Press Release, 28 October 2015

Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Flowers and Insects*, oil on canvas, 49 x 67 cm, KMSKA,
Photo Lukasart in Flanders vzw Photo Dominique Provost

POWER FLOWER
Floral arrangements captured brilliantly in paint

Winter may be coming, but the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) and the Rockox House Museum will bring us the joys of spring and summer in the months ahead. The exhibition *Power Flower: Floral Still Lifes in the Low Countries* opens at the Rockox House on 28 November, offering a compact but refined survey of three centuries of beautiful flower paintings.

Precise observation of nature has always been a trademark of both Flemish and Dutch painting, and flower still lifes are one of the best illustrations of this pursuit of the natural. The masterly arrangement *Flowers and Insects* by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (see illustration) is a perfect example. With a subtle sense of lighting and depth, the artist has arranged roses and tulips, an ear of maize, poppies, gentian, anemones, cumin, wheat, ivy and marigold into a vivid bouquet. Ripe cherries hang from twigs in the upper left of this wonderful microcosm, populated by a grasshopper, a Red Admiral, caterpillars, a garden spider and other insects, down to the tiny ants that creep out of the white rose. De Heem was, therefore, undoubtedly the most admired still-life painter of his time.

As the title of this exhibition suggests, flower still lifes were more than simply charming jewels from nature. To the social elite, they were a status symbol and a collector's item, while powerful rulers like Emperor Rudolf II in Prague used them as diplomatic and business gifts. The peerless garlands painted by the Jesuit and flower painter Daniel Seghers helped his Order gain privileges from the Prince of Orange, and led Cardinal Infante Ferdinand, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm and the future King Charles II of England to visit his studio in person.
Engravers and publishers produced prints of rare and expensive flowers for sale to a wider public as home decorations.

Artists from the period before 1600 until long afterwards came under the spell of the *'Power Flower'*. Floral painters were long overshadowed by fellow masters who conjured up grandiose religious, historical or mythological compositions in their canvases. It is increasingly recognised, however, that they deserve a place among the very best Flemish and Dutch artists. The flower genre has enjoyed a real revival in recent decades, as we also see from the intriguing photographs by the contemporary artist Bas Meeuws in this exhibition. His Photoshopped flower still lifes, based on the work of old masters are deceptively real-looking.

The focus exhibition features some forty artworks, including paintings, engravings, miniatures and books from collections in Belgium and abroad. There are works by the likes of Joris Hoefnagel, Roelant Savery, Ambrosius Bosschaert, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Osias Beert, Daniel Seghers, Joannes Fijt, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, Jan van Huysum and Rachel Ruysch. Many other art objects incorporating flowers and floral decorations also appear in the permanent presentation of *The Golden Cabinet*, such as paintings by Jan van Eyck and Frans Francken II, a virginal decorated with flowers and art cabinets.

The next focus exhibition will be devoted to *Clara Peeters* (23 June to 2 October 2016). It will then travel to the Prado in Madrid.

PRESS PRESENTATION: Thursday 26 November at 11 a.m.

PRACTICAL DETAILS
28 November 2015 to 27 March 2016
Rockox House Museum, Keizerstraat 12, 2000 Antwerp
T + 32 3 201 92 50 – F + 32 3 201 92 51
www.rockoxhuis.be and www.kmska.be
Open: Tuesday to Sunday: from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; closed Mondays, 25 & 26 December, 1 & 2 January

Entry prices: €8 / €6 / €0

Tours: For groups of up to 20 people. Tours cost €75 (€50 for student groups) and last 90 minutes. Info and bookings: Tel. + 32 3 224 95 61 – Fax + 32 3 248 08 10 / publiekswerking@kmska.be

Catalogue and visitor guide: A catalogue (NL) is available at € 12.50, and there is also a free visitor guide (NL/EN). The visitor guide is available for download from 28 November at www.kmska.be

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