

MAINTAINING ITS SPIRIT

Collection Marlies & Jo Eyck
at Bonnefanten

ENGLISH

BONNEFANTEN



With artworks by:

Akkerman, Ben
Asher, Dan
Beekman, Chris
Blotkamp, Carel
Böhm, Hartmut
Bonies, Bob
Brethouwer, Harmen
Bustamante, Jean-Marc
Calderara, Antonio
Caravaggio, Gianni
CCC
Cortier, Amédée
Cragg, Tony
Daniëls, René
Dekkers, Ad
Domela, César
Dumas, Marlene
Edmier, Keith
Elk, Ger van
Fliciniński, Jaroslaw
François, Michel
Geelen, Guido
Guðni, Georg
Haagmans, Fons
Haaster, Bettie van
Haynes, Nancy
Heijne, Mathilde ter
Hermans, Benoît
Hilgemann, Ewerdt
Hiryczuk/Van Oevelen
Jacobs, Henri
Judd, Donald
Killaars, Fransje
Koningsbruggen, Rob van
Kreij, Marijn van
Kruysen, André
Lambermont, Robert
Leck, Bart van der
Lohse, Richard Paul
Long, Richard
Martin, Agnes
Martin, Kenneth
Mol, Pieter Laurens
Morellet, François
Munster, Jan van
Pope, Nicholas
Raat, Thomas
Sauter, Willy de
Schoonhoven, Jan
Struycken, Peter
Tajiri, Shinkichi
Tones, Curdin
Tuerlinckx, Joëlle
Tušek, Mitja
Tuymans, Luc
Ungers, Sybille
Verkerk, Emo
Visser, Carel
Vries, Herman de
Vroegindeweyj, Leo
Woutermaertens, Barbara

Maintaining Its Spirit: Collection Marlies & Jo Eyck at Bonnefanten

In 2012 a large private collection of contemporary art was acquired by the Bonnefanten. The collection was created over the course of forty years by business and marriage partners Marlies and Jo Eyck, and includes work by renowned artists in the abstract geometric tradition. It is based at Wylre Castle, the home of the Eycks. The Bonnefanten's acquisition of the collection, with vital financial support from Limburg provincial authority, has made it possible to keep this country home and its grounds – including beautifully designed gardens, a coach house and an exhibition pavilion – in southern Limburg accessible to the public.

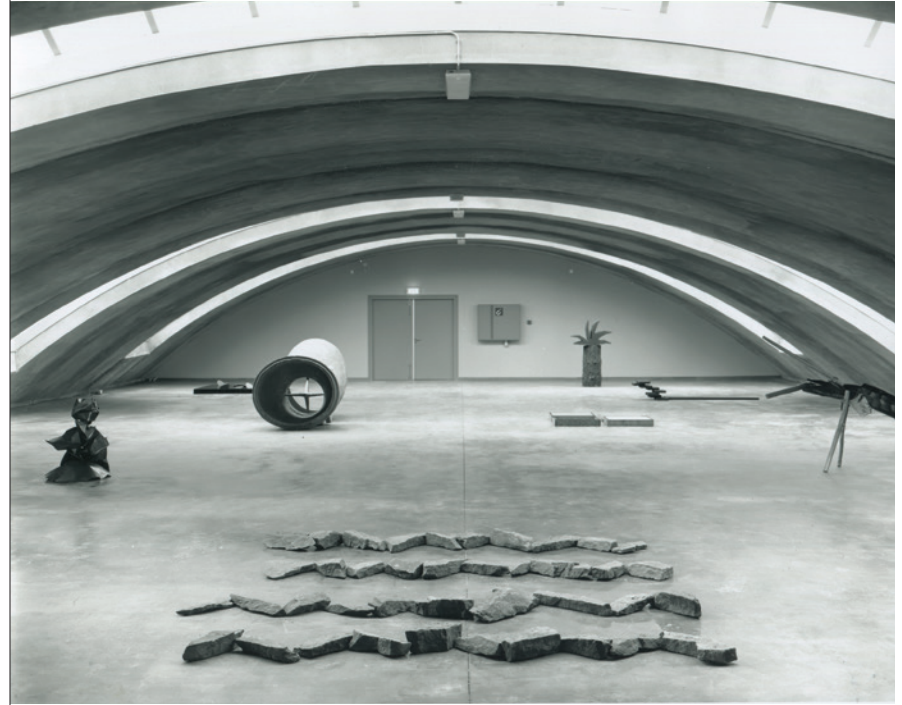
Kasteel Wylre estate, as it is now known, is the Eycks' life work, the fruit of all their efforts. It is a place where visitors can experience art, nature and architecture and the connections between them, each one retaining its own individual character. Over the past few decades, many have experienced the couple's legendary hospitality. The castle grounds are now a frequent destination for lovers of art, gardens and architecture.

