

## “THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE – TALENTS FROM BRUSSELS” THE TALK SHOW BULLETIN

### Brussels: the crossroad of European culture

The event BRUSSELS DAYS, held May 16-20 in Tokyo at the Embassy of Belgium in Japan, was programmed to present the many charms of Brussels. Sponsored by **MAD Brussels - Mode and Design Center**, **Brussels Invest and Export** and **FORWARD Brussels FASHION AND DESIGN LABEL** (a joint project by the first two organizations), the event hosted a talk show of 4 groups of designers entitled THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE – TALENTS FROM BRUSSELS, on May 19, in conjunction with a special exhibition to introduce the works of 17 top creators from Brussels. While presenting a wide variety of works, including some of their latest and featured projects, they shared their ideas to the Japanese public interested in design.



Talk show coinciding with the exhibition to introduce the many designs of Brussels. The event was attended by many design experts in Japan, including producers, journalists, curators, designers, buyers and in-house design planners.

There were 6 guest speakers: Elric Petit and Augustin Scott De Martinville from design studio BIG-GAME, fashion designer Jean-Paul Lespagnard, Thierry Brunfaut and Fabian Jean Villanueva from creative agency BASE DESIGN and Pierre Lhoas from the architectural design studio LHOAS & LHOAS. BASE DESIGN and LHOAS & LHOAS both worked on structuring the concept of the show, as well as designing the space.

**Alexandra Lambert, director of MAD Brussels**, explained the concept in bringing everything together. MAD Brussels, founded in 2011, is a unique institution to create a stimulating collaborative platform between fashion and the designers of Brussels, and to communicate the value of their work. It was founded in close cooperation between ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), the Brussels-Capital Region and the city of Brussels.

*“This event is aimed to show Brussels design in its entirety, as in product, fashion and graphic designs. While showcasing its creativity, it was meant for breaking conventional boundaries and making experimental challenges to seek for innovation. Our aim is to deliver a wide variety of designs, not just domestically, but internationally. As a matter of fact, there are many facets that characterize the design coming out of Brussels. As a creative industry, we try to nurture different processes for tomorrow.”*

**Cécile Jodogne, the Secretary of State for Foreign Trade**, also participated in the talk event. *“We believe both Belgium and Japan share important values in our foundation of artistic creativity. It may be in the way we respect tradition, seek innovation, and aim for higher quality. These things can be further developed with interaction, and we believe that such opportunities can be very important. Also, Brussels’ creativity holds a wide variety of narratives, like its eye for detail and the sense of humor. We have a great resource of creative individuals who have brilliant ideas worth exploring, and they are eager to bring them out into international gatherings like this.”*

**Cécile Jodogne** touched on the fact that New York Times, in December 2015, chimed that “Brussels is the New Berlin”. *“Not to mention the fact that Brussels is the European hub for economics and politics, but even the creative environment has become active, making it the new creative hub. It is open, creative and therefore, and not just for artists and curators, but Brussels is being introduced as a city where collectors are looking on with interest.”*

Even as a city limited in size, many cultures are thriving. Deep down in the town of Brussels, there is a rich cultural stream of cultural creativity flowing underneath. For example, back in 1880, the city prospered as a center for Art Nouveau with works by Victor Horta, and flourished with the booming industrial revolution and the skilled expertise of artisans as a backdrop. At present, approximately 500 Art Nouveau architectures remain, and it shows the city’s history of how art has come hand in hand within the daily lives of the people. So then, how will international designers of the city compete in the world today?

As the talk show begins, the designers can share their views and ideas on the subject.

**CULTURE  
FOLKLORE  
UPDATED TRADITION  
WE LOVE OBJECTS**

The guest speakers planted their ideas based on the idea of Four Passions. “We have chosen Passion as the topic, in order to find the connection between the people in Tokyo and the panel from Brussels,” began **Thierry Brunfaut from BASE DESIGN**. “These four passions make an important theme connecting the speakers.”

