



**Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans**

**The Sackler Wing of Galleries**

29 October 2016 – 29 January 2017

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The Royal Academy of Arts will present the first major exhibition of James Ensor's (1860-1949) work to be held in the UK in twenty years. One of Belgium's most prominent modernist artists, Ensor was widely considered to be an important precursor of Expressionism. *Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans* will bring together some 70 paintings, drawings and prints by the artist, the vast majority of which have been drawn from major Belgian collections. The exhibition will be curated by the renowned contemporary painter and one of Belgium's foremost artists, Luc Tuymans, who will bring a fresh perspective to the selection and presentation of Ensor's work.

A highly skilled draughtsman and painter, Ensor had a deep appreciation of the poetic possibilities of light and a lifelong devotion to the inherent creativity of the mind. His eclectic visual language drew upon a wealth of subjects from the traditional to the fantastic, producing an extraordinary body of work that spanned poetic evocations of the Belgian countryside and coastline, to disturbing visions of imagined worlds. Ensor's works have continued to baffle, intrigue and defy categorisation in equal measure, providing one of the most singular and distinctive bodies of work to be produced at the turn of the twentieth century.

Born in 1860 to an English father and a Belgian mother, Ensor was raised in the coastal town of Ostend, where his family ran a curio shop which he described as "an inextricable jumble of assorted objects constantly being knocked over by a number of cats, deafening parrots, and a monkey...". It was this somewhat eccentric environment, as well as Ostend's annual carnival and the archaeological excavations at the time, from which Ensor drew much of his later imagery such as masks, theatrical costumes and skulls. Referred to as "the painter of masks" by poet Émile Verhaeren in 1908, Ensor wrote: "The mask means to me: freshness of colour, extravagant decorations, wild generous gestures, strident expressions, exquisite turbulence."

As a student at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Ensor was an outsider who rebelled against traditional teachings and was drawn towards the avant-garde salons of artists and intellectuals at the time, an environment in which he flourished. Heartened by these encounters, Ensor returned to Ostend in 1880 where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1883 he co-founded the progressive artist group *Les Vingt*, yet even this once stridently avant-garde group proved too safe for Ensor who became

increasingly isolated from the external world and remained committed, throughout a long and belatedly successful career, to his individual style.

*Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans* will include a selection of significant paintings, drawings and prints by the artist which span the breadth of his entire career, some of which have never been exhibited in the UK. The exhibition will feature three of Ensor's most important works: *The Intrigue*, 1890 (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), which depicts a newly-wed couple encircled by sinister masked figures, *The Skate*, 1892 (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels), a powerful, enigmatic still life and *Self-portrait with Flowered Hat*, 1883 (Mu.Zee, Ostend), a humorous reference to Peter Paul Rubens' *Portrait of Susanna Lunden* (National Gallery, London) of 1622.

Ensor's works will be accompanied by a selection of *Gilles de Binche* carnival masks, two works on paper by Belgian Symbolist painter Léon Spilliaert and Guillaume Bijl's 2002 black and white film *James Ensor in Ostend*. The exhibition will also include *Gilles de Binche*, 2004, by Luc Tuymans, whose on-going concern with light in his practice is similar to that of Ensor. Tuymans' curation of the exhibition will engage with the sense of mystery, anonymity and mischievousness associated with masks.

### Organisation

The exhibition has been organised by the Royal Academy of Arts in association with the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. It will be curated by Belgian contemporary artist Luc Tuymans, in collaboration with Adrian Locke, Senior Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts.

### Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with contributions from Luc Tuymans, contemporary artist and curator of the exhibition; Dr. Herwig Todts, Research Curator at Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; Gerrit Vermeiren, author of *Luc Tuymans: Is it Safe?* and Xavier Tricot, curator of several James Ensor exhibitions.

### Dates and Opening Hours

**Press View:** Tuesday 25 October 2016, 10am – 2pm  
**Open to public:** Saturday 29 October 2016 – Sunday 29 January 2017  
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)  
**Late night opening:** Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

### Admission

£11.50 full price (£10 excluding Gift Aid donation); concessions available; children under 16 and Friends of the RA go free.

### Tickets

Tickets for *Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans* are available daily at the RA or online at [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk).

Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email [adultgroups@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:adultgroups@royalacademy.org.uk).

## **Images**

Publicity images for *Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans* can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at [www.picselect.com](http://www.picselect.com) and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

## **Social Media**

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#Ensor

## **About the Royal Academy of Arts**

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The RA is undergoing a transformative redevelopment which will be completed in time for its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. Led by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the plans will link Burlington House on Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens for the first time, uniting and revitalising the two-acre site. The redevelopment will also reveal the elements that make the RA unique, sharing with the public the historic treasures in its Collection, the work of its Academicians and the RA Schools, alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. For more information on the RA visit [www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra250#video](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra250#video).

**For public information, please print 020 7300 8090 or [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)**

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