



Press file

Abstract art, a bird's-eye view

13.06.2020 - 14.01.2021
FeliXart Museum Drogenbos, Belgium



Press file: Exhibition *Abstract art, a bird's-eye view*, FeliXart Museum

Abstract art, a bird's-eye view

The Museum of Ixelles, 1965. Felix De Boeck (1898 - 1995) left his back yard in Drogenbos, exchanged his farmer's clogs for city shoes and travelled to this famous museum, where a first retrospective was devoted to his oeuvre. This exhibition is considered one of the best of its day, it earned De Boeck recognition as a pioneer of modernism.

Today, 55 years later, in the same back yard in Drogenbos. Felix De Boeck is no longer among us, but his legacy lives on in a museum that bears his name, and which is located next to the beautiful farm buildings where he thrived as a farmer, artist and *bon vivant*. His family farm which also housed his painting studio, is now a protected and a restored monument. It looks as if De Boeck could at any moment open the front door with his pipe in his mouth to receive his friends and fellow artists. As if time stood still. The FeliXart Museum, a modernist building with lots of incoming light, was designed by architect Rob Geys entirely in the spirit of De Boeck's geometric work. Here time definitely does not stand still: what started as a monographic art cabinet has become a centre of scientific expertise on abstract art. The museum investigates the development of abstract modernism, revealing it in exhibitions where De Boeck's legacy is placed in a broader perspective.

The present exhibition reflects the approach of the museum. 50 works from the rich collection of the Museum of Ixelles travel to the FeliXart Museum. The Museum of Ixelles collection includes *The Pigeon*, an outstanding work by Felix De Boeck, dating from 1927. This pigeon temporally returns home, to the small green oasis in the municipality of Drogenbos, just 7 km as the 'pigeon' flies from the capital.

Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, refers to the structure of the exhibition: an ensemble of artworks that examines the evolution of modernism in Belgium, with special attention to abstract art. The FeliXart Museum is a particularly honoured host and opens its doors wide open to allow the works from the Museum of Ixelles, which are travelling while their alma mater is closed for renovation, to dialogue with those of Felix who, with his instinctive sense of innovation, passed through various art movements during his long life. Completing this historical overview is a small selection of works from the Interbellum collection of the Antwerp Royal Museum of Fine Arts. The loans from the Museum of Ixelles and the KMSKA tell beautifully the story that the FeliXart Museum cherishes and explores.

This story begins in a turbulent fin de siècle atmosphere, at the end of the 19th century and moves to its conclusion in the final decades of the 20th century. A thirst for innovation and an urge to experiment, combined with the processing of traumatic wars and crises. A period characterized by a contradiction between hopeful expectations and fear of an uncertain future. In the arts this ambivalent attitude is reflected in an extremely interesting way. A first generation of avant-gardists breaks with time-honoured realism and figuration, and paves the way for later generations of artists with a rich diversity of pictorial experiments. A new visual language is expressed in an amalgam of diverse movements, in which shape, colour and line are central, illustrated in the exhibition *Abstract art, a bird's-eye view* with a multifaceted variety of artworks.



Press file: Exhibition *Abstract art, a bird's-eye view*, FeliXart Museum

During the Interbellum this avant-garde remained in the background, to emerge as a source of inspiration after the Second World War for a second generation of artists who took abstraction to the limit. To this day, the search for breaking with conventions, for absolute purity or independence from reality remains central to artists, a search that comes into its own in this exhibition.

As part of the exhibition *Abstract art, a bird's-eye view*, the FeliXart Museum is also exhibiting a selection of works by Felix De Boeck at the Museum of Ixelles in 1965 during his first major retrospective. Drogenbos – Ixelles – Drogenbos: the circle is complete.

In partnership with:

MUSÉE
D'IXELLES
MUSEUM
VAN ELSENE



Practical information

Exhibition: 13.06.2020 - 14.01.2021

Opening hours: from Thursday to Sunday: 10:30 am – 5 pm
group visits also possible on other days by reservation

Entrance fee:

7 € / 5 € (discount)

guided tours (max. 25 visitors): 70 €

reservations: info@felixart.org or +32 2 377 57 22

Catalogue

OKV (Openbaar Kunstbezit Vlaanderen) dedicates a special issue to the exhibition *Abstract art, a bird's-eye view* and traces Felix De Boeck's personal evolution through iconic as well as less known but not less striking abstract creations from the collection of the Museum of Ixelles. De Boeck's art evolves entirely in step with the modern movements of the 20th century, without compromising to convention, but from an authentic creative urge. In the aftermath of Impressionism he progresses through the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde to contemporary art. Both the exhibition and this special issue duplicate the story the FeliXart Museum tells through the permanent collection of Felix De Boeck's works in Drogenbos.

