

More is expected, more is required. Excess. Or so it seems. But even here, if we take the world for what it is — does this not mean that it can also be something else? Not everything that is possible must be possible. Is there not also a part of the world that is opposed to excess, and precisely desires less? Not to find less, but to use less to find something else. Something more. A different more.

Imagination is the key here. An imagination that does not start from the excess, but embraces the less.

The built world faces the same dilemma. More is expected, more is required. More has to be possible. The same question may be asked. Is the striving for more the only response to the world we live in? Should we not find opportunity in constraint? Again, a different opportunity. And as soon as this is found, can this not be celebrated as *bravoure*? The world needs imagination to change its course, as does the built world. However, the built world

needs imagination in its materiality.
Imagination through making.

A new momentum emerges. Using the barely to imagine much more. To imagine scarcity as *bravoure*. New expressions appear and new meanings merge.

Imagination creates a momentum. A turning point. A turning point that transforms scarcity into wealth. Observation precedes imagination. And, more often than not, requires boldness. At the same time, doubt arises. Not as contradiction, but as harbinger of imagination. Imagination surpasses certainty, precisely because of a moment of doubt. A moment of doubt caused by a shift in perception. Not as a deliberate reconsideration, but as the result of an unexpected event. The opportunity of the event and the acceptance of the unexpected provide the key.

short stories

P.75 Scouting premises in Blankenberge. A first demonstration of

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scarcity. Barely different from simply building. But with a precision that makes all the difference. A plastic gutter and corrugated fibre cement. A structure of wooden beams and columns as backdrop. No resources. But when scrupulously employed, just enough resources. A scarcity that requires precision, and becomes a measure for *bravoure*. An unexpected precision.

P.80 An archives building in Ghent. What might and should have only been a box turns into something else. The context of façades becomes a context of windowsills. Or lintels. Either way, a context of lines. Lines that return. A different rhythm. A different proportion. A different scale. And, just like this, the box resonates with its context.

Scarcity as a matter of observation. The observation of context. And adding just enough to make a difference. An unexpected observation.

P.51 A room in a house. Technical installations in the basement and appli-

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ances above. Pipes that need to cross the space, right through the centre. And why not? But columns of a classical order define the space. How, then, could mere pipes be allowed to cross this space? By the boldness to introduce a different column. A column in a material that was supposed to be hidden. Here applied with exacting precision and dedication — an object of difference. A very different column, but also a very precise one, between the others. As precise as necessary to transform the classical order into a different order. Again, observation, but also boldness. The boldness to introduce a difference.

P.85 A roof light is set in the roof. The edge of the roof light needs a finish. It is obvious how this should be finished. Of course it should be finished. Or maybe it should not. A moment of doubt. The acceptance of what is. A moment of scarcity that turns into a moment of acceptance. And so becomes a moment of *bravoure*. The border is beautiful

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as it is. A beautiful scarcity.

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P.69 Acoustic panels and light fittings in a day-care centre. Technical installations are inevitably part of the whole. But how to be a part of the whole is the question. The question of how to imagine technical installations to be no longer technical installations. But something else. A shift in meaning. A shift in naming. A shift in perception.
Technical installations as birds.

P.57 A door frame in Nivelles. A door frame for a door. The same door frame for pipes too. To let pipes circulate. The framing of pipes when pipes are allowed to be more than pipes. A different framing. A different perception.

intermezzo

This is what architecture needs to do. This is perhaps what architecture really needs to do. To be an all-encompassing possibility. The possibility to move that which is expected into a

different perception. Not to be just a part of the whole. Which architecture today resembles more and more. Using the excuse of a growing complexity. While departing from this complexity should be the challenge, no more no less.

short stories

P.91 When a friend is dying and needs a house. When the house is built not only as prescribed or expected. But to build a house as it is meant to be: a place to embrace life. Giving care becomes giving life. Life as a sign of architecture. A building detail as a sign of life. The house will accompany the friend. A reflection on life. On what life is at the very least. Reconsidering what is not supposed to be reconsidered.

P.102 A garden in a suburban neighbourhood. The garden is our garden. But when does our garden truly become our garden? A garden that is shared by everyone? The fence is no longer the edge of our private

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existence. Our existence is no longer the size of our garden. Our garden on the other side of the fence opens up the edge that the fence would create.

The scarcity of space is distributed differently. The scarcity of space becomes an abundance of space.

P.45 A letter box needs to be enlarged. But the columns of the gate do not allow for that. Perhaps one of the columns needs to be rebuilt. A gesture of receiving. A modest gesture. But in its modesty also a grand gesture. Even for a letter. From scarcity to dignity.

P.63 When the wall has been an obstacle for so long, but can never be removed; then the wall can still be something else. Simple yet exacting holes make the difference. Round drill holes of an exceptional scale bring that which lies beyond the wall through the wall. Pleasure, and only pleasure. Barely anything happened. Yet there is so much happening.

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P.106 The water is always too deep. The other side always too far. A bridge always too difficult. The story of how to employ what is available differently. Not at once, but with practical resourcefulness. Merely the invention of a single new piece. And so much of what is available can be employed differently. Perceived differently. A tower becomes a bridge. A piece of a tower crane becomes a piece of a beam. An inventive coupling piece becomes the opportunity for a bridge.

A bridge in Brussels.

P.97 A clothes line in Kortrijk. A clothes line that becomes a light line. Light was never hung more beautifully. Light was never hung more lightly.

Years later, in Antwerp, the same clothes line. Again. As repetition. Because something good should be celebrated. Should be celebrated again. Unexpected beauty. Smile as *bravoure*.

P.117 When a pavilion needs to be in order for the next exhibition, everything

10 is painted white. Every time. The question could and maybe should be if this is really necessary. Every time.

Because the previous white is still very white, and the damage done is perhaps not only damage done. If only we could see this differently. Polish and gloss are used to transform this damage into frescoes. Polish and gloss are used to see the damage differently.

P.112 An old school needs to be replaced with a new school. While the old school was characterised by scarcity, the new school is characterised by even more scarcity. The old school as a collection of pavilions. Demolished one by one. And yet, one pavilion remains.

An empty pavilion. Without an idea. Without an end. But to give every unexpected idea a chance later on.

A gesture of generosity. To preserve what does not need to be demolished. To allow that which had been discarded a chance.

Scarcity is not only a matter of building differently. Scarcity is also a matter of living differently. And thus of building differently.

The idea of scarcity as an opportunity for *bravoure* transcends personal fixation. It is a piercing observation, and an appeal to the imagination.

A call to reconsider architecture as all-encompassing, knowing that these simple opportunities can make an unexpected difference. Because where scarcity today is recognised as scarcity, it is too often limited to only scarcity. Scarcity is too often an excuse for not looking further.

Scarcity can make the difference by an unexpected turning point. Or unsurpassed precision. Or bold introduction. Or shifting perception. Or merely acceptance. An opportunity that transforms what is scarce into what is lasting. Because what was not considered as

Finding opportunities where opportunities were not expected or were not allowed to be expected. Opportunity is life. Opportunities make life. Make life different. Opportunities are found in necessity. Should be found as occasions. The turning point. The unexpected.

And should be life. Allowing the modest everyday life to be no longer scarce. Allowing scarcity to be beauty. That is *bravoure*.

Opportunity is what those expressions look for. Pleasure is inseparably the drive of those opportunities. The pleasure comes when the turning point is recognised. The pleasure allows for the turning point. This *bravoure* is a pleasure. *Bravoure* is pleasure. That is also *bravoure*.

And eventually, all of this. A smile as the result. *Bravoure* makes you smile. Merely an indirect result. But *bravoure par excellence*. A smile because of the everyday.

Sometimes the notion of the everyday is reduced to the conventional. To us, the everyday is precisely that which is connected by all kinds of small, unexpected events breaking through the routine.

— Paul Vermeulen

Bravoure is not just a perfect technical execution. You need the expertise, but the expertise is only the condition from which you can create so much more than just a solution.

— Henk De Smet

CG Scarcity, economy, acceptance, technology. To us, these words all relate to the legitimisation of architecture. They are posited here as an invitation to discuss building and the making of architecture.

JDV Our fascination for these objects — these birds — in your building in Antwerp derives from an interest in the building process. More specifically, it comes from an interest in the moment that the building process takes a turn. There is not much that happens here, but for once the acoustic panels are not positioned straight, and for once the lights do not line up with the grid. Can you describe the moment when something like this happens?

PV Of course, a moment like this occurs late in the design process. The design has already taken shape and the themes are already present. Then a problem arises that needs to be solved. At a certain point we needed to calculate the amount of acoustic material necessary, and we realised that less material was needed if the panels hung freely in the space, releasing the upper side of the panel as an absorbing surface. The rest was inevitable. The number of light fittings had already been specified and the acoustic panels had to be suspended evenly with the lights. I remember that someone made a small model in a few minutes, where the light and the panels were a single figure, and together they became a bird.

HDS This sort of thing very often happens by accident. Because this kind of problem needs to be solved quickly, certain things come into being without us having anticipated them. And once the solution is described as something else, as a bird, it develops its own logic, which you then have to follow through.

JDV At that moment it becomes so much more than just a solution. It solves the problem, but it also takes a turn, it departs from it. To what extent was this determined by a limited budget?

HDS A limited budget is not necessarily a condition, but it does stimulate resourcefulness.

PV Scarcity also has a lot to do with the amount of time available to solve a problem. It would be absurd to commission an artist or to draft a brief for something like this. Those acoustic panels had to be hung either way, and the only thing we did was to suggest hanging them in this specific way. Once you call them cranes or herons, it becomes clear that the light needs to be suspended in such a way that it sticks out on the side of the panels. This much is at least necessary to resemble the image of a crane. This way it also seems as if no effort had gone into it, as if these elements had been carelessly positioned.

JDV How important is it that an occasion or opportunity presents itself that allows this architectural incident to happen? Is a certain condition necessary to make such occasions possible, to recognise and seize them?

HDS Having a clear understanding of the building is a precondition. During the design process the building develops its own logic and rules. It is only from an understanding of those rules that you can clearly recognise what is right or not. That is when you can spot these opportunities. If you still have to learn the rules of the building at that stage, it is too late to seize them. In that sense, the birds are the result of the relation between several elements that were already present in the building. The bird is very important as an object in itself, but its existence is dependent on

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Architect: De Smet Vermeulen architecten
Project: Day-care centre De Strandloper, IGLO, Antwerp, 2013

GENEROSITY
Interview with Henk De Smet and Paul Vermeulen
All interviews by Christoph Grate and Jan De Vylder unless otherwise indicated

the building as a whole. It is the kind of element you would expect in this building.

CG Scarcity often suggests a minimum, reducing something to its essentials, not being able to afford anything. These birds are then not something you can explain from the economy of the building, but maybe they can be understood from the purpose of the building?

PV It is not something that has been added to the building to give it meaning. It is something that was necessary. Those acoustic panels had to hang there, so they might as well hang there in this specific way.

HDS I would definitely not consider it an artistic intervention. It is something that was done to solve a problem. We are sensitive enough to see the poetry of it, but we did not intend to create an installation as an artist. That is a very fine line.

JDV Your architecture is primarily concerned with acts of building, but there is always an element of playfulness there, too. I think it is very important that you can explore a sense of innocence in something as serious as a building. To me this is indeed a different position from that of an artist.

HDS Sometimes you impose certain rules on yourself that do not immediately make sense. For example, in the adjacent nursing home, we set a rule that there would be no flat roofs, so all roofs had to have an angle. People would look down from the surrounding high-rises and see the shadows of the towers glide over the building during the day. We wanted to break these shadows. In the end, that is an additional complexity you create for yourself, but it is a complexity that also enriches the building.

JDV This is *bravoure*. Doing this. Not only in this one object we are showing, but also in the complete building there is an attitude of *bravoure*.

PV I also think this has a lot to do with appreciating the everyday and the ordinary. We are related to a broad movement in architecture that is concerned

with creating 'an architecture of the everyday'. Sometimes the notion of the everyday is reduced to the conventional. To us, the everyday is precisely that which is connected by all kinds of small, unexpected events breaking through the routine.

JDV Do you think it is relevant to draw attention to something like this at a place like the Venice Biennale? Not to talk about large-scale urban interventions, but rather to talk about, for example, the doorknob? To say, look at those birds over there?

PV I think it is definitely worth it, especially in the context of the Biennale, where all kinds of grand statements flourish. The idea of craftsmanship is definitely relevant too. All of the objects on show here are the result of the question of how to build something. It is about overcoming the obstacles posed by the materiality of things, without exaggerating. In this sense, they are all graceful projects, because they do not give the problem more attention than it can claim.

HDS Of course, we could have solved this acoustic problem with more precision or perfection. Here, it is only a simple assemblage of different materials to deal with the problem. *Bravoure* is not just a perfect technical execution. You need the expertise, but the expertise is only the condition from which you can create so much more than just a solution.

JDV At the beginning we had words such as scarcity, economy, acceptance. It seems that other words are also important, for example, gracious, and maybe also generous. It is indeed generous to use an acoustic panel and fluorescent lighting to arrive at a crane bird. By attributing more to the assembly than just the separate materials, it becomes something poetic, simply through building, without trying to create poetry as such.

DIGNITY

OR, EVERY MAN A KING

Using different proportions indicates that someone has thought about these two simple columns, that they have been built with care and consideration. In this sense, they are an intellectual gesture.

