

We are wonderful

25 years of
design & fashion
in Limburg



a book about:

1. many things
2. Limburg (B)
3. twenty five years
4. outsiders' views
5. glory and relativity of design

1 — SOIL

The defining elements of Limburg's geological history are sand, clay, gravel and, especially, coal. Limburg's fertile soil has also determined its sociological and economic shape and development. This history fuels its progress to this day.

2 — LESS

Good design shows, because it contains logic. Its strength resides in a convincing and harmonious form that both is and doesn't want to be. Good design means as little design as possible. Nothing important is included, so the design's function and quality are immediately understood.

3 — ROOTS

Creativity is deeply rooted in the region's soil. Talent doesn't only germinate in the greenhouse of academia or in the warm embrace of a mentor or company. When given free rein, it clears a path of its own, persevering with conviction and ambition.

4 — UNIQUE

Contemporary design requires mastery. Unique and artisan designs always reveal the hidden hand of a master craftsman. The designer always has a hand in production, whether it is a limited edition or an industrial run. The range from one-man studio to mass production is what makes unique.

5 — INTEGRITY

No design can exist on its own. It is always, and sometimes in a very complex way, influenced by a wide constellation of situations and attitudes. It is always dependent on its surroundings, the resources of the planet. Skill, vision, knowledge of materials, and conscious, honest use, all contribute to sustainability.

6 — MOMENTUM

Momentum always indicates a tipping point, a crucial phase where energy is condensed or a critical mass created. A turning point beckons thanks to – or because of – people taking a certain road. The turning point rides on choices that, often with hindsight, look decisive in time or space.

7 — TECHNOLOGY

There is no end to the possibilities for innovation. Technological developments always offer new options for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in combination with innovative technology and can thus never be an end unto itself – Dieter Rams

8 — AESTHETICS

Italian designer-artist and theoretician Bruno Munari described a designer as a "planner with a sense of aesthetics". A designer has to control every element of the project, because the end product has to be coherent to form. A designer who plans carefully with an eye for aesthetics spans a bridge between art and people, and he is aware of the human needs of his time.

9 — SOCIETY

Both design and designers have a responsibility toward society. The design process of Social Design leads to social change. It makes a contribution to human well-being and welfare.

10 — FUTURE

Design is pioneering. It breaks new ground and, whether it is bold or conservative, it always embodies the values of our times. Values based on democracy and industrialisation. Values expressed by the direct merging of beauty and efficiency, the hallmarks of a good design in any age.

NEEDLES BY ILSE JOOKEN

VISUAL INTRO OF THE BOOK:

Photographer Ilse Jookien searched in the wood for the trees of the designed nature reserve. Limburg is characterised by many coniferous forests, planted at the time to provide wood for beams and reinforcement of the ground at the surface. As an applied product, mine timber had to have great weight-bearing power and be flexible, and most importantly, give warning when overloaded. At the time of the pit closures, 90% of Limburg's forests were coniferous, but efforts were made through sustainable forestry, to help nature recover and readjust, by clearing pine forests and planting new oak, birch and beech trees. Ilse Jookien shot this series of pines and firs analog including the filters and flairs, unpredictable to a certain extent. Art versus nature at its best in this first chapter.

URTH BY PABLO HANNON

VISUAL HEART OF THE BOOK:

The dark of times need fluorescent and youthful input. For millions of years Earth layers have been stacking, drying, melting and forming. What is underneath us, is a story on its own. Pablo Hannon took on this book as designer and artist and, same as with the glass archives treasures, gave its content an extra layer of rainbow, bronze, multi-fluorescent ink. The layer added on top of the bronze historic photographs of previous century (photographer unknown) is created by the same material that has formed this story: charcoal. The rough lines and aquarel, made of that same charcoal, express what's in those photographs, the roughness of life, the passion and fruitful exploitation, the protectionism of Earth's underground and rich material, the letting go and have Earth take back what was hers to start with. *Urth* is what's Underneath Earth.

THE WAYS SARAH HERMANS

VISUAL OUTRO OF THE BOOK:

Photographer Sarah Hermans soaked out the waterfronts of the Zuid-Willemsvaart (1815-1826) and Albertkanaal (1930-1939), two important waterways which cut through the Limburg countryside, making it accessible: designed, deepened, broadened, branched and fitted with sluices. Water carriers for the coal and steel and other industries, were economic arteries which have now become second nature. What other technique than cyanotype could have been used in this last chapter, the ending, the outro, the good flow out and forward. Sarah Hermans shot this series analog to capture the slow pace of the water, its users and surroundings. These days a must have in a region: time and space to step out of the urban and daily rush.

INNOVATION IS FOUNDED WITHIN ALL THAT SURROUNDS US, KNOWLEDGE OF ITS ROOTS AND MORE SO, THE EMBRACE OF PAST

VAST RICHNESS

IGOR PHILTJENS

Early in the 1980s, Dieter Rams wrote *Ten Principles for Good Design*, also known as the ten commandments. Rams was concerned about the impact design was having on our environment and the way we live, which made him wonder: what does good design mean to me? The answer is his ten rules of thumb, which you can sum up in a single, paradoxical-sounding theme: a good design is one that involves as little design as possible.

This core idea is appropriate for our region and its countryside. Anyone travelling through Limburg will come across a broad range of nature: heath land, coniferous forests, orchards, grain fields, sand flats, valleys, ponds... sometimes wild, overgrown and impenetrable, sometimes panoramic and open. All this nature seems authentic, but is nothing less than the result of human intervention in the environment: a wonderful example of invisible design.

