



KEES VAN DONGEN

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Ajuntament de Barcelona
Barcelona Cultura



**KEES
VAN
DONGEN**

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CONTENTS

1. PRESENTATION
2. EXHIBITION TOUR
3. EXHIBITION AREAS
4. EXTENDED LABELS ON WORKS
5. CHRONOLOGY





1. PRESENTATION

This exhibition dedicated to Kees Van Dongen shows the artist's evolution from his student years to the peak of his career and evokes many of his aesthetic ties and exchanges with Picasso, with whom he temporarily shared the Bateau-Lavoir. Born in a suburb of Rotterdam, Van Dongen's career was spent mainly in Paris where he came to live in 1897.

A hedonist and frequent traveller, he was a regular visitor to the seaside resorts of Deauville, Cannes and Monte Carlo, where he died in 1968. Van Dongen experienced poverty, during the years of revelry with Picasso, and then fame before finally falling out of fashion, a status he endured with a certain melancholy.

The exhibition confirms Kees Van Dongen's decisive role in the great artistic upheavals of the early 20th century as a member of the Fauvist movement, in which he occupied the unique position of an often irreverent and acerbic portraitist. The virulence and extravagance of his canvases provoked immediate repercussions abroad, particularly within the Die Brücke German expressionist movement. Together with his orientalism, contemporary with that of Matisse, this places Van Dongen at the very forefront of the avant-garde. His bold and vibrant works – often compared to “prodigious orgies of light, heat and colour” – testify to the affirmation of his own style within the history of modern art, alongside Matisse and Picasso.

Assembled in the light of new research and including previously little-known works, the exhibition also provides a new perspective on the artist.

It has been designed chronologically in order to demonstrate Van Dongen's evolution from one piece of work to the next, in addition to his recurrent concerns and his enduring traits and characteristics. It includes examples of the artist's work in different fields: painting, of course – in which, wrote Elie Faure, Van Dongen “wrote the sensual poem of the world” – but also illustration and graphic work.





2. EXHIBITION TOUR

Room 1: Between Rotterdam and Paris. The Formative Years

Room 2: Paris, Drawing

Room 3: From Tachisme to Fauvism

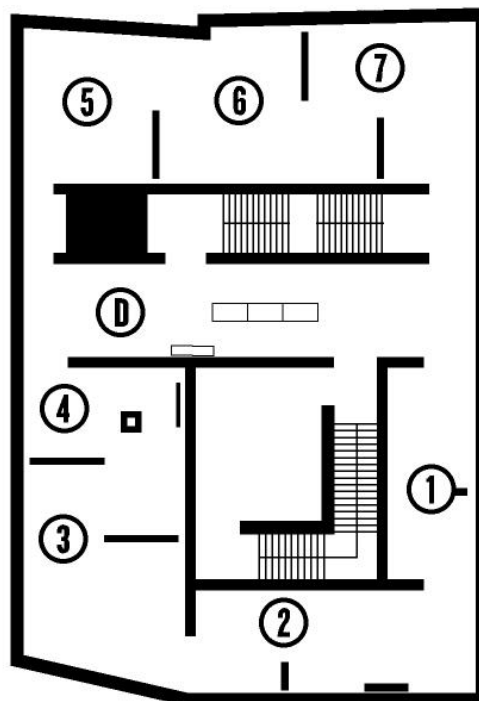
Room 4: Le Bateau-Lavoir. With Picasso and Fernande

Room 5: The 'Fauve' Years

Room 6: Exoticism

Room 7: The 'Années Folles'

D Documentation and lecture point





3. EXHIBITION AREAS

Room 1: Between Rotterdam and Paris. The Formative Years

As a student at the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Rotterdam, Van Dongen painted his first pictures with a dark palette in the manner of Rembrandt, the master of chiaroscuro — indeed, in 1927 he published a book about Rembrandt that is more autobiography than hagiography in which he did not hesitate to intertwine his own destiny with that of the Master. In these youthful works from the mid 1890s, Van Dongen reveals a personal affinity with the paintings of Jozef Israël, the ‘nineteenth-century Rembrandt’ who had had a retrospective in 1894. Van Dongen next painted a series of Dutch landscapes in the Voorhaven in Delfshaven, a neighbourhood dating from the seventeenth century at the front of the port of Rotterdam where his family lived and where his father worked as a maltster. His palette brightened and his compositions reveal an already pronounced modernist cast, influenced by the framing used in photographs and films (*Zealander woman*). That he could produce in this youthful context the *Self-portrait* or *Self-portrait in blue* and *Spotted chimera* in 1895, authentic pictorial manifestos driven by a fascination with self-representation and allegory, is an extremely strong signal announcing an exceptional destiny. On his definitive move to Paris in 1899, Van Dongen settled in the Butte Montmartre, where penniless painters, showgirls and cabaret dancers, demi-mondaines and outcasts of all kinds and the occasional stray bourgeois made up a subterranean society that was to inspire his graphic and pictorial universe.



