



**PRESS KIT**

**WILLEM VAN GENK**

**DU 4 MARS  
AU 27 JUIN 2021**

**COLLECTION  
DE L'ART BRUT  
LAUSANNE**

**MEGALOPOLIS**

Guided press preview

**Thursday 4 Mars 2021, 11 :00 am**

Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Registration : [sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch](mailto:sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch)

**Adress**

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# WILLEM VAN GENK - MEGALOPOLIS

Willem van Genk (1927–2005) is a Dutch Art Brut artist whose works – drawings, paintings and model buses - entered the Lausanne museum in the 1980s, when Jean Dubuffet introduced him to Michel Thévoz, the first director of the Collection de l'Art Brut.

In his early years, van Genk used drawing as an escape hatch from his everyday life and a means of "travelling" via imaginary cityscapes. As an adult, he settled in The Hague, where he could finally confront his childhood dreams with reality, in particular on visits to major European capitals. In his drawings, then his paintings on large varnished wooden panels, he began using complex cut-up and collage processes, and was directly inspired by his travels, notably in the former USSR, Rome, Paris, Madrid, Copenhagen, Cologne and Prague. Megacities and their characteristic means of transport would become his favourite subjects.

While attacking the consumer society and its dictates, van Genk was also a eulogist of modernity and technological advances, in particular as exemplified by such different modes of transport as dirigibles, planes, buses, metros, rockets and satellites. At the same time art, criminality, religion, Communism, classical music and war loomed large in his output.

Writing, too, is everywhere present amid a graphic proliferation on the cusp of the comic book: cartouches and speech bubbles allow the artist to make his characters speak, or to voice an opinion of his own. In this respect the van Genk oeuvre is also a hymn to justice and tolerance, and a denunciation of the violence inflicted on minorities.

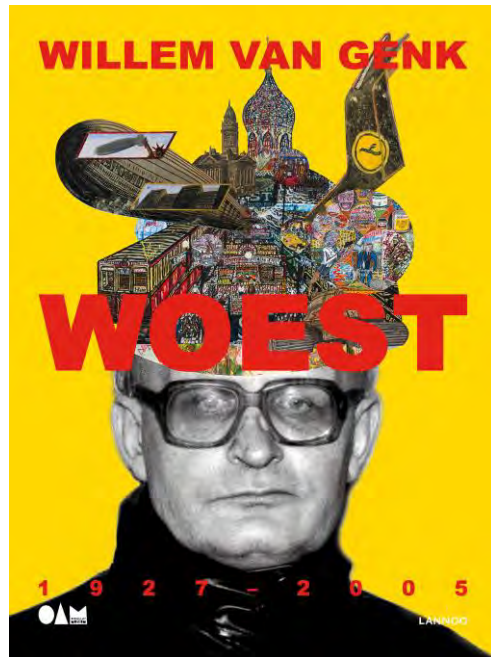
A brochure in French and English, available free of charge to visitors, contains explanatory notes on a selection of works presented in the exhibition. In addition, a book in Dutch and English has been published by the Outsider Art Museum in Amsterdam. It is accompanied by a separate version in French, produced by the Collection de l'Art Brut.

In addition to the works, the exhibition includes a series of photographs by Mario del Curto and Nico van der Endt, introducing us to the artist in his combined living/working space.

*Willem van Genk: Megalopolis* has been organised in close cooperation with the Museum of the Mind | Outsider Art (Amsterdam/ Haarlem) and the Willem van Genk Foundation. These Dutch partners have lent major works, which are complemented by those from the Collection de l'Art Brut. The exhibition has further benefited from exceptional loans from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent and private collections in Switzerland and abroad.

Curators: Pascale Jeanneret, curator, and Sarah Lombardi, director of the Collection de l'Art Brut.

## PUBLICATION



Ans van Berkum, Hans Looijen,  
Walter Van Beirendonck, Sarah Lombardi,  
*Willem van Genk : Woest 1972 - 2005*,  
Lannoo, 2019, 159 pages, with a French  
translation.

