

A RED THAT SINGS



Royal  
Museum of  
Fine Arts  
Antwerp

Adriaan Gonnissen



SINGS

# RED THAT

Masterpieces by  
James Ensor,  
Rik Wouters and  
Jules Schmalzigaug















# FOREWORD

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) is founded on two icons of Flemish, Belgian and international art history. Peter Paul Rubens is our flag-bearer for the old masters, while James Ensor is the pivotal figure in the emergence of modernism. Through Rubens and Ensor, we present our historical museum as an institution that focuses on early and modern art alike; on seven centuries of art history up to the present day, which enables us to see the fascinating connections that run across our artistic past and present.

What this new exhibition clearly highlights (once again) is that the Flemish artistic tradition stands firmly in favour of grandiose colour. In favour of rich, saturated pigments that continue to astonish, enrich and connect us. Colours that sing! Colours so impactful that they can be sensed and heard like sounds.

Of course, our modern masters also draw eagerly on that spectacular tradition. Sensual and sensational in its effect, the ‘red that sings’ has been a pigment of choice for centuries. Colour brings things to life. It not only stimulates the eyes, it triggers emotions too. Which is why in this exhibition KMSKA has made a point of showcasing James Ensor, Rik Wouters and Jules Schmalzigaug as the key figures behind modernism’s revival of the spectacular colour palette.

The exhibition includes masterpieces from the substantial bodies of work by these three artists. The KMSKA is custodian of several key works, but the exhibition’s story has been reinforced by the generous support of several significant lenders. We cannot thank them enough for being such valuable partners over many years.

Several prominent names provide context and depth. We could hardly open the exhibition with anyone other than our very own Rubens, whose work is a veritable opera in paint – the grand master of the Baroque simply had to be included. But more recent artists are crucial too; Ensor, Wouters and Schmalzigaug also admired the Antwerp painter Henri De Braekeleer and the illustrious Frenchman Adolphe Monticelli as forerunners of a freer, more resonant play of colours.

Music and painting; colours like sounds. A visit to the KMSKA is always a feast for the senses! Finally, we owe special thanks to our curator Adriaan Gonnissen for creating this magnificent exhibition.

Carmen Willems  
KMSKA Managing Director

Luk Lemmens  
KMSKA Chair

# A RED THAT SINGS



# THE SOUND-COLOURS OF MODERN PAINTING

Adriaan Gonnissen

Museum-goers at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) gaze open-mouthed at the paintings of James Ensor, Rik Wouters and Jules Schmalzigaug, at what they see as a 'feast of colour'.

Our three big modern colourists set the beat for an exhilarating modernism, painted to the rhythm of spectacular colours. Their brushes took the system of subtle colour harmonies and bright-soft tonalities that the Impressionists had developed through the refined sensibility of their vision and shook it up with flamboyant pigments. For this trio, the expressive power of the modern lay in the *musica* of pure colours: strident vermilion reds, sonorous cobalt blues, shrill sunny yellows, resonant autumnal oranges, chirping grass greens. Colours to make your mouth water; colours that sound loud; colours that, perhaps, not only stimulate our eyes but also evoke symbolic associations through our other senses.

This book is about the interconnection of perception and the fascination it generated in the heyday of modernism. Drawing on contemporary descriptions, we look closely at the way that artists, writers, critics, musicians and other commentators employed the ephemeral affinities between optical and auditory sensations to better understand colourful paintings. We attune ourselves to the pitch of the 'red that sings' – a metaphor we owe to our Antwerp Futurist, Jules Schmalzigaug.

