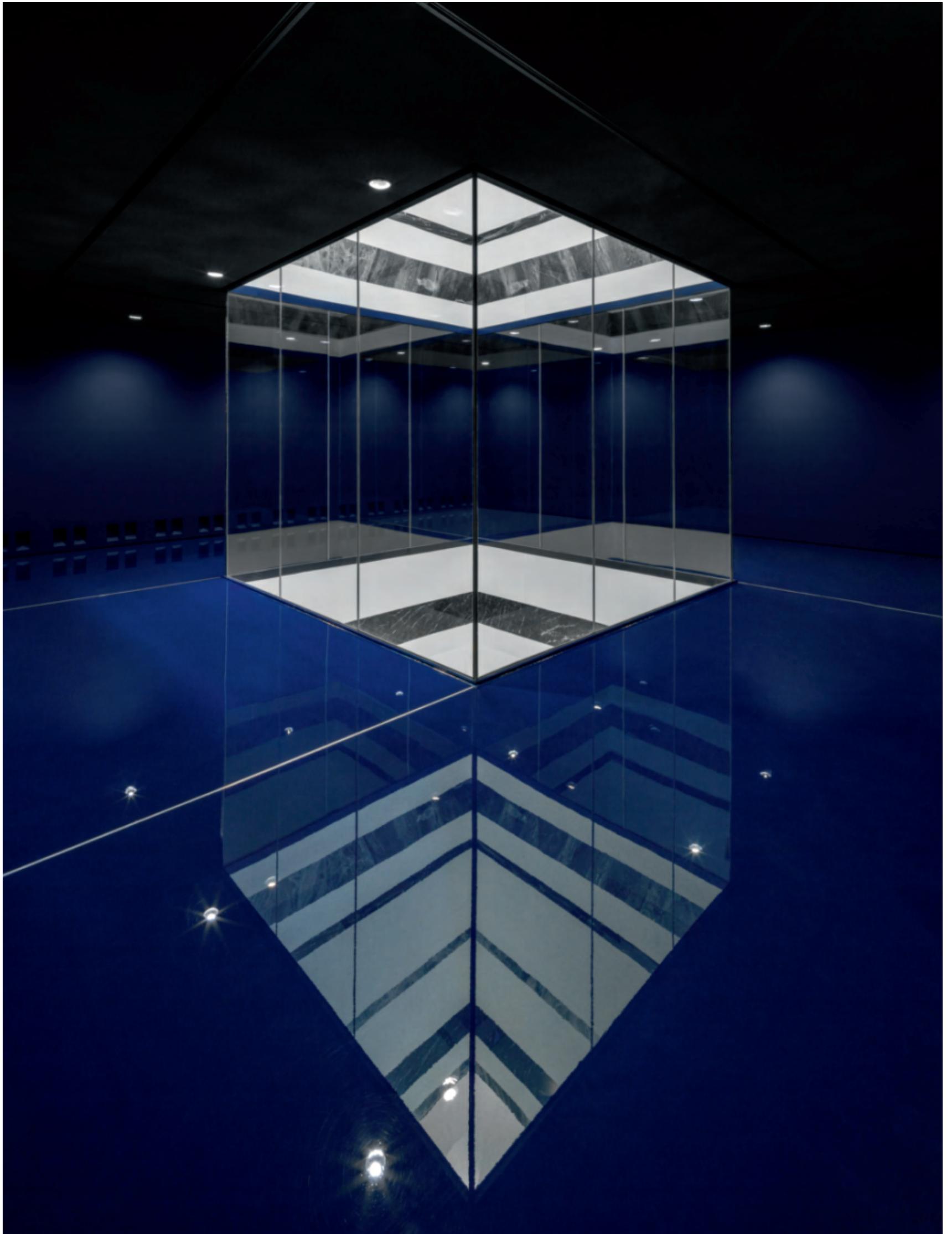
An intensive programme of restoration was completed during the museum's closure and a great deal of scholarly research was conducted, resulting in new and even more fascinating stories than before. We will use them to amaze, enrich and connect our visitors. The magnificent collection, iconic building, stimulating presentation and welcoming organisation will make the KMSKA an inspiring meeting place for all lovers of beauty.

Our sincere thanks are due to everyone who has contributed to this finest book for the finest collection. We hope you will give it a place in your home or office where our magnificent works can inspire you and your visitors and tempt you to the KMSKA. You can count on a warm welcome at the open house our museum will always be.

Feast your eyes and enjoy your reading!

