

Rethinking the soil and the city with it
The Belgian landscape planner Bas Smets - **Laudatio Kaye Geipel**

Cities undergoing ecological upheaval are causing unease in many places. The slow farewell to individual mobility and the modern idea of a seemingly endless buildable space is difficult for many residents.

This year's Schelling Prize 2024 under the motto "Deep Transformations - Earth, Landscape, Architecture" has set itself the goal of making the city-shaping possibilities behind the urban changes brought about by climate change more visible. The three nominees for the Schelling Prize show in an infectious way how the concept of a cooperative city with more open space qualities can be advanced by incorporating nature-like principles into urban planning and architectural practice.

Bas Smets, a landscape architect with an office in Brussels, is a seeker of an understanding of the city based on ecology. Smets, who trained in Leuven and Geneva and then worked with Michel Desvigne in Paris, pursues a new understanding of landscape planning in his work. How do the demands of the Paris Climate Protocol (IPP instead?) change conventional planning know-how? These questions challenge him. According to Smets, many things need to be rethought. Landscape planning can play a pioneering role. Smets' goal: to climate-proof local urban environments throughout the year.

At the beginning of an assignment, he is usually seen walking around with a thermometer and looking for the infamous heat islands, the data of which he then transfers to his first drawings. He refers to Alexander von Humboldt's way of working, who collected as much information as possible on his travels and translated it into drawings. "Understanding reality - that is the greatest inspiration for me". In the design process, he combines the multitude of data with the search for the simplest possible open space forms that make public spaces "greener" throughout and thus also change the architecture. Smets calls his search for integrating urban landscapes that can do several things "augmented landscapes".

His practice-oriented know-how is in demand in many competitions, even beyond Belgium. Most of his projects are created in close collaboration with architects, climate engineers, neurobiologists, urban planners and residents. For example, he designed a large new park on the former Turn and Taxis industrial site in Brussels between 2009 and 2017. He collaborated with Lina Gothmeh (then DGTA) /1/ to design the open space for the Estonian National Museum on the site of the former largest Soviet military airport in Tallinn. In Paris, he won the international competition for the redesign of the surroundings of Notre-Dame. His repertoire also includes small projects characterized by social experience. He

He created a series of memorials in memory of the victims of the attacks on March 22, 2016 and the leading victims of the coronavirus pandemic. The forms of these memorials are characterized by architectural modesty and endowed with a slightly surreal urgency that betrays his Belgian origins. How closely must landscape planning and urban planning cooperate in the future? Bas Smets believes in the need for "biospheric urbanism". Smets has shown how this can be implemented in Arles in the surroundings of Frank Gehry's Luma Museum. There, he took on the challenge of turning a former locomotive depot, which was literally scorched earth after years of vacancy, into an urban garden for the residents of Arles. More than 1,000 new trees and 80,000 plants were dug in between 2009 and 2021 and a new soil profile was created that responds to islands of shade and water courses. This urban garden is now not only the largest park in the city, but - this is important to him - is 20 degrees cooler on hot days than before. The way in which Smets designs such places in collaboration with other disciplines makes them exemplary experiments for the future of our heated cities.