



Art in the  
Belgian Embassies



## Diplomatic force of art

It may not be self-evident, but there is one unequivocal link between art and diplomacy. Or more generally, between culture and diplomacy. At first glance, the rather formalist diplomatic world and the spirited artistic environment seem to be miles apart. In reality they are interdependent.

Art, by its very nature, represents an internationally understood language that knows no borders. A language that simultaneously affords places, countries and peoples an identity. That not only yields beauty but also frequently produces understanding, and sometimes confrontation. Some refer, a little pretentiously to *'the diplomatic force of art'*. This is precisely because art, and more generally culture, are an essential component of effective diplomacy.

They involve a display of a country's cultural diversity and richness to the outside world. And that is what we do, first and foremost in our communities' international activities, often in association with our embassies, and through private initiatives that reinforce our country's image.

Not only does this takes place abroad but also in our own country. FPS Foreign Affairs is actively involved, financially as well as in organisational terms, in the biennial arts festival Europalia. This is an ambitious series of events where the cultural wealth of a different country is assessed in each edition. In addition we collaborate with Bozar, a partnership specifically designed to focus on activities with international appeal.

Furthermore our FPS implements an active arts policy, and artworks must of course be exhibited. And we do that too, more actively now than in the past, at accessible locations as well as in the main buildings in Brussels and in our embassies.

I am also lucky to have artworks in my office. Three paintings by Rik Slabbinck adorn the sitting area, a landscape, a portrait and a still life that offer a worthy presentation of his oeuvre.

Three works were arranged in the meeting area. These consist of a *mappemonde* (a map of the world), the domain of Foreign Affairs, by the young French artist Jean Denant. There is the lithography *The Conversation* by Luc Tuymans, which appears to portray a negotiation scene; one could say the trademark of diplomacy. Lastly there is the work by Denmark, which could be considered a reference to the documents we work with on a daily basis, ranging from treaties to press articles. Denmark shreds newspapers and uses them to create open books with fading lines, alluding to the relativity and the transience of what we do here every day.

Dirk Achten  
President of the Board of Directors  
FPS Foreign Affairs

Luc TUYMANS, *The conversation*,  
1995, H 50 x W 63 cm,  
silk-screen on 200-gram Hahnemühle paper

BRUSSELS HEADQUARTERS







Félix Augustin MILIUS, Réception solennelle du Consul Général de Belgique Mr. Daluin, par l'Empereur du Maroc à Rabat le 2 décembre 1865 (Solemn reception of the Belgian Consul General, Mr Daluin, by the Emperor of Morocco in Rabat on 2 December 1865), 1865, H 110 x W 140 cm (without frame), H 140 x W 170 cm (with frame), oil on canvas

RABAT RESIDENCE

Cover 1:  
Wim DELVOYE, Atlas 8, 2003,  
H 100 x W 125 cm,  
cibachrome print on  
aluminium

BRUSSELS HEADQUARTERS

© Wim DELVOYE

Cover 4:  
Rear façade Washington  
residence  
© Tom D'HAENENS



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Augustijnklooster, Academiestraat 1, 9000 Gent  
tel. 09 269 58 30, fax 09 269 58 39,  
info@okv.be, www.tento.be

**Production**

Peter Wouters  
peter.wouters@okv.be

**Final drafting**

Mark Vanvaeck  
mark.vanvaeck@okv.be

**Editor in charge**

Peter Wouters, Academiestraat 1, 9000 Gent

**Layout**

Oeyen en Winters

**Pre-press**

Grafisch Buro Geert Lefevre

**Printing**

Joh. Enschedé I Van Muysewinkel

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# Art in the Belgian Embassies

## Introduction

Belgium certainly has no shortage of collections. The FPS Foreign Affairs' collection, which is as old as the country itself, leads a fairly inconspicuous existence, at least as far as Belgian citizens are concerned. It is not exhibited nationally and there are few publications devoted to it. This collection is destined to adorn the embassies, thus serving to promote Belgian art abroad.

The FPS Foreign Affairs' collection occupies a unique position in the series of art collections that originated in central state institutions from 1830. The Chamber of Representatives and the Senate possess impressive art collections that have also been the subject of new books published in recent years. These collections are, at least partially, accessible to the public. This is also true for the art collection housed in the Royal Palace, which can be viewed during periods when the Palace is open to the public. They have been highly publicised.

FPS Foreign Affairs does not have a space or central location that it could use to publically display the collection or a part thereof. Nonetheless, FPS Foreign Affairs can use two of the most beautiful buildings in Brussels: Egmont Palace and Val Duchesse. The magnificent Egmont Palace, the former residence of the Princes of Arenberg, one of the great European noble families, is well known to participants of the many international meetings held there. The stunning artefacts they can admire there include a number of tapestries that date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, Egmont Palace is virtually inaccessible to the general public, not in the least due to strict security measures.

And thus only fragments of the collection, which contains at least 4,500 items including paintings, tapestries, works on paper and sculptures and recently photographs, mixed media and video as well, remain accessible to world travellers with influential contacts in the world of diplomacy, in Belgian embassies, consulates and residences. Nevertheless, the collection unequivocally validates the importance a government agency can attach to art as a communication medium.

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*Luc TUYMANS,  
The worshipper, 2005,  
H 105 x W 75 cm,  
silk-screen on 270-gram  
BFK Rives paper  
AMMAN RESIDENCE*

*Jean-Dominique VAN  
CAULAERT, Portrait of  
Queen Astrid with pearl  
garland, 1936,  
H 100 x W 73 cm  
(without frame),  
oil on canvas  
STOCKHOLM RESIDENCE*

# A prestigious posting

## Embassies in the 19th century



The first Belgian ambassadors were, as a rule, members of the nobility; this remained the case for over a century. The situation was not typically Belgian, but also applied in many other countries with a monarchy and old nobility. The government called upon members of noble families that were able to represent the country, with the required prestige, in a permanent manner (albeit limited in duration). The ambassador was expected to reside in the capital of the country concerned. The post and the title of ambassador were considered a great honour, rather than a job that required specific training (which didn't even exist in those days). Thus the government did not provide any remuneration for the service. Even the décor of the embassy or residence was sometimes entrusted to the incumbents' taste and standard of living. One can only assume that the interiors reflected the world inhabited by the high nobility in their own country. There was no shortage of family portraits, hunting still lifes, historical scenes and probably large tapestries, the prestigious showpiece of many a 19<sup>th</sup>-century salon. One still highly intact example of a nobleman's life is the Castle of Beloeil, which is open to the public. Prince Eugène François Charles Lamoral de Ligne (1804-1880) was the Belgian ambassador to Paris from 1842 to 1848. He was certainly able to decorate his residence in Paris in a most prestigious manner. The family castle at Beloeil still stands testament to this today, more than a century later.

### ROYAL PORTRAITS

An absolute must for every embassy and all the new country's institutions (from the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate to town halls and schools) was a royal portrait. Portraits of Leopold I depicted him during his London years and included the work of Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), though these could not be used for his Belgian kingship. So Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-1873), the great European portrait painter of ruling monarchs, was called upon, as was the Dutch painter Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) who had found fame in Paris. Winterhalter was a prominent and talented specialist who had painted virtually all the ruling dynasties of the time. He used monumental dimensions, endowed his models with a noble air and his painting technique was extremely precise, which was a valuable asset when reproducing the elaborate dresses worn by the queens and princesses. Winterhalter usually supplied several examples of the work in the same dimensions, which were then copied by his studio or others in various dimensions and using different techniques such as engraving and lithography. This was necessary due to the incredible demand following the fall of Napoleon, when the map of Europe was redrawn, of which Belgium is just one example. The Ghent painter Liévin de Winne (1821-1880) is famous for his portrait of an older Leopold I, which expresses more psychological empathy. This realistic painting makes quite an impression and was also copied. He went on to paint the young Leopold II.

### A SMALL GIFT

In 1838, the Belgian ambassador to Vienna, Baron Alphonse O'Sullivan de Grass de Séovaud (1798-1866), was received in Istanbul, after the Ottoman Empire gave diplomatic recognition to Belgium. The Antwerp painter, Jacob Jacobs (1812-1879), was present at the time as he was returning from a painting exhibition in Egypt. His painting, *Harem of Constantinople, after nature* (which he may have started on location after this encounter and completed in Antwerp), was presented to the Sultan a year later by the ambassador. According to Eugène Warmenbol, who mentions this anecdote in his study of two Orientalist painters, Florent Mols (1811-1896) and Jacob Jacobs, it was probably a gift from an Antwerp ship-owner, in the interest of trade in the Bosphorus, offered via the ambassador, a gift that benefited foreign trade.

This example from our diplomacy's history illustrates several characteristics that can still be observed in the collection's operations today. The interest in contemporary art is obvious. Orientalism was a new trend at the time and became immediately successful, at least in Europe. It also implies that the artist had thought about what would appeal to the recipient. This might explain the Ottoman subject matter (Istanbul), instead of something related to ancient Egypt, which was Jacob Jacobs' speciality. This attitude has not disappeared; on the contrary, even now one can identify many examples of the "bridging function" fulfilled by art, whereby a metaphorical bridge to the local art community or environment is built. In this context, it is also termed "cultural diplomacy" or "art as an ambassador". It offers possibilities for creating a (cultural) dialogue.







