Virtual Exhibitions from the Flemish Art Collection

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Flanders has excellent museums with a world-renowned art collection. One needs only to think of the Flemish Primitives in Bruges, the Rubens collection in Antwerp, and the superb 19th-century art with the works of Ensor in the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent. The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (KMSKA) is currently closed for renovations, but there are many, regular exhibitions *extra muros*. Curiously enough, however, you find few to no virtual exhibitions in Flanders. There is only one exception. The Flemish Art Collection, a collaborative association amongst the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (KMSKA), the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent (MSK), and the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, has launched four thematic websites www.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be since 2011. The presentations concern James Ensor, the Flemish Primitives, George Minne and an

The Flemish Primitives portal: http://vlaamseprimitieven.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be/

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online museum: Baroque in the Southern Netherlands.

James Ensor

One of the virtual exhibitions covers the Flemish artist James Ensor. It is worth mentioning that the look and feel of the share site looks completely different. Each subject has a unique design. The structure of the virtual exhibition is again the same: Biographies, Collection, Sources, Research and Experience Ensor. The 'Biography' section is divided into a series of qualities of the artist: as painter, as drawer, as graphic artist, as author, and so forth. Each section is extensively illustrated, even with audio recordings of the painter himself. Under the 'Collection' rubric, the site also covers the development of the collection. That is an interesting angle as it sketches out the provenance of the works and frequently illustrates the preference of the time or the preserving

James Ensor portal: http://jamesensor.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be/

passion of a collector or conservator. In the long term (2015), a responsive site is forthcoming so that the virtual exhibitions can also be viewed on other platforms such as tablets and smartphones.

The Flemish Primitives.

One of the most visited virtual exhibitions is that of the Flemish Primitives. Via a menu, one can learn more about biographies, the collection and research. With 'Biographies' it is possible to browse through the lives of the famous painters that belong to the Flemish Primitives such as Melchior Broederlam, Jan Van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, and also lesser-known names such as Jan Provoost. Under 'Collection' one finds an overview of the many paintings by Flemish Primitives in

The Flemish Primitives portal: http://vlaamseprimitieven.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be/

Jan van Eyck, *Madonna with Canon Joris van der Paele*, 1436, Groeninge Museum Bruges

museums in Flanders as well as in churches, for example. Under 'Research' there is a complete overview of research centres, specialised libraries and even an overview of Flemish researchers who work on the Flemish Primitives. Under the 'Experience More' menu, one has an overview of web stores together with the possibility to book guided tours and to order reproductions.

George Minne

A smaller exhibition gives information about George Minne (1866-1941), a Flemish sculptor. The exhibition has the same structure as the others with buttons that refer to the Biography, the Collection, Research and 'Experience More'.

An interesting tool here is the possibility to open the sketchbook from the artists and to admire page by page the sketches of the artist.
The drawings in this sketchbook deal with sculptures such as The Prodigal Son, the Small Figure Kneeling, a few religiously inspired sketches of a physically fallen Christ and a Christ on the Cross as well as a kneeling John the Baptist.
One sketch recalls the independent drawing, Grieving Mother from 1890. Further, this sketchbook also contains more realistic drawings with attention to the musculature of the body. Worth noting are the sketches from groups of male figures that seem to be carrying out some ritualistic dance with arms stretched out upwards.

The Online Museums

The Online Museums constitute a portion of the strategy of the Flemish Art Collection in order to promote its collections and related expertise abroad. The online policy places Flemish artists and art periods on the international map. The official language is Dutch as well as English. Each of five Online Museums is a point of reference for the specific artist or art period. Scientific researchers and conservators of the partner museums of the Flemish Art Collection ensure scientific accuracy.

The Online Museums regularly receive updates. Various sorts of relevant items with reference to the artist or art period are offered via news features. Exhibitions within and

George Minne portal: http://georgeminne.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be/

George Minne, *Fountain with Kneeling Youths*, 1898, Plaster, Museum of Fine Arts Ghent

outside of Flanders, works on loan, art books, conservation news, scientific symposia and other art matters are communicated via the news features.

The visitor can subscribe to RSS feeds and follow the share site via Twitter and Facebook. A Pinterest page is created per website (so long as the artists are not bound to copyright). The Flemish Art Collection publishes accessible web publications created by experts and answers questions from visitors. The most important news reports on the thematic websites are also reused for the newsletter and the website of Arts Flanders, the international window to culture in Flanders and the Flemish cultural offering abroad.

With each Online Museum, the Vlaamse Kunstcollectie works together with domestic heritage institutions that have an important collection. For Baroque in the Southern Netherlands, the VKC mobilised nine museums (Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, the Groeningemuseum, Saint John's Hospital in Bruges, Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp, Rockoxhuis Museum, Plantin-Moretus Museum/Print Room, Rubenshuis and the City Museum De Hofstadt in Diest) as well as eight churches and cathedrals (Saint Bavo's Cathedral and Saint Michael's Church in Ghent, Our Blessed Lady Cathedral, Saint Andrew's Church, Saint Paul's Church and Saint Carolus Borromeus Church in Antwerp, Saint Martin's Church in Zaventem and Saint Rombout's Cathedral in Mechelen). Twenty-six Flemish Baroque artists are provided with a biographical file. There are thematic collection presentations for typical Baroque topics such as Art Chambers, Floral Still Life, Animal paintings, the Counter-Reformation, Mythology, and Portraiture. There is a 'Research' rubric and a list with reference literature. Via the website, the public gains access to collections abroad, as well as museum shops and touristic information. Thanks to the collaboration with Lukas, Art in Flanders (vzw) and the service of Antwerp City Museums Image Bank, most works of art can be zoomed in upon. The Rubenianum in Antwerp is also on hand to guarantee the quality of the scientific and art-historical information.

BAROQUE

IN THE SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS

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WHAT IS BAROQUE?

In the early 18th Century, the term "Baroque" describes the exuberance of a raw, irregularly formed pearl. From there, one used it to describe the ideological imagery, of which catered to the princely absolutism, the Church contra-reformation and bourgeois moralism. This imagery is seen in the painting and sculptural art, in the architecture, in music and literature. A strong pervading illusionism, stateliness and abundance needed to convince the viewer of an internal message. The Baroque aspired to a power of persuasion of its own against the rationalism of the Renaissance. The representation of emotions is no longer a taboo: realism makes its entrance and shall serve as a counterpoint to the traditionally venerated theory of art.

The term "Baroque" covers a variety of levels and sometimes causes confusion, but is staunchly entrenched in today's parlance. In addition, the boundaries of the Baroque period are also disputed. Artistically speaking, the time period generally begins with the generation of Caravaggio (1571-1610), the brothers Annibale (1560-1609) and Agostino Carracci (1557-1602) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Yet also with the religious revolution of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), this could be considered a beginning. In the Southern Low Countries, the Baroque roughly coincides with the historical period between the Fall of Antwerp and the Treaty of Utrecht, when the Spanish territory fell into Austrian hands. This website takes the latter definition into account and deals with artists active between 1585 and 1713.

Nico Van Hout (Curator at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp)

ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN - PETER PAUL RUBENS
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