

KBR museum



The KBR museum
turns the page 📖

Table of contents

Press release	3
The enemy of every manuscript: light	5
A few top items in the spotlight	7
Manuscripts with a sequel	10
Partners	13
Cultural programme	14
Practical information	18
Health measures	19

Press release

On 11 May 2021, the KBR museum will be turning the page: from then on, there will be a completely new selection of manuscripts and miniatures from the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy on display.

As manuscripts are highly sensitive to light, they must not be exhibited permanently. The “new” museum will be displaying some top items with beautiful miniatures such as the “Recueil des histoires de Troie” or “Le Livre des faits d’armes et de chevalerie”.

Good news for foodies too: they can finally enjoy food and drinks on the rooftop terrace, as Albert, our restaurant, is also opening its doors on 11 May.

A make-over every six months

On 18 September 2020, the KBR museum opened its doors to display a national treasure that had remained hidden for 600 years: the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy and its beautiful collection of 15th-century manuscripts. The museum will be displaying a new selection of manuscripts from the Burgundian library every six months. This is good news for the frequent visitor: they will see new items each time they visit.

A ‘new’ museum, but why?

The reason is simple: the manuscripts are too fragile to be exhibited permanently. The materials are highly sensitive to light and because a book is always exhibited open, the binding would come under strain from its own weight. After 6 months, the manuscripts go back into the vault for a rest.



What exactly is changing?

Top items such as the *Horloge de Sapience* will be retrieved from the vault, while other gems from the selection that is currently on display will be stored away. Visitors have been able to admire the first volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* in the past few months, and now the second volume will be exhibited. For some of the manuscripts in the KBR museum, we will be turning the page, so that the visitor can admire a new miniature from the book. There will be a total of 77 new manuscripts to discover from 11 May 2021: a completely new visit experience. In short, the KBR museum lends itself perfectly to a half-yearly repeat visit.

6 months of light, 6 years of rest

At the KBR museum, we choose to display the manuscripts to the public for 6 months; that gives everyone the chance to discover the beauty of the dukes' books. However, it does mean that we need to store them away again in the archives for 6 years afterwards, far away from light, for a rest. After all, in line with internationally accepted standards, parchment may be exposed to light for a maximum of 12,500 lux hours per year. By allowing them to rest for long enough after exhibition, we will not be endangering the manuscripts and we can cherish them for future generations.

Digital collection

The manuscripts that were previously on display at the museum can still be admired online in the KBR's digital library. Almost all the manuscripts from the Burgundian Library are available to browse through at www.kbr.be. You can zoom in on the miniatures down to the tiniest detail with the application.



The enemy of every manuscript: light

Manuscripts can take a beating: the parchment of the books from the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy still looks impeccable after 600 years. As do the miniatures. Yet they have one big enemy: light. Of course, a slight amount of light is indispensable if one wants to exhibit manuscripts. That's why you'll find new manuscripts in our showcases every 6 months.

Sturdy but vulnerable

Quite a few of the manuscripts that are on display in the KBR museum have survived looting, fire, waterlogging or vermin. In the museum's specially designed display cases, they are safe because the temperature and humidity are constantly being monitored. But there is another, creeping danger: exhibiting a medieval manuscript means exposing its miniatures and written text to light, the enemy of every book.

Light and manuscripts: not the best fit

A manuscript usually consists of materials of natural origin: leather, fabric, wood, parchment, pigments, and dyes. Light rays accelerate the aging of these materials by providing energy for chemical reactions that can damage these materials. Light can, for example, cause the illumination and calligraphy in medieval manuscripts to fade over time. Fortunately, we can control most types of light.



Is all light bad?

Just as for humans, some wavelengths of light are more harmful than others:

- Ultraviolet radiation causes photochemical reactions that can cause the parchment pages in a manuscript to yellow and become brittle.
- Infrared radiation causes heating, which accelerates the chemical and physical breakdown of parchment.
- Radiation from visible light can cause discolorations.

UV and infrared light can be easily avoided in a museum setting, as you don't need them to visually observe a manuscript or miniature. Visible light, however, is essential. Indeed, without this kind of light, visitors see... nothing at all.



How does KBR protect manuscripts from light?

To safely exhibit our manuscript collection, we keep light levels very low:

- The LED lighting in the KBR museum is set at 50 lux, which is the minimum level of lighting needed to perceive the details in miniatures with the naked eye.
- Only LED light is used in the museum: a light source without infrared and ultraviolet radiation. The natural light that enters the museum space is also severely restricted, because it contains ultraviolet and infrared radiation and also has variable light levels, which are difficult to control.
- We regularly change the folios and manuscripts on display. Based on the total dose of light exposure, one can calculate how long a folio can be exposed to light and how long it should rest afterwards. The math is simple: you must consider the amount of light and the duration of exposure.