Another invisible element is the bizarre collection of people, places and organisations which, in a relatively short period of time, has succeeded in giving this region a clear design aspect. Some of the biggest names in 21st-century design and fashion came from our region: international stars and masterpieces. Now it's time to put them in the spotlights! This book pays tribute to everything beautiful which has happened in Limburg in the last 25 years in design and fashion: Martin Margiela, Marina Yee, Raf Simons, Piet Stockmans, Michaël Verheyden, to name but a few. Say it out loud: *We are wonderful*.

We put the list together, in our own unconventional manner, offering not a classic overview, but rather a 360-degree view of design which surprises, confronts and inspires. In ten unique chapters, we offer insight into what makes our region, and our design, special. They form the backbone of this book, otherwise best described as a journey of discovery; explore it, get lost in it, put it down and pick it up again later.

This is not a destination, but merely a beginning. Many creative spirits, entrepreneurs, experts and organisations were brought into dialogue and invited to contribute. In an impressive 400 pages, we show how far-reaching and enriching the network of Limburg design is. Retrospect is the best foundation for innovation.



image by Luc Daelemans for Bokrijk

Igor Philtjens is member of the Provincial Executive for Tourism, Culture and Heritage in Limburg (B).

Er bestaat geen twijfel over. De steenkoolnijverheid heeft in Limburg in de eerste helft van de 20ste eeuw voor een enorme vooruitgang gezorgd en heel wat welvaart gebracht. Zeven steenkolenmijnen veranderden dunbevolkte dorpjes op de hei tot uit de kluiten gewassen gemeenten, geconcentreerd in cités rond de schachtbokken en mijninstallaties. Er was veel volk nodig om in de putten van Beringen, Zolder, Houthalen, Zwartberg, Waterschei, Winterslag en Eisden te gaan werken. Van bij het begin moest een beroep gedaan worden op gastarbeiders. Belgen schuwden het gevaarlijke en zware werk onder de grond, zeker in de beginperiode. De eerste gastarbeiders kwamen vooral uit Frankrijk, Duitsland en Oost-Europa, later volgden Italianen, Grieken, Spanjaarden en Portugezen. Aan het begin van de jaren 1960 ronselden de mijnbazen ook in Turkije en Marokko arbeiders. Eerst kwamen de mannen alleen, maar al snel volgden hun vrouwen en kinderen. Door al dat volk ontstond in de Limburgse Kempen een ware smeltkroes van nationaliteiten en culturen. Met drie mijnen op haar grondgebied was Genk veruit de grootste mijngemeente. Limburg telt vandaag meer dan 150 verschillende nationaliteiten.

Het ontwikkelen van een mijnijverheid in Limburg slokte enorme hoeveelheden kapitaal op. Er moest tot op een gemiddelde diepte van 1000 meter en vaak door moeilijke onderlagen geboord worden om tot bij de steenkolen te raken en zo iets kostte heel veel geld. Dat geld kwam van investeerders uit Brussel, Wallonië en Frankrijk. In Vlaanderen, laat staan in Limburg, was geen geld beschikbaar. De oorsprong van het geld bepaalde de cultuur van de mijnijverheid. De voertaal was Frans, de taal van de bazen. Ook later zullen we zien dat Limburg geremd zal worden in haar ontwikkeling door de afwezigheid van kapitaalkrachtige families.

FINANCIËLE PUTTEN

Ondanks het vele geld dat naar de putten vloeiende, is de Limburgse mijnijverheid slechts enkele decennia winstgevend geweest. Al in de jaren 1950 werd in de Europese steenkolengebieden de alarmklok geluid. De verouderde kolenbekkens van de Borinage en Luik gingen in sneltempo dicht. In het België van die tijd was het normaal dat tussen Vlaanderen en Wallonië een zogenaamde wafelijzerpolitiek gevoerd werd. Gelijktijdig met een bloedbad in de tewerkstelling in de Waalse mijnen moest ook in Vlaanderen de productie inkrimpen. Een eerste terugloop werd gerealiseerd door in 1964 Houthalen ondergronds met Zolder te verbinden. Personeel kon op een natuurlijke wijze afvloeien. Maar dat zou niet volstaan, waardoor Zwartberg – de modernste van de drie mijnen in Genk – in 1966 brutaal en onverwacht werd gesloten. Die beslissing lokte bijzonder zwaar protest uit. De ondergrond van de mijn van Zwartberg werd door radeloze mijnwerkers dagenlang bezet. Met geld- en voedselinzamelingen toonde Limburg zich solidair. Studenten uit Leuven en Vlaamse actievoerders uit Antwerpen en elders sloten zich bij het protest aan. Misschien was dat de reden dat de confrontaties met de rijkswacht voor de poorten van de drie mijnen van Genk almaar grimmiger werden. Op 31 januari 1966 vielen twee doden aan de mijnpoort in Waterschei. De regering riep de noodtoestand uit en stuurde soldaten naar Limburg. Na de regeringsbelofte om nooit meer een mijn te sluiten voordat gezorgd zou zijn voor vervangende tewerkstelling, keerde de rust weer in Limburg (Akkoorden van Zwartberg).

Op 7 oktober 1966 werden in Zwartberg de laatste kolen bovengehaald.

