

Art trail Triennial in Bruges starts: "We are playing with the image of the city"

Kristien Bonneure
Sat 08 May 10:24

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VRT NWS

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Article by Kristien Bonneure
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The triennial art event [Triennale in Bruges](#) in 2021 will sail under the banner "Trauma", a word that can include both "dream", "space" or really "trauma". Curator Till-Holger Borchert: "We chose this theme for a long time before corona, but reality is catching up with us."

“We want to look behind the Bruges postcard

13 artists and architects from home and abroad set to work on the theme. Their often striking and spectacular work can be viewed for free in special locations and often hidden, lesser-known places. Till Holger-Borchert: "It is a journey of rediscovery. We are playing with the well-known image of Bruges." His colleague curator Michel Dewilde agrees: "We want to look behind the *picture-perfect* Swiss-Alps picture of Bruges. Below the waterline, below the unruffled. Because this city has so many histories. And what then emerges are wondrous but also threatening stories."

The works of art tell about dreams and nightmares, or about what is visible and what is hidden, with a hint to the most famous book about Bruges, "Bruges-la-morte" by Georges Rodenbach.

“I want to upgrade the seamstresses

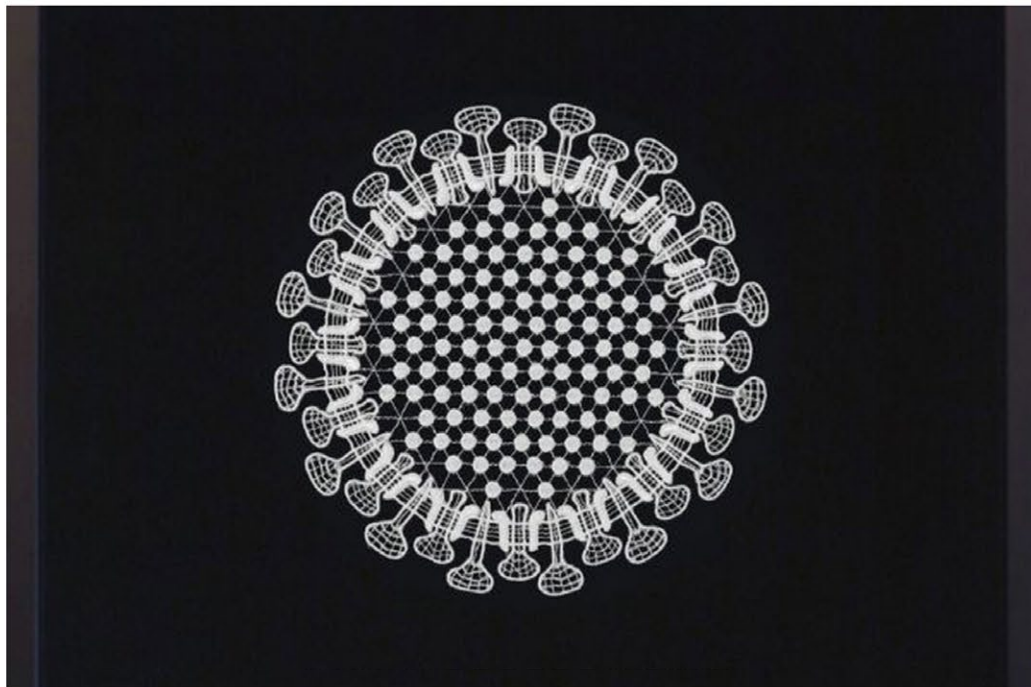
The festive colorful dream is provided by the American textile artist **Amanda Browder**. Together with hundreds of volunteers, she sews pieces of fabric together to cover buildings in the future. That is somewhat delayed due to corona; there is already a digital print over the water at the Verversdijk, the place where cloth was colored in the Middle Ages. "I want to upgrade the seamstresses, the weavers, everyone who works with textiles," says Browder, "just think of the wool or lace that were so important to Bruges. Often women's work that was unjustly not noticed."

