

Three historic events warrant this presentation of "Ecovention Europe: Art to Transform Ecologies, 1957-2017." Following the burning of the city by the French in 1677, and the subsequent destruction of its gates, Sittard became an "open city," enabling a "people's garden" to flourish on land once occupied by its defense system. Situated near the confluence of two ley lines, one energy band stretching east from Stonehenge to Externsteine, DE; and another flowing north from Clervaux, LU to Wijnaldum, NL; Sittard has offered both pilgrims and gardeners refuge for centuries. 2017 also marks the 60th anniversary of both the "Treaty of Rome," manifesting Erasmus' vision of a unified continent, and "Natuur en Kunst," the first exhibition known to present nature on par with art, organised by Willem Sandberg for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, NL.

Thirdly, 2017 is the fifteenth anniversary of "Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies," the exhibition that first distinguished ecoventions (ecology + invention) from Earthworks, eco-art, and environmental art, held at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, US. Already artworld parlance, "ecoventions" are increasingly exhibited and discussed as such among the coterie of artists, art historians, and curators committed to implementing "practical actions with ecological intent." "Ecovention Europe," however, roots this history in Europe, wresting it away from its historical associations with American land art by tying it instead to two landmark Stedelijk Museum exhibitions. In the following decade, Joseph Beuys performed river and wetland actions, Herman de Vries recorded bird and waterfall sounds, Nicolás García Urriburu "greened" canals and harbors, Hans de Vries replaced sidewalks with peat moss and counted species, Gruppo 9999 transformed vegetable gardens into living spaces, Ugo La Pietra documented Milanese *orti*, and Teresa Murak hand-dug *Sculpture for the Earth*. Meanwhile, US-based artists such as Jackie Brookner, Mel Chin, Agnes Denes, Hans Haacke, Harrison Studio, Ocean Earth, and Robert Smithson built their most enduring ecoventions on this continent.

Despite such notable beginnings, it would take another three decades for this movement to gain steam, engendering the creative force for change that it is today. "Ecovention Europe" assembles over 120 works by 45 artists from 16 nations whose inventive practices have enriched our planet, forever changing public perception, all the while challenging ecologists, designers, and other scientists to think anew about how to address ecological problems, as well as how to resolve them. Temporary ecoventions by Czekalska + Golec, Ecole Mondiale, N55, Jean-François Paquay, Søren Dahlgaard, Vera Thaens, and Lois Weinberger are sited around Sittard. Since ecoventions are collective endeavors, artists routinely collaborate with politicians, scientists, urban planners, and landscape architects to implement their ideas, while recruiting stakeholders to act as stewards who will protect and maintain ecoventions after they leave.

The adjacent map indicates twelve ecovention hotspots, as well as scores more sites where ecoventions have taken place, as discussed in the accompanying book. The exhibition's organisation echoes the book's eight themes, beginning with Activism and flowing through Valuing Anew to Biodiversity, Urban Infrastructure, Restoration/Reclamation, Food Security, Climate Change, and Oikos. Each work's theme(s) is/are indicated on its bi-lingual object label.