Onder impuls van de provinciegouverneur, wijlen Louis Roppe, werd aan het begin van de jaren 1960 de Amerikaanse autoreus Ford naar Limburg gehaald. In plaats van de bestaande autofabriek in Keulen zelf uit te breiden, besliste Ford een nieuwe fabriek in Genk te bouwen, onder de vleugels van moederbedrijf Ford Keulen. Toen Ford Genk op 27 oktober 1964 officieel ingehuldigd werd, waren er al ruim 5000 mensen in dienst. Veel mijnwerkers, vooral Belgen, verlieten de put om bij Ford te werken. In 1994 was Genk de grootste fabriek van Ford wereldwijd. Er werkten toen 14.700 mensen op de Ford-site aan het Albertkanaal en nog eens meerdere duizenden bij toeleveranciers.



Aerial picture of the coaling port of Beringen. The firm Laura Coal was active there in the (exterior) coal trade until the early years of the 21st century. Further up the Albert Canal, on the left bank, lies the industrial port of Tessenderlo.

image by Coolens and Deleuil, with authorisation from Tractebel

WHEN I AM ON MY BICYCLE I FEEL FREE ...

KLAUS BONDAM

To be honest, I am a car driver. And I am also a user of public transport. Every day I am a pedestrian. I sometimes hop on an airplane. And I am of course also an everyday cyclist. Sometimes I am all five things on the same day. Or at least four of them. I don't fly that often (except for 'flying downhill' on my bicycle every day). As a citizen and a taxpayer in a democratic society, I expect the same level of safety, comfort, connectivity and accessibility, no matter whether I am a car driver on the highway, a train passenger, a pedestrian – or of course, when I am on my bicycle. The truth is that I mostly get this safety and comfort using my private car or on board a train, but sadly and disappointingly, it seems I cannot expect that as a cyclist. I just do not get it. What is wrong with me and the other cyclists? Why do they jeopardise our safety – and expect us all too often to accept the second- or third-best solutions when it comes to the quality and layout of the infrastructure? Why are there so many places with an illogical, disconnected and badly-maintained bicycle infrastructure where the bicycle path suddenly stops? Where cyclists cannot go from A to B in a convenient and well-connected way? You may think it strange or awkward, but I have wracked my brain over issues like this since I was a child.

I see cycling as the most logical thing to do; it's fast, and yet it moves at a pace where you can experience what's going on around you. It gives you physical exercise, if you stick to a reasonable speed, without exhausting yourself. It creates an urban environment where people can see and meet each other eye-to-eye, yet it also gives the impression of movement and efficiency. And then there are all the added bonuses in the form of reduced air and noise pollution, no CO₂ emissions, improved public health etc. Taking into consideration that somewhere between 40% to 50% of all car trips on European cities are shorter than 5 km – and 20% are shorter than 2 km – there is an enormous potential for more cycling. But it takes safe, secure and segregated infrastructure. As they say: if you build it, they'll come. From a socio-economic point of view, the return on investment is very high, compared to other infrastructure investments. The Danish Ministry for Transport argues that for every kilometre we replace the car with the bike, our society gains almost one euro in prolonged life and improved health. Making us cycle more is simply the logical step.

I grew up in the countryside. I am the youngest of five siblings. Our parents didn't have the time to drive us around whenever we had to go somewhere. Throughout my entire childhood, the bicycle was my only mode of transport – and a way of getting away from our farm. If I wanted to see friends, I had to cycle one or two kilometres to the neighbouring farms. If I wanted to go to the swimming pool in the village, it was a six-kilometre ride. I cycled four kilometres through the forest every morning to catch the school bus. I must have spent thousands of hours cycling when I was a child – and I have basically kept up ever since. I love to feel the mood of the day on my bike, feel the sun or the wind – or even a drop of rain – on my face. I see so many things along the side of the road which I would never experience if I took the same route in my car. I can stop my bike whenever I want if something catches my interest. I love people-watching on my bike: glancing, flirting, smiling and reflecting during my brief encounters with fellow cyclists.

On my bike, I feel free. Of course I have my everyday route commuting back and forth from work. It's okay to include minor changes from day to day. But the times that I really feel free are those days where I just bike on and on and on. Where I bike out into the blue, having no final destination and no clue where the ride will take me. Sometimes I see route signs for cyclists. They make me happy. Very happy. Sometimes I follow them, but often I break away. They make me happy, because they are a clear and visible sign that I am seen and noticed as a cyclist. They know I am coming and I am there. And I know that I am not the only cyclist. We are many – and more will come.

Klaus Bondam was born in 1963 on the island of Bornholm in Denmark, to a Danish mother and a Dutch father. He originally trained as an actor and worked as such for many years. He starred in the first Danish Dogma movie 'Festen' (The Celebration) in 1997 as the German toastmaster. The film became an international success. He was a member of the city council in Copenhagen from 2002-2010, serving the social liberal party. He served as Mayor for Technical and Environmental Affairs from 2006-2009, introducing new standards for sustainability and urban space policies in Copenhagen, including a strong focus on improving the city's already good bicycle infrastructure, emphasising safety, security, comfort, connectivity and accessibility for the cyclists. From 2011-2014 he lived in Brussels, and was director of the Danish Cultural Institute in Benelux. In 2014 he returned to Denmark, after having been appointed CEO of the Danish Cyclists Federation, a position he still holds. Klaus Bondam is deeply committed to developing a European and international bicycle culture and is a dedicated and motivational speaker on cycling. He is also a member of the steering committee of World Cycling Alliance.

"The designing itself didn't take much time, it's setting up the production which goes so slowly, taking up to six months: making moulds, doing tests, developing the product. These were things I supervised, but they were not my responsibility."

