

***Ménage à trois* – part VI**

Report by Bruno De Wachter

Since 2019, Flanders Arts Institute and the Direction des Arts Plastiques contemporains of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles organise the recurring annual programme *Ménage à trois*, an occasion for fruitful moments of exchange between the artistic scenes in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. With previous editions taking place in Ghent, Charleroi, Brussels, and Hasselt-Genk, the sixth edition of *Ménage à trois* went to the Centre d'Art Contemporain du Luxembourg Belge (CACLB) to focus on the relation of art with nature and the countryside, and the conditions of artistic creation in rural areas.

A new sensitivity

The ecological crisis we are going through is just as much a crisis of **our sensitivity for the living world**. This is one of the central themes in Charlotte Van den Broeck's literary essay [A flame of thylacines](#) (2024), for which she gives credit to Estelle Zhong Mengual's book [Apprendre à voir. Le Point du vue du vivant](#) (2021). Zhong Mengual, according to Van den Broeck, "formulates methods for training the eye, using attention and visual intuition to deepen our relationships with the living world around us. (...) By viewing animals and plants not as passive elements, but as living beings with the capacity to act and to carry meanings of a narrative and emotional nature, we can strengthen our relationships with them. She proposes forms of attention that unite knowledge and sensitivity. (...)"

Developing such new forms of attention does not necessarily require a pastoral environment, far away from the city. For her project *Ces abeilles et ces flores indociles*, Lise Duclaux retreats to an urban garden to study wild bees and their relationship with flowers. Sharing the curiosity and attention for detail with scientists, she differs from them in her rejection of pure objectivity in favour of a more relational approach, which she tries to

deepen through drawings and a poetic use of language. She allows both knowledge and mystery to play a role (*“là où il y a de la vie, il y a des mystères”*) and witnesses how we are all taking part in “an intertwined dependence” (*“une dépendance enchevêtrée”*).

A similar combination of art and science can be found in the approach of Tom and Nicolas Valckenaere at the Wiels wetland in Forêt, Brussels. The inspiration for their practice came from another book by Zhong Mengual, [*Reclaiming Art / Reshaping Democracy: the new patrons & participatory art*](#), which demonstrates how participatory art projects can open up a space for political experimentation and turn into moments of direct democracy. The ecological crisis in which we are living and the lack of sensitivity for our surroundings is just as well affecting the realm of inter-human relationships. This urges for initiatives that actively involve the audience, shaping social spaces into “communities of singularity”. For the Valckenaere brothers, **cohabitation** is a central notion to their practice, and this includes human as well as non-human individuals. The Wiels wetland is a small, urban nature reserve that arose spontaneously from a mismanaged building site. Several artists and nature conservationists were already active on the site, but the Valckenaere brothers were the first to draw attention to the underwater life in the pond. Their slow, long-term artistic research is free of any productive aim and reaches out to all passers-by, from dogwalkers to teenagers hanging around, from picknickers to people searching for a moment of rest. By organising a monthly, on-site gathering in which they show their discoveries and share food, the initiative gains visibility and deepens its connection with the neighbourhood.

While the Valckenaere brothers draw attention to the water, Clyde Lepage, Caroline Le Méhauté and Christophe Alix share an interest in the soil. Over the past few centuries, city dwellers vacillated between indifference and outright contempt for everything related to the soil, even though we eat from it, our history is buried in it, and we all return to it when we die. This rejection can be understood from the connotations with mind-numbing manual labour, suffocating family ties, and an oppressive, territorial idea of identity that have often been evoked, throughout different periods in history, by the countryside, agricultural activity and the soil. In the city, people could free themselves from these burdens. For the

bourgeois, traces of soil on clothes and hands were now regarded as ‘dirty’, while living and work spaces moved further and further away from the ground. In cities, the earth is covered with asphalt and concrete, and its importance is reduced to the price per square meter. This evolution culminated in the emergence of a new class of nomads who travel between cities through the air and are proud of being ‘derooted’. Various counter-movements have popped up over time, of which the ‘flower power culture’ was perhaps the most prominent, reaching its climax in the mud-throwing festival of Woodstock. But even at that time, attention was drawn rather to the flower than to the earth in which it was growing, to put it bluntly. The cause for this indifference for the soil might also go back to the western concept of ‘landscape’, which is defined by the horizon, meaning the surface, and not what’s underneath, combined with the image-focussed culture in which we live today. In their recently born artistic research project *Performing with the soil*, Lepage, Le Méhauté and Alix are not afraid to make their hands dirty, and draw attention to smell, taste and the tactile sense to complement the images. In collaboration with botanists and microbiologists, they aim to set up forms of experimentation at the crossroads of science and the arts. Combining knowledge and sensitivity in the spirit of Zhong Mengual, Lepage focusses on cow dung, Alix on the role of weeds, and Le Méhauté on soil contamination and decontamination. During their presentation in the woods of Montauban, the latter talked about the common practice of deporting contaminated soil to dedicated processing facilities and replacing it with ‘good earth’. These forced journeys would not be necessary if we would have the time and patience to let the soil repair itself on-site through phyto-regeneration, she explained, but this option is not considered feasible because our life and economy have a different temporality than the ecosystems of the soil.

Slow dynamics

In their performance on the bus on the way to Montauban, Pierre-Philippe Hofmann and Mathias Domahidy talked about Paul Virilio and his theory on how cities are eager to move fast. “This speed becomes a kind of violence that goes out of control. In cities, there are too many things to do, too many choices, too many appeals. Paradoxically, this desire to move quickly coexists with places that are too crowded or poorly designed, blocking movement.

And this blockage makes people even more hurried. We are slowed down precisely because everyone wants to move quickly. To save time, we try to do everything at once.”

For art to flourish – both in its development and in its reception – a minimum of **concentration** is required, in the two meanings of the word: both the mental state of concentration, and a concentration of ideas, artistic scenes and human interaction. That second type of concentration is another reason, together with the social freedom as described earlier, why throughout history cities have mostly been dominant when it comes to the arts. But one could wonder whether today the arts would not rather benefit from a bit less interaction and a little more seclusion, given the breakneck speed at which our world is going forward and the concentration problems that plague our overly connected world. The solution may lie in a well-considered combination of both environments, aiming for an equilibrium. Célestin Pierret has been running the art gallery La Part du Feu in the heart of Brussels since 2011 and became director of the Centre d’Art Contemporain du Luxembourg Belge (CACLB) in 2025, after he had been working in the centre already for many years. A larger contrast is hard to find in our country. The CALCB is a small exhibition space tucked away in the forest in the southernmost part of Belgium, far away from the nearest big city and more than two kilometres from the nearest village. The site of Montauban on which it is situated has a long history, going from a Gallo-Roman settlement, over medieval ironworks, to a nineteenth century furnace and associated manor, but it is without any permanent residents today. The valley feels like an oasis with its frog pond, its fast-flowing creek, its reed beds and flowers, surrounded by hills covered with lush, old-growth forest, while the shipping containers in which part of the exhibition spaces are situated, create an industrial counterpoint. La Part du Feu, on the other hand, is currently housed in the avenue Jean Volders in Saint-Gilles, a lively street with tall Parisian-style buildings, close to the ever congested inner ring road of Brussels and to the park of the Porte de Halles. As the neighbourhood has a high concentration of artists and art-lovers and the street is heavily used by pedestrians, the gallery can count on casual passers-by whose curiosity is aroused by a glance through the spacious window. At CALCB, by contrast, casual passers-by are most likely to be deer or wild boar, but those human visitors who do find their way to this

unique place, tend to take their time. The site is free of any form of consumption, not even a shop or café, making all the attention go to the exhibition itself and the surrounding gardens, historical remains and nature, creating a very relaxing atmosphere that invites the audience to suspend judgement and to look a little longer than usual.

For an artist used to closed urban spaces, setting up an exhibition here can be a challenge and the calmness of the surroundings can almost feel intimidating. Mélanie Berger experienced this during the set-up of her work *Composition (Friche)* for the Arkhè exhibition. She admitted that she struggled with the fear that there was nothing to be added to the existing site, and had a hard time to get the composition right. But sometimes, challenges of this kind can be fruitful. To me as a spectator, her work fits so perfectly that it seems as if the entire concept was thought out for this space. The work of Berger is made up of a large number of rectangular pieces of paper which are coloured by a mixture of linseed oil and pigments. By using an overdose of oil, the quality of the paper changes and its degradation over time gets accelerated. For each exhibition, those coloured papers are laid down on top of each other in a unique composition, revealing some parts and hiding others. The entire work covers a large area on the floor of the room and can only be appreciated by walking around, looking at it from different angles. The parts that are exposed to light transform differently over time compared to the hidden parts, and some of the traces and margins left behind during previous exhibitions are being exposed, much like traces of history may come to surface in a landscape. The work of Berger evoked associations in me to Chinese landscape art as revealed in [Living off Landscape](#) by the French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien. The Chinese word for 'landscape' is 'mountain(s) – water(s)', which draws focus to the fact that the world consists of tensions between opposites, creating a much more open, more dynamic concept compared to the obsession with viewpoint, framing, and stopping of time in the western notion of landscape (National Geographic: "A landscape is a part of Earth's surface that can be viewed at one time from one place"). For Chinese landscape painters and poets, spirituality and materiality are not two opposites, but one and the same, creating an art of experience rather than representation. Chinese artists appreciated the mountains by walking through them, without the pursuit for the perfect

viewpoint, and their landscape paintings consisted of large roll-ups which invited the viewer to walk along. As there is no clear division between object and subject in oriental philosophy, there is no need for a fixed standpoint and no need for perspective. The singular, unique quality of everything, including the uniqueness of one self, is always part of something global, universal, in a cosmic connection, creating an atmosphere of affection, connivance and complicity, rather than a projection of hyper-personal feelings on the natural world around, or the extreme opposite – pure ‘objectivity’. When looking up from the work of Berger and turning my attention to the window, showing a view on the ruins of the ancient forge surrounded by densely wooded hills, I almost had to laugh, as this image suddenly came to me as a pastiche of a romantic landscape painting. When turning my attention back to the work of Berger, this now seemed more real to me, paradoxically, than the cliché of the real world revealed by the window. As if, by laying all those painted rectangles on top of each other in a complex spatial structure, she wanted to restore some of the qualities of the all-embracing landscape-experience that have been ignored by centuries of western image production.

The Chinese way to see the landscape as a river-mountain polarity resonated equally well with Laura Colmenares Guerra’s work *Topography of a second*, which was also part of the Arkhè exhibition. One side of the work showed an AI-generated video of a smooth water stream. A sculptural work occupied the other side, consisting of a 3D-printed ceramic ‘still’ of the same stream, bearing a strong resemblance to a miniature landscape of mountains and valleys. It shows how images of landscape, as well as topographic maps, create an artificially static impression of the living world, always and eternally in motion. But it is also reminiscent of the fact that mountains and rocks were originally formed from liquid material; they are not ‘out of time’ but just frozen, living in a different temporality.

In the acoustic work of Adrien Degioanni that was part of Arkhè, the perspective of the artist and spectator was called into question by reducing their standpoint to one of total absence. In the attic of the small bureau des forges, Degioanni made sound recordings with highly sensitive microphones while leaving the room empty. This recording was then processed and amplified to be played back in the same room in which it was recorded. As an

exhibition visitor, you hear what you don't hear in a space in which you are not. Here again, the continuous flow of the sound was contrasted with images that seemed to have frozen time – a sharp piece of glass piercing through a fragile texture and mirrors caught in the action of breaking and falling.

