

**DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS**

**Designing  
Childhood**

**01.04.26**

**20.09.26**

**A HISTORY OF  
DESIGN  
FOR CHILDREN**

**PRESS KIT**





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## 1 PRESS RELEASE

**From April 1st to September 20th, the Design Museum Brussels presents *Designing Childhood: A History of Design for Children*, an exhibition co-organised in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou that explores the evolution of design for children throughout the 20th century.**

As a testing ground for new materials and production processes, children's furniture has left its mark on the history of 20th-century design. It embodies the ambitions, social changes and technological advances of its era. Children's furniture is characterised by its playful nature and versatility, while at the same time reflecting the evolution of the child's place in the family and social structure. Gradually recognised as individuals in their own right, children are no longer seen as 'little adults' and have carved out a specific place for themselves in the home, society and the market.

In this new collaboration, the Design Museum Brussels enriches the narrative initiated by the Centre Pompidou by highlighting the Belgian contribution. This exhibition is the result of the encounter between the collections of the Design Museum Brussels and the Centre Pompidou, unfolding a dialogue that spans the entire 20th century, from the children's bedrooms by Pierre Chareau in the 1920s or by Sylvie Feron in Belgium in the 1930s, from school equipment in the 1930s (Jean Prouvé, Arne Jacobsen) to the Reconstruction classroom by Marcel Gascoïn in France or by Jules Wabbes in Belgium. In the 1960s, pop aesthetics and the spread of plastic materials marked the peak of children's design through light and flexible furniture.

Through pieces from its collections, the Design Museum Brussels highlights the vitality of design in Belgium, in line with major international trends. It reveals an approach that is attentive to children's needs, integrating ecological and educational issues from an early stage, as well as current initiatives such as the ecoBirdy duo's Charlie chair made from recycled plastic. Today, designers are once again turning their attention to children's furniture with a focus on learning and inclusivity, which is reflected in the two collections, where formal innovation is combined with a reflection on society and the environment.

This exhibition also gives the Design Museum Brussels the opportunity, in collaboration with BNA-BBOT (Bruxelles Nous Appartient-Brussel Behoort Ons Toe), to launch a podcast series dedicated to key figures in the Brussels design world. The first episode focuses on the career and work of Marie Paquay Wabbes.

To coincide with the exhibition, the book *Designing Childhood. Le mobilier pour enfant – Kindermeubilair – Children's furniture* will be published, edited by Marie-Ange Brayer and Arnaud Bozzini (CFC Éditions, May 12, 2026). This trilingual book presents a selection of iconic pieces from the history of children's furniture and offers an accessible introduction to the evolution of design for children.

Linked to the exhibition, a selection of two objects can be seen through the windows of the museum's storage. The selection focuses on design for babies and offers a glimpse into parts of the collection that usually remain behind the scenes, revealing the wider holdings that support exhibitions and research.

## **2 EXHIBITION TEXTS**

### **A HISTORY OF DESIGN FOR CHILDREN**

Children's furniture is present throughout the history of design in the 20th century. Far from simply being a miniature version of furniture for adults, it opens the door to the imagination, games and stories. With furniture for children, objects are reinvented, becoming adaptable, multifunctional and evolving, reflecting the inherent dynamic of childhood.

In 1900, Swedish philosopher and teacher Ellen Key predicted that the 20th century would be the century of the child. In the early 20th century, the rise of theories of learning and education influenced the design of furniture for this purpose. The way in which children were considered within families and society evolved towards more recognition.

In the context of the Reconstruction after World War II, full bedroom sets started to take children's learning and playful universe into account. The development of industrial design led to mass production, where furniture for children was made in a spirit of rationalisation, as shown by school equipment. Plastic materials from the 1960s 1970s would later bring colour, lightness, modularity, and flexibility to furniture. Even today, furniture for children remains an experimental playground for designers, who have expanded it to become an environment all of its own.

The Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou and the Design Museum Brussels present a joint adaptation of *L'Enfance du design. Un siècle de mobilier pour enfant* (curated by Marie-Ange Brayer & Céline Saraiva), originally exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2024. This Brussels edition brings two complementary collections into dialogue to retrace the history of children's furniture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

### **THE INVENTION OF THE CHILD'S BEDROOM**

The emergence of the child's bedroom in the modern home coincided with a change in the status of the child, which began in the late 18th century, driven by the progressive and humanist ideas of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This movement of recognition continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, supported by major figures in avant-garde pedagogy such as Ovide Decroly or Maria Montessori. It contributed to the emergence of a space reserved for children within the domestic sphere, which could foster their development and the construction of their identity. From then on, the architects and designers of modernity, inspired by functionalist ideology, the desire for comfort and the progress of industry, imagined rooms for children with educative and playful dimensions at the same time, going beyond basic functions of use. Several large events, exhibitions and fairs, also helped shape this new space within the home.

