

KBR :

EXPO

Musées royaux  
des Beaux-Arts  
de Belgique  
Koninklijke Musea  
voor Schone Kunsten  
van België

# James



# Ensor

INSPIRED BY  
BRUSSELS

Press kit





# Table of contents

<b>Press release: KBR and the RMFAB are unpacking the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels” .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>KBR and the RMFAB join forces.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>An exhibition about Ensor &amp; Brussels.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Pieces in the spotlight.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Publication.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Podcast.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>On the programme .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>A sequel for the expo.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Ensor year 2024.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Crowdfunding.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Partners.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>MuseumPASSmusées.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Practical information.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>VIP Package.....</b>	<b>26</b>

# Press release: KBR and the RMFAB are unpacking the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”

The year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of James Ensor’s death. In honour of the artist, KBR (Royal Library of Belgium) and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) will open the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”. With this expo, both institutions will highlight a lesser known but key chapter in the Ostend artist’s life.

## **Bustling Brussels**

James Ensor has left an indelible mark on his native Ostend. Less well known is that the artist spent his formative years in Brussels. After studying at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, he returned to Ostend, but his connections with the capital endured for the rest of his life. The artists, intellectuals and collectors he came to know there impacted the development of his idiosyncratic style.

## **More than 75 works**

This exhibition introduces visitors to the impact the capital had on the work and life of the young Ensor. More than 75 works take the visitor on a journey to the places and encounters that shaped him, as a person and as an artist. As a visitor, you will admire some works never before exhibited from the extensive oeuvre of the master and discover several less well-known aspects of his work. The exhibition offers a rare opportunity to discover a large number of his drawings. Unique because Ensor’s drawn work is very fragile and therefore rarely displayed.

## **Ensor on the Mont des Arts**

The paintings, drawings and prints in this exhibition come mainly from the rich collections of KBR and the RMFAB. Together, they hold more than 200 of Ensor’s works. Both collections have their origins in the 1890s, making them the oldest public Ensor collections. There are also some loans from private Belgian collections on display.



## **The Palace of Charles of Lorraine**

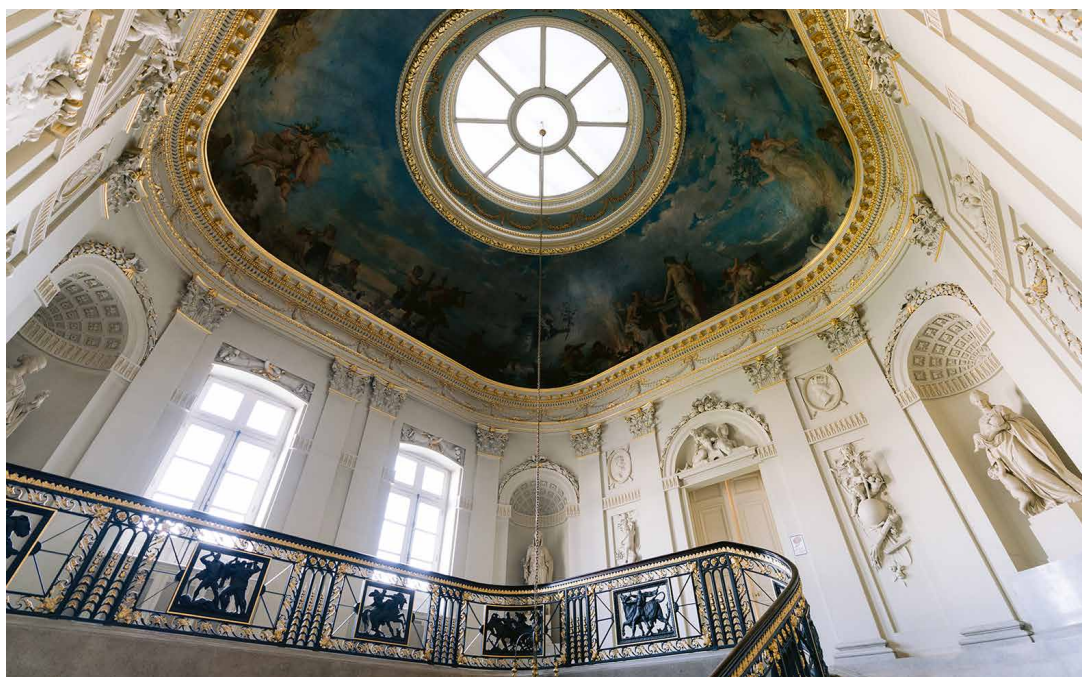
The exhibition takes place at KBR and, more specifically, in the eighteenth-century Palace of Charles of Lorraine, which in Ensor's day housed the Museum of Modern Art. There, from 1887, he exhibited controversial works with artists' groups such as Les XX (Les vingts). It was a true meeting place for an avant-garde that shook the art world to its foundations. In this unique historical setting, the exhibition brings together an exceptionally large number of original works by the master.

## **Ensor inspires**

That Ensor remains a source of inspiration even after his death is demonstrated in the exhibition by the work of several contemporary artists. Frédéric Coché, Adriaan Marin and Leen Van Hulst made an etching inspired by Ensor's oeuvre especially for the exhibition. The first copies, purchased by KBR, will be on display in the exhibition. The etchings will be on sale in a limited edition for the duration of the exhibition. After this, no reprints will be made until the works fall into the public domain. They are therefore true collector's items.

