

C. Critical Reconstruction Masterplan

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# Crime, punishment and art

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# Crime, punishment and art

—When new-build prisons are put out to tender in Belgium, a substantial amount is reserved for the integration of art. Unfortunately, the forthcoming construction of the prisons in Beveren, Marche-en-Famenne and Leuze-en-Hainaut shows that the path of art integration has not even been tried out. With a view to plans for another 10 new prisons, it is not a moment too soon to ask this question: can art be meaningfully integrated with the imposition of a custodial sentence?

## Failed flirt

New prisons are built as public-private partnerships. For the new prisons in Beveren and Dendermonde, the federal government opted in June 2011 for a development consortium assembled around the Dutch construction company Koninklijke BAM Groep. The consortium convinced the jury architecturally by means of a design by Stéphane Beel – the architect of projects including deSingel in Antwerp and Museum M in Leuven. This was a generic design that could be carried out at both locations and was also offered for Marche-en-Famenne and Leuze-en-Hainaut (where the consortium failed to convince the jury). Following pressure from local residents the construction plans in Dendermonde have been put on hold.

BAM's offering of art integration was also highly promising. In Berlinde De Bruyckere, Ronny Delrue, Emilio Lopez Menchero and Wesley Meuris, some respected artists lent their name to the enterprise. However, it soon became clear that nobody was overly enthusiastic about input from top-flight artists. More than once there was whispering in the corridors about balancing the additional costs of building the prison by slicing the art budget. Today (December 2013), just three months before delivery of the project in Beveren, it is still not known which artist will be engaged – let alone information about the choice of works. The parties involved are confident that art will ultimately get a place in the prison – and that will undoubtedly be the case. But it will surely mark the end of the integration of art in

the design and construction process.

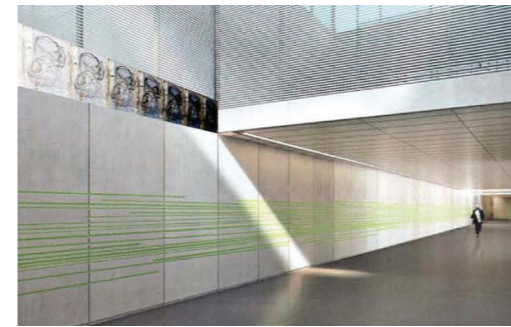
In the prisons in Marche-en-Famenne and Leuze-en-Hainaut, we can see how the integration of art degenerates into decorating walls and even becomes part of the security apparatus. Artists were asked to put forward a few proposals for the new prisons. Clutching the pattern card the management looked for a suitable place for the exchangeable objects. For the prison in Leuze-en-Hainaut, George De Decker and Franca Ravet put together a bundle of artistic interventions at the main gate (a sculptured fountain), the central corridor (wall decoration, sculptured lighting and audio tape), the waiting room (a painting on canvas), the lawyers' room (mask statues and paintings on canvas), the staff patio (a statue), chapel (coloured plexi-window) and panopticon (graphical fresco on the ceiling). The sound installation in the central corridor is not retained.

In Marche-en-Famenne a series of works of Vincent Strebelle was selected in a similar process. The most striking work is a set of four steel trees in the exercise yard. The eye-catching construction has a trunk height of 4 m and a crown height of 6 m. Besides embellishing the exercise yard the tree is intended to prevent helicopters from landing. Five polished stainless steel mirrors will be fitted to the perimeter and give the detainees the illusion of

looking through the wall. At the main gate there will be a door made of Corten steel that symbolically swings open and three flagpoles that lean towards each other. The wall of the courtroom is decorated with a gold-coloured fresco of a humane shadow – designed by B. Drion. The colourful lockers in the reception area also form an integrated piece of art.

The limited share of art in the massive public-private partnership obviously made it necessary for us to lower our expectations. The cost of building the prison in Beveren is estimated at €70 million and on top of this there will be an availability payment of approximately €13.7 million per year over an operational period of 25 years. The proposed piece of art called 'After all ... this time' by Kris Martin has a once-only budget of only €485,000. But when we take into account the different standards in the cultural world the budget reserved for art integration does create an opportunity to dream up something more ambitious.

