THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL
In Flemish Portraits.
14 March–31 December 2020

The Phoebus Foundation and the Snyders&Rockox House Museum have set up an intriguing 'blind date' in central Antwerp. Together with the Emperor's Chapel, St Charles Borromeo's Church and the Vleeshuis Museum, they are presenting a unique exhibition devoted to portrait art. The many portraits in the foundation's collection, dating from the late Middle Ages to the early modern era, are an ideal starting point from which to reveal the rich story of this genre. To help visitors get their bearings, the panels and canvases are accompanied by accessories and attributes like toys, combs, jewellery and much more besides.

Wealthy townspeople from the prosperous Low Countries, not to mention well-connected and rich princes, have come to pay their respects to Mayor Nicolaas Rockox, the perfect host, who receives them at his stately residence. At the Emperor's Chapel (Keizerskapel), meanwhile, visitors can find devout portraits of pious patrons who booked their place in heaven by commissioning imposing triptychs. Mysterious angels, honest clergy and demure citizens also await. St Charles Borromeo's Church (Sint-Carolus Borromeuskerk) plays host to children's portraits – solemn images of mini-adults, often with a powerful emotional charge. The Vleeshuis Museum, lastly, is showing three mouth-watering paintings by Frans Snyders, which symbolise the wealth of 16th and 17th-century Antwerp. They helped nourish not only the city's arts but its trade too.

The portraits are shown in their natural habitat, but with Walter Van Beirendonck's original scenography adding a surprising look. As a fashion designer, he knows exactly how to give these finely dressed ladies, gentlemen and children, along with austere saints and devout townspeople, an appropriate place on the various catwalks. He has even created a dialogue for them with several early 17th-century citizens – models dressed in brilliant creations by Isabelle de Borchgrave.

By way of a hint, here are just some of the many portrait artists included in the show: Quinten Massys, Frans Floris, Jan van Hemessen, Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Jan Cossiers, Jan Boeckhorst and David II Teniers.

Jan Cossiers
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For those whose appetite has been whetted by the exhibition, there is a portrait walk too. Besides the four main locations, visitors can explore the everyday world of the people in the portraits at St Paul's Church, the Royal Academy for the Fine Arts, Antwerp University-Hof van Liere, St James' Church (Sint-Jacobskerk) and the Burgundian Chapel (Bourgondische kapel).

Jan Boeckhorst
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BLIND DATE draws visitors into a dialogue with people from a long vanished time. Stern looks, barely concealed smiles, sly glances, healthy blushes and casual eye-contact: portraits are mirrors of their time. You'll be amazed at the stories you can tease out as you come face to face with such pride, wealth, hard labour or charming beauty.

Katharina Van Cauteren, The Phoebus Foundation, Chief of Staff and Curator
Hildegard Van de Velde, Snyders&Rockox House Museum, Conservator and Curator

www.blinddate.vlaanderen
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