



Visitor Guide  
**Maidens' House Museum**

18 March 2015

Impressive and quite confrontational.  
We don't learn enough from the past.

H. Inesren

22 April 2015

Magnificent paintings, sculptures and religious objects.  
A nice slice of history.

Isabelle Granier, Paris

30 July 2015

Extremely fascinating

Federico, Italy

The Maidens' House is quite possibly the smallest museum in Antwerp. It is situated in between other historic buildings in a trendy shopping neighbourhood in the city centre. The museum belongs to the Public Social Welfare Centre of Antwerp (OCMW or Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn van Antwerpen) and is home to the centre's unique art collection.

The museum is located in an interesting historic building, which dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was formerly an orphanage for young girls. The poor relief in Antwerp was organised here. As a care institution, the public social welfare centre has a rich and layered history, which started with the various charitable institutions in the early Middle Ages. The art collection was expanded by the predecessors of the public social welfare centre, which also administered care. It largely consists of gifts and bequests from rich benefactors.

Learn all there is to know about the care for foundlings, orphans and the poor throughout the centuries as you explore the collection of daily utensils, curious artworks and paintings, including several masterpieces. Here you will realise that the history of poor relief, the building and the collection are inextricably linked.

The museum's permanent collection mainly comprises paintings from the fifteenth until the seventeenth century, with masterpieces by prominent artists such as Peter Paul Rubens, Jacob Jordaens, Sir Anthony van Dyck, Pieter Aertsen, Maarten de Vos and many more.

Every two years, the museum organises temporary exhibitions with a strong social and educational emphasis. The theme of these temporary exhibitions is always linked in one way or another to one of the public social welfare centre's priorities: (child) poverty, the refugee problem, integration, homelessness, a roof over one's head, youth unemployment and so on. It is our way of making visitors reflect on important themes in our society as well as asking people's ongoing attention for the most vulnerable people in our society.

This guide will take you on a tour of the many rooms in this stunning historic dwelling. It informs you about the art, the building and the lives of the orphans who lived here. Antwerp's social history strongly resonates in the building and the artworks in it. That is why the visitor guide starts by explaining the time frame in which the building became an orphanage after which it elaborates on the collection.

We hope you enjoy your visit!

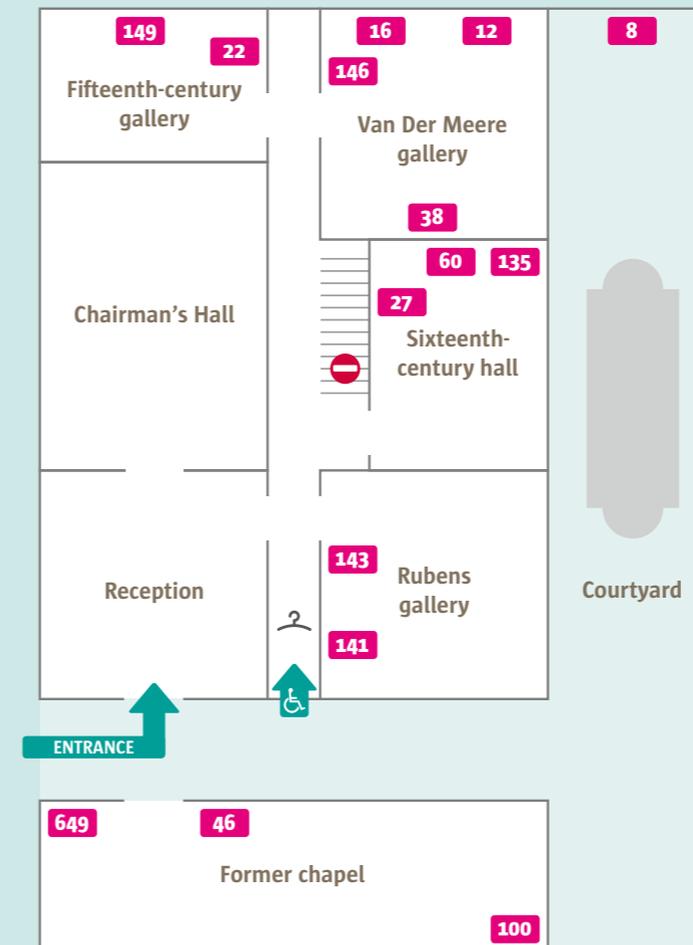


Cover: porridge bowl depicting the Virgin Mary, majolica (last quarter of the sixteenth century)

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# Map and masterpieces



   = Masterpiece

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# A building and collection rooted in Antwerp's social history

It was widely accepted in early modern Western Europe that orphans required special care. The early death of one or both parents meant there were a large a number of (semi-)orphans. The increase in the number of abandoned children and child beggars was a matter of concern for the city's authorities and population alike. That is why several cities founded institutions for minors who were neglected and who had no parents. In Antwerp, this institution was called the Maagdenhuis Museum or the Maidens' House. Thanks to the financial contributions of rich private benefactors, the Maidens' House was able to expand regularly as the centuries passed.

## Hendrik Suderman and Jan Van der Meere

Hendrik Suderman was a wealthy German merchant who acquired a few parcels of land from St Elisabeth's Hospital in the years between 1350 and 1354. Here he built a home for poor women and girls. Two centuries later, Jan Van der Meere was also moved by the fate of the poor "young and miserable maidens". He built a hospice and school for young orphaned girls. Although the building's resources were limited, it regularly accommodated about a hundred girls. Here they learnt how to read, write and do arithmetic, as well as sewing, knitting or spinning. They also had to learn household chores. The

idea was to prepare these girls for a job as chamber maid or servant.

## Gilbert van Schoonbeke

The Maidens' House was significantly expanded in 1634-1636. The heirs of the renowned real estate developer and speculator Gilbert van Schoonbeke made large financial contributions to the Chamber of Poor Relief or Armenkamer. Thanks to these donations, the Maidens' House was thoroughly renovated. It was during this period that the stunning white stone façade of the Maidens' House as we know it was built. In 1882, the orphans moved to a new building in Albert Grisarstraat. The office of the Civilian Almshouses then

moved into the building of the Maidens' House.

## Burgerlijke Godshuizen

The office of the Civilian Almshouses was a predecessor of the current public social welfare centre. It was the result of a restructuring operation within the public services for relief to the poor and sick at the end of the Ancien Régime.

On the eve of the French rule, a number of parish tables for the poor, hospitals, almshouses, orphanages, schools for the poor and convent communities assured relief for the poor and the sick. Over the years, some of these institutions for the



Oldest group photo, Maidens' House, 1886

most part lost their original function. They did not disappear but their services were simply incorporated into new structures.

- ▷ The history of these charitable institutions is closely linked to that of urban development in the Middle Ages and modern times. Until the eleventh century, succour to the sick, the poor, to widows and the elderly was the monopoly of the Church. While the Church continued to play a significant role in relief for the poor and the sick, from the thirteenth century onwards rich citizens decided to establish their own initiatives increasingly frequently. Relief for the poor and the sick continued to be religiously inspired and motivated however.
- ▷ Civilians founded their own hospitals and special hospitals for lepers which, in time, gave rise to specialised charitable institutions, the so-called almshouses. Gradually, the organisation of social assistance was in hands of the urban elite. Wealthy citizens were in charge of the tables of the poor and of distributing food to and controlling the poor. This group consisted of invalids, elderly citizens in need and the unemployed.
- ▷ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the political and economic elites considered social policy an instrument for regulating the labour market. This was done, for example, through compulsory employment. Periods of increased proletarianisation led to impoverishment and people being uprooted. Moreover, a spectacular number of immigrants moved from rural villages to the city. That is why the city government wanted to preserve public safety and maintain social order by getting a handle on poverty.



Façade of the Maidens' House Museum.

### Centralisation of poor relief

Reforms such as the establishment of the **Camer van Huysarmen** (the Chamber of the poor, which was managed by a committee of almoners) in 1458 gave rise to a centralisation of poor relief. In 1540 and 1779, the almoners also took important steps towards centralisation. By the end of the Ancien Régime, they had about 30 almshouses under their supervision. And yet social assistance at the end of the eighteenth century was still relatively fragmented and its approach was far from adequate.

In 1798, the almoners tried to change this by establishing the board and administration of the **Civilian Almshouses**. The administration was given the laborious task of managing a large number of institutions of varying dimensions. It soon became clear that reforms were need. As a result of the reorganisation, the almoners sold the smallest institutions or demolished them to reduce the number of institutions.

This also had consequences for the art heritage. Every almshouse traditionally had a **chapel**. Over time, these chapel acquired their own collection of artworks. From 1839 until 1884, successive commissions established an inventory and restored the art heritage of the Civilian Almshouses.

### Opening of the Maidens' House Museum

In 1884, the Maidens' House Museum was inaugurated. The museum exhibited a selection of about one hundred paintings and art objects in the chapel of the Maidens' House. Its extensive collection featured art that had been acquired during centuries of poor relief.

The Museum of Fine Arts (the present-day Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, which is scheduled to reopen in 2018) was inaugurated at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, parts of the prestigious collection of the Maidens' House Museum moved to this new temple of the arts. The Maidens' House Museum closed its doors and used the newly freed up space for administrative purposes.

