

wallonia and brussels

winter 2019/2020

wab
magazine

Discover a region that combines
technical knowhow with quality of life

GOLDEN AGE

WALLONIA'S ARCHITECTS SHINE ON THE
INTERNATIONAL STAGE

- Enterprise of the year EASI
looks to the future
- Fun activities around the region
to warm up the winter



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Editorial

International recognition for his investigative work into thrombosis is inspiring Jonathan Doux fils (above) to further his research into reducing the health risks for women using the contraceptive pill. The Namur pharmacy professor appreciates the peer recognition that the award brings. Architects in Wallonia and Brussels are similarly attracting attention from abroad. In our Focus, we hear how they are experiencing a golden age and profile some of the firms displaying particular creativity.

Accolades have also spurred Nivelles IT firm EASI. Read the inspiring story of founding director Salvatore Curaba and how the company is planning further growth. Meanwhile, chocolatier Arika Denis has experienced a massive boost since being named Walloon chocolatier of the year 2020. The Andenne artisan shares his creative yet rigorous approach to developing his pralines and his brand. And with the festive season upon us, we enjoy a merry tour of Wallonia, exploring the myriad activities that will warm you this winter. Happy holidays!

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Wallonia and Brussels - Contact

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www.awex.be

WBI Wallonie-Bruxelles International
www.wbi.be

Welcome Offices
www.investinwallonia.be



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Cover: The Chapel of Silence (Arsonic concert hall, Mons) by architects Holoffe Vermeersch



GIFT FROM WALLONIA

The majestic 22m, 60-year-old Nordmann conifer adorning the Grand' Place in Brussels is a present to the capital from the town of Stavelot. The Liège province municipality carefully selected the four-tonne tree from private property in the Hautes Fagnes natural park. It was felled by Stavelot local councillor Raymond Kockelmann – who happens to be the 20-time Belgian logging champion. With the agreement of the owner of the property, the town of Stavelot will plant a replacement Nordmann of the same quality. The Christmas tree is decorated in the colours of the Belgian flag and with the image of Manneken Pis, who this year is celebrating his 400th anniversary. The seasonal gift is in recognition of the special relationship that links Brussels and Stavelot, which dates from World War Two, when the capital came to the aid of the bomb-stricken Walloon town.



Prestigious award for crystal factory project in Seraing

The Val Saint Lambert Free Time Park project has been named the best future shopping centre in the 2019 Mapic Awards in Cannes. The awards recognise innovation and creativity in the retail real estate industry. Previously a glass factory producing the Val Saint Lambert crystal, the 120-hectare site in Seraing, Liège, is currently under redevelopment. The mega-project encompasses a retail and business park with a leisure centre, housing, a hotel and congress centre, as



well as a new crystal factory. The former industrial site will also be home to pop-up stores, young designers, artisans and independent boutiques. “The jury welcomed our innovative ap-

proach, which integrates the latest trends of combining functions by placing leisure and experience at the centre and opting for an energy and environmental management of the future,” said Pierre Grivegnée of L’Immobilière du Val Saint Lambert, which owns the site. The attention to environmental concerns has been boosted by the arrival of local business John Cockerill Energy to the design team, with the Seraing industrial group providing a green electricity system. Initial renovation work is expected to take 11 months; it will be followed by phase 2, dependent on planning permits. The park is expected to be inaugurated in 2022.



DOGSTUDIO MOVES TO MEXICO

With 40% of its activities already abroad, Namur digital agency Dogstudio is further spreading its wings by establishing an office in Mexico. The multidisciplinary creative studio already has premises in Chicago, providing branding and digital products for international clients. Two years after setting up an agency in the Windy City, it is moving south to Mexico City, where it has one client, Rappi, an Amazon-style online store. Dogstudio was established by four Namur digital entrepreneurs and they are committed to retaining the majority of their activity in their home city. Co-founder and digital content specialist Gilles Bazelaire will travel between the Walloon capital and the Mexico office. Bazelaire is also a founder of the Namur creative hub TRAKK and one of the key figures driving the digital economy in Wallonia.

dogstudio.co



© Belga/Benoît Doppagne

REDU CHOSEN FOR ESA CYBERSECURITY OPERATIONS CENTRE

The Luxembourg province European Space Security and Education centre ESEC-Redu is to become a cybersecurity operations centre. Belgian federal science policy minister David Clarinval announced the news following a meeting of the European Space Agency (ESA) council of ministers in Seville at the end of November.

An initial optional investment of €27 million was proposed by the ESA, of which €14 million is to be provided by Belgium.

The ESA committed to completing it to up to €10 million. Clarinval said he welcomed the unanimous decision to support the development of a cybersecurity programme at ESEC-Redu, an agency that employs 250 people. "The installations and the personnel to be found there already enjoy an excellent reputation, thanks to the collaboration of researchers and technicians from all over the country," he added. "Deciding to install this centre for cybersecurity will only reinforce the importance of their work and international recognition of the role that Belgium plays in this sector of the future that is the conquest of space."

BRIEFS

Research at Liège University Hospital (CHU) has revealed a **link between high blood pressure and diet**. One Belgian in four suffers from high blood pressure, a major cause of cardiovascular disease. Until now, the origins have remained mysterious, but the recently published study could help with diagnosis and establishing a treatment plan, with better diet and lifestyle potentially having an impact on the prevention and delay of high blood pressure. "By analysing the bacteria composition of an individual's intestine, we can predict the risk of heart attack and stroke," said Professor François Jouret of CHU.

The largest trade mission ever undertaken by Belgium – to China in November – resulted in a number of **signings of agreements**. The Wallonia Export-Investment Agency (AWEX) signed agreements in the domain of scientific research; Hub.brussels, Wallonia-Brussels International, the Wagralim competitive cluster for the agrifood sector and UCLouvain also signed agreements. The European Horse Centre in Vielsalm, Luxembourg province, signed a letter of intent with an equestrian centre in the Beijing region to promote the sport and for the training and exchange of young vets in Belgium and China. The mission was led by Princess Astrid.

Grâce-Hollogne technology company WideTech has signed a **new five-year contract** with Oman Gas Company (OGC) for its data validation software platform WiDE. The system is used for surveying, validating, approving, declaring and automatically stocking data at the gas company's installations. WideTech president and technical director Bruno Vrielynck: "We are delighted and honoured to have won this long-term contract with OGC, our first client in the Middle East."



