



Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux
James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830-1930
16.12.2023 – 14.04.2024

Noble Rose entre toutes les Roses, Rose des heures, Rose des vents, Rose altière des guerriers d'Angleterre, Rose diamantée, Rose nostalgique des pays ardents, Rose lunaire, Rose capitale, Rose songeuse des nuits d'été, Rose des poètes, soyez toujours Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. (Noble Rose among all Roses, Rose of times, Rose of the winds, Proud Rose of the warriors of England, Diamond rose, Rose nostalgic for ardent countries, Lunar rose, Capital rose, Dreamy rose of summer nights, Rose of the poets, be ever Rose, Rose, Rose to my mind.)
(James Ensor, 'Speech delivered in Ostend at the Claude Bernières banquet – Prix Verhaeren', 1923)

Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830 – 1930

The exhibition with guest curators Prof. dr. em. Bart Verschaffel and Sabine Taevernier, assisted by Mu.ZEE curator Dr. Stefan Huygebaert (biographies attached), concentrates for the first time entirely on the still lifes of James Ensor.

Still life is the triumph of colour and life
(James Ensor to Edgar Picard, 1906)

Some fifty paintings from the important production of Ensor in this area – from the first bourgeois examples through the 'haunted' still lifes of the '90s to the ethereal, dreamy examples of the late period – underpin and calibrate an overview of still life in Belgium between 1830 and 1930. In this century, various talented painters are figuring out how the genre, which has become an ostentatious, decorative genre without artistic investment, can be re-energised, both in pictorial and iconographic terms. Ensor here illustrates the overall trend, and his own exceptional quality at the same time.

James Ensor may rightly be regarded as a 'gamechanger', an innovator, an important interface between 19th century artists and modernists. Along with contemporaries such as Edvard Munch, Claude Monet or Odilon Redon, he belongs to the European group of avant-garde artists of the 19th century: their work denotes a turning point in European art history and is therefore crucial for a better understanding of the origins and development of modernism in the course of the 20th century.

Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830-1930 also offers, in particular, an overview of the 19th century, academic, decorative tradition from David De Noter to Frans Mortelmans, with many forgotten but highly skilled and in their time very successful painters such as Jean Robie and Hubert Bellis. Particular attention is paid here to wholly forgotten female painters such as Alice Ronner and Georgette Meunier, as well as the isolated figure of Henri De Braekeleer. This is followed by a selection of painters who, already within the accepted tradition of modernism, focus on still life, but themselves remain within the conventions of the genre, such as Louis Thevenet and Albert Saverys. In addition, a number of painters are included who, like Ensor, through their pictorial approach and image composition, create highly personal, strong images, such as Léon Spilliaert, Rik Wouters, Gustave Van de Woestyne and Walter Vaes.

The exhibition concludes with artists who blow up the permanent image space of the 'theatre of things': Jean Brusselmans, René Magritte, Marthe Donas and Frits Van den Berghe.

The exhibition welcomes loans from, among others, the Kunsthalle Mannheim, Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent, our two museum partners the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp and from numerous public institutions and private collections from, among others, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Monaco.

[Dominique Savelkoul, director of Mu.ZEE about the importance of the exhibition](#)

Almost thirty years after the exhibition *Belgische stilleven- & bloemenschilderkunst 1750–1914* (October 1994 – January 1995), curated by Norbert Hostyn in the then Museum of Fine Arts Ostend, our museum is once again the forum in which the painted still life can be discovered. At the same time, this exhibition enables the visitor to discover works which do something different with the still life, which challenge the genre, both in terms of form and content. In this way, the exhibition, like the accompanying catalogue, recalls artists whose names had often been forgotten and whose work had equally often suffered the same fate. Still life was a domestic genre that flourished in the private sphere and to which female artists, excluded from the art academy and the public sphere, pre-eminently devoted themselves. With the Cercle des Femmes Peintres (1888–93), among others, they created their own professional environment as artists during their lifetime. It is therefore with pride that we confront works by Berthe Art, Louise De Hem, Georgette Meunier and other female artists, among others, with still lifes by Ensor and other fellow artists. Their presence, and in some cases rediscovery, is entirely in line with Mu.ZEE's ambition to put historical female artists on the map more than ever within its core focus on Belgian art from 1880 to the present. It is therefore heart-warming that Mu.ZEE can count on the generous support of Fonds Marlein for this exhibition, just as the Friends of Mu.ZEE (Vrienden van Mu.ZEE) can benefit from the support of the National Lottery.'

(from the preface to the catalogue Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux. James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830-1930)

[About the scenography](#)

In response to *Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux – James Ensor en het Stilleven in België 1830 – 1930*, the “last exhibition” in anticipation of the forthcoming renovation of the museum building, a special scenography was designed by Kris Coremans and Guy Châtel (ssa/xx-architects). It creates a foreground for the exhibition while the numerous spatial incidents of the existing building are relegated to the wings. The scenography confronts the former department store in which Mu.ZEE is located with the model of the 19th century museum. The crude wooden structure evokes the contours of a classic museum with a central hall and side galleries. The still lifes on display are hung on silky poplar cladding. The more elaborate wooden structure remains visible in the upper and lower register of the wall structure. The central Ensor hall forms a shrine. The cladding is contiguous, over the entire circumference. In the galleries around it, displaying the decorative 19th century application of still life, the cladding has been interrupted here and there to open up perspectives and vistas, and thus present the existing museum building as a visible backdrop. The room devoted to modernist questioning and criticism of the “still life” genre differs from the conventional rectangle with two sloping walls. It leads to the Epilogue where the paintings that typify the abolition of the genre are displayed against the white museum walls (Guy Châtel, 30.11.2023)

Catalogue

We would like to thank Mercatorfonds for publishing a catalogue of the same name on the occasion of this exhibition which, in addition to an overview of the works on display, contains fascinating contributions about the significance of still life in James Ensor’s oeuvre and the history of still life in Belgium.