In Venice in 1913, Schmalzigaug and the Italian painter Luigi Russolo reflected at length on the idea of colours as sounds. Russolo, a leading Futurist, was raised in the nearby town of Portogruaro by a father who played the local cathedral organ, an upbringing that inclined him to experience painting in terms of music, as witnessed in his scintillating 1911 masterpiece *Music* (p. 15).<sup>1</sup> Having trained in both disciplines, he was still studying in Milan when he produced the groundwork for his manifesto *L'Arte dei rumori* (1913), which he addressed first and foremost to the 'great Futurist musician' Balilla Pratella. 'Pouah! Let's get out quickly, for I can't repress much longer the intense desire to create a true musical reality finally by distributing big loud slaps right and left, stepping and pushing over violins and pianos, bassoons and moaning organs! Let's go out!'<sup>2</sup>

Not long after these mind-expanding encounters, Schmalzigaug wrote a letter to another great Futurist, Umberto Boccioni, in which he asked whether he had ever been to KMSKA, and if so, whether he had stared open-mouthed at Peter Paul Rubens's *The Adoration of the Magi* (1624–25) (p. 16). Schmalzigaug said that he had never seen an Impressionist painting with a red as dazzling as the '*rouge qui chante*' in the flamboyantly painted cloak of the king who stands in the foreground of Rubens' monumental altarpiece staring straight out into the room.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, 'a red that sings' and other similarly resonant colours raised the curtain not only on the theatre of the Baroque, but on that of modern painting too.<sup>4</sup> Red always grabs the attention, more so than any other pigment. Across the centuries, red in a painting has seduced and warned. It is the colour of blood and fire. The colour of the heart and of passion. The pure pigment triggers emotions. Red serves symbolic and formal purposes. It drives the composition of paintings, fashions forms and creates visual rhythms and abstractions. To quote the nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson:

Sang from the Heart, Sire,  
Dipped my Beak in it,  
If the Tune drip too much  
Have a tint too Red –

Pardon the Cochineal –  
Suffer the Vermillion –  
[...]”<sup>5</sup>



Peter Paul Rubens  
*The Holy Family with the  
Parrot*, 1614–33, oil on  
panel, 164 × 190 cm,  
Royal Museum of  
Fine Arts Antwerp –  
Collection Flemish  
Community, inv. 312









In Belgium too, the paintings that Ensor exhibited in Brussels at the artistic society Les Vingt in the late nineteenth century were described as ‘symphonies of colour’. ‘His still-lives sing in an original key, shrill melodies, the like of which have not been heard before. His blood-red masks are as fresh as strawberries in cream,’ one reviewer wrote in *La Gazette* on 20 February 1893.<sup>15</sup>

For the vast majority of people, including artists and writers, the notion that a colour can actually be heard is not expressed via genuine chromaesthesia – a rare and specific form of synaesthesia. Only a few people experience this blending of the senses. Yet many claim to perceive this rare phenomenon, out of the allure of the idea that the visual stimulation of a colourful work of art triggers a gut feeling. This emotional stratum of meaning is precisely what enables artists and art lovers to sense what such multisensorial perception might feel like, even without experiencing it themselves.

At any rate, what Ensor, Wouters and Schmalzigaug show is that colours begin to sing loudest when applied to the canvas freely. Muscular colours convey compelling, dominant values, and only then do fluent touches truly dance across the canvas to a clearly discernible beat. Pure of pigment, but also full of dynamism and meaning. It is not surprising that the Rubens’ red should have been an inescapable source of painterly passion for our modernists and critics. It’s less obvious that the quest for modern renewal was also preceded by illustrious exponents of a freer, more resonant colour palette in the more recent past. The Antwerp realist Henri De Braekeleer is among them, even if this *maître coloriste* is known chiefly – and not unjustly – as a painter of silence and stillness. Modern painters were not afraid to take a different view on occasion, searching the surface of the canvas for what might sound like music to their ears. Several fascinated critics also had their ears attuned, although the majority had different expectations.



