



Large
Print

Intrigue

James Ensor

by Luc Tuymans

North Gallery

Do not remove from gallery

Multimedia tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Welcome and Introduction



Afternoon in Ostend, 1881



Self-portrait with Flowered Hat,
1883



Skeletons Fighting over a Pickled
Herring, 1891



Bathing Hut, 1876

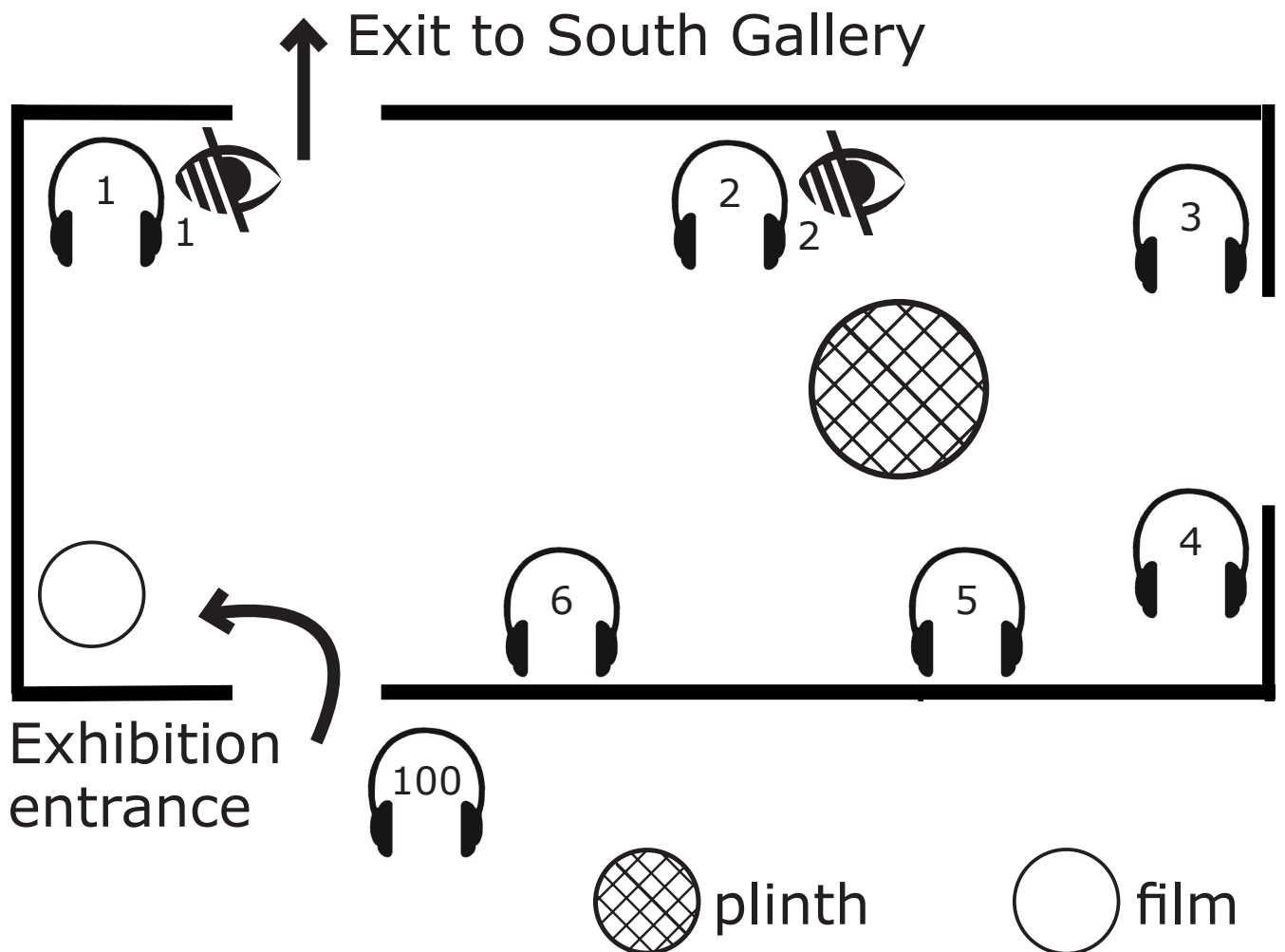
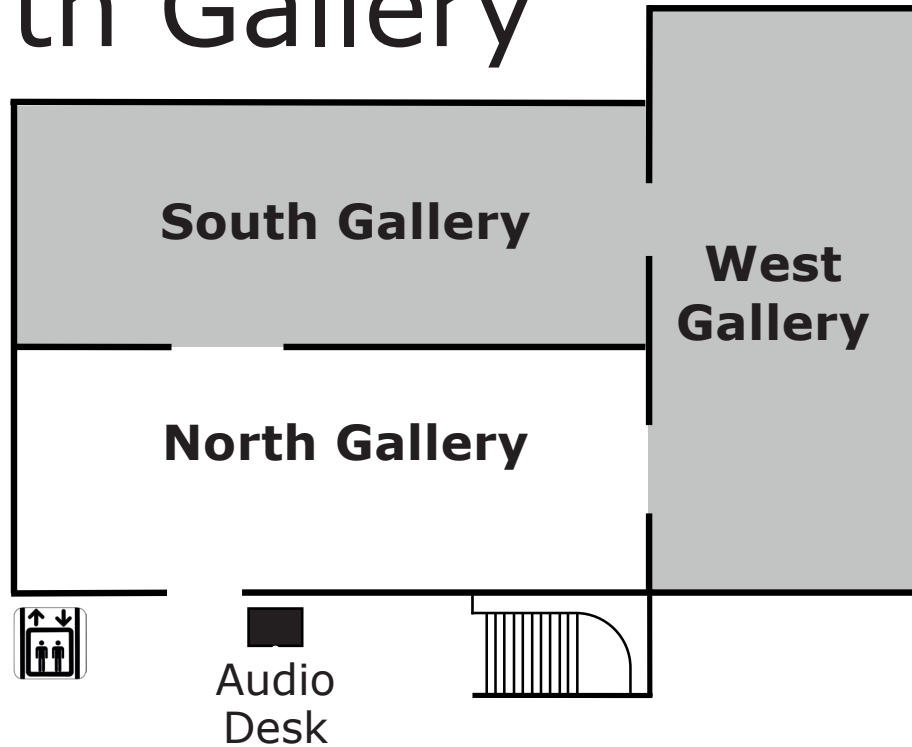


