

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 (yellow, purple, pink). The background is dark and textured.

Ensor

2024



Flanders
State of the Art



ANTWERP

CONTENTS

1. Ensor, so much more than the painter of masks	4
2. Exhibitions in Antwerp	7
<i>In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism, KMSKA</i>	
<i>Maskerade, Make-up & Ensor, MoMu</i>	
<i>Cindy Sherman, FOMU</i>	
<i>States of Imagination. Ensor and the graphical experiment, Plantijn-Moretus Museum</i>	
3. Other projects in Antwerp	15
<i>Ensor Research Project, KMSKA</i>	



1

ENSOR

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

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

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.

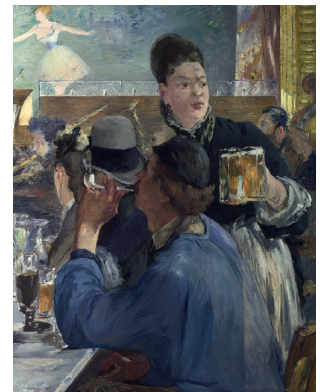
In his oeuvre, Ensor shows himself to be a game-changer: often with a twinkle in his eye, sometimes contrary, and always innovative. These qualities make Ensor timelessly relevant. Antwerp has therefore chosen surprising perspectives to highlight his work. How do we see echoes of Ensor in art, fashion 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



In the autumn of 2024, art by James Ensor will be taking over the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA). The Museum is organising one of Belgium's largest Ensor exhibitions since the retrospective in the KMSKB in 1999. With *In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism*, KMSKA is not only delving into Ensor's wondrous universe of wild visions, masks and satire. Ensor's work will be displayed with works created by international artists who inspired him and against whose work, he compared himself. Ultimately, Ensor aspired to be the best, even when his competitors included the likes of Claude Monet, Edvard Munch including Hieronymous Bosch and Francisco Goya.

The museum has the largest and most diverse Ensor collection in the world. Moreover, the KMSKA is home to the Ensor Research Project, the knowledge centre dedicated to the modern master. This makes KMSKA the perfect place for the overall view of Ensor's art that offers his *wildest dreams*. Two crucial aspects of Ensor's art are at the heart of this exhibition: how a Belgian avant-gardist wants to go "beyond impressionism", and his desire to depict our "wildest dreams".

James Ensor did not lack ambition. His goal? No less than to be the leading avant-garde artist in Belgium. He tried to do so by introducing French Impressionism into his work. However, his actual knowledge of Impressionism was vague. This did not stop Ensor from developing his own version in the years 1880-1885, although his early work is more inspired by the realism of Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Raffaëlli.



In 1886, Ensor revealed his “impressionist” work. At the winter Salon of the avant-garde circle, Les XX, he compared his own contributions such as *The Bourgeois Salon* (1881), *The Oyster Eater* (1882) and *The Flanders Street in the Sun* (1881) with works by the renowned/established French impressionists Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Camille Pissarro. Immediately, he decided to take a new direction. Yet, the salon at Les XX was a fruitful experience for him. Monet’s landscapes provided him with a bright impressionist colour palette, that he had never used before, and a new technique. From Odilon Redon, he learned about a dark, fantastic visual language. For *In Your Wildest Dreams. Ensor Beyond Impressionism*, that tipping point was the start of Ensor’s varied oeuvre. After this initial phase, he increasingly found his own experimental voice as an artist.



IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS

In 1887, Ensor painted *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* (KMSKA) and drew *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (Art Institute Chicago). These two key works marked the beginning of Ensor’s new artistic adventure. Like the Impressionists, the paint went directly from the tube onto the canvas without mixing, and the shadows in earthy colours disappeared for good. He gave those colours their very own expressive power in the most refined shades. Until then, Ensor was an artist who constantly broke the rules of the game. At this point he became an artist rewriting the rules: a gamechanger. Freed from the controlled style, Ensor went wild. Moreover, he cultivated a preference for a strikingly whimsical design. With a grotesque and terrifying iconography, he conjured up hilarious and hellish images that you normally only see in your wildest dreams. Ensor’s interest in humanity’s more infernal activities fitted in seamlessly with a new vision of good, evil, lust and impulse. Ensor’s uncomplicated fascination with a highly imaginative portrayal of incomprehensible visions unexpectedly links him to artists such as the Norwegian Edvard Munch and the Swede Ernst Josephson.

ENSOR BEYOND IMPRESSIONISM

The cherished decadent iconography of the European symbolists inspires Antonin Alexandre to open the Cabaret de l’Enfer in Montmartre in 1892, alongside the Cabaret du Ciel. This popular culture proves to have a major impact on monumental realisations, which has never been studied before. In the section *Beyond Impressionism*, we show the connection between the *Cabaret de l’Enfer* and Henri Degroux’s *Christ aux outrages*, or Ensor’s *Fall of the Rebel Angels*.



