

## BOOKS

in an unfinished state, as this allowed him to avoid the oily, lush, overworked surfaces he associated with academic painting. To this end he also frequently used mixed media – pastel, crayon and charcoal are often combined with paint – making the actual definition of what constitutes a ‘painting’ by Munch controversial. On top of this, many paintings are in an extremely fragile state. Munch is renowned for his rough treatment of his work: his ‘kill-or-cure’ remedy even involved leaving his paintings outdoors, exposed to the elements for long periods of time. Opinion is divided over whether this was a deliberate attempt on Munch’s part to ‘distress’ the surfaces of his paintings or whether it was mere carelessness. The former argument is more convincing, but whichever view one takes it is undeniable that Munch’s actions had a catastrophic effect on the conservation of his paintings.

Dating is also an issue that has dogged attempts to publish a scholarly overview of Munch’s paintings. The many different versions that the artist made of his best-known motifs are frequently undated or retrospectively and unreliably dated, which has made establishing a systematic chronology extremely complicated. As recently as 2001 controversy raged, for example, over the re-dating of the Munch-museet’s version of *The scream* from 1893 to 1910 (although the new date is followed by a question mark in the catalogue to indicate that there are still unresolved problems). It is now generally understood that Munch painted this new version of *The scream* to replace the 1893 motif that he had sold in 1910 to Olav Schou, who immediately donated the famous painting to the Nasjonalgalleriet in Oslo. As Patricia Berman points out in her interesting essay that introduces volume four of the catalogue (‘The Many Lives of Edvard Munch’), pragmatic concerns like replacing an important painting he had sold in order to guarantee that it would still be available for exhibition may well underlie Munch’s practice of painting several versions of his best-known motifs. This challenges the romantic view that Munch obsessively repeated images associated with the traumas of his childhood, thus throwing radical new light on his artistic practice – a revision that is much needed given the plethora of romantic myths that have grown up around him. In 1910 a new version of *The scream* might also be associated with the, by then, middle-aged artist’s dialogue with Expressionism and Fauvism, or even viewed as a response to the emergence of young Norwegian ‘Matisse students’. As Berman concludes: ‘When located within a systematic chronology, Munch’s inspiration for what to create, and his choices of when to do so, become clearer’.

Throughout this four-volume publication, Woll clearly intends to produce a catalogue that is not just a convenient tool for art dealers and collectors but also provokes art-historical reflection and debate. Each volume has an introductory essay: first a general meditation on ‘Munch’s Painted



46. *Puberty*, by Edvard Munch. 1895. Canvas, 150 by 110 cm. (Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo).

Works’ by Woll, which lucidly sets out the history of the project and discusses topics such as authentication, dating and various categories of motif in Munch’s *œuvre*. In volume two there is an essay on technical aspects of Munch’s paintings, followed by an essay in volume three on Munch’s monumental decorations for the aula of Oslo University. In the fourth volume we find Berman’s essay, which might usefully have been placed alongside Woll’s introduction in volume one, as it provides a helpful conceptual framework and guide for the non-experts and students who will be interested in this catalogue. Not only does Berman give an overview of the different trends in Munch scholarship, but she also ‘deconstructs’ the romantic myths that have tended to equate Munch’s life and work and ‘explain’ his paintings by referring to the artist’s own poetic, autobiographical prose. She points out that Munch participated actively in the construction of his own myth and was indeed a relentless self-publicist. Interestingly, Munch approached writing and image-making in a similar way, endlessly returning to his literary motifs across the years to forge repetitions and variations so that the original experiences he recounts become ‘veiled by poetic recapitulation’ (p.1,288). Rather than use these literary fragments to ‘explain’ the paintings – a trap that many commentators on Munch’s work have fallen into – we should be aware that they too were often penned with a particular promotional event in mind such as an exhibition or a new biography. The tendency to isolate Munch as a towering individual and forefather of modern art fails to address the fact that ‘his textual experimentation, as well as his visual expression’ needs to be contextualised within ‘the advanced literary milieu of turn-of-the-century Scandinavia’ (p.1,289).

