

OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

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The *Baroque Influencers* city festival builds a bridge between the seventeenth century and the present with a varied cultural programme

The exhibition *Baroque Influencers: Jesuits, Rubens and the Art of Persuasion* opens on Saturday 22 April at three central locations in Antwerp's city centre: Museum Snijder&Rockox House, Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library and St Charles Borromeo Church. The exhibition marks the official kick-off for the city festival of the same name, which will run at various locations in Antwerp until November. It is an initiative of UCSIA and the University of Antwerp. This ambitious project is also supported by several partners.

Exhibitions, baroque music concerts in collaboration with AMUZ and the Bach Festival, a lecture series with local and international speakers, and a stunning experience trail for young and old – that's *Baroque Influencers*. At the request of the initiators, UCSIA and the University of Antwerp, the festival coordinator Harold Polis brought more than fifteen cultural centres and organizations on board, including KMSKA, Museum Snijders&Rockox House, Tutti Fratelli and Port of Antwerp-Bruges. You can participate in the festival at various locations in Antwerp's city centre until November 2023. The key question the festival asks is: **why are we still children of the baroque today?**

'Baroque Influencers is a Flemish Masters revival project of Tourism Flanders. It offers both an accessible experience of and an in-depth reflection on art, society and religion in the seventeenth century. The exhibitions highlight our rich past, but they also provide inspiration for the future. Moreover, Baroque Influencers demonstrates that our commitment to the Flemish Masters extends beyond the seventeenth century to include contemporary art. Baroque Influencers is aimed at a wide local and international audience. I wish the city festival every success!' - *Flemish Minister for Tourism Zuhair Demir*

'I am sure that every Antwerp resident and every visitor will look at our city's rich past in a new way thanks to Baroque Influencers. What's more, the city festival's well-filled programme will also encourage people to think about the present and the future.' - *Bart De Wever, Mayor of Antwerp*

'With the festival, we want to look for a valuable compass and refreshing answers to the big questions of our time.' - *Bea Cantillon, UCSIA chairperson, initiator*

Rubens and the Jesuits

With a prestigious exhibition in three historic locations, visitors will have a chance to experience the baroque in a surprising way. In the galleries of St Charles Borromeo Church you can discover the Antwerp of the seventeenth century – a cosmopolitan trading centre in which the Jesuits played a prominent role. Through unique documents, prints and artefacts, we show how the Jesuits tried to persuade their contemporaries.

Museum Snijders&Rockox House focuses on Antwerp's most famous baroque painter, Peter Paul

Rubens. The Jesuits were an important commissioner of Rubens. At their request, he made thirty-nine ceiling paintings for St Charles Borromeo Church, which were lost in the fire of 1718. During Baroque Influencers, we will try to revive that lost art treasure with over forty masterpieces, from Belgium and abroad, by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck and Daniël Seghers.

[>> To the press release of Museum Snijders&Rockox House](#)

In the same breath, you can discover the true story of Nottebohm Hall in the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library. During the seventeenth century, it was the site of the building of the Sodality, a society whose members included Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck and many other baroque artists from Antwerp.

[>> To the press release of Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library](#)

A book accompanies the exhibition, published in Dutch and English by Hannibal Books, with contributions by researchers affiliated with the universities of Antwerp, Leuven and Stuttgart and with various heritage institutions.

[>> More information about the book](#)

The avant-garde in Antwerp

After the baroque, the avant-garde is the most fascinating artistic period we have known in our parts. During the city festival, KMSKA's Print Room rediscovers the art society *De Pelgrim* (1924–30). The exhibition focuses on an underexposed aspect of the historical avant-garde: its religious dimension.

Here, you can rediscover the national and international network of *De Pelgrim* (*The Pilgrim* in English) and the religious community art of the interwar period. Like so many other culture-critical voices, the inspirers of *De Pelgrim* were concerned about the consequences of rampant modernization. To modernize ecclesiastical art, while stemming the tide of modern mass culture, Felix Timmermans, Ernest Van der Hallen and Flor Van Reeth founded *De Pelgrim* at the beguinage of Liège in 1924.

