

# EZINE 2 SPRING 2013

WELCOME

3D

**Gerdien Verschoor**

An article on the [Vienna Kunstkammer](#), a piece on [Dutch and Flemish sculpture in the Baltic region](#), and a tapestry specialist [In the spotlight](#): this issue of the eZine is dedicated completely to the three-dimensional arts.

Sculpture and the applied arts have been important to CODART from its inception. Although our organization is open to curators in all disciplines, it is curators of the “flat arts” who most often join CODART. Since the majority of our members concentrate mainly on paintings, drawings and prints, it stands to reason that our congresses and other activities mostly focus on those disciplines. This means that the applied arts and sculpture do not always receive the notice they deserve from CODART, and this could easily turn into a vicious circle, for why would curators in these fields want to join an organization that pays them scant attention? The current tendency for museums to present paintings, prints and drawings in combination with period pieces of sculpture or objects of applied art is reason enough for CODART to sharpen its focus on 3D art. Moreover, CODART’s eZine, with its technical features, offers the perfect opportunity to highlight these disciplines, as clearly shown by this special issue, which features a film on the [boxwood project at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto](#).

In an attempt to stir up interest in sculpture and the applied arts within CODART, curators in these disciplines were invited this past year to join the program committee and the editorial board of the eZine. They have put their knowledge and professional networks to use in supporting CODART’s efforts to integrate 3D art into our activities and to increase membership among curators of sculpture and the applied arts. Everyone who reads this is welcome, of course, to introduce new members.

The exhibition *Surviving the Iconoclasm: Medieval Sculptures* at the Catharijneconvent in Utrecht was a good opportunity to concentrate on sculpture. More than fifty people attended the CODART*focus* meeting held there on 28 January to mark the exhibition. It was a pleasure to work closely in this context with the Contact Group Early Netherlandish Art. Not surprisingly, those attending this gathering represented an international mix of CODART members, academics, students, and other specialists in the field, who shared their expertise with one another and discussed the works on display. This issue of the eZine contains an account of the day’s activities by Micha Leeftang, one of the initiators of this [CODART\*focus\* meeting](#).

This year CODART celebrates its fifteenth anniversary. Behind the scenes a lot of work is going on to organize an event to commemorate this milestone. You will be hearing more about this soon.

Naturally CODART owes its success primarily to the ever-growing number of faithful members who visit our congresses and meetings and contribute to the eZine and our website. Of increasing importance to the functioning of our organization are our Friends, who help to expand our social base and contribute financially to our activities. This is why the current eZine includes an [interview with Thomas Leysen](#), a collector and Patron of CODART, who has served as chairman of the Friends of CODART Foundation since the spring of 2012.

Funds, too, play an ever greater role in the financing of our activities, so it is highly appropriate, at this point, to express our gratitude to the Stichting Dioraphte, which provided financial support for this issue of the eZine.

Meanwhile the [CODART ZESTIEN congress in Vienna](#), organized in close cooperation with the Kunsthistorisches Museum, is approaching. In Vienna you may take part in a fascinating program of lectures, discussion groups and excursions, as well as an exclusive visit to the Kunstkammer, which reopens in March. The keynote speakers will be Arthur Wheelock and Julien Chapuis. Many CODART members have already signed up for CODART ZESTIEN, but there are still a few places available. Don’t wait too long to apply if you want to reserve a place in the discussion groups and excursions of your choice. I look forward to seeing you in Vienna!

To whet your appetite for both the upcoming congress and the re-opening of the Kunstammer we would like to share this teaser with you:

## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

## Manifestations of Habsburg Splendor – Tapestries in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna

Katja Schmitz-von Ledebur

Since the Middle Ages, sets of tapestries – the products of painstaking handiwork involving wool, silk and metal threads – have served to radiate stately grandeur and political aspirations. Owing to their costliness, such wall hangings remained the preserve of the elite, mostly from aristocratic and clerical circles.

Signifying dignity and ennoblement, they were temporarily put on display on festive or ceremonial occasions to decorate interiors and sometimes also public spaces.

The over seven hundred tapestries preserved in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (KHM) in Vienna constitute one of the largest and most important collections of its kind in the world and bear eloquent witness to the splendor once associated with this textile medium. The core of the Vienna tapestry collection harks back to the House of Habsburg, whose members – like the dukes of Burgundy before them – were among Europe's most important patrons and lovers of tapestries. In particular, the extraordinary acquisitions of Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) set high standards for the other courts of Europe.

It is almost impossible to unravel the details of the history of the Vienna tapestry collection, owing to the scant reports of their commissions, purchases and often very eventful pasts. One of the earliest testimonies is an inventory drawn up between 1666 and 1679, which primarily lists the subjects of the tapestries and occasionally the names of the designers, manufacturers and previous owners. At the top of the list is one of the most prominent and exceptional sets in the Vienna collection, namely the six-piece series depicting the *Histori von Khönig in Frankreich* (History of the King of France). The patron of this so-called *Fontainebleau Series* (cartoon: Claude Badouin; weavers: Jean and Pierre Le Bries, Fontainebleau 1540-47) was the French king Francis I. The renovation (1528-32) of his residence at Fontainebleau had included the creation of the so-called Great Gallery under the supervision of the Florentine artist Rosso Fiorentino (1494-1540). The *Fontainebleau Tapestries* represent a woven repetition of the decoration of the south wall of this gallery.

Similar to the *Fontainebleau Series*, the circumstances of the production of a ten-piece series displaying Portrayals of *Emperor Charles V's Campaign against Tunis* of 1535 are also documented (the ten surviving cartoons are preserved in the Picture Gallery of the Kunsthistorisches Museum). In the capacity of war correspondent, Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (ca. 1500-1559) took part personally in the campaign. He was also responsible for the designs and cartoons executed between 1546 and 1550. The *editio princeps* of this series, produced for Emperor Charles V, now belongs to the Patrimonio Nacional in Madrid. Preserved in Vienna, on the other hand, is another edition of the same series, executed after the same cartoons between 1712 and 1721 for Emperor Charles VI by the distinguished Brussels manufacturer Jodocus de Vos (active 1700-1725).

By contrast, the history of most of the other tapestries in the KHM are documented in far less detail. For example, only one series in the KHM – “verdures” produced around 1540

by the famous Brussels manufacturer Willem de Pannemaker (recorded 1539-1581) – can be traced, on the basis of his coat of arms – to Emperor Charles V, a great tapestry patron with extensive holdings.

Maximilian II (1527–1576), the nephew of Emperor Charles V, also owned numerous tapestries. A set depicting the *Seven Virtues* – produced in the Brussels workshop of Frans Geubels in the second quarter of the sixteenth century – still belongs to the Vienna holdings. Maximilian inherited the series from the estate of his sister, Queen Catherine of Poland († 1572). Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria (1529–1595), the brother of Maximilian II, was also fascinated by the textile medium. Several sets of tapestries in the KHM's holdings, such as a series depicting the *Six Ages of the World*, can be connected with this patron and passionate art collector.

The prominent series, likewise preserved in Vienna, of *Garden Landscapes with Animals*, also known as the *Granvelle Gardens* (Brussels 1564), was commissioned by the great art lover, cardinal and statesman Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle

(1517-1586) from the above-mentioned Brussels manufacturer Willem de Pannemaker. After the cardinal's death, the series was acquired by Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612).

One of the greatest art collectors and patrons of the Habsburg dynasty was Archduke Leopold Wilhelm (1614-1662), regent of the Southern Netherlands. He not only owned one of the most impressive collections of paintings of his time, but also possessed a large number of tapestries. A considerable part of his estate was passed down to Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705), who probably also inherited six tapestries depicting the *Months* and an allegorical representation of *Night*, which Archduke Leopold Wilhelm had commissioned in 1650 in Brussels, together with a depiction of *Day*, a representation of the *Four Seasons* and another of the *Four Elements*. The designs were produced by Jan van den Hoecke (1611–1651), the archduke's court painter, and the tapestries were woven by the Brussels manufacturers Everard Leyniers and Aegidius van Habbeke. In addition to the tapestries, the archduke also inherited the relevant designs and cartoons, all executed in oil and likewise preserved in the Picture Gallery of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. There is also extensive documentation on tapestry-collecting at the court of Emperor Leopold I. For example, the Vienna merchant Bartholome Triangl was ordered to procure baldachins, tapestries and carpets to embellish the imperial palace on the occasion of the emperor's marriage to the Spanish Infanta Margarita Teresa in 1666. The six series that Triangl had sent from the Southern Netherlands to Vienna can largely be traced to their place of origin. One of these series is the spectacular eight-piece set depicting *Riding Lessons* (Brussels ca. 1665/66).

What was probably one of the greatest additions to the tapestry collection occurred on the occasion of the marriage of Maria Theresia to Franz Stephan von Lothringen (1708-1765) in 1736, when the bridegroom had no fewer than twenty sets of tapestries brought to Vienna.

Among them was the *Throne Baldachin* of 1561, which is still one of the most spectacular pieces in the collection. Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527-1606) was responsible for the composition's illusionistic architecture, and Michiel Coxcie (1499-1592) designed the figures of Pluto and Proserpine.

