

EN

A detailed oil painting of a man's face and upper torso. He has a thick, dark beard and mustache, and is looking slightly to the left. He wears a light-colored hat adorned with several colorful flowers in shades of yellow, purple, and pink. The background is dark and textured.

# Ensor

## 2024



Flanders  
State of the Art



ANTWERP



# CONTENTS

<b>1. Ensor, so much more than the painter of masks</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Exhibitions in Antwerp</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism, KMSKA</i>	
<i>Masquerade, Make-up &amp; Ensor, MoMu</i>	
<i>Cindy Sherman, FOMU</i>	
<i>Ensor's States of Imagination, Plantijn-Moretus Museum</i>	
<b>3. Other projects in Antwerp</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Ensor Research Project, KMSKA</i>	
<i>Ensor Window Displays</i>	



1

ENSOR

so much more than  
**the painter  
of masks**

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If there has been one artist in the history of art of the last two hundred years in Belgium whose oeuvre has a key influence, it is undoubtedly James Ensor. Ensor belongs to the small company of European avant-garde artists who, in a loose association at the end of the 19th century, liberated painting from romantic heroism, superficial appearance and banal realism. Ensor's view of humanity is sometimes light-hearted, often pessimistic, but just as often lyrical and hilarious. By using the artist's visual tools, form and colour, autonomous, detached from reality, he has created images in which an accurate depiction of reality is subordinate to the portrayal of a whimsical "phosphorised dream". **Ensor is an innovator, a gamechanger.**

To understand the emergence and development of modernism during the 20th century, his art is indispensable.

Artists today freely use a variety of media side by side and in combination. They choose painting, performance, a video, an installation or another art form to create images that can appear sinister yet attempt to be charming - or just the opposite. This could just as well describe Ensor's diverse artistic endeavours. In 1883, an older friend of his was already completely enamoured with his Wagnerian improvisations on the piano. Later he composed music for a charming ballet. As a man of words too, Ensor also loved striking performances. Emile Verhaeren, poet of the fatherland *avant la lettre*, admired Ensor's "superlificoquentious" (wonderful) literary concoctions. Above all, Ensor was undoubtedly a visual artist. But here too, he would constantly experiment with new subjects, genres, styles, and techniques into old age, in an almost project-like manner. Indeed, Ensor pursued his artistic endeavours with expertise: he carefully selected his materials in the more expensive

stores, he was aware of what the avant-garde, the artistic, the musical as well as the literary circles were doing in Paris and Brussels, but he also knew which old masters, Bruegel, Rembrandt, Watteau, Goya or Hokusai, would be usable models.

From the very beginning, Ensor was regarded by friend and foe alike as a formidable talent. Even before the turn of the century, his work was known in literary circles in France. Jean Lorrain drew inspiration from Ensor's art to evoke the world of decadent aesthetes in two novels. After 1900, German avant-garde artists, Paul Klee, Emile Nolde, Erich Heckel, Stefan Zweig, as well as dealers and connoisseurs would discover Ensor as a pioneer of a modernist visual language. German museums would later collect his works, including etchings and paintings. Even before World War II, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had also acquiring his works. Over time, Ensor's reputation expanded beyond being an "artist's artist", a cult hero for a small discerning audience. Since the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, in 1986, acquired Ensor's *Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889* for a reportedly legendary sum, Ensor's popularity worldwide, among a wide audience, has steadily grown. In recent years, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) has successfully organised Ensor exhibitions in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Seville, Paris, London, The Hague, Copenhagen, Mannheim, Basel and Tokyo.

Ensor was born in Ostend in 1860 and died there in 1949. 2024 marks 75 years since his death. He lived and worked all his life in Ostend, but he also had various artistic contacts in Brussels.

The image of the eccentric misunderstood recluse in a draughty attic in Ostend is a myth. He was an enthusiastic participant in the cultural and social life of his hometown with the Cercle artistique, the Compagnie du Rat Mort, Henry Storck's film club and the brand-new Rotary.

Ostend remains the place where the myth of Ensor comes alive, not only in the Ensor House, but also elsewhere in the city or looking out over the North Sea.

