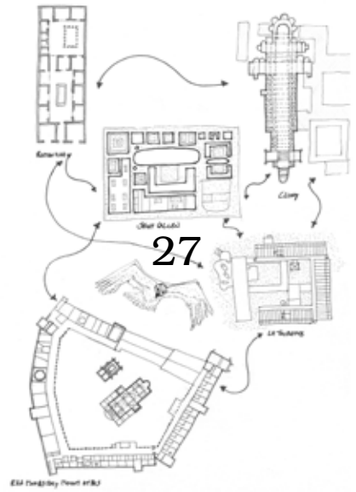
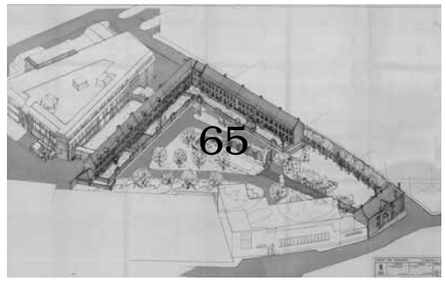
Trace

Notes on adaptive reuse

N°3 On Collectivity





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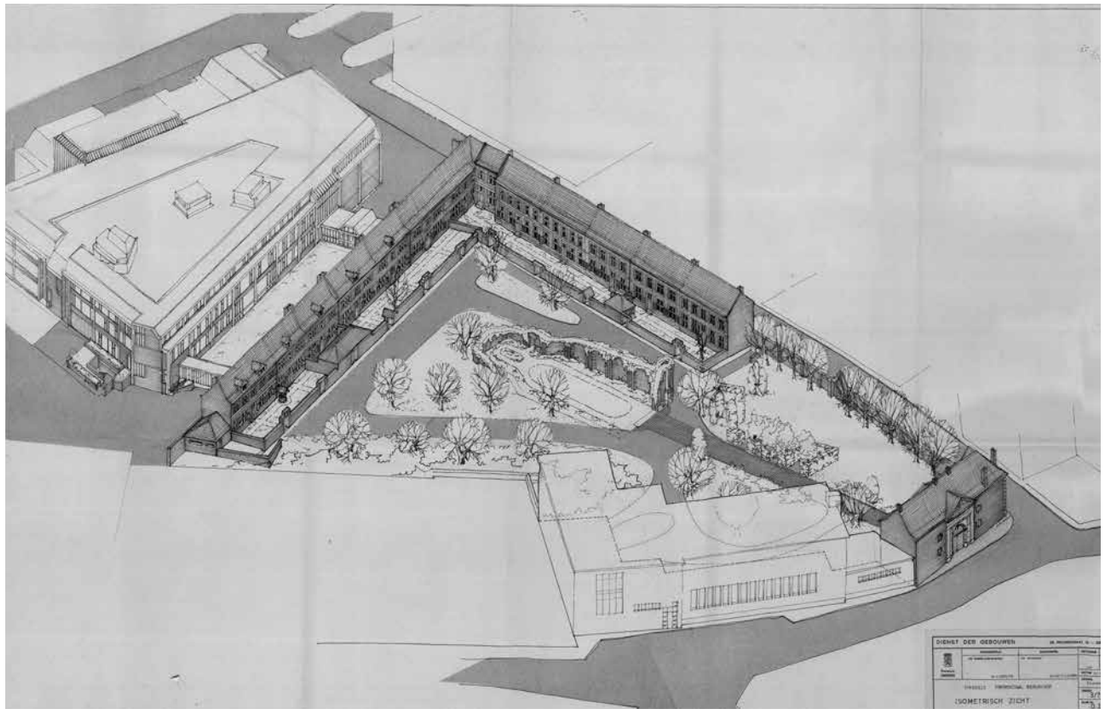
Memory as a design studio
The transformation of the Hasselt Beguinage into a Faculty of Architecture*

K. Van Cleempoel . . . . . .



[1] The Hasselt Beguinage, c.1980, with the newly designed library of Paul Felix on the left, and the volumes of the Expo 58 in the front. The garden design with the central axis between the gatehouse and the ruins is clearly visible. Note the proposed – but never realised – corridors between the new library and the beguinage.

* This title comes from the 2020 thematic call of the Flanders Architecture Institute, organising a national competition for curating the Belgian pavilion at the Venice Biennale. It states that 'the frame of reference for new design is formed by the history of landscapes and places, of buildings and design traditions, and of material and ideas. The memory becomes a design studio'. Out of 57 applicants, Bovenbouw Architectuur – who is also remodelling the Hasselt Beguinage, as discussed below – won the competition with 'Composite Presence', a project showing an urban landscape composed from 45 large architectural models on a scale of 1/15.