The purchase of a private collection using public money by a public museum in the Netherlands is something that does not happen every day. It underlines the significance ascribed to the collection created by Marlies and Jo Eyck. This was not always the case. The core of the Eyck collection is rooted in a period when post-war abstract art struggled to gain a foothold in Limburg. The region was conservative and inward-looking. The outstanding presentation of their sculptures in 1995, for the reopening of the Bonnefanten, was therefore an acknowledgement for Marlies and Jo Eyck of their pioneering role as early champions of abstraction in their province.

It was also clear that the artistic and substantive focus of both the Eyck collection and the museum's collection coincided, despite remarkably little overlap in the choice of artists.

The Bonnefanten has permanent exhibits of several formerly private collections, including the renowned Neutelings Collection of small medieval sculpture, on display in its Neutelings Treasure Trove. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to permanently exhibit the Eyck collection, as the 147 works by 60 artists

would require more than an entire wing of the museum. But as a tribute to Marlies and Jo Eyck, both of whom passed away recently in just a short space of time, for the next seven months the collection will be on show in its entirety for the first time at the Bonnefanten. A small selection is on display at Kasteel Wijlre estate, giving visitors an opportunity to get to know the most important formerly private collection of contemporary art in Limburg in both a museum setting, and in its original setting.



Exhibition *Sculptures from the collection of Marlies and Jo Eyck*, Bonnefanten Wiebengahal, 1995.
Photo: Etienne van Sloun/Gregor Ramaekers

Heerlen head office

Marlies and Jo Eyck did not set out to build a collection. Initially, they focused on hosting short, compact solo presentations of the work of abstract artists, first at their company premises in Heerlen, and later, from the 1980s, at Wijlre Castle. Purchasing one piece from every exhibition, they slowly but surely amassed a collection. This was very much a joint enterprise, Jo Eyck later explained. “It wasn’t often that one wanted to buy something and the other didn’t.”

The foundations of the collection were laid in the 1960s and 70s. Jo Eyck and Marlies Voncken married in 1959, a year after Jo had taken over his father’s wholesale business, Verfindustrie Jac Eyck. The firm, closely associated with paint manufacturer Sikkens, benefited from Limburg’s flourishing mining industry. Lots of homes were being built in Heerlen, the ‘mining metropolis’, and all these new houses had to be painted. Business boomed.

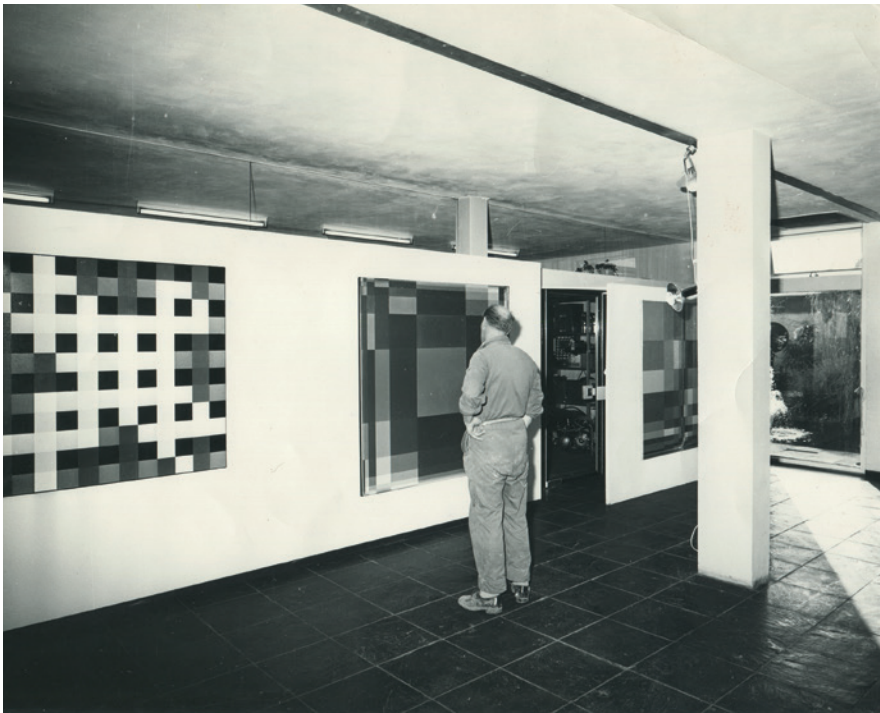
Marlies and Jo Eyck were not art historians, and nor were they professionally involved in the art world in any other way. As lovers of art, they were guided by their intuition and their discernment. They both grew up with art and culture. Marlies Voncken’s mother was an artist, and her pharmacist father actively supported the progressive cultural ambitions of post-war Heerlen. Jo Eyck’s father loved to browse art markets, and would involve his son in his assessment of what was on offer, and what he chose to buy.