For Ensor, Ostend is "the queen of fickle seas, of soft sands and skies laden with gold and opal".

Thanks to a group of wealthy Antwerp enthusiasts and determined museum curators, since the 1920s, the KMSKA has possessed the world's richest collection of Ensor. That collection has gradually grown into an ensemble of 39 paintings, 650 drawings, and includes no fewer than 10 masterpieces. It is an unmissable ensemble that will occupy a central and crucial place in the new collection presentation of the KMSKA in 6 rooms.

What Van Gogh is to Amsterdam (where he only spent a few months), Ensor is to Antwerp, because "Antwerp is for (him) the most hospitable of all mothers". KMSKA has also taken on the task of conducting an in-depth investigation of Ensor's creative processes, in collaboration with the Department of Conservation Science and Natural Sciences at the University of Antwerp: the Ensor Research Project.

→ **Each of the museums in Antwerp participating in the 2024 celebration of Ensor's art aims to demonstrate that Ensor's oeuvre, 'le peintre des masques', is so much more than just masks.**

Ensor experiments with various graphic techniques and materials, in the search for an accurate representation of light and his surroundings.

Ensor, like so many avant-garde artists around 1900, is fascinated by Impressionist colours and techniques but, along with several well-known and much lesser-known European artists, he will soon reject Impressionism too.

Ensor also has a contemporary resonance. There will also be a focus on the topicality of Ensor's vision; his visual language and attitude are up for debate in the world of photography, fashion and make-up.

2

# ENSOR 2024

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exhibitions  
in Antwerp

# ANTWERP AND ENSOR: A SURPRISING MATCH

***On 28 September 2024, Antwerp will take over the baton of the Ensor Year from Ostend. Antwerp will spare no effort in offering a diverse and surprising exhibition programme.***

*What has Antwerp got in common with Ensor? A shared curiosity to look beyond the mundane. This goes back as far as the time of Ensor himself. Not coincidentally, many of his works ended up in Antwerp during his lifetime and these works form the core of KMSKA's Ensor collection and a starting point for the Ensor Research Project today.*

*In his oeuvre, Ensor shows himself to be a game-changer: often with a twinkle in his eye, sometimes contrary, and always innovative. These qualities make Ensor timelessly relevant. Antwerp has therefore chosen surprising perspectives to highlight his work. How do we see echoes of Ensor in art, fashion and photography? How does he continue to inspire and what can we learn from him today? Antwerp will go in search of answers in four world-class expos.*



# IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS

ENSOR BEYOND IMPRESSIONISM

KMSKA

28.09.24 - 19.01.25



James Ensor, *Masks Confronting Death*, 1888, MoMA, New York



Edouard Manet, *Corner of a Café-Concert*, The National Gallery, Bought, Courtauld Fund, 1924

The Ensor year 2024 would not be complete without an exhibition at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) in the autumn of 2024. *In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism* offers an all-round exploration of James Ensor as a trailblazing artist. In addition to delving into Ensor's wondrous realm of turbulent visions, masks and satire, the exhibition will also show Ensor alongside the work of international artists who inspired him and with whom he set out to compete. Because if there was one thing Ensor wanted, it was always to be the best; even if those rivals had names like Claude Monet, Edvard Munch or even Hieronymus Bosch and Francisco Goya.

The KMSKA boasts the largest and most varied Ensor collection anywhere in the world and is also home to the Ensor Research Project – the leading centre for the study of this modern master. All of which makes the museum the ideal venue for for this once-in-a-lifetime tribute to one of the fathers of modernism. The exhibition will centre on two crucial aspects of Ensor's art: how a Belgian avant-garde painter set about going 'beyond Impressionism' to give visual form to our 'wildest dreams'.

James Ensor played a pivotal role in the Belgian art of the past 200 years. Towards the end of the 19th century, together with a small group of other European avant-garde artists like Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), he liberated painting from Romantic bombast, respectability and dreary realism. Following in Ensor's footsteps, you follow how he unleashed his creativity to become a rebellious gamechanger. Who determines the rules of art himself. In doing so, he resolutely steps away from the classical European ideal of beauty and from Impressionism, which initially fascinated him so much.





