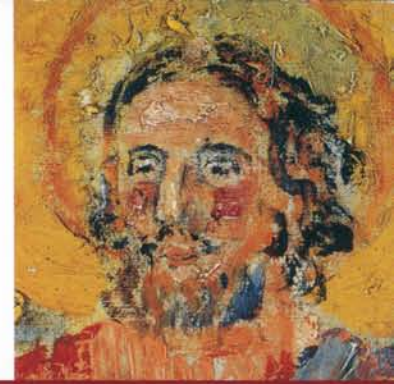


PATRICIA G. BERMAN

JAMES ENSOR

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889





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GETTY MUSEUM STUDIES ON ART

JAMES ENSOR

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889

PATRICIA G. BERMAN

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A PAINTING AND ITS PARADOXES

Sometime in 1888, the young Belgian painter James Ensor (1860–1949) tacked a giant canvas to his studio wall and created one of the most important and enigmatic paintings of the later nineteenth century: *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1). A phantasmagoria of color and motion, the painting represents the imagined entry of Jesus into the city of Brussels during Mardi Gras, the grand new boulevards of the city choked with grotesque masked figures who are too involved in their own strutting and revelry to acknowledge the presence of the Christian savior. The crowd snakes around in a huge phalanx that begins in the upper right of the composition and marches into, and seemingly breaks through, the extreme foreground. Buildings and viewing stands, decorated with bunting and flags, frame the composition like a proscenium, and the tide of people fills the street, balconies, and windows.

The painting's grand scale (8¼ × 14 feet), the grotesque caricatures of the military, clergy, and business class, and the incorporation of texts, including the vast banner surmounting the composition reading *Vive la Sociale* (Long Live the Social), proclaim this a polemical work. The carnival masks, viewing stand at the right, banners, and bunting all suggest a popular spectacle, the

subject of a genre painting. Its religious imagery, particularly the fragile representation of Jesus riding a donkey in the center of the composition, also seems to place the painting within a tradition of sacred art. The extraordinary crowd of figures pressed into the foreground, and swelling into the background, indicates a commentary on the burgeoning urban scene. Yet the painting is not any one of these things, but, rather, a kaleidoscopic amalgamation of them all. *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* is a bitter, eloquent, and satirical painting, and its manifold themes, like its cryptic form, narrate modernity itself.¹

The canvas is so large and sprawling, so encrusted with detail, and so garishly colored that it demands of its viewers that they move back and forth to see the whole and read the details. A close-up view is dominated by the great variety and theatricality of the masks and faces in the foreground, many of them life size or greater, and by the dazzling virtuosity of Ensor's brushwork. Flouting contemporary practices of *peinture claire*, Ensor troweled on paint using a palette knife, scored it with the end of a paintbrush, applied it wet-on-wet and dry-on-dry, and delicately feathered it. Yet from the intimate view needed to discern such a variety of techniques, the overall composition is impossible to digest. From close-up, the painting

FIG. 1

James Ensor (Belgian, 1860–1949), *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 252.5 × 430.5 cm (99½ × 169½ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (87.PA.96).

FIG. 2

Photographer unknown,
James Ensor painting *Christ's
Entry into Brussels in 1889, 1887–88*.
Gelatin silver print. Ostend,
Museum of Fine Arts.
Photo © SABAM—Belgium 2002.

can only be read episodically, one boldly rendered mask, or one complex massing of shapes or brushstrokes, at a time. From the distance required to assimilate the whole canvas, the immediacy of Ensor's touch, and the psychological presence of his masks, is diminished.

From many yards away, the composition assumes the appearance of a wide, enclosed boulevard in which the vast procession moves forward through a radically telescoping and ultimately unstable architectural landscape. The painting seems to have one rational vanishing point. Carefully constructed orthogonal lines, traced by the balconies at left and the reviewing stand at right, and echoed by the perim-



eters of the receding parade, seem to guide the viewer's eye, and the parade, to a point below the *o* on the banner reading *Vive la Sociale*. Yet the great rose-colored phalanx actually disappears from view at a point just to the right of the word *Sociale*. The subtle distance between these two points, and the oddly vectored lines that lead the viewer's attention to them, create a visual paradox in which a one-point perspectival system collapses, emulating the sensation of movement through the crowd. From a distance, the observer also experiences the dizzying effects of the multiple points of view that Ensor carefully embedded in his painting. The spectator views the boulevard as though from the height of the platform to the right, on which four privileged figures (one of whom bends over to show us his rump) watch the procession. The figures in the extreme foreground, meanwhile, are viewed from eye level; so insistent is this perspective that we are able to see into the mouth of the bloated cleric in the center foreground as he throws back his head.

Ensor did not have the luxury of such a complete view in his studio. Located in the attic of his family's home in the windswept seaside town of Ostend, Ensor's studio was barely large enough to accommodate the large canvas, and the artist had to paint the ambitious composition piecemeal and under great physical constraints. A photograph taken of the artist at work (fig. 2) shows the canvas covering the entire studio wall and presumably extending downward to the floor. It also reveals that Ensor first covered the primed, unstretched canvas with an extensive and detailed under-drawing using colored crayon:

I drew with great precision, both with pencil and color, *he wrote*. The canvas, as large as the wall of my old studio, where I attacked it, lay on the floor. I worked on the lower part of it sitting on the floor. Water seeped through the

ceiling onto the painting. I attribute to this sprinkling the freshness which the canvas has retained.²

It may be that the artist's differing proximate relationships to the canvas (on the upper wall and at floor level) assisted him in his exploitation of variable perspectives, points of view, and contrasts between near and far. As Getty Museum conservator Mark Leonard has noted, the careful underdrawing, visible in many passages where the paint is thin, or in interstices between areas of pigment, reveals how systematically *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) was planned and executed. What at first appears to be an anarchic and spontaneous composition is in fact the result of great discipline and order. Moreover, as chaotic and unconventional as the canvas looks in terms of its form and techniques, Ensor actually executed the painting using traditional procedures.³

Ensor's strategy of organizing his composition around a mobile audience parallels the compositional strategies of the giant Naturalist paintings that populated the European Salons of the 1880s. Theatrical formulae often used by Salon painters to engage their audiences—pushing a dramatic or sentimental scene into the extreme foreground of a life-size or over-life-size composition, exaggerating the contrast between the scale of figures in the fore- and background, and reducing the degree of detail from front to back—were deployed to arrest the viewer's attention within the context of a large, crowded exhibition. By orchestrating a spectator's assimilation of the painting through a succession of views (walking toward and away from the composition to see the whole and read the details), Salon painters enacted in art the audience's experiences on the street. The heterogeneous texture of events that conditioned the observer's daily experiences: new urban spaces, new tech-

nologies, and a rapid proliferation of images in every aspect of daily life had begun to undermine the possibility of a contemplative viewer:

The observer of paintings in the nineteenth century was always also an observer who simultaneously consumed a proliferating range of optical and sensory experiences . . . paintings were produced and assumed meaning not in some impossible kind of aesthetic isolation . . . but as one of many consumable and fleeting elements within an expanding chaos of images, commodities, and stimulation.⁴

At the Salon, the observer operated as a *flâneur*, a mobile consumer of a succession of commodity-like images, just as she or he did on the boulevard.

Indeed, it is likely that at least one of the sources of inspiration for this vertiginous canvas was Belgian Salon painting itself, a tradition that Ensor invoked only to parody and subvert. A prominent example is *The Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* (fig. 3), one of the most popular paintings in 1880s Belgium and the masterpiece of its now-obscure author, Jan Verhas. This vast painting depicts a parade of 23,000 schoolchildren from all districts of the newly modernized city of Brussels and all parts of Belgium, organized on August 23, 1878, to celebrate the golden wedding anniversary of King Léopold II and Queen Marie-Henriette. As we shall see, Léopold was a strong promoter of such unifying public spectacles throughout Belgium, a nation comprising two distinct cultures (French and Flemish) that had only achieved independence in 1830. With its emphasis on a smooth, immaculate depiction, Verhas's canvas describes this superbly orchestrated public spectacle with photographic fidelity. In it, schoolgirls march in a disciplined line into the extreme foreground of the compo-



FIG. 3

Jan Verhas (Belgian, 1834–1896), *The Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* (*La Revue des écoles en 1878*), 1880. Oil on canvas, 241 × 423 cm (94 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 166 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.). Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique (2821).



sition. They are unified by their white dresses and golden hats and individuated by the meticulous rendering of faces. As the parade approaches the middle ground, it arcs subtly to the left, allowing the audience to see both the front ranks *en face* and the seemingly endless procession more obliquely as it moves into the far distance. Flanking the girls are the king and queen and members of Belgium's elite: the mayor of the town; leading writers, artists, and architects; and members of the business and educational community assigned the task of transforming Belgium into a modern urban state.

FIG. 4

Hans Makart (Austrian, 1840–1884), *The Entry of Charles V into Antwerp*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 520 × 952 cm (204 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 374 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.). Hamburg, Kunsthalle (1515).

The Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878 was a painting of the most extravagant reassurance. The spectacle it represents symbolized the future health and unity of the country. One commentator noted, “The generation of students presents a sight that gratifies patriotic hearts. . . . Look! It is the twentieth century that passes by!”⁵ Bringing together the themes of family, patriotism, continuity, a familiar and heartening modernity, and identifiable individuals, the painting became a bourgeois icon. It was also reassuring in its fidelity to nature: space is mapped, the locale (the esplanade and plaza in front of the royal palace) is recognizable, the time of day and weather are specified by the clarity of light and shadows, and the crowd is orderly, regimented, sentimental, triumphantly middle class, and elegantly turned out. So popular, comforting, and Belgian was this work, that an author writing in 1896 reported that the ubiquitous reproductions of it were enough to evoke the event itself through its tiny details.⁶ Epitomizing Belgian academic taste and nationalist principles in the 1880s—a grand Naturalist “machine” depicting a public spectacle with patriotic overtones—this popular painting made Verhas one of the most celebrated artists in Belgium; through the sale of photomechanical reproductions, the motif created a “gold mine” for the artist.⁷

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889 can be seen as a complete inversion of this conception. It is a painting that resists the tidiness, ease, and comfort of Verhas and his Naturalist colleagues. Ensor's painting also invokes, and parodies, the old tradition of the “joyous entry,” one of the grand nationalist themes in nineteenth-century Belgian painting, perhaps most famously represented by Austrian painter Hans Makart's *Entry of Charles V into Antwerp* (fig. 4), a history painting representing the triumphal entry of Charles, the Holy Roman Emperor, King of Spain,

and Archduke of Austria, in 1520. In this and other historical works of this genre, a reigning monarch or duke enters the city through a ritual gateway, is symbolically given keys to the city, and is celebrated through a spectrum of festivities. This ritual of the joyous entry bound national and regional alliances, reenacted the historical relationships between the city and the dukes and kings, and reinscribed the legitimacy of the monarchy.⁸ Parodying and undermining the control asserted by such national and civic rituals as represented by Makart and Verhas, Ensor's canvas paraphrases and fragments the conventions of Belgian civil, religious, and political festivals. Defying traditional invocations to a unified future and references to a glorious past, the painting subverts the placidity and prosperity of Léopold II's Belgium. Cacophonous where in conventional Salon painting there was order, ambiguous in perspective and composition where there was surety, extravagant in technique and iconography where there was restraint and predictability, and unstable in meaning, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) dispensed with the rules of taste, narrative, and technique that operated in 1880s Belgium. Even in 1888, a year in which Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne ventured into radical new pictorial experiments, *Christ's Entry* stands as one of the most extraordinary and prophetic works of art produced anywhere in Europe.

James Sidney Edouard Ensor was twenty-eight years old when he executed this audacious painting. Born in 1860 to a Flemish mother and an English father raised in Belgium, Ensor spent most of his life in his hometown of Ostend, whose population in the 1880s was around sixteen thousand. A small fishing town seventy-seven miles west of Brussels, Ostend became a resort community catering to tourists from England and elsewhere in the summer. King

Léopold was a frequent visitor. Ostend also was, and remains, famous for its pre-Lenten Carnival festivities, culminating in a citywide masquerade and parade, balls, and raucous tavern rituals. Ensor's family ran a curio shop in the center of the town that catered to both of these annual events with souvenirs for the summer clientele and masks for Carnival (fig. 5). Ensor and his biographers attributed the formation of his vision to the town and the shop:

My grandparents had in Ostend . . . a shop selling sea shells, lace, rare stuffed fish, old books, prints, jams, china, an inextricable assortment of objects constantly being knocked over by a number of cats, noisy parrots, and a monkey. . . . My childhood is filled with marvelous dreams and visits to my grandmother's shop, with its luminous glow from the reflections of the shells, sumptuous lace, strange stuffed animals and terrible savage weapons that terrified me. . . . This exceptional milieu without doubt developed my artistic faculties and my grandmother was my great inspiration. . . .⁹

Ensor lived with his family throughout his life, which, in his early years, included his parents, his maternal grandmother, his maternal aunt, and his younger sister Marie, nicknamed "Mitche." All served as his chief models through the mid-1880s.

By all accounts Ensor was a man with a rebarbative personality and a great capacity for parody and satire.¹⁰ His writings, a blend of high mysticism, puns worthy of James Joyce, and prankish humor, are packed with mythologizing stories about his life.¹¹ For example, in 1928 he recounted a "formative event" that was remarkably similar to Sigmund Freud's 1910 analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's famous childhood memory of a bird of prey:



FIG. 5

James Ensor Standing in Front of the Souvenir Shop Operated by His Mother and Aunt, Corner of Rampe de Flandre and the Rue Du Nord (Now Boulevard Van Iseghem), Ostend. Photo: From Patrick Florizoone, *James Ensor: Les Bains à Ostende* (Brussels, 1996), p. 55.

One night, as I lay in my cradle in my lighted room, all the windows open and given over to the ocean, a large sea bird, undoubtedly attracted by the light, flew in before me and knocked over my cradle. An unforgettable impression, I was crazed with terror and I can still see that horrible apparition and still feel the strong impact of the black bird.¹²

Such poetic autobiography extended to Ensor's statements about his training, which suggest that he was autodidactic. Taking his early artistic studies in Ostend with two local landscape painters, Ensor later distanced himself from this training by labeling these painters as provincial. From 1877 to 1880 Ensor enrolled at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, which was a prestigious training ground for the kind of precise technique that made Jan Verhas so popular, and the conduit for a successful Salon career. Again Ensor repudiated his training, particularly in an article that he wrote in 1884 entitled "Three Weeks at the Academy":

"You don't want to learn! To paint like that is positively mad, wicked!" . . . "You do the opposite of what you are told" . . . "You started out so well" . . . "But you ruin everything you do" . . . Moral: The pupil quits the Academy and becomes a *Vingliste* [see below]. Further Moral: The Salon rejects his paintings.¹³

Following his formal studies, Ensor engaged in a sustained dialogue with master painters and draftsmen, copying reproductions of works by old masters such as Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Jacques Callot, Honoré Daumier, and Eugène Delacroix, and contemporaries including Jules Bastien-Lepage and Jan Verhas, that were published in such sources

as the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (Paris) and *The Studio* (London).¹⁴ While these works were echoed in Ensor's mature painting, he nevertheless stated in his later writings that he was innocent of inspiration from other artists: "I evolve freely and not exposed to influences, I ignore the great Gallic schools, the Frankish, the German, the shabby, the Photo-specific, and the success of the painters of the moment from the land of madness."¹⁵ Ensor traveled little, making only two trips to England in 1886 and 1892, three trips to France in the 1880s, and two trips to Holland in the 1880s and early 1890s.¹⁶ He spent considerable time in Brussels, the capital of Belgium and the center of much avant-garde artistic and literary activity in the latter nineteenth century, and he traveled to Ghent and Antwerp, both towns with burgeoning artistic scenes and substantial collections of old master paintings. As we shall see, although Ensor did live a relatively secluded life in Ostend, his claims to artistic isolation must be viewed as a strategic reworking of his career and intellectual sources. He was strongly connected to the artistic communities of late nineteenth-century Belgium and was well versed in the history of art. Indeed, in 1883 he was one of the founding members of the avant-garde exhibition society *Les XX* (*Les Vingt*, The Twenty), Belgium's, and one of Europe's, premier associations for the advancement of new art.

Between 1880 and 1886 Ensor was engaged primarily in the recording of his immediate environment, including seascapes, still lifes, and interior scenes.¹⁷ By the early 1880s he had made a substantial, if controversial, reputation as a colorist and a promising Naturalistic painter. His works shown with the exhibiting societies *L'Esson*, *Le Cercle Artistique*, *La Chrysalide* (The Chrysalis), and *Les XX* had garnered Ensor some favorable reviews, including at least a few acknowledgments of genius. More frequently, however,



he was criticized by the art press for what was viewed as his poor execution and unorthodox style. However, in 1884, when all of his submissions were rejected from the annual Salon, Ensor was recast by the avant-garde journal *L'Art Moderne*, the publication associated with *Les XX*, as the most radical of Belgian painters:

Ensor is the leader of a clan. Ensor is in the limelight. Ensor sums up and concentrates certain principles which are considered to be anarchistic. In short, Ensor is a dangerous person who has great chances. . . . He is consequently marked for blows. It is at him that all the harquebuses are aimed. It is on his head that are dumped the most aromatic containers of the so-called serious critics.¹⁸

Such rhetoric, written by Octave Maus, one of the leaders of *Les XX* and a publisher of *L'Art Moderne*, helped to establish the idea of Ensor's oppositional standing in the art world as the radical against whose career others would be measured.¹⁹

By that year, Ensor's interest in the effects of light and atmosphere had led him to begin the process of dissolving the material objects he painted in order to convey a sense of mood rather than location. In 1882 he had painted a masterful composition, reflecting this appeal to the careful study of light effects and a dissolution of form. Entitled *Woman Eating Oysters* (fig. 6), this painting is a domestic genre scene representing a life-size female (modeled by his sister), seated at a table and engaged in the consumption of a small repast. The entire lower half of the painting is dominated by a dazzling foreground still life. Composed largely in pale creamy shades punctuated by strong accents, it is a bravura representation of light animating liquids,

FIG. 6

James Ensor, *Woman Eating Oysters*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 207 × 105 cm (81½ × 41⅞ in.). Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum of Fine Arts (2073).

glass, draped linen, porcelain, and flowers. The large scale of the painting, the homey detail, and the relaxed attitude of the model may be seen today as echoes of the moody domestic genre painting popular throughout Europe at the time. Yet on the basis of this painting, Ensor was strongly rebuffed by his conservative critics for a lack of decorum and finish and hailed by Octave Maus and other members of the avant-garde as Belgium's breakthrough into radical art.

Throughout the 1880s, Ensor continued his investigations into mood painting, injecting his atmospheric naturalism with increasingly uncanny elements. In 1883 he painted *Scandalized Masks* (fig. 7), the first work in which he replaced human faces with carnival masks. In what seems to be a working-class bar, a masked male figure leans desolately against a rough wooden table as he is approached by another masked figure menacingly waving a cane or club. Art historian Libby Tannenbaum first identified these figures as symbolic representations of Ensor's father and grandmother, the former an acute alcoholic, and the latter the family matriarch.²⁰ Exhibited in 1884 as *Masks*, the painting represents a critical turning point in Ensor's career. Beginning in that year, he explored the ambivalence, strangeness, humor, and grotesquery of masks as human dopplegängers:

Hounded by those on my trail, I joyfully took refuge in the solitary land of fools where the mask, with its violence, its brightness and brilliance, reigns supreme. The mask meant to me: freshness of color, extravagant decoration, wild generous gestures, strident expressions, exquisite turbulence.²¹

In *The Astonishment of the Mask Wouse* (fig. 8), he interposed a mask on a standing female figure, surrounding

her with a pile of masks, carnival costumes, skulls, musical instruments, a puppet, two animated figures who are perhaps themselves masked, and a length of Chinese fabric.²² The mound of skulls, masks, and costumes that lies on the bare wooden floor were Ensor's actual studio props, many of which appear repeatedly in his paintings. The mask with dark glasses playing the clarinet, for example, is the one worn by the standing figure in *Scandalized Masks* (fig. 7) and by figures that appear in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 9).²³ From the mid-1880s until Ensor's death, these masks and props offered the artist a kind of repertory of images and characters that he first used as his weapons against middle-class propriety and complacency, and then increasingly as lyrical decorative elements. As the Symbolist poet Émile Verhaeren noted in 1908, it was on the basis of these images that Ensor became known as "the painter of masks."²⁴ In the decades that followed, Ensor mined the shocking innovations that he had injected into his work in the later 1880s: masks, skeletons, figures from the commedia dell'arte, a bright and luminous palette, and thick, dramatic applications of paint.

By the latter 1890s Ensor was an established figure in Belgian modernism. In 1898–99, a one-man exhibition at the Salon des Cent in Paris was a signal event in the artist's career. A book of essays published to coincide with the exhibition (and which Ensor helped to orchestrate) provided critical and poetic exegeses on his work that positioned the artist as one of Belgium's, and Europe's, most radical and authentic artists.²⁵ Within a few years, however, just at the time that he began to achieve wide recognition, Ensor's work became repetitive. In the first decades of this century his palette softened, and he reworked older compositions to the point where he drained them of vivacity. These included, in 1925 to 1930, small oil paintings that recapitulate

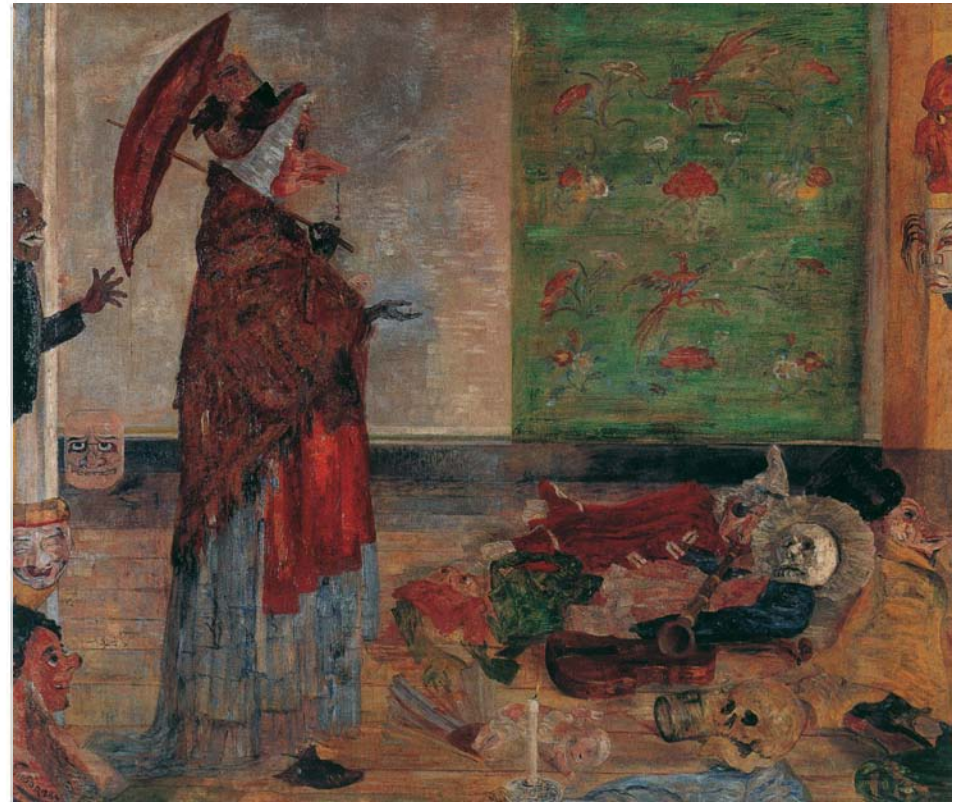


FIG. 7

James Ensor, *Scandalized Masks*,
1883. Oil on canvas, 135 ×
112 cm (53 1/8 × 44 1/8 in.). Brussels,
Musées royaux des beaux-arts
de Belgique (4190).

FIG. 8

James Ensor, *The Astonishment of the Mask Wouse*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 109 × 131 cm (42½ × 51¾ in.). Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum of Fine Arts (2042).

FIG. 9

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).

FIG. 10

James Ensor, *Singing Masks*, 1925–29. Oil on wood, 32 × 40 cm (12½ × 15¾ in.). Private collection.

details from *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), such as *Singing Masks* (fig. 10). At the same time, Ensor, the once-savage critic of polite Belgian society, began to be valued as a national treasure. He was made a Knight of the Order of Léopold in 1902 by royal decree, and in 1929, King Albert I conferred a baroncy on him. Ensor literally became a monument in 1930 when a bronze bust of the artist was installed in Ostend. In 1942, when he heard a radio broadcast mistakenly announcing his death, Ensor visited this monument to pay his respects.

However, the years around 1888, when Ensor began to paint *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, were the artist's most challenging, experimental, and productive. His father had died under tragic circumstances related to his alcoholism in 1887, and earlier in the same year, his maternal grandmother had passed away. This interval of mourning, and of Ensor's own illnesses, precipitated a period of high creativity. Having taken up the technique of etching in 1886, he produced 133 prints, most of them between the years 1886 to 1889 and 1895 to 1899. He also produced a large number of drawings and paintings in the mid- to late 1880s, including numerous motifs taken from the Bible. Many of these were satirical, quite a few were political, and he introduced into his work the masks, skeletons, and commedia dell'arte figures that would populate his paintings for decades to come.

From 1888 to 1889, Ensor's work also underwent a profound formal transformation as he pushed his investigations of light and color into a new and radical direction:

A development was apparent in my way of working. To achieve rich and varied tones, I had always mixed my colors. Unfortunately, these mixtures sometimes caused discoloration and several paintings subsequently darkened. I thus changed tack and began to paint with pure



colors. Logically I looked for powerful effects—especially masks with their bright colors. I liked these masks, because they offended the public who had given me such a poor reception.²⁶

Like his contemporaries Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, Ensor began to use color as an expressive rather than a descriptive or naturalistic element in his work. His palette and touch in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* are among the most radical of his career. The thick trails, masses, and dots of unblended colors, and his use of intense, scalding colors and dissonant contrasts convey a sense of the artist's inspiration before his composition. On the basis of his free and expressive use of color and his exploration of masks, skeletons, and other devices as human equivalents, he has been identified as a leading member of Europe's Symbolist generation and a forerunner of twentieth-century Expressionism.

Although Ensor never gave away clues to any fixed meaning in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, in a letter to his early biographer, Émile Verhaeren, in 1892, he referred to the painting in formal terms as “my great canvas of Christ and masks, full of motion and of tumultuous patterns accented by an intensity of color.”²⁷ In his 1908 monograph on Ensor, Verhaeren likened the brightness of Ensor's palette—an “exaltation of raw tones”—to lithographic posters.²⁸ There is, in fact, an affinity between Ensor's painting and the grand scale, brilliant coloration, caricatural linearity, and compressed space of the large color lithographic advertisements for products and entertainments that French graphic artist Jules Chéret had begun to produce in Paris in the 1870s, and which had become widespread and much emulated in Paris by the late 1880s. In such works as his advertisement for a Lenten masked ball at the Palace-Théâtre, created between 1881 and 1890 (fig. 11), Chéret created colorful, strongly articulated, mural-size images that were intended to be assimilated by passersby on the city street. Exuding a kind of refined vulgarity and exaggeration, “artistic” lithographic posters by Chéret and others furnished the city of Paris with instant and ephemeral murals, introducing color and entertainment onto the gray walls of the bustling city, and creating memorable visual form for passing events such as exhibitions, balls, and carnivals. Identified as the most sensitive and talented of all the French poster artists in an influential 1886 study by Ernest Maindron,²⁹ Chéret had a vast following among advertisers and lithographic artists throughout Europe and North America. By likening Ensor's flat, unsaturated color palette to that of the poster artists, Verhaeren alluded to the ways that the vernacular nature of these images, which covered city walls throughout Europe, carried over into Ensor's painting.³⁰

Ensor also claimed that his paints were not themselves conventional artists' pigments, but common house paints. As recounted by art historian Paul Haesaerts, these unorthodox pigments released an inchoate creativity in him: after Ensor told a housepainter that he was suspicious of the quality and permanence of commercial artists' pigments purchased in tubes, the painter mixed fresh pots of color for the artist.³¹ Ensor reports that when he painted *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, “I found myself pushed by a large demon. These large containers inspired me toward great subjects, and it was without constraint that I drew my work from [these] generous vases.”³² However, analysis of the pigments performed by Mark Leonard at the Getty Museum has revealed that they were standard artists' pigments from the period. This same analysis confirms Ensor's procedure of laying the pigments down directly throughout the painting, only mixing them occasionally.³³ Whether his paints had their mythic origins in the utilitarian medium of house paint, or in more expensive and elite artists' pigments, the purity and vibrancy of their colors remained the aspect of the painting of which Ensor seemed the most proud:

In 1888, I glimpsed my future, I made my act of faith in light, in my light, my composition, my imagination and my freedom. I worked for the long term. I chose my colors. White! More white! The fresh color. The pure color. The one that brings things to the fore, without betraying it. Vivid red. Green green. Raw yellow. . . .³⁴

Ensor's invocations of directness and an almost primal spontaneity, free of the trappings of academic procedure and accepted artistic taste, trace a genesis story for *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* in a kind of pan-European discourse of radicalism that will be discussed presently.

FIG. 11

Jules Chéret (French, 1836–1932),
Palace-Théâtre–Bal masqué.
Mi-carême. 15, rue Blanche.
Cavaliers 3 Fr. Dames 1 Fr.,
 between 1881–90. Color litho-
 graph. Chaumont, France, Henry
 Dutailly collection (A 1377).
 Photo courtesy Bibliothèque muni-
 cipale de Chaumont.



Despite the size and complexity of the painting, and the extreme care with which the details are woven together, there are remarkably few drawings that can be considered preparatory works for the composition. The idea for it seems to have begun with a series of six ambitious black-and-white religious drawings that Ensor made in 1885–86 and exhibited in 1887, which he entitled *Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibility of Light*.³⁵ One of them, a six and one half foot tall drawing entitled *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66), provides the rudiments of the composition, the mingling of historical and contemporary references, and even some of the specific details of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1). Under a sweeping banner inscribed with the mocking words *Hail Jesus, King of the Jews*, a parade moves forward into the extreme foreground, enveloping the figure of Jesus, who is radiating light and is seated astride his donkey. The parade snakes to the left and then to the right, around the elevated viewing stand that occupies half of the extreme foreground. On this podium stands a small cluster of figures whose backs are turned to the audience, the tallest of whom wears a turban-like hat. The crowd in the foreground is comprised of a mass of faces that meld together to form a human sea. Riding a donkey and surrounded by a nimbus of light, the figure of Jesus is larger, darker, and more detailed than the figures around him, and he therefore stands out above the crowd. Before and behind him are members of military marching bands. In the distant crowd march delegations bearing banners from their hometowns in a manner mirroring the conventions of contemporary Belgian parades and spectacles. Banners and flags bearing the insignia of *Les XX*, advertising *Colman's Mustard*, announcing the troubling and oxymoronic *Pork Butchers of Jerusalem*, and proclaiming the



FIG. 12

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, 1898. Copper etching on paper heightened with colored pencil, 24.8 × 35.5 cm (9 3/4 × 14 in.). Private collection. Photo courtesy Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels.

slogans and leaders of Belgium's Socialist movement (see "The Artist as Rebel and Redeemer," pp. 71–90), adorn the architecture that frames the composition. These contemporary references transpose the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, described in the New Testament (Matthew 21:1–11), into a complex modern and local parable. Even the architecture of "Jerusalem," including caryatid figures to the right and a nineteenth-century boulevard-style building to the left, generally reflect the grandiose architecture of the Boulevard Anspach, one of the vast new arteries cut through Brussels as part of Léopold II's plan to modernize the city.³⁶

This commingling of the contemporary with the historical, and social commentary with religious procession, is carried over into the painting. It seems that several of the original inscriptions were at first repeated in the painting as well. Ensor modified and repainted sections of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, particularly some of the banners, obliterating the earlier inscriptions. In 1898 Ensor created an intaglio version of the motif (fig. 12), in which the painting's composition is reversed into a mirror image and reinterpreted with great fidelity. In it, several of the political, cultural, and commercial slogans that are included in the 1886 drawing *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66) are repeated. Because of the reiteration of these texts, it has been speculated that several of the banners in the painting once also carried these inscriptions. For example, the red, white, and blue banderole or placard borne by the figure at the bottom center of the picture likely carried the words *Vive Anseele et Jesus* (referring to one of Belgium's Socialist leaders), as it did in the 1898 print, but it was reported to have been painted over by the artist.³⁷ Likewise, the standard carried in the extreme right of the painting, which now reads *Vive Jesus Roi de Bruxelles* [sic] (Long Live Jesus King of Brussels), once held a longer phrase that is barely legible through scrawled lines of red paint.³⁸ The large yellow flag at the left center of the painting has recently been discovered to have carried the words *Inventeur des insectes belges invincibles* (Creator of the Invincible Belgian Insects), a satirical reference to the Belgian national anthem (fig. 13).³⁹ It has been suggested by a number of scholars that Ensor painted out these slogans in order to depoliticize the painting, particularly in the early part of the twentieth century when he was being considered for a barony.⁴⁰



FIG. 13

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1). Digital scan: Michael Smith, J. Paul Getty Museum.

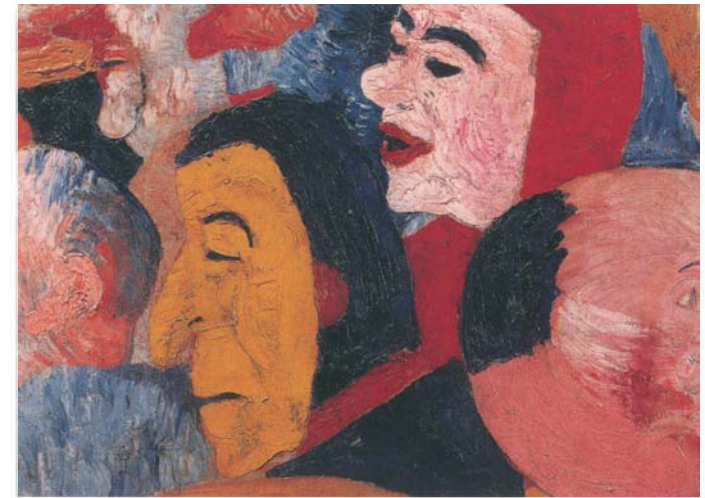
FIG. 14

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).

FIG. 15

Fernand Pélez (French, 1843–1913), *La Mi-Carême: Le Carnaval des enfants*, circa 1888. Oil on canvas, 265.8 × 201.7 cm (104 7/8 × 79 3/4 in.). Paris, © Phototeque des musées de la ville de Paris (ppp00596). Photo: Peirrain.

Despite these continuities, the differences between the first drawings and the 1888 painting are considerable. The narrative elements of the triumphal entry—the logical and comprehensible flow of the parade, the prominent and densely populated viewing platform, the accented figure of Jesus—have been suppressed in favor of a more iconic representation of the crowd, and the crowd itself has been transformed into a sea of masked and costumed figures, rendered in vulgar “poster-like” colors, and strongly individuated. As revelers in a pre-Lenten festival, these figures assume unstable and fictive identities through their masks and outlandish outfits. In such a spectacle, one’s daily identity is traded for an artificial, fantastic, and often satirical persona. Because the mask is such a multivalent image (it is at once a sign of the person wearing it, an assumed and alien character, and an emblem of power or otherness), it demands recognition as a costume. Ensor enhances the dizzying effect of this masquerade by dramatizing the artificiality of the masks worn by some characters through the device of emphasizing the differences in size and color between the figures’ false and “real” faces (fig. 14). He also sets off the obvious artificiality of masks by suggesting the presence of human faces through a more unified use of color and texture (such as the two heads that appear in the painting’s bottom right-hand corner). In this amalgam of naturalism and fantastic effects, of almost comprehensible human faces and bizarre masks, Ensor’s painting shares affinities with such works as French painter Fernand Pélez’s *La Mi-Carême: Le Carnaval des enfants* (fig. 15), a large canvas from the turn of the century. In this Naturalist painting, masks and costumes lend an element of the uncanny to a conventional genre street scene, the representation of a children’s pre-Lenten festival.⁴¹ However, Ensor’s technical exaggeration of color, line, form,



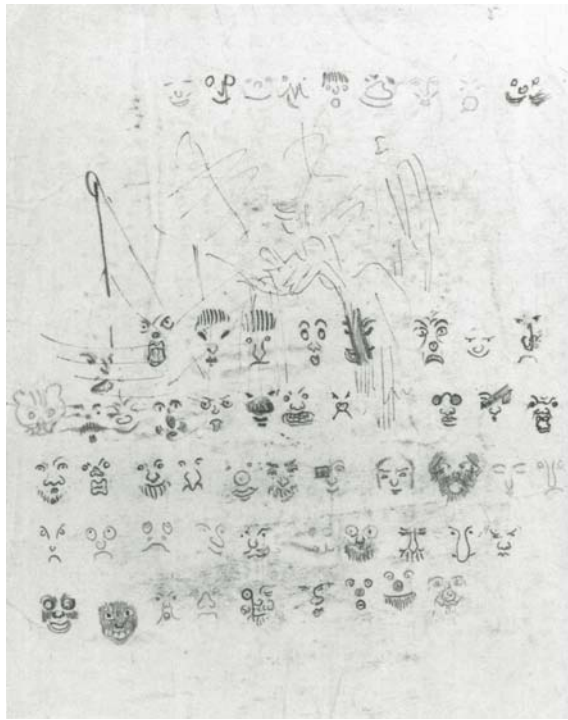


FIG. 16

James Ensor, *Series of Masks*, circa 1885. Detail from a larger sketchbook page, 22.4 × 17.5 cm (8 7/8 × 6 7/8 in.). Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum of Fine Arts (2712/69).

and composition invests his painting with a far greater sense of symbolic and expressive meaning. Rather than depicting a scene drawn from Carnival, he rendered his entire composition in the manner of Carnival itself: anarchic, chaotic, acerbic, and wildly exaggerated.

