

MESTIZO ARTS PLATFORM

Mestizo Arts **PLATFORM** brings artistic innovation and exploration to cities from Antwerp, via Mechelen, Ghent, Turnhout and Brussels to Rotterdam, Buenos Aires and Mexico City. A new wave of artists with their view of the world. A mix of theatre, music, dance and image. MAP explores the city vibes in its Fridays at MAF, BRAINS, MAPping, Studio Urbanization, Work In Progress and other concepts. All this artistic energy culminates in the annual Mestizo Arts **FESTIVAL** in October.

The wealth of new, ever-changing cities

We live in exciting times. People from all over the world are connecting and living together in a shared space: the city. New technologies make it possible for these city-dwellers to keep close contact with their home countries. Cities generate a wealth of information and form a breeding ground for many tales to be told.

“The Mestizo Arts Platform is an atlas for adventure, celebrating the diversity of our cities. In our wanderings through the city labyrinth we meet the artists who have put down roots in its vibrant streets, musing on what the city represents and dreaming about its possibilities. MAP is a declaration of love to the polis, medina or ciudad.

A multidisciplinary arts platform and festival

MAP is a platform for the exchange of creative impulses and strategies by artists and groups from Belgium and further afield. We present our own concepts and projects together with co-productions and performances that suit our innovative take on urban art, creating a podium that reflects the ever-changing character of cities.

“We proclaim artistic endeavour in all possible voices and languages so that it resounds and sparkles on the street. Artists from all disciplines shout out the strength and splendour of the city.

The mix, encounters and cross-pollination

Our point of departure is a rich mixture (*mestizo*) of art forms, cultures, organisations, performers, public, and the dialogue between them. We push our boundaries out into the unknown.

“We look for a common language, shifting wildly between registers and mediating as translator between different world visions. Performers tell you how they view the city and invite you to broaden your horizons.

Community and cooperation

With more than 50 partner organisations and over 150 performers we lay before you the cultural wealth of our cities. We build bridges and strengthen ties between performers, cultural institutions, organisations outside the art field and of course, the city-dwellers.

“Curious? Then put on your walking shoes, pick up your binoculars and take along some snacks. Don't panic. The intimidating blare and roar of the city demands your courage and determination. Be daring! And grow with the city. Climb its towers and take time to enjoy the view from above. The confusing complexity of the city requires patience.

WHAT WE DO

The Mestizo Arts Festival (MAF) is the annual podium for new urban art

For two weeks, dancers, musicians, theatre makers, writers and visual artists immerse themselves and the public in the vibrant life of the city. Since 2007 the Mestizo Arts Festival (MAF) has become the central square of an ever-growing imaginary city: the Mestizo Arts Platform. The festival unites all the artistic

inroads, sections, side tracks, pathways and offshoots. MAF is an annual regeneration ritual. It is an exciting adventure that encourages you to develop new ideas, build new repertoires and reflect on them. The focus is on innovative artists who are keen to develop their own talent and explore the talent of others. The festival is centred in Arenberg, but other artistic centres in Antwerp, Brussels and Mechelen also present a variety of performances. The cooperation with Buenos Aires and Mexico City and other cities unfolds on stage.

“During the Mestizo Arts Festival - coup de théâtre! – the collective imagination takes hold of the city. It is voluble and speaks in many languages. You will hear artists from all disciplines proclaiming the strength and splendour of the city: a declaration of love to the polis, medina or ciudad. The Festival reveals the modern city as an entity of great diversity and huge complexity.

BRAINS: The Research & Development department of the Mestizo Arts Platform

The Mestizo Arts Platform identifies, explores and collects information about new artistic practices in the city. BRAINS is a place where ideas bubble up to the surface and enthusiasm sparkles. Together with experts who have gained practical experience in the art sector, we consider the challenges facing the art sector and beyond. The sessions are informal and upbeat. Hidden, secret agendas are banned and obvious ones will be pushed aside. BRAINS is an ode to the spontaneity of thought. It is a feast of collective intelligence: behind every practice, every project or pathway, behind every organisation you will find people with the essential grey matter. These are the brains, giving form and direction to the activities. At BRAINS they share their practical knowledge and expertise.

