KOEN VANMECHELEN

CV & PORTFOLIO

Koen Vanmechelen (Belgium, °1965) is an internationally renowned conceptual artist. Biocultural diversity is central to his groundbreaking work. Over the past 10 years, Vanmechelen has worked on this theme together with scientists from a broad range of disciplines. These boundary-defying projects have earned him an honorary doctorate from Hasselt University (2010) and the Golden Nica Hybrid Art (2013).

Koen Vanmechelen is best known for his 'Cosmopolitan Chicken Project' (CCP), a unique artistic project which he launched in the late 1990s. The focus of this project is the chicken – more specifically, the crossing of national chicken breeds to create 'cosmopolitan chickens'. In 2024, the 29th generation of this global project is born: the Mechelse Jær, with genes from Belgium, France, England, America, Germany, the Netherlands, Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Turkey, Cuba, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt, Senegal, Slovenia, Austria, Indonesia, Detroit, Denmark, Finland, Vatican City, Chile, Croatia, Israel, Iceland, Bangladesh and Norway. The project put Vanmechelen on the world map, both in the art world and beyond. The essence of the project is not the chicken, nor the egg; but the cross-breeding process itself and the diversity that ensues.

That same diversity also characterises the other animal species, farms, projects and foundations that together make up the artist's work. As a modern Uomo Universale, Vanmechelen fuses art, nature and knowledge, reaching out to anyone and anything that can help him to break boundaries on his journey. He records the results of his experiments in every conceivable medium: from highly expressive paintings and drawings to photography, performances, sculptures, video, innovative 3D techniques, glassware, (living) installations, and also practical interventions in communities and science. In the midst of society, among the people, these works point the way to new insights; to a Cosmopolitan Renaissance.

Vanmechelen's work has already been exhibited on almost all continents and in many countries, from the U.S. to China, from Senegal to Iceland. He has had international solo and group exhibitions at the Uffizi Gallery (Firenze), Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba (Havana), the National Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), Museum Kunst Palast (Düsseldorf), Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (Amsterdam), Macro (Rome), MAD Museum (NY), Belvedere (Vienna), ZKM (Karlsruhe), Serlachius Museum (Manttä) and Pushkin Museum (Moscow). In addition to the Venice Biennale, his work has also been shown at exhibitions in Moscow, Dakar, Havana and Poznan, the World Expo Shanghai 2010, the Guangzhou Triennial, Manifesta 9 and dOCUMENTA (13). As a speaker in high demand, he has given presentations at the World Economic Forum (Davos), various TEDxConferences, World Expo (Shanghai), Climate Change Congress and the Creativity world Forum.

Since 2017, Vanmechelen is based at LABIOMISTA; an immense park in Genk (Belgium) where among great architecture and natural landscape installations, artworks and avians of the most disparate species live together. LABIOMISTA is the embodiment of Vanmechelen's artistic and philosophical vision, created on the belief in art as a driver of mutual understanding and as a guide in the search for answers to the major challenges of the 21st century, the relationship between nature and culture and in particular the development of sustainable communities.

More information - www.labiomista.com

I HONORS AND AWARDS (selection)

— Social Impact Award, Tulum (MX), 2019
— Golden Nica Hybrid Art, Prix Ars Electronica, Linz (AT), 2013
— Pavilion 0 Global Artist's Award, Venice (IT), 2013
— Beste Concept, VENUEZ, Cosmocafe (BE)
— Doctor Honoris Causa UHasselt, Hasselt (BE), 2010
— Honorary citizenship Sint-Truiden (BE), 2005
— Gustav-Henemann-Friedenspreis (with Gregie de Maeyer for 'Juul'), Berlin (DE), 1998

II EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2024
— Looking for the Ark, 60th Venice Biennial, Venice Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale (IT)
— Mechelse Jær – CCP29, Kunsthall 3,14, Bergen (NO)
— Sweet Dreams, Delegation of Flanders to the European Union, Brussels (BE)
— Hybrids: Composite creatures from Sagas, Myths and Legends, De Warande, Turnhout (BE)
— Best of Glasstress, Reggia di Venaria, Turin (IT)
— Landscape of the Imagination, Watou Art Festival (BE)

2023
— Dream of Human Nature, Brihatta Art Foundation, Dhaka (BD)
— Carousel of Life, MUSE, Trento (IT)
— Socrates Temptation, Museo Correr, Venice (IT)
— Glasstress, The State Gallery of Art, Sopot (PL)
— The Worth of Life, Watou (BE)

2022
— Seduzione, Uffizi Gallery, Firenze (IT)
— Cosmopolitan Renaissance, CC Scharpoord, Knokke (BE)
— Burning Falls, Homo Faber, Venice (IT)
— Glasstress, State of Mind, Biennial of Venice (IT)
— Mysticism, Limburgs Museum, Venlo (NL)
— Sense of Place, Watou (BE)
— Medusa's Hope, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba (CU)

2021
— Glasstress Boca Raton, Miami (US)
— Crossquery - The Jerusalem Biennale (IL)
— SJAMANISM, Milan (IT)
— Glasstress, Window to the Future, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (RU)
— Custodian, La Biennale de Paris (FR)

2020
— Iconic works, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (SE), Ateneum, Helsinki (FI)
— TOUCH ME Festival, Biennial of Zaghreb (HR)
— Biennial of Poznan - Events Horizon (PL)

2019
— FOOD; Bigger than the Plate, V&A, London (UK)
— The Worth of Life, Teatro dell'architettura, Mendrisio (CH)
— Human Rights Pavilion, Venice (IT)
— Art With Me, Tulum (ME)
— Human Rights Pavilion - Cosmocafe, Worldwide

2018
— Protected Paradise, Palazzo Franchetti, La Biennale di Venezia (IT)
— CWRM, Land art installation, Ypres (BE)
— IT'S ABOUT TIME, Serlachius, Mantta (FI)
— Il Terzo Giorno, Parma (IT)

2017
— Protected Paradise, Palazzo Franchetti, La Biennale di Venezia (IT)
— Vision of the Owl, galerie Bach, Brussels (BE)
— Force of Nature, The Art Pavilion, Mile End Park, London, (UK)
— Planetary Community Chicken, VII Socle du Monde, HEART, Herning, Denmark (DK)

2016
— ENERGY/MASS, Wasserman Projects, Detroit (US)
— Planetary Community Chicken, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare (ZW)
— Daydreaming With... Stanley Kubrick, Sommerset House, London (UK)

2015
— This Is Not a Chicken, Het Domein, Sittard (NL)
— LIFEBANK/AWAKENER, GLASSTRESS 2015 GOTIKA, 56th Biennial of Venice (IT)
— Evolution of a Hybrid - CC®P, The Importance of Being..., Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Habana (CU), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires (AR), Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (BR)
— Protected Paradise - C.C.P., Vienna for Art's Sake, Belvedere, Vienna (AT)
— New Brood - C.C.P., Höhenrausch, OK Center for Contemporary Art, Linz (AT)
— Arena de Evolución, 12th la Bienal de La Habana (CU)
— La Biomista, Exo-Evolution, Globale 2015, ZKM, Karlsruhe (DE)

2014
— Darwin's Dream, The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras Church, London (UK)
— Never Green - C.C.P., Rurart, Poitiers (FR)
— In Captivity, Genius Loci – Spirit of Place, Lisson Gallery & Berengo Studio, 55th International Architecture Biennale of Venice (IT)

2013
— Leaving Paradise, CONNERSMITH, Washington (US)
— Mechelse Styrian - 17th generation - C.C.P., Galerija Kapelica, Ljubljana (SI)
— Leaving Paradise, Art Sanya, Hainan (CN)
— CC®P – The Cosmopolitan Chicken, OK Center for Contemporary Art, Linz (AT)
— Evolution of a Hybrid, Bozar, Brussels (BE)
— Note Book, Beit Ha'ir, Tel Aviv (IL)

2012
— Hybridity in art and science – C.C.P., dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel (DE)
— COMBAT, Landcommandery Alden Biesen (BE)
— Entwined - C.C.P., Breaking the Mold, Glasstress, MADmuseum, New York (US)
— Hotel de Inmigrantes 2 – Cosmopolitan Stranger (Collateral Event Manifesta 9), Open University of Diversity, Hasselt (BE)