Still, Sonja was a more elegant model than the stocky cups in the hotels market. It was immediately a great success in that sector, and its success continued to grow. In total, 50 million were produced.

"The coffee cups in the Netherlands, with their 160 cc, were a smaller size than those in the rest of the world. Once buyers switched to Sonja, the competing manufacturers could no longer combine with those cups, for the simple reason that they had different dimensions and stacking possibilities. They had to be compatible with Sonja, or they would lose clients." So at a certain point, no fewer than seventeen copies were counted going around, which only increased Sonja's success. In addition, Mosa could not forbid these copies, since many manufacturers also bought their other products, and a reprimand might have led to drops in sales.

Stockmans left Mosa in 1989, but received a phone call in 1994, just before Sonja's twenty-fifth anniversary, asking him to design one last set of crockery, linked to Sonja: Sofie, or as Stockmans calls it, Sonja's little sister. Sofie was given a ribbon at the rim, and a handle shaped like a ribbon. This time, however, it was not a great success, partly because Mosa was doing badly at that moment, and ended in bankruptcy in 2004. Until that point, the crockery production had stayed in the Netherlands, but it was then transferred to Turkey, and branded as Maastricht Porcelain.

The Sonja cup has become an icon, a kind of standard, with an almost complete pedigree. It never expanded to become much more than a variation on Sonja plates and the Sonja cup, since that was all the hospitality industry needed. Stockmans never received royalties for his definitive design, which he himself feels is logical, since he was employed by Mosa at the time.

As far as the name is concerned, don't go reading too much into it. The child had to be named, and a girl's name was chosen; as simple as that. You might just as easily have been drinking your coffee from the Henk cup. But you're not!





Creneau, Levi's RED presspack

Creneau, Levi's Europe, Pierre Koenig inspired exhibition stand

Will Erens wanted to be a tennis pro. But a knee injury made him change his career plans. The daredevil from Maasmechelen went on to become a visionary in the field of interior design and other design concepts. "You can't learn to be a designer in school, only life will teach you that."

Will Erens grew up in a James Bond interior. Pool on the roof. Verner Panton chairs and a Le Corbusier lounge chair in the living room. His father was an architect and a lover of anything visionary. He passed away when his children were teenagers, but had told them already that architecture was a no-go zone for them, because "you will always have to build someone else's dreams."

Will: "I was never ever going to follow in my father's footsteps. Tennis was my thing, but that dream vanished the day I injured my knee. Lying in hospital, I started drawing. Then I went to art school in Limburg, but I only stayed a year. I was doing everyone's homework except my own. I was into airbrush, I wanted to build sets. My internship at a local window-dresser's changed my view on things: he introduced me to the golden section. It was pure epiphany. I suddenly saw the light." He smiles.

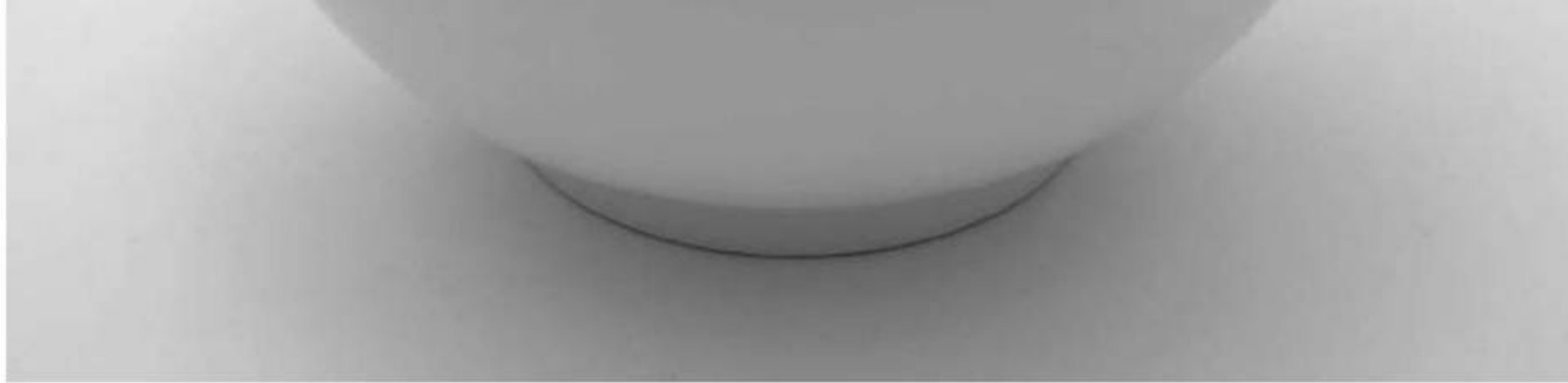
Will started as a set builder and stylist, doing odd jobs like fashion shows (with some of the famous Antwerp Six) in shop interiors. One of his first ventures was turning a wash salon into a grocery store annex hamburger joint. He went on to make other dreams come true: whether it was for a fashion brand or for a café owner. "I think I learned a lot from my father, who tried out things in his own house, before doing it elsewhere. We had suspended stairs and olive green doors back in the 1970s. I believe you cannot learn to be a designer at school. Life and the people you meet will do that for you. And no, I am not talking about building a huge network; I always say that you have to surround yourself with nice people you would love to work with."