Léon Spilliaert, Self-portrait with
Easel in the Mirror, 1907



The Skeleton Painter, 1896

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Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans

In the Sackler Wing of Galleries
29th October 2016 – 29th January 2017

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The Art of Painting Nothing Luc Tuymans on James Ensor

In 1933 Albert Einstein, en route to America, met James Ensor for lunch on the Belgian coast, near Ostend. "What do you paint?" the scientist asked the artist. "Nothing," came the reply.

Ensor was an enigma. A talented artist from a young age, he lived and worked in Ostend, a city that was extroverted during summer but became isolated and inward-looking during the winter.

He lived a solitary life there, close to his family, and rarely travelled.

Living on the edge of the continent and of society, Ensor was aloof from the world and rarely left the safety of the metaphorical mountaintop from which he viewed it.

He was a nonconformist and refused to pander to the demands of the Académie royale des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, where he had studied, or to those of the wider art world. To the end, Ensor was his own man, well versed in anguish and estrangement.

I first came across his work in Antwerp when I was about sixteen, and his painting 'The Intrigue,' included in this exhibition, immediately provoked in me a profound sense of unease.

Captivated by the theatrical power of this work, with its unsettling crowd of masked figures, I found myself questioning which elements were true, and which were false.

For me, Ensor was a scenographer, depicting a strange world that was neither tangible nor imaginary, populated by inscrutable beings. Perhaps the painting was a vision of the parallel existence that for Ensor, the perpetual outsider, signified reality.

Unlike his fellow Ostend artist Léon Spilliaert, whose work also features in this exhibition, Ensor questioned others, but never himself. This led me, as a Belgian art student at a time when painting was regarded as old-fashioned, to develop the idea of 'authentic forgery', anchored, perhaps subconsciously, in Ensor's own sense of mistrust.

The more one looks at Ensor's works, the more intriguing he becomes. It is evident from the selection I have made that he was a brilliant painter, printmaker and draughtsman.

Despite peaking before he was forty years old, Ensor was convinced by his own ability and individual style and carried on working into his eighties, only later in life garnering critical acclaim, financial success and honours. For me, he is a star of the art world – and one with a compelling rebellious streak.

Luc Tuymans (b.1958) is an internationally renowned artist living and working in Antwerp, with a close connection to London. He recently curated 'The Gap: Selected Abstract Art from Belgium' at Parasol unit.

In 2004 Tuymans was the subject of a monographic exhibition at Tate. 'Luc Tuymans: Glasses' is currently showing at the National Portrait Gallery.

Unless otherwise stated, all works in the exhibition are by James Ensor.

Ostend: A City of Contrasts

James Ensor (1860–1949) was born in the coastal city of Ostend to an English father and a Flemish mother. Strategically located where the English Channel meets the North Sea, Ostend had become an important Dutch port by the eighteenth century.

When a new railway connected it to Brussels in 1838, the city began to transform into a fashionable summer seaside resort, popular with English tourists.

Patronised by King Leopold I, who had assumed the throne after Belgium gained independence from Holland in 1830, and his son Leopold II, the city changed following new additions such as a casino and a grand seafront promenade, turning

Ostend into the 'Queen of Belgian beaches'. Ostend also played host to one of the most famous carnivals in Belgium, which concluded with the Bal du Rat mort, or Dead Rat Ball – a masked ball named by its founders after a small bar that they frequented in Montmartre, a bohemian area of Paris.

As a teenager, Ensor was surrounded by this burgeoning development, yet as construction sites emerged around the city he also witnessed the accompanying disinterment from mass graves of skeletons that were centuries old.

These belonged to the victims of the three-year Siege of Ostend (1601–04) during the Eighty Years' War, when Holland sought independence from Spanish rule. A city of contrasts, Ostend glimmered in its newfound vibrancy only briefly each year; densely packed in the summer, the city's

population contracted during the harsh winter months.

Ensor's mother and aunt ran a curio shop that sold seaside souvenirs and carnival objects such as shells, chinoiserie and masks from around the world.

A monkey, a parrot and several cats populated the shop, adding to its exoticism; many of these elements would subsequently appear in Ensor's work.

Showing artistic talent from an early age, Ensor left school aged sixteen to enter the Académie des Beaux-Arts d'Ostende, setting up a studio in the attic of the family home.

The following year he left Ostend to enroll at the Académie royale des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels. During his three years there he achieved little academic success and felt harshly treated and misunderstood by his tutors.

Nonetheless, Ensor made some important friendships in Brussels, particularly with the artists Fernand Khnopff and Willy Finch who, like Ensor, came from Ostend and had an English father.

Ensor also became close friends with the painter, poet and writer Théo Hannon and his sister's family the Rousseaus, central figures among the intellectual elite of Brussels.