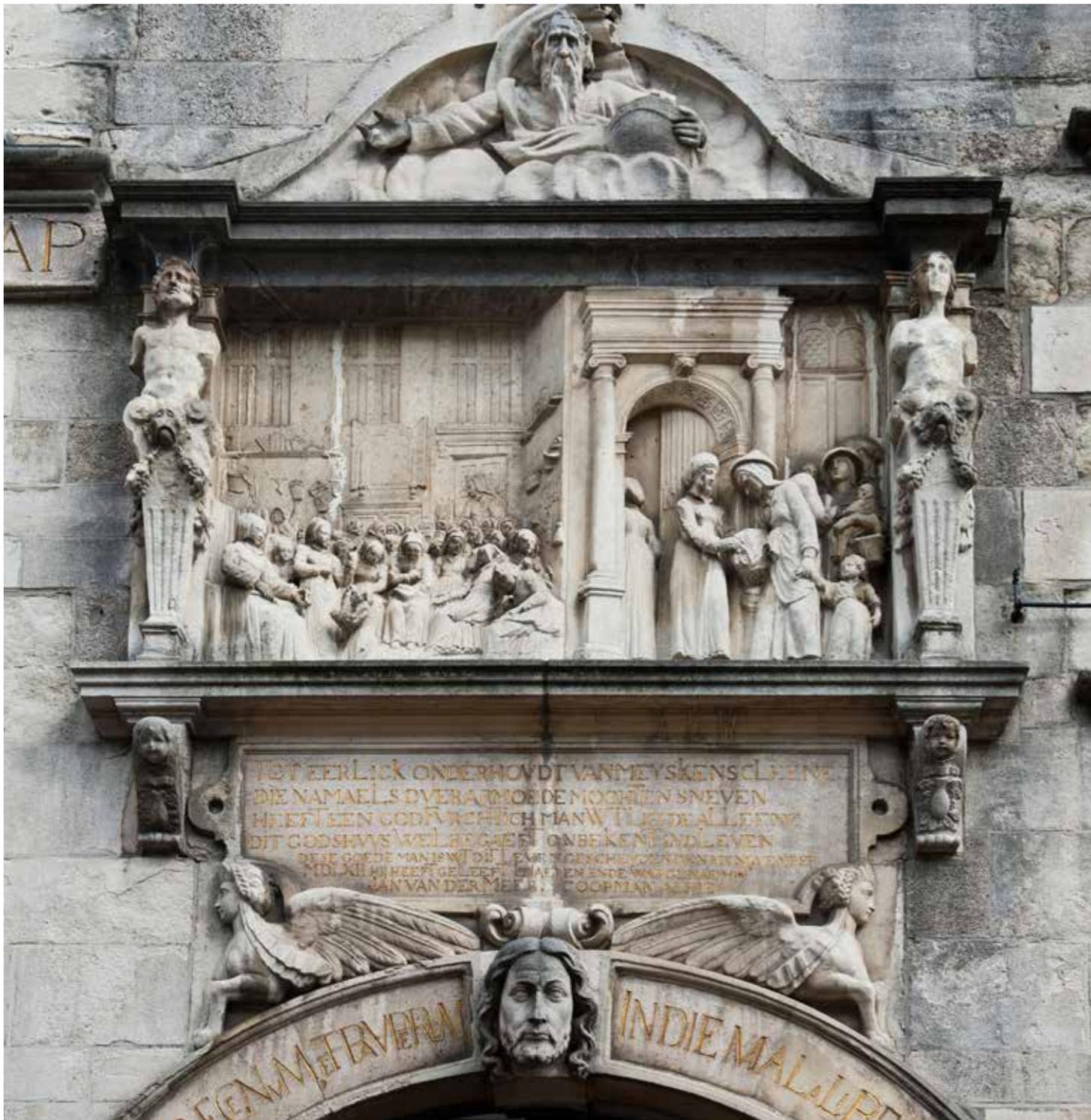
The Maidens' House Museum reopened in 1930 in the margin of the World Expo, which took place in Antwerp that year. That same year, the city also hosted an international conference about charity. Since then this unique boutique museum has constantly expanded. The merger of the Office of Civilian Almshouses and the Office of Charity into one organisation, called the Commission for Social Assistance (Commissie van Openbare Onderstand, C.O.O.) also contributed to the collection's growth. A number of unique

artworks were transferred back to the Maidens' House Museum from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts.

### Masterpieces by prominent masters

The museum's collection features plenty of works by prestigious artists such as **Jacob Jordaens, Sir Anthony van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens**. It also owns beautiful works by "less important masters", such as Michiel Coxcie, Otto Van Veen, Erasmus II Quellinus and Theodoor Van Loon. All these works are related to a small slice of Antwerp's social history. In some instances, they are directly related to the history of the Maidens' House, such as the unique collection of sixteenth-century majolica porridge bowls. These masterpieces of Flemish heritage took pride of place in the ornate kitchen of the former girls' orphanage.

The valuable collection of the Maidens' House Museum is recognised in Belgium and abroad, as is evidenced by the many requests for scientific research and loans the museum receives.



## Façade

When you entered the museum you already had the opportunity to admire its monumental façade. This façade was built during the major renovation that took place from 1634 until 1636. The most striking element in the façade is the sculpture above the entranceway. Cornelis Floris de Vriendt probably designed this bas-relief around 1564. He was a sculptor and also designed Antwerp's town hall among others.

- ▷ At the bottom left of the sculpture you can see various orphaned girls gathered in the school.
- ▷ To the right is a teacher who is leading the children into the orphanage.
- ▷ These two scenes are flanked by two “Hermes” figures, which protected gate buildings in ancient times.
- ▷ At the top we see God towering above the clouds, and Christ as the Good Shepherd standing above him, accompanied by a dove as the personification of the Holy Spirit.

There are various Bible fragments in Latin on the façade alongside this inscription. They emphasise the merit of charity and generosity.

As you step into the building through the entrance gate, you will see the reception desk and the first museum galleries to your left. The former chapel, the last space on the tour, is to your right. In front of you is the courtyard from where you have a view of the girls' dormitories. You will find further information about this elsewhere in the guide.

Below this scene are various inscriptions. The almoners wanted to commemorate the founder of the Maidens' House, Jan van der Meere, with these inscriptions:

*This pious man founded this almshouse out of sheer love and for the honest maintenance of young girls who would have died in poverty otherwise.*

*This good man died on 19 November 1562.*

*He was 73 years old and was known as Jan Van Der Meere, a merchant in the city.*

◀ The bas-relief above the entrance gate. Cornelis Floris de Vriendt, c. 1564.

# The passage leading to the courtyard

## 160 Offering box, ironwork (seventeenth century).

This offering box was originally produced for the "Zinnelooshuis" in Sint-Rochusstraat.

## 162 Commemorative stone "In memoriam" (twentieth century).

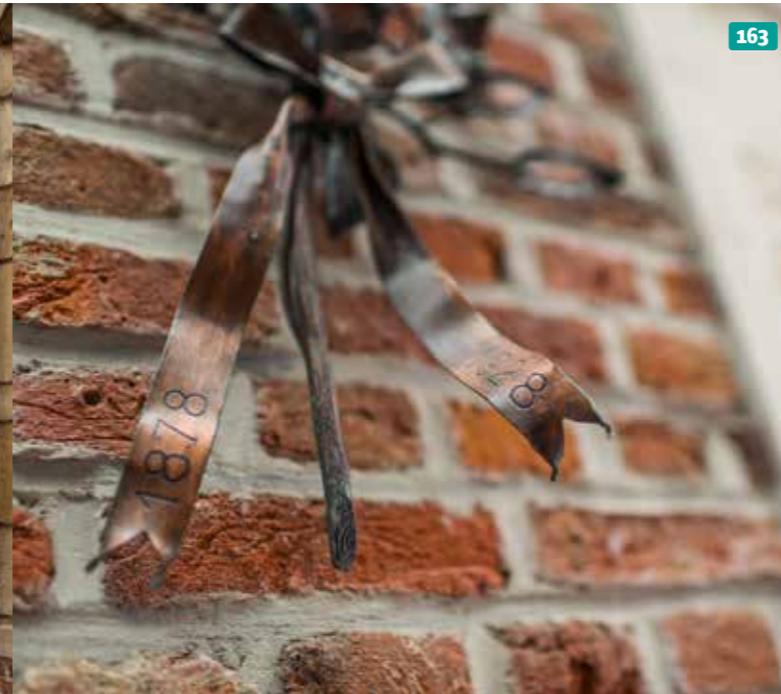
This stone commemorates the staff of the Civilian Almshouses, the Office of Charity, the Commission for Social Assistance and the pupils who died during the two World Wars.

## 163 Palm branches (twentieth century).

This is a tribute by the Royal Fanfare "De Vereenigde Weezen" to the Royal Fanfare of Orphaned Boys of Antwerp (1878-1928).



Passage to the courtyard



163



The brass band of the Boys' Orphanage, c. 1920



160

# Reception

You are currently in the reception area or the former voorsael or forecourt. In the past, this is where you would have found the catheloge or catalogue. This book listed all the names of the orphaned maidens who lived here. It was also where the administration of the Maidens' House was kept.

Let us start with the impressive painting opposite the desk:

## 56 Peter IJKENS (1648-1695), Father Bulteau Reports To God.

Father Bulteau commissioned two identical paintings. He donated one to the boys' orphanage – also called the Knechtjeshuis – while the other was for the Foundlings' Orphanage. Bulteau felt a kinship with these institutions because he grew up in one of them himself. At age eleven, he was abandoned at the Foundling's Orphanage. Shortly after, he was transferred to the Boys' Orphanage, where he was given the opportunity to go to school. Afterwards, Bulteau was appointed parish priest of Boechout. He did however always continue to support the Antwerp Chamber of the Poor.

The painting features Jacob Bulteau, standing opposite Jesus. Bulteau is accompanied by his own guardian angels, St Jacob and St Bavo. The various inscriptions give a better idea of the context. One reads: "An evil man may wallow in his evil until death but I will claim his blood in your name" (Den boosen sal wel in sijn boosheidt sterven, maar uijt uwe handt sal ick sijn bloedt eijsschen). Jesus has a book in front of him with the words "The clergy must defend my interests and that of my souls the most" (De gheestelycke moeten mijn en mijn sielen meest beherten).

We have no idea what is the underlying meaning of this composition but this is obviously a moralising painting. The inscription

"bermhertigheijt en gheen rechtveerdichheijdt" (charity and no justice) at the bottom only serves to emphasise this assumption.

## 144 Cornelius SCHUT (1597-1655), The Assumption Of The Virgin Mary.

Cornelius Schut started out his career as a pupil of Peter Paul Rubens. In 1618, he was admitted to St Luke's Guild as a master painter after which he established his own successful studio. He became one of the leading seventeenth-century Antwerp Baroque painters. And yet, Schut was not as well-known as Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens. He was not a great innovator, choosing instead to continue the Baroque tradition which he learnt from his master.

After Rubens died in 1640, Schut was the Antwerp painter who received the most commissions from the Church. He painted the Assumption of the Virgin Mary for the ceiling of Antwerp's cathedral among others. This painting hangs at the highest point in Antwerp.



### Good to know

The painting you see here was originally painted for the chapel of the Zinnelozenhuis and depicts the same Biblical scene. It is lavishly decorated with putti. These are young, chubby children, sometimes with wings.



121



**121 Marc DE GROOT (1910-1979), Stained glass windows.**

The eight stained glass windows behind the reception desk commemorate the main benefactors of this institution. They donated significant sums to the Commission for Social Assistance since 1925.

**147 UNKNOWN MASTER (seventeenth century), Mount Calvary.**

This work portrays the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and two criminals. The crucifixion took place on Mount Calvary, which is also sometimes called Golgotha. Golgotha is the Armenian word for the “place of the skull”, which explains the skull at the bottom of the painting. There are three people mourning at Jesus’ feet: his mother, the Virgin Mary, the apostle John and Mary Magdalene.

**150 Erasmus QUELLINUS THE YOUNGER (1607-1678), The Holy Family.**

This scene depicts Joseph, the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus along with an angel. It was painted by Quellinus the Younger. He was born into a famous family of artists. His father and his younger brother were sculptors, while another brother specialised in prints.

Initially Quellinus the Younger was interested in the academic world, obtaining a degree in philosophy. He was so attracted to art however that he apprenticed with Rubens. At age 26, Quellinus was admitted to St Luke’s Guild as a master painter. After Rubens died in 1640, he succeeded his friend and former teacher as the official city painter. He also accepted several engraving commissions from the world-famous Plantin-Moretus printer’s.

This artistic family tradition continued after Erasmus Quellinus the Younger died. His son Jan Erasmus followed in his father’s footsteps. The court of Austria even appointed him “imperial crowned painter”.

