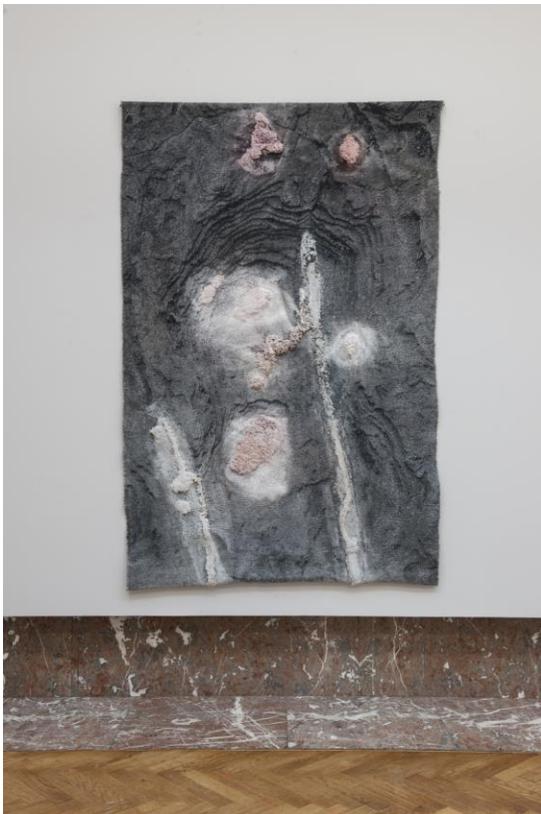




## Otobong Nkanga wins the Belgian Art Prize 2017

The most important and historic award for contemporary art in Belgium goes to Otobong Nkanga. The artist's delicate works on transformation processes referring to changes in our society won over the international jury. Alongside the Belgian Art Prize exhibition in Brussels, Otobong Nkanga's work is currently also on view at Contour in Mechelen and Documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens.

The public voted for its favourite artist and awarded the ING Public Prize to Maarten Vanden Eynde.



Otobong Nkanga, *Steel to Rust - Slow Growth*, 2017, Installation view © Philippe De Gobert



Maarten Vanden Eynde, *The Gadget*, 2017, Installation view © Philippe De Gobert

**Otobong Nkanga** was pronounced the winner of the BelgianArtPrize 2017 at the official awards ceremony in BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts on April 19. The **biennial art prize** focuses on stimulating **leading mid-career artists** and contributing to their further career development through increased international visibility. In that respect the prize is similar to other **European prizes** such as the Turner Prize in the United Kingdom, the Prix Marcel Duchamp in France and the Prix de Rome in the Netherlands.

The winner was chosen from the **four finalists (Edith Dekyndt, Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost, Otobong Nkanga and Maarten Vanden Eynde)** by a distinguished international jury consisting of **Beatrix Ruf** (Director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam), **Hans Ulrich Obrist** (Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries in London) and **Dieter Roelstraete** (Co-curator of Documenta 14), art collector **Mimi Dusselier** (who has been involved in visual arts for the past 30 years) and **Estelle Francès Lasserre** (Director of the Fondation d'Entreprise Francès).

The **international jury** has decided to award the Belgian Art Prize 2017 to **Otobong Nkanga** in recognition of her extraordinary and complex artistic practice. Nkanga is an artist who records the social and topographical changes of her environment, who observes their inherent complexities and understands how resources such as soil and earth, and their potential values, are subject to regional and cultural analysis. Her work invites the spectator to enter into a dialogue about the intangibility of identity, memory and perception and to observe how these parameters change when presented within a specific composition and recitation through language. The jury sees Otobong Nkanga's contribution to the international art scene through her installations as extremely valuable.

The jury applauded the commitment of the four nominated artists and praised the quality of their diverse artistic practices. The finalists translated both local and international cultural histories into strong works with powerful immediacy that evoke the social and political commitment of each of the nominees. The poetic and enigmatic character of each proposition reflects the complexities and challenges of today's world.

