

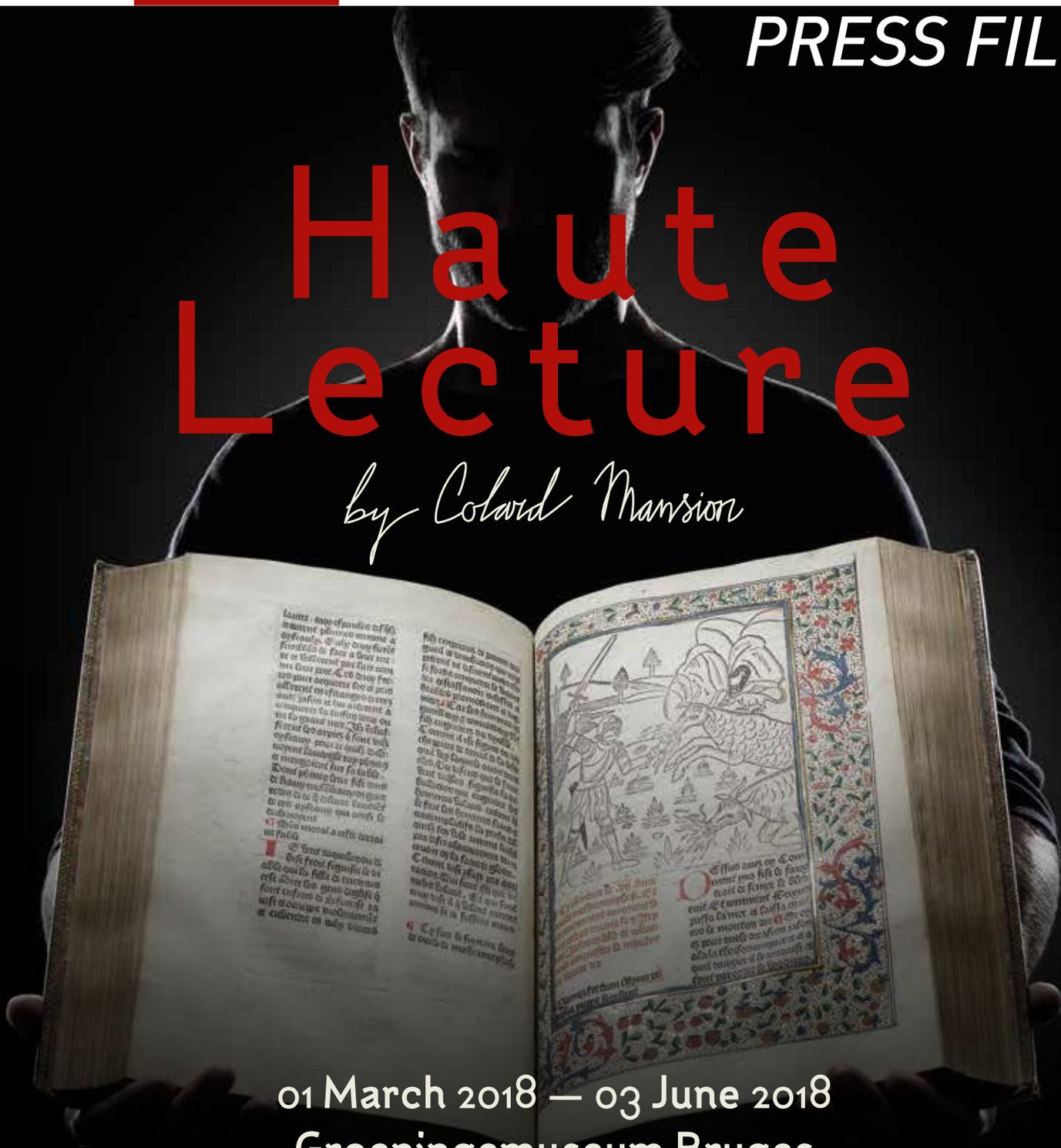
BRUGGE

EXPO

PRESS FILE

Haute Lecture

by Colard Mansion



01 March 2018 — 03 June 2018
Groeningemuseum Bruges

INTRODUCTION

HAUTE LECTURE BY COLARD MANSION

INNOVATING TEXT AND IMAGE IN MEDIEVAL BRUGES

'In the Late Middle Ages, Bruges was one of the world's great book cities. Sadly, there is little evidence of this in today's cityscape. But this is hardly surprising. Being one of the world's great book cities meant that books made in Bruges, either following in the footsteps of international trade or through acts of exchange between princes, gradually conquered the world by finding their way into the libraries of many different countries and continents. In other words, the luxury books produced in the city in medieval times link Bruges to the rest of the world. This offers a number of interesting but challenging possibilities for the international exchange of historical stories, for scientific and academic research, and for the visual display and contextualization of this world heritage in exhibitions.'

