



COLNAGHI

Suzanne Fabry
Self-portrait

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(Brussels 1904 – 1985 Sint-Pieters-Woluwe)

SELF-PORTRAIT

Charcoal on paper

45 x 39.5 cm

Signed (lower left): *SUZANNE FABRY*

Provenance

Private collection

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Born in Brussels in 1904, Fabry spent much of her artistic career exploring questions of identity through a significant body of enigmatic self-portraits, often confronting the viewer with a direct and penetrating gaze. This *Self-portrait*, however, presents a markedly more reflective aspect of the artist, revealed through the turned head and averted eyes.

Framed by a halo of hair, Fabry's lowered gaze creates an impression of quiet contemplation and melancholy. The gentle handling of charcoal carefully models her face, contrasting with the brisk and free marks of her hair. Fabry's interest in Renaissance art is evident in the sloping, rounded shoulders, elongated neck, and subtly suggested contours of her clothing, which are reminiscent of Botticelli's female figures, with their emphasis on poetic grace and elegance (fig. 1).

Fleeing to England at the start of World War I, with her father, the celebrated Belgian Symbolist painter Émile Fabry, the young Suzanne spent her formative years against the backdrop of the political and ideological turmoil of the early twentieth century. Following her time in Herefordshire and the Cornish town of Saint-Ives, Fabry and her family returned to Brussels after the war, where she went on to enrol as a student at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in 1923.

During this time, Fabry studied under Jean Delville (1867-1953) and Constant Montald (1862-1944); both influential Belgian symbolists who, in partnership with her father, founded the group *L'art monumental*. Emerging from Symbolist ideals, the group sought to bring art from the private gallery into the public sphere, elevating public consciousness through the beautification of civic spaces. Their draped figures and commanding nudes, redolent of classical antiquity and projecting internal strength and harmony, are evident influences on Suzanne Fabry's practice. Graduating in 1928, her inclination toward portraiture was already manifest since the very first years of her artistic journey. Her early experiences, alongside her Symbolist education, provide an important context for her sustained interest in visual self-examination portraiture and the female form.

Self-portrait lives alongside an array of introspective and enigmatic portraits of the artist as she navigates her artistic formation. Though the specific date is unknown, comparison with related self-portraits in terms of Fabry's appearance, hairstyle and technique suggests a likely date of around 1930. With the same placid youthfulness, *Autoportrait* (1932, fig. 2) captures what could be understood as a later extension and development of the present work, supporting the attribution of an earlier dating. With voluminous hair and softly shaped cheekbones, *Self-portrait* intrigues not through a commanding pose, but through the soft tilting of the head and the artist's distracted gaze.



Fig. 1. Sandro Botticelli, *Idealised Portrait of a Lady* (Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci as Nymph), ca. 1480 – 1485, Städel Museum.

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Fig. 3. Suzanne Fabry, *Autoportrait*, 1932, oil on canvas, 111 x 74 cm, the estate of the artist.

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