The twelve core members – or 'apostles' – included painters, architects, poets, writers, musicians, designers and theatre-makers. *De Pelgrim* advocated community art and sought to marry modernity with faith. That quest took concrete form in a magazine of the same name and two successful exhibitions in Antwerp, in 1927 and 1930. The Antwerp Jesuit Leonce Reypens was the society's 'spiritual leader' and a co-founder of the Antwerp Ruusbroec Institute. Well-known members included Albert Servaes, Huib Hoste, Renaat Veremans, Gerard Walschap, René Demedts and Marnix Gijzen.

Baroque Influencers today

Antwerp Port House, with a stunning architectural design by Zaha Hadid, forms part of the city trail of Baroque Influencers. This iconic landmark is a symbol of renewal. It is the ideal location for a project focusing on contemporary art in Antwerp. The artistic project at the Port House was curated by Sergio Servellón. The exhibition expands on the tenets of the festival, bringing the dialogue of tradition and renewal into the present.

The Port House itself also features in the programme, which focuses on themes such as sustainability, the energy transition and innovation. At the Port House, Nadia Naveau's work takes

centre stage. Her work symbolizes the entanglement of tradition and renewal. In their opulence and luxury, Naveau's sculptures are closely aligned to the baroque in form.

[>> To the festival's image library](#)

'Big Questions' lecture series

The seventeenth century was a turbulent period. Religious wars, trade and the exploration of the newly discovered New World shook the prevailing world view. Just like today, citizens faced uncertainty. Yet the Jesuits looked to the future with hope and confidence. What is striking is that we are still wrestling with many of the same issues today. Can we find inspiration in the baroque wisdom and solutions of the past? Can their attitude to life offer us a lifeline in this rapidly changing world? Baroque Influencers searches for answers in its 'Big Questions' lecture series, featuring experts such as Frank Vandenbroucke, Elizabeth (Liz) Bucar, Judith Pollmann, Ad Meskens, Ann Doods, Manuel Sintubin, Lieke Stelling and Mirela Altic.

[>> More background on the 'Big Questions' lecture series](#)

A walk through baroque Antwerp with Rudi Mannaerts and De Loodsen

Specially for the festival, the art historian and pastor of St Andrew's Church Rudi Mannaerts has developed a city walk around the city's baroque landmarks. The walk is available online via the Gazet van Antwerpen app. Prefer to hold a real map? You can pick one up at the City of Antwerp tourist information points in Antwerp Central station or Het Steen, or at one of the festival locations in the city centre.

De Loodsen also takes you on a tour. Discover the social influencers who lived in Antwerp's university district in the past five hundred years. What goes on behind the historic façades today? More information via the [website of De Loodsen](#) (in Dutch).

Festive opening on 22 April with Tutti Fratelli

For the festival's grand opening, various free activities will be held on Saturday 22 April in and around Hendrik Conscienceplein, the baroque 'beating heart' of the festival. At 11:00 you can join us in the Reading Room of the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library for a live recording of the Baroque Influencers podcast. What would the influencers of the seventeenth century have thought of our present world? And how do influencers today view that exceptional century and the artistic legacy that is the subject of this festival? Host Anke Verschueren searches for answers with her prominent guests.

From 13:45 Tutti Fratelli will make St Charles Borromeo Church and Hendrik Conscienceplein roar and reverberate with delight. In a blaring, hard-hitting style that comes straight from the heart, they sing of the baroque, the people and the city.

This festival is made possible by the financial support of Tourism Flanders, the Flemish Government, the City of Antwerp, KBC and the Port of Antwerp-Bruges. More information on www.barokkeinfluencers.be.

The festival can also be followed on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Spotify](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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If you have any questions about the festival and/or would like to request an interview with the festival coordinator or one of the organizers or curators, please contact Ellen Van Tichelt (ellen.vantichelt@barokkeinfluencers.be / +32 474 69 13 70).

[>> Download the press kit.](#)