

*Creaturely Light: James Ensor Animate Still Life Painting
or A Schizophrenic Vernacular of Paint*

“The tendency of true colorists is to discount the separateness of illumination, to identify it with the colour of objects so that these objects appear to be self-lit in virtue of their colour, as if breathing.” (Adrian Stokes)



James Ensor, *Shrimps and Seashell*, 1894

‘They aren’t pictures, they are *symphonies*,’ or so remarked the Belgian painter James Ensor about his own painting to the tyrant King Leopold II. It was around this time, in 1890, that Ensor began working on a slew of quixotic still life pictures. Two year’s after completing his monumental canvas *Christ’s Entry into Brussels*, and nearly a decade since the first exhibition of *The Oyster Eater*, Ensor was creating enigmatic still lifes: a cosmos of bulbous and bulging sea shells, fleshy peaches, erotic skate, ganrled prawns, and flayed fish. Often rendered macabre and animate, it makes sense that not but a year later conservative Belgian critics would ridicule his unusual paintings as mere ‘hatchings of the palette,’ randomly smeared brushstrokes.ⁱ These unassumingly small ‘symphonies’—paintings replete with scatological imagery and excremental allusions—were, nonetheless, a disturbance to the highbrow salon culture of Europe. Ensor, the provocateur and soon-to-be scandalous painter of

masks was inventing a revolutionary vernacular in paint. A consummate draftsman, it was not his configuration of line or handling of contour that governed this aesthetic vision; it was his painterly preoccupations with light and materiality.

The artist, proclaims Ensor, ‘discerns the subtleties and manifold effects of light...’ He continues, ‘in the deformation it [light] imposes on line, I saw an immensity to be explored, a new vision to be proclaimed.’ⁱⁱⁱ For Ensor, light’s sheen made manifest transfigurative options for the artist. Unique to early modernist discourse, some kind of holy radiance began to ensconce the Belgian painter’s oeuvre: call it the phenomenologically resplendent life of matter. Working in his Ostend attic studio beneath a large south-facing window and nearby the sea, the painter indeed seemed to be psychically illumined under the sun’s glow, the urgency of his praxis an absorptive, all-subsuming act in creation. Nearly four decades before Georges Bataille’s (*Documents* 1930) essay ‘The Rotten Sun’—with his praising of Picasso’s ‘hideous paintings’ and their decomposition of form—the Belgian recluse Ensor had already begun to pictorially destabilize *the real*. Perceptual muddying and the indeterminacy of objects were together a shared act in dispossession materializing through the artist’s undulant veils of light and congealed brushwork.ⁱⁱⁱ

Art historian Sabine Taevernier rightly suggests at this critical historical juncture that Ensor’s paintings increasingly ‘blurred, governed not by the line of the object but by the light and deformation of line it produced.’^{iv} Similarly describing a kind of experimental wash in paint—and the ensuant configurations of light as both translucent ingredient and necromantic sorceress—Michel Drauget notes ‘matter [was] no longer merely a means of rendering the presence of forms,’ but rather ‘it embodied an absolute spirit from which form emerges, fully aware of itself.’^v For Ensor, the stakes of picture-making became part and parcel with both a spiritual project in awakening and materialist critique of hegemonic capitalist culture. In a reevaluation of both substance and light, he began to ‘untangle the deeper logic of late Realism’ applying pressure to both the Realist ‘nostalgia for duration’ and the Impressionist search for an ‘illusion of instantaneity.’^{vi} With reality uniquely distorted, a new and vivacious forcefield of color unleashed; the creaturely life of masks and shrimp, tables and objects together crystalized inside Ensor’s own original, primal mark-making. Coupled with his vanguard sensibilities, technical facility, and nontraditional subject matter the artist would announce a novel set of possibilities for avant-garde European painters at the turn of the century.^{vii}

