

**Museum**  
of the **Walloon**  
**Life**



Snapshots of Wallonia

The talented sculptor from Liege, **Léopold Harzé** (1831-1893) has succeeded in capturing social life and customs with a highly delicate touch or a down-to-earth attitude. Sensitive to detail the artist would stroll about armed with his modelling clay so he could sculpt from life.

Scenes from the street, the market, colliery, carnival or more intimate scenes engage in a dialogue with the snapshots of the contemporary photographer, Jim Sumkay from Liege roaming around Wallonia to capture scenes of everyday life with humour, tenderness and modesty.



The school, Léopold Harzé, 1860



Colliery scene, Léopold Harzé, 1863



From the monastery to the museum,  
a page in the history of Liege's heritage



Former monastery of the Friars Minor, around 1890, renting out hand carts

«A museum about the life of a community has to continue to develop every day rather than be regarded as an initiative that has been concluded.» This was the motto of the founders of the Museum of Walloon Life and it is from this perspective that a start was made in 2003 on refurbishing the building and museum layout.

A huge renovation programme was carried out between 1963 and 1971 in line with the building's new purpose: housing the Museum of Walloon Life's collections and services.

## The building

The museum has been created in a former monastery whose history is intricately related to that of the city: founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Friars Minors the monastery became a celebrated public place. It offered shelter to the destitute and those found guilty for various reasons, while providing opportunities for various professions to meet and then housing a market. The monastery was completely rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Meuse Valley style so typical of this region. In the wake of the French Revolution it was sold in several plots and used for storage purposes.

The architectural harmony was destroyed during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the changes made by one owner after another. It was seriously damaged by a flying bomb that fell there in 1944.



Destruction during the Second World War

## The institution

The idea that the witnesses of a community's past should be saved from destruction and kept alive in people's memories was very much in tune with the times in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A plan for a museum was put forward in 1913, at the instigation of **Joseph-Maurice Remouchamps, Jean Haust and Henri Simon**. In order to give tangible shape to this museum dedicated to ethnography and folklore in Wallonia, the founders appealed to the general public to come forward with any documents or objects they possessed that had a bearing on the people of Wallonia, their traditions, their activities, their quality of life and their ideas. The museum decided in 1925 to invest in a former outbuilding of the hotel Curtius, in a street called Féronstrée and a puppet theatre was created five years later. During the 1970s the establishment relocated to the former monastery of the Friars Minors.

The Province of Liege signed long lease contract with the City of Liege in 1989 and a collection loaning agreement with the Museum of Walloon Life, which has enjoyed the status of an establishment of public benefit since 1958.



The founding fathers of the Museum of Walloon Life, 1914



Three rare looks at Wallonia stimulate the imagination, revive its history and invite people to share in its legendary spirit of celebration

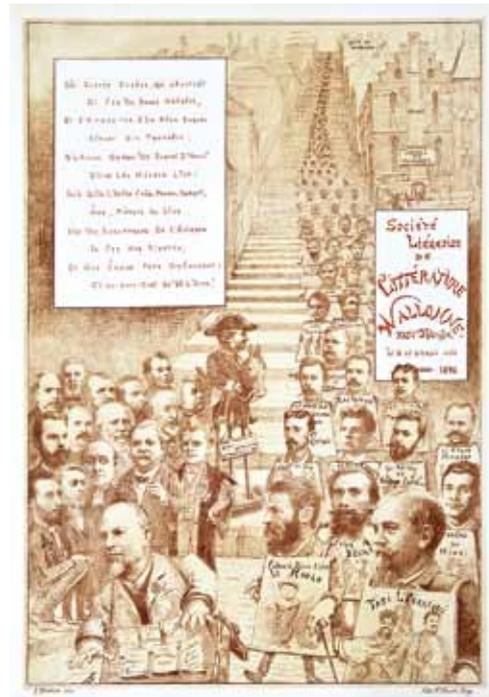
## A reflective survey of Wallonia



Cube made from clay

The material of the five cubes conjures up the rich resources of the soil and subsoil. Wood, stone, earth, iron and coal, glass and water are made layer after layer, in common with nature. Bouquets of rushes disseminate the various tones of Wallonia's Romance dialects, relating them to the materials to which they are close.

Picardy, Walloon, Gaumais or Lorrain and Champenois represent the four families of Romance dialects in Wallonia.



XXIV heureye menu from the Liege Walloon literature Society, showing the Society members descending the mountain of Bueren, lithograph F. Namur, Liege, 1890