A large number of the Vienna tapestries of French origin entered the collection as diplomatic gifts. In 1777, when Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) was staying in Paris incognito, posing as the Comte de Falkenstein, his sister Maria Antonia and her husband, King Louis XVI, presented him with several series at once. Among them were the *Tapestries after Frescoes by Raphael* (Royal Gobelins Manufactory, Paris 1765–71), the so-called *Nouvelles des Indes* (after Alexandre-François Desportes, Royal Gobelins Manufactory, Paris 1774–78), the *Meuble Rose* (Boucher Room), a set consisting of covers for two sofas, twelve armchairs, a hearth screen and a partition, as well as four tapestries with central oval images after François Boucher (1703-1770) and *alentours* after Maurice Jacques (Royal Gobelins Manufactory, Paris 1772–76). Since 1880 in particular, these furnishings have pride of place, having been chosen to decorate a room in the Vienna Hofburg. This honor was also bestowed on numerous other tapestries, owing to the renewed interest in prestigious textile wall decorations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The last addition made to the collection by a member of the House of Habsburg occurred during the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916), who authorized the purchase of a nine-piece set of tapestries depicting *Scenes of the Gospels* after designs by Raphael (Brussels, late sixteenth/early seventeenth century). Moreover, he was presented with a portrait (ca. 1814/15) of Marie Louise of Austria (1791-1847) as empress of the French, executed at the Royal Gobelins Manufactory after a design by François-Pascal Simon Gérard (1770-1837).

The tapestries from the former Habsburg holdings were still in use in the time of Emperor Franz Joseph I.

It was not until the fall of the monarchy and the transfer to the Kunsthistorisches Museum of all artworks depicting religious, mythological, historical or moralizing subjects that the tapestries largely became objects in a museum context. A small number of them, which are alternated regularly for reasons of conservation, are on display in the *Kunstkammer Wien*. Special exhibitions also offer an ideal opportunity to make these fragile objects accessible to a wide public.

*Dr. Katja Schmitz-von Ledebur is curator of the Kunstkammer and tapestries, Kunsthistorisches Museum (KHM), Vienna, Austria, she has been a member of CODART since 2008*

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

**Forgotten Netherlandish Artists in the Baltic Region: the migration of Dutch and Flemish sculptors to the Baltic region in the second half of the sixteenth century****Cynthia Osiecki**

Sometimes interesting subjects of research are stumbled upon by accident. In 2008 I was looking for a subject for an undergraduate thesis in my field of interest, Dutch artists who emigrated to Poland, when I came across

Hans van Mildert (1588?-1638), a sculptor active in Antwerp who was born and later received his training in the East Prussian city of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad in the Russian Federation). The research I did at that time left me with so many questions that in 2010/11 I wrote another thesis, this time for a Masters in Museum Curating at the VU, the Free University of Amsterdam. My subject was the Mechelen sculptor Willem van den Bloocke – possibly Van Mildert's teacher – who was active in the Polish city of Gdańsk, and my supervisor was Professor Frits Scholten, a member of CODART. My research included only a fraction of the sculptors active in the Baltic region. I plan to continue studying this group, which is certainly much larger than hitherto assumed.

I am currently studying the Mechelen sculptor Gert van Egen, who emigrated to Denmark at the end of the sixteenth century. In March 2013 I will start my Ph.D. research on this group of sculptors at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University in the German Hanseatic city of Greifswald.

Starting in the second half of the sixteenth century, a sizeable group of artists from the Low Countries, mostly from the Southern Netherlands, moved abroad. Italy was a popular destination, of course, but many sculptors traveled to countries situated on the Baltic Sea, probably with no thought of ever returning home. The Eighty Years' War had caused political and religious turmoil, and there were few prospects for employment. The Baltic region was a new and very attractive destination for artists, because for centuries there had been little competition. Moreover, the signing of the religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 led to greater political stability within the Holy Roman Empire, and the ensuing economic prosperity meant that more attention and money was given to the arts.

**“Floris Style”**

A group of pupils and assistants of the Antwerp master-sculptor Cornelis Floris (1514-1575) left his studio with a Baltic destination in mind, intending to make use of Floris's network and the popularity of the so-called Floris style. Floris made monumental tombs for various Baltic patrons, including the king of Denmark and the duke of East Prussia. His style became widely known through the series of prints made after his designs. The assistants who accompanied Floris's sepulchral monuments to their destination and supervised their installation often settled down there afterward and made a name for themselves as Floris-style sculptors. Among these assistants were Robert Coppens (Mechelen ca. 1530-after 1603?), Philips Brandin (Utrecht ca. 1535-1594 Nykøbing), Willem van den Bloocke (Mechelen 1546/47-1628 Gdańsk) and Gert van Egen (Mechelen ca. 1550-Helsingør, before 28 February 1612).

Relatively little art-historical research has been carried out on these migrant sculptors active in the second half of the sixteenth century in the area around the Baltic Sea. This group must have included many more names than the few mentioned here. Archival research has often unearthed information on sculptors who remained in one place, but there are large gaps in our knowledge of those more mobile sculptors whose place of residence was not always known, such as Robert Coppens. He was first mentioned in the archives in 1587 in Wolfsburg and afterward in Lübeck, only to disappear from the records after 1603, when he left for parts unknown. Travel within the Baltic region was relatively easy, because the principalities of North Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, East Prussia and the Baltic states were closely related by marriage. These principalities were also largely Lutheran, apart from the kingdom of Poland. In Poland, however, there was a considerable measure of religious freedom in the second half of the sixteenth century, and in the free city of Gdańsk, most of the inhabitants were Protestant.

**A Choice Based on Religion?**

The big question I focused on during my research was whether patrons consciously chose the Floris style as a new style for the new religion, but I could find no evidence whatsoever of such a deliberate choice. After all, the subjects depicted on tombs and epitaphs were biblical themes favored by Protestants and Catholics alike.

Take, for instance, such Old Testament scenes as the vision of Ezechiel, which Willem van den Bloocke used for Eduard Blemke's epitaph in St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk, or "Jonas and the Whale," a scene that Robert Coppens carved in relief on the tomb of Christopher of Mecklenburg-Gadebusch and his wife, Elisabeth Vasa of Sweden, in Schwerin Cathedral in Germany.

In other cases religious depictions were omitted entirely and replaced by an inscribed plaque, by "the virtues," or by other ornamentation characteristic of Floris's work, as evidenced by the Stroband family epitaph carved by Willem van den Bloocke in the Church of Our Lady in Toruń, Poland.

### **A Sculptor's Network**

Another aim of my research was to determine the area in which these sculptors were active and the kind of network they could depend on to establish successful careers abroad. After all, in their native cities – where most of them were trained – they could have relied on the guild for support and protection. The sculptors listed above all worked at princely courts or as free masters: a privileged position that had many advantages. They had no duties to the guild and were often exempt from certain taxes, and consequently could work in freedom.

Immigrants from the Low Countries were active not only as sculptors but also as painters, architects and craftsman, such as stone masons.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, most of the ships plying the waters of the Baltic Sea came from the Low Countries. The mercantile houses in the Hanseatic cities and the Baltic region were largely in the hands of Dutchmen. Most of the trade involved timber, grain or salt.

The migrant sculptors went to settle in areas that already had a Netherlandish community and thus networks that could help them to set up as artisans. Such networks were also useful in helping newcomers to find work.

To begin with, the sculptors who propagated the Floris style took advantage of the master's contacts with local patrons. Willem van den Bloocke probably left Floris's studio in 1569/70 to convey the sepulchral monument made for Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg-Ansbach to Königsberg. Albrecht's successor, Duke Georg Friedrich, then commissioned Van den Bloocke to make a tomb for himself and his wife. The Polish king, Stephan Báthory, having seen this monument during his visit to Königsberg, asked Van den Bloocke to come and work for him, whereupon the sculptor moved to Gdańsk. There he remained, working for the rest of his life for the aristocrats in the king's circle and for the local bourgeoisie.

This concise overview of the extremely successful career of Willem van den Bloocke shows how important patrons were to artists. A satisfied patron could help an artist, whether or not intentionally, to secure subsequent commissions. Once the Polish king had commissioned a monument, for example, the aristocracy soon followed suit. Another reason for the many commissions received by this group of sculptors was their mastery of the Floris style, which had been enormously popular in this area since 1549.

The first traceable commission for a work in this style came from Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg, in Königsberg, who asked Floris to make an epitaph for his late wife, Dorothea of Denmark (for this epitaph please also read our [news item from 4 June 2013](#) in which the rediscovery of the present location of the bust (Pushkin Museum, Moscow) was announced by the author). Albrecht wrote to Dorothea's brother, Christian III of Denmark, about this sepulchral monument, who subsequently commissioned from Floris a tomb for his father, Frederik I, which was eventually installed in Schleswig Cathedral, now in Germany. Because the rulers throughout this region were related by marriage, the Floris style spread over a large area.