While extant art historical scholarship regularly addresses the artist’s carnival pictures and political satire, fanciful religiosity and individual mental maladies, little attention has been paid to his strange still life pictures from the early 1890s. Manin Young, for example, discusses the artist’s

gothic masquerading images and suggests their ‘insidious quiet, spleen, [and] swallowing-up of conventional reality’ result from the study of shape as well as the ‘disintegrating action of light jumbling and distorting forms.’^{viii} Young’s discussion of Ensor’s oeuvre highlights the artist’s vitalist sense of archaeology: splenetic cleansing of blood, the visceral fragmentation of matter and dissolution of light waves. In this way, his grimy yet sublime carnival emblems emerged alongside an ocean vernacular of flotsam and jetsam, squirmy symbolic language thick with brackish metaphors. Tracing this kind of insight, we find kindred pathos within the visual matrix of Ensor’s still life paintings. These small peevish pictures reveal some penetrating and transspecies territory: urchins and hermit crabs, conch shells and other aquatic organisms made tactile, each a sentient projection from the sea. Through Ensor’s touch, the marine unknown became a site robust displacement. More too, his sluiced and graphic dissection of quasi-living objects espoused anthropocentric critique. Coherent subjectivity and the imaginary wholeness of ego—that bourgeois fantasy of fixity and armored sanctity—gradually devolved in paint.

More explicitly, I want to suggest Ensor’s gnarled still life paintings show us the vicissitudes of an interior mental landscape—a revolutionary and precarious artist tiptoeing along the brink of reason. Albeit unbeknownst to even the artist himself, his modest table scenes detail the private and unknowable sphere of psychosis. To explore this psychological deformation, I want to shuttle between three interrelated modes of visual analysis: first, Ensor’s inimitable subject matter—an unprecedented bombardment with ungainly marvels from the nearby sea; second, his hallucinatory and creaturely rendering of this *thing-life*; and last, the artist’s own askance invocation of his cloistered and unstable selfhood.

Summarily, the master draftsman created subliminal tableau scenes; his parallax vision at once a phenomenological blurring of forms and facades, his ‘beautiful legend of Me, the unique Me...to Be: I am, we are, you are, they are...’ full disclosed.^{ix} Wherein language—direct objects, verbs, subjective syntax—fail and legibility fades, the wordless hum of paintings may still resound. Nevertheless, Ensor’s sense of inner turmoil was not, however, a mere solipsistic dive into madness. Instead, the visual maestro behind the curtain would become public trickster, a misunderstood masked man negotiating the edges of both acceptability and sanity.^x This is that story in three pictures.

Consider first *Shrimps and Seashell*, a small (18 x 24 cm) oil painting on prepared panel from 1894. Seven meticulously painted prawns skirt the mottled surface. The languid hotchpotch of crustaceans appears just barely dead. A thickening of life and objecthood brought to life through pigment was at stake. Through Ensor’s uniformly limited bloodshot palette, the skeletal sea group form a quasi-

ossified mass. At center-right, the crimson hued telson of a single shrimp conspicuously reaches off the table's edge. With exposed and dangling abdomen, this arrow-like tail seems to nearly puncture the picture plane surface. A second central prawn rests to the left; its pose is in stark contrast to their splayed-out brethren beside. Situated just about the table's veiny rim this shrimp appears to curl inward. In some sense, it is as if Ensor's spiralling sea creature attempts to recede from our vision. The coiled posture, in fact, however, operates twofold: at once a hermetic guardian, some shielding protectorate force keeping viewers at bay; and also too, a secret inhabitant residing in the shell of its own life. The gestural torque of the artist's brushwork balances these two ulterior modes of life—the seen and the unseen, the cloaked and the unveiled, the knowable and the unknown.

