COMING OF AGE

Sea Trade
Hoog Kortrijk
Stad aan de Stroom
Europakruispunt
Paviljoen Sevilla '92
Beursschouwburg
Emile Braunplein
Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)
Concertgebouw Brugge
Vlaams Administratief Centrum Hasselt

Coming of Age tells how a culture of architecture competitions grew in the 1980s and 1990s in Flanders and Brussels. As a literary and film genre, a coming-of-age story is about a young person's growth into adulthood. The exhibition makers have used this image to zoom in on the decades that preceded the establishment of well-balanced competition and award procedures for architectural commissions. Ten competitions are shown as scenes composed of original archival material. These ten competitions were selected on the basis of a study of competitions in the Dutch-language architecture reviews of the period. They each highlight a different perspective on contests. In the narrative of the ten competitions, a number of red threads are revealed that characterize the architectural climate of the time.

Each competition involves different societal actors, each actor bringing its own ambitions to the competition. Some competitions, for example, deliberately internationalized the architecture scene in order to raise the overall quality of the responses to the competition question. Through other competitions, public commissioning authorities created support for new buildings or spatial developments. Those competitions were accompanied by impressive communication campaigns targeting the general public. Authorities also used competitions to give shape to their ambition to be transparent and approachable. Architects use competitions just as much for their own agendas. Competitions can draw attention to the position of young architects and force opportunities for renewal. Through competitions, architects and architecture critics also try to weigh on the public debate and make policymakers aware of the need for certain spatial revolutions or the need to scale up architectural ambitions.

The selected competitions all express one or more of these aspirations. They share the ambition to make architecture discussible. This can be within a professional field – with public commissioners – or in public opinion more broadly. In this sense, the selected competitions make up the building blocks that enabled the emergence of an architectural culture.

The exhibition is not structured chronologically. Rather, it takes the liberty of deliberately looking for similarities and contrasts between the competitions. As a result, the exhibition as a whole reads like a gradual process towards the professionalization of competition procedures. By assembling fragments, the exhibition provides insight into what mattered. As such, the exhibition contributes to our understanding of where Flanders stood in the field of architectural competitions around the year 2000. At the time, the creation of the position of Flemish Government Architect – who launched the Open Call as the first instrument – coincided with an institutionalized award procedure for architectural commissions. Of course, this does not exclude that other competition formulas continued to exist. Nevertheless, 2000 was a pivotal year, making *Coming of Age. Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels* a mirror, as it were, of the exhibition on *20 Years of Public Architecture*. A concise timeline connects the two exhibitions

Sea Trade

In 1988 the temporary association Zeebouw-Zeezand (the port's contractors) organized an invited design competition in close consultation with the Port Authority of Bruges-Zeebrugge. The programme was a representative terminal building that would mark the new port of Zeebrugge, but also put Bruges on the map as a port and as a trade and art centre. The occasion for this was the planned construction of the Channel Tunnel, which would form a new link between the European mainland and Britain.
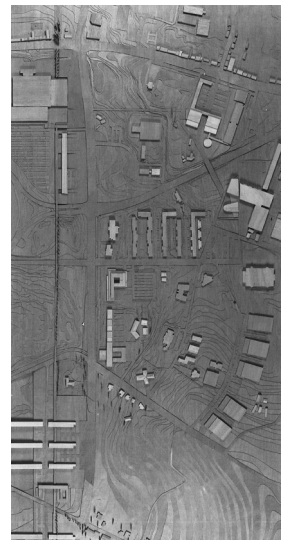
For the first time in Belgium, an invited competition was issued, architecture critic Geert Bekaert acting as adviser. He invited nine internationally renowned architects to make a proposal for the overall development plan of the area, a terminal building and a hangar. The design had to meet many technical requirements and withstand the high mobility pressure and exceptional climatic conditions in the vicinity of the North Sea. The emphasis was on a visually prominent architectural form for the terminal, which should act as a beacon for the seaport's ambitions and identity. No budget was provided and the functions described in the brief were of secondary importance to the visual power of the design. The Sea Trade Terminal had to be an expression of port culture where technology, people and nature come together.

Rem Koolhaas's OMA won the competition. Although the design was never built, the Dutch architectural firm's proposal would acquire an important place in architectural history as an iconic image. The competition shows how a design issue triggered an ambition to raise the quality of architecture in Belgium, with an injection of national and international high-profile designers and their vision into the local architectural climate. The competition played on the field of tension between international ambitions and the local institutional context.

