

INTRODUCTION

Castles, hunts and lavish celebrations with great pomp and splendour are what we often associate with the aristocracy. Yet there is more to the nobility than that, especially in the case of the Arenberg family. Over the centuries, the Arenbergs have combined economic, political and military power with an intense passion for beauty in all its forms, including art, literature and nature. The dynasty also distinguished itself through its interest in science, along with a hefty dose of enterprise.

THE ARENBERGS: EUROPEAN NOBILITY AT HOME IN LEUVEN

The House of Arenberg has belonged to the high nobility since the sixteenth century. Firmly rooted in local networks, the family also moved with surprising ease across the European stage. The Arenbergs' numerous foreign contacts enabled them to marry into aristocratic dynasties all over the continent and their cosmopolitan lifestyle is reflected in the diversity of their famous art collection.

The Arenbergs were princes of the Holy Roman Empire who served the Habsburgs and held important political positions at court and in government. They were most in their element on the battlefields of Europe and, once their soldiering days were done, around the tables at which important peace treaties were negotiated.

A strategic marriage with the Croÿ family towards the end of the sixteenth century resulted in the Arenbergs inheriting the estate in Heverlee, complete with castle and surrounding forests. The building underwent a series of architectural alterations over the years in keeping with the tastes of its residents and the fashions of the time. Meanwhile, sustainable management of the forests around the Heverlee estate mean that they still function to this day as an immense green lung for the city of Leuven. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ownership of Arenberg Castle and its park passed to Leuven University, which established an extensive science campus there.

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition at M Museum Leuven takes you to an extraordinary world of power and beauty. The Arenbergs were true 'nobles of the sword' who served on the great battlefields of Europe, while their passionate entrepreneurship enabled them to amass immense wealth. As holders of significant political and economic power, the family enjoyed access to the highest cultural circles. They built up an impressive art collection and it is through paintings, prints and other art objects that you can make the acquaintance at M of the mighty Arenberg dynasty. You will find illustrious names here like Rubens, Veronese, Dürer and Jordaens, but you will also be surprised by the generous lifestyle and artistic spirit of this culturally prominent family. Over time, the Arenbergs' art collection was dispersed around the world, in museums and private collections. A selection of their masterpieces has been assembled for this exhibition, making it a unique, one-off reunion.

The exhibition runs from 28 October 2018 until 20 January 2019.

POWER AND BEAUTY: THE ARENBERGS

PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY, STORY OF A COLLECTION

The Arenberg family has been part of the continent's high nobility since as early as the sixteenth century, a position from which it has played a leadership role at European level in a variety of fields. The dynasty's immense landholdings, sophisticated marriage policy and active soldiering enabled it to steadily expand its political power. Meanwhile, the combination of financial prosperity with a passion for art and culture resulted in a series of collections impressive for both their scale and their quality. The exhibition at M Museum reunites masterpieces from those collections to help tell the story of the Arenbergs.

PRINCES AND DUKES – Room 1.G

The first room of the exhibition takes you into the Arenberg family's portrait gallery, inspired by the gallery that greeted guests in the vestibule of Arenberg Castle in Heverlee. Collecting art and patronizing artists was one way for the nobility to distinguish itself and so the family invested generously in art that would immortalize its status, wealth and above all its pedigree. This included the very biggest of names: the iconic equestrian portrait of Albert d'Arenberg that you see in this room, for instance, is by no less a painter than Anthony van Dyck.

Each portrait shows the members of the family at their best: the ladies in impressive gowns, the gentlemen in armour, with sashes, bows and ribbons: bravura and panache aplenty. Family portraits were expected to convey reproductive success and dynastic cohesion, of which the portrait of Charles d'Arenberg (1550–1616) and Anne de Croÿ (1564–1635) with five of their twelve children is an example *par excellence*.

But portraits were not the only means of expressing the family's prestige. You can see the Arenbergs' real crown jewels on the table in the middle of the room: the charters that elevated them to the status of princes of the Holy Roman Empire (1576) and duke (1644) and which provided the ultimate legitimization of their power. A letter from Empress Maria Theresa and a prestigious decoration from Napoleon, meanwhile, testify to the links the family enjoyed with the highest echelons of Europe's aristocracy.

