



Text & photos John Liem



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The exhibition "The Birth of Capitalism: The Golden Age of Flanders" is conceived and arranged in a way that we would like to see in more exhibitions: the content and presentation are perfect.



To me, this exhibition tells an economic and social story. I am looking at history, and everything that is happening is seen through the lens of the

entrepreneur. The central focus is on these questions: how are prosperity and wealth created? What are the driving forces behind the prosperity? What happens to prosperity and wealth? How are prosperity and wealth wasted?

Fernand Huts, together with Professor Dr Katharina Van Cauteren, curator, provide an answer to all these questions that is spread across 11 themes here in the exhibition.

Farmers become entrepreneurs – technology, innovation, globalisation – textiles, the engine behind the economy – craftsmanship becomes an industry – entrepreneurship creates profit, profit creates money, money creates wealth – money is sinful – death and what comes after? – Pope, cardinals, abbots and monks crave money and luxury – The fall – Entrepreneurial man, emancipated mediaeval man, you and us – Silhouettes from earlier times.

For each of these themes there is a display not only of magnificent paintings, but also of sculptures, prints, books and even a loom; they tell and explain a story. Around 140 works in total; a large number come from F. Huts' The Phoebus Foundation and are supplemented by loans from the Belgian museums and private collections.

Every item, every work is a top museum piece and every one is set off to wonderful advantage thanks to a clear story, incorporated into a scenography that's beyond wonderful.



Fernand Huts, like the nobility and clergy of earlier times, is not always given credit by cultural moaners for his role of patron.

"The private sector can never take the place of the government, and can only be complementary. Huts' approach is therefore risky: you can't make art and heritage projects dependent on the whim of patrons or on market mechanisms," is a frequently voiced criticism, as is "... then the money goes to the government, which can then decide by objective criteria what cultural projects it will use it to support".

As if the current state-dependent and politicised administration were free from whim and market mechanisms. The most drastic market mechanism is that our museums are no longer in a position to purchase important pieces, so that important collections go abroad, like the Broodthaers one recently.

The story in or behind this exhibition is that of a contemporary entrepreneur who wants to demonstrate from his own perspective what enterprise can mean to society.

His narrative may not always interpret history correctly, but it is wonderfully told and is stimulating and positive, which in the present setting of our failed state is without doubt commendable.

Belgium is neither the first nor the last country to see the emergence of private collections and private museums, and Fernand Huts is neither the first nor the only person in Belgium to have such an important collection. However, few collections are as eclectic as his.

Info from the organiser

From 17 June 2016 until 1 January 2017, the Province of East Flanders stages an exhibition called 'The Birth of Capitalism, The Golden Age of the Southern Netherlands' at the Caermersklooster in Ghent. Masterpieces and unknown gems will accompany the visitor on a journey through the fascinating Middle Ages and bring the past back to life in a stunning setting. Together, they tell a story about our cultural history. A story which sheds light on the rich past of what is now called Flanders.

Information

OPENING HOURS

10am to 6pm
(last admission 5pm)



Closed Mondays
also 24, 25, 31/12 and 1/1

COST OF ADMISSION

EUR 10: Individual visitors

EUR 7: People aged 19 to 26 or over 60,

Holders of teachers' cards, disabled persons, Groups of 10 or over