← OMA (Rem Koolhaas, Xaveer De Geyter, Jaap Van Heest), Presentation model Sea Trade Center , 1988. Collection: Port of Zeebrugge. Photo: Karin Borghouts

Name	Sea Trade Center
Location	Zeebrugge
Date	1988–1990
Status	not built
Commissioner	Zeebouw-Zeezand (temporary association)
Type of competition	Invited competition
Winner	Office for Metropolitan Architecture (Rem Koolhaas, Xaveer De Geyter, Jaap Van Heest) (Netherlands)
Number of participants	5 (Fumihiko Maki (Japan), Aldo Rossi, Claude Zuber (Italy), Charles Vandenhove Architektenwerkgroep (Belgium), AWG (b0b Van Reeth, Marc Van Bortel, Mica Franck, Geert Driesen and others) (Belgium), Tadao Ando (did not accept invitation, Japan), Santiago Calatrava (not submitted on time, Spain–Switzerland), Norman Foster (did not accept invitation, Britain), Frank Gehry (not submitted on time, US))
Jury	Herman Liebaers (chairman, Honorary Grand Marshal of the King and Honorary Chief Curator of the Royal Library), Louis De Meyer (president Zeebouw-Zeezand), Louis Gilles (director MBZ), Maurice Michiels (director general MBZ), Robert Simoen (director MBZ), Fernand Traen (president MBZ), Jan Decort (inspector general MBZ), Geert Bekaert (consultant)

→ Studio Associato Bernardo Secchi Paola Viganò, Presentation model of the proposal for Hoog Kortrijk, 1990. From: Karel Debaere, Herman Jult, Pierre Duc, Programme book invited urban-planning competition Hoog Kortrijk, 30.03.1990. Collection: Intercommunale Leiedal

Hoog Kortrijk

Many of the large-scale development projects that define the image of the urbanized landscape today have their origins in the 1990s. Hoog Kortrijk, the area bounded by the E17 motorway to the south of the historical city centre of Kortrijk, provides a powerful example of this.

      In the 1980s Kortrijk commissioned Leiedal to develop an urban development vision for the city centre. Leiedal is the intermunicipal agency grouping 13 municipalities in the Kortrijk region. The intermunicipal agency finds it necessary to speak out in practical terms about the urbanization of the peripheral area of Hoog Kortrijk. Regional functions such as the expo halls, the university campus (KULAK) and the Kennedypark office zone are located there, and they have expansion plans. A new hospital, a research park and a cinema complex are also eyeing up the area.

      On the advice of architecture critic Geert Bekaert, five designers were invited via a closed urban development assignment. They were invited to think about the structure and the coherence of the area. Improving the connection with the city centre was paramount. The participants submitted very different designs with distinct visions of the continuity of the city. According to the jury, laureate Bernardo Secchi gave the most satisfactory answer to the question with his concept of a central urban axis.

      The Hoog Kortrijk competition meant both an upscaling of urban development and the inclusion of the periphery as an essential part of the urban development discourse. The competition formula was deployed here as an instrument in the search for spatial quality. It underlined the importance of talented designers for the urban dynamic.

Name	Hoog Kortrijk
Location	Kortrijk
Date	1990
Status	built
Commissioner	Leiedal intermunicipal agency and Kortrijk city authorities
Type of competition	Invited urban-planning competition
Winner	Studio Associato Bernardo Secchi Paola Viganò (Italy)
Number of participants	4
Jury	Antoon Sansen (mayor of Kortrijk), Emmanuel de Bethune (deputy mayor of Kortrijk), Firmin Cornelus (general manager, Leiedal), Fernand Van Walleghem (city engineer), Karel Debaere (urban planning department, Leiedal), Geert Bekaert (consultant)

1986
The city of Kortrijk commissions the intermunicipal agency Leiedal to develop the city centre.

1989
Leiedal develops initial ideas for the development of Hoog Kortrijk, but there is a demand for a more thorough examination of the problem.

Late 1989
The city of Kortrijk and Leiedal issue an invited urban-planning competition.

Early 1990
Five participants are invited on the advice of Geert Bekaert: Stéphane Beel (Belgium), Bernard Huet (France), Rem Koolhaas (Netherlands), Bernardo Secchi (Italy), bOb Van Reeth (Belgium).