2011
— Nato a Venezia, Collateral Event of 54th Biennial of Venice, Venice (IT)
— Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Art Labor, Shanghai (CN)
— Breaking the Cage, IKOB, Museum of Contemporary Art Eupen, Eupen (BE)
— Modified Spaces – C.C.P., 4th triennial of Guangzhou, Guangdong Museum of Art (CN)
— Genetic Freedom – C.C.P., Scenarios about Europe, GFZK, Leipzig (DE)

2010
— 14th Generation - Mechelse Silky, Himalayas Center, Pudong Shanghai (CN)
— Cosmopolitan Chicken – Diversity, Espace Européen pour la Sculpture, Brussels (BE)
— Mediations Biennial Beyond Mediations, Tower of Babel, Poznan (PL)
— CCP -Innovations and adaptation, Dak'Art Biennial, Dakar (SN)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken – Frozen Culture Balance, National Museum Warsaw, (PL)
— The Armory Show, New York (US)
— Parallellepipeda, Museum M, Leuven (BE)
— FADA Los Angeles Art Show 2010 (US)

2009
— Unicorn, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009, Venice
— Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam (NL)
— Against Exclusions, The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Mechelse Orloff, 3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, curator Jean-Hubert Martin, Moscow (RU)
— Becoming Intense, Becoming Animal, Becoming ..., Völkerkundemuseum von Portheim-Stiftung, Heidelberg (DE)
— In Bed Together, Breaking the Cage, Royal/T, curator Jane Glassman, Culver City (US)

2008
— Breaking the Cage – The art of Koen Vanmechelen, Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts & Business, curator Mike Phillips, London (GB)
— The Chicken's Appeal, Museum Valkenhof, curator Frank Van der Schoor, Nijmegen (NL)
— Genesis: CCP 10 Generation, Zentrum Paul Klee, curator Fabienne Eggelhöfer, Bern (CH)
— The Cathedral – Ectoplasma – CCP, Congress Centre, Davos (CH)
— Zerbrechliche Schönheit, The Accident, museum Kunst Palest, curator Thijs Visser, Düsseldorf (DE)
— CCP Ten Generations, Galerie k4, Münnich (DE)

2007-2000
— The Accident, curator Agnes Husslein, Palm Court, Miami Beach (US)
— Genesis - The Cosmopolitan Chicken, Centraal Museum Utrecht, curator Emilie Gomart (NL)
— Handle with care, Pushkin Museum, Moscow (RU)
— Red Jungle Fowl - Genus XY, CRAC, curator Hilde Teerlinck, Altkirch (FR), 2005
— Cosmopolitan Chicken Project – Mechelse Owlbeard, GEM Den Haag / KunstRAI, curator Wim Van Krimpen, Amsterdam (NL), 2003
— Visible / Invisible, Galerie Tapper, Malmö (SE), 2003
— Two Asias, Two Europes, Duolun Museum of Modern Art, curator Gu Zhenqing, Shanghai (CN), 2005
— Smak, smak, The Mechelse Bresse, S.M.A.K., curator Jan Hoet Jr., Ghent (BE), 2002
— Cultivando la Naturaleza, Fundacion César Manrique, curator Bianca Visser, Lanzarote (ES), 2004
— Cinecittà, Berengo Fine Arts, Filmfestival, Venice (IT), 2003
— The Walking Egg, Shinchu Museum, Taipei (TW), 2003
— Wir sind die ander(en), curator Jan Hoet, Herford (DE), 2001
— The Walking Egg, Arco 2000, Madrid (ES), 2000
— Storm Centers, curator Jan Hoet, Watou (BE), 2000
— A Shot in the Head, curator Jill Silverman, Lisson Gallery, London (GB), 2000

II PERMANENT WORKS (selection)

— Cosmopolitan Fossil, T2 Campus Genk (BE), 2024
— Archive - Redcap, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, 2023
— Domesticated Giant, CERA, Leuven (BE), 2023
— UBUNTU, the Uffizi Gallery, Firenze (IT), 2022

— Ab Ovo – LaMouseion, VUB Campus Etterbeek (BE), 2021
— CCP/PCC, Sint-Truiden (BE), 2021
— PROOVO, private collector (BE), 2021
— T-REX, The Jungle, Creutz & Partners, Beiler (LU), 2019
— Book of Genomes, National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa (ET), 2018
— Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, ZKM, Karlsruhe (DE)
— INCUBATED WORLDS, Ethiopia
— T-REX, Männtä (FI)
— Medusa, Serlachius Museums (FI)
— Human Rights House, Tulum (MX)
— Collective Memory, EIUC, Global campus of Human Rights, Venice (IT), 2017
— Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, dOCUMENTA, 2012 Drawing, GEM | Museum voor actuele kunst, 2003
— Infinity - C.C.P., Dronten (NL), 2016
— Modified Spaces, T-Rex, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou (CN), 2011
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken – Celestial body, VOKA Kamer van Koophandel Limburg, Hasselt (BE), 2010
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken – Time Temperature, BioVille, Campus UHasselt, Biomedical Research Institute (BIOMED), Diepenbeek (BE), 2010
— The Walking Egg – Born, Ziekenhuis Oost- Limburg, Genk (BE), 2005

III FOUNDATIONS

— CosmoGolem Foundation; founded in 2010, to coordinate the project behind the growing series of towering wooden sculptures symbolizing children's rights.
— The Walking Egg Foundation; founded in 2010 to support the Walking Egg Project and the research on (in)fertility in developing countries. Chaired by fertility specialist Willem Ombelet (MD, PhD).
— The Open University of Diversity; founded in 2011, an intellectual space unifying the artistic projects of Koen Vanmechelen and a place where science and art can intersect. It serves as a think tank and is a meeting place for people to discuss the core themes relating to biocultural diversity which are found in the artist's work.
— COMBAT; founded in 2013, to coordinate the GoneWest project and with the purpose to further uncover the oeuvre and deeper meaning of Koen Vanmechelen's work and to actively bring the public closer to his work via action and reflection. In collaboration with vzw ku(n)st.
— MOUTH; Founded in 2014, a philanthropic foundation which brings together art, science and people for diversity. It partners with individuals and organisations worldwide to put diversity front and center of the global development agenda. The aim is a new, more constructive social and ecological balance.
— LABIOMISTA; the unique site of Koen Vanmechelen in the Belgian city of Genk. It accommodates the artist's first Open University of Diversity and the different foundations and subprojects. The site consists of 24 hectares and hosts three identities; a renovated villa, a newly designed studio by Mario Botta and a park.

MODIFIED SPACES,
4 TH GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL
GUANGDONG MUSEUM OF ART (CN), 2011

The Guangdong museum of Art (Guangzhou, China) selected Vanmechelen as central artist for the Fourth Guangzhou Triennial. The artist created a site-specific installation called 'Modified Spaces'. An installation about the balance between nature and humans and about transformation.

NATO A VENEZIA
BIENNALE OF VENICE (IT), 2011

Inside the walls of one of the main centers of Venetian culture and knowledge, Koen Vanmechelen presented a 'laboratory' on the borderline of art and science. In an open study, the visitors were actively invited to take part in different research projects on biological and cultural diversity that are conducted by the researchers on site.

LIBRARY OF COLLECTED KNOWLEDGE
BIENNIAL OF CUBA, 2014

Vanmechelen presented with Library of Collected Knowledge – Arena de Evolución a multi-media and interactive installation at the 12th Biennial of Havana, paralleled with a scientific programme. More info on lock.koenvanmechelen.be

LABIOMISTA
ZKM, KARLSRUHE (DE), 2016

Combining and reconfiguring genes and memes, mixing, experimenting and probing lie at the core of the Vanmechelen's oeuvre. His new studio; Labiomista (mixed life) is the architectural embodiment of his transdisciplinary approach and formed the entrance piece at the Exo-Evolution exhibition curated by Peter Weibel.

PROTECTED PARADISE
VIENNA FOR ART'S SAKE, BELVEDERE, VIENNA (AT), 2015

Heaps of golden corn have taken the place of the baroque gold leaf in Prince Eugene's former Dining Hall; the room contains a large, industrial aviary where two blue-and-gold macaws live. Vanmechelen addresses the issue of the contrast between culture (Baroque) and nature (birds) and establishes a direct connection of our present, the endangered nature, and the baroque past.

