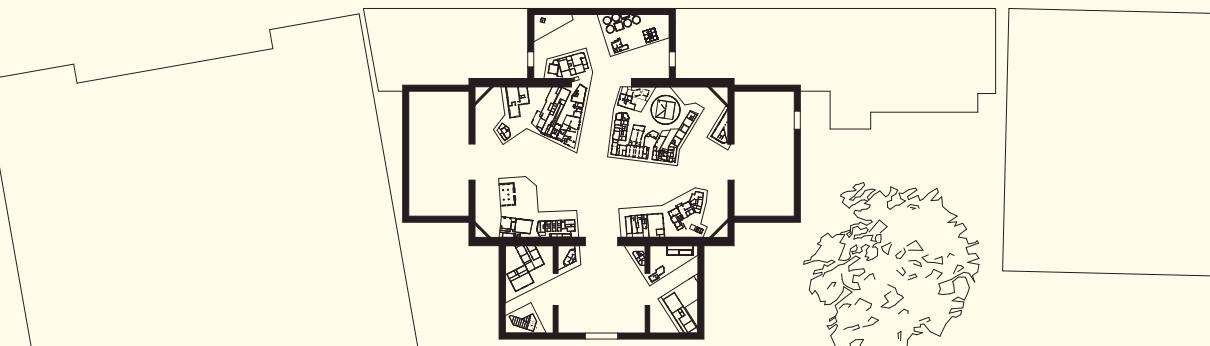




Composite Presence



Curator

Bovenbouw Architectuur

Commissioned by

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How we live is organized differently and influences in turn how we see the city. We are in contact with others without professional and relational activities explicitly having to take place explicitly in a physical or metropolitan space. Familial, professional and social bonds take on other forms. Today we cherish other expectations with regard to the tie to our domicile, the idea of a home and therefore also the meaning of architecture. This explains in part why old dichotomies—such as between city and countryside, the functional division between housing, work and leisure, or between powerful urban figures and the anonymous, vernacular urban fabric—are losing in relevance. The societal evolutions mentioned also explain the heterogeneous appearance of the model installation. In the current political and economic circumstances, the collage—and more generally the composite character of the architectural composition—has a different role and meaning than in Rowe's manifesto. It is a way of cleverly dealing with the available conditions rather than the formalist expression of the postmodern zeitgeist or the expression of a retrograde, traditionalist attitude.

Despite important ecological challenges that the climate problem or the colonization of the countryside entail, two themes that are here addressed only indirectly, a progressive force manifests itself in the installation. Maintaining, refurbishing and adapting the existing heritage are also expressions of sustainable management and design, and can be equally innovative.¹⁶ Together with the protection of open landscape areas, dealing with the existing heritage, according to Thomas Sieverts, is one of the most important cultural challenges: 'The handling of multifarious disused spaces, revaluations, interpretation of disused resources all become important planning tasks, and they are to a large extent essentially cultural tasks.'¹⁷ Neither the traditional urban planning tools nor the technocratic zeal for regulation are adequate to accompany the transformation of buildings and urban fragments that have fallen into disuse or received a new social destination.

The model advocates an approach in which fine-meshed architectural operations take centre stage, and reuse, reconstruction, extension, reparation and modernization of the existing heritage are given a real chance. The architecture on display emerged in reaction to contextual givens and locally anchored negotiation procedures. All projects were reactions to new social questions or to found qualities in the existing landscaping morphology. The model installation shows that grandiose urban planning gestures are not exclusively determining for the shape of the city. Coherence can be found through subtle architectural interventions in the fine grain of the urban fabric. The resulting landscape is the appealing evocation of an organically grown and composite city.

The model installation calls on the cultural imagination, but also relativizes the ambition to systematically opt for radical overthrow and the latest sociopolitical project. This text took Louis Marin's definition of the utopia as its basis. The 'play of spaces', as Marin would subtitle his book about utopian thought, labelled the French theorist as utopian. Clearly this definition of utopia differs strongly from Rowe's definition with which he criticized the sociopolitical aspirations of the modernist project. Marin's semiological analysis of the particular narrative structure of More's *Utopia* shows that stories and representations, such as sign and referent, establish an imaginary relation to reality. We showed that the model on display is a critical and studious reflection of the reality that the model represents. The utopia is in this case a project of cultural imagination, but by no means a politico-totalitarian project. The model landscape celebrates the heterogeneity of contemporary architecture in Flanders. The assemblage of architecture fragments presents itself not only as an inevitable condition, however, but also proves itself to be a potential that can be seized. The scale model—and the reality it refers to—can in that sense also be seen as a thought figure that could be imitated in dealing with future challenges.

