



450 Years of Bruegel

125 years since *Dulle Griet* was rediscovered

Dulle Griet ('Mad Meg') is one of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's most enigmatic works. For 125 years now, the painting has been the star attraction in the collection of Fritz Mayer van den Bergh, who rediscovered it.

The Mayer van den Bergh Museum in Antwerp is *the* place to experience Bruegel in 2019. Discover two paintings there by Bruegel himself, several works by his sons, and the enthusiasm which the collector Fritz Mayer van den Bergh held towards this artist.

Beginning on 5 October 2019, *Dulle Griet* will be the highlight of the exhibition *Madonna meets Mad Meg*.



MUSEUM
MAYER
van DEN
BERGH

FROM 5 OCTOBER 2019

Madonna meets Mad Meg

It goes without saying that Bruegel and Fouquet are the real masters behind ‘Dulle Griet’ and ‘The Madonna’. Yet it is thanks to master collectors that we are able to enjoy these masterpieces today. Step into the world of connoisseurs Fritz and Florent and discover their unfailing nose for beauty.

Florent van Ertborn (1784–1840) and Fritz Mayer van den Bergh (1858–1901) collected paintings, sculptures, manuscripts and other art objects with immense passion. Their acquisitions were often bargains, sometimes investments and occasionally brilliant discoveries. Both Antwerp collectors were far ahead of their time. For centuries, Rubens was considered the greatest artist. Little interest was shown in Flemish masters like Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Quentin Massys and Rogier van der Weyden, or in the work of the French artist Jean Fouquet. Fritz and Florent, by contrast, recognized the quality of this art.

Trendsetters

Beginning on 5 October 2019, this pair of astute collectors invite you to visit the Mayer van den Bergh Museum in Antwerp, where Fritz and Florent will sweep you up in their passion for collecting and share several of their masterpieces. The highlight is the recently restored *Dulle Griet* (‘Mad Meg’) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Fritz rediscovered the painting precisely 125 years ago and purchased it at auction in Cologne, where the enigmatic work was displayed high up on a saleroom wall. The young collector proved more alert than the various prestigious museums and was able to acquire the strange work for just 488 old Belgian francs. It turned out to be the purchase of Fritz’s life, as the masterpiece was believed lost at the time.

Florent, who acquired around a hundred of the masterpieces that now belong to the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (KMSKA), had a similar nose for brilliant discoveries. Fouquet’s highly unusual *Madonna* – after more than 500 years, still one of the loveliest French paintings – was purchased from a Paris art dealer. To get hold of Antonello da Messina’s *Calvary*, meanwhile, Van Ertborn came to an arrangement with a Ghent collector, who could have sold the little Italian panel for a hefty sum. The precise details have yet to be discovered, but Van Ertborn most likely traded several other works for da Messina’s masterpiece.





Fritz's acquisition of the Christmas cradle might have been a stroke of luck, as the piece formed part of a substantial lot, on which he took a huge financial risk. Connoisseurs and collectors viewed the cradle as a medieval toy, but Mayer van den Bergh spotted the household object's exceptional quality. Nuns in the fifteenth century would pull on the string while singing songs, causing the cradle to rock and the little bells to jingle – a mystical experience that appealed to the senses.

Hosts and founding fathers of museums

Fritz and Florent made a highly significant contribution to the world of art, each laying the foundations of what would become major museum collections: that of the Mayer van den Bergh Museum and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA).

For this exhibition, Fritz is hosting Florent at the Mayer van den Bergh Museum in the heart of Antwerp. In the course of his short life, Fritz collected over 3,000 art objects and when he died suddenly, his mother Henriette had this museum built to house the collection to which her son had dedicated his life. Paintings, altarpieces, monumental sculptures, manuscripts, tapestries, and more besides are displayed in an atmospheric interior, full of small, delicate art treasures. Today's visitors can still sense Fritz's enthusiasm and connoisseur's eye, as well as a mother's unconditional love for her son.



