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These seven questions deal with the fundamentals of Flemish architecture today. They outline where architecture in Flanders comes from, by whom it is produced and in order to do what. It also outlines the singular identity of Flemish architecture, its representation and why it is necessary anyhow. The thing that binds the seven questions is Flanders, the proud region located in the heart of Europe, known recently for its excellent architecture. Images are by Heleen Verheyden.

The text is a compilation of articles published in Dutch in various magazines/newspapers and reworked for the 7Q series.



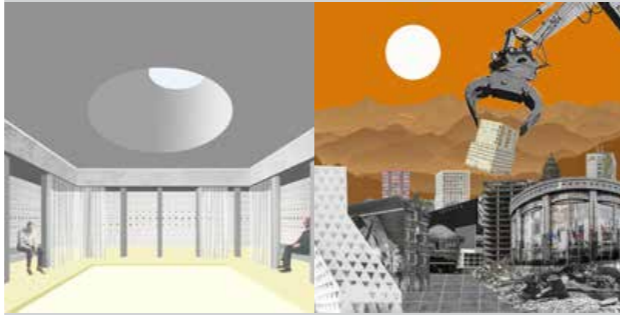
1 Why is architecture creation *ex nihilo*?

In Flemish architecture today there is a discussion on the extremely short lifespan of much government office infrastructure in Brussels. After 15, 20 maybe 25 years of use, these big corporate complexes are up for demolition and get replaced by new architecture. Most notably, the Koning Boudewijn Building, standing prominently on the Small Ring road in Brussels' North Quarter and designed by Jaspers-Eyers Architects, was demolished after only 25 years. No one has wept a tear for the demolition of that specific building, apparently the interior climate was as dramatic as its public appearance. The outrage was more about the ugliness of the whole operation happening at the hands of the Flemish Government. How can we afford disposable architecture in the new climate regime? And, perhaps even more cynically: how is it possible that the new Quatuor building, which replaced the Koning Boudewijn Building, was designed by exactly the same corporate office responsible for the urban drama we were just liberated from? The Brussels Government Architect Kristiaan Borret seized upon the upcoming demolition processes, seeing them as 'windows of opportunity' and finding ways of having good architects on the job. So it happened that the headquarters of the KBC bank, a sort of pseudo-neo-classicist pastiche designed by Jaspers-Eyers architects and built in the 1990s, will be (partly) replaced by a multifunctional office-living block, designed by Office KGDVS in collaboration with Jaspers-Eyers architects. New architect, new program, the future looks bright (at least in the rendered images). Still, it raises the question: how can good architecture be a medicine for the 'building, cashing, demolishing' syndrome in Flemish architecture? How can good architecture suddenly present itself as the final solution for disposable architecture? It creates the illusion that the cycle of creative destruction is something that we can solve, conveniently forgetting that this is the basic paradox of capitalism. It also creates the illusion that good architecture is somehow beyond the process of creative destruction, as if we reach the end of (architectural) history by launching the last round of demolition. But how do we know good architecture will be the final solution? I wish good architecture a long and healthy life ahead, but no one can predict the future. What we do know, however, is that the Dans theater, designed by OMA and built in 1987, got demolished in 2015. The lifespan of a great building by great architects proved to be equally short. It brings me to my first question: how come good architecture is also still happening in the context of creation *ex nihilo*? Why can we not hold architects responsible for the mess they created first? Or, could it be that good architecture is just another argument to allow another round of demolition?

2 Why is the exodus of architecture the only way of doing architecture?

The second question deals with an enigma brought to me by Luc Deleu, co-founder of the T.O.P office with Laurette Gillemot. Luc Deleu's argument was that most architecture we know is about building production, meaning that in order to really produce architecture, one has sidestep architecture. The architect has to move to the art world, not to produce art in the art world, but to use the world of art to produce architecture. The world of art provides a parallel universe. It is the 'safe haven of *schòle*, leisure, the time-space of stubborn devotion', said Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter. It is the space where the architect can escape from the limitations imposed by commissioners, competitions, regulations, market procedures and so on. The voluntary exodus to the art world allows us to understand a lot of work by Luc Deleu. Alongside the built work, Luc Deleu has been producing countless paper proposals, often provocations, such as the proposal for neglect of road surfaces, proposal for total disuse of public lighting, proposal for the decentralization of the Antwerp medium city, proposal for the use of rockets to export nuclear waste, and so on and so forth. Famous is 'The Last Stone of Belgium' (1979), discussing in an idiosyncratic way the immense land use in our lovely country. And what to make of the art works made with Lego bricks, such as 'The Obelisk' (1983) and his later constructions with modular freight containers stacked in the form of a lookout, bridge structure, triumphal arch, wall ornament, and more. Using the symbol of globalised goods consumption as the elementary building block was, according to Deleu, a refusal of the use of architecture as PR for global brands: Prada with OMA, BMW with Coop Himmelblau, etc. The point is that all the sublime objects are not architecture but mere PR products, and they quickly lose significance. Using the context of the museum, Luc Deleu even started practicing urbanism on a global scale, calling it Orbanism. You recognize the same exodus in different practices here in Flanders. Same for Wim Cuyvers, an architect often identified as an artist after he skipped building practice and started doing architecture another way. One of his actions was putting tents—the very cheap sort of tents you find in Decathlon—on a cemetery in the remote village of Rozebeke, deep down in provincial area of Flanders, part of the art tour in Zwalm. The intervention caused scandal and was even discussed on primetime television. His argument was: This is not an art intervention, it is a reflection on public space. The cemetery, the place of death, is the only space in today's urban setting where we can find a high degree of publicness, because it is the only place in which there is no interest, no desire, nothing. The same exodus is visible in the work of ROTOR. Interestingly, the last time work by ROTOR was featured in the official Architecture Review, published by the Flemish Architecture Institute, is when they put a shed on a temporary building site at the Vlaamse Steenweg in Brussels. The shed was one of their first projects, made from recovered materials and functioning as statement, but you could still identify it as architecture *qua* building. Later works by ROTOR are much more relevant in terms of architecture, dealing with

use and wear of materials, also dismantling and recycling buildings, but somehow it did not fit the logic of architecture *qua* building anymore. The same exodus is visible in the work of Gijs Van Vaerenbergh or Laura Muyldermans, architectural practices that proudly take their place in the art world. It makes me wonder: what went wrong in the discipline of architecture that the art world is the only place to produce meaningful architecture?



3 Why is architecture produced in the name of the Father?

The next question deals with the fact that an awful lot of Flemish architecture is identified with the name of the architect. I am not just talking about our lovely community of architects who all know each other and engage like real gentlemen, even when you lose the competition. The point is that architecture in Flanders is commonly identified by the name of its author. Here in Flanders, it is very normal to say: "In Leuven stands the Beam by Beel", it is actually the name of the building referring to its author: Stéphane Beel, one of the founding fathers of contemporary architecture in Flanders, important also because of lot Flemish architects famous today started working in his studio (Jan De Vylder, Inge Vinck and Jo Taillieu to name just a few). There is no issue in writing an article with title "Antwerp now has a Beel" – more particularly the extension of deSingel Arts Centre, where also the Flemish Architecture Institute is located. We simply forget about the first name Stéphane, supposing that everybody knows this is about Stéphane Beel. The first name is irrelevant. Except in inner circles of architecture institutes where the logic is inverted. Here, we often talk about Stéphane and Xaveer, simply suggesting we all know who we are talking about and are all good friends. But let us stick to the strange logic of using family names to identify buildings. We, architects, are talking about architecture but immediately see names. So, we visit buildings by De Vylder Vinck Taillieu here or there. We go on a DVVT tour. Names become intrinsic to architecture. Where does it come from? And where will it end? In the extension to deSingel Arts Centre, in Antwerp, designed by Stéphane Beel, the name of the architect even became the name of the floors. So, you can go to Beel +2 which is the second floor of the Beel extension. The exhibition hall and offices of the Flemish Architecture Institute is situated on Beel +1. After your visit you can drink a coffee down on Stynen -1, which the name of the modernist Flemish architect Léon Stynen, author of the original building. The grand

café on Beel +2 is also an option. Architecture is not only identified with the name of the architect, but in this case the architects' names allow you to navigate the complex. How can we explain this? One of my hypotheses is about the absence of general criteria or a classification system for good architecture. Architecture is not like mental health care where every patient is diagnosed with a statistical check list and put into a category referring to their specific psychopathology. In architecture this is quite difficult and would itself be considered madness. Good architecture is identified case by case, this is a long-standing tradition in Flemish architecture which started perhaps with Geert Bekaert, another founding father of Flemish architecture culture, not a practicing architect, but a critic-theorist who wrote an immense and fascinating oeuvre on architecture. Although Geert Bekaert did make high statements, he once argued in an interview that all his work started out as a journalistic endeavour. Bekaert was a master in writing casuistical essays. There was no final theory, no overarching theory. Architecture is discussed case by case in the form of either praise or criticism. By discussing the case you cannot but discuss the name of the architect. The case studies by Geert Bekaert—often on young emerging practices such as Stéphane Beel, Luc Deleu and later Office KGDVS—were highly influential in the formation of Flemish architectural culture. The name is linked with the logic of the oeuvre, where the author suggests a link between diverse commissions. Just take Office KGDVS identifying every project with a number: Office 51, Office 52, Office 53, etc. It is also PR tactic. However, the name can also backfire on the architect. I am thinking about Paul Robbrecht from Robbrecht en Daem architecten, again one of the outstanding oeuvres in Flemish architecture. Paul Robbrecht received lot of criticism when he stood up to defend the Stadshal project in Ghent, a very nice and intriguing but contested design, because it is nothing but a roof in the heart of the city, on the square between the medieval Belfort, Town Hall and Sint-Niklaas Church. Paul Robbrecht got lot of critique when he stood up to defend the landscape design for the Oosterweel tunnel and bridge construction, meant to close the highway ring road in Antwerp. In the midst of political contestation and social outrage, even culminating in a referendum, Paul Robbrecht was somehow the last one defending the tunnel and bridge construction. Same story for the design for the Beer Temple in Brussels, located in the old stock exchange in the heart of the city. In each case, the name of the architect became the red flag that could aggravate the discussion. That is the first problem with the issue of names in architecture. The second problem is clear: the repression of the female figure in the process of architectural production. Even if an office bears a generic name, it is often identified with the man. The disappearance of women in architecture is a strange tradition that is only now getting its just attention in Flanders, with initiatives like the Wiki Women Design project and Women in Architecture Belgium. Still the repression of the female figure in architecture should be seen as a symptom for a repression of tertiary figures

active in architectural production. In talking about architecture, all collaborators are forgotten, all interns, all clients, all government architects, all regulators, mediators, photographers, whatever their role. They are diluted from the picture. It brings me to the question: why is it that when we look at an image of a sublime piece of architecture, we tend to actively forget so much?

4 Why is the architect replaced by the architect-mediator?

The next question deals with the death of the architect in Flemish architecture today and their substitution for the architect-mediator. Perhaps it is not a substitution, but the arrival of a new kid in town, a new sort of architectural practice as. I am thinking here specifically about Architecture Workroom Brussels, a non-governmental institution active in the field of architecture culture, similar to the Flemish Architecture Institute but taking a more operative, active and even entrepreneurial position in the field. Architecture Workroom Brussels has been defining its role as 'cultural operator'. An exemplary project is 'The Ambition of the Territory' set up for the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennial and continued in deSingel Arts Centre (in collaboration with architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu, GRAU, Joost Grootens and Ante Timmermans). Architecture Workroom Brussels organised outdoor exhibition programs, such as ParckDesign 2012 and Festival Kanal Play Ground (2014), using urban interventions by architects to highlight forgotten potential and envision future lines of flight. In programmes such as The Future is Here (2018) and Take Care! (2019), the role of curator has been shifted towards that of operator. The work is not so much about exhibiting or promoting sublime objects produced by the architect, but instead about designing the things you normally do not see in architectural production. The parallel sphere of culture is used to set up design tables that bring all stakeholders and shareholders together around specific design challenges, and construct fruitful coalitions that could potentially come up with innovative solutions. In this way, the work engages with the logistics that usually precedes architecture design, i.e. agenda setting, coalition making, project definition, arranging budgets, negotiating design, and so on. The Great Transformation (2021) is perhaps the most extensive and ambitious in presenting itself as an 'independent learning environment, incubator and public programme', bringing together 'entrepreneurial citizens, governments, businesses, impact investors, scientists and organisations' to match major challenges with ambitious plans and define many strategic projects that can be developed simultaneously in many locations between now and 2030. The website of 'The Great Transformation' makes the algorithm clear: harvest and assemble, provoke a breakthrough, design acceleration, learn by doing and replicate. The work involves a lot of participation, but certainly not the institutional sort of processes set up by governments to inform people about future plans while the design is actually already finished. The participation happens much more during the design process, or rather: the participation is the design process – it is as if the

relational aesthetics of Nicolas Bourriaud has left the museum hall and finally entered the world of architecture. At the same time, Architecture Workroom Brussels has adopted the mission from the Flemish Government Architect, though skipping the institutional atmosphere and enjoying much more freedom of action. One of the famous quotes by the first Flemish Government Architect bOb Van Reeth was: 'You cannot leave architecture to the architects alone'. The argument was that good architecture not only originates from the hard work of a good architect, you also need a good commissioner, which implies you have to involve architectural thinking in the definition of the project. The European competition procedures, however, do not allow an architect to be involved in the pre-phase of a competition, as this would run against the fair and equal chances of competitors. Entering architectural thinking in the preproduction phase is exactly the thing Architecture Workroom Brussels is attempting by acting as cultural operator. The domain of culture allows for a relative freedom in relation to government administrations. The work of the cultural operator results in an awful lot of slogans, manifestos, collages, debates, reports and all the things necessary to keep the debate going and translate ideals into clear engagements. The cultural-operator reminds us about the argument of Boris Groys, Russian philosopher and art historian, who said the subversive power of the curator in the world of contemporary art—especially active in biennials—lies in the fact he or she creates a meta-narrative that allows the curator him/herself to pick and choose individual works by artists and put them in a certain context that changes the perspective, or does something. The curator became the master-artist, said Groys. This is exactly what Architecture Workroom Brussels are doing, setting up meta-narratives about urgent social issues in Flanders and translating these into design challenges, thus unfolding what the call a 'meaningful context for architects' to operate in.

Still, the curator needs the artist, as Boris Groys said, because they do not possess the original creative power of the artist, like that of Marcel Duchamp who put the urinal in the museum hall. Why was the urinal considered art? Because of the creative power of him, the man, the artist, Marcel Duchamp. He signed it with his name. The role of the architect-mediator in weaving a meaningful context for architects draws on the same dynamic, leaning on the creative power of the architect while at the same time making the work his own meta narrative, thus also slightly humiliating the architect. This brings us to the pending question: is the architect replaced or superseded by the mediator-architect?

5 Why is there no cultural difference in architecture? The question of cultural difference in architecture came to me when discussing the design of a new crematorium in Flanders. To be more precise: the question was indirectly indirectly brought to me by Siham Lakhali, back then master student at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. She was discussing the architecture for the dead in her master thesis project, including her own perspective as a

young Muslim woman from Flanders, and asking how to integrate uses and rituals specific to her cultural background. Siham was asking me for advice in the ambitious and daring project of cultural translation. Clearly the request was extremely difficult because of the personal element. It is the sort of moment that confronts you with the lack of words and images to talk about something, not only about the difficult liminal experience of death, but also the transcultural fluidity of life. I found comfort in the idea I at least know something about how we, architects in Flanders, deal with death in our own small universe, with the generous help of some Dutch friends. So, I started to discuss with Siham the design of the crematorium in Sint-Niklaas, near Antwerp, recently realised by KAAAN architecten (previously known as Claus & Kaan Architecten). I explained about the Open Call competition organized by the Flemish Government Architect. I explained significant differences in the competition entries by most interesting practices in Flanders today, such as Stéphane Beel Architecten, De Smet Vermeulen Architects, Amor Fati (Wim Cuyvers and Carl Bourgeois) and Vincent Van Duysen architects. I did even explain about the discussion in the jury, about the serenity and the grandiose, overwhelming atmosphere of the Claus & Kaan design and the elegant architectural promenade but rather difficult element of chimney in the design by De Smet Vermeulen. After studying the Open Call archives of the Flemish Government Architect, I kept going, suggesting general lines and comparing with building projects for crematoria elsewhere. I kept talking about the wave of new crematoria in Flanders, using the new public program as a way to build exemplary buildings by good architects from Flanders and abroad. No doubt the case of the crematoria shows a great deal of good commissionership. The building projects were realized in a new joint venture of the Flemish Government Architect and different parastatal organizations sharing means and capacity of local governments, the so-called *intercommunales*. I kept going. I also described other examples, such as the Daelhof crematorium in Zemst, designed by Christian Kieckens Architects and built at Cargovil, an industrial site just outside the village. Again, the shortlist brought together outstanding practices, such as Sou Fujimoto, NU architectuuratelier, noAarchitecten, Christian Kieckens and Pascal Flammer. Beyond the winning design, the competition entries showed an excellent deal of design knowledge on how to organize the architecture for the death on an awkward piece of land and still find comfort in form, proportion and materiality, yes, even in the natural surroundings. But there was more to say. There was another crematorium called Polderbos under construction in Ostend, designed by the Office KGDVS. There was the crematorium 'Outlook' ['Uitzicht'] in Kortrijk designed by Eduardo Souto De Moura. The Hofheide crematorium in Holsbeek designed by RCR architectes with Coussée & Goris architecten. And there was the Stuijduin crematorium in Lommel, designed by A20 architecten. Finally, there was the Siesegem crematorium in Aalst designed by Felix Claus Dick van Wageningen Architecten. All wonderfully designed

buildings, excellent commissionership, and I suddenly realized that although I know everything in terms of good architecture for crematoria in Flanders, I dodged the question on the integration of uses and rituals from Islamic culture in our Flemish way of dealing with death. Even worse: the friendly conversation confronted me with the fact that I actually do not know where and how my Muslim fellow countrymen are buried. That is quite an achievement after all, because the neighbourhood where I live in Brussels is predominantly inhabited by people from Turkish and Albanian backgrounds. I had to honestly admit not to know a single thing about how the people from my neighbourhood, mostly people from Turkish and Albanian backgrounds, bury their dead. I do not even know where they bury the dead. There is little excuse I could find for my own ignorance, still the question is why the building program of the Flemish Government Architect seems to suffer the same blind spot of cultural difference.



6 Why does the photographer appear in the image? The international recognition of architecture in Flanders has been supported by the birth of what we call an 'architecture culture' in the late 1990s, embodied most notably by the Flemish Architecture Institute. The main mission of the Flemish Architecture Institute was to build a 'framework of thoughts and references' about architectural quality and how it improves the living environment – these were the words from the 1999 coalition agreement for the new Flemish Government. The inscription of architecture in the political ambition note was the proud result of grass roots activism by the professional discipline. The creation of a discourse on architecture was considered the best antidote against the atmosphere of clientelism in public commissions and the recent celebration of public architecture in Flanders proves its success. My hypothesis is, however, that photography did play a key role in providing the right images that depict the surplus of architecture for the living environment. It brings us to the question about the importance of representation in the success of Flemish architecture today. One can sketch a brief history of architecture photography on the basis of the Architecture Review, published by the Flemish Architecture Institute (the start of the series even predates the institute). The first step in the brief history of architecture photography starts with the idea that images should be made just before the finalization of the building process. It is the moment photographers are called in to document the new building, photographer Stijn Bollaert called it the '5

minutes before 12'. The logic is that in the '5 minutes' before finalization you can capture architecture in its purest, absolute and immaculate state. The building is almost finished, the builders have left the construction, but the thing is not yet touched by the users carrying in all their stuff to start bringing the house to life. It connects with the typical images featuring sharp perspectives, blue skies, chiaroscuro, etc. In the second step, photography shifts towards landscape photography. In the Architecture Review issue of 1996 there was a big discussion on photography, after photographer Jan Kempeneers depicted all selected projects in some sort of black and white landscape photography inspired by John Davies. The architects involved were scandalized and made it clear to the Flemish Architecture Institute that they did not want to have Kempeneers' images representing their work in the Architecture Review. The result was that architects—one of them Paul Robbrecht from Robbrecht and Daem architecten—were taking photography upon themselves and have it published as project documentation. A twist of fate meant that the landscape image by Kempeneers from a design by Macken & Macken was used as the cover image for the Architecture Review, the reason is still unknown, but most probably the editor Katrien Vandermarliere wanted to make a statement. The whole point was that landscape photography literally opened up the scope. It shows the potato field around the building, the murky building next door, everything that lies in the background, yes, even the rainy Belgian weather. The third step is the idea that architecture photography should show use and appropriation in architecture. The idea is that photography should no longer repress how people live in the building, but on the contrary show it as the ultimate proof of success. Architecture Review 11 included an image essay by magnum photographer Harry Gruyaert. The images show idiosyncratic poses of users and passers-by, a group of cyclists enjoying a fresh beer on a sun-drenched day against the background of Shopping K, a design by Robbrecht and Daem architecten in Kortrijk. The imaginary of the everyday in architecture is an interesting idea, but often creates an uneasy feeling when children freeze while playing and parents while cooking in the kitchen. It is never really clear whether the scenes are staged or not. That is how photographer Stijn Bollaert came to the idea of appearing in the image, somehow presenting himself as the user of the building. The cameo appearance is a sort of subversive technique to deal with the difficult issue of use and appropriation as it merely reflects the fantasized pure gaze on architecture and its use. The question is why we need the user as an alibi to keep intact our gaze on architecture? The question was already raised by the third step in the brief history of architecture-photography: the detail. It is part of the Architectural Review Nr 13: This is Not a Mustard Factory. The five image essays curated by Steven Humblet break radically with the ideology that architectural photography should always portray the project in a recognizable manner. Esther Eggermont photographs the Zwin visitors' centre designed by Coussée and Goris without depicting the architecture, but with marram grass,

weather-beaten wood and a stork. Sarah Westphal pictures the Caritas project in Melle by architects De Vylder Vinck Taillieu with mysterious detail images that focus on the wooden floor, the glass of the greenhouses, the gravel and so on. The art photography in *Architecture Review* Nr. 13 makes us look critically at the masterpiece. The wonderful series of images focus explicitly on specific details, colours and reflections, dropping any idea of coherence. It is no longer clear which building we are talking about. It is no longer clear who designed the building. The eye's comfort is also compromised because you cannot see the building in one glance. The user is no longer used as alibi to keep the view on architecture intact. It is only at this stage that photography no longer walks alongside the architect and becomes more than just a PR instrument.

7 Why still architecture (competitions)? "Why still architecture?" was the great title of a text by Geert Bekaert, founding father of Flemish architectural culture. I was confronted with this question in a discussion about the Design Museum in Ghent. The Open Call organized by the Flemish Government Architect was won by a team of Carmody Groarke, TRANS and RE-ST architects. Christophe Van Gerrewey, architectural theorist, made the statement in the daily newspaper *De Standaard* that the wrong office won the competition and that there was a better design among the shortlisted offices. After single-handedly reconsidering the jury, he came to the conclusion that Office KGDVS should have won the competition, because they are simply 'the most important architects of the Flemish golden generation' and our little country is in danger of missing out on 'hordes of Japanese architecture tourists'. The winning design by architectural team with Carmody Groarke, Trans and RE-ST was dismissed as boring and just as distasteful as many a clothing chain – referring to the Zara clothing retailer. In the same breath Van Gerrewey accused Leo Van Broeck of, in his role as Flemish Government Architect, disavowing talented colleagues and never taking the client's wishes into account. The accusation touched the foundations of the Flemish Government Architect, created in 1999 by the Flemish Government as a way to depoliticize architecture, more specifically to finish the widespread culture of clientelism in public commissioning. The idea was to professionalize the commission by having architectural quality as a defining element in the selection of the architects. But as you can see in the discussion launched by Christophe Van Gerrewey, the Flemish Government Architect might play a role in the de-politicisation of public commissions, but the function itself will never be free of politics. (Although I must admit the critique by Van Gerrewey was a rather elaborate way of starting a discussion, because more often the same disputes among colleague-architects over the winner of an Open Call and the role of the Flemish Government Architect are guided by underbelly reactions.) Politics is ever present in the functioning of the Flemish Government Architect. Politics is in the project definition. This is what we learned from Leo Van Broeck's term as Flemish

Government Architect. His multi-year program note was entitled 'Place making for humans and nature' ['Plaats maken voor mens en natuur'], but the moment he started to discuss the climate, the church was suddenly in turmoil. Politicians and political commentators made their message clear: Van Broeck had to respect the primacy of politics. Architects suggested the Flemish Government Architect had better shut up about the climate because it would endanger the good continuation of the Open Call. But there is also ordinary politics in the long- and shortlisting for the Open Calls by the Flemish Government Architect. The weight of the Flemish Government Architect lies in drawing up a longlist (10) and shortlist (5) of architectural firms that will compete with one another. In principle, it makes no difference to the Flemish Government Architect which office ultimately wins the commission. (Therefore, the argument that Design Museum chose a wrong winner makes no sense: if it were the wrong one, then the Design Museum has itself to blame). Of course there are also politics in the jury, as these are diverse people with different backgrounds, expertise, interests, and so on. So, considering the de-politicisation of Flemish architecture a good cause does not exempt you from understanding how politics is active in architecture itself. There is no way of escaping the politics of architecture. The problem is that those who claim to be beyond politics are perhaps the most deeply embedded in politics. After 20 years in existence, the Flemish Government Architect has helped the realisation of exemplary public projects that are praised today for their outstanding quality. A logical consequence is that a scene has developed of exemplary Flemish architects who owe much, if not everything, to the shortlists of the Flemish Government Architect and who are indeed making a name for themselves on international forums. The grotesque accusation of the non-election of Office KGDVS to design the Design Museum simply because they are 'the most important architects of the Flemish golden generation', shows how this scene is frozen in a canon. Why would we still need architecture competitions if we already know who the best Flemish offices are? If there is a threat of bankruptcy for the Open Call, it is in the confirmation of a canon for which competitions, juries and government architects have become redundant.



Images by Heleen Verheyden (BAVO).

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