**140 Grandfather clock (eighteenth century).**

This magnificent eighteenth-century clock is made of mahogany. This is the first of many historic interior design objects, which are part of the collection of the Maidens’ House Museum.

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# Chairman's Hall

According to historic sources, this hall was also called the groote neercamer or large ground floor hall or heerencamer (the gentlemen's room). This is where the regent and the almoners would convene around the large table. They would sit on four high chairs, decorated with black Spanish leather. When the Commission for Social Assistance (the C.O.O or predecessor of the current public social welfare centre) was established, the meetings were also held in this hall.

**58 Pieter VAN AVONT (1600-1652), The Holy Family in a Landscape with Angels.**

Pieter Van Avont's work, which hangs above the mantelpiece, stands out in the room. Not much is known about this painter. We know he started out his career in Mechelen but he was only admitted to the painter's guild as a master painter in Brussels. In 1631 he was accepted as a master in St Luke's guild in Antwerp. During this period, he worked with Jan Brueghel among others.

**115 Frans FLORIS (c. 1520-1570), Portrait of Gilbert van Schoonbeke.**

There are two portraits alongside the mantelpiece. The portrait on the left depicts Gilbert van Schoonbeke.



Van Schoonbeke lived during Antwerp's Golden Age (1498-1568). In 1496, there were about 124 streets in the city, which covered a surface area of about 210 acres within the city ramparts. By 1568, this number had increased to 212. Van Schoonbeke was a very successful real estate developer, financier and factory owner. His impact on Antwerp's urban fabric was substantial. He bought land, subdivided it, built streets and squares as well as buildings. This visionary speculator developed a centralised brewery complex in the new district, called Nieuwstad (currently, the southern part of the Eilandje neighbourhood). He was not always popular with the population and in 1554 this culminated in a protest. Subsequent generations were more positively inclined towards van Schoonbeke. They posthumously awarded him the honorary title of meliorator van der stadt Antwerpen (the man who improved the city of Antwerp).

Although Van Schoonbeke was very wealthy, he never donated much to Antwerp's efforts towards poor relief. His heirs, however, made significant contributions to charity. That is why van Schoonbeke is often praised as a benefactor of the Maidens' House, although he did not strictly contribute it in any way.

The painting is by Frans Floris. His father was a sculptor, just like his brother Cornelis II Floris (de Vriendt). The latter was a well-established sculptor but is also better known as the architect of Antwerp's town hall and the man who designed the entranceway to the Maidens' House Museum.

Frans Floris did not fit in with the traditional Flemish school. His style was more mannerist and Italianate. He thought about the positions for his models. His portraits were quite realistic in contrast. Frans Floris established an Italian-style workshop with assistants. In that sense, he was a predecessor of Rubens.

**116 Frans FLORIS (c. 1520-1570), Portrait of Elisabeth Heynderickx, Gilbert van Schoonbeke's wife.**

This is a portrait of Elisabeth Heynderickx, Gilbert van Schoonbeke's wife. There are several portraits of Gilbert van Schoonbeke and his wife throughout the museum. It is interesting to compare the various portrayals.



**Good to know**

Two of van Schoonbeke's granddaughters (Elisabeth and Leonora de Cater) made a substantial donation to the Maidens' House Museum. Because both of these women remained childless, they made various cash donations to the almoners. They also gifted an adjacent building, which allowed the Maidens' House Museum to expand.

**63 Maarten PEPIJN (1575-1643), Let The Little Children Come To Me.**

Jesus is surrounded by various young children and spectators in this painting. It portrays a Biblical passage in which Jesus summons the children: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Gospel according to St Mark, 10, 14-15). A painting in which the children are in the spotlight is perfectly suited to the context of the Maidens' House and Boys' Orphanage.

Maarten Pepijn painted the work. He was a contemporary and personal friend of Rubens. The fact that Rubens's wife was the godmother to one of Pepijn's daughters is evidence of their friendship. However, Pepijn's techniques and those of the master painter are very different.



**65 Jan VOORHOUT (1647-1723), Samson and Delilah.**

This painting portrays the sleeping warrior Samson, who is betrayed by his lover Delilah. As Samson lets his guard down, Delilah cuts his hair, which is the source of his power. Betrayed by his lover and stripped of his power, Samson is overpowered by his enemy, the Philistines.

Jan Voorhout, who painted this scene, originally came from the Northern Netherlands. During the French invasion in 1672, he fled to Germany. He returned after three years, settling in Amsterdam where he became a huge success.

**96 Entourage of Hendrik DE CLERCK THE YOUNGER (1570-1629), Jesus Appearing To Mary Magdalene.**

This painting is by De Clerck. It portrays Christ as a gardener with a shovel in his hand. He appears to Mary Magdalene, who is easy to recognise because of the pot of salve she carries. The painting refers to a passage in the Gospel according to St John: Mary Magdalene waits outside while the apostles enter Christ's empty tomb. There she meets Christ but she assumes he is a gardener. "Thinking he was the gardener, she said: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." (John, 20, 15).

The work was originally created for the chapel of the Lantschot almshouse in Falconruui. This charitable institution is named after its founder, Cornelis Lantschot. This rich merchant is buried in Antwerp's Saint James's Church. His tomb bears the inscription "You win heaven with violence, but heaven can also be bought with the power of money" (Men wint den hemel met geweld, of is te koop met kracht van geldt). The inscription refers to one of the motives for charity, namely to obtain salvation through donations.

**99 Maarten PEPIJN (1575-1643), Jesus holding a Cross appears to the Sinners.**

Jesus stands in the centre of this painting on a tombstone, holding a cross and looking down on the kneeling sinners. The painting is by Maarten Pepijn, the same painter who painted "Let The Little Children Come To Me". The Maidens' House Museum thus owns several works by this painter. (Administration des hospices civils d'Anvers. Compte moral administratif de 1885, Antwerp, 1886:14-15).

**4 David TENIERS THE YOUNGER (1610-1690), Jacob's Scheme to multiply his flock.**

The painting depicts a Biblical scene. Jacob was not satisfied by his father-in-law's actions and decided to return to his native country. Laban promised him that he could remove all the striped, speckled or spotted animals from his flock and take them with him. Jacob devised a scheme, and placed speckled poplar branches in the troughs. He hoped that the speckled branches would influence the conception. Jacob's plan worked and after seven years in Laban's service he was an extraordinarily wealthy man.

David Teniers the Younger painted "Jacob's Scheme To Multiply His Flock". He apprenticed with his father David Teniers the Elder and subsequently with Rubens and Adriaan Brouwer. In 1645, he was appointed as dean of St Luke's guild in Antwerp.



His paintings were very popular at various royal courts: Philip IV of Spain, Queen Christina of Sweden and Prince William II of Orange all purchased works by him. He subsequently moved to Brussels where he became court painter of the archduke. Thanks to Teniers's personal initiative and his influence at the court, he was able to found the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. The academy celebrated its 350th anniversary in 2013. It is one of the oldest art schools of the west, along with the academies of Paris and Rome.

**122 Marc DE GROOT (1910-1979), Twelve stained glass windows.**

These stained glass windows depict the activities of charitable institutions in the past and present. They list the names of the respective chairmen of the Commission for Social Assistance and of the public social welfare centre.

**61 UNKNOWN ANTWERP MASTER (c. 1615), Portrait of Jacques de Vergnies, his sons and Saint Jacob. Back, Saint Jacob, grisaille.**

Shortly before his death, Jacob de Vergnies founded an almshouse in Bontmantelstraat. It consisted of five houses and a chapel and was designed to accommodate ten poor, elderly women. Soon after the number was reduced to six. In 1636, Jacob's son Gaspar de Vergnies transferred the management of the almshouse to the almoners who further reduced the number to four in 1641.

On this panel we see Jacques de Vergnies and his sons. Gaspar took charge of the almshouse after his father died. The work is completely in line with the right panels of previous epitaph triptychs. The tradition of epitaph triptychs became increasingly rare in 1610-1620 as a result of the emergence and popularity of the ornate main altar.

**62 UNKNOWN ANTWERP MASTER (c. 1615), Portrait of the wife and daughters of Jacob de Vergnies. Back, Saint Clement, grisaille.**

Besides the large paintings and other art objects we also recommend taking a look at the historic interior objects.

**89 Draw leaf table or bolpoottafel (seventeenth century).**

**112 Mantle clock with twisted pillars (mid-nineteenth century) and**

**82 Stove plate depicting "The story of the rich miser", (sixteenth century), cast iron.**

**85 Tall four-door cabinet with a flip up door and open-worked top doors, stiles decorated with lion's heads, herms and copper nails (first half of the seventeenth century, Antwerp).**

**131 BRUSSELS (Décor genre Sinceny) workshop of Joseph-Philippe ARTOISENET or Philippe MOMBAERTS), Wall fountains and wash basin (third quarter of the eighteenth century).**

**80 Chest of drawers decorated with pearl motives, copper locks and handles (c. 1770).**

**88 Low four-door cabinet with console legs.**

**133 Candlesticks, copper and porcelain.**



## Side corridor

In this side corridor which runs between the various museum galleries you will see a magnificent example of portrait art, namely the portrait of Elisabeth Keyzers. It also contains a few paintings of the four Western Early Church Fathers, i.e., Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory and Augustine. The ideas of these church scholars significantly influenced the Church's doctrine.

**2 ANONYMOUS (late sixteenth/early seventeenth century), Portrait of Elisabeth Keyzers alongside a crucifix.**

Elisabeth Keyzers or De Keyzer was the founder of the weekly Mass in the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe almshouse in Schoenmarkt. She donated 800 guilders for this. This portrait must be interpreted in the context of her concern for her salvation and remembrance. You can deduce that Keyzers was wealthy from the fur and velvet of her dress and from the crucifix (tortoise and copper). The inscription states that she was 72 years old.

In 1847, this painting was catalogued as a "copy after Rubens". The 1872 catalogue states that it was painted by Cornelis De Vos but there is no evidence of this.



**57 Frans FRANCKEN the Elder (1542-1616),  
The Wedding at Cana.**

This painting portrays the wedding at Cana, an important moment in the New Testament as this is the first miracle attributed to Jesus. He transforms water into wine.

The painter Frans Francken was the second generation of the Francken artist's dynasty. There were five generations of artists in all. Frans Francken was a renowned painter. There is a large triptych by Francken in the cathedral of Antwerp. The influence of his master Frans Floris can be keenly felt in his paintings.

**186 Abraham BLOEMAERT (1564-1651), De Heilige Ambrosius.**  
Bloemaert was a Dutch portrait, history, landscape and genre painter. He was a famous artist in his era. He was also one of the figureheads of the Dutch academic movement in the seventeenth century.

The Maagdenhuis Museum owns four paintings by him, which portray the Western church fathers. The first is Saint Ambrose. He was born in Trier around 340 AD. He is depicted with a book, a sign of his wisdom.