Introduction

Flemish beguinages are unique urban traces of collective living for women that were in use between c.1250 and c.1950. Beguines demonstrated a desire to withdraw from contemporary social life and a wish to be involved in it simultaneously. Their way of living focused on charity, manual work, and teaching. As like-minded women who wished to escape from the consequences of secular life, such as the obligation of marriage and the lure of material possessions, they lived together in a combination of private and shared spaces.[1]

Beguinages were created by and for women in towns throughout the Low Countries from the 13th century onwards. They were not nuns who lived in monasteries following a specific 'monastic rule' after taking their vows, including poverty, chastity, and obedience. However, beguines lived according to similar Christian values, apart from obedience to a local Bishop or the Pope in Rome. There was no real founder, no constitutions, and no formalised structure.[2] Instead of a monastic 'order', it was more like a 'movement' with great diversity and impact on social and urban organisation. Beguinages, or 'cities of ladies',[3] grew organically as beguines purchased houses near the chapel or parish church. Due to the attractiveness of their lifestyle, they quickly grew into large structures with a central courtyard,[4] often on the edge of a city – as is also the case of the Hasselt Beguinage. The courtyards functioned much like medieval village greens.

A duality between contemplative and active life also shaped the unique typology of the beguinage: that of an enclosed common green courtyard flanked with rows of humble houses and a church, sometimes extended with narrow streets for additional houses. Typically, this ensemble could be closed at night by a central gate to provide safety and seclusion. Its spatial organisation was a balance between the better-known monasteries with enclosed inner courts or '*hortus conclusus*' and a miniature rural village with a central meadow surrounded by houses and larger buildings for shared use.

This 'negotiating typology' was exemplary for their apparent tension between a *vita activa* and *vita contemplative*. Its introverted typology, combined with the former autarkic quality, still offers – in several Flemish cities – hidden oases of peace in bustling city centres. Indeed, in contemporary urban fabrics, they appear as much-coveted havens of tranquillity that seem to effortlessly unite heritage values, social values, and – as I argue in this essay – contemporary architectural values.

More a movement than a religious congregation, the great popularity of the beguinages is proven by the numbers: 111[5] have been recorded from – present-day – southern Holland to northern France, with a chronological focus between the 16th and 18th centuries[6] and the highest geographical density in Flanders. Some beguinages housed over 1,000 inhabitants, occupying sites that almost competed with the actual city. Today, only 26 beguinages are preserved, and since 1998, 13 have been listed as World Heritage Sites.[7] UNESCO recognised their particular qualities and decided to accept them in 1998,[8] motivated by three criteria:

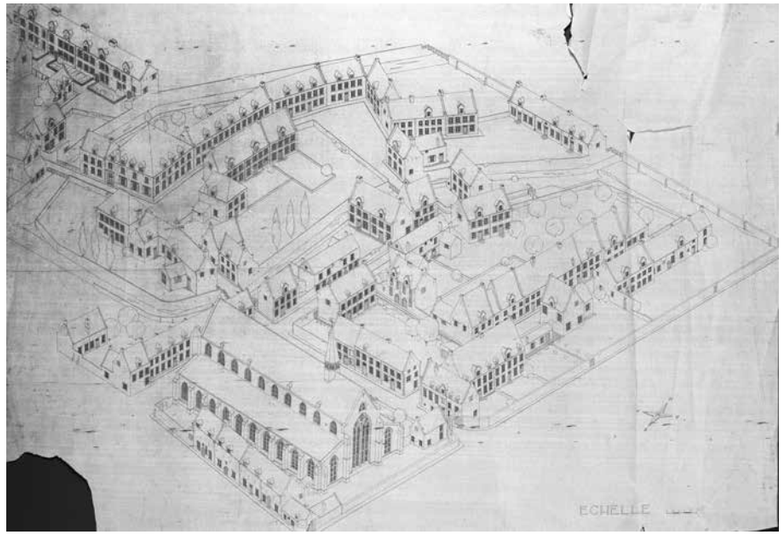
(1) Outstanding physical characteristics of urban and rural planning and a combination of religious and traditional architecture specific to the Flemish cultural region.
(2) Exceptional witness to the cultural tradition of independent religious women in north-western Europe in the Middle Ages.
(3) An outstanding example of an architectural ensemble associated with a religious movement characteristic of the Middle Ages with both secular and conventual values.

The angle in this essay is the transformation process of the Hasselt Beguinage into an architectural faculty combined with a public park. I focus on the process leading up to the selection of the design team and their design strategies. The discourse of 'heritage as a common good' is a legitimate strategy to maintain the beguinage's age-old collective qualities for the people of Hasselt. It is the single common green space in the historic fabric: an urban interior reviving aspects of its rich memory.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the negotiation of values in the Louvain Beguinage

Undoubtedly, the renovation process of the Great Beguinage of the city of Louvain between 1962 and 1972 has contributed to the international exposure and recognition of the beguinage typology [1]. I refer to this case as a comparison to Hasselt for several reasons (despite the chronological gap of five decades):

(1) Both beguinages are linked to a university.
(2) Both renovation processes are very extensive and start from a design strategy to address communal value as opposed to accurate restorations of individual houses.
(3) Most importantly, the processes in both cases sharpened the debate on the relationship between heritage values, architectural values, and the use-value of a unique urban model of communal living.