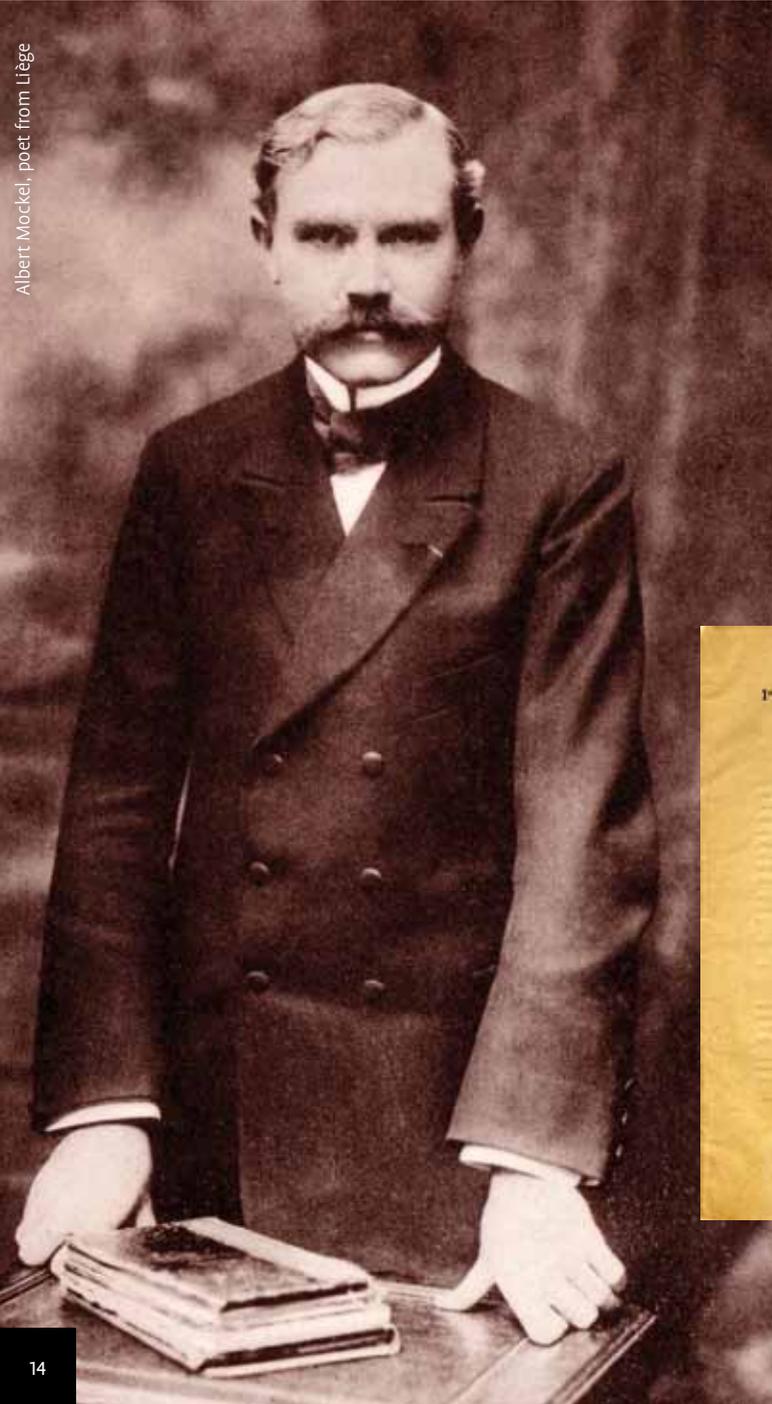


Stoumont, les Fonds de Quarreux, picture of Kepenne, 1900

The atmosphere of a collector's chamber offers visitors the opportunity to discover the variety of Walloon landscapes via works of art selected throughout Wallonia.

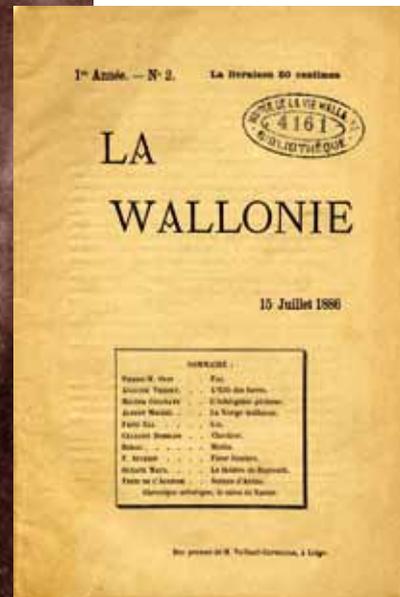
Benoît Dervaux's images projected onto nine screens lead us with the current to an encounter with sites, people and their histories.

## The long march of the Walloon activities led to the creation of the Walloon Region



Albert Mockel, poet from Liège

The call for Flemish autonomy has grown stronger and stronger since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In reaction to this movement the concept of Wallonia began to take shape in 1886 in the writings of the poet **Albert Mockel**.



Copy of the literary magazine *La Wallonie* created by Albert Mockel, 1886

A juniper berry liquor bottle decorated with the Walloon rooster



*The Walloon rooster*, watercolour painting by Pierre Paulus, 1913

In the wake of the Flemish breakthroughs, Jules Destré wrote his famous *Letter to the King* in 1912, about the separation of Wallonia and Flanders and took part in the Walloon Assembly meeting in Charleroi. This was when **Pierre Paulus** was commissioned to produce the Walloon emblem, a bold red rooster on a yellow background.

The rooster is now found decorating a wide variety of objects: beer mugs, paper knives, packets of tobacco, thimbles, soap or bottles of alcohol.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Walloon movement intensified. A Walloon National Congress called for the «autonomy of Wallonia in the Belgian State». The Royal Question in 1950, the crises resulting in the school pact and the Single Law of 1960 served to exacerbate the conflicts.

The trade unionist **André Renard's** call for «structural reforms» fuelled the ideology of Walloon People's Movement set up in 1961. The establishment of a language border, in 1962, raised the controversial issue concerning the status of the Fourons. In 1970, article 107c enshrined regionalisation in the Belgian Constitution. The Walloon Region finally came into being in 1980

## Revival: an alternative perspective on objects from the past and folklore

Borrowing its name from the English language, the revival gave rise to a growing interest in the past and a desire for people to assert their identity and their attachment to a region.



*Les Cabris du Val d'Ambève, a folk dance company*



Roundabout decorated with an old farm machine



Wallonia's rich folklore is on display during numerous festivities paying tribute to traditions, costumes, music, dance, regional dishes and older professions.

The depiction of the hiercheuse, emblematic figure of the Universal Exhibition in Liège, in 1905, is one of the first expressions of the folklore revival. This female worker in charge of pushing the coal wagons was chosen to recall mining activities in Wallonia

Transformed into decorative items the unassuming objects of yesteryear are used in contexts for which they were never intended, ornamenting houses, gardens or public spaces. Ploughs, pumps, wheelbarrows are converted into flower boxes. Indoors dwellings are decorated with milk jugs, horseshoes, irons and clogs.



