

## English architects and BREXIT

**This week it was announced that the competition for the renovation of the SMAK (Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art) in Ghent was won by NoaArchitecten together with the British architect David Kohn Architect from London. English agencies do everything they can to gain exposure in other countries through associations. This while architects from Flanders who are internationally appreciated do not receive assignments nor are they asked for associations. BREXIT changed a lot for English architects, this is more than clear. After completion, the renovation of the SMAK will not be able to participate in the European Union's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award.**

Daniel Rosbottom of DRDH Architects from London won the competition for the major renovation of the Ghent Opera. This agency makes interesting projects, there is no doubt about that. I met Rosbottom and at the beginning of this year I wrote him the following: "I regularly ask myself when the top architects from Flanders will get a commission in England. Is Paul Robbrecht, José Van Hee, Vincent Van Duysen really not good enough for the English? English architects get opportunities in Flanders, but there is nothing vice versa. Are we really such bad architects?"

***Designed by SMAK Ghent / NoaArchitecten together with the British architect David Kohn Architect from London.***



The response from London: "In answer to your last point, we don't get any work in the UK either - it is a very hostile environment for architecture with a very poor competition culture. This is why we and so many of our esteemed colleagues, look for opportunities in Belgium. It certainly isn't to do with the quality of Flemish architecture."..... "I agree with you it is a problem but you should perhaps rather be happy that Flanders has managed to create a system through which at least some good contemporary architecture, and good architects, can thrive. I would like nothing more than to be able to focus on opportunities in my own city."



***European Union's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award 2024 Barcelona  
photo Marc Dubois***

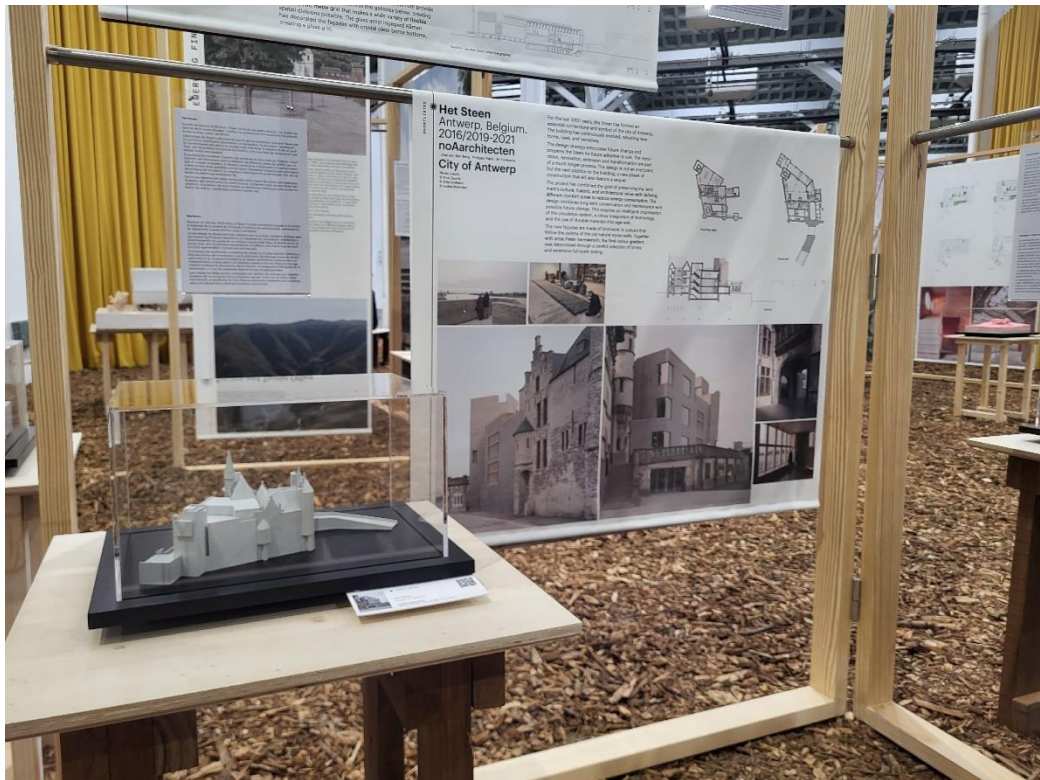
It is clear that British architects greatly appreciate the concept of the "Open Call" of the Flemish Architect. However, it is a one-way street and the English architects enjoy the goodwill of the Flemish and Ghent City Architect. Flanders has interesting architects, but we are perhaps not chauvinistic enough, which the English are! This is not a call for "own architects first" but for groups of firms in Flanders and in Europe. The English have made a choice and must realize this. Let me be clear, the architectural firms from across the Channel that want to profile themselves in Belgium are interesting teams and their work is good. The



***European Union's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award 2024 Barcelona  
photo Marc Dubois***

Belgian agencies that collaborate with British agencies do this primarily to increase their chances of selection. An international team simply has more prestige! However, something has changed since Brexit. English agencies can no longer participate in the European Union's Mies van der Rohe Award. This is clear! England is no longer part of the European Union. This is thanks to Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage! Only when England starts negotiations again and expresses its desire to join the Union will it become possible again. For years now, Switzerland cannot and may not participate in the Mies Award, Switzerland does not belong to the European Union. Swiss architects are excluded, but their projects within the European Union are also no longer eligible, such as the excellent renovation of the Tate Modern in London designed by Herzog & deMeuron. The British people have chosen to leave the European Union and must therefore also accept the European rules. This is democracy.

So projects in which English architects participate in Belgium are excluded. This means that the renovation of the Ghent Opera, the Design Museum Ghent and now also the SMAK are not eligible to participate in the most important architecture prize in Europe. While the city of Ghent wants to apply for European Capital of Culture in 2030. None of the above-mentioned projects can be submitted. The Ghent Architect Peter



**European Union's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award 2024 Barcelona Expo Het Steen ANTwerp by NoaArchitecten (Brussels / Bruges).  
photo Marc Dubois**

Vanden Abeele probably overlooked this. As a biennial advisor for this Mies Award, I can say that no project with English architects has been eligible in 2024.

Everyone knows the European rules before entering into associations, and therefore one must be consistent, even if one regrets this.



*Marc Dubois,  
architect Hon FRIBA  
Juni 2024*