[2] The Great Beguinage of Louvain, restored by Raymond Lemaire from 1962 onwards, is considered an exemplary project on a European scale and will serve as a reference by its author for his later achievements. It will also confront him with the limitations of the Venice Charter (1964) that he co-authored.

When the century-old Catholic University of Louvain acquired this large 'city-within-a-city-beguinage' in 1962, the renovation is Professor Raymond M. Lemaire (1921–1997). At that very same time, he was also involved in the composition of the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964).[9] It is compelling to associate this influential charter with the rehabilitation process of the Louvain Beguinage because of the intellectual tension it generates in the attitudes of its author. Initially, Lemaire saw the renovation of the beguinage as an interesting alternative to the 'monumental' approach of the Venice Charter and an example of a 'reviving' policy for ensembles.[10] In a related discussion, he articulates its urbanistic qualities and sees in the historical typology an argument against the modernist concept of tabula rasa, which is still very influential in Flemish city policies in the 1970s:

> In the service of humans, new urbanism and architecture are still looking for the ways to reach a balanced synthesis between their needs and the means to fulfil them. The cities from the past are the still living expressions of such a synthesis. They were built for and around humans and the diversity of their ways of being and their needs, and not almost exclusively in function of the economy that allows their substance. They have thus acquired a human dimension of which we are often deprived in the new ensembles. And this is why, most likely, they have an essential educative value and a great lesson to teach us.[11]

Lemaire considers a 'reviving strategy' legitimate because the beguinage provides a valuable 'model' of a 'traditional environment' for a healthy social life in response to modernist models. Its use-value, in this sense, becomes equally essential to its heritage value. Even in his later projects – for example, the 'quartier des arts in Brussels'[12] – Lemaire would still refer to the Louvain Beguinage as a model. Presenting the project in 1970 to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Committee for Housing, Construction, and Planning), Lemaire lists four general principles that guide his reference work: the scrupulous conservation of all authentic and valuable parts, the rejection of a 'museum setting', the search 'to find current solutions for a set of dwellings containing everything from a student's room to a house for a large family', and finally the legibility of interventions adopting today's forms and materials resolutely, but with restraint and modesty. In these principles, Lemaire clearly aimed to adopt

1 For the historical introduction of the beguinages, I used three recent sources: Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies. Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris. Gender Patronage and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and Laura Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines. The Forgotten Story of a Medieval Women's Movement* (New York: Katonah, 2014).

2 Some suggest that they followed a '*vita apostilica*', inspired by the medieval desire to imitate the first followers of Jesus (see Ernest McDonell, 'The Vita Apostolica: Diversity or Dissent', *Church History*, 24 (1955): 15–31.

3 The expression *civitas beghinarum* – city of beguines, was used in 1288 referring to the Dendermonde Beguinage (Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 55, n. 103)

4 There are some exceptions to his typology, illustrated in Suzanne van Aerschot and Michiel Heirman, *Vlaamse begijnhoven: Werelderfgoed* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2001), which is still one of the best surveys on the subject. The authors also have prepared the motivation for listing the beguinages as World Heritage Sites.

5 Repertory of Beguinage Communities in Simons, *Cites of Ladies*, Appendix 1, 256–259.

6 Three beguinages are examples of exceptional large formations: Ghent's Groot Begijnhof of St. Elizabeth, with 610–730 beguines in the late 13th century; St. Christoph in Liège, with some 1,000 members by 1250; and the Groot Begijnhof of St. Catherine in Mechelen, with c.1,500–1,900 beguines around 1500 (ibid.).

7 See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/855/documents/. This decision was also featured that same year in the *New York Times* ('A Lost World Made by Women'): https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/13/travel/13journeys.html.

8 See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/855/.

9 'International Charter of the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites' (The Venice Charter), 2nd International Congress Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments (Venice 1964). Adopted by ICOMOS in 1965: https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf.

10 Raymond Lemaire, 'Restauration et reanimation des ensembles historiques', in *Principes et méthodes de la conservation reanimation des sites et ensembles d'intérêt historique ou artistique* (*Confrontation*

the principles of the Venice Charter, for example, by giving new interventions a muted 'contemporary stamp'.

However, the remodelling process of the beguinage challenged the principles of the charter, and Lemaire would later even admit its unsuitability for remodelling larger heritage ensembles. For example, he aimed to reconstitute a state as close as possible to the original at the cost of the 19th-century transformation, despite the charter's recommendation to safeguard all historical layers. The complete transformation of most interiors contradicted the principle of transmission of the building's historical message and a consistent interior-exterior relationship. More importantly, Lemaire sensed an intellectual tension between restoring each building individually according to its own values (and in the Charter's spirit) against the global value of the built envelope and its public spaces. The perhaps too-dogmatic tone of the charter favours the more 'creative' approach that Lemaire employed in the beguinage project to enhance the picturesque state of the ensemble and its 'beauty' – a key argument in his decision-making process.[13]

This triangular negotiation between heritage values, social values, and architectural values will also frame the remodelling process of the Hasselt Beguinage. It will again, 50 years later, illustrate the capacity of the beguinage typology to embrace – almost effortlessly – the needs of a need programme.

The Hasselt Beguinage as a palimpsest

The chronology in appendix 1 shows three important time frames of the Hasselt Beguinage: first, how the initial 13th-century location was replaced by a new beguinage in the 1570s inside the city walls alongside the west side of the Nieuwe Demer River; second, how an extension on the other side of the river was built between 1707–1763, including a large church dedicated to St. Catherine; and third, how WWII destroyed the church and the 16th-century section of the beguinage leading up to its transformation into a city library and cultural centre until 2016 – the start of the fourth transformation described below.

The Hasselt Beguinage survived WWII as a wounded soldier, with its left arm and leg amputated: the oldest settlement on the west side of the river was bombed beyond repair and the typical secluded character was broken. Moreover, like an open wound, the central church was reduced to ruin. These two war relics would condition the site in its current state. The restoration process took place between 1946–1957, and the vision behind reviving its two remaining wings – the 18th-century triangle on the north-east side – could be best described as a 'stylistic restoration' of a historicised nature. There was a focus on fitting the programme of a public library into the site and dressing it up to 'look' like a medieval beguinage. The critical approach and international context that would characterise the process of the Louvain Beguinage was not available in Hasselt, and it did not enjoy the academic context of Louvain. Other forces, instead, reshaped the future of its disintegrated beguinage.

In 1948, the Belgian government decided to organise a world exhibition, partly inspired by the financial success of an earlier expo in 1935. The resources were much needed for reconstructing the national war damage. The date for the expo was set for 1955, but due to the Korean War, it was moved to 1958. Centred around the Heizel site in Brussels, with the construction of the iconic Atomium monument, each major city in Belgium also erected large new buildings with cultural programmes to attract numerous international visitors from Brussels. The spirit of the age was related to wide held beliefs in freedom and prosperity, and over 42 million visitors came to Belgium. The prominent graphic design and architectural language that accompanies this global event were known as the 'Expo 58 style'. In Hasselt, the mutilated beguinage is chosen as the site for an Expo 58 satellite [2, 3]. This large exhibition centre, designed by Daniëls, still dominates the left part of the site when one enters the court. One could even argue that it shifted the point of gravity, initially located in the now-ruined church.

Restoring this balance in favour of the beguinage park is one of the design strategies of the current project by Bovenbouw and David Kohn Architects, as will be explained below. Indeed, the design of this Expo 58 wing brings a new language and volumetry to the site: one prominent element penetrates the courtyard and breaks its historical grammar. The Flemish heritage council has described this intervention as a 'large-scale disruptive, west wing'.[14] It is likely that this negative reception led to the exclusion of the Hasselt Beguinage from the UNESCO World Heritage list – in addition to the loss in WWII of the beguinage's oldest, 16th-century settlement.[15]

The palimpsest character of the site was also addressed when the Agency of Immovable Heritage joined the remodeling process, as the beguinage is a protected national monument. The previous, invasive interventions created a challenging and fragmented heritage condition, as noted by an agency member:

[3] Art centre, 1958.

> Due to the war damage, the Hasselt beguinage lost many of its authentic heritage elements. In the existing housing, not everything is what it looks like: during the first restoration phase, several historical elements from other buildings were integrated into the beguinage. In some houses, only the exterior façade was restored, but the floors separating the interior were opened up: the roof can be seen from the ground floor. In other places there are still authentic elements present. Such a condition creates unique heritage challenges: what is valuable, what is to be maintained, and what can be re-designed.[16]

As the owner of the beguinage, the Limburg provincial authorities installed a public library in the north wing of the former houses between 1949–1979, when it moved to the new building alongside, designed by Paul Felix (1913–1981) and Georges Nolens. In 1979, it became a centre for the arts, merging with The Museum for Contemporary Art, which was still located in the Expo 58 wing. In 2002, its name was changed to Z33, House for Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture. Between 2011–2019, the Italian architect Francesca Torzo designed an extension to the Expo 58 wing, which she also remodelled.[17] Her intervention smoothed the incoherent west wing of the beguinage park and offered it new, fresh energy as well as an invitation to dialogue with the abandoned beguinage houses.[18]

The following view would appear to someone entering the beguinage court in 2016: a west wing elegantly remodelled by Francesca Torzo, a central park with a ruin looking for a new life and proper maintenance, and the north and east wings of the 18th-century beguinage houses left empty as its former inhabitant was about to move to the new, remodelled west wing. The owner of the beguinage had no immediate solution and decided to market it, inviting private developers for offers and a vision to remodel the historic site.

