

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Léon Spilliaert
(Oostend 1881 – 1946 Brussels)

*Cover design for the book
"Le Sculpteur de Masques"
By Fernand Crommelynck,
Ed. Deman, Brussels
1907*

Signed with monogram LSP. (lower right)
Lavis in india ink, colour pencil and pencil on paper
45.2 x 31.3 cm.;
17 3/4 x 12 3/8 in.

Provenance

Auction Guillaume Camp, Antwerp, 22 October 1974, nr. 413;
Belgian private collection.

Literature

To be included in the catalogue raisonné un preparation by Mrs. Anne Adriaens-Pannier

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The present work is the prime version for the cover design of the play "Le sculpteur de masques" by Fernand Crommelynck and published by Editions Deman in Brussels in 1907. Léon Spilliaert also made a second design that is currently in the collection of the Museum of Ixelles. (Fig 1)

Fernand Crommelynck's theatre is neither a civic festival nor a morality lesson, nor is it designed for relaxation. It is a theatre of action, of psychological probings, of character evolution, of dramatic climaxes, and of shattering suspense scenes. The bizarre machinations of his protagonists, their instinctuality and crudeness, bring to mind the seventeenth-century farceurs. The young Molière, it has been claimed, was attracted to the Pont Neuf to observe the antics and verbal routines of the famous Tabarin, who would abash his viewers with his exaggerated visual and auditive compositions.

Crommelynck captures the rudimentary temperament of the farceur in *Le Cocu magnifique*, 1920 and *Tripes d'Or*, 1925; and the lithe and imaginative quality of the commedia dell'arte plays with their improvisations and stock characters in *Carine* (1929); the hermetic implications of the mask in *The Sculptor of Masks (Le Sculpteur de Masques, 1911)*; the symbolic and illusory realm in *The Puerile Lovers (Les Amants puérils, 1921)*; the more popular blends of boulevard theatre in *Hot and Cold (Chaud et Froid, 1934)* and *A Woman Whose Heart is too Small (La Femme qu'a le coeur trop petit, 1934)*.

Fernand Crommelynck was born in Paris on November 19, 1886 into a family of actors. A journalist by necessity, Crommelynck shared his life between Brussels and Paris, with frequent stays in Ostend. At the age of 20, he won the prize from the Brussels magazine *Le Thyrs* for *Nous n'irons plus au Parc*, performed in Brussels in 1906. *Le Sculpteur de Masques* was created in 1907 and published by Deman with a cover by Léon Spilliaert. It has been performed in Paris in a revised version from 1911.

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About Léon Spilliaert:

Léon Spilliaert was born in Oostend, the oldest of seven children of Léonard-Hubert Spilliaert, who was a perfumer. From childhood he displayed an interest in art and drawing. A prolific doodler and autodidact, he was predominantly a self taught artist. Sickly and reclusive, he spent most of his youth sketching scenes of ordinary life and the Belgian countryside. When he was 21 he went to work in Brussels for Edmond Demon, a publisher of the works of symbolist writers, which Spilliaert was to illustrate. He especially admired the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Watercolour, gouache, and charcoal were the means by which he produced much of his best work, including a number of self-portraits executed in black crayon in the early years of the twentieth century. A significant influence on Spilliaert was Odilon Redon, whose expressive use of black finds parallels in his own work. Frequently depicting a lone figure in a dreamlike space, Spilliaert's paintings convey a sense of melancholy and silence. Among the best known works of Léon Spilliaert are the images "Digue la nuit" and "Clair de Lune et Lumières".

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Fig 1. Léon Spilliaert (Oostend 1881 – 1946 Brussels) *Cover design for the book “Le Sculpteur de Masques” By Fernand Crommelynck, Ed. Deman, Brussels, 1907. Signed with monogram LSP. (lower right) Lavis in india ink, colour pencil and pencil on paper. Museum of Fine Arts of Ixelles, Belgium.*