

DIERIC BOUTS



# DIERIC BOUTS

CREATOR OF IMAGES

Edited by Peter Carpreau

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York



**DIERIC BOUTS**  
**CREATOR OF IMAGES AND EXPANDER OF HORIZONS**

In the handing down of even the most valuable expressions of our human culture, chance and circumstance often play a far greater role than we presume. The works of Johann Sebastian Bach might never have come to our ears had they not been rediscovered in the nineteenth century by Felix Mendelssohn. Similarly, the paintings of Dieric Bouts might never have reached us, or would have continued to be wrongly attributed to Hans Memling, had it not been for the groundbreaking work of Johann David Passavant. This German painter, researcher and curator was fascinated by the Old Masters and published the influential travel and art book *Kunstreise durch England und Belgien*, in which he did justice to Dieric Bouts by acknowledging his essential contribution to the history of the art of the Low Countries. For this, we wish to thank him and pay posthumous tribute.

As a society, we do not wish the transmission of our cultural capital to be dependent on accidental rediscoveries. For this reason, the Flemish Community, the City of Leuven and KU Leuven are jointly investing in a proactive heritage policy to counter the risk of cultural memory loss and promote historical awareness. Exactly 25 years after the last retrospective, *Dirk Bouts (ca. 1410–1475). Een Vlaams primitief te Leuven* (Dirk Bouts. A Flemish Primitive in Leuven), organised by Prof. Maurits Smeyers and held in St. Peter's Church in 1998, we urgently need a new way of marking the importance of Dieric Bouts's legacy in Leuven – and one that is tailored to the twenty-first century.

Under the leadership of Peter Carpreau, art historian, curator and Bouts expert, the M Leuven team has drawn on collections around the world to bring together the largest number of paintings attributed to Dieric Bouts and his workshop ever seen under one roof. Bouts is back in the city where his works took shape and acquired meaning in the middle of the fascinating fifteenth century. In a period of enormous social transition, when medieval feudal society was slowly but surely crumbling, new urban forces were emerging. City leaders, fraternities, and guilds were shaping what can now be considered a fledgling urban democracy. Most notably in Leuven, this historical process had an exceptionally powerful catalyst in the founding of the University in 1425. Leuven was fertile ground for the growth of an international stronghold of innovation.

All these developments were, of course, accompanied by a deeply human desire for distinction. Leuven was embarking on an ambitious building programme that led to the construction, among others, of the historic Town Hall and the collegiate St. Peter's Church. These new landmarks included new visual programmes and, consequently, a significant number of artistic commissions. In this enterprising cultural climate, Dieric Bouts emerged as the right image maker in the right place and at the right time. The spatiality of Jan van Eyck and the visual lines of Rogier van der Weyden came together in panels painted by Bouts in a perfect synthesis of the visual culture of the early Renaissance. Bouts used this potential to execute ambitious projects in which clients and advisors – themselves affiliated with the young University – had an important say in determining the iconographic programme that the artist would capture in paint. The historically documented commissions for his *Last Supper* (for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament's chapel in St. Peter's Church) and *Justice of Emperor Otto III* reveal how Dieric Bouts translated themes that were rarely, if ever, explored into new kinds of images with a deep footprint that is still present in our own visual culture today.

M Leuven reflects this in putting together an exhibition that can be explored in two parallel ways. Across five adjoining museum galleries, the visitor is introduced to some 25 works by Dieric Bouts and his workshop, supplemented by about 40 pieces from their historical context. In conjunction with this, the makers of the exhibition in each gallery have connected Bouts's late Gothic images with those of our contemporary visual society. M Leuven invites us on a fascinating visual journey in which the image types that Dieric Bouts introduced or perfected continue to be in evidence today in striking visuals from advertising campaigns, sports reports, and science fiction films. For example, the models from the storyboards of *Star Wars*, housed in Los Angeles and on loan from the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, suddenly seem like an echo chamber of the fantastic landscapes in Bouts's *Fall of the Damned* in Lille (on loan from the Palais des Beaux-Arts). And a sublime sports photograph of Eddy Merckx exhausted after drawing on the last of his strength to win a race, visually merges with *Christ Crowned with Thorns* from the M Leuven collection. This wealth of tantalizing interfaces is the work of a multidisciplinary team of curators and scholars that connects art historical expertise with the professional visions of visual creatives.<sup>1,2</sup> With this sense of adventure, M Leuven presents to the world a trans-historical exhibition dedicated to visual mastery over the centuries.

The exhibition at M Leuven is the focal point of the *New Horizons | Dieric Bouts Festival*, which opens on 22 September 2023. The festival, with Dieric Bouts as its inspiration and New Horizons as the consistent thread, allows audiences to discover a host of new horizons over a period of four months through a broad cultural programme ranging from visual arts and music to theatre and lectures. The initiator is KU[N]ST Leuven, a partnership between the City of Leuven and KU Leuven. More than a hundred organizations are contributing to the programme, which will broaden our horizons, just as Dieric Bouts did so masterfully in the fifteenth century.

The *DIERIC BOUTS. Creator of Images* exhibition at M Leuven begins a month later, on 20 October 2023, and runs until 14 January 2024. A supplement will follow a few weeks later in the form of a smaller focus exhibition, *Atelier Bouts*. Running from 16 February to 28 April 2024, this exhibition takes a closer look at the material of four large altarpieces and two smaller works, considering in detail recent laboratory research and offering unique insights into the creation process and the extremely accurate form and image structure of Bouts's painting practice. There will be a particular focus on the launch of an ambitious new restoration project that the Museum is being supported by the Flemish Community to undertake. The focus is on *Triptych of the Descent from the Cross*. Since 1505, this literally and figuratively *majeure* work by Dieric Bouts has been preserved in the Capilla Real in Granada. It is leaving Spain for the first time to be restored to its former glory by a specialized team from Belgium's Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage following the exhibitions at M Leuven. This enables us to fulfill our responsibility to sustainably preserve the most valuable Flemish heritage in the world for generations to come.

