

Biography of Axel Vervoordt
Born on June 29, 1947, in Wilrijk.

1969

Axel begins the restoration of the « Vlaeykensgang », a street with historic 16th-century houses in the center of Antwerp. The houses were not protected at the time; this happens only in 1973. The renovation takes several years, Axel establishes his antique business there, and make it his home. The « Vlaeykensgang » is now considered as an important part of Antwerp's heritage.

1972

Axel marries May Schelkens, with whom he expands his business in art and antiques. Together, they start designing interiors. May assists particularly with selecting fabrics and colors. The « Vlaeykensgang » becomes an oasis of tranquility in the city, appreciated by art and antique lovers as well as fans of the Carillon concerts. The biannual « open house days », where the home is opened to the public, becomes legendary. Axel's ability to mix artworks and antiques from various cultures and periods in search for harmony is groundbreaking.

1982

First participation in the « Biennale des Antiquaires » in Paris, where Axel meets important clients who will give him international recognition, such as Pierre Berger, Hubert de Givenchy, Ralph Lauren, Guy de Rothschild, and Rudolf Nureyev.

1984

- Purchase of the castle of 's-Gravenwezel. After two years of restoring, the family moves in with their two sons, Boris and Dick.
- Second participation in the « Biennale des Antiquaires » in Paris with a highly noted stand featuring a large selection of Ming porcelain from the « Hatcher cargo ». The J.P. Getty Museum purchases the Ledoux boiserie at this stand.

1986

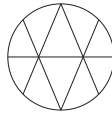
Move to the castle of 's-Gravenwezel. The tradition of the « open house days », where the house and garden are opened to the public twice a year, continues.

1998

Purchase of an abandoned 19th-century industrial site along the Albert Canal in Wijnegem. Axel immediately sees the industrial archaeological value and decides to restore it.

1999-2000

Start of the restoration of the « Kanaal site », which becomes the headquarters of the family business. The complex includes offices, workshops, and exhibition spaces. At its center is Anish Kapoor's installation 'At the Edge of the World' (1998), open to the public.



2002

- Establishment of the music foundation *Inspiratum vzw*, aimed at organizing concerts, supporting young musicians, and producing operas on a human scale in intimate spaces. Koen Kessels and Giulio d'Alessio are appointed as artistic directors responsible for programming.
- During the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris, a large industrial barge named 'Kanaal in Paris' is installed on the Seine, showcasing a selection of furniture, antiques, and works by old and contemporary masters.

2004

- Exhibition of « *Jef Verheyen: Lux est Lex* » at « Kanaal » to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the artist's death.
- Auction of part of the collection by Christie's at the castle of 's-Gravenwezel. The event is a great success, attracting an international audience of art and design enthusiasts.

2005

Trip to Japan where Axel discovers the Gutai movement. Axel and his son Boris, begin collecting and promoting Gutai works internationally to museums and major collectors.

2007

The art world is surprised by a grand exhibition *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art* organized during the Biennale at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice. The exhibition is a great success and marks the beginning of a long collaboration with Palazzo Fortuny.

2008

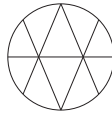
- *Artempo* is followed by the exhibition *Academia. Qui es-tu?* in the chapel of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.
- Establishment of the *Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation*. This private foundation manages a collection of art objects consisting of antiques and contemporary art. It also has an educational mission: organizing exhibitions and publishing books.

2009

- Son Boris gradually takes over the management of the family business, while Axel focuses on designing furniture, organizing exhibitions, creating think tanks, writing books, and traveling to meet artists and collectors. Boris upholds the values of quality, sustainability, and harmony, opening the door to a new phase.
- *In-finitum*, the last exhibition of the trilogy, takes place in the summer at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice.

2010

Publication of *Wabi Inspirations* by Flammarion and in Dutch by Lannoo. *Wabi* is a Japanese concept referring to simplicity, austerity, authenticity, and serenity. It emphasizes the beauty of imperfection. The principles of material elegance, noble simplicity, and timeless tradition define this concept, which also embodies Axel's philosophy.



2011

- Opening of the *Axel Vervoordt Gallery*: a contemporary art gallery in the « Vlaeykensgang », Antwerp, directed by Boris Vervoordt, with a solo exhibition of Gunther Uecker. The gallery presents modern and contemporary artists whose work focuses on the concept of emptiness, the physical act of creation, and the experience of space and time.
- Curator of the exhibition *TRA: Edge of Becoming* at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice.

2013

Curator of the exhibition *Tàpies: Lo sguardo dell'artista* at Palazzo Fortuny, awarded the best exhibition by the Association of Art Critics in Catalonia.

2014

Opening of the *Axel Vervoordt Gallery Hong Kong*, an extension of the Antwerp gallery, with a program of five exhibitions per year and participation in major international fairs.

2015

Curator of *Proportio*, the fifth exhibition in Venice. It is awarded the title of 'Best Exhibition of the Year' by Leading Cultural Destinations and is a major success with over 70,000 visitors.

2017

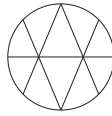
- Axel Vervoordt Gallery moves to Kanaal and presents a monumental exhibition featuring the work of Kazuo Shiraga, a leading figure in the Gutai movement.
- Renovation of M_HKA, with Axel Vervoordt serving as an advisor for the permanent collection presentation and the entrance with the library.
- Curator of *Intuition*, the sixth and final exhibition organized at Palazzo Fortuny, Venice and the seventh in the series.
- The « Kanaal site » is completed with new spaces for the Axel Vervoordt Gallery and permanent installations of the *Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation*, as well as an auditorium for concerts of *Inspiratum* and artist talks.