Many of Ensor's masks were based on those sold in his family's shops, which were used for the Carnival in Ostend, and which Ensor likened to carapaces:

Oh the animal masks of the Ostend Carnival: bloated vicuna faces, misshapen birds with the tails of birds of

paradise, cranes with sky-blue bills gabbling nonsense, obtuse sciolists with moldy skulls, peculiar insects, hard shells giving shelter to soft beasts.⁴²

Carnival, which takes place just before the Christian population must retreat into the sobriety of Lent, provides the opportunity for its participants to escape en masse into disguise and revelry. Ensor's writings suggest the buffoonery in this act, but also a kind of desperation endemic in the crowds, street manifestations, and social structure of modern urban life:

Ah, one must see the masks, beneath our great opal skies, and when they are daubed with cruel colors, they develop, miserable . . . pitiful in the rain, what a lamentable disorder, terrified characters, at the same time insolent and timid, grumbling and yelping, high squeaky voices or raging, macabre animal heads. . . . I have experienced this and my heart has palpitated and my bones have shaken and I have felt the enormity of the distortions and anticipated the modern spirit; a new world took shape.⁴³

In their quixotic and bizarre appearance, some of Ensor's masks suggest this modernity in a general way. Others, however, seem to allude to individuals or social types who comprised Belgian society of the 1880s and who were caricatured and parodied routinely in the popular press.

Ensor's interest in caricature is clear from his many ambitious works that examine the appearance and operations of masks, and from informal jottings in his sketchbooks (fig. 16). Art historian Xavier Tricot notes that early in his career, Ensor showed an interest in the art of cari-

FIG. 17 (OPPOSITE)

Probably Eugène Philippon, 1865, Album Page with Mounted Photograph of Busts of Members of Parliament by Honoré Daumier (French, 1808–1879),

photograph. Photo: From Jeanne L. Wasserman, *Daumier Sculpture: A Critical and Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).



FIG. 18

Anton van Cuyck, *Almanach of Grimaces*, 1858. Lithograph. Published by J. Buffa, Bruges. Bruges, Collection A. De Blieck.

cature, which likely led him to the study of English artists such as William Hogarth and Thomas Rowlandson.⁴⁴ In later years, he wrote to one of his critics:

Under the works of Botticelli, the majority of today's artists turn their noses up utterly at the great masters and satirists like Turner, Constable, Crome, Gainsborough, Hogarth, Rowlandson etc. Do you not agree with me . . . that my vision, my style and my painterly qualities give me something in common with these artists, in landscape painting as well as in satire? I feel more English than most of the English artists now slavishly imitating the early Italians.⁴⁵

Typically, caricature is a medium intended for mass circulation, in some ways an ephemeral art form satirizing current events, political developments, and prominent personalities at a specific historical moment. With some notable exceptions, including the parodic clay busts of the members of the French legislature created by Honoré Daumier in the 1830s (later cast in bronze) (fig. 17), caricatures rarely appeared on a grand scale or in permanent and elevated materials such as oil paint and canvas. One of Ensor's feats in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* was to erode the distinctions between these categories of production, creating a caricature of Belgian society on the grand, even bombastic, scale of a history painting.

In their distortions and references to animals and their varying expressions of emotion or vacuousness, Ensor's masks also reflect *grimaces*, a popular form of illustration that mapped the traits and expressions of various social types through distortions of their features (fig. 18).⁴⁶ Such mass-produced images (in this case, a work by one of Ensor's first teachers) relied on the broad popularity of

eighteenth-century physiognomic studies, most prominently Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, first published in Leipzig in 1774–78, and the Dutch physiologist Pieter Camper's *Essay on the Natural Varieties that Characterize the Physiognomy of Men* (1791). In Lavater's physiognomy, a vast range of human faces and heads, often likened to animal features, was provided as an index of character and social status. The belief that facial structure was also a measure of human development, with facial angles operating as indices of "advanced" or "primitive" stages of the human race, was put forth by Camper.⁴⁷ In the early nineteenth century, a period of emerging European-wide nationalist consciousness, these studies in turn supported treatises on national and ethnic "types," such as Gottfried Schadow's *National Physiognomies* (1835), a systematic study that helped to shape the terms of racial and ethnic coding in the later nineteenth century.⁴⁸ The Positivist underpinnings of this discipline provided the basis for much nineteenth-century anthropological and ethnographic investigation, and for a range of sciences founded on a belief in human taxonomy.⁴⁹ With their sources in part in this determinist science, the popular *grimaces* mapped class, ethnicity, occupation, gender, nationality, and health, providing humorous panoramas of contemporary society while also enforcing social stereotypes.⁵⁰ Indeed, the very notion of the stereotype (repeated facial and other bodily features so familiar that they can be read like texts) was the stock and trade of caricature that circulated in mass-media publications.⁵¹ Such codes of human appearance, read as keys to human character, became especially significant during Europe's most rapid period of industrialization and colonial expansion.⁵² With the movement of rural populations into urban centers,

the growth of urban cosmopolitanism, the displacement of Jews and other persecuted populations from Eastern and Southern Europe, and an increase in racial consciousness stemming from the growth of empire into Africa, Asia, and Oceania, such indices provided reassurance to the European audience in the form of humor and satire.

The carnival masks that Ensor used as props in his paintings were also shaped by such typologies. The masks in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) represent both stock carnival masks, masks drawn from Asian and other world traditions,⁵³ and caricatures of both famous and obscure contemporary Belgians.⁵⁴ As Legrand notes, masks allowed Ensor the freedom to play with the appearance, and to tweak the social positions, of his contemporaries.⁵⁵ So strong was the association between the masks and contemporary personalities that as late as the 1930s, their identification was a kind of parlor game practiced by Ensor's neighbors in Ostend and beyond:

The inhabitants of the little town of Ostend and its surroundings—and I think that these reach all the way to Brussels—are looking for the hundreds of faces that are visible in this picture, which takes up a large part of the wall. They are looking for similarities with or references to the famous and not so famous people in their small or in their large circle of acquaintances. Thus the head, as Ensor himself had pointed out to me, has been called Stresemann. In the case of another one, similarities with Herriot have been detected, which, however, have eluded me. And if a visitor has succeeded in finding yet another new similarity among all of these faces, he will feel proud and happy having understood the entire artistic and spiritual content of this picture. By the way,

Belgian artists told me that still today every visitor directs his ambition towards enriching this list of identifications with new names.⁵⁶

Art historians have also ventured to decode the meaning of this painting by associating specific masks with figures from Ensor's intimate life.⁵⁷ However, it appears that Ensor himself did not wish to fix his work by identifying individuals, signs, symbols, or any other element of his composition.

While *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* is now universally regarded as one of the most radical and important achievements in European art of the nineteenth century, it was seen and known only to a few of Ensor's intimates until late in his life. The catalogue of the exhibition society *Les XX* for 1889 lists the painting as one of Ensor's many submissions that winter. Had it been exhibited in February 1889, it would have been on view just before Brussels's Mardi Gras, in which case the painting would have acted as a kind of distorting mirror held up to the "real-life" revelry, masquerade, and street politics of the city of Brussels. Its multiple satires, parodies, and critiques would have had immediate and bitter currency. However, whether due to the artist's ill health in the winter of 1888, his possible qualms about exhibiting the canvas, or, most likely, to the fact that the painting was not finished in time, it was not sent to the exhibition.⁵⁸ While it has been taken for granted in the Ensor literature that *Christ's Entry* was rejected by *Les XX*, Stephen McGough has pointed out that Ensor himself may have held the canvas back.⁵⁹ "Unsullied by exhibition," in Ensor's later words, the painting remained in the artist's studio, rolled up because no wall was large enough to support it until his move to the home he inherited from his uncle in 1917.⁶⁰ There, the painting was

installed in the artist's sitting room for the rest of his life. With the exception of two large retrospective exhibitions, one in 1929 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and the other in the galleries of the Gazette des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1939, *Christ's Entry* was seen only by the artist's visitors during his lifetime. These included some of the leading Expressionist artists in Europe, among them Émile Nolde in 1911 and Wassily Kandinsky in 1917. By Ensor's death in 1949, the painting was understood by his biographers and admirers to be his artistic testament, a manifesto-like demonstration of his thoughts and opinions, his training and experimentation, and a radically new formulation of painting as a medium of emotion and invention.

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889 is a political painting without a clear political message; a panorama of Belgian society with ambiguous references to individual identities; a parade that is simultaneously Mardi Gras festival, political demonstration, and religious spectacle; an artistic manifesto with a hidden program; a religious painting that is resolutely secular; a vertiginous display of perspectival systems, multiple brush techniques, and garish colors that challenges prevailing tastes; and a curious hybrid of poster, caricature, and history painting. From the tiny confines of his attic studio and the mythologizing bent of his imagination, Ensor invoked the consensus, comfort, and reassurance of a vision like Jan Verhas's parade of schoolchildren in order to invest it with the anxieties and transformations of his age. Castigating those playing at Empire—within personal, political, religious, and artistic arenas—and asserting an independent, satirical, and moral vision of modernity, Ensor created a grandiose *grimace* that resonated with the aspirations of his generation to remake the world.

THE CITY, THE STREET, AND THE URBAN SPECTACLE

The setting for *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) is a vast boulevard, “the modern artifact par excellence,” according to urban historian Anthony Vidler.⁶¹ The panoramic foreground and radically telescoping perspective of *Christ's Entry*, the painting's dizzying mobility of viewpoint, and above all its throngs that threaten to engulf the viewer, articulate the experience of the modern city. By setting his monumental satirical painting in a vast boulevard, Ensor selected one of the most potent symbols of Belgium's new urban order, for the Brussels that Ensor's Christ entered was a city in remarkable physical transformation in the 1880s. As urban historians Henri and Paul Hymans stated in that decade, when Léopold II assumed the throne in 1865, a new chapter in the history of modern Belgium was initiated.⁶² Under the influence of Napoleon III's Paris, Léopold II transformed Brussels from a sleepy town into a modern imperial city. Even before he became king, Léopold developed plans for grand boulevards flanked by unified beaux-arts facades; punctuated by parks, monuments, and monumental new civic buildings; and connected by new transportation and sanitation systems, rendering Brussels the material representation of the power and prosperity he envisioned for his reign. By

1887 the Hymanses could write, “Contemporary Brussels changes every day. And it would take an infinite sequence of instantaneous views to fix its mobile physiognomy.”⁶³ It is this new, changeable, scenographic Brussels that Ensor gives us in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, and its many street spectacles and manifestations that he conflated into his phantasmagoric urban vista.

However, it is not Léopold's controlled, orderly, authoritarian Brussels (fig. 19) that Ensor represents, but its nightmarish double, the maelstrom described by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* (1862), a place of turmoil and anxiety.⁶⁴ In Ensor's painting, the lack of any reference to a skyline or distinguishable architectural monuments; the visual movement suggested by the multiple flags, banners, and bunting that snake their way throughout the composition; and the jarring colors create the sense of the street as both chaotic and amorphous. In particular, the perspectival lines that converge high in the background reinforce the sense of claustrophobia caused by the improbably condensed crowd in the foreground. Like Gustave Caillebotte's monumental canvas *Paris Street; Rainy Day* of 1877 (fig. 20), Ensor pictures an orthogonal view of a vast boulevard, splayed open in the extreme foreground,

FIG. 19

Photographer unknown, *View of the Boulevard du Nord at the Place De Brouckère*. Archives de Saint-Luc, Brussels. Reproduced in Yvon Leblcq et. al., *Bruxelles*,

construire et reconstruire: Architecture et aménagement urbain 1780–1914, exh. cat. (Brussels, Crédit Communal de Belgique), 1979, p. 62.



funneling rapidly backward, and rendered as though from the perspective of a *flâneur*. However, in radical contrast to the complex geometries and orderly recession into the background that articulate the modern city of Caillebotte's rigorously organized canvas, Ensor's urban vista is obscured by crowds, banners, and placards, making it ultimately unlocatable.⁶⁵ And in even more dramatic contrast to Caillebotte's canvas, which is dominated by a bourgeois couple and includes other figures engaged in unremarkable daily activity, Ensor's mob approximates the cacophonous description of Carnival offered by Belgian writer Albert Mockel in 1887:

People went down to the fair, from which the boom-boom hovering over the center of the city was an echo of rumbling cacophony. An enormous surge of idlers was strolling confusedly on the boulevards . . . thousands of lights penetrating the darkness of their blinking eyes, separated in a bizarre splendor the sparkling crudeness of the gilding and the soiled banners. A deep din swelled in the air, interrupted incessantly by the bumping noises of the orchestras, whose rhythmic racket was haltingly seconded by harsh shouts of the clowns: a doubtful harmony. Here and there was lighted obstinately the cruelty of several electric beacons varnishing with a pallid light the faces of the blind bourgeois and streaking the air with long, slender, powdery rays. And in among the storm of the tom-tom and the lights peacefully moved the wave of strollers whose placid faces take on a sinister and cadaverous air under the bluish flash of the electric lamps . . . beneath their eyes all the sickness and morally hideous sights of the old world. Unfair lawyers, infamous bakers, priests, rabbis, and cooks, a great lady hiding a tumor in the fullness of her skirt, butchers,



FIG. 20 (OPPOSITE)

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894), *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 212.2 × 276.2 cm (83½ × 108¾ in.). Art Institute of Chicago, Charles and Mary Worcester Collection (1964.336).

pastry-cooks, journalists, and hypocrites, all went to the footlights under the jeering that indignation brought to the public, all passed penitent and burning without pity, whereas, from the height of its bloody tribunal the clown bellowed in order to curse them with great bursts of resounding imprecations. . . .⁶⁶

The urban space that Ensor creates is one of mass spectacle and physical confusion. Like Mockel's description of Carnival, it represents the claustrophobic, artificial landscape of the boulevard teeming with the most base and ironic of civic virtues embodied by carnival revelers.

Carnival is traditionally understood to represent a reversal of power, a time when the common people assume control and normal authority breaks down. Celebrated before the beginning of Lent, it is an extravagant last fling in which all appetites are expressed, and slaked, in public. It is also a time when, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, laughter, festivity, and base bodily functions operate as important agents of social release and renewal.⁶⁷ In this Rabelaisian sense, it is the moment that the hierarchies of church and state are subverted through a mass display of excess. Carnival is a festival of irreverence. No physical act is too grotesque to mime, no person too sacrosanct to parody, no taboo too stringent to name. Representing Léopold's orderly city, the symbol of Belgium's apotheosis as a European power, as profoundly out of control in the throes of Carnival, Ensor claimed the street as a site of resistance to the new urban order.

Ensor first lived in Brussels while he was a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the late 1870s. It is not hard to imagine the amazement of the small-town adolescent at the spectacle, scale, and congestion of the urban scene. When Ensor returned to Ostend in 1880, he began

to paint views of his hometown from the bird's-eye perspective that Impressionists Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Gustave Caillebotte had used to represent Paris in the 1870s, imbuing the small town with an urban quality. When Ensor moved temporarily back to Brussels in 1885, accompanied by his mother, sister, and aunt, he lived on the Boulevard Anspach, one of Brussels's new arteries, across from the Bourse, one of Léopold II's new public monuments. In that year, the artist painted a view of the city entitled *Brussels Town Hall* (fig. 21). Locating himself and his viewers at the level of the boulevard rooftops, he

FIG. 21

James Ensor, *Brussels Town Hall*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm (39½ × 31¾ in.). Liège, Musée d'Art moderne et d'Art contemporain (AM 64/218).

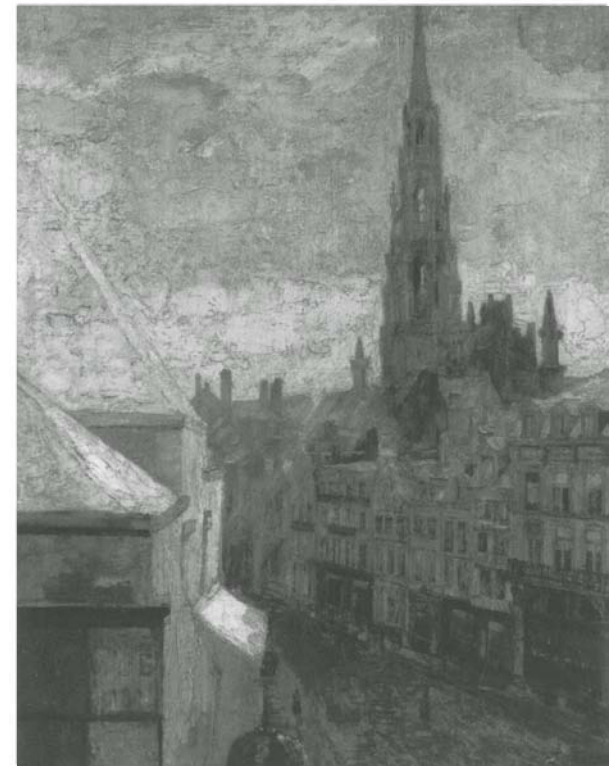


FIG. 22

James Ensor, *House on the Boulevard Anspach*, 1888. Drypoint, 13.4 × 8.5 cm (5¼ × 3⅜ in.). Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts (1988-B20-1).



again assumed the perspective that had been employed in several views of Paris by Caillabotte in 1878.⁶⁸ Although populated by a few figures who add anecdotal detail to this early morning view, the real subject of Ensor's painting seems to be the opalescent light that radiates from the cloudy sky and flattens the urban architecture below. The steeple of the city hall in the background, extending beyond the upper edge of the canvas, dominates the surrounding buildings. In this painting, Brussels is represented as an Impressionist cityscape, its early morning commerce quietly animated through the agency of light.

Ensor again took a room on the Boulevard Anspach from late 1887 to early 1888, a location that he memorialized in an etching of 1888 (fig. 22). The building, extending almost the entire height of the compressed space, appears monumental and imposing in relation to the tiny figures who march in a regimented fashion past it along the boulevard in the extreme foreground. Large awnings, shading the shops on the building's ground floor, extend upward from the crowd. In contrast, the side street represented to the left of the building is nearly empty. In the distance, along this axis, the smaller-scale buildings of older Brussels can be seen, miniaturized by the imposing giant in the foreground. The Beaux-Arts detailing is rendered with fidelity by Ensor, down to the decorative iron balconies that surround two of the stories, a stone cartouche

in the center of the facade, and the bull's-eye windows in the attic story. A banner bearing Ensor's name hangs from the lowest cornice, on the building's corner, just over the water barrel. In this print, in contrast to the 1885 painting, architecture seems monumental and authoritative in relation to the crowd, which is dwarfed at its vast base.

In a radical departure from the earlier Impressionist view of the city, or the emphasis on architectural scale and ornament in the 1888 etching, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) exaggerates the city as a place of crowds and chaos. As opposed to the historical growth of cities until the mid-nineteenth century, which developed by accretion within neighborhoods and districts, the planning and engineering of long, wide boulevards systematized and homogenized the urban landscape. Envisioned and implemented by Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann in Napoleon III's Paris of the 1850s and 1860s, wide, gaslit boulevards, stretching as far as the eye could see, lined with trees and providing open space for mass transportation, became the artifacts and avatars of urban modernism and progress.⁶⁹ Providing new opportunities for centralized business (for example in the new department stores), novel entertainments, rapid transit, and, as attested to in Naturalist literature and Impressionist painting, new forms of pedestrian visual and psychological experience, the boulevard transformed urban life and consciousness. Charles Baudelaire wrote about the new sensations of mobility and anonymity offered by the boulevard, its implacable artificiality stimulating a new modern identity and pattern of social relations.⁷⁰ The crowded boulevard, a triumph of social and mechanical engineering, also engendered the sense of displacement and alienation: "I am a stranger to these new boulevards without turns, without incidents of

perspectives, implacable in their straight lines; no longer feeling like the world of Balzac, but bringing to mind some American Babylon of the future.”⁷¹

This sense of an “American Babylon,” the symbol of an imminent collapse of social integrity, was stimulated by the density of crowds that populated these new urban spaces, and by the transformation of social life into spectacle. The term “spectacle,” as examined by Guy Debord, refers to the replacement of the tangible world by reproduced images, lived human relations by public performances, and social exchanges by material commerce. Debord identifies the society of spectacle as one in which society itself becomes a commodity and intimate experience is embedded in, and shaped by, images of mass diffusion.⁷² In the later nineteenth century, participation in the urban spectacle fundamentally changed cognitive patterns as multiplying and overlapping sensory information—photographs, advertisements, department store commodities, mass transportation, rallies, parades, artificial lighting, etc.—shifted norms and practices of attention and perception.⁷³ The increasingly heterogeneous and dynamic environment of the modern boulevard, itself conceived as spectacle, reshaped and dissolved intimacy and memory.

Between 1860 and 1890, with large demographic changes in Belgium as its population shifted from agriculture to industry, Belgian cities experienced overcrowding, as well as new social and health problems that resulted from the concentration of industrial workers. The overall growth in the national population from 4,827,833 in 1860 to 6,069,321 in 1890, with a thirty-five percent increase in the population of Brussels alone, demanded the rapid creation of new housing.⁷⁴ This situation proved propitious for speculators, who provided substandard housing

at usurious prices. The greater the urban congestion, the poorer the construction of workers’ housing, which was a gold mine for real estate speculators.⁷⁵ With few sanitary facilities to accommodate the new urban density, the inner core of Belgium’s cities became increasingly vulnerable to contagious disease. A cholera epidemic in Brussels in 1866 convinced the city fathers to undertake the immense public works program that changed the face of the city.⁷⁶

In 1867, Léopold II assigned the mayor, Jules-Victor Anspach, the task of covering over the heavily polluted Senne River, which ran through the center of Brussels, and which routinely overflowed its banks. Already by 1861 Léopold had called for a master plan to build up Belgium, and in 1865 Brussels city architect Leon Suys was asked to prepare a redevelopment scheme for the city, rerouting the river into two ducts, laying down central sewer lines, and opening up land for a network of wide, modern boulevards.⁷⁷ A plan for the restructuring of Brussels by city surveyor Victor Besme inaugurated the unified pattern for the boulevards.⁷⁸ The task of covering over the Senne, begun in 1867, served as the basis for a grand restructuring of the heart of the city. The work was carried out by Anspach, in communication with Napoleon III’s Baron Haussmann, the Prefect of the Seine.⁷⁹ In place of the small winding streets that had grown along the river since the Middle Ages, wide straight boulevards were cut through, amounting to what historian Yvon Leblecq calls a “massacre.”⁸⁰ His comment refers to the controversies over the demolition of historical architecture that unfolded even as Brussels was under transformation. With the razing of the neighborhoods adjacent to the Senne, along the boulevards running over and near it (and in sites of other large urban projects), much of Brussels’s medieval and Renaissance urban fabric was destroyed. Charles Buls, the mayor

of Brussels after Anspach, came into conflict with King Léopold because of Buls's desire to protect historical architecture and his opposition to the use of the city as a mechanism of control. During his tenure as mayor, Buls was an ardent preservationist, initiating the renovation of the Grand Place and the gardens of the Petit Sablon, establishing the "Committee for Old Brussels," and even resigning his post over Léopold's plans for the "Mountain of the Arts," a grand complex of cultural institutions that threatened to (and finally did) supplant the neighborhood on the slopes of the Coudenberg.⁸¹

Two issues drove the controversies over architectural preservation versus modernization: the contest of memory and the displacement of Brussels's urban poor. For many social commentators, the new thoroughfares and neighborhoods were out of scale with the surrounding urban spaces, and in their gigantism and vast vistas, they represented an "alien, empty, memory-free new ambience," in the words of architectural historian Spiro Kostof.⁸² Although congested and polluted, the old neighborhoods slated for demolition were inhabited by a stable population that had resided in Brussels for generations. The winding streets, alleys, and impasses were the repositories of local collective memory and sites of localized commerce and control. With the demolition of these areas, local "pocket" history and identity were erased, historical domestic architecture was destroyed, and in their places were erected light-filled spaces and grand homogenous architectural ensembles.

Demolition also displaced Brussels's poor and politically disenfranchised who, moreover, tended to be the city's Flemish-speaking population. Largely relocated to new neighborhoods on the western fringes of the city, they were replaced by a new bourgeois population that took up residence along the boulevards. Composed largely of

professionals (drawn by Brussels's growing banking and business opportunities), this better-educated, more financially adept, cosmopolitan, and consumer-oriented population helped to transform the center of the city into a francophone, white-collar quarter.⁸³ Many were non-Belgians, and by 1890, nearly one in nine residents of Brussels was foreign born. The majority were German, French, or from the Low Countries.⁸⁴ The lack of memory and texture was evoked in modern districts on the margins of the city as well. Émile Leclercq, writing around 1890, described the Quartier Léopold, a wealthy district to the east of the town center laid out in the 1850s, as

a checkerboard cut by pieces, at right angles, with streets without end fringed by houses and mansions without character or beauty. The pedestrian, who becomes lost as if in a great maze, searches in vain for some corner, some curving lines, some sign which would help him to get out of this annoying labyrinth. It is the triumph of mediocrity . . . of industrial design, of depressing sumptuousness.⁸⁵

In addition to the construction of Brussels's new boulevards, Léopold fostered the development of individual monuments and public buildings. Because he favored historicist architecture that evoked associations with triumphalism, the city became increasingly embellished with Neoclassical and Neo-Renaissance edifices.⁸⁶ The most grandiose of these was architect Joseph Poelaert's Palais de Justice, begun in 1866 and completed in 1883. This behemoth, described by poet Paul Verlaine as "Babel-like,"⁸⁷ required the demolition of nearly 26,000 square meters of old neighborhoods, and the displacement of all of their working-class inhabitants.⁸⁸ As suggested by Jean Baes's



FIG. 23

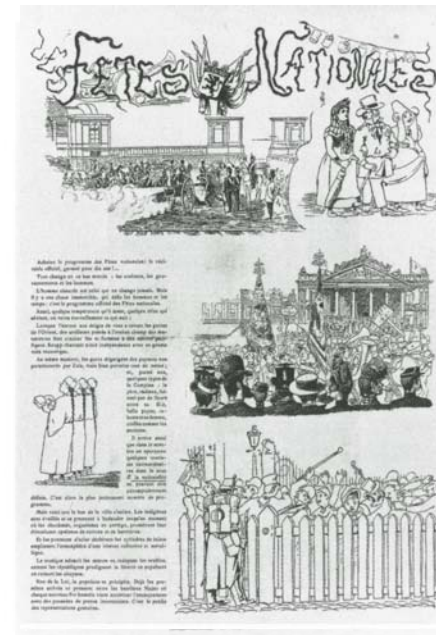
Jean Baes (Belgian, 1848–1914),
La Palais de Justice, late
nineteenth century. Oil on canvas.
Museum of the City of Brussels.

FIG. 24

“Fêtes Nationales,” cartoon
appearing in *Le Patriote Illustré*,
September 18, 1887, p. 300.
Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale
Albert Ier.

painting *La Palais de Justice* (fig. 23), the building was radically out of character with its neighboring urban tissue. Its monumental scale and eclectic classical detailing imposed a towering imperial presence, and a sense of official surveillance, over the abutting medieval, working-class districts. Other projects, such as the monumental neo-Roman Bourse, built on the Boulevard Anspach between 1871 and 1873 by Léon Suys, and the Passage du Nord (1882), caused the heart of the city to be in a perpetual state of demolition and construction around the time that Ensor first visited Brussels. Although located to the east, the exhibition halls, monument, and arcade of the Cinquante-naire (1880; later expanded for the 1897 Brussels International Exposition), the celebrations marking Belgium’s fiftieth anniversary of independence, also represented a new urban complex that expanded and changed the character of the city. A relative backwater at the turn of the nineteenth century, Brussels had become an imperial and bourgeois city by the time Ensor portrayed it in 1888.

As Baron Haussmann had demonstrated in Paris, the broad boulevards assisted officials in their direct surveillance of the public. The new boulevards of Brussels supported a more subtle form of control in their accommodation of the numerous official street spectacles and manifestations that punctuated Léopold’s reign. The king recognized the value of public spectacles that reinforced national and civic devotion, and he encouraged and



inspired such public events as the parade of schoolchildren represented by Jan Verhas (fig. 3), commercial parades, and the annual independence day celebrations. For example, the boulevard Anspach served as the parade route for the independence day festivities of 1887. As a cartoon from the September 18, 1887, *Le Patriote Illustré* portrays (fig. 24), on the boulevard, merchants and musicians bearing commercial and civic regalia consorted with a crowd composed of military personnel, bourgeois men and women, “peasants” (according to the accompanying commentary), and tourists of indeterminate nationality. Such a mingling of social classes, genders, and nationalities was monitored in these circumstances by official authority. Within the context of an imperial spectacle, the boulevard became an instrument of social management.

The banners and signs included in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) repeat the forms and bombastic content of the ubiquitous props used in such celebrations. The banner that reads *Hail Jesus, King of Brussels* in the right foreground provides the satirical double for official "joyous entries," and the standard bearing the words *Doctrinaire Fanfares Always Succeed*, in the center of the composition to the left of Jesus, is surmounted by a decoration that repeats the guild symbols historically borne in civic parades. Finally, the red, white, and blue banners and bunting, and the black, red, and gold banner to the immediate left of the viewing platform, bear the colors of the French and Belgian states. These are all references to officialdom.

The red banner announcing *Vive la Sociale* at the top of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, painted in the signifying red color of the Socialist party, lampoons the anti-authoritarian forces that challenged the imperial authority of the boulevards. At the same time that the new boulevards embodied the official character of the government, they also operated as vehicles of subversion. Their size accommodated large manifestations just at the time when Socialist organizations began to agitate for political participation in Brussels and Anarchist groups rallied to dissolve the government. A mass demonstration for universal suffrage held on August 15, 1886, for example, one of the first and largest Socialist actions in Belgium, was enacted on the grand boulevards of the city. Held on Belgium's national independence day, this political intervention undermined the imperial messages of unity and reassurance conveyed by the parades, floats, banners, and spectacle of the national celebration. This collision between the symbols of imperial nationalism and the left-wing appropriation of the boulevards was probably

witnessed, and perhaps even attended, by Ensor.⁸⁹ Susan Canning speculates that the commingling of political symbols and slogans in *Christ's Entry* might have been directly inspired by these simultaneous dissonant celebrations of August 15, 1886. Ensor's enigmatic term "Vive la Sociale" or "Long Live the Social," in place of a more direct appeal to Socialism, confuses and flattens the meaning of any political doctrine. Within Ensor's urban setting, all political messages are contradictory.

Just as the new boulevards provided scenographic backdrops for imperial and dissident demonstrations, they were also sites of religious festivals. During religious observances throughout Belgium, urban streets became the backdrops for processional reenactments of sacred events, framing fictive scenes of Christ's Passion and other sacred tableaux. In the Procession of the Holy Blood in Bruges, dating to the twelfth century, biblical characters are depicted in floats and tableaux, accompanied by bands and military escorts, and on banners representing parishes, guilds, and local societies.⁹⁰ Throughout Belgium, there are today a profusion of festivals that include similar *tableaux vivantes* and historical reenactments. Rich in pageantry, costuming, elaborately painted flags and backdrops, and including enormous figures rising well above human height, such festivals provide spectacles in which the historical, the political, the sacred, and the commercial intermingle. In the town of Furnes (Veurne), for example, representations of the Passion of Christ, including an actor dressed as Jesus riding a donkey, sanctify public space through the Procession of the Penitents (fig. 25), while also providing an opportunity for a street fair and its attendant commercial interests.⁹¹

There are numerous references to these festivals in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. The most notable, of

FIG. 25

Unknown photographer, *Christ Entering Jerusalem [Procession in Furnes, Belgium]*, circa 1900. Vignetted photographic postcard, 9 × 14 cm (3 × 5½ in.). Collection of the author.



course, is the representation of Jesus at the center of the composition. There is the suggestion that, like the actor performing in the Procession of the Penitents in Furnes, or his corollaries in the multiple Belgian festivals of religious reenactment, the appearance of Jesus on a city street has been routinized through masquerade, anticipated rather than miraculous to the blasé urban dweller. In addition to the inattention of the crowd in the foreground, such an allusion is made through Ensor's other references to religious *tableaux*. Along the left side of the painting, severely cropped by the edge of the canvas, is a large banner that contains the image of a small child wearing a halo, a familiar type of prop held aloft during religious processions. There are also ambiguous details in the painting that may refer to religious reenactments. One is a small group of figures in the foreground that seems particularly staged, viewed just over the bishop's right shoulder and preceding the marching band, that Ensor later adapted as the motif *Singing Masks* in the 1920s (fig. 10). A figure in a white mask is one of the few characters in the foreground with enough space

around it to reveal its torso, separating it from the crowd. Four others, including one in blackface set against a red veil and one in whiteface wearing a crown, form a semi-circular frame for this central figure. The configuration of this group, and the indication of a gap around it, suggests that it is suspended within the multitude, resembling a *tableau vivant* of a Lamentation scene. Such a recognition, in concert with the reference to the religious banner, renders the nature of Jesus' performance enigmatic. As we shall see, the ambiguity of Christ's identity is a crucial component of the painting, and of Ensor's parody of Belgian life.

Diane Lesko has demonstrated that *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* is indebted to the tradition of caricature both for its sardonic content, and for its formal structure. Representations of cities from the British satirical tradition, such as George Cruikshank and Henry Mayhew's *London in 1851* (fig. 26), suggest the chaos and tumult of the city through the condensed packing of the crowd, the overwhelming number of simultaneous anecdotal incidents, the un-natural skyless claustrophobia of the urban architecture, and the presence of commercial and civic texts, all viewed from a bird's-eye perspective. By lowering the viewpoint on this tumultuous scene of crowding, Ensor established a visual trope that would be played out with increasing frequency in the following decade. It is the view of what Marshall Berman calls "the archetypal modern man . . . a pedestrian thrown into the maelstrom of modern city traffic . . . a man alone contending against an agglomeration of mass and energy that is heavy, fast, and lethal,"⁹² as described in the work of Charles Baudelaire and Émile Zola. In both Edvard Munch's oil painting *Evening on Karl Johan* (fig. 27), and Ludwig von Zumbusch's satirical representation of the coming of spring printed on the cover of the German journal *Jugend* (fig. 28), several of the

FIG. 26

George Cruikshank (English, 1792–1878) and Henry Mayhew (English, 1812–1887), *London in 1851*. Illustration *From 1851, or, The Adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family, Who Came up to London to 'Enjoy*

Themselves,' and to See the Great Exhibition. Published by David Bogue (London, 1851). Cambridge, Massachusetts, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.



formal devices that Ensor used to suggest crowding are repeated: in each case, the mindless and conformist crowd is suggested by the close proximity of bodies to one another, compressed so tightly that they appear as a sea of heads floating on a tide of barely undifferentiated figures. In both the oil painting and the satirical lithograph, human faces are replaced by mask-like representations: in Munch's painting, by flat, skull-like appearances, and in the *Jugend* cartoon, with linear caricatural exaggerations of facial features. Both later works suggest the forward motion of their human tides by positioning the viewpoint above the immediate foreground and by compressing the crowd into a sharply receding funnel that converges and disappears into the background.

