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EXPERIMENTAL PRINTMAKER

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JAMES ENSOR
EXPERIMENTAL PRINTMAKER

C.G. BOERNER



PREFACE

To the casual observer of his prints, it seems as if James Ensor used them only to revisit some of the themes he explored in his paintings. As a printmaker he is, therefore, often seen primarily as an illustrator of the many weird and eccentric motifs that lie at the core of his oeuvre: skulls and skeletons, masks, and fantastic and farcical reimaginings of episodes from the Bible as well as from the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe. Even the most dedicated aficionado of Ensor's work tends to be "image driven" and chiefly focused on these elements in the appreciation of his prints.

However, this selection of prints by Ensor, from a single private collection, draws special attention to the medium of print itself. To borrow a term from a seminal exhibition devoted to Rembrandt, one of his most admired artistic models, we would like to introduce James Ensor as the "experimental etcher" that he also was and to show him as a printmaker who went far beyond merely redrawing his favorite subjects with the etching needle. Two and a half centuries after Rembrandt, the division between artist and professional printer was firmly established, and it has become increasingly clear that Ensor collaborated with a wide range of printers. But in doing so he exploited all kinds of effects that are possible in the graphic medium beyond the simple multiplication of the etched composition: the choice of specific inks (black, sepia, sanguine, and even blue); a variety of papers (European laid and wove papers; real and imitation [*simili*] Japan paper; Japanese "mother of pearl" paper, known as *nacré*; tissue-thin Chinese paper; and vellum as well as satin); the occasional coloring of impressions with watercolor and gouache; the reversing of the printed image in counterproofs (that then show the image in the same direction in which it was drawn on the plate); and the slipping of the plate as it is pulled through the press, thereby—intentionally or otherwise—creating a blurring of the image.

The group brought together in this catalogue is by no means representative of Ensor's art. But it is a fairly comprehensive survey of virtually *all* of the above-mentioned printerly effects the artist deployed in the creation of his oeuvre (the sole effect missing here is an etching printed in blue ink). However, these sheets mostly existed apart from whatever edition(s) were printed of the etchings, probably just as vehicles for the artist's technical exploration of the medium. All these examples are, therefore, of the utmost rarity, sometimes even unique, and give a sense of the artist operating at the primary and most experimental stage of the creative process.

Other extremely rare remnants from the artist's studio in this collection are the platewrappers or "proof envelopes" (cat. nos. 2 and 17). Ensor wrapped the plate for the *Warmth-Seeking Skeletons* in a *Makulatur* impression of the print that he then not only annotated but also colored; Patrick Florizoone has suggested that these handcolored wrappers were used as models when the artist colored impressions pulled from the plate decades later.

There is also a deluxe edition of an important early monograph by Grégoire Le Roy (cat. no. 18). Fifty-five copies of the book were printed on fine ARCHES paper and contained two original etchings by Ensor. Our copy, however, is distinguished by a dedication by the artist and by the fact that the two prints in it were handcolored by him.

Finally, this selection includes a rare monotype by the artist. Here Ensor takes experimentation with the print medium to the extreme, creating a mostly undefined blurry backdrop on which he then draws an assembly of figures so whimsical that the composition as a whole can hardly be deciphered.

1. *Le Verger – The Orchard* 1886

etching on antique laid paper; 160 x 240 mm (6 ⁶/₁₆ x 9 ⁷/₁₆ inches)

Delteil and Croquez 2, Taevernier third (final) state (but describing an additional fourth state in the text), Elesh third (final) state

PROVENANCE

private collection, Germany

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 4

The impression shows subtle plate tone; it also shows where the plate has slipped during the printing process. Since similarly distorted impressions of Ensor's etchings *The Cathedral* (T. 7) and *The Main Dock at Ostend* (T. 45) are known to have survived, it is conceivable that the artist was intentionally experimenting with this effect. And the resulting image is thereby imbued with a vibrancy that reinforces the impressionistic feel of the composition.

While Taevernier categorizes only three states for this print, he also mentions "courtesy proofs" of which "a very small number" were printed "on old paper" in 1932 and that effectively represent a fourth state. They are distinguishable by "a few tufts of grass" that were added in the lower-left corner of the plate.

Ensor wandered around the little villages in the countryside near his native Ostend in all seasons and was an unlikely practitioner of the highly traditional genre of landscape. *The Orchard* was only his second etching, made soon after his extraordinarily fluid and expressive *Christ Mocked* (also known as *Ecce Homo*; T.1). This exquisite print, showing an orchard near the village of Oudenburg, is a much more formal and closely executed image, one apparently inspired by another of Rembrandt's subjects, his etched *Three Trees* of 1643. In contrast to Rembrandt's trees, isolated in a richly described landscape under an ominously clouded sky, however, here Ensor shows an entire orchard, one largely confined to the lower half of the sheet under a sky that is barely defined. Nonetheless, a distinct group of three trees on the left clearly echoes the motif established by his distinguished predecessor, whose influence on Ensor's graphic work in general, both technically and thematically, was pervasive.



2. *La Flagellation – The Flagellation* 1886

etching on laid paper; 100 x 70 mm (3 7/8 x 2 3/4 inches)

Delteil, Croquez, Elesh, and Taevernier 8, only state

PROVENANCE

Albert Croquez, Paris (his stamp and inscription in ink on the backboard; not in Lugt)

Mira Jacob, Paris (Lugt 4576);

Christie's, London, March 19, 2014, lot 17

EXHIBITED

Strasbourg, 1995, cat. no. 10

One of the rarest of Ensor's prints. This impression shows signs of wear and damage since it has been used as a "proof envelope" in which the artist kept the copperplate wrapped. The platewrapper is in itself unusual and only very few of them survive (see cat. no. 17). Delteil did not know of an impression of *The Flagellation* (the artist was unable to supply him with one) and it is therefore not reproduced in his catalogue; further, the organizers of the 1929 Ensor retrospective in Brussels were unable to obtain an example to include in their comprehensive show.

The flagellation of Christ covers only about one sixth of the image, the rest dominated by an architectural structure possibly inspired by the southern portal of the cathedral of Bourges. The composition has the feel of some engravings from the first century of printmaking depicting ecclesiastical interiors. Ensor populates the monumental Gothic portal in the foreground with groups of tiny figures: on the left, the formal poses and clothing of the soldiers, in Eastern dress, contrast with the nudity and aggressive postures of the three figures attacking Christ. In this early etching, a typical Ensorian theme—the demons of hate persecuting an innocent person in full view of an indifferent audience—has already found a first, haunting formulation.

yclation



26

Hayellation



3. *Petite Vue de Mariakerke – Little View of Mariakerke* 1887

drypoint with some etched lines, printed with selectively wiped tone on handmade laid Japan paper with deckle edge at left; 89 x 129 mm (3 ½ x 5 inches)

signed and dated in pencil; annotated on the verso *1^{er} État*

Delteil and Croquez 16, Taevernier first state (of three), Elesh first state (of two)

PROVENANCE

Albert Croquez, Paris (not stamped)

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 16

EXHIBITED

Tokyo, 2001, cat. no. 20

Like *The Orchard*, the *Little View of Mariakerke*, showing a fishing village along the coast from Ostend, is a modest bucolic scene in which the artist appears to be exploring the medium of etching through the most traditional of motifs and genres. Such contained and austere images contrast notably with the anarchic anti-academicism of the richly inhabited works with which his name soon became associated; both prints also owed their simple horizontal format to Rembrandt's landscape etchings. Ensor drew and painted this subject as well as representing it in another etching of 1887 known as *Grand View of Mariakerke* (T.13) and in an etching of 1900, also titled *Little View of Mariakerke* (T. 117), both of which are more detailed and somewhat more boldly handled.

We can offer here a superb impression of the extremely rare first state (Taevernier rates it “RRR”), printed with wonderful rich plate tone on *vrai japon*.



Jerry Van 1887

4. *Petite Vue de Mariakerke – Little View of Mariakerke* 1887

etching with drypoint, printed with subtle plate tone on *simili* Japan paper

signed in pencil; titled on the verso *Vue de Mariakerke*

Delteil and Croquez 16, Taevernier second state (of three), Elesh second (final) state

PROVENANCE

Henri Wergifosse, Liège (not stamped)

Gerard Loobuyck, Ostend (not stamped)

EXHIBITED

Albstadt, 1999, p. 30

Himeji, 2010, cat. no. 13

A fine impression of the second state, still rated “RR” by Taevernier.



Linn. 1800

5. *Rue du Bon Secours à Bruxelles – Rue du Bon Secours, Brussels* 1887

drypoint on vellum; 130 x 90 mm (5 1/8 x 3 1/2 inches)

titled, signed, and dated in pencil

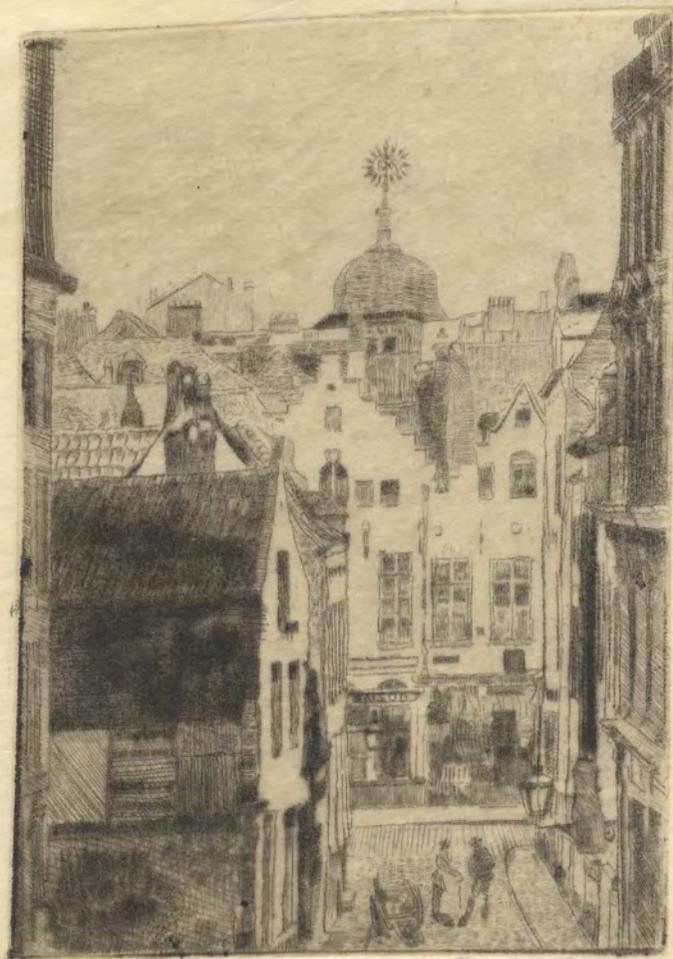
Delteil and Croquez 17, Taevernier and Elesh only state

PROVENANCE

Mira Jacob, Paris (not stamped; cf. Lugt 4576)

