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Press Release

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Bento and Vinciane Despret will occupy the Belgian Pavilion 18th Venice Biennale of Architecture

The Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Wallonia-Brussels International are pleased to announce the appointment of the curatorial team, Bento and Vinciane Despret, with their proposal "**In vivo**," to represent Belgium at the 18th Venice Biennale of Architecture (20 May-26 November 2023).

The proposal was unanimously chosen by the jury from among the 19 entries following the publication of the call for projects. "In vivo" questions our extractivist production system by identifying and developing construction alternatives based on materials from living organisms. This multidisciplinary team (architects, philosopher, anthropologist, designer and microbiologist), combining architecture with the field of human sciences and stemming from the entire territory of the Walloon-Brussels Federation, particularly convinced the jury.

In that capacity, for the scenography of the Belgian Pavilion, the curators will experiment on a large scale with natural and living materials, including unbaked clay and mycelium (the root-like structure of mushrooms) and will present examples of Belgian production channels and architectural projects that fall under a similar approach.

Their credo: *"How can we rethink architecture in a world of finite resources? [We propose to experiment with enviable alternatives for our territories, our cities -- alternatives that would be forged with and from the living elements that inhabit them and make up their fabric. Such experiments would altogether merely prolong, extend, and even honour the multiple (and often neglected) arrangements between humans and non-humans, living and non-living [...]. The "In vivo" pavilion will provide a time and a place for critical thinking, in particular because questions of responsibility, of taking into account other beings and of justice will be broached in relation to living and erected structures. Its strength will nonetheless be defined above all by concrete and inventive proposals for an enviable future of living, for which the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation will be a starting point for thinking, listing, affirming, confirming, revoking, planning, fantasizing and above all dreaming."*

The team is composed of architects Florian Mahieu, Corentin Dalon, Charles Palliez (Bento) and the philosopher and psychologist Vinciane Despret. Several partners are involved in the mounting of the exhibition: Corentin Mahieu (furniture designer and scenographer), Juliette Salme (anthropologist), Corentin Mullender (microbiologist), Permafungi (company producing mycelium-based materials).

Catalogue

Extract from the application: *"In order to generate the content of the catalogue and to articulate the proposals of the different members of the team, a period of study in the field will focus on the cross-analysis of constructions or initiatives carried out on the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation which work around making the most of local and/or natural resources for the manufacture of this territory, by structuring channels, wood, hemp, straw, mycelium, with Walloon stumps or straw, species from Soigne Forest, Brussels soils..."*

This study will be necessary in order to draw up an inventory of local initiatives carried out by individuals, companies or public institutions. This inventory will not however fall into the trap of an exhaustive list or the claim of a ready-made recipe, nor will it idealize the a priori benefits of things local.

The latter is a prerequisite to questioning our way of life, for which the Belgian territory will serve at times as a milestone at others as a starting point so as to be able to project ourselves towards an enviable future during the pavilion experience. These themes are articulated with the work of researchers from the University of Liège, the Faculty of Agricultural Biotechnology of Gembloux, the (French-language) Free University of Brussels, sometimes in connection with cultural institutions of the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the MAD Brussels (platform for gathering expertise from the city's Fashion and Design sector), the Contemporary Art Centre of Belgian Luxembourg, etc."

Team

It is on the basis of these reflections that Bento was awarded the European 16 prize on the CIVA (International Centre for the City and Architecture) site in Brussels. Florian Mahieu (born in 1993 in Saint-Ghislain, Belgium), Corentin Dalon (born in 1993 in Lyon, France) and Charles Palliez (born in 1993 in Lille, France) are now involved in developing mycelium recipes to bring Bento to a new scale by structuring a Belgian sector with producers and a microbiologist who are also part of the team.

Vinciane Despret (born in 1959 in Brussels, Belgium) holds a doctorate in philosophy and a degree in psychology from the University of Liège, where she is now a lecturer. She also teaches ethology and psychology at the (French-language) Free University of Brussels. She has written numerous books, the best known of which are *Au bonheur des morts* [To the Joy of the Dead] and *Habiter en oiseau* [Living as a Bird]. She has curated exhibitions in Belgium and abroad, given numerous lectures and directed several research projects.

Associates:

- **Corentin Mahieu** (born in 1989 in Saint-Ghislain, Belgium) is a designer. He has designed furniture for numerous exhibitions in Belgium (including some past and future exhibitions with Bento) and abroad, and has created stage designs (often built by himself), the latest of which is currently at the Varia theatre in Brussels. His knowledge of wood, assembling and mounting will prove particularly valuable for the installation and furnishing of the exhibition.
- **Juliette Salme** (born 1993 in Liège, Belgium) is an anthropologist. She is currently working on her doctorate in the department of social sciences at the University of Liège. Her doctoral research focuses on alternative practices of "making" from the perspective of an anthropology of techniques and a study of "do-it-yourself" sciences, where she is interested in the sensitive dimension of the development of biomaterials and relations between humans and non-humans at work. It was in the context of this field of investigation that she met the Bento collective.

Consultant :

- **Corentin Mullender** (born in 1989 in Ath, Belgium) is a microbiologist. He will supervise the formulation and production of the mycelium panels. He works regularly with Bento, as both are involved in another Brussels non-profit organisation, the "fungal lab", a research laboratory on mycelium.

Subcontractor:

- Based in Brussels, **Permafungi** (2014, Brussels, Belgium) is a company that produces mycelium-based materials, represented by Julien Jacquet (1984, Mons, Belgium).

For more information

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