Room 2: Paris, Drawing

Van Dongen abandoned the symbolist style of his first beginnings (illustrations for the magazine *De Vrije Kunst*) for a realism with strong social connotations which climaxed in his drawings of the Boer War for the Dutch satirical magazine *De Ware Jacob*.

Van Dongen developed a real predilection for the picturesque quality of the red-light districts of Rotterdam, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Paris, with their brothels with red lanterns and the girls immobile in their windows. Drawing enabled him to capture scenes of exceptional realism without being seen. 'I had rented a room in one of these houses. I drew my little what-nots by the light of the oil lamps,' he wrote.

In Paris between 1900 and late 1903, he gave up painting, probably due to financial difficulties. Through the good offices of Théophile Steinlen he worked for the satirical papers of the day — *L'Assiette au beurre*, *Le Rire*, *L'Indiscret*, *Le Frou-Frou*... — and on the proceeds set up house with Guus Preitinger, also from Holland and herself a painter. He illustrated an entire issue of *L'Assiette au beurre* (dated 26 October 1901) devoted to the subject of prostitution from the perspective of the conditions of the prostitutes.

Through the practice of drawing, Van Dongen affirmed his anarchist political beliefs while gradually moving towards expressive maturity.

The owner of the Moulin de la Galette described Van Dongen as 'chasing after the dancers and drawing them at the same time', and this testimony confirms, if confirmation were needed, his extraordinary talent for capturing with vivid immediacy scenes of jubilant gaiety, picturesque subjects and crowds in movement thanks to his precise, incisive and masterly line.

Room 3: From Tachisme to Fauvism

Sponsored by Paul Signac and Maximilien Luce, Van Dongen exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1904. His submission was particularly noticed by Charles Morice, the highly influential critic who wrote for *Le Mercure de France*. More importantly, during 1904 Van Dongen organized his first one-man exhibition at the Galerie Ambroise Vollard, where he showed more than a hundred works, mostly paintings of Holland, Paris and the Normandy coast, a significant selection from which can be seen in the present exhibition.

Van Dongen walked in the same path as his contemporaries, the Impressionists and Claude Monet, but was quick to arrive at a personal language marked by a turbulence and tumult of colour and form very much in line with the Divisionism of Paul Signac and Van Dongen's compatriot Otto van Rees. In embracing Tachisme, Van Dongen took the principle of the divided touch of colour to paroxysmal extremes; one critic spoke of his 'juxtaposed touches of brush-wipe'. *The merry-go-rounds of pigs* series attests to this new and highly personal path, which gradually led the artist to Fauvism. With two works at that notorious 1905 Salon d'Automne which the critic Louis Vauxcelles summed up in the famous phrase 'Donatello chez les fauves' — Donatello among the wild beasts. Van Dongen was exhibiting more or less concurrently at Galerie Druet, showing canvases characterized by what the same critic described as 'torrential orgies of colour'. This *Tachiste* period reached its peak with the monumental *At the Galette*: presented at the Salon des Indépendants in 1906, this masterwork conceived as a

veritable manifesto that was to be Van Dongen's defiant response to Henri Matisse. Alert to the demands of the market, the artist subsequently decided to divide up this vast work into six separate canvases, three of which are reunited in the present exhibition.

Room 4: Le Bateau-Lavoir. With Picasso and Fernande

In 1905 Van Dongen, his wife Guus and their daughter Dolly moved to an apartment in the Bateau-Lavoir, an unsanitary slum on the heights of Montmartre. His studio was next to Pablo Picasso's, and the two artists became close friends. Picasso's companion Fernande Olivier referred to the strong ties between the two artists and their respective entourages in her memoirs (*Picasso and His Friends* and *In Love with Picasso*).

In *In Love with Picasso* Fernande Olivier writes: 'Pablo loved little "Gusie" and played with her without getting bored, she could get him to do whatever she wanted. I didn't know at the time that he could take so much pleasure in being with children. We would have liked to have a child, but as this wish was never realized, we had to be content with the little Van Dongen.'

Van Dongen and Picasso shared a taste for 'the provocative and barbaric elegance' of women, a legacy that derived from Baudelaire: 'painters of modern life', they preferred the circus to the theatre, and were attracted to the demi-monde, prostitutes and fairground dancers. 'Slums, dog-trainers, down-and-outs, maybe even thieves, all comrades!' Van Dongen declared.

When she moved into the Bateau-Lavoir with Picasso, Fernande had to stop working as a model for the painters of Montmartre, on account of her lover's legendary jealousy. Whether as a result of his temporary break with Picasso from late August 1907 or from an acceptance of the Spanish artist's way of working at home, the fact is that Van Dongen produced a series of portraits of Fernande in a wide range of styles, and she established herself as his preferred model, alongside his wife Guus. The artist draws forth from Fernande Olivier by extrapolation a variety of female types, from the frail and delicate Spanish courtesan to the woman of the night befuddled by absinthe, and intensifies a sensuality that is never denied. He experimented with this art of the portrait of which he became such a master, with tight framing and novel angles, in pictures that are a subtle blend of painterly Expressionism and the photographic snapshot.

