PRESS RELEASE

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St James's Church, the Snyders&Rockox House and the City of Antwerp present:

Family reunion at the Snyders&Rockox House

Adriaen and Catherine Rockox visit their grandson Nicolaas with their thirteen children.
St James's Church in Antwerp is lending the celebrated Van Hemessen Triptych to the Snyders&Rockox House for several years.

Snyders&Rockox House Museum
10 Keizerstraat
2000 Antwerp

The City of Antwerp, with the support of the Flanders Heritage Agency, is about to start work on restoring St James's Church (Sint-Jacobskerk). The project will take about ten years to complete in all, with two principal phases. During the first of these, the church will close the nave and aisles in mid-January 2019, while the transept, choir and ambulatory chapels will remain open. As a result, several important altars and artworks will no longer be accessible to the public, including *The Last Judgement* or *Rockox Triptych by Jan van Hemessen (Hemiksem,* c. 1500–1556/57). For the next five years or so, the imposing work will be hosted at the Snyders&Rockox House Museum.

Adriaen Rockox (1460–1540), chamberlain to Emperor Charles, and Catherine van Overhoff (1486–1549), related to the Lords of Breda and the aristocratic Liere family, enjoyed considerable prestige in Antwerp. They lived in Keizerstraat, where they owned various buildings. In 1515, Adriaen and Catherine purchased the Chapel of St Dymphna in St James's Church as their future burial place. Twenty years later they commissioned a triptych from Jan van Hemessen, the central panel of which shows the *Last Judgement*. The couple appear in the side panels, accompanied by their thirteen children. Catherine and their ten daughters are shown on the right, with Adriaen on the left with their three sons, including Adriaen Jr., the father of Nicolaas Rockox, our former burgomaster.

Adriaen and Catherine had a nose for art. They lived through the final years of the Middle Ages and the transition to the Renaissance, by which time Antwerp had become one of Western Europe's most important centres of trade. Commercial success made the city a hotbed for artists, whose

primary aim was to promote the Renaissance. Jan van Hemessen was an established name in the city and a master in the Guild of St Luke since 1524. He also made several visits to Italy, which influenced his practice as a painter. Following the death in 1530 of Quentin Massys, founder of the 'Antwerp School', Van Hemessen emerged as a worthy successor.

The Rockoxes were wealthy citizens who could afford to commission themselves a memorial. And what better place than a church – a public space *par excellence and cultural centre* avant la lettre – in which to promote themselves? Choosing a highly-rated artist was important too: Adriaen and Catherine ordered their triptych from Jan van Hemessen in around 1535/36. Investing in a memorial painting offered the added return of absolution from sin and the salvation of one's soul.

The Last Judgement theme, which features in a number of commemorative paintings, was supposed to remind the patrons of their duties. Van Hemessen also used the commission as an opportunity to show off his knowledge of the Italian Renaissance. He visualized the scene in a striking way, with the rendering of the nudes in particular clearly influenced by artists like Michelangelo and Raphael.

The family portraits in the open side panels are painted with peerless skill. The seventy-five year-old Adriaen is shown on the left, clad in armour and accompanied by his patron saint, Adrian, holding his anvil attribute. The martyrdom of St Adrian is depicted in an expansive landscape in the background. Adriaen's three sons pose behind him: Jan, Nicolaas and Adriaen Jr., father of Nicolaas Rockox, Antwerp's future burgomaster for external affairs. All three sons went on to hold positions of responsibility in the city. Jan served several terms as guildmaster of the Cloth Hall in Antwerp, alderman, justice of the peace and orphans' trustee. Nicolaas gained a law degree and later held the office of alderman and, on nine occasions, burgomaster for internal affairs. Adriaen Jr. entered the service of Philippe de Lannoy, Lord of Molembaix and a knight in the Order of the Golden Fleece. When this portrait was painted, however, he was barely ten years old, and he is shown here as a boy along with his two grown-up brothers.

Catherine van Overhoff can be seen in the right panel with her ten daughters. Dressed in a black cloak and fur stole, she kneels at a prie-dieu, draped with a Turkish carpet. The white cap on her head is still part of the late-medieval tradition. Catherine was aged about fifty at the time and has a distinctive, slightly care-worn appearance that radiates motherly solicitude. She is accompanied by St Catherine of Alexandria, part of whose wheel, the instrument of her martyrdom, we can just make out. The life of this saint too is depicted in the landscape in the background. Catherine's daughters are positioned in two rows behind her, all ten of them dressed in the new Renaissance manner with decorative braid around their necks, a deep, horizontal décolleté and slashed sleeves revealing the fine linen beneath. They are most likely arranged by age too. The daughters strongly resemble one another, and since no other portraits are available it is hard to determine who is who. What's more, there was an age difference of almost twenty-five years between the oldest and youngest daughters, which is not evident from these portraits. The daughters' faces are less marked by time than that of their mother. Barbara Rockox, the oldest daughter, is probably located in the front row. She was married to Fernando Dassa, a merchant from Aragon, who grew rich through a monopoly on sales of alum. The other daughters likewise married wealthy and influential men. One of the young women is shown in profile, possibly Anna Rockox, who died at a young age. She was barely twenty-five at the time of her death and was probably painted posthumously. Although Van Hemessen has not added a little cross to show that she had passed away, he does present her in an unusual way compared to her sisters, two of whom cast sympathetic glances towards her.

The backs of the side panels are also painted in an inviting and innovative way, with God the Father, Christ with the cross and Saints Peter and Paul on the left. Considerable uncertainty persists

regarding the iconography of the panel on the right. Are the two figures Mary and Margaret? Or is the kneeling woman actually St Dymphna?
The painting is particularly interesting, as few portraits of this kind from the first half of the sixteenth century have survived entirely intact and still in their original triptych configuration. It is also of exceptionally high quality. The triptych survived the wave of iconoclastic violence that struck Antwerp in the late sixteenth century as well as the subsequent Calvinist regime. It will now spend the next few years at the Snyders&Rockox House. Catherine van Overhoff will also have the opportunity to meet her maternal uncles, who are portrayed in *The Lords of Liere* by an anonymous artist (private collection via the Centraal Museum in Utrecht), on long-term loan to the Snyders&Rockox House.

PRACTICAL INFO
From 16 January 2019 probably until 2024
Rockox House Museum, Keizerstraat 10, 2000 Antwerp
Tel. + 32 3 201 92 50
www.snijdersrockoxhuis.be / www.sintjacobantwerpen.be
Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays
Entry prices: €8 / €6 / €0

Tours can be booked via VISIT ANTWERP:
Booking Ticketing
Tel. + 32 3 338 95 30
Via e-mail: tickets@visitantwerpen.be

Sunday lectures at Snyders&Rockox:
Sunday 17 March 2019:
'Onder de toren van Sint-Jacob: *Lief en leed* en kunst gedeeld door Rockox en Rubens' ('Under the tower of St James's Church: love, suffering and art shared by Rockox and Rubens' – in Dutch)
Dr Beatrijs Wolters van der Wey
Register: infosnijdersrockoxhuis@kbc.be

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