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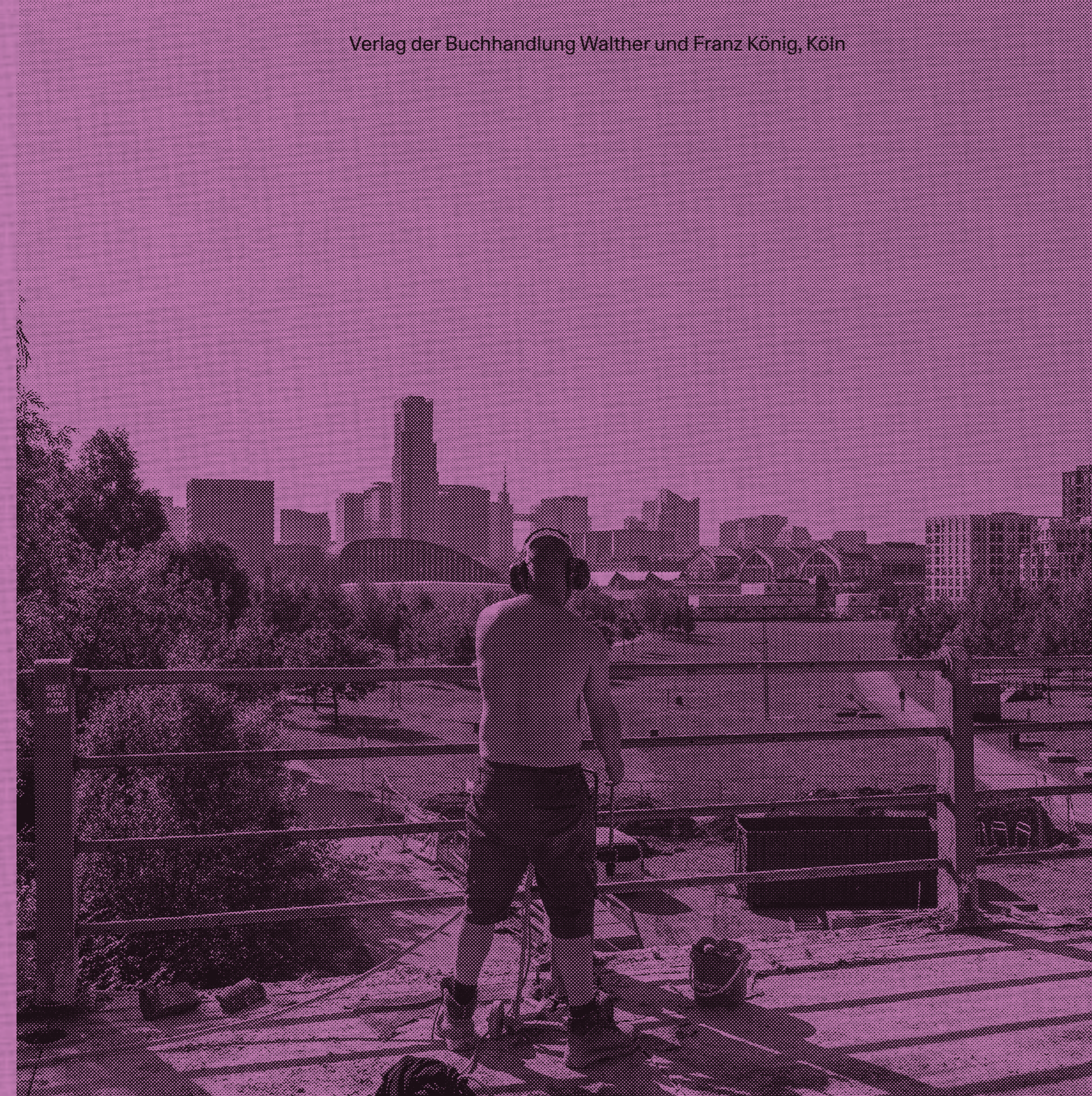
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SOFT POWER 10 YEARS OF BOUWMEESTER MAITRE ARCHITECTE IN BRUSSELS

SOFT

From 2015 to 2024, Kristiaan Borret was the Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA) of the Brussels-Capital Region. The BMA is appointed by the government to stimulate spatial quality in urban development, from an independent position. This book looks back at a period when architecture in Brussels gained international recognition and also takes a look at the city's future. It illustrates how the city is made and experienced today, covering both formal tools and informal practices that, together, form the Soft Power of the Bouwmeester Maître Architecte. This book embraces complexity, like Brussels city life itself.

