

The Rubenianum Quarterly

2018
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The Snyders&Rockox House: A museum full of surprises in the heart of Antwerp

On 24 February 2018 the *Snyders&Rockox House* opened to the public. The museum is made up of two painstakingly restored historical buildings, which are both part of the heritage of KBC. The everyday world of their 17th-century residents is evoked through items from the museum's own rich collection of 16th- and 17th-century art, supplemented by long-term loans from the collections and reserves of Belgian museums, museums abroad and important private collections. The press releases were full of praise and in the meantime a few thousand people have already visited the museum. The Snyders&Rockox House aims to be a meeting place, where art and history can be experienced. The 17th-century buildings – exponents of Antwerp Baroque – provide a context in which art can be brought to life. Together with the intangible heritage – the stories and the timeline – they will create an organic unity. In this way, the museum endorses something the Turkish Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk once wrote: 'Museums must not confine themselves to showing us pictures and objects from the past; they must also convey the ambiance of the lost time from which those objects have come to us. And this can only happen through personal stories' (*New York Times*, March 2014).

Nicolaas Rockox and Frans Snyders were key figures in Antwerp during the Baroque era. Each made his mark on the city's cultural and social life – Nicolaas as burgomaster and Frans as a brilliant painter of animals and still lifes. They were also neighbours for twenty years, occupying adjacent patrician's houses in Keizerstraat. We will be able to view their domestic environment through their own eyes, along with the creation and promotion of art, collecting and display, leisure and entertainment, markets and richly set tables, nature and gardens, and the humanist and the average citizen in the turbulent era in which they lived. They are also hosting another patrician family – the Duartes. These were renowned jewellers, but most of all it was their musical talents of which their contemporaries expressed the greatest admiration. To tell their story, Antwerp's Vleeshuis Museum has provided both its expertise and several musical instruments on long-term loan. Rockox and Snyders might have died over four hundred years ago, but their houses still testify to a fascinating piece of Antwerp history.

Hildegard Van de Velde: www.snydersrockoxhuis.be



The Connoisseurs' Tribune

After seven years 'on the market' it is time to introduce a new column in our Rubenianum Quarterly. It will focus on connoisseurship and there is hardly a better place in the world to develop that rare skill than the Rubenianum, where a world-class documentation centre is based, which includes an extensive photo archive and specialist library. The word 'connoisseur' sounds somewhat old-fashioned and reminds us of Honoré Daumier's prints and drawings showing art-loving gentlemen scrutinizing paintings or prints. Connoisseurship, however, is an essential skill for the identification or the attribution of works of art to a particular artist. It is based upon a slow accumulation of knowledge of style and technique, and a good deal of intuition. One needs to have an eye for recognizing the characteristics of a specific artist as well as a thorough understanding of his work. Connoisseurship cannot be taught in books but rather in the field, by repeatedly looking at 'the real thing': the hundreds of paintings or drawings in museums, exhibitions and private collections. That is the place where the eye can be trained and the experience can be gathered. Connoisseurs are a rare breed today and they are somewhat frowned upon by the academic world. Fortunately, catalogues raisonnés continue to be published, an indispensable tool in the identification of an artist's work. Great projects like the Rembrandt Research Project and the Corpus Rubenianum have relied on the methods of connoisseurship, and in association with the new scientific investigation of works of art, this skill is certainly not outmoded but remains essential and ... challenging. The first person stepping into the connoisseurs' arena is Elise Boutsen, who describes on pages 3 and 4 how she managed to attribute two previously unknown paintings to Gillis van Coninxloo II.

Cécile Kruyfhoofd

Three women unleashed in the Flemish drawings collections

The cultural department of the Flemish Government decided to make listings of works of art in Flemish collections which are considered of great value and indispensable to the community. This year, master drawings from the 17th century are being considered. The Rubenianum and the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels were jointly appointed to this task. Sarah Van Ooteghem was designated as the leading expert in the field and a Grand Tour of Flanders was organized for thorough visits to all relevant collections. Sarah is Assistant Curator of old master drawings at the Printroom of the Royal Library and is currently preparing a catalogue of the most important sheets. She is assisted by Elise Boutsen, a researcher at the Rubenianum specializing in Flemish landscapes of the early 17th century, and by Julie Rooryck, who worked on Dutch Golden Age genre scenes on paper in the drawings department of the Musée du Louvre. I had the privilege to be involved in this fascinating project and it was a great pleasure to accompany these three enthusiastic women. Especially in the Antwerp Print Room we studied, for many days, an endless procession of superb drawings and sketches, which was a great treat. Although being myself a chronic collector of master drawings, it was a little frustrating too, as I will never have the chance to find or finance anything like the masterpieces seen there. But let's hear it from the three researchers themselves.

Sarah, you were only given six months to realize these listings. How did you proceed?

All over Flanders, in Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Kortrijk, Leuven ... we visited collections with 17th-century drawings in their holdings. Armed with laptops, cameras and notebooks we invaded public institutions as well as private collections, libraries, art academies, universities and even church administrations. The interesting drawings were photographed and concise annotations were made for a more detailed description afterwards.

What criteria did you use to select drawings?

In the huge mass of fine works on paper several selection criteria needed to be applied. The most essential ones being the rarity of the drawing, its artistic or historical value and its possible function as a keystone within the oeuvre of an artist, or its importance for the collective memory of our community.

Sarah, how was the workload divided?

The research needed after these visits was particularly time-consuming. Attributions had to be checked and confirmed, the latest literature consulted and finally an argumentation given for why this or that drawing was selected. This immense task had to be split up and naturally each of the project assistants would look after the drawings she was most familiar with. Apart from monitoring and coordinating the whole project, I concentrated on the drawings that have a link with the ones in the Brussels Library as well as the hundreds of designs by Flemish sculptors. Julie focused on genre drawings and the late 17th century. Elise tended to the early 17th-century drawings and the landscapes from about 1600 in particular. When on location an interesting landscape of that period showed up and her advice was needed, the other two just hummed Beethoven's piano tune *Für Elise*.

Did you often cry out in delight?

Elise: I am particularly fond of Rubens's roughly drawn sketches, in which he builds up a composition very fast and spontaneously;

here we can see a creative genius at work. I came across really breathtaking sketches by him. *Julie:* Rubens designed a 'Labora et Constantia' printer's device for the Officina Plantiniana, the printing business of the Plantin and Moretus family. While working there I was able to have a close look at this beautiful pen drawing and even hold it in my hands!

Sarah: It is impossible for me to choose one particular drawing. Therefore I would argue in favour of so many outstanding drawings we came across which are still 'problematic', on account of either their function within the artistic process or their attribution.

Sarah, Julie and Elise, what makes this project so unique?

As great drawing lovers, we realized from the beginning how exceptional it was to work on this project. We were given easy access to all the collections, were allowed to browse through them for hours, and to get

very close to all these famous masterpieces. We were also pleasantly surprised by the kind hospitality we encountered all over Flanders. We met interesting people and gathered loads of knowledge on drawings in a short time. Working together as a team and discussing the drawings jointly was also great fun. Now and then troublesome attributions were frowned upon and a work could trigger some disagreement, but the subsequent debates remained civilized and ladylike.

Which institutions were most helpful?

Three Antwerp institutions were crucial in bringing this task to a successful conclusion: the Plantin Moretus Museum, the Antwerp Print Room and the Rubenianum. In the well-designed new reading room at Plantin Moretus we looked at remarkable series of drawings, made by famous Flemish artists and destined to be transferred to print by eminent engravers. The most important drawings in Flanders are kept there, as well as in the vast collections stored in the new depot of the Print Room next door. With the kind help of the freshly appointed drawings curator Virginie Dhaene, dozens of boxes were opened and many *Oh's* and *Wow's* could be heard from between the racks. Concerning the subsequent research, another institution is praised *unisono*: the Rubenianum. For the duration of the project Elise and Julie will be housed there and have the outstanding photo documentation and literature at their disposal. In this institution the *crème de la crème* of Flemish art scholars are regularly besieged with questions, usually at the bubbling coffee machine.

The deadline is June 2018. With their touching enthusiasm this winning trio will certainly achieve this task with brio! *Cécile Kruyfhoft*



Elise Boutsen, Sarah Van Ooteghem, Virginie Dhaene and Julie Rooryck looking at great drawings in the reading room of the Plantin Moretus Museum.

The Connoisseurs' Tribune

A new attribution to Gillis van Coninxloo II 1544–1606/07

Elise Boutsen

The RKD 'unmounted material'

There is nothing as enjoyable as browsing through a box, filled with photos of works of art, carefully ordered under the name of the artist of your interest. These documentation boxes are the treasures of institutions such as the Rubenianum in Antwerp and the RKD in The Hague. Each box is unique, containing remnants of different, carefully gathered archives assembled by fondly remembered art collectors, art historians or art dealers. Each institution follows its own guidelines to organize this material. Some deliver uniform, neat boxes with photographs laid down on cardboard mounts. Others display the vast array of all possible ways of reproducing images: vague xerox copies, rare ektachromes, handwritten notes and all the other delights of archivists doing their best to preserve these fragile gems. The boxes of the RKD belong to the neat, uniform kind. They contain a tremendous amount of valuable imagery, but your search is never complete if you



Fig. 1 Black-and-white photograph from the 'unmounted material' section in the RKD, The Hague

haven't checked the section 'unmounted material'. It contains all the photographs that as yet haven't found their way into the boxes. One might compare it with a junk drawer – everybody has one – in which all the unsorted, though useful,

objects are stuffed: that old battery charger, a forgotten gift card and the spare key that should be there but for some reason can't be found. During my quest for unknown works by the Antwerp-born landscape painter Gillis van



Fig. 2 Gillis van Coninxloo II, *Wooded Landscape*. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Fig. 3 Gillis van Coninxloo II, *Wooded Landscape*. Schloss Milotice



Fig. 4 Copy after Gillis van Coninxloo II, *Wooded Landscape*. Alte Pinakothek, Munich



Fig. 5 Copy after Gillis van Coninxloo II, *Wooded Landscape*. Alte Pinakothek, Munich

Coninxloo II (1544–1606/07),¹ I uncovered among the unmounted material a very interesting black-and-white photo of a forest landscape (fig. 1). To the right, a vista through the thick foliage opens onto a view of a castle built on high rocks. Here and there, little animals emerge from between the tree-trunks and the twisted branches. Even a monkey can be spotted, above in the tree to the right. No single human figure is present, apart from a small man running away into the woods. The absence of a narrative is quite exceptional for a Flemish landscape which, in my opinion, can be dated back to the years around 1600. The trees are delicately executed with a good eye for proportion and balance. Even though the forest is painted very densely, the artist managed to create the illusion of depth. Both this feeling for proportion and depth are characteristic of Gillis van Coninxloo. In the first half of the 20th century, this artist was still regarded as the ‘inventor’ of the wooded landscape which differed so drastically from the 16th-century panoramic landscapes in the manner of Joachim Patinir (1475–1524). However, we now know that this kind of landscape had been developed earlier on, as can be seen in some drawings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1526/30–1569) from the 1550s. Be that as it may, it was Van Coninxloo who reached a high point with his forest landscapes and who influenced artists such as Abraham Govaerts (1589–1626) and Alexander Keirincx (1600–1652). Apart from the subject and the overall quality of the painting, some small details also reminded me of Van Coninxloo’s paintings. If Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891) once stated that the earlobe of a painted figure is like an artist’s signature, the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for leaves, twigs and the texture of tree-trunks in landscape painting. Of course, one should bear in mind the striking similarities between the style of a master and his students or of painters active in the same workshop. These first observations, however, were no more than a starting point, a clue, for which I had to find further evidence.

A castle in the Czech Republic

On the back of the photograph the name ‘Schloss Milotice’ was written as well as the size of the panel: ‘56 × 85 cm’. These numbers rang a bell, and I soon realized why they looked so familiar: they were identical with the dimensions of a landscape in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (fig. 2). With barely any sky showing through the foliage, this forest landscape looks even more dense.

In this painting, no single human figure is portrayed. Only small animals can be found. On the tree-trunk to the left, remnants of a monogram – ‘GvC’ with an arrow – are similar to other monograms of the artist. In view of the identical measurements, I wondered whether this painting from the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the unknown painting in the Schloss Milotice could be ‘pendants’ – two paintings of the same size, composition and subject-matter, meant to be hung next to each other. A decisive element for landscapes is the height of the horizon, which should correspond in both pendants. That is the case in the Vienna and the Schloss Milotice paintings (figs. 2 and 3); the horizon seems to flow from one painting into the other. What is more, the way in which the foliage, the trees and the texture of the forest ground are painted is very similar in both panels. While these observations confirmed my first assumption, another detail offered further proof. The landscape in the Kunsthistorisches Museum must have been quite popular, for it has been copied at least six times.² One of these copies can be found in the collection of the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (fig. 4). Compared to Van Coninxloo’s original, it misses the atmospheric depth he created so skilfully. Moreover, the leaves look much more simplified and repetitive. The copyist has added the biblical theme of Hagar with the Angel (Genesis 20:14–20). Incidentally, the Alte Pinakothek also owns a pendant of this copy. It has the same measurements and shows a corresponding subject (fig. 5). Here we see Hagar and Ishmael being sent away by Abraham. This landscape closely resembles the landscape in the black-and-white photograph and is therefore, most likely, a copy after the Milotice panel. In that case, the Alte Pinakothek pendants must have been painted after the original companion pieces, which have since long been separated. If Gillis van Coninxloo painted the original of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, therefore, it is plausible that he is also the author of the Milotice painting, since both were originally intended as a pair.³

I had to see this for myself on the spot, as I could not afford to base my argument on a black-and-white photograph alone. And so, off I went to that small town Milotice in the south-east of the Czech Republic. I was warmly welcomed by the director of the castle. He offered me a Turkish coffee and showed me the painting which was lying on the desk in his office. The atmospheric forest was rendered in

very rich colours with the typical brownish *imprimatura* shining through the leaves (fig. 3). I could almost ‘smell’ the dampness of the mosses, and marvelled at the thickly arranged shrubberies in the foreground, cast in the perpetual shadows of the gigantic oak trees. Although the superb quality of the brushwork was still obvious, the overall condition of the painting was troublesome. The paint layer showed severe cracks and flaking. It is my hope that the present article may soon lead to a conservation and restoration treatment. On the back of the panel the name Nicolaes (?) de Groote was written in a more recent handwriting. This may have been a former owner of the panel whose provenance is mostly unknown. Before it became part of the Schloss Milotice collection in 1945, it belonged to the collection of the Koryčany castle nearby. Further information on its history might surface when the provenance of the Kunsthistorisches Museum panel is researched with which it once formed a pair.

Finally I would like to add a word about the rarity of works by Gillis van Coninxloo. Many paintings have been attributed to the master but they differ a lot from the six signed paintings we know so far.⁴ New attributions to him are quite exceptional. I share the opinion of many of my colleagues that there is still a lot of work to be done regarding the oeuvre of this mysterious landscape painter. On the other hand, this article is a warm invitation to keep on browsing through those documentation boxes. You never know which masterpiece you might stumble upon.

- 1 For more information on Gillis van Coninxloo II and further literature references see Elise Boutsens, ‘Onbekende panoramalandschappen van Gillis van Coninxloo’ in exh. cat. ‘The Sky is the Limit’, Antwerp, Rockoxhuis, 2017, pp. 57–70.
- 2 Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw, inv. 181831; Daphne Alazraki Fine Arts, New York (2003); sale Amsterdam (P. de Boer), unknown date; sale Vienna (Dorotheum), 21 April 2015, lot 22; sale auction Amsterdam (Christie’s), 14 November 1991, lot 217. This list of copies is also available via RKDimages, record 262015.
- 3 A second copy of this painting was auctioned at Christie’s Amsterdam, 6 May 2008, lot 16.
- 4 The five other signed paintings in addition to the panel in the Kunsthistorisches Museum are: *Landscape with the Judgement of Midas*, 1598, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, inv. 857; *Forest landscape with a resting hunter*, 1598, Fürstliche Sammlungen Liechtenstein, inv. 751; *Forest landscape with horsemen*, 1604, Fürstliche Sammlungen Liechtenstein, inv. 753; *Forest landscape with hunters on a wooden bridge*, 1605, Historisches Museum der Pfalz Speyer, inv. HM 1975/122; *Landscape with Venus and Adonis*, undated, The Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 62293. There are records of other signed paintings on the art market such as a monogrammed landscape which was sold in 1995 by art dealer Kurt J. Müllenmeister in Solingen, and a landscape dated 1588 auctioned at Christie’s Monaco on 7 December 1987, lot 12. However, the authenticity of the signatures remains impossible to determine as the whereabouts of the paintings are unknown.

Call for papers

'Many Antwerp Hands: Collaborations in Netherlandish Art, 1400–1750'

On 5–6 November 2018, the Rubenianum will host an international conference on artistic collaboration in the early modern Low Countries. This conference takes artistic collaboration to be the process of two or more individuals contributing substantively to a work's conception and production, so that the end result is something different from what they could have produced on their own. The Rubenianum invites contributions that engage closely with how artists across a range of media conceived of collaboration and how early modern audiences perceived objects made in collaboration. We are especially interested in contributions that reflect on the theoretical questions that collaboration implies and that rigorously seek to assess the question of why Antwerp has so long been viewed as the centre of this practice.

Please send an abstract not exceeding 500 words, along with a CV, to Abigail Newman and Lieneke Nijkamp (Lieneke.Nijkamp@stad.Antwerpen.be). Speakers will be asked to send drafts of their talks by 1 September 2018.

Archive of Walter S. Gibson acquired for Rubenianum's Special Collections

We are excited to announce the recent acquisition of the papers of Dr Walter S. Gibson. A renowned specialist of early Netherlandish art and a former professor at Case Western Reserve University, Dr Gibson has published extensively on both Bosch and Bruegel. It was his wish to have his body of working material on 16th-century art permanently available for scholars and students through the care and services of a specialized institute. For the Rubenianum, it is a privilege to look after a unique part of the impressive and lasting legacy of this great scholar, author of such landmark publications as *Mirror of the Earth: the World Landscape in Sixteenth-century Flemish Painting* (1989) and *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006). Sign up for our Collections Newsletter to be informed when the collection will be ready for public consultation.

Exhibition

Michaelina Wautier

This summer the Rubenshuis and the MAS will be organizing the first-ever comprehensive exhibition devoted to the work of Michaelina Wautier (1604–1689). Although still scarcely known today, Michaelina was arguably the most important and talented female artist working in the Southern Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Earlier painters, such as Catharina van Hemessen (1528–1588), earned reputations based on portraiture and devotional paintings, while Clara Peeters (1607–1657) was celebrated for her still lifes. Together with her Italian counterpart Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653), Michaelina was one of the first woman artists to gain a reputation as an accomplished painter of large, multi-figure compositions with a mythological or Biblical theme – the sort of work considered the most demanding test of an artist's ability. In addition she also painted portraits, flower pieces and

scenes of everyday life of extraordinary originality. Little is known about Michaelina's life. She was probably born in Mons to an aristocratic family, the older sister of the painter Charles Wautier (1609–1703). In the early 1640s Michaelina and Charles took up residence in Brussels, where they shared a house and studio together. There she soon came into the orbit of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, Governor of the Netherlands (1614–1662). The inventory of his collection mentions four paintings by 'Jungfrau Magdalena Woutiers von Mons oder Berghen'. The presence of these pictures in such a prestigious collection is indicative of the distinguished position Wautier appears to have held in the Southern Netherlands at this time. Thanks to the research of Katlijne Van der Stighelen this talented artist is currently enjoying a well-earned revival. 'Michaelina. The Leading Lady of the Baroque' runs from 1 June until 2 September in the MAS, Antwerp. *Ben van Beneden*



Michaelina Wautier, *Two Girls as Saint Agnes and Saint Dorothy*. Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp

The Rubenianum Lectures

Sunday, 24 June 2018, 11 am

PROF. KATLIJNE VAN DER STIGHELEN KU Leuven

Michaelina Wautier (1604–1689): A Genius Rescued from Oblivion

In June 2018 the first retrospective exhibition of the work of Michaelina Wautier will be held at the MAS, Antwerp. Paintings, prints and drawings will illustrate the exceptional talent of this mysterious painter, who lived and worked in Brussels around 1650. The lecture will give an overview of her oeuvre as well as try to answer the question as to why she was all but forgotten.

The lecture is in Dutch and takes place at the Rubenianum.

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