### **THE REBIRTH OF SCHOOL FURNITURE**

From the mid-19th century, amid rapid socio-economic change, industrialised countries began to rethink the role of public instruction in education. At this time, World Fairs provided excellent platforms to spread awareness of new pedagogical practices and promote the circulation and debate of ideas. In the early 20th century, mass schooling, new teaching practices, health and hygiene concerns, and the progress driven by industrialisation transformed spaces of learning and school facilities. Following World War I, a variety of innovative pedagogical approaches spread around the world, finding an echo among the architects and designers of modernity. These professionals took up these ideas to renew school architecture and furniture.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AND FURNITURE FOR ALL**

In the wake of the Second World War, multiple ministerial programmes and industrial partners in France and Belgium encouraged numerous architects and interior designers to become involved in the social programme of Reconstruction. The aim was to quickly refurbish the interiors destroyed by the war. Within the home, space for children became more widespread. Designers involved in this movement imagined mass-produced, low-cost furniture with minimalist and rational design. Adopting a progressive approach, they used new materials and industrial manufacturing techniques, while making sure that they maintained quality, aesthetic and comfort. At the various fairs of the time, children's bedrooms played a leading role, embodying the idea of social progress. They were shown as an environment of their own, one that could evolve and combine learning, play and rest.

### **PLAY CORNER**

At the heart of the exhibition *Designing Childhood. A History of Design for Children*, this wall punctuated with alcoves is a place to connect, relax and create. It encourages to slow down and take the time to explore differently. Young and old alike, can explore the House of Cards game, created in 1952 by designers Charles and Ray Eames, browse through books on design, touch, observe, and create at your own pace. By working with blocks, assembling shapes, or building structures, such as Studio 65's Baby-Lonia, everyone can discover essential design concepts such as form, balance, and structure. This space sparks imagination, encourages experimentation, and celebrates the joy of creating together. It reminds us that design, from childhood onwards, is discovered above all through playing and experience. Please note: Books are for onsite reading only. Do not forget to return them when you're done.

### **AN EXPERIMENTAL FIELD**

In the post-war period, children's furniture became a laboratory where designers researched new materials and production processes. Reducing the size of objects makes it possible to test technical innovations from industry and military engineering, such as plastics and moulded plywood. In the 1960s, the democratisation of design and the emergence of light and colourful materials introduced a playful dimension: stackable, modular or inflatable, children's furniture was transformed into a tactile and visual experience. Sensitive to comfort, safety, play and integration, designers are rethinking form and function, combining ergonomics, technical innovation and imagination.

### **PLAY FURNITURE**

From the modern era to the present day, the idea of play has run throughout the history of children's furniture (and illustration). It allows designers to become more inventive with forms and use original narrative systems. As an alternative to rationalism, furniture for children is subject to functional reappropriation, going against the standardisation of industrial design. Items are assembled and fitted together, constantly defining new configurations. They are most often made from wood, a soft and supple material that evokes construction games and an artisanal aspect. Children's furniture is multifunctional, transformable and evolving, constantly stimulating imagination and creating new typologies of design. Play unfolds in spaces that invite interaction, encouraging children to inhabit and make them their own, much like a fort or a den.

## **FROM POP OBJECT TO ENVIRONMENT**

In the 1960s, a wave of democratisation hit design. Furniture became lighter than the robust pieces from the Reconstruction period. Prior to the oil crisis of 1973, the boom of plastic materials paved the way for flexible, stackable furniture in bright colors. A new playful dimension infiltrates design thinking. Furniture became modular, no longer conceived as a single “object” but as an environment placing the child at the heart of the domestic space. Design for children becomes a new, more intense consumer market. Innovative materials and shapes transform children into a symbol of the future and stimulate their imagination.

## **CHILDREN'S FURNITURE TODAY**

After establishing itself in domestic interiors, furniture for children has now become a prominent field for designers. Their interest in learning, transmission and inclusivity matters helps create environments that foster sharing and creative development. Today, designers draw from the world of children to create another approach to design, based on a hybrid blend between play and learning, in order to include children in an all-encompassing environment, promoting early learning and cognitive interaction.