IN THE SPOTLIGHT Jonathan Douxfils

The Namur University pharmacy professor has won the Eberhard F Mammen Young Investigator Award for his research into thrombosis



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An award provides us with more confidence about the usefulness of our research

What was your reaction to winning the award?

That this was good news for the visibility of our research, the University of Namur, our spin-off QUALblood and recognition by our peers. The entire team deserved the prize; they can be proud of what we have achieved.

Can you describe your research?

Every year, around 800,000 women worldwide will develop thrombosis due to the contraceptive pill. This risk is higher in those with thrombophilia, a condition that makes the blood more prone to clotting. Usually those affected by thrombophilia are not eligible for hormonal contraception. However, around 10% of the population suffer from thrombophilia and many are young women who are not aware or who are not screened, due to the cost of the tests, around €350.

We developed a unique test at a more reasonable cost, which screens thrombophilia and helps a physician choose the most appropriate contraceptive. The test also allows monitoring of the individual response to contraceptive therapy. For example, the combination of a fourth-generation contraceptive pill with thrombophilia increases the thrombotic risk more than 40-fold, while it is increased only two- to four-fold in the presence of thrombophilia alone. Our test may help reduce thrombotic risk, save lives and improve quality of life for these women without being overpriced for insuring bodies.

How will the award advance your research?

We do research because physicians need more efficient therapies and diagnostic tools to improve patients' quality of life. An award provides us with more confidence about the usefulness of our research and discoveries. It

gives us more visibility and may help to gather collaborators. Research is not something you can do alone, you need to collaborate, to mobilise other brains to reach your objectives.

How does the spin-off QUALblood work to combat thrombosis?

QUALblood is a gathering of experts in of thrombosis and haemostasis. We are a contract research organisation: we help other pharmaceutical companies develop their products. We can bring our know-how to demonstrate the therapeutic benefit of their products by helping them design their studies or giving them ideas on biomarkers needing investigation. We also developed our own tests that may then be used in their clinical trials. In the future, my main objective is to undertake the entire development of a drug candidate from identifying the target to the management of studies in humans.

How do you combine your various roles?

In addition, to my academic and management positions, I'm a pharmacist and I still practise. The combination of teaching, research and management requires a lot of time but when you are motivated this does not matter. They are also complementary. Supervising theses at the university is also a source of inspiration.

What skills does a researcher require?

Rigour, self-motivation, open-mindedness, curiosity, ambition and modesty. I was lucky to have parents who gave me all I needed to satiate my curiosity when I was a child. This certainly built my scientific curiosity, drove my choice at secondary school and influenced my choices at university. The choice of your mentor also drives your future: this is an important point to consider when starting a career in research

qualiblood.eu

New heights

Walloon companies lift quality of composite materials for aviation sector

By Andy Furniere

The aviation industry is increasingly looking to lightweight and resistant composite materials to replace metal alloys such as aluminium, steel and titanium. With the help of the Walloon Region, many local companies are tapping into the potential of these materials.

Skywin, the region's aerospace cluster, long ago identified composites – like thermosets (reinforced resins) and thermoplastics (rein-

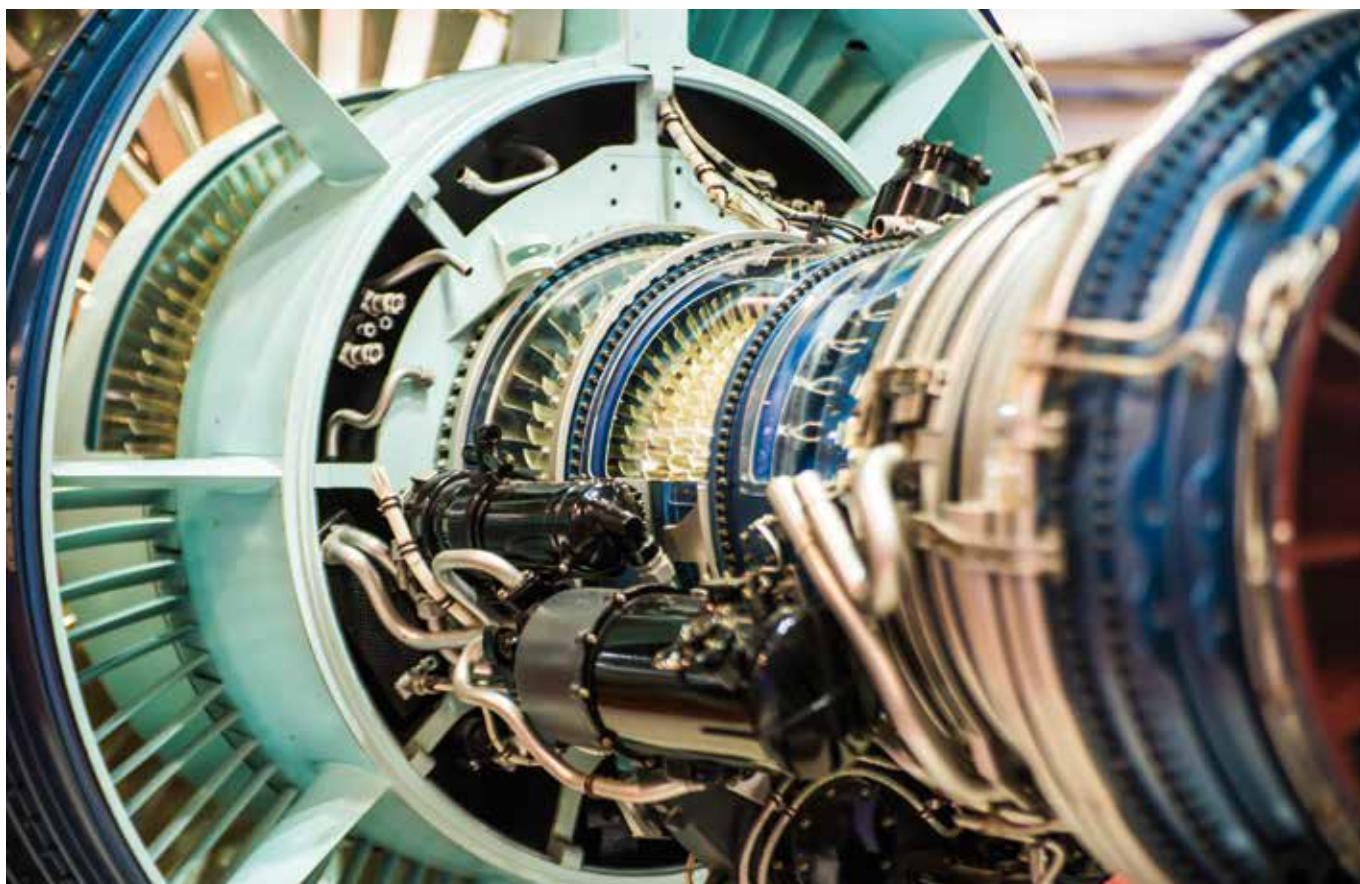
forced plastics) – as a promising domain in aviation, and through regional development programmes has supported Walloon companies to adjust their R&D activities accordingly. Skywin also regularly organises events such as seminars to keep them up to date with the latest evolutions.

“Composite materials can make aviation structures lighter compared to the traditional metal alloys, while being just as high per-

forming,” says Ashley Lyon, aeronautics and space expert at Wallonia's foreign trade and investment agency (AWEX). “The reduction of weight is essential to companies because it allows aircraft to have more fuel, cargo and people on board.”

Thanks to new techniques, composites are becoming increasingly resistant and cheaper to produce. That doesn't mean they don't pose any challenges, however. Maintenance can be

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difficult, as it's hard to detect possible damage, and replacing aircraft structures made of composites can also be complicated. Still, the advantages are growing. The result is that aircraft of leading companies, such as the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and the Airbus A350, are made up of more than 50% composites. Thermosets are mostly used for structural parts, as they are more resistant, and thermoplastics for internal non-structural components.

The competition in this field is tough but Wallonia is holding its own, with about 20 companies providing cutting-edge products and services. Engineering company Coexpair, from Namur, has developed the innovative RTM (Resin Transfer Moulding) technique, which helps it to secure important contracts with the major international players in aviation. Hexcel's Welkenraedt plant, on the other hand, is a specialist for example in prepreps and in honeycomb parts, which are important components of aerospace structures such as civil and defence aircrafts, helicopters and aero-engines.

Digital simulation company Open Engineering in Liège accurately predicts the performance

of composite materials used for aerospace applications. Another Walloon company active in this field is Samtech (Siemens).

Apart from the businesses, the Skywin cluster also includes many research centres that have taken a special interest in composites. Sirris, the technology centre of the Belgian manufacturing industry, provides expertise and up-to-date equipment for innovative composite processing technologies. R&D company Cenaero in Gosselies is another example.

While the aircraft industry is one of the leading markets for the businesses in this field, Lyon also identifies other significant prospects: "The space market focuses even more on the

introduction of lightweight and resistant materials, in order to optimise the launching of satellites," he says. "In recent years, the rapidly developing drone sector has also looked to composites to make their devices lighter, so less energy is needed to keep them airborne, which makes the batteries last longer." AWEX itself supports the export activities of the Walloon companies in this field by helping them to participate at fairs and airshows. Next year, the Walloon companies will be present at the JEC World show in Paris, the Farnborough International Airshow in the UK and the Singapore Airshow.

skywin.be
awex.be



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The reduction of weight is essential because it allows aircraft to have more fuel, cargo and people on board

Funding injection

€800m for major international employers NLMK and Google with an eye on sustainability

By Andy Furniere

An investment of €200 million between now and 2022 should ensure that the steel production site of the Russian NLMK group in La Louvière can strengthen its activity in niche markets interested in highly resistant steel and

make its working process more sustainable. Half of the investment comes from the Walloon Region's investment fund Sogepa and the other half from the group itself. A major part of the investment, €150 million, is being used to modernise the hot rolling

mill at the La Louvière production line. The technology update includes the installation of a new automated system, rolling stands, cooling table and water treatment system. The innovations that will be put into place will enable the creation of



© Courtesy NLMK

thinner, more resistant steel. A new smoke extraction system, improved energy efficiency and a closed water circuit should all help to significantly reduce the system's ecological footprint.

"This is the largest investment in decades for our site at La Louvière," Ben de Vos, CEO of NLTK International, said in a press release. "This innovative project represents the start of our future developments."

Walloon economy minister Willy Borsus expressed his satisfaction to be able to announce an investment of this size. "This action will stimulate a new industrial development for the Centre region in Wallonia," he said. Borsus pointed out that the NLTK group has been active in Belgium since 2006 and called the new, joint investment effort "a good example of lasting collaborations between the Walloon region and international companies". The Walloon investment fund Sogepa holds 49% of the shares of NLTK Belgium Holdings (NBH), the Belgian branch of NLTK.

The La Louvière facilities produce metal for the automotive industry and the construction sector. The site provides work



© Courtesy NLTK

to about 650 people, and NLTK also has a site in nearby Clabecq.

American technology giant Google, meanwhile, has invested €600 million in a fourth data centre at its site in Saint-Ghislain, near Mons in Hainaut, which should be ready by 2021. This addition to the site brings the total investment of the company in Belgium up to €1.6 billion.

"Google is very devoted to Belgium, which we have called home for 12 years," Google's data centre facilities manager, Frédéric Descamps, said in a press release. "Apart from our investments, we also actively support the local NGOs, community groups, schools and businesses in the area of Saint-Ghislain and Mons."

Former prime minister Charles Michel said the investment "confirmed Belgium's position as a digital pioneer, a reputation we have carefully built up over the years". He added that Belgium's knowledge and highly trained staff ensured that companies such as Google, but also start-ups, continued to grow and invest here. "Our country has a leading role in Europe concerning digitalisation, which creates many jobs."

The data centre in Saint-Ghislain was Google's first in Europe. It opened in 2009 and currently employs about 350 people. At the end of the year, the third data centre at the site will be opened and a solar panel field put into use, as part of Google's sustainability strategy.

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This innovative project represents the start of our future developments

EASI does it

After being named Enterprise of the Year, a Nivelles IT company is beginning a new era

By Tomáš Miklica

Salvatore Curaba's story would make a good film. Imagine the biopic starting at a late-1980s Sporting de Charleroi football match, with a talented player suddenly facing a difficult decision – he can continue kicking the ball, or he can give it up to pursue a career in IT, a new and exciting business sector. Curaba has a knack for programming and management but there's no real way of knowing how far he can go until he stops being a full-time footballer. And so he does.

Fast-forward a few years, to 1999. At the age of 35, Curaba, the son of Italian immi-

grants, founds EASI, an IT company headquartered in Nivelles, Walloon Brabant. Twenty years later and EASI is voted the Best Workplace in Belgium for the fifth year in a row and named Wallonia's Enterprise of the Year for the first time. You could call it a happy ending, except for one detail – this is not the end. Instead, EASI has bold plans for further growth and has installed two CEOs in place of one.

