

# The Rubenianum Quarterly

2023  
2

## Empty museum? Full house!

Crates, ladders and bales of packing material form eerie still lifes in the rooms of the Rubenshuis. The emptiness is all the more palpable through these mundane and haphazard installations. Their banality underscores the absence of paintings and sculptures. The house seems fast asleep amid intense construction outside. The wooden gate on the Wapper admits no guests, only diggers and machinery.

There is a certain charm to this, that of a fairy-tale spell. But as the head of public engagement, I confess that a museum without visitors is not an uplifting place. During the annual pause in construction in July, all work on the site will halt, offering us the chance to bring the house back to life and offering you several once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to discover the Rubenshuis in a wholly different way.

Rubens entertained lavishly, with cook Willemyne and butler Jan working in tandem to serve up dishes worthy of the artist and his guests. From 5 to 29 July, chef Seppe Nobels, of Michelin Green Star and Gault&Millau fame, and his 'multiculinary' team from the Inroom Academy will occupy the kitchen of the historic house. Guests will savour a five-course gastronomic meal based on period ingredients, recipes and paintings, tasting Rubens's own favourite home-grown delicacies.

A dance master taught Rubens's children, and this summer, we will host dance company Voetvolk performing the new piece 'Nomadics' in an exclusive preview. The European Mahler Student Festival Orchestra will rehearse in the house and give courtyard concerts. Pianist Hantrax will fill the same space with a mix of classical music, jazz and electronic sounds. The music connoisseurs of Dansende Beren have scouted three up-and-coming artists to showcase their work, while the festival organizers Full Circle are anointing the dance masters of tomorrow, a brigade of disc jockeys, for two all-nighters. Other events will approximate the salon-style atmosphere created by William and Margaret Cavendish during their tenure in the Rubenshuis, with poets invading the house under the guidance of Lotte Dodion.

Beginning in 1635, Rubens spent the summer months in Elewijt, retreating to his country house. Surely his pupils and assistants must have taken advantage of his absence to get up to all sorts of mischief. This summer, I hope you will join in on our festive and irreverent programming. Please consult our website for details and tickets. As the saying goes: *als de kat van huis is, dansen de muizen!* (When the cat's away, the mice will play). | Liene Conard



## Dear Friends of the Rubenianum,

Newly planted trees are leafing out in the museum garden. A monumental arbour flanking the garden pavilion, the perfect foil for Rubens's gem-like architectural centrepiece, is ready for clambering vines, climbers and roses. A quatrefoil basin awaits a marble vase and the trickle of a fountain. Historical bulbs have been ordered from the coveted stock of the Hortus Bulborum. But don't be mistaken, this is a construction site in full swing. Helmets, high-vis vests, hammering and shouting enliven a scene of frantic activity.

For museum staff, too, this is a time of frantic activity. Loans are being arranged to prestigious venues such as the Galleria Borghese in Rome or the Museo del Prado in Madrid. Public programming will take advantage of the opportunities offered by an empty museum. We are hosting a ten-day summer course for early-career scholars and have been teaching Rubens in schools in Antwerp and beyond while finalizing the design for an immersive and interactive digital space in the new building.

As you read this, the two floors of the future library are taking shape. The current library has filled the building on Kolveniersstraat like a papery wasp's nest, quietly abuzz with the knowledge of generations of scholars. Moving this massive store of information while switching from a closed stack to an open stack system is a daunting undertaking. Our librarian, Ute Staes, who is as much a fan of Rubens's learned brother Philip as she is of the artist himself, is facing this Herculean task with befitting stoicism. We can only imagine how Rubens prepared the move of his own library from the main house to the very place where we will be installing ours in 1639. Surely the reams and reams of publications devoted to his life and work which Ute and her team are preparing for transfer would have flattered the artist.

Enjoy your summer, and your summer reading.

Bert Watteeuw  
Director Rubenshuis & Rubenianum

## Klara Alen: A new Rubenshuis staff member introduces herself

In late May, I was appointed research curator of the historical garden of the Rubenshuis. At that time, I also started working as an archival researcher for Rubens's country estate 'Het Steen' in Elewijt on behalf of Visit Flanders. The last historical tulip of the season still in bloom – the one befittingly named Rubens – showed off as proudly as I did.