We sincerely thank everyone involved in putting on the exhibitions and designing the festival programme.

Bert Cornillie  
Alderman for Culture, city of Leuven  
Chairman, M Leuven, Co-chair, KU[N]ST Leuven

Mohamed Ridouani  
Mayor, city of Leuven

Bart Raymaekers  
Advisor to the Rector for Culture, Art and Heritage, KU Leuven  
Co-chair, KU[N]ST Leuven

Luc Sels  
Rector, KU Leuven

1 Inigo Bocken (KU Leuven/Radboud University), Till-Holger Borchert (Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum), Peter Carpreau (War Heritage Institute), Marjan Debaene (M Leuven), Valentine Henderiks (Université Libre de Bruxelles/Périer-D'Ieteren Foundation), Stephan Kemperdick (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), Gust Van den Berghe.

2 Charlotte Abramow, Amira Daoudi, Tom Eerebout, Laela French, Jasper Jacobs, Lectrr (Steven Degryse), Ryan Linkof, Luc Shih, Adalberto Simeone, Sebastian Steveniers, Gust Van den Berghe.

The Flemish Community is a proud partner of the *New Horizons / Dieric Bouts Festival*, an ambitious and innovative project that puts Dieric Bouts on the global map as a Flemish Master and revisits his place in the history of art.

Dieric Bouts is perhaps the most important artist that the city of Leuven has ever produced. An extensive city festival around a major exhibition at M Leuven now positions him on the global scene as an image maker with an essential connection to Leuven. In the fifteenth century, the city was already a hub for innovations in science, social development, and painting. Bouts brought together all the innovations of his time in unique works that portray a new world in the context of a fledgling Humanism in which the human perspective is central.

The significance of Dieric Bouts to the history of art is recognized by international experts. His works hang in leading museums all around the world. The highlight of the *New Horizons / Dieric Bouts Festival* will therefore be the exhibition at M Leuven, with works from international collections returning here on loan for a display of greatest number of Bouts works ever previously on show. This exceptional achievement is the result of years of negotiation by the museum's team. The exhibition aims to explore different and new horizons and places Dieric Bouts in the fifteenth-century context of the early Renaissance and emerging Humanism. Visitors will also discover how Bouts's innovations remain important and live on in our contemporary visual culture.

The exhibition at M Leuven is part of a broader festival programme representing collaboration by more than a hundred different organizations and ensuring unprecedented local embedding. The festival and the exhibition also reflect a broader, long-term master plan that will continue to strengthen the bond between Dieric Bouts and Leuven as time goes on.

The city of Leuven's aim for the *New Horizons / Dieric Bouts Festival* is to contribute to the international profile of Flanders in the arts and as a cultural tourism destination. Since the fifteenth century, Flemish Masters have commanded international admiration for their craftsmanship, creativity, and technical innovation. Dieric Bouts fits perfectly in the list of Flemish Masters who have helped shape European art history and continue to inspire it to this day. They are a unique asset for Flanders, attracting a wide and international audience for the master to our region. Needless to say, we also warmly welcome the Flemish community to rediscover this fascinating piece of their past.

We welcome you to Leuven this autumn for a new perspective on Dieric Bouts!

Jan Jambon  
*Minister-President of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Culture*

Zuhal Demir  
*Flemish Minister for Tourism*

It is no coincidence that participants in the National Lottery are supporting a large-scale urban festival around a unique exhibition dedicated to the Leuven Master, Dieric Bouts. Both Bouts and the lottery date back to the fifteenth century, with Bouts's arrival in the city actually coinciding with the arrival of the lottery and the concept of supporting charitable causes.

Dieric Bouts is widely believed to have been born in Haarlem around 1415 and died in Leuven in 1475. His works hang in major museums all over the world. The lottery meanwhile came into being in Bruges in 1441. It continues to be played by millions around the world to the present day.

Both Dieric Bouts and the *lotinghe* of 1441 represented innovation. Bouts innovated by being one of the first painters to introduce single vanishing point perspective into his work. The advent of the lottery, meanwhile, innovated by creating a mechanism for people to purchase a ticket on a voluntary basis and be eligible for prizes, with a portion of the profit being spent on social or charitable projects, creating opportunities for those who would otherwise not enjoy them.

We do not know whether Bouts ever attended a lottery draw, let alone purchased a ticket, but it is possible that he was aware of the lottery that took place in Utrecht in 1446, considering the relatively short distance between his probable hometown of Haarlem and Utrecht.

What we do know is that the collaboration between KU[N]ST Leuven and the National Lottery offers today's general public several ways to become acquainted with the figure of Dieric Bouts and the times in which he lived. Juxtaposing Bouts with figures from our own time, as the organizers have done so brilliantly, proves that strong personalities stand the test of time. This also applies to the National Lottery: a crowdfunding platform *avant la lettre* that proves its social usefulness every day through its policy of supporting charitable causes.

The National Lottery is exceptionally proud to be a partner in this wonderful initiative. We wish attendees at any of the many events, and in particular the exceptional *DIERIC BOUTS. Creator of Images* exhibition at M Leuven, a memorable visit. We would also like to express our hope that our partnership with KU[N]ST Leuven continues to enjoy a bright future.

Frank Demeyere  
*National Lottery*

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# 3

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