

NATHALIE CAPART, ISABELLE DE PANGE
AND JEAN-JACQUES EVRARD



SECRET BRUSSELS



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

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MAGRITTE'S PHYSIOGNOMICAL FOUNTAIN ②

Find the painter's face

Place de Ninove



© Jean-Jacques Evraud

On Place de Ninove, nothing clashes with the humdrum Brussels routine – not the rows of neoclassical houses, not the old trees, and especially not the blue stone fountain gracing the centre of the square. And yet, if you look closely at the moulded base of the fountain, which seems rather ordinary at first, you'll see a double profile emerge in the negative on both sides, delimited at each end by the thin stream of water falling from the basin.

Perhaps you recognize him? It is Magritte's face that is so skillfully depicted here in a manner dear to Luca Maria Patella, the artist behind this work placed here in 2002. The inventor of 'physiognomical vases', this Italian artist has already sculpted the profiles of the likes of Goethe, Diderot, Duchamp and Annunzio in marble using the same technique (to learn more, visit his 'official and unofficial site': <http://lucapatella.altervista.org/index-english.htm>). But here, he has surpassed himself: what better homage could be paid to the painter of mysteries than this ghostly apparition that haunts an ordinary local fountain?



NEARBY

Rue de la Cigogne

Rue de Flandre 138–140 and Rue du Rempart des Moines 23

The rue de la Cigogne is probably one of the prettiest lanes in Brussels. Repaved in original cobbles and lined by old houses, it has a rustic charm much to the liking of its residents. On the street side of rue du Rempart des Moines, the way in is through the gateway of a attractive little chapel, in which there is a statue of St Roch dating from 1780 by an unknown sculptor.

③

GRAN ELDORADO ROOM OF THE UGC CINEMA OF BROUCKÈRE

⑪

Impressions of Africa: an Art Deco cinema complete with jungle decor and elephant's head

Place De Brouckère 38
09 00 10 440
Metro De Brouckère



While the UGC De Brouckère cinema complex is obviously well known, the magnificent Gran Eldorado cinema is too often forgotten. Overwhelmed by the 12 theatres making up the complex, this 700-seat cinema is an Art Deco gem. Built between 1931 and 1933 by the Liege architect Marcel Chabot, it was formerly part of the Eldorado that merged with La Scala in 1974. After a succession of incidents and a closure, the cinema chain UGC reinvested in the site in 1992 and restored the complex to become the flagship of its network in Belgium.

And the magic works. What a joy to find yourself in this comfortable setting, to admire the detail of the bas-reliefs while waiting for the film to begin. An elephant's head in one corner, a jungle scene in another, it's almost like being in Africa. And what a contrast, not only with the other anonymous theatres in the De Brouckère or other cinema complex. What a pity, however, that in the programme circulated each week, the UGC management does not even mention which film has the honour of being shown in the Gran Eldorado.

