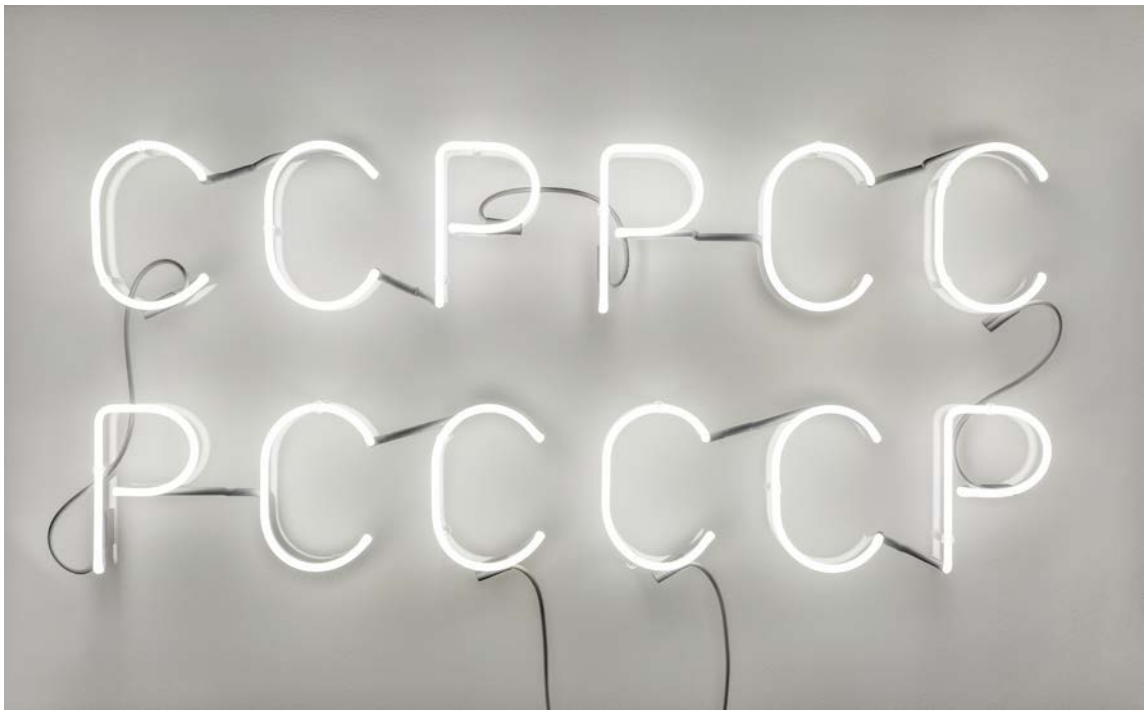
KOEN VANMECHELEN

COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT - PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN



Foundations
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BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY

KOEN VANMECHELEN

Domestication - CCP, 2011 © Koen Vanmechelen

BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work is guided by the belief that every organism needs another organism to survive - and that only through diversity do we achieve adaptability and resilience.

If there's one secret in life, it's that everything is dual. Chicken and egg, cause and effect, good and bad, construction and destruction: everything exists in relation to the Other. I see the chicken as a metaphor for man, and the egg both as a metaphor for the world and as a laboratory for the future. The egg is a protected environment and a source of life. It is also a cage, a restriction from which we have to break free.

The chicken is the most domesticated animal in the world, indispensable to society. The chickens we know today are artificial human design constructs. Through a process of inbreeding, they have become indigenous breeds that reflect the cultural characteristics of a particular nation. I'm not sure we ought to create a frame around a living object. My art is an attempt to disrupt that process and think about a new kind of evolution.

LABIOMISTA, literally "mix of life", explores this new evolution. As an integrated art work in itself, housing my studio and animals, a park and a heritage site, LABIOMISTA sits at the intersection between nature, industry and city. It is a unique site dedicated to the importance of diversity and resilience in nature and society. It is a living laboratory, located in the old mining city of Genk, exploring new ways to create balance. The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and the Planetary Community Chicken are central to this exploration. They link diversity with productivity, global with local, and art with science and communities.

Koen Vanmechelen

Laboratorium of Human Rights © Koen Vanmechelen

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

CCP

The Cosmopolitan Chicken - Mechelse Orloff, 13th Generation, 3rd Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art, Against Exclusion, curator Jean-Hubert Martin, Moscow (RU), 2009

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

THE IDEA

The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP) was begun in 1999. Biological and cultural diversity, or biocultural diversity, forms the central theme of the work. In it, art and science merge. Through the continuous interbreeding of different species of chickens from around the world, Koen Vanmechelen's living art project illustrates and responds to the evolutionary processes and human behaviours at play. The CCP is an on-going artistic enquiry which deals with the myriad and fundamental issues that underlie biocultural diversity: globalisation, migration, domestication, identity, racism, speciesism, cloning, genetic manipulation and balance.

Central to Vanmechelen's idea is the understanding that every one of the world's chicken species is descended from a single ancestor, the Red Junglefowl, a bird that lives at the foot of the Himalayas. Over time, humans took this bird and bred it in different countries around the world, creating multiple indigenous breeds that reflect the cultural characteristics of their regions and communities. These breeds, crafted through continuous human selection, now risk becoming too isolated, and their gene pools too narrow to remain sustainable. Vanmechelen's CCP breaks through these artificially constructed boundaries and frames, and presents diversity as the only viable option for development.

The ultimate aim of the CCP are truly Cosmopolitan Chickens, carrying genes of all the world's chicken breeds. Each year, a chicken from a different country is introduced to the CCP, mating it to create a new bird and thereby continuing the genetic diversification of the flock. The pairing takes place in the new country, and is accompanied by an art exhibition. It reveals how this country has become part of a new global story.

To date, the CCP encompasses genetic diversity from over 20 different strains of purebred chickens from all over the world, including strains from Belgium, France, England, U.S.A., Germany, The Netherlands, Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Turkey, Cuba, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt, Senegal, Slovenia, Austria, Indonesia, Denmark and Finland.

Using media, including painting, live installations, photography, and taxidermy, Vanmechelen's work is as diverse as the chickens themselves. It gives rise to important questions around national identity, the interdependence of different cultures, species, and the environment, and the way we interact with "the other".

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT (CCP)
1999 — 2018

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

THIS IS NOT A CHICKEN

For Vanmechelen, the Cosmopolitan Chicken offers up a mirror to society. His work is not about chickens, it is about the need for crossing, duality, and for recognising the value of the other. It is about the interdependency of species. The message emerging from his art is that crossbreeding is both a practical and a philosophical necessity, if not a moral duty. Today's chicken breeds are failing to prevent inbreeding and degeneration; new blood is needed. Societies, he believes, are no different.

History suggests that progress is predicated on daring to let go of what we already have. The result of hybridisation is often uncertain, but it is this very fact that intrigues Vanmechelen:

"Fertilisation, enrichment – they always come from outside. It's precisely the unexpected things that are important to me. I take notice of apparent coincidences and reflect upon their possible meaning. I believe in the serendipity of discovery."

This is also why the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project is a work in progress, an art project that doesn't have an end.

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

ART + CHICKEN = SCIENCE (1)

Vanmechelen has found each successive generation of the CCP to be more resilient than its purer bred parents. The chickens live longer, are less susceptible to disease, and exhibit less aggressive behaviour. The crossings have resulted in new strains that show a significantly increased potential for gene transcription and expression. The CCP strain now contains over 13 million SNP DNA, in contrast to the 4-5 million in a normal chicken.

Since its inception, the CCP has increasingly attracted the attention of scientists, for whom the chicken has long been a vital model organism for research. For livestock geneticists, the longevity of the CCP may help provide real-world evidence for the link between diversity and survival. For human science, the CCP samples and biodata now offer unique opportunities to study complex molecular processes that are used in medical research and drug development.

The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project contributions to science have been recognised through the Golden Nica Hybrid Art Award (2013) and the Best Art Award at the Art and Science Exhibition of the international conference on Intelligent Systems for Molecular Biology (ISMB) (2013).

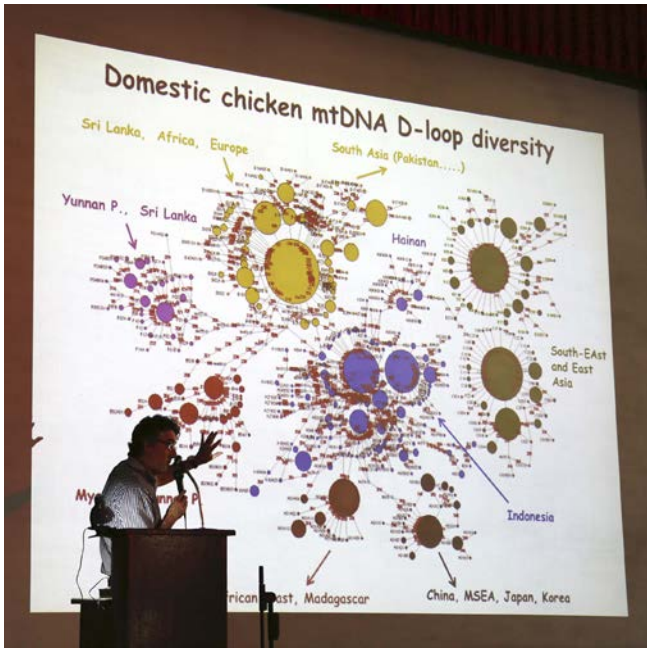
THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

ART + CHICKEN = SCIENCE (1)

Professor Cassiman and Koen Vanmechelen in his studio, The Open University of Diversity, 2010

These are exceptional chickens. The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project is like no other in the world. It offers a unique opportunity to gain new insights into the impact of crossing on the genetic make-up of both chickens and mankind. It enables new advances in science and development, and it also raises important social and cultural questions about how we choose to live our lives. It is truly a project of its time."