© Xavier DELORY



© Xavier DELORY

*Portrait of King Leopold I,*  
H 72 x W 57 cm,  
work on paper

LONDON CHANCERY

*Xavier DELORY, Barre ilot 01,*  
2010-2012,  
H 135 x W 90 cm,  
Lambda print

BELGIAN HOUSE IN COLOGNE

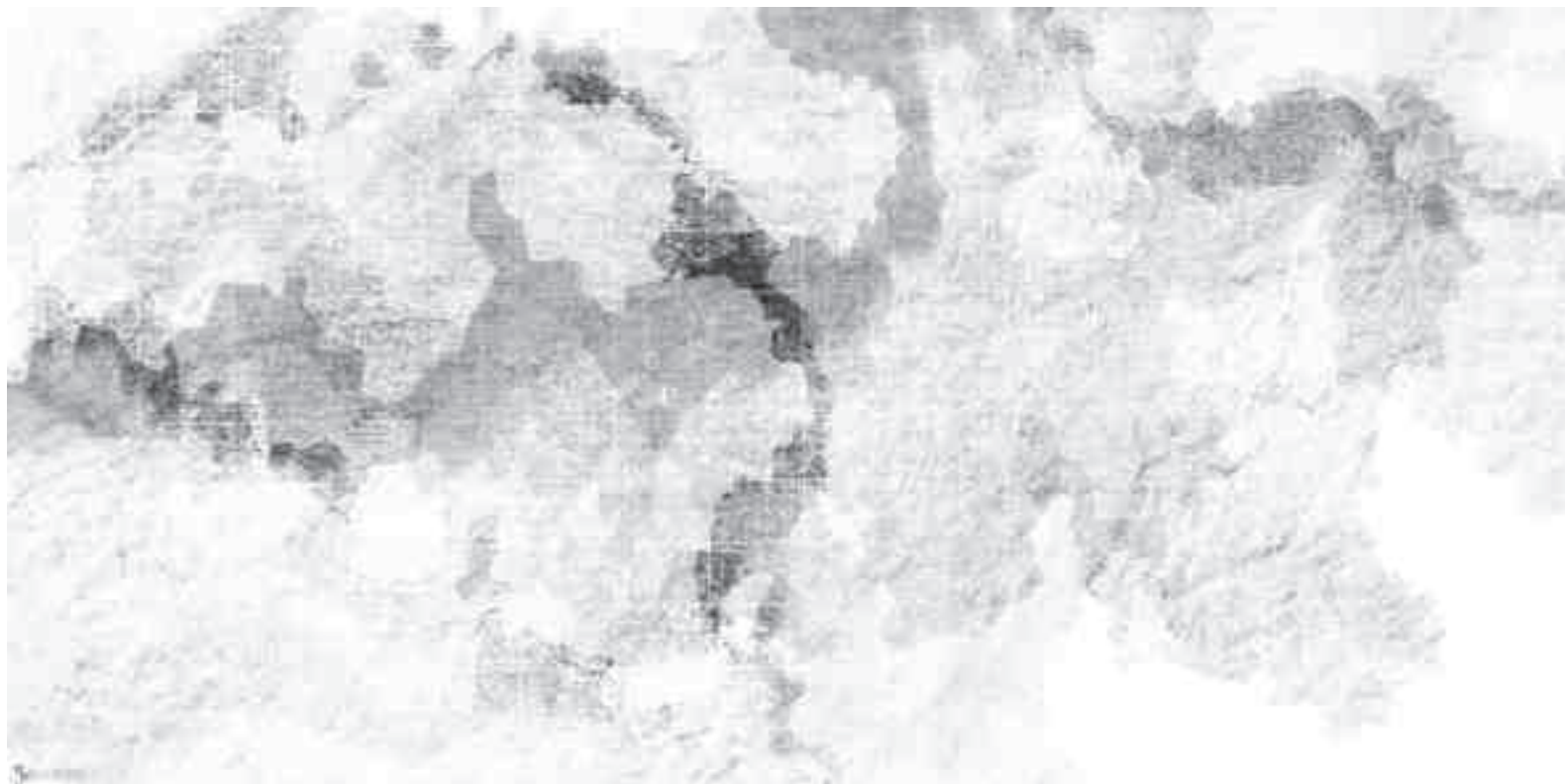
*Xavier DELORY, Barre ilot 04,*  
2010-2012,  
H 135 x B 90 cm,  
Lambda print

BELGIAN HOUSE IN COLOGNE

### THE GLORIOUS FATHERLAND

Paintings of the King and his family in the embassies were joined by artworks that reflected the glory and the beauty of the country. This seemed logical for a country that considered itself to be the heir of the prestigious Flemish painting tradition, in which the landscape played a vital role. This might sound old-fashioned today, but it is still part of the reality. Indeed, representing the country is one of the tasks of a minister of foreign affairs. When the central state institutions were established in Brussels, these buildings were also graced with monumental paintings of characteristic Belgian landscapes, from the sea to the Ardennes, not forgetting famous historical cities and figures. The names of the painters that were often also involved in the first lithographic firms are not familiar to us today. Nevertheless, this fact does nothing to diminish the quality of their work.

Paintings depicting major economic activities, the ports, agriculture and industry also occupy their rightful place here. Belgium was the first country in continental Europe to be engulfed by the Industrial Revolution. In order to manoeuvre the ever-expanding economic machine or keep it on track, an international network of contacts was required in places of importance to the world economy at the time. These were represented by industrial centres such as Liverpool or Manchester, as well as port cities throughout the world, from the Ottoman Empire, Africa to Australia, China and America. (Noble) ambassadors were not immediately dispatched to such locations, but employed consuls (merchant consuls) that were sometimes recruited in Belgium, or even more frequently enlisted on location, from business or political circles, taking efficiency into account.





Wim DELVOYE,  
Atlas 7, 2003,  
H 100 x W 125 cm,  
cibachrome print on  
aluminium  
HEADQUARTERS BRUSSELS

Yvonne KROESE,  
België (Belgium), 2013,  
H 250 x W 500 cm,  
print on canvas  
THE HAGUE CHANCERY

In the style of Peter Paul  
RUBENS, Philip IV, XVII,  
H 75 x W 60 cm, oil on  
canvas, on loan from the  
Royal Museums of Fine Arts  
of Belgium in Brussels  
MADRID RESIDENCE

#### ANCIENT MAPS AND PORTRAITS

Portraits of important figures are inherent to the development of a national awareness. The decoration of the Senate, with its series of monumental, historical portraits of important figures from the history of the Low Countries, by the Tournai-born painter Louis Gallait (1810-1887), commissioned by the Chairman of the Senate, Prince de Ligne, is a wonderful example of this. It has left its mark in the embassies, represented, to cite just one example, by the portrait of Philip IV, in the style of Rubens, in Madrid, on loan from the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

The representation of multiple aspects of the country is easier if one has a decent map in hand, certainly for a territory such as present-day Belgium, with its constantly-changing borders over the centuries. Maps have always played an important role in the world of diplomacy. This means that historical maps in particular are a permanent feature of the delights a visitor may glimpse on a trip to the embassy. They provide an opportunity to call attention to our important cartographic tradition, which includes Mercator, among others. Today, one can distinguish a link between ancient cartography and contemporary art, which adds a fascinating dimension to pure history. Some examples include the imaginary world maps by Wim Delvoeye, a world map by Mona Hatoum, a mappemonde by Jean Denant, a collage by Elisabeth Lecourt, two interwoven paper world maps by Hoessein Valamanesh and a graphic design National Geographic Institute map by the Dutch artist Yvonne Kroese.

Joost De Geest





Charlotte BEAUDRY,  
*Mlle Nineteen-Natasja*  
(*Miss Nineteen-Natasja*),  
2010, H 120 xW 140 cm,  
oil on canvas  
AMMAN RESIDENCE



# FPS Foreign Affairs' collection

## Positioning, profile and presentation

The FPS Foreign Affairs' art and antiques collection is a public, semi-accessible collection. It takes its place besides those of other federal public services, collection management institutions (such as parliaments, universities and the Royal Palace), corporate collections and the federal scientific institutions, museums and art centres. It is a collection that is part of the Belgian Federal State. The buildings in Brussels are - just like those of other federal public services - managed by the Belgian Buildings Agency (*Regie der Gebouwen*). Management of the buildings related to diplomatic postings (also in Brussels) is entrusted to FPS Foreign Affairs.

On 4 February 2013, our country had at its disposal 318 buildings, of which it owned 179, 52 being chancelleries and consulates-general, 77 residences and 50 staff accommodation units and other types of property, and 139 rentals, including 82 chancelleries and consulates-general and 57 residences. Certain buildings have historical value, dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The vast majority of the constructions date from the twentieth century, and a few have been built in the twenty-first century. As of 2013, the network of missions, which is a dynamic factor, will be modified. The focus will be on co-location with other EU embassies, such as those of the Netherlands. High-quality management of the immovable and movable heritage will play a major role in this regard.

### WHAT APPROACH DO OTHER COUNTRIES ADOPT?

There are several marked differences between the Belgian FPS Foreign Affairs' collection and other countries' collections. The U.S. Department of State does not have its own collection. It compiles a collection for each post, based on collaborations with galleries and artists, which remains in the ambassador's residence for the duration of his or her term of office. The Department of State invests in transport and communication. This has seen considerable success.

The operations of the British Government Art Collection and the Irish Office of Public Works have more in common with the collection management approach adopted by the Flemish and French Communities. They manage a vast collection, with a considerable workforce and a department that is also responsible for minor procedures and makes artworks available to various public bodies.

In Sweden and Switzerland, operations resemble the Belgian Buildings Agency, in which architects, interior architects and art historians are entrusted with the management for other bodies. France uses *le mobilier national* for furniture and a reserve for contemporary art.

The approach adopted by FPS Foreign Affairs comes closest to that of the Netherlands, in terms of staff and setup, although our northern neighbour's budget surpasses ours. The greatest similarity between the various collections is the fact that their management is implemented along the same lines and that virtually no country talks solely of enhancing their properties, but view art as an ambassador, art as cultural diplomacy. Most place the emphasis in terms of acquisitions (or exhibitions) on contemporary art.

### MISSION

In the FPS Foreign Affairs' art policy plan, the mission statement reads: "The artworks support FPS Foreign Affairs' *corporate identity*. Their objective is to provide a multifaceted and contemporary representation of Belgium, to initiate an intercultural dialogue. In the public areas in the embassies and in the main buildings in Brussels, they help create a dynamic working atmosphere, hone the critical spirit and reflect the constantly changing world. FPS Foreign Affairs wants to continue to score well on the core tasks involved in collection management (digital registration and documentation, conservation and management, collection policy and presentation) so that it can take its place in the global, artistic landscape as a reliable partner with a clearly defined profile. Moreover, art and antiques are increasingly viewed in relation to architecture, interior design and their cultural and geographical contexts."

The collection profile is described as follows: "It is FPS Foreign Affairs' task to collect and exhibit a range of qualitative works by Belgian professional artists that is as broad as possible. This qualitative cross-section of artworks, from the past and present, consisting of different media, devoted to both new and established values, represents added value for the buildings and the interior and promotes a multifaceted and contemporary image of Belgium."

### ART ACQUISITION POLICY

Little is known about how the collection was built up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The antique furniture is mainly housed in the purchased, historical properties located mainly in Europe and America. The collections of former ambassadors and





Theo VAN RYSELBERGHE,  
*Femme au collier d'ambre  
 jaune - Vrouw met barnstenen  
 halsnoer (Woman with  
 amber necklace), 1905,  
 H 80 x W 72 cm (without  
 frame), H 102 x W 91 x  
 thickness 6 cm (with frame),  
 oil on canvas*  
 BUDAPEST RESIDENCE

Front façade Budapest  
 Chancery

Virginie BAILLY, Berlin, 2002,  
 H 180 x W 200 cm,  
 oil on canvas  
 HANOI RESIDENCE

consuls were often dipped into for the artworks. In those days, they frequently remained at the same post long-term and were not replaced every four years as is the case today. The art collection was built up from acquisitions in Brussels and at the various embassy locations. It is certain that, as far as the paintings are concerned, the focus was placed on Post-Impressionism. Notable works include an Emile Claus in Berlin and a painting by Theo Van Rysselberghe in Budapest.

