

TIMELESS

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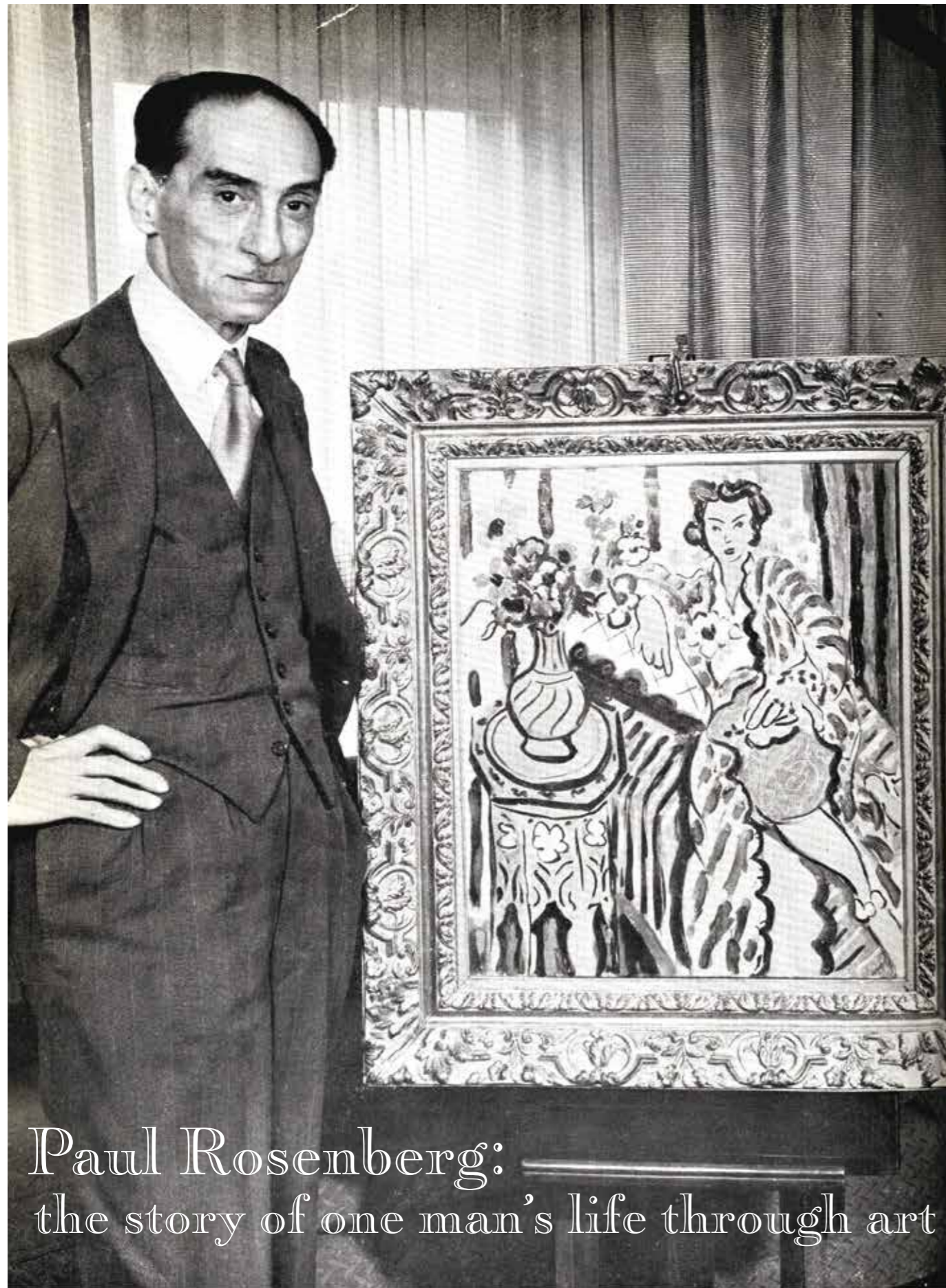
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Paul Rosenberg:
the story of one man's life through art