Jean-Jacques Cassiman, Emeritus Professor of Human Genetics, KULeuven, Belgium



Professor Hanotte at the Arena de Evolución symposium organized at the University of Havana by artist Koen Vanmechelen, Biennial of Cuba, 2015

"This continuous experiment, doing years and years of breeding, would have been impossible to put into practice in a world where scientific grants run from three to five years at the most. The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project isn't constrained in the same way.

We can also predict that these chickens will be better fit to respond to a large spectrum of pathogens. Inbreeding is never good when you're talking about disease resistance. Environments are constantly changing - the best-adapted chickens are likely to be those with the greatest diversity of traits."

Olivier Hanotte, Livestock geneticist and Professor, University of Nottingham, England

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT

EXHIBITIONS

Vanmechelen's wide-ranging oeuvre includes photography, sculpture, mixed media installation, video and living art initiatives. His work has been presented in numerous exhibitions and art biennale worldwide, including solo and group exhibitions in the National Gallery London, Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Museum Kunst Palast (Düsseldorf), Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (Amsterdam), Macro (Rome), MAD Museum (NY), Belvedere (Vienna), ZKM (Karlsruhe), National Gallery of Zimbabwe (Harare) and Pushkin Museum (Moscow). Biennial of Venice, Cuba, Moscow, Havana, Dakar and Poznan, Triennial of Guangzhou, World Expo Shanghai 2010, Manifesta 9, dOCUMENTA (13).

What follows are images from a selection of exhibitions.

MODIFIED SPACES - CCP,
4TH GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL, GUANGDONG MUSEUM OF ART
GUANGZHOU (CN), 2011

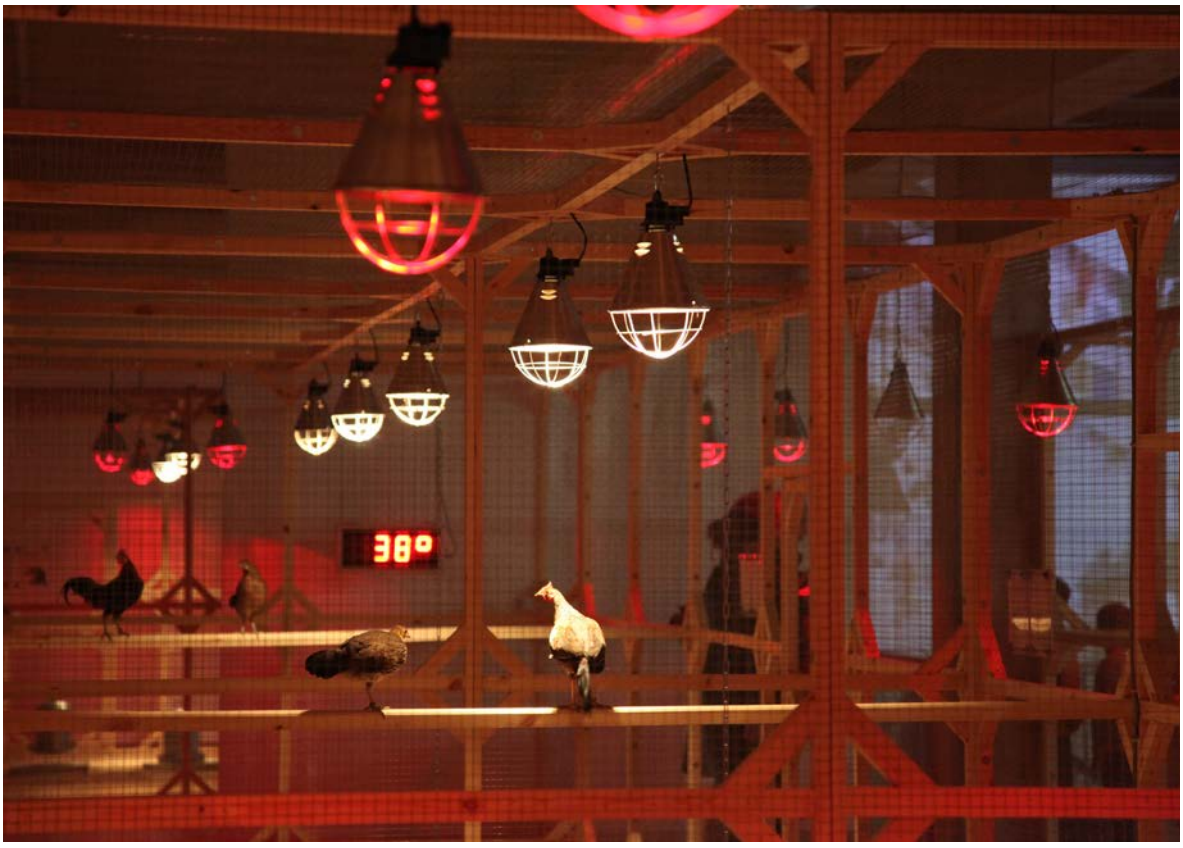
Top Press interviews during the opening night in the Conservation space, showing stamped eggs of the CCP on industrial tables.

Below Visitors trespassing the cage of the Red Junglefowl at the opening of the exhibition.

MODIFIED SPACES - CCP,
4TH GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL, GUANGDONG MUSEUM OF ART
GUANGZHOU (CN), 2011

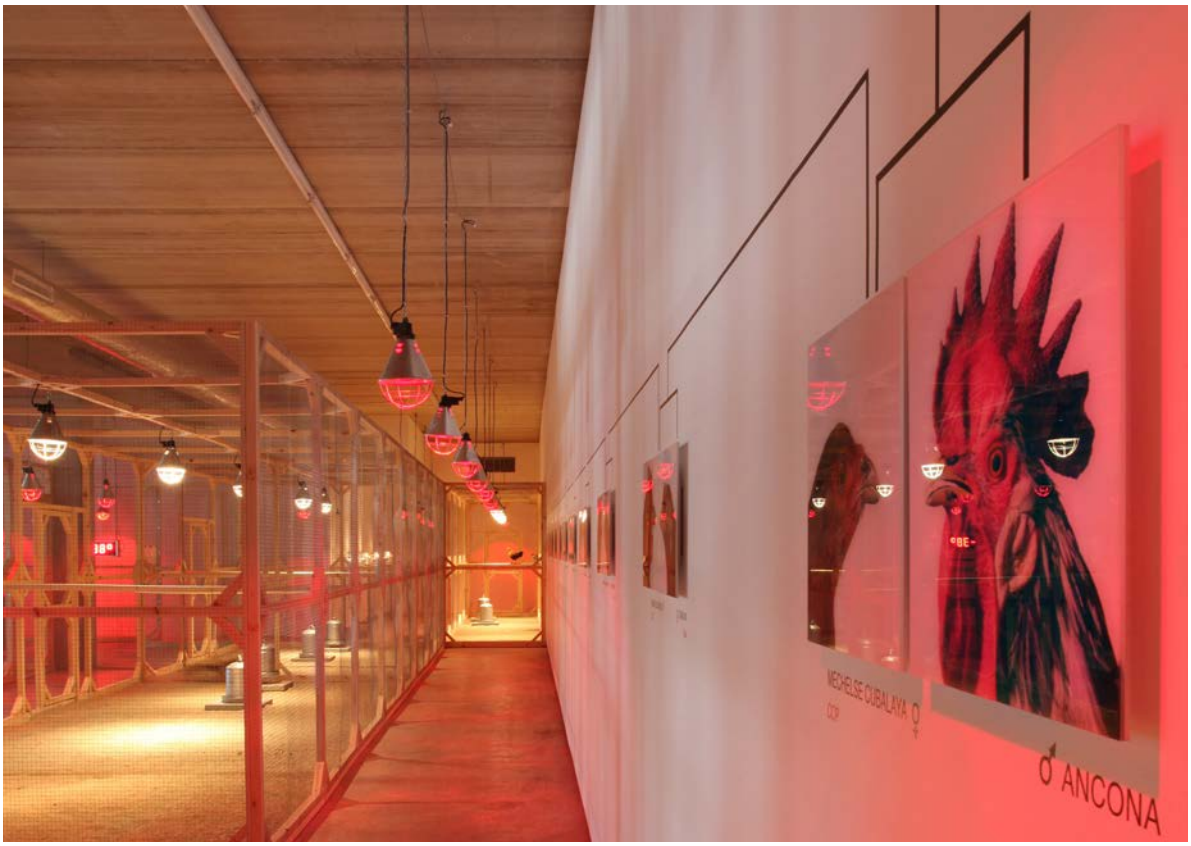
Installation view of the Incubation Space with video projection.