Whatever the case may be, the meagre basis for art integration is symptomatic of the monopoly of the Ministry of Justice within the prison system. Criminal sentencing in the form of solitary confinement is regarded as the historical and sole task of a prison. All other elements of the programme are held to be of secondary importance. Education, welfare, culture and religion are always in the shadow of criminal sentencing. This tradition is being perpetuated by the internal reform of the Belgian state whereby education and welfare programmes are provided in prisons



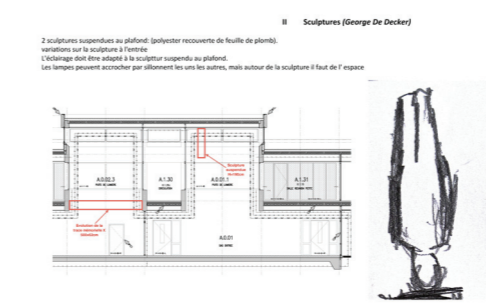
Etat d'esprit Franca Ravet  
Technique mélangée, acrylique, encre, vernis...  
3 Toiles 1m de 1m sur 1m montées sur châssis bois/alu  
Cadre de suspension en alu.

© George De Decker & Franca Ravet



I Travail graphique (Franca Ravet)  
Placé sur 47, 3m de hauteur dans deux des quatre puits  
sur les 2000 mètres carrés de la façade, de deux œuvres qui ont pour thème  
« Evolution de la trace mémorielle X »  
2x Evolution de la trace mémorielle X »  
Dimensions : 500cm x 12,5cm (en deux parties de 250cm)  
Technique : Impression directe sur plaques de d'Enova L.M.

© George De Decker & Franca Ravet

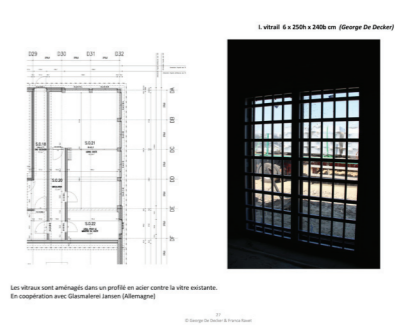


II Sculptures (George De Decker)  
2 sculptures suspendues au plafond. (polyester recouverte de feuille de plomb).  
variations sur la sculpture à l'entrée.  
L'éclairage doit être adapté à la sculpture suspendue au plafond.  
Les lampes peuvent accrocher par elles-mêmes les uns les autres, mais autour de la sculpture il faut de l'espace



L'INVERTÉ est né pour penser, mais n'est né que un moment sans le faire ;  
mais les pensées pures, qui le rendent heureux, il peut toujours les soutenir,  
le fatiguer et l'abandonner ;  
C'est une vie en soi à laquelle il ne peut s'accommoder ;  
Il lui faut du remuement et de l'action, c'est à dire  
qu'il est nécessaire qu'il soit quelquefois agité des passions,  
dont il sort dans son cœur des sources si vives et si profondes.  
(Blaise Pascal)

une figure inversée  
la tête en bas  
un monde à l'envers  
sculpture en plein air  
fonte d'aluminium ou en acier corten  
Colonne 2 mètres (120 x 70)  
Figure 2 mètres