Left: Paul Rosenberg at the end of 1930 with a painting by Matisse. (Image: © Archives Paul Rosenberg New York/ MoMA) © DR

Garry Shaw visits a new exhibition in Liège which involves Modernist masterpieces and their journey through twentieth-century art history, thanks to the vision of one man

During the Nazi occupation of Paris in the 1940s, the Jeu de Paume museum – originally built to accommodate indoor tennis courts in the nineteenth century – temporarily became home to some of the greatest works of Modern art ever produced. Stolen from their owners – looted from vaults and seized from homes – the Nazis kept these artworks at the back of the building, gathered in a space known as the Room of the Martyrs. Designated ‘degenerate’ due to being ‘un-Germanic’ or ‘Jewish’, such works were to be sold on, exchanged for ‘Aryan’ art, or, as happened to some, burned. These Modernist masterpieces formed part of a much larger collection of stolen art at the Jeu de Paume; the majority, classified as suitably ‘Germanic’, were to be sent to Germany for display in the planned Führermuseum. Hundreds also ended up in the private collection of Hermann Göring, who was a frequent visitor to the collection.

Among the many Modernist paintings at the Jeu de Paume were pieces owned by the French art dealer and collector Paul Rosenberg. Of Jewish faith, the Nazi invasion forced Rosenberg to abandon his famous art gallery at 21 rue la Boétie, Paris, for New York in 1940. But before leaving the country, he hid many of his artworks in a vault in Libourne, southwest France. Unfortunately, despite Rosenberg’s efforts, the Nazis entered the vault a year later. They seized his collection, classified his paintings as ‘degenerate’, and sent them to the Jeu de Paume. Some are still missing today.

Visiting La Boverie

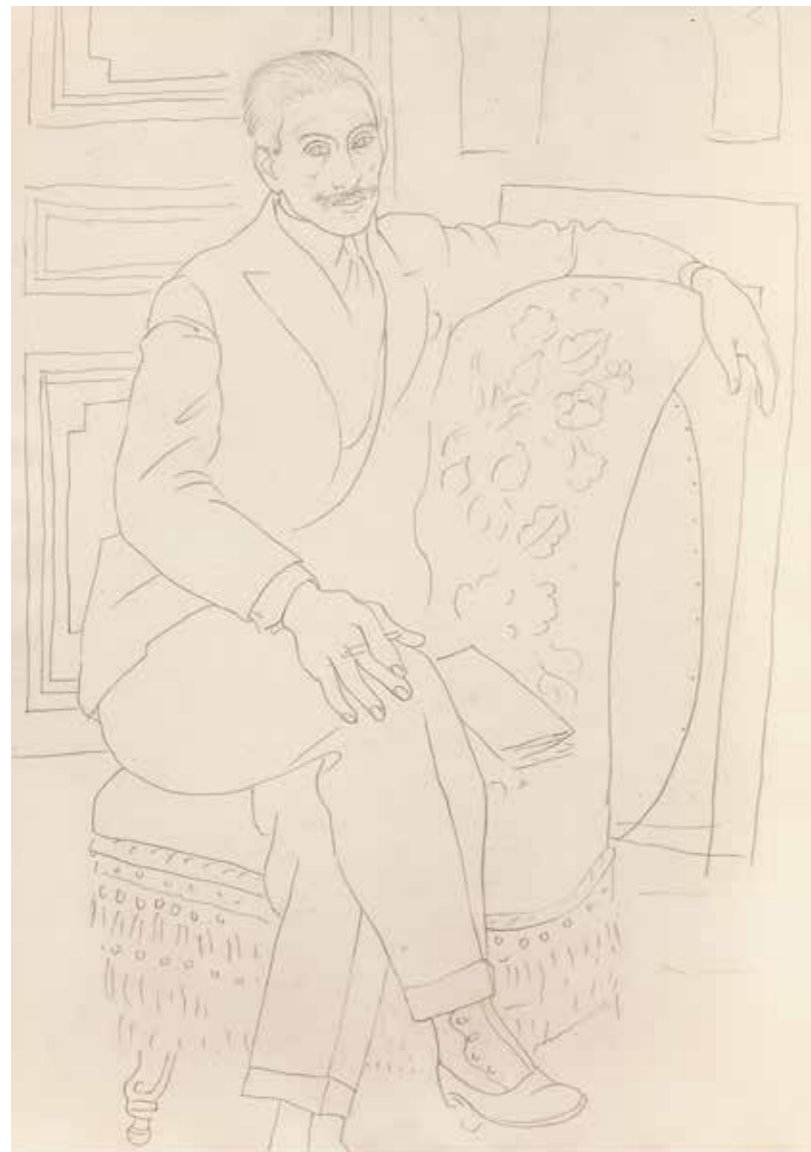
Paul Rosenberg’s life and times are now the focus of a new exhibition at La Boverie in Liège, Belgium, entitled 21 rue la Boétie, after the address of his Paris gallery. By following Rosenberg’s life story, visitors are introduced to the emergence of private art dealers and collectors in the late nineteenth century, the business of being an art dealer, the

Nazi assault on Modern art, and Rosenberg’s subsequent attempts to recover his lost artworks. There are archival documents to see – reflecting Rosenberg’s business activities – photographs, and a short film on the rise of art dealers, but the exhibition’s main draw is its 60 works of art, many of them Modernist masterpieces, that once passed through Rosenberg’s galleries in Paris and New York. These have been gathered together again for the first time, loaned from museums around the world – including the Musée Picasso, Paris, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington – and private collections.

The exhibition venue, La Boverie, is itself a work of art. A neoclassical building – painted white, surrounded by columns and topped by domes – standing in the picturesque nineteenth-century ornamental garden of the Parc de la Boverie, it was built as the Fine Arts Palace for the World Fair of 1905. Afterwards, it served various functions, until eventually becoming Liège’s Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. This closed in 2013 to enable the century-old building to be restored, extended, and reborn as La Boverie in May 2016. Its revamped space now houses Liège’s fine arts collection, and has an extensive space dedicated to major temporary exhibitions. It is the most recent addition to a city already brimming with culture. Even Liège’s glorious Santiago Calatrava-designed train station (Liège-Guillemins), just a short walk away from the exhibition, across a newly constructed bridge over the River Meuse, is a sight to see – futuristic and stylish, from certain angles it looks like a huge metal shark eating the station, from others like a giant clam.

The emergence of art dealers

The exhibition is presented chronologically, starting with the emergence of private art dealers in the late nineteenth century. Traditionally in



Above: Picasso, Portrait of Paul Rosenberg, 1918-1919 (Image: © Succession Picasso - SABAM Belgium 2016)

Right, top: Fernand Léger, Le déjeuner, 1921-1922, MoMA (Image: © SABAM Belgium 2016)

Right: bottom: Paul Rosenberg at 21 rue la Boétie in 1914 and showing a Renoir to the writer, Somerset Maugham (Images: © Archives Paul Rosenberg New York/ MoMA © DR)

France, the quality and worth of an artwork was decided by the elite: first by the kings, nobles, and clergy, who commissioned expensive pieces for their palaces and churches, and later by the State, represented by the Academy of Fine Arts. But by the second half of the nineteenth century, the world had changed. The bourgeoisie were buying art for their homes, and artists were increasingly defying the State's decisions, particularly its refusal to accept impressionist artworks for display. In response, many artists found new venues to show and promote their art. With the old ways swept aside, including much of the elite's funding, artists were freer, but struggled to make ends meet. Nonetheless, new opportunities now presented themselves, particularly for entrepreneurs interested in promoting up-and-coming artists to a wider market.