BREAKING THE CAGE - CCP
IKOB, INTERNATIONAL ART CENTRE, EUPEN (BE), 2011



Top Green Junglefowl
Below Installation view of the labyrinth of cages

BREAKING THE CAGE - CCP
IKOB, INTERNATIONAL ART CENTRE, EUPEN (BE), 2011



Top Cosmopolitan Chicken Project - Mechelse Fayoumi, 30 x 30 cm, photo print on plexi glass
Below Installation view, Breaking the Cage

LA BIOMISTA - CCP,
ZKM, KARLSRUHE (DE), 2015

Top Koen Vanmechelen in the installation
Below LABIOMISTA, print of plans of LABIOMISTA by Mario Botta, Koen Vanmechelen, Buro and Buro Landschap on paper, scale model, 3D printed animals, iron table, 2015.

LA BIOMISTA - CCP,
ZKM, KARLSRUHE (DE), 2015

Top Visitors during the opening night.
Below Library of Collected Knowledge - Arena de Evolución, multi-media installation, 2015

LEAVING PARADISE - CCP
ART SANYA,
HAINAN ISLAND (CN), 2014

Top Reflection of the passports of the Cosmopolitan Chicken project in a photo print (lambda) on plexi glass.

Below Hybridity in Art and Science – CCP, Showcase(glass and steel), passports chickens CCP, file Hybridity in Art and Science, canvas, video (The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project - Koen Vanmechelen), monitor, headphones, 120 x 110 x 60 cm, 2012.

LEAVING PARADISE - CCP
ART SANYA,
HAINAN ISLAND (CN), 2014

Top Installation view, Leaving Paradise, Red Junglefowls, wood, chicken gaze, sand, tropical plants, chicken passports.
Below Installation view, Leaving Paradise, multimedia installation.

HYBRIDITY IN ART AND SCIENCE - CCP
THE WORLDLY HOUSE, dOCUMENTA (13), KASSEL (DE), 2012

Top The Worldly House, curator Carolyn Christov- Bakargiev and Tue Greenfort.
Below Installation view, Hybridity in Art and Science, archive of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and video archive.

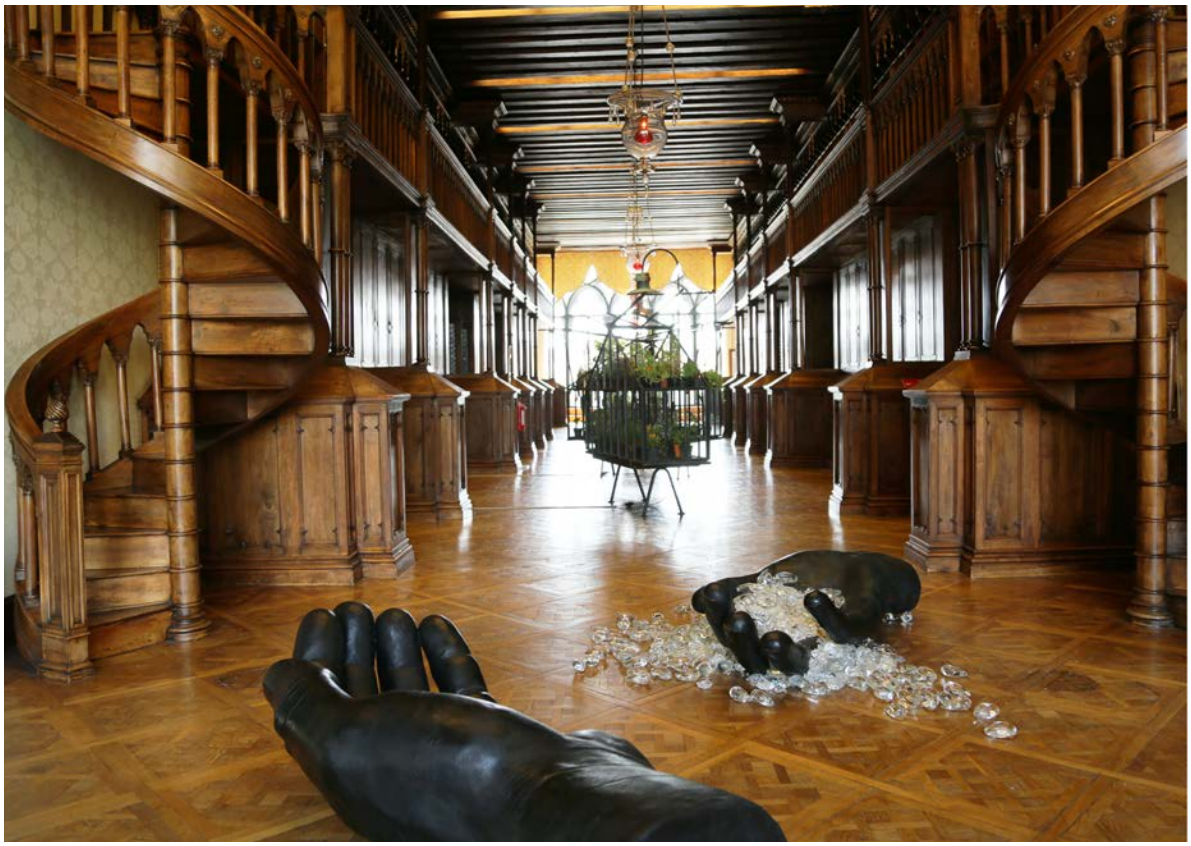
EVOLUTION OF A HYBRID - CCP
BEAF/BOZAR, BRUSSEL (BE), 2013

Installation view, Evolution of a Hybrid - CCRP, Container (plexi glass, inox), Cosmopolitan Chicken, plexi glass box with 3D print of DNA; Polyamide (Selective Laser Sintering), neon and lettering, lamp holders, LED lamps, chair, video recording equipment, 200 x 450 x 200 cm. More information on www.ccrp.be.

EVOLUTION OF A HYBRID - CCP
BEAF/BOZAR, BRUSSEL (BE), 2013

Installation view, Evolution of a Hybrid - CCRP

AWAKENER/LIFEBANK,
PALAZZO FRANCHETTI, BIENNIAL OF VENICE,
VENICE (IT), 2015



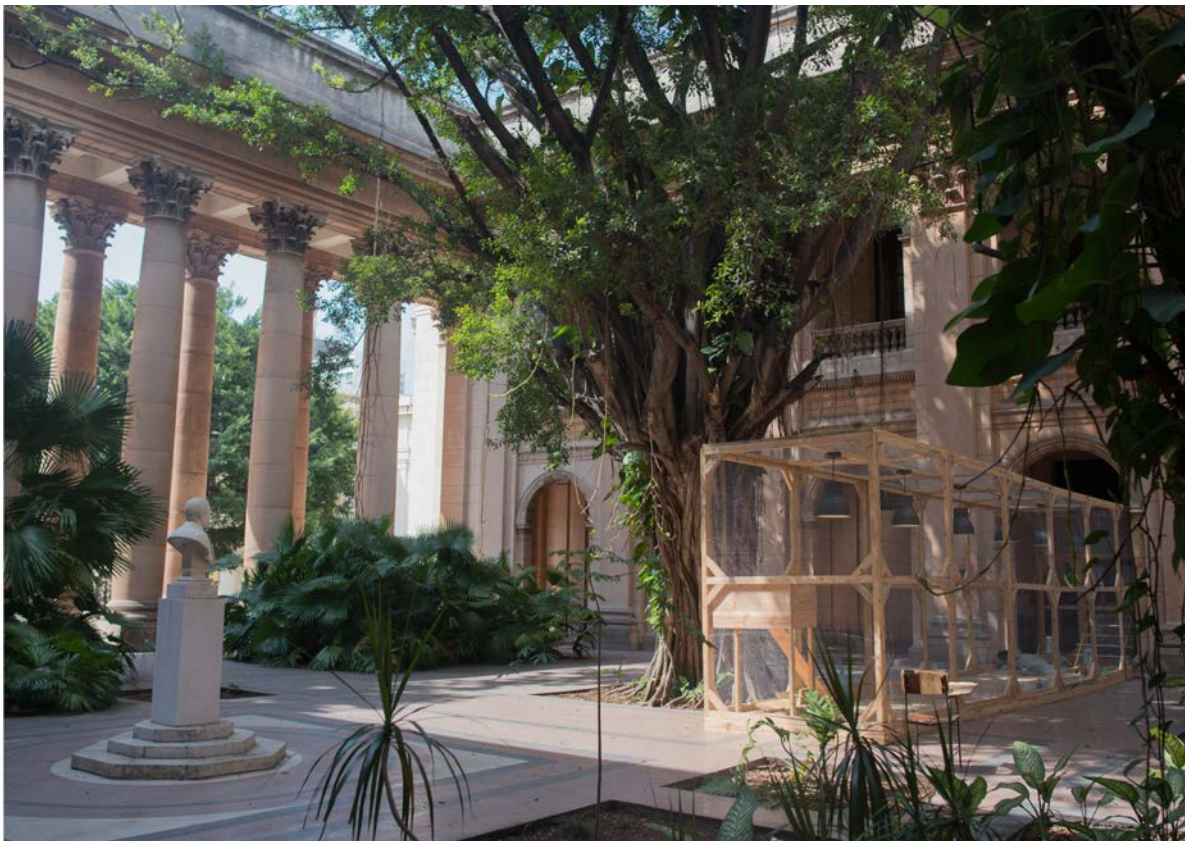
Top Domesticated Giant, bronze, glass, 55 x 178 x 86 cm, 40 x 174 x 87 cm, 2015
Below installation view LIFEBANK, Glasstress 2015 Gotika, Palazzo Franchetti, la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy, 2015

AWAKENER/LIFEBANK,
PALAZZO FRANCHETTI, BIENNIAL OF VENICE,
VENICE (IT), 2015

Top Detail of glass jars with seeds, LIFEBANK, Glasstress 2015 Gotika, Palazzo Franchetti, la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy, 2015.

