PLASTIC FURNITURE IN POST-WAR BELGIUM

The Case of Meurop (1958-1980)

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the production of plastic furniture in post-war Belgium. Plastics were commonly used to imitate wood in order to mass-produce traditional furniture in popular styles. This provoked strong reactions from the traditional furniture industry protecting their trade, and from modernists, who rejected the "dishonest" use of materials. The Meurop company was established in 1958 with a policy to offer good design at affordable prices. Targeting the new European market, Meurop developed its own distribution system of shops that covered Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, France, and Germany. In 1960, it was the first Belgian furniture company to open its own plastics department, designing and fabricating modern designs created by its own art director, and later, by its in-house design studio. Later, as a result of the 1973 oil crisis and a different attitude to plastics, Meurop's plastic dream ended and the company had to close its doors in 1980.

KEYWORDS: plastic furniture; Meurop; post-war Belgium; mass production; plastic heritage

INTRODUCTION: Plastic furniture made its entrance in the Belgian interior after WW II. International brands like Knoll and Herman Miller conquered the high-end Belgian market with modernist furniture made of plastic materials that were soon endorsed by progressive intellectual circles.[1] In the 1960s, Italian plastics also found their way into the Belgian markets.[2] When, in 1968, the renowned Biennale Interieur in Kortrijk opened its doors, it was particularly the new Italian design – with its experimental application of plastics enabling vivid colours, slick shiny surfaces, and sloping shapes – that made the hearts of Belgian middle-class consumers beat faster [FIGURE 01]. *"Blow"* – the first inflatable armchair produced in large numbers – could even seduce the Belgian Prince Albert to test it at the inauguration of the first edition of Biennale Interieur in 1968 [FIGURE 02].

Meanwhile, the Belgian production of plastics for interiors started off slowly. The very first furniture company in Belgium to set up a large-scale production of plastics was

01 View of the first edition of the Biennale Interieur, Kortrijk, 1968. © Collection Biennale Interieur Kortrijk

02 Price Albert inspecting together with Lut Schots-Devroe the Italian Blow of Zanotta, the first inflatable armchair produced in large numbers, at the first edition of the Biennale Interieur, Kortrijk, 1968. © Collection Biennale Interieur Kortrijk

Meurop.[3] It originated from the Belgian enterprise Trefac, a wire pulling factory in Rijmenam that was established in 1946. From 1956 onwards, Trefac started to produce small pieces of furniture. In view of the new European market and the export opportunities, the directors of Trefac decided in 1958 to create a new and much larger furniture firm: Meurop [FIGURE 03]. The policy of the new company was to offer good design at affordable prices through mass-production: a Belgian Ikea *avant la lettre*.[4]

In contrast with the international brands mentioned earlier, Meurop did not aim for high-end production of plastic furniture for culturally progressive circles, but targeted the mass market with affordable home products and ready-to-assemble furniture. Specifically, it targeted the new European Common Market that had come into effect that same year. Indeed, its name gives away these commercial ambitions: "Meurop" is a contraction of the French word *meubles*, meaning furniture, and *Europe*. The European future was exciting for Belgian industrialists, since it represented a new post-war economic reality and the chance to access much larger markets.[5] Moreover, Belgium was one of the driving forces behind European unification with Brussels taking on the role of Europe's unofficial capital, culminating in the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

To be able to act directly in this new extended European market, Meurop developed its own distribution network with shops in Belgium (1958), The Netherlands (1959), France (1961), Luxemburg (1963), and Germany (1964).[6] With the slogan "from factory to the home," Meurop opened more than 60 shops in Western Europe and expanded its mail-order sales business through the distribution of advertising brochures.[7] The brochures had a wide circulation with a print run of 780,000 copies in 1959; by 1970, this number had increased to three million. The head office and factory were located in Bonheiden-Rijmenam, a small village close to Mechelen. The factory was responsible for the production for the whole of Western Europe and incorporated various workshops: woodwork, metal, sewing, matresses and a print department for the many advertisement brochures that were distributed by mail. At its height in the 1960s, more than 1000 people were employed at Meurop.

The international ambitions of Meurop were also reflected in its artistic choices. The company employed the renowned French designer, Pierre Guariche (1926-1995) as its art director.[8] Guariche was a respected designer who worked with important furniture producers like Steiner and Airborne in France.[9] For Meurop, he designed a homogeneous modern collection of modular elements and functional furniture. In 1968, Guariche was succeeded by an in-house design studio headed by

03 Walter Bresseleers, Meurop's head offices and shop at the Paleizenstraat 65-67 in Schaerbeek, 1957. © Private archive Walter Bresseleers

Guy Bernard. The in-house design studio developed new furniture ranges, working together with Belgian and international modernist designers such as Robert Heritage, Jean-Paul Emonds-Alt, Isidore Zielonka, Willy van der Meeren, Claude Blondel, George Vanrijk, Frank Smout, Guy Gerard, Philippe Neerman and T. Zanko.[10] In the 1970s, the range was expanded with more traditional furniture in semi-historical styles.