When a diplomatic post is renovated nowadays, an ad hoc committee is often involved that includes the ambassador as well as the administration. Considerable importance is attached to consultation. The rooms' local needs and functionality are tested with the ambassador, the architect and the interior architect. An acquisition is only made after the art market has been adequately explored. If necessary, experts from the art world are also consulted.

FPS Foreign Affairs purchases a fairly large number of artworks each year and has a budget at its disposal amounting to approximately 200,000 euros. Acquisitions focus on contemporary art and must respect a number of objective criteria. Only works by professional artists are eligible for acquisition. The main focus is on Belgian artists or artists that have a connection with our country, who can boast several major exhibitions and/or the work itself must depict something characteristically "Belgian" or be linked to FPS Foreign Affairs' operational scope. The work must not pose any issues in terms of dimension or durability. The work's quality and validity (proof of authenticity, pedigree) are equally important. There must be a potential connection with the location in which it is to be displayed and it must be possible to acquire the work for a reasonable price. Several balances are also observed: French-speaking/Dutch-speaking, male/female and new/established artists. In 2012, FPS Foreign Affairs acquired 76 works by 44 artists. The works were purchased via galleries, auctions and directly from the artists themselves. Acquisitions are considered as sustainable investments. It is assumed that the State can also play a role for young artists who have already experienced a certain amount of success. In the past ten years, works acquired include those by Katrien Vermeire, Charlotte Beaudry, Otobong Nkanga, Tinka Pittoors, Tina Gillen, Goedele Peeters, Virginie Bailly, Nele Tas, Kim Corbisier, Gert De Keyser, Rinus Van De Velde, Tom Bogaert, Stefan Serneels, Lieven De Boeck and Xavier Delory.

With regard to established artists, work by Marthe Wéry was acquired, and on an international level, work by Jeff Wall, Mona Hatoum and Noboyoshi Araki.

#### LOAN POLICY

Loans were concluded from the very beginning and certainly since the 1920s. Approximately 120 works are currently on loan. The institutions that provide the most works on loan are the Flemish and French Communities (collection of the former National Ministry of Education and Culture), followed by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels. There are artworks on loan from the Royal Museums of Art and History, the Museum of Ixelles, the Broel Museum in Kortrijk and several works were recently loaned from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp for the Quirinal Palace in Rome.

Stefan SERNEELS,  
*The Stairs and the pit*, 2010,  
H 112 x W 177 cm,  
Indian ink, gouache and  
collage on paper  
RIYADH RESIDENCE



Jan DE MAESSCHALCK,  
*Untitled*, 2008,  
H 27.5 x W 36.6 cm,  
acrylics, acrylics on paper  
RIGA CHANCERY

Irish Minister Brian Hayes,  
Minister of State for Public  
Sector Reform and the Office  
of Public Works, and Belgian  
Ambassador Robert Devriese  
view Ervinck's artwork at the  
opening of the 'Kaleidoscope'  
exhibition on 30 April 2013  
in Dublin  
Nick ERWINCK, *Ayamansk*,  
2010, 36 x 41 x 33 cm,  
3D print  
DUBLIN CHANCERY





Loans are sometimes agreed with a local museum such as in Riga, with a local private collector such as in Los Angeles, or with the actual artist. This was the case for the *Shadow piece* video by David Claerbout in Tokyo, followed by *Waterdrawing* by Katleen Vermeir.

FPS Foreign Affairs also acts as a lender to promote the collection's visibility. Two tapestries are on permanent loan to the Foundation of Tapestry and Textile Arts (*La Fondation de la Tapisserie*) in Tournai. Another two tapestries could be admired in an exhibition in the Museum of Walloon Art (*Le Musée de l'Art Wallon*) in Liège. A painting from the embassy in London took part in the *King Albert I* exhibition in the BELvue Museum. A dinner service (crystal and porcelain) was requested for the *Feestelijk tafelen* (Festive dining) exhibition organised by the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels. Furthermore, the *James Ensor* painting by Charles Szymkowitz was loaned, at the artist's request, for his retrospective at the Le Bois du Cazier site in Charleroi-Marcinelle in 2009. In 2013, a work by Jan De Maesschalck from the embassy in Riga was included in the *Weg van Vlaanderen* (Swept away by Flanders) exhibition at the Warande in Turnhout. The recently acquired artwork *Ayamonsk*, by Nick Ervinck, for the new chancery in Dublin can be seen in the Irish capital in 2013 at the *Kaleidoscope* exhibition, as part of Ireland's Presidency of the EU.





© Bert CLOET

### COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

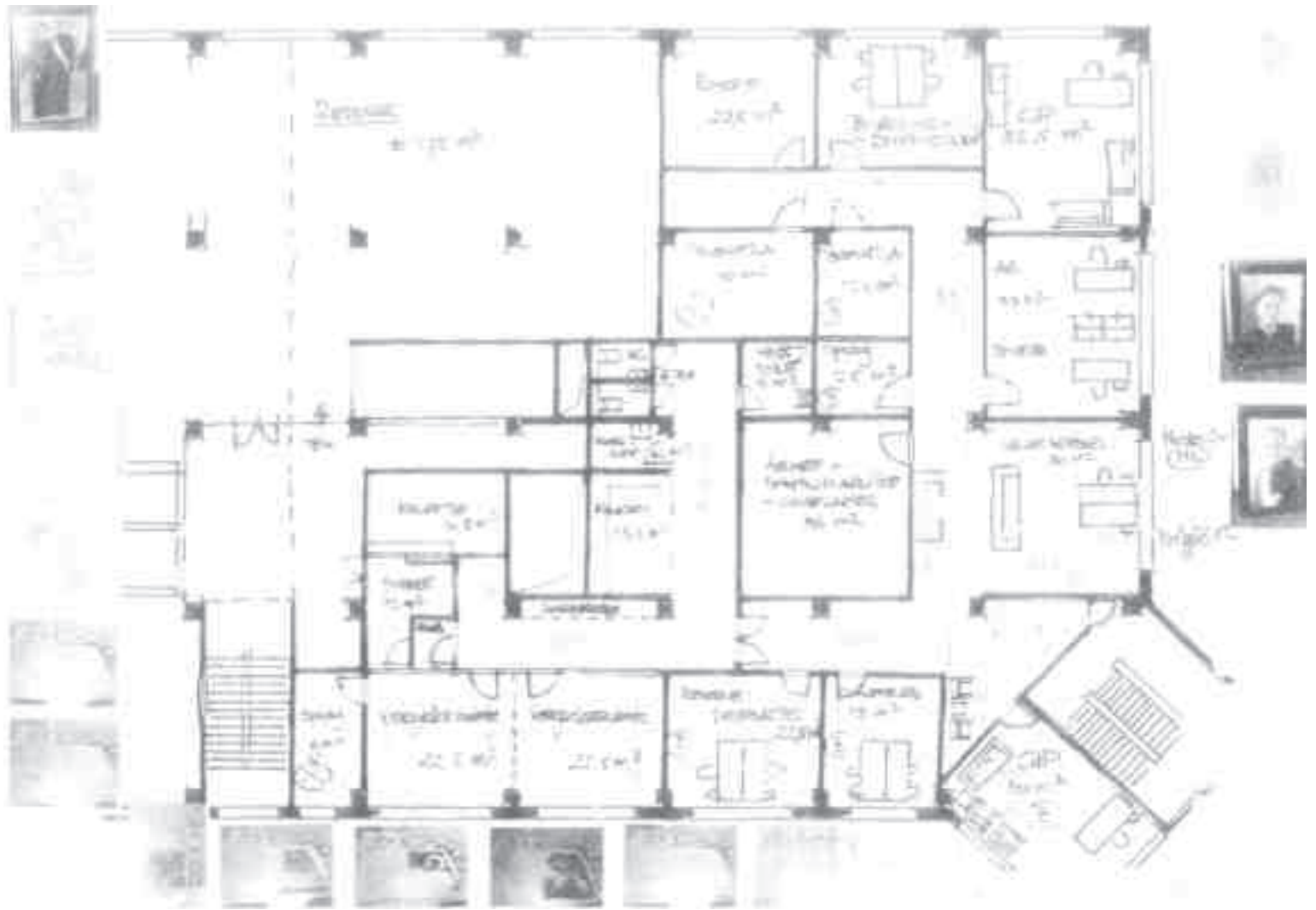
To a far greater extent than is true for a museum collection, FPS Foreign Affairs is confronted with the artworks' considerable mobility. One must take into account different climatic conditions as well as potential risks, such as political unrest. The artworks are displayed in secure buildings; they are not housed in a museum context and are not surrounded by museum-trained staff.

FPS Foreign Affairs has designed a number of specific tools to manage this particular situation. An art database describes and provides the location of the collection pieces and is linked to the database for buildings and the embassies' inventories. This creates a transparent and traceable system. External experts are also occasionally called upon to provide information about a certain piece. In addition, the administration has developed an internal guide with a code of ethics that, for example, describes in great detail how a work should be moved and what to do if it is damaged. Considerable importance is attached to preventive conservation. Conservation and restoration activities are exclusively performed by external professionals and local expertise is employed when possible. For example, there are master craftsmen in Eastern European countries and in Italy, which makes it possible for valuable furniture and paintings to be restored. There are skilled carpet restorers in other countries. Ten years ago, the construction of a substantial art and furniture depot in the main building in Brussels was introduced as a priority. The depot provides temporary shelter for the pieces. The emphasis is, however, on temporary because the vast majority of pieces in the collection are intended to be on display.

*Bram BOGART,  
Red-blue-brown, 1986,  
H 56.5 x W 76 cm (without  
frame), H 84 x W 98 x  
thickness 4 cm (with frame),  
lithograph*

MONTREAL RESIDENCE

*Art plan for the Astana  
chancery*



## PRESENTATION

Visitors to the embassies are not art lovers by definition and viewing art is not the ultimate reason for their visit. Therefore, a conscious decision was made to present these illustrious artworks in an accessible manner. This may be achieved by working around a theme, such as travel in the embassy in Madrid, or around a movement such as CoBrA art in Astana, a collaboration with the Dutch.

The artworks are labelled to provide interested visitors with a starting point. QR codes were also included on the labels in the most recent projects so that smartphone owners could surf to the artist's website.

In the future, FPS Foreign Affairs also wants to employ diverse communication channels to inform people about the collection. This applies to the website, intranet and FPS Foreign Affairs' internal electronic newsletter. Several of these channels, such as the newsletter, are already used to share certain information. A number of brochures are also produced upon a project's completion. There is an English language brochure about Bangkok, Beijing, Washington and London and a trilingual brochure about the artworks of the Permanent Representative to the European Union.

In 2013, an art committee was founded with the objective of organising exhibitions in the key buildings in Brussels. The first one, entitled *Discover the World*, will be held in September and is devoted to travel photography.

*Ilse Dauwe*



Didier MAHIEU,  
*Garden, 2007*,  
H 100 x W 150 cm (with  
frame), mixed techniques,  
ink on Baryta paper  
BEIJING RESIDENCE



# Art traversing the globe

## A selection of noteworthy embassies

### BEIJING

There were contacts between China and our Regions long before Belgium came to be. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the authorities wanted to establish contacts with “distant” lands. The spotlight turned to China and the consul general in Singapore was assigned the mission to negotiate a place for Belgium following the Treaty of Tientsin (1858) that opened up eleven Chinese ports to foreign countries and allowed embassies to be established there. This business gained momentum in 1865 during and after Leopold II's visits to Guangzhou and Hong Kong. This led to the foundation of an embassy in Beijing in 1868 and to the construction of a railway line in the Chinese Empire, running from north to south (1,200 km) a year later, from 1898 to 1906. At the same time, a Belgian consulate was established in Shanghai and a Chinese embassy in Brussels. This period also saw the construction of the Chinese Pavilion on the edge of the royal domain in Laeken. Valuable contacts with China may also have prompted the efforts of many Chinese to reconstruct the completely decimated city of Ypres at the end of the First World War.

The existing embassy is a recent (1972) building by the Chinese architect Li Zhezhi. Since then, it has been expanded to incorporate the ambassador's residence and to receive visitors. The artistic decoration is almost entirely contemporary, apart from a small etching by Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921). The viewer's eye is drawn to the ensemble comprising four works by Didier Mahieu (b. 1961). Mahieu has become known for highly refined and evocative drawings of figures, portraits and landscapes. This refinement and occasional



sense of floating also lean towards the Chinese tradition. One of the portraits is entitled *Anna*. It is a fictional portrait of a woman who gets lost during World War II. It is the sole embodiment of the artist's imagination and has nothing to do with reality. In *Portret van een Chinese vrouw* (Portrait of a Chinese woman), Chinese visitors can identify the features of a famous gallery owner. Mahieu delights in these kinds of suggestions. The dining room boasts two more of his landscapes and a *Boom* (Tree) by Frans Labath (b. 1949), an artist who is devoted to seeking out the essence of things. Labath exhibited at the Modern Chinese Art Foundation in Beijing in 2008. Here, too, there are a couple of works with a connection to the country's culture. Displayed close to the dreamy work *En souvenir* by Khnopff is a photograph by Michael Chia, who was born in Singapore and has lived in Brussels since 1980. His *Fantasia* is a tranquil and somewhat mysterious image. Even more explicitly, Tjok Dessauvage (b. 1948) engages in a dialogue with the great Chinese ceramic tradition. The library houses a display of a series of nine pots, or urns, fired using the ancient raku technique, with a drawing in porcelain. This refers to the period of Wanli porcelain, which became known in Europe as Kraak porcelain because of the type of ship the Portuguese used to transport it. One striking aspect is the presence of several pieces of ancient Chinese pottery (8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century) that are on loan from the Broel Museum in Kortrijk. Due to the original composition under glass cloches against the walls, they resemble an intervention by a contemporary artist.



© Tom D'HAENEENS

Tjok DESSAUVAGE,  
*Fragmentaties (Fragments)*,  
2008, H 100 x W 100 x  
thickness 30 cm,  
ceramics and Wanli porcelain,  
metal plate  
BEIJING RESIDENCE

Washington rear façade

Taf WALLET, *Saint-Idesbald  
and Saint-Idesbald Marée  
basse (Saint-Idesbald and  
Saint-Idesbald at low tide)*,  
1945, H 65.4 x W 80 cm  
and H 65 x W 80 cm,  
oil on canvas  
WASHINGTON RESIDENCE

In the style of Jean-Michel  
CLODION, four bronze  
sculptures - two matching  
pairs - male figure and female  
figure with torch, 1880,  
France (Paris),  
H 113 x W 42 x t  
thickness 31 cm, bronze  
WASHINGTON RESIDENCE



## WASHINGTON

The residence in Washington is situated in a large park and was inspired by an 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion in Paris: the Hôtel de Rothelin-Charolais (rue de Grenelle), constructed by an architect of Louis XIV, Pierre Cailleteau, and occupied by a granddaughter of Louis XIV, Louise-Anne de Bourbon-Condé, Countess of Charolais. The American version was commissioned in 1930 by Anna Dodge Dillman (1871-1970), widow of the Dodge automotive pioneer, as a wedding gift for her daughter Delphine. The architect was Horace Trumbauer (1868-1938), who specialised in large mansions and who collaborated with Julian Abele (1881-1950) on the design. The latter had spent several years in Paris, which explains the French finesse in the decorative details that imbue the entire house.

This is clearly not a residence that was built at the Belgian State's behest. Belgium had already established diplomatic contacts with the United States in 1832 and dispatched a Resident Minister, Baron Désiré Behr, to defend the country's economic interests. In 1854, the two countries signed the Trade and Navigation Treaty. Behr was later sent in the same capacity to Constantinople, to the Sublime Porte, the central government of the Ottoman Empire.

The fact that this gem of the American Gilded Age ultimately fell into Belgian hands is due to Baron Robert Silvercruys (1893-1971), an entrepreneurial ambassador with exquisite taste. He succeeded in acquiring the palace for the Belgian State in 1945.

The house had been rented for a time and was in need of some tender loving care. Baron Silvercruys enlisted the services of the same decorators used







by the original inhabitant, Anna Dodge Dillman. Consequently, the house's 18<sup>th</sup> century, French Regency style has been completely preserved. The role afforded to sculptural elements is extraordinary, such as the four torchères in the style of Jean-Michel Clodion (1738-1814). This sculptor spent a considerable time in Rome and developed a style in which he combined Roman elements with a sensuality à la Rubens with French nuances. Painting did not take centre stage in the initial design. The two antique-style landscapes in the dining room are conventional replicas created towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, they are a fitting adornment for the panelling, as are the two shepherdesses in bisque.

One of the paintings displays great similarities with a painting by Paul-Joseph De Cock (1724-1801), a relatively unknown Bruges painter, which is located in the Groeninge Museum in Bruges. De Cock depicts a mixture of famous monuments from Rome, such as the Pantheon, the ruins of the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the Colosseum. Several figures are depicted around a fountain crowned by a classic statue of Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, who carries a quiver over her shoulder and a bow in her right hand. The painting is a creation of an imaginary, ruin landscape in which the various monuments are brought together in an unrealistic fashion. Old catalogues mention that the painting is copied from a work by Canaletto (1697-1768). The original on which this painting is based was, however, not

*Library in the Washington residence*

*Alphonse JONGERS, Baron Sylvercrus, 1942, H 92 x W 71.3 cm, oil on canvas*

WASHINGTON RESIDENCE

*Taf WALLET, La plage (The beach), no date, H 81 x W 65 cm, oil on canvas*

WASHINGTON RESIDENCE

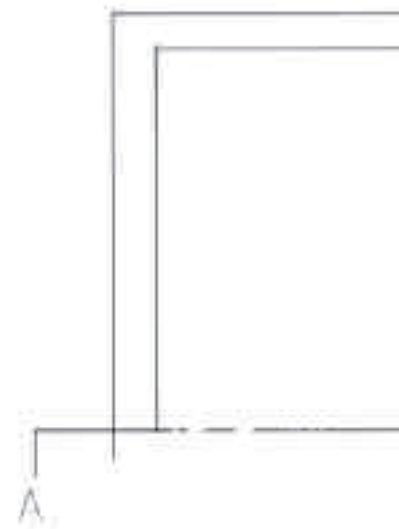
*Taf WALLET, Matinée à 11 h (Matinee at 11), no date, H 81 x W 65 cm, oil on canvas*

WASHINGTON RESIDENCE

*Henri-Léon GREBER, urn, between 1880-1920, France, zinc, iron/lead, steel, aluminium*

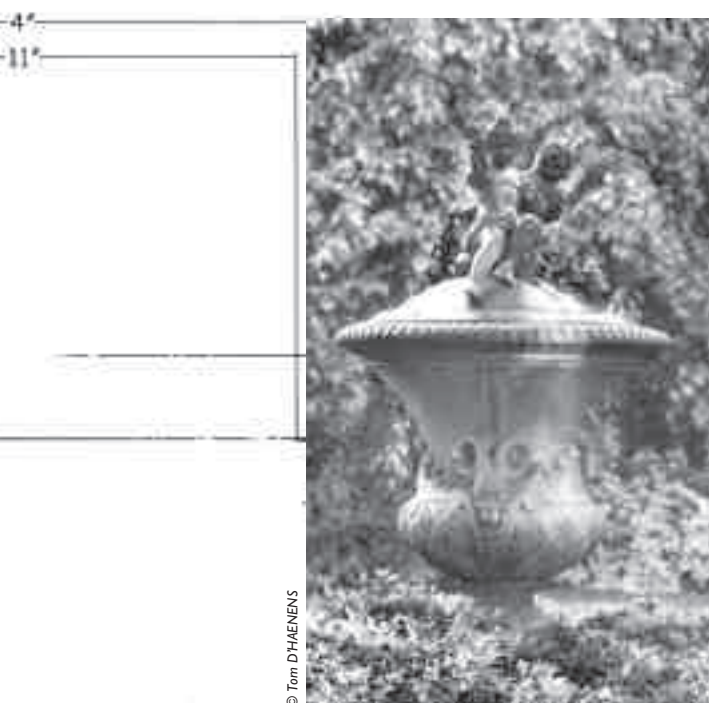
WASHINGTON RESIDENCE

*Section through urn showing schematic armature, final report on the restoration by Conservation Solutions INC, 17/04/2007*



© Conservation Solutions INC





created by Canaletto, but is the work of Gian Paolo Panini (1691-1765), who specialised in paintings featuring these kinds of Roman fantasies.

