

LES ORANGERIES DE BIERBAIS

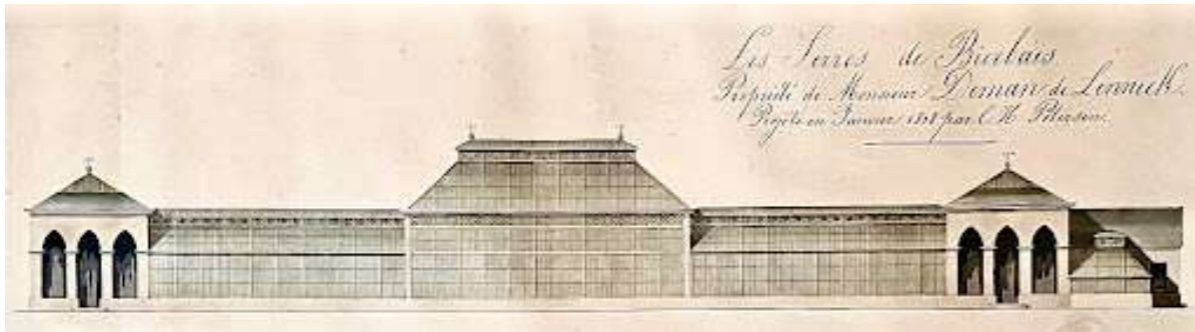
ACTIVITY REPORT 2023



GENERAL PRESENTATION

HISTORY: PAST AND PRESENT

In 1828, landscape architect Charles-Henri Petersen designed monumental iron and glass greenhouses in Bierbais. These greenhouses were so impressive that he was soon entrusted with other ambitious projects for fledgling Belgium, starting with the Botanique (Brussels, 1829) and the heart of the Mariemont estate (1832). At Bierbais, he would introduce another landscape architect who would also leave his mark on English garden design in the 19^e century, Edouard Keilig. A private estate for many generations, the Orangeries de Bierbais have now been converted into a "third space". Here, several organizations are committed to promoting arts and culture, respect for the environment and international solidarity.



THE ORGANIZING BODIES

Les Orangeries de Bierbais is home to a foundation and a collective of artists and researchers. Both entities operate in harmony on very specific networks. The main activities and the animation of the site are articulated around five pillars of intervention: *arts, culture, information, environment and cooperation*.

PhD In One Night

The idea for PhD arose from a desire to find alternative access to knowledge outside the classic hierarchy of institutional and educational constellations (school, university, theater, museum, etc.). It was also about questioning the existing system of knowledge evaluation and, hence, the importance of the value of the title in our society and our times in general. The de facto association is active in the annual programming of Les Orangeries. It was founded by Ivana Momčilović in 2007, in collaboration with the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In 2020, during a residency at the Orangeries, Ivana Momčilović fell under the charms of the place and decided to devote all her energy to it. For several years, PhD has been developing residencies welcoming international artists and researchers.

La Nacelle

La Nacelle was a nomadic foundation for many years, before settling permanently in the west wing of the Orangeries in 2019. It was founded by Martin van der Belen, photographer and cultural worker. During his many travels in South America and Africa, he kept strong links with local scenes of visual artists and devoted himself to promoting them. Today, the foundation's objectives are to establish and broaden the links between creation and the issues of society and the contemporary world by developing international and committed artistic projects.

La Nacelle is an invitation to think and see the world differently. By organizing exhibitions, concerts, artist residencies and training courses around current themes such as migration, over-consumption, climate change... La Nacelle aims to be a platform for projects that cross disciplines, decompartmentalize culture, nature and social and human development.



Laboratory for Radical Peace

PhD in One Night, in collaboration with the La Nacelle foundation, have created an international platform for rethinking the concept of world peace as the possible consequence of the solidarity between individual, nature, and society.

"An idea of peace as radical dissensus in the world where war and state of exception make the unspoken consensus. It is a new idea of nature as the active refuge and place of a new reconfiguration of man and the world, of creation as a place of collective thought, hosting various experiments and meetings between migrants, refugees, and sedentary people around the idea of peace. For our part, we have the image of an imperfect and unfinished garden in which nature and man can be reconciled and agree, cohabit, without the idea of human domination over nature, in a relationship of equality. We are interested in how nature can play the role of an active shelter, from which it is possible to think about peace, the world, the dominant idea of war and to propose an alternative. In this name, we have developed theses on 'Sensible Intelligence' which are the raw material of the Laboratory."



ORANGERIES DE BIERBAIS

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESIDENCY PROGRAM



The residency program by Les Orangeries de Bierbais aims to welcome proposals, projects and experiments which enlarge and nurture our ideas in five different points and to host artists-researchers-experimentators who may also work on their own projects, combining it daily with some chosen works among the following ones :

- Research on the social heritage / archives of **Paul van der Belen**, pioneer in constructing bridges between people from South and North, East and West, rising awareness especially among young people about the necessity of acting/thinking with a perception of humanity without borders;
- Archive and research work about the **mystery of the disparition of the Bierbais greenhouses**, thought to have happened between 1850 and 1880 (apparently destroyed, despite of the monumental and the pioneer character of this patrimonial value);
- Work on the **Serge Pahaut's Book Fund**, consisting in the book collection and archives of the Belgian meloman, mythologist, anthropologist and socio-linguist, disciple of Claude Levi Strauss, who spent his life at ULB (Free University of Brussels) in the circle of Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize in Chemistry (1977) and with whom he developed various projects linking art and science, as well as science and nature.
- Work in the conceptual garden **Collective Garden of Knowledge**, related to the *Thesis for sensible intelligence*, which will be translated and sown into the garden and inaugurated on 29th of September during the Polyphonic day with Jacques Rancière at Les Orangeries de Bierbais.
- Work on giving visibility to the space and researching new partners
All the conceptual issues will be combined with daily :
Work in the physical garden started by the Zapatist and the Kurdish delegations, reconfiguring and expanding it on the basis of permaculture.