James Ensor, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, The Art Institute of Chicago, Regenstein Endowment and the Louise B. and Frank H. Woods Purchase Fund

Ensor certainly did not lack ambition. The goal he set himself was nothing less than to become Belgium's leading avant-garde artist. He sought to achieve this by introducing French Impressionism into his work, yet his concrete knowledge of the school was vague at first. Not that this stopped Ensor from developing his own version of Impressionism in the years 1880–85. Emile Verhaeren (1855–1916) compared the young James to Edouard Manet (1832–1883). As far as the celebrated author was concerned, Ensor's art was no less revolutionary than that of Manet. In reality, however, his early work was inspired more by the realism of Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) and Jean-François Raffaëlli (1850–1924). Ensor was also clearly an admirer of Rembrandt (1606–1669).

Ensor introduced his 'Impressionist' work to the world in 1886 at the winter Salon of the avant-garde group 'Les XX'. He was now able to compare works of his own, such as *Bourgeois Interior* (1881), *The Oyster Eater* (1882) and *Rue de Flandre in Sunlight* (1881) with those of established French Impressionists like Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Camille Pissarro. It prompted an immediate change of direction. *In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism* views this pivotal moment as the true beginning of Ensor's varied oeuvre. After this preliminary phase, he steadily found his own, experimental voice as an artist.

*Often floating by headwind,  
I set sail to wonderful lands.*

James Ensor



## IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS

### NOT IMPRESSIONISM?

James Ensor painted *The Oyster Eater* in 1882 with the goal of demonstrating the innovative character of his work on an ambitious scale. He showed the painting at Les XX in 1886, where the artist hoped it would confirm his revolutionary reputation compared to the art of Monet and Renoir. In the 1900s, critics and artists rediscovered *The Oyster Eater* as Belgium's first Impressionist painting, yet it only takes a moment's comparison of Ensor's work with that of Manet and Monet to realize just how different *The Oyster Eater* was. Ensor knew it too. All the same, showing his work at Les XX was a fruitful experience for him. Monet's landscapes, which Ensor was able to study there, offered him a bright, Impressionist colour palette of a kind he had not previously used, together with a new technique. In the work of Odilon Redon (1840–1916), meanwhile, he discovered a dark and fantastic visual language.

### FRESH MILESTONES

In 1887 Ensor painted *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* (KMSKA) and drew *The Temptation of St Anthony* (Art Institute of Chicago): two key works from the beginning of his new artistic adventure. Like the Impressionists, he applied his paint unmixed from tube to canvas, while bidding farewell to earth-coloured shadows. Unlike them, however, he gave the colours an expressive power entirely of his own, with the most refined of shades. Up to now Ensor had been an artist who consistently broke the rules: now, as a true game-changer, he set about rewriting them. The time for restraint was over. Time for Ensor to go wild.

It was also at this point that he began to cultivate his preference for decidedly strange compositions: a grotesque, comical and frightening iconography that he used to conjure up images at once hilarious and hellish, of the kind you normally see only in your wildest dreams. As the end of the 19th century approached, a new vision of good and evil, lust and passion was developing, into which Ensor's fascination for humanity's more nefarious side blended seamlessly.

As part of the Ensor Research Project, KMSKA has reconstructed the process by which *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* was created. In it, we see Ensor seeking to shrug off the constraints of Impressionism – the art of those he called 'superficial daubers'. He drew visual motifs from a whole range of sources: a composition by John Martin (1789–1854), elements from palaeontological publications, Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, Rubens' *Fall of the Rebel Angels* and Rembrandt's *Annunciation to the Shepherds*.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Ensor's straightforward interest in the free rendering of unfathomable visions links him to artists like the Swede Ernst Josephson (1851–1906).

### IMPRESSIONISM AFTER ALL?

Even though Ensor continued to explore different approaches to content and form throughout his life, he retained a persistent interest in the possibilities held out by Impressionism. His late still-lives in particular are closely related to the aesthetic of Auguste Renoir.

