

Traces of Humanism.

Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper in Belgium, preserved in a once Flourishing Abbey.

Griet
Van Eyck
Belgium

The antecedent role of KIK-IRPA's *Photographic Repertoire of the Moveable Art Objects of Places of Worship in Belgium*

In 1967, both the Flemish and the Walloon Culture Ministers were worried about the moveable works of art after the modification of the liturgy, decided by the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, the Belgian Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), which was installed in 1900 as a photo



Abbatial ring,
1801-1899,
unknown goldsmith,
Property of
Abbey O.-L.-Vrouw
Tongerlo (Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
Brussels (Belgium),
cliché X001324]



The young housekeeper,
1861-1888,
Henri De Braekeleer,
oil on canvas,
29 x 29,5 cm,
Property of Abbey
O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
Brussels (Belgium),
cliché Z004494]



In this article we focus on the making of a digital exhibition on the Last Supper using the MOVIO-tool, a more than life-size depiction measuring 4.5 by 8 meters, profoundly documented, restored and conserved by KIK-IRPA since 1952

Nocturlabium, 1589,
Jacopo De Succa
(metalworker) and
Gerardus van Drunen
(astronomer),
brass,
12,2 x 8,6 cm,
Property of
Abbey O.-L.-Vrouw
Tongerlo (Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
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workshop of the Royal Museums of Art and History, was asked to make a photographic inventory of works of art in Belgian religious buildings. It took ten years to make 250,000 pictures. In 1995, the decision was made to complete the photographic inventory with the collections of public social assistance centres and abbeys. In addition, the department progressively purchased the necessary equipment for colour photography. The first real peak of photographs, 318 shots of the abbey in Tongerlo and its belongings, were taken in 1991. This collection was the foundation for the publication of the first part of the inventory in 2006 and it was in this enormous series of records that we first saw the opportunity to link artefacts with their spatial setting.

In this article we focus on the making of a digital exhibition on the Last Supper using the MOVIO-tool, a more than life-size depiction measuring 4.5 by 8 meters, profoundly documented, restored and conserved by KIK-IRPA since 1952. In doing so, a comprehensive overview of photographs of details has been provided. It was moved to a new museum in the abbatial garden in 1966 to guarantee optimum spatial conditions.

Clockwork, 1901-1950, unknown watchmaker, gold,
Property of Abbey O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo (Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium), cliché Z005924]



Introduction to the *digital exhibition*

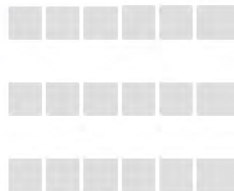
More recently, the painting has been covered by a Flemish decree as a masterpiece with a key function, so it is regarded as a piece of art that obtains a high mark in three of four criteria. First, it is part of the collective memory as it recalls the aspirations of Abbot Arnold Streeters (1494-1560) and depends on the link with Renaissance banqueting rites. Second, it illustrates a cultural switch in art or history when it contributes to the philosophy of the mistake and the accordance between master and pupil. Third, it fulfils an indispensable role in historical science and shows us elements that are no longer visible on the original by da Vinci (1452-1519). The permeation of pan-European sources in this digital exhibition makes sure our story fits even more into the European context of the AthenaPlus project. To draw attention to the criteria already



Fish dish,
1701-1800,
unknown ceramist,
Brussels faience
in verdigris,
21 x 33 cm,
Property of Abbey
O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
Brussels (Belgium),
cliché Z004185]



Snuffbox,
1801-1900,
unknown, silver,
1,1 x 8,1 x 5,4 cm,
Property of Abbey
O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
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cliché Z005953]





Norbertine
Abbey of Tongerlo,
1547-1966
[© KIK-IRPA,
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cliché Z004030]



mentioned, which predict the value across borders of the cultural background of the painting, the digital exhibition was set up at <http://54.247.69.120/build/movio/movioTraining45/>. The focus on the abbacy by Streeters is thus not only a way to expand the sixteenth century as a period in which many artworks were commissioned or acquired. Our aim is also to illustrate this wealthy era as a time of intellectualism and its cultural evocation through banqueting traditions. As such we could also include some links to other topics documented in our online database, as for example the residence of Jerome of Busleyden (about 1470-1517) in Malines.

The digital exhibition offers therefore a brief introduction to the abbey's history with a focus on the Renaissance period. After an iconographic description of the main characters and aspects as introduced on Leonardo da Vinci's original and a study on the roots of this copy, the exhibition offers the spectator a more profound look on the academic activities of the abbey and some general remarks on the contemporary occupation with making copies.

We could realize this by illustrating 'the mistake' as a largely discussed philosophical item amid humanists which offers us some ideas about the value of this art made by artists who, although talented, lacked sometimes the extraordinary skills of their master.