A bilingual newspaper Quechua-Spanish in Ecuador - "Jatari Campesino" (Wake up, Peasant), dedicated to landless peasants, that Paul van der Belen was editor in the 60's.



Inaugural stone of monumental winter garden in Bierbais, 29.9.1828.

Bierbais. (Bentley)



Le jardin légumes avec les serres l'orangerie.



Collective garden
of knowledge
proposed by PhD
in One Night

C. BOSI (1), H. CAZAERCK, D. JOSTEN
(2), P. BELC, S. KRNJAJIĆ,
S. GOLUBOVIĆ (4), P. SIKORA,
K. KOTTOVA' (5).

RECONFIGURATION OF THE GARDEN



Realization of the potager (vegetable garden)

During 2023, the reconfiguration of the garden brought the realization of its operative heart: the vegetable garden. It was ideated by Laura Malonne and realized with her guidance and the 6-month-long support of Hadrien Brichard. The work on the garden runs parallel to the other artistic activities, and all the artists/researchers in residence participate in the activities surrounding the maintenance and continuation of the garden. Alongside the creation of the vegetable garden forms, other areas within the English garden have been transformed within the process of reconfiguration.

conception for collective creation: Laura Malonne (long-term residency)
duration: started in January 2023, ongoing and permanent
Hadrien Brichard (through the partnership with Le Service Citoyen)

- realization of the vegetable garden forms
- construction of a DIY greenhouse
- conversion of the historical vineyards
- permaculture soil preparations in the fields
- hedge: tree plantating action
- continuation of the Collective Garden of Knowledge



Laura Malonne (Belgium, France)

Artist in long-term residency

"My name is Laura Malonne, I was born and raised in Belgium and the roots of my tree extend to the mountains of north Spain. Growing up I developed interests in sciences but also in the vast domain of art territory. I grew up in the countryside of Brussels, besides school life, I've always had a garden to play in or some nature around; at my parents, at my grandparents, at the horse farm."



Spring (March - June)



Summer (June - September)







Fall (September - December)



Seedlings and construction of a DIY greenhouse

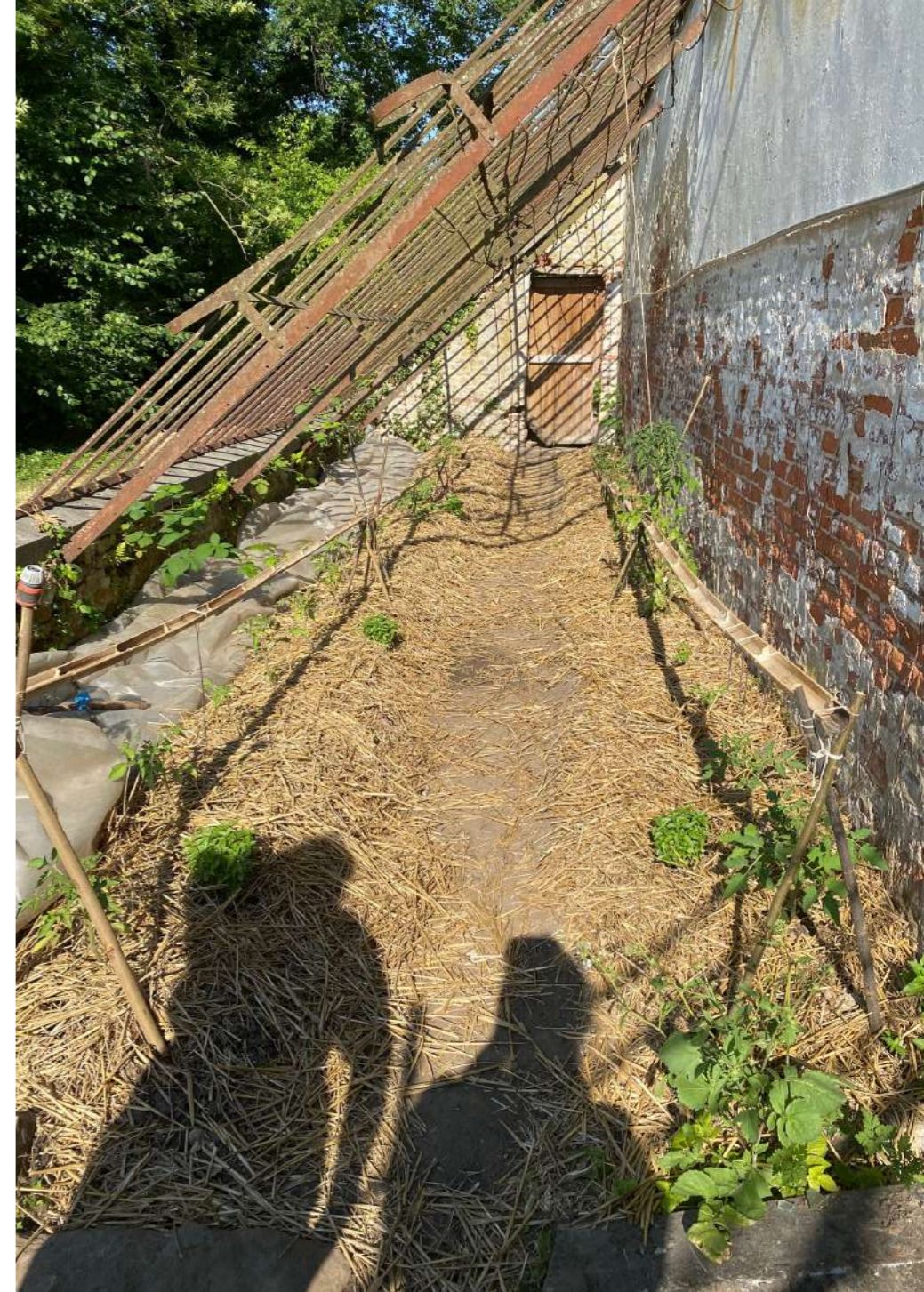
Both before and during the realization of the vegetable garden, through the months of February, March and April, sprouts and seedlings were grown, first in the house to be then transferred in the greenhouse.

