Press Kit | Ouverture
04.02.2017

The Museums of the City of Brussels
In February 2017, Manneken-Pis, the most famous Brussels resident, will have his own museum. What could be more fitting for this little gentleman courted by the world? Folklore associations but also celebrities and even governments all want to give him a costume. Not to hide his youthful nudity, but instead, to smile at his unique rebellious and unifying attitude. As for the little lad, he is truly a Brussels resident taking on a new identity with each new costume. And he has over 950 of them! He is indeed the image of this city - multicultural, proud and a tiny bit rebellious.

Some of his costumes are currently on display in a small room at the Maison du Roi. Alongside the teams at the Museums of the City of Brussels, I was committed to giving this collection a more dignified setting. Moving his wardrobe to Rue du Chêne, a stone’s throw from the fountain, is part of a broader perspective to accentuate and show more of the City of Brussels’ collections. After the reopening of the Sewer Museum in 2015, the launch of this new museum is the second phase in this major redeployment.

The original statue is still kept at the Museum of the City of Brussels. At the same time as the opening of GardeRobe MannekenPis, the Manneken-Pis room at the Maison du Roi has been entirely redesigned around the statue’s history, which is intimately linked to the history of Brussels itself.

The official opening will take place on Saturday 4 February. A large-scale public festival will be held in celebration and I invite all Brussels residents and its many tourists to join us in experiencing this historic moment.

Karine Lalieux,
Alderwoman of the City of Brussels, responsible for Culture
INTRODUCTION

On 4 February 2017, the GardeRobe MannekenPis will open. Until now located in the Maison du Roi on the Grand-Place, the incredible wardrobe of the famous statue is moving to rue du Chêne 19, a stone’s throw from the fountain. On the same day, the Maison du Roi will inaugurate its new Manneken-Pis room, which will enable visitors to discover the surprising, often eventful, and still largely unknown history of the sculpture.

A representative selection from among more than one hundred costumes is presented according to seven themes: geography, folklore, charity and citizens’ associations, trades, celebrities and characters, sports and designers. These show the richness of this fabulous and uncommon collection, which today includes nearly 1,000 items! The sculpture’s clothing – which is a tradition dating back to the 17th century! – is still part of the folklore and historical heritage of the city of Brussels.

At the same time, the Manneken-Pis room will be given a new look. The idea is for it to be like a treasure chest – a home for curiosities in connection with the original statue. In a backdrop designed to spark their curiosity, visitors are given the keys to understanding the fountain’s history. When does it date back to? Who sculpted it? When, and how, did Brussels residents begin to show their attachment to this sculpture? Original documents – engravings, photographs, postcards, etc. – along with objects and works of art illustrate the different facets of the enthusiasm provoked by Manneken-Pis throughout the centuries.

The new GardeRobe MannekenPis, and the new room of the Maison du Roi, can be discovered via a single ticket. With the fountain as the link between them, they trace a “Manneken-Pis trail” through the lower half of the centre of Brussels. The statue is a curiosity of the city that, as a world-renowned attraction, is a must-see.

This is why Manneken-Pis will hold the place of honour on 4 February, 2017! The festivities will begin at 2 p.m. The Ommegang will present Manneken-Pis with a copy of his oldest known costume – the one he can be seen wearing in a painting from 1615. Next, the GardeRobe MannekenPis will open to the public, followed by a conference by Roel Jacobs and a special “Manneken-Pis: True or False” game show. This day of celebration will end with the opening of the new Manneken-Pis room at the Maison du Roi at 6:30 p.m.
GARDEROBE MANNEKENPIS

Manneken-Pis has been the beloved child of Brussels residents since the 17th century. The practice of dressing him up on special occasions had already taken root back in that era. This strange tradition has continued throughout the centuries, and has even become more prevalent since the 1980s. Although dressing up religious statues – particularly the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus – is an established practice, Manneken-Pis is the only known example in the world of a non-religious statue with a real wardrobe.

The new GardeRobe MannekenPis offers visitors a perfect opportunity to discover this surprising collection and its astounding history.

A representative selection
Visitors are welcomed into the world of this wondrous wardrobe through a representative selection of costumes. Just over one hundred costumes are on display, arranged according to seven themes: geography, folklore, charity and citizens’ associations, trades, celebrities and characters, sports and designers.

