

DECADENCE AND DARK DREAMS

Belgian Symbolism

16.09.2020
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ALTE NATIONALGALERIE
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Bodestraße 1-3
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EXHIBITION
18.09.2020 – 17.01.2021

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An exhibition of the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, with the support of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, made possible by the Freunde der Nationalgalerie.

PRESS RELEASE

The sensual gaze of a jaded society on the brink of the abyss, the morbid attraction of Thanatos and Eros: these are subjects in art which found expression at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in Belgian Symbolism. The large-scale special exhibition “Decadence and Dark Dreams”, with over 180 works in the Alte Nationalgalerie, is dedicated to this artistic trend that emerged in the 1880s with Brussels as a major centre.

Belgian Symbolism is characterised by a special predilection for morbid and decadent themes. Death and dissipation were recurring motifs even around the middle of the century, and can be traced back to sculptors such as George Minne and that master of the absurd, James Ensor. Inspired by contemporary literature, the artists around 1900 were linked by a new mysticism with an extravagant and sumptuous style. In this context the femme fatale became a central figure as an expression of over-abundance and lust. Symbolism, however, did not just influence portraiture and figure painting, but was also reflected in landscape painting and eerie interior scenes.

The extensive special exhibition with over 180 works on loan from international collections and Belgium’s most important museums, including Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent, introduces the entire spectrum of Belgian artistic positions previously little-known in Germany – like Fernand Khnopff, Léon Spilliaert, Félicien Rops, James Ensor and Jean Delville – as an important reference for Symbolism. Of special note, from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, is Khnopff’s sphinx-like “The Caresses”: an absolute icon of Belgian Symbolism. Works by artists such as Max Klinger, Edward Burne-Jones, Arnold Böcklin, Edvard Munch, Gustave Moreau and Gustav Klimt allow placement within the broader European context.

The exhibition is supported by the Royal Museums of Art in Belgium, and made possible by the Freunde der Nationalgalerie. An extensive catalogue will be published by the Hirmer Verlag.

Originally planned to run from 15 May until 13 September 2020, the exhibition has been postponed due to the museum’s Corona virus related closure. You can find the latest updates about hygienic precautions and special opening hours for the new exhibition at: www.smb.museum

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Further information on the exhibition, including press images for download, can be found in the press section of the websites: www.freunde-der-nationalgalerie.de, and www.smb.museum

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