Through them, he entered a circle of progressive, free-thinking liberals in whose company he flourished, and who would influence his evolution as an artist.

Disillusioned by the strictures of the Académie and the traditional salons, which were generally dismissive of his work, Ensor co-founded a group called Les Vingt (Les XX) in 1883. This group invited a number of established artists, including Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, Camille

Pissarro and Georges Seurat to exhibit alongside the twenty emerging Belgians who comprised the core of the group.

Initially nurturing his individuality, Ensor's relationship with Les XX was ultimately fraught with disagreements. Despite continuing to exhibit with the group until its dissolution in 1893, he was determined to maintain his independence and lived in Ostend for the rest of his life, occasionally travelling to other parts of Belgium and making a few short trips to England, France and Holland.

In his 1908 biography of Ensor, the Symbolist poet Emile Verhaeren referred to him as "the painter of masks". Indeed, following his first mask painting in 1883, the motif reappeared frequently for the rest of his life.

In his own writings, Ensor stated that “to me, the mask signifies freshness of colour, extravagant decorations, wild generous gestures, strident expressions, exquisite turbulence.”

Although this persona has proved hard for Ensor to dislodge, the intention behind this exhibition is to demonstrate that Ensor was much more than this.

Curated, at the invitation of the Royal Academy, by the internationally renowned contemporary Belgian artist Luc Tuymans, the exhibition has been hung subjectively, the work of one artist as seen and appreciated through the eyes of another.

Early Work and Self-portraits

The short film 'James Ensor in Ostend', by the contemporary Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl, pays homage to Ensor's heyday and presents him as the 'grand old man' of Ostend, played by a local antique dealer who bears a striking resemblance to the artist.

This silent film deliberately evokes those made by French actor and film-maker Sacha Guitry who, in 1915, captured Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas and Claude Monet in their old age.

Like them, Ensor was embraced as an esteemed pillar of his nation's cultural life in his later years. Nonetheless, his most productive years, which resulted in his best-known works, were over by the time he was 40.

The paintings in this gallery all date from that period, and trace Ensor's development as a young artist.

Initially, he mainly produced small-scale seascapes and landscapes, such as 'Bathing Hut' (1876), the earliest work in the exhibition. Executed when Ensor was sixteen, the painting demonstrates his youthful sensitivity to light.

A few years later he turned his attention to interior scenes, and two paintings that are rarely seen together, 'The Bourgeois Salon' (1880) and 'Afternoon in Ostend' (1881), represent his interest in capturing figures in dimly-lit Ostend homes.

The earlier painting is distinctly impressionistic while the other, depicting his sister Mariette (known as Mitche) and their mother Maria Catherina, demonstrates a more mature, refined style.

A group of self-portraits in this room

reveals the interest that Ensor had in himself as a subject and his attitude to art historical precedents.

At times, he consciously placed himself in the tradition of influential Old Masters like Rubens and Rembrandt, staring back at himself in a dispassionate manner.

On other occasions he took the unusual decision to depict himself as a skeleton, reflecting a lifelong preoccupation with death. In a startling painting, 'The Man of Sorrows' (1891), Ensor even conflates himself with the suffering Christ.

Ensor was not averse to reworking paintings. The flamboyant hat which features in the celebrated 'Self-portrait with Flowered Hat' (1883), for instance, was added later in a deliberate reference to Rubens's 1636–37 painting 'Hélène Fourment and Her Children Claire-Jeanne and François', which Ensor saw at the Louvre in Paris.

Also among this group is an intense self-portrait by Léon Spilliaert (1881-1946), a fellow Ostend resident who credited Ensor with his decision to become an artist, and who has long interested Tuymans.

Something of a counterpart to Ensor, Spilliaert's introspective work has a curious sense of detachment, emphasised by a muted palette and elegiac, dreamlike spaces.

A small but powerful painting, 'Skeletons Fighting over a Pickled Herring' (1891), satirises Ensor's turbulent relationship with the art world.

In this painting, two critics fight over the artist, literally pulling him apart. Highly sensitive to the critical reception of his work, Ensor clearly felt savaged (and greatly misunderstood) by the artistic establishment.

In the middle of the room stands an ostrich feather headdress typical of those worn at the UNESCO-recognised Carnival of Binche, one of Europe's oldest surviving street carnivals that dates back to the Middle Ages and takes place in the small French-speaking Walloon municipality to the south of Brussels.

The all-male Gilles, a type of clown, wear these headdresses on the final day of the carnival, in fanciful imitation of the Inca of Peru, and are the subject of Tuymans's painting 'Gilles de Binche' (2004) that hangs in the adjoining gallery.

Earlier in the day's festivities the Gilles wear wax masks, also displayed in this exhibition, and throw oranges both at each other and at spectators.

The origins of the costume are unknown but are thought to have been a nineteenth-century invention based on local history dating back to 1549 when Archduchess Maria of Hungary, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, built a castle in Binche and celebrated its completion with a fancy dress party.

