

STAM^{EN}

Stadsmuseum Gent

enlightened
city

gallery texts

available for download at www.stamgent.be

01. ENLIGHTENED CITY

on day, light and night

Enlightened City looks at how city life is conditioned by light and darkness, and how cities and their inhabitants use the light and the dark in their day and night-time lives, in architecture, in lighting and in symbols. Light and dark are the very basis of life in the city. *Enlightened City* links past, present and future, and goes beyond the clichés and the technicalities of light. We put the spotlight on the city of Ghent and eagerly draw on the Ghent Collection, but *Enlightened City* goes further, extending its horizons to urbanity and light in general.

This inexhaustible theme is approached from different angles in fourteen different spaces, each of which explores a new facet. The result is a kaleidoscopic trail.

city one minutes

City One Minutes (cityoneminutes.org) brings together more than a hundred cities from all over the world. Filmmakers depict city life in one-minute portraits for each hour in a 24-hour period. The project grows constantly. This video installation links and groups twenty of those cities from different time zones.

02. THE CITY IN SOUND

8-minute sound installation

“Actually people use their eyes far too much, while there are lots of other ways of ‘looking’. How wind touches your skin, how peripheral sounds, which normally pass us by because we are so fixated on looking, are suddenly audible.”

“Shut your eyes and stand somewhere for two or three minutes... and suddenly you begin to hear sounds you don’t normally hear, but which you relate to so much more, or from which you can learn so many other things.”

Jempie Vermeulen – blind actor/musician –
during a walk in Ghent on June 8th 2010

03. THE VISIBLE CITY

“Light is so much part of almost everything we do that we forget how much we owe to it.”

Prof. L. Morren, light expert, Brussels

Look and you see space. Light makes the city, its people and its spaces visible. We regard that as self-evident. Light enables people to find their way in the city.

But light does much more. The rhythm of light and dark determines a city's mood. It orders and disorders, it guides our eyes. So apart from being visible, light is also tangible in city life. Light can make the city dance or plunge it into melancholic mood.

04. **NIGHT**

on dispelling darkness
and the radiant city
during joyful entries
and other celebrations

lighting

Until the end of the eighteenth century, cities were dark at night and people had to rely on moonlight. Only those who had permission to do so, doctors and the civic guard, were allowed out on the streets after the evening curfew, providing they carried a burning torch. In the middle of the seventeenth century, wealthy citizens took to lighting a lantern at home. City lighting was a matter for private individuals.

In the nineteenth century the gas-lamp made street lighting the responsibility of the city. At the end of the century electric lighting gradually started to become more commonplace. By the 1950s something that was desirable had become all too prevalent. Today we favour more sober lighting. We use light to create the image a city wants to project. Lighting is an

important aspect of urban development and design. Cities decide what they want and don't want to see lit during the daytime and at night. Lighting plans, such as Ghent's, are a recent phenomenon.

festivity

For centuries cities were bathed in light on festive occasions: joyful entries, processions, parades... On such occasions light and fire were also used to symbolize power and to make an impression. Ghent was one of the cities that staged light shows.

The tradition of large-scale light shows continued in the nineteenth century.

On festive occasions the bourgeoisie even released hot-air balloons accompanied by fireworks. Light is still an important part of celebrations of every description. A recent phenomenon are city light festivals. They have historic predecessors.

05. **DIARIES**

the rhythm of the city
in diaries

Five 'diaries' from various periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrate how essential light was for their authors, and just how it affected the quality of life in the city. Herewith a selection.

1. Between 1805 and 1808, just before the great light revolution, the Amsterdam artist Christiaan Andriessen kept a sketched diary with intriguing captions. It provides an almost photographic record of his daily life in Amsterdam. In Andriessen's world tables are next to the window to take advantage of the daylight. Houses and the city are still very dark in the evenings.
2. The 180 engravings by the famous French artist-illustrator Gustave Doré from his 1872 *London, a pilgrimage* paint an impressive portrait of the dark, industrialized and overpopulated London. As Doré himself said, he wanted "to show the extremes of life in London."
3. In the wood engravings *Mon livre d'heures* (Passionate Journey) Frans Masereel produced in 1919, a young man encounters the extraordinary modern metropolis during morning walks and nightlife forays. Electric lights are seen for the first time. The contrast between the 'primitive' technique of wood engraving and the pace of city life is intriguing.
4. The photographs by Ghent's charming postman — the 'facteur-charmeur' — and city guide Rudi Chatelet document his experience of day and night in his hometown in the 1990s.
5. Twenty-four images from the Ghent *City One Minutes* illustrate day and night in the summer of 2010.

06.

DAY

from bleaching fields to solar energy, from masks to sun therapy, or how people appropriate sunlight.

People instinctively turn to the light. We exploit sunlight in many different ways. In the preindustrial age the sun dictated the length of the working day and industries like the textile industry put sunlight to good use. For example, textiles were laid out to dry in the sun on bleaching fields. These days we harness sunlight to generate new energy, and we sun ourselves on roof terraces. The antithesis of the sun and sunlight was darkness — for example, the darkness of the old passageways of the medieval city and the blind alleys lined with workers' cottages of the nineteenth-century industrial city, where the sun did not penetrate. At the end of that century people began to believe that cities were unhealthy places to live, particularly for children. Some were sent to hospitals in sun-drenched seaside or mountain resorts for a cure. When fashion requires it, we turn away from sunlight. So long as a pale skin was 'in' and a brown skin the trait of peasants and country folk, the upper classes avoided the sun, using masks and parasols to protect their delicate skin. Now that we go looking for the sun, we don sunglasses to protect our eyes from the bright light.

