**PRESS RELEASE**

**Same Same but Different**

**BC architects & studies & materials**

**09.04 - 07.08.22 in Z33, House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture**

**Architecture as ‘game changer’**

Raw materials are becoming scarce, the impact of traditional forms of extraction on the environment, nature, as well as the social impact and global systems of inequality that they help maintain, requires different thinking and new practices that should lead to greater sustainability. Extraction does not have to equate to emptying or further depleting the earth. Architecture in particular can be an important game changer in this story, precisely because of the major impact it can have on the pursuit of a more sustainable environment.

The exhibition 'SAME SAME, BUT DIFFERENT' in Z33 focuses on the theme of exploitation from the perspective of architecture. In this project we want to critically question the current system of resource use in our built environment and propose alternative ways of thinking and working.

On the one hand, three projects that are presented focus is on the process of prototyping and sampling, a necessity to make material applications possible.

On the other hand, an entire space is curated by students of the postgraduate Building Beyond Borders (UHasselt). They explore the potential of new systems in the building world where extraction is thought from regenerative materials and 'urban harvesting'. In all areas there is a great need for a paradigm shift in architecture. This lab will be supported by a public program that will run throughout the exhibition.

**The Act of Building**

BC architects & studies and BC materials have built a discourse with 'the Act of Building' that seeks to shape the building process in an alternative way. They experimented and built in different contexts and with different programs, actors, techniques and collaborations: a women's home and kindergartens in Morocco, a library in Burundi, but also a community center in Edegem and a bakery oven for Bokrijk. A project is always much more than the realization of a building. BC is always looking to explore the boundaries of building culture and to explore geographical contexts, processes and techniques.

The act of building is action and discourse at once. Building is the complex effort of a community through classes and specializations, materials and technologies. Building impacts and expresses values and ideas that have emerged in a broad network around a specific project. Many people, effort and resources are activated in the building process. The act of building thus has the potential for change. At BC architects & studies, they believe that in order to have a positive impact on society, they need to focus not only on the design of infrastructure, but also on rethinking the process of its realization. “We take on the role of implementer, we transfer knowledge, we develop and produce materials, we tell stories about what the future can look like, and we think about the reorganization of the community. Through process design, an architectural expression of a different kind of future appears - a utopia for realists; how something is built determines what is built.”

**We’re doing the “same but different”**

The title of the exhibition "Same Same but Different" is based on the idea that we are intrinsically doing nothing new. What is different than before is that we link this rediscovered knowledge to our current and new social, political and architectural contexts. The materials and educational and architectural processes on display are similar to how architecture was done in the past and in certain contexts. In this exhibition you will see how that knowledge is applied to a completely changed society. This makes the process innovative and brings new themes to the table.

The most obvious example is BC materials: the cooperative produces building materials based on clay, sand and gravel. This is something that has been done for thousands of years. We have simply linked this to the earthmoving of yards in the city.

“*When BC started doing architecture with local materials, we were working within a niche of the architecture world. Little people were considering these materials as possible alternatives to certain architectural constructions. Little architects were hybrid in their work and goals; developing and researching materials while designing and constructing buildings. Today many topics such as vernacular architecture, ecological materials, … are becoming more and more mainstream. The problems were there already 10 years ago, but they are getting bigger each year. They can’t be unseen. Therefore we look more and more to possible solutions, to alternative ways, to different visions, … I think BC, in their vision and projects, manages to materialize the search of many architects, designers, … who want to do things differently.”*

In ancient times, old stone buildings were also used as quarries for new stone buildings. The principle of reuse/circular building/urban mining is nothing new, but the society in which it happens is completely different today. The counterculture movement of the 1960s took the first steps of the path we take with BC today in many ways.

- The concept of "sustainability" as we know it today, first appeared in 1987 in the famous Brundtland Report (also titled "Our Common Future") prepared by several countries for the UN. This formed one of the main lines of the exhibition at the 19th Oslo Trienal in 2013; "Behind the Green Door" by ROTOR.

- "The whole Earth catalog" by Steward Brand (the first issue came out in 1968 - see also this article in the Guardian) is one of the works from that period that embodies the search for some sustainable transition. We are so small compared to these fantastic thinkers. We are mostly following their ideas in a changed society. We're doing the "same but different".

- "Architecture Without Architects" by Bernard Rudofsky (64s) shows the intrinsic power of vernacular architecture. An architecture of pragmatism.

- Founded in 1979, CRAterre, as a European center, has developed guidelines to enable earth as a material within the industrial scale of our cities.

**Themes within the exhibition**

The exhibition in Z33 consists of 4 themes that reflect on the way raw materials are extracted and used: geo-sourced, urban sourced, bio-sourced and urban harvesting. Within each theme 1 project of BC architects will be highlighted.

***Theme 1: Geo-sourcing***

**Project WOODSTOCK**

*Project Description:*off-grid vacation house
*Location:*private (BE)
*Client:*private
*Architect:*BC architects & studies
*Structural engineer:*BASbvba
*Technical engineer:*EA+ / Robuust
*Landscape architects:*LAMA landscape
*Budget:*/
*Surface:*650 m2
*Concept:*2019

A vacation home floats over the river bank in southern Belgium.

