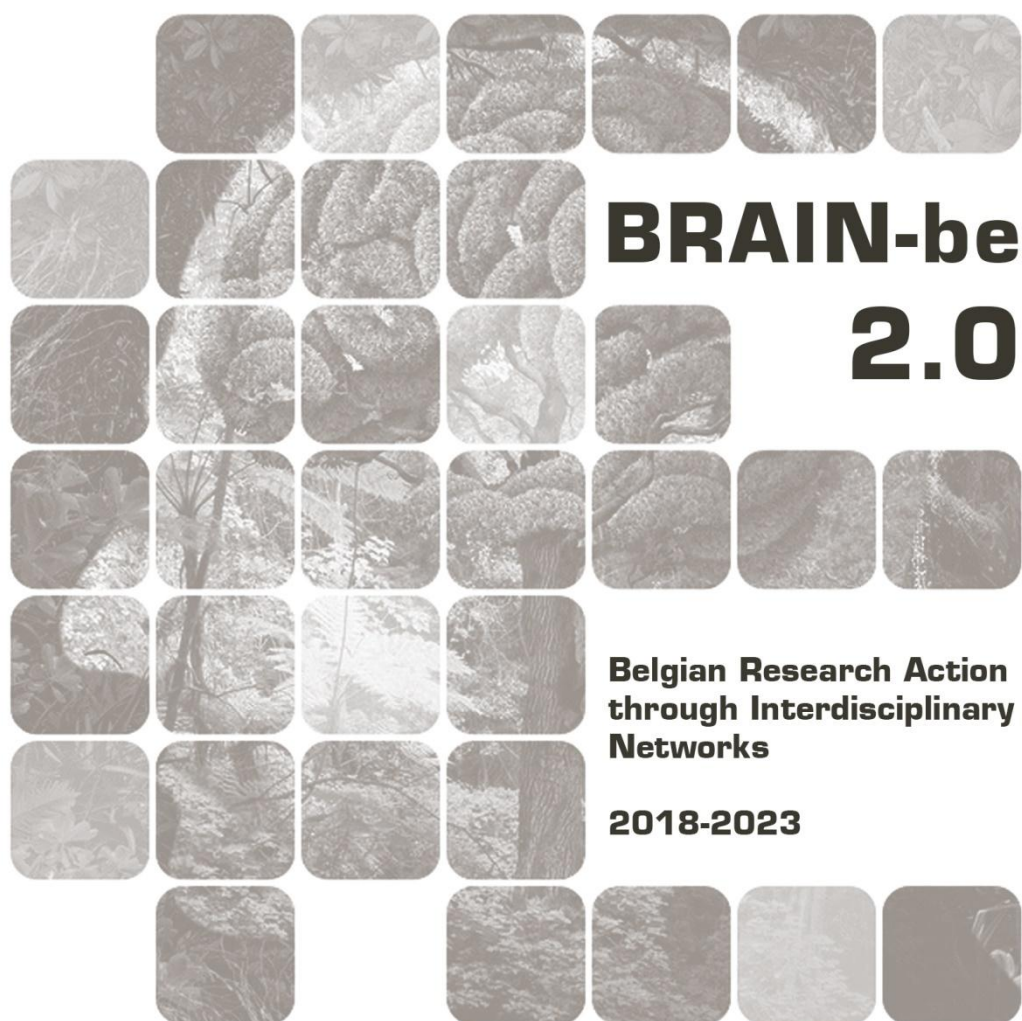


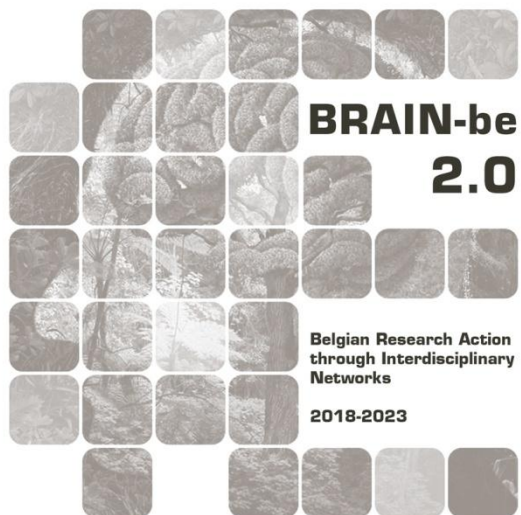


BePAPER

Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective. 1918–1950

Inga Rossi-Schrimpf (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium)

Pillar 2: Heritage science



NETWORK PROJECT

BePAPER

Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective. 1918–1950

Contract – B2/191/P2/BePAPER

FINAL REPORT

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Published in 2026 by the Belgian Science Policy Office

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Inga Rossi-Schrimpf. **BePAPER. Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective. 1918-1950.** Final Report. Brussels : Belgian Science Policy Office 2026 – 25 p. (BRAIN-be 2.0 - (Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks))

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ABSTRACT

BePAPER – Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective (1918–1950) was funded under the BRAIN-be 2.0 programme to study, document, and valorise Belgian avant-garde works on paper held primarily at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB).