James Ensor  
*Carnival in Binche*,  
1924, oil on canvas,  
61 × 76 cm, Royal  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Antwerp, long-term  
loan from Rubey





James Ensor  
*Fanfare in Red*,  
1884, oil on canvas,  
114.5 × 80.7 cm,  
Ensor Foundation,  
Ostend





In the artist's most celebrated syntheses of grotesque masquerades and sonorous colours, such as *The Intrigue* (1890), 'the red that sings' seems to swing across the canvas, from left to right, from sleeve to sleeve, cheek to cheek, lips to lips (pp. 22–23 and detail, left). These masterpieces are completed with pure greens, blues and yellows. The same goes for Ensor's tour-de-force, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889* (1888–90) (pp. 62–65). In this painting, the din of the metropolis comes to life, seeming to blend with the crowd of caricatures. The colourfully uniformed military musicians, drummers, oboists and other '*fanfares doctrinaires*' are unable to compete. The widest, most flamboyant expanses of colour not only form the stage sets, they also convey the work's meanings and ambitions. 'Long live Socialism!' is spelled out in green letters across a bright red banner, the colour of the labour movement.

Schmalzigaug once visited Ensor in his studio, where he felt like an extra in a spectacular play, with Ensor as director, set designer, lighting technician and sound effects operator. He looked back on the occasion in the art-history course he compiled, evoking a studio in which a huge Japanese mask dangled from the ceiling on a wire, while colourful screens, easels, parasols and fans obscured the view of 'a skeleton *au naturel*, with a patina of dust'. Colourful still-lives were arrayed in every corner of the space, prompting Schmalzigaug to wonder whether Ensor actually painted them all: 'Ensor had placed them there to feast his eyes, to compose a little poem in his own way, in those strange harmonies of sensation and colour, he delighted in it as he gazed at it lovingly and with his faintly ironic smile [...] And then a large composition "The Entry of Christ into Brussels" with brass bands and bass drums, a socialist crowd, banners with slogans and, in the houses, domestic scenes and arguments visible through the windows.'

James Ensor  
*The Intrigue* (detail),  
1890, oil on canvas,  
89.5 × 149 cm, donation  
from Friends of the  
Museum, 1921, Royal  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Antwerp – Collection  
Flemish Community,  
inv. 1856

pp. 62–65:  
James Ensor  
*The Entry of Christ  
into Brussels in 1889*,  
1888–90, oil on canvas,  
252.5 × 430.5 cm,  
J. Paul Getty Museum,  
Los Angeles



Rik Wouters  
*Autumn*, 1913, oil on  
canvas, 135 × 140 cm,  
donation from Dr. Ludo  
van Bogaert-Sheid,  
1989, Royal Museum  
of Fine Arts Antwerp –  
Collection Flemish  
Community, inv. 3293

Rik Wouters  
*Chrysanthemums*,  
1915, oil on canvas,  
69 × 91 cm, The Phoebus  
Foundation, Antwerp

The Antwerp poet Paul van Ostaijen was thus able to describe Wouters as 'Expressionism's second event in Flanders' after Ensor: 'Not an event like Ensor, despite the immense power to which his still young work speaks [...] Rik Wouters began like anyone else whose early formation was rooted in Impressionism; he applied the principles of Expressionism intuitively, yet continued to resist the movement.'<sup>75</sup>

Van Ostaijen was referring to (among other things) Wouters's remarkable balance between muscular colours and charming, mundane content, which is what shapes his immense popularity in Belgium to this day. We have a fondness in this region for the small and the intimate, the unpretentious, while simultaneously yearning, with modest restraint, for the adventurous, the new and the unknown. For the wider world.

For all the affection in which he is held in his own country, people beyond our borders are rather indifferent today towards Wouters's work. Judging by the responses of international visitors to KMSKA, there tends to be greater appreciation abroad for Schmalzigaug and Ensor, for sheer 'wall power', free of charming distractions. Could it be that Wouters is too well behaved for foreign taste? 'Too much like Cézanne', we occasionally hear. Van Ostaijen already had an explanation for this: 'Cézanne's influence was such that there was never more Cézanne in a Wouters canvas than there was of the real Wouters. However, Wouters fully understood the reinvigorating power of Cézanne, namely the inner life of outwardly dead things. Colour lives with structure in a body, in the most intimate connection.'<sup>76</sup>





Jules Schmalzigaug  
*Dynamic Expression  
of the Movement  
of a Dancer*, 1914,  
distemper on canvas,  
94 × 105 cm, Mu.ZEE –  
Collection Flemish  
Community, Ostend