The inevitability of the mob moving forward articulates the sense of conformity and mindlessness that social theorists at the time attributed to urban life. In the case of Munch, the vacuous skeletal faces, the contrast between the crowd on the left and the empty boulevard on the right, and the overall blue tonality of the work articulate a sense of morbid alienation. By contrast, Zumbusch's mob suggests a festive conformity, as Munich's moldy professional class follows the young siren Primavera out of the city gates and into the countryside. However, both of these works locate their crowds in specific relation to their familiar city landscapes: Munch's gaunt battalion moves along Karl Johan Street in central Christiania (the nineteenth-century name for contemporary Oslo), and its location is mapped by the tripartite facade of the Parliament building, which occupies the right center of the painting. In the *Jugend* cartoon, the rooftops and church spires of Munich line the upper edge of the lithograph. In both of these works, the cities maintain their distinct identities even if their crowded inhabitants have shed theirs.

FIG. 27

Edvard Munch (Norwegian, 1863–1944), *Evening on Karl Johan*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 84.5 × 121 cm (33 1/4 × 47 1/2 in.). Norway, Bergen Art Museum, Rasmus Meyer Collection (RMS.M.245). Photo: Geir S. Johannessen.



FIG. 28

Ludwig von Zumbusch (German, 1861–1927), *Spring*, cover illustration from *Jugend* Magazine, June 5, 1897 (II Jahrg., nr. 23). Boston Public Library.



In Ensor's painting, the city remains generalized and nearly featureless, lacking the signifying buildings of Munch's or Zumbusch's cities, or the street and commercial signs of Cruikshank's London. A strong sense of irony emerges from the collision between the specificity of the painting's title and the vague depiction of the city: "Brussels" is not identified by recognizable landmarks or historical references, but by spectacle, the kinetic environment of its new boulevards. Other than the generalized references to the new Brussels, only a small gray and white portico, directly under the *o* in the banner bearing the phrase *Vive la Sociale*, is readable as an individual building. Its presence helps to make the otherwise abstract architectural environment legible. Although dwarfed by the human throng and the surrounding cityscape, the specificity of this portico, likely referring to Léopold II's predilection for grand classical facades (like that of the Bourse) is cited here. As a shorthand reference to Léopold's increasing allegiances with Belgium's Church, financiers, and military, the classical edifice, like the boulevard itself, is a critical symbol of the kingdom. Ensor's implied analogy, between the visionary Jesus entering into Jerusalem and the secular throng populating the new materialist city, underlies the painting's commentary on the bankruptcy of Léopold's spectacular city.

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889 was intended to be exhibited in the year that France was to celebrate the centenary of the Revolution and host its international exposition, and less than two decades following the Paris Commune. As historian Susanna Barrows has observed, the reverberations of these events were the focus of scientific study in the 1880s as officials in France, and throughout Europe, became acutely concerned about the role of mobs and mass movements in political life. Hippolyte Taine's influential multivolume *Origins of Contemporary*

France (1876–1894), which emphasized the role of the mob in the French Revolution, drew attention to the notion of the urban crowd in its pathological dimensions just at the time when mass manifestations were increasingly part of political life.⁹³ His notion of a crowd was one of mental and physical disease: "mutual contagion . . . [ending] in a state of drunkenness, from which nothing can issue but vertigo and blind rage."⁹⁴

Throughout Europe, social scientists attempted to theorize about the crowd in biological or anthropological terms. Gustave Le Bon's 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* summarized and elaborated on much of this research, providing a popular study for an anxious middle-class readership. Elitist and authoritarian, Le Bon proposed that "the substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age. . . . The age we are about to enter will in truth be the era of crowds."⁹⁵ In this work, the urban boulevard, with its opportunity for assembly, provided the vehicle for the mass contagion and suggestion that transformed the individual into a bestial unit of a mob. Ensor's painting, preceding Le Bon's publication by nearly a decade, articulates this sense of anxiety about mass behavior. Its crowd, swelling into every space within the composition, transforms Léopold's coherent city into a site of chaos. In many ways, it is the gulf between the architecture and the crowd, the orderly city that is known and the dystopia asserted by Ensor, that gives the painting much of its force.

The threat of the dehumanizing city was also the focus of increasing concern in the fledgling fields of sociology, psychology, and anthropology in the 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, the morphology and cultures of the modern city were the preconditions of much new Positivist writing,

including César Lombroso's criminology and Émile Durkheim's studies of French depopulation. In scientific and pseudo-scientific writing of the late nineteenth century, the underside of the city, the necessary link to urban material progress, was understood to be contagion and degeneration. Max Nordau, the Hungarian-born physician who published the notorious anti-modernist tract *Degeneration* in 1894, proposed in many of his writings that the modern city bred immorality and a contempt for tradition, preconditions of cultural disease:

The inhabitant of a large town . . . who is surrounded by the greatest luxury, is continually exposed to unfavorable influences which diminish his vital powers . . . its population falls victim to the same fatality of degeneracy and destruction as the victims of malaria. . . . At the present time an incomparably larger portion of the whole population is subjected to the destructive influences of large towns than was the case fifty years ago; hence the number of victims is proportionately more striking. . . .⁹⁶

Urban crowding was even identified by the American physician George M. Beard in 1869 as a cause of neurasthenia, a disorder of the nervous system resulting in enervation, lassitude, and a diminution of vigor. His popular 1879 book *The Treatment of Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)* proposed that the disease was brought about by a surfeit of stimulation in the modern urban milieu.⁹⁷

By 1903, however, sociologist Georg Simmel proposed that the variety of stimuli and the rapid pace of situational change of the modern city, along with its pathologies and anomie, forged a new, more intensified individualism:

The mutual reserve and indifference, and the intellectual conditions of life in large social units are never more

sharply appreciated in their significance than in the dense crowds of the metropolis because the bodily closeness and lack of space make intellectual distance really perceivable for the first time. . . . As a result, in order that this most personal element be saved, extremities and peculiarities and individualizations must be produced and they must be over-exaggerated merely to be brought into the awareness even of the individual himself.⁹⁸

Out of the crucible of mass homogenization and conformity engendered by the society of spectacle and its deracinated boulevards, a new cult of intellectualism and affectation was born.

Although Ensor's painting preceded these landmark publications by as much as a decade, his representation of the city, as Susan Canning has demonstrated, is drawn from some of the same sources, including the Naturalist writings of Baudelaire, Dickens, Flaubert, and Zola.⁹⁹ This anti-modern attitude toward metropolitan life was a ubiquitous theme in the literature of the period. In Belgium, the theme of the modern materialist city as an agent of social dissolution reached an apogee in Georges Eekhoud's *Nouvelle Carthage* (1888). Hailed as a breakthrough in Belgian vanguard literature, Eekhoud's novel used the physical setting of Antwerp and vignettes from the lives of its working class to narrate the debasement of contemporary life and mores. Factories, the port, the Bourse, the new bourgeois appurtenances, and the debased revelry of Carnival all traced the "superb, rich, Darwinist" city, whose "opulence" masked its decay, promiscuity, and destruction.¹⁰⁰ Presaging the theme of Georges Rodenbach's influential *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), Eekhoud's anti-modernism is allied with an intense nostalgia for the lost medieval fabric of the city and with it, a vanished

Christian spiritualism. Like Ensor's painting from the same year, Eekhoud's novel asserts that the loss of historical urban patterns and relationships narrates the more profound revocation of moral, spiritual, and humane values.¹⁰¹ The great social and scientific anxieties about the adverse effects of the city on human consciousness, and on the formation of mobs, that drove members of the Symbolist generation, such as Rodenbach, into nostalgic reverie, were the crucible for Ensor's radical new treatment of the city in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. However, rather than escaping the shifting political, class, and cultural identities of the boulevard, Ensor found the means to transmit their complexity.

In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, Ensor asserts an anti-urban vision, rebelling against the real crowds and symbolic meanings of the new city. He later expressed this view repeatedly in regard to his hometown of Ostend, which, like Brussels, was "modernized," in part through plans originating with Léopold:

Poor old Ostend, at the mercy of the depredations of lame architects who see no farther than their noses. Down with those who are ruining our marvelous landmarks! Unmask those moldy schemes of the improvement-mad! Blast those who are filling our wonderful ship basins! Public flogging for those who are leveling the gentle curves of our sand dunes!¹⁰²

Ensor even represented Ostend itself as a kind of displaced urban spectacle, in which urbanites seeking rest and renewal flocked to his coastal home in the summer only to sully it with their frenetic activity. *The Baths at Ostend* from 1890 (fig. 29) satirizes the concentration of follies embodied by local residents, urbanites, and other tourists

on their vacations.¹⁰³ The site of one of Léopold's residences, and of a casino that opened in 1878, Ostend was the destination of tourists from throughout Europe, in the words of Ensor, "*Le tout* elegant Brussels and the less elegant masses from Ghent . . . bathers promenading their elephantine shapes on large flat feet. . . . A rapacious tribe that sickens all sensitive souls and pollutes the lovely, delicately toned beach."¹⁰⁴ In his writings of the 1890s and thereafter, Ensor professed to deplore the development schemes for Ostend, in which Léopold ceded land to expand the park Marie-Henriette, to create new public squares, and, most egregiously, to restructure the dunes surrounding the town.¹⁰⁵ In *The Baths at Ostend*, the undulating dunes, like the anonymous boulevard, become the indifferent site of mass folly; the crowd, oblivious to its surroundings, transforms the dunes of Ensor's elegiac imagination into a reproduction of urban congestion, consumption, and excess.¹⁰⁶ Whether on the beaches of his beloved hometown or the boulevards of modern Brussels, Ensor represented urban culture as a collection of debased mass behaviors.

If Carnival provided the license for Ensor to insult Belgium's ruling elite, then the city—the physical display of its hegemony—provided the ideal stage for his parody. In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, the mob that moves unheedingly forward, swept away by the excesses of Carnival, the architecture that is subsumed by banners and slogans, and the grand imperial vista that collapses on itself subvert the sanitation and imperial control of Léopold's Brussels. At the same time, the rapid acceleration of public life, and the bureaucratization of all aspects of private experience (as categorized in the new sciences of psychology and sociology), gave rise to Ensor's private fantasy, and to the gestures toward resistance, which he acted out in this painting.

FIG. 29

James Ensor, *The Baths at Ostend*, 1890. Black pencil, colored pencil, and oil on wood panel, 37.5 × 45.5 cm (14½ × 17¾ in.). Photo courtesy Gallery Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp.



FIG. 30

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).



ENSOR AND THE BELGIAN ART WORLD

At the right of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), Ensor applied his signature, *J Ensor 1888*, in red paint to the towering green viewing platform that looms in the foreground. In the upper left corner of the painting, just under the word *Vive* in the large banner spanning the top of the composition, a balcony, in part obscured by flags and pennants, provides a counterpoint to this prominent feature. Painted in the same green color and displaying an inscription in the same red pigment, the balcony bears an overlapping double *X* signifying *Les XX* (The Twenty), the avant-garde artists' association that Ensor had helped to found in 1883, and that disbanded and reorganized a decade later (fig. 30). The poster for the organization's 1884 inaugural exhibition, designed by Fernand Khnopff, had been one of the first venues for this logotype on its upper left side (fig. 31). By the time of the 1889 exhibition of *Les XX*, the double-X logo had appeared for half a decade on the posters, catalogues, and other ephemera associated with *Les XX*'s exhibitions, and it was painted on the walls of its gallery spaces. Had Ensor's painting been viewed in the exhibition, as intended, the inclusion of this logotype would have created a significant echo effect, coupling the fictive space of the painting with the real exhibition space around it.

Ensor's insertion of the group's symbol in his panoramic view of Brussels also anchored the painting in the politics of the Belgian art scene. The balcony overflows with people viewing the parade. One of them, wearing a red turban-like hat, leans down, clutches the edge of the balcony,

FIG. 31

James Ensor, Poster for the First Salon des XX, 1884. Colored ink on paper, 87.9 × 60.1 cm (34½ × 23¾ in.). Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Archives de l'Art Contemporain (11357).



and vomits copiously onto the crowd below. To his right, a large rounded pink rump protrudes over the balcony's edge, and to his left stands a red-nosed man wearing what appears to be either a fool's cap or a bishop's miter, echoing that worn by the porcine bishop who leads the parade in the painting's foreground. These bawdy details mark the gap between the pious Salon representations of Belgium's nationalistic street spectacles, such as Jan Verhas's *Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* (fig. 3), and Ensor's parody of them. Implicating *Les XX* in his anarchic inversion of Léopold's Brussels, these figures also chart Ensor's increasing disaffection with that organization.

At the time that Ensor began to paint *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, his relations with *Les XX* were strained. Ill during the winter of 1887–88, Ensor had not yet submitted his paintings and drawings by the opening of the organization's 1888 annual exhibition. Two days after the opening, he wrote to the organization's guiding spirit, Octave Maus: "The illness which for two weeks has kept me absolutely in bed has made it impossible for me to send you before the opening of the exhibition the canvases and drawings that I have proposed to show there. I deeply regret this delay."¹⁰⁷ He further requested that works by emerging French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec be removed to accommodate his late submission. Eventually some of Ensor's drawings and prints were exhibited, but his paintings were not. Years later Ensor recast this event as an act of censorship when he stated, "In 1888, before a cabal fomented by jealous colleagues today forgotten, I had to withdraw all my works already listed in the catalogue. . . ."¹⁰⁸ As Susan Canning speculates, Maus may have used Ensor's illness as an excuse to screen some of his work.¹⁰⁹ According to reports in the contemporary press, it seems that Ensor's enormous composite drawing

The Temptation of Saint Anthony (fig. 72) may have been rejected from the exhibition for indecency, although it was exhibited with *Les XX* in the following year.¹¹⁰ However, Canning notes, Ensor seems to have interpreted and reported these incidents as acts of institutional aggression against his art, establishing himself as an outsider, even within his own organization.¹¹¹ Ensor's sardonic reference to *Les XX* in his polemical painting was in part conditioned by what he understood to be his inferior treatment at the 1888 exhibition, but also rooted in the artist's longer-standing agitation about his critical profile within the organization and the larger Belgian avant-garde.

Ensor was a rebellious and impressionable seventeen years of age when he traveled from Ostend to Brussels to study at the Royal Academy in 1879. As suggested by his satirical 1884 essay "Three Weeks at the Academy," he felt that his real learning took place not because of the academic system itself, but in spite of it. While at the Academy, he met a number of young artists who, like himself, were more attracted to the radical art produced by Belgian and French Naturalists and Impressionists than anything they could learn from older academic professors. Four years later, in 1883, some of these students joined Ensor in founding *Les XX*, an artist-run organization dedicated to "an independent art, detached from all official connections," and to the undermining of the Academy and the official Salon system.¹¹² The stated intention of the organization was to hold an exhibition during February of each year (one month prior to the Salon) that included works by its twenty members, and by invited foreign and domestic artists.

Under the guidance of Octave Maus and Edmond Picard, both of whom were lawyers, writers, and promoters

of modern art, *Les XX* became the leading forum for the exchange of new ideas and images in Brussels. Its annual exhibitions were also sites of artistic exploration in various media: lectures, poetry readings, and musical performances all took place within the galleries, providing unique opportunities for the fruitful interchange among art forms. Indeed, the organization became so important and prestigious internationally that Paul Gauguin, James McNeill Whistler, and Auguste Rodin lobbied to become members.¹¹³ *Les XX* was founded on the notion that it would not promote any particular style, but would specifically embrace eclecticism, enabling all artists with progressive visions to display their work. Ensor was one of the members most stridently attached to radical change. In 1886, when Whistler was proposed as a member, Ensor wrote to Octave Maus: “Why admit Whistler? His painting already smells moldy and musty. . . . Let’s seek out the young, and only grow old as late as possible. Make way for those who seek—not for those who have arrived.”¹¹⁴

Since its establishment in 1883, appeals to anarcho-socialism had run throughout the public rhetoric of *Les XX*. Red flags were hung outside of its annual exhibitions, and in 1888, the year before *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* was intended to be exhibited, the cover of its catalogue was printed in the same red-orange ink that would be associated with Socialism.¹¹⁵ Picard and Maus were both Socialists. Picard in particular had strong left-wing beliefs that he expressed in his publications on art, law, and religion, as well as in his bids for Parliament, and he politicized the group’s rhetoric through his belief that art could transform society. Émile Verhaeren made an explicit connection between the objectives of the artists’ organization and anarcho-socialism: “It is ardent, young, rough, violent; it encounters the same tendencies, the same enemies,

the same aspirations, the same objectives, the same obstacles.”¹¹⁶

The organization’s aspirations for the radical transformation of art and politics were most consistently expressed in the journal *L’Art Moderne* that Maus and Picard had founded in 1881, and which became the platform for *Les XX*. One of the more than twenty-five journals of arts and ideas that were launched in the burgeoning art and literary scene in late nineteenth-century Belgium, *L’Art Moderne* was a forum for essays on the arts and poetry, and for the reporting on new ideas appearing throughout Europe.¹¹⁷ Its polemical reviews, unsigned articles, and a masthead that did not reveal the composition of its editorial board established the journal as the voice of a radical collective, making any disagreements among the editorial board invisible to oppositional critics or the public.¹¹⁸ *L’Art Moderne* proclaimed that the one unifying feature of *Les XX* was its rejection of “the formulas passed on from generation to generation by the dubious ateliers of the academies. . . .”¹¹⁹ Further securing the far left political identity of *Les XX*, Picard used *L’Art Moderne* as a vehicle for Anarchist political theory. For example, in 1886, following a series of workers’ uprisings throughout Belgium, he published a three-part article entitled “Art and Revolution” in which he reviewed Peter Kropotkin’s *Words of a Rebel* and Jules Vallè’s *The Insurgent*.¹²⁰ In the first installment, he attempted to galvanize artists into radical action: “The hour has come to dip our pens in red ink.”¹²¹

From the time that *L’Art Moderne* was first published in 1881, it established itself as an organ associated with “L’Art Social,” Social Tendency Art, one of the galvanizing movements of the later nineteenth century. Inspired by writer Camille Lemonnier (“I appeal to artists: be part of

your century. It behooves you to be historians of your time. . . .”¹²²), “L’Art Social” was embraced by writers and visual artists who believed that their art should serve a higher moral purpose than “art for art’s sake,” and that it could effect social transformation. In the early 1880s, “L’Art Social” was associated with the promulgation of subject matter drawn from the lives of the working class, and with an emphasis on literary and artistic Realism.¹²³ Renowned for his portrayal of laborers, the sculptor and painter Constantin Meunier created some of the most enduring images from the period. At the 1885 exhibition of *Les XX*, he exhibited wax models for his sculptures *Puddler* and *Stevedore*, announcing a new social agenda for modern monumental sculpture. Ensor was closely affiliated with this movement of artists and writers throughout the 1880s. However, he later professed disdain for such didactic work as Meunier’s: “I have never cared for the subjects which our sculptor of genius, Constantin Meunier, portrays . . . his emaciated miners, so superficial, so dull . . . a vast metallic lie.”¹²⁴ Although parodying the seriousness of “L’Art Social,” *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* is nonetheless rooted in its social agenda.

By the mid-1880s, *L’Art Moderne* and *Les XX* promoted the notion that such revolutionary social aims were linked with progressive artistic practices.¹²⁵ In 1886, *L’Art Moderne* took up the cause of Symbolism, and in that journal, as in the practice of literati throughout Belgium, “L’Art Social” and Symbolism became intermingled.¹²⁶ *Les XX* had been organized with the commitment to exhibit diverse new tendencies in the arts. Nonetheless, its exhibitions did demonstrate some stylistic uniformity. When the organization was founded, Ensor’s brooding interiors and bold sense of touch had earned him leadership within the group, and by 1885–86, his built-up surfaces, agitated

brushwork, and lightened color palette were emulated throughout his circle. However, *Les XX*’s general orientation toward Impressionism gave way to a rapid assimilation of French Pointillism, inspired by Georges Seurat in 1887; then to a moody Symbolism in 1888; and in its last years, to Art Nouveau. When Ensor sensed that his preeminence was eclipsed by these other tendencies, his response was often brutal.

For example, Ensor used his art as a satirical weapon of reprisal after *Les XX* disbanded against his will. In 1893, Octave Maus decided to dissolve *Les XX*, of which he was the secretary, and to found in its place *La Libre Esthétique* (The Free Aesthetic), a society of one hundred collectors and art enthusiasts from all parts of Belgium, of which he became the director. Ensor complained to Maus that he had never been contacted about the two meetings to discuss the group’s dissolution.¹²⁷ When the members of *Les XX* voted to disband, Ensor’s was the only negative vote. *The Dangerous Cooks*, from 1896 (fig. 32), chronicles Ensor’s reaction to these events. In this painting, Maus and Picard are represented as having executed their artists and served them up to the critics Édouard Fétis, Eugène Demolder, Camille Lemonnier, Max Sulzberger, and Émile Verhaeren, who sit at a table in the background, eating and regurgitating. Ensor includes a representation of his own head served on a platter by Maus. A sign neatly driven into his skull reads *Art Ensor*, a pun (when read aloud in French) on “Haereng Saur,” pickled herring, as suggested by Ensor’s small, fish-like body. Other *Vingtistes*, such as Anna Boch as the plucked chicken hanging from the ceiling at left, or Guillaume Vogels, whose head sits in the pan held over the stove by Picard, are depicted as victims of betrayal and gluttony. Like Ensor’s other paintings of the period that pilloried the professions in contemporary Belgium (see

FIG. 32

James Ensor, *The Dangerous Cooks*, 1896. Oil on wood, 38 × 46 cm (15 × 18½ in.). Private collection. Photo courtesy Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp. Photo © Speltdoorn.



“Unholy Alliances: The Politics of Church and State in Belgium,” pp. 52–70), his grotesque parody of the fate of *Les XX* employs wit and evokes revulsion to vent his opinion.

This painting was one of many such clever, querulous assaults on those whom Ensor viewed as his antagonists. In 1886, when he received little critical attention at *Les XX* but one of his rivals was singled out for praise, he created *Calvary* (fig. 60), representing himself as a literal martyr to banal critical and institutional taste. In the following year, after Ensor’s drawing series *Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light* was labeled by the conservative press as “Lucubrations of a sick mind and pretentious products of a man who wishes to cause a scandal,”¹²⁸ the artist had responded with *The Pisser* (fig. 33). In this etching, Ensor represents a man, shown from behind, who urinates against a graffiti-covered wall on an urban street. The graffiti include the childish drawn images of figures smoking pipes and walking a dog (under which rest “real” dog droppings) and the scrawled legend, *Ensor is a fool*. The vulgarity of this image has a particularly local inflection, as it evokes the image of *Mannekin Pis*, the beloved seventeenth-century public sculpture in the center of Brussels that commemorates a little boy who put out a fire threatening the city with his urine.¹²⁹ In these, and a group of satirical images from around 1889 (including *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*), Ensor deployed local scatological humor to critique institutions of power, and to playfully poke his finger in the public eye. Of such works, and even more scurrilous images by Ensor, Maus later noted: “There were bursts of laughter and some scuffles. Impossible to exhibit such paintings. The Prosecutor would descend on us! The government would close the exhibition. . . .”¹³⁰ Nonetheless, he included them in the exhibitions of *Les XX*.¹³¹

FIG. 33

James Ensor, *The Pisser*, 1887.
Etching, 14.5 × 10.5 cm
(5¾ × 4¼ in.). Ostend, Museum
of Fine Arts (TAV 12). Photo
© H. Kessels.



Prior to the appearance of *Les XX*, Belgium had played host to other artist-run organizations that had been formed to weaken the authority of the Academy. The annual Salon, which was the showcase for academic painting and sculpture, was held alternately in Brussels, Ghent, and Antwerp, in order to accommodate the three chief arts centers of multilingual and bicultural Belgium. Works that appeared in the annual Salon were chosen and installed by a jury composed of academicians who assured a stability of style, content, and subject matter. As at the Paris Salon, the paintings of young artists, or those whose works were somewhat unorthodox, were installed in the least favorable positions. In the 1860s and 1870s, artists influenced by the model of the *Salon des Refusées* and the Impressionist group exhibitions in Paris established artists' exhibition societies that would protect and give some measure of control to emerging and unconventional artists. The *Société Libre des Beaux-Arts* (Free Society of Fine Arts), founded in the 1860s as an alternative to the annual Salon, *La Chrysalide* (The Chrysalis), established in the 1870s, and *L'Essor* (Departure), which began exhibiting in 1876, all provided such forums.¹³² In 1881 Ensor received his first review at the exhibition of *La Chrysalide*:

Among new arrivals, James Ensor seems full of promise and has attracted attention. His sketches reveal an attentive observation to the effects of light and air, a finesse in producing certain tonalities, and an extraordinary lack of banality for a beginner. There are the makings of a painter here, but there is also scorn for drawing, modeling, and perspective. M Ensor should not fool himself: talent is not complete without the science of form.¹³³

Seven years later, Ensor would parlay these attributes—his razor-sharp observations, his sensitivity to color and light, and his departures from orthodox drawing and perspective—into *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1).

Around the time that *Les XX* held its first exhibition in February 1884, a different reaction to academic conservatism was fomented by members of *L'Essor*, one that was close to Ensor's satirical sensibility. In 1885, a group of rebellious artists who were members of the relatively conservative *L'Essor* organized *The Great "Zwans" Exhibition*, an exhibition parodying the art and mores of the epoch.¹³⁴ The Anglo-Bruxellois title refers to the phenomenon of *zwanze*, a mode of mockery, burlesque, or farce that was adopted by artists in Brussels in the 1870s as a term, and an

approach to art, to use as a weapon against Academic pomposity. Allied with the art generated by the Parisian Anarchist circle calling itself the "Incoherents," *zwanze* art has been likened to the Dadaist movement of the early twentieth century.¹³⁵

Emerging from the Parisian cafe culture of the late 1870s, a phenomenon known as *fumisme* (literally, smoke-ism) became a term that referred to a parodic, skeptical, anti-institutional, and anti-academic artistic lifestyle in Paris's famous Bohemian community on Montmartre. Its mission was to counteract the affectation and hypocrisy that its participants saw in society around them by using humor and satire as a means of inverting and transgressing the daily order: "A kind of disdain for everything . . . an internal madness evidenced externally by countless buffooneries."¹³⁶ Although *fumisme* was best characterized by pranks, happenings, and ephemeral gestures, artists associated with this community produced visual arts as well.

Out of this milieu, Parisian writer Jules Lévy founded the Incoherents in 1882. This group—which included some of the leading members of Montmartre literary, musical, and artistic culture, including Rodolphe Salis, founder of the famed *Chat Noir* cabaret, and Paul Willette, publisher of *Le Pierrot*—held art exhibitions between 1882 and 1893. The first exhibition, organized by Lévy in his apartment in October 1882, was noted and chronicled in the satirical newspaper *Le Chat noir*; all subsequent exhibitions had catalogues and brochures associated with them.¹³⁷ The visual image that perhaps best summarizes the group's parodic and sometimes regressive satirical humor is Eugène Bataille's *Mona Lisa with a Pipe* (fig. 34), published in an 1887 issue of *Le Rire*. It undermines the French academic reverence for genius and originality by outfitting Leonardo's icon with a déclassé clay pipe and an evanescent halo.

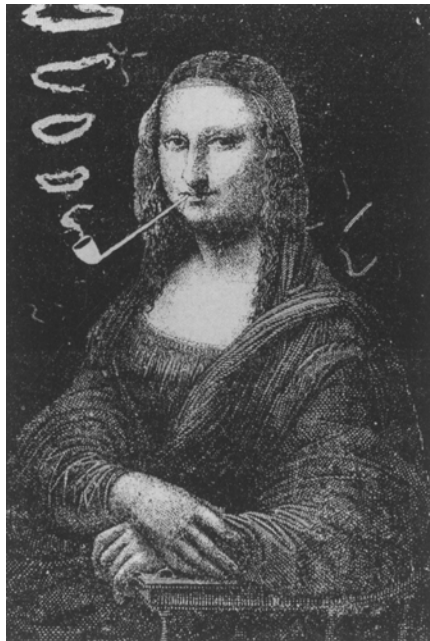


FIG. 34

Eugène Bataille (French, 1853–1891), *Mona Lisa with a Pipe*, 1887. Photo-relief illustration for "Coquelin Cadet," *Le Rire*, 22 × 15 cm (8½ × 5¾ in.). New Brunswick, Jane Vorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Acquired with the Herbert D. and Ruth Schimmel Museum Library Fund. Photo: Jack Abraham.

Ensor's parody of "joyous entries" and other imperial festivals encoded in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* falls into this tradition.¹³⁸

In *The Great "Zwans" Exhibition* and subsequent exhibitions, including *L'Exposition Universelle burlesque*, held from February through April of 1887 (coinciding with the 1887 exhibition of *Les XX* and commenting on the 1885 Universal Exposition in Antwerp), members of *L'Essor*, including Ensor, had the opportunity to parody their local art establishment.¹³⁹ Among those artists parodied were members of *Les XX*. Like their Parisian counterparts, the Brussels *zwanze* artists were associated with left-wing causes, donating funds from performances allied with their 1887 exhibition to benefit victims of a mining disaster.¹⁴⁰

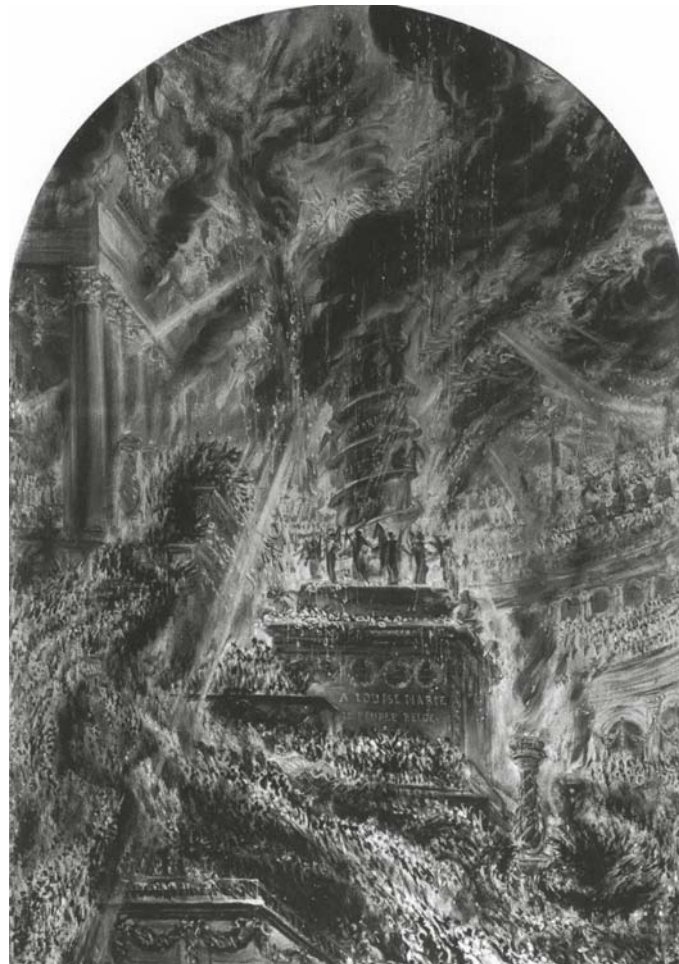
Ensor's politics are not clear-cut, although in such works as his 1885–86 series *The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibility of Light*, he seems to have reflected Picard's and Verhaeren's belief in the alliance of progressive art and Socialist politics (see "The Artist as Rebel and Redeemer," pp. 71–90). By 1888–89, as we shall see, Ensor's art reflected a vision closer to Anarchism than Socialism, and *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* seems to both reflect and parody the Socialist affiliations of *Les XX*. In 1879, two years after Ensor entered the Royal Academy, one of his new friends, the painter and poet Théo Hannon, had introduced him to his sister Mariette Rousseau, a mycologist, her husband Ernest Rousseau, a physicist and the rector of the Free University of Brussels from 1884–86, and their son Ernest. The Rousseau home operated as a kind of salon for the emerging intellectual, political, and artistic elite of Brussels and was dedicated to left-wing politics. Through the Rousseaus, the young Ensor was introduced to activists associated with the newly founded Belgian Socialist move-

ment, including Picard, Verhaeren, Belgian Workers' Party founder and leader Edward Anseele, and writer Camille Lemonnier. It was also through the Rousseaus that Ensor was introduced to Anarchist writings.¹⁴¹ The circle's belief that art was critical to the lives of working people, and their promise that intellectuals could overthrow the old order, stood out in stark contrast to Ensor's experience at the Academy. In many ways, the Rousseaus's home was Ensor's genuine academy. As we shall see, the political messages built into *The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibility of Light*, the starting point for *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, were indebted to this circle.

The Rousseau home also adjoined the museum dedicated to the work of Anton Wiertz, one of the leading painters of mid-nineteenth-century Belgium. Wiertz's *The Apotheosis of Queen Louise Marie* (fig. 35), which hangs at the Wiertz Museum, was the sketch for what was intended to be a massive, dizzying work of ephemeral public art, a 150-foot-tall painting intended to hang outside of the Royal Palace during the Silver Jubilee in Brussels in 1856. *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* is indebted to this canvas for its ambitions, the formal massing of its crowds, the idiosyncratic organization of both compressed and expansive spaces, and its spectacular content.¹⁴² It is also possible that this painting's intended venue, as the backdrop for a public spectacle, also found echoes in Ensor's canvas. Had Ensor's painting been shown at the 1889 exhibition of *Les XX*, it would have meshed with the gallery walls by using the organization's symbols and rhetoric to celebrate and lampoon it from within its own exhibition space. Echoing the red banners hung outside of the real exhibition, the streamer surmounting Ensor's composition declaring *Long Live the Social* parodied

FIG. 35

Antoine Wiertz (Belgian, 1806–1865), *The Apotheosis of Queen Louise Marie*, 1856. Oil on fabric, 100 × 70 cm (39 3/8 × 27 1/2 in.). Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique (1939).



the organization's political rhetoric by saluting social life ("Vive le *Sociale*"), rather than Socialism ("Vive le *Socialisme*").

Such a parodic view of the *Les XX*'s political orientation was likely prompted by Ensor's sense of having been marginalized by the organization. By 1888, the year in which he claimed to have been censored by a "cabal," the Impressionism practiced by members of *Les XX*, which had been in part pioneered by Ensor, was no longer seen as progressive: "These bold works that perhaps long ago were new seem nearly timid today. They are weakened by their heavy and disagreeable forms."¹⁴³ This statement was to some extent inspired by the galvanizing effect that Georges Seurat's monumental canvas, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* (fig. 36), had on *Les XX* when it was exhibited in that organization's 1887 exhibition. Enormous in scale (6 3/4 × 10 feet), methodically painted in tiny dots and crosshatched and parallel strokes of bright color, austere in its geometry, and seemingly utopian in its representation of Parisians at leisure on a blinding Sunday afternoon, Seurat's canvas announced for the Belgians a radical departure from Impressionism. In 1886, Octave Maus had seen the canvas at the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition in Paris. He had been guiding *Les XX* toward an increasingly internationalist, and particularly French, orientation, and in February of that year, several French artists (notably Renoir, Caillebotte, and Monet) had exhibited with the organization. Maus then traveled to Paris to identify new work for the 1887 exhibition.¹⁴⁴ Exhilarated by Seurat's painting, he invited Parisian critic Félix Fénéon to publish an article on Seurat's technique in a September 1886 issue of *L'Art Moderne*, and he arranged to have Seurat exhibit with *Les XX* in the following year.¹⁴⁵

FIG. 36

Georges Seurat (French, 1859–1891), *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 207.6 × 308 cm (81¾ × 121¼ in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection (1926.224).

In Seurat’s “Pointillist” technique, areas of color are fragmented into minute paired spots of purer complementary hues (red-green, blue-orange, yellow-violet), creating a sense of color “vibration.” Based on research into the science of optics by Charles Henry and others, this sense of vibration was defined by Fénéon in an 1888 article in *L’Art Moderne* as: “The individual brushstrokes combine on the retina in an optical mixture. It so happens that the luminous intensity of the optical mixture is much higher than that obtainable through the [physical] mixture of pigments. . . .”¹⁴⁶ In contrast, according to Fénéon, “the works of the Impressionists had the look of improvisation: their overall effect was summary, brutal, and approximate.”¹⁴⁷ Like many artists of his generation, Seurat took advantage of the scientific literature that had appeared since the 1830s on the behavior of light and color in nature (and of human perceptions of it), superseding previous associative color theories of the Romantics. Most notable are Michel-Éugène Chevreul’s *On the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colors* (1839), reproduced in artists’ manuals throughout the nineteenth century; and later, Ogden Rood’s study of the physics of color optics, *Modern Chromatics* (1879); and Charles Henry’s applications of experimental psychology to aesthetics in *Introduction à une esthétique scientifique* (Introduction to a Scientific Aesthetics, 1885).¹⁴⁸ The claim that Fénéon made for Seurat and his followers was that their “rigorous technique . . . produce the very effect of life; this is because to them objective reality is simply a theme for the creation of a superior, sublimated reality in which their personality is transformed.”¹⁴⁹ According to Fénéon, Seurat could bridge art and science, making him the most modern of artists.

Octave Maus’s wife, Madelaine, chronicled the appearance of Seurat’s painting at the exhibition of *Les XX* as an epiphany:

Absolute newness, sudden clarity, unheard-of translucence! The most celestial and the most contemplative poetry expressed by means of the utmost precision; painting washed clean of all untruth, resistant to all trickery; so much nobility, so much sweetness, and the genius of the painter at the service—not in any way restrictive to himself—of a principle: we were only a few for whom these landscapes marked an indescribable moment. In front of *La Grande Jatte* . . . it was a revolution.¹⁵⁰

The repercussions continued to be felt throughout the Belgian art world, and particularly in *Les XX* and *L’Art Moderne*. In 1887, for example, *L’Art Moderne* identified Seurat’s work as “a new earth, fertile and young,”¹⁵¹ and in 1888 it claimed that “a new window had been opened on art” by Seurat,¹⁵² and that opposition to Neo-Impressionism was tantamount to living in the past.¹⁵³

Ensor’s response was not reverential like Maus’s, nor did he absorb the principles and touch of Pointillism into his work as did many of his colleagues in *Les XX* (especially Willy Finch, Henry van de Velde, Théo van Rysselberghe, and Georges Lemmen). On the contrary, according to Verhaeren, Ensor eschewed Seurat’s technique and the scientific principles that it embodied:

The research of the Pointillists leaves me indifferent. . . . Indeed, they apply their points coldly and methodically between cold, correct outlines. Moreover, this uniform



and overly restrictive procedure prohibits extending [their] research, which results in an absolute impersonality in their works, so that the Pointillists only achieve one of the aspects of light—vibration—but fail to present its form.¹⁵⁴

The highly theorized principles of Pointillism, or “Neo-Impressionism,” as defined by Fénéon, were antithetical to the more subjective and spiritual approach to painting held by Ensor. Noting elsewhere that “[a]ll rules, all canons of art, vomit death,” Ensor was resolute in his disdain for doctrinaire attitudes toward art movements, or for organized and tightly defined theories that shaped the appearance and production of works of art.¹⁵⁵ It is also likely that the idealizing vision of Seurat, in which the island of the Grande Jatte provided a quiet, classicizing respite for Parisian workers, was antithetical to Ensor’s more raucous and dystopic view of the modern city. In *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*, the city is inescapable both for its inhabitants and for the audience absorbed by the painting’s scale and viewpoint. Even Ensor’s representations of leisure from the period, such as *The Baths at Ostend* (fig. 29), are permeated with the commotion of the city.

Although it would be an overstatement to claim that *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* was created as a direct answer to Seurat’s masterpiece, Ensor himself cited Seurat as part of a chronology of his career that he sketched in the mid-1890s, suggesting that the exhibition of Seurat’s painting was both a landmark event in Belgian art circles and in his memory of his own work.¹⁵⁶ In an 1887 review in *La Nation*, Émile Verhaeren had likewise singled out Seurat and Ensor as flash points in the exhibition of *Les XX*: “There was a riot in front of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* by Seurat, and a revolution

in front of the *Vision* of Ensor.”¹⁵⁷ Seurat’s analysis of light and color, and the sensational response to it within the critical community (ranging from the hostile equation of Seurat’s small marks with the bubonic plague to Octave Maus’s declaration of Seurat as the “Messiah of the New Art”¹⁵⁸) must have incensed Ensor. As noted earlier, Ensor’s rebelliousness, and his martyrdom at the hands of conservative critics, was one of the foundational stories of *Les XX*. The notion that this French artist now triumphed in the arena of color struck at the one arena in which Ensor had previously received critical accolades, and it challenged some of the artist’s deeply held beliefs both about color and light, and about his status as a radical.

From his earliest exhibitions, Ensor had been noted as a strong colorist, even among critics who otherwise disparaged his work. In fact, the analysis of color and light had been central to Ensor’s objectives as a revolutionary throughout the 1880s: “I threw away the rules that are the enemy of invention . . . the possibilities of the line seemed artificial to me, whereas those of light could accommodate the greatest of aspirations. . . .”¹⁵⁹ In 1882 Ensor wrote a statement of his intentions as an artist, in which he claimed that an artist’s concentration on color over line was a highly evolved, and spiritual, preoccupation:

Vision is altered by observation. The first type of vision, the common kind, is the simple line—dry with no attempt at color. The second is where a keener eye makes out the value and delicacy of the different shades. This type is already less comprehensible to the common man. The final kind is where the artist discerns the subtleties and manifold effects of the light, its planes and gravitational fields. These progressive investigations alter primitive vision, undermining the line and rendering it

subordinate. . . . This is how art has evolved from the Gothic line through the color and movement of the Renaissance to arrive at modern light.¹⁶⁰

Implicit in this text is Ensor's assertion of himself as the logical next innovator within this tradition. The narrative about the triumph of color over line also has nationalist implications. Since the late seventeenth century, the control and aesthetic direction of the French Academy had turned on the question of whether line or color was the primary formative element in painting. In the seventeenth century, the theoretical defense of color prevailed, largely due to the passionate writings of Roger de Piles about Peter Paul Rubens. In his theoretical defense of color, de Piles established Rubens's reputation as the predominant colorist, and the greatest artist, in the European tradition.¹⁶¹ His followers, the "Rubénistes," upheld his advocacy of color, the expression of the senses, while the "Poussinistes" argued for the superiority of line, the symbolic agent of reason. In the early nineteenth century, the academic debates between the Neo-Classicists and the Romantics built upon the earlier debates, enhancing the Flemish master's reputation in France. At the same time, following Belgian unification in 1830, Rubens became a symbol of the new Belgian state. For Ensor, who understood himself to be revising the "Flemish" tradition of color and sensuality, and to whom critics ironically referred as "the Rubens of Modernity,"¹⁶² the Belgian critical reception of Seurat, the master of color *as* reason, must have seemed traitorous.

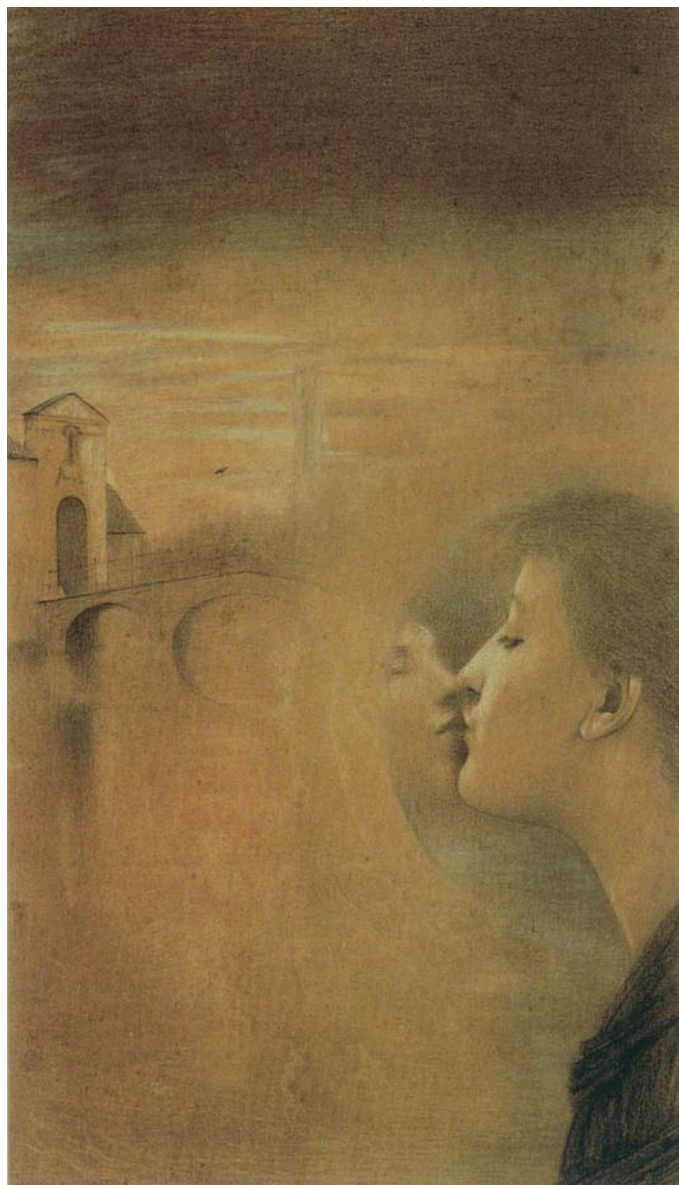
Ensor's 1882 text had also asserted the literal nobility of such investigation into light and color: "Such vision will not be widely understood. It requires long observation and attentive study. The common man will merely see disorder, chaos and impropriety."¹⁶³ Later he elaborated

on this notion of the alienation of the visionary: "Why satisfy the vile desire of the crowd . . . a desire without nobility, a curiosity that weighs heavily upon us, the super-sensitive. Let us resist communion with the mob! To be artists, let us live in hiding!"¹⁶⁴ In these statements, as in Ensor's claim to have "evolved freely" (see "A Painting and Its Paradoxes," pp. 1-19), he describes himself as isolated from both the "masses" and the art-world elites. Such a claim to alienation repeats some of the central ideas of the European-wide Symbolist movement, and a widespread tenet of early modern art, in which the conscious strategy of exclusion guarantees artistic authenticity through his alienation.¹⁶⁵

Ensor's appeals to alienation, and to the artist's need to resist modernity, had been formulated in part in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s in the writings of the literary Decadents in Paris, including Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Joris-Karel Huysmans. The Decadents advocated a rejection of scientific Positivism in art and literature in favor of the cultivation of their own subjective and often irrational experience. Further, they maintained a rhetoric of pain as a source of artistic redemption. In turn, the authors were themselves accorded attributes of a cultivated alienation and disintegration.¹⁶⁶ Such states of poetic affliction became the hallmarks of Symbolism, the artistic movement that acknowledged that an internal, psychological world has primacy over material reality, and that the world of the interior can be expressed through symbols or linguistic signs. As we shall see, this generation's doctrine of alienation and divination fostered a spiritual revival in which religious images and references came to play a significant role. Ensor was among the artists who most consistently worked in this direction.

FIG. 37

Fernand Khnopff (Belgian, 1858–1921), *With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Cries for the Past*, 1889. Graphite, colored pencil, and white chalk on gray-blue paper, 25.5 × 14.5 cm (10 × 5¾ in.). The Hearn Family Trust.



Ensor's use of masks, skeletons, and other objects to symbolize states of emotion, and his exploration of formal strategies to evoke ideas rather than represent material reality, also allied him with Symbolism. Symbolism was first identified as a cohesive movement or sensibility in a manifesto published in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* by Jean Moréas in 1886: "Symbolist poetry endeavors to clothe the Idea in a form perceptible to the senses."¹⁶⁷ In the same year critic Gustave Kahn wrote: "The essential aim of our art is to objectify the subjective (the externalization of the Idea) instead of subjectifying the objective (Nature seen through the eyes of a temperament)."¹⁶⁸ In Belgium, in an 1886 article about Fernand Khnopff, Émile Verhaeren defined Symbolism as an uneasy retreat from the present:

Modern imagination is strongly drawn toward the past, [undertaking] an enormous scientific inquiry into unfamiliar passions over a vague and as yet unidentified supernatural, which has urged us to reincarnate our dreams and even our fear and trembling before the new unknown of this strange Symbolism which interprets the contemporary soul as antique symbolism did for the soul of ancient times. But it is not our faith and our beliefs that we put forward; on the contrary, it is our doubts, our anxiety, our problems, our vices, our despair and probably our agony.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, in 1880s and 1890s Brussels, Symbolism was understood to be associated with the refined, elite, and literary pursuit of nostalgia as embodied by such works as Khnopff's 1889 *With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Cries for the Past* (fig. 37). In this drawing, the delicacy of the artist's touch, the images that seem to dissolve, and the empty, filmy quality of the background articulate a vision disem-

bodied from the material world. The pale, dreaming woman in the foreground who kisses her reflection in a mirror denotes the languorousness and solipsism of this sensibility. The title expresses the desire to retreat into the past not through any physical action, but through sensations of loss, desire, and nostalgia. Establishing an affinity with the poet Grégoire Le Roy, whose first collection of poems was entitled *My Heart Cries for the Past*, Khnopff solidifies a partnership between the arts. Founded on the notion that visual images could escape their ties to materialism, such links with poetry, music, or other non-mimetic arts proposed the visual arts as springboards for the imagination, and for ambiguity, rather than as Positivist mirrors of the material world.

Verhaeren's elevation of Khnopff to revolutionary leader of this new tendency must have been especially bitter for Ensor. At the 1886 exhibition of *Les XX*, Ensor received little critical notice when he exhibited his canvas *Russian Music* (1881; Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels), an interior scene representing a woman playing a piano for an attentive listener. Khnopff also showed *On Listening to Schumann* (1883; Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels), a painting that Ensor considered a plagiarism of *Russian Music*, in the same exhibition.¹⁷⁰ Ensor complained in a letter to Octave Maus that Khnopff's composition was a direct derivation of his own, and he developed a deep antipathy for Khnopff and his defenders following that incident.¹⁷¹ Verhaeren's three-part exegesis on Khnopff's work, appearing within months of these events, certainly served to alienate Ensor from his organization. Seurat's triumph in the following year further exacerbated Ensor's sense of rivalry and injustice, as well as his sense of opposition to prevailing tastes.

Ensor's sardonic, earthy, and fractious work is in many ways antithetical to the elegiac vision of Khnopff. Nonetheless, in his desire to use art as a conduit to a deeper understanding of human experience, Ensor helped to shape the terms of Symbolism as a social as well as an aesthetic tendency. In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, one of the few paintings that can be associated with Symbolism that overtly confronts and gives image to the modern city, Ensor critiques modernity while embracing its changeability and chaos.¹⁷² Abetted by the oppositional spirit of *Les XX*, the satirical vitality of *Zwanze Art*, the luminous palette of Impressionism, and Symbolism's disengagement from pure mimesis, Ensor created *Christ's Entry* as an anarchic intervention into the tastes, beliefs, and social practices of his generation, and as a send-up of his organization. Inscribing the painting with the banner bearing the statement *Fanfares Doctrinaires Toujours Reussit* (Doctrinaire Fanfares Always Succeed), Ensor borrowed a topical social critique from the realm of politics to parody what he surely saw as "doctrinaire" movements within his own artistic community that had seemingly displaced his own prominence. Claiming himself to be free of influence, separate from any vogue, and intent upon a quest for the spiritual, Ensor positioned himself as the enlightened outsider by virtue of whose isolation he could critique, and amend, the cultural circles within which he worked. The vomiting and defecating figures on Ensor's green balcony (fig. 30) embody his sense of bemusement at the personal, cultural, and even global duplicity that he perceived. Mining his position as enlightened social outsider, claiming a distance from *Les XX*, and dedicated to a spiritual and artistic Anarchism, Ensor painted *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* as a burlesque theater of the contemporary art scene within the broader panorama of civic life.

UNHOLY ALLIANCES: THE POLITICS OF CHURCH AND STATE IN LÉOPOLD'S BELGIUM

In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), Ensor uses Carnival, in all of its reversals and subversions, as the excuse to venture potentially reckless opinions of contemporary Belgian politics. Through its evocation of Mardi Gras, the painting operates as a manifesto of denunciation in the tradition of Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, Hieronymous Bosch, and other moralizing artists who used the visual arts to expose abuses of power.¹⁷³ The street in the foreground is not occupied by the disempowered, as one would expect from a Carnival celebration, but by the alliance of the Church, the military, merchants, and politicians. As Ensor's Jesus enters Brussels, he is preceded by what appears to be a solid wall of caricatures representing the military, religious, and political authorities of the nation. Bracketed by the grotesquely inflated bishop in the front and the vacuous marching band in the rear, this throng incorporates farcical references to individuals and circumstances that comprised both Ensor's private world and the broader political arena of the nation.

Within this group, carnival masks take the place of many of the characters' faces, lampooning and exaggerating their features. Masks transform the military marching band into a phalanx of wooden, puppet-like drones who puff and beat ludicrously on their instruments. Members

of the professional elite wear masks (and in some cases seem to reveal their own flesh-and-blood features) that sport improbably elongated noses, goggle eyes or empty eye sockets, fat cheeks, or protruding chins that are intended to disclose their deformed characters. On the left side of the composition, the winsome politician (wearing a sash of honor) to the left of the bishop, the figure of Death wearing a beaver skin hat, the ungainly adolescent facing him, a mask representing an owl, stock characters from the *commedia dell'arte*, and a kissing couple, transform the entourage into a carnivalesque menagerie. In both the 1886 drawing *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66), which preceded this painting, and the 1898 etching that reprised it (fig. 12), members of this mob hold signs hailing Edward Anseele, a leader of the Socialist Workers' Party. Ensor's mingled references to Socialism, the military, the Church, and the bourgeoisie reflect the chaotic state of Belgium in 1889, and more specifically, the artist's jaundiced view of it.

Belgium had a remarkably robust economy in the 1880s. With unprecedented wealth accumulating by the upper classes, monumental public works projects raising Brussels to the level of an international cosmopolitan capital, the infusion of new industrial wealth, and the king's

recent colonial claim to Congo, the bourgeoisie of Belgium felt that it had much to celebrate in 1889. In less than sixty years since its consolidation as an independent state, Belgium had risen from a cultural backwater to one of Europe's great Capitalist powers. At the same time, inequalities between the elites and the laboring classes were threatening to rend the fabric of the nation. A depression that had begun in 1873, with its attendant decline in wages and prices, put extreme pressure on the laboring classes. These strains were made worse by alliances formed among the king, the Liberal Party, the military, and the Catholic Church, all of which encouraged social policies that negatively affected the poor and the progressive initiatives of the left.

The 1880s was also a decade of unprecedented political instability in Belgium. During this period, the Liberal left had become disenfranchised, the right-wing Catholic Party came to command parliamentary politics, and an opposition between the religious, clerical point of view and anti-clerical forces intensified.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Belgian public life had become polarized by clashes between the policies of secularization promulgated by the left, and the heavy enforcement of right-wing policies by the Catholic government. In January 1879, an education bill had been introduced to provide funding for lay schools in an attempt to democratize and secularize the Catholic-dominated society. Within five years, this program, which was viewed as a threat to the Catholic establishment, stimulated a strong right-wing reaction, and in 1884, the Catholic Party came into power in Belgium using the liberal education initiative as its platform. The left-wing Liberals had also agitated for universal male suffrage; in contrast to its neighbors France and Germany, only ten percent of Belgians could vote in the 1880s.¹⁷⁵ The establishment Liberals, known as the *doctrinaires*, resisted, as did the Catholic Party, and on the

basis of these contentious initiatives toward democratization, the Liberal party split into two often-oppositional factions. A further issue to dominate Belgian politics of the 1880s was the debate over the terms of national military service. The old system of *remplacement* assured that young men with means, unlucky in the conscription lottery, could pay substitutes to enter the army on their behalf. The question of a mandatory military service—"personal service," supported by Socialists, left-wing Liberals, and even the military and the king, but opposed by the Catholics and conservative Liberals—further polarized the bourgeoisie and the laboring classes, and helped to shape increasingly complicated political coalitions.¹⁷⁶

At the same time, the nation, divided between Flemish-speaking Flanders, which extends just north from French-speaking Brussels, and francophone Wallonia to the south, engaged in an intensifying dispute over language and identity. The language of the Belgian elites—the government, the courts, the military, commerce, and the fine arts—was French, in part a reaction against the Dutch government from which Belgium had gained independence in 1830.¹⁷⁷ Belgium's intelligentsia, and its urban bourgeoisie, was largely French-identified, and its rural population, Flemish-identified. In the 1880s, the linguistic divide was, consequently, increasingly seen as a demarcation of power, class, and even race.¹⁷⁸ By the end of the 1880s, the Flemish Movement, fostered by intellectuals as well as the laboring classes, had exerted enough pressure on the government to legislate the use of Flemish in court cases involving Flemings, and in bilingual street signs and other official inscriptions. Although the Catholic Church was particularly strong in rural Flanders and encouraged the use of Flemish in schools and within the Church, it came into conflict with the more radical Flemish Move-

FIG. 38

“Cinquante-sept années de bonheur et de prospérité.” Cartoon appearing in *La Bombe*, August 20, 1887. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, microfilm PERM 270, 1887 (1-3, IX).



ment, which agitated for social as well as linguistic reform. The disenfranchisement of the Flemings, the lack of responsiveness of the government, the ambivalence of the Catholic Church, and a reactionary francophone movement initiated in 1886 created another layer of political discord in Ensor's Belgium of 1889. Although the Catholics in rural Flanders remained strong, the rise of Socialist and Anarchist movements fueled a powerful anti-clericalism in industrialized Flanders and Wallonia.

The Belgian Socialist Party had been formed in 1877. It was followed by several sister organizations, including the Belgian Workers' Party, the country's leading Socialist party, which was founded in 1885 and impelled by events of the following year.¹⁷⁹ In 1886, a series of strikes broke out in the industrial regions of Belgium, culminating in a mass strike in March that was unprecedented in its scale and violence. Although order was restored within a few days by the deployment of some twenty thousand troops, this was the largest and most far-reaching strike that Belgium, or Europe, had yet seen. Edward Anseele, a founder of the Belgian Worker's Party (and the man to whom Ensor referred in *Alive and Radiant: The Entry into Jerusalem*) (see “The Artist as Rebel and Redeemer,” pp. 71–90), was one of the supporters of this action. The increasing size and strength of the Socialist parties and other radical movements, and the specter of mobs bearing placards reading *Down with Capital* and *Death to the Middle Classes* in 1886, reinforced the bourgeois electorate's support of the Catholic Party.¹⁸⁰

A cartoon from the newspaper *La Bombe* of August 1887 articulates the anger and disillusionment of the left with the political and economic disenfranchisement of Belgium's working class (fig. 38). Above the caption “Fifty-five years of happiness and prosperity” floats a small

representation of a patriotic motif from the rebellion against the Dutch (which culminated in Belgium's independence), dated 1830, and the scene of a wounded male being ministered to by his wife, and lamented by his cowering child, dated 1887. The words “Glory!” and “Misery!” frame the scene. In the center, juxtaposed against national flags, are the familiar grouping of a skull and crossbones. Resting jauntily atop the skull is a crown surmounted by an orb and a cross, the regalia of Léopold II.

The degree to which Ensor mused on these contemporary events can be discerned from two bitter polemical works dating from 1889 in which Léopold II, King of Belgium since 1865, is likewise at the center of a satirical condemnation of contemporary politics. The messages conveyed by these works, and other political works by Ensor from the period, do much to elucidate the artist's contempt for the military, the Church, the government, and all institutional authority that is mirrored in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), with its bitter invocation of the “Doctrinaire Fanfares” that “always succeed.”

The first, entitled *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century* (fig. 39), is a minutely detailed drawing rendered in graphite and red, white, and blue colored pencil whose stage-like composition echoes that of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. Léopold, in the guise of God the Father, looks down from a bull's-eye window in the sky onto a massive demonstration. The crowd is composed of civilian workers who, through the use of a large red standard, demand “national military service,” “compulsory free education,” and “universal suffrage,” the chief political debates then occurring in Belgium. Their exhortations are met by brutal military retaliation. The background is composed of a solid mass of soldiers, their sabers and swords bristling as they move forward through the crowd.

FIG. 39

James Ensor, *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century*, circa 1889. Colored crayon on paper, mounted on panel, 16.3 × 21.4 cm (6½ × 8½ in.). Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, Cabinet des Estampes (s.v.27367, folio C).



FIG. 40

Caricature of Leopold II, King of the Belgians, Distributing Medals, from *Cadel-Roussel* (Liège), June 3, 1877; reproduced in John Grand-Carteret, *Popold II: Roi des Belges et des Belles* (Paris, 1908), p. 33. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Libraries, Widener Library (NETH 411.2).



FIG. 41

James Ensor, *Doctrinal Nourishment*, 1889. Etching, zinc plate, no bevels, first plate, fourth or fifth state, with additions in watercolor and gouache, 17.6 × 24.5 cm (6 7/8 × 9 7/8 in.). Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts (1998-B-79-1).



In the foreground, police guns are drawn, civilian blood flows, and a woman runs from the violence to protect the infant in her arms. The chaos contrasts markedly with the impassivity of Léopold, who views the fracas through his lorgnette. His patrician features remain detached, and below him, decorative banderoles bear his words: *What do you want? Aren't you satisfied? Be patient. No violence. I'm sure I can see something but I don't know what or why, I can't make it out very well.*¹⁸¹ Taking its form in part from conventional political caricature, such as an 1877 depiction

of a hieratically enlarged Léopold distributing medals at one of his royal festivals (fig. 40), this drawing operates as overt social critique. Under the banner proclaiming *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century*, the remote king and the embattled populace are described as polarized.

The royal distribution of “favors” is the theme of *Doctrinal Nourishment* (fig. 41), Ensor’s second polemical work from 1889. Under the legend *Belgium in 1889 Doctrinal Nourishment*, five large figures representing, from right to left, the military, the educational authority,

FIG. 42

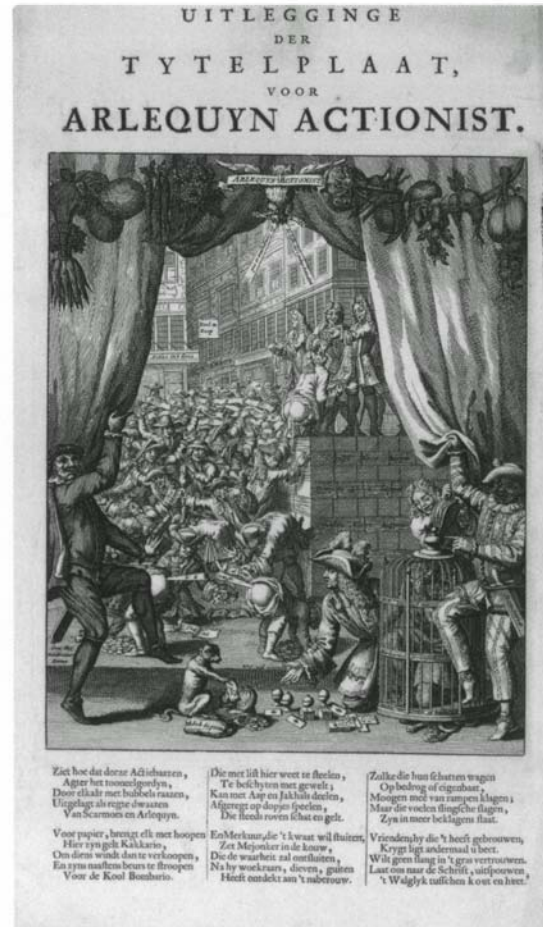
Anonymous (Flemish, eighteenth century), *We All Shit in the Same Pot*, from Flemish Proverbs. Facsimile of a popular image printed in Ghent in the eighteenth



century, reproduced in Louis Maeterlinck, *Le genre satirique dans le peinture flamande* (Brussels, 1903), p. 291.

FIG. 43

Anonymous (Dutch, eighteenth century), *Harlequin as Auctioneer*, Amsterdam, 1720. Etching. Department of Prints, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster.



the king, a bishop, and a nun perch inelegantly around the parapet of a wide, semicircular balcony or viewing platform. Feces, streaming from their exposed buttocks, fall onto a crowd composed of tiny bourgeois and working-class figures. Almost all members of the crowd look up expectantly; many open their mouths in anticipation of the gifts from above. While Léopold casually holds the orb signifying his office, his compatriots clutch signs bearing the same demands as in *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century: Universal Suffrage, Mandatory Military Service, and Mandatory Free Education*. Stephen McGough and Susan Canning have noted that such scatological imagery has its roots in local tradition, including proverbs and popular prints.¹⁸² As they propose, the spectacle of defecation was an entrenched part of the popular visual “folk” tradition of Flanders (fig. 42), including the history of Carnival, and Ensor’s audacious lampooning of the king reflects this earthy heritage. Such ribald imagery was also familiar from eighteenth-century urban political satire. One example is the anonymous Dutch etching *Harlequin as Auctioneer* (fig. 43), a satirical view of the financial market. In it, traders clamor for the scrips for international trading companies that are blown out of the naked behinds of “expeditors,” their desire for capital outweighing all repugnance.¹⁸³ *Doctrinal Nourishment* exhibits this grotesque critique of capital, as the requests for progressive social programs are met with a hideous substitute that is, nonetheless, docilely consumed.¹⁸⁴

An earlier work, dating to 1888, the year in which Ensor painted *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*, while also horrific, is more pointedly topical. In *The Strike or The Massacre of the Fishermen* (fig. 44), Ensor memorializes a contemporary event in which the herring fishermen of his hometown of Ostend rose up on August 23, 1887,



FIG. 44

James Ensor, *The Strike or The Massacre of the Fishermen*, 1888. Colored pencil on paper, 34 × 67.5 cm (13 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 26 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.). Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum of Fine Arts. © Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels.

against English fishermen who had violated their commercial rights. The police and the civic guard were called in to quell the turmoil that resulted, and the conflict between the citizens of Ostend and the police resulted in numerous shootings and several deaths. In Ensor's large drawing, composed of six pieces of paper mounted on cardboard, the police and civic guard suppress the fishermen's action on a broad stage-like public square near the docks. While imperial flags wave above, images of brutality are emphasized within the sprawling crowd: a man is bayoneted in the throat on the left and, as Susan Canning notes, a pregnant woman, her body covered by a Belgian flag, lies wounded and bleeding on the right.¹⁸⁵ The citizens of Ostend, pictured in the bars and taverns that frame the composition, shower the troops with vomit, regurgitated fish, urine, and feces. The contrast between the regimented troops and the earthy citizens, and the rigid weapons and

the bodily effluvia, symbolizes an elite government at war with its citizens, a theme that informs *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*.

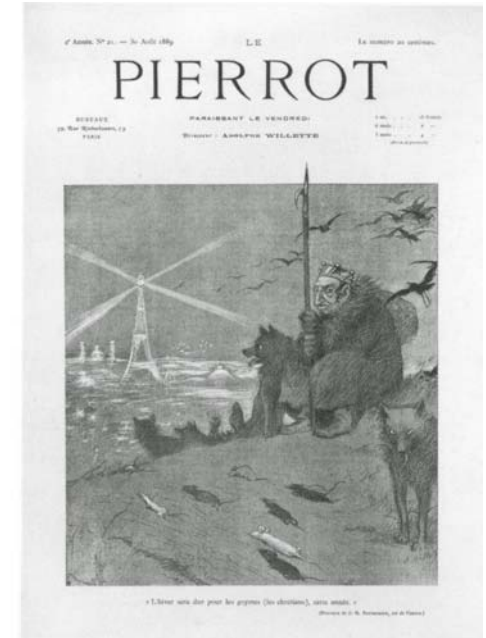
Although Léopold does not appear in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, Ensor pillories the elites that propped him up—the Catholic Church, the military, and the business and bureaucratic class—and the social conditions that their alliance, and their capital, had created. Léopold II, uncle to England's Queen Victoria, ascended the throne immediately after his father's death in late 1865. In the year of his inauguration as king, Léopold traveled throughout Belgium reenacting the old "Joyous Entries," the ceremonies guaranteeing liberties to the provinces as affirmed under the charter known as the "Joyous Entry," practiced by the dukes of Brabant.¹⁸⁶ Distributing decorations throughout the country in that year, Léopold initiated one of the phenomena that marked his reign: frequent celebratory street spectacles. He also embarked on campaigns to broaden the power and economic wealth of Belgium: "It is the first duty of a king to enrich his country."¹⁸⁷ At the time when the power of most constitutional monarchies in Europe was diminishing, Léopold II consolidated his control. He continued his father's policy of welcoming refugees and political dissidents into Belgium,¹⁸⁸ creating a cosmopolitan environment, particularly in Brussels, that was friendly to international business. With a large foreign population (around 206,000 in 1890),¹⁸⁹ and strong economic ties to France and Germany, Brussels provided a burgeoning capital market through which French and German businesses borrowed funds (Belgian money helped build the Paris Metro, for example).¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, because many members of the Brussels business community invested their capital outside of Belgium, allowing financiers to thrive during a time of economic

FIG. 45

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).

FIG. 46

Adolphe Willette (French, 1857–1926), “L’hiver sera dur pour les goymes cette année.” Cover of *Le Pierrot*, August 30, 1889. Cambridge, Massachusetts, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.



hardship, the newly organized Socialist parties associated cosmopolitanism with the declining conditions of the nation's working class.

In Belgium, as elsewhere in Europe, critiques of Capitalism often invoked anti-Semitism. Perhaps nowhere in Belgium did this take a more antagonistic form than in the writings of Edmond Picard, the lawyer and Socialist politician who helped to lead *Les XX*. In 1887–88, he published a series of increasingly strident articles in *L'Art Moderne* about biblical scholarship in which he enumerated supposed differences between the “Semitic race” and the European, “Aryan race.” After representing the Jews of antiquity as barbaric and superstitious, he enlisted contemporary ethnographic research in an attempt to prove that

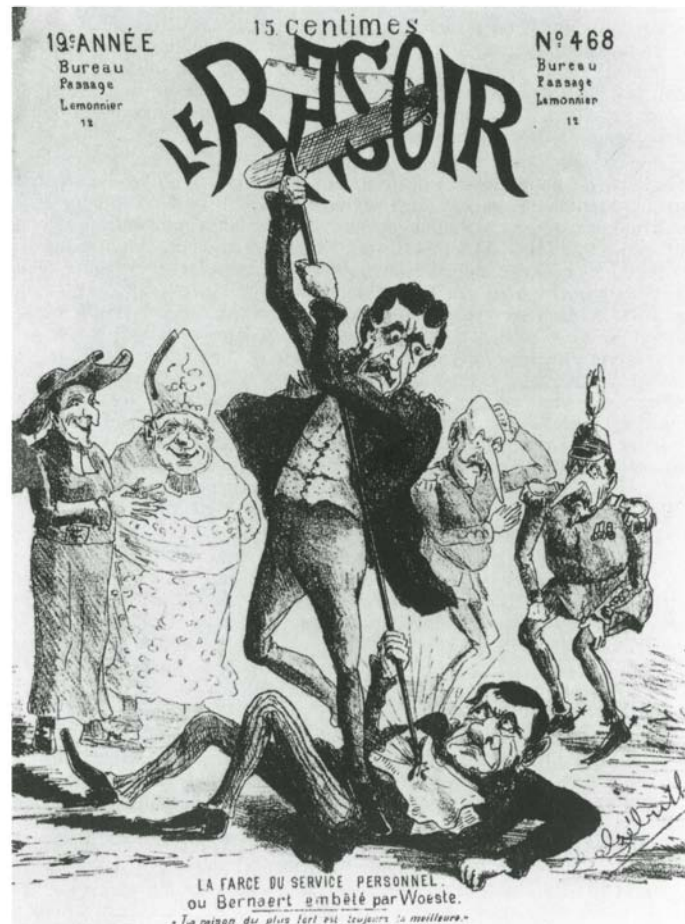
Semitic “racial characteristics” persist “from antiquity until the present,”¹⁹¹ among which he counted financial rapaciousness and a tendency to “grow upon the life forces of Aryan nations.”¹⁹²

These short essays later formed the basis for two lengthy volumes by Picard in the early 1890s, *Synthèse de l'Antisémitisme* (1892) and *L'Aryano-Semitisme* (1898). He began the former book by attempting to demonstrate that the two great social problems facing Europeans in the late nineteenth century, “the Social question” and “the Jewish question,” were intertwined, and that Jewish interests threatened to dominate European (“Aryan”) culture.¹⁹³ Picard was only the most vocal of many members of anti-Capitalist groups (Octave Maus was another) who

FIG. 47

“La farce du service personnel.”
Caricature appearing in *Le Rasoir*,
August 16, 1887, p. 1, as reproduced
in Luc de Vos, *Het effectief van
de Belgische krijgsmacht en*

de militiewetgeving, 1830–1914
(Brussels: Musée Royal de l’Armée,
1985), p. 247. Cambridge,
Massachusetts, Harvard University
Libraries (HW KRCR 6).



called for a redistribution of power and resources through the deployment of racialism and anti-Semitism.¹⁹⁴ In his scurrilous 1891 treatise *Jews and Anti-Semites in Europe*, French critic Jean de Ligneau claimed that the Belgian press of the 1880s had been preoccupied by usury and price fixing, citing articles by Picard to demonstrate that this phenomenon, too, was a “Jewish” problem.¹⁹⁵ The topicality of these issues, buoyed by a rising tide of anti-Semitism throughout Belgium and the rest of Europe, may have conditioned some of the caricatures that made their way into *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1). Investing the painting with a particular critique of the modern “social question,” the distortions of the features in some of Ensor’s characters, such as the figure in the immediate right foreground (fig. 45), reflect distorted stereotypical signifiers of Jewishness (hooked nose, large lips, lowered brow, facial asymmetry) that were conventional signs of contemporary anti-Capitalist critiques throughout Europe (fig. 46).