North Gallery

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Guillaume Bijl (b.1946)

James Ensor in Ostend, 2002

Black and white film

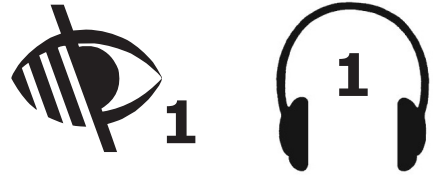
Guillaume Bijl, Antwerp

The Bourgeois Salon, 1880

Oil on canvas

Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

Afternoon in Ostend, 1881



Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Chinoiseries, Fans and Fabrics, 1880

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Skeleton Looking at Chinoiseries, c. 1888–90

Oil on canvas

Collection King Baudouin Foundation, entrusted to
the Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent

Self-portrait with Flowered Hat, 1883

Oil on canvas

Mu.ZEE, Ostend



Portrait of the Artist at His Easel, 1879

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Skeletons Fighting over a Pickled Herring, 1891

Oil on panel

Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels



Bathing Hut, 1876



Oil on cardboard

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Léon Spilliaert **(1881–1946)**



Self-portrait with Easel in the Mirror, 1907

Watercolour on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Large View of Ostend (Rooftops of Ostend), 1884

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Skeleton Painter, 1896



Oil on panel

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Ensor at His Easel, 1890

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Plinth

Karl Kersten (b.1955)

Ostrich feather headdress as
worn by the Gilles de Binche on
the afternoon of Shrove
Tuesday, 2000

Ostrich feathers, metal, cardboard, fabric

Musée International du Carnaval et du Masque, Binche



Large
Print

Intrigue

James Ensor

by Luc Tuymans

South Gallery

Do not remove from gallery

Multimedia tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise, 1887



Plague Here, Plague There, Plague Everywhere, 1888



The Cuirassiers at Waterloo, 1891



My Portrait in 1960, 1888

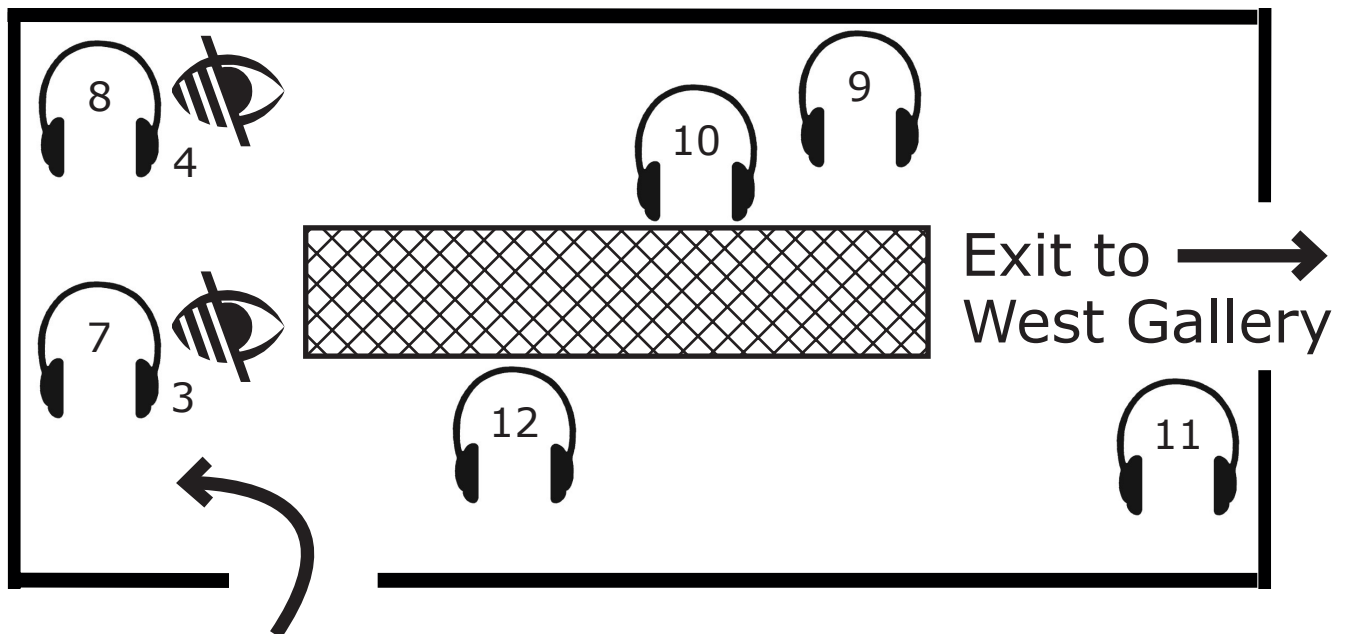
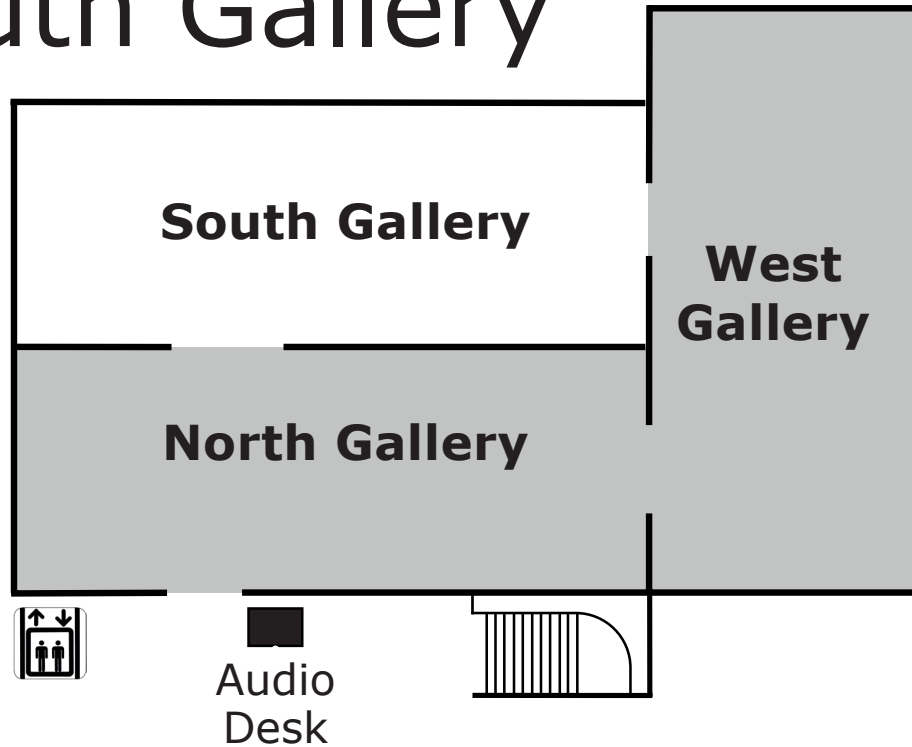