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## EXHIBITION EXTRAS

**Retrobus:** Shuttles in a 1977 bus will run between Lausanne Railway Station and the Parking du Vélodrome.

Sunday 21 March

Saturday 1 May

Saturday 3 April

Sunday 30 May

Service: 10:45 am – 6:15 pm

Details: Collection de l'Art Brut [www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch)



## EXCERPTS FROM THE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

### WILLEM VAN GENK : WOEST 1972 - 2005

#### ***Willem van Genk and the Collection de l'Art Brut: A Story of Encounters*** by Sarah Lombardi, director of the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Michel Thévoz discovered the work of Dutch artist Willem van Genk thanks to Jean Dubuffet. Following a large solo exhibition of Dubuffet's work in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1966, the museum's director, Edy de Wilde, sent several photographs of van Genk's work to Dubuffet, assuming that he might be interested in including the works in his *Art Brut* collection, which was housed in Paris at the time. De Wilde wrote that he had just acquired van Genk's *Metrostation Opéra (Parijs)* for his museum and expressed his admiration for the artist [...]

From 1980 onwards, Thévoz made every effort to buy various works by the artist, despite a limited budget. Thanks to him, the museum now owns eleven works of exceptional quality. In March 1980 Thévoz again wrote to van Genk's agent: 'We would like to include at least two important works by Willem van Genk in our collection. The only obstacle is the financial aspect. We can pay a maximum of CHF 5,000 for *Collage 78* and one other work – *Paranasky Kultur, Academy Information* or *Architecture*. Please point out to Willem van Genk that it is very much in his interest to be included in our collection, that we put a great deal of effort into producing monographs and other publications about our artists, and that we might be able to offer him the prospect of an exhibition, which would be of considerable interest to us.

Michel Thévoz kept his word: he dedicated two solo exhibitions to the works of van Genk. He personally curated the first exhibition, held from June to October 1986, with van Genk's agent. The second exhibition, held from June to September 1999, was a travelling exhibition that was organised by Museum De Stadshof in Zwolle. Thévoz also published two important articles about van Genk in the fourteenth part of the *Fascicules de l'Art Brut*, published in 1986. One of the articles is a conversation between the artist and Nico van der Endt, who was referred to by van Genk as 'his capitalist friend' and who rang him two or three times a month. [...]

The first paintings to be included in the museum's collection are both crucial works: *Collage 78* and *Paranasky Kultur*, purchased for 6,000 Dutch guilders, a favourable price that was agreed on the condition that a solo exhibition of the artist's work would be held in Lausanne. Nico van der Endt confided in Thévoz that 'van Genk is only mildly enthusiastic because he is greatly attached to his work. He asks continuously when the exhibition he was promised will actually take place.' This remark shows how hard it is for *art brut* artists to part from their works. At the same time, it shows that these artists are not indifferent to the fact that their work will be exhibited and looked at, despite their often uneasy relationship with the outside world and the public. On top of this, van Genk, who refused to sell to private individuals, thought that his works were worth considerable sums, something that proved an obstacle in the negotiations with his agent, who had been commissioned by the Collection de l'Art Brut. [...]

The last works that were added to the museum's collection are three-dimensional. In 1998 the museum bought two of van Genk's collage sculptures of buses. They are made of waste materials – medicine packets, coca-cola cans, light bulbs, pieces of plastic – and function as totem images that symbolise our society's mobility and mass consumption. A year later, the collection of the artist's work was completed by a third bus sculpture, which is larger than the first two.

It is evident that the first director of the Collection de l'Art Brut played a vital role in ensuring the recognition of this Dutch artist, who is now considered one of the most important representatives of *Art Brut*. Thanks to Nico van der Endt's unflinching support and help, Michel Thévoz succeeded in building up a collection of works with a powerful, graphic ambience that provide us with a special view of contemporary issues such as the development of large cities and the problems of mobility and communication confronting us as a society.



Willem van Genk at home, 1991  
Photo: © Mario Del Curto  
Archives of the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

## BIOGRAPHY

**Willem van Genk** (1927–2005) was born in Voorburg, in the Netherlands, the only boy in a family of ten children. He lost his mother when he was four and was afflicted with learning difficulties and behavioural problems at a very early age. He began to draw at school and at home, finding in this mode of expression an escape from a lonely and difficult childhood. After a spell in an orphanage until he was thirteen, he went to live in The Hague and attended a technical school, which he left before finishing his education. His search for work led to a job in an advertising agency; a few years later, still a teenager, he was once again placed in an orphanage, then in a Christian school of arts and crafts, where he took courses in commercial art. Unable to adapt socially, he lost his job and was finally taken in by a workshop for the mentally handicapped in The Hague. Living alone in a small apartment where he had disconnected all the electrical plugs, he spent his small wage on art materials. His pictures used complex cut-up and collage processes and were directly inspired by his many visits to the Soviet-bloc countries, Rome, Paris, Madrid, Copenhagen, Cologne, Prague and elsewhere. He also went for his ideas to various guidebooks and his own travel photos. In 1988 he concentrated mainly on making model buses and in the 1990s he limited himself to producing copies of earlier works, using different coloured pens.

In 1966 a series of heart attacks prevented him from painting, and two years later he was admitted to an old people's home. All the works in his home in The Hague were moved out and the apartment completely emptied. On 12 May 2005 Willem van Genk died of pneumonia.



The Trolleybus Station in Willem van Genk's livingroom, Collection Dick Walda.

## THE TROLLEY BUS MODELS

In the mid-1980s, Willem van Genk began making a series of three-dimensional works, out of cardboard, plastic, wire and other scrap materials. Gluing his components together, he created some 70 trolley buses, many of which are on display here. In the opinion of Michel Thévoz, the first director of the Collection de l'Art Brut, they constitute "real totems of our Western urban culture."

In the 1980s and 1990s van Genk worked on a recreation of the bus station in Arnhem, in Holland's eastern province of Gelderland, near the German border. Arnhem is the only Dutch city with trolley buses, dozens of which converge on the station every day.

Van Genk had spent a year in the region as a student and retained the habit of regular visits to Arnhem to buy cakes whose cardboard boxes he used for his model buses.

Eventually he recreated the entire Arnhem bus station and its square, complete with stops and its many buses coming and going. The buses themselves are arranged on cardboard supports, and the work is raised on stacked books from the artist's own library: that way van Genk could survey his bus station while sitting in his armchair, and from this privileged observation post, as Ans van Berkum points out in the main catalogue text, "He could claim to be directing these silent vehicles drawing their energy from pantographs sliding along overhead electric cables. What reality denied him was achieved through his creation: he himself controlled the visible and invisible networks of the world."



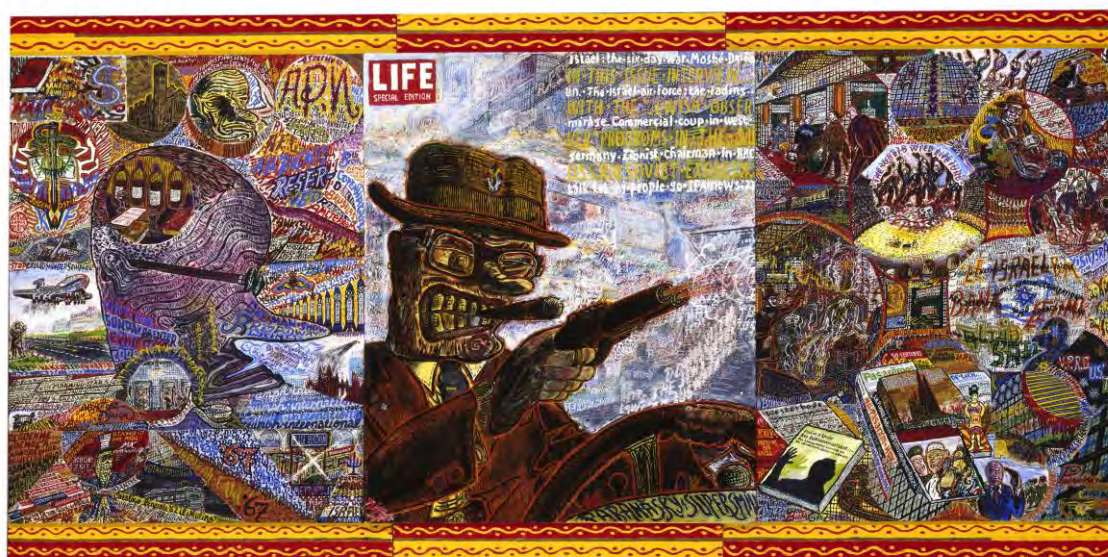
The Trolleybus Station in Willem van Genk's livingroom.