**187 Abraham BLOEMAERT (1564-1651), Saint Jerome.**

Saint Jerome was born around 340 in Dalmatia (which is now part of Croatia). Jerome is mainly known as a scholar. His translation of the Bible was subsequently called the Vulgate. In this painting he is probably working on this translation.

**188 Abraham BLOEMAERT (1564-1651), Saint Gregory.**

Saint Gregory was born around 540 AD in Rome. He founded various convents and was elected pope. He proved to be an excellent organiser and manager. Here he is portrayed as Pontifex Maximus with the pontifical crown and papal ferula, the staff which may be exclusively used by the pope.

**189 Abraham BLOEMAERT (1564-1651), Saint Augustine.**

Saint Augustine was born in 354 AD in North Africa. He was taught and christened by Saint Ambrose.

Saint Augustine is often portrayed with a burning heart and/or a child that is scooping water into a hole. The latter refers to a scene that he observed when meditating about the mystery of the Holy Trinity. He saw a child carrying water from the sea to a small hole in the sand. Augustine pointed out that this small hole could not possibly contain all the water of the sea. The child replied that it was no more impossible than what he was trying to do, namely to understand the mystery of the eternal God or the secret of the holy trinity with his small intelligence.

**29 Hendrik DE CLERK THE YOUNGER (1570-1629),  
The Visitation**

De Clerck was a painter at the court in Brussels and subsequently worked for the governor, Isabella of Spain. He also often received commissions from churches in Brussels. In addition to this, he often cooperated with other painters, including Daniel van Alsloot, H. van Balen, Jacques Artois and J. de Momper.



**1 ANONYMOUS (late sixteenth/early  
seventeenth century)**

**Bourgeois girl working.**

This painting portrays a young girl with a sewing cushion on her lap. For quite some time, it was assumed that she was an orphan but her lavish clothes seem to indicate that she was from the upper classes.



**Good to know**

This ostensibly simple portrait has several intriguing layers. The restoration revealed a child's hand that was holding a carnation. Further X-rays showed that the tablecloth conceals a small child. This leads us to think that this painting was part of a larger whole. As the painting's size was reduced, the composition also had to be adapted. The part with the flower was overpainted.

The painting was previously attributed to Cornelis De Vos but this origin is uncertain, as is the case for the portrait of Elisabeth Keyzers.

# Rubens gallery

This space used to be the first of three kitchen areas. It was called the Pronckceucken or ornate kitchen because of the beautiful bowls that were hanging from a rack on the wall.

You can see our unique collection of porridge bowls elsewhere in the museum.

This magnificent room used to be the office of the controller of the Commission for Social Assistance, the predecessor of the current public social welfare centre.

**141** Thomas WILLEBOIRTS BOSSCHAERT (1613/14-1654),  
Portrait of Chevalier Nicolaas Rockox.

This is a portrait of Nicolaas Rockox (1560-1640), one of the most prominent citizens of the city of Antwerp. Rockox was an alderman or mayor of the city for almost fifty years, leaving his mark on a political era. This did not prevent him from organising activities as a humanist, an art lover and a collector of antiquities. He set up various projects with friends such as Rubens.

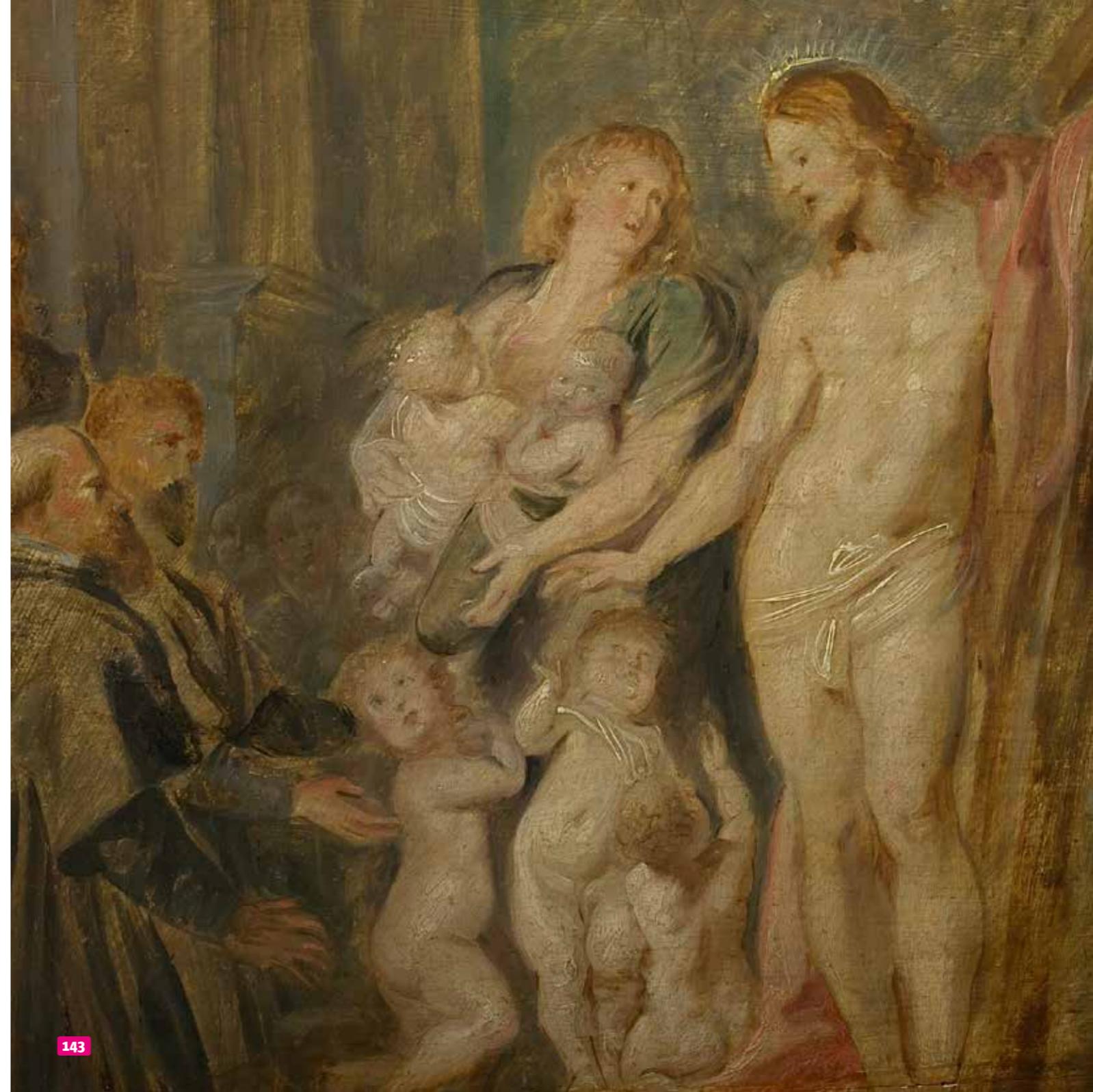
Rockox is portrayed among the two most renowned painters of Antwerp, namely Rubens and Van Dyck.

The portrait was painted by Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, who was inspired by Van Dyck's portrait of Rockox. He completed this in 1641 as part of an epitaph in the Chamber of the Poor of Antwerp's cathedral. Willeboirts Bosschaert received 30 guilders for this. A few months prior to his death, Rockox donated the huge amount of 20,000 guilders to the almoners in his testament for the orphans. Later he also left his possessions to the almoners. They were tasked with auctioning off Rockox's furniture, paintings, coins and books and to use the proceeds from the auction for poor relief in Antwerp.

**143** Peter Paul RUBENS (1577-1640), Christ, Defender of the Orphans.

This painting was created for the former boys' orphanage in Paardenmarkt. It is a preparatory study for an unreleased painting or a painting that was not preserved. The theme of Christ as the defender of the orphans is a typical theme in the collection of the Maidens' House Museum. To the right we see Christ holding his hand over three naked children, who symbolise the poor orphans. To the left the almoners take charge of the children, promising them a good education. A woman stands between the two groups. She is the personification of charity and acts as an intermediary between Christ and the almoners.

The painter of this work is Peter Paul Rubens. He was the best known Baroque painter of Antwerp and had a lasting influence on early seventeenth-century art. Rubens was a painter, a diplomat, an entrepreneur. He employed several painters in his studio. This work is part of this studio tradition. Rubens created the composition, but left his assistants to paint large sections of the work. He would add the finishing touch at the end, changing a few details.





141

**Collection of religious textile from the sacristy of St Elisabeth's Hospital.**

Here you see a nice collection of some unique, historic priest's cassocks. The magnificent motives and the detailed stitching transform these garments into small works of art. Liturgical garments go back a long way and actually originated in the civilian clothes of the Romans in late Antiquity. In 1570, Pope Pius V enacted a uniform colour code for these garments. Every religious festivity had its own specific colours.

The chasuble was probably the most striking and the most elaborately decorated garment. Originally this was a travelling coat or raincoat in Roman times but now it is the priest's celebratory garment. The chasubles are lavishly decorated with gilt thread.

Chasubles and other religious textile were an important part of the rich, material culture of the chapels of the almshouses and other institutions for the poor. They also had silver chalices and candlesticks and leather-bound books.

**Religious objects in the display case**

**6 UNKNOWN MASTER, Saint Barbara, polychrome reliquary statue (c. 1520).**

Saint Barbara was locked up in a tower by her father to prevent her from being influenced by strange people and ideas. She converted to Christianity, much to her father's chagrin. When his father realised he could not force his daughter to reject her faith, he had her beheaded. God punished him, by swiftly killing him with a lightning bolt.



**Good to know**

Saint Barbara is often portrayed with a tower. She is the patron saint of various trades: the bell ringers, the bell founders, the artilleryists, the miners and other dangerous professions. She was also the patron saint of the almoners, who were tasked with the organisation and management of charity in Antwerp. Every year, two new almoners were elected on her saint's day.

6



**9 UNKNOWN MASTER, the Virgin Mary, polychrome wood (seventeenth century).**

This statue is a beautiful representation of the Virgin and child. Here Jesus is portrayed as the Salvator Mundi or saviour of the world. You can clearly see this as He is blessing the world with one and holding a globe in the other.

**10 UNKNOWN MASTER, Saint Blasius, polychrome wood (sixteenth century).**

This statue by Saint Blasius originally came from the almshouse named after the saint. The bishop-martyr is primarily venerated for a cure for afflictions of the throat.