Living heritage
Up until the beginning of the 20th century, the wardrobe comprised only a few costumes, usually ceremonial outfits offered by royalty or by Brussels authorities. The statue wore them on special occasions. Between 1918 and 1940, Manneken-Pis was given around thirty new costumes. From 1945 to the 1970s, he was given between five and fifteen costumes a year. Since the 1980s, around fifteen costumes a year have been added to the collection. Currently, Manneken-Pis wears clothes around 130 times a year (an official calendar has been established for this). Manneken-Pis’ attire has today become part of Brussels folklore, and the wardrobe is part and parcel of the city’s historical heritage.
The beginnings of a tradition
The oldest available information on Manneken-Pis’ costumes dates back to the 17th century. The statue is shown attired as a shepherd on one of the eight canvases painted by Denis Van Alsloot in 1615 and depicting the Ommegang parade.

The first written record of a costume being given dates back to 1698: on the occasion of the papegaai – a traditional yearly shooting competition – Maximilien-Emmanuel de Bavière, governor of the Spanish Netherlands, is said to have offered a blue Bavarian arquebusier’s uniform to the Serment bruxellois des Arquebusiers, as well as to the statue of their patron saint, Saint Christopher and Manneken-Pis! Unfortunately, this costume has not survived to our era. In 2001, the Bavarian delegation to the European Union had a copy made for the statue’s wardrobe.

Lastly, the oldest costume that has been preserved was offered by Louis XV in 1747 by way of an apology for the attempted theft of Manneken-Pis by some of his soldiers, then garrisoned in Brussels. On this occasion, the King of France also decorated the statue by making it a Knight of the Royal Military Order of Saint-Louis, an honour only bestowed upon the bravest officers.

A question of visibility
As early as the period between the two World Wars, the nature of donors became more varied: veterans’ associations, professional, cultural, athletic, charity, and citizens’ organisations, youth movements, celebrities, tourism offices and embassies. Whether to gain recognition for a just cause or to spread the buzz, offering a costume to Brussels’ most famous resident is a way of gaining visibility.
A very serious committee
In order to donate a costume to Manneken-Pis, a formal request must be sent to the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Brussels. The Manneken-Pis Consultation Committee evaluates applications. To be eligible for submission, costumes must be those of a country, region, city, or municipality, or those of historical, cultural, folk, athletic, philanthropic, charitable, or professional group in existence for a minimum of ten years and not already present in Manneken-Pis’ wardrobe.

However, care must be taken, as the statue cannot be used for political or advertising reasons, or to promote beliefs.

Creating a costume
Fashioning a costume for Manneken-Pis is no easy task. The statue’s unique body measurements mean that clothes and accessories must be tailor-made. Furthermore, its hands and feet are stuck in place, with the former attached to its hips and the latter to its base. As such, it takes a certain amount of skill to ensure that the clothes can be put on Manneken-Pis on site at the fountain, especially since the dressing process must take place at the top of a ladder and without the aid of one’s vision, given the fact that the back of the statue is inaccessible. A hole in the back of the clothing is required so that the pipe supplying the fountain with water can pass through. Buttons, snaps, staples or Velcro(R) – every costume has its clever tricks. Donors are free to hire the tailor of their choice or call upon Manneken-Pis’ official seamstress.

Did you know?
The oldest record of a tailor being appointed for Manneken-Pis dates back to 1756.
An unusual museum collection
Comprising costumes tailored to be worn by an outdoor fountain, the wardrobe of Manneken-Pis is quite an unusual museum collection, the preservation of which raises specific issues. After they are officially handed over to the fountain, clothes are dried and, if needed, cleaned and repaired. A list of the different articles, which are stored separately for protection, is made. In spite of the care that is taken, some costumes are damaged when worn by the statue. When this happens, they are either given to restorers or replaced.

Réplique d’une relique
The oldest costume that has been preserved in the wardrobe was offered by Louis XV in 1747. It is a “French-style” garment, popular with eighteenth-century aristocracy. Because of its fragility, this magnificent silk brocade, lined with silver and gold thread, cannot be displayed. As in previous cases, a replica has been made so that it can be displayed in the new GardeRobe MannekenPis.
OPENING ON 4 FEBRUARY 2017

At 2 p.m.
The Ommegang will offer the little lad a copy of his oldest known costume.
PLACE - City Hall: Official presentation of the costume, procession to the fountain, unveiling of Manneken-Pis wearing his new costume.

Official inauguration of the GardeRobe MannekenPis.

