

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Maurice LANGASKENS (Ghent 1884 - Schaerbeek 1946)

Portrait of Karl Wielemans in the Role of 'Baas Peeters' in 'In de War'

Pencil and black ink and black wash, black chalk and watercolour on a large sheet of buff paper from a sketchbook.

Signed *M. LANGASKENS.* in pencil at the lower left.

Inscribed *Vlaamsche Tooneelkring / Munsterlager / Karl Wielemans / als / Baas Peeters / in "In de War" / 11-12-1915 / M. LAGACH-* at the upper right.

307 x 259 mm. (12 1/8 x 10 1/4 in.)

During his period of internment as a prisoner of war, Maurice Langaskens was able to continue working as an artist, and made numerous studies of his fellow prisoners and of camp life. Among the activities sanctioned by the Germans were musical and theatrical performances by the prisoners. The present sheet depicts a soldier-prisoner playing a role in one such theatrical production; a humorous play entitled, in Flemish, *In de war* (*Confused*) and performed at the Münsterlager camp on December 11th, 1915. Langaskens painted watercolour portraits of several other actors and performers in camp productions, which remained together as a group until their eventual dispersal at auction in Belgium in 2019. Another watercolour by Langaskens of a performer from the same production is in the collection of the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres.

By far the largest and most comprehensive collection of works on paper by Langaskens – numbering over five hundred drawings, watercolours and prints, mainly dating from his time as a prisoner of war but also including works from throughout his career – is today in the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres. Other drawings by the artist are in the collections of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History in Brussels, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Historial de la Grande Guerre in

Péronne and the Commune de Schaerbeek, as well as in several private collections.

Exhibitions

Antwerp, Districthuis van Deurne, Belgische Frontschilders Eerste Wereldoorlog, 2014.

Artist description:

A Belgian painter and printmaker, Maurice (Maurits) Langaskens enrolled in the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1901, and was trained as a decorative painter by the leading Belgian muralist and sculptor Constant Montald. From early on Langaskens was recognized as a fine draughtsman, and won several prizes at the Académie. After living and studying for a few months in France in 1906, mainly in Dijon, the young Langaskens settled in Schaerbeek, outside Brussels. He began his independent career in 1907, when he exhibited three decorative paintings at the Salon in Brussels for the first time and also had an exhibition of his work shown at the Salle Boute in the city. The following year he contributed six paintings to the 16th annual exhibition of the Belgian artist's association 'Pour l'Art' in Brussels, where he was to exhibit frequently over the course of his later career, until 1941. (Langaskens also designed the poster for the 17th 'Pour l'Art' exhibition in 1909.) Also in 1908, one of his paintings was selected for an exhibition of modern Belgian art in Berlin.

Much of Langaskens's early work was in a vibrant and visually arresting Art Nouveau or Symbolist style. This bold and colourful manner also translated well into large-scale mural commissions, and he soon became one of the leading painter-decorators of the early 20th century in Belgium. His decoration of the town hall of the city of Zoutleeuw in 1912 earned the artist considerable fame and the praise of his teacher and mentor Montald: 'He was one of the best students in the class; today he is the most outstanding artist among the decorators of our time.' The same year the first of several exhibitions of Langaskens's work was mounted at the Cercle Artistique et Littéraire in Brussels.

The outbreak of the First World War, however, brutally interrupted the rise of the artist's successful career. Drafted into the Belgian army at the beginning of August 1914, Langaskens was captured by the Germans after less than a fortnight. He spent the next three and half years as a prisoner of war, at internment camps at Sennelager, Münsterlager and Göttingen. He produced numerous, mostly small-scale paintings and watercolours of portraits and depictions of many of his fellow prisoners, as well as scenes of daily camp life, that are today regarded as among his finest and most personal works. It was also during this period that he painted two of his best-known pictures, the large canvas *In Memoriam*, painted in 1916 and depicting the burial of a Belgian soldier by his comrades, and the monumental triptych *Repose en Paix*, painted between 1915 and 1918. After his liberation and return to Belgium, Langaskens exhibited over eighty of the paintings and drawings that he had produced as a prisoner of war at the Galerie Sneyers in Brussels in 1918.

After the Armistice, Langaskens - suffering from aphasia and nervous disorders brought about by his long confinement - painted mainly easel pictures of winter landscapes, rustic genre scenes and floral subjects, and also produced a number of designs for tapestries, book illustrations and stained-glass windows. Within a few years, however, his health had recovered and he returned to undertaking large-scale decorative mural commissions. In 1920 Langaskens was one of the founders, alongside Montald, Jean Delville, Emile Fabry and Albert Ciamberlani, of the Société de l'art Monumental, dedicated to the monumental decoration of public buildings and their integration into architecture. Among his first public commissions after the war was a large mural decoration for a school in Schaerbeek, completed in 1922. A monograph devoted to Langaskens was published in 1923, and important exhibitions of his paintings, drawings and prints were held in galleries in Brussels in 1924, 1925, 1930 and 1936.

Between 1934 and 1935 Langaskens, along with other members of the Société de l'art Monumental, contributed to the extensive decoration of the municipal theatre at Leuven. He continued to exhibit throughout the 1940s, particularly at the yearly 'Pour l'Art' exhibitions. There he showed more and more of his superb graphic work, which had begun to take up much of his time. In 1943 Langaskens also provided illustrations for an edition of Maxence Van der Meersch's novel *L'empreinte du Dieu*. After the artist's death in 1946, the contents of his studio were sold at auction in Brussels and subsequently dispersed. Memorial exhibitions were held in Brussels in 1949 and in Schaerbeek in 1956, while more

recently a retrospective exhibition of his work was mounted at the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres in 2003.

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