

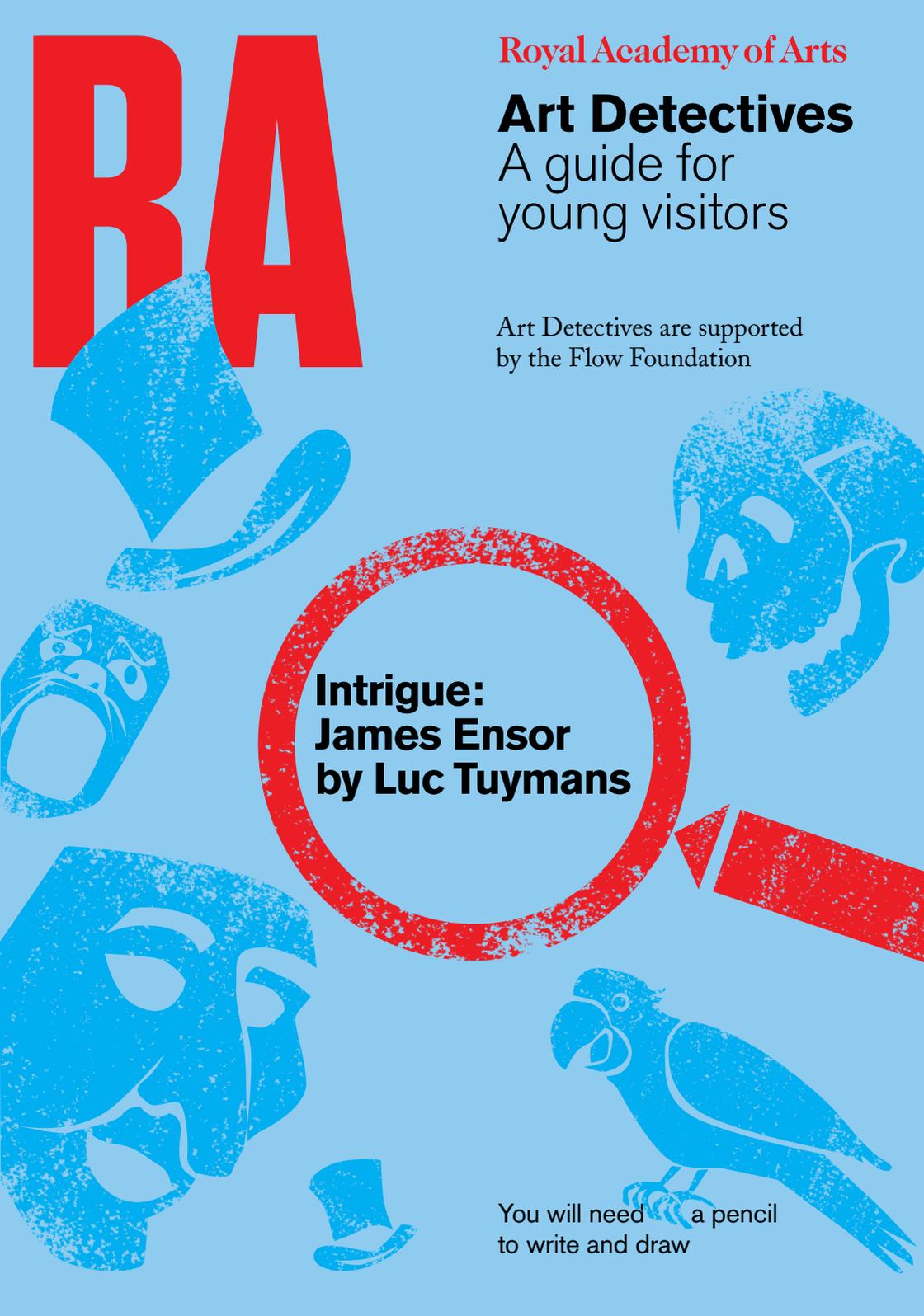
# RA

Royal Academy of Arts

## Art Detectives

A guide for  
young visitors

Art Detectives are supported  
by the Flow Foundation



**Intrigue:  
James Ensor  
by Luc Tuymans**

You will need a pencil  
to write and draw

## Introduction

James Ensor was born in Belgium in 1860. His family lived in Ostend, a small fishing village on the coast of Belgium. After a short period studying in Brussels, he returned to his childhood home. He lived there for the rest of his life, until he died in 1949. His father was an Englishman and his mother was Belgian. He lived above a curiosity shop run by his mother and aunt, which was filled with shells, masks, skeletons, stuffed animals and live animals.