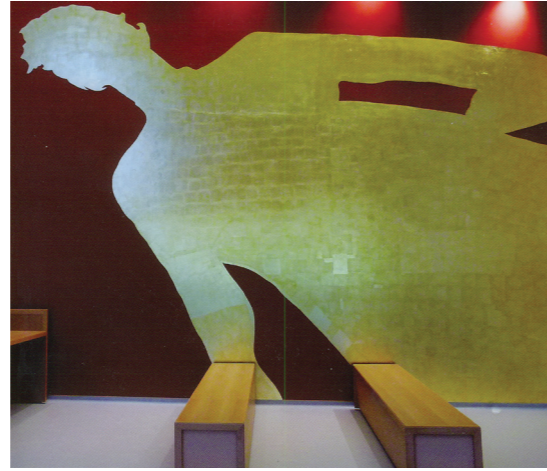
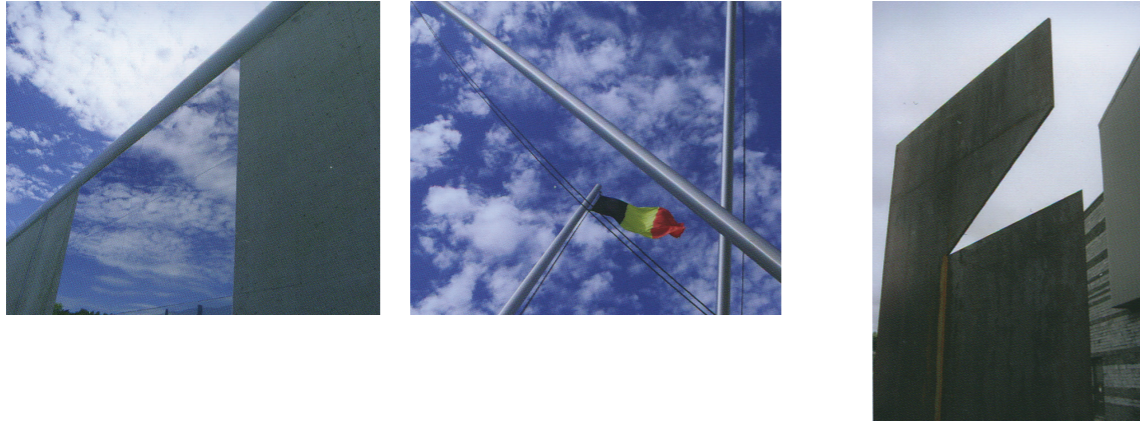


III vitrail 6 x 250h x 240h cm (George De Decker)

Les vitraux sont aménagés dans un profil en acier contre la vitre existante.  
En coopération avec Glasmalerie Jansen (Allemagne)

© George De Decker & Franca Ravet

Proposal for art integration in the new prison of Leuze-en-Hainaut by Georges De Decker and Franca Ravet: fresco 'Evolution de la trace mémorielle X' (above left), fresco 'Etat d'esprit' (above right), sculpture of inverted man, mask-statues, coloured plexi-window (2013). © Buildings Agency

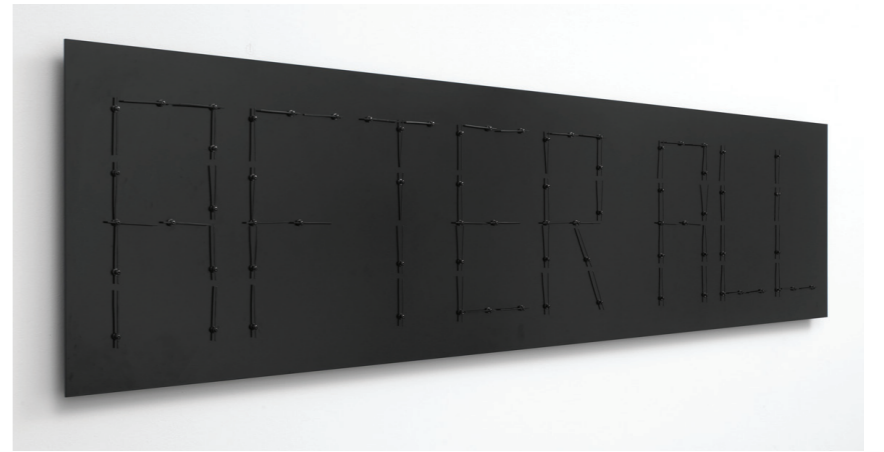


Art integration in the new prison of Marche-en-Famenne with a series of works by Vincent Strébelles (sculpture 'Open Corten steel', five mirrors 'Breaches for the mind', four tree sculptures and three inclined flagpoles.) en B. Drion (fresco 'Shadow of the Human Rights') (2013). © Buildings Agency



Proposal for art integration in the new prison of Beveren by Interbuild NV (BAM PPP) with art work by Kris Martin 'After All... This Time' (4x boards After all, 1x board This Time, 70 x 300 x 7,5 cm). © Sies + Høke Galerie

by philanthropic organisations with aid from lower authorities. In the worst case, these extra-judicial activities are assigned a place in a system of privileges that detainees receive for good behaviour.



