

**Hendrick De Clerck.**  
**Alberts and Isabella's spin doctor**

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## INTRODUCTION

The painter Hendrick de Clerck (c. 1560–1630) might well be described as the ‘spin doctor’ of Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella. A contemporary of Rubens, he shot to fame with a body of work that perfectly matched his sovereigns’ ambitions. When the Archduke and Infanta set their sights on the imperial crown in the late 1590s, it was De Clerck who led their visual campaign. Albert and Isabella’s court in Brussels vied with those of the leading royal houses of Europe, not least through a visionary artistic project for which they recruited the most successful Brussels painter of the time. De Clerck drew and painted a political programme that was perfectly tailored to the archducal couple. There is more to his mythological and religious scenes, therefore, than might appear at first sight: this was political propaganda *avant la lettre*. ‘The sky is literally the limit in De Clerck’s paintings’, says Curator Katharina Van Cauteren. ‘The Archduke and Infanta had their eye on the imperial crown and had everything to gain from the right image. That’s why they are shown as heroes and gods.’

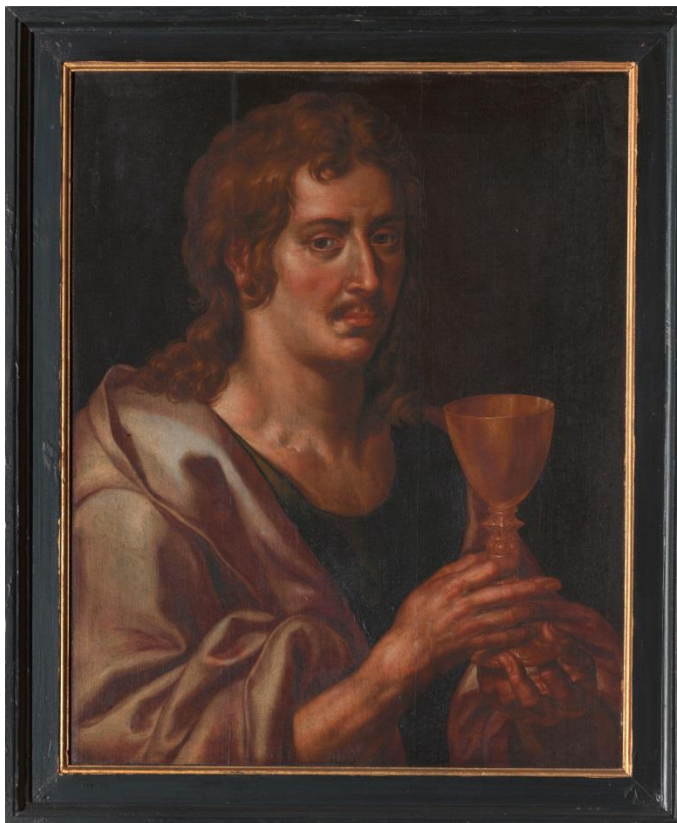
The exhibition will help visitors unravel the artist’s propagandist imagery. In addition to paintings by Hendrick de Clerck himself, Bartholomeus Spranger, Maerten de Vos, Otto van Veen, Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Younger, you will see rare drawings by De Clerck and a *Wunderkammer* – a cabinet of curiosities. Together, they paint a picture of the ambitious lifestyle and mentality of these early-modern rulers and of a fascinating episode in the history of the Southern Netherlands.

**Curator: Katharina Van Cauteren**

## HENDRICK DE CLERCK (ca. 1560-1630)

Hendrick de Clerck's name crops up for the first time in 1590, when the artist was commissioned to paint a prestigious altarpiece for the Church of St Gudula in Brussels. He shot to fame afterwards, becoming court painter to Ernest of Austria, governor of the Netherlands, four years later. When Ernest died suddenly in 1596, De Clerck continued to serve Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella, his successors. Although the couple have gone down in history as the founders of Catholic Belgium, they dreamed of nothing less than the imperial crown.

Hendrick de Clerck was a contemporary of Peter Paul Rubens, yet there is nothing in his paintings that resembles the bravura works of the Antwerp master. De Clerck's painting style was political and reflected the latest fashion at the Habsburg courts of Central Europe. By tapping into this tradition, he presented the Brussels court as the equal of its imperial counterpart in Prague.



