



Sint-Lucas Beeldende Kunst Gent

This term (spring 2009) I have been an exchange student at the Experimental Studio at Sint Lucas art school in Gent, Belgium. And I have been very satisfied with both the school, the social and cultural aspect of this experience. This rapport is going to be quite personal, ending with a few facts.

If you are from Norway, Belgium might feel a bit crowded because there are a lot of people and not so much space. Due to the very good and cheap public transport, the country sometimes feels more like one big city than a country. Especially the Northern part, Flanders with cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges and Gent are very closely connected, but on the other hand the country also contain a very big diversity, and the national politic is so confusing that most Belgians feel a little bit lost in it. When I first arrived people were very eager to tell about the country's three semi-independent parts and the three main languages, which are Flemish, French and German. Although the students in Belgium learn all three languages in school, it doesn't necessarily mean that there is a free flowing communication between the parts - not at all.... on the contrary I would rather say because the country seems quite divided with Brussels as the French speaking melting pot.

Well enough about that... Gent (where I were) is, as above-mentioned, situated in Flanders, and I found it easy to get around with speaking English. Actually my general impression of the whole Flanders is that the population here is good at speaking and understanding English. But as for the language Flemish, we from the Nordic countries have an advantage when wanting to learn it, because, similar to our languages, it also have its' roots in the German language family, so "a lot" of the words seems familiar to us.

The offering of a language course at Sint Lucas was one of the only things I didn't find quite satisfying (and I am sorry to start with complaining first, because I were very very happy for everything else, but it felt natural to mention it here) because the only option for learning Flemish was to spend 7 hours a week divided on to evenings (Tuesday and Thursday) from February to May in the language school. I found that quite silly because it meant that you weren't able to go out in the evenings and talk to your Flemish schoolmates but had to spend the nights with other Erasmus students, and I didn't think that you learned very much by that so.... I quit. And that was the positive thing about the language course, that it was voluntarily because as an Erasmus student you didn't have to follow the theoretical lessons at Sint Lucas because these were taught in Flemish. So your stay were mainly

focused on the practical work in your studio. To finish the with the language course problematic I told the exchange co-ordinator about my feelings towards the structuring of it, and she explained me the reason but said that it maybe would change sometime in the nearest future

As mentioned above the organisation of the language school is the only thing that I didn't feel so good about but everything else seemed very well organised. When coming to the school all the Erasmus students were very very well welcomed by the exchange co-ordinator. And for two weeks we had different courses and visits to museums, culture centres etc. to introduce us to the Belgium culture, the city and each other. I think it was a very good and gentle way to start out and I felt secure and wanted.

Furthermore I also had a very good start in my studio where I, one of the first days, was asked to do a short presentation of my work, which I think made it more easy to get in contact with the other students in the studio because they, in that way, knew a little about my background and we had a place to start our conversation. To give a short introduction of the experimental studio, the difference between it and e.g. the sculpture department is that as a student in the experimental studio you are free to work with what ever material/medium in what ever way you want. So it is, in my opinion, a studio that demands quite a lot of independence from the students because you very easy gets lost in all the freedom. But, at the same time, it is also a place with a lot of room for experimenting and trying out things. And when I were there, there was a very good teacher for audio art/installations.

What I furthermore enjoyed very much about the experimental studio was that the teachers in general were very committed and eager to give their students some interesting experiences. Often we went to exhibitions in Holland and other cities in Belgium to see what was going on elsewhere, and in April my teacher brought 12 students to an art festival in Bourges in France where we did a small exhibition. So the attitude in the studio was that you learned a lot by seeing other peoples work and not only producing yourself, and I liked that very much.

At the end of the year the students had there end-jury, where they presented their work for a jury and afterwards talked about it. What was new for me in this situation was that you actually got points for what you did, and that you could fail if your points wasn't good enough. Normally in my school (Norwegian Theatre Academy) we have an evaluation where you talk to the teacher and in that way you know what was "good" and what was "bad". And I think I missed that in this situation. Of course you were in constant dialog with your teachers in the process up to the end-jury which is very different from NTA, and this function of the teacher I enjoyed very much because you always had someone you respected to "develop" your idea with, and at the same time you always had the possibility of "not listening to the advice".