Luk Lemmens,
KMSKA Chairman

Carmen Willems,
KMSKA Managing Director



TWO MUSEUMS IN ONE: THE BUILDING

Véronique Van Passel

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) is an old and a new building in one. Horizontally and vertically, the nineteenth century in dialogue with the twenty-first. A home for old and modern art. The story of its metamorphosis, this unique doubling up, is told here through a brief tour of the ideas and construction work that resulted in the new KMSKA.

From the nineteenth century to the twenty-first

A major fire at the Stadswaag building – in the heart of the city – in 1873 prompted plans for a new museum building in the Antwerp South district. The collection, with a turbulent history stretching back to the late-mediaeval Guild of St Luke, was housed at the time in the city's Academy of Art on Mutsaertstraat (today's Mutsaardstraat), where it served as a teaching resource for art students.

The South (Zuid) district was a recent urban development following the demolition of the old city walls and the Duke of Alba's notorious sixteenth-century fortress. The city council set aside some of the freed-up land for a new museum and announced a contest to find an appropriate design. The young architects Jean-Jacques Winders and Frans Van Dijk won the prize with their plan for a new temple of art. Construction began in 1884, followed by the ceremonial opening in 1890.

The museum in Antwerp South was custom-built to house the collection: the art belongs to the

building and the building to the art. But it did not take long before it had once again grown too small. Van Dijk's proposed solution was to add wings on either side, but his planned extension was rejected. It was decided instead to convert the side galleries on the ground floor and to roof over the interior courtyards. These alterations were completed in 1927 and remained in place until 2011.

Now more than a hundred years old, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the building was in urgent need of an ambitious master plan. The well-being of the art collection could no longer be guaranteed, there was no room for temporary exhibitions, the facade was in a hazardous state and the garden bore no resemblance to its original appearance. Not to mention that the expectations of today's museumgoers are very different to their late-nineteenth-century counterparts. All in all, a quantum leap was required.

In 2003, the Flemish Government Architect bOb Van Reeth issued an open call for a new master plan for the KMSKA, attracting an ingenious plan from a small team in Rotterdam that won the competition. The design by Claus en Kaan Architecten (now KAAAN Architecten) envisaged a double museum: the old nineteenth-century building would be renovated and a new twenty-first-century construction, invisible from the outside, would be inserted within the walls. Execution of the master plan began in the autumn of 2011.

