

# Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts

## Introduction

The name "Academy" dates from 387 BC when Plato opened his famous school outside Athens in the neighbourhood of the temple of Academos who was a hero of the Trojan War. This name was again used in Italy in the 15th century, when scholars of all disciplines formed study groups around three themes: philosophy, language and science. They wanted to develop an experimental approach to nature, freed from received and often erroneous ideas. This gave a new impulse to learning and led to science, as we now know it. Scientific academies were started in Rome (Accademia dei Lincei, 1603), London (Royal Society, 1660) Paris (1666) and in Brussels (Imperial and Royal Academy for Science and the Fine Arts, 1772) although the latter was abolished by the French in 1794 during their occupation and reconstituted in 1816 by King Willem I. In 1845, it was extended to include a humanities section. An academy of medicine had already been formed in 1841. All these Belgian Academies were mainly French speaking and Flemish supporters worked for the establishment of a Flemish academy. After 45 years of effort, an Academy for Dutch Language and Literature was established in Gent in 1886. The University of Gent became Dutch speaking in 1930. After a long fight, Flemish academies of science, humanities and the fine arts and of medicine were formed in 1938. This led to confusion between national, officially bilingual, academies with members from both the north and the south of the country, and the Flemish academies. This situation was cleared up in 1971 with the formation of two equivalent academies, a Dutch language one for the Flemish community and a French language one for the French speaking community. In the same way, two academies of medicine were formed.

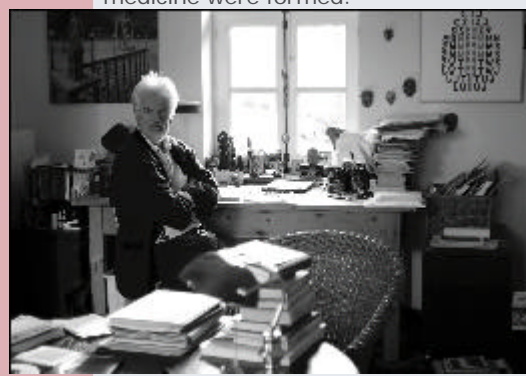


Photo: Jacques Weygaerts

The President of KVAB for the years 2007-2008, Frans Boenders

All these academies have had their difficulties in the 20th century. In 1900, they were at the forefront of scientific research and publication, with sponsoring and peer review long before these became common. Their influence has been reduced by their own success leading to an increase in funding, in scientific output and in specialisation. In some countries (UK, Sweden,



The Marble Room

USA, the Netherlands) their importance is still visible. In Flanders, the KVAB is catching up. It is again becoming a forum for science and the arts with, among other activities, about a hundred symposia a year. It houses the Flemish Sabbatical Centre (VLAC) where outstanding scholars from all over the world can stay for a few months. The Academy also publishes research reports by young (up to 40 years old) researchers and long-term series including the Dictionary of National Biography and the letters of Justus Lipsius. Furthermore, by publishing reports and position statements concerning current social problems and by awarding prizes and holding exhibitions together with the Flemish, Belgian and international scientific communities, the Academy contributes to the popularisation of science and the arts.

The Royal Flemish Academy for Science and the Arts consists of three classes: Science, Humanities and Fine Arts, each with fifty members. The members are elected, usually when in their fifties, by co-option and are appointed for life although they become honorary members on reaching the age of 75. The aim is to bring together the most successful scholars and artists in order to use their expertise in a council of sages to provide a conscience for the community. The classes meet once a month to discuss activities and management. Public meetings of the three classes together, are held twice a year.

The Academy has a board of management (14 members) with a president elected biennially, each time from a different class. The presidents since 1997, when these statutes were adopted, were Marcel Storme, Yvan Bruynseraede, Carl Van de Velde, Mark Eyskens, Jef Van Landuyt and Frans Boenders. The numerous tasks are executed by a staff of ten under the direction of the Permanent Secretary, Niceas Schamp appointed in 1997.

The Palace of the Academies



# CAWET

The Academy Commission for Science and Technology (CAWET) prepares recommendations on the treatment of current social problems having a technical aspect. For this purpose, it calls on the expertise of eminent engineers from Flemish universities and industry.

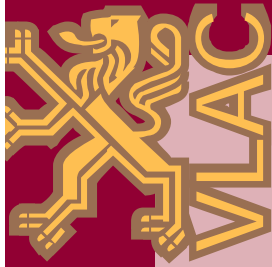
The Flemish Academic Centre for Science and the Arts (VLAC) has the aim of stimulating, supporting and publicising scientific and artistic research by providing a unique environment where foreign scholars can spend their sabbaticals. It was formed in 1999 on the lines of the many successful institutes

for advanced study such as the IAS in Princeton, New Jersey and the NIAS in the Netherlands.

