THEODOOR VAN LOON
A Caravaggist painter between Rome and Brussels
10 October 2018 - 13 January 2019

Exhibition organized in collaboration with the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium

CENTRE FOR FINE ARTS BRUSSELS
PALEIS VOOR SCHONE KUNSTEN BRUSSEL
WWW.BOZAR.BE
THEODOOR VAN LOON
A CARAVAGGIIST PAINTER BETWEEN
ROME AND BRUSSELS

Curator : Sabine van Sprang

INTRODUCTION

Theodoor van Loon (1581/82 – 1649) is one of the most original and innovative Flemish painters of his generation. Returning from Italy, in the early seventeenth century, Van Loon, like Rubens, introduces the new idiom of artistic creation from Rome to the Southern Netherlands: beginning with Caravaggio, but also by characters such as Barocci, Caracci and Domenichino. Soon admired, he works – as does Rubens – at the court of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella and rubs shoulders with the great scholars of his time. His style is very different, however, from that of the Antwerp master; indeed, throughout the whole of his career, Van Loon remains marked by the great transalpine masters which he studied.

Van Loon thus develops a powerful art that continues to impress till this day with its majestic plasticity. Like Barocci and Caravaggio, he depicts robust, life-sized characters, with broad gestures and full in the face; in the Bolognese style, his compositions are often clear and orderly; but in the manner of the Northern painters, he remains attached to the detail of textures and ornaments.

Essentially religious, his art is also nourished by the ideals of the Counter-Reformation. For if the work of Van Loon embodies a different pictorial ambition to that of his rival Rubens, both artists share a similar élan that was crucial for the history of European art: that of the intellectuals, princes and artists who joined forces to develop a new aesthetic to meet the demands of a militant and Catholic Church. We are particularly indebted to Van Loon for the seven major altarpieces dedicated to the Virgin at the Basilica of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel (near Diest), a veritable manifesto in favour of Catholicism, which was built by the famous architect Wenceslas
Cobergher at the request of the court. There are other churches in Belgium that still retain the paintings of the artist, including the Church of Saint John the Baptist at the Béguinage in Brussels, or Saint Martin’s Church in Ghent.

A successful painter, Van Loon was not only to influence several of his colleagues, but also the painters of the next generation. Resistant to the way that Baroque painting was evolving towards a greater dynamism and lyricism, which was typical of the 1630s, his style will serve as an example to the young, classicist artists who passed through Brussels, such as the Wautiers, or Philippe de Champaigne, who grew up in the Brabantian city.

Today, however, Van Loon is very little known to the general public. Like many of his contemporaries, his memory was eventually eclipsed by that of Rubens and those that followed him. The principal aim of this exhibition - the very first to be dedicated to Van Loon - is therefore to allow as many people as possible to discover the art of this unique painter. By bringing together the known works, it will also enable experts to refine their knowledge of the artist. It will be a question of locating his production within the emergence of the European 'Baroque', but also of understanding his style in relation to the function assigned to his works.

The exhibition will therefore not only bring together the significant works of Van Loon, but also of other painters (including the likes of Caravaggio, Baroci, Carracci and Bloemaert) that may have influenced him, or those that he, in turn, may have inspired (such as De la Mars...). Through books, albums, drawings, and prints, the exhibition will also seek to evoke the historical, cultural and intellectual context in which Van Loon evolved.

In total, the exhibition should bring together around forty of Van Loon’s works (thirty paintings + prints and drawings), as well as around twenty works by other artists (paintings + engravings - see below).
CHAPTERS

The route proposed here is only a preliminary draft, intended to define the themes of the exhibition in an historical perspective on the basis of the known works that are a priori available for loan. The proposed works and themes are therefore not complete and should be supplemented by other suggestions arising from future research (see the following point). It will also be necessary to take into account the conservation status of the selected works and the possibility of discovering that some pieces have been moved on the market.
I. Rome: the formative years (before 1602-1608/1612; 1617)

This section will aim to illustrate the artistic and intellectual environment, as well as the influences that Van Loon would have been subject to during his first two trips to Rome (1602-1608; 1617-1618)
2. The collaboration with the court architect, Wenceslas Cobergher.

This collaboration first began with Van Loon's return to the Netherlands around 1612 and focuses on the major commissions emanating from the court, including the famous scenes for the Life of the Virgin at the Basilica of Our Lady (Scherpenheuvel).
3. The lavish years in the Netherlands (1612/17-1628).

Here will be grouped the works that Van Loon produced in the Netherlands outside of his collaboration with Cobergher. This section will include works for comparison and will be divided into sub-sections that art yet to be finalized.