For Charlotte Gigan and Martin Duchêne of Studio Biskt, which also contributed to Arkhè, the opportunity to exhibit their ceramics in the open air and in the water of the pond has brought about a shift in their own view of their work, as they explained during *Ménage à trois*. Studio Biskt transformed the extrusion technique common to industrial serial production to one of artistic creation, producing unique ceramic sculptures with a vegetal appearance. Machine errors are made part of the conception and the mechanical production is complemented with manual adjustments. At CALCB, the location of their pieces in the water and the open air makes them susceptible to decay under the influence of the elements and all kinds of living organisms. For Gigan and Duchêne, this transformation, which happens slowly but becomes visible over the two-month time span of the exhibition, creates a new dynamic to their work which feels completely natural.

All these works of the exhibition, with their different temporalities and spatial layouts, were put into tension in a singular manner by the surroundings at CALCB and the contrasting rhythms they incorporate – the flowing water of the creek versus the still water of the pond, the steadfast nature of the historic walls versus the temporality of the shipping containers, the short cycle of the day versus the annual cycle of the seasons.

Hofmann and Domahidy drew attention to the seasonal cycle in their causerie on the bus, where they elaborated on the Japanese Koyomi, an ancient lunisolar calendar that divides the year in 72 micro-seasons, based on the observation of the sun and the moon and the behaviour of animals and plants. In the modern urban society, such a cyclical perception of the world has faded in favour of a linear time concept, and with the latter comes not only the notion of 'progress', but also the appreciation of originality and inventiveness over repetition and imitation, a value scale which is at the heart of the modernist conception of artistic creation. During *Ménage à trois* in Montauban, artist Malo Van Belle painted a

graphic interpretation of the Koyomi, consisting of 72 colourful drawings on a long, rolled-out sheet of paper, which could be admired by the meeting participants as they walked past during the afternoon break. In showing freshly created drawings representing natural events of a recurrent character, this act was somehow situated at the intersection of both perspectives: the rural, cyclical worldview that thrives on repetition, and the modern, linear one, in need of originality.

The aim to slow down and to favour a dynamic approach instead of a fixed end-result can also be found – under a totally different form – in the approach to *La Maison Vivante du Pays des Collines* by Valentin Bollaert and Raphaël Pirenne of the architecture office bureau Nord. In association with Label Architecture, the office won the architectural and scenographic competition for the renovation of the visitor centre for the Parc naturel du Pays des Collines in Ellezelles, in the north of Hainaut, on the border with the ‘Vlaamse Ardennen’. The usual practice in architecture and museum design is to work towards a well-defined final goal in a tightly managed project (an approach that often leads to delays in the planning due to ‘unforeseen circumstances’). Following some curatorial principles and a judgement on what is worth exhibiting, the works for the museum are assembled – which inevitably means that they are taken away somewhere else to give them a final ‘rest place’ in the museum, as if it were a burial ground. Much like Joni Mitchell sings in *Big Yellow Taxi*: “They took all the trees put ‘em in a tree museum. And they charged the people a dollar an’ a half just to see ‘em”. Inspired by the ‘new museology’ as initiated by Georges-Henri Rivière, the scenographic proposal for the Maison Vivante follows an entirely opposite approach: instead of designing a finality, it creates the starting conditions for development, in the form of a protocol. The opening of the house will not show a museum, but an empty space. Through coaching rather than curating, the people of the village and its surroundings will be invited to use the space for their own expression and interaction. The house wants to open itself up for their particular intelligence and sensibility, following the adage that everyone is an artist, and without making a clear distinction between art, culture, handicraft or folklore. Such an approach takes a lot of time, but it allows for developing a strong and long-lasting connection between the place and its environment.