The origins of *il disegno*

The Last Supper conserved in Tongerlo seems to be a secondary copy of Leonardo da Vinci's



Cabinet, 1701-1800, unknown, ebony and ivory, 38 x 50 cm,
Property of Abbey O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo (Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium), cliché X052355]

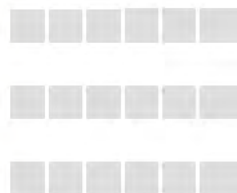


Milanese masterpiece. The latter was commissioned by Ludovico Sforza (1452-1508) and Beatrice d' Este for the refectory wall in the Dominican Sancta Maria delle Grazie. The copy in Tongerlo was probably painted around 1520 as a copy of the Last Supper, or Cenacolo, by the atelier of Giampietrino (1508-1549), an epigone of Leonardo da Vinci, which was executed around the same time and was already indebted to da Vinci's composition. This first copy by Giampietrino was meant for the refectory of the convent of Pavia but is currently on permanent display in St. Magdalen College in Oxford. Researchers agree that the same cartoons were used. The designs were probably executed after Gianantonio Beltraffio (1466-1516), who made them for these purpose.

The scene has been conceived in vibrant colours that support the dynamic gestures of the

Twelve Disciples. Outmost on the right side of Christ, we recognize Bartholomew, James the Less and Andrew. More centrally we meet a second threesome that represents Peter and Judas, with John in the background. On the left hand of the Lord we find James the Greater, with Thomas in front of him, flanked by Philip. Divided in these small groups, the apostles serve not only to offer a linear view on the story of the Last Supper; they have to be perceived as knots in the web of contemporary behaviour, as if they externalize the humanistic aspirations of Renaissance table guests. An experienced observer will note some anatomical anomalies: the right hands of Bartholomew (first from left) and Thomas (fifth from right) lack some modelling; the right thumb of Peter (third from left) is represented in an impossible pose; the shape of the toes is unrealistic; proportions weren't always well chosen; the

Last Supper,
about 1620,
after Giampietrino,
oil on canvas,
424 x 802 cm,
Property of Abbey
O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
© KIK-IRPA,
Brussels (Belgium),
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*Portrait of
Arnold Streeters,
1601-1650,
unknown
Flemish artist,
oil on canvas,
118 x 97 cm,
Property of Abbey
O.-L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
Brussels (Belgium),
cliché X052348]*

index fingers of Peter and Thomas are too long and the eyes of the latter are too large; and the general figure of Simon (far right) is drawn too poorly.

The acquisition

Arnold Streeters bought the painting in 1545, when he summoned his secretary Peter Schelen to go to Antwerp and to purchase the canvas with the Last Supper for the sum of 450 florins. Relying on an eighteenth-century transcription of the purchase deed, the circumstances of the acquisition by the abbey

can partly be reconstructed. The painting was offered for sale by the heirs of Jean Le Grand, whose French name suggests a corresponding pedigree, but is further unknown.

When the oeuvre arrived in Tongerlo on February 23rd of that year, it was first suspended in the choir of the old abbey church. Later on, a bit before 1721, when the church was being reshaped in rococo-style, it was moved to the north face of the nave. In 1902, when the painting returned to the abbey after a long trip caused by the consequences of the French revolution and which spanned more than a century, a first restoration was executed and it was again placed in the transept, this time of the new church, until 1966 when the museum was built. We could say that the iconography of the monumental piece never found its pendant in an associative setting as a refectory.

Remarks on transitional research objectives

Since its establishment in 1948, KIK-IRPA is conceived as a conjunction of multi-disciplinary contributors who foster a responsibility towards the national awareness of their cultural heritage. For several decades, the abbey of Tongerlo has been one of their concerns. The relentless growth of their moveable property augments the need for a thorough inventory as desecrated catholic institutions seek proper conservation of their contents. It constrains a methodology adapted to contemporary research standards as focusing on material vulnerability or discerning the distinction between valuable materials, rare examples of daily proceedings and ordinary devotionalia. Both approaches should be balanced in order to result in coherent and effective support for handling this kind of heritage by the community of interest and to



Detail of the
Last Supper,
oil on canvas,
after Giampietrino,
Property of Abbey
O.L.-Vrouw Tongerlo
(Westerlo)
[© KIK-IRPA,
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feed a mind shift that now points toward revaluing local heritage. The present case study and the pertaining digital exhibition illustrate the exceptional reliability of a picture to merge with the growing attention to the authenticity of the story instead of preoccupation with the genius. Subsequently, it will be this changed perspective that passes on the right to speak from the connoisseur to the cultural participant.

Conclusions on the use of MOVIO

The shift from the art-historical to the public view opens a perspective on digital exhibitions as a fertile medium offering multiple angles of incidence towards the enthusiastic observer. The MOVIO-tool improves accessibility to this kind of application and thus enables more local heritage associations to take the plunge. In a broader sense, digital improvements that often permit larger than life experiences surely

have countered the decreased possibility of developing prestigious moving exhibitions caused by smaller budgets or the downsizing of governmental grants. The museum as a specifically conceived shelter can be more than a room to contemplate on the subject of the painting and is now able to serve as some kind of lab to facilitate the visitor to look at the artwork from new kinds of perspective. It could be a setting wherein a touch screen could be included as an optional stop to elicit some new questions from the spectators who are often tourists on a daytrip or people who reside for a few days in the refuge of the abbey. More than the generally known spatial intervention favoured in the 1960's, the digital exhibition will enable the art lover to switch between levels of knowledge on the subject and bridge the gap to search more deeply for the facets that trigger the reader the most, as a stele pointing in several directions.





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