A few top items in the spotlight

Stratagemata

A three-time consul, governor of Brittany under Vespasian, Sextus Julius Frontinus remains known in history for his *Strategemata*, a treatise on military techniques based on examples from Roman history. Frontinus came from a patrician family and had distinguished himself in the war against the Parthians. On the displayed folio, General Lucius Caecilius Metellus, having defeated the Carthaginians in Sicily, sends the elephants seized from Hasdrubal to Italy on rafts made from assembled barrels. Pachyderms were not very well known in the West, and were more imagined than described from memory; their tusks are almost vertical, they have thin, floppy ears and trunks that are strangely horn-shaped.

This exceptional manuscript, which was illustrated in France in the second half of the 15th century by one or more anonymous miniaturists, was for a time part of the library of Charles V, before becoming a late addition to the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy on an unknown date.

Frontinus, *Stratagemata*
French translation by Jean de Rovroy
France, 1471
ms. 10475, fol. 24r *Lucius Caecilius Metellus embarks his elephants in Sicily*



Le Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie

Considered one of the first female writers, Christine de Pizan, a “simple weak woman” as she was described by some of her disdainful contemporaries, took inspiration for this astonishing work from several Roman authors such as Frontinus and Vegetius, who were known through their French translations. The aim was to bring together a vast amount of literary material to make it accessible to soldiers - including the young dauphin of France who was just 12 years old - and better prepare the Christian armies for war after their massacre at the Battle of Nicopolis. A large part of the text of this copy is thought to have been written by Christine de Pizan herself. Although rather dry, the work was extremely successful.



The English printer William Caxton edited it and translated it into Middle English in 1489. The only illustration in the manuscript depicts the author, in her study in discussion with the goddess Minerva, while a group of knights approaches from the right. This scene in all likelihood shows the workshop of the Master of the City of Ladies, a little known illustrator who probably lived in Paris. The exact circumstances of how this volume became part of the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy are not known.

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie*
France (Paris?), second half of the 15th century
ms. 10476, fol. 3r *Christine de Pizan speaks to the goddess Minerva*

Le Recueil des histoires de Troie

Perhaps of Picardy origin, Raoul Lefèvre remains a little-known author although he is named chaplain to Philip the Good in some manuscripts. But in reality the Burgundian archives do not mention his name. In any case, he writes two texts for the duke. The first, entitled the *Histoire de Jason* (the History of Jason), aims to rehabilitate this character in the events of the discovery of the Golden Fleece instead of Gideon. Written around 1464, the second is known as the *Recueil des histoires de Troie* (A Collection of the Histories of Troy). Lefèvre first evokes the epic of Saturn and Jupiter which leads to the birth of the city of Troy and then the adventures of Hercules who destroys the city twice. The twenty-two miniatures in the first volume are by Loyset Liédet. Here we can identify his very recognisable style: rather neutral and unindividualised faces; slender and tapering figures, often too large; lively but stereotyped gestures of the characters which recall the shortcomings of the courtly style. They are inserted in well-arranged compositions where often several episodes are represented in unified spaces.



Raoul Lefèvre, *Le Recueil des histoires de Troie*, book 1
Southern Netherlands (Bruges), circa
1464
ms. 9261, fol. 19v *Dardanus killing his
brother Jasius*

Manuscripts with a sequel

Chroniques de Hainaut

The well-known opening miniature from the first volume of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* was exhibited until 9 May. The second volume is now on display at the KBR museum. The illustrations in this volume are by the illuminator Willem Vrelant and his main assistant, “le Maître de la Vraie Cronicque descoce”. On the displayed folio, the pagan king Radbod (7th century), who was hostile to Christianity and refused to be baptised, is abducted to the underworld by four horned demons with eagle or dog heads, slimy bodies and bat-like wings. This happens under the eyes of St. Wulfran, the evangelist of Friesland.



Jacques de Guise, *Chroniques de Hainaut*, vol. II. Translation by Jean Wauquelin
Southern Netherlands (Mons and Bruges), second half of the 15th century
ms. 9243, fol. 186v *King Radbod carried away by the demons*

Histoire de Charles Martel

From 18 September 2020 through 9 May 2021, visitors were able to admire the second volume of the *Histoire de Charles Martel* at the KBR museum. It is now the third volume's turn. Put into prose based on rhyming texts, this volume of the book was copied in circa 1465 by David Aubert on the orders of Philip the Good. The Duke of Burgundy vowed undying admiration to the “King of the Franks”, who defeated the Arabs in Poitiers. In the eyes of Philip the Good, Charles Martel, like Charlemagne, was a perfect example of a valiant knight and defender of Christianity. In the inventory of the ducal library produced on the death of Philip the Good, the work was one of the 15 prestigious volumes that remained unfinished. In his desire to create “order” in his father’s library, Charles the Bold had all these “non lyés ne historiés” (bound nor illuminated) volumes completed.



The illustration of the Codex was produced by Loyset Liédet, a prolific illustrator who lived for a time in Bruges. On the displayed folio, in a rather unusual scene, he portrays Charles the Bold surprising David Aubert in his scriptorium by hiding behind a column. The duke’s motto, “Je lay emprins” (I undertook it) appears in white letters on the wall. This inscription evokes that at the back of the painting *Arnolfini Portrait* by Van Eyck. Liédet depicts many references to this painting in this miniature: the convex mirror in which two silhouettes are reflected, the suspended rosary, the light, the oranges and the brush.

Histoire de Charles Martel, vol. III
The Netherlands (Bruges and Brussels),
second half of the 15th century
ms. 8, fol. 7r *David Aubert in his
scriptorium*

Breviary of Philip the Good

From 11 May 2021, the first part of this breviary is making way for the second volume. The manuscript was manufactured for Philip the Good. Despite its exceptional character, it is not included in the inventory of the Library of 1467-1469 drawn up after the death of the duke. According to the liturgy and the calendar, the texts follow Parisian practice. The choice of a Parisian breviary is not surprising for a Valois for whom France, beyond political conflicts and tensions, remained a model. However, if the texts are indeed French, the same cannot be said for the illustrations. In all likelihood, the manuscript was copied from a Parisian model and then illuminated in the Southern Netherlands. Most of the illustrations are by Willem Vrelant, whose workshop is known to have been in Bruges in the second half of the 15th century. The frontispiece scene depicts God the Father seated on an imposing throne flanked by two angels in prayer. He holds his son before him on the cross, the base of which rests on the earthly orb. The dove of the Holy Spirit lands on the wooden crossbar. In the corners, the symbols of the four evangelists holding philacteries are inscribed: the lion for Mark, the bull for Luke, the angel for Matthew and the eagle for John.



Breviary [of Philip the Good] for use in Paris
France (Dijon, St Esprit Hospital), circa 1450-1460
ms. 9026, fol. 1r *The Holy Trinity and the symbols of the tetramorph*

Partners

The KBR museum saw the light thanks to collaboration and support from the Belgian Buildings Agency, Toerisme Vlaanderen, the Baillet-Latour Fund and the non-profit organisation Friends of KBR.

The **Belgian Buildings Agency** is the federal real estate authority for the federal public service and Belgium's national architectural and historic patrimony. The organisation invests heavily to maintain the country's patrimony and adapt this to the evolving context. The Belgian Buildings Agency has played a key role in the infrastructural and interior design work in KBR's premises. Thanks to them visitors of KBR will enjoy more frequent opportunities in the future to admire the magnificent heritage collection in the renovated exhibition spaces.

Toerisme Vlaanderen promotes the sustainable development in tourism and of the tourist industry in Flanders and Brussels with a view to improving economic return, employment and social welfare. Toerisme Vlaanderen has supported KBR by adapting the reception infrastructure, the museum layout and improving accessibility. As such, KBR can satisfy the needs of every (inter)national visitor seeking a first class visitor experience.

The **Baillet-Latour Fund** focuses on encouraging, developing and promoting human excellence in Belgium, with a rigorous but open approach to social evolution. The Fund's mission is to preserve Belgian heritage with the allocation of funds, prizes and grants. The Fund is regularly involved in restoration projects and, in this way, contributes to managing Belgium's patrimony. The Baillet-Latour Fund supported the restoration of the medieval manuscripts.

The **non-profit organisation Friends of KBR** supports KBR's activities in a number of ways. For example, it supports KBR in purchasing collection items and funding. The organisation financed the scale model of a crane from Bruges.

Cultural programme

Each time the KBR museums turns the page, we are organising activities and events to give visitors the chance to further their knowledge of the Burgundian Library.

Foire du Livre 6.05.21 - 16.05.21

The Brussels Book Fair is largely taking place online this year, with KBR as the décor for various broadcasts. On the eve of the festival, on 5 May, a symbolic marriage between the French-speaking author Thomas Gunzig and the Flemish writer Lize Spit place at the Nassau Chapel. Another literary tête-à-tête between Bart van Loo and Thomas Gunzig to be broadcast on 16 May also takes place at the KBR museum. From 6 May through 16 May, meetings with authors will be filmed in KBR's Newspaper reading room.

More information: www.flb.be



Lunch at Albert's terrace From 11.05.21

Foodies can indulge their taste for gastronomy at Albert, the brand-new restaurant on the 5th floor of the KBR building. With over 1,000 m² in surface area and a view of the Palais de Justice, its terrace is a hidden jewel, just like the Burgundian collection.

Albert will be offering dishes and drinks to delight your taste buds throughout the day. In the evening, visitors can go there for weekly cultural events under the moniker of "albert.culture". The programme consists of a selection of resident DJs, concerts and collaborations with key figures from the Brussels scene. Original events themed around tasty food and drinks will also be held there regularly.

The restaurant will be officially opening its (terrace) doors on 11 May. With its choice of local and high-quality ingredients and drinks with a unique story, Albert is treasuring time.

More information: www.albert.brussels



Lectures

KBR is organising some illuminating lectures to accompany the museum turning the page. This time, listeners will find out whether the most beautiful paintings by the Flemish primitives can really be found in the books.

Till-Holger Borchert: “Van Jan van Eyck tot Simon Bening: schilderen op perkament”

27.06.21 (11 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

In this lecture, to be given in Dutch, Till-Holger explains the ways in which the miniaturists' language of imagery differs from that of the painters from the 15th century. He will shepherd listeners along with him through several striking examples from the museum.



Véronique Bücken: “Peinture et miniature à l’aube de la Renaissance dans les Pays-Bas bourguignons”

10.07.21 (11 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

Véronique Bücken will take listeners with her on a journey through the world of the Flemish painters from the 15th and 16th century in this lecture, to be given in French, using some examples being exhibited at the KBR museum.

More information: www.kbr.be

Workshops

The perfect way of getting to know medieval art is to make your own start. People visiting the KBR museum on 29 June or 1 July will be able to take part in a free creative workshop on calligraphy or painting miniatures.



Workshop “Writing with a quill” 29.06.21 (2 p.m. - 5 p.m.)

During this workshop, visitors will learn calligraphy as a medieval writer would have, and will be copyists for a few minutes. They will doubtless be left with greater admiration for the artists who provided the calligraphy in the impressive manuscripts from the KBR museum centuries ago.

Workshop “Painting with pigments” 1.07.21 (2 p.m. - 5 p.m.)

In medieval illustrators’ studios, there were no boxes of watercolour paints or tubes of gouache to be found. Instead of these, they made their colours from natural materials or with pigments from far corners of the globe. In the workshop on painting with pigments, young and old will learn how fun it is to make paint from pigment powder and gum arabic, and will paint a detail from a manuscript or a coat of arms themselves.

More information: www.kbr.be



Practical information

Opening times

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

Closed on Mondays and certain bank holidays (1 January, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, 1 May, Thursday of Ascension Day, Whit Monday, 21 July, 15 August, 1 November, 11 November, 25 December)

Location

Mont des Arts 28, Brussels (metro “Gare Centrale”, tram/bus stop “Place Royale”)

Access via the main entrance of KBR.

The building and museum tour are accessible to people with a disability. Several disabled parking bays can be found near Boulevard de l’Empereur 4.

Tickets

Standard: € 11

Concessions: € 8

65+, students, groups of min. 15 people, FED+ card

Free

<18 years, visitors with a disability (+ 1 accompanying adult), Belgian teachers (Lerarenkaart/carte PROF), jobseekers, ICOM card, PASS musées, Belspo card, Brussels card, Brussels Card Discovery, My Flanders Pass, valid press card

PASS musées: € 59

The PASS musées gives visitors one year’s access to the KBR museum and 180 other museums in Belgium.

Museum visit by train

SNCB offers a reduction on train journeys for visitors of the KBR museum. Thanks to the SNCB code on their online admission ticket to the museum, visitors can buy a Discovery Ticket which gives them a 50% reduction on their journey to Brussels-Central and back.



Health measures

- 1. The number of visitors is limited to 50 people per hour.**
- 2. There is hand sanitiser gel in various locations and disinfectant wipes for audio devices.**
- 3. A digital stylus is provided for using the interactive screens.**
- 4. The museum is fully disinfected every day (twice a day for risk points).**
- 5. Visitors do not pass each other and numbers are limited in confined spaces.**
- 6. Wearing a mask is mandatory, as is maintaining physical distance.**

Press contacts

PRESS CONTACT KBR

Joachim Spyns
Press Officer

joachim.spyns@kbr.be

+32 (0) 485 46 60 36

+ 32 (0) 2 519 55 97

www.kbr.be

PRESS CONTACTS Be Culture

Séverine Provost
General Manager

Noor Van der Poorten
Project Coordinator
noor@beculture.be

+32 (0) 475 47 29 44

+32 (0) 2 644 61 91

www.beculture.be