Through *The Oyster Eater* and other early works, Ensor himself went on to inspire younger artists in Brussels, including Rik Wouters (1882–1916). They followed his example to reconcile structure and colour in their work. Around 1910, Ensor responded in turn by creating a series of 'reprises' of his earlier work, applying the style of his younger colleagues as originally inspired by himself, thereby completing the circle.

## ENSOR BEYOND IMPRESSIONISM

### HELL AND ITS ENTICEMENTS

The decadent iconography so beloved of the European Symbolists inspired Antonin Alexandre in 1892 to open the 'Cabaret de l'Enfer' (Cabaret of Hell) next door to the 'Cabaret du Ciel' (Cabaret of Heaven) in Montmartre. Popular culture like this would have a major impact on monumental artworks in a way that has not previously been studied. In the *Beyond Impressionism* section of the exhibition, we explore the links between the Cabaret de l'Enfer and Henri Degroux's *Christ aux outrages* and Ensor's *Fall of the Rebel Angels*.

Renewed secular interest in St Anthony inspired Ensor to produce a whole series of paintings and drawings in which the hermit is shown struggling with the very same temptations of which the modern bourgeois man dreamed. The exceptionally complex, quasi-Surrealist collage-drawing *The Temptation of St Anthony* (Art Institute of Chicago - cover image) seems like the monumental fruit of a creative high. It anticipates Ensor's grotesque imagination in all sorts of elements and countless details. A separate part of the exhibition is devoted to analysis of the drawing and how it came about.

### MASKS GALORE

And invariably Ensor manages to surprise on account of his contrasts between the comic and the sinister, the sophisticated and the wild, cosy bourgeois salons and scary skeletons, in a world steeped in wry satire. Ultimately, it all leads to Ensors' most eye-catching contribution to the birth of modernism. He began to paint canvases featuring imaginary mask-creatures. Ensor was by no means the only artist to explore this motif in the late 19th century: in this respect too, he resembled like-minded artists such as Emil Nolde (1867–1956). For other artists, though, masks were often a decorative element or an enigmatic way to conceal a person's identity. In Ensor's work the mask actually reveals the human being's true nature. This was his invention, which he applies very radically and found its way into more mask paintings than by any other artist.

### ENSOR, DEADPAN HUMOURIST

James Ensor's work and that of the European Symbolists has been viewed as the product of tormented personalities, with the result that the comic element in Ensor has been overlooked. In reality, his art is steeped in the late-19th-century satirical humour beloved of sophisticated circles in Brussels and Paris. Ensor's view of humanity alternates between light-hearted and pessimistic, yet it is just as frequently lyrical and very funny. *In Your Wildest Dreams* firmly shows Ensor from his most satirical side.

**Curator: Herwig Todts**  
**co-curator: Adriaan Gonnissen**  
**scientific collaborator: Annelies Rios-Casier**

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# MASQUERADE, MAKE-UP & ENSOR

MOMU

28.09.24 - 02.02.25

*The mask means to me: freshness of colour, sumptuous decoration, wild unexpected gestures, very shrill expressions, exquisite turbulence.*

James Ensor



editorial featured in ID Magazine, 1993, model: Kate Moss, make-up: Linda Cantello, hair: Julien d'Ys, © Paolo Foversi / ArtCommerce



Genieve Figgis, detail Ladies at Versailles, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Amine Rech, © Foto: Nicolas Brasseur

In the autumn exhibition, *Masquerade, Make-up & Ensor*, James Ensor's ideas about masquerade, (false) coquetry, seduction, deception and the transient are brought up to the present day. MoMu celebrates the painters of fashion: the craftsmanship and inexhaustible creativity of make-up and hair artists, in a multimedia exhibition in which light, colour, art, fashion and make-up come together.