These words are contained in the 'Blueprint for Bruges, City of Letters', an appeal and a programme that were launched in 2013 as a lever for connecting Bruges' present-day strengths as a centre for letters and books with the city's rich cultural and literary heritage. The exhibition 'Haute Lecture by Colard Mansion' shows that this ambition is by no means a dead letter.



2

Colard Mansion: book entrepreneur

The central figure in the exhibition is Colard Mansion. This might sound a little strange, since we actually know very little about Mansion's personal history. He first appears in local documents in 1457 and disappears again after 1484. We do not know where he came from in 1457. And we do not know where he went to and what happened to him after 1484. All is shrouded in mystery.

What we do know is that during his years in Bruges he was responsible for producing an outstanding corpus of work. It is these books, manuscripts and prints that deserve our attention. The name of Colard Mansion calls to mind the luxurious parchments and beautiful incunabula of Burgundian Bruges. 'Haute Lecture' indeed! Interest in his oeuvre dates back to the 18th century, when Mansion was first 'discovered' and thereafter collected by antiquarians and bibliophiles.

In this exhibition the focus quickly shifts from his life to his work, his books and their sociological context: the literary world of Bruges in the Late Middle Ages. This was a world characterized by both tradition and innovation. Mansion's oeuvre was firmly rooted in the existing craftsmanship of the book-making industry for which medieval Bruges was famed, a cosmopolitan industry with a strong international anchoring. Moreover, it was an industry employing many pairs of highly-skilled hands, attracting artists and other professionals from a wide region of Northern Europe. Their number and their influence led to the creation of a new specialist guild, the librarians' guild. Mansion was closely involved with these developments, being an excellent writer (copyist) and learned translator, as well as a book entrepreneur in the widest sense of the word, undertaking major projects for the creation of large and luxuriously illuminated manuscripts. Last but not least, he was a book printer of high repute, capitalizing on the

new form of book production that was quickly conquering Europe after the revolutionary innovations introduced by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz in 1455.

Incunabula and innovative techniques

As the first person in Bruges to embrace the new art of book printing, initially in the workshop of William Caxton, but from 1476 onwards in his own atelier, it is clear that Mansion was an innovative entrepreneur. He succeeded in combining two important literary domains - luxurious Burgundian manuscripts and printed books. The result was a new product of great quality and beauty, which he launched onto the market with instant success. These were 'luxurious manuscripts created using mechanical techniques,' as Paul Saenger put it in 1975. Investing in a printer's workshop in those days was a high-risk venture, but Mansion was willing to chance his luck by sinking his money into the most fundamental form of capital for any printer: letters. The fonts that Mansion (had) designed knew no equal in 15th century Europe and continue to inspire letter-makers today. For example, Jo De Baerdemaeker has developed a new type of lettering that he calls 'Colard Mansion sans serif'. This font has been used throughout 'Haute Lecture'.

Mansion's complete oeuvre reunited

At least one copy of all the incunabula ever produced by Colard Mansion is present in the exhibition. To make this possible, libraries and museums worldwide have allowed their copies to temporarily return to the source. The municipal library in Bruges already had a fine collection of Mansion incunabula, donated by the Bruges Parisian Joseph-Basile van Praet (1754-1837). Since 2015, this collection has been officially recognized as a Flemish Top Collection. Van Praet was also involved in putting together what is now the world's largest collection of Mansion's works, held in the National Library of France in Paris. Thanks to the generous support of this library, all Mansion's works will now be displayed together for the first time in more than 500 years in the city where they were originally produced.

Book printing led Mansion into the world of book illustration and the fabrication of prints. These are two other disciplines where tradition and innovation were closely combined in Mansion's time. In this way, the work of printmakers like Master FVB and Master WA also come within our scope, demonstrating as they do numerous iconographic and technical interactions. All the examples of the illustrated incunabula produced by Mansion – the 'Boccaccio' (1476) and the 'Métamorphose' (1484) – are displayed side by side in the exhibition. This is not only a feast for the eyes, but also allows us to better understand the connection between books and prints.