THE SIREN CALL OF PLASTIC

In 1960, Meurop made the substantial investment to open its own plastics department. It was equipped with the latest machinery,[11] and employed around 40 people, working in three shifts. It was the first company in the Belgian furniture industry that ventured into the domain of plastics mass-production. Until then, manufacturers would have sub-contracted production of plastic furniture to the petro-chemical industry.[12] In this regard the Belgian petro-chemical industry was strongly influenced by recent developments in the United States[13] through the inflow of American products, business models, and know-how stimulated by the Marshall Plan.[14] Following the American example the Belgian petro-chemical industry moved into the market of plastic products for interiors.

The petro-chemical industry had promoted the presence of plastics in the Belgian home, but usually in the guise of traditional materials, such as wood.[15] The formal possibilities of plastics were mobilized to mass-produce traditional furniture in popular styles such as Louis XV that

04 Advertisement for Synfina. © Belgian Plastics, 9, VII-1970, p. 95, collection KU Leuven Bibliotheken 2 Bergen Campus Arenberg

dominated Belgian interiors [FIGURE 04]. Wood veneer could be replaced by decorative plastic film, and molding and injection techniques enabled the manufacture of structural elements and even entire furniture pieces in plastic. The distinctive, shiny, slick surfaces of these new materials were most acceptable in the places of the house where utility is key: the kitchen and the bathroom. For example, the Ghent-based firm Vynckier, known as a producer of switchgear cabinets, developed a new collection of plastic bathroom furniture named Vyncolux.[16] Embracing the advertised hygienic character of plastic, the elements were made from formaldehyde resin in an iron mold under high pressure and temperature. Some Belgian firms from the new plastic industry also produced modernist furniture but mostly as sub-contractors. For example, Didak in Grobbendonk produced plastic furniture for Asko, and Synfina fabricated the plastic table 877 designed by Pierre Paulin for Artifort.[17]

The arguments of the chemical companies to favor plastics over traditional materials were many.[18] It was argued that the material was hygienic, low maintenance (no need to repaint or maintain the different kinds of woods), moisture-proof and that the formal and aesthetic qualities of plastics were high.[19] Advertising boasted that differences between wood and plastic could not be detected with the naked eye. The biggest advantage, however, was the price. Plastic was very cheap; that is, until the oil crisis broke out. An important addition to these advantages was that, in contrast to the traditional furniture industry, a furniture piece with very complicated shapes and many details was no more expensive in production than one with very simple shapes. In that way, the price of production could be lowered, which – according to the petro-chemical companies – implied a democratizing of the traditional furniture market.

Using plastic as a substitute for wood provoked strong reactions from the traditional furniture industry, which was still characterized by family businesses using traditional production methods. The arguments they put forward were mainly colored by anti-American sentiment – the presence of the petro-chemical industry in the furniture trade was even dubbed by some as the "the invasion of barbarians."[20] They argued that the American furniture market – where plastics had already made its entry – was not comparable to the European furniture market, since they claimed that European tastes and lifestyles differed strongly from those of Americans.[21]

Modernists also rejected the "dishonest" use of plastic imitating other materials, but from another perspective. In line with the modernist thinking, they promoted the "genuine" and "rational" application of plastics.[22] The Belgian modernist architect Renaat Braem, for example, was convinced that plastics could entail an important liberation within the field of architecture and even make Belgium more beautiful.[23] However, he alerted people to a possible "plastic inferno" when the material was not used "correctly" and bad taste was at play.[24] The Belgian design critic K.N. Elno promoted similar attitudes.[25] He was convinced about the many possibilities plastic offered in the realm of design, but detected two notable problems. The first problem was the prevailing "*plasticomanie*": there was the tendency to produce *everything* in plastic. The second problem was the inability to find an authentic form for plastic goods. He criticized the childish desires of the industry towards imitation and falsification and warned that this would cause distrust among the public and stimulate the impression of plastic as an inferior material.

The new plastics industry worried about its public image, and realized that the association of plastic with "unauthentic" and "dishonest" qualities was a commercial threat. Synfina, the largest plastic processor in Belgium, started an intense advertising campaign to change this negative perception.[26] It underlined that plastic, like other materials, had ancient antecedants as illustrated in an advertisement in *Meubel Echo* that showed natural plastic used in Egypt at the time of Tutankhamun.[27]

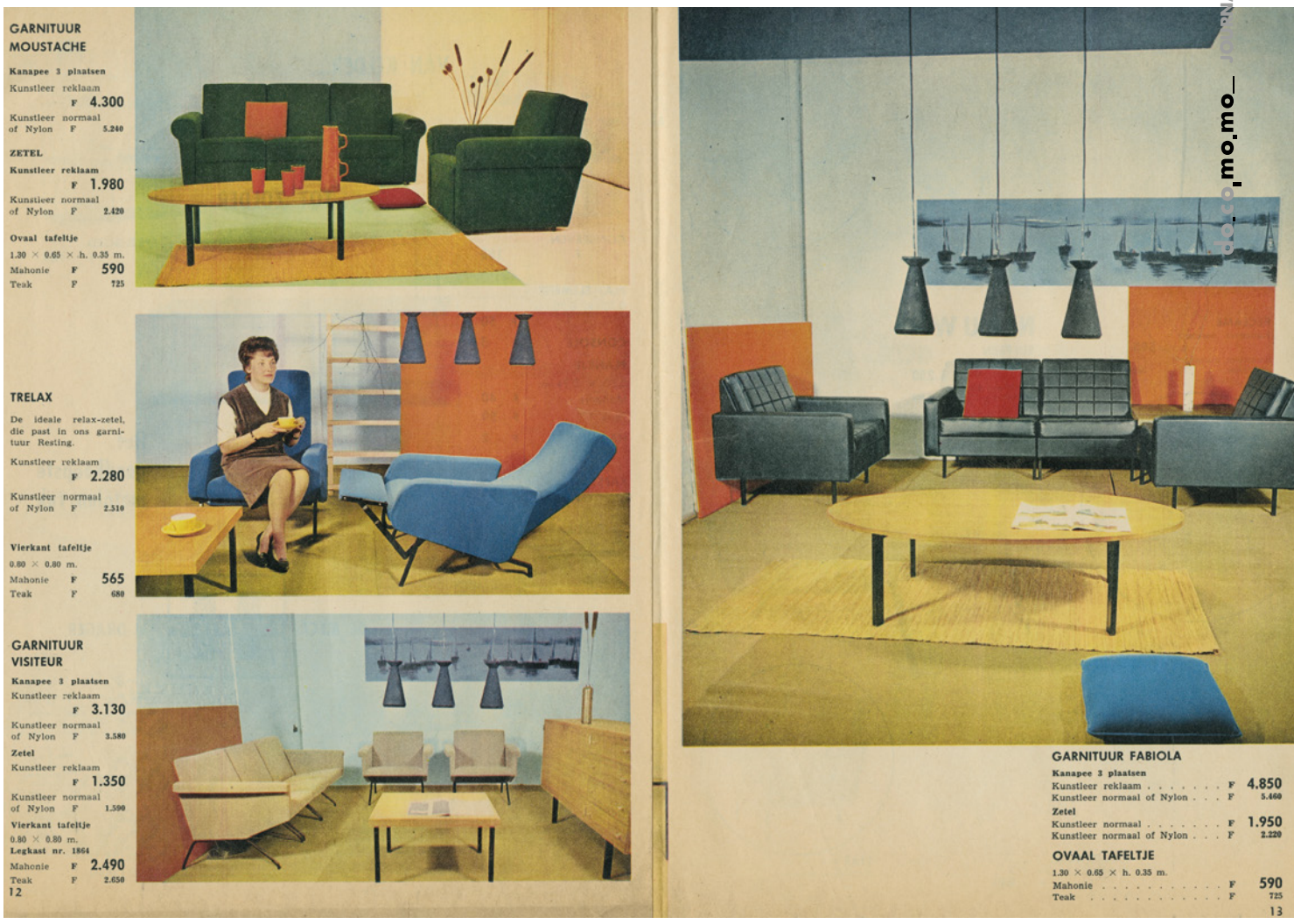
PLASTIC AMBITIONS AND PRODUCTION

Meurop was, from a very early date, convinced about the positive possibilities that plastic could offer to interiors. The company initially began production of furniture in metal and plywood but soon entered into the world of plastics.[28] The sales brochures of 1958 show that many furniture pieces on offer were finished with synthetic materials such as nylon, foam rubber, and imitation leather [FIGURE 05]. These materials were not produced in-house, but bought from other producers.[29]

It is unclear how Meurop gathered the knowledge to start in-house plastic production, which was usually held within the chemical industry. In 1960 the board of directors, chaired by the businessman Franz Pottiez appointed an American, Mr P. Molla as an administrator.[30] One can only speculate on the reasons for his involvement, but he may have brought technical knowledge of plastic production in the US. The head of the plastic department, Gaston Van Hove, explained in an interview that most of the workers did not have a specialized education,[31] so after they finished school at the age of 14, they started in the factory and learned by experience. All the machines had to be manually adjusted, and this was mostly a process of trial and error.

The first synthetic product made by Meurop was PVC cord which was wrapped around a metal frame to create a chair. Meurop had this chair patented in Belgium;[32] and its invention was a radical improvement over rattan, as cords of PVC were cheap, of endless length, elastic and could be colored.

The shell chair *Plastico* was announced in the March 1960 issue as "the first plastics chair" and described as "a plastic shell adapted to the shape of the body, in attractive and modern colors, without maintenance and no need to ever be repainted."[33] Next to this promotional slogan, we see a picture of three housewives sitting on this chair, cheerfully throwing their arms into the air, exclaiming, "the plastic chair has arrived!!!" It is not clear whether Meurop produced this chair itself, but it appears to be an important turning point in the company's endorsement of plastics because, soon after this, Meurop announced its "new plastics department," and expanded its range.[34] Polypropylene was the main manufacturing material, while the brochures kept using the generic term "plastic",



05 Seating units upholstered with imitation leader and nylon upholstering, Meurop brochure, no. 29, 1962. © Collection of the Flanders Architecture Institute – Collection of the Flemish Community

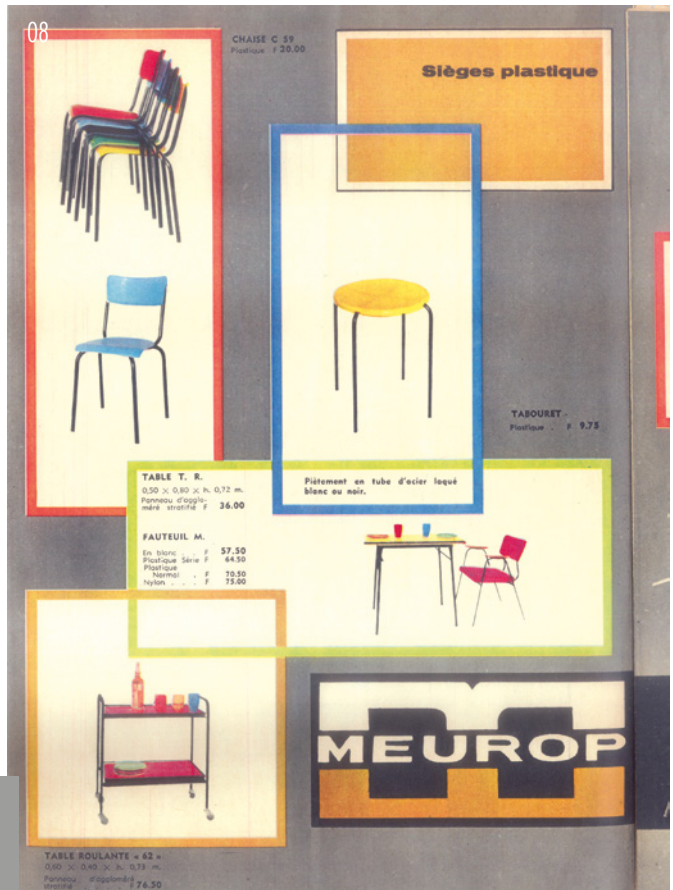
and repeated the advantages of the fabulous material, such as practicality in use, low maintenance, colorfulness, and cheerfulness [FIGURE 06 - 08]. The arrival of the new collection designed by Pierre Guariche in 1961 also included a polypropylene shell chair called "*Sea shell*." At this point the brochures no longer only expressed practical and useful properties, but also carried more qualitative and normative designations. The chair, for example, was advertised as decorative and elegant.[35]

In 1964, a new synthetic material was introduced in Meurop's collection: wall panels with PVC laminate that imitated different sorts of wood.[36] It was probably not made in Meurop's factory since it was sold under its trade name *Renolit*. The new material changed the look and the feel of its home goods completely. All the furniture – from desks, kitchen cupboards to beds that were previously laminated with wood veneer – were now only available with a PVC finish. Meurop's initial modernist approach

06 Meurop brochure announcing 'New articles from the department plastics', no. 11, 1960. © Keerbergen, Personal collection of former employee Claude Pire

07 'Color and at home by plastic', Meurop brochure, no. 12, 1960. © Keerbergen, Personal collection of former employee Claude Pire

08 Plastic chairs promoted in Meurop brochure, no. 13, 1963. © Keerbergen, Personal collection of former employee Claude Pire



had been overtaken by trends for imitation promoted by the chemical industry in the traditional furniture industry.