The DIY greenhouse is a symbolical statement: placed between what remains of the monumental greenhouse (i.e. the two orangeries, currently one home to the residency programme and the other is a private property), it creates a dialectical exchange with the hidden colonial history. Where once steel and glass were signs of man's power over nature and other men, now humble organic wood speaks of environmental consciousness and solidarity.



Conversion of the historical vineyards

With the help of 14 volunteers from the Service Citoyen, on March 23 there was an action day to transform the historical vineyards. Extended throughout the length of the longhouse, the terrain was filled with thorns and overgrown nettles. Lately (June), during the year, tomatoes have been placed there. Although the location was not successful, the historical vineyards are now visible in all their subtle beauty.





Permaculture soil preparations

The year started and approached its end with the preparation of new zones based on permacultural method. In fact, autumn and winter are the seasons during which is essential to prepare the soil, the first and fundamental phase for permaculture based on the layering of organic strata.

Collaborator Marie-Fripiat (local and creator of "L'Art Tisane") came to offer guidance at the beginning of the year (January-February). In October, as part of the ongoing collaboration with Zrenjanin School (Serbia), a small delegation came and their students learned the basis of permaculture.



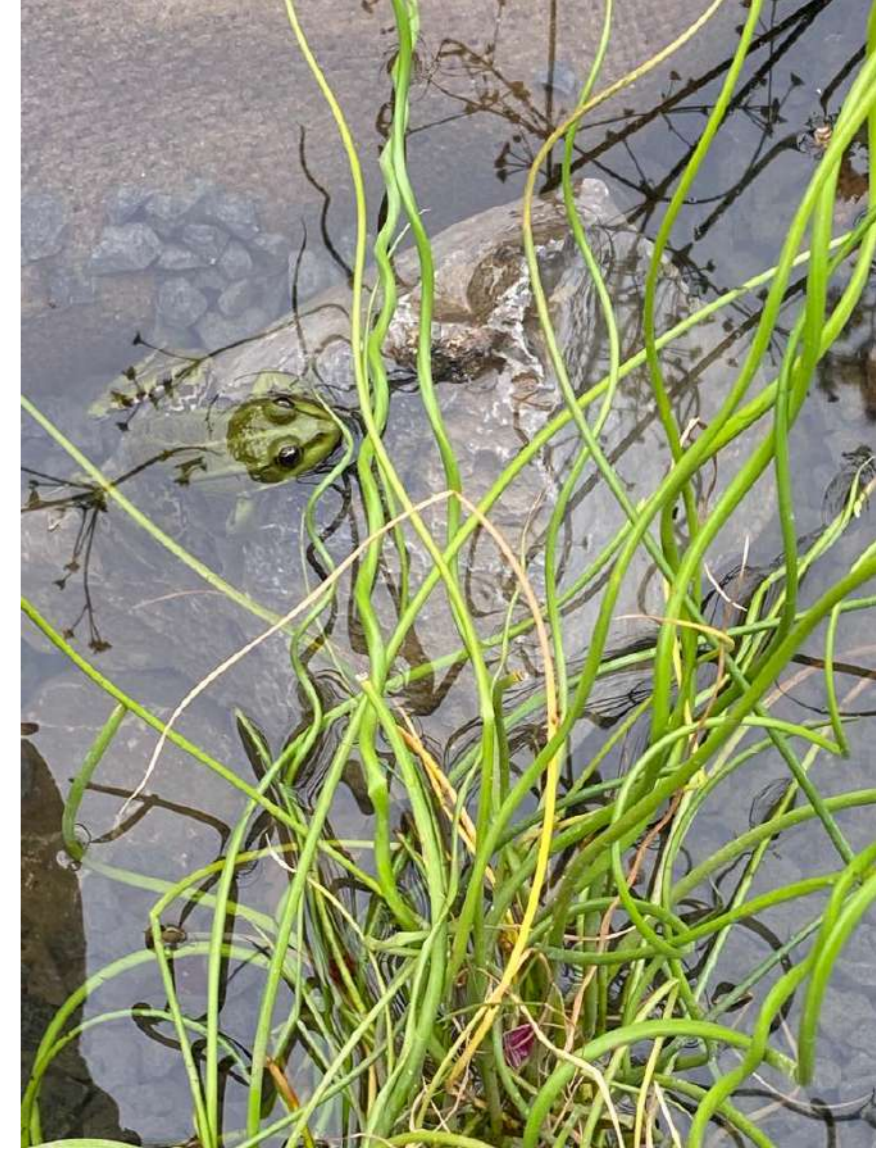






Hedge: tree planting action

The year ended in December with an action to plant young trees for beginning the hedge. It will change the lines and views in the garden, creating soft visual interruptions and connections, within the reconfiguration of the fruit tree area.



Collective Garden of Knowledge

The Collective Garden of Knowledge continues Nina de Vroome's intervention made during Guerilla University Austria (October 2021), by PhD In One Night.

The idea further developed through an epistolar conversation with Elisabetta Cuccaro, leading its opening toward a collective dimension.

