



STATIS CIVILIBET
EORV CIRCA AN XXXI

Press kit Museum
Hof van Busleyden -
Knights of the Golden Fleece

Welcome to Museum Hof van Busleyden

Museum Hof van Busleyden is an inspiring place where you can discover and experience the Burgundian Renaissance in all its aspects. After a full restoration of the interior and exterior, the sixteenth-century city palace in the historic centre of Mechelen is ready to open a new chapter.

While the museum still looks back on this important period in Mechelen's history, it does so now from a contemporary, diverse and critical perspective. It also inspires visitors to look forward, towards the future. As before, Museum Hof van Busleyden establishes itself as a place to contemplate a changing world.

At the long-awaited reopening this spring, the museum will present a renewed permanent exhibition under the banner 'At Home in Burgundian Mechelen'. Visitors will be hosted by the city palace's first owner Hiëronymus van Busleyden, followed by the regent Margaret of Austria who resided at the Court of Savoy nearby, and then the reclusive Sisters Hospitalliers of Mechelen. Historical collection pieces are displayed beside contemporary artworks to cover universal themes such as power, religion and politics.

The permanent exhibition not only shows the splendour of power, but also its sharp edges.

The reopening of the museum will go hand-in-hand with a grand opening exhibition. *Knights of the Golden Fleece: A Brilliant Myth Unravelling* introduces visitors to the Order of the Golden Fleece. This legendary order of knights can be seen as one of the earliest trans-European political alliances. As the exhibition coincides with the Belgian presidency of the European Council, which begins in January 2024, the curators of *Knights of the Golden Fleece* aim to stimulate the visitors' curiosity about the relationship between this mediaeval alliance and the European Union of today.

Museum Hof van Busleyden reopens on 24 February 2024. The exhibition entitled *Knights of the Golden Fleece: A Brilliant Myth Unravelling* runs from 24 February to 2 June 2024 in Museum Hof van Busleyden. This exhibition was made possible with support from Toerisme Vlaanderen, Provincie Antwerpen, Fonds Perier-D'leteren, Sint-Romboutskathedraal, Stad Mechelen and media partners Knack, Klara and De Standaard.



The Renewed Museum

A Second Restoration Phase

The city palace, where Hiëronymus van Busleyden received renowned guests such as Erasmus and Thomas More in the sixteenth century, went on to become a museum in 1938, telling the history of the city of Mechelen. In 2010, the city palace was to undergo an eight-year restoration, reopening under its current name of Museum Hof van Busleyden in 2018. In the process, the focus was placed on the era of Hiëronymus van Busleyden, its original occupant: the Burgundian Renaissance.

In March 2022, the museum closed its doors once again, this time as a restoration of the building's exterior was needed. A restoration that would enable the museum to showcase its valuable works in the future. In the second restoration phase the museum was given a new roof and all the windows and woodwork were renewed.

At the same time, work began on the carillon at the city palace. The stairs were restored to improve access to the tower. Visitors can now climb to the top of the tower on special occasions. The instrument itself was also due for restoration. The keyboard and bell frame were refurbished, and the clappers and transmission (wiring and pivots) were renewed. Thanks to these works, the carillon meets contemporary quality standards and sounds even more beautiful than before.

From Geometric and Paved to Lush and Green

The extensive restoration presents the ideal opportunity to redesign the gardens. The three walled gardens of the city palace transformed from rigid geometrical designs to a green and lush enclosed oasis that is freely accessible. Hard landscape elements make way for softer forms, and lush and more natural vegetation replace the gravel. The gardens serve as living heritage, bridging the gap from outside to inside and vice versa. When visiting the museum, you can begin or end your journey here in all tranquillity. However, passers-by and local residents can also enjoy this piece of green in the city and marvel at the richness of the plant species daily.

The new museum gardens were designed by landscape architect Ronald van der Hilst and his team. They created a layered and contemporary response to the Renaissance gardens that adorned the city palace in Hiëronymus's day, and collaborated with Berlinde De Bruyckere, who took care of the artistic interpretation. The large entrance garden is set out as a Hortus Catalogus or science garden, a form of Hortus Conclusus which was popular in the Renaissance.

The design plays with perspective, through the convergence of the main path with a diagonally placed arbour covered in dense grape vines. The second garden, enclosed by the wings of the city palace, is conceived as another variant of the Hortus Conclusus, the Hortus Ludi or 'pleasure garden'. It is a garden for pleasure, which has flowing lines and a water feature with a fountain. The third and final museum garden is at the back, hidden behind the city palace. It is an enclosed garden that few visitors enter, although the museum's modern annex overlooks it.



An important source of inspiration for the garden design is the unique series of Enclosed Gardens in the museum. These display cases, filled richly with silken flowers, wooden sculptures, medallions, relics and inscriptions, depict paradise-like gardens through which your thoughts can wander for hours. Van der Hilst and his team have converted the idea into a diamond pattern, which allows visitors, as they walk, to discover plant species such as roses, carnations and columbines, all directly from the Enclosed Gardens. The gardens also read as a homage to botanist Rembert Dodoens (1517-1585) whose Crujideboeck laid the foundations for a new classification of plant species. The plant scientist's bust overlooks the plants and herbs he spent his life studying, and so becomes a part of the garden.

Coffee Bar and Museum Shop

In addition, Museum Hof van Busleyden gets its own coffee bar: 't Schipke, the eighteenth-century building on the corner of Frederik de Merodestraat and Sint-Janstraat, has been restored and repurposed after more than ten years of vacancy. To this end the museum has entered into partnership with BAI, which already operates a number of museum shops and pop-up stores including those of the KMSKA in Antwerp and the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren.

The new coffee bar is the perfect place to begin or end your visit to the museum. However, passers-by, neighbours, families enjoying the gardens, and takeaway customers are more than welcome too. The coffee bar creates a link between city and museum: it lowers the museum entry threshold, and tempts museum visitors to explore the city afterwards.

From the coffee bar you can cross immediately to the brand-new museum shop, which is also managed by BAI. While the shop offers a fresher and more modern selection and caters to the many art and culture enthusiasts who visit the museum, it is also freely accessible by anyone who would like to browse the beautiful selection.



Contemporary art in the permanent exhibition

- × Younes Baba-Ali, 'Coffret de Survie #4', 'Coffret de Survie #5'
- × Peter Brathwaite, 'Rediscovering Black Portraiture No.5/ Jan Mostaert, Portrait of An African Man, c. 1525-30'
- × Berlinde De Brucykere, 'It almost seemed a lily V'
- × Anouk De Clercq, 'Helga Humming'
- × Randa Maroufi, 'Place Houwaert, Les Intruses'
- × Sofie Muller, 'Four Alabaster Hands'
- × Leonard Pongo, 'The Necessary Evil'
- × Subin Son, 'Left Eye, Right Eye'
- × Narcisse Tordoir, 'BBQ-Death as Bread (series of 49)'

The Renewed Permanent Exhibition

Same Focus, Only Sharper

During the restoration works the curators felt themselves invited by the empty museum rooms to renew the permanent exhibition and sharpen the focus of the narrative. While the focus is still on the Burgundian Renaissance, there was a need to renew the manner in which the period is conveyed. Surveys of various target groups revealed the need for a stronger and more critical museum narrative, more masterpieces and greater diversity. The paradigm shift that our society has undergone since the museum's previous reopening, due to international movements such as Black Lives Matter and MeToo, also called for more diversity and elucidation.

In the renewed permanent display, Museum Hof van Busleyden tells the story of Mechelen as the capital of the Burgundian Netherlands. It does so without losing sight of the stories in the margins, and in full awareness of the tensions between the dominant narrative and other narratives. Contemporary artworks, carefully selected by guest curator Magali Elali of The Constant Now, invite the visitor to cast a critical eye over this period.

A visit to the museum begins with an introduction to the Burgundian Renaissance, in which you learn something about the city and its inhabitants. The visitors are then invited into the worlds of three protagonists, to explore the period further.

At home in Burgundian Mechelen

In the first room of the museum, visitors are immediately immersed in history. It is 1507, and Margaret of Austria and Hiëronymus van Busleyden are settling into Mechelen: the beginning of a glorious period for the city. An enormous world map snaps these grand events into perspective: while Mechelen is certainly important, there is a lot going on in the rest of the world.

As a visitor, you get to know the city and its inhabitants, from Margaret's Burgundian family to the often-forgotten voices in the margins. At that point, the perspective expands far beyond the borders of the Duchy of Burgundy. The impressive 'Battle of Tunis' tapestry shifts our gaze to the Middle East and Africa, but we also look further to America, India and Japan. Burgundian globalisation is a story of cultural exchange and flourishing trade and knowledge, but also one of oppression, war and violence. Contemporary artworks link to themes that are still of relevance today and encourage the visitor to question the obvious.



At Home with Margaret

The visitor begins by exploring Margaret's Mechelen: a city with a thriving crafts industry. This is evident from the beautiful alabaster reliefs and a collection of popular poupées de Malines. But, like any other mediaeval city, Mechelen is also a place where the Christian faith leaves its mark on everything. Contemporary artists draw their inspiration from the craftsmen of Mechelen at that time, and show us that in some parts of the world religion is still very much alive.

Thereafter, we get to know Margaret through a timeline of her life. We see her as the aunt and educator of a young Charles V, and as an influential regent and politician. While her status as a widow speaks of great sorrow, it also contributes to her power and independence. The image of the strong Margaret is the inspiration for Anouk De Clercq's compelling video work 'Helga Humming', a contemporary response to the classic portraits of the Renaissance.

Finally, we see how Margaret acts as a patron of the arts, and how she uses art for her own image building. In the last of the rooms, Margaret of Austria's Choir Book shines out, while polyphonic music resounds like an apotheosis.

At Home with Busleyden

In the world of the jurist Hiëronymus van Busleyden, jurisprudence is central. The first space is dominated by 'The Great Council', the recently restored painting and Flemish masterpiece by Jan Coessaert, which depicts the opening session of the Parliament of Mechelen in 1474. The visitor discovers how the Burgundian dukes used The Great Council to achieve legal unity and as a tool of power, and what concepts such as justice and injustice meant in the sixteenth century.

Thereafter, the visitor is introduced to Hiëronymus van Busleyden, the humanist. In his city palace he hosted prominent thinkers such as Erasmus and Thomas More. Three contemporary experts critically examine the sharp edges of society at that time. What was it like to be a woman, to be poor or to be a person of colour in the Burgundian period? They make it clear that the work of the humanist thinkers is still relevant today.

At Home with the Hospital Sisters

On the top floor of the city palace, visitors can admire the museum's collection of Enclosed Gardens in a dark and intimate attic room. The reverently illuminated Gardens place their spectators in a delicate balance between the world and paradise, between public and private.

Berlinde De Bruyckere places the vulnerable retable cabinets made by the Hospital Sisters against one of her monumental sculptures. It almost seemed a lily V could be seen in the museum in 2019 during De Bruyckere's grand solo exhibition. The poignant work now returns to the permanent display, as a contemporary response to the Enclosed Gardens by which it was inspired.

The Museum for Children and Families

Family Tour, School Offerings and Museum Camps

Museum Hof van Busleyden aims to introduce everyone to the Burgundian Renaissance. For that reason, the museum proudly presents a programme tailored to its youngest visitors. Families with children can explore the museum creatively through a renewed family tour. Golden cubes can be found in various museum rooms, containing a whole range of facts, playful tasks and inspiring questions related to the artworks on display. The family tour is included in the museum visit and need not be reserved in advance.

Schools are also more than welcome to visit the museum. Preschoolers in the second and third kindergarten classes and children in the first grade can be given a customised tour that focuses on their first museum experience. A guide will take them on an exploration of the city palace, where beautiful colours and surprising discoveries hide in every corner. Primary school children can become acquainted with the grand masters, who enchant us with their craftsmanship and colours. Every tour concludes with a creative closing session in the brand-new Museum workshop.

Secondary school pupils are also treated to an inspiring museum visit that will remain etched in their memories. They are challenged to engage with themes presented in the various rooms, ranging from power to religion to wealth. Alongside history, the future is also explored. Links are made between then and now, and they are encouraged to think outside the box.



Museum Highlights

The Museum in Twelve Masterpieces

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Hof van Busleyden City Palace and Gardens

Hof van Busleyden is a fine example of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century aristocratic architecture typical of the Low Countries. Over the years, the city palace has had various uses ranging from a stately private residence with lush gardens to an alms house for the poor. Today, it is home to Museum Hof van Busleyden, named after the very first occupant of the house.

Enclosed Garden showing Saint Elizabeth, Saint Ursula and Saint Catharine

A unique religious art form emerged in the Low Countries in the late Middle Ages: Enclosed Gardens. These are richly stocked retable cabinets depicting gardens of paradise, embellished with silk flowers, wooden sculptures, medallions, relics and inscriptions. Mechelen houses a unique collection of Enclosed Gardens. Nowhere else in the world is there a collection as large as this to be seen.

Mechelen Choirbook

The Mechelen Choirbook of 1515–1516 is one of the finest and best-preserved music manuscripts handed down to us from the sixteenth century. In Museum Hof van Busleyden you not only see but also hear this masterpiece. In the dark room where this manuscript is on view, the choirbook and the magnificent polyphony of Flanders

The Battle of Tunis

This monumental wall tapestry shows Charles V's campaign against the Ottomans, who had occupied the city of Tunis in 1534. It is one of several (partial) copies, based on two of the original drawings and depicts the conquest of Goulette, the fortress guarding the port of Tunis. The work was commissioned by archbishop Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, a patron of the arts who had an impressive art collection containing many tapestries.

Anonymous

16th century, Museum Hof van Busleyden

Anonymous

1515-1516, Mechelen City Archives

Willem de Pannemaker, after drawings by Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen and Pieter Coecke van Aelst

1565-1566, City of Mechelen

Triptych showing Charles of Habsburg as the King of Spain

This beautiful triptych was painted by Jan van Battel of Mechelen in 1517-1518. Charles V is shown in the centre, as the absolute centre of power. Around him we see the territories that he ruled or would come to rule. The golden frame symbolises Charles V's wealth as the ruler of an empire on which the sun never set.

Jan Van Battel
1517-1518

Ceremonial Opening of the Parliament of Mechelen under Charles the Bold

The painting 'Ceremonial Opening of the Parliament of Mechelen' depicts a significant moment in history. What you see is the inaugural assembly of the Great Council, the highest judicial body in the Netherlands. The monumental work is attributed to Jan Coessaet and recognised as a Flemish Masterpiece.

Jan Coessaet
1587

Portrait of Margaret of Austria

Dressed fully in black, the regent Margaret of Austria looks the viewer in the eye. The portrait is by court painter Bernard van Orley, who began working for Margaret in 1508. He took charge of a large workshop with a high production output, which is where this portrait was produced. The records show that the painter produced several portraits of Margaret between 1519 and 1532. This representation served as the regent's official portrait.

Bernard van Orley
ca. 1515

Hercules and Omphale

These two wonderful seventeenth-century terracotta busts are the work of Mechelen sculptor and architect Lucas Faydherbe, an apprentice of Pieter Paul Rubens. They are part of a series of mythological figures produced by Faydherbe and are both recognised as Flemish Masterpieces.

Lucas Faydherbe
1675-1680, Museum Hof van Busleyden

Crucifix

This small sculpture is one of the few signed works by a seventeenth-century female artist. Another reason to list it as a Flemish Masterpiece in 2023. Sculptor Maria Faydherbe was born in Mechelen into a family of professional artists. She was so confident in her own expertise that she openly competed with her male colleagues.

Maria Faydherbe
1620-1635

**Blessing Baby
Jesus**

This sixteenth-century blessing Baby Jesus holds a small globe in his left hand, symbolising divine sovereignty over the world. With his right hand he gives a blessing, derived from the Roman sign for speaking. This blushing child is a fine example of one of the most popular export products from that period: the Mechelen dolls or poupées de Malines.

Saint Lucia

The Saint Lucia we see here is Lucia of Syracuse (283-304), patron saint of the blind. She was tried and condemned for her faith in Christ. Lucia proved so unyielding that the executioner, at the end of his tether, thrust a sword through her throat. She is depicted with that attribute here - seemingly unaffected - with a gentle smile and a rosy blush on her cheeks. This wooden doll was carved in a workshop in Mechelen.

**Helga
Humming**

With the Helga Humming video projection, contemporary artist Anouk De Clercq offers the viewer a modern perspective on portraits from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Actor and performer Helga Davis draws you in with her gaze and fills the space with her powerful presence. In this work, music artist Vessel uses a compelling soundscape to reduce polyphonic music to its most essential form: Helga's gentle humming forms an almost hypnotic soundtrack to this portrait, where the body serves as a resonating chamber.

Anonymous

16th century, Museum Hof van Busleyden

Anonymous

ca. 1500-1530, Museum Hof van Busleyden

Anouk De Clercq

2019

Knights of the Golden Fleece

A Brilliant Myth Unravelling

Unity beyond the national borders: then and now

Mention European unity, and the first thing that comes to mind is the European Union. But transnational political alliances date much further back than the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 or the Treaty of Rome of 1957.

In 1430, Philip the Good founded the Order of the Golden Fleece, a knightly order considered today as one of the earliest and most significant trans-European political alliances. The establishment of the order was a master plan, both political and symbolic, conceived by the Burgundian duke. By inviting important European rulers and nobles to join, he created a network of allies, thereby strengthening his power and influence in Europe. At the same time, he used the Order to enhance the prestige of the Burgundian lineage and reinforce their image as powerful and influential rulers.

The Knights of the Golden Fleece would gather regularly at special meetings, known as chapters. These meetings would last for several days and were accompanied by solemn services. In 1491, members of the very highest European nobility assembled in Mechelen for the fifteenth chapter of the Order of the Golden Fleece. This festive gathering is one of the largest and most important events in the history of the city to this day.

Fast-forward to 2024, when Belgium assumes the presidency of the European Council for six months. The ideal moment to reflect on the meaning of unity across the national borders and the centuries. Museum Hof van Busleyden does this with a transhistorical exhibition on the legendary Order of the Golden Fleece.

Knights of the Golden Fleece: A Brilliant Myth Unravelling introduces visitors to the Order of the Golden Fleece. While there is no direct link between the two organisations, this exhibition also aims to raise questions about the relationship between this mediaeval alliance and the present-day European Union. Knights of the Golden Fleece examines the similarities as well as the differences between them, thereby revealing the universal nature of these political alliances, which involve everything from solidarity and cooperation to tension and conflict.



Exhibition Concept

The Myth Unravelled

The stars of this exhibition are the 29 coats of arms of the Golden Fleece, which were specially made for the Gothic choir in the then Saint Rumbold's church in Mechelen, to mark the opening celebration of the fifteenth chapter in 1491. The fifteenth-century escutcheons have been very carefully restored in recent years. In this exhibition, the full series can be admired for the first time at close quarters.

In addition, curator Hannah Iterbeke (Museum Hof van Busleyden) and guest curator Magali Elali (The Constant Now) have selected another eighty artworks and objects from various time periods for this exhibition. These pieces are designed to challenge visitors to doubt their assumptions and ask questions.

The exhibition seeks in this way to offer a critical outlook on the image and mythology around the Order of the Golden Fleece and to place historical concepts and symbols in a new perspective. How does the PR machine of the Burgundian dukes work? How do they employ magnificent tapestries, banquets and tournaments to enhance their power? What do identity and 'belonging' actually mean to them? These questions not only invite visitors to unravel the myth of the Order of the Golden Fleece, but bring currency and relevancy to the story.

For, just like the Burgundian dukes of the past, a contemporary international organisation like the European Union is constantly looking for ways to create unity and solidarity.



Spectacle and deconstruction

The exhibition is composed of two parts: "the Spectacle" and "the Deconstruction". In the Spectacle, the image of the Order of the Golden Fleece is presented, as it was set up by the Burgundian dukes themselves. In the second part of the exhibition, the Deconstruction, the Order of the Golden Fleece is fully dissociated and analysed and you will discover how power is captured in images both in the past and today.

The Spectacle

In the first part of the exhibition we see the stars of the exhibition shine: the restored coats of arms. They are arranged exactly as they were in 1491 in the Gothic choir of Saint Rumbold's church for the opening celebrations for the chapter. The escutcheons, showing the coat of arms of each family, marked where each of the knights was to take their seat. The festive gathering of the past is brought to life by an evocative lighting and audio display, featuring the voice of master storyteller Bart Van Loo.

Then, the visitor takes a literal step backwards to enter the wings of this mighty spectacle. The forum provides space for proponents and opponents, and it becomes apparent how deeply anchored certain power archetypes have become in our contemporary visual language.

Guest curator Magali Elali has selected contemporary artworks that challenge visitors to question their perception of history and the society in which we live. How does a uniform affect someone in the picture? What happens if we present ceremonial actions out of context? What does knighthood actually mean? Reflections of this kind disrupt the prevailing image and create a new perspective on the meaning of historical symbols and concepts.

The Deconstruction

In the second part of the exhibition, the deconstruction, the visitor is invited to act as a theatre critic and evaluate the Burgundian spectacle. Through the use of historical objects and in-depth information, the political theatre of the Burgundian dukes is unravelled. When each part of the spectacle is examined, it becomes clear that the Order of the Golden Fleece is a carefully constructed myth serving the ends of political power.

Scientific Research

The coats of arms at the centre of this exhibition date back to 1491. The fact that they can still be found in Saint Rumbold's Cathedral in Mechelen, the place for which they were made over 500 years ago, is quite remarkable. What also sets the escutcheons apart, is their exceptional pictorial quality.

As the coats of arms were in such poor condition, they were in need of thorough restoration and conservation. From early 2022 to January 2024, a team of independent restorers worked on the series of 29 coats of arms. The treatment went hand in hand with an in-depth study of the art history and materials.

The overall project was overseen and guided by a scientific board of academics, researchers, restorers and museum conservators. The results and findings of the research project as a whole were compiled in a publication entitled *Knights of the Golden Fleece, a Brilliant Myth Unravelling*. The book is to be released in February 2024 by Uitgeverij Lannoo.

Construct Europe

For the first six months of 2024, Belgium assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union. The city of the Mechelen will mark the occasion with Construct Europe 2024, a grand city festival in celebration of culture and society. To this end, the city joins a variety of partners: the Hannah Arendt-Institute, Arts Centre nona, Mechelen Feest and youth organisation J@M. This exhibition is part of the Construct Europe programme.



Contemporary art in the temporary exhibition

- × Marina Abramovic & Ulay, 'Rest Energy'
- × Raphaël Barontini, 'Allure Saint-Maurice et le Dragon'
- × Alexandre Bavard, '1981'
- × Elen Braga, 'Mistress of Beasts'
- × Yentl Demunter, 'Seinen'
- × Karim El Maktafi, 'Untitled, from the series Fantasia'
- × Mous Lamrabet, 'My knight in shining Du-Rag'
- × Randa Maroufi, 'Les Plieurs'
- × Sven 'T Jolle, 'Global Empowerment'
- × Dittmar Viane, 'Front Row'
- × Pei-Hsuan Wang, 'Statue of Asking: Threshold Guardian I', 'Statue of Asking: Threshold Guardian II'



Tours and events

- × Every Friday, from 13:00 to 17:00 and the second Saturday of the month from 10:00 to 13:00, visit the museum in peace and quiet during the Quiet Visit. We limit the number of visitors and provide a low-stimulation environment for those who need it.
- × Every Sunday morning, Museum Hof van Busleyden organises introductory tours for individual visitors to the permanent and temporary exhibition.
- × For schools, the museum offers tailor-made educational programmes. During school holidays, creative workshops and museum camps are offered.



Practical info

Tickets and info

hofvanbusleyden.be

Dates

permanent exhibition: opening 24.02.24

temporary exhibition: 24.02.24 to 02.06.24

Opening hours

Tue - Wed - Thu - Fri - Sat - Sun 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

* The museum is closed on 25, 26 and 31 of December and on January 1.

Tickets

15 euro standard rate, 13 euro reduced group rate

discounted rates: hofvanbusleyden.be

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