A number of plastics were introduced in 1967 that generated new possibilities in design: notably high-impact polystyrene and rigid polyurethane. The first was used for the futuristic range of chairs called *Starlook-ultralight* designed by Pierre Guariche.[37] Their illustrious names were: *Mars*, *Polaris*, *Jupiter* and *Luna*. This series of organic and soft chairs were meant for the living room where they would "embrace" the user "in all [their] softness" – as the advertisement goes. Vacuum-formed polystyrene was mainly used for storage objects to be hung on the wall, mirror frames, and parts of cupboards or chairs [FIGURE 09 - 11]. The shiny surface and the bright colors made these polystyrene objects very attractive, and they are often seen illustrated in a teenager's or child's room.

Meurop's ambitions in the domain of plastics reached further still. The company aimed to create a plastic shelf to be comparable with its chipboard counterpart, in both weight and cost.[38] It developed a new concept based on square tubes: hollow elements made by extrusion. These tubes could be cut to any length and also welded together. Other factories had experimented with plastic shelves at the beginning of the 1960s, but could only achieve a maximum width of only 20 centimeters, whereas Meurop succeeded in producing shelves up to 60 centimeters wide.[39] This production technique was clearly of value as the managing director, Franz Pottiez, patented it in ten different countries: Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden, America, Great Britain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, France and Canada.[40] This development led to a whole new range of easy-to-assemble products from 1967 onwards: cupboards, office furniture, bathroom furniture and more, all completely made from plastic.

The plastic euphoria did not last long. At the end of the 1960s, plastics suffered increasingly from a poor image when people became aware of the negative consequences for the environment. Issues such as recycling and the "throw away mentality" gave plastics a bad reputation. This was connected to the new ecological mindset

09 Bed room furniture in high-impact polystyrene, Cover Meurop brochure no. 101, 1970. © Rijksarchief Antwerpen-Beveren, bedrijfsarchief Philippe Neerman

10 Seating elements in high-impact polystyrene and polystyrene foam, Cover Meurop brochure no. 140, 1972. © Rijksarchief Antwerpen-Beveren, bedrijfsarchief Philippe Neerman

11 Furniture in high-impact polystyrene, Meurop brochure, no. 5, 1971. © Collection of the Flanders Architecture Institute

that emerged in the 1970s.[41] In 1972, the Club of Rome, founded as a think tank by scientists in 1968, published its widely read report "Limits to Growth." The report warned about the exhaustion of natural resources on Earth, particularly oil. Its message was reinforced when the oil crisis hit the following year and car-free Sundays were organized. That same year, designer Victor Papanek published his controversial and well known book on design: *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*.[42] He presented an activist agenda that particularly appealed to young design students: "As socially and morally involved designers, we must address ourselves to the needs of a world with its back to the wall while the hands on the clock point perpetually to one minute before twelve."[43] These publications were early indications of a growing aversion toward the modern consumer society, of which plastic was to became a negative symbol [FIGURE 12].

For Meurop, the oil crisis and the new ecological concerns were disastrous. It became expensive to make synthetic products and the negative associations with plastics curbed sales. The price of polystyrene had risen by 65%, and repeated financial reports noted that the plastics department, once very successful, had become a weak section of the company.[44] This also meant that investments into plastic shelving and the associated licenses were no longer profitable, and, furthermore, Belgium became burdened by high inflation. In 1980 Meurop's plastic dream ended and the company had to close its doors.[45]

The history of plastic design in Belgium remains a largely unexplored field for scholars. Little literature is available on the production, mediation, and consumption of plastics. While plastics played an important role in shaping the everyday material environment in post-war Belgium, plastic goods by Meurop had difficulties in finding their

12 Meurop furniture selected for the exhibition In echt plastiek / En plastique véritable by the Brussels Design Centre in 1970. All the selected pieces were made of high-impact polystyrene, except of the chair that is made of polyurethane foam. © Collection of the City Archive Gent, VDBP_P6.1

way to the design canon. However, as the case of Meurop illustrates, this area of design is nevertheless an important part of Belgium's design history as it reflects the enormous appeal and potential of the European mass market, and the hopes and dreams connected with plastic as the material for the modern world.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Meurop describes the post-war experience of growing affluence and availability of new plastic products to broad sectors of society. Over a period of about fifteen years the production of popular consumer goods evolved from aspirational, design-led products to more popular styles with wider appeal. Eventually, increased public awareness about the environmental impact of mass-produced plastic was followed by the economic impact of the oil crisis which made plastic products far less economically viable.

ENDNOTES

1 See for example, Fredie Floré, "Architect-designed Interiors for a Culturally Progressive Upper-middle Class: The Implicit Political Presence of Knoll International in Belgium," in Robin Schuldenfrei, *Atomic Dwelling. Anxiety, Domesticity, and Post-war architecture,* Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, 169-185; Fredie Floré and Hannes Pieters, "The Interiors of the Belgian Royal Library. An Expression of National Identity with an International Imprimatur," in Fredie Floré and Cammie McAtee, *The Politics of Furniture. Identity, Diplomacy and Persuasion in Post-War Interiors*, London, Routledge, 2017, 62-80.