— Jo Van Den Berghe

JVDB This project started without much ambition. There was a very simple and pragmatic issue that had to be resolved. In front of my house were two brick columns, the remnants of a gate that once stood there. These columns were in need of repair and I decided to rebuild them using the same bricks. I had some extra bricks lying around, so I decided to make one of the two columns a bit bigger. This made it possible to create a letter box inside the taller column. The post office had informed me that my current one was too small and that they would stop delivering mail. The conditions were very practical, very basic. So there was definitely a certain scarcity at the outset of the project, without maybe having considered it as such. There was a limited amount of time, a limited amount of material, and a limited amount of ambition. There was also a kind of urgency, which often accompanies scarcity, I think. Something had to be done quickly, and it had to be done with the available resources. But when you rebuild something, things also start to mutate. Despite the scarcity, the process of rebuilding was used as an opportunity to create something different, to sublimate this scarcity into something more. We could do this because my father was the mason. He was and is my 'king', and I could serve him by handing him the material, brick by brick. We both handled every single brick.

JDV You decided to rebuild these two columns first, despite the repairs that needed to be done on the house itself. Since there was no gate anymore,

it seems to me that it would have been easier to just remove the columns altogether and to first renovate the roof, for example, which was much more urgent. Yet at some point you decided that the columns had to be rebuilt before everything else. I think this is something that can also be seen in the original house. The house is a very simple building in which not much could be afforded, yet there is an ornamental band of yellow bricks in the front façade. Together with the ornament of the columns, in which you repeated this yellow line, this is a very detailed element in an environment characterised by scarcity.

CG Maybe this can be seen as a question of necessity. The architecture of the house is one that has been reduced to its necessity. But the columns were not only there to support the gate. They also mark the beginning of the courtyard. This is a social necessity. Together with the strip of yellow bricks, this perhaps indicates a desire for civilisation. Then, there are also the different proportions of the columns you rebuilt. The notion of proportion is of course a fundamental aspect of architecture, which is also a sign of civilisation.

JVDB The yellow bricks in the façade indeed indicate a desire for civilisation. The house could have been built without them, but apparently it was necessary to have them there. The columns are a symbol of pride. The landowner would have built them as a marker of his presence in his street, his village, his landscape. Maybe the different proportions I introduced in the columns are motivated by the same kind of desire. Using different proportions indicates that someone has thought about these two simple columns, that they have been built with care and consideration. In this sense, they are an intellectual gesture.

CG I think this is something that is present in almost all simple houses, no matter how basic. Despite the scarcity that dictates the architecture, they usually still possess a very sober kind of classicism, which retains a certain dignity. Maybe dignity is then also a very important word

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Architect: Jo Van Den Berghe — architect p. 45
Project: WOSHO, Herzele, 1986-2013

DIGNITY
Interview with Jo Van Den Berghe

here. This is the attitude of someone who wants to wear a white shirt on Sundays. Despite the fact that it is so hard to keep a shirt white, you still insist on wearing a white collar that day. This is a matter of basic human dignity.

JVDB Yes, this is also the case in the original house. A central corridor, two rooms on either side, both downstairs and upstairs. Very simple, but at the same time it expresses a certain consideration, and indeed a certain dignity. Moreover, this concept has the capacity to merge dignity with necessity and functionality. This is cultural sustainability.

JDV Do you think that something so simple is worth discussing? Do you see any relevance in telling this story in a place like the Venice Biennale?

JVDB I think it is definitely relevant to talk about dignity, even more so in the context of scarcity. There is a basic dignity that persists despite everything. It is of course a story that only connects with those who are attentive. Against an unwillingness to see, one has no remedies. I think it is possible to transmit the indispensable message of human dignity without the need for architectural spectacle.



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Now, the side of the building that is usually hidden can be seen in plain sight, and the traces of those who make it become visible.
— Jan De Vylder

You can feel the presence of craftsmanship in the original architecture, and then, suddenly, we realise that we are dealing with these same things by using very banal materials.

— Bart Hollanders

CG This column is the result of a very basic problem with an obvious solution, yet you decided to do something different.

BH The problem was indeed quite basic. The pipes from the technical installations in the basement had to reach the upper floors. This type of problem is usually solved by running the pipes up the wall in an encasement. However, given the existing situation of those structural and ornamental columns already present in the space, it was obvious to us that we needed to introduce a new kind of column.

JDV The choice of material is very important here. Instead of using this opportunity to create a white column in plaster that could lead to a conceptual statement about imitation, which would have pushed the project further in the direction of an artwork, you chose to stay within the discipline of architecture and focus on the use of a very standard material. By doing this, it becomes a story about materiality and building.

BH This has of course to do with the context of the entire project. The client asked us to transform a nineteenth-century house into a number of different studios, which meant that we had to divide the building into distinct units. Because we wanted to keep the unity and beauty of the house as a whole, we decided to add only walls that were expressed differently from the existing ones. This decision led to the use of materials in ways in which

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Architect: Eagles of Architecture
Project: Maarschalk Gerardstraat 5, Antwerp, 2014

CRAFTSMANSHIP
Interview with Bart Hollanders

Image: Mason Standing Dad
Photograph by Jo Van Den Berghe, 1996

We do not want to play this postmodern game of references. We want to develop history. History carries architecture. It is a building block with which we create our own architecture, not through copying or formal games, but as a way of reconsidering architecture.

— Paul Robbrecht

JDV What most stands out in your design for the State Archives in Ghent are these elements on the façade, with no apparent function.

PR For us they refer to windowsills, but also to bookshelves or simply shelves. Early in the process we made a sketch in which these shelves were filled with plates, or with small statues, nineteenth-century stuff, all kinds of objects from a museum collection that are never exhibited.

JDV The building is situated in a street that used to be lined with beautiful town houses, most of which were demolished in the 1990s to build new apartment buildings. To us, these shelves or windowsills seem to reconnect with the window frames of these old town houses and bring back unity to a fragmented street. The building develops its meaning by restoring a fragment of this lost architecture. It also echoes the rounded corners of Henry van de Velde's architecture of the university.

JR The fragmented streetscape was one of the things that played a definite role in the design process. Given the presence of these town houses in the surrounding neighbourhood, those out-of-place apartment buildings in the street, and the fact that the site was a very anonymous location in the city, we wanted to bind those elements and create a sense of place. We also wanted to give the archives a certain visibility on a larger urban scale. Archives are usually thought of as hidden out of sight. We knew very quickly that we wanted a white and shiny building that would stand out. So, on one hand we wanted the building to nestle in its context,

BH Yes, this is again the puzzle that starts to come together. Those existing ceilings, columns and ornaments were all carefully crafted by hand. You can feel the presence of craftsmanship in the original architecture, and then, suddenly, we realise that we are dealing with these same things by using very banal materials.

which are plastered evenly afterwards. Since the screws would be visible, they had to be placed in the exact same spots everywhere. We devised a system with L-profiles and U-channels to determine where the drill holes would be so that they would be identical on every panel.

JDV I think this is an important point of focus. Suddenly the people who place the plasterboard become very important. Quality always depends on the dedication of those who work towards it and have an understanding of how to achieve it. Now, the side of the building that is usually hidden can be seen in plain sight, and the traces of those who make it become visible. What were the consequences of this preciseness in practical but maybe also in financial terms?

BH It required a lot of concentration from the crew, which was different from the normal atmosphere on a construction site. The contractor was initially hesitant because all traces of construction would be visible. We had to insist that it was only a matter of placing plasterboard as usual. Financially, I do not think it mattered much. On paper, it was still plasterboard. Since we did not need any plasterwork and painting afterwards, it may even have been cheaper. Otherwise, it was merely a redistribution of costs.

CG By using a very banal material in this specific way, the people who place plasterboard suddenly become craftsmen. We do not usually think of this kind of work as a craft, in the way we might think of masonry or woodwork as a craft. The placing of plasterboard can perhaps be seen as related to the plasterer, which used to be a respected craft until the nineteenth century. Craftsmen from Venice used to be asked all over Europe to decorate ceilings and walls, as was probably the case in the original architecture of this house. By using this very banal material differently, you are able to connect with both the level of craftsmanship of the original architecture and its rich, rococo-like atmosphere.

they are not usually employed. This in turn meant that we could explore a distinct materiality that is different from the white-painted walls of the original house. We used a metal stud frame and plasterboard panels, with the intention of leaving both the load-bearing structure and the unfinished plasterboard exposed. We only added a layer of polish to the plasterboard, giving it a certain depth and making it look even more finished than when plastered and painted.

JDV The polish is indeed important. Without it, the column remains a raw artefact. By using the polish, you transform the exposed, unfinished plasterboard into a finished element.

BH Yes, and the resulting colours of the walls then follow a purely technical logic. Pink plasterboard is fire-resistant, green is waterproof, and blue is for acoustics. As a result of the material and the colours, you immediately see the contrast between the old house and the new walls.

CG These colours are also reminiscent of rococo architecture and seem to connect with the pastiche-like architecture of the original house. This original architecture has now been completely painted white, but the colours of the new walls seem to allude to this world of ornament and decoration, a world of differently themed rooms: the salon, the dining room, the green room, the pink room.

BH There are always those moments during the design process when different things suddenly coincide and the puzzle starts to come together. These colours indeed connect with the atmosphere of the original house, which is why they work so well together, despite being complete opposites.

JDV Usually, using plasterboard panels does not require precision, since everything is plastered afterwards anyway. But now, by leaving the plasterboard exposed, the panels had to be placed very precisely. How did this affect the construction process?

BH These panels have a recessed margin of a few centimetres on either side, where to screw the panels to the metal studs

but on the other, with its more or less abstract tower and new small square at the back, it also had to lend its surroundings a new identity.

PR We needed to consider a number of particularities. The street extends all the way to the Vooruit, a major cultural institution in Ghent. And at the other end of the street is our building. We wanted to connect these two cultural institutions by making perspectival suggestions, by emphasising the lines of the windows in the street. At the same time, we are also involved in a restoration project on Van de Velde's Book Tower, the university library, a few streets away. This building has very specific volumetric dimensions and a very specific architectural language developed by Henry van de Velde, including those rounded corners in the entrance building to the library, which we adopted in the State Archives. We do not want to play this postmodern game of references. We want to develop history. History carries architecture. It is a building block with which we create our own architecture, not through copying or formal games, but as a way of reconsidering architecture. This is paramount for us.

JDV There is a difference between the general idea of how a building should connect with its context and these small details that effectively connect the building with its context. At that moment the detail takes over.

JR In our practice this occurs very early on in the design process. Sometimes we even start with a detail. This is not something that we think of afterwards. It was clear from the start that, despite the utilitarian programme, the building had to have these windowsills and rounded corners.

JDV Viewed in the context of scarcity, these details seem abundant, apparently superfluous. They are of no use to anyone, except to those who like them. On the other hand, it is also a moment of scarcity when you have to design a very sober and functional building in which there are only a few moments when these very precise elements become possible.

PR Our main ambition, of course, is to maintain a dialogue with the broader cultural field.

We see architecture as a way of contributing and developing this dialogue. These details are an important way of relating the building to its cultural, historical and spatial context. Beyond the functional and economic requirements of the programme, this kind of detail remains essential to architecture.

JDV Nonetheless, this kind of detail seems to contradict the building's very utilitarian programme. How do you convince a client who would prefer a drying hall outside the city of the necessity of these elements?

PR This has a lot to do with the client's situation. This project was carried out as a public-private partnership, which meant that the client did not in fact exist. We never discussed these details with anyone. On drawings and in models these shelves were nothing more than small lines on the façade, barely visible. Nobody questioned these things. Only in the specifications was it clear that these lines had to be executed as concrete slabs.

JR Since no one was looking over our shoulder during the design phase, we enjoyed a moment of freedom to develop these details. The speed of the process is a huge advantage here to keep some things out of the discussion.

PR A building is always an answer to certain well-described expectations, but architecture also needs to answer to expectations that are not described, that cannot even be described. In this sense, architecture is always waiting, always open to the unexpected. The building as a waiting object. This is what those shelves express. Waiting to be filled, provocations of what could be.

20 ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance enables us to free architecture from its concepts, to free architecture from one specific way of reading. I do not need legibility. I do not need to communicate with architecture.

— Wim Goes

JDV I think yours is one of the most personal stories we are taking to the Biennale. It is important to know that this house was built for a friend diagnosed with ALS and a limited life expectancy and that it has to be disassembled again afterwards. On the other hand, we think this story has wider implications too, beyond these particular circumstances.

WG The story of the house is indeed twofold. On one hand, there is the story of the house itself, with its very specific requirements to accommodate the different stages of the illness. On the other, there is also the idea that we wanted to use the building process itself to bring together a group of over one hundred people. This idea of building a house collectively was a way of transforming the subject of illness and death with which we were confronted into a different subject. It was a matter of accepting reality and focusing on constructiveness. We wanted to celebrate life.

So it was not only about the building. It was really about living and working together with this diverse group over the course of several months. There was no hierarchy, yet there was a beautiful kind of uncertainty. People came together not knowing what to expect. One of the reasons we chose to build the walls in straw and clay was to make the building more accessible. This was crucial. Despite the requirements for the house in terms of the illness, we also had to look for a way of building that was familiar to everyone. Many of us have memories of playing in haylofts and building sandcastles at the beach as a child. There is great ac-

cessibility in materials such as straw and clay, a belief that everyone can build this. There was also the idea of borrowing the materials from contractors, which would be returned afterwards. We wanted to give everyone the idea that they could be part of the world of building that seems so inaccessible to many people.

JDV The accessibility of a building usually refers to the physical access point of a building, to the entrance, to the circulation within, but here you take it further. The building process itself becomes accessible. It is really about the psychological accessibility of a building, about how a building can connect a group of people as a community.

WG Yes, and this is still visible in the construction itself. Anyone can place these glass elements, the stacking of straw bales is almost a playful activity, and the application of clay is easy to learn. Building this way, together, as a community, is a very basic activity.

JDV Scarcity here becomes the condition that is necessary to establish commonality. It is precisely because a minimal amount of material and expertise is required that it is possible to bring a group of people together and to create a whole world in itself. People come together in this scarcity. And then, despite this scarcity, despite these basic conditions, there are these small wooden elements at the bottom of the wall that come into being, which were not designed in advance, but seem extremely important and rich.

WG In this sense the topic of *bravoure* interests me. It is not about the elements as such, which are very basic, but about the assembly of those elements. It is important to know that these wooden elements were not planned. There was of course an initial design for the house, but there was also this group of people who would make mistakes during the process. Every time I returned to the site I had to think about how to proceed.

I knew the end result, but at the same time I did not. At one point, water from a downpour had gathered at the edge of the building and threatened to overflow the project. We had to place these small wooden sticks so as to press the waterproofing to the tiles underneath to prevent the water from flowing in. We simply took a wooden plank and made small laths. These of course did not fit completely, so it started to lead its own life. These are things that happen by accident and which you have to deal with during the building process. This has to do with the relativity of building. There is a lot of room for error, but also an acceptance of this room for error.

CG All of the projects in the pavilion have something to do with the acceptance of errors and unforeseen circumstances which pose problems but are, at the same time, also an opportunity to do something unexpected. How important was this to you?

WG I think this acceptance relates closely to the meaning of architecture. By accepting the presence of a variety of people in the building process and by accepting that this changes the design, the building develops a diversity of meanings. Everyone views the building from a different angle because everyone has a different history and a different way of looking at the world. Acceptance enables us to free architecture from its concepts, to free architecture from one specific way of reading. I do not need legibility. I do not need to communicate with architecture. I would rather have someone else do that. That is why I was unhappy at first with these wooden elements. The project had no architectural ambition, but the sticks seemed to develop into an architectural language.

JDV The game with the wooden sticks addresses the very essence of architecture. It is clearly something that is shared. They are the traces of a communal building process which remain as a kind of unintended ornament.

WG Yes, and in this sense it is also an ornament as joint. The joint is a predecessor of the ornament. The way materials come together is recognised as

a cultural phenomenon, which is then transformed into an ornament. But then these ornaments are no longer about the assemblage of materials, but about form and shadows. These meanings shift over time. If you look at woodcarving, for example, you see that these joints have been imitated in stone ornaments as decoration.

CG This also has to do with the decoration of one's own labour as a sense of purpose. This project is very much about finding purpose through building, especially as a shared activity. The participants started out with a sense of uncertainty, but are united in this search for meaning. This is the opposite of the division of labour today, when only a few people have the satisfaction of the complete building process. By disrupting this division, the building process again becomes a meaningful activity. This detail of these wooden elements is then something that presents itself in one way during the process, but can also be read in another way afterwards — psychologically, visually, functionally.

WG Yes, and this again has to do with the accessibility of the building and the way people read it. A building detail only means as much as the meaning you attribute to it. But in the end the communication ceases and the building will be there in all its openness. I hope that everyone that arrives there, with or without knowledge of the story, can connect with the building, can relate it to his or her own history, and can project their own meaning on it. I just hope it is open.



Image: Original situation
Photograph by Wim Goes Architectuur



Image: Family and friends constructing the façade
Photograph by Wim Goes Architectuur

There is a difference between ornament and ornamentation. The ornament is generally something added, while ornamentation is something that can come into being during the process of making.

— Richard Venlet

CG Scarcity has to do with the conditions in which decisions about architecture are made. But it is not only about solving problems. Moments of pleasure, elegance and generosity also persist in this context of scarcity. Scarcity can also offer an opportunity to do something unexpected.

RV Perhaps we could also read this context of scarcity as an opportunity for a new kind of ornamentation. How a basic necessity acquires a new kind of meaning. I think the notion of ornamentation comes into play here. In this sense, the roof lights we created for the studio of Michel François can be seen as accidental ornaments.

JDV Yes, but it seems to me that this roof light, and especially the small border of plaster, is not something that can be thought up at the drawing table, in advance. But the question of how to make the connection between the dome and the ceiling does arise in the design process. How does something like this come into being?

RV The solution for the roof light went through different stages. There were other designs for it which were more complicated and more ambitious in form and function. The solution we ultimately proposed was driven by the context of the project. The studio space really only needed more light and a view outside, so that is what we focused on. Together with Michel François we wanted to retain the anonymity of the original building as much as possible, and only a minimal amount of architecture could be added in this perspective. In the end, we placed six standard Perspex roof lights and decided to finish only the framing border, leaving untouched the old ceiling, which was painted black.

The border was left unpainted and the plaster is still visible.

PVDM As an artist, Michel François can read architecture. Our mutual aim was to find a kind of architecture that was reduced to its necessities, without disturbing the studio space where he develops his own work. We constantly considered where we could and would intervene and to what extent.

JDV Scarcity then is not only related to economic or material conditions. The artist does not want anything that precedes him. There is even a desire for scarcity. It is a question of how much architecture is acceptable as a background for daily life.

PVDM Yes, the client had a kind of fear of the building and of our interventions. Some things needed to be done, but at the same time, not much could happen.

CG But the fact that the client can read architecture is also an enrichment. There are certain notions and ideas that are already presupposed. You understand each other well. There is a shared appreciation for things that would normally be rejected, for example these oppositions between the complete and the incomplete, the finished and the raw. And this allows for this roof light to happen. To create such an expensive, technologically advanced object, and then to allow its edges to remain unfinished.

RV Yes, this shared appreciation of contrasts was definitely necessary and enriching in this project. At certain moments the interventions had to be very precise, at others there was an acceptance of, and tolerance for, the unknown. This is always a difficult balance. It is because of these contrasts that the unfinished border of plaster can be appreciated and becomes a kind of 'ornamentation'.

JDV Ornaments are usually related to enrichment, something that is added. But in this case, it is something that is left unfinished. Can we still talk about enrichment?

RV There is a difference between ornament and ornamentation. The ornament is generally something added, while ornamentation is something that can come

Architect: Philippe Vander Maren — Richard Venlet
Project: Atelier Michel François, Brussels, 2014

ORNAMENTATION
Interview with Philippe Vander Maren and Richard Venlet

Image: Roof lights
Photograph by Philippe Vander Maren

into being during the process of making. In this sense it is also accidental. The plaster border emerged during the building process. It is something that, to us, added an interesting detail to the space. It is an acceptance of incompleteness as enrichment rather than a conscious addition.

CG This is of course something that conflicts with the standard notion of craftsmanship. This acceptance is the exact opposite, it is a perversion of the craft. You need a specific kind of background to be able to appreciate this kind of rawness as ornament.

JDV This difference between ornament and ornamentation is, I think, highly important. It is not something that is planned, but something that occurs. And in order to recognise it as an ornament, a specific cultural background or knowledge is indeed required. In the way we try to look at architecture here, the critical moment is then perhaps education. A certain precondition is necessary to appreciate these things we are showing.

CG On the other hand, we also find similar details in public buildings, which we also show in the pavilion. They indicate a certain sensibility to appreciate this ornamentation, not only with a specific client, but with a larger public too.



In a way, we are always dealing with beauty. We only do things which we consider to be beautiful in a certain way. But these are not always appreciated as such.

— Els Claessens

Everything is what it is. A detail can just be beautiful. It does not need to be something else. It does not only need to be functional. It bears witness to a conscious and involved building process.

— Tania Vandenbussche

JDV Your project for the scouting premises deals with the basics of building. It is a very basic method of construction. Brickwork, wooden beams, corrugated sheets and a gutter. One can see that this building had to be constructed with very little, even less than one would expect. And yet, in the construction itself, you were able to do something unexpected.

TV The building is indeed fairly simple and straightforward. On one hand, the resources were limited. On the other, since these are scouting premises, we felt that it also needed to be a rather basic construction. We wanted to make a building that really responded to its users and its context. Neither did we want it to be too clean, it had to have a certain roughness. Since the budget only allowed for the use of a cheap, standard brick, we needed to employ the brickwork in a different way to create this sense of roughness. So we asked the mason to smear mortar on the bricks.

EC Sometimes doing a bad job is more difficult than doing it right. The mason had to try different ways of smearing on the mortar, with a flicker machine, with his trowel, and in the end he just smeared it on the seams, which seemed to work best.

JDV How do you control this? Is this something you can take into account when drawing plans or writing out specifications?

Architect: architecten Els Claessens en Tania Vandenbussche
Project: Scouting premises, Blankenberge, 2008

BEAUTY
Interview with Els Claessens and Tania Vandenbussche

EC No, this was something that happened on the construction site. We had to discuss this with the mason on the spot and try out different things during the building process itself. You can still see the different days the mason worked on the wall according to the methods that were employed. By trying out these different methods while building, a kind of drawing came into existence, which lends the building its character.

TV The other elements, however, had to be drawn in advance. The drainage system was fairly simple and straightforward, but the wooden structure had to be drawn in detail. Overall it was a simple construction, but we had to invent a more complex detail to connect the columns and beams. We wanted to keep the connections invisible, instead of using simple joist hangers.

JDV Why is that?

TV Because in the end, despite the lack of resources, there are certain things you still find more important than others.

EC Yes, despite the simple and basic construction of the building, a joist hanger would have gone too far for us.

JDV Can we consider this a redistribution of costs, where you pay more attention to one thing while compromising on another? This complex detail will probably have made the structure more expensive.

EC I do not think we considered this consciously. In the end, it is just because we thought it more beautiful without a joist hanger. Maybe it is as simple as that.

JDV This is indeed something we no longer discuss. In a way, it has become a taboo to discuss beauty in a very formal sense as architects.

CG Yes, we can still appreciate a kind of simplicity as beauty, which is not necessarily cheap or simple. But when an economic logic comes into play, we are ready to accept that things should no longer be special. But what is crucial here is that the question of beauty has been inverted. Beauty is not sacrificed to scarcity — rather scarcity is used as an opportunity to create beauty.

EC In a way, we are always dealing with beauty. We only do things which we consider

to be beautiful in a certain way. But these are not always appreciated as such.

TV I do not think we have a single project in which we are not dealing with beauty. But we do have to choose certain things over others. We are often focused on refining one detail while accepting another as simple and standard.

CG On the other hand, beauty is always linked to what one has learned to appreciate as beauty. Aesthetic preferences have to be acquired. We can think of the brickwork here as a piece of zero art from the 1960s, while someone else may think that it is just sloppy. Perhaps it is precisely because of the scarcity that this beauty is tolerated. Precisely because these are merely scouting premises, this roughness is allowed. But maybe after a few years someone who has never seen a piece of zero art can nonetheless start to appreciate these walls as something beautiful.

JDV In the story of BRAVOURE we rarely use the word 'beauty', but we do use the word 'craftsmanship'. The latter, however, is always linked to a notion of beauty, in a classical sense. We only regard something as a piece of craftsmanship when it is beautiful too.

CG And here the idea of beauty connects with *bravoure*. A synonym for *bravoure* is artfulness, which is of course related to craftsmanship. But then the question is, how does this artfulness apply? On what level is it situated today? Is it about scale, rhythm, proportion, materiality?

TV I think it has more to do with paying attention to certain things. It is also possible to build an ugly building with these same materials, if you do not pay attention to the right things.

EC It is also about anticipation, about tackling problems in advance. A lot of architects write out specifications for a building without, for example, thinking of the specific position of the drainpipes. This is usually left to the contractor to solve.

TV Yes, in the end it is about being involved. You need to commit yourself to the entire building process. It is important to still be involved as an architect at the moment the building is actually being constructed. There is a lot that still needs

Image: Façade texture
Photograph by Marius Grootveld



to be decided during the construction process. And we do not like to use tricks to hide things that went wrong or were not anticipated. Everything is what it is. A detail can just be beautiful. It does not need to be something else. It does not only need to be functional. It bears witness to a conscious and involved building process.

It is a very logical construction viewed from the overall concept of the building. It seems very surreal, but at the same time it is a very rational decision.

— Thomas Dierckx

JDV The ambition of the BRAVOURE project is to demonstrate that our own way of looking at architecture can also be found in the work of others. Here we come across this same perspective in a project by an office of a much larger scale than our own and which usually carries out much larger projects too. It seems that even here, despite the difference in scale, we can still detect the same sensibilities in the making of architecture. Someone has decided to construct these elements in this specific way. How does this happen?

TD This particular detail of a door frame with these transverse pipes is the result of two separate decisions. The first was a very conscious one. The crèche was built as an extension to an existing crèche, next to the original building. The client wanted a passive construction, so from the start we wanted to emphasise the difference with the old building, which is anything but passive. To do this, we wanted to keep the installations and vents visible, to highlight these as an important part of the architecture. We wanted the people who would live and work here to experience the new building differently, and we wanted to stimulate them to use it differently. The second decision was an indirect one that had to do with financial concerns. This wall was originally supposed to be a curtain wall, made of a wooden frame and glass panels. To be able to run these vents through the glazed wall, we introduced a full panel in the frame above the door. For budgetary reasons the curtain wall was ultimately replaced with a gypsum wall, but the full panel and the framing remained.