Unique loans from around the world

The bringing together of incunabula, manuscripts and prints, supplemented with paintings and objects from the metalworker's art, ensures that 'Haute Lecture' is a rich, varied and dynamic exhibition. More than 55 archives, libraries and museums from all around the world have made available some 150 exhibits on loan. Superb manuscripts, illuminated incunabula and rare prints bring the innovative book industry of the Mansion era back to life. The exhibition also firmly places the book world of the Late Middle Ages in Bruges on the scientific and academic agenda. It not only summarizes the current state of knowledge about Mansion's life and his strong network, but also highlights the gradual transition from hand-crafted manuscripts to printed books, as well as focusing on the workshop practices and commercial strategies of the early printer-publishers, the development of late medieval prints, and the impact of the publication of an impressive literary corpus in the vernacular language.

'Haute Lecture by Colard Mansion' allows both visitors and researchers to enjoy the very finest works of their day, whilst at the same time challenging them to explore a history that has remained unknown for far too long.

HAUTE LECTURE BY COLARD MANSION

INNOVATING TEXT AND IMAGE IN MEDIEVAL BRUGES

(source: Museumbulletin)

This spring the Groeningemuseum will turn the spotlight on a luxurious page in Bruges' rich history with the exhibition 'Haute Lecture by Colard Mansion: innovating text and image in medieval Bruges' (1 March-3 June 2018). By the time the book entrepreneur Colard Mansion arrived in Bruges, the city already had an excellent reputation as a centre for the production of fine manuscripts. Between 1457 and 1484 Mansion also crafted superb manuscripts in Bruges, but he was too the first person to print books there. Now, more than 500 years later, Musea Brugge and the municipal library in Bruges have collected together all the different books he ever made. This impressive oeuvre offers us a unique view of the city of Bruges in the era when the art of book printing first arrived.

The book entrepreneur and his work

Colard Mansion is a mysterious figure. From 1457 onwards, he lived and worked in Bruges. In 1484, he suddenly disappeared from the city. Where did he come from and where did he go to? Nobody knows. We can assume that he must already have been in middle age and had sufficient wealth and social contacts to build

up a thriving book business. Mansion made a niche for himself in the literary world as the coordinator of the production of manuscripts, working as an intermediary between the best-selling authors of his day and the ateliers who produced their work. Moreover, he was also a skilled copyist and a learned translator in his own right. But he is perhaps best known for his activities as the printer of incunabula. This is the term used to describe books printed in the 15th century, when the art of printing was still very much in its infancy.

Nowadays, Mansion's books can be found in libraries all around the world. Reconstructing and bringing together his entire book production forms the basis for this exhibition. There is at least one copy of each of the 26 editions he published. This means that after a gap of 500 years Mansion's complete oeuvre will be reassembled in Bruges, where it was first crafted. This has only been made possible thanks to the generosity of numerous lenders from Europe and America, backed by the unstinting support of the 'Bibliothèque nationale de France' (National Library of France), which is home to the world's largest collection of works by Mansion. This distinction is largely due to the



efforts of its one-time librarian Joseph-Basile van Praet (1754 - 1837), who was originally a native of Bruges. Van Praet also donated fifteen Mansion incunabula to the municipal library in his home city. This library has now joined forces with Musea Brugge to create an exhibition that does justice to both the book-historical and the art-historical aspects of Mansion's work. In Mansion's day, the technical production and the final appearance of incunabula, manuscripts and prints were closely interrelated. The objects in the exhibition invite today's experts to look beyond the narrow confines of their own research specialism and to explore the interactions that occur when different forms of art meet.

The turning point for manuscripts and printing

The production of manuscripts reached its high-water mark in the second half of the 15th century, at the same moment when the production of printed books was just starting to take off. The common ground between these two literary domains found its expression in the person of Colard Mansion. Initially, he was more concerned with providing traditional manuscripts of high quality for the Burgundian aristocracy and other wealthy bibliophiles. Part of the work was carried out in his own workshop, with the remaining part being farmed out to sub-contractors, whose activities he supervised and coordinated. Mansion must have felt in his element in Bruges, which was then the undisputed centre for manuscript production in north-west Europe.