Hendrick De Clerck, St John the Evangelist, *Sint-Pauluskerk*, Opwijk  
© www.lukasweb.be - Art in Flanders vzw, foto Dominique Provost

*De Clerck's version of St John the Evangelist is far from traditional. He painted a man with a conspicuous moustache and steely gaze, who seeks eye contact with the viewer. In doing so, Hendrick broke with visual tradition; what's more, given that artists quite often portrayed themselves as St John, it is tempting to conclude that we are looking here at a self-portrait of Hendrick de Clerck himself.*

## A VISIONARY CAMPAIGN FOR ALBERT AND ISABELLA



Frans Pourbus II, Portrait of the Archduke Albert & Portrait of the Archduchess Isabella  
Musea Brugge © [www.lukasweb.be](http://www.lukasweb.be) - Art in Flanders vzw, photo Hugo Maertens

Archduke Albert of Austria was appointed governor-general of the Netherlands in 1595. King Philip II of Spain had grandiose plans for his nephew, whom he married to his favourite daughter, the Infanta Isabella. Not only was her dowry the Spanish Netherlands, if Isabella's younger brother – Philip III – happened to die prematurely, she would inherit Spain's global empire as well. Albert's brother, meanwhile, Emperor Rudolf II, suffered from bouts of melancholy. The search was on, therefore, for a potential new emperor and Albrecht might well have been the ideal candidate. All the same, a prince is only as important as he makes himself. So the Archduke and Infanta drew up a political campaign, in which Hendrick de Clerck would play a leading role. The work he produced reads like a catalogue of themes and visual mechanisms that are still in use today. In his paintings, he associated Albert with the sun god Apollo, while Isabella is presented as the wise goddess Minerva, the chaste Diana or the Virgin Mary herself. Albert became Christ, the supreme ruler of the cosmos who, together with his wife, would bring about a thousand year empire, and a period of peace and justice.

## 1. Joyous Entry': Albert, Saviour of the Netherlands

The idea of the 'joyous entry' – the *joyeuse entrée* or *blijde inkomst* – evolved in the course of the sixteenth century. These public events were originally an opportunity for a city to communicate with its ruler. Now, however, they became a propaganda vehicle for the prince to shape his image among his subjects. The ceremonial entry into Brussels was a noteworthy experiment in this regard. Albert arrived at the gates of the city on 11 February 1596, where he was given a festive reception. Hendrick de Clerck was responsible for decorating the largest of the triumphal arches. His design drawings depict scenes that will have been clearly understandable to the average Brussels citizen. Archduke Albert is shown dressed in cardinal's robes or as a general at the walls of Lisbon; but always recognisable as himself. The scene in which Albert descends like a god to rescue 'Bruxella' (the molested maiden as personification of a city was a staple of sixteenth-century propaganda) could hardly be clearer. To make it even less ambiguous, ordinary citizens could see themselves reflected in the depicted tradesmen. The fact that this scene, rather than some allegory or other, was chosen for the programme of a joyous entry was wholly unprecedented in the Low Countries. The Archduke would save the people and with them the city as a whole. As propaganda goes, that's a pretty powerful message.



Hendrick De Clerck, Bruxella kneeling before Archduke Albert  
© Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg Wolfegg

*The personification of the city is shown kneeling in one of the drawings, with the inscription 'the maiden must throw her arms around the Cardinal's knees.' It was evidently not enough that she was only kneeling in front of Albert: Bruxella had to grab the saviour of the Netherlands physically, like some kind of groupie.*



© The Phoebus Foundation

*This piece of embroidery laments the symbolic violation of the Netherlands: Spanish soldiers molest her, while the treasury is plundered. Hendrick de Clerck recycled the motif, with the difference that he added an element of hope. In the right of the image, the damsel in distress points to Archduke Albert who descends like a demigod from heaven to save the Low Countries. Through this clever, yet simple adjustment, De Clerck transformed the scene into shameless propaganda for the Habsburgs.*

## **2. New audience, new gods**

Those who wish to hold power must know how to play to their audience. In many cases, this meant a select target group of the highest nobles. Hendrick de Clerck played an essential role in this regard too. When communicating with the elite, however, he substituted the easily legible iconographies of the joyous entries with mythological and religious imagery. These picturesque scenes of classical gods are pure political propaganda too, with an increasingly ambitious message. The sun god Apollo symbolised Albert himself, while Isabella was wiser than Minerva and as beautiful as Venus. Hand in hand, they would bring a golden age of plenty and unity to the Netherlands. The sky, in other words, was the limit.