Down through history, make-up has often been viewed with suspicion and compared to the wearing of a mask: a mask to hide one's true face. James Ensor was a critical observer of the world and the people around him. He recognized their insecurities and insincere coquetry. From 1888, Ensor used masks, clothing and accessories as ambiguous instruments for unmasking: a way of revealing the true nature and deeper feelings of his masked figures. The work of James Ensor leads to universal questions: Why do we wear masks? Why are people so afraid of visible aging? How do we deal with ideals of beauty that are always changing and are impossible to achieve?

Today, make-up and beauty have exploded into a trillion-dollar industry that perpetually confronts humans with their bodily impermanence, imagined imperfections and existential fears. However, like paint, make-up is also a medium for personal expression, artistic experimentation, joy and freedom. *Masquerade, Make-up & Ensor* investigates how closely intertwined make-up is with so many aspects of our being human.

MoMu has joined forces with iconic art, beauty and culture platform Beauty Papers to curate the works of leading contemporary makeup artists and photographers in 3 new video installations exploring the key themes of Ensor's work through the lens of beauty today.

With work by James Ensor, Issy Wood, Cindy Sherman, Tschabalala Self, Genieve Figgis, Harley Weir, Julien d'Ys, Inge Grognard, Peter Philips, Martin Margiela, Christian Lacroix, Walter Van Beirendonck, Cyndia Harvey, Lucy Bridge, Eugene Souleiman, Eamon Freely, Bruce Gildea and many more.

**Curators: Kaat Debo, Elisa De Wyngaert, Romy Cockx**

# CINDY SHERMAN

FOMU

28.09.24 - 02.02.25



© Cindy Sherman | Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Untitled #414 | 2003 | Chromogenic color print



© Cindy Sherman | Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Untitled Film Still #17 | 1978 | Gelatin silver print



© Cindy Sherman | Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Untitled #462 | 2007/2008 | Chromogenic color print

**FOMU presents Belgium's first major solo of the American artist Cindy Sherman. Featuring more than 100 works from the 1970s to the present, the exhibition offers an exciting overview of this leading contemporary artist's work.**

## Anti-Fashion

Spanning five decades of work divided over multiple floors, the exhibition *Anti-Fashion* dives deeper into Sherman's fascination for fashion and the nexus between her independent work and commissions in the fashion industry. Since the 1980s she has worked regularly with leading fashion houses including Comme des Garçons, John Galliano and Balenciaga and fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Interview* and *Harper's Bazaar*. With no interest in glamorous fashion shoots, she creates provocative photos featuring figures that could hardly be called beautiful, thus calling established ideals of beauty into question.

*Anti-Fashion* was realised by the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in cooperation with Cindy Sherman's studio in New York and her gallery Hauser & Wirth.

## More on Cindy Sherman's work

In her photographs, Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) looks at identity as a construct, exploring the ways in which women are depicted in mass media. She has served as her own model since the 1970s. In make-up, costumed and disguised, she continually occupies a new identity, taking inspiration from the endless visual clichés on offer in film, television, fashion, magazines, art history and the internet. She exaggerates stereotypes to absurd and even grotesque dimensions to expose rigid conceptions of gender, beauty and ageing. Each time anew, Sherman subjects dominant visual patterns to a critical investigation, always in step with the zeitgeist and continually surprising the viewer with her characters and subjects. With humour and intelligence, she confronts us with reflections of ourselves.



### **Early Works**

Also on view is a presentation of *Early Works 1975 – 1980* that sheds light on some of Sherman's main motivations and ideas. It includes experimental works from her student years and her iconic series *Untitled Film Stills*, which led to her international breakthrough in the late 1970s.

*Cindy Sherman – Early Works 1975 – 1980* was developed in collaboration with the VERBUND COLLECTION, Vienna.

### **Ensor 2024**

FOMU's Cindy Sherman exhibition is part of ENSOR 2024, a year-long programme marking 75 years since James Ensor's death. Like Ensor, Sherman expresses her critical take on social conventions through masks and disguises.

