

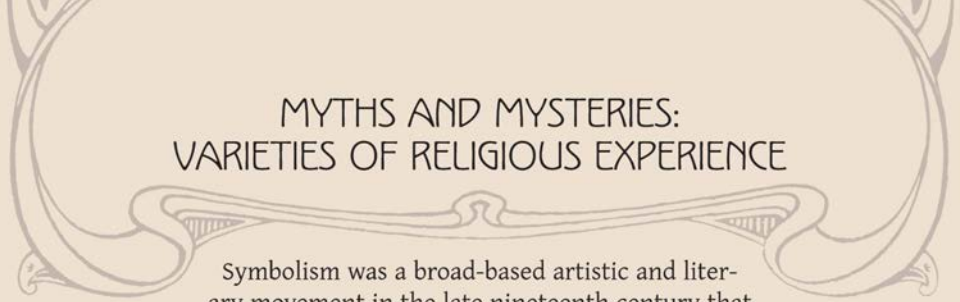
SHADOWS AND LIGHT SYMBOLIST ART IN BELGIUM WORKS FROM THE HEARN FAMILY TRUST

Showcasing the most important collection of Belgian symbolist art in private hands—assembled by Charles Hack over more than four decades—the exhibition features over 150 major works by Belgian and other European artists in their orbit. *Shadows and Light* charts a world of dualities: dream and reality, modernism and tradition, music and silence, mystery and revelation. Together, these works offer a counterpart and counterpoint to the sun-drenched landscapes of contemporary neo-impressionism, asserting a distinct and rival presence in Belgium.

New research illuminates the complex world of Belgian artists at the vanguard of the international symbolist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a pivotal moment in the development of modern art. Composed of ten “movements,” the exhibition unfolds in the galleries as a visual symphony with artists engaging with vital issues of modern life, including questions of faith, social justice, historical identity, and psychological analysis. Building on the historic tradition of Belgian and Flemish art, the exhibition demonstrates how these artists’ works are innovative in style and personal vision, significantly expanding the language of art.

Belgian artists represented include: Cécile Caution, William Degouve de Nuncques, Léon Frederic, Fernand Khnopff, Georges Le Brun, Xavier Mellery, Constantin Meunier, George Minne, Armand Rassenfossé, and Léon Spilliaert. Paintings by Gustave Moreau, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, František Kupka, and Koloman Moser, as well as works from the McMullen Museum’s collection, elucidate the rich context of international symbolist art, in which Belgians played a leading role. With forty-six works by Spilliaert, the exhibition seeks to introduce North American audiences to one of Belgium’s most enigmatic and celebrated artists. Upstairs, the Monan Gallery is devoted to a selection of Spilliaert’s landscapes.

Organized by the McMullen Museum, *Shadows and Light* has been curated by Jeffery Howe and underwritten by Boston College with major support from the Patrons of the McMullen Museum and Mary Ann ’67 and Vincent Q. Giffuni ’65, P’94.



MYTHS AND MYSTERIES: VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Symbolism was a broad-based artistic and literary movement in the late nineteenth century that sought to restore meaning to a world both invigorated and challenged by modern technology, industry, and colonial ventures. The movement's primary goal was the re-enchantment of a world where mystery seemed to have been banished.

Gustave Moreau and Fernand Khnopff revitalized classical mythology to reveal eternal values, while others found meaning in mystical traditions that were in dialogue with Christian themes. Art and religion reinforced each other; Edward Burne-Jones, Koloman Moser, and John La Farge undertook major religious commissions, even reviving the medieval art of stained glass.

The plight of the working class in modern industrial society jolted the conscience of many artists in Belgium—a theme explored later in this exhibition. Conversely, the beauty of nature provided another channel for aesthetic delight and spiritual revelation, as seen in the works of Franz von Stuck, Odilon Redon, and Khnopff.

Revolutions in modern psychology granted artists the freedom to explore dreams and the pathways of the unconscious, longstanding tools of revelation. Figures like František Kupka and Jan Toorop opened windows into imaginative universes with complex moral themes that shape subsequent sections of this exhibition.



Henry de Groux (1866 Brussels–Saint-Josse-ten-Noode 1930)
Christ Insulted, 1890

Pastel, chalk over lithograph

The Hearn Family Trust

Henry de Groux was the son of the noted realist painter Charles de Groux. Here, he turbulently depicts the drama of the first Station of the Cross when Christ is mocked by soldiers and civilians as he is condemned to death. This work reproduces the artist's oil painting of 1889, which achieved considerable success. The delicate colors of the pastel and chalk over a lithograph contrast with the violence of the scene, which matches the intensity of earlier Netherlandish depictions by Hieronymus Bosch and modern versions by Édouard Manet and James Ensor.



Koloman Moser (1868 Vienna–Vienna 1918)

Madonna and Child, c. 1904–05

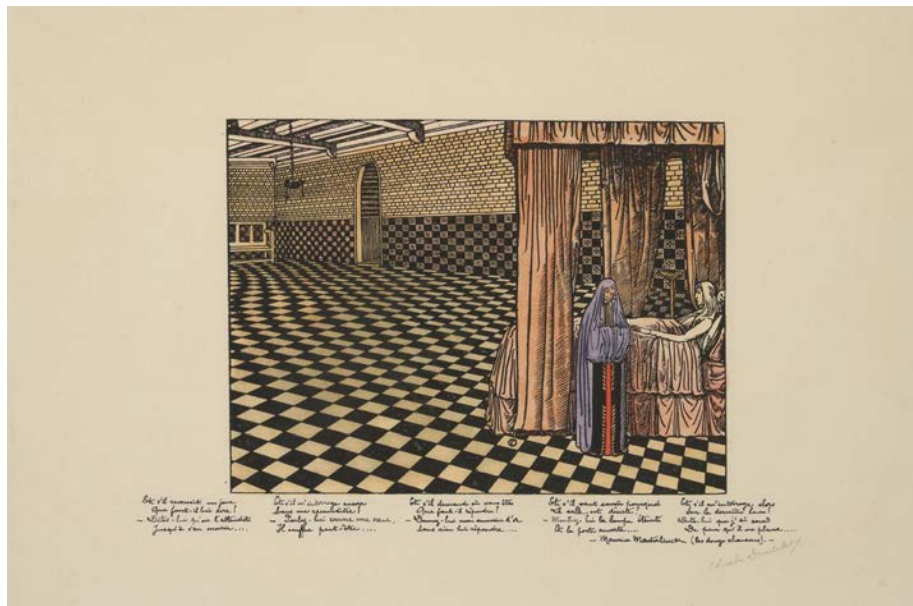
Watercolor, gold paint, wax crayon on transparent paper, mounted on watercolor paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Koloman Moser was one of the leading artists of the Vienna Secession, a group that split from the traditional academy in 1898 to create a variant of French art nouveau and German Jugendstil. Their goal was to revitalize art, making it modern. Moser contributed decorative designs infused with geometric patterns to the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops).

In this work, Moser drapes the figures of Mary and the baby Jesus in blue and gold fabrics that are deliberately flattened, echoing Byzantine and Japanese art. The design is both archaic and modern, anticipating later art deco patterns. The Madonna's dangling feet hark back to medieval jamb figures on cathedrals. She stands atop a triple base of Ionic capitals that rise up like a fountain—an image reinforced by the flowing waters of life cascading down symmetrically. The beautiful painting is related to Moser's contemporary designs for the decoration of the Church of St. Leopold am Steinhof in Vienna (see image).





Charles Doudelet (1861 Lille–Ghent 1938)

*Et s'il revenait un jour... (And If He
Were to Return One Day...)*, 1896

Illustration for Maurice Maeterlinck, *Douze Chansons* (Twelve Songs)

Offprint on paper hand-finished in watercolor, ink

The Hearn Family Trust

Illustrating Maeterlinck's poem of longing and regret, Doudelet evokes a dreamlike image of an ailing soul in a medieval bedroom, confiding to a nun from her deathbed. The poem's dialogue is elliptical, hinting at parallels between the absent lover and Christ, whose arrival is eagerly awaited, if uncertain.

And if he should come again
What should I say to him?
—Tell him that one waited for him
Until she died...

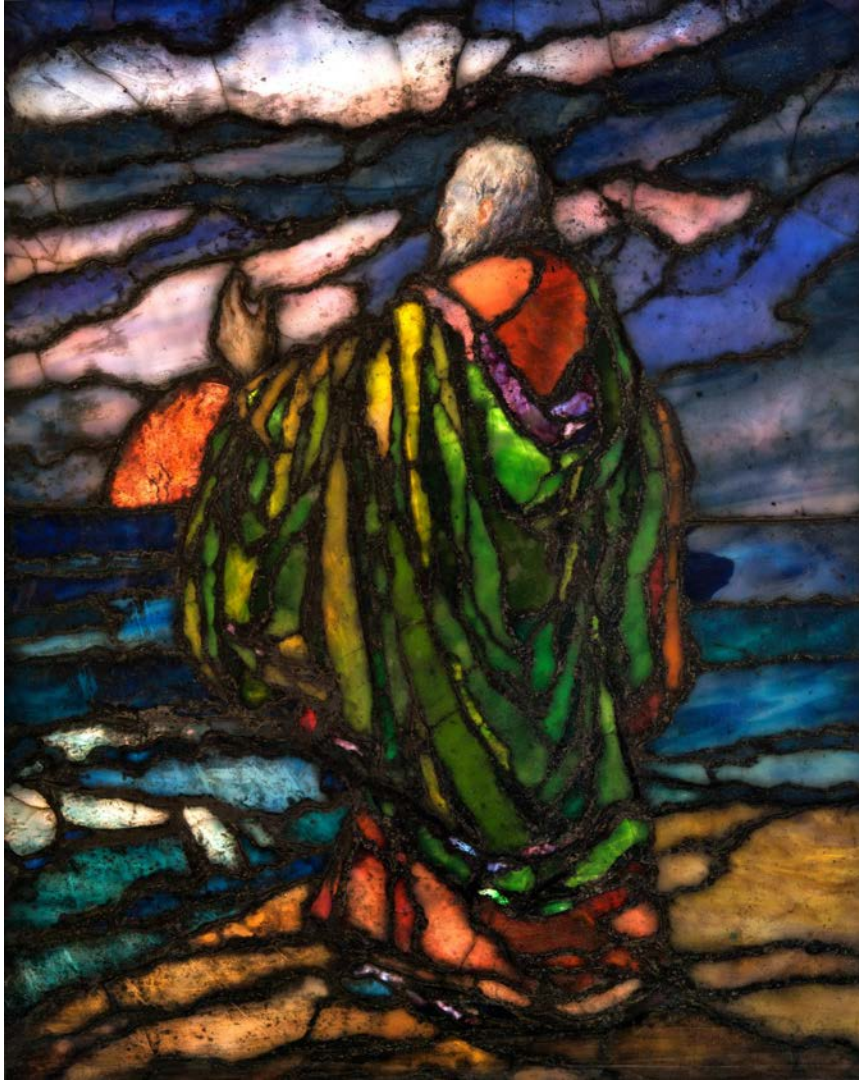
And if he questions me again
Without recognizing me?
—Speak to him like a sister
He may be suffering...

And if he asks where you are
What should I answer?
—Give him my golden ring

Without answering him
anything.

And if he wants to know why
The room is deserted?
—Show him the extin-
guished lamp
And the open door...

And if he questions me then
About the last hour?
—Tell him that I smiled
For fear he might cry...



John La Farge (1835 New York City–Providence, RI 1910)
Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still, c. 1909

Opalescent leaded glass

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Gift of Oliver La Farge Hamill

La Farge's opalescent leaded glass panels serve as a perfect illustration of "painting with light." His innovative creations, along with those of L. C. Tiffany, parallel European developments of the Aesthetic movement and art nouveau in the use of stained glass to fill houses and churches with brilliant illumination and symbolic meaning. After all, the theology of light is embedded in the first line of the Bible: "Let there be light." The large triptych in the McMullen Atrium is a superb example.

While he is most renowned for his religious themes, La Farge also applied his innovative techniques to private domestic spaces. This small panel was one of six made in 1909 for the writer and publisher Edward W. Bok; they were designed to be combined in an allegorical window in Bok's home. Three subjects represent various arts, and three represent different religious traditions. The book of Joshua 10:12 tells of the miraculous defeat of the Amorites when Joshua commanded the sun to stand still until the Israelites had achieved victory—an exceptionally appropriate subject for a medium dependent upon light.

Edward Coley Burne-Jones

(1833 Birmingham–London 1898)

The Annunciation, c. 1888

Bodycolor over pen and ink, silver paint, gold paint with white heightening on board

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Gift of Alexandria and

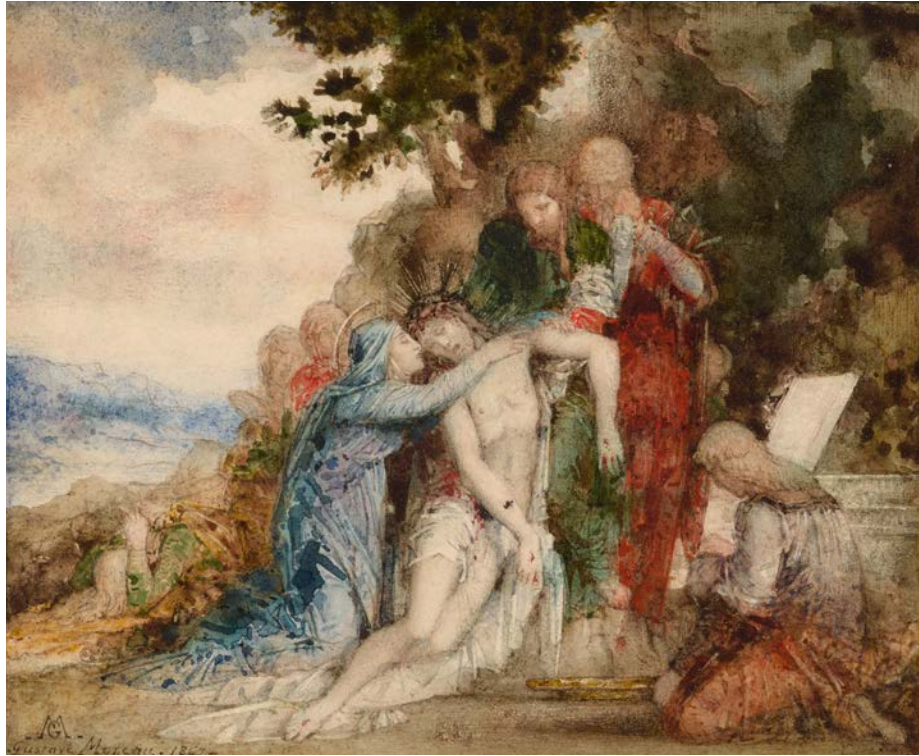
Michael N. Altman P'22, '24, '26 in memory of Father Michael J. Himes



Burne-Jones shared with Moreau a deep religious faith and a love of early Renaissance art. This study for an architectural composition portrays the figures of Mary and the angel Gabriel in an arid landscape, a change from the interior scenes depicted by artists such as Fra Angelico in the fifteenth century, or even Burne-Jones's friend and mentor Dante Gabriel Rossetti (see image). The angel has just delivered the crucial news to Mary (that she would miraculously conceive Jesus), who bows her head as she responds “*Ecce ancilla Domini*” (“Behold the Handmaiden of the Lord”). At the lower left a pelican pierces her breast to feed a chick with her heart’s blood, a traditional symbol of sacrifice known as the “pelican in her piety.”



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce ancilla Domini*, 1850.
Oil on canvas, Tate, London.



Gustave Moreau (1826 Paris–Paris 1898)

The Entombment, 1867

Pencil, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Although best known today for his arcane mythological and symbolist works, nearly twenty percent of Moreau's œuvre represents conventional religious themes. He frequently professed his faith in God and artistic intuition:

Do you believe in God? I believe in him alone. I do not believe either in what I touch or in what I see. I only believe what I do not see and uniquely what I feel... my inner feeling alone seems eternal and unquestionably sure.

The Entombment is a central theme of Christianity, the sacrifice of God for the redemption of the human race, and was frequently depicted by earlier artists. Moreau wrote:

Let us look for God no other place than in that mysterious influence which makes us love what is outside of life, sacrifice, effort without reward, and which makes us understand love and charity, these two divine and superterrestrial essences.



Gustave Moreau (1826 Paris–Paris 1898)

St. George and the Dragon, c. 1869

Pencil, watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The battle of St. George and the dragon is the classic paradigm of the Christian knight battling sin, a subject frequently depicted by Raphael and others (see image), and is echoed in paintings and sculptures of St. Michael defeating the Devil.

Moreau's haloed warrior wears armor as he fatally spears the dragon, rescuing the princess faintly depicted in the background. The composition owes much to Raphael's High Renaissance version of the same story, although the landscape is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci—one of Moreau's favorite artists. It is easy to see the princess as an allegory of the human soul rescued from sin by the grace of God. Moreau once declared, "Art can lead to religion—and to real religion, the kind that elevates the soul."



Raphael, *St. George and the Dragon*, c. 1503–05.
Oil on wood panel, Louvre, Paris.



Gustave Moreau (1826 Paris–Paris 1898)

Helen in Glory, 1896

Watercolor, gouache, shell gold on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Moreau was proud to call himself a worker—an “assembler of dreams.” This densely figured watercolor and gouache shows the apotheosis of Helen, a key figure in the fate of Troy in Homer’s *The Iliad*. Moreau shows a nearly nude Helen being carried aloft by a syncretic group of classical and Eastern-inspired spirits as she looks down, holding a lotus blossom. The attendant with a lyre might be Apollo or Orpheus, the bearded man holds a scepter with a winged sphinx, and the figure on the left wears the winged hat associated with Hermes or Hypnos. The crouching form in the lower left flies away and has the red wings of a cherub; his pose echoes that of the flying Dionysus being born in Moreau’s contemporary masterpiece *Jupiter and Semele* (see image).

In Moreau’s mystical interpretation of this classical story, Helen is a necessary but fatal actor. Her beauty was divine, but her sensuality led to the downfall of Troy.



Gustave Moreau, Detail of Semele and Dionysus from *Jupiter and Semele*, 1896. Oil on canvas, Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.



Gustave Moreau (1826 Paris–Paris 1898)

Orpheus, 1865–70

Graphite, pen, ink, wash, with lead framing lines, on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Moreau has chosen the tender moment when a Thracian woman reverently carries the severed head of Orpheus on his lyre after he had been torn to pieces by female followers of Dionysus (see additional interpretations, below). Classical myths were read allegorically since the Middle Ages, and concealed Christian values under a veil of paganism; this double meaning would be understood by those initiated into the code of the mysteries. Such a viewer of this drawing would have recognized Orpheus, who descended into Hades to reclaim his dead wife, Eurydice, and whose head lived again to give oracles after his decapitation, as a pagan forerunner to Christ.

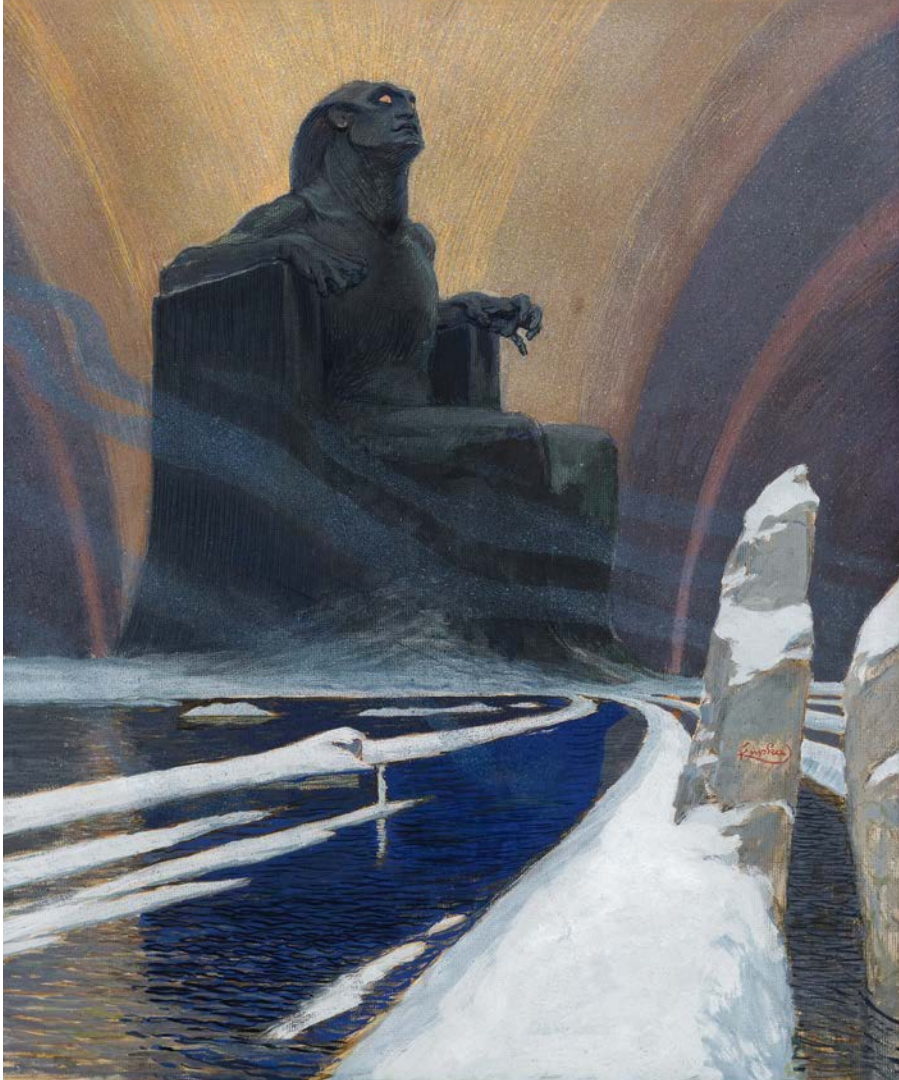
The doctrine of Neoplatonism, viewing the soul as a divine emanation—essentially a spark trapped in an earthly shell, was widely influential in the late nineteenth century. Human life was seen as a kind of fall from grace, and the soul longs for liberation and the final union with God.



Gustave Moreau, *Orpheus*, 1865. Oil on wood, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Jean Delville, *The Death of Orpheus*, 1893. Oil on canvas, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



František Kupka (1871 Opočno, Czechia–Puteaux, France 1957)
Black Idol, or Defiance / Revolt / Resistance, 1902–03
 Watercolor, gouache, white heightening on paper
 The Hearn Family Trust

The mysteries of ancient Egypt inspired much symbolist art, from pharaohs to the gods Isis and Osiris. In this striking image, a seated deity is alive, and, unusually, positioned in an Arctic setting surrounded by the glow of the northern lights. It is a scene from a nightmare, but the flowing, curving lines and subtle color evoke a sense of sound—the quintessential symbolist goal of synesthesia.

