

## Press release

Exhibition *Camouflage, Behind the Abstract Pattern : Art - Nature - War*

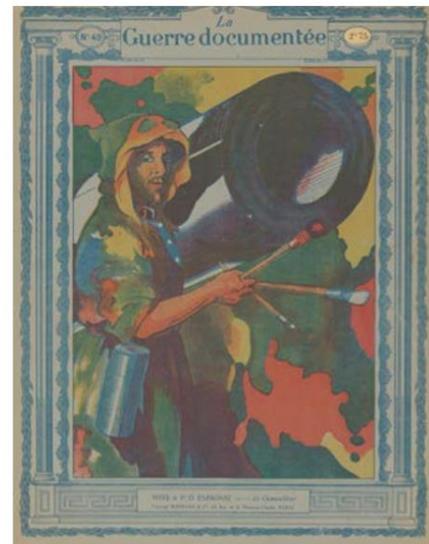
24-11-2019 to 29-03-2020

FeliXart Museum, Drogenbos, Belgium

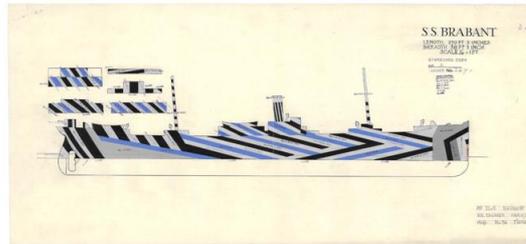
The concept of camouflage involves much more than a particular type of abstract motif. The exhibition *Camouflage: Art - Nature - War* at the FeliXart Museum offers a historical overview of the various tactics and motives involved in camouflage, and examines and reflects on the theme of camouflage in art and in our contemporary societies. With the advent of facial recognition systems and the risks of invasion of privacy, the subject is more than ever topical.



Fred Bervoets, *De Clown, Nevada*, 1988, acrylic on camouflage pattern fabric, 113 x 165 cm, private collection, all rights reserved; Pavo, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences; La Guerre documentée, n°49 [France], [1917-1918], private collection, all rights reserved.



The abstract camouflage patterns we are so familiar with today took shape on an experimental basis during the First World War, at the same time as Belgian artists were also experimenting with abstraction. The exhibition presents a surprising and original combination of specimens of natural camouflage, military objects and works of art. It highlights camouflage's relation to nature, the phenomena of optical illusion and the ambiguity of images.



Victor Vasarely, *Kara*, 1956, acrylic on canvas, 77 x 70 cm, private collection; *Equus burchellii bohmi*, 170 x 180 x 50 cm, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences; *S.S. Brabant*, dazzle camouflage plan, 1918, War Heritage Institute, Brussels.

For *Camouflage*, the FeliXart Museum has received outstanding pieces and archives, several of them previously unpublished, on loan from the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences and the War Heritage Institute. The exhibition is completed by works from the "Modern Art of the Interbellum Years" collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp, which are on deposit with the FeliXart Museum during restoration of the Antwerp museum, and by loans from Belgium and abroad.



Joseph Lacasse, *Le passage des Allemands à Tournai, le 6 août 1914*, oil on canvas, 210 x 110 cm, private collection; *Daphnis nerii* (Sphingidae), Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences; *Helmet*, Royal Belgian Institute

