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 Voor een geschiedenis van modern design in België  
 For a history of modern design in Belgium

*Javier Gimeno-Martínez & Katarina Serulus*

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*Javier Gimeno-Martínez*

[FR]

Le ADAM — Brussels Design Museum, est une jeune institution de la capitale de la Belgique et de l'Europe. Il décline sa programmation autour de la collection du *Plasticarium* qui retrace l'impact des matières plastiques sur la création en art et en design des années 1950 à nos jours et par des expositions temporaires qui explorent l'univers du design à travers des thèmes variés et des époques choisies.

L'idée d'une rétrospective sur l'histoire du design en Belgique a quasiment vu le jour avec la création du projet muséal. Il semblait utile de porter un regard historique et rétrospectif sur la question du design en Belgique. *Panorama. A History of Modern Design in Belgium* retrace cent ans d'histoire du design moderne du pays à travers cette publication de référence éditée dans le cadre de l'exposition présentée au ADAM de juin 2017 à janvier 2018.

*Panorama* s'ouvre sur le style Art nouveau, émergeant à Bruxelles à l'aube du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, pour ensuite retracer l'évolution du design jusqu'aux années 1980. S'appuyant sur la réflexion d'un comité scientifique dynamique, la rétrospective proposée sous la direction de Katarina Serulus, en collaboration avec Thierry Belenger pour l'exposition et Javier Gimeno-Martínez pour le livre, s'interroge à parts égales sur les aspirations sociales du mouvement avant-gardiste de l'entre-deux-guerres et sur les expériences pédagogiques menées au sein de l'école de La Cambre tout en passant par l'engouement de l'après-guerre pour le design. Les auteurs du livre ont également mis l'accent sur le travail de promotion du design moderniste belge par le Design Centre de Bruxelles.

Utopique ambition d'améliorer le quotidien et outil économique unique destiné à promouvoir et stimuler l'économie nationale, l'exposition *Panorama* et cet ouvrage dévoilent ainsi les nombreuses facettes de cette épopée artistique, culturelle et industrielle.

Il s'agit du troisième ouvrage de la collection ADAM/CFC-Éditions. Ce livre a vu le jour grâce à la confiance et l'enthousiasme partagés par ces deux structures depuis le début de leur collaboration.

Henri Simons, *Directeur général Atomium+ADAM*  
 Arnaud Bozzini, *Directeur des Expositions ADAM*

1960s, the ‘good design’ creed was contested by the rise of young consumers with an interest in challenging products. The link to a less rational, more communicative design had been present at the Kortrijk ‘Interior’ biennial since 1968 [FIG. 47]. Founded by a group of industrialists, this trade fair sought to turn Belgium into a centre for high-standard design [FIG. 48-49]. Parallel to this, state-funded plans sought to palliate the effects of the 1970s crisis of the clothing and textile sector. A major state campaign aimed to promote Belgian products among Belgian consumers and to boost the career of young, local talent [FIG. 50-51]. Consequently, this initially economic plan had consequences in the realm of creativity, and the success of fashion designers such as Martin Margiela (b. 1957), Dries van Noten (b. 1958), Ann Demeulemeester (b. 1959), Dirk Bikkembergs (b. 1959) and Walter Van Beirendonck (b. 1957) needs to be framed within this context.<sup>21</sup> These designers participated in international fashion platforms, since they achieved recognition after showing their collections first in London and later at the Paris Fashion Weeks. Similarly to the expansion of Art Nouveau at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, the dissemination of this talent benefited from Belgium’s proximity to key European metropolises.

In the consecutive state reforms culminating in 1993—when Belgium became a fully fledged federal state—design promotion was devolved to the regions. As a result, the Belgian promotion plan for fashion was discontinued. From then on, the Flemish and Walloon governments acted independently in cultural and economic matters. Antwerp consolidated its position as a fashion capital, the Royal Academy becoming a reference fashion school worldwide, its impact being magnified by the Flanders Fashion Institute and

the MoMU Fashion Museum, which opened in 2002. Both the city and the regional government invested in this infrastructure.<sup>22</sup>

However, this did not put an end to the use and popularity of the ‘Belgian design’ label. Conclusive proof is the ‘Belgium is design’ label under which the three current regional design bodies and their respective export-promoting agencies today work together on crucial design manifestations such as the Milan Design Week [FIG. 52]. The label is then not so much used to denote a strict industrial style in the line of the Design Centre’s legacy, but rather to suggest a kind of ‘non-identity’ disobeying any categorisation. In 1994 Geert Bekaert already put forward the absence of a Belgian identity as the main hallmark of ‘Belgian’ design: ‘If we can call something Belgian, it is the quasi-innate awareness of the identity as a limit’.<sup>23</sup> This stereotypical *Belgitude* still seems to be the dominant category to describe popular Belgian design today. In 2013 the famous British design critic Justin McGuirk tellingly articulated in *Domus* the ingrained paradoxes of this Belgian cliché: ‘Can such a thing as “Belgian design” exist, in a country where the lack of a sharply defined common identity is arguably an identity in itself?’<sup>24</sup>

The study of design in Belgium shows how the local is indissolubly embedded in the international and how the consolidation of external influences responds to both internal and external aspects. Colonialism and the Industrial Revolution help understand Art Nouveau, just as the formation of Europe does with Belgian 1950s design or the federalisation of the country explains the emergence of Antwerp as a fashion city. Belgian designers have benefited from the proximity to London and Paris as springboards to gain international recognition, which at the same time delayed the creation of an own design hub in Belgium.



[FIG. 1] ◦ Jacquet & Nédonchelle, service à café de style néogothique / Neogotisch koffieservies / Neo-Gothic coffee set, 1834-1839.



[FIG. 2] ◦ Affiche de l'Exposition universelle, Anvers, 1894. ◦ Affiche Wereldtentoonstelling, Antwerpen, 1894. ◦ Poster Universal Exhibition, Antwerp, 1894.



[FIG. 3] ◦ Exposition universelle, Anvers, 1885. ◦ Wereldtentoonstelling, Antwerpen, 1885. ◦ Universal Exhibition, Antwerp, 1885.

1. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2016, Chapter 6, pp. 133-146.  
 2. Claire LEBLANC, 2005, p. 10.  
 3. Daniela N. PRINA, 2010, footnote 7, p. 346.  
 4. Linda VAN SANTVOORT, 2005, p. 24.  
 5. Paul GREENHALGH, 1993, p. 25.  
 6. Daniela N. PRINA, 2012.  
 7. Françoise AUBRY, 2005, pp. 94-95; Werner ADRIAENSSENS, 2005, p. 110.  
 8. Werner ADRIAENSSENS, 2010.  
 9. Werner ADRIAENSSENS, 2006.  
 10. Iwan STRAUVEN en Maurice CULOT, 2005, pp. 64-65; Iwan STRAUVEN, 2016, vol. 11, p. 63.

11. Geert BEKAERT, 2005, p. 149.  
 12. Werner ADRIAENSSENS, 2005, p. 115.  
 13. Maurice CULOT, Robert L. DELEVOY en Anne VAN LOO, 1979.  
 14. Luc VERPOEST, 1993.  
 15. Lise COIRIER, 2004; Fredie FLORÉ, 2010; Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2010.  
 16. Katarina SERULUS, 2016, pp. 35-60.  
 17. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, Joana OZORIO DE ALMEIDA MEROZ en Katarina SERULUS, 2013, pp. 278-282.  
 18. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2010, p. 133.

19. Katarina SERULUS, 2016, pp. 149-200.  
 20. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2014, p. 85.  
 21. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2011, p. 212.  
 22. Javier GIMENO-MARTÍNEZ, 2007, p. 2461.  
 23. Geert BEKAERT et al., 1994, pp. 154-56  
 24. Justin MCGUIRK, 2013.

# 2

<sup>[FR]</sup> Les arts décoratifs et  
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<sup>[NL]</sup> De decoratieve kunsten  
en de Belgische Staat van  
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<sup>[ENG]</sup> The decorative arts and  
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colleagues, Wabbes was not inspired by social issues, concentrating instead on developing stylish modern furniture made of top-quality materials for new office buildings, banks, embassies and the homes of wealthy clients. His work for corporate clients, including the Belgian airline Sabena, served as an excellent example of the collaborations the minister of economy hoped to initiate or stimulate in order to strengthen the national economy.