Jules Schmalzigaug  
*Composition*,  
1914-15, oil on  
canvas, 95 × 106 cm,  
private collection



Jules Schmalzigaug  
*Composition*, 1915-16,  
pastel chalk on paper,  
336 × 195 mm, Royal  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Antwerp – Collection  
Flemish Community,  
inv. 3803

## NOTES

- 1 *Music* (Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London) depicts a mysterious pianist, shrouded in shadows, thrashing away at the keyboard as a dark blue, arabesque line meanders up behind him, blending with a blue sky of concentric circles. This masterpiece visualises the complexity of musical emotions, with grinning red, green and yellow carnival masks symbolising harmonious and complementary chords.
- 2 'grand musicien futuriste'. 'Pouah! Sortons vite, car je ne puis guère réprimer trop longtemps mon désir fou de créer enfin une véritable réalité musicale en distribuant à droite et à gauche de belles gifles sonores, enjambant et culbutant violons et pianos, contrebasses et orgues gémissantes! Sortons!' For the original text see: Luigi Russolo, *L'Arte dei rumori* (Milan: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, 1913). English translation by Robert Filliou from *The Art of Noise* [sic] (*Futurist Manifesto, 1913*) (Great Bear Pamphlet, 1967). Accessible online: [https://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/russolo\\_noise.pdf](https://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/russolo_noise.pdf).
- 3 In early 1914, Schmalzigaug wrote four letters to Umberto Boccioni (25 January, 17 February, 20 February, 7 March). They are currently kept at Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, Umberto Boccioni Papers, inv. 880380 (box 1). The letters have also been published in full in Maria Elena Versari, 'Sur la correspondance inédite de Jules Schmalzigaug à Umberto Boccioni', *Bulletin de la Fondation Ça Ira* 40–41 (October 2010), 7–37.
- 4 Carlo Carrà – another Futurist and acquaintance of Schmalzigaug – wrote, for instance, in his manifesto *La pittura dei suoni, rumori, odori* (1913) (The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells, 1913): '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.' ('1. I rossi, roooooossssi roooooossssssimi che griiiiiidano. [...] Tutti i colori della velocità, della gioia, della baldoria, del carnevale più fantastico, dei fuochi d'artificio, dei café-chantants e dei music-halls, tutti i colori in movimento sentiti nel tempo e non nello spazio.')
- 5 Thomas H. Johnson (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960), 482. The original poem dates from around 1865.
- 6 The appeal of the phenomenon of synaesthesia in the arts, literature and philosophy is explored in a recent book: Susan Bernstein, *The Other Synaesthesia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2024).
- 7 See, for example, Fiona Elizabeth Burrows, 'Words of Shape and Shade: Synaesthesia in the Poetry and Poetics of the Early Twentieth Century' (PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2006).
- 8 'la Nature'; 'un temple où de vivants piliers laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles'; 'forêts de symboles'; 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent'. Charles Baudelaire, 'Spleen et idéal', *IV Correspondances, Les Fleurs du mal et autres poèmes* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), 39.
- 9 'Cette grande symphonie du jour, qui est l'éternelle variation de la symphonie d'hier, cette succession de mélodies, où la variété sort toujours de l'infini, cet hymne compliqué s'appelle la couleur. On trouve dans la couleur l'harmonie, la mélodie et le contre-point.' Charles Baudelaire, *Salon de 1846* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1846), 11. Accessible online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8626546p/f35.item>. English translation by Jonathan Mayne in Charles Baudelaire, *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies* (London: Phaidon Press, 1955), 46–47.
