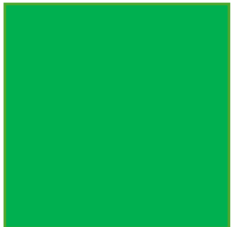




Press kit

**HANSCHKE.
MASTER IN
STUCCO**

12 February to 31 May 2026





Presumed self-portrait of Hansche © Vincent Das

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Press release

Press release Hansche. Master in stucco

Leuven, 12 February 2026 – From 12 February to 31 May 2026, Museum PARCUM tells the story of Jan Christiaen Hansche, the 17th-century stucco sculptor who refused to call himself a craftsman. His stucco ceilings adorn the finest abbeys and castles of the Southern Netherlands. Yet he remained unknown for centuries. Thanks to new archival research, Museum PARCUM now reveals for the first time his life, technique and his struggle for artistic recognition. The exhibition poses a timely question: when does craftsmanship become art?

Look up

Look up in Park Abbey in Leuven. You see a ceiling full of reliefs: angels, floral motifs and biblical figures that seem to literally grow from the wall. These three-dimensional works were created by Hansche shortly after 1650, when he came from Olfen, Germany, to the Southern Netherlands. His technique was unknown here: he modelled figures from fresh lime mass, high on scaffolding, with perfectly timed precision.

“Master stucco sculptor”

When Hansche applied for Brussels citizenship in 1661, he described himself as “master stucco sculptor in statues, figures and other works”. The Brussels authorities had other plans: he was to join the plasterers’ and thatchers’ guild. Hansche refused. For ten years he fought for his recognition as a free artist. In 1666, he prevailed. A charter from King Charles II of Spain allowed him to practise his ‘free art’ independently.

“Those signatures testify to an extraordinary artistic self-awareness,” says Liesbet Kusters, curator at PARCUM. “He signed his work with ‘I.C.H.’ That was exceptional for a craftsman in the 17th-century Southern Netherlands.”

New research reveals the master

Art historian Valerie Herremans laid the groundwork for the exhibition in recent years. Herremans conducted archival research into Hansche’s career and his long-running conflict with the guilds. Abbot Libertus de Pape of Park Abbey gave Hansche not one but three commissions. “They probably met in Brussels,” says Stefan Van Lani, curator of the abbey, “where Hansche was based and where the Norbertines of Park had a refuge house.”

His reliefs are more than decoration. In the refectory of Park Abbey, the Last Supper takes centre stage, surrounded by biblical scenes about food. “Such as the scene where Jesus addresses a Samaritan woman,” says Stefan Van Lani. “At the time, that was absolutely not done. It makes you think about hospitality and how we treat each other. That universal message was probably very deliberately chosen by the abbot.”

Literally in his footsteps

In Hansche. Master in stucco, visitors stand literally beneath the masterpieces. In three locations in the abbey, Hansche’s ceilings can be seen, restored in 2020. In addition to the abbey ceilings, the exhibition presents a rare ceiling fragment from a Ghent townhouse (STAM collection, 1673). This lay hidden in a depot for decades. The cross-section reveals Hansche’s working method.

Activities

Around the exhibition, Museum PARCUM organises a varied programme: a duo workshop 'Hansche in Love' on Valentine's Day, creative workshops for children aged 10 to 14, guided tours of Hansche's ceilings at Horst Castle, Saint Nicholas Church in Perk and Park Abbey, and a Heritage Day programme around the theme 'HAHA Humour'.

Hansche. Master in stucco runs from 12 February to 31 May 2026 at Museum PARCUM, Abdij van Park 7, Leuven. More info and tickets at www.abdijvanpark.be/expo-hansche-meester-kalk.



Signature of Hansche in the library of Park Abbey © Vincent Das

Activities

Around Hansche. Master in stucco, we are building a rich programme of workshops, lectures and surprising events. Whether you want to follow a romantic workshop with your partner, get creative with the children, take a guided tour as a heritage enthusiast, or are simply curious about baroque and craftsmanship. At Museum PARCUM, there is always something to experience.

Creative workshop: make your own stucco figures

Sunday 15 February, 15 March, 19 April and 17 May 2026 | 2pm-4pm

Step into the world of Jan Christiaan Hansche. In Park Abbey, this artist decorated the ceilings with magnificent figures and stories. In this workshop, you get to work yourself and bring your own magical figures to life, just like Hansche.