As a child, I romped endlessly in a large sun-drenched garden in Geel, where my father kept oleanders in large terracotta pots and wine barrels. All the dishes that left our restaurant's kitchen were lavishly garnished with fresh garden herbs and edible flowers. I took my first course on the Antwerp Baroque from the passionate Katlijne Van der Stighelen at KU Leuven. Like many of my colleagues in the Rubenshuis and Rubenianum, I fell in love with the seventeenth century. For my master's thesis, I studied the life and work of the Dutch flower painter Margareta Haverman. After a morning of archival research at the Amsterdam City Archive, I was invited to lunch at a charming round wooden table in an early eighteenth-century kitchen at Prinsengracht 851. At that table, I was introduced to Sam Segal, a biologist widely regarded as one of the foremost experts on early modern still lifes. It marked the beginning of many wonderful years of learning and a beautiful friendship.

After my studies in Leuven, I moved to Amsterdam for a master's in Art, Market and Connoisseurship and worked in Sam Segal's specialized and meticulously compiled library and documentation on a catalogue raisonné of Osias Beert, one of the first Antwerp still-life painters and a colleague of Rubens. During our visits to exhibitions and Maastricht's famed art fair, he taught me how to look closely at painted flower pieces and laid tables.

Back home, I worked as a teaching assistant in the early modern art group at KU Leuven. There I leapt at the opportunity to work as a PhD researcher and art historian on the interdisciplinary project *Mapping the Antwerp-Oudenaarde-Brussels tapestry complex via social network analysis (1640–1720)*, supervised by Koen Brosens and supported by The Research Foundation – Flanders. The Antwerp City Archive became my second home for almost four years, and our database Cornelia my favourite instrument to visualize and analyse our endless archival finds. My interest in the social and economic strategies of seventeenth-century Antwerp tapestry entrepreneurs brought me to Rubens's vibrant neighbourhood and the commercial

hub of the Tapissierspand (today Antwerp's Bourla) in the St George parish.

During my doctoral research in Leuven, I remained committed to still-life studies. I contributed to the *Power Flower* exhibition and catalogue at the Snijders&Rockoxhuis and gave lectures for the KMSKA and at the Prado. After defending my dissertation in 2017, I collaborated intensively with Sam Segal on his magnum opus on Flemish and Dutch flower pieces. When he unexpectedly passed away in 2018, it became my mission to complete our work. In 2020, Brill published our book *Dutch and Flemish Flower Pieces: Paintings, Drawings and Prints up to the Nineteenth Century*. Since then, I have worked as a freelance still-life specialist and archival researcher for universities, museums and international institutions. Recently, I contributed to the exhibitions *Peter Paul Rubens and the Northern Baroque* at the Diözesanmuseum in Paderborn, *Linnaeus and Glimpses of Paradise* at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum in Helsinki and *Tulpenschau im Gartenbau. Historische Zeugnisse der Tulpomanie* in the Staats- und Stadtbibliothek in Augsburg.

Never before has a new job felt so much like home and the people around me so heartily welcoming as at the Rubenshuis and Rubenianum. Since I was a student, the Rubenianum has been a trusted place to study. In 2017, I briefly joined the Centrum team as an editor for the *Corpus*. On behalf of the Rubenshuis and in the context of the preliminary research for the Masterplan, I dug through the Antwerp archives looking for plants and stories on Rubens's garden for four months in 2021. For the first time in (art) history, I placed Rubens's urban garden in comparative perspective and systematically went through a wide variety of archival sources (including estates, last wills, accounts and letters). In doing so, I connected the garden of Rubens with those of his neighbours, close friends and patrons, suppliers and collaborators. Then I compared that harvest with, among other things, the *Hortus Eystettensis* from 1613 owned by Rubens, and a 'florilegium' of Antwerp specimens by artists with whom Rubens collaborated or maintained close ties. Put together, we now have a rich selection of fruits and flowers grown in the Antwerp gardens of Rubens's time.