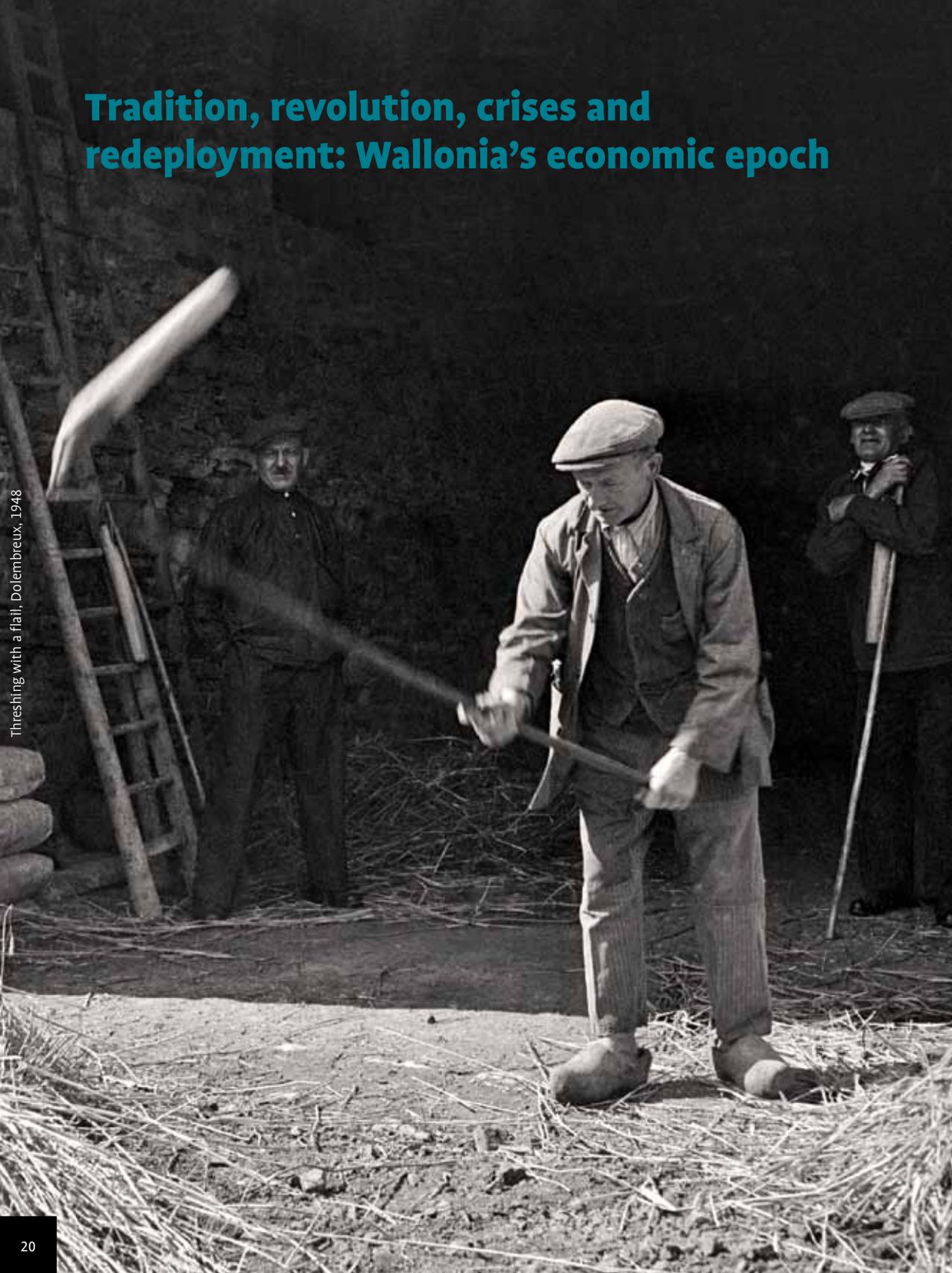
*Draught horse collar converted into a mirror frame*



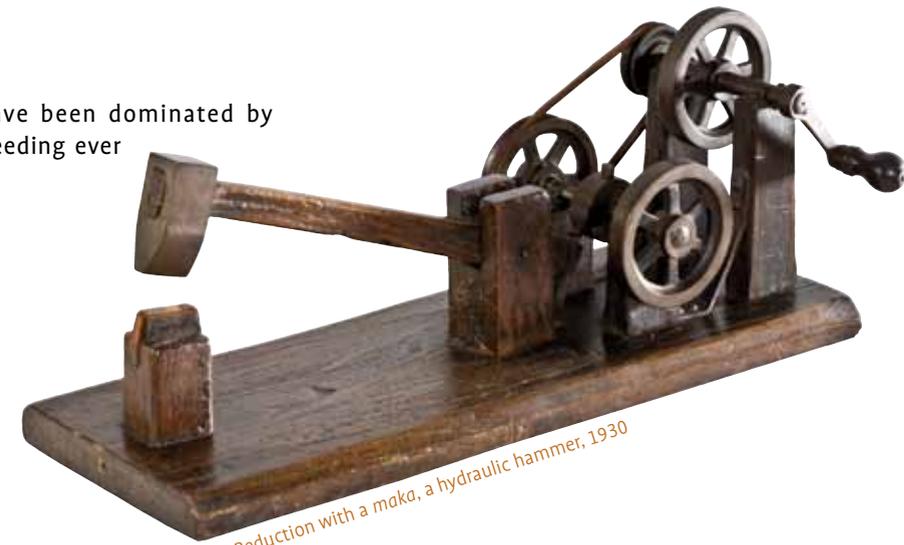
Developing production and communication systems

## Tradition, revolution, crises and redeployment: Wallonia's economic epoch

Threshing with a flail, Dolembreux, 1948



Human activities have been dominated by farming and stockbreeding ever since the Middle Ages.



*Reduction with a maka, a hydraulic hammer, 1930*

Craft activities began to decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the face of the technical innovations that were gradually being introduced into the workplace.

The Walloon people entered a new epoch in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the region's rich subsoil resources and a large workforce combined with the know-how and dynamic force of engineers, investors and captains of industry.



*Glass blowers workshop in Val-Saint-Lambert Crystal glassworks, oil painting, Emile Masson, 1905*



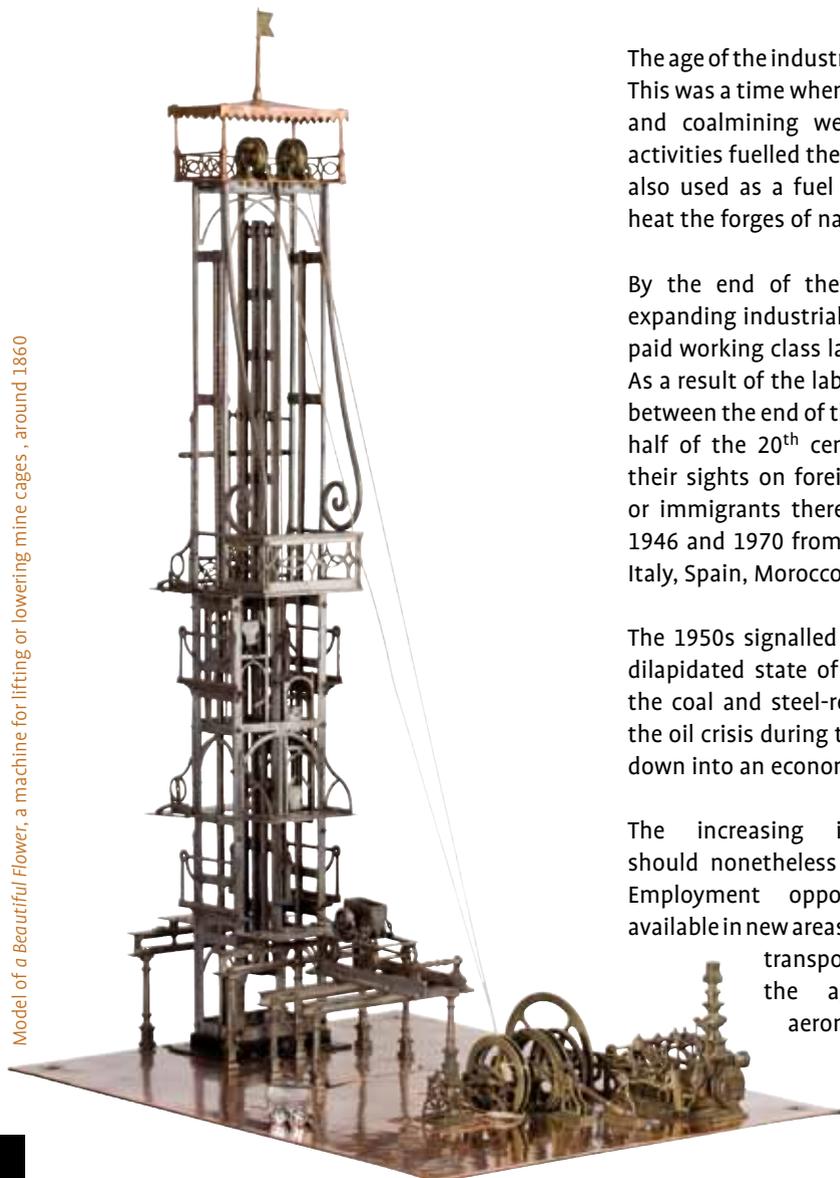
A hewer, coal miner working, photography by G. Marissiaux, 1904

