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Elvis Pompilio has made hats for everyone, from Madonna to our very own Queen Paola

Focus

September by Design

Design September is Belgium's biggest design event – a month-long, city-wide celebration of all things functional, fashionable and forward-looking. We speak to six of the most exciting creators involved, while on page 65 we offer an overview of one of the highlights, Designers Weekend

BY VEERLE DEVOS
PHOTOS BY NATALIE HILL

Elvis Pompilio 1

Before he became a world-famous hat and accessories designer, Elvis Pompilio's elegantly eccentric designs made him one of the pioneers of the Brussels fashion scene. That was back in the 1980s. During Design September, he'll be showcasing the fruits of his new cooperation with .MGX by Materialise in their flagship store at the Sablon. "It's an exercise focused on the hat as an object that you can wear as beautiful headgear as well as something you'd like to have at home," he says. .MGX will make 3D prints of Pompilio's hats with a pioneering method that allows for customised shapes from epoxy or polyamide. Each piece is individually drawn and created by laser beam and finished by hand. Pompilio is delighted that Brussels is showing its innovative heart in Design September, which he describes as "an important forum for designers to present new ideas and creations".

La Villa Hermosa 2

Pierre-Philippe Duchâtelet and Lionel Maes, aka La Villa Hermosa, are a young graphic design duo who work on everything from film sequence titles to web design. During the Design September Open Doors event, they will be staging an overview of their work and providing a sneak peek at their creative process. Unorthodox, perhaps, but quite normal for them. "In order to connect with people and to get feedback, we show our work every six months. As graphic designers, we're stuck in front of our computers so this is a good way to reach out and share ideas," says Maes. They see graphic design not as a cosmetic that you add on at the end, but a shared universe they create together with their clients. Both Duchâtelet and Maes say they are fond of Brussels, but admit that its creative potential is yet to be realised. "Let's change the creative climate in Brussels. Creators should focus on daring and sharing!" During the Open Doors, La Villa Hermosa will also launch their new book. *Artistes numériques/Digital Artists from 2006 to 2010.*



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La Villa Hermosa are named after the alley where they set up their first design studio



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Olivier Bastin was appointed Master Architect of Brussels in 2009, 20 years after he founded L'Escaut

Olivier Bastin 3

When architect and current 'master builder' of Brussels Olivier Bastin founded L'Escaut in 1989, it became immediately clear that this would be more than just an architect's studio. Located in an industrial building in Molenbeek, L'Escaut has not only designed projects as diverse as the Théâtre National and the Chapelle skatepark, but it also designs stage sets and installations. During Design September, L'Escaut will open its doors to the public because Bastin thinks the festival plays a crucial part in helping to build the identity of the city. "This kind of event asks questions about a city's identity and architecture can give answers to those questions. Brussels has long been afraid of architecture, but those days should be over now. The capital needs powerful motors to generate enthusiasm and to put the city on the map. New architecture should take the cultural diversity as a starting point, instead of building copies of international architecture. That's how Brussels can become a 'jewel' of cultural production, lively and diverse."

Hannes Van Severen & Fien Muller 4

When artists design furniture, the result is often wonderful and completely unusable. Hannes Van Severen (son of the late Belgian furniture designer Maarten Van Severen) and his life partner Fien Muller consider themselves keepers of this fine tradition. Van Severen is renowned for making 'freakishly-cool-but-ultimately-useless' furniture, like his famous disembowelled wardrobes. "I transform recognisable images and objects in my imagination," he explains, "thereby giving the object a new visual meaning." Muller, on the other hand, is a photographer and sculptor whose work is presented in museums, magazines, festivals and fairs. During Design September they will exhibit the sleek and unusual results of their first professional collaboration, a collection of storage boxes, tables, shelves and lamps commissioned by the Antwerp-based Valerie Traan Gallery. The look is unfussy with a trendy touch. "We focused on functionality and honest materials like brass, marble and polyethylene. We were limited in materials and colours but surprisingly enough these restrictions turned out to be very liberating. The absolute freedom that comes with creating art can also limit," says Van Severen. Although their design focuses on the aesthetic, they insist "it has nothing to do with some of the 'cool design' shown in specialised magazines or at design fairs. The kind of minimalism we present is simple but not cold at all."

"This kind of event asks questions about a city's identity; architects can give answers to those questions"



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If you've ever wished for a table which sprouts a lamp from one of its legs, be sure to check out Muller Van Severen

Cathy Coëz 5

Brussels-based French artist Cathy Coëz doesn't call herself a ceramist, but she's nevertheless one of a group of artists who have made the ceramics world shake at its foundations by transforming what was formerly only known as 'artisan pottery' into challenging contemporary art which explores the prospects of the medium. "My calling is the visual arts, not ceramics. For me, throwing clay is like drawing a shape. I hope that the border between arts and ceramics will keep on blurring. I like how Design September plays with the boundaries between disciplines, which are highly artificial and have nothing to do with the content. It's time to break down those walls." During Design September, she will be showing her work at Ampersand House: it will consist of abstract clay drawings and ceramic installations made with what she collects at flea markets, resulting in sculptures which explore the boundaries of kitsch. Sadly, apart from flea markets (her favourite being Jeu de Balle), Brussels doesn't inspire her much. "There's a lot happening in Brussels when it comes to culture, but there's obviously no budget to let it prosper. In Paris, for instance, they take art and culture more seriously. Design September might draw attention to this."



