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Oud Holland

Review of: 'Renaissance children' (2021)

November 2022

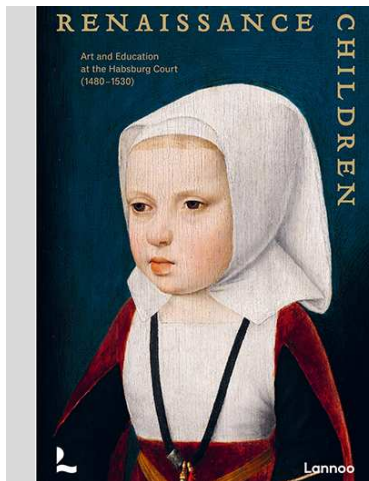
ANNEMARIE JORDAN GSCHWEND

Review of: Samuel Mareel (ed.), *Renaissance children. Art and education at the Habsburg court (1480-1530)*, Lannoo Publishers [Tielt] 2021

Three generations of Burgundian-Habsburg children grew up in the court city of Mechelen (Malines), under the charge of two powerful women, Margaret of York (1446-1503), Duchess of Burgundy, and Margaret of Austria (1480-1530), Duchess of Savoy, and later regent, of the Habsburg Netherlands. Margaret's father, Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), was largely absent from Mechelen, however, kept a distant but watchful eye over this brood of princes and princesses, who, after all, were his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This exhibition venue at the Hof van Busleyden Museum in 2021, curated by Samuel Mareel. Its objective was to showcase young Habsburg boys and girls while taking a closer look at their education and upbringing. The Hof van Kamerijk, also known as the Court of Cambrai, Margaret of York's former palace, became their first official residence, nursery and playground. This exhibition transmitted its concepts well to the general public and was runner-up for the 2022 award, 'International Exhibition of the Year', granted by the Museums + Heritage Awards in the United Kingdom.

The richly illustrated, and hardback catalogue is beautifully designed, and its compact format and size (25x19 cm.) recall a bound notebook used in a classroom. The cover with the infant Habsburg Archduchess is particularly charming and inviting. Four scholarly essays, well researched and supported by new archival documents, trace the historical, educational and artistic background of these princely children, relying primarily upon a series of portraits, of which a surprising number have survived. Not only is the genre of the children's portrait, dating from the late-fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century, examined at length, but also the humanist ideas advanced by Erasmus (1466-1536) and Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540), which influenced childrearing (the notion that young people can be formed through rigorous education and outdoor activities). The catalogue is thematically divided under five headings, with scholarly entries on

paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, engravings and toys. The last section: 'A court for children and for art, politics, education, fragility, [and] young Belgians' is dedicated to the nineteenth century, when Belgium painters looked to historical themes and sought inspiration from past heroes, painting personages like Emperor Charles V, thus imbuing the young nation-state of Belgium with its history and legitimacy. Samuel Mareel's essay looks at Mechelen as a Burgundian-Habsburg court city, as well as a dynamic cultural center at this date, where three successive generations lived between 1485 and 1530. Mareel highlights the importance of Burgundian court ceremonial which later impacted these youngsters, when they in turn ruled as queens and kings, at their own respective courts. Every aspect of the environment, spaces and daily lives of these young Habsburgs was monitored and controlled by strict etiquette. Entire households revolved around these children. For instance, as a toddler, the future Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) already had a bodyguard of 50 archers. By the age of three, he had been assigned his own drummer and lute player, with cooks and other crucial servants a part of his entourage, overseeing his every personal and physical need.



Left: Cover of *Renaissance children. Art and education at the Habsburg court (1480-1530)*

Middle: fig. 1, (cat. 7), Jan van Nieu-landt, *Charles V, Ferdinand, Isabella, Eleanor, Catherine and Mary on Horseback*, c. 1521-1525, woodcut on paper, 26.6 x 37.8 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, R-P-P-1928-138

Right: fig. 2, (cat. 12) Bernhard Strigel (after), *The family of Emperor Maximilian I*, c. 1560, oil on canvas, 66.5 x 78.5 cm., The Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp

Margaret of Austria became an *ersatz* mother of her brother's (Archduke Philip the Fair (1478-1506)) four (later six) orphan children, after his unexpected death in Burgos (Spain) in 1506: Charles V and his three sisters – Leonor of Austria (Eleanor or Eleanora) (1498-1558), Isabella of Austria (1501-1526), and Mary of Hungary (1505-1558), became Margaret's wards. Philip the Fair's youngest son, Ferdinand (1503-1564; Emperor in 1556),¹ and posthumous daughter, Catherine of Austria (1507-1578; Queen of Portugal in 1525), were both born in Spain.² The woodcut by Jan van Nieu-landt), depicting Charles V with his imperial siblings as teenagers riding together, was printed in the early 1520s to market this dynamic generation of Habsburgs, despite the fact that two of them had not grown up in the Netherlands (cat. 7).

