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Fondation d'Utilité Publique - Stichting van Openbaar Nut

Ceremony of the Francqui Prize by His Majesty The King at the Fondation Universitaire on June 8, 2016

Career - Work - Report of the Jury



Barbara Baert

Career

Barbara Baert (born in Turnhout, 1967) was raised with a great interest in the visual arts. Frequent journeys during her childhood through Southern Europe gradually drew her heart towards medieval and Renaissance art. When she graduated as top of her year from the Latin and Greek stream of the Spijker Instituut in Hoogstraten (1979-1985), her teachers advised her to pursue a degree in Classics, but Barbara Baert did not hesitate to enrol in the Art History programme at the KU Leuven.

During her studies at the KU Leuven, where she graduated in 1989 with the Highest Distinction, her interest for research grew. Her M.A. dissertation on an unknown fifteenth-century incunable (an early printed work held by the Royal Library of Belgium) was in 1993 awarded a prize by the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium, Class of Fine Arts.

After graduation Barbara Baert won a Flemish Community specialisation scholarship to the Università degli Studi of Siena (Italy), where she worked with professors in the fields of stylistics (describing and researching visual idioms) and of iconography (describing and researching thematic traditions in the arts). This specialisation year provided her not only with expertise in Italian painting, but also with an itch for an integrative approach to Art History that would combine both form and content.

A position as assistant in the tutorial service brought Barbara Baert back to the KU Leuven, where she devoted herself to advising first-year students. Her inspiring teaching is still valued to this day. While holding this post, Barbara Baert obtained a B.A. in Philosophy and, under the supervision of Professor Dr Maurits Smeyers, began to work on a doctorate on the cult of relics that would have a major impact on within the scholar community in her field. The extent and ambition of this project was celebrated by a foreign colleague with the ironic description of "The glorious mistake of a pioneer". The resulting book, *A Heritage of Holy Wood* (Brill, 2004), has now become a reference work. It lays at the basis of Baert's characteristic 'iconological' method: a method that combines in art history, the history of ideas, theology, literature, and the visual arts.

The sudden death of her supervisor, Professor Dr Maurits Smeyers, in 1999 was the beginning of a difficult period for Barbara Baert. At the time, she held a postdoctoral scholarship from the national

research fund that would be extended to 2004, but had to carry on working through the lull. Barbara Baert started travelling. She delivered lectures at countless institutes and universities in Europe and the USA. She accepted a one-year fellowship in Trier, and obtained a series of writing scholarships in Rome. At this stage of her career she developed a wide and stable international network. Academic freedom gave her the breathing space to branch out into new iconological themes and experiment methodology within her field. Spending times outside her Alma Mater, the lines of research that continue to undergird her work were sketched out. Looking back on this period, Barbara Baert herself speaks of an “important emancipatory time with regard to impact and insight that she survived thanks to conviction and perseverance”.

After this her career really took off and her work became ever better known.

In 2006 Barbara Baert got appointed within the senior academic staff of the KU Leuven.

In the same year she founded the Iconology Research Group (IRG), an organisation with links to ten institutions that support, disseminate and internationalise research on iconology.

Also in 2006 she again received a prize from the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium, Class of Fine Arts, for her impressive career under the age of forty.

In 2015 she was appointed Full Professor. News of this most recent promotion reached her during a Senior Fellowship at the *Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie* of the Bauhaus Universität, Weimar (April-September 2015), where she had been invited as an excellence-expert on iconology.

Barbara Baert is married to Koen Kwanten and together they have two sons, Andreas (2002) and Marius (2007). Her parents, Rita Gybels and the visual artist Paul Baert, in 2007 moved from their eighteenth-century farmhouse in Merksplas to the converted industrial property “De Mouterij” in Leuven – close to the laureate.

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Work

The discipline of Art History is a house of many mansions. A single field that deals with questions about form and beauty through time, as well as about content (iconography), cannot but embrace diversity. Art historian James Elkins (Chicago) once wrote: “It is a sign of the health of Art History that it can address large-scale questions”.

The work of art historian Barbara Baert never avoids large-scale questions. Her work links knowledge and questions from the history of ideas, cultural anthropology, philosophy, and in some measure also from psychoanalysis, and shows great sensitivity to cultural archetypes and their symptoms in the visual arts. Her usual point of departure is the art of the past, especially the Middle Ages and early modernity, but where relevant she also engages with contemporary art.

Barbara Baert’s investigations into the way that cultural symptoms (such as texts, or elements of oral culture) are ‘turned into’ visual works are widely regarded as a model for further research. This approach has its origins in her dissertation on the relics of the True Cross in Western Europe, published as *A Heritage of Holy Wood* (Brill, 2004). Now an important work of reference, it was then a methodological trailblazer. In short, Baert’s projects show a determined interdisciplinary dialogue within the humanities and can be regarded from three main angles: the methodological space between text and image, the impact of the sensorium in the visual arts, and finally critical reflection upon her own discipline.

