**Annexe: Farewell to director Ben van Beneden**

**The return of *The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* also marks the start of the last weeks of Ben van Beneden’s tenure as director of the Rubens House. He will be retiring in September.**

Ben van Beneden was appointed to the position in 2010. Together with his team, he developed several international exhibitions, including *Rooms full of Art, Palazzo Rubens,* and *Rubens in private*. His main priority, however, was the upgrade and enrichment of the collection and the artist’s residence. He drew attention to the urgent need for the restoration of the portico and garden pavilion – the original elements of the house, which were designed by Rubens himself. After several years of preparation, the project was successfully completed in 2019. The restoration and the protective glass butterfly awning met with international praise and appreciation. Van Beneden applied this same precision and boldness to the art collection, paving the way for the restoration of Rubens’s *Self-Portrait*, among others.

Loans from public and private collections were another priority in Ben van Beneden’s policy was the. Lacking the budget for acquisitions, he instead searched for inventive solutions to supplement and elaborate on the story of Rubens. As such, van Beneden was able to exhibit several masterpieces at the Rubens House, such as *The Massacre of the Innocents* and ‘David Bowie’s Tintoretto’. He also worked very closely with the King Baudouin Foundation. Thanks to this collaboration, the Rubens House has a masterpiece of exceptional quality on permanent loan: *The Apostle Matthew*, by the young Sir Anthony van Dyck. He also helped co-found the *Rubenianum Fund*, an organisation that is financing the *catalogue raisonné* of Rubens, under the auspices of the King Baudouin Foundation: the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard. Under van Beneden’s management, the number of annual visitors to the Rubens House gradually increased from 150,000 to 210,000 in 2019.

Outgoing director Ben van Beneden will be retiring in September 2021.