Hendrick De Clerck, The Contest between Apollo and Pan © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

*De Clerck painted a 'Judgement of Midas', but rather than focusing on the musical contest between the sun god Apollo and Pan, protector of wild nature, he added the goddess Minerva. She forms the radiant central point of the composition, together with Apollo. In this way, Albert becomes the new Apollo or Sun King, who will rule alongside Isabella as the wise Minerva. That is the key to this painting: Albert and Isabella will triumph and will resist Pan's animalistic urges. By following the path of reason, they will be rewarded with eternal fame.*



Hendrick De Clerck, Sleeping Hercules © Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg Wolfegg

*Hendrick de Clerck's Sleeping Hercules is the design for a painting that has not survived, and which referred to the story of Hercules at the Crossroads. He had to choose there between virtuous reason and base urges, of which people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were particularly wary. No wonder then that Albert was systematically depicted as the model of wisdom and virtue.*





Hendrick De Clerck, The judgement of Paris © The Phoebus Foundation, Belgium

*The Judgement of Paris shows the first ever beauty pageant. The shepherd Paris had to choose which goddess was the loveliest: Juno, Minerva or Venus. He chose Venus, thereby unleashing the Trojan War. The Judgement of Paris was thus an example of what a wise sovereign should not do: the judicious ruler should not choose beauty, but the wisdom of Minerva. De Clerck warns in this painting against foolishness while implicitly suggesting that Albert is much wiser than Paris.*

### **3. The prince: a god in the making**

A prince who rules virtuously deserves to be rewarded. After his death, Albert's soul will journey around the seven planets known at that time before being taken up into the realm of the gods. From there he will reign over the cosmos, provided he rules wisely: he must resist the temptations of Venus and the vicissitudes of fate. If Albert succeeds, he will be a god in the making. The same thing is expressed in De Clerck's drawings too.



Hendrick De Clerck, Venus and Apollo © Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg Wolfegg

*Hendrick de Clerck placed the planetary gods within a continuous vista of Brussels. After all, with the divine Archdukes as its ruler, how could the city be anything but the centre of the universe? Albert would rule from Brussels like a new Apollo over the entire cosmos, and the Low Countries would become a new Paradise on Earth. The goddess Venus is usually a symbol of passionate love; this time, however, she does not allow herself to be maddened by her son's arrows. The wheel in her hands alludes to the wheel of fortune. There is one way, however, to escape her caprices – to be rational. In other words, those who resist passionate love and are rational in bad times as well as good, will triumph over fate. It hardly needs to be said that this applies to Albert and Isabella.*

#### 4. Wunderkammer

The age of European expansion into exotic and previously unknown locations contributed to the rise of the princely hobby of collecting. *Wunderkammern* were set up all over the continent. The sole purpose of these collections of art and curiosities was to bring together all the wonders of creation, which the prince could then study. And since knowledge is power, those familiar with all the wonders of the earth and beyond were surely fit to rule over all creation. Princely collections could therefore include virtually anything, from seashells, coral, gemstones, ivory and minerals, to living plants and animals. These *naturalia*, meanwhile, were accompanied by *artificialia* – man-made objects.

The *Wunderkammer* that most captured the imagination was undoubtedly that of Emperor Rudolf II. What is less well known, however, is that the second largest in Europe was the one belonging to Albert and Isabella. Their extensive collection of art gave them the universal knowledge to conquer the cosmos. In this way, at the End of the World they would rule the thousand year empire as the last ever monarchs. The cabinet of curiosities has been reconstructed for the exhibition: visitors will be immersed in the world of sixteenth-century people.

## 5. The divine archduke

The person who restores paradise on earth is nothing less than the new Adam. But the new Adam is also the new Christ – something Hendrick de Clerck understood very well. In this way, the palace in Brussels became a conduit between heaven and earth, with the archduke in the role of the new Christ. Isabella too had a direct line to heaven. She was like the new Virgin Mary: she would pray for the citizens of the Netherlands and God would hear her prayers.