Context

Belgian avant-garde works on paper (1918–1950) occupy a central position in the history of artistic experimentation, yet they have long remained under-researched, inconsistently catalogued, and insufficiently integrated into European art-historical narratives and digital infrastructures. BePAPER addressed this gap through an interdisciplinary approach combining art history, archival research, digital humanities, and museum practice. The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) hold one of the most significant federal collections of modern works on paper and archives from this period, offering a unique opportunity to reassess the role of this medium within Belgian and European avant-gardes. The BePAPER project was developed within this context, while also addressing broader challenges related to open science, data interoperability, and the sustainable valorisation of federal heritage collections.

Initially structured around four interlocking work packages (data gathering, digital development, scientific study, and outreach), the project had to be adapted substantially over its duration (2020–2025). External factors—including the Covid-19 pandemic, long-term medical leaves, maternity leave, and institutional governance changes—necessitated a re-prioritisation of activities. Rather than compromising scientific standards, the consortium adopted an adaptive strategy focused on data quality, methodological robustness, and long-term sustainability.

Objectives

BePAPER aimed to (1) study why and how Belgian avant-garde artists turned to paper as a key artistic medium between 1918 and 1950; (2) systematically document, analyse, and contextualise works on paper from the RMFAB collection; and (3) enhance the scientific, digital, and public accessibility of these works. An additional objective was to use the project as a test case for integrating research-driven documentation into institutional and open-data strategies.

Conclusions

Despite significant external and institutional challenges during the project's lifetime, BePAPER successfully achieved its core objectives. The project produced a consolidated and standardised corpus of Belgian avant-garde works on paper, advanced new scientific insights into the aesthetic and functional role of paper, and resulted in peer-reviewed publications and a doctoral dissertation. It also generated durable institutional impacts by improving cataloguing practices and informing digital strategy development. BePAPER demonstrates that adaptive project management, combined with methodological rigour, can ensure high-quality scientific outcomes in complex, collection-based research environments.

Key scientific results include:

- a redefinition of paper as a central avant-garde medium,
- a consolidated, standardised corpus of over 700 works,
- peer-reviewed publications and edited volumes,
- a doctoral dissertation grounded in the RMFAB collection,
- durable improvements to cataloguing and metadata practices,
- an exhibition and publication transmitting scientific research results to a broader public.

Dissemination and valorisation were achieved through an international symposium, academic publications, public talks, exhibitions-in-preparation, teaching activities, and digital platforms. While some outreach activities were postponed or reformatted, the project prioritised securing results for future reuse inside institutional infrastructures.

BePAPER concludes as a scientifically robust project that met its core objectives while generating transferable insights for federal heritage institutions regarding research integration, open data strategies, and digital sustainability.

Keywords

Belgian avant-garde; works on paper; modern art; museum collections; digital humanities; open data; federal heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The BePAPER project (*Belgian Art on Paper in a European Perspective. 1918–1950*) was funded within the framework of the **BRAIN-be 2.0 programme** of the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO). The project was conceived as an interdisciplinary research network coordinated by the **Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB)**, in close collaboration with academic partners at **KU Leuven** and the **Université libre de Bruxelles**.

The BePAPER-project was designed to provide a first overview of the field of Belgian avant-garde works on paper (under which we understand autographic, unique artworks using paper as basic material, such as drawings, watercolors, collages, and paper assemblages) within an international context between 1918 and 1950, that is, up and until the dawn of CoBrA and the rise of the so-called neo-avant-gardes through the lens of the collection of the RMFAB. Belgian avant-garde artists of whom works have been studied within the scope of the project include the Futurist Jules Schmalzigaug, the Expressionists Frits van den Berghe, Joseph Cantré, Gustave De Smet and Constant Permeke, the Constructivists Jozef Peeters, Karel Maes, Felix De Boeck, Victor Servranckx, Edmond van Dooren, Pierre-Louis Flouquet or Marthe Donas, the Surrealists Paul Delvaux, René Magritte and E.L.T. Mesens as well as the Dadaist Paul Joostens, but also lesser known names as Marcel Lefranq, Roger Van Gindertael or Germaine Rimbout and Mig Quinet. In addition to this collection of art works, the study found another strong base through the holdings in the Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium (ACAB), Archives of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (ARMFAB) and the museum library.

It thus addressed a longstanding gap in both **art-historical research** and **museum documentation practices**: the under-representation and insufficient scholarly treatment of **works on paper** within Belgian avant-garde studies, despite the central role of this medium in artistic experimentation, reproduction, and circulation during the interwar period.

The project originally relied on a clearly defined work-package structure (WP0–WP4), as detailed in **Annex I to the contract**, and was designed to progress from data gathering and digital development toward scientific synthesis and outreach. Over its full duration (2020–2025), BePAPER was, however, confronted with a series of **exceptional external and institutional constraints**, including the Covid-19 pandemic, long-term medical leaves of key personnel, maternity leave, and profound governance changes within the coordinating institution.

