

CHRISTIE'S

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JAMES ENSOR PRINTS

THE MIRA JACOB COLLECTION

OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON, 19 MARCH



The Deadly Sins dominated by Death, from: The Seven Deadly Sins
Drypoint and etching extensively handcoloured with watercolour and gouache, 1904
Estimate: £25,000–35,000

London - Christie's is pleased to announce the sale of *James Ensor Prints: The Mira Jacob Collection*, which will be offered on Wednesday, 19 March in London. This remarkable collection is one of the most comprehensive groups of the artist's graphic oeuvre in private hands, comprising 161 works dating from 1886 through to 1931. Included are many hand-coloured proofs, some great rarities and all of the artist's most important printed subjects. The collection was carefully put together by the Parisian gallerist and collector Mira Jacob, one of the great champions of surrealist art, and provides a unique insight into the salient themes of Ensor's art, ranging from delightfully quiet landscapes to scathing satire, and from symbolist nightmares populated by skeletons and ghouls, angels and demons, to scenes from the life of Christ. The sale of the collection presents an exceptional opportunity for established and new collectors around the world and is expected to realise in the region of £1 million.

Murray Macaulay, Head of Sale, London, comments: *Fantastical, macabre, subversive - the art of James Ensor is as startling today as it was to his contemporaries. Drawing on the satirical tradition of Bosch and Bruegel, and inspired by the 'gothic' literature of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Ensor's grotesque, often darkly comical fantasies lambasted the status quo and exposed the unsavoury side of human nature. Once an inspiration to André Breton and the Surrealists, Ensor's bizarre imagery resonates today with a contemporary audience nurtured on the uncanny cinematic visions of film directors such as*

Guillermo Del Toro and Tim Burton. *The Mira Jacob Collection of James Ensor Prints celebrates Ensor as an artist and printmaker whose oeuvre is as quirky and personal as it is universal.*

Madame Mira Jacob (1912-2004) was a renowned figure in the Parisian art world. Her gallery *Le Bateau-Lavoir*, located on the rue de Seine, made its name with exhibitions of surrealist art, of which Jacob was a passionate advocate. In Ensor she recognised one of the great precursors of Surrealism and in 1978 held an exhibition devoted to the artist, composed entirely of prints from her private collection. The collection was subsequently exhibited at the Strasbourg Museum and the Kunstmuseum Basel in 1995-96.

The sale is led by a remarkable hand-coloured etching titled *The Deadly Sins dominated by Death*, 1904 (estimate: £25,000-30,000, *illustrated first page*), which forms part of a series of *The Seven Deadly Sins (Les Sept Péchés Capitaux)* created over a period of sixteen years, from 1888 to 1904. This print presents the winged figure of Death presiding over an allegory of each sin: Sloth, represented by a somnolent man in a nightgown and cap, with a snail crawling over him; Envy, bearing a bloody knife; Gluttony, relishing a sausage; Lust, who fondles a woman who then accosts him in anger; Avarice, clutching a bag of gold, and Pride, represented by a soldier sporting a bearskin hat. Unusually, Ensor extended the image beyond the platemark by attaching strips of paper to the sheet at right and left and coloured it so extensively in gouache that the print becomes a small, jewel-like painting.



Further highlights include *The Entry of Christ into Brussels (L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles)*, 1898, which was executed after the painting of 1888-1889, now in the Getty Museum, Los Angeles (estimate: £40,000-60,000, *illustrated right*). The figure of Christ is an important theme within Ensor's oeuvre. No fewer than thirteen of his etchings depict scenes from the life of Christ. In this etching, Ensor has imagined Jesus arriving as a revolutionary political figure during the maelstrom of the Brussels carnival. The artist regularly attended carnivals in Ostend and Brussels and was fascinated by the energy and noise of the crowds and their latent potential for violence.

The subject of his famous work, *Hop Frog's Revenge (La Vengeance de Hop Frog)*, 1898 (estimate: £30,000-40,000, *illustrated left*), derives from the short story of the same title by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the American author, poet, editor, and literary critic, with whom Ensor shared an equally developed taste for the uncanny and macabre. The artist found great appeal in these transformations both artistically and philosophically. In *Hop-Frog* a grotesque series of insults leads to a horrifying tale of retribution. The dwarf Hop-Frog seeks revenge on his king and court after being ridiculed for his ugliness. He convinces the king and his ministers to dress as orangutans in costumes made from tar and feathers and chain themselves to a chandelier. The chandelier is set on fire and illuminates the ballroom for a horrified crowd.



In total, the collection offers four impressions of *Hop Frog's Revenge* (*La Vengeance de Hop Frog*), including the exquisitely hand-coloured example (*illustrated second page left*); a fine and rare impression of the first state (estimate: £15,000-20,000); one of the second, final state (estimate: £7,000 - 10,000); and an extremely rare lithographic version of the same subject (estimate: £6,000 - 8,000).

Ensor's web-footed Death hovering over a shrieking crowd of people in *Death pursuing a Flock of Humans* (*La Mort poursuivant le troupeau des humains*), 1896 (estimate: £30,000-40,000, *illustrated right*) is a comical take on the traditional iconography of the Triumph of Death. As in the medieval tradition of the *Danse macabre*, Death is the great leveller, who reaps all of humanity, irrespective of status, wealth, power or moral virtue. The crowd is made up of all of society - men and women, soldiers, monks, judges, kings and peasants. In the artist's depiction of this teeming mass, Ensor took inspiration from Edgar Allan Poe's tale *The Man of the Crowd*, a vision of mankind blinded by mundane concerns and desires. With his characteristically savage humour, Ensor turns this into a burlesque comedy of Death. The crowd uncontrollably rushes forward; an endless mass of humanity hurtling towards an unavoidable fate.



Illustrating the breadth of the collection, from left to right: *Poster for the Ostend Carnival* (*Affiche pour le Carnaval d'Ostende*), 1931, a brightly coloured lithograph on wove paper (estimate: £2,000-3,000, *illustrated above left*); *The Pisser* (*Le Pisseur*), 1887 (estimate: £2,500-3,500, *illustrated above centre*), an etching depicting a top-hatted gentleman relieving himself on a graffiti-covered wall scrawled with the legend *Ensor is a mad man* (*Ensor est un fou*) – a bawdy riposte to his critics; *Fridolin and Gragapança of Yperdamme* (*Fridolin et Gragapança d'Yperdamme*), 1895, a hand-coloured etching representing a flute playing Ensor (Fridolin) and his friend Eugène Demolder (Gragapança) dancing to his tune and referencing to a short story written by Demolder (estimate: £10,000 - 15,000, *illustrated above right*).

PRESS CONTACT

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PUBLIC EXHIBITION:

Saturday, 15 March: 12:00pm – 5:00pm

Sunday, 16 March: 12:00pm – 5:00pm

Monday, 17 March: 9:00am – 4:30pm

Tuesday, 18 March: 9:00am – 8:00pm

AUCTION:*James Ensor Prints: The Mira Jacob Collection*

Wednesday, 19 March 2013

10:30am

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