While Curaba (pictured right) remains chair of the board of directors and EASI's main ambassador, he has recently appointed two successors, Jean-François Herremans

and Thomas Van Eeckhout (pictured below right). "We prepared this transfer for two-and-a-half years with Salvatore," says Van Eeckhout. "Jean-François is more analytical, while I tend to move ahead more quickly. We complement each other quite well. You might see this as the beginning of a new era, an era in which we will make sure to focus even more on customer satisfaction and added value through our solutions, but also an era in which we will show even more ambition than we have done in the past."

Currently, EASI has a turnover of approximately €35 million, dealing in software



© Nicolas Deneffe/Vision Photography

and mobile development, data protection, IT infrastructure and cloud solutions. Its products include sales management application SmartSales and accounting software Adfinity. The company employs more than 250 people across eight offices in Belgium, Luxembourg and France.

“In 2019 we had our first international acquisition in Switzerland, and created our first Dutch branch,” says Van Eeckhout. “I’m confident that new countries will follow soon. We have very ambitious growth plans and we expect that, in order to achieve those plans, we will need at least 250 additional people over the next five years.”

All this has now been recognised by the Enterprise of the Year award, organised by Ernst & Young since 1996. Having been first nominated in 2015, EASI was selected this time by a professional jury, beating Dufour, John Cockerill and Trendy Foods. “It’s an important milestone for us,” says Van Eeckhout. “We’re especially proud because it’s an evaluation of the entire company, and not just one aspect. Besides growth and



future potential, it recognises our financial performance, our entrepreneurship, innovation, internationalisation and corporate governance.”

Van Eeckhout, who started his career in 2006 as EASI’s account manager, says the reason for the company’s success is simple – a strong company culture based on a firm bond between colleagues, and where 100% of the shareholders of EASI are its employees. “Some refer to us as a family, others as a tribe. I can only say that the energy we feel when we’re together is special and allows us to achieve amazing things,” he says.

easi.net



© Fotostudio Leemans

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The energy we feel when we’re together is special and allows us to achieve amazing things

MEET THE BRUSSELS EXPAT



**Tibetan translator
Chloé Cramer
from Switzerland
lives in Etterbeek
with her husband
and spends time
each week at
the Dharma City
meditation centre
in Florennes,
Wallonia**

I grew up in Geneva and lived in Germany, Hong Kong and Nepal before moving to Belgium in 2002. Belgium has excellent, affordable and accessible film schools. I studied at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion, which is hosted by the Wallonia University Campus of Louvain-la-Neuve, and lived in Brussels because it was more in tune with my needs as a young adult and artist.

Although I intended to become a movie director, I finally changed career to become an interpreter and translator, specialising in Tibetan. I discovered Tibetan Buddhism in 2008 and was fascinated by the depth and complexity of the philosophy and practice. I learned the language to understand the scriptures and teachings better.

My interests and activities are connected to work, or in other words my work is connected to my interests. I do meditation retreats and attend seminars on Tibetan Buddhism, especially in Dharma City, a meditation centre in Florennes, just over an hour's drive from Brussels in Namur province. I help out as a volunteer and participate in events.

The beautiful renovated 300-year-old farmhouse is surrounded by countryside, and is a fully fledged meditation centre with

rooms, a vegetarian cafe and restaurant with homemade food, an organic shop and, most importantly, spaces for seminars and retreats for activities such as meditation and Qi Gong, or Chinese healing movements.

The whole place is suffused with a peaceful atmosphere that may be the fruit of all the positive wishes by the people who practise there, individually or collectively. Visitors come from all over the world and it is very interesting to meet them with their different backgrounds and common interest. Local people are also fond of the teahouse with its cuisine that includes Tibetan specialities.

A visit to Florennes can be combined with other places in the area like the Lacs de l'Eau d'Heure, Chimay Abbey and Dinant. Everything in Belgium is very close: within an hour or two one can reach any part of the country. There is the sea, gorgeous forests, hills, castles and interesting cities. Belgian natives are generally welcoming, humorous and relaxed. They are good at reaching out to others and it creates a nice atmosphere. There is room for initiatives and creativity in Belgium, and it is home to many artists as well as many community projects.

dharma-city.net

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I discovered Tibetan Buddhism and was fascinated by its depth and complexity



Building up

Wallonia's burgeoning architecture scene is joining Brussels in winning international accolades

By Sarah Schug



• Perrett Hall by architect Pierre Hebbelinck



• MAC, Grand Hornu

© Serge Brison



As the birthplace of Art Nouveau, Brussels has had a prominent spot on the global architectural map ever since Belgian eminence Victor Horta and his contemporaries created the influential movement at the end of the 19th century. And while Horta's shoes (he's often-times dubbed the architect of Brussels) are hard to fill, a vibrant contemporary scene has been making its mark in recent years, not only in the capital but also in Wallonia.

"It's a fantastic moment for architecture in Wallonia right now," says Nathalie Brison, the project leader of Wallonie-Bruxelles Architectures, an organisation that supports local architects on the international stage. "The Architectural Review has even spoken of a golden age." Indeed, architects from Wallonia have attracted quite some

attention lately, with Liège-based Pierre Hebbelinck leading the way.

His studio, arguably the most prominent in Wallonia at the moment, has just received, with a French office, the AMO Award from the Association française des Architectes et des Maîtres d'Ouvrage for the impressive transformation of a derelict market hall in France into a cultural centre. The project also scored a nomination for this year's prestigious Mies van der Rohe Award. That award was won in 2017 by Brussels bureau MSA / V+ in the Emerging Architect category for their pioneering Navez social housing complex in the Brussels district of Schaerbeek.

Homegrown architects are also increasingly venturing abroad, such as award-winning Brussels studio Baukunst, which has opened

a branch in Lausanne, Switzerland. Besides the established offices, a bunch of young up-and-coming studios has been emerging, choosing their base not in the capital but in Namur (Specimen) and Liège (Binario).

International media coverage, prizes and projects paired with fresh talent are all vital signs of a dynamic sector on the rise. Pablo Lhoas, dean of the architecture programme of renowned Brussels art school La Cambre, explains it this way: "Brussels is now really connected with the main international architectural scene due to high-profile architects who teach and exhibit around the world, its schools, and the work of the city's master architect. This of course inspires and influences the entire region, which is very connected with what's happening in the capital. There is more creativity and experimentation now in Wallonia."