## **2024: Ensor Year in Belgium**

The Ensor Year pays tribute to the Belgian grandmaster. In December 2023, the Ensor Year kicked off in his hometown of Ostend with a city-wide festival and the exhibition "Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. James Ensor and still life in Belgium from 1830 to 1930" at Mu.ZEE, followed by the Brussels exhibitions "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels" at KBR and "James Ensor. Maestro" at Bozar opening in February 2024. In September 2024, Antwerp will take up the torch with four surprising exhibitions.



# KBR and the RMFAB join forces

**KBR and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts were the first public institutions to purchase work by James Ensor. As early as 1892, KBR's Prints Department purchased 25 of the Ostend master's etchings. Three years later, in 1895, the RMFAB acquired an early masterpiece by the artist: "The lamplighter".**

*"I am delighted with this partnership between KBR and the RMFAB, which not only stems from a shared history but also demonstrates their common desire to make the heritage they preserve, manage and study accessible to a wide and diverse audience."*

- Sara Lammens, Director General KBR and interim Director General RMFAB

## **KBR & Ensor: a long history**

KBR rapidly expanded its Ensor collection after its first purchase in 1892. By the turn of the century, the Print Room had more than 75 prints by Ensor. In the 20th century, the Print Room actively focused on tracking down and acquiring missing copies and states, which almost tripled the collection and heightened its reference value. In 1977, this virtually complete collection of Ensor's graphic work was augmented with 16 original zinc- and copper plates.

Only in 1932 did the drawing collection begin to take shape, when the Print Room bought six drawings from Joseph Van Overloop, an Antwerp writer and print seller who was also a friend of Ensor's. Later noteworthy acquisitions again came from the antiquarian bookshop of Paul Van der Perre, who had acquired a significant part of Ensor's studio estate after the artist's death in 1949; the most important acquisition was undoubtedly *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century*. Today, the Print Room holds 23 drawings covering every period of Ensor's career, providing a thematically representative survey of his drawn oeuvre.

The Royal Library of Belgium's Ensor collection is still growing. The most recent acquisition is *Torso of Laocoön*, a large drawing that Ensor produced for a competition while a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels in 1878. The Print Room continues to enhance the collection by acquiring key works and missing prints, and strives to present the most complete picture possible of Ensor's work on paper.



James Ensor, *Torso of Laocoön*, 1878. Conté pencil and charcoal on paper, 820 x 580 mm. KBR, inv. F-2023-3

## **The RMFAB & Ensor: a coherent and exceptional collection**

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium's Ensor collection is a coherent ensemble, the result of a century of following a carefully considered collection policy. The museum holds groups of paintings and drawings that are important for both their quality and quantity, providing a representative picture of Ensor's activity in various artistic genres – portraits, interior scenes, still lifes and marines – as well as in the categories that were entirely his own – namely, mask and skeleton pieces. The collection includes 23 paintings, 25 drawings and a book of drawings.

The focus of the collection is unmistakably on the early period, which is also chronicled as the “dark” period. Several pieces from the early 1880s and even a work from Ensor's teens, *Bacchanal*, provide exceptional insight into the development of an artist who was already idiosyncratic and would become even more so. *The Strange Masks and Skeletons Fighting over a Pickled Herring* epitomise the phase in which Ensor began to employ a more expressive palette, thus initiating his later, utterly unique imagery.

*The Scandalized Masks*, in which Ensor depicted masks for the first time, using a palette that was essentially still that of his bourgeois salon scenes, represents a turning point in his iconography. Several works also have a superior provenance, such as the paintings or drawings that the Rousseau family, Anna Boch or Robert Goldschmidt received or bought directly from the artist.

# An exhibition about Ensor & Brussels

**Brussels held a special place in Ensor's life and work at the beginning of the painter's artistic career. He settled there in 1877 as an academy student and flourished as an artist. The exhibition introduces you to the young painter and the city where he will develop into a pivotal figure of the Belgian avant-garde.**

## **Born in Ostend**

James Ensor is born in 1860, in Ostend, a coastal town that he will see grow into a fashionable seaside resort. James Ensor is the first child of Marie-Catherine Haegheman and James Frederic Ensor. The British Ensor family settled in Belgium exactly 200 years ago, in 1824. Great-grandfather and namesake James Ensor had a successful business in the textile industry in Ghent. His children move to Brussels, where the artist's father is later born. At the age of 17, he meets his future wife during a summer in Ostend.

Marie-Catherine is a daughter of the entrepreneurial Haegheman family which runs several souvenir shops on the Belgian coast. You can buy trinkets like lace, chinoiserie, shells, toys, jewellery, souvenirs and masks. In that setting, little James grows up. A cabinet of curiosities in which busy summer months alternate with sleepy, endless winters.

## **The early days**

Ensor receives a painting box as a gift from his father on his 15th birthday. It is the start of his artistic journey. He apprentices with some local artists and enrolls at the Academy of Ostend at 16. With these first experiences in drawing and painting under his belt, Ensor is ready to enrol at the prestigious Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels next school year.