PROTECTED PARADISE,
BIENNIAL OF VENICE (IT), 2017

The work highlights the fragility of humanism within the larger story of natural evolution. The cage is made of recycled material and serves as a metaphor for the hysterical state of contemporary society. Every perceived or imaginary threat is followed by some form of internal confinement with enclosures, walls, detention centres, laws and frameworks. All this contradicts the essence of life. Paradise can never be found within walls. Paradise is like life itself: fascinating and terrible, boundless and beautiful. - Koen Vanmechelen

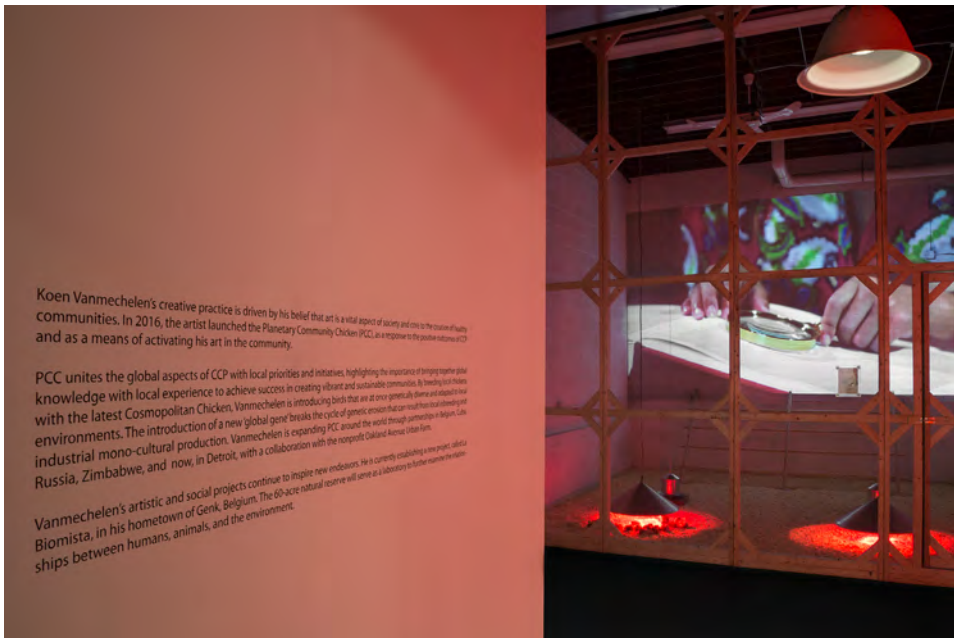
NEVER GREEN
RURART, POITOU- CHARENTES (FR), 2014

There is no green light.
Man has devised lots of systems – political, religious and economic – in an attempt to impose meaning on the chaos of life and to reduce the risk of the unexpected. Engaged in a truly Sisyphean effort, he has tried to cage the complex system of nature, and he has struggled to impose his will on natural systems.
The installation Never Green recreates this inherently human endeavor and subtly challenges the futility of it.

PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ZIMBABWE, HARARE, 2016

In the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Vanmechelen showed an allcompassing, living art installation with a new species of chicken. His surprising collaboration with local communities of Harare explored broader philosophical issues about the future of global communities and our relationship to the world.

ENERGY/MASS
WASSERMAN PROJECTS, DETROIT (US), 2016



Via 2D- and 3D-works, alongside live chickens from the 20th generation of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP) and the Planetary Community Chicken (PCC), the ENERGY/MASS exhibition highlighted the artist's engagement with diversity and duality and spurred the scientific and social debate on balancing productivity with diversity, global with local.

IT'S ABOUT TIME
SERLACHIUS MUSEUMS, MANTTA (FI), 2018

It's About Time offers an in-depth retrospective overview into the unique territory Vanmechelen's art occupies on the edges of art and nature; presenting striking and monumental artworks inside the Serlachius main exhibition space, with his famous breeding program for chickens and pigs outside across the grounds of the park. A deeply ethical artist, his work is concerned about the state of the Earth and a sustainable future for all species. He seeks both symbolically and concretely to open perspectives into a future where people do not exploit nature or each other but live in a state of balance.

INCUBATED WORLDS
ADDIS ABABA (ET), 2018

On 26 April 2018 a unique poultry facility opens in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. Incubated Worlds is an artwork and research center, a combined effort of internationally acclaimed Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen and two ILRI livestock geneticists: Tadelle Dessie and Olivier Hanotte. More than a scientific facility, Incubated Worlds is about harnessing diversity to promote new types of unity and harmony. It reveals art and science as valuable partners in addressing global challenges of sustainable food systems.

THE WORTH OF LIFE
TEATRO DELL'ARCHITETTURA, MENDRISIO (CH), 2019

An extensive review over more than sixty-five works by the artist Koen Vanmechelen: sculptures, paintings, neon, lambda prints and installations set up outside and in the three floors of the Teatro dell'architettura Mendrisio, the new campus building designed by architect Mario Botta. Curated by Didi Bozzini.

CCPPCC
FOOD: BIGGER THAN THE PLATE, V&A LONDEN (UK), 2019

FOOD: Bigger than the Plate investigated the bigger story behind our food, from compost to table. By zooming in on stories of innovative individuals, societies and organisations, the exhibition aimed to focus on a radically new way of eating. Curators Catherine Flood and May Rosenthal Sloan invited Koen Vanmechelen to present his Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and Planetary Community Chicken Project.

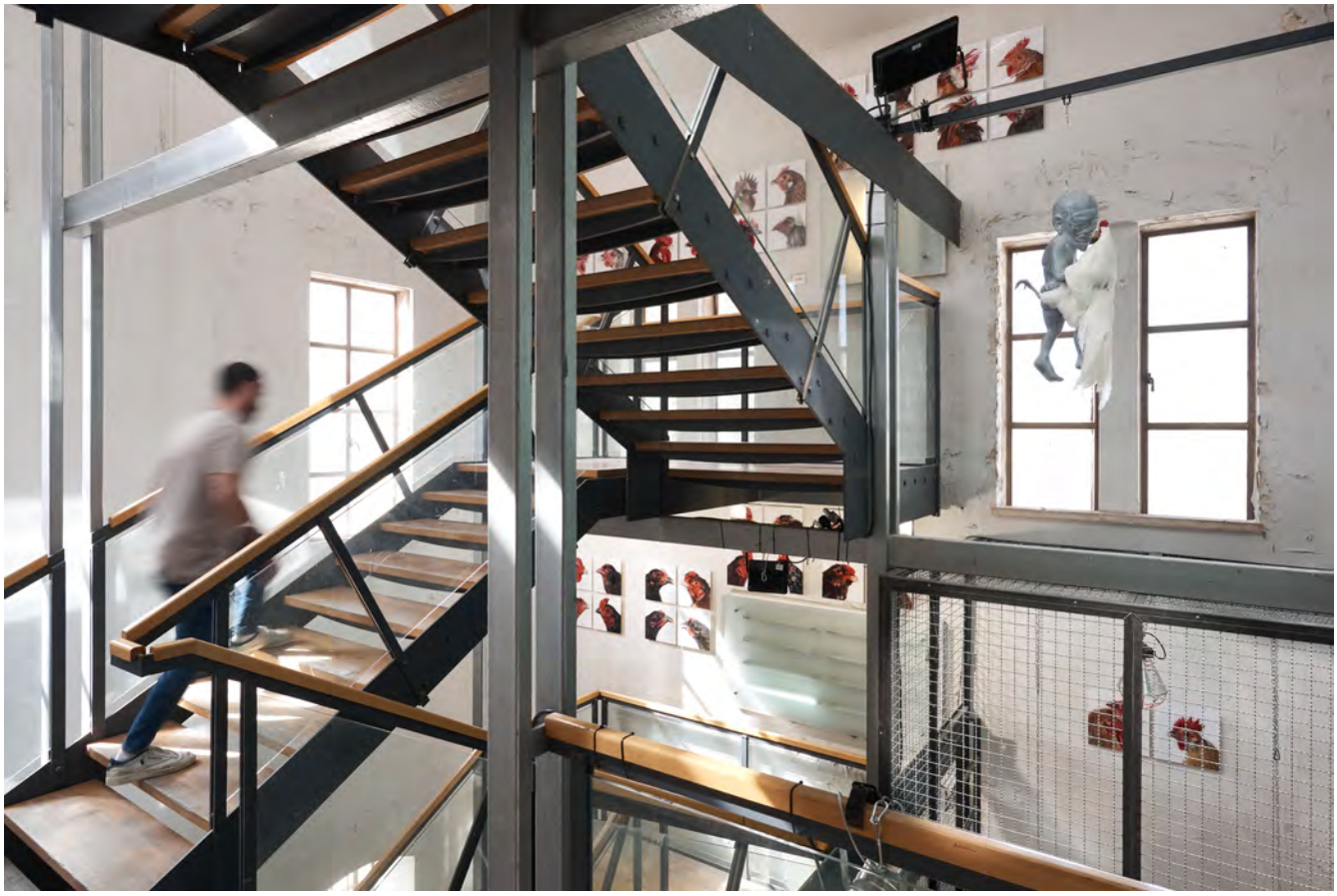
HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
ART WITH ME, TULUM (ME), 2019