• Arsonic concert hall in Mons (former fire station), architects Holoffe Vermeersch



• L'Artothèque, Mons, by L'Escaut Architectures

© François-Lichtie

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Urbanism and architecture joined forces to make peoples' lives better

Pablo Lhoas

The launch of the Institut Culturel d'Architecture Wallonie-Bruxelles (ICA) this November seems to have come at exactly the right time. By bringing together all the region's architectural actors with the goal to create links and increase visibility, it could give the already thriving scene an important additional push. “We want to build on

this momentum. ICA will fill a crucial gap and Wallonia will finally have the same kind of organisation as Flanders and Brussels already do,” says director Audrey Contesse.

But is there a common denominator when it comes to architectural practices in Wallonia? Are there recurring characteris-

tics or trends? While all experts agree there is no general, prevailing style, there are a number of things that Walloon architects are especially good at. “They are known for their negotiating and compromising skills because of the multitude of laws and actors to consider,” says Brison. “They are very used to reassessing and rethinking their propos-



© Maxime Delvaux

als. Urbanistic, architectural and energy-related rules are very strong in Wallonia and Brussels.”

Contesse’s analysis points in the same direction: “I used to say that they are great architects *despite*. Despite small budgets, despite lack of progress, despite the myriad regulations. Besides that, they are really hands-on, as opposed to architects in France or the United Kingdom for instance. Here, they need to have engineering skills as well, and it’s the architects themselves who visit the construction sites and follow the projects from A to Z.”

The regional architectural culture is charac-

terised by a mix of pragmatism and inventiveness paired with a human touch. It’s not by accident that MSA / V+ won the Mies van der Rohe prize for a social housing project, which Anna Ramos, director of the foundation, described as “an approach both heroic and ordinary”.

This willingness to connect with the everyday person is something that ICA cherishes and understands as part of its mission. Contesse: “One of our core ideas is to create quality by involving the general public. We want to be there for everyone, not just for the architects. Architecture can seem very complicated and intimidating, and we want to bring it closer to the people.”

Exemplary for this creative but down-to-earth philosophy with a social conscience is the case of Charleroi, a former mining town and Wallonia’s most densely populated city in what many locals refer to as the Black Country, Belgium’s biggest coal basin. With the closure of the mines, unemployment rocketed and the city experienced a lengthy period of post-industrial decline.

“The situation was quite desolate and dire,” Lhoas says. “But then, urbanism and architecture joined forces to make peoples’ lives better, and proved they can serve as an engine for development.” Largely thanks to the city’s master architect, Charleroi has seen a significant process of renewal and

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It’s a fantastic moment for architecture in Wallonia right now

Nathalie Brison



• Kietude Housing, Namur, by Specimen architects

© Valentin Bianchi

regeneration over recent years, bringing about a new dynamism and revival of a town presumed dead.

Large parts of its riverside have been transformed into a welcoming landscape of ramps, bridges, stairs and benches and a gigantic former bank building now hosts the stunning cultural centre Quai 10, centred on cinema and video games, remodelled by the Brussels-based practices V+ and L'Escaut, to name a few examples.

“Charleroi is a very influential case in terms of what architecture can achieve when academia, politics and economics work together,” Lhoas adds. In fact, it has even inspired the creation of a new master’s programme



© Valentin Bianchi

SPECIMEN, NAMUR

Founded in Namur in 2008, Specimen is one of the younger players blowing fresh wind into the Walloon architecture scene. This year, the self-described “multidisciplinary platform operating in urban planning, architecture and design” received a special mention at the Belgian Building Awards (BBA) as Rookie of the Year. The reason: the studio’s recent project Kietude Housing, in a street needing revitalisation in the founders’ hometown, Namur.

Imaginative, bold and pragmatic all at once, the five-floor residential building, now the tallest timber frame building in Wallonia, has attracted a lot of praise and attention. A standout feature is the eye-catching folded facade that includes an intriguing contemporary take on the Art Nouveau bow-window but also plays with shadows in a way that ensures the 10 small studios and apartments won’t overheat in the summer. At the same time, the original design maximises light and space.

This is not a luxury apartment complex, but one that was built for students and young couples. While Specimen’s portfolio features a lot of private homes, it is by no means limited to that. One of the studio’s flagship projects, nominated at the BBA, was the unlikely conception of a Belgian car wash, allowing them to break with the usual monotony of industrial zones, where the hiring of architects is rather rare. Specimen’s humble, respectful and poetic approach is also valued beyond Belgian borders: in Laos, the studio thought up a hotel in Vang Vieng, with the goal of preserving the original spirit of the resort made up of small bungalows. Saving as many trees as possible and preserving the natural slope of the land, the architects turned a concrete mega-structure into a contemporary interpretation of the bungalow using regional materials such as limestone, slate and wood.

specimenarchitects.com

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Architecture can seem very complicated and intimidating, and we want to bring it closer to the people

Audrey Contesse

dedicated to territorial urban development, a joint effort of the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and the University of Mons that attracts not only architects but also engineers and geographers.

About 60km west of Charleroi, in the town of Hornu, lies the MAC, an art museum reviving a former mining site that carries the Unesco World Heritage label. It was repurposed by the Pierre Hebbelinck studio. The mindset to repurpose existing structures can be found all over Wallonia. Architecture studios L'Escaut and Atelier Gigogne converted a former chapel in Mons into a museum, Baumans-Deffet oversaw the redevelopment of a former dairy factory complex in Dison into an art centre, and Holoffe Vermeersch transformed a fire station into a concert hall. “Many architects here work on projects giving a new life to historic buildings while respecting their heritage,” says Brison.

