

Genck

A visitor of Genck today, will discover a lively city with numerous living quarters, industrial sites and a city centre with shops and shopping malls. This city centre is relatively new, and small in comparison to the total area. Visiting the city centre, one searches in vain for historical buildings. Only a few 19th century buildings, such as the former city hall, seem to suggest an historical centre, where art history was written.

From 1840's onwards the small Kempen town of Genck became one of the most beloved artist villages in Belgium. Between 1840 and 1940, hundreds of painters visited Genck to capture the scenery on canvas.

In the beginning of the 19th century the cultivation of the heaths had reached its peak, resulting in an endless monotonous and barren landscape. As far as the eye could see, the sandy region was carpeted with heather and drifting dunes, traversed by little brooks and dotted with ponds and marshy pools. You might stumble upon the occasional little farmstead or stray turf hut in the shadow of a birch tree or, after wandering for hours in a desolate part of the inhabited world, you might find yourself amidst a cluster of houses in a Kempen village or hamlet.

Perhaps a distant church tower or recently planted pine forest would puncture the otherwise uninterrupted horizon. At a time when, far from the studio and the academy, nature was found to be a source of inspiration, the variety of this natural world offered dozens of plein-airistes inspiration in abundance.

But then, in 1917, the first Kempen coal mine came into operation and from then on Genck gradually became the throbbing heart of Limburg's mining industry. Two resident artists, Armand Maclot and Emile Van Doren, pulled together in their unremitting efforts with regard to nature conservation, not least through their membership of the Royal Commission for Monuments and Landscapes. By putting the landscape on the tourist map, they hoped to give it a role and significance that would stand in the way of new industry.

In the drive to capture for ever the rapidly disappearing Kempen way of life, Charles Wellens (1889-1959), who painted countless farmsteads and their interiors, helped found Bokrijk Open-air Museum, where the Old Kempen was given a permanent home in 1958.

Today, the [Emile Van Dorenmuseum](#) (housed in villa Le Coin Perdu, the former home of landscape painter Emile Van Doren) conserves and researches this particular art history, establishes an archive that safeguards the memory of the local landscape and tells the landscape painters' story in various exhibitions. Also, the museum commissions temporary artists to create new work, inspired by today's landscape.

Artists of the Artists' Colony

François Roffiaen	(1820 - 1898)
Edmond De Schampheler	(1824 - 1899)
Léon Becker	(1826 - 1909)
Joseph Coosemans	(1828 - 1904)
Alphonse Asselbergs	(1839 - 1916)
Isidore Verheyden	(1846 - 1905)
François-Joseph Halkett	(1856 - 1921)
Emile Van Doren	(1865 - 1949)
Herman Richir	(1866 - 1942)
Alfons De Clercq	(1868 - 1945)
Edmond Verstraeten	(1870 - 1956)
Elinor Barnard	(1872 - 1949)
Joseph De Mey	(1873 - 1903)
Armand Maclot	(1877 - 1959)
Ludovic Janssen	(1888 - 1954)
Charles Wellens	(1889 - 1958)

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