GENERALS AND DIPLOMATS, LANDOWNERS AND ENTREPRENEURS – Room 1.H

The second room focuses on the economic, military and diplomatic power that the Arenbergs exercised over the centuries in Brabant, the Low Countries and Europe. History paintings show parades, tournaments, battles and diplomatic negotiations, which were the achievements in which the Arenbergs took the greatest pride. Works like this formed part of the image-building and reputation management at which the nobility was so adept. Books of arms, meanwhile, testify to their membership of the exclusive chivalric order of the Golden Fleece.

WEALTHY AND ENTERPRISING LANDED ARISTOCRACY

For centuries, the Arenberg family was a textbook example of Europe's mighty landed aristocracy. In addition to holdings in the Low Countries and Germany, they acquired estates in France, Austria, Bohemia and Italy, enabling the family to move across the European stage

with surprising ease. All the same, they always retained strong ties with the Low Countries, as reflected by the Three Cities Salon at Arenberg Castle in Heverlee, the walls of which were graced by three breathtaking views of Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam. The panoramas can now be seen side by side in the exhibition at M.

As befitted 'old' nobility, the Arenbergs lived off their land. This contrasted with the 'third estate' (commoners) and *nouveaux riches*, for whom it was acceptable to make money through banking and commerce. The Arenbergs derived their income from farming, mining and forestry. This brought the family immense wealth when coal was discovered in the nineteenth century beneath their new estates on the right bank of the Rhine –what we now call the Ruhr region. They were already champions by that time when it came to large-scale land ownership in Belgium, while the French branch of the family was among the founders of the Compagnie de Suez, which helped build the Suez Canal and later went on to become one of the most important players in the energy market.

MARRIAGE POLICY

A strategic marriage policy enabled the Arenbergs to expand their territory. The land they obtained through Anne de Croÿ made them the most important noble landowners in the Habsburg Netherlands at a stroke. Anne's legacy also gained them the title Duke of Aarschot, which Emperor Charles V had granted to the Croÿs. The dynasty's prestige and its identification with the Habsburg cause resulted in an increasingly international marriage policy, through which the Arenberg family tree was enriched by a growing number of fellow princes of the Holy Roman Empire and by Spanish, Italian and Austrian aristocrats.

GENERALS

But strategic marriages were by no means the only way to acquire new territory: the Arenbergs were above all active on the battlefield. As seasoned generals, they were involved in just about every armed conflict in Europe from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. They fought mostly on behalf of the House of Habsburg, which turned constantly to the counts and dukes of Arenberg in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, for political and diplomatic as well as military services. They proudly bore the titles of admiral of the Flemish fleet, captain-general of Hainaut and field marshal of the imperial armies.

The Arenberg men's active soldiering had the secondary consequence that their wives were left to oversee the family's business interests, not to mention the fact that quite a few male scions were killed prematurely. In the latter instance, the wives' management of the estates proved more than temporary. When a husband failed to return from the war, the widow or dowager was expected to preside over the children and property and it is safe to say that many Arenberg women developed in this way into extremely powerful ladies. Margaret de la Marck, Countess of Arenberg, for instance, outlived her husband, who died at the beginning of the Eighty Years' War (1568), by over three decades.

DIPLOMATS

Male Arenbergs who managed to survive several military campaigns were often granted diplomatic missions afterwards, enabling them to expand their political and social power even further. They enjoyed a prominent position around the negotiating table and were thus viewed for centuries as the leading nobles of the Low Countries. The exhibition includes a painting, for example, of the signing of the Treaty of London (1604) during the Somerset House Conference. The work shows Charles d'Arenberg as one of the emissaries who negotiated the end of the Spanish-English War. The Arenberg family belonged to the select club that determined the fate of Europe.

GATHERING POWER, COLLECTING ART

Power goes hand in hand with appearances, since anyone who is powerful and wishes to remain so needs to communicate that power. Opulence, display and grandeur were thus an important part of life for a noble family like the Arenbergs. Artistic goods were needed to demonstrate their wealth, enhance their prestige and perpetuate and legitimize their power. In this way, the family played a prominent role for generations as exemplars of fine living and good taste as expressed through aspects such as lifestyle and fashion, fine art and architecture.

