

Masking the inhuman in us all

Antwerp's Fine Arts Museum links three masters of the grotesque

REBECCA BENOOT

Goya, Redon, Ensor. At first glance, these three renowned painters have very little in common. But when you delve a little deeper into these eclectic oeuvres, you'll notice their mutual fascination and depiction of the grotesque is a remarkable theme that links these three diverse artists and forms the basis of this extraordinary exhibition in Antwerp.

On entering the show at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, you're confronted with a line from Victor Hugo's *Cromwell*: "The grotesque will play the role of the beast in man". A taste of things to come.

All three artists were each in his own right pioneers of modern art. Goya portrayed inner turmoil and the horror of his era, Redon became one of the leading symbolists with his bizarre and fantastical drawings, and Ensor, slowly but surely, banished all realism from his colourful and very expressive paintings.

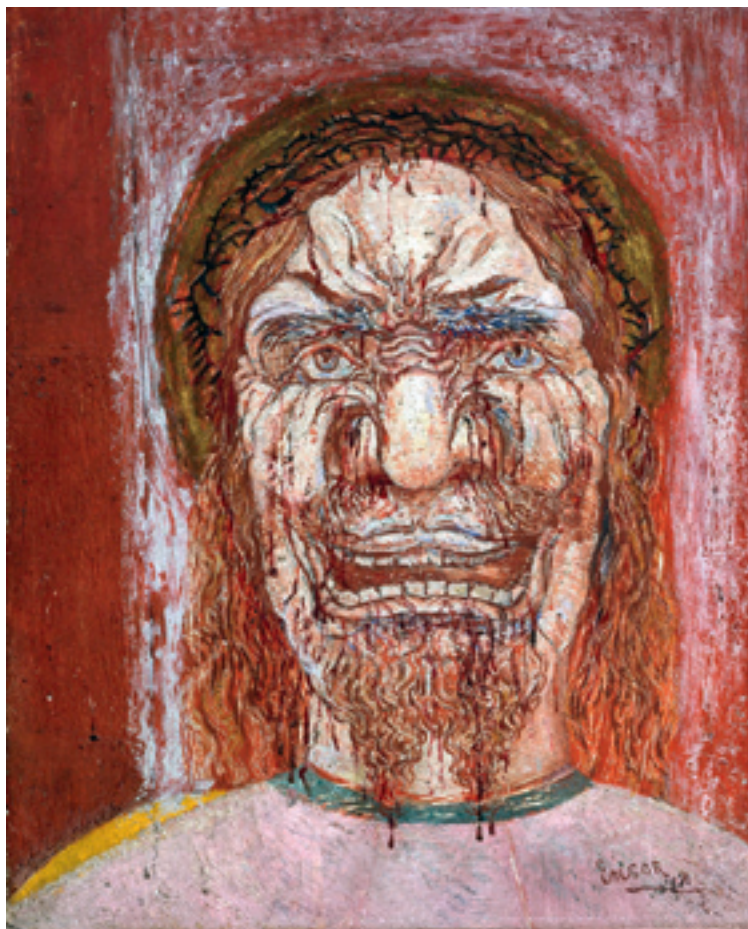
The influence of Goya, a former 18th-century Spanish court painter, on the 19th century Redon and Ensor was immense. They were inspired by his morbid and absurd combinations of demons, devils and anguish. An entire room is dedicated to his sinister etchings of human folly, where Goya portrays the darker side of human nature

in all its shapes and sizes, often covered up with masks – a notion that was revived in Ensor's later work.

The exhibition alternates light rooms with darker ones, suggesting that you are entering the belly of the beast. Redon figures heavily in the darker, more intimate spaces. The French painter and printmaker's work is simple yet symbolic, melancholy yet surreal. The morbid constructions enhance the monster-filled dream world of this mad genius – a place both brutal and surprisingly peaceful.

Finally, our own Belgian Ensor, whose love for bright colours and masks have made him legendary. Not only masks but also faces are hidden in the most surprising places in his drawings and vivid paintings. He sought to emphasise the ornamental aspect of the grotesque, literally masking the hidden truths of humanity. Together with Redon, he is also responsible for the highlight of the exhibition, a series of disquieting drawings inspired by the works of Edgar Allen Poe.

The Museum of Fine Arts, which already holds the majority of Ensor's work, gathered many of the other paintings, drawings and prints from around the globe. *Goya, Redon, Ensor* is an ideal run up to the 2010 Ensor Year.