As this exhibition takes you on a journey through Ensor's colourful artworks, you will notice masks and carnival outfits, light skies filled with clouds and skeletons in dark rooms. Sometimes gruesome, sometimes playful, Ensor's work is varied in subject matter. Ensor created paintings and etchings and you will see both in this exhibition.

Luc Tuymans, a contemporary Belgian painter, curated the exhibition. You will see a few of his works that echo the themes of carnivals, chaos and curiosities.

Let's explore...

## Section 1.



### Mood in Landscape

Find *Large View of Ostend* (1884) and *Bathing Hut* (1876)

James Ensor painted *Large View of Ostend* from his bedroom window, in the attic of his mother's house. He was 24. He painted *Bathing Hut* when he was 16. Both paintings evoke a great sense of mood, through the billowing clouds and dark skies.

Look at the two paintings.  
How are they similar?  
How are they different?

---

---

---

---

What does the colour of the sea tell you about the weather?

---

---

---

---

Look at how *Large View of Ostend* is composed. What takes up more space, the sky or the rooftops? What effect does this have?

---

---

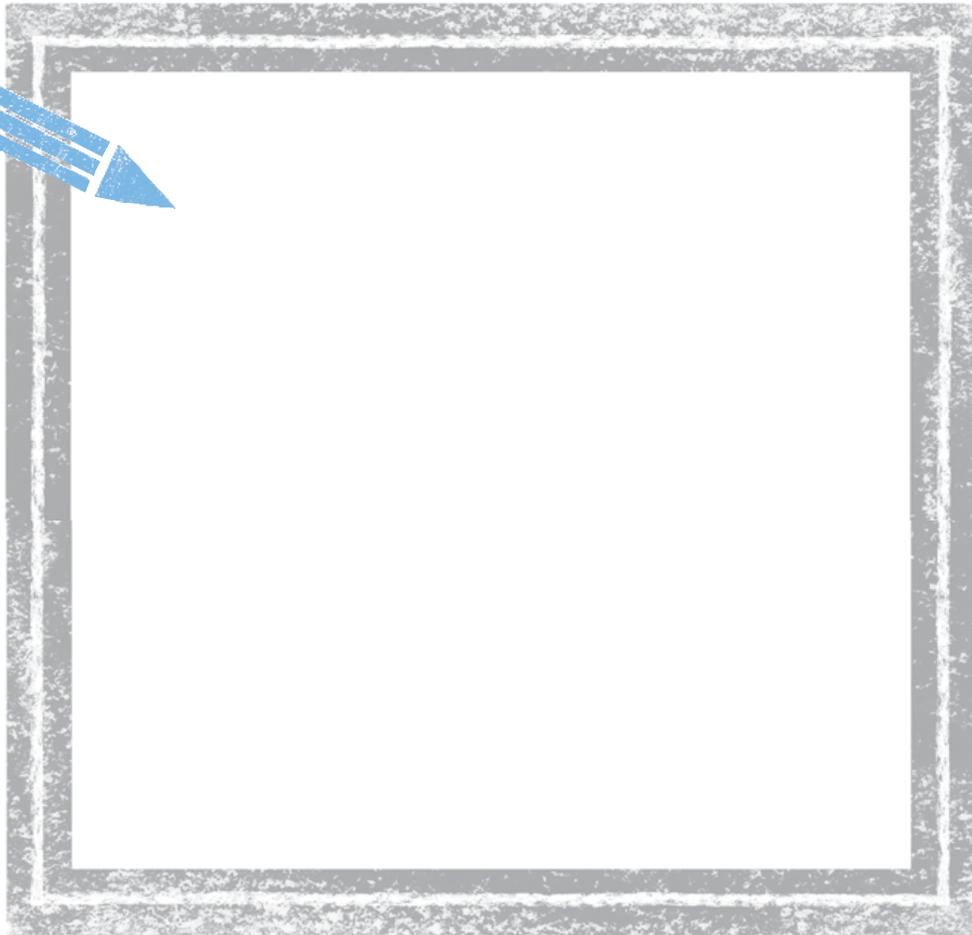
## Section 1.