During the ceremony the winner was awarded **€ 25,000**, presented by Roland Gillion Crowet, president of the non-profit association **La Jeune Peinture Belge-Contemporary Art** and founder of the BelgianArtPrize: "Since 1950, the association *La Jeune Peinture Belge*, a group of art lovers, art professionals and collectors, has organised, in collaboration with the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, a biennial art prize that offers a platform to young artists in Belgium. The transformation of this historic art prize into the BelgianArtPrize is in line with the association's desire to consolidate the position of this art prize in a global context and to contribute to the international network and further development of the careers of four mid-career artists living and working in Belgium. The Belgian Art Prize contributes to the development of the artist's career, both in Belgium and abroad. That is why my wife and I are delighted to offer this prize as a tribute to my father-in-law Pierre Crowet, founding member of the Belgian Young Painting since 1950 and president until his death in 1984. I had the honour of succeeding him at that time, and we are therefore continuing his work of patronage and encouragement in order to represent and support the winner and the three other finalists."

**Paul Dujardin, CEO and Artistic Director of the Centre for Fine Arts/BOZAR**, continues: "The aim of the BelgianArtPrize remains to encourage; it is a look forward, much more than a look back. The BelgianArtPrize is meant to be a prize, which – in hindsight – sets things in motion and stimulates the creation of new artworks. As the exhibition takes place at the Centre for Fine Arts, we are giving the artists visibility in a place with an emphatically European cultural mission. We activate a broad network. The Jeune Peinture Belge – Contemporary Art non-profit organisation and BOZAR share the same international ambition and commitment to the artists."

Commenting on the selection of the four finalists for the BelgianArtPrize, **Sophie Lauwers, Head of Exhibitions at the Centre for Fine Arts/BOZAR**, declared: "Edith Dekyndt, Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost, Maarten Vanden Eynde and Otobong Nkanga offer a vision, a glimpse, of what is also in reality an open Belgian scene. Very often thanks to private dynamic and initiatives and the intelligence of the actors in the artistic world, it is one that transcends functional or institutional compartmentalisation. While all the artists have shown merit with their impressive achievements, the four finalists stand out for the diversity of their respective positioning and the benefits a BelgianArtPrize award is likely to represent in further pursuing their promising careers. I am very proud to be here today alongside these four major and enterprising artists who emphasise Belgium's major role on the international contemporary art scene.

The winner of the **ING Public Prize** was also announced at this same awards ceremony. **Maarten Vanden Eynde** was chosen by public vote as the public's favourite artist. He was awarded **€ 10,000**, an amount that the artist will use as to further develop his/her artistic career. **Patricia De Peuter**, Head of the ING Art Department: "The public has understood Maarten Vanden Eynde's message loud and clear, and with good reason. Maarten has been engaged in a highly original research field for years and he is fully cognizant of the economic, social and historical processes that clarify our time and also determine our future. His biggest challenge has been to find a way to visualise this research in his art. His submission for BAP2017 in BOZAR is powerfully convincing, not only due to its labour-intensive aspect but most of all thanks to its imposing presence. Maarten's work provides plenty of food for thought and has clearly inspired the public to vote for him."

The exhibition is on show at BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts until 28 May.

## Otobong Nkanga

Otobong Nkanga is a visual and performance artist based in Antwerp, Belgium. Nkanga's multidisciplinary practice spans drawing, photography, installation, video and performance, and focuses on the interrelation between environment, architecture and history. Her work interweaves concerns about land, natural resources, architecture, the value connected to them and the dynamic status of remembrance. These predominantly political topics are incorporated in poetic combinations of autobiographic and collective narratives, memories and concepts.