Goya, Redon, Ensor

Royal Museum of Fine Arts - Leopold De Waelplaats, Antwerp

Until 14 June

→ www.kmska.be

new music

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

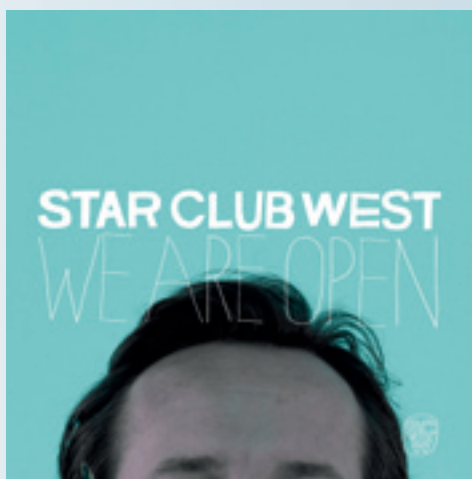
Star Club West

Inneke 23 & The Lipstick Painters

We've said this before, and it's still true: the last few years, Ghent has become Flanders' rock capital. It's a position that, during the 1990s, was proudly held by Antwerp. But that doesn't mean 't Stad, as its denizens like to call it, is no source of good music anymore. On the contrary! Star Club West and Inneke 23 & The Lipstick Painters serve as Antwerp exhibits A and B.

Will their fourth album *We Are Open* help Star Club West rise from being unsung heroes to, at least, cult status? They deserve it, that's for sure. Sparkling melodies are countered by buzzing sounds – a jamming transmitter in "It Is Working" and do we really hear a typewriter in "54"? – that always result in catchy tunes.

Star Club West gravitates around the songs of Nico Jacobs, who is partial to krautrock, the repetitive German music from the 1970s. That is never more blatant than in the hypnotising, slowly disintegrating closing song "What about that Lofi Ghost Track". An amazing effort, since even the sonic thunderstorm can't oust the melancholy that's always present in Star Club West tunes. Apart from the one misfire "Brilliant in Our Bites", *We*



Are Open is top-notch.

Another too-little-known from Antwerp's underground scene is Inneke 23, who used to be in de Bossen, a threesome that specialised in trashy garage rock (their amazing "Speed Queen" is for sale on iTunes). A decade ago, de Bossen was invited by BBC Radio One for the legendary Peel Sessions, but their management didn't find it appropriate since their record hadn't been released

in the UK yet. How wrong can you be? The momentum for de Bossen dwindled almost as quickly as it had risen, and the band more or less imploded.

But Inneke 23 kept on making music, and, backed by The Lipstick Painters, she has just released her second album *Charcoal*. It's an enchanting collection of country rock, and it comes as no surprise that Inneke 23 honours, in "Star Car", Gram Parsons, the long-deceased but not forgotten master of the genre.

She even manages to smuggle him into her cover of the The Stranglers' punk anthem "No More Heroes", in which she also praises Flemish author Louis Paul Boon (as Louis Paul Bonnie!). Admittedly, her accent with the English lyrics is sometimes a bit, erm, unusual, but hey, most people from Antwerp even have an accent in their native Dutch. It doesn't matter, anyway; *Charcoal* is a collection of heartfelt songs. That's what counts.

→ www.starclubwest.be

→ www.inneke23.be

CULTURE NEWS

ALAN HOPE

The *FC De Kampioenen* movie has been cancelled, the VRT announced. Apparently some of the actors concerned found the screenplay not up to their expectations. "The story just wasn't good enough," said Herman Verbruggen, who plays Markske. A spokeswoman from VRT said: "If we can't count on the whole-hearted commitment of the entire team, then it makes no sense to launch a movie project," said a spokeswoman for the VRT. The scriptwriter, Koen Vermeiren, has already written 20 episodes of the long-running Flemish sitcom.

Disco and New Wave diva **Grace Jones** has been added to the bill of Rock Werchter, organisers announced. Jones, now 60, recently released her first record in 20 years and played a well-received show at the Ancienne Belgique in Brussels.

The new **Leuven city museum M** has cancelled a preview opening on 25 and 26 April in order to allow building work to continue. The White Opening was intended to give an advance look at the building before its official opening in September. But much work still needs to be done before a visit from the international museums commission in May, whose opinion is crucial for M's ability to organise future international exhibitions.

Schoolchildren and students will be able to take De Lijn busses and trams to **cultural events for free**, announced the Flemish education and mobility ministries.



The **replacement for Kathleen Aerts** (above), who recently announced her departure from the kiddy-pop group K3, will be decided on a new reality TV series, a co-operation between Studio 100, which founded and sponsors K3, and broadcaster VTM. Aerts is leaving the group after 10 years to pursue a solo career.

Flemish director **Stijn Coninx** won two awards for his new film *Soeur Sourire* at the Valenciennes film festival last month in northern France. The film, about the life of the singing nun Jeanine Deckers, opens in Belgian cinemas on 6 May.