

PRESS RELEASE

## Soft Power – The Brussels Way of Making the City

From October 19, 2024 until March 16, 2025, the S AM Swiss Architecture Museum presents the exhibition 'Soft Power – The Brussels Way of Making the City'.

An exhibition of S AM Swiss Architecture Museum in cooperation with the Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA) and with support of Brussels Capital Region.

### THE EXHIBITION AT A GLANCE

The exhibition 'Soft Power: The Brussels Way of Making the City' traces Belgium's journey to becoming an internationally renowned hotspot for contemporary architecture and urban planning. The show sheds light on the framework conditions that have given rise to a high-quality building culture in Brussels and encouraged a new generation of architects to participate in its urban development.

The Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA), which was founded in 2009, has made a significant contribution to this, despite being an institution with a purely advisory function. Through it, the city architect and his team have developed a range of tools aimed at supporting clients throughout the entire project process, from its definition to its realization.

Competitions are the BMA's most important instrument: they enable a transparent opening of the markets for architecture, urban planning or public space and contribute to the quality of the projects and thus ultimately the city. The non-anonymized and internationally tendered 'calls' are conceived as a hybrid between open and invited competitions – a format to be considered more frequently in Switzerland?

Artistic Directorship: Andreas Ruby (S AM)

Curated by: Roxane Le Grelle, Andreas Kofler (S AM)

### BOUWMEESTER MAÎTRE ARCHITECTE (BMA)

In Belgium, the first 'bouwmeester' was appointed in Flanders in 1999, succeeded by Antwerp (2000), Brussels (2009), Charleroi (2013) and Ghent (2017). The scope of the Belgian 'master architect' is much broader than that of the historic Dutch 'Rijksbouwmeester', from which the designation derives. The Bouwmeester is not limited to supporting the government in its role as an exemplary client, but also promotes architectural culture through competitions, awards, and pilot projects.

In Brussels, Olivier Bastin was appointed first Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA) for a period of five years, during which time the development of new competition procedures began. Kristiaan Borret has retained this focus since assuming the position in January 2015. During his two mandates (January 2015 – December 2024), more than 400 'open calls' have been held, which serve as the first phase of a competition. Based on their skills, experience and motivation, 3 to 5 applicants are then selected for the second phase, for which a more detailed design is to be developed.

### 5 TOPICS, 10 YEARS, 15 PROJECTS

If multipli-city is the imperative future of the European city, then Brussels is a model for embracing this complexity. But it is precisely the notion of not having a Leitkultur that is now regarded as an interesting condition. A certain disharmony of the cityscape is perceived as positive, as it ultimately also better reflects the diversity of the urban population. The BMA has maintained this philosophy in Brussels and supplemented it with a variety of architectures that have emerged from the competition system.

The main part of the exhibition features 15 projects that have consolidated the agenda of Bouwmeester Maître Architecte, not least by requiring experimental procedures to be found and/or developed. They also reflect how Brussels is now able to focus less on being the political capital of Europe and again on being an inclusive home for its citizens.

### Productive City

Project: NovaCity, Anderlecht; architects: DDS+, &bogdan

Project: Manufaktur, Anderlecht; architects: Baukunst

### **Mixed City**

Project: Bronze, Anderlecht; architects: Carton123, agmen  
Project: Dockside, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean; architects: V+, MSA, ATAMA  
Project: ZIN, Bruxelles-Ville; architects: 51N4E, l'AUC, Jaspers-Eyers

### **Circular City**

Project: Zinneke, Bruxelles-Ville; architects: OUEST, Rotor  
Project: Usquare, Ixelles; architects: evr-architecten, BC architects & studies, Callebaut Architecten  
Project: Karreveld, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean; architects: AgwA

### **Everyday City**

Project: Gandhi, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean; architects: POLO  
De Roovere - Machtens, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean; architects: BC architects & studies  
Moulin 41, Saint-Josse-ten-Noode; architects: Czvek Rigby  
Project: Brigittines, Bruxelles-Ville; architects: XDGA - Xaveer De Geyter Architects  
Project: Condor, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean; architects: Dierendonckblancke Architecten  
Project: Flagey, Ixelles; architects: Kollektif landscape, Fallow, Ecorce  
Project: Marie Janson, Saint-Gilles; architects: VVV, StudioPaolaViganò