Will built a huge business working for people in the four corners of the world. Projects from his design studio Creneau (and later Puresang) made it into *Wallpaper** and other trending magazines, and even white-collar business schools like Vlerick invited Erens to give lectures and workshops. Erens lived life in the fast lane for more than twenty years, but the ups were often followed by downs, because money was never on Will's mind. "If you ask me about my favourite projects, I can mention the 17-million-euro hotel project we are working on right now (with his new business Too Many Agencies). But I'd rather tell you about that first café annex nightclub I built in Maastricht. Jabbedabbedoe was a 5000 Belgian francs project (125 euros). Today we would call it a hipster bar. It was vintage all the way. And storytelling. That's the current buzz word, but to be honest: I've been telling stories all my life."



Creneau, Lee Jeans presspack





Het klassiek design- en kunstonderwijs was steeds gericht op een intensieve en persoonlijke begeleiding. Binnen het huidige onderwijs komt het zelfstandig vergaren van kennis en vaardigheden door studenten steeds centraler te staan. Kan de persoonlijke begeleiding volgens jou vervangen worden door onlinelessen of zelfstudie?

"Neen, ik vind dat helemaal fout. Onderwijs is in contact komen met mensen, alles uit de studenten proberen halen, creativiteit ontwikkelen, aanmoedigen, werken bespreken, adviseren, enzovoort. Dat kan niet ex cathedra. Misschien werkt dat voor de advocatuur, maar ik betwijfel het. Net de informatie die rond de wetgeving verteld wordt, is interessanter dan de wet zelf. Maar dat kan alleen op een persoonlijke manier. Wij hebben ook steeds in groep les gegeven en opdrachten besproken. Misschien vertelden wij wel twintig keer hetzelfde, maar onze studenten hoorden dan ook twintig keer hetzelfde waardoor het bleef hangen. Alles wat je individueel bespreekt, geldt telkens ook voor de hele klas. Onderwijs is groepswerk, wat studenten de gelegenheid geeft elkaars klankbord te zijn. De docent is een katalysator, iemand bij wie de studenten ideeën kunnen toetsen. Zo maak je samen het onderwijs. Geen enkele docent heeft de waarheid in pacht. De studenten zijn daarin even belangrijk als de docent."

Binnen deze onderwijsveranderingen verschuift ook de rol van de docent. Welke houding moet hij volgens jou aannemen?

"Hoe groter zijn persoonlijkheid is, hoe sterker zijn invloed en impact zullen zijn. Eigenlijk moet hij werken met het materiaal dat hij krijgt en moet hij dat materiaal door en door kennen. Sommige studenten hadden problemen met de persoonlijke vragen die ik stelde, ik wilde weten uit welk nest ze kwamen. Ik vond dat, als ik iemands werk moest beoordelen, ik ook moest begrijpen waarom hij dat op die manier gemaakt had. Met welk recht beoordeel ik zijn werk als ik de achtergrond ervan niet ken? Ik stopte nooit bij 'Het is niet goed', ik bleef advies geven om het werk te verbeteren. Zoiets kan niet vanop afstand."

Een veelgehoorde boutade is dat docenten in het kunst- en designonderwijs zelf slechte of mislukte kunstenaars en ontwerpers zijn. Moet je een groot designer zijn om studenten te kunnen opleiden? Is een goede designer vanzelfsprekend ook een goede designdocent of zijn dit volgens jou twee totaal verschillende kwaliteiten?

"Een goede ontwerper is niet altijd een goede docent en er zijn goede docenten die absoluut geen ontwerpers zijn. Ik heb ooit het verhaal gehoord van een docente piano, die les gaf aan de beste pianisten. Haar leerlingen deden mee aan de Koningin Elisabethwedstrijd. Toen haar werd gevraagd waarom ze zelf nooit had deelgenomen, zei ze: "Omdat ik niet goed piano kan spelen." (lacht) Je weet hoe het moet en je kunt het goed uitleggen, maar dat maakt van jou nog geen groot pianist."