During a short visit to the exhibition Hansche. Master in stucco, you discover the work of artist and stucco sculptor Jan Christiaan Hansche. He created magnificent ceilings where stories come to life. Then you get to work yourself: with your own hands you create unique figures, just like Hansche. Let your imagination run free!

Duo workshop: Valentine's Day

Friday 14 February 2026 | 10am-1pm & 2pm-5pm

Celebrate love in a special way: with your hands in the clay. In this romantic duo workshop, you step together into the world of the baroque with Hansche's masterpieces. Your day begins with a visit to the exhibition Hansche. Master in stucco. There you discover the magnificent ceilings created by Jan Christiaan Hansche in the 17th century. Then it is time for your own creation.

Under the guidance of Kaatje from Klei 'n meer, you work with clay and create a unique work of art together. No experience needed: Kaatje teaches you all the techniques you need. You work with building techniques and choose the glaze colour for your piece yourself. After the workshop, Kaatje takes your creation to her studio for firing and glazing. A few weeks later you pick it up: a tangible memory of your creative Valentine's Day.

Hansche on location

12 March, 12 April and 12 May 2026 | 1.30pm-3pm & 7.30pm-9pm

At Museum PARCUM, you discover the story of Jan Christiaan Hansche, the forgotten master in stucco. But his impressive ceilings also adorn locations far beyond the abbey walls. With Hansche on location, you venture out to two other remarkable places in Flanders where his work can still be admired today, in addition to the abbey. At each location, an expert who knows Hansche's work inside out provides explanations. Each month on the 12th, a different location.

Heritage Day: HAHA Hansche

Sunday 27 April 2026

Humour and heritage: a surprising match? Absolutely! For Heritage Day 2026, we bring together the theme HAHA Humour with the baroque masterpieces of Hansche.

Partnerships

For the exhibition Hansche. Master in stucco, Museum PARCUM collaborates with various partners, each playing a crucial role in unlocking Hansche's heritage.

STAM, Ghent

The Ghent city museum STAM holds fragments of a dismantled Hansche ceiling from a Ghent townhouse (1673), hidden in the depot for years and never previously displayed. For this exhibition, STAM lends one fragment, following conservation treatment by restorer Rani De Vos (Keramiek Kliniek). The cross-section offers a unique view of Hansche's materials and working method.

Herita

Herita manages Horst Castle in Sint-Pieters-Rode, where Hansche carried out one of his earliest noble commissions in 1655. Herita and Museum PARCUM are working together on the valorisation of the research.

Valerie Herremans

Art historian Valerie Herremans conducted groundbreaking archival research into Hansche's life and career.

Production

The exhibition scenography was designed by Fugzia. The exhibition videos were produced by Vincent Das (Videotheek Das), who also created photographic material.

With the support of

Fonds Léon Courtin-Marcelle Bouché

The restoration of three historic 17th-century ceilings by Hansche in Park Abbey was carried out by the City of Leuven with the support of the Flemish Government, in collaboration with architecture firm Studio Roma.



Angel in Park Abbey © Vincent Das

Exhibition texts

Hansche. Master in stucco

Around 1650, an unknown artist emerges in the Southern Netherlands: Jan Christiaan Hansche. With his unique technique, he creates magnificent baroque ceilings throughout the Southern Netherlands.

He does not see himself as a craftsman, but as a free artist. His stubbornness leads him to noble houses and abbeys, including Park Abbey. Who is this mysterious master?

New research provides answers. This exhibition takes you on a journey of discovery through his work, his world, and his character. Look up... and let yourself be surprised.

Status in stucco

Why did a German stucco artist travel to the Southern Netherlands around 1650? Hansche made the journey at the invitation of wealthy noble families and powerful clergy.

In castles, abbeys, and churches, he left his mark. His ceilings are far more than decoration. They embody wealth and prestige. Through his craft, Hansche immortalized the influence of his patrons – their status in stucco.

His commissions reveal his network of elite connections. Many of his masterpieces remain intact. Discover where you can still admire them today.

Artist or craftsman?

You're looking at Hansche's first ceiling in Park Abbey: the Assumption of Mary. Do you see the engraving on the table? They're almost identical.

Hansche doesn't call himself a craftsman, but a free artist. But does he design his ceilings himself? He leaves no original designs behind but works with existing engravings. He likely receives the design and engravings from his patrons.

Did Hansche simply copy then? His strength lies in his technique. With an innovative stucco technique, he not only adds depth to a flat print but also gives it his own unique twist. Nobody can do that like him.