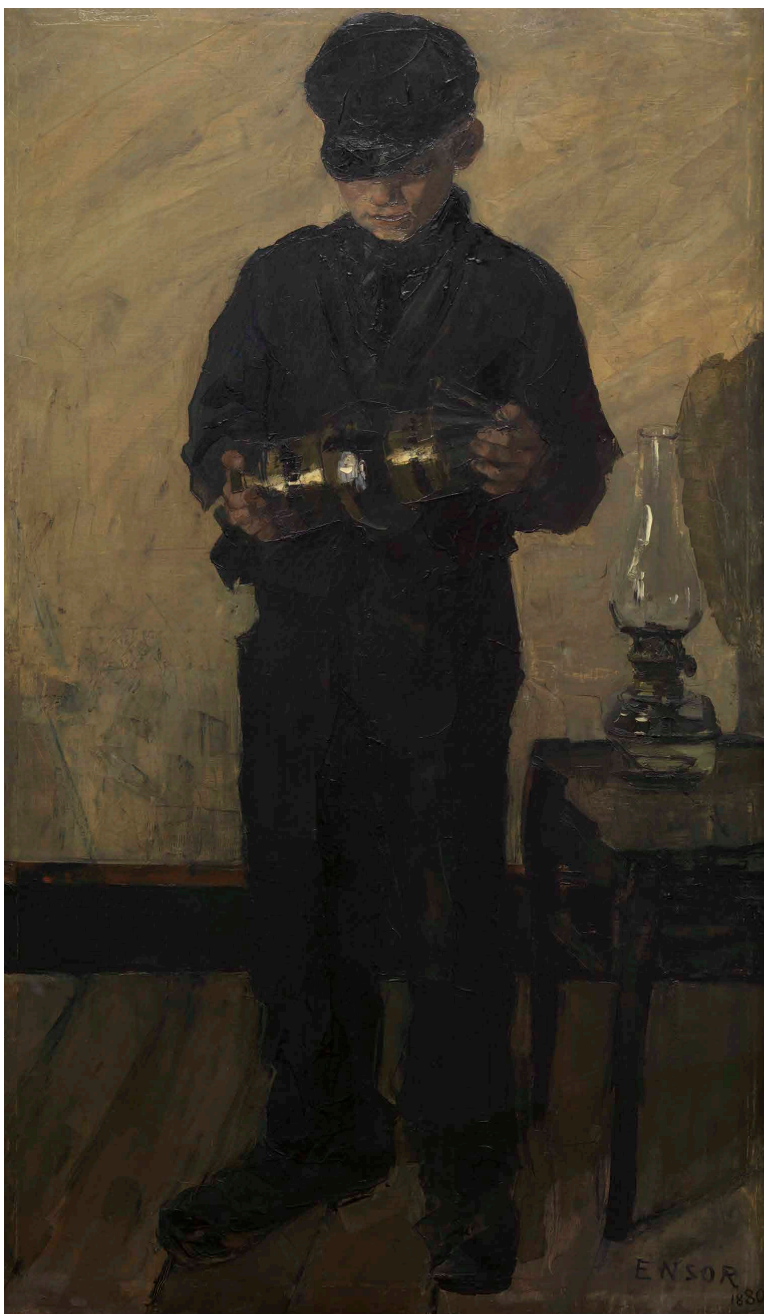
## **Out and about in Brussels**

In October 1877, the 17-year-old Ensor arrives in Brussels to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. He rents a room at Rue Saint-Jean 12, less than a hundred metres from the current Mont des Arts. Brussels, with its vibrant night- and cultural life, is a revelation for the young artist. He discovers fresh ideas, establishes important contacts and makes lifelong friends.



## The Academy

Ensor spends three years at the Academy. His courses there include “Drawing after antique head”, “Painting after nature” and “Historical composition”. Like many of his fellow students, he experiences the course as old-fashioned and rigid. For instance, he has to draw and paint plaster casts of statues from classical antiquity. Ensor does so with fresh reluctance. Concours are held every year - drawing and painting competitions for the academy students. He gets high marks from his professors in the drawing competitions, but they are less enthusiastic about his paintings: he usually finishes last.



### An early masterpiece

Through his fellow artists in Brussels, Ensor is introduced to realism, an international art movement that puts ordinary people at the centre and which adopts an unpolished style. The total opposite of what he has learned at the Academy. A few months after leaving the Academy, and inspired by realist artists, he paints *The lamplighter*, a depiction of a working-class boy servicing lamps.

James Ensor, *The Lamplighter*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 151.5 x 91 cm. RMFAB, inv. 3294

## Second home

After his academy days, Ensor leans heavily on his slightly older Brussels friend Théo Hannon, a key figure of the Belgian avant-garde. He introduces Ensor to his sister, Mariette, and her husband Ernest Rousseau. She is a biologist; he is a physics professor. It is the start of a close and enduring friendship. Ensor is a familiar guest at their beautiful townhouse in Ixelles. He comes into contact with new ideas there, and they also buy his work.

## Les XX

In 1883, the magazine *L'Art moderne* announced the creation of Les XX. This group brings together 20 Belgian artists rebelling against the prevailing artistic taste. Ensor is a founding member, the Brussels lawyer and art pope Octave Maus is designated secretary. Their goal? To organise an annual salon featuring radical work by group members and sympathisers. They do so according to their own rules of the game, independent of juries and official institutions. From 1887, the salons took place in the old Palace of Charles of Lorraine. Ensor and his fellow artists make Brussels the hotspot of the avant-garde in Belgium.



James Ensor, *The vexed masks*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 135 x 112 cm. RMFAB, inv. 4190

The Les XX salons are Ensor's main forum. He shows his most controversial works there for the first time. In 1884, for instance, his first mask scene *The vexed masks* caused quite a stir. The more grotesque and screaming, the more criticism he garnered. He was accused of shocking respectable citizens. During the last years of Les XX, he also mocked King Leopold II's policies and the prevailing political situation. Les XX was dissolved in 1893, 10 years after its founding.

