**Attachment 2
The discovery of a mystic marriage**

Interview with Pierre-Yves Kairis **Pierre-Yves Kairis (°1958), is a doctor in art history at the University of Liège and departmental chair ad interim at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage in Brussels. He discovered the 'Mystic Marriage of St Catherina' in Namur and is a specialist in the works of Charles Wautier, Michaelina's brother.**

**How did you come across the work by Michaelina?**

P-YK: “In 1991, I was recruited by the King Boudewijn Institute during their first major restoration campaign of monumental paintings. There were more than 670 requests submitted, and I was involved with the French-language files.

Within that context I went to the church in Gimnée, in the Namur province, where a large, impressive painting caught my attention. The painting depicted Saint Eloois and was signed by Charles Wautier, a painter whom I knew nothing about, but from which I determined that he must have been an important painter. I did some research and discovered that he had originally come from Mons. Soon thereafter I found quite a considerable amount of information about Michaelina, a female painter who was also from Mons. I suspected that they were brother and sister, but could not prove it.

A few years later I stumbled upon an article by Kalijne Van der Stighelen that was published in 1996, which contained my whole file! Without knowing it from each other, Katlijne and I had done nearly the same foundational research. She has continued the research with the drivenness that we know from her, which is fully expressed here in this splendid exhibition in the MAS, ”

**What makes Michaelina so special, according to you?**

P-YK: “What struck me right away was the variety of genres that she successfully practised: religious, mythological and allegorical paintings, portraits, floral and genre paintings. That is most exceptional for a woman painter from the 17th century, a time in which the "lady painters", such as they were called in France at the time, were at best tolerated for painting flowers. A genre in which they painted canvases with a refinement that was equal to the best Flemish painters of this kind of work. Just as striking is the absence of Michaelina in every, old historiography, as if the extensiveness of the activities of a woman was disturbing and thus consciously silenced.”

**Are there notable similarities with her brother Charles?**

PY-K: “There are unmistakeable and notable similarities of form between the work of Charles and Michaelina. We encounter similar framing elements and arrangements here, for example, with the holy figures of which only the upper-body is shown, with heavy and superfluous draperies and warm skin tones that come out fully with sophisticated lighting effects. Their figure often breathes a feeling of nostalgia. Given that Charles and his younger sister shared the same studio in Brussels and had clients that came from the same social status (in particular officers in the service of the Spanish crown), we can hardly doubt that they have collaborated more than once on the same paintings. However, the trail needs to be researched further still: the discoveries must still follow.”

**What is the story behind 'The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine'?**

P-YK: “The restoration of 'The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine' by the Seminary of Namur actually has a true resurrection, the painting was covered by a thick layer of grime. I found this painting again in 2001, during an investigation of all paintings that were preserved in the Seminary of Namur. I was primarily taken by the quality and said to the conservator who was giving me the tour: "There you have a masterpiece!”

However, I did not then immediately think about our female painter from Mons. When I came closer and looked at the painting in detail, I was shocked when I noticed the barely legible signature of Michaelina Wautier, a signature that apparently nobody had ever noticed before, as the painting had become so dirty and dulled.

Thanks to the restoration, we thus experience a true resurrection. Small anecdote: this painting created such enthusiasm at that moment with the restorers of the KIK-IRPA that we went in search of a sponsor for the restoration. Without any luck, because Michaelina was at the time practically unknown and nobody showed any interest in her. Some fifteen years later, thanks to the outstanding work of Katlijne Van der Stighelen, she is recognised as a very major female artist from her time and it became much easier indeed to entice sponsors.