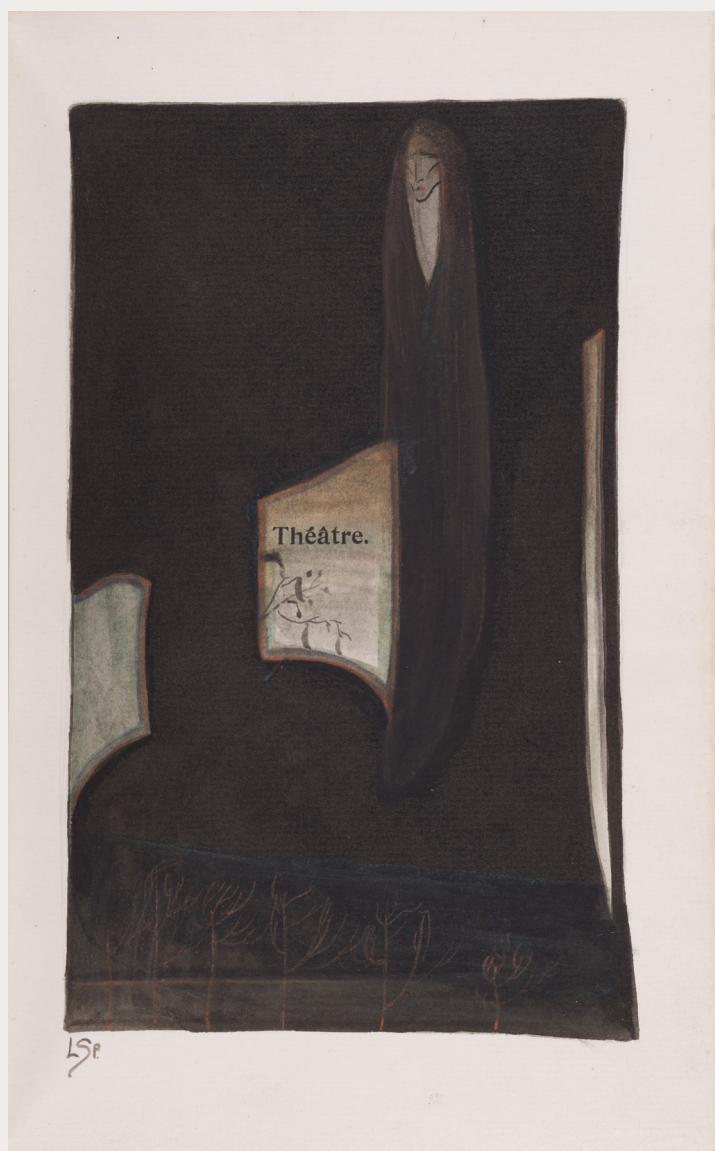


PRESS KIT

'Théâtre' by Maurice Maeterlinck with illustrations by Léon Spilliaert
has joined our collection



Following an initiative by the museum, 'Théâtre' by Maurice Maeterlinck, illustrated by Léon Spilliaert, a work recognised as a masterpiece by the Flemish Community, will be preserved for ever and made accessible to the public in our public collections. This has become possible thanks to a unique collaboration between the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Flemish Community, the Belgian Science Policy Office and the King Baudouin Foundation.

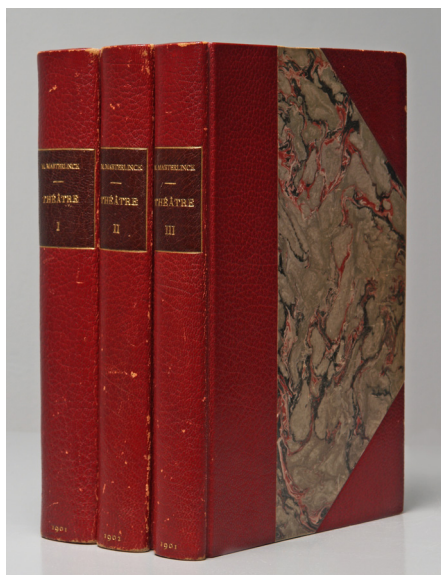
Thanks to the Eliane Vercaempt Fund, the three-volume work 'Théâtre' by Maurice Maeterlinck, illustrated by Léon Spilliaert, is now part of Belgium's public heritage.

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium and their Director Michel Draguet decided to purchase this work because of its significant heritage value, using funds from the Eliane Vercaempt Fund. This Fund, which is managed by the King Baudouin Foundation, was created to purchase one or more important works from the 19th or 20th centuries for the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, which then makes them accessible to the public.

