



**Jan Toorop (1858-1928)**

*Miek Janssen, Bruges, 1915*

Conté crayon and pencil on paper  
6¼ by 4¾ inches (16 by 12 cm.)  
Signed & dated 'JT Toorop 1915'

**Provenance**

Private collection, The Netherlands  
Sale, Zeeuws Veilinghuis, Middelburg, 6 June 2019, lot 449

**Note**

From 1882 through 1889, welcomed by the Belgian avant-garde, Indonesian born artist Jan Toorop lived intermittently in Ixelles, near Brussels. Joining the newly formed *Les XX (Les Vingt)* in 1884, he was immediately part of the inner circle of the “revolutionaries”: James Ensor (1860-1949) and Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921). As the sole Dutch member of *Les XX*, Toorop forged important relationships between his contemporaries in Belgium and The Netherlands. After meeting the British student Annie Hall (1860-1929) in Brussels, whom he would marry in 1886, Toorop split his time between The Netherlands, England and Belgium. In April 1890, the couple settled in the Dutch coastal town Katwijk aan Zee, jumpstarting a new artistic endeavor. Notwithstanding an absence from Holland for nearly a decade, Toorop was considered the most important Dutch avant-garde artist at the time, with international connections and aspirations.

Soon after returning to the Netherlands, Toorop cofounded the *Haagse Kunstkring (Art Circle of The Hague)*, where he organized the first retrospective exhibition of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) followed by a group show of *Les XX* in 1892. That same year, Sar Péladan (1858-1918) visited The Netherlands, luring Toorop to join his *Salon de la Rose+Croix* and ushering in his foray into symbolism. Soon, seductive, fatal women, symbols of sensuality and destroyer of man, entered Toorop's emblematic vocabulary. Embracing his colonial East Indies heritage of tropical vegetation, carvings and Hindu iconography, Toorop began his most important symbolist drawing *The Three Brides*, now in the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo. After its completion in 1893, Toorop returned to portraiture, employing his personal symbolism: the soul is revealed in a fantasy, embodying different types of beings rather than the formality of a portrait. The sitter no longer represents a particular woman, but rather the embodiment of a melancholic mood.

Like many other symbolist contemporaries, Toorop situated some of his late symbolic religious themes in Bruges, a medieval town in Belgium. The mystic aura of fifteenth century architecture



and paintings by the Flemish primitives such as Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling appealed to artists at the turn of the century. In 1914, Toorop created the monumental drawing *Adoration Bruges* (or *Divine Love Walk*). His muse and mistress, Miek Janssen (1890-1953), whose presence in the symbolist drawing is eternalized in their interlaced monogram OM (for Miek and Olaf, his nickname), described in detail its meaning and dedicated a poem to boot.<sup>1</sup> Expressing man's desire to unite with God, slender figures of divine beings flow past the lofty houses of Bruges, stretching their hands. In their midst rises the young woman in adoration, and they lead her, the longing one, to the Infinite Love.

**Jan Toorop (1858-1928)**

*Adoratie Brugge*, 1914

Black chalk and pencil on paper  
97 x 95 cm.

Signed, dated & inscribed 'J.th.Toorop 1914 ADORATIE BRUGGE'

Private collection, The Netherlands

Bruges is seemingly a second sitter in Toorop's drawings dated the following year: the present drawing executed in Conté crayon and the colored chalk one in the Kröller-Müller Museum. Rather than a formal portrait depicting a sitter, it seems to be a continuation of the now uncloaked young woman in adoration, the artist's archetypal muse. Toorop's daughter, Charley, was the artist's preferred model, until 1912, when she married and their relationship became fraught. That same year, she was replaced by Miek, his future favorite model. The downward gaze and symmetrical frontality of the sitter are typical for Toorop during this period, as is the reference of the city of Bruges as a backdrop. The arched bridges, inspired by the Begijnhof, are also a well-known motif known from Fernand Khnopff's 1892 frontispiece for *Bruges-la-Mort* by Georges Rodenbach.



**Jan Toorop**

*Meisjeskopje*, 1915

Colored chalk on paper  
26.5 x 16 cm

Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo

Inv.no. KM 103.075

<sup>1</sup> Miek Janssen, "Jan Toorop", in: *Onze Kunst. Geïllustreerd maandschrift voor beeldende en decoratieve kunsten*, No. 14 (1915), Vol. 17, pp.1-40, p. 29