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Josep de Togores

(Municipality of Cerdanyola del
Vallès 1893 - 1970 Barcelona)

*Portrait of the demoiselles Louise
and Berthe Godon*

Paris, 1921

oil on canvas

116 x 81 cm.;

45 5/8 x 31 7/8 in.

signed and dated lower left: *togores / 921*

Literature

José de Togorès, exh. cat., Galerie Simon, Paris 1922, cat. no. 17;

Togores. Clasicismo y renovación (obra de 1914 a 1931), exh. cat., Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid 1997, p. 77, cat. no. 21, reproduced on p. 105;

Catalani a Parigi – Catalans a Paris, Mediterrània, Brescia / Barcelona 2002.

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Simon, *José de Togorès*, 1922 (cat. no. 17);

Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, *Togores. Clasicismo y renovación (obra de 1914 a 1931)*, 25 November 1997 - 15 January 1998 (cat. no. 21);

Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, *Togores. Classicisme i renovació (obra de 1914 a 1931)*, February - April 1998 (cat. no. 21);

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Brescia, Palazzo Martinengo, *Catalani a Parigi*, 10 February - 12 May 2002 (without cat. no.);

Barcelona, Sala Parés, *Viajeros, 1877 - 1950*, 18 December 2021 - 20 February 2022 (without cat. no.).

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Josep de Togores was born into an aristocratic family in Cerdanyola, a few miles north of Barcelona. His early fondness and facility for painting led him to train with artists such as Joan Llaverías and Fèlix Mestre and to exhibit while still in his teens at the Sala Parés (1910), after which he achieved public recognition at the Brussels International Exhibition. After an initial stay in Paris in 1913, during which he was influenced by the painting of Paul Cézanne, he had to return to Barcelona following the outbreak of the First World War. He settled permanently in Paris in 1919 and came into contact with the avant-garde artists of the French capital such as Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani and Georges Braque, among others. At the end of 1920 he signed an exclusive contract with one of the most important art dealers and gallery owners in Europe, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who exhibited Togores' work all over Europe with great commercial and critical success.

Les Demoiselles Godon is a portrait of Kahnweiler's sisters-in-law: Louise Leiris, Zette (1902 - 1988), married to the poet and ethnologist Michel Leiris (1901 - 1990), and Berthe Lascaux, Bero (1893 - 1984), married to the naïf painter Élie Lascaux (1888 - 1968). For many years, this canvas was part of Kahnweiler's personal collection. It passed through both the Galerie Simon and the Galerie Leiris, and has been on display in major exhibitions on the painter's career and 20th-century European figuration.

The work was first shown at Josep de Togores's first solo exhibition in Paris, at the Galerie Simon in Kahnweiler in February 1922 (this information is preserved on the frame of the painting). On the importance of the works on display in this exhibition, the writer and painter Max Jacob (1876 - 1944) stated that Togores's painting was in the *juste milieu* between the objective tradition of Spanish realism and the constructive vigour of Cubism, and defined Togores as "an aristocrat, simple and natural". In fact, this moment in Togores's career is interesting for appreciating the shift from Catalan Noucentista classicism to the classicism and compositional and aesthetic arrangement derived from Cubism, which he assimilated and interpreted so well and in such a personal manner. The portrait of the *demoiselles* Godon perfectly demonstrates Togores's mastery of the avant-garde techniques and fits in with the elegant international style of the time, as Marta González pointed out on the

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occasion of the exhibition on the artist held at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid in 1997.¹

The composition is based on the drawing and the prominence of the matt fabrics: the greyish blue and red worn by the two sisters forcefully divide the canvas into two vertical sections. The two figures are set against the rest of the accessories on the canvas, which set the scene and provide depth. The anatomy of the sitters is flat, hinting at the softening in Togores's depiction of the human figure that was beginning to appear in his paintings. The exaggeratedly mannered positions of the legs and, above all, the arms and hands lend a certain dynamism to the figures, which are harmoniously contrasted by the inclination of their heads and the sophisticated hairstyles typical of Paris in the 1920s. It is also worth noting the inclusion of animals as a complement (the sleeping dog in the corner and the arctic fox boa), treated with an elegant synthesis that allows the artist to work with gradations and nuances to define the forms, which is fully in keeping with the Expressionist approaches of August Macke and Franz Marc.

Sergio Fuentes Milà

¹ M. González, 'Varada', in *Togores. Clasicismo y renovación (obra de 1914 a 1931)*, exh. cat., Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid 1997, p. 44.