## Willing subcontractors

The meagre basis for art is attributable not only to a lack of interest among contracting authorities, however. A lot is due to the offering prepared by Stéphane Beel Architects. The offering's precise detailing and estimate of the sketched design is in sharp contrast with the vague chapter on art integration. What we read here is merely the impressive accomplishments of the artists concerned, fleshed out with a few general considerations. Only Ronny Delrue and Emilio Menchero Lopez took the trouble to put forward an initial suggestion for a concrete artistic intervention.

Emilio Menchero Lopez suggests creating situations whereby the body of the detainee is mirrored. He refers in this respect to earlier work in which the human voice was reintroduced into urban space, like the Tarzan cry (Ghent, 2000) and Pasionaria (Brussels, 2006). It remains unclear in the suggestion whether the voice of the detainee is deemed to be present inside or outside the prison. In any event the artist hopes to humanise the abstract space of a prison – and the work of art responds in a certain sense to the mortification of the individual within the prison complex.

Ronny Delrue suggests collecting portrait photographs of every incoming

detainee and then obliterating the face and the sticking it to the prison wall. This creates a total work of art whereby the identity of the detainee disappears and the former living environment remains as a silent witness. Here again it remains unclear whether the indoor walls of the prison are involved or the outdoor wall.

The offering's suggestive nature is appropriate to the pronounced autonomous interpretation of art. The offering describes how a respectful dialogue will be established with the artists. The artist is not confronted in any way whatsoever by specific expectations and conditions – let alone a commitment to deliver a certain result. The art chapter in BAM's offer is therefore not about finished ideas, but about the person of the artist. The promise is that they will act as an artistic quality chamber that enters into an in-depth dialogue with the architect, developer and client. In practice, the total freedom of the artist produces precisely the opposite result: a non-dialogue and total lack of interest.

The silent demise of art is not surprising insofar as the selected oeuvres reflect a 19th century view of art. In the work of Berlinde De Bruyckere, we see an art production of sublime objects focused on passive contemplation. In a spatial environment where every standalone element is removed preventively, the question is quickly answered as to whether such an object would not be better in the indoor garden or in the car park. In



Proposal for art integration in the offering 'Gate of Beveren' prepared by Stéphane Beel Architects and JaspersEyers Architects with art works by Berlinde De Bruyckere (in Flanders Fields, 2000), Emilio López-Menchero, (Pasionaria, 2006) and Ronny Delrue (untitled sketch, 2011)  
© BAM PPP

a management model where every responsibility is scrupulously defined and translated into cash, there is no place for the unguided missile of art. Whatever the case may be, it remains unclear who will find comfort in viewing a deformed art object, a series of mutilated self-portraits or a raising of the human voice.

### Disrupted contact

To save the integration of art it is necessary above all to ask this question: what exactly is the art being integrated in? In the ARTfloor project (2005) the German artist Jeanet Hönig incorporated abstract line drawings in the cast-house floor of the new prison in Hasselt. The playful shapes and colours are in marked contrast to the grey monotony and rectangularity in the prison. The spatial experience is designed to induce contact between the different users of the prison. The applied strategy is in line with Hönig's earlier works in public spaces and circulation areas in which social interaction is not obvious, such as hotels, shopping centres, railway stations and airports.

The problem of the artistic interpretation of the prison as a circulation area is that it disregards the aspects of crime and punishment. The disrupted contact in a prison is not a result of rushed commuting, but part of a

regime aimed at mortification: by taking away the individual's freedom the prison sentence also takes away the social network in which he or she moves. In the quasi-religious interpretations that underlie the panopticon, each person was assigned one cell. Inside the cell the detainee is left to his own devices – not only with a view to security, but also with a view to penance and reflection. Contact with other people is restricted to a strict minimum.

Something else that is overlooked is that by definition social contact in a prison is not good. Prison represents a punishment model that brings a lot of detainees together under one roof. In principle, the criminal record, social background or psychological condition of the individual is unimportant. This undifferentiated regime is often cited as a reason for the high reoffending figures because a prison brings together



people it would be better not to bring together. Many people describe prison as a factory of crime rather than a place of reflection. Not to mention the effects of overcrowding which means that several people – two and sometimes with a third sleeping on the floor – are obliged to share a small cell for 23 hours per day.

The problem with the ARTfloor object is that it engages too directly in the prison architecture and thus focuses on the easiest victim: the detainee. Would it not be far more exciting to look for a dialogue with the designers (the subject) of this regime instead of the detainee (the object)? Apparently, the regime is unable to create the human prison environment that the law prescribes. The Basic Law (2005) states that a custodial sentence should

occur in 'psycho-social, physical and material circumstances that respect the dignity of the person, that enables retention or growth of the self-respect of the detainee and that hold him accountable for his individual and social responsibility'.\* Such an environment is necessary as a foundation for the future rehabilitation and reintegration of the sentenced person. From this perspective, would the detention regime itself not be a better target of art integration?

\* See Article 5 of the Basic Law concerning the prison system and the legal position of detainees (2005)



Art integration in the new prison of Hasselt with art work by Jeanet Hönig, 'ARTfloor' (2005) © Buildings Agency

## Punishment and repression

Or, what would happen if art integration focused on the outside world? Is it not more meaningful to set up art integration that aims at the disrupted pattern of life of the normal urban dweller? After all, the disruption of social relationships in prison is also the result of an increasing culture of repression in society. A political stance of immediately punishing every delinquent act runs in parallel with the general lack of interest in the punished individual. These two forms of repression are shaping the current modernisation of the prison system following the Masterplan 2008-2012-2016.

Firstly, the building of new prisons is part of a more stringent criminal sentencing. The Master Plan was established to modernise the prison system in Belgium based on the new Basic Law. In practice, all attention is being directed principally to extra capacity. When taking up her post as Minister of Justice, Annemie Turtelboom made clear that the priority was to create extra cells. She hoped that this would put an end to overcrowding and, above all, to the absence of punishment. The new prisons will enable the legal system to impose custodial sentences more quickly.

Secondly, the Master Plan means

shifting prison complexes from the central, visible positions given to them in the 19th century. The locations chosen for new prisons is always in peripheral areas. The prison in Beveren is adjacent to the E17 motorway. The prisons in Sint-Gillis, Vorst and Berkendael are being relocated to a remote industrial site in Haren (on the northern border of Brussels Capital Region) where they will be combined into a fully-fledged prison village. The choice of locations for the 'New Antwerp' prison alongside the A12 trunk road has again been raised for discussion by the new city council – but the latter's Management Agreement makes certain that the existing Remand Centre in Begijnenstraat will disappear.

A frequently heard reason for this shift is the nuisance caused and the potential danger for local residents. But even in the new locations there are still issues with the efficient inward and outward movement of detainees. After all, the distance between the prison and the court will be considerably greater – with a greater likelihood of delays through traffic congestion. Whatever the case may be, the choices of remote and even marginal locations are at odds with the modern vision of criminal sentencing with retention of human dignity and social network. The spatial embedding of the new prison complexes has a stigmatising effect and makes it more difficult for relatives to pay visits. In this way the modernisation of the prison system appears to have been inspired more by the mediaeval tradition of expelling delinquents from towns.



Photo project 'Out of the picture' by Victoria Deluxe in the prison of Ghent (2012). Photography: Eduardo Tardaguila (above left), Evy Menschaert (centre left), Kaat Pye (right) and Michiel Hendryckx (bottom) © Evy Menschaert

## Counterwork

A lesson that we can learn from the art intervention in the prison in Hasselt is that the integration of art in a prison never goes far enough. The inclusion of colour shades in the cast-house floor goes a step further than putting up a statue at the main gate, but still exhibits a lack of interest in the day-to-day existence of detainees. It also exhibits a disbelief in the possibility of art to make a contribution to the humanisation of a custodial sentence – or at the very least to intervene in the detention regime. Is it too much to ask for art at least to offer some distraction from a mind-numbing detention regime?