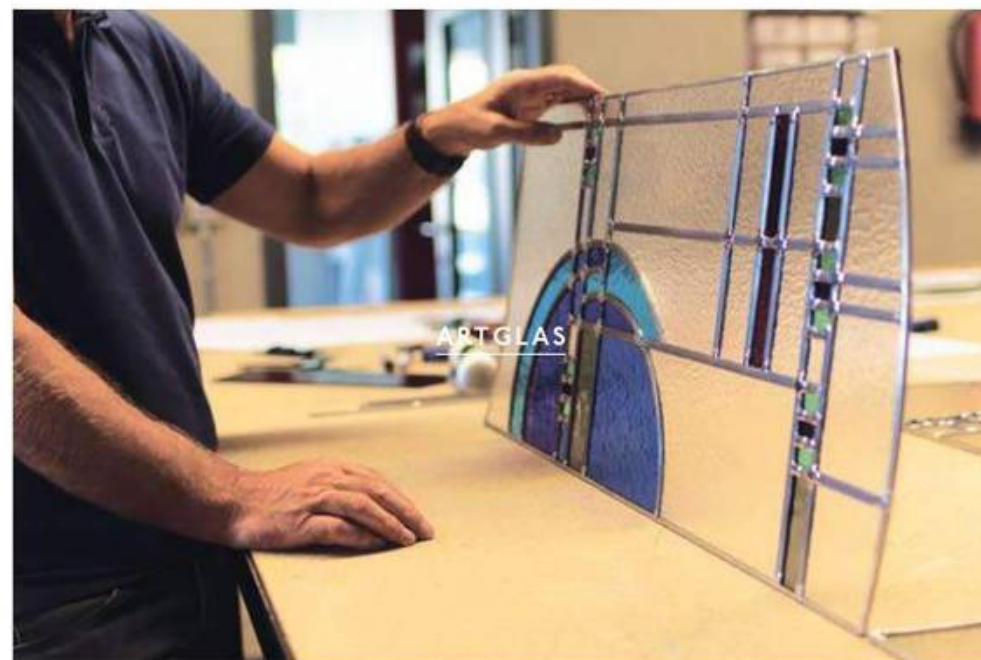
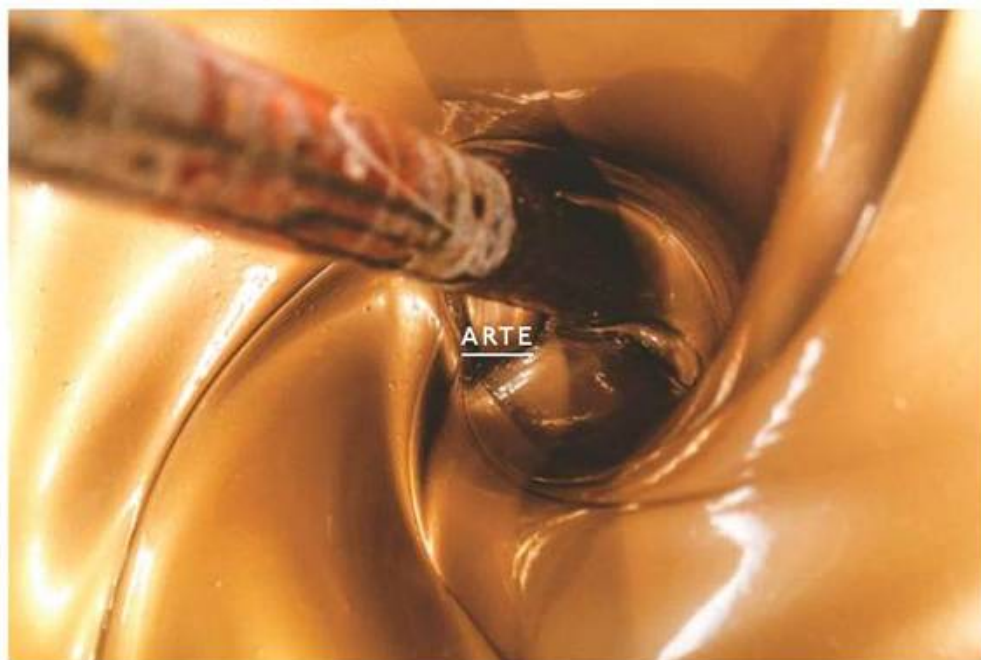
Wat was jouw persoonlijke drijfveer om ontwerpers op te leiden?

"Ik zag het als een roeping."



Piet Stockmans: Windlight Round Blue Rim, 1987
Piet Stockmans: Expression salad bowls, 1989





Let's not go so far as to claim that this image set in motion the sustainability debate as we are now experiencing it, but it is an absolute, albeit indirect, achievement of the former Apollo Project that our urge to explore space determined the manner in which we now consider sustainability on our planet. The unconscious implications of the ambition to walk around on the moon radically changed our view of Earth. As so often happens in history, this was synchronous with numerous other events, meetings, reflections and inventions which have given shape to, and become a part of, a global movement which increasingly strongly demands attention for the problems caused by a rampant, uncontrolled abuse of Earth's natural riches.

FROM PLATO'S CAVE TO SPACESHIP EARTH

The notion of sustainability has always existed. In his majestic book *Collapse*, evolutionary biologist and environmental scientist Jared Diamond describes the downfall of the greatest civilisation the world has ever known. The central thread in the book is that the repeated disastrous impact on the living environment as a result of a long-lasting, thoughtless use of natural sources emerges as one the most important causes with which to explain the collapse of those rich and powerful communities.⁵

As far back as the 5th century before Christ, Plato reflected, in his allegory of the cave, on mankind's inability to live in balance with nature. His assertion is that as long as mankind is incapable of reaching a perfect symbiosis with nature, it is also incapable of understanding the authenticity of the world, and is doomed to live in a world which is merely an image of the actual reality. *"And as long as we do not know the nature of the good, the just, or the beautiful, we can never attain real knowledge as to which particulars are good, just, or beautiful either."*⁶

In his *Meditations*, a series of posthumously published personal notes and thoughts, the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD) ponders the idea of *Unus Mundus*, where the emphasis is on the absolute necessity of finding and maintaining a perfect balance between, on the one hand, everything that is present on Earth, and on the other hand, everything that mankind creates: *"All things are implicated with one another, and the bond is holy. For there is one world (unus mundus) made up of all things, and one god who pervades all things, and one substance, and one law, one common reason in all intelligent animals."*⁷

From that point on, we perceive that the reflections on sustainability throughout more than 1,500 years have taken place almost exclusively within a religious discourse. During that long period, everything about this is dominated by the concept of divine providence, and treated within its indisputable impact on nature and on the life of medieval man. From the Renaissance on, scientists and philosophers such as Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza did explore other routes regarding sustainability, but their theories largely remained by-products, and thoughts in the margin, of the work which put their names in the history books. We have to wait until after 1750 to see new points of view and opinions, when the consequences of a sharp increase in the population and a corresponding consumption of raw materials, fuelled by the first Industrial Revolution, start to trickle through. From that point on, for the first time, there is a growing insight into the finiteness of the Earth's capacity.⁸ In 1798, the pessimistic but influential *Essay on the Principle of Population* by the British demographer, economist and preacher Thomas Malthus appeared, in which he described the potentially catastrophic consequences of the exponential growth in population which was taking place at that time, and which was not supported by a proportionate increase in food production. His radical solution was to forbid people to start a family if they did not have the means to support that family.⁹

