Press release, 21 February 2018

SNIJDERS | ROCKOX | HUIS

Open to the public from 24 February 2018
The Snyders&Rockox House
A museum full of surprises in the heart of Antwerp

24 February 2018 sees the opening of the *Snyders&Rockox House.* The museum is made up of two painstakingly restored historical buildings, which are both part of the heritage of KBC. The everyday world of their 17th-century residents is evoked through items from the museum's own rich collection of 16th and 17th-century art, supplemented by long-term loans from the collections and reserves of Belgian museums (the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, the Maagden Museum, MAS, the Vleeshuis Museum and the Rubens House in Antwerp, the Groeninge Museum, Bruges, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels and M Museum, Leuven), museums abroad (Musée de Flandre, Cassel, Museumslandschaft Hessen, Kassel, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, Centraal Museum Utrecht, Liechtensteinmuseum, Vienna, Prado, Madrid and Frey-Näpflin Stiftung Stans) and private collections (including the Phoebus Collection and the Lottery Museum).

The Snyders&Rockox House aims to be a meeting place, where art and history can be experienced. The 17th-century buildings – exponents of Antwerp Baroque – provide a context in which art can be brought to life. Together with the intangible heritage – the stories and the timeline – they will create an organic unity. In this way, the museum endorses something the Turkish Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk once wrote:
'Museums must not confine themselves to showing us pictures and objects from the past; they must also convey the ambiance of the lost time from which those objects have come to us. And this can only happen through personal stories.' (New York Times, 03/2014)

Nicolaas Rockox and Frans Snyders were key figures in Antwerp during the Baroque era. Each made his mark on the city's cultural and social life – Nicolaas as burgomaster and Frans as a brilliant painter of animals and still lifes. They were also neighbours for 20 years, occupying adjacent patrician's houses in Keizerstraat. We will be able to view Nicolaas and Frans's domestic environment through their own eyes, along with the creation and promotion of art, collecting and display, leisure and entertainment, markets and richly set tables, nature and gardens, and the humanist and the average citizen in the turbulent era in which they lived. They are also hosting another patrician family – the Duartes. These were renowned jewellers, but most of all it was their musical talents of which their contemporaries expressed the greatest admiration. To tell their story, Antwerp's Vleeshuis Museum has provided both its expertise and several musical instruments on long-term loan.

Who was Nicolaas Rockox?
Nicolaas Rockox (Antwerp, 1560–1640) was born into a noble and wealthy Antwerp family. He studied law at Leuven, Paris and Douai and played a key role in the political, artistic and social life of his city in the 17th century, holding several important posts, including those of alderman and burgomaster. His diplomacy, his bond with the city and his influence were especially strong during the period between the Spanish capture of Antwerp in 1585 and the Treaty of Münster in 1648, which marked the permanent separation of the Northern and Southern Netherlands (the modern Netherlands and Belgium). He married Adriana Perez, who came from an old and wealthy family of Spanish merchants. Nicolaas and Adriana bought their home,

Den Gulden Rinck in Keizerstraat, in 1603, and had it remodelled in the Flemish Renaissance style. They turned it into a temple of art. KBC bought the stately town-house in 1970, had it thoroughly restored for a second time and has since managed the building as an important witness to Antwerp's grandiose history.

His love of art

Rockox was also a highly influential patron of the arts, humanist, antiquarian and numismatist. He contributed to Rubens's breakthrough in the 1620s by providing the great Baroque master with important commissions. As burgomaster, one of the paintings he ordered from Rubens was the *Adoration of the Magi* (Prado, Madrid) for the Antwerp Town Hall. His private commissions to Rubens included his tomb memorial, *The Incredulity of Thomas* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), while in his capacity as master of the Arquebusiers' Guild, Rockox also commissioned Rubens to paint the famous *Descent from the Cross* for the guild's altar in the cathedral. Rockox's passion for art was likewise demonstrated by his personal collection, of which the inventory of his estate following his death offers a glimpse, listing 82 paintings that Nicolaas acquired in the course of his life and revealing him to be a collector of contemporary art.