Regarding the facilities of the experimental atelier I think it wasn't optimal. The rooms were kind of dark and not so cosy, and a lot of the students worked at home because the space were used to so many different things and often you had to remove all your stuff because somebody/something needed the space. But I think that it is going to change because there is going to be a structural change in the atelier where their co-operation with the sculpture department will be stronger, and thereby some more working spaces will be provided for the students.

But when that is said, the atmosphere on the school is very good. Its old catholic buildings and they are filled with stained glass and the yard filled with old statues. And I found it a good place to sit and drink a cup of coffee and talk to the other students.

Although the Belgians have an reputation for being withdrawn and reserved, my experience was almost opposite. I found them very sociable, and at first I was quite amazed by the fact that they every night went out to drink something with their friends. To me it seemed like every night was like weekend, but slowly I made my own theory why and that's because most of the Belgian students go home to their parents in the weekend so the social activities with the classmates has to be in the week to me. This always stroke me as a little weird because the city Friday, Saturday and Sunday sometimes felt a little empty. Luckily enough Gent is not solely an university city, as e.g. Leuven, so there is still some life and things to do in the weekend, especially also because the cultural life in Gent (and actually in the whole of Belgium as far as I have experienced) is very good, so if you are interested in culture there is always something to spend your time and money on

But yeah... a lot of the Belgian students leave town on Friday and I think the reason for that is that they in general are quite young when they study. The tradition is that they go from high school to university/university college, so some of them are as young as 18 when they start and furthermore it is their parents that pays their education and (part of their) living, so the dependency to the parents are much higher than we are use to in the Nordic countries where we have the governmental financial support. But for a stranger without the need for visiting ones family base every weekend, the positive side of this "tradition" is that the public transport as above mentioned is really really good and cheap - especially in the weekends. You can get an open return ticket to Brussel for only 9 Euros in the weekend. In general my impression was that the public transport worked much better than the private. Because of the many inhabitants the main roads often was overloaded with cars which of course caused a long queue and sitting in the car and waiting for a long time. Beside the public transportation the biking is also a very popular way of transport in Gent anyway. Actually it sometimes seemed like bikes drove after no rules, and that the cars had to adopt to that, which was nice - when you were on bike.

When the astonishment over the cheap beers, and the Belgians' enthusiasm for fries and soup has cooled down what remains as either a nuisance or a liberty is the allowance of smoking inside bars and establishments. Although it is not any longer allowed to do it in restaurants, all bars and discothèques are still filled with smokers, and there is a lot! My general impression was that almost all young people in Belgium smoke. That not smoking is a rarity rather than a majority. But although I am a none smoker, I actually enjoyed the smoking policy. I felt it was more human and in general I felt a lack of all the restrictions that we in Nordic countries are surrounded by, which I liked.

Before ending I want to mention the average living cost in Gent is 250 Euros. And the most of the students live in a student kot which is a place where you have your own room but share the kitchen and bathroom with a lot of other students. By coincident I got a room in a house with two Belgian students, and as an Erasmus student I think it was a very fortunate because they were good at presenting me for their friends and inviting me out and there were always somebody to talk to when coming home from school, in the weekends or holidays.

As a last tip. If going to Gent as an exchange student or just as a tourist, you should definitely consider to be there in the end of July where the big Gentse Feeste is. Which is a 10 day party in the town where the rumour is that the whole city is partying, and nothing is normal

To sum up I must say that I enjoyed my stay in Gent and at Sint Lucas in the experimental studio very much! That all my worries I had before going was totally unnecessary. I can only recommend it very strongly!!!!

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact me and ask.

Kind regards

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Some random hard facts:

- Gent: 230.000 Inhabitants
- The study possibilities on the art school Sint Lucas: main ateliers: Experimental atelier, painting, sculpture, textile, glass and ceramics, graphic design, illustration, multimedia additional ateliers: photo, print, video,
- The homepage of the school: <http://www.kunst.sintlucas.wenk.be/>
- Finding a place to live: <http://www.samenhuizen.be/index.php> (mainly in dutch)
- <http://www.opkotingent.be/>
- Good cultural places: Vooruit (<http://vooruit.be/>)
- Museum voor Schone Kunsten (<http://www.mskgent.be/>)
- Museum for contemporary art (<http://www.smak.be/>)
- Campo - theatre (<http://www.campo.nu/>)