- 10 'je veux qu'un rouge soit sonore et résonne comme une cloche; si ce n'est pas cela, j'ajoute encore des rouges et d'autres couleurs jusqu'à ce que j'y arrive.' Translated and quoted in Charles Edward Gauss, *The Aesthetic Theories of the French Artists* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), 43.
- 11 Delacroix wrote: 'There is a kind of emotion that is entirely unique to painting; nothing else can give an idea of it. There is an impression that arises from a particular arrangement of colours, light, shadows, and so on. That is what one would call the music of the painting.' ('Il y a un genre d'émotion qui est tout particulier à la peinture; rien dans l'autre n'en donne une idée. Il y a une impression qui résulte de tel arrangement de couleurs, de lumières, d'ombres, etc. C'est ce qu'on appellerait la musique du tableau.')
- 12 See Eugène Delacroix, 'Impressions et méditations', in *Œuvres littéraires, II, Études esthétiques*, ed. by Élie Faure (Paris: G. Crès & Cie, 1923). Accessible online: <https://www.lecturiels.org/lecturiel/1397.pdf>.
- 13 Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, Nienke Bakker (eds), *Vincent van Gogh: The Letters. The Complete, Illustrated and Annotated Edition* (6 vols.) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), vol. 3, letter 547. Accessible online: <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let547/letter.html>.
- 14 'Pourquoi suis je si peu artiste que je regrette toujours que la statue, le tableau ne vivent pas? Pourquoi conçois je mieux le musicien, pourquoi vois je mieux la raison d'être de ses abstractions.' Van Gogh, 1914. Accessible online: <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let659/letter.html>.
- 15 'vocabulaire sonore ou musical; ils nous parleront de rouges ronflants, de verts criards, de bleus qui chantent, d'une note jaune qui fait tapage, d'harmonies et de dissonances chromatiques. Par compensation, pour nous décrire une symphonie, ils nous parleront peinture [...]. "En passant par des sonorités diverses, la ligne mélodique se colore de teintes diverses."' Paul Souriau, 'Le symbolisme des couleurs', in *La Revue de Paris* 2 (March–April 1895), 860. Accessible online: [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_la-revue-de-paris\\_march-april-1895\\_8](https://archive.org/details/sim_la-revue-de-paris_march-april-1895_8).
- 16 'Elles chantent, sur un mode original, des mélodies suraiguës qu'on n'a point entendues autre part. Ses masques, aux rouges sanglants [...] ont la fraîcheur de fraises écrasées dans la crème.' Quoted in Susan M. Canning, *A History and Critical Review of the Salons of 'Les Vingt', 1884–1893* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1980), 415; Herwig Todts, James Ensor, occasioneel modernist. Een onderzoek naar James Ensors artistieke en maatschappelijke opvattingen en de interpretatie van zijn kunst' (PhD thesis, University of Ghent, 2013), 78.
- 17 '[De Braekeleer] avait le sentiment de la couleur à un degré que pas un autre n'a égalé parmi les artistes du Salon. [...] une magie d'effets remarquables [...] Ses très-réelles magies [...] Ses figures sont sacrifiées au besoin d'en tirer parti pour le coloris'. Camille Lemonnier, 'Le Salon', *Revue de Belgique* 4, no. 12 (1872), 287.
- 18 'De verf-wrijver zelf lost zich, in de ongedwongenste houding, uit het geheel op, en geen toontje, geen tintje, dat, ware 't nog zou wuttel, in die kleuren-harmonie schittering of wangeluid teweegbrengt,' Phulax, 'XXXIle Driejaarlijksche Tentoonstelling Salon van Gent', in *Nederlandsche dicht- en kunsthal* 6 (1884), 389.