### **3 COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTRE POMPIDOU**

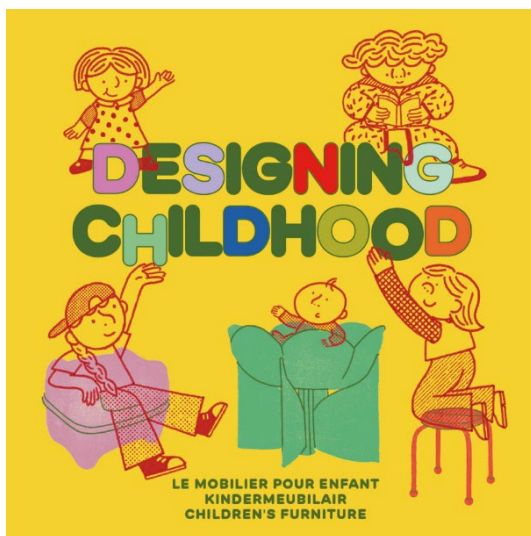
Since 1977, the Centre Pompidou has consistently been a hub of vibrant and socially engaged culture – a multidisciplinary centre deeply rooted in the city and open to the world. In 2025, it will embark on a major transformation that will enable it to remain active throughout its renovation, right up until its reopening in 2030. Thanks to the ambitious Constellation cultural programme, the very spirit of the Centre Pompidou is embodied in numerous partner venues throughout France and internationally – foremost among them the Centre Pompidou-Metz, the Grand Palais and soon, the Centre Pompidou-Francilien.

Over the past fifteen years, the Centre Pompidou has been strengthening its international presence through travelling exhibitions, exceptional loans and long-term collaborations. This initiative aims to showcase the collections, share expertise and foster dialogue between artistic communities, whilst contributing to French cultural diplomacy. The opening of Centre Pompidou branches around the world plays a key role in this strategy. Following Malaga in 2015 and Shanghai in 2019, and alongside the anticipated opening of the Centre Pompidou Francilien in Massy, two new international venues will open successively, in Seoul and then in Brussels, marking a significant milestone in the institution's history. The Centre Pompidou prioritises tailor-made and evolving collaborations in these locations, confirming its role as a key player in the global circulation of art and museum practices.

## 4 PUBLICATION: DESIGNING CHILDHOOD. CHILDREN'S FURNITURE – MAISON CFC ÉDITIONS

Designed to be accessible and engaging, the book features a selection of 32 objects, each presented in full-page images in chronological order of creation.

Two trilingual texts (FR/NL/EN) complete this project. The book captures the spirit of the exhibition in a condensed form and highlights the diversity of approaches taken by both leading figures in design and designers less well-known to the general public, yet whose contributions deserve to be showcased. It is intended to serve as a memento of the exhibition, a tool for discovery and a testament to design that is mindful of children.



Designing Childhood | Le mobilier pour enfant – Kindermeubilair – Children's furniture

Authors: Marie-Ange Brayer, Arnaud Bozzini, Gadiel Ulanovsky

Graphic design and cover illustrations: Ivonne Gargano

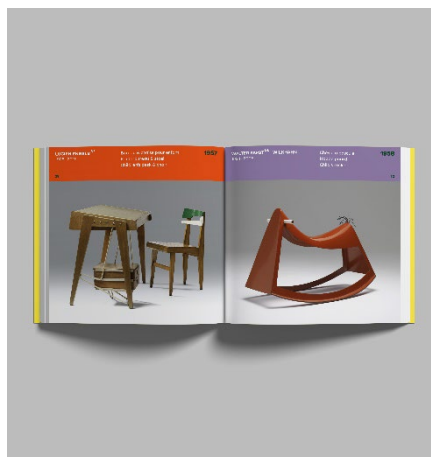
Price: €16

Release date: 12 May 2026

15 x 15 cm – Hardcover

80 pages

Trilingual book (FR/NL/EN)



## 5 PODCAST

The Design Museum Brussels has teamed up with Bruxelles Nous Appartient – Brussel Behoort Ons Toe (BNA-BBOT) to launch a podcast series dedicated to the figures and voices that have shaped Belgian design. This collaboration places the designers' own words at the heart of the project and offers a sensitive approach to the history of design: a living history, told by those who shaped it. Through these conversations, the museum extends its mission to preserve and communicate the history of design in Belgium by sharing the journeys, practices and contexts that have shaped creativity in the country.

Bruxelles Nous Appartient – Brussel Behoort Ons Toe (BNA-BBOT) is contributing to this series through its work in collecting and archiving sound recordings. For over 20 years, the association has been gathering testimonies, conversations, songs, monologues and soundscapes to build a public, polyphonic and multilingual archive of Brussels, which now comprises nearly 25.000 recordings.

