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**Pageant of the Golden Tree  
Press release 20.11.23**

## After 7 years the Pageant of the Golden Tree is ready to set out again into the historic centre of Bruges

*“Je lay emprins”* (“I’ve given it a shot”) is the motto of duke Charles the Bold. And that’s exactly what Brugge Plus is doing – commissioned by Stad Brugge – in organising the renewed Pageant of the Golden Tree, that will set out on Sunday 25 August 2024 in the historic centre of Bruges.

The Pageant of the Golden Tree is a medieval pageant that narrates the rich history of Bruges and the County of Flanders. In 2024 the Pageant takes place for the fourteenth time. Once more the festivities surrounding the wedding of Margaret of York and Charles the Bold in 1468 are at the centre of the Pageant.

### Roots of the Golden Tree

Only few will remember ‘The Great Tournament of the Golden Tree’ from 1907 or ‘The Pageant of the Golden Fleece’ from 1930, but the Pageant of the Golden Tree – as we know it today – moved across the streets of Bruges for the first time in 1958.



Going back to the roots of the Pageant of the Golden Tree is travelling back in time 555 years! On 3 July 1468 Margaret of York and Charles the Bold were wed in a spectacular ceremony. Festivities lasted for ten full days and have entered history books as the most extravagant celebration in Bruges history. Many chroniclers have tried, but all fell short on words to describe the pomp and circumstance established in the event: abounding banquets with the rarest foods, upper-class delegations from all over Europe, an eight-day joust known as the ‘Passage of Arms of the Golden Tree’, to which the Pageant still owes its name... It was all there, and it was all dazzling. (Read more about the Legend of the Golden Tree in the attachment.)

*“It’s been 65 years since the first edition of the Pageant of the Golden Tree. Over the years quite a lot of the costumes, decorations and floats have been damaged or lost; participants came and went; the structure of the Pageant was changed...”*

*In 2024 the Pageant of the Golden Tree will be divided into four chapters: the arrival of Margaret of York, the chronicle of the historical County of Flanders (and Bruges), the wedding itself, and the present time.”*

**Franky Demon, chairman of Brugge Plus vzw**



## **Same trunk, new branches**

After the 2017 edition of the Pageant of the Golden Tree the decision was made to update the Pageant from 1958 to a more modern approach. The goal of this rendition was many-sided: making the Pageant more accessible and discernible to both the citizens of Bruges and its visitors, infusing the Pageant with more dynamics and interaction and last but not least stimulating far-reaching partnerships. Non-profit organisation Brugge Plus was given the task to put this letter of intent into effect.

An artistic team of twelve experts from the worlds of (historical) pageants, scenography, costumes, music... was assembled to realise that makeover.

As artistic director, Tom Ternest will lead the direction of the Pageant with the help of Dominique Deckers.

Along with her costume workshop, Evelyne Meersshaut will create and refine more than a thousand costumes that will dress up the participants in irresistible fashion.

Katrijn Van Aelst is responsible for the impressive props that will turn the Pageant into a visual spectacle of great splendour and majesty. With over 10,000 new items to include in the Pageant, her task is an impressive tour de force.

Giovanni Vanhoenacker is scenographer and will built some new installations for the Pageant. He gets support from Cellmade to bring the Pageant to life with breath-taking set pieces and structures.

Visual artist Elise Eeraerts will inject the Pageant with some modern art elements. All this contributes in directing the Pageant of the Golden Tree into the 21st century.



But let's not forget about...music!

As in 2017 Mieke Demeyer is going to conduct the harmonies and take care of the musical accompaniment. She will be supported by Hendrik Van den Abeele and Aline Hopschet, who will give the typical traditional music its rightful place in the Pageant.

Last but not least, Benjamin Boutreur is going to compose a new Golden Tree anthem that will fill the streets of Bruges multiple times during the Pageant.

Historical compass during the entire process was Jan Dumolyn, historian and professor of medieval history. Additionally, the advice of pageant expert Jan Vromman was truly valuable in the research phase.

*“For its time, the 1958 Pageant was flawless. That makes updating it a somewhat fearsome task. We have to find ways to connect the Pageant to the times we are living in: recent developments in arts, society, the voluntary sector and even shifting rhythms and relations in people’s homes. Not only the form of the Pageant is important, also the way to get there.”*

**Dirk De fauw, mayor**



However, the Pageant as known for so long by the citizens of Bruges, will not lose its familiarity. Historical figures and scenes such as those of Charles I Count of Flanders, Jan Breydel, Joanna of Navarre, the Vikings and the Crusades remain present as ever. In addition, some of the familiar floats will be refurbished, as will be the giant Finaert and the Golden Dragon.

## **Readability of the pageant**

The story of the Pageant of the Golden Tree will become quite a lot more straightforward with the 2024 edition. By dividing the Pageant into four chapters the artistic team hopes to captivate the audience with a thoughtful build-up.