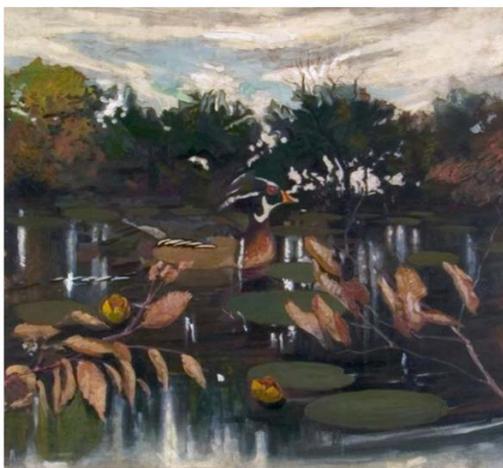
*Art: the twentieth-century eye, a different perspective* Playing with ambiguous images, dissolving the the outlines of shapes, and liberating colours are all typical of the artistic avant-garde of a century ago. The world underwent a radical change. Frames and fixed shapes blurred as people went searching for new ideals of wonderment and openness, fresh perspectives, widened horizons, economic recovery, social progress. This avant-garde approach expressed itself in particular in abstract art, of which Felix De Boeck was a pioneer in Belgium. Camouflage, the ideas it conveys and the forms it has helped popularize, inspired not only abstract artists, who played with shapes, but also Surrealists who employed it as a strategy. With the industrialization and generalization of camouflage during the Second World War, its impact increased even further, as camouflage motifs invaded fashion, music, cinema and, quite naturally, counter-culture.



Scott Paper, *The souper dress*, ca. 1966, cotton and cellulose, Modemuseum Hasselt; Michael Kampe, *Silhouette Eins*, 2010, collection Exploded View; Walter Van Beirendonck, AW1718 collection.

### Nature: Abbott Handerson Thayer

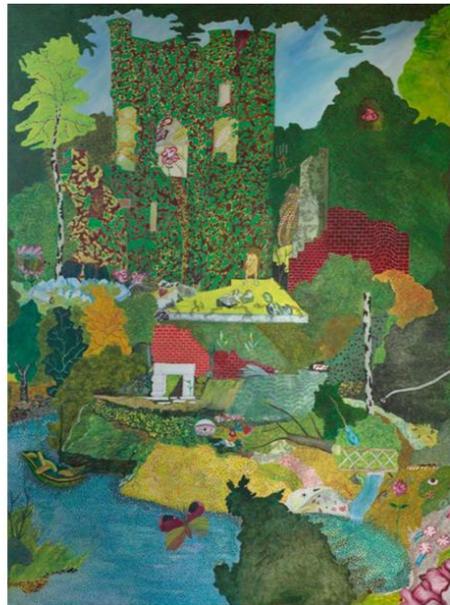
Animals develop specific colours, behaviours and patterns with which to conceal themselves in nature. These camouflage strategies form the basis of the artistic research of American painter and naturalist Abbott H. Thayer (1849-1921) and of his publication *Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom: An Exposition of the Laws of Disguise Through Color and Pattern* published in New York in 1909. Considered the father of scientific camouflage, Abbott Handerson Thayer researched the theme of camouflage extensively. The military aspects of his investigations served as inspiration to the English and American armies. His work on this theme, exhibited for the first time in Europe, provides the starting point for the exhibition *Camouflage: Art - Nature - War*.



Abbott Handerson Thayer (1849-1921):  
*Male Wood Duck in a Forest Pool*, study for plates 3 and 4 in *Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom*, ca. 1909, oil on board, 80 x 86,3 cm, Family and Estate Abbott Handerson Thayer; *Landscape with Bird Cutout*, s.d., watercolor on cardboard mounted on plywood frame, 15,5 cm x 57,1 cm, Collection of Elizabeth and Richard Meryman; *Diorama for Militaire Camouflage*, ca. 1915, watercolor and collage, 12,7 x 17,1 cm, Collection of Elizabeth and Richard Meryman.