Fritz Mayer van den Bergh



At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Florent van Ertborn bequeathed a fabulous art collection to his native city of Antwerp. This legacy, consisting of 141 panel paintings, remains one of the keystones of what is now the Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKA), enabling it to present an extraordinarily rich collection of Flemish Primitive painting. The KMSKA is currently closed for renovation, pending which some of its leading works are on show at museums abroad. For this particular exhibition, however, they will return to Antwerp under the approving eye of Florent van Ertborn, the museum's founding father.

The exhibition is being organized in close collaboration with the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) and dovetails with Bruegel Year 2019.



Fritz, catalyst for Bruegel research

The art historian Leen Huet writes in her book 'Pieter Bruegel. De biografie': 'His purchase [Dulle Griet] was the clarion call for the start of scholarly research into Bruegel, which now fills an entire library.'

At the time Fritz was building up his collection at the end of the nineteenth century, Pieter Bruegel the Elder's reputation was poor. He was not really known to the public at large and the majority of his forty-five or so paintings were unavailable for viewing. In so far as his work was known at all, it was heavily criticized: Bruegel was widely held to be in poor taste, if not downright coarse.

Fritz, who had been fascinated by Bruegel since an early age, set out systematically to find work by the then little-known

and mysterious painter. He purchased a first print after Bruegel as early as 1890, followed three years later by no fewer than twenty-two more. But the best was yet to come: in October 1894, Mayer van den Bergh picked up *Dulle Griet* for just 488 Belgian francs – an absolute bargain when you consider that a work by Rubens changed hands that same year for 45,000 francs. In 1899, five years later, Fritz bought a second painting by Bruegel: *Twelve Proverbs on Plates*.

During his short life, Mayer van den Bergh rekindled interest in Bruegel who, thanks to Fritz's enthusiasm, has now been studied and coveted for over 100 years. The Mayer van den Bergh Museum is *the* place in Flanders to discover Bruegel. It has two paintings by him and several works by his sons, and testifies to Fritz's fascination for this mysterious artist.



PRACTICAL DETAILS

Permanent

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Dulle Griet* ('Mad Meg')

From 5 October 2019 to 31 December 2020

Madonna meets Mad Meg

Mayer van den Bergh Museum,
Lange Gasthuisstraat 19, 2000 Antwerp
www.museummayervandenbergh.be

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Admission

€ 8.00 / € 6.00 / free

Tickets: online via www.museummayervandenbergh.be
or at the museum

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday: **10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Closed: Mondays and public holidays (1 November,
25 December, 1 January, 1 May and 15 August)

Open exceptionally on Easter Monday and Whit Monday

Getting here

The Mayer van den Bergh Museum is about 20 minutes' walk
from Antwerp Central Station.

By public transport

metro/tram: 3, 5, 9, 15 (Meir) / 4, 7 (Lange Gasthuisstraat)

By bike

Velo bicycle hire: www.velo-antwerpen.be

By car

P-route 'Meir-Stadsschouwburg': Car parks Oudaen,
Arenberg, Horta (Hopland), Lombardia

By bus

Coach parking Kaai 19 (signposted SK 19): free of charge, no
reservation required. Within 10 minutes' walking distance
from the historic centre. Coach drivers can drop off their
passengers and collect them at the following public transport
(De Lijn) stops (maximum 10 minutes):

Destination (P-route) 'historisch centrum':

- Heading north: Suikerrui/Steenplein stop

- Heading south: Suikerrui/Ernest Van Dijckkaai stop

Tours

Duration

90 minutes

Capacity

max. 15 persons per guide & max. two groups per hour

Languages

NL – ENG – FR – GER

Price guided tour

€ 75 + € 5 administrative cost; not including museum entry
fee (€ 8 p.p. or, for groups of 12 or more: € 6 p.p.)

The museum has a listening system, so that the guide can be
heard perfectly.

Reservation

Visit Antwerp – Booking and Ticketing

Tel.: +32 3 338 95 30 (working days from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

tickets@visitantwerpen.be

Accessibility

The Mayer van den Bergh Museum is a historic house with a
lot of stairs. The exhibition is on the first floor. Access for
wheelchair users is limited to the ground floor.