**Curators: Rein Deslé and Anne Ruygt**

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# ENSOR'S STATES OF IMAGINATION

MUSEUM PLANTIN-MORETUS

28.09.24 - 19.01.25



Pride, 1904, Collection PF, (coloured version)



The Dangerous Cooks, 1896, Collection City of Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus



The Deadly Sins dominated by Death, 1904, Collection City of Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus

**How did Ensor make prints? What techniques did he use? In what ways did he experiment with this medium and from which old masters did he draw his inspiration? Find out the answers in this exhibition.**

In autumn 2024, the Museum Plantin-Moretus presents the exhibition *Ensor's States of Imagination* about Ensor's remarkable graphic adventure. For several years, the young Ensor experimented lavishly with etching techniques. In his own words, "Practice makes perfect! Especially for etching. Experience is lacking and requires repeated trials and efforts."

Ensor soon developed a unique approach to the medium. With predecessors like Rembrandt in mind, Ensor went his own way. His studio became a test lab for experiments where chance sometimes played a role.

*Ensor's States of Imagination* gathers for the first time the most remarkable results of these experiments: preparatory drawings, copper plates and various states of impressions. We show unique prints on parchment and colored satin. Ensor transforms prints into unique works of art by manually coloring them with colored pencil, chalk or watercolor. In this way, unexpected details emerge, depth is created in large crowds and new figures take shape.

At the same time, our museum's 18th-century reading room will zoom in on Ensor and Verhaeren through the mini-exhibition *Ensor filleted by the Dangerous Cooks*. This mini-exhibition starts from the special Verhaeren collection which - until now - has received little attention. The focus here is Ensor's drawing *Les cuisiniers dangereux* from this collection.

**Curators: Izanna Mulder, Willemijn Stammis**



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# ENSOR 2024

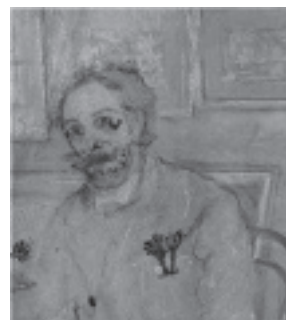
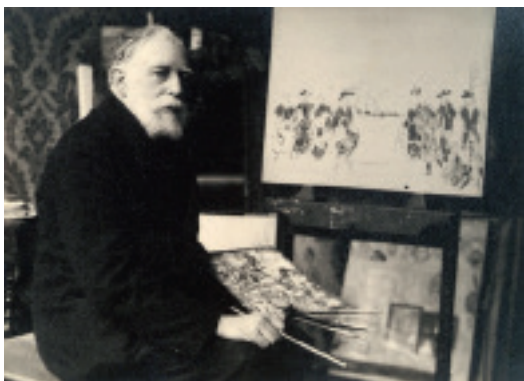
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other projects  
in Antwerp

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## ENSOR RESEARCH PROJECT

KMSKA



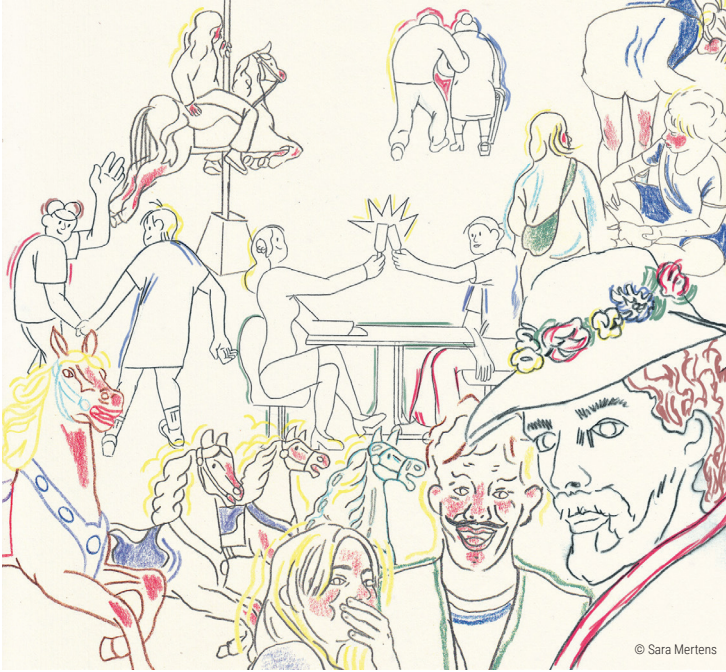
The art of James Ensor reflects the artistic and cultural upheavals that were rapidly taking place around the end of the 19th century. The affinities between Ensor's painting and that of Ernst Josephson and Emile Nolde have not been sufficiently explored from a cultural and historical perspective, even though it is precisely this international context that can help us better appreciate the specific qualities of Ensor's art. It is therefore one of the underlying principles of *In Your Wildest Dreams*, as well as the KMSKA's Ensor Research Project, which will also feature in the exhibition. Drawing on key works like *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* and *The Temptation of St Anthony* the exhibition zooms in on the historical, creative and technical genesis of Ensor's changes of artistic course.