From the first angle, Barbara Baert has conducted much work into the body as medium in text and image. Her research into the issue of ‘touch’ in the iconography of biblical women (Mary Magdalene; the woman with an issue of blood) has contributed to a better understanding of gendered taboos of touch and blood. An important concern in this group of publications on corporality is the role of relics, on the one hand, and, on the other, of textiles as a second skin. In these projects she works comparatively across the cultural boundaries of Europe.

Her familiarity with research questions on the impact of touch, on textiles, and on the body's liminal zones has secondly led to projects on the human senses. The latest challenges in Barbara Baert's work are the representation and experience of the senses that escape the visual medium, such as scent and wind, and can only be visualised indirectly. Her most recent book on these themes is *Pneuma and the Visual Arts in the Middle Ages and early Modernity. Essays on Wind, Ruach, Incarnation, Odour Stains, Movement, Kairos, Web and Silence*. This deals with the complex relationships between the human person and their ecological environment, the person and their body, the spiritual relationship between visible and invisible in the visual arts. Baert proposes the phenomenon of 'wind' as a paradigm for research into the image as such.

The third approach in Barbara Baert's oeuvre is critical reflection on the foundations and the future of her discipline. This preoccupation has taken shape in a series of reflective essays on the discipline within the purpose-made series *Studies in Iconology* (Peeters Publishers). This series shows a bold and perceptive researcher, protecting her intellectual sanctuary and by analogy cherishing a discourse that dares to interrogate the academic genre itself. She defends an academic practice of 'fluidity' and empathy rather than one of boundaries and a fixation on the 'self'.

One last question remains: what name to give such an interdisciplinary dialogue in the current juncture? German uses *Bildwissenschaften*. French currently prefers *Anthropologie visuelle*. Flemish retains the original term 'iconology'. Whatever the case may be, the exceptional energy of Art History as a whole perhaps lies in its unclassifiability. As the Italian aesthetician Giorgio Agamben has fondly remarked: it is *une science sans nom*. The current richness of Art History in the Low Countries is perhaps explained by Belgium's key position and its three language zones: constantly subject to dynamic influences, constantly open to friendly 'contagion', and constantly alert to new initiatives.

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Report of the Jury (May 9, 2016)

Barbara Baert, Professor of Mediaeval Art at KULeuven and member of the Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, Klasse der Kunsten, is an extremely productive and influential scholar, whose thematically diverse work on the art and culture of the Middle Ages has transformed this field and has had significant impact on other disciplines. What characterizes her research is the wide range of topics, that she has treated in numerous books and edited volumes, and in more than 100 articles and chapters in collective volumes. Her publications deal with previously unexplored aspects of Christian art, including gaze and touch, the use of textiles as metaphors, affects and emotions, silence, air, and smell, and the phenomenology of blood.

Her truly innovative approach to the iconology of Mediaeval Art, which has placed into the foreground the senses, materiality, and various aspects of the female and male body, and iconographical themes that have been neglected in the past, has deeply transformed the way European religious and secular art of the Middle Ages is viewed.

Professor Baert's research has promoted an intensive international dialogue between the study of the culture, society, and art of mediaeval Europe with history, philosophy, anthropology, theology, and psychology. By introducing new methods, questions, and approaches, Professor Baert has broken new ground not only in the study of mediaeval art, but in art history. More generally, she has produced work of lasting value, and has inspired scholars around the world.

It is an honour and a pleasure to support Prof. Barbara Baert in her nomination for the 2016 Francqui Prize in the Human Sciences.

Jury members :

Professor Eric Maskin is Adams University Professor at Harvard. He received the 2007 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics (with L. Hurwicz and R. Myerson) for laying the foundations of mechanism design theory. He also has made contributions to game theory, contract theory, social choice theory, political economy, and other areas of economics.

He received his A.B. and Ph.D from Harvard and was a postdoctoral fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge University. He was a faculty member at MIT from 1977-1984, Harvard from 1985-2000, and the Institute for Advanced Study from 2000-2011. He rejoined the Harvard faculty in 2012.

Chairman

and

Professor Richard Blundell is the David Ricardo Professor of Economics at University College London. Since 1986 he has also been Research Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). He has held visiting professor positions at UBC, MIT and Berkeley. He holds Honorary Doctorates from the University of St.Gallen, the Norwegian School of Economics, the University of Mannheim, and USI, Lugano. In 1995 he was awarded the Yrjö Jahnsson Prize for his work in microeconometrics and the analysis of labour supply, welfare reform and consumer behaviour. In 2008 he was the recipient of the Jean-Jacques Laffont Prize given to a high level economist whose research combines both the theoretical and applied aspects of economics. He was awarded the 2015 BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Prize in Economics. He was knighted in the 2014 Queens New Years Honours for services to Economics and Social Science. His research covers the empirical analysis of consumer, savings and labour supply behaviour. He has developed new microeconomic tools for the analysis of individual decisions.