BRAINS is a source of inspiration that continues to sparkle thanks to the excellent artistic feedback. The form it takes varies, but always includes a reflection on atmospheres, impressions, anecdotes and insights. The reports give clarification and create the handbook for new urban arts: they form the margin notes of the Mestizo Arts Platform atlas. This gives everyone a taste of the cultural capital coming out of the debates.

“We don’t shout and scream our messages, but create an intimate corner – digitally or on paper – where voices can find their way to listeners, whispering into the dark and dormant regions of grey matter and make them tingle and light up.”

On Fridays at MAF we stage a mixture of music, dance and theatre: a taster and a short stop on the way to the Mestizo Arts Festival in October

For many of the artists a MaFfe Friday is an informal stop on their artistic path. It is an instructive stopover, somewhere between a work in progress and the Mestizo Arts Festival. See it as a meeting up of travellers on a station platform, all heading to the same destination. You will see fragments of various performances, all with a common thread – usually the Festival’s annual theme. Alongside the artistic nourishment there is bodily nourishment in the form of a themed meal available in the MAF Resto at every MAFfe Friday event.

“On MAFfe Fridays the Mestizo Arts Platform tests the city’s climate. What moods are floating through the streets, what vibes are humming in the air? Performers and artists present their impressions and show the city from their perspective, often through binoculars or a magnifying glass.

MAPping: artists map out their city in a performance, an artistic city plan and online walking route.

In MAPping four performers explore their city. Their exploration is developed into a performance through the city, a book with the city’s tales presented as a layer of stories and an online artistic walking route. Each performer works from a different discipline. A director from another city with an external perspective assists the four artists. He or she serves as sounding board and will weave the different stories together.

“Every city is a store of memories and the background décor for the performances of its people, be they glorious or banal. In MAPping performers explore the streets in amazement, like social and

cultural cartographers. They go in search of random, indefinable places and untangle their meaning. With an individual approach. Using a favourite sense. Or from an absurd, personal obsession. They use their particular artistic practice to show us the little gems. To the small things that make up that great, blaring, celebrating thing that is the city, in all its beauty, vulnerability and confusion. Enjoy the city – it is your own.

*In 2014 performers mapped out Antwerp and Mechelen. The performances linked to these explorations were brought to the public in 2014 and 2015. You can order the books via e-mail: info@mestizoartsplatform.be
The research stage of MAPping Brussels started with a residence of Junior Mthombeni at KVS in October 2015. MAPping is also programmed for Gent, Turnhout and Rotterdam. Buenos Aires and Mexico City are sure to follow shortly.*

Studio Urbanization: experiment with new talent and art forms. A breeding ground for talent ...

At Studio Urbanization experimentation is key. Mestizo Arts Platform identifies what the buzz is in the city and who's creating it. Talents are discovered by open invitation and by the antennae of our extensive network. In the initial experimental stage we work with a multi-disciplinary group of artists from different genres to create a performance or installation. The MAF year theme provides a starting point for the experiment. During this creative process the performers and artists seek a common language. There is also room for individual creativity: everyone starts from their own strengths. An artistic guide helps the group identify their ambitions, encourages cross-pollination and helps translate ideas into new repertoire. We then work with a number of performers on definitive productions for the Mestizo Arts Festival in October. We call this the fast track, because performers often find their way to MAF or other creative professional assignments through Studio Urbanization.

“Studio Urbanization is a laboratory for ambitious artists. The first phase? Simmering in their own talents. And when cooked until tender they are handed a megaphone and their innovative voice can resound throughout the city landscape.

Studio Urbanization, first launched as a pilot project in 2009, was the result of collaboration between Arenberg and Fiëbre for the Mestizo Arts Festival. In the early years the emphasis was on young hip-hop, rap and spoken-word artists. Gloria Boateng, Salah Ibnou Kacemi from NoMoBS, Simon Den Haerynck and others later collaborated in productions such as H&G (grimmiger), TROOST, the big band B.U.R.K.A., Rumble in da Jungle. In 2014 Fiëbre turned to the visual arts in the hope of discovering new talent. In 2015 we worked with a multi-disciplinary group of artists using the MAF year theme for the first time. The performers collaborating in this study were later selected to participate in the campaign image ('the MAF wall') and other MAF productions.