Beneath this crepuscular body, incised dashes of clay-orange color mark the table's surface. These washed-out hues create a mirage of form amidst the swirl of disintegrating scratches and stains. Most unusually however, notice the way this blotchy mass is nearly identical in size, shape, and tone to the most distant shrimp behind. Hieroglyphic-like, the two swaths of orange paint parenthetically bracket the crouching shrimp noted above. Moreover, read orthogonally together these analogical shapes curiously intersect the coiled prawn. The turpitude of Ensor's knifework and radical impasto technique “intended to be excremental in its very existentiality.”^{xi} Painters in the Belgian avant-garde sought ‘to combine Realist motifs with a painterly technique derived from Courbet's use of the palette knife.’^{xii}

It is as if Ensor intended to destabilize vision and perception through painterly means, performing a kind of tactile subterfuge through his handling of abstract forms in pictorial space. Ernest Verlant suggests the artist offered ‘through a new dance of the human body, a crushing defeat of this microbial world that is nothing but coagulated nothingness’ (Verlant 90). This kind of battle with nothingness was a new phenomenological mode of registering the world. The infectious lexicon of colorful pathogens and eroded bacterial resins subsumed not only the artist's pictorial content; as significantly, this anti-linguistic [legible] impulse propelled the work toward ‘life beyond form...transforming painting into an act turned against itself.’ Ensor's subject matter recurrently reveals a disintegrating blueprint of hues, a palpitating ‘shapeless mass of colors’ (in *Tribulations of Saint Anthony*) that would come to haunt the artist—his work and life alike (Draguet 98).

At far right of the small *Shrimps and Seashell* canvas rests a modest scallop shell. The only one of its kind pictured, its conspicuous presence anchors the scene. I want to call attention to two things here: the first, historical; the other, visual. Aside from the formal balance and compositional structure the seashell provides in the picture, Ensor's decision to include a single scallop shell in a still life scene governed by flaccid shrimp seems unusual. Herein lies a key origin story, the domain

of allegory and artistic genealogy summoned to mind through symbolic image. Scallop shells invoke one of the most iconic and recognizable paintings in the long history of western art: Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1486). Whereas Botticelli's marble white and gold rimmed shell opens outward to birth the goddess of love, Ensor's mordant seashell is flipped upside down. No reproductive act of Eros or life-giving mythopoesis blossoms in the tiny sea life picture. Instead, through an act of entrapment and enclosure watery red-white striations rhyme with the indolent shrimp nearby. The briny surfaces and abrasive pink thresholds of *Sbrimps and Seashell* keep life at bay—there is no angelic heraldry bestowed nor love beholden at the shore in this late 19th century still life.

Another strange micro detail completes the uncanny epidermic form of Ensor's sea scallop. Notice the exaggerated sliver of a black hole at the base of the shell. The sinuous crevice of dark appears at once to both peer outward and seep inward. Moreover, the arabesque shape has some queer doppelganger in the blackened cavity nestled in the gap between the shrimp body and tail adjacent. Seen obliquely together, it is as if these two slits of abject darkness configure the disjointed eyes of some misshapen and formless Ensorian mask. The artist himself often even imagined the lifeforce of his celebrated tableaus through briny analogies, his quirky attestations further bridging the disparate domain of faces and fish. They [the masks] are "spiced with prettiness, purple, azure blue, mother-of-pearly, shell-like, *oysterish*, embossed, striped, *turboty*, bearded, *coddy*, *floundery*, rascally, imbued with imagination, they are exuberant to their hearts' content," he scrawls.^{xxxiii} Slippage of fact and fiction, scoundrels and shells further dramatize the peculiarities of Ensor's praxis.

While the unusual scallop shell at right balances the beveled horizontal scene, perhaps as prominent is an absent detail at far left. Akin to some kind of optical erasure, notice the missing countertop surface. Lost in the periphery and bending into the border's edge, the tabletop's front most curvature disappears. The artist as magician and the totemic work of suspending disbelief cohere in this feigned porous arch. The vanishing brim reads in stark juxtaposition to the bulbous shell situated across and opposite the frame. Amidst this hyperbolic lacuna of excess and surplus—wherein but a solitary charcoal line denotes the table's topmost brink—a singular orbicular brushstroke of stained patina emulates the crustacean lifeforms beside. In a painterly act of compression, the motley swash of dragged color becomes part and parcel with the skein of sea life above. Through the viscous secretions of this miasma, Ensor sublimates matter into a twirling helix of both form and anti-form.