These circumstances required **adaptive project management** and a dynamic re-sequencing of tasks. Rather than compromising scientific ambition or data quality, the consortium prioritised methodological robustness, consolidation of results, and long-term sustainability of research outcomes. This final report therefore presents a **faithful synthesis of the project as originally planned and as effectively realised**, in accordance with Article 7.3 of the contract.

2. STATE OF THE ART AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 State of the Art

At the outset of BePAPER, Belgian avant-garde art history was characterised by a strong focus on painting, sculpture, and architecture. Works on paper — including drawings, collages, gouaches, watercolours, unique prints and paper assemblages — were often treated as preparatory, peripheral, or documentary rather than as autonomous works of art. They therefore **remained comparatively under-studied**, under-catalogued, and insufficiently integrated into international narratives of the historical avant-gardes.

This historiographical imbalance was mirrored in museum practices. Despite the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) holding a **substantial and largely unique corpus** — approximately 2,400 works on paper dating from 1918 to 1950, including around 750 works by Belgian avant-garde artists — this material was:

- described using heterogeneous and historically layered cataloguing practices,
- only partially digitised, limited digital interoperability,
- weakly connected to archival holdings and contextual documentation,
- insufficiently accessible to researchers and the wider public,
- and weak integration of paper-based practices into European avant-garde narratives.

From a policy and heritage-management perspective, this situation reflected broader challenges faced by memory institutions:

fragmentation of descriptive standards, difficulty distinguishing between archival documents and artworks, and limited interoperability of collection data across institutions and borders.

At the same time, the rise of **open science**, **FAIR data principles**, and **digital humanities** posed both opportunities and challenges for federal scientific institutions. BePAPER positioned itself at the intersection of these debates by using works on paper as a **use case** for research-driven digitisation and metadata harmonisation.

2.2 Objectives

Against this background, BePAPER set out with **interlinked scientific, infrastructural, and policy-relevant objectives**, articulated in the initial report and operationalised through the network structure. They were **ambitious but well-aligned** with BRAIN-be's mission to connect scientific research, federal collections, and societal value creation.

The objectives formulated in the initial project set-up were maintained throughout the project, but progressively refined and operationalised in response to the research process and external constraints.

Scientific objectives

- To study **why and how Belgian avant-garde artists turned to paper** as a privileged medium between 1918 and 1950, and thus, analysing its role within the Belgian avant-garde, including its functions as experimental space, reproducible carrier, and network object.
- To analyse the **material, aesthetic, and functional diversity** of works on paper within Belgian avant-garde practices.
- To situate Belgian works on paper within **European avant-garde constellations and their networks of reproduction, circulation, and exchange**.

Collection- and infrastructure-oriented objectives

- To consolidate and better disclose the RMFAB collection of modern works on paper through systematic documentation and cataloguing.
- To harmonise descriptive practices and terminology across multilingual and time-layered records.
- To link objects, archives, and scholarly interpretation within sustainable digital infrastructures.

Policy-oriented objectives

- To contribute to reflection on **open data**, interoperability, and digital sustainability within federal heritage institutions.
- To generate transferable insights applicable to future collection-based research projects.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 General approach

BePAPER was conceived as an **interdisciplinary, network-based research project**. It followed an **iterative and research-driven methodology**, grounded in the work-package structure defined in Annex I, but adapted pragmatically throughout the project's duration.

The methodology combined object-based art-historical analysis, systematic archival research, quantitative and qualitative data synthesis, experimental digital workflows, continuous peer validation through an international follow-up committee.

In parallel, extensive archival and literature research was conducted in Belgian and international collections. This made it possible to reconstruct the circulation, reproduction, and reception of works on paper through exhibition histories, avant-garde journals, and artist networks. These different strands of research were progressively connected, allowing both quantitative overview and qualitative interpretation.

A terminology handbook for works on paper was developed during this phase. This tool provides harmonised definitions for artistic techniques, materials, and object categories and addresses long-standing inconsistencies in museum documentation. It constitutes both a practical outcome for the RMFAB and a methodological contribution transferable to comparable collections.

Digital tools were used selectively to support data cleaning, structuring, and visual exploration. Rather than developing stand-alone platforms, the project focused on producing data that can be sustainably integrated into institutional systems and reused in future research contexts.

3.2 Data gathering, corpus construction and cataloguing (WP1)

The first stage of the project focused on assessing and describing the RMFAB collection of modern works on paper. Starting from an extensive list, the first step was to define the corpora, one for the research of the doctoral student, and a second one for the cataloguing. Even though the second one is broader, some works had to be eliminated: (1) a number of works that are dated between 1918-1950 but are not relevant to the corpus in regards of the avant-garde or modern quality of the work and (2) the works on paper between 1981-1950 by foreign artists. (3) elimination of a number of works dated before or after 1918 and 1950 but by avant-garde artists still has to be determined

Starting from an initial corpus of ca. 2,400 items on paper created in the period 1918 to 1950, successive filtering and evaluation led to a **working corpus of over 700 artworks**, suitable for systematic study, the identification of inconsistencies not as errors, but as historically meaningful layers of description.