Sotheby's, Paris, September 23–24, 2004, lot 184

This rare drypoint exists only in very few impressions. During the winter of 1887–88, Ensor rented an attic room on the Boulevard Anspach in Brussels that afforded him a sweeping view onto the rue du Bon Secours. The carefully observed geometries of the closest buildings and the small figures in the foreground, as well as the view over the distant rooftops of the city, give the scene an illustrational quality. At the end of the street, a small shop bears a sign with the name ENSOR written on it in capital letters. The print can be related to some of Ensor's other more conventional views of Brussels, among them his 1885 painting of the *Hôtel de Ville de Bruxelles* (now in the Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de la ville de Liège; Tricot 260) with its similarly plunging perspective, and his drypoint of 1888, *Maison du Boulevard Anspach* (in which the artist's name is also seen on a building, this time on a banner; T. 20). These works could not contrast more radically with the crowds and chaos with which Ensor represented the city in his cryptic and satirical chef d'oeuvre of the following year—*Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (1888–89; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Tricot 280)—and his 1898 etching of the same name.



la rue du Bon Secours - Bruxelles James Ensor 1867

6. *Buste – Bust* 1887

drypoint, printed with rich burr on *simili* Japan paper; 130 x 89 mm (5 1/8 x 3 1/2 inches)

signed in pencil; titled on the verso *Buste point sèche*

Delteil and Croquez 18, Taevernier and Elesh only state

PROVENANCE

Galerie Georges Giroux, Brussels (their stock number in pencil on the verso: *GGG 1277*)

Henri Wergifosse, Liège (not stamped)

Gerard Loobuyck, Ostend (not stamped)

EXHIBITED

Albstadt, 1999, p. 222

This extremely rare print shows the bronze bust by the Belgian sculptor Jef Lambeaux that decorated the chimney-piece of the drawing-room of the Rousseau family in Brussels. Ernest and Mariette Rousseau were close friends with whom Ensor often stayed early in his career; after the stifling intellectual territory of his native Ostend, he seems to have especially appreciated the welcome he received in the circle around Ernest Rousseau, a professor in physics at the University of Brussels. Ensor's 1885 painting, *The Garden of the Rousseau Family* (Cleveland Museum of Art; Tricot 259), is one of many works he made of members of the family and their home over the years; another is the 1887 portrait print of Ernest Rousseau that Ensor created in a Rembrandtesque style, and executed entirely in drypoint (T. 11; fig.1).

There are no known states of *Bust* and the drypoint technique did not allow for many impressions to be pulled from the plate since the soft and rich burr it produces typically wears away very quickly. The considerable amount of burr still present in our impression can only be found in very few of the earliest pulls, making the print in this form undoubtedly one of the great rarities of Ensor's printed oeuvre.

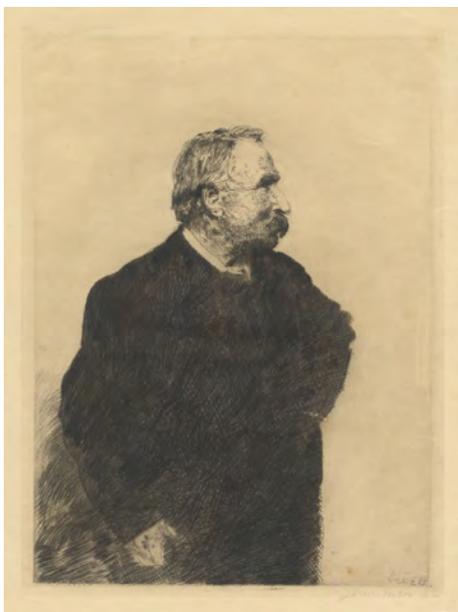


fig.1



James Mason

7. *Hôtel de ville d'Audenaerde – Town Hall of Audenaerde* 1888

etching on handmade Japan paper with deckle edges at right and below; 150 x 113 mm (6 ¼ x 4 ¾ inches)

signed in pencil

Delteil and Croquez 28, Taevernier and Elesh first state (of three)

PROVENANCE

Henri Wergifosse, Liège (not stamped)

Gerard Loobuyck, Ostend (not stamped)

EXHIBITED

Albstadt, 1999, p. 83

Taevernier's first state is described by him as "probably a unique proof-print on old Japan, a unique print without a signature and undated" (p. 83). While this description fits our print, Taevernier also mentions that "Van der Perre points out a first state with a sketch in the lower center of the drawing" [sic—this is a mistranslation into English; it is clearly not a drawing but a print and the Flemish and French texts refer correctly to *plaat* and *planche* respectively]. However, this detail was probably sketched in by hand and not printed. Since Taevernier apparently never saw the impression described by Paul van der Perre, his cataloguing remains inconclusive.

Since what modern cataloguers describe as the second state was annotated by the artist himself as *1er état* (see the following entry), this impression is clearly a working proof of which perhaps only two examples survive (the one presented here and the one referred to by Taevernier), both apparently printed on *vrai japon*. They suggest that Ensor was intrigued by the variety of effects afforded by the printing process in combination with the use of special papers—even in an image that is rooted in the rather sober tradition of the topographically precise *veduta* print.

The town of Oudenaarde is famous for its exuberantly decorated Gothic town hall and, as Stephen Goddard points out, "Ensor uses an old Flemish spelling 'Audenaerde' (literally 'old earth') for his etching" to align it with its "historical subject matter, a quintessentially Flemish sixteenth-century town hall." He further suggests that the artist, "who was intrigued by mob scenes and carnival behavior, may have known the legend that this building rests on the foundations of an earlier town hall that was destroyed by fire in 1525 by a mob celebrating carnival" (cat. Lawrence, 1992, p. 202, cat. no. 34).