### **Gert van Egen**

The monuments made by Gert van Egen in Denmark are similar in style to the work of Coppens in North Germany and the work of Van den Bloocke in Poland. This group of sculptors worked mainly on monumental designs for tombs, altars and



entrance portals.

One exception is the Mechelen sculptor Gert van Egen, active in Denmark, by whom small-scale work is also known. His extant oeuvre consists of five works and two studio copies, the only monumental work by his hand being the tomb – for which Floris produced the preparatory study – made for the Danish king Frederik II in Roskilde Cathedral. Two statuettes belonging to Van Egen's oeuvre are both signed with his initials: GE.

One statuette of Judith holding the head of Holofernes is now in a private collection in New York. The other, a Mercury standing on an identical base, belongs to the [collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York](#). These small pieces clearly show that Van Egen received his training primarily in Mechelen, the center of alabaster kleinplastik, or small-scale sculpture.

Later on Floris taught him how to make large-scale works. Van Egen's actual oeuvre must once have been much larger. A great deal of his income was presumably generated by the production of statuettes. Now, however, this work is either lost, circulating on the art market, or hidden away in museum collections. I am looking for more small-scale sculpture by Van Egen and am hoping that the members of CODART can lend me a helping hand in this endeavor.

Please contact me at [cynthiaosiecki@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiaosiecki@gmail.com)

## CURATOR'S INTERVIEW

An interview with Alastair Laing, retired Curator of Pictures and Sculpture at the National Trust, interviewed by Annette de Vries

Alastair Laing (1944) recently retired as Curator of Pictures and Sculpture at the National Trust after a career of almost twenty-seven years devoted to the art preserved in historic houses. Laing personifies the title of his much-admired exhibition *In Trust for the Nation*, held at the National Gallery, London in 1995-96.

As a curator at the National Trust, he looked after the marvelous collections of paintings in around 120 historic houses with great knowledge and care. It has only been since the mid-twentieth century that the National Trust (founded in 1895) and others have gradually come to acknowledge its growing responsibilities for the art collections of country houses, which makes it clear how important the work of Laing – and that of his predecessor St John Gore (curator from 1956 to 1986) and his successor David Taylor – has been and continues to be. The National Trust's collection of paintings is second only to the Royal Collection in number and quality.

*We all know you as Curator of Pictures and Sculpture at the National Trust. Would you please tell us what you did before joining that organization?*

I studied history at Oxford (in those days art history was not yet a degree subject) and afterwards did a one-year diploma in art history. After a year in the civil service, I applied to the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and began to work on a never-finished thesis on the origins of early South-German Rococo stucco under the supervision of Anthony Blunt

(which did result, however, in my co-authorship with him of *Baroque & Rococo: Architecture and Decoration* [Paul Elek, 1978]). I really learnt my profession, however, while working at the Heim Gallery in London for seven years, cataloguing art, especially Mannerist and Baroque paintings and sculpture. That way you get to know works of art in all their different aspects. I was a co-curator and main author of the catalogue of the exhibition *François Boucher*, held in 1986-87 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Detroit Institute of Art and the Grand Palais in Paris. In April 1986 I entered the service of the National Trust.

*You worked at the National Trust for almost twenty-seven years. What did your job entail? What changes took place in that organization in the course of your career?*

I started as an Adviser on Pictures; the sculpture I myself added to my responsibilities. At that time there were some sixteen regional curators, called Historic Building Representatives, who were mainly architectural historians. The everyday responsibility for the art objects in the houses was not theirs, but part of the job of the property manager.

It was my duty to advise them on the hanging and rehanging of pictures, on acquisitions and lending, on conservation, cleaning and restoration. In my occasional talks to volunteers and room stewards I tried to improve their knowledge of their collections.

Most of my time, however, was devoted to the continuous process of cataloguing the pictures in the various historic houses and writing summaries for guidebooks. Over time the National Trust did experience some major organizational changes that affected my role as an adviser, inaptly renamed curator. The decentralization of responsibilities – “Going local” – resulted, in my opinion, in a deterioration of the curatorial responsibility for works of art. Being a curator is, after all, a profession requiring specialized knowledge and experience.

*About 120 historic houses that have pictures in their collections currently belong to the National Trust. How can those picture collections best be described?*

It is important to make a distinction between houses with “real” collections of paintings (between twenty and twenty-five) and houses with a more or less random collection of pictures, accumulated by various owners in the course of time.

Examples of the first category are Petworth and Kingston Lacy, with collections formed over several centuries, and Ascott House and Upton House, both with collections of Old Master paintings that were acquired by their owners during the twentieth century: the 1st and 2nd Viscounts Bearsted and Anthony de Rothschild. The last two collections are more like present-day museum collections, and include artists as significant as Rogier van der Weyden, Aelbert Cuyp and Canaletto. In houses with a more “historic” accumulation of paintings, the genres of portraiture in particular – including portraits of animals – and landscapes dominate. The interest in portraiture corresponds, of course, to the owners’ interest in their ancestors and genealogy.

*There is in fact a difference between pictures hanging in a museum and pictures hanging in a historic house. Would you care to elaborate on that?*

Pictures in historic houses serve a dual role. They are both individual works of art and part of a historic interior. The interconnectedness in historic houses between paintings and the history of the house gives them something really special. It also explains the “family resemblance” between the paintings in our various houses. When trying to recreate historic hangs, one always has to strive for a balance between adjustments made for aesthetic reasons and those made for the sake of historical correctness.

*The presentation of artworks to the public competes to some extent with the preservation of art. How did you deal with this conflict of interest?*

The National Trust definitively developed a different line in this field in the course of time, with positive as well as negative consequences. Until about five years ago, there were a lot of ropes and so on to keep the public at a safe distance from vulnerable items. Since then barriers have increasingly been taken away. This enables the public to study works of art close up, but also increases the risk of damage to furniture and carpets. On the other hand, both barriers and the absence of small things can distort the feeling of authenticity when visiting a historic room. A problem that still has not been solved is the lighting of rooms.

Strong or too-evident artificial lighting is undesirable, but bad lighting affects our appreciation of individual works of art.

I am very optimistic about the possibilities of fiber-optic lighting, using targeted light, but with the light source concealed. It would also enable us to illuminate pictures without damaging the more light-sensitive textiles, drawings and watercolors in the same room. The experiences with this kind of lighting at Waddesdon Manor are very promising. Unfortunately the method is expensive, and not always easy to install.

*Do you have any favorites among the pictures in the National Trust’s care?*

I have many personal favorites. Among them is *A View of Dordrecht* by Aelbert Cuyp at Ascott House, a painting that was cut in two in the eighteenth century – into a morning view and an evening view! – but happily reunited in the nineteenth century. Among my favorites I also count a *Self-Portrait of the Artist Engraving* by the British artist Richard Morton Paye, shown at the exhibition *In Trust for the Nation* in 1995-96. At Petworth House I love the beautiful *Adoration of the Magi* by Hieronymus Bosch, a version of the one at the Prado, with a unique variation in the Christ Child. And, last but not least, François Boucher’s *La Vie Champêtre* at Belton House is one of my favorites, not only because of my professional interest in the work of this artist, but because, having persuaded its then owner to lend it to the Boucher exhibition in 1986-87, she angelically left it in her will to the house in which it had previously hung for two centuries.

*Which two or three historic houses should CODART members visit at least once in their lives?*

Well, let's see. I'm very sure three houses stand out for their superb collections of paintings.

Kingston Lacy, because of the wonderful Rubens portraits of the Marchesa Maria Grimaldi and Marchesa Maria Serra Pallavicino, and a set of fine mature portraits by Sir Peter Lely. Not to forget the *Apollo Crowning a Poet* by Tintoretto and the large *Landscape with Herdsmen* by Nicolaes Berchem. Second, of course, is Petworth House, with the previously mentioned *Adoration of the Magi* by Bosch, Van Dyck's numerous portraits, including the early ones of Sir Robert and Lady Shirley in exotic costume, and Lely's *Three Young Children of Charles I*. Ascott House is also very much recommended to CODART members, above all because of Cuypp's *View of Dordrecht*, but also because of the masterpieces by other Dutch artists, such as Adriaen van Ostade and Ludolph de Jongh.

*What were the most important events in your career at the National Trust?*

The most interesting and professionally important event for me was the above-mentioned centenary exhibition *In Trust for the Nation* at the National Gallery, London in 1995-96. This exhibition showed an overview of paintings from National Trust houses. It was an illustration of how these paintings relate to the historic houses. The most terrible experience was the fire in 1989 at Uppark House, an intimate 1690s house with superb eighteenth-century interiors. The top floor, containing mainly family objects, was totally lost. The contents of the main lower area could be evacuated in time.

*You are a member of CODART. What do you think about the exchange of knowledge and artistic experience between countries?*

In my view there is much more exchange of knowledge and experience on the conservation level than on the curatorial level. In practice, curators seem to have too little time for the frequent exchange of knowledge. It is telling that we don't even have much contact with our colleagues at the National Trust for Scotland. In the field of conservation, however, there is a lot of pioneering in conservation across borders.