In Orangeries de Bierbais, since 2022 it took the form of the proposal made by Ivana Momcilovic/ PhD In One Night to propose to artists/ researchers to (self)-learn and make on the principles of permaculture their own rays at the place, which once upon a time was in the historical garden a fountain space and years ago a sand playground space for kids. Since then, many of them left their traces: Claire Bosi, Dries Josten, Helena Cazaerck, Petra Belc with Srdjan Krnjaic and Sasa Krnjaic, Slobodan Golubovic, Kaya Erdinc, Piotr Sikora with Karina Kottova and kids (to be continued...)

ART RESIDENCIES PROGRAM



INTRODUCTION

Les Orangeries de Bierbais is fully equipped to support multiple residencies at the same time, as well as family residencies. Some artists and researchers come several times for shorter periods (g.e. on weekends), while others come one time to realize their research or project. All the residency proposals are related to Les Orangeries de Bierbais, be the garden and/or the theoretical research - such as archival work or research on the history and heritage of the site. All the participants help with the work in the garden.

Anni Laakso (Finland)

- period: January and one-month between August and September
- ideation and production of the Observatory for Bio and Human Diversity
- participation in permaculture (January)
- participation in the visit of State Secretary of Belgium to the Orangeries of Bierbais, August 2024 in the frame of the programme of Service Citoyen.









Petra Belc / Srdjan Krnjaic (Croatia)

- family residency (they came with their daughter)
- period: March 2023 (one month)

Petra holds phd in experimental film and practices it. She worked on the Orangeries archives and preparations for the collage-experimental film about the Orangeries that she finished. Srdjan Krnjaic worked on the digitization of the Book Fund of the Belgian mythologist and anthropologist Serge Pahaut, bequeathed by the Orangeries de Bierbais. They left behind the "air" with their seedlings in the collective garden.







Slobodan Golubovic (Serbia)

- March (15 days), July (1 month)

In the frame of his Erasmus program Slobodan, philosopher, came to learn about permaculture and apply this topic in conjunction with political science, aesthetics and philosophy to his master's degree in Sarajevo, based on the example of the Orangerie de Bierbais as a new place and a new community.

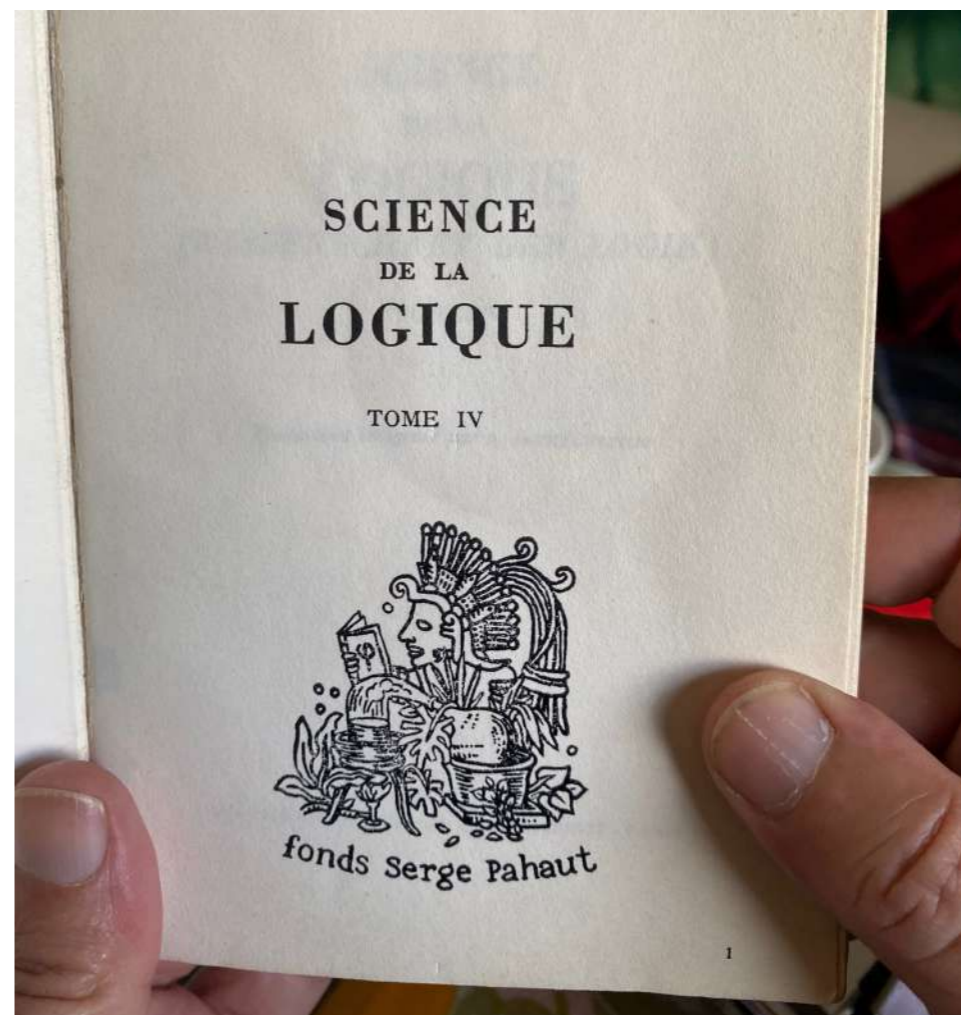




Xavier Lowenthal (Belgium)

Illustrator, permanent short residencies, monthly in 2024 (during the whole year)

-Work on digitisation of books (illustrations, graphic articulation, graphic signalisation in the parc, wall painting on mobile structures in the Parc Orangeries de Bierbais and work on a publication in collaboration of 5Couche, editing House where Xavier is editor and Les Orangeries de Bierbais







Dejana Sekulic (Belgium/Serbia)

Violinist, silence explorer, sound artist

- short residency in May (following her participation in the program in 2022)
- installation of "Gardened", a three-part fixed audio-visual installation, with sound work hosted online and physical objects located on-site at Orangeries de Bierbais

While one of the pieces is entirely made from sounds collected in the Orangeries and thus mainly working with superposition of time, the other two are hybrid time-place constructions. In addition to the sounds of Orangeries, in the these two pieces, I am also using field recordings, found sounds, and radio captures, related or from Kurdistan/Rojava and Mexico/Zapatistas. They are portals and connection to long-standing exchange between the collective People Coming from NowHere, PhD in One Night, and Orangeries de Bierbais - Laboratory for Radical Piece.





Piotr Sikora, Karina Kottová (Czech Republic)

- family residency with 2 kids
- 15 days August

Piotr is a curator at Meet Factory, an art residency center in Prague and a big fan of the combination of permaculture and art. Karina Kottová is a curator and theoretician of contemporary art. Currently she is a director of the Jindřich Chalupecký Society. Their stay with two children brought a lot of new knowledge about mushrooms, which is Piotr's specialty, and a wonderful new "air" in the collective garden of guerrilla knowledge, where water filter plants are combined with permaculture preparation of wild mushrooms.







Vesna Protić

- Secondary Agricultural School Zrenjanin (Serbia). June - July (2 months).

Vesna, a veterinary technician, was there for 2 months, June and July, in the context of the preparation of cooperation between this school and Orangeries de Bierbais. The school's delegation was later in October 2024 and got acquainted with the principles of permaculture, which they have included in compulsory education from now on.





Short residencies

Kosta Jakić, pianist (Belgium)

Kaya Erdinc, artist, writer and gardener (The Netherlands)

Elisabetta Cuccaro, writer, artist and art critic (Italy/The Netherlands)

Mansur Tafuri, philosopher (Iran, France)

Steve Corcoran, philosopher (Australia/ Germany)

Lea Lansade, dancer (France)

Françoise Thirionet (Belgium)

Frank Keizer, writer, poet (The Netherlands/ Belgium)





PUBLIC EVENTS



(HYPO)THESES OF SENSIBLE INTELLIGENCE. With Jacques Rancière and the Theses Working Group

18 March 2023

Interdisciplinary Conference, Kulturakademiet, Paris (France)

The gathering was initiated and organized by PhD In One Night/ Laboratory for Radical Peace in residence at the Orangeries de Bierbais, in order to discuss the (Hypo)theses on Sensible Intelligence, a collective text consisting of 30 ideas/statements written by the residents, and inspired by the work of Jacques Rancière. This collective act of thinking and writing –putting the collective intelligence into practice – presents an attempt to reconfigure the private domain and historical English garden built in 1828 by the German/Dutch architect C.H. Petersen. The reconfiguration of this place is thought under new protocols of work and collective influences, relating the Orangeries de Bierbais with the theses from Rancière's book "The Time of the Landscape: On the Origins of the Aesthetic Revolution" (2020). *videos on vimeo published by PhD in One Night.

With: Ivana Momcilovic, Jacques Rancière, Anders Fjeld, Gulistan Sido, Camille Rancière, Kosta Jakić, Elisabetta Cuccaro, Alexandra van Laeken and other participants of the Theses Working Group, Slobodan Gulobovic.