30 March 1990 – 1 October 1990
Four proposals are evaluated, Bernardo Secchi being the laureate.

16 October 1990 – late January 1991
Exhibition of the design proposals in the halls in Kortrijk.

1991
A joint venture is set up between the city of Kortrijk and Leiedal to further monitor the development of Hoog Kortrijk.

May 1991
The Kortrijk city authorities give Bernardo Secchi a new assignment to further elaborate the plans for Hoog Kortrijk, to draw up a structural plan for the city centre and to further develop ideas about the global structure of the city.

May 1992
Bernardo Secchi presents his plans to the city council, the Hoog Kortrijk non-profit association and the population.

1993
Secchi is given an additional assignment: the redevelopment of the Grote Markt and the new municipal cemetery in Hoog Kortrijk.

2000
Dissolution of the non-profit association Hoog Kortrijk.

Stad aan de Stroom

With Stad aan de Stroom, the international phenomenon of waterfront development took hold in Antwerp. The controversial demolition of the royal warehouses on Willemdok illustrated why the development of the nineteenth-century port area required a high-quality urban development vision. The abandoned port area offered Antwerp opportunities to develop further as a metropolis with a strong European identity.

The independent think tank of the same name took matters into its own hands and in 1989 organized a two-fold international competition. The goal: to generate strong designs that could reconnect Antwerp to the water. The think tank set up a planning group in which the city services were also represented. The competition concentrated on three parts of the old port area: the Eilandje, the Scheldt quays, and Zuid. In addition to this closed urban design competition with six internationally renowned designers, the planning group also held an open international ideas competition. The latter acted as an ideas generator for future public or private developments.

From the outset, the think tank viewed the Stad aan de Stroom project as a comprehensive programme, with the urban design competition as its 'foundation'. Through exhibitions, publications and conferences, the project presented itself on an international forum where exchange with other European port cities was stimulated. Temporary events, such as an urban trail and an arts programme, were organized to deepen the involvement of the people of Antwerp.

The Stad aan de Stroom competition represented a twofold change in mentality: internationalization gave a new impetus to urban development and the citizen was given a say.
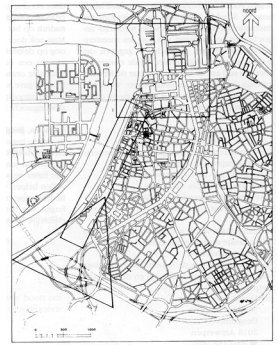
← **Stad aan de stroom vzw, Indication of subareas the Eilandje, the Scheldt quays, and Zuid in Antwerp, 1989–1990. Collection: Vlaamse Gemeenschap – Vlaams Architectuurinstituut**

Name	Stad aan de Stroom
Location	Antwerp (sub-areas the Eilandje, the Quays, and Zuid)
Date	1989–1990 – official call 15 December 1989 – launch 15 January 1990 – project period January-May 1990 – jury 18–22 June 1990 – announcement 27 June 1990 – exhibition 2 September – 31 October 1990
Status	not built
Commissioner	vzw Stad aan de Stroom in collaboration with the city of Antwerp
Type of competition	Twofold: – International invited urban-planning competition – Open international urban-planning ideas competition
Winners	– Invited competition the Eilandje: Manuel de Solà-Morales (Spain) – Invited competition Zuid: Toyo Ito, Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects (Japan – Open ideas competition the Eilandje: group of fourth year students HAIR (Antwerp) under the guidance of Georges Baines, Frank Commers and J. Praet – Open ideas competition the Quays: Ben van Berkel, Caroline Bos, Hein van Meer, René van Veen (Amsterdam) – Open ideas competition Zuid: Bureau Spea (Milan)
Number of participants	– Invited competition: 6 – Open ideas competition: ca. 120
Jury	Edward van Steenbergen (chairman, Belgium), Isabelle Auricoste (France), Geert Bekaert (Belgium), Joan Busquets (Spain), Bernardo Secchi (Italy)

Europakruispunt

In 1983 the Royal Academy of Belgium organized its triennial Paul Bonduelle Prize. This edition revolved around the Europakruispunt or Carrefour de l'Europe in Brussels, a controversial urban node between uptown and downtown where the underground rail connection and road infrastructure have left their mark. Since 1960, the square has been the subject of no fewer than three ideas competitions, various commissioned and spontaneous projects as well as a protest by ARAU. This competition did not provide a breakthrough either, but instead focused on the charged urban challenge within the relatively free context of a cultural institution.