## Printmaker

Ensor sees etchings as a means of making his art more widespread and affordable. This allows him to reach a wider audience. He does not have a printing press himself so he has his etchings printed in Brussels, often with the help of his friend Mariette Rousseau. She brings the plates to the printers and is also commissioned to watch over the quality of the prints. As thanks for her services, Ensor sends the biologist special mushrooms and occasionally rare stamps for her little son Ernest Jr.

Ensor is a great admirer of Rembrandt's etchings. Together with the Rousseau family, he visits KBR's Print Room to study the old master's work. The same Print Room appreciated Ensor's work early on. In 1892, it was the first public institution to buy a considerable quantity of his etchings. The young Ensor was delighted with his first museum sale: from now on, his own work will be kept together with that of his great example Rembrandt in the same cabinet.



The Print Room of the Royal Library of Belgium, 1888. Photograph, 208 × 261 mm. Brussels, KBR, inv. S.V 16091



## Vive la sociale! The streets of Brussels

Ensor's Brussels is not only an artistic centre but also the centre of power. The city is the symbol of a young kingdom and the place where the voice of the people resonates powerfully. In Brussels, Ensor becomes acquainted with rising socialism and the mass protests that shake up conservative Belgium. The citizens' movement becomes a recurring theme in his work. This fascination culminates in his metre-sized, iconic canvas *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1898*, which has been in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles since 1987.



James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889, 1898*. Etching, 248 x 355 mm. KBR, inv. F. 27016 © KBR

## Curators

The curators of the exhibition are Daan van Heesch and Vanessa Braekeveld.

Dr Daan van Heesch is head of the Print Room at KBR and manages more than 750,000 works on paper from the late Middle Ages to the present. He publishes regularly on old masters such as Bosch and Bruegel and is author, co-creator and editor of the publication "Ensor & Brussels" (Mercatorfonds, 2024), which is published in connection to the exhibition.

Vanessa Braekeveld is responsible for the temporary exhibitions within KBR: the exhibitions "The World of Bruegel in Black and White" (2019), which won a Brussels Award for "Best noted exhibition", "Toots 100. The Sound of a Belgian Legend" (2022) and "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels" (2024) are on her record.

# Pieces in the spotlight

## Choice of Daan van Heesch, curator of “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”

### Belgium in the nineteenth century

Life sometimes takes unexpected turns. Such was the case when Ensor was elevated to baron in 1929. According to tradition, the new nobleman then went out of his way to get his etching *Doctrinal Nourishment* out of circulation. It was indeed quite a shocking print, showing King Leopold II and other rulers feeding the people with their excrement. A rare copy is on display at the exhibition. However, declaring *Doctrinal Nourishment* my favourite Ensor would be in poor taste. My favourite work is the drawing *Belgium in the nineteenth century*, an equally biting satire on the social unrest and political unwillingness of his time.



James Ensor, *Belgium in the 19th century*, 1889/90. Pencil and coloured pencil on prepared panel, 160 x 212 mm. KBR, inv. 27367

In the drawing, Leopold II, king of the Belgians, peers down at his subjects like an indifferent deity. The streets of Belgium are crammed with figures fighting for “universal conscription, compulsory education and universal suffrage”. The socialist-inspired demonstration is brutally put down by a Belgian militia. The king is perplexed:

*“What do you want? Aren’t you content? A little patience, no violence. I can see that something’s up, but I don’t know why. I can’t make it out very well.”*

Ensor takes these last words from an 18th-century fable, in which they are spoken by a not very bright turkey.

*Belgium in the nineteenth century* is among Ensor’s most provocative works. In it, he shows his critical view of political current events in a way that is as sharp as it is playful. For me, this makes it one of his most successful works of art.



## Choice of Vanessa Braekeveld, exhibition manager “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”

### Peculiar insects

Ensor and the Rousseau family. I continue to find it an intriguing story. The Rousseau family is his second home and James has a special relationship with Mariette. Was he secretly in love with her? He stated that his encounter with her was the most important of his life. We will never really know, but special it was.

The dry point *Peculiar Insects* from 1888 is one such example. How Ensor here depicts himself as a beetle and his unattainable Mariette as a dragonfly. And how the family's niece, Blanche Rousseau, had the following memory recorded in the 1899 article “Ensor intime”:

*“I have a beautiful memory of a summer afternoon when we listened to Heinrich Heine together in the shade of a large oak in the Sonian Forest. It was with my cousin E[rnest Rousseau Jr]. I remember us running like children, betting on who would reach the end of the path first. James had brilliantly improvised one of his vague, disjointed stories, in which giants and abbesses twist and turn amidst the clatter of lances and the dazzling splendour of gold and precious stones. [...] My cousin read out “Les Caprices des Amoureux” [Die Launen der Verliebten]: ‘A beetle sat on a hedge, sad and pensive; he fell in love with a fly: “O fly of my soul, be the wife of my choice. Marry me, don't reject my love, I have a belly of gold.”’ I remember Ensor's silent laugh [...], a sudden burst of mocking and satanic joy with which he emphasised the hidden meaning of the funny sentences with bitter irony.”*

I would have loved to have been a fly myself to feel the tension that hung in the air there. This etching is a small masterpiece with a lot of hidden content. And just for those reasons, it is my favourite.