On the mantelpiece, in between two porcelain birds, stands a bronze portrait of Silvercruys, which was created by his sister Suzanne (1898-1973). She was more than just the man's sister. She fled Belgium during the First World War and soon made a name for herself in the USA as a sculptor and gave numerous readings. She created busts of leading personalities, including President Hoover and Audrey Hepburn, and wrote several books.

Baron Silvercruys also watches over the great salon. It features a portrait of him painted by the Canadian artist Alphonse Jongers (1872-1942), thus before the building was acquired. There are also two beach scenes, painted in Saint-Idesbald, by Taf Wallet (1902-2001). These were a gift (in 1982) to the embassy from Mary Marvin Breckinridge Patterson (1905-2002). Waller's serene, poetic art blends effortlessly with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century decor, which also boasts armchairs upholstered in Beauvais tapestry and a large Aubusson carpet (although this is actually a copy). In 2011, FPS Foreign Affairs acquired two additional works by Taf Wallet.

In the garden stand four, sizeable lead urns, works by the French sculptor Henri-Léon Gréber (1855-1941). They are topped by a couple of putti, further underlining the property's aristocratic bearing. The urns were restored in 2007.

## LONDON

The embassy in London was perhaps the most significant for young Belgium. After all, it was where the “London Conference” of European powers decided on the new State’s foundation in 1830. A year later, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, widower of Princess Charlotte, the only daughter of King George IV, was chosen as the first King of the Belgians.

Since 2006, the embassy has been located in a prestigious corner building on Grosvenor Crescent (Belgravia). The Victorian property dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and is a listed building.

It houses several noteworthy royal portraits. The most impressive is that of Albert I depicted before the ruins of Ypres and painted by André Cluysenaer (1899-1939), the son of Alfred Cluysenaer (1837-1902), whose paintings can be found in the Royal Palace and the Parliament in Brussels. André Cluysenaer spent the war years in London. Thus, the portrait was painted afterwards. Albert I never posed before the ruins of Ypres, but there was no better background imaginable for London, taking into account the horrific battles fought between the Allied and German armies that completely devastated the city. The portrait is hung in the meeting room.

The ambassador’s office is home to an oval portrait of Leopold I, the work of Polydore Beaufaux (1829-1905). He won the Belgian Prix de Rome and became a teacher at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. This portrait is reminiscent of those by Winterhalter. There is also a portrait of Maria-Henrietta, Archduchess of Austria, who married Leopold II in 1853 and became Duchess of Brabant (and later Queen consort), as well as a coloured etching of the Palace of the Nation in Brussels, the seat of the Belgian Federal Parliament.

There are several other paintings on loan from the Flemish Community, a work by Henri-Victor Wolvens (1896-1977), two works by Rik Slabbinck (1914-1991), a work by the Liège painter Edgard Scauflaire (1893-1960) and the drawing entitled *Tower Bridge and London Bridge* by the Brussels graphic artist Jacques Muller (1930-1997).

The artistic bridging function performed by an embassy is evident in London in the display of several watercolours painted in Belgium by the English painter Hubert James Medlicott in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many English artists, including William Turner (1775-1851), crossed the Channel to paint watercolours from Normandy to Zeeland.

Then there are two more portraits of a famous ambassador, Baron Emile de Cartier de Marchienne (1871-1946), who resided in London between 1927 and 1946 and provided a great service caring for Belgian refugees. He called on the talents of leading society portrait painters. One is the work of Richard Jack (1866-1952), an English painter who became the first war artist for Canada during the First World War. He painted subjects such as George V, Queen Mary and the King of Spain and worked repeatedly for Buckingham Palace. The other portrait is the work of Oswald Birley (1880-1952), who was born in New Zealand when his parents were on a world tour. He earned his fame with portraits of personalities including George V, Queen Mary, George VI, the Queen Mother, Elisabeth II, Churchill (to whom he also gave painting lessons) and prominent figures of the British Empire.



Richard JACK, *Roi Albert Ier Uniforme Dragon Guard (King Albert I in Dragon Guard uniform)*, XX, H 125 x W 102 cm (without frame), H 154 x W 130 cm (with frame), oil on canvas

LONDON RESIDENCE  
This painting was shown at the exhibition in the BELVUEmuseum from 25/11/2009 to 28/01/2010

From the “Tristan & Isolde” suite, “Yseult trouvant l’épée” (Isolde finding the sword), Brussels, circa 1580, H 330 x W 400 cm  
EGMONT PALACE

*Verdure*, Brussels, XVII, H 378 x W 260 cm  
LONDON RESIDENCE





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## BRUSSELS, THE EUROPEAN NUCLEUS

Brussels continues to be a hub of Belgian diplomacy, as the country's capital and headquarters of numerous international institutions in which Belgium is represented, such as the European Union and NATO. One historical building plays a prominent role in this regard: Egmont Palace on the Kleine Zavel/Petit Sablon and in the immediate vicinity of the FPS Foreign Affairs' administrative headquarters. Egmont Palace is virtually the only great noble residence to have survived the centuries. The Palace, which was continuously expanded and rebuilt, belonged to the Egmont family, succeeded by the Arenbergs, one of the wealthiest European families, who owned many properties both in Belgium and abroad. It had already been extensively renovated at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Tilman-François Suys (1783-1861), who also designed the marble room in the Academy Palace at the time. In 1892, an entire wing went up in flames, that of Françoise van Luxemburg (the mother of the beheaded Lamoral, Count of Egmont, whose statue now graces the Kleine Zavel/Petit Sablon). It was the oldest part of the palace and it is thought that the Arenbergs kept one of the most arresting art collections there, which included pieces from ancient times and the Middle Ages, from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Alas, not a single work was rescued. After the First World War, the Arenbergs' Belgian assets were seized. The palace became the property of the City of Brussels until the State and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took it over and restored it to its former glory. It is now intensively used for receptions, as a residence for foreign guests and as an international conference centre.

The interior exudes prestige with its spectacular staircase, grand gallery and a series of salons. Of the original, far larger park, there remains an agreeable city park with several monuments ranging from a Gothic fountain to a statue of Peter Pan and a Marguerite Yourcenar space.

The modern-day palace is the result of various construction phases. The large stables, which were located behind the wing that houses the great gallery, were converted into a well-equipped meeting room for the international conference centre, which was renovated again in 2012. The central hallway displays all the posters from the Europalia exhibitions, which were supported by FPS Foreign Affairs.

The blue and orange meeting rooms display series of photographs by Brussels photographer Bernard Queeckers (b. 1950) - the *Aligner* series, 1986 - and by the French photographer Marie-France Lejeune (b. 1957). These series focus on disappearing, the illusion of reality and playing with the horizon.

An artwork by the Beirut-born Mona Hatoum (b. 1952) adorns the reception area. She now lives in Berlin and London. The piece *Projections* (2006) comprises a world map, not using the Mercator projection, but the principles of cartography and those of the historian Arno Peters, in which the continents are eaten away by acid. It makes one reflect on a country's place in the world and the relationship between nations. The international dimension is fulfilled by a piece by the Ethiopian-born Mulugeta Tafesse (b. 1960),



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View of 2 of the 4 tapestries  
"Les quatre continents" -  
"Europe", "Amérique", "Afrique"  
and "Asie" (The four continents  
- Europe, the Americas, Africa  
and Asia), Brussels, XVII, cartoon:  
Louis VAN SCHOOR, Atelier  
Judocus de Vos  
View of 1 tapestry from the  
"Le Dressage du cheval" (The  
Dressage of the Horse) series,  
Antwerp, XVII, Van Hecke or  
Peemans  
View of 1 of the 2 sculptures  
by Plumier, "L'enlèvement de  
Proserpine" and "L'enlèvement  
des Sabines" (The Rape of  
Proserpine and The Rape of the  
Sabine), XVIII, marble, H 215 x  
W 83 x thickness 52 cm  
EGMONT PALACE







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View of 1 tapestry from the  
*"Le Dressage du cheval"*  
 (The Dressage of the Horse)  
 series, Antwerp, XVII,  
 Van Hecke or Peemans  
 EGMONT PALACE

View of 4 of the 5 tapestries  
 from the *"Tristan & Isolde"*  
 suite, Brussels, circa 1580  
 EGMONT PALACE

who paints figurative art as in the example *Buick, in deep carmine pink* (2006-2007). He views the car as a “civilisation vessel”. In addition to work by Sven ‘t Jolle (b. 1966) and Vincent Meessen (b. 1971), there are two videos by Angel Vergara (b. 1958), an artist with Spanish roots, *Palais d’Egmont - Peinture en 1 acte et 12 tableaux* and the video *Tree* by Bart Stolle.

In 2011, a new residence for Belgium’s Permanent Representative to the European Union was acquired. It is an elegant, Art-Nouveau property from 1903, close to the Ter Kameren/La Cambre Abbey. The selection of artworks is explained by the FPS Foreign Affairs art historian, Ilse Dauwe, in the publication *Art in Residence@the PR of Belgium to the EU*. The current ambassador stipulates therein that fifteen artworks were collected and that he hopes that residents and visitors to the residence will be inspired by the project’s welcome slogan, a defiant “fist” for Europe. The clenched fist, *Power*, a bronze by Etienne Desmet (b. 1943), is in fact the first thing that confronts the visitor in the hallway. It conjures up Europe’s historical influence and symbolises the power of Europe, of Belgium, of politics and diplomacy. Another piece also refers to Europe, a light sculpture by Fred Eerdekens (b. 1951), that demonstrates *Wat af is, is nooit gemaakt* (What’s completed, was never made), a replica of his piece that graces the office of the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. Political life is also the theme of *Giscard* (2004), a lithograph by Luc Tuymans (b. 1958). The surroundings were systematically taken into account when the artworks were selected. The Sonian Forest (Ter Kamerenbos/Bois de la Cambre) is close by. It is represented by four drawings of trees by Patrick Van Caeckenbergh (b. 1960), as well as in a more traditional watercolour by the relatively forgotten Willy Gilbert, depicting the entrance to the Ter Kamerenbos/Bois de la Cambre with the two pavilions.

Another eye-catching painting is *Cities of the Red Night II*, the colourful piece by the young, German artist Abel Auer (b. 1974). He has already exhibited at Wiels. The work has a poetic, dreamy quality and offers an abundance of glimpses into another world. The second large painting in this house is a work by Stijn Cole (b. 1978), *Colorscape*, in which he approaches nature in a totally different way, using an abstraction of the perception resulting in a canvas filled with square, coloured boxes.

All the artworks, including a lambda print by Pieter Vermeersch and four “briefjes” (letters) by Etienne Van Doorslaer, are recent acquisitions with the exception of three of the four works by Van Caeckenbergh, on loan to the M HKA, and the piece by Gilbert on loan from the Flemish Community.