*The National Trust is a very dynamic organization. What are the major differences between the National Trust today and the way it was when you started working there?*

There have indeed been many changes. The organization has doubled in size. Its headquarters were moved from London to Swindon in Wiltshire. Conservators were separated from curators. The curatorial function was delegated to property managers, to the detriment of the authority of the curatorial point of view in decision-making. One of the most important changes in the past ten years has been the emphasis on accessibility, something that has both positive and negative sides, as mentioned earlier. It is wonderful to have people enjoy historic houses and gardens, but it should happen in a way that highlights the qualities of the houses and the collections. The National Trust has also become a more campaigning organization, very much focused on fundraising.

*What do you hope the National Trust will accomplish in the coming decades?*

I hope that the National Trust will to some extent return to celebrating the historic houses and their collections for what they are. The present need always "to tell stories" somehow diminishes the emphasis on the houses, their inhabitants and the collections for their own sake. Our wonderful houses are exciting enough as they are, we don't have to make them exciting artificially. I would like more money to be spent on the presentation of the houses and the collections. My concern applies to paintings in particular, which should have a surface clean and varnish every twenty-five years and a full clean every hundred years or so. We are very much behind schedule, partly because today the restoration of textiles, which are very fragile indeed, is understandably favored. But the sums of money involved are huge.

*The National Trust, whose very name expresses its ambition to preserve the national heritage, whether natural or man-made, seems to be looking for new ways to interest the public in its cause, for example, by installing contemporary art in and around historic houses. What do you think of this development?*

I admit I am not very happy about it. The emphasis on contemporary art has little to do with the purposes of the National Trust as expressed in its very name: The National Trust for the Preservation of Places of Historic Interest and Natural

Beauty.

It distracts the organization from its goals, and leads to a diversion of funds to fashionable projects. We have some wonderful institutions, such as Tate Modern, that are fully devoted to the appreciation of contemporary art, so why should we try to duplicate that?

*One of the wonderful things about being an art historian is the possibility to remain active after retirement. Do you have any plans for the future?*

It will not surprise you that I will continue to work on François Boucher. I am planning a catalogue raisonné of his drawings. I have accumulated a lot of documentation in the past, but there is still a great deal of work to be done. I very much look forward to it, but I am extremely grateful for the quarter-century that I have had working for the National Trust.

*Dr. Annette de Vries is director and curator of Duivenvoorde Castle near The Hague in the Netherlands. She has been a member of CODART since 2009.*

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

## Investigating Miniature Boxwood Carving at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto

Alexandra Suda and Lisa Ellis

The Thomson Collection of European Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto is well known as the home of Peter Paul Rubens' *Massacre of the Innocents*, painted in 1611 and famously bought at auction in 2001 by Ken Thomson (1923-2006). Together with five *Ecorchés* drawings by Rubens, the *Massacre* reveals Thomson's admiration of the painter's craft.

The *Massacre* is a wondrous achievement – the bodies of the soldiers appear to be truly three-dimensional, the grief of the mothers is painfully palpable, and the mastery of past artistic traditions is crystal clear.

Perhaps less well known, but no less wondrous, are the eight hundred works of European art that preceded the *Massacre of the Innocents* but inspired its acquisition. Gothic ivory diptychs and freestanding sculptures of the Virgin and Child, Baroque ivory tankards and relief carvings, as well as British portrait miniatures and other objects, all provoke the question: How were these made?

Perhaps no group of works prompts this question more than the Thomson Collection's ten prayer beads and two miniature devotional altarpieces, the largest collection of sixteenth-century devotional miniature carvings in the world.

Eight of the prayer beads and the two altarpieces are Northern in origin and were possibly carved in Antwerp or another Brabantine city, while two of the beads were most likely carved in Germany. Audiences have been captivated by the sixteenth-century devotional boxwood carvings in the Thomson Collection since they came on view in 2008 when the Art Gallery of Ontario reopened after the completion of architect Frank Gehry's expansion of the Toronto arts institution.

It is not uncommon to find gallery visitors gathered around the showcase that houses the carvings, audibly expressing their amazement and wondering aloud how they were manufactured. Recent publications by Frits Scholten, Evelin Wetter, and a group of scientists together with Rijksmuseum conservator Arie Wallert (*Journal of Synchrotron Radiation* 19 [2009], pp. 310-13) provide valuable insight, but a study of the Thomson Collection's devotional carvings seemed like the best course of action to satisfy our audience's, and our own, curiosity. The basic goal of our study was to understand the intricacies of how the prayer beads and altarpieces were constructed.

Given our relatively large sample size, roughly ten percent of the surviving works, we hoped that we might also identify the work of individual carvers and/or distinct workshops.

We began our investigation in-house with microscopy, and quickly looked to X-radiography (Heidi Sobol, Royal Ontario Museum) for more information. A slideshow produced for the small-scale exhibition *Idea Lab: Research at the AGO Investigating Miniature Ivory and Boxwood Carving* displays some of these early X-radiography findings.

Minute samples of adhesives, coatings and polychrome embellishment are being characterized at the Canadian Conservation Institute with a variety of scientific instrumentation (Elizabeth Moffatt, Canadian Conservation Institute), whereas similarly minute textile samples are being characterized at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Richard Newman).

Most recently, we turned to micro-computed tomography (Andrew Nelson, Ron Martin & Zoe Morris, Sustainable Archaeology, University of Western Ontario, London Ontario), which we feel fully satisfies our investigative needs. To date, we have micro CT-scanned two prayer beads: a skull-shaped bead that features *Christ Carrying the Cross* and the *Crucifixion* inside (AGOID.29283) and another whose interior depicts the *Last Judgement* and the *Coronation of the Virgin*. This bead has been loosely attributed to the workshop of Adam Dirksz (AGOID.29365). The scans of these two beads revealed two distinctly different approaches to carving prayer beads: the former relatively simple, with two solid halves carved in shallow relief and hinged, and the latter unexpectedly complex.

The intricately carved spherical bead has a wonderfully pierced Gothic tracery exterior and measures 6.1 cm in diameter

when closed. When opened, interior carved hemispheres are nestled within the exterior shell, where they were originally held in place with wooden pegs alone.

Each interior hemisphere is approximately 5.7 cm in diameter with a depth of approximately 3.2 cm. X-radiography and Micro-CT scanning revealed a number of clever strategies used by the sculptor to confound the viewer's attempt to understand how the object was made.

It appears that each interior hemisphere started as a solid wooden mass, which was carved from the front flat plane but contains "windows" or portions of the exterior which were removed to allow access into the deeper portions of the hemisphere from behind. The "windows" were then replaced in such a way as to be invisible to the viewer when seen from the front.

There are a variety of traditional joining techniques employed in the construction of the interior hemispheres, including tongue and groove joints, rabbets and butt joints secured with pegs occasionally held in place with what appears to be original adhesive.

The precise number of carved elements used to depict the *Last Judgement* is not yet known. However, close to thirty separately carved, delicate spikes were set into the ceiling boss in the uppermost portion of the scene and also around the enthroned Christ figure.

The rest of the scene appears to have been constructed out of multiple pieces carved from a single piece of boxwood and then fitted back together so that the original wood grain remained intact. The artist who made this bead had its survival in mind: the alignment of the original wood grain allows the bead to act like a solid piece, making it much less likely to sustain damage through expansion and contraction.

So much of what we've discovered about the Thomson Collection's devotional carvings raises the question of artistic intent: Did the artist expect viewers to consider construction issues? If so, was it his aim to defy all attempts at visual comprehension? Who, in fact, was he? Adam Dirksz is often cited as the author of any carving with stylistic connections to a prayer bead in the Statens Museum, Copenhagen that heralds an inscription with his name. Alas, stylistic connections are not always easy to identify, since the works are so small that it is difficult to distinguish "styles," assuming it was possible for a carver to develop his own artistic style on such a minute scale. Perhaps it is more useful to consider the individual carvings in terms of their unique characteristics.

Certainly, it is the unique use of polychromy in the area representing the Mouth of Hell in the Thomson bead's *Last Judgement* scene that has offered us the most meaningful connection to another important boxwood carving. In the lowest register of the upper hemisphere of the Thomson bead, the cavern-like area that represents hell includes a tiny speck of gilding on the nose of the *Hell Mouth* that is visible to the naked eye, as well as flickers of a color that can be seen with the aid of a strong light source. High magnification under the microscope reveals that the cavern's walls were coated with a bluish black pigment (the radio-opaque pigment is visible in X-rays), with red paint used selectively on the carved figures hanging upside down as well as to articulate flames in the background.

The prayer bead that is the central part of the British Museum's Waddesdon Bequest *Miniature Tabernacle* (WB.233) presents an almost identical approach to the lowest register of its lower hemisphere, which depicts the *Harrowing of Hell*. The Waddesdon bead's hell scene is housed beneath a rocky outcropping remarkably similar to that of the Thomson bead's hell scene. When examined with a strong light that hits it at a glancing angle, the painted interior of the cavern is unmistakable in the BM bead, as it is in the case of the AGO bead.

By extension, such small details as the facial gestures and the drapery seem to be by the same hand in the two tiny masterworks, and the identical nature of the hinges and general methods of construction used in making these two beads allow us confidently to suggest the same author.