Kupka explored other Egyptian themes with rows of dreaming sphinxes in versions of *The Way of Silence* (see photo). The ancient Egyptian preoccupation with the afterlife appealed to occultists and mystics, including Theosophists and Rosicrucians. The American artist Elihu Vedder portrayed a pilgrim seeking the answer to the riddle of life and mortality in *The Questioner of the Sphinx* (see image).



František Kupka, *The Way of Silence II*, 1903.
 Color etching, drypoint, aquatint, roulette on paper,
 Minneapolis Institute of Art.



Elihu Vedder, *The Questioner of the Sphinx*, 1863. Oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Nemesia, 1895

Watercolor, pastel, crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Nemesia is an allegorical fantasy inspired by an exotic flower newly imported from Africa. *Nemesia* is a flowering plant native to South Africa's Western Cape province, introduced to European gardeners in 1892. The complex and often tragic relations with Africa shadow this flower, as did the trade in ivory that provided material for Belgian sculptors, including Khnopff. *Nemesias* are known for their rich scent, and the picture exudes beauty and sensuality. Khnopff's title is also a pun on *Nemesis*, evoking the Greek goddess of divine retribution. The female figure here is thus a personification of implacable justice—a resonant theme for Khnopff, the son of a prosecutor and judge.

The model for the figure is most likely Elsie Maquet, who posed often for Khnopff in the 1890s. With a mannered gesture, she holds a necklace that resembles the string held by the Three Fates to measure the lifespan of humans in Greek mythology. Her blue eyes are mesmerizing; the work is redolent of mystery.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

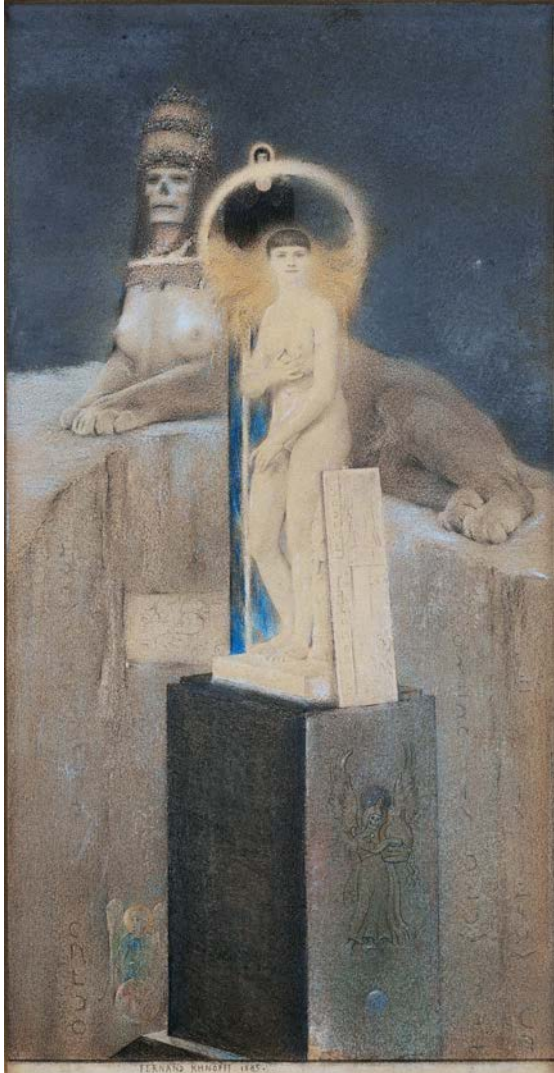
Herodias, c. 1917

Conté crayon, pencil, graphite underdrawing on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Herodias is a reprise of the theme of the fatal woman. Herodias, the mother of Salome, was a figure of fascination for symbolist writers and artists, including Stéphane Mallarmé, Gustave Flaubert, and Oscar Wilde. The cruel, enigmatic figure is shown here in a gentler, if implacable, depiction by Khnopff. She stands unmoving, despite having orchestrated the death of John the Baptist through the sensual dance of her daughter Salome, who demanded his head on a platter. Herodias is crowned with roses, with a halo-like shape behind her, as she plays her role in the biblical tale of death and redemption. Wartime shortages forced Khnopff to use coarse paper.

Knopff was a lifelong lover of opera; the opera *Hérodiade* by Jules Massenet premiered in Brussels at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie on December 19, 1881.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

The Supreme Vice, or Venus Reborn (after Joséphin Péladan), 1885

Black pencil, colored pencil, Conté crayon, white heightening on paper
The Hearn Family Trust

Once considered scandalous, this work was inspired by the esoteric novel *Le Vice suprême*, written by the French mystic and Rosicrucian Joséphin Péladan. The novel and the work of art decry—and revel in—the perceived decadence of the modern world. The drawing is a collage of figures and themes from the novel, which stands as a lurid denunciation of modern moral decadence.

This picture became notorious when a noted young opera singer Rose Caron (1857–1930) took offense, complaining that the face of the nude figure too closely resembled her. Angered, Khnopff tore the work to pieces in front of her during the exhibition of Les XX in 1885. This is an alternate version.

Péladan's 1884 novel was published with a frontispiece by Khnopff's fellow Belgian artist Félicien Rops (see below).





Jan Toorop (1858 Purworejo Regency–The Hague 1928)

The Three Brides, c. 1893–96

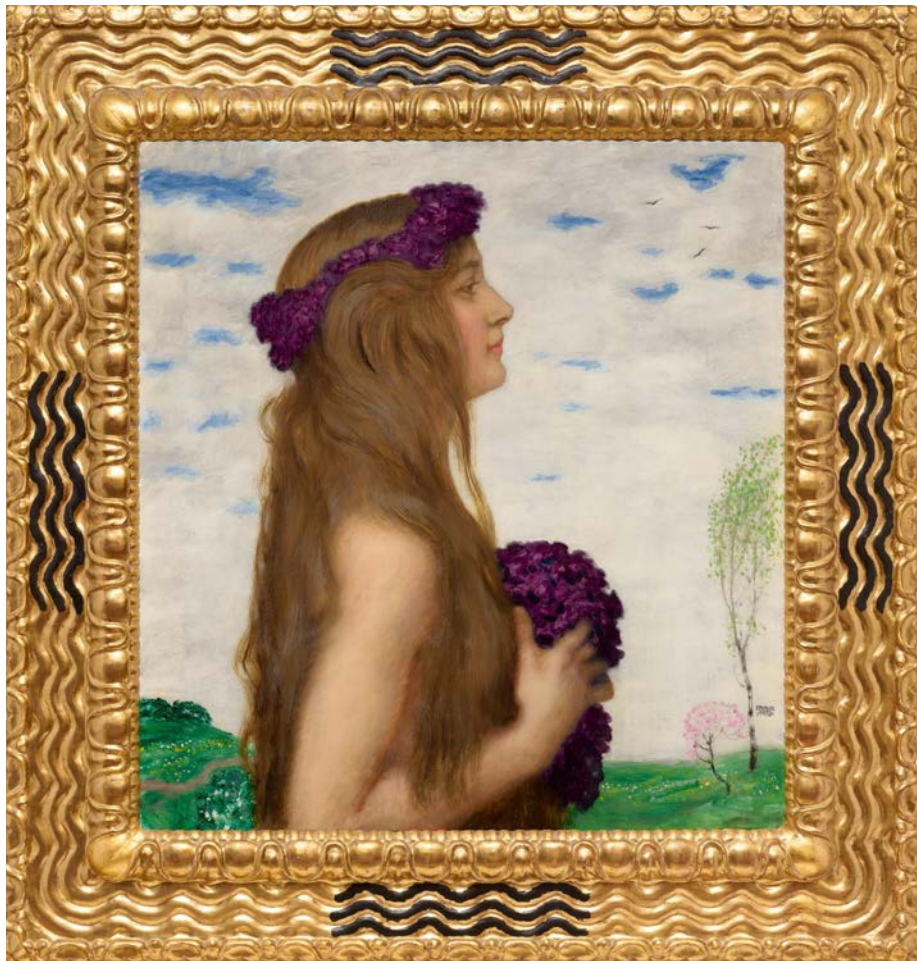
Platinum, lead white heightening, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This is a haunting image of mystical religion, embodying a personal vision of the soul's union with Christ. Jan Toorop was born in Indonesia, and this mysterious scene includes floating figures in the foreground inspired by Indonesian puppets. Their impossibly long hair flows from bells attached to the crucified hands of two figures flanking the composition in the upper corners. They represent the Good Thief and the Bad Thief, who were crucified with Christ. The tortuous flooring of the picture is a stylized image of the crown of thorns.

Significantly, the central figure of Christ is missing. In his place are three women depicting modes of life: from left to right, a nun; a woman dressed in a transparent veil; and a sinister steely-eyed woman wearing a necklace of human skulls. The latter holds a basin being filled with blood. She is clearly a femme fatale, inspired by the Hindu goddess Kali. All are brides of God but represent three different outcomes for the human soul, from eternal life to damnation. The attendant figures hold lotus blossoms, sacred in ancient Egypt, and roses, symbolizing the Madonna.

This densely figured picture is a key example of synesthesia, a blending of the senses, with the lyrical patterns of the flowing hair evoking a visual equivalent of sound. Triple images of women, signifying different stages of life or different psychological characters, recur frequently in symbolist art.



Franz von Stuck (1863 Tettenweis–Munich 1928)

Spring, c. 1902

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

A leading member of the Munich Secession, a group of ninety-six artists who broke from the official academy to advance their own artistic goals, Franz von Stuck was drawn to symbolist subjects from mythology, the Bible, and nature. *Spring* celebrates the beauty of the natural world, personified by a nude woman with flowing hair wearing a floral crown and holding a bouquet.

Like Fernand Khnopff and others of the era, von Stuck designed his own home in 1897, a “palace of art” that still stands in Munich. He decorated the interior with his own art, with several *Künstleraltars* (altars to art, see photo), and a large depiction of the zodiac on the ceiling.



Franz von Stuck, *Künstleraltar* incorporating a painting of *Sin* (1892) and sculptures. Museum Villa Stuck, Munich.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Roses and Japanese Fan, c. 1885

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Japanese influence is clear in Khnopff's still life here, which features a beautiful moonlit landscape in ukiyo-e style on the fan, and luxuriant pink roses in a vase. Japanese kake-mono (hanging scrolls) inspired the tall, vertical format. The fallen blossom is a subtle reminder of the brevity of earthly beauty, evocative of memento mori themes in earlier Dutch and Flemish still lifes.



Odilon Redon (1840 Bordeaux–Paris 1916)

Flowers in a Green Vase, c. 1910

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Redon was a keen observer of nature. Biology and the cycles of life were among his earliest interests, combining a fascination with Darwinian evolution and an animistic vision of nature. Some of his works spring from the world of dreams, prefiguring surrealism. He began with black-and-white lithographs, only discovering his fantastic color sensibility after turning fifty. His flower paintings are superb examples of the joy of life and the inherent energy of the natural world. This still life bursts with color and vitality.



Odilon Redon, *The Marsh Flower, a Sad Human Head (Homage to Goya)*, 1885. Lithograph, Cleveland Museum of Art.



Gustave van de Woestyne (1881 Ghent-Uccle 1947)

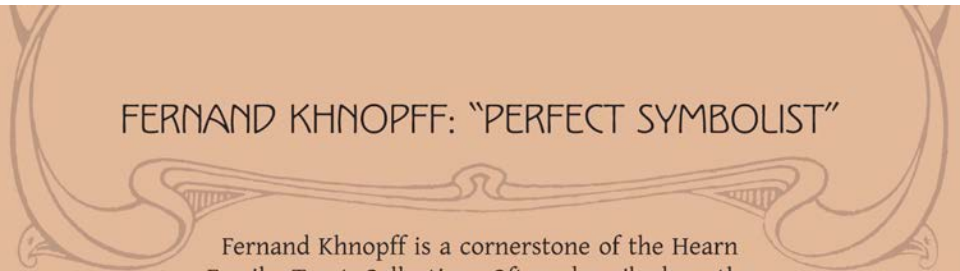
Still Life with Coffee, Milk, and Bread, 1925

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Van de Woestyne was one of a group of artists who established an artists' colony at the village of Sint-Martens-Latem, on the banks of the river Lys, at the turn of the twentieth century. His brother, Karel, was a noted symbolist poet, and Gustave similarly sought to create a sense of mystery in his art.

Gustave's works are eclectic in style, at times medievalizing in his deeply spiritual religious paintings. Many exemplify Belgian expressionism. Others reflect modernist trends, like this humble still life that has spatial distortions in the manner of Cézanne alongside the precisionist edges characteristic of the 1920s *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement.

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, flowing lines that frame the title and the first paragraph.

FERNAND KHNOPFF: "PERFECT SYMBOLIST"

Fernand Khnopff is a cornerstone of the Hearn Family Trust Collection. Often described as the "perfect symbolist," he has earned a reputation as one of the finest painters of the late nineteenth century. Khnopff developed his art in a highly intellectual milieu shaped by an ancient heritage, yet positioned at the vanguard of modernism. Brussels became a leading international center for art through the groundbreaking exhibits organized by avant-garde artistic societies, including Les Vingt (Les XX, 1883–93) and La Libre Esthétique (1893–1914); Khnopff was a founding member of both. Two sketchbooks displayed here reveal his restless talent and his early formation as an artist.

A versatile artist working in many media, Khnopff focused on three primary subjects: enigmatic allegories, landscapes, and portraits. While most famous for his mysterious symbolist images, he also painted evocative landscapes throughout his life, particularly near his family's country estate in the Ardennes and the medieval city of Bruges, where he spent his childhood. His elegant portraits were highly prized, especially those of women and children from the Belgian upper class. Beyond painting, he created sculptures, photographs, theater designs, book illustrations, and he was deeply involved in designing his own unique home—all to explore how art acts as a reflection of personal and social values. Recurrent themes of sphinxes and doubles, along with photography's role in artistic representation, dominate his personal interpretation of modernism.



E. & J. Malvaux (printers)
Portrait of Khnopff, c. 1900

Heliogravure

The Hearn Family Trust

Formal photographs of Khnopff often show him holding gloves. Khnopff was deeply concerned with his personal style, always determined to make an elegant impression. Émile Verhaeren memorably described him as “a clergyman in the process of becoming a dandy.”

In the face of relentless modernization and capitalist progress, Charles Baudelaire declared that dandyism was the last refuge of heroism in modern culture; not just for the idle pursuit of fashion, but for the dedicated search for perfection and idealism. This search was reflected in his largely self-designed house, which stood apart from its neighbors with classical references and a spare geometry inspired by Viennese architecture (see photo).



Fernand Khnopff and Édouard Pelseneer, Khnopff's house, avenue des Courses, Brussels, 1900–02. Demolished 1938.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

The Attorney General / Portrait of Edmond Picard / The Umbrella, 1884

Charcoal, Indian ink, chalk, crayon, stumping on board

The Hearn Family Trust

In 1884, Khnopff illustrated Edmond Picard's novel *La Forge Roussel*, using houses resembling those of Fosset where his family had a summer villa, as his setting. This is also one of his first portraits, as the image of the attorney general with his umbrella is thought to be a depiction of Edmond Picard (1836–1924) himself. Picard was a prominent lawyer, socialist reformer, and one of the editors of the influential Brussels journal *L'Art moderne*. Although a talented writer, Picard promoted a virulent racist and antisemitic ideology in his later works.

The drawing depicts the elderly lawyer at his first appearance in the novel, following the text in minute detail. Picard wrote:

Down the middle of the cobbled, muddy, glistening street advanced a tall old man, clad in a long, buttoned frock coat and a white cravat, his head covered by one of those low-crowned, wide-brimmed hats worn around 1830. He was gaunt. Long white hair, ending in curls, fell over the collar of his coat. His face was pale, clean-shaven, and had a slightly parchment-like texture. His nose was prominent and hooked like an eagle's beak. His expression was noble and grave.

Belgium attained independence in 1830; the proud figure of the attorney resists the weather and changes in fashion, signifying his own uncompromising spirit. Khnopff's portrayal may have been shaped by his own experience of his father as an attorney.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

In Fosset: An Evening, 1886

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Knopff depicts a still and mysterious scene just outside the wall enclosing his family home in Fosset (see photo). The asymmetric background frames two female figures, both of whom represent Khnopff's younger sister who was one of his favorite models, Marguerite (1864–1946). The woman on the left wears a dark cloak and dress that covers her feet, making her seem like an apparition. This multiplication of the same figure foreshadows Khnopff's extraordinary pastel *Memories* (1889), which features seven images of Marguerite in the sporting attire of the day.

The setting for this painting is nearly unchanged today, except for alterations to the wall. The picture's striking frame, designed by the artist, features wide panels with embossed patterns resembling Japanese sword-guards.





Dante Gabriel Rossetti

(1828 London–Birchington-on-Sea 1882)

Rosa Triplex, c. 1867

Chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Rossetti's *Rosa Triplex* presents a triple portrait of Alexa Wilding, one of his favorite models, with each figure holding a rose. This composition anticipates Khnopff's monumental pastel *Memories*, a study for which is located nearby. Historically, supernatural doppelgängers ("double goers") were emblematic of mystery and life after death, as seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's haunting *How They Met Themselves*. There is also a later watercolor version by Rossetti (1874), using May Morris, noted craftswoman and daughter of British artist William Morris, as the subject.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *How They Met Themselves*, 1851–60. Pen, ink, wash on paper, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fernand Khnopff (1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)
Study for *Memories: A Tennis Player / Lawn Tennis*, 1888

Pen, ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Memories (1889), an enormous pastel in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels (see image), has always been regarded as one of Khnopff's most important works. In it, seven young women stand on a lawn enclosed by a tall hedge at twilight. Looking deeper, the image raises questions about the fundamental nature of vision and memory: all of the figures represent the same woman, Khnopff's sister, Marguerite. This drawing, made from a photograph (see photo), is a study for one of these figures.

Women's sports were entering a new era at the time, though their athletic costumes were still quite impractical to modern eyes. Khnopff heightened the effect of grace and slenderness of the figure in this drawing, lending her an ethereal quality.



Fernand Khnopff, *Memories*, 1889.
Pastel on paper, Royal Museums
of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



Photographic study for
Memories. J. Paul Getty
Museum, Los Angeles.



Fernand Khnopff (1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)
The Temptation of Saint Anthony
 (after Flaubert), c. 1883

Pastel, white heightening on albumen print

The Hearn Family Trust

In the dawning age of mechanical reproduction, Khnopff became interested in disseminating his works through photographic replicas that he would heighten with pencil and color. This may be one of his earliest photographs of his paintings, produced sometime between 1883 and 1888. It is marked with the dry stamp of the Société Royale de Photographie, which was used between 1882 and 1888.

This photo is inscribed "à mon ami H. Devillez." Louis-Henri Devillez (1855–1941) was a Belgian sculptor. The original oil painting (see image) was a milestone in Khnopff's development of a symbolist style, moving away from the naturalism of his early works to engage with spiritual drama. Inspired by Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same name (1874), Khnopff combines the traditional story of the temptation of Saint Anthony with modern psychology. The story was frequently represented in late medieval and Renaissance art in Flanders, and later notably by Paul Cézanne and Odilon Redon. Khnopff's version is distinctly modern in its lack of physical torments or fleshly temptations; his Saint Anthony is being tempted by spiritual and psychological lures.



Fernand Khnopff, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 1883. Oil on canvas, on long-term loan to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



Fernand Khnopff (1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Isolation, c. 1891

Tinted and reworked platinum print, pastel

The Hearn Family Trust

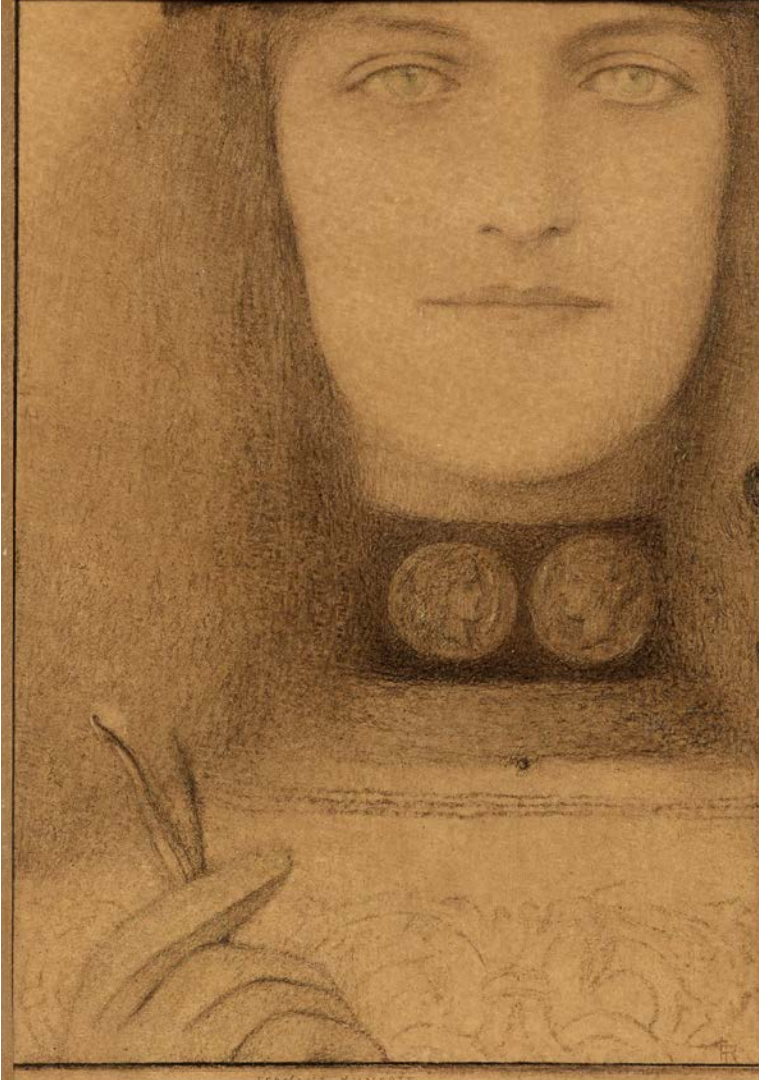
Isolation is a platinum print, a replica of an important work from the height of Khnopff's mystical symbolism, which he has tinted and reworked with red pastel accents. It is one of three moral paths that were embodied in the individually framed images of women (see photo, below, of the works as displayed at the McMullen in 2004); *Isolation* was the central panel, and suggests Khnopff's identification with that figure.