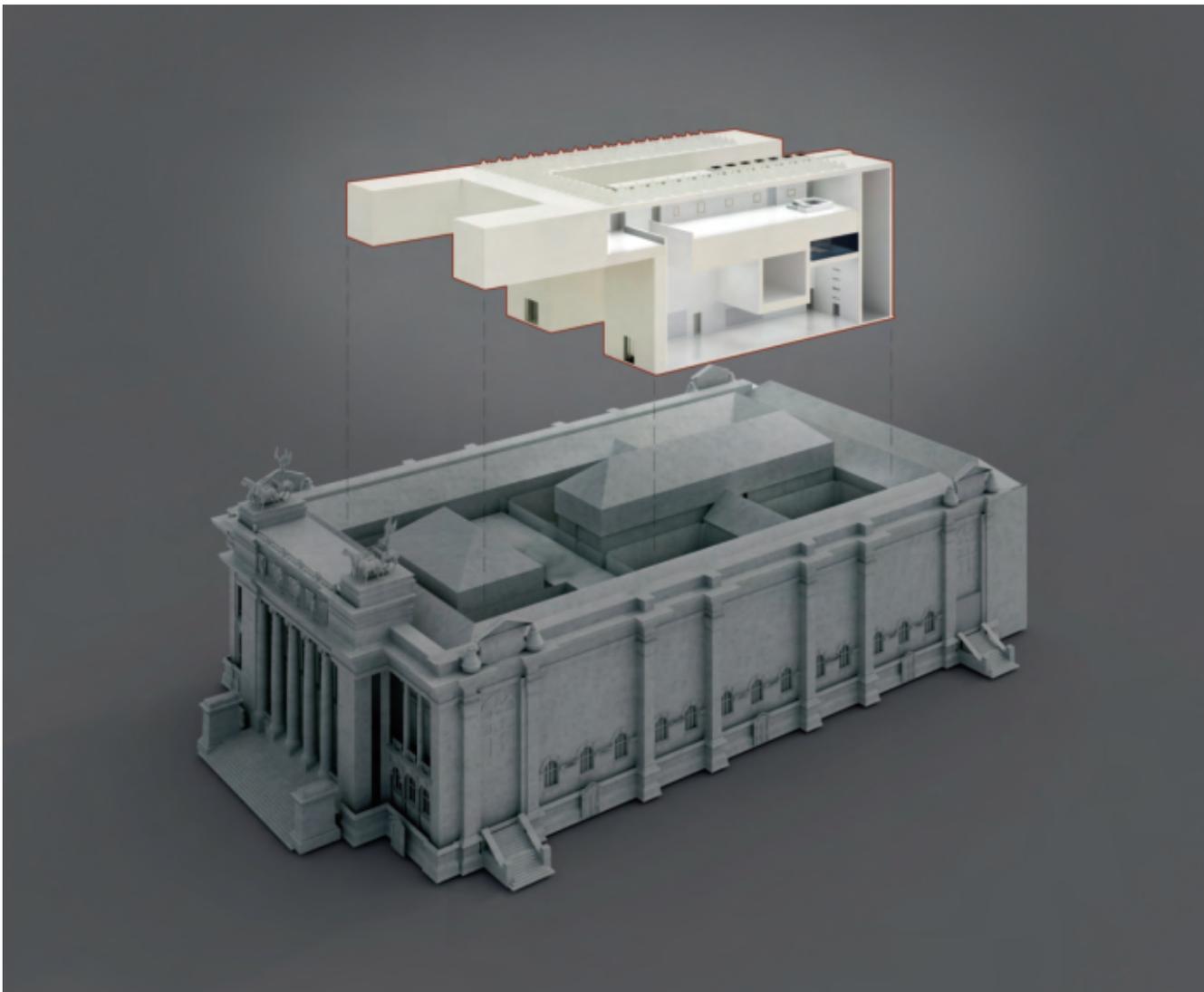
One building, two worlds

The existing museum is a protected monument and could not be altered. Consequently, the architect Dikkie Scipio had to be exceptionally circumspect in her approach to the old building. Rather than designing a new annexe – the customary way to extend a museum – she opted for internal expansion using the space occupied at that point by six courtyards. A new vertical structure was inserted: four legs and a tabletop above the existing roof, as the architect herself puts it. In this way, she has created two worlds in one building – the old ‘horizontal’ museum comprises a symmetrical succession of galleries, while the new building plays on the elements of verticality and surprise. The new spaces cannot be seen from the nineteenth-century rooms: as Dikkie Scipio says, ‘The new volume should not compete with the old building but enter into a dialogue with it’.

Two courtyards now house the technical systems, while the museum as a whole has forty percent more space in which to house the artworks and accommodate visitors. Eleven ground-floor galleries have been freed up for temporary exhibitions. This successful integration project earned the European Award for Architectural Heritage Intervention.



The museum, its garden and surrounding area were conceived in the nineteenth century as a single ensemble.



A new, vertical structure has been inserted into the existing courtyards. Two museums in one.

Three light-wells provide illumination to each layer of the building. Muted light is conveyed through large windows into the rooms where light-sensitive art is exhibited.



Mechelen 1882
Amsterdam 1916

Woman Ironing [originally Interior B] [I9I2]

Oil on canvas,
108.5 × 124.8 cm
Inv. 1932

Domestic sunshine

This looks like a spontaneous snapshot of a chance moment, a domestic scene: Nel – wife and muse of artist Rik Wouters – is looking up from her ironing. We can see a basket of clothes still to be ironed, a brass lampshade, a vase of flowers, and a glass dome on the mantelpiece below the mirror. All of them details in a canvas where the true star is the light, the sunshine and the associated warmth.

In her memoir of the eleven years she lived with Wouters prior to his premature death, Nel describes how he would constantly watch her in the hope of a moment that would spark his creativity. 'A day was occasionally lost to the ironing, which upset Rik, who felt he was wasting his time without his model.... For want of anything better, he sat nearby so he could draw me in his habitual way, in the hope of spotting some pose or other that would be worthwhile. I have on the same pink linen dress as in *The Pink Lane* and am standing under the light hanging over the table, on which I iron a blue tablecloth. Rik cries out enthusiastically, making me look up. And yes, he feverishly draws the pose of the woman ironing. The more he looks at me, the more appetising the colours seem, and soon he can stand it no longer and rushes off to the studio to fetch a canvas, easel and box of paints.'