Our research has only just begun, but will continue with the aim of organizing the Thomson prayer beads and miniature altarpieces and their counterparts into groups according to style and methods of production. At the moment we assume that a

single workshop or artist would have approached the construction of such an object in a rather distinctive way. Of course, we look forward to contradiction as much as we do to collaboration.

*Alexandra Suda is assistant curator in charge of the Thomson Collection of European Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada. She is a member of CODART since 2012.*

*Lisa Ellis is Conservator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada*



## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

## Netherlandish Altarpieces and Sculptures in the Niguliste Museum

**Merike Kurisoo**

Most CODART members probably think of Tallinn, Estonia as the birthplace of the painter Michel Sittow. They might also be familiar with the collection of Netherlandish paintings and prints at the Kadriorg Art Museum. But they are less likely to know the medieval and Renaissance art of the Low Countries in Estonian collections.

The Art Museum of Estonia's holdings of medieval and early-modern art are exhibited in the Niguliste Museum, housed in the former St. Nicholas' Church. It is one of the most extensive and significant collections of ecclesiastical art of that period in the Baltic countries. Medieval altarpieces and wooden sculptures from northern Germany and the Low Countries form the core of the Niguliste's collection. The Niguliste Museum is best known in northern Europe for two magnificent and monumental works by Lübeck masters of the late medieval period. The first is *Danse Macabre*, a painting executed in the workshop of Bernt Notke at the end of the fifteenth century; the second is the retable of the high altar of St. Nicholas' Church, which originated in the workshop of Hermen Rode in 1478-81.

A large part of the Niguliste's collection comprises post-Reformation ecclesiastical art from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The museum's permanent display, which is quite small, numbers about fifty works of art. Also on exhibit are nearly one hundred tombstones dating from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries and a collection of chandeliers from the early-modern era. The museum's Silver Chamber houses the silver collection of the Art Museum of Estonia, founded in 1919. Its collection of ecclesiastical art was formed over the better part of a century. After the Second World War, works of religious art from other Estonian museums and churches were added to the collections formed in the 1920s and 1930s. Numerous works in the Niguliste Museum, however, come from St. Nicholas' Church.

**Netherlandish Altarpieces**

The collection of the Niguliste Museum contains three Netherlandish altarpieces from the late medieval period. Two of them originated in the workshops of Bruges masters; the third is a carved altarpiece from Brussels. Only one has survived in its original form; the other two underwent alterations in the post-Reformation period. The first one, the *Altarpiece of the Virgin Mary of the Brotherhood of the Black Heads*, is attributed to the Bruges Master of the Saint Lucy Legend. The retable, commissioned for the altar of the Virgin Mary belonging to the Brotherhood of the Black Heads in Tallinn's Dominican Friary, arrived in Tallinn in 1493.

The retable is double-winged: the first view of the altarpiece (with the wings closed) presents the Annunciation; the second view (with the outer wings open) features the Double Intercession. On the inside of the outer wings, thirty men kneel at the feet of the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist; appearing on the outside of the inner wings are God the Father and Christ with angels holding the Instruments of the Passion. The open, most celebratory view of the retable depicts the Virgin Mary enthroned, together with Saints Victor and George, the patron saints of the Brotherhood. On the inside of the inner wings, we see Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Gertrude of Nivelles. The Brotherhood of the Black Heads, which commissioned the retable, was an association of local, unmarried merchants and foreign merchants.

It had close ties to the Great Guild, an association of Tallinn's wealthy, married merchants, from whose ranks the wardens of the altars belonging to the Brotherhood of the Black Heads were chosen. It has therefore been assumed that the two male figures in the foreground of the two groups portray members of the Great Guild.

In September 1524 there was an outbreak of iconoclasm in Tallinn. On the eve of these turbulent events, the Black Heads removed a great deal of their property from the churches and took it for safekeeping to their guildhall, where it remained until the Second World War.

The *Passion Altarpiece* from the workshop of the Bruges master Adriaen Isenbrandt has been dated to the first quarter of the sixteenth century and was originally installed in St. Nicholas' Church. The altar retable has been overpainted several times, and in the sixteenth century it came to be used as an epitaph. The open retable depicts the story of Christ's Passion.

The outer wings present two pairs: the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child and the apostle James the Greater; and Saint Adrian and Saint Anthony the Great. These figures were probably painted in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. Originally the wings depicted four Franciscan saints. In the mid-sixteenth century, the altar retable was turned into the epitaph of the Lutheran superintendent of Tallinn Heinrich Bock.

His portrait – a praying figure – appears on the central panel of the retable, together with a portrait of the town's mint master. There are also additions from later centuries: a portrait was painted into the scene depicting *Christ Carrying the Cross* some time in the seventeenth century. At the beginning of that century, the retable, having been turned into an epitaph, was given a top part that depicted the Resurrection.

A carved altarpiece executed in a Brussels workshop in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, as well as two wooden sculptures exhibited at the Niguliste Museum, bear witness to the spread of Southern Netherlandish carved altarpieces to the eastern side of the Baltic Sea. The carved, winged altarpiece bearing the quality mark of the Brussels woodcarvers – a tiny hammer – was made around the year 1500. Its pictorial program was originally dedicated to the Holy Kinship. Only four of the original figures have survived: Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Salome with her son James the Greater. The other figures date from the mid-seventeenth century. It is known that the retable, which was installed in Tallinn's town hall, was bought in 1652 by a rural congregation for their church outside Tallinn. Modifications to the altar retable were commissioned from Tobias Heinze, a local Tallinn master.

The members of the Holy Kinship were replaced by male figures, some of whom can be identified as apostles on the basis of their attributes. The upper wings and the inner sides of the four lower wings were overpainted. Only fragments have been preserved of the paintings on the inner sides of the lower wings, which depict episodes from the lives of Emerentia, the grandmother of the Virgin Mary, and of Mary's mother, Anne. The first scene portrays *Emerentia's Vision on Mount Carmel*, the second *The Birth of Anne*, the third *The Marriage of Anne and Joachim*, and the fourth *Anne and Joachim Giving Alms to the Poor*.

The collection of the Niguliste Museum also contains two wooden sculptures from the early sixteenth century that portray Roman soldiers and Longinus. The figures were most likely part of a Southern Netherlandish carved altarpiece.

Though the majority of the surviving works of ecclesiastical art in the collections of Estonian museums and churches were commissioned from artists active in the artistic centers of northern Germany, the known and surviving works and also the written sources indicate that the cities had also been commissioning ecclesiastical art from the Netherlands since the second half of the fifteenth century.

The post-Reformation, Lutheran period saw changes in the way artwork was commissioned, with most of it now being ordered from local masters. Netherlandish art continued to exert an influence, however, as reflected, above all, in the use of such models as the prints (including examples of ornaments) by Hans Vredeman de Vries and Cornelis Floris, and the works of Peter Paul Rubens.

### **From St. Nicholas' Church to the Niguliste Museum**

A distinctive characteristic of the Niguliste Museum is the fact that it is housed in the former St. Nicholas' Church. This provides the museum with a unique opportunity to present its collection of historical church art in an ecclesiastical setting. Many of the works were originally commissioned or purchased for the church and are still *in situ* in their historical locations.

St. Nicholas' Church was founded in the thirteenth century and served for hundreds of years as one of Tallinn's two parish churches. In the early 1520s, the first evangelical preachers arrived in Tallinn and St. Nicholas' Church became Lutheran. It evolved over centuries into a church whose congregation consisted mainly of the town's wealthy citizens and local German merchants. The glory of Hanseatic times and the affluence of the church's congregation and donors are reflected in the ecclesiastical art commissioned for the church, both from the large artistic centers of Europe and from local workshops.

The Second World War was disastrous for St. Nicholas' Church: during the bombing of Tallinn in 1944, the church was ravaged by fire and almost all of its furnishings were destroyed. Only some of the artworks (mostly medieval) and the collection of chandeliers survived, owing to their timely evacuation. The church itself, however, was left in ruins. After the Second World War, Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. In the 1950s it was suggested that the church be rebuilt, but in the Soviet era it was impossible to restore it as an ecclesiastical building. In 1953 work was started on the restoration and reconstruction of St. Nicholas' Church as a museum of ecclesiastical art. It was thought vital to restore the ecclesiastical space as authentically as possible and to present the different stages of construction and the various chapels as magnificent examples of local ecclesiastical architecture. The restoration continued intermittently for almost thirty years. The building, a branch of the Art Museum of Estonia, opened as a museum and concert hall in 1984.

Today the Niguliste Museum is one of the most frequently visited art museums in Estonia, with nearly 101,000 visitors in 2011. In addition to the museum's permanent and temporary exhibitions, the Niguliste's two concert organs and excellent acoustics ensure its popularity as a concert venue.