As noted earlier, the physiognomic distortions that mark Ensor’s masks were accustomed tools of popular caricature. A cartoon published in *Le Rasoir* in July 1887 (fig. 47), for example, in which Justice minister Charles Woeste pinions Auguste Beernaert, leader of the Catholic government, over the subject of personal service, provides many of the signifying details that Ensor adapted into the painting: the politicians’ rigid faces, the bloated visage of the Catholic bishop, and the elongated noses and pointed chins of the priest and generals were the stock and trade of both caricaturists and the artists who made the marionettes for Brussels’s famous satirical Toone Theater.¹⁹⁶ Faces depicted through such theatrical exaggeration were instantly understood to be analogues for the vices attributed to the figures. Hieronymous Bosch’s *Christ Carrying*

FIG. 48

Hieronymus Bosch
(Netherlandish, 1450–1516),
Christ Carrying the Cross, 1510–16.
Oil on panel, 76.7 × 83.5 cm
(30¼ × 32⅞ in.). Ghent, Museum
of Fine Arts, donated by the
Friends of the Museum (1902–8).



the Cross (fig. 48), a likely source for Ensor's musings on caricature,¹⁹⁷ provides an early example of the ways in which physiognomic readings of physical distortions were used as indices to moral character. The face at the lower right of Ensor's painting suggests a direct affinity with the third face from the upper right in Bosch's painting. In the latter work, a collection of distorted and bizarre faces surround the head of Christ. Their contorted features are intended to signify their duplicity as Christ's enemies.

Jewishness had become such a commonplace metaphor for business, and the image of the Jew and the Capitalist had so fully converged, that by the later nineteenth century, the kinds of facial distortions that had been employed by Bosch to symbolize treachery were deployed by caricaturists as signs of a dangerous Capitalist cosmopolitanism. As Ruth Mellinkoff has noted, the bulging eyes, distorted lips, and enlarged, hooked noses displayed by these faces were already by the fifteenth century conventional signs for Jewishness. Mounting anti-Jewish agitation in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries contributed to a consistent and troubling visual culture of deformity that became absorbed by racialist theories of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁸ In anthropological texts of the mid-nineteenth century, particular facial features were encoded with ethnic and social meanings: "The Jewish, or Hawk nose . . . indicates considerable shrewdness in worldly matters; a deep insight into character, and facility of turning that insight into profitable account."¹⁹⁹ Such representations were so entrenched in European visual culture by the later nineteenth century that they were conventional means by which Capitalist avarice was signified in physiognomic and ethnographic literature and the popular press.²⁰⁰ Like the caricatures that appeared in *La Rasoir*, such stereotypical representations provided a

FIG. 49

James Ensor, *Christ Driving the Moneychangers from the Temple*, 1886. Black chalk and pencil on paper, 22.6 × 17.2 cm (8⅞ × 6¾ in.). Brussels, private collection.



kind of available shorthand for complex sets of ideas. By encoding some of his masks as “Jews,” the artist participated in a growing political discourse that exploited these myths and stereotypes to portray Belgium’s ruling class as rapacious, alien, and dangerous to the nation.²⁰¹

It is clear that Ensor was preoccupied with the topic of capital in the mid- to late 1880s, and that he embedded his commentary in religious motifs. One of the many religious compositions that Ensor produced at that time was a small black chalk drawing entitled *Christ Driving the Moneychangers from the Temple* (fig. 49), from 1886, in which a crowd of about two dozen buffoons are sent scuttling down the steps of a vast portico by a radiant and stalwart figure of Jesus. Within the crowds are figures who are masked, zoomorphic, or grotesquely exaggerated, figures who seem to be gleefully collapsing and displaying their rumps to the audience, and one who is ignominiously vomited upon. As one of a series of moralizing religious compositions that Ensor created in the mid-1880s, which will be examined shortly, *Christ Driving the Moneychangers from the Temple* reflects Ensor’s technique of embedding contemporary political commentary in historical and religious narratives. Here his denunciation of the state of finance in Léopold’s Belgium is encoded in the New Testament episode (Matthew 21: 12–13) in which Jesus casts out the commercial activity that has desecrated the temple, shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

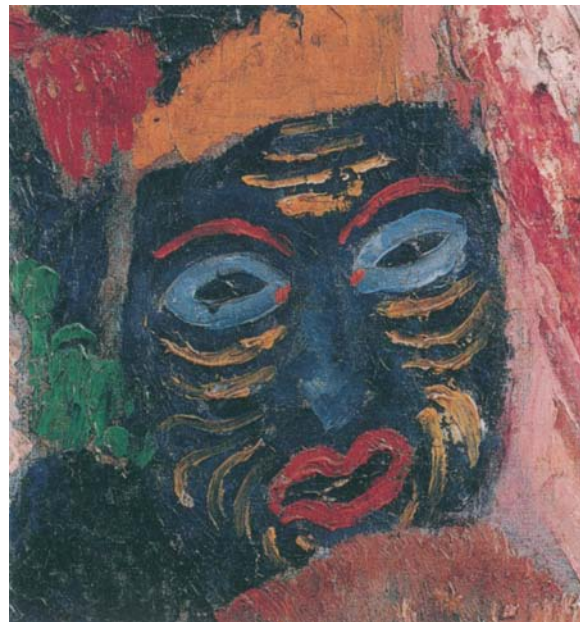
At the time that Ensor painted *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*, Léopold II was on his way to becoming one of the richest men in Europe by exploiting the rise of international trust Capitalism. Léopold was a shrewd financier who allied himself with Belgium’s business leaders, some of whom became his straw men in his investment schemes.²⁰² His most lucrative project was his claim

FIG. 50

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).

FIG. 51

Photograph of a vitrine containing sculpture from the Peoples of Angola, Portuguese Pavilion, Universal Exposition, Antwerp, 1885. Municipal Library of Antwerp.



to the Congo Free State, a colonial entity constituted in 1885, of which Léopold was the monarch. Some of the masks included in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* resonate with this aspect of Léopold's Belgium.

A West African mask stares out from the left side of Ensor's composition, about two-thirds of the way down the canvas (fig. 50), resembling a Songye mask from south-eastern Congo in its concentric patterning. The presence of this mask may, on the one hand, be seen merely as an addition to the painting "for the sake of color and rhythm," or as an example of the artist's interest in masks from all cultures, which included the Asian examples sold in his family's shop.²⁰³ In this regard alone it is significant for being one of the first examples of a European artist incorporating West African masks into an experimental painting,

two decades before the Fauves, Expressionists, and Cubists appropriated them for their own work. This mask, and the white faces with blackened eyebrows and red lips along the left edge of the canvas that resemble Tshokwe masks, may have been based on artifacts that Ensor had seen in reproduction, in private collections, or at the 1885 Universal Exposition in Antwerp. In the Exposition's Portuguese pavilion, for example, a vitrine containing a Kongo figure playing a drum, and Luba and Tshokwe figures below (fig. 51), displayed artifacts and trophies from the expeditions that accompanied the European colonial expansion into the Congo basin.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Ensor's mask likely reflects mounting press interest within Belgium about Léopold II's African empire. It embeds a reminder of

Léopold's foreign investments within the artist's carnival-esque atmosphere.

Even before Léopold II assumed the throne of Belgium, he had held aspirations to be an imperial monarch, planning grand public works within his country (see "The City, the Street, and the Urban Spectacle," pp. 20–36) and colonial expansion wherever it might be most propitious: "Only on the day when we possess an overseas policy will we be able to cauterize the appalling cancer of liberal-clerical conflict that is eating us away and wastefully diverting both our energy and the living strength of the nation."²⁰⁵ In addition to recommending imperial expansion because of such internal divisions within Belgium, he legitimized it through the fact that Belgium's territory had been diminished by war and treaties: "In the East we must win for our fatherland what we cannot reconquer for her in Europe."²⁰⁶ In 1876 Léopold had hosted the Brussels Geographical Conference and founded the International African Association, ostensibly a humanitarian venture, out of which eventually grew the Congo Free State.²⁰⁷ In 1880, explorer Henry Morton Stanley embarked on the first of several expeditions for Léopold "to secure . . . a slice of this magnificent African cake."²⁰⁸ Stanley was one of Europe's most famous and admired African adventurers, whose book *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), a best-seller in numerous languages, had helped to secure in the European mind the imagined barbarism of Africa. Over the course of a few years, Léopold became the sole financier of, and exerted complete control over, the vast Congo Free State.

Although Léopold negotiated many of his dealings in Congo in secrecy,²⁰⁹ his claim to Congo was widely publicized by the late 1880s. Following the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, and the founding of the Congo Free State,

Léopold advertised his Congo venture in order to raise money. The king helped to finance his project by offering 150,000,000 francs of premium bonds, which came on the market in 1888, the year in which Ensor painted *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. At the same time, he organized well-reported expeditions up tributaries of the Congo River.²¹⁰ Until Congo was wrested from his brutal control in the early twentieth century, the Congo Free State was the only colony in the world claimed by one man.²¹¹ Although it would be another decade before the money from Léopold's slave labor would finance Brussels's extraordinary efflorescence of art nouveau architecture, and another still before the atrocities committed by his officers and agents were revealed, Congo was increasingly present in the Belgian press in the late 1880s. In such specialty publications as *Le Moniteur du Congo*, founded in 1885, bureaucratic reports and travel narratives were joined by the occasional satirical image. The cartoon that appeared on the cover of the July 19, 1885, edition, for example, entitled "The Two Kings" (fig. 52), pictures Léopold's imaginary arrival in his new territory. Accompanied by symbols of his civilization (a herring, vegetable puree, and a keg of rum), a scrawny and near-naked Léopold is greeted by the grotesquely stereotyped image of a local royal who stoops to kiss his foot. Invoking European rumors of African cannibalism, the presence of the menu in the immediate foreground suggests that the Congolese king's subservience masks other motives. In mainstream publications such as *Le Patriote Illustré* and *Revue de Belgique* (which reviewed Stanley's publications), Congo was part of daily discourse. An 1888 issue of *Le Patriote Illustré* provides a typical formula for the reporting on the Congo Free State, including accounts of the adventures of European explorers, the allure of exotic flora and fauna, lurid tales of

FIG. 52

“Les Deux Rois” (The Two Kings), cartoon appearing in *Le Moniteur du Congo*, July 19, 1885. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier.



FIG. 53

“Feu Carnaval,” cartoon appearing in *Le Patriote Illustré*, April 1, 1888, p. 167. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier.

violence perpetrated on Congolese by Congolese, and materials of ethnographic interest.²¹²

Congo was not a popular enterprise among Liberals because the very concept of a civil Belgian state seemed to be in danger, nor among members of the progressive left because of their concern with living and working conditions on home soil and, later in the 1890s, because of a concerted offensive against imperialism.²¹³ The colonial enterprise itself was appealing to some cultural theorists, however, because it raised into relief Europe’s “other,” providing an opportunity to legitimize experimental art produced by the *Vingtistes* and other vanguard artists and writers. Diane Lesko has identified Edmond Picard as the author of an 1887 article entitled “Fantastic Reality” that likens free artistic imagination with the kinds of discourses evoked in Stanley’s writings: “The fantastic is constantly evolving everywhere, all around one, and that it is a black region to explore, like unknown continents, an underdeveloped area for art and music.”²¹⁴ By 1888, references to Congo, and the phenomenon of African exploration, were standard fare. In April 1, 1888, *Le Patriote Illustré* included a parodic reference on the lower left (fig. 53) to “an explorer’s return from Congo,” including animals and disturbing caricatures of Congolese, amid satires of episodes from Brussels’s Carnival. Facing this contingent, on the right, is a *zwanze* (parody) of the military in



which cadets rush forward like a “corps de balais,” a pun, when spoken, on “a corps of brooms” and a “ballet corps.”

In his pursuit of Congo, and in his attempt to control the Socialists and Anarchists in the wake of the 1886 strike, Léopold had consolidated relations with the military, and he had increased the prestige of Belgium’s police, and civic guard, a phenomenon that is parodied in *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*. Leading the military marching band in the center of the composition is a hypertrophic general (resembling General Pontus, head of the military), his priggish waxed mustache enhancing the

vanity displayed by the dense field of metals and ribbons that decorate his chest. Behind him march the members of the military band, each figure's face made absurd or vacuous through the agency of the mask that it wears. "When I see soldiers parading on formal occasions," stated Ensor, "my imagination divests them of their decorations, and I see them in their shirttails."²¹⁵ The bishop leading the parade, parodied by the bawdy figures on the balcony to the left of the scene, and the caricatures that Ensor created in *Doctrinal Nourishment* are at the heart of this approach to parody. In this formulation, Léopold's investment in Congo becomes another vehicle of parody. Ensor's masks carry with them a mockery of Léopold and his minions akin to those illustrated in *Le Moniteur du Congo* and *Le Patriote Illustré* (figs. 52 and 53).

Ensor employed such vehicles of subversion and denunciation against institutional authority throughout the following decade, lampooning the leaders of *Les XX* after his falling-out with them, as we have seen, in *The Dangerous Cooks* (fig. 32); the faculty of medicine at the Free University of Brussels in *The Bad Doctors* (1892); the teachers at the Royal Conservatory of Music in *At the Conservatory* (1902); and the legal profession in *The Good Judges* (fig. 54). In *The Good Judges*, Ensor even lampoons himself as a lawyer addressing five judges seated at a dais and six attorneys standing behind them in a satirical composition strongly reminiscent of Honoré Daumier's 1845 series *Men of Justice*. All eleven wear mask-like faces suggesting various stages of impassivity, imbecility, and boredom. Two of the lawyers have clearly been immobilized for some time: a spider has woven her web between their heads. The pustulent and ruddy Ensor drips sweat from his beard and snot from his nose as he addresses the court; flies swarm from his open mouth. In the foreground stand two

accused men with the severed head of their female victim, and on the dais, before the judges, are scattered detached human body parts. A cropped representation of the Crucifixion, embellished by an enterprising spider, in the upper register of the canvas, and of the scales of justice—which are out of balance—point to the outcome of the trial. The condemned men represent two Flemish laborers falsely accused of murder in 1860, the year of Ensor's birth. The trial was held in French, which the two prisoners did not speak. They were executed but later acquitted posthumously following a lengthy political intervention by a Flemish member of Parliament. Inserting himself into such a contested and politicized historical trial, Ensor calls into question the morality of the legal profession and the dynamics of class and linguistic politics in contemporary Belgium. The fact that his painting also ridiculed the occupations of jurists Octave Maus and Edmond Picard, the leaders of *Les XX*, provided additional ironic impact when it was shown in the 1892 exhibition of that organization.

Similarly, Ensor represents the Catholic authority, the bishop at the head of the parade in the foreground of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, as a buffoon. Zealously leading the parade, performing a decidedly profane rather than a religious task, the bishop seems unaware of the Christian savior who trails behind him on the street. Following in a long tradition of moralizing artists who satirize the Church, such as Hieronymous Bosch, who transformed a group of clerics into animal-headed devils in the left panel of his triptych *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 55), Ensor represents the clergy as diabolical.²¹⁶

In Ensor's painting, Mardi Gras provided the opportunity for the artist to lampoon all aspects of his social landscape. With its suspension of normal power relations

FIG. 54

James Ensor, *The Good Judges*,
1891. Oil on panel, 38 × 46 cm
(15 × 18½ in.). Brussels, Patrick
Derom Gallery.





FIG. 55

Hieronymus Bosch
(Netherlandish, 1450–1516),
The Temptation of Saint Anthony,
1505–1506. Left wing of triptych.
Oil on panel, 131.5 × 53 cm
(51¼ × 20⅞ in.). Lisbon, Museu
Nacional de Arte Antiga (1498).
Photo: José Pessoa.

FIG. 56

Peter Bruegel the Elder (circa
1525–1569), *The Fight Between
Carnival and Lent*, 1559.
Oil on panel, 118 × 164.5 cm
(46½ × 64¾ in.). Vienna,
Kunsthistorisches Museum (1016).



FIG. 57

Benozzo Gozzoli (Italian, 1420–1497), *The Procession of the Magi with Lorenzo de' Medici and His Court*, 1459–1461. Fresco and gold. Florence, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York.



FIG. 58

Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1848), *Voltaire*, 1778. Marble, h: 130 cm (51 1/4 in.). Paris, Comédie Française.



and its anarchic masquerade, Carnival gave Ensor the license to articulate what he saw as hidden truths.

In Pieter Bruegel's *Fight Between Carnival and Lent* (fig. 56), this sense of chaotic activity is conveyed through the vignettes of boisterous revelry scattered across the canvas. Here, the village street is a theater of earthy carousing in contrast to the austere figure representing Lent, in the right foreground, and her pious followers flowing out of the church. Although Bruegel's painting was a likely model for Ensor,²¹⁷ the buildup of faces in the foreground of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) is more organized in comparison. Despite the grotesqueness of their individual features, Ensor's masks seem closer in conformity to the crowd represented in Verhas's *Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* (fig. 3), or in a fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Procession of the Magi with Lorenzo de' Medici and His Court* (fig. 57), painted for the chapel of the Palazzo

Medici in Florence between 1459 and 1461. It is not clear that Ensor knew this latter image, although Gozzoli had been one of the most popular of early Italian Renaissance artists in the earlier nineteenth century, celebrated in particular by the Pre-Raphaelites in England.²¹⁸ However, if he did, this citation would add an additional layer of irony to Ensor's parody of his contemporaries. The merchants in Gozzoli's fresco, members of the Medici family, parade as kings, whereas in Belgium, the king operated as a merchant. Whether reprising this processional image, or others from the Flemish tradition, Ensor's panorama of masks, representing a spectrum of Belgian officialdom, is resolutely organized to display every exaggerated facial feature.

In this light, it is not surprising that Ensor inserted what seems to be the placidly smiling face of Voltaire, well known through Jean Antoine Houdon's portrait sculptures of him (fig. 58), in the extreme lower right corner of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, next to the face that has been identified as a representation of the marquis de Sade.²¹⁹ Although Ensor is said to have excoriated other Enlightenment philosophers (Paul Haesaerts reports him to have stated, "Above all else let us condemn the infamous doctrines of Descartes, that platitudinous valet to the odious Christina of Sweden, and the stupid Malebranche; the doctrines of these unwholesome men tend to sterilize the heart in the name of reason"²²⁰), Voltaire's anti-clericalism and invectives against abuses of power may have seemed congenial to the artist's project of lampooning Belgium's unholy alliances between the Church, the state, and the financial market. From his privileged position on the lower right corner, Voltaire smiles benignly as Christ enters Ensor's Brussels and the throng enacts a bankrupt version of an urban bourgeois carnival on the boulevard of the modern city.

FIG. 59

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).



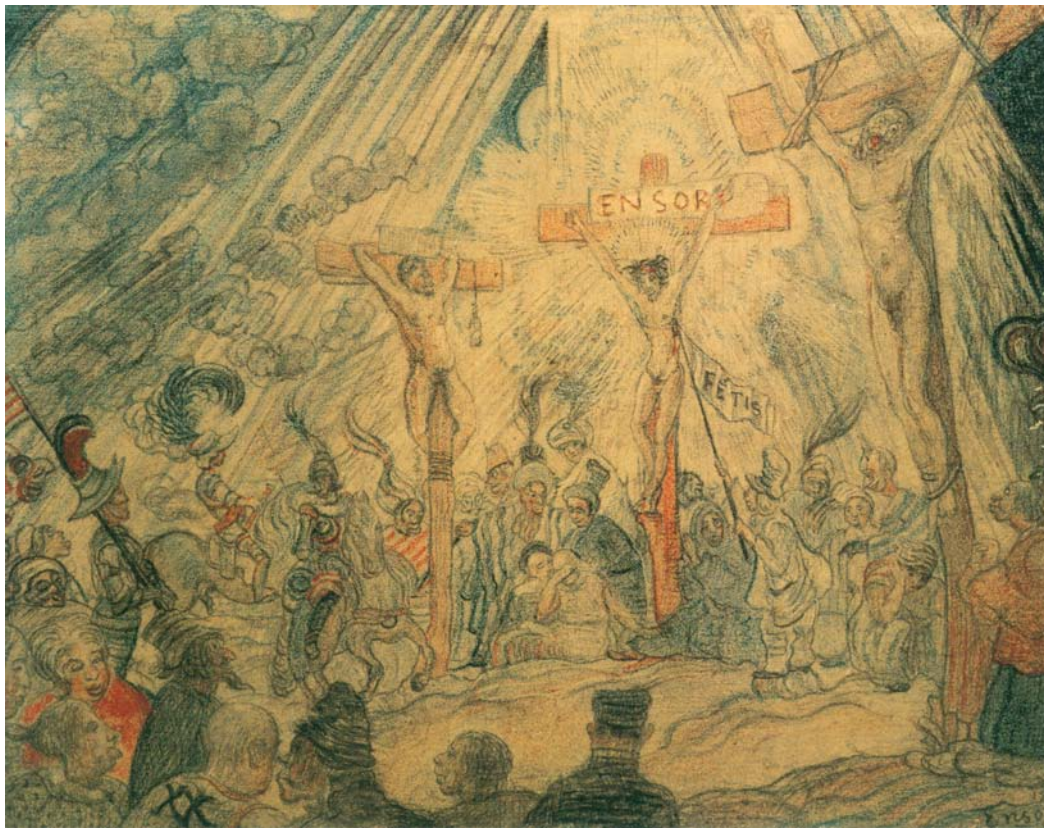
THE ARTIST AS REBEL AND REDEEMER

It is not possible to know precisely what Ensor's religious convictions were at the time that he painted *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1). There are no documents or texts that testify to a particular set of beliefs. However, Ensor created a large body of biblical imagery in the 1880s, in particular in the years 1885 to 1888, that provides insight into his sense of religiosity.²²¹ As suggested by his satirical attacks on the Church as an institution, Ensor approached organized religion with antipathy. In the tradition of Voltaire, and perhaps in sympathy with contemporaries such as Leo Tolstoy and members of Belgium's Anarcho-Socialist movements, he seems to have viewed the Church as reinforcing an oppressive social and political structure on which the well-to-do depended. At the same time, Ensor emerges in his religious works as a spiritual person who believed in the redemptive power of art. Indeed, it is generally understood that the image of Jesus included in *Christ's Entry* is a self-portrait of the artist (fig. 59). As such, Ensor inserts himself into the middle of the composition as an expression of his anticlericalism and his romantic belief in the artist as the spiritual mediator of culture.

At the core of the painting resides an enigma. The painting's epic title, cast of thousands, and extravagant spectacle all point to the Christian savior as the venerated figure in the composition, his presence representing not just the culmination of the "joyous entry," but an apocalyptic "second coming." Yet despite his yellow nimbus, his is an elusive presence. When the painting was fresh, the figure of Jesus would have been heightened by the layer of chrome yellow paint laid down in a triangle around him, but the paint has now faded and Ensor's intended color vibration has been lost.²²² The artist's intensification of the figure, however, was abrogated by the compositional strategies that he used to direct the viewer's gaze away from the figure of Jesus. The black perspectival lines that Ensor incorporated into the painting's underdrawing, and the painted forms that overlay them, lead to a vanishing point above the figure of Jesus that suggests, but does not pinpoint, his position in the canvas. Further, the representation of Jesus seems at first to occupy the center of the composition, below the convergence of Ensor's orthogonal lines. But he is, in effect, off axis, located above and slightly to the left of center. Finally, as described earlier, the

FIG. 60

James Ensor, *Calvary* (also known as *Ensor on the Cross*), 1886.
Black and colored pencil on panel,
17.2 × 22.2 cm (6¾ × 8¾ in.).
Photo courtesy Gallery
Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp.



receding contours of the parade do not convene at the perspectival vanishing point, as a viewer would anticipate, but well to its right, at the upper edge of the canvas. The sense of dissonance that results from these compositional deviations sabotages the possibility of any one focal point in the painting and forces the viewer to search the crowd for the Christian savior. However, the sea of large, brightly colored, and strongly delineated caricatures that inhabit the entire lower half of the canvas repeatedly arrest the viewer's attention, complicating the act of locating Brussels's honored guest.

Ensor's formal veiling of Jesus in this manner operates as a metaphor, for the identity of Christ was debated in the later nineteenth century. Redefined as a purely historical figure by Positivist philosophers, a political leader by left-wing theorists, the *poète maudit* (the suffering artist) by literary romantics, and, of course, the central symbol of the increasingly politicized Belgian Catholic Party, the divinity of Jesus was contested. In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, and in the religious drawings and paintings related to it, Ensor interrogated the relevance of Jesus to a modern, secular society. To Ensor's distracted crowd, including the bishop in the extreme foreground, Jesus is extraneous, one of many colorful entertainments available on the crowded city boulevard. To the artist, Jesus was a moral and spiritual exemplar and, for the purpose of this painting, an alter ego.

Ensor's identification with Jesus is most directly expressed in *Calvary*, also known as *Ensor on the Cross*, an 1886 drawing in colored pencil on prepared panel (fig. 60). Based in part on Rembrandt's *Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves (The Three Crosses)* (1653; Bartsch 78), the drawing represents the Crucifixion of Jesus surrounded by a crowd of spectators that includes repre-



FIG. 61

Paul Gauguin (French, 1808–1903), *The Agony in the Garden*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 73 × 92.1 cm (28¾ × 36¼ in.). West Palm Beach, Florida, Norton Museum of Art. Gift of Elizabeth C. Norton (46.5).

sentations of Roman soldiers on horseback, exotic turbaned figures, and contemporary Belgian men and women. The double-X emblem of *Les XX* appears on the back of one of the spectators in the immediate foreground. Light cascades down from the sky in three mighty streams illuminating the three crucified figures. The central figure of Ensor is also surrounded by a radiating nimbus of divine light. His cross bears the name *Ensor* in place of the traditional *INRI*, the anagram for the brutally mocking phrase

“Hail Jesus, King of the Jews.” A clownish figure in a top hat pierces Ensor’s side with a lance bearing the name *FETIS*, referring to Édouard Fétis, one of the critics who also appears in *The Dangerous Cooks* (fig. 32).²²³ In this drawing, naked and vulnerable, Ensor is a martyr to his critics and his society, one of the dominant themes in artists’ self-representation at the turn of the century. Avant-garde artists, in particular, imagined themselves to be the reviled redeemers of culture, the carriers of an exalted pain.²²⁴

From the Romantic era onward, a rhetoric about the redemptive properties of art, and of the sacrificial blood of artists, separated the avant-garde from the world of mass cultural taste. The authors who most strongly influenced the Symbolist generation made messianic claims for artists. Charles Baudelaire equated the *poète maudit* with the isolation and mission of the redeemer: “In the poetic and artistic order, the true prophets are seldom preceded by forerunners. The artist stems only from himself. . . . He has been his own king, his own priest, his own God.”²²⁵ Gustave Flaubert invoked the evangelical and redemptive narratives of Jesus when he wrote, “We must have Christs of art to cure the lepers.”²²⁶ In the visual arts of the Symbolist generation, Jesus became a conventional symbol for artistic inspiration and isolation. Paul Gauguin portrayed his own features in *The Agony in the Garden* (fig. 61), elevating his sense of mission by representing himself in this controversial iconic guise. Along with Émile Bernard, who underwent a profound Catholic religious conversion in the next year, Gauguin used the canonical imagery of Catholicism to proclaim the primacy of ideas over material reality.²²⁷ Bernard interpreted the entire Symbolist movement as an attempt to reconcile Catholicism with modernity, moving painting beyond the anecdotal to a transcendent sacred realm: “Symbolism led art back to the very reason

FIG. 62

Edvard Munch (Norwegian, 1863–1944), *Golgotha*, 1990. Oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm (31½ × 47¼ in.). Oslo, © Munch Museum / Munch-Ellingsen Group / ARS, 2002. Photo: Andersen / de Jong.

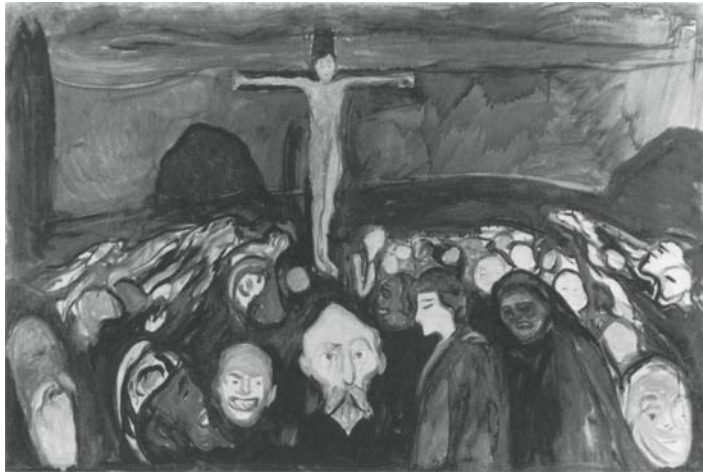


FIG. 63

F. Holland Day (American, 1864–1933), *The Crucifixion [Day posed as Christ]*, 1898. Platinum print, 23 × 14.5 cm (9 × 5¾ in.). Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, F. Holland Day Collection.



for her existence: the expression of the ideal, the unreal. It reminded art of her origins and reinstated mysticism as the inspirer of the super-real.”²²⁸

At the end of the century, Norwegian painter Edvard Munch used the crucifixion motif as a means of expressing his sense of martyrdom to his art and his critics. In *Golgotha* (fig. 62), the wavy red cloud that runs across the top of the canvas and echoes the arms of the cross resembles the sky in his widely reproduced image *The Scream* (1893; National Gallery, Oslo). This element, and the caricatures of figures from his intimate life that appear in the swirling foreground crowd, help to identify the crucified figure as

the artist himself.²²⁹ Representations of Jesus were also ventured in photography, a medium that was understood in the late nineteenth century to slavishly repeat material reality. American photographer F. Holland Day used the motif of the crucifixion to challenge this belief in photographic fidelity by creating a *tableau vivant* of the crucified Christ and substituting his own body for that of Jesus (fig. 63).²³⁰ In these works, the artists created images that mediate between messianic time and the present by reenacting the moment of Christ’s greatest agony through the vehicles of their own bodies. Such self-portraits functioned as symbolic outlets for these artists’ romantic objectives for their art. While Ensor’s crucified self-image participates in this widespread rhetoric, it also differs fundamentally from the other artists’ works in its satirical humor. While there can be no doubt that the artist likens himself to Christ in *Calvary*, there is something parodic in the inscription of his name on the cross and the caricatural exaggerations of the two crucified thieves and the crowd of witnesses and oppressors.

Francine-Claire Legrand made the claim that other drawings that can be associated with *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) are all projections of the personality of Ensor onto that of Christ.²³¹ In 1887, the year in which Georges Seurat’s *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* (fig. 36) caused a sensation at *Les XX*, Ensor had submitted the painting *Christ Walking on Water* (1885) and an ambitious series of sacred drawings that he entitled, in a letter to Octave Maus, *Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light*.²³² Six drawings, executed in 1885–86, comprise this series: *Gay: The Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 64); *Raw: Christ Presented to the People* (fig. 65); *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66); *Sad and Broken: Satan and His Fan-*

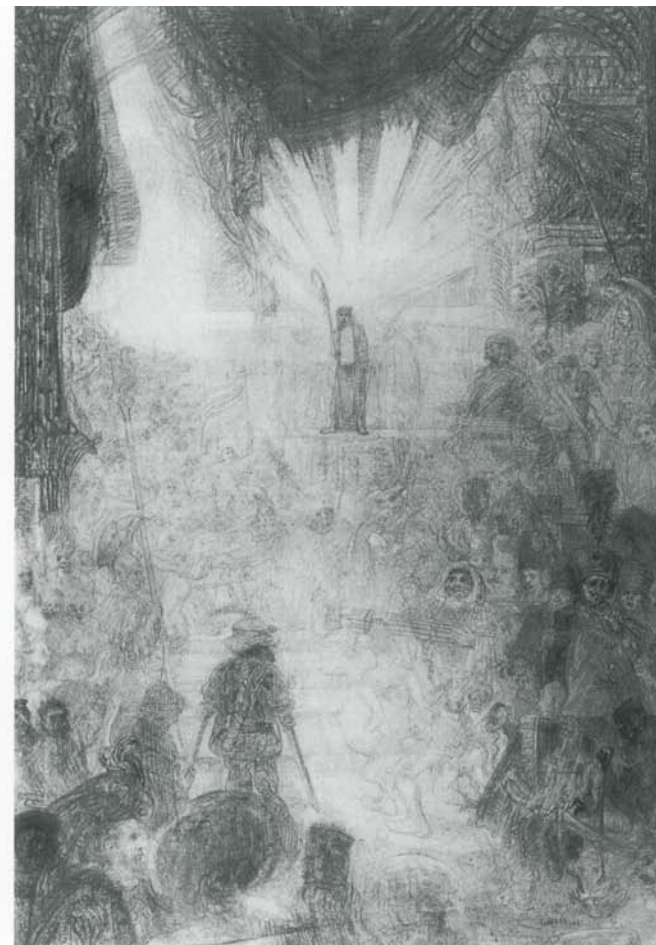
FIG. 64

James Ensor, *Gay: The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1886. Charcoal, black chalk, and pencil on paper, mounted on canvas, 76.8 × 61.1 cm (30¼ × 24½ in.). Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique (4192).



FIG. 65

James Ensor, *Raw: Christ Presented to the People*, 1885. Black crayon and watercolor on paper originally mounted on canvas; transferred to screen in 1986, 155 × 102 cm (61 × 40½ in.). Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts (1988-c).





tastic Legions Tormenting the Crucified Christ (fig. 67); *Tranquil and Serene: The Descent from the Cross* (fig. 68); and *Intense: Christ Ascending to Heaven* (fig. 69). With these drawings, Ensor began to explore the potential of biblical motifs as vehicles for social critique and personal expression.²³³ The paired titles, referring to states of mind (the terms before the colons) and moments in the life of Jesus (the descriptions following the colons), invest each work with historical and psychological resonance. According to Stephen McGough, these titles translate episodes from the New Testament into a modern psychological idiom by associating the Passion of Christ with emotional states of being.²³⁴

Taken as a whole, the series presents an idiosyncratic narrative of the life of Jesus, including traditional and invented motifs. The manifest theme of the series is the life of Jesus as a public presence, extending from his first appearance to humble shepherds to the last days of his ministry, his Crucifixion, and his Resurrection.²³⁵ *Gay: The Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 64) is one of the more tradition-bound motifs, echoing Rembrandt's treatments of the theme (circa 1654; Bartsch 45), and reflecting the structure of Peter Paul Rubens's *Adoration of the Magi* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels). Within the dark setting of a rustic structure, the dominant motif in the drawing is the pyramidal composition formed by Mary, the Child, and a compressed group of shepherds who kneel before them. However, the anecdotal details that surround this figural group far exceed the references to daily peasant life included in Rembrandt's or Rubens's work. In addition to the presence of the pigs, cows, and earthy rural figures on the left, a figure holding a flea-infested dog on a leash squats infelicitously in the right foreground. Just behind him is a figure slaughtering a goose. In the background, bathed

FIG. 66 (OPPOSITE)

James Ensor, *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem*, 1885. Black and brown crayon with pasted-on paper, on paper originally mounted on canvas; transferred to screen in 1986, 206 × 150.3 cm (81½ × 59½ in.). Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts (1963-E).