Between ten and twenty Fellowships are awarded annually to first rate scholars from home and abroad who thus have the possibility of spending a certain time on their intellectual activities without having to bother about day-to-day academic tasks. In addition to a monthly honorarium and a travel allowance, all foreign Fellows have an apartment in Brussels and a fully equipped office at their disposal in the Academy's Throne Building. Flemish universities are compensated financially for the absence of their professors. PhD students receive an appropriate payment.

Flemish and foreign scholars and artists may apply for individual fellowships in order to work on their own projects for at least one semester. They can also make proposals for a group of two or more scholars of different disciplines to collaborate on a particular theme. Younger scholars and artists may form part of such a group.

On 3 May 2006, the Academy's board of management appointed Professor Marc De Mey as director of the VLAC. He is a member of the Humanities Class and was professor of cognitive science in the philosophy department of Gent University until his retirement in 2005.



## Flemish Academic Centre



The director of the VLAC prof. M. De Mey and the fellows I. Bocken and ????

# CONTACT FORUM

Every year the Academy coordinates and finances many scientific meetings in the fields of science, humanities and fine arts. These Contact Forums bring together specialists in different branches from all over the world.

Any Flemish scholar active in a Flemish institute of higher education or research may propose the organisation of a Contact Forum. If the proposal is accepted, the Academy provides a grant of €2500 and logistic support.

Proposals for the organisation of a Contact Forum are considered thrice yearly and must be submitted by 1 January, 1 April or 1 September. Application forms and further information are available on the website [www.kvab.be](http://www.kvab.be) or by e-mail: [inez.dua@kvab.be](mailto:inez.dua@kvab.be)

## Platform for Contemporary ART

The Platform for Contemporary Art (PHK) was formed in 2005 under the aegis of the Academy in order to provide a meeting place for young artists where they can organise exhibitions, concerts and discussion meetings. The subjects include, as well as the visual arts, architecture, music and even literature. The PHK organises biannual exhibitions in the Throne Building in addition to lectures and concerts.

L. Nollet and K. Dierickx



## PHK

L. Nollet's exhibition in the Atrium of the Throne Building



# Prizes

The KVAB awards several prizes, which recognise the exceptional artistic and scientific activities and encourage the practice of science and the arts.

## The Gold Medal:

Since 1998, the Academy has awarded its Gold Medal in recognition of the scientific or artistic career of persons who have made an important contribution to the progress and encouragement of science and the arts. It has been awarded successively to Jan Briers Sr., Paul Janssen, Philip Herreweghe, Karel Van Miert, Peter Piot, Angèle Manteau, Roger Raveel, Ingrid Daubechies and Jacques Wirtz.



Jacques Wirtz

## Foundation Prizes:

Several members of the Academy have created foundations with the purpose of awarding a prize in a specific field of science or the arts. The Academy gives these prizes for particular works.



## Academy Laureates:

The Academy gives annually three prizes, each of €10.000, one for science, one for humanities and one for fine arts (to a creative artist, an art critic or an art historian), in recognition of a young career (not more than 40 years old).

Barbara Baert, Laureate in 2006 in the discipline fine arts.

## The Flemish Science Policy Minister's Prize:



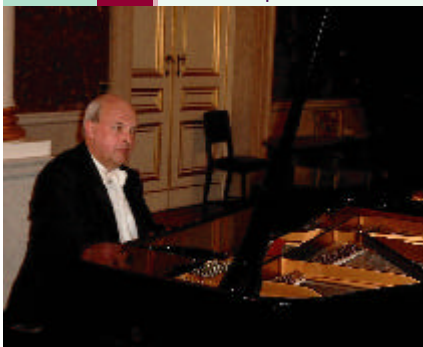
Technopolis

The triennial prize of the Flemish Minister for Science Policy is awarded to a person, a group or an organisation that has made a noteworthy contribution to the popularisation of science or technology. It has the value of €7500 and has been awarded successively to EOS, Over Leven and Technopolis NV.

## The Centre for European Culture CEC

Jozef De Beenhouwer  
"Flemish piano music"

The Centre for European Culture (CEC) was instituted in 1993-1994 as a special commission by which the Academy presents scientific and artistic subjects to a wider public. Thus, the CEC holds public lectures on subjects of current interest, one-day symposia on particular aspects of European culture or of a country or a group of countries and an annual concert with a talk by the artist. All these activities take place in the Academy House.



# National and international cooperation

## Bilateral cooperation

The Academy has bilateral agreements with several foreign academies, including those of Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Italy, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, for the exchange of scholars whereby visits are balanced in both directions. All researchers attached to a Flemish university may submit proposals to the Academy.

## RASAB

The Royal Academies for Science and the Arts of Belgium (RASAB) was formed in 2001 to coordinate all national and international activities for which the KVAB and the 'Académie royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique' (ARB) carry a common responsibility. The principal task of RASAB is the supervision and encouragement of the 26 national scientific committees.