VERSUS stages different genres and disciplines face to face and side by side

Can a poet, a word artist, a rapper and a slam poet stand along the same lines? And how does the timbre of their voices change when you add a musician?

The Mestizo Arts Platform does not avoid confrontation. On the contrary, we celebrate contradiction all year round. Sometimes we like to provoke, and several times a year we even create an arena. We unite warriors from different art forms. Not to organise dirty street fights. On the contrary. It is only when they are confronted with the other that the artists will share their true essence. When uniting forces they can also enrich their own repertoire by exploiting the other's strengths. This way everybody wins.

For the audience it is an exercise in exploring boundaries. Where does one person's art end and where does another's begin? What artistic language is used to connect with each other on stage? And how does this dialogue sound?

“VERSUS is a broad podium showcasing different disciplines and genres side by side so that they

can explore each others boundaries. And be warned: we do this with the secret, silent hope that their mutual attraction will create fusion. Even if it is only for one night.

Versus incorporates several initiatives and creative processes such as 'The Bobby James Family Invites...'. A VERSUS of rappers and poets was created as early as 2009. Christophe Vekeman, Eva Cox, Naima Albdouni, Gloria, Jizz and Magot challenged each other. The concept was repeated with other performers and continued to develop over the years. In 2013 The Bobby James Family became the central pivot for creating VERSUS nights.

> **The Bobby James Family invites ...**

The Bobby James Family has allure, the band is known for its strong improvisations at their legendary jam sessions. They lovingly interweave their favourite musical genres such as soul, funk and jazz and they're not afraid to use a solid beat. For the Mestizo Arts Platform the musicians mix with artists from different genres. A few times each year The Bobby James Family invites one or more performers – from slam poets to performers of reggae or electronic music – to evening-long jam sessions at Arenbergschouwburg.

Work In Progress (W.I.P.): the auditorium of the new arts

Each year MAF programmes two days of Work In Progress. A dozen artists present a work in progress. The auditorium is mainly filled by the performers' network, partner organisations and the wider art sector. After each W.I.P. performance the performers join selected art sector representatives at their table for discussion. Inquisitive city-dwellers, drawn in by the appeal of the unknown, come to get the latest news on the street. In two jam-packed days they can sample the new voices of the city. This cultural tasting is pure indulgence. It's a joyful and thrilling experience to see something new being created at close hand. Because the artists are only showing the foundations of a future performance the experts' comments are intended as encouragement rather than criticism. And although the artists don't have to follow the advice it can turn out to be gold-dust to them. Taking the constructive feedback on board the performers withdraw to the studio to allow their ideas to mature. Often with a business card in hand. And when an expert decides to help develop a performance the Mestizo Arts Platform offers its assistance. This results in several premières at the Mestizo Arts Festival the following year.

“Work in Progress is straightforward: performers from various disciplines pause somewhere along the incredible route of their creative journey to show where they stand. Critics from all over the country are there to deliver constructive feedback and a business card or two.

Inter-City network: artists explore a network of cities involving Antwerp, Brussels, Mexico City and Buenos Aires.

We've invited artists and artistic organisations to carry out an experimental arts exchange in Antwerp, Brussels, Mexico City and Buenos Aires. Together they study how new urban developments such as super diversity, migration waves and digitalisation influence different art forms. Besides constructing a sustainable inter-city network this enriches the artists' personal development.

For a number of years MAF has been organising exchanges with artists and organisations from Mexico City and Buenos Aires. We can identify with these cities but at the same time they have a strong personal identity and know-how on the potential of art, cooperative art, migration from Europe and the United States, and the metropolis.

We have developed a two year trajectory. In the course of 2016 the selected artists will visit other cities where they will be in residence at professional organisations for three weeks.

In 2017 the artists will take part in various creative processes in participating cities.