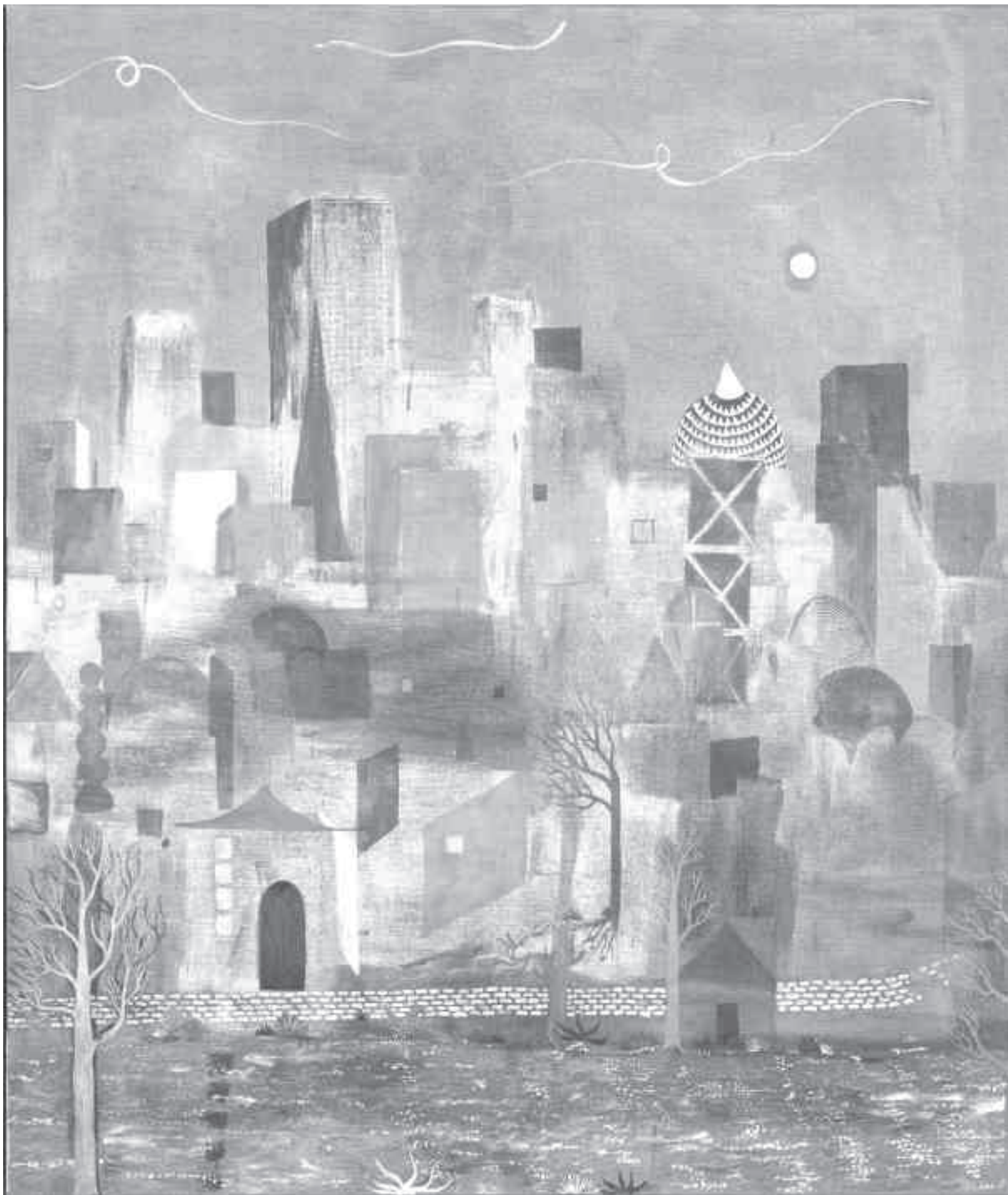


Etienne DESMET,  
*Power*, 1980,  
H 50 x thickness 50 cm,  
bronze, here, the artwork is  
flanked by the artist and the  
ambassador, Mr Wouters, and  
his wife  
PR TO THE EU RESIDENCE IN  
BRUSSELS

Piet STOCKMANS,  
*27 EU ribbons*, 2006 and  
2010, 40 to 50 cm long/  
ribbon, porcelain strips  
PR TO THE EU CHANCERY IN  
BRUSSELS

Abel AUER,  
*Cities of the Red Night II*,  
2012, H 200 x W 170 cm,  
oil on canvas  
PR TO THE EU RESIDENCE IN  
BRUSSELS





## BERN

In 2011 the residence of the ambassador to Switzerland was provided with new artworks, apart from four old paintings that remained. The villa in Neo-baroque style was constructed in 1904 by a local architectural firm and is now a listed building. It was purchased by the Belgian State in 1949 and consists of three floors. The artworks are displayed exclusively on the ground floor.

An art plan was first compiled, as is usual for FPS Foreign Affairs, which takes the architecture and the functions of the rooms into account. It states: "The new artworks should provide a fresh, contemporary, multifaceted Belgian touch to the entire place." It is also notable that there is consideration for the Swiss sensitivity related to the language mix and that artists are represented from the three Communities. The proximity of Art Basel also plays a role.

The residence is adorned with 21 pieces, which are predominantly original, unique works. A concerted effort has been made to match the frames; an investment that has certainly paid off. Bern is viewed as a stable and important diplomatic post.

A coat and a work (in pastels) depicting a coat both hang in the hallway, making a befitting subject for an entryway. The picture of a coat is the work of Mathieu Weemaels (b. 1967), a Brussels artist who has already exhibited in Bern. He drew the coat he wore when he was a student at La Cambre. The "real" coat, which hangs on a nail in the wall, is a work by the Antwerp artist Mark Luyten (b. 1955). The piece is entitled *Iconography*. This is how he describes it: "Coat, pockets filled with shells. Coat is worn simply, woollen, dark blue waistcoat, North Sea shells in pockets (may eventually be replaced with a jacket that is more in tune with the fashion of the day; the coat becomes worn with the passing of time)."

Three paintings (oil on paper) by the Liège artist Yves Zurstrassen (b. 1956), whose work is also exhibited in the IKOB in Eupen, hang in the library. The blue salon is decorated with five paintings by Gilbert Swimberghe (b. 1927), who started his career under the influence of Flemish Expressionism, but later turned to Constructivist art. These resplendent works are in keeping with this movement. When the paintings were hung, the existing moulding on the walls had to be taken into consideration.

In the dining room, pride of place is bestowed on the older paintings. They are anonymous paintings in the Flemish tradition from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most important is *Twee personages keuvelen aan de rand van een bos* (Two figures chatting on the edge of a forest).

The staircase features a tapestry - this is the case in many residences - which is a lyrical, abstract piece by Jules Lismonde (1908-2001), woven at De Wit in Mechelen.

Yves ZURSTRASSEN,  
*080904*, 2008, oil on paper,  
H 40 x W 40 cm (without  
frame), H 62.4 x W 62.4 cm  
(with frame)

BERN RESIDENCE

Gilbert SWIMBERGHE,  
*Untitled blue*, 2001,  
H 80 x W 80 cm,  
oil on canvas

BERN RESIDENCE

Jules LISMONDE,  
*Untitled*, 1963,  
H 213 x W 186 cm,  
tapestry (wool)

BERN RESIDENCE

Mark LUYTEN,  
*Iconography*, 2005,  
H 100 x W 40 x thickness  
20 cm, mixed media, organic  
materials, dark blue woollen  
coat, North Sea shells

BERN RESIDENCE

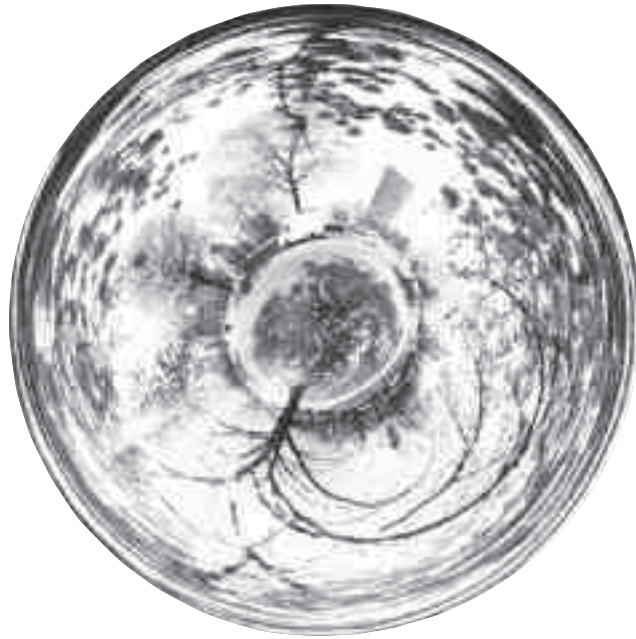
Hans VANDEKERCKHOVE,  
*Hortus Conclusus I*, 1993,  
H 65 x W 50 cm (without  
frame), H 91 x W 76 cm  
(with frame), mixed media

BERN RESIDENCE









Marin Kasimir

## TOKYO

The embassy in Tokyo has suffered a turbulent existence. The former embassy was completely destroyed during the Second World War. The new embassy also disappeared, albeit under more peaceful circumstances. In fact, it was replaced by a large complex, of which only a part is used as an embassy and residence. This explains why all the artworks and furniture were shipped back to Belgium in 2010 and replaced with more contemporary pieces.

A rather exceptional procedure was devised for this project. Several walls were selected in the building, in consultation with the architect and the interior architect, and following a prospection and research phase, an artist was designated for each location and was contacted regarding an existing artwork or to work out a proposal. In total, 37 artworks were purchased from 15 artists; one piece is on loan and 2 existing paintings were assigned a new location. The total cost amounted to 200,000 euros. This equates to just over 1% of the budget allocated by the Communities (and the Flemish and Brussels Government Architects) for art integration in government buildings.

A dialogue with the host country is always welcome and, in the VIP area at the entrance, there is clearly an ongoing dialogue between a Belgian sky by Marie-Jo Lafontaine (b. 1950), *Sky*, and a Japanese sky by Nobuyoshi Araki (b. 1940). This time, FPS Foreign Affairs has acquired a work by an important foreign artist. At the entrance to the Visa department, there is a circular work with a Japanese cherry tree at its centre, surrounded by the Brussels skyline. It is *Eternelle éphémère* (Eternal ephemeral) by Marin Kasimir. Four works in fluorescent shades by Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven (b. 1951) are given a prominent position in the grand entrance hall above the two benches by the Belgian designer Charles Kaisin (b. 1972). Furthermore, an obvious link between Japanese manga and the Belgian comic book story emerges in the works by Yves Ullens and Benoit Platéus (b. 1972).