Hendrick De Clerck, The Risen Christ with Musician Angels, Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

*This painting is almost a miniature. Christ, surrounded by an orchestra of angels, is shown triumphing over evil. The latter refers to original sin, when the serpent tempted Eve, Adam took a bite of the apple, and death came into the world. No need to worry, though: Albert and Isabella will bring divine harmony to earth and overcome original sin. Albert is depicted in this way as nothing less than a new Christ. He will bring history to its end, and herald in a thousand-year empire of peace and plenty.*

## 6. The end of the campaign

In 1612, the imperial crown went to Albert's brother, Matthias. Suddenly, there was far less need for De Clerck's scenes, and Albert turned out not to be the new ruler of the world after all. Henceforward, the Archduke and Infanta would concentrate on the Low Countries and on the Counter Reformation. The grandiose, overwhelming altarpieces of Rubens now moved to the centre of the artistic stage. De Clerck's intellectual and refined courtly style gradually became irrelevant. So it was that he faded into obscurity, along with the grandiose ambitions of Albert and Isabella.

## PUBLICATION

*Politics as painting: Hendrick de Clerck (1560–1630) and the archducal enterprise of empire.*

The book tells the story of Hendrick de Clerck, his connections with the Archduke and Infanta, and the political significance of his paintings.

Lannoo, 416 pages, hard cover, 65 euros

## LIST OF WORKS

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AFTER FRANS II POURBUS. **Portrait of the Archduke Albert & Portrait of the Archduchess Isabella**  
First half of 17th century, Groeningemuseum, Brugge

### GALLERY 15

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**John the Evangelist (Self-Portrait?)**

First half of 17th century, Sint-Pauluskerk, Opwijk

### GALLERY 16

ANONYMOUS

**Lamentation over the destruction of the Netherlands**

C. 1577, The Phoebus Foundation

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The virgin Bruxella kneels before Archduke Albert**

**Philip II hands Albert the Cadeceus (I & II)**

**Albert as Army Commander before Lisbon**

**The Assailed Bruxella is Saved by Albert**

**Despairing craftsmen (I & II)**

**Albert unravels the Gordian Knot**

**Albert delivers a Damsel from a Dragon**

1595-1596, Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg, Schloss Wolfegg

FRANS HOGENBERG

**The entry of Archduke Ernest in Brussels**

1596, Royal Library of Belgium

WORKPLACE OF FRANS POURBUS II

**Albert of Austria as Knight of the Golden Fleece**

C. 1596, The Phoebus Foundation

ANONYMOUS

**Jetons handed out at the entry of the Archdukes in Leuven**

1599, M – Museum Leuven

### GALLERY 17

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**Ceres, Venus & Bacchus**

C. 1594 ?, Private collection

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The Judgement of Midas**

1600 – 1629, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

NICOLAES JANSZ. CLOCK AFTER CAREL VAN MANDER

**The Judgement of Midas**

1589, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

BERNARD DE MONTGAILLARD

Funeral Orations for Archduke Albert : **Le soleil éclipsé, ou Discours sur la vie et mort du Serenissime**

**Archiduc Albert Prince Souverain des Pais bas et de Bourgogne**

1622, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**Sleeping Hercules**

1600 – 1610, Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg, Schloss Wolfegg

HIËRONYMUS WIERIX  
**Hercules at the Crossroads**  
1592, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

PETER PAUL RUBENS  
**Minerva Overthrowing Ignorance**  
First half of 17th century, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp

HENDRICK DE CLERCK  
**Banquet of the Gods**  
First half of 17th century, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Liège

HENDRICK DE CLERCK  
**Allegory of the Archducal Virtues**  
C. 1600 – 1605, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp

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**The Judgment of Paris**  
C. 1600 – 1610, The Phoebus Foundation

MAARTEN DE VOS  
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1568, The Phoebus Foundation

BARTHOLOMEUS SPRANGER  
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17th century, Collection Belfius Bank, Brussel

DIRK DE QUADE VAN RAVESTEYN  
**Venus en Cupid**  
c. 1600-1610, The Phoebus Foundation

OTTO VAN VEEN  
**Allegory of the Diligence and Laziness**  
C. 1600 – 1625, The Phoebus Foundation

FRANCISCUS HARAEUS  
Portrait of Philip II : **Annales Ducum seu principum Brabantiae totiusque Belgii**  
1623, KU Leuven, University Library, Tabularium