And yet more uncanny still, however, is the blood-curdling red line that shores up the painting's bottom limit. The ghastly varicose tissue of the sea abuts against the surface foreground. The

rippling edge of this stationary table is a disjunctive formal element here pictured with both an animate and veiny sense of life. This cuticle membrane registers as some self-generative token wound, a slice of Ensor's 'an autochthonous impressionism' gathered along the shore of his Ostend seaside home.^{xiv} Close-looking at the stark interplay between marks and scratches, caesuras and omissions begins to unveil an eccentric and ardent interiority visible across the artist's oeuvre. Ensor's vision was his own, his sanity and disequilibrium likewise constitutive of an aggravatingly specific—and often unknowable—visual language.

Spongy and susceptible to the exterior world, it makes sense then that even the ecological surroundings and wet atmospheres of parochial Belgium, could soak into Ensor's baroque canvases. *Rooftops of Ostend* (1884) evinces this imposing gloom (fig. 2). Painted a decade prior to *Shrimps and Seashell*, the muted and brisk seaside weather was a cauldron composed of slate grays and stony blues. For the scandalous artist of boggy botanicals and creepy masquerades, the terrain inside the mind was a regurgitated Ostend storm, an exposed cavity of sleet charcoal smog blurred the sky and self in tandem. Swirling around the lascivious intestines of Ensor's brain was to live trapped inside one's own inner scatological sanctum: the murky logic of colors and life of objects turned inside out.



Rooftops of Ostend, 1884



The Multiplication of the Fishes, 1891

Gothic masquerading
Totemic
Mask
Oceanic/Phermone-logical
The mirror of the self; Pierrot (Nadar); Narcissus
preoccupation obsession deception fetishization with
Countenance, reflection, the face, selfhood, unveiling



James Ensor, *Peaches*, 1890, 19 x 23 1/2 , oil on panel



Still Life with Blue Pitcher (1890-94)

Crab body and lemon pulp/fruit—shapes, fleshy, motility,

Serpentine olive amber glass handle

The translucent ghostly ribbed glass behind

Red and white table cloth neatly folded at right—bracketing the scene and bracing the arabesque animacy of the objects

The marbled table a quezy blend of color: crimson fishy scales, sapphire blue jug, and pastel washed wall cohere

Dreaded opulence—crystal glass pitcher, viscous innards of a seashell, fl

Black corner at far left—depth of surface, picture plane, interiority—in visual rhyme with black triangular crevice of the shell at right

In tandem this orthoginal cuts almost directly through the eye splayed open fish



James Ensor, *Still Life with Ray*, 1892, 31 1/2 x 29 3/8 inches
Royal Museum of Fine Arts Belgium, [image museum](#)

A Round shape: misplaced eyes

limbs limp,

Bifurcating the canvas vertically, we notice the skate's sinuous salamander-like tail

Genital-esque droops of the gnarly tables edge. Sags

A castration



“The confused mass of eccentric objects was constantly being knocked over by one of several cats, squawking parrots and a monkey,” Ensor wrote. “I spent many hours in those beasts’ company. The shop smelt musty, the seashells were full of monkey wee and the cats would snuggle down among the most precious pieces of lace.”

Body/Sense/Touch

99. Ensor transformed “painting into a form of chaos with the Edenic landscape of his 1890 *Domain of Arnheim...*” (Draguet)

Marnin Young astutely situates Ensor’s radical sense of avant-garde modernism as operating across some fraught temporality liminal state of in-betweenness the logic of

“His living room is a box in the theater of the world.”¹⁰⁴

with its prioritization of the inwardness or “interiority” of the individual subject.⁹⁵

interior as an emblem of the dream-world of the bourgeoisie,

In Ensor’s still life pictures from the early 1890s we see a final gasp.
This exacerbation for interiority, dream worlds, private domestic casings, and...

at stake were the temporal registers of both was t“to **offer a profound critique of**

Relationship between the sea, creaturely animal existence, an archaeology of unknowable depths,

Read in tandem with his ‘Multiplication of the Fishes’