This print repeats many motifs from Khnopff's *I Lock My Door upon Myself* of the same year. The Hypnos head, the lily, and even the young woman leaning on her hands, who appears as a vision in a crystalline bubble. The bubble is a symbol of delicate beauty and also of vanitas, the transience of human life.

This androgynous woman is tightly sheathed in a dark, high-necked dress and brandishes a scepter-like sword. The background reveals that she is seated in a church, emphasizing the sacred quality of her isolation.



Acrasia, c. 1892, on deposit at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; *Isolation*, 1891, Fondation Neumann, Gignin; and *Britomart*, 1894, on deposit at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Necklace with Medallions, 1899

Graphite, pastel on paper, varnished

The Hearn Family Trust

This exquisite drawing exemplifies Khnopff's unique compositional skills and demonstrates his deep fascination with the history of art. The haunting face, fully frontal and pressed against the picture plane, breaks the traditions of academic art to create a cropped, asymmetrical representation. Long, diaphanous hair encases the face, and the hieratic balance of horizontals and verticals enhances the figure's serenity. A distinctive feature is the tightly worn necklace that incorporates two Roman medallions or coins.

The wearing of ancient medals was a means to connect a modern figure to the elites of antiquity. The high-collared necklace was a fashion favored by Khnopff; he often covered the throats of his figures with a collar or choker. The figure is strikingly androgynous; some art historians refer to the subject as male, while others identify it as female.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

Ygraine at the Door, c. 1895–98

Colored pencil, Conté crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Ygraine at the Door was an integral feature of the design of the music room of the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, an art nouveau landmark designed by the Viennese architect Josef Hoffmann and built from 1905 to 1911. The Palais Stoclet is a perfect example of a Gesamtkunstwerk (“total work of art”), uniting architecture, sculpture, music, and the visual arts. This work depicts a moment from *The Death of Tintagiles* (1894), a play by Maurice Maeterlinck, one of the most important Belgian writers.

The story emphasizes humanity’s helplessness at the mercy of unseen forces, and reads like a dark fairy tale: the innocent Tintagiles is captured by an evil queen, who is in fact his grandmother. His older sister Ygraine struggles in vain to save him from being murdered by the queen, who hides behind a locked door in the castle. Khnopff tightly crops the nude figure, emphasizing her extraordinarily long arms, and her backward gaze over her shoulder creates a profound image of vulnerability. While this work is not dated, it must date to between 1895 and 1898 when Khnopff published a variant in the December issue of the Viennese journal *Ver Sacrum*.



Fernand Khnopff (1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Drawings for *A Sphinx* and for *Victoria*, 1889, 1892

Compressed charcoal, white pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

Presentation was extremely important to the meticulous Khnopff; this assemblage of drawings exemplifies how deliberate he was in mounting his works. Art critic Edmond-Louis de Taeve noted of Khnopff in 1894 that “Nothing is left to chance. ... Everything is thought out, even the most bizarre or apparently minute details...and this way of thinking is now accompanied sometimes by the desire to make an impression or provoke discussion. ... Thus, the master was one of the first to cover his paintings with glass, to choose strange frames and to invent titles which are just as extraordinary.”

When considered as meditations on the theme of fate, these four drawings form a series representing Khnopff's explorations on the mystery of life and mortality. The upper left panel reproduces the face of Oedipus as seen in the study for *Art*, or *The Caresses* shown nearby. The fifteenth-century portrait head depicted in the lower left panel was suggestive of reincarnation, a theme embodied in Khnopff's *Across the Years* (below). The ecstatic woman with closed eyes at the upper right is based on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, a woman receiving the kiss of death from an invisible angel. The armored female at lower right is a study for *Victoria*, a work related to several other images of armored saints.



Fernand Khnopff, *Across the Years*, lithograph, Studio 4, no. 20 (Nov. 1894).



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Woman's Head with Closed Eyes, c. 1892

Pencil, charcoal, chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The realm of dreams and the imagination was a central focus of Khnopff's symbolism. He even installed an altar to Hypnos—the god of sleep and dreams—in his studio. The late nineteenth century saw a widespread fascination with dreams and introspection, from biblical revelations in dreams to the popular fascination with hypnotism, which served as a key tool for Sigmund Freud's early explorations of the unconscious.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

Sketch for *Art, or The Caresses*, 1896

Conté crayon with white heightening, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The haunting and mysterious encounter of Oedipus with a sphinx was a perfect emblem for the mystery of life and fatality, and was the subject of Khnopff's most famous painting, *Art, or The Caresses* (see image). The sphinx, a monstrous composite of human and animal, was one of the most popular motifs of the time. It was used as a symbol of inescapable fate, magic, and sexuality. The fine features of Oedipus on the left are mirrored in the profile of the sphinx in this elegant drawing.



Fernand Khnopff, *Art, or The Caresses*, 1896. Oil on canvas, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

Sketchbook 1, 1879; Sketchbook 2, c. 1879

Pencil, ink on paper in bound sketchbooks

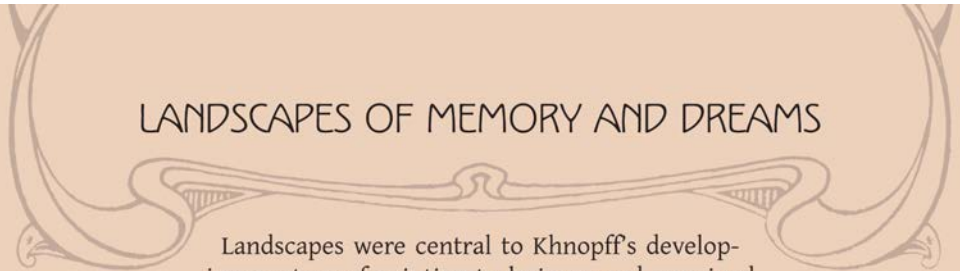
The Hearn Family Trust

Two sketchbooks from Khnopff's student years show him developing his artistic style and a wide range of cultural interests. One is inscribed with Khnopff's address at the time, the family home at 14 rue du Luxembourg in Brussels and the date of [18]79. His drawings display a youthful interest in nature, with sketches of horses, a tiger from the Natural History Museum, and birds. These are quick private sketches, often loose, but important tokens of his growing mastery of drawing and his increasing understanding of the cultural legacy of images.

The early sketches in Sketchbook 1 reveal his enthusiasm for the fashionable Orientalism of the day, with Near Eastern figures inspired by paintings by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps and Eugène Delacroix. Khnopff also shared Gustave Moreau's interest in Indian art, copying illustrations of Hindu temples and Buddhas published in the French weekly journals *L'illustration*, *Le Magasin pittoresque*, and other sources. This marked the beginning of Khnopff's lifelong interest in varieties of religious experience.

Sketchbook 2 reflects Khnopff's study of artists of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, with copies of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes and Pierre Puget's figural sculptures. Khnopff was most likely working from photographs as he engaged with Old Masters from the history of art.

See the monitor nearby for annotated digitizations of both sketchbooks.

A decorative scrollwork border in a light brown color, featuring symmetrical, flowing lines that frame the title and the first paragraph.

LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY AND DREAMS

Landscapes were central to Khnopff's developing mastery of painting techniques and remained an enduring subject for him. They reveal an important yet often overlooked aspect of his practice: simplicity. Émile Verhaeren noted that he was able to "accomplish this near contradiction: to remain very realistic in order to express the great beyond." Khnopff himself was more direct: "I paint because I can do nothing else, because I feel that it is my destiny to paint."

His focus was on sites where he had lived and to which he held an emotional attachment: the village of Fosset in the Ardennes and the city of Bruges. These works reflect the symbolist fascination with the intersection of the exterior world and interior states of mind—the artist's "inscape" is reflected in the landscape.

Khnopff's depictions of Fosset are based on direct observation, embodying Émile Zola's dictum that art should be "nature viewed through a temperament." Conversely, his dreamlike images of Bruges are based on childhood memories filtered through the medium of photography, creating a complex layering of meanings in a combination of modernism and historicism. His approach was admired by many, including Edward Steichen, whose moody twilight photograph displayed here celebrates this same poetry of shadows and light.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Fosset: The Flood, 1881

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Even this quiet corner of nature in Fosset was subject to seasonal disturbances. This rapidly executed painting of floodwaters shows Khnopff's experimentation with restrained color and unusually quick, dynamic brushstrokes, with thick layers of paint showing traces of the palette knife. Neither conventionally picturesque nor sublime, despite the theme of a flood, this is an intimate study of a landscape Khnopff knew and loved.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Fosset: The Hamlet, c. 1882–83

Oil on canvas laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

The scenes Khnopff painted at Fosset were located only a short walk from his house. Although the small scale of these landscapes suggests they could easily have been finished in the open air, he may also have made initial sketches to be completed in the studio.

Fosset was deeply imbued with memories for Khnopff; his landscapes reveal a profound emotional attachment to the hamlet. He frequently explored the various moods of the terrain, with its rain, floods, reflections, and lingering glow of twilight.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Fosset: Twilight, c. 1890–94

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Sometime between 1890 and 1895, Khnopff painted two interpretations of a twilit scene in Fosset, focusing on a small stream near the family home and a hillside depicted with soft greens, ochers, and tans, with feathered brush strokes (see below). Both capture the soft light at the end of the day, utilizing harmonious tones that owe much to the *Nocturnes* of James McNeill Whistler. This nearly square version is slightly less polished; in it, one sees the artist experimenting with different compositions, cropping the sky more tightly to focus attention on the river and hillside. It was reproduced in the British journal *The Studio* in March 1894.



Fernand Khnopff, *Fosset: Twilight*, c. 1890–95. Oil on canvas, the Hearn Family Trust.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Fosset: The Village, 1883

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Knopff oscillated between two poles: his elegant home in Brussels, and the family property in Fosset, where he spent many summers as a child and young man. Fosset is a tiny hamlet of about twenty residents set in the hills of the Ardennes. The Khnopff family owned most of the land surrounding the village—over five hundred acres—and nearly all of Khnopff's paintings of Fosset are based on land that they possessed.



Fosset, with the Khnopff house in the distance



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Fosset: Rain, 1890

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

The titles of Khnopff's Fosset landscapes often emphasize transitional states of weather or time. The scene is devoid of workers, and the outbuilding has no windows or signs of activity. The color palette is a harmony of subtle grays and earth tones; the whitewashed structure provides the only bright note in the composition. Gentle mists fall from the sky, uniting the clouds with the land.

Much symbolist poetry explores the introspective mood of rainy days. Paul Verlaine's famous lyric, "Il pleure dans mon cœur comme il pleut sur la ville..." (It weeps in my heart as it rains on the town...), was echoed by several Belgian symbolist poets.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

The Bridge at Fosset, 1897

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

The most famous monument in Fosset is the old stone bridge over the Laval River, located just below the Khnopff house. Traditionally thought to be an ancient Roman structure, the bridge likely was constructed in the early nineteenth century. A small religious shrine is just visible on the right. Both the bridge and the shrine were damaged during the Battle of the Bulge and rebuilt after the Second World War. The bridge endures; its weathered stone construction embodies the bedrock of this region, linking the past to the present.



Bridge, Fosset

Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Landscape in Fosset, c. 1890–95

Oil on canvas laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust



Knopff painted tightly cropped scenes of the rivers near his home several times, including this exquisite small landscape. He captures the bucolic beauty of the flowing stream, depicting a river in a symphony of greens with notes of blue and white, as if from a viewpoint hovering slightly above the water. He framed it with the same Japanese-influenced embossed border he used for *In Fosset: An Evening*, displayed nearby. It is a scene of profound tranquility. Such ordinary vistas gave Khnopff the opportunity to refine his craft and explore the restorative power and varying moods of nature.

Interestingly, Khnopff left an unfinished painting on the reverse of this landscape (see photo). It appears to show a woman's head, bowed in front of a rectangular grid that may be a window frame.





Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

The End of the Day, 1891

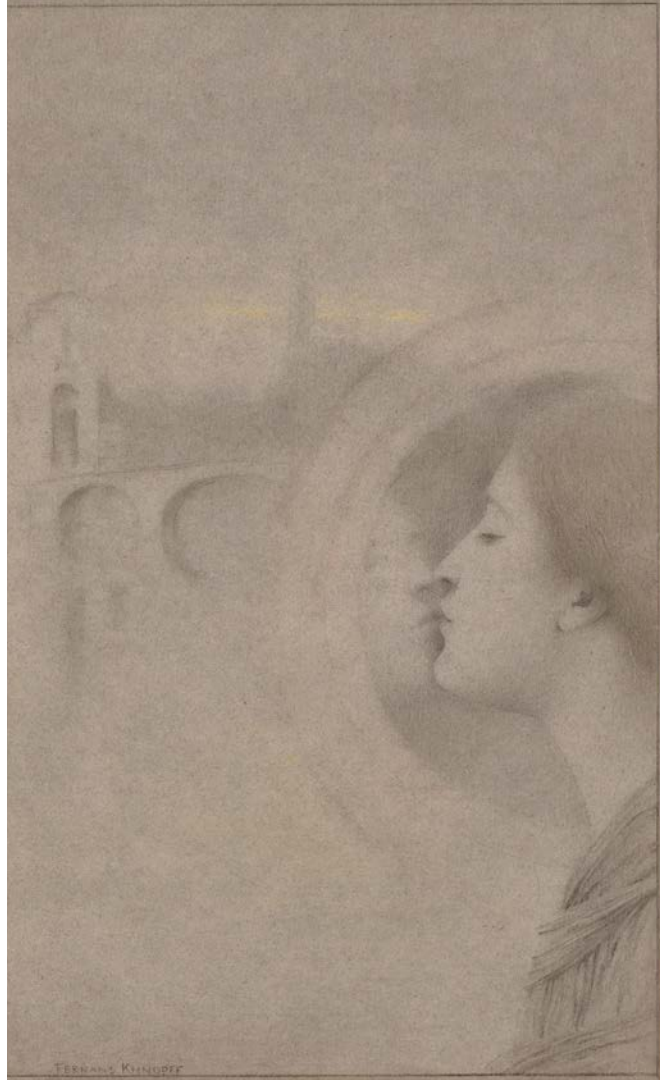
Conté crayon, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In 1890, Khnopff's sister Marguerite married Charles Freson, whose family owned the property next door in Menil, a few hundred yards from Khnopff's family home in Fosset. Khnopff renders the pond as a mirrorlike plane that reflects and refracts visible reality. Like the charged surface of a mystic's crystal, it invites contemplation and may have served as a symbol of Marguerite, who frequently served as Khnopff's model and psychic double (see below).



Fernand Khnopff, *Portrait of Marguerite*, 1887. Oil on canvas, mounted on wood panel, King Baudouin Foundation, on permanent loan to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

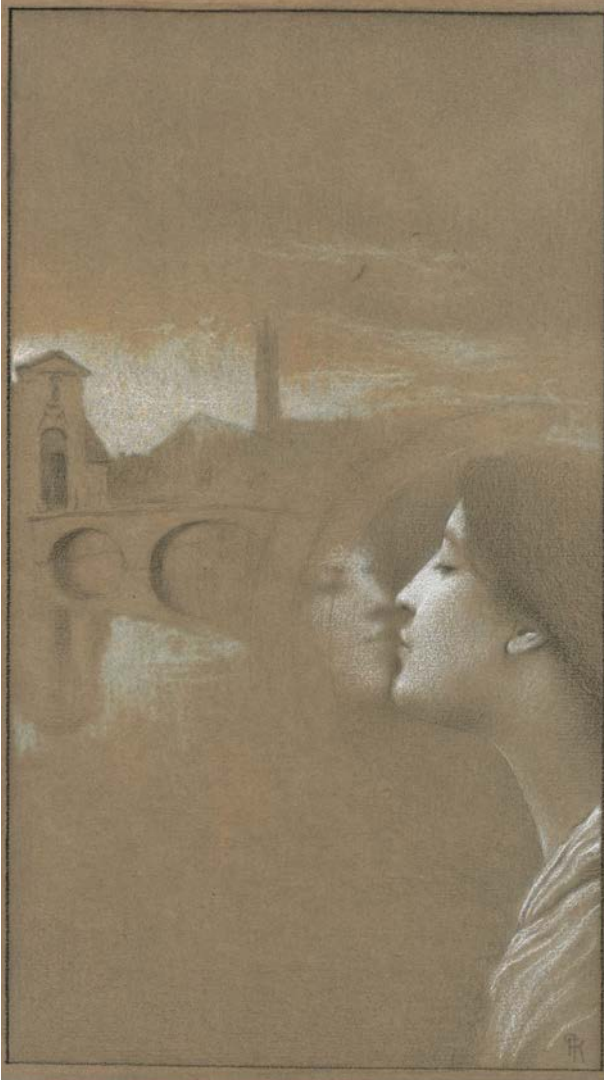
With Grégoire Le Roy: My Heart

Weeps for Days Gone By I, 1889

Graphite, chalk, Conté crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Doubles and mirrors appear in many guises throughout Khnopff's work. Created as a frontispiece for a book of symbolist poetry by Grégoire Le Roy in 1889, this drawing, as signified by its title, was intended as an accompaniment to Le Roy's poems. The image is a portal to the past, symbolized by the city of Bruges. The woman kissing the glass seeks to embrace both her own reflection and the magic mirror itself, as if to enter the enchanted realm of the city where Khnopff and his sister Marguerite spent their early childhood.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

With Grégoire Le Roy: My Heart

Weeps for Days Gone By II, 1889

Black pencil, colored pencil, chalk, Conté crayon on paper

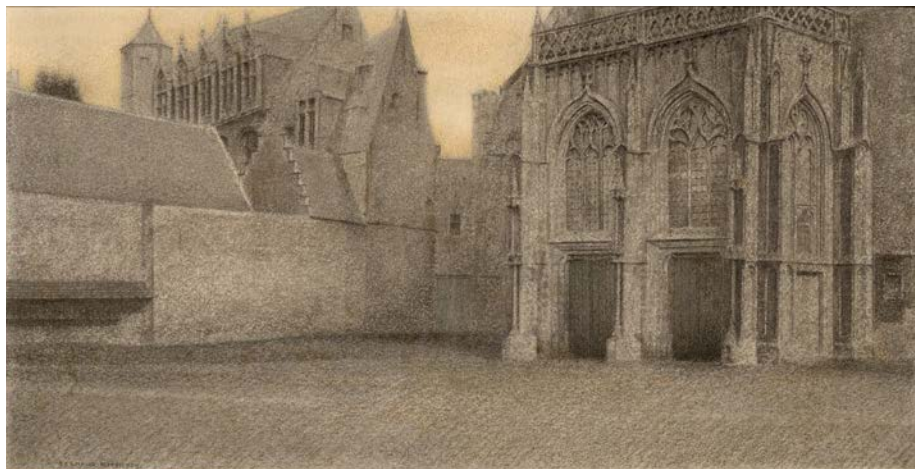
The Hearn Family Trust

Knopff's earliest images of Bruges were inspired by literature; poetry especially seems to have provided a pretext for him to revisit the scenes from his youth.

Carefully nurturing his public image, Khnopff often declared that he had never returned to the city since his childhood and that all his depictions of Bruges were based on his cherished memories. While this may be true of the present composition, his later series *Memories of Bruges* clearly relies on photography.



Entrance to the Beguinage, Bruges



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Bruges: A Portal, c. 1904

Graphite, Conté crayon, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The evocative combination of stone and water, along with the beautiful Northern Gothic architecture and its intricate designs, suited Khnopff's style and emotional inclinations. The wall depicted here—which stood at the time Khnopff made the drawing but no longer exists—once divided the secular realm of the Palace of the Lords of Gruuthuse from the religious sphere of the Church of Our Lady in the foreground. The portal shown is an elaborate private entrance to the baptistry of the medieval church.



Edward Steichen

(1879 Bivange, Roeser, Luxembourg–Redding, CT 1973)

Moonlight: The Pond, 1904

Photogravure from *Camera Work* 4, no. 14 (Apr. 1906): plate 4
The Hearn Family Trust

This photo of a pond in the evening—with moonlight filtering through the trees and lighting the surface of the water—reflects the pictorialist movement in photography. Although most commonly associated with America, Steichen was born in Luxembourg and often visited Europe. He was keenly aware of European artistic developments; consequently there are striking parallels with the paintings of Fernand Khnopff (see below) in this moody, suggestive image. Steichen hoped to photograph Khnopff himself, but was never able to do so.



Fernand Khnopff, *Still Water*, c. 1894. Oil on canvas, Belvedere, Vienna.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Heath in the Rain, c. 1916

Pastel, colored pencil on paper laid on cardboard

The Hearn Family Trust

A misty evocation of the Ardennes landscape near Fosset, this is one of Khnopff's most abstract works. No buildings or even trees can be discerned; there is only a horizon line separating earth and sky. Although it depicts rain over the fields, the composition remains strikingly luminous. The storm seems to dissolve any distinct features on the right, suggesting a sense of movement in the atmosphere. One may wonder if this dissolution of the landscape, blurred and smudged as it is, symbolizes the disappearance of the natural order during the First World War.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Snowy Landscape, c. 1917

Pastel, charcoal on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

After the death of his parents, Khnopff and his younger siblings sold the country estate in 1907 to Jules du Jardin, an art critic and painter. Du Jardin later sold the former Khnopff family farm to Maurice Martens, whose descendants own it to this day.

Knopff continued to reproduce scenes of Fosset during the First World War (1914–18), working either from photographs or from memory. In the context of that devastating conflict, these memories of the peaceful Ardennes take on deeper meaning. The snow-covered hills and frozen river appear blurred—almost ghostly—in this subtle, intimate sketch.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

The Shrimp Fisherman, c. 1912

Pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Khnopff never painted scenes of laborers. The closest he came to the subject was this seascape; however, the overriding impression here remains one of delicate atmospheric nuances.

Catching shrimp in the traditional manner with a net in the surf, the solitary fisherman is rendered on a small scale, embodying the isolation that characterized Khnopff's art. His figure is mirrored in the surf, embedded in a taut composition where the horizon divides the picture in a ratio nearly matching the golden section. The abstract geometry of this work appears strikingly modern; the balance of the low horizon against the subtle verticality of the fisherman and his reflection anticipates the rectilinear compositions of the Dutch pioneer of abstract art, Piet Mondrian.



Alfred Stevens (1823 Brussels–Paris 1906)

Seascapes, 1880s

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

From a prominent family of artists, Stevens was one of the most successful painters of his generation. He began his studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1837 before moving to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1843. Following a series of highly regarded realist works, he achieved fame for his sophisticated depictions of elegant modern women.

In the 1880s, Stevens spent many summers by the sea on the advice of his doctor, who deemed the coastal air essential for his health; these seascapes likely date from one of those sojourns. Like Knopff, Stevens alternated between images of nature and intimate scenes of upper-class life.