## International organisations

The Academy is active in a number of international organisations: the International Council of Science (ICSU), the Union Académique Internationale (UAI), the European umbrella organisations: ALLEA (All European Academies) for greater Europe, EASAC (European Academies Science Advisory Council) for the EU and IAP, the International Academy Panel.

Information on the foundation prizes is on the website: [www.kvab.be](http://www.kvab.be)

## Spring Lectures

Since 1999, the Academy holds an annual series of Spring Lectures on a current theme, which is examined from various standpoints in several sessions on different days. Past series were:

- 1998 1st spring lecture: 'The Introduction of the Euro'
- 1999 2nd spring lecture 'Whither Belgium'
- 2000 3rd spring lecture 'Successes and Risks of Science'
- 2001 4th spring lecture 'Media, Markets and Society'
- 2002 5th spring lecture 'Art and Science'
- 2003 6th spring lecture 'Immigration'
- 2004 7th spring lecture 'Ageing'
- 2005 8th spring lecture 'Art as inspiration for the fine arts'
- 2006 9th spring lecture 'Art and Science'

Ninth spring lecture  
"Art and Science"





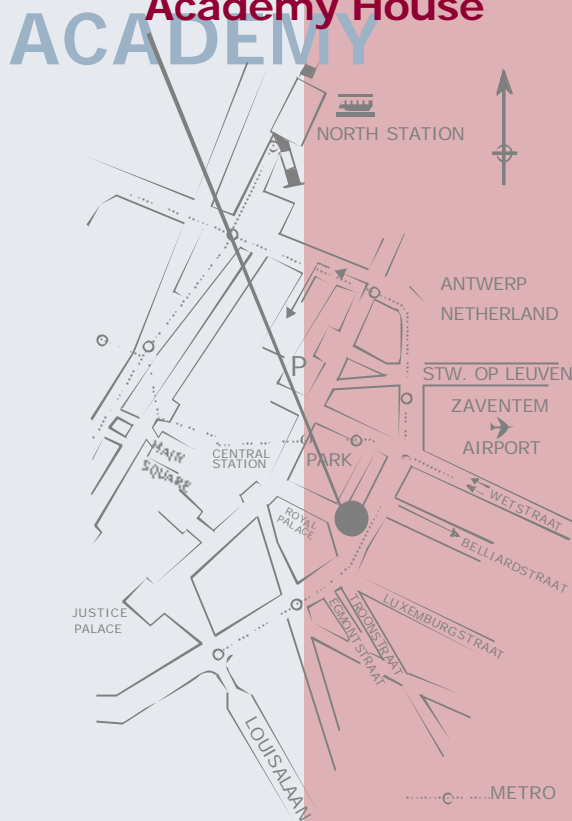
VLAST

## VLAST The Friends of the Academy

The "Friends of the Academy" are welcome in the Flemish Academic Foundation (VLAST), formed in the summer of 2004 on the initiative of Professor Mark Eyskens, then President of the Academy. In fact, it developed as the result of continued cooperation between the Royal Academy for Dutch Language and Literature in Gent and the KVAB in Brussels. The aim is to bring the activities of the academies, which are meeting points for scholars of various trends, disciplines and universities, more into the public eye by the organisation of lectures, symposia, colloquia and by the award of prizes. In order to have a solid financial basis, which would enable it to increase its activities, VLAST is constituted as a not-for-profit association so that donors may make tax-free gifts. At first, VLAST sought support from the business world but has now extended its fundraising to all the Flemish community sympathetic to academic pursuits.

All those wishing to support VLAST can do this by transferring €100 to the KVAB account (BIC BPOTBEB1, IBAN BE33 0000 0352 5746) mentioning 'VLAST contribution'. For this, they will receive a Belgian tax exemption certificate.

## Academy House



HOW TO REACH THE ACADEMY

From Brussels Airport: By train to Brussels Central Station.

By train: Brussels Central Station. It takes about ten minutes to walk from Central Station to the Academy House. Alternatively, take the metro.

By metro: Subway station Trone  
From Central Station: line 1 to Kunst-Wet and there line 2.  
From Noordstation (North): tramway to Rogier and there line 2.  
From Zuidstation (South): line 2.

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## Recommendations

The Academy is a neutral institution with a wide network of first class researchers. This attribute has led the Flemish Parliament to call on the Academy for advice on unnecessary decrees. On its own initiative, the Academy has published standpoints on ageing, on bibliometry in the humanities and on the future of Europe. Each of these recommendations has been published as a "Standpoint". It aims to strengthen these advisory activities in the future.

## Publications

The KVAB has published, since 1979, a score of monographs, volumes of long term series, academia analecta and reports of contact forums.

All these publications, renowned in Belgium and abroad for their scientific quality, have made an important contribution to the dissemination of knowledge in the world. The long-term series such as the letters of Justus Lipsius and the Dictionary of National Biography (in collaboration with the Royal Academy for Dutch Language and Literature) are among the country's major scientific publications.

Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek

