



THE ART OF MEDIATING BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The role of commissioned art in socio-ecological transitions

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The art of mediating between people and the environment
The role of commissioned art in socio-ecological transitions

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'EquilArbre' by artistic duo Driessens and Verstappen
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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the results of a participatory investigation into art as one approach to handling socio-ecological transitions. The focus is on what is known as “commissioned art.” The platform “Kunst in Opdracht” (Platform Art by Commission), the entity that guides and supports these types of projects from within the Flemish authorities, refers to the Commissioned Art decree (1 March 2019) for a definition (freely translated): “works of art created at the request of a principal for a specific context or situation by a living artist with a professional art practice” [1]. This project ran between March 2022 and December 2023 and actively engaged with principals who work with nature, water, landscape or roads, and are therefore key players in bringing about socio-ecological transitions. Three participatory days were organised, interspersed with evaluation sessions, on the question: **How can organisations use art as an approach to contribute to shared understanding and action regarding socio-ecological transitions, with the most diverse group of actors possible?** The results included several critical lessons and suggestions. We learned that organisations looking to start up and monitor **an art commission in the context of a socio-ecological transition should ideally use a participatory approach, in order to create as much space as possible for the role of art (which in itself does not have to be participatory) in the exchange of meanings between people among themselves, and people and the environment.** What do organisations need in this regard?

- **An open manual for a participatory approach** to art commissions that is visually expressive and easy to share. This manual does not have to guide the principal, their colleagues or supervisors, mediators or artists, but support them in a personalised process.

- The manual goes hand in hand with **networking**. Learning and working in a network is crucial to strengthen the position of both the artist, the mediator, and the employee who has to lead the commission within the commissioning organisation. Indeed, the network of actors with experience and knowledge of art in socioecological transitions is still too limited. The network makes it possible to reflect on individual case experiences, and to learn from other cases. The participants appreciated the network that grew within the participatory process of this project. The stronger presence of governments, in this case through the Platform Art by Commission of the Flemish authorities, to play a permanent connecting, knowledge-sharing, and supporting role in this network is essential.
- **Good practices can be archived and shared within a network because the examples of art in socio-ecological transitions are still few and far between.** This may be in the form of a database of case studies (See example Annex 3) [1], reference projects and typologies of projects for appointing a mediator and artist within an art commission.
- To put this manual into practice, **an in-house pilot project can be initiated within an organisation.** All the steps of an art commission that specifically address socio-ecological challenges can be tangible in this regard, and serve as an example both inside and outside the organisation.

0. INTRODUCTION

We are currently facing major ecological challenges that demand urgent action. It is crucial in this context to make people aware of the relationship they have with their natural and built environment and how their lives and well-being depend on it [2]. Moreover, it is important that they acknowledge their dependence on each other to take actions together to improve their living environment. In this vision, ecological transitions are therefore related to social dynamics, which is why we refer to them as socioecological transitions. Many Belgian and international organisations work with these transitions on a daily basis. In Belgium, they include government agencies and organisations working in open and built-up areas, such as VLM/Flemish Land Agency (co-initiator of this research project), Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB), Natuurpunt, AWW/Agency for Roads and Traffic and ILVO/Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

We explored the role art can play in raising awareness of the relationships between people and their built and natural environments. This is part of a longer tradition in research into the role of art in socio-ecological transitions, as described in Huybrechts,

2014 [3]; Salazar & Kaethler, 2016 [4] and Dolejšová et al, 2021 [5], among others. We conducted this investigation on behalf of Platform Art by Commission - the Flemish platform that encourages, guides, supports and evaluates these projects - and the Flemish Land Agency, a government agency that strives for (freely translated) “a resilient open space full of life and a dynamic countryside in response to challenges such as urbanisation, climate change and biodiversity loss (VLM, 2024).”[6] It is therefore a collaborative project between government agencies that are active in culture and the natural and built environment, and the Contractor of the investigation, a university research group specialising in participatory design and artistic research.

The investigation is the continuation of a project that ran from 2020 to 2023, which explored commissioned art as an approach to visualise, question, initiate or discuss transitions in the public space [7]. The key question in this preliminary process was “How can commissioned art relate to the public space and the transitions inherent in it, with an emphasis on quality?” It was found that much more attention needed to be paid to the specific work context and

practices of principals and the situated contexts in which they work, in order for art to interact meaningfully with transitions in the public space (De Ridder & Huybrechts, 2022, p. 12) [7]. This study puts the above recommendations into practice. It actively engages with a specific segment of the principals who work with the natural and built environment, and who are therefore key players in bringing about socio-ecological transitions to tackle the climate crisis. The objective was to discover how these government agencies can use art in the transition projects they work on every day. Based on a literature review on the role of art in these socio-ecological transitions (1), it became evident that there was a significant need to set up a participatory design process that would allow art to become more prevalent in government agencies and organisations working on socio-ecological challenges. (2) The study resulted in a series of challenges, opportunities and tools to incorporate art in a more participatory way in the daily work of government agencies (3).

1. LITERATURE

THE ROLE OF ART IN SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

Throughout the history of art [8], people have learned that art can be an extremely valuable approach in shaping socio-ecological transitions. Art can take different forms in this regard, such as physical interventions and installations [9, 10], distributed digital works and visualisations [3, 7, 11], games [5], photography [12], biodiversity Living Labs [13], performative and speculative walks [14, 15], critical and speculative projects [16], speculative exhibitions

[17], and critical open explorations through stories [18]. These examples show that art can make a valuable contribution to developing a shared understanding of socio-ecological transitions (1.1.) [19]. Moreover, they demonstrate the need for a dialogical approach for art to make valuable contributions to these transitions (1.2.).



© Recetas Urbanas, MontaÑA Verde, De Coninckplein Antwerp, from the Middelheim Museum group exhibition Experience Traps, 2018. Photo: Tom Cornille

1.1. ART AS A CONTRIBUTION TO SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Art can play a role in shaping a shared yet always diverse image and solidarity for a sustainable future [20]. Based on Otte (2022) [19], the role of art can be viewed as working along in a shared repertoire of meaning-making. However, such a shared image or project is quickly enclosed by one group and can lead to misunderstanding or even opposition among other groups [12].

If we see art as a way to move beyond the polarising discourse on socio-ecological issues [21], then art projects need to consciously exchange meaning across the boundaries of multiple groups and different cultures. Artists do this by not only helping to represent their own reality, but by listening to and engaging in conversation about the experiences of the reality of others. A dialogue between artists and diverse participants is necessary in this regard, such as the residents (human and non-human) of a social-ecological context and the employees of government agencies that manage these contexts, e.g. the Flemish Land Agency. Arts organisations are generally the catalysts for dialogue through art, but residents or government agencies and organisations working in connection with the open and built environment can also be the catalysts [23]. These artworks sometimes take shape as a collaborative and political process in which the boundaries among professional organisation, community activism and

artistic production are blurred: actors who often function separately from one another then flow into one another, and even involve the same people [22] [7]. For example:

The artist collective Recetas Urbanas built a green sculpture MontaÑA Verde in the city of Antwerp to address the lack of space for greenery and diversity in the city. Their aim was not to create a solution to a specific social problem. By building the sculpture together with the neighbourhood and other organisations, the artists didn't want to solve a social problem, but to foster debate on the meaning of greenery and biodiversity [24].

Art therefore creates an experience that makes it possible to share imaginations. The insights gained can be used to shape our society. Using art in this way, in Otte's view (2022) [19], is - as is often expressed as a criticism - not an instrumentalisation of art, because it is not used for objectives outside art, but to help diversify cultural exchanges. Meanings exchanged through art help us gradually gain insight into certain socio-ecological transformations. They change and transform organisational structures and frameworks rather than "scaling up," an idea that mainly falls within a faith in progress [5]. It offers opportunities to start a debate on meanings from the past, present and future of a social transition [19] and can therefore create shifts in both the organisations [5] and communities

involved [22]. For example, within arts organisations, themes such as ecology or landscape have long been prominent. With an increasing exchange between art organisations, government agencies with a focus on open and built environments, and community contexts, the diversity of themes that art projects address today is steadily expanding, such as water, drought or (nuclear) energy. For example:

The artwork Pazugoo by the artist Andy Weir invites debate on meanings relating to nuclear waste. PAZUGOO is the name of a collection of 3D printed demons, which act as “markers” for deep geological storage sites for radioactive waste. The Pazugos are produced via a series of collective workshops led by the artist [7].



© PAZUGOO, Andy Weir, 2021.

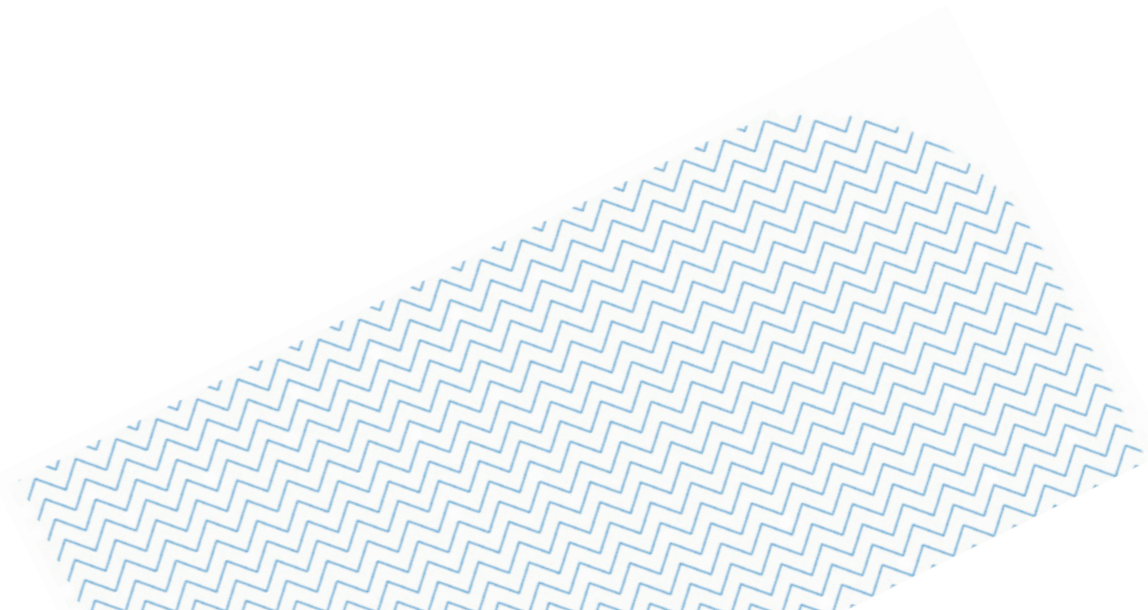
1.2. DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO ART PROCESSES

Government agencies that want to work in connection with socio-ecological dynamics with art experience challenges with these exchanges of meaning. They still too often commission art in a specific direction, and adapt the role of art to their frameworks. There is therefore a need to develop strategies with and for these organisations to actively trigger debate between diverse voices of artists, local and supra-local human and more-than-human actors (nature, animals etc.) [25]. This is referred to as agonistic dialogues in the literature - based on the concept by Mouffe [26] and further developed in Participatory Design by DiSalvo [27] and others - referring to how differences and even conflict can have a positive place in a dialogue.

