

PRESS RELEASE

HILDEGARDEN

**NEW FLORAL DISPLAY AS A LIVING TRIBUTE
AT THE SNIJDERS&ROCKOXHUIS IN ANTWERP**

From 30 May 2026

ANTWERP, MUSEUM SNIJDERS&ROCKOXHUIS

With the opening of HildeGARDEN, the Snijders&Rockoxhuis presents a new focus display dedicated to the beauty of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century flower still lifes. This permanent, dynamic presentation brings exceptional loans into direct dialogue with recognized masterpieces from the museum's own collection, while also serving as a lasting tribute to Hildegard Van de Velde as she retires as honorary curator.

A FRESH PRESENTATION



Anna Van Thielen, *Flower Still Life with Diana*, 1664
Mechelen, Museum Hof van Busleyden
Photo: Dries Van den Brande

The small city garden of Nicolaas Rockox remains a hidden gem in the heart of Antwerp. Twenty years ago, the garden was revived based on thorough research, and today it still offers a surprising oasis of tranquillity. Building on this, *HildeGARDEN* unfolds as a vibrant counterpart, placing painted flora centre stage. Eye-catchers include colourful floral compositions by artists such as Anna Maria van Thielen (Hof van Busleyden), Jan van Kessel (Museum Mayer van den Bergh) and Judith Leyster (King Baudouin Foundation).

These works enter into dialogue with a strong ensemble from the museum's own collection, including Flemish Masterpieces by Osias Beert and Jan Fyt. And, like a garden that evolves with the seasons, this display will remain dynamic, with regular new accents made possible by the network of lending partners that Hildegard Van de Velde has built over the past decades.

A FLORAL TRIBUTE

In her *HildeGARDEN*, Hildegard Van de Velde is being put into the spotlight— a symbolic and fitting tribute to her many years of dedication and her refined eye for beauty and quality.

After a long and distinguished career, Van de Velde is stepping down as curator of the Snijders&Rockoxhuis and as head of KBC's art collections. Over several decades, she played a key role in developing and internationally positioning these collections. As a specialist in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Flemish art, she combined historical depth with an accessible, contemporary presentation for a broad audience.



Osias Beert, *Flower Still Life in a Niche*,
c. 1610
Antwerp, Museum Snijders&Rockoxhuis
Photo: KBC

Within the Rockoxhuis — since 2018 the Snijders&Rockoxhuis — she curated numerous exhibitions that resonated nationally and internationally. Her trajectory began with projects that reactivated the historical core of the museum, with a highlight being the return of Rubens' *Samson and Delilah* to the "Rockox fireplace" in 2007. Between 2013 and 2017, the close collaboration with the temporarily closed KMSKA led to the widely acclaimed *Golden Cabinet*, complemented by sharply focused dossier exhibitions on flower painting, landscape, and cartography. She was also instrumental in groundbreaking monographic exhibitions on Clara Peeters (2016), Jan Brueghel the Elder (2019), and Jan Davidsz. de Heem (2024).

Her work was strongly collaborative: she initiated and deepened partnerships with institutions such as The Phoebus Foundation (*Blind Date*, 2020), Museum Vleeshuis (*Klavier*, 2022), the University of Antwerp (*Baroque Influencers*, 2023), and Europalia (*Ydañez en Amberes*, 2024).

Van de Velde is widely appreciated for her collegial approach and her ability to bring complex projects to a consistently high standard. Her work has had a lasting impact on the museum's direction and its reputation in Antwerp and far beyond.

A NEW CHAPTER

The torch is now passed to Dr Maarten Bassens, who will build on the strong foundation laid by Van de Velde. He aims to continue developing high-profile exhibitions grounded in in-depth research, international collaboration, and strengthened public engagement. This ambition will take shape with the upcoming exhibition *Van Hemessen & Father: The Antwerp Painters' Studio of Jan and Catharina van Hemessen*, opening on 15 October at the museum and subsequently travelling to the National Gallery in London.

With the departure of Hildegard Van de Velde and the opening of *HildeGARDEN*, the Snijders&Rockoxhuis turns a new page — with respect for the past and a clear vision for the future.



Hildegard Van de Velde and Maarten Bassens.
Photo: KBC

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For more information and images:

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