Vanmechelen transformed a house on the beach of Tulum into a permanent reminder of the importance of Human Rights. "In this Human Rights House one can feel the origin of life that once rose here out of the water. Here, nature offers a chance to question one's growth. It is a locus of opportunity and danger, where temptation conflicts with finding balance. The Human Rights House reminds us to continuously redefine the definition of communities." - Koen Vanmechelen

COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT
BIENNIAL OF ZAGHREB (HR), 2020

The 25th generation of Koen Vanmechelen's Cosmopolitan Chicken was one of the highlights of the Touch Me festival at the Nikola Tesla Technical Museum HALA V in Zaghreb. Amid the pandemic, this festival lets art explore new forms of coexistence between all that lives, nature and technology.

CROSSQUERY
THE JERUSALEM BIENNALE (IL), 2021



Vanmechelen was the eyecatcher at the 5th edition of the Jerusalem Biennale. At Sha'arei Tzedek, he presented a site-specific installation titled 'Crossquery'. The eerie installation, almost spiritual in nature, dealt with the various stages in life. Vanmechelen: "The essence of this installation is transformation. It's presented in linear form, starting from alpha, with an incubator that represents endless possibilities." Key to Vanmechelen's installation was the Baladi, Israel's iconic indigenous chicken breed.

SEDUZIONE
UFFIZI GALLERY, FIRENZE (IT), 2022

The exhibition 'Seduzione' opened the 2022 season of the world-renowned Uffizi Gallery: 30 artworks by Koen Vanmechelen dedicated to the themes of evolution and hybridization are installed among the museum's classic masterpieces. Curated by Eike Schmidt and Francesca Sborgi.

COSMOPOLITAN RENAISSANCE
CC SCHARPOORD, KNOKKE-HEIST (BE), 2022

In Knokke-Heist, Vanmechelen presents Cosmopolitan Renaissance, an out-of-the-box exhibition that unfolds as a total experience. Besides drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations and videos in the upper and lower hall of Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord, the show also includes performances, outdoor installations, lectures and crossovers with MAAK – Open House for the Arts, and the Zwin Natural Park. Curated by Jo Coucke

MEDUSA'S HOPE
MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES DE LA HABANA (CU),
2022

Medusa's Hope completed Vanmechelens 'triptych of Hope' launched in 2022. Following his earlier call for a Cosmopolitan Renaissance in Seduzione (Uffizi, Florence) and in Knokke-Heist (Belgium). 'My work is about a world in full transition. It is a hopeful call for a reawakening that tilts our perspective toward another existence. In that revolution, we must not forget anyone; hence, Ubuntu; I am because we are. It is vital to portray that new evolution in a location that powerfully reinforces this message. That is why I am in Cuba, a country isolated from the rest of the world.' Curated by Jorge Fernandez

CAROUSEL OF LIFE
MUSE – TRENTO SCIENCE MUSEUM (IT), 2023

During the exhibition "Anima Mundi - La Giostra della Vita" at MUSE - Science Museum of Trento two enchanting carousels by Koen Vanmechelen embody the artist's vision of life and its diversity. Vanmechelen explains, "It is a carousel of hope in the magical creative forces of life, reminding us that we can achieve extraordinary things when we come together to celebrate our differences. But there is also a fallen angel among them." Curated by Beatrice Mosca, artistic director; Stefano Zecchi

SOCRATES TEMPTATION
MUSEO CORRER, VENICE (IT), 2023

Koen Vanmechelen's work Socrates Temptation was featured in the exhibition 'IMAGO IUSTITIAE', at the famous Museo Correr in Piazza San Marco in Venice. The exhibition addressed the theme of the iconography of Justice in art and traverses time. Together with Kendell Geers and Ai Weiwei, Vanmechelen was invited by curator Marina Mattei to create a contemporary work of art for this show, in collaboration with Berengo Studio.

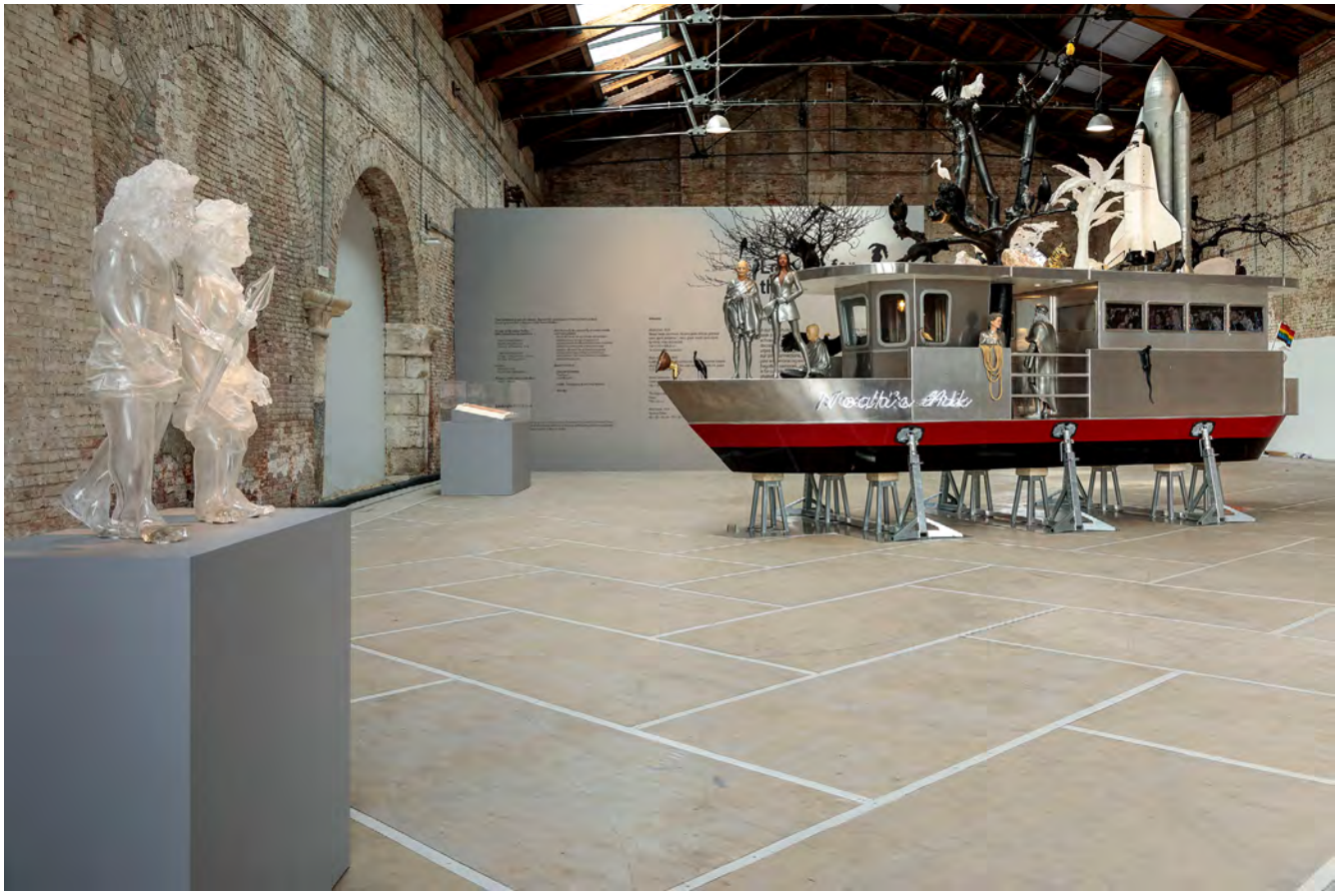
DREAM OF HUMAN NATURE
BRIHATTA ART FOUNDATION, DHAKA (BD), 2023

In his solo exhibition "Dream of Human Nature", Vanmechelen unveils his latest chicken crossbreed. With the Mechelse Aseel, chicken genes from Bangladesh are added to the CCP; a global metaphor for the global cultural and genetic melting pot. In the expo art, science and community come together. The interactive exhibition actively invites visitors to explore how we can dream and create a more sustainable future, and to discover nature as a library of knowledge. The key, states Vanmechelen, is seeking connection with the other, across borders, in the midst of the chaos of real life.