Available in the museum: 10 €



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FelixArt Museum

Contact

Gudrun Dewilde - communication
FelixArt Museum
Kuikenstraat 6, 1620 Drogenbos
www.felixart.org
gudrun.dewilde@felixart.org
+32 476 62 70 15

Press images:
via the press room on www.felixart.org (password: press)
or by email



An initiative of



VLAAMS-
BRABANT



DROGENBOS

With the support of



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt



ERKEND
MUSEUM





Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FeliXart Museum

The first steps towards abstraction

The social-economic upheavals of Western society at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century are clearly reflected in art. Artists start looking for a different reality, which goes beyond the visual perception, to show a different world-view. This manifests itself in the choice of themes and the artistic experiments with lines, colours, light and perspective. Between the end of the 19th century and the First World War there is a multitude of artistic movements: Impressionism, post-Impressionism, 'les Nabis', Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism and futuristic. All movements that reject traditional academic forms and desire to abandon the classic examples that focus on pure imitation.

Belgium is quite special in this respect: the different artistic movements enter the country almost simultaneously, resulting in a hybrid style as a result of mixing the different influences. We find a constant in the free treatment of light and colour. However, the freedom of gesture, the way light and colours are treated in all these works is the common denominator.

Brabant Fauvism marks an important moment in this period of Belgian art. With a new vision of reality, defined by an explosion of bright colours on a flat canvas, a whole generation of artists, ambitious and optimistic, show their willingness to create a new twist in painting, which reflects the modern society. Thanks to the brewer and patron François Van Haelen who bought and collected their paintings, this generation of artists (Fernand Schirren, Rik Wouters, Jehan Frison, Jos Albert, Roger Parent) gained recognition. Located at the intersection of Linkebeek, Drogenbos and Beersel, the brewery became their meeting place, which is one of the reasons why the group would later be known as the Brabant Fauvists.



Ferdinand Schirren, *La lecture*, 1914, collection Museum of Ixelles



Rodolphe Strebelle, *La petite famille*, s.d., collection Museum of Ixelles



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FelixArt Museum



Ferdinand Schirren, *Les poissons rouges*, s.d., collection Museum of Ixelles

The time of experimentation

The idea of the avant-garde, being always ahead, led to a huge increase in of daring artistic experiments: Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, up to its most radical form: Abstract art. Abstraction marks a turning point in the history of art: it is both an end and a beginning. An end because Abstract Art represents the ultimate outcome of all artistic quests since the Renaissance, whereby art is interpreted as the imitation of reality (*mimesis*). It also marks a beginning: it opens up an immense field of possibilities for artists and influences all the art of the 20th century.

In Belgium the artistic revival accelerated after the First World War, mainly due to the emergence of two parallel movements: Abstraction (influenced by Theo Van Doesburg (1883-1931), initiator of the 'De Stijl' group) and Expressionism (influenced by German artists).

Between 1920 and 1926 Abstraction reached its peak in Belgium: this first generation of abstract artists, gathered in the group 'la Plastique Pure', offered a unique synthesis between Futurism (movement, dynamic lines) and Fauvism (bright colors arranged in flat tints), such as the works of Felix De Boeck, Prosper De Troyer and Jan Kiemeneij presented in the exhibition.



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FeliXart Museum

Expressionism, on the other hand, advocates a distorted figuration in order to increase the emotional strength of the subject represented. Artists such as Gustave De Smet and the brothers Oscar and Floris Jaspers created their own expressionist style, with cubist influences.

The 1930s were characterized by a 'return to order' in the arts (return of figuration and of tradition), the protagonists of 'La Plastique Pure' found themselves on the fringes of the artistic scene as Flemish expressionism blossomed. Thus, ended the dream of a new world.



Pierre-Louis Flouquet, *Construction 1*, s.d., collection Museum of Ixelles



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FelixXart Museum



Victor Servranckx, *Opus 20*, 1922, collection Royal Musea for Fine Arts Antwerp



Felix De Boeck, *Abstract*, 1921, collection Vlaamse Gemeenschap – FelixXart Museum

The Post-war years: rediscovery and new experiments

Geometric abstraction

After being marginalized for almost thirty years, abstract art returned to the forefront in the artistic process that followed the Second World War.

Between 1945 and 1948, the Apollo Gallery in Brussels exhibited young artists presenting the new trends in Belgian art: 'Young Belgian Painting'. Among them a small group presenting abstract paintings gives a new impetus to the movement.

Two trends can be identified among this group. On one hand, the so-called 'geometric' abstraction and on the other hand, the so-called 'lyrical' abstraction.

Geometric abstraction combines geometric shapes and plane colour fields in a two-dimensional space. The form, the rigour of the composition and the search for balance are essential here and are in line with the first abstract artists of the 1920s. In Belgium, Jo Delahaut was the main driving force behind this trend, he was soon followed by a new generation, including Pal Horvath and Guy Vandenbranden.