Below Lifebank Conservatory, greenhouse (glass, steel), lamp, variety of plants, 180 x 200 x 70 cm, LIFEBANK, Glasstress 2015 Gotika, Palazzo Franchetti, la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy, 2015.

ARENA DE EVOLUCIÓN –
LIBRARY OF COLLECTED KNOWLEDGE
BIENNIAL OF CUBA, HAVANA (CU), 2015



Top View of the courtyard of the University of Havana
Below Installation view of the Cubalaya Cage, Arena de Evolución – L.O.C.K., 12 Bienal de la Habana, Museo Felipe Poey, 2015.

ARENA DE EVOLUCIÓN –
LIBRARY OF COLLECTED KNOWLEDGE
BIENNIAL OF CUBA, HAVANA (CU), 2015

Top Inside view of the Museo de Historia Natural 'Felipe Poey' at the University of Havana, Cuba, the oldest museum of Havana.

Below Installation view Arena de Evolución – L.O.C.K., 12 Bienal de la Habana, Museo Felipe Poey, 2015.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

PCC

Chicks from the Planetary Community Chicken presented in Koen Vanmechelen's 'Broeders van de Wereld' installation at the central square of Sint-Truiden (BE), 2016.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

THE IDEA

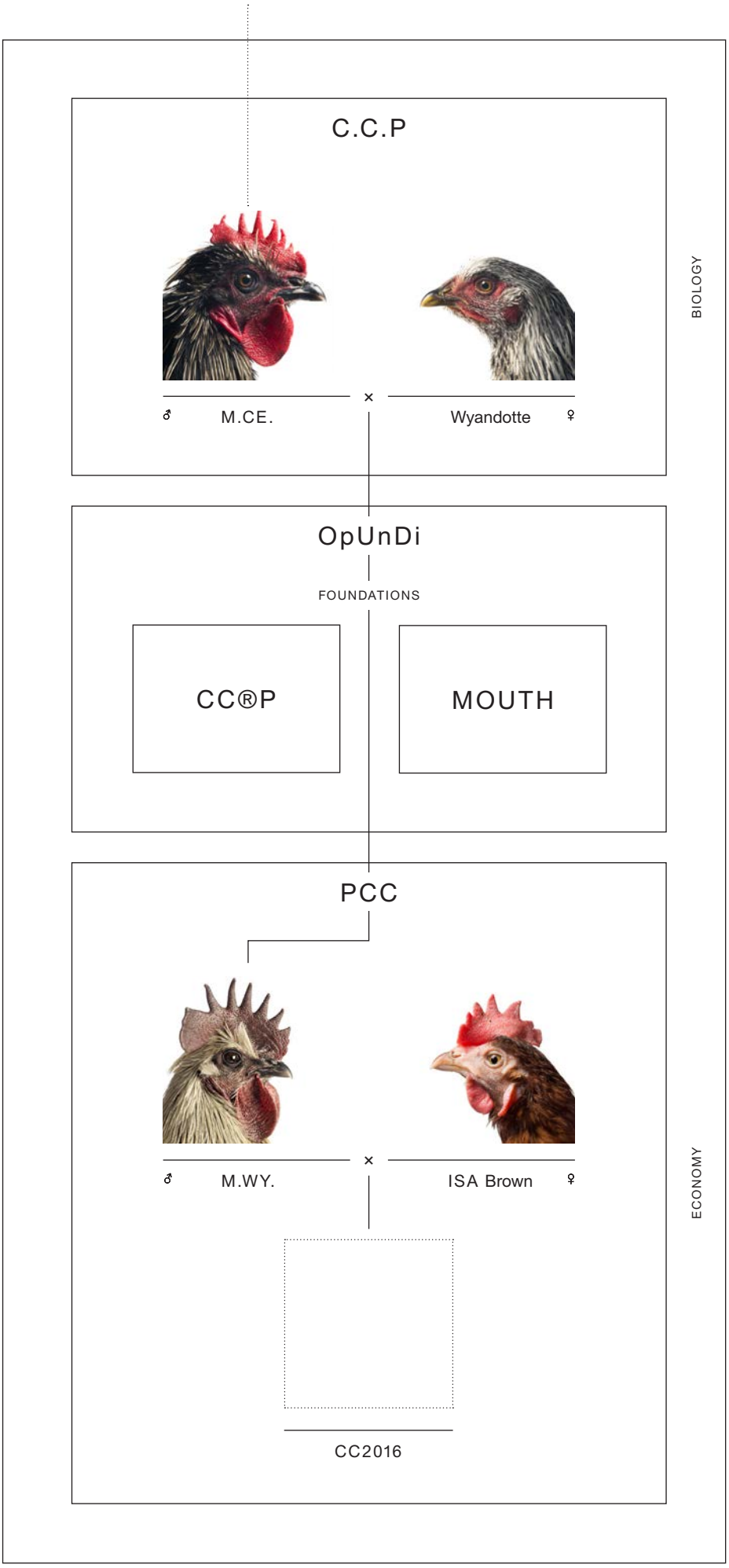
In 2016, Vanmechelen launched the Planetary Community Chicken (PCC) as a natural response to the positive outcomes of the CCP, and as a way to take his art and findings on diversity out into society. The project focuses on bringing new, healthier chickens to the world's communities, and emphasises the importance of diversity and local, small-scale community farming for long-term sustainability.

The project starts with the idea that, every year, a rooster of the newest CCP crossbreed will be paired with a local commercial hen somewhere in the world. This chicken will absorb the genetic pool of the CCP rooster and the local commercial hen and produce a vital community chicken that can provide its host community with eggs and meat.

The introduction of a new 'cosmopolitan genome' to the local flock puts an end to the ongoing cycle of genetic erosion that results from local inbreeding and industrial highly efficient mono-cultural production. It promises greater resilience and adaptability. In turn, the local chicken provides familiarity and the necessary characteristics suited for the local environment, as well as resistance to domestic threats.

In each community into which the PCC is introduced, Vanmechelen makes an art exhibition the venue for the crossing and, through it, encourages public discussion about the value and meaning of diversity and identity. The beauty of 'the other', the coming together of the global with the local are visualised in a wide variety of works. The new crossbred chicks hatch in the galleries and museums – with exhibition materials often constructed and recycled by local communities - before being transferred to selected free-range flocks.

A.R.T.



C.C.P.	Cosmopolitan Chicken Project
M.CE.	Mechelse Cemani - CCP19
Wyandotte	Typical chicken of a Native American tribe historically prevalent in the lower Great Lakes
OpUnDi	Open University of Diversity
CC®P	Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project
MOUTH	Museum of Understanding, Trust and Humanity
PCC	Planetary Community Chicken
M.WY.	Mechelse Wyandotte - CCP20
ISA Brown	Laying hen from Hendrix Genetics
CC2016	Carbon Copy 2016
A.R.T.	Active Reviving Transmission

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

THE NECESSITY OF COMBINING THE GLOBAL WITH THE LOCAL

As it leaves the gallery and settles in the cities and farms, every PCC species becomes part of a new community somewhere around the globe. It brings an injection of new blood, and incorporates different local communities into a global one. It acts as a reminder that the local and the global must work together for greater biological sustainability and social understanding. The CCP-PCC represents the start of a new pattern of migration and evolution - a perpetual process of connection and dispersal which disrupts and subverts some of the human influences we have known.

Vanmechelen turns this message about diversity and global connectivity into a tool for local empowerment, dialogue, education and enquiry. The PCC chicken is introduced to the selected community projects and small-scale farms to produce a chicken that is resilient, adaptable and efficient over time. This can help support the development of sustainable, locally-managed food systems, and improve access to quality nutrition and employment for local people, especially women. Incorporated into every pilot is the use of art and story-telling to foster community-led and classroom discussion around the value and impact of biocultural diversity.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

ART + CHICKEN = SCIENCE (2)

Vanmechelen has been invited to link his work with the CCP and PCC chickens to a series of scientific livestock research projects worldwide. Most notably, this includes the African Chicken Genetic Gains Project being carried out by the International Livestock Research Institute in Ethiopia. The investigations seek to understand and optimise the balance that exists between genetic diversity and short-term and long-term productivity in livestock. Whilst genetic erosion will naturally take place over time in any stock, the CCP chicken could provide an on-going source for the injection of fresh DNA at regular intervals, or as required by a changing environment.

In collaboration with scientists, museums and local communities, the MOUTH Foundation coordinates initiatives and research into the scientific and practical value of the project.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

Belgium

A pilot project ran in Belgium in March 2016 in collaboration with Ghent University (2016, Coopman and Debersaques), Hendrix Genetics and local organization “De Hoev”.

The first PCC chicken was a crossing between the 19th generation CCP, the Mechelse Sulmtaler and the commercial egg-laying hen, the ISA Brown. Their offspring hatched at De Hoev organic farm in Zonhoven, a local social economy project. Here, the organization “Werkende Handen” (Working Hands) promotes sustainable agriculture in an urban environment, and provides job opportunities for those who struggle to find work through the regular job market.