LOOKING FOR THE ARK
VENICE PAVILION, BIENNIAL (IT), 2024

Out of the pool of the Venice Pavilion rises a two-meter-high sculpture of a child in black marble, grasping a bronze anchor, a symbol of security and stability. "Looking for the Ark", stands for hope and resilience. It anchors future generations while glancing at a horizon of possibilities. But the child struggles with the anchor. Seeking steadiness, it is in danger of collapsing under the anchor's weight. The sculpture also reflects Venice's search for a sustainable future.

NOAH'S ARK
BIENNIAL OF VENICE (IT), 2024



At Tesa 99, Vanmechelen presents 'Noah's Ark', a contemporary interpretation of the iconic Venetian water bus — the Vaporetto — transformed into a floating gallery. This vessel, carrying a microcosm of our world, serves as a call to reimagine our world. It reflects the human condition and urges us to navigate the turbulent waters of our existence with awareness, responsibility, and hope. The ark is flanked by by Vanmechelen's diverse installations, guided by the belief that "The Future depends on forgotten memories."

2024
— Art Academy, Bergen (NO)
— Conference on the Global State of Human Rights, Venice (IT)
— Nerdland Festival, Wachtebeke (BE)

2023
— Conference on Community Driven Processes for Climate Responsive Design, Kigali (RW)
— De Montfort University, Leicester (GB-SCT)
— Radbound University, Nijmegen (NL)
— Mysticism — Rituals, Stillness, Rapture, Limburgs Museum, Venlo (NL)

2022
— The Eye of the Needle, Knokke-Heist (BE)
— Riders on the Storm, Magritte room, Knokke-Heist (BE)
— Centro de arte contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana (CU)
— GUM - Gents Universiteitsmuseum, University of Ghent (BE)
— World Art Foundations Conference, Milan (IT)

2021
— Goblal Campus of Human Rights conversation, Venice (IT)
— National Academy of Arts, Sofia (BG)
— Pecha Kucha, Unbore Collective
Beirut rises from the Ashes - UNESCO forum, Venice (IT)
— Fact to Act, Hannah Arendt institute, Mechelen (BE)
— LABIOMISTA, BeMUSEUM Conference, Etion Forum, Gent (BE)

2020
— STARTS European project, Milan (IT)
— New Current, Amsterdam (NL)
— Mindblowers, VUB/KVS, Brussels (BE)
— Pecha Kucha, Unbore
— Intersect Chicago/SOFA (US)
— The Ultimate Crack, China

2019
— Xfestival, UHasselt (BE)
— Food & talk seminar, Foodcamp Finland
— Human Rights Pavilion, OPUS, Mapuche (CL)

2018
— Incubated Worlds, ILRI, Ethiopia
— IT's ABOUT TIME, UNIARTS Helsinki (FIN)

2017
— Tedx, Univeristy of Michigan (US)
— This is not a chicken, Design Indaba (SA)
— Collective Memory, Diplomatic councel on human Rights, EIUC, Venice (IT)

2016
— VLIR-UOS, The Chicken's Appeal, Tour & Taxis, Brussels (BE)
— The Chicken's Appeal, International Livestock Research Institute, Nairobi (KE)
— XIII International Forum, Sculpture Network, Verbeke Foundation, Kemzeke (BE)
— Duo lecture with Maarten Doorman on the social relevance of art, DordtYart, Dordrecht (NL)

2015
— This is Not a Chicken, Het Domein, Sittard (NL)

2014
— The Chicken's Appeal, Vienna Center for Quantum Science and Technology (on invitation of Prof. Dr. Anton Zeilinger, Vienna (AT)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken, Loitering with Intent, Stockholm University of the Arts, Stockholm (SE)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken, New Narratives for Europe, Berlin (DE)
— Arena de Evolución, Feest van de Filosofie, University of Leuven, Leuven (BE)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project, Visualizing Biological Data Conference, Heidelberg (DE)

2013
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken, New Narratives for Europe, Milan (IT)
— Evolution of a Hybrid, Poultry Genetics Symposium, Venice (IT)
— This is not a chicken, Leuphana University, Lüneburg (DE)
— Evolution of a Hybrid, STIMA, Ghent (BE)
— Hybridity in Art and Science, Auslandskulturtagung, Vienna (AT)
— This is not a chicken, Prix Forum Golden Nica, Linz (AT)
— Evolution of a Hybrid, A Vision of the Future, Pavilion 0, Biennial of Venice (IT)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte), Havana (CU)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, CONNERSMITH, Washington (US)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Galerija Kapelica, Ljubljana (SI)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (US)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Cranbrook University, Wayne University, Detroit (US)
— When happiness happens, BOZAR (in cooperation with United Nations), Brussels (BE)

2012

— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Tori Oso (SR)
— The Open University of Diversity, TEDxYouth Flanders, Antwerp (BE)
— The Open Univeristy of Diversity, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing (CN)
— This is not a Chicken, World Appreciative Inquiry Conference, Ghent (BE)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Europe (to the power of N), Berlin (DE)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Bioethics Congress, Rotterdam (NL)
— The Walking egg, Unite for Sight Global Health & Innovation, Yale University (US)

2011

— This is not a chicken, Galerie Für Zeit Genössische Kunst, Leipzig (DE)
— Modified Spaces –C.C.P., with Peter Noever, Guanzhou Museum of Art, Guangzhou (CN)
— In-Vetro – C.C.P., Symposium Transparent vision – the art and science of glass Kijkduin Biënnale (NL)
— The Chicken's Appeal, Pecha kucha, Brussels (BE)

2010 - 2002

— The Chicken's Appeal, TedxFlanders, Antwerp
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, European Conference On Computational Biology, Ghent
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Belgian pavilion World Expo, Shanghai (CN), 2010
— The Accident, Debate with Professor J.-J. Cassiman, Dr. Mike Philips, Dr. Luc Vrielinck, and Peter Adriaenssens, moderator: Indra Dewitte, Museum M, Leuven (BE), 2010
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, PULSE New York (US), 2010
— The Chicken's Appeal, 3rd Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art, Moscow (RU), 2009
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project – Culture and Nature Balance Climat Change Congress, 2009, Kopenhagen (DK), 2009
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken, Debate, World Economic Forum, Davos (CH), 2008
— Day of Hope, Cosmogolem, Jeanne Devos Fonds, Mumbai (IN), 2008
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (UK), 2008
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, Creativity World Forum, Lotto Arena, Antwerp (BE), 2008
— The Walking Egg, Expert meeting Fertility in Developing Countries, Arusha (TA), 2007
— CosmoGolem en Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, The Jacobs Foundation, Zurich (CH)
— The Cosmopolitan Chicken, Natural History Museum, London (GB), 2002

Top TEDXUofM, Michigan (US), 2017
Below Design Indaba, South-Africa, 2017

Top The Eye of the Needle, Cosmopolitan Renaissance (BE) 2022
Below Riders on the Storm, Magritte Room, Grand Casino (BE) 2022

Koen Vanmechelen —
LABIOMISTA, an evolving work of art about the mix of life.

On the foundations of the mining past and the former zoo of Zwartberg (Genk), a project is evolving that transports you into the unique vision of artist Koen Vanmechelen and his life's work in terms of identity, fertility & biocultural diversity. A garden of order and chaos, an arena of culture and nature. Vanmechelen's wonder lab.
As you find your way in the 24-hectare park through an open-air exhibition with many of his (living) artworks and installations, universal societal topics such as diversity and human rights are made concrete and turned into conversation pieces.

In this unique collaboration between artist Koen Vanmechelen and the city of Genk, a shared vision about the potential of identity & diversity takes shape in different ways. LABIOMISTA is a permanent and evolving work of art that invites, challenges and inspires you. It's a hotbed for a wealth of new ideas, creations, projects and collaborations. And it's a meeting place for all the species of this world.