Tom Lambrechts

"Een duurzaam beeld veronderstelt een bescheiden blik op de wereld. Deze blik moet langer aangehouden worden dan het fysieke momentum en moet ook zelf aan verandering onderhevig zijn. Duurzaamheid veronderstelt dus een strenge omgang met weerbare materialen om tot de ontwikkeling van een dergelijke blik te komen. Het is niet het duurzame dat de duurzaamheid aanstoot. Onze obsessie voor duurzaamheid duidt op een gefixeerde belangstelling voor het duurzame als materieel gegeven, dat evenwel van voorbijgaande aard blijft te zijn. Het ene duurzame voorwerp ruilen we niet spelend gemak in voor een ander slijpbaar object."

In the first half of the 19th century, and from a more humanist point of view, the economic philosopher John Stuart Mill developed his vision on the stable state, an economic, social and political equilibrium, making him the first to integrate an ecological and sustainable development into general considerations on social models. To be fair, the discussion was not framed those terms at that time.¹⁰ It was not until the end of the 19th century that the Danish botanist, Eugenius Warming, elaborated on the principles of ecological discipline in the margin of his research into the physiological relation between plants and their surroundings.¹¹ It would take until 1987 before we would see the expression 'sustainable development' being defined and assimilated.¹²

After the Second World War, the world economy experienced exponential growth, and early in the 1960s, the first protests against the disastrous impact of the way in which large-scale industry was treating the Earth, were already taking place. It was at this time, when NASA's Apollo programme was being thought up and implemented, that the sustainability discourse within which we still think and act took on its present form.

In 1962, American marine biologist and environmental activist Rachel Carson published her book *Silent Spring*, in which she strongly criticised the then-widespread use of the disastrous pesticide DDT. Not only did her protest lead to a ban on the use of that weed killer, she inadvertently became an influential voice and a significant symbol of the upcoming environmental movement.

Hanne De Wynaert

"Duurzaamheid is het ontwikkelen van producten met een sociale impact op de gemeenschap die ze produceert, met respect voor hun omgeving en de omgeving waarin ze bereikbaar. Specifiek werken we samen met arme inheemse gemeenschappen in Guatemala. Door daar werkgelegenheid te creëren en kennis te delen, trachten we de eeuwige noodzaak van duurzame productie te creëren en kennis te delen. We creëren bewustzijn bij de consument door te communiceren over het ecologische productieproces, de werftratie en de levensomstandigheden van de werkers. Door duurzaamheid een 'business' te maken, worden denken we immers al te vaak dat duurzaamheid gekocht kan worden en onze levenswijze onaanvaardig kan blijven."

- Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, North Point Press, 2004, ISBN 978-01430-365-55.
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- In 1987, the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), led by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, published the report 'Our Common Future'. That report defined sustainable development as the development which matches the needs of the present, without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In recent years, there have been a number of initiatives in the energy sector which have taken inspiration from the impact of the original Apollo campaign. In 2008, the American green energy movement, The Apollo Alliance, published the New Apollo Program report. Their aim is clear: *"The New Apollo Program is a comprehensive economic investment strategy to build America's 21st century clean energy economy and dramatically cut energy bills for families and businesses. It will accelerate the development of the nation's vast clean energy resources and move us toward energy security, climate stability, and economic prosperity. And it will transform America into the global leader of the new green economy."*³⁰ Chemist and Permanent Special Representative for Climate Change of the UK Government Professor Sir David King, formulated very similar ambitions last year, when he christened his think tank and action group Global Apollo Programme. Their objective is to make carbon-free electricity much cheaper than the predominant variety we now generate from coal or other unsustainable sources, by 2025, by way of a world-wide research programme.³¹

The envisioned Apollo project for which we sound a loud fanfare here has, however, a more integral ambition in its thoughts and deeds. It concerns not only the energy issue (though this is a crucial part of it), but rather the totality of the sustainability effort. This means that every scientist, engineer, academic, creative thinker and genuinely committed citizen can also be called upon to use their thinking skills to ensure that, now and in the future humans will walk around on this planet. Just as in the Apollo project 60 years ago, our starting point is also a clear vision, and the enthusiasm is present within a relatively large group to make a serious effort (although on a global scale, it is still much too small). But this is where the similarity ends. There is no consensus on the route to be taken, never mind a road map and a predetermined time schedule, acceptable to everyone, in which we want to have that vision realised. Throughout the world, the financial means are present, but they are all serving individual, or at most national interests, meaning they are largely being spent very inefficiently. More than 2,500 years after Plato wanted to get man out of the cave, there is the realisation that we are still sitting in that cave, and the consensus grows that it is high time that we finally leave it. But how we want to do this – after all, we all have to leave that cave simultaneously – no, that we don't know yet. Can Apollo offer insight?

CATHEDRAL BUILDERS

At the core of this global, ambitious and at the same time most necessary challenge mankind has ever faced, we place the designer – for the simple reason that the designers are the ones who shape the future. Every design, regardless of whether it is thought up by a product, graphical, social, process, service, industrial, societal or mobility designer, should contribute fundamentally to a sustainable society.