Wouters' preparatory drawings and watercolours show how he was constantly on the lookout for 'captivating' moments in Nel's daily activities. One such watercolour tells us that *Woman Ironing* is not actually the spontaneous record of a chance moment. Rik felt that the tablecloth being ironed needed to be bigger, for instance, and to intensify its blue he placed a yellow straw hat in the foreground. The striking expanse of pink, meanwhile, called out for green accents and so a green bowl duly appeared at the front of the table. There are various pink motifs in the watercolour study, but not the dress that Nel is shown wearing in the finished oil painting.

Spontaneous or otherwise, Rik Wouters also had his classics in mind. In his case, they included Paul Cézanne and the palettes of Auguste Renoir and James Ensor.

[HT]

PROVENANCE
Purchased from Galerie
Georges Giroux, Brussels, 1924.

LITERATURE
Stefan Hautekeete, *Rik Wouters (1882–1916): ontwikkeling en betekenis van het picturale oeuvre*, Antwerp: Pandora, 1997, pp. 186–98. – Olivier Bertrand, 'Nel Wouters: Het leven van Rik Wouters doorheen zijn werk', in: Olivier Bertrand, *Rik Wouters, Visies op een levensloop*, Brussels: Belgian Art Research Institute, 2000, pp. 57–58. – Herwig Todts, 'Levenslust en levensstijl: de iconografie van Rik Wouters', in: *Lust for Life*, exhib. cat. [Mechelen, Hof van Busleyden], Veurne: Hannibal, 2016, pp. 10–15.



RIK WOUTERS

Mechelen 1882
Amsterdam 1916

Self-Portrait with Black Eye Patch [1915]

Oil on canvas,
100.3 × 85.6 cm
Inv. 3297

Trials

In the summer of 1915, Rik Wouters underwent an operation that disfigured his face and cost him an eye and part of his jawbone. After three years of severe recurring headaches, it had become clear that he had cancer. Wouters died on 11 July 1916, just shy of his thirty-fourth birthday, two years after making his breakthrough thanks to successful exhibitions in Brussels and Antwerp. His work had also been shown in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

The fact that the Mechelen-born artist died in Amsterdam was due to the First World War. Wouters was a soldier in the Belgian infantry when, fleeing from the Germans, he was interned as a prisoner of war in Zeist in the neutral Netherlands. Thanks to the intervention of acquaintances, however, he was allowed to live freely in Amsterdam with his wife, muse and model Hélène (Nel) Duerinckx. That is, until terminal illness set in.

This moving self-portrait is one of Wouters' final works. According to Nel, Rik used a mirror to paint a portrait 'radiant with joie-de-vivre' over three sessions. She persuaded him to do it, 'so that later, after he recovered, it would remind us of our trials'. The work's simplicity and monumentality are typical of the paintings and sculptures Wouters produced as early as 1914.

Ludo van Bogaert, a celebrated neurologist and art-lover, bequeathed this canvas to the KMSKA together with another twelve paintings, eight sculptures and thirty-three works on paper by Wouters. Van Bogaert had been a friend of the artist's widow.

[HT]

PROVENANCE
Bequest of Dr Van
Bogaert-Sheid, 1989.

LITERATURE
Nel Wouters, 'Het leven van
Rik Wouters doorheen zijn werk',
in: Olivier Bertrand, *Rik Wouters,
Visies op een levensloop*,
Brussels: Belgian Art Research
Institute, 2000, pp. 113–14.



JULES SCHMALZIGAUG

Antwerp 1882
The Hague 1917

Speed [1914]

Oil on canvas,
74.6 × 109.7 cm
Inv. 2099

Lightning-fast painting

Jules Schmalzigaug was born into a wealthy Antwerp family with German roots. Having spent several years in Paris, from 1912 he mainly lived and worked in Venice. There, he developed a fascination for Italian Futurism and the question of how painters ought to depict the various phases of dynamic movement. How to convey speed on canvas: passing cars, say, or their flashing reflections in shop windows? What associations exist between colour and sound? And what emotions do they trigger? Can you use colour to determine forms? *Speed*, the canvas shown here, is a response to just such questions, which Futurists saw as the essence of their art.

Schmalzigaug took part in a major exhibition of International Futurism in Rome in the spring of 1914 where he met people such as the great Giacomo Balla, whose studio he would visit intensively for several months. Balla, too, was seeking ways to capture on canvas phenomena such as the flitting reflections of cars. What most occupied them was the visual representation of intangible movements, which become abstract swirls of lines and shapes in their experimental canvases, packed with colour effects.

Speed was probably created during or shortly after the exhibition in Rome. Schmalzigaug had to leave his studio in Venice in a hurry in December 1914, shortly after the First World War broke out. He sought refuge in The Hague but was unable to take his paintings with him. They were not repatriated until after the war, by which time Schmalzigaug had already committed suicide (in 1917), having suffered with his health since his youth. This work was exhibited for the first time in 1923.