For the BelgianArtPrize, Otobong Nkanga is interested in the notions of corrosion, oxidation, impregnation and contamination. With three textile pieces and a steel sculpture, she continues to explore the transformation processes of materials. She experiments with crystallisation of a textile piece (Steel to Rust - Slow Growth), or with a rusted and laser-cut plate in steel, evoking the effects of corrosion (Steel to Rust - Resistance), or in another textile piece with the slow impregnation of a liquid contaminating the poem that has been woven into it (In a Place Yet Unknown). Her inspiration comes from the transformation processes present in our society, seemingly built on cast-iron values, but in which (in)visible mechanisms of corrosion, the crystallisation of ideologies and the birth of new structures hide beneath the surface, all signs of life.

*Otobong Nkanga was born in 1974 in Kano, Nigeria, and has lived in Antwerp for nine years. She recently had solo exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary (2016), In Situ Gallery in Paris (2016), Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2016), M HKA in Antwerp (2015), Somerset House in London (2015), Portikus in Frankfurt (2015), Kadist Art Foundation in Paris (2015) and the Performance Room at Tate Modern in London (2015). In 2016, she also had major international projects in Shanghai and Beirut (Landversation). She has taken part in several international group exhibitions, including the 13th Biennale de Lyon (2015), the 31st São Paulo Biennial (2014), the 8th Berlin Biennale (2014) and the Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013). She won the Yanghyun Prize in 2015. In 2013 - 2014, she was a guest of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm – Artists-in-Berlin Program. In 2017 she is participating in Documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel.*



Otobong Nkanga, *Steel to Rust - Meltdown* (detail), woven textile, 2016. Photography Wim van Dongen

[www.otobongnkanga.com](http://www.otobongnkanga.com)

## Otobong Nkanga: On Corrosion and Contamination

Text from the visitor's guide

Otobong Nkanga's work is constantly 'in progress'. To elements from past exhibitions she adds new ideas which in turn take concrete shape in drawings, photography, installations and performances. She is now showing a snapshot of this swirling mental process at the Centre for Fine Arts, in the form of a sculpture and three textile works that weave musings together with views of the world.

'For the BelgianArtPrize I am exhibiting a woven textile piece at BOZAR, one which is slowly but surely absorbing the liquid it is soaked in. You can see how the liquid leaves traces and agonizingly slowly contaminates the fabric.' With this artwork she builds on the work in her solo show 'The Encounter That Took a Part of Me', which was on at Nottingham Contemporary from October 2016 to January 2017. In that show, my installations visualised ideas that were converted into materials. I put these transformations into hexagonal modules: hexagonal cases reminiscent of molecules or honeycomb. Their modular structure enabled me to add or omit elements depending on the space.'

'The first case contained metal and a vacuum was created in it. The material stopped corroding and was conserved in the state the metal was in when the case was closed. What applies in reality is also true in the exhibition spaces: we try to conserve everything as well as possible, but materials, and therefore art too, are subject to change, unless you remove the oxygen.'

'The second case contained a pile of scrap metal, together with a piece of felt that was impregnated with rust and water that dripped in a circular motion, influencing the scrap metal, evaporated and fell onto the felt again, just like in a microcosm. The third structure contained clay that dried out rapidly and started to crack when the case was closed. You saw how its consistency in the wet-dry state was conserved and came to a standstill in situ.'

### Stillness, defilement or inspiration?

'I find it fascinating to view the past and reality in the light of this transformation process. We think our society is built on cast iron values, but beneath the surface are (in)visible processes of corrosion, crystallisation of ideologies and the birth of new structures. And that's a good thing too, because it is a sign of life. If you hermetically seal off a community, an idea or a natural process, it slows down, is deformed or stops the process for lack of oxygen. But it also stops developing and dies or fossilises.'

