



# Revival after the Great War: Repair, Rebuild, Remember

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Colloquium Program



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### **Regionalism and rural architecture: the reconstruction of farms after the First World War**

**(by Yves SEGERS and Dries CLAEYS, KU Leuven)**

To this day, the First World War has a profound impact on the image of the countryside in West Flanders. This is not only the consequence of the abundance of war relics in the region's landscape. Thousands of houses and farms date from the immediate aftermath of the war. Almost all of these buildings have many common characteristics, that have been labelled 'regionalist architecture' by historians as well as architects. While regionalism has in the past been disregarded as a backward movement, there is now a growing consensus that it was more than the employment of a traditional formal language. Regionalist architects, who dominated the post-war reconstruction in Belgium, aimed at the integration of a traditional architectural style and several new buildings techniques and improvements with regard to the comfort of houses. However, these conclusions are mainly based on research on urban areas.

Little attention has been given to the ways in which the plans of regionalists were put into practice during the reconstruction of Belgian farms after the First World War. By looking at building plans of the Dienst der Verwoeste Gewesten, this paper studies the degree to which rebuilt farms corresponded to the features of 'good' farms in contemporary publications of regionalists. Was the connection between regional building materials and styles and elements of modernity also visible in the West Flemish countryside? And what are possible explanatory factors for its presence or its absence?

### **Assessing and valorizing the values of Belgian reconstruction cityscapes today. Revisiting Labo S's engagement with Ypres and Heuvelland**

**(by Maarten LIEFOOGHE, Ghent University)**

Readily dismissed as inauthentic *vieux-neuf*, the centrally orchestrated architectural production during the Belgian reconstruction campaigns after the Great War faced a rather cold architecture historical reception in Belgium. The recon-

## Sessions

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struction of individual monuments and entire towns, villages and landscapes was often only discussed in historical overviews as what came in lieu of a modernist alternative that had missed its appointment with history. This negative appraisal in architectural histories was however but one of the factors that complicated the possible recognition of this varied yet unified architectural and urban production as valuable heritage. Mid 1980s, the Resurgam research, exhibition and publication project directed by Marcel Smets meant however a first turning point. Twenty years later, also local planners and cultural policy makers from the former war front area in West Flanders initiated a second phase of engagement with the reconstruction heritage, now from a more contemporary perspective.

In this context, the Labo S research group within the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning at Ghent University was asked to advise local authorities on how to assess and valorize the various aspects of reconstruction heritage in Ypres and Heuvelland, but also to suggest possible approaches to give contemporary developments a place in the still largely extant reconstruction landscape. This paper presents the conceptual approach Labo S took, combining a value analytical approach with morphological close readings. It also makes an evaluation of how this impulse and initiatives by other actors subsequently played out on the ground, in recent planning and preservation management, and in architectural projects.

### **SESSION 4: THE ARTS AFTER THE GREAT WAR**

In the first decade after the war, many artists and architects lived with a paradox. On the one hand, they developed the feeling of being part of a *siècle du trop plein*. In addition to the rapid social transformations, they were confronted with numerous artistic impulses, often dating from the prewar period, but now gaining full momentum. Expressionism did not stop to open up the imagination. Manifestoes on abstract art kept on undermining the fulfillment of historical references. On the other hand, many artists feared to end up in a *siècle du vide*. They were worried about the impossibility of giving meaning to artistic practice and their