Favouring collective, small-scale and locally rooted projects outside of the major cities is also what Plan B stands for. This art platform supports artists of various disciplines in the development and presentation of their site-specific work. One telling example is the research project *Dorpsdramaturgie* (Village Dramaturgy) by Elien Ronse and Plan-B-founder Leontien Allemeersch, which settled in Aalst. Here again, a slow, collective and dynamic approach is followed. Through interviews and observations, spread out over the time of two years, Elien and Leontien were mapping the many experiences of social workers in Aalst and its boroughs, including the obstacles they are facing, the degradation of social structures they are witnessing, and the impact of political decisions they have to cope with. This will be translated into visual work that will be displayed on site, as well as small-scale events and actions that will take place with and for the local communities.

Getting real

The observation that life moves more slowly outside of the city, however generally true, carries the risk of conjuring up a whole box of idealized images of the countryside that have become deeply ingrained in our subconscious, shaped by a few centuries of art and tourism dominated by city-dwellers. In 1782, a London-based painter named William Gilpin published his *Observations on the River Wye*, a mixture of travel journal, tourist guide *avant la lettre* and aesthetic manual for landscape painters, which became a founding text of the romantic movement. The book proposed a journey through the Wye Valley, on the border of England and Wales, as an alternative for the Grand Tour to Italy, which had been the traditional initiation journey for young painters up to that time. To indicate which views were suitable to capture on canvas, Gilpin introduced the new word 'picturesque'. The book stands out for its **prescriptive tone**: you must go down the Wye by boat, you must go ashore at Symonds Yat, you shall paint a meandering river and not a canal, you shall paint overgrown rocks and not bare rocks. This dogmatic approach can be understood from the decline of Christian religion, which had had the exclusivity of distinguishing between sacred and profane sites in the landscape since a long time, and the terrifying vacuum this waning faith was leaving behind; the new dogmas had to be strong enough to conceal the emptiness behind. The 'rules for the picturesque' described by Gilpin can be found back

not only in romantic landscape painting, but even more so in the first travel guides that appeared fifty years later, and his prescriptive tone became the typical style for this genre ever since. Today, the practice of reducing the countryside to viewpoints meeting stereotypical qualities lives on in Instagram-tourism, making large numbers of people travel to the same places taking the same picture. The Wye Valley, by the way, came back into the spotlight as the location for the Netflix series *Sex Education*. When being asked in interviews about the choice for this location, the show's director of production Kate Murrell explained that they aimed for a worldwide audience, and wanted a landscape that looks somehow familiar to everyone. "The landscape of the Wye Valley looks a bit like a fairy land, it seems both everywhere and nowhere," she said. This is probably the case because the very notion of the picturesque was born there and has been expressed in countless paintings and photographs ever since, to such an extent that it has become part of the collective subconscious of people all over the world.

In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord explains how our society has a tendency to produce images that detach themselves from every aspect of life to produce a world on their own. Even though those images only capture a limited part of the world in which we are living, cutting out many others, they start to develop a unity on their own, creating a parallel pseudo-world in which contemplation remains the only possible stance and authentic human interactions are supplanted by representation. The world has turned into a spectacle and we are being reduced to passive consumers.

In the collective Seasonal neighbours, a group of nine artists of various disciplines are looking beyond the picturesque clichés of the countryside and beyond the images disseminated by the tourism-spectacle and the food industry (laughing cows!), to focus on the actual contemporary rural life in all its aspects and complexity. Since 2020, the members of the collective are working on farms in several countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Switzerland) to embed themselves into the real-life context and develop connections with seasonal workers. When discussing experiences with each other, they tackled questions regarding power structures and work ethics, and tried to develop an artistic language that avoids imposing narratives on, and victimisation of, the seasonal

workers with whom they build ties. During *Ménage à trois*, Pia Jacques talked about her experience of working on a chicoree farm in Kampenhout. Out of the 10 to 15 workers there, several were retired women who wanted to earn some extra, and about half of them were Thai women, a coincidence which had started with one of them who was living in the village. Language was a recurrent issue among the group of people from different origins working together in the small packaging room inside the farm. Jonathan De Maeyer shared his experience of picking apples and pears in Kortenaak together with a group of Polish workers. Having a degree in photography, he grew interested in the way the workers talked about landscapes in Belgium and Poland. At first, he had the plan to travel to Poland to see the landscapes they evoked with his own eyes, but when that proved difficult due to the Covid pandemic, he started to see the beauty of the oral descriptions they were giving, leaving space for imagination.