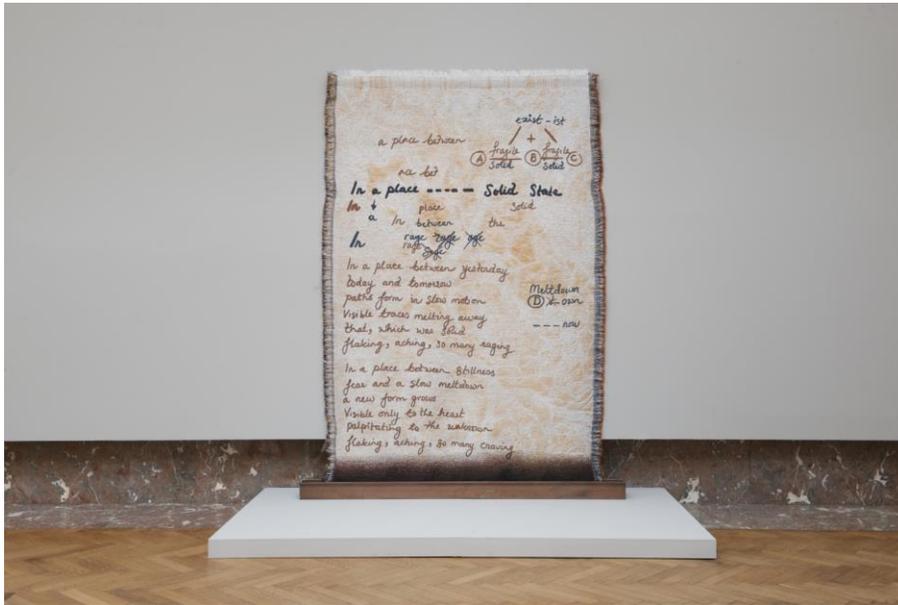
'Today the idea of closing borders and building walls is mostly linked to fears of contamination and decay instead of seeing the possibilities of a new growth that can be beneficial in multiple ways, a society keeps on changing and evolving for better or worse but that depends on the choices made. To oxygenate or not.'

'For the BelgianArtPrize, the works presented in the space of the Centre for Fine Arts are experimentations of matter or material to explore the social, ideological and environmental (trans)formation. Terminologies such as decay, corrosion, contamination, crystallisation, stagnation, growth, these words that are so often used to describe the state of societies, environments and economies, but how does it translate to the spaces



Otobong Nkanga, *Steel to Rust - Slow Growth*, 2017, Installation view © Philippe De Gobert

we exploit, materials we use and dispose of? How do things change? From what point do we see shifts in a landscape? At what age do we start to think in terms of exchange or contamination, inspiration or corrosion?' 'Although times are uncertain and we do not always understand and know why particular decisions are taken, we continue to look for our place in this world, and for the best way of surviving. These are the questions and musings that I am setting down in the new work for the 2017 BelgianArtPrize.'



Otobong Nkanga, *In a Place Yet Unknown*, 2017, Woven textile and metal © Philippe De Gobert

# Maarten Vanden Eynde: The (R)evolutionary Path of ‘World-changing Wonders’

## Text from the visitor’s guide

How will we view the present time in, let’s say, a thousand years from now? In his oeuvre, Maarten Vanden Eynde digs down to find the origins of future traces. For the BelgianArtPrize he is showing work from the ‘Triangular Trade’ project at the Centre for Fine Arts and has drawn a triangle between the trade in cotton and uranium, Belgium’s mercantile history and every human’s capacity to rewrite history.

‘Material is the foundation of my work. Where does it come from? What influence does it have? Every civilisation leaves traces, and the materials that are inseparably linked with our present society will one day be dug up by the archaeologists of the future. Layer by layer we are building on the future representation of the present world as part of the Anthropocene period, a geological era that succeeds the Holocene period – from 11,700 years ago until the present – and in which the Earth is experiencing the consequences of human activity. Today’s materials form the blueprint for the future, and I find that tremendously fascinating.’

‘Over the last ten years I have been engaged in research into the principles of ‘genetology’, the counterpart to eschatology, the ‘theory of last things’. Oddly enough, ‘genetology’ has never been acknowledged, even though there is in every science a branch that is concerned with the ‘theory of first things’. Although I have focused on specific material in my recent work, such as plastic in *Plastic Reef* and cotton and uranium in *Triangular Trade*, I still use ‘genetology’ as an underlying methodology.’

‘The world as we know it will not continue to exist. Instead of focusing on this sombre fact, I prefer to concentrate on what will follow, what is left and with which pieces of the puzzle we shall write history. Subjective? Absolutely! And that makes it a highly liberating way of working. What I like so much about ‘genetology’ or post-apocalyptic science is that everyone is called to account. Whether you do or do not do something, it all has an impact on the history that is ultimately written, because even the smallest object can be recovered and be representative of today’s world. I want to do something with this, not only as an artist, but also as a human being.’

## Triangular Action

‘For the BelgianArtPrize at the Centre for Fine Arts I am showing three works that are part of *Triangular Trade*, a long-running research project that focuses specifically on the influence of the worldwide trade in raw materials, such as cotton, gold, oil, wood, copper, rubber, uranium and so on. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the influence of this transatlantic trade was decisive to the development of the present power balance in the world and in most cases was played out in a geographical triangle between Africa, America and Europe.’



Maarten Vanden Eynde in collaboration with Musasa, *Ils ont partagé le monde*, 2017, Detail of the installation view © Philippe De Gobert

‘In its turn, *Triangular Trade* comes under the umbrella of ‘Enough Room for Space’, an artists’ organisation I set up with my wife Marjolijn Dijkman in 2005 to organise research projects and residencies. We always engage with different groups of artists, academics, thinkers etc., who gradually assist in determining the direction the project evolves in. For *Triangular Trade* I did two years of research. The presentation at BOZAR is the moment when the project is made public and really gets started.’

'Among other things I will be introducing *Ils ont partagé le monde*, a series of nine paintings I did together with the Congolese painter Musasa. They show the most important raw materials that provide the foundations of the world that we know. For each raw material, various drawings and symbols will form a visual rebus, or a summary of the origin, use and influence of the various materials. These nine panels, in the form of a slice of tart and a circle refer to the wheel of fortune, the wheel of progress and the distribution of economic and natural riches.'

## An explosive liaison

'Another work is called *The Gadget*, the name of the first atom bomb, which was developed in secret under the name 'the Manhattan Project' in the 1940s. It comprises a 3D version of the very first atom bomb, but in bobbin lace. There is a significant link between cotton and uranium: most of the uranium used in the first atom bombs came from the Shinkolobwe mine at Katanga in the Congo. It was processed in the southern United States and transported by the Belgian businessman Edgar Sengier, the director of *Union Minière* in Belgium. The same route was taken by cotton: slaves from the kingdom of Kongo planted and picked cotton in the southern United States and it was then transported to the major weaving mills and bobbin lace industry in Belgium. An odd encounter between the highly feminine activity of making bobbin lace and the particularly masculine occupation of making bombs is woven into the gossamer-thin tangle of threads in *The Gadget*.'

'The installation called *Around the World* is a bobbin in the form of a rocket and it symbolises the significant role that cotton plays on a global scale. It has 40,015 kilometres of cotton thread wound round it, which is the average circumference of the earth. The whole development of space travel can be linked to it, because without the income from trade and commerce there is no space travel. The work represents in a delicate way how large the earth is and how much distance there can be between points A and B, but it also gives a glimmer of how fragile we humans are. The grandeur of the whole hangs by a cotton thread. I see it as a poetic way of creating and starting and finishing point. You tie up a thread somewhere and walk round the world until you arrive back at the beginning.'

