

BePAPER

Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective. 1918-1950

DURATION

15/12/2019 - 15/03/2024

BUDGET

650.798 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The BePAPER-project will provide a first overview of the field of Belgian avant-garde works on paper within an international context between 1918 and 1950, that is, up and until the dawn of CoBrA and the rise of the so-called neo-avant-gardes. The project will contribute to a better definition of the collection category of “modern works on paper”.

This project studies and discloses Belgian avant-garde “work on paper” (under which we understand autographic, unique artworks using paper as basic material, such as drawings, watercolors, collages, and paper assemblages) between 1918-1950. The project builds on the collection of “work on paper modern art” of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. For the period from ca. 1918 to 1950 the collection houses about 2400 individual sheets and sketchbooks, half of which were created by Belgian avant-garde artists. These artists include the Futurist Jules Schmalzigaug, the Expressionists Frits van den Berghe, Joseph Cantré, Gustave De Smet and Constant Permeke, the Constructivists Jozef Peeters, Karel Maes, Felix De Boeck, Victor Servranckx, Edmond van Dooren and Pierre-Louis Flouquet, the Surrealists Paul Delvaux, René Magritte and E.L.T. Mesens as well as the Dadaist Paul Joostens. In addition to this collection of art works, the study will be foremost based on the holdings in the Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium (ACAB), Archives of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (ARMFAB) and the museum library.

The project main objectives are, first, to study why and how this wide variety of Belgian classic avant-garde artists turned to paper during the interwar period and to isolate possibly late appropriation tendencies within the Belgian avant-gardes as well as the emergence of trends already pointing ahead to the neo-avant-gardes. For although there was a limited number of (Symbolist) artists before c. 1918 who turned to paper as their prime medium, it is only during the interwar period that innovative Belgian artists massively began to work on/with paper. This is unlike the situation at the time in neighboring countries such as France or Germany. Seemingly belated, Belgian avant-garde work on paper from this period nonetheless gained wide European recognition and visibility. It figured in little magazines, galleries and exhibitions across Europe in countries as diverse as the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary and Austria as well as in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

Focusing on the specific case of Belgium, and building on (monographic) studies and publications on the Belgian classic or historical avant-gardes and their networks, the project starts with the hypothesis that the avant-gardes’ marked turn to work on paper formed an essential and integral part of their project to innovate art. The classic avant-gardes after all are known for their penchant to blur boundaries and to challenge the institution of art. Unlike their predecessors, they did not consider work on paper as secondary to painting or sculpture. Producing paper assemblages, collages, verbo-visual experiments and more, they transformed “art on paper” into a new category of art in its own right, a new area of experimentation, which requires to be studied, disclosed and promoted accordingly.

Second, we aim to better disclose the RMFAB collection of works on paper through the findings gained within the study and through the development of open data solutions. To this aim, a collection curator in this project will team up with the institution’s Digital Museum unit, also to investigate the internal possibilities of permanently unlocking scientific research for open science and aligning it with the FAIR principles or Research Data Management (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability and Reusability). The BePAPER project is the perfect use case to determine to what extent the theory of open data can currently be put into practice within a FSI, to figure out what might be possible obstacles to achieve this goal and how to overcome them. This is not just an approach in the field of data management but contains also a more general approach to addressing open data issues (cf. copyright restrictions) in terms of policy.



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As result several outreach events such as conferences, publications or exhibitions addressing a scientific and student audience as well as a wider audience are planned.

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LINKS

<https://www.fine-arts-museum.be/en/research/research-projects/bepaper>