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| Ensor, James Sydney Edouard (1860–1949) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, James Ensor (b. 1860 Ostend, Belgium – d. 1949 Ostend, Belgium) worked during the summer months in a souvenir shop owned by his family in the Belgian seaside resort of Ostend. His artistic career took place in the political, financial and cultural capital of Brussels, which was a train ride away from his home. From 1877 to 1880 he attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, where he participated in the *Les XX* group, the *La Libre Esthétique* artistic society, and the *Galérie Georges Giroux* gallery. He took part in the cultural life and nightlife of Brussels, where he met literary friends, art lovers, and his mistress Augusta Boogaerts.  Ensor believed that the capital sin of producing aesthetic banality could be successfully combated by constantly exploring new subject matter, genres, techniques, materials, styles, and artistic disciplines (he wrote articles and composed music as well). Ensor explored the possibilities of any specific artistic project usually by radicalising an existing model. His desire to experiment with realism, symbolism, impressionism, Rembrandt’s light, the grotesque repertoire of Hiëronymus Bosch and Francisco Goya, or the farces of Pieter Brueghel resulted in iconographic and stylistic incoherent drawings and paintings with a surreal character. Occasionally Ensor used line, form, brush strokes, and colour in an almost autonomous manner. He often employed one of his favoured images, the mask, as an ambiguous and psychologically affecting motif (usually as an instrument of unmasking).  Since the 1960s, scholars have investigated the subversive function of Ensor’s combination of social and political satire, religious subject matter and a highly private iconography. |
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| Further reading:  (Berman)  (Draguet)  (Fraenger)  (Todts)  (Verhaeren) |