The Pageant starts with the entrance of Margaret of York (chapter 1). In which county is she arriving? How do people celebrate here? Or fight wars? Which plagues has the county been through? As an answer to her questions Margaret is presented with a recital of the most important highlights from Flemish and Bruges history.

After this historical enactment (chapter 2) the festivities begin. We introduce the guests, then the sumptuous banquet, and wrap up with the notorious Passage of Arms of the Golden Tree (chapter 3).

In the fourth and last chapter the Pageant closes with some breath-taking sculptures that connect the middle-ages with the present time.

## Dynamic and interactive

The Pageant of the Golden Tree aims for dynamics and interaction. The audience is drawn into the presented stories in various ways: Bruges jesters will appear as living subtitles between sections and narrate storylines with satire and humour. The duke's court jesters will literally break through the borders of the Pageant, incorporating facades, walls (and spectators?) into the scene.

## The temptation of the Golden Tree

Without participants there simply wouldn't be a Pageant of the Golden Tree. For August 2024 we are still looking for 1,500 participants. This is a truly unique opportunity to parade the streets in medieval attire. And there's something to suit everyone.

Who will greet the audience from under a scarlet baldachin as the duke himself? Or conquers the heart of a noble knight or lady in luster? Who is ready to take up the Viking sword? Or to flee from that sword in monk's tunic? Who feels strong enough to endure the dreaded plague? Or to swing a real 'goedendag'? Who - oh who? - is courageous enough to castigate themselves as a Bruges flagellant?

Volunteers, enthusiasts, collaborators, organisations, dancers, singers... Join us and sign up via [www.goudenboomstoet.be](http://www.goudenboomstoet.be).

*“The Pageant of the Golden Tree has always connected people. On that day everybody is equal. Whether you are a duke, princess, flagellant or beggar... The magic of the Pageant is in the sum of all partnerships: from director to actor, from supervisor to those putting up flags. The Pageant is more than the spectacle on 25 August. I hereby summon everyone to participate in this fourteenth edition of the Pageant of the Golden Tree.”*

**Nico Blontrock, city counsellor responsible for Culture.**

## Practical info

Let's meet up on Sunday 25 August 2024 in the centre of Bruges, where the Pageant of the Golden Tree will flourish as never before.

Tickets available in spring.

Eager to participate or join in the Pageant? Sign up via [www.goudenboomstoet.be](http://www.goudenboomstoet.be).

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**Pageant of the Golden Tree is organised by non-profit organisation Brugge Plus, commissioned by Stad Brugge, with support from the Flemish authorities and Brugse Zot.**

## The Legend of the Golden Tree ...

Generations of Bruges citizens have grown up with the pageant but only few of them know where its name actually comes from. The name **'Pageant of the Golden Tree'** is derived from the 'Passage of Arms of the Golden Tree', which was only one specific act within a much larger event: the glorious wedding of Charles the Bold with Margaret of York in 1468.

A fantastic **feast full of buoyant banquets**, a majestic city festival, fountains of wine and noble hippocras (wine infused with honey and spices), a fire-breathing mechanical dragon, a giant, griffins, goats playing shawm, singing donkeys, wild boars playing flute, bears playing lute, a 12-metre long whale with singing mermaids and sea knights crawling from its mouth... Just your typical Bruges social occasion!

But how about that Golden Tree?

Well, there are various versions of where it got its origin, so let's stick to the explanation that was given by Véronique Lambert. It goes like this...

**Anthony**, the Great Bastard of Burgundy and half-brother of Duke Charles the Bold was the central figure in the Passage of Arms of the Golden Tree, which was held on the occasion of the wedding of the duke with **Margaret of York**.

Anthony once proclaimed that he had had **a dream**, sent to him by the **goddess Venus**. In that dream he got lost at sea and stranded on an unknown island. Once there, he was captured by the ruler of the island and imprisoned by her in a castle. The woman got help from a dwarf who was so cunning that it had even succeeded in catching a giant. The giant had been tied to a golden tree with a silver chain girdling its neck. Next to that tree, on a sort of platform, the dwarf was sitting all day long staring in the far distance hoping to spot any living soul approaching the island.

Anthony was never to regain his freedom, unless he promised to challenge every stranger knight who would show up on the island. He was given a few very specific tasks in doing so. In a joust, he first had to break exactly 101 lances. Not only his own but also those of his opponent counted. After having done that he had to bring about 101 sword blows - given or taken - in a tournament. Last but not least he was ordered to decorate the golden tree with the emblems of renowned champions.

It's this vision, this dream, that Anthony - the Great Bastard - wanted to make real in honour of his half-brother on the occasion of his wedding with Margaret of York. And so it has come about ...



**Vlaanderen**  
verbeelding werkt



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