2 Katarina Serulus, "1968-2016, 25 Editions of Biennale Interieur," in *25th Silver Edition. Biennale Interieur 2016,* Kortrijk, Biennale Interieur, 2016, 8-13; Katarina Serulus, (2017). "Biennale Interieur, een halve eeuw designgeschiedenis," in *DesignX50,* Veurne: Kannibaal, pp. 12-15. For more information on the history of the Interieur design biennale in Kortrijk, see: Foundation Interieur (ed.), *Interieur. Design Biennale since 1968*, Kortrijk, Interieur Foundation, 2010; Moniek Bucquoye (ed.), *24th International Biennale Interieur 2014. The Book*, Kortrijk, Interieur Foundation, 2014.

3 See the author's earlier studies: Katarina Serulus, "Meurop in Holland 1959-1960. The Mediation of Popular Design" (dissertation, VU University Amsterdam, 2011); Katarina Serulus, "Het Plastic Meubel in België (1954-1973)" (dissertation Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010).
The local history club 'Heemkring Het Hoefyser' organised in 1994 a small exhibition and published a booklet 'N.V. Trefac - N.V. Meurop. 1946-1980' on the history of the company.
Meurop is also shortly mentioned in: Javier Gimeno-Martínez, "Redefining Social Design in 1970s Belgium: Affordable Design Vs. Elite Design," *Interiors*, 2, 2011, 149-167; Monique Bucqoye, Lieven Daenens and Mil De Kooning, *Forms from Flanders. From Henry van de Velde to. Maarten van Severen 1900-2000,* Gent/Amsterdam, Ludion, 2001; Lise Coirier, *Design en Belgique/in Belgium/ in België 1945-2000*, Brussels, Racine, 2004; Philippe Decelle, Diane Hennebert and Pierre Loze, *L'utopie du tout plastique: 1960-1973*, Brussels, Fondation pour l'architecture, 1994.

4 See N. 138. Sociétés commerciales. Annex au Moniteur Belge/ Handelsvenootschappen. Bijlage tot het Belgisch Staatsblad, January 4, 1959, pp.1601-1602.

5 See Katarina Serulus, *Design and Politics. The Public Promotion of Industrial Design in Post-war Belgium (1950-1986)*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2018, 101-130.

6 Katarina Serulus, "Meurop in Holland 1959-1960. The Mediation of Popular Design" (dissertation, VU University Amsterdam, 2011); Katarina Serulus, "Het Plastic Meubel in België (1954-1973)" (dissertation Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010); Javier Gimeno-Martínez, "Redefining Social Design in 1970s Belgium: Affordable Design Vs. Elite Design," *Interiors*, 2, 2011, 149-167.

7 Except for some early issues of 1959, the Dutch, Belgian and French editions are identical and only the language, price and the numbering of the volumes vary. The analysis is based on 111 Dutch, Belgian and French Meurop brochures, dating from the period 1958-1980. The following institutions have copies of Meurop brochures in their collection: Brussels, Royal Library (B14557); Brussels, Archives of the City of Brussels (Collection Fauconnier III-C-14-a); Den Haag, Gemeentearchief, (OV3 Reclame nr 110, 111); Beveren, Rijksarchief, Archief Philippe Neerman (BE-A0512 / B13); Rotterdam, Gemeentearchief (reclamecollectie); Amsterdam, Internationaal Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis (Pm 13203); Flanders Architecture Institute.

8 *Meurop* 2, No. 13, 1960; Delphine Jacob, Lionel Blaisse, Aurélien Jeauneau, Pierre Guariche, Paris, Norma, 2020, 160-187.

9 Delphine Jacob, Lionel Blaisse, Aurélien Jeauneau, Pierre Guariche, Paris, Norma, 2020; Patrick Favardin, Les Décorateurs des années 50, Paris, Norma, 2002, 180-87, 211-21; Patrick Favardin, Steiner et l'aventure du design, Paris, Norma, 2007, 44-55; Dominique Forest (ed.), Mobi Boom. L'explosion du design en France 1945-1975, Paris, Éditions les Arts Décoratifs, 2010, 276-77.

10 "De beste der werelden…naar een onderhoud met de h. Pottiez," *Infordesign*, (1971) 38, 5; *Meurop*, 16, No. 130, 1972.

11 Katarina Serulus, Interview with Gaston van Hove (head of Meurop's plastic department), Boortmeerbeek, Belgium, 8/2/2010, not published.