James Ensor, *Peculiar insects*, 1888. Etching, 114 x 154 mm. KBR, inv. S.II 53365

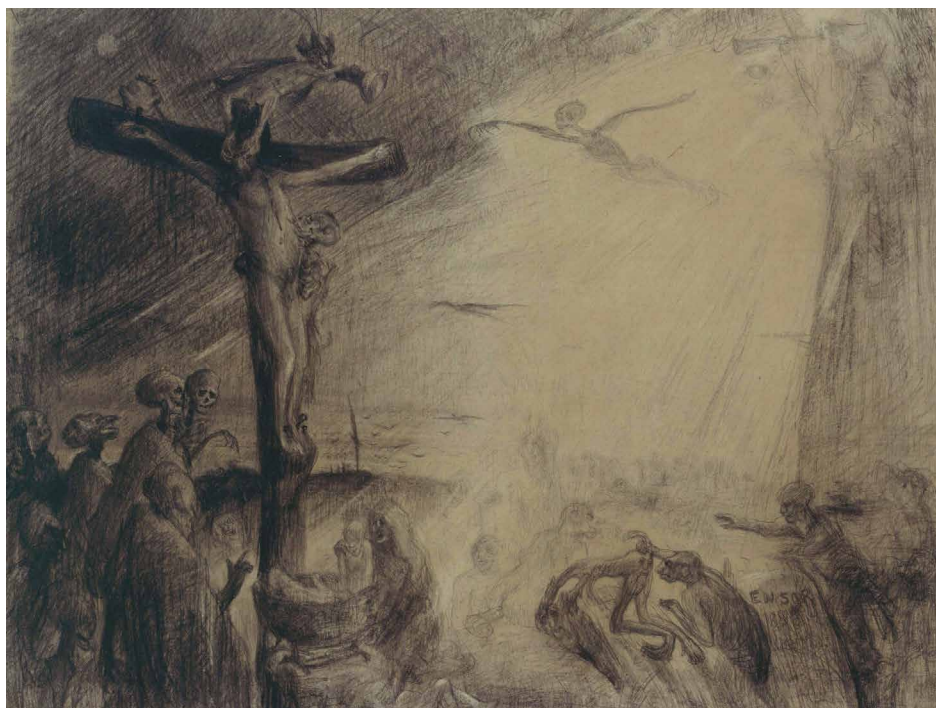
**Choice of Sarah Van Ooteghem, curator of modern works on paper (19th-21st century) at the RMFAB, author and co-editor of the publication “Ensor & Brussels”**

**Satan and the fantastic legions tormenting the crucified (recto), Study of a standing boy (verso)**

Many drawings by Ensor have been preserved, from sketches to finished works of art. His earliest drawings were made on small-format paper. He started deviating from this when he realised his “Ostend types”: large charcoal drawings of characters he bumped into in the streets of the seaside town.

That they did not always carry his satisfaction is shown by a copy that has since known a hidden existence. The reverse side Ensor used for a drawing with which he made a grand appearance at one of the salons of Les XX in 1887: *Satan and the fantastic legions tormenting the crucified*. He exhibited this sheet along with six other drawings as autonomous works, at the time something radically new.

The series was entitled: Visions, with the explanatory subtitle: *The Aureoles of Christ, or the Sensibilities of Light*. In a completely unique way, Ensor uniquely interweaves the life of Christ, with whom he strongly identified, and the study of light, which he considered his child. The dramatic effect and the compositional ingenuity of its pure black and white images were patently influenced by Rembrandt’s prints, which he studied in the same period, not least through copying them. They are technically consistent with the etchings Ensor began to experiment with around the same time.



James Ensor, *Satan and the fantastic legions tormenting the crucified* (recto), 1886; *Study of a standing boy* (verso). Charcoal, black chalk and pencil on paper pasted on Japanese paper, 613 x 758 mm. RMFAB, inv. 4193.

## Choice of Davy Depelchin, curator of 19th-century painting and sculpture at the RMFAB, curator of the Meunier and Wiertz museums, author and co-editor of the publication “Ensor & Brussels”

### The strange masks

The paintings produced by James Ensor in the 1880s, of which the RMFAB is lucky enough to own more than a dozen, are extremely interesting in terms of art history. Early masterpieces such as *The lamplighter*, *The cabbage* or *The vexed masks* show like no other the growing process of radical innovation that Ensor brought.

In relation to the theme of the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”, however, it is justified to pay special attention to a masterpiece from the early 1890s: *The strange masks*. It is a painting that can immediately be recognised as a typical Ensor: there are masks, there is the bright colours and the alienating atmosphere. The carnivalesque rag dolls Ensor depicted are reminiscent of popular entertainment as the artist himself must have witnessed it when he lived in Brussels. In turn, the imaginative medieval setting links to the literary work of Ensor’s close friend, Eugène Demolder, a “brusseleir”. Moreover, the performance is particularly intriguing and enigmatic. The masquerade and the lucid sparkling palette borrowed from the Impressionists divert our attention from the intrigue the scene depicts. The masks are huddled in a room, yet there is interaction with the world outside, a town with a medieval appearance. Ensor was most likely alluding to Yperdamme, the imaginary world of Eugène Demolder’s collection of stories published the previous year. Could Pierrot’s anxious glance towards the street where armed and armoured men of the town guard are loping by suggest that the masks have something to fear? Have they committed a crime? And what is wrong with the violinist slumped on the floor? Though his apprehensive and fearful gaze shows that life still lingers, his body seems to have dissolved: all that remains is a heap of clothes and a shoe. Is this a case of fratricide? And how are we to interpret the little red creature with its arms and legs spread wide, precariously balanced on the index fingertips of two of the masked figures? Is it the stolen soul of the supine figure on the floor?