Exhibition CCC (Slothuber and Graatsma) in head office Heerlen, 1966.
Photo: F. Lahaye, Maastricht

One important source of inspiration was Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and the progressive policy of director Willem Sandberg. In 1957 he acquired a unique collection of work by the Russian pioneer of abstraction, Kazimir Malevich. Work by Dutch De Stijl artists like Mondrian, Van Doesburg and Van der Leek was also welcomed at the Stedelijk. Jo and Marlies had therefore encountered the forerunners of the abstract geometric art they would later collect. The Stedelijk's 1966 exhibition 'Colour Forms' also made a deep impression on them.

House painter for paintings by Richard Paul Lohse in the Heerlen head office, 1968



The Dutch capital was a long way from Heerlen, Jo Eyck pointed out: "It's quite a distance [...] in those days it wasn't so easy to go to Amsterdam." But it was a way for him and his wife to encounter subjects and artists which they found more exciting than what was on offer in the small world of Limburg.

They met artist Ad Dekkers at a meeting in Ghent for constructivists from all over Europe. This encounter speeded things up. Dekkers' austere abstract geometric work so affected Jo Eyck that he immediately decided to stage an exhibition during a visit to his studio. Ad Dekkers became a friend for life, as did artist Peter Struycken. In 1967 Dekkers introduced the couple to Riekje Swart. At her gallery in Amsterdam, Marlies and Jo Eyck met other leading international artists, and so the fledgling collectors came into contact with like-minded art critics, gallery owners and museum people. In the 1960s and 70s, their company premises in Heerlen hosted exhibitions of the work of Ad Dekkers (1967), Peter Struycken (1969), CCC (architects Slothouber and Graatsma, 1966), Richard Paul Lohse (1968), Amédée Cortier (1970) and François Morellet (1976).

Wijlre Castle

Their collecting and exhibitions were put on hold between 1979 and 1984. The couple moved to Wijlre Castle, built in the 17th century. The move, and the restoration of the house and gardens, commanded all their attention. From 1984 onwards they would host a temporary exhibition each year in the Coach House, which is now set up as an exhibition space. The exhibitions were staged in collaboration with Amsterdam gallery Art & Project, owned by Geert van Beijeren and Adriaan van Ravesteijn. The Coach House exhibitions featured more lyrical abstract work – often sculpture – by artists like Ben Akkerman, Richard Long and Leo Vroegindeweyj. The focus on the relationship between art and nature grew, and the gardens were opened to the public during exhibitions. Visitors came in large numbers, thanks in part to positive reviews in the press, which appeared to have closely followed every development in the purchase of the castle, the laying out of the gardens and the furnishing of the castle in the preceding years.

Marlies and Jo Eyck now rank among the fifteen most important collectors in the Netherlands. In the 1990s they increasingly focused their attention on the further renovation and development of the castle grounds and the surrounding gardens. Their daughter Zsa-Zsa, an art historian, and later a gallery owner in Amsterdam, took over the organisation of the exhibitions. Abstraction remained a pillar of the collection, but new developments in art also started to feature. Emotionally charged figuration and conceptual photography seeped into the collection via the exhibition policy. By now, the collection was steadily expanding. Carel Visser and Ger van Elk are examples of artists whom the Eycks followed for many years, purchasing work from them during several periods. Their collection now includes more work by Ad Dekkers and Peter Struycken than any other.



In Hedge House Wijlre: left Richard Paul Lohse, middle: Leo Vroegindeweyj, right middle Richard Long, on the back wall René Daniels. Photo: Kim Zwartz

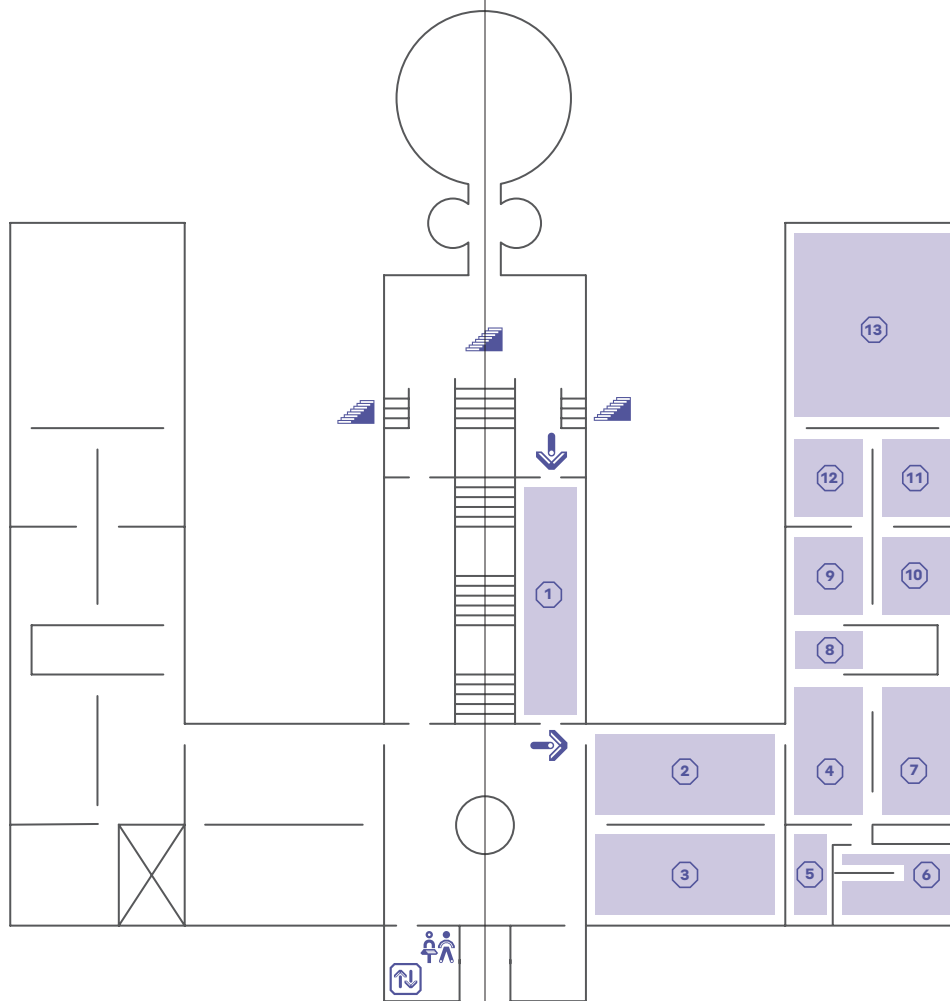
Hedge House




In 1998 Heerlen architect Wiel Arets was commissioned to build a pavilion in the garden. The concrete and glass building is partially underground, and has an elementary design. After it opened in 2002 the pavilion soon became known as Hedge House. As well as a large exhibition space, it also includes a hen house, an orchid nursery and a reception room with a view of the hedges in the garden. The art pavilion resembles a museum and it also recalls the austere, minimalist aesthetic of the head office in Heerlen. Hedge House is now part of the non-profit foundation that runs Kasteel Wijlre estate. The estate is open to the public for a large portion of the year, and it is a permanent feature of the cultural landscape in South Limburg, with its contemporary art programming and public events.



