

**Opening speech at the vernissage of the MTVP & ICEAC Domburg exhibition
JACOBA VAN HEEMSKERCK (1876-1923). ARTIST AND INSPIRATOR | A
SMALL TRIBUTE at the MTVP Museum Domburg, on July 1, 2023**

**by Francisca van Vloten, curator of the MTVP Museum Domburg and director of the
ICEAC Domburg**



Introduction to the exhibition by Francisca van Vloten; the *euroart* artists come with a surprise

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1907, at the age of 31, the young and very gifted artist Paula Modersohn-Becker died in Worpswede, Germany. Her last words were: *‘Wie schade ...’*. Jacoba van Heemskerck has reached the age of 47 and we don’t know what her last words were, but *‘Wie schade ...’* could just as well apply to her. Jacoba van Heemskerck also died too young and still in the middle of her development. Both women were born in 1876, Jacoba in January and Paula in February of that year. For Paula Modersohn-Becker, recognition as an artist only came in the last year of her life; for Jacoba van Heemskerck during the last ten years of her life.

In 1906, in Paris, Paula Modersohn had met the German sculptor Bernhard Hoetger, who, when he understood that she painted, wanted to see her works and was completely overwhelmed by them. Hoetger believed unconditionally in her artistry. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who had been close friends with Paula for many years and even shared a ‘soul affinity’ with her, also started to do so about this time – only *then*, as he lamented after her death. He wrote a beautiful *Requiem* for Paula. She knew how to convey his awareness of all great art, that is: ‘all things have their secrets, their silent wonders, to be able to make them sing, to reproduce them in their core without touching them, affecting them, that is what it is about’. Or as Rilke put it literally in his volume of poetry *Mir zur Feier*, published in 1909: *‘Ich will immer warnen und wehren: Bleibt fern. / Die Dinge singen hör ich so gern. / Ihr rührt sie an: sie sind starr und stumm. / Ihr bringst mir alle die Dinge um.’* Paula, according to Rilke, could free herself from herself. ... But he wrote that later, and it was Hoetger’s outspoken appreciation during her lifetime that gave Paula Modersohn-Becker the courage to persevere as an artist and to go her own way.

... Now you are probably wondering if I have the wrong piece of paper in front of me, but that is not the case. I am interested in the similarities and differences between these two very special artists. ... Another factor is that female artists seemed earlier accepted in the Netherlands than in Germany; for example, they were allowed to go to the art academies, while this was only allowed in Germany in 1919.

Thinking about the differences between Paula and Jacoba, I suspect that the source of inspiration was of great importance. Art never stands alone, always needs an impulse – and, it seems to me, it came to Paula Modersohn from within, from herself, while Jacoba seemed to need an impulse from outside to arrive at her exceptional works. I'll get back to that.

What Bernard Hoetger meant to Paula Modersohn-Becker, Herwarth Walden meant to Jacoba van Heemskerck. In 1913, this leader of the avant-garde artists' group Der Sturm in Berlin invited Jacoba to participate in his Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon, an international exhibition of modern art in Berlin. That was the beginning of a close collaboration. Walden believed unconditionally in Jacoba's artistry. From that moment on she felt valued and she started to develop herself enthusiastically in an expressionistic sense. She was supported in this by *her* soul mate, Marie Tak van Poortvliet.

In Domburg, both women spent the summers from 1908 in Marie Tak's Villa Loverendale next to the Badhotel. A studio was built in the garden for Jacoba. Because of her poor health, Marie and she lived a rather withdrawn life in bustling Domburg.

Although Jacoba was closely involved in the so-called Domburgsche Exhibitions, which took place between 1911 and 1921 and which were mainly organised by Jan Toorop, Mies Elout-Drabbe and Jan Heyse, her relationship with Jan Toorop's circle of friends was not close. She often expressed herself negatively, to very negatively, about colleagues. She may have needed that to feel stronger, but it immediately raises the question to what extent Jacoba was able to separate herself from herself in her work and, like Paula Modersohn-Becker, to pervade to the core and to represent the things without ballast, without affecting them. – Where the impulse to create comes from is irrelevant here.

