MUCH-AWAITED EXHIBIT AT MAS MUSEUM IN ANTWERP OPENS TO LARGE CROWDS



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After much anticipation, on Thursday, June 20th, the exhibition “To the Antarctic: Belgica’s Polar Pioneers” at Antwerp’s MAS Museum officially opened its doors.

The long-awaited exhibition presents the origins of Belgium’s long history of polar exploration and research in Antarctica.

The exhibition begins by recounting Adrien de Gerlache’s historic overwintering expedition of 1897-99, the first ever scientific research expedition that allowed scientists to conduct experiments and collect samples and data during the austral winter. Several original artefacts from that legendary voyage are on display in the exhibition, including the Belgica's original steering wheel, the vessel's crow's nest, the polar gear the crew wore, the saws the crew used to free the vessel from the sea ice, and the crank organ that played Belgium's national anthem, the Brabançonne, which lifted the spirits of the crew during the long polar night of 1898.

The exhibition then shifts its focus to the modern era of Belgian involvement in Antarctica, featuring videos and materials from BELgian Antarctic Research Expeditions (BELARE) in the 1950s and 60s during which Belgium’s first Antarctic research station, the King Baudoin, was built.

The next part of the exhibition focuses on research taking place in Antarctica today, in particular research at the first (and to date only) zero-emission research station, Belgium's very own Princess Elisabeth Antarctica (PEA). Put together by IPF Education and Outreach Coordinator Mieke Sterke, this part of the exhibition features information about the wide variety of scientific research projects taking place at PEA, videos of breathtaking landscapes in Antarctica, and interactive screens visitors can use to learn more about what scientists are learning from their research.

The exhibition wraps up with an installation from Dutch artist Esther Kokmeijer. Entitled Terra Nullis, her work calls attention to Antarctica's unique protected geopolitical status under the Antarctic Treaty System.

A grand opening

The day began with an exclusive tour of the entire exhibition for journalists lead by exhibition curator Waander Devillé. The intimate tour of the exhibition allowed journalists to get a first glimpse of the artefacts without the crowds.

Later in the evening, Lies Buyse, Director of the MAS Museum, Nabilla Aït Daoud, Alderwoman for Culture for the City of Antwerp, and Waander Devillé officially opened the exhibition, each delivering a keynote speech. Then at 9:00 pm, the exhibition officially opened to the general public. Hundreds of people enjoyed drinks served in the foyer just outside the exhibition while DJs created a festive ambiance.

It was a memorable night for all involved!

The international Polar Foundation would like to thank the MAS Museum and the City of Antwerp for the opportunity to contribute to such an important exhibition, to all of the scientists and experts who contributed materials to the exhibition (and who are too numerous to mention here), and to the general public who will visit the exhibition and come away knowing a lot more about Belgium's history in Antarctica and and all of the important scientific research happening at the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica!

Stop by

The exhibition is open until November 3rd. Whether you're a passing tourist in Antwerp or a local looking for something fun to do with the family, this exhibition is certainly worth a visit!

Visit the MAS Museum website to learn more about the exhibition and how to buy tickets!