After the death of Margaret of York in 1503, Margaret of Austria established her residence in the Mechelen palace, Hof van Savoyen (Court of Savoy), which she transformed into a cultural and humanistic center, gathering there the best painters, sculptors, architects, poets and musicians of her time. Maximilian I implicitly entrusted her with the education of Philip's children, whom Maximilian and Margaret referred to in their correspondence as, 'our children' (*noz efffans*).

The Spanish and French tutors Margaret engaged for her wards included Juan de Anchiata (1462-1523), Luis Cabeza de Vaca (1465-1550), Robert of Ghent (dates unknown) and Adrian of Utrecht (1459-1523), who later became Pope Adrian VI – while her renowned library of over 400 volumes and illuminated manuscripts were placed at the disposal of these illustrious preceptors and their princely pupils. Margaret herself undertook to teach her three nieces the domestic arts of sewing, needlework and making preserves. Secular and religious music played a foremost role at Margaret's court, which engaged Josquin Desprez (c. 1440-1521) and Pierre de la Rue (c. 1460-1518). Henri Bredemers (†1522), Margaret's organist and music teacher, taught all four children the art of playing keyboard instruments, which they mastered. Leonor of Austria was especially gifted musically, playing the lute, viola and clavicord. Charles would appreciate music his

entire life. Dancing was practiced with great intensity, as was riding and hunting, a recreation enjoyed by the entire court. These Archduchesses became formidable equestriennes. Contemporaries wrote of how Mary of Hungary rode intrepidly like a man,³ and excelled in falconry, having been personally trained by her grandfather Maximilian, when she moved to Innsbruck and Vienna.

Through the numerous children's portraits in this exhibition, audiences were introduced to the future political players of a fledging dynasty on the rise, and one which would reshuffle the chessboard and history of Renaissance Europe. Maximilian I used his family as political pawns for his endless gambits to contract strategic marriages, which advanced and promoted the Habsburg house. His progeny in Mechelen would become the future emperors, kings and queens of kingdoms that linked Portugal and Spain (and their overseas trade empires), with courts as far north as Denmark and as far east as Buda (Hungary). A genealogy in the catalogue helps readers understand these complex family connections, reinforced in the exhibition by Robert Péril's largescale woodcuts (22 in all), of the *Family Tree of the House of Habsburg*, printed in 1535 (cat. 13). Maximilian's obsession with legitimizing the heritage and power of the Habsburg house, was succinctly encapsulated by Bernhard Strigel (c. 1461-c. 1528) in a telling group portrait, with the Holy Roman Emperor proudly portrayed with three generations of his family. Maximilian looks to his deceased son, Philip the Fair, embracing his second grandson Ferdinand. His heir to a world empire, Charles V, centers the composition. Maximilian's beloved first wife, Mary of Burgundy, presides as the venerated *mater familias* of his dynasty (cat. 12).⁴

Leading painters like the Master of the Magdalen Legend, Pieter van Coninxloo (c. 1460-1513), the Master of Mechelen's Saint George's Guild, Juan de Flandes (c. 1465-1519), Jan Gossaert (c. 1478-1532) and Jakob Seisenegger (1505-1567) were tasked by their aunt Margaret of Austria to create stunning portraits of these children at different stages of their infancies and throughout their childhoods. Till-Hoger Borchert's essay surveys portraits of Habsburg children: '[...] the Habsburgs attached particular importance to portraits of their progeny, who guaranteed the continuation of the dynasty. It seems that children and grandchildren of the Habsburgs were painted at regular intervals, in pictures that thus document them growing up' (p. 51). There's little doubt these portraits were commissioned at different stages of their childhood to document their growth and progress. However, as seen in the catalogue entries by different scholars and historians, portraits of targeted Habsburg princesses were also deployed in the complex marriage games Maximilian I pursued. One portrait, possibly of the Archduchess Leonor of Austria, at the tender age of four, today in a private collection and attributed to the Master of the Magdalen Legend, was most likely painted as a nuptial portrait (cat. 43), as were those of Archduchesses Elisabeth and Anna of Austria, executed by Jakob Seisenegger in Vienna (cats. 15-17). Small, portable portraits were exchanged between courts to preview the prospective bride, even if still a child, and before an alliance was sealed.



Left: fig. 3, Bernard van Orley, *Portrait of Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy (1480-1530)*, c. 1510-1520, oil on panel, 37.1 x 27.5 cm., Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

Middle: fig. 4, *Toy jousting figures*, c. 1450s, Austria, Bronze, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, in. KK 81 and KK 92

Right: fig. 5, (cat. 37), *Mary of Burgundy*, c. 1480-1510, oil on panel, 52 x 32 cm., Gaasbeek Castle, Lennik, inv. no. 480

This exhibition offered a unique overview of children's portraiture and its artistic development between the end of the fifteenth century until the mid-sixteenth century. In the exhibition section, entitled 'Fragility', the high mortality rate of children was underscored, with many images of children cherished by their parents as mementos of infants who died very young (pp. 152-175). One poignant portrayal was the

drawing of the funerary monument of Archduke François (Francis), the third child of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I who died prematurely at four months. The small baby is portrayed as a *gisant*, recumbent on his tomb, hands clasped in prayer, with a sleeping lion at his feet, echoing the funerary monuments of his illustrious ancestors, the Burgundian dukes, at Champmol (cat. 49).

Growing up with and being raised alongside the young royals in this unique Habsburg kindergarten and classroom were elite children (at least 20 *enfants d'honneur*) from noteworthy, aristocratic families from across Europe: the future courtiers, military generals, civil servants and ladies-in-waiting who would distinguish themselves in the service of the Habsburg court. Foreign teenagers of noble rank were equally sent to Mechelen to complete their education, where the Courts of Cambrai and Savoy were appreciated as *the* 'finishing schools' of the day, including Anne Boleyn (c. 1501/7-1536) (the future wife of Henry VIII (1491-1547) who arrived there after a sojourn at the Valois court, and Massimiliano Sforza (1493-1530) from Milan, both of whom took part in the same lessons as Habsburg girls and boys.

The curriculum and pedagogic program offered by tutors, scholars and specialists (such as Charles V's fencing master Pierre Maxin-dates?), included literature, mathematics, eloquence and history. The languages learned were Latin, Greek and Spanish, although the mother tongue of the Habsburg children at Mechelen was French (the court language), which Charles preferred to use in personal correspondence with his sisters, Leonor of Austria and Mary of Hungary. Instruction for calligraphy and learning the alphabet (ABCs) was given with richly illustrated manuscripts borrowed from Margaret of Austria's great library (cat. 30). The art of drawing was mandatory. The painter by the name of 'Jehannin' (either Jan Mostaert (c. 1475-1555) or Jan Gossaert) was paid an annual salary of £100 to teach the young Charles how to paint, despite his lack of talent.⁵ Margaret herself drew and painted skilfully. A paintbox in the shape of a book (embellished with her coat of arms) and five brushes, gifted by the Venetian painter Jacopo de' Barbari (c. 1460/70-before 1516) when he resided at her court, was listed in Margaret's 1524 inventory.⁶

Hilde de Ridder Symoens' essay assesses the education and upbringing of Maximilian I's extended family, at this Burgundian-Habsburg court. The arts of war – fencing and jousting – reflect the lingering chivalric, knightly traditions of the Burgundian court, which Charles V cherished. Maximilian commissioned lightweight armor for the young prince, who practiced at staged tournaments, such as the suit ordered in Innsbruck for his grandson (cat. 33). Riding, fishing and hawking were encouraged not only for the boys, but also the girls (cats. 37-38).

The question of favorite pets such as small domestic birds, exotic parrots and dogs, belonging to these children – these mascots an essential part of their daily lives – is not addressed. Margaret of Austria owned a lapdog named *Boute*, and a small green West African parrot, *Amant Vert*, which she adored. When this parrot died, he was buried in the gardens of her Mechelen palace, where she erected a tomb to his memory. The poet Jean Lemaire de Belges (1473-1525), penned in 1505, a famous poem – *Triomphe de L'Amant Vert* – dedicated to this bird.⁷

Nor were fools or dwarves, another aspect of Habsburg court life, part of this exhibition. Maximilian I loved his jester, Konrad (or Kunz) von den Rosen, and Margaret of Austria had a *folle* in her female retinue.⁸ Since 1506, 'Grand Jehan' the dwarf, had played the tambourine in the young Charles V's household. Portrayals of memorable dwarves were commissioned by Margaret from her leading court painter Jan Gossaert, who painted a 'well-executed' double portrait of the King of Denmark's (Christian II's (1481-1559)) dwarves.⁹ Jesters, buffoons and dwarves became close companions of their Habsburg patrons (young and old), adding both pleasure and magnificence to their everyday lives.