To make this purchase possible, the Flemish government granted permission to take this masterpiece outside Flanders for an extended period.

In view of the importance of this work, collaboration between the various authorities has been essential and the KBF acted as a facilitator to preserve the work and facilitate the collaboration.

AN EXTRAORDINARY MASTERPIECE HAS BEEN ADDED TO OUR PUBLIC COLLECTIONS



© Luc Schrobiltgen, Brussels

There is no doubt that 'Théâtre' is a masterpiece. Two great Belgian figures were involved in its creation: Maurice Maeterlinck, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (9/11/1911), and Léon Spilliaert, a representative of the Belgian avant-garde in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This masterpiece, which has been designated a protected 'Topstuk' by the Flemish Community, had always been in private hands. The Royal Museums of Fine Arts initiated a successful collaboration in order to preserve the work and make it accessible to the general public. Thanks to a bequest made to the King Baudouin Foundation for the Royal Museums of Fine Arts (RMFAB), the masterpiece of the Flemish Community has been purchased by the KBF and given on long-term loan to the RMFAB, specifically the Fin-de-Siècle Museum.

A UNIQUE, PRICELESS TREASURE

The three valuable volumes of 'Théâtre' comprise Maurice Maeterlinck's complete works for the stage, and the volumes were illustrated by Léon Spilliaert between 1902 and 1903. Of the 110 copies published by well-known Brussels publisher Edmond Deman in 1901 and 1902, this is the last one that remains. In fact it is his own personal copy. He asked the young Belgian artist to illustrate his personal vision of Maeterlinck's oeuvre.

Léon Spilliaert used Indian ink, coloured pencils, gouache, pastels and watercolours to do this. He went far beyond illustrations for the margins and vignettes, creating many full-page compositions too.

In many cases the 348 original drawings overlap the printed text. The reader will be not only captivated by the extraordinary power of Maeterlinck's words, but also drawn into the idiosyncratic universe of a great Belgian artist who was already showing incredible artistic maturity in spite of his young age. Here we can already see the typical figures that Spilliaert would go on to develop in independent works and larger formats.

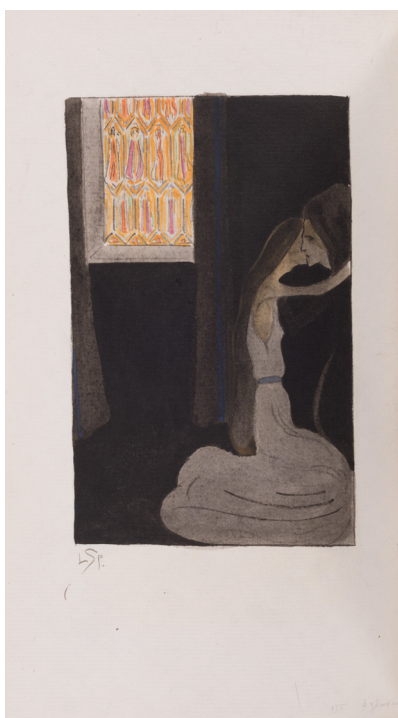


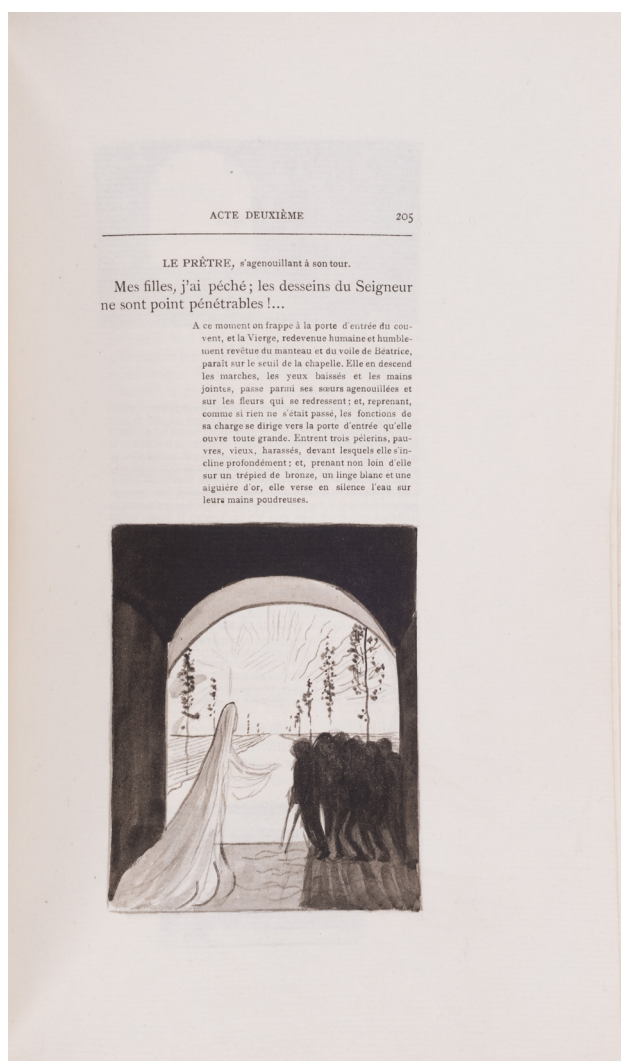
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TWO ARTISTS WITH A SINGLE SENSIBILITY