Theodoor van Loon, The Emmaus Disciples, Antwerp Maagdenhuis

Abraham Bloemaert, The Emmaus Disciples, 1622, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

Theodoor van Loon, The Adoration of the Shepherds. Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium
4. Variations on a theme

Several museums and churches preserve replicas and copies of paintings of Van Loon. Very often, these versions are of less better quality. This is why we want to illustrate this issue based on one single example, namely The Adoration of the Shepherds.
5. Van Loon and Graphic Art

Van Loon realises different frontispieces and at least one series of engravings dedicated to the apostles and the saints. These allow us to learn more about his intellectual network.
EXHIBITION VENUE AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

The exhibition ‘Theodoor van Loon. A Caravaggist Painter between Rome and Brussels’ is a collaboration between the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels (Bozar) and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

Since the current exhibition rooms of the Royal Museums preclude them from being able to exhibit the major works of Van Loon, their sister institution, BOZAR, seems to be the ideal venue in which to stage this event. After Brussels, the exhibition will travel in a smaller version to the National Museum of Art and History of Luxemburg.

Since Van Loon was mainly active in Brussels, the city stands out as a prime location for the exhibition. With their five paintings, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium own one of the most important museum collections of this artist in the world, while the churches and convents of the city are home to no less than ten of his paintings, of which at least seven are easily transportable. The pre-selection carried out makes it possible to confirm that over 70% of the exhibited works will come from Belgian museums and religious institutions.

A partnership with the churches of Brussels that are in possession of paintings by Van Loon that cannot be transported (The Béguinage; The Church of St. Catherine), as well as the altarpiece of the Basilique of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel will also be taken into consideration. This will make it possible to honour a major set of Belgian heritage sites that are protected by the Flemish Masterpieces Decree.

A number of paintings currently preserved in churches in Brussels will also be included in the Masterpieces Decree of the Region of Brussels-Capital. Some of these paintings are undergoing a restoration, carried out by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA). This latter will also examine the paintings on a technical level. This restoration campaign will be financed by the Foundation Baillet Latour, managed by the King Baudouin Foundation.
TIMING AND SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION

There has been an increase in recent years in the amount of research and the number of exhibitions dedicated to Caravaggism, a current in which Van Loon undoubtedly took part. These projects have not failed to arouse new interest in Van Loon among researchers from Belgium and beyond. However, many questions remain unresolved in relation to his education, his activity in Italy, the chronology of his works, the influences (including sculpture) to which he was subject, or his recourse to a workshop.

That's the reason why an international scientific advisory committee comprising specialists in the painting of Van Loon and/or his time was established. Most of these specialists are invited to contribute to the catalogue as well. We also hope to organize an international study day during the course of the exhibition.

Scientific Committee:

- **Dr. Joost Vander Auwera** is curator at the MRBAB who has been working for many years on Caravaggism, tempered with other influences on the art of the Southern Netherlands.
- **Prof. Dr. Luc Duerloo** is a professor of history who specializes in the government of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, and is the author of a monograph on the Basilica of Scherpenheuvel.
- **Dr. Liesbeth Helmus** is curator of paintings, drawings and sculptures at the Centraal Museum Utrecht, and curator of the exhibition *Utrecht and the Caravaggisti*, that will take place in Utrecht in 2018.
- **Dr. Nico van Hout** is curator of seventeenth-century Flemish painting at the KMSK, Antwerp, and a specialist in seventeenth-century painting techniques.
- **Dr. Pierre-Yves Kairis** is section chief a.i. at the IRPA.
- **Professor Dr. Hans Vlieghe** is honorary professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, and a leading expert in Flemish painting of the seventeenth century.
THE CATALOGUE

Since this is the first monographic exhibition on Van Loon, it seems to us to be essential to have a scientific catalogue including extensive essays on the painter and his context, and an entry by work seems essential.

Here is a preliminary draft of the summary (provisional titles):

**Essays**

"Characteristics of the work of Van Loon, biography and critical review."
*Sabine van Sprang*

"Importing the Italian idiom to the Southern Netherlands in the early seventeenth century."
*Joost Vander Auwera*

"Van Loon, Caravaggio, and the others."
*Irene Baldriga*

"Van Loon and the Accademia dei Lincei."
*Irene Baldriga*

"Van Loon and the Counter-Reformation."
*Sarah Moran*

"Van Loon and Cobergher."
*Sabine van Sprang and Tine Meganck*

"The pictorial legacy of Van Loon."
*Hans Vlieghe*

"The pictorial technique of Van Loon."
*Jana Sanyova, chemist at the KIK-IRPA*

**Catalogue**

Italian influences
*Irene Baldriga, Sabine van Sprang, Joost Vander Auwera*

Van Loon
*Sabine van Sprang, Irene Baldriga, Sarah Moran, Jean-Philippe Huys, Eelco Nagelsmit*

Artistic exchanges with the artists from the North
*J. Vander Auwera (Janssen ; Bloemaert) ; H. Vlieghe (De la Mars)*