The revival of the profane interest in St Anthony inspires Ensor to create the exceptional complex and quasi-surreal monumental collage drawing *The Temptation of St Anthony* (Art Institute Chicago). The drawing appears to be the fruit of a creative high and anticipates Ensor's grotesque imagination in many parts and 101 details.

Ensor's quest to repeatedly unite the hilarious and the whimsical, the morbid and the infernal, culminates in his most striking contribution to the birth of modernism. He starts to create paintings with unreal masked creatures. Once again, Ensor encounters like-minded artists such as Edvard Munch or Emil Nolde. Throughout the 19th century, there were other artists who painted masks, either as a decorative element, or to mysteriously disguise a person's identity. However, in Ensor's work, the masks reveal the true nature of humanity. That is his discovery, which finds its way into more mask paintings than any other artist.

James Ensors' work is imbued with late-nineteenth-century "incoherence", "shenanigans" and "nonsense", forms of mocking humour that were very much in vogue in Brussels and Parisian circles. Ensor's view of humanity ranges from light-hearted to pessimistic but just as often lyrical and hilarious. *Ensor's wildest dreams. Beyond Impressionism* shows Ensor at his most satirical.

ENSOR RESEARCH PROJECT

James Ensor's art reflects the artistic and cultural-historical upheavals that take place at breakneck speed around the end of the 19th century. Yet the similarities between Ensor's work and that of Edvard Munch, Ernst Josephson or Emile Nolde have not been adequately explored. It is precisely this international context that offers the opportunity to better appreciate the specific qualities of Ensor's art. This is one of the premises of *Ensor's wildest dreams*, and the Ensor Research Project of the KMSKA. The research project also gets a place in the exhibition. Through some crucial works such as *The Oyster Eater*, *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 artistic changes of direction.

Furthermore, the KMSKA focuses on the artist's creative process: *Ensor at work*. As part of the Ensor Research Project, the museum is creating material research images and digitising ego documents. These endeavours provide an answer to questions about Ensor's use of materials, varying technique and compositional structure. This section offers the general public a deeper understanding of Ensor's oeuvre.

Ensor's work is more relevant than ever: *in your face* and at the same time introverted and enigmatic, revealing and concealing, sugar-sweet appearance and outrageous authenticity, droll, whimsical and malevolent.

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

MASKERADE, MAKE-UP & ENSOR

MOMU

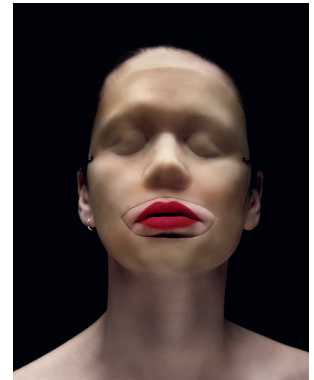
28.09.24 - 19.01.25

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

James Ensor



Genevieve Figgis, detail Ladies at Versailles, 2022.
Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech, © Foto: Nicolas Bresseur



Inge Groggaard, © Foto: Ronald Sloops

In MoMu's autumn exhibition, Masquerade, Makeup & 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 superb craftsmanship and inexhaustible creativity of makeup and hair artists, in a multimedia exhibition in which light, colour, art, fashion, makeup and hair artists come together.

Down through history, makeup 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, makeup 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, makeup is also a medium for personal expression, artistic experimentation, joy and freedom. Masquerade, Makeup & Ensor investigates how closely intertwined makeup is with so many aspects of our being human.

With work by James Ensor, Issy Wood, Harley Weir, Cindy Sherman, Tschabalala Self, Juergen Teller, Bruce Gilden, Serge Lutens, Julien d'Ys, Thomas De Kluiver, Eugene Souleiman, Inge Groggaard, Lucy Bridge, Pat McGrath, Lucia Pieroni, Gary Gill, Isamaya Ffrench, Aurore Gibrien, Siddhartha Simone, Yadim, Ana Takahashi, Holli Smith and many more. The exhibition also presents video installations in collaboration with Beauty Papers, a creative platform and biennial magazine about the culture of beauty.

Curators: Kaat Debo, Elisa De Wyngaert, Romy Cockx

CINDY SHERMAN

FOMU

28.09.24 - 02.02.25



Cindy Sherman, Untitled, #410, 2003, Privately owned © Cindy Sherman



Cindy Sherman, Untitled, #588, 2016/2018, Genehmigt von der Künstlerin und Hauser & Wirth © Cindy Sherman



Cindy Sherman, Untitled #602, 2019, Billis Renaud Collection © Cindy Sherman

FOMU links up with ENSOR 2024 by translating the issues found in James Ensor's oeuvre to a contemporary artistic context. American artist Cindy Sherman (US, 1954), like Ensor, is renowned for her critical and ironic commentary on social conventions through the use of masquerades.

