

ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Suzanne Fabry
(Brussels 1904 – 1985)

Triple Self-Portrait

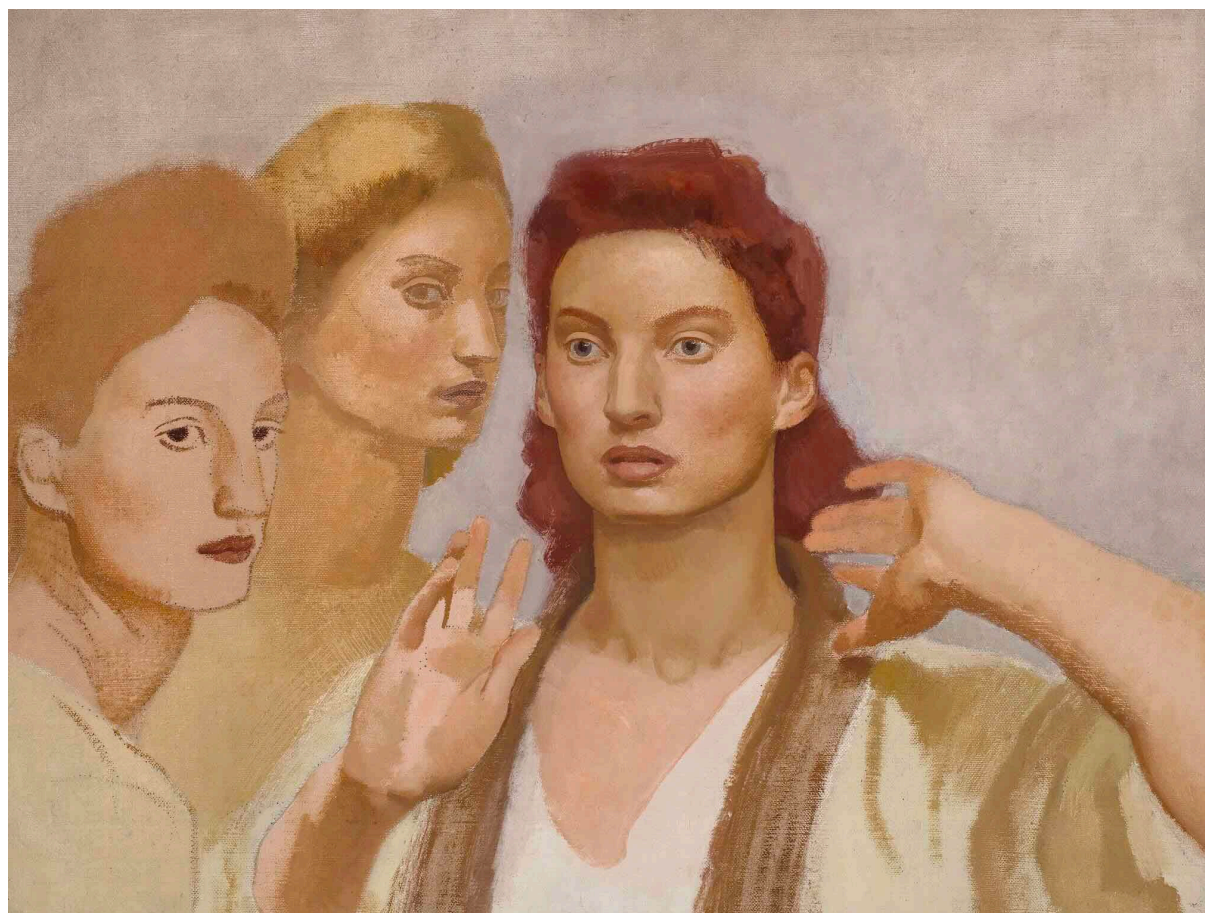
Signed on reverse: *SUZANNE FABRY*

Oil on canvas

66 x 85 cm. (26 x 33 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Private collection, Belgium, until 2023.



Born in Brussels in 1904, Suzanne Fabry was the daughter of the Symbolist painter Emile Fabry (1865–1966). Although she was not herself a Symbolist painter, she was possessed of a lyrical and dreamlike temperament and a very distinctive sensibility, especially evident in her portraits.