James Ensor, *The strange masks*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm. RMFAB, inv. 4194

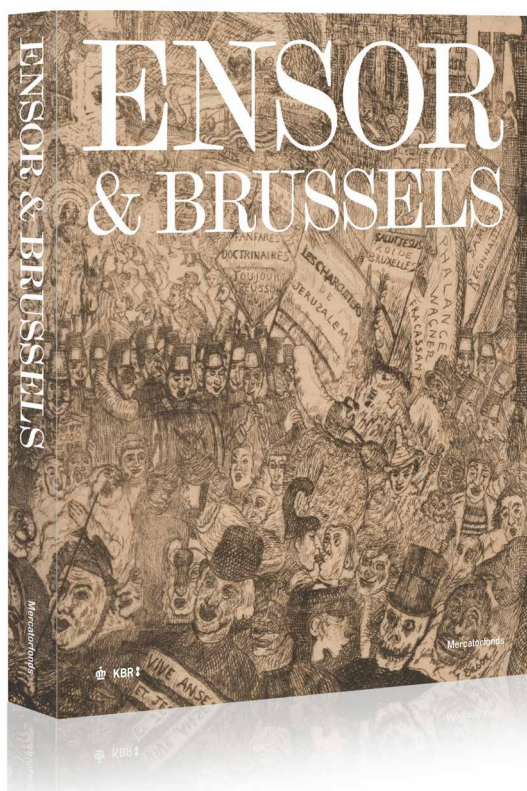


# Publication

## Ensor & Brussels

**Daan van Heesch, Davy Depelchin & Sarah Van Ooteghem (compilers)**

This lavishly illustrated book accompanies the exhibition while also providing a complete overview of Ensor's paintings, drawings and prints held in the collections of KBR and the RMFAB. The catalogue explores Brussels of the time and takes the reader to the places, encounters and events that shaped Ensor as an artist and as a human being. With Ensor as his guide, the Belgian capital presents itself as a melting pot of prosperous bourgeoisie and struggling bohemians, conservative critics and rebellious artists, stately and smoky popular theatres.



The book is for sale in the shops of KBR and the RMFAB for €35. Available in Dutch, French and English.

Publisher: Mercatorfonds, Brussels (2024)

ISBN 978-94-6230-366-9

ISBN 978 94-6230 368-3

ISBN 978 94 6230 367 6

216 pages

# Podcast

**KBR launches its first podcast on the occasion of the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”. In this four-part series, listeners will learn all about the life of the young Ensor and his career in Brussels.**

In the podcast “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”, KBR delves into the life of young James Ensor and his time in Brussels. His arrival in our capital as a 17-year-old from Ostend will leave a mark on the artist for the rest of his life and career.

What does Brussels have to offer him? How well does he do at the Academy and who are his friends? How and what does he exhibit during the salons?

You will find out all about it in this series of four episodes.

Episode 1: Ensor in Brussels

Episode 2: Ensor and the Academy

Episode 3: At home in Ixelles

Episode 4: Les XX

This podcast exists in French and Dutch and is a production of KBR realised by “We Tell Stories” As the beginning and end credits, you will hear “Skeletons Fighting Over a Pickled Herring” by Isolde Lasoen.

## Credits

- Production: KBR
- Production and distribution: We Tell Stories
- Texts and script: Vanessa Braekeveld
- French-speaking voice: Virginie Havelange
- Dutch-language voice: Vanessa Braekeveld
- Generic: Isolde Lasoen

**The first episode was released on 19 February and the series is available on all listening platforms. For more information, visit [www.kbr.be/podcast-ensor](http://www.kbr.be/podcast-ensor).**



# On the programme

**On the occasion of the exhibition, KBR and the RMFAB are organising many activities. Info and tickets at [www.kbr.be](http://www.kbr.be).**

## **24.02, 25.02, 10.03, 24.03, 07.04, 28.04, 12.05 & 26.05 – Guided tours (NL & FR)**

During these guided tours, you will discover how James Ensor's visual language originated in bustling Brussels.

## **24.02 & 25.02 – Intaglio workshop for kids (NL, FR & EN)**

An intaglio printing workshop for the young creatives among us.

## **24.02 – City walk (NL)**

An experienced guide will show you Brussels using Ensor's address book. An activity suitable for young and old alike!

## **25.05 – Speakeasy speaks Ensor! (NL, FR & EN)**

During the opening weekend of the exhibition, Speakeasy artistically introduces you to the imaginary world of James Ensor.

## **08.03 & 17.05 – Guided tours for the blind and visually impaired (NL & FR)**

Entry-level tours for the blind and visually impaired at the exhibition "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels".

## **10.03 – Davidsfonds Academy (NL)**

During this Davidsfonds Academy at KBR, you will be immersed in the Brussels universe of James Ensor.

## **13.04 – Guided tour Slow Art Day (NL & FR)**

Join this tour on the occasion of Slow Art Day and slow down your gaze.

## **21.04 – Embroidery workshop (NL, FR & EN)**

Do you like to get creative and love the work of James Ensor? Then this embroidery workshop is for you.