Room 5: The 'Fauve' Years

Van Dongen's language was moving towards a form of Expressionism. The scenes of collective revelry at the Moulin de la Galette and the dance of the Matichiche slowly but surely give way to portraits. Van Dongen started off by painting models he had 'at hand': Guus, Dolly and Fernande.

In the Bateau-Lavoir in 1907 he was a witness to the genesis of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, that seminal work of the Cubist Picasso. Van Dongen stayed on the sidelines of this formal revolution, and justified his decision in the following terms: '...an art that was only of science would be a suicide.' His painting was turning increasingly to

women, and expressing an eroticism that was out of step with the time, and provoking a somewhat prudish reaction from the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who deplored 'the painter of urban shame'. Élie Faure wrote of the heat generated by these bodies and a bestiality which gradually conquered the mind, and Van Dongen retorted that shamelessness was a virtue. In this context of a radical and unprecedented overthrow of the compositional rules that had governed Western painting since the Renaissance, Van Dongen affirmed his own aesthetic stance with *The wrestlers* or *Tabarin Wrestlers*, in which the reappraisal of the picture space serves instead to make visible the flesh, desire, femininity and the ambivalence of sexual desire. In Van Dongen's works of this key period, the prostitute combines the roles of the sacred hetaira of antiquity, the cabaret dancer and the artist's own wife, all of whom his brush elevates to the status of authentic 'Idols'.

In 1908 he exhibited at the new gallery opened by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, thanks to whom he was able to present his works in Germany and meet the German Expressionist painters of Die Brücke.

Room 6: Exoticism

The man from the port district of Rotterdam set off to encounter 'distant lands, hot and exotic'. In the winter of 1910-1911, Van Dongen travelled to Spain. This was his first contact with Moorish architecture, with its palaces and the minaretted mosques, the contrast of dark passages and dazzling white walls baked by a scorching sun. But above all Van Dongen was attracted by the look of the Andalusian people, the movement of the bodies of the flamenco dancers to the wild rhythms of their tambourines, the colours of the flower-embroidered Manila shawls that give his painting Matisse-like accents in places. The Spanish and Oriental works are marked nonetheless by the artist's distanced fascination with his models and the mysterious aura of the woman under the mantilla or burnous or behind the veil. His exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim Jeune in June 1911 under the title 'Hollande, Paris, Espagne, Maroc' established the reputation of the works influenced by his travels in southern lands.

'European or exotic as he chooses, Van Dongen has a personal and violent sense of Orientalism. [...] This painting smells of opium and amber,' Apollinaire wrote in 1913. That year Van Dongen visited Egypt and went up the Nile to Thebes, where he posed for the camera in the midst of the ruins. This contact with the Egypt of the Pharaohs marks a real turning point in his work, which now goes beyond the Orient as the source of its themes and colours. The artist redefines the function of the drawing in a purified art: a sure, precise line that is reminiscent at times of his early caricatures, and a chromatic language based on large expanses of flat colour or monochrome. In 1913, Van Dongen seems to have sought to conclude this cycle with a very provocative large composition; the blatantly exhibitionist nature of *Spanish Shawl* caused a scandal and the picture was removed from the wall at that year's Salon d'Automne by the police.

Room 7: The 'Années Folles'

'The world is a big garden full of flowers, full of weeds. [...] The lovely thing our time is that we can mix everything, blend everything: this really is the cocktail age,' Van Dongen wrote.

In 1912 the artist took a studio in rue Denfert-Rochereau, where he held the first of his famous 'Van Dongen Balls'. *Self-portrait as Neptune* attests to this new and short-lived incarnation as a socialite. He met the couturier Paul Poiret, who became one of his patrons. With his depictions of increasingly elongated female forms, Van Dongen became 'the painter' of the boyish women of the years between the two World Wars; women whose liberation from the old constraints of marriage allowed them to take a new place in society. The artist's acquaintance with the whimsical doyenne of fashionable Paris in the 'Années Folles', the Marquise Luisa Casati, shown from the back in his painting *Urn with flowers*, and with Jasmy Jacob, who became his companion from 1917, gave Van Dongen an entrée to the most select circles in Paris. He moved to Villa Saïd, on the edge of the Bois de Boulogne, and then in 1922 to a luxurious mansion on rue Juliette Lamber, converted into a showroom devoted to his painting. The rebel from the Butte Montmartre had become a sort of Great Gatsby. The grandest figures of the day came to sit for him, from Anatole France to Anna de Noailles, not to mention a host of celebrities from the world of entertainment: Geneviève Vix, Lily Damita, Yves Mirande, Lucien Guitry, Arletty... Animated as always by a spirit of provocation, Van Dongen said that he loved 'all that glitters, precious stones that sparkle, shimmering fabrics, beautiful women who inspire carnal desire... and painting gives me the most complete possession of all this, because what I paint is often the haunting realization of a dream or a nightmare...' By contrast, Édouard Courrières, the author of the first monograph study of Van Dongen, published in 1925, detects a certain distancing on the part of the artist, which makes him a moralist or a history painter.