Personages in Front of the Playbill of 'La Gamme d'Amour', 1928-29



Hop-Frog's Revenge, 1898

You are in the South Gallery



Entrance from the North Gallery

 = showcase

Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans

In the Sackler Wing of Galleries
29th October 2016 – 29th January 2017

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State of the Art

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Works on Paper

Ensor was a highly accomplished draughtsman and printmaker, elements of his 'œuvre' that are examined in this gallery.

Producing his first etchings in 1886, he considered printmaking to be of greater importance than painting, remarking to his friend, the historian Albert Croquez: "Poor painting! An art exposed to the incompetence of restorers and the imperfections of reproductions [...] I want to survive – I think of hard copperplates, imperishable ink, easy reproduction. I therefore prefer the etching as a means of expression."

His talent as a printmaker was recognised early on, and in 1893, two years before making the first public purchase of one of his paintings, the Belgian state bought a group of Ensor's etchings.

In 1899 one of the greatest collections of works on paper in the world, the Albertina in Vienna, bought approximately one hundred of Ensor's etchings, cementing his reputation as a printmaker.

The selection of prints in this gallery demonstrates the broad range of subject-matter that Ensor explored in the medium.

Morbid self-portraits such as 'My Portrait as a Skeleton' (1889) and 'My Portrait in 1960' (1888), satires of middle-class professionals such as 'The Bad Doctors' (1895; made after a painting of the same subject in the next room), religious and fantastical scenes such as 'Christ Mocked' (1886) and literary references such as 'Hop-Frog's Revenge' (1898), after a tale by Edgar Allen Poe, demonstrate this variety.

A hand-coloured etching of Ensor's most famous painting 'The Entry of Christ into

Brussels in 1889' (1888–89; shown at the Royal Academy in 1971) is also displayed.

Exhibited among Ensor's prints is a previously unseen etching by Tuymans made when he was an eighteen-year-old art student. The influence of the older artist is clear.

Ensor produced his first lithograph in 1891, but his most celebrated work in this medium is perhaps the poster he made for an exhibition of his work at the Salon des Cent in Paris in 1898, shown here as a proof.

Drawing was also central to Ensor's practice. On the wall in this gallery, early sketches of people and carriages passing in the street below his attic studio and juxtaposed vignettes of domestic interiors demonstrate his natural skill as a draughtsman.

From 1885 Ensor increased the scale and ambition of his drawings, and a number of highly finished coloured drawings (sometimes referred to as 'drawn paintings') including 'The Strike' (1888) and 'The Cuirassiers at Waterloo' (1891), show a maturing style and an increasing emphasis on the medium.

Dominating the gallery is one of Ensor's largest and most impressive landscapes, 'Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise' (1887). Naked and desperate, Adam and Eve flee across a typical north Belgian landscape in a painting dominated by the dramatic sky, revealing Ensor's admiration for the English artist J. M. W. Turner.

As Ensor once said: "I have no children, but light is my daughter; light, one and indivisible; light, the painter's bread; light, the painter's crumb; light, queen of our senses."

South Gallery

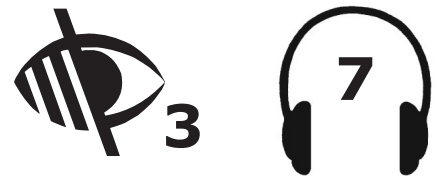
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Theatre of Masks, 1889

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise, 1887



Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Plague Here, Plague There, Plague Everywhere, 1888



Black, blue and red chalk and graphite on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Fight of the Down-and-Outs, 1887

Black pencil on paper, mounted on board

Private collection, courtesy Richard Nagy Ltd,
London

Nymphs, Dancers, Demons, c. 1908

Crayon on paper

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Calvary, 1886

Charcoal on paper

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Comical Meal, 1905

Chalk on paper

The Phoebus Foundation

Fireplace, Utensils and Masks, 1880–85/1886–88

Black chalk on paper, mounted on board and canvas

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Cabinet Moulding and Writing Woman, c. 1885–88

Black chalk on paper mounted on Japanese paper

Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

Silhouettes over a Seventeenth-century Sketch, date unknown

Pencil and black crayon on paper

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Study of Figures with Carriage, 1882

Charcoal and pencil on paper

Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

Silhouettes, date unknown

Gouache and pencil on paper

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Double Composition, 1881

Charcoal and pencil on paper

Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

Portrait of My Aunt, 1886–88

Conté crayon on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Self-portrait, 1879–80

Conté crayon on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Cuirassiers at Waterloo, 1891



Indian ink, crayon, coloured pencil and pastel on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Strike, 1888

Coloured chalk, black chalk and coloured pencil on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Revelatory Heart, 1884

Pencil and black chalk on paper

Private collection, courtesy Richard Nagy Ltd,
London

My Dead Mother, 1915

Pencil on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Man of Sorrows, 1891

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Personages in front of the Playbill of 'La Gamme d'Amour', 1928–29