To explore such a dialogic approach and make it usable for organisations, we asked the following general research question: How can organisations

use art as an approach to contribute to shared understanding and action regarding socio-ecological transitions, with the most diverse group of actors possible? To answer this question, we paid attention in this study to three aspects based on an analysis of the work structure of government agencies working with the open and built-up space..

- 1 In a preliminary research/context analysis, how do you define the role of art in a specific transition?
- 2 How do you integrate the approach to art into the project structure specific to your organisation?
- 3 How can art play a role in the realisation phase of the transition project?



2.

EMPIRICAL SECTION

PARTICIPATORY PROCESS



To explore these three questions, we designed a participatory process. We conducted in-depth interviews and observations in the initial months with government agencies working on commissioned art (four interviews and two site visits), with mediators developing the dialogic approach to art projects (two interviews) and with educational partners training these mediators (two interviews). We then organised three half-day workshops, interspersed with evaluation sessions with a steering board comprising five members: four from the Department of CYM (Laureline Soubry and Katrien Laenen from the Platform Art by Commission, Bart Pluym, research coordinator, and Helena Vansteelant, policy officer for the Arts) and one person from the policy area open space of the Flemish Land Agency (Griet Celen, Head of Department Land Development and Landbank).

During these sessions, we used and built upon a set of tools and methods already developed by our research group that support participatory exchange (Participation Studio, <https://participatiestudio.be/>) [28], building on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to learn about art as a practice within a cultural and historical context [29]. We will describe each of the art projects with the artist's name, because even after they are anonymised, these works will still be recognisable. We have anonymised the quotes that arose from the workshops with the employees of government agencies.

Each workshop day was organised around one of the three sub-questions, supplemented by two to three more short explanations of art cases. The participants presented their own project in which they were already working with art, or where this could be the case. They were divided into groups. In each case, they were asked to complete posters, elaborated with questions, based on the literature review, interviews and observations.

The questions were always answered from **the different positions of the participants** at the table: principal, artist, mediator. Each formulated their answers and together they looked at the synergies and tensions between them. Finally, there was a joint reflection session in a group. Gradually, throughout the three sessions, and together with researchers and experts, we designed a range of approaches to allow art to play a role in socio-ecological transitions.

The group of participants in the three educational sessions included eleven staff members from four

different government agencies and organisations working in connection with the open and built space, selected by a steering board put together for the project on account of their experience with and interest in art in socio-ecological transition processes: Siska Van De Steene (Flemish Land Agency), Wim Van Isacker (Flemish Land Agency), Eddy Dupae (Flemish Land Agency), Elisabeth Van Besien (Flemish Land Agency), Stefan Van Riet (Flemish Land Agency), Maarten Sper (Flemish Land Agency), Jessica Schoffelen (AWV), Hannah Van Nieuwenhuysse (Agency for Nature and Forests), Dries Desloover (Agency for Nature and Forests), Stijn Deruyter (Agency for Nature and Forests), Elke Vanempten (ILVO) and Nils Iwens (Natuurpunt). This group was supplemented by artists and mediators in each session, to ensure diversity in the group of participants, including Tim Joye (Reaktor 21), Danielle van Zuijlen (mediator at PILOOT), Clara Spilliaert (artist) and Jan Hermans (cultural policy coordinator of the municipality of Herzele).

The sessions were moderated by the research team, four researchers with mixed backgrounds in culture, art, architecture and Participatory Design (Liesbeth Huybrechts, Liese Mertens, Lieve Custers, Janno Dilissen, Hasselt University).

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

THE ART OF MEDIATING BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The projects of the participating government agencies and organisations are usually structured by a preliminary study, context analysis, the design of a project/mission with a participation group to review and monitor the plan, an implementation plan and an aftercare process. We therefore compiled by phase what the opportunities and challenges are for art to play a role in them.

RONDWEG ASSE

11.30 - 11.45

0 - Toelichting case

Noteer hier de krijtlijnen van de case in kwestie als ook die van de bijhorende (typische) projectstructuur. Gebruik hiervoor de bijhorende post-its.

1. Doelstelling
 - Doelstelling voor de regio
 - Doelstelling voor de gemeente
 - Doelstelling voor de kunstenaar
 - Doelstelling voor de organisatie

2. Doelstelling 'wat' en 'hoe'
 - "Wat" teruggeven aan de Assenaren
 - leefbaarheid leefwijken verlagen

3. Doelstelling 'wanneer'
 - Wanneer wordt de kunst geïnstalleerd?
 - Wanneer wordt de kunst verwijderd?

4. Doelstelling 'waar'
 - Waar wordt de kunst geïnstalleerd?
 - Waar wordt de kunst verwijderd?

partnerschap met Landschap?

leefbaarheid leefwijken verlagen

In welke fase bemiddeling opstarten?

In welke fase kunstenaar betrekken?

© fragment Miroboard: leermoment 2, Uhasseit

3.1. IN A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH/CONTEXT ANALYSIS, HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE ROLE OF ART IN A SPECIFIC TRANSITION?

Challenges

The participants have observed an enhanced use of art in social-ecological transitions. In this context, art takes on an increasingly public character, in their perception, and engages more often with the open and built environment (land, water, etc.). However, the projects are still too often top-down, from a private or public initiative (e.g., government, hospital or community organisations). There is therefore a challenge to enter into dialogue in which principals, residents and artists play an equal role.

For public principals, art is often not part of their 'core business', so this is not always incorporated in budgets or the artwork is often installed in a given space without context. Art is also primarily used materially, as a physical intervention. This physical presence can bring positive attention to open spaces, but it can also overload them with additional artefacts. The designers, both active within the organisations and outside, are not always keen to integrate art, for fear of overloading the landscape or confusing or slowing down the already difficult transition process. The moment in the process when art is integrated can also be a potential hurdle for these designers. However, the earlier art is involved in the process, the more it can benefit the process.

Some art projects take on a more intangible form. While these interventions are often appropriate in socio-ecological transitions, they are not always readily accepted, as the participants explained. People are more likely to understand a material artefact that is and remains visible than more subtle

interventions in the landscape, such as interventions that decay (e.g., made from materials that blend into nature) or a built space which is removed even though people value it: for example, fences, streets or buildings. Budgets are more quickly allocated to projects that effectively take up space because they are more tangible.

As regards the role of various actors in the process of commissioned art, the role of artistic actors (such as the artists) is often described as "free" framed: they can freely explore the open or built space project in and out, with the disadvantage that their role can be fragile or too non-committal and can end at any moment. In addition, the employees of these organisations or government agencies also need to have their position strengthened inside and outside the institution in order to fully deploy art as an approach. The employees feel it is risky to take full responsibility for art alone as an approach from the beginning to the end of the process. The challenge is therefore to empower staff and artists and ensure that art commissions take a form which is appropriate to a context, both tangible and intangible.

Opportunities

The participants state that it is important, in this dialogic approach to art, to pay attention to translating/clarifying for each actor the uniqueness of other actors: the artists, players in both the open and built space, and actors in 'everyday life'. There is therefore a need for a mediation process that starts before a given commission is formulated toward an artist, and does not end when the artwork is realised. A mediator - preferably someone with experience with commissioned art and the associated complex process - can play an important role in the complex network of diverse parties and can offer some realism about what art can and cannot do. This person can identify the actors and bring about an exchange of meaning that may or may not lead to an art commission. The mediator can help find the question, the role, the form and can monitor the quality of art in relation to other quality objectives of a project (nature, accessibility, communication, etc.). This insight is supported by previous study commissioned by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, and conducted by IDEA Consult [30] and the Arck research group at Hasselt University [7]. The two exploratory studies suggest that the field of commissioned art needs a deeper understanding of the role of mediators. This can draw on a host of studies in the field of participatory design relating to mediation [31]. The following insights regarding the mediation process and the mediator emerged during the session among the participants:

- The participants suggested that the mediator can be an internal employee of the organisation, but - due to lack of time and experience - they are more likely to appoint an external mediator who can take on coordination, draft specifications or work with the communications department to remove the burden for project leaders. Mediators are often freelancers; they are sometimes appointed within the arts organisation involved in the collaboration. Sometimes different mediators are used in different phases or places in an area covered by the project, depending on their expertise.
- There is often uncertainty among participants in working with a mediator, in connection with responsibilities, expertise and budgets. The commissioning organisation wants to free up the burden for its own operations by using a mediator, but fears that it will still end up saddled with a lot of work. Mediation therefore also requires consideration for responsibilities.
- It also appears to be difficult to find good mediators (and artists) to work with socio-ecological transitions. The Platform Art by Commission supports the work and appointment of a mediator, by managing a pool of mediators that is steadily growing, with highly diverse profiles and by offering their online toolbox "mediation for art commissions" [32]. The participants also indicated that additional training is needed for mediators with this expertise.
- Mediation costs money, which is often the stumbling block when the pathway to realisation is not clear in terms of planning or time. The participants ask for tools to facilitate this process of estimating costs.

Points of attention

The participants also agreed that **a comprehensive context analysis** is needed to formulate an artistic approach with the necessary understanding for diverse actors and materiality.

- This can be done by getting an overview of the area, the history, and the relationships between actors. **This requires an analysis of both human and more-than-human actors (nature, animals, materials, etc.) as a collectivity, rather than focusing only on the human perspective:** many people, animals and natural elements do not have a voice in an art process. The insights gained from the analysis can be distilled into a plan, not to pin down an idea, but to serve as context and inspiration.

The mediator can play a role in this analysis because they can help analyse the commission from the context and initiate dialogues with the principal, an artist and the resident. One of the mediators, for example, assumes that

"(...) when a project is realised somewhere, things are already happening. So I find it interesting to create a kind of artistic or ecological master plan and work from there, which can open up the vision."
(participant 1)

The artist and the principal can also analyse the context, but often there is too little time and space in this regard. At best, all of these parties contribute to the context analysis.

"The mediator should actually already be thinking along about art in the process of land-use planning, where they sit internally with various sectors (such as landscape experts, agronomists, archaeologists, ecologists, etc.)." (participant 2)

- It is good to **develop standard specifications** for appointing a mediator or artist to conduct this context analysis. However, there are often no budgets for this. The Platform Art by Commission could therefore develop a grant channel, for example, to apply for budgets for the preliminary exploration of art commissions. An offer can be made based on how long a mediator will be involved, for example, only for the artistic selection or also in preparing the commission, or also in following up the project..