Urban renewal in post-industrial cities, abandoned industrial sites, budgetary and legal constraints – the architects of Wallonia are facing a lot of challenges. But they have been responding to them with creativity, practicality and a sense of social solidarity that has given rise to a new kind of architecture.

wbarchitectures.be



© Pierre Hebbelinck

PERRETT HALL, MONTATAIRE

In collaboration with hbaat studio in Lille, France, the transformation of an abandoned market hall in the small French town of Montataire is the project that secured Liège-based architect Pierre Hebbelinck the AMO Award, as well as a nomination for the esteemed Mies van der Rohe Award 2019. One of Wallonia's most sought-after architects who can look back on a career stretching over 30 years, Hebbelinck is also the creative mind behind the MAC Grand-Hornu, the Manège theatre in Mons and the Liège theatre. In the case of the Perrett Hall, he shows a high level of appreciation for a kind of industrial heritage that usually doesn't get much recognition: he preserves the concrete framework of the unassuming warehouse and makes it an integral part of the new cultural centre, which houses a music school, dance school and recording studio. New and old elements merge into a sober concrete landscape bathed in natural light, evoking a raw kind of beauty. “The project enriches the depreciated remains thanks to acupuncture work that borders on magic. Could it be the famous ‘Belgian touch’?” the AMO said.

pierrehebbelinck.net



© Ateliers Europaexpo



© Ateliers du ministère des antiquités égyptiennes

Mummy talks

The legend of Tutankhamun comes to Liège

It was 97 years ago that British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb of the young pharaoh Tutankhamun – one of the most mythical finds in the history of Egyptology. A new exhibition in Liège immerses visitors in the period.

With the travelling exhibition Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh making waves in world capitals, Europa Expo decided to launch its own show, which works to fill in the gaps. Tutankhamun: The Discovery of the Forgotten Pharaoh at the Liège-Guillemins station exhibition space comes with a complete replica of King Tut's

tomb. Artefacts found in the tomb were painstakingly copied by artisans at the Ministry of Egyptian Antiquities.

The exhibition also includes more than 350 original artefacts from major European museums and prestigious private collections previously unseen by the general public, as well as a recreation of the studio of Thutmose, thought to have been the official court sculptor of Tutankhamun's father, the pharaoh Akhenaten.

Belgium has an important historical link with the story. Queen Elisabeth, the Bavarian

princess who became the wife of Albert I, had a lifelong interest in ancient Egypt, and was among the first guests to see the newly opened tomb in February 1923. Jean Capart (1877-1947), a Belgian Egyptologist who studied at the universities of Namur and Brussels, visited Egypt on many occasions and directed excavations at Elkab in the 1930s and 40s. He founded the Egyptian Foundation in the queen's name with the aim of encouraging research into Ancient Egypt in Belgium. He was also a professor at the University of Liège.

europaexpo.be



© WBT/Denis Closon

Winter wonders

There's no shortage of activities this season, from fine food and drink to fun in the snow

By Sarah Crew

GOURMET DELIGHTS

One of the joys of winter is tucking into hearty, warming dishes with friends and families. With such a rich terroir and proud tradition of artisanal production, Wallonia's generous cuisine never fails to please. When the temperatures drop, nothing beats raclette. One original con-

cept is Le Chariot à fondue, a year-round activity by Ardenne Trait Gourmande in Luxembourg province. For the ultimate in meals on wheels, select a menu from a range of seasonal and local produce and choose your route: beer, wine, storytelling, museum or show and hit the high road in these Ardennes shire horse and cart trips. For more of an alpine experience,

enjoy your raclette at Namur winter pop-up restaurant Le Chalet with its log fires and festive red decor. It's open daily, with all-inclusive menus served until 19 January, on the outskirts of the city in Erpent for hassle-free parking.

chariotafondue.wixsite.com/Laetitia_truffeblanche.be/chalet



© WBT/Jean-Paul Rémy



© WBT/Jean-Paul Rémy



© Eric Martin/FigaroPhoto

Winter is a perfect time to sample some of the region's seasonal beers. Wallonia's breweries serve up a selection for the festive period, specially brewed in August and September. Grab yourself a glass of Christmas cheer with one of these suggestions, flavoured with cinnamon, cloves, orange peel and vanilla. Be warned: they are usually pretty strong at 9-11% ABV. Look out for seasonal offerings from these brewers: Dubuisson, Dupont, Brasserie des Carrières, Lupulus, De Ranke, Saint-Feuillien, l'Abbaye des Rocs, Val de Sambre, Brasserie des Fagnes, Bertinchamps and Minne.

HOLIDAY EVENTS

Christmas villages in cities such as Namur (above, centre) are an annual attraction with their twinkly lights, vats of mulled wine, chalets plying warming fare and seasonal gifts. The Christmas Village in Liège (above) is the largest in Belgium and has a German flavour, while Durbuy adopts an artisanal theme. The pretty town also features an ice skating rink, as do many of the city markets. Animal park Pairi Daiza opens during the holidays and apart from its star attraction – twin baby pandas (see p28) – it's drawing crowds with the largest floating ice skating rink in Europe (right). From 14 December to 5 January, visitors can take to the lake for a magical winter experience. Made entirely of recycled materials, the eco-friendly facility is one of the park's many seasonal attractions.

villagedenoel.be
pairidaiza.eu

NATURE ACTIVITIES

Thanks to its undulating hills, Wallonia has eight ski centres, in the Ardennes and the Hautes Fagnes in East Belgium. When snow falls, the downhill resorts include Baraque de Fraiture, which has an altitude of 652m, while the longest is a 1,000m red run at Mont des Brumes, near Francorchamps, with four lifts. Many offer cross-country trails, toboggan descents and plenty of walking possibilities. At Saint-Hubert in Luxembourg province, there are also dog sled tours and snow kite facilities. The Hautes Fagnes nature park, near the German border, is a boggy terrain criss-crossed with boardwalks. As well as signposted walks, it's possible to rent bikes and scooters. The Botrange visitor centre in Waimes supplies maps and information and there's a warming circular fireplace.

walloniebelgiquetourisme.be
ostbelgien.eu



ESCAPE THE COLD

Family-friendly water park Aqualibi – part of the Walibi theme park near Wavre – is a popular year-round destination. Less well-known is the subtropical swimming pool Aqua Mundo at the Center Parcs Les Ardennes site in Vielsalm, Luxembourg province. A large toboggan, jacuzzi, wave machine and heated outside pool with terrace are additional attractions.

The Ice Mountain Adventure Park in Comines-Warneton enables skiers to descend its indoor slopes, whatever the weather or temperature. Its other activities include paintballing, laser gaming, aerial climbing and indoor freefall skydiving. There are also two restaurants including a rustic wooden chalet with open fires and specialities from the Savoy region of France, open to all.

To really warm you up, Wallonia is home to numerous countryside spas and hotel facilities, including Les Thermes de Spa (pictured above) in the town that gave its name to the relaxing and rejuvenating concept. Chaudfontaine's Château des Thermes is another; a haven for luxury pampering.

aqualibi.be
centerparcs.com
ice-mountain.com
thermesdespa.com
chateaudesthermes.be



Sweet success

Ariqua Denis is Walloon chocolatier of the year

By Sarah Crew

Less than a year after opening his Andenne atelier and boutique, Ariqua Denis has been named Wallonia's chocolatier of the year 2020 by gourmet guide Gault & Millau. The 32-year-old's meteoric rise in the world of Belgian chocolate is thanks to his passion for all things cocoa.