4. EXTENDED LABELS ON WORKS

Spotted Chimera (Hall)

Van Dongen painted this monumental work in the studio his father set up for him in the family's Delfshaven malt-house, using a simple linen cloth for a canvas, which he evidently rolled up and took with him when he moved to Paris. Duly mounted on a proper frame, the picture was always given pride of place in his studio, as we can see from the photographs of the atelier in rue Denfert-Rochereau, of the Villa Saïd (where it hangs opposite *Tango of the Archangel*) and of the studio in rue de Courcelles.

This canvas depicts a strange hybrid animal. With its bird's plumage, the imposing croup of a Percheron and the grace and speed of a winged horse, it embodies the spirit of Van Dongen's people, and summarizes certain fundamental choices: whether to stay firmly on the ground or to take to the air, defying the laws of gravity in pursuit of a more spiritual universe. The touch of colour on the muzzle breaks with the overall monochrome: this hint of 'tender rose', in Van Dongen's words, represents the animal energy that emanates as hot, potent breath. Here for the first time the artist dares openly to silhouette a figure, with an emphatic application of broad perpendicular brushstrokes for the hindquarters, and stumped, misty grey for the creature's neck and forelimbs.

Zelander Woman (Room 1)

This portrait of a young Zeeland woman is one of a series of small oils that Van Dongen painted in the open air during 1894 and 1895 in the Voorhaven district of Rotterdam, where he grew up, some of which were included in his show at the Galerie Ambroise Vollard in Paris in 1904.



If, as the writer Tom Schilperoort suggested, we can discern the influence of Rembrandt in Van Dongen's Dutch landscapes, with their dreamy Sunday boredom, this portrait is set apart from that context by its brightness, worthy of a film set. In fact everything in this premonitory image seems to look forward to the future language of the cinema: the close-up and the flattening of the picture field by a telephoto lens, and the extreme mobility of the foreground. The model is extraordinarily beautiful and serene.

Tom Schilperoort invited Picasso to Holland in 1905, and Picasso went home with new works that heralded the end of the austere Blue Period — paintings characterized by the presence of female figures of the northern type, with milky complexion and hair tucked up in a cap.

Self-Portrait in blue (Room 1)

In *Self-Portrait in blue* Van Dongen depicts himself, in tones of blue shading to black, silhouetted in front of a window that is the only source of light in the picture. In its rejection of chiaroscuro, the handling here parodies the effect of a photograph taken against the light. It is quite likely that the artist painted his reflection in a mirror in the family malt-house: through the window we can see the masts of the boats moored in the Voorhaven or fore-harbour of Delfshaven, where he spent his childhood. Van Dongen's pose is defiant: with his hands thrust in his pockets, his head tilted up and back and his body in an almost swaggering attitude. The pose at the same time suggests movement, and in presenting himself with his hands in his pockets the artist is not indicating a apathy or nonchalance. This is a self-portrait of an authoritarian figure, an individual ready to fight or at least to stand up to adversity.

L'Assiette au beurre (Room 2)

Van Dongen settled permanently in Paris in the autumn of 1899, moving into an apartment in Montmartre with his wife Guus. Finding himself in need of an income to live on he started to draw 'snapshots' — 'doodles in pencil or pen and ink'. On Théophile Steinlen's recommendation, the satirical newspaper *L'Assiette au beurre* bought a number of his drawings in July 1901, and an introduction to the influential critic Félix Fénéon led to commissions from *La Revue Blanche*. In October 1901 he was invited to illustrate an entire issue of *L'Assiette au beurre*, ironically entitled 'A little story for children large and small'. He produced a series of 16 drawings, in larger formats than any he had worked in before: they tell the story of a young woman who has a baby by her lover, and when he abandons them she is forced into prostitution to survive. From the bright promise of her beginnings, thanks to her beauty, we see her degradation and decline into disease and death. In this sombre tale, the poor woman's child is doomed to repeat her mother's fate. Taken together, these drawings in ink with their sure lines enhanced by washes of colour attest to the continuing influence of Toulouse-Lautrec.

Between 1901 and 1903 Van Dongen also produced numerous illustrations for other magazines, notably *Le Rire*, *L'Indiscret* and *Le Rab'lais*, in which his favourite subjects are elegant society and the *demi-monde*.