PARKS AND CASTLES – Room 1. I

By the nineteenth century, the Arenbergs owned a variety of castles and estates in Europe. The family's favourite residences in the Low Countries had included Enghien and Heverlee since the seventeenth century. They purchased the first of these from the French crown and we know what its Baroque park looked like from etchings by Romeyn de Hooghe in a seventeenth-century 'garden book' dedicated to the duke. Heverlee was inherited through the Croÿs along with the duchy of Aarschot, which would prove to be one of the Arenbergs' most profitable landholdings. In this room, you can see drawings that depict the duchy and which formed the basis of the famous Croÿ Albums. The Arenbergs made their mark on each landscape they owned, while their commitment to the local communities is reflected in their support for monasteries and beguinages. A typical form of local patronage was the ceremonial guild chains they donated to shooting associations, which are sure to have enhanced the dynasty's popularity among local people.

So intense was the urge for splendour and display that the high nobility incurred constant debts in order to live up to expectations. Building and rebuilding were a particularly onerous expense. The Arenbergs had to mortgage their most profitable landholding, the duchy of Aarschot, for virtually the entire eighteenth century. Paradoxically, their status obliged them constantly to live beyond their means.

WARDROBE AND STAGING – Room 1.J

This room offers a glimpse into the life of a European noble family. At the centre is a catwalk with authentic costumes, masquerade outfits and ethnographic pieces. The display evokes the atmosphere of the masquerades organized in eighteenth-century Brussels, following which the

clothing ended up in the dressing-up box, before reappearing as theatrical costumes at the end of the nineteenth century.

Theatre and performance featured prominently in the world of the Arenbergs. The eighteenth-century nobility was gripped by a veritable mania for the stage, frequently taking on the role of actors themselves and staging plays in their own private quarters, complete with appropriate costumes and sets. Theatre featured particularly prominently in the life of Léopold-Philippe d'Arenberg, who ran the Brussels theatre La Monnaie for several years in the mid-eighteenth century, together with the Duke of Ursel and the Marquis of Deinze. He also invited the actors to perform at the private theatre at Enghien Castle. Shortly before his death, Léopold-Philippe had his theatre in Heverlee remodelled. The family continued to organize private performances there until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Around 1720, a passion for fabrics, interior textiles and technology led Duke Léopold-Philippe to create his own factory at Enghien to produce luxurious, high-quality silks. Painted interior views from the nineteenth century provide a picture of aristocratic homes and the occasional glimpse of everyday life. Watercolours like this formed a new strand at the time in noble self-representation and were produced either by professional artists or by painter princesses.

THE HEIRS OF CROÿ AND DE LA MARCK – Room 1.K.a

The urge for prestige is timeless. Noble families liked to show off their privileged position by collecting art and patronizing artists. The Arenbergs took the Croÿs and de la Marcks as their model in this regard, the Renaissance prince Charles de Croÿ having set the tone as a patron of the arts and bibliophile. Alabaster sculptures from the Celestine monastery in Heverlee are combined in this room with two paintings by Veronese and a canvas by Frans Floris. Charles' library was also legendary and was sold in 1614, as recorded in one of the earliest auction catalogues.

The *Honor* tapestry from the *Gloria Immortalis* series belonged to the de la Marck family. Jean de Ligne gained ownership of it, along with the Arenberg name, through his marriage to Margaret de la Marck. Tapestries were a familiar status symbol in noble circles and the *Gloria Immortalis* series performed that role with aplomb at the Arenberg Palace in Brussels until the beginning of the twentieth century.

GALLERY AND CABINET – Room 1.K.b

The Arenbergs were famed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not only as military commanders but as art lovers too. They commissioned works from contemporaries like Rubens and Van Dyck and also built up a collection of antique sculpture. In the nineteenth century, Duke Prosper Louis had a gallery installed at his palace in Brussels to house the collection of paintings. It was known for its Flemish and Dutch masters and European travel guides recommended it as a private museum to visit. The atmosphere of the gallery is evoked here by a wall of masterpieces: portraits, genre scenes and landscapes. The cabinet, meanwhile, housed Egyptian stelae, Greek and Etruscan vases and Celtic jewellery. Religious works from the Low Countries were displayed in and around the palace chapel. The acquisition of the German castle of Nordkirchen in 1903 brought a significant expansion of the collections, including the large canvas here showing the *Discovery of Moses*.