16 In that sense, the project fits in a more long-term agenda of the Flanders Architecture Institute. See: Grafe, C. (2011). *Vlugschrift Dierbaar is duurzaam. Zes stellingen rond architectuur, cultuur en ecologie*. Antwerp: VAI; Grafe, C. and De Caigny, S. (2017). *Onvoltooid verleden*. Antwerp: VAI.

17 Sieverts, T. (2003). *Cities Without Cities. An Interpretation of the Zwischenstadt*, p. 81.



Brussels #1, 1997



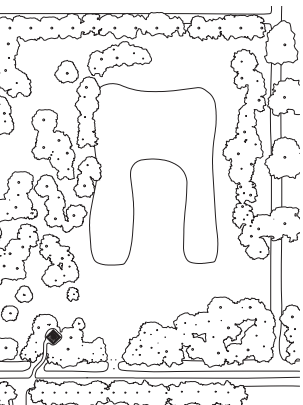
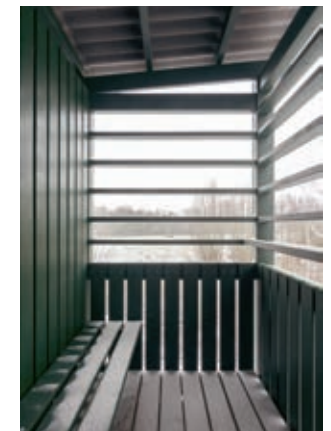
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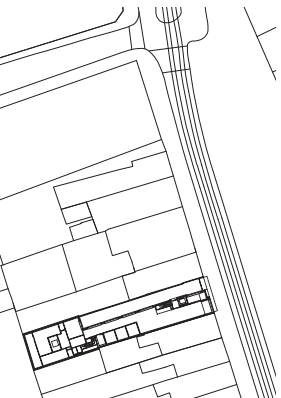
Baeten Hylebos Architecten
Observation tower

In the midst of one of Flanders' scarce nature areas, the Boudelo Foundation, a small landmark has been erected to overlook the surroundings. Made entirely out of wood, the observation tower was designed in a very simple and lucid manner by Baeten Hylebos Architecten. The tower consists of a square, two-storey spiralling staircase inside a wooden framework. Painted in a modest dark-green, the construction has been clad in wooden planks on the inside, letting the constructive elements determine its appearance. Outlook openings disrupt this tectonic system and prevent the façade from looking rigid. The landmark function of the tower is a territorial act, one that 'reclaims' the natural area. It revisits it, makes it accessible, opens it up to the public. Paradoxically, we need architecture to make us aware of the few remaining natural reserves. We also need it as a political act to prevent it from being developed.





De Smet Vermeulen architecten
Kioskplaats Police Station



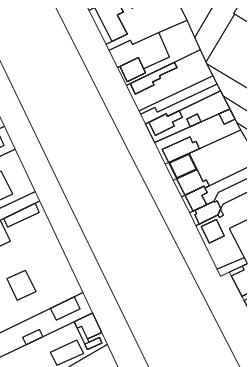
In order to raise the public visibility and lower the threshold of the police station in Hoboken, the building was moved to a central location on an elongated public square. On the deep, narrow parcel, De Smet Vermeulen architecten designed a station that is proportioned as an urban house, without a generic office façade. A higher, set-back volume on top was positioned to the left, seeking connection to the small apartment building. The roof terrace on the right reads in turn as a humble gesture towards the house on the right. The façade in a light-blue glazed brick was conceived as a public moment in the street, with a clock and a canopy to open it up to the street. The gate and front door of the demolished house were recuperated and add a commonplace historical dimension to the façade of the building.





**architecten de vylder vinck taillieu
in collaboration with
Doorzon interieurarchitecten
*House Verbrande Brug***

Overlooking the Zenne canal, a garage was converted into a house by architecten de vylder vinck taillieu and Doorzon. The garage's one-storey perimeter wall and its gate were kept in their original state. Within this perimeter, a new volume was added. The main axes of the new volume were rotated to give this terraced house a different relation to the canal. In the triangular interspace between the existing perimeter wall and the new oblique façade, an outdoor antechamber emerges as a welcoming gesture. The living quarters are on the first floor, offering long views over the canal. These large windows resonate with the dimensions of the gate on the ground floor. The gabled roof in common dark tiles finishes the almost classical threefold structure of the front façade.