**124 Chalice, chased silver.**

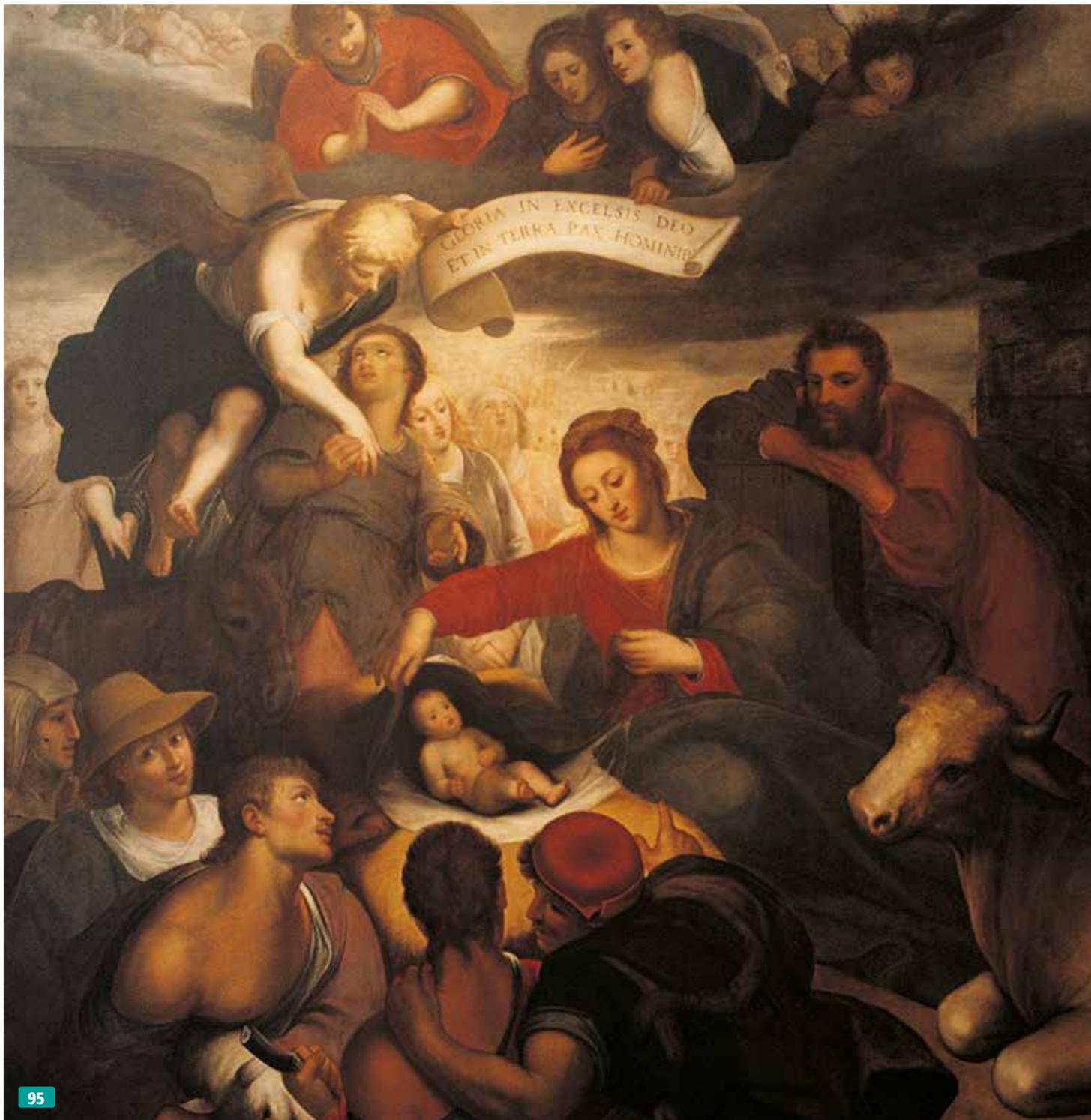
**161 Missale Romanum, Roman missal, 1773, bound in gilt-stamped red leather.**

**20 UNKNOWN MASTER, The Virgin Mary, alabaster (early eighteenth century).**

This statue of the Virgin Mary is made of alabaster, a marble-like type of gypsum. Mary and Jesus are portrayed on a globe, in reference to the universal character of the divine power.

**75 Candlesticks, copper (end of the fifteenth century).**

**76 Candlestick, copper (seventeenth century).**



**34 UNKNOWN MASTER, Saint Roch.**

This statue is a typical representation of Saint Roch. He gave away all his possessions and became a pilgrim and a beggar. During his travels in Italy he cured many plague sufferers. Then he was struck down by the disease himself. He withdrew from society. An angel cared for him, while his dog brought him bread every day and licked his sores. Saint Roch is often portrayed with a sore on his thigh. He is accompanied by a dog and an angel (often portrayed as a child).

**23 UNKNOWN MASTER, Saint Roch.**

This portrayal of Saint Roch was probably created for the chapel of the foundlings' orphanage and asylum in Rochusstraat in Antwerp. Here the saint is portrayed with the attributes we described above: a dog and an angel who appears as a child.

**142 Peeter THYS THE ELDER (attributed to) (1624-1677), Portrait of a Dominican Saint.**

This work is a copy after an original by Rubens, which was not preserved unfortunately. This magnificent version was probably painted under Rubens's supervision in his studio. The work portrays a Dominican saint. It is unclear whether this is Saint Dominic (1170-1221) or Thomas Aquinas (c. 1226-1274). There is some doubt because they both have the same attribute, a yellow star.

**159 ANONYMOUS, Winged Angel's Head, polychrome wood (seventeenth century).**

**95 Otto VAN VEEN (1556-1629), triptych. The Adoration Of The Shepherds.**

This imposing triptych combines a religious subject with the civilian portrait of Simon Rodriguez d'Evora. The shepherds who adore the new-born Christ take centre stage in this painting.

D'Evora was a Portuguese diamond dealer, who had settled in Antwerp and was well-respected. He donated the painting with his portrait to the Saint Anna almshouse, which he established. This institution offered accommodation to twelve women, from good families who had been robbed of their status and resources as a result of a change of fortune. Another good example of a benefactor with a portrait in his own institution.

Otto Van Veen painted this work. He was born in Leiden but moved to Antwerp, Aachen and Liège as a result of the political instability. A few years later he undertook a voyage to Italy. He spent some time at the court of Emperor Rudolph II in Vienna and in Munich and finally returned to the Netherlands in 1583. He was employed as a court painter in Brussels until 1592 and was admitted to St Luke's Guild in Antwerp after this date. Van Veen played a key role in the history of Flemish painting. He broke with the complex, mannerist style, developing a new simple and clear style instead. His influence on his most famous pupil, Peter Paul Rubens, cannot be underestimated.

Below is a description of the various seals and deeds in this display case. They mainly relate to the old St Elisabeth's Hospital. The Maidens' House Museum is situated in the grounds of this old hospital, which explains the link between these two institutions. The museum is also proud to own an original deed of the election of Emperor Charles V.

**49 Notarial deed electing Charles V as Roman Emperor (1519)**

This deed is the written proof of Charles V's election to emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The various electors voted who would occupy this position. The document contains the seals of five of the seven Electors.



**Good to know**

This document, which has huge historic value, was found in the archives of St Elisabeth's Hospital. It is a mystery how it ended up there. It probably was part of the personal possessions of one of the hospital nuns. Possibly the nun was related to one of the electors or had ties with the Habsburg family.



**50 Papal bull of Honorius III (1226).**

The bull by Pope Honorius granted St Elisabeth's Hospital the right to build a chapel and appoint a chaplain in 1226. At the bottom you can make out the pope's seal and the image of the apostles Peter and Paul.



**Good to know**

This document is the oldest document in the museum's collection. It proves that St Elisabeth's Hospital was founded before 1226.

**51 Oldest known seal of Antwerp appended to a document from 1232. The first seal to the left is that of the city, the third that of St Elisabeth's Hospital.**

The seals are appended to a charter dated 17 March 1232, donating "3 shovels of soil" to St Elisabeth's Hospital. The left seal was used from 1196 until 1239 as a seal by the Antwerp city government (sigillum monarchie antwerpensis). The third seal was that of St Elisabeth's.

**52 Only known example of an Antwerp city seal from 1250, first seal from the left.**

Godefridius de Wezele and his wife donated land to St Elisabeth's Hospital in this charter. Besides an Antwerp city seal from 1250, two other seals are noteworthy: a seal of St Elisabeth's and a traditional city seal.

**53 The only known intact Antwerp city seal on a document dating from 1297.**

The seal is appended to a charter dated 15 November 1296. Under this charter, St Elisabeth's Hospital acquired a plot of land from Joannes van Wineghem. This is the largest thirteenth-century city seal.

**54 Seal of Henricus Van Herentals, sheriff of Antwerp.**

This is the seal of Henricus Van Herentals, the sheriff of Antwerp. Henricus acted as the local representative of the lord. This specific seal was appended to a document from 1238, granting the hospital permission to move from the Atrium (in the Church of Our Lady) to outside the city walls.

**55 Seal of Willem Slabbaert, sheriff of Antwerp, first seal from the left (1264).**

This seal was appended to a charter in which Joannes van Ranst granted an excise or tax to the hospital. Two other aldermen appended their seal to this document, namely Arnoldus Cambitris and Egidius Kiekin.



## Sixteenth-century gallery

The large kitchen or groote ceucken used to be in this gallery. It was where the scullery maids and the girls who helped them worked. When the girls' orphanage moved, the Commission for Social Assistance (the predecessor of the current public social welfare centre) decided to move into the building. This room was by the commission's chairman.

**60** Jacob DE BACKER (c. 1540-1595). *Let The Little Children Come To Me.*

As you enter the room, the large work to your left immediately catches your eye. This painting portrays a Biblical scene in which Jesus has the children come to him. "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (The gospel according to St Mark, 10, 13-16). This theme is eminently suited to institutions such as the girls' and boys' orphanages.

Jacob de Backer painted the work. He was one of the greatest and most successful colourists of his era. He apprenticed with Antonio Van Palermo, which is why he is sometimes known as Jacob van Palermo. Several courts owned some of his works.





**135 UNKNOWN MASTER (sixteenth century), Portrait bust of Gilbert van Schoonbeke.**

Van Schoonbeke was one of the most successful entrepreneurs of his era. He thoroughly changed the face of Antwerp with his large subdivisions and major construction projects. In 1626, his daughter Leonora donated this portrait bust to the Antwerp's girl's orphanage. The heirs of Gilbert van Schoonbeke made several donations to charitable institutions in Antwerp.



**Good to know**

As far as we know, this is the only extant bust of Gilbert van Schoonbeke. Painted terracotta portraits that were true to life were very popular all over Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Good examples of this tradition were the portraits of Nuremberg citizens by Johan Gregor van der Scharde in 1570-1580. Many of these busts were lost because the material was so fragile. The busts were mainly made of pipe clay, a fine, resilient type of clay that was used to fire pipes.

**64 UNKNOWN ITALIAN MASTER (sixteenth century), The Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus and Angels.**

Not much is known about this painting. It is probably a copy of a fifteenth-century work.

**157 UNKNOWN MASTER (c. 1540), Portrait of Gilbert van Schoonbeke.**

Another portrait of Gilbert van Schoonbeke, the well-known Antwerp real estate developer. You will have already encountered this prominent man in the museum collection. Van Schoonbeke himself did not donate anything to the Antwerp Maidens' House. His heirs were more generous.

**158 UNKNOWN MASTER (c. 1540), Portrait of Elisabeth Heynderickx.**

Elisabeth Heynderickx, Gilbert van Schoonbeke's wife, is portrayed here.

**84 Cabinet door with X motives (sixteenth century).**

This is the door of a Gothic cabinet. It is decorated with Eucharistic motives. The bunches of grapes refer to the blood of Christ.

**27 Two-door cabinet, decorated with medallions, grotesques and arabesques (c. 1540).**

In the middle of this stunning cabinet you can see a small statue of the Virgin Mary. There are eighteen separate panels with medallions. They depict several men's and women's busts, some in the traditional Spanish civilian dress of that era, others in oriental garments.

**98 Michiel COXCIE (1499-1592) (attributed to), Triptych. Middle panel: Adoration of the Copper Snake. Right: The Finding of the Cross. Left: The Raising of the Cross.**

This triptych was supposedly painted by Michiel Coxcie. There are several details that support the attribution to Coxcie, including a pen drawing as a preliminary study and the quality of the back of the panels. Coxcie was a famous painter and received many prestigious commissions from churches and courts, including that of Charles V and his son Philip II. He is often called the "Flemish Raphael" as a result. Like Raphael, Coxcie set up a studio, which allowed him to have a high output of work. It looks as if his studio painted the remaining parts of the triptych.

- ▷ The middle panel depicts the Adoration of the Copper Snake. The Israelites who fled Egypt with Moses became impatient. God punished them for their impatience with a plague of

venomous snakes. A lot of people died. In the foreground you can see two men who have been killed by the poisonous bite of a snake. Moses begged God to release them from this punishment, at which point God ordered him to put a copper snake on a post. Anyone who had been bitten by a snake and looked at the copper snake was cured.

- ▷ There are other scenes on the side panels, including the Finding of the Cross and the Raising of the Cross. The left panel depicts part of the legend of the finding of the cross. Empress Helena, Constantine the Great's mother, found the three crosses of Golgotha. She recognised Christ's cross, when a dead man who was placed on it came back to life. The right panel depicts the Raising of the Cross by Emperor Heraclius. This Byzantine emperor (575-641 AD) was able to win back the Holy Cross from the Persians.

The link between the middle panel and the right panel is explained in the Gospel according to St John. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The copper snake thus becomes a prefiguration of Christ.

**Display case (archival documents).**

**Charity tokens.**

**Accounts of donations to St Anna's Hospital (1412).**

**Accounts of the Table of the Holy Spirit of Our Lady (1374).**

**Almoner's trays.**

**Offering tray (the "Carिताat") representing Saint Barbara (eighteenth century).**





## Van Der Meere Gallery

At the end of the side corridor to your right you will find the Van Der Meere gallery. The name of this gallery refers to the founder of the Maidens' House.

In the past, this third space was also used as a kitchen and was called the coeckceucken or back huys. As you can surmise from the name, it was primarily used for baking. The flour was preserved above the kitchen.

From 1949 until 1954, this room was thoroughly renovated and refurbished. A marble floor and stained glass windows were added. It became a reception room and was called Kleine Zittingzaal or small meeting room.

### **12** Jacob JORDAENS (1593-1678), *The Washing and Anointing of the Body of Christ*.

One of the most prestigious items in our collection hangs on the left-hand wall of this room. "God's Plight". This painting of the washing and anointing of the body of Christ belonged to Jordaens's own collection. After his death in 1678, it was donated to the Maidens' House through the Chamber of the Poor.

In 1620-1623 a young Jordaens painted the stunning central panel of this work.

- ▷ Christ's body is surrounded by his mother Mary, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. This part is very reminiscent of Caravaggio's painting of "The Death of the Virgin".
- ▷ The beautiful lighting and the raw realism of Christ's body contribute to the high quality of the central panel.



#### Good to know

The enlargements that were added in 1650 or later are quite remarkable. The Royal Institute for Art Heritage exposed different layers of this complex work during its restoration in 2010. Rubens already applied this technique of the enlargement of the format.



**92 Eight roundels in stained glass (sixteenth century, Antwerp).**

In contrast with monumental church windows, these stained glass panes are made to be observed from close up. They are usually found in more mundane surroundings. The panes have been created using the crown glass method. The glassblower spun the thick liquid mass of glass or bullion into a flat disk by centrifugal force. These panes were then used as separate medallions instead of incorporating them into a larger window.

You can see some examples of such medallions here. They date back to the sixteenth century. They represent various saints, including Saint Peter, Saint James, Martyr Adrian, Saint Michael (twice), Saint Barbara and a crucifixion.

**38 Theodoor VAN LOON (c. 1582-1649) The Men of Emmaus**  
Opposite Jordaens's painting is the painting of "The Men of Emmaus".

This work was painted by the early seventeenth-century artist Theodoor Van Loon, who was the most prominent painter in Brussels during his lifetime. Van Loon was clearly inspired by the Italian master painter Caravaggio. This is expressed in the skilful realism and the harsh, contrasting chiaroscuro.

In the painting Van Loon depicts the Biblical scene of the men of Emmaus.

- ▷ Two of Jesus' disciples discussed the sentencing and crucifixion of Jesus on their way to Emmaus.
- ▷ When they arrived in the village, a strange man followed them in to dinner. The disciples only recognised the resurrected Christ when he broke and blessed the bread.
- ▷ The bread and the grapes in the painting refer to the body and blood of Christ, which was shed for humanity.



**146 Abraham DE VRIES (c. 1590-died between 1650 and 1662), Portrait of the painter Simon De Vos.**

The portrait of the Antwerp painter Simon De Vos has belonged to the boys' orphanage in Antwerp since 1678.

The painting was created by De Vries, a painter who had travelled extensively. He was born in Rotterdam but subsequently lived in Antwerp, Amsterdam, Paris and 's Gravenhage after which he finally decided to return to his native city.

The inscription at the top of the painting is an excellent illustration of charity for one's own salvation. Here you can read that De Vos donated half of his possessions to the poor ("mits den armen erfgenaem maeckt in de helft van syn goet"). The orphans must pray for his salvation (pray to God that he will accept his soul or "bidt godt syn siel wilt ontfermen"). This beautiful portrait suggests why so many wealthy citizens donated so much to charitable institutions. But the inscription was added to the portrait at a later date. It mentions the date on which Simon De Vos died (15 October 1676), while Abraham de Vries painted it as early as 1635.



We have also exhibited some striking furniture in this room:

**37 A bolpoottafel or draw leaf table.**

**39 A chair decorated with children's heads, copper nails and leather.**

**77 A low two-door cabinet.**

This seventeenth-century cabinet is decorated with lion's and angel's heads, root patterns and geometric frames.

**81 A linen press cabinet with a drawer, a door with geometric frames, male deities and lion's heads on the stiles.**

This one-door cabinet dates from the seventeenth century. Flowers, lion's heads, laurel wreaths, eagles and angel's heads have been incorporated in the design.



**16 Sir Anthony VAN DYCK (1599-1641), Saint Jerome (attributed to a follower or the entourage of Van Dyck).**

This painting depicts Saint Jerome, one of the four Western Early Church Fathers, who lived in the fourth century AD. You have already seen one portrayal of this scholar in the side corridor. Jerome studied grammar, rhetoric and philosophy in Rome. After visiting the monks in Trier, he decided to live an ascetic life. He was ordained a priest around 379 AD. Jerome was a great scholar who translated the Bible. His translation is also called the Vulgate. His attributes are red garments, which refer to the cardinal's garments. He also often portrayed with a skull, which refers to penitence. The painting ties in with the fifteenth-century tradition, that represented Jerome as an ascetic.

For quite some time, the painting was considered as one of Van Dyck's early works. Recent scientific research by the University of Antwerp, however, has refuted this attribution.



# Fifteenth-century gallery

You are now entering the smallest room in the Maidens' House Museum. Not much is known about the use of this room but we do know that three elderly women lived here in the seventeenth century: Lyntien Leyssens, Tanneken van der Goes and Lytjen Bals. They had donated funds to the almoners in exchange for a room and boarding in the Maidens' House. This room has now become a gallery for art from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the period in which Antwerp became an international arts centre.

**149 UNKNOWN ANTWERP MASTER (1490-1500),  
The Last Judgement, the Seven Acts of Mercy and the Seven Deadly Sins.**

This painting is the oldest work in the museum's collection as you can clearly see from its style. It is very different from the Baroque works in the other galleries.

This moralising painting was originally created for the almoner's room. It reminded the observer that he would be judged at the Last Judgement when Jesus separates the good from the bad. Only those who lived a virtuous life would be able to pass through the gates of heaven.

- ▷ The path to a virtuous life runs consisted of the seven acts of mercy. These are depicted on the left and are numbered from a through g. Jesus is featured in all seven works, with a golden halo around his head, blessing the people. The seven works of mercy are:
  - (a) Feed the hungry
  - (b) Give drink to the thirsty
  - (c) Shelter the traveller
  - (d) Clothe the naked

- (e) Comfort the sick
- (f) Free the imprisoned
- (g) Bury the dead

These acts of mercy are carried out by seven saints. You can read their names on their garments.

- ▷ Jesus condemns people who did not live a virtuous life to hell. On the right side of the painting you can make out hell, with the seven deadly sins beneath it. A dark Satan is depicted in every scene. He skilfully charms people into evil acts.

The seven deadly sins are numbered from h to o:

- (h) Pride
- (i) Envy
- (k) Sloth
- (l) Wrath
- (m) Greed
- (n) Gluttony
- (o) Lust





22

**22 Entourage of Jacob CORNELISZ VAN OOSTSANEN (1475-1533) (formerly attributed to the Master of the Bartholomew Altarpiece), “The Mass of Saint Gregory”.**

This painting depicts St Gregory, the church father and pope, saying Mass. Legend has it that one of Gregory’s pupils doubted the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion.

- ▷ Gregory prays to God asking him to exercise his divine power, whereupon Christ suddenly appears on the altar. This legend is depicted by Christ as he pours his Holy Blood into the chalice. Only Gregory sees Jesus, the other attendants do not look up.

- ▷ At the bottom left you can see how the Eucharist frees Adam and Eve from Purgatory. The blood in the chalice hits the monster of hell in its mouth, allowing the first humans to escape from purgatory. This motif (praying for salvation from purgatory) is often linked to St Gregory.
- ▷ A restoration in 1952 revealed a number of profile busts behind Christ. At the top left you can see Hannas and Caiphas, Peter and the maidservant and finally Christ and Pilate. They remind us of the most important stations in Christ’s suffering.

The work was created for the Chapel of Our Lady of Succour in Schoenmarkt (which the locals call the shoemaker’s chapel). The chapel originally belonged to an almshouse that was founded in 1343 by Hendrik Suderman. This wealthy German merchant also founded the Maidens’ House. You can read more about this in the introduction.