THE LIBRARY – Room 1.L

The French author Voltaire was surprised not to find any books at Arenberg Castle in Enghien, but that building was a hunting lodge and the Arenbergs' real library was located at their residence in Brussels, what is now the Egmond Palace. We present a selection of their book collection here, with sections devoted to genealogy and heraldry, atlases and topography, classical culture and the history of the Low Countries. Other favourite subjects in European aristocratic culture included chivalric orders, military engineering, fencing and dressage.

The Arenbergs also collected musical manuscripts, such as this unique score by Vivaldi. Some of the dukes were notable bibliophiles. The large collection of Middle Dutch literature was particularly noteworthy, including early printed books or incunabula and other precious works in the *collection spéciale*. Libraries also traditionally featured a cabinet of prints, as represented here by an exceptional sixteenth-century album containing virtually the entire print output of Albrecht Dürer.

THE ARENBERG QUALITY MARK – Room 1.M

The family's collections were so famous that 'Arenberg' became a mark of quality. Items now scattered all over the world – some of which have been reunited in this gallery of honour – bear the Arenberg name to this day. They are art objects of a highly varied nature and origin, ranging from an Ottonian-era Evangeliary to an exotic 'colcha' with an Indo-Portuguese interpretation of stories from classical antiquity.

In this exhibition you have witnessed the history, status and lifestyle of the House of Arenberg – a family that shaped the political and cultural development of Europe for five centuries. Thanks to the Arenberg mark of quality, the objects in this room form part of that illustrious history and hence assume a deeper significance, an additional aura connected to a wider European story.

MASTERPIECES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CURATORS' CHOICE

MARK DEREZ – KU LEUVEN

EQUESTRIAN PORTRAIT OF ALBRECHT D'ARENBERG

FROM THE VAN DYCK STUDIO



Studio of Anthony van Dyck, Equestrian Portrait of Albert of Arenberg. KU Leuven, Art Collection
© KU Leuven - Bruno Vandermeulen

‘This portrait of an Arenberg after Van Dyck is an iconic image. Seated high up in his saddle, the horseman is a model of self-control and assertiveness. This is the theatre of power. The equestrian portrait was also in keeping with the self-image of the high nobility and that of the Arenbergs in particular. These were no dandies but soldiers through and through: they owed their prestige not to their behaviour at court but to their deeds on the battlefield, where they spilled their blood and not infrequently died in action.’

PETER CARPREAU – M MUSEUM LEUVEN
TWO PAINTINGS FROM THE BUCKINGHAM SERIES
BY PAOLO VERONESE



Paolo Veronese and workshop, Christ and the Samaritan Woman, c. 1585 © Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien



Paolo Veronese and workshop, Lot and his Daughters, c. 1585 © Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien

‘The two paintings from the Duke of Buckingham Series are a wonderful example of Paolo Veronese’s late work. We see an artist at the height of his powers: the grandeur, colours and composition are all executed to perfection. The work also offers an excellent reflection of the nobility’s international view of art and culture. It belonged to Charles de Croÿ’s collection and several European families expressed an interest in the work following his death. The Duke of Buckingham eventually purchased the series. The metamorphosis of these paintings following their thorough restoration is enough in itself to justify a visit to the exhibition.’

ANNE VERBRUGGE – KU LEUVEN
MASQUERADE COSTUME FROM ARENBERG CASTLE



Masquerade costume, Brussels, before 1783. KU Leuven, Art Collection
© KU Leuven – Stany Dederen

‘Thirty years ago, I found three large chests containing over 300 items of clothing in the *Fumoir* at Arenberg Castle. It turned out to be the costumes that the Arenbergs used in the castle theatre towards the end of the nineteenth century. For me, it marked the beginning of a prolonged process of research and conservation. You can admire several of the costumes during the exhibition on an aristocratic catwalk, including this elegant shepherdess’s outfit. It’s a mute witness to an aristocratic pastime: theatre and masquerades.’

OTHER MASTERPIECES

THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY OF LONDON IN 1604 IN THE PRESENCE OF CHARLES D'ARENBERG, ANONYMOUS, C. 1604 (NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON)

Charles d'Arenberg became one of the most prominent noblemen at the court of Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella, the governors of the Southern Netherlands, who sent him on regular diplomatic missions. Charles was also present at the crucial peace negotiations that led to the Treaty of London between Spain, the Southern Netherlands and England in 1604. The treaty put an end to almost twenty years of war between England and Spain and this painting from the National Portrait Gallery in London commemorates its signing. Eleven representatives from England, Spain and the Southern Netherlands were involved in the negotiations. The envoys are shown sitting around a large conference table in Somerset House.

THE AWAKENING OF THE ARTS, FRANS FLORIS (MUSEO DE ARTE, PONCE)

'A very excellent piece with nine sleeping muses' is how the artists' biographer Karel van Mander once described this painting. It originally belonged to the art lover Nicolaes Jonghelinck of Middelburg, before entering the collection of Charles de Croÿ, the inventory of which describes the image as the 'Seven Sleeping Liberal Arts with Mars'. So are these the muses or the Liberal Arts?

If we examine the painting scene by scene, we see Mars, the god of war, being disarmed and led away by Prudentia (wisdom) and Fortitudo (strength). In the foreground, ten women are awakened by Mercury, a man with a laurel wreath on his head and a sceptre in his hand. Contrary to Karel van Mander's opinion, therefore, these cannot be the nine muses. As described in Croÿ's inventory, the women actually represent the seven Liberal Arts, along with Architecture, Sculpture and Painting.

ROULEAU D'ARENBERG CRUSADER'S SCROLL, C. 1300 (PRIVATE COLLECTION)

This medieval scroll dating from around 1300 illustrates the story of the First Crusade which began in 1096 and tells of the foundation of the first Christian kingdom in Jerusalem in 1099. It also traces the history of the early crusades and the creation of the first Latin Kingdom or Crusader States in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. The final part of the scroll is missing.

The scroll was thoroughly researched recently and proved to be quite extraordinary, not least because of the way the story is presented. The document is 33 cm wide and 267 cm long, which is a very unusual format for scrolls of this type. The identity of its author and where it was made remain a mystery.

The text was written in French and is divided into columns, thus creating a timeline with the history of the Latin Kingdom in the Mediterranean. One column tells the story of the establishment of the County of Edessa, one of the first Crusader states on what is today the border between Turkey and Syria. Another column focuses on the foundation of the Principality of Antioch, while the final column of text is devoted to the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The centremost illustration with lines and medallions contains illustrations of the cities and the names of the kings, princes and barons who took part in the crusades. The connecting lines show the relationship between them.

EMBROIDERED BEDSPREAD – THE ARENBERG COLCHA

This bedspread is an Arenberg heirloom. It is a 'colcha', which means quilt in Portuguese. Colchas originated in Indo-European culture and were used as tablecloths, floor coverings or bedspreads. They found their way into European art collections via Portuguese merchants as early as the sixteenth century. Experts identify similarities between this colcha and the seventeenth-century coverlets and other decorative textiles produced in the Hugli region of Bengal. Textiles were some of the most costly commodities for many years and Bengal was the region's most important centre for their production.

Although the bedspread was made in the east, the exquisitely embroidered images are clearly inspired by Western classical antiquity. We see episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Labours of Hercules and the lesser-known story of the singer and harpist Arion, written by the ancient historian Herodotus. Also note the central image, in which you can see Jupiter punishing Phaethon for losing control of the horses harnessed to the sun chariot. Phaethon is a hair's breadth away from incinerating the earth and the supreme god is forced to intervene, bringing down the chariot with a thunderbolt and killing its driver. According to researchers, Phaethon is intended here as a symbol of the rebellious Dutch provinces, which had to be tamed by the Spanish king.

Bedspreads like this were regularly presented as diplomatic gifts by members of the Hapsburg court, with which the House of Arenberg was closely connected.

MUSICAL SCORE BY VIVALDI

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, members of the Arenberg family took a great interest in contemporary music. Music lessons were part of their education and the Arenbergs also actively supported musical life by financing theatres, opera houses and musicians. This passion led to the establishment of a music library, which already ran to 1,500 scores in the seventeenth century.