A remarkable technique

Hansche calls his craft stucco carving. Yet he doesn't really carve. He builds up his figures layer by layer. Quickly and confidently, because after one day the mortar hardens. Corrections are then no longer possible.

In Southern Europe, this technique already exists, but Hansche brings it to the Southern Netherlands. He creates full sculptures: figures that completely detach from the background.

Today, this technique has almost disappeared. Only restorers keep the knowledge alive.

In the refectory

You're standing beneath one of Hansche's masterpieces.

In 1679, he creates this ceiling for the refectory, the dining room of the fathers. The influential abbot Libertus de Pape commissions the work. He brought Hansche to the abbey a few years earlier. The ceiling tells Biblical stories about food.

In 2020, this ceiling is restored, along with the ceiling in the library above you. Take the stairs to admire that impressive work.

Signed, Jan Christiaen Hansche

You're standing by the final ceiling in the library. Here, Hansche makes it clear that he is an artist. He even signs the work! Can you find his signature?

Here too, you see the tension between art and copy. He depicts the life of Norbert and four evangelists. He works with engravings from the *Vita Sancti Norberti*.

The technique is masterful. The curved vault makes the ceiling complex. See how figures gain depth: church fathers writing behind their desks, Norbert almost falling out of the frame, the horse reins.

Do you see the man with the hat above the entrance, near the crucifixion? Hansche may have depicted himself here. He places himself among saints and scholars. His message is clear: I am Hansche. Master in stucco.



Ceiling in the library of Park Abbey © Vincent Das

Step-by-step guide: stucco the Hansche way

Want to know how Hansche worked? With these videos, you'll get the hang of the technique!

To begin, you need a sturdy structure of main and secondary wooden beams. Between them, nail thinner, cleaved laths – also called attachment laths. This forms the base for creating your stucco work.

Materials needed

- Fat lime (also called air lime or calcium hydroxide)
- Fine sand
- Animal fibres, brown or white
- Water
- A wooden mould for the mouldings
- Spatulas and modelling tools for the ornaments

Step 1: Prepare the lime mortar

Mix the lime with the sand and animal fibres. Add some water if needed.

Step 2: Apply the base coat

Apply a first layer of mortar onto and through the laths. On the back, 'beards' form – protrusions that provide anchorage. Allow to cure.

Step 3: Apply a second layer

Dampen the first layer for better adhesion. With the second layer of lime mortar, even out the base coat. Allow to cure again.

Step 4: Pull the mouldings

Mark where the mouldings of your design will go. Pull the mouldings with a wooden mould.

Step 5: Mark and model the ornaments

Make a preliminary drawing to determine where your figures will go. Model the ornaments with lime mortar – like a sculptor with clay. Work quickly and confidently, as lime allows no hesitation. After one day, the mortar is hard. Corrections are then virtually impossible.

Step 6: Finishing touches

Refine your mouldings and ornaments with a thin layer of lime mortar. Finally, optionally apply a thin layer of limewash.

Photos

High-quality images are available. Credit attribution is mandatory when using them, according to the listed credits. When no credits are listed, copyright is always PARCUM. High-resolution images are available at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/PHwZztkiowKYkqjA8>.

Practical information

Hansche. Meester in stucco

12/02/2026 – 31/05/2026

Museum PARCUM

Abdij van Park 7

3001 Leuven

info@abdijvanpark.be

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10am – 5pm

Monday Closed

Tickets

Standard €12

Reduced €10

12 – 18 years €7

Under 12 Free

Getting here

Car: Parking with parking disc (4 hours) on the grounds of Park Abbey

Public transport: Bus 4, 14, 15, 11 from Leuven Station

Bike: Bicycle parking available at the entrance of the cemetery

Online

Website: <https://www.abdijvanpark.be/expo-hansche-meester-kalk>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PARCUMbe>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/museum_parcum

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/parcum>

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About Museum PARCUM

Museum PARCUM is located in Park Abbey in Leuven, one of the most illustrious abbeys in the country. In the museum, you come face to face with the exceptional heritage of the abbey. The changing exhibitions engage with religious heritage in a distinctive way, in dialogue with contemporary issues, contemporary artists and multireligious culture. The museum is an open meeting place that offers space for critical and creative thinking, for wonder and depth, for reflection and dialogue.



Jesus on the cross in the library of Park Abbey © Vincent Das