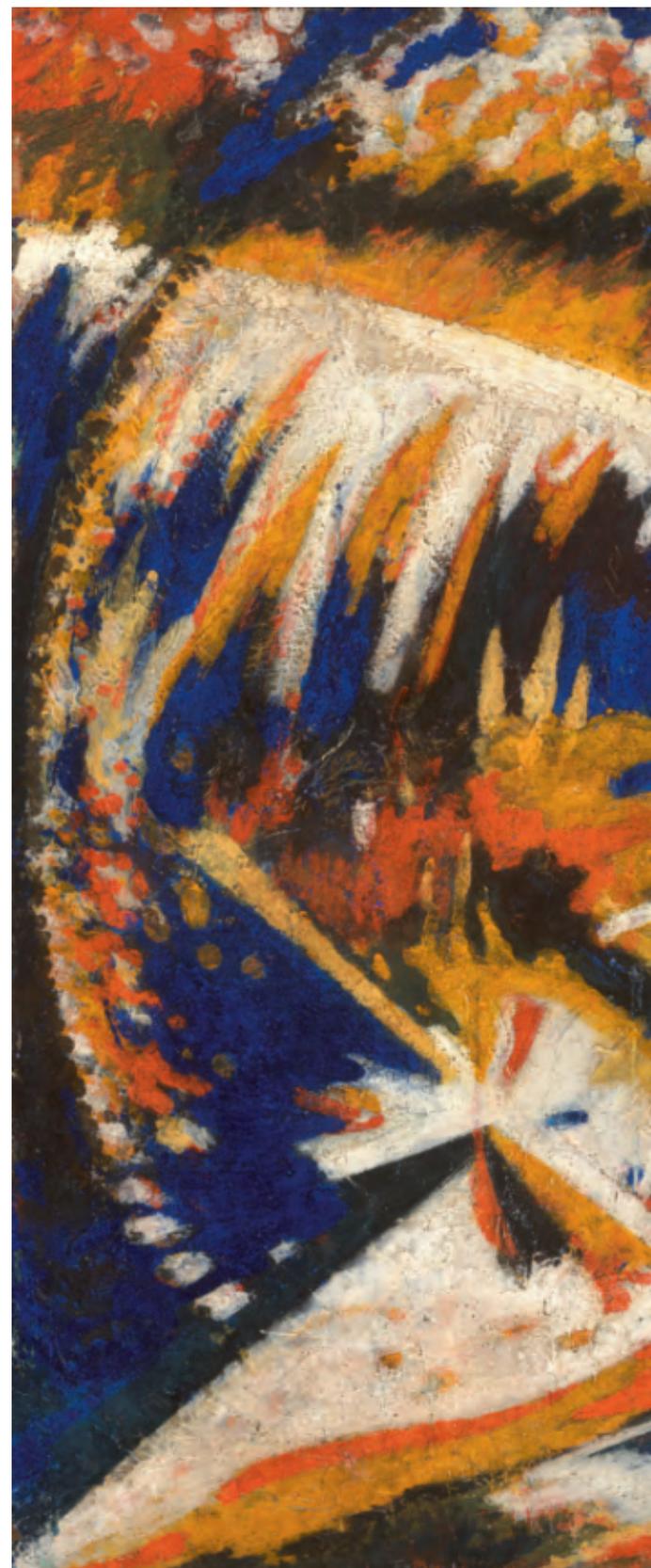
[AG]

PROVENANCE

Donated by the artist's brother,
Walter Malgaud, 1928.

LITERATURE

Valerie Verhacq (ed.), 'Jules Schmalzigaug. Een Belgische futurist', exhib. cat. [Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique], in: *Cahiers van de Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België*, 8, Ghent: Snoeck, 2010, p. 122. – Adriaan Gonnissen (ed.), *Jules Schmalzigaug – Futurist*, exhib. cat. [Ostend, Mu.ZEE], Ostend: Mu.ZEE, p. 81. – Ronny and Jessy Van de Velde (eds.), *Jules Schmalzigaug 1882–1917: Oeuvrecatalogus*, Brussels: Ludion, 2020, p. 143.