Professor Yve-Alain Bois - After teaching the history of art for two decades at Johns Hopkins and Harvard, Yve-Alain Bois joined the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, in 2005. He has written extensively on 20th century art, from Matisse, Picasso and Mondrian to post-war European and American art, with a particular emphasis on the work of Ellsworth Kelly. He has curated or co-curated several exhibitions, notably of the artists just mentioned, in the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; the National Gallery of Art, Washington; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge; and other institutions. He is currently establishing the catalogue raisonné of Ellsworth Kelly's paintings, reliefs and sculpture, the first volume of which appeared in 2015.

Professor Angelos Chaniotis was born in Athens in 1959. After having served as Professor of Ancient History at New York University (1994-1998), and the University of Heidelberg (1998-2006), Vice Rector of the University of Heidelberg (2001-2006), and Senior Research Fellow in Classics at All Souls College in Oxford (2006-2010), he joined the faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study in 2010. He specializes in the history of the Hellenistic world and the Roman East. For his work he has received numerous awards, including the Research Award of Baden-Württemberg and the Annelise-Maier Research Award and honorary doctorates from the University of Liège and the Hellenic International University.

Professor David Coen is Director of the School of Public Policy and founding Director of the Global Governance Institute at University College London. In 2015 he held the Fernand Braudel Visiting Professor Fellowship at the European University Institute and in 2009 he held a Fulbright Distinguished Fellowship at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In 2015 he conducted a major study for the European Parliament on EU Lobbying. Recent books include: Handbook on Business and Government. (2010), Oxford University Press and Lobbying the European Union: Institutions, Actors and Policy, (2009), Oxford University Press.

Professor Antoine Compagnon est professeur au Collège de France, titulaire de la chaire de littérature française moderne et contemporaine, et à Columbia University, New York. Il a publié sur Montaigne, Baudelaire et Proust notamment, ou sur les antimodernes. Ses derniers livres sont L'Âge des lettres (Gallimard, 2015) et Petits spleens numériques (Équateurs, 2015).

Professor Elaine Fox. Born in Dublin, Elaine studied at University College Dublin where she obtained a PhD in Psychological Science in 1988. She has over 25 years experience having held

academic appointments in Ireland, New Zealand and the UK. She was appointed Professor of Psychology and Affective Neuroscience at the University of Oxford in 2013 where she founded the Oxford Centre for Emotion and Affective Neuroscience (OCEAN). Prof Fox was awarded a prestigious ERC Advanced Investigator award in 2013 to lead a large-scale project investigating cognitive and genetic factors involved in emotional vulnerability, resilience, and psychological wellbeing. She is author of the bestselling popular science book, *Rainy Brain Sunny Brain* and has also written a highly regarded textbook: *Emotion Science*.

Professor Nilli Lavie is a Professor of Psychology and Brain Sciences and Director of the Attention and Cognitive Control laboratory, at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, University College London. She is an elected Fellow of the **Royal Society of Biology**, the **American Psychological Society**, and the **British Psychological Society**. **She is also** an Honorary life member of the **Experimental Psychological Society**, UK. She is the creator of the influential Load Theory of Attention, Perception and Cognitive Control and has received numerous prizes for her contribution to Cognitive Sciences, including the Mid-Career Award from the **Experimental Psychology Society**, UK and the [British Psychological Society](#) award for outstanding contribution to research on [Human Cognition](#).

Professor Beth Simmons is Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs in the Department of Government at Harvard University. She researches and teaches international relations, international law and international political economy. She is best known for her research on international political economy during the interwar years, policy diffusion globally and her work demonstrating the influence that international law has on human rights outcomes around the world. Her book, *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics* won the 2010 American Political Science Association's **Woodrow Wilson Award** for the best book published in the United States on government, politics, or international affairs. Simmons has directed the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard, is a past president of the International Studies Association and has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Ursula Verhoeven-van Elsbergen is Egyptologist and received her academic degrees at University of Cologne, Germany. After a one-year fellowship for traveling in the Mediterranean World, she became assistant professor at Universities of Cologne and Bonn and visiting professor at University of Marburg. Since 1998 she is university professor for Egyptology at Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. Later, she became ordinary member of the German Archaeological Institute and the Academy of Sciences and Literature Mainz, and is now in charge of two long-term projects (*Necropolis of Asyut; Ancient Egyptian Cursive Writings*).

Members