Umbrellas or Four people hurrying in the rain (Room 3)

A few months before painting this canvas Van Dongen had drawn a cartoon for the magazine *L'Indiscret* on the same theme of people walking with their heads down trying to keep the rain off. Though it dates from 1903, when the artist had recently returned to painting after a three-year interval, and is still in the Post-Impressionist tradition, this is a truly exceptional work for a number of reasons. Its horizontals—the pavement in the background, the lines of the umbrellas and the people's feet—are intersected by broad vertical strokes that mimic the heavy rain streaming down the windows. The language of Tachisme, which Van Dongen adopted in 1904-1905 and of which we have an early example here, serves at once to create a sense of liquefaction and an impression of the image in movement that was totally unprecedented in its day, an effect that the Futurists were to systematize five years later. This painting was owned for some time by the filmmaker Jacques Tati, director and star of *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*, and it is easy to imagine that much of what attracted him to the picture was its powerful impression of movement.

The circus (Room 3)

Like Picasso, Apollinaire, and many other artists of the early twentieth century, Van Dongen was attracted by the circus. He frequently attended shows at the Cirque Médrano, sometimes taking Picasso with him. What was most fascinating about this world, which seemed to have no future in a modern industrial society, is that it has scant regard for social convention: the artistes exhibited themselves to the public in indecent poses. Van Dongen painted a rubber woman, a skeletal female clown, female bareback riders and a number of sad clowns: in his work, the world of the circus is pervaded by a deep nostalgia. In 1904 he did a series of works on paper based on scenes sketched *in situ* at the circus which feature, among others, the double act *Saucisse and Pépino*. *The Circus Médrano horseback riders* (1905) marks a real turning point in Van Dongen's graphic work: the line, which fuses with the strong silhouette, is precise, sharp and effective, and endows the bodies with a combination of mobility, weightlessness and strength.

Moulin de la Galette (Room 3)

À la Galette is a 'lost' work whose existence has only recently come to light we see Van Dongen reach the apotheosis of his *Tachiste* language, derived from Neo-Impressionism. The picture seems to be a 'reply' to the challenge that Matisse had launched with *Luxury, Calm and Pleasure*, which he exhibited at the Salon des

Indépendants in 1905. In the 1950s, when things were not going well for him financially, Van Dongen cut the canvas into six pieces, and three of them are included in the present exhibition. The first, *Chandelier*, was the upper central part of the original work. The theme of light and its diffraction and the reflections in the crystal pendants gave the artist an ideal opportunity to use the *Tachiste* technique, treating the forms and the colour with broad strokes applied with a thick brush. The lower part of the picture is devoted to the dance hall and its occupants, the fauna that frequented the Moulin de la Galette, an old mill converted into a place of leisure, not to say debauchery. There the clientele danced the famous *Matichiche*, a 'coarse' dance in which the dancers' bodies were brought into much closer contact than was considered acceptable by the conventions of the time.

A close look at the second 'part' of the picture on show in the present exhibition reveals a very different style in the treatment of the eyes of the woman in the foreground, which are silhouetted with broad strokes of contrasting colour. It seems fair to say that this was not only the great work with which Van Dongen concluded his *Tachiste* period but also that it contained the seed of his future pictorial syntax.

The Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (Room 4)

The *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* was painted between 1907 and 1908. In the 1960s it was acquired by Óscar Ghez, to whom Kahnweiler gave the following account of it: 'My portrait by Van Dongen is in fact a fragment of the real portrait, which measured 100 x 81 cm and showed a dancer in a jersey in the background. Luckily I have a photograph of it. I lost the portrait when my assets were impounded and sold off after the First War. I do not know who subsequently cut it up.' (Letter dated February 10, 1966.) In the original, the model was shown sitting at a table with a book on it. Behind him there was one of those figures in a jersey so typical of paintings of that era. No doubt it was the painter himself who altered the picture, as he also did, for example, with *The Idol*, 'reframing the composition to obtain a more austere and mysterious work.' As in his *Fauve Self-portrait*, Van Dongen subsequently covered up the original background with a blood-red monochrome layer and signed the picture again.

Fauve Self-portrait (Room 4)

It would be interesting to know who classified this self-portrait as 'Fauvist'. Was it Van Dongen, or someone in his circle who felt that of the various self-portraits he painted during 1908-1909 this was the most 'savage', the one closest to a primitive mask. The blue for which the artist had such a preference when it came to portraying himself serves to soften the rugged, almost violent features of a strong, rough man who could also be taken for a tough stevedore in the port of Rotterdam. In his essay on Van Dongen's self-portraits ('Le Peintre nu'), Philippe Dagen speaks of this picture as an 'artistic manifesto': 'A Fauve preening himself like a Fauve wild beast: his position could not be better affirmed than in the first person, nor his style better displayed than on his own face. Thus, the most pertinent comment on this canvas would be Arthur Cravan's: "Van Dongen has done admirable things. He has painted on his skin. When I

talk with him and look at him, I always imagine that his cells are saturated with colour, that even the hairs of his beard and his head flow with green, yellow, red or blue.”.