Beyond these areas of art-historical interest the catalogue of paintings functions well as a tool to assist research into Munch’s painted *œuvre*. The standard of colour reproduction is high (Fig.46), there are many interesting documentary photographs and detailed cross-references between individual works. The catalogue entries are factual rather than interpretative which, in the case of this particular artist, comes as something of a relief. Despite the vast number of paintings under discussion most of Munch’s mature work has an exhibition history, although there are many paintings from the early years that are far less well known. The first volume of the catalogue contains an informative biography, while the final volume has several supplementary tools, including archive photographs and a price list from the Commetersche Kunsthandlung in Hamburg dating from 1906–07 (which was the first extensive record of Munch’s paintings), a full list of exhibitions, an index of portraits, a chronological index with thumbnail illustrations of all 1,789 paintings, a full bibliography, a list of paintings in museums and public collections and, finally, an alphabetical index of titles, which is reprinted at the back of each volume. The fact that we are dealing with four unwieldy volumes is not made any the easier by the decision to list catalogue and page numbers in this index but not volume number, so that you have to be familiar with the catalogue before you can use this vital tool effectively.

Nevertheless, the abiding impression left by this first catalogue raisonné of Munch’s paintings is its impressive scholarship. As Woll points out, it fulfils in print Munch’s dream that his work should not, in his words, ‘disappear like a small scratch hanging on the wall in a home where only a couple of people can see it’, but rather be judged as a whole, with each work resonating as part of a larger entity.

#### James Ensor. The complete paintings.

By Xavier Tricot. 480 pp. incl. 845 col. + 145 b. & w. ills. (Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009), €198. ISBN 978-3-7757-2465-4.

Reviewed by PATRICK FLORIZOONE

SIXTY YEARS AFTER the death of James Ensor (1860–1949), work on an inventory of his varied *œuvre* – paintings, etchings, lithographs, drawings, speeches, interviews, letters and music scores – still continues. Five volumes have already been devoted to his graphic work, three of which appeared during the artist’s lifetime. That unknown states of his prints still emerge attests to the fact that Ensor was anything but thorough as a record keeper and provided authors with inaccurate information.

The artist’s lack of thoroughness also plays a role when compiling a catalogue of his paintings. During his long and active career, from

1873 to 1941, Ensor painted more than 850 works. Xavier Tricot, who has been studying Ensor's *œuvre* for thirty years, did not receive a ready guide from the artist himself. On the contrary, Ensor's writings are not only incomplete but also ambiguous and imprecise. He backdated several works and also made later copies of his own works that nevertheless retained the original date, while he frequently exhibited his paintings with new titles. Then there is the problem, as with any sought-after painter, of authenticity, and of what exactly constitutes a 'painting'; he made several works on prepared panel using pencil or watercolour and (almost) no oil. Thus are there plenty of pitfalls before any definitive statements can be made.

The book consists of two parts: a biography and a catalogue, the latter also including an extensive bibliography and list of exhibitions. The first edition of this work dates from 1992, which was published in two volumes with mostly black-and-white images. The 780 pages of that edition were almost entirely taken up by the catalogue, while the biography was a mere eight pages. The difference with the current edition is remarkable: one volume with many colour illustrations and a catalogue that takes up two hundred of the 480 pages.

Making lists of his own works was important for Ensor, although this was the result of practical rather than scholarly considerations. Since he did not like to lend his works for fear of damage, or because there was too much work involved in the transportation, or because a painting lacked a frame, he often referred exhibition organisers to collectors, sometimes putting them under pressure, for example, by insisting on a sale with the understanding that the work would be available as a loan to an exhibition.

One of those lists was made by Ensor in 1929 on the occasion of his retrospective exhibition in Brussels. Tricot has made good use of this list, along with correspondence between Ensor and the organisers, as an important source for paintings up to 1929. After this exhibition Ensor understood the usefulness of an inventory. When in 1929–30 he received a sketchbook as an Easter gift, this became his '*Liber Veritatis*' (now in the Art Institute of Chicago). In it he recorded in coloured pencils, alongside some older works, almost every new painting. These 'miniatures' are usually accompanied by information concerning the dimensions, support and, sometimes, other information, for example the collector who acquired it. Obviously this is a valuable, if incomplete, source for the preparation of a catalogue raisonné. It also points up certain lacunae; when a painting could not be identified, the miniature from the sketchbook takes its place in the catalogue, which is the case for forty-two of the 250 works for the period between 1929 and 1941. This means that some seventeen per cent of this part of the artist's *œuvre* is still 'up for grabs'.

The provenance given for each work is impressive, with exhaustive listings of auction

and exhibition catalogues, collectors and dealers, and this goes some way in establishing authenticity. The concordance with the first edition is interesting in that respect; thirty-two new works were added, especially early works, but also a painting of 1896 was rediscovered (*Masques jouant aux cartes*; private collection). However, thirteen works from the first edition have not made it into the present catalogue, either because they are no longer considered authentic, or that they are no longer considered to be 'paintings'. The most spectacular rejection concerns a work from the collection of the former Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Ostend: *Fille de pêcheur* of 1882 entered the Museum's collection during Ensor's lifetime, but despite much controversy in Ostend newspapers at the time, the artist never gave his definitive opinion on the matter.

Ensor's paintings are difficult to reproduce; much of the painter's touch, subtle use of pearly tints and nuances of colour, as well as the texture of the paintings, is lost in photographs. Moreover, most illustrations are small and therefore mainly useful for verification, although a selection of some 120 works has been reproduced on a more generous scale. What really adds value to this book is the biographical section. It concerns a chronological account of the wanderings of the works themselves and includes many quotations from exhibition and auction catalogues, letters and articles. The author thus highlights a specific facet of Ensor: by chronicling the artist's choices and refusals, we encounter Ensor as both a man in doubt and as a man who knew exactly where he was heading; he refused to participate in some exhibitions but could also be hurt because he had not been invited to show in others. In such cases Ensor sharpened his pencil to curse, for example, someone such as Octave Maus. There is also new light shed on the commercial activities of art dealers and of friends. We find the earliest patrons of Ensor, the Brussels Rousseau family (some unknown photographs are reproduced), buying and selling numerous works by their artist-friend. Ensor follows these developments very closely and notes with some resentment how a painting which he had previously sold for 300 Belgian francs was sold a few decades later for tens of thousands.

The biography is rich in new information, especially in the more than four hundred footnotes, even when the frequent and extensive quotations from letters and articles makes it a biography aimed at a very specialised audience. The title of the Dutch edition includes the words '*Leven en Werk*' ('Life and Work'), which covers its contents more accurately; the emphasis is on Ensor's work, even in the biographical part. The only quibble one might have is that there is a lack of critique of Ensor's writings, so that the manipulative side of Ensor's character is not always properly understood and exposed. However, this is an exemplary publication that provides a solid basis for further research.

**Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater.** Edited by Susan Tumarkin Goodman. 226 pp. incl. 130 col. + 105 b. & w. ills. (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008), \$48. ISBN 978-0-87334-202-5.

Reviewed by CHRISTINA LODDER

SOME EXCEPTIONAL EXHIBITION catalogues do not merely act as *aide-mémoires* of shows but become important art-historical texts in their own right. This is particularly true of *Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater*. Those lucky enough to have seen the exhibition in New York or San Francisco will remember it as a vivid display, which used costume and set designs, models, photographs and even films and audio material to evoke one of the most important theatrical experiments of the twentieth century. The centrepiece was the display of Chagall's original 1920 decorations and murals for the State Yiddish Theatre in Moscow. These canvases lined the walls of the theatre; instead of painting only on the stage, the murals enclosed the whole interior within a painting, and became known as 'Chagall's Box'. They had been miraculously preserved in Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery, and were unrolled for Chagall when he visited in 1973. In contrast to previous displays, these were now placed into a detailed theatrical context and accompanied by a plethora of theatrical designs by other notable avant-garde Jewish artists such as Natan Altman, Robert Falk, Aleksandr Tyshler, Isaac Rabinovich and Ignaty Nivinsky. The catalogue documents these and all the other elements of the exhibition in an exemplary manner and is a crucial source of information about this hitherto neglected area of Jewish creativity, adding enormously to our knowledge about early Soviet theatre and theatrical design. Susan Tumarkin Goodman provides an illuminating overview of the history of the Soviet Jewish Theatre, while Zvi Gitelman places that history within the political and cultural context of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Vladislav Ivanov probes more deeply into the biblical nature of the Habima's output, while Jeffrey Veidlinger examines the phenomenon that he calls 'Yiddish Constructivism', which is a hybrid of Expressionist fantasy and architectural rigour. Finally, Benjamin Harshav provides an overview of the designs produced for both theatres. These scholarly articles are presented within an exemplary apparatus. They are accompanied by numerous illustrations of good quality, there are shorter essays on Chagall's murals and each play in an illustrated chronicle; the exhibits are listed, biographies of artists, writers, actors and creative personnel are included, a timeline is provided, a detailed bibliography is supplied and there is even that invaluable tool – an index. The Jewish Museum, the curator, Susan Tumarkin Goodman, and all the experts involved are to be congratulated.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 overturned a repressive regime and for a few years