The age of the industrial revolution was dawning. This was a time when steam engine applications and coalmining were closely linked. Mining activities fuelled the steel industry but coal was also used as a fuel for heating homes and to heat the forges of nailsmiths and blacksmiths.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the rapidly expanding industrial sector had created a badly paid working class labouring in dire conditions. As a result of the labour shortage that emerged between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrialists turned their sights on foreign labour. A large number of immigrants therefore arrived here between 1946 and 1970 from various countries, such as Italy, Spain, Morocco and Poland.

The 1950s signalled the start of a decline. The dilapidated state of the factories operating in the coal and steel-related sectors, followed by the oil crisis during the 1970s dragged Wallonia down into an economic slump.

The increasing importance of services should nonetheless help to halt this decline. Employment opportunities are becoming available in new areas: information technologies, transport, biotechnologies, the agri-foodstuffs industries, aeronautics and aerospace. New hopes for the futures are being contemplated.



Model of a Beautiful Flower, a machine for lifting or lowering mine cages, around 1860



Wind turbine, Villers-le-Bouillet

# From the road network to the airways, from carrier pigeon to satellites: Wallonia undergoing profound changes

Human portorage and animal traction were for a long time the time-honoured transport systems for serving rural communities and markets and supplying materials for craft activities and industry. Women in Liege used baskets for carrying coal and foodstuffs. Horses, cattle, dogs or donkeys were used for transport operations depending on the size of the loads to be carried.



Women porters, Liège marketplace, around 1927



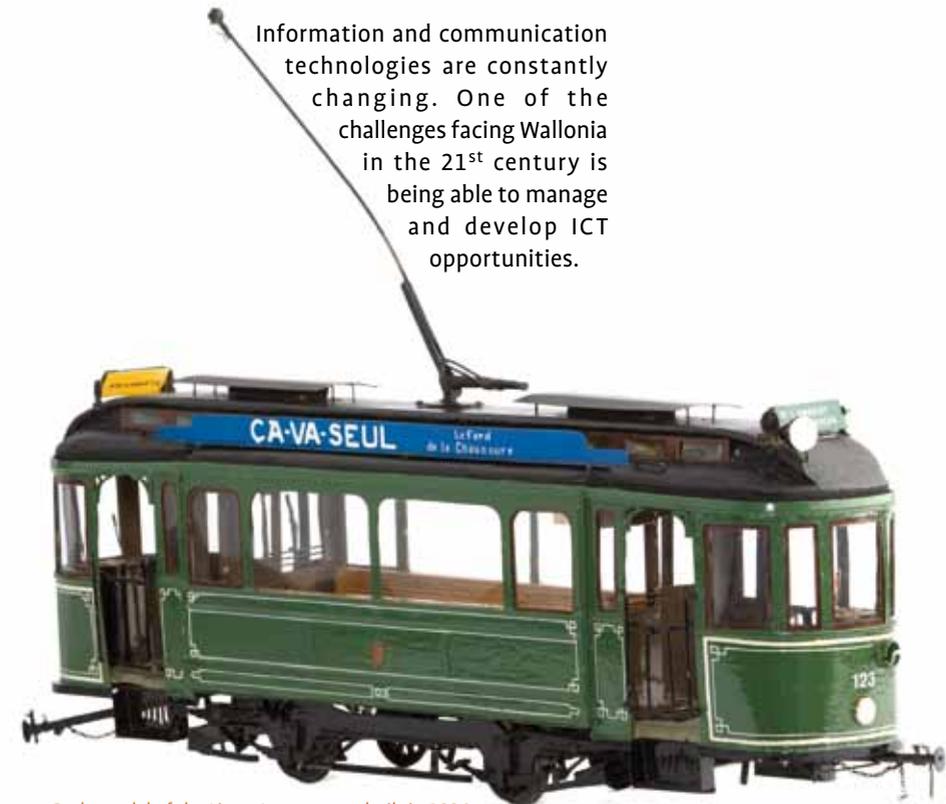
Dog-drawn cart for carrying milk, around 1960