The design consists of a circular wooden structure with living area and three new natural stone cores built from the material of the surrounding landscape. These natural stone cores consist of the technical areas, the sanitary areas and the additional sleeping areas.

The house stands on pilotis as as matter of returning space to nature and allows the valley to reconnect to previously separated ecosystems along both sides of the original development. By suspending the living deck above the riverbank, the house gives a 360-degree view of the breathtaking landscape. The facade is conceived in such a way that it can be opened and evoke the feeling that the living area is part of the forest and natural environment. While the living area is more outward facing, the spaces in the stone volumes are more inward facing. The stone volumes contain all the personal spaces and are fully designed for intimacy.

The stone and brick base of the previous house has been preserved and serves as the foundation for the project's new garden terrace. The roof mimics the material of the mountain behind. The new building is placed longitudinally in the site, marking the edge of the forest and floating like a boat over the river bank.

***Theme 2: Urban Sourcing***

**USQUARE**

*Project Description:*Project Usquare
*Location:*Brussels, Elsene (BE)
*Client:*ULB - VUB
*Architect:*BC architects & studies and evr-architecten
*Restauration:* Callebaut architecten
*engineering:* VK engineers
*Budget:*12.266.271,06 € (VAT excl.)
*Surface:*9035 m2
*Concept:*2018
*Status:*Laureate 2018 / in progress

We show the public project USquare. A project in collaboration with engineers EVRBAS bvba. We focus on the earthbased materials.

Complete design assignment in multidisciplinary team concerning the renovation and reallocation of several buildings on the site of the old barracks in Ixelles.

The former barracks of Ixelles are iconic buildings in the district and the city close to the university campuses of the ULB and VUB. This location offers real potential for redevelopment as an international university site and new urban district. The complete design brief includes the renovation and re-use of 7 historic buildings for university and neighborhood facilities: a research center, an international welcome center, an experience center, the Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BIAS) and a sustainable food market. As part of a larger project, this operation is the first concrete realization of the Usquare project.

We start from the existing study made by MSA+IDEA+ORIGIN. This involves the demolition of buildings C' and A', with the intention of opening up the site from Boulevard Général Jacques (Boulevard GJ). We maintain this intention, but propose an alternative regarding demolition of buildings C' and A', through reprogramming and redesign of buildings C' and A'. In doing so, we still want to open up the site to Boulevard GJ. We therefore think that the urban design of the site cannot be viewed separately from the architectural design of the buildings. The architectural proposal that we make focuses strongly on circulation, multi-use, long term design, and to make this possible we reinterpret the intention of the existing study by MSA+IDEA+ORIGIN. In doing so, we start from the following considerations:

1) the Etterbeek train station and streetcar stop, metro line 5, the proximity of VUB campus, the intersection between Boulevard GJ and Kroonlaan: The center of gravity of people and mobility flows is at the southeast corner of the site.

2) Boulevard GJ is a busy traffic artery with noise pollution.

3) Building C'' has little architectural value and hides the architectural and heritage value of buildings J and J'.

4) The lower horizontal circulation axis within the site in the above study dead-ends at building C''.

5) Building C' can be designed so that this space encompasses the reception lobby of the International Revival House. A covered plaza where the operation of the site can show itself to the general public.

We propose the following interventions compared to the study. These are necessary to make the site work optimally within the urban fabric and to make the design multi-purpose and circular in the long term.

1) We propose to demolish building C'' and organize a plaza here. The site will thus be opened up horizontally. Buildings J and J'' will be restored to their former glory. Building C will have a square next to it and will be located as a corner building at the public center of gravity of the site.

2) We propose to program the series of buildings B, A', A, C', C in this way: building C gets the most public function of experience center and at the other end building B gets the most private function of living, with a gradient public-private between the two. In the middle of this public-private axis, the programmatic center of gravity is in building A with research center, reception house and BIAS.

3) We propose not to demolish buildings A' and C', but to renovate them and use them as programmed connectors between the Boulevard GJ. This screens the interior site from acoustic nuisance from the Boulevard GJ, while creating views and circulation between Boulevard and interior site.

In this way we get a building along the Boulevard that can work as 1 whole instead of 3 separate buildings. We consider that 1 building is the only possible way to have a compact building, instead of 3 separate buildings that each need their circulation, access and other systems. 1 building also makes long term multi-use more possible than 3 separate buildings.

Finally, the site becomes fordable in the north-south direction via the renovated connectors C' and A', and the west-east axis across the courtyard of honor is extended from street to street across the site.

***Theme 3: Bio-sourced***

**Lot 8**

*Project Description:* A project by Atelier LUMA in collaboration with BC (architects & studies & materials) and Assemble
*Location:* Arles (Fr)
*Local architect:* ODA

*Structural engineer:* Betrec, Chris Posma
*Surface:* 2500m2
*Concept:* 2020
*Status:* Construction phase

A project in collaboration with Assemble studio and Atelier LUMA for Atelier LUMA and the LUMA foundation. We only show the parts of the project which are constructed in biosourced materials.