The Hasselt Beguinage and the Flemish Government Architect

In 2016, the Limburg provincial authorities initiated an open-market consultation for the beguinage and its gatehouse. The money from the public sale was meant for improving the quality and accessibility of the park and its ruins. An internal study was made to map the heritage values, and this identified the row of 18th-century houses in the north-east wing, alongside the Badderijstraat, which could be completed with new construction up to three levels. A cadastre drawing of 1842 already depicts the 'waiting wall' on this side, a condition that remains to the present. The applications of private actors were to be examined by a jury.

However, the decision to sell and privatise the beguinage houses generated strong reactions and a public debate, partly fuelled by a petition organised by students of the architecture faculty.[19] They argued in favour of safeguarding its public, common character and against private development. The petition was handed over to the civil servants responsible

C. Défense et mise en valeur des sites et ensembles d'intérêt historique ou artistique), (Bath, 1966), Council of Europe, 1967, 61–62. Translated and quoted in Claudine Houbart, 'Raymond M. Lemaire, the Great Beguinage of Leuven and the traditional city reinvention', in *Urban Renewal and Resilience - Cities in Comparative Perspective EAUH Conference* (Rome, 2018).

11 Ibidem.

12 Claudine Houbart, 'Raymond Lemaire et les débuts de la rénovation urbaine à Bruxelles', *Revue d'histoire urbaine* 41 (2012): 3–76.

13 Claudine Houbart, 'The Great Beguinage of Leuven: An early challenge for the Venice Charter', *OPUS* 2 (2018): 105–128.

14 See https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/erfgoed objecten/22113.

15 The author of the UNESCO application also catalogued the Flemish beguinages with the rather negative description of the remodelled site in Hasselt. In the official application, Hasselt is not mentioned. The application process would eventually result in a monograph: van Aerschot, *Vlaamse begijnhoven*.

16 Vicky Wuyts, civil servant of the Agency of Immovable Heritage, quoted in the exhibition *Open Call. 20 Years of Public Architecture*.

17 Bie Plevoets, and Shailja Patel. 'Z33 Hasselt: Hortus Conclusus as a Model for an Urban Interior.' *Interiority* 4 (1), 2021.

18 The design aims to promote it as place of rest, with a different sound from the bustling city centre. The protection is given by the layering of the built border with its varying degrees of privacy: the park, the Begijnhof gardens, walls and gates, the plants and the herbs, the almost blind wall of the Jenever Museum and its silent chimneys, the modern severity of Vleugel '58, the solid opening of the Poortgebouw. http://www.francescatorzo.it/works/n09-z33-hasselt-belgium-2011-2019.

19 Entitled 'The Beguinage belongs to everybody', the petition drew in a short period of time more than 3,000 signatures: https://www.petities.com/het_begijnhof_is_van_iedereen.

20 https://vlaamsbouwmeester.be/en/: 'Its mission is to promote the architectural quality of the built environment by advising public patrons in the design and realization of buildings, public space, landscape and infrastructure. Its teams also stimulates the development of visions and reflection, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral initiatives. The Flemish Government Architect

[4] Daily life in the *bejinhof* of Sint-Amandsberg in Ghent, unknown date but probably early 20th century.

for the sale with local press coverage. On the day of the deadline, there was only one bid: the University of Hasselt in concert with the regional investment holding company LRM, supported by architectural plans of noAarchitecten. The proposal was well-received, but it did not meet formal regulations because both parties were public and not private actors. As a result, it was deemed inadmissible and rejected.

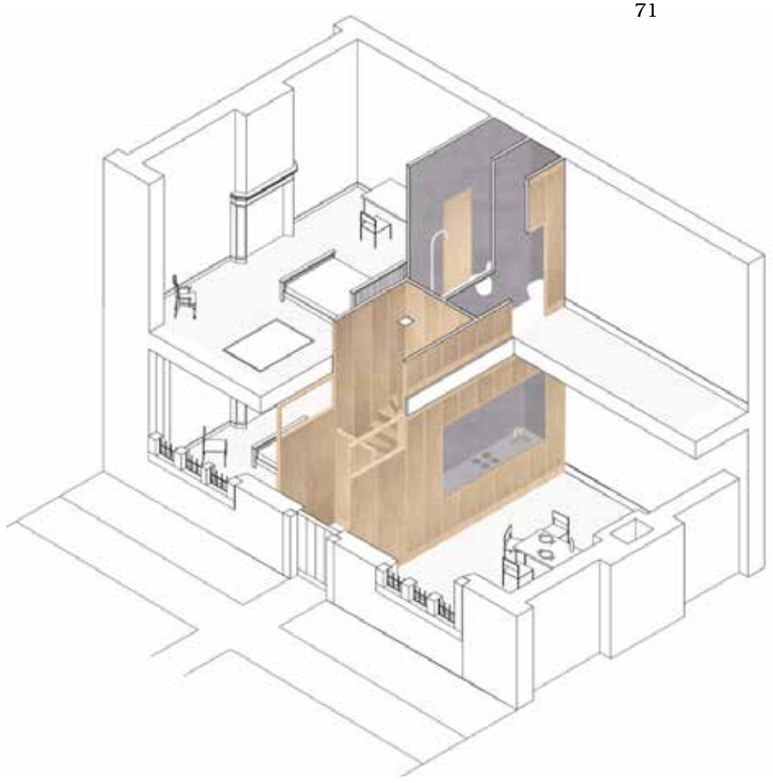
Emphasising the quality of the common green space and the continuity of the houses as centres for culture and science, the concept approached the beguinage as a unique space for synergies between the people of Hasselt and their city, art and architecture, and research and education. Visual references navigated between historic gardens in city centres, interiors of architecture schools in historic buildings, and the wonder and attraction of ruined churches and monasteries. Scenarios were examined by introducing workspaces for students, lecture rooms, and design studios into both wings of the beguinage houses and in the gatehouse. The park and ruins were compared to a '*hortus conclusus*' typology but intended for public use. No volumes were added: the area indicated previously for such an extension was by this time occupied by trees and a subtle shelter structure.

To meet the growing ambitions and match the emerging programme of a public park combined with a university faculty, the parties involved approached the 'Flemish Government Architect'.[20] Since 2000, its team has developed unique expertise in helping public principals select designers for assignments in the areas of architecture, public space, and infrastructure. Their 'Open Call' is devised precisely for that goal, published twice a year Europe-wide. The Hasselt Beguinage applied successfully to being listed for such an Open Call competition, as project OO3406, published in July 2017 as an 'All-inclusive design assignment for the beguinage site in Hasselt'.[21]

In collaboration with the Flemish Government Architect, the owner of the beguinage (Limburg provincial authorities) and its future users (the city of Hasselt and Hasselt University) composed a protocol outlining the design brief and the criteria to evaluate them. Three specific challenges were highlighted:

(1) Integrating the central garden as a green lung for the historic city centre of Hasselt.[22]
(2) Remodelling the beguinage as a university campus with evident attention to its 'civic' role, reaching out to the city and its inhabitants.[23]
(3) Engaging in an ambitious and intelligent manner with the historical values of the site; the mentioned fragmentation of the entire site needs to be addressed.[24]

The interested parties believed that the integration of new, subtle elements in the design would be possible to enrich the heritage values of the site, the attractiveness of the garden, and to improve the integration of the entire site into the public fabric. In all, 26 design teams applied, and based on the submitted portfolio, the Flemish Government Architect preselected ten teams, including several international firms in combination with established Flemish studios. An internal jury made a second selection, including all the mentioned stakeholders (representatives of the province, city, university and heritage council), reducing it to four teams who received an invitation – and funding – to generate a design proposal.[25]



[5] Memory as a design studio: the large oak furniture-objects restructuring the vertical rhythm of the houses, including staircases and other services. This is inspired by the original cabinets of the beguines, which offered them some privacy.

These four teams presented their proposals to the final jury in June 2018 at the studio of the Flemish Government Architect in Brussels. Bovenbouw and David Kohn Architects' joint project was selected unanimously. Their generous,[26] respectful, and subtle approaches to the entire site is appreciated as negotiating intelligently between memory and architecture.

[6] A collage of the interior showing the enfilade with the 'hidden' doors opened, connecting the different houses. Closed doors create the historical identity of the individual houses and stress its domestic atmosphere.

acts as an advisor to the entire Flemish government'. Celebrating its 20th anniversary, an exhibition called *Open Call. 20 Years of Public Architecture* was organised, including a survey of the more than 300 realised projects (curators: Maarten Liefooghe, Maarten Van Den Driessche and Pieter-Jan Cierkens). The exhibition was also on shown in Hasselt in the mentioned extension of Z33 by Francesca Torzo. The Hasselt Beguinage was explained in detail as a case study of the methodology of the Open Call procedures. We are indebted to the curators and their explanatory notes.

21 See https://vlaamsbouwmeester.be/en/instruments/open-call/projects/oo3406-hasselt-beguinage?f=opstart.

22 'This site does after all occupy a unique position in the fabric of the city and after its restoration, change of use and revaluation, it must be made more openly accessible. The beguinage site must once again be put prominently on the map, by means of an open view of the spatial links with the surroundings, the upgrading of the garden to a public park.… There is also a request for a concept for dealing with the church ruins in accordance with its historical importance to this place.… This should give rise to a central location that will play an important part in the experience of the beguinage site and its history. The beguinage garden is intended to become Hasselt's green lung'.

23 The historical houses of the beguinage and the gatehouse need to be reconsidered as design atelier, seminar rooms, a modest lecture theatre and 'city lab' as an open and inclusive reflection on the development of the city. Accomodation for a limited number of long-term (academic) guests is also envisaged. The spill-over between the public park and the faculty is important: the entire site must become a space for all inhabitants of Hasselt to cherish and embrace.