But when book printing first made its appearance, Mansion was quick to see its potential. In Bruges he was one of the first pioneers of this 'new art'. Whereas a hand-written manuscript was a unique 'one-off' work, printing made it possible to produce incunabula in multiple copies. Even so, the fact that Mansion now started to devote increasing attention to the printing of books does not mean that he turned his back on manuscripts. In time, the latter would certainly be forced to give way to the former, but in these early days of printing the two coexisted side by side. Mansion continued to make them both.

Yet although he understood the possibilities offered by book printing, the technology was

still very much in the early stages of its development. There were no universally applicable 'rules' for the production and design processes. For this reason, Mansion built further on his own expertise in manuscripts for the production of his incunabula. As a result, his books are characterized by an interplay between tradition and innovation. This balance was probably determined by commercial considerations. On the one hand, there was still a demand for traditional hand-crafted manuscripts. On the other hand, this demand was growing at such a rate that Mansion was happy to use a technique that allowed him to satisfy demand more quickly, albeit in a slightly different printed book form.

Métamorphose

This close relationship between manuscript and printing is evident in Mansion's incunabulum *Métamorphose* (1484). The text was clearly in the tradition of the allegorical and moralizing manuscripts that are typical of the Burgundian period. The book recounts the stories of the Roman writer Ovid (43 B.C. -17 A.D.) about the physical transformations that certain figures in classical antiquity were able to make. Mansion used a Christianized version of these pagan tales to make them more acceptable to a medieval European public.

The incunabulum also strongly resembled a typical 'Burgundian' manuscript in its external appearance. This was noticeable right from the very first page: the text is printed in a monumental Gothic font known as 'bastarda', which was a printed version of the lettering used by the copyists to produce hand-written manuscripts. Mansion decided to 'illuminate' the book not with miniatures, but with woodcuts. The woodcut on the first page depicts the god Saturn, who ate his offspring because of his fear that they would one day bring about his ruin. While Saturn is devouring one of his children, another of his sons, Jupiter, castrates him and throws his manhood into the sea, where it miraculously gives rise to the birth of the goddess Venus. The page is further decorated by hand, with an initial, accompanied by red titles and headers. The foliate scrolls, flowers and fruits were also painted manually.

The new possibilities offered by book printing Mansion clearly saw book printing as a way to produce traditional manuscripts using mechanical means. As a result, he continued to experiment with the possibilities offered by the new technology. Sometimes he printed the red titles and headers, instead of having them painted by hand. Around 1477, he designed a new and smaller font: 'rotunda'. The rounder shape looked more modern and marked a first distancing from the traditional appearance of the Burgundian manuscripts. Mansion also varied the types of texts he made. Some were still highly luxurious, but others were more simple; for example, an almanac. Sadly, none of these almanacs have survived - largely because they were intended for intensive use, which meant that they became damaged more quickly than his luxury products.

Like a spider in its web

Mansion occupied a central position in book production in Bruges. He rented a workshop near the St. Donatian Church, in the heart of what was then the city's book district. Two years later he was appointed to the most senior position in the librarians' guild. The term 'librarian' included everyone who worked on the making of books. Mansion's oeuvre reflects his role as a pivotal figure in the Bruges book world. To make his incunabula, he relied on the collaboration of a wide network of parchment makers, paper merchants, bookbinders, miniaturists and printmakers.

De la ruyne des nobles hommes et femmes

It was Mansion's good contacts with this latter group of craftsmen - the printmakers - that transformed his 1476 incunabulum 'De la ruyne des nobles hommes et femmes' into what is now regarded as the high-water mark of his oeuvre. The text by the Italian humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) describes the tragic fates that befell a number of unfortunate figures from the Bible, classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. These figures all had in common that they first enjoyed a period of prosperity, followed by a dramatic and often disastrous decline and fall. For example, Regulus was a Roman politician and general who served as consul in 267 and 256

B.C., before later being tortured to death by the Carthaginians. Boccaccio wanted to use stories of this kind to warn his readers against the possible consequences of pride and ambition.

Almost miraculously, a number of different versions of Mansion's Boccaccio have survived. One of them was made to allow the addition of miniatures as illustrations, whereas others use these spaces for engravings. Was this variation Mansion's deliberate intention? Or did he have to adjust to unforeseen circumstances? This is one of the many unanswered questions about his oeuvre. What we can say with certainty is that this was one of the very first books to be illustrated with engravings, which were made especially for the 'Boccaccio'. It is possible that the designs were crafted by miniaturists, but the actual engraving was carried out by an unknown artist now referred to as the Master of the Boccaccio Illustrations.