Born in 1881, Paul Rosenberg was among these early entrepreneurs; initially promoting the work

of impressionist painters, he later embraced the Modern movement with a passion. Though not the first dealer and collector to popularize Modern art, he was certainly among the most successful, as shown by the number of famous names that wanted to work with him. The exhibition's first major space dedicated to artworks collected and sold by Rosenberg is dominated by Picasso, Braque, Lhote, and Léger. Among these masterpieces is Léger's large *Le déjeuner* (*Le grand déjeuner*), painted from 1921-1922; here, three naked women sit drinking tea, their bodies rendered in smooth curves. Picasso's *Femme en vert* (*Buste de femme*), depicting a human figure formed of elegant pastel polygons, also demands attention. Meanwhile, showing another side of the painter's work, one entire wall features Picasso's costume designs for the ballet *Le Tricorne*, and his drawings of harlequins.

The art business

A central part of the exhibition is dedicated to Rosenberg's approach to business, referred to as 'The Rosenberg System'. As explained in one of the panels, his work was guided by five principles: investment in safe bets when buying art; the creation of a list of wealthy clients through networking; the promotion of his artists through catalogues, adverts, and events; careful management of his stock; and the frequent organisation of exhibitions. Here, a number of catalogues from Rosenberg's exhibitions can be viewed – shows dedicated to Braque, Picasso, Laurencin, and Lhote – as well as paintings that – in addition to being Modernist masterpieces – reflect Rosenberg's business skills. Among them is Picasso's *Guitare sur un tapis rouge*, sold by Rosenberg to Walter Percy Chrysler Jr. during his push to bring Modern art to the North American market. Rosenberg also put a great deal of thought into his displays at 21 rue la Boétie. Modernist works were displayed on the ground floor and nineteenth-century art upstairs; this forced customers interested only in nineteenth-century art to pass the Modern works first, hopefully leaving them intrigued by what they'd seen (and interested in making purchases).



Image: Digital image © (2016) The Museum of Modern Art / Scala, Florence





Another intriguing section explains how Rosenberg set the price for his artworks. As was normal at the time, a piece's sale value was calculated according to the size of the canvas and the fame of the artist; this normally led to Rosenberg making double (sometimes triple) the amount he'd paid the artist for the piece. Rosenberg also signed 'first rights' contracts with his artists, giving him the first option to buy any artworks they produced. For this exclusivity, the artist received an annual payment from the dealer. To illustrate this, a contract signed by Rosenberg and Matisse can be seen on display. As well as fostering strong business relationships, Rosenberg also became close friends with his artists; Picasso, for example, painted members of Rosenberg's family, and even moved from Spain to France, to live next door to the art dealer's Paris gallery.

'Degenerate Art' and the Nazi assault on Modern Art

During the 1930s the rise of Nazi ideology increasingly posed a threat to any person, religion, or expression regarded as un-Aryan. Hitler – as one of 21 rue la Boétie's exhibition panels explains – regarded Modern art as a 'product of Jewish degeneration' and from 1933, set about attacking all examples he could find. At first, his effort was confined to German museums, which were emptied of their Modernist works. At the same time, the Nazis promoted their vision of 'Aryan' art in specially produced exhibitions, while attacking Modern art in others. One poster on display advertises an exhibition of 'degenerate art' held in Munich in 1937. A major success, this show went on

to visit 12 cities and be seen by 3.2 million people (none of them children: the young were banned from entering because the artworks promoted a 'Jewish concept of the world').

This is perhaps the most intriguing, yet creepy, section of 21 rue la Boétie. Giant black and white photos show Nazis (including Hitler) strolling along, viewing artworks, while headphones enable you to listen to 'degenerate music' (the Nazis even held an exhibition on this subject in Dusseldorf in 1938). To illustrate what the Nazis regarded as acceptable, and what was not, the curators have placed similarly themed artworks by Modern artists and Nazi-approved artists side by side; among them, there's a portrait of a young woman by Marie Laurencin, painted in pale colours and with dark eyes that stare out at you. Beside it hangs a more traditionally painted image of a young woman by Alfred Höhn; her eyes look to the side, her hair is covered, and her arms are tightly held against her body.