The painting was probably created by a member of the entourage of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen (c. 1475-1553). The typical and characteristic treatment of the heads and parts of the composition point to this. Van Oostsanen was the first artist to be known by his name, who lived and worked in Amsterdam. He opened a flourishing studio in 1500 in Kalverstraat in Amsterdam and produced prints, paintings, stained glass windows and even textile. He was one of the pioneers of the subsequent Golden Age of Netherlandish painting.

**105 UNKNOWN MASTER (sixteenth century), Portrait of Benoet Piret.**

This painting dates from the sixteenth century and is therefore somewhat more recent than the works in this room. It portrays the benefactor Benoet Piret, who made several gifts to the foundlings’ house.

- ▷ At the top left you can see the inscription “Father of the foundling’s house”.
- ▷ Alongside the two orphans, the artist has added a long, moralising text. The fourth line is a frequently used reason for such donations: “Free your soul of all sin with charity” (Verlost u ziel van sonden met charitaten). As we already indicated, many of these donations were inspired by people trying to secure their salvation.

**18 UNKNOWN MASTER (fifteenth century), Triptych.**

The central figures in this fifteenth-century painting are the Virgin Mary and child. The side panels are painted in a different style and were probably added in the sixteenth century.

- ▷ The left panel depicts Saint Margaret, the right panel Saint Adrian.
- ▷ Saint Anne and a monk grace the backs of the panels. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about this intriguing work.

**19 Two-door cabinet decorated with letter panels, in oak.**

This magnificent Gothic two-door cabinet dates from around 1500.



105



## Former chapel

This part of the museum formerly used to be the chapel for daily prayers.

The tight schedule of the orphans started and ended with prayers, before and after their laborious daily chores. The rules of 1816 state that the girls should attend daily Mass at 5.30 a.m. In wintertime, this Mass was said 30 minutes later. The orphans ended their day of hard labour with prayers in chapel and would then go to sleep at 9 p.m. They were expected to pray for the salvation of the dead benefactors of Antwerp's poor relief.

After the orphans were moved to other buildings in 1882, the chapel became a museum in 1884. The roots of the Maidens' House thus lie in this space. Besides magnificent paintings, there are also several historically valuable items on display in this room.

**111 Huibrecht VAN DEN EYNDE (1594-1661), The Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus, sandstone.**

This beautiful sculpture of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus originally graced the courtyard. It was subsequently replaced by a plastic copy that can better cope with the weather conditions.

Huibrecht Van Den Eynde created the original sculpture in 1636. He was born into a family of sculptors and largely worked in Dendermonde, Averbode and Duffel. Two of his works in Antwerp are the monumental "Scaldis" and the "Dolphins on Waterpoort" (1624), together with Hans Van Mildert.

**69 Coffe decorated with iron bands, painted flowers and hunting scenes (early seventeenth century).**

The almoners would keep the donations of rich citizens in this coffe. When the regent, the masters of the poor relief and other wealthy citizens visited the institution, the orphans had to

look their best. This was the case at Easter but also for the festival of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary.



**Good to know**

As of 1636, this celebration of the Virgin Mary was a festive occasion for which the entire Maidens' House was decorated. Several priests would say Mass in the chapel, accompanied by musicians and a choir of children from the foundlings' orphanage. On this occasion, the almoners would also distribute prints depicting saints. This attracted such a crowd to the gate of the Maidens' House that they would pay a "sergeant" to stand guard. The prettier the orphans looked on this festive day, the more money the rich citizens would donate to the orphanage, filling the coffers of the Maidens' House.

**26 Lambert LOMBARD (1506-1560) (attributed to), The Last Supper.**

The painter Lombard travelled to Italy at age 32 to expand his knowledge of Italian art. The influence of his travels is clear in this painting: the marble pillars, the wine pitchers and the landscape are obviously Italian. The representation of the characters in the painting is considered typically mannerist or Late-Renaissance.

**125 Bell cast by Paschasius MELLIART, Bronze, (1708).**

**100 Pieter AERTSEN (1507/1508-1575), Jan van der Biest Triptych.**

The middle panel of this triptych features a crucified Christ, with the Virgin Mary, the apostle John and Mary Magdalene. In the background soldiers are playing a game of dice to see who will get Jesus's garments. The artist has left his signature in the painting by painting the letter A on the shield of one of the soldiers.



**Good to know**

This triptych was commissioned by Jan van der Biest, a tanner and merchant. In 1504, he transformed his own home into an almshouse for seven poor elderly women. The painting was for the almshouse in Falconrui.

100



- ▶ Van der Biest is portrayed on the left panel in a blue garment. His patron saint, St. John the Baptist, is by his side.
- ▶ St. John is portrayed on the right-hand panel, with an open book and pen. You can spot the name "Jan van der Biest" on the seal at the bottom left.
- ▶ The painter has painted old crones on the backs of the side panels. As a result, the residents of the almshouse are also portrayed on the painting, which is quite unique.

The painting is by Pieter Aertsen. He was also sometimes called "Lange Pier" because he was so tall. He was a master of St Luke's Guild in Antwerp but moved between Amsterdam and Antwerp. He was mainly renowned for his genre pieces, but he excelled at historic paintings, religious paintings and still-lives. This triptych is the first known work by Aertsen. Many of his religious works were destroyed during the Iconoclasm in 1566.

**Cabinet with foundling tokens**

Abandoning a child was considered equivalent to murder and therefore a crime. The city government tried to prevent parents from abandoning their children and yet babies were found daily. Their parents would often leave them in the evening in front of important public buildings, such as convents and churches. Or they would leave their child behind on the corner of a street or at the gate of the Foundlings' orphanage. These children were then taken to the almshouse in Sint-Rochusstraat.

In order to reduce the health risks for foundlings, the foundling drawer was developed under Napoleon's rule in 1811. Every department of the French empire was forced to install such a drawer. Parents would thus have somewhere safe to leave their child. The objects in this cabinet are related to this.

Foundling tokens



- ▶ At the top you can see the clothes in which the children were found.
- ▶ There are also a number of police reports which describe how the child was found. The report listed the place and time where the child was found as well as its new name. The name was often related to the place where the child was found. The first foundling, for example, was called Paul Du Tour. This referred to "le tour", the French word for the foundling drawer.
- ▶ Finally, there are also a number of "schedula" or tokens in the cabinet. These half playing cards were left with the child. If the mother changed her mind, she was able to prove that she was the child's rightful mother by showing the other half of the playing card.

At the end of the museum tour in the courtyard you can take a look at a replica of the mechanism of the former foundling drawer in Sint-Rochusstraat.



Photo from the Institution for Abandoned Children, c. 1921.



**46** Porrige bowls featuring the Virgin Mary, busts of men and women, majolica (last quarter of the sixteenth century).

The Maidens' House has 63 original majolica porrige bowls. The orphans of the Maidens' House would eat from these bowls on Sunday and on public holidays.

The beautifully decorated porrige bowls go by different names in literature: majolica, faience, gleiswerk or pateel. Majolica refers to Majorca, which used to be a storage for the earthenware that had to be shipped. Ceramics originated in Mesopotamia and spread to Europe via North Africa and Spain.

Italian immigrants introduced the art of majolica to Antwerp before 1508. The Golden Age of this art discipline in Antwerp was somewhere between 1520 and 1565. Later several of these artists would move to the north as a result of the religious wars. This ceramic art is thus a predecessor of the well-known Delftware.

**List of Flemish Masterpieces.**

The exceptional collection of earthenware porrige bowls of the Maidens' House is very rare. In December 2011, these ornate bowls were included on the list of Flemish Masterpieces. This aims to protect Flemish cultural heritage, based on its exceptional historic, artistic and scientific value. The Maidens' House Museum now belongs to a select group of museums, churches and archives in Flanders which have Flemish masterpieces in their collection. They include the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, St. Rumbold's Cathedral in Mechelen and Groeninge Museum in Bruges.

- ▷ The shape of the porrige bowl refers to the well-known "be-guines' bowl", which was usually made of pewter.
- ▷ The top of these polychrome porrige bowls has been tinglazed. The bottom is covered with lead glazing.
- ▷ The decoration in the bowl always consists of a medallion representing a man's or a woman's bust, or the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus. Every medallion is encircled with a painted border of geometric motives or stylised flowers. There are definite Chinese and Italian influences.



The porrige bowls were created by Michiel Nouts, an Antwerp ceramic artist who moved to Delft.

A lot has been written about the exact date these porrige bowls were created. There is a consensus that they date from the last quarter of the sixteenth century. One of the resources for this dating was costume history.

**47** Porrige bowls decorated with blue floral motifs, earthenware (second half of the seventeenth century).

These bowls with floral motifs are more recent than the other porrige bowls. Their origin is unknown. The assumption is that they are from Friesland.

**70** Tray depicting the Archangel Michael in the centre, chased copper (end of the fifteenth century).

**71** Tray depicting St. George, chased copper (end of the fifteenth century).

**72** Wall-clock, mechanism by J.B. at Grimar (c. 1740, Antwerp).

**649-651** Adriaan VAN OVERBEKE (first half of the sixteenth century). Triptych.

**Middle panel: Calvary.**

**Left panel: The bearing of the Cross.**

**Right panel: The Resurrection.**

This work is the oldest known work of Adriaan Van Overbeke, a sixteenth-century painter. Van Overbeke was a member of St Luke's Guild in Antwerp since 1508. During the early decades of the sixteenth century, Van Overbeke was quite successful. His studio specialised in high altarpieces.

This altarpiece is taken from the chapel of St. Elisabeth's Hospital.

- ▷ The central panel depicts the crucifixion of Christ and two criminals.
- ▷ On the left panel we can see the bearing of the cross. Veronica kneels before Christ who is bearing the Cross.
- ▷ Finally, on the right panel, we see Christ's resurrection from the dead. Two guards are sleeping while a third looks startled.



**32** Pieter POURBUS (1523-1584), Portrait of Eleonora van Schoonbeke.

Eleonora van Schoonbeke supposedly sat for this portrait because she owned the painting when she died. But we cannot be sure. Eleonora was the daughter of Gilbert Van Schoonbeke, the rich sixteenth-century real estate developer. The museum owns several portraits of Van Schoonbeke.

This work is by Pieter Pourbus, the grandfather of Frans Pourbus the Younger. Pieter worked in Bruges as a portrait and history painter. He was also a skilled cartographer and chartered surveyor. He was tasked with drawing maps and street maps of the city of Bruges and the surrounding region.

**128** Eight roundels in stained glass, the Acts of Mercy (nineteenth century).

These stained glass roundels depict the Seven Acts of Mercy.

**33** Two-door cabinet (early sixteenth century).

This cabinet is decorated with X motifs and bunches of grapes. It also features a portrayal of St. Peter with a key and has a book incorporated in it. The cabinet originally stood in the Boys' orphanage.

**17** UNKNOWN MASTER (c. 1750), The Virgin Mary Atop a Crescent Moon.

This statue of the Virgin on a moon crescent originally stood in the St. Anna almshouse in Korte Nieuwstraat.