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, flowing lines that frame the title and the first paragraph.

PORTRAITURE: SOULS IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

A portrait captures an image of the subject at a certain moment, defying the inevitable process of aging. Reversing the premise of Oscar Wilde's famous novel of 1891, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait remains forever young despite the passing years. Portraiture is one of the most universal and accessible art forms, yet there is an impenetrable mystery inherent in the representation of a human personality. For the person depicted, viewing such a work over time provides both a link to their past and a vision of how the artist perceived them.

Examples in this section by Fernand Khnopff, William Degouve de Nuncques, Georges Lemmen, Marthe Donas, Maurice Langaskens, and Léon Navez demonstrate remarkable sensitivity in their portrayals of subjects. The artists reflect social and cultural values of the day, and build modernist images on traditional styles, with some using photography as a creative tool. Significantly, others capture the transition to new roles for women in society.



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde–Brussels 1921)

Portrait of Ernest van den Broeck, 1882

Chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This delicate portrait, presumed to be of Ernest van den Broeck, is a sensitive rendering of the noted scientist as a young man. Van den Broeck (1851–1932) was a geologist, paleontologist, and botanist; he served as the curator of the Royal Museum of Natural History of Belgium from 1879 to 1919 and was the first general secretary of the Belgian Geological Society. While the identification of this portrait is not certain, the figure strongly resembles images of Van den Broeck as a middle-aged man found on commemorative medals.



Charles Samuel, *Portrait Medal of Ernest van den Broeck*, c. 1907



Léon Navez (1900 Mons–Auderghem 1967)
Portrait of Gustave van Geluwe, 1925

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Gustave van Geluwe (1881–1962) was the owner of a couture house and a noted collector of Belgian art. Navez shows him in front of a wall decorated with nineteenth-century fashion designs.

Having studied at the academies in Mons and Brussels, Navez won the Prix Godecharle in 1924, allowing him to move to Paris where he painted this portrait of Van Geluwe under the influence of Parisian modernists such as Picasso and Modigliani. After winning a Prix de Rome scholarship in 1928, Navez was one of the founders of the Nervia group, a Belgian artistic circle that fostered artists from Wallonia and sought to counterbalance Flemish expressionism. He designed stained glass windows for the Abbey of La Cambre in 1930. During the Second World War, he worked with the Resistance.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

Marcelle, Niece of the Artist, 1899

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Degouve de Nuncques balances the severe frontality of this portrait of his niece by softening her riveting gaze with the delicate rosettes of lace in her dress, and the magical flowering backdrop. The frame is also a robust example of Arts and Crafts design, rather than a delicate carving of gold leaf patterns. Though young, Marcelle is a force to be reckoned with. Her long, flowing hair and elaborate dress are reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite painting *The Bridesmaid* by John Everett Millais (see below), which similarly depicts a young woman on the cusp of adulthood.



John Everett Millais, *The Bridesmaid*, 1851. Oil on panel, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



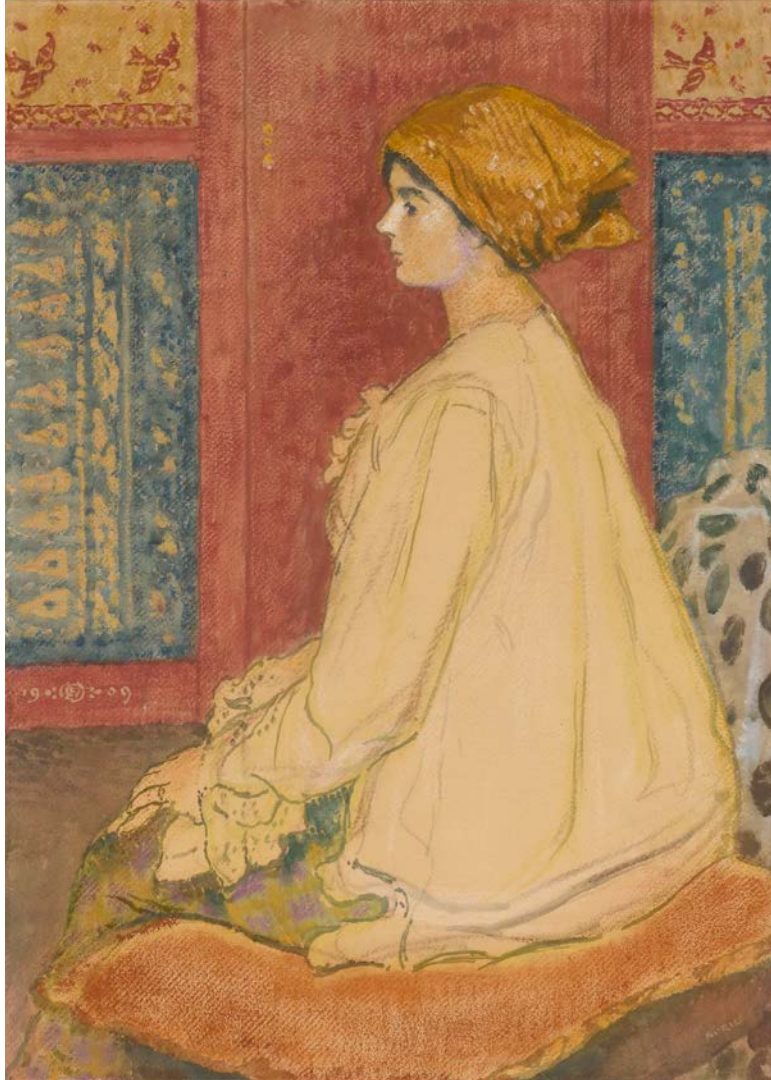
Maurice Langaskens (1884 Ghent-Schaerbeek 1946)

Portrait of Elisabeth de Puyt, 1908

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Elisabeth de Puyt was the wife of Maurice Langaskens, portrayed here at the beginning of his artistic career. Her face is softly modeled, emerging from a nearly monochromatic background. The misty atmosphere veils the subject in the manner of the French symbolist Eugène Carrière, whose work Langaskens may have discovered while studying in Paris in 1907.



Georges Lemmen (1865 Schaerbeek–Uccle 1916)
Portrait of Madame Dumont-Wilden, 1909

Gouache, watercolor on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust

This surprisingly informal image of Lina Marie Elvine Dumont-Wilden (née Wilden, 1878–1961)—seen in profile wearing casual clothes and a kerchief around her hair—presents her as an icon of artistic fashion. The background is richly patterned with stylized art nouveau designs. She embodies an artistic, even bohemian, personality.

Her husband, Louis Dumont-Wilden (né Dumont, 1875–1963) was a noted Belgian writer and art critic; they combined their last names upon their marriage in 1898. Many Belgian women in artistic circles possessed a strong sense of identity and independence.



Marthe Donas (1885 Antwerp–Audregnies 1967)

Portrait of Georgette, 1926

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

One of the first women abstract painters, Marthe Donas was born into a wealthy family in Antwerp. Her father actively discouraged her dream of becoming an artist. In 1912, at age twenty-seven, she began to study with Frans van Kuyck. During the First World War the family fled to the Netherlands, and Donas moved to Ireland in 1915 where she pursued a career in the arts, including making stained glass windows for churches. After the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 she moved to Paris, and came into contact with leading modernists, developing a unique abstract style influenced by cubism. To evade prejudice against women artists, she used pseudonyms.

Made shortly after Donas returned to Brussels, this sensitive portrait of her young niece shows Georgette in a contemplative seated pose and marks a temporary departure from the artist's abstract practice.

In 2010, a museum dedicated to Donas's work was founded in Ittre, near Brussels, where she lived for a time in the 1920s. In fall 2025, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp highlighted her contributions with a major retrospective.



Marthe Donas in her Paris studio, 1920



Fernand Khnopff

(1858 Grembergen-lez-Termonde-Brussels 1921)

Portrait of Yvonne Suys, 1890

Oil on panel

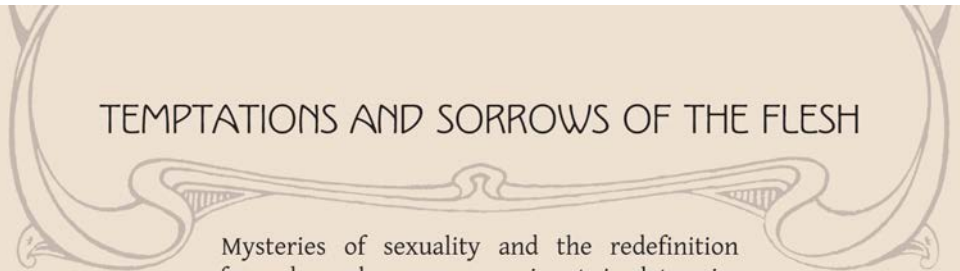
The Hearn Family Foundation

It is difficult to remember that the precocious little girl who looks so self-possessed in Khnopff's portrait was only seven years old at the time it was painted. Richly dressed in velvet and furs, she holds a lush iris in her hand. Yvonne Suys was born in Brussels in 1883, into a family that had shaped the built environment of Brussels for generations. Their contributions are explored in the catalogue essay "Dreams of Beauty: Fernand Khnopff's *Portrait of Yvonne Suys*."

Knopff's portraits of children were very popular with the upper classes in Belgium, and are among his most intriguing and appealing works. To spare little Yvonne from long hours of posing, this painting was based on a photograph taken by Julien Ganz, a commercial photographer in Brussels (see below).



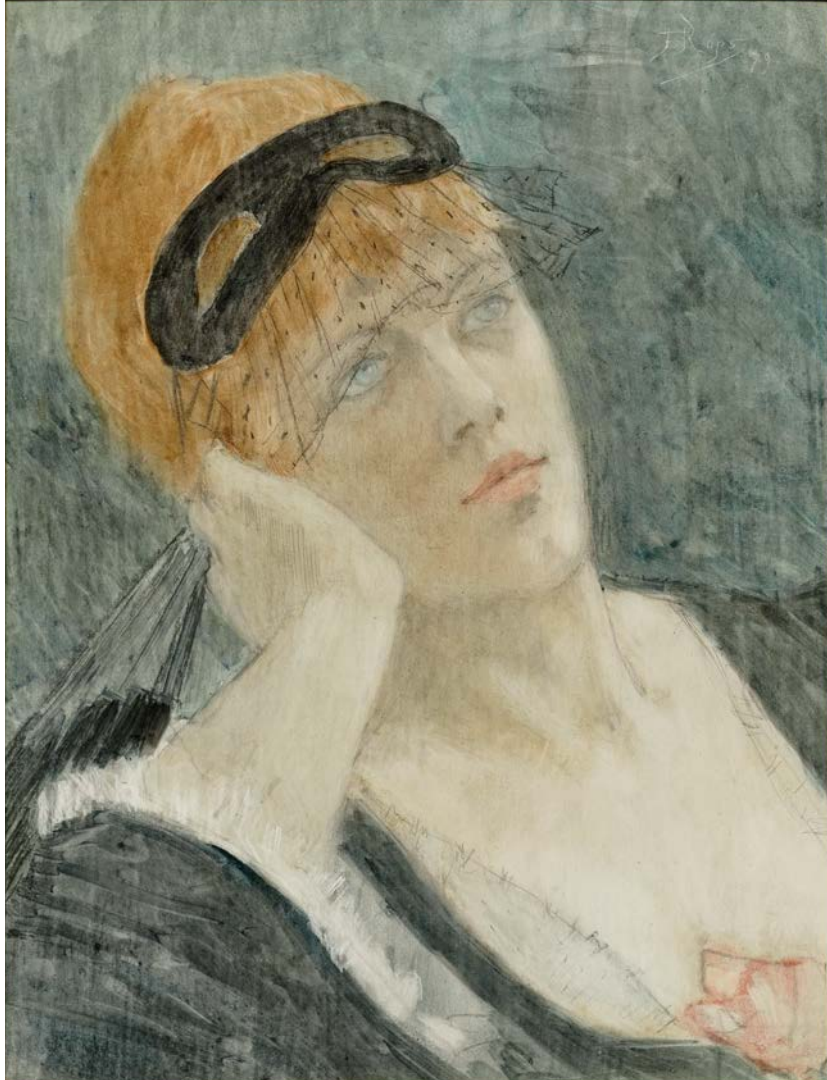
Photograph of Yvonne Suys, 1890

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, flowing lines that frame the title and the first paragraph. It has a central, ornate knot-like element.

TEMPTATIONS AND SORROWS OF THE FLESH

Mysteries of sexuality and the redefinition of gender roles were prominent in late nineteenth-century culture. Feminists demanded equality in familial and social spheres, and psychologists such as Sigmund Freud theorized about the biological and cultural constructs that shaped sexual identity. Numerous works by Fernand Khnopff, Gustave Moreau, and George Minne address these themes.

Then, as now, assertions of sexual identity could be a tool of self-discovery and resistance against societal norms. The artists Félicien Rops and Armand Rassenfosse (sometimes nicknamed “Ropsenfosse”) were among the more controversial explorers of this terrain, exploiting and subverting the “male gaze” in their critique of modern life.



Félicien Rops (1833 Namur–Corbeil-Essonnes, France 1898)
Woman with Mask, 1879

Watercolor, gouache, pencil on paper
The Hearn Family Trust

Félicien Rops was astonishingly popular in Paris and Brussels in the late nineteenth century. His first works were comic caricatures of Salon exhibitions and realist lithographs. His incisive social commentary often used highly charged sexual images as a metaphor for decadence. This is one of his more realistic images of a woman who still wears the mask of an evening ball. The mask is a token of concealment and intrigue, which seems to have left the woman exhausted. She is an emblem of the allure and trials of modernity; although Rops is known for many misogynistic images, this one shows that he was also capable of sympathy for modern women.

Rops was a member of the avant-garde artistic society Les XX (The Twenty) and a favorite of modern writers Charles Baudelaire and Joris-Karl Huysmans. The sensuality of his works has led him to be compared with Auguste Rodin; both participated in the exhibition of Les XX in Brussels in 1884.

Joséphin Péladan, founder of the Salons de la Rose+Croix, praised Rops:

To be a modern artist, today, is to serve modern spirituality in contemporary forms, and there is only one artist who has done it, who does it, with such breadth: Félicien Rops. ... He is, in my eyes, the greatest Flemish master since the School of Antwerp.



Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège-Liège 1934)

Imperia, n.d.

Chalk, watercolor, pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Nearly nude, a statuesque woman holds an orb surmounted by an ironic figure of Eros, who holds his bow behind his back and wears a fool's cap ornamented with three bells. The message is clear: love is a game of fools. Rassenfosse shares the same satirical (and misogynistic) view of the relationship between the sexes as his friend and mentor, Félicien Rops. The woman's name, *Imperia*, leaves no doubt about who is in control.

Rassenfosse attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Liège, but meeting Félicien Rops in Paris in 1888 proved decisive to the direction of his art. Rops introduced him to the Parisian artistic milieu, and the two became friends and collaborated on engraving methods, creating an innovative soft-varnish technique that was nicknamed "Ropsenfosse."



Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège–Liège 1934)

Ygieia [Hygieia], c. 1895–1900

Pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Ygieia (or Hygieia) was the daughter of Asclepius, the ancient Greek god of medicine. While her father represents the curing of illness, Hygieia serves as the personification of health and disease prevention. In traditional iconography, the serpent symbolizes rejuvenation, and the bowl represents medicine. The rooster is an emblem of Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium.

In classical art Hygieia is typically draped in a peplos or chiton; Rassenfosse depicts her nude with a large snake wrapped around her. This echoes the provocative representations of Salammbô, the Carthaginian temptress in Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same name and a frequent subject in symbolist art.

Hygieia is among the deities invoked in the original Hippocratic Oath. This pastel was owned, and likely commissioned, by Dr. Alexander von Winiwarter of Liège, Rassenfosse's hometown.



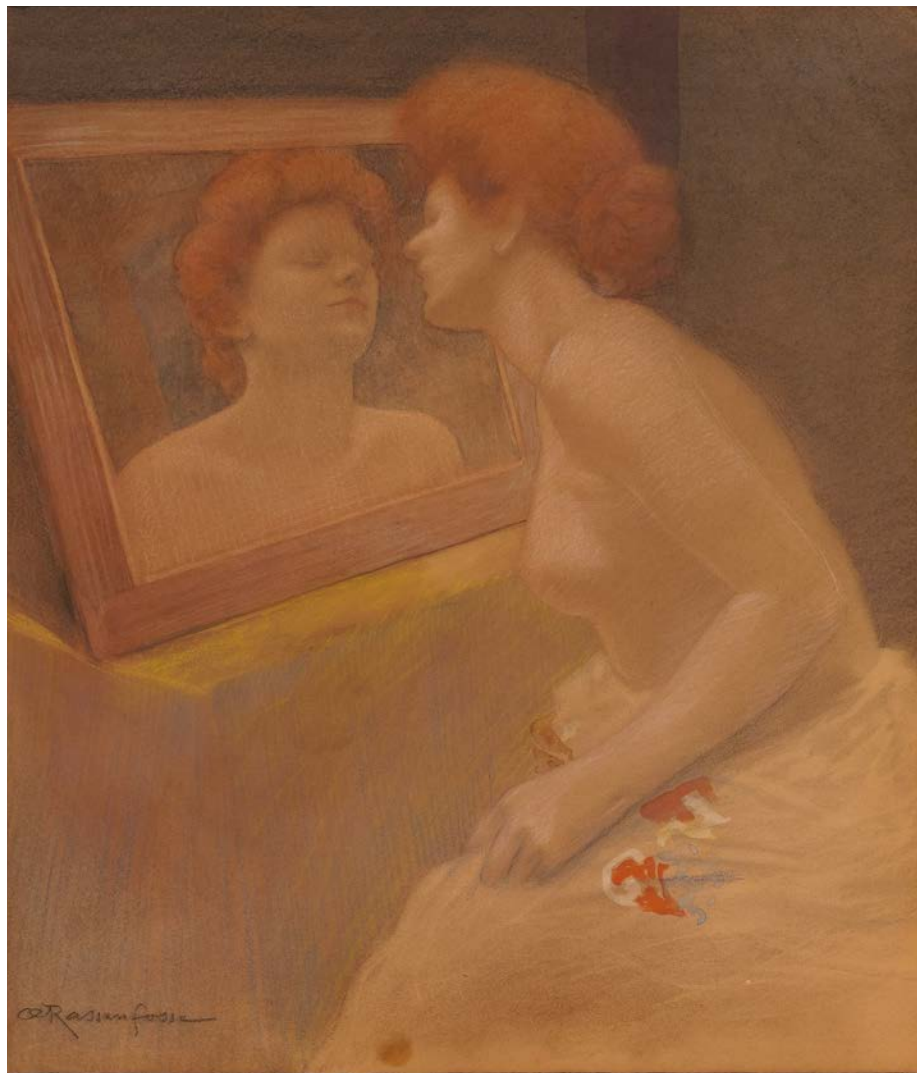
Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège–Liège 1934)

Damnation, n.d.

Chalk, watercolor, pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This drawing by Rassenfosse shows a sensuous nude woman stretching her arms upward while she sits amid the flames of hell. Even in the midst of eternal torment, she is enticing and seductive, reflecting the fashionable misogyny of the time.



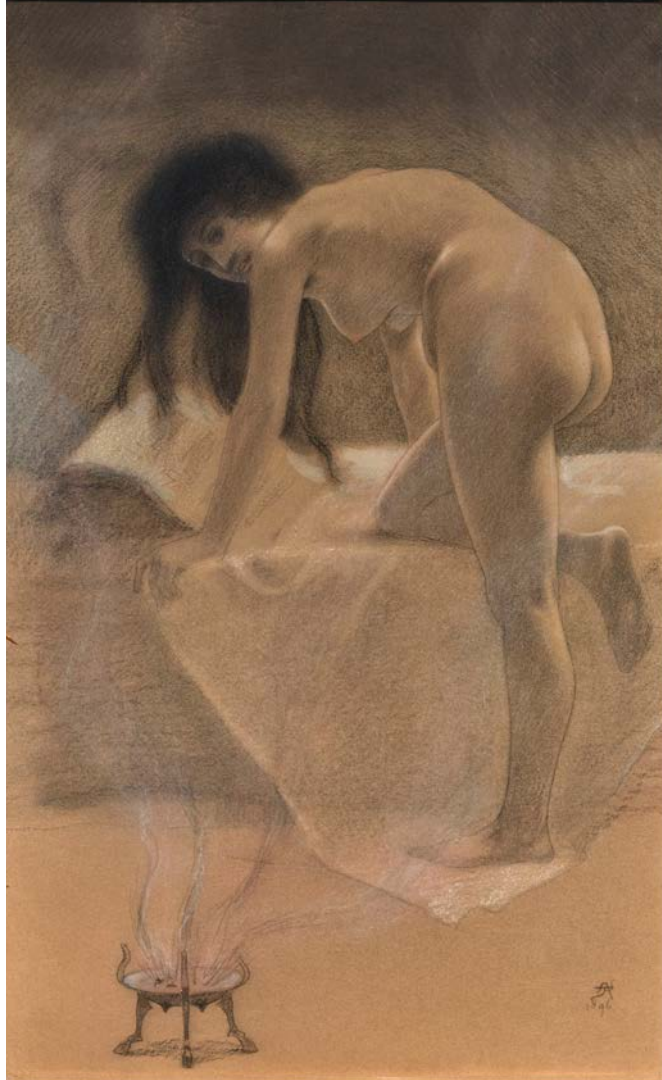
Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège–Liège 1934)

The Mirror, n.d.

Chalk, watercolor, pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Mirrors traditionally evoke vanitas and the transience of human life, but they also invite introspection and are significant to conceptions of art itself—especially the idea that art “holds a mirror up to nature.” The red-headed woman gazes intently at her reflection as she undresses, perhaps practicing a kiss, a frequent theme in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is nonetheless a quality of mystery and psychological depth in her searching gaze.



Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège–Liège 1934)

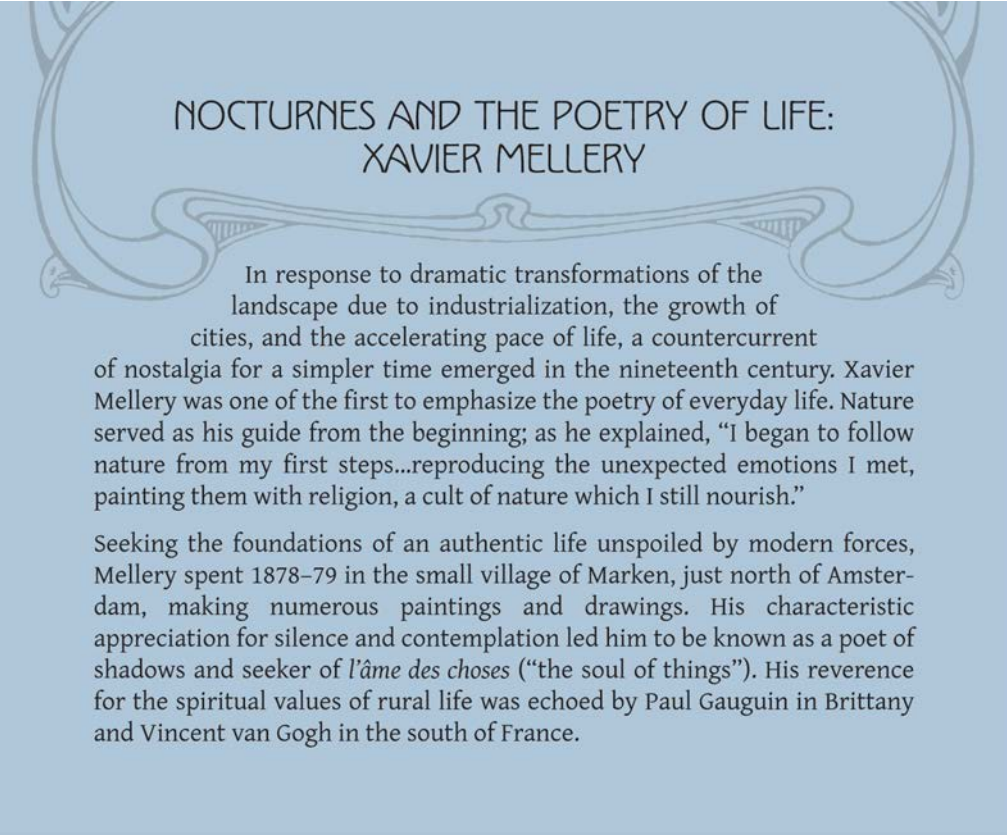
The Witch, 1896

Chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In the late nineteenth-century occult revival, there was a surge of images of witches, generally emphasizing their sexual allure. In 1862 Jules Michelet published *La Sorcière* (*The Witch*), a sensational and popular history of witchcraft in Europe. Later, Joris-Karl Huysmans chronicled the contemporary fascination with the occult in his satanic novel *Là-Bas* (*Down There, or The Damned*), 1891.

In Belgium, Bruges was reputed to be a haven for satanists, while the Walloon village of Ellezelles was notorious for witches and, like Salem, Massachusetts, still celebrates them today. Witches and seductive women have a long history in Flemish painting, particularly involved with love charms. Rassenfosse's witch burns incense in a tripod, perhaps part of a magical rite, as she climbs onto a bed.



NOCTURNES AND THE POETRY OF LIFE: XAVIER MELLERY

In response to dramatic transformations of the landscape due to industrialization, the growth of cities, and the accelerating pace of life, a countercurrent of nostalgia for a simpler time emerged in the nineteenth century. Xavier Mellery was one of the first to emphasize the poetry of everyday life. Nature served as his guide from the beginning; as he explained, “I began to follow nature from my first steps...reproducing the unexpected emotions I met, painting them with religion, a cult of nature which I still nourish.”

Seeking the foundations of an authentic life unspoiled by modern forces, Mellery spent 1878–79 in the small village of Marken, just north of Amsterdam, making numerous paintings and drawings. His characteristic appreciation for silence and contemplation led him to be known as a poet of shadows and seeker of *l'âme des choses* (“the soul of things”). His reverence for the spiritual values of rural life was echoed by Paul Gauguin in Brittany and Vincent van Gogh in the south of France.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

Baptism in Marken Island, c. 1878–84

Watercolor, pastel, pen, ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The citizens of Marken were noted for their picturesque costumes; the men wore billowing pantaloons, while the women wore bonnets and bodices. The couple at left is bringing their swaddled child for baptism, while a similarly dressed family looks on. A child holds a hoop, a traditional toy in the Netherlands.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

Village Scene, Marken, n.d.

Pen, ink, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Dramatic transformations of the landscape and the increased pace of life in the late nineteenth century engendered a strong reaction of nostalgia for a simpler era. The small village of Marken, just north of Amsterdam, has been compared to Brittany as a refuge from modern life, complete with old-world customs and residents in quaint costumes. This drawing provides a romantic, moonlit view of young villagers gathered near the fishing cottages lining the harbor. The young women hold prayer books, which may suggest that they are leaving an evangelical prayer meeting in a private house; a man smoking a long pipe waits at the foot of the stairs. All seem focused on their interior thoughts.

Mellery spent much of 1878–79 in the quiet village of Marken, regarded by folklorists and anthropologists as a relic of traditional culture. The Belgian writer Charles de Coster commissioned a suite of drawings to illustrate his article on Marken published in *Le Tour du monde*.



Marken, the Netherlands



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

Marken Triptych, c. 1882–84

Charcoal, pencil, ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The triptych format is generally associated with religious pictures, but here Mellery has used it to capture distinct moments and settings from the life of this rural fishing village. The interior on the left is richly decorated with ceramics and sturdy furniture; the central panel shows animated street life in front of the village's characteristic gabled houses (the man in black in both panels is a preacher). In the right panel, a group of women and children examine a map displayed by two men.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken-Brussels 1921)

Interior in Marken Island, c. 1878-79

Watercolor, pastel, pen, ink, washes on cardboard

The Hearn Family Trust

This watercolor shows the interior of the same house as in the triptych nearby. Ceramic plates cover the walls, while a young man seems to plead his romantic case to the young woman seated beside him. A mother cat and her kittens suggest a potentially growing family.

The intimacy of bourgeois interiors was a frequent focus for Belgian artists of the late nineteenth century.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

Monastic Life, n.d.

Charcoal, pencil, Chinese ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Mellery created many meditative drawings and paintings of scenes in Bruges, including shadowy, silent interiors, which the artist classified under the heading *L'Âme des choses* ("The Soul of Things"). As a group, they bring out the mysterious mood of religious devotion that characterized the medieval city.

Although traditional religious subjects had been overshadowed in the neoclassical era, Romantic artists rekindled interest in depicting the life of religious orders. Faith was a constant underpinning for many Belgian artists, an identity historically defined by the split between Catholic Belgium and Protestant Netherlands. Another example in this exhibition is Léon Spilliaert's *The Meditation of the Uncle Priest*, c. 1917.

The rigid geometry of this perspectival rendering of a chapel interior is reminiscent of early Renaissance artists, similarly evoking natural and divine order. The young monk seems to be distracted by something beyond the arcaded windows, while the crucifix, symbol of his faith, waits behind him.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

Flemish Interior: The Weaver, 1884

Pencil, Indian ink, wash, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Weavers were still an important part of the cottage industry system in the nineteenth century. The loom and the spinning wheel provided an income for hardworking families. Mellery's image depicts a handsomely appointed interior with a clock and pictures on the walls, and the family is well-dressed. Their child is encased in a wicker walker that allowed the toddler to move somewhat freely while being kept from harm.



Child in a wicker walker, c. 1900



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)
The Knitter (Evening, by Lamplight), c. 1890

Black chalk, washes on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This is an evocative image of the role of creativity in domestic craftwork. The woman is focused on the interweaving of her knitting, standing in a niche near two framed pictures, suggesting that art is a blend of physical gestures and mental concentration. Her meditative knitting is a genteel, yet productive, activity.

Mellery was introverted and dedicated to his interior life. He lived in the same house from birth until 1898, when he had it significantly enlarged. Most of his domestic scenes depict his house and its garden.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

The Doors, n.d.

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

An aura of mystery pervades this image of rooms arranged in a sequence, culminating in a window looking outward—its view is blocked by a nearby brick wall. The interiors are shadowy and seem to be liminal spaces defining a comfortable bourgeois home. The transitions are subtle, and a framed picture on the first wall suggests a yearning for other vistas.

Like Léon Spilliaert, whose works are displayed in the final sections of this exhibition, Mellery was fascinated with the rich visual and psychological effects of domestic interiors. The understated work defines a deep existential realm.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

The Piano Lesson, c. 1900

Charcoal, white chalk, Chinese ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Music was an important part of bourgeois life in nineteenth-century Belgium and was often the subject of artists who explored the parallels between visual art and music. In this drawing, a large candelabra illuminates the woman, her sheet of music, and a small statue of the Madonna atop the piano. Light and faith are subtly linked.



Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

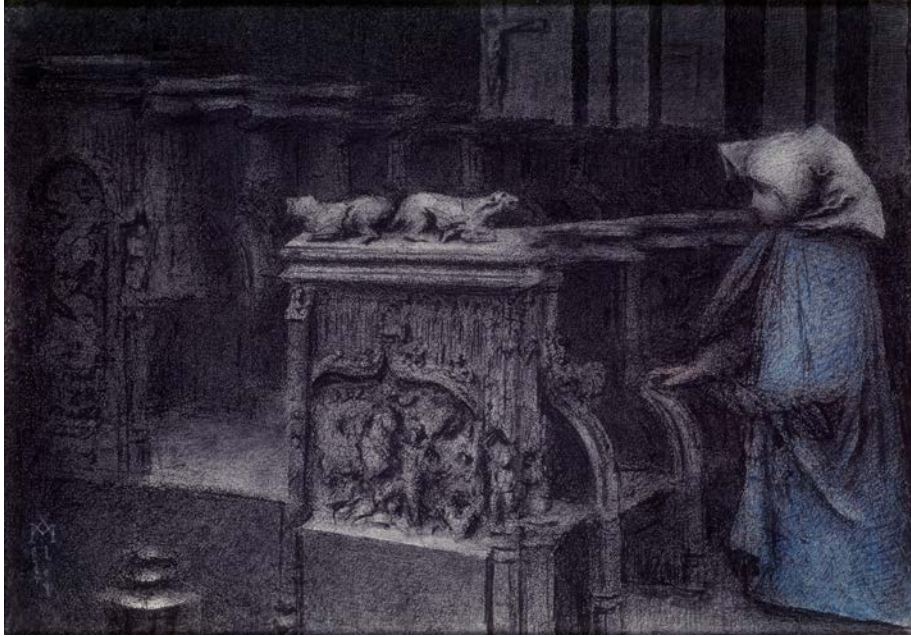
Meditation, n.d.

Pen, ink, chalk, wash on board

The Hearn Family Trust

Mellery depicts a heavily robed monk in prayer. He sits within the choir stalls of the Church of Our Lady of Good Hope in Vilvoorde, Belgium (see photo). His faith is mirrored by the carved angels and saints in the ornate woodwork, an exquisite feature typical in many Belgian churches where such craftsmanship was employed to celebrate the Catholic faith.





Xavier Mellery (1845 Laeken–Brussels 1921)

In the Chapel, n.d.

Conté crayon, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This shadowy drawing depicts the interior of the Church of Saint-Materne in Walcourt, Belgium (see photo). A pious young woman approaches the ornate carved choir stalls, seeming to query the fantastic carved beasts. Her luminous simplicity contrasts with the fanciful ornamentation of the sixteenth-century church that is shrouded in darkness.



NOCTURNES AND THE POETRY OF LIFE: WILLIAM DEGOUVE DE NUNCQUES

As with Xavier Mellery, William Degouve de Nuncques explored the expressive effects of shadow and light in scenes of Bruges, Venice, and the Belgian countryside. Many of his early landscapes are illuminated only by dim streetlights or interior lamps viewed through windows, or at times suffused by an eerie glow.

Degouve de Nuncques could take the viewer into a realm of existential mystery, as in *The Servants of Death* (see below), which updates the traditional legend of death and the woodcutter. His nocturnal scenes of Bruges and Venice are evocative of haunting stillness amid dark medieval streets and canals. By contrast, his *View of Stavelot (Summer, Ardennes)*, painted after World War I, presents a verdant landscape saturated with light.



William Degouve de Nuncques, *The Servants of Death*, c. 1897
Oil on canvas, the Hearn Family Trust



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

View of Stavelot (Summer, Ardennes), 1925

Oil on canvas

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

In 1919, Degouve returned to Belgium, establishing himself in Stavelot, a town in the Ardennes near Spa. While Stavelot is noted for the ruins of an ancient abbey, Degouve chose to focus on the pine forest that surrounds the town. This sun-drenched image offers a sweeping vista of the Ardennes, viewed from a hilltop fringed with conifers. Here he revisits the light-filled scenes he painted before the war.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

The Vegetable Garden, 1925

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

This almost pointillist depiction of a kitchen garden is an image of nature's harmony and bounty. Since the time of Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the sixteenth century, images of the harvest betokened wealth and security in art of the Lowlands. Degouve de Nuncques paints a domestic plot, more suitable for a family rather than a large farm. Flooded with light, it is a calm image of the bounty of nature.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

Bruges at Night, 1889

Pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

After centuries of economic doldrums, which left its medieval architecture largely intact, Bruges became popular with artists and writers in the nineteenth century. Famously, Georges Rodenbach's influential novel *Bruges-la-morte* (1892) used the city as the setting for a melodramatic mystery in the manner of Edgar Allan Poe. The city continues to capture the public imagination, as evidenced by the film *In Bruges* (2008).

The extraordinary light effects in this nocturnal image of a canal in Bruges are haunting. The scene is lit by streetlamps and by the glow through windows—one is even made of stained glass. The lights are reflected in the water and illuminate the medieval buildings. Two cloaked figures wearing *kapmantels* are dimly visible in the shadows as they move along the street. This traditional hooded costume became an iconic image of Bruges. The precise location in Bruges cannot be identified, contributing to the picture's sense of mystery.



William Degouve de Nuncques

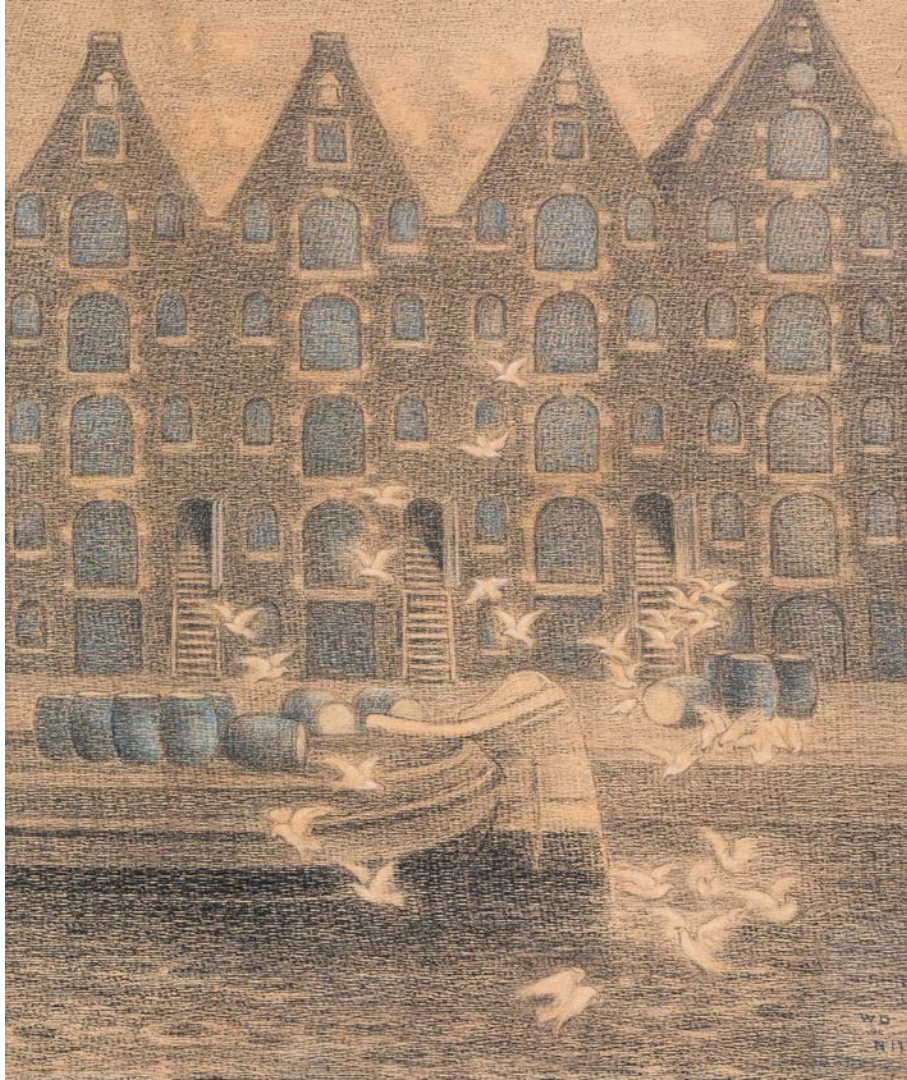
(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

Old Canal (Venice), 1895

Pastel on laid paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Degouve de Nuncques continues his exploration of mysterious ancient cities in this nocturnal image. Like Bruges, canals define the circulation of Venice. The brilliant light of the sea-bound city had attracted painters like Canaletto in the eighteenth century, and J. M. W. Turner and Claude Monet in the nineteenth. Unlike them, Degouve de Nuncques sought to capture the subtleties of darkness in his depiction of a dead-end canal.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

Warehouses on the Brouwersgracht, Amsterdam, 1917

Colored chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Like many Belgian artists during the First World War, Degouve de Nuncques migrated to the neutral Netherlands, eventually settling in Amsterdam. In 1917, he executed this remarkable colored chalk drawing of warehouses along a canal in the northwestern part of the city. The brick façades of the buildings in the middle ground form a backdrop punctuated with a complex pattern of windows, stairs, and gables. Degouve fills the foreground with a flock of fluttering seagulls. In the midst of the Great War's terrible conflict, nature and commerce continued in the peaceful Netherlands.



Warehouses on the Brouwersgracht,
Amsterdam (photo: Mireille Mosler)



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

View of Brussels, c. 1890

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Two women—one elderly, the other middle-aged—walk in the street on the outskirts of Brussels. The composition is strongly geometric, defined by a series of horizontal elements that divide the space into parallel planes. The cobbled street, wooden fence, and bare trees lend a rich texture to the image, while the background is filled with whitewashed houses. Although the women are in shade, the panoply of windows suggests a persistent striving for light.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

The Hamlet (Snow), 1911

Charcoal on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In 1905, Degouve joined Emile Claus and other painters in the first exhibition of the newly formed artist society Vie et Lumière (Life and Light). Over the next five years, he revisited this scene several times, often depicting it covered with snow. In contrast to his earlier dark and mysterious works, these are high-key images of light-filled landscapes. As such, they continue the tradition of sixteenth-century Flemish snow scenes. This particular version in charcoal has a strong tactile quality in its textures.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

The Canal at Haren (Summer), 1906

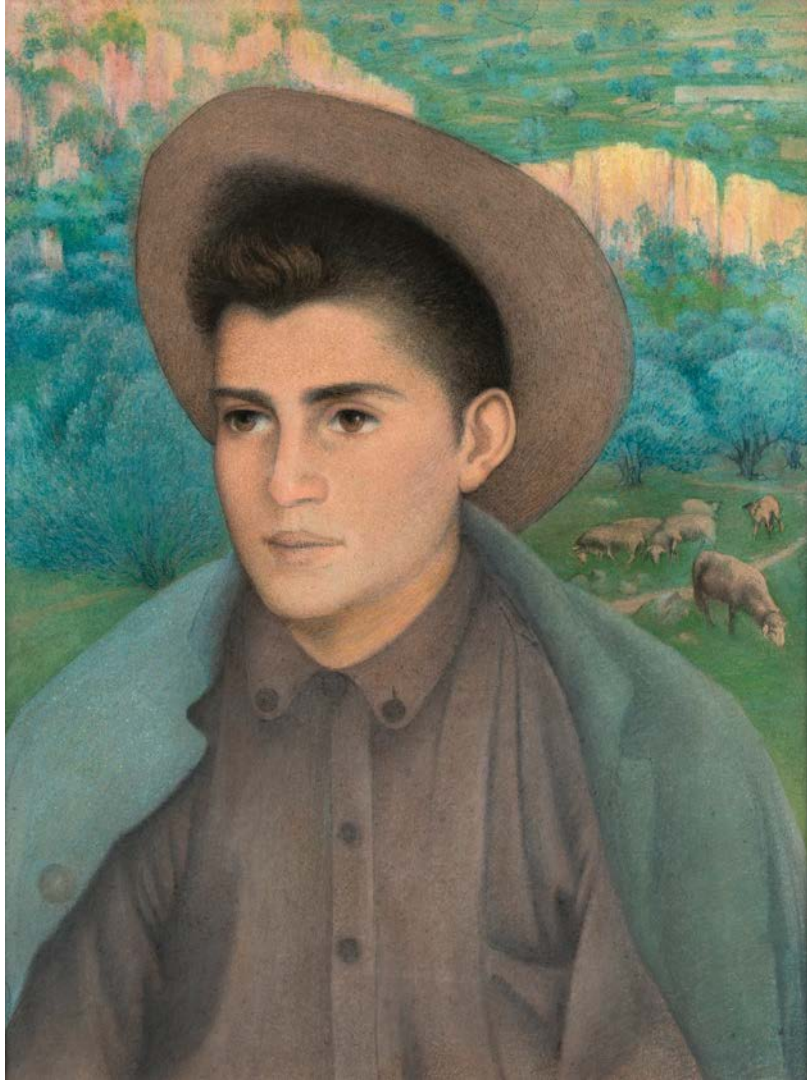
Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Degouve de Nuncques presents a well-ordered, peaceful scene of a prosperous farmhouse in the Belgian countryside. Haren is a village on the northeast outskirts of Brussels. Bordered by a rhythmic allée of trees, the whitewashed buildings glow in the twilight behind a barge anchored in the canal. It is a stolid image of security, commerce, and the serene beauty of nature. Degouve repeated this composition with a snow scene the following winter.



William Degouve de Nuncques, *Barge in the Snow, Haren*, 1907. Oil on canvas, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

The Shepherd, 1890

Pastel, pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The Shepherd revives the composition of early Flemish portraits, like that by Hans Memling below. Degouve de Nuncques depicts an attractive youth in the foreground of a deep landscape; the figure presses against the picture plane, as if to enter the viewer's space. The artist painstakingly renders the shepherd's delicate features and takes meticulous care to delineate the sheep grazing among the rounded, "puffy" trees in the background.



Hans Memling, *Portrait of Bernardo Bembo*, c. 1474. Oil on panel, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp.

A decorative Art Nouveau style frame with flowing, organic lines and symmetrical motifs, enclosing the title and text.