From here, you pass a hanging Nazi flag (another creepy experience) into a section about Paul Rosenberg's escape from Europe to New York, and the Nazi occupation of France. At the time of the invasion, Rosenberg's artworks were widely dispersed; many were in New York, some were in London, and others were kept safe by a family friend. He secured the rest in a vault in Libourne, only to later learn that they'd been confiscated by the Nazis in 1941 and sent to the Jeu de Paume. In Paris, the Nazis also took over Rosenberg's gallery, transforming it into their headquarters for the Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, and organised an exhibition at the Palais Berlitz called

Other works of art in the exhibition at La Boverie

Above, left: Marie Laurencin, La répétition, groupe de femmes 1936 (Image: © Fondation Foujita, SABAM Belgium 2016)

Above, right: Paul Gauguin, Le sorcier d'Hiva Oa (Image: © MAMAC, Liège, Classé Trésor par la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles le 23 novembre 2010)

'The Jew and France', dedicated to teaching the French how to spot Jews. By the end of the war, around 22,000 artworks had been stolen.

Recovering artworks after the war

The exhibition's final part focuses on the recovery of stolen artworks after the Second World War. Among the stories told is that of Paul Rosenberg's son, Alexandre Rosenberg, who served as the leader of a commando unit during the liberation of France. At the time, the Nazis were emptying the Jeu de Paume, trying to get their stolen artworks out of Paris by train. Tipped off by a member of the resistance, Alexandre's unit intercepted one of these trains, and managed to retrieve 967 artworks, including some owned by his father. This event was dramatised in the 1964 movie *The Train*, starring Burt Lancaster. Clips from the movie can be seen in the exhibition.

After the war, Paul Rosenberg decided to remain in the US, and sold his gallery at 21 rue la Boétie. Since leaving France, he'd opened a successful gallery in New York, using his remaining paintings and his American contacts to quickly establish himself across the Atlantic. Until his death in 1959, he dedicated much of his time to tracking down his stolen art – not an easy task given that much of it had been sold on by the Nazis and had vanished into private collections. Nonetheless, some were recovered quickly: the paintings *Baigneur et*

baigneuses (Trois baignants), and *Nature morte à la cruche*, both by Picasso, were returned to him as early as September 1945. Other paintings took much longer to find; among them was Matisse's *Profil bleu devant la cheminée*, which was only returned to the Rosenberg family in 2014. Having passed through various hands, including those of Hermann Göring, it had entered the collection of the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Museum in Norway, and was only much later identified as one of Rosenberg's missing pieces. This, and other paintings returned to the Rosenberg family, feature in the final part of the exhibition.

21 rue la Boétie combines a mesmerising display of Modernist masterpieces with a fascinating journey through early twentieth-century art history, all explained through the life of one man. Themes of conflict run throughout the exhibition – from the first Modernist artists fighting to get their art accepted, to the battle against Nazi ideology, to Rosenberg's attempts to recover his lost artworks. At the same time, through Rosenberg, the exhibition highlights how with passion and dedication for your work, you can always succeed, no matter what the setbacks. Paul Rosenberg's central role in the promotion and acceptance of Modern art cannot be underestimated, and the artworks on display at La Boverie are testament to his legacy. ●

The exhibition 21 rue la Boétie is at La Boverie, Liège, until 29th January 2017.