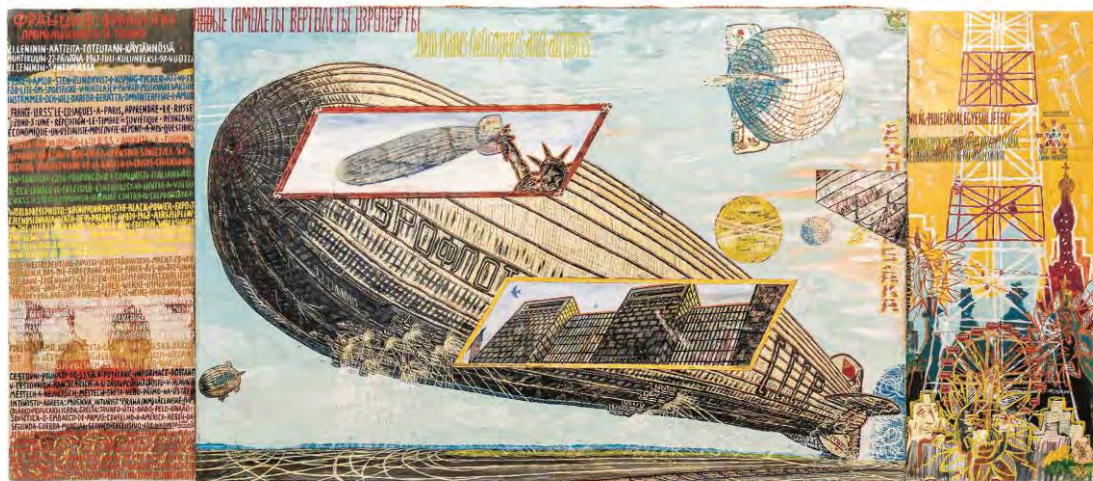
## MEDIA VISUALS



*Tube Station*, 1970, mixed media and collage, 75 x 124 cm, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne  
photo : AN – Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



*Parnasky Culture*, 1972, oil on fibreboard, 70 x 142 cm, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne  
photo : AN – Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



*The Project Asbery Moscow*, ca. 1970, oil on fibreboard, 84 × 189 cm, Collection Dolhuys, Haarlem



*Moskou*, 1966, collage and drawing on paper, 94,5 × 173 cm, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne  
photo : AN – Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



*Metrostation Opéra*, 1964, mixed media on paper, 67,5 × 160 cm,  
Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam



untitled, s.d, assembly of recycling materials, 24 x 81 cm, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne  
photo : AN – Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

## EXHIBITION EVENTS

Guided tour for the press **Thursday 4 March 2021, 11:00 am**  
Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne Bookings:  
[sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch](mailto:sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch)

**Public opening Thursday 4 March 2021, 6:30 pm**  
**Covid Info on [www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch)** Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

**Free guided tours Saturday 20 March 2021 at 2:30 pm**  
**Saturday 29 May 2021 at 2:30 pm**

**Free guided tours for teachers Thursday 23 March 2021 at 5 :00 pm**

**Workshops for kids (aged 6 - 10)** **Saturday 20 March 2021 at 2 pm** *Duration: 1h45*  
**Saturday 24 April 2021 at 2 pm** CHF 10.- per child  
**Saturday 29 May 2021 at 2 pm**

**Exhibition extras **Rétrobus****  
**Shuttles in a 1977 bus will run between Lausanne Railway Station and the Parking du Vélodrome.**  
Service: 10:45 am – 6:15 pm  
Details: Collection de l'Art Brut [www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch)

**Sunday 21 March 2021**  
**Saturday 3 April 2021**  
**Saturday 1er May 2021**  
**Sunday 30 May 2021**

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**Guided tours** For schools (age 4+) and groups in French, German, English and Italian  
On request

**School visits** Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11:00 am – 6:00 pm.  
Thursday 9:00 am – 6:00 pm  
Advance booking required

**Information and bookings for all tours and workshops** [www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch) > agenda or Tel. 021/ 315 25 70  
subject to availability

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Press material** Illustrations and press kit: download from [www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch), section: media

**Press officer** Sophie Guyot  
Tél. +41 21 315 25 84 (Tuesday, Wednesday morning, Thursday)  
[sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch](mailto:sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch)

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CH – 1004 Lausanne  
[www.artbrut.ch](http://www.artbrut.ch)

**Opening hours** Tuesday–Sunday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm  
including public holiday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday  
Admission free first Saturday of each month

**Admission** CHF 12.-  
Concessions : CHF 6.–  
Groups of 6+ CHF 6.– per person  
Jobseekers, under-16s : free

**Access Bus**

From St-François: Line 2, get off at Beaulieu-Jomini.  
From the train station: Lines 3 and 21, get off at Beaulieu-Jomini.

**On foot:** 25 minutes from the station; 10 minutes from Place de la Riponne.

**Car:** freeway, Lausanne-Blécherette exit, follow Palais de Beaulieu. Parking: Palais de Beaulieu.

**People with reduced mobility:**

The Collection de l'Art Brut has an elevator.

All the temporary exhibitions are accessible for people with reduced mobility

### THE COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT THANKS FOR THEIR SUPPORT:



Fonds  
Dick van Nievelt

### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

**MUSEUM VAN DE GEEST**  
OUTSIDER ART AMSTERDAM