As part of an art installation, the first generation of PCC was raised in a vacant building on the Grote Markt, the central square of Sint-Truiden. Locals came into contact with the active young chicks as a living work of art, and were able to follow their progress until the chicks were mature enough to move on to the next location. Fifty-one CCP crossings have now been distributed across Belgium and the Netherlands, and are being evaluated and compared with commercial breeds in integrated plant-animal production systems in a project led by Ghent University.

BROEDERS VAN DE WERELD - PCC
SINT-TRUIDEN (BE), 2016

The PCC chickens hatching in the city center of Sint-Truiden (BE), Broeders van de Wereld, 2016.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

Zimbabwe

An exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Zimbabwe in August 2016 marked the launch of the PCC on the African continent. The project in Zimbabwe was developed in partnership with The Future of Hope Foundation, a local educational and commercial organization led by social entrepreneur Chido Govera.

In the museum, the newly-hatched CC2016 chickens moved across the sand bedding of the Courtauld Gallery. Two large chicken portraits overlooked their flock; the Mechelse Sulmtaler rooster, the 18th generation of Vanmechelen's Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, and a local commercial hen. Chicken coops in the central space of the gallery were built by people from nearby communities in the ancient tradition of Dhaka hut making. Above them, referencing the potential of the future of these communities., giant nests were filled with 'blown out' eggs. The nest and eggs symbolize desire and the process of breeding and breaking free. They suggest the birth of mysterious, unborn identities.

Later, the chicks were relocated to a nearby farm operated by Chido Govera's Future of Hope Foundation. The foundation works to help disadvantaged orphans, women, and communities lift themselves out of poverty through agriculture. The chickens were introduced as components in the small-scale circular food systems managed by the foundation. Able to roam freely and forage on the mushroom mycelium and other produce grown on the farm, the chicken's now routinely fertilize the mushrooms on which they feed, while the eggs are collected and sold by the locals. Together, the chickens, mushrooms and eggs constitute a living and life-giving ecosystem managed by the communities, to whom they provide nutrition and income.

PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN, NATIONAL GALLERY OF ZIMBABWE, HARARE (ZW), 2016

Top Social entrepreneur Chido Govera and some women from the nearby communities.
Below Installation view, Planetary Community Chicken, National Gallery of Harare, 2016.

THE PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN

EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

Detroit

For the Energy/Mass exhibition of 2016, the 19th generation Cosmopolitan Chicken, the Mechelse Cemani, was bred with the Detroit Wyandotte, prevalent in the Great Lakes region, to create the 20th generation Mechelse Wyandotte, which now holds aspects of DNA from 20 different breeds from across five continents. ENERGY/MASS featured the artist's 2D and 3D-works, alongside living chickens from the CCP and PCC. From each of the chicken species - Mechelse Wyandotte, ISA Brown and the resulting CC2016 - the precise order of nucleotides (the four letters of the DNA alphabet) within the genome was determined, a process that is called sequencing. When compared to the standard chicken genome, the new strains showed significantly increased diversity and potential for gene transcription and expression.

In Detroit, Koen Vanmechelen and Wasserman Projects are partnering with the local non-profit Oakland Avenue Urban Farm to bring the latest PCC chicken, a cross between the Hendrix Genetics' ISA Brown industrial chicken and the 2016 Cosmopolitan Chicken, the Mechelse Wyandotte, into the farm's agricultural and sales operations.

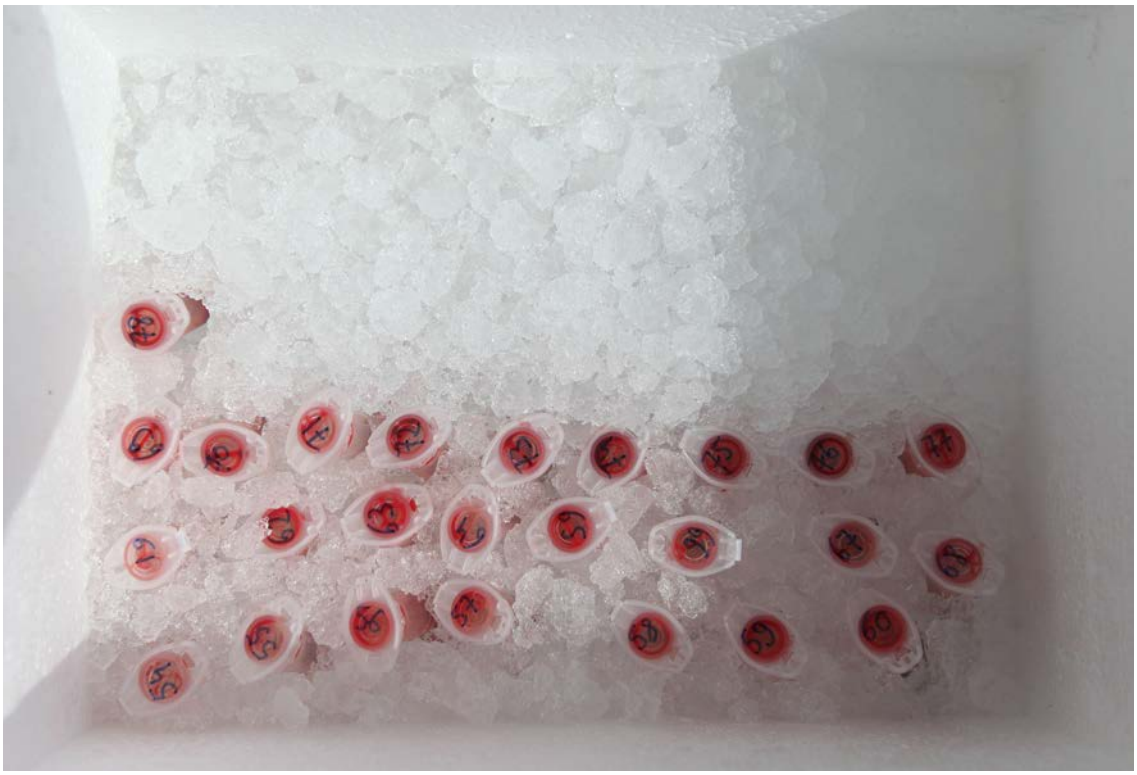
PLANETARY COMMUNITY CHICKEN, WASSERMAN PROJECTS, DETROIT (US), 2016

Top Green house at the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm which will be transformed in a house for the Planetary Community Chicken.

Below Installation view ENERGY/MASS, Wasserman Projects, Detroit (US), 2016 © Koen Vanmechelen

ART AND SCIENCE

CCP - PCC



Blood samples from the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project,
collected by the CCRP foundation

ART AND SCIENCE

CCP - PCC

A strong advocate for the symbiosis between art and science, Vanmechelen says:

“Art and science have the same origin and follow a similar process. Both are inspired by the power of imagination and fueled by the ever-inquiring mind. Art, like science, is a way to discover new things. Both disciplines imagine the future and are tasked to advance society. Art, in a way, is expected to ‘tear up the rule books’. It has the ability and the responsibility to trigger innovation – also in science.”

From the start, Vanmechelen has been collaborating with scientists and experts from different disciplines to explore the scientific value and practical applications of his work:

• The University of Leuven, under the leadership of human geneticist J.J. Cassiman, has used state of the art genomic techniques to study the effect of Vanmechelen’s crossings on the genetic diversity of chickens and its relevance for human genetics.

• Hendrix Genetics, a leading multi-species breeding company, has compared the diversity of Vanmechelen’s chicken to the reference genome, using SNP genotyping and whole genome sequencing.

• Ghent University is investigating whether Vanmechelen’s chicken is the better choice in ecological and integrated chicken farming.

• The University of Nottingham (UK) has included the CCP in its research on genetic introgression in domestic chicken.

• The MOUTH foundation, established in 2015 and chaired by Philip Remans, aims to form a centre for the application and study of biodiversity in science, food and sustainable production, using data and samples from the CCP project.

• In 2016, the international Livestock Research Institute in Ethiopia co-opted the CCP-PCC project to further the research agenda of their African Chicken Genetics Gains Project (ACGG), backed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. As a follow-on to the project, an ACGG selected strain is being cross-bred with the CCP to help identify a sustainable, high productivity chicken strain suitable for sub-Saharan Africa.

Vanmechelen’s contribution to link art and science were recognized in 2013 with the Golden Nica Hybrid Art Award for his Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, and at the Art and Science Exhibition of the international conference on Intelligent Systems for Molecular Biology (ISMB) for Evolution of a Hybrid.