(continued)

Draw the view out of your bedroom window.  
Try to evoke one of the following moods:

dark and stormy

or bright and optimistic



## Section 2.



**Self-portraits** Find *Portrait of the Artist at his Easel* (1879) and *Portrait of the Artist in a Flowered Hat* (1883)

Ensor often painted self-portraits. As an artist he contemplates his identity and plays with it, presenting himself in different ways. He had a strong sense of belief in his art, even though his teachers at the Academy where he studied in Brussels did not think he was a good painter.

The curator chose to hang these two self-portraits side by side. What do you notice that is different about the two portraits? What is similar?

---

---

---

---

What does Ensor's choice of hat make you think about him in *Portrait of the Artist in a Flowered Hat*?

---

---

Which painting tells you more about the artist? Why?

---

---

---

How many other self-portraits can you find in the exhibition?

---

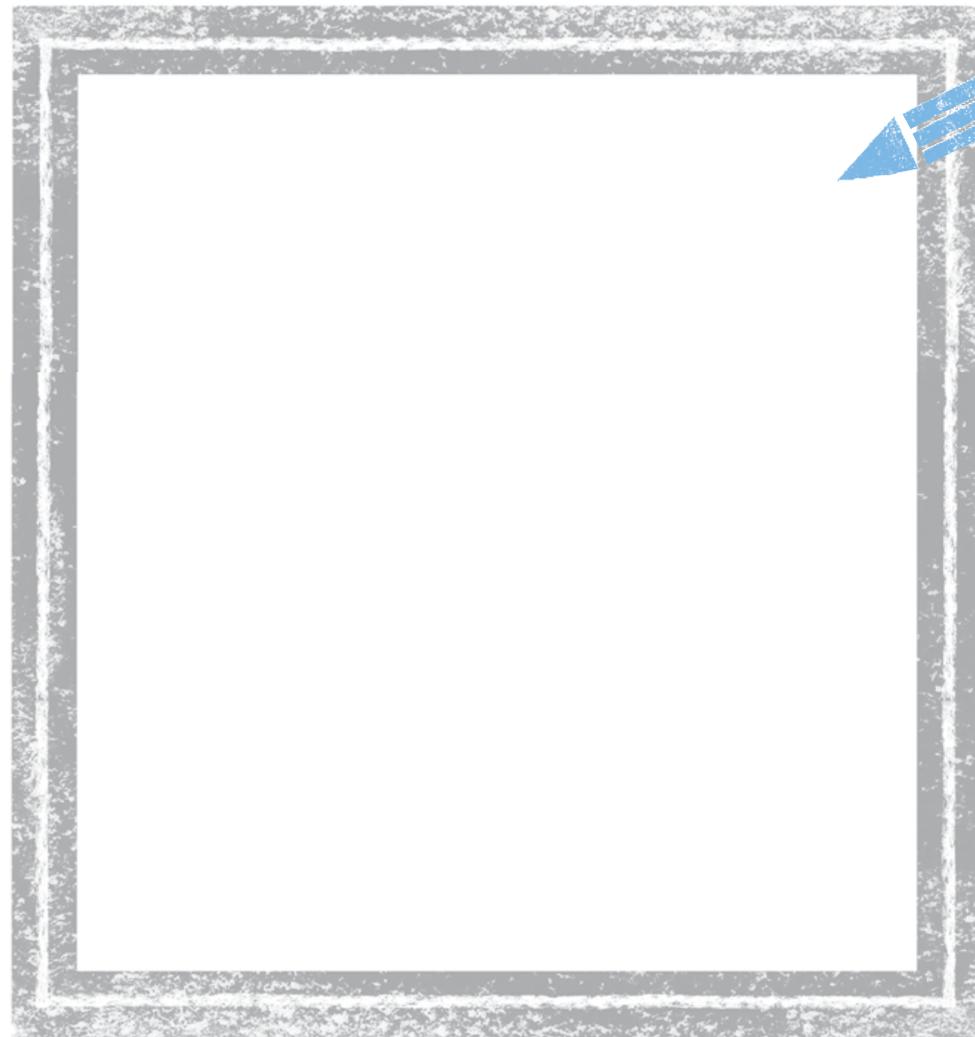
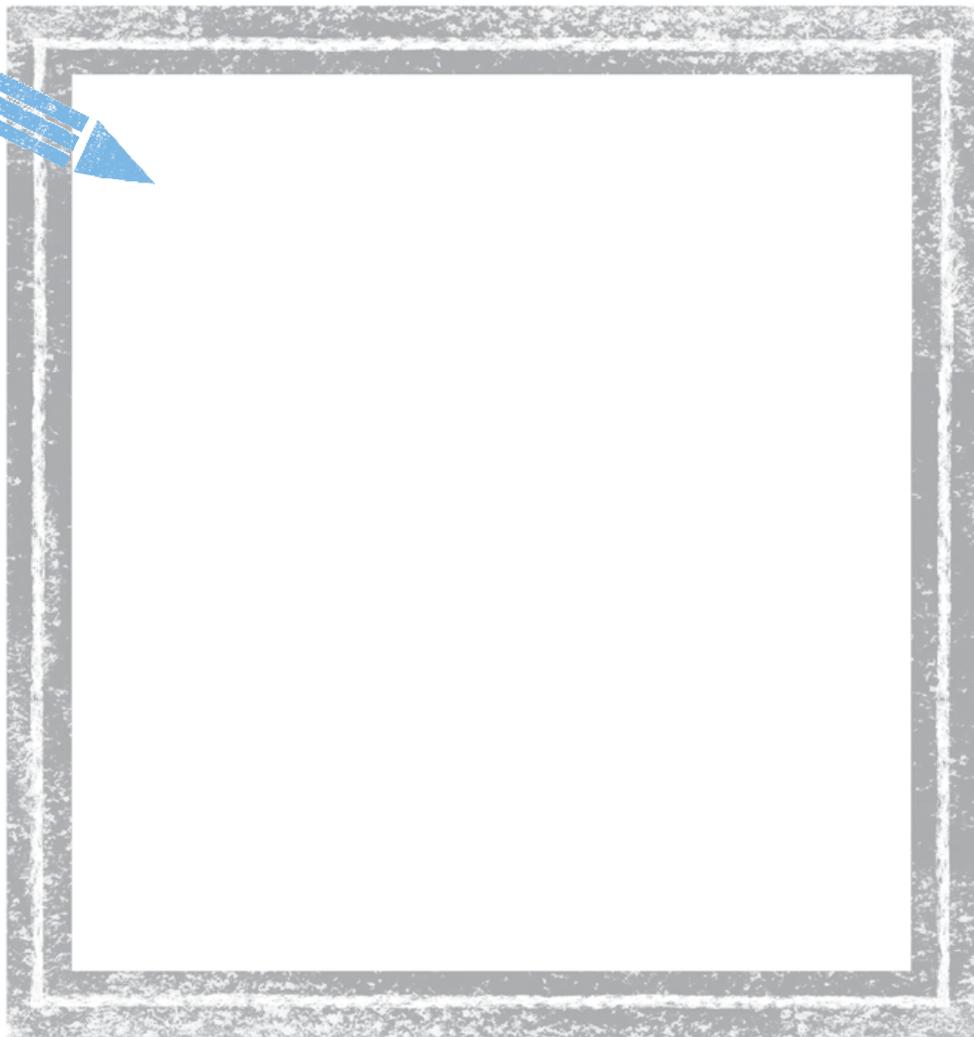
---

## Section 2.

(continued)

When you last dressed up what or who did you dress up as?

In one box, draw a self-portrait of you in your costume.  
In the other box, write about why you were dressed up,  
what happened and how it made you feel.



## Section 3.

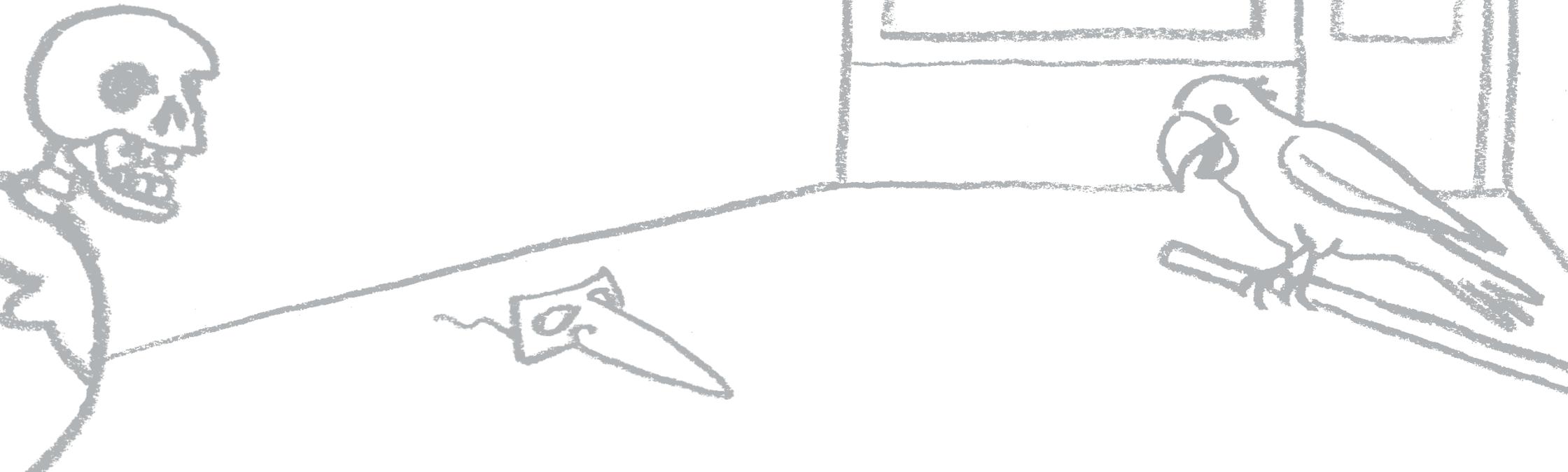


### The Curiosity Shop Find *Chinoiseries* (1907)

Ensor's mother ran a curiosity shop that sold masks, carnival costumes, shells, skeletons and other weird and wonderful things. Chinoiseries are objects that come from China or are made to look like Chinese objects. Ensor was heavily influenced by his early life in the curiosity shop and you can see this in paintings like *Chinoiseries*.

If you ran the curiosity shop, what would you sell?  
Draw some more curiosities...

*You could draw stuffed animals, or more real ones, more costumes, some shells, things you might find on the beach. Think about filling your shop with strange and interesting objects that people might find "curious".*



## Section 4.



### Holidays in Ostend

Find *The Baths at Ostend* (1890)

Ostend is a small fishing town on the north coast of Belgium. Once King Leopold II of Belgium began to holiday there, over 150 years ago, it became a popular seaside holiday destination, where people would enjoy the beach.

Look closely at this drawing of people holidaying at the seaside.

Can you find anyone:

- Taking a photograph from a rooftop
- Washing their hair
- With fish hanging off their belt

How many dogs can you see in the drawing?

---

How many umbrellas can you see?

---

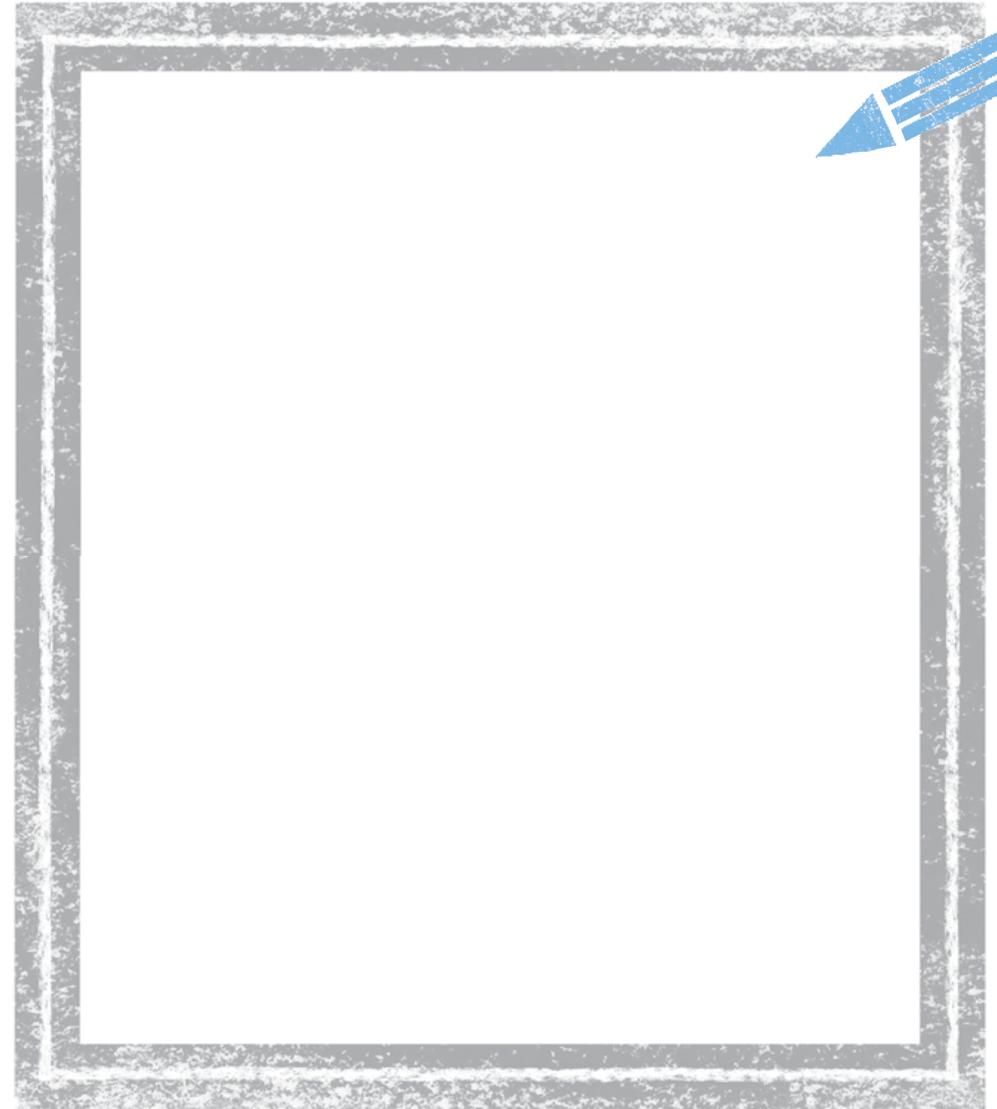
How many telescopes?

---

How many flags?

---

Draw your own imagined holiday scene below:



## Section 5.



### Carnival!

Find *The Intrigue* (1890)

The carnival of Ostend put the seaside town on the map in the 19th century. People would flock there, dressing up in costumes and masks, taking to the streets to celebrate. The carnival took place (and still does today) on Shrove Tuesday – the last day before the beginning of Lent in the Christian calendar. During the carnival of Ostend people would play a game called *The Intrigue*, where they would have to guess each other's identities, despite their disguises.

This painting shows people dressed up at the carnival of Ostend.

Do the people's costumes make them seem:

Happy Scary Mean Ugly  
Wild Calm Intimidating Friendly

Does the fact that everyone in this painting is dressed up make them seem friendly or intimidating? Why?

---

---

---

What happens to someone's identity when they wear a mask?

---

---

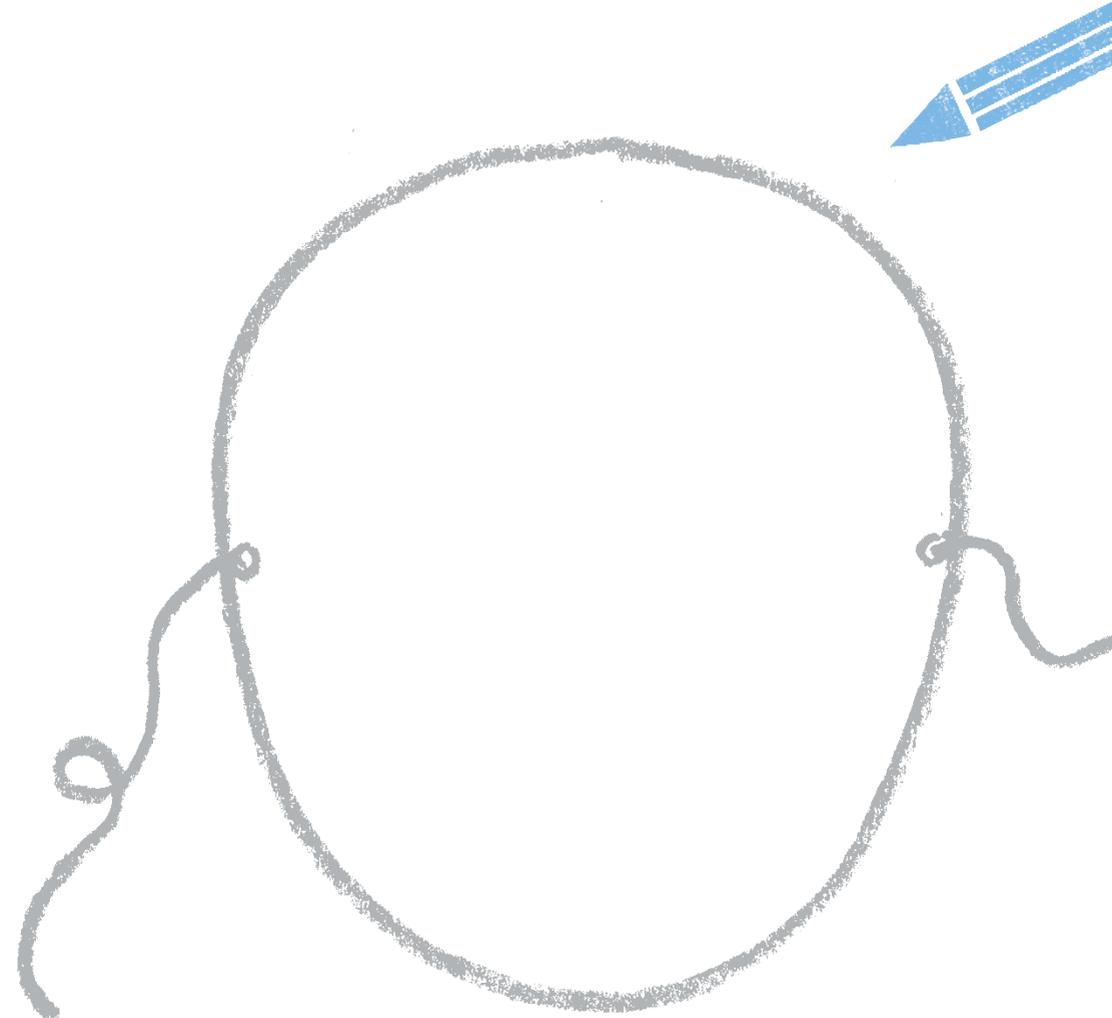
---

---

## Section 5.

(continued)

Draw your own carnival mask here:



## Section 6.



**Gruesome and Gory** Find the painting *The Bad Doctors* (1892) and the etching *The Bad Doctors* (1895)

This exhibition includes paintings, drawings and etchings by Ensor. These two works are mirror images of one another. Ensor copied the painting onto the etching plate. When he used the plate to print, the scene on the paper was reversed. In the *Bad Doctors*, Ensor depicts a group of doctors and the grim reaper, and a man who is being treated for a tapeworm. Ensor presents the event like it is a scene from a play, set on a stage. It makes the serious subject matter more silly, than scary, even though what is being depicted is not very pleasant. The way Ensor makes fun of the people and the subject matter makes it satirical.

How does this painting make you feel? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

How does this remind you of a scene from a play or a stage? What does the artist do to make you think this?

---

---

---

How is the etching different to the painting? Why do you think this is?

---

---

---

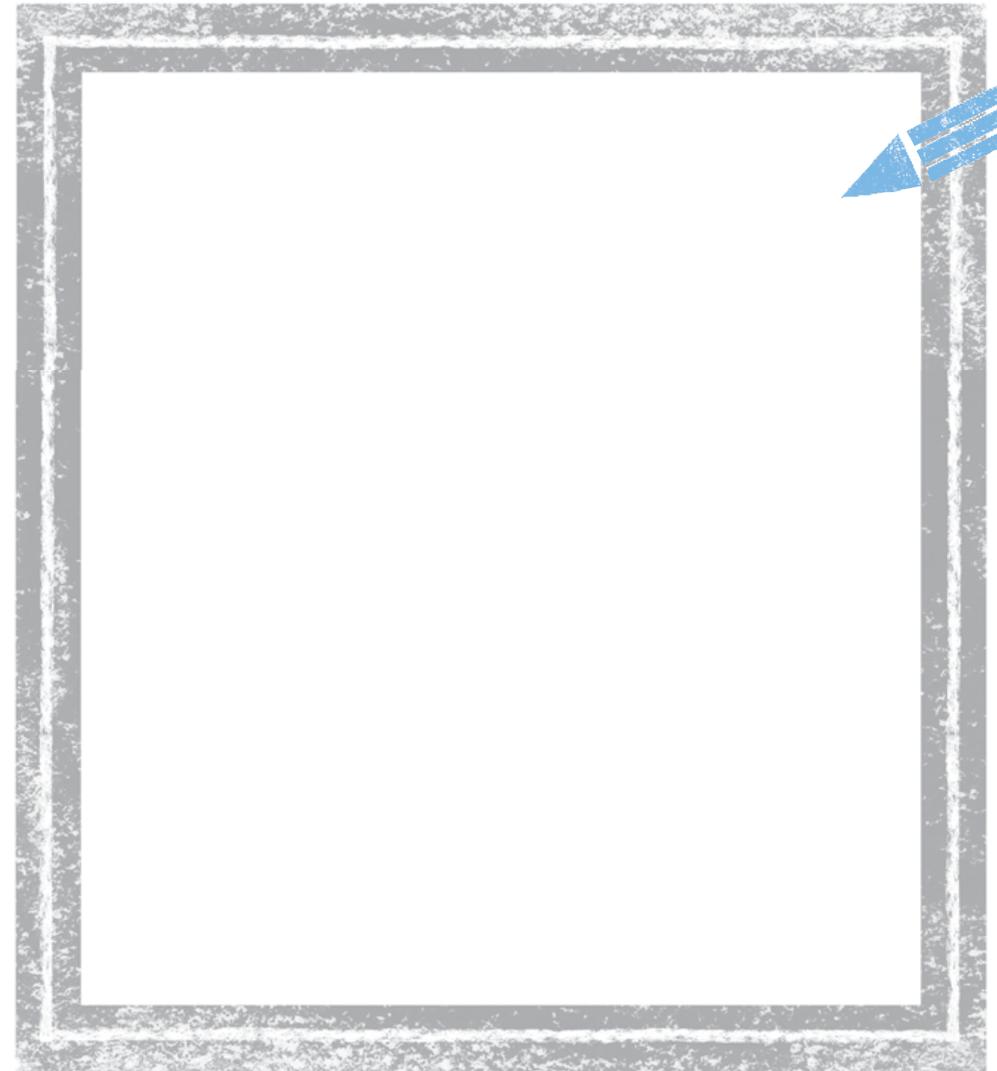
---

## Section 6.

(continued)



Can you find any other paintings that have matching etchings? Sketch the composition here.





Written for the Learning  
Department by Zoë Smith  
© Royal Academy of Arts  
Designed by Kathrin Jacobsen



Tweet a picture of any of your drawings to  
**@royalacademy**  
Or share them on Instagram using  
**#ArtDetectives**

If you would like to see any of your drawings on the RA website, please hand in your completed Art Detectives at the Reception Desk. Alternatively, if you would like to work on your drawings at home and send it to us later, you can post it to:

Learning Department  
Royal Academy of Arts  
Burlington House  
London W1J 0BD