



The Bold and the Beautiful

In Flemish Portraits
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ISBN	9789463887403
Publisher	Hannibal Books
Binding	Hardback
Territory	World excluding Benelux, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy
Size	290 mm x 250 mm
Pages	400 Pages
Price	£55.00

- Portraits from an important Belgian collection, most of which have never before been published
- Published to accompany the exhibition *Blind Date* at Snijders&Rockoxhuis, Antwerp, Belgium, Autumn 2020

Men in stately black, women with huge ruffs, children with golden rattles, old women with wizened faces, and self-satisfied artists... These are the main players in just about every portrait ever painted in the Southern Netherlands. From the 15th to the 17th centuries, the tract of land that we today call Flanders was the economic, cultural, intellectual and financial heart of Europe. And money flows – with everyone who could afford it investing in a portrait.

Today, these cherished status symbols of the past have largely lost their original significance. But beyond their functional and emotional aspects, these portraits turn their subjects into gateways to the past. This book takes masterpieces from the collection of The Phoebus Foundation and outlines the broad context in which they came into being, peeling back levels of meaning like the layers of an onion. Whether captured in an impressive Rubens or Van Dyck, or an intimate portrait by a forgotten artist, the persons portrayed were once flesh and blood, each with their own peculiarities, hidden agendas and ambitions. Some portraits are very personal and hyper-individual. Others are a little dusty, the ladies and gentleman being children of their time. In most cases, however, their dreams and aspirations are surprisingly timeless and soberingly recognisable.

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is an appointment with history: a meeting through portraiture with men and women from bygone centuries. But for those willing to look closely, the border between the present and the past is paper-thin.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition *Blind Date*. Portretten met blikken en blozen, Autumn 2020, in Snijders&Rockoxhuis Antwerp, curated by Dr. Katharina Van Cauteren & Hildegard Van de Velde with a scenography by Walter Van Beirendonck.

Katharina Van Cauteren, chief of staff of The Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp.