[www.nigulistemuuseum.ee](http://www.nigulistemuuseum.ee)

*Merike Kurisoo is curator of the [Niguliste Museum](#) in Tallinn, Estonia*

## CURATOR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Ingrid De Meûter, Cinquantenaire Museum (Jubelparkmuseum), Brussels

**About Ingrid De Meûter**

In 1977 I completed my studies in art history at the University of Ghent. It was Professor R.A. D'Hulst who suggested that I write my thesis on a subject connected with tapestries, and this proved to be a harbinger of my later career. Not only was Professor D'Hulst an expert on the oeuvre of Rubens and other seventeenth-century painters of the Antwerp school, but he had also written one of the seminal works on the art of tapestry-making: *Vlaamse wandtapijten van de XIVde tot de XVIIIde eeuw* (*Flemish Tapestries of the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*), published in 1965. In his view there was still a lot of research material to be unearthed in this field, and he was certainly right. Ever since then, my studies have concentrated mainly on Flemish tapestries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

After finishing my degree I was given the opportunity to work under Guy Delmarcel in the Cinquantenaire Museum (Jubelparkmuseum), where I classified and labeled the photographs of tapestries that successive curators had collected over the decades. It proved to be an incredibly edifying experience.

I therefore had the good fortune, already at the beginning of my career, to have two of the best teachers in the field – each of a different generation and with a different approach. In my spare time I mastered the technical and practical side of weaving and learned how to analyze textiles.

Unfortunately, my temporary job came to an end after three years. In Belgium it was common in those days to set up temporary projects with government aid in order to provide work for young unemployed people in the cultural and social service sectors. One short-term project followed another, in the course of which inventories were drawn up of various textile collections in Flemish and Walloon churches, sometimes coupled with conservation treatments and/or exhibitions. This program also had an offshoot in South America. In 1987-88 I worked for a couple of months as a consultant on a project organized by the General Board for Development Cooperation that involved the restoration of art objects, particularly textiles, and the installation of a museum in a convent in Quito (Ecuador).

Later I either worked on or curated various large exhibitions mounted by what was then the ASLK Bank (now part of Fortis Bank). This was an interesting experience, even if the connection with textiles was sometimes rather tenuous. I learned how to organize exhibitions for a large public – no longer working on my own with a limited budget, as had previously been the case, but with an entire team and ample funding at my disposal. In the meantime I tried to keep alive my interest in textiles, particularly tapestries, by adding to my private documentation and conducting research.

My documentation proved to be very useful when I began to work for the city of Oudenaarde, where in 1993 I organized the double exhibition *Kleur voor wand en vloer* (Color for wall and floor). The historical component consisted of carpets and tapestries from the studio of Elisabeth De Saedeleer, a trendsetting weaver in the 1920s and 1930s. A selection of modern tapestries was also shown. That collaboration resulted in a second assignment, this time to catalogue and carry out research on the Oudenaarde tapestries. More than 3,000 photographs had been collected, and they formed the ideal basis for a large retrospective exhibition and catalogue:

*Oudenaardse wandtapijten van de 16de tot de 18de eeuw* (Oudenaarde tapestries of the 16th to the 18th centuries). The exhibition, held in 1999, was a great success. The project was awarded the title “Cultural Ambassador of Flanders 1998-99” and the catalogue won the special “Prize for the History of Textiles in Flanders,” bestowed by the VZW Stichting Etienne Sabbe and the province of West-Vlaanderen.

Since 2000 I have lectured on the history of textile arts to students taking the Master's degree in textile design in the School of Arts at Hogeschool Gent. There are also a number of committees and boards of which I'm pleased to be a member: the Direction Council of the *Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens* (CIETA), the Scientific Advisory Board of the

MoMU (Modemuseum Antwerpen), the Art and Culture Committee of the Flemish Parliament, and, since 2011, the program committee of CODART.

### **Ingrid De Meûter and the Cinquantenaire Museum (Royal Museums of Art and History) in Brussels**

In 2000 I returned to the Cinquantenaire Museum (Jubelparkmuseum) as curator of the tapestry and textile collection. It felt like a homecoming. As a Flemish specialist on tapestry production in Flanders, it is wonderful to be able to work with the largest collection of tapestries in Belgium. The collection is not a historically sequential one, like the collections in Madrid and Vienna, but was formed by coincidence, as are most collections.

It is indeed remarkable that very few tapestries were preserved in Belgium, even though the majority of tapestries in collections worldwide were made in the Southern Netherlands. Most tapestries were produced, of course, for the foreign market. The collection was formed after the foundation of the museum in 1835. The first piece, acquired in 1844, was a Northern Netherlandish tapestry that was donated to the museum. Remarkably, only the fourth tapestry to enter the collection (in 1864) was produced in Brussels: *The Descent from the Cross* from the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Our collection numbers 170 tapestries and is therefore not very large, but it offers a beautiful and complete overview of Flemish tapestry production of the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Moreover, it contains a number of top-notch pieces, such as the Tournai tapestry, over nine meters in width, which dates from ca. 1445-55 and depicts *Scenes of the Passion*, the ten-piece set illustrating the *Story of Jacob*, designed by Bernaert van Orley, and, from a later period, the five pieces from the set of tapestries depicting the *Story of Achilles* by Peter Paul Rubens.

The tapestry we are asked to lend out more often than any other is the *Legend of Notre Dame du Sablon*. Of the four-piece set, also designed by Bernaert van Orley, the museum has a fragment of the first and the last tapestry.

The appearance in this 1518 tapestry of the portraits of various members of the Habsburg dynasty, including the later Emperor Charles V, make it highly suitable as an illustration of historical themes.

Of the entire collection, only forty tapestries hang in the museum galleries, intended as a presentation of the decorative arts of the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The display is changed every three years, so that other tapestries can be shown.

We have held several small tapestry exhibitions, the most important of which was *Krijgstumult aan de Marokkaanse kust* (at its American venue it was called *The Invention of Glory: Afonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries*).

This exhibition, mounted to mark the restoration of the four huge Tournai tapestries (each 4 x 11 m), made a big impression. They tell the story of the conquest of the Moroccan cities of Arzila (Asilah) and Tangier by King Alfonso V of Portugal. This important historical event took place in August 1471, and the tapestries must have been woven shortly afterwards.

Of the textile collection, only a fraction of the more than two thousand fragments (mostly silk fabrics from the thirteenth to the twenty-first centuries) can be shown, owing to problems of conservation. Here, too, we try to change the display regularly. I have already organized temporary presentations, making use of display cases installed in the galleries, to show textiles of the various periods.

As the only curator in the department I am expected to perform a variety of duties, such as digitizing the collection and handling loan requests.

Now and then private individuals offer to give us their tapestries on temporary loan. So far the proposals have been interesting enough for such requests to be honored. Alternating the tapestries on a regular basis keeps the display fresh. To enable us to change the display, we actively seek sponsors willing to pay for conservation treatments. The King Baudouin Foundation is a big help in this regard.

The time remaining for scholarly study is obviously limited. For a number of years I concentrated on research that resulted in an undergraduate thesis: “De wandtapijtproductie in Oudenaarde rond 1700 in relatie met de andere Vlaamse centra” (“Tapestry production in Oudenaarde around 1700 in relation to the other Flemish centers”).

During preparations for the exhibition held in Oudenaarde in 1999, important holdings were discovered in the city archives: a collection of documents dating from 1669 to 1737 from the estate of the Van Verrens, a family of tapestry-weavers of Oudenaarde: personal letters, commercial correspondence, workbooks, memorial books and financial statements. My research focused mainly on the painters who supplied the designs. Both the figure painters and the landscape painters appear to have supplied cartoons to studios in Antwerp, Oudenaarde and Brussels. I have treated different aspects of this collaboration in various articles, and I have also researched the interaction between these cities around 1700. An important factor in the success of tapestries in that period was the contribution of the landscape painters. Their input was therefore examined in detail, and each element traced back to extant tapestries.

I’m now putting the finishing touches on a manuscript that will contain most of the results of my research, which I hope to publish in 2013. At the same time I have a project in the pipeline: an exhibition designed to highlight the interaction between the landscapists’ paintings and the work they did for the tapestry industry. Whether this show can be realized in the foreseeable future depends on the director’s decision. The museum is in a state of reorganization and far-reaching reforms are pending; unfortunately, it is uncertain what the authorities intend to do with our museum and the collections of decorative arts.

*Ingrid De Meûter is curator of tapestries and textiles in the [Cinquantenaire Museum](#) in Brussels. She has been a member of CODART since 2010.*

## FRIENDS

### Thomas Leysen, chairman of the Friends of CODART Foundation interviewed by Gerdien Verschoor

Thomas Leysen studied law at the University of Leuven (Belgium) and went on to build an impressive career in the world of business. For years he served as CEO of Umicore, a materials technology group recently named as one of “the world’s 10 most sustainable corporations”. He is also chairman of Belgium’s largest newspaper publisher. In 2011 he was named chairman of the board of the KBC banking and insurance group in Brussels.

He also holds numerous executive positions in the cultural world, serving, for example, as chairman of the Rubenianum Fund and as a chairman of the Heritage Fund of the King Baudouin Foundation and of the European Friends of Versailles. In addition, Thomas Leysen is chairman of the [Friends of CODART Foundation](#), in which capacity he has succeeded in enlisting new Patrons. He was also one of the instigators of the CODART Patrons Workshop, held for the first time during TEFAF 2012 – all reasons for an interview with a passionate businessman who, as he himself admits, suffers from a serious condition: the collecting bug.