At 3 p.m.
Opening of the GardeRobe MannekenPis and goûter du ketje
PLACE - rue du Chêne, 19

At 5:15 p.m.
Conference by Roel Jacobs [NL] and “Manneken-Pis: True or False” game show [FR]
PLACE - Brussels City Hall (reservation required).

At 6:30 p.m.
Opening of the new Manneken-Pis room.
PLACE - Maison du Roi, Grand-Place (invitation required).
A treasure at the Maison du Roi
The GardeRobe MannekenPis is being moved to its new home, and at the same time, a new room at the Museum of the City of Brussels will be entirely devoted to this famous fountain and its eventful history. The idea is for this new space to be like a treasure chest – a home for curiosities in connection with the original statue - that visitors will be able to admire from every angle.

A journey through time
Against a backdrop designed to spark their curiosity, visitors receive the keys to understanding the statue’s history. When does it date back to? Who sculpted it? When, and how, did Brussels residents begin to show their attachment to this sculpture? Visitors are taken on a journey through time that brings them back to 1451, the first record of the existence of a fountain called daerdmennekenpist (“the place where the child pees”).

Did you know?
After another attempt to steal Manneken-Pis in 1965, the statue was given to the municipal museum, with a copy put in place of the original at the fountain. It is this copy that is on display today. Broken in half, the original statue was restored in 2003.
Jérôme Duquesnoy’s Manneken-Pis
In 1619, the Brussels Authorities decided to remodel the Manneken-Pis fountain, replacing the column, pool and statue. They placed an order for a new bronze Manneken-Pis with a renowned sculptor of the era, Jérôme Duquesnoy (circa 1570-1650). The artist sculpted a baroque interpretation of the theme of the urinating child, which has roots in ancient Greco-Roman art, where it was common to see Cupid, the god of love personified as a naked boy (with or without wings), depicted as a urinating boy. From the 15th to the 18th century, the urinating Putto (“small boy”) came into fashion in the arts, and was commonly used as a subject for public and private fountains in Europe.

Many-faceted enthusiasm
Manneken-Pis has long been particularly cherished by Brussels residents. Considered as one of their own, he has always been associated with celebrations in the city, during which he wears a costume. Brussels residents see themselves reflected in the little tyke (or fellow?), making him a symbol of their personality, which they want to be seen as mischievous and irreverent. As such, it comes as no surprise that Manneken-Pis is sometimes the standard-bearer for eccentric humour or the spokesperson for the mood of Brussels residents. It has been copied, imitated, reproduced and reinterpreted. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, which saw the birth of the consumer society and mass tourism, products bearing the statue’s likeness proliferated. More recently, artists have appropriated this symbol for themselves, imbuing it with personal interpretations.

Isabelle de Borchgrave
For the renovation of the Manneken-Pis room of the Maison du Roi, Brussels artist Isabelle de Borchgrave agreed to create a paper replica of the clothes offered by Louis XV in 1747, the oldest example of the statue’s clothing that has been preserved. From her favourite artistic material, she has created a disturbingly realistic costume.
The legends of Manneken-Pis

In 1824, French author Jacques Collin de Plancy wrote the Story of Manneken-Pis Told by Himself, in which he tells of important moments in the history of Brussels. In it, he was also the first to transmit four legends explaining the origin of the theme of the famous statue. The book met with great success, and while rather whimsical, became the basis for a number of books devoted to the statue. Afterward, several writers, such as Victor Devogel (Légendes bruxelloises, 1890), would reinterpret, adapt and supplement the collection of amazing stories about Manneken-Pis. These stories all depict him as a little boy whose adventures earned him the right to a sculpture in his image.

The Maison du Roi – The Brussels City Museum

The Brussels City Museum is located in the city’s historic centre, on the Grand-Place, the most famous and visited area of the capital. It is housed in a Neo-Gothic style building called the Maison du Roi in French and the Broodhuis in Dutch. These two different names can be explained by the very history of the building. Broodhuis refers to its original use as a bread market in the 13th century, whereas Maison du Roi refers to the title of the building’s owner, the Duke of Brabant. In the 16th century, this Duke was none other than Charles V, “King” of the Spanish Empire. The building itself is the museum’s greatest masterpiece, having been recognised as a national heritage site in 1936 (one of the first in Belgium), and, along with the Grand-Place, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000.