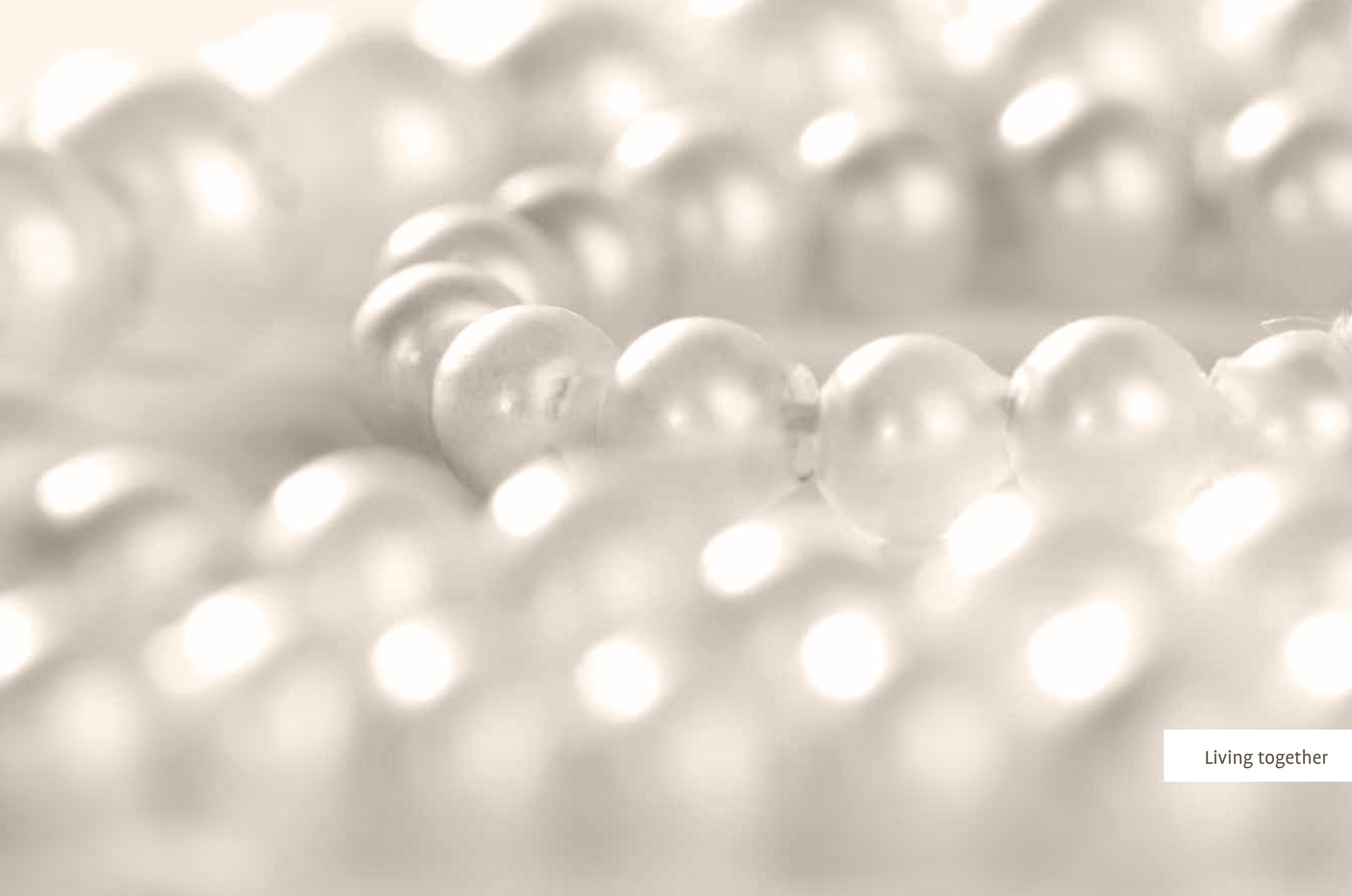
The public transport systems expanded to cater for the growing population and the improved channels of communication. The stagecoach gave way to trams and trains. Bus and car traffic then grew quite considerably.

Industry was able to tap into the new infrastructures deployed for the railways and shipping. Air traffic is currently expanding rapidly.

Information and communication technologies are constantly changing. One of the challenges facing Wallonia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is being able to manage and develop ICT opportunities.



Scale model of the Liege-Ans tramcar, built in 1886



Living together

## Festivals and recreation play an important role in life and forge social ties



Ivory purse, 1902

People are social beings, forging ties within their families so as to enhance the feeling of belonging to a tribe. Meals, gatherings and celebrations of various kinds characterise the various stages of life from the cradle to the grave.

Each one of us also has contacts with a wider social network.

Calendar festivals that used to be associated with fertility and reproduction still play an important part in our daily lives even though they have become secular and recreational. Fairs, processions or carnivals are opportunities for community celebrations.

The tourist industry went from strength to strength after paid holidays became a social entitlement in 1936. Tourists now have a wide range of destinations to choose from and there is something to suit all tastes. Camping used to be a popular, low-cost way of spending a holiday but has now become an increasingly sophisticated way of spending leisure time. The popularity of package holidays and stays in hotels has continued to grow as tourist agencies continue to offer increasingly competitive prices.



Memory of an engagement, around 1870

Individual and group sports have always been popular both in terms of participants and supporters. They offer entertainment to wide sections of the population, who are at the same time integrated into the social fabric. Some traditional sports activities, such as ball games, cross-country races and pigeon fancying, are still popular, while new disciplines are enjoying a great success

Youth movements enjoy a high profile in Wallonia. They offer a wide range of activities (entertainment, resourcefulness and learning about community life).



Backpack, around 1960



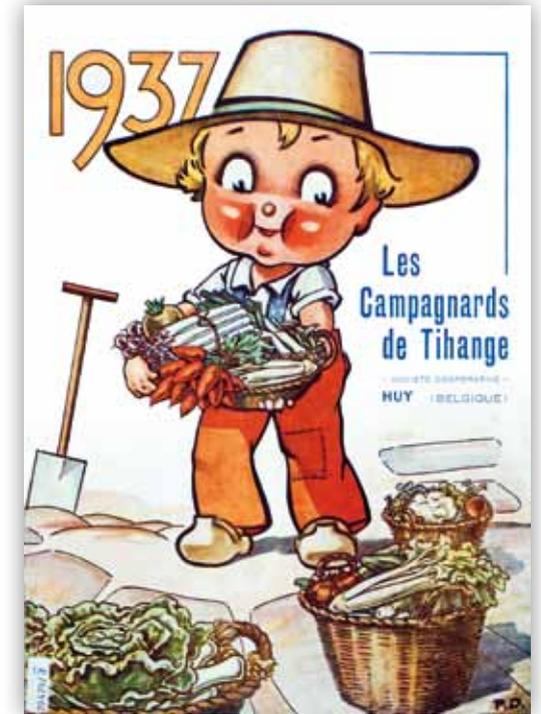
Funfair, 2008

As for the café, it has always been and will continue to be a special place for meetings in a friendly atmosphere. A place where people play games, discuss the news or have a conversation about the latest gossip.



Advertising statuette used for bettings

Extremely popular in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a creative hobby may be a solitary activity or group activity in the context of a club. Modelling, DIY, gardening or sewing are catered for by shops and specialist reviews.



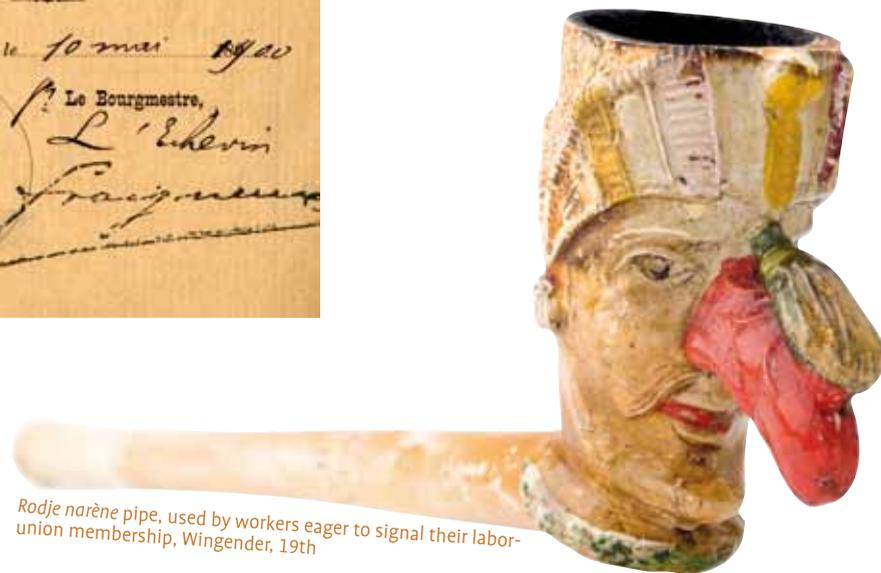
Garden centre catalogue, 1937

## Our society espouses democratic ideals: solidarity, equality and freedom of conscience

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, generation after generation fought to acquire or maintain their rights, gradually developing a democratic culture.

