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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Jenny Montigny: Beyond the Light

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The Museum of Fine Arts (MSK) in Ghent presents a retrospective of Jenny Montigny (1875–1937), a painter who looked beyond the light and colour of the Leie region. Her works reveal a lasting interest in everyday life, from children and mothers to agricultural workers and wounded soldiers.

Jenny Montigny grew up in a wealthy Ghent family and chose painting at the age of 17. As a pupil of Emile Claus, she learned to paint outdoors and observe how light transforms landscapes and people. Yet she soon developed her own perspective. While Claus reportedly found the bustle of children too distracting to paint, Montigny made them a recurring subject. After settling in Deurle in 1904, she depicted children walking to school, playing in groups and moving through the village. Her landscapes were never merely idyllic views: people worked, walked and cared for one another. Even among begonia growers, she focused not only on colourful flowers but also on the labour behind them.

Women and children became central to Montigny's work. She painted mothers with babies, nannies in parks and scenes of family life, showing the practical realities of care rather than idealising motherhood. During the First World War, she lived in London, where she depicted mothers, nannies and children in Hyde Park as everyday life continued amid the conflict. Her work also took a more confronting turn: drawings and etchings portrayed wounded Belgian soldiers receiving treatment at King Albert's Hospital, as well as the women caring for them. These scenes reveal her enduring interest in work, vulnerability and the people who keep daily life going, even in difficult circumstances.

Montigny exhibited in Belgium and abroad. Her work featured at Ghent's 1913 World Exhibition, and she became a recognised name in the salons of Ghent and Brussels during the interwar years. Her prints also reached Britain, where the British Museum acquired examples. The war, however, left her financially weakened. Her stay in London cost a fortune, while the Germans requisitioned her house in Belgium and the works stored there disappeared. She also lost her treasured paintbox. Forced to sell her house, she settled in central Deurle. Despite health problems in the 1930s, she continued painting large canvases, with financial support from her sister Yvonne, until her death in 1937.

The retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK) brings together paintings, pastels, drawings and etchings, tracing how Montigny moved beyond the luminism of her teacher Emile Claus to develop a distinctive vision. Her subjects are often ordinary people, but her attentive gaze makes their lives

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compelling. The exhibition runs from 10 October 2026 to 10 January 2027 at the MSK in Ghent. Many of the works on display come from private collections, so this is an opportunity to see them. For opening hours and admission prices, visit the museum's official website at <https://www.mskgent.be/en/>

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