As opposed to the NASA officials, we have no blueprint for the plans we wish to realise. Work on this new Apollo project will have to take place analogous to the way in which the Gothic cathedral builders went to work in the 13th century. Engineer, philosopher and system theoretician Philippe Vandenbroeck describes this as follows: *"The first is the 13th century Chartres Cathedral: an amazing innovation of its time, but without signature. There is no architect's name (unthinkable today!) nevertheless it's still standing. Chartres is the equivalent of a modern-day laboratory, where people collaborated, experiments happened, discoveries were made and the knowledge base grew, using the rule of thumb, life-sized drawings and a strong overarching mission (building the house of God): no blueprint, pragmatic, and messy."*³²

The role of the designer in this laboratory consists of designing the objects and services which will enable everyone to make their own contribution. Just as the designers in the 13th century (who also had to go through life without the added value of that professional categorisation) who through their designs gave stonemasons and sculptors, and all the other craftsmen, the opportunity to realise all that was monumental and unique, out of gratitude for all that divine providence offered them.

"Duurzaamheid is in mijn ontwerpraktijk geen op een integrale aanpak van het designproces. Hierbij neem ik zowel artistieke, sociale, economische als ecologische duurzaamheid in beschouwing. Vanaf het begin breng ik elke schakel van het proces in rekening. Deze holistische aanpak laat toe om een nieuw businessmodel te creëren voor de maakindustrie. Meer specifiek probeer ik mijn ontwerpen steeds te individualiseren aan de hand van duurzame materialen. Door een band te creëren tussen de gebruiker en het product neemt de levensduur van een product aanzienlijk toe. De ontwerpers van morgen zullen duurzaamheid in alle aspecten moeten integreren om te kunnen overleven."

Karen Wuytens

DESIGN FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

Although the responsibility the 'designers for Apollo' bear can be expressed in thousands of ways, two structural design dynamics can be distinguished with which their contributions can be characterised. In the first place, they are designing for Homo Sustinens, the species of man which is already convinced of the necessity for a sustainable society. They are constantly searching for products and services which are not only designed in such a way as to give shape to the designer's outlook on life, but can also be used to express that outlook.

For them, the sustainability issue cannot be solved with one grand gesture. It is their honest opinion that you only get results if there is a chain of programmes, which continually deal with smaller aspects of sustainability. So as a designer, you design those products and services which sustainability-conscious people regard as necessary tools which enable them to add a link to the chain of solutions.

The most radical demand that the conscious consumer makes of the design process is undoubtedly the call to be given complete and transparent insight into the production and recycling process. Promises will not suffice; the proof must be demonstrated. The product should be made from reclaimed and energy-efficient materials from suppliers who set store by environmentally-friendly production processes, and the distributor should also guarantee a warranted return policy for total recycling.

With respect for all the Homo Sustinens' sustainability principles, Viktor Papanek, the great advocate of ecological design, postulated as a primary condition that the sustainable society can never be attained if man's basic needs remain unfulfilled. We will chop down the last tree and pull the last fish out of the ocean in order to survive. A sustainable Earth without social sustainability is unattainable.³³

DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR

A second dynamic can be briefly described as design which should be supportive and encouraging. In a 2015 survey of a thousand Belgians, commissioned by the sustainability network *The Shift*, one in every two Belgians says that they no longer understand what the idea of sustainability embodies, and one in three even says they are tired of the idea. Other conclusions were: *"More than half of those questioned admit to not making it a priority in everyday life. Only one in three sees himself as a 'sustainable citizen' and more than four in ten are more likely to be let themselves be led by comfort or price rather than sustainability. The survey also shows that one in three Belgians feel that they have too little understanding of sustainability."*³⁴

In addition to designing for the growing group of Homo Sustinens, there is still much more to be done to encourage the non-believers and heretics to display a renewed interest in a sustainable lifestyle, by way of intelligent, innovative and accessible products and services. Countless studies show that the sustainability concept germinates mainly in people who are more well-educated. Other studies indicate unanimously that with a non-convinced public, the importance of the sustainability factor of a product will always compare unfavourably with the price.

"Binnen mijn ontwerpraktijk wordt duurzaamheid getekend door het digitale karakter van de ontwerpen. Dit geeft mij immers de mogelijkheid om een oneindig breed ontwerpproces na te streven. Duurzaamheid plaats ik dus niet meteen binnen een ecologisch denkkader. Mijn producten moeten in de eerste plaats maakbaar zijn. Het financiële luk is hierbij prioritaair. Duurzaamheid kan volgens mij ook een gewaardeerd vorm aannemen wanneer uit louter winstbejag enkel bepaalde aspecten van een ontwerp als duurzaam uitgeroepen worden. Daarbij worden de minder duurzame onderdelen niet benoemd en krijgt tenslotte een heel vertekend beeld."

Peter Donders

30. Jerome Ringe, *The New Apollo Program*, published online by the Apollo Alliance, 2008, on <http://community-wealth.org/content/new-apollo-program-clean-energy-good-jobs>.

31. David King, John Browne, Richard Layard, Gus O'Donnell, Martin Rees, Nicholas Stern & Adair Turner, *A Global Apollo Programme To Combat Climate Change*, published by the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2015, on http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/_/Global_Apollo_Programme_Report.pdf.

32. Philippe Vandenbroeck, *Systems thinking for wicked problems: pipe dream or cure-all?*, lecture at Namahn, Brussel, September 24, 2015.

33. Viktor Papanek, *The Green Imperative: Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture*, Thames & Hudson, 1995, ISBN 978-05002-784-68.

34. Gert-Jan Swinnen, *Belgen zijn duurzaamheid moe, maar niet beu*, *De Standaard*, Editie van 2 juni 2015.