First assembled with the goal of providing a fair view of our rich past and offering models for industry and trade professions, the collections of the Brussels City Museum continued to grow throughout the 20th century. They are very diverse in nature: paintings, altarpieces, tapestries, earthenware, porcelain, plans, scale-models, sculptures, city maps, archaeological collections. All these bear witness to the social, economic, intellectual, artistic and urban changes which have taken place in the city. Today, the museum boasts more than 7,000 items, including the original statue of Manneken-Pis.
THE FOUNTAIN

A drinking water fountain from the Middle Ages

It is probable that it was in the 15th century that the Manneken-Pis fountain was constructed at the corner of Rue de l’Étuve and Rue du Chêne. Beginning in the 13th century, the Brussels Authorities had already begun constructing public fountains in order to supply the city’s burgeoning population with drinking water. These fountains quickly became places where people socialized and congregated. For residents, they were useful landmarks in a growing urban landscape.

“He’s so small!”

Many are surprised when they first discover Manneken-Pis. Often, they cannot help but let out a stunned: “Wow, is that it!?” The statue’s fame is inversely proportional to its size. Small wonder that it can lead to surprised reactions. With a height of 55.5 centimetres, the sculpture is indeed rather small. But this visual effect is heightened by the size of the alcove in which it sits and the height of the pedestal on which it stands. Why construct such an imposing monument for such a small statue?
The sculpture and the monument have nothing to do with each other. It was in 1770 that the simple column on top of which the statue had been perched was replaced by this imposing Rococo backdrop taken from another public fountain. In this new Rococo environment, the Renaissance statue appears quite small, and its back, which is adorned with meticulous detail, is no longer visible.

A decorative fountain
In 1851, Manneken-Pis became a purely decorative fountain. Its water now flowed into a blue stone basin, made inaccessible by new wrought-iron grating in imitation of the Rococo style. Brussels was one of the first European capitals to offer a water-distribution system that delivered water into residents’ homes. As a result, public fountains were deprived of their raison d’être, and most were demolished. But because of its renown, Manneken-Pis did not meet the same fate.

A BRIEF TIMELINE

1451 oldest reference to the fountain, daerdmennekenpist (“the place where the child pees”), in an administrative text relating to the network of water pipes that fed Brussels’ public fountains.

1572 first schematic illustration of Manneken-Pis at the corner of Rue de l’Étuve and Rue du Chêne in the map drawn by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg. The fountain is shown on the street.

1615 first known depiction of Manneken-Pis wearing clothes, attired as a shepherd in Denis van Alsloot’s painting of the Ommegang parade. A preparatory sketch of this painting shows the statue perched atop a column, emptying its water into twin pools.

1619 The Brussels Authorities order a new version of Manneken-Pis from Jérôme Duquesnoy for the fountain’s renovation; the column, basin, and sculpture are replaced.

1695 Manneken-Pis is chosen as a spokesperson for the people of Brussels by the author of a satirical text criticizing the King of France, Louis XIV, who has just bombarded Brussels. This publication is the first to reflect the statue’s fame.
**EARLY 18TH CENTURY** first detailed depiction of the fountain, now located further back from the street and protected behind a railing, in an engraving by Jacques Harrewijn. The fountain is in its current location.

**1720** confirmation is given in a story of the tradition of dressing up Manneken-Pis during celebrations that are a basic facet of life in Brussels, and the practice of non-residents coming to visit the statue.

**1747** King Louis XIV of France makes Manneken-Pis a Knight of the Order of Saint-Louis and gives him gentleman’s clothing by way of an apology for the attempted theft of Manneken-Pis by some of his soldiers garrisoned in Brussels. This is the oldest of Manneken-Pis’ costumes to have been preserved.

**1756** first known appointment of an official tailor for Manneken-Pis.

**1770** the statue is placed in a new Rococo backdrop, previously used for another fountain. From this point on, the statue seems small and it is not possible to see its back.

**1817** theft of Manneken-Pis. It is quickly found. The statue, broken into eleven pieces, is restored, and the guilty party is severely punished.

**1824** publication by French author Jacques Collin de Plancy of a story about Manneken-Pis in which he tells legends that explain the choice of the sculpture’s theme. Although the book is whimsical, it became the basis for a number of later books devoted to the statue.

**1851** Manneken-Pis becomes a purely decorative fountain. Its water now flows into a basin made inaccessible by the new railing.

**1965** another theft. Manneken-Pis is broken in two. Its feet and ankles remain on the base, with the rest of the body gone. A copy of the sculpture is placed at the fountain, where it remains today.