The House of Arenberg was in contact with musicians all over Europe, including Mozart and Haydn. The collection contained scores from the Baroque, classical and romantic periods. Today these rare compositions are preserved in the Arenberg archive in Enghien, where a manuscript by Vivaldi was discovered a few years ago.

How did the score come to be in the collection? Credit has to go to Duke Léopold-Philippe d'Arenberg, who lived in the first half of the eighteenth century. He was in contact with Italian impresarios, musicians and singers who were involved in productions of Antonio Vivaldi's work. This probably explains how these two hand-written scores with arias found their way into the Arenberg collection.

PETER PAUL RUBENS, YOUNG WOMAN WITH CURLY HAIR, C. 1618-1620 (LOS ANGELES, HAMMER MUSEUM)

This portrait of a young woman with curls is one of the many works by Rubens that could be seen in the Arenberg collections in past centuries. The family enjoyed strong links with the Antwerp Baroque painter. Rubens picked up the courtly etiquette that stood him in such good

stead in his later diplomatic career during the time he spent at the court of Duchess Marguerite de Ligne-Arenberg.

KUNST STUCK ALBRECHT DÜRERS. A LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ALBUM WITH OVER TWO HUNDRED ENGRAVINGS BY ALBRECHT DÜRER (PRIVATE COLLECTION)

This sixteenth-century album contains virtually the entire printed output of the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. Binding prints was a traditional way of preserving collections of this kind and gives an idea of how prints were viewed during the Ancien Régime. This copy is a German-bound album that found its way into the Arenberg collection following the purchase of Schloss Nordkirchen in 1903.

Via this link <https://mleuven.prezly.com> you can access our pressroom where you will find a selection of photos. Other photos can be made available upon request.

SEVERAL NOTEWORTHY SCIONS OF THE HOUSE OF ARENBERG

The marriage of **Hedwige de Ligne** (1877–1938) and Duke Engelbert-Marie d’Arenberg (1872–1949) in 1897 put the seal on a centuries-long relationship between the two noble families. Besides being a dynastic project, it also entailed an extraordinary real-estate operation, as the Lignes and Arenbergs were Belgium’s top landowners. The duchess added further arable land just across the Dutch border in the shape of the Hedwige Polder, which is now scheduled for reflooding. For his part, the then Duke of Arenberg had the Midas touch: coal had been discovered beneath his German estates – especially in the Ruhr – to which the duke was entitled to a tenth of the proceeds. The Arenbergs grew fabulously wealthy as a result and Hedwige featured in the society magazines as the wife of a German property magnate. The couple hosted the German Kaiser at Arenberg Palace in Brussels in 1910. The Hungarian society portraitist Gyula Benczur painted her as a *grande dame* of the *belle époque*, in which guise she also appears in Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Léopold-Philippe d’Arenberg (1690–1754) perfectly matched the profile of successive dukes of Arenberg as ‘nobles of the sword’ who offered the sovereign their military service. He was inducted into the elite Order of the Golden Fleece at the age of nine and a portrait shows him dressed in the child’s version of the Order’s regalia. When he was fifteen, he took command over an infantry regiment, following in the footsteps of his father who had died in the Great Turkish War in 1691 when Léopold-Philippe was just one year old. He proved more fortunate than his father and survived all the battles at which he was present, despite never missing an important campaign. The duke began his military career at the beginning of the eighteenth century at the time of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–13). He subsequently fought in the War of the Polish Succession (1737) and rounded off his career mid-century with the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48). By then, however, he was serving as a diplomat and no longer in the thick of battle. Léopold-Phillipe made his presence felt in the field of culture too, corresponding with Voltaire and setting up a silk-making factory in Enghien.

Like his ancestors, **Louis-Engelbert d’Arenberg** (1750–1820) was destined for a military career. However, during a hunting party at Enghien in 1775, the testosterone-fuelled young men began to jump onto the tables and shoot their guns into the air. A stray round hit the twenty-five-year-old Louis-Engelbert in the face, leaving him blind. All the same, he went on to lead a very active life: he travelled widely, was a fervent art collector and a patron of the sciences. He set up Leuven’s first experimental physics laboratory, for instance, on the site where M Museum stands and donated a small steam engine. He also funded the first hot-air balloon that Jan-Pieter Minckelers launched in Leuven. The same coal gas that powered the balloon was used for gas lighting, making Minckelers a local hero. Louis-Engelbert (1750–1820) was similarly enlightened, though in a political sense. As a democratically-minded aristocrat, however, he came into conflict with his Habsburg master, the ‘enlightened despot’ Emperor Joseph II. The blind duke had to kiss his political career goodbye, yet still emerged unscathed from the successive political regimes of his revolutionary era, from Napoleon to King William I of the United Netherlands.