*Maarten Vanden Eynde* (b. 1977, Leuven, BE) works in Brussels (BE) and Saint-Mihiel (FR). In recent years his works were included in the exhibitions '2050. A Brief History of the Future' in Palazzo Reale, Milan (2016) and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (2015), 'Realités Filantes, #4' at the Lubumbashi Biennale (2015), 'Beyond Earth Art' at the Johnson Museum of Art in Ithaca (2014), 'Ja Natuurlijk', Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (2013), during 'Manifesta9' in Genk (2012), 'The Museum of Forgotten History' at M HKA, Antwerp (2012) and Dublin Contemporary (2011). In 2005 he founded the organization 'Enough Room for Space', a mobile platform for site-specific projects, together with Marjolijn Dijkman. On May 24 a LUNĀ talk takes place in Bozar in the framework of the BelgianArtPrize about the influence of cotton production and trade on the creation of nation states and other global power structures.



Maarten Vanden Eynde, *Around The World*, 2017. Installation view © Philippe De Gobert

## Practical information

### The exhibition

BelgianArtPrize 2017 is on show at BOZAR until 28 May  
BOZAR, Centre for Fine Arts, Rue Ravensteinstraat 23, 1000 Brussels  
[www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be) – 02 507 82 00 – [info@bozar.be](mailto:info@bozar.be)

A catalogue of the 2017 edition of the BelgianArtPrize 2017 is at the visitor's disposal

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*Main sponsor: ING Belgium*

### The Winner of the BelgianArtPrize 2017

BelgianArtPrize (€ 25,000): Otobong Nkanga

### The Winner of the ING Public Prize 2017

ING Public Prize (€ 10,000): Maarten Vanden Eynde

### The Finalists of the BelgianArtPrize 2017

Edith Dekyndt  
Denicolai & Provoost  
Otobong Nkanga  
Maarten Vanden Eynde

### National Jury (Selection of the 4 finalists)

Museum Directors: **Denis Gielen** (Director of MAC's), **Dirk Snauwaert** (Artistic Director of WIELS), **Phillip Van den Bossche** (Director of Mu.ZEE), **Philippe Van Cauteren** (Artistic Director of S.M.A.K.).  
Art Collectors: **Gaël van Lierde-Diercxsens** (Art Collector, Curator and Artistic Advisor), **Frédéric de Goldschmidt** (Art Collector and Patron of the arts), **Tanguy Van Quickenborne** (Entrepreneur and Art Collector).

### International Jury (Selection of the winner)

Professional experts from the arts sector: **Beatrix Ruf** (Director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Curator and member of several cultural Boards), **Hans Ulrich Obrist** (Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries in London and Curator of many exhibitions), **Dieter Roelstraete** (Co-curator of Documenta 14).  
Art Collectors: **Mimi Dusselier** (Art Collector who has been involved with and committed to the visual arts for over 30 years), **Estelle Francès Lasserre** (Art Historian and Cultural Manager, Founder and Director of the Fondation d'Entreprise Francès).

The international jury is chaired by **Sophie Lauwers** (Head of Exhibitions BOZAR) and **Roland Gillion Crowet** (President of the non-profit organisation La Jeune Peinture Belge).

## Exhibited works by the finalists of the BelgianArtPrize 2017

### Edith Dekyndt

*They Shoot Horses (Part. 1), 2017*  
Installation / Installatie  
Velvet, steel nails, video screen

### Maarten Vanden Eynde

- *Ils ont partagé le monde, 2017*  
Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard  
- *The Gadget, 2017*  
Cotton thread, wooden bobbins, Plexiglas cylinder, aluminium frame

- *Around The World*, 2017  
40,015 km cotton thread, A320 Jet engine, metal

**Denicolai & Provoost**

*EYELINER*, 2017

Lent objects; guide / catalogue in free distribution, print

**Otobong Nkanga**

- *In a Place yet unknown*, 2017

Woven textile and metal

- *Steel to Rust - Meltdown*, 2016

Woven textile

- *Steel to Rust – Slow growth*, 2017

Woven textile

- *Steel to Rust – Resistance*, 2017

Laser cut steel, rust and wax

**Contact**

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