James Fowler

8. *Hôtel de ville d'Audenaerde – Town Hall of Audenaerde* 1888

etching on *simili* Japan paper; 150 x 113 mm (6 ¼ x 4 ¾ inches)

dedicated in pencil in lower margin *Epreuve pur Mr Van Campenhout* and signed; annotated below by the artist *1^{er} état*

Delteil and Croquez 28, Taevernier and Elesh second state (of three)

PROVENANCE

Jean-Baptiste van Campenhout, Brussels

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

EXHIBITED

Lugano, 1999, cat. no. 28

The working proof described under the previous number was apparently not considered a state by the artist who annotated this impression, the modern second state, as *1^{er} état*. In the later, final state he further accentuated the outlines of the architectural details, darkened the shadows beneath the arcades, and indicated additional buildings to the left.

The impression is dedicated to Jean-Baptiste van Campenhout, one of Ensor's printers, who had issued a portfolio of 12 prints by the artist in 1896 under the title *Douze Eaux-fortes* (cf. Patrick Florizoone's essay on Ensor's printers in Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, pp. 197–214, here p. 202).



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17 Oct

9. *Chaloupes – Fishing-Boats* 1888

etching on handmade Japan paper with deckle edge at right and below; 178 x 238 mm (7 x 9 3/8 inches)

with a pencil filigree by the artist framing the composition; annotated à *Ostende* at top right, below at left *S/ vieux chine épreuve rare*, below right *Par James Ensor certifié par ...* [?], and dated 1931

Delteil and Croquez 44, Taevernier first state (of two), Elesh only state

PROVENANCE

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

A pencil drawing that seems to be preparatory for this print showing fishing boats in the port of Ostend survives in the Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er de Bruxelles. Ensor also produced a painting of the subject two years later (Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts d'Anvers; Tricot 308).

With their comparable subject matter this print and the one described in the following entry can be seen as pendants, an idea reinforced by the fact that Ensor embellished them both with wiggly pencil lines. It is worth noting that in both cases he specifically chose early impressions printed on handmade Japan paper—not the *simili* Japan that was his preferred choice for whatever editions were printed from the plates and that is the most common paper found in his prints. Both sheets also show holes from thumbtacks and traces of dust. They might, therefore, have been tacked to the wall of his studio for a considerable amount of time (if we presuppose that only the artist himself and not even an early collector would pin an etching printed on precious paper to the wall without mat or frame). Executed in 1888 and—as first states—definitely printed at the time they were created, the pencil “framing” followed much later. The artist’s annotation points out that the impressions are printed “*s[ur] vieux chine*” (what modern cataloguers now call “handmade Japan”) and are dated 1931. What remains unclear, however, is the word “certifié” in this context; further, we have not been able to decipher the name of the person to whom the two prints were dedicated.

We know of no other examples of Ensor prints decorated and annotated in such a way; this pair of prints in this form is very probably unique.

a Ostende



1802

Vue de la
cité d'Ostende

Par J. M. de
Craeynest
1802

1802

10. *Barques échouées – Boats Aground* 1888

etching on handmade Japan paper with deckle edge at top; 176 x 237 mm (7 x 9 3/8 inches)

with a pencil filigree by the artist framing the composition; annotated *à Ostende* at top right, below at left *S/ vieux chine épreuve rare*, below right *Par James Ensor certifié par ...* [?], and dated 1931

Delteil and Croquez 49, Taevernier and Elesh first state (of three)

PROVENANCE

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

EXHIBITED

New York 2009, checklist p. 191

Fishing boats stranded on the sand are shown awaiting the next high tide that will allow them to return to the sea. The mast of the boat at the far left lists in the direction of a column of clouds described by Ensor with a flurry of dense hatching that dominates the upper half of the image. In his seminal catalogue on the *Les XX* movement, Stephen Goddard writes that *Barques échouées* “is usually considered Ensor’s most successful marine subject. This remarkable evocation of sand, light, mist, and salty air is simply unsurpassed in the medium of etching.” He allows that the print “is essentially a study taken from his beloved port city, but its confluence with symbolist imagery is probably why this, of all of Ensor’s marines, is singled out as his most essential.” Goddard further quotes Ensor’s friend, the poet Émile Verhaeren, who writes that “the depth of the landscape is wonderfully rendered due to the oblique position of the two principal lines, that of the distant shore, and that of the boats of the bank ... Often, the subtle play of lines doesn’t fare well in the compositions of James Ensor, but here the most malevolent of critics have nothing to grasp onto; the work is irreproachable” (cat. Lawrence, 1992, p. 200, cat. no. 33; the Verhaeren quote is translated from Émile Verhaeren, *James Ensor*, Brussels 1908, p. 59).

As an early impression on Japan paper, with its framing ornament added later in pencil as well as with its identical annotation, this impression forms a pendant to the previous catalogue number.

à l'ombre



View of the harbor of ...
at ...
18...

18...

18...

11. *Boulevard Van Iseghem, Ostend* 1889

drypoint and etching on vellum; 132 x 93 mm (5 ½ x 3 15/16 inches)

signed and dated in pencil within the platemark below; titled on the verso

Delteil and Croquez 66, Taevernier and Elesh third (final) state

PROVENANCE

Mira Jacob, Paris (not stamped; cf. Lugt 4576)

Sotheby's, Paris, September 23–24, 2004, lot 206

In 1880 Ensor had already made a painting, *Boulevard Van Iseghem sous la pluie* (private collection; Tricot 150), of the street he could see from the window of his attic studio in Ostend. The scene is overcast by an atmospheric North Sea storm whose dark rolling clouds are suggested by subtle areas of hatching.

Although the print shows a view of Ensor's hometown of Ostend, it is—as a predominantly topographical view—very closely related to the prints the artist executed during his stay on the Boulevard Anspach in Brussels during the winter of 1887–88. Ensor must also have seen this affinity between these prints since he (or rather his printer at the time) pulled impressions from both this plate and that of the view of the *Rue du Bon Secours, Brussels* on vellum (see cat. no. 5), a highly unusual surface that is fiendishly difficult to use for intaglio printing. Ensor was evidently intrigued by this challenge.