Roundedness

Anthropomorphic sea creatures teeming with life

Foil—Skeletons as a casing from the neurosis of life—, viscous, barnacles, the sea,

The head, the privileged site

‘**The nineteenth century witnessed a revival in medieval aesthetics** that coincided with new discoveries being published in medicine and anatomy.’ Maria Anna Cynkier (83)
an ungainly affect of discomfit we could even mark as urethral.
naked discomfit,

critique stable sense of self

schizophrenic break—is explored with paint through still-life tableaux.

replete with

; interiority; mind and the providence of mental the painter began

A spirited embodied both mentally and in

sanctity

Ulterior models of personhood,

A fragmented body and self

The novelty of Pre-psychoanalytic and Freudian excavation

Excavation and psychology

I. **Painterly application:**

Use of precise draftsman to paint scrawling lines that both depict and animate.

Scour/scratch/marking the canvas surface

Bombastic nearness to the surface of the picture plane

Baroque

Size

While a similar leftward orientation,

Peaches, the

Flemish painting

Manuscript illumination

II. **Subject matter:**

Uncanny depictions of sea life in a state of animate in-betweenness—fish, squid and skate but nearly dead

“The objects and characters in his ‘bourgeois interiors,’” wrote Paul Haesaerts in the 1950s, “are not instantly or immediately apprehended.” *Paul Haesaerts in the 1950s (I think) (Young)



Still Life in the Studio, 1889



James Ensor, (1860-1949), *Masker en schaaldieren (Mask and Crustaceans)*, 1891. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, inv. 1958. Photo: Rik Klein Gopink. On show in *Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux: James Ensor and Still Life in Belgium from 1830 to 1930* at Mu.ZEE in Ostend

- I. **Wider socio-cultural milieu of Ostend, Belgium** (psychoanalysis; imperial plunder King Leopold II; tourism and the sea)

Colonizing
Interiority (man of wounds)
Modernism and response
Local vernacular
Vivisection—the innards, experimentation and facts
Two versions of interiority/vacated/insides—sepulchral; damp; dance of death
Bourgeois interiors

The grotesque, the phantasmatic, mental health,
Spiritual conflation of religious iconography and
Suspended identity and **delusional** relational models with the world at large

A doll, acting as some kind of puppeteering conductor, rides atop the shoulders of the cadaveric mannequin at center.

1882 triennial in Antwerp—refused to display
The same 1882 review in *L'Art moderne* comparing Ensor to Impressionism claimed that *Afternoon in Ostend* gave the “idea of an apartment **subjected to the oscillation of an earthquake.**” (Marnin Young)

Young 19th-century invent some kind of casing for!” / what Verhaeren calls “accessories”—

Young **Realism’s temporal dimension—the sense of “a suspended duration” in the interiors—offered critical and aesthetic.**^{xv}

and I spent my childhood in the paternal shop surrounded by curiosities from the sea...’ 70
Sabine Taevernier

...And that, even now, in the present darkness and madness of all thought on the great question of the social condition, it is not impossible that man, the individual, under certain unusual and highly fortuitous conditions, may be happy.
Poe, ‘The Domain of Arnheim’



E.A. Poe, *The Domain of Arnheim*



Skeletons Fighting over a Pickled Herron, 1891

Sucking, swallowing

Chewing, nibbling

In tandem a stark portrait of mordant rapture; gruesome devouring



Notes

Deborar Silverman, *Empire as Architecture*

[E-flux article](#)

“This was not a settler colony propelled by a national mission, **but a private entrepreneurial venture**. The abundance of ivory, timber, and wild rubber found in this enormous territory brought sudden and spectacular profits to Belgium, the king, and a web of interlocking concession companies.”

