

Jules Schmalzigaug

Jules Schmalzigang



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Word of Thanks

Donors are a lifeline for an art museum. As the 2020 Book of Benefactors of the KMSKA reminds us: 'Without donations and private patronage, the museum's collection would be substantially less rich and diverse.' To which we would like to add that without Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, run by Ronny and Jessy, the KMSKA's collection would be substantially less rich and diverse. Antwerp and the history of modern art in Belgium, in particular, have always had a special place in the hearts of these passionate collectors, gallery owners and art dealers. Their generous donations to various museums and, more specifically, to the KMSKA have enhanced public art collections across Flanders and Belgium.

In 1985, they donated a superb collection of 169 drawings and collages by the Antwerp avant-garde artist Paul Joostens to the museum. In 2018, they enriched the James Ensor collection with their donation of two mother-of-pearl fans by the Ostend master. One of these stunning objects is now on display in the museum, along with other masterpieces by Ensor. They also recently donated an early drawing by Georges Vantongerloo to the museum, having previously gifted a portrait of this artist by his brother, Frans Vantongerloo, to the KMSKA.

In 2022, Ronny and Jessy Van de Velde expressed their desire to donate a unique collection of works on paper and egodocuments by the Antwerp Futurist Jules Schmalzigaug to the KMSKA in memory of their son, Wouter Van de Velde. As a result, the KMSKA was able to expand its collection with 43 drawings, one important preliminary study of his Futurist-inspired colour theory, one lithograph, one painting by his friend Walter Vaes, four sketchbooks, and 27 photos relating to his life and work, as well as an archive collection of manuscripts and correspondence.

It is this exceptional gift that prompted this publication. Adriaan Gonnissen, KMSKA curator of modern art, also notes that 'Jules Schmalzigaug' has been the museum's fastest-growing subcollection in recent years. As such, the KMSKA has all the assets in hand to give this uniquely talented modern artist the recognition that has been his due for such a long time. Thanks in part to Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, we can now give Jules Schmalzigaug the magnificent posthumous career he deserves in the KMSKA, where he belongs.

Luk Lemmens
KMSKA chairman

Carmen Willems
KMSKA managing director

Jules Schmalzigaug is perhaps the most important rediscovery Antwerp art collectors and dealers Ronny and Jessy Van de Velde made in their careers. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, they rescued the work of this modern pioneer from oblivion, organising the first exhibitions of his art. Later, they continued to make Schmalzigaug their life's work. They were the principal consultants and lenders for the three museum retrospectives devoted to the work of this Futurist and colourist in Belgium, at the KMSKB in 1985 and 2010, and at Mu.ZEE in Ostend in 2016. In 2020, they published the catalogue raisonné of his work. This substantial publication is the main reference work on Schmalzigaug and is regularly updated (digitally) with new information and discoveries. The catalogue is permanently available and can be accessed through the website of Gallery Ronny Van de Velde.

Besides this overview of his career with contributions by KMSKA curators Herwig Todts and Adriaan Gonnissen, a biography of the artist was also published, written by Peter J.H. Pauwels. In 2023, a delightful project was added to this already exciting line-up in the form of a podcast titled *Jules Schmalzigaug (1882–1917). Het gedreven leven van een Antwerps futurist* ('The dedicated life of an Antwerp Futurist') (accessible through Spotify, see QR code on the last page of this book). Narrator Eric Rinckhout and Belgian actor Matteo Simoni in the role of Schmalzigaug bring the man and artist to life in this unique and at times also emotional audiobook.

The name Schmalzigaug deserves to be more internationally known. Some of his work was already included in Pontus Hultén's crowd-pulling *Futurismo & Futurismi* exhibition at Palazzo Grassi (Venice) in 1986. In 2003, two paintings were featured in the 'Orphism' section of the exhibition *Aux origines de l'abstraction* at the Musée d'Orsay. In 2022, two of his best works were the highlights of an exhibition titled *Futurismo. La nascita dell'avanguardia 1910–1915* at Palazzo Zabarella in Padua.

Thanks to the recent gift to the KMSKA, the museum now holds the most comprehensive collection of Schmalzigaug's work. At the same time, it also became the world's most important knowledge centre on his life, with all kinds of letters and photographic and archival documentation. As a result, the KMSKA can now contribute to the international promotion of this artist while providing an insight into the evolution of his creative process, from his earliest academy studies and his heavily stylised drawings of urban life to the Futuristic arabesque rhythms and the pastels that he created later in life, in The Hague and Scheveningen.

It goes without saying that the KMSKA will one day devote a comprehensive exhibition to Schmalzigaug's (net)work. The museum owes it to this Antwerp pioneer.