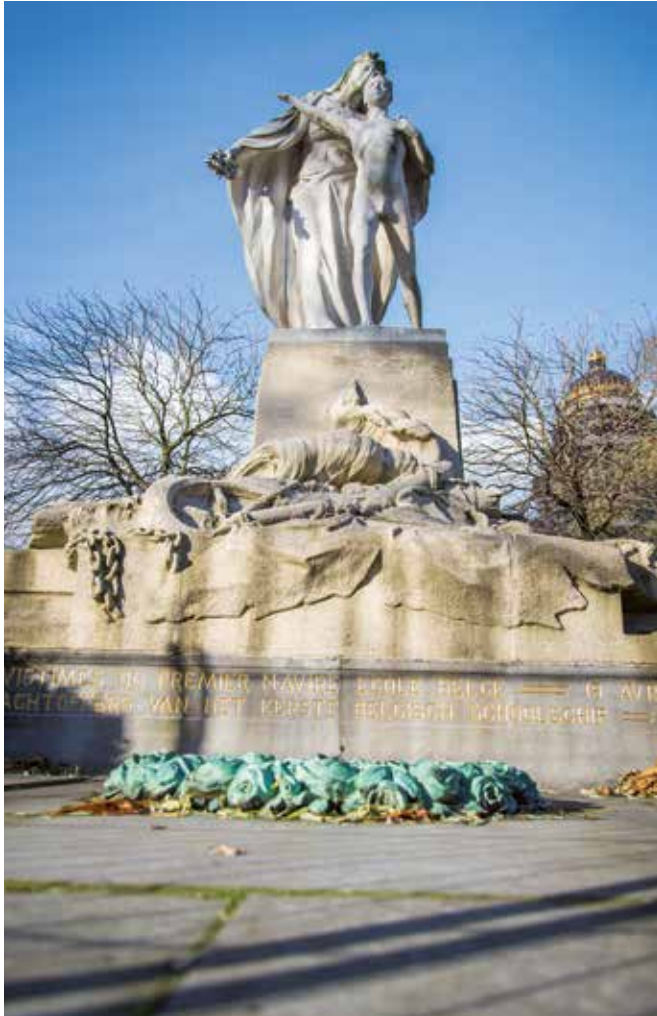
For those who enjoy this exotic style of decoration, take a stroll along the banana route while in the city centre (see p. 26).



DE SMET DE NAEYER MONUMENT ²⁹

The only military vessel to have sunk in the whole of Belgian history is a training ship that sank during a storm

Place Jean-Jacobs
Metro Louise



Situated next to an urban motorway, a remarkable statue recalls a particularly tragic, albeit completely forgotten, disaster. The monument pays homage to 33 crew members who drowned in 1906 when the training ship *Comte de Smet de Naeyer* was shipwrecked.

It is ironic to note that it is the only military vessel in the whole of Belgian naval military history to have sunk. Moreover, it was not damaged during a battle in wartime, but sank as the result of a violent storm off the Spanish coast.

After the shipwreck, 26 crew members were rescued by a French boat. They told of how Captain Fourcault and his crew made every effort to save the vessel and its sailors. Water entered the boat but the crew, which consisted mostly of young naval cadets, were unable to find the place where the boat had been damaged. As they couldn't repair the breach, the men on board exhausted themselves operating the hand-pumps.

As a last resort, Captain Fourcault gave the order to abandon ship and man the lifeboats, but some of these capsized due to the crew members' haste in evacuating the ship. The 26 crew members who were saved were in the only lifeboat that did not capsize.

The survivors related a quite unusual anecdote: the final words of Captain Fourcault, who was the last remaining person on the ship, a cigarette in his mouth, were: 'One last cigarette before I die'. The statue is supposed to represent a young man enthused by the call of the sea whose worried mother is trying to hold him back.

A wave and debris from the ship can be seen at the foot of the statue.



THE VAN EETVELDE HOTEL

③

A little-known gem of Brussels Art Nouveau architecture

LAB-AN

Avenue Palmerston 2-4

02 303 48 94 – info@lab-an.be

Saturday to Monday from 10am to 5pm (including public holidays)

Schuman metro station



Built in 1895 for Edmond van Eetvelde, Secretary-General of the Independent State of Congo, the Hôtel van Eetvelde is a true masterpiece by the famous Belgian architect Victor Horta. Since 2023, it has been open to the public three days a week.

The main part of the hotel (to which two extensions were added in 1899 and 1901) was particularly avant-garde for its time: Victor Horta built it around a large metal structure that both supports the different levels and displays an Art Nouveau aesthetic within the building's skeleton. Art Nouveau is evident everywhere you look, even on the façade, which also breaks with tradition through its multiple metal elements and asymmetry, with the entrance door located at one end.

The interior is a real gem, with delicacy evident in every detail: the spaces, which can be adapted thanks to the sliding partitions designed by Horta, are bathed in light filtering through the dome of the central rotunda. The omnipresent plant motifs, from the floral stained-glass windows to the woodwork evoking vines, unfold around the metal columns that serve as stems in this artificial garden.

Several of the materials used were imported from the Belgian Congo, a privilege (as it was still the private property of King Leopold II at the time) granted to van Eetvelde because of his position.

The glass roof of the central rotunda was nearly destroyed in 1950 when the Federation of Industry and Gas, which had just bought the premises, moved in. However, architect Jean Delhaye, a former student of Horta who lived in the neighbouring building, managed to save the stained glass windows, which were reinstalled in the dome when it was restored in 1988 following the demolition of the offices. before being restored once again during the work undertaken in 2022 and



2023 throughout the entire hotel to accommodate the LAB-AN (Art Nouveau Laboratory).

Founded on the occasion of Art Nouveau Year 2023, this initiative invites us to take a contemporary look at the formidable heritage of Art Nouveau works that adorn not only the capital, but also the rest of the country and the world.



SGRAFFITI OF THE MAISON DRICOT

③

Outstanding sgraffiti depicting construction workers

Rue Malibran 47



© Jean-Jacques Evraud

Designed by Edmond Pelseneer in 1900 for building contractor Pierre Dricot, the house at No. 47 Rue Malibran is a magnificent, Art Nouveau-style, bourgeois building.

The most striking feature, of course, is the excellent sgraffito work by Paul Cauchie, depicting the trades practised by the owner's company.

They show seven construction workers in action, with their tools and materials.

Like the well-known façade Cauchie created for himself and his wife on Rue des Francs in Etterbeek, this one can be seen as a genuine advertisement, clearly serving as a business card for the contractor Dricot.

The sgraffiti were remarkably restored to their original design in 2017, thanks to subsidies from the Brussels Region. The rest of the facade had undergone destructive renovations in the 1980s, including the replacement of the original loggias. Today, it has almost entirely been restored to its former glory.

NEARBY

Rue Souveraine 52

④

A beautiful Art Nouveau house built by Gustave Strauven in 1902, and one of the few works by this architect to be found outside Schaerbeek and the squares of the Quartier de l'Europe. You'll notice that an extra storey has been added to the original house. Admirers of Strauven should also see the famous Saint-Cyr house at 11 square Ambiorix, as well as the house at 85 boulevard Clovis (see p. 108 and 110).

Géo Ponchon's Studio

⑤

Rue de la Croix 25

An old neoclassical building that displays three panels of sgraffiti, well-drawn but in poor condition. Ponchon, who himself produced sgraffiti, devised a system to prevent them from deteriorating through time and exposure to the elements. Since his customers were often put off by the need to completely restore a sgraffito at great expense every few years, he proposed instead to carry out regular maintenance work in return for an annual subscription.



© Rehexio

TOWN HALL OF SAINT-GILLES

④

Built in the style of a Renaissance palace, the Hôtel de Ville was decorated by over 107 artists

Place Van Meenen 39

02 536 02 11

Guided tour by arrangement

Trams No. 81 and 82, Horta stop



© Jean-Jacques Eyraud

It's too often forgotten that the Saint-Gilles Hôtel de Ville is a veritable mini-museum of early 20th-century art. Its administrative function means that by definition it's open to the public, thus visits are free.

Responding to a constantly growing population and an initiative on the part of bourgmestre Van Meenen, who later lent his name to the town square, the Hôtel de Ville was inaugurated in 1904. With its 42 m bell tower, it was built in the style of a Renaissance palace by the self-taught architect Albert Dumont (1853-1920), responsible for the planning of De Panne on the Belgian coast in 1895 and Haredot-Plage in France. Over 107 artists contributed to the decoration of the building, in accordance with the wishes of the community council.