Mediator 1 does not yet ask for a fee for a first conversation, but then he suggests the first step to work on (conducting an investigation or making a first move). This should ideally be done for a fee, something many principals forget to budget for.

3.2.

HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE THE APPROACH TO ART INTO THE PROJECT STRUCTURE SPECIFIC TO YOUR ORGANISATION?

Challenges

Because of the public role, the need for dialogue and translation, and the greater role art can play in realising the socio-ecological ambitions of - often public - organisations, there is a need for a suitable negotiation procedure. The artwork is too often seen as a product rather than an approach that can initiate a process. Like any methodology, the art process can be conceived through a tailored approach. This means that multiple artists and mediators can be asked a transition question and thus start a process within a legal framework. One participant stated:

“As principals, we often already have an artwork in mind. That attitude can be detrimental to the process.”
(participant 2)

Opportunities

The participants indicated that supporting and working out the **description of the commission** for the mediator and artist is essential to get this negotiation going. The formulation of the commission should come from, and be communicative to the artist, mediator, the organisations working in connection with the open and built space, and local and supralocal actors. In this search, a good balance needs to be found between an abstract and a concretely detailed description, so that people at different scales and in different themes can identify with it.

Guiding core concepts can articulate the expectations relating to commissioned art and allow collaborative communication and evaluation of the process. These guiding principles do not have to be too steering, in the participants' view, so that artists retain artistic freedom and also *“the landscape can say whether art is worthwhile there (participant 3).”*

“The idea of working with guiding concepts came from an internal process within our organisation with its employees, where they had decided on these guiding concepts in a participatory approach, such as ‘humour,’ ‘connection with landscape.’” (participant 4)

The full assignment description must ultimately be usable by organisations, which often takes the form

of specifications. However, most **specifications** are rather technical and difficult for artists to interpret. The participants therefore asked to see sample specifications.

The specifications then need to be translatable into a **selection process**. This includes:

- Drawing up a **long- and or shortlist** of different profiles of artists who may be interesting in a given context (inquiring, socially minded, etc.) and who can be contacted.
- Drawing up **the invitation to artists**. It should be clear in the invitation what is being asked of the artist: a portfolio, a concept or an extensive proposal. In any case remuneration needs to be provided for. The selection and award criteria also need to be listed - based on the guiding concepts.
- Deciding on a **procedure to disseminate the project call**. This can be via an open call (very broad selection), a closed competition (a limited number of artists are invited based on a shortlist) or by directly awarding the commission to one specific artist.
- For example, a **selection committee** can include only the principal and the mediator as advisors, but it is also interesting to add local actors and stakeholders. The management of organisations are often apprehensive about involving their own employees. Nonetheless, this often leads to more boundary-pushing decisions, and can trigger more support from the whole organisation.

“Employees gave a score from 0 - 10 to assess which artworks they like and which they do not, justifying their choices. Why do these artworks score so high (or low)? Everyone had the chance to give input. The additional conclusion from this survey was that support for the process was much broader than originally expected.”
(participant 3)

“The choice of an artist can be supported by an external party with artistic expertise, but the final decision is best made together with local actors in the context and the relevant organisation.” (participant 5).

3.3.

HOW CAN ART PLAY A ROLE IN THE REALISATION PHASE OF THE TRANSITION PROJECT?

Challenges

These days, the realisation process of an art commission rarely happens together with other actors. People still too often try to integrate art in a rushed manner, while the coherence of different art projects - often installed by different landowners/managers - is important for the identity of the landscape. Using art as an approach is also a technical challenge in large infrastructure environments such as the agency for traffic and roads, which builds roads, or organisations such as the Flemish Land Agency, which are responsible for complex landscape projects, or the Agency for Nature and Forests, which develops and manages natural areas. Organisations need to make room and budget for this, both spatially and in tight schedules. Despite the obvious benefit of having the conversation about a transition in an imaginative setting on-site, the complexity of using art in a project is why art is still dropped from projects or not taken seriously as an approach.

Our organisation has been trying to include art in land-use planning projects for twenty years, and has also realised quite a lot of projects, but art is often the first thing to be dropped, usually by the project leaders, if the budgets were not accurately estimated and come under pressure. (participant 6).

Finally, the participants state that there is often a lot of uncertainty in art projects regarding the **aftercare of the art projects**, for example who takes on what responsibilities for care, communication or maintenance.

Opportunities

If we use art as an approach to give shape to socio-ecological transitions, it must be part of **a broader exercise in** - what we refer to in Participatory Design as - **“infrastructuring,” a long-term process involving different groups, places and natural elements over time** [33, 34]. The original definition of infrastructuring is focused on information technology - web platforms, apps, radio stations - as the infrastructure for bringing collectives together to exchange meanings. For art projects, this can involve highly diverse platforms, such as the green sculpture or the 3D printed figurines mentioned in 1.1.

“Doing it” together and choosing a recognisable location as a workshop in or close to the studied landbased context can contribute to infrastructuring. The artists then quickly become familiar with both human and more-than-human actors in the neighbourhood (neighbours, materials, natural elements), which makes the involvement of actors more diverse.

Clara Spilliaert drew inspiration for her artwork ‘1000 bricks’ from the abundant clay soil in Kruibeke and the accompanying rich past of brickmakers, to create a Covid-19 commemorative monument. She wanted to integrate the sense of touch that was missed so much during the pandemic. Her idea was to fire 1,000 handmade bricks with the handprints of 1,000 residents. These bricks were then distributed at six locations. Clara turned a vacant information office in the neighbourhood

into a temporary work studio. This building was well-known in the area and added dynamism to the neighbourhood. During her residency, she received a lot of local support and help from volunteers, including a neighbour from her (temporary) studio.

Infrastructure management - both in preparation, realisation phase and aftercare - requires cooperation and oversight. It is therefore interesting to determine through **an agreement the mutual arrangements or consortium for this long-term process**. The participants agreed that **the earlier the artist is involved in an agreement, the better**, but that at any point in the process it can be interesting for an artist to take on a role. An art expert explained he works with a methodology that organises art projects over time.

“I place them in an ecosystem thought framework through several key principles, such as assembling a diverse steering board (knowledge & funds); managing expectations (making robust agreements); enabling long-term thinking and ecosystem thinking (modular, flexible, room for new synergies); paying attention to biodiversity and ‘more-than-human’ etc.” (participant 1)

According to the participants, it is important in this regard to also draw up **aftercare agreements**. These can specify who will be responsible for supporting and mediating between the artwork, artist, principals and stakeholders after the project is realised. Advice can also be given on how to make the work environmentally resilient, what instructions to give regarding aftercare: technical, insurance, how the work lives on in public actions, for example, and how it can evolve aesthetically and communicatively.



© Workshop at residential care centre, Clara Spilliaert

4. CONCLUDING REFLECTION TOWARDS A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO THE USE OF ART IN SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

When we attempt to answer our initial research question, we see that if we want to use art as an approach to address socio-ecological challenges, we need to make room for an **exchange of meanings** between a lot of parties. We learned that art commissions are often fitted into a modus operandi that starts from one actor, the initiator, or is rolled out without much thought:

“We use art because we have to, but we do not always know why anymore.” (participant 9)

The various frameworks of meaning specific to government agencies or services active in the open and built environment, the professional arts field and everyday life only enter into dialogue with difficulty. The meanings in one domain quickly dominate the others, with the result that art as an approach is perceived as risky even today. Using art as an approach requires strengthening the artists, mediators and the individuals from the commissioning organisations who want to use art as an approach and have to communicate this both internally and externally [3]. Integrating art into these processes therefore requires a change of culture within organisations working in connection with the open and built space. **Bringing about this change of culture requires a modus operandi toward**

encouraging the exchange of meanings, mutual understanding and shared responsibility between government agencies and organisations working with the open and built environment, mediators, artists and local and supralocal actors. This also requires exploring the politicising role of this process of exchange, which should bring about a power shift in which silent actors take on more importance in a process. This is a reference to artists who are given too non-committal a role, but also to the lack of a voice for nature in art commissions in socio-ecological transition projects [35]. The process should make people aware of the different meanings of both their human and natural environments and how they are all interdependent.

Employing art as an approach in socio-ecological transitions, with space for the role of art (which in itself does not have to be participatory) in the exchange of meanings between people among themselves, and between people and the environment, and with consideration for the silent voices, should ideally take a participatory approach. A number of aspects need to be considered in this regard.

- Learning and working in a **network** strengthens the position of the artist, the mediator and the employee who has to lead the commission within the commissioning organisation.
- *Indeed, the **network of actors with experience and knowledge of art in socio-ecological transitions** is small. That is why the network that grew within this participatory study was appreciated. Continually focusing on this network makes it possible to exchange experiences.*
- *This network can provide leverage for employees of government agencies active in the open and built environment to **enshrine collaborative processes around art in the organisation.***
- *This network can strengthen artists, possibly assisted by a mediator or a collective of artists (if the project context allows). A mediator explained during one of the sessions that she “started a platform with five artists to give art a voice in the field of urban development (participant 7).”*
- *The presence of governments (in this context, the Platform Art by Commission) needs to be strengthened to play a **permanent connecting, knowledge-sharing and supporting role** in that network, including in giving a voice to the more vulnerable voices in the process (often the artist or nature).*
- **An open manual for a participatory approach** to art commissions that is visually expressive and easy to share; supports the principal, staff or managers, mediators or artists in a tailored process.
- **Good practices in the area of art in socio-ecological transitions** are still few and far between, and need to be archived and shared. This can be in the form of a database of case studies, sample commission descriptions and standard specifications.
- Launching a **pilot art commission with a clear identity inside and outside the organisation**, focusing specifically on socio-ecological challenges, can activate the network, the manual and the examples.

The above participatory study focused on the use of art by staff at government agencies and organisations working in the open and built environment in connection with socio-ecological transitions, in collaboration with artists, mediators and (supra) local actors. While this study can provide inspiration on how a participatory process can play a role in researching and setting up art processes with government agencies and organisations, artists and mediators around a variety of socio-ecological transitions, other contexts require follow-up studies. We hope to have provided an impetus around a further exchange on this topic.

5. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: THE MANUAL

ANNEX 2: CASES

ANNEX 3: COMMISSIONED ART DATABASE

ANNEX 1: THE MANUAL

Each art project has its own individuality and the need for a custom process. This manual can support you in various steps in preparing or evaluating an art commission. This manual was structured on the project structure of the participating government agencies and organisations of this study.

1. In a preliminary exploration, how do you define the role and place of the art project in dialogue with a specific transition?
2. How do you integrate the art project into the project structure specific to your institution?
3. How do you guide the art commission in the realisation phase?
4. How do you organise the aftercare of the art project?
5. What can we take away as point for attention/suggestions for the future for organising art commissions?