## **27.04 – Cultuursmakers members' day (NL)**

Cultuursmakers organises a members' day at the exhibition "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels".

## **28.04 (NL) & 12.05 (FR) – Master class intaglio drypoint**

Have you always wanted to learn more about graphic techniques? This master class will introduce you to all aspects of drypoint engraving.

## **24.05 – Lunchtime concert (NL, FR & EN)**

Enjoy a concert by Alexandra Cooreman on the occasion of the exhibition "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels".

## **02.06 – Speakeasy speaks Ensor! (NL, FR & EN)**

During the last weekend of the exhibition, Speakeasy artistically introduces you to the imaginary world of James Ensor.

# A sequel for the expo

MuseumPASSmusées and VRT's National Expo will take place at KBR this year. Artists will have the chance to see work shine in KBR's exhibition spaces, as the third edition of The National Expo will start in the summer of 2024: the Ensor edition. Together, MuseumPASSmusées, VRT and KBR will search for hidden talent in the visual arts: from painting to ceramics, from drawing to mixed media. Not only adults, but also creative children and young people can participate. Participants can submit their artwork from 26 February to 26 May 2024 via [www.ExpoNationale.be](http://www.ExpoNationale.be). Participants must collect as many votes as possible during the competition to increase their chances of winning. The lucky ones will finally admire their work in July 2024 during The National Expo at KBR.



# Ensor year 2024

**The Ensor Year 2024 is a tribute to Belgian artist James Ensor, who died 75 years ago. Dozens of exhibitions and events related to Ensor will be organised for a year starting in December 2023 in the Belgian cities of Ostend, Antwerp and Brussels.**

## **Ostend**

Ostend kicked the Ensor year off in December 2023 with the opening of the exhibition “Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. James Ensor and still life in Belgium from 1830 to 1930” at Mu.ZEE. The seaside town is hosting a year-long city wide festival with more than eighty initiatives. For instance, the local Ensor House is organising two exhibitions including self-portraits and the Venetian Galleries are hosting an exhibition on the theme “Ensor’s imaginary paradise”. In spring 2024, Fort Napoleon will also host a family show based on the picture book “Great art for little connoisseurs: James Ensor” with illustrations by Thais Vanderheyden.

## **Brussels**

Two major exhibitions are planned in Brussels from February to June 2024. KBR is organising the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels” and brings together, with 18 paintings, 24 drawings and 33 prints, an exceptional number of original works by the master in a unique historical setting. The exhibition “James Ensor. Maestro” of BOZAR highlights Ensor’s lesser-known artistic skills as a writer and composer in an anthology of some 100 works.

## **Antwerp**

Starting in September 2024, Antwerp will also host several Ensor exhibitions. With the exhibition “In your wildest dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism” at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, you will for the first time see Ensor side by side with international sources of inspiration, contemporaries and imitators. The Photo Museum of Antwerp links Ensor to contemporary art with the exhibition “Cindy Sherman. Anti-Fashion”, which focuses on photographs by the American photographer. The exhibition at the Fashion Museum of Antwerp presents works by make-up artists and artists in relation to Ensor’s ideas around masquerade, and the Museum Plantin-Moretus explores his technical skills as a printmaker.

# Crowdfunding

## Crowdfunding for the restoration of an extraordinary work by Ensor

Besides paintings, prints and drawings, visitors will also be able to admire a very special object that is part of the collections of the RMFAB of Belgium. This is a unique album containing letters collected from James Ensor to the Rousseau family, in particular to his close friend Mariette. In doing so, it delves into Ensor's experiences with the Rousseau family and illustrates the artist's creativity in a more intimate context.



The album has become very fragile with time and a thorough restoration is imminent. The binding has come loose and the paper on which the drawings and letters are glued is increasingly acidic. Preventive measures have been taken for the exhibition to display one page of the album. Through a digital tool, other drawings from the album will be displayed. During the exhibition, a crowdfunding campaign will be launched to fully restore this exceptional album. The campaign will officially launch shortly after the exhibition opens. Visitors will have the opportunity to contribute directly upon viewing the album.



# Partners

## **National Lottery**

The exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels” came about thanks to the support of the National Lottery. The National Lottery is more than games. Many players take part in a National Lottery game for a small amount of money. They have a chance of winning and, with their efforts, help countless initiatives in society. Thanks to its players, the National Lottery can support culture, scientific research, sustainable development, combating poverty, development cooperation and many other themes. In short: initiatives that benefit us all. So the small bets of lots of players like you make a big difference to lots of projects and organisations. Thanks to all the players, KBR, the RMFAB and many other organisations can enjoy extra financial support. Every year, thanks to the players, 345 million euros can be invested in organisations and projects that make a difference to many people and thus ensure a better society. Playing is also helping, which is why the National Lottery is much more than playing!

## **Tavolozza Foundation**

The exhibition catalogue “Ensor & Brussels” has been produced with the support of the Tavolozza Foundation. The book is also conceived as a collection guide and contains a complete overview of Ensor’s works of art kept at KBR and the RMFAB. The publication appears simultaneously in Dutch, French and English.

## **King Baudouin Foundation**

Thanks to the King Baudouin Foundation, KBR has made the exhibition blind and visually impaired friendly. We have made specific works by Ensor accessible through tactile slides and a tailor-made tour. We plan to use this knowledge for other projects within KBR in the future.