- felste tegenstanders ervan te horen krijgen. [...] het is hoog tijd dat er ten onzent een ernstige poging gedaan wordt om de verschillende beeldende kunstenaars opnieuw in nader verband met elkaar te brengen. Wat zou samenwerking tusschen bouw-, schilder- en beeldhouwkunstenaars al goede vruchten opleveren! En waarom zouden wij met de jongste letter- en muziekunst geen voeling houden.' Anonymous, 'Belgische moderne kunstkring Open Wegen Amsterdam', *Architectura. Orgaan van het genootschap Architectura et Amicitia* 25, no. 52 (29 December 1917), 404.
- 67 'De associatie van indrukken is wellicht gewaagd en onverantwoordelijk maar, bij den aanblik van dit portret, hoorde ik weer in mijn herinnering, opkomend uit de zonverlichte arena van Barcelona, het diepklagend geloei van den jongen stier die bloedend en uitgeput, te midden der duizenden vijandige menschen, de kudde uit het verre weiland ter hulp roept, nu hij voelt dat de kracht hem gaat begeven en dat hij sterven moet.' Jozef Muls, 'James Ensor en Rik Wouters', *Vlaamsche Arbeid* 2 (February 1922), 208.
- 68 'De kunstenaars op wier werk hier in 't bijzonder de aandacht werd getrokken – Vincent van Gogh, Jakob Smits, James Ensor – behooren nu juist tot diegenen die voor heden en toekomst van overwegenden invloed zullen blijken, en daarnevens stond [...] Rik Wouters, die van al de belovers voor morgen, één der solidste en der rijkst aangelegde temperamenten is.' Ary Delen, 'Kunst van Heden. Tentoonstelling van 1914 te Antwerpen', *Onze Kunst. Geïllustreerd maandschrift voor beeldende en decoratieve kunsten* 13, no. 25 (1914), 162–178.
- 69 'En dépit de dissonances volontaires et du meilleur effet, il régnait dans cet apparent désordre de jeunesse une harmonie qui ne se dément jamais. [...] Le talent de Rik Wouters s'annonce et s'avère déjà comme celui d'un coloriste intrépide sachant découvrir, dans le domaine toujours vierge des tons, des valeurs nouvelles. [...] C'est tout le rythme de la vie qui éclate dans ces transports vers des clartés nouvelles.' Franz Hellens, 'Rik Wouters', *L'Art Moderne* 34, no. 9 (1 March 1914), 67.
- 70 'De kleurige, zingende dingen rondom haar zijn slechts zoo schoon en zoo blij, omdat de schilder ernaar keek [...] wij hooren de geestige muziek die zij voor hem spelen, het snaar-getokkel dat hem begroet.' Muls 1922, 209.
- 71 Min 2011, 152–153.
- 72 'Bij deze schilderijen denkt men niet in de eerste plaats aan wat zij voorstellen. De wereld komt ons hier voor als een tooverachtig kleurenspeel.' Muls 1922, 208.
- 73 'Bonken van kleur'. N.H. Wolf, 'Stedelijk Museum. Josina Knap, Rik Wouters, G.W. Knap', *De Kunst. Een Algemeen Geïllustreerd en Artistiek Weekblad* 8, no. 419 (5 February 1916), 218.
- 74 Brabant Fauvism, of which he was the undeclared forerunner, was above all a marketing ploy from the 1940s. Yet to this day, the term remains highly successful in art-historical discourse.
- 75 'Geen gebeurtenis als Ensor, spijs de reuzekracht die uit zijn nog jong werk spreekt [...]. Rik Wouters begint gelijk eenieder, wiens eerste vorming in het impressionisme wortelt; hij past intuïtief beginselen van het ekspressionisme toe, doch verzet zich nog tegen de beweging.' Paul van Ostaijen, 'Ekspressionisme in Vlaanderen', *De Stroom* 1, no. 1 (15 July 1918), 156.
- 76 'De invloed van Cézanne was zó dat er toch nooit in een doek van Wouters meer van Cézanne, dan van de echte Wouters aanwezig was. De renovatorische kracht van Cézanne begrijpt Wouters echter volledig: d.i. het innerlike leven der uiterlik dode dingen. In een lichaam leeft de kleur met de structuur in een zeer innig verband.' Van Ostaijen 1918, 157.
- 77 'muzikale impressies en wij krijgen in kleuren en vormen te zien wat zekere muziek, b.v. die van Debussy, ons in klanken te hooren geeft.' Muls 1922, 209.