PSYCHE AND PHYSICALITY: A SYMBOLIST'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Belgian symbolists take the viewer on a deep dive into the enigmas of existence and personal identity, invoking resonances of faith and pioneering new modes of expression. George Minne created a subjective and spiritually intense style inspired by symbolism and art nouveau. In the late 1890s, Minne joined a group of artists in establishing a colony at Sint-Martens-Latem near Ghent. He expanded the limits of sculpture through an original study of body types and gestures, seeking a nonverbal language to express psychic and spiritual realities—a pursuit that led to major success in Austria and Germany.



George Minne (1866 Ghent–Sint-Martens-Latem 1941)
The Little Wounded One II, 1898

Bronze

The Hearn Family Trust

By the late 1890s, Minne joined Gustave van de Woestyne and other artists in establishing an artists' colony at Sint-Martens-Latem, near Ghent. At a convenient remove from urban centers, the artists developed distinct practices.

The “wound” has a double signification, denoting a physical state while simultaneously conjuring a wounded spirit. Minne retains his partiality for gaunt adolescents, with a heightened intensity by depicting the figure literally licking his wound. By leaving the nature of the injury undefined, Minne allows the audience to decide if the wound is physical or emotional.



George Minne (1866 Ghent–Sint-Martens-Latem 1941)

Adolescent, 1901

Plaster

The Hearn Family Foundation

Adolescence was a central topic for many artists and writers of the era. The belief in the connection between the physical and the psychological, the emphasis on both the innocence and deviance of childhood, and a fascination with androgyny and sexual ambiguity frequently appear in the writings of some of the most influential figures of the time. Minne was notably influential in Vienna, inspiring a variety of modernist artists.

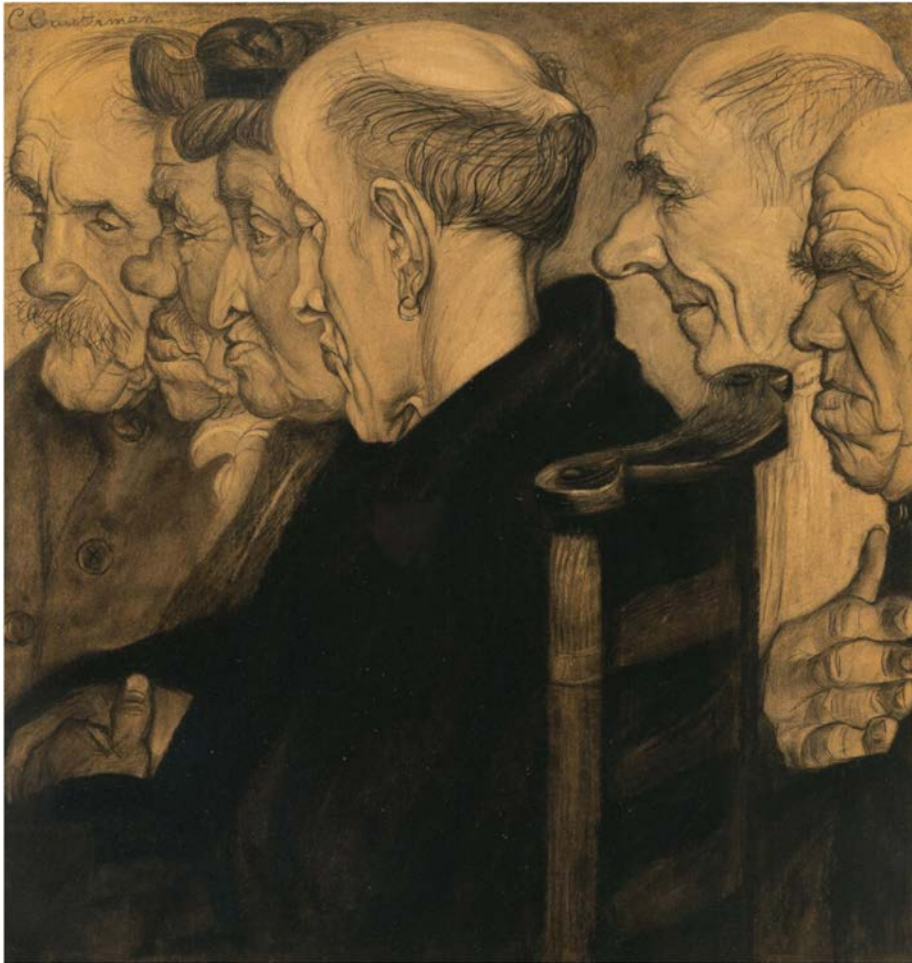
Minne, like the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, clearly believed that the body can effectively express inner states of mind and emotion. Minne's figure seems to rise with the onset of adolescence and to appear comfortable with the transformation of his body.

CÉCILE BOONANS CAUTERMAN

Born into a privileged family in Ghent in 1882, Cécile Boonans rejected the comforts of her social class. She faced significant barriers in her pursuit of an artistic career and needed special permission to draw life models at the Ghent Academy of Fine Arts, then open only to male students. In 1906 she married Emile Cauterman, director of a craft school in Ghent, who supported her art.

With an unflinching commitment to social justice, Cauterman sought out models from the fringes of Ghent's society. She set up her studio in a thirteenth-century Dominican monastery that had been converted into a tenement house (it is now a cultural center for the University of Ghent). For decades she produced sensitive and expressive portraits of beggars and prostitutes, the mentally ill and physically disabled. She portrayed marginalized figures respectfully and objectively, without falling into stereotypes or caricatures. Though her provocative drawings at first met with harsh criticism, she remained devoted to her vision, eventually gaining appreciation for her incisive, empathetic drawings of society's "have-nots."

Cauterman defied conventional standards of beauty in favor of honesty and empathy. Her works evoke the spirit of earlier Flemish artists Pieter Bruegel and Quentin Matsys, as well as modern artists Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Honoré Daumier, and Käthe Kollwitz. In 1937 Cauterman was featured alongside Charley Toorop and Tamara de Lempicka at the landmark exhibition devoted to European women artists at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris.



Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

Devotees, n.d.

Charcoal on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust



Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

An Elderly Lady, 1923

Charcoal on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust



Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

Sleeping, 1926

Charcoal, turpentine paint on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust



Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

Leaning Figure, 1924

Charcoal on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust

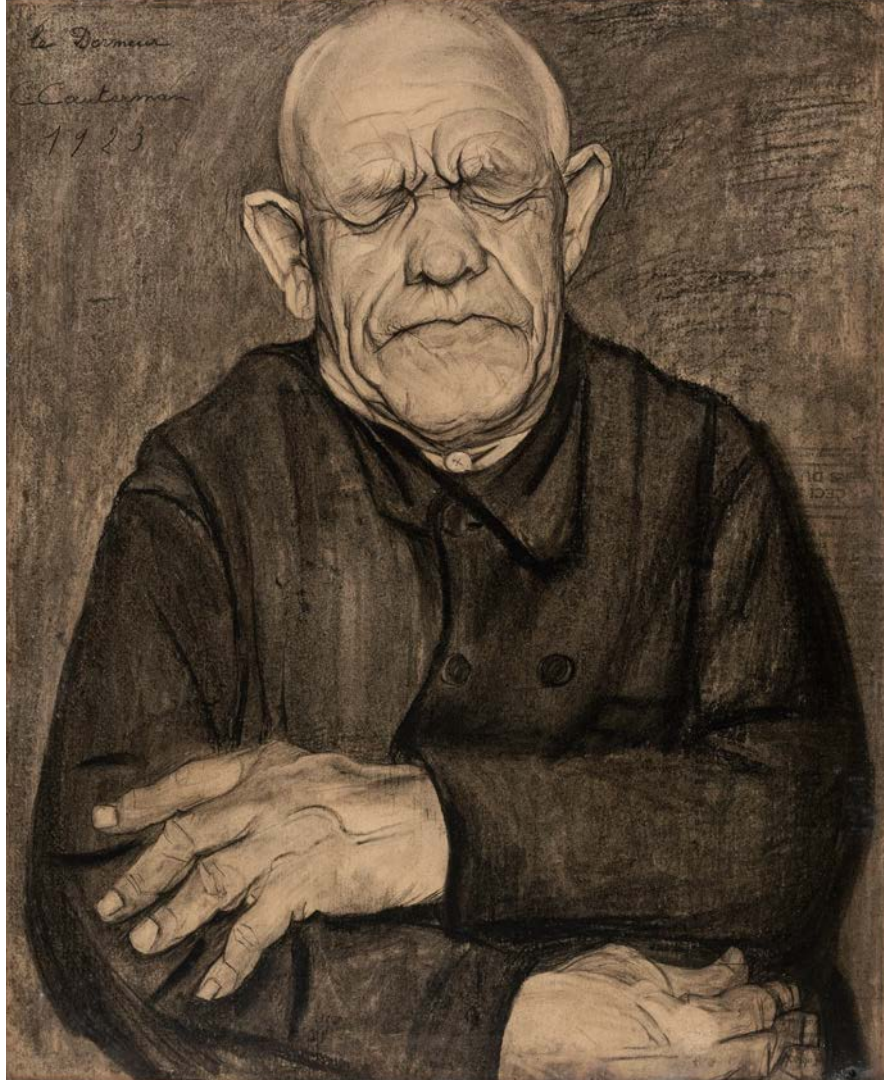


Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

Leaning Man, c. 1924

Charcoal on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust

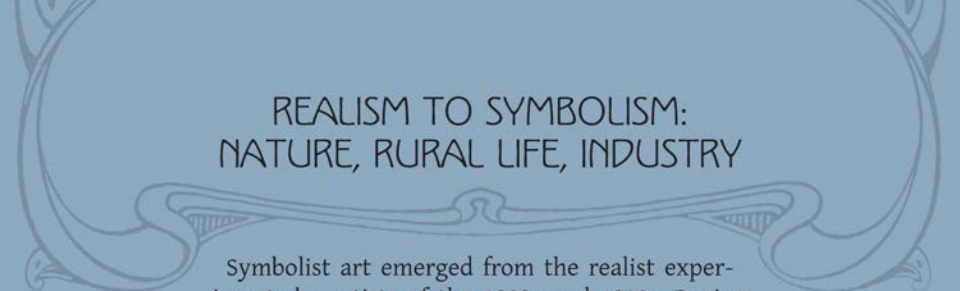


Cécile Cauterman (1882 Ghent–Ghent 1957)

The Sleeper, 1923

Charcoal on artist's board

The Hearn Family Trust

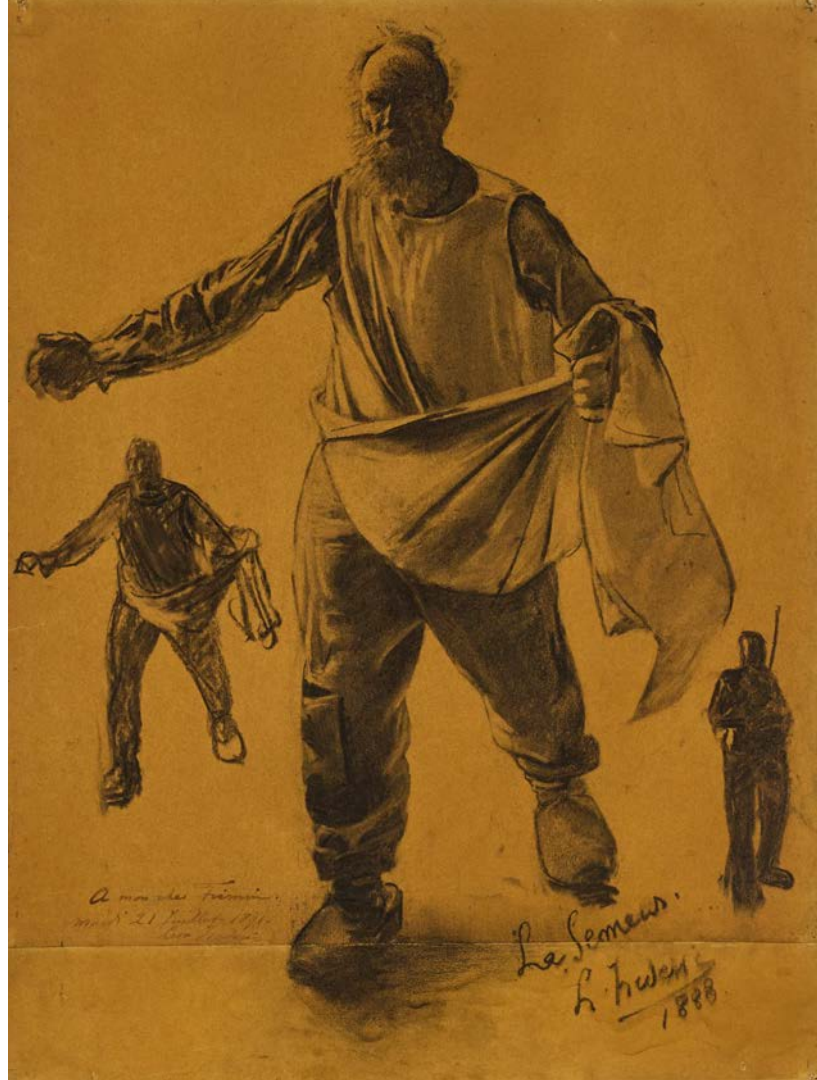


REALISM TO SYMBOLISM: NATURE, RURAL LIFE, INDUSTRY

Symbolist art emerged from the realist experiments by artists of the 1880s and 1890s. During this period, depictions of external reality evolved into a more subjective interrogation of existential questions—a transition clearly visible in this section. These works are marked by a search for the dignity of labor, both rural and industrial. This pursuit was particularly resonant during the late nineteenth century, a time of profound social unrest that saw explosive riots in 1886 in Belgium as well as throughout Europe, and even America.

Léon Frederic was strongly drawn to peasant life, spending many summers in the rural village of Nafraiture in the Ardennes. There he refined his craft and produced a series of studies of the Walloon landscape, capturing its rolling hills, farm workers, and peasants. As with J.-F. Millet and Vincent van Gogh, his pictures of rural laborers often evoke biblical themes. Fernand Khnopff praised Frederic's social conscience, remarking: "His dream was that the disinherited of the earth should have their fair share of happiness. ... In a word, Léon Frederic is indeed a painter of our own time." This dedication to social justice was shared by Firmin Baes and Constantin Meunier, who valorized the workers who built the industrial and agricultural wealth of Belgium.

Cécile Caeterman's portraits, displayed in a previous gallery, evince a similar dedication to portraying society's outcasts while maintaining their essential dignity.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

The Sower, 1888

Charcoal on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The sower was a powerful icon for socially conscious artists in the nineteenth century, from J.-F. Millet to Vincent van Gogh. Belgian artists such as Constantin Meunier and even Félicien Rops depicted the typically heroic figure of an agricultural worker spreading seed. While the image has roots in the biblical parable of the sower, it also resonated deeply with the labor movements of the day; the act of spreading new life is the beginning of a new era.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

The Barrels, 1888

Conté crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

A tour de force of perspective and natural observation, this view of a warehouse filled with barrels—perhaps containing beer—demonstrates Frederic's remarkable representational skills. The shadowy cellar is both a meticulous record of industry and a compelling mysterious realm.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

Little Peasant Girl, 1887

Pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Frederic paints a child in profile, similar to the portrait of the young boy displayed nearby. Although he describes the girl as a peasant, her clothes and hair are neat and well-cared for, and she wears a delicate necklace. She is likely from the Ardennes village of Nafraiture where Frederic spent many summers.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)
Profile of Child in Front of Nafraiture, 1893

Oil on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

As this young boy overlooks the lush landscape of Nafraiture from a window or balcony, Frederic compresses the space, bringing near and far zones together. As with *The Old Man Blessing*, there are reminiscences of early images juxtaposing portraits with landscape scenes. This child is not idealized, however; he appears almost feral as he gives a sideways glance at the viewer.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

The Old Man Blessing, 1889

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Here, Frederic blends the styles of Italian Renaissance and early Flemish landscape painting, upon which he superimposes ordinary people as symbolic types. One such character, whom he painted at his Ardennes retreat in Nafraiture, is this bearded elderly man wearing a loose robe. Raising his right hand in a gesture of blessing, he resembles a weathered Saint John the Baptist. Positioned close to the picture plane, the old man fills the frame and dominates the expansive landscape behind him—a technique that recalls how late fifteenth-century Northern Renaissance artists emphasized monumental figures in their compositions.



Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)
Rue de Turquie Under Snow, Brussels, 1883

Oil on canvas laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Cropped slightly closer than its companion piece depicting spring, this winter view omits the foreground wall to focus on the gardens beyond the city. It features the same sparse row of trees and cluster of buildings, now all blanketed in snow as the fields lie dormant.

The area of the rue de Turquie in Saint-Gilles, Brussels (see postcard below from after 1900) was developed between 1897 and 1899 with dense housing and commercial buildings. Now known as the rue de Tamines, it was renamed after the First World War because Ottoman Turkey was aligned with Germany in the conflict.





Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

Chaussée d'Alseberg, Brussels, 1883

Oil on canvas laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

Frederic's pair of paintings depicting Brussels in spring and winter revives the early Flemish tradition of portraying the seasons and labors of the months. Representing spring, this view is set within a garden sheltered by a low wall, while two workers dig the earth in what was then the outskirts of the city. The trees are still bare, and the houses of Brussels loom on a hill in the distance.

Like the rue de Turquie shown in this painting's pendant nearby, the chaussée d'Alseberg was largely developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Consequently, these paintings serve as important records of the urban growth of Brussels. The changing seasons are emblematic of the life cycle of both nature and the city.



Georges Le Brun (1873 Verviers–Stuivekenskerke 1914)

Autumn Evening, 1903

Watercolor, pastel, charcoal on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In this peaceful scene of twilight on a rural farm, puddles of water reflect the evening sky, which is ornamented with a row of heavily pruned trees in the middle distance. A shadowy figure stands before a substantial half-timber farmhouse with a thatched roof on the right.

A highly talented artist, Le Brun unfortunately died in Stuivekenskerke, Belgium, during an early battle of the First World War.



Georges Le Brun (1873 Verviers–Stuivekenskerke 1914)

The Conversation, c. 1897

Charcoal, pencil, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

A farmer and his wife stand in the yard, pausing their labors to converse. The composition recalls the peasant scenes of French realist J.-F. Millet (see below) and the early works of Vincent van Gogh. Like those artists, Le Brun sought to depict the inherent dignity and spirituality of simple country life.



J.-F. Millet, *The Angelus*, c. 1857–59. Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Georges Le Brun (1873 Verviers–Stuivekenskerke 1914)

The Ironers, 1905

Pencil, gouache on paper laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

The light-filled interior of this elegant workroom downplays the hard work of the women seen from behind as they quietly go about their tasks. Ironing was an arduous chore in this era, requiring heavy metal irons that had to be heated on the stove visible at left. Artists as stylistically different as Edgar Degas and Picasso used the theme of ironing to depict the labor required of working-class women.



Edgar Degas, *Women Ironing*, 1884–86.
Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Pablo Picasso, *Woman Ironing*, 1904. Oil on canvas,
Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York.



Constantin Meunier (1831 Etterbeek–Brussels 1905)

Miner in Profile, 1895

Watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

One of the most prominent artists in Belgium in the late nineteenth century, Meunier trained as both a painter and a sculptor. Through the 1870s, the majority of his paintings focused on religious themes. However, after about 1885, he produced primarily realist works depicting scenes from the industrial heart of Belgium. While coal mines generated tremendous wealth for their owners, the industrial laborers who toiled in them often lived in extreme poverty. Meunier's powerful workers are modern-day icons of physical and moral strength.



Constantin Meunier (1831 Etterbeek–Brussels 1905)

The Miner, c. 1904

Cast iron

The Hearn Family Trust

Here, Meunier reproduces in bas-relief the visage of the miner depicted in the adjacent painting.



Constantin Meunier (1831 Etterbeek–Brussels 1905)

The Wounded, c. 1900–05

Bronze

The Hearn Family Trust

Meunier's sculpture of a seated worker tending to his wounded foot is one of several works depicting industrial accidents. It is also reminiscent of the *Spinario*, the famous classical bronze of a boy pulling a thorn from his foot; it is a traditional motif updated to the modern industrial era.



Spinario (*The Thorn Puller*), 1st century BCE (based on 5th–3rd century BCE models). Bronze, Capitoline Museum, Rome.



Firmin Baes (1874 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode–Ixelles 1943)
Old Peasant of Condroz, c. 1937

Pastel on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Firmin Baes worked in many media but was best known for his skillful and precise pastels on canvas. This rare technique allowed him to work in a larger format than was usual on paper. Firmin studied at the Brussels Academy from 1888 to 1894, where his father Henri Baes (1850–1920) was a teacher.

Like Léon Frederic, Baes often depicted peasant scenes. In fact, Baes once owned Frederic's *The Sower*, also displayed in this section. The Condroz is a rural region of Walloon Belgium between the Ardennes in the south and the river Meuse. In this portrait, the old man seems weary, resting with a crude walking stick or an agricultural tool.



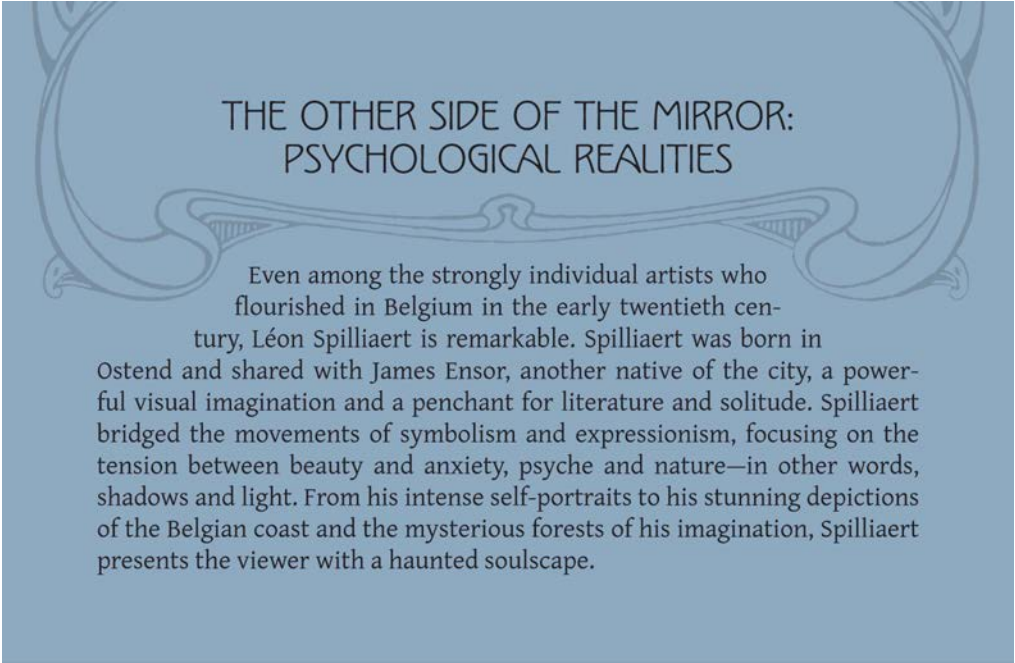
Armand Rassenfosse (1862 Liège–Liège 1934)

Female Miner, 1894

Gouache, Conté crayon on board

The Hearn Family Trust

Female coal miners, known as “hiercheuses,” played a crucial role in the heavy industry that transformed the Belgian landscape in the nineteenth century. With this attractive depiction of a young worker, Rassenfosse downplays the grueling work typically undertaken by these women. As such, it contrasts with grim images of women workers often depicted scrambling for leftover fragments of coal.