Oil on canvas

Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

Chinoiserie, Flowers, Vases and Fans, 1915/19

Oil on canvas

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Chinoiserie, 1907

Oil on canvas

Museum Dhont-Dhaenens, Deurle

Luc Tuymans (b.1958)

Gilles de Binche, 2004

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Flowers and Vegetables, 1896

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

South Gallery showcase

List of works (clockwise)

The Bad Doctors, 1895

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Warmth-seeking Skeletons, 1895

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

My Portrait as a Skeleton, 1889

Etching and drypoint on paper

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Devils Thrashing Angels and Archangels, 1888

Copper plate etching

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Lust, from the series The Deadly Sins, 1888

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

My Portrait in 1960, 1888



Copper plate etching

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Peculiar Insects, 1888

Copper plate etching on Japanese paper

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

The Haunted Furniture, 1888

Etching and drypoint on Japanese paper

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

The Pisser, 1887

Copper plate etching

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent

Christ Mocked, 1886

Zinc plate etching on paper

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Luc Tuymans (b.1958)

Untitled, 1976

Drypoint etching

Studio Luc Tuymans

The Procession of Penitence in Veurne, 1932–33

Sketchbook pages; pencil on paper

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Gluttony, from the series The Deadly Sins, 1904

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Pride, from the series The Deadly Sins, 1904

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Avarice, from the series The Deadly Sins, 1904

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Sloth, from the series The Deadly Sins, 1902

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

The Artist Surrounded by Evil Spirits, 1898

Colour lithograph (poster proof)

Victoria and Albert Museum

Hop-Frog's Revenge, 1898



Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

The Entry of Christ into Brussels, 1895

Hand-coloured copper plate etching

Musea Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges

Holly Tree with Heads in Garden, 1889

Pencil, black crayon and coloured pencil on panel

Collection Patrick Florizoone, Ghent



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West Gallery

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Descriptive commentary



The Dangerous Cooks, 1896



The Skate, 1892



Jean-Luc Pourbaix. Six fabrication stages of the masks as worn by the Gilles de Binche on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, 2003



