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Watou Arts Festival gives space to imagination

This weekend sees the start of the new edition of the Watou Arts Festival. From July 6 to September 1, during *Landscape of the Imagination*, artists and poets showcase the power of imagination in unique locations in the village and Castle De Lovie. Through imaginary landscapes, artists and poets interact more than ever with their surroundings.

Havens for a new humanity

"We need new landscapes. Places of experimentation, refuges and spaces where a new humanity can be born," says Koen Vanmechelen, for the third time acting as inspirator for the festival. A call that more than 40 artists and 20 poets took up, under the title *Landscape of the Imagination*. The title deliberately offers room for interpretation and ambiguity. The festival aims to give artists the freedom to explore and express themes of identity, political fears, gender constraints and freedoms through various media such as painting, photography, sculpture, films and performance. "Artists can imbue landscapes with symbolic meanings, exploring themes such as the subconscious, bodily experiences, and societal issues. This process can be an amalgamation of a memory, intuition and emotion, creating 'landscapes' that are both nowhere yet everywhere", observes visual arts curator **James Putnam**.

Many of the artists developed their works in dialogue with Watou's environment. In the spring of 2023, 200 artists registered for the open call *Patchwork*. An international jury - chaired by Koen Vanmechelen and consisting of Dirk Draulans, Jo Coucke, Marjan Doom, James Putnam, Edith Doove, Michaël Vandebril, Sabiha Keyif and Loes Vandromme - selected the participants for the summer camp. Their ideas "flowed" from the landscape and resulted in some twenty new realizations for the new edition of the festival. The interconnectedness between the village, the landscape, the poets and the artists is what makes this festival so

unique. An open call was also launched this spring, for which a record number of more than 250 applications were received.



Mariko Hori, *Pleasing the hedges*, 2024 © Michaël Depestele

Man vs. Nature

The relationship between man and environment comes to the fore in a strikingly large number of the artistic projects. For example, artist Mariko Hori asked several inhabitants of Watou to stop trimming their meticulously cut hedges: a subtle intervention to show how man imposes artificial boundaries on nature. Daan Navarrete-van der Pluijm put up telephone poles at different places in the area to promote connection between the inhabitants and Lieze De Middelair's chairs with skin prints roam the village during the entire festival. Werner de Valk's horizon scanner turns the lines of the landscape into a score, Laura Vandewynckel lets a creature of progress wander through the streets, and in Sanne van Balen's lampposts you can discern - in a composition by sound artists ZONDERWERK - the voices of various Watou residents. Castle domain De Lovie again plays an important role in the route, with various locations taken up by artists and poets. A new durational performance by Mikes Poppe can be seen on the pond of the castle park. The artist sits there for two months in a seemingly peaceful pond. Until suddenly there is a violent burst of water ...



Sanne van Balen, *Tell me*, 2024, © Michaël Depestele

Lieze De Middelair, *kom, zet u*, 2024 © Lieze De Middelair

Participating artists:

Kostya Benkovich (RU) – Pato Bosich (CL) – Cecile Broekaert (BE) – Monique Broekman (NL) – Christopher Bucklow (UK) – Linde Carrijn & Dijf Sanders (BE) – Mat Collishaw (UK) – Matthijs De Block (BE) – Lieze De Middelair (BE) – Werner de Valk (NL) – Joost Elschot (NL) – Jem Finer (UK) – Ellen Gallagher (US) – Karolina Halatek (PL) – Mariko Hori (JP) – John Isaacs (UK) – Lafleur & Bogaert (HT & BE) – Ilya & Emilia Kabakov (RU) – Klimaatdichters (BE) – Carel Lanthers & Lee Eun Young (NL & KR) – Mashid Mohadjerin & Jan De Vroede (IR & BE) – Daan Navarrete-van der Pluijm (NL) – Alice Obee (BE) – Hans Op de Beeck (BE) – Panamarenko (BE) – Mikes Poppe (BE) – Roundhouse Platform (US/CA) – Marina Resende Santos & Johan Orbie (BR & BE) – Anila Rubiku (AL) – Kiki Smith (US) – Sanne van Balen (NL) – Lieke Muis van der Meer (NL) – Lie van der Werff (NL) – Laura Vandewynckel (BE) – Koen Vanmechelen (BE)

Poetry that inspires, unsettles and mobilizes

The participating poets also engage with the environment. The bicycle route "Swimming Lessons for Later" gives a platform to thirteen Climate Poets. "At the end of last year, the Westhoek and also Watou were under water. It is clear that the climate is changing. Do we stand by and watch idly by or do we do something about it? With their poetry, the climate poets want to inspire, alarm, mobilize and above all give courage to care for this world that is our home. We are also giving space to the project 'Laat alles hier aarden' (Let everything be grounded here) by the Climate Poets led by Sara Eelen that wants to give a voice to the landscape threatened by humans," clarifies poetry curator Michaël Vandebriel. He once again chooses new creations by twenty poets from home and abroad, who enter into conversation with the work of the visual artists and with the village. Following the death of Gwy Mandelinck earlier this year, poet and close friend Paul Demets wrote a response poem to one of Mandelinck's poems as a tribute to the inspirer of the Arts Festival.



Carel Lanthers & Lee Eun Young, *Anathemata*, 2024
Paul Demets, *Ex Voto*, 2024



Sara Eelen - Klimaatdichters, *Laat alles hier aarden*, 2023

Participating poets:

Rodaan Al Galidi (IQ) – Benno Barnard (NL) – Moya De Feyter (BE) – Dominique De Groen (BE) – Paul Demets (BE) – Athena Farrokhzad (IR)– Ingmar Heytze (NL) – Doina Ioanid (RO) – Frank Keizer (NL) – collectief Letterzetter (Imane Karroumi – Loeke Vanhoutteghem – Veronica Schmalz – Alice Boudry – Maite Vanthournout) (BE) – Jens Meijen (BE) – Carl Norac (BE) – Maria van Daalen (NL) – Marjolijn van Heemstra (NL) – Anke Verschueren (BE) – Billie Vos (BE) – Daniëlle Zawadi (NL) – Emma Zuiderveen (NL)



© Marijn Fotografie

A packed summer program

"This year, **Watou Live** once again brings a varied program of performances, concerts and encounters. In addition to established names, emerging artists in particular will be given a stage, ensuring that the festival remains a breeding ground for new talent," says alderman for culture, Loes Vandromme. The **poetry podcast** 'Huis van de Dichter' returns with a second season. Literary journalist Jelle Van Riet creates a new series of six poetry podcasts with audio-maker Pauline Augustyn from the writer's residence Huis van de Dichter, which will be presented on De Standaard's podcast platform and in a listening room on the festival trail. Bart Moeyaert, Moya De Feyter, Benno Barnard, Daniëlle Zawadi, Ted Van Lieshout and Maria Barnas are this year's guests.

You can also discover the arts festival as a family with a quest tailored for children. Go on a **treasure hunt** and find the Treasure of Fly! You will discover poetry and art through play. The walk will take you through the history of the arts village.

For those who like to take a little more time to fully enjoy what's on offer, Tourism Poperinge developed **lodging packages** with numerous Poperinge hotels, guest rooms and vacation homes. Those who book a lodging arrangement receive a welcome package worth 80 euros, which includes a festival ticket, a visitor's guide, tickets for the Hop Museum, a booklet of coupons, a tasty local product and a specially brewed festival beer. Lodging packages can be reserved at www.toerismepoperinge.be.

More Info

The new edition of the Watou Arts Festival, *Landscape of the Imagination*, takes place from July 6 to September 1. Artists and poets showcase the power of imagination. They enter into dialogue with each other and with unique locations in and around the village and castle De Lovie. Koen Vanmechelen, Michaël Vandebril and James Putnam act as curators. Experience art at unique locations, cycle past climate poetry with the cycling route 'Swimming lessons for later' or listen to poetry podcast 'House of the poet'. Watou Live brings exciting performances and concerts throughout the summer.

More info on the exhibition and participating artists:

[Landscape of the Imagination](#)

[Artists & poets](#)

[Watou Live programming](#)

downloads & media assets

PRACTICAL

Watou Arts Festival - Landscape of the Imagination

Saturday July 6 until Sunday September 1, 2024

Open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each time.

Tickets on sale online or at the box office. Your festival ticket is valid all summer. Your ticket allows you to attend all Watou Live events for free.

Basic rate € 20 | -26 years € 7 | -12 years free.

Check the website for all reduced rates, info on group visits, the children's trail, etc.

kunstenfestivalwatou.be

Contact

Loes Vandromme, alderman for culture Poperinge:

loes.vandromme@poperinge.be, 0478 60 91 05

Annemie Morisse, project coördinator:

annemie.morisse@poperinge.be, 0474 24 39 24

Lize Chielens, production:

lize.chielens@poperinge.be, 0478 24 61 03

Valérie Van Haute, press and communication:

valerie@regelsvandekunst.be, 0472 21 74 50

Het Kunstenfestival Watou is een organisatie van de stad Poperinge. In samenwerking met volgende partners:





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Onze contactgegevens:

Grote Markt 1, 8970 Poperinge | kunstenfestival@poperinge.be

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