10 YEARS OF BOUWMEESTER MAITRE ARCHITECTE IN BRUSSELS

POWER

SOFT POWER

A city — according to urban sociologist Richard Sennett, who once taught Kristiaan Borret — consists of two parts: *ville*, the built city, and *cit *, the lived city. Looking back over ten years and two mandates as Bouwmeester ma tre architecte (BMA) in Brussels cannot be limited therefore to describing the building blocks that have been laid. Both working on the city and living in the city have also undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade.

This book first and foremost tells the rich stories associated with spatial transformations. Drawing on exchanges with the Bouwmeester and his team, this publication sheds light on the formal processes and tools as well as on the creative bureaucracy — overall, BMA's *soft power* — to transform the city together into a new kind of ecosystem of 'city makers'.

Moreover, this book takes a position. In a series of eight statements, Kristiaan Borret articulates fundamental visions expressed in a selection of projects. This work then explores the everyday realities and ways in which people come to experience these projects. The record of conversations between designers, users, clients and BMA staff during collective site visits deepens the confrontations between design and appropriation, vision and materialization. Architects and activists, developers and neighbours, administrators and contractors, but also butchers, schoolchildren and many others share their personal experience of new projects in the city.

In addition, the narrative fits into a broader urbanism. Despite the numerous achievements of the past decade, the book is down to earth: the projects BMA could weigh in on represent only a fraction of the developments in Europe's capital. The photo-essays therefore not only show life at the project level, but also examine its embedding in neighbourhoods and communities. Rather than attempt to present an imposed harmony, the book embraces the spatial multiformity inherent to Brussels, Europe's most diverse city.

Lastly, this volume looks not only back, but also forward. In their guest contributions, professionals from Brussels and beyond — from a fellow city architect to a community worker, as well as established and emerging designers — offer critical reflections, and outline ambitious projections for the role of BMA in the creation of conditions for a quality and equitable development of both *ville* and *cit *.

Hedwig van der Linden
Jan Denoo

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Kristiaan Borret

A civil engineer-architect by training, Kristiaan Borret (1966) also holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy (KUL, Leuven) and in political science and public affairs (UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve), as well as a Master in Urbanism (UPC Barcelona). His career is marked by a close relationship between theory and practice, design and policy, the public and private sectors, architecture and urban planning. Previously, he has carried out theoretical research into contemporary transformations of the city, urban life and public space, and contributed as a designer to urban development projects in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. He is a visiting professor at Ghent University since 2005. From 2006 to 2014 he was the stadsbouwmeester of the City of Antwerp and then, from 2015 to 2024, the Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte (BMA) of Brussels Capital Region. Since 2017 he works also for the City of Amsterdam as quality supervisor for the Oostenburg and Hamerkwartier urban transformation areas.

Jan Denoo

Jan Denoo (1995) is an urbanist, agogue and curator. He researches, designs and guides socio-spatial transitions as part of the workers' cooperative Endeavour. He is also founder and curator of Stadsform, an independent centre for dialogue on urban issues. He strives to politicise, democratise and collectivise the making of cities.

Hedwig van der Linden

Hedwig van der Linden (1992) is trained as an architect (TU Delft) and is co-founder of design practice Dérive, operating from Brussels and Rotterdam. Dérive is a research-driven practice operating between architecture, public space and urban strategies. Hedwig seeks synergy between conceptual thinking and co-creative practice by providing space for dialogue. She is a guest tutor at the Amsterdam University of the Arts, the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft.

Gilles Debrun

Gilles Debrun (1972) is an ornithologist, architect and studio coordinator at the Faculty of Architecture at UCLouvain. As design co-director of MDW architecture for 15 years, he has won numerous national and international competitions and awards. In 2019, together with Dimitri Fache, he founded USAGES, a sustainable architecture and land care studio. He is also an author, a member of the editorial committee of the magazine A+ architecture in Belgium and a curator. In association with Pauline de La Boulaye, he directed the book and the exhibition Inventaires #3 Architectures Wallonie-Bruxelles 2016-2020.

Lisa De Visscher

Lisa De Visscher (1976) is an architect, writer and curator. She worked in Paris at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, in Austria at Baumschlager Eberle Architects and Neutelings Riedijk architects in Rotterdam. From 2015 to 2023, she was editor-in-chief and artistic director of the magazine A+ Architecture in Belgium. She curated many exhibitions and published several books on contemporary architecture. Since 2009, she has been a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Architecture at ULiège.

Atelier Sven Beirnaert

Atelier Sven Beirnaert (ASB) is a graphic design office that makes books for national and international publishers as well as museums and galleries. ASB won several awards such as the 'DAM Architectural Book Award' (Frankfurt, Germany) and the 'Best designed book in Flanders'.