The garter (Room 4)

This painting is representative of the new style that Van Dongen developed in the wake of his *Tachiste* period: a style characterized by a strong blue silhouette that detaches the figure from the background, tone on tone, in large areas of uniform colour. The influence of Henri Matisse and his monumental *The Joy of Life*, presented at the same Salon des Indépendants show as *À la Galette*, is undeniable. It seems likely that the Dutch artist felt ‘left behind’ by a collective movement that sought to define new rules for the expressive use of colour. The fact is that during these few months Van Dongen painted a series of major works embodying the new principles, including *The One-eyed Dancer*, *The One-eyed Dancer Waving* and *My Wife and her Kid*.

Quite apart from its stylistic history, *The garter* occupies a key position in the evolution of Van Dongen’s career, in that it offers a new representation of woman imbued with disturbing sensuality. The wide-brimmed hat, which Kuspit sees as an emblem of women’s power, screens the model’s face of the figure and wraps her in mystery as she offers her body to the desiring gaze in its most absolute nudity (see *Tableau* or *The Spanish shawl*, 1913). An object of sexual fantasy, the model remain distant and her gaze unattainable, while her body is within easy reach.

Modjesko, soprano singer (Room 5)

This painting from 1907 is undoubtedly one of Van Dongen’s masterpieces. As a rule, this artist’s models are fantasy objects: the objects of male fantasies that do not necessarily lead to the satisfaction of desire but reduce men to the condition of slaves (*Salomé* or *Tableau* or *The Spanish shawl*) or stress the dark side of femininity. Donald Kuspit has noted that in Van Dongen we have much more than ‘a mere observation of transgressive women’, and that for this artist woman is ‘an absolute that allows a man to realize his identity, to become truly himself’.

The extremely luminous yellow flesh here is enveloped in a subtle range of reds that is also to be seen in other pictures, such as *Tabarin wrestlers*. The very prominent red outline around the hand serves to highlight the voluptuous breast, and Van Dongen’s brush makes the Gypsy transvestite a great diva, whose song seems to be emerging with such power that we can also hear it.

Tabarin wrestlers (Room 5)

Van Dongen painted *Tabarin wrestlers* on his return from his trip to Holland during the first half of 1907. This picture stands out within the artist’s oeuvre on account of its theme: though he preferred to do portraits of individual women, or of a group of two or three elegant ladies at most, here we have a whole harem of nine female wrestlers from the Bal Tabarin in skin-tight leotards. Together with the Folies Bergères and the

Moulin de la Galette, the Tabarin was one of Van Dongen's favourite haunts in Montmartre. It is more than likely that he painted *Tabarin Wrestlers* after seeing *Demoiselles d'Avignon* in the studio he briefly shared with Picasso after he came back from Holland. The two paintings have in common the themes of the gynaeceum, the bacchanalia and erotic fantasy, inspired by Cézanne's *Bathers*, which was shown in Paris in 1907, the year after Cézanne's death, and which inspired both Matisse and Derain to produce their own interpretations in a pastoral mode. In place of an Arcadian world of innocent paradisiacal nudity, Picasso and Van Dongen preferred a coarse sexuality of false appearances. *Tabarin wrestlers* shares certain formal rules with *Demoiselles d'Avignon*: the rejection of the mechanism of perspective inherited from the Renaissance, the curtain that stops the eye at the surface of the picture, the absence of any intersubjective relationship between the personages represented, whose gaze is directed in every case at the spectator.

Self-portrait as Neptune (Room 6)

'[...] There is not the slightest doubt about that fancy-dress ball with a maritime theme that Van Dongen held in 1922, to which Nicole Groult came dressed as a mermaid. The cheap costume jewellery, the red and green pearl necklaces, the geometric rings and pendants, the earrings... had nothing to do with evoking Antiquity. These things were contemporaries of the transatlantic liner sailing after a god who in all probability was more likely to sing an aria from Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène* ('Ce barbu qui s'avance – bu qui s'avance – bu qui s'avance'), and be more interested in Agamemnon than mythology. Cruise ships and transatlantic travel, parties and cocktails. Van Dongen was sure of two things: one was that 'The lovely thing about our time is that one can mix everything, blend everything: this really is the cocktail age,' and the other was that 'Painting is the most beautiful lie.'

Daniel Marchesseau

Tableau or The Spanish shawl or Woman with pigeons or Beggar for love (Room 6)

The scene looks to be artificially illuminated with acetylene lamps, though the face is in a zone of greenish shade. Van Dongen returns here to a situation he had already addressed in his famous painting *The idol* (1908), in which the same model—the artist's wife—places no other limits on her unabashed exhibitionism than her own face: that is to say, her identity. A crouching, ape-like beggar (as in *Susanna and the Elders*, perhaps?) is indicative of exclusion, impotence and, despite everything, assertive will. This painting was removed from the Salon d'Automne of 1913 by order of the police, and the scandal sparked a major debate in the press between right-wingers and left-wingers. Henri Matisse—who together with Marquet, Camoin, Valtat, Francis Jourdain and Segonzac took the artist's side against the censors—wrote in a letter to Charles Camoin, ironic and disenchanted: 'Van Dongen has enhanced his reputation thanks to a ridiculous scandal occasioned by the prudery of Desvallières (a member of the Salon d'Automne).'