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR: PSYCHOLOGICAL REALITIES

Even among the strongly individual artists who flourished in Belgium in the early twentieth century, Léon Spilliaert is remarkable. Spilliaert was born in Ostend and shared with James Ensor, another native of the city, a powerful visual imagination and a penchant for literature and solitude. Spilliaert bridged the movements of symbolism and expressionism, focusing on the tension between beauty and anxiety, psyche and nature—in other words, shadows and light. From his intense self-portraits to his stunning depictions of the Belgian coast and the mysterious forests of his imagination, Spilliaert presents the viewer with a haunted soulscape.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Self-Portrait (Bust), 1907

Indian ink wash, brush on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In his first self-portraits, Spilliaert sketched the image of a young man who sought to distance himself from the world while still affirming his identity as a member of the respectable bourgeoisie, as evidenced by his formal attire (see another example, below). The starched white collar and black jacket are part of his persona, with nothing corresponding to the popular image of the “bohemian artist.” His many self-portraits provide a clear view of a talented, yet tormented, artist.



Léon Spilliaert, *Self-Portrait*, November 2, 1908. Indian ink wash, brush, colored pencil, gouache on paper, the Hearn Family Trust.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Rachel, My Sister, 1903–04

Pen, Indian ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert depicts his sister with a shadowed visage and penetrating gaze in this bust-length portrait. As a young artist, his first models were often members of his own family.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Lady with Hat and Headscarf, 1910

Indian ink wash, brush, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

An anonymous figure—impassive and perhaps characteristic of the citizens of Ostend—confronts the viewer with a stolid gaze. Her hat is held in place with a long scarf to protect against the strong winds of the sea coast.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Earth, July 19, 1902

Chinese ink, brush, gouache, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

A stylized dark silhouette, this totemic figure acts as a silent presence, suspended between the artist's imagination and a vision of a forbidding external world. Light itself seems to participate in the expression of human solitude. Although "Mother Earth" is generally a comforting concept, here she is a dark and heavy personification, revealing the pessimism and anxiety that permeated Spilliaert's work at the turn of the twentieth century.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Beast of Prey, 1903

Brush, ink wash, chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

An archetypal, unflattering image of a femme fatale, this early drawing belongs to a period when Spilliaert indulged in literary and mythic fantasies. This mysterious figure echoes his earlier illustrations for the hallucinatory novel *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Isidore Ducasse (who published under the pseudonym Comte de Lautréamont). This novel would later become a foundational text for the surrealists.



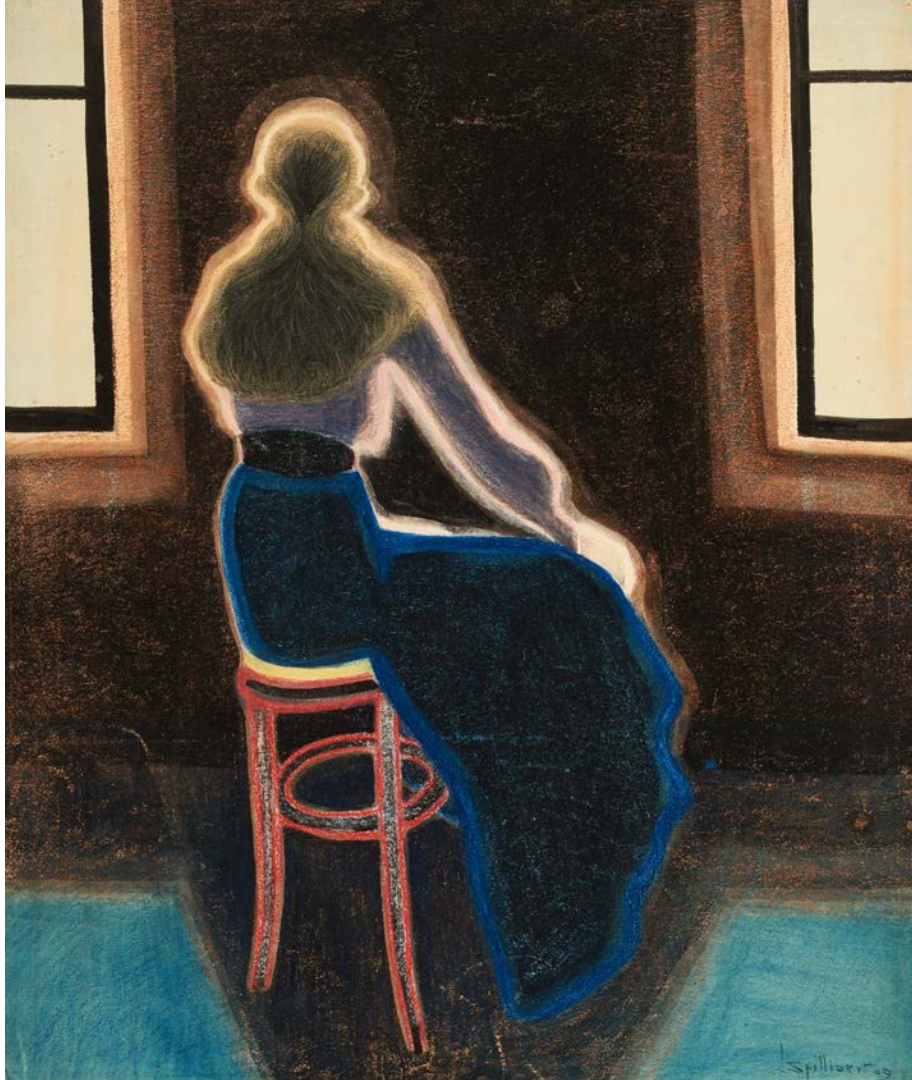
Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Waiting, December 1908

Pencil, Indian ink, wash, brush, colored pencil, colored
chalk on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert often emphasizes the social limits faced by bourgeois women. Portrayed as isolated or withdrawn, these figures recede into themselves. In this work, the subject's glance is averted, and she remains bound within the context of her comfortable interior. We do not know what she is waiting for—a friend, a lover, or perhaps a more existential encounter? The psychological drama and constrictions of women's lives intrigued Spilliaert.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Young Woman on a Stool, 1909

Indian ink, brush, colored pencil, wax crayon, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In this haunting image, a young woman sits in contemplation within a sober setting, cloistered in her own immobility. The energy of her spirit envelops her in an aura of light; her presence illuminates the room as much as the sunlight streaming from the two flanking windows. The silently waiting figure, her gaze fixed on a blank wall, shuns contact with the outside world and turns within herself to find spiritual peace.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
The Fireplace in the Living Room, 1908

Ink, crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

An engaging image of domestic comfort, this work features a tea kettle kept warm by the fireplace, stacks of books on the dresser at left, and vases with flowers flanking a statuette of *Callipygian Venus* poised before a mirror. All the senses are invoked: scent, taste, sight, hearing (should the kettle boil), and touch (Venus clutching her robe). This is an unusual work for Spilliaert in its celebration of sensual pleasures. The statuette is a copy of an ancient Roman sculpture; “*Calipygian Venus*” literally means “Venus of the beautiful buttocks,” and she is seen twice—once on the mantel and again reflected in the mirror.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Flask, 1909

Indian ink, watercolor, colored pencil, wax crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The simplicity with which Spilliaert rendered everyday objects that he observed in his father's perfume workshop is both engaging and disconcerting. The empty flask shown here has mysterious depths. The transparency of the thick glass suggests its inner volume, yet surface reflections of exterior reality conceal its contents. The viewer is drawn into the picture while still kept at a distance.



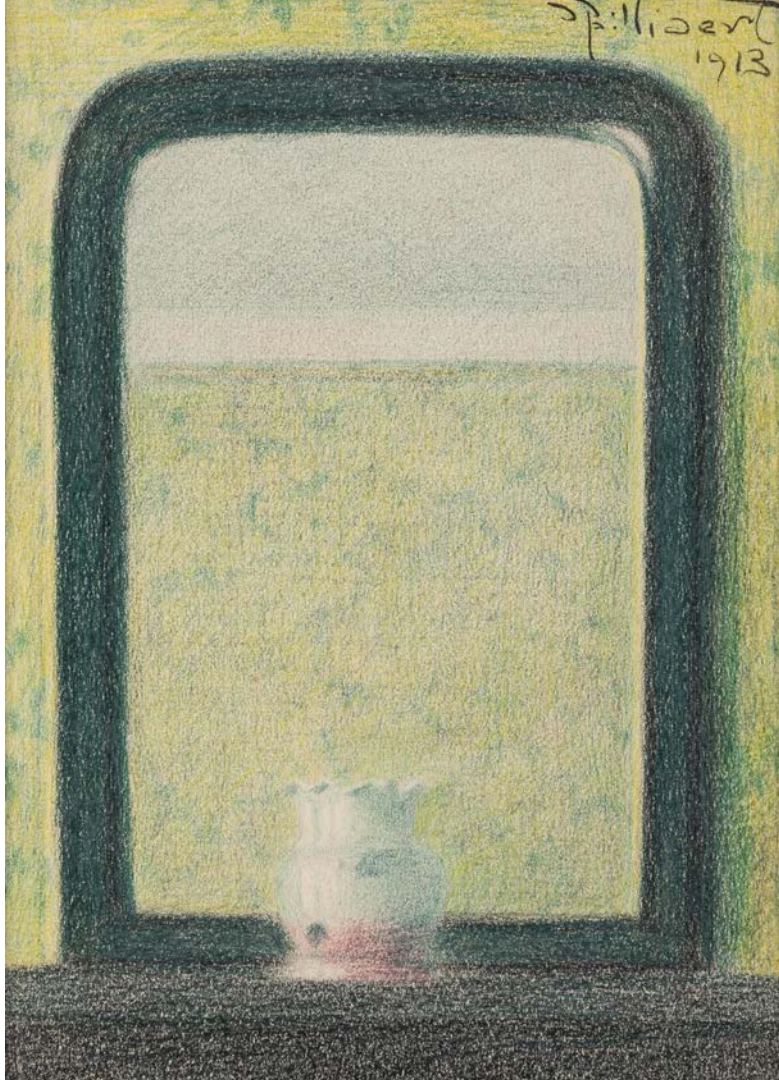
Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Flask and Green Boxes, c. 1909

Gouache, watercolor, pastel on card

The Hearn Family Trust

Inside and outside are in dialogue in this picture of containers: mysterious green boxes with unknown contents and a large glass flask that, though empty, reflects the window above. The flask's transparency provides a refracted view of the boxes. It is a quiet still life that embodies the poetry and paradoxes found in the silent corners of life.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
Mirror and White Vase: The Fireplace, 1913

Black chalk, colored chalk on paper
The Hearn Family Foundation

The scene is bathed in light shades of yellow and green, with the dark frame of the mirror above the fireplace mantel forming the center of the composition. Due to the frontal point of view, the isolated vase obscures its own reflection in the mirror that reveals only the empty room beyond. The artist is conspicuous by his absence. Spilliaert draws attention to the strangeness of reality and the inherent paradoxes of vision.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Open Door, 1904

Conté crayon, Indian ink, brush on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

In this early work, Spilliaert draws the viewer's gaze into an intimate space where the sensation of waiting in a seemingly abandoned room becomes inescapable. A climate of silence reigns, as the light contends with the deepening shadows.



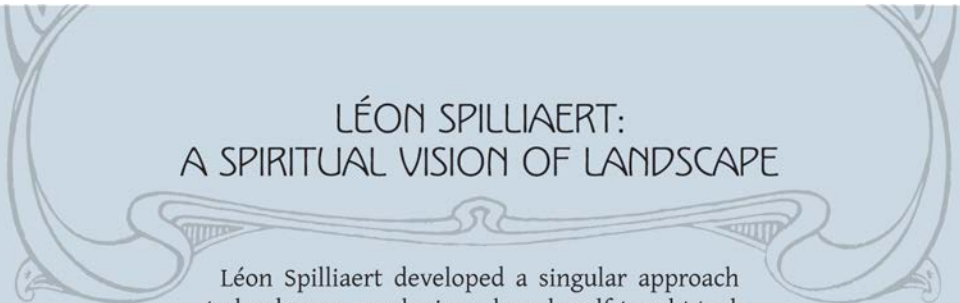
Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Attic with an Old Chair, 1909

Chinese ink, wax crayons on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

The tilted perspective causes the floor to rise up, as if straining to reach the massive roof beam at the rear of the nearly empty room, with its dirty whitewashed walls. A solitary chair and a clothesline with a cloth hanging from it are the only objects in the space. Strange, almost cabalistic, designs and a ghostly female silhouette haunt the pale door.

A decorative, light blue frame with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral motifs at the top and bottom, enclosing the title and the first paragraph.

LÉON SPILLIAERT: A SPIRITUAL VISION OF LANDSCAPE

Léon Spilliaert developed a singular approach to landscape, employing a largely self-taught technique. His hometown of Ostend was transformed into a place of mystery and intrigue through his use of plunging perspectives and sinuous compositions. Under his hand, banal street scenes and deep coastal vistas become dramatic, even mythic, settings.

Later in life, Spilliaert moved to Brussels. Away from the coast, he discovered a new fascination with trees and forests. These are rendered in a unique manner that echoes both the enchantment of fairy tales and a Romantic appreciation for the animism that permeates all nature. Inspired by both the classical poet Virgil and the Belgian symbolist author Maurice Maeterlinck, he created a powerful body of work that is only now gaining international recognition. In 2030, the bicentennial of Belgium as an independent nation, Spilliaert will be celebrated as a key figure in world art with exhibitions across Belgium, France, and the United States.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Avenue de la Reine near Marie

Henriette Park, Ostend, 1909

Ink, wash, watercolor, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert was drawn to the urban landscape and architecture of Ostend, which he pushed to the limit of abstraction as he explored the relationship between nature and the built environment. His mastery of perspective and deep space is clearly evident here, as the road turns a sharp corner and swiftly recedes into the distance. For Spilliaert, Ostend was a realm of endless depth and fascination.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Forest Edge in Spring, c. 1900

Pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In this shimmering rendition of a forest's edge, dense foliage forms an impenetrable wall, met with a flat expanse of grass that heightens the visual tension in this pastel. In later years, Spilliaert would concentrate on the delicate interlace of bare tree branches in winter, a theme explored in several other works in this gallery.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Promenade and Lights, Ostend, 1909

Brush, Indian ink, wash, colored crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The sinuous curve of the seawall draws the viewer's eye deep into the expanse of the shoreline. The horizon is placed very high, while glowing lights cast reflections back toward the foreground of the picture. The French author and mystic François Jollivet-Castelot, who met Spilliaert in 1909, wrote in 1912:

His art communicates, above all, the vertigo of the infinite. When he paints a seascape, it is as if, there in front of you, is the endless ocean with its mysterious waves, the monotonous beach and a sky which becomes one with the sea in the distance. When he represents the sea-wall or the quay, their lines stretch until they are lost in empty distance. ... No limits, no milestones, no premature stopping places. Horizons flee, plunging through space, creating a dream of thought and hopes.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Snow Landscape, Ostend, 1905

Pastel, charcoal, Conté crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Nature and industry are juxtaposed in this beautiful scene of modern life. Large white snowflakes are suspended in the atmosphere, as if nature holds its breath; beside the railroad tracks, telegraph and power poles further signify human-made dynamism, yet the forces of nature continue to overlay the landscape of machines.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
The Crane in the Port of Ostend, 1911–12

Gouache, pastel on board

The Hearn Family Trust

Beginning around 1910, Spilliaert created a series of images documenting modern technology; these included several depictions of enormous airships barely contained in their hangars, and this portrayal of a towering crane in the Port of Ostend. The forces of modern industry fascinated the artist as much as the mythic figures of his earlier works. During this time, Ostend was a vital hub for sea and land transport.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Hofstraat in Ostend, c. 1908

Indian ink, wash, brush, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This work's shadowy, film noir atmosphere prefigures later expressionist cinema and art. The plunging perspective of the buildings and the empty street draw the eye toward a lone streetlamp beside the harbor. Although the Hofstraat was largely rebuilt after the Second World War (see present-day photo, below), the moody atmosphere of Spilliaert's drawing remains a deeply personal interpretation of the site.

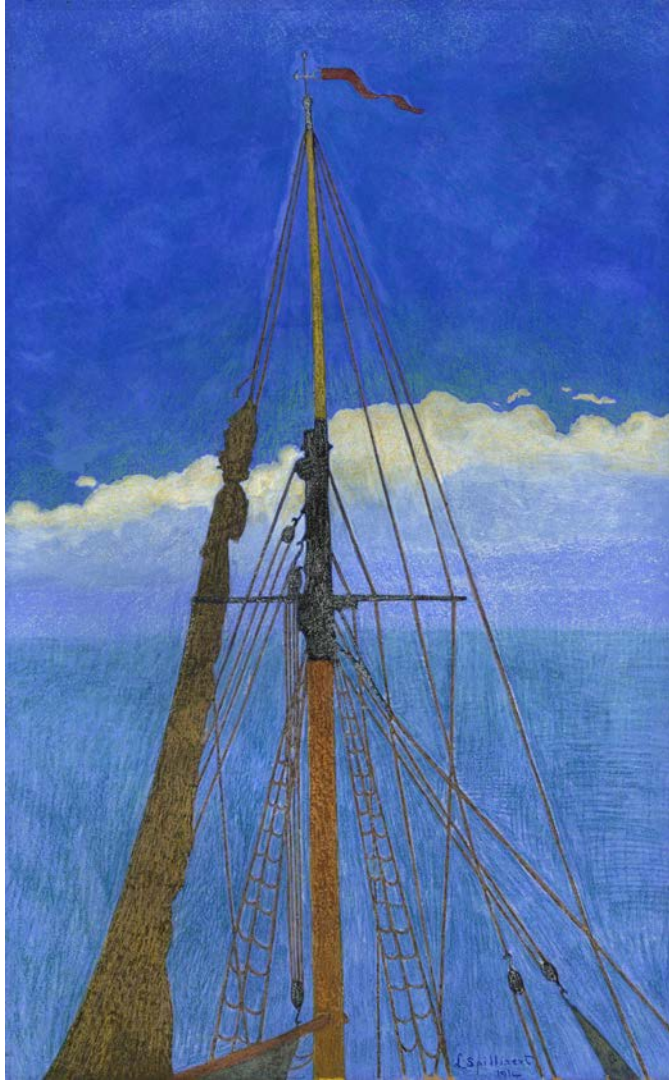




Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
*Fence Outside the Royal Palace Hotel,
Rue du Trône, Ostend, 1909*

Brush, wash drawing with ink and chalk on paper
The Hearn Family Trust

The Royal Palace Hotel in Ostend was a grand edifice in the French Second Empire style, featuring a domed entrance and a long arcade stretching along the beach. Spilliaert chose not to depict these ostentatious architectural features directly; instead he gives us a glimpse through a wrought-iron fence. The tension between the two-dimensional fence and the deep space beyond—emphasized by the rapidly diminishing perspective of the building—is reminiscent of Japanese prints and the French impressionists, yet it carries a more stark, modern impact.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Mast, 1914

Indian ink, gouache, casein, watercolor, chalk on cardboard

The Hearn Family Trust

The delicate structure of the ship's mast and rigging soar above the sea and low clouds, reaching high into the blue sky. It is a vertical poem of striving to reach the heavens; at the top of the mast, a banner flutters from a cross-shaped fixture. Is it a veiled Christian symbol? Sailing ships are a traditional metaphor of the "voyage of life."



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Bright Shell Traces in the Night, Ostend, 1917

Watercolor, pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The First World War brought immeasurable suffering to Belgium, which endured years of German occupation and prolonged fighting between Allied and German forces. New technologies added to the carnage, creating grim spectacles as even the air became a battlefield. In 1917, Spilliaert created this extraordinary painting of exploding star shells against a dark sky; the bursts appear like delicate flowers, an ironic twist on the mechanized horror that they illuminated. The abstraction of this work contrasts dramatically with wartime photographs of battles and the mud-filled trenches below. The Great War, as it was then called, challenged the limits of both language and the visual arts.



Ernest Brooks, Battle of Flanders-Courcelette, Sept.
15, 1916. Imperial War Museum, London.



Maurice Langaskens (1884 Ghent-Schaerbeek 1946)
***The Grenadier André Ceulemans (The Cellist)*, 1917**

Watercolor, colored pencil, graphite on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Langaskens studied at the Royal Academy of Brussels in 1901 and began exhibiting at the Brussels Salon in 1907. His early output consisted of monumental commissions and decorative works in the contemporary art nouveau and symbolist styles. When the First World War broke out in 1914, he was drafted but was captured in the first two weeks of the conflict. He was held as a prisoner of war for three and a half years and moved across several camps in Germany between 1915 and 1917.

These experiences led him away from the decorative aesthetic of his earlier years toward a more direct realism. Although art materials were scarce, he documented the everyday life he observed around him, including his fellow prisoners. This poignant portrait of André Ceulemans playing a cello demonstrates the vital role of art in maintaining the spirits of captured soldiers. Following his long confinement, Langaskens suffered from post-traumatic stress and aphasia; however, he recovered after a few years and resumed his art career.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

*Three Dolls (Shepherdess,
Marquis, Countess)*, 1931

Indian ink wash, watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert discovered the subject of dolls through his daughter, Madeleine (1917–2005). She received this trio in 1928 from the director of the Kursaal casino in Ostend, a friend and patron of the artist. Ironically, Spilliaert was more intrigued with these dolls than his daughter, who often ignored them.