His house today

The inventory of Rockox's estate after his death was both a guide and a major source of inspiration in bringing the house to life. Visitors can discover his reception room, where Rockox introduces himself as burgomaster for external affairs along with his social and professional network. His picture gallery offers a selection of Antwerp's greatest talents, while his study highlights Rockox's interest in nature in all its aspects. In the rooms that follow, we learn about leisure and entertainment in the 17th century, for both ordinary people and wealthy patricians. And in the kitchen, we get to taste the culinary pleasures of Rockox's period. A music room is set up on the first floor, where visitors are introduced to the talented musicians of the Duarte family.

Who was Frans Snyders?

Frans Snyders (1579–1657) was an Antwerp draughtsman and painter, who was best known for his still lifes and animal paintings. His keen eye, knowledge of nature and original compositions continued to inspire a great many artists until well into the 19th century. In 1611, Frans married Margriete de Vos (died 1647), sister of the animal painter Paul (1595–1678) and the portraitist Cornelis de Vos (1584–1651). The couple lived in Keizerstraat from 1622 onwards, purchasing a patrician's residence there named *De Fortuyne*. It too has been restored for a second time by KBC and prepared for use as a museum.

His career

Frans was a pupil of Hendrick van Balen the Elder (1573–1632) and Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564–1638). Snyders's acquaintance with the latter's brother, Jan Brueghel the Younger (1568–1625), was however to prove even more important. Jan paid much greater attention to detail than Pieter did, a talent that Snyders shared, and Jan became Frans's mentor. Snyders was the teacher in turn of Joannes Fyt (1611–1661). Frans enrolled as an independent master in the Antwerp Guild of St Luke in 1602 and was later appointed its dean in 1628. Snyders spent the period 1608 to 1609 in Italy, during which time he worked in Rome and Milan. He subsequently settled in Antwerp, where he established himself as a painter of still lifes and animals and as a master of powerful hunting scenes. Other artists frequently asked Snyders to add still lifes and animals to their works. He collaborated in this way with Abraham Janssens (1567–1632), for instance, Cornelis de Vos (1584–1651), Jacques Jordaens the Elder (1593–1678) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). Snyders was not only a well-known figure in Antwerp, but also a sought-after painter in England. He worked in the Northern Netherlands and in Spain. The Archdukes Albert and Isabella likewise owned paintings by him.

His house today

We are less well informed about Frans Snyders's former home, of which the deeds only provide a vague description. We know that the interior of the house is worthy of a master's studio and is the ideal setting in

which to introduce you to the painter and to display his talent to best effect. We make the acquaintance of the master himself on the ground floor, with a magnificent portrait of Frans and his wife Margriete by Anthony van Dyck. There are also hunting scenes and paintings of fish here, by both Snyders and his contemporaries. The focus on the first floor is on birds and still lifes. Snyders excelled in the tactile rendering of animals and fruit, perfect staging and the bold representation of tension and drama.

Best of neighbours

Snyders got on well with Nicolaas Rockox. Both men had an art collection and Rockox owned a still life by Snyders. The burgomaster had already made his name as an antiquarian and might have helped Snyders in 1616 when he acquired five plaster casts from the estate of Cornelis Floris III, including busts of Marcus Aurelius and Hercules – purchases that testify to his interest in classical antiquity and Neostoicism, as developed by the humanist Justus Lipsius. Independently of one another, Snyders and Rockox each had Anthony van Dyck paint their portraits in 1621, highlighting the important status both gentlemen enjoyed. Rockox also invited Snyders to witness the final codicil to his will. Rockox and Snyders might have died over 400 years ago, but their houses still testify to a fascinating piece of Antwerp history.

PRACTICAL DETAILS
Open to the public from 24 February 2018
Snyders&Rockox House Museum
10 Keizerstraat
2000 Antwerp
T + 32 3 201 92 50
www.rockoxhuis.be (until 31 December 2017)
www.snijdersrockoxhuis.be (as of 1 January 2018)
Open: Tuesday to Sunday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays, 1 January, 1 May, Assumption Day, 1 November and 25 December.
Entrance:
8/6/0 euros
Until 27 May 2018, you will receive a 2 euro discount for a visit to the Snyders&Rockox House on presentation of a ticket for the exhibition *Spanish Still Life, Velasquez, Goya, Picasso, Miro* at Bozar in Brussels.

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