Jasmy Jacob
(Room 6)

Known alternatively as 'la divine' and 'la terrifiante', Jasmy Jacob has been described as an exceptionally proud woman. In his book *Van Dongen après le Fauvisme* Jean Melas-Kyriazi even claims that Jasmy used the painter 'to conquer the Paris of the time and satisfy her ambition to shine'. Van Dongen first met her in 1916, and she was his partner until 1927. Luisa Casati and Jasmy Jacobs were the two women who the left of the painter who took Van Dongen away from the social outcasts of Montmartre and Montparnasse and introduced him to the salons and casinos where high society and the *demi-monde* rubbed shoulders: where Van Dongen saw a blend of the picturesque and the seductive, Jasmy saw a profitable operation. The architect Frantz Jourdain, who admired Van Dongen's work, described Jasmy as a person of sober elegance and very sure taste.

Van Dongen's portraits of Jasmy reveal a woman who is self-confident, eleven haughty, with an aquiline profile. In this portrait, which she donated to the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris in 1946, she seems to turn a disdainful, almost absent gaze on the world.

Still life with teapot
(Room 7)

It seems likely that Van Dongen, who was interested in portrait painting first and foremost, regarded the still-life as a minor genre, though he did frequently paint flowers: hydrangeas, chrysanthemums, lilies, etc.

This *Still-life with teapot* is probably unique of its kind in the whole of Van Dongen's oeuvre. Painted in 1913, it demonstrates his extraordinary mastery of technique, his ability to construct the space and give a sensation of depth based on large uniform patches of colour and the movement of the rectangles of the table within the frame of the picture. The construction of a space that defies the laws of perspective and the diminution of depth by means of a view from above that deforms the foreground give this picture, in which we can detect analogies with a number of contemporary Cubist works, its great formal power.

Urn with flowers
(Room 7)

This canvas marks the entry of Van Dongen's painting into the realms of elegance and the fashionable milieu which would mark his work in the period between the wars. The figure shown from the back looking in a mirror is Luisa Casati, whom he had recently met and who was his lover for a while. A capricious and eccentric character, she was also a lover of the Italian poet Gabriele d'Annunzio and muse of the Futurists. The Marquise or Marchesa Casati frequented the fashionable salons of the aristocracy, and introduced Van Dongen to the most select Paris circles. He also travelled with her to Venice, where he painted several pictures of the lagoon. The female figure here appears exaggeratedly elongated, and the greyhound lying at the bottom right of the canvas, which also appears in other Van Dongen pictures, is an emblem of the refined society in which the artist was then moving.



5. CHRONOLOGY

1877-1896

On January 26, 1877, Cornelis Theodorus Maria (known as Kees) van Dongen is born in Delfshaven.

In 1892 his father enrolls him in the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Rotterdam, where it takes drawing classes and studies industrial art and architecture.

In 1894 he sets up a studio on the top floor of his family's malt-house. He is interested in Rembrandt and Frans Hals, and paints pictures that are still classical in conception and handling.

The transition to adulthood is marked by the discovery of Rotterdam, its slums, prostitutes and political agitation.

In 1895 he takes part in his first group exhibition, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

In 1896 he divides his time between Rotterdam and Belgium, and his work reveals the influence of the Symbolist milieu he frequents.

1897-1903

He arrives in Paris and feels especially attracted by the air of freedom there. His lack of money obliges him to accept all kinds of jobs, and he lives in considerable poverty.

In 1898 he returns to Holland and meets Augusta Preitinger (Guus), whom he marries in 1901.

In 1899 he returns to Paris and finds work as a guide and interpreter at the World's Fair of 1900.

He regularly visits his native Holland and makes a living primarily as a freelance illustrator for various satirical newspapers. His illustrations are characterized by their denunciation of society's cruelty and injustice. He abandons painting until 1903.

1904-1907

His Montmartre years are marked by an upsurge of artistic inventiveness. Encouraged by Picasso, Derain and Vlaminck, he shows at the second Salon d'Automne.

His first individual exhibition at the Galerie Ambroise Vollard reveals his chief qualities as a painter: precision of gaze, beauty of subject matter, simplicity, solidity and boldness in composition, together with a great gift for using colour.



In 1905 Montmartre life becomes his main source of inspiration. In addition to portraits, female figures and landscapes he paints acrobats, clowns and bareback riders. He frequents the Cirque Médrano, often with Picasso, whom he also regularly visits at the Bateau-Lavoir.

On April 18 his daughter Dolly is born.