At the start of World War I, Suzanne moved with her family to England where they remained until the end of the war, first in Herefordshire and later in the Cornish town of Saint-Ives. They returned to their home in Belgium after the war and in 1923 Suzanne enrolled as a student at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts where she studied under Jean Delville (1867-1953) and Constant Montald (1862-1944), two of the founders, alongside her father, of a group of artists who called themselves *L'art monumental*. The group's aim was to produce public, monumental, and culturally sophisticated art that would elevate consciousness through the representation of idealised, universal themes. Their commanding nudes would constitute an important source of inspiration for Suzanne's own work.

Suzanne graduated from the Académie in 1928 and embarked on her career as a painter in the 1930s, taking part in the triennial Salon in Antwerp in 1930 and the quadrennial Salon in Liège in 1931. Around the same time, her father was completing a cycle of large-scale paintings for the entrance and staircase of Brussels' opera house, La Monnaie, where, many years later, Suzanne and her husband Edmond Delescluze (1905-1993) would be employed as costume and set designer respectively. She continued to pursue her career as a painter, alongside her work as head of the opera's costume workshop, until her death in 1985.

Fabry's most impactful and original work tends to date from the 1930s and early 1940s. During this period, when her focus was primarily on self-portraiture and the monumental female nude (fig. 1), Fabry began to develop her own artistic style. Working in a semi-pointillist technique, Fabry's poetic and meditative works from these years are effused with a very personal and dreamlike ambiance.



Fig. 1, Suzanne Fabry, *Female Nudes by the Sea*, 1943, oil on canvas, 153 x 173 cm, Private Collection

Triple Self-Portrait is an important example of Fabry's work from these years, particularly interesting for its unfinished nature which demonstrates the artist's working technique. In a method harking back to the Renaissance, Fabry uses tracings from preparatory studies on paper, as confirmed by the pouncing dots seen most notably on the left-hand figure and the proper right-hand of the central figure.

The three figures depicted all possess Fabry's distinctive countenance and shock of over swept hair, traits clearly recognisable from other self-portraits from this time (fig. 2). Whilst the figure furthest back looks out with a piercing, investigative gaze, the eyes of the central figure are turned towards some other, unspecified place, lost in the distance. The hand gestures are equally revealing, perhaps held up in a moment of surprise. Fabry had a very gentle nature, calm but rarely smiling. In her early thirties, this young woman was in full artistic bloom yet retained a certain reserve.

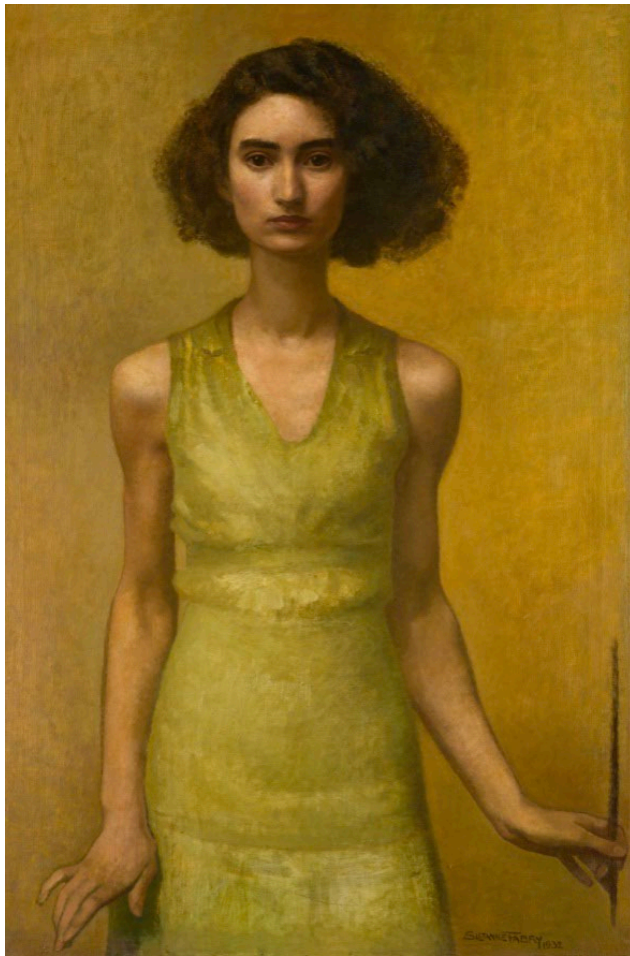


Fig. 2, Suzanne Fabry, *Self-portrait*, 1932, oil on canvas, 111 x 74 cm, Private Collection