JULES SCHMALZIGAUG

Antwerp 1882
The Hague 1917

Rhythm of Light Waves: Street + Sun + Crowd c. 1915–1917

Oil on canvas, 98 × 127 cm
Signed lower left: JSchmalzigaug
Inv. 2100

Fast colours

Antwerp-born Jules Schmalzigaug painted this bustling street scene in The Hague, a place of refuge for Belgian artists during the First World War, during which The Netherlands remained neutral. Even before the war, he had aligned himself with the international avant-garde in painting (most notably Italian Futurism) in Paris, Venice and Rome.

The canvas bathes in the light of the Sun, which triggers a rotating movement in the upper right corner, a Futurist technique that Schmalzigaug often used. The light carves its way through the forms, creating an energetic rhythm of 'incredible chromatic chords'. The result is a kaleidoscopic viewing experience.

Schmalzigaug was also interested in the underlying theory: in the sensory effect of colour, for instance, or how a painter could evoke movement, the associations between colour and music, colour types and so on. Like James Ensor, of whom he was an admirer, he did away with nuanced colour, the 'delicate hue', mixing pigments as little as possible with a view to their visual effects.

Schmalzigaug saw a difference between 'light colours' and 'felt colours' and the way the two types play with the absorption and reflection of light. By juxtaposing them, it was possible to stimulate optical rhythms of action and reaction. This work is a fine example: 'light colours' such as orange-red and yellow are played off against 'felt colours' such as olive green, purple-blue and brown.

Rhythm was shown at an exhibition of Belgian art in Amsterdam a few months before Schmalzigaug's death. The artist took his own life on 13 May 1917.

[AG]

PROVENANCE

Donated by the artist's brother,
Walter Malgaud, 1928.

LITERATURE

Valerie Verhacq (ed.), 'Jules Schmalzigaug. Een Belgische futurist', exhib. cat. [Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique], in: *Cahiers van de Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België*, 8, Ghent: Snoeck, 2010, p. 100. – Adriaan Gonnissen (ed.), *Jules Schmalzigaug – Futurist*, exhib. cat. [Ostend, Mu.ZEE], Ostend: Mu.ZEE, p. 77. – Ronny and Jessy Van de Velde (eds.), *Jules Schmalzigaug 1882–1917: Oeuvrecatalogus*, Brussels: Ludion, 2020, p. 145.



OSSIP ZADKINE

Vitebsk 1888
Paris 1967

The Misery of Job 1914

Elm, 122 × 83 × 139.5 cm
Signed and dated on the base,
front right: 'ZADKINE / 1914'
Inv. 2338

Utter misery

You do not need to know the title of this sculpture group to see that it is steeped in sadness. Job was a figure in the Old Testament who suffered terrible trials. The key question in his story is whether Job will remain faithful to God despite all his misery. And whether suffering has any meaning.

Job lies prostrate on the ground, while four other figures lament over him – his kneeling wife and three friends, who stand with their heads slumped. According to the Bible: 'Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.' Zadkine liked to bring an element of spirituality into his sculpture.

The young artist did not conceive the group as a whole, only placing the four statues together on a low base after the First World War. Zadkine made them using the *taille directe* technique, in which the woodcarving process itself helps determine the final form of the work. In other words, the grain of the wood partially dictated the poses and gestures of Zadkine's figures. The sculptor placed himself, as he put it, 'at the service of the wood'.

Born in Belarus as Yossel Aronovich Tsadkin, he lived and worked as a naturalised Frenchman under the Gallicised version of his name, Ossip Zadkine. He was based mainly in Paris but also had important promoters of his work in Belgium. His sculpture was frequently shown in Brussels and was also seen in Antwerp. Zadkine is well represented in the collection of both the KMSKA and the Middelheim Museum. The artist himself donated this work.

[AG]

PROVENANCE

Donated by the artist, 1937.

LITERATURE

Lydia Schoonbaert (ed.),
Moderne meesters in het Koninklijk Museum, Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1992, pp. 41–42. – Sylvain Lecombré, *Ossip Zadkine. L'oeuvre sculpté*, Paris: Spadem, 1994, n.p. – Sylvain Lecombré, Patrick Elliot, Pierre Daix *et al.*, *Zadkine, bois et pierres*, exhib. cat. [Arles, Musée Réattu – Paris, Cloître des Cordeliers], Arles: Actes Sud, 1992, pp. 42–43.



ZADKINE
1914

JEAN BRUSSELMANS

Brussels 1884
Dilbeek 1953

Spring 1935

Oil on canvas, 154 × 154.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left:
'Jean / Brusselmans. / 1935.'
Inv. 2967

Spring in Dilbeek

When Jean Brusselmans looked out of the window of his modest studio in the 1930s, this was the scene he saw in Dilbeek, to the west of Brussels. A row of houses on a street, patches of field in which people are hard at work and, on the right, a colourful mosaic of trees and bushes, with woods in the distance. A sky that is at once blue and cloudy.

Or rather, Jean Brusselmans did *not* see what we see in this canvas. Brusselmans *the painter* stripped back what he saw from his window to its essence, to angular planes of quite strictly demarcated bright colour. The world is turned into a flattened grid, giving a sense of abstraction. Brusselmans' work exudes simplicity and even a seemingly naive awkwardness, yet he planned his compositions very carefully.

The artist was strongly attached to 'his' Dilbeek, located in the hilly and 'incomparably beautiful' (his words) Pajottenland region and to the 'tenacity of the rough-and-ready people' there. Brusselmans once wrote: 'The tastefully appropriate copses, the well-tended vegetable gardens, the oh-so symmetrically planted wheat fields, the paths, the beautifully traced roads, everything is their work, everything is the fruit of their long and patient labour.'

The way he turned reality to his own painterly ends justifies us calling Jean Brusselmans a Modernist, even though he himself had little interest in labels or artistic manifestos. He was a loner, situated literally on the margins of big-city Brussels and its art scene, who wanted more than anything 'to be natural'.

[AG]

PROVENANCE

Purchased from the heirs of
the Van Geluwe estate, 1963.

LITERATURE

Robert L. Delevoy, 'Jean Brusselmans', in: *Meesters van de hedendaagse schilderkunst in België*, vol. 4, Brussels: Laconti, 1972, p. 177. – Phillip Van den Bossche and Koenraad Dedobbeleer, *Jean Brusselmans*, exhib. cat. [Ostend, Mu.ZEE], Ostend: Mu.ZEE, 2013. – Hans Janssen (ed.), *Jean Brusselmans, 1884–1953*, exhib. cat. [The Hague, Gemeentemuseum], Veurne: Hannibal, 2018.



FAUSTO MELOTTI

Rovereto 1901
Milan 1986

The Dance [1972]

Gilt brass and plexiglass,
50 × 62 × 13 cm
Inv. 3124

Dancing in harmony

The pianist, engineer and avant-gardist Fausto Melotti liked to unite different forms of art. As far as he was concerned, everything began with harmony. He experimented as early as the 1930s with three-dimensional structures where he sought to unite the figurative and the abstract, the musical and the theatrical.

The Dance from 1972 features ten couples made from brass wire, a very pliable material. The work seems choreographic, with slender metal structures that evoke dance moves and poses from a variety of styles. In each case, one of the two structures represents a pose, and the other a mostly spiral movement. The rhythmic connection between the two refers to musical compositions in counterpoint: note against note.

Melotti intended a work like this to express, visually, a sense of harmony, rhythm and music. The transparent, supportive plexiglass heightens the feeling of weightlessness and elegance in the perfectly balanced dance moves. A demonstration of how aesthetics and technology can go hand in hand to become an 'artful' theme.

[AG]

PROVENANCE

Purchased at Marlborough A.G., 1973.

LITERATURE

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GÜNTHER UECKER

Wendorf 1930

Dark Field 1979

Nails on canvas on wood,
150.5 × 150.5 × 19.5 cm
Signed and dated lower right
on the back: 'Uecker 79'
Inv. 3205

Field of swaying nails

Dark Field was created in the following way: beginning at the centre, Günther Uecker quickly and rhythmically drove hundreds of nails into this square panel in different directions and patterns. In so doing, he transformed the two-dimensional surface of the 'painting' into a three-dimensional spatial object.

The effect is spectacular: the 'flat' artwork steps outside itself to interact with the viewer's space. Depending on their position and movement, what they see is a fluctuating play of light and movement – an ocean of nail heads that seem to sway like stalks of wheat in a field. The illusion of movement is heightened by the contrast between the black background and the rhythmic play of reflections on the steel nails. Each casts its own shadow, multiplied a thousand times over.

In the 1950s, the young Uecker began to hammer, chisel and nail more than he painted – the artist as a kind of manual worker. The monotonous hammering of custom-made nails became his trademark. The romance of brush and palette left this 'painter' cold. He drove his nails into traditional supports, such as canvases and panels, but also tables, TV sets, record players and pianos. Uecker's 'nail fields' come in the shape of geometric constructions, spirals and free structures. Something essentially sharp and hard – the common-or-garden nail – is transformed here into an aesthetic experience of poetry, beauty and infinity.

After the Second World War, Uecker was not alone in his exploration of new avenues in art: in the early 1960s, for instance, he belonged to the ZERO movement, which originally arose in Germany (see p. 278). The themes these artists explored were light, space and movement.

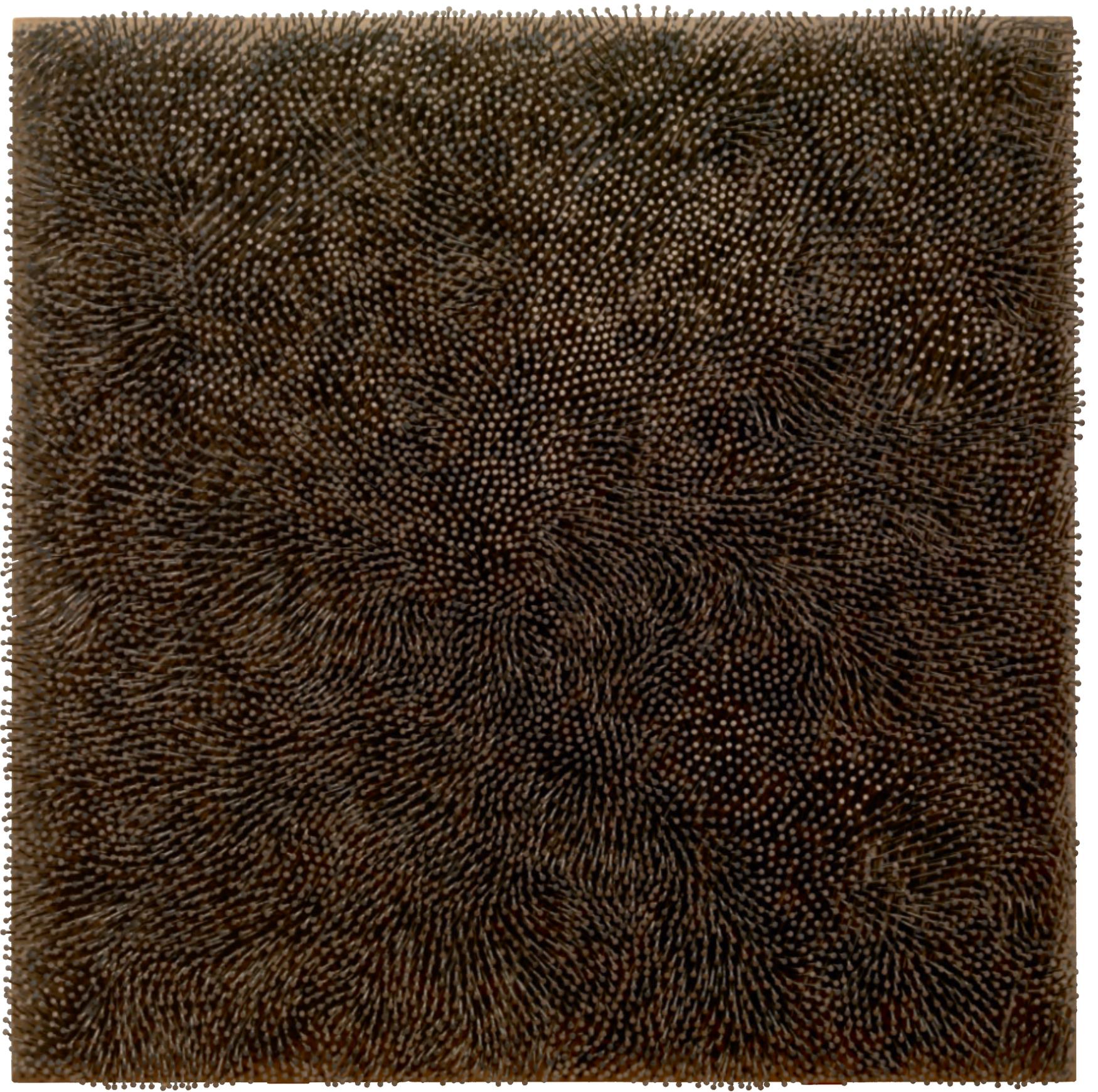
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Purchased from
the artist, 1981.

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Jean Fouquet, *Madonna Surrounded by Seraphim and Cherubim* [detail]

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Otto Piene, *Great Sun* [detail]

Image pp. 38–39:
Jules Schmalzigaug, *Rhythm of Light Waves: Street + Sun + Crowd* [detail]

Image p. 286:
James Ensor, *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* [detail]

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