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FelixArt Museum

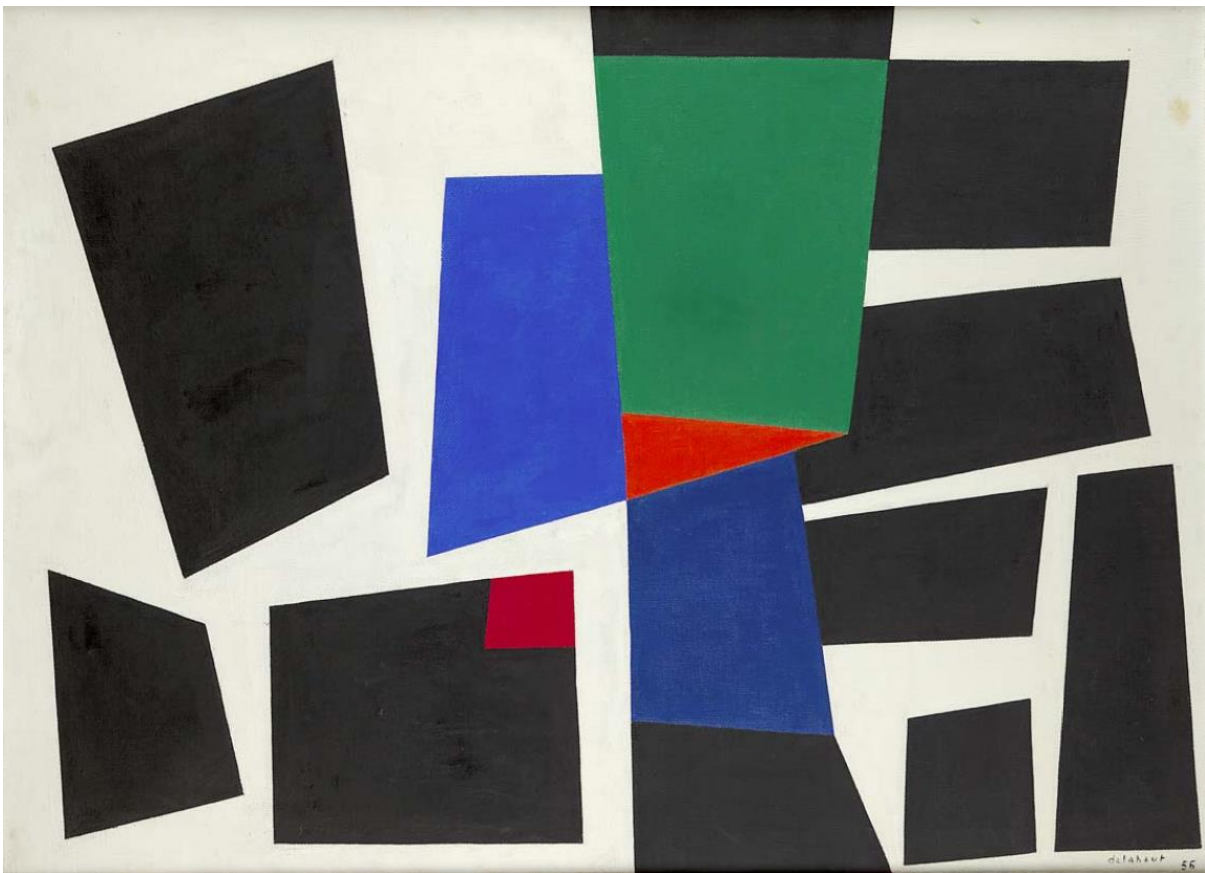


Pal Horvath, *Un thème et cinq variations*, 1971, collection Museum of Ixelles



Gaston Bertrand, *Dunes*, 1951, collection Museum of Ixelles

This (re)discovery of the pioneers, combined with the influence of the 'Zero' group (1958-1966), will profoundly influence the abstract artists of the 1960s. Reconnecting with the optimism and experimentation of their elders, these artists developed an informal and minimalist style that embodied a new modernity (Walter Leblanc, Jef Verheyen).



Jo Delahaut, *Rumeurs*, 1956, collection Museum of Ixelles



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FelixArt Museum

Lyrical abstraction

The group 'Young Belgian Painting' was a breeding ground for gifted artists who had a lasting influence on Belgian painting in the second half of the 20th century.