A following step included analysing the inconsistencies in description in the works of the BePAPER corpus and led to the creation of a **descriptive terminology handbook for works on paper** within the RMFAB was developed and tested internally, contributing to long-term institutional standardisation.

It was inspired by international best practices (notably the Philadelphia Museum of Art), but adapted to multilingual museum contexts, historically layered documentation, and Belgian institutional realities. Workshops with RMFAB curators and specialists ensured institutional buy-in, practical applicability beyond the project, long-term sustainability of the standards developed.

In parallel, photo sessions of about the works of the BePAPER corpus were organized in collaboration with the Digital Museum team in order to document the collection and open it through the online catalogue.

This early corpus refinement already functioned as a **critical analytical step**, revealing lacunae in the collection, dating uncertainties, historiographical biases in acquisitions. Later, a **focused subset of ±100 artworks** was defined for deeper study, publication, and partially exhibition. The selection was done with materiality, medium, mobility and motive as the main focuses. Importantly, the project explicitly acknowledged **collection bias**: selections were framed as representative of the RMFAB holdings and their history, not of Belgian avant-garde production at large.

3.3 Archival and literature research

Parallel to object analysis, extensive archival research was carried out in RMFAB archives and library, Archives of Contemporary Art in Belgium (ACAB), and numerous external institutions in Belgium and abroad (BOZAR, Mu.ZEE, KBR, Letterenhuis, KLSKA, Archiv der Avantgarden, Getty, etc.)

This research enabled the study of reproduction and dissemination through magazines and print media, exhibition histories, artist networks and theoretical discourses on paper as a medium.

3.4 Digital development and data governance (WP2)

Digital development was approached cautiously and reflexively. The project distinguished between **communication platforms** (project website), **experimental research environments** (Omeka), and **institutional systems** (Fabritius CMS).

Tools such as OpenRefine and Tableau were used for data cleaning and exploration, while discussions around CIDOC-CRM, IIIF, and linked data fed into broader institutional strategy reflection. Several initially planned digital outputs were intentionally deferred to avoid producing unsustainable or disconnected platforms.



WP2 focused on building sustainable digital infrastructures and coherent data governance, but revealed both progress and structural limitations. Core actions included the development of the project website, experiments with digital publishing (notably via Omeka S), and the structuring of datasets using standards such as Dublin Core and controlled vocabularies. Efforts also addressed archiving (Wayback Machine, SharePoint) and explored open access and data-sharing practices. However, implementation was constrained by incomplete and heterogeneous metadata, copyright restrictions, and the lack of high-quality digital images across the collection. Technical experimentation often preceded clear data readiness or storytelling goals, while the complexity of tools and limited support slowed progress. More broadly, the project highlighted the need for centralised strategies, improved workflows, and institutional investment in core collection data. Its main impact lies in identifying gaps between digital ambitions (FAIR data, open access, linked data) and current infrastructures, offering a valuable case study for future, more integrated digital transformation initiatives.

3.5 Scientific synthesis and outreach (WP3 & WP4)

Scientific synthesis was realised through a doctoral dissertation, peer-reviewed articles and chapters, an international symposium and edited proceedings.

Outreach originally planned as an exhibition and masterclasses was partially reformulated, with emphasis placed on securing content, preparing exhibition concepts, and ensuring institutional readiness beyond the project's formal end date.

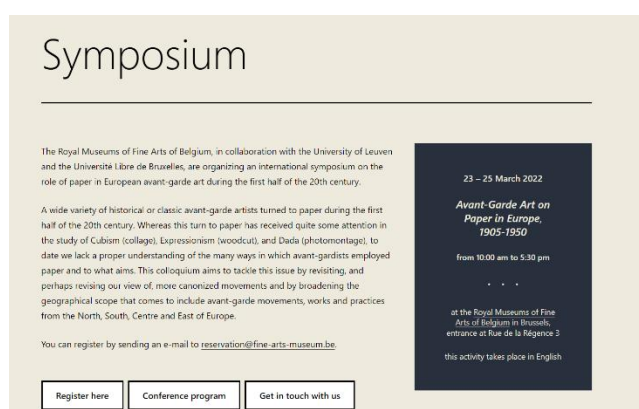
The symposium aimed to create a framework for situating Belgian avant-garde in its international context. The call for paper encouraged specifically papers exploring the material composition or construction of works on paper as it is generally acknowledged that the classic avant-gardes introduced a shift in the use of paper, transforming it from a support into a medium in its own right. Paper's variety in texture and color, thickness and weight, exposure to print or light, thereby all dramatically came to determine the work of art. What (other) qualities of paper came to condition the avant-garde work on paper? Which techniques deployed require our attention? What, perhaps so far neglected, aspects of the medium or the use of paper call for more scrutiny? And which 'categories' or 'genres' of art on paper did the classic avant-gardes yield?