Adriaan Gonnissen
Curator modern art
KMSKA





Jules Schmalzigaug (1882–1917) and the KMSKA

The History of a Colourful Collection





FIG. 1
Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Impression of
Café Florian*, 1914,
black chalk, crayon,
watercolour and
gouache on paper,
31.7 × 39.3 cm,
private collection

FIG. 2
Letter from Schmalzigaug
to his parents with a
sketch of a 'flying machine',
Paris, 20 December 1911,
Royal Museum of Fine
Arts Antwerp – Flemish
Community Collection,
gift Gallery Ronny
Van de Velde, 2022

'Singing red'

In the early 1900s, Jules Schmalzigaug (1882–1917), an Antwerp painter with German roots, lost his heart to the bustling city life in metropolises such as Paris, Rome and Venice. It was in the mythical northern Italian city on the water that he became infatuated with the shimmering light and the views of the city's many churches and *basiliche*, the Doge's Palace and *piazze*, and the lagoon and its gondolas. He frequented the city's dance halls and *caffè concerti*. He also witnessed the heated artist debates between more conservative 'passéists' and progressive Futurists first-hand at the famous *caffè Florian* in legendary St Mark's Square. [Fig. 1] Rarely was the clash between the old and the new more exciting than in those heady early years of the 20th century.¹

Schmalzigaug had also increasingly come to believe in the visual Modernism of the Futurists. He had also noticed the acceleration of modern life, technology and industry, and socio-economic upheavals, which these avant-gardists embraced wholeheartedly. In 1911, he wrote to his parents from Paris about his visit to the 'flying machines' during the Salon de l'aéronautique: 'There are booths with machines that rival each other in perfection and are of admirable purity. This is infinitely more interesting than a salon of paintings where the rule of thumb is that a few artists show serious work but many *des croûtes* (rubbish).'² [Fig. 2–3]

Two months later, again in the French capital, Schmalzigaug was blown away even more by his visit to the Futurists' exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery. Triggered by what he saw, he wrote that he sensed that he was witnessing innovation on some level, but 'I did not yet understand it.'³ It would take until early 1914 before he dared to nail his colours to the mast in a letter to Umberto Boccioni, one of the undisputed leaders of the Futurist movement. He asserted confidently that '*une discipline neuve pour l'étude de la couleur*' ('a new discipline for the study of colour') would punctuate his own Modernist adventure, stating that he intended to compose Futuristic paintings as a great 'optical polyphony' of pigments. He referred more specifically to the '*rouge qui chante*' ('singing red'): the lush vermilion that sings, as in the iconic billowing red cloak in the foreground of Peter Paul Rubens's altarpiece *The Adoration of the Magi* (1624), which is on display at the KMSKA.⁴ [Fig. 4–5]

Schmalzigaug thus seemingly had no problem connecting vivid memories of the historical museum in his hometown to Futuristic experiments in colour science and abstract avant-garde, larded with some theosophy and synaesthesia. Besides echoing Rubens's opera in paint, the red that sings was also a reference to the sensory outpourings of Carlo Carrà, a Futurist who, in his manifesto *La Peinture des Sons, Bruits, Rumeurs* (1912), made the following sweeping statement: 'The painting of sounds, noises and smells calls for: 1. Reds, rrrrrreds, the rrrrrreddest rrrrrreds that shouuuuuuuut [...] All the colours of speed, of joy, of carousings and fantastic carnivals, of fireworks, café chantants and music halls; all colours seen in movement, colours experienced in time and not in space.'⁵ [Fig. 6]

That same spring of 1914, Schmalzigaug's style was beginning to be appreciated in Futurist circles thanks mainly to his participation in the high-profile *Free International Futurist Exhibition* at the Galleria Giuseppe Sprovieri in Rome.





FIG. 3
Jules Schmalzigaug,
Dynamic Movement,
1914–1915,
watercolour and
pencil on paper,
47 × 60 cm,
Ronny and Jessy Van
de Velde-Bolsens

FIG. 4
Carlo Carrà,
*La peinture des sons,
bruits et odeurs*,
Manifeste futuriste,
Milan: Direction
du mouvement
futuriste, 1913



‘Perhaps you have seen Rubens’s *Adoration of the Magi* in Antwerp? I cannot think of any Impressionist painting with a red that is as majestic as the formidable red of King Melchior’s cloak.’

Jules Schmalzigaug in a letter to Umberto Boccioni, 25 January 1914



FIG. 5
Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Development of
a Theme in Red:
Carnival*, 1914,
oil on cardboard,
81 × 64 cm,
Royal Museum of
Fine Arts Antwerp –
Flemish Community
Collection, inv. 4081

FIG. 6
Peter Paul Rubens,
*The Adoration of
the Magi*, 1624–1625,
oil on panel,
447 × 336 cm,
Royal Museum of
Fine Arts Antwerp –
Flemish Community
Collection, inv. 298

The ensemble of six paintings he submitted was positively received and aptly described as ‘rhythms of coloured arabesques’ in the Italian avant-garde magazine *Lacerba*.⁶ In Rome, he also found a very erudite listening ear in the painter Giacomo Balla, who had set up a teaching studio.