07.

A CHRONICLE OF GHENT

'facteur-charmeur' and photographer
rudy châtelet portrays his city
(1990 – 1997)

08.

CONFLICT

where artificial light is exposed
for what it is

In the nineteenth century the preindustrial age with its clear distinction between day and night began to give way to cities that never sleep. Artificial light was responsible for that. Since the diffusion of light, life has changed radically: we can work round the clock if we so wish, and in the evenings city centres pulsate with life. Artificial light is synonymous with progress.

But the light revolution also created tensions, conflict and unintended side-effects. Light made it possible to keep a check on the city. Hence the smashing of gas lanterns as symbols of power in 1848. Workers paid their boss 'light money': working by artificial light was considered a privilege.

Animals are disoriented by the round-the-clock city lights, and people's sleeping patterns have changed. Question marks hang over the desirability of all this. These days ecological questions are also raised about the permanent

sea of light that engulfs cities and more environmentally-friendly lighting is being introduced.

09.

ARCHITECTURE

how urban regeneration
and architecture
capitalize on light

The quest for light in architecture is of all times. In the early Middle Ages the amount of light that filtered into interiors was limited because man lacked the expertise to create large window openings and expanses of glass. Developments and improvements in construction methods and materials meant that more light could be brought into interiors. Light was a luxury. Around 1800 the size of the windows even became a yardstick for levying tax. Rapid advances by the glass and metal industries had a huge influence on nineteenth-century architecture. Skylights channelled light into the middle of large, deep spaces in factories and other workplaces. Artificial light taught us that more light makes for higher productivity.

In the nineteenth century bay windows, winter gardens, greenhouses and the like brought light into introverted townhouses. Not until modernist architects came along was light really allowed to flood an open architecture that looks out towards the world.

As a reaction to the dark, built-up medieval city centres, at the end of the nineteenth century cities also went in search of more light. Urban areas expanded, city centres were cleared, squares remodelled, the blind alleys lined with workers' cottages redeveloped. Sometimes this involved demolition.

10.

TWIN MAQUETTES UNDER THE SUN

five locations in Ghent at
two different times in their history

In this room you'll find twin maquettes of five striking locations in Ghent at two different times in their history. Both were radically altered in some way, thereby completely changing the incidence of light. Discover parts of Ghent by day and night, before and after their metamorphosis.

church of st nicholas and the kuip in the heart of ghent

1. The situation at the end of the nineteenth century with the built-up Kuip and the integrated church
2. The situation soon after that, with the makeover of the urban space which was cleared in the early twentieth century. The bricked-up windows of the church were opened up during restoration.

het licht printing plant

1. A large nineteenth-century town house in Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat
2. Conversion and extension by architect Brunfaut to provide a modernist printing plant (1930). A new façade replaced the neoclassical façade, acting as a beacon for the socialist newspaper Vooruit.

grand bazar/inno veldstraat

1. A chic department store built in the 1920s with a large, domed glass atrium
2. Its transformation into a modern emporium in 1956, with five sales floors and no daylight. Today we know it as Inno.

de groene briel

1. The neighbourhood at the end of the 1940s, a mass of blind alleys lined with workers' cottages
2. Regeneration in the mid-1950s according to the strict modernist notion of urban renewal

house 43

1. A dark, narrow terraced house with outbuildings
2. Jan de Vylder's and Trice Hofkens' conversion of the terraced house into a light and airy home with patio and free-standing studio. This design represents today's individual, small-scale approach to urban redevelopment.

11. **A COLLECTOR'S SITTING-ROOM**

how light also affects
life indoors

The way we light our houses changes constantly as a result of developments in technology and fashion. Every light source creates a different colour and intensity of light. The form of the light fittings partly dictates the effect of the lighting.

Experience three different light situations:

1. The 1950s: the room only has a couple of light sources with incandescent bulbs.
2. The 1980s: the lighting is spread over the room. Halogen light makes inroads.
3. Now: LED adds colour and enables us to use very small fittings. Incandescent lighting is on the way out.

12. **THE SMALLEST LIGHT MUSEUM**

the stamp collection
belonging to
engineer a. devogelaere,
collector of light

13. **CONVENT LIFE**

from morning prayer
to evensong
in the abbess' room

*The winged herald of the day
Proclaims the morn's approaching ray:
And Christ the Lord our souls excites,
And so to endless life invites.*

Hymn at cockcrow by the Spanish-Roman
poet Prudentius, C4

Convent life is a life dictated by the rhythm of light, from early matins to evening vespers. That is also how life was lived for centuries at Bijloke Convent.

Philip Gröning's 2005 film *Die grosse Stille* (Into Great Silence) portrays the life of silence led by Carthusian monks.

14. **SYMBOLISM**

light and darkness as
a symbol in religion, politics,
art, social life, etc.

Light and dark stand for more than themselves; they are used as symbols to convey or reinforce a message. That light is good, and dark is evil is an antithesis deep-rooted in our cultures. Light is life and darkness is death.

In Christianity God is light and the devil does his work in the dark. Artists draw inspiration from this contrast, the incidence of light in church buildings plays on that theme, stained-glass windows — an underestimated art form — are one great feast of light. But Socialism also exploits symbols of light to strengthen group feeling. Torches and sunny horizons enthusiastically point the way to a better future.