Hobbies and pastimes of the young Habsburgs were presented through the lens of material culture as it was around 1500. Annemarieke Willemsen's essay looks, in-depth, at children's clothes, dolls, accessories such as hobbyhorses and rattles (cat. 45), toy weapons and canons, (cat. 36), model knights for jousting (cat. 35) and toys used outdoors, such as wooden spinning tops. The portrait of the infant Archduchess, perhaps Isabella of Austria, attributed to the Master of the Magdalen Legend, depicts her with a black ribbon around her neck with a wolf's tooth and a piece of red coral as pendants (cat. 42). These were intended to be sucked on when the child was teething, but also served as amulets to protect against illness and sudden death.

The Habsburg children at the Mechelen court, grew up in opulence, were given the best education, wore luxurious clothes, were permitted to use magnificent books and manuscripts for their studies and had the finest of toys with which to play. Their careful upbringing, supervised in every detail, was to prepare them for the prominent social and political positions they would one day fulfill. The foremost lesson, however, taught at Mechelen, was duty and honour. From infancy, Margaret of Austria trained her nieces and nephew to respect and serve the dynasty they were born into, instilling in her young protégés one principle they would respect their entire lives – a deep loyalty to and respect for, the Habsburg house.

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NOTES:

- 1 For Ferdinand's years in Spain, before he moved to Mechelen in 1518, consult the exhibition catalogue, Nuria Sabadell González, ed., *Fernando I. Un infante español emperador*, Valladolid 2003.
- 2 Catherine of Austria, the forgotten *infanta* of her family, was raised by her mother Juana I of Castile in Tordesillas (Spain). She would never meet her grandfather Maximilian I, her aunt Margaret of Austria, two of her sisters (Isabella and Mary), nor her brother Ferdinand. See, further: A. Jordan Gschwend, 'A Forgotten Infanta. Catherine of Austria, Queen of Portugal (1507–1578)', in S. Haag, D. Eichberger and A. Jordan Gschwend (eds.), *Women. The art of power. Three women from the House of Habsburg*, Innsbruck-Vienna 2018, pp. 50-63.
- 3 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Ms. 2436, fol 114: '[...] *la Reyna Maria muy determinada y gran caçadora, en un cavallo como un hombre.*' 'The Queen Mary is a determined and great huntress and on a horse [rides] like a man.'
- 4 In his first testament of 1521, Emperor Charles V stipulated that if he were to die in or near the Netherlands, he wished to be buried in Bruges, in the Church of Our Lady, next to his grandmother, Mary of Burgundy, an ancestor much revered by the Habsburgs. Cf. A. M. Roberts, 'The chronological and political significance of the tomb of Mary of Burgundy', *Art bulletin*, 71 (1989), pp. 376-400.
- 5 G. Parker, *Emperor. A new life of Charles V*, New Haven 2019, p. 36.
- 6 E. E. Tremayne, *The first governess of the Netherlands. Margaret of Austria*, London 1908, p. 312, no. 106: '*Ung fainct livre, couvert de velours violet à deux fermiletz d'argent dorez, aux armes de Madame, à trois escailles, une petite boîte d'argent et v pinceaux, garniz d'argent dedans ledit livre. Le tout servant pour le passe temps de Madame à paindre.*'
- 7 *Le Triumphe de l'Amant vert, comprins en deux épistres fort joyeuses, envoyées à Mme Marguerite Auguste, composées par Jehan Le Maire de Belges*, Paris 1535.
- 8 J. Doran, *The history of court fools*, London 1858, p. 63 and pp. 326-331.
- 9 Tremayne 1908 (note 5), p. 306, no 14: '*Item delivré audit garde-joyaulx, depuis cest inventoire fait, la pourtraicture des nayn et nayne du Roy de Dannemarque faicte par Jehann de Maubeuge, fort bien fait.*'

CITE AS:

Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, 'Review of: Renaissance children. Art and education at the Habsburg court (1480-1530)', *Oud Holland Reviews*, November 2022.

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