

Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe

Offices of the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, Brussels

Exhibition 17.12.2010 - 31.08.2011.

Exhibition curator : Jan Boelen.

It is as a firm believer that I have been involved in this initiative to display contemporary Belgian art in my own and my staff's offices. The Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe has already been a fascinating experience for us and will hopefully also fascinate many visitors.

When I arrived at the Council building, just one year ago, I was struck by a kind of bareness. The European Union buildings generally give little sense of history. That is not surprising. They are, of course, not ancient stately palaces now home to democratically elected governments, but rather modern offices. That chimes with the EU's public service nature, as well as with my own role.

We nevertheless felt that it should be possible in this working environment to revive something of the old nexus between art and politics, so characteristic of nascent modern Europe. The idea of a "cabinet of curiosities" was ideally suited for the purpose. Not just because of the word "cabinet" (in Belgian and European parlance, designating a politician's personal staff), but also because of the nature of the old Wunderkammer (chamber of wonders) itself, showcasing a wide range of art works, objets d'art, stuffed animals and "monsters". Where does its appeal lie? Not in any instant attraction, but in the clear sightedness and patience of the collector. Not in any simple grand gesture, but in a variety defying borderlines (even between art and nature!). Not in the spectacular panorama, but in the twinkle in the keen eye of the connoisseur.

The wealth and diversity of the new Cabinet of Curiosities evokes something of that magical world. A first work, by Piet Stockmans, has been hanging in my suite for two months now. It is already bringing a "new wind".

I am looking forward to soon being surrounded with works by his fellow artists from all over Belgium as well. Perhaps this trial project can be continued in future, with art from other Member States !

May I lastly give my warm thanks to the museums and collections lending works, to the curator, Jan Boelen, for the project design and to the other individuals and institutions without whose help this Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe would not have been possible.

*Herman Van Rompuy
President of the European Council*

The Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe project focuses on the presentation of Belgian art in the international context of the Office of the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. It was my ambition to present an apposite interdisciplinary sample of contemporary art in Belgium, assembled in the physical surroundings of the new Office of the “President of Europe”. With the 16th and 17th century Wunderkammer / Kunstkabinet / Cabinet of Curiosities in mind, we decided to present the project in a way that transforms the Office’s various rooms (and the reception area) into a setting for heterogeneous compilations of works of art from a variety of collections in Belgian museums and institutions.

For the first part of the project, a number of leading museums and collections in Belgium (Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) were asked to loan one work by a Belgian artist for the duration of the exhibition. The concept is an overt allusion to the exhibition project Rolywholyover A Circus (1993) by John Cage, who, at the invitation of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, radically transformed the traditional exhibition format - all museums within a radius of 35 kilometres were asked to provide 10 works of art on loan, thereby giving clear international visibility not only to the artists but also to the galleries.

In practical terms, we invited a range of institutes to take part in this unique project by proposing three Belgian works from their collections. As curator, I then selected one or more works from each institute. In view of the space limitations, consideration was given mainly to two-dimensional works and “wall / sculpture / installations”.

The second part of the Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe comprises three commissions. We asked three leading Belgian artists to produce work for a specific location in the Office. The President’s lounge or reception room for the various international delegations was given a delicate Stockmans-blauw background and a text sculpture by Fred Eerdekens. The centrepiece of the Office is a Belgian joint effort by Studio Job and the Val Saint Lambert crystal manufacturer.

As artistic director of Z33, a house for contemporary art, I, together with my team, create projects and exhibitions with artists and designers encouraging visitors to see everyday objects in a new light.

These projects are a departure from the lives that people lead and the way in which our society deals with impressions and impulses.

Z33 is an initiative by the Belgian province of Limburg, adjacent to the Brussels-Amsterdam-Paris triangle. We invite you to see the Cabinet of Curiosities from Belgium for Europe as an inspirational way of looking at everyday life in a new light.

Jan Boelen
Artistic director of Z33

Participating artists

Marc Angeli, Charlotte Beaudry, Guillaume Bijl, Michel Boulanger, Dirk Braeckman, Jacques Charlier, Edith Dekyndt, Wim Delvoye, Fred Eerdekens, Jan Fabre, Walter Leblanc, Michel Mouffe, Hans Op de Beeck, Gert Robijns, Jean-Pierre Scoufflaire, Piet Stockmans, Studio Job in association with Val Saint Lambert, Ante Timmermans, Luc Thymans, Koen van den Broek, Johan van Geluwe, Philippe Vandenberg, Jan Vercruysse, Pieter Vermeersch.

Participating museums and collections

BAM / Beaux-Arts Mons, Belgacom Art asbl / vzw, BNP Paribas Fortis, Cera, Belgium Dexia Collection, Espace 251 Nord (Liège), Groeninghe Collectief (Brugge), Belgium Collection ING, IKOB - Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst (Eupen), M-Museum (Leuven), MAC's Musée des Arts Contemporains de la Communauté française Wallonie-Bruxelles au Grand-Hornu, M HKA - Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, Mu.ZEE (Oostende), National Bank of Belgium Private Collection (Antwerpen), S.M.A.K. - Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (Gent).

Link

<http://www.z33.be/en/news/2010/12/17/jan-boelen-makes-cabinet-curiosities-president-european-council>

From the collection of the Nationale Bank van België, the painting "Untitled" (2007) by Charlotte Beaudry was selected for "Cabinet of curiosities from Belgium for Europe" at the Cabinet of Mr. Van Rompuy (Brussels), curated by Jan Boelen.