From the mid 1950s, encouraged by Jean Rey's policy, various initiatives were launched for a widespread promotion of design in addition to the better-living educational movements. From 1954 to 1957, for example, an exhibition of industrial design was staged at the Liège International Trade Fair, of which several editions with the support of the Ministry of Economy [FIG.18-19].<sup>11</sup> In 1956 the *Instituut voor Industriële Vormgeving voor België en het Groothertogdom Luxemburg* (Institute of Industrial Design for Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) was set up on the initiative of Belgian and Luxembourg industries with the objective to assist them 'by disseminating the ideas and the processes of Industrial Design' [FIG.20-22].<sup>12</sup> The *Vereniging ter Bevordering der Kwaliteit in de Nijverheidscreatie* (Society for the Promotion of Quality in Industrial Creation) was also established in 1956.<sup>13</sup> The aim of this society was to award an annual quality prize to a selection of well-made, mass-produced products from Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Taking the Italian *Compasso d'Oro* as an example, the prize was called het *Gouden Kenteken* or le *Signe d'Or*. The mark would be an instant indicator of the international potential of the submitted objects and would encourage the development of a professional network. Coverage in the professional press about new developments in the design was generally positive and hopeful, albeit tempered on occasion by a degree of scepticism. 'Will "Industrial Design" take root in Belgium?' wondered design and art critic Léon-Louis Sosset in an article in 1954.<sup>14</sup>

## A NEW STAGE OF PROFESSIONALISATION

For many Western countries, the first decades after the Second World War were crucial in terms of the professionalisation of design as a discipline. Countless new magazines were published and training courses set up, focusing specifically on the design of industrially made objects. Various professional centres, networks and organisations were also created. One of the major steps in this process was the establishment of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) in London in 1957 to defend the interests of industrial designers. In Belgium, the post-war development of design was closely related to efforts of the national government, local authorities, designers, new agencies and societies, manufacturers, cultural institutions and non-governmental organisations to tackle the housing problem and the challenges of a changing economic environment. This encouraged the development of new furniture designs, household and decorative objects and other products. Some designs were conceived as attributes of modern living and looked unconventional and innovative, such as the colourful tables and chairs of Willy Van Der Meeren.<sup>15</sup> Other designs were less radical, endeavouring rather to marry innovation with tradition and craftsmanship, such as the production of Van Den Berghe-Pauvers.<sup>16</sup> Yet other objects had nothing to do with practical living, but served as models for design innovation in Belgium. One such was a remarkable milking machine made by the above *Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre*, which was awarded a *Signe d'Or* in 1957 [FIG.23].<sup>17</sup> There was no evidence of any coherent output or 'national style', but the various objects were each in their own way the result of, and contributed to, a new stage in the professionalisation of design in Belgium.

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11. Mil DE KOONING and Iwan STRAUVEN, 2000, pp. 39-42.

12. 'Het Instituut...', 1957.

13. Javier GIMENO MARTÍNEZ, 2010.

14. Léon-Louis SOSSET, 1954.

15. Mil DE KOONING, 2007.

16. Fredie FLORÉ, 2013.

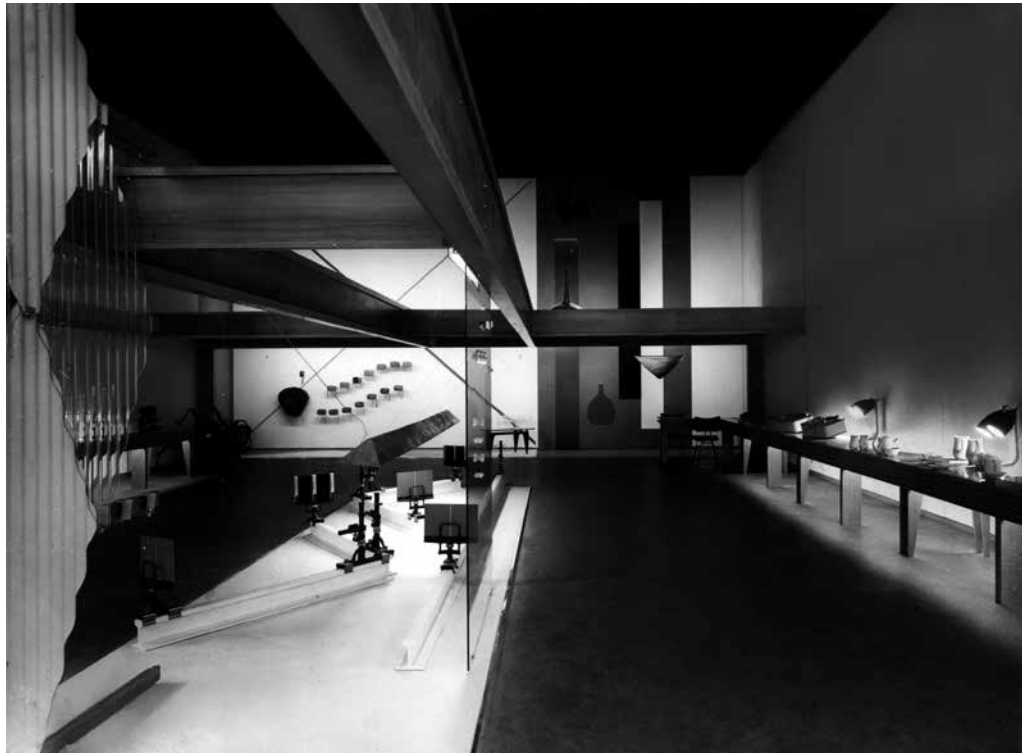
17. Javier GIMENO MARTÍNEZ, 2010b.



[FIG.1] ◦ La princesse Joséphine-Charlotte visite l'exposition des KAV et des KWB «De Thuis» («La maison»), Anvers, 1952. Cet intérieur modèle montre du mobilier produit par Van Den Berghe-Pauvers et conçu par l'architecte d'intérieur Jos de Mey. ◦ Prinses Josephine Charlotte bezoekt 'De Thuis', de woontentoonstelling van de KAV en KWB, Antwerpen, 1952. Deze modelwoonkamer toont meubels van fabrikant Van Den Berghe-Pauvers, ontworpen door interieurarchitect Jos de Mey. ◦ Princess Joséphine-Charlotte visits the KAV and KWB home exhibition 'De Thuis' ('The home'), Antwerp, 1952. This model interior shows furniture produced by Van Den Berghe-Pauvers and designed by interior architect Jos De Mey.

[FIG.2] ◦ Willy Van Der Meeren, intérieur-modèle dans l'exposition «Het Nieuwe Wonen» («La Nouvelle Habitation»), Anvers, 1953. ◦ Willy Van Der Meeren, modelinterieur op de tentoonstelling 'Het Nieuwe Wonen', Antwerpen, 1953. ◦ Willy Van Der Meeren, model interior in the exhibition 'Het Nieuwe Wonen' ('The New Living'), Antwerp, 1953.





[FIG.13] ◦ Architecte André De Poerck, pavillon belge, X Triennale de Milan, 1954. ◦ Architect André De Poerck, Belgisch paviljoen op de X Triennale van Milaan, 1954. ◦ Architect André De Poerck, Belgian Section at the X Milan Triennale, 1954.



[FIG.14] ◦ Le ministre Jean Rey (avec des lunettes) visite la X Triennale de Milan, en présence de Tommaso Ferraris, Secrétaire de la Triennale (à gauche) et l'architecte Carlo de Carli (à droite), 1954. ◦ Bezoek van minister Jean Rey (hij draagt een bril) aan de X Triennale van Milaan, met Tommaso Ferraris, de Secretaris van de Triennale (links) en architect Carlo De Carli (rechts), 1954. ◦ Visit of Minister Jean Rey (he is wearing glasses) to the X Milan Triennale, with Tommaso Ferraris, the Secretary of the Triennale (left) and the architect Carlo De Carli (right), 1954.



[FIG.15] ◦ Armes à feu, exposées par la Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre dans la section belge de la XI Triennale de Milan, 1957. ◦ Vuurwapens van de Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre, tentoongesteld in de Belgische sectie van de XI Triennale van Milaan, 1957. ◦ Shotguns by Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre displayed at the Belgian section on the XI Milan Triennale, 1957.

[FR] Le Signe d'Or était attribué à des produits des trois pays du Benelux. À la première exposition du Signe d'Or à Bruxelles, le public a ainsi pu admirer la chaise *Revolt* du Néerlandais Friso Kramer (1922) pour Ahrend, le fabricant de meubles néerlandais, une chaise longue pliable de Souplex à Deinze et une armoire de Cees Braakman (1917-1995) pour la célèbre marque de mobilier néerlandaise UMS Pastoe.

[NL] Het Gouden Kenteken werd toegekend aan producten uit de drie Beneluxlanden. Op de eerste Gouden Kenteken tentoonstelling in Brussel prijkte zowel de *Revolt* stoel van de Nederlander Friso Kramer (1922) voor het Nederlands meubelbedrijf Ahrend, als een opvouwbare ligstoel van Souplex uit Deinze of een kast van Cees Braakman (1917-1995) voor het bekende Nederlandse meubelmerk UMS Pastoe.

[ENG] The *Signe d'Or* was awarded to products from the three Benelux countries. The first *Signe d'Or* exhibition, held in Brussels, featured the *Revolt* chair by the Dutch designer Friso Kramer (1922) for Ahrend, the Dutch furniture company, a folding beach chair by Souplex, a Belgian company, and a cupboard by Cees Braakman (1917-1995) for the renowned Dutch furniture brand UMS Pastoe.



[FIG.4] ◦ Première exposition du Signe d'Or, au Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles, 1957.  
◦ De eerste tentoonstelling van het Gouden Kenteken in het Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussel, 1957.  
◦ The first *Signe d'Or* exhibition, held at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1957.



[FIG.5] ◦ Le logo du Signe d'Or, conçu par Corneille Hannoset (1926-1997). ◦ Het logo van het Gouden Kenteken ontworpen door Corneille Hannoset (1926-1997). ◦ The *Signe d'Or* logo, designed by Corneille Hannoset (1926-1997).



[FIG.6] ◦ Josine des Cressonnières, Secrétaire du Signe d'Or. ◦ Josine des Cressonnières, Secretaris van het Gouden Kenteken. ◦ Josine des Cressonnières, Secretary of the *Signe d'Or*.



[FIG.7] ◦ À l'Expo 58, le pavillon de l'Union soviétique est diamétralement opposé à celui des États-Unis. ◦ Het paviljoen van de Sovjet-Unie lijnrecht tegenover dat van de Verenigde Staten op Expo 58. ◦ The Soviet Union pavilion directly opposite that of the United States at Expo 58.

# Modeprofeten, maar niet in eigen land.



In de mode schijnt het maar al te waar te zijn. Terwijl de creaties van sommige Belgische stylisten faam genieten in Amerika en Japan - om van Parijs nog maar te zwijgen -, blijven de Belgische vrouwen een vreemd vooroordeel koesteren tegenover de Belgische mode. Onze creaties moeten nochtans niet onderdoen voor de Franse of de Italiaanse. Qua stijl, smaak en kleuren rivaliseert de Belgische mode met de beste buitenlandse produkties. En kwaliteit is een traditie van bij ons. Kijk in het vervolg eens met andere ogen naar een kledingsstuk dat in België ontworpen werd. Pas en keur het met een kritische blik, in plaats van met een vooroordeel. Het zal u vast en zeker bekoren.

*Deze advertentie werd geplaatst in opdracht van het Belgisch Instituut voor Textiel en Konfektie, dat o.m. in het leven geroepen werd om kleding en textiel van bij ons te promoveren.*

[FIG.1] ◦ Publicité «Personne n'est prophète en son pays» [*Modeprofeten, maar niet in eigen land*], 1982, *Knack Magazine*. ◦ Advertentie 'Modeprofeten, maar niet in eigen land', 1982, *Knack Magazine*. ◦ Advertisement 'No one is a profet in his own land' [*Modeprofeten, maar niet in eigen land*'], 1982, *Knack Magazine*.

[FR] Ces chaussures se composaient d'un soulier à lacet glissé dans une sorte de galoche. Elles faisaient partie d'une collection qui valut à Bikkembergs de remporter le *Golden Spindle Award* en 1985.

[NL] Deze schoen bestaat uit een veterschoen gestoken in een klompachtige schoen. Hij maakte deel uit van de collectie waarmee Bikkembergs in 1985 een Gouden Spoel behaalde.

[ENG] These shoes consisted of a lace-up shoe introduced in a clog-like shoe. They were part of the collection that made Bikkembergs win the Golden Spindle award in 1985.



[FIG.2] ◦ Dirk Bikkembergs, chaussure double pour homme, 1985. Cuir gris. Confectionné par Monarca. ◦ Dirk Bikkembergs, dubbele mannenschoen, 1985. Grijs leder. Fabrikant: Monarca. ◦ Dirk Bikkembergs, double shoe for men, 1985. Grey leather. Manufactured by Monarca.