LABIOMISTA also creates new life. In so doing, it inspires and fertilises its environment with energy and initiatives in various cultural, social and economic areas. This creates a profound and unique cross-fertilisation between artist and city, people and society.

KOEN VANMECHELEN

LABIOMISTA is the embodiment of Vanmechelen's artistic and philosophical vision. A renowned artist, he has been working for over 20 years at the intersection of art, community and science. His comprehensive oeuvre includes paintings, sculptures, videos, mixed-media installations and 'living art' projects. His passion is based on the belief in art as a driver of mutual understanding and as a guide in the search for answers to the major challenges of the 21st century, the relationship between nature and culture and in particular the development of sustainable communities.

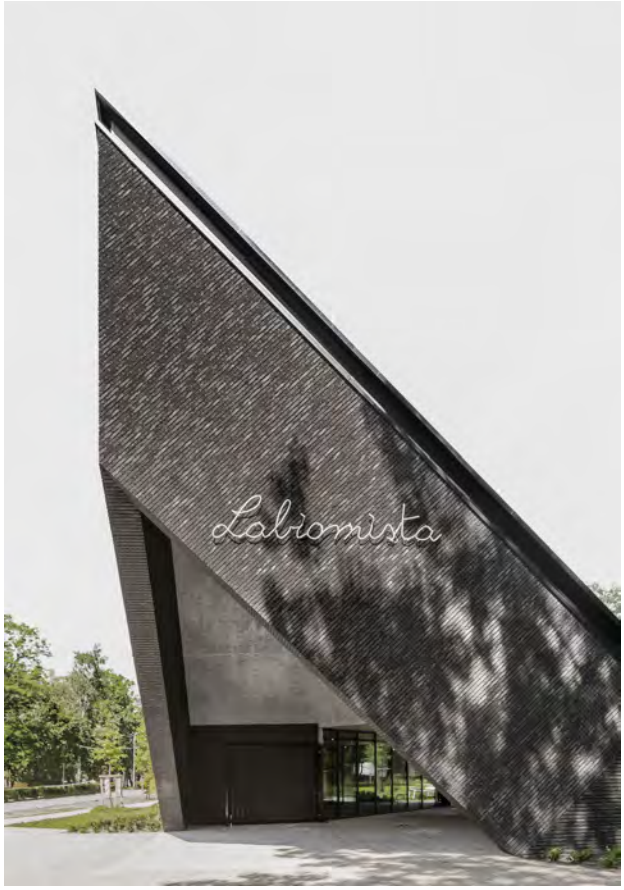
CITY OF GENK

As the most diverse city in Flanders, the city of Genk shares Koen Vanmechelen's vision on diversity as an explanation for the present and a shaper of the future. That's why they are confident that with LABIOMISTA, the artist, together with the city can fertilise Zwartberg's fertile soil and generate experiments and redevelopment. The themes in Koen Vanmechelen's work can be translated to the context of a small-scale, cosmopolitan city like Genk. This constitutes a new, bold approach to urban renewal.

Koen Vanmechelen —
In an experimental way, LABIOMISTA represents my vision on nature, society and life. It will evolve together with my work. Because it's so all-encompassing, it could only have taken shape in a city as diverse as Genk.

The Battery – studio Koen Vanmechelen, exterior view with eagle cage, LABIOMISTA, Genk (BE)
© Koen Vanmechelen, 2018 - Photo by Philippe van Gelooven

Artworks, installation view beneath The Battery – Studio Koen Vanmechelen, LABIOMISTA, Genk (BE) © Koen Vanmechelen, 2018 - Photo by Kris Vervaeke



The Ark, exterior view, entrance building of LABIOMISTA designed by Mario Botta
© Koen Vanmechelen, photo Jeroen Verrecht

PARK AND MEETING PLACE

Half of the 24-hectare area consists of wild nature. LABIOMISTA also houses Koen Vanmechelen's studio and operational headquarters (The Battery), the restored director's residence of the former coal mine, later used by the Zwartberg zoo (now transformed into Villa OpUnDi) and a striking gateway building (The Ark). There is an outdoor exhibition with numerous live artworks and installations, and a space for workshops and education (LabOvo). Renowned Swiss architect Mario Botta designed The Ark and The Battery. Together with Botta, Vanmechelen created an extraordinary conservatory (The Looking Glass) and a huge condor cage as part of his studio.

The park section contains three animal compounds that add up to more than 9,000 m², three ponds and a walkway more than one kilometer long interspersed with a few bridges. The animals in the park play an essential role in Vanmechelen's work. In addition to his famous chicken species, you can also see llamas, Darwin rheas, dromedaries, zebras, white eared pheasants and toucans. In 2024, a new landmark opens: Future Garden, a residence for tapirs.

A SUBSTANTIVE PROJECT, EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY

The cross-pollination between Koen Vanmechelen and the city primarily takes shape as a substantive project. City, neighbourhood and artist all work together to strengthen the local urban fabric. This fits in with the shared vision of supporting sustainable, healthy and vibrant communities by linking local with global, art with society.

LaMouseion, Protected Paradise, LABIOMISTA
© Koen Vanmechelen, photo Kris Vervaeke

That's why the entrance revenue for LABIOMISTA is fully reinvested in the public function of the park and in neighbourhood projects. These projects are masterminded at OpUnDi Genk (Open University of Diversity) which is physically located at Villa OpUnDi.

Adjacent to LABIOMISTA is Nomadland, after a concept developed by Koen Vanmechelen. Nomadland refers to the nomad, the traveller along the Silk Road, which brings together the wealth of different cultures. With its public gardens, picnic areas and an events meadow, it will become the meeting place of choice.

With LaVieBreede, Vanmechelen's artistic and conceptual vision for the area of LABIOMISTA, a next step is taken in the integration, relaunching and strengthening of the neighbourhood. Together with the city of Genk and various partners, a mix of substantive, social, economic and physical projects will be set up in the most vulnerable part of Genk North.

T-REX, Cosmopolitan Culture Park, LABIOMISTA, Genk (BE)
© Koen Vanmechelen, Photo by Kris Vervaeke

Protecting the Other, Protected Paradise, LABIOMISTA, Genk (BE)
© Koen Vanmechelen, photo Kris Vervaeke

Artist Koen Vanmechelen at the Open Global Farm, Oudsbergen (BE)

COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT (2019)

The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP) is a worldwide cross-breeding program with chicken breeds from different countries which Koen Vanmechelen started in 1999. In the CCP, art and science merge. The chicken is much more than a domesticated animal, it is art in itself, a metaphor for humanity and social processes, especially bio and cultural diversity.

The ultimate result of the CCP is a truly Cosmopolitan Chicken, carrying the genes of all the world's chicken breeds. Starting point for all these species was once the Red Jungle Fowl; the original chicken that lives at the feet of the Himalaya. Man took this chicken, spread it all over the world and made an indigenous breed; one that reflects typical cultural characteristics of their community. These descendant breeds are all man-made end-points, even sometimes literally so, in the sense that they are infertile. After so many years of crossbreeding Vanmechelen on the contrary found that each successive generation of hybrids is more resilient, lives longer, is less susceptible to disease, and exhibits less aggressive behavior. Genetic diversity is critical for livable populations.

The diversity that characterises Vanmechelen's work is further also visible in the media he uses; from more traditional (painting, photography) to innovate techniques (Genome Visualization). It also involves a symbiosis of art, science, philosophy, politics and ethics, touching on topics like globalisation, racism, genetic modification and cloning. It is the artist's way of reflecting on the existential questions of individual identity and life.

Since the effect of the crossings on the genetic diversity of the chickens is unknown and can generate important insights, also for the human race, the Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project (CC®P) studies the different hybrids from the CCP. So far, the research proved that the crossing of different races leads to increased genetic diversity, which confirms one of the artist's hypotheses. It is also a fact that the fertility and life span have increased.

The CCP officially started in the millennium year 2000, when Koen Vanmechelen presented his first 'crossing', the Mechelse Bresse, born out of the Belgian species Mechelse Koekoek and the French Poulet de Bresse. Each successive generation of Cosmopolitan Chickens comes from crossbreeding the previous generation with a pure breed. In 2024, the artist's ongoing creation reached, with the Mechelse Jær, its 29th generation; born as a result out of the crossing of the iconic chicken from Norway and the Mechelse Aseel (CCP28).