1. In a preliminary exploration, how do you define the role and place of the art project in dialogue with a specific transition?

What is **the specific reason** for the project? How did you come up with the idea?

Context?

Location: To what contextual qualities specific to the location of the work can the art project connect?

Historical: How does the project relate to the history of the location?

Artistic: How does the art project relate to certain artistic trends?

What is the **vision** of what the commission should do in relation to this transition?

What is the **social transition or theme** to which the commission relates? To what tangible and intangible reality should the art commission relate?

Actors

Who is already involved in the commission? Who do you want to involve via the art commission?

How do you draft **specifications** for jointly developing this context analysis? Sample specifications can provide support in this regard.

Objective

What do you want to achieve with the art project?

Division of tasks

Who exactly will do what in the whole process?

Will an external party be needed to guide (parts of) the process, or will you as an institution provide this yourself?

Ensure clear agreements/arrangements regarding the division of tasks and responsibilities.

2. How do you integrate the art project into the project structure specific to your institution?

Look at your organisation's **project structure** and relate it to the project structure of the artwork. Are there opportunities? Are there conflicts?

How do you draft specifications?
Sample specifications can provide support in this regard.

How do you draft the **commission description** for the art project?

"Guiding concepts" can provide support in this regard, as they articulate expectations regarding commissioned art through a number of core concepts. This is critical to communicate and evaluate the process together.

How do you make **a contract containing the mutual agreements or consortium?**
Sample agreements can be useful here.

How do you organise a selection process? This includes:

- **Drawing up a long- and or shortlist** of different profiles of artists who may be interesting in a given context (very inquiring, socially minded, etc.) and who can be contacted.
- Drawing up **the invitation to artists**. It should be clear in the invitation what is being asked of the artist: a portfolio, a concept or an extensive proposal. In the latter two cases, there needs to be remuneration. The selection and award criteria also need to be listed in it - based on the guiding concepts.
- Deciding on **a procedure to disseminate the project call** to reach artists. This can be via an open call (very broad selection), a closed competition (a limited number of artists are invited based on a short or longlist) or by directly awarding the commission to one artist.
- Putting together **a selection committee to choose an artist**: this can be just the principal together with the mediator as advisor, the whole team of your organisation and/or local actors and stakeholders (e.g., specific employees of the municipality, representatives of the local neighbourhood work, cyclist union, etc.).

3. How do you guide the art commission in the realisation phase?

In what part of your **organisational culture as a commissioning institution** does the art project bring changes?

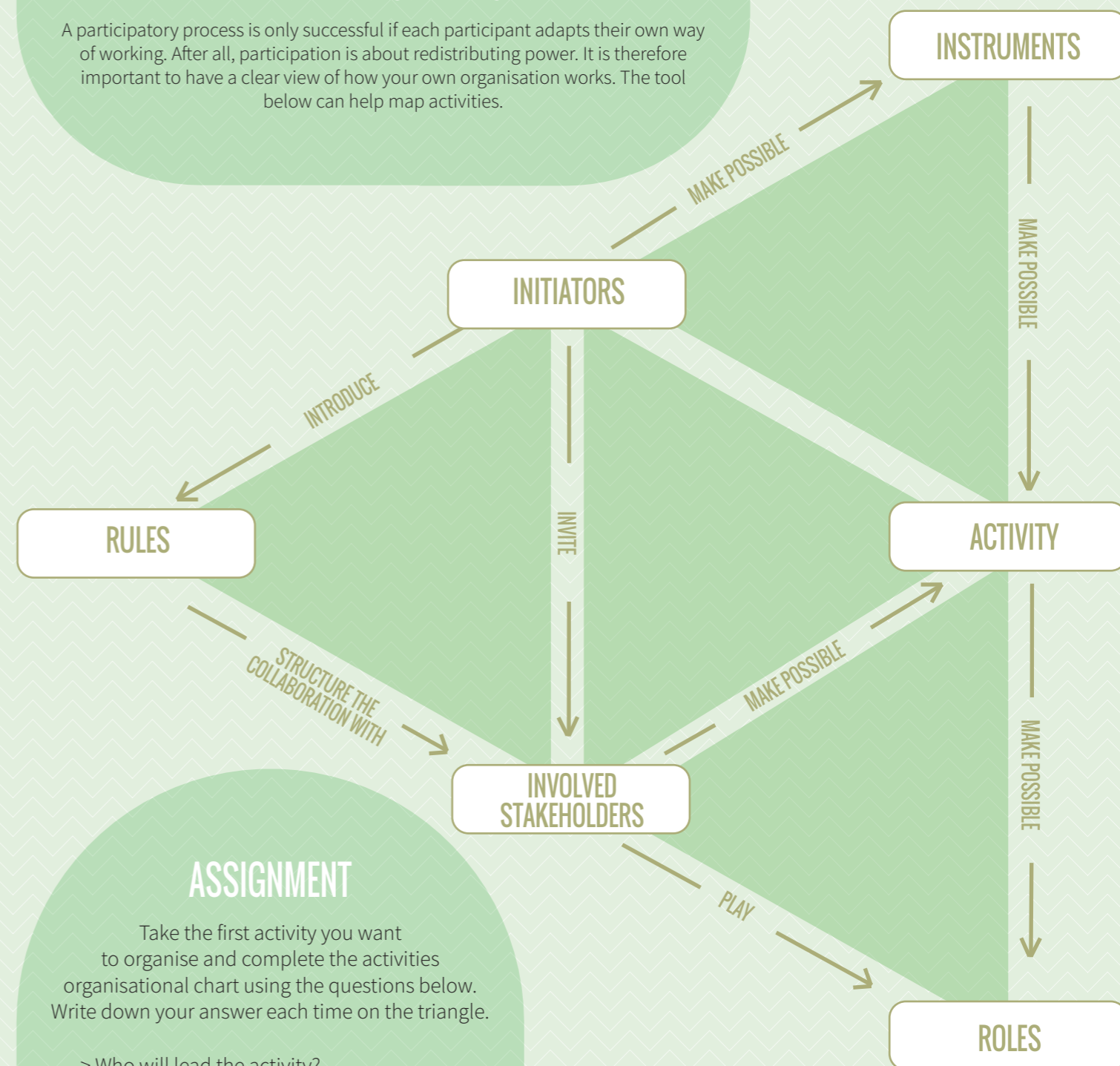
- Instruments you work with
- Involved people you work with
- Rules specific to your organisation
- Roles specific to your organisation

Describe **the activities** you want to organise based on the art project:
(See tool opposite: **IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES**)

Are there **tensions** in introducing these changes (e.g., because you lack expertise, your colleagues are not ready)? Describe these tensions.

IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES

A participatory process is only successful if each participant adapts their own way of working. After all, participation is about redistributing power. It is therefore important to have a clear view of how your own organisation works. The tool below can help map activities.



ASSIGNMENT

Take the first activity you want to organise and complete the activities organisational chart using the questions below. Write down your answer each time on the triangle.

- > Who will lead the activity?
- > What tools will you use to organise your activity? (For example, “doing it” together can be interesting; or choosing a recognisable workplace in the studied location)
- > Who will you involve in this activity?
- > What role will each involved stakeholder get?
- > What rules will you introduce to structure the interaction between actors/ collectives? (e.g. weekly meetings, keeping blog)

4. How do you organise the aftercare of the art project?

How do you draft an **aftercare agreement**?

Who will be **responsible** for supporting and mediating between the artwork, artist, principals and stakeholders after the project is realised?

What types of **assurance** are needed?

What **specific instructions** do you want to give regarding aftercare (technical), but also how the work should be perpetuated, aesthetically or in terms of communication?

How do you make the work **environmentproof**?

5. What can we take away as concerns/suggestions to the future for organising commissioned art projects?

What were the Points of Attention for each phase?

- Preliminary exploration/Context analysis
- Integration of the project structure
- Realisation phase
- Aftercare

What are suggestions for the next commissioned art project?

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CASE 1:

ONDERZOEKSKOUTER - ILVO

CONTEXT PROJECT

The ILVO-onderzoekskouter (research arable fields) is a physical space south of Ghent, but also a mental place and working platform where ILVO works on the co-creative development of an innovative agricultural park or food landscape on its sites. Kunst in Opdracht supported ILVO in facilitating an artistic process where science and art prompt the general public to reflect.



© Sketch design and implementation of chosen design 'EquilArbre' by artist duo Driessens and Verstappen. 2023.
Photo of Implementation: Ilvo

PROCESS

It started in early 2021 with **the launch of the exploration into the role of art**. They wondered whether they should do something with art out of their social remit and exemplary role. It was the first time art was addressed as a methodology within the organisation. At first, graffiti was envisioned as a work of art in an already defined location, which **immediately restricted the commission considerably and left very little room for artistic freedom**.

An application was then submitted to the Kunst in Opdracht incentive instrument for guidance on the project, and this immediately created added value. Feedback in the first stage of the submission led to the appointment of **an artistic mediator**. The application was amended in the second round. This was a completely different proposal. The various steps in **the commission description** were reviewed with the art mediator. How will we approach the commission? Why? What do we want to accomplish? It was decided to work with **a number of guiding concepts** (e.g. humour, connection to the landscape, caring for the future, representative, cooperative, etc.) that could inspire the artwork. This idea came from a working group and was later supplemented with an internal project within ILVO with its employees. This internal process proved to be a useful formula for engaging multiple people, opening up perspectives and exchanging ideas or opinions.

The art mediator then made a proposal to broaden the whole process. What can art mean, what forms are there? The art commission was further finalised and put into a more comprehensible form. A letter was drafted and sent to various artists. This explained what the 'onderzoekskouter' entails, why ILVO is putting this whole process together, and why they invite artists. A longlist of several artists was drawn up in collaboration with the art mediator. This **longlist was then boiled down to a shortlist** by taking into account the answers of some questions such as: does the artist and his/her work fit with the previously identified

guiding concepts? Is the artist interesting and do we feel a connection with them?

After the shortlist was made, **an artist selection process was drawn up**. There was doubt whether they would choose one artist right away, because the budget was very limited. However, the art mediator stressed the importance of diversity and choice. It was decided to select two artists and invite them for an introduction, dialogue, discussion and a guided tour. Then they both created a sketch design as the first step. Realising that the psychology of choosing between two proposals was not ideal, a third artist was invited to go through the same process. Feedback was given to all the artists regarding practical concerns and the feasibility of the artworks. A new proposal was then made by the artist.

It was decided to draw up **a survey** on these three proposals, and employees gave a score from 0-10 to assess which artworks they liked and which they did not, justifying their choices. Everyone had the chance to give input. In the end, one artist was democratically selected and the further developmental trajectory started. **The additional conclusion from this survey was that support for the process was much broader than originally expected**. Of course, the other artists were also **remunerated for their sketch proposal**.