Studio Bua



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*Cities and
Signs 1*

‘You walk for days among trees and among stones. Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and then only when it has recognized that thing as the sign of another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger’s passage; a marsh announces a vein of water; the hibiscus flower, the end of winter. All the rest is silent and interchangeable; trees and stones are only what they are.... Outside, the land stretches, empty, to the horizon; the sky opens, with speeding clouds. In the shape that chance and wind give the clouds, you are already intent on recognizing figures: a sailing ship, a hand, an elephant...’
—From *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino (translated from the Italian by William Weaver)

Studio
Donna van
Milligen
Bielke &
Ard de Vries
Architecten



© Studio Donna van Milligen Bielke & Ard de Vries Architecten

In-Between

Architecture casts the space around us. Ultimately, this is more important than what is usually the primary reason to build—to produce the required square metres for a certain functional need. A building’s function is less significant than its dialogue with its immediate context. Together with other edifices, a building determines the architectural borders of the public space. This public space is comprised of streets, alleys, courts and squares, which form the interlocked public network, the urban warp and weft which give a city its structure, character and usability. In essence, our architecture is about making boundaries, by subdividing space through borders, by making the decisions between interior and exterior, private and public, open and closed. In this sense, our architecture is concentrated in the confines between distinct worlds. To a significant extent, our work is defined by a condition of the in-between, which occurs where building and city, architecture and urbanism meet.

Studio
Ossidiana



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*The City
of Birds*

Birds populate our metaphors, inform our music and language, appear in allegories and myths from the foundation of cities to the origin of speech ... From crops to weapons, music to faith, birds are in our thoughts, in our diet, in our songs. *The City of Birds* is a collection of models, ranging from dovecotes to aviaries, bird feeders to perches, bat towers to bird cages, portraying a fictional ‘city of birds’ born from the devices, spaces and objects people invented to mediate the encounter between our species and another. At times tender, at times violent and simplistic, they tell the story of caloric, spiritual and cultural ties which bind us to other species.

Awareness-raising and good communication constitute a second link in this broader transition process. The conversation about architecture is often only conducted by the happy few, by the public attending architecture exhibitions. I found that we also needed to reach the people in the street. Local authorities can only act decisively if they have the necessary backing among their supporters. Together with film-maker Nic Balthazar, we made the educational film “Plannen voor Plaats” (Planning for place), which was widely screened. I went around the region and gave lectures in venues ranging from theatres with a seating capacity of 1600 to back rooms that could barely squeeze in 40 people. In short, I wanted to increase the government architect’s reach.’

‘Weiterbauen’ on the diffuse city

‘My Berlin background largely determined my vision of the city. The ideas developed in Berlin during the *Internationale Bauausstellung* in 1987 would form the basis for decades of the “*Kritische Rekonstruktion*” of Berlin under the leadership of the then city architect (*Senatsbaudirektor*) Hans Stimmann.

My vision of Antwerp is based on the conviction that the critical-reconstruction approach forms an excellent repertoire for the transformation of the inner city and the nineteenth-century belt. In this sense, I have translated the German “*weiterbauen*”, which was originally used as an architectural principle, into an urban planning concept. However, the challenge in Antwerp does not lie so much in the nineteenth-century belt, for which we know the ingredients and recipes. It is the morphologically much less unambiguously defined “diffuse city” of the twentieth-century belt and the ring zone for which we need to develop new ideas.

This is where the opportunities for growth and urbanistic matters lie which we will have to provide an answer for in the coming years. The city has turned its back on the “dirty” ring and we are now bearing the consequences. The complexity requires a customized approach. As city architect, I can rely on a rich range of instruments, the legacy of my predecessors. The competition procedures are fashioned and refined in such a way that quality is the decisive argument in the choice of an architect. We can speak of an “Antwerp school” of architects who fit successfully in this competition tradition. In addition, design research has gained a lot of ground in recent years.

These instruments will play an important role in today’s quality control. Nevertheless, in my opinion there is need for further integration of the various disciplines. That is why we have transformed the building aesthetics committee into the comprehensive quality chamber that is about more than just the visual

Christian Rapp has been City Architect of Antwerp since 2016. He was trained as a bricklayer and studied architecture at TU Berlin and TU Delft. In 1997 he was awarded the Maaskant Prize for young architects. After various visiting lectureships, he has taught at TU Eindhoven as Professor of Rational Architecture since 2007. Together with his wife Birgit he founded Rapp+Rapp in 1999. Rapp+Rapp’s work has a predilection for sound buildings, the use of traditional materials, and the making of architectural urbanism.