**36** UNKNOWN MASTER (sixteenth century), Triptych: The Adoration of the Shepherds.

This painting dates from the sixteenth century and definitely has Italianate influences. And yet there is a lot of attention to detail, beautifully detailed landscapes and bright colour. The accolade shape of the triptych is typical of the Antwerp style.

**73** Roundels made of pieces of stained glass (seventeenth century, Antwerp).

These pieces of stained glass are attributed to Abraham Van Diepenbeek. The artist probably worked in Rubens's studio. He created paintings, engravings and stained glass paintings. The roundels are fragments and are probably related to Van Diepenbeek's painting "Four Saints Dispensing Alms".

**31** Jan MASSYS (1509-1575), Saint Mary Magdalene.

The son of the major Antwerp painter Quentin Massys painted a portrait of Mary Magdalene. She can be recognised by the pot of salve, an attribute with which she is often portrayed. It refers to the Biblical story in which she anoints Jesus' feet. Although this is a portrayal of a saint, Mary Magdalene has been portrayed as an ordinary civilian woman.

**40** Walter POMPE (1703-1777), Christ on the Cross, terra cotta, signed W. Pompe.

**104 Representation of the Presentation of Mary**

Adam Van Noort (Antwerp, 1562-1641) was the son of Lambert Van Noort and the second teacher of Peter Paul Rubens. He painted several Biblical and religious scenes and the original altar cloth of the chapel of our orphanage.

It is no coincidence that this theme is also treated in another painting, the large panel by Joannes de Maré (Marnix House, former office of the president). This festivity of the Roman-Catholic calendar (21 November) in effect was also the saint's day of the patron saint of the orphanage.

The story of the presentation of Mary refers to the apocryphal gospels. When Mary was three years old, her parents, Joachim and Anna, brought her to the temple. The little girl walked up the fifteen high steps unassisted, which was considered a miracle. This was God's way of showing that he had great designs for Mary.

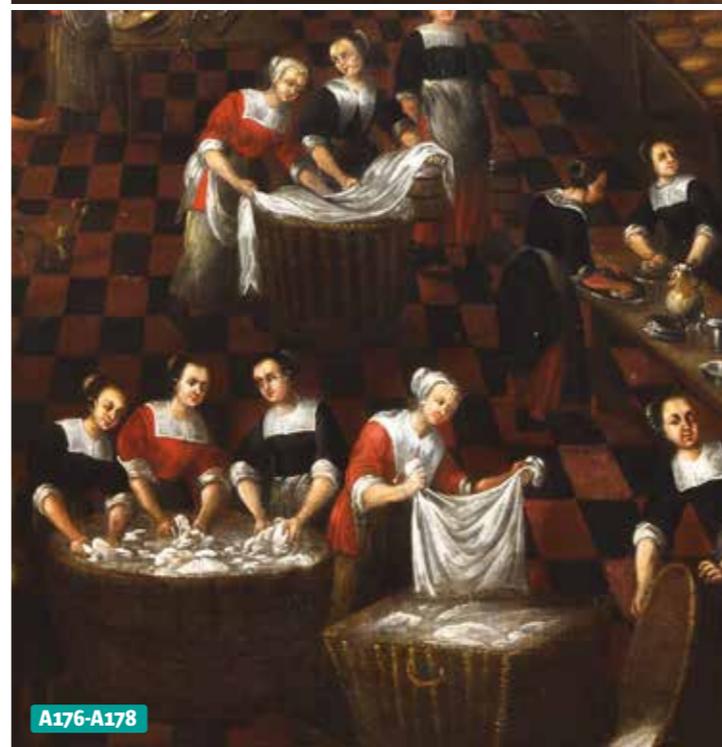
Mary was raised with other virgins in the temple. Every day, an angel visited her and she had visions of god. This protected her from all evil, leading her towards the good.

**746 ANONYMOUS (nineteenth century), walker, reed and linen.**

This walker is from the girls' orphanage in Albert Grisarstraat. It gives an idea how toddlers were taught to take their first steps.

**Uniform of the orphans of the Maidens' House (2015), wool and linen.**

This twenty-first century replica shows the uniform of the orphans and is based on the paintings of De Maré and Herreyns. We chose woollen cloth for the dress and linen for the undershirt, in which the maidens slept, as well as the collar and the pinafore.





A176-A178

**A176-A178 Joannes DE MARÉ**

These three oil painting by the seventeenth-century painter Joannes de Maré were commissioned by Franciscus Van Hildernissen. He was appointed Antwerp almoner in 1673. Van Hildernissen was also a governor of the Maidens' House.

Little to nothing is known about the painter Joannes De Maré, which says something about the low art historical value of the man's paintings. Their documentary value is what matters here.

**A slice of life**

We do not have much visual material that relates to the daily life of the orphans in the Maidens' House. The paintings of De Maré are the exception to this rule. They depict a number of girls sewing or making lace. Or a group of girls doing the laundry, the dishes or cleaning and cooking vegetables. He also painted the preparations for a festive dinner.

The paintings consist of three parts:

- ▷ Orphans at work
- ▷ Almoner François van Hildernissen
- ▷ Orphans in the Maidens' House

The poor "young and miserable maidens" learned to read, write and do arithmetic as well as sew, knit or spin wool in the Maidens' House. They trained as servants or chamber maids and therefore also practiced several household chores.

**The city portrayed**

The canvases reconstruct a number of rare cityscapes. A procession of girls crosses Mechelseplein on their way to Mass in St. George's church. We also see the pump pillar with the Madonna sculpture which used to stand in this square and of which almost no other visual recollection exists.

We also have a portrait of almoner Van Hildernissen, his wife Catharina De Coninck and their family. This gives us an insight into how almoners liked to be portrayed during this period.



**Good to know**

De Maré's works were featured separately or as one whole in prestigious exhibitions in Belgium and abroad, such as the World Expo Antwerp (Antwerp, 1930), the exhibition of the collections of the Belgian Commissions for Social Assistance (Brussels, 1961) and the exhibition "The Fascinating Faces of Flanders" (Lisbon, 1998).

# Courtyard

The museum tour ends in the magnificent courtyard.

The rooms you just visited are part of the “front building”. These rooms were mainly used as kitchens and meeting rooms. There was also a room for the regents of the Maidens’ House.

You can also see the annex in the courtyard. This is where the orphans lived and worked. The ward or sieckhuys, where sick orphans stayed, was on the ground floor level to the left. In the centre of the building was a refectory and the school was on the right of the building. The children had to work hard in the school, spending their whole day labouring on lace and sewing. The girls slept in one of the three dormitories on the first floor. On average, there were about a hundred girls in the orphanage at a time, but only sixty beds. It was not unusual for these orphans to share a bed.

## 8 UNKNOWN MASTER, Wooden Clara (seventeenth century).

Under the left gallery you can find a wooden statue of a seventeenth-century maiden in her uniform. Originally it served as the main pillar of a stairwell in the voorsael or antechamber (where you can find the reception). This statue mainly became famous as a result of Hendrik Conscience’s novella. The imagined story goes as follows:

*In 1589, a Spanish nobleman (Count Calisio d’Almata) and his Flemish wife Cateleyne van Gyseghem moved into the house next to the Maidens’ House. They had just returned from Spain.*

*Catalina was very melancholic. Before wedding the Spanish nobleman, she had been engaged to Lanceloot van Bisthoven. Her lover died in the Spanish Fury. Catalina decided to leave their love child behind.*

*Overcome by regret Catalina went in search of her daughter in Antwerp. It took her a while but finally she found her in the Maidens’ House. She was known as Houten Clara or Wooden Clara because she had this habit of always standing very straight.*

*Count d’Almata became suspicious about his wife’s surreptitious comings and goings and accused her of having an affair. Catalina fainted when she heard his accusation. Her maid then told the whole story.*

*The Spanish nobleman wanted to meet Clara. He was charmed by the child’s simplicity and pleasant demeanour and decided to adopt Clara, as the child of his dead brother.*

*It is said that the wooden sculpture was made at the request of the other orphans, to remember their friend who from then on was known as “Brigida Clara Juanita Contessa d’Almata”.*



**155** Jan SCHUT (seventeenth century), list of names of almoners since 1458.

These two triptychs stand alongside the sculpture of Wooden Clara. They list the names of the various almoners that were in charge of the Maidens' House.



**Good to know**

The almoners did not receive any pay for their work. Four almoners, who each had a mandate of two years, were tasked with managing the city's poor relief.



**164** Palm branch, ironwork (twentieth century).

Tribute of the Royal Fanfare "De Broederband" to the orphanage, 1883-1933.

**110** Sebastiaan VAN DEN EYNDE (1624-1702), Portrait of Cornelius Lantschot, white marble.

On the opposite side of the courtyard you will notice a beautiful marble bust of Cornelius Lantschot. This sculpture used to stand atop the entranceway to the chapel of the almshouse in Falconrui, which Lantschot founded.

**117** Façade stone of the former Van Dale almshouse.

This stone used to grace the façade of the almshouse in Korte Sint-Annastraat. The Van Dales, a family of rich bankers and merchants established the almshouse in 1498, creating accommodations for seven women.

**119** Commemorative stone taken from the attic floor of the Maidens' House (1677).

**120** Commemorative stone taken from the attic floor of the Maidens' House (1692).

**156** Reconstruction of the gate and drawer of the Foundlings' orphanage in Sint-Rochusstraat.

Besides the orphanages for boys and girls, there was a third institution in the city for children: the Foundling's orphanage in Sint-Rochusstraat.



**Good to know**

You will have already seen various items related to foundlings in the chapel. Under Napoleon's rule, it was no longer a crime to abandon your child. At least if you left it in a foundling's drawer that is.

The drawer you see here is a reconstruction. When the mother would close the latch of the drawer a bell would ring.



**118** UNKNOWN MASTER, Bonus Pastor, white stone (sixteenth century).

This sculpture of the Good Shepherd used to stand atop the entrance to the Maidens' House. It has been replaced with a replica.

**154** Huibrecht VAN DEN EYNDE (1594-1661), Madonna Group Faustina.

This is a copy of the original sculpture in the chapel. There are several interesting inscriptions behind this work.

These include the double portrayal of a Roman commemorative coin, for Empress Faustina (104-141 AD). She was the wife of Emperor Antonius Pius and founded a refuge for orphaned girls in Rome.

Under the commemorative plaque you can see the coat of arms of Filips Le Roy. He served as almoner in 1633-1634 and regent of the Maidens' House in 136. To the left you will recognise the coat of arms of his wife, Maria De Raet.



**Good to know**

There is a sonnet on the other wall. The first letter of every line of this acrostichon spells "Philippus Le Roy". This text is accompanied by a line of music notation. Legend has it that the orphans sang this at the inauguration of the courtyard in 1634. This sonnet is a unique example of music notation, which has been incorporated in architecture.

# Colofon

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Back: photos of children from the Boys' and Girls' Orphanage, 1907-1920



Meisjesweeshuis. Antwerpen  
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Handwerkklas.  
Classe de couture