- CG But the decision to keep this regardless is of course key. Was it a conscious decision to keep it this way, or rather a coincidence that resulted in this construction?
- TD Obviously it was not the original intention to construct it like this, but in the end it was a conscious decision to keep it this way. It seemed to emphasise our basic concept even more. The framing of these vents explicitly addresses the logic of building.
- CG Afterwards, of course, you read this as a very deliberate choice. It seems very orchestrated. On one hand, there are these voluptuous bodies hanging from the ceiling, these ducts and installations that very much resemble physical bodies. On the other, there is this white abstract wall. And then, precisely at the place where these two worlds meet, there is a third element that seems to come from a totally different place, a wooden frame that evokes a very homely architecture. This is Belgian surrealism at its finest.
- TD It is a very logical construction, viewed from the overall concept of the building. It seems very surreal, but at the same time it is a very rational decision.
- CG Yes, but the way you explain this situation, it seems as if this is merely the result of a general ambition to leave the ducts exposed, combined with a budgetary restriction. But in the end someone decided to do it like this, someone who thought this was a good idea, who perhaps thought this was beautiful. That is why it was built the way it was. Now, we do not really seem to be addressing the intentions of this person, as if it were merely an accident that happened due to circumstances. Can we also address the author of this construction? Can we also consider the beauty of the construction as its *raison d'être*?
- TD This is difficult since the person who did this, or author as you say, no longer works with us. I only know of the practical circumstances of the construction. I do not know if this was intended to be something beautiful or not, but this was definitely not the starting point.
- CG But then this means that the idea of beauty is linked to an author. As individ-

uals we can think of something as beautiful or not, but you are also saying that if something is meant to be beautiful, it depends on the author. This is an interesting position to take as a large office in which people come and go.

- JDV This means that individual architects within the context of the larger office are expected to account for their decisions. Then, when the author of a project leaves, the office apparently is able to continue without them, which eventually transforms the individual intentions into the larger ambition of the office. This is what happened here.
- TD Our ambition is not to develop only one distinct signature as an office, but to allow the architects involved in a project to create a building that answers to its specific context, its programme and the client's intentions from their own conceptions about architecture. This detail is the result of this process, which is driven by the general ambition of the office to build good projects — which may also be beautiful.

To start a discussion, an awareness of the environment is necessary. It is about being aware of what is happening around you, spatially, economically, socially. These holes provoke that awareness.

— Laura Muyldermans

As architects, we are always aware of what we are trying to do, and at the same time it is only afterwards that we realise what we really did.

— Dawid Strębicki

JDV The Kijkgat [peephole] project seems to be two-sided. On one hand the project has a clear social engagement. It seems as though there is an involvement with the citizens of Strombeek. It tries to contribute something to a public debate. On the other, it is more than just a response to a public debate. It is also an architectural project. In the end, you were there as architects to propose a spatial intervention, which you then had to execute with the available resources.

DS As architects, we are always aware of what we are trying to do, and at the same time it is only afterwards that we realise what we really did. In the first place, we were there indeed as architects, concerned with the spatial conditions of the place. There was a situation of a brick wall that completely closed off a patch of green. At the same time, we also knew that the citizens of Strombeek experienced a lack of green in their village. So we just tried to put those two simple things together. I do not know whether we were really aware of the fact that this could be a response to a public debate or not, but that is part of the process.

LM We knew that we wanted to do something with this tension between that patch of green, the wall enclosing it, and the larger context of the village. Strombeek is actually something between a village and a city. It is a kind of urbanised village. It is located at the

edge of Brussels, but has been cut off from the countryside by the motorway. Being there, we experienced a tension between the residents' longing for the country and the advancing urbanisation. The presence of this unused plot filled with green in contrast with this desire for the countryside was remarkable to us. Our initial idea was to make the green accessible, to remedy the tension. We wanted to introduce a door in the wall, to draw in the passers-by. In the end we had to abandon this idea for financial and practical concerns, but mainly also because we did not feel like this was the right thing to do. The door would only be a compensation for this desire — instead, we wanted to address the desire itself. Eventually we developed a proposal to drill holes in the wall, which makes the green visible but without allowing access. This would heighten the desire and thus render it explicit. In this sense, you could say that this is more an action within the context of a public debate rather than a solution to a practical problem. But whether that was the intention from the start, I do not know. This is indeed something that develops during the process.

CG In these interviews we often discuss the precision with which these projects have been executed. How important is the precision of this project to succeed as a contribution to the public debate?

DS Precision was definitely required in the way we wanted to execute the idea. Since we wanted to address the citizens of Strombeek as a whole, we could not just drill these holes anywhere. The wall and adjoining pavement run downhill, so we imagined the straight line of the horizon on the wall and drilled the holes along this line. This way, the height of the holes rises in relation to the pavement, and anyone going by encounters a point at which the hole is positioned directly at eye level. Of course, the size and position of the holes were also determined by the structural properties of

the wall. So there was definitely a kind of precision required to execute what seems like a simple project.

JDV The drilled-out parts of the wall were then used as stools in the cultural centre. Was this something you anticipated in advance?

LM It was only when we drilled out those cylinders that we could really understand the potential of these elements. We first saw them as stepping stones making it possible to look through the holes that were too high. But the project was about the wall and the patch of green behind it. Placing these elements in front of the wall seemed to detract from this intention. So we moved them to the Strombeek cultural centre where they became stools. We liked the idea of creating connections across the urban fabric. It is a matter of creating awareness about the spaces people live in. We like to think the inhabitants of Strombeek will notice this connection over time and will look more closely at their environment.

CG This precision is perhaps related to Reyner Banham's use of the word 'arresting'. This kind of decision cannot be explained on the basis of an economic or functional logic, but rather of a logic that originates out of the form of the project itself. In this sense, this is a formal-aesthetic precision. The precision with which the holes have been drilled out, their position, but also the sharpness of the edges — to me this all seems essential to the success of the project. Otherwise, it would just look like a damaged wall. Did you get a response from the neighbourhood?

LM There was no meeting afterwards at which to hear feedback, but we did get positive responses during the drilling of the holes. Then again, there was also the concern that the holes would become dustbins, that people would throw garbage through them.

CG This is an interesting remark, I think. It indicates how the citizens experience the urbanisation of Strombeek as something dirty and hostile. The city is associated with rubbish. This project is really about the shift from village to city and about the fear that its inhabitants

will lose their identity. These holes can be read as a precursor of the increasing disappearance of greenery, a last glimpse of what the residents desire. In this sense, one can regard the holes as an invitation to the inhabitants to think about the direction they want their village to take.

LM Yes, they are indeed an invitation to start a discussion about this urbanisation. To start a discussion, an awareness of the environment is necessary. It is about being aware of what is happening around you, spatially, economically, socially. These holes provoke that awareness.

JDV What you did was to propose a minimal spatial intervention to provoke a debate about a large-scale urban transformation. This intervention was perhaps restricted for financial reasons, but you nonetheless succeeded in making a huge contribution to a public debate, one that was perhaps even non-existent beforehand. To me it seems that this is something that architecture will increasingly need in the future, to find these small moments in building where you can achieve so much with very little.

LM Yes, but at the same time, to us, this did not feel like such a small moment. There were indeed few resources available, but it was still a significant event.



Image Top: Under construction 1
Image Bottom: Under construction 2

30 DETAIL

We did not want to merely decorate the site. Instead we wanted to focus on what this space really needed, partly in the context of the festival, but mostly in the larger context of the city of Brussels.

— Arnout Van Vaerenbergh

The canal divides Brussels at the moment, while it could just as well be a connection. The festival wanted to deal with this situation, and our project, Bridge, addressed this ambition.

— Pieterjan Gijs

It is about constructing something with very few resources in a context where very little is possible, in order to make an unexpected difference on both a spatial and a social level. Simply because we believe that we, as architects, can contribute something to our society. This is bravoure.

— Jan De Vylder

AVV The project can only be understood in the context in which it took place. It was part of Festival Kanal, an urban festival centred on the canal area of Brussels. We were asked to develop a scenography for the heart of the festival. We used this question as an opportunity to address a much broader issue, and in this sense, our proposal was an answer to a different question. We did not want to merely decorate the site. Instead we wanted to focus on what this space really needed, partly in the context of the festival, but mostly in the larger context of the city of Brussels.

PG In the question to develop a scenography for this site, we also felt the need for a gesture that would lend the site a certain visibility in its urban context. We also knew that for some time already there had been plans to build a bridge there, but that this had stalled because of the complex regulations in Brussels. So we wanted to use the festival as an opportunity to build a bridge after all, and in doing this, to lend visibility to the festival.

JDV I think this is the first moment of *bravoure* in this project. You were able to catch up with over a decade of administration about whether or not it is permissible to build a bridge there, precisely because it is not clear whether your project really is a bridge or rather an art project.

AVV We see this as an art project in the sense that it was also about the performance of assembling and disassembling the bridge. It was only there for three days, so you can definitely ask whether it was really about the bridge as such. But it is also precisely because it was only there for three days that we were able to build the bridge. We notified all the relevant authorities and filed all the necessary paperwork, but because city regulations are so complex, the bridge had already been taken down again before the administration could process it.

PG A real bridge is apparently not possible here. But because of the temporary character of our project, the context of the festival and the artistic nature of the project, we could take a shortcut through the administrative machinery and realise this very quickly.

JDV A second moment of *bravoure* in this project is then perhaps that it is also a very beautiful gesture to make a bridge simply by placing two cranes horizontally. Especially in a city that is filled with vertical cranes constructing new buildings, but which nonetheless fails to connect its different communities with each other.

PG Yes, this is indeed again a response to its urban context. The location of the bridge at the canal is between a rich and a poor part of Brussels, between the Dansaert area and Molenbeek. The canal divides Brussels at the moment, while it could just as well be a connection. The festival wanted to deal with this situation, and our project, Bridge, addressed this ambition.

CG Exactly, this is a city that is currently one of the most problematic areas of Europe. It is one of the most complicated and segregated cities, cultural-

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considered these four joints in the centre to be a bridge within the bridge. In the same way the bridge connects the two banks of the canal, this construction detail connects the two parts of the bridge itself.

CG Yes, that detail in the middle of the bridge is loaded with meaning. It is the essence of the bridge. It connects the whole construction and results in its architectural experience. At the same time, it contains the complete political reality of Brussels, the need for a connection. In one small gesture it is able to condense its whole spatial and social context, and in doing so it shapes this situation, it becomes a monument.

PG This construction detail is indeed the crucial point of the bridge. It is basically the only part that had to be designed. The other parts are standard cranes that we rented and which we were able to use in a different way precisely because of this one element. The project is really about assessing what is available and about thinking of how we can employ this differently.

JDV Yes, this is the *bravoure* that we are looking for. On one hand, to build a bridge for only three days seems rather decadent, but on the other, it arises out of a condition of scarcity. It is about constructing something with very few resources in a context where very little is possible, in order to make an unexpected difference on both a spatial and a social level. Simply because we believe that we, as architects, can contribute something to our society. This is *bravoure*.

ly, socially and economically. It has the biggest social problems a city can have. In this context, by building a connection or rather, by projecting the image of a connection, which is even more important here, you are of course making a political statement. The project is really about the fact that this city desperately needs a connection.

PG Yes, because of its context, building something here almost automatically becomes a political act.

JDV But to realise a project like this, in the end you also have to construct something. Despite the fact that your practice is very much situated on the border between architecture and art, in the end you are still architects and you have to figure out how to make something, down to its very details. And this shows itself especially in the construction detail at the centre of the bridge.

AVV The construction detail of the four joints in the centre is indeed the result of an architectural choice. The kink in the bridge does not have any structural value. A previous idea for the bridge was a simple horizontal structure, which would also have worked well from a structural perspective. But then you would have experienced the whole bridge already at the moment you stepped onto it. The other side is immediately visible, there is no turning point. By introducing this kink, we could change the perspective inside the bridge. The slope creates a completely different experience. The climb to the top adds an element of suspense. It also results in a window in the centre of the bridge, which frames the perspectival depth of the canal and the surrounding façades converging towards the horizon. It reinforces this perspective.

JDV This is then a third moment of *bravoure*. It demonstrates the importance of a construction detail. Not only in the structural sense, to prevent the bridge from collapsing, but as an architect you use this as an opportunity to give the project an architectural turn.

AVV This way, all we needed were two simple cranes that we could flip horizontally and connect with each other. We

This is an economy of ideas. To solve different problems in one gesture. Perhaps they are not problems in a strict sense. It is about addressing all kinds of aspects of a building in one movement.

— Stéphane Beel

SB These lights are the result of the simple question to provide lighting to an outdoor space. At the time, I could not find any light fixtures I liked so I tried making them myself, in a very basic way. These are just simple, waterproof lights, with a few posts and a cable. When you combine them, they evoke a clothes line. I thought this worked really well in that environment, it seemed to reinforce the space.

JDV Is it really that simple?

SB Yes, but at the same time it is more than that, of course. You create something that does not belong there. You are distorting a very trivial element into something different. So, on one hand you completely meet the demand to add light to a space, you meet all the technical specifications about waterproofing and fire resistance. But on the other, you do not meet the demand since you yourself create a lamp out of elements one would not expect there.

JDV This same attitude can also be seen in the building itself, I think. For example, the sunshades that were never realised would have been nothing more than industrial nets. Simple objects that do not belong there, but still answer to the need to block out the sun.

SB The design for the Tacktower is indeed simple, very basic. It is about employing what is available as well as possible. The original building had all kinds of different spaces, quite different from each other. To keep the character of these spaces intact, we merely added a glass box on the side to organise the circulation within the building. This glass construction faces the city, becoming a kind of billboard. The nets we wanted to use as sunshades would

create a pattern on that billboard, a kind of abstract painting. But, again, in a very simple way by using elements one would not expect there.

JDV Of course, it is more than a collection of objets trouvés. This attitude is something that can also be recognised in the construction of the architecture itself. For example, the window frames also seem to be the result of this basic way of looking at things. A T-profile to place the glass in and a glazing bead to screw everything in place. Simple, but intelligent. Is this the result of the same attitude as the lights?

SB I try to look at things in a simple way, to reduce things to something basic. It is not a desire for purity as such, but rather because nothing more is necessary. Things can be very simple, and that is it.

CG This same clothes line of lights returns in a later project of yours, the expansion of deSingel in Antwerp. Again, there are only a few posts stuck in the ground with a cable strung between them to hang the lights. To be honest, I cannot imagine a stronger image of what architecture is. It looks like a temple, or like an exercise in post-and-beam architecture. Only here, the beam has become a cable or a garland. The Romans made the same gesture, planting a few posts in the ground and hanging a garland between them. This is a basic demarcation of place. It is a gesture that is very functional, but at the same time it also evokes a memory of a festive architecture that is over two thousand years old.