The industrial revolution witnessed the emergence of an urban proletariat compelled to suffer dire working and living conditions. Community and international campaigns were undertaken to improve the workers' lot. The social advances made over the years include the creation of co-operatives, trade unions, mutual insurance companies, shorter working hours (restricted to eight hours a day) and the right to paid leave.

People also had to struggle for individual rights. Customs changed quite significantly. The right to contraception and abortions were won as a result of initiatives undertaken by feminist groups and the support of doctors. Nowadays people speak quite openly about the issue of preventing sexually transmissible diseases, such as AIDS.



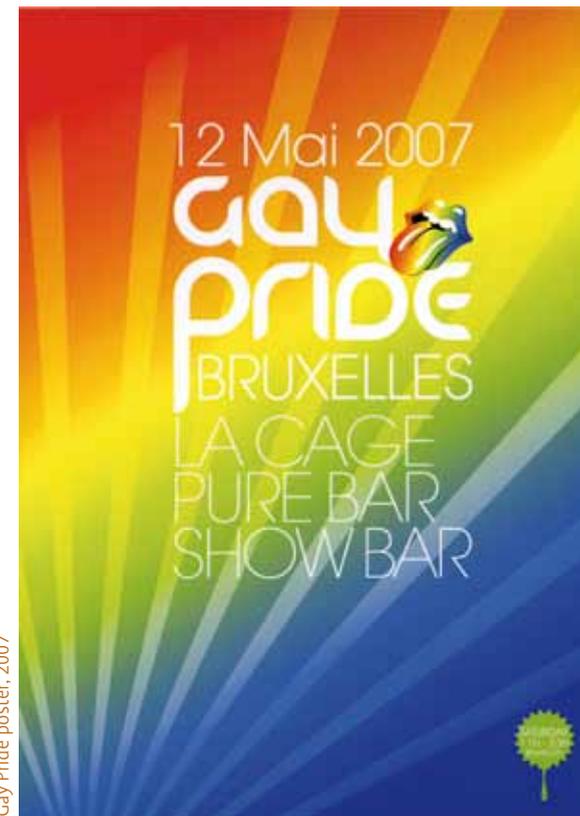
Rodje narène pipe, used by workers eager to signal their labor-union membership, Wingender, 19<sup>th</sup>

A long time the subject of suspicion, homosexuality is now more accepted, while same sex marriages became legal in 2003 in Belgium.

The controversial issue of euthanasia is still a bone of contention between supporters of the “right to die a dignified death” and those who believe it is always “wrong to kill”. Nonetheless, euthanasia has been accepted since 2002, subject to strict conditions.



Contraception and AIDS information for young people, 2006



Gay Pride poster, 2007



Pin sold to help the fight against AIDS, 2000



Living from day to day

## The times have changed, as have our homes

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the various areas in dwellings became noticeably more specialised. The middle classes made a distinction between rooms used for receiving people and those used by the family, while more humble homes had one single collective room to which a bedroom would sometimes be added.

From the hearth and coal stove to the gas or electric cooker, everything was being done to improve people's home comforts.



Advertising poster by Armand Rassenfosse, Liège, 1910

Changes in the female employment situation and the gradual disappearance of domestic staff meant the kitchen area was designed in a more rational way for the sake of convenience. The Cubex kitchen, the first modular system, invented in the late 1920s, represented a milestone in the modernisation of this room and was a forerunner of contemporary fully-equipped kitchens.



Main room with hearth, picture F. Herman, early 20<sup>th</sup> century



Living room, on display in the Grand Bazar furniture department in Liège, 1960s

Hygiene became a key concern by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of a movement set in motion by the medical fraternity, even though bathrooms were rare in working class homes until as late as the 1950s, when this domestic feature starting to become widespread.

When the laundry room appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was the beginning of the end of the practice of laundering linen outdoors. After 1960 the automatic washing machine revolutionised the drudgery of washing clothes.

During the 1950s, the «living room» where the television and hi-fi system were installed, represented the availability of comfort to ever larger sections of the population, and became a symbol of the recreational society.



Combined boiler and spin-dryer washing machine, 1966

## Plentiful supplies and variety are the key words of consumption



Goods distribution systems are tailored to changes in consumer purchasing power. Markets and shops were edged aside by the superstores but have recently come back into favour. The credit expansion after 1980 was regarded as the solution for the many demands of the consumer society.

A society's situation and developments are reflected in the way its citizens clothe and feed themselves.



Lemouche sweet shop, photograph by L. Max, Liège, 1931

Fashion was set by the middle classes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but the emergence of the clothes industry and ready-to-wear clothes meant trends became available to the masses. The Americans brought nylon to Europe during the Second World War (the basis of all synthetic materials) and jeans, the never-fading star of the modern wardrobe.

Turmix electric blender, 1950



A wider variety of foods appeared with better and better keeping qualities thanks to technological innovations. A more international attitude meant people were taking more of an interest in foreign culinary delights, while others were rediscovering what traditional Walloon cooking had to offer. Consumers are now clamouring for better quality in terms of hygiene and nutrition.

Appearing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homecrafts have undergone a tremendous change, particularly since the arrival of electricity.



Art deco bag with glass beads embroidery, 1925



Woman's ankle boots, late 19<sup>th</sup> century

# Cult of saints, magic and superstitions and their impact on our daily lives

Memory of Our Lady of Beauraing, 2007



Often tinged with fetishism, the cult of saints, with their protective and healing powers, were given expression in individual pilgrimages or during major gatherings, at sites that are now the scene of a form of pious tourism. Several sites in our region were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, who enjoyed a special devotion.

Voting offerings were placed as thanks for grace obtained or wishes that had come true.

Folk medicine was often used when people were ill. The analogy between two elements or the transfer of evils to living beings or things is at the root of these practices.

The healing power of a saint could also be transmitted by images or objects from the saint's place of worship.

Antoinisme, a healing religion to be found in Wallonia, used prayer as a therapeutic system.

Considered to be irrational, superstitions linked to popular beliefs based on magico-religious principles cater for the universal need for protection. They are still engraved in the collective memory even though they are inconsistent with religious doctrine and scientific knowledge.

Numerous books were published about magic in days of yore. Written in the 16th century by **Heinrich Cornelius Agrippan**, *De occulta philosophia* is a work that others are judged by in this area.



