

BELGIAN FEDERAL SCIENCE POLICY OFFICE - BELSPO

The Belgian Federal Science Policy Office – BELSPO - (www.belspo.be) represents no less than 30% of the total budget invested by different Belgian authorities in scientific research.

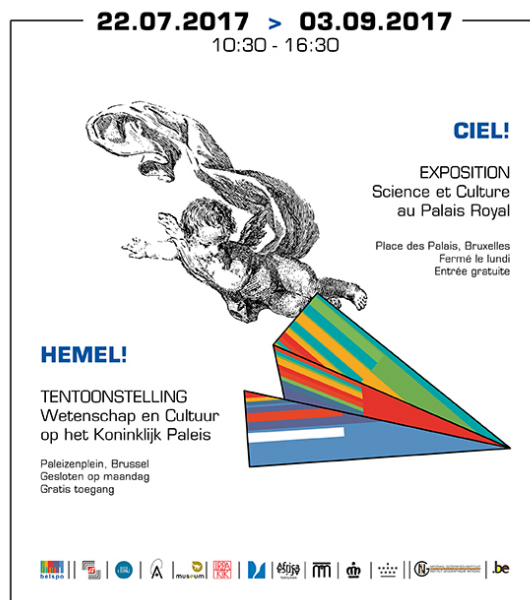
The Belgian Science Policy Office coordinates major research programmes and provides the Federal government with all the data needed to make decisions about sustainable development, the effects of climate change, biodiversity, energy, health, mobility and aspects concerning the information society. The Belgian Federal Science Policy Office is also involved in research carried out in our country's universities and research centres.

Furthermore, the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office manages the incredible federal cultural and scientific heritage conserved in the Federal scientific institutes. The conservation and intelligent enrichment of this heritage is one of BELSPO's priorities. This heritage is constantly made available to the general public via exhibitions, archives, libraries and documentation centres, as well as, more recently, its digitalisation.

It is within this context that the "HEAVEN!" exhibition, a BELSPO initiative, has been organised in the frame of the summer event "Science and Culture at the Palais Royal".



Science & culture at the Palais Royal 2017 Exhibition "HEAVEN!"



In collaboration with the Palais Royal of Brussels, the FPS Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the FPS Science Policy (BELSPO) and the Federal Scientific Institutes (FSI) are renewing an initiative this summer which corresponds to a need expressed by the general public: to open their minds to art and science through an insight into our federal cultural and scientific heritage.

With the "Heaven!" exhibition, the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office is implementing one of its key missions: to raise awareness among a wide Belgian and international public about research activities as well as the federal heritage which it promotes among its scientific institutes. Science and culture invite visitors to rediscover the sky through a multitude of approaches, various depictions, and methods of observation or understanding in the fields of science and art.

Coordinated by BELSPO, "Heaven !" brings together the ten Federal Scientific Institutes: the General State Archives (ARA-AGR), the Royal Library of Belgium (KB-BR), the Royal Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy (BIRA-IASB), the Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium (KMI-IRM), the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (KBIN-IRNSB), the Royal Museum for Central Africa (KMMA-MRAC), the Royal Museums of Art and History (KMKG-MRAH), the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (KMSK-MRBAB) and the Royal Observatory of Belgium (KSB-ORB). As in 2016, they are joined by the National Geographic Institute (NGI), the project's guest institution.

Together, thanks to the expertise of the competent scientific staff and the pooling of their respective experience, this exhibition reveals a relatively unknown dimension of our rich federal heritage.

The sky... this infinitely large space in perpetual motion, in which our planet appears so tiny, is the inspiration for an original exhibition presented in an exceptional space: the *Throne Room* of the Palais royal.

The changing aspects of the sky have fascinated humans since the dawn of time: its inexpressible beauty, its immensity, its breathtaking and sometimes terrifying phenomena, the astonishing heavenly bodies which pass through it, its shades of blue, grey or orange, and more. It never fails to move people and continues to have a huge power of attraction over our thoughts and our minds, opening our imagination to a world of infinite possibilities. We have always admired it, feared it, questioned it or interpreted it.

Who has never dreamed beneath an infinitely star-filled sky, endlessly changing clouds or the lights of an aurora borealis?



Since humans have walked the earth they have been fascinated by the sky. Its light, its movement, its colours inspire artists. It is the eternal muse of writers and poets. Is it infinite? It sparks the curiosity of academics, it has inspired legends and our religions and pragmatic inventors try to conquer it.

Unchanging yet always different, the sky escapes our perception and invites science to constantly push back the limits of knowledge in order to explore the secrets of our universe ever further. Through this wish to understand the inaccessible, humans constitute a tiny bridge between the sky and the earth.

Throughout the "Heaven!" exhibition, the ten Federal Scientific Institutes and the National Geographic Institute offer pieces that are representative of their collections and shed light on their research work, thus allowing visitors to rediscover the sky in all its aspects: works of art inspired by the sky, unusual objects, scientific observation or measurement instruments, video sequences, etc. Researchers from very varied backgrounds consider the sky in their own way, through their discipline, thus offering varied approaches that sometimes prove themselves to be complementary.



Several themes inspire the exhibition's storyline: *Legends and beliefs*, *Geographic observations*, *Depiction of the Universe*, *Conquest of the sky and space*, *Meteorological phenomena*, *Through the eyes of artists*, *Biodiversity*, etc.



Along the way, visitors will be able to admire the carefully selected pieces: the lid of a fabulous Egyptian coffin in which *Nut*, the sky goddess, appears to be sleeping for eternity (KMKG-MRAH);



the delicate papers of a 17th century astronomer (ARA-AGR); the pages of a valuable 15th century Latin manuscript (KB-BR) or 19th century armillary spheres (KSB-ORB).

They will discover the Brussels' falcons, perched incredibly near the angels of the *Nativity*; the model of a canopy glider (KBIN-IRNSB) flying over the tropical forest canopy, or surprising pictures of the universe taken with the Gaia telescope which maps the billions of stars in our galaxy. Further on, they will discover the model of the SOLAR platform (BIRA-IASB), fastened to the outside of the Columbus European module of the International Space Station; strange meteorological measurement instruments (KMI-IRM) - heliograph, actinometer or actinographs - as well as an aerial observation camera for the implementation of geographic maps (IGN).



Some works also evoke artists' views, such as this painting by J. Cobbaert (KMSK-MRBAB) or a surprising photo, a worm's eye view, of the transept of Antwerp Cathedral by T. von Lüpke (KIK-IRPA). A large *nkishi* (KMMA-MRAC), a protective fetish in Songye culture (south-east DRC), evokes ritual beliefs based on a sacred mediator between the sky and the earth.

Presented in an informal manner, all these pieces or works of art illustrate the varied approaches used by scientific research for a central theme, variations on the theme of the Sky. They respond to each other, challenge visitors, stimulate their curiosity and their interest in a discipline, sometimes making them want to explore it further. Each of them highlights a specific field of science, art and research studied at the scientific institutes: from art history to astronomy, including the conservation of manuscripts, meteorology, natural sciences, space research, geographic sciences, or the restoration of works of art.

During their visit around the magnificent *Throne Room*, visitors invent an imaginary journey that allows them to reinvent the sky in their own way and dream... a way of awakening their inner child and inviting them to look at the sun, the moon or the stars from time to time, in the same way as the Little Prince looked at the planets!

"HEAVEN!"
an Exhibition by BELSPO
 PALAIS ROYAL
 Place des palais, Brussels
 from 22 July to 3 September 2017 - Free entry