The contrast with the theatrical show 'A New Exercise' (2013) of Victoria Deluxe and De Rode Antraciet is considerable. This is a show directed by Caroline Petrick and Dominique Willaert in Ghent prison – more widely known as 'The New Exercise'. In the show, ten detainees and internees tell a recognisable story based on a soccer metaphor about life after prison. In their imagination they take a daily walk to attractive places that encourage them to get back on to the field. A bad violation is what has to be avoided.

The show might not be intended as the integration of art, but it does offer – and explicitly – a real addition to a prison regime. The actors personally wrote the scenario during work sessions with the directors who acted solely as a supervisor of a process of which the result was not known in advance. The theatre project came about spontaneously at the request of the detainees and internees who were involved in the 'Out of the Picture' exhibition of Victoria Deluxe. In the photo project photographers were asked to record the distant recollections of detainees and internees in an artistic impression.

The show continued where the photo project stopped. The need to weigh up the individual role within the common interest of the show offers the participants a possibility to experience personally the significance of citizenship. By so doing, art reintroduces the forgotten prospect of rehabilitation and reconciliation in the everyday prison life. Despite its modest contribution, the art sector nevertheless appears to be one of the few parties to do justice to a perspective

Wie dat wij zijn?  
Gevangenis.  
Je moet geen ander woord gebruiken.  
Waar wij verblijven?  
In de gevangenis.  
Het woord 'bak' mag je hier ook gebruiken.  
En hoe wij ons voelen?  
Gevangen  
Zet het maar in het vet.

Als je een lange schorsing ultiem en je komt terug op dat veld...  
Is het dan niet zo dat je heel wild staat?  
En het risico loopt om snel een nieuwe zware overtreding te maken?  
Gaat dat hier over voetbal of over onze beschaving?  
Wel, de voetbal is een onderdeel van onze beschaving.  
Iedere ochtend maak ik in mijn hoofd een nieuwe wandeling.  
Het zit hem vooral hier (wijst naar z'n hoofd).  
Wij zijn op zoek naar plekken en momenten in ons hoofd die ons opnieuw goesting doen krijgen om mee te spelen.  
Wij willen terug op dat veld geraken.  
En hoe schoner en peetscher dat die plekken en momenten zijn,  
hoe groter de kans dat we deze keer niet van het veld worden gestuurd.

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that, mandatorily, has been written into the new Basic Law (2005).

It is important to note that the show was put on repeatedly in the prison in front of a large audience. The rare moment of contact opened a different, virtual space in which the detainee and internee distanced themselves from the all-determining crime. In the show the detainees and internees involved do not represent themselves, but play an interchangeable role that they choose themselves, one appropriate within a scenario and that is of significance to the viewer. The sublime element in art thus gets a very practical function in the breaking of a chain that equates the individual with the crime.





## In conclusion


'A New Exercise' is a production that shows how art integration can fulfil a precise function within the detention regime. In the theatre project the detainee is no longer portrayed as a passive consumer of a sublime object created by some creative genius with an elevated message. In 'A New Exercise' the detainee and internee are themselves the active producer of a shared artistic project. The position of passive consumer is taken on board by the audience, who will experience that the detainee or internee does not simply correspond with the crime, but rather is a living subject that speaks and acts.

From this point it should not be all that difficult to define in precise terms the expectations to artists within the Performance Plan and also to give the costs a place in the business model of the public-private partnership for the next ten or more prisons. However, a precondition is that artists get away from the 19th century interpretations of both prison life and art.



## PRISON GEAR

KENNISPLATFORM  
VOOR HUMANE  
GEVANGENIS  
ARCHITECTUUR

 With support of the  
Flemish authorities

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