In collaboration with the artist and the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, FOMU is bringing the retrospective exhibition Anti-Fashion to Antwerp.

For almost fifty years, the theme of fashion has run like a thread through Cindy Sherman's work. The exhibition Anti-Fashion focuses on this and sheds new light on her photographic work, reflecting the interplay between fashion and art. Indeed, Sherman uses her many commissions for magazines like Vogue and Harper's Bazaar and her close collaboration with famous designers as a continuous source of inspiration. But the artist's influence has likewise impacted the world of fashion, providing important impulses.

Through the medium of photography, fashion and visual art have traditionally engaged in a dialogue with one another. Sherman also questions the entire system with all its pitfalls. Her interest in the fashion world reflects a subversive attitude towards what that milieu stands for. Her photographs depict figures that are far from attractive, contradicting all the conventions of haute couture and the usual representations of beauty. Not least, the theme of fashion serves as a starting point for the artist's critical questions about gender, stereotypes and age. Sherman's broad spectrum of characters reveals the artificial and ever-changing nature of identity, which more than ever seems to be a matter of choice, (self-)constructed and fluid.

Curators: Rein Deslé and Anne Ruygt

STATES OF IMAGINATION.

ENSOR AND THE GRAPHICAL EXPERIMENT

MUSEUM PLANTIN-MORETUS
28.09.24 - 05.01.25



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?

In the autumn of 2024, the Museum Plantin-Moretus will present *States of Imagination*, which will focus on James Ensor's remarkable graphical adventure. In his younger days as an artist, Ensor exuberantly experimented with etching techniques for several years. He said himself of this: "I am no master of the etcher's craft. I draw and engrave neatly, but I leave all the rest to chance. I don't know all the knacks and tricks of etching, so I have damaged a great many sheets and needlessly spoilt my eyes."

Ensor was not a born print-maker, but he soon developed a unique approach to the medium. With predecessors such as Rembrandt in the back of his mind, Ensor embarked on a quest that was entirely his own. His studio became a testing lab for experiments, in which chance sometimes also played a part.

For the first time ever, *States of Imagination* will bring together the most remarkable results of these experiments: preparatory drawings, copper plates and prints in a variety of states. The museum will be displaying some unique prints on old paper, parchment and coloured silk. Ensor transforms prints into unique artworks by colouring them in by hand in pencil, gouache or watercolour. Some unexpected details turn up that way, depth is added to large masses of people and new figures take shape.

At the same time, the museum's 18th-century reading room will zoom in on Ensor and Verhaeren in the form of the mini-exhibition *The Banquet of Dangerous Cooks. Ensor filleted by Emile Verhaeren* (working title). This mini-exhibition will be based on the extraordinary Verhaeren collection held by the museum, which has received too little attention until now. The centrepiece of the exhibition will be Ensor's extraordinary drawing *The Dangerous Cooks* (Les cuisiniers dangereux) which forms part of the museum's collection.

In addition to exhibiting pieces from its own collection, the Museum Plantin-Moretus is also able to call upon a number of important private collections for the exhibition(s).

Curator: Izanna Mulder

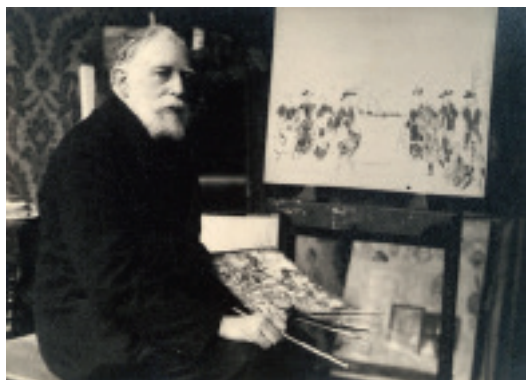
3

ENSOR 2024

other projects
in Antwerp

ENSOR RESEARCH PROJECT

KMSKA



ENSOR 2024 calls for thorough scientific preparation.

KMSKA's Ensor Research Project, in collaboration with the Department of Conservation Science at the University of Antwerp, is going to investigate the material-technical aspects of Ensor's creative processes.

The aim, in a first phase, is to document and analyse all of Ensor's paintings in public collections in the Benelux (130 in total) with research images in wall light, UV, UV reflector tomography, Infrared, IR-false colour, X-Ray, MXRF and, if necessary, sample analysis. It is an investment in specific expertise that addresses issues related to classical stylistic-critique problems (authenticity, dating), preservation, conservation and restoration, and the material-technical aspects of the modernist artistic revolution. This research is also a crucial aspect of the project *Ensor's wildest dreams. Beyond Impressionism*.