➔ Exhibition starts here

- ① Corridor
- ② Room 2.05
- ③ Room 2.06
- ④ Room 2.07
- ⑤ Room 2.08
- ⑥ Room 2.09
- ⑦ Room 2.10
- ⑧ Room 2.11
- ⑨ Room 2.12
- ⑩ Room 2.13
- ⑪ Room 2.14
- ⑫ Room 2.15
- ⑬ Room 2.16



-  Lift to other floors
-  Stairs to other floors
-  Toilets



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Maintaining Its Spirit

The Marlies and Jo Eyck collection is presented in three groups distributed over ten rooms. The first two rooms contain a group of abstract sculptures from the 1980s and a large series of work by a single artist, 'computer pioneer' Peter Struycken. Beyond the swing doors a further five rooms showcase the growing variety in the collection from the 1990s onwards. The last three rooms, including the grand main gallery, are given over to abstract geometric work from the 1960s and 70s. Consisting mainly of paintings, and works on paper, this art-historically coherent group of artworks constitutes the fundament of the collection, which established Marlies and Jo Eyck's reputation in the art world.

Previous page: Marlies and Jo Eyck at the opening of the Heerlen head office, 1965.

Photo: F. Lahaye, Maastricht

Below: Jo Eyck at the installation of the collection in the Koetshuis in Wijkre.

Photo: Oscar van Alphen, Amsterdam



Room 2.05 and 2.06

The lobby, flooded with light entering through the large windows, sets off the sculptures displayed on the floor to great effect. The Eycks collected these works after moving to Wijkre Castle in the early 1980s. Jo Eyck was able to enjoy them in the peace and quiet of the upper floor of the Coach House, which had been converted into an exhibition space. The extensive castle grounds are ideal for displaying sculpture. The Coach House is surrounded by natural beauty. The geometric paintings from their early years, based mainly on mathematical shapes and principles, gave way naturally, as it were, to more lyrical abstraction. The sculptures are made of a range of materials, including lead, copper, wood, cast iron and concrete. The properties of the material generally dictate the form when it is folded, stacked, chopped or cast.

The colourful triptych on the wall is by Rob van Koningsbruggen. When it was made in 1979 it heralded a shift towards more expression and poetry in abstraction. His solo show that same year was the last to be held at the at the company premises in Heerlen, marking the end of thirteen years of exhibitions there. The paintings were created by the systematic act of sliding canvases covered in coloured paint over one another, and do not feature the angular austerity of the previous generation.

Two works presaged the return to figuration, illusionism and ambiguity in art in the 1990s: Tony Cragg's furniture still life covered in ground plastic and the fluently rendered painting by René Daniëls showing an exhibition space. Or is it a bow tie?

The back room has a large collection of systematic and serial works by Peter Struycken. Like Ad Dekkers, who died at an early age, Struycken was very important to Marlies and Jo Eyck, as an artist, close friend and adviser on matters of colour. In the late 1960s Struycken took a computer course for composers. From that point on the computer played a key role in determining the highly varied manifestations of his work. In 1969 he showed an early product of this approach in Heerlen: a series of panels with a black-and-white chequered pattern, developed using a computer programme and executed by another painter.

Struycken produced work for the Eycks for decades, including coloured panels for a corporate space, a coloured metal sculpture for the garden, and a woven tapestry for their home. In 2019 the couple celebrated Struycken's eightieth birthday with a solo show in the Coach House and Hedge House.



Rob van Koningsbruggen, *Untitled*, 1977, oil on canvas, 180 x 60 cm (3x). Bonnefanten Collection, acquired in 2012 with support from the Province of Limburg from the Eyck collection. Photo Peter Cox



Room 2.07 to 2.13

These five rooms contain work that the Eycks collected from the 1990s onwards, partly in response to group exhibitions. This part of the collection includes some important works, but it is also eclectic. It thus reflects a postmodern era in which art became more pluriform, with a growing focus on relatively new disciplines like photography, video and installations, which produced unexpected combinations of materials and media.

The multifaceted nature of the collection was also the result of the way Marlies and Jo Eyck collected. Despite their deeply rooted love of art, they did not continually seek out the latest developments. They preferred to be inspired by the things that crossed their path, driven by their close interaction and intense conversations with like-minded artists, collectors and other art lovers. Furthermore, their daughter Zsa-Zsa took over the organisation of the exhibitions in the 1990s.

