



# Building Biospheres. Interview with the curator Bas Smets

**In this interview, inside the Belgian Pavilion at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, Bas Smets describes how he and plant neurobiologist Stefano Mancuso have reimagined a 1907 exhibition hall as a working climate prototype.**

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Visitors enter what feels like an indoor forest, with over 200 subtropical plants lining the central nave. Far from mere decoration, each specimen channels live readings of sap flow, temperature, humidity and CO<sub>2</sub> into a control system. Those signals then open irrigation valves, modulate LED lighting and adjust ventilation fans, allowing the greenery itself to cool, humidify and purify the air<sup>1</sup>.

Smets selected subtropical species because their native climates align closely with human comfort. Over six months, three weather stations compare Venice's external heat, a sealed antechamber and the vegetated hall to measure exactly how well plants perform alone.

Beyond proving the science, Smets invited four young Belgian studios to envision "living landscapes" for apartments, offices and public spaces that breathe and adapt like forests. *Building Biospheres* does not offer a one-size-fits-all remedy to the climate crisis; rather, it issues a bold provocation: could architects truly share control with living matter and, in doing so, redefine design practice and our relationship with the environment?

[1] "Building Biospheres: A New Alliance between Nature and Architecture," Press Release, Flanders Architecture Institute, 2025.