- 78 't Is als de opborrelende klankenweelde van een dionysische levensvreugde, verrukking om kleuren en schoonheid. Deze schilderijen en teekeningen, zij hebben de bekoorlijke frischheid van een jonge Lente. [...] Wouters heeft zijn opvoeding genoten bij een die hem al de geheimen van kleur en licht moest openbaren, nl. bij James Ensor. [...] Het kleurgevoel is bij hem tot een uiterste ontwikkeld, en hoe heftig ook, toch ontaardt het nooit tot schreeuwerige gemeenheid.' Delen 1914, 178.
- 79 'Schitterend, vlammend vizioen, chaos van kleuren en lijnen, was de Val der Engelen, een werk dat oningewijden zeker niet bekoren kan – *ils n'y voyaient que du feu!* – maar dat als kleurensymphonie eenig is. Vurige zuivere rooden en schitterende groenen en gelen vermengen er zich op fijne rose-tinten en wit grijze tonen tot een fanfare van episch geweld!' Delen 1914, 174.
- 80 'En zoo zijn we genaderd tot den Benjamin en helaas ook den steen des aanstoots dezer tentoonstelling: Rik Wouters. Is het niet jammerlijk hoe deze geniale jongen tot in den dood door onbegrip vervolgd wordt, hoe tot in den schoot eener uit kunstenaars en kunstzinnigen samengestelde Commissie een harden strijd moest worden gevoerd, om zijn werk te doen aanvaarden? [...] als in een voor gevoel van een vroegen dood, werkte hij haastig en ongeduldig; hij had zóóveel te zeggen! Zulke onuitputtelijke schatten leefden in hem – en hij wilde alles geven, zich geheel uitleven nog vóór de tijd gekomen was. Maar dan ook: wat vuur, wat temperament, wat overborrelende geestdrift! Kleuren schetteren en knallen, vormen zwenken en zwijmelen, lichtvlekken dansen en smelten in oogenverblindende pracht. Zie het geweld van die Roode Gordijnen tergend als de lap van een capeador, gillend tegen de mozaïek eener binnenkamer en een uitkijk op een zondoorblakerden tuin; [...] Maar het compleetste werk, naar ons oordeel, is de Strijkster, een schemer van kleuren en nauw aangegeven vormen, waar hoofdzak is en blijft de duizendvoudige speling en wisseling van het licht, het stroomen van de lucht door die ruimte, zoo reëel en toch zoo ijl, dat ze zich uitspreidt buiten de lijst, en ons met haar trillingen omhult. Ze hingen naasten, deze doeken, in een matig verlicht zijzaaltje; maar zij ontstaken licht in de schemering en sloegen gaten in den wand. Zij verkondigden de nieuwe Lente en het nieuw geluid; met al het gebrekkige of onvoldragene, dat men er kan in zoeken, getuigden zij dat onze kunst zich eeuwig vernieuwt en verjongt, dat zij de afgetrapte paden verlaat en in jeugdigen overmoed nieuwe gebieden verovert.' Paul Buschmann, 'De keurtentoonstelling van Belgische meesters (1830–1914)', *Onze Kunst. Voortzetting van de Vlaamsche school* 19, no. 37–38 (January–December 1920), 27–28.
- 81 Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Siemens, 1893).
- 82 A solid overview of the modern history of the arabesque line can be found in Markus Brüderlin, 'L'art abstrait du XXe siècle, autour de l'arabesque', *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art* 1 (2010), 171–176.
- 83 'jeu linéaire souple qui est à la fois rythme et mélodie dans la composition. [...] qu'elle s'enroule en spirale [...] qu'elle se lie ou délie selon une cadence idéale que le peintre sent adéquate au régime coloré de sa composition, l'arabesque a un pouvoir d'attraction elle-même, suggestif et impérieux, ressemblant à celui d'une belle ordonnance chorégraphique.' 'Cours Schmalzigaug', chapter 20, 33–35.



Jules Schmalzigaug  
*Girl with Cat*, 1915–17,  
 coloured pencil on paper,  
 200 × 106 mm, donation from  
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Front cover  
Rik Wouters  
*Portrait of Nel* (detail),  
s.d., oil on canvas,  
131 × 76 cm,  
private collection

