

SNIJDERS
ROCKOX | HUIS

EXPO
15.10.26 → 31.01.27

Van
Hemessen



&
father

THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY

THE BOWES
MUSEUM

KBC



From 15 October 2026, the Snijders&Rockoxhuis presents an exhibition of international significance: the first ever retrospective devoted to the sixteenth-century Van Hemessen family of artists.

The exhibition brings a forgotten family of artistic pioneers back into focus and, in doing so, rewrites the story of the Antwerp Renaissance. At its heart is a surprising perspective: a painter's workshop in which father Jan and daughter Catharina worked together, experimented and left an enduring mark on the history of art.



JAN VAN HEMESSEN
Portrait of a 37-year-old Man, 1543
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation

With no fewer than 33 sixteenth-century works by Jan and Catharina van Hemessen, *Van Hemessen & Father* is the must-see exhibition for autumn 2026. Loans from 24 international collections will be coming to Antwerp from cities including Basel, Berlin, Cologne, Linz, London and Prague, as well as from numerous private collections (see the full list at the end). Due to the fragility of these oil paintings on panel, they are very rarely lent out. The exhibition will also present several masterpieces from private collections to the public for the first time.

The collaboration with The National Gallery in London and the Bowes Museum places the Antwerp project in an international context. After the exhibition, a selection of the works by Catharina van Hemessen will continue their journey to these museums, where her oeuvre will receive further attention.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Portrait of a Man, 1552
London, The National Gallery

JAN VAN EYCKE, ALIAS VAN HEMESSEN

An innovative painter in sixteenth-century Antwerp

Jan van Hemessen (c. 1500-c. 1557) was one of the leading artists of the Antwerp Renaissance. Although his name is perhaps less familiar today than the names of his contemporaries Quinten Massijs and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, his work was widely known and admired during his lifetime.

From his workshop in Antwerp, Jan developed an innovative and distinctive visual language. Monumental religious scenes stand alongside intriguing portraits and compositions in which everyday figures come strikingly close to the viewer. The exhibition presents his oeuvre through a number of important signed works, workshop (re)productions and paintings that have recently been rediscovered.

The presentation also reveals the scale and organisation of his workshop. Repeated compositions and technical parallels point to a production process that involved several artists, while the master retained overall control.



JAN VAN HEMESSEN

Portrait of a Young Girl Weighing Gold, c. 1528-29

Berlin, SMB, Gemäldegalerie



JAN VAN HEMESSEN
Vanitas, c. 1540-43
Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts



JAN VAN HEMESSEN
The Weeping Bride, c. 1540
Prague, National Gallery

CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN

A pioneer rediscovered within her own world

At the heart of the exhibition is the artistic relationship between father Jan van Hemessen and his daughter Catharina. Although Catharina is now recognised as a key figure in Western art history, her works have never been brought together before for an exhibition on this scale.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Portrait of a Woman, 1551
London, The National Gallery

An absolute highlight is her *Self-Portrait at the Easel* of 1548. This is regarded as the earliest known painted self-portrait in which an artist depicts herself working at an easel. The small panel is not only an image of the painter, but also a confident assertion of her professional identity.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Christina van Hemessen at a Virginal, 1548
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Self-Portrait at the Easel, 1548
Basel, Kunstmuseum

Catharina was known above all for her finely executed small-scale portraits. She also produced a handful of religious paintings. The exhibition presents a number of works that are newly attributed to Catharina, offering a fuller understanding of her artistic achievements.

In 1554, she married the musician Christiaan de Morien. Through his service at the court of Mary of Hungary, the couple later settled in Spain. Removed from her artistic environment in Antwerp, this move likely also marked the end of her career as a painter.

Although Catharina van Hemessen's oeuvre has traditionally been defined by a small group of signed works, *Van Hemessen & Father* suggests that her contribution to her father's workshop was more substantial than had previously been assumed. Stylistic and technical parallels indicate that she may have participated in the execution of several larger compositions. The exhibition therefore sheds new light on both her own oeuvre and the collaborative practices within the Van Hemessen workshop.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Rest on the Flight into Egypt, c. 1555
Private collection

ROCKOX & VAN HEMESSEN

It is no coincidence that the first exhibition dedicated to the Van Hemessen family is being held in the former residence of Mayor Nicolaas Rockox (1560-1640). A painting by Frans II Francken, depicting a festive banquet in Rockox's patrician dwelling, offers a fascinating glimpse into his art collection and the way it was formed. Among masterpieces such as *Samson and Delilah* by Peter Paul Rubens, religious panels by Quinten Massys, and a series of antique busts, a depiction of *Saint Jerome* also stands out. Who is the creator of this striking and expressive painting? None other than Jan van Hemessen.