The award, announced in the autumn, may have been unexpected, but Denis is resisting changing his concept. "If we won thanks to the quality of our products and balance of flavours, we are not going to change everything," he says. However, with complete control of the bean-to-bar process the ultimate ambition, he already imagines the

odour of the roasting process wafting into the boutique as customers enter.

It was the aroma of molten chocolate cascading from a fountain on a school trip that inspired his own passion when he was 11. "In the eyes of a child, it was at least two metres high and so appetising," he recalls. "Back home, all I could talk about was chocolate, chocolate, so my mum said, 'no problem, we'll orientate your studies around that.'" While at technical school, he entered competitions to advance his skills. "My objective was to do everything to succeed," he says. At 19, he was a master chocolatier and his first job was with the legendary Pierre Marcolini.

After a couple of years in Brussels developing a range for a small chocolate business, Denis returned home to start a family, taking a job in a patisserie. "I didn't learn anything about chocolate, but I did learn plenty about selling and running a business." With the additional experience under his belt, he chose Andenne, on the banks of the Meuse between Huy and Namur, to establish his atelier and boutique. "I really believe in the town's development project. There's free parking and we're showing that small towns can work and are convivial, enabling you to get to know your clients," he says.

Denis has since perfected his own range



that includes original pralines, truffles and bars. He sources all his additional ingredients locally – mint from his garden, speculoos biscuits from a neighbourhood baker and honey from a nearby village. Demand for his confectionery has rocketed, leading him to take on three young members of staff, and visitors to the store can see the team at work in the adjoining workshop.

What skills do you need to be a good chocolatier? “In all the artisan trades, you need a passion that pushes you to reflect on what you do and take yourself further,” he says. And he appreciates the precision and control in the craft. “When you bite into a praline, I like it when you can hear the crunch of the outer shell. It needs to be subtle, not enough to break a tooth, but not too thin a layer either.”

The ganache and fillings require similar attention to detail. “When making a ginger ganache, I carried out seventeen tests and for the earl grey tea flavour, we made many infusions before achieving the right result,” says Denis. He opts for a familiar palette, with a couple of surprises: “We have a few special ones, but customers tire of them after a while; what they want are the classics.” Among his seasonal specials was balsamic vinegar in the summer, a flavour that surprised him with its popularity. For winter, there are the comforting flavours of cinnamon, marzipan, pecan and speculoos, although the latter is so popular it features all year round.

When it comes to his own preferences, Denis’s taste buds transport him to Latin



America. “My favourite is from Ecuador, which gives you an essential cocoa flavour at 71%, but not at all bitter. My second choice is a 66% Mexican, very gentle, but you let it melt on your tongue and the flavour slowly develops.” His next job, for the new year, is creating a signature praline with chocolate from Ecuador, Mexico and

Guatemala, “because they represent three types of chocolate that I appreciate a lot”. Summing up his winning approach, he concludes: “It’s all about finding the right balance, in my work and family life, as well as in the chocolate.”

ariquachocolaterie.be

“

You need a passion that pushes you to reflect on what you do and take yourself further

Take a bow

Local designers are honoured at the third annual Belgian Fashion Awards

By Clodagh Kinsella



“

Being a finalist in such contests is a great opportunity to share your work with your peers as well as with a wider audience

The local fashion scene may be famous for its modesty, but there's one time of year when the country proudly celebrates its avant-garde design credentials and fiercely independent streak: during the annual Belgian Fashion Awards. The awards honour the country's designers at home and abroad, focusing on big names as well as behind-the-scenes talent, and act as a springboard for up-and-coming brands.

The third edition of the event took place in November in the context of the fashion seminar Fashion Talks. It was organised by publications *Le Vif Weekend* and *Knack Weekend* alongside three bodies key to the promotion of Belgian creativity: Walloon-Bruxelles Design Mode (WBDM), MAD Brussels and Flanders DC.

"These days, being an entrepreneur in the fashion sector is a bigger challenge than ever, both for newcomers and for the numerous professionals in the sector," says Elke Timmerman of MAD Brussels. "By taking part in the organisation of the Belgian Fashion Awards, WBDM wants to strengthen the reputation and international visibility both of the sector as a whole and the talented individuals with their unique character, whether they work independently or within a fashion house," adds Laure Capitani of WBDM.

Awards were given in seven categories, and francophone designers were well represented. Couture lingerie creator Carine Gilson, whose label celebrated its 30th anniversary this year, was nominated for Designer of the Year, while in-demand fashion



© Fille Roelants Photography

editor Benoît Béthume and photographer Pierre Debusschere both vied for Professional of the Year, with Debusschere taking the crown. Dominique Rocour of Liège school Château Massart and Thurel Thouet of HELMo Mode were among the joint winners of the Most Promising Graduate title. The jury felt the seven finalists all deserved the title, saying they found the candidates "very strong individuals who give a great overview of what our various Belgian fashion schools have to offer".

The Emerging Talent of the Year award, reserved for brands less than three years old, saw a nomination for rising star Sarah Levy, a Brussels-based accessories designer and La Cambre Mode(s) graduate who recently scooped the Public Award at France's prestigious Hyères Festival. "When you have a more discursive than business-oriented approach to design, being a finalist in such contests is a great opportunity to share

your work with your peers as well as with a wider audience," says Levy.

An architect by training, Levy's award-winning project *Creatures of Habit* draws on exchanges with sociologist Mathieu Berger, materialising often-vapid contemporary fetishes in the form of accessories. Such a conceptual approach feels very Belgian – one reason she feels a kinship with the country's radical creative scene. "Of course I appreciate the dynamics of big cities like Paris or London, but Brussels' outsider status gives me a feeling of freedom that's decisive in the development of my work."

Having won the Emerging Talent award last year, contemporary denim label *Façon Jacmin*, founded in 2016 by twins Alexandra and Ségolène Jacmin, underscored its popularity as one of several francophone brands honoured in the Fashion Brand of the Year category. The public selected the winner from a jury-selected shortlist of 10 brands including veterans Natan, a brand whose roots stretch back to 1930.