Embossed silver thanksgiving plaque, around 1930



Nail tree : a nail that had been in contact with a part of the body that was ailing would be hammered into a tree so as to transfer the illness



Spiritual life

# Throughout its history, Wallonia has benefitted from various philosophical and religious trends



Buddhist ceremony at the Yeunten Ling Institute, Huy, 2008

Human beings have long sought a meaning for the world around them and what happens to them after death.

Three monotheistic religions exist side by side in Wallonia: Christianity (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches), Judaism and Islam

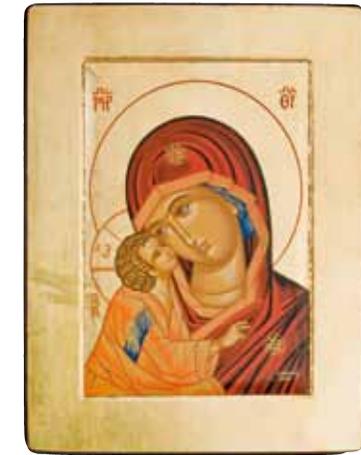
They claim to have a common source, Abraham, and are based on two holy books, the Bible, in the case of Christianity and Judaism, and the Koran, in the case of Islam.

Three spiritual movements are also well represented.

Originating in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Buddhism is one of the major oriental systems of thought and action, regarded both as a philosophy and a religion.

Secularism encourages people to espouse «free thought», a system based on human experience, excluding any confessional, dogmatic or supernatural references.

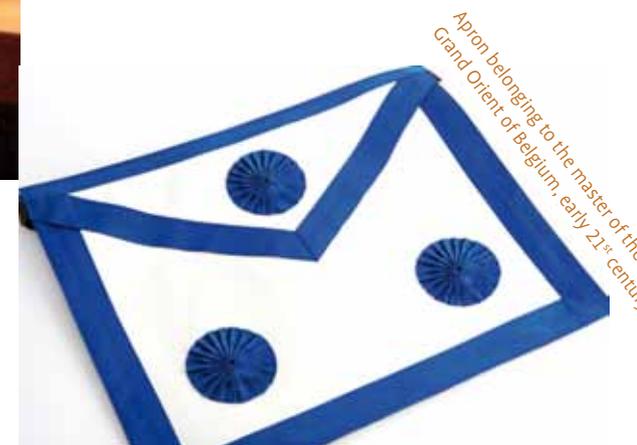
Free masonry offers esoteric teachings full of symbols and rituals. It encourages its members to work in a spirit of fraternal service for the progress of humanity and provides them with training so they can convey these values to the people around them.



Reproduction of a Byzantine icon from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, representing Donskaia the Virgin, early 21<sup>st</sup> century



Arabic calligraphy, early 21<sup>st</sup> century



Apron belonging to the master of the Grand Orient of Belgium, early 21<sup>st</sup> century



Gold-plated solid silver chalice, early 21<sup>st</sup> century

## Universal education, another engine behind social progress.

The concept of the school and approaches to teaching have changed over the course of time. Education was a prerogative of the church for a long time. A series of educational conflicts erupted in the late 19th century and during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when supporters of Catholic and secular education found themselves at loggerheads with each other.

As early as 1870, regulations were applied to define the school architecture and furnishing as well as the teacher training system. Child labour continued to be an obstacle to school attendance, so a Law ushering in free compulsory education was adopted on 19 May 1914.

Boys and girls did not always have the same lessons. Young girls were compelled to learn sewing for a long time, as shown in the above canvas. Nowadays, sexist discrimination confining girls to a restricted professional future is prohibited by law.



Embroidered canvas made for Mother's Day, 20<sup>th</sup> century



Primary schoolchildren, early 21<sup>st</sup> century



Glazed clay marbles, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Parties and rituals are a feature of student life. Initiation ceremonies are used to integrate junior students called «freshers». The Saint-Torè celebration in Liege and the 24-hour cycling event in Louvain-la-Neuve are testaments to folklore and local traditions. Caps, skull caps or aprons are common features of these students out on the town.



Liege University student cap, 20<sup>th</sup> century

# Skilful gestures: hands are tools making the accomplished gestures of virtuoso craftsmen



*Azmuth dial, Max Elskemp collection, 18<sup>th</sup> century*

The transfer of knowledge and solidarity is the hallmark of «companionship», a secular method of teaching manual trades. The three stages leading to the status of «companion» are an induction into the profession, further training involving occupational travelling from one master to another, and the creation of a masterpiece, as a testament to a perfect mastery of a craft.



*Brown and cut bulb vase, Jérôme Closset, 2007*



*Copper weathercock made by Guido Clabots, 2006*

In the case of the craft industry, the term «know-how» speaks for itself, implying the ability to design and produce. It refers to both a mental aptitude and manual dexterity.

Craftsmen have traditionally been called upon to produce useful objects made to last but their supply no longer matches the demand in a society where industrial overproduction relies on disposable objects so that supplies can be depleted.

Hence the craft industry is geared more to the decoration and luxury products sectors.

In the face of competition from mass production businesses, craftsmen often cater for customers keen on authenticity and prepared to pay the price for this privilege.



Hat created by Ariane Lespire, 2007

The design concept made its appearance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of a higher industrial output and more concern about aesthetics. It is the outcome of a collaborative effort between industrialists and artists or craftsmen. The artists or craftsmen design a prototype, a unique work that may be replicated several thousand times over, while incorporating the functional and commercial requirements.



Land Mine sweetbox, designer Pascal Koch, 2007



Motorcycle, designer Denis Polet, 2007



Sentenced to death!  
Sentenced to death?

The guillotine made its appearance in our region when Belgium was annexed to France. Used in Liege between 1796 and 1824, the specimen on display in the Museum used to stand on what is now the Place de la République française.

People who fell victim to the guillotine included the famous bandit Magonette from the Ardennes. In response to doctors specialising in anthropometry, casts were made of the heads of people sentenced to death so as to help identify the supposed physical characteristics specific to murderers.

In the wake of a judicial error, the death penalty was no longer pronounced after 1863 for common law infringements.

The death sentence was increasingly commuted as the years went by, so our country has led the way in this area, whereas France was still using the guillotine as late as 1977.



Plaster moulding of the head of Magonette, a famous bandit from the Ardennes, 1821



Guillotine, used in Liege between 1796 and 1824



The Liege puppet theatre



The popularity of puppets grew and grew in the Liège region during the last quarter of the 19th century.

The no-frills theatres were particularly suitable for offering pure entertainment, while promoting the community spirit.

The stage is where the actors made from wood perform. An iron wire connects them to the hands of the puppeteer hiding behind a backing.