For the reception desk, Sophie Nys (b. 1974) created six *Fujiogrammen* (photograms), inspired by Mount Fuji of course. In the ambassador's secretariat, the dialogue is resumed by Patrick Gerola (b. 1959), a Belgian artist living in Japan, who depicts *Kamakura in full bloom*, next to three seed packets (lithographs) by Jef Geys (b. 1934). Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927) is represented by two works

Marin KASIMIR,  
*Eternel Ephémère* (*Eternal Ephemeral*), 2009, 200-cm diameter, photograph on 10-mm Plexiglas  
TOKYO CHANCERY

Michel FRANÇOIS,  
*Jeune fille à l'arrêt* (*Girl at a stop*), 1996 (2010), H 250 x W 420 cm, photograph  
TOKYO CHANCERY

Anne-Mie VAN KERCKHOVEN, "So nothing really ends...", "Formal clarity and its effect", "Beyond the unisex", 2007, H 100 x W 120 x thickness 0.5 cm, acrylic and mixed media on Perspex  
TOKYO CHANCERY

Benoit PLATEUS,  
*Spectrum 2*, 2007, H 200 x W 140 cm, C-Print  
TOKYO CHANCERY

Tokyo chancery









© Auctionhouse De Vynst



on rice paper that clearly illustrate a major source of inspiration for the artist, Japanese calligraphy. The ambassador's office is decorated with four more works on paper by Panamarenko (b. 1940), comprising a wealth of graphic and poetic refinement. The choice of décor in the ambassador's residence is more traditional with a drawing by Gustave De Smet (1877-1943), reminiscent of Foujita, four watercolours from the early 1930s by Léon Spilliaert (1881-1946) with landscapes featuring red-roofed houses, and as their counterpart a contemporary piece by Hans Vandekerckhove (b. 1957), *Little Village*. Next to a photograph featuring Emperor Akihito and King Albert II in the dining room hangs a painting by Albert Saverys (1886-1964), *Entrée au château* (Entrance to the castle) (1942), which commemorates their encounter.

The standards maintained by FPS Foreign Affairs for displaying artworks abroad are illustrated here in an exemplary fashion.

#### NAIROBI

The Belgian embassy in Nairobi does not have any direct link with colonial architecture, which is what one would expect to a certain extent. It is a (scaled down) replica of the Grand Trianon in Versailles, albeit resplendent in a lush, tropical park.

The ever-impressive building dates back to the early 1950s. Frenchman Pierre Pichot, thanks to the fortune of his British friend, owner of the oldest coffee plantations in Kenya, assigned the project to a local architect, Indris Davies, to create a smaller version of the original of the French palace. The result is still

Hans VANDEKERCKHOVE,  
*Little Village*, 2008,  
H 125 x W 100 cm,  
oil on canvas  
TOKYO CHANCERY

Gustave DE SMET,  
*De naaister* (The seamstress),  
circa 1921-22,  
H 28.5 x W 21.5 cm,  
pen drawing  
TOKYO RESIDENCE

Gallery of the Belgian  
residence in Nairobi: 'In  
Flanders Fields' by Berlinde  
De Bruyckere and in the  
background '42 plus 1 Burnt  
Heads' by Ehoodi Kichapi  
(Funika Fufuka exhibition)  
NAIROBI RESIDENCE



breathtaking even today. In front of the villa stands a copy of the fountain of the Grand Bassin in Versailles. This incredibly nostalgic monument, decorated with a profusion of artworks, was intensively used to host parties until the death of his partner and the 1955 coffee crisis ruined Pichot.

Kenya became independent in 1963. The Trianon was up for sale when the first Belgian ambassador, Baron Eugène Rittweger de Moor (1921-1984), arrived in the country. The Belgian State was able to acquire it for 30,000 pounds sterling at the time. Renovation works were entrusted to a Belgian architect, Brunard, in the spirit of the Louis XV style. It became the ideal location to host receptions for the new elite. The gardens were redesigned and boast the largest collection of ferns in Africa. In 2012, at the suggestion of Ambassador Bart Ouvry, a remarkable event was organised in this rather exceptional décor in the midst of Africa: an exhibition of Kenyan and Belgian artists devoted to a politically charged theme. It was *Funika-Fufuka Cover-Recover*, involving twelve artists and a local curator, Gonda Geets. The starting point was a work that is on loan from the M HKA: *In Flanders Fields* by Berlinde de Bruyckere, a dead war horse from 1914-1918. Local artists were invited to exhibit their work related in some way to the theme of aggression, violence and injustice. The exhibition was naturally aimed at visitors to the embassy as well as students in and around Nairobi. The ambassador linked it to the hope of free, fair and non-violent elections in 2013, and fortunately it transpired that this wish was granted. So, in fact, the exhibition was something of a prophecy. Curator Gonda Geets referred to the conflicts expressed in the art and said: "The artworks invite introspection. As much as they express vulnerability, pain and confusion, they are also carriers of hope, beauty and dignity." The sculptor Gor Soudan displayed *The mother of all eatings*, a piece that comes close to the power of expression found in a Roel d'Haese and said: "Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it." This is far removed from the sometimes stuffy image one might harbour of the diplomatic world.

Joost De Geest



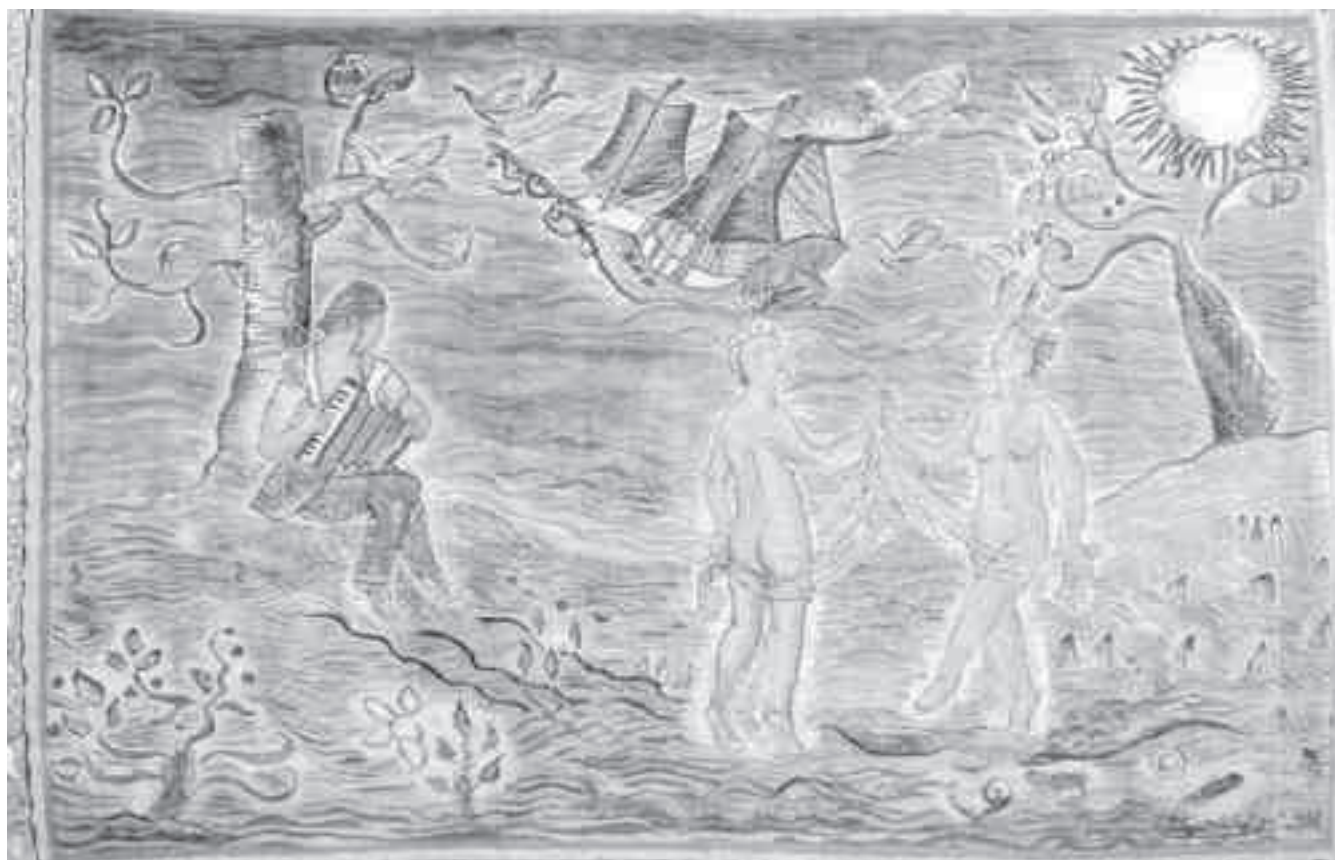
# Out of sight, but definitely not out of mind

## Belgian tapestries at embassies around the world

Our country is naturally associated with “High Art”. This also includes the Flemish tapestries. The latter are found in virtually all major museum collections and adorn the walls of many castles and palaces. This means that visitors come into contact with art that has contributed to Belgium’s image for centuries. Those that are only accessible to a privileged few, and are therefore fairly unknown, are the tapestries that hang in Belgian embassies, consulates and official residences around the world. These places are highly suitable havens for displaying these treasures, precisely because this art form is so closely linked to and associated with our country.

The FPS Foreign Affairs collection includes fifty-five antique tapestries. They date back to between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and were woven in Brussels, Antwerp, Oudenaarde and Aubusson. Many are housed in the Egmont Palace in Brussels, while a total of twenty-nine tapestries adorn the walls of the embassies in Rome (the Vatican and Quirinal) and London. They depict mythological scenes, hunting scenes and landscapes. Sometimes the old tapestries are combined or replaced with their counterparts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. FPS Foreign Affairs also possesses around 140 modern tapestries created from designs by Belgian artists. In this respect, this collection is, alongside the one in Tournai in the *Musée de la Tapisserie et des Arts du tissu* (Museum of Tapestry and Textile Arts), one of the most important in the country.