Within the scientific and business communities, the CCP-PCC process has already prompted discussion around a range of health-related questions:

• Is the CCP, with its higher genetic diversity, indeed more immune to a variety of diseases than a regular commercial chicken? (O. Hanotte, University of Nottingham, ILRI)

•With the chicken genome displaying over 60 % homology with the human genome, and serving as a relevant model for the study of specific human diseases including dementia and ovarian cancer, what can be learned from and translated to human genetics? (J.J. Cassiman, Unversity of Leuven)

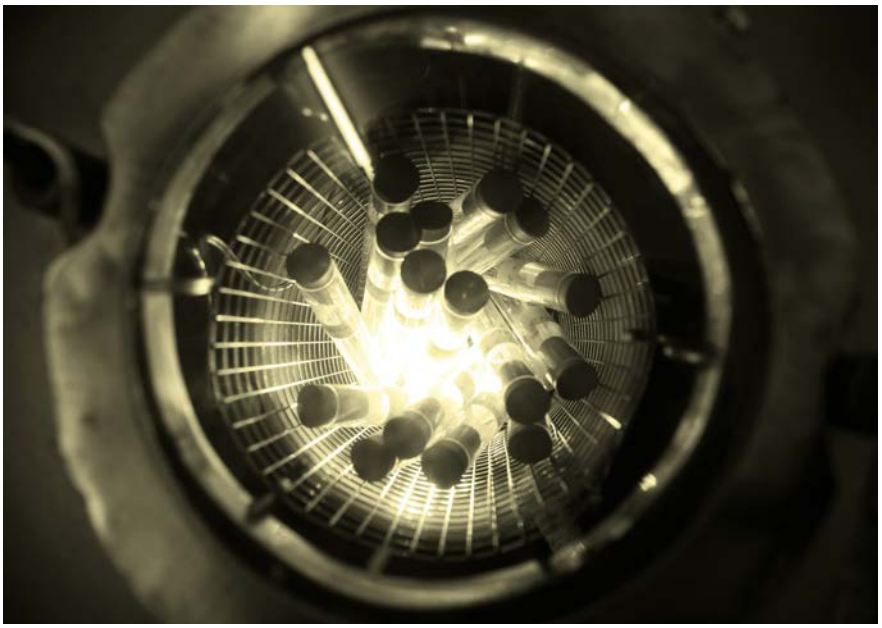
• What new insight might the CCP bio-data bring to the understanding of complex biological and metabolic systems in scientific research? (P.H.Remans, MOUTH Foundation)

• What new insights can the CCP and PCC projects offer not only for genetics and genomics, but also epigenetics and epigenomics? (P.H.Remans, MOUTH Foundation)

• What are the best parameters to monitor changes in the local ecosystem after the introduction of the PCC? (Coopman and Debersaques, Ghent University).

• Can the PCC be an effective component in local empowerment and commercially-viable food development projects? (L. Vrielinck, PH Remans, MOUTH Foundation; C. Govera, Future of Hope Foundation)

FROZEN CULTURE,
2005 - PRESENT



Top As a result of the pandemic bird's flu, Koen Vanmechelen decided to safeguard the genetic material of the CCP by freezing in the sperm. A hi-tech operation, made possible by collaborating with scientists.

Below Frozen Culture, CCP - In Vetro, Mediaruimte, Brussel (BE), 2011.

GOLDEN SPUR
2008 - 2011

After having lost a spur in a battle, a rooster was treated by a surgical team to provide a bone-anchored support, on top of which a screw-retained golden spur was placed. The operation was performed by Dr. Luc Vrielinck in Genk (BE).

CCRP / MOUTH
2009 - PRESENT

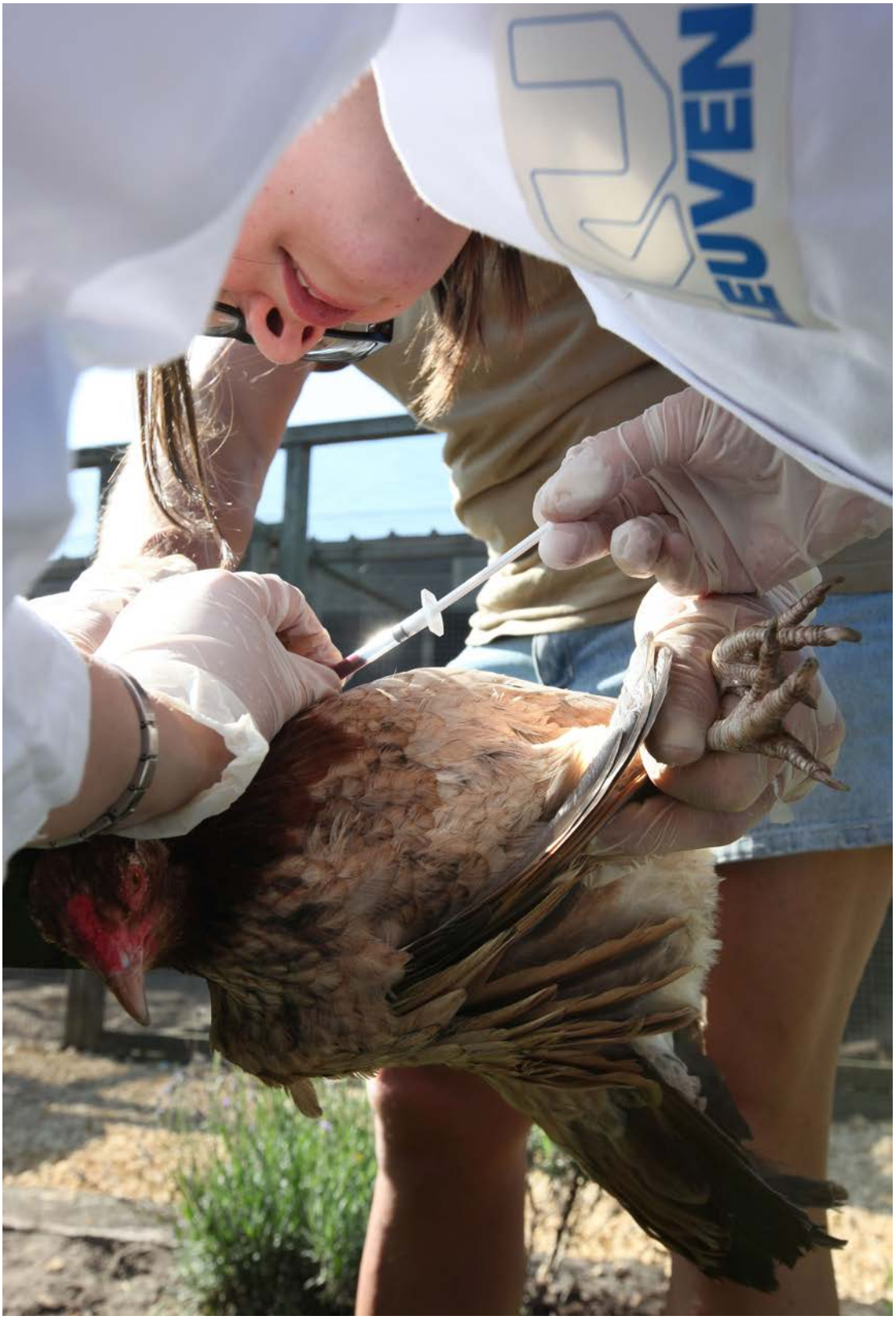
Throughout the years, the CCRP and Mouth foundations have been developed with the objective to investigate the genetics and immunology of the chicken. Expert meetings, lectures and debates are organised on a regular basis.

INCUBATED WORLDS
2016 - PRESENT

INCUBATED WORLDS

ACGG × CCP
EAPCC

Incubated Worlds is a collaboration between Koen Vanmechelen, MOUTH, the International Livestock Research Institute and the Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture Research. As follow-up to the African Chicken Genetics Gains (ACGG) Project backed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Cosmopolitan Chickens are to be crossbred with chicken strains selected according to productivity and farmer preference in sub-Saharan Africa. The resulting crossbred chicks will be known as Ethiopian African Planetary Community Chickens (EAPCC). They combine the greater resilience of the genetically diverse Cosmopolitan Chicken with the productivity of the ACGG-selected strains.



Researchers from the KULeuven bleed the Cosmopolitan Chickens

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

The Chicken's Appeal, 2007

KOEN VANMECHELEN
BIOGRAPHY

The Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen (1965) is an internationally acclaimed conceptual artist. His work explores the importance of bio-cultural diversity, identity and community.

As a young boy, Vanmechelen had two unusual passions. Inspired by the local pastry chef, he took up cooking, and quickly came to see it as a form of alchemy and art. His other fascination was chickens. From the age of five, he continually kept a flock in his backyard. Vanmechelen later trained and qualified as a pastry chef himself, working in numerous Michelin star restaurants. But he never stopped working on his art. During this period, his early exhibitions comprised mainly figurative expressionist paintings and constructivist wooden sculptures of birds created in the basement of the restaurant where he worked.

Vanmechelen's art first gained worldwide recognition in the late nineties, with the launch of his Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP) in which he cross-breeds domesticated chickens from different countries as an allegorical and aesthetic statement about the way in which diversity can shape the global cultural and genetic mix.

Twenty years on, Vanmechelen has presented his work on almost every continent and is a regular contributor to the Venice Biennale. He was a guest speaker at the World Economic Forum, the WHO and the World Expo in Shanghai. The artist's scientific collaborations have earned him numerous awards including the Golden Nica Hybrid Art award in 2013. His focus on social engagement has led to the establishment of several community-focused foundations. These foundations and projects are based in the artist's studio in Belgium, LABIOMISTA, meaning literally 'mix of life'. The 24-ha site, which includes an animal park, urban farming lots and an educational and research center alongside the studio, is a living laboratory exploring how culture, nature and humanity might achieve a more sustainable balance.

Vanmechelen's latest Planetary Community Chicken project, supported by the MOUTH Foundation, promotes art, story-telling, entrepreneurship and 'beyond the lab' research into the impact of bio-cultural diversity on food, health, society, livelihoods, and the environment.

The project centers around the introduction of the CCP chicken to local flocks. The coupling of the genetic diversity of the CCP with the productivity and familiarity of the local commercial chicken seeks to create a resilient, adaptable and productive chicken better able to support the communities of our planet. The aim is to question one of the main outcomes of modern poultry farming whereby flocks have become genetically impoverished and susceptible to disease due to industrialization and inbreeding.