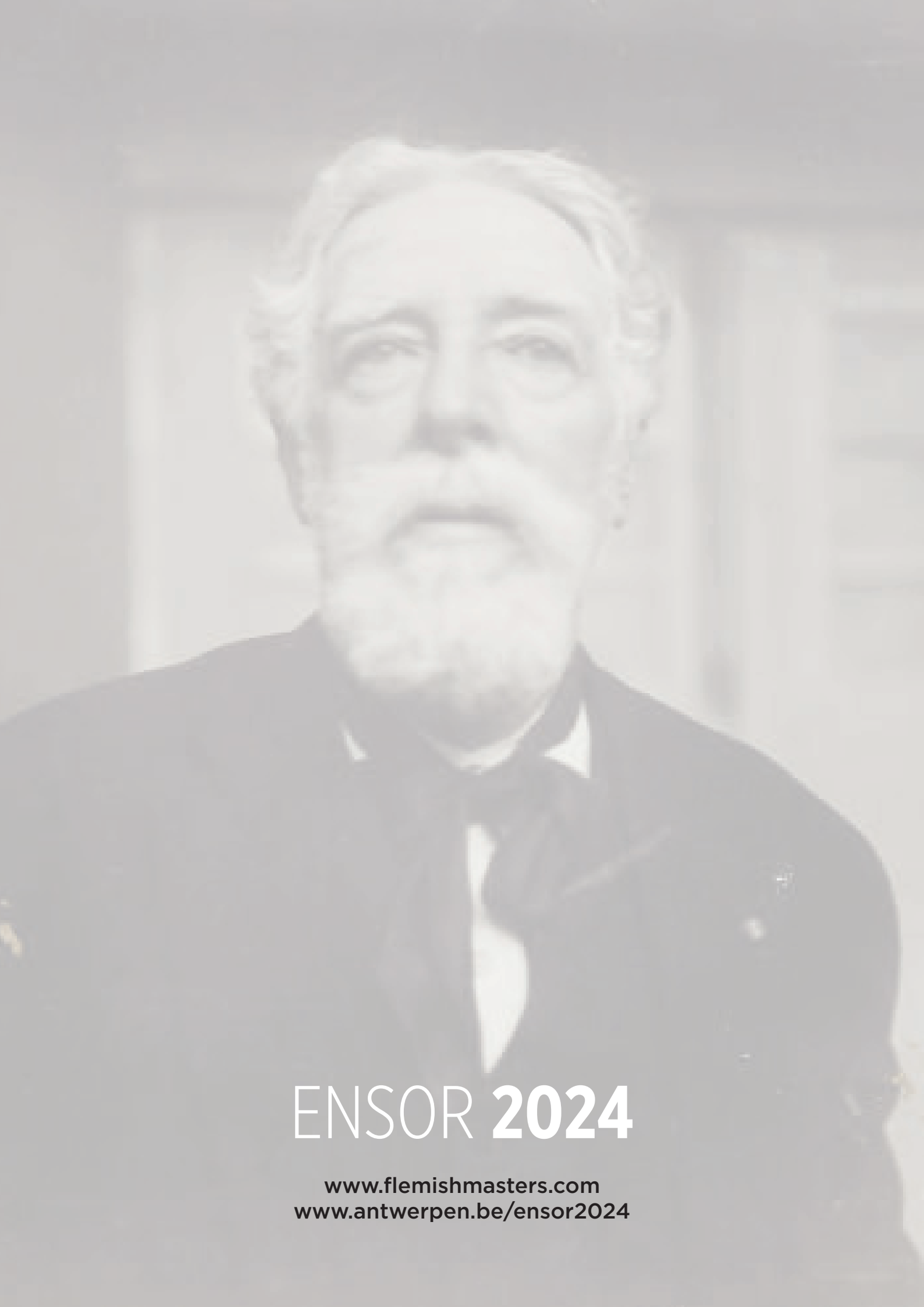
The results of the Ensor Research Project itself will be made accessible via an Online Scholarly Catalogue.

Cfr. <https://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/osci/>

OVERVIEW

2024				01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
ANTWERP	Ensor's wildest dreams	KMSKA	28.09.24 - 19.01.25												
ANTWERP	Maskerade, Make-Up & Ensor	MoMu	28.09.24 - 19.01.25												
ANTWERP	Cindy Sherman	FOMU	28.09.24 - 02.02.25												
ANTWERP	States of Imagination	Museum Plantin-Moretus	28.09.24 - 05.01.25												

2025				01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
ANTWERP	Ensor's wildest dreams	KMSKA	28.09.24 - 19.01.25												
ANTWERP	Maskerade, Make-Up & Ensor	MoMu	28.09.24 - 19.01.25												
ANTWERP	Cindy Sherman	FOMU	28.09.24 - 02.02.25												
ANTWERP	States of Imagination	Museum Plantin-Moretus	28.09.24 - 05.01.25												



ENSOR 2024

www.flemishmasters.com
www.antwerpen.be/ensor2024