24 The 'ensemble value' is equally as important as restoring the individual houses for their new use. The church ruins also need to be made accessible and may be upgraded both 'materially and immaterially'. Such an encompassing vision must surpass a mere restoration approach; the heritage values need to be handled respectfully, in combination with a contemporary interpretation.

25 (1) Bovenbouw Architecten & David Kohn Architects; (2) architecten BOB361 & Studio Roma; (3) Ard de Vries Architecten & Studio Donna van Milligen Bielke; (4) UR Architects.

Memory as a design studio

The U.S. philosopher Jeff Malpas elaborates on the triangle between time, space, and memory by introducing the notion of place-making.[27] For Malpas, architecture is 'as much a *response* to place, a *conversation* with place, as it is *making* of place'. His *places* are not static but dynamic, and it is through this performative character that place, memory, and buildings are bound together. This definition also makes sense in relation to the Hasselt Beguinage, as Malpas continues to argue that:

> we should think of buildings, not as inert structures that stand apart from remembrance, from felt experience, sentiment, or affect, but as constituted romantically and materially at one and the same time. In terms of memory, buildings carry memory as an essential and inevitable part of what they are, and they do this in several ways.

The new programme of the beguinage as a public park and a house-like extension for university faculty will bring new life to this site; it will make this place into a new, attractive area of the city. The designers are trying to realise this by providing an appropriate response to the various layers of the site. Their design strategy, therefore, negotiates between heritage values and architectural values. The memory of the site – albeit in a fragmented condition – is the basis for developing a vocabulary to re-consider the garden and the historical houses and to present a new, consistent vision on all scales.

The architects were confronted with a dual challenge regarding the internal fragmentation of the houses. Due to the former use as a library and museum space, the humble individual spaces were doubled or even tripled by connecting houses and thus destroyed the internal vertical logic, generating horizontal spatial emphasis. Secondly, in some houses, floors were taken out to create double-height spaces from the ground floor to the roof. To address this, large wooden furniture-objects are created to structure the vertical, internal rhythm of the beguinage houses. For this intervention, the designers sought inspiration in the beguines' cabinet: large pieces of closet-like furniture that gave beguines some private space within their otherwise shared spaces [4]. These intriguing and unusual pieces of furniture are translated by the designers into a structural element to re-install the vertical logic and rhythm of the space [5]. These large oak 'cabinets' connect all floors and contain new staircases, vertical circulation, or service utilities like sinks, bookcases, and lockers. They organise the space and offer the designers the option to introduce an enfilade that

[7] collage of the proposed garden showing the brick Belvedère on the right, the remodelled ruins on the left with the water pond, and the newly designed path on the north-south axis, linking the existing and newly created entry points.

negotiates between the given horizontality and the desired vertical rhythm. By re-introducing separating walls with hidden doors in them, the architects re-install the identity of each house, but when all the doors are opened, a new coherent logic emerges [6]. Both options offer spatial qualities. The memory of the beguine's cabinet is translated into a contemporary architectural gesture to restore internal order in the fragmented interiors.

A slim *campanile*-like tower with an octagonal plan is inserted off-centre from the vertical axis in the garden, on the right-hand side after entering the site through the gatehouse [7]. This strong yet elegant intervention dialogues in two ways with the memory of the disintegrated context: its height of 26 metres refers to the lost church, and, more interestingly, it restores the 'balance' in the garden. The architects argue that, due to the loss of the monumental church, the centre of gravity shifted from the centre to the edges. Simultaneously, the prominent façade of Wing 58 captures the viewer's attention, causing the beguinage to disappear even further into the background. 'If we were to restore the scale of the beguinage church', the team explains:

> the garden around it would be literally and figuratively shaded. We do not want to reconstruct the idea of a residual space around a monumental central figure. The garden should be the protagonist in the new equilibrium. The garden will be the new centre of the site. In the perimeter, we want to optimize the balance between the different players.…A successful garden requires a good balance between attraction and tranquillity, between passage and residence and between nature and architecture. That is the balance we are seeking.

[8] The winning project of the 2018 competition by Bovenbouw and David Kohn, showing their proposal for remodelling the gardens and the ruins by inserting a new north-south axis connecting the historical entrance of the gatehouse with a new one above it, in-between the Jenever Museum and the beguinage.

[26] The jury report applauds the strategy to approach the park as 'one generous space, which makes sense in the historic core of Hasselt which is left without public green space'.'

[27] Jeff Malpas, 'Building Memory', *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 13, 2012: 11–21.

[28] The reference to *freedom* and *fidelity* comes from Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator'. The analogy between translating literature and poetry and transforming buildings in the light of this essay is discussed in Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'Fidelity and Freedom in the Theory of Adaptive Reuse. Thinking with T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin', *Writing Place. Laboratory of Architecture & Literature* 4, 2020: 30–47.