The jury awarded the first prize to Georges Baines, an established name in post-war architecture at the time, with a portfolio consisting mainly of housing. His conventional-looking set of drawings announced the later decades of his oeuvre, in which he often intervened, always with great care, in existing architectural settings of significance, such as Le Corbusier's Maison Guiette (1988–93), Victor Horta's Centre for Fine Arts (2000) and the Fotomuseum in Antwerp (2000).

But the competition is especially important in the early oeuvre of a number of young architects. Under the name Team Hoogpoort, Stéphane Beel, Xaveer De Geyter, Arjan Karssenberg and Willem-Jan Neutelings represented a new generation of architecture. Their panels contrasted sharply with those of Baines in their dynamic use of collage and perspective drawings. The project injected, straight into the heart of the Belgian architectural tradition, a dose of opportunistic rationality in the spirit of Rem Koolhaas and OMA. Despite the highly institutionalized background, young architects in the competition seized the opportunity to present themselves and get involved in the debate.

← **Team Hoogpoort (Stéphane Beel, Xaveer De Geyter, Arjan Karssenberg and Willem-Jan Neutelings), Presentation panels project for the Europakruispunt in Brussels (competition Paul Bonduelle), 1983. Collection: Stéphane Beel Architects. Image: Team Hoogpoort**

Name	Paul Bonduelle Prize 1983 (7th period 1981–83)
Location	Brussels
Date	1981–1983
Status	not built
Commissioner	Royal Academy of Belgium, Fine Arts Department
Type of competition	design competition
Winner	Georges Baines
Number of participants	ca. 20
Jury	Léon Stynen, Roger Bastin, Victor-Gaston Martiny, Philippe Roberts-Jones, Jacques Moeschal

Paviljoen Sevilla '92

In the mid 1980s three young Antwerp architects (Guido Driesen, Jan Meersman and Jan Thomaes) found themselves at the crossroads of two circumstances. Professionally, it was an enormous challenge for beginning designers to find work. Culturally, by contrast, things were starting to move in architectural Flanders, with initiatives such as Stichting Architectuurmuseum (S/AM) in Ghent and the early architectural programme of De Singel in Antwerp.

Within this cultural development, a plea resounded for competitions as an instrument to distribute public commissions more fairly, especially with regard to young architects. Driesen, Meersman and Thomaes found themselves in the front row as a result of their cultural commitment. In 1985 Meersman and Thomaes facilitated a discussion in *Knack* magazine that presented arguments for competitions. In 1988, as a staff member of De Singel, Meersman was also involved in the vernissage of the exhibition *Young Architects in Belgium*, at which Jo Crepain, speaking on behalf of a number of young architects, denounced the usual award mechanisms.

In 1989 it was decided to reconsider such an award process, namely the one for the design of the Belgian Pavilion at the 1992 World's Fair in Seville. Not only the cultural field, but also the professional association of architects BVA had protested against the award method of the contract. The General Commissioner's Office of the Belgian Government then introduced an open architectural competition in which none other than Driesen, Meersman and Thomaes submitted the winning design. Their project presented a radical technological shell for a highly symbolic architectural assignment, but was also the starting shot for DMT-architecten and a rare major achievement by three young architects.

Name	Belgian Pavilion, World's Fair Seville Expo '92
Location	Seville, Spain
Date	1989–1990
Status	built, demolished in 2004
Commissioner	General Commissioner's Office of the Belgian Government for the 1992 World's Fair
Type of competition	open, anonymous, national competition
Winner	– First prize: Guido Driesen, Jan Meersman, Jan Thomaes – Tied second prize: Architectenbureau Frank Delmulle (Waregem) – Tied second prize: Etienne Fromont, Pierre Gilbert, Dominique Maret, Driss Boufoud (Doornik) – Tied third prize: Xaveer De Geyter (Berchem), Luc Reuse (Ghent) – Tied third prize: Hans Ferdinand Degraeuwe (Veurne) – Tied third prize: Serge Henrotin, Benoît Legrand (Hemptinne)
Number of participants	ca. 90
Jury	Geert Bekaert, Walter Steenhoudt, Lucien Kroll, Kees Rijnboutt (Dutch Government Architect), G. Vranckx (NROA delegate), Paul Etienne Maes (general commissioner) (replaced by Alex Dumont), Delmulle (director general of the Buildings Agency), Piet Ketsman (BVA chairman, as observer to look after the interests of the participants)