With his projects, Koen Vanmechelen brings together art, science and communities in the search for a more sustainable balance. In Zimbabwe and Detroit, a series of urban art exhibitions by Vanmechelen preceded the introduction of the Planetary Community Chicken to farms in rural and peri-urban communities. During the exhibitions, communities, village leaders, city dwellers, artists and academics alike were all encouraged to work together to explore the themes of diversity and sustainability in both food systems and society.

In Ethiopia, Vanmechelen's work is supporting the African Chicken Genetics Gains Project (ACGG), a three year collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), backed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. As part of its research into identifying a sustainable, high productivity, low-input chicken strain for Sub-Saharan Africa, an ACGG selected strain is being cross-bred with the CCP. Over 2500 household farms are included in ILRI's research, where families benefit from being able to eat and sell the resulting eggs and meat.

For more information
www.koenvanmechelen.com

LABIOMISTA

“LABIOMISTA inspires a new generation in finding sustainable ways to create a new society based on biocultural diversity.”
Koen Vanmechelen

LABIOMISTA (literally ‘mix of life’) is Koen Vanmechelen’s all-encompassing project, representing both his artistic practice and his philosophical ideas.

The site unites art and science, humans and animals, city and countryside, industry and community. Designed as an ever-evolving platform for reflection and learning, the project navigates between and across different disciplines, positioning diversity as the foundation for sustainable living and offering an alternative to traditional mono-cultural approaches to development.

LABIOMISTA is situated in the multicultural city of Genk in the Belgian province of Limburg.
The 24-hectare site consists of three parts: the villa, the park and the artist studio, designed by influential Swiss architect Mario Botta, each one representing a different identity: humans, nature, and the interplay and tension between them. The studio’s distinctive architecture incorporates a greenhouse and a giant aviary which houses two stellar eagles.

LABIOMISTA is scheduled to open to the public in the spring of 2019 and its mission is to embed the park sustainably in the district and the city as a living quarter.

LABIOMISTA consists of different elements;

I THE BATTERY
The main building of LABIOMISTA, the Battery, consists of the artist’s studio, exhibition space, art collection, laboratory and archive together with an auditorium for lectures, films and conferences. A greenhouse guides the visitor physically and temporally through the ecosystem of the original chicken and leads him to the present. A pair of stellar sea-eagles look down from their cage above the studio. The customizable niches under the building house the story of the different generations of the Cosmopolitan Chicken and Planetary Community Chicken project.

II THE VILLA
The villa originally belonged to a local mine owner and subsequently to the director of the former Zwartberg Zoo that was situated there. Currently being restored, this historic mansion will house the Library of Collected Knowledge (L.O.C.K.) that combines Vanmechelen’s own foundations and projects: The Open University of Diversity Genk (OpUnDi), the CC®P, CosmoGolem, Walking Egg, MOUTH and COMBAT and the archives of Genk’s mining past. The building will also offer accommodation for visiting scientists, scholars and curators who wish to research in the library and archives.

III THE COSMOPOLITAN CULTURE PARK
The 24-hectare site includes a public sculpture park and breeding stations for chickens of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and Planetary Community Chicken project. Other animals include camels, ostriches, llamas, emus, nandus and alpacas. In their relationship towards each other, both as couples and individuals, these animals form a unique ecosystem. It shows the visitor how important connections are, however unexpected they can be. Some of these animals will be part of a breeding programme to be reintroduced into the wild. In the furthest zone of the park there will be an area where wolves can roam. Through a walking tour, the visitors discover the different identities and stages of domestication and go from dedomestication to the wilderness.

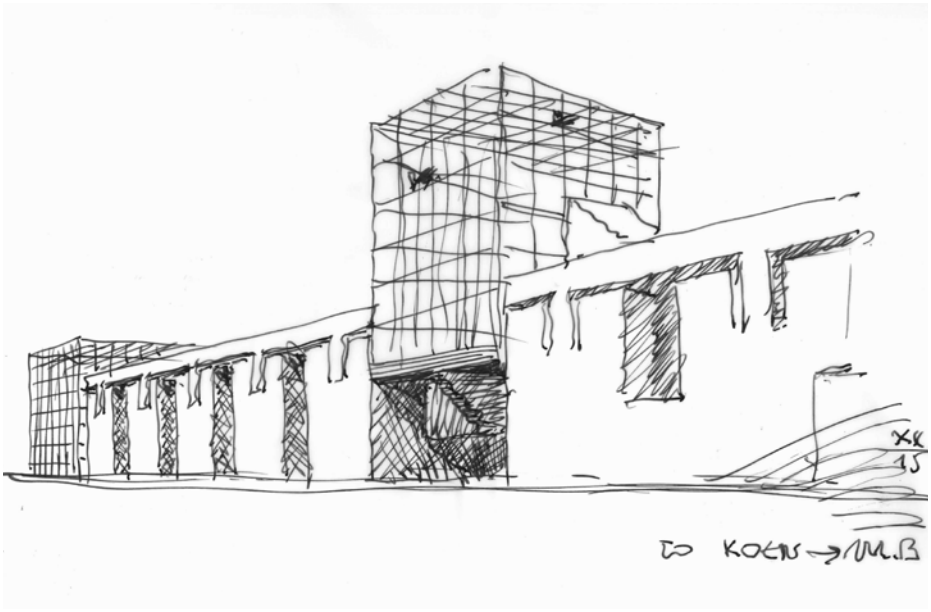
IV THE ARK
The Ark, also designed by Mario Botta, serves as the main entrance to the site. The impressive gate structure, that is opened manually every day, references the former entrance of the zoo. As visitors enter through the Ark, they are faced with both the old villa and the new studio in which greenhouse and aviary raise above the human living spaces, a new exploration between man and nature begins. It is a search for a new, more sustainable balance.

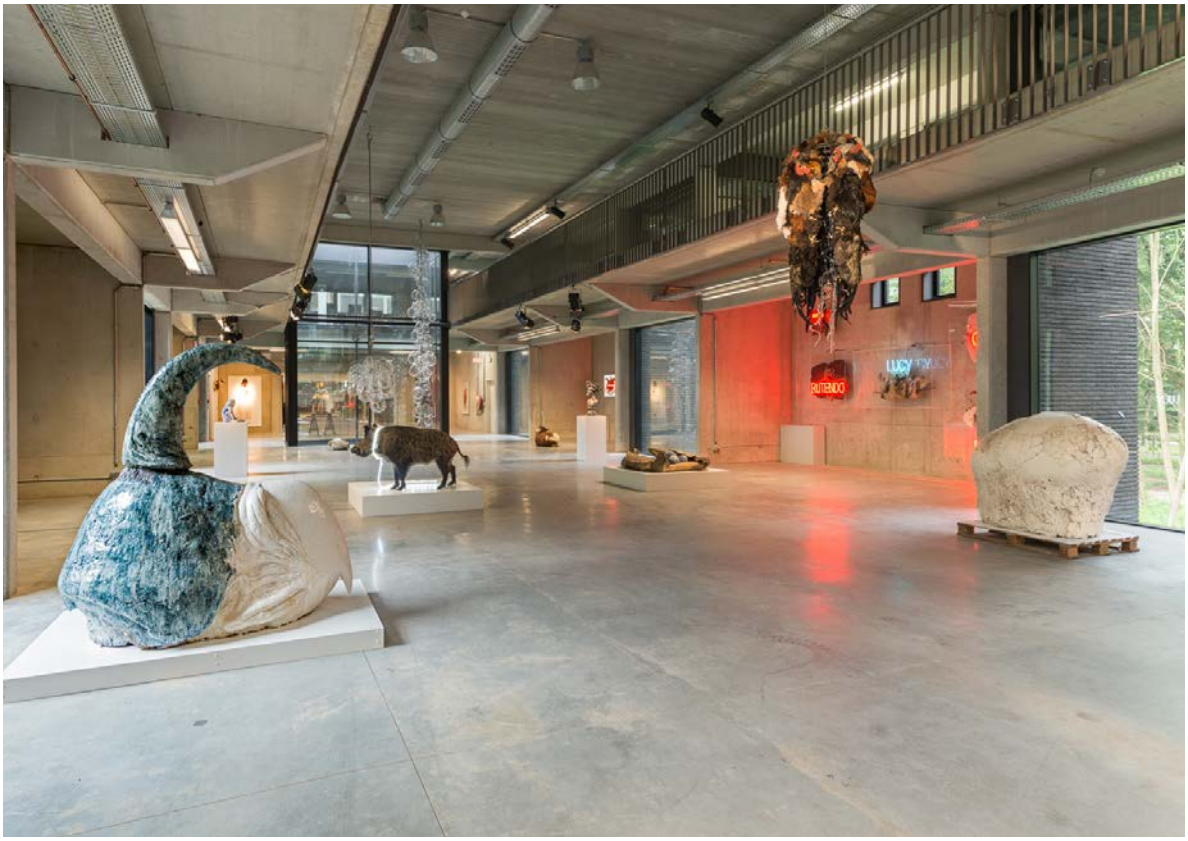
V LAB OVO
Built as an organic open pavilion in the park, Lab Ovo visualizes integration and interconnectivity. The pavilion will provide information and experiences on the different symbiotic relationships that are included throughout the park. The pavilion also houses an experimental laboratory, an education center and a care place for the animals in the park.