The artwork "EquilArbre" by artist duo Driessens and Verstappen was subsequently inaugurated in the summer of 2023.

The 11 guiding concepts for this art commission were:

1. Opening up the 'Onderzoekskouter' as a starting point
2. A unique research landscape, that clarifies that there is more to the onderzoekskouter
3. Triggering conscious experience and changing perspectives by prompting discussion, conversation, or reflection, thereby eliciting critical thinking
4. Humour
5. Holistically connecting: it is not so much about the individual pieces or themes that make up ILVO as it is the system as a whole
6. Responding to the ambition of ILVO to care for the future
7. An understandable, intriguing narrative
8. Feasibility and affordability
9. A visually permanent work, unless the artist makes an interesting proposal for temporary work that does leave clear traces
10. Cooperation - collaboration
11. Making a link with the Kouter walk

CONCLUSIONS CASE

- Dialogue among all involved with continuous feedback is important, but it takes time and someone has to take a role in that.
- Develop a commission description through 'guiding concepts', a set of core concepts that convey the expectations regarding commissioned art, as a tool for communicating and evaluating the process.
- How to deal with the unknown of a commission description is a major challenge. The task is to accurately delineate where it begins, ends and exactly how much it will cost.
- The choice of artist was made via a democratic survey. This ensured there was broader support for the process.

CASE 2:

VLOETHEMVELD - AGENCY FOR NATURE AND FORESTS (ANB) AND FLEMISH LAND AGENCY (VLM)

CONTEXT PROJECT

The Vloethemveld is a nature reserve covering around 365 hectares, with forest, heathland, sparse grasslands and nutrient-poor water. It is characterised by pristine nature, military heritage and the memory of a POW (Prisoner of War) camp through the art of its former inhabitants. The ANB owns and manages the Vloethemveld. ANB has already completed a process with the Flemish Land Agency, and since 2008, they have been involved in the development of the Vloethemveld project in cooperation with the two local municipalities: Jabbeke and Zedelgem. A Vloethemveld non-profit association has been set up as part of the project as well. After all, participation and a sense of community are essential in this process.

When the military abandoned the area for good, ANB worked step by step on a nature and landscape management plan and further nature restoration works were implemented. The partners focused on the heritage, and the site has since been recognised as open heritage. Vloethemveld aims to work not only in connection with nature and heritage, but also art. Indeed, art is linked to the domain from the time of the POW camp. Good ideas for art were developed, but there is also **a risk that they are multiple and not well connected and that they might overwhelm the area.**



© Vloethemveld, Zedelgem, ANB. Photographer: Erwin Deraus

PROCESS

After the cooperation agreement among the local municipalities of Jabbeke and Zedelgem, ANB and the Flemish Land Agency was approved, steps were taken to integrate art. The Flemish Land Agency has already completed a number of processes regarding a number of artworks, and they encountered a number of challenges in the process: the commission description was **described too concretely** or there was **too much decided beforehand**, too many ad hoc decisions, etc. As a result, **too many art ideas and works were developed that were not cohesive.**

The steering board therefore decided to take a project-based approach around art, in collaboration with **Kunst in Opdracht**. Indeed, **they have expertise and can offer advice**. The physical works of art already present in the landscape have been an impetus to give art and buildings a purpose. However, (in the future) they would like to set up an art project from the outset, concurrent with the planning. In collaboration with the incentive instrument Kunst in Opdracht, a competition **was launched to appoint an artistic curator, with the intention that this person would draft an artistic master plan and then look for and appoint artists.**

The award procedure for the artistic curator was based on questions the latter would have to answer. This mediator has to **make artistic choices and draw up an artistic master plan**. Everything in an art project like this one has to be done within a certain legal framework. The award procedure laid down evaluation criteria, three

candidate curators were chosen from a shortlist, each submitted a proposal and were compensated for it.

Through a negotiation procedure without publication, an artistic master plan is now being drawn up. As part of this, the chosen artistic curator has to create a longlist of artists from which to draw in the coming years.

CONCLUSIONS CASE

- The connection between art and nature is precarious; art can bring positive attention to the landscape, but it can also overload it. There is therefore a need for a good balancing act.
- There is a need for guidance and expertise to set an objective and work toward it, without getting caught up in an incohesive (art) story.
- A project-based and collaborative trajectory is desirable to ensure coherence. This means that the process is longer, but leads to purposeful and cohesive art.

CASE 3:

KLARE WAL, FLEMISH LAND AGENCY IN COLLABORATION WITH DE NIEUWE OPDRACHTGEVERS

CONTEXT PROJECT

Klare Wal is an archaeologically valuable site in Alveringem. Klare Wal lies on the border of the Izenberge plateau (higher sandy loam soils) and the polder area along the Lovaart, formerly the old channel of the Yser. The remains of a circular moat (160 m in diameter) and a level difference from the surrounding plots are still visible on the site. During a survey conducted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels) in 2013-2014, a pile structure was found in the middle that was dated to around 2050 B.C. The original hypothesis identified the structure as a fortification built in the 9th century against Norman/Viking raids (castellae recens facta, text from 891).

Due to its archaeological importance, the plot was taken out of agricultural use during the Sint-Rijkers land consolidation and transferred to the municipality of Alveringem. It is currently in use as pasture. A walking path was recently built, which has made the site easily accessible. To draw the attention of passers-by to the unusual form and rich history of the site, the VLM solicited the Nieuwe opdrachtgevers to work with a commissioning group to create an artwork on this site. Together they came to the decision to “make the invisible visible.” [37]

PROCESS

De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers work with (what they call) a group of principals. These are local actors who promote participation and support for the artwork. In this case, the municipality, archaeologists and interested residents of Alveringem were brought together to help draft the commission. De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers themselves then search for the appropriate artist for that type of project and that particular site. They propose a shortlist of various artists and the group of principals then gets to decide which artist to partner with to find a suitable artwork. Once an artist is selected, De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers enter into a contract with the artist in question.

Currently, the Klare Wal project is in the phase where the selected artist is creating a sketch design. The final design will be submitted shortly, along with a cost estimate. This element is important because within the operations of the Flemish Land Agency, they are very technically oriented (stability, responsibility, finance, etc.). However, proposing answers to these questions is very difficult at this stage, since it is not yet known exactly what the artwork will be. De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers are the “lead civil servant” for the implementation of the artwork project.



© Principals on site Klare Wal.
Photo: Louise Goegebeur, De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers.

CONCLUSIONS CASE

- The choice for a shortlist of artists is via an external party (De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers nonprofit organisation), but the final decision is made by a local participatory group of principals.
- Working with local actors ensures broader support.
- Making estimates in advance is important (technical and financial perspective), but this is difficult due to the uncertainty that the artwork is not yet known.

CASE 4:

RUPELSTREEK - FLEMISH LAND AGENCY IN COLLABORATION WITH DE NIEUWE OPDRACHTGEVERS

CONTEXT PRINCIPALS

The Flemish Land Agency has several ongoing art projects within land-use planning projects in collaboration with De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers. The Flemish Land Agency has been trying for twenty years to get art in the landscape included in land-use planning projects, but these are often the first to be dropped because they do not fall within the objectives of the Flemish Land Agency, and they require additional budgets. Nonetheless, provided there is a good plan, art can be foregrounded into a project description e.g. as a measure.



© Visualisation of the design by Bosco Sodi, Boom.

CASE RUPELSTREEK - BOOM

A project is currently ongoing in the Rupel region (Rupelstreek) where there was large-scale clay mining in the past. There were many furnaces with lots of big chimneys, around fifty of them, but there is now only one remaining. The idea was to perhaps bring the area back to life, for example, as a kind of projection. The intent was therefore already somewhat defined, not as an artwork, but as an experience of that heritage in relation to the mined landscape. De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers were then solicited to guide the process, reformulating the commission in the process.

The artist is expected to help build awareness of the past and future of the landscape of Boom, with a monumental work at the threshold to the municipality. Clay mining dominated the landscape for decades, but once the soil was depleted, the land in Boom was contaminated and the pits were used for landfill. Various initiatives are currently ongoing to give this landscape of industrial mining and landfill a new future. The artist will be asked to use the clay from Boom for an artwork, drawing attention to this wonderful material and its richness.

Installed on the site where a brick kiln once stood and which has now been reclaimed by nature, this work will become both a critique of the exploitation and pollution caused by the industrial past, and a guardian of the future ecological and landscape developments of the Rupel region.

CASE 5:

HALVE MAAN - FLEMISH LAND AGENCY IN COLLABORATION WITH DE NIEUWE OPDRACHTGEVERS

CASE 'GOED GEBUUR' HALVE MAAN - ZWIJNDRECHT

The 'Schans Halve Maan' (Entrenchment Half Moon) is part of the defensive belt around Antwerp and is situated between two forts. An entrenchment (schans), or small defensive structure, was previously built on top of it, and was excavated after the floods in 1953. After these floods, several families were allowed to build emergency houses on top of the former Schans. These families are still living there, seventy years later. There is therefore an interesting challenge to do something with an artwork to restore this military heritage and make it visible again. Through De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers, a project group was set up with all stakeholders. The project group included the Flemish Land Agency, the municipal council, residents of the Halve Maan and several advisory councils such as the Cultural Council and Environmental Council. All ideas, desires and suggestions were heard, considered and weighed up, and from that Adrien Tirtiaux was proposed as the artist who would realise the project. Tirtiaux made several proposals, and one project was chosen in consultation with the project group, entitled 'Goed Gebuur' (Good neighbour).

Over the years, families have come to appropriate the military heritage. The appropriation of the public space by the families would be cleaned up in the project, freeing up a central axis through which the public domain extends far behind the site. The selected artist made a copy of the current façade structure and replicated it on the other side. This created a combination of public and private use. The space can still be appropriated by residents, but creates a kind of dialogue about the site. The design confronts how we deal with spatial planning, our heritage and situations from the past.



© Visualisation of design Adrien Tirtiaux, 2022.

CONCLUSIONS CASES

- Institutions ideally need to budget in advance for an art project.
- It is best to involve the mediator early on in a project, as it will then be a coherent, undergirded and a generally accepted (art) story.
- An external party (e.g. De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers non-profit organisation) can broaden the horizon and (re)open up the commission description, but this may also entail new obstacles and uncertainties.

CASE 6:

POTENTIAL OF ART AROUND NEW ROADS - AGENCY FOR ROADS AND TRAFFIC (AWV)

CONTEXT PRINCIPALS

AWV (Agency for Roads and Traffic) collected various examples of how they are currently incorporating art in their projects. AWV is often not the initiator of an art project in open space, they are more likely to be a partner if the local municipality wants to initiate something.