The KMSKA is also focusing on the artist's creative process in *Ensor at Work*. As part of the Ensor Research Project, the museum is producing technical research images and digitizing Ensor's writings. The expo thus gives you an insight into Ensor's thought processes.

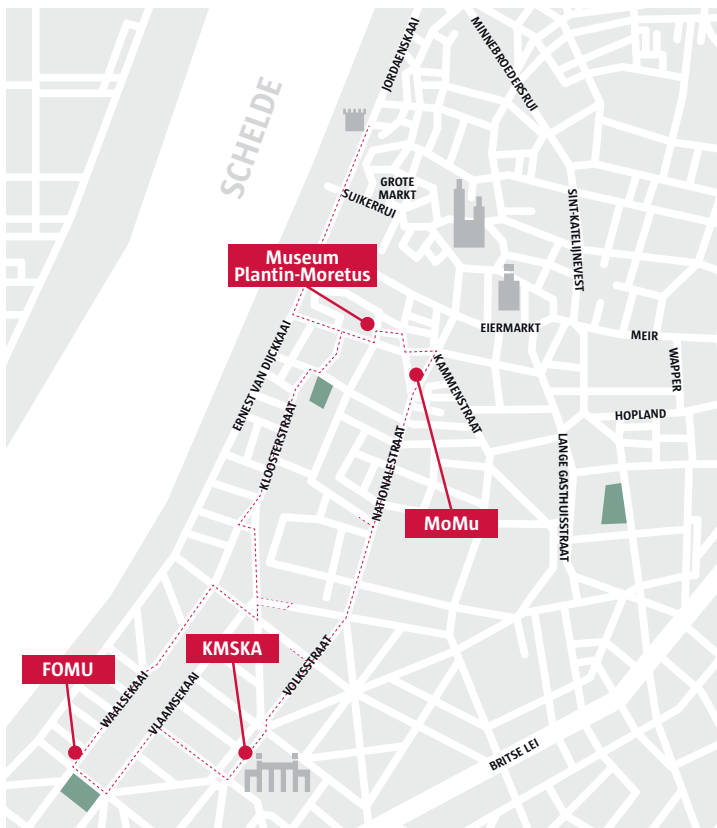
James Ensor's work is more relevant than ever: 'in your face' yet also inward-looking and inscrutable; revealing and concealing; superficially sweet and coarsely authentic; comical, weird and malevolent.

# ENSOR WINDOW DISPLAYS

27.09.24 - 02.11.24



James Ensor's iconic works engage in dialogue with contemporary creativity. Stroll past 22 shop windows in Antwerp and admire unique window displays by talented local artists. The artists of TUIG were inspired by James Ensor's life and work. The walking route takes you on an inspiring trail along the four museums.