Some consistent trends can however be discerned in the collection. Work by artists like Carel Visser, Ger van Elk and Guido Geelen was included from an early stage, and collected over a longer period. Autonomous conceptual photography was introduced to the collection (Jean-Marc Bustamante), as well as more emotionally charged figurative painting (Luc Tuymans, Marlene Dumas). Then there was the advent and impact of the mass media and popular image culture (Keith Edmier). And a lighthearted version of abstraction as a kind of flexible design (Jaroslaw Fliciński, Fons Haagsmans).

One notable feature of the Eyck collection is the small proportion of work by female artists (i.a. Joëlle Tuerlinckx, Mathilde ter Heijne, Bettie van Haaster), despite the fact that this was a time when they were finally advancing in the art world.

Room 2.14, 2.15 and 2.16

From the very start, the young couple and business partners had exacting standards, in both business and art. Before meeting Ad Dekkers, they had started organising a short exhibition each year in 1965, showing work by leading Dutch and international artists of the post-war neo-constructivist movement at the new, modern premises of their paint wholesale business in Heerlen. They were artists who produced abstract geometric work and had an interest in how art relates to architecture and space.

A unique, beautifully presented catalogue would be published for each exhibition, in collaboration with printer Cor Rosbeek. Printed in small numbers, copies would be sent in advance to art professionals, interested parties and business associates. The openings were well-attended, partly because the Eycks managed to persuade prominent museum directors and art historians like Jean Leering, Rudi Fuchs and Frans Haks to contribute to the catalogue and give the opening address. The press closely followed the couple's every move, highlighting the 'unprecedented rise in standards' which they brought to Limburg.

Like their main supplier, Sikkens, the Eycks made art part of their corporate culture. "Good public relations for your own company and also for the Sikkens group", director Van der Plas wrote to Jo Eyck in response to the well-attended and favourably reviewed Ad Dekker exhibition of 1967. Immediately after the war the paint group Sikkens of Sassenheim – which later became part of AkzoNobel – deliberately linked its company policy with the new cachet enjoyed by art and culture. After the grey years of the war and the immediate post-war period, colour was becoming steadily more important. Three artists with whom the Eycks worked at that time receive the prestigious Sikkens Prize: CCC (Slothouber and Graatsma) and Peter Struycken in 1966 and Richard Paul Lohse in 1971.

Marlies and Jo Eyck linked their paint business to the hopeful modernity of the 1960s and 70s. Their deep affinity with minimalist architecture and abstract geometric art cannot be seen in isolation from the high-minded social ideals that were an integral part of these movements. In this view of the world, individual expression and subjectivity were abandoned. The promise of a progressive, objective artistic method was attractive, and it brought artists and business together. The result would be a better living environment achieved through a synthesis of space and colour. The collection that Marlies and Jo Eyck brought together over the course of forty years is based on this foundation of abstract geometric and systematic art, which inextricably links it to the post-war period of reconstruction and betterment.



Audience with Marlies and Jo Eyck at the opening of Ad Dekkers, 1967. Photo: Will Nilwik

Maintaining Its Spirit Collection Marlies & Jo Eyck at Bonnefanten

21.09.2024 – 04.05.2025

This exhibition is a collaboration with
Kasteel Wijlre estate.

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MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday, 11.00 – 17.00

Bonnefanten Collection, long-term loan from Marlies and Jo Eyck: Marlene Dumas, *Terms* (1992), Luc Tuymans, *The Nose* (1993), René Daniëls, *Monk and Ministry* (1987).

Bonnefanten Collection, donation heirs of Marlies and Jo Eyck: Marijn van Kreijl, *Untitled* (Picasso, *Le Carnet de la Californie*, 1955) (2018).

Other works Bonnefanten Collection, acquired in 2012 with support from the Province of Limburg.

Bonnefanten is subsidised by the Province of Limburg, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the VriendenLoterij.

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Cover image and image on the right: Michel Francois, *Atelier Pissenlits* (detail), 2005, mixed media installation, 242 cm high. Bonnefanten Collection, acquired in 2012 with support from the Province of Limburg from the Eyck collection.



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