

SNIJDERS ROCKOX | HUIS

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Press release
Exhibition

WANDERLUST: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT LANDSCAPES

Antwerp, Snijders&Rockox House Museum, 13 December 2024 – 31 August 2025

The Snijders&Rockox House is home to a remarkable collection of landscapes and city views, including masterpieces from the 16th and 17th centuries. From the early, idealised panoramas of Joachim Patinir to the Baroque grandeur of paintings by Jan Brueghel the Elder, this series of paintings reflects the development of a popular genre. Many of these masterpieces have been in storage for a long period and offer valuable perspectives on the art of landscape painting.

In this temporary exhibition from our collection, painted landscapes come into their own as a living, theatrical representation. Nature has the leading role, with majestic mountains, picturesque villages and endless skies providing a dramatic setting. At times deserted but sometimes populated by people and animals, each painting carefully creates a scene in which emotions and tensions are further accentuated by the use of light and shadow. How realistic are these distant views? Are they drawn entirely from the painter's imagination? The answer is usually somewhere in between. Each of these works invites the viewer to admire it from closer quarters, pause for reflection and lose themselves in a different reality.



Studio of Joachim Patinir (c. 1485-1524),
Saint Christopher bearing the Christ Child, oil
on panel, 48 x 59.5 cm (inv.no. 77.55).



Jan I Brueghel (1568-1625), *Travellers on the
Way*, oil on copper, 22 x 30 cm (inv.no. 77.118).

A pioneering genre

Although landscape painting has a long history - for example in books of hours and backgrounds in late Mediaeval religious scenes - it was not until the early 16th century that the landscape appeared as an independent genre. In this early phase, nature gradually became the dominant element, with Biblical or mythological characters becoming completely secondary to the landscape itself. The more

prominent role given to the expansive panoramas and distant views had a lot to do with the changing spirit of the age: voyages of discovery and increased mobility, a wider view of the world, the advent of printed books and new world-views all expanded people's perspectives during the Renaissance. Previously - until about the end of the 15th century – religious subjects and portraits were the primary work of a painter's studio, but since the Renaissance space was also made for these secular themes.



Joos II de Momper (1564-1635),
Tobias' Journey, oil on canvas, 90 x 136
cm (inv.no. 77.130).

Old brushes with new strokes

Painters increasingly often left their familiar studios to find fresh inspiration in the open air. In the mid-16th century Pieter Bruegel the Elder travelled to Italy, where he briefly exchanged the glowing landscapes of Brabant for the spectacular topography of the Alps. His admiration for monumental, panoramic views was a decisive factor for many of his colleagues who had remained behind in Antwerp. Forty years later, his son Jan Brueghel the Elder followed in his father's footsteps and continued to refine the art of landscape painting. As well as exploring the more 'exotic' plateaus of Germany, Jan also popularised the everyday beauty of Flemish villages, woods and fields.

Artistic journeys revealed not only new landscapes, but also the strange beings that populated them. Roelant Savery came from Kortrijk and settled in Prague in the early 17th century as court painter of Emperor Rudolf II. At the prince's request, this 'Bruegel of Bohemia' painted the region's impressive mountains and valleys, although his work was further enriched by the Emperor's unique enthusiasm for collecting. Thanks to Rudolf's exotic zoological garden, Savery's painted landscapes became a hunting-ground for lions and leopards.



Roelant Savery (1576-1639),
Landscape with wild animals,
oil on panel, 82.5 x 145 cm
(inv.no. 77.39).

Perfecting perspective

The constant challenge when painting landscapes is the search for the right perspective. Through trial and error, painters discovered techniques such as high horizons and wide foregrounds, altered vanishing lines and the addition of repoussoir elements to enhance the depth and liveliness of the natural world. A bird's eye perspective made representations more realistic and created scope for more wide-ranging narratives.

In the end it was Rubens in the 17th century who moved the story of landscapes into the new century. His landscapes appear realistic, but they can be read with a certain degree of idealism. His focus on everyday life - a hunter stalking their prey or a farmer with a stuck cart - adds to the bucolic atmosphere of his landscapes. Painters like Lucas van Uden continued to pursue this idealised vision of nature. David Teniers II, on the other hand, concentrated more on peasant life, harvest celebrations, village festivals and outdoor life on the fringes of a city, and his great successor was Mattheus van Helmont.



Lucas van Uden (1595-1672/3), *De vastgelopen wagen* (The Stuck Cart), oil on panel, 56 x 90.5 cm (inv.no. 2017.3).



Mattheus van Helmont (1629-1675), *Dorpsfeest met Antwerpen in de verte* (Village festival with Antwerp in the distance), oil on canvas, 80 x 106 cm (private collection, on long-term loan).

For more information and images:

Hildegard Van de Velde and Dr. Maarten Bassens, Curators, Snijders&Rockox House Museum

Hildegard.vandevelde@kbc.be

Maarten.bassens@kbc.be

Tel: 03 201 92 71 / Mobile: 0499 96 53 34

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