SB The first act of architecture that is possible in a landscape is the building of a wall. This gesture establishes a front and a back, a place to hide; it introduces a human scale in the landscape. That is architecture. It is one of the most basic things you can do, but at the same time it is full of meaning. Here, in Antwerp, the intention was to define a place with very few resources. And then the clothes line returns, like a cadavre exquis — almost, since

es available. As an architect, these are things you need to address in one basic gesture, simply by making architecture.

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ECONOMY

In our practice, we have abandoned functionalism as a possible answer to the question of economy. Instead, we try to develop architecture on a more abstract level, to produce certain spatial effects. It is about creating spatial configurations that provide opportunities rather than trying to solve specific questions.

— Kersten Geers

This notion of an economy of means has to do with redistribution — in the sense of rearranging conventional elements to establish a different reading of a place.

— David Van Severen

DVS This fence is the result of a very abstract notion of what a fence can be, but at the same time it is the result of its specific, material construction. There is this constant oscillation between the conceptual and the material that drives the design process. This fence is about setting up a perimeter, about rhythm, about dimensions. But it is also about the position of the screws. It is not just a fence either. Where the fence runs underneath the upper floor of the house, it becomes a load-bearing structure. To do this, the steel T-sections of the fence have to become I-sections that are exactly double its size. So, it is really about being able to reconsider what you want to build on a very abstract level, while at the same time having sufficient knowledge about the actual construction of these things too.

KG The house in Buggenhout is indeed both a very conceptual story and a material one. It does not start from an obsession about using this specific type of T-section or that specific type of I-section. These things are important, but they are not fixed ideas. These choices were mostly defined by a very limited economy. For example, early on, the ground floor was supposed to be in concrete and the upper floor in wood, or perhaps there was not going to be an

it is my own drawing that I further develop. The same elements were used, but in a different context, in different proportions and in different materials. In Kortrijk, it was just a simple line. In Antwerp, it defines a space.

CG Repetition is of course fundamental to architecture. In two thousand years of architectural history, the reprise was an essential theme. With the modernists, this became problematic, but then you see that this still happens. Some things are so basic and so universal that you cannot do without them. A wall is a wall. You can stick two posts in the ground with a beam on top in many different ways, but in the end it is the same principle. In that sense, this simple gesture contains a kind of primitivism. The space is defined with very basic elements, but you understand it immediately.

SB You do not always have to think of new solutions to the same problems. You can go back to what other people did and reuse those things in different ways. It depends on how you interpret these things.

CG But this clothes line is of course more than just a solution. In the context of BRAVOURE, solutions are considered as opportunities to do something more. Many problems in building today are solved in a technological way, for which there is usually enough money. But when you want to address these same things by just using the space, it is still regarded as a luxury. We live in a culture that believes in technology as the solution to problems. This clothes line indeed answers to a demand for light, but it also defines the space much more than a standard light fitting would, by using very little. To us, this seems like an act of *bravoure*.

SB This is an economy of ideas. To solve different problems in one gesture. Perhaps they are not problems in a strict sense. It is about addressing all kinds of aspects of a building in one movement. The problem here was to create light and at the same time to define the space. I wanted to create a kind of vestibule, and there were few resourc-

upper floor at all. We thought it would be cheaper to do it in wood, but we could not find a good contractor to do this. So eventually all of this changed into simple brickwork and plaster. When the project stalled because of a timing issue, we used this as an opportunity to convince the contractor to do the upper floor in wood after all. The position of the materials changes throughout the process, but by embracing this you can maximise their potential every time. This indeed requires a constant movement from a conceptual position to a technical one and back again.

DVS Yes, but it does begin with a very abstract approach. In the end, the fence is given form through a simple post-and-beam composition, but of course, it starts out from a conceptual idea of what a fence can be.

CG So it really is about having the opportunity to do things. What you achieve, in the end, has to do partly with what you want to do, and partly with what you can do, in terms of both knowledge and resources.

DVS Yes, this is what we call an 'economy of means'.

CG This notion of economy is something that keeps returning in these conversations. This is usually related to a functionalist logic in which resources are employed according to functional principles to maximise their performance. Yet here the notion of economy becomes related to the idea of *bravoure*, and thus assumes a different meaning from a strictly functional one. The decision to prioritise and employ certain elements is not the result of this functional instrumentalisation. What, then, is the underlying logic?

KG In our practice, we have indeed abandoned functionalism as a possible answer to the question of economy. Instead, we try to develop architecture on a more abstract level, to produce certain spatial effects. It is about creating spatial configurations that provide opportunities rather than trying to solve specific questions. For example, in this project, the establishment of a perime-

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BDH Yes, and that is perhaps why Ante's intervention was the only art integration that was realised in the projects of Scholen van Morgen. When we won the competition, there was no definitive proposal from Ante yet, but his involvement was already included in the design proposal. Later, this was never questioned because we never had any budgetary discussions to begin with. When we had already received the demolition permits and the planning permission for the new buildings, Ante finally suggested saving one of the pavilions from demolition.

AT The reason why I hesitated so long to intervene is because this was the first time I had to make a definitive proposal. My drawings always contain a sense of openness, but here I had to propose something complete. The art integration was limited by a number of restrictions. For example, the work had to be connected to the building, it had to last at least thirty years, and it could not be sold during that time. When you add up those things, you quickly arrive at a drawing on the wall or a sculpture anchored to the building. But when I saw the final plans of what would be built and what would be demolished, I thought it would be interesting to propose a third category, of what could not be demolished. This proposal met all the restrictions, and at the same time, by claiming one of those pavilions as a work of art in which something can happen over the next thirty years, I was able to retain that sense of openness I needed. That is why this pavilion needs to stay empty now, to keep all possibilities open.

BDC In this context of scarcity and economic restraint, keeping the pavilion empty is of course an interesting gesture. This art integration was made possible by an economisation of the project as a whole, and since there is one pavilion less that needs to be demolished now, this intervention is probably accompanied by a further reduction of costs. But afterwards, precisely by keeping

OR PERHAPS, PROJECT 17

This is perhaps a rather unexpected conclusion to draw here at the end, how conditions of scarcity, precisely by doing nothing or almost nothing at all, can lead to a moment of excess.

— Jan De Vylder

BDH Ante was involved in the project from the start, when it was still a competition entry for an Open Call of the Team Flemish Government Architect. When we won the competition, this became a project of *Scholen van Morgen* [Schools of tomorrow], which is a public-private partnership between the Flemish government and the banking sector. In the end, *Scholen van Morgen* discarded any kind of art integration in their projects, except for Ante's participation.

JDV The general set-up of *Scholen van Morgen* is a political strategy to balance a country's budget by transferring the construction of new schools to private partners, which are mostly concerned with the financial side of things. As a result, the design for this new school was very much defined by conditions of scarcity, and yet there was still room for an artistic intervention.

BDH The budget was indeed limited. The original school consisted of fourteen outdated pavilions which were going to be demolished. In its place a new school needed to be built, using limited resources. So, from the start, we decided to adopt a modest attitude and to develop a very restrained architecture. This meant basic materials, simple construction methods, standard detailing. But in our practice, we always try to deal with a budget economically, and this sometimes allows for a margin to involve others in the project too.

BDC This notion of redistribution often recurs in these conversations. By using fewer resources in one place, it becomes possible to do more in other places.

usually necessary while compensating for it in others?

DVS We always project a certain ambition for a project. And in the end, the ambition is always to create architecture. A standard fence would definitely be cheaper, but it would not meet our ambition. We do not want to create a parody of an existing fence, we want to rethink what a fence can be, which means that we have to design the possibility of a fence anew, instead of using an existing one.

KG This is something that often returns in our projects. We have a tendency to invest a lot of resources into things that at first sight seem the least relevant. Not as a provocation, but because we have the ambition to use architecture to create a sense of place in the field in which we operate. The last thing you need, then, are elements that are used everywhere. Instead, you need to achieve a kind of idealisation of the techniques that are used elsewhere and to try to give them a sense of beauty, which lends these otherwise banal elements a kind of importance. We are not afraid of this notion of beauty. I think we explicitly try to create beauty. This, as David said, has to do with rhythm, proportion and dimensions. Sometimes it is about materiality too, but it is always about dimensions. By focusing on these aspects, you can give an object without clear meaning a sense of beauty nonetheless.

JDV It is indeed about the rearrangement of an everyday and banal reality, which results in a different perception. In the story of BRAVOURE, the notion of beauty is definitely related to this rearrangement, because it means that we can still find beauty in places where you would not expect it.

in combination with this double set of nine rooms allows for the possibility of a house, but it does not limit the building to this function. This is of course a shift in perspective. In our economy of means, this pragmatic question of what is necessary for a house becomes rather a question of how to define a series of spaces through a set of perimeters or markers, which then allows for other things too. It is about accepting that you do not need to solve much in the world — you only need to redistribute things differently.

DVS This notion of an economy of means indeed has to do with redistribution — in the sense of rearranging conventional elements to establish a different reading of a place.

KG Yes, for example, every house has a fence. But according to regulations, these fences can only have a limited height. By placing the fence inside the plot instead of at the edge, we had total control and the fence could be as high as necessary to function as a load-bearing structure, for example. Placing the fence inside the plot also allowed for an entrance on the side of the building, creating two equal outdoor spaces at the front and back of the house, something which completely subverts this standard notion of a front and back façade. The logic here is indeed to subvert the normal reading of the hierarchy of a place. With a minimum of means it becomes possible to undermine the conventions that are usually associated with suburbs in Flanders.

JDV But still, you decided to construct a new kind of fence out of steel beams, instead of using the standard type you typically see in this environment. This is definitely not the cheapest way to build one. On the other hand, inside the house we can see how standard cinder blocks have been used and left unfinished. This is a typical construction element employed in the cheapest way possible. Perhaps this economy of means you describe also means redistributing certain costs and using more resources in certain places than is

the pavilion empty, it can be read as a waste of space and thus as an excess instead.

JDV Yes, a design process is always accompanied by a discussion about how to match the necessary programme with the amount of square metres that can be realised within the budget. Usually, this means downsizing the programme to meet the budget. But now, by preserving one of the pavilions, there is suddenly a surplus of square metres available which nobody really knows what to do with exactly. And then the artist decides that it needs to be empty.

AT This is indeed a matter that has not yet been settled. The school board has already proposed ideas for a new function of the pavilion. There have even been talks about using it for bike storage. But to me, this emptiness is not yet exhausted. What matters are the possibilities it contains, rather than already defining how it should be used. Once the decision has been taken to use it as a bike shelter, nothing else is possible anymore.

BDC This is of course related to the status of the building. Originally it was considered to be architecture — it used to be a building with a specific function. Through this artistic intervention, however, it has been transformed into a work of art, and as such it needs to remain empty according to the artist. But the school board apparently still sees it as architecture. They still try to project a functional meaning onto the building. It is then a question of how to read this space. While the pavilion had already been discarded and was ready for demolition, it was eventually saved through an artistic intervention. But by reading it as architecture afterwards, it can still be considered an excess nonetheless.

AT Maybe, then, the building needs to remain empty for at least six years, until all of the current students who used to have classes there are gone. By then, a new generation of students will have

experienced the pavilion as an empty building, and perhaps then it will be read as a work of art.

JDV This preservation of the pavilion and these ongoing discussions of what to do with it demonstrate how opportunities — and even excess — are still to be found in that which has been discarded, which is precisely the *bravoure* we are looking for. On the other hand, the new school that was built next to it deals with conditions of scarcity too. It is precisely because of its restrained architecture that this artistic intervention is made possible. Now, it is almost as if we find ourselves in a state of confusion about which of the two is really an act of *bravoure* and what this still means. This is perhaps a rather unexpected conclusion to draw here at the end, how conditions of scarcity, precisely by doing nothing or almost nothing at all, can lead to a moment of excess.

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Image: 805/2015, drawing on paper
Drawing by Ante Timmermans



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Ante Timmermans: "We mostly/only talk about what there is and not about what there is not. The positive space is negative space. While at first the pavilions defined the open space automatically, the cleared (open) space now has to define itself - forced? (im)possibility. The preserved, empty pavilion is both positive and negative space. To 'plant' the demolished pavilions again in the open space, is to define (and situate) the new negative space."

TRIPTYCH
book
exhibition

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BRAVOURE as a small book that just so tries to observe things differently.

A different architecture. A different future. Brought into focus, and demonstrated.

BRAVOURE as an exhibition. As context for the book. A demonstration on a human scale. And somehow, as reality.

BRAVOURE is demonstrated through thirteen fragments of thirteen buildings of thirteen architects. Thirteen fragments as triptychs.

The fragments of reality as demonstrations of *bravoure*. In three perspectives.

A photographic observation of the fragment as a first perspective. Before reality was cut away.

A photograph, as observation. As it is. By Filip Dujardin. As photographer.

A one-on-one representation of the fragment as a second perspective.

On a human scale. As a model. After reality was cut way.
At first, only that.

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A third perspective is neither perceived as reality nor as fragment, but as a contrast through the work of Filip Dujardin. As artist.

A very different work. An observation, as manipulation.

A third perspective that transforms the second perspective into a different perspective. Not as artefact isolated from reality, but as architecture in itself.

The reason for the triptych. A layered observation.

This is when craftsmanship becomes *bravoure*. When that which is barely visible in its banal reality can become a reality in itself. And thus be beauty in itself.

