

Vanmechelen launches his new artistic headquarters in Genk

GENK - On Wednesday, December 9th, Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen will officially launch La Biomista, the new artistic site that he is developing together with the city of Genk. Among those attending will be the renowned Swiss architect Mario Botta, Flemish culture minister Sven Gatz and a delegation of urban innovators from Detroit.

La Biomista, literally “mix of life”, is Koen Vanmechelen’s (50) new headquarters. It will be the central hub from which the renowned artist manages multidisciplinary projects such as the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, the Walking Egg, and the CosmoGolem. “Completing the first stage of the works, the studio will be built after a design by star architect Mario Botta,” says Vanmechelen. “The renovations to the former director’s villa of the old mine and zoo are ongoing.” At a later stage, a wildlife park will be constructed for the animal species that play a role in Vanmechelen’s work. “We hope to finish by 2018.”

Numerous prominent figures will attend the ceremony on December 9. Among them Mario Botta, whose enigmatic design is in tune with Genk’s coal-mining past. “This is my first black building, a reference to coal, the DNA of the city of Genk,” says the architect who also built the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco and the Watari Museum in Tokyo. “And its also my first building designed specifically for both humans and animals.”

Flemish culture minister Sven Gatz will also be in attendance, as will be a delegation from Detroit (Michigan), consisting of three thinkers around urban renewal: the industrialist Gary Wasserman, city planner and slow food activist Kathryn Underwood, and Dan Carmody, a specialist in the development of non-profit community projects. Genk is in the illustrious company of Havana and Detroit as being one of the cities boasting one of Vanmechelen’s Open Universities of Diversity. The artist recently also launched a community chicken project in Detroit.

La Biomista will also start up innovative nutritional initiatives in Genk. Mayor Wim Dries is very enthusiastic: “The city is very happy to participate in La Biomista because of the large incubator value of this unique project. La Biomista has great allure for the city and a clear social and scientific value. It can create a laboratory environment for socio-cultural diversity and connect the urban to the non-urban.”

The official launch in the evening is part of a full-day programme. The day starts with a visit to Vanmechelen’s current studio in Hasselt, followed by a trip to the artist’s breeding centre in Meeuwen-Gruitrode and some urban projects in Genk, Flanders’ most intercultural city. During the second part of the evening ceremony, DNA from the chicken species Vanmechelen uses to breed community chickens in Genk, Detroit, and Harare (Zimbabwe) will be exchanged. Vanmechelen: “DNA is the building block of my work. In each city, a Book of Genomes will be kept in a special vault with the genome of its urban chicken.”

“Every organism is looking for another organism to survive,” Vanmechelen concludes. “From the start, La Biomista will actively seek collaboration with other institutions and centres. But first, we connect with the Genk community. Together we make the difference.”

EDITOR’S NOTE

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Images and more information can be downloaded on [Google Drive](#)

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