FRANS II FRANCKEN

Banquet in the House of Nicolaas Rockox, c. 1630-35

Munich, Bayerische Staatssammlungen, Alte Pinakothek

Nicolaas Rockox was not the first member of his family to maintain a connection with the art of Jan van Hemessen. A century earlier, in about 1540, his grandparents, Adriaen Rockox and Catharina van Overhoff, commissioned a monumental triptych of the *Last Judgement* for their private chapel in Antwerp's Church of St James. The richly attired donors are depicted on the wings of the triptych alongside their thirteen children, among them the father of Nicolaas Rockox.



JAN VAN HEMESSEN & PIETER AERTSEN

The Last Judgement with donor portraits of Adriaen Rockox & Catharina van Overhoff, c. 1540-45
Antwerp, St James' Church

This impressive altarpiece, which has remained *in situ* for centuries, returns to the Snijders&Rockoxhuis on the exceptional occasion of this exhibition. It is undoubtedly one of the exhibition's highlights, forging a tangible link between the stories of the Van Hemessen and Rockox families.

The connection between the two families remains visible to this day. The permanent display of the Snijders&Rockoxhuis also includes two works by Catharina van Hemessen: a moving *Lamentation of Christ* from the museum's own collection and a *Portrait of a Lady with a Dog*, on long-term loan from the Government of Flanders.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Lamentation of Christ, c. 1550
Antwerp, Museum Snijders&Rockoxhuis



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN
Portrait of a Lady with a Dog, c. 1551
Antwerp, Museum Snijders&Rockoxhuis (long-term loan from
the Government of Flanders)

NEW RESEARCH, NEW DISCOVERIES

Van Hemessen & Father has given a fresh impetus to research into the lives and works of both Jan and Catharina van Hemessen. Supported by an academic committee of distinguished experts (see below), the project has included extensive research in the areas of biography, techniques and the history of art. This has led to a series of new and often far-reaching insights. Intensive archival research has made it possible to reconstruct the lives of father and daughter more precisely and correct long-standing historical errors.

The (un)known *Saint Jerome*

Nicolaas Rockox owned a *Saint Jerome* by Jan van Hemessen. This original painting was lost for many centuries and a workshop version was mistakenly believed to be the missing masterpiece. Research has now led to the rediscovery of the authentic work. For the first time in centuries, the original painting is being shown in Antwerp once again.



JAN VAN HEMESSEN
Saint Jerome, c. 1543
Private collection

Catharina's Contribution to the Family Workshop

Technical examination and stylistic comparisons support the hypothesis that Catharina collaborated on several of her father's larger compositions, most notably in the execution of secondary figures in the background. These findings suggest that Catharina had a more active role within the family workshop.



JAN VAN HEMESSEN EN CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN (?)
 Christ Driving the Merchants from the Temple, 1556
 Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts

The Rockox Triptych reconsidered

New technical imaging of the *Last Judgement* triptych sheds remarkable new light on the creation of this masterpiece. Analysis reveals that the central panel underwent substantial alterations at various stages of its execution, offering a rare insight into the working methods used in the workshop. Moreover, the execution of several figures can now be convincingly attributed to the young Pieter Aertsen, who was later to emerge as one of the most influential artists of the sixteenth century. These findings place the painting within a new art-historical framework.

Hidden figure revealed in one Catharina's paintings

A surprising discovery lies beneath the paint surface of Catharina van Hemessen's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. MA-XRF examination revealed a kneeling female figure, invisible to the naked eye. This discovery offers a rare insight into the artist's creative process shortly before her departure for Spain.



CATHARINA VAN HEMESSEN

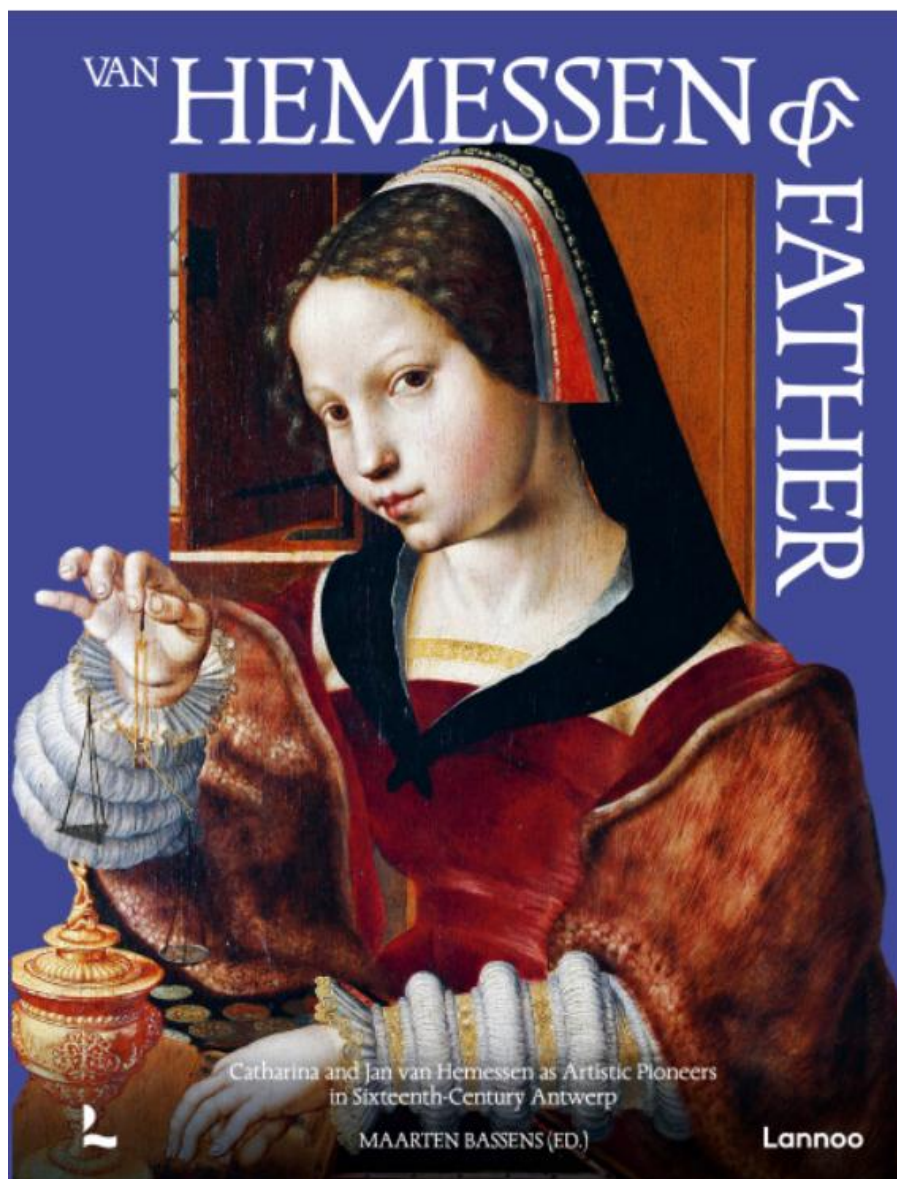
Rest on the Flight into Egypt (with overlay of MA-XRF image, map of lead (Pb) and iron (Fe)), c. 1555

Private collection

Conservation & Acquisitions

Several works given on loan from London, Genoa and Prague, have undergone conservation work for this exhibition. With the support of KBC bank, the Snijders&Rockoxhuis was able to organise the conservation of its 'own' *Saint Jerome* and also of the rediscovered and recently acquired *Christ as the Man of Sorrows Surrounded by Angels*.

The groundbreaking results and new discoveries resulting from this research have been made permanent in a richly illustrated catalogue published by Lannoo Publishers (ISBN 9789059962514). Issued in Dutch and English and distributed worldwide, this authoritative publication brings the new insights into Jan and Catharina van Hemessen to an international audience and provides an enduring reference for future research into this remarkable family of artists. The book has been written by a team of internationally renowned experts.



Exhibition

VAN HEMESSEN & FATHER

The Antwerp Workshop of Jan and Catharina van Hemessen

Antwerp, Snijders&Rockoxhuis Museum
15TH OCTOBER 2026 – 31ST JANUARY 2027

In collaboration with The National Gallery, London, and the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle

Lenders:

Alkmaar, Bijl-Van Urk Master Paintings
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
Antwerp, Saint James' Church
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation
Basel, Kunstmuseum
Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Gemäldegalerie
Brussels, Collection Flemish Government
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium
Esztergom, Diocesan Museum
Genoa, Musei di Strada Nuova – Palazzo Rosso
Ghent, Collection Jan Muller
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum & Fondation Corboud
Linz, Landesmuseum
London, The National Gallery
Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts
Prague, Narodni Galerie
Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts

and numerous international private collections who wish to remain anonymous.

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Christine Seidel (London, The National Gallery)
Anna-Claire Stinebring (New York, The MET)
Ruben Suykerbuyk (Rotterdam, Boijmans van Beuningen)
Matthias Ubl (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum)
Peter van den Brink (independent researcher)
Margreet Wolters (The Hague, RKD)

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