Secondly, it asked for papers and research exploring the dissemination and circulation of works on paper in the historical avant-garde's network as many works on paper were reproduced by photographs and texts, i.e. they were described in articles, letters and diaries or were duplicated on postcards, in magazines, etc. How and to what aims were works on paper circulated in the avant-gardes? How did they circulate on the (inter)national art market, in (private and public) collections, galleries and exhibitions?

And finally, and closely related to the second facet, we wanted to know how did works on paper figure within the more general artistic and aesthetic output of the avant-gardes? How did works on paper relate, among others, to other types of artistic production (architecture, painting, sculpture, poetry, dance, ...) by the same or other artists? What, if any, discourses were in place (within the avant-gardes) to discuss the specificity of works on paper? Did the avant-gardes give shape to a theory or theories that focused specifically on work on paper? Could we, in hindsight, reconstruct one or several aesthetics of paper at work in the avant-gardes?

We looked thus for papers that address topics such as the materiality of paper and its (intentional) use by artists, the reception of works on paper in the art market, European exhibitions of art on paper, the circulation of works on paper within Europe and beyond, the role of works on paper in spreading avant-garde ideas, the role of print culture in the avant-garde, the politics of paper (caricature, photomontage, etc) and the impact of the World Wars on the use of paper in art, but also the role of gender in the use of paper, Further we wondered if there was research on the production of works on paper, art on paper in avant-garde movements (Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, etc.) , the artistic process and its relation to art on paper, the relationship of sketches to the final works (painting, design, theatre, etc.), the relationship between works on paper and other art forms (architecture, painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance, etc.), sketchbooks as objects/artworks as well as on the field of collage, assemblage and photomontage or more broadly, experiments and chance on and with paper.

We received 72 paper proposals of which we selected 46 and 39 speakers were on the final program (see annexe).



The selected papers and the different panels of the international symposium “Avant-Garde Art on Paper in Europe, 1905–1950” explored the central role of paper as both a material and a conceptual medium in the development of European avant-garde art. Bringing together scholars across art history, visual studies and media theory, it investigates how paper was not merely a support, but an active agent shaping artistic practices, aesthetics and dissemination.

The program was structured around key thematic axes. Several panels address the **materiality of paper**, examining its physical properties, fragility and transformation in artistic processes. Others focused on major movements such as **Cubism, Dada, Futurism and Constructivism**, highlighting techniques like collage, photomontage and printmaking. A strong emphasis was placed on **print culture and circulation**—including magazines, portfolios, postcards and artist's books—which enabled avant-garde ideas to travel across borders and audiences. Additional sessions explored the **political and social dimensions of paper**, from propaganda and censorship to its role in wartime economies and ideological struggles.

Overall, the symposium proposed a shift in perspective: understanding avant-garde art through the lens of media ecology and material culture. Its impact lies in foregrounding paper as a key site of experimentation, connecting fine art with publishing, design, and communication networks. By doing so, it contributed to a more integrated history of modernism and opened new paths for research, including digital art history and transnational exchange studies.

3.6 Adaptive implementation

Project setbacks — including Covid-19 restrictions, staff absences, and governance changes — were managed through re-sequencing of tasks, prioritisation of data quality and scientific consolidation, close coordination with BELSPO and the follow-up committee.

This adaptive approach was in line with the risk-management logic foreseen in the initial project design.

4. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

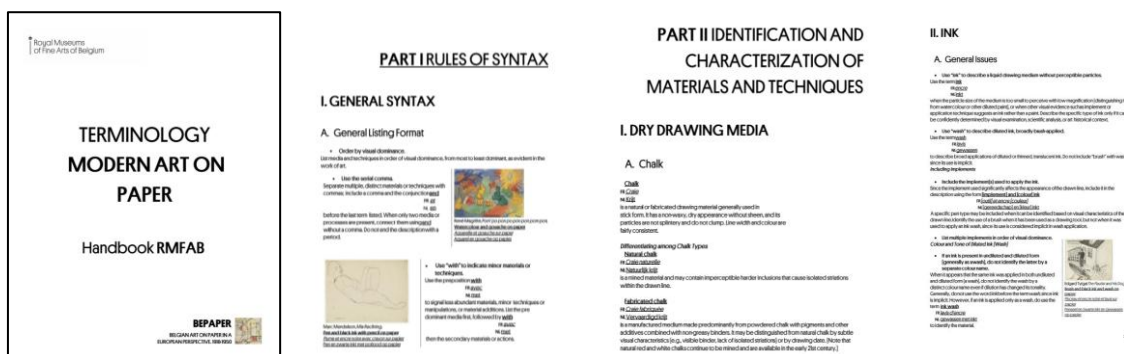
4.1 Scientific results

BePAPER achieved robust scientific outcomes:

- Conceptual redefinition of **paper as a central avant-garde medium**.

We were equally able to situate Belgian avant-garde art on paper and the BePaper project within the broader cultural and artistic context of the early twentieth century, when paper emerged as a central medium in both everyday life and avant-garde artistic practice. In Belgium, artists engaged with international movements such as Expressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Dadaism and Surrealism, adopting and transforming paper-based techniques—from collage to printmaking—into autonomous artistic forms. Paper's accessibility, mobility and experimental potential enabled new modes of creation, circulation and collaboration, notably through magazines and networks that connected Belgian artists to a wider European avant-garde. At the same time, the diversity of approaches and the impact of historical events, including both world wars, shaped distinct trajectories within Belgian art, underscoring the complex, transnational and socially embedded nature of art on paper in this period.