The *Triple Self-Portrait* has precedence in Fabry's oeuvre. The artist painted a second example in 1934 (fig. 3), around the same time as the present work. Here the figures retained the variegated gazes and hand gestures, though are posed at half-length and with a different palette. Like other works from the 1930s and 1940s, *Triple Self-Portrait* demonstrates Fabry's interest in the great art of the past. The imagery of the *Three Graces*, with their assorted poses and gazes, is clear, with the iconography perhaps being mediated through ancient statuary or Botticelli's *Primavera*. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's ethereal study

for *Rosa Triplex* (fig. 4), which was in the National Gallery of British Art during Fabry's time in England, may have also been a source of inspiration.

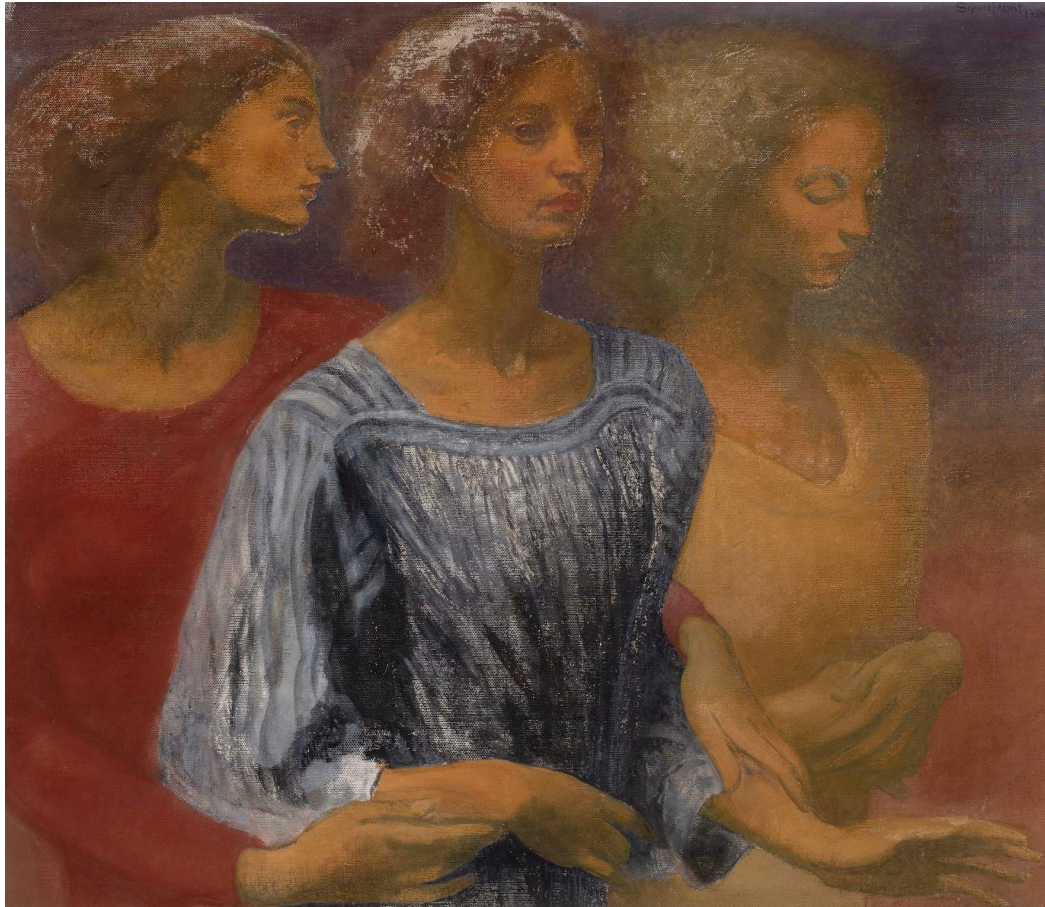


Fig. 3, Suzanne Fabry, *Triple Self-Portrait*, 1934, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 89.5 cm, Private Collection, formerly with Elliott Fine Art



Fig. 4, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Rosa Triplex*, 1867, red chalk on paper, 51 x 74 cm, Tate Britain