The tulip turned out to be one of the most desirable flowers. Coincidentally or not, around the Tapissierspand – in that part of the city most familiar to me – I discovered a group of tulip speculators in the 1630s. Among them were Rubens's collector Antoon de Tassis, brewer Hendrick Stockmans and co-*momboir* Peter Hannekart. Since



I have begun on the preliminary research, the garden of the Rubenshuis hardly ever leaves my mind. In and out of the picture, I have been able to share my enthusiasm in a Rubenianum lecture as part of the *Become Rubens' Gardener* campaign; a national radio broadcast; a visit to the historical tulip collection in the Hortus Bulborum in Limmen; a palaeography workshop on Rubens's *Staetmasse* for the Summer Course for the Study of the Arts in Flanders; and, most recently, a lecture at the *Power of Flowers, 1500–1750* congress organized by Ghent University.

My appointment as a research curator for the garden runs for two years. It will be an exciting period in which a lot will happen. Early printed books, manuscripts and archival collections await further exploration. Next spring, the garden will become the only accessible part of the artist's residence and, for some years to come, the main museum gallery. The Rubenshuis and Rubenianum teams have everything it takes to continue a strong and fresh public engagement. Through our collaboration, we will create a guidebook, a podcast and an app. The charming gardeners' bothy, now inaccessible to the public, will become the place to tell compelling stories and host small public events relating to the garden.

Research on the garden of the Rubenshuis will be presented at national and international scientific conferences, in journals and in a book. We will make contributions to specialized horticulture and garden magazines, so that a new audience of garden lovers and specialists will also find their way to the Rubenshuis. Finally, we will prepare a special team of volunteers and guides for the garden. Connecting Rubens with his garden in Antwerp and his castle in Elewijt offers boundless possibilities and an utterly challenging and fascinating Rubens journey for a *dixseptième*iste.

# Rubens, the Jesuits and the Arts of Persuasion: Baroque Influencers

Hildegard Van de Velde

## Introduction

On 12 September 1621, the St Ignatius Church of the Jesuits of Antwerp, the current St Charles Borromeo parish church, was inaugurated with due pomp. After barely six years of building activity, not only did an imposing church emerge, opening up like a true shrine, but the construction had also led to an ingenious and innovative transformation of an area of the still-medieval city centre. The old street grid had been replaced by a large square, bordered by the spectacular Baroque church, the Jesuit professed house with the famous library, and the sodality. Naturally, this was all carried out with diligent care and forethought. Previously, in 1575, the Jesuits had built a modest chapel on the grounds of the House of Aachen, on Korte Nieuwstraat. After the fall of the Calvinist government in 1585, now under Spanish rule, they had conceived the plan to build a professed house and a new church.

Thanks to the creativity of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and the Jesuit architects François d'Aguilon (1567–1617) and Pieter Huyssens (1578–1637), the church is still a veritable shrine waiting to be discovered. Rubens was armed not only with the required expertise in the classical architecture of antiquity and its modern interpretation, but also with indispensable knowledge in theology, optics and the Baroque idiom. He created 39 ceiling paintings for the church, in addition to designs for sculptures and several altarpieces. The trio managed to create an object of wonder for visitors who often came from distant corners of the world.

Through exhibitions, concerts and other events, the *Baroque Influencers* city festival (March–November 2023) demonstrates that the Baroque period continues to be a powerful source of inspiration. With the exhibition at the Snijders&Rockox House, which – alongside exhibitions in St Charles Borromeo's Church and the Nottebohm Room of the Hendrik

Conscience Heritage Library – forms part of a triptych within the festival's programme, we are looking more closely at Rubens's importance to the Jesuits and their Antwerp church.

## The church: the identity of the Jesuits

The oldest designs for the Jesuit church in Antwerp date from around 1612–13. Eventually, a basilica ground plan was chosen, to which two west towers and an eastern bell tower were added in 1617. The order's instructions definitely determined the plans of the church, not only in terms of its architecture, but also when it came to the carefully considered symbolism of the sculptures both on the façade and in the interior. The façade was to express the identity of the Jesuits and to emphasize their core message. At the very top of the central bay, the Glorification of the Holy Virgin is represented in the pediment, from where she gazes at her pendant image in the façade of the City Hall. Below her, above the central window, two angels hold a laurel wreath over a bust of St Ignatius. In the middle of the second storey, above the entrance, there is a monumental cartouche with the letters IHS, the abbreviated name of 'Iesus Hominum Salvator' (Jesus, the saviour of men), and also the monogram of the Jesuits. The cartouche is encircled by fruit-bearing garlands and carried by angels. Angels are an essential part of the sculptural ornamentation; they were often the topic of fascinating discussions among the Jesuits. Literature on angelology was certainly abundant at the time. The Jesuits Joannes David and Petrus Thyraeus wrote books about this interesting topic. Finally, the statues of the apostles Peter and Paul, and of the four evangelists, underline the mission of the Jesuits.