2018

First guest curator of the Diamond Museum DIVA in Antwerp, where Axel creates his 'Room of Wonder', giving an energetic boost to the new museum's visitor numbers.

2019

- The Axel Vervoordt Gallery in Hong Kong relocates to a larger space on the other side of the city, Wong Chuk Hang, allowing for more simultaneous exhibitions on two floors.
- Awarded the *Antwerp Cultural Prize 2019* for his 'exceptional contributions to the city of Antwerp through the preservation of the Vlaeykensgang, his advisory role in the renovation of M_HKA, and his guest curatorship of 'Room of Wonder' in DIVA, as well as his ongoing support for young artists through his music foundation *Inspiratum vzw* and the *Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation*.



2021

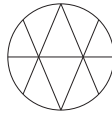
Receives the honorary title 'Officer of Arts and Letters' from the French State, presented by the French Ambassador to Belgium for his years of service in the art world.

2023

The fiftieth wedding anniversary with May prompts the publication of the book 'A Search for the Universal' about the *Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation's* collection, including an overview of various exhibitions in Venice, Paris, and Antwerp.

Publications

- *Axel Vervoordt. The Story of a Style*, Assouline, 2001. (NL, FR, ENG)
- *At Home with Axel and May Vervoordt*, Lannoo, 2001.
- *Axel Vervoordt. Timeless Interiors*, Lannoo, 2007. (NL, FR, ENG, GER)
- *Artempo. Where Time Becomes Art*, MER, 2007. (ENG, ITA)
- *Academia. Qui es-tu?* MER, 2008. (ENG, FR)
- *In-finitum*, MER, 2009. (ENG, ITA)
- *Jef Verheyen. Le peintre flamant (!)*, ASA Publishers, 2010
- *TRA. Edge of Becoming*, MER, 2011. (ENG, ITA)
- *Wabi Inspirations*, Lannoo, 2010. (NL, FR, ENG, GER, ITA)
- *Sadaharu Horio*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2011.
- *Te gast bij May*, Lannoo, 2012. (NL, FR, ENG, GER, ITA, RUS)
- *Shozo Shimamoto*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2012.
- *Norio Imai*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2013.
- *Ida Barbarigo*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2013.
- *Tàpies. Lo sguardo dell'artista*, MER, 2013. (ENG, ITA)
- *Axel Vervoordt. Living with Light*, Lannoo, 2013. (NL, FR, ENG, GER, ITA)
- *Leap into the Void*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2014.
- *Maekawa I*, MER, 2014.
- *Yuko Nasaka*, MER, 2015.
- *PROPORTIO*, MER, 2015. (ENG, ITA)
- *Dominique Stroobant*, MER, 2015
- *Ryuji Tanaka*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2016.
- *Maekawa II*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2016
- *INTUITION*, MER, 2017. (ENG, ITA)
- *Masatshi Masanobu*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2017.
- *Axel Vervoordt. Stories and Reflections*, Lannoo, 2017. (NL, FR, ENG)
- *Axel Vervoordt. Portraits of Interiors*, Lannoo, 2019. (NL, FR, ENG, GER, ITA)
- *Yun Hyong-keun*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Hatje Cantz, 2019. (ENG, ITA)
- *Bosco Sodi a Palazzo Vendramin Grimani. What Goes Around, Comes Around*, Fondazione dell'Albero d'Oro, 2022.
- *Raimund Girke. Between White*, Mer, 2022.
- *A Search for the Universal*. The Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation, MER, 2023
- *Ryuji Tanaka II*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, 2024



Participation at Arts Fairs (2024)

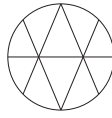
- BRAFA, Brussels
- TEFAF, Maastricht
- TEFAF, New York
- Art Brussels
- Frieze Masters, London
- Frieze Masters, Seoul
- West Bund, Shanghai
- Art Basel, Hong Kong

Awards and Recognitions

- Member of the Association of Belgian Royal Warrant Holders (since November 2001)
- Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres de France (since September 2002)
- Architectural Digest (AD100): International yearbook featuring the top 100 architects and interior designers (since 2004).
- Selected for the list of the '10 best interior designers' by the AD Hall of Fame in 2017, 2018, and 2019.
- Officer in the Order of the Crown (since December 2008)
- Best exhibition for Tàpies. Lo sguardo dell'artista by the Association of Art Critics of Catalonia (ACCA) in 2014.
- Best Exhibition of the Year for PROPORATIO, (Palazzo Fortuny, 2015) by Leading Cultural Destinations in 2015
- Longhouse Art Leadership Award, NY, March 2017.
- Inducted into the List of Prominent Figures by KMSKA, September 2018
- Life Long Achievement Award, Architectural Digest Spain, March 2019
- Cultural Award 2019 by the Antwerp City Council
- Officer of Arts and Letters of the French State, received on 29/9/2020 at the castle of 's-Gravenwezel by Ambassador Ms. Hélène Farnaud-Defromont

Memberships (selection)

- B.K.D.K. (Belgian Chamber of Art Experts)
- C.I.N.O.A. (International Confederation of Art Dealers)
- K.K.A.B. (Royal Chamber of Antiques Dealers of Belgium)
- Member Reform Club, London
- Member for Life of the Guggenheim Museum
- Chairman of Inspiratum vzw
- Chairman of the Patronage Committee for Orchestral Masses at St. Paul's, Antwerp
- Friend of the ZERO Foundation
- Member of the Christoffel Plantin Fund
- Donor of the Rubinianum Fund
- Committee Member of Human Rights Watch
- Patron of El Sistema, Greece



www.axel-vervoordt.com

Press Contact:

Anne-Sophie Dusselier,
asd@axel-vervoordt.com
+32 (0)476 / 230 989

Nina Eeckman
ne@whyte.be
+32 485 91 79 89