At the time, the cards were clearly stacked in favour of an international career. But the outbreak of World War I shattered many a dream, including Schmalzigaug’s, who was forced to leave his studio in Venice, the city he loved so much. He joined his family in the Netherlands, which was neutral, spending his forced exile in The Hague, where he committed suicide in 1917. He died in his studio, surrounded by his last paintings.

Colourists: the Big Three

War decided otherwise over a promising career. There is no denying that Schmalzigaug was an extremely talented artist in his short-lived but brilliant career. His role in the history of Belgian Modernism was that of an undeniable pioneer. This also explains why the KMSKA team sometimes refers to the Big Three of modern colourists, namely James Ensor, Rik Wouters and Jules Schmalzigaug (without forgetting Henri Evenepoel or Henri De Braekeleer, of course). [Fig. 7–9]

At the same time, there is no denying that this Futurist’s history in the KMSKA was very different from that of his compatriots. Wouters and Ensor have perpetuated their position as the figureheads of Belgian Modernism for more than a century even in the museum. In contrast, Schmalzigaug’s flamboyant polychromy has only been given a very prominent place on the KMSKA’s walls since the museum’s reopening in September 2022. Currently, his paintings are displayed in each of the thematic zones for ‘modern masters’ on the themes of Light, Colour and Form. As such, the museum historicises the fact that the Modernist use of saturated colours as a source of light and form, but also as a visual resource that can be autonomously employed, has rarely manifested itself more convincingly.

While this rehabilitation is entirely justified, it took time. On the one hand, as will become apparent, there is the fact that the main component of the Schmalzigaug collection was established in one go [phase 1] in 1928 thanks to a donation from the artist’s brother. On the other hand, there is no denying



that, for many decades afterwards, this nascent museum collection was rarely used, whether for art-historical research or collection presentations. There was no way of expanding the collection at the time. The acceleration came in the twenty-first century, prompted in part by the thorough art-historical research in preparation for three retrospective exhibitions in Belgium [see introduction].

'Jules Schmalzigaug' became the museum's fastest-growing sub-collection in four consecutive phases between 2015 and 2022. As a result, the KMSKA now owns a collection of 218 inventory numbers (excluding archive documents), making it the most complete and qualitative collection in the world – as is the case for Ensor and Wouters – of Schmalzigaug's work. This publication is primarily intended as an intermediate round-up of the key (historical) contacts, decisions and files that have shaped this collection. In the meantime, the museum continues to look for ways to expand its Schmalzigaug collection with valuable additions. Gifts and bequests are warmly welcomed, with the promise of art-historical research, conservation, presentation and efforts to promote one of the most talented avant-garde artists in Belgium's history on the international scene.

FIG. 7
James Ensor,
The Intrigue, 1890,
oil on canvas,
89.5 × 149 cm,
Royal Museum of
Fine Arts Antwerp –
Flemish Community
Collection, inv. I856

FIG. 8
Rik Wouters,
Etching Table, 1909,
oil on canvas,
86 × 94 cm,
Royal Museum of
Fine Arts Antwerp –
Flemish Community
Collection, inv. 2I67

FIG. 9
Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Light + Mirrors and
Crowd: Interior of
a Popular Ballroom
in Antwerp*, 1914,
oil on canvas,
52.5 × 64 cm,
Royal Museum of
Fine Arts Antwerp –
Flemish Community
Collection, inv. 2I0obis





1928

On 15 May 1928, the KMSKA's chief curator, Arthur Henry Cornette, posted a letter addressed to his '*cher ami*' ('dear friend') Walter Malgaud, a lawyer by profession and Schmalzigaug's younger brother.⁷ (Shortly after the war, the originally German family had changed its name to the French-sounding Malgaud. Their not entirely unjustified fear of latent antipathy to a German-sounding name in Antwerp at the time would have played an essential role in this.) Cornette reported that '*tes amis*' ('your friends') made the right decision in recommending a donation to the museum. 'Because it is certain that they [Schmalzigaug's paintings] constitute a very interesting effort in the history of our modern art.'

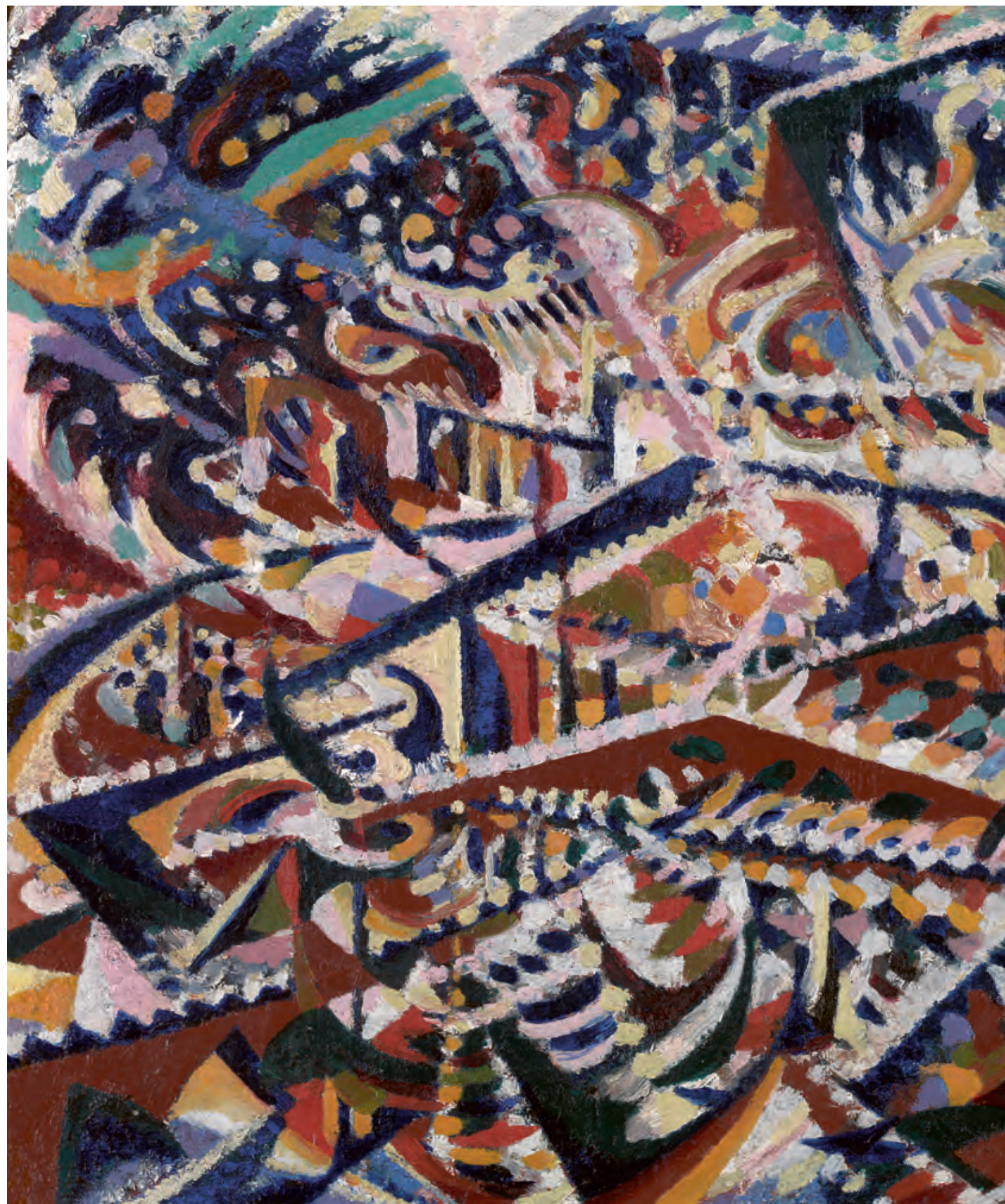
The letters from Malgaud to Cornette have yet to be found. Given the family ties, however, it is highly plausible that Malgaud's advisers would have been friends of an art society called Kunst van Heden, which organised art exhibitions. From late 1907 or early 1908, Schmalzigaug had been affiliated with this society as an 'assistant writer', secretary and international networker.⁸ In the spring of 1923, Kunst van Heden also presented an extensive, posthumous survey of works by its former secretary at the annual Salon it traditionally organised in the Antwerp Festival Hall on the Meir. [Fig. 10] At the time, the wall space reserved for Schmalzigaug was filled mainly with the Futuristic canvases that his brother Walter was able to recover shortly after the war from the studio Jules had occupied in Venice from 1912 until 1914 and which he had been forced to leave on the spur of the moment due to the impending threat of war. In 1923, however, Belgian art criticism was (still) not quite ready for Schmalzigaug's synthesis of the abstract, dynamic innovations in Italy's urban centres. Some critics could be quite harsh: 'sickly, a nightmare, and impossible dilettantism: nothing more but dynamic eccentricities which even the devil would have found hard to stomach [...].'⁹