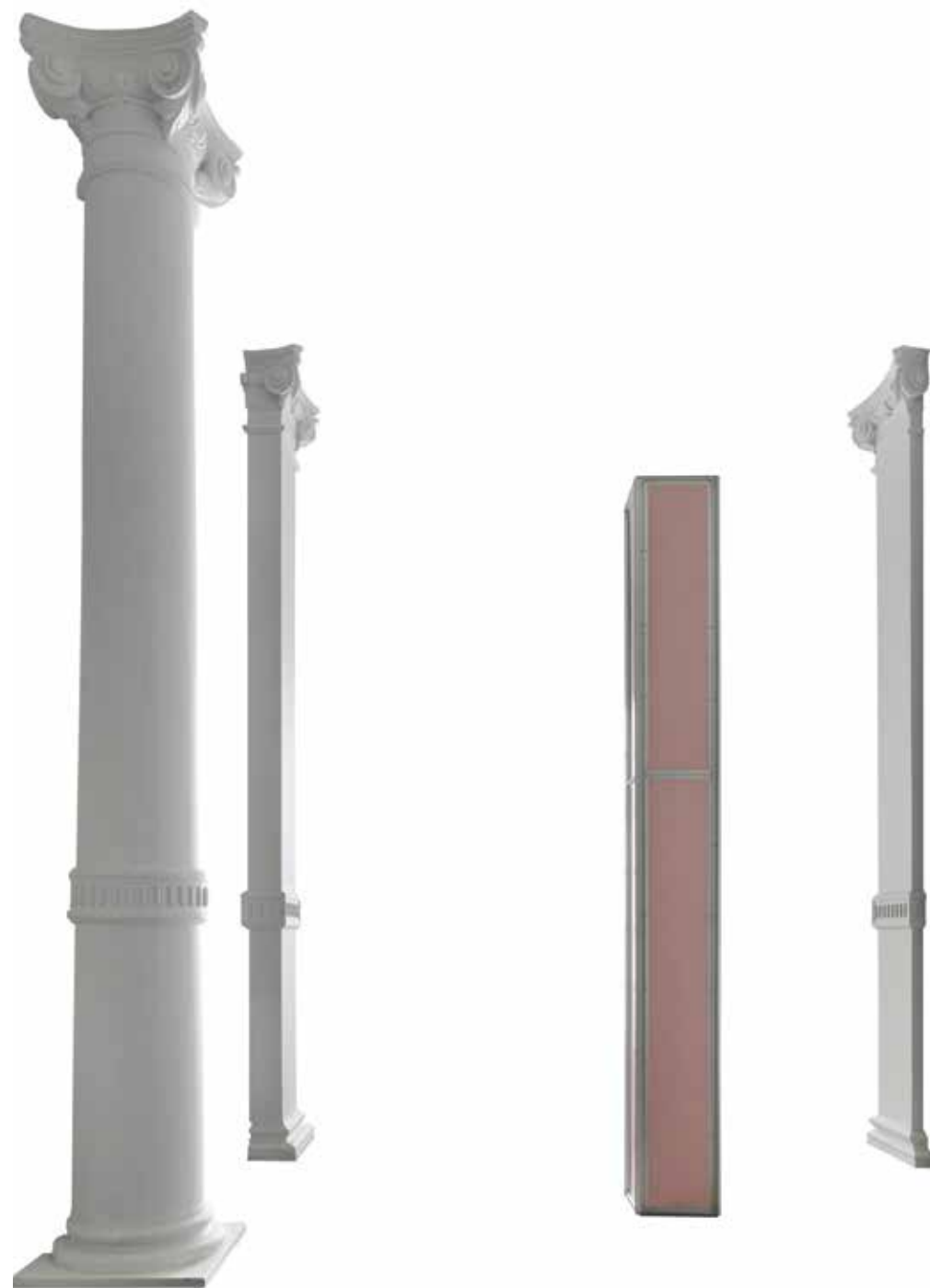






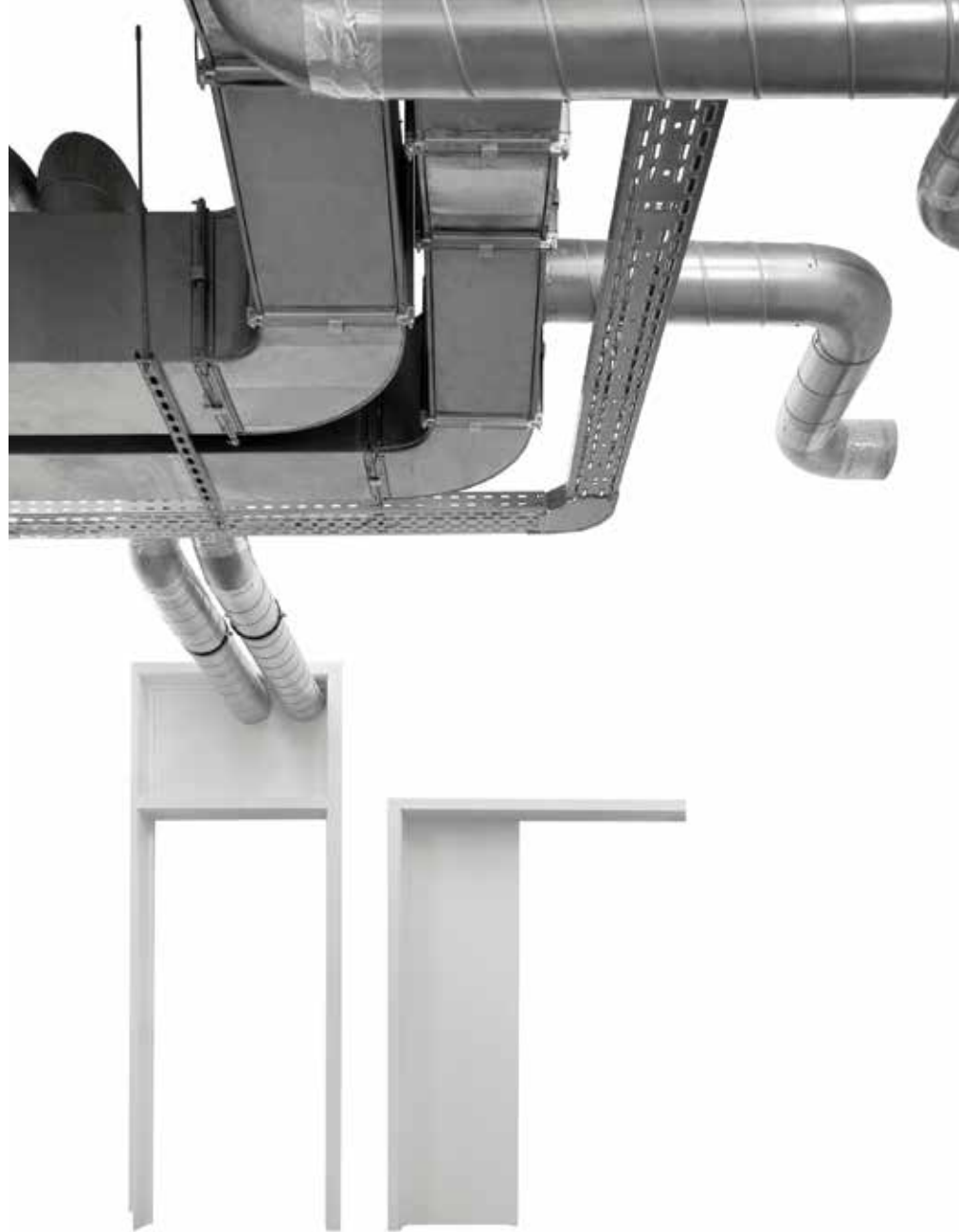
Filip Dujardin — two trees, 2006













Filip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2007







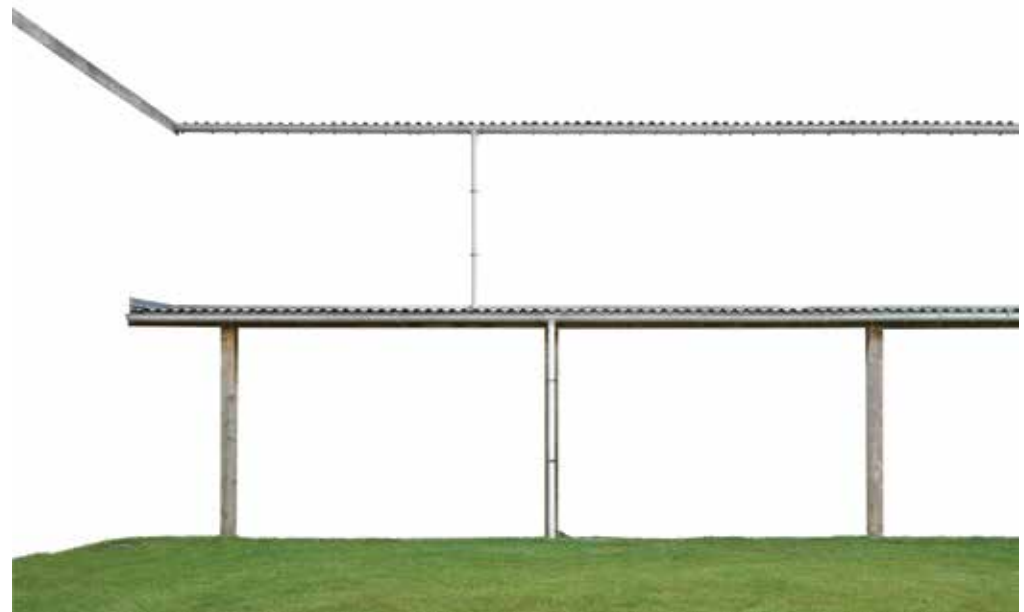






Filip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2007



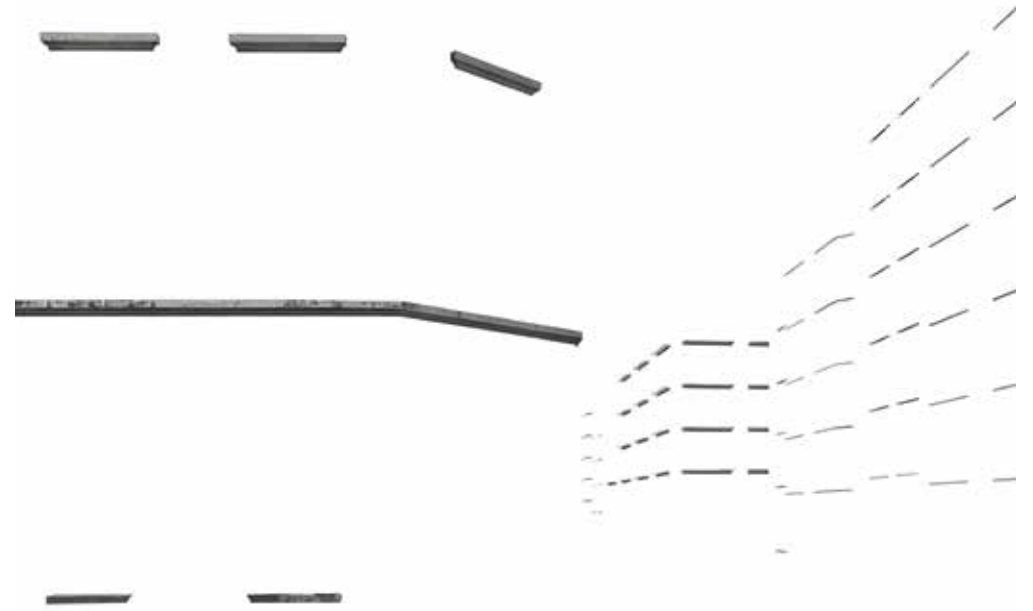




Filip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2007



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Filip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2010











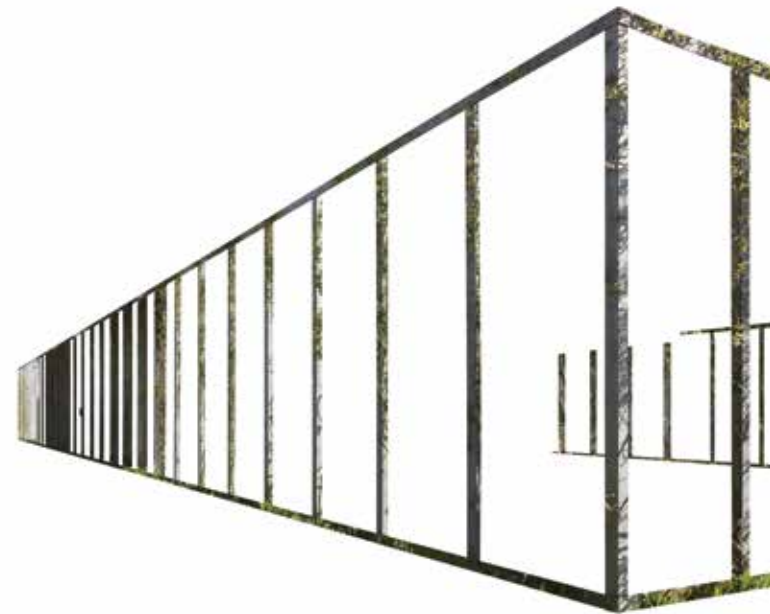


Filip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2011













Photograph by Jeroen Verrecht, 2014





Flip Dujardin — untitled from series *Fictions*, 2007





Filip Dujardin — *memorial II*, 2016







13th DEMONSTRATION

— AMBITION

— MANIFESTO

The pavilion still bears the traces of the previous exhibition. But not just as traces. The traces are celebrated.

The walls may be damaged, but they will be polished and will shine. What is damaged will remain damaged, but it will tell a story.

To polish what was expected to be painted. To hold dear what was expected to be hidden. With less than half of what was expected. And to tell a story that was not expected to be told. This is the thirteenth demonstration of the ambition.