- A consolidated, standardised corpus of Belgian avant-garde works on paper within the collection of the RMFAB.



The handbook that has been established specifically for the corpus and in the future all modern works on paper within the collection, standardizes the description of modern artworks on paper within the RMFAB, offering **clear syntax and precise terminology for materials and techniques**. It includes detailed classifications (drawing, print, collage) and trilingual equivalents. Its innovation lies in adapting an existing model to the specific needs of the museum, ensuring consistency, clarity, and enhanced documentation for research, cataloguing, and collection management.

A **corpus of 708 works** of art has been reviewed, partially photographed and descriptions adapted. A database has been established so that this result can be easily included in the Collection Management System (serving also for the online-catalogue of the collection) as soon as it is installed and all data can migrate.

- Production of internationally peer-reviewed publications.

See under Publications

Especially, the **symposium proceedings** demonstrate that paper was a central material, medium, and critical concept in the European historic avant-garde. Contributions show how, from the early twentieth century onward, artists transformed paper from a passive support into an autonomous artistic medium through practices such as collage, photomontage, printmaking, and experimental publishing. The studies reveal how extensive print networks—manifestos, little magazines, portfolios, and postcards—enabled the formation of transnational artistic communities and the circulation of works. They also highlight the material diversity of paper and its industrial production as shaping artistic choices, especially under conditions of scarcity during and after World War I. Finally, the contributions emphasize that avant-garde uses of paper often entailed a broader cultural critique, addressing its roles in mass communication, bureaucracy, and economic systems, thereby positioning art on paper as both aesthetic experimentation and social reflection.

They are a reflection of a very intense and rich symposium with 39 contributors held in March 2022 and unfortunately impacted by political reactions on the beginning of the war in Ukraine and interdiction of Russian experts on avant-garde art as speakers. The publication is a choice of texts by 14 contributors of the symposium and an introduction by Sascha Bru.

- A doctoral thesis grounded in federal collections : Sarah Eycken, *New World Designs: Belgian Historic Avant-Garde Art on Paper*, public defence, 16.09.2025, <https://www.kuleuven.be/doctoraatsverdediging/fiches/3H20/3H200717.htm>.

This **dissertation** examined paper as a central medium in the Belgian avant-garde between 1917 and 1950, demonstrating how its low cost, mobility, and technical versatility enabled artistic experimentation, rapid dissemination, and the construction of international networks. Based on the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium’s extensive collection of modern works on paper, the study shows how industrialised printing and the ubiquity of paper in the interwar period made it a privileged site for artistic renewal. Avant-garde magazines such as *Het Overzicht*, *7 Arts*, and *Variétés* acted as transnational platforms for exchanging ideas and for the emergence of graphic design as a new discipline. Four case studies highlight distinct artistic strategies: **Paul Joostens** used collage and assemblage to build satirical and often misogynistic visual worlds, incorporating printed ephemera and reproductions; **Marthe Donas** developed abstract, geometric representations of women as a paper-based argument for gender equality, culminating in her constructivist drawing *Tango* (1920), later disseminated through *Der Sturm*; **E.L.T. Mesens** employed magazines, pamphlets, and photomontage to challenge bourgeois rationality and articulate a politically charged surrealist critique of totalitarianism; and **Jozef Peeters** used studies, sketches, and graphic designs on paper to formulate a constructivist “total concept” uniting art, architecture, and social reform. Across these practices, paper functioned simultaneously as an experimental laboratory and a democratic medium for circulating avant-garde ideas. The conclusion points to the continued relevance of paper in postwar neo-avant-gardes, particularly through the understudied archive of **Ernst Engel-Pak**, indicating that the paper-based legacy of the avant-garde remains far from fully explored.

Two core theses: paper became an ideal medium for artistic innovation and paper functioned as an experimental laboratory and as a democratic medium.

- New insights into the formation, biases, and histories of museum collections.

As a major outcome we were able to **highlight the diversity of objects, their interconnections with other collections and archives within the holdings of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts**, and the central role of interwar avant-garde works, largely acquired after 1960. We demonstrated that the collection was shaped retroactively, with decisive phases occurring from the late 1940s through the 1970s, reflecting changing institutional priorities and a growing recognition of Belgian abstract avant-garde art.

By tracing the delayed institutional recognition of works on paper — long subsumed under painting — the project revealed structural biases in acquisition, categorisation, and display. It also showed how broader post-war developments expanded museum missions and fostered new research fields. Combining collection history and object-based analysis, we could establish a foundation for future research while advancing a more reflexive, accessible, and integrated understanding of museum collections and their historiography.