Those same art critics had nothing but praise, however, for the oeuvre of Rik Wouters, who, like Schmalzigaug, had died in exile in the Netherlands during the war and who was honoured with a retrospective at the same 1923 Salon. This penchant for Wouters in Antwerp, Flanders and Belgium was one of the lasting effects of the successful Salon that Kunst van Heden had organised in 1914. By then, Wouters's status as a rising star of Belgian Modernism was already confirmed. Many of his works were on display, alongside comprehensive surveys of the oeuvre of Kempen painter Jakob Smits and Vincent van Gogh. The fact that Schmalzigaug had participated in the *Free International Futurist Exhibition*, a much talked-about event in avant-garde circles in Rome that same year, went completely unnoticed in Belgium.¹⁰ During their short careers, both artists had given a remarkably innovative emotional meaning and visual function to colour (and light). However, the domestic bliss of Wouters's work was deemed lovelier and figurative, thus garnering acceptance more easily in his home country. The development of a more modern style of painting in the village of Watermael or Boitsfort, like Wouters did, carried more favour with Belgian critics than the more radical variant that had its origins in the cosmopolitan cities of Venice and Rome.

In 1913, Schmalzigaug set aside one of his painted impressions of the Rialto Bridge in Venice and some other canvases for the 1914 Kunst van Heden Salon. The artist never pursued this option, however, because he wondered whether a coming out in Flanders might negatively affect his growing rapprochement with Futurism.¹¹ Ultimately, he had the following to say on the subject in a letter to Boccioni, one of his Futuristic counterparts in Italy: 'I only have one word for this contemporary Belgian art, the Word SHIT. [...] That is why I chose to go into exile, and well before I had the pleasure of encountering you and your friends, I had already chosen your fledgling nation of Italy as my elective home. Here I can breathe.'¹²



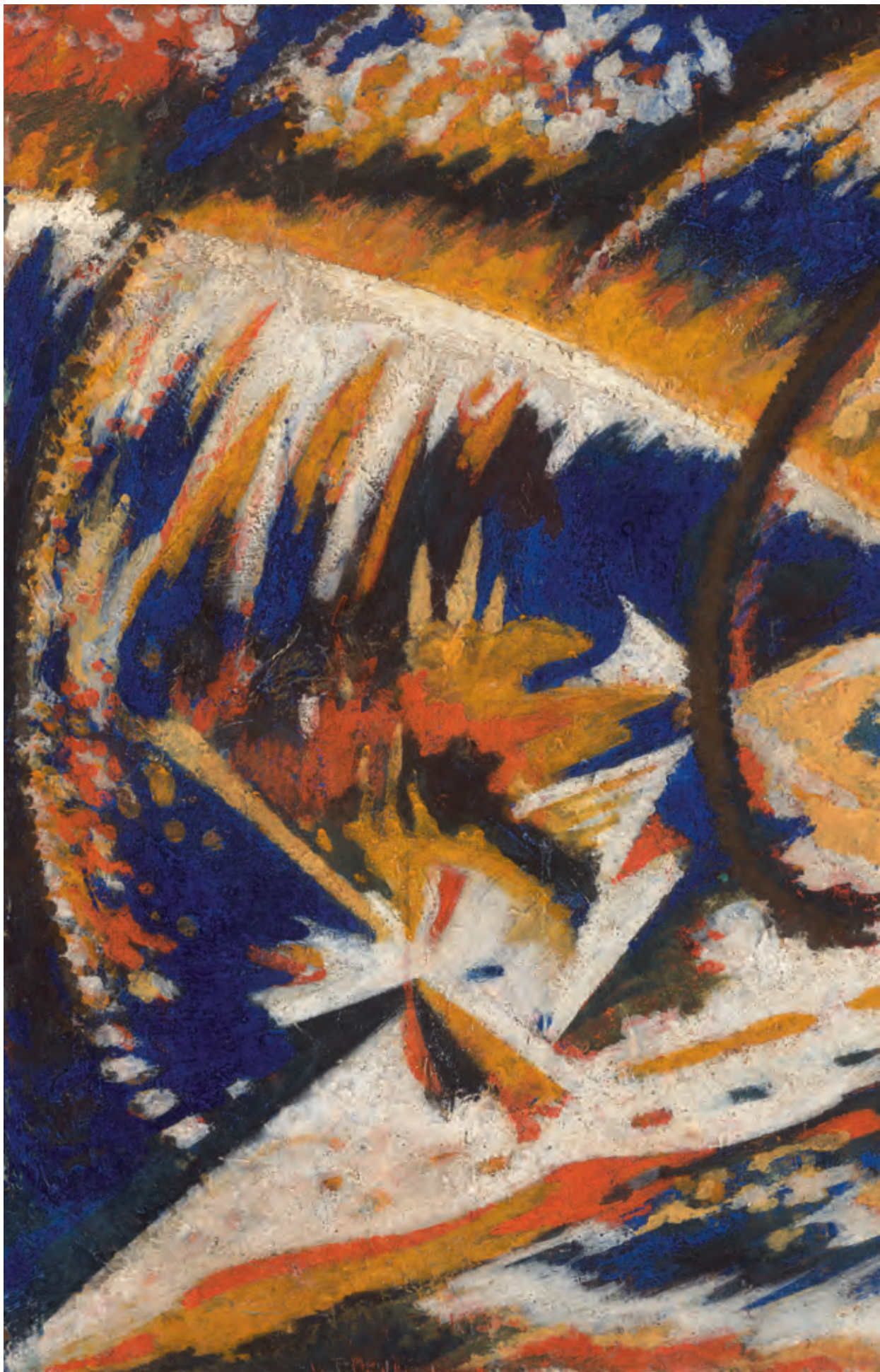
FIG. 10
Poster for the
Salon of Kunst
van Heden, 1923,
Letterenhuis,
Antwerp

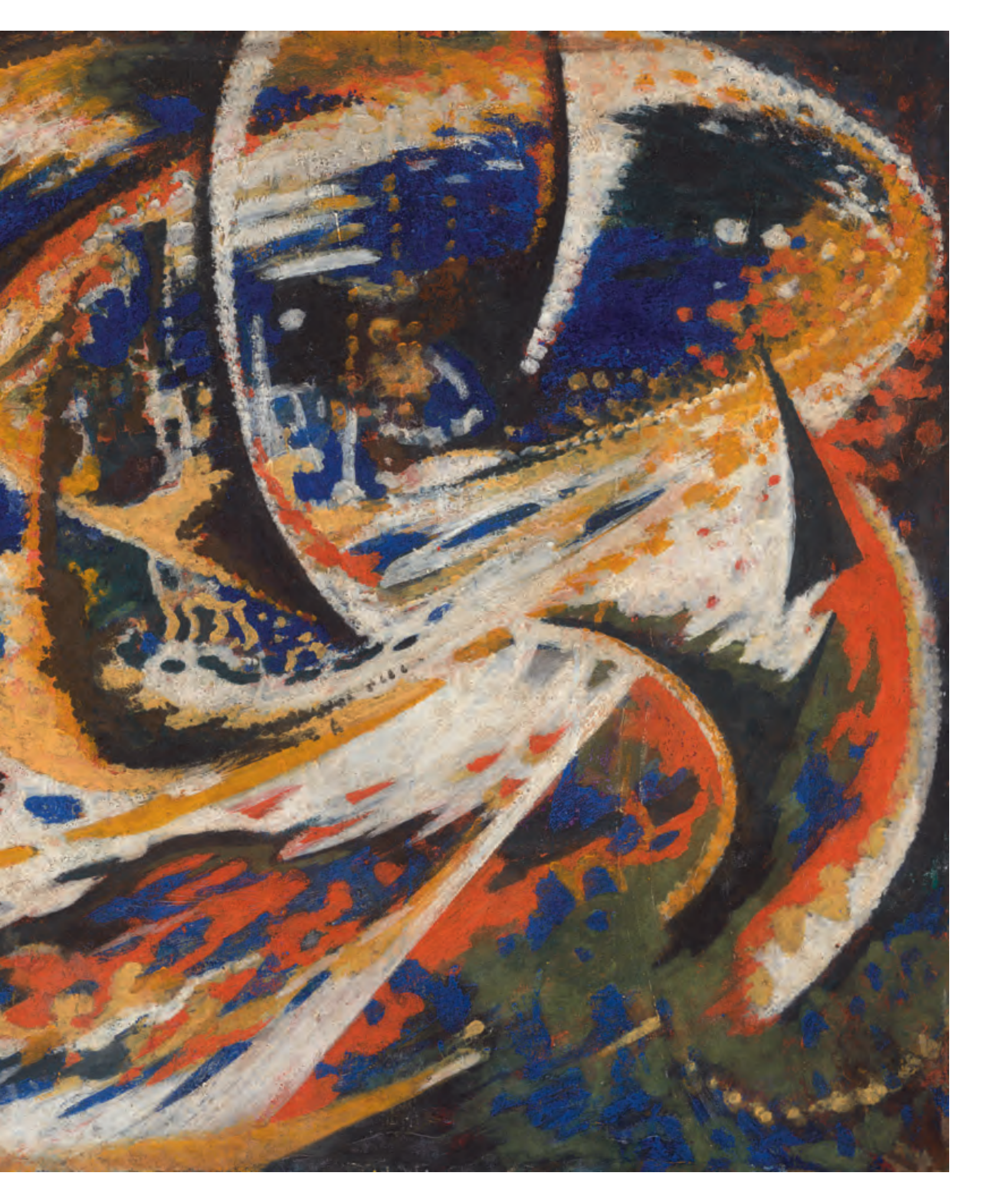




Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Light + Mirrors and
Crowd: Interior of a
Popular Ballroom
in Antwerp, 1914*,
oil on canvas,
52.5 x 64 cm

Jules Schmalzigaug,
Speed, (1914),
oil on canvas,
74 × 108 cm









Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Rhythm of Light Waves:
Street + Sun + Crowd*,
(1915–1917),
oil on canvas,
marouflage on panel,
98 × 127 cm





Jules Schmalzigaug,
Beach in Scheveningen,
(1915-1917),
pastel chalk on paper,
250 × 400 mm

Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Kursaal and Beach
in Scheveningen*,
(1915-1917),
pastel chalk on paper,
250 × 395 mm



2015

Fast forward to 2015. By then, the name Schmalzigaug was gaining traction in Belgian museum circles. As we already mentioned, retrospective exhibitions were organised at the KMSKB and at Mu.ZEE in Ostend. The exhibition *Modernisme: Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa* (1912–1930) at the MSK Gent (2013) also paid tribute to Schmalzigaug's pioneering role.

In the meantime, the KMSKA, which was closed for extensive renovation at the time, took essential steps in the expansion of its collection during the closure. Following an acquisition, the museum was able to add 18 works on paper and one sketchbook to its collection on 16 December 2015. The sketchbook was donated by the then owners of this collection of drawings, Maurice and Caroline Verbaet. The other drawings were acquired through the intermediary of Eric Gillis Fine Art, a Brussels-based gallery for old and modern masters. But Gallery Ronny Van de Velde had already rediscovered these drawings much earlier.

Thanks to this acquisition, the museum was and is now better able to document the different phases in Schmalzigaug's artistic development, from the early days right up until the end of his career. Such exercises on paper give us a good indication – perhaps even more so than his finished paintings – of what the artist liked to look at, the places he visited to practise his drawing and painting skills, and the ideas, compositions, or techniques he was toying with.

The earliest drawings in the sketchbook date from Schmalzigaug's time at the academy in Brussels (1903–1904). In addition to architectural drawings and designs for posters, they include figure studies, mainly in red chalk.

Two of the acquired works also point to Schmalzigaug's experiment with engraving during this period (1905–1911), from his first trip to Venice until his stays in Bruges. The etching known as *Dragon on a chessboard*, which was renamed *Grotesques* in the catalogue raisonné, is clearly the result of a creative mind that likes to experiment (and with some droll Ensorian traits). [p. 40]

The watercolour *Red Sailing Ship and Gondola*, meanwhile, is an excellent example of how Schmalzigaug perfected his love of colour in 1912–1913 in the Doge's city, with its distinctive gondolas and canals. The sketched and hatched iconographic motifs, along with the saturated yellows and reds which suggest the waning of the light of the setting sun, show how Schmalzigaug adapted his eyes to the vibrant Venetian light and the shimmering colours that are an inseparable part of it. [p. 42]

A gouache like *Head of a Woman* (1914–1915), also known as *Veiled Lady*, shows how Schmalzigaug practices his distinctive, freely 'pointillated' brushwork with thick blue, red, or yellow 'dots'. [p. 49]

Two enigmatic *Compositions* (1915–1916) in pastel on black paper hint at Schmalzigaug's research into abstract art. These experiments have figurative titles such as *Burning Bushes* or *Medusa and Green Streak* in the acquisition file. In all likelihood, these figurative readings attest to a human need for recognisability rather than the artist's visual intentions. The catalogue raisonné opted for *Composition*, a more abstract title.³⁰ [pp. 44–45]



Jules Schmalzigaug,
Grotesques, (1905),
etching on paper,
194 × 270 mm

Jules Schmalzigaug,
Backyard, (1909–1911),
etching and drypoint
on paper,
229 × 313 mm