"Awards like this are really a boost on so many different levels: they create visibility and so are a marketing boon where you really feel the commercial consequences of winning," say the sisters. "We're also very proud of Belgian fashion and its excellent reputation and history worldwide, so the quality of the prize is an extra motivation to win it – although just to be nominated already feels like a reward." It's a response suggesting that, even on prize day, Belgium's famed modesty isn't something that's easily set aside.

belgianfashionawards.be

PICK UP A PANDA

Pairi Daiza's twin giant panda cubs made their public debut on 14 December. The pair will no doubt prove to be star attractions at the animal park, near Mons. Born on 8 August, weighing 150g, the new additions to the panda family are the zoo's pride and joy. Their birth was the result of a tricky artificial insemination process and their first public appearance follows a difficult first few months when they were cared for separately in incubators. Following Chinese tradition, they were only named 100 days after their birth as it's deemed unlucky to attribute names earlier. After a public poll, the girl was named Bao Mei and the boy Bao Di in honour of their big brother, Tian Bao, who was born in 2016. In other baby news, the park announced the birth of another endangered animal with the arrival of a white southern rhinoceros calf on 25 November.

pairidaiza.eu



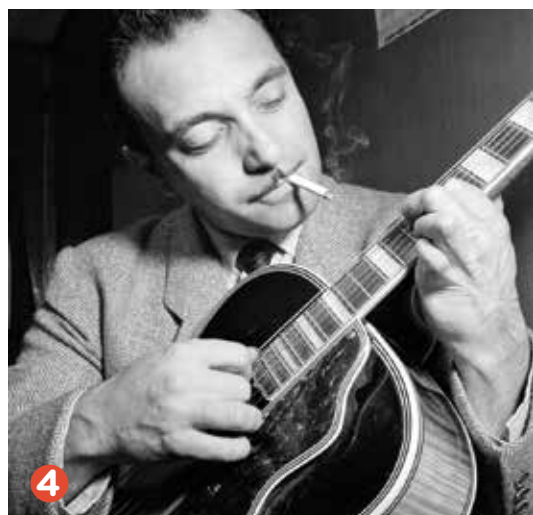




© Wu Wei Xinhua/WBT



© AOliver Guyaux



© William P. Gottlieb and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress



© Roberto Marossi

EXHIBITION NATURE MORTE/NATURE VIVANTE ①

Nature morte, or still life, is an enduring style of painting, with its focus on aesthetically pleasing – and often gourmet – delights: think cut flowers, bright red wine and bunches of plump grapes. But it also alludes to humans' manipulation of these natural elements. While beautiful, these paintings show elements in decay, struck down by the human need for sustenance or control – or, in modern times, simple greed. Scientists, architects and artists come together in this exhibition at Grand-Hornu to illustrate just how resilient nature is in the face of a human race bent on destroying it.

UNTIL 8 MARCH
cid-grand-hornu.be



HERITAGE CARNIVAL

2

One of the continuing charms of Carnival is the unique spin cities put on it. Wallonia has some of Europe's most famous Carnival celebrations, not least because of their quirky characters. Don't miss Binche, where more than 1,000 figures called Gilles march through the streets on Shrove Tuesday, sporting striped suits and wooden clogs. They don sky-high hats of ostrich feathers later in the day to throw oranges to the crowd. Other Carnival highlights are in Malmedy, where you'll meet the Grosse Police and the dancing Hanguets, and in Stavelot, with their pointy-nosed Blancs Moussi.

23-25 FEBRUARY
carnavaldebinche.be
malmedy-tourisme.be

EXHIBITION DOTREMONT AND THE SURREALISTS

3

While the CoBrA art movement was short-lived in years, it was long on influence. It's Karel Appel's bright, messy colours or Asger Jorn's grotesque figures that usually spring to mind, but the 20th-century avant-garde collective owes its name (referring to Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) to Christian Dotremont. Before that, however, the Brussels poet and painter was a Surrealist. This free exhibition in the capital puts his archives on show for the first time and brings to life a turbulent wartime period in the arts.

UNTIL 9 FEBRUARY
belvue.be

JAZZ FESTIVAL DJANGOFOLLIES

4

Jazz guitar legend Django Reinhardt was born in Wallonia, and this annual festival is an ode to his talent, influence and remarkable life. He learned to play string instruments growing up in gypsy camps outside Paris. It was the gift of a banjo when he was still a boy that would set Reinhardt on the path to creating gypsy jazz and make him the greatest jazz guitarist the world has ever known. Djangofollies takes place across Wallonia and Brussels and features local and international ensembles – like the Kamao Quartet, pictured – that put strings in the spotlight.

14-31 JANUARY
djangofollies.be

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Marie Pok is the director of CID, the Centre for Innovation and Design at Grand-Hornu. Its exhibition Nature Morte/Nature Vivante, curated by Veerle Wenes, Ralph Collier and Françoise Foulon, brings together designers, architects and artists to question the relationship between humans and nature.

"The concept of nature morte, or still life, is a constant return trip between life and death. The hourglass evokes the next death, but, at the same time, it draws attention to the urgency of life. For example, a video in the exhibition by Lieve Van Stappen has all the appearances of wallpaper, but looking closely we see that the flowers open and slowly fade, one after the other... It evokes the idea of blossoming, of life. But in fact, she created it following a double mastectomy due to cancer. Day after day, month after month, she painted roses at every stage in their life cycle. It visualises the evolution of the disease, and the threat of death.

Some artists use living materials. Nurit Bar-Shai created a series of shapes on petri dishes that illustrate the social behaviour of bacteria. Their system of self-organisation is surprisingly complex, and they have a highly perfected means of communication. We can see an incredible variety of results with only slight alterations to their initial environment. Plastic Reef by Maarten Vanden Eynde is an agglomeration of plastic debris taken from various oceans. It poses crucial questions about pollution and coral reefs. According to scientists, their gradual disappearance is due to the absorption of micro-plastics.

In the installation Aqua con gas by art cooperative Various Artists, the immersion of bonsai trees recreates the image of flooded olive groves and refers to the enormous impact of agriculture on nature. During a journey through southern Europe, Various Artists witnessed upheavals in the landscape due to the construction of hydroelectric dams. Such investments, subsidised by the EU, are designed to supply the energy and water for intensive agriculture, to the detriment of the local fauna and flora. Next year, CID will host three exhibitions that explore climate, food, ecology and water issues. Plant Fever, for example, will focus on how to work with plants in production processes. Plants develop resilience and communication strategies that inspire scientists, engineers and designers to develop more sustainable and efficient products."

cid-grand-hornu.be



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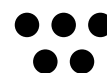
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