**Attachment 1  
Koen Theys in a dialogue with Peter Paul Rubens**

by Kathy de Nève, art historian

DIASPORALIA is an installation of twelve bronze mattresses/beds that have been purposefully lined up in St. Joseph’s Chapel in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp. The two rows of six bronze mattresses face each other. Personal belongings lie on each of the mattresses, also made of bronze. Some of the details or ornaments have been accentuated with colour. Gold, red, blue and bronze are the main Baroque colours.

The work’s title refers to the problem of refugees, the diaspora or the scattering of a nation – a theme that concerns us all, we can no longer ignore it. People on the run, who are fleeing their country and their language, sometimes voluntarily, but most often forced to do so. Often they leave unexpectedly, with just a few memories in their rucksacks, or even in their jacket pocket. DIASPORALIA appeals to the spectator’s emotions and makes a profound impression because of the illusion of hope and faith in another life, in a better future. We gaze at a dramatic scene. A grand, bold and overwhelming scene, which will move anyone who walks past. But, where are the people, why are they missing? A dehumanisation, which makes this tableau (non-vivant) all the more dynamically *in-human*. And while you cannot discern any movement or life in this setting, you still sense that something is going on. A dynamic that is emphasised with colour accents: certain details in the work are “highlighted” or magnified. This reminds us of the *chiaroscuro* effects that Baroque artists liked to use, which accentuated the parts that fuelled the spectator’s imagination or appealed to his feelings the most. In DIASPORALIA, the imagination is rendered palpable and/or distant in the things we see. We gaze at a mattress/bed on which personal belongings have been laid out. We try to identify the individual – the “missing human” or the refugee who denies his rights and his own “self” as soon as he crosses a border – based on these few belongings. He becomes the remnant of his own self.

Identity is a central theme in Koen Theys’s work. How man rejects existing reforms and/or opinions, goes in search of the opportunity to give himself a new destination in life. For DIASPORALIA Koen Theys has engaged in a dialogue with the Flemish Baroque artist Rubens. And yet again he happens upon man as an individual, on his identity and how to preserve it: the illusion of hope and faith in a continued future, which only emphasises even more how Baroque this work really is: art as a doctrine of salvation to achieve redemption. Drama and a magnificent staged paintings were part of the seventeenth-century spiritual strategy to bring about a rapprochement between people and art. The Baroque, which originated in an act of opposition, as part of the Counter-Reformation, which used overwhelming tableaus to inspire emotions in people, so they would return to faith and the Church. So it is hardly surprising that DIASPORALIA was installed in St. Joseph’s Chapel in the Cathedral. Towering above the altar is a representation of St. Joseph, the protector of the defenceless, with Jesus on his arm, the child as the saviour of the world. An ecclesiastical dialogue between Baroque and contemporary art, which will move anyone who sees it, which is vital in the world of images we live in.