There are a number of statues gracing the exterior. In the entrance to the *Cour d'Honneur* stands a Jef Lambeaux sculpture *La Déesse du Bocq* (*The Goddess of Bocq*), which caused a sensation when it was installed. Intended to symbolize the bringing of piped water from the Bocq River, the sculpture of a young, willowy-limbed nude offended the public, as had *Passions Humaines* in the Horta pavilion at the Parc du Cinquantenaire (see p. 118), and so it disappeared into the cellars. The statue was only put back in place in 1976.

The interior is equally remarkable and most of the rooms are accessible: you only need to open the door. The great hall and staircase are decorated with several panels by Cluysenaar father and son, Jacques de Lalaing and Albert Ciamberlani, as well as a Carrera marble statue by Jef Lambeaux, *La Volupté* (*Voluptuousness*), and the original version of *La Porteuse d'Eau* (*The Water Carrier*) by Julien Dillens. A symbol of the commune, the latter is inspired by a young girl who used to water the horses that drew the omnibus along chaussée de Waterloo as far as La Barrière, where a copy of the famous statue now stands.

The registry office has a beautiful ceiling painted by Fernand Khnopff, as well as tapestries by Hélène de Rudder. Nearby you'll see a fine collection of antique pottery. The most sumptuous chamber is probably the Salle des Pas Perdus, decorated by Omer Diericx who took over four years to finish the ceiling composition *La Liberté descendant sur le monde aux acclamations de l'Humanité* (*Liberty Descending on the World to the Acclamations of Humanity*).

MAISON HANNON

⑥

The only Art Nouveau work by the architect Jules Brunfaut

Avenue de la Jonction 1
maisonhannon.be

Wednesday and Friday 11am–6pm and weekends 1pm–6pm



Today occupied by the photographic association Contretype, the magnificent Hôtel Hannon is one of the finest examples of Art Nouveau in Brussels. Built in 1902 by the architect Jules Brunfaut, this townhouse has the remarkable attribute of being his only work in the Art Nouveau style. He was actually a close friend of the owner, Edouard Hannon, and he expressed his friendship in trying out a new style for him in this building.

The result speaks volumes. Clearly inspired by Horta, as well as Van Rysselberghe, Brunfaut also called upon the famous master glassmaker of Nancy, Émile Gallé, for the furnishings and on the Rouen painter Paul Edouard Baudoin, pupil of Puvis de Chavanne, for the superb staircase fresco.

The house was abandoned in 1965 on the death of Denise Hannon, the owner's daughter, and was threatened with demolition by a property developer. The district council rose up against this aberration and the Saint-Gilles commune bought the house in 1976, the year it was listed, although the restoration wasn't complete until 1988.

During this time most of the furnishings disappeared. Some can now be seen at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Although the building now serves as a space for photographic exhibitions (a nice gesture to Edouard Hannon's passion for photography), it is particularly valued for its exterior architecture and its ground floor, staircase and fresco.



© Jmh20

A home, not a hotel

Although it was listed in 1976 as Hôtel Hannon, the building is now called Maison Hannon, because it has none of the architectural features that would make it a mansion: no vestibule or carriage entrance, no service staircase for the servants, no kitchen cellar or maids' rooms, and a relatively narrow façade.

For the sake of accuracy and respect for the intentions of the Hannons, it was decided to rename this residence Maison Hannon because, although large and luxurious, it was above all the living quarters of two connoisseurs and by no means intended as a stately home.

SCHAERBEEK MUNICIPAL HALL

12

Very few entered it

Place Colignon



© Edison McCullen

If most Brussels residents know the imposing Schaerbeek Municipal Hall, very few have ever been inside. Built out in the countryside by the architect Jules Jacques Van Ysendick, then reconstructed in 1911 after a fire, this town hall is a good example of Flemish neo-Renaissance style. Admire above all the stained-glass windows of the main stairway inside, the two lateral staircases, the glass wall at the rear and the principal rooms at the front of the building, notably the wedding hall and the council chambers. The chambers have some pretty Malines tapestries representing cherry trees, whose fruit is the symbol of this commune.