To date, the hybrid consists of regional breeds of chickens in Belgium, France, England, U.S.A., Germany, The Netherlands, Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Turkey, Cuba, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt, Senegal, Slovenia, Austria, Indonesia, Detroit, Denmark, Finland, Vatican City, Chile, Croatia, Israel, Iceland, Bangladesh and Norway. To secure the future of the project, the genetic material of all the Mechelse hybrids is stored frozen in liquid Nitrogen. The core of the project is neither chicken nor egg, but cross-breeding and the diversity that comes from it. The CCP holds up a mirror to us. Cross-breeding is a practical but also a philosophical necessity, if not a moral duty.

Chido Govera and Koen Vanmechelen distributing the PCC chickens in Zimbabwe, Future of Hope Foundation, Open Global Farm, 2017

Incubated Worlds, an art-science collaboration with ILRI in Ethiopia, 2019

PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN (2016)

The Planetary Community Chicken (PCC) is both a result and a counter to the CCP. With the PCC, Vanmechelen creates chickens for the communities of our planet. Through his work, he tables questions on the monocultural approach of centralized industrial farming and makes us reflect on the importance of local, small scale community farming in sustainable food provision. The project re-enforces Vanmechelen's strong belief in diversity and places his art categorically where it belongs: in the middle of society, engaged with people, always committed.

Modern poultry flocks have become genetically impoverished due to industrial farming and have become more susceptible to diseases, stress and physiological problems. The Planetary Community Chicken project, couples the genetic information of the industrial chicken species to chicken species of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP).

The layout for the project is like this: every year a rooster of the new CCP crossbreed is paired with a regular egg laying chicken from the industry. This chicken absorbs the genetic pool of the CCP rooster and produces a vital community chicken that can provide its host community with eggs. The name of each Planetary Community Chicken generation consists of CC and the year of its creation. The first is called CC_{2016}, meaning Carbon Copy 2016. Every Planetary Community Chicken species will find its own community somewhere on the globe. Starting from a fixed point, the chickens will be sent out and dispersed to other communities around the planet.

The first species introduced in this project was the Mechelse Cemani, the 19th generation of the CCP. It was crossed with the ISA Brown from Hendrix Genetics and formed the CC_{2016} generation.

This project is a metaphor for a new migration and a vehicle to bring art into active communities. The PCC moves from the community gardens, to urban surroundings and further on to agrarian centers and universities. Leaving the academic walls, it travels in its new form to agrarian and urban communities again. The reintegration of the PCC in cities and communities brings us questions and debates on the value of diversity in both food production and migration to our backyards and shopping streets.

The PCC chickens are currently raised in Detroit (USA), Genk (Belgium), Harare (Zimbabwe), and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia).

Artist Koen Vanmechelen at the Open Global Farm, Oudsbergen (BE)

INCUBATED WORLDS

The INCUBATED WORLDS installation was opened on April 26, 2018 at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Ethiopia. It's a unique artistic-scientific project. By integrating both living and visual artworks into scientific research, the installation creates a new paradigm that brings together art, science and social engagement in a symbiotic relationship.

INCUBATED WORLDS investigates how introducing diversity can significantly improve the subsistence and the diet of small farming communities.

It's a collaboration between ILRI's African Chicken Genetics Gains (ACGG) project in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Koen Vanmechelen, in that ACGG-selected chicken breeds are crossed with various chickens from the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project. The aim is the creation of a sustainable, productive chicken breed, a Planetary Community Chicken that will thrive in Sub-Saharan Africa.

LUCY, passports of the parent couple for the crossing between the Duroc and Mangalica pig, 2016

LUCY

LUCY- PEEL PETUUM MOBILE is a collaboration between Koen Vanmechelen and Heyde Hoeve, a collaboration of four pig farmers in Holland that focus on transparency and sustainability in food production.

With LUCY, a bio-diverse pig is created. A new pig that tells the story of the search for a better, more sustainable economical system. After the recent focus on monoculture in farming, the project argues that crossbreeding is essential and the only solution for sustainable production.

LUCY is the result of the crossing between the industrial Duroc and the Mangalica, a hardy type of Hungarian pig. Through an open stable, visitors are offered a unique view in the essential part of the process: the beginning.

The title of the project LUCY - Peel Petuum Mobile embodies all these elements. The primal sow LUCY (first female), Peel (the location of Heyde Hoeve) and Petuum (huge amount of data on diversity) serve as a reference to an infinite process of crossing, a perpetual motion in time and space.

The concept contributes to the wider debate on intensive animal farming. It shows the farm per definition as a generator of diversity and sustainability. The multitude of different animals and techniques makes the farm a mini diversity Hub.

Meeting with the Maasai, Arusha (TZ), 2014 as part of the 'Arena de Evolución - Library of Collected Knowledge' project for the Biennial of Cuba, 2015

SOTWA, 117 × 136 × 36 cm, plexi, neon, cow skin, rope, print on tag, wood, 2016

SOTWA (2014)

SOTWA – meaning umbilical cord – started in 2014 when Koen Vanmechelen visited the Maasai tribe in Arusha as part of his Library of Collected Knowledge project for the Biennial of Havana. With SOTWA, Koen Vanmechelen explores the benefit of crossbreeding between cattle stock in Africa, where climate change increasingly threatens the tribe's traditional cattle herding.

By adopting a Kenyan cow and donating it to the Maasai tribe in Tanzania, fresh blood and DNA are injected to the herd, strengthening the resilience of the herd through crossbreeding and thus offering it a more viable chance for the future. While the tribe enjoys the actual benefits from the cattle; flesh, milk and blood, the artist receives the skin and horns when the cow dies as materials to create an artwork.

Installation view, AWAKENER, Wilford X, Temse (BE), 2016

MECC (2016)

In this project called Mushrooms, Egg, Chicken, Camelids, Koen Vanmechelen explores the boundaries dividing different species. Real crossings are not possible, but maybe substances from one organism can migrate to another organism of another species. MECC is an innovative art/research project, supported by IWT (Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology) in which researchers in molecular virology from Ghent University and Flanders Institute for Biotechnology collaborate with the artist to explore possible interactions between mammals (camelid), birds (chicken) and mushrooms.

Winter, LABIOMISTA © Koen Vanmechelen, photo Stoffel Hias

Winter, LABIOMISTA © Koen Vanmechelen, photo Alix Spooren

The project aims to show that in some way we are all related and interconnected, part of the same universe. Man is also part of a planetary superorganism. He is bioculturally connected with all other species, some of which can be of vital importance for our survival. The art is finding the appropriate intermediary agents that form the bridge between the species; here chickens and mushrooms.

From a scientific standpoint, the possible transfer of immunologic substances and resistance will be studied. Dromedary antibodies promise to be a powerful weapon against viruses, but their merits cannot be fully delivered to humans yet. In studying the chickens, the focus lies on the Mx gene, which provides natural protection against various viruses, including bird flu. The Mx gene of monoculture chickens, however, barely demonstrates any antiviral activity. This might be linked to the limited genetic diversity of various artificial chicken breeds. The hypothesis is that the greatly increased genetic diversity of the Cosmopolitan Chicken can reinforce the antiviral activity of the Mx gene.

In a collaboration with the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering, Laboratory of Tropical and Subtropical Agronomy and Ethnobotany of the UGent rice or spelt are added to the circle, hereby creating an integrated farming system for a village community in which rice cultivation, alpaca, chicken and mushroom are interconnected. This model serves as a scientific illustration of food sovereignty at a local level, investigating if raw materials can be more efficient and more environmentally friendly deployed in the creation of a local food system as a valuable and viable alternative to more centralized, industrial systems.

LAMA WINTER

The Cosmopolitan Culture Park at LABIOMISTA is home to Winter, a llama who has gained global fame. She joined the herd 20 years after Ohm and Padma, Vanmechelen's first llamas. Winter is the star of research conducted by Xavier Saelens (University of Ghent and VIB) and Jason McLellan (University of Texas) in the fight against the coronavirus.

In 2016, researchers found unique antibodies in Winter the llama. These can block coronaviruses such as MERS and SARS. Further research showed that this antibody also blocks the new COVID-19 virus. The discovery of this antibody in Winter the llama may well form the basis of a possible drug for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.

With Winter the llama, LABIOMISTA has reinforced its role as ground zero of a new era in which art, science and nature form the building blocks of a new paradigm, in which respect for mutual knowledge takes centre stage.

