

The mysterious imagery of Léon Spilliaert (Ostend 1881–Brussels 1946) exerts a particular fascination. His works on paper evoke the solitude of human beings and the immensity of the sea, the life of places familiar to the artist in and around his home town of Ostend, together with domestic interiors and objects. His striking self-portraits convey the anguish of sounding the very depths of his being. His creations embody a highly individual, reflective and spiritual meditation, through close observation of scenes that symbolize eternal Nature, out of time.

The twenty-one works in this exhibition all stem from the artist's family – an intimate chronicle of his artistic quest and explorations. The accompanying catalog situates Spilliaert's oeuvre within the wider context of the art of his day. It includes a unique, first-hand account of the artist's family life, together with succinct chapters outlining the exceptional artistic contribution of the featured works.

With texts by leading Spilliaert expert Anne Adriaens-Pannier, art historian Édouard Derom and Professor Jeffery Howe, and an interview with Spilliaert's grandson, Johan van Rossum.

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WANDERER THROUGH SILENCE

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PATRICK DEROM GALLERY

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20€ · ISBN 978-9-4616-1896-2



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PREFACE

It is a rare privilege these days for a private gallery to have the opportunity to present a broad selection of works by an artist of the caliber of Léon Spilliaert. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the Patrick Derom Gallery enthusiastically accepted the invitation of Johan van Rossum, the artist's grandson, to show an exceptional ensemble of works which have always remained in the family's personal collection.

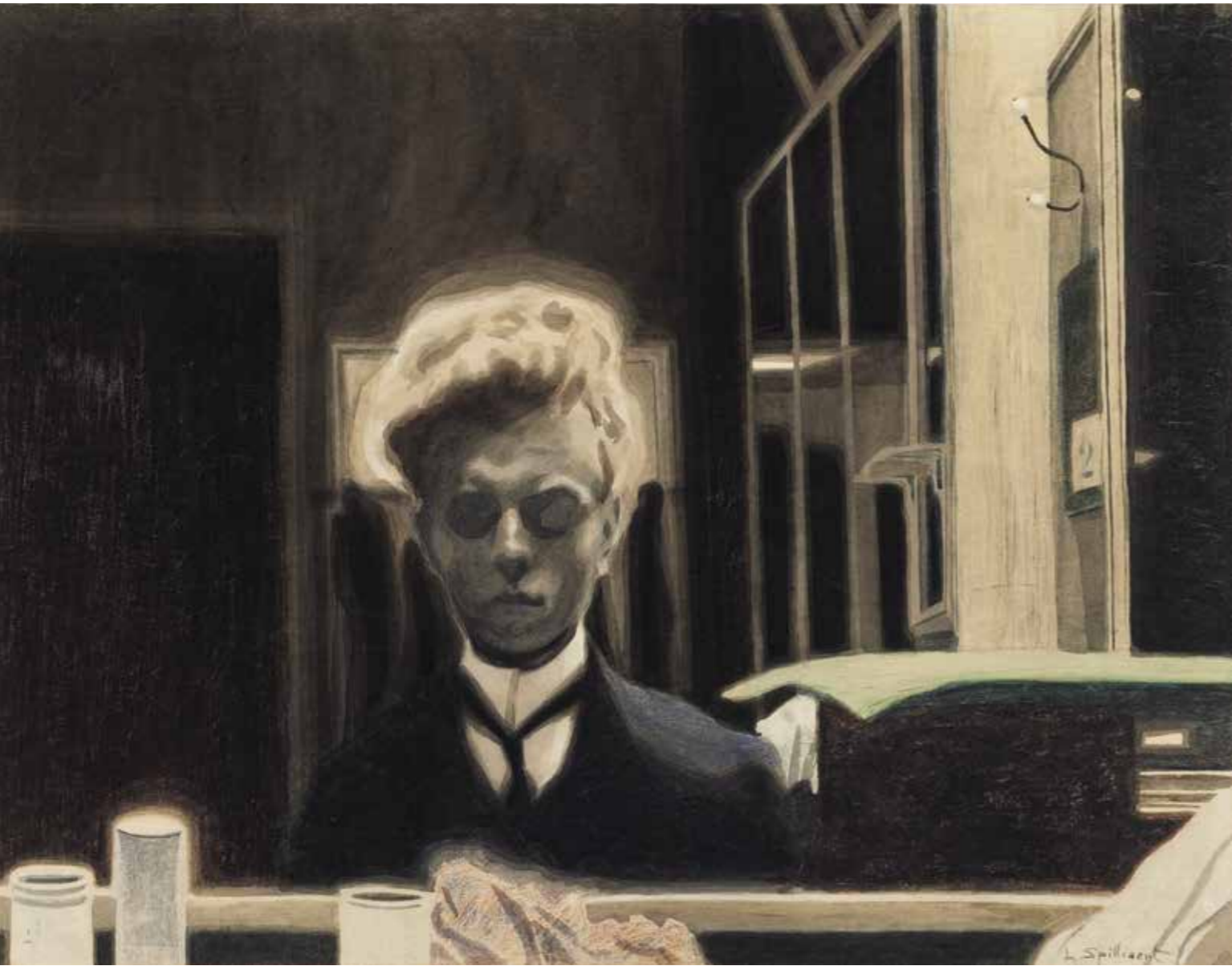
The invitation did not come out of the blue, however. Since its founding some 40 years ago, the Patrick Derom Gallery has made the representation and promotion of Spilliaert's work a vital cornerstone of its existence. During the 1980s and 90s, the gallery worked closely to this end with Francine-Claire Legrand, former curator of modern art at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium and a leading expert on the artist. Over the years, the gallery has brought important seascapes and self-portraits to the market. We pride ourselves on finding major private and public collections to welcome these significant works. In 2005, for example, the gallery sold Spilliaert's *Self-Portrait with Masks* (1903) to the Musée d'Orsay.

The present exhibition showcases twenty-one works on paper, some of which have never been seen in public. They span the entirety of Spilliaert's career, from early works (the brooding *Landscape with Sign*, 1904; cat. 1), to mid-career works such as the luminous *Blue and Yellow Seascape* (c. 1934; cat. 11), and late-life pictures, including the mysterious *The Open Door, Waiting* (c. 1945; cat. 18). The exhibition is organized into five sections, each of which focuses on a distinct aspect of Spilliaert's oeuvre, allowing the visitor and the reader to familiarize themselves with lesser-known features of his work.

We would like to thank Philip Van Bost and Gunther De Wit from Snoeck Publishers, whose enthusiasm for Spilliaert and this project led us to embark on a more substantial publication. The result is an exhibition catalog that stands, in our opinion, as a substantial contribution to the literature on Spilliaert. This is particularly true in light of the inclusion of an interview with Johan van Rossum, providing context on Spilliaert's family, and the insightful essay by Jeffery Howe, placing Spilliaert in a broader artistic context. We are especially grateful that Howe agreed to write such a compelling piece. The connection he makes between Spilliaert and Edvard Munch is particularly relevant, and it remains our ardent hope that an exhibition juxtaposing both artists will soon be held.

Finally, we must express our profound gratitude to Anne Adriaens-Pannier, who has been our driving force throughout the journey of this exhibition and publication. Her keen eye, intellect, and unwavering dedication have made all the difference. This project could not possibly have come to fruition without her. For the past 30 years, Anne has dedicated herself body and soul to the study of Spilliaert's life and oeuvre. Her 2006 monograph on the artist, expanding on her doctoral thesis, still constitutes the ultimate reference for anyone with an interest in the artist. Through her countless publications, past and future exhibitions, and the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Spilliaert's work, Anne has contributed more than anyone else to the artist's international recognition and his rightful standing at the forefront of the canon of twentieth-century Belgian art.

*Patrick Derom
Édouard Derom*



Self-Portrait, 2 November (c. 1908)

Indian ink wash, brush,
colored pencil, gouache on paper,
490 × 638 mm (day)
The Hearn Family Trust, New York

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