Bruges and printmaking

The exhibition displays prints from a number of different engravers, many of whom, like the Master of the Boccaccio Illustrations, probably worked in Bruges, although it is often difficult to prove this conclusively. One of them is now known as Master FVB and the Print Cabinet of Musea Brugge holds one of his works. It is an engraving that shows a barefoot St. Paul, holding a sword in his right hand. The shadows in the saint's face and the folds of his gown are elaborately worked, displaying a fine technique that gives many of this master's engravings an almost 'painted' appearance. This effect is strengthened by his habit of often incorporating details and compositions that are found elsewhere in the paintings of the period in the Southern Netherlands.

An entrepreneurial spirit

Mansion had a nose for lucrative niche markets. He concentrated specifically on producing books for wealthy readers. Many of them were members of the Order of the Golden Fleece, who were linked to the Burgundian royal court. One such patron was Louis of Gruuthuse (1422 - 1492). His great passion for books resulted in him compiling a library of some 200 manuscripts, a huge number at that time. Many were made to

order, like 'De la Pénitence Adam' (Adam's penitence). Mansion provided the French translation and may also have been involved in the further production of the manuscript. The text is an apocryphal legend that tells how the cross on which Christ was crucified was made with wood from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from the Garden of Eden. Mankind was therefore saved by the same wood that had first led to mankind's fall in Adam. The opening miniature in the book depicts the story on Adam and Eve in a rural setting: the fall from grace in the background, the banishment from paradise in the middle, and the washing away of sin in the foreground. Louis of Gruuthuse surveys these scenes from his position on the rock on the right, where Colard Mansion hands him a copy of the book.

As an entrepreneur, Mansion also had a sharp eye for previously unexploited areas of the market. For example, he was one of the first librarians to print his texts mainly in French, the language of the people. He often also chose contemporary texts for his books. If he opted for a more traditional subject, he was frequently the first to produce it in book rather than in manuscript form. It is true that Mansion had the good fortune to live at a remarkable moment in both the history of books and the history of the city where he worked, but he exploited this advantageous position to the full. This is evident first and foremost in his oeuvre, which even today still testifies to the way he revolutionized text and image in medieval Bruges.



THE 'COLARD MANSION': A NEW FONT AS A TRIBUTE

The remarkable typography of Mansion inspired letter designer Jo De Baerdemaeker to carry out detailed research into the work of the master and to develop a new digital font. The 'Colard Mansion' was officially launched on 7 December 2017.

The European Lettering Institute

In recent years, the Municipal Library in Bruges (Openbare Bibliotheek Brugge) had developed sustainable collaboration with the European Lettering Institute (ELI) and its director, Lieve Cornil. The basis for this collaboration is a shared interest and passion for our written and printed heritage.

The European Lettering Institute is located in Bruges and offers unique training programmes in letter and graphic design. Students are given the opportunity to acquire a deep historical and contemporary practical knowledge in written, drawn and digital forms of lettering.

The collaboration between the library and the ELI focuses on concrete projects. The exhibition 'Haute Lecture by Colard Mansion' fits perfectly into this context. The proposal that the ELI made to the library was as follows: first study the fonts used by Mansion as a printer, then use this study to develop a historical reconstruction of the Mansion fonts, and finally develop a contemporary Mansion font on the basis of the reconstruction.

This ambitious project was led by Jo De Baerdemaeker, an independent letter designer and producer-developer of digital fonts, as well as a post-doctoral researcher and a lecturer at the European Lettering Institute.

Jo De Baerdemaeker

Jo De Baerdemaeker has an MA diploma in Typeface Design and received his doctorate from the University of Reading.

In 2012, he founded Studio Type in Antwerp. He works together with other international type foundries, software companies and (international) design studios, like Microsoft, Google and the New York Times.

He is an elected member of the ATypI Board of Directors and the ATypI country delegate for

Belgium, is currently lecturing at the Plantin Institute for Typography (Antwerp), the European Lettering Institute (Bruges), and the LUCA School of Arts (Sint-Lukas campus, Brussels), and is a guest lecturer for various international art programmes and universities.

He regularly speaks at international congresses on the theme of typography and letter design, is a consultant for companies, and holds international workshops on letter design.

On 16 January 2017, Minister of Culture Sven Gatz conferred on Jo De Baerdemaeker the honorary title of 'New Flemish Master in Art' at the Henry Vande Velde Awards, held at the BOZAR in Brussels.



Colard Mansion

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee
Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk
Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu
Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

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LECTURE

Bruges and Paris. Joseph-Basile van Praet and the incunabula of Colard Mansion

by Geneviève Guilleminot, curator of the Rare and Precious Books Reserve at the Bibliothèque nationale de France

No other bibliophile is more closely linked to Colard Mansion than Joseph-Basile van Praet (1754-1837). He grew up in his father's bookstore and printing workshop in Bruges. Later, he moved to Paris, where he became librarian of the National Library of France during the French Revolution. He collected the incunabula of Colard Mansion throughout his life.

Geneviève Guilleminot, curator of the Rare and Precious Books Reserve at the National Library of France (2004-2017), will talk about the importance of Van Praet as a librarian in Paris and as a book collector.

Wednesday, 23 May at 19.30r

Main Library, Biekorf

Lecture in French

€5 | €3: Teachers at the Sint-Lodewijk's College and members of the Culture Library | Free: Friends of the Biekorf Library and Friends of Musea Brugge

Registration:

www.brugge.be/brugge-en-parijs

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A Miraeus lecture (international book historians talking about their research) organized by the Bruges Municipal Library in collaboration with the Flemish Work Group for Book History

CORES

Symposium on the theme of conservation and restoration

CORES is a competence platform for the conservation and restoration of books and other archive material. It is a joint initiative by several partners from the heritage sector in Bruges and Syntra West. Once every two years, CORES organizes an international symposium in Bruges on the themes of conservation and restoration. The 2018 symposium will focus, amongst other things, on the restoration of incunabula and manuscripts carried out in preparation for the 'Haute Lecture' exhibition.

Friday 25 May

Info on www.cores-vlaanderen.be

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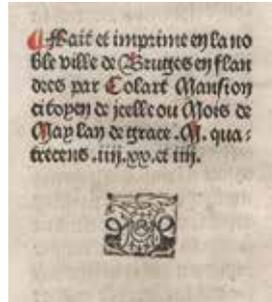
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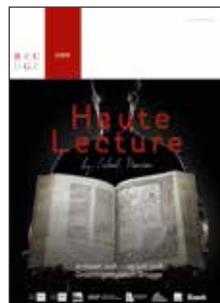
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12

1. Valerius Maximus, 'Faits et dits mémorables', manuscript ordered from Colard Mansion by abbot Jan Crabbe, Brugge, Grootseminarie, Ms. 158/189, f. 138r © Lukas - Art in Flanders, photo Dominique Provost
2. Printer's mark [Brugge: Colard Mansion, 1484]. Brugge, Openbare Bibliotheek, Incunable 3877
3. Master FVB, 'Paulus', Brugge Groeningemuseum © Lukas - Art in Flanders, photo Dominique Provost
4. Petrus Christus, 'Portrait female donor', Washington, National Gallery of Art
5. Woodcut from Publius Ovidius Naso, 'Métamorphose', by Colard Mansion, Brugge, Openbare Bibliotheek, Incunable 3877
6. Page with woodcut from Publius Ovidius Naso, 'Métamorphose', by Colard Mansion, Brugge, Openbare Bibliotheek, Incunable 3877
7. Publius Ovidius Naso, 'Ovide moralisé en vers', København, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Ms. Thott 399
8. 'Book of hours of Charlotte of Bourbon-Montpensier', Alnwick, Alnwick Castle, Duke of Northumberland, Ms. 482
9. Master of the Boccaccio Illustrations, 'The fight between Lady Fortune and Poverty', Paris, Musée du Louvre, Collection Edmond de Rothschild, 80 LR
10. Maynus de Mayneris, 'Dialogue des créatures', manuscript ordered by Lodewijk of Gruuthuse, translated from Latin to French by Colard Mansion, Private collection, Switzerland, f. 7r
11. Diana shooting an arrow, from 'Ovide Moralisé', København, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Ms. Thott 399
12. Exhibition poster

PRACTICAL INFO EXHIBITION

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Audioguide:	included in the ticket price available in NL/FR/DE/EN
More info:	www.museabrugge.be

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MORE INFO

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The press file can also be consulted online and texts can be transcribed, again via www.museabrugge.be, under the heading 'press'.

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You can also send the files digitally (stating ftp or url) to sarah.bauwens@brugge.be. We thank you for your cooperation and interest.



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