**They are <Culture>, <Folklore>, <Updated Tradition> and <We Love Objects>.**

**Thierry Brunfaut** starts by explaining the first topic <Culture>.

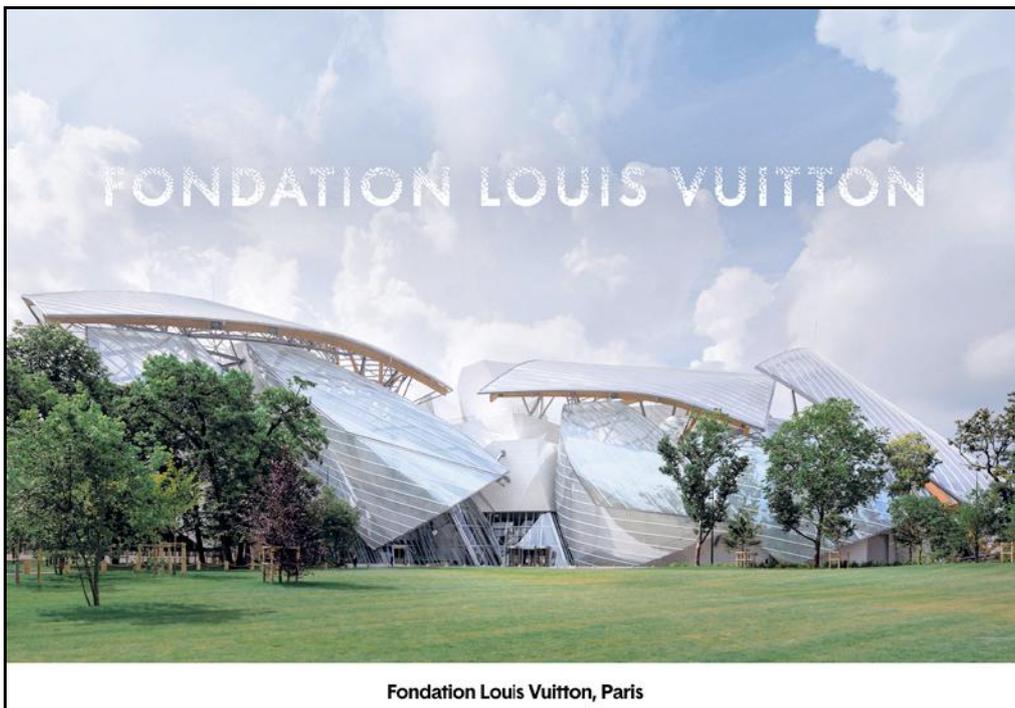
*“Brussels has a different background compared to other European cities. Despite its limited size, it is the “crossroads of culture”, and there is a certain mix of Latin and Anglosaxon heritage as well as immigrants from other backgrounds, where the cultures of north and south come together. Also, the main institutions for EU are located, which makes it the capital of Europe. Although it is small, it is a worldly city where over 100 nationalities come together.”*

*“As the country being small, it does not excessively boast a strong national pride, and has a natural tolerance to foreigners. It is not difficult to find people who speak more than three languages. With this unique location and character, as designers, we are ready to work flexibly even outside Belgium, with an advantage to discover and relate to other cultures”*

BASE DESIGN has studios in New York and Geneva, and work on projects in different countries such as with the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris and MOMA in New York, as well as in cities like Lausanne and Munich.



In front is BASE DESIGN. From left Thierry Brunfaut and Fabian-Jean Villanueva.



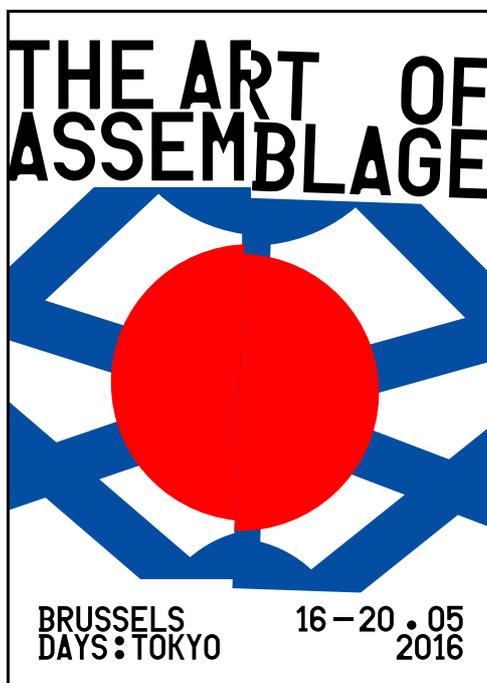
**Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris**

Project of BASE DESIGN.  
Their work includes logo design and brand identity for Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris.