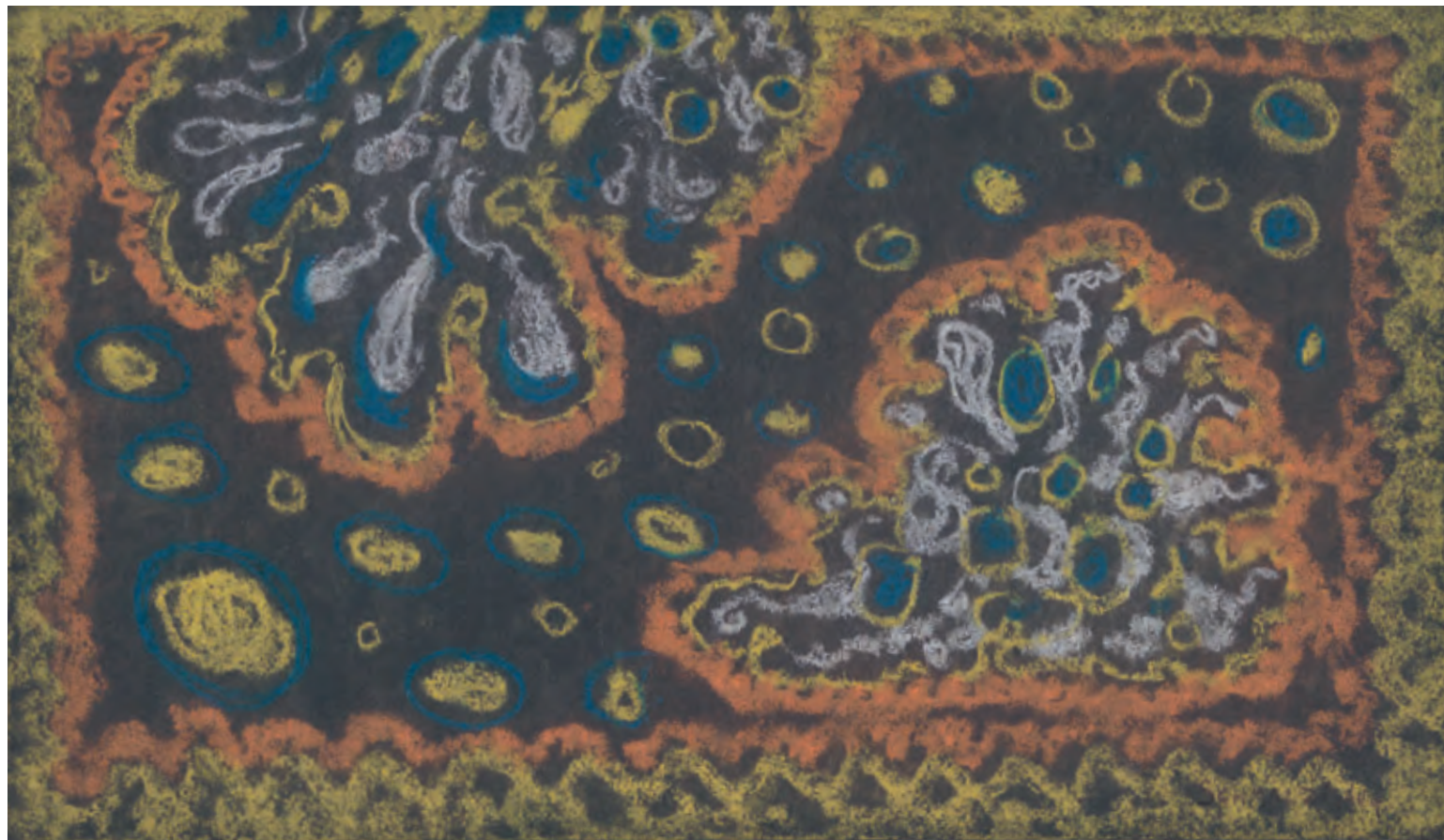


SCHMALZIGANG



Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Red Sailing Ship and
Gondola*, (1912-1913),
watercolour on paper,
238 x 171 mm

Jules Schmalzigaug,
*Chiesa dei Gesuati in
Venice*, (1912-1913),
coloured chalk on paper,
110 x 132 mm



Jules Schmalzigaug,
Composition,
(1915–1916),
pastel chalk on paper,
197 × 338 mm

Jules Schmalzigaug,
Composition,
(1915-1916),
pastel chalk on paper,
336 × 195 mm





Jules Schmalzigaug,
Composition,
(1915-1916),
charcoal on paper,
500 x 642 mm



Jules Schmalzigaug,
Street View,
(1915-1916),
Conté chalk on paper,
207 x 118 mm

Colophon

This book has been published following the gift by Gallery Ronny Van de Velde in 2022 and is a companion volume to the *Jules Schmalzigaug (1882–1917). Futurismo!* exhibition from 28 September 2024 until 12 January 2025 at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA).

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collaborators at the KMSKA

Cover image
Jules Schmalzigaug,
Light + Mirrors and Crowd:
Interior of a Popular
Ballroom in Antwerp, 1914,
oil on canvas, 52.5 × 64 cm,
Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Antwerp – Flemish Community
Collection, inv. 210obis

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Podcast

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Het gedreven leven van een
Antwerps futurist on Spotify.
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and with the voices of Matteo
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Peeters, Boet Schauwink,
and Tom Van Landuyt.
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