And above all, a manifestation. A manifestation of an attitude. Of a perspective on architecture. Of a perspective on life.

The final demonstration of what is celebrated as *bravoure*.

But there is more.

The pavilion as a building. It looks good, at first sight. But perhaps not that

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good, after all.

It rains inside. The floor is damaged. The roof is coming apart. Today we have to deal with this. Tomorrow we have to deal with even more.

The pavilion needs reparations. Urgently. Structurally. The pavilion has two inhabitants, but neither seems to know the other. And any agenda seems to be lacking.

Of course, total and structural repair is necessary. But of course, total and structural repair needs resources.

And time. But time is running out.

The 13th demonstration — as manifestation — sets an example. Not only through its polished walls. But through a perspective on the pavilion as a building.

INTERMEZZO

Villa Tugendhat in Brno.
By Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
A kind of mirror tape wraps the
chrome railing of a staircase
leading down. As a temporary
reparation. As a temporary
protection. But also, as beauty.
Especially this.

A beautiful connection between
chrome and mirror tape.
Between rich and poor.
Between rich and rich. Two
kinds of rich. Mirror tape.
A different meaning since Brno.



Image: Villa Tugendhat, one week before restoration
Photography by architecten de vylder vinck taillieu

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A first perspective of repair. And protest. 126

Thirteen buckets collect rain. Three posts support the roof. Mirror tape wraps the bucket. Mirror tape wraps the post.

They celebrate their banal reality. Not only as reparations. But also perhaps as beauty. Even though they were not expected to be.

And a greenhouse. A mirror-taped greenhouse. To replace a roof light that lets in rain rather than light. To build a greenhouse as a roof light is to build a different perspective on what a roof light could be. A different light. A different transparency. A different economy.

An exhibition is a momentum. Every time. To demonstrate ambitions. As idea. As challenge. As a demonstration of how things can be done differently from how things are expected to be done.

A second perspective. Of generosity.

Scaffolding. Every inhabitant needs scaffolding. And every time the scaffolding needs to be transported back and

forth. Each their own. Never shared. 127

An economy of excess.

BRAVOURE provides a scaffolding. For all inhabitants. For the future. Wrapped in mirror tape. Not just useful, but also beauty. Especially beauty.

When part of an exhibition can become part of the pavilion. Every time. As attitude. As ambition.

And finally, a white flag. As a perspective of surrender. And not to surrender.

If the call is to report from the front, then BRAVOURE is the answer. A demonstration. And a manifesto. But a manifesto is also a call. To answer the call with a different call.

The white flag as a sign of surrender. Of course. A surrender to architecture. But never a surrender of architecture.

By recognising beauty in the banal reality of the everyday. What was once a fundament of architecture. What is here a fundament of architecture again.

This is *bravoure*.



At Villa Tugendhat, by Mies van der Rohe. A kind of mirror tape wraps the chrome railing. Temporary reparation. Temporary protection. But also, temporary beauty. Much later, at MANIERA 05 & 06, by architecten de volder vincck taillieu. The mirror tape returns. Here, a post wrapped in mirror tape. To transform an element for construction into an element or living. The post as such. As beauty.

crafts
man
ship

art
ful
ness

scarcity
BRAVOURE

BRAVOURE is nothing less than a call.

A call to consider simple making as the making of architecture. In all modesty: to consider it as an ambition for architecture too. In all pretension: to consider it as the ambition of architecture *par excellence*.

Craftsmanship contains the act of making. Of man — or rather, of woman and man.

Artfulness contains the idea of elevation. Of the craft. Elevated as art.

Not only the most skilled execution. But also the most imaginative. Especially that.

Bravoure is only *bravoure* when craftsmanship and skilfulness are revealed in a context of scarcity. In a context of what may seem like an impossibility. *Bravoure* only reveals itself where what was con-

sidered to be impossible is proven to be possible after all.

Scarcity as a momentum in economy.
A momentum of our time.

Imagination and making here come closer than ever before. They have to. They should.

To consider *bravoure* as ambition is not only possible. It is necessary.

Because in times of scarcity, imagination is in danger. While imagination is precisely the chance to find opportunities in scarcity.

BRAVOURE through SCARCITY is BEAUTY.

This is not only a call as a sign of our times. It is a call to consider the universal dimension of architecture as the art of thinking through making.

In times of scarcity, there seems to be an absence of opportunity. But opportunities are not about what is possible.

Opportunities are about what is wanted to be possible.

ON FUNDAMENTALS

JDV With this project we wanted to bring architecture back to its ordinary and banal necessities. In doing so, we were looking for that first, small step through which architecture distinguishes itself as architecture. It is almost a return to the primitive hut, but not quite. It's about the next step, the first movement through which the primitive hut becomes architecture.

CG Why is this an inevitable and necessary project?

JDV In a way, architecture has perhaps become saturated with grand discourses about its social and political function, in an almost scientific way. We want to go back to that moment during the construction of the primitive hut when it was constructed ever so differently, in a way that was barely perceptible but which made all the difference. At that moment the primitive hut became architecture. This was the initial emancipation of the primitive hut. We want to return to this shift in meaning, not through discourse, but through the construction process itself.

CG The construction of the primitive hut is about solving a problem. There is a need for shelter and the hut is the solution. When you say that the primitive hut only becomes architecture at this moment of emancipation, you are actually saying that architecture is different from solving a problem. It is more than just addressing this need for shelter.

JDV Exactly, it is about a return to the fundamentals of architecture, but not a return to the primitive hut itself. It is really about how to make things, and how to do so differently. In this sense, we are reconsidering craftsmanship as one of the fundamentals of architecture.

CG But why now?

JDV Because today the world is facing a condition of scarcity which calls into question certain practices in architecture. BRAVOURE offers a moment to turn back and reconsider

what it means to make architecture in relation to this condition of scarcity.

ON WEALTH

IV I think it is important to recognise that there is a wealth to be found in these conditions of scarcity through which architecture can develop its meaning. With BRAVOURE we want to demonstrate this wealth.

CG What kind of wealth? Can we define it?
IV I think it has to do with necessity. For example, in the project by Henk De Smet and Paul Vermeulen, the birds are the result of a necessity, of technical requirements for lighting and acoustics. Those elements need to hang there, but you do not want to hang them randomly.

SE Exactly, you do not want to, but you could. I don't think this has to do with necessity. Those elements are hung in the shape of a bird, but why? I think it is because you want to do something as an architect. You want to create architecture. You want to distinguish yourself.

CG Which is perhaps a different kind of necessity.

FD How does this distinguish itself from the primitive hut?

SE The primitive hut is not architecture. It is an answer to a basic need, only a solution. In the primitive hut there are no intentions. It lacks an author.

FD Yes, like a bird that builds its own nest.

CG But how do we define this wealth?

IV The notion of craftsmanship implies wealth in one way or another. By being involved in the making of something, and consciously considering the construction process, there is automatically a shift in meaning. As Stefanie said, at this point the construction starts to show traces of an author. This is already a kind of wealth.

SE Yes, in the projects exhibited here, all kinds of wealth are addressed. Perhaps that is what that list of words means through which we have tried to define these projects. Generosity, dignity, awareness, acceptance. These are different kinds of wealth.

ON SCARCITY

JDV By connecting the notion of *bravoure* to scarcity, we want to demonstrate

how there are still things to be found in conditions of scarcity. That is why the BRAVOURE project is so important, not only from the point of view of architecture, but also from a general world view. It is about finding opportunities in places where we no longer expect to find opportunities, or where we are not allowed to find opportunities. It is about believing in something of which everyone thinks that it either does not qualify or is unimportant, and to find value there nonetheless.

CG Which here means to focus on elements in architecture that have long been dismissed as banal or ordinary?

JDV Yes. With BRAVOURE we are basically saying that there are many opportunities in these ordinary elements and that we can still make architecture with them.

ON INSTRUMENTALISATION

CG When talking about the primitive hut, we discussed how this follows an instrumental logic. It is a construction that considers each element as an instrument to solve a specific problem. With BRAVOURE you say that these elements, as basic as they may be, are not merely instruments, but have value in themselves.

FD And fulfil their function at the same time.

CG Yes. However, this notion of 'function' is still strictly related to the idea of instrumentalisation. It derives from mathematics. There is a problem and there is an element whose function it is to solve it. This is a strictly one-on-one relationship. What BRAVOURE demonstrates, however, is that these elements have a value in themselves. In other words, we are here trying to free our considerations about architecture from this instrumental logic. The projects exhibited here propose a series of perspectives on architecture that differ from an instrumental one.

JDV In our practice we always try to avoid solving things

CG Exactly, and this is the same attitude that Adorno and Horkheimer expressed in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. To them, the problem

of modern society is this focus on the instrumentalisation of the world, which transforms the Enlightenment into a repressive apparatus. They consider this straightforward, functional relationship between a problem and its solution as being extremely suspicious. This is one of the problems they see with modernity. I think the projects we show also contain a deep mistrust towards this instrumentalisation of the world. Instead of solving things, these projects try to create opportunities.

JT Yes, it is not about solving a problem – rather, it is about making things possible. Making it possible to deal with acoustics, for example. This is different.

CG It is indeed not a simple vector that points from one thing to another. Instead, it is a multiplicity of vectors, which have a general sense but still point in other directions too. To use the same example of Henk De Smet and Paul Vermeulen, the bird they created not only meets the requirements for acoustics and lighting, but it also generates a sky inside the building. Birds fly through the air, an infinite space. When you look up at those birds, it seems as if the ceiling is receding. It also breaks the way the light enters the building. It creates shadows that move during the day. It does so much more than solve the need for acoustics and lighting. In this sense, they completely surpass their supposed function.

ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

JDV BRAVOURE was a response to an open call for proposals from the Flanders Architecture Institute that focused on the theme of craftsmanship. This indicates, of course, that there is a broad interest in craftsmanship, beyond our own obsessions. It is apparently a relevant theme for the Flemish Community too, and maybe even beyond. Why this focus on craftsmanship?

CG We launched this question as the Flanders Architecture Institute because we believe that this will perhaps be one of the most important questions in architecture for the coming decades. I think the question of civilisation and

how to preserve this is deeply related to the notion of craftsmanship. It is really about how we make the world around us, and how we preserve a human dignity in all of this. Precisely because of the industrial nature of our society today, this question of how to make things is extremely relevant. This is of course a social discourse. It is about giving everyone a place and value in our society. It is about making sense of the world, in which the production of things plays a crucial role. It is about creating meaningful things and a meaningful culture through which our lives develop meaning too.

IV I think this has indeed a lot to do with the industrial nature of our society, which we have to deal with as architects. A lot of the projects that we show deal with this too. Craftsmanship is no longer about handicrafts, about a woodworker creating everything by hand in his workshop. It is about dealing with an industrial production process and looking for a human scale in it. This is a different kind of craftsmanship.

ON THE HUMAN SCALE

JDV With the notion of craftsmanship, BRAVOURE is also about the human scale in architecture. These projects all have a human scale: a letter box, a light fitting, a drainpipe, a plinth. It is not about craftsmanship per se, but about the people that meet in architecture through this craftsmanship.

CG Precisely. The notion of craftsmanship is definitely related to the human scale. It is about the people who make these things. Through the traces they leave behind in the construction of things, they are valued again. This is not a classical humanism, but rather a kind of material animism. The objects take on meaning precisely because they lend a presence to the people who made them. But as we see here, this also entails a questioning of the correctness of things. In some of the projects, things were not done as they should have been, something which a lot of people, including craftsmen, would have disapproved of. But this was done to lend things a par-

ticularity again, to draw attention to the presence of these ordinary elements and their makers. Sometimes this has to be done at the expense of correctness or conventions.

SE But it is even more than that. It is also about the human experience of the space. And this is very hard to deal with when talking to clients. They expect a solution to their problem and everything else is regarded as an extra. It is extremely difficult to express this human experience that we strive for, especially in relation to a budget or functional requirements.

ON BEAUTY

JDV What we do not really discuss when we talk about craftsmanship and *bravoure* is the notion of beauty. I think all of this definitely has to do with beauty, in its broadest sense.

CG What we are discussing here definitely has a universal dimension. On the other hand, the notion of beauty is also something that has become highly problematic in modernity. For thousands of years, there was a classical definition of what beauty was supposed to be, and what it was not. Modernity was about questioning these fundamental principles and pushing the boundaries of what beauty could be. Our notions of beauty today entail completely different things from classical principles of symmetry and harmony. It is definitely relevant here, but also very problematic.

JDV Yes, but what I mean is that with BRAVOURE we are trying to discover beauty in places that are not seen as containing beauty. This is the crucial point. We do not want to define what beauty is, but we do want to demonstrate that there is also beauty to be found in things that are usually ignored. Craftsmanship is inseparably connected to the love with which someone makes something and with caring for the things you create, which is inevitably connected to a sense of beauty too.

FD For me, the notion of beauty is indeed very problematic. I would not connect *bravoure* with beauty, since this is something about which entire libraries have

maximum of resources to attain a minimal goal. By doing the opposite, we can emphasise BRAVOURE even more.

JDV Yes, in a way it would be inappropriate to present BRAVOURE in a clean and white environment as if it were a museum or an art gallery. It would transform the things we want to show into artefacts, while they are still very much architecture. Now we only use half the paint to achieve so much more.

ON THE AMBITION

CG This project was conceived in the context of the Venice Biennale, but its ambition is perhaps much wider. What remains of the project once we leave Venice?

JDV To be very pretentious, the ambition of the project is to propose a specific perspective on architecture that will return again and again. That is why we made this small book. It is intended to become part of that group of books on architecture that keep returning. One of those books that you pick up regularly, just to browse through or read a few pages, only to recall for a moment what architecture is really about. It does not try to teach anything, it only proposes a certain way of looking at architecture. It tries to develop a very specific perspective on architecture that has a universal dimension at the same time. It is definitely not about developing architectural theory — rather it tries to look at what is already there.