With his multidisciplinary artistic approach, Frédéric Fourdinier is also looking beyond the stereotypes of 'nature' and 'the countryside' to consciously face the contemporary reality of non-urban environments and develop novel, active ways of dealing with it. Since 2010, he has been organising walks under the title *less is more*. With a group of maximum ten people, he sets off for a walk of about a week, camping wild along the way. During pauses, participants discuss environmental topics that cross their path. Some basic food is brought along, but the rest of their nutrition is to be found during the walk, in the form of edible plants or via contacts with locals. By travelling light and without spending money, a new position towards food, away from abundance, is being developed. For the edition of 2025, they walked through the big ski resorts in the French Savoy, an area that is completely transformed to accommodate the winter sports amusement industry but shows its real, unmasked face in summer.

Foris Orare, another project by Fourdinier, was commissioned by the small city of Lancrecies in the Avenois region in the north of France, close to the extensive Mormal Forest. By creating two secular oratories, one in the city itself and one at the edge of the forest, the project aims to create a symbolic and physical link between those two neighbouring, but highly distinct environments. The Avenois region has many oratories,

small places of worship that were given form by the Catholic church but which were often being used in pagan ways. Inspired by these places and by Japanese Shinto shrines in the forest, Frédéric Fourdinier created two new, secular oratories. The monuments were built from local blue stone, crafted by local masons, and erected in a participative action with inhabitants of the town. They provide a destination for a walk or bike ride, albeit not in the superficial way of going there, taking a picture and coming back, but rather as a place that invites people to hang around a little longer – be it for contemplation, meditation, or any kind of expression, encouraging the development of an intimate connection with the land.

While some artistic projects are demystifying ‘the countryside’, one could also wonder what the difference between city and countryside still means in a country like Belgium. As Pierre-Philippe Hofmann and Mathias Domahidy humorously pointed out during their performance on the bus, Belgium has one of the highest population densities in the world, but on top of that, many of its citizens feel the desire to escape from the others to go and live in what they regard as a more peaceful environment, ‘close to nature’. One only has to go for walks in randomly chosen places in Belgium to realize how much of the country has become an in-between area, not city and not countryside. In this suburbia, villas and their gardens take most of the space, next to meadows with hobby-horses, shopping malls, and business parks. In these areas, people move around in cars between their home, their work, shopping areas, and dedicated sites for entertainment, making it difficult to casually meet passers-by in the street. This is also what the organisers of the Mol-Rauw biennial experienced. This annual art festival in the Flemish hamlet of Mol-Rauw started in a casual way in 2019, when founder Jaimy Van Der Sloten contacted the local priest with the request for a work and exhibition space. Soon enough, he got the idea to also use the space assigned to him for exhibiting work of other artists. The whole project took off rapidly, and the 2021 edition showed the work of 40 artists, with the support of the Koning Boudewijnstichting. This fast growth gave the organisers the feeling that they were lacking time for reflection and creativity, so they downscaled the festival again, making it focus more on artistic research and building connections, and less on the creation of an end product. For the 2023 edition with the central theme ‘How to be part of society’, the

organisers set the ambition to strengthen ties with the village and its residents. This confronted them with the observation that most of the village life happens inside houses and private gardens, while the streets and the church tend to be empty most of the time. After reflection, they came up with the idea to work with front gardens as exhibition spaces. Front gardens in villa neighbourhoods can be seen as border-spaces between private and public. While rarely used for practical purposes – apart maybe from parking the car – they are often meticulously decorated and function as a kind of a vitrine for the house behind – they are, in a way, already exhibition spaces. By using them to show art work, the biennial could engage inhabitants in a natural way, blurring the fences between private and public.

Forging connections

When listening to all those stories, the desire to re-establish a physical connection with the land around us stands out as a recurring theme. This is also the case for the architecture office *Bento*, that developed building materials from natural and living substances, all sourced and developed in the Brussels region. The seed of the story lies in the construction of an orphanage in Benin, which the collective of three Brussels-based architects carried out in 2017. Being critical of the usual way architects position themselves, they developed a dialogue with people from the village, not only about social structures and ceremonies, but also about local building materials and assembly techniques. This resulted in the use of construction materials from the surroundings, such as reeds and soil gnawed by termites. Back in Brussels, they wanted to build on this experience and created a small research centre to develop building materials based on mycelium. Bento was selected to curate the Belgian pavilion at the 2023 architecture biennial in Venice with a design that was based on the use of living organisms combined with natural substances. The construction material was made by mycelium which transformed soil and wood chips from the Forêt de Soignes into building blocks. Unlike other projects of this kind, the mycelium is kept alive, in a state of hibernation, and by creating the right circumstances, it is woken up again on site and helps to merge the individual building blocks into a solid wall. For this project, Bento collaborated with the Belgian science philosopher Vinciane Despret, who proposed to

change their vocabulary, avoiding common scientific terms such as ‘production’ or ‘colonisation’.

The way we tell stories and the language we use contributes to the world we build. This is one of the key beliefs that characterise the thinking of the American eco-feminist Donna Harraway. In a conference on Harraway, the Belgian sociologist Benedikte Zitouni introduced the term *narration spéculative*, which was later picked up by the philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, among others. In discussions about art, common terminology includes ‘framing, focussing, to make a section, to bring forward and to express’ but in the testimonies of artists and curators during *Ménage à trois*, a different vocabulary seemed to be taking over; one of creating connections, acknowledging interdependence, working collectively, blurring borders, and even taking a step back. This new vocabulary was perhaps the most prominent in the story of Sambre2030 as told by Olivier Pestiaux. The project aims for a legal recognition of the Sambre river, similar to the project Still Here around the Senne river and to actions carried out in other countries. Combining the artistic, ecological and social approach with a legal path is a way to obtain an official recognition of our interdependence with the river – with its memory, its life and its future. It’s a trick of *legal animism* with the aim of changing the position of the river from an object to be exploited to an active subject – one of the many actors in the ecosystem we are all part of. The Sambre river was the first one in Belgium to be canalized and played an important role in the industrialisation of the region. The aim of Sambre2030 is not to return the river to an idealized, pristine state of some distant past, but to open a debate about the post-industrial rights of nature and to create a more caring interaction, built on principles of kinship and stewardship. The role of Olivier Pestiaux in the project is different from the conventional artistic creation or curation, acting rather as a mediator forging connections, based on a holistic approach that encompasses various fields of practice and various territories. Many cultural, environmental as well as socio-economic organisations came to collaborate with the initiative, including the communes of Namur, Charleroi, Sambreville and Thuin in Belgium, and Maubeuge in France.

As the project of Sambre2030 shows, putting too much emphasis on dichotomies like city-countryside or nature-culture is probably not fruitful. If there is something to learn from the Chinese approach to landscape as described by François Jullien, it is the awareness that the local itself is global, constantly interacting and communicating. After all, it doesn't matter so much whether the scene is made up of streets or valleys, cities or forests, as Jullien states in his conclusion to *Living off landscape*. What matters is our sensitivity for the multiple polarities that are woven into the land, putting the world in tension. And as the initiatives and works presented at *Ménage à trois* showed, it doesn't matter so much whether art projects are rather of a formalistic nature, like the work of Mélanie Berger, or close to activism, like Sambre2030, or anything in between, as long as they contribute to the development of this sensitivity, creating precious islands that are immune to the fake uniformity the society of the spectacle is presenting to us, and that save us from the indifference that grows from a life of passive consumption.