← **DMT Architecten, Competition model Belgisch expopaviljoen Sevilla, 1989–1990. Collection: DMT Architecten. Photo: Wim Van Nueten**

Beursschouwburg

In 1991 the Beursschouwburg neighbourhood committee issued a press release opposing the plans at the time to convert the theatre without taking into consideration the historical layers to be found behind the façade. Initially, the Beursschouwburg supported the conversion plans dating from 1991 because the theatre wanted to meet the contemporary needs of the theatre world. It argued for a new building behind the historic façade.

In the years that followed, the programmers of the Beursschouwburg embraced the metropolitan character of Brussels more and more explicitly. Whereas they initially opposed the neighbourhood committee, after a while both parties found each other in a struggle to maintain the unique character of the Beursschouwburg. This led to the shelving of the plans from 1991.

The Beursschouwburg managed to draw the attention of the Flemish Government to its responsibility as owner of the building. In 1997 the Flemish Community issued a competition for the conversion of the Beursschouwburg. The involvement of the local residents in the building was actively encouraged in the competition in the form of a public consultation. The competition also demonstrated the Flemish Government's burgeoning sense of responsibility regarding an architecture policy. As the owner of the building, the Flemish Government used the 1997 competition as an opportunity to act as an exemplary commissioner and to inspire others. In doing so, the Flemish Government was announcing a full-fledged architecture policy with a focus on good commissioning practices.

Name	renovation and conversion Beursschouwburg
Location	Brussels
Date	1997–1998
Status	built, works 2001–2004, completed in 2004
Commissioner	Minister of Culture of the Flemish Community
Type of competition	Two-phase competition: – Phase 1: 48 – Phase 2: 3
Winner	D'Hondt-Heyninck-Parein Architecten bvba & B-Architects Crols-Engelen-Grooten bvba
Number of participants	– Phase 1: 48 – Phase 2: 3 laureates
Jury	Jan Vermassen, Chris Van Haesendonck (representatives of the Flemish Government), Johan Wambacq (representative of the public and artists), Patrick Moyersoen, Paul Corthouts (representatives of the Beursschouwburg), Katrien Vandermarliere, André Loeckx, John Körmeling, Paul Vermeulen and René Greich (excused) (external experts)

1985
Flemish Government becomes the owner of the Beursschouwburg

March 1989
Patrick Dewael approves the conversion by architect Vink.

October 1989
Protest against the Vink plan. The Beursschouwburg wants to be able to meet the contemporary needs of the theatre world and argues for a new building behind the historic façade. Minister Dewael agrees. This becomes the second Vink plan or Vink bis.

October 1991
The Vink plan bis provokes protest from the Beursschouwburg neighbourhood committee in October – 11 articles in the local press between late October and early November 1991.

1994
Ministerial decision not to implement plan Vink.

1997
Flemish Community launches two-phase competition.

22 June 1997
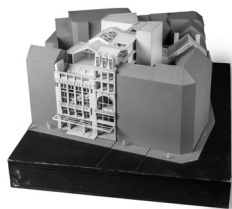First public hearing of 48 first-phase submissions.

29 November 1997
Second hearing: eight interested parties comment on the three laureates.

28 April 1998
Jury

19.09.98–11.10.98
Exhibition: design competition conversion Beursschouwburg in Beursschouwburg, Brussels.

← B-Architecten, Crols-Engelen-Grooten and D'Hondt-Heyninck-Parein Architecten, Model renovation Beursschouwburg Brussels, 1997–1998. Collection: Vlaams Architectuurinstituut. Photo: Karin Borghouts

Emile Braunplein

In the run-up to the 1913 World's Fair, the centre of Ghent was thoroughly 'cleaned up' under Mayor Emile Braun (in office 1895–1921). The development of the now familiar picture postcard involved the construction of the Sint-Michiels slope, but mainly of the demolition of building blocks that had always filled the space between the three towers. In the 1960s, moreover, a block next to the town hall that had previously been spared was demolished to make way for an expansion that never materialized. However, the freed-up space later primarily proved to be an unintended catalyst for the exponential increase in car traffic in the city.

Although the city of Ghent drew up various infrastructural design proposals in the 1970s and 1980s and even held an urban planning ideas competition in 1984, the town squares remained a subject of discussion at the level of both government and citizens. This was also the case within a network of young architects who were just beginning to make a name for themselves, namely Hilde Daem, Marc Dubois, Christian Kieckens, Paul Robbrecht and Marie-José Van Hee. In 1988, for example, Dubois organized an ideas competition with international architecture students in order to generate new insights for the city centre.

In 1996 Ghent held a design competition which was to lead to a feasible solution. Robbrecht, Daem and Van Hee proposed a 'market hall' to treat the spatial wounds of 1913, but they were excluded on the grounds that they ignored the demand for parking facilities. Jordi Fernando's winning design would never be built: a public consultation revealed that the people of Ghent did not want a car park there. Robbrecht, Daem and Van Hee develop their 'market hall' project further for a new competition in 2000, which they won. Between competition and execution (2010–2012), the design continued to evolve: the reflection conducted over years by the Ghent architects did not stop with the jury.

← **Robbrecht en Daem architecten and Marie-José Van Hee architecten, Competition bundle second design Emile Braunplein/Stadshal, 2008. Collection: Stadsarchief Gent**

| Name	Urban development vision for Emile Braunplein and surroundings
Location	Ghent
Date	2000
Status	built, start of works 2010, inauguration 2012
Commissioner	Ghent city authorities
Type of competition	Two-phase international competition: – Phase 1: sketch designs are evaluated and the jury selects a maximum of five designers or design teams – Phase 2: submission of a detailed preliminary design – In October and November, the citizens of Ghent could assess the four designs during an exhibition
Winner	Robbrecht en Daem architecten, Marie-José Van Hee architecten
Number of participants	– Phase 1: 28 – Phase 2: 4
Jury	composed of 17 people, experts from all city departments involved and external experts from the academic world

Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)

With the competition for Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), the city of Antwerp wanted to stimulate the redevelopment of the Eilandje, the nineteenth-century harbour district north of the city centre. The competition was therefore related in terms of both name and ambition to Stad aan de Stroom (the city on the river, another name for Antwerp). However, the architectural scale and the pioneering role of the local authorities made the realization of this project far more likely. Moreover, in the meantime the architectural field had developed further. The well-balanced competition jury included administrative, museum and architectural experts, including councillor for culture Eric Anthonis as the initiator of the project and the first (and newly appointed) Flemish Government Architect (bOb Van Reeth) as chair.

Out of fifty-five submissions by designers from Belgium and abroad, the radical proposal by Neutelings Riedijk Architects (NRA) was selected as an urban icon. The spiral-like stacking of halls full of urban history generated a dynamic public walkway to a roof terrace with panoramic views of the city. The streamlined volume in a cladding full of signs and references typified NRA's practice, but above all embraced the demand for something iconic.

From the jury's decision onwards, the design was therefore the grateful subject for a comprehensive communication strategy intended to generate support. The design appeared in the city's communication channels and visited all corners of the city in a travelling exhibition – accompanied by the four other designs from the second round. The characteristic volume was reproduced on various scales and for various purposes, while the hands on the façade were the subject of a crowdfunding operation. In this way, the MAS resolutely sought attention as a building, but also and especially as an urban project, including competition and communication.
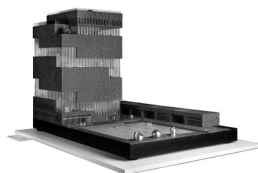
← **Neutelings-Riedijk Architects, Model Museum aan de Stroom. Collection MAS Antwerpen. Photo: Karin Borghouts**

Name	Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)
Location	Antwerp
Date	1999–2000
Status	built
Commissioner	Antwerp city authorities
Type of competition	Two-phase international competition: – Phase 1: a general, open call for applications and the selection of five design teams by a jury on the basis of selection criteria – Phase 2: an anonymous limited competition in which a detailed preliminary design was requested that was assessed by the jury on the basis of set criteria
Winner	Neutelings Riedijk Architects
Number of participants	– Phase 1: 55 – Phase 2: 5
Jury	bOb Van Reeth (Flemish Government Architect), Eric Antonis (councillor for culture), Leo Delwaide (councillor for the port), Paul De Loose (councillor for public works), Erwin Pairon (councillor for spatial planning) Hugo Schiltz (councillor for finance and tourism), Georges Baines, Tuur Cuppens (architect and municipal official), René Daniëls (Antwerp City Architect, project manager Eilandje), Ivan Harbour (architect, project manager Court of Appeal), Gerda Van Hove (Municipal Development Company), Christopher Brown (Ashmolian Museum in Oxford), Catherine David (curator Documenta X), Jan Debbaut (Van Abbemuseum), Armande Nauwelaerts (project manager MAS), Michèle Périsiière (Musée des Douanes in Bordeaux), Wouter Davidts (architecture researcher UGent), Véronique Degrootte (Order of Architects), Pieter Soete (ROHM Antwerp), Jan Rombouts and Maud Coppenrath (secretaries)