Dolls are not just toys with which children act out dramas, but are among the earliest vehicles for the creative imagination and were employed symbolically by artists. Maurice Maeterlinck's first plays were designed for marionettes, a theatrical form with a long history in Belgium. The three figures in Spilliaert's watercolor reflect eighteenth-century characters, an era noted for artificiality in life and performance.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

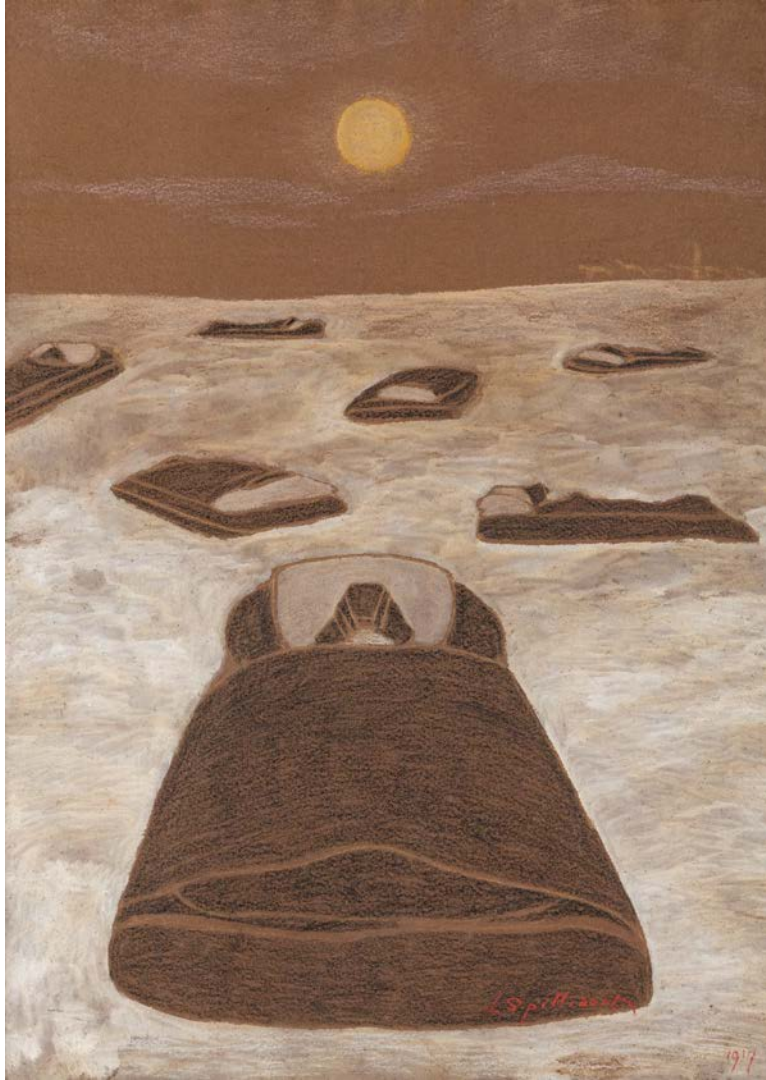
The Meditation of the Uncle Priest, c. 1917

Pencil, Indian ink, pen, wash, colored crayon on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This work was inspired by a famous sixteenth-century Dutch morality play titled *Mariken van Nijmegen*. It is the tale of a young woman seeking freedom who runs off to the city and spends seven years living with the Devil before ultimately seeking redemption. One of the main characters in the play is Mariken's uncle, a pious priest named Gijsbrecht, who prays for her salvation and eventually guides her back to grace. Spilliaert depicts the priest deep in thought as he prays for his niece. She is barely visible in the distance, traveling on the road to the city.

This work was created in Brussels where Spilliaert fled with his wife, Rachel, to escape the battles near Ostend at the end of 1916. During the First World War Spilliaert found solace in literature.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

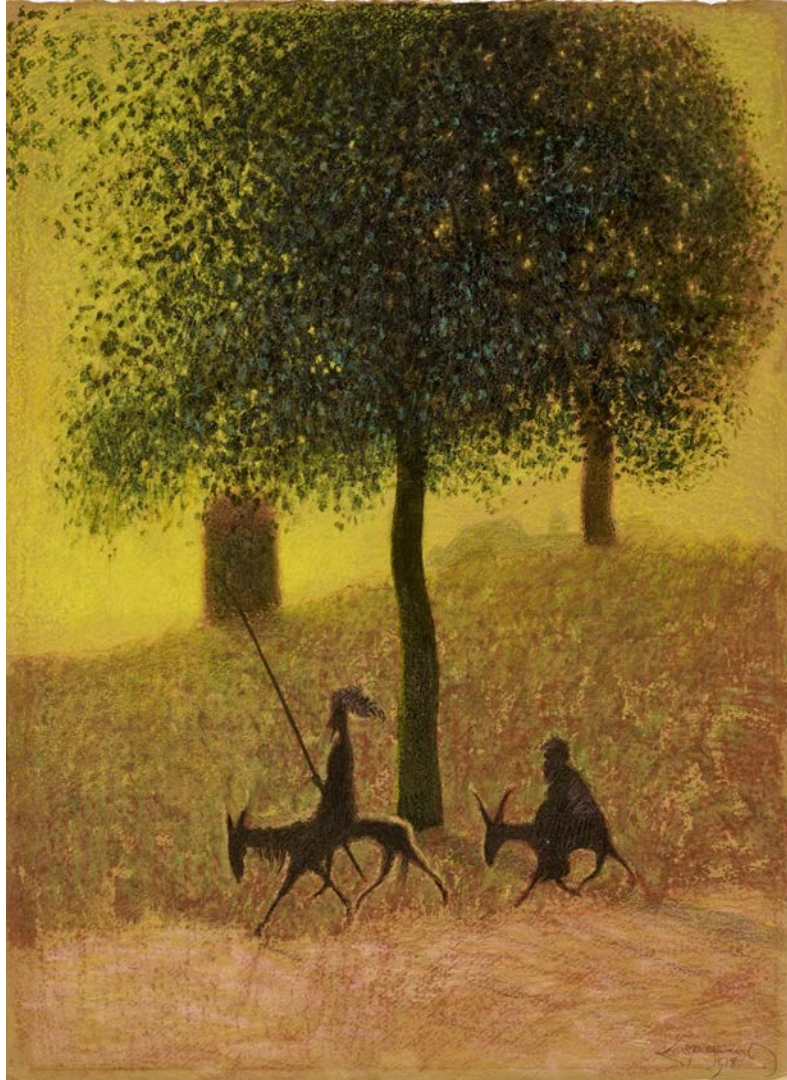
Hothouses II, 1917

Gouache, black chalk, colored pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

Maurice Maeterlinck's collection of symbolist poetry *Serres chaudes* (*Hothouses*), 1889, was a literary sensation; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911.

In 1917, Spilliaert designed a series of ten lithographs illustrating Maeterlinck's poems. This separate drawing captures the dark, moody mysticism of Maeterlinck's symbolist vision: seven sleepers lie in shallow beds scattered across a desolate, snow-covered landscape illuminated by the moon. The drawing evokes both expressionist and symbolist intensity, as the distorted terrain mirrors internal emotion and invites the viewer into a state of reverie.



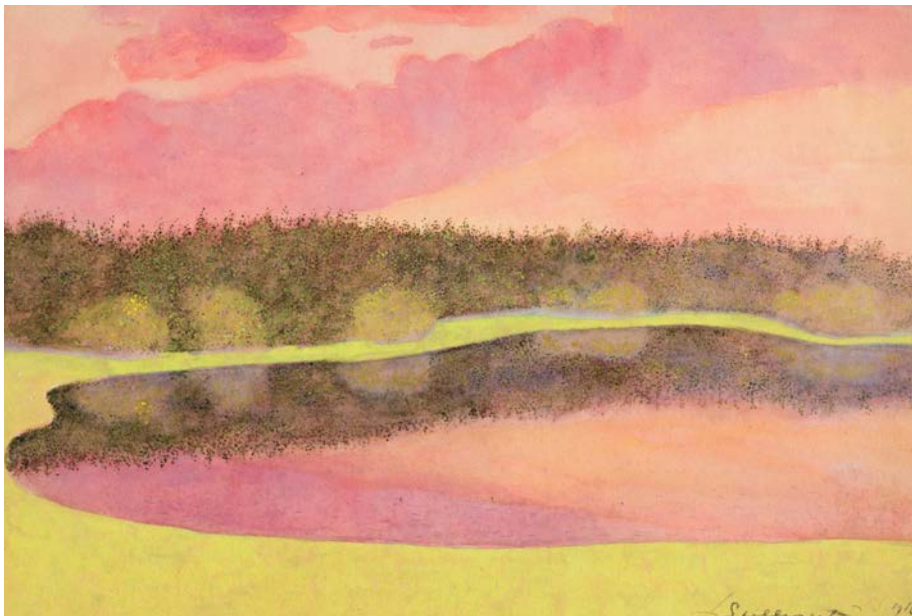
Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Don Quixote, 1918

Watercolor, pastel on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

As another of Spilliaert's literary subjects, the hapless but idealistic Don Quixote and his faithful companion Sancho Panza embody a stubborn quest for hope in the modern world. With the First World War raging at the time, this must have seemed like an "impossible dream."



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Pond in Marie Henriette Park, Pink Dawn, 1916

Watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

This is a luminous vision of a park in Ostend that features pink morning clouds reflected in the surface of a pond and stippled forms of trees and shrubs along the shoreline. Located just south of the city center, this park was created in the 1890s at the request of King Leopold II and eventually named after his wife, Maria Hendrika of Austria. *Avenue de la Reine* near *Marie Henriette Park*, displayed nearby, depicts the thoroughfare that connected this green space with the seawall and the Royal Chalet.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Blue and Yellow Seascape, c. 1934

Watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

Seascapes are among the most memorable of Spilliaert's works; his meditative paintings evoke his solitary experiences on the Ostend shore. Like the Norwegian Edvard Munch, he uses nature as a vehicle to express inner emotions and explore fragile psychological conditions. As Francine-Claire Legrand noted, "Like Munch, Spilliaert formed a hinge between Symbolism and Expressionism."

The taut horizontality of Spilliaert's *Blue and Yellow Seascape* transforms the natural landscape into a rigorous geometric composition. The illusion of great depth is countered by the dominant horizontal lines, matching in abstract harmony the dynamic energy of Munch's radical (if unfinished) *Waves* (see below).



Edvard Munch, *Waves*, 1908. Oil on canvas, Munch Museum, Oslo.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Beach Scene, Gloomy Seascape, 1925

Gouache on paper laid on panel

The Hearn Family Trust

In contrast to *Pond in Marie Henriette Park* (seen nearby), this is a rather somber, albeit elegant, panorama of the Belgian coast. An undertone of yearning pervades many of Spilliaert's images, which offer glimpses of infinite distance and boundless horizons. While Spilliaert dreamed of long sea voyages, he seldom traveled, remaining largely an observer of the sea from the stability of the shore.

Though not an academic or theorist, Spilliaert was deeply thoughtful and widely read. He admired the American poet Walt Whitman for his use of nature as a mirror to the soul, a hallmark of the Romantic tradition. As art historian Anne Adriaens-Pannier observes, Whitman "said that he could feel the whole world expanding within him," a sentiment that applies just as easily to Spilliaert.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
Fisherman's Wife with a Giant Crab, 1923

Oil on canvas

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert was fascinated by the life of the sea, a dominant presence in Ostend, a major port then and now. The intense colors of this sunset scene make it one of the artist's most expressionistic images. A fisherman's wife crouches on the shore, contemplating an enormous crab. Despite its potential for profit, critical to a working family, she seems moved by the existence of this almost prehistoric living being.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)
View of Florenville sur Semois from Martué, 1938
Watercolor, gouache, brush, ink on paper
The Hearn Family Trust

The Semois River winds through Gaume, the southernmost region of Belgium, which is bordered by France. This ancient land is the gateway to the Ardennes and boasts such notable monuments as the majestic ruins of the medieval Trappist Abbey of Orval and the castle of Godefroy de Bouillon, leader of the First Crusade. Uninterested in depicting these historic sites, Spilliaert focused instead on the picturesque scenery of the river, seen from the village of Martué, with only a tiny glimpse of the church steeple of Florenville visible in the far distance.

The winding river plain is veiled by the interlacing branches of the trees in the foreground, making a strong two-dimensional pattern on the surface of the work. Spilliaert combines his interest in trees, a defining theme of his later career, with a delightfully fresh view of the Belgian landscape. It is early spring, and only a few smaller trees have put forth new leaves. Might this be a symbolic reference to the recent marriage of his beloved daughter, Madeleine? His first grandson would be born in the fall of 1938.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Hills, the Heath, 1944

Watercolor, Indian ink, pen on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

In the summer of 1937, Spilliaert discovered the wild and deserted landscapes of the High Fens in eastern Belgium. The encounter with panoramic views of these vast and mysterious moors offered the artist a new subject, one that reawakened the symbolist feelings of melancholy and profound solitude so central in his early seascapes. In this animist landscape, the low-lying vegetation takes on a tactile quality, appearing almost like tufts of fur.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Cyclamens at the Park's Edge, 1937

Ink, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

One of the artist's most delightful floral compositions, these red cyclamens form a graceful arc, flanked on the right by fir branches. In the background, Spilliaert lightly sketches rocks and a portion of a stone gate. Cyclamens are beautiful flowers often said to signify both joy and humility; however, they can also represent departure, as they typically bloom at the end of summer. Spilliaert's daughter Madeleine was married in August of 1937, so this might be a commemorative image.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Vegetation with Lilies, April 25, 1913

Indian ink, pen, pencil on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Appearing almost as a photographic negative of silhouetted foliage and a central lily, the work's stark contrast of dark and light creates a near-scientific image of mystery. The composition feels both modern and mystical.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Pine Trees in the Snow, 1940

Watercolor, Indian ink, brush on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

Spilliaert's landscapes evoke interior moods and even spiritual states of mind. This rhythmic composition depicts a stately group of tall, slender pines whose drooping branches cascade downward at measured intervals toward a tangle of shrubs that writhe and curl at ground level. The geometry of the elegant pines contrasts with the sinuous, chaotic shrubbery.

While this peaceful forest offers both shelter and mystery, the eurhythmic lattice of the pine branches builds on the elegant repetitions of art nouveau and art deco designs, even suggesting parallels to music. This lyrical pattern introduces an element of abstraction perhaps inspired by Japanese prints.

While grounded in natural observation, the image is abstracted to create a mythic, dreamlike quality, bearing comparison to works by Khnopff and Edvard Munch. Those works, however, feature deep paths leading into dark forests, whereas Spilliaert's composition presents a nearly two-dimensional grid of tall pines. The viewer is kept at a distance from the forest interior, as the design remains firmly on the surface.



Fernand Khnopff,
*In Fosse: Under the
Fir Trees*, 1894. Oil
on canvas, Royal
Museums of Fine Arts
of Belgium, Brussels.



Edvard Munch, *New Snow*,
1900–01. Oil on canvas,
Munch Museum, Oslo.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Fig Tree in Winter, Grasse, 1923

Gouache, casein on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Fig trees are rare in Belgium; this specimen was painted in southern France. Spilliaert was introduced to Grasse (the perfume capital near the French Riviera) by Henri Van-deputte, a writer and director of the Kursaal in Ostend. As Spilliaert's father had been a luxury perfume merchant, this region may have held a special, evocative meaning for the artist. The deep blues of the night sky and monochromatic tracery of the tree and its bare branches create a haunting image of pattern and design in nature.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Lonely Trees in Winter, 1919

Sepia ink on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Spilliaert seems to have felt a deep kinship with the trees he depicted. Here he silhouettes these solitary forms against the winter snow. The bare branches appear sparse and brittle, as if they have endured a traumatic windstorm. The artist evokes the animist sensibility of the early nineteenth-century Romantics, who similarly utilized trees as an “objective correlative” for their own inner emotions.



Caspar David Friedrich, *The Lonely Tree*, 1822. Oil on canvas, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Undergrowth in the Snow, 1940

Watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

In this chilly tableau, the writhing forms of young trees seem to dance as they flank a snow-covered path. Although frozen in winter stasis, they remain vital and energetic—merely waiting for the spring thaw to burst forth once more.



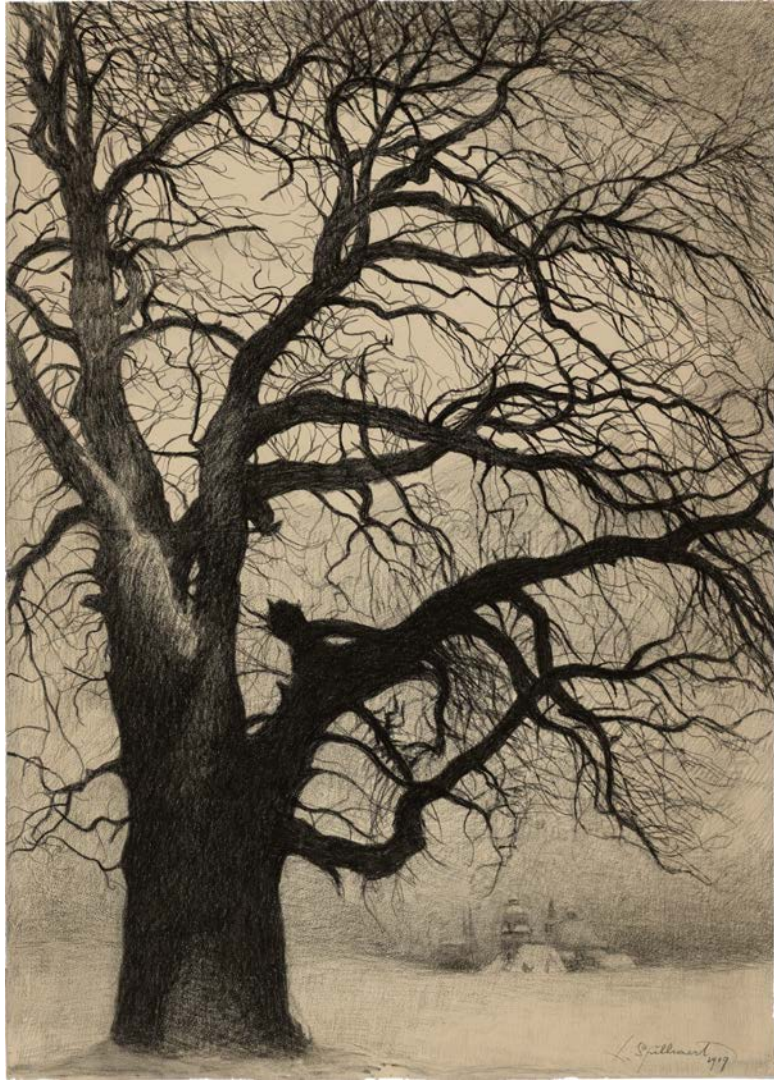
Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Green Trees, 1944

Indian ink, pencil, gouache, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Standing like sentinels in the dark forest, these tree trunks seem to reach out to each other with slender, undulating branches that weave them together. The scene is reminiscent of a dark fairy tale, perhaps one written by the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Tree in Winter, 1919

Pencil, Conté crayon, charcoal on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The twisting branches of this mighty tree evoke images of Romantic forests and the raw force of nature. These writhing limbs have been shaped by the strong offshore winds of the North Sea. Late in life, Spilliaert would focus on trees for a stunning series of images—several can be seen nearby in this gallery.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Trees at the End of Winter, March 1941

Chinese ink, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

Regarding his deep love of nature and trees, the art historian Anne Adriaens-Pannier observed of Spilliaert:

Ever since his youth, trees were a constant presence in Spilliaert's works. Reading Virgil opened his mind even more to the particularities of each tree, their specific place in cultivated or wild habitats, and their individual characteristics. As he formerly distinguished a wide variety of forms in the structure of dikes, breakwaters, and beaches, Spilliaert now constructed a complete vocabulary, almost architectural, from the unique characteristics of his preferred age-old trees.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Trees in the Flood, 1944

Watercolor, Indian ink, washes, pen on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

A dreamlike, almost surreal, image of trees emerges from the still waters of a flood. The delicate branches remain bare, signaling the dead of winter. Nonetheless, the trees endure, encouraged by a resilient patch of green in the shrubbery at the lower right. The landscape seems to be holding its breath, awaiting both the change of seasons and the recession of the floodwaters. One wonders: is this perhaps a symbolic parallel to a nation awaiting the end of the war?



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Treetop and Branches in Winter, 1940

Pencil, Indian ink, pen, watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

The simplicity of this drawing is deeply engaging, focusing solely on the upper trunk and branches silhouetted against a foggy sky. The delicate interlace of these slender limbs creates a complex linear pattern within a shallow, compressed space. Although it depicts a winter scene, the tips of the branches are beginning to put forth new shoots—a poignant sign of returning life during a difficult time of war.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Nuns in the Forest, 1936

Watercolor on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

Human figures, landscapes, and natural motifs correspond through a shared economy of means, where the strangeness of the visible world becomes a mirror for inner anxiety. Far from any anecdotal narrative, Spilliaert's work transforms the external world into a mental space—one inhabited by silence, expectation, and tension—that serves as a privileged site for existential meditation. His art combats the “disenchantment” of the world so often characteristic of modern culture, seeking instead to restore a profound sense of beauty and mystery.



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

Trunks of Beech Trees in Spring, 1945

Watercolor, gouache on paper

The Hearn Family Trust

After moving away from the Ostend coast later in life, Spilliaert focused on the infinite variety and mysterious presence of trees. Veils of watercolor capture the light and give a lyrical modulation to the composition. He emphasizes the trees' volume with dark, thick outlines, while delicately drawn pen lines enliven the outgrowths and crevices of the ancient bark.

Spilliaert created contemplative images of nature through the columnar forms of tree trunks seen in close perspective, resembling generalized forms of sculpture or architecture. The mood of solitude and isolation in these works has roots in the traditions of Romanticism and symbolism, whose artists viewed nature as an animist counterpart to the soul; here, these sentinels of the forest replace human forms. As Baudelaire wrote in his seminal symbolist poem "Correspondances":

Nature is a temple where the living pillars
Sometimes emit perplexing messages
Man moves through forests of symbols...



Léon Spilliaert (1881 Ostend–Brussels 1946)

The Open Door: Waiting, 1945

Pencil, watercolor, Indian ink wash, pen on paper

The Hearn Family Foundation

One of his final works, *The Open Door: Waiting* highlights the artist's mature technique. Spilliaert painted two other versions of this scene in 1938 and 1946, both now in private collections.

Posed as if within a stage set, the woman in the doorway is rendered with a delicate field of controlled cross-hatching. The figure, seen from behind, recalls Caspar David Friedrich's many Romantic *Rückenfigur* compositions (see image); because we cannot see her face and can only partially glimpse her view, the spectator is drawn deeper into the work.

This dreamlike atmosphere also recalls the oneiric images of the surrealists. Here, the barrier between interior and exterior becomes mysterious as the woman stands on the threshold, contemplating the forest beyond. In the shadows of the doorway, it appears as if the trees are entering the house—a truly liminal space suspended between inner and outer worlds, and between waking and dreaming.



Caspar David Friedrich, *The Woman at the Window*, 1822.
Oil on canvas, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.