Alongside geometric abstraction, a group of artists developed a so-called 'lyrical' trend. This is characterized by the direct expression of the artist's emotion on the canvas and is expressed by a free and spontaneous gesture. Many artists from the 'Young Belgian painting' movement (Louis Van Lint, Anne Bonnet, Mig Quinet, Jules Lismonde, Marc Mendelson) are part of this trend, but it was not until 1947 that the term 'lyrical abstraction' was used. It covers a wide variety of styles. If some paintings are close to American Abstract Expressionism (Antoine Mortier, Pierre Lahaut), others are influenced by the CoBrA movement (Louis Van Lint, Mig Quinet, Maurice Wyckaert), others finally see their style and palette evolve from geometric abstraction to lyrical abstraction (Gaston Bertrand).

Although the artists of this 'second generation' of abstract artists were not unaware of the work of their elders, it was in Antwerp a few years later, around the group G58, that they first met. In 1959 the exhibition *The First Abstracts in Belgium* opened at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp. It was a tribute to the pioneers and included works by Jozef Peeters and Felix De Boeck: old and new avant-garde were brought together.



Maurice Wyckaert, *Paysage aux empreintes*, s.d., collection Museum of Ixelles



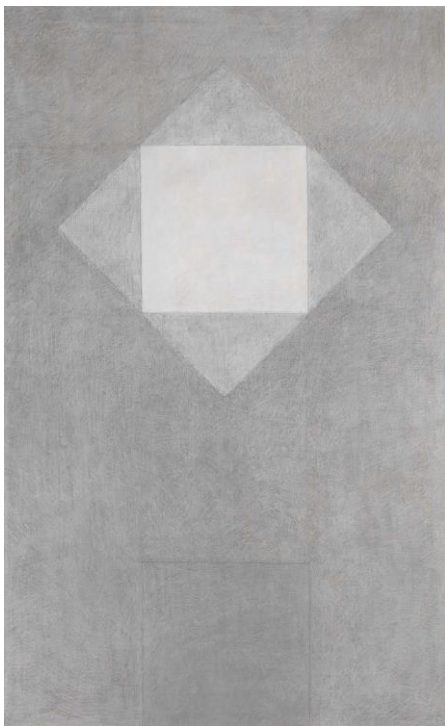
Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FeliXart Museum

Abstraction today

The artistic field opened by abstraction at the beginning of the 20th century is constantly renewing itself in its formal expressions and themes.

But unlike previous generations, few artists today define themselves as abstract. Nevertheless, in the abundance of contemporary artistic creations, we have selected a few artworks that we would like to put in perspective with the 'tradition of abstraction'.

During the years 1970-1980, when minimalist abstract art dominated the art scene (Dan Van Severen, Francis Dusepulchre), a shift towards conceptual art took place (Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Marthe Wéry, Michel Mouffe, Ann Veronica Janssens and Edith Deckyndt). The work of these artists, creates a link between abstraction and conceptual art. The work that we see reflects an 'idea', which becomes concrete in an extreme and simplified way by favouring pure lines and materials: the concepts are materialized in an 'abstract' way.



Dan Van Severen, *Sans titre*, 1978-79, collection Museum of Ixelles



Xavier Mary, *Modern industrial unit*, 2008, collection Museum of Ixelles

In recent years the FeliXart Museum, with its expertise in the first generation of abstract artists, has been exploring this link between abstraction, minimalist art and conceptual art, notably through exhibitions such as those devoted to Filip Francis (2018), Werner Cuvelier (2016) and, most recently, Stevv Steenhoudt (2020).

Finally, it is interesting to note that many actual artists share with their elders the desire to question and shake up the spectator's certainties and question the artist's place in society.



Press file: Exhibition Abstract art, a bird's-eye view, FeliXart Museum



Ann Veronica Janssens, *Untitled*, 2001, collection Museum of Ixelles

Artists

Felix De Boeck, Ferdinand Schirren, Rik Wouters, Roger Parent, Rodolphe Strebelle, Louis Thevenet, Georges Creten, Jean Brusselmans, Jean-Louis Flouquet, Jehan Frison, Jos Albert, Willy Schlobach, Dario de Regoyos, Marcel Jefferys, Jef Verheyen, Anne Bonnet, Gaston Bertrand, Louis Van Lint, Jo Delahaut, Jean Dewasne, André Dekeijser, Marc Mendelson, Antoine Mortier, Guy Vandenbranden, Paul Horvath, Mig Quinet, Jules Lismonde, Pierre Lahaut, Dan Van Severen, Gaston Bertrand, Edith Dekyndt, Ann Veronica Janssens, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Walter Leblanc, Michel Mouffe, Marthe Wéry, Xavier Mary, Maurice Wyckaert, Francis Dusepulchre, Jan Kiemeneij, Floris Jaspers, Oscar Jaspers, Ossip Zadkine, Edmond Van Dooren, Victor Servranckx, Jules Schmalzigaug, Paul Joostens, Prosper de Troyer, Marthe Donas