Concertgebouw Brugge

The election of Bruges as the cultural capital of Europe in 2002 was the occasion to issue the competition for a Concertgebouw or concert hall. Within the Flemish cultural field, the need for such a building was evident, as shown by the almost parallel competition for a Forum for Music, Dance and Visual Culture in Ghent (not carried out). For Bruges the project was an opportunity to distance itself from its image as an open-air museum as well as to give shape to 't Zand, a rather undefined public space on the edge of the historic city. As a result, there was a field of tension between the cultural programme (almost unparalleled in Flanders) and the medium-sized (and eccentrically located) Flemish city.

In the competition procedure, this area of tension came together at full speed with a highly developed architectural field – on the eve of the establishment of the Flemish Government and of the Flanders Architecture Institute. The 2002 deadline contributed to an enormous concentration of ambition; the worlds of architecture, music and local government (each represented in the jury) were compelled to find each other quickly in order to select a project that had to be completed within three years. The scale, technical complexity and background of the historic city of Bruges presented an enormous challenge to the participating designers.

Remarkably enough, out of the international field of participants, the jury selected three design teams led by architects with a name in the region: Robbrecht en Daem architecten, Neutelings Riedijk Architects, and Stéphane Beel and Lieven Achtergael. Their projects showcased, perhaps more sharply than ever, some of the most prominent, distinct and diverse design identities that had emerged in Flanders. After a second round of strikingly detailed preliminary designs, the choice fell on the restrained monolith of Robbrecht en Daem.

← Catalogue 'Tentoonstelling Concertgebouw Stad Brugge', 1998. Collection: Stéphane Beel Architects

Name	Concert hall Brugge
Location	Bruges
Date	1998–1999
Status	built, start of work 1999
Commissionner	City of Bruges
Type of competition	International two-phase limited competition: – Phase 1: eight candidates were selected from an international call for applications – Phase 2: assessment
Winner	– First prize: Robbrecht en Daem architecten, Eugéne Van Assche and Michel van Langenhove (temporary association) – Second prize: Neutelings Riedijk Architects, Bureau Bouwtechniek (Rotterdam, Antwerp) – Third prize: Projectteam Stéphane Beel Architects, Architecten Achtergael (Bruges)
Number of participants	– Applications: 41 – Phase 1: 8 – Phase 2: 3
Jury	Gerard Mortier (director of the Salzburg Festival), Peter Bongaerts (architectural engineer, Head of Department at the Provincial College for Architecture and Urban Development, Diepenbeek), Dirk de Meyer (architectural engineer, lecturer at the College of Architecture at RUGent), Marc Dubois (architect, lecturer at WENK, the College for Science and Culture, Ghent), Hilde Heynen (architectural engineer, lecturer at KULeuven, Higher Institute for Architecture, Urbanism and Spatial Planning), André Loeckx (architectural engineer, Professor at KULeuven, Higher Institute for Architecture, Urbanism and Spatial Planning), Erna Van Sambeek (architect), Wim Van den Bergh (architectural engineer, Professor at TU Delft, TU/e, Maastricht Academy), Patrick Moenaert (Mayor of Bruges (deputy: councillor Dirk De Fauw)), Jean Van den Bilcke (First councillor of Bruges (deputy: councillor Yves Roose)), Gerrit Defreyne (Permanent representative, Province of West Flanders), Jan Vermassen (architect, representative of the Minister of Culture).

→ architectenwerkgroep AWG bOb Van Reeth architecten, architectenbureau Jos Berben, architectenatelier L. Vanmuysen and I. Mees, Perspective drawing, 1997. Collection: a2o architecten

Vlaams Administratief Centrum Hasselt

In the mid 1990s, Flemish minister Wivina Demeester decided to gather the external services of the Flemish administration in five Flemish Administrative Centres (VACs). Each provincial capital got a VAC in the immediate vicinity of a large train station. The Flemish Administrative Centre in Hasselt was the first.

For the commission, a competition was first set up among property developers. Minister Sauwens decided to ignore the result and to organize a public architecture competition. This would symbolize the growing awareness of the exemplary role that a public commissioner should play. At that time, the Belgian Parliament had voted on the legislation of the European Council on public procurement (18 June 1992). There were no implementing decrees yet when Sauwens took his decision, but the Prime Minister had recommended the application of the European directive in a circular (8 June 1993).

The aim of the public architecture competition was to be 'recognizably present' as the Flemish Government, according to the title of Minister Demeester's policy letter of 1998. It is in the same policy letter that she elaborated the appointment of a Flemish Government Architect. According to the policy letter, this future Government Architect would have to monitor the architectural quality of the housing of the Flemish Government and would further realize the 'recognizable presence'. In organizing the architecture competition for the VAC Hasselt, the Flemish Government was gaining experience as a commissioning authority. The competition was a testing ground for the later Open Call.

Name	Study assignment for the design of a Flemish Administrative Centre (VAC) Hasselt
Location	Hasselt
Date	1996–1997
Status	built, execution 2000–2005
Commissioner	Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of General Affairs and Finance
Type of competition	Two-phase competition: – Phase 1: General call for applications and selection of minimum 5 and maximum 20 design teams for phase 2. A total of 47 applications were submitted. – Phase 2: Architectural competition (design contest) between the selected candidates. Architectural and engineering firms were invited to take part in the competition through the European Official Journal, the Bulletin of Procurements and the trade press.
Winner	Architectenwerkgroep AWG bOb Van Reeth architecten, architecture firm Jos Berben, architecture studio L. Vanmuysen and I. Mees, engineering firm BEG and engineering firm Technum NV
Number of participants	– Phase 1: 47 – Phase 2: 9
Jury	Wivina Demeester, Wilfried Terryn, H.D. de Haan, Alfons Hoppenbrouwers, Jean Vandeputte, Achiel Santermans, André Verkeyn, Koen Van Synghel, Martine De Maeseneer, Hilde Daem, Barbara Van Der Wee, Katrien Vandermarliere, Eduard Van Steenbergen, Bart Casier, Geert Bekaert (excused), Bernard Vauterin (acting). The jury included at least eight members who did not belong to the commissioning authority, at least five members had an architecture degree and at least five members had trained as engineers. The Minister chaired the first round of the jury. This was the subject of a complaint. In the second round of the jury, the Minister was no longer the Chair.

24.6.1996
Approval of specifications no. GVG/ARCWOO1/96 and the associated requirements programme for the architectural competition for the Flemish Administrative Centre Hasselt by the Flemish Government.

12.11.1996
Competition rules drawn up.

29.11.1996
Announcement of the call.

31.01.1997
End of phase 1, general call.

25.03.1997
The Flemish Government ratifies the selection of nine tenderers for phase 2.

15.7.1997
The Flemish Government ratifies the jury's decision and announces the winner.

10.12.1997
Second assessment of the jury, following a court ruling as one tenderer had contested the procedure.

Epilogue

Coming of Age was preceded by a study of architecture competitions in Dutch-language architecture reviews between 1980 and 2000. The resonance of the competitions in the reviews helped to determine the selection of the ten competitions. For these ten, the story has been reconstructed on the basis of the archives of commissioning authorities, architects, mediating structures and the mainstream press. The search for the original documents demonstrated how delicate this material is. Original models or crucial documents have often been destroyed or are lost. The exhibition is therefore also a plea for the careful handling of the heritage of competitions.

      Coming of Age also holds up a critical mirror to the present. Important steps have undeniably been taken, but they are by no means the end of the road. How do we proceed with the way in which architecture culture in general and competition culture in particular have developed? What was at stake and how far have we got? What significance does internationalization have today? Do competitions still have a role to play in major social upheavals? How can we discuss architecture competitions, now that they regularly prove to be an opportunity for controversy on social media? How can citizen involvement be addressed in a constructive manner in the procedure of architectural competitions? Can competitions also engage with the responsibility of private developers? What opportunities are there for young designers today? A lot has changed over the past two decades, both in society and in the field of architecture. By looking back at the past, the exhibition invites us to reflect on the meaning of architectural competitions today.

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