### **Metropolitan City**

Project: Tondo, Bruxelles-Ville; architects: OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen  
Project: KANAL, Bruxelles-Ville; architects: noAarchitecten, EM2N, Sergison Bates architects  
KANAL - Bookshop and Reading Room; architects: CENTRAL, Sophie Dars, Pierre Leguillon  
KANAL - Bar-brasserie; architects: Chancel, Frick Cloupet, Gangloff, Loizidis  
KANAL - Restaurant; architects: Elmès, Générale, Sarah & Charles, Vormen

## **THE BRUSSELS WAY OF MAKING CITY**

At the beginning of March 2024, the BMA launched a competition to develop the scenography for the S AM exhibition. A total of 61 applications for the first phase of the competition were submitted by March 18. Based on their quality and relevance as well as the quality assessment, 3 teams were selected to develop a proposal: Aslı Çiçek, Stiller Projects + studiømile, and POV (Carlos Pena & Damien Nuyts Roussel).

The teams had until mid-April to further develop their proposals and then present their projects in Brussels and discuss them with representatives of S AM and BMA, and Roxane Le Grelle (guest curator of the exhibition). Following the oral presentations and the subsequent discussion, it was decided to award the commission to Brussels-based Aslı Çiçek and her team. Together with the S AM and Roxane Le Grelle, they went on to develop the final concept

## **EXHIBITION LAYOUT**

I. The first exhibition room introduces Brussels not as the epicenter of the European Union but as an epicenter of contemporary European architecture. The content in this space prepares visitors for an architectural journey to Brussels. A 'light box' features over 300 sites in Brussels, each of which is introduced with a photo from Séverin Malaud. These locations have been tendered as competitions over the past ten years under the direction of Kristiaan Borret's team. The activities of the BMA, which are presented 'personally' by Kristiaan Borret and his team. A PowerPoint presentation that the office often deploys to introduce itself is used as the basis for the video. At the back of the room a work table reveals the BMA's tools and its extensive work.

II. In the following two-part enfilade of the S AM, 15 emblematic projects (see pages 8 and 9) that were accompanied by the BMA are presented in detail and divided into themes: Climate Change, Productive City, Mixed City, Circular Adaptive Reuse, Everyday City, Real Life, International City. These include well-known projects such as KANAL-Pompidou and WTC/ZIN. The selection is completed by projects in the field of social housing, public spaces, or re-use.

III. A selection of projects and their immediate urban contexts will be shown as 'tableaux vivants' (moving stills) developed especially for the exhibition by Maxime Delvaux - a Belgian architectural photographer based in Brussels. These 'tableaux vivants' will be projected onto the walls in the last room of the exhibition and will immerse visitors in Brussels. A contribution that will also be audible.

In addition to Maxime Delvaux, photographs by Arvi Anderson, Michiel De Cleene, Dennis De Smet, Delphine Mathy, Thomas Noceto, Bas Princen, Dieter Van Caneghem and other Belgian photographers document the single projects in the exhibition.

## COOPERATION PARTNERS

### Bouwmeester Maître Architecte

Kristiaan Borret has been Bouwmeester Maître Architecte of the Brussels-Capital Region since 2015. The Bouwmeester is an independent government official who stimulates and supervises the design quality of urban development projects. He previously held the same position in Antwerp (2006-2014) and currently also works for the City of Amsterdam as supervisor for the two major urban transformation areas Oostenburg (2017-) and Hamerkwartier (2020-). He has been a professor of urban planning at the University of Ghent since 2005. In 2013, Kristiaan Borret was awarded the Flemish Culture Prize for Architecture.

### Guest Curator

Roxane Le Grelle is an architect and art historian. She was program coordinator at A+ Architecture in Belgium for four years and curator the Belgian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018. In that same year she started working at 51N4E. In 2020 she founded Architecture Curating Practice, an independent platform for architecture culture. Today, in addition to these, she is also a curator at Archizoom EPFL.

## SWISS ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM

### Curator

Andreas Kofler is an architect, urbanist, freelance writer and, since March 2018, curator and deputy artistic director at the S AM Swiss Architecture Museum. Originally from Merano, he studied architecture in Madrid and Vienna. He then worked for numerous offices, such as Rem Koolhaas's OMA/AMO, l'AUC and Dominique Perrault, before cofounding Weltgebras in 2013 in Paris. He writes regularly for the magazine L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui and teaches at the National School of Architecture in Versailles (ÉNSAV).

### Artistic Directorship

Andreas Ruby is a German architecture critic, book publisher and exhibition curator. After studying art history, philosophy, and media studies in Berlin, Trier, Bonn, Düsseldorf, and Cologne, he worked as an editor at the architecture magazine Daidalos in Berlin. He has taught architectural theory at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the University of Kassel, TU Graz, and ENSAPM in Paris. Together with Ilka Ruby he founded the agency for architectural communication Textbild in 2001 and the award-winning architectural book publisher Ruby Press in 2008, whose catalog now includes 50 titles. Since 2016 he is director of the Swiss Architecture Museum S AM in Basel.

## EVENTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

Education is a central component of the exhibitions at S AM. It takes place in close cooperation between the curators and the education team and is considered from the outset in the conception of the exhibitions.

The events in the accompanying program offer the opportunity to take up and deepen the topic in public discourse.

**18/10/2024**

**3 PM.**

Learning from Brussels

Public Exchange with the Team of Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA)

Venue: Multipurpose room of the Department of Construction and Transport, Dufourstrasse 40

**7 PM**

Public Opening

with speeches from Andreas Ruby, Kristiaan Borret (BMA), Roxane Le Grelle, Andreas Kofler

**22/10/2024, 7 PM.**

The KANAL - Centre Pompidou in Brussels: Trust in the Existing

Talk with: EM2N, noAarchitecten, KANAL, BMA, chaired by: Regula Lüscher, die Stadtmacherin

With support of the Hans und Renée Müller-Meylan Stiftung

As part of: les journées de l'architecture 2024

Venue: Messe Basel

**29/10/2024, 5-6 PM**

Exhibition tour for teachers  
Registration: [education@sam-basel.org](mailto:education@sam-basel.org)

**7/11/(DE), 12/12/2024 (DE), 23/1/(FR), 13/2/(DE), 27/2/2025 (EN), 6 PM**

Guided tours through the exhibition

**4.12.2024, 6 PM**

Book Launch: '10 Years of Soft Power - The Bouwmeester Maître Architecte in Brussels' & archithese 4.2024: Belgium

Venue: Domushaus EG, Pfluggässlein 3

**17/1/2025, 6 PM - 2 AM.**

Basel Museums Night at S AM - Comics & Brussels

**24/1/2025**

The future of Swiss architecture competition  
Lectures & Workshops in cooperation with SIA Basel & BSA Basel

**12/2/2025, 3 - 5 PM**

Kulturkompass in the S AM - for children aged 8 and over  
Cooperation between cultural institutions around the Theater Basel

**19/2/2025, 10 AM - 12 PM**

Wednesday-Matinée in the S AM

**27/2/2025**

**6 PM:** Special guided tour of the exhibition in dialog with Kristiaan Borret (EN)

**7 PM:** Book presentation 'Brussels Housing' (Birkhäuser)

**16/3/2025, 3 PM**

Tandem-Tour, S AM & Kunsthalle Basel

For changes in the program and further information: [sam-basel.org](http://sam-basel.org)

### **School Education**

Program for kindergartens, schools, universities, and daycare centers  
Dialogue-based guided tours and workshops in the museum, tailored to different age groups  
Guided tours: 60 min. / workshops: 90-120 min.  
Times: Mon-Fri: 8 AM-12 PM / 2-4 PM. Tours and workshops can also be booked outside official opening hours, making it possible to have the unique experience of being alone in the museum.

**COSTS:**

Elementary schools/Sec II: Free of charge  
Costs universities/private schools: CHF 200.-  
Tours ON FOOT or BY BIKE: discoveries outdoors

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### **Audioguide**

The broad project presentation shows the various tools and formats that the BMA has developed over the years. Since 2023, the S AM has also had an audio guide system that enables visitors to experience the content of the exhibition via sound. For the 'Soft Power' exhibition, this system will be used by the BMA team to explain the special features and the process of the projects individually.

THE EXHIBITION IS SUPPORTED BY

Exhibition Partner:

**BOUWMEESTER MAITREARCHITECTE**



Exhibition Supporters:



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