Atelier LUMA develops bioregional materials based on straw, algae, salt, soil, stone, mycelium, ... and plans to implement its headquarters in the Parc des Ateliers in Arles France.

BC architects and Assemble design according to the principles of bioclimatic, bio-based, low-tech and circular construction. Several new materials are being developed from bioregional waste streams. To this end, R&D processes will be set up with Atelier LUMA whereby the successful results will be implemented in the project. Ultimately, a radical pilot project on circular construction will be developed, via a multi-purpose, adaptable, flexible building system introducing prefabrication techniques, all within an educational process creating capacity among local crafts and professionals.

The LUMA studio consists of a public reception area with Resource Center, and a private workspace with laboratory infrastructure, and a workshop for processing bioregional materials. Cooling and heating is done through cold storage of a large amount of ice under the ground which feeds an energy system, and outdoor spaces combine algae culture with water purification principles.

The project is a model project in France and abroad, with several innovations that are being discussed with insurance companies, control agencies and public institutions in order to anchor these innovations in a changing building culture.

***Theme 4: Urban Harvesting***

Scarce and expensive resources, climate change, pollution, social inequality, ... Our imperative consumer society urgently requires a new approach to the urban and non-urban environment. The traditional view of the city, as a place where people live and consume resources, must change. How can it also become a place where people produce their own resources? The research on "urban harvesting" looks at how a city can reorganize itself and make the most of all its possibilities. It is a positive contribution to urban needs, reduces the negative effects of consumption or limits inflows. This requires a high level of organization that has not been explored before.

This separate space in the exhibition is in the hands of students from the Building Beyond Borders’ postgraduate program (UHasselt). For six months they explored the possibilities of 'urban harvesting' in Brussels.

“*As students****,*** *we were challenged to curate the last room in order to deal with and take a position about the importance of the distribution of the knowledge we are creating.”*

***Projects and partners***

[**Atelier LUMA**](https://www.atelier-luma.org/)

Assemble and BC collaborate on the project of the Magasin Electrique (shown in the exposition) in collaboration with Atelier LUMA.

**BBB Postgraduate (UHasselt)**

The BBB postgraduate is an experimental postgraduate in which BC collaborates. 2 years ago the BBB built a women’s house in Ouled Merzoug, which won this year’s [TerraFibra](https://www.terrafibraaward.com/portfolio-item/la-maison-des-femmes/) award for best educational project. The TerraFibra is the first international prize on earth and fiber architecture. The topic of this year BBB is based on the Z33 “Same Same but Different” exposition. You can read more on it [here](https://sites.google.com/uhasselt.be/building-beyond-borders/platform/postgraduate-certificate/pg-2021-22-programme?authuser=0). You can see the recorded opening [lecture here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5L2wQfBCuo).

The postgraduate is the materialization of the activism that is so much needed in the search for societal and ecological transition. We understand education as a project, in the same way an architect sees a building as a project.

**Main collaborators**

[***Assemble studio***](https://assemblestudio.co.uk/about)

Assemble and BC collaborate on the project of the Magasin Electrique (shown in the exposition) in collaboration with Atelier LUMA. (Parc des Ateliers, LUMA Foundation, Arles).

[***EVR***](https://www.evr-architecten.be/)

Evr collaborates together with BC on the project of Usquare shown at the exhibition

[***Callebaut architecten***](https://callebaut-architecten.be/)

Callebaut architecten are collaborating with Evr and BC on the project of Usquare shown at the exhibition

**BIO**

***BC architects & studies & materials***

BC is BC architects and BC studies and BC materials. BC stands for Brussels Cooperation and points to how BC grew - embedded within place and people. We operate through 3 legal entities registered in Belgium: BC architects bvba (architecture company), BC studies vzw (non-profit), BC materials cv (material production cooperative).

BC is a hybrid practice, designing and undertaking "acts of building" towards systemic change in the construction sector. We strive for bioregional, low-tech, circular, beautiful and inclusive design. We work with our minds and our hands, undertaking activities such as community organisation, material production, contracting, teaching, prototyping. We aim to impact positively on people's ideas and planet. We act on behalf of the generations after us.

Started in between 2009 and 2012, our team currently consists of 4 co-founders and around 15 collaborators, working from Brussels on projects on the European and African continent.

BC architects is an award-winning architectural office, and is teaching at KULeuven University (BE), UHasselt University (BE), and has been teaching at EiABC Addis Ababa University (ET), ETH Zurich (CH), TU Stuttgart (DE), TU München (DE),...

[**www.bc-as.org**](https://www.bc-as.org/)

[***BBB***](https://sites.google.com/uhasselt.be/building-beyond-borders/platform/postgraduate-certificate)

Building Beyond Borders postgraduate (UHasselt) is a cross-border learning platform to enhance knowledge and push action towards regenerative and distributive building processes.

Its postgraduate certificate offers a learn-and-act programme for graduates and professionals to become change-makers in the built environment. Every edition of the postgraduate certificate has a unique focus, explores a wider narrative, tests the knowledge and ideas in a realistic case and develops a real-life intervention resulted in the beautiful La Maison des Femmes.