MSG 900 ans (Artists' trail organized by the commune of Mont-Saint-Guibert)

Date: June 4, 2023

500 visitors to the event

Target audience: families and art lovers

Partners: MSG en transition, the commune of Mont-Saint-Guibert, Archenterre, Service Citoyen

Art trail featuring some 30 local artists (MSG commune)

Cocktail bar and snacks on site

Free admission

Creative workshops and activities for young people run by the local youth department

Introduction to aerial fabric (for all ages)

Performance by Parenthèse Artistik students

Closing show with the Takapa company and Parenthèse Artistik

Marie Fripiat, singing and Shaddaï women's choir

Exposition avec 6 artistes internationaux (La Nacelle):

Béret, peintre, RD du Congo

Eddy Ekete, plasticien, performeur, sculpteur, RD du Congo

David Essomé, auteur, Cameroun

Rafiy Okefolahan, plasticien, Bénin

Salvador Tomnyuy, plasticien, performeur, Cameroun

Youssef el Yedidi, plasticien, performeur, photographe, Maroc





- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Service providers | Benedicte Duman |
| Jean-Paul Poysse | Philippe Dupont |
| Marie-Jane Roberts | Christophe Peres |
| Alan Gao | Marie-Cristine Bouch |
| Michele Janczakova | Sonia Lambert (Coba) |
| Simon Boumans | Virginie Lefevre |
| Carin DeKosman | Marlene Hodges |
| Vera Abovitch | Andre Ja. Jonckheere |
| V. de Jager | Hudon Boogaerts |
| Arnold Anthony | Jacqueline Batters |
| Hedwig van Burgum | Janet Rivers |
| Sam Francis (UK) | Caroline P. de Percebois |
| Christine Security | Wojciech Ludwik |
| Agnes Derksen | Isabelle Frenkel |



JEPM / Journées Européennes du Patrimoine/Matrimoine

Date: 9-10 September 2023 (Les Orangeries de Bierbais)
Around 600 visitors to the event

- Historical Exposition: "De jardin anglais à la permaculture, l'expérimentation esthétique et solidarité"
- Plaine de jeux
- Exhibition "Direction Paysage : dans l'espace immédiat" with students of Académie des Arts Visuels de Molenbeek
- Presentation of the international project "Tempe de mon Eveil" by artist Eddy Ekeke
- Projection of the trailer "Sur les traces de Bierbais" with Petra Belc
- Presentation of the artistic project "Herbarium Bierbais" initiated by Elisabetta Cuccaro
- Guided tours
- Permaculture atelier with Laura Malonne and Kaya Erdinc
- Discussion about conceptual comics by Xavier Lowenthal
- Inauguration of the architectural installation "The Observatory" by artist Anni Laakso
- Mini concert Chopin dans le potager by Kosta Jakić

An initiative by Laboratory for Radical Peace - Les Orangeries de Bierbais / Fondation la Nacelle / PhD In One Night, in partnership with Académie des Arts Visuels de Molenbeek and MSG en Transition

During the European Heritage Days, the garden of Les Orangeries de Bierbais was open to the public with a series of activities and installations that allowed to discover the place, its history (past, present and future) and artistic program (events and residency).

Free entrance
Bar and market with products from the vegetable garden
food station by MSG en Transition









Concerts : Simon Gronowski & Kosta Jakić

Date: 7 May, 24 June 2023

Location: Fort Breendonk, Kazerne Dossin

Initiated by PhD In One Night, in the frame of the Laboratory for Radical Peace - Les Orangeries de Bierbais

80 participants: sold-out concerts

Jazz pianist Simon Gronowski accompanied by André Ronsse, classical pianist Kosta Jakić. A highlight for these places of remembrance of the Second World War: both locations were previously concentration camps.

Simon Gronowski was 11 years old when he was arrested in 1943 and imprisoned for a month at the Dossin barracks. He managed to escape from the 20^e convoy by jumping off the train. Today, Simon Gronowski is a doctor of law and renowned jazz pianist.

Kosta Jakić is a Belgian-Serbian pianist and bandleader. Since 2014, Kosta Jakić has been performing solo recitals throughout Europe. In September 2021, he graduated with great distinction from the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp. He is also vice-president of the 'Belgian Doctor Symphony Orchestra' and researches the role of music in detention camps and prisons.

- Jazz session by Simon Gronowski and clarinetist André Ronsse
- Piece for the Speaking Pianist: 'De Profundis' by Frederic Rzewski and Chopin's
- Mazurkas by Kosta Jakić
- Four-hand piece performed by Simon Gronowski and Kosta Jakić
- Screening of the trailer for an intergenerational film by Ivan Put about Kosta and Simon
- Screening of drawings by Christophe Poot and Xavier Lowenthal during a talk by Kosta Jakić on the role of music in prisons.



Jubilee Summer School Brussels: Alternative Learning and Self-organisation

Date: 22 September 2023

Location: Les Orangeries de Bierbais

Opening of the Summer School in collaboration with PhD In One Night - Les Orangeries de Bierbais.

Ivana Momčilović, dramaturge, will introduce PhD In One Night, an international platform for aesthetic experimentation and education of all, and the different participants she invited for the day.

To commemorate the inauguration of the Orangeries de Bierbais (29 September 1828), a public event will be organised this year in solidarity with the present occupation of the Gécamines building (GCM, Société générale des carrières et des mines).

Martin van der Belen (Fondation La Nacelle) and Ivana invited Philip Buyck for a short presentation on the Patrice Lumumba Library, currently squatting at La Gécamines with 50 Congolese families.

Axel Pleeck, philosopher, educator and director of Academy for Visual Arts Molenbeek presents several of his own creations of sharing the knowledge, which responds to Jacques Rancière's *Le Maître ignorant* (1987).

Amateur experimental artist, writer and gardener Kaya Erdinc, presents his approach to amateur ways of poetics of knowledge.

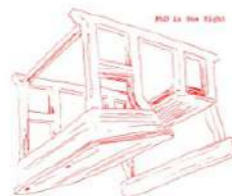
Ivan Put, photographer, will show his short film about Orangeries de Bierbais. Xavier Lowenthal, editor and artist will present comics series *Tintei akei Kongo* that he edits and publishes with *La cinquième couche*. Using *détournement* and *dérives*, *Tintin in Congo* is reframed through the tonal Bantu language spoken in Lingala, Congo.

Finally, PhD In One Night shares the approach of their collaborator, Kurdish philosopher and translator of Rancière into Kurdish, Mansur Teifuri (can't be present) regarding 'ignorant knowledge', 'lessons of poets', and their common Guerilla University in collaboration with the self-organised Kurdish Rojava University.



PARTNERSHIPS / ORGANIZATIONS

Coordination



Institutions



Mont-Saint-Guibert



Meet
Factory



CENTAR
TOLERANCIJE
ZAGREB



helsinki
international
artist
programme

Médias



ORANGERIES DE BIERBAIS

2 rue de Bierbaix, 1435 Mont-Saint-Guibert
Orangeriesdebierbaix@gmail.com
0488 86 42 55 / 0485 16 79 13

Administrative Coordination: Foundation La Nacelle
Artistic Coordination: PhD In One Night





THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION



- YOURS, LES ORANGERIES DE BIERBAIS

PORTFOLIO ANNEX



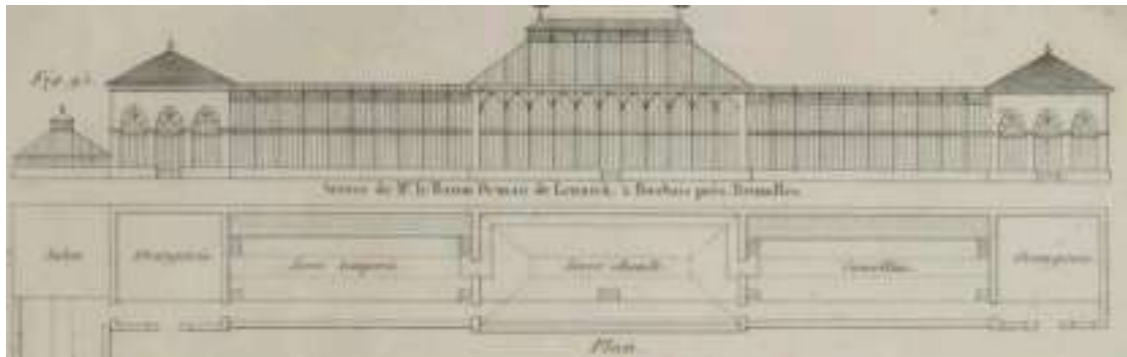
Until the late 1980s, the Orangeries de Bierbais were part of the Château de Bierbais park. In the 19th century, this 2.5-hectare part of the park was home not only to a collection of remarkable fruit and ornamental trees but also to monumental heated greenhouses of international renown, within English-style gardens designed by Prussian landscape architect Charles-Henri Petersen, who lived in Bierbais until his death in 1859.

General plan of the Château de Bierbais park, proposed 1825

A palace of glass and iron, exceptional for its time

Besides the park, he designed greenhouses, daring in their monumental early use of iron, which were inaugurated on September 29, 1828, one year before Petersen completed those of the Brussels Botanic Garden. The greenhouses of Bierbais reached international fame, according to the *Journal d'horticulture pratique de la Belgique* (1857)

"Bierbais, whose greenhouses can rival those of the Dukes of England, and which in terms of palms can display one of the most extensive collections on the continent, both for the quantity of species and for the strength and grandeur of the feet." "7 Counting in its collections "the finest representatives of the flora of Asia, America and Africa"



"It's a veritable parterre, criss-crossed with paths, basins and lined with artificial rocks, from which, here and there, a jet of water springs up from among the greenery "8. The natural landscape qualities of a visible garden, marvellous as they are, are not enough; what's needed is something more than that, something supernatural, something Edenic. In short, what we're looking for, and what the park and greenhouses of Bierbais seem to offer, is "a real paradise".

Another detailed description that attests to the exceptional character of this place comes in 1846, in the magazine *Art de construire et gouverner les serres*. Although the construction of greenhouses was booming at the time, and they were often built with a certain degree of sophistication, "they do not acquire that degree of architectural splendor or elegance" compared to the greenhouses of Baron Deman de Lennik in Bierbais. A very wealthy man at the time, for whom floriculture was a leisure activity and a source of learning, he was able to build a veritable "palace where art combines with the needs of plants, where good taste comes to the aid of the mathematical science of the builder."



What did his collections look like?