Visual design for the Ruhr Triennale in Germany.

The way Brussels designers think is also reflected in the visual graphics of THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE. “Red and blue, the combination of graphics and traditional logotypes, there are no hierarchy between them, and is only based on the idea of respect. In the space here, we introduce a flag that reads <BEAUTIFUGLY> (a combination of BEAUTIFUL and UGLY). We wanted people to find out for themselves, first showing interest before they decide whether it is beautiful or not.”



Visual design by BASE DESIGN for THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE – TALENTS FROM BRUSSELS (left) and the flag designed for the space in Tokyo.

**Fabian Jean Villanueva, a colleague of BASE DESIGN** adds. *“Not limited to our projects, in Brussels, a lot of creativity is based on bridging a wide variety of cultures and mixing them together. Being mix-cultured and mix-disciplined can mean that it may give unlimited potential to the city. This is the whole the idea of Art Assemblage. We hope you find that the spatial design represents this situation.”*



Space design in Tokyo for THE ART OF ASSEMBLAGE – TALENTS FROM BRUSSELS created for the Embassy of Belgium in Japan.  
Concept and scenography by BASE DESIGN and LHOAS LHOAS.

**Pierre Lhoas**, from the architectural design studio LHOAS & LHOAS - who co-designed the space with BASE DESIGN to show the present creative scene in Brussels, by analyzing and recomposing the works of the 17 designers from different angles - introduced their recent work and scenography they had created for the Venice Art Biennale 2015. Pierre, who founded his studio with his elder brother after studying architecture in Brussels, posed an idea for the city. *“It is where a huge mix of people live together. The ways to live in that city shows the character of Brussels as well. It holds an attraction different from Paris or London.”*



Pierre Lhoas of LHOAS LHOAS.



Project by LHOAS LHOAS.

Scenography for the Belgian Pavillion for the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2015. Exhibition curated by Katrina Gregos.

**BIG-GAME** has three core members who have grown up in different cultural backgrounds. One of the speakers Petit was born in Belgium, De Martinville in France, and they teamed up with Grégoire Jeanmonod who was born in Switzerland to form the studio in 2014. *“When we had a show in a museum in Belgium, on our fourth year, as a concept, we decided to create a mix that represent our culture.”* *“When you think of Brussels, you think of chocolate. Compared to the traditional French chocolate and the mountain shaped Swiss chocolate, in Belgium, there are new types of chocolate emerging based on innovation. This also goes for the monuments in the city, where France has the Eiffel Tower, Brussels has the Atomium, which represents a crystalized structure of iron, built for the Brussels World’s Fair in 1958. This is also an example to show how people interested in innovation and design.”*



BIG-GAME founders from Belgium, France and Switzerland. From left Augustin du Martinville from France, Gregoire Chamonos from Switzerland and Elric Petit from Belgium.



Presentation by BIG-GAME.

Introduced were the differences between France, Switzerland and Belgium, as well as the innovative aspect of Belgium incorporating chocolate and city monuments.

Another speaker, **Jean-Paul Lespagnard** follows. *“Being based in Brussels, which is a cross cultural platform, is really important as a fashion designer. Although it does not try to promote itself as a city of Fashion or the Arts, the whole town is art. There is an important dance school too. So not only do I design for my own brand, I get to provide designs for talented choreographers. I believe that any kind of fabric can be used for costumes.”*



Project by Jean-Paul Lespagnard.  
Costume design for Scottish Dance Theatre’s YAMA. Choreographed by Damian Jalete of Belgium.  
Photography ©Brian Hartley

We are quite convinced that Brussels functions as a crossroad for European culture. The speakers, based, born or having studied in Brussels, and now working internationally, moved on to talk about the other three ideas on Passion.

*Text by Noriko Kawakami  
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