Current examples are primarily street art (graffiti) near road infrastructure, for example under a bridge, usually produced by a few local artists. **This kind of art does not always say something about the environment.** Another example in Groenendaal is under an ecoduct where all the animals in the area have been depicted by

graffiti artist DZIA. Other examples are the new concrete bicycle tunnels in Hasselt that play with light and colour. It is not really art, but it **does play into the environment.** Art on roundabouts does sometimes want to say something about the environment, and also represents safety (vehicles cannot drive across the roundabout). These projects **are often produced on behalf of the municipality.** AWV is rarely the initiator for this type of project, but is willing to help look for **opportunities.**



© Ecoduct in Groenendaal, Street artist Dzia, 2017.

CONTEXT POTENTIAL CASE

In the context of this commissioned art session, reflections can be made on a potential case. For example, a study is ongoing for a new bypass in Asse. The purpose of the bypass is to relieve the centre of significant, heavy through traffic. This road would change the environment and replace something else, in this case a green valley and the connection of a neighbourhood on the north side of Asse. There seems to be a lot of potential within the Agency to start something art-related, in order to also **“give back” something to the environment in the process.** An important aspect for infrastructure projects is that integrating artworks also needs to be technically feasible and not compromise the safety of road users. The principal is the municipality and AWV, and there are always a number of other stakeholders in the steering board, including the Department of MPW (Mobility and Public Works), De Lijn ((Flemish public transportation), the province, ANB (for the urban periphery forest and the valley crossed by the bypass).

The design phase (with the preliminary project brief) is gradually coming to an end, and there will now be a ‘quiet’ period (during which the necessary plots of land will be purchased and additional studies will be carried out, among other things). It is not yet certain when the implementation phase will start, but this ‘quiet’ period can be an opportunity to co-create an art project together with residents. The initial intention is not to create support for the ring road with an art project, but rather for additional opportunities such as giving the residual land a neighbourhood function in a future phase. The context also involves several peripheral municipalities, and establishing contacts with regional projects around them seems to make sense. Since the bypass is not an isolated project, there are various programmes running in parallel (e.g. mobility plan of the municipality, vehicle restrictions in the centre, peripheral forest). It would be an opportunity to use this project to inspire the programmes of other entities. For example, work together with Landuse Planning, Regional Landscape, the Flemish Land Agency. It can become a strategic project with cultural history (e.g.,

regional hop culture), nature connections and landscape integration. These nature connections could perhaps be in the form of art, to also create other connections. The responsible Department of Culture could also be involved.

Finally, one option would be to bring in an external party who can map all these actors (including those who don’t initially have their say) and connect them. A mediator does not have to come on board to “integrate a work of art.” It is also important to build a project through a participatory process. If the focus is also on livability around the ring road, then perhaps collaborations with other entities could also provide opportunities to leverage other resources.

It may also be important in the award procedure to involve a mediator (who does not necessarily need to have an artistic approach) that can create even broader cultural support that may or may not lead to an art commission. This mediator should ideally already be involved in the whole analysis. The award procedure should be tailored to the commission.

CONCLUSIONS CASE

- There is more potential to use art to enter into dialogue with the environment, but it always comes with a technical challenge.
- A mediator can offer support by mapping and bringing together the various actors in a project. In addition, a mediator can also seek additional financial resources through these actors to finance the artistic process.
- Taking a participatory approach can broaden support for a project.
- It is important to customise the award procedure, taking into account the whole process.

CASE 7:

KOPPELINGSGBIED RIEME-OOST - FLEMISH LAND AGENCY

CONTEXT PROJECT

This project relates to the connection area Rieme-Oost, in the port of Ghent. The site housed a brickworks that has since been demolished. An initial draft was drawn up with a green zone as a green buffer between a residential core and activity. Additionally, the idea to integrate artworks also came up for the redesign of this site. There are a lot of **historical reminders** to do something with the layout of the park/ green buffer (demolished mill, remnants of bombing such as craters, a former execution site nearby, the brickworks, etc.).

PROCESS

The principals already have a **work of art in mind**: the idea is based on the bricks that used to be fired here in the former brickworks, and they want to integrate this. A **“The idea is ...” attitude can be dangerous**, as the commission description then often goes too far. A first draft is already on the table for the connection area, but it is still under development. The land has been acquired, demolition work has just been completed, and planting of the buffer (the green area itself) has started. The area should be laid out in 2024, and there should also be a work of art installed as a kind of public magnet, but the artist has not yet been selected. The idea is to open a work of art in a particular spot along with the design of the park. The draft design of the park itself is already at an advanced stage, so if an artist needs to be involved, this should ideally be as soon as possible.

If we want to move toward an integrated process, mapping the actors within your organisation can be very useful. Support could perhaps be provided **by appointing an additional party to coordinate the mapping, write**



© Luchtfoto koppelingsgebied Rieme-Oost en omgeving, september 2016.



© Presentation Plan Koppelingsgebied Rieme-Oost, 2023.

out specifications and organise involvement in the park. It is important to include the artist in a participation platform as well, especially when looking at subsequent support and aftercare.

There was an exploratory discussion and site visit with De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers non-profit organisation to guide the mapping of actors and look for an artist, but in the end it was decided not to collaborate, and try to work it out internally. There were still doubts as to the award procedure and whether an artist should actually be appointed. When an artist is involved (e.g., very early in the process), something is always expected of this artist, even though it may not always be necessary. Matching an artist to a given field/project is highly specific and spontaneous, and should not always be tied to all kinds of rules. A competition formula in the relevant neighbourhood might also be a useful method.

The available budget is still set aside for an art project. However, for the sake of budget control, it was decided with the supervising group of partners to wait for the layout of the park before launching an art commission.

CONCLUSIONS CASE

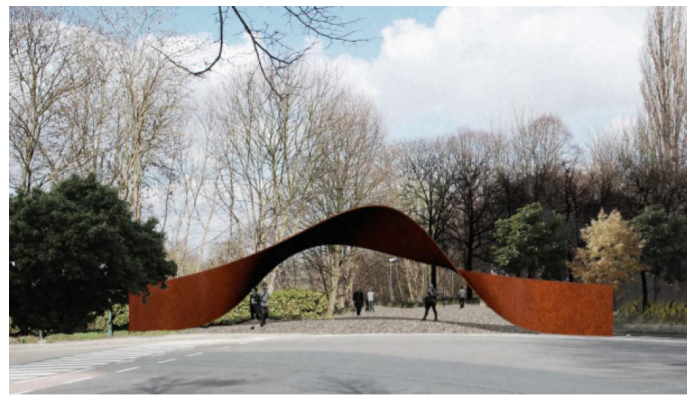
- A “They already have a work of art in the back of their minds... The idea is...” - attitude can be dangerous, and restrict a commission right away.
- It is important to provide additional resources for coordinating participation.
- It may be interesting to work out a competition formula for finding an artist.

CASE 8:

STUDY GATES WOLUWEVELD - VLM

CONTEXT

The Woluweveld gates was a coincidental commission on the outskirts of Brussels. The wish was to have a gateway as an improved access to an open area, to make people aware of the open space in question. Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, in collaboration with Vectris, tendered for the project. Unfortunately, the municipality did not want to allocate money for it.



© Visualisation of the design gateway by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh.

CASE 9:

KOLENSPOOR TO BRUSSELS - VLM

CONTEXT

This project is located along an old tramway (coal railway) that went to Brussels. There is a fascinating mushroomshaped structure in concrete along this approach road, which was previously a hangar for trams. There was opportunity to do something really creative here, but the specifications were already decided upon and the Flemish Land Agency did not find the time and resources to start an extensive process and appoint an artist. The Flemish Land Agency then painted its own silhouette on the wall and displayed a timetable of the trams that used to operate there. All rather literal, when in fact they had hoped for more creativity around this interesting piece of architecture.



© Historic tram hangar on the old tramline to Brussels.

CASE 10:

AIRPORT IN HAREN-EVERE - VLM

CONTEXT

The airport in Evere is Belgium's first airport. This place has an incredibly interesting history. It wasn't until 1958 that the airport was disbanded, and it really only became Zaventem after the World's Fair in the same year, but no one actually remembers this. The site offers lots of clues for a possible artwork, but nothing came of it.



© Haren-Evere Airport project.

CASE 11:

AIRPORT IN GRIMBERGEN - VLM

CONTEXT

This project is located in Grimbergen, and once again it is an airport with a lot of history. A process did get started this time, thanks to De Nieuwe opdrachtgevers, and a creative art project can finally materialise. De Nieuwe opdrachtgevers opened up a lot of avenues in this project.

CONCLUSIONS CASES

- Integrating art into a project requires adequate resources and people. These costs should ideally be integrated into the specifications in advance.
- Some examples bear witness to the pitfalls if a solid process is not put in place with the necessary support/expertise. (Nothing happens, not enough creativity, not the desired result, not satisfied, not enough resources, etc.)

CASE 12:

ARTISTIC BIRD OBSERVATORY - RIVIERENLAND NATURE PARK

CONTEXT PRINCIPALS

Rivierenland Nature Park is a park initiative in the broader region around Mechelen. It is a highly urbanised area with various challenges, including loss of ecosystem services, the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis. Nature is enormously fragmented, especially in Flanders. Flanders has a “postage stamp nature”, with very small areas, while many species need large and robust strips of nature in order to thrive. In 2020, the area coalition of Rivierenland Nature Park drafted an ambition memorandum containing five core ambitions:

1. **Preserve, enhance and extend biodiversity.**
2. **Reconnect nature in the highly urbanised region.**
3. **Future-proof the region.**
4. **Provide quality nature experiences that do not exceed the carrying capacity of nature.**
5. **Create support for conservation through strong collaborations.**

PROCESS

With this in mind, they want to create a bird observatory/landmark at Zennegat in Mechelen. In addition, this project is also situated along the Animalinas Route, a 100-km route that connects nature snippets in the Rivierenland region, demonstrating the potential for reversing the fragmentation. Graffiti artist DZIA created thirty works on various walls along this route, to highlight the local species that live there. The teacher training curriculum at Thomas More University of Applied Sciences and Arts will create thirty texts for the graffiti murals in the spring of 2024. These texts will include ex-OKAN students from Busleyden Atheneum Campus Stassart in five different languages, that will be recorded in a professional recording studio. The audio clips will be included in a free downloadable app from Visit Mechelen with GPS. There will also be QR codes during the project, a variant for cyclists and an overnight package for tourists who want to cover the route in four days.

They are looking for funding from partners in the regional coalition, or through a supralocal subsidy from culture. The OP/TIL non-profit association (subsidised by Flanders) guides organisations in claiming these subsidies. They form the bridge between the cultural sector and another sector (this year it is the nature sector). The main goal is actually “networking,” but they also guide the application for a supralocal (cultural) subsidy.

They started by defining the objective of the bird observatory/landmark: by creating wonder, both for the artwork and the birds being spotted, to build support for nature conservation. Unfortunately, they immediately came across a challenge, as they wanted to attract people to an area, while the “artwork” is also intended for bird watchers and therefore has to remain quiet. There is therefore a dual audience that appears to be difficult to reconcile. The landmark needs to contribute to the



© Graffiti drawing of a fox on the Animalinas route, Street artist Dzia. (2021).

‘unique selling proposition’ of the park and is located on a tourist route (hiking and biking hub) which could put it in the spotlight. This (tourist) attention would be in conflict with the people who want to spot birds here in peace. These contradictions (wishes, problems, etc.) should be communicated to an artistic mediator early on. Moreover, this potential future mediator could also first conduct a scan of the whole area and then work out a plan to approach it artistically (a kind of artistic master plan). If each project is given an individual artistic interpretation, a project loses cohesion. This problem could therefore be given to an artistic mediator as a kind of “commission for the commission.” Another difficulty is also navigating between artistic and functional purpose (merging into the landscape and impermanent vs. structurally safe and always accessible).

The bird observatory should be inclusive (also nature-inclusive) and accessible, but not overly so. Visitors might contribute through payment or effort to reach it, ensuring it doesn’t become overcrowded—such as by following a short, silent route. In addition, the profiles of future users and the compatibility (if any) among all these profiles also needs to be taken into account. We therefore first need to consider exactly what commission should be given to the mediator, and it is also recommended to work with one point of contact. There are therefore more challenges than just the financial aspect. Finally, a landscape scan and a scan of the social actors is also very instructive and important to already anticipate well some of these future challenges/bottlenecks/etc.

CONCLUSION CASE

Scanning and mapping the actors is very important in this case. At first glance, the most obvious actors often seem to have profiles that are difficult to reconcile. This brings additional challenges, and needs to be highlighted when looking for a potential mediator.

CASE 13:

TIM JOYE: MEDIATOR REAKTOR 21

Tim Joye is a mediator. He believes that an (art) mediator can connect people, through their network. It results in (international) cross-fertilisation. Moreover, an artist (and also an art mediator) has a social role to play (for example, in the story of the climate or biodiversity crisis) mediating with an open mind, allowing everyone to take ownership of the work and admitting the social fabric can make for a very rich steering board.

Joye assumes that when a project is realised somewhere, that there is already 'creative capital' in the social fabric that can be involved. That is why it is interesting to create a kind of artistic or ecological master plan and work from there, which can open up the vision. This can be achieved by scanning the site and studying the historical, ecological and social layers, mapping relationships, putting them in a plan, and creating a work of art from that. The plan is not supposed to be an idea in advance to introduce into the environment, but provides context and inspiration. In addition, backup (experts, specialists, etc.) is often needed to address the specific questions and challenges that arise outside the safe walls of the traditional art space. A symbiosis between both human and more-than-human actors, whereby the collectivity plays a crucial role, is an important goal. Art must also always be rooted locally, in a participatory way, to make this possible.

REAKTOR 21 STANDS FOR:

1. Putting together a diverse steering board (knowledge & funds).
2. Expectations (making robust agreements).
3. Long-term thinking.
4. Ecosystem thinking (modular, flexible, room for new synergies).
5. Using the artwork in a communication strategy
6. Linking the Flemish policy challenges (instrumentalising art, provided there is good mediation)
7. Cultural ecosystem services expert group
8. Being bold in thinking (experiment)
9. Creating incentives or win/wins for art in the open space
10. Circularity, regenerativity, nature-inclusivity (local talent, materials and ecology)
11. Better arrangement for temporary purpose (in project developments)
12. Attention to biodiversity and the 'more-than-human' perspective

CASE 14:

DANIELLE VAN ZUIJLEN : MEDIATOR PILOOT TONDELIERSITE GHENT

Van Zuijlen has worked as a mediator in an urban development project, and created an accompanying vision (long-term) in which art can play a role. Together with five artists, a platform was set up to incorporate art in the field of urban development. This group of artists is vulnerable to the phenomenon of urban development. As an artistic player it is difficult to remain a solid party in the (mainly economic) story, and not become instrumentalised. One exemplary goal of this platform, for example, was to connect residents with each other in an area with considerable social tensions - such as the Rabot neighbourhood in Ghent. It was approached in a way that showed not only a positive picture of development, but also collectivity and connections are always crucial

throughout the environment. Art should also not just be a sculpture in a place, but a living process that always needs to be maintained. Danielle van Zuijlen recalled that they used a method at Manifesta. They started with an environmental analysis that was cast in a kind of atlas. This then formed the basis for the artists to start work. Artists were put forward as an important factor (as important as e.g. electricity or water supply) in the development of a site, and this required just as much attention. Some artists may not be the ideal person for environmental analyses, but when combined with experts and professionals, they can produce meaningful analyses.



© Outdoor performance PLOT, Ghent, Project PILOOT, September 2022. Photography: Michael De Lausnay

CASE 15:

CLARA SPILLIAERT: ARTIST '1000 BRICKS'

1000 bricks is an art project realised on behalf of the municipality of Kruibeke. The community was looking for a Corona monument to commemorate this difficult period. To realise the monument, the municipality wanted to partner with an artist, and to find this artist, the municipality appointed a curator. The curator had to find and present three artists. One artist was then selected from these three candidates. That was then the end of the mediator's role. This was a decision of the municipality itself, but she still remained a personal point of contact for Clara, although this was on a voluntary basis.

Clara took inspiration for the artwork from the abundant clay soil in Kruibeke and its rich history of producing bricks. She also wanted to integrate the sense of touch that was so starkly absent during the pandemic. Her idea was to fire 1,000 handmade bricks with the handprints of



© Workshop residential care centre, 2023.
Source: Clara spilliaert

1,000 residents. She would then integrate these bricks into the landscape in six locations (two residential care centres, three cemeteries and one public place). The whole project ran on a fairly tight schedule. Preparations took place from May to August, a participation process was set up from September to October with eight workshops, to produce the handprints in the bricks, among other things, and the art project was implemented from November to March. During this time, Clara was based in a vacant information office that temporarily served as her studio. This building was well-known in the area and added a kind of dynamism to the neighbourhood. During her residency, Clara received a lot of local support and help from volunteers, including a neighbour from her (temporary) studio. Moreover, this neighbour, well-known and liked in her neighbourhood, helped organise publicity for the project. Communication with the environment was essential in her process, to get everyone excited about the artwork. For example, the first handprint (from the mayor) in the first brick was communicated the same day, which raised awareness of the project.

To appeal to a wider audience, for example, Clara also planned a workshop simultaneously with Monument Day. Throughout the process, Clara often received help from local volunteers. These local residents got in touch with Clara spontaneously through - among other things - a shared and local points of contact, the neighbour who had already helped, and two craftsmen from the neighbourhood provided comprehensive support for the implementation, ranging from bricklaying to transport with a crane truck. People could closely follow the project via Instagram, an interview article in municipal information sheet, flyers and posters at various locations, etc. Documentation, communication and promotion were crucial in the success of the art project. The municipality's cultural department was a big help in this regard, and was in direct contact with Clara.

On the one hand, there were the materials to build the artwork; on the other, there were the locations where the artwork would be built. The locations were agreed upon from the outset. However, the artist had some different ideas. It would have been easier to have a more concrete conversation with the municipality regarding the locations. A mediator would have been helpful in resolving this conflict, but the mediator's role had already come to an end once the artist was appointed.

It was uncertain whether the artwork would reach everyone, even after the inauguration, but people were curious and started looking for their own handprint. The municipality created an online map with all the locations, but it wasn't ready for the inauguration, which was a missed opportunity. In hindsight, it might have been better to include a walking map of all the other locations.



© Inauguration at mercato island, Rupelmonde, 2023.
Photo: Clara spilliaert

CASE 16:

JAN HERMANS: CULTURAL POLICY COORDINATOR MUNICIPALITY OF HERZELE ON ART COMMISSION BRICK CANYON BY MICHAEL BEUTLER

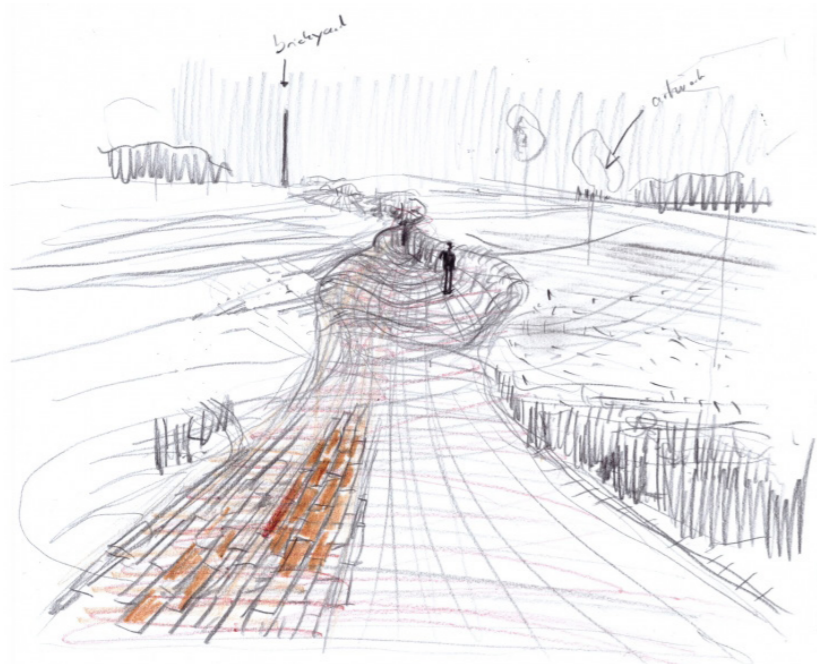
Time and space are important concepts in a landscape. Time refers not only to good planning and deadlines, but also to the temporary nature of the art project itself. Time also refers to the fact that opinions and ideas can change. Art in a landscape does not necessarily have to be permanent, but the impermanence - so inherent in nature - can also be integrated into the art project. A temporary work of art sometimes requires aftercare, but sometimes not at all.

Clay mining was started up at a site next to an old brickyard in Herzele, in 2016. This had a huge impact on the landscape, and therefore entails a certain opportunity. An artist could get stuck into this. A collaboration was set up with De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers, and they approached German artist Michael Beutler.