12 See: Katarina Serulus, "Het Plastic Meubel in België (1954-1973)" (dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010).

13 Penny Sparke, *The Plastics Age: From Modernity to Post-Modernity,* London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 1990, 34-37; Jeffrey Meikle, *American Plastic: A Cultural History*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995.

14 Rik Coolsaet, *België en zijn Buitenlandse Politiek 1830-2000*, 3rd ed., Leuven, Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2001, 344-46, 66-69, 408; Marc Reynebeau, *Een Geschiedenis van België*, Tielt, Lannoo, 218; Els Witte, Jan Craeybecxx, and Alain Meynen, *Politieke Geschiedenis van België. Van 1830 tot Heden*, Antwerpen, Standaard Uitgeverij, 2005, 455-70.

15 "Kunststoffen veroveren de meubelmarkt," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 11, 1970, 9; "Gespoten Meubelen," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 11, 1970, 39; "Zullen kunststoffen de plaats innemen van hout voor de vervaardiging van meubelen," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 29, 1972, 22.

16 "Nieuwe Verwezelijkingen," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Kunststoffen*, No. 2, 1961, 84-85; "Nieuwe Verwezelijkingen," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Kunststoffen*, No. 2, 1961, 179; P. Dubois, "Les matières plastiques thermodurcissables dans l'équipement des salles de bain," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Kunststoffen*, No. 5, 1964, 104-107.

17 "Meubelen in gelaagde polyester – glasmaterialen," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 5, 1970, 14; "Nieuwe Meubelen," *Belgian Plastics, No. 16*, 1971, 55.

18 The discussion between advocates and opponents of the use of plastic in the Belgian furniture industry can partly be found in in the magazines *Meubel Echo* and *Belgisch Tijdschriften voor Kunststoffen*.

19 J.P., "Editoriaal. Het tijdperk van de plastiek," *Meubel Echo*, No. 87, 1970, 9; "Kunststoffen veroveren de meubelmarkt," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 11, 1970, 9; "Zullen kunststoffen de plaats innemen van hout voor de vervaardiging van meubelen," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 29, 1972, 22.

20 "Vak-en Jaarbeurzen. Düsseldorf: het Salon van de Kunststoffen," *Meubel Echo*, No. 12, 1971, 71-74.

21 "Bij wijze van editoriaal. Hout en plastiek," *Meubel Echo*, No. 89, 1970, 11.

22 See also the accounts of Jos de Mey and Marcel-Louis Baugniet: Jos de Mey, "Nieuwe Vormen in het Binnenhuis," *West-Vlaanderen*, No. 2, 1955, 73-77; Jos de Mey, "Meubel en Machine," *Bouwen en Wonen*, No. 3, 1954, 114-116; Jos de Mey, "Meubel en Machine," *Bouwen en Wonen*, No. 4, 1954, 153-155; Jos de Mey, "Meubel en Machine," *Bouwen en Wonen*, No. 10, 1954, 348-350; Marcel-Louis Baugniet, "Situation du meuble moderne en 1962," *La Maison*, No. 18, 1962, 169-170.

23 Renaat Braem, "De kunststoffen en de architectuur van morgen," in *Plastics 59. Antwerpse Dagen van de Kunststoffen. 13-29 november 1959. Voordrachtencyclus,* Antwerpen, 1959, 51-58.

24 Ibidem, p. 58.

25 See his writings on the subject: K.-N. Elno, "Industriele vormgeving en de verwerking van kunsstoffen," in *Plastics 59. Antwerpse Dagen van de Kunststoffen. 13-29 november 1959. Voordrachtencyclus,* Antwerpen, 1959, 144-148; K.-N. Elno, "Zoeklicht op de plastics," *Berichten van het Instituut voor Industriële Vormgeving*, No. 1, 1960, 4-5.

26 "Reportage. Synfina: 'Ons probleem is niet langer het gebruik doen aanvaarden van kunststoffen in de meubelindustrie, maar wel het voldoen aan de vraag!'," *Meubel Echo*, No. 111, 1972, 53.

27 *Meubel Echo*, No. 119, 1973, 77.

28 Unfortunately, the archives of Meurop were destroyed on its closure in 1980. The study of its plastic collection is mainly based on patents (to be consulted at be.espacenet.com) and the 111 advertising brochures (1958-1980) preserved at different archives: Brussels, Royal Library (B14557); Brussels, Archives of the City of Brussels (Collection Fauconnier); Den Haag, Gemeentearchief, (OV3 Reclame nr 110, 111); Beveren, Rijksarchief, Archief Philippe Neerman (BE-A0512 / B13); Rotterdam, Gemeentearchief (reclamecollectie); Amsterdam, Internationaal Instituut Sociale Geschiedenis (Pm 13203).