## Rubens and the Jesuits

It was an obvious choice to call upon Rubens to help design the Jesuit church in Antwerp. Rubens, the ideal humanist, was able to interpret the word visually and help spread the message of the Jesuits. He probably first became acquainted

with the Jesuits through the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga, whom he would have met in Antwerp in 1598. Rubens travelled to Italy in 1600, where he was soon appointed court painter to the Gonzaga family. There he also met the Jesuits who had settled in that city, on the invitation of the Gonzaga duke. In 1604–05 he was commissioned by the duke to paint three monumental altarpieces for the Cappella Maggiore of the Santissima Trinità, the Jesuit church in Mantua. Respect for Rubens's talent grew apace in the Jesuit world, and the artist continued to receive commissions from Rome and Genoa. At the end of 1608, Rubens returned to Antwerp, where he stayed in contact with the Jesuits. He designed title pages for nineteen books written by members of the order.

## Rubens's contribution to architecture and sculpture

It remains difficult to determine the extent of Rubens's influence on the façade of the Jesuit church. Several of the preparatory drawings for the sculptures that have come down to us are attributed to him, including the design for the cartouche with the IHS inscription and a pair of angels, for example.

Entering through the arched portal, we are greeted by two trumpet-blowing angels, radiating triumph and joy and dressed in ancient robes (figs 3–4). Rubens drew inspiration for the concept of this motif from Roman antiquity. A trained eye will discover even more such angels in the church, where they form a subtle but integral part of the interior decoration. Inside the church, we are overwhelmed by the splendour and virtuosity of the high altar. Both Pieter Huyssens and Rubens drew designs for this portico altar. As with the façade of the church, Mary and the infant Jesus are placed at the top, crowning the superstructure. She is represented as the queen of all the saints and angels. Jesus raises his hand in blessing and welcomes us. The experience in the church is intensified by the sunlight

Fig. 1 Anton Gunther Gheringh, *Interior View of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, c. 1665. Oil on canvas, 97 × 116.5 cm. © Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation.



Fig. 2 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Miracles of St Francis Xavier*. Oil on panel, 104.5 × 72.5 cm. © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Gemäldegalerie, GG528.





Fig. 3 Peter Paul Rubens, *Angel Blowing a Trumpet, Facing Left*, c. 1617–20. Drawing, 25.1 × 27.3 cm. © Morgan Library & Museum, New York, purchased as the gift of the Fellows with the special assistance of Walter C. Baker and Mr. and Mrs. Carl Stem, inv. 1957.1.



Fig. 4 Peter Paul Rubens, *Angel Blowing a Trumpet, Facing Right*, c. 1617–20. Drawing, 24.6 × 28.4 cm. © Morgan Library & Museum, New York, purchased by Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) in 1909, inv. 1,233.

Fig. 5 Peter Paul Rubens, *Esther before Ahasuerus*, 1620. Oil on panel, 62.3 × 60.7 cm. © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London, Seilern Bequest, 1978, p.1978. PG.367.

Fig. 6 Christian Benjamin Müller after Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, *Esther before Ahasuerus*, 1718. Watercolour, 195 × 308 mm. © Plantin-Moretus Museum/Prentenkabinet, Antwerp – UNESCO World Heritage, 0T.00406.



streaming in, which, depending on the time of day, puts certain sculptures in the spotlight and successfully creates a theatrical effect.

### Persuasive with the paintbrush

In 1617 the Jesuits asked Rubens to further articulate their mission in paintings. They commissioned him to paint two altarpieces to be displayed alternately on the main altar: *The Miracle of the Blessed St Ignatius Loyola* and *The Miracles of St Francis Xavier* (both now in the Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Both Jesuits were canonized a few years later, in 1622, by Pope Gregory XV. The oil sketch for *The Miracles of St Francis Xavier* is also on display in the Gemäldegalerie (fig. 2).

On 29 March 1620 Rubens received an official request to make 39 ceiling paintings for the galleries in the aisles of the Jesuit church. He had hardly a year to complete this order. When the contract was signed, the artist was given a list of themes: 18 scenes from the Old and New Testaments for the upper galleries, and 21 representations of saints for the ground floor. The contract stipulated that he was to paint the preliminary oil sketches himself; for the final production he was allowed to be assisted by his students,

including Anthony van Dyck. Rubens first made grisaille sketches on small panels, painting only the contours of the composition. He would then paint more detailed oil sketches on the basis of those designs. These were presented to the Jesuits and used as models in his studio. Rubens made 42 oil sketches for the church, three of which were never executed in large format.

Given that a devastating fire destroyed all the ceiling paintings of the church on 18 July 1718, the more's the pity that not all Rubens's grisailles and oil sketches have survived. Interior views from before the fire, painted by Wilhelm Schubert van Ehrenberg and Anton Günther Gheringh (fig. 1) bear witness to the grandeur of the Jesuit church and give us a glimpse of the ceiling paintings in the aisles. The works by German artist Christian Benjamin Müller and Dutch ceiling painter Jacob de Wit have been much more useful for the reconstruction of Rubens's ceiling ensemble, however. They, too, had visited the Jesuit church before the fire. Müller made faithful copies of Rubens's ceiling paintings (fig. 6). De Wit's original drawings have been lost, but later reworkings by his hand – in which he did allow himself some liberties – have been preserved.

### The original ceiling paintings

Visitors to the church were astonished by the sophisticated content and the high quality of the ceiling paintings. Rubens linked events from the Old Testament to events in the New Testament and to Christ himself, thus creating a fascinating dialogue. He also depicted the saints in a representative and innovative way, in some cases even without being able to fall back on an iconographic tradition. But in addition to the quality of the execution, the powerful foreshortening of the scenes was breathtaking. Not only Rubens's interest in optics came in handy here, but also the inspiration he had taken from the work of the Venetian painter Paolo Veronese (1528–1588). Rubens showed his mastery of foreshortened proportions combined with a perfect frog's perspective, with which he was well acquainted thanks to Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's *Le due regole della prospettiva pratica* (Rome, 1611), a theoretical work on perspective that he had in his library. As a viewer, one was sucked into the depths of these paintings.

In the exhibition, a number of oil sketches and grisailles by Rubens are a delight to the eye. They are not sketches in the literal sense of the word, but small oil paintings rendered with such precision that Rubens's talent unmistakably astounds. Superb examples are the Greek church fathers Athanasius and Basil. Even the grisaille sketches, with particular emphasis on the contours and light, are very accurately staged.

**Exhibition:** until 16 July 2023  
**Curators:** Nils Büttner, Ria Fabri, Piet Lombaerde, Hildegard Van de Velde and Bert Watteuw

## Continuing the ‘Digitization of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*’

Between 2013 and 2016, project associate Karen De Meyst registered 6,500 artwork records from the first nineteen volumes of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* in the online database of the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History. The digitally enriched volumes are available on the Rubenianum website and form our most consulted web page.

The project was co-funded by three organizations: the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Flemish Government and the City of Antwerp. They now join forces to allow us to complete the digital version of the largest catalogue raisonné ever dedicated to a single artist. In the next

four years, a new project associate, Saar Vandeweghe, will add about 9,000 records to this online and open-access resource for global art-historical research on Rubens and Flemish art in general.

For the printed books, the online Corpus will continue to constitute an added value: through the digital artwork records, it will be possible to add high-resolution illustrations to every listed work and add addenda and corrigenda, for instance to the bibliography. Moreover, the format allows for future updates.

Speaking about the future – completing this Rubens database will result in the largest existing data set on a single artist, offering a range of possibilities. This project

will not result in a static status quo but offer a flexible foundation for further developments. As a showcase for digital Rubens knowledge, the Rubenshuis–Rubenianum and Centrum Rubenianum intend to continue working on this in the future and put a digital Rubens hotspot in Antwerp on the global map. With the complete data set, we will be able to work towards a comprehensive interface of the Rubens universe and devise alternative ways of querying, presenting and exploiting the master’s oeuvre. Bringing the timeless, inspiring work of Peter Paul Rubens to an even bigger audience will be one of our main aspirations. | *Elise Gacoms*

## Art Evaluation Day at the Rubenianum

On 15 June we organized the first art evaluation day ‘after the pandemic’. It is now ten years ago, in 2013, that the first edition of this – otherwise – annual event took place.

We welcomed more than twenty visitors and over fifty artworks, mostly paintings and drawings, new acquisitions and family heirlooms alike. People from all over Belgium and even from the Netherlands and Paris travelled to Antwerp to show their beloved collection pieces to the present experts: Nils Büttner, Abigail D. Newman, Lieneke Nijkamp, Bert Schepers, Brecht Vanoppen, Katlijne Van der Stighelen, Sarah Van Ooteghem and Hans Vlieghe. Happy to join in this collective effort, they provided our visitors with more information about the subject, dating and, if possible, an attribution of any given work

of art. Many seventeenth-century works were passed in review, including copies after Rubens, Van Dyck and Snyder (ill.). Some objects were clearly of good quality, but still impossible to attribute to a specific hand.

Especially worth mentioning are two drawings already published in earlier volumes of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* as copies after Rubens. They could now be examined in detail up-close by current Corpus collaborators. One was a drawing of Neptune that appeared in the volume dedicated to the *Decorations for the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* volume of 1972 (!) (No. 3, Copy 6). This may well have been made by someone in Rubens’s workshop. It certainly is thrilling when works published long ago re-emerge.

A copy on copper of Rubens’s *Diana and Callisto* in the Prado was recently purchased on the art market. At that time, it was covered in dirt and damaged, but it has now been cleaned and restored and may be tentatively attributed to Victor Wolfvoet.

We concluded with a beautiful work by Willem van de Cruys depicting a hunting trophy (1663). | *Elise Gacoms*

### The Rubenianum Lectures

Sunday, 1 October 2023, 11 am

**ANNE SCHRYVERS**

Archaeologist, City of Antwerp

*Atro tellurio occulta:*

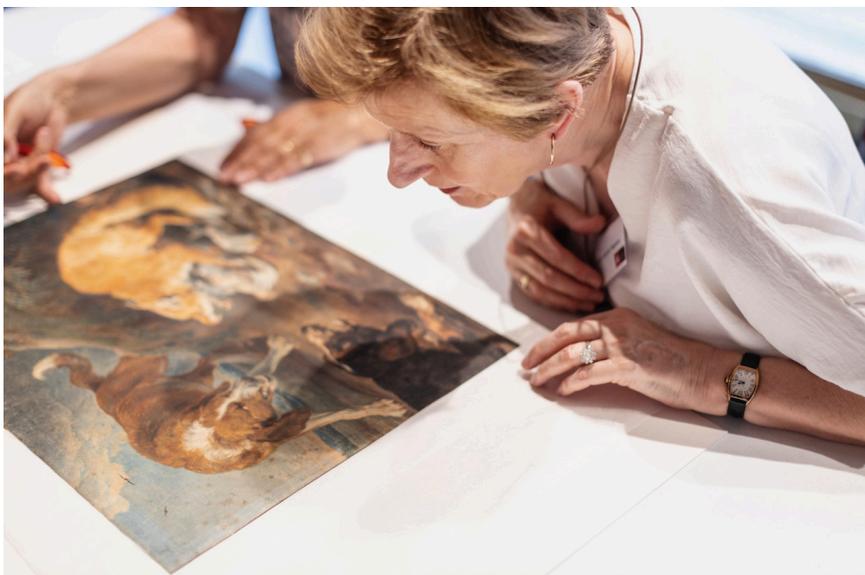
*Hidden in the darkness of the earth*

In 1627 Albert Rubens, the elder son of the artist, published a short poem in a study about numismatics. The thirteen-year-old scholar argues that time devours all that is buried in the earth’s womb. When he is strolling in the garden on the Wapper, dark secrets lay beneath his feet.

This spring, the Archaeology Department of the City of Antwerp studied the soil under the Rubens Garden. In this lecture, archaeologist Anne Schryvers tells us about the special finds that came to light during that soil investigation.

*With the support of the Fonds Baillet Latour.*

*The lecture is in Dutch*



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