

The Belgian Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale, Curated by Dirk Somers, Explores the Relationship Between Architecture and the City

Written by **Dima Stouhi**

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Titled "Composite Presence", the Belgian pavilion at [the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia](#), will explore the complex love-hate relationship between architecture and cities of Flanders and [Brussels](#) under the theme of "memory as a design studio". Curated by [Bovenbouw Architectuur](#) in collaboration with [Flanders Architecture Institute](#), the national pavilion will be on display from 22 May until 21 November 2021.

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Dirk Somers is a Belgian award-winning architect, university professor, lecturer, and the founder and



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disciplines of architecture and redefine the bases of design.



“ Dealing in a respectful and inventive manner with the city’s historical layers leads automatically to different perspectives on society. In that sense, Composite Presence draws on the core of the discipline of architecture to answer the question posed by curator Hashim Sarkis: how will we live together? -- Sofie De Caigny, [Flanders Architecture Institute](#), commissioner of Composite Presence ”

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The pavilion tackles the question of *'how can the city and architecture flourish together?'* Throughout the years, the entire region of Flanders and its capital Brussels have developed a unique relationship with their architecture. Historical layers, morphological specificities, and unpredictable clashes inspired the contemporary urban fabric of the regions. To showcase this layered urban landscape, [Bovenbouw Architectuur](#) has designed a scenography which consists of a series of models scaled at 1:15, laid out at table height to represent a winded landscape of a typical Flemish urban environment.

The architecture studio chose to recreate fifty different architecture projects of the past 20 years, displaying a balanced architectural ecology and bringing together different styles, functions, and typologies. The selected projects range between "modest repurposings" and "shiny new constructions", contribute to the concept of a "cobbled-together yet balanced" city. The city architects of Antwerp and Ghent have also contributed to the Composite Presence project, along with the [Team Flemish Government Architect](#).

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“ The model landscape is a unique illustration of the energetic friction between [urban planning](#) and architecture in Flanders. -- Dirk Somers ”

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Composite Presence

- Producer: [Flanders Architecture Institute](#)
- Commissioner: Flanders Architecture Institute
- Director: Sofie De Caigny
- Curator: [Bovenbouw Architectuur](#)
- Scenography: Bovenbouw Architectuur
- Editors of Catalogue: Sofie De Caigny, Maarten Van Den Driessche, Dirk Somers
- Supported by: [Flemish Government](#), [Flemish Government Architect](#), [City Architect of Antwerp](#), and City Architect of Ghent
- Contributions: Leo Van Broeck (former Flemish Government Architect), Christian Rapp (Antwerp City Architect), Kristiaan Borret (Brussels Government Architect), Edith Wouters (artistic director Ar-tur) and Peter Vanden Abeele (Ghent City Architect)
- Cultural Partners: [Z33](#)
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Bovenbouw Architectuur

Founded in 2011 by Dirk Somers, [Bovenbouw Architectuur](#) is an Antwerp-based architecture firm with a portfolio of educational, residential, and public architecture. Lead by Somers, the team consists of 18 European architects. The studio's work is characterized by an *open minded design*, detached from the compulsive desire for avant-gardist design. Bovenbouw's work can be understood as bringing together old and new ideas in an interesting blend of the everyday.


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