LABIOMISTA
OVERVIEW

I	The Battery
II	Villa
III	Cosmopolitan Culture Park
IV	The Ark
V	LAB OVO

LABIOMISTA
PHOTOS





Top Drawing of the studio by Mario Botta
Below LABIOMISTA - Studio Koen Vanmechelen, Genk (BE)

Playing Chicken With the Art World

A Belgian artist crossbreeds fowl to explore ideas of globalization and identity. And for the eggs.

By HILARIE M. SHEETS

Visit the exhibition by the Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen in Detroit this fall and you may never think about chickens the same way again — if you think about them much at all.

You may never think about art the same way, either.

During the past 20 years, Mr. Vanmechelen has gained attention with his Cosmopolitan Chicken Project. He has continually crossbred chickens from different nations to create a hybrid that is ever more robust in health and spectacular in physical attributes. This was not just for the sake of the chickens, though they do roam on a farm in Meeuwen, near the artist's studio in Hasselt, Belgium. He shows his chickens in museums and galleries as living art, alongside paintings, photographs, sculpture, video and installations that explore ideas of cultural, biological and aesthetic diversity.

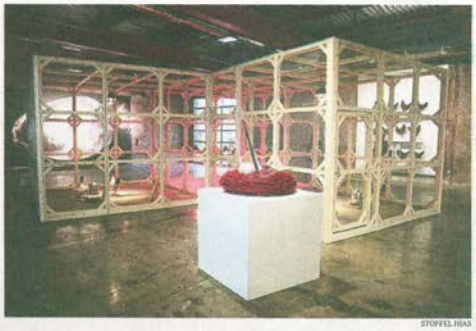
His chicken art project has been seen worldwide, including in Shanghai, Beirut and Havana; he has participated in three Venice Biennales, most recently in 2015.

Now, in his largest exhibition in the United States, Mr. Vanmechelen has teamed with Wasserman Projects in Detroit to showcase his art and also to take the concept much further (in a way that will become clear in just a moment). In the high-end world of fine art, this is definitely fringe. But he and his admirers view it as a crucial crossroads where art meets life.

"The chicken is such a strong metaphor," said Mr. Vanmechelen, 51, who developed a rapport with the bird at 5, when his uncle gave him chicks and an incubator. "Anthropologically, it tells something about humans and mirrors how humans spread all over the world," he said. "This work opens up discussions about globalization, multiculturalism and genetics."

In "Energy/Mass," on view through Dec. 17, a chicken coop installation hosts a Mechelse Cemani rooster — what the artist calls the 19th generation of his Cosmopolitan Chicken, and that he created by sequential matings of 18 international breeds. The Mechelse Cemani is commingling in one section with American Wyandotte hens, named for a Native American tribe that once populated the lower Great Lakes.

Their offspring make up the 20th generation of the Cosmopolitan Chicken, what Mr. Vanmechelen calls the Mechelse Wyandotte, on view in another part of the coop. Surrounding the animals are mixed-media works by the artist, including a family tree of the Cosmopolitan Chicken.



STOFFEL HAS

Until now, Mr. Vanmechelen's chickens have been raised solely as art. They die natural deaths, and then some are transformed by taxidermy into sculptural objects, as in the rooster poised at the hilt of a 12-foot-long steel sword at the entrance to the Detroit show. But the artist and the gallery's founder, Gary Wasserman, wondered how they could justify taking chickens only as art to Detroit, a city of such enormous economic and nutritional need.

Addressing these real-life issues, they have started a collaboration, the Planetary Community Chicken, a mating of the 20th-generation Cosmopolitan Chicken with an industrial hen to produce food for sale.

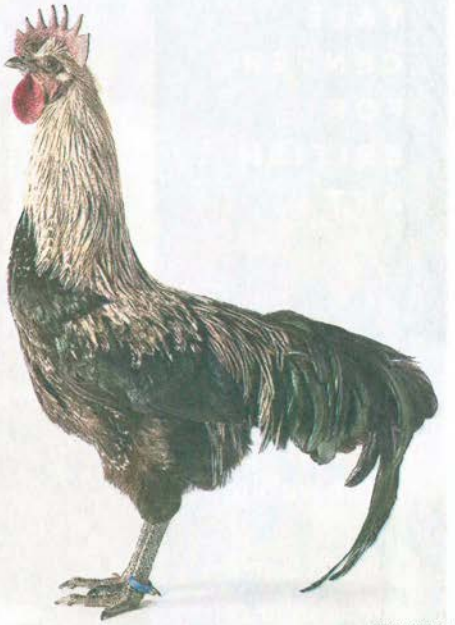
Some of their chicks are running around a pen in the backroom of the gallery and will start producing eggs next spring in their future home at the nearby Oakland Avenue Urban Farm. It is one of some 1,400 agricultural ventures that have sprung up in the empty lots of Detroit, where foreclosed homes have been torn down. "We're taking the installation project and delivering it into the hands of the community, where we're actually doing something that is not a token activity," Mr. Wasserman said. "It is art meeting agriculture meeting science meeting social science meeting economy."

William and Jerry Hebron, the married couple who run the farm and sell food to their neighbors from their backyard, as well as at farmers' markets, have never dealt with livestock but were game to try. "It's another way of making money for us, and the community is going to love it," said Mr. Hebron, who helped his wife start the farm in 2008 because the area "didn't have a place to buy a tomato or cucumber."

Will the Planetary Chicken lay good eggs? Olivier Hanotte, a livestock geneticist and professor at the University of Nottingham in England, said, "It will, of course, and I hope Koen will give me some to taste."

For several years, Mr. Hanotte has used genetic samples from the artist's birds for his research into the diversity of local chickens versus wild ones. With the Cosmopolitan Chicken's more diverse immune system, "we can predict they will be better fit to respond to a large spectrum of pathogens," he said. "Inbreeding is never good when you're talking about disease resistance."

Mr. Vanmechelen has achieved what scientists have not, he added. "This continuous experiment, doing years and years of breeding, would have been impossible to put into practice in a world where scientific grants run from three to five years at the most," he said. "Koen wasn't constrained by those things." In 2011, Mr. Vanmechelen founded the Open University of Diversity, which invites specialists from different fields to exchange ideas.



KOEN VANMECHELEN

Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts, former managing director of the Lisson Gallery in London, discovered Mr. Vanmechelen during his first living art installation in 2000 at Storm Centers in Watou, Belgium, for which he crossbred the Mechelse Koekoek, native to Belgium, with the French Poulet de Bresse. She then arranged for him to breed this first-generation Cosmopolitan Chicken with the English Redcap in an exhibition at her gallery that year. "Koen doesn't see the borders between anything," she said.

In 2014, Ms. van Coenegrachts, now an independent curator, took Mr. Vanmechelen's work back to London in "Darwin's Dream" at St. Pancras Church. There, along one corridor, she installed a kind of fashion show of blown-up portraits of generations of the Cosmopolitan Chicken. "You were confronted with very beautiful six-foot-tall chickens looking at you in the eye, the way a chicken looks at another chicken," she said. "Koen's work creates a big shift in your head, in how we position ourselves with other things that are alive around us."

A Metaphor!

Above left, an installation view of the Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen's "Energy/Mass," at Wasserman Projects in Detroit. Above, one of his special chickens and clucking metaphors, a Mechelse Wyandotte.

Article in the New York Times on the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, OCT 30, 2016 p. 26. Read online; https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/30/arts/design/playing-chicken-with-the-art-world.html

VIDEOS

Enter the fascinating universe of Koen Vanmechelen and discover video's on the various projects and on LABIOMISTA at our vimeo channel; www.vimeo.com/koenvanmechelen

Video (Selection)

OpUnDi Detroit, 2015
Artist Koen Vanmechelen, founder Wasserman Projects Gary Wasserman and Gallery Director Alison Wong explain further plans to bring the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project and the Planetary Community Chicken to Detroit, fall 2016.

Art & Science, 2015
A short documentary on the work of Koen Vanmechelen, focusing on the new studio LABIOMISTA. With footage of the different locations of Koen Vanmechelen's studio in Belgium. Produced by ZKM Karslruhe for the Exo-Evolution exhibition.

Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project - CC®P, 2009
A short documentary focussing on Koen Vanmechelen's collaborations with scientists, his honorary doctorate at the University of Hasselt and the Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project.

In one minute, 2007
A one-minute introduction into the oeuvre of Koen Vanmechelen by Liam Chan.

PUBLICATIONS

THE ACCIDENT IV, 2013

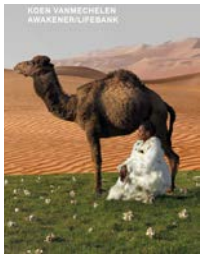
The Accident is a biennial magazine published by Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen and serves as a laboratory, think tank and mirror of Vanmechelen's work.

DARWIN'S DREAM, 2014

Catalog published on the occasion of Darwin's Dream, Vanmechelen's solo exhibition at the Crypt Gallery - St Pancras Church, London (UK) in 2014 curated and edited by James Putnam and Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts.

LA BIOMISTA, JOURNAL, Volume 1, 2015

Journal on LABIOMISTA, the new studio of Koen Vanmechelen in the city of Genk, presented at the cornerstone ceremony on the 9th of December, 2015.



AWAKENER/LIFEBANK, 2015

Catalogue published on the occasion of Vanmechelen's project for the 55th biennial of Venice; AWAKENER/LIFEBANK with texts on the artist's MECC project and his expansive installation intended to raise awareness of our ever-increasing abuse of food production.

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