"The middle pavilion, where forest-like plants from the warm greenhouse are housed, full of life and health (...) The pavilions serving as orangeries and the middle one are linked by two temperate greenhouses. In return, a lower pavilion is used as a lounge, followed by three greenhouses for Pelargoniums, Palms and Orchids. All these greenhouses are built entirely of iron and glazed on all sides. (...) The cultivation and beauty, even considered individually, of the myriads of plants housed in these greenhouses, their irreproachable maintenance, their magnificence in the midst of one of the most beautiful parks we have ever seen, all this property most richly endowed with the rarest and most splendid of nature and art, make this estate one of those marvels that we dare not describe for fear of falling short of reality."

Paradise Orchids

In the Orchid collection, some of the clumps of flowers in the orchid collection are up to three meters high, simulating this curious and grandiose amalgam of lush tropical vegetation. Many of these flowers are rare and remarkable, helping to create "a true terrestrial paradise". Precise descriptions of the specimens in the greenhouse beds were published in the Journal d'horticulture pratique de la Belgique and in England's The Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette.

In 1855, the flowering of *Laelia elegans* specimens attracted the attention of the German newspaper Allgemeine Gartenzeitung, which highlighted the work of Petersen's assistant, M. Edouard Keilig, who was also to become an important landscape architect for the history of 19th-century gardens in Belgium: "This plant is so rare in cultivation that it (...) must have reached incredible perfection."



Demolition of large greenhouses

Edouard Keilig, initially hired to extend the embellishment of the Bierbais park, was commissioned to organize the first major sale of plants from Baron de Lennick's collection in 1857. Who bought these hundreds of rare specimens, and also these tropical trees, including palms over ten meters tall? Then, despite their "European reputation" and outsized dimensions, the greenhouses disappeared between the 1860s and 1880s. When and why the greenhouses were dismantled remains a mystery...

A farm-school for war orphans

In 1918, the estate was bequeathed to the Orphan-Fund. This English organization was dedicated to the care and education of the many war orphans. The hundred or so children housed at Bierbais slept in the stables, which had been converted into three large dormitories. Many educational activities were developed on this ideal site: agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, carpentry, sports, and more. These courses have been illustrated by numerous period postcards.

These photographs also show the diversity of the park's infrastructure and layout. The large garden bed in front of the former orangeries shows that it had been converted into a vegetable garden. You can also see the old waterwheel of the park's farm, on your left. At the time, it supplied half the village with electricity.



11 Belgian Orphan Fund, Institut Agricole et Horticole de BIERSBAIS, Mont-Saint-Gilbert
Le Potager
The Kitchen-garden



13 Belgian Orphan Fund, Institut Agricole et Horticole de BIERSBAIS, Mont-Saint-Gilbert
L'atelier de menuiserie
The Carpenter's shop

Kitchen garden, in place of the former garden beds, facing the remains of the large greenhouse, dismantled before 1880, circa 1930.

Students from the School of Horticulture, in the carpentry workshop, circa 1930

An Opening onto the World

Alphonse Everarts de Velp, who grew up at Château de Bierbais, was to become an exemplary figure in many fields. As a very young engineer, he spent almost four years working in Donetz, Ukraine, then in the United States, returning as a pioneer in rayon (nylon). His great passion was ballooning. He named his "Brabant Wallon". His gondola haunted one of the orangeries for decades. It told the story of his participation in the prestigious Gordon Bennett International Cup. Léon de Brouckère, a future figure in Belgian aeronautics, was Alphonse's teammate in this adventure. They won the bronze medal sailing from Berlin to St Petersburg. As head of the Tubize spinning mill during the First World War, he showed great courage in confronting the German occupiers, at the cost of his own freedom. His personality and stories influenced his grandson Paul van der Belen. After a round-the-world trip at the age of 20 in 1959, Paul wrote his story and his reflections, and appeared on television. He was convinced that young people had an important role to play in reinventing the relationship between European countries and what was then known as the "Third World". A pivotal encounter with Abbé Pierre. Paul embarks on a cooperative mission to promote the emancipation of indigenous communities in Ecuador. King Baudouin applauded his initiative and called on the nation's youth to follow his example. Paul went on to multiply his initiatives, enabling thousands of young people to become involved in new North-South relations. He was an ambassador for South American culture, a precursor of fair trade, an advocate of integrated rural development, and a link between Belgium and Madagascar. He called himself a "humanist globetrotter". He died in Bierbais in 2020.



*Godon Bennett Cup 1908.
Departure from Berlin. Alphonse
reaches St. Petersburg.*

Site conversions

In the 1970s, architect Édouard Carlier converted the two orangeries - all that remained of the monumental greenhouses - into homes. The one on the east side was completely opened up on its west façade in 1972, in a modernist-brutalist style, thanks to the early use of Corten steel. This part of Bierbais Park began opening in 2019. Known as "Les Orangeries de Bierbais" since 2022, it has become a permaculture third place, hosting artists, researchers and experimenters in residence.

Recent publications on the former monumental greenhouses of Bierbais have revealed the pioneering and exceptional character of a historical heritage that has been forgotten for generations. The Orangeries de Bierbais team and its partners seek to perpetuate the site's openness to the outside world through a project based on creativity, environmental awareness and the desire for a more united world.



QR-code des pages wikipedia Orangeries de Bierbais