Cosmocafe in Chile

HUMAN RIGHT PAVILION (2019)

During the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, Koen Vanmechelen heralded the birth of the Human Rights Pavilion, an evolving artwork that will take shape over the course of the following years. At the next Biennale, Vanmechelen will present his completed OPUS, as a platform for a recurring international human rights pavilion.

The project came about in collaboration with international partners: the Global Campus of Human Rights, Fondazione Berengo and the MOUTH Foundation.

Roaming the planet, the pavilion-to-be will take shape through contact with persons and organizations involved with or interested in human rights. At all locations, encounters and conversations will be encouraged via so-called SoTO (Survival of The Other) dialogues in Cosmocafes. Local hubs, 'free spaces' to debate the conditions for sustainable coexistence of individuals and human cultures with each other, and with other species on the planet. The Cosmocafes bring together thinkers and dreamers, visionaries and realists. Crossing over disciplinary boundaries and interconnecting global and local perspectives. The encounters are breeding ground for new knowledge and insights. The conversations are art.

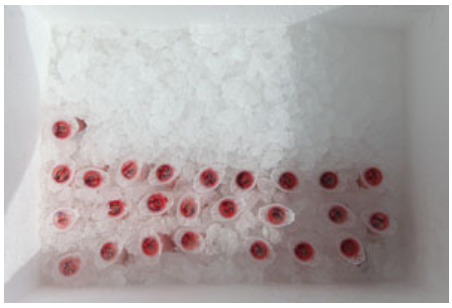
Art as a Human Right.

Cosmogolem at the National Domestic Workers Federation in Mumbai, India, 2008

Cosmogolem at The Future of Hope Foundation, Zimbabwe, 2014

COSMOGOLEM (2014)

Not every child that exits the womb arrives into a world it deserves. For these children, there is the CosmoGolem: the wooden protector of Koen Vanmechelen that brings relief to children in need. Although himself always silent, this giant statue makes children talk. Although closed – apart from the hatch – he gives them a chance to open up. Because the CosmoGolem is always on the move, he brings cultures together. CosmoGolems are spreading over the planet, often supported by sister cities or twin towns. From India to Nicaragua, from Tanzania to Belgium the CosmoGolem gives children a face. The NGO CosmoGolem coordinates this project and has two honorary members: human rights activist Jeanne Devos and child and adolescent psychiatrist Peter Adriaenssens (KULeuven).



Bloodsamples of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project

CC®P (2008)

This unique artistic-genetic research project started with the cooperation between Vanmechelen and human geneticist Jean-Jacques Cassiman (KULeuven). The Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project or CC®P, which aims to study the different crossbreeds produced by Koen Vanmechelen, is relevant, because the effect of the crossings on the genetic diversity of the chickens is unknown and could generate valuable insights. This research project is also potentially applicable to the human population. The same process of the CCP namely also takes place in the world population. Genomes are being merged by individuals from different regional groups, not by the entire population simultaneously. Even though individuals possess the same genetic roots, over the years mankind has acquired a great deal of genetic diversity. The chicken has proven a useful model for a better understanding of the function of the human genome.

Cosmopolitan Chicken Project_In-Vetro, Mediaruimte, Brussels (BE), 2011

MOUTH (2016)

The MOUTH Foundation can be summarized as: food and philanthropy. Philanthropy means etymologically "the love of humanity"; in the sense of "caring", "nourishing", "developing and enhancing" what it means to be human: improving the quality of life or the development potential of humans and communities. A conventional modern definition is "private initiatives, for public good, focusing on quality of life," which combines an original humanistic tradition with a social scientific aspect developed in the 20th century.

Closely linked to Vanmechelens art-science-community projects, the MOUTH Foundation aims to form a nerve center for the study of biodiversity in food and food production. It offers the possibilities for related scientific research and for projects investigating possible social, economic and ecological impact of biocultural diversity. Starting from the Planetary Community Chicken (PCC) project, the foundation supports research into the nutritional benefits and opportunities of the new crossings, and drives the reintegration of the PCC back to the communities of the world.

The Walking Egg © Koen Vanmechelen

THE WALKING EGG

Koen Vanmechelen and the international fertility expert dr. Willem Ombelet crossed paths in this project. Its central focus is to enable access to affordable fertility care for childless women/couples through a multidisciplinary and global approach. Art serves as a medium to facilitate this. The Walking Egg (TWE) is more than a noble idea. It left the ivory tower of science and the laboratory of art. It wants to inject fertility in sterility and advocates the right to reproduction in all developing countries. Every woman has a right to an offspring. The foundation TWE collaborates with the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) and the World Health Organization

Winter, LABIOMISTA © Koen Vanmechelen, photo Stoffel Hias

Winter, LABIOMISTA © Koen Vanmechelen, photo Alix Spooren

LAMOUSEION (2021)

More than 2000 years ago, the astronomer Aristarchus of Samos theorised that not the Earth but the Sun was the fixed centre of the known universe. He came to this conclusion within the walls of the Mouseion. In ancient Alexandria, this famous (Wiki) was a unique cradle of knowledge, a venerable place dedicated to the muses – the nine goddesses of the arts and sciences. It was the home of music and poetry. Of philosophy and literature. The fount of mathematics and physics. Of astronomy, biology and historiography.

LaMouseion is our contemporary re-creation of this historic antecedent. A new locus for experiments at the crossroads of nature and culture. A new beginning – Ab Ovo – starting with the egg.

Just like in ancient Greece, LaMouseion brings together free spirits in their tireless quest for answers, knowledge and wisdom. They get to work in three large wooden boxes, each 6 by 3.5 metres in size, bordering the southern edge of Protected Paradise, which is part of LABIOMISTA. Each of the wooden boxes is named after a pillar of evolution, i.e.: diversity, fertility and immunity. These are also the main themes of Koen Vanmechelen's work. These 'think-boxes' are open for anyone who wants to write, research or brainstorm, inspired by the environment of LABIOMISTA. Visitors are asked to leave behind an account of the knowledge they acquired, which is added to LABIOMISTA's Library of Collected Knowledge (L.O.C.K.) The project grew out of Vanmechelen's belief that we should consult, pool and stimulate the world's immensely huge, unknown and untapped reserves of brain power, in order to find solutions for the enormous problems that our planet faces. After all, it's connections like this that create innovation. The goal is to discover, to remember and to cherish. But also to question, to learn, to translate and to pass on. With and within this world. Without any limitations. In LaMouseion, you're allowed to think the Unthinkable.

LaMouseion's first project is called The Unthinkable Experiment. In the Unthinkable Experiment, we pass on the monopoly on knowledge to the new generations. Coming out of a series of global lockdowns, we're looking for new knowledge, for its diversity and freshness. Based on generosity and curiosity, critical thinking, solidarity and responsibility. Inspired by the environment of LABIOMISTA. Sheltered by the freedom of the arts.

Together with his partners LABIOMISTA, VUB/ULB, KULeuven, Global Campus of Human Rights, MOUTH Foundation, OpUnDi Genk and various local associations, Vanmechelen invited young people to work on various chapters for a library of the future; among others Chapter Freedom, Generosity, Black Stork Baby, Hope and The Future of Education.

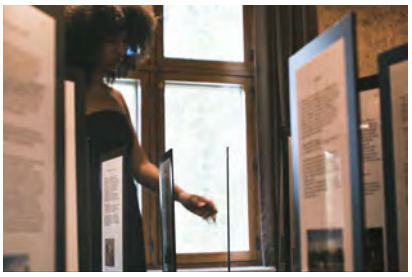
Enter the fascinating universe of Koen Vanmechelen and discover video's on the various projects and on his studio LABIOMISTA at our vimeo channel;

www.vimeo.com/koenvanmechelen

— Koen Vanmechelen, 2018
A one minute introduction to the world of Koen Vanmechelen

— CCP-PCC, 2018
Video on Koen Vanmechelen's Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and Planetary Community Chicken

— LABIOMISTA, 2020
Video about LABIOMISTA, Koen Vanmechelen's 24ha Park in Genk (BE)



— SEDUZIONE, the Uffizi, 2022
Video on Koen Vanmechelen's solo exhibition Seduzione at The Uffizi Gallerie in Firenze (IT)

— Cosmopolitan Renaissance, 2022
Video on Koen Vanmechelen's solo exhibition Cosmopolitan Renaissance in Scharpoord (BE)

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