The history of the RMFAB's collection of avant-garde art on paper reveals **a gradual and uneven recognition of this medium**. After 1918, drawings were long treated as secondary to painting, with limited acquisitions and visibility despite early examples and sporadic gifts. Economic constraints and institutional priorities further restricted acquisitions during the interwar period. A decisive shift occurred from 1947 onward, when Paul Fierens became head curator and promoted international and avant-garde art, leading to more systematic collecting, though works on paper still remained marginal. From the 1960s, under head curator Philippe Roberts-Jones, the collection expanded significantly through purchases, gifts, and bequests, especially of Belgian avant-garde artists, while research and exhibitions increased their visibility. Yet structural biases persisted, notably the absence of dedicated display spaces and gaps in representation. Recent decades have focused on addressing these limitations by strengthening research, diversifying acquisitions, and revaluing works on paper as a central component of the museum's holdings.

4.2 Institutional and policy recommendations

Based on the project's trajectory, BePAPER formulates the following recommendations:

For research funding bodies

- Allow methodological flexibility in long-term, collection-based research.
- Recognise descriptive and data-structuring work as scientific output.

For heritage institutions

- Integrate research projects more structurally into digital strategies.
- Avoid fragmentation between temporary research platforms and core systems.
- Investment in descriptive standards should be treated as research infrastructure, not merely administrative work.
- Multilingual and interoperable metadata practices are crucial for international visibility

For future projects

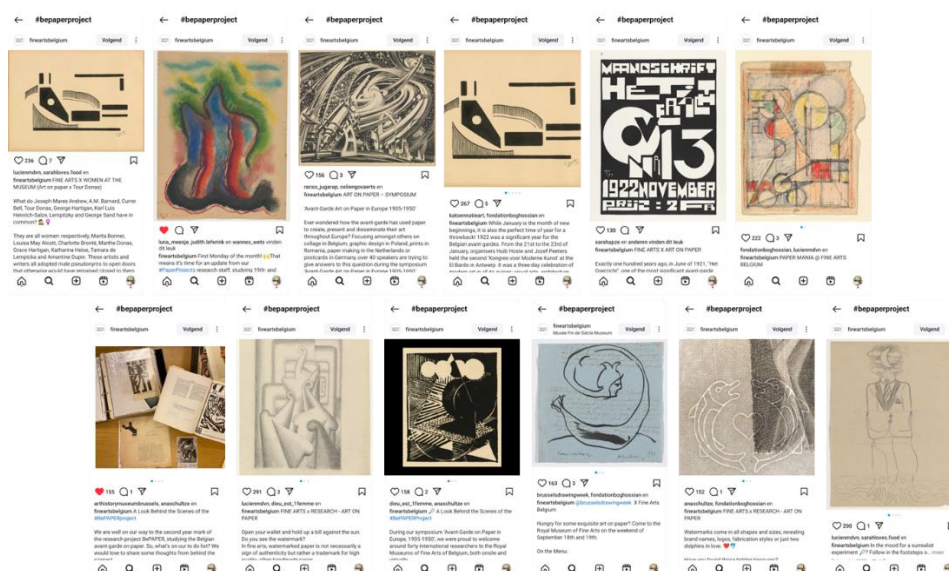
- Embed digital experimentation within institutional infrastructures.
- Use networked follow-up committees as active methodological sounding boards as they demonstrably improve methodological robustness
- Combining doctoral research with institutional cataloguing creates mutual reinforcement between scientific depth and operational outcomes.
- Social Network Analysis and contextual modelling deserve further development in art-historical research on avant-gardes

5. DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION

From the outset, BePAPER integrated dissemination as a **core project component**, not as a final add-on.

Initial dissemination actions included:

- Regular communication via RMFAB and project social media channels.



- Structured engagement with an international follow-up committee.
- Preparation of international scientific events planned for later project phases.

The dissemination logic explicitly addressed **multiple audiences**: academic researchers, heritage professionals, students, a broader interested public.

Finally, dissemination and valorisation were achieved through:

- an international symposium (*Avant-Garde Art on Paper in Europe, 1905–1950*, 23.03. – 25.03.2022, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium see program in annexe),



- scholarly publications and edited volumes (*see under Publications*),
- public talks and lecture series, teaching and training activities, contributions to major cultural events (e.g. *Art on Paper Brussels*), such as 'Traces of Travelling Art'. Art on Paper,

Brussels, 6.10.23, or the *BePaper Talks*. Series of three conferences held at the RMFAB in early 2025: 07/02/25, *Les avant-gardes belges. Une introduction (Fanny Paquet)* - 13/02/25, *Van aanwerving tot tentoonstelling. Collectiebeheer van moderne werken op papier in de KMSKB (Laura Kollwelter, Sarah Van Ooteghem, Lise Vandewal)* - 18/02/25, *Belgian historic avant-garde works on paper (Sarah Eycken)*



- a project website serving as an archival and bibliographic reference (www.bepaper.be),



- based on an established concept within the project, a temporary exhibition at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium (18.05. – 19.10.2025) [Exposition « Salle Spilliaert » – Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique](#).