**1966** following an anonymous phone call, the part of the statue stolen the year before is fished out of the Brussels-Charleroi canal. Both pieces of the sculpture are kept at the museum.

**2003** the statue is restored.
**THE THEME OF MANNEKEN-PIS**

**An entirely new audio experience for ages 10+:** Take a journey into the wardrobe of Brussels’ most famous resident by following the steps of his official tailor. This audio-fiction, which is inspired by true events, is included in the admission fee. Follow the guide! In French, Dutch, English, German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Chinese and Japanese.

**The 10 Keys to Manneken-Pis:** the central elements of Manneken-Pis’ history and his incredible wardrobe. Booklet included in the price of admission and available in French, Dutch, English, German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Chinese and Japanese.

**Fun activities:** two games are proposed to test the skills of visitors of all ages: a memory game for the youngest visitors, and for those who feel adventurous, the possibility to dress up a Manneken-Pis in one of its simplest costumes. Easier said than done!

**The virtual wardrobe:** for preservation and space reasons, it is impossible to display all Manneken-Pis’ costumes. However, visitors can discover the whole wardrobe virtually, on site at the Maison du Roi and on the website, to find out who offered what costume and on what occasion. In French, Dutch, English, German and Spanish.

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**AT THE MAISON DU ROI**
**THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF BRUSSELS**

**Learning activities:** workshops intended to stimulate the creativity of very young children in the areas of drawing and the recognition of materials.

**Children’s educational game (from ages 6 to 9 and 9 to 12):** Manneken-Pis has a central place in the educational game that invites young visitors (with their families or their class) to discover the Maison du Roi while having fun.

**The legends of Manneken-Pis:** first published in the 19th century, these tales inspired by common oral tradition are part of what evokes such enthusiasm for Manneken-Pis. They bear indulgent witness to the age-old attachment felt by the people of Brussels for this sculpture.
Manneken-Pis, the irreverent and cherished child of Brussels residents, was in need of a biography. The opening of the new GardeRobe MannekenPis and the renovation of the room devoted to him at the Maison du Roi present an occasion to fill this void. A richly illustrated tome brimming with surprises! Manneken-Pis, Brussels, CFC Editions, 2017 - 248 pages, €25. Trilingual edition: French, Dutch and English.

A WEBSITE

A new mannekenpis.brussels website invites you to discover information on the three official places dedicated to the little lad. On the website, you will find the calendar for his attire, the latest costumes that have been donated, the virtual wardrobe that encompasses the entirety of the preserved collections, and the visitor experience via a web app.
THE REORGANISATION OF THE MUSEUMS OF THE CITY OF BRUSSELS

The Museums of the City of Brussels are undergoing a process of reorganising their rich collections. The opening of the new GardeRobe MannekenPis and the new Manneken-Pis room at the Maison du Roi are the second step in this ambitious project, which aims to make the history of Brussels more accessible and concrete for Brussels residents and all visitors. The first step was the reopening of the Sewer Museum in November 2015.

In 2018, it will be the Maison Patricienne, transformed into a museum on daily life and the art of living based on the decorative arts collections of the Museum of the City of Brussels, which will be opened to the public. Along with the Maison du Roi, the Sewer Museum, the Bruxella 1238 archaeological site, and the Museum of Costume and Lace, the Museums of the City of Brussels form a new expanding museum hub in the lower half of the city centre.
PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Opening hours
Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed every Monday and on 1/11, 11/11, 25/12, and 1/1

Combined admission fees allowing entry
to the Museum of the City - Maison du Roi
· Admission: € 8
· Seniors, Students: € 6
· Free for visitors under age 18
· Article 27: €1.25 in exchange for an Article 27 ticket
· Other discounts available
· Guided visits of the Museum of the City of Brussels, by reservation at:
  T. +32 (0)2 279 43 67 of service.educatif@brucity.be
The GardeRobe MannekenPis is a project created on the initiative of the Office of the Alderwoman for Culture.

With the support of

be.brussels  
Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles  
Francophones Bruxelles  
Vlaamse Gemeenschap  
ChapSCO

The Friends of the Museum  
The Mayor’s Cabinet (International Image of Brussels)  
- Including the French Community

With the participation of:

MAISON D'ANDOY  
visit.brussels www.visitbrussels.be

List of illustrations

May we remind you that the use of these illustrations is solely reserved for the promotion of the two new spaces dedicated to Manneken-Pis as of 4 February 2017, and that their origin must be mentioned:

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