The catalogue is available in Dutch, French or English in the Mu.ZEE shop: €45.

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About the curators

Bart Verschaffel is a philosopher and art critic, and emeritus professor at Ghent University. Since 2017, he has been responsible for the exhibition programme of the VANDENHOVE arts centre of Ghent University, and has curated Piranesi, among others. The collection of Ghent University (Museum of Fine Arts Ghent, 2008) and Bob van Reeth, architect (BOZAR, 2013). He has published extensively on art, philosophy of art and aesthetics, with studies of still life and genres in painting, and studies of artists, such as Giambattista Piranesi, Antoine Wiertz, James Ensor, Giorgio De Chirico, René Magritte, Balthus, and many contemporary Belgian and international artists. He was the screenwriter of television films by Jef Cornelis about modern art and contemporary art. He is currently director of the arts class of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium. Most important monographic publications on art and artists: *À propos de Balthus. Le Roi des Chats, Le regard sondeur* (A&S/books Ghent, 2005); *Nature morte, portrait, paysage. Essais sur les genres en peinture* (La Lettre Volée, Brussels, 2007); *De zaak van de kunst. Over kennis, kritiek, en schoonheid* (A&S/books Ghent, 2011); *What is real? What is true? Picturing Figures and Faces* (VANDENHOVE- A&S/books Ghent, 2021); *What Artistry Can Do. Essays on Art and Beauty* (Edinburgh UP, 2022).

Sabine Taevernier has a master's degree in art history. She is an art expert, advisor to public and private collections and since 1983, an independent curator specialising in art from the end of the 19th century and the 20th century. She has organised exhibitions on Symbolism, Expressionism and James Ensor in collaboration with the museums of Ghent, Antwerp, Milan, Rotterdam and Frankfurt. She worked as an expert for the Impressionist and Modern Art Department at Christie's from 1988 to 1998.

She is the founder of the Ensor Advisory Committee (2002). Since 2019, she has been vice-president of the Council for the Preservation of Movable Cultural Heritage of Flanders (Topstukkenraad/Masterpieces Council) and in January 2022 she became director of the King Baudouin Foundation. Together with Robert Hoozee, she wrote a monograph on the drawings and prints of James Ensor (Antwerp, Mercatorfonds 1987) and was also involved in most of the Ensor exhibitions, including Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, James Ensor, 1990; Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, James Ensor, 1999; New York, The Drawing Center, *Between Street and Mirror: The Drawings of James Ensor*, 2001; New York, Museum of Modern Art, James Ensor, 2009; Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Ensor, 2009/2010; Chicago, James Ensor: *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 2014/2015; New York, Gladstone Gallery, James Ensor. *An intimate portrait*, 2021/2022.

Stefan Huygebaert, project manager, is a curator at Mu.ZEE, Ostend, where he focuses on exhibition and research projects on art around 1900, in particular Léon Spilliaert and the exhibitions *Anna Boch. Een impressionistische reis (2023)* and *Rose, rose, rose à mes yeux. James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830-1930 (2023-2024)*. Before that, he was a pre- and postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University for ten years. He researches, teaches and publishes on various aspects of the art of the long nineteenth century (1789-1914), including legal iconography, symbolism, the picturesque and the picture postcard.

Ensor2024

2024 is dedicated to James Ensor in Flanders and Brussels, when it will be 75 years since the death of this Ostend great master. Ostend and Antwerp are joining forces for a fascinating and complementary Ensor year. From December 2023 to August 2024, Ostend is presenting a museum programme and a varied city festival in honour of Ensor. In September 2024, Antwerp will take over the torch with four different exhibitions of international allure, spread across the city. This special year is being launched in Ostend, the city where he lived and worked for almost his entire life, at Mu.ZEE with the exhibition *Rose, Rose, Rose, à mes yeux. James Ensor en het stilleven in België 1830-1930*.

'After the Bruegel, Rubens and Van Eyck year, the Flemish Government decided to allocate 4.5 million euros to the realisation of the Ensor year 2024. This support is considerable but necessary to realise international ambitions. The Flemish heritage and skill of our Flemish masters remain calling cards for the Flanders of yesterday and tomorrow (Minister-President Jan Jambon).

All the exhibitions, activities and events taking place in Ostend and Antwerp can be found at <https://www.ensor2024.be>.

Partners

Mu.ZEE wishes to express its heartfelt thanks to all its partners for their support for this exhibition and all the associated projects.

First and foremost, the Flemish Community. **Ensor2024** was classified as a top event by the Flemish Government. Support is provided within the resources of EventFlanders, the partnership between the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, Sport Vlaanderen, Tourism Flanders, and the Department of Chancellery and Foreign Affairs.

The City of Ostend, the Fonds Radio Marlein managed by the King Baudouin Foundation, the Vrienden van Mu.ZEE, who in turn are supported by the National Lottery, as well as its media partners Knack, Le Soir and Klara.



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Met dank aan onze museale partners :