29 Katarina Serulus, Interview with Gaston van Hove (head of Meurop's plastic department), Boortmeerbeek, Belgium, 8/2/2010, not published.

30 *N.V. Trefac - N.V. Meurop. 1946-1980*, 'Heemkring Het Hoefyser', Rijmenam-Bonheiden, 1994.

31 Katarina Serulus, Interview with Gaston van Hove (head of Meurop's plastic department), Boortmeerbeek, Belgium, 8/2/2010, not published.

32 See the patent: BE 576088 (A), 25/2/1959, 15/6/1959, Meurop.

33 *Meurop*, No. 7, 1960. My own translation of the original Dutch text: "Voor de eerste maal een stoel vervaardigd uit plastic ...een plastickuipje in de vorm van het lichaam, aantrekkelijke moderne kleuren, vraagt geen onderhoud en behoeft nooit opnieuw te worden geverfd."

34 According to former employee, Claude Pire, the structure of this chair did not match the (then) current production techniques at Meurop. It is therefore possible that this chair was not made by Meurop but was bought from a supplier. Katarina Serulus, Interview with Claude Pire (Head metal department), Keerbergen, Belgium, 4/1/2010, not published. Remain

35 See for example: *Meurop*, No. 16, 1961.

36 *Meurop*, No. 44, 1964.

37 "Meubelen in hardschuim," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 5, 1970, 17-27.

38 The extruded shelf had a density of 260 kg/m^3, weighted 4 kg per m^2 and the raw material then costed only 20 BEF per kg. Meurop had four extrusion lines that each produced a specific width: 30 cm, 45/50 cm, 55 cm and 60 cm. The plastic shelves were 1.7 cm thick. Remain "Geëxtrudeerde Meubelelementen," *Belgian Plastics*, No. 5, 1970, 28-33; "Meurop. Democratisch design in plastics," *Infordesign*, No. 35-36, 1970, 242-243.

39 "Het lanceren in België van een meubel geheel uit plastiek," *Meubel Echo*, No. 87, 1970, 60.

40 BE 672618 (A), 22/09/1965, 16/03/1966, Frantz Pottiez; DE 1604622 (A), 9/3/1966, 16/9/1971; DE 1779941 (A), 9/3/1966, 10/2/1972, Meurop, Pottiez Franz; LU 50265 (A), 17/1/1966, 17/03/1966, Meurop, Frantz Pottiez; SE 313158 (B), 18/1/1966, 4/8/1969, Meurop, Pottiez F.; US 3435575 (A), 21/1/1966, 1/4/1969, Meurop Frantz Louis Charles Pottiez; GB 1138734 (A), 1/4/1966, 1/1/1969, Meurop; CH 472865 (A), 15/3/1966, 31/5/1969, Meurop, Frantz Pottiez; NL 6603383 (A), 15/03/1966, 23/05/1966, Meurop; FR 1471696 (A), 17/3/1966, 23/1/1967, Meurop; CA 822576 (A), 9/9/1969, Meurop, Pottiez Frantz L C.

41 Alison Clarke, "'Actions Speak Louder.' Victor Papanek and the Legacy of Design Activism," *Design and Culture*, No. 2, 2013, 151-68; Pauline Madge, "Design, Ecology, Technology: A Historiographical Review," *journal of Design History,* No. 3, 1993, 149-66; Javier Gimeno-Martínez, "Redefining Social Design in 1970s Belgium: Affordable Design vs. Elite Design," *Interiors*, No. 2, 2011, 149-68; Alison Clarke, "Design for Development, ICSID and UNIDO: The Anthropological Turn in 1970s Design," *journal of Design History,* No. 1, 2015, 1-15; Alice Twemlow, "I Can't Talk to You if You Say That: An Ideological Collision at the International Design Conference at Aspen, 1970," *Design and Culture* 1, No. 1, 2009, 23-49.

42 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change,* London, Thames & Hudson, 2006. For more information on Victor Papanek, see: Mateo Kries, Amelie Klein & Alison J. Clarke (eds.), *Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design*, Weil am Rhein, Vitra Design Museum, 2018.

43 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change,* London, Thames & Hudson, 2006, IX.

44 Lier, Archives of Rechtbank van Koophandel in Mechelen, W. Vandepoel, N.V. Meurop Rijmenam, 28/2/1980.

45 F. De Nijs, chairman of Rechtbank van koophandel in Mechelen, declared Meurop bankrupt on September 24, 1980. The curators were L. Wouters, Ph. Stiers and J. Bogaerts. Lier, Archives of Rechtbank van Koophandel in Mechelen, W. Vandepoel, N.V. Meurop Rijmenam, 28/2/1980.

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