

# the Bulletin

THE NEWSWEEKLY OF THE CAPITAL OF EUROPE / JUNE 25, 1992 / 75 BF

## Reviews

### ARCHITECTURE

## Back to the drawing-board

Visitors to the current exhibition at the Fondation pour l'Architecture, **Unbuilt Belgium, 1950-1990**, can decide for themselves which of the many plans, blueprints and models for buildings that never got built we are lucky to have been spared and which ones we might have liked.

In fact, foundation head Caroline Mierop and her team are encouraging visitors to cast ballots for their favourite projects in a kind of informal public referendum. It's a bold idea. No museum curator would dream of letting the average gallery-goer decide which pictures should be hung on the walls and which consigned to storage. The notion has an exhilarating spirit of anarchism about it that seems entirely appropriate for a show that is nothing if not idiosyncratic.

Strolling clockwise, we see the first of several startling suggestions by Luc Deleu: a 1972 model for a floating university. Land-hungry developers might well be attracted by the notion of establishing campuses on what appear to be aircraft carriers.

In the might-have-been or too-late-now department is the space devoted to plans for the Crossroads of Europe (the triangle of land between the central station and the Grand'Place that used to be a parking lot and is now a jumble of silly-looking hotels). Joel Classe and associates had the charming idea of connecting a series of simple houses along the Rue de la Montagne by a long arcade. And Arau, those astute critics of urban mismanagement, have come up with a pleasantly jumbled yet uncluttered scheme. But then take a look at the plan that won the Prix Bonduelle in 1983. No comment.

In the it-could-have-been-worse category are the original plans for the Hilton Hotel by Henri Montois. If his dream had come true there would now be two towers instead of one standing like bookends beside the poor Egmont Park. But that was 1961 and in the so-called Golden Sixties big was beautiful. Look at the Quartier Nord, the area where the World Trade Center now stands. If you think *that's* bad you should see what it was supposed to have been. Groupe Structure's Plan Manhattan just shows you how perverse the mind of man can be. Thank goodness that disastrous financial miscalculation put a stop to this folly.

Not that everyone has learned a

whole lot in the intervening years. We have only to look at Deleu's proposal to build a viaduct, a towering air bridge, over the city for the TGV. His drawing looks like a 19th century vision of the future. Sanity is restored, however, with the idyllic picture of what the Boulevard Jacquain could be if houses were reduced to a more human scale. That the architects don't really believe anyone is likely to fund their project is indicated by a touch of nostalgia, the 1920s-style roadsters with their tops down that they have drawn into the peaceful-looking street.

As a rule, though, says Mierop, Belgian architects do not go in for the hypothetical approach. "All of the architects I spoke to while preparing the show objected to the use of the word utopian in reference to their work. They felt it suggested fuzzy thinking or mere daydreaming. They wanted me to know that their plans were entirely feasible, based on hard-headed calculation."

There is certainly nothing soft-hearted about some of the solutions for the restoration of central Ghent. In a competition called, A New Heart for

Ghent, a maquette shows the cathedral and belfry hemmed in by 16 tower blocks, eight on either side. No doubt the occupants of these buildings would have fine views of the ancient monuments. Much more likable is the idea of flooding the downtown area and surrounding Saint Bavo with a moat, leaving it reachable by bridge. Well, why not?

Bridges, an architect associated with the Fondation exhibition pointed out, seem to fascinate the Flemish architects as much as skyscrapers do the Brussels builders. Aside from the various dramatic plans for bridging the Scheldt at Antwerp — study Dirk Coopman's astonishing exercise in what he calls "speculative reality," convincingly illustrated with holograms — there is the above-ground link between the two sides of the Waterloo battlefield drawn up by Rik Nijis.

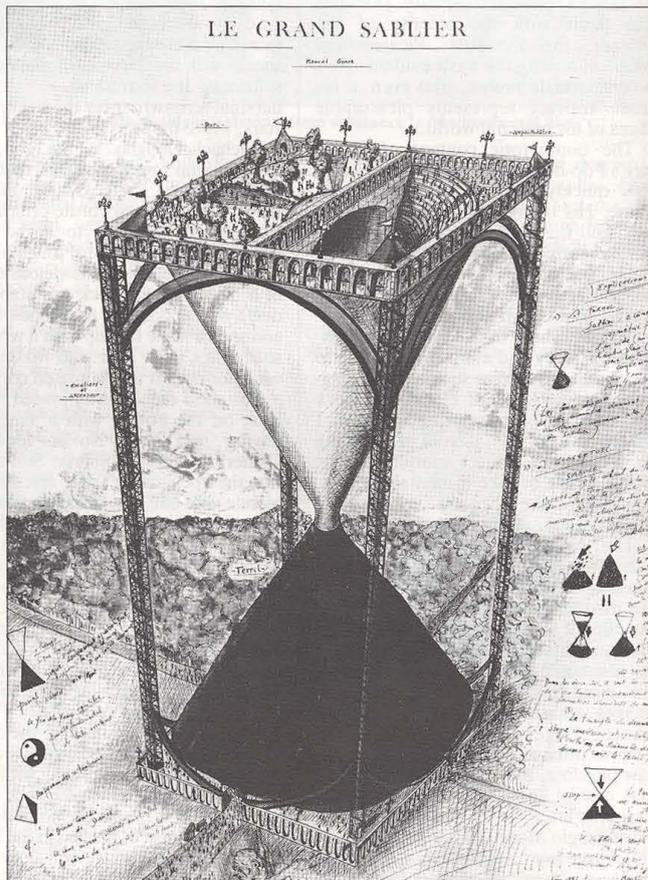
Various possibilities for the restoration of the Brussels canals have been set out. The most imposing is certainly student Anne Van de Velde's Hotel Phare, a combined yacht club, hotel and lighthouse. Antwerp architect Bob Van Reeth had a lighthouse in the form of an "illuminated tower" that he would have been happy to see put up at Zeebrugge. It would have contained meeting halls, a cinema and restaurants. I think I might vote for that.

More radical notions of urban planning for Charleroi, Liege and other cities or sites are laid out in the Fondation's usual style of meticulous museology: instructive, attractive and entertaining.

A parallel exhibition of work by three young architects, Christian Kieckens, Victor Levy and Bernadette Schyns, provides an encouraging glimpse into the creative thinking of the younger generation. Each has his or her own approach to similar problems of space, aesthetics and human convenience. The Fondation has asked them to suggest ways of expanding or redesigning its building, a converted power station, and they have given their answers with models and drawings displayed on the mezzanine.

### Cleveland Moffett

*Unbuilt Belgium, 1950-1990*, is at the Fondation pour l'Architecture, 55 Rue de l'Ermite, until September 6, open Tuesday to Friday from 12.30 to 7 pm and weekends from 11 am to 7 pm.



The Great Hourglass by Manuel Gomez in contest to find uses for a slagheap