*You come from a family of entrepreneurs. Did you inherit your interest in the fine arts and your passion for collecting from them?*

I’ve been going to museums since I was a child. We had a lot of art books at home and many art historians were among the regular visitors to our house. Even so, I never seriously considered making art history my profession, although I did study art history for a year, alongside my studies in law at the University of Leuven. So in fact I did get my interest in art from my family, and later on I delved into it more deeply. It has only been ten or twelve years, however, since I caught the collecting bug (which is a rather serious condition once it takes hold).

*Would you please tell us about it in more detail?*

My first purchase was actually a drawing, which I bought at the age of fourteen with money my grandmother had given me: a work by the French draftsman Jean-Louis Forain. My later purchases were mainly modern and contemporary prints. My interest in the fine arts led me to visit many art fairs, such as TEFAF, without buying anything, simply as a spectator. Around 2000 I bought my first old master drawing: an anonymous Flemish landscape drawing, which I purchased at an auction in London. I still haven’t discovered the name of the artist. This was soon followed by a drawing by Hendrik van Balen – a preparatory study for an allegorical painting now preserved in the Hermitage – and other sheets, chiefly Flemish landscapes.

After my fifth or sixth acquisition, I knew that I’d caught the collecting bug and that the condition was probably incurable. Several years later I started to buy paintings, at a time when I had more financial resources available. After that, things started to move rapidly. I began to follow all the most important old master auctions. Nowadays I buy a majority at auctions, but often from art dealers as well.

*How would you describe your collection?*

My collection focuses on Antwerp masters of 1500 to 1650, that is to say, from Quinten Metsys to Rubens, van Dyck and their followers. Sometimes I can’t resist going down a side track, but I try to keep my passion for collecting in check by maintaining this focal point as much as possible.

The core of my collection consists of portraits, landscapes, and allegorical and mythological scenes. The main criterion is the aesthetic appeal and the emotional impact. Second in importance is the ‘story’ behind the work (the subject in its

historical context, the work's provenance, etc). The attribution and the condition of the work are slightly less important to me. I have no objection to a high-quality work without a firm attribution, and am less obsessed by the condition of a work than many other collectors or curators. Of course, a work's condition is important in assessing its monetary value, so these things must be taken into consideration. But I prefer to hang a great painting that needed some conservation work, rather than a more mundane one in pristine condition.

*What about succumbing to other 'temptations', such as buying contemporary art? How do you explain that?*

I don't buy much contemporary art, but sometimes I branch out to other periods and schools. In such cases I let myself be driven purely by the aesthetic appeal. If I fall for a work at first sight, and my wife does too, then we may go for something outside our main field of interest.

*Would you tell us about any friction that might exist between 'Thomas Leysen the collector' and 'Thomas Leysen the businessman'? Are they at odds with each other, or do they complement and nurture one another?*

The businessman needs the collector and vice versa. I can only function optimally in harmonious and aesthetically pleasing surroundings, and in this I'm aided by 'the collector'. Naturally 'the businessman' must provide 'the collector' with the needed financial means. Occasionally the businessman finds the collector impulsive or imprudent, and this can cause some tension between them..

*We know you mainly as an art collector. Are you equally passionate about other arts, such as music or literature?*

I appreciate good literature and music, but I'm not passionate about them to the same degree. But I am passionately involved in the restoration of a seventeenth-century house in the center of Antwerp, and this has taught me a great deal. I'm also fascinated by the history of my city.

*You lend many artworks to museums. Why?*

My present house and my offices don't have enough space to hang everything to best advantage. I'd be very sorry to relegate certain works to a hidden existence somewhere in a depot, so I pro-actively offer them to museums. At the moment there are loans to a dozen museums in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the United States.

This way others can enjoy them too. Often, when works are lent out, additional information about them comes to light. And of course it's good for your collector's ego to know that works from your collection are good enough to be shown at the Metropolitan, the Louvre, the Rubenshuis or the Frans Hals Museum...

*For years now you've held important positions in the business world, but you also give a great deal of your time to social organizations, particularly cultural institutions. You're a member of the board of the Cultural Heritage Fund of the King Baudouin Foundation and you're a successful fundraiser for the Corpus Rubenianum. Not only that, but you're the current chairman of the Friends of CODART Foundation. You play a key role in all these organizations. Why do you find this so important?*

I consider each and every one of them important and valuable institutions, and if I'm asked to serve on the board, I find it difficult to say no, especially if I think that my contribution could actually make a difference. It's certainly no sacrifice, though. I also get a lot out of it, and that inspires me in other areas. I come into contact with fascinating people, doors open up for me in the international art world, I gain access to a great deal of knowledge, and it is immensely satisfying to achieve our common goals.



*What do you hope to achieve as chairman of the Friends of CODART Foundation?*

The Friends of CODART Foundation needs to give CODART financial flexibility and additional room to maneuver, certainly in the present-day context of governments in the process of reducing their support to the arts.

It's also important to create a broader basis of support for CODART. One goal is for the Friends of CODART Foundation to contribute to straightforward, professional relations between curators, on the one hand, and art collectors and the art market, on the other. Perhaps we can help to overcome a certain wariness that sometimes prevails between these groups.

Last year we succeeded in attracting more benefactors and Patrons for CODART, but we want to do more. The Patrons Workshop organized during last year's TEFAF was a fine example of collaboration, with several members of CODART generously sharing their knowledge with a group of Patrons. Another such workshop will be held during the upcoming TEFAF, and we hope that these events will become a tradition. In the future it will also be possible for Patrons to attend the annual CODART congress. CODART could likewise play a role in encouraging private collectors to lend their paintings to appropriate museums.

*How did you hear about CODART, and how did you first come into contact with it?*

I've long known the website as a particularly valuable tool for every lover of Dutch and Flemish art, but it wasn't until a couple of years ago that I came to know the organization better. I was immediately impressed by the network's international range, and I'm amazed at how much can be accomplished by such a small team.

*Why, in your opinion, is CODART important?*

CODART is an indispensable network for museum curators. The website first made me aware of this, but when I attended the CODART VIJFTIEN congress in Brussels in March 2012 I witnessed the enthusiasm CODART generates and how much its members benefit from these gatherings. Another thing that struck me is that CODART does not confine itself to the circle of museum professionals, but reaches out to others, through its website and the eZine.

*You're actively involved in policy-making aimed at sustainable business and a green economy. Do you have anything to say to the museum world in this regard? Or do you see these as totally separate areas?*

As far as the necessary greening of the economy is concerned, I don't see such a direct link to museums.

But the concept of sustainability is naturally connected with conservation, with the preservation of everything of value and passing it on to succeeding generations. In this sense museums and curators certainly fulfill an exemplary role.

*Do you, as an active entrepreneur and successful businessman, have any special message for museum curators?*

Whether we like it or not, the global trend in most countries is for governments to give less money to cultural institutions, including museums. Therefore, more emphasis on fundraising from private sources will be necessary. In Europe in particular, this will require a change in mindset, and it would be good for us to tackle this pro-actively. In my view, this is not only a job for directors. Curators will have to play a role as well for it is precisely them whose authority, expertise and contacts with collectors and art dealers can lead them to make decisive contributions, to the benefit of their institutions. This must be done with high ethical standards, of course, and with the necessary professionalism. But it is better to embrace the inevitable in an intelligent way than to ignore it until it is too late.

*Gerdien Verschoor is director of CODART.*

## CODART ACTIVITIES

## CODARTfocus in Utrecht

Micha Leeflang and Annabel Dijkema

The collection of sculpture belonging to the Museum Catharijneconvent is one of the most important in the Netherlands in terms of both quality and quantity. Its core consists of the collections of the Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum Utrecht (ABM, Archiepiscopal Museum Utrecht) and the Bisschoppelijk Museum Haarlem (BMH, Diocesan Museum), both of which came to be housed in 1976 in the new Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, together with other ecclesiastical collections. After its privatization in 1995, the museum was given its present name; it has the largest and most important collection of ecclesiastical art in the Netherlands. The sculpture holdings comprise more than 1,800 objects, the majority produced in the Northern Netherlands before 1600.

The exhibition *Surviving the Iconoclasm: Medieval Sculpture from Utrecht 1430-1530* – which can be seen at the Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht until 24 February 2013 and then at the [Suermondt-Ludwig Museum in Aachen](#) from 14 March to 16 June – includes more than ninety pieces of sculpture made of wood, stone and pipe clay. In addition to twenty-six statues from the Museum Catharijneconvent, more than thirty lenders from the Netherlands and abroad have put objects at the disposal of the exhibition, thereby enabling us to provide an overview of the wealth and beauty of Utrecht sculpture of the late Middle Ages.