The spectacle of rapacious accumulation and imperial looting
Dispossession—the maddening frenzy
Sexual fantasy

King Leopold II Effigy, Ostend

Joseph Carey Merrick (The Elephant Man), Ostend

Fierce campaigner against vivisection (think *Experimental Animals*)

Barbara Creed, horror and abjection (1996)

Flagrant and the Foul, Alain Corbin

p.90 ‘Ensor: A Theatre of the Mind,’ Michael Draguet in *James Ensor* (MOMA, Anna Swinbourne)

ARTICLE: “James Ensor: Anarchism, Spirituality, Degeneracy in the Belgian *fin de siècle*,”
Maria Anna Cynkier
Symbolist practice

Michelle Facos, leading scholar on symbolism, ‘an artist’s desire to represent ideas’ and ‘manipulation of colour, form, and composition that signals the artist’s relative indifference to worldly appearances.’ (p. 77, fn 5)

Book: *Goya, Redon, Ensor grotesque paintings and drawings*

Realism in the Age of Impressionism, Marnin Young

“A direct response to French art, Ensor’s early paintings of bourgeois interiors—*Russian Music*, shown at the Paris Salon of 1882, is the most prominent—evince the most compelling contemporary meditation on the possible synthesis of Realism and Impressionism, of durational and instantaneous temporalities.

Because of his cultural location in Belgium, Ensor was uniquely capable of **untangling the deeper logic of later Realism**. Ultimately, the last chapter of this book argues, his charged overlapping of contradictory painterly modes and temporalities allowed him to break decisively with the French tradition but also “*to offer a profound critique of both the Realist nostalgia for duration and the Impressionist illusion of instantaneity.*”

(Figures 114.115)

“On the whole, Ensor clearly recognized certain dominant trends in recent art, ones that responded directly to the nature and legacy of midcentury Realism and its more recent variations in France. More than anything, the Antwerp sketchbook indicates how seriously Ensor took the diverse imagery of modern art. Ultimately, however, these copies were iconographic and compositional not stylistic, based as they were on engravings after the paintings; the technique of modern painting he learned from Vogels and possibly firsthand from Courbet’s painting. Although critics understood it incorrectly as an importation of Impressionism, Ensor’s painting emerged out of an internal and parallel development within the **Belgian avant-garde, one that sought to combine Realist motifs with a painterly technique derived from Courbet’s use of the palette knife**. For its practitioners, Tachisme was an internally consistent style elaborated out of Realism, but for many critics, its turn to quasi-Impressionist techniques failed to cohere.”

“The class character of the late-nineteenth-century interior has subsequently emerged at the conceptual heart of theoretical reflection on space in modern culture. Most notably, for Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, the bourgeois obsession with the interior was key to any critical analysis of the nineteenth century. Adorno saw the interior as central to his understanding of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, **with its prioritization of the inwardness or “interiority” of the individual subject.**⁹⁵

Benjamin famously isolated the **interior as an emblem of the dream-world of the bourgeoisie**, but as such it was a historically limited phenomenon, emerging in tandem with the shopping arcades in the 1820s and fading after the innovations of Art Nouveau in the 1890s”

Replete with ocean life and crawling with

Ensor's strange still life paintings

“His living room is a box in the theater of the world.”¹⁰⁴

Bourgeois culture thus attempts to maintain some kind of historical experience within the space of the interior. For Benjamin, the “trace” of the private individual evidenced the new bourgeois practice of dwelling, and all sorts of new objects proliferated to serve this containing function: “What didn’t the nineteenth-century invent some kind of casing for!”¹⁰⁵ The walls of the interior itself form the grandest of these casings. Yet, the attempt to maintain some “long experience” connecting the self to history through the dizzying piling up of things within the home—what **Verhaeren** calls “accessories”—could not, ultimately, undo the triumph of capitalist modernity

More than anything, Ensor seems intuitively to have recognized that **Realism’s temporal dimension—the sense of “a suspended duration” in the interiors—offered critical and aesthetic** possibilities for metaphorizing not only this subject’s place within a wider Franco-Belgian artistic practice, but also the very nature of the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior.¹¹⁴ T

Merleau-Ponty, ‘Eye and Mind,’ painters

Size inverted in these two tiny oil panels—absorptive; condensed; compressed; saturated

Surface

Shape

Line—deformation

Bart Verschaffel, ‘Still Lives in Belgium 1830-1930’

