

The Permeke Museum is back. And how!

After three years of renovation work, the time has come. The Permeke Museum will open its doors to the public again on 29 March. Permeke is Jabbeke and Jabbeke is Permeke. This is where Constant Permeke (1886 – 1952) lived for around 20 years. Born in Antwerp in 1886, he moved to Ostend with the rest of his family in 1892. Apart from a short spell in England during the war years, he would live in Ostend until the end of the 1920s. From 1929, however, he could be found in Jabbeke, where he lived until his death, in 1952.

“A new story about the connection between people and nature, about humanism, about a free spirit, about the development of a young and promising talent into an artist recognised internationally, both then and still today.” Dominique Savelkoul, director of Mu.ZEE and the Permeke Museum

Inne Gheeraert, curatorial coordinator of the Permeke Museum sums it up as follows:

Constant Permeke is an important modernist artist who was highly acclaimed throughout his life. He enjoyed success in his own country and far beyond. As a young artist, he joined the progressive art movements germinating at the time in Brussels and Paris. Although his work is usually categorised as expressionism, Permeke chose a highly idiosyncratic and original course driven by a deep-rooted humanism.

That made Constant Permeke so much more than a painter of peasants and fishermen in dark, sombre colours. The museum wants to break this one-sided view of the artist and demonstrate his international importance. After all, Permeke had one foot in European modernism and the other in the tradition of Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Gogh and others. The Permeke Museum aims to develop into THE centre of knowledge around Constant Permeke, where the archives and knowledge about the artist are brought together to stimulate academic research.

For Permeke, art and life were closely linked. His oeuvre teems with lively, raw energy, but also breathes melancholy. His focus was on authentic human themes, solidarity between people and their connection with nature. In his many landscapes and seascapes, nature takes over completely. For Permeke, it was less about the subject matter than the game and the process of creating, the search and experimentation, the constant decision to continue or to let go. He was willing to take risks and push boundaries in his choice of techniques, materials and formats, which he put together as collages. In a truly modernist approach, he sought to reinvent his visual language over and over again.

The Permeke Museum offers a permanent insight into a number of striking themes from Permeke's life and work. Stories are told using artworks, utensils, archive material, photos and films. Each year, two exhibitions will be held in the renovated sculpture studio, with artworks from the museum's collection as well as loans from private collectors and international

museums. The winter exhibitions will focus on the research round Constant Permeke and modernism, while the summer exhibitions will bring together the art of Permeke and other artists (from various periods) in an intriguing and innovative dialogue.

During the renovation work, an appeal was made to people who knew Permeke personally. As a result, seven exceptional testimonies were recorded and incorporated into the new presentation of his former home.

The reopening of the Permeke Museum also heralds the opening of the very first Constant Permeke exhibition with background. The exhibition offers a surprising look at some thirty eye-catching artworks that confirm the diversity and groundbreaking nature of Constant Permeke's work. It invites visitors to approach his art from new insights. Some exceptional loans from private collections and (inter)national museums were also granted for this exhibition.

(Permeke Museum, 29 March – 3 November 2024)

The history of the house in a nutshell

The plans for the country house, *De vier winden*, were designed by architect Pierre Vandervoort in 1928, in close consultation with Permeke. It was a very innovative home, in a functional modernist style, rising imposingly above the wide polder landscape. Today, the residence is considered to be a superb example of 1930s modern architecture. It was the place where he entertained his friends and fellow artists, and where a large number of his artworks were created. It was Permeke's wish to turn his home into a museum when he died. The Province of West Flanders bought the house and garden and granted Permeke's wish. In 2018, the estate came into the hands of the Flemish Community. Today the Permeke Museum consists of the family home, the artist's studio and the sculpture studio. It is surrounded by a vast garden. The running of the entire museum is taken care of by the Permeke Museum team, which is part of Mu.ZEE vzw.

About the renovation

The renovation was carried out and financed by the Flemish Government, owner of the building. A great deal of work was done on the sculpture studio, in particular. It has been thoroughly insulated and fitted with a contemporary air-conditioning system for museums. The security system on the estate and wheelchair accessibility have – where possible – been updated too. In the house, rooms have been opened up, so that there is light everywhere.

The Permeke Museum also received a large subsidy from Tourism Flanders, as part of the Flemish Masters recovery project, for new and public-friendly content and the redesign of the garden.

With the support of Tourism Flanders, the Permeke Museum has now truly become one of the absolute top in terms of visitor experience, digitisation and greening, says the Flemish minister for tourism. Not only has the museum been given a facelift, there have also been important additions to the content. The website has been thoroughly overhauled, so that the collection can now be seen online. Meanwhile, the museum itself has become more environment friendly and is soon to be fitted with solar panels. But the cherry on the cake is the beautifully redesigned garden, with benches and a digital walk. And, by the way, the garden is not only open to museum visitors but also to local residents. Once again, it is a wonderful place, where our philosophy of 'Travel to tomorrow' comes to life.

A garden with a museum

The garden was transformed in collaboration with the ecological organisation *Plant en Houtgoed*, in close consultation with *Regionaal Landschap Houtland en Polders*. Authentic

elements, such as the sunken lawn and the hedged avenue of trees inspired by the *Arts and Crafts* movement, have been nurtured and restored in line with photos from Permeke's archives. The care of the garden is radically ecological, with a focus on increased biodiversity. It is a garden of the future, with an experimental and progressive approach typical of the artist Permeke. The manicured lawns have been replaced by flower meadows, fruit and nut trees. Ecological mowing management has been chosen in collaboration with the agricultural and horticultural school of Oedelem. Participatory projects with schools and local residents will be organised too. During the opening hours of the museum the garden will be freely accessible to everyone. Even if you do not visit the museum, you can relax in the garden, enjoy the biodiverse nature, meet each other, even picnic together.

For visitors – both young and not so young

A digital walk will be provided in and around the museum. All information will be available in four languages.

Studio Permeke will also reopen and continue the art-educational activities that were already much in demand before the renovation work. Workshops for schools, holiday camps, family workshops, birthday parties, teacher training and other activities will once again take place in Permeke's atmospheric studio and in the beautiful garden.

New publication

With the reopening of the Permeke Museum, thirty years after WVdB's reference work, Hannibal Book has published a new book.

This collector's item is beautifully illustrated with dozens of paintings, sculptures and drawings. The many archive photos offer an in-depth view of the master's life and work. With illuminating essays and literary contributions by Jan Ceuleurs, David Van Reybrouck, Inne Gheeraert, Franz W. Kaiser, Felipe Martinez Sevilhano, Anneleen Cassiman, Lise Vandewal, Daniël Rovers, Inneke Schwickert and Wendy Van Hoorde. Price: €39.95

CONTACT

The Permeke Museum is part of Mu.ZEE vzw in Ostend

For all practical info, opening hours, closing days and tickets see: www.permekemuseum.be

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