**The Rubens House: 2017–2021**

2017–18

SELF-PORTRAIT RESTORATION

Rubens’s self-portrait has been undergoing restoration at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) since January 2017. The process will take roughly a year and will be performed in stages. As a first step, the restorers are performing a technical examination of the painting. The results might provide increased insight into Rubens’s painting technique and the construction of the panel. Although he was an extremely methodical craftsman in every respect, Rubens was in the habit of constructing the panels he painted for himself – landscapes, for instance, and family portraits – from different planks of wood. This makes the panels in question especially fragile, with inevitable implications for conservation. The Self-Portrait will not appear again in all its glory until 2018, when it will be the calling card for the year-long ‘Antwerp Baroque City’ event. Rubens in all his finery will act as host of this urban cultural festival.

2017–19

RESTORATION OF PORTICO AND GARDEN PAVILION

Peter Paul Rubens purchased his home in 1610 and added a portico, a garden pavilion, a sculpture gallery and a studio, all of his own design. The portico and the garden pavilion are the only original parts of the Rubens House to survive, not to mention the only remaining physical examples of the master’s architectural work. Both structures currently need restoration, due to pollution and water infiltration. The work is scheduled for 2017–19, and in the meantime, wooden supports have been installed for the portico’s shell motif. The restoration can be followed live online.

01.06.2018 – 02.09.2018

MICHAELINA

The exhibition *Michaelina* demonstrates the exceptional talent of an artist who grew up at a time when female artists were a rarity. The clients of Michaelina Wautier (1614–1689), a younger contemporary of Rubens, included the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, one of the most important patrons of the seventeenth century.

Wautier distinguished herself from other female painters by the genres on which she concentrated. She ventured to make history paintings in large format – a challenge that many male painters shied away from. The twenty-six known works by her hand are remarkable for their daring subject matter and superior pictorial technique.

Her undisputed masterpiece is *The Triumph of Bacchus* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). In this work in large format, she did not shrink from demonstrating her knowledge of the male anatomy, nor from portraying herself as a semi-nude Bacchante – the only figure who looks the viewer frankly in the eye.

This project is the result of years of intensive research carried out by Professor Katlijne Van der Stighelen (KU Leuven) and will be realized in collaboration with the Rubens House (Ben van Beneden) and the Rubenianum (Bert Watteeuw). The Rubens House is still looking for six paintings by Michaelina Wautier for this exhibition. *The Five Senses* series dates from 1650 and consists of five signed and dated works on canvas. All that is known about them at present is a single black-and-white illustration in a 1975 auction catalogue. There has also been no trace since 1985 of the signed and dated still life *Garland with Butterfly*. More information on [www.rubenshuis.be](http://www.rubenshuis.be)

Spring 2019

DAVID BOWIE’S TINTORETTO BACK TO VENICE

Autumn 2016 saw the auction at Sotheby’s in London of David Bowie’s art collection. Bowie owned one Old Master– a monumental altarpiece by Jacopo Tintoretto (1518–1594) – which was purchased by a private collector. The latter announced within minutes of the sale that Tintoretto’s painting would be placed on long-term loan with the Rubens House in Antwerp, were it will be on display from 27 June 2017.

Tintoretto painted *St Catherine* for the altar of the Scuola di Santa Caterina in the Church of San Geminiano on St Mark’s Square in Venice, where it could be admired until the building was demolished in 1807. The altarpiece then disappeared into private ownership.

Since the announcement in November 2016 that the painting would be loaned long term to the Rubens House, Ben van Beneden has worked closely with the Colnaghi Foundation on a plan to return the altarpiece temporarily to Venice during the 2019 Biennale. When the Flemish Minister of Tourism, Ben Weyts, learned of the plan, he immediately decided to support it through Visit Flanders. The painting will be the centrepiece of an exhibition in 2019 on the demolished Church of San Geminiano and the artworks it once housed. The show will also feature works containing famous views of the city by Antonio Canaletto and Francesco Guardi, in which the church can be seen on St Mark’s Square. Flemish masters too, such as Rubens, Van Dyck and Maerten de Vos, will be represented through temporary loans by our museums. It is hard to overstate the affinity between Flemish painters and Venetian art. The Flemings absorbed and assimilated the Italian legacy during their visits to the country and through the dissemination of Italian art in the form of prints. Several Venetian works from Flemish museums, including the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, will also return to the city of the Doges for the exhibition in 2019.

Autumn 2019

DESIGNED BY RUBENS

*Designed by Rubens* focuses on a remarkable and particularly interesting aspect of the oeuvre of this brilliant artist: Rubens as a designer of exclusive, luxury art objects in costly materials such as silver, ivory and bronze.

It was during his stay in Italy that Rubens first saw such objects, designed by his revered predecessors Raphael (1483–1520) and Giulio Romano (c. 1499–1546). In his own studio in Antwerp, Rubens embraced this artistic challenge by making his own designs for such precious showpieces. For their execution, he turned to young, talented artist friends, such as the German sculptor Georg Petel (1601/02–1634), and the Flemish sculptors Artus I Quellinus (1609–1668) and Lucas Faydherbe (1617–1697). For the first time ever, some thirty designs (paintings, oil sketches and drawings) and the objects themselves will be brought together in a fascinating exhibition. The show will be accompanied by a scholarly publication, the first to focus on this subject.

*Designed by Rubens* is due to open at the same time as the newly constructed Rubens Experience Centre, which will be inaugurated at the Rubens Site in autumn 2019.

Autumn 2019

RUBENS EXPERIENCE CENTRE

The Rubens Experience Centre is being constructed at the iconic Rubens Site. The brand new building will house an interactive visitor centre and numerous visitor facilities, which the Rubens House currently lacks, either partially or entirely. These necessary additions will be located on the periphery of the site, respecting its protected historical elements, alongside and between the existing historical buildings, which are preserved within the new design. Rubens’s vision will be central to the new complex. His palazzo is more than a site where the master lived and worked: it is a carefully conceived and sophisticated concept, in which each part has its own considered place and meaning. It is the only place in the world, moreover, where physical examples have survived of Rubens’s ideas on architecture. Rubens impressed every visitor with the architectural excellence of his artist’s residence. The master’s design will remain at the core of the site after the new architecture has been completed.

The Rubens Experience Centre will open in autumn 2019 at the same time as the exhibition Designed by Rubens, with the first stone laid during Antwerp Baroque 2018: Rubens as an Inspiration. Tourism Flanders and the City of Antwerp are jointly investing 6 million euros in the Rubens Experience Centre.

2021

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUBENS HOUSE MUSEUM

The Rubens House celebrates its 75th anniversary as a museum in 2021. The milestone will be marked with special events, new masterpieces and fascinating presentations.