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Besides sculpture, Cathy Coëz also creates clay, porcelain and silkscreen drawings

Nathalie Dewez 6

When asked what she would change with Brussels' public lighting if she had a magic wand, Nathalie Dewez laughs: "I might colour the lights along the canal to create a cosier atmosphere. And I would definitively turn some off; we don't have to keep the entire city lit all night long." But even with her proposed partial blackout, Dewez's own light shines brightly. This June, she won the 2011 Designer of the Year award (an initiative of the Interieur Foundation and the magazines *Weekend Knack* and *Le Vif Weekend*), and she also received the Pierre Bergé & Associés Award, which resulted in an invite to exhibit at the renowned Brussels auction house during Design September. There, she will showcase commissions for clients such as Ligne Roset and Established & Sons alongside brand new pieces. Although Dewez uses new technologies, the way her creations emerge within a space suggests that she works like a sculptor. As a light designer, however, Dewez faces no shortage of challenges. "Technology is changing very fast. Now that the bulb is out, lighting is very much in transition. It's not clear what the norm in lighting will be in five or even two years." But one suspects that Dewez looks forward to finding out.



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Not only is Nathalie Dewez's work inspired by art, both her mother and grandfather are artists too

DESIGN SEPTEMBER

Between **September 8 and 30**, Brussels will be full of all things design: furniture, objects, industrial products, graphic design, architecture, fashion and art. Whether you have a casual interest in design or you are a certified design addict, you will be served royally. Everyone from new kids on the block Les Tontons Racleurs to big shots like Xavier Lust will be taking part in exhibitions, open days, conferences, film screenings, markets and even a special Pecha Kucha night. It's international, too, with British Designer of the Year 2010 Donna Wilson at La Fabrika and renowned Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola taking part in a conference at Flagey. Events will be spread all over the city to provide visitors with a good excuse to explore unknown corners of Brussels. Design September also hosts the **Designers Weekend** (see overleaf) which presents international brands on the Belgian market. Director of Design September Marie Pok says: "As a unifying force, this annual event offers a chamber for creativity and for initiatives launched by the design sector in Brussels." We say: don't miss it! www.designseptember.be

RECOMMENDED

- 1. SEPTEMBER 9 TO 30.** Elvis Pompilio at .MGX by Materialise, 31 Rue Joseph Stevens, Brussels. www.mgxbymaterialise.com, www.elvispompilio.com
- 2. SEPTEMBER 16 TO 17.** Open Doors at La Villa Hermosa, 34 Rue du Himiste, Brussels. www.lavillahermosa.com
- 3. SEPTEMBER 16 TO 17.** Open Doors at L'Escaut, 60 Rue de l'Escaut, Brussels. www.escaut.org
- 4. SEPTEMBER 8 TO OCTOBER 10.** A Furniture Project by Fien Muller & Hannes Van Severen, Galerie Jérôme Sohier, 55 Rue de la Régence, Brussels. www.valerietraan.be, www.jeromesohier.com.
- 5. SEPTEMBER 10 TO OCTOBER 15.** Living with Ceramics, Ampersand House, 30 Rue Tasson Snel, Brussels. www.coez.be, www.ampersandhouse.com
- 6. SEPTEMBER 8 TO 24.** Nathalie Dewez at Pierre Bergé & Associés, 40 Place du Grand Sablon, Brussels. www.pba-auctions.com, www.n-d.be.



Top left
Colour Carpet by Hay
Middle left
Accademia Brera chair by Kartell
Bottom left
White Tolomeo Mega floor lamp by Artemide
Centre
Chair by Joe Colombo for Kartell

**DESIGNERS WEEKEND**

What is Designers Weekend? Probably the most ambitious element of the Design September programme. Think of it as a design version of the Magical Mystery Tour. Aimed squarely at professionals and design aficionados with lifelong subscriptions to *Wallpaper and Elle Decoration, it offers people a chance to visit showrooms, shops and exhibition spaces across Brussels to find out more about the work of the participating design companies. Belgian office furniture giants Bulo, Austrian eco-furniture company Team 7 and iconic Italian plastic furniture company Kartell are amongst the 15 design brands taking part in the 27th edition of Designers Weekend. As in previous years there will be a free shuttle service to ferry pre-registered visitors between the different showrooms but this year there will be an added feature in the shape of a new exhibition space at the Nonciature on Place du Sablon, which will bring several brands together under the same roof. The guest of honour, Swiss architect Mario Botta, will be taking part in a conference at Flagey on September 24 at 20.00, and also for the first time, each brand is being asked to collaborate with a designer, architect or an artistic director whose work matches the sensibilities of that particular brand. This invited guest will work on the staging and curation of the exhibition, leading to a new dialogue between the two parties. Designers Weekend runs from September 23 to September 25, 10.00 to 18.00. To pre-register or to find out more, visit www.dwe.be



Top right
Design by Molteni
Middle right
Boffi Minikitchen. Photo by Duilio Bitetto
Bottom right
Audrey bathtub by SICIS/The Art Mosaic Factory

la
fabrika.

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