To mark the exhibition *Surviving the Iconoclasm*, a CODARTfocus meeting was held on 28 January, the second in cooperation with the Contact Group Early Netherlandish Art. More than fifty people from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and Norway took part in this symposium. The program naturally included an enlightening tour of the exhibition, during which various experts clarified selected pieces and there was much discussion about technique, style and attribution. The lectures dealt with the realization of the exhibition, ongoing research, and proposals for future research projects. Several new insights were also shared with the participants.

Marieke van Vlierden, one of the organizers of *Surviving the Iconoclasm*, presented the plan to set up an international database of makers' marks – including workshop marks and monograms – on sculptures, furniture and panels made in the Netherlands and the German-speaking regions (Central Europe) in the period 1300-1700. The instigators are Marieke van Vlierden (independent researcher, Utrecht), Michael Rief (curator and head of collections, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen), Seppe Roels (freelance curator, Mechelen) and Micha Leeflang (Curator of Medieval Art, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht). The participants include Ria De Boodt (independent researcher/postdoc research assistant, Artesis Hogeschool Antwerpen and Hogeschool Gent), Marc Peetz (restorer at the Rheinisches Amt für Denkmalpflege) and Kim Woods (senior lecturer in art history, Open University Milton Keynes, UK). The RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History) in The Hague has already expressed its interest in the project and will engage in the discussions in the near future.

Aleth Lorne, freelance curator of sculpture, and Michael Rief, curator of sculpture and head of collections, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, gave a talk with the title "Insight or lack of insight? Questions about the materials and techniques of sculptures in the Late Gothic period in Utrecht." They stressed the fact that surprisingly little technical research is being done on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Utrecht sculpture. Although wooden and stone sculpture has been studied to some extent, pipe-clay sculpture has hardly been subjected to technical examination. Two aspects of this were discussed. The first was the construction of wooden and pipe-clay altarpieces and the relationship between these two groups of sculptures, as well as their installation in the altar frames.

Were wooden and pipe-clay statues installed in the same way? The pipe-clay fragment with the *Swooning of Mary* in the collection of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen displays various holes in the back where it was mounted in the retable. These holes are very similar to those seen in several fragments of wooden altarpieces. Two retable fragments, one displaying the *Adoration of the Magi* (BMH bh144) and the other the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (ABM bh275), both in the collection of the Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht, are composed of various elements held together by small wooden slats and nails.

These joinings are most likely original and are somewhat similar to the construction of several fragments of Antwerp altarpieces. Aleth Lorne emphasized that systematic research into mounting holes could be very important for a better understanding of how altarpieces were constructed.

The second aspect discussed by the restorers was the way in which brocade and other textiles was imitated by means of polychromy on wooden and stone sculptures (Aleth Lorne), and the punch patterns on two statues attributed to the Master of the Utrecht Female Head of Stone (Michael Rief).

This part of their talk sparked a discussion about which artisans were responsible for the polychromy. Archival documents have shown that statues were often decorated by painters, but in the period preceding Jan van Scorel (1495-1562), Utrecht can hardly be said to have had a school of painting.

Were the Utrecht artisans who decorated sculpture with polychromy actually specialists who had devoted themselves completely to painting statues? Or were they book illuminators? Or was there in fact a school of painting of which we know nothing? Another possibility is that artists from elsewhere were hired to do this work. Michael Rief pointed out the similarities in the decorative patterns seen on the Utrecht statues of Mary Magdalene (Münster, LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, I 36) and Saint Dorothea (Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, SK 605) to the polychromy on sculptures originating in Antwerp and Mechelen.

Ingmar Reesing's lecture, titled *Handy saints: research into small devotional objects*, elucidated his Ph.D. research at the University of Amsterdam. Until now, little research has been done on micro-carvings and pipe-clay sculptures from the Northern Netherlands.

Small objects such as pipe-clay statues of saints, ivory pax or *portapaz*, and prayer beads were intended for private devotion. Particularly little is known about the production of prayer beads – also called “prayer nuts” – which are small, richly decorated boxwood carvings containing minuscule biblical scenes. We know only one wood carver by name: Adam Theodorici (Adam Dirksz), who signed a prayer bead now preserved in Copenhagen. This master's known work includes other extremely refined objects, such as elaborately decorated knife handles.

A great many devotional objects made of pipe clay have been found in Utrecht, where numerous statues of saints were made of a type of clay that turns white when baked. Although it was long assumed that pipe-clay statues were produced only in Utrecht, this is certainly not the case.

Devotional objects of pipe clay were also made in Delft, Leiden, Amsterdam and Liège. Moreover, wooden statues patterned after Utrecht pipe-clay statues have been found in the Rhineland and Cologne. And it is possible that the pipe-clay statues made in Utrecht served as examples for woodcarvings or metalwork made outside the Netherlands, in places as far away as Slovenia and Poland. Although it is frequently said that pipe-clay statues were mass-produced, the large and often richly decorated pipe-clay statues – such as the Virgin and Child from Zwolle (Stedelijk Museum, Stichting Emmanuëlshuizen collection, 16593-3) and the reliefs made for altars (including Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, BEK 1054 B and Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, BK-1972-156) – seem to have been the work of specialists, particularly their polychromy. The small statues of saints intended for private devotion were possibly the by-products of pottery.

The morning session prompted a discussion about materials. What caused a patron commissioning a sculpture to choose wood, stone or pipe clay? It was concluded that the material chosen depended on the object's function. As Hans Nieuwdorp and Marieke van Vlieden rightly observed, altarpieces had to be moved frequently, and so could not be too heavy (which

explains the choice of wood or pipe clay). Holy Sepulchre groups and pieces connected with architecture – such as keystones, epitaphs and mantel friezes – were made of stone. Export products were often made of wood or pipe clay because they weighed less than stone and were easier to ship.

In the afternoon Tone Marie Olstad, senior curator of paintings at the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, talked about the so-called Leka Group, an ensemble of five Utrecht altarpieces that were transported from Utrecht to Norway at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

She has been researching these retables since 1986, and in this presentation she discussed the usefulness of construction drawings. As part of her research, she took the exact measurements of both the statues and the altar frames. The scale drawings show the front and back as well as the cross-section of the retables, and provide a great deal of insight into the construction of altarpieces.

Henri Defoer, former director of the Museum Catharijneconvent, gave a talk titled “Name-dropping and Utrecht medieval sculpture” about the identification of masters with provisional names. Reinhard Karrenbrock’s identification of the Master of the Emmerik Saints as Raebe Lambert Luetszoon (see exh. cat. *Middeleeuwse beelden uit Utrecht 1430–1530*, Micha Leeflang and Kees van Schooten [eds.], Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, and Ludion, Antwerp 2012) is not justified, according to Defoer.

He thinks it highly unlikely that a sculptor active in Utrecht – which can be ascertained on the basis of the corbel displaying an angel bearing a coat of arms, ca. 1475, Utrecht, Ridderlijke Duitse Orde (RDO), Balije van Utrecht, which was produced by the Master of the Emmerik Saints in Utrecht – the pre-eminent center of sculpture at that time, would choose to move to Emmerik. He thinks it more plausible that the statues were exported from Utrecht to Emmerik, and therefore argues in favor of retaining the name “Master of the Emmerik Saints.”

In the case of the Master of the Utrecht Female Head of Stone, who was active in Utrecht between 1500 and 1530, we have come closer to identifying this individual, thanks to the exhaustive archival research carried out by Jan Klinckaert, director of the Center for Religious Art and Culture in Flanders and Brussels. On the basis of his study of the period in which this master was active, he has come up with three names. The first, Hendrik Hendrikszoon Bontmaker, can be eliminated on the basis of his divergent style.

Even though no work is known by the other two important sculptors then active in Utrecht – Jacob Eelgiszoon van Genderen and Claes Engbertszoon van Esbroeck, whose names were also gleaned from archival documents – it is in fact very likely that one of these two sculptors can be identified with the Master of the Utrecht Female Head of Stone.

As Defoer indicated, the quality of the oeuvre attributed to the Master of the Utrecht Female Head of Stone is very diverse, which suggests the possibility that a number of workshops were working in a similar style. The Leka Altarpiece, the Saint Dorothea from Aachen and the Mary Magdalene from Münster all bear close stylistic resemblances, but seem to be by a hand other than that of the Master of the Utrecht Female Head (Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, ABM bs604).

By contrast, Dagmar Preising’s recent discovery of a wooden statue of a female saint in the Polish town of Niepolomice, near Krakow, does seem to offer us an important link between the core piece in Utrecht and the pieces from Leka, Münster and Aachen. The Polish statue displays all the stylistic characteristics of the Master of the Utrecht Female Head of Stone, including the moon-shaped eyelids, the double chin, the bulging forehead and the long curly hair. Various technical aspects, however, place the statue closer to the Leka statues and the saints from Münster and Aachen. After all, these statues are made of wainscot and display the same traces of a workbench on the lower side.

Preising’s find indicates that there is still a lot to be discovered, and we therefore hope that the exhibition and the symposium will prove to be a springboard for new discoveries and further research.

*[Micha Leeftang](#) is Curator of Medieval Art at the [Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht](#), and has been a member of CODART since 2007.*

*Annabel Dijkema is an assistant curator at the Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.*