### *War: optical illusions in the firing line*

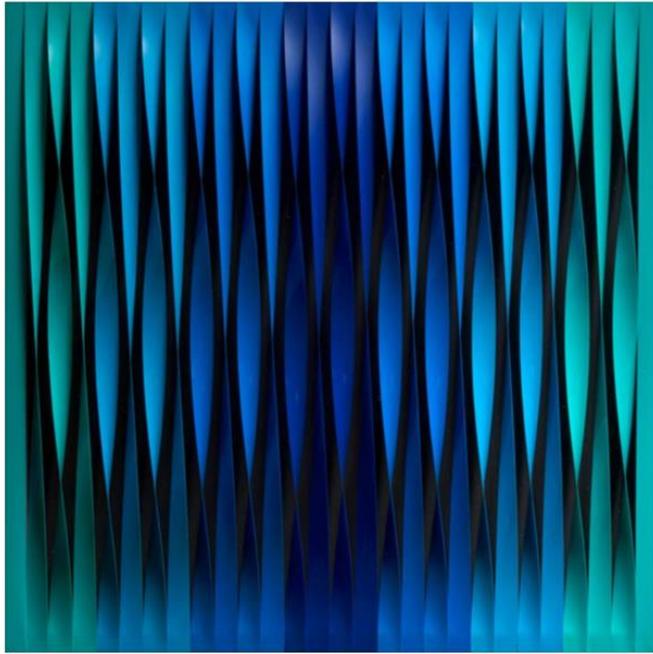
The First World War, which marked an indisputable turning point in the history of the twentieth century, also advanced many technical innovations of its day. Among these it established camouflage as a real military science aimed at protecting one's own troops, and surprising, distracting and, above all, deceiving the enemy. At the same time as soldiers traded their traditional coloured uniforms for more sober colours, numerous tactical experiments were conducted to teach soldiers to blend in with the natural environment and to deceive the enemy. Concealment (*krypsis*) and imitation (*mimesis*) are just two of the many forms and techniques of animal camouflage applied to military engineering. In the navy, a different motif and principle was developed: the *razzle dazzle*. This camouflage technique, consisting of linear and disruptive motifs is intended, not to make a ship invisible, but to make it difficult for the enemy to determine its course and speed. This form of camouflage has a disruptive effect on the predator's vision, in the same way as the stripes of a herd of zebras intersect and blur a lion's perception of them.



Edmond Van Dooren, *Het Paar*, 1920, oil on board, 132 x 62 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp; Pjeroo Roobjee, *De gecamoufleerde ruïne van Batenberg* (Brechtesgarten), acryl op doek, 200x120 cm, private collection; Jean-Jacques Gailliard, *Portret van een jonge schilder*, olieverf op paneel, 1943, Museum Dhont-Daenens.



All these issues still confront us today, in society and the contemporary arts: questions of privacy, our relationship to authority or our relationship to nature. In its various aspects, camouflage evokes the subtle balance that exists between the visible and the invisible, between the microscopic and the cosmic, between authority and subversion, between dissimulation and deception.



Walter Leblanc, *Torsions*, 1972, Collection Walter Leblanc Foundation; *Butterfly Morpho (Nymphalidae)*, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences; Adam Harvey, *CV Dazzle*, Look 5, 2014.