© Edison McCullen

NEARBY

Private house of Henri Jacobs

13

Avenue Maréchal Foch 9

A short distance from the Schaerbeek Municipal Hall, the architect Henri Jacobs built a house in 1903 that served as both his residence and office. It has in particular a magnificent sgraffito between the cornice and the four ogival windows on the upper floor. It owes its good state of conservation to the wide overhang of the cornice, which has protected it from the elements. This same cornice, however, has the drawback of leaving the top of the sgraffito in shadow much of the time. As you walk by, admire the neighbouring house at No. 11, also built by Jacobs. Henri Jacobs was also architect of the schools in rue Josaphat and avenue de Roodebeek, as well as the Institut Diderot at Les Marolles.

SAINTE-SUZANNE CHURCH

19

The concrete-built church shades harmoniously from pink to brown in typical Art Deco style

Avenue Gustave Latinis 66

Mass daily at 6.30pm, Friday at 9am, Saturday at 5pm, and Sunday at 10am

Tram No. 23, Louis Bertrand stop, bus No. 66

A short walk from boulevard Lambermont, Sainte-Suzanne is a remarkable church built in Art Deco style, which also possesses magnificent contemporary stained-glass windows. Of the three concrete-built churches in Brussels, Sainte-Suzanne is the oldest (the other two are Saint-Augustin at place de l'Altitude 100 in Forest, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Molenbeek). The church was constructed mainly thanks to funds from the widow of General Maes, who had lost her only daughter Suzanne in 1914, at the age of 20. The parish naturally adopted the name desired by its benefactress and the church celebrated its first rites on 11 August 1928, the feast day of St Suzanne. A niece of Pope Caius, she was decapitated during the persecutions of Diocletian around the year 300. From the outside, the building is striking with its concrete frame and its

bell tower rising in successive stages to a height of 49 m. Characteristic of Art Deco, it uses several palettes of colour, shading harmoniously from pink to ochre or to brown. Its architect, Jean Combaz, was inspired by the church at Raincy in the Paris suburbs, built by August Perret. The interior, which can hold up to 1,000 people, is surprisingly vast.

For the first time in Belgium, the use of concrete allowed the construction of a single nave, without any columns or pillars. To the right as you enter, note the pretty baptistery created in 1935 by the Maredsous art workshops. On the floor, you'll see mosaics in black, yellow and red, a reminder of the military career and patriotism of Madame Maes's husband. Nevertheless, it is the stained glass that does most to enhance the church's artistic worth: composed of six large windows, they are all the work of the same artist (Simon Steger) and the same master glassmaker (Jacques Colpaert). Each of the windows is decorated by stained glass on the inside, and a novelty at the time, clear glass on the outside. This provided better insulation and also better protection against the effects of pollution. Extremely luminous today, Sainte-Suzanne was originally even more so: when it was first built, a seventh window was placed behind the altar and the caisson ceiling had nine skylights in the form of a cross. But as it was then thought that religious contemplation required dim light, all these windows were removed.



NATHALIE CAPART, ISABELLE DE PANGE
AND JEAN-JACQUES EVRARD



SECRET

BRUSSELS

Stunning Art Nouveau facades, a stretch of the Senne reconstituted in Saint-Géry, a farm in the centre of the city, a Freemasonic reading of the Brussels Park, the amazing physiognomical fountain of Magritte, the place where the Tsar of Russia vomited at the park of Brussels in 1717, the former rotunda of Panorama parking, a tribute to the soldier pigeon, from speleology to The National Basilica of the Sacred Heart, a panoramic swimming pool, a scandalous pavilion in the park Cinquantenaire, a huge vegetable garden in Uccle, a 19th century artist's studio in Schaerbeek, a campsite in the heart of the city, a garden forgotten in the Forest ...

For those who can observe, push the doors and exit beaten tracks, Brussels is full of curiosities and surprising details that will amaze its inhabitants as well as its visitors who thought they knew it well.

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