He shows at the third Salon d'Automne. Room VII, with works by Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck, is judged to be scandalous and unleashes the fury of the critics. Louis Vauxcelles coins the famous phrase 'cage aux fauves' (cage of wild beasts).

He moves away from Tachisme to explore the brutal realism characteristic of Fauvism.

In early 1906 he moves into the Bateau-Lavoir. He spends a lot of time with Picasso, who calls him 'the Kropotkin of the Bateau-Lavoir', a reference to Van Dongen anarchist ideals.

Fernande Olivier becomes the first major model for Van Dongen's paintings, essentially because 'she was pretty and I had her on hand, and didn't have to pay her a penny'.

In February 1907 he moves out of the Bateau-Lavoir, leaving his furniture in Picasso's studio until his return in the summer. He comes back to Paris alone. He stays in Picasso's studio and various other places before moving to Montmartre.

He works with an increasingly strident palette.

1908-1911

The Die Brücke painters contact him and invite him to join the group, which constitutes a bridge between German Expressionism and French Fauvism.

In 1909 he moves to an apartment opposite the Folies Bergère cabaret. Van Dongen's Fauvism undergoes a shift in style. Nini from the Folies Bergère and the bohemian Anita, his models and lovers, inspire his most sensual nudes to date.

He travels in Spain and Morocco in the winter of 1910-1911, and discovers the light and colours of the Mediterranean.

1912-1918

His financial success enables him to rent a spacious studio and he organizes splendid parties and masked balls.

He meets the Marchesa Luisa Casati, and during his 'cocktail era' he rubs shoulders with the luminaries of fashionable Paris society, who attend his soirées and commission him to paint their portraits.

In March he travels to Egypt. Another change of style points to his first mannerism: the figures and forms are stretched and elongated and become more elegant. By 1913 his *Fauviste* period has ended.

In 1914 the outbreak of war separates him from Guus and Dolly, who are in Rotterdam, and he is unable to see them for four years. He is not called up for military service and remains in Paris.

In 1916 he meets Jasmy Jacob, and they commence a relationship that continues until 1927.

In 1917 he attends the premiere of *Parade*, even though he sees less and less of Picasso.

With the end of the war in 1918, Guus and Dolly return to Paris, but he refuses to live with them.

1919-1922

The glory years of his fashionable success are marked by a greater variety of themes, although the female form is still his favourite subject. He has a penchant for women with large eyes and sensual lips.

Starting in 1920 he puts on exhibitions in his studio.

He shows his portrait of Anatole France at the Salon de la Nationale in 1921, causing a scandal by portraying the most famous French writer of the day as a senile old man.

The great names from the arts, high finance and Paris society vie to have their portraits painted by him. However, though he is at the summit of his public success, his work is in decline.

The receptions he holds from 1922 on in his luxurious Paris mansion contribute to his public image as a Dutch Great Gatsby.

1925-1927

Having devoted his energies to painting and a riotous social life, he marks a break. His individual shows become less frequent.

In 1926 he receives the Order of the Legion of Honour, with the rank of knight.

In 1927 he publishes his autobiography, *Van Dongen raconte ici la vie de Rembrandt et parle, à ce propos, de la Hollande, des femmes et de l'art*.

That same year the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam puts on the first Van Dongen retrospective. He receives the Order of the Crown of Belgium.

1928-1935

Van Dongen has changed: he sells less, exhibits little and withdraws into himself.

The Wall Street crash of 1929 marks the end of the 'crazy years'. The commissions are few and far between. He is granted French nationality.

In 1930 his father, Jan Van Dongen, dies.

In 1932 he settles in Garches, but has no intention of retiring there. Over the next two years he refuses to sell any of his work to stop his prices from falling, and he travels to the United States in search of new contacts.

1936-1945

By 1936 the recession is over. He receives a number of prestigious commissions and is much in demand among figures from the entertainment world.

In 1938 he meets Marie-Claire, and their son Jean-Marie is born in 1940.

In November 1941 he takes a one-week trip to Germany organized by Arno Breker, an official sculptor of the Third Reich. This trip results in the failure of the very important Van Dongen retrospective organized in 1942 by the Galerie Charpentier in Paris, and the subsequent 'trial' after the Liberation in 1945, which bans him from the Salon d'Automne for a time.

He returns to Deauville, where he regains his pre-war clientele of wealthy and famous people.

1946-1968

Guus dies in 1946.

In 1947 Marie-Claire and Jean-Marie settle in Monaco; she buys a villa where in 1949 and names it Le Bateau-Lavoir. Marie-Claire and Van Dongen marry in 1953.

In the course of 1959 there are numerous exhibitions of his work.

To mark his 90th birthday in 1967, the Musée national d'Art Moderne in Paris organizes a retrospective, which then travels to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

Kees van Dongen dies on May 28, 1968. Due to the events of May in France, his death goes unnoticed in Paris.

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