“Art in public space brings people together

Amanda Browder asked and received piles of fabric scraps from the people of Bruges and set up a sewing workshop. "Public art brings people together. To pin fabric, learn to sew. Later, when the work is on display, residents can say: look, that piece is mine, or that pattern reminds me of something." The creation process is the most important, Browder points out. Her work "Happy coincidences" is an eminently social project. During the summer there will be three huge "quilts" hanging in Bruges; a huge printed preview has already been stretched over the water at the Verversdijk.

Corona side

More textiles from the American **Laura Splan**, who works at the intersection of art, design and science. She is fascinated by the shape of viruses. And so the first lace with the typical corona spines took shape. Fittingly, it hangs next to a video installation by Splan in the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Potterie museum, where plague victims were cared for long ago.



Hermetic black

For the nightmare of the Bruges Triennial, you have to be in the church of the Grootseminarie. The German **Gregor Schneider** built a hermetic labyrinth of black velvet there. You enter the church gate, are swallowed up by the night and after a few moments you feel completely lost. There is nothing for it but to shuffle along carefully and by feel, until there is literally dim light at the end of the tunnel. Not for claustrophobics. The installation is called "Black Lightning" and is reminiscent of "The Hermetic Black", a novel by Marguerite Yourcenar, set in medieval Bruges.



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For people without a fear of heights there is "Strangler" in the beautiful garden of the Gezellehuis (see photo above this article). Mexican artist **Héctor Zamora** built a fluorescent scaffolding and spiral staircase around a huge pine. Like a creeper that threatens the tree. Zamora: "I want to show the tension between the organic and the human structures. The tree is of course a universal symbol. With public art like this you have to speak an open language." Anyone who ventures to the top has a beautiful panorama at a height of 30 meters over a relatively unknown corner of Bruges. On the ground floor, the bust of Gezelle, surrounded by fluorescent scaffolding, watches everything.

Communist Natasha in the Beguinage

Polish artists **Joanna Malinowska** and **CT Jasper** brought a copy of an old communist statue to Bruges. It was once a "gift" from the Poles to the Soviet "liberators" and was called "Natasha" by the population. In 2021 Natasha carries the symbols of the feminist struggle in Poland against the restriction of the right to abortion and other women's rights. "In that respect, we were better off in the Soviet years than we are now," says Joanna Malinowska. It is no coincidence that the statue is in the Beguinage, between the houses where devout, but at the same time very independent women lived.

“How hospitable are we?”

In the shade of the trees on the Burg, where St. Donaas Church once stood, the Tunisian-Ukrainian-German **Nadia Kaabi-Linke** has erected a round bench covered with iron spikes as if to scare pigeons away. The work "Inner circle" has many meanings, she explains. It's about closed circles and clubs, where you belong or just don't. About the human urge to control all nature: "Chasing pigeons away with iron pins? Those birds that symbolize freedom and peace?" But also about (in)hospitality towards migrants and refugees. Or about the question of how accessible public space still is. You can't sit on the round bench, but the first villain has already aimed an apple at it.

The "Colonnade" on the Komvest, on the northern edge of Bruges, also plays with "in" and "out", inside and outside. The structure of **Gijs Van Vaerenbergh** looks like a fallen forest or a Greek temple after an earthquake, with thick columns of rust metal. The architect duo Gijs Van Vaerenbergh is known for their see-through steel church in Borgloon and for an equally rust-colored labyrinth in C-mine.

Gijs Van Vaerenbergh is one of the three Belgian participants in the Bruges Triennial, alongside **Nadia Naveau**, who has colorful masks and ribbons reflected in the water of the quiet Augustijnenrei, and **Hans Op de Beeck**, whose work requires some patience. Due to corona, his "Danse macabre", a stationary full-size carousel, will not be ready until June 10. It will be a mysterious, petrified, gray-colored merry-go-round next to the baroque Walburgakerk.

The Bruges Triennial runs from May 8 to October 24 and is free. Almost all outdoor works can be viewed 24/7. For the group exhibition "The porous city" in the Poortersloge and for some other locations you do have to make a reservation. [All information about the Triennial can be found here](#).