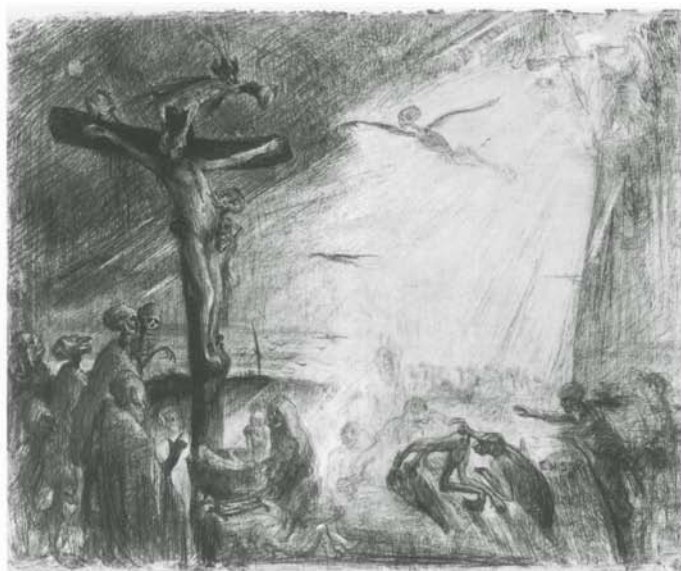


FIG. 67

James Ensor, *Sad and Broken: Satan and His Fantastic Legions Tormenting the Crucified Christ*, 1886. Charcoal and Conté crayon on paper, 61.3 × 75.8 cm (24¼ × 29¾ in.). Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique (4.193).

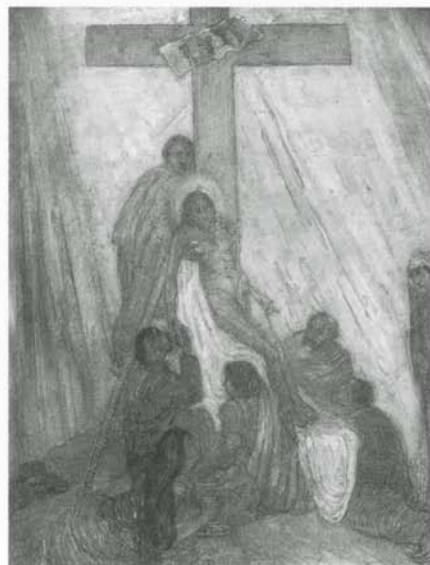
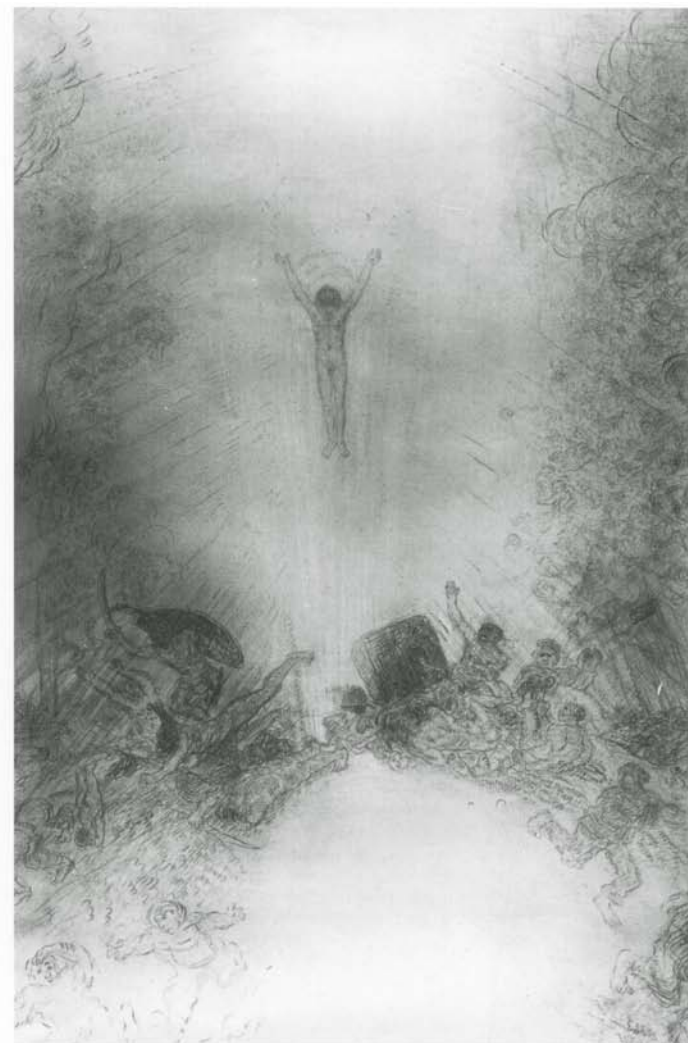


FIG. 68

James Ensor, *Tranquil and Serene: The Descent from the Cross*, 1886. Crayon and oil on panel, 58 × 46 cm (22¾ × 18½ in.). Private collection.

FIG. 69

James Ensor, *Intense: Christ Ascending to Heaven*, 1885. Black crayon on paper mounted on canvas, 150 × 100 cm (59 × 39½ in.). Private collection.



in outdoor light, a vast crowd of onlookers swarms around the window, looking inward toward the figural group. Ensor's insertions of exaggerated earthiness and local anecdote strip the event of metaphysical meaning. Only the light radiating from the Child denotes a supra-human presence.

A heightened emphasis on luminosity also invests the next two scenes, *Raw: Christ Presented to the People* (fig. 65) and *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66), with sacred meaning. In their enormous size (respectively 5 and 6¾ feet in height), density of detail, and amalgamation of historical and contemporary references, these two drawings became genesis points for *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. *Raw: Christ Presented to the People* is based in part on motifs by Rembrandt (1635; Bartsch 76) in which Jesus has been accused of claiming to be King of the Jews. Vulnerable, looking almost like the unwilling actor in a theatrical spectacle, Jesus stands above a curious throng on a high viewing platform. Below him are a horde of historical and contemporary figures, including Octave Maus, whose bearded profile is seen in the lower left corner, artist Willy Finch, below the stage at the right, and Ensor himself along the right edge of the drawing.²³⁶ Other carefully delineated faces, some with exaggerated noses, eyes, and modern accessories, make clear Ensor's connection between the biblical setting and his contemporary milieu. Here, light radiates more strongly from the figure of Jesus, decomposing the forms in the center of the composition.

Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (fig. 66) likewise blends old master allusions with contemporary references. However here, as in the later painting, Ensor playfully conflates biblical text and contemporary custom. A raised platform in the right foreground of the

composition is drawn from Rembrandt's *Christ Before Pilate* (1635; Bartsch 77).²³⁷ This quotation, along with the Rembrandtesque stippling and chiaroscuro effects throughout, imbue the drawing with an old master quality. Ensor ingeniously revises these valorized motifs and methods by incorporating them into a drawing of astonishing size and polemical content. Here, the Jesus of the old masters is engulfed by a parade and surrounded by contemporary Belgian slogans, flags, and placards that vie for attention along the parade route. In the foreground, members of the crowd wear the name *Jesus* on their foreheads and hats, as they might a favored politician. Crowning the vast scene are banners bearing the phrases *Hail the Social and Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. Underneath is a giant streamer reading *Hail Jesus King of the Jews*, whose form is repeated in the red banner at the top of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, and whose message was translated into *Hail Jesus King of Brussels* on the painting's lower right. As noted earlier, slogans advertising products (*Colman's Mustard* and the disturbing *Pork Butchers of Jerusalem*) and contemporary artistic politics (*Les XX*, *Noisy Wagner Phalanx*, *The Belgian Impressionists*, *The Symbolists*, and *The Decadents*) intermingle with left-wing slogans referring to the urgent social issues of the 1880s (Sée "Unholy Alliances: The Politics of Church and State in Léopold's Belgium," pp. 52–70): *Amnesty*, *Send the Clergy Away*, *The Flemish Movement*, 'ca ira' ("It must go," or "work"), and *Hail Anseele* (referring to the Flemish Socialist politician Edward Anseele). At least one critic emphasized this last dimension of the motif, interpreting the drawing as an Anarcho-Socialist action and describing the crowd as "deformed by physical labor, convulsed by the fatigue of the march, distorted by hatred, vengeance, cravings. . . ." Ensor represents every person "who wishes

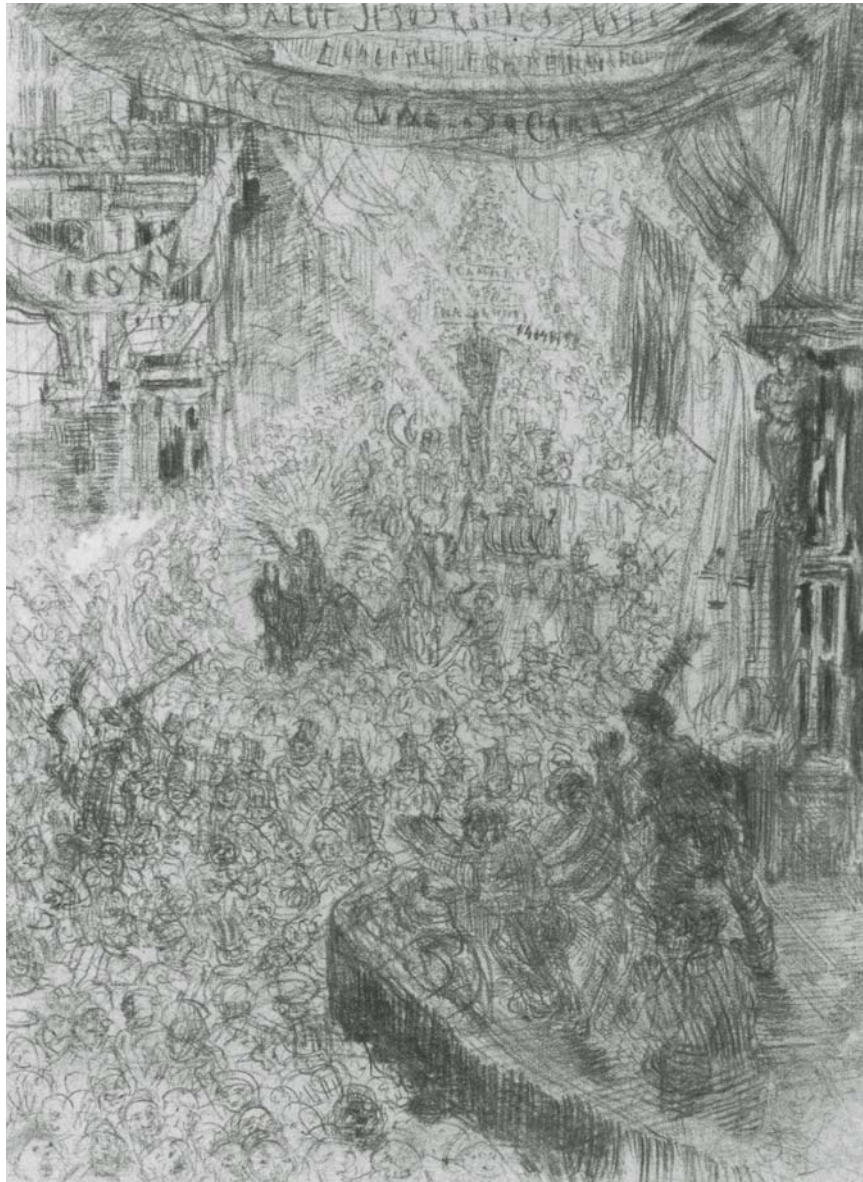
to ameliorate, reform, overthrow, turn upside down, with his flags, standards, emblems, symbols, cartels. . . .”²³⁸

Other critics viewed the drawing as a less overtly political metaphor of modernism. One described it as “a gigantic carnival, symbolizing the modern street.”²³⁹ Like the urban boulevard, the drawing provides the space for the encounters, and collisions, among national identity, class politics, fashion, art, and religion within the modern secular city. Émile Verhaeren described the drawings in terms that his contemporaries used to describe the phenomenon of the boulevard (see “The City, the Street, and the Urban Spectacle,” pp. 20–36): “They stupefy at first, then they impress. They carry [one] off toward vertigo, toward chaos. . . .”²⁴⁰ Like the boulevard, Ensor’s incorporation of the many slogans, texts, and references to local parades and spectacles produced an open-ended work of art, one whose meaning was likely intended to remain ambiguous. For example, the procession that winds its way through the compressed urban architecture includes placards identifying various hometowns (Jesus precedes the contingent from Nazareth), suggesting the vernacular form of an official parade, a “joyous entry.” In a small sketch for *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66), in addition to the above elements, Ensor inscribed the dates 1404 and 1453 near the placard reading *Nazareth* in the same black Conté crayon or chalk that he used for several other inscriptions and to highlight the architecture. Bracketing a period in European history when the Burgundian empire (incorporating much of contemporary Belgium) was at the height of its prestige, the inscription is a curious and playful allusion to the Burgundian-led defense of Christianity in the fifteenth century.²⁴¹ Although these dates do not appear in the final drawing or in the painting, they add one more layer of

complexity to the meaning of this parade that is, simultaneously, occurring in biblical Jerusalem and contemporary Brussels; in the name of Jesus, wars have been waged (in this case, the Crusades of the mid-fifteenth century), violences committed, and fortunes immorally amassed.

The drawings comprising *Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibility of Light* (figs. 64–69) were of exceptional meaning to the artist.²⁴² They were rendered at a time when, following his sustained study of old master work, Ensor increasingly grappled with the problem of seeking his own expressive means. Julius Kaplan has noted that Ensor in part achieved this end by investing personal meanings in traditional biblical subjects as well as by seeking unusual episodes from religious literature that had not been treated before.²⁴³ But his most significant achievement was his realization of light as a symbolic agent of spirituality and moral authority. From a concern with the effects of light dissolving the material contours of objects, like the French and Belgian Impressionists with whom he was aligned in the earlier 1880s, he became preoccupied with light as the essence of art, a position that he reiterated in speeches in the 1930s: “I have no children, but light is my daughter, light one and indivisible, light, the painter’s bread, light, the painter’s crumb, light, queen of our senses . . . strike us! vitalize us, show us the new routes leading to joy and bliss. . . .”²⁴⁴

Having grappled with the psychological and sacral dimensions of light as explored formally and thematically in *The Aureoles of Christ*, it must have been particularly vexing to Ensor to witness the apotheosis of Georges Seurat as the “Messiah of the new art” at the 1887 exhibition of *Les XX*. Ensor’s Rembrandtesque analysis of light, as expressed in *The Aureoles of Christ*, was resistant to science and intellect, but was instead a romantic attempt to



come to terms with the sublime. The artist's striving toward the understanding of light as visual fact and metaphysical agent, as "planes and gravitational fields" (see "Ensor and the Belgian Art World," pp. 37–51) may have both prompted a particular interest in Rembrandt and conditioned the lessons that he took from his art.²⁴⁵

In the 1880s, Rembrandt's work and reputation underwent reassessments as they were reinterpreted through Symbolist aesthetics: his chiaroscuro effects were increasingly interpreted as a highly modern nebulousness, the representation of a mystical vision (in opposition to the clarity and materialism of the Naturalist tradition), and the triumph of instinct over intellect.²⁴⁶ Eugène Fromentin's 1875 study of Dutch and Flemish painting, *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland*, provided an influential foundation for this interpretation of Rembrandt:

He decomposed and reduced everything, color as well as light, so that, while eliminating from appearances everything that is manifold, condensing what is scattered, he succeeded in drawing without outlines . . . in coloring without color, in concentrating the light of the solar system into a ray. . . . His ideal, as in a dream pursued with closed eyes, is light; the nimbus around objects, phosphorescence on a black ground."²⁴⁷

Rembrandt's chiaroscuro effects, according to Fromentin, were nothing short of metaphysical, visionary, and supernatural, revealing the hidden depths and the spiritualism of the artist. The echoes of Rembrandt's compositions, and the reflections of his mastery of light and shadow in Ensor's drawings for *The Aureoles of Christ*, carry this mystical reading into Ensor's work and titles.



FIG. 70 (OPPOSITE)

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, 1885. Graphite and Conté crayon on off-white woven paper, 22.5 × 16.5 cm (8¹⁵/₁₆ × 6⁵/₁₆ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (89.GD.42).

FIG. 71 (ABOVE)

James Ensor, *The Tribulations of Saint Anthony*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 117.8 × 167.6 cm (46³/₄ × 66 in.). New York, Museum of Modern Art. Purchase.

Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light was also exhibited at *Les XX* in the year after Ensor visited London with fellow *Vingliste* Guillaume Vogels, where he viewed the works of J. M. W. Turner, a decisive influence on his work at the time.²⁴⁸ Turner's canvases, which seemed to materialize light, dematerialize matter, and embody a sense of the sublime, had the effect of helping to enhance and concentrate the luminosity of Ensor's palette and freeing up his broad painting techniques in 1887. The tumultuous brushwork and luminosity of *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* (1887; Royal Museum

of Fine Arts, Antwerp), and the episodic composition and radically thick incrustations of paint in *The Tribulations of Saint Anthony* (fig. 71) are indebted to Turner.²⁴⁹ At the same time, the latter painting is also filled with grotesque details, including nightmarish animals and the suggestion of excrement.²⁵⁰ The unorthodox composition, in which details seem to leap out of the chaos as the viewer searches the painting for some kind of cohesive center, was later paralleled in the capricious space and dense detail of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*.

In an even more audacious and monumental composition on the same theme, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 72), composed of seventy-two sketchbook sheets assembled into a gold- and blue-tinged composition that is six feet in height, Ensor extended the biblical story into an encyclopedic critique of contemporary Belgium.²⁵¹ Gluttonous clerics, grotesquely exaggerated representations of the bourgeoisie (some of whom wear top hats bearing such achingly banal slogans as *Good Fricasseed Sausages*), deformed and unnatural animals, a skeleton, icons drawn from world religions, and architectural monuments to greed are amalgamated in an idiosyncratic and hallucinatory composition that presaged *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*.²⁵² It was this drawing that was declined from the 1888 exhibition of *Les XX* for indecency.²⁵³ This act in part led to Ensor's sense that a "cabal" had formed against him within that organization. Over the next year, he adapted this composition's sweeping critique of contemporary Belgium into his monumental canvas. This work and *The Aureoles of Christ* were the immediate sources for *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*.

As Robert Hoozee notes, the religious meaning of *The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light* (figs. 64–69) is complicated by a portrait that Ensor had drawn



of the French philosopher and philologist Émile Littré, and that he had pasted onto the lower right of *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66). Copied from a photograph by the Parisian portrait photographer Nadar (fig. 73), this face leads the parade route.²⁵⁴ Littré was one of a growing number of philosophers, theologians, and writers in the mid- and later nineteenth century who attempted to reconcile Positivist science with Christian faith by retrieving the story of Jesus from its uses in the Catholic Church. In his collected essays *Conversation, Revolution, and Positivism* (1852), Littré defined the Church as a decadent form of spiritualism, an oppressive institution that undermined Christian morality and promoted class stratification and oppression.²⁵⁵

Littré was also the French translator, in 1840, of David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, first published in Germany in 1835. This influential work was one of the first to retrieve an "historical" Jesus, and to reinterpret his life without recourse to the metaphysics or "mythology" of Church dogma by reviewing the "facts" of the New Testament. To Strauss, and to those who followed him, Jesus was a hero and a statesman, but not a divinity:

His admirable wisdom he acquired by the judicious application of his intellectual powers, and the conscientious use of all the aids within his reach; his moral greatness, by the zealous culture of his moral dispositions, the restraint of his sensual inclinations and passions, and a scrupulous obedience to the voice of his conscience. . . .²⁵⁶

Strauss also alleged Hellenistic influences on Jesus and claimed that he was unrelated to Judaism, thus laying the groundwork for Picard and other anti-Semitic theorists to



FIG. 73

Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon) (French, 1820–1910), *Émile Littré*, circa 1860. Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts.

pronounce him an “Aryan.”²⁵⁷ Ernst Renan’s *Life of Jesus* (1863) likewise attempted to wrest the interpretation of Jesus from the Catholic Church and to define him as a progressive and charismatic social leader: “A man of great religious genius, who, through his daring originality and the love he had the gift of inspiring, created the object and the fixed point of departure of the future faith of humanity.”²⁵⁸ Ensor was likely aware of this biography, because it was reviewed in *L’Art Moderne* in 1882, preceding a review of the sixth exhibition of *L’Essor*, in which Ensor showed several paintings.²⁵⁹

By subjecting Catholic mystery and Church dogma to the “cleansing” rigors of science, these authors, and others, established a discourse so powerful that Pope Leo XIII, assuming the papacy in 1878, issued *Aeterni Patris*, the encyclical of the following year that called upon the Church hierarchy to restore Christian philosophy by reconciling science with revelation.²⁶⁰ German theologian Martin Kähler, writing in 1892, identified the Positivists’ quest to rediscover the authority of the historical Jesus as a theological crisis. In what he termed a collision between the “Jesus of history” and the “Jesus of faith,” Kähler claimed that ideologues had dispensed with Christian dogma only to re-create Jesus in their own images: “The historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ. . . . I regard the entire Life-of-Jesus movement as a blind alley.”²⁶¹ Likewise, in the following decade, Albert Schweitzer identified the Life-of-Jesus movement as one of the signal events of nineteenth-century German theology.²⁶² Ensor’s representations of Jesus in *The Aereoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light* and *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* were created at the height of this controversy.

FIG. 72 (OPPOSITE)

James Ensor, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 1887. Pencil on paper, 170 × 150 cm (67 × 59 in.). Kapellen, Collection of Frédéric Speth.

In Europe and North America, such Positivist challenges to Church dogma were echoed in Naturalist painting. The popular German painter Fritz von Uhde established his reputation through sentimental depictions of scenes from the Gospels in contemporary working-class settings.²⁶³ At the same time, other philosophers and authors attempted to reaffirm Christian faith by imagining the Second Coming of Christ in a modern context. One was Honoré Balzac, about whom Ensor wrote in the 1920s:

The great Balzac, the hard working, piercing, and magnificent Balzac, the glorious dreamer . . . my father admired him and my mother kept him and I myself have been reading him since childhood.²⁶⁴

In a speech delivered at around the same time, Ensor proclaimed: “You all know the most delightful of the great Balzac’s stories: ‘Jesus Christ in Flanders.’”²⁶⁵ Referring to Balzac’s 1831 tale, Ensor cited a possible source for his representations of Jesus. In Balzac’s short legend, Jesus arrives in Ensor’s native Ostend. Blending veiled references to the politics of the newly unified Belgium, vivid descriptions of the town, its seaside setting, and its inhabitants, and a visionary appeal to faith, the story unfolds at an “indeterminate time in the history of the Brabant.”²⁶⁶ At the end of the tale, a series of bizarre events unfolds within the cathedral, reaffirming religion as the foundation of society. Diane Lesko has suggested that this story provided a likely source of inspiration for several of Ensor’s motifs in the 1880s, including the 1886 etching *The Cathedral* (fig. 74).²⁶⁷

In this work, the cathedral soars above its surrounding landscape, dwarfing its neighboring structures and the crowd that carpets its base. The upper reaches of the towers are cropped by the top of the etching plate, enhancing the

monumentality of this edifice. The foreground of this etching, a full third of the image, is taken up with the exquisitely rendered representation of the crowd. Susan Canning has pointed out the heterogeneous composition of this crowd, which includes representations of members of the working class and bourgeoisie, the military, a marching band, and exotic figures wearing turbans.²⁶⁸ She also notes that the crowd is subtly divided between the marshal regularity of the marching band and the military, which forms a distinctly geometric phalanx extending in a subtle diagonal across the middle of the crowd, and the preceding disorderly mob of deftly articulated faces. The Church remains majestic regardless of what transpires on the ground, perhaps reflecting Balzac's moral: the uncorrupted church of the working class can generate the goodness of religion, in contrast to the debased church of the rich and powerful.²⁶⁹ As we shall see, such a contrast between good religion and bad, or in Littré's terms "religion" and "theology," is reflected in Ensor's suggestion of two distinct elements within the vulgar, airless urban assembly in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*.

In his cramped attic studio, Ensor extracted details from all of these works from 1885 to 1887 to formulate his phantasmagoric composition of 1888. In particular, he drew upon *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66) for his central motifs. However, the differences in conception and execution from the 1885 drawing to the painting of three years later are radical. Formally, the transformation from a vertical to a horizontal format changes the dynamic of the street setting. In the painting, the lateral expanse of the boulevard is emphasized, rather than the vertical compression exerted by the drawing's architectural setting. In the drawing, the crowd snakes through an environment that is more con-

ventionally representative of a city, whereas the vertiginous expansiveness of the wide boulevard in the painting is clearly embedded in the bodily experience of being absorbed by the modern urban crowd. A small, informal drawing that combines *Raw: Christ Presented to the People* (fig. 65) and *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (fig. 66), probably created after the completion of the two large drawings, points toward this pictorial structure (fig. 75).²⁷⁰ From this casual conflation of his two motifs, Ensor laid out the painting's expansive foreground, its proscenium-like expanse of bunting, and even its multiple points of view that compete for focal attention. Within the grand urban expanse of the painting, the number of conflicting political slogans is reduced, and instead their meanings are dispersed throughout the canvas as caricatures. Finally, the judges who are the conventional occupants of the viewing platform in *Ecce Homo* motifs have been transformed into a red-nosed politician, two clowns, and a figure in a Chinese costume. In a gesture of the most vulgar hilarity, Ensor translated the large judge with his back turned toward us in *Alive and Radiant: The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* into a clown whose star-emblazoned behind pushes toward the audience (see p. v). But the most astonishing transformation from the monumental drawing to the even larger painting is Ensor's translation of the parade into a colorful evocation of Carnival. In his painting, Carnival becomes the discursive frame for the artist's encyclopedic parody of Belgium's cultural, religious, and political institutions and for his considerations of Christ's meanings and messages.

In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), there is a distinct contrast between the crowd of officialdom who precede Christ, and the sea of people who follow him. As noted earlier, the crowd in the foreground is composed

FIG. 74

James Ensor, *The Cathedral*, 1886. Etching on paper, 23.6 × 17.7 cm (9¼ × 7 in.). Antwerp, Verzamelingen Stedelijk Prentenkabinet (MP 09523).

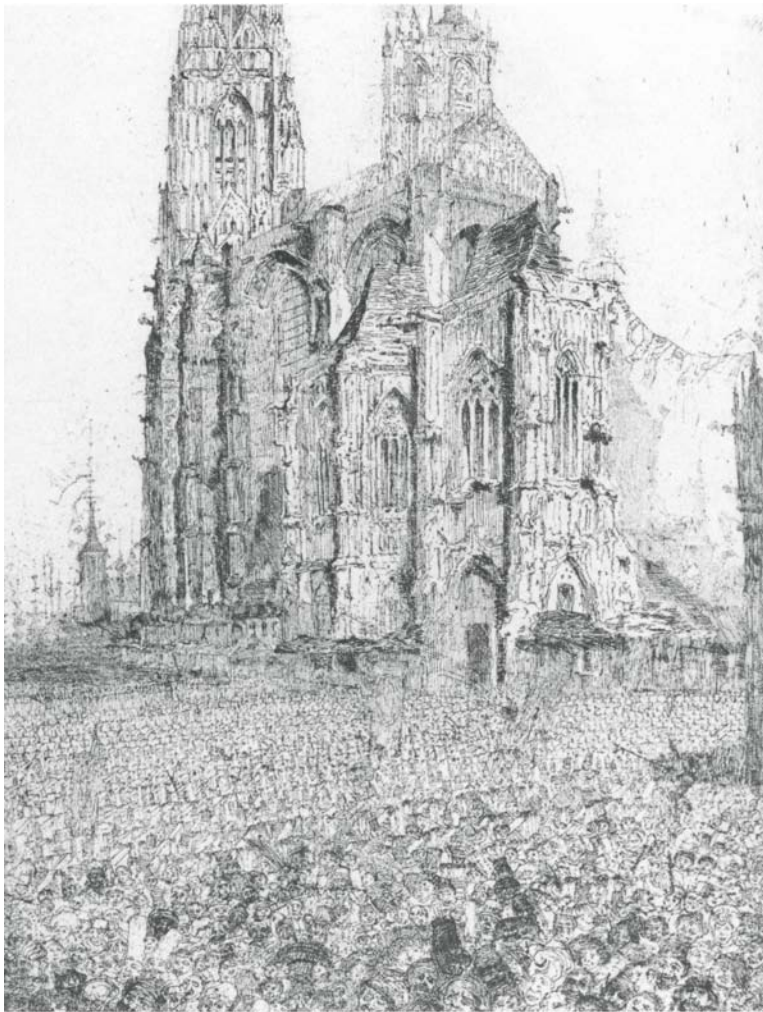


FIG. 75

James Ensor, *Christ Presented to the People and the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem*, 1887. Black crayon on paper, 17.3 × 22.1 cm (6¾ × 8¾ in.). Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts (1985-M).



FIG. 76

James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (detail of fig. 1).



of masks, caricatures, and portrayals of Belgium's ruling elite (its military, clergy, politicians, speculators, and bourgeoisie), interspersed with non-Western masks, and presented with the taxonomic ordering of a *grimace*. This foreground mass seems like a self-enclosed world, in which the paraders engage with one another, but seem oblivious to, or blasé about, the figure of Jesus who parades behind them. The vacuity and marshal regularity of the military marching band terminating this section of the procession adds to its sense of cohesiveness.

However, as soon as the military has passed, a motley collection of costumed figures gathers around Jesus, their puppet- and insect-like faces raised toward him (fig. 76). The multitude of people following Jesus in the parade seem less formal and more celebratory than the foreground group: several break rank to dance or cheer (as do the yellow-clad man just to Jesus' left, the masked woman to his left bearing a parasol, and the portly man to their left whose arms are raised in a robust cheer). The faces in this background crowd, at least in the front section, are less tightly compressed than the phalanx in the front of the painting, giving them a greater sense of movement and freedom. As the members of the crowd funnel back into space, they retain a remarkable degree of detail. Ensor meticulously painted in eyes and mouths, even on some figures who are otherwise represented by dots of paint, creating the uncanny sense of individuation also suggested by detailing in his etching *The Cathedral* (fig. 74).

The front rank of this crowd is composed largely of costumed figures resembling those of the commedia dell'arte, the sixteenth-century theatrical tradition that was famously revitalized in nineteenth-century Paris. In part, this cast of characters represents a convention of Belgian Carnival masquerades. Characters from the commedia

dell'arte were, and continue to be, familiar participants in Carnival processions. In the nineteenth century, the Boulevard Anspach was described, for example, as a crush of Pierrots, Harlequins, Colombines, babies, and clowns during Mardi Gras.²⁷¹ However, Ensor's figures also carry with them other identities that ally them with the artistic avant-garde. By the 1880s characters from the commedia dell'arte were also interpreted as avatars of artistic alienation and martyrdom akin to the Symbolists' fantasies about Christ.

In particular, the figure of Pierrot became the blank canvas for the projected desires and beliefs of the literary vanguard of Paris, including Gustave Flaubert, Paul Verlaine, J.-K. Huysmans, and the Goncourts.²⁷² The sixteenth-century characters of Harlequin, Columbine, Pantalon, Cassandre, and Pierrot were revived in Paris in the early nineteenth century at the *Théâtre des Funambules*, performing short satirical morality tales before working-class audiences. Toward the middle decades of the century, the popularity and prestige of the theater's mime artist Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau began to attract members of Paris's Bohemian intellectual circles, and by mid-century Deburau had become a cult figure among the literary intelligentsia. Even after his death, his reanimation of the character of Pierrot had become a metaphor for Paris's Bohemia. Traditionally downtrodden, passive, and the object of others' scorn, Pierrot had been re-imagined by Deburau as a wise fool, an identity that tallied with the aspirations of the artistic avant-garde. Moreover, Deburau began to use his character as a way of commenting on contemporary politics.²⁷³ By the end of the 1850s, Théophile Gautier projected onto Pierrot the fantasies and self-definition of Bohemian Paris: "Pierrot, pallid, slender, dressed in sad colors, always hungry and always beaten,

is the ancient slave, the modern proletarian, the pariah, the passive and disinherited being, who, glum and sly, witnesses the orgies and follies of his masters.”²⁷⁴

By the 1850s, the figures of the *commedia dell’arte* had been fully reinterpreted by the literati as artists and poets of the street. The poverty, marginality, and inventiveness attributed to them by Baudelaire and others invested in them the Romantic attributes of the *poète maudit* that came to shape the 1880s Symbolist generation. Alienated, performing out of desperation and ecstasy, clustered for safety and sympathy into marginal subcultures, the street performers, or *saltimbanques*, became potent symbols of Bohemian marginality at mid-century.²⁷⁵ The 1880s was a particularly rich decade for the multiplying personae of Pierrot. A Bohemian Pierrot made his appearance in Jules Laforgue’s *Pierrot fumiste* (1883); in Albert Giraud’s 1884 *Pierrot lunaire*, Pierrot suffered from ennui and became the agent of society’s rituals of sacrifice; and the sensitive, poetic clown was serialized in Paul Willette’s stories and caricatures for Montmartre publications and performances, and in his short-lived periodical *Le Pierrot* (1888–89, 1891).²⁷⁶ In 1880s Paris, Pierrot had become a conventional symbol for the artist and the martyr.

As Stephen McGough pointed out, the Parisian reinvention of Pierrot as a figure of romantic alienation was absorbed by those in Ensor’s circle who published *L’Art Moderne*.²⁷⁷ Ensor’s colleague Théo Hannon created *Pierrot macabre* in 1886, a ballet and mime in which Pierrot is killed and resurrected, echoing themes of violence and sacrifice popular in Paris at the time.²⁷⁸ Characters from the *commedia dell’arte* were routinely adopted by satirists in the Belgian press to lampoon politicians and social organizations. In particular, the artists of *Les XX* were caricatured as members of the *commedia dell’arte* in the

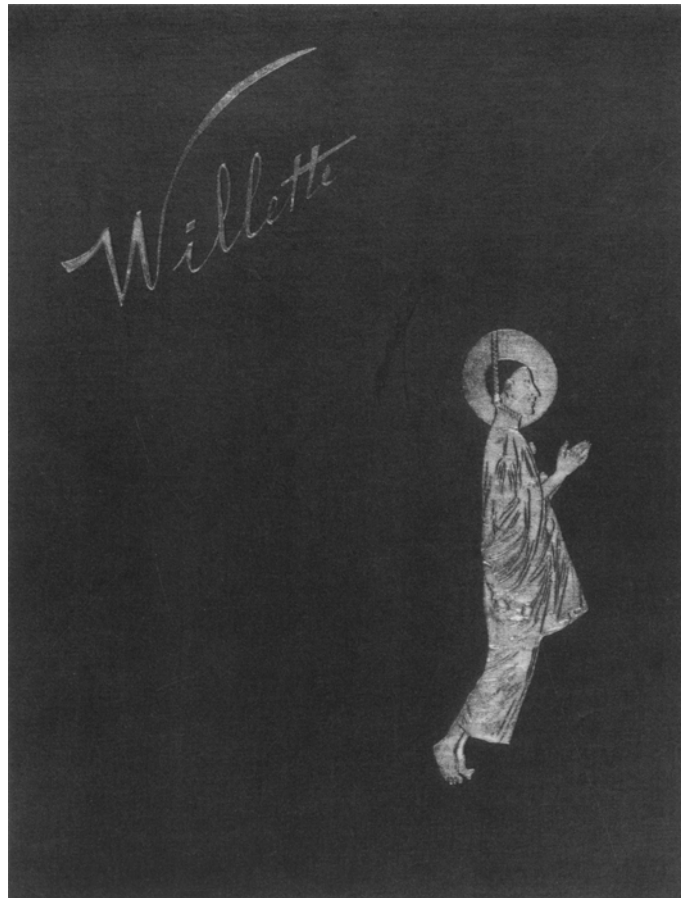
1880s and 1890s, carrying with them the Parisian associations of the vanguard artist as clown.²⁷⁹ The mob that trails Jesus in *Christ’s Entry in to Brussels in 1889* consequently played out both the popular role of *commedia dell’arte* characters in Carnival parades and the more elite associations of the intelligentsia.

Two representations of Pierrot also appear in the foreground of *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*. In the lower right, at the base of the viewing platform under Ensor’s signature, is the profile of a man whose aquiline features, whiteface, blackened eyebrows, red lips, and black cap repeat the mime artist Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau’s signature makeup and much-reproduced face. In the center of the canvas, near the left side, is a tall ocher-clad figure wearing a pointed red hat, whose features resemble Ensor’s own and whose costume allies him with the *commedia dell’arte*.²⁸⁰ By inserting himself in the foreground mass of officialdom in this guise, and by peppering the throng surrounding and following Jesus with the familiar costumes and theatrical gestures, Ensor allies two coded representations of the artist, as Pierrot and as Jesus. Both figures were adopted by the literary vanguard of the nineteenth century as displaced symbols of their own objectives, and in the work of some authors, the two figures were conflated. Adolphe Willette’s 1926 portfolio of cartoons from the 1880s and 1890s, *Pauvre Pierrot* (fig. 77), used the motif of Pierrot as a self-martyred saint, his halo framing the rope with which he has hanged himself, as a way of making this relationship manifest.