Below: Georges Braque Nu Couché, 1935 (Image: © SABAM Belgium 2016 © Photo: Collection David Nahmad, Monaco)



Getting there

Travel

Various carriers provide direct services from the UK to Brussels. Among them is BMI Regional, British Airways, and Belgium's national carrier, Brussels Airlines. Eurostar trains also connect London St. Pancras to Brussels-Midi/Zuid, with up to nine daily departures. From Brussels, two trains an hour head to Liège – the journey takes about one hour. Liège Airport connects the city with a number of Spanish destinations, including Malaga and Alicante.

Visas

Members of the EU do not require a visa to visit Belgium. Those from Canada, USA, and Australia can also enter without a visa, as long as they stay for less than 90 days.

Getting around

Central Liège is easy to navigate by foot, but there's also a bus service and taxis to help you get around. La Boverie is situated on an island in the River Meuse, and can be reached by a footbridge just a short walk from Liège-Guillemins train station.

Weather

In Liège, average summer temperatures reach from about 10°C to 20°C. Winters can be rainy, with temperatures hovering around 0°C to 5°C.

Holidays

In 2017: January 1 (New Year's Day), April 17 (Easter Monday), May 1 (Labour Day), May 25 (Ascension Day), June 5 (Whit Monday), July 21 (National Day), August 15 (Assumption), November 1 (All Saints' Day), November 11 (Armistice Day), December 25 (Christmas Day).

Essentials

Time difference: GMT + 1

Language: Dutch, French, and German are the official languages of Belgium. English is also widely spoken.

Electrical Current/ Plugs: Plug sockets have two round pins and have a current of 120V AC, 60Hz.

Religion: Most of Belgium's population are Christian.

Water: Tap water in Belgium is safe to drink, and bottled water is widely available.

Politics: Belgium has a constitutional monarchy and is a federal parliamentary democracy.

Shopping

Belgian chocolates are rightly world famous and should be tried at every opportunity. Similarly, you can't visit Belgium without tasting a few of the country's hundreds of beers (I particularly recommend the Tripel Karmeliet); in bars and restaurants, these are normally served in their own special glasses, which you can buy for yourself in shops around the country. Tapestries and lace, traditionally produced in Belgium, also make excellent purchases. Liège is particularly famous for its Boulets à la Liégeoise (Liège meatballs) and waffles covered in crunchy sugar.

Short history of Liège

Built along the Meuse River, the earliest settlement at Liège dates to Roman times (with the remains of a Roman villa on view in the city's Archéoforum, beneath Place St-Lambert). In AD 705, St. Lambert of Maastricht was murdered while visiting Liège, leading to the town becoming an important pilgrimage destination. Prosperity followed, and towards the end of the first millennium, Liège became the capital of its own Prince-Bishopric – a large principality, technically part of the Holy Roman Empire, but mostly independent of Rome. In around AD 1000, a cathedral was built in honour of St. Lambert, and his relics were moved to its crypt, securing the city's place on pilgrimage routes. In the late 18th century – at the same time as the French revolution – the people of Liège led a revolt against their rulers, leading to the city eventually merging with the French Republic; the Prince-Bishop was duly removed and St. Lambert's Cathedral was demolished. The city remained under French control until 1815, when it passed to the Dutch. Everything changed again 15 years later, when Liège became part of Belgium. Afterwards, the city grew wealthy as a major industrial centre, particularly for the production of glass and steel.

Money

Currency: The currency in Belgium is the Euro (EUR; symbol €) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents. ATMs are widely available throughout Belgium.

Credit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Cirrus, Maestro, and Visa are widely accepted.

Traveller's cheques are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euro, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

La Boverie

La Boverie, located in the Parc de la Boverie, houses Liège's fine arts collection. The museum is only 700m from Liège-Guillemins train station, and is accessible by the Boverie footbridge, which links the left bank of the River Meuse with the island of La Boverie. It is open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 10am to 6pm and closed on Mondays. Adult entry from €5. There is free entry on the first Sunday of every month.

Garry Shaw travelled as a guest of the Belgian Tourist Office – Brussels & Wallonia. For more information visit: www.belgiumthelaceto.be

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