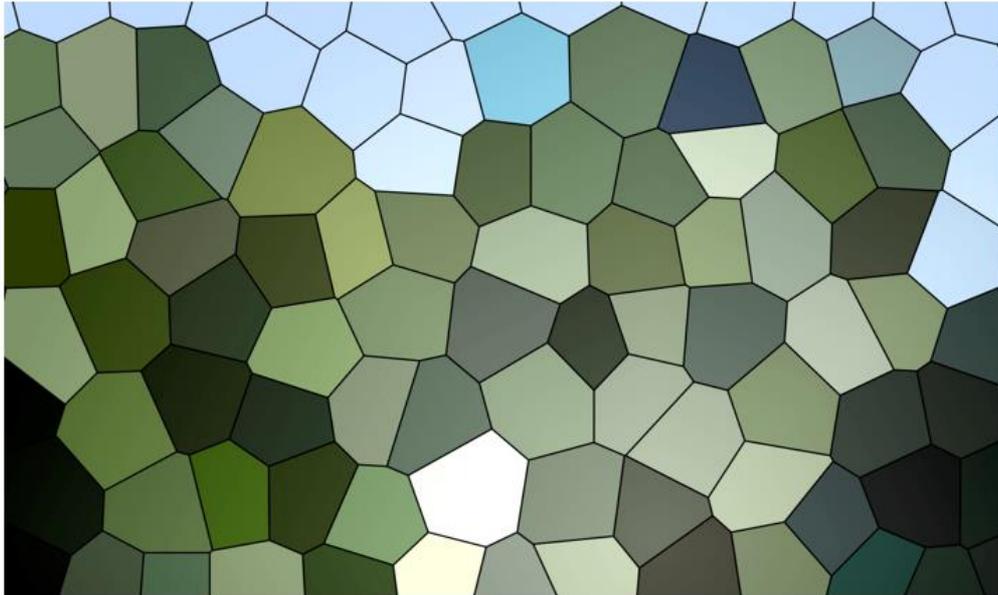
### *Works exhibited*

More than 60 natural specimens and military objects

Artists: Abbott H. Thayer, Rik Wouters, George Creten, J. Vanden Eeckhoudt, Jules Shmalzigaug, E-F. Lecomte, Joseph Lacasse, Frans Masereel, Paul Poiret, Jos Albert, Ferdinand Schirren, Felix De Boeck, Ramah, Marthe Donas, Jozef Peeters, Edmond Van Dooren, Floris Jaspers, Leo Dohmen, Robert De Smet, Marc Eemans, Marcel Lefrancq, Raoul Ubac, Willy Kessels, Victor Servranckx, J-J. Gailliard, Walter Leblanc, Michel Seuphor, Anne Bonnet, Louis Van Lint, Victor Vasarely, Maurice Wyckaert, Piet De Groof, Scott Paper, Jozef Mees, Alfons Schilling, Jan Yoors, Fred Bervoets, Pjeroo Roobjee, Emily K. Kngwarreye, Ria Pacquée, Martin Margiela, Walter Van Beirendonck, John Mawurndjul, Pascal Bernier, Lieven Segers, George Tjungurrayi, Kathleen Petyarre, Gérard Berréby, Michael Kampe, Simon Menner, Adam Harvey, Isabelle Streffen, Roy Villevoeye, Blexbolex, C. Gonzales-Casanova, Gery Desmet, Sylvie De Meerleer, Adji Titus, Nidraged and others.

### *FeliXart fully camouflaged*

On the occasion of the exhibition, the theme of camouflage has been developed across the FeliX site, both in the museum (FeliXart) and in the surrounding 5 ha eco-area (FeliXeco). A portion of the museum's façade will be camouflaged and integrated into the exhibition as part of a participatory project involving the inhabitants of Drogenbos.



### *Schools, groups and families: all in khaki!*

For *Camouflage*, the FeliXart Museum has developed a specific offering for schools and families. Guided tours followed by artistic workshops for young and old, play-circuits for families, full-day activities, vacation courses, cinema sessions ... Everything has been designed to learn while having fun!

The *Camouflage* exhibition will also be the occasion for a pilot project for Alzheimer's patients and their families in partnership with local players.

### *About the FeliXart Museum*

In an unexpected location, in the centre of the now urbanized municipality of Drogenbos, lies the FeliXart Museum, surrounded by a 5 hectare green oasis. This estate formerly belonged to Felix De Boeck (1898-1995), one of the pioneers of abstract art in Belgium. The museum opened in 1996 and focuses on the abstract art of historical avant-gardes, contemporary art and questions of visual perception. Through various projects, including exhibitions and publications of national and international importance, the museum has developed real expertise in these areas, taking, in recent years, an increasingly prominent place in the museum world.

### *Contact*

Gudrun Dewilde  
Communication FeliXart  
Kuikenstraat 6  
1620 Drogenbos  
[gudrun.dewilde@felixart.org](mailto:gudrun.dewilde@felixart.org)  
+32 476 62 70 15