



Léon  
**Spilliaert**

Royal  
Academy  
of Arts



Leon Spilliaert  
Sept 1903

**Léon**  
**Spilliaert**

Royal Academy of Arts

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'Léon Spilliaert'

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### Editorial notes

Unless otherwise stated, all illustrated works of art are by Léon Spilliaert (1881–1946).

All dimensions are given in centimetres, height before width (before depth).

Where known, media are listed in order of application.

### Illustrations

Front cover: *Woman at the Shoreline*, 1910 (detail of cat. 45). Indian ink, coloured pencil and pastel on paper, 47.1 x 60.2 cm. Private collection

Page 2: detail of cat. 75

Page 6: detail of cat. 55

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Page 42: detail of *Heures ternes* from *Les Serres chaudes* (cat. 19)

Pages 52–53: detail of cat. 4

Back cover: *Self-portrait with Blue Background*, 1907 (cat. 76). Indian ink wash, brush, pastel, coloured pencil and coloured chalk on paper mounted on canvas, 77 x 63 cm. KBL European Private Bankers S.A.

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# President's Foreword

Although the work of Léon Spilliaert has been shown on three separate occasions at the Royal Academy – as part of 'Ensor to Permeke: Nine Flemish Painters, 1880–1950' in 1971, 'Impressionism to Symbolism: The Belgian Avant-Garde, 1880–1900' in 1994 and, most recently, 'James Ensor by Luc Tuymans' in 2016 – this singular, self-taught artist has, somewhat surprisingly, never had a monographic exhibition in the United Kingdom. Over seventy years after he died, 'Léon Spilliaert' is a unique opportunity to appreciate at first hand a representative body of this artist's extraordinarily intense and diverse work.

An artist of great technical skill, Spilliaert eschewed oil paint to work in combinations of Indian ink wash with brush and pen, pencil, Conté crayon, charcoal, chalk, pastel, watercolour and gouache, producing layered works of profound depth and ambiguity. Like many artists, poets, playwrights, novelists and thinkers of the period he was, for a time, consumed with an existential angst that led him to produce a sequence of extraordinary self-portraits. In these brooding works his eyes are prominent features, serving as both his window onto the world and a window into his soul. As a young man, driven by insomnia brought on by illness, he walked the streets of Ostend, his home town, at night, depicting the buildings, promenade and beach in adventurous ways often with dramatic viewpoints. Spilliaert was a daring and innovative artist who challenged the artistic conventions of the day. He explored new ways of perceiving the world, prompting the viewer to look at that familiar world again with new eyes.

This exhibition has been expertly curated by Dr Anne Adriaens-Pannier and Dr Adrian Locke, in conjunction with Leïla Jarbouai at the musée d'Orsay, Paris, and with the invaluable help of Anna Testar and Dr Noémie Goldman. Dr Adriaens-Pannier, Artistic Director of Het Spilliaert Huis, Ostend, and former Curator at the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, is the foremost expert working on Léon Spilliaert with numerous exhibitions and publications on the artist to her name. The exhibition would not have been possible without her dedicated involvement. We would particularly like to thank Luc Tuymans, a passionate advocate of Spilliaert; it was thanks to his urging that the seed of this exhibition was first planted. Flora Fricker and Nancy Cooper have expertly overseen all aspects of the management of the exhibition.

'Léon Spilliaert' is a partnership with the musée d'Orsay, who have the largest institutional collection of Spilliaert's work outside Belgium. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Laurence des Cars, Hélène Flon, Stéphanie de Brabander and Isabelle Gaëtan, as well as Ms Jarbouai. We would like to acknowledge all the lenders to this exhibition, especially those museums and institutions in Belgium that have lent so generously. In addition we would like to thank the numerous private collectors, many of whom wish to remain anonymous, for their loans which have made this exhibition possible. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Flanders for its support.

[Name here]

President, Royal Academy of Arts

# Sponsor's Foreword

The Government of Flanders is delighted to support this unique exhibition of the work of Léon Spilliaert (1881–1946). He is one of our artists who reinvented the imagery of introspection, using desolate domestic interiors and deserted landscapes that mirror a state of mind.

The aura and history of the Royal Academy contribute to Spilliaert's international recognition. We witnessed this force during our cooperation in 2016, when the RA showed the works of James Ensor who was, like Spilliaert, a native of Ostend. Whilst wandering around in this 'queen of the Flemish seaside resorts', one can linger in the same settings as in the works now on show in London.

May those who discover Spilliaert for the first time be encouraged to learn more about Flanders' enchanting heritage. The museums in Ostend, Bruges, Mechelen, Leuven, Antwerp and Ghent exhibit works worth knowing and will welcome you with open arms.

*Jan Jambon*

Minister-president of the Government of Flanders and Flemish  
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Culture, ICT and Facility Management





L. Spilliaert  
09

# Littoral



45

**Woman at the Shoreline, 1910**

Indian ink, coloured pencil and  
pastel on paper, 47.1 × 60.2 cm  
Private collection

46

**Signal Pole on the Pier, 1907**

Indian ink wash, brush, pen and  
coloured pencil on paper, 40.5 × 50.5 cm  
Private collection  
Not exhibited



Please retouch shadows on either side from frame

47

**Promenade, Light Reflections, 1908**

Indian ink wash, brush and coloured pencil on paper, 48 × 38.5 cm  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

48

**Hofstraat, Ostend, 1908**

Gouache, watercolour and pastel on paper, 63 × 48.5 cm  
Private collection. Courtesy of Francis Maere Fine Arts, Ghent





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