The earlier states show considerable burr. However, they are extremely rare and were clearly never editioned. It is interesting to note that even in this final state, from which most likely a small edition on the usual *simili* Japan paper was printed, Ensor experimented with different supports. The fact that the result was then fully signed and dated further proves that he clearly embraced the results of such experiments—in very much the same way as Rembrandt, his much-admired predecessor.



James Ensor 18 89

ENSOR

12.-14. *La Kermesse au moulin – Village Fair at the Windmill* 1889

Delteil and Croquez 72, Taevernier and Elesh only state

Ensor depicts this scene of a country fair from an elevated viewpoint. While the landscape is imaginary, the mill at the center of the etching is very similar to the one at Oudenburg near Ostend. As Stephen Goddard writes, Ensor shows himself in this print “to be steeped in Flemish tradition, both in terms of folklore and art history. Elements of this etching, such as the banner jutting from a tavern window (probably announcing a saint’s day), figures eating and drinking at an outdoor table, festive dancers, and a silhouetted figure urinating against a building, were all stock elements in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century depictions of village fairs” (cat. Lawrence, 1992, p. 205, cat. no. 36). However, the frenzied dancing of the figures in the foreground suggests a pagan ritual more than a picturesque local dance, a notion very much consistent with Ensor’s preoccupation with the demonic and dark side of human experience.

We are able to offer three rare and special but very different impressions of this print.



etching on *simili* Japan paper with touches of blue watercolor and red and green gouache;
135 x 174 mm (5 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 inches)

titled, signed, and dated in pen and ink within the platemark; countersigned in pencil on the verso

The first is from the “standard” edition on *simili* Japan. However, it is very delicately colored with touches of blue watercolor and red and green gouache. The restraint and refinement of the coloring—just sufficient to evoke a painterly quality and to contribute to a visual clarification of the crowded scenery—was surely applied by the artist himself.



etching on satin; 135 x 174 mm (5 3/8 x 7 inches)

titled at lower left and signed and dedicated at lower right in pencil à Madame A Franck / en souvenir d'une belle fête à la campagne

PROVENANCE

François Franck, Antwerp (according to the artist's inscription)

Gerard Loobuyck, Ostend (not stamped)

EXHIBITED

Albstadt, 1999, p. 51

New York, 2009, checklist p. 195

The impression on satin is of the utmost rarity. It is one of a total of only six examples of prints by Ensor printed on this support (according to Taevernier), most likely as exclusive *hors-série* impressions (pp. 366–368). James Elesh suggests that these deluxe impressions were in all likelihood pulled by Leon Evely (Elesh, vol. 1, p. 71). Florizoone, on the other hand, raises doubts about the existing information on which printer worked for Ensor and when. Based on his own thorough review of the available documentation, he concludes instead that ultimately “little is known about his [Evely’s] relationship with Ensor” (in Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, p. 205). Therefore, while we know of occasions when Evely and Ensor did work together, we can by no means be sure that “special” impressions such as this one on satin were necessarily printed by him. Florizoone, who knows of one other example of *La Kermesse* on satin, suggests that these are somewhat later impressions, possibly printed by Jean Baptiste van Campenhout (e-mail of April 27, 2015).

The esteemed provenance of the impression on satin further confirms the preciousness of this print. It was first owned by the Antwerp collector François Franck, an important patron of the arts and an early supporter of Ensor.



counterproof of the etching on tissue-thin *chine* laid down on laid paper; 135 x 174 mm (5 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 inches)

annotated in pencil on the verso of the support sheet *les patineurs* [sic] *eau-forte renversée* Mad. Daveluy maart 1958

WATERMARK (of the support sheet)
HFDC

PROVENANCE

Alexandra Daveluy (according to the pencil inscription on the verso)
Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

Equally unusual and probably even more rare is the third impression of the *Village Fair at the Windmill*. It is a counterproof, created by covering a “fresh,” regular impression of the print with a new sheet of paper—here a piece of tissue-thin *chine*—and then running them through the press again. The still-moist ink then largely adhered to the new sheet which, in turn, shows the composition in the same direction in which it was drawn on the plate. Given the extreme thinness and hence fragility of the *chine* used here, it only survived because it was laid down on a sheet of standard laid paper. The counterproof is annotated and was most probably owned by Ensor’s niece, Alexandra Daveluy, the daughter of his sister Marie.

15. *La Mare aux peupliers – The Pool of the Poplars* 1889

etching with drypoint printed in sanguine on Japan paper; 155 x 233 mm (6 ⁵/₁₆ x 9 ³/₈ inches)

Delteil and Croquez 74, Taevernier only state (but describing an additional second state in the text), Elesh second (final) state

PROVENANCE

The Romantic Agony Book Auctions, Brussels, June 30, 2005, lot 44

EXHIBITED

New York, 2009, checklist p. 194

In this impression, the burr created by the fresh drypoint gives a wonderful vibrancy to the lines. The sanguine ink perfectly matches the ivory-toned Japan paper and creates a beautiful evocation of this idyllic natural scene in which human intrusion is restricted to a farmhouse at the edge of the forest beyond the pond and—perhaps—to a small, hardly noticeable figure seated in the undergrowth in the lower-left corner—not unlike the two lovers hidden in the foreground of Rembrandt's most famous landscape etching *The Three Trees*.



16. *L'Ange exterminateur – The Destroying Angel* 1889

etching with drypoint, printed in sanguine on thin laid Japan paper; 112 x 152 mm (4 5/8 x 6 1/8 inches)

Delteil and Croquez 77, Taevernier only state (but describing an earlier first state in the text), Elesh only state

PROVENANCE

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 65

Taevernier noted drypoint work in the impressions he had seen and concluded that “the existence of another state must remain in question. We have not been able to find a proof without the retouches.” The present print is, according to Florizoone, one of only two known impressions of this elusive first state; further, this is the only one printed in sanguine.