The contrast between the distorted representations of the foreground elite and the more exuberant representation of the background rabble articulates the divisions of class and power as Ensor saw them in the late 1880s. The commitment that Ensor made to the invention and adapta-

FIG. 77

Adolphe Willette (French, 1857–1926), Cover of *Pauvre Pierrot*, 1926. Cardboard covered in fabric. Cambridge, Massachusetts, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.



tion of Christian themes in the mid-1880s, and to the ways in which religious motifs intersected with social critique in the later 1880s, achieved fruition in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. In the artist's own words, the painting "crowns the heartfelt series [of works] out of which passionate declarations are bursting to be spoken."²⁸¹ By the time he purchased the vast canvas, drew the meticulous underdrawing, and applied his paints, the grand themes of the painting, and even some of its smallest details, had been well rehearsed in his religious motifs. Not only had Ensor grappled with the ways in which Christian narratives could be modernized, but the open-endedness of these narratives were familiar and debated within his social circle.²⁸²

In *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, Ensor used the image of Jesus, and the anarchic activities of Carnival, to denounce Belgium's alliances among the Church, the state, and the financiers who helped to solidify what Susan Canning has termed the monolithic power that moved the Belgian government in the 1880s. Although Belgian Catholicism had, in that decade, attempted a transformation from a powerful advocacy of papal authority and hostility to everything modern, to a social Catholicism intent upon reconciling dogma with modern culture, the Catholic Party was itself reactionary.²⁸³ Perhaps in the manner of Leo Tolstoy's condemnation of organized religion in the 1870s and thereafter, Ensor assailed the Church for distorting Christ's teachings while affirming his commitment to the moral and spiritual dimensions of Christian belief.²⁸⁴ Aligning his denunciation of false religion with what surely must have seemed to Ensor like the false prophesying of *Les XX*, the artist proposed a singular redemptive vision for his contemporaries. As Jesus, as Pierrot, and in sympathy with the *saltimbanques* who take over Léopold

II's grand boulevard, Ensor offered up a view from the margins in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, and that view was most likely allied with Anarchism.

The principles of Anarchism (the rejection of authority) were well known to Ensor through political work and theories of his social circle. Canning makes the important connection that through the Rousseaus Ensor probably became familiar with the writings of, and perhaps even met, geographer Elisée Reclus, one of Europe's leading Anarchist theorists.²⁸⁵ In his 1884 pamphlet *An Anarchist on Anarchy*, Reclus provided a synthetic analysis of bourgeois hegemony by identifying the ways in which all elite institutions reinforce one another's power.²⁸⁶ In his introduction to the 1885 publication of Peter Kropotkin's *Words of a Rebel*, Reclus also made the distinction between the oppressive Church and the liberationist ministry of Jesus that seems to be reflected in Ensor's religious critiques:

As Anarchists and enemies of Christianity, who must remind a whole society that pretends to be Christian of these words spoken by a man whom they made into a God: "Say unto no man Master, Master." Let everyone remain his own master. Do not turn towards those who sit in office, or to the noisy demagogues in your search for a true message of freedom. Listen rather to the voices which come from below, even if they have to pass through the bars of a prison cell.²⁸⁷

Like his predecessors and colleagues in the movement, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin, Reclus proposed that a moral life is lived outside of organized social institutions, and that every decision to resist institutional authority strikes a blow for individuality.

Because of its emphasis on individual freedom, such rhetoric had great appeal to artists throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century. Oscar Wilde, for example, published his essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" to advance what he called a doctrine of "Individualism." In contrast to Socialism, which threatened to become as doctrinaire and dictatorial as any other political system (according to Wilde), Individualism provided a moral system that could accommodate both collective needs and individual desires. The artist held a privileged place in this system: "Art is the most intense mood of Individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of individualism that the world has known."²⁸⁸

If there is a political "program" to *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1), it is likely akin to Reclus's notion of the freedom of the individual as a moral imperative, and Wilde's belief that artists have the responsibility to open the space for that freedom. In the tradition of Bosch, Bruegel, and Goya, Ensor created this painting as an attempt to lampoon those institutions that confused authority with greater human laws. Ensor's representation of Jesus intervenes in the guise of that moral presence in an extraordinarily sweeping critique of Belgian officialdom. Yet his ambiguous figure of Jesus (who is just as likely to be an actor in a Carnival parade, or a marginalized artist, as the Christian savior) provides one of the many paradoxes in the composition that saves it from becoming programmatic. Like the multiple contradictory celebrations that are quoted in this painting (Carnival, a political rally, a joyous entry, an imperial spectacle), the unknown street, and the unidentifiable genre (Cartoon? Caricature? History painting?), Ensor's Jesus contains the suggestion and not the narration of meaning.

“A KALEIDOSCOPE GIFTED WITH CONSCIOUSNESS”

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889 is a prescriptive painting. Signing the canvas with the date 1888 and conjuring up a vision of the immediate future, Ensor used the title of his canvas as a prognostication. By inserting himself in the center of a carnivalesque Brussels as the redeemer of the city's vices and transgressions, the artist projected a perpetually liberating role for his art and its reception by a ceaselessly unheeding public. In his ambition to produce a grand, encyclopedic statement, Ensor joined other artists of the Symbolist generation who felt that art must express grand, synthetic, universal truths. Ensor's painting should therefore be understood within the context of such works as Auguste Rodin's vertiginous *Gates of Hell* (fig. 78), Paul Gauguin's *Whence Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), and Edvard Munch's protean painting cycle *The Frieze of Life* (first formulated in the early 1890s). On a formal level, each of these artists overturned the conventions of his medium, dissolving the illusion of continuous pictorial space to express a symbolic space of ideas. In this regard, each artist can be seen as a revolutionary, annihilating history. In Ensor's painting, the artist adopted the roving perspective of the *flâneur* on the

FIG. 78

Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917), *The Gates of Hell*, 1880–1917. Bronze, H: 618 cm (243⁵/₁₆ in.), L: 398 cm (156¹/₁₆ in.), D: 118 cm (46¹/₂ in.). Paris, Musée Rodin (s 1304).





modern boulevard, in a sense taking the well-known description by Charles Baudelaire and escalating its effect to a point bordering on hallucination:

We might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all elements of life. He is an “I” with an insatiable appetite for the non-“I,” at every moment rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive.²⁸⁹

Revising the tradition of the carnivalesque from Flemish tradition to articulate the tumultuous experience of the spectacular society, Ensor pushed the chromatic intensity of his palette, the physicality of his lines, and the prolixity of his composition well beyond the threshold of what other artists had deemed experimental in order to underscore the painting’s radical messages.

Like Rodin, however, Ensor was strongly rooted in art historical tradition, in particular of the Flemish masters whose moralizing works undergirded his own investigations. His principal ambition to utter “genuine, passionate declarations,”²⁹⁰ and his desire to “make others famous, to uglify them, to enrich their ugliness,”²⁹¹ were conditioned by the satirical social visions of Bosch and Bruegel. Ensor’s allusions to canonical works such as Bruegel’s *Fight Between Carnival and Lent* (fig. 56) and Bosch’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 48) must be seen as both reverential and strategic. When the artist himself invoked the names of the revered old masters, he often used them as a foil for his own credo of experimentation unfettered by rules or convention: “Long live ignorant

FIG. 79 (OPPOSITE)

James Ensor, *Self-Portrait with Flowered Hat*, 1883/1888. Oil on canvas, 76.5 × 61.5 cm (30 1/8 × 24 1/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Ostend (1956/157).



FIG. 80

Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640), *Self-Portrait*, circa 1638–40. Oil on canvas, 109.5 × 85 cm (43 1/8 × 33 1/2 in.). Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.



FIG. 81

Peter Paul Rubens, *Hélène Fourment and Her Children, Claire-Jeanne and François*, circa 1636–37. Oil on wood, 115 × 85 cm (45 1/4 × 33 1/2 in.). Musée du Louvre, Paris (1795). Photo: RMN-H. Lewandowski.

and naive painting. . . . Flemish art since Bruegel, Bosch, Rubens, and Jordaens is dead. . . . Modern art has no boundaries. . . . Long live free, free, free art!”²⁹² Ensor’s acclamatory references to historical Flemish artists were likewise suffused with irreverence. Such repetitious phrases as “Bruegel, our god, our father”²⁹³ and “Rubens

our father, creator of the sky and the earth”²⁹⁴ seem to parody the ways in which these figures were venerated in the late nineteenth century as much as they express the artist’s own admiration. At the same time, his visual and verbal references to Flemish masters legitimized his work by placing it within an exalted tradition.

A self-portrait completed in year in which Ensor painted *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* embodies this debt and ambivalence. In 1883, around the same time that the youthful artist had begun to copy the works of established artists from magazines and exhibition catalogues (see “A Painting and Its Paradoxes,” pp. 1–19), he created a self-portrait in three-quarter view, somewhat in the manner of Peter Paul Rubens. Five years later, the artist returned to his older canvas (as he had done with other works at that time) and amended it with whimsical additions (fig. 79).²⁹⁵ Applying a swirling, upwardly turned blue mustache and a wide-brimmed flowered hat with sweeping pink feathers, Ensor transformed the painting into both a tribute to and parody of Rubens’s *Self-Portrait* from about 1638–40 (fig. 80). By substituting the plumed chapeau that emulates Rubens’s *Hélène Fourment and Her Children, Claire-Jeanne and François* (fig. 81)²⁹⁶ for the Flemish master’s large, black hat, Ensor undermined the sober masculine authority of Rubens, considered the last great Flemish genius before the decline of that nation’s creativity. In addition, Ensor painted segments of a gray oval onto the surface of the composition that seem to frame the artist as he looks into a mirror.²⁹⁷ Representing himself mirroring, caricaturing, and masquerading as Rubens, Ensor enacted his ambivalent relationship to art history, and his place in it.

Ensor’s emulation of past Dutch and Flemish masters, and his invocation of native Flemish traditions of the car-



FIG. 82

Maurice Antony (Belgian, 1883–1963), *James Ensor Playing the Harmonium in His Music Studio*, Belgium, July 28, 1933. Gelatin silver print, 23.3 × 29.6 cm (9 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{16}$ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (90.XM.3).

nivalesque, not only articulate his engagement with art history but with the ways that Flemish painting had become politicized in late nineteenth-century Belgium. As already noted, Ensor countered the growing notion that all radical artistic enterprise emanated from France by connecting progressive art with a Flemish past. Polemics such as “Our Flemish Forebears,” published in an 1883 issue of *L’Art Moderne*, buoyed Ensor’s efforts. Defining a national “tem-

perament” for Belgians more flamboyant than the French and the “taciturn” Germanic peoples, the article attempted to consolidate the concept of a national essence that was expressed in the works of Peter Campin, the Limbourg brothers, Rubens, and Jordaens. However, so immense was the historical influence of Rubens on French painting that to see his legacy, lamented the author, one must regrettably “go to the Louvre.”²⁹⁸ The article was an appeal to avant-gardists to seek their inspiration, therefore, not in French art, whose color and sensualism were derived after all from Rubens, but from the Flemish original. Rather than looking outside of Belgium, the article exhorted young artists to reclaim and transform a broken, and colonized, heritage.

Such an assertion of veneration for an old master as a model for the avant-garde was also nourished by Flemish art-historical research, a preservationist arm of the Belgian “renaissance” of the 1870s and 1880s. Such projects as Charles Buls’s attempts to preserve the historical monuments and neighborhoods of Brussels and the scholarly compendia of Belgium’s artistic heritage brought renewed attention to what increasingly came to be seen as a coherent lineage.²⁹⁹ The systematic analysis of Peter Paul Rubens’s career was a particularly important element in this process, for Rubens had been identified as a rallying point for national pride at the time of Belgium’s independence in 1830.³⁰⁰ Eugène Demolder’s 1892 book about Ensor, hailing the artist as a culmination of the coloristic legacy of Rubens and the Flemish Primitives, must be read within this culture-wide attempt to retrieve what was perceived as an interrupted historical legacy.³⁰¹ Such rhetoric, justifying the production of an unorthodox contemporary artist by allying it with the work of esteemed old masters, was a standard practice of promoters of the avant-garde by the end of the nineteenth

FIG. 83

James Ensor, *Ostend Carnival*,
1931. Color lithograph,
48 × 32.8 cm (18 7/8 × 12 3/4 in.).
Los Angeles, Getty Research
Institute, Special Collections
(890102*).



century.³⁰² It is precisely the sacral nature of this legacy, and earnest endeavors to preserve it, that Ensor sends up in his self-portrait, and in *Christ's Entry*.

Although *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) was not exhibited publicly for forty years after its completion, from 1917 until Ensor's death it hung in the artist's sitting room over his harmonium (fig. 82). Since it traveled outside of his home only twice during his lifetime—in 1929 for his retrospective exhibition in Paris and in 1939 for the retrospective of his work in Brussels—*Christ's Entry* provided a touchstone for Ensor's ongoing work. Over time, the social circumstances that the artist satirized in 1888–89 changed, and the artist's responses to politics became less confrontational.

Occasionally motifs that were used to brutal advantage in the painting were rendered charming in Ensor's later work.³⁰³ As described earlier, between 1925 and 1930, Ensor selected details from *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* as the subjects of individual canvases [see figure 10]. In them, motifs that had originally contended for attention within the carnivalesque swirl of the painting achieved static clarity. In 1931, Ensor designed a lithographic poster announcing Ostend's Carnival celebrations of that year (fig. 83) in which two masks from the lower right of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* appear (fig. 9). Included in a wreath-like arrangement of seashells, crustaceans, other masks, and a squid that frames the scene of a fisherman and his catch, these masks, no longer parodic, assume an endearing eccentricity. All of these recyclings ultimately depoliticized the painting's original messages and redefined Ensor's masks as comical decorative devices. The stories that Ensor later recounted about the painting's genesis—his claims to the use of house paint, his spontaneity in the face of physical adversity—also served to displace the radi-



FIG. 84

Paul Haesaerts (Belgian, 1901–1974) and James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, 1929. Gouache and oil on paper, 240 × 410 cm (94½ × 161⅞ in.). Brussels, Kunsthandel Jan de Boever.

cal politics of the painting into a critical exegesis on the painting's radical form and technique. The rhetoric that he maintained about his isolation from historical and contemporary art enabled him to consolidate his position as a visionary: "The artist must invent his style," Ensor stated, "and each new work demands its own."³⁰⁴ Over time, the painting's radical content became entirely equated with its audacious form.

In a twist of irony, this once satirical painting that had challenged bourgeois propriety was intended to be apotheosized into a tapestry, one of the most valuable and luxurious media in European history, one that had a particularly strong imperial meaning for the historical Burgundian dukes.³⁰⁵ In 1929, around the time that Ensor became a baron, a plan was conceived to translate the

painting into a tapestry design for the De Saedeleer tapestry firm in Etikove, Belgium. Ensor and art historian Paul Haesaerts created a full-scale copy in gouache and oil (fig. 84) for that purpose, but the project was not carried out because of its high cost. Nonetheless, the firm's commission, and Ensor's participation, suggest the gulf that separated the initial subversive content of the painting from its later, more benign identity.

Given its extraordinary vivacity, bawdiness, scale, and critiques of Capitalism, it is further ironic that, following Ensor's death, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 1) was installed in the casino in Knokke-le-Zout, where gamblers and revelers could extend the painted crowd into a larger mass swirling around the forgotten Christ (fig. 85). In 1957 the painting was moved to the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, and in 1983 to the Kunsthhaus in Zurich. In 1987, the Getty Museum purchased the painting, after the Belgian government gave up its right of first refusal to purchase it. In what Belgian art historian Norbert Hostyn characterizes as "one of the blackest chapters in Belgian cultural politics,"³⁰⁶ the painting was lost to Belgium. Paradoxically, while Jan Verhas's once-fashionable *Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* has drifted into relative obscurity, Ensor's once angry, farcical Anarchistic intervention became a flash point for Belgium's national patrimony.

What the painting has retained throughout its process of political sanitization, and its removal from its native context, is an enthralling visual power that was indebted to Ensor's oppositional politics. Poised on the edge of pictorial chaos, Ensor deftly maintained control of his compositional means through his grounding in academic technique, his intense scrutiny of past masters' work, and the lessons he extracted from his own audacious works such as *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (fig. 70) and *The Tribula-*

FIG. 85

Hubert de Segonzac, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*
Hanging on the Wall of the Casino
in Knokke-le-Zout, Belgium,
1951. Photograph. Property
of Paris *Match*, courtesy Patrick
Derom Gallery, Brussels.



tions of Saint Anthony (fig. 71). Through immense discipline, Ensor parlayed his youthful Anarchist politics into a canvas of immense integrity and astringent beauty. A synthesis of the artist's budding ideology, inchoate spirituality, anger, humor, and sense of loss, the painting encapsulates the aspirations and discord of late nineteenth-century modernity. At the same time, it has maintained its complex-

ity and freshness throughout the Expressionist movements of the twentieth century. By transforming the spiritual content of *The Aureoles of Christ* or *the Sensibilities of Light* into a brutal and comical tirade against contemporary art and politics, Ensor gave to posterity one of the most deeply personal and elusive views of public life from the turn of the nineteenth century.

ENDNOTES

1. *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* has been the subject of two monographs: Walter Vanbeselaere, *L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles* (Brussels, 1957), a philosophical consideration of the painting, and Stephen C. McGough, *James Ensor's "The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889"* (New York and London, 1985), which locates the painting within the cultural politics of late nineteenth-century Belgium. As the best-known and most significant of Ensor's works, the painting has also been analyzed in depth in virtually all contributions to Ensor's formidable bibliography. Of the many studies, Émile Verhaeren's 1908 monograph, one of the first studies of Ensor's work, provides an astute description, formal analysis, and social commentary. Jean Teugles, *Variations sur James Ensor* (Ostend, 1931), provides source material; Libby Tannenbaum, *James Ensor* (New York, 1951) and John David Farmer, *Ensor* (New York, 1976), proposed social contexts for reading of the painting; Paul Haesaerts, *James Ensor* (New York, 1959), asserts a psychobiographical meaning for the canvas; and the publications of Francine-Claire Legrand, especially *Ensor: Cet inconnu* (Brussels, 1971) and *Ensor: La Mort et le Charme, un autre Ensor* (Antwerp, 1993) are fundamental sources. Susan M. Canning's essays, "La Foule et le boulevard: James Ensor and the Street Politic of Everyday Life," in *Belgium: The Golden Decades, 1880–1914*, Jane Block, ed. (New York, 1997), pp. 41–64, and "The Ordure of Anarchy: Scatological Signs of

Self and Society in the Art of James Ensor," *Art Journal* 52, no. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 47–53, provide social-contextual readings of the painting; and Diane Lesko, *James Ensor: The Creative Years* (Princeton, 1985), contributes sources for the painting in Belgian and French literature and in the tradition of parody. Most recently, Michel Draguet, in *James Ensor ou la Fantasmagorie* (Brussels, 1999), asserts a psychological and existential context for the painting, and Stefan Jonsson's "Society Degree Zero: Christ Degree Zero: Christ, Communism, and the Madness of Crowds in the Art of James Ensor," *Representations* 75 (Summer 2001), pp. 1–32, brilliantly analyzes the painting in light of social and literary theories of the 1880s and 1890s (the latter was unavailable at the time this book was written).

Ensor himself provided little analysis of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. Despite the large volume of writing on this painting, it continues, in the words of Stephen McGough (note 1), to "overwhelm the public and resist interpretation." A comprehensive bibliography of writings on Ensor until 1960 may be found in Hubert de France, *James Ensor: Essai de bibliographie commentée* (Brussels, 1960). Xavier Tricot, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures* (Antwerp, 1992), is an excellent general survey of his paintings; and Robert Hoozee et al., *James Ensor: Dessins et estampes* (Paris, 1987) provides an authoritative overview of the artist's graphic work.

2. Lucien Schwob, *Ensor: Les Cahiers du Journal des poètes* (Brussels, 1936), n.p., translated in McGough (note 1), pp. 58–59.

3. Mark Leonard and Louise Lippincott, "James Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*: Technical Analysis, Restoration, and Reinterpretation," *Art Journal* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1995), pp. 20–21.

4. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 20.

5. *Les fêtes des Noces d'Argent: Compte rendu des cérémonies* (Brussels, 1878), p. 37.

6. Edmond-Louis de Taeye, *Les Artistes belgiques contemporains: Leurs vie—theurs oeuvres—theur place dans l'art* (Brussels, 1894), p. 238.

7. De Taeye (note 6), p. 237.

8. See McGough (note 1), pp. 61–62 and 80–81.

9. Ensor, letter to Louis Delattre, dated Ostend, August 4, 1898, in *James Ensor: Lettres*, Xavier Tricot, ed. (Brussels, 1999), pp. 105–106.

10. Ensor's biographer and colleague Paul Haesaerts asserts that "no other artist is . . . given so completely, and it would seem, exclusively, to all forms of playful activity. No other artist derives all his behavior, his

mode of expression, and, in so far as he has one, his philosophy, from play. The idea of play is doubtless the golden key that opens the door to a deeper understanding of this painter-conjurer, of this master of the puzzling.” Haesaerts (note 1), p. 98.

11. Ensor’s many essays, articles, and dinner lectures, several of which were previously issued, have been collected into published volumes, the most authoritative of which is James Ensor, *Mes écrits*, preface by Franz Hellens, 5th ed. (Liège, 1974). In addition, many of his letters have been edited and published in the following volumes: *James Ensor: Lettres à André de Ridder*, introduction by André de Ridder (Antwerp, 1960); *James Ensor: Lettres à Emma Lambotte 1904–1914*, Danielle Derrey-Capon, ed. (Tournai, 1999); and *James Ensor: Lettres* (note 9).

12. Ensor, Letter to André de Ridder, dated Ostend, August 2, 1928, in Ensor (note 9), pp. 190–191. The passage echoes Leonardo’s memory of a bird of prey visiting his cradle and putting its tail in his mouth. The story is recounted and analyzed in Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, Alan Tyson, trans. (New York, 1964), p. 32. This study was first published in Leipzig and Vienna in 1910 and translated to French in 1927 (*Un souvenir d’enfance de Leonardo da Vinci* (Paris, 1927). Herman Piron’s *Ensor: Een psychoanalytische studie* (Antwerp, 1968) begins with an analysis of this anecdote and interprets it, using Freud’s psychoanalytic method, as a key to Ensor’s phantasmagorical imagination (see p. 20ff.).

13. Ensor, “Three Weeks at the Academy,” [1884], translated in Haesaerts (note 1), pp. 355–356.

14. These drawings are catalogued in Lydia Schoonbaert, “Addendum Beschrijvende Catalogus 1948: Een verzameling tekeningen van Ensor (deel I),” *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (Antwerp, 1968), pp. 311–342. Ensor’s copy after Jan Verhas’s *The Master Painter* is listed as no 2711/159a, *The Art Students*, on p. 341. Ensor copied a reproduction of Verhas’s painting from 1830–1880: *Catalogue illustré de l’exposition historique de l’art belge et du Musée Moderne de Bruxelles*, F.-G. Dumas, ed. (Brussels, 1880), pl. 165. A schematic drawing of Verhas’s *Review of the Schoolchildren in 1878* appears in pl. 152 of the same volume.

15. Ensor, “Discours (2me) de Monsieur le Baron James Ensor,” [1935] in Ensor, *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 224.

16. A recent chronology, as well as an extensive genealogy and biographical summary, is provided in Jean Plasschaert, “Biography,” in Ensor, exh. cat. (Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1999), pp. 332–341. The date provided for Ensor’s first trip to London in this publication is 1887.

17. A summary of this work is provided by Robert Hoozee, “Ensor and His Environment: Landscapes, Interiors, Still Lifes, 1880–1887,” in *James Ensor 1860–1949: Theatre of Masks*, Carol Brown, ed., exh. cat. (London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1997), pp. 18–26.

18. “Le Salon de Bruxelles, sixième article, la jeune école,” *L’Art Moderne* 41 (October 12, 1884), p. 330, translated in McGough (note 1), p. 41.

19. Susan Canning notes that the catalogue of the exhibition of *Les XX* from 1885 lists two of Ensor’s paintings as having been

“rejected from the Salon.” Susan M. Canning, “Vervreemding en expressionistische visie: Ensor, Les Vingt, en de kritiek,” in *James Ensor*, exh. cat. (Antwerp, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, 1983). I am grateful to Susan Canning for providing an unpublished English version of this essay (1990), from which I draw my information.

20. Libby Tannenbaum (note 1), pp. 50–51.

21. Ensor, in “Discours au Kursaal d’Ostende,” in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 143, translated in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), Introduction, p. 12.

22. Norbert Hostyn surmises that the title refers to a local name or pun specific to Ostend. Hostyn, *James Ensor: Leven en werk* (Bruges, 1996), p. 71.

23. Hostyn (note 22), p. 71.

24. Émile Verhaeren, “Sur James Ensor” [1908], in *Émile Verhaeren: Sur James Ensor suivi de Peintures par James Ensor*, preface by Luc de Heusch (Brussels, 1990), p. 73.

25. Robert Jensen notes this exhibition as a turning point in the promotion of modern art in Europe. The partnership of the exhibition and the laudatory monograph assured a prominent market position for the artist and a fixed critical frame for the public consumption of his work. See Jensen’s *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), p. 133. Canning (note 19) demonstrates Ensor’s participation in the critical discourses of the book.

26. Ensor, letter to Pol de Mont, undated [1894–95], published in *Ensor ein Maler aus dem späten 19. Jahrhundert*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart,

Württembergischer Kunstverein, 1972), translated in Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque, “Me and My Circle,” in *Ensor* (note 16), p. 18.

27. Ensor, letter to Émile Verhaeren [early 1892], in *Ensor* (note 9), p. 755.

28. Verhaeren (note 24), p. 72.

29. Ernest Maindron, *Les affiches illustrées*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886).

30. Verhaeren later wrote extensively about Chéret in “L’Affiche,” *L’Art Moderne* 8 (February 19, 1893), pp. 57–58, in which he famously referred to Chéret’s posters as humanizing the “cold banality of modern city walls.” Reprinted in Émile Verhaeren, *Écrits sur l’art (1893–1916)*, Paul Aron, ed. (Brussels, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 570–572. He also noted Seurat’s debt to Chéret in “Les XX,” *La société nouvelle* (February 28, 1891), pp. 248–255, reprinted in *Écrits sur l’art*, vol. 1, pp. 403–409; and “Georges Seurat, *La société nouvelle* (April 30, 1891), pp. 430–438, reprinted in *Écrits sur l’art*, vol. 1, pp. 409–427. On Seurat and Chéret, see Robert Herbert, “Seurat and Jules Chéret,” *Art Bulletin* 40 (1958).

31. Paul Haesaerts, “Quand James Ensor peignait ‘L’Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles,’” *L’Œil* 131 (November 1965), p. 30.

32. Jean Teugels, *Variations sur James Ensor* (Ostend, 1931), p. 61, translated in McGough (note 1), p. 58.

33. Leonard and Lippincott (note 3), p. 22. The technical analysis and cleaning of the painting was accomplished by Mark Leonard and the Paintings Conservation Department staff at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

34. Speech by James Ensor, published by René Lyr, in *Les Mots et les couleurs* (Tournai,

1978), pp. 120–121, translated in Ollinger-Zinque, in *Ensor* (note 16), p. 22.

35. These drawings are examined in detail in “The Artist as Rebel and Redeemer,” pp. 71–90.

36. Robert Hoozee made this observation in Hoozee et al., *Ik James Ensor: Tekeningen en prenten*, exh. cat. (Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), p. 68.

37. Legrand (note 1, 1971), pp. 76–78. For an analysis of the likely changes to the composition, see McGough (note 1), pp. 207–213.

38. Leonard and Lippincott (note 3), p. 23, identify *Vive Jesus . . . ces reformes . . . libertes doctrinaires* as the only phrases legible in the latter banner’s underpainting.

39. At the time of this writing, Michel Draguet is completing a forthcoming article on this and other effaced inscriptions in *Christ’s Entry*. Working closely with members of the Paintings Conservation Department of the Getty Museum, and assisted by digitally enhanced photographs, he is deciphering Ensor’s original painted slogans. This process will shed considerable new light on the painting. I would like to thank Michel Draguet and Denise Allen for sharing this information with me.

40. McGough cites the testimony of Frank Edebau, director of the City Museum of Ostend, and a friend of Ensor, to that effect, as noted in McGough (note 1), p. 207. A view of Ensor’s studio that the artist painted in 1917, in which the painting is shown hanging in the background, seems to suggest that the slogans remained unchanged in the painting from 1917 until now. *My Studio in 1917*, formerly in the Wayenberg collection, and now lost, is illustrated in McGough (note 1), fig. 166.

41. See Robert Rosenblum, “Fernand Pelez, or The Other Side of the Post-Impressionist Coin,” in *Art the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson*, Moshe Barasch et al., eds. (New York and Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981), pp. 707–718. The painting has most recently been dated to 1900–1905 in *D’Ingres à Cézanne: La XIXe siècle dans les collections du Musée de Petit Palais*, exh. cat. (Paris Musées, 1998), p. 156.

42. Ensor, quoted by Paul Haesaerts (note 1), p. 166.

43. Ensor, letter to André de Ridder, dated Ostend, August 2, 1928, in *Ensor* (note 9), p. 192.

44. Xavier Tricot, “Ensor and English Art,” in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), p. 103.

45. Ensor, note to Pol de Mont, dated Ostend, October 4, 1900, in the collection of the Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ostend, translated in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), p. 98.

46. Octave Maus made this observation in “L’orsqu’en 1884,” *La Plume* (Paris, 1899), p. 31.

47. For a discussion of Lavater’s work and its implications for later science and art, and for a summary of the history and practice of physiognomy in the nineteenth century, see Mary Cowling, *The Artist and the Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge and New York, 1989), especially chapter 1, “Physiognomy: The Literal Law.”

48. Gottfried Schadow, *Physiognomies Nationales, ou observations sur la différence des traits du visage et sur la conformation de la tête de l’homme*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1835).

49. George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987), especially chapter 1, “The Idea of Civilization Before the Crystal Palace (1750–1850).”

50. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1981).

51. Judith Wechsler has demonstrated the complex relationships among the art of caricature, the science of physiognomy, mime, and other forms of social indexing in her study *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Chicago, 1982).

52. Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London, 1991), especially chapter 7.

53. Legrand suggested the importance of Japanese masks, and the tradition of theater that they bore, as sources for Ensor's adaptation of the mask as a consistent theme and emblem in his art. She notes Ensor's exposure to them in his family's shop, where they were sold as decorative objects. Legrand (note 1, 1971), p. 79.

54. Some of these will be discussed in the chapters “The City, the Street, and the Urban Spectacle,” pp. 20–36, and “Unholy Alliances: The Politics of Church and State in Léopold's Belgium,” pp. 52–70.

55. Legrand (note 1, 1971), p. 80.

56. Gotthard Jedlicka, *Begegnungen mit Künstlern der Gegenwart* (Zurich, 1946), pp. 165–166.

57. Gert Schiff identified the group of masks clustered just below and to the left of the viewing platform (fig. 9) as, from right to left, Ensor's grandmother (the bespectacled mask

also used in *Scandalized Masks*), mother, sister, and aunt. He also identified a portrait of Ensor's close friend Mariette Rousseau and counts seven self-portraits in the guise of a “white-faced, hook-nosed Pierrot.” Gert Schiff, “Ensor the Exorcist,” in *Art the Ape of Nature* (note 41), pp. 728–729. Subsequent scholarship has generally discounted these readings.

58. Xavier Tricot, *James Ensor: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings*, vol. 1 (London, 1992), p. 257, dates the completion of the painting to 1888–89 on the basis of works from 1889 that appear in the photograph reproduced here as figure 2. He notes that this photograph “explains why . . . [the painting] . . . did not figure in the 1889 exhibition of *Les XX*: the work was, as yet, unfinished.”

59. McGough notes that Ensor was ill in the winter of 1887–88, at the time that the composition of the *Les XX* exhibition was being decided, and that he did not submit his works in time for its February 4, 1888, opening. He then wrote to Octave Maus, the secretary of *Les XX*, requesting that his works be included anyway. Some of his works were hung, but the majority were not. There is no reference in Ensor's writings that the painting was rejected or suppressed in the 1889 exhibition, nor was there a mention of such a scandal in the exhibition reviews. Because, as noted in “Ensor and the Belgian Art World,” pp. 37–51, Ensor and Maus had previously come into conflict, a perception of *Les XX*'s rejection of *Christ's Entry into Brussels* has been a commonplace in much of the Ensor literature. See McGough (note 1), pp. 44–46 and 205–206.

60. Ensor, letter to André de Ridder, dated Ostend, September 30, 1928, in Ensor (note 9), p. 195.

61. Anthony Vidler, “The Scenes of the Street: Transformations in Ideal and Reality, 1750–1871,” in *On Streets*, Stanford Anderson, ed. (Cambridge, 1978), p. 91.

62. Henri and Paul Hymans, *Bruxelles a travers les age*, vol. 3, *Bruxelles Moderne* (Brussels, 1974) [reproduction of edition Bruylant-Christophe et Cie], p. 481.

63. Hymans and Hymans (note 62), p. 519.

64. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Paris, 1862), p. 486, cited in Bonnie L. Grad and Timothy A. Riggs, *Visions of City and Country: Prints and Photographs of Nineteenth-Century France*, exh. cat. (Worcester Art Museum, 1982), p. 93.

65. For an analysis of the structure of this canvas, see Kirk Varnedoe, *Gustave Caillebotte* (New Haven and London, 1987), pp. 88–95; and Peter Galassi, “Caillebotte's Method,” in the same volume, pp. 27–40.

66. “L'Hemma” [Albert Mockel], *Les Fumistes wallons* (Brussels, 1887, translated in Lesko (note 1), p. 112.

67. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Hélène Iswolsky, trans. (Bloomington, 1984), especially chapter 1. Timothy Hyman, in “James Ensor: A Carnival Sense of the World,” in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), pp. 76–86, examines Ensor's work in relation to Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais.

68. See *Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist*, Anne Distel et al., eds., exh. cat. (Paris, La Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, and the Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), nos. 60–62.

69. On Haussmann's restructuring of Paris, see David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and*

the Rebuilding of Paris (Princeton, N.J., 1958); and Howard Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris Transformed* (New York, 1971).

70. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Jonathan Mayne, trans. (London, 1964), p. 10. See Susan M. Canning's analysis of Baudelaire, and of the modern boulevard (note 1, 1997), pp. 41–64.

71. Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, *Journals: 1851–1870*, entry for November 18, 1860, translated in Vidler (note 61), p. 99.

72. Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle* [1967] (Detroit, 1977).

73. See Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, 1999), which examines the ways in which the emerging languages of modern painting are embedded in broad social and scientific examinations of, and attempts to master, the shifting terrain of optical and temporal perception within the spectacular society.

74. Jean Stengers, *Emigration et immigration en Belgique au XIXe et au XXe siècles* (Brussels, 1978), p. 69.

75. Marcel Smets, *L'avènement de la cité-jardin en Belgique: Histoire de l'habitat social en Belgique de 1830 à 1930*, Pierre Mardaga, ed. (Brussels, 1977), p. 9.

76. Hymans and Hymans (note 62), p. 506.

77. Christine Weightman and Anthony Barnes, *Brussels: Grote Markt to Common Market* (Brussels, 1976), p. 184.

78. Liane Ranieri, *Léopold II Urbaniste* (Brussels, 1973), pp. 14–19.

79. The correspondence between the two has been lost. Yvon Leblieq et al., *Bruxelles, construire et reconstruire: Architecture et aménagement urbain 1780–1914*, exh. cat. (Brussels, Crédit Communal de Belgique, 1979), p. 283.

80. Leblieq (note 79), 286.

81. Weightman and Barnes (note 77), p. 193.

82. Spiro Kostof, "His Majesty the Pick: The Aesthetics of Demolition," in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, Zeynep Çelik et al., eds. (Berkeley, 1994), p. 10.

83. Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *Elites for the Capital? Foreign Migration to Mid-Nineteenth Century Brussels* (Amsterdam, 1990), p. 16. See chapter 2 for an analysis of the population changes in Brussels's city center in the mid-nineteenth century.

84. *Population: Recensement Général de 1890*, vol. 1 (Brussels, 1893), pp. 188–189 and 369.

85. Émile Leclercq, in *La Belgique illustrée*, vol. 1 (Brussels, circa 1890), pp. 119–120, quoted in Yvon Leblieq (note 79), p. 23.

86. Ludwig Bauer, *Leopold the Unloved: King of the Belgians and of Wealth* (Boston, 1935), p. 166.

87. Weightman and Barnes (note 77), p. 189.

88. Victor-Gaston Martiny, *Bruxelles: L'Architecture des origines à 1900* (Brussels, 1980), p. 120.

89. Canning (note 1, 1997), pp. 44 and 52.

90. Walter Vanbeselaere suggests that the Procession of the Holy Blood may have been

a source for the parade represented in *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, and that the image of Christ seated on a donkey, the marching band, and the dramatic drum major included in the painting are indebted to this procession. Vanbeselaere (note 1), p. 15.

91. A description of this procession, and others listed below, is found in Hugh Gibson, *Belgium* (New York, 1939), pp. 240–245.

92. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), p. 159.

93. Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 1981), pp. 73–92.

94. Hippolyte Taine, *La Révolution* (Paris, 1878), 1: 70, quoted in Barrows (note 93), p. 77.

95. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 2nd ed. (Dunwoody, Georgia, 1968), pp. v and xv.

96. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* [from the 2nd German ed.] (New York, 1895), pp. 39–40.

97. George M. Beard, *Neurasthenia (Nerve Exhaustion) with Remarks on Treatment* (St. Louis, 1879).

98. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" [1903], in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Donald N. Levine, ed. and trans. (Chicago, 1971), pp. 334 and 338.

99. Canning (note 1, 1997), p. 45.

100. Georges Eekhoud, *La nouvelle Carthage* [1888], reprinted in *Le Belgique Fin de Siècle: Romans-Nouvelles-Théâtre: Eekhoud*,

Le Monnier, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, Van Lerberghe, Verhaeren, Paul Gorceix, ed. (Brussels, 1997), p. 515.

101. On this widespread phenomenon, see Sharon Hirsh, *Malaise: Symbolist Art and Urban Society* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press), chapter 6.

102. Haesaerts (note 1), pp. 44–45.

103. For a contextual analysis of this painting, see Patrick Florizoone, *James Ensor: Les bains à Ostende* (Brussels and Antwerp, 1996).

104. Ensor, “A Ostende,” in *Mes écrits* (note 11), pp. 44–45.

105. These plans are included in Ranieri (note 78).

106. See his many speeches and writings on Ostend and its development, including “Un cri d’alarm,” in *Mes écrits* (note 11), pp. 66–67.

107. Ensor to Pol de Mont, letter dated February 6, 1888, reproduced in Legrand, “Les lettres de James Ensor,” *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1966), p. 33, translated in Susan M. Canning (note 19).

108. Ensor, letter to André de Ridder, dated September 30, 1928, Ensor (note 11, 1960), p. 61, translated in Jane Block, *Les XX and Belgian Avant-Gardism 1868–1894* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984), p. 35.

109. Canning (note 19).

110. Block (note 108), p. 35.

111. It was on the basis of these events in 1888, or more to the point, Ensor’s description of them, that it was later assumed that *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* had been rejected by *Les XX* in the following year.

112. “Les Vingt,” *L’Art Moderne* 45 (November 11, 1883), p. 361, translated in Jane Block, “Les XX: Forum of the Avant-Garde,” in *Belgian Art 1880–1914*, exh. cat. (New York, The Brooklyn Museum, 1980), p. 19.

113. Block (note 108), p. xiii.

114. Ensor to Maus, dated November 1886, in Francine-Claire Legrand (note 107), p. 26, quoted in Block (note 108), p. 48.

115. Jane Block quotes a critic from 1888: “The catalogue is red, a blood red, the red of combat and carnage,” in “Chronique de la ville,” *L’Etoile Belge* (February 5, 1888), in Block (note 108), p. 37. On the Anarcho-Socialist connections with *Les XX*, see Block (note 108), pp. 37–39; Susan M. Canning, “‘Soyons Nous’: *Les XX* and the Cultural Discourse of the Belgian Avant-Garde,” in *Les XX and the Belgian Avant-Garde*, Stephen H. Goddard, ed., exh. cat. (Lawrence, Kansas, Spencer Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 28–54; and Canning, “In the Realm of the Social,” *Art in America* (February 2000), pp. 74–82 and 141.

116. Émile Verhaeren, “La lutte pour l’art,” *Le National Belge* (February 10, 1884), in Block (note 108), p. xv.

117. Susan M. Canning (note 115, 1992), p. 28.

118. Jane Block, “Les XX and La Libre Esthétique,” in *Impressionism to Symbolism: The Belgian Avant-Garde 1880–1900*, Mary Anne Stevens et al., eds., exh. cat. (London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1994), p. 42.

119. “À Propos du Salon des XX: l’Impressionisme,” *L’Art Moderne* 6 (February 5, 1888), p. 42, translated in Block (note 112), p. 26.

120. Block (note 112), p. 31.

121. “L’Art et la Révolution,” *L’Art Moderne* 29 (July 18, 1886), p. 25.

122. Camille Lemonnier, “Pour Servir de Préface au Salon de 1872,” *L’Art Libre* (August 16, 1872), p. 241, translated in Sura Levine, “Politics and the Graphic Arts of the Belgian Avant-Garde,” in *Les XX and the Belgian Avant-Garde: Prints, Drawings, and Books, circa 1890*. Stephen H. Goddard, Spencer Museum of Art, ed., exh. cat. (University of Kansas, 1992), p. 55.

123. Pierre Baudson, “De ‘Germinal’ à ‘Happe-Chair,’ et de Constantin Meunier à Dalau,” in *Paris-Bruxelles/ Bruxelles-Paris: Réalisme, impressionisme, symbolisme, art nouveau. Les relations artistiques entre la France et la Belgique, 1848–1914*, Anne Pinget et al., eds., exh. cat. (Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1997), p. 372.

124. Haesaerts (note 1), p. 182.

125. See Baudson (note 123), pp. 370–375.

126. See Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885–1898* (New Haven, 1961), and Paul Aron, *Les Écrivains belges et le socialisme (1880–1913): L’Expérience de l’art social: d’Edmond Picard à Émile Verhaeren* (Brussels, 1985).

127. Block (note 108), pp. 76–77.

128. “Chronique générale,” *Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la littérature* (February 28, 1887), p. 131, translated in McGough (note 1), p. 43.

129. Susan M. Canning (note 1, 1993), p. 48. Canning also identified Amedée Lyden’s

cover illustration to Théodore Hannon, *Au pays de Mannekin-Pis*, 1883, as a source for Ensor's etching (p. 47).

130. Octave Maus, "James Ensor," in *James Ensor: Peintre et graveur*, special issue of *La Plume* (Paris, 1899), 31–33, translated in Block (note 112), p. 21.

131. Some of the most confrontational works that Ensor exhibited with *Les XX* were *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 72) and *The Strike or The Massacre of the Fishermen* (fig. 44), both shown in 1889, and *Belgium in the Nineteenth Century* (fig. 39) and *Doctrinal Nourishment* (fig. 41), both exhibited in 1891. As Susan M. Canning notes, the incendiary content of these works prompted Maus to attempt to block display of *The Good Judges* (fig. 54) in 1892. After Picard's intervention, however, the painting was later exhibited. See Canning (note 19), p. 18.

While Ensor, and other artists exhibiting with *Les XX*, did provoke critical controversy, Maus's alarm about governmental action seems to have been more rhetorical than genuine. King Léopold II himself is reported to have championed Ensor when the painter's *The Baths at Ostend* (fig. 29) was refused by *La Libre Esthétique*, the exhibition society founded by Maus after *Les XX* was dissolved. According to Ensor, Léopold encouraged the organization to exhibit the painting: "Monsieur Ensor has done the subject very well; he has not exaggerated, this is exactly how one bathes at Ostend. . . ." Quoted in Susan M. Canning, "The Devil's Mirror: Private Fantasy and Public Vision," in Catherine de Zegher, *Between Street and Mirror: The Drawings of James Ensor*, exh. cat. (New York, The Drawing Center, 2001), p. 78, n. 51.

132. On the formation of *Les XX* and its relationship to the other arts organizations in Belgium, see Block (note 108).

133. Jean François Portaels, *L'Art Moderne* 23 (June 5, 1881), p. 107, quoted in H. de France, *James Ensor: Proeve van gecommentariëerde bibliografie* (Brussels, 1960), pp. 26–27, and translated in Farmer (note 1), p. 20.

134. Jacques van Lennep, "Les expositions burlesques à Bruxelles de 1870 à 1914: l'art zwanze—une manifestation pré-dadaïste?," *Bulletin, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique Bruxelles* (1970), pp. 127–148. The catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition was entitled *Catalogue de la Great Zwans Exhibition organisée par Les soins des Membres de l'Essor au profit de L'oeuvre de la presse (ouvriers sans Travail)* (Brussels, 1885).

135. See Van Lennep (note 134).

136. Émile Goudeau, *Dix Ans de Bohème* (Paris, 1888), quoted in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, exh. cat. (Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1996), p. 104. An anthology of writings by and about the *Fumistes* may be found in Daniel Grojnowski and Bernard Sarrazin, *L'Esprit Fumiste et les rires fin de siècle* (Paris, 1990).

137. Cate and Shaw (note 136), p. 40. See also Luce Abélès and Catherine Charpin, *Arts incohérents, académie du dérisoire*, exh. cat. (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1992), pp. 16–35.

138. Timothy Hyman speculates that Ensor knew of the Incohérents in "James Ensor:

A Carnival Sense of the World," in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), p. 78.

139. Ensor exhibited *A Study of Christ Walking on the Water*, listed as no. 36 in the exhibition catalogue *Essor-Marcunvins (Caisse d'Art Appliqué—Bienfaisance) 1887: Catalogue de l'Exposition Universelle burlesque ouverte au Musée du Nord, du 12 Fev. au 30 Avril 1887*, Brussels, circa 1887), p. 29, cited in Van Lennep (note 134), p. 140.

140. Van Lennep (note 134), p. 139.

141. Canning (note 1, 1993), p. 51.

142. Diane Lesko (note 1) discusses Wiertz's influence on Ensor on p. 61.

143. "L'ancien et le nouvel impressionisme," *L'Art Moderne* 6 (February 5, 1888), p. 42, translated in Block (note 108), p. 63.

144. Canning (note 19).

145. The article is Félix Fénéon, "L'Impressionnisme aux Tuileries," *L'Art Moderne* 38 (September 19, 1886).

146. Félix Fénéon, "Le Néo-impressionisme," *L'Art Moderne* 18 (May 1, 1887), pp. 138–139, translated in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 162.

147. Fénéon (note 146), p. 161.

148. The extensive literature examining Seurat's understanding and uses of contemporary color science is summarized in John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (London, 1999), pp. 209–227.

149. Fénéon (note 146), pp. 138–139. Linda Nochlin's translation is published

in *Seurat in Perspective*, Norma Broude, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978), pp. 40–41.

150. Madelaine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'Art 1884–1914* (Brussels, 1926), p. 52, translated in Sarah Faunce, “Seurat and ‘The Soul of Things,’” in *Belgian Art* (note 112), p. 41.

151. “La recherche de la Lumière, *L'Art Moderne* 26 (June 26, 1887), p. 202.

152. “Le Salon des XX: L'Ancien et le nouvel impressionism,” *L'Art Moderne* 6 (February 5, 1888), p. 42.

153. “Le Néo-Impressionnisme,” *L'Art Moderne* 11 (March 11, 1888), p. 85.

154. Verhaeren (note 24), p. 69.

155. Ensor, *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 13, translated in Tannenbaum (note 1), p. 94.

156. Ensor, letter to Pol de Mont, around 1894 or 1895, in Ensor (note 9), p. 127.

157. “Aux XX,” *La Nation* (February 6, 1887), p. 1, quoted in McGough (note 1), p. 122. The “vision” to which Verhaeren refers was Ensor’s submission of the six drawings comprising the series *Visions: The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibility of Light*, which will be discussed presently.

158. Octave Maus, “Les Vingtistes Parisiens,” *L'Art Moderne* 26 (June 26, 1886), p. 204, quoted in Faunce (note 150), p. 44.

159. Ensor, letter to Pol de Mont, undated [1894–95], translated in Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque, “Me and My Circle,” in *Ensor* (note 16), p. 17.

160. Ensor, “Réflexions d’art” [1882], in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 50.

161. *L'Art du Peinture* (1668), *Dialogue sur le coloris* (1675), and *La Vie de Rubens* (1681) are among his most influential works.

162. G. Lagye, “L’Art jeune,” *Le Fédération Artistique* (March 1, 1884), p. 156, quoted in Canning (note 19).

163. Ensor, “Réflexions d’art,” [1882] in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 50.

164. Ensor, quoted in Haesaerts (note 1), p. 227.

165. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, 1986), p. vii.

166. W. Rasch, “Literary Decadence: Artistic Representations of Decay,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 1 (January 1982), p. 205.

167. Jean Moréas, “Le Symbolisme,” *Supplément littéraire du Figaro* (September 18, 1886), p. 150, translated in Dorra (note 146), p. 151.

168. Gustave Kahn, “Réponse des Symbolistes,” *L'Événement* (September 28, 1886).

169. Émile Verhaeren, “Silhouettes d’artistes, Fernand Khnopff,” *L'Art Moderne* 37 (September 12, 1886), p. 290, translated in Francine-Claire Legrand, “The Symbolist Movement,” in *Belgian Art* (note 112), pp. 57–58.

170. In a letter to Octave Maus, Ensor accused Khnopff of plagiarism, likening himself to the artist Claude Lantier, and Khnopff to Fagerolles, who plagiarized Lantier’s work after his suicide, from Émile Zola’s novel *L'Œuvre* (1886). Legrand (note 107), p. 24. The incident is recounted in Canning (note 19).

171. See Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque’s catalogue entry for *Listening to Schumann* in Stevens et al., eds. (note 118), p. 140.

172. See Hirsh (note 101).

173. In a letter to fellow *Vingtiste* Dario de Regoyos, dated Ostend, December 1884, Ensor remarked on how strongly he was moved by Goya’s painting *Time and the Old Women* (circa 1810–12), which he saw at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lille: “Never have I seen more frightening figures; they impressed me vividly.” Published in Ensor (note 9), pp. 153–154. See also L. Schoonbaert (note 14), pp. 311–342, for Ensor’s copies after Goya and others, rendered in the early 1880s.

174. This opposition had been less pronounced in Belgium than elsewhere in Europe because the Church had participated in the revolution against the Dutch in 1830. See Lode Wils, “The Two Belgian Revolutions,” in *Nationalism in Belgium: Shifting Identities, 1780–1995*, Kas Deprez et al., eds. (London and New York, 1998), p. 39.

175. Alexander Murphy and Carl Strikwerda, “Brussels and the Belgian Avant-Garde in Historical and Geographical Perspective,” in Goddard, ed. (note 115), p. 21ff.

176. For further information on these issues, see Ernst Heinrich Kossmann, *The Low Countries 1780–1940* (Oxford, 1978), chapter 6, “Towards Democracy, 1879–1896.”

177. McGough (note 1), p. 75.

178. See for example “Manifesto of the Walloon League of Saint Gilles” [1886], in *The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History, 1780–1990*, Theo Hermans et al., eds. (London and Atlantic Highlands, N. J., 1992), pp. 170–71.

179. McGough (note 1) provides a summary of the consolidation of the Socialist movements on pp. 63–79.

180. Demetrius C. Boulger, *The Reign of Leopold II, 1865–1909*, vol. 1 (London, 1925), p. 245.

181. Xavier Tricot, “Ensor and English Art,” in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), p. 114, interprets this inscription as a reference to Florian’s fable *The Monkey and the Magic Lantern*, in which a monkey projects images that only the dim-witted turkey, of all of the animals, claims to see. This identification is made in Hoozee et al. (note 1), pl. 109, p. 155.

182. McGough (note 1), p. 197, and Canning (note 1, 1997).

183. The print was published as a title page for a satirical play by Pieter Langendyk in 1720. A French version of the print was also produced. On this image, see Hans Ries, *Zwischen Hausse und Baisse: Börse und geld in der Karikatur* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 53–55.

184. Significantly, around the time that Ensor became a baron, he attempted to purchase and destroy as many impressions of this and another version of the print as he could locate. As a result, this is a very rare image. Auguste Taevernier, *Catalogue illustré de ses gravures leur description critique et l’inventaire des plaques* (Ledeberg-Ghent, 1973), p. 199.

185. Canning (note 1, 1997), p. 56.

186. Neal Ascherson, *The King Incorporated: Leopold II in the Age of Trusts* (London, 1963), p. 62.

187. Ludwig Bauer, *Leopold the Unloved: King of the Belgians and of Wealth* (Boston, 1935), p. 204.

188. For example, Marx and Engels met in Brussels, and Victor Hugo fled there after the Paris Commune. See Murphy and Strikwerda (note 175).

189. See Jean Stengers, “Emigration et immigration en Belgique au XIXe et au Xxe siècles,” *Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer* (Brussels, 1978).

190. Murphy and Strikwerda (note 175), p. 25.

191. Edmond Picard, “La Bible et le Coran: A Monsieur Franz Philippson,” *L’Art Moderne* 18 (April 29, 1888), p. 137.

192. “La Bible et le Coran: Correspondence,” *L’Art Moderne* 17 (April 22, 1888), p. 130. The other articles in the series are “La Bible: Traduction nouvelle par E. Ledrain,” *L’Art Moderne* 6 (February 6, 1887), pp. 42–43; “La Bible: Traduction par M. Ledrain,” *L’Art Moderne* 8 (February 19, 1888), p. 61; “La Bible et le Coran,” *L’Art Moderne* 15 (April 8, 1888), pp. 114–116; and “La littérature anti-Sémitique,” *L’Art Moderne* 46 (November 11, 1888), pp. 361–363.

193. Edmond Picard, *Synthèse de l’Antisémitisme: La Bible et le Coran, Les Hymnes Védiques, L’Art arabe, Les Juifs au Maroc* (Brussels, 1892), pp. 9–14.

194. Karl Marx, *A World without Jews*, D. D. Runes, ed. and trans. (New York, 1959), cited in David Vital, *A World Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 194–195. Picard became most famous internationally as a political theorist for an 1897 article in the French *Revue encyclopédique* (July 24, 1897), pp. 595–599, describing the “l’âme belge” as the daughter of the Germanic and Latin races. Cited in Kossmann (note 176), p. 313. Kossmann

believes that Picard’s political career was hampered by his anti-Semitism.

195. Jean de Ligneau, *Juifs et antisémites en Europe* (Paris, circa 1891), pp. 128–131.

196. Legrand (note 1, 1971), p. 80.

197. McGough (note 1), p. 195.

198. For a history of the visual encoding of Jews and other minority groups in Northern Europe, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern Europe, Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1993). On the broader theological and philosophical context, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* [1943] (Philadelphia, 1966). See also Margaret D. Carroll, “Dürer’s Christ Among the Doctors Re-examined,” in *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*, Cynthia P. Schneider et al., eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995).

199. Eden Warwick, *Notes on Noses* (London: Richard Bentley, 1864), p. 11, reproduced in Cowling (note 47), p. 82.

200. For a survey of such imagery prior to the Dreyfus Affair in France, see Norman Kleeblatt, *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, exh. cat. (Berkeley, 1987).

201. McGough (note 1) notes the anti-Semitism that laced the political writings of Octave Maus and Edmond Picard as well as anti-Semitic statements issued by Ensor late in his life (pp. 93–94).

202. Ranieri (note 78), p. 66.

203. In her essay entitled “The Masked Soul of James Ensor,” in *Ensor* (note 16), Danielle Derrey-Capon states that Ensor included masks from Africa, North America,

and China “for the sake of color and rhythm” (p. 43). She also quotes a 1937 statement of Ensor’s in which the artist denied any interest in non-European masks: “I thoroughly disapprove of masks from the hell of Africa, Asia, and Oceania, fatalia, somnolia and crocosia” (“Masques divers,” in *Mes écrits* [note 11], pp. 200–201, translated in Derrey-Capon [note 11], p. 38). Legrand (note 1, 1971), p. 40, discusses Ensor’s interest in Asian masks.

204. I would like to thank Suzanne Blier for help in identifying possible sources for Ensor’s masks, and for locating this photograph. The vitrine is reproduced in *Sculpture Angolaise: Mémorial de cultures*, exh. cat. (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Etnologia, 1994), p. 13. On the early collecting of material culture from Congo, see *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Enid Schildkrout et al., eds. (New York, 1998).

205. L. le Febve de Vivy, *Documents d’Histoire précoloniale belge* (Brussels, 1955), p. 34, translated in Ascherson (note 186), p. 51.

206. De Vivy (note 205).

207. See John Bierman, *Dark Safari: The Life Behind the Legend of Henry Morton Stanley* (London, 1990).

208. Ascherson (note 186), p. 104.

209. See for example “Leopold II’s Prospectus on the Opportunity for Railway Construction in Africa, 1878.” This confidential prospectus circulated among business people in Belgium. Under sponsorship of the king, Belgian businessmen were organized by Émile Banning, archivist in the Belgian Foreign Office, into a group called “Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo” (Comité d’Études du Haut Congo), which engaged Henry Morton

Stanley to return to Africa secretly in 1879 to begin fashioning a Belgian empire there.

“Leopold II’s Prospectus on the Opportunity for Railway Construction in Africa, 1878,” in Louis L. Snyder, *The Imperialism Reader* (Princeton, N.J., 1962), pp. 188–189.

210. Ascherson (note 186), p. 159.

211. On the history and politics of Léopold II and the Congo, see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York, 1998). A concentrated summary is provided in Schildkrout (note 204), pp. 7–17.

212. See the October 21, 1888, ed. of *Le Patriote Illustré*.

213. See Ascherson (note 186), p. 137.

214. “Le Fantastique Réel,” *L’Art Moderne* 4 (January 23, 1887), p. 25, quoted in Lesko (note 1), p. 111. Lesko surmises that the author of this three-part article was Edmond Picard. In another article from the same year, Picard invoked racist notions of an uncivilized Africa, extracted from the growing number of turgid accounts of exploration published by Stanley and others, to create a link between contemporary colonial expansion and the Christian triumph over the Semitic peoples of antiquity. In this article, Picard made reference to Lieutenant J. Becker, whose book *Life in Africa* had been published by C. Muquardt in Brussels in 1887.

215. Haesaerts (note 1), p. 191.

216. For an interpretation of the triptych, see Dirk Bax, *Bosch: His Picture-Writing Deciphered* (Rotterdam, 1979).

217. McGough (note 1), p. 195.

218. See Diane Cole Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli* (New Haven, 1996), p. 10.

219. Leonard and Lippincott (note 3), p. 20.

220. Haesaerts (note 1), p. 226.

221. A survey of these works, and a list of Ensor’s religious motifs from 1877–1900, is provided in Julius Kaplan, “The Religious Subjects of James Ensor, 1877–1900,” *Revue Belge d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’art* 35 (1966), pp. 175–207.

222. Leonard and Lippincott (note 3), p. 21.

223. Not only was Fétis a critic who was particularly strident in his criticism of Ensor’s work, but his positions as “d’ancien conservateur” at the Royal Library, as a member of the administrative commission of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, and as a critic for the prestigious liberal journal *L’Indépendance belge* gave particular weight to his criticism. Herwig Todts, catalogue entry for *Calvary*, in *James Ensor*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1990), p. 160.

224. At this time, according to Renato Poggioli, “The artist comes to be conceived of as an *agnus dei*, an expiatory scapegoat, almost as if he were the innocent creature upon which society transfers its own sense of sin and guilt, and whose sacrificial blood redeems the sins of the whole tribe. The poet-artist, having descended from the role of the elect to that of the rejected . . . again ascends to the new role of saint or martyr.” Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 111.

225. Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris, 1845–62: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, Jonathan Mayne, trans. (London, 1965), p. 127.

- 226.** Faunce (note 150), p. 55.
- 227.** On the rhetoric and appearance of Jesus as a metaphor for the artist, see J. Adolf Schmoll Gen. Eisenwerth, "Zur Christus-Darstellung um 1900," in *Fin de Siècle: Zu literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, Roger Bauer et al., eds. (Frankfurt am Main, 1977).
- 228.** Émile Bernard, in *Mercure de France* (June 15, 1936), p. 48, quoted in Mary Anne Stevens, "Bernard as Critic," in *Émile Bernard 1868–1941: A Pioneer of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (Mannheim and Zwolle, Städtische Kunsthalle, 1990), p. 70. Bernard's conversion to a deeply conservative Catholicism was inspired in part by Sâr Joséphin Péladan, leader of the Parisian Salon of the Rose + Cross (1892–97). Turning toward a new, deeper sense of the Christian faith as a means of liberating art from mass culture, Péladan saw artistic creation as a weapon against materialism and bourgeois secularization: "Artist, you are a priest: art is the great mystery and when your efforts become masterpieces, a divine ray of light descends as if onto an altar. . . ." Introduction to the catalogue of the first Salon of the Rose + Cross, Paris, 1892, quoted in Francine-Claire Legrand, "The Symbolist Movement," in *Belgian Art* (note 119), p. 58.
- 229.** On this painting, see Patricia G. Berman, "Edvard Munch's *Maladie du Siècle*," in *Edvard Munch*, Nozomi Endo, ed., exh. cat. (Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum, 1997).
- 230.** On this image, see James Crump, "F. Holland Day: 'Sacred' Subjects and 'Greek Love,'" *History of Photography* (Winter 1994), pp. 322–333.
- 231.** Legrand (note 1, 1971), p. 76.
- 232.** McGough (note 1), p. 120.
- 233.** Canning, "Visionary Politics: The Social Subtext of James Ensor's Religious Imagery," in *Theatre of Masks* (note 17), p. 58.
- 234.** McGough (note 1), p. 120.
- 235.** Canning (note 1, 1997), p. 62.
- 236.** Auguste Taevernier, *Le drame Ensorien: Les Auréoles du Christ ou les sensibilités de la lumière* (Ghent, 1976), pp. 37 and 38.
- 237.** Robert Hoozee made this identification (note 1), pp. 106–115.
- 238.** A. J. Wauters, "Aux XX," *La Gazette* (February 10, 1887), quoted in Block (note 108), p. 38.
- 239.** Jules Destrée, "L'Exposition des XX," in *La Jeune Belgique* 6 (March 5/April 1, 1887), p. 134, quoted in McGough (note 1), p. 44.
- 240.** Émile Verhaeren, *La Vie Moderne* (February 26, 1887), p. 138, translated in McGough (note 1), p. 43.
- 241.** The early date corresponds to John the Fearless's succession as the Duke of Burgundy, and the latter, the fall of Constantinople, which prompted John's son, Philip the Good, to vow that he would join the Christian crusade in the following year. See Richard Vaughan, *Valois Burgundy* (London, 1975).
- 242.** Gisele Ollinger-Zinque noted that he retained the drawings at home, as he did the other works to which he attached particular meaning. Ollinger-Zinque, "Les Auréoles du Christ ou les sensibilités de la lumière de James Ensor," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique* 21, nos. 3–4 (1968), p. 191.
- 243.** Julius Kaplan (note 221) provides an exhaustive chronology of Ensor's religious works on pp. 201–206.
- 244.** Ensor, "Lumière une et indivisible," [1932] in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 150.
- 245.** Ensor's copies after Rembrandt are listed in Schoonbaert (note 14).
- 246.** This set of ideas reached their apogee in the enormously influential 1890 publication of Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, a book that became infamous in the wake of the Holocaust because of its propagation of Germanic primitivism and ethnic myths. On Langbehn and the reception of this book, see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961), Part 2, "Julius Langbehn and Germanic Irrationalism."
- 247.** Eugène Fromentin, *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland*, Mary C. Robbins, trans. (Boston and New York, 1896), p. 311.
- 248.** Vanbeselaere (note 1), p. 19.
- 249.** Lesko reviews the popularity of this theme among artists and authors in the later nineteenth century as a narrative through which to critique materialism. She states that Gustave Flaubert's novel was a critical contribution to the growing reputation of Saint Anthony in its assertion of Anthony's human weaknesses, its descriptions of the saint's grotesque, hallucinatory visions, and its allegorizing of Anthony as an artist. Lesko (note 1), pp. 115–118.
- 250.** On this, see Marshall Neal Myers, "James Ensor's *The Tribulations of Saint Anthony*: Permutations of the Excremental Vision," *Arts* 54, no. 4 (December 1979).
- 251.** Lesko (note 1), p. 127.
- 252.** McGough (note 1), p. 145.

253. Block (note 108), p. 35, reconstructs this story through the press reports of this incident.

254. Robert Hoozee proposes that Ensor may have seen this photograph reproduced at the time of Littré's death in 1881, and may have copied it then. See Hoozee et al. (note 36) and Taevernier (note 184), p. 27.

255. Émile Littré, "Des progrès du socialisme," in *Conservation, Révolution, et Positivisme* (Paris, 1852), pp. 278–304.

256. David Freidrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (New York, 1855), p. 880.

257. Beginning with a consideration of Jesus' genealogy as represented in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Strauss negates the possibility that Jesus' lineage extended back to Abraham, which later undergirded the arguments, such as those put forward by Edmond Picard, that Jesus was not of Jewish descent. Strauss (note 256), pp. 97–104.

258. Ernst Renan, *Life of Jesus* (Boston, 1915), p. 77.

259. Canning (note 1, 1997), notes in footnote 5, p. 69, that a review of Renan's book appeared in *L'Art Moderne's* January 15, 1882 issue (p. 18).

260. See *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*, preface by John J. Wynne (Rome, 1903), pp. 34–57.

261. Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* [1892], Carl E. Braaten, trans. (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 43 and 46.

262. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York, 1948), p. 4.

263. Von Uhde's *Suffer the Little Children Come Unto Me* (1884; Leipzig Museum der bildenden Künste) and *The Last Supper* (1886; Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart) are two prominent examples of this genre. The representation of Jesus in humble (and often politicized) contemporary settings became a staple in Realist and Naturalist painting in that decade. Artists from the French Jean Béraud and the Finnish Albert Edelfelt to the American Thomas Eakins recast religious motifs as naturalistic genre scenes.

264. Ensor to de Ridder, p. 56, translated in Lesko (note 1), p. 85.

265. Ensor, "Discours Provonce au Banquet d'adieu Van de Woestijne a Ostende," in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 96, translated in Lesko (note 1), p. 86.

266. Honoré de Balzac, "Jésus-Christ en Flandre," in *Cobseck et Jésus-Christ en Flandre* (New York, 1913), p. 93.

267. Lesko (note 1), pp. 91–92. Tannenbaum (note 1) was the first to suggest, p. 78, that "Jesus Christ in Flanders" influenced the subject matter.

268. Canning (note 1, 1997), p. 48.

269. Balzac (note 266), p. 119. See R. T. Holbrook's commentary on p. 188.

270. Robert Hoozee et al. (note 1), p. 119.

271. Louis Quiévreux, *Dictionnaire anecdotique de bruxelles* (Brussels, 1966), p. 26.

272. A history of the literary representations and reinventions of Pierrot is provided in Robert F. Storey, *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire: Nineteenth-Century Literary Artists and the Comic Pantomime* (Princeton, N.J., 1985).

273. See Wechsler (note 51), pp. 42–46.

274. Théophile Gautier, *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Paris, 1858–89, vol. 5, p. 23, quoted in Wechsler (note 51), p. 45.

275. Robert F. Storey, *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), p. 110. Storey cites Théodore de Banville, *Les Pauvres Saltimbanques* (Paris, 1853), and Baudelaire's "Le Vieux Saltimbanques," *Revue Fantaisiste* (November 1, 1861), as texts that helped to shape this notion.

276. See Storey (note 275), pp. 139–155.

277. McGough (note 1), p. 95.

278. McGough (note 1), p. 96.

279. An example of this reference to members of *Les XX* as figures from the commedia dell'arte, from *Le Patriote Illustré* (February 2, 1890), is reproduced in Philippe Roberts-Jones, et al., *Bruxelles Fin de Siècle* (Paris, 1994), p. 71.

280. Vanbeselaere (note 1), p. 33, identifies this figure as one of a group of three Pierrots "right out of Watteau."

281. Ensor, "Discours [2me] de Monsieur le Baron James Ensor," [1935] in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 221.

282. See for example Eugène Picard, "La crise morale actuelle," *Revue de Belgique* 18 (April 15, 1866).

283. See Kossmann (note 176), pp. 364–366.

284. Tolstoy's religious writings of the 1880s, although censored in Russia, developed a wide reputation throughout Europe and North America. His negative view of organized religion, condemnation of violence, and

reconciliation of reason and spiritual belief appealed to leftist intellectuals. See Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings* (London and New York, 1987).

285. Canning identifies an Anarchist program in *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem in 1889* (note 115, 2000), p. 80.

286. Elisée Reclus, *An Anarchist on Anarchy* (Boston, 1884).

287. Elisée Reclus, "Introduction" to Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel* [1885] (Montreal and New York, 1992), p. 18. Kropotkin's book was reviewed by Picard in *L'Art Moderne* on July 18 and 25, and August 1, 1886, pp. 225–227, 233–236, and 241–244, respectively. Picard referred to it as "a breviary" for those seeking social insurrection (July 25, 1886), p. 233.

288. Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1989), p. 1090.

289. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life (note 70)," pp. 9–10.

290. Ensor, "Discours [2me] de Monsieur le Baron James Ensor," [1935] in *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 221.

291. Haesaerts (note 1), p. 89.

292. James Ensor, "Une réaction artistique au pays de narquoisie" [1900], in *Mes écrits* (note 11), pp. 37–39.

293. Ensor, *Mes écrits* (note 11), p. 85, as translated in Stephen F. Eisenman, "Allegory and Anarchism in James Ensor's *Apparition: Vision Preceding Futurism*," *Record of the*

Art Museum, Princeton University 46, no. 1 (1987), p. 3.

294. Ensor, *Les écrits de James Ensor* (Brussels, 1944), p. 134.

295. See Marcel De Maeyer, "De Genese van masker, travestie en skeletmotieven in het oeuvre van James Ensor," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1963), pp. 69–88.

296. As noted by Lesko, the hat itself, minus some of the decoration, hangs in Ensor's house museum in Ostend. See Lesko (note 1), p. 80.

297. Marcel De Maeyer was the first scholar to propose that these elements were added in 1888 to the earlier painting. See De Maeyer, "Ensor au chapeau fleuri," *L'Art Belge* (December 1965), p. 41–44.

298. "Nos Flamands," *L'Art Moderne* 27 (July 6, 1884), p. 218.

299. On the latter, see, for example, Jules Jacques van Ysendyck, *Documents classés de l'art dans le Pays-Bas du Xe au XIXe siècle* (Antwerp, 1880–1890).

300. The first volume of Max Rooses's catalogue raisonné of Rubens's work, *L'Oeuvre de Peter Paul Rubens: Histoire et description de ses tableaux et dessins*, was published in Antwerp in 1886; his first volume of Rubens's correspondence was issued in the following year: *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres*, M. Rooses et al., eds. (Antwerp, 1887–1909).

301. Eugène Demolder, *James Ensor* (Brussels, 1892).

302. On this phenomenon, see Patricia G. Berman, "The Invention of History: Julius Meier-Graefe, German Modernism, and the Genealogy of Genius," in *Imagining Modern German Culture: 1889–1910*, Françoise Forster-Hahn, ed., *Studies in the History of Art* 53 (Washington, D.C., 1995), pp. 91–105.

303. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Ensor composed the score, libretto, sets, and costumes for a ballet-pantomime entitled *La Gamme d'amour*, which was first performed publicly in 1920. Ensor put the finishing touches on this ambitious project in the immediate presence of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. Like the painting, the setting for the ballet is Carnival, and some of the characters who were incorporated into *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, particularly the characters from the commedia dell'arte, were reprised in the ballet with a romantic, rather than a reformist, purpose. On the ballet and its place in Ensor's musical composition, see Robert Wangermée, "La Gamme d'amour and Ensor's Music," in *Ensor* (note 16), pp. 54–62.

304. Quoted in André de Ridder in *Chroniques du jour* (Paris, 1930), p. 31, and cited in Tannenbaum (note 1), p. 59.

305. See Marina Belozerskaya, *Perceiving the Renaissance: Burgundian Arts Across Europe* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).

306. Hostyn (note 22), p. 79.

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GETTY MUSEUM STUDIES ON ART

JAMES ENSOR

Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889

PATRICIA G. BERMAN

JAMES ENSOR
Belgian, 1860-1949
*Christ's Entry
into Brussels in 1889,*
1888

The brash young artist James Ensor painted *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* during a period of extraordinary artistic and political foment in his native Belgium. It is understood today to be one of the most dazzling, innovative, and perplexing paintings created in Europe in the late nineteenth century, and it rivals any work of its period in audacity and ambition. Huge in scale, complex in design and execution, and brimming with social commentary, the painting is one of the most challenging works in the Getty Museum's paintings collection. This book examines *Christ's Entry* in light of Belgium's rich artistic, social, political, and theological debates in the late nineteenth century, and in the context of James Ensor's exceptional career, in order to decipher some of the painting's messages and meanings.

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