IONNES BOCHIUS  
Entry into Antwerp of Albert and Isabella : **Historica narratio profectionis et inaugurationis serenissimorum Belgii principum Alberti et Isabellae, Austriae archiducum.**  
1602, The Phoebus Foundation

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**Louis XIV during 'The Wedding of Thetis and Peleus'**  
17th century, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Paris

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1612? Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

DENIJS VAN ALSLOOT & HENDRICK DE CLERCK  
**Winter**  
1611, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

DENIJS VAN ALSLOOT & HENDRICK DE CLERCK  
**Wooded Landscape with the Flight into Egypt**  
C. 1608  
Oil on panel  
The Phoebus Foundation

ANONYMOUS

**Genesis**, C. 1550, The Phoebus Foundation

JAN SAENREDAM AFTER ABRAHAM BLOEMAERT

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1604, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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**The Archdukes walking in the Palace Park**

1609-1621, Rubenshuis, Antwerpen

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**Adam and Eve in Paradise**

1617, Salomon Lilian Dutch Old Master Paintings

MICHEL DE NOSTRE-DAME

The Prophecies of Nostradamus : **Prophéties, recueillies par Vincent Sève**

1568, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

ERICIUS PUTEANUS

The Comet of the Year 1618 : **De Cometa anni MDCXVIII. Novo Mundi spectacolo libri duo. Pradoxologia.**

1619, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

ANTONIO TORQUATO

The Prophecies of Antonio Torquato on the Fall of Europe : **Prognosticon de eversione Europae**

1544, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

ANONYMOUS

**Vue on the Coudenberg Palace**

C. 1570, The Phoebus Foundation

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**Design for the Ceiling of the Archiducal Oratory in the Coudenberg Palace**

1609, Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg, Schloss Wolfegg

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**Christ Triumphant with Musician Angels**

C. 1599 – 1601, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Alte Galeria, Graz

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**Jesus Christ & Philip II**

1568, Royal Library of Belgium Brussels

HANS SPRINGINKLEE

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1519, Royal Library of Belgium Brussels

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**Emperor Ferdinand II as Christ on the Mount of Olives**

1622 – 1623, Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg

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Archduke Albert Crowned in the Outermost Sphere : **Apotheose chrestienne ou Panegyrique sur les grandes**

**vertus du Serenissime Archiduc Albert Grand Prince des Pays-Bas & de Bourgogne. A la Serenissime**

**Princesse Isabelle Claire Eugenie Infante d'Espagne**

1622, Royal Library of Belgium Brussels

JACOBUS DE SUCCA

**Sundial**

1601, Rubenshuis, Antwerpen

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Elisabeth I and the Celestial spheres : **Sphaera Civitatis**

1588, University Library of Erlangen-Nürnberg

JEAN TERRIER

Pulchra ut luna. Fair as the Moon : **Portraits des S S Vertus de la Vierge...**  
1635, Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The Seven Planetary Gods before Brussels : Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, Venus, Mercure, Juno**  
C. 1600-1610, Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg, Schloss Wolfegg

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1660, Royal Library of Belgium Brussels

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**  
1606, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwebasiliek, Scherpenheuvel

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The Resurrected Christ appears to his Mother**  
First half of 17th century, M-Museum Leuven

HENDRICK DE CLERCK

**The Adoration of the Magi**  
1628, Kerkfabriek Sint-Pieters-en-Guidokerk, Anderlecht

### **WUNDERKAMMER**

PORFIRIUS Kunstkamer, Neerijse  
Bernard Descheemaeker, Antwerpen  
The Phoebus Foundation

ANONYMOUS

**Nautilus Cup**  
Shell, silver and gilded silver  
Royal Museum of Arts and History, Brussel

MASTER OF THE PELICAN

**Silver owl hallmarked Antwerp**  
1548-1549  
Coconut, silver, gilded silver  
Coll. Koning Boudewijn Stichting





## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### OPEN

Monday > Sunday 11:00 >< 18:00

Thursday 11:00 >< 22:00

Wednesday closed

### TICKETS

	Tickets reception desk	Online tickets (°)
+ 26 year	€12*	€9*
+ 26 year & concessions	€10*	€7*
13-25 year	€5	€3
0 - 12 year	free	free

\*audio tour included | (°) + € 1,50 per reservation

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## PRESS IMAGES

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