In addition to the modest and mild Marie Tak van Poortvliet, Jacoba van Heemskerck could not only come across as very driven, but also hard and sharp at times. ... It was not difficult to get the impression that Marie Tak put her life at the service of Jacoba's artistry. For her, and for that matter also for other artists, she acted as a patron. In 1912 she started building up an art collection that resulted in about 150 works. A catalogue, which was compiled in 1917, seems to be untraceable, but according to the art historian and writer Friedrich Huebner, the collection included works by many great artists, I will now only mention Kandinsky, Marc, Mondrian and, of course, Jacoba van Heemskerck. – How I would like to know if Paula Modersohn-Becker was also among them ...

In Domburg, Jacoba was initially still searching, which caused Jan Toorop to sigh not very kindly in 1913: '*...what will she imitate next year...?*' To put it more positively: The modern movements in Domburg intrigued Jacoba; they were the impetus for her to develop herself further. In Domburg, thanks in part to Toorop, Mondrian and Lodewijk Schelfhout, she moved from realism to luminist and cubist expressions, and then, with Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy as a guideline, she began to experiment in different ways with lines and colours. ... It is striking how often she used motifs from Domburg, trees drawn in strong lines and various representations of sailing boats off the coast, on canvas and on paper, in woodcuts, drawings and paintings.

As far as the woodcuts are concerned, it is striking that some of them resemble linocuts rather than woodcuts. But that riddle is soon solved if one looks at Jacoba's correspondence with Herwarth Walden. On January 6, 1919, Jacoba wrote from The Hague to Walden in Berlin: '*Wenn ich kleine Linoleumschnitte mache, muss das dann immer erwähnt sein; kann man nicht einfach*

sagen: *Holzschnitt? [...] ist Linoleumschnitt künstlerisch nicht so wertvoll?*’ Walden must have responded positively to the first – wood was expensive in those days – because our exhibition also includes some works that were called woodcuts from the start, but clearly look like linocuts. Der Sturm owned a gallery and an art magazine; unique was the attention naturally given to female artists such as Gabriele Münter, Sonia Delaunay, Else Lasker-Schüler, Marianne von Werefkin and Natalia Goncharova. Also in the great appreciation for Jacoba van Heemskerck as an artist, it did not matter whether she was a woman or a man. This applies to Domburg as well, but it should be noted that the quality was often not the determining factor for appreciation, which lay rather in mutual friendships, love for the Walcheren countryside and pleasure in work.

Although Jacoba van Heemskerck was even involved in the organisation of the exhibitions from 1911 to 1915 and from 1920 to 1921, as mentioned earlier, a distance remained between her and her colleagues. In the midst of her Sturm friends she was apparently different, more open, more enthusiastic, but her friendship with Herwarth Walden also cooled. From 1914, Jacoba and Marie had mainly focused on Germany; around 1919 they began to pay more attention to the Dutch art world again.

It was in the restriction of the woodcut and the glass technique that Jacoba van Heemskerck ultimately came into her own; she gained fame also in the Netherlands with her stained glass windows and glass mosaics. For her glass designs she used the watercolour technique. In Domburg she herself made some small windows for houses; later the designs for villas and other buildings elsewhere followed. A world still seemed open to her when she died quite unexpectedly in Domburg on August 3, 1923 – now a hundred years ago.

At the exhibition you can follow Jacoba’s development in about thirty works, from the realism of a *Boereninterieur* via the Luminism and Cubism created in Domburg to her exceptional expressionism and designs for stained glass windows and glass mosaics. An overview and a tribute to a special artist.

But before you get to De Zaal, you will pass through De Galerij. There are twenty works on show by contemporary European artists, in one way or another connected to *euroart*, who were inspired by the work of Jacoba or by Jacoba himself. They have expressed this in their own way in sometimes very surprising works. Even the use of toothpaste was not shunned. The eleven contemporary European artists are, in alphabetical order: Didier Bonnot, Leonore de Berlis, Jacques Dujardin, Krisztián Horváth, Gerd Lepic, Michel di Maggio, Onno Octavius, Michiel Paalvast, Eric Schafflein, Wim Scheere and Uta Schnuppe Strack. They are from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary and – an outsider – Taiwan. The Hall Text and the Publication accompanying the exhibition provide extensive information about them and their work.

Finally, an observation in which sex and gender creep in – or perhaps not: surprisingly enough, more male (9) than female (2) artists were inspired by Jacoba van Heemskerck for this part of the exhibition.