The Astonishment of the Mask Wouse, 1889

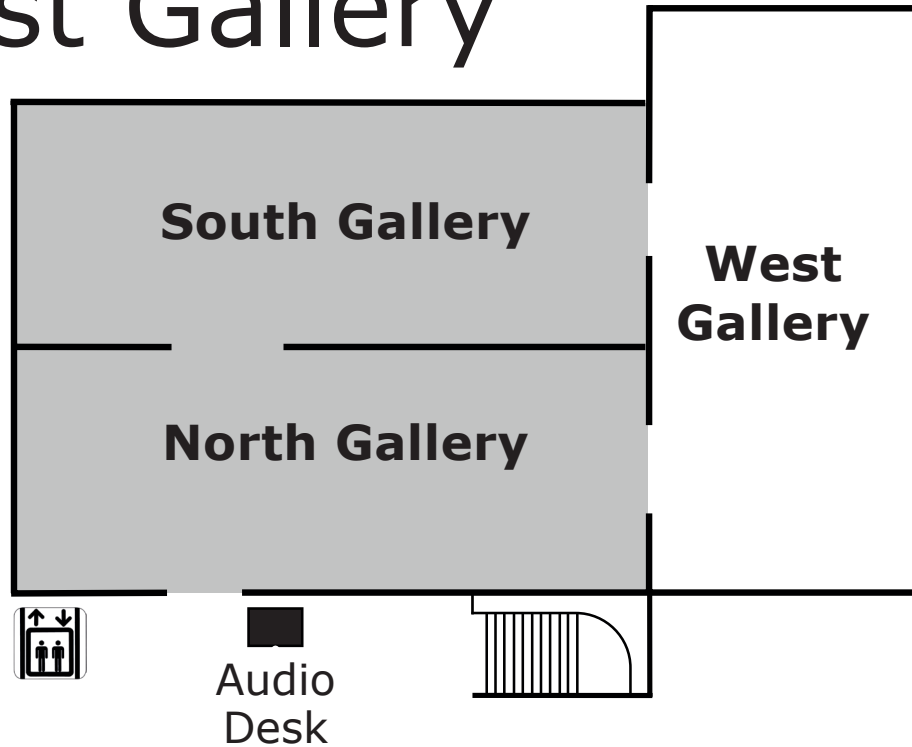


Skeletons in Fancy Dress, 1898



The Intrigue, 1890

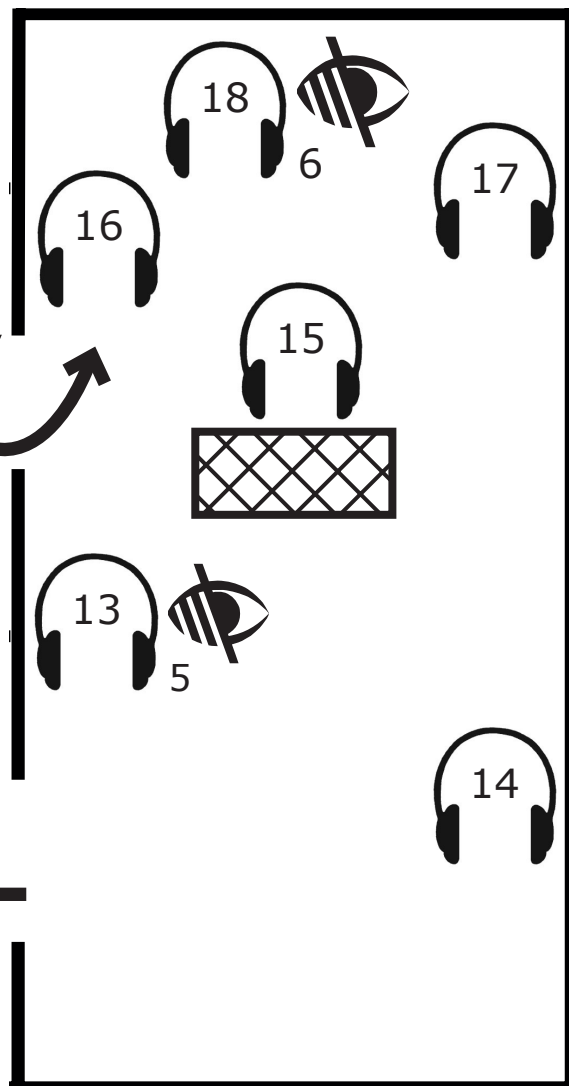
You are in the West Gallery



Entrance from
the South Gallery

West Gallery and
exit from the
exhibition

 =showcase



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Intrigue

In this room hangs one of Ensor's greatest works, 'The Intrigue' (1890). This mysterious painting, showing a group of masked carnival-goers, was the first of Ensor's works that Tuymans saw as a teenager, and it has stayed with him ever since.

The panoramic scope of the horizontal canvas and the crowd of people who almost seem to surge towards the viewer not only impressed him but led him to question the relationship between the individual and the mask, and whether what he saw was real or fictional.

Nearby, two later paintings, 'Skeletons in Fancy Dress' (1898) and 'From Laughter to Tears' (1908) explore similar themes.

The earlier painting (last seen in public in 1931, when Ensor was still alive) reflects Ensor's characteristic sardonicism, mocking contemporary life by presenting a group of skeletons dressed up in middle-class garb.

But the later painting – perhaps a more sombre comment on the cycle of life and death – places the skull and the mask alongside one another in an explicit questioning of individual identity versus anonymity.

Gazing back with sightless eyes from the opposite end of the gallery is a mysterious portrait by Spilliaert of the Scottish-American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Countering the characters in 'The Intrigue', Carnegie's empty eye sockets turn his very face into a mask.

Ensor's later works have often been dismissed as inferior to those of his early career, but those hanging in this room

reveal an intensity and vibrancy marked by a bold new colour range, demonstrating that while Ensor struggled for new subject-matter he continued to paint with great emotional commitment and experimentation.

Among these late paintings are 'Christ in Agony' (1931), a copy of an earlier version from 1888, and 'The Winds' (1940), taken from an engraving also from 1888. They reveal how Ensor began to revisit his earlier work later in life, creating new versions in a freer style and with a more intense palette.

Perhaps one of Ensor's most important still-lives, 'The Skate' (1892) is a skilfully painted arrangement of a typical North Sea catch. The head of the ray, however, is presented as though it were a fantastical mask while elsewhere, in the gaping volute shell, simmers an erotic undertone.

Nearby, a small group of paintings reflects Ensor's passion for lampooning Belgian society. In 'The Baths at Ostend' (1890), the beach is densely populated with summer holidaymakers cavorting in the water. Close inspection reveals all sorts of amusing goings-on.

In the 'The Bad Doctors' (1892), the attention of the surgeons, botching a procedure while Death looks on, is diverted towards the lawyer entering the operating theatre while the patient, whose entrails are looped around one of the surgeons, shrieks in pain.

'The Dangerous Cooks' (1896) excoriates Octave Maus and Edmond Picard, both lawyers, and the art critic Emile Verhaeren.

Together they published 'L'Art moderne', the periodical that chronicled Les XX. Maus is shown carrying Ensor's head to a group of diners, made up of critics including Verhaeren, while Picard sautés the head of

fellow artist Guillaume Vogels.

Drawing on the English caricaturists James Gillray and George Cruickshank, Ensor reveals the depth of his disdain for those that profited, literally and metaphorically, at the expense of others.

Baron Ensor

Though now widely admired, Ensor's reputation fluctuated throughout his life. Following an early artistic flourishing, his productivity waned after 1900 and he pursued a range of other activities.

He played the penny whistle and piano and, in 1906, was given a harmonium on which he composed the score for 'La Gamme d'Amour' ('The Love Song'), a ballet for which he also designed the costumes and sets and which was first performed in Antwerp in 1924.

In 1921 he published a selection of his writings under the title 'Ecrits', and in 1929 he finally relinquished his British citizenship in order to receive the title of Baron from King Albert I.

In later life, he became an important influence on younger artists and was visited by Wassily Kandinsky, Emile Nolde and Max Beckmann.

Despite having an English father, Ensor remains surprisingly underrepresented in national collections, with only two paintings and a handful of works on paper in the UK. Widely exhibited in Europe, it was not until 1936 that he had his first exhibition in London, at the Leicester Galleries.

This was followed by a major retrospective at the National Gallery in London in 1946.