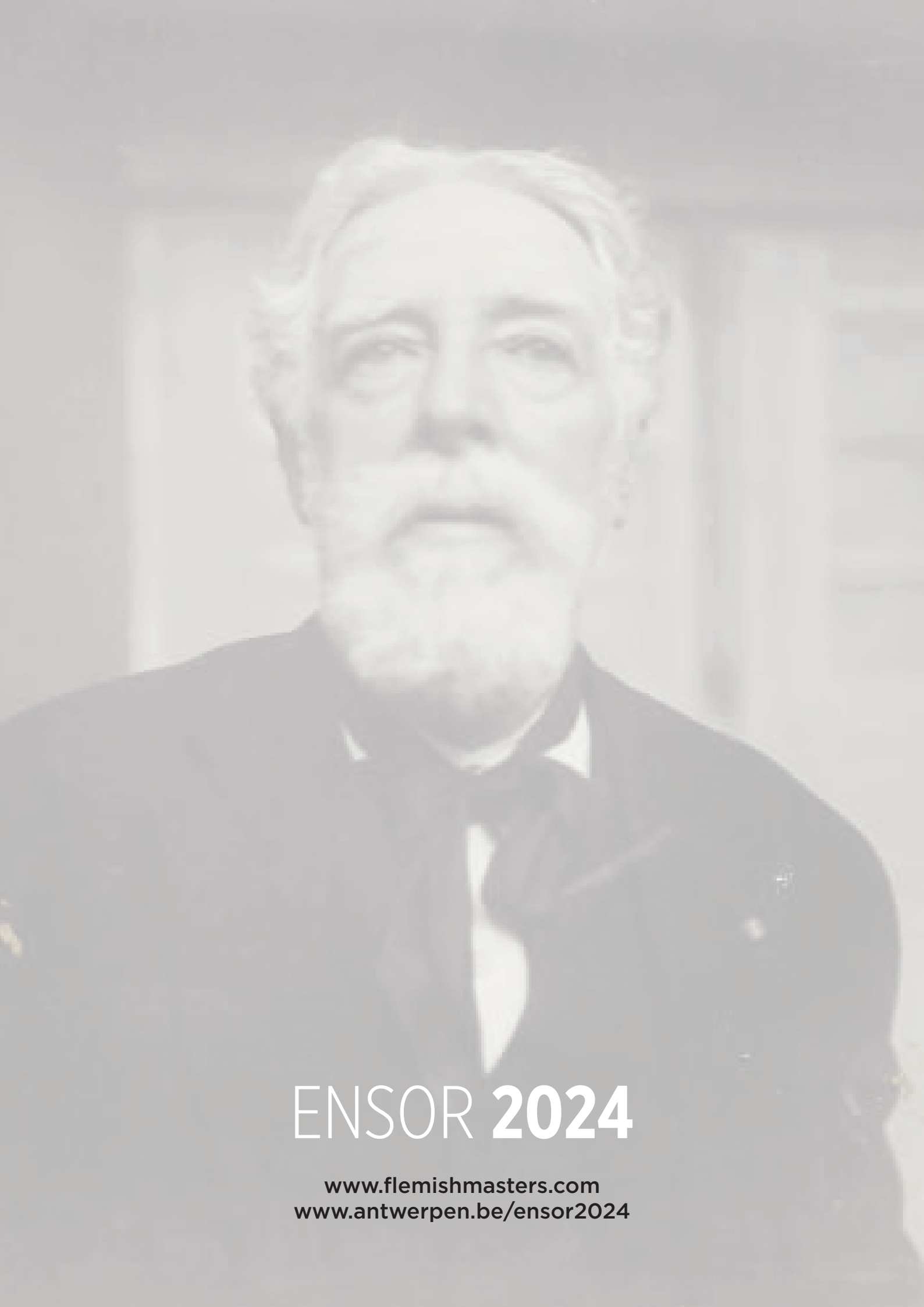


----- Ensor Window Displays

# OVERVIEW

			2024												2025	
			01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02
<b>Ensor Window Displays</b>		27.09.24 - 02.11.24														
<b>Ensor's wildest dreams</b>	KMSKA	28.09.24 - 19.01.25														
<b>Masquerade, Make-up &amp; Ensor</b>	MoMu	28.09.24 - 02.02.25														
<b>Cindy Sherman</b>	FOMU	28.09.24 - 02.02.25														
<b>States of Imagination</b>	Museum Plantin-Moretus	28.09.24 - 19.01.25														





# ENSOR 2024

[www.flemishmasters.com](http://www.flemishmasters.com)  
[www.antwerpen.be/ensor2024](http://www.antwerpen.be/ensor2024)