James Ensor / Calvin Marcus
November 4, 2026–January 23, 2027

Rodder is pleased to present ***James Ensor / Calvin Marcus,*** a dialogue between artists James Ensor (b. 1860, Ostend, Belgium; d. 1949, Ostend, Belgium) and Calvin Marcus (b. 1988, San Francisco, California). Although the works on view by Ensor and Marcus were created a century apart and within significantly different cultural contexts, both artists have developed visual languages that resist categorization, move between humor, the absurd, the grotesque and the uncanny, and give attention to objects that are often disregarded.

Belgian artist James Ensor's groundbreaking use of masks, grotesque figures, and caricature established him as a formative figure in the development of twentieth-century art. Calvin Marcus is an American artist who works in series, developing stylistically and materially distinct bodies of work that engage with unsettling psychological and social concerns.

Objects occupy a significant place in both practices. Marcus' grandparents were toymakers, while Ensor grew up around his family's shells and porcelain souvenir shop in Ostend. Ensor worked from the attic of his mother's house and shop, surrounded with shells, masks, curios, and souvenirs that would soon become recurring subjects in his work. The mask, in particular, became a motif for examining identity, social performance, and the absurd.

Marcus similarly draws upon familiar or playful objects or environments, their associations and symbolic significance emerging through the work. This shared attentiveness to familiar, but unexpected objects informs the mischievous and uncanny quality that is present in both artists' practices.

The grotesque and absurd take different forms in their work. Marcus often depicts scenes of isolation, solitary figures, sparse still lifes, and expansive or empty landscapes. His works evoke a sense of absence and loneliness, the absurd emerging subtly and often uneasily. Ensor, by contrast, often depicts the grotesque within public and social life, using crowds, caricatures, masks, and scenes of bourgeois society to expose the absurdity of collective behavior and authority.

Their practices are similarly connected by a refusal to adhere to fixed artistic categories. The dialogue exhibition at Rodder will give insight into how Ensor moved between painting, drawing, and printmaking, shifting styles and scale throughout his career, while Marcus works across a wide variety of media including painting, drawing, print-making, and ceramics. For both artists, this movement between forms is accompanied by a close attention to color, surface, composition, and the physicality of their materials; made evident by the works on view.

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ABOUT JAMES ENSOR—James Ensor (1860–1949) was a Belgian painter, draftsman, and printmaker who was born in Ostend and lived lived between vibrant Brussels and the seaside. His distinctive use of masks, caricature, and the grotesque made him a pivotal figure in the development of modern art.

Ensor's work is held in major collections including the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Belgium, Brussels, Belgium; the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA), Antwerp, Belgium; the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, USA; the Art Institute of Chicago, USA; the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany; Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany; and the Neue Pinakothek, Munchen, Germany; among many others.

Ensor has been the subject of many exhibitions at institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France; Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland; the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK; Bozar, Brussels, Belgium; the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA), Antwerp, Belgium; and the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany; among others.

ABOUT CALVIN MARCUS—Calvin Marcus (b. 1988) is an American artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. He develops distinct bodies of work across painting, ceramics, watercolor, and installation, engaging with psychological and social tensions through shifting approaches to material and image.

Marcus' work is held in major collections including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, USA; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA; the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway; the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, France; and the K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; among others.

Marcus has presented solo exhibitions at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium; The Power Station, Dallas, USA; and Peep-Hole, Milan, Italy. His work has been included at institutions including K11 Musea, Hong Kong; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA; Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany; Louisiana Museum of Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, USA; among others.

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