Adrian Locke and Anna Testar

West Gallery

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

The Astonishment of the Mask Wouse, 1889



Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Skeletons Fighting for the Body of a Hanged Man, 1891

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Intrigue, 1890



Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Skeletons in Fancy Dress, 1898



Oil on canvas

The Phoebus Foundation

Christ in Agony, 1931

Oil on canvas

Museum Dhont-Dhaenens, Deurle

From Laughter to Tears, 1908

Oil on canvas

The Simon Collection of Belgian Art, courtesy Patrick Derom Gallery

The Winds, 1940

Oil on canvas

Collection SVH, Belgium

The Skate, 1892

Oil on canvas

Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels



Léon Spilliaert

(1881–1946)

Portrait of Andrew Carnegie, 1913

Gouache, pencil and pastel on canvas

Mu.ZEE, Ostend

The Fall of the Rebel Angels, 1889

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

The Bad Doctors, 1892

Oil on panel

Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, on temporary
loan at the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de
Belgique, Brussels

The Dangerous Cooks, 1896



Oil on panel

Private collection

The Baths at Ostend, 1890

Black pencil, coloured pencil and oil on panel

Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent

Plinth

Jean-Luc Pourbaix

Five fabrication stages of the
masks as worn by the Gilles de
Binche on the morning of
Shrove Tuesday, 2003

Linen, wax, colour

Musée International du Carnaval et du Masque, Binche

James Ensor Chronology

1860

James Sidney Ensor is born 13 April in Ostend to James Frederic Ensor, a Brussels-born engineer with English parents, and Maria Catherina Haegheman, an Ostend native who runs a small curio shop with her sister in which Ensor will spend much of his childhood.

1861

Ensor's sister Marie Carolina Emma, known as Mitche, is born.

1873

Enrols at the Collège Notre-Dame in Ostend and shows a keen interest in sketching. His father arranges for him to have additional lessons with two local artists.

1876

Leaves school and enters the Académie des Beaux-Arts d'Ostende, where he produces small paintings of his local environment on packing cardboard from his mother's shop.

Sets up a studio in the attic of his family home.

1877

Moves to Brussels and enrolls at Académie royale des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, where he will study for three years. He disagrees with the traditional teaching methods and achieves little academic success.

Becomes friends with the painter and writer Théo Hannon and his relatives the Rousseaus, who introduce him to the intellectual elite of Brussels.

1880

Completes his studies and returns to Ostend where, apart from occasional trips within Belgium and abroad, he will remain for the rest of his life.

1881

Exhibits publicly for the first time, submitting three paintings to the final Salon of the avant-garde group La Chrysalide and one to the more traditional Brussels Salon.

1882

Joins L'Essor, an art circle founded in 1876, and shows at their annual exhibition. Exhibits abroad for the first time at the Exposition des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

1883

Breaks away from L'Essor to co-found Les Vingt (Les XX). The writer and lawyer Octave Maus is elected secretary.

1884

Shows six paintings at the first annual exhibition of Les XX, but has two rejected from the Brussels Salon. Travels to France and sees the work of Francisco Goya, Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet.

1885

Begins a series of six large-scale drawings collectively entitled 'Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light.'

1886

Exhibits around twenty works at the annual exhibition of Les XX; guest artists include Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Odilon Redon and James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Produces his first etchings.

1887

Ensor's maternal grandmother dies in February, followed by his father in April.

(continued over)

1888

Begins work on his masterpiece, 'The Entry of Christ into Brussels' in 1889. Produces 44 etchings, approximately a third of his lifetime's production.

1890

Shows at the annual exhibition of Les XX in the face of growing opposition to his membership. Invited artists such as Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh take centre stage.

1893

Participates in the final annual exhibition of Les XX. Despite his increasing isolation from the group, he is one of few to protest against its dissolution.

1894

Participates in the first exhibition of La Libre Esthétique, a group founded by Octave Maus. He will continue to do so

until 1899 despite opposition from Maus.
Co-founds the Cercle des Beaux-Arts
d'Ostende.

King Leopold II attends the first exhibition,
where 25 etchings are sold to the
Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden.

First one-man show is held in Brussels.

1899

The Albertina in Vienna buys approximately
one hundred of his etchings.

1903

King Leopold II makes Ensor a Knight of
the Order of Leopold. The Ostend-based
society Le Rat mort, co-founded by Ensor
in 1898, celebrates with a dinner.

1906

Ensor's friends and patrons Emma and Albin
Lambotte give him a harmonium, which he
will treasure for the rest of his life.

(continued over)

With it, he begins to compose his ballet 'La Gamme d'Amour', for which he will also produce the sets, costumes and libretto.

1911

The German Expressionist painter Emil Nolde visits Ensor.

1915

Ensor's mother dies aged 80. He is visited by the young German painter Max Beckmann.

1917

Ensor inherits his late uncle's house, where he will live for the rest of his life. The house is now a museum.

1919

Fellow Ostend artist Léon Spilliaert visits Ensor, writing of the "sad and lonely" circumstances in which he finds the older artist.

1920

A large monographic exhibition is held in Brussels in celebration of Ensor's 60th birthday, accompanied by a performance of 'La Gamme d'Amour'.

1921

The first of edition of Ensor's writings, 'Ecrits', is published.

1927

A retrospective of Ensor's work begins touring Germany.

1929

Largest ever retrospective of Ensor's work held in Brussels. 'The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889' is exhibited for the first time, 30 years after its execution.

Ensor receives the title of Baron from King Albert I. Wassily Kandinsky visits him in Ostend.

1933

Ensor is awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French Minister of Culture. Meets Albert Einstein, who is en route to the United States to escape the Nazi regime. A dinner is held in Ostend, where Ensor gives a speech entitled 'Ensor to Einstein'.

1936

First monographic exhibition in England held at the Leicester Galleries, London.

1939

The journal 'La Gazette des Beaux-Arts' organises a major exhibition of over two hundred of Ensor's works at its gallery in Paris.

1942

The Albertina in Vienna organises an exhibition of Ensor's prints. Several newspapers erroneously announce his death.

1945

Ensor's sister dies at the age of 84.

1946

A large retrospective is held at the National Gallery in London.

1949

Ensor dies in Ostend on 19 November at the age of 89.

Your feedback, please

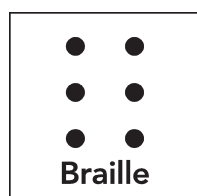
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Molly Bretton, Access Officer



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