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

Maurice Maeterlinck was born in Ghent in 1862. This Belgian poet, writer and dramatist was a major literary figure of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He experienced international success, and at just 28 years of age was described by Octave Mirbeau in an article for *Le Figaro* as 'a new Shakespeare'.

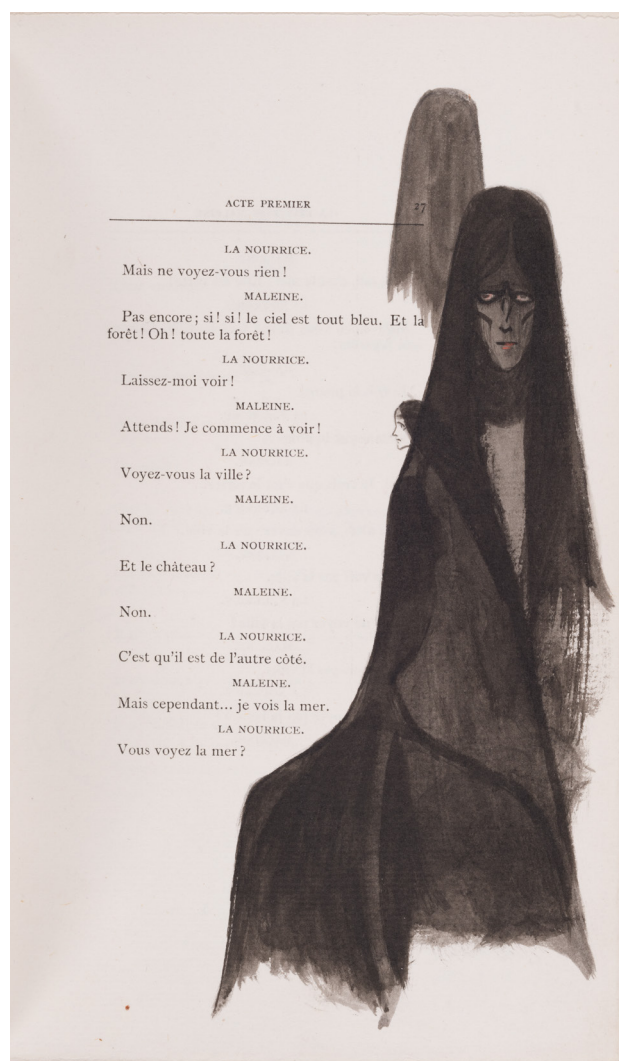




LÉON SPILLIAERT

Léon Spilliaert was born in Ostend in 1881, making him almost 20 years younger than Maeterlinck.

From the early years of the 20th century, his work reflected a symbiosis between the Symbolism of the late 19th century and a certain Expressionist modernity that was typical of the period. Spilliaert was very close to the poet Emile Verhaeren, his spiritual father whom he met through the publisher Edmond Deman.



As a young man, Spilliaert was fascinated by classical and contemporary literature. Although they never met, the two creative geniuses shared the same personal experience, marked by feelings of anguish because of the multiplicity of the 'self' and the world of dreams. Maeterlinck spoke, in his own words, of a terrifying mare tenebrarum, an inner ocean of darkness. Léon Spilliaert was imbued with a similar sensibility, revealed in even his earliest works.

While working for Edmond Deman, he could not fail to be inspired and stimulated by Maeterlinck's words, with their particular form of melancholy and existential terror. 'Inspired' is the right word here, for his illustrations for 'Le Théâtre', populated with ghostly characters in claustrophobic worlds, are not slavish representations of the texts, but a genuine personal interpretation by a young artist who was hypnotised by these masterpieces of dramatic literature.

A UNIQUE COLLABORATION

ABOUT THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT'S MASTERPIECES DECREE

Flanders boasts a rich, dynamic and lively cultural landscape. Ensuring that all this cultural diversity is preserved for the future demands a sustainable cultural policy that makes room for participation and creativity. Cultural heritage is a collective term for everything that has been created by previous generations, still exists in the present and has great value for the community. Cultural heritage is further subdivided into movable cultural heritage items and heritage buildings.

Through the Masterpieces Decree, the Flemish Government now protects cultural assets that are valuable or important for the Flemish Community. A cultural asset can be either a movable item or a collection. It is classified as a masterpiece if it is considered rare and indispensable for the Flemish Community because of its archaeological, historical, cultural-historical, artistic or scientific importance. [More information.](#)

“This masterpiece came under the protection of the Masterpieces Decree in 2018 precisely because of its cultural-historical and artistic importance. Through this decree the Flemish Government aims to protect and safeguard movable cultural heritage items that are of exceptional importance and to ensure that rare and indispensable objects and collections in Flanders are not lost. A far-reaching collaboration has meant that we not only succeeded in acquiring this important work but we are able to make it accessible to the public immediately. I am very pleased about that.”

*Jan Jambon,
Minister-President of the
Flemish Government.*

ABOUT THE STATE SECRETARIAT FOR SCIENCE POLICY

The ten museums and Federal Scientific Institutions (FSIs) that form part of the Federal Science Policy have conserved, developed, studied and promoted our exceptional scientific, artistic and historical heritage for more than two centuries. Their specific missions of scientific service, research and their contribution to Belgium's image highlights the special national and international character of these institutions. [More information.](#)

“I see this purchase as a great Belgian story. It is a superb illustration of the cultural exchanges that were taking place in the early twentieth centuries and have continued to this day, with this work now included on the list of Flemish “masterpieces”. I am also glad that this work will be joining the wonderful Spilliaert collection at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels. There is no doubt that the 40 or so paintings by this painter from Ostend that are exhibited in the artist's dedicated area are some of the most beautiful of all his works.”

*Thomas Dermine,
Federal State Secretary for
Science Policy*

ABOUT THE ROYAL MUSEUMS OF FINE ARTS OF BELGIUM

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) are among the country's most visited museums, and home to the country's most important collection of fine art. Its six museums and 20,000 works of art relate a historical narrative spanning the 15th to the 21st centuries, through paintings, sculptures and drawings. Founded in 1801 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the RMFAB's museums preserve and enhance this prestigious heritage while also facing the challenges of our contemporary society.

The missions of the RMFAB are based on two main principles: to be an international centre for scientific research and to be a place of openness and sharing for the widest possible audience. The museums aim to preserve, study, enhance, and enrich the artistic heritage of Belgium while being engaged as actors of cultural, economic and social progress.

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium comprise six museums: the OldMasters, Magritte, Fin-de-Siècle and Modern museums and the Wiertz and Meunier artists' workshops. [More information.](#)

"The KBF also mainly acted as a facilitator. As a neutral player it was able to bring all the parties together to find a solution in the interests of everyone. The result has been a successful collaboration between the Flemish Community and a federal institution, which has become a success story."

*Brieuc Van Damme,
CEO of the King Baudouin Foundation*

"Thanks to this bequest to the King Baudouin Foundation, this three-volume work with its references to both Maeterlinck and Edmond Deman, a great avant-garde publisher of the fin-de-siècle, will now be part of Belgium's heritage. Spilliaert's unique, central work fits perfectly within our collection, since thanks to his family's generosity the RMFAB holds a large Spilliaert collection. The opportunity to house 'Théâtre' within our museum is a superb way for the RMFAB to pay tribute to Léon Spilliaert's heirs."

*Michel Draguet,
Director General of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium*

ABOUT THE KING BAUDOUIN FOUNDATION

The King Baudouin Foundation aims to contribute to building a better society in Belgium, Europe and elsewhere in the world, with activities based on eight public-interest programmes. This includes working to preserve and protect our heritage, for example through the Heritage Fund, which acquires works of art and testimonials to the past and makes them accessible to the general public.

Thanks to numerous donations, the King Baudouin Foundation has assembled a valuable collection that now comprises almost 27,000 works and 26 archives. These are housed and exhibited to the general public in more than 90 museums and public institutions.

The King Baudouin Foundation also helps patrons of the arts to realise their philanthropic aims in the areas of heritage and culture. This has already led to a diverse range of projects focusing on heritage assets, music, architecture, natural heritage, archaeology, history and more. [More information.](#)

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High-resolution photographs can be [downloaded here](#).