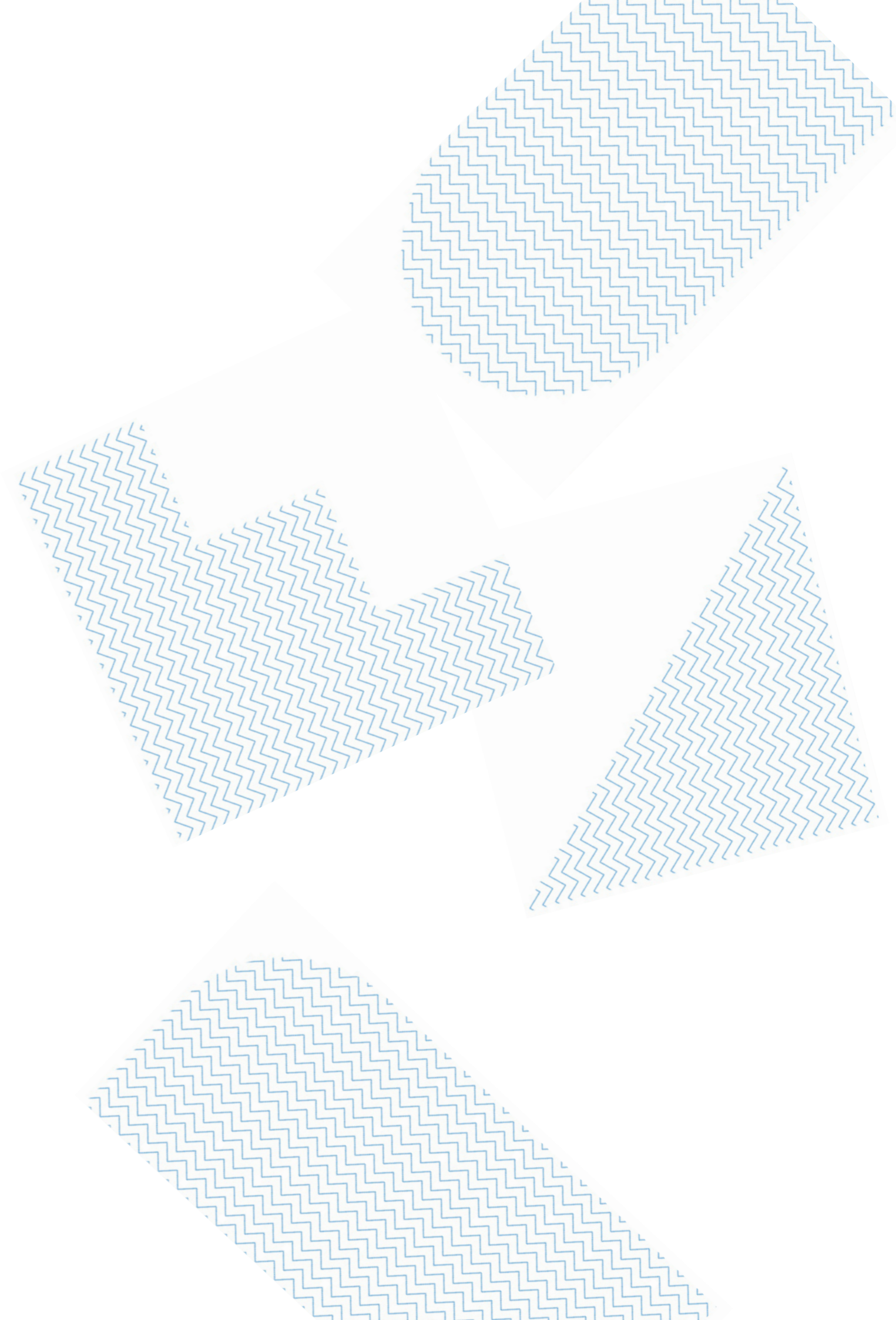
“ART IN AN INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT IS OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE ALTHOUGH YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHAT YOU ARE ASKING OF AN ARTIST, YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO GET.”

Not only regarding the design, but also the exact location and cost. Beutler's original intention was to create a gorge in the area that people could hike through, but this idea exceeded the budget. A few changes were then made, but it was still not financially feasible, according to the municipality. Then came COVID-19, as well as the Kunst in Opdracht incentive instrument. This offered an opportunity to implement the work. Beutler modified his ideas and made the relation with the former brickyard more explicit by working with stacked bricks.

A given place generates certain ideas that then need to be checked off against the actual framework. The local (financial) support from the municipality was not enough, but with support from Flemish funds, it will just become feasible, if there are changes and adjustments. Gradually puzzling out the framework is therefore important. Good partners are essential in this regard.



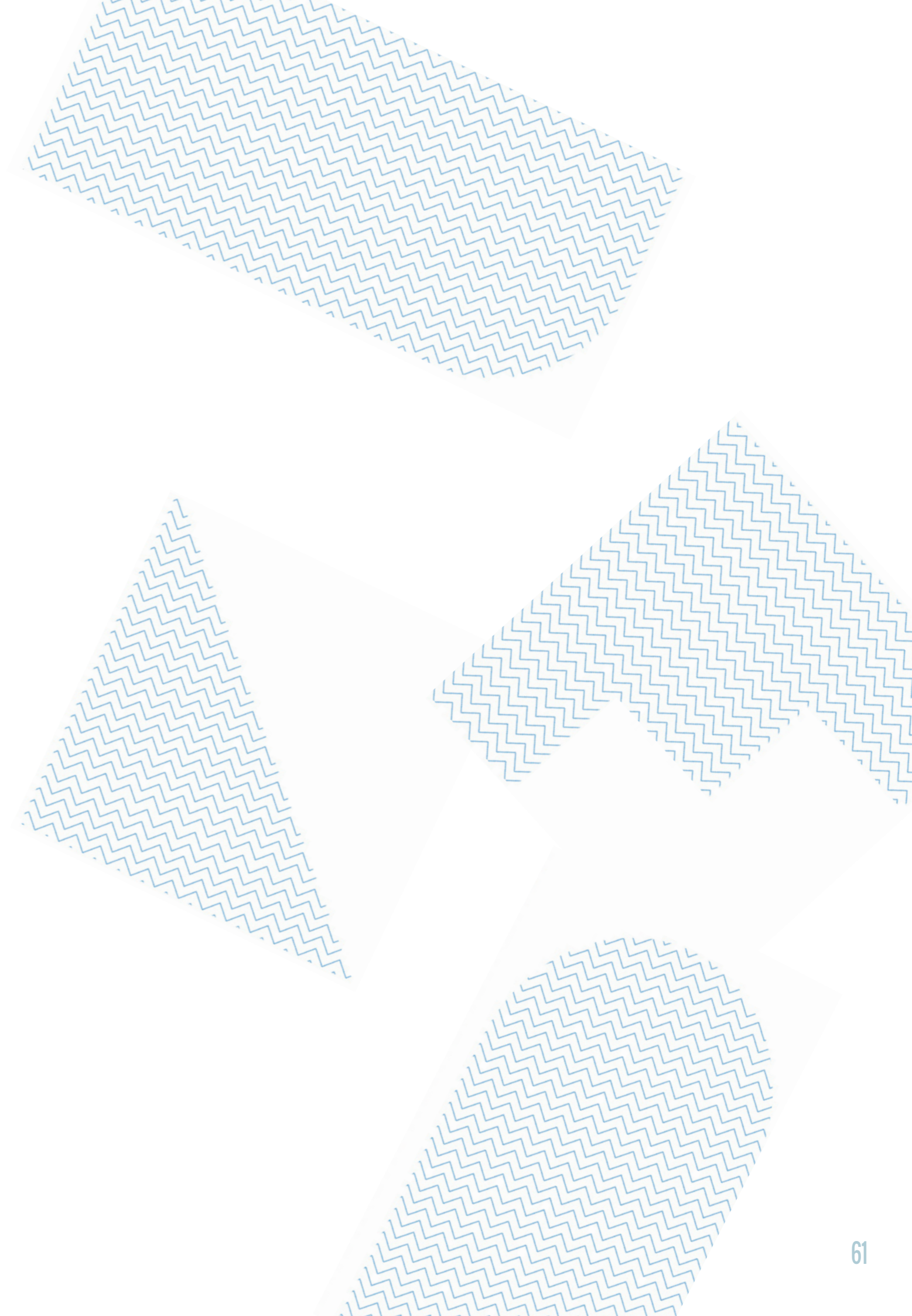
© Sketch Heinrich Altmüller based on an idea by Michael Beutler.



ANNEX 3: INSPIRING EXAMPLES OF COMMISSIONED ART

The Platform Art by Commission has already set up a database on their online platform* featuring inspiring examples of art in the (semi-) public space, and this will be further supplemented. You can access it at <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/nl/kio>

Note: This page is only available in Dutch



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IMAGE LIST

[Cover]

Implementation of chosen design 'EquilArbre' by artist duo Driessens and Verstappen. Onderzoekskouter, 2023. Photo Artwork [Photo]. (Archives: ILVO)

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Recetas Urbanas, Montaña Verde, Coninckplein Antwerp, from the Middelheim Museum group exhibition Experience Traps, (2018). Image artwork [Photo]. (Photographer: Tom Cornille)

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Fragment Miroboard educational session 2, Kunst in Opdracht (2022). Fragment Miroboard [screenshot]. (Hasselt University archives)

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1000 bricks, artist Clara Spilliaert, Residential care centre Kruikebeke (2022). Image workshop [Photo]. (Archives: Clara spilliaert)

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Sketch design of chosen design 'EquilArbre' by artist duo Driessens and Verstappen. Onderzoekskouter, 2022. 3D Rendering artwork [Rendering]. (Archives: ILVO)

Implementation of chosen design 'EquilArbre' by artist duo Driessens and Verstappen. Onderzoekskouter, 2023. Photo Artwork [Photo]. (Archives: ILVO)

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Vloethemveld, Zedelgem, ANB. Photo series Vloethemveld area [Photo series]. (Photographer: Erwin Deros- archives ANB)

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Principals on site Klare Wal (undated). Fieldwork De Nieuwe opdrachtgevers [Photo]. (Louise Goegebeur, De Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers non-profit association)

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Visualisation of the design by Bosco Sodi, Boom (undated). 3D Rendering artwork [Rendering]. (Archives: Flemish Land Agency)

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Visualisation of design 'Goed Gebuur' Adrien Tirtiaux. (2022). Series of 3D Renderings artwork [Renderings]. (Archives: Flemish Land Agency)

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Graffiti mural on Ecoduct in Groenendaal, Street artist Dzia. (2017). Photo Artwork [Photo]. (AWV Archive)

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Aerial photo connection area Rieme-East and surrounding area, (September 2016). Aerial photo [Photo]. Archives Flemish Land Agency)

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1000 bricks, artist Clara Spilliaert, Residential care centre Kruikebeke (2022). Image workshop [Photo]. (Archives: Clara spilliaert)

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1000 bricks, artist Clara Spilliaert, Inauguration at mercato island, Rupelmonde (2023). Series of images of the inauguration [Photos]. (Archives: Clara spilliaert)

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