CG In other words, it wants to be universal, but not normative. But this also means that it is a commitment, it is not optional. What I mean is that this perspective on architecture is based on a clear understanding of our times and the current condition of humanity. Today, there are a lot of things you can no longer say — about truth and beauty, for example — but on the other hand we can no longer afford this postmodern attitude either, which is usually accompanied by a certain relativism. So, without proclaiming a truth, we can still try to formulate a critique of the instrumentalisation of the world, which we see everywhere around us. This definitely goes beyond

a more universal dimension. By using the work of others, we could transform our own obsession into a general ambition, and maybe even formulate a call to look at architecture in general through our perspective.

IV This is also why we used Filip's photographs. We show the work of others, but through our own lens, through our own eyes. We want to show the things in architecture which we believe are important, but also how these things can be seen everywhere.

ON COLLABORATING

JDV It would be nice if we could show a photograph in the book that Filip took of our design for a house in Meulestede. I think this photograph clearly captures the three entities of BRAVOURE in a single image. In the design for that house we tried to do something differently by leaving the electricity tubes exposed. The tubes just ran straight up the wall, as they should, but were visible. When Stefanie and Caroline came by, they suggested not running them straight up the wall, but making curves with them. What we tried to do differently, Stefanie and Caroline again did differently. Afterwards, when the house was finished, Filip came by and again positioned the tubes differently, by framing them in a specific perspective through his camera. That photograph by Filip is thus a clear demonstration of how we collaborate. By doing differently what the others already did differently. Intuitively, we feel that we are doing the same things, but always from a slightly different perspective.

CG In other words, doorzon interieurarchitecten and Filip are there to question all kinds of conventions that are still present in the practice of *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu*, despite all efforts to already do things differently. They question conventions that are perhaps deeply related to the discipline of architecture as such, from their respective positions outside the discipline, out of a strong sense of perception, experience and observation.

SE That is indeed why we do the things we

been written and endless debates have been held. I do not want to risk going there. It is extremely pretentious to declare something beautiful today.

CG Yes, but maybe we should consider the notion of beauty here as that which indicates that things have value in themselves. This is again related to the idea that things are not merely instruments used to solve a problem, but are entitled to an appreciation as things in themselves.

ON PHOTOGRAPHY

CG Filip, a lot of what you say in these conversations is perhaps related to your role within the team as someone who deconstructs architecture. Is it correct to say that your work deals with deconstructing existing architectural situations, in both your photography and photomontages?

FD I think this is definitely the case in my photomontages, in which I appropriate existing architecture to construct new situations. On the other hand, in my photographs I also construct spaces. It is always about trying to understand things. I have the ambition to condense in one image or photograph a lot of divergent things, to synthesise them, to bring them together.

JDV When you talk about your work, you are indeed always explaining things. But to us, your work is precisely about not understanding things. It is about opening up opportunities and about reconsidering what we take for granted. We think your work opens up interpretations instead of giving them.

FD Yes, but still, I always start out from a specific idea. I try to give form to my understanding of things, which can perhaps open up someone else's understanding.

ON ALTER EGOS

CG With BRAVOURE, you appropriate the work of others to demonstrate your own perspective on architecture. Why is that?

JDV In doing so, we tried to demonstrate how the story of BRAVOURE is not limited to our own fascinations but has

the Venice Biennale, and also beyond the discipline of architecture. It is about proposing a certain attitude, a kind of world view. And maybe, in doing this, we can still arrive at some fundamental values, which we so desperately need, considering the urgency of our time.

JDV Yes, and these fundamental values are perhaps those thirty-five words. Maybe we only need this one page. A list of thirty-five words. That is all.

BRAVOURE as alter ego for an inevitable collaboration between *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu*, doorzon interieurarchitecten and Filip Dujardin

A search for basic things. Not minimal things, but everyday things. And trying to see things differently. Trying to see the everyday differently. By giving the everyday a chance to be perceived differently. And by celebrating.

doorzon interieurarchitecten imagines objects for corners. Corners are spaces, and yet often remain only corners. Objects for corners allow corners to be seen as spaces while not being expected to be seen as spaces. Triangular objects that transform simple corners into spaces.

When *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu* uses electricity tubes to draw simple lines on the wall then doorzon interieurarchitecten redraws these lines as simple waves. A different drawing. But still, a drawing. The pleasure of drawing.

In Z33, Filip Dujardin, the artist,



Image: Electricity tubes on wall by *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu*
Curved electricity tubes by doorzon interieurarchitecten
Perspective by Filip Dujardin

Lexicon: scarcity, observation — perception, unexpected — boldness, doubt — precision, opportunity — possibility, difference — artfulness, necessity — chance, making — imagination, life — distribute, modest — everyday, generosity — dignity — craftsmanship — dialogue — acceptance — ornamentation — beauty — surreal, awareness — detail — reprise — economy — excess, pleasure — smile, bravoure

constructs a first manipulation of the built world, which he observes and manipulates again and again through the lens of the camera. Behind a large window a brick wall appears. Built in reality.

As if window and wall slip into each other.

With the project for Les Ballets C de la B and LOD, Filip Dujardin, the photographer, and *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu* collaborate for the first time. Filip Dujardin observes and captures clearly how a multiplicity of structures meet behind glass. Glass and wall slip into each other. Again.

For *architecten de vylder vinck taillieu*, architecture is to construct. For *doorzon interieurarchitecten*, architecture is to inhabit. For Filip Dujardin, architecture is to observe.

Craftsmanship is not only to construct. It is not only to observe. It is not only to inhabit. It is all of this together.

Only then, craftsmanship has a chance at *bravoure*. Only then, architecture becomes *bravoure*.



But unexpected, as a stool.
A stool called *Kruk*.
By *doorzon interieurarchitecten*.

Celebrating, and yet, so scarce. A pipe,
hardly recognisable. A simple material,
recuperated.

PLEASURE
All of a sudden we have the pleasure.
Of making. Of dreaming. A stool.

COLOPHON

This book was published on the occasion of the BRAVOURE exhibition in the Belgian pavilion at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice, Italy. The exhibition was commissioned by the Flanders Architecture Institute and developed by the BRAVOURE team. This publication is a production of the Flanders Architecture Institute on behalf of the Flemish Minister for Culture, Sven Gatz.

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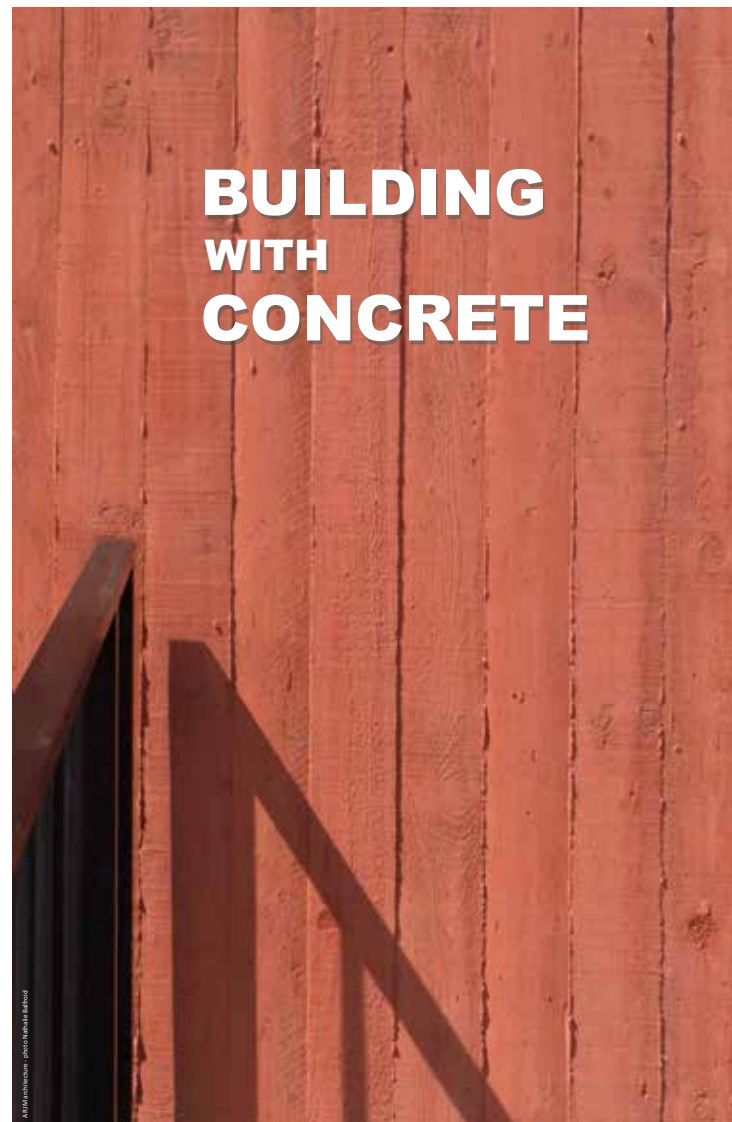
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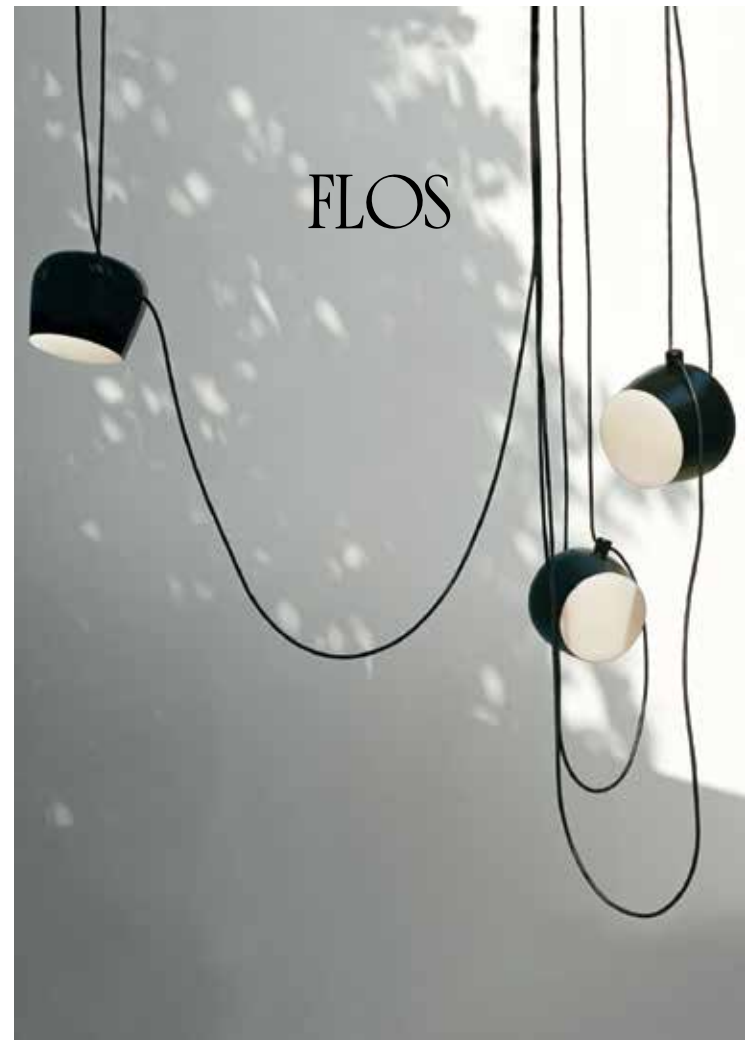
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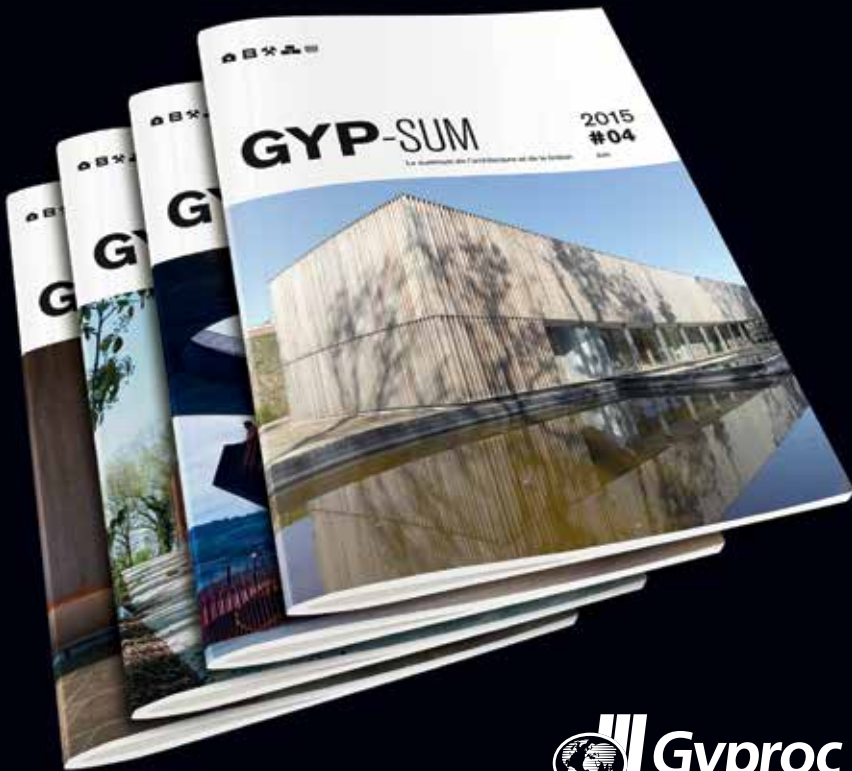


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State Archives

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