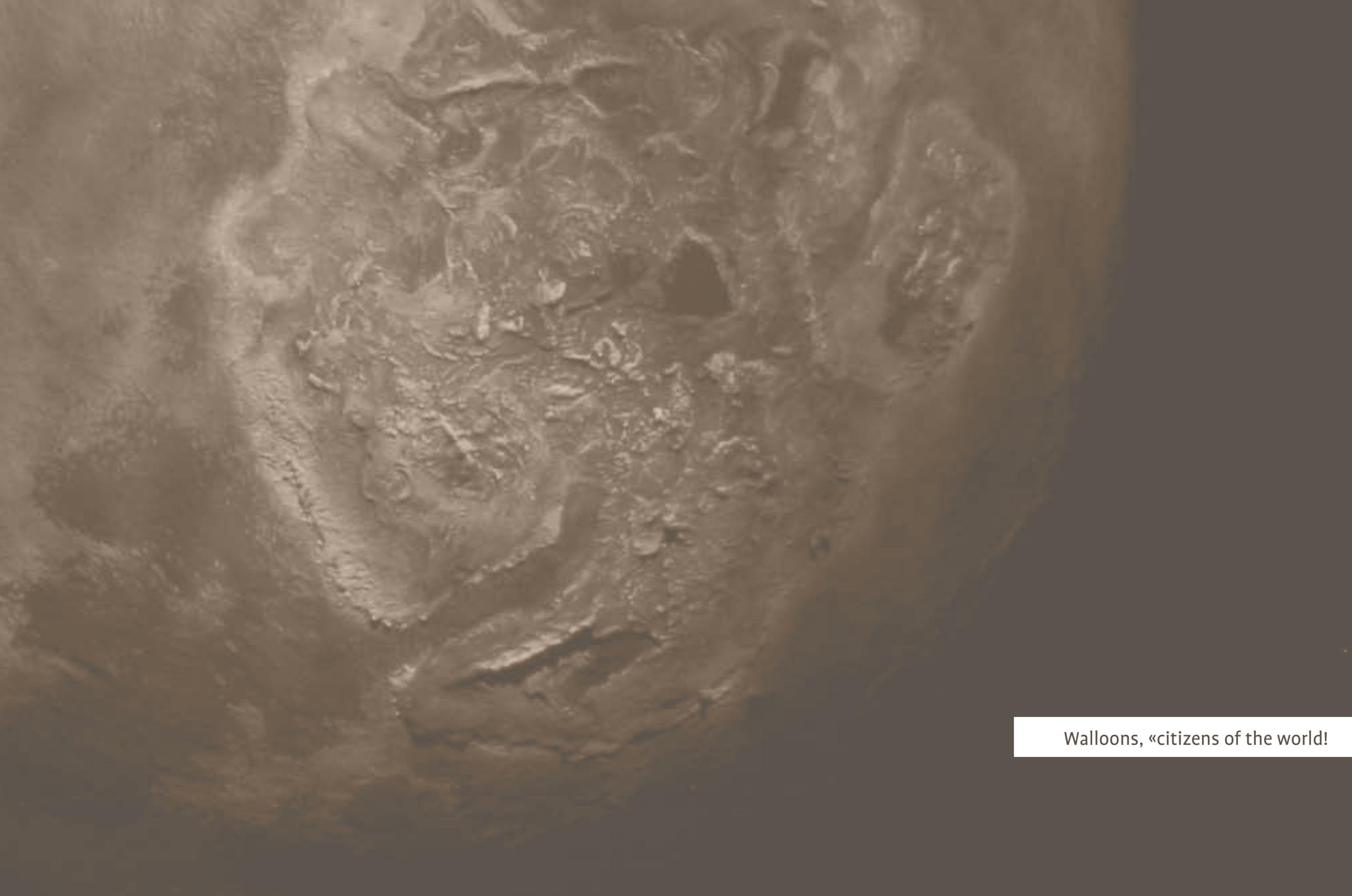
In the traditional Liège theatres, Emperor Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was a key figure surrounded by lords, knights and ladies. The presence of commoners looking like peasants and workers in the 19th century helped to spice up the shows. Tchantchès stood out from these others to become a popular hero and a symbol of the Liège spirit.

The puppet theatre went through a long period of decline but was kept alive thanks to the Museum of Walloon Life's theatre. An increasing number of puppet shows can now be seen. Performances based on the pure Liège tradition, adaptations of stories reflecting fairy tales or more contemporary productions - there are shows to suit every taste and public.

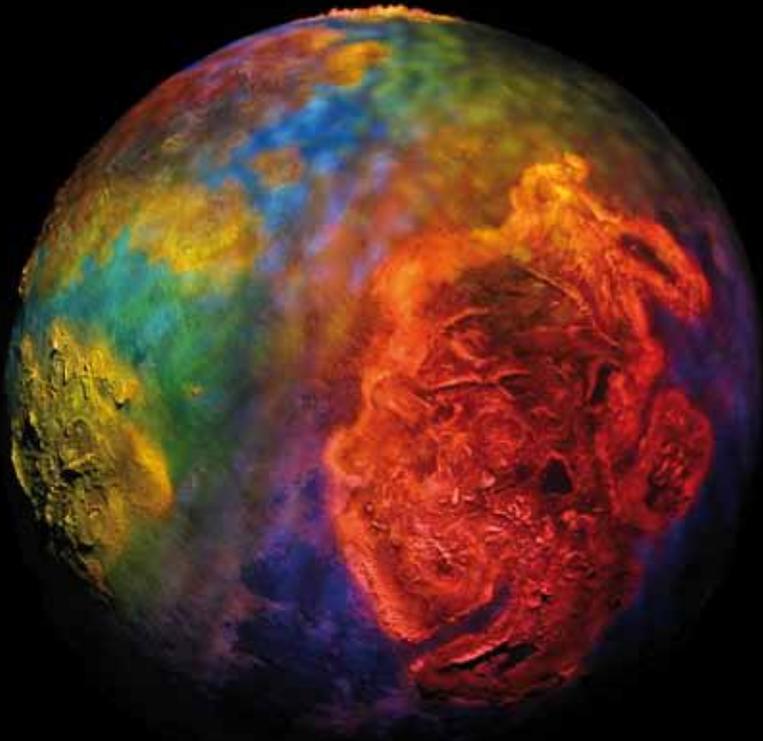
The Museum of Walloon Life can now pride itself on having an outstanding collection, comprising almost 6000 objects.



Tchantchès puppet, J. Ficarotta, early 21<sup>st</sup> century



Walloons, «citizens of the world!



Wallonia: an authentic region that is unique, multidimensional, hospitable and constantly changing.

The Museum of Walloon Life offers a diversified anthropological approach that is above all very instructive.

**«How can we cope with the challenge of the future if we are unaware of how our past was built?»**

Jacques CHARLIER