Léopold-Engelbert d'Arenberg (born 1956) is the current Duke of Arenberg and the thirteenth to bear the title. His passion for the history of his family and of Europe is expressed in a variety of ways, including prizes and conferences to encourage young historians to communicate their research to a wide audience. The duke views this exhibition too as an opportunity to share this knowledge with others. The Arenberg Festival, of which the exhibition at M forms part, came about with his collaboration and that of the Arenberg Foundation.

THE CURATORS

This exhibition is curated by Peter Carpreau, Mark Derez and Anne Verbrugge. Peter Carpreau is the curator, conservator and director of the Old Masters Department at M Museum Leuven. Mark Derez is the archivist at KU Leuven, who teaches and publishes regularly on the history of Leuven. Anne Verbrugge works as a curator 'Artistic Heritage' at KU Leuven.

The three curators are available for interviews. Requests for interviews can be sent to Philippe Mertens, philippe.mertens@leuven.be.

PARTNERS

The partners behind the exhibition are M - Museum Leuven, KU Leuven University Archive and Art Heritage Department, KU[N]ST Leuven and the Arenberg Foundation.

PUBLICATION

ARENBERG

PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY, STORY OF A COLLECTION

Edited by Mark Derez, Soetkin Vanhauwaert and Anne Verbrugge

The Arenbergs were part of a high nobility that owned large estates and whose interests extended across national borders. They featured prominently on Europe's battlefields and drew power, wealth and prestige from their military role. The family lived a princely lifestyle with an art collection of superior quality to match. Works were commissioned from contemporaries like Rubens, Van Dyck, and later Watteau. In the nineteenth century, the Duke of Arenberg had a gallery installed at his palace in Brussels that became known for its Flemish and Dutch masters, including Bruegel and Jordaens, Rembrandt and Vermeer. The travel guides of the time firmly recommended it as a private museum worthy of a special visit. Collecting art and patronizing artists are a traditional part of aristocratic culture.

The publication has been produced by KU Leuven in collaboration with the Arenberg Foundation.

Available for purchase at M – Museum Leuven, the University Library of Leuven and the Arenberg Foundation, for the price of € 49.

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OPENING HOURS

Daily 11:00–18:00

Wednesday Closed

Thursday 11:00–22:00

TICKETS

Book your tickets quickly and easily at www.arenbergleuven.be/en/tickets

ARENBERG COMBI-TICKET

Combine the exhibition at M Museum Leuven with a visit to the exhibition at the University Library with a value-for-money Arenberg Combi-ticket.

Price: € 16

The Combi-ticket gives you admission to:

- The 'Power and Beauty' exhibition (incl. audioguide)
- The 'Noble Living' exhibition
- M - Museum's permanent collection
- Leuven University Library and its tower

TICKET POWER AND BEAUTY

- Standard admission: € 12.00
- Concessions: € 5.00–10.00
- 19–25 year-olds: € 5.00
- 18 years and younger: free
- KU Leuven Culture Pass: free
- Including audioguide

GROUP VISITS

The two exhibitions are perfect for a group visit, whether it's a family get-together, a club outing or a corporate event. Special packages are available for guided tours.

Please book your tour at least three weeks in advance at <https://www.arenbergleuven.be/en/group-visits>

COMBI-GUIDED TOUR 'POWER AND BEAUTY' AND 'NOBLE LIVING'

- € 130 per guide
- Admission € 16 per person
- Max. 25 people
- 2 x 90 min.

POWER AND BEAUTY

- € 65 per guide
- Fewer than 15 people: admission € 10 per person
- More than 15 people: admission € 8 per person
- Max. 25 people
- 90 min.

PRESS

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PRESS PHOTOS

Via this link <https://mleuven.prezly.com> you can access our pressroom where you will find a selection of photos. Other photos can be made available upon request.