



PRESS RELEASE
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MSK to celebrate anniversary with year of cultural festivities

The MSK will soon have two reasons to throw a party in Ghent. The first is to mark its 225 years of existence - making it Belgium's oldest museum. And the second is to honour the 125th anniversary of the Friends of the Museum. Starting on 2 September, both of these milestones will be celebrated with a year full of cultural festivities. Across two exhibitions, a historical tour of the galleries and a series of art projects around the city, the MSK will take stock of its fascinating history, while also addressing the question of what it means to be a museum in today's world.

The Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK) was founded in 1798, in the wake of other great museums such as the Galerij Prins Willem V (now known as the Mauritshuis) in 1774 and the Louvre in 1793. Having opened its doors to visitors in 1802, it is now Belgium's oldest public museum and one of the oldest museums in Europe.

In 1897, less than a century after the museum opened, the Friends of the Museum for Fine Arts came together for the first time. Ever since, this association of museum supporters has helped to expand the collection by acquiring and donating outstanding works of art, from *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Jheronimus Bosch, to *Portrait of a Kleptomaniac* by Théodore Géricault, to *Head of Sorrow* by Auguste Rodin. The association lives on today, with 850 members who are all just as fond of the museum as ever.

The celebration of not one but two anniversaries - 225 years for the museum itself and 125 for the Friends of the Museum - is abundant cause for a year's worth of festivities! These will kick off on 24 September with a four-day celebratory weekend at the museum, which will set the tone for a year bursting with exhibitions and activities. Throughout the year, visitors will constantly be encouraged to share their ideas for the MSK's future. After all, an anniversary year is not only a time to look back, but also the ideal time to think about the role of the art museum in the 21st century. Keep an eye on the MSK's news and publicity over the coming months to make sure you don't miss a thing.

A look at what's ahead: the festive programme for 2022-2023

Albert Baertsoen
03.09.22-27.11.22

To open the season the MSK stays firmly in Ghent, turning the spotlight to painter, illustrator and graphic artist Albert Baertsoen (1866-1922) for the first time in 50 years. Hailing from a factory-owning family in the city, he was a leading figure in the international art world at the close of the 19th century and the dawn of the 20th.

Baertsoen's contemporaries described him as *le peintre de Gand* - the Ghent painter - an honorific that conveyed his love for the city. But his influence extended far beyond Belgium. Over a career spanning 30 years, Baertsoen assembled an impressive network of art aficionados, collectors and fellow artists. He worked in London, painted the landscapes he saw while traveling on his luxurious houseboat, and presented his works at the Venice Biennale and the Vienna Secession. By the beginning of the 20th century his works were exhibited internationally more than those of almost any other Belgian artist. This exhibition explores the life and network of the cosmopolitan Ghent painter.



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Theodoor Rombouts

22.01.23-23.04.23

Without question, the highlight of the MSK's festive year will be the first ever monographic exhibition of works by the baroque master Theodoor Rombouts (1597-1637). The MSK will bring paintings from around the world to Ghent, where their joyful scenes and monumental compositions will come to life along a special route through the galleries.

Young Rombouts left his native Antwerp for Italy in the early 17th century. Once there, he found inspiration in the works of the revolutionary artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) and his successor Bartolomeo Manfredi (1582-1622). After returning to Antwerp, Rombouts developed an artistic identity that was entirely his own, achieving a sublime harmony between northern and southern styles of painting and forged a solid reputation in the Antwerp art world. The standout elements of Rombouts' varied oeuvre are his huge, lively and sometimes moral-heavy genre scenes, with their merry, elegant groups of musicians and other figures. His neatly arranged compositions are often bathed in the mingled light and shadow that was so typical of southern painting, and infused with Rombouts' signature vibrant colour palette. The particular refinement with which he depicted objects and textiles was unique in his era.

Both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue will illuminate Rombouts' triumphant career and re-establish his name as a leading Flemish Caravaggist and a major figure in genre painting.

The past and the future in the galleries

Starting on 2 September, the MSK will also address aspects of its history through activities in its permanent galleries. How did the collection take shape? What role does the museum play in a city as culturally vibrant as Ghent? And what, exactly, does it have to with the S.M.A.K.? Observations by its partners, staff and visitors reveal what the museum means to them today, and cover issues such as how the visually impaired enjoy art, and how an art student finds inspiration in paintings that are hundreds of years old. But since a 225th anniversary is also a time to look forward, the museum will be encouraging everyone to share their hopes and dreams for the MSK's future.

Taking the collection outside

The MSK's 225th anniversary is an occasion for a major interactive project by and for the people of Ghent. 'Taking the collection outside' involves the MSK and its partners going into the neighbourhoods of Ghent, looking not only for art aficionados, but also for people who might never have heard of us or visited the museum. In an accessible way, we look at what the collection means now and what it could offer to wide range of audiences in the future. The findings of these activities could be reflected in a dialogue about a work of art, a series of creative workshops or walks - or even a festive event designed to bring all the people of the neighbourhood together. Through all of this, the MSK intends to explore its relationships with the people of the city, and to find ways to make the museum more accessible to people who might otherwise not find their way into the galleries. The insights gained during the 'Taking the collection outside' activities will be presented in the museum galleries as evidence of the continuous interaction between the city of Ghent, its museum, and its people.



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Full programme of activities

Besides the exhibitions, the MSK will roll out a large variety of activities aimed at encouraging all kinds of visitors to become acquainted with the museum in any way they like. During a four-day festive weekend at the museum, the people of Ghent and beyond are invited to come and eat, drink, dance and - naturally - explore the galleries. The programme for the rest of the celebratory year is still taking shape, but it is certain to include evening activities, special thematic days and weeks, workshops and conversation evenings, sensory-friendly sessions, new activities for people with special needs, city walks, and activities to please even the very youngest visitors. Whether you are new to Ghent, a passionate art lover, a student living just around the corner, or perhaps even all three, you can be sure that the MSK will be offering everything you could want - and more - throughout 2022 and 2023.

More information

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