Edgard TYTGAT, *La souplesse des femmes est comme celle des flots* (The flexibility of women is like the waves), 1937, H 148 x W 207.5 cm, wool & silk, atelier Elisabeth De Saedeleer

SAINT PETERSBURG RESIDENCE



Edgard TYTGAT, *La Roulotte - La danseuse* (The Caravan - the dancer), 1939, H 149 x W 191 cm, wool & silk, atelier Elisabeth De Saedeleer

SAINT PETERSBURG RESIDENCE





### WORLD'S FAIRS AND SPAAK'S COMMISSION

In the first half of the last century, the Belgian State commissioned tapestries to be woven on several occasions to be exhibited at the World's Fairs. Elisabeth De Saedeleer (1902-1972), who ran a small-scale but important weaving workshop, wove tapestries for the World's Fair in Paris in 1937 designed by Edgard Tytgat (1879-1957): *La souplesse des Femmes est comme celle des flots* (Women's flexibility is like that of the waves) and *Le sommeil des Femmes fait rêver les Hommes* (Sleeping Women make for the dreams of men). *La fortune de la roulotte* (The caravan's fortune) was added for the World's Fair in New York in 1939. The tapestries, smaller versions of which were also produced, are now the property of FPS Foreign Affairs and have been the pride of the Consulate General in Saint Petersburg since 2009. Prior to this, they graced the interior of the ambassador's residence in Washington. At the World's Fair in New York, two tapestries were exhibited that had been designed by Floris Jaspers (1889-1965), *De Stichting van New York* (The New York Foundation) and *Het werk van de Missionarissen in de Verenigde Staten* (The work of the Missionaries in the United States), woven by the manufacturer Braquenié in Mechelen. This last tapestry now hangs in the chancery in Washington. The greatest boost for Belgian tapestry art came with the commission from Minister Paul-Henri Spaak (1899-1972) in 1947 and awarded to the *Centre de Rénovation de la Tapisserie de Tournai* (Tournai tapestry restoration

Floris JESPERS,  
*Contribution of the  
 Belgian missionaries and  
 academics to the discovery  
 and civilisation of America,*  
 1936, H 400 x W 500 cm,  
 Braquenié, Mechelen  
 WASHINGTON CHANCERY

workshop). The order for 300 m<sup>2</sup> of tapestries, amounting to 2,100,000 Belgian francs, had to be completed within three years. This was initiated by Forces Murales, a collective founded in 1947 by the young artists Louis Deltour (1927-1998), Edmond Dubrunfaut (1920-2007) and Roger Somville (b. 1923). The group was later joined by Marcel Bagniet (1896-1995), Michel Holyman (1924-1966) and Jean Ransy (1910-1991). Their objective was the procurement and revaluation of monumental arts. They wanted to make art for the people, art that denoted the working man for better or worse, joyful and belligerent. Tapestries using the traditional weaving technique were considered one of the means to achieve these objectives. The tapestry cartoon designs were applied in the *Atelier Coopérative de Tournai* (Tournai cooperative workshop). In spite of the great start and the dedication and enthusiasm of those involved, the cooperative went bankrupt in 1951. During its three-year existence, at least eighteen tapestries were woven from designs by Forces Murales. They belong to FPS Foreign Affairs and were intended from the start to embellish various embassies abroad. Cartoons that the group's members had designed separately were also used by the Tournai workshop. At the request of Foreign Affairs the weaving workshop's signature was not applied to all the tapestries; only the initials of the three artists were woven into the designs. The Forces Murales signature, an F and an S tilted to the right, is hidden in the linear pattern of the composition of some of the tapestries. Spaak's commission not only supported Tournai's tapestry production, but also the jobs associated with it and provided artistic promotion for an international revival of artistic expression. The tapestries, woven according to designs by famous artists, adorn the walls of embassies the world over: Riyadh, Canberra, Johannesburg, Montreal, New Delhi, Santiago de Chile, Seoul, Sidney, Tehran, etc. Nowadays, however, the style of these tapestries is not as popular, which means that many of them are stored in the FPS Foreign Affairs art depot in Brussels.

#### **ORDERS GALORE**

FPS Foreign Affairs (as well as other federal public services such as FPS Economy, Culture, SMEs and Education) also placed orders for tapestries with other workshops. In 1952, the manufacturer Gaspard De Wit in Mechelen was commissioned by the Belgian State to produce the winning tapestry cartoon resulting from a competition for a tapestry design for the UN headquarters in New York. For a long time, *The United Nations' work* from a design by Peter Colfs (1906-1983), was the largest existing tapestry (860 x 1350 cm) to be woven as a single piece. When it was completed in 1954, Belgium offered it as a gift to the United Nations; however, FPS Foreign Affairs continues to be responsible for its maintenance. The tapestry is a typical child of its time and is now somewhat dated. Nevertheless, despite losing its colour palette, it still takes pride of place in the UN headquarters in New York.

In the 1950s, FPS Foreign Affairs commissioned De Wit to weave *Opschik van Venus* (The Trappings of Venus) and *Oranje boeket* (Orange bouquet) by the Flemish artist Julien Van Vlasselaer (1907-1983) and *Les Vendanges* (The Harvests) and *Les vièrges sages et vièrges folles* (The wise virgins and



mad virgins) by Mary Dambiermont (1932-1983). In 1963, the workshop produced *Triomf van de Vrede* (Triumph of Peace) from the design by Roger Somville. The Belgian State agreed to loan it to NATO for its former headquarters in Paris. Furthermore, there are many tapestries in the collection that were woven between 1950 and 1980 by the manufacturer Chaudoir in Brussels. These are mainly works produced from tapestry cartoon designs by Liliane Badin (b. 1929), José Crunelle (1924-2012), Robert Degenève (1919-2008), Marce Truyens (b. 1939) and Jean Van Noten (1903-1982). All these artists have made a major contribution to Belgian tapestry art. The selection of artworks that are on display abroad is compiled from proposals made by the FPS Foreign Affairs Movable Heritage, Art and Antiquities department, in consultation and/or at the request of the ambassador involved. The selection takes account of the building's possibilities, location and the condition of the tapestries. Sometimes work can be observed that spans several decades, such as in the Washington D.C. chancery, where the aforementioned tapestry by Floris Jaspers from 1936 houses, together with *Sint-Joris en de draak* (Saint George and the dragon), also known as *St-Georges et la Pucelle* (Saint George and the Maid), from 1949 by Michel Holyman.

#### STYLE COMBINATIONS

Various styles are combined at other locations. The embassy in Riyadh displays *Le Chèvre* (The Goat) by Dubrunfaut and *Le Dormeur* (The Sleeper) by Somville. José Crunelle is an artist famous for his colourful, lyrical, abstract compositions. His work has adorned the stunning official

Michel HOLYMAN,  
*Sint-Joris en de draak*  
(*St. George and the Dragon*),  
1949

WASHINGTON CHANCERY

José CRUNELLE, *Untitled*, XX,  
H 146 x W 155 cm, wool,  
Chaudoir, Brussels  
OSLO RESIDENCE

Roger SOMVILLE,  
*Les pêcheuses* (*The fishwives*),  
XX, H 298 x W 194.5 cm,  
wool & cotton  
NEW DELHI RESIDENCE





residence in New Delhi, where several tapestries (including *Le pêcheur* (The fisherman) and *Les grandes voiles* (The mainsails) by Somville and Forces Murales have hung since 2011. The embassy in Kampala is fortunate enough to display the colourful, abstract tapestries by Degenève and Reginald Mangon, as well as the stylised *Puenté la Reina* by Truyens. Lastly, closer to home, a modern ensemble of four tapestries is displayed at the embassy in Helsinki. *Vogels met slingerplanten* (Birds with creepers) by Netty de Montalembert (1892-1993) and the warm, impressive *Ardevante Espagne* (Passionate Spain) by Crunelle date back to the 1960s. The piece by Marcelle La Croix-Flagey (1900-1999) is truly exceptional. Her abstract tapestry cartoon designs include natural phenomena, feelings or cities, such as *Helsinki* from 1971, totally befitting for this location. Her extremely personal visual language and subtle use of colour affords La Croix-Flagey's tapestries a certain timelessness. Recently, a work in red and purple by Tapta Wierusz Kowalski (1926-1997) was added, which testifies to the evolution that tapestry art underwent in the 1970s. This means that various genres are represented in Helsinki.

This brief insight, featuring a limited selection of embassies, illustrates the attention that FPS Foreign Affairs devotes to the balanced representation of modern Belgian tapestry art abroad. Safe in the knowledge that this art form and broader textile art is still alive in Belgium today, it offers the hope that this tradition will endure and that Foreign Affairs will continue its leading role by also including contemporary creations in its collection.

Elsje Janssen

# Practical info

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## AUTHORS

**Ilse Dauwe** studied art sciences at Ghent University. She also obtained art and antique dealer qualifications from Syntra Brussels (evening school). She has managed the FPS Foreign Affairs art and antiques collection since November 2002.

**Joost De Geest** studied at the RUG (now Ghent University) and the Free University of Brussels. The theme of his thesis involved fantastic literature and art. He worked at the Université de Lille III (Lille 3) and in the communication department at Gemeentekrediet/Dexia bank, including as a curator of the art collection. He managed the *Musea Nostra* and *Monografiën over moderne kunst* (Monographs on modern art) series. Joost De Geest's publications include those related to Brabant Fauvism, art at the Front 1914-1918, H.V. Wolvens, Gustave Van de Woestyne, Emile Veranneman, Wilchar, Jozef De Coene, Emile Salkin, Armand Rassenfosse, Willy Peeters, Jozef Van Ruyseveldt, Bruno Vekemans and Roel D'Haese and he compiled *Het Belgisch kunstboek* (The Belgian book of art) (Lannoo en Standaard). Joost De Geest was an art critic at *De Standaard*, and now performs the same role for *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Netto*. He is the author of the OKV (Public Art Collection Flanders) themed editions *Aquarelkunst na 1800* (Watercolour art after 1800) (2008, no. 4) and *Regionale schilderscholen* (Regional painting schools) (2009, no. 6).

**Dr. Elsje Janssen** studied Art history and Archaeology, Textile Restoration and Social and Cultural Anthropology. She obtained a PhD in Archaeology and Art History at the Free University of Brussels with a thesis about *De wandtapijtkunst in België na 1945* (Tapestry art in Belgium after 1945). She worked as the Tapestry and Textile Curator at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels and was actively involved in the foundation of the MAS Museum in Antwerp. She was also curator of the Vleeshuis Collection and the Town Hall Collection and director of Collection Policy/Conservation and Management for the City of Antwerp. Elsje Janssen is coordinator of the *ICOM Conservation Committee Textiles Working Group* and selects artists that will represent Belgium at the *International Triennial of Tapestry* in Lodz, Poland. Since January 2011, Elsje Janssen has worked as Textiles Curator at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

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