The project's final phase focused on **securing outputs** for sustainable reuse rather than maximising short-term visibility. As soon as the new Collection Management System (CMS) of the RMFAB will be operational, all catalogue entry updates on the corpus will be available online for further use by researchers, curators and the general public. The descriptive handbook and improved workflows directly strengthened RMFAB's documentation practices beyond the project scope. These leaves a legacy of:

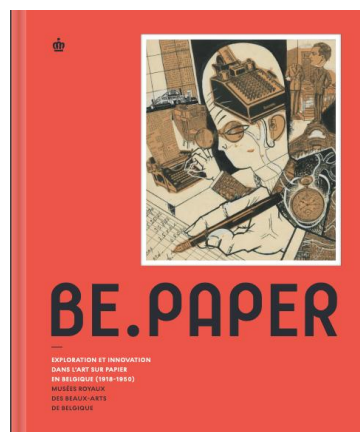
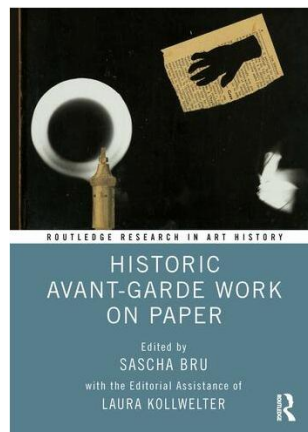
- Long-term impact on RMFAB cataloguing practice and CMS development.
- Transferable insights into digital sustainability and interoperability.
- Foundations laid for future exhibitions and digital reuse beyond the project timeline.

By aligning research, digitisation, and data governance, BePAPER established conditions for future reuse in education, exhibitions, and international research infrastructures.

6. PUBLICATIONS

Edited volumes

- Bru, Sascha & Kollwelter, Laura (eds.), *Historic Avant-Garde Works on Paper*. London/New York: Routledge, 2024.
- *BePAPER. Innovation and Exploration in Belgian Art on Paper (1918–1950)*. Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 2025.



Peer-reviewed articles & chapters (selection)

- Eycken, Sarah, "Het tijdschrift als papieren tentoonstellingsruimte voor de Belgische avant-garde in het interbellum: Het Overzicht – De Driehoek – Variétés," *Tijd-Schrift* 12, no. 2 (2022).
- Eycken, Sarah, "Colour Samples: The Use of Coloured Paper in Belgian Avant-Garde Circles after 1917," in *Artists' Paper: A Case in Paper History*, 2023.
- Eycken, Sarah, "Black-and-White Work on Paper in Belgian Constructivism," in *Historic Avant-Garde Works on Paper*, 2024.

(A full bibliographic list is archived on the BePAPER website.)

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BePAPER consortium warmly acknowledges:

- **BELSPo**, for funding and constructive programme guidance within the BRAIN-be 2.0 programme, and especially Helena and Georges Jamart,
- the **Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium**, for institutional support and access to collections and archives,
- partner institutions **KU Leuven** and collaborating institutions, such as **ULB**,
- the members of the **international follow-up committee**, whose feedback was instrumental throughout the project,
- archivists, librarians, curators, and collaborators, as well as colleagues from related research projects (notably FRIABLE) for knowledge exchange,
- researchers and students who contributed to the project's success under challenging circumstances,
- all contributors to conferences, publications, and outreach activities.

ANNEXES

Programm International Symposium, 2022

From Initial Design to Adaptive Implementation

As described in **Annexe I (B2/191/P2/BePAPER)**, BePAPER was originally conceived as a **four-work-package project** advancing in two main phases:

- **Phase 1 (WPs 1–2):**
data gathering, cataloguing, digital development, and metadata modelling
- **Phase 2 (WPs 3–4):**
scientific synthesis (PhD, articles, symposium) and public outreach (exhibition, publications, lecture series)

This structure assumed:

- continuous on-site access to collections,
- stable staffing across the full project duration,
- progressive parallel integration of research results into digital infrastructures.

Major external and institutional constraints

Over the project lifetime (2020–2025), this initial setup had to be **adapted substantially** due to cumulative, well-documented setbacks:

- the Covid-19 pandemic (repeated lockdowns, restricted collection access),
- long-term medical leave of the project coordinator,
- long-term medical leave of a research assistant,
- maternity leave of a research assistant,
- an institutional governance crisis at RMFAB, including **two changes of General Director**,
- delays in the renewal of the museum's Collection Management System (CMS).

Adaptive strategy adopted

Rather than abandoning objectives, the consortium **re-sequenced priorities**, shifting from a parallel to a **layered logic**:

- safeguarding data quality before enabling digital dissemination,
- prioritising scientific consolidation (PhD, edited volumes) over early-stage digital visualisation,
- transforming originally planned outreach formats (exhibition, masterclasses) into **phased or deferred outputs**, ensuring institutional feasibility.

This adaptive governance approach ensured:

- scientific credibility,
- preservation of core deliverables,
- long-term institutional impact beyond the formal project end date.

This evolution is explicitly consistent with the **risk-management and escalation logic** defined in the original Annex (cf. “FEASABILITY”, “RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES”).