‘Ensor was keen to activate their murky symbolism and erotic associations, as in the case of the flabby skate with its flaccid tail (45)

Sabine Taevernier, ‘*Nature morte* is the triumph of color and life’

STILL LIFE, p.65

A minor genre (thinking here of Sianne Ngai)

200 pictures; a quarter of his entire oeuvre

‘my mother, daughter of Ostend sea-shell sellers, continued her parents’ trade **and I spent my childhood in the paternal shop surrounded by curiosities from the sea...**’ 70

A way of painting that ‘captures the fluidity of things...one might call it **an autochthonous impressionism**’ 72

‘the great freedom of his style was disconcerting: **the painting was blurred, governed not by the line of the object but by the light and the deformation of line it produced.**’

p. 73. Painting the poppies he has received

1886-88 returned to earlier pictures and ‘transformed realistic drawings...’ p. 78 . describes some of the peculiarities

76. the situation in Brussels

103. replying to King Leopold, **‘They aren’t pictures, they are symphonies.’**

As **Paint**

Genre, history, still life, function, medium specific historical context and milieu

Were other painters representing this kind of subject matter? How can we understand the contemporary radicalism of Ensor's paintings? What kind of historical configurations and personal narrative are embedded in these late 19th century 'still life' painting?

Ensor's Still life pictures are more than still lives

There is a creaturely echo, an aliveness or **In-between-ness**

The discussion of James Ensor and the mind

Bipolar-Disorder, Manic Depression as Language

Translation of worldly experience

Visual expression of the mind;

An Avisual projection of an erased and disintegrating self;

(for Ensor as **character**: person in time and space; **an actor** now embedded within the visual painterly *remembering* of the past; as historical artist with a subjectively figurative self)

Becoming silent—not a passive designation; rather, an action

Not **created** affectless;

A dramatic event,

For Ensor, a *declaration* made in paint.

When verbal language fails

Place of self-reconstruction and identity shaping as linguistic models, medicinal investigations, scientific explanations remain stultified

The creative unknowable map of image making and construction

Freud: His Dreams and Sex Theories, Joseph Jastrow

p. 47—clinical (problems); Freud has psychological response/import



Masks Watching a Negro Tumbler (1890)? P. 42 still life *Rose Rose* book (Yale 2024 press)
Hermes, turtles, music, trickster

Ensor's 'Masks watching a Black Minstrel'

Preceding perhaps the most famous turtle in the history of 20th century painting, Henri Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* (1906), the uncanny allure of the picture is no less remarkable

Beak and Pinocchio mask nose; reaching across the countenance of the black man at center.

Keeping at bay; partitioning off
Or intruding/haunting
Or captured

<https://3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2009/07/james-ensor-keepin-it-surreal.html>



Skeleton Painter in his Studio, 1896





The Artist's Mother in Death, 1915



James Ensor, *The Oyster Eater*, 1882, 80 x 60 inches



James Ensor (1860-1949), *Rozen (Roses)*, 1892. Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels. Photo: J. Geleys. On show in *Rose, Rose, Rose à mes yeux: James Ensor and Still Life in Belgium from 1830 to 1930* at Mu.ZEE in Ostend

i (n 1891Draguet fn. 5, p. 112))

ii (fn 31), 97 ...this is how art has evolved from the Gothic line through the colour and movement of the Renaissance to arrive at modern light ; and (part 2), Sabine Taevernier *Roses* p. 75

iii Rosalind Kraus, *Optical Unconscious*, 180.

iv Sabine Taevernier

v Michel Draguet (99)

vi Young

vii Marilyn Young; also Bakhtin

viii (Young)

ix (Draguet) 94.

x Lewis Hyde, *Hermes public*.

xi (91-92. 1878-1881)

xii ' (Young)

xiii (Draguet fn 3) Ensor quote

xiv 72 Sabine Taevernier, '*Nature morte* is the triumph of color and life'

xv Bart Verschaffel, 'Still Lifes in Belgium 1830-1930'