

HALLE GATE

Royal Museums of Art and History

**Back to Bruegel
Experience the 16th Century**

18 October 2019 – 18 October 2020

**With the support of
Toerisme Vlaanderen
La Région de Bruxelles-Capitale**

Back to Bruegel

A journey back in time

The Royal Museums of Art and History will present the exhibition *Back to Bruegel*.
Experience the 16th century, in the medieval tower of the Halle Gate.

The exhibition will offer a real journey back in time, the supposedly impossible dream of all history-lovers. The turbulent period of Bruegel's 16th century will be presented through four themes: 'Power and Rebellion', 'Religion and Reform', 'Travel and Curiosities', 'Celebrations and Entertainments'.

Each visitor will receive a pair of VR-glasses (VR-room for groups) that will catapult them into the paintings. **The paintings will come alive** and allow the viewer to discover one of the major themes of the 16th century. Afterwards, an attractive and dynamic itinerary including **works of art and archaeology** will provide more in-depth insight into the topics. The visitor will be able to look at objects, but will also discover by way of touch, smell and handling. The combination of original works, virtual reality and **sensory experiences** will make this exhibition particularly appealing.

The crowning achievement will be the **panorama from the parapet walkway** of the Halle Gate. Some iconic buildings, such as the Chapel Church and the Town Hall are to be seen. And telescopes will provide a **virtual image of the 16th-century Brussels** which Bruegel knew and was inspired by: for example the fortifications which abruptly separated the city from the countryside.

An exhibition for everyone

The exhibition and the panorama are an experience aimed at members of the general public with an interest in discovering an important period of European history. *Back to Bruegel* may be a first introduction to the work and times of the Flemish master, or a reminder for connoisseurs, but in either case it will be a lively and surprising experience! There will be no long texts on panels in this exhibition. History will be told by Bruegel himself by way of audio or video. The universal themes dealt with in the exhibition can be of interest to any visitor, no matter where from. All the information will be available in six languages - French, Dutch, English, German, Spanish and Russian.

This adventure will also be a unique experience for children. An audioguide of the circuit will be specially designed for them.

The Halle Gate : a tourist attraction

Thanks to this exhibition, the Royal Museums of Art and History also want to bring attention to this unmissable monument in Brussels. The 16th-century former gate to the city, perfectly preserved and magnificently restored to welcome the public in perfect conditions, is moreover situated in the very Brussels neighbourhood in which Bruegel lived and was married.

2019, Bruegel Year

2019 will be the year that celebrates the life and times of Pieter Bruegel, 450 years after his death. A major series of exhibitions and events in Brussels and Flanders will show the whole world the extent to which Bruegel was and still remains today an important and influential artist.

The exhibition in summary

The 16th century is a pivotal time in Western history. The exhibition will focus on the Low Countries during Bruegel's time and will be broken down into four major themes. Each theme will contain a virtual animation that will take the visitor into one of the painter's works, together with a fine selection of artistic and archaeological works accompanied by sensory experiences.

1) *Power and Rebellion*

In taking power in the Low Countries, Charles V put into place a political and geographic union of a territory which contained the present-day Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg as well as territory in France and Germany. He established its government in Brussels.

To finance their armies and citadels, ... Charles V, followed by his son Philip II, overburdened the population, already impoverished by high economic inflation, with taxes.

The emperor Charles V created a state inquisition to combat religious dissidence more forcefully. Faced with the riots of a growing protestant population, Philippe II put in place in 1567 the Council of the Troubles (called at the time the "Council of Blood") which imposed death penalties and financial foreclosures by the thousands, thereby enriching the Spanish Treasury.

This religious intolerance, combined with over-taxation in a period of economic crisis, pushed the people to revolution.

Far from openly opposing these harsh and repressive policies, Bruegel was actually close to the High Representative of the Low Countries, Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, a collector of his works.

Virtual reality animation of the painting : *The Massacre of the Innocents*

Masterpiece : Armour of Philip II, 16th century

2) *Religion and Reform*

In the 16th century religion is entwined in every moment of daily life, from birth to death. Religion and politics are closely linked. Christian faith is merged with monarchical faith. Philippe II leads a veritable crusade against religious heresy.

The worship of Mary, the saints, relics, pilgrimages, and processions become more and more developed in response to the fear of death and hell. Religious practices slide towards the territory of superstition, often for profit. The abuses of the Catholic Church at the expense of the population multiply.

Several currents, from the moderate to the extreme, rise in opposition to these practices. They recommend a return to inner faith and wish to make worship available to all by translating the Gospels, until then circulated only in Latin.

Confronted with this will of dissent, the Council of Trent reunites the great catholic prelates to redefine catholic dogma. While the Council achieves the abolition of a few abuses in the Church, it results nevertheless in the definitive separation of the catholic and reformed faith.

A real civil, political and religious war breaks out.

Far from being able to decide on Bruegel's position in the face of the religious conflicts of the time, his painting shows him to be open to new ideas and among the great humanists of his time.

Virtual reality animation of the painting : *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*

Masterpiece : Tapestry *The Legend of Our Lady of Sablon*, Bernard van Orley, 1516/1518

3) *Travel and Curiosities*

Ships improve and allow the discovery of new territories. Coastline navigation gradually gives way to navigation on the open sea. The sea, finally tamed, opens up new horizons: we see the transport of people and merchandise develop over longer and longer distances. Treasures are brought back from far-off lands. The Low Countries open up to the world, old and new. Mapmaking contributes to the diffusion of the new world view.

The development of this maritime commerce allowed the expansion of several port towns, such as Antwerp or Brussels, in the 16th century. The large Flemish port establishes stronger and stronger commercial links with Spain and even Portugal and the Baltic. Brussels for its part, profits from the digging of the Willebroek Canal. This waterway provides much more rapid access to the North Sea. With his series of "sea vessels", Pieter Bruegel paints ships at sea for the first time in the manner of real portraits.

Virtual reality animation of the painting : *The Tower of Babel*

Masterpiece : The armillary sphere of Gauthier Arscenius, 1575

4) *Celebrations and entertainment*

Fairs are very important to the population. Each religious celebration is the opportunity for the people to assemble and feast together. The fair must go on, even if it means a year of fasting! Religious and secular authorities did not approve of these moments of debauchery and were always trying to limit them. These popular jollities mix together rich and poor, city and country folk, men and women.

Written sources reveal that Bruegel like to mingle with the guests at village celebrations. On his engravings of fairs appears the phrase « *Die boeren verblijen hun in sulken feesten. Te dansen springhen en dronckendrincken als beesten* » (Leave the peasants to their celebrations. Dancing, jumping and drinking like beasts).

Virtual reality animation of the engraving : *The Fair of Saint-George*

Masterpiece : Chain of the arquebusiers guilds of Nivelles, circa 1525

Information

Halle Gate

Boulevard du Midi 150, 1000 Brussels
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portedehal@rmah.be
www.portedehal.be

Prices

€12 - €10 - €4

Opening times

18 October 2019 – 18 October 2020
Mon – Thurs : 9:30 - 17:00
Sat – Sun : 10:00 - 18:00
Closed : Fridays & 1/05,
1/11, 11/11, 25/12, 01/01

Access

Train : Bruxelles-Midi station
Metro, tram, bus : stop « porte de Hal »
Pay parking (500m)
Drop off zone for coaches in front of the building

Contact

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