

PRESS RELEASE

Double exhibition provides unique insight into architecture competitions from 1980 to now

40 Years of Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels

Architecture in Flanders and Brussels has come of age and is now firmly positioned on the international stage. How crucial is the role of architectural competitions in this success story? The exhibitions *Coming of Age, Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels* and *Open Call, 20 Years of Public Architecture* both shed light on **40 years of competition**. Unique archival material introduces you to the iconic entries and the mechanisms behind the most high-profile competitions.

40 years of competition

Coming of Age. Architectural competitions in Flanders and Brussels

Open Oproep. 20 jaar architectuur in publieke opdracht

Double exhibition | from 27.11.2021 to 17.04.2022

Vernissage & opening talk | on 26.11.2021 at 20:00h

Flanders Architecture Institute in De Singel, Antwerp

Coming of Age, Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels

The recent debates about the Gravensteen in Ghent and Het Steen in Antwerp show that architectural competitions do not only stimulate the minds of professionals and policymakers, but also enter the public discourse. This is nothing new. Architectural competitions for public projects have been organised in Flanders and Brussels for decades now, albeit via very different competition formulas, procedures and communication strategies. The appointment of the first Flemish Government Architect in 1999 and the arrival of the Open Call procedure in 2000 can be seen as a pivotal moment. For the first time, an independent body was tasked with helping public clients appoint design teams for their projects through a process that was not just transparent but also international in scope. At the same time, a jury monitored the architectural quality. The Open Call procedure remains a unique and celebrated formula that has no international equivalent.

Yet the Flemish Government Architect and the Open Call procedure did not materialise out of thin air. The Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi) – which itself saw the light of day in 2001 – viewed the Open Call's twentieth anniversary as the perfect opportunity for a

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retrospective look at how architecture competitions were organised in the two decades prior to the existence of the procedure and what led to the development of this unique instrument. The VAI's archivists conducted extensive research into architecture competitions from the 1980s to the 1990s using contemporaneous architectural journals. The result is a vast database that chronicles all the published architecture competitions between 1980 and 2000. Ten representative cases were selected from the compilation. Sofie De Caigny, director of the VAI and curator of *Coming of Age*: "There are well-known and less well-known competitions in the exhibition. Usual suspects are the Sea Trade Terminal, Hoog-Kortrijk and Stad aan de Stroom. Amongst the surprises, I count the Flemish Administrative Centre (VAC) in Hasselt, not as an icon but rather as a seminal project in the realisation of the Open Call procedure. Transparency and architectural quality became important criteria from that point onwards." Using original presentation drawings, models, testimonies, photos and video material, ***Coming of Age, Architecture Competitions in Flanders and Brussels*** tells the story of some of the most talked-about architecture competitions in these regions and their impact on contemporary architectural culture.

Cases Coming of Age

- **Europakruispunt, Brussels**
- **Sea Trade Terminal, Zeebrugge**
- **Paviljoen, Sevilla**
- **Stad aan de Stroom, Antwerp**
- **Hoog Kortrijk, Kortrijk**
- **Flemish Administrative Centre (VAC), Hasselt**
- **Beurschouwburg, Brussels**
- **Emile Braunplein, Ghent**
- **Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), Antwerp**
- **Concertgebouw, Bruges**

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Open Call, 20 Years of Public Architecture

The first Flemish Government Architect (Vlaams Bouwmeester) was appointed in 1999. To mark the twentieth anniversary of this role, the post-holder's office organised a travelling exhibition in 2019 dedicated to the oldest, best-known and still very much alive instrument: the Open Call. Curators Maarten Van Den Driessche and Maarten Liefoghe (Department of Architecture, University of Ghent) devised the exhibition concept. After presentations in Ghent, Brussels, Hasselt and Kortrijk, the Flanders Architecture Institute is now showing an expanded version of the exhibition *Open Call, 20 years of Public Architecture* at De Singel in Antwerp.

The Open Call procedure enables public clients to appoint a design team for their projects in a way that is both transparent and international in reach. This takes place on the basis of a clearly formulated social ambition and via a manageable procedure, in which quality is the central selection criterion. The Open Call has not only played a role in determining the appearance of many Flemish towns and cities but has also helped shape the way in which architecture is perceived and debated in Flanders.

Using archival material, testimonies and beautifully designed architectural installations (by Ester Goris, Malgorzata Maria Olchowska and Joris Kerremans – Louis Seynaeve – Toon Verdonck), the exhibition introduces you to twenty years of public commissioning. It shows in an accessible way how the Open Call works, what spatial quality entails in the various Flemish contexts, and which key tools are used to support public authorities in their pursuit of excellence.

And there is more. The Flanders Architecture Institute, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester and the University of Ghent have added a new dimension to the existing exhibition in the form of an interview project. Through a series of filmed conversations with current and former government architects, with members of Team Vlaams Bouwmeester and with Wivina Demeester, who established the role of Flemish Government Architect, you will gain a first-hand account of the story behind the Open Call.

More Than a Competition - The Open Call in a Changing Building Culture

Did architectural criticism in the 1990s help to pave the way for the Government Architect position and the Open Call? Does the key to quality lie in smart procedures? What is a 'strong' public commissioner in a democratic system? What does the Flemish Government Architect do and what has the Open Call achieved over the past twenty years? What do the distinct projects mean in their broader spatial context? Can architects satisfy a collective desire with singular designs? To what extent is the Open Call in line with the broadening of the practice of architecture and the evolving

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competition culture? Looking back on two decades of public commissions, this book presents current reflections on these issues.

This book will be presented during the opening programme of the vernissage of the double exhibition *40 years of competition* on 26 November in De Singel.

Celebrating Public Architecture - Buildings from the Open Call in Flanders 2000–21

This volume compiles 70 projects, from all over Flanders—from its west coast to the Dutch border in the east—to illustrate the astounding quality of these projects. They prove that public architecture can be daring, thought-provoking, cooperative, and well-done at the same time.

The book takes an extensive look at how this procedure works, how it is received by architects, politicians, and clients—and ultimately, at the outstanding public architecture in Flanders as an example for other countries to study closely. Dit boek wordt voorgesteld tijdens de opening van de dubbeltentoonstelling *40 jaar wedstrijdcultuur* op 26 november in De Singel.

This book will be presented during the opening programme of the vernissage of the double exhibition *40 years of competition* on 26 November in De Singel.

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Quotes

- “*Coming of Age* looks back on some of the most striking architecture competitions that have helped shape architectural policy. The retrospective brings extremely topical questions to the fore, which is fascinating. One only has to think of internationalisation, the public debate, participation, and the position of young architects.”

- Sofie De Caigny, Director, Flanders Architecture Institute and curator of *Coming of Age*

- “In the late 1990s, architecture literally had to give a face to the newly acquired powers of an independent Flanders. The Flemish Administrative Centre [VAC] in Hasselt is a clear example of this trend.”

- Sofie De Caigny, Director, Flanders Architecture Institute and curator of *Coming of Age*

- “Architecture from Flanders and Brussels has reached maturity.”

- Petrus Kemme, curator, *Coming of Age*

- “*Coming of Age* explores the organisational principles behind the architecture competitions and aims to reopen the dialogue with all the actors involved.”

- Petrus Kemme, curator, *Coming of Age*

- The title *Coming of Age* refers to the growth trajectory of architecture in our region and the role that competitions have played within this process.

- Mathilde Breukink, curator *Coming of Age*

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40 years of competition

Coming of Age, Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels

production Flanders Architecture Institute and De Singel

curators Sofie De Caigny, Mathilde Breukink, Petrus Kemme

scenography Eef Boeckx and Bart Macken

with the support of the Flemish Community

exhibition | Coming of Age. Architectural Competitions in Flanders and Brussels

Sat 27 November 2021 → Sun 17 April 2022

De Singel, Desguinlei 25, 2018 Antwerp (Belgium)

open Wed → Sun / 14:00 → 19:00 h and during evening performances until 22:00 h

no admission

opening | 40 years of competition

Fry 26 November 2021 – 20:00 h

De Singel, Blue Hall

Desguinlei 25, 2018 Antwerp (Belgium)

register at vai.be

40 years of competition

Open Call, 20 Years of Public Architecture

production Team Flemish Government Architect, University of Ghent, Flanders

Architecture Institute and De Singel

on the initiative of Team Flemish Government Architect

curators Maarten Liefoghe, Maarten Van Den Driessche

scenography Eef Boeckx, Kris Koremans, Hans Lust

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exhibition | Open Call, 20 Years of Public Architecture

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book | More Than a Competition - The Open Call in a Changing Building Culture

publisher: 2021, Flanders Architecture Institute and Team Flemish Government

Architect

authors: Sofie De Caigny, Alice Haddad, Maarten Liefoghe, Carlo Menon, Véronique Patteeuw, Maarten Van Den Driessche, Beatriz Van Houtte Alonso and Erik Wieërs

design: ruttens-wille

language: NL/EN

€ 24,50

available in bookstores and at vai.be

ISBN 978-9-49256-722-2

book | Celebrating Public Architecture - Buildings from the Open Call in Flanders 2000-21

publisher: 2021, Florian Heilmeyer (ed.) in collaboration with Flanders Architecture Institute and Team Flemish Government Architect

Including buildings by 51N4E, Bovenbouw Architectuur, Dierendonckblancke, Zaha Hadid, KAAN, Maxwan, Hideyuki Nakayama, Ney & Partner, noAarchitecten, OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, RCR Arquitectes, Robbrecht en Daem, Sergison Bates, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Xaveer de Geyter, among others

language: EN

€ 36

available in bookstores and at vai.be

ISBN 978-3-86859-692-2

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