[29] Timeline of Hasselt Beguinage. Source: beheersplan ARAT architecten.

Intuitively, the position of this octagonal Belvedère – so defined by the architects – is to restore the harmony in the garden. Obviously, it also introduces an element of attraction and panoramic joy. As a beacon, the tower will project the beguinage into the city, outside of its enclosed space [8].

The new proposal for the ruined church also contributes to the attractiveness of this 'public interior', providing a shallow pond in the summer that can also disappear (as a negative fountain) to offer space for small performances. The architects define it as the 'positive energy of a ruin church'. In the design of the garden, the architects took references from university campuses in the U.S.: large open green spaces, carefully maintained as public parks, offering common spaces for citizens and students alike. This hybrid approach redefines the beguinage garden as an urban meeting place, as a generous *free space* in the city.

Conclusion

Remodelling the Hasselt Beguinage into a public park and a domestic extension for university faculty is an act of translation involving fidelity and freedom at the same time; of memory and amnesia: *fidelity* towards tradition, typology, and craftsmanship; *freedom* to create a new language, powerful enough to liberate the original language.[28] The example of the beguine cabinet offering inspiration for an architectural gesture to restore the fragmented – and partly destroyed – internal structure is such an example. The designers addressed the mentioned triangle between memory, time, and space as an invitation for *place-making*, weaving the new programme into the existing layers – not by any means nostalgic or historicised, but by creating a new language based on the memory of the various layers of the site. The confidence to translate the fragmented heritage condition of the Hasselt Beguinage into a contemporary architectural vocabulary is clearly indebted to the methodology and expertise of the Flemish Government Architect and its 20 years of experience. In three steps, they elevated the ambitions and the quality of the transformation process in Hasselt by refining the programme and the design brief, organising an open, international competition, and, most importantly, providing common ground between the new users (the city and university), the owner (province of Limbourg), the heritage council, and the appointed architects. This formula created unique conditions for the transformation and the translation of the Hasselt Beguinage into a domestic addition to the Faculty of Architecture and Arts.

Appendix 1[29]

1245	Mention of the first beguinage outside the city walls of Hasselt
1567	The beguinage outside the city walls is destroyed
1571	Foundation of a new beguinage within the city walls, situated on the left bank of the Nieuwe Demer River
1573	New beguinage church consecrated on the left bank
1707–1763	Expansion of the beguinage on the right bank of the Nieuwe Demer River
1753–1754	Construction of a new beguinage church dedicated to St. Catherine
1780	Construction of the gatehouse on Zuivelmarkt
1798	Beguinage sold under French rule but later became the property of the beguines Catharina Brouwers and the Jadin sisters
1839	Property of the Diocese of Liège, Friars of the Immaculate Conception build a boys' school
1880	Property of the Armenbureel Hasselt
1883	Church furniture is sold
1886	Last beguine from Hasselt, Rosa Margaretha Vandenhoudt, dies
1896	Property of the Breeders van Liefde (Ghent)
1938	Property of the Province of Limburg and the start of restoration
1939	Beguinage is protected as a monument
1944	Destruction of the beguinage church St. Catherine and the old beguinage located on the right bank during WWII bombardment
1946–1957	Restoration
1946–1979	Provincial Library, Provincial Museum, Provincial Centre for Fine Arts
1958–1959	Construction of exhibition building to the left of the gatehouse by architect G. Daniëls (exhibition spaces) Current function Arts centre, House of contemporary art, Z33

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[3] Art Centre, 1958. Collectie provincie Limburg - PCCE.

[4] Daily life in the begijnhof of Sint-Amandsberg in Ghent, unknown date but probably early 20th century. Postcard. Collectie Archief Gent, STORME_PBK_462.

[5] Detailed drawing of furniture-objects. ©Bovenbouw and David Kohn.

[6] Collage interior. ©Bovenbouw and David Kohn.

[7] Collage exterior. ©Bovenbouw and David Kohn.

[8] Site plan. ©Bovenbouw and David Kohn.

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Trace
Notes on adaptive reuse

is serial publication by research group TRACE at Hasselt University, in reflection on the annual International Master of Interior Architecture: Adaptive Reuse. All papers are blind peer reviewed.

Vol. 3 — On Collectivity
First published 2020

Editorial team
Research group TRACE: Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Nikolaas Vande Keere, Saidja Heynickx, Bie Plevoets, Nadin Augustiniok

Editors of this issue
Bie Plevoets, Nadin Augustiniok

Graphic Design
Geoffrey Brusatto

Printing
Chapo, Hasselt (Belgium)

Responsible Publisher
Faculty of Architecture and Arts,
Hasselt University
Campus Diepenbeek
Agoralaan Building E
B – 3590 Diepenbeek

architectuur@uhasselt.be
+32 (0)11 292 101
www.fac-ark.be
www.uhasselt.be/Master-of-interior-architecture-adaptive-reuse

ISSN — 2593-8002

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