## **Belspo**

BELSPO manages ten federal scientific institutions. KBR and the RMFAB are among them. These institutions house world-renowned historical and artistic collections, including many masterpieces, which are researched and made accessible by scientists from inside and outside the institutions. Thanks to the support of BELSPO, KBR and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium are able to exhibit one of the highlights of the federal collection in the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels”.

## **The Brussels Capital Region and visit.brussels**

Brussels was James Ensor’s second home city. The Brussels-Capital Region and visit.brussels are therefore putting their backs into the Ensor Year. The Brussels Capital Region’s communication agency for tourism, culture and city marketing is promoting Brussels as a tourist destination.



## **Media partners**

The media partners of the exhibition “James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels” are De Standaard, La Libre Belgique, Klara, Musiq’3, La Première and La Trois.

# MuseumPASSmusées

## Limited Edition

The largest museum subscription pass in the country, museumPASSmusées, is celebrating Ensor Year 2024 by releasing a limited edition. The pass is completely dedicated to the painter from Oostend, with the famous *Self portrait with a flower hat* from 1883 gracing its front.

With the museum pass, visitors can not only visit the exhibition at KBR, but also at Mu.ZEE, the James Ensor House and later this year at four museums in Antwerp. So visitors who like to save on individual tickets should get their hands on this unique museum pass and enjoy a year's access to the Ensor exhibitions and the exhibitions in 240 other Belgian museums. As often as they like.

The Limited Edition museum pass is on sale at the KBR reception desk, while stocks last.



# Practical information

## Dates and opening hours

From 22 February to 2 June 2024.

- Open from Tuesday until Sunday between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Closed on Mondays and certain bank holidays:
  - ◊ Easter
  - ◊ Easter Monday
  - ◊ 1 May
  - ◊ Ascension Day
  - ◊ Whit Monday

## Tickets and prices

- Standard ticket: €15
- Reduced tickets: €11
  - ◊ 65+, students, groups of min. 15 people, Davidsfonds, Cultuursmakers
- Free:
  - ◊ <18 years, PASS musées, visitors with a disability (+ 1 accompanying adult), Lerarenkaart, Carte PROF, jobseekers, ICOM card, Belspo card

## Location and accessibility

KBR – Mont des Arts 28, 1000 Brussels

- The building and the exhibition space are accessible for people with a disability.
- There are some parking spaces for people with a disability at Boulevard de l'Empereur 4.
- KBR is accessible by public transport as well as by car and bicycle.
- Thanks to the SNCB code on your online admission ticket, you can buy a Discovery Ticket which gives you a 50% reduction on your train journey to Brussels-Central and back.

# VIP Package

**When the doors close to the public, Ensor's wonderful world opens exclusively to corporations. Companies booking a VIP package can visit the exhibition "James Ensor. Inspired by Brussels" during a private tour. The VIP package is ideal for a company party or networking event: guests enjoy a unique setting with a cultural touch.**

## Package

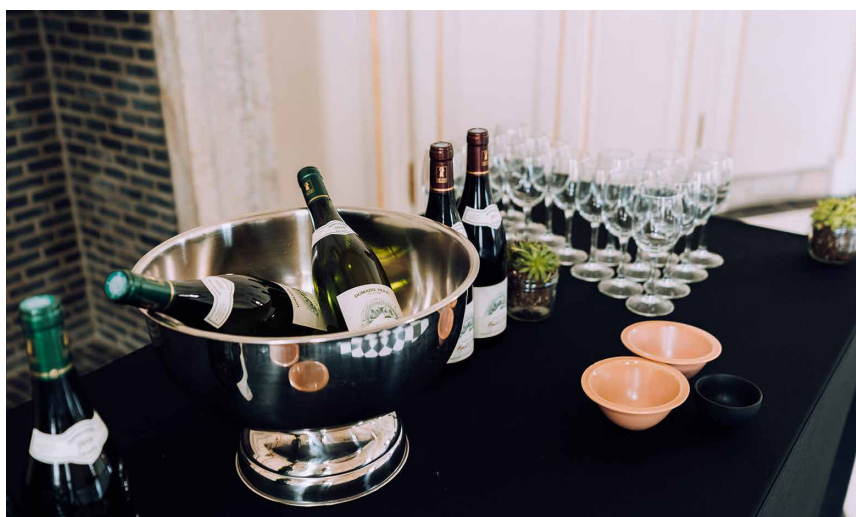
- Nocturne in the exhibition
- Reception by bilingual hosts
- Cloakroom service
- Guided tour of the exhibition / Language selection (1 guide per +/- 20 people)
- Welcome drink before the visit
- Cocktail reception at the end of the visit
- Reserved parking (1 per 2 persons)
- On-site coordinator

## Example programme

- Access to Albertine car park
- 7.00 to 7.30 p.m.: Welcome drink in the Galerie Room
- 7.30 to 8.30 p.m.: Guided tour of the exhibition
- 8.30 to 10.30 p.m.: Cocktail reception in the Galerie Room

## Price

- € 265 pp excl. VAT
- Based on 100 attendees (other options on request)



# Press contacts

## PRESS KBR

Rebecca Thierfeldt  
rebecca.thierfeldt@kbr.be - +32 (0) 473 49 59 20

## PRESS RMFAB

Hélène Lebailly  
helene.lebailly@fine-arts-museum.be - + 32 (0) 476 79 04 50

## PRESS BE CULTURE

Séverine Provost, Founder & General Manager  
Sophie Moffat, Project Leader  
sophie@beculture.be - + 32 (0) 494 65 36 57