This print shows Ensor in more characteristic subversive mode in his vision of the exterminating angel of the Apocalypse. The scene shows a crowd of figures, all with pants down and bottoms turned to the viewer as they defecate (a motif most famously recurring in the artist’s etching, *Doctrinal Nourishment*, of the same year; T. 79), in this case in terror at the sight of the menacing sword-brandishing figure on horseback in the sky above. There is certainly a tradition of scatological humor in Flemish folklore to which this may relate. Some scholars have suggested that here Ensor, like Henri Rousseau in his painting *La Guerre* (1884, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), was further inspired by a caricature titled *Le Tsar* published in the French journal *L’Egalité* on October 6, 1889. The motif might also have been influenced by the two versions of Jacques Callot’s etching of *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1635) which, with their squatting and defecating figures, were furthermore clearly the source for Ensor’s large painting *The Tribulations of St. Anthony* (1887; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tricot 274) and his 1888 etching *Devils Thrashing Angels and Archangels* (T. 23).

Rousseau, on the other hand, must have been aware of Ensor’s print when he made the pen lithograph that accompanied the second issue of the periodical *Bulletin de l’Ymagier* in January 1895 (fig.1).



fig.1



17. *Squelettes volant se chauffeur – Warmth-Seeking Skeletons* 1895

handcolored etching (probably a *Makulatur* impression) on wove paper, retouched in pen and ink and colored with red, yellow, orange, green, and lilac crayon, blue wash, and white heightening; 133 x 97 mm (5 ½ x 4 inches)

inscribed on the stove in pen and ink *Plus de feu*; and on the folded-over margins in pencil *appart J Ensor / 27 Rue de Flandre Ostend* and *imp – cuprifère [?] tiré 12 epr / di cent [?] 1912 – Squelettes volant se chauffeur*

Delteil and Croquez 98, Taevernier first state (of two); Elesh 100 first state (of two)

PROVENANCE

Renée Belvaux, Liège (not stamped)

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

EXHIBITED

Tokyo, 2001, cat. no. 109

New York, 2009, checklist p. 195

LITERATURE

cat. Albstadt 1999, p. 17 (ill.)

cat. Tokyo, p. 19, figs. 11–12

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 80

This etching was inspired by the artist's painting of this title made in 1889 (Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX; Tricot 291). The macabre scene of clothed skeletons hovering around the stove in the artist's studio might be explained by the inscription at the base of the stove in the painting "Pas de feu/En trouverez vous demain?" (No fire/Will you find any tomorrow?) and the violin, painter's palette, and lamp in both the print and painting, perhaps symbolizing art, music, and literature. Together they suggest the artist's sense of the precarious nature either of his artistic inspiration or of his profession in general. The scene can also be related to print cycles of the Dance of Death that emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, most famously the woodcut series by Hans Holbein the Younger of 1538 in which a skeletal figure of Death is seen escorting people of varying professions and social status to the same final destiny.

This is an extraordinary impression of a "proof envelope," printed on a sheet subsequently used by the artist to wrap the copperplate, its folded corners intact.

Squalentes vocant se chivier



Empereur le 12
decembre 1712

Empereur le 12
decembre 1712

18. Grégoire Le Roy, *James Ensor*

G. van Oest & C^{ie}, Brussels 1922

no. 31 of 55 from deluxe copies on fine ARCHES paper (there was also a regular edition of 550 copies)

PROVENANCE

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 82

EXHIBITED

Tokyo, 2001, cat. nos. 111 and 113

The book contains two handcolored etchings:

Masques scandalisés – Scandalized Masks 1895

116 x 76 mm (4 ¾ x 3 ⅜ inches)

Delteil and Croquez 99, Taevernier only state; Elesh 101 only state

The print is based on Ensor's painting of 1883 (Tricot 231) which is "the first work in which he replaced human faces with carnival masks. ... 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 doppelgängers" (Berman, p. 9). It is more than fitting, therefore, that Le Roy chose this important work not only for photomechanical reproduction but also, within the deluxe edition at least, to be represented by an impression of the artist's original print of 1895.

La Roi Peste – King Pest 1895

96 x 115 mm (3 ⅞ x 4 ¾ inches)

Delteil and Croquez 100, Taevernier only state; Elesh 102, only state

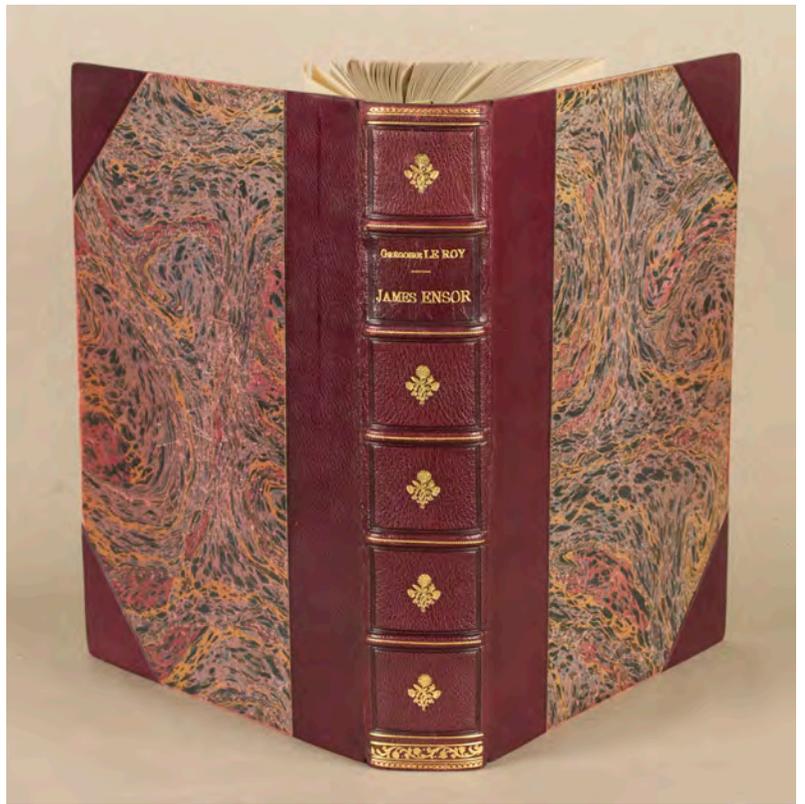
Like the famous image of *Hop-Frog's Revenge* that Ensor executed as both etching (T. 112) and lithograph (T. 137) in 1898, *La Roi Peste* is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe. His story of the same name was first published in 1835.

This copy of the book is unique. Both etchings were handcolored by the artist; it is also inscribed by Ensor: "Les suffisances matamoresques appellent la finale crevaison grenouillère" (The boastfulness of the overly proud ones will cause them to die like the frog in the tale.). This refers to one of La Fontaine's fables about the frog that aspires to become as big as an ox by puffing himself up—resulting in a nasty fate.



Les suffisances matamosques appellent la
finale curieuse grenouillère

James Ensor



19. *Menu pour Charles Vos – Menu for Charles Vos* 1896

etching on laid paper, handcolored with with red, blue, yellow, and green watercolor and touches of red gouache;
157 x 109 mm (6 ¼ x 4 ¼ inches)

titled, signed, and dated below and countersigned on the verso, all in pencil

Delteil 110; Croquez 109; Taevernier 110 only state; Elesh 112 only state

PROVENANCE

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 91

EXHIBITED

Tokyo, 2001, cat. no. 165

Los Angeles, 2008, p. 23

Portland, 2014, brochure no. 16

Ensor's etching was designed for and printed by Charles Vos, traditionally believed to have succeeded Léon Evely as Ensor's main printer. As Patrick Florizoone has shown, however, Ensor worked with a variety of different printers. And, in fact, there is very little evidence that Vos was even a printer. He is known to have been a publisher, art critic, and dealer and, by all accounts, a close friend of the artist (see Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, pp. 212f.) Furthermore, it seems that Vos was a pretty *louche* character. The occasion of the dinner was the opening of Vos Hall, his exhibition building, but he was also the owner of a Brussels cabaret called "Le Diable au Corps." Ensor had created a design for the menu for the wedding of Ernest Rousseau, Jr. the previous month. But while that etched sheet was decorated with the romantic motif of the couple, pierced with cupid's arrow, riding off in the sky to their honeymoon, the menu for Vos's event suggests a rather more disreputable occasion. The guests are seen arriving at the hall laden with lobsters, fish, a live pig on a leash, an outsize fork and spoon, and numerous bottles. From the tower of the building, marked with a fox motif (referring to the Dutch meaning of the word *vos*), revelers can already be seen grotesquely relieving themselves out of the windows—in true Ensor style.

We can offer two impressions of this exceptional and rare print. This one is handcolored with red and blue chalk and watercolor reveals the innovative way in which Ensor deployed the coloring process in the best of his handcolored prints. Rather than just "filling in" forms already outlined in the etching, he exploited the open areas of the menu template, adding features that are not delineated in the printing matrix. Here the space left empty for the written menu has been transformed into an open landscape with a lake or river flowing next to the castle and a group of trees in the background.



Même chose vs

Jans 1516

20. *Menu pour Charles Vos—Menu for Charles Vos* 1896

etching on *simili* Japan paper; 157 x 109 mm (6 ¼ x 4 ¼ inches)

the menu is added in the left half of the composition in pen and ink

PROVENANCE

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

cat. Tokyo, 2001, p. 17, fig. 7

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 92

EXHIBITED

Portland, 2014, brochure no. 15

This impression incorporates the handwritten menu featuring many exotic dishes, among them the mysterious “Mégalosor.”

Vos. Hall:

Ménu du déjeuner mangé
du 25. 12. 96.

Charles Vos.

Huitres.

Hors. d'œuvre

Mégalosor.

Cuissot d'ange d'York.

Terrines Hummel.

Ecrevisses.

Pommes et autres.
à boire

Vins { Du Rhin
Gasparo authentique
Champagne Du
Père Heidsieck



21. *L'Orgueil – Pride* 1904

etching with touches of drypoint on *simili* Japan paper, retouched in pencil; 93 x 146 mm (3 ¾ x 5 ¾ inches)

annotated in pencil on the verso *1^{er} état*

Delteil and Croquez 122, Taevernier first state (of four); Elesh 127 first state (of four)

PROVENANCE

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

This impression is recorded by Taevernier and described as “a proof on Japan in which the mane of the male-goat on the right is sketched and the feathers of the turkey-cock on the left are lengthened. All this is in pencil.”

This was one of eight etchings that Ensor made for the album of *Les Péchés capitaux* (The Deadly Sins), published in 1904 with a preface by Eugène Demolder and sold for 20 francs a copy. In his preface, Demolder noted that in this series “James Ensor combines brutality with devilry. Ferociously, he gives us the image of his contemporaries in the pitiless mirror of his irony. He is without pity. He does not embellish. With a mocking realism he emphasizes the ugliness and the hideous features[?].”

Pride shows an obscure public figure trumped up in his finery and surrounded by impoverished groveling grotesques. He is also attended by a crowing bird, a crowing turkey, a skeleton, and Death with his scythe, seen examining a woman's head for lice with his bony finger.



22. *L'Envie – Envy* 1904

etching on *simili* Japan paper; 94 x 148 mm (3 ¾ x 5 ⅞ inches)

signed in pencil

annotated on the verso *L'Envie 1^{er} etat 1904 / Rare*

Delteil and Croquez 125, Taevernier first state (of three); Elesh 130 first state (of three)

PROVENANCE

[pencil paraphe in the lower-right corner, fig.1]

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

EXHIBITED

Lugano, 1999, no. 125

Tokyo, 2001, cat. no. 132

Los Angeles, 2006

This is an impression of the first state of the print. Ensor reworked the plate considerably in the next state, most noticeably the figure of the man in the center behind the woman holding a small child. Here his head is tilted toward the right. In the next state it is tilted in the opposite direction and the hat now resembles a pointed cap rather than the fedora in the first state.

At the center of the scene, Ensor shows a serene-looking woman holding her baby and a man with his arm around her gazing lovingly at her. Rays of light, suggested by small lines, emanate from them to the edge of the image. But the happiness of the little family is clearly threatened by the envy of the group of bizarre and unappetizing characters crowding around them. All have joyless expressions, and while some are thumbing their noses at the couple, others are giving disapproving glances, or appear to be spreading malicious gossip. To make matters worse, a skeleton floats on each side of the image, one of them apparently trumpeting a reminder that even in the presence of new life we should not forget the inevitability of death. Grim indeed.



fig.1



L. A. M. 1850

23. *L'Ombre sur la maison – The Shadow on the House* 1933

drypoint on laid paper; 175 x 125 mm (7 x 5 inches)

annotated in pencil on the verso *1^{er} Etat / avant le ciel l'enseigne et divers travaux et avant la signature / Tiré à 4 épreuves*

Delteil and Croquez 131, Taevernier first state (of three); Elesh 138 first state (of three)

WATERMARK

VAN GELDER ZONEN

PROVENANCE

Geert Behaegel, Pittem (with his mark, not in Lugt)

According to Croquez, there exist only four impression of the first state before the completion of the signboard and the signature.

This is a first-state impression of this late drypoint showing an old inn. According to Croquez (and to the annotation on the verso of our impression) only four impression of this state exist before Ensor completed the signboard with the lettering DRANK HUIS IN TONZE VROUWTJE and added his signature in the lower-left corner of the plate. Even the second state was only printed in a small edition of 15 copies and inserted into the deluxe version of the second edition of Albert Croquez's 1947 catalogue raisonné of Ensor's prints. There was also a posthumous edition of 110 copies printed from the third state of the print; it accompanied a monograph on Ensor written by Croquez's brother Robert (*Ensor et son temps*, Ostend 1970).



24. *Le Diable au moulin – The Devil and the Windmill* 1934

soft-ground etching printed in sanguine on *japon nacré* with deckle edge below; 145 x 190 mm (5 ¾ x 7 ⅝ inches)

signed in pencil

Delteil and Croquez 133; Taevernier only state; Elesh 140 only state

PROVENANCE

Patrick Florizoone, Ghent (not stamped)

LITERATURE

Gillis/Florizoone, 2002–03, cat. no. 118

EXHIBITED

Tokyo, 2001, cat. no. 166

According to Taevernier, 396 impressions of this print were taken for inclusion in a volume of *Contes D'Horace Van Oeffel* (Tales by Horace Van Oeffel) published in 1935. Our impression belongs to the deluxe printing of 25 copies printed on so-called *japon nacré* or “pearly” Japan paper, whose shimmering surface is reminiscent of mother-of-pearl.

The subject of Ensor's composition, handled with the remarkable, impressionistic fluidity allowed by the soft-ground etching technique, is typically subversive. The Devil is shown standing in glory at the center of a rustic scene with a loosely described house on one side and a windmill on the other. Rays of light emanate from him as various figures and creatures look on in apparent awe.



Lans mra

25. *Apparition*

monotype on tissue-thin *chine*, reworked with blue crayon and red and white gouache;
150 x 98 mm (5 7/8 x 4 inches)

signed in pen and ink at upper right

A very intriguing work by Ensor in which he appears to have taken experimentation with the print medium to an extreme. Monotypes are hardly ever described in the Ensor literature and they only very occasionally appear on the market. Recently a group of three was offered for sale in Belgium (De Vuyst, sale 160, March 7, 2015, lot 134). They were of similar size, dated in the sale catalogue to “ca. 1910–1920,” and came from the esteemed collection of François Franck (see our cat. no. 13).

The sheet looks as if Ensor had used the unworked back of one of his printing plates (some of the later plates from 1903–04 appear to be closest in size: T. 120 ff.). The precise subject of the composition is difficult to decipher. Hardly any recognizable details were printed. Pulling the (dirty) plate through the press has primarily provided the artist with a rectangular backdrop on which he then outlined a variety of figures. The central figure is surrounded by a nimbus of rays reminiscent of the figure of Christ in a Resurrection or Ascension scene; however, here in the monotype this figure might also be read as female. At least some of the figures in the lower half of the sheet, especially those hinted at with white heightening, are female nudes. The overall layout of the composition seems to relate to such early drawings by Ensor as *The Rising: Christ Shown to the People* of 1885 (Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp; however, its measurements of 155 x 102 cm [61 x 40 inches] make this only a very tentative comparison) or *Christ Driving the Moneychangers from the Temple* of 1886 (this one being considerably smaller at 22 x 17 cm [9 x 6 3/4 inches]). Compositionally related, on a yet again much more monumental scale, is the series of six *Aureoles* drawings from 1885–86 that Ensor exhibited at the fourth exhibition of *Les XX* in 1887 (cf. Berman, pp. 74ff., and cat. New York, 2001, cat. nos. 54ff.).



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