The first episode is dedicated to the illustrator and textile designer Marie Wabbes (born Marie-Louise Paquay). In an interview with design historian Katarina Serulus, the designer looks back on her career and her work in illustration and design. Marie Wabbes, who was already featured in the exhibition *Untold Stories – Women Designers in Belgium 1880–1980*, is also present in *Designing Childhood*, where her work reflects the richness and diversity of objects and images designed for children.

This podcast thus enriches the exhibition by shedding further light on the designers who have helped shape the visual and physical world of children. It also helps to situate these practices within the broader history of design in Belgium.

The episode will be available from 31 March on the website of the Design Museum Brussels (<https://designmuseum.brussels/en/news/podcast-interview-marie-wabbes/>).

## 6 COLOPHON

An exhibition in collaboration with the Mnam CCI—Centre Pompidou

Curated by Marie-Ange Brayer and Anna Izard from the Centre Pompidou and the curatorial team of the Design Museum Brussels

### **ATOMIUM +**

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General Director

Julie Almau Gonzalez

Deputy Director

Arnaud Bozzini

#### **DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS**

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## EXHIBITION

Design et prospective industrielle, Centre  
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The Design Museum Brussels would like to express their warmest gratitude to all the people, designers, collections and institutions for their authorisation to present the works in this exhibition and Les Amis du Centre Pompidou for their support in expanding the collections of the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou, specifically through the Bonpoint Acquisition Fund, which has enabled the acquisition of major works now featured in the exhibition.

Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles/ Archief van Brussel; Archives Design Projects; Archives Marie Wabbes; Cristina Bargna; Nathalie Dewez; Collection Gevers; Kathrin Hasskamp (Konstantin Grcic Design); Gufram; Frederick Flötotto (Flötotto); Inter IKEA Systems B.V.; Marie Wabbes; Private collection, Brussels; Céline Saraiva; Vanessa Yuan and Joris Van Briel (ecoBirdy)

However, despite a diligent search to identify the right holders of certain reproductions, some right holders could not be identified or located. We therefore invite these right holders or beneficiaries to manifest themselves by contacting the Design Museum Brussels. The museum has been committed for several years to an eco-design approach, integrating sustainability as a guiding principle in the conception of its exhibitions. In this context, 80% of the scenographic elements presented here come from reclaimed materials or are not only helps reduce the environmental footprint of our activities, but also extends the lifecycle of materials, limiting waste and promoting circularity.

By rethinking the way exhibitions are designed and produced, the museum demonstrates its determination to combine creativity with environmental responsibility, and to make sustainability an integral part of its cultural mission.

**With the support of JC Decaux**

JCDecaux plays an active role in promoting cultural life in cities and local communities. Through its street furniture network, JCDecaux regularly makes advertising space available to support the promotion of cultural events and local initiatives.

By providing these advertising spaces, JCDecaux enables cultural organisations to reach a wide audience and boost the visibility of their projects in the public space.

It is a way of contributing to cultural diversity and making it accessible to everyone.

## **7 EXHIBITION PROGRAMME**

### **ENCOUNTERS**

#### **Discovery tours**

*10.05.2026 and 28.06.2026 – 2 p.m. (FR) and 2.30 p.m. (NL)*

Follow our guides as they lead you on a tour of the exhibition.

### **ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS**

#### **Story time at the museum**

*08.04.2026, 13.05. 2026, 10.06.2026, 08.07.2026, 12.08.2026, 09.09.2026 – 2 p.m. > 4 p.m.*

Story time for children (aged 3 and above) (FR)

#### **Design Brunch**

*07.06.2026 – 10.30 a.m. > 2.30 p.m.*

Tour of the exhibitions, creative activities, behind-the-scenes tour, combined with a convivial brunch.

#### **Family Sunday**

*07.06.2026 – 11 a.m. > 7 p.m.*

A day full of surprises for young and old.

#### **The treasures of Vlieg**

*01.07 > 31.08.2026*

A fun treasure hunt filled with adventures to discover the exhibition with your family.

### **NOCTURNE**

#### **Nocturne**

*21.05.2026 – 6 p.m. > 10 p.m.*

An evening full of experiences: exhibition tours, creative activities, and a festive atmosphere.

### **CONCERTS**

Classical music concerts in the heart of the exhibitions.

#### **Cécile Lastchenko (mezzo-soprano) and Lionel Bams (piano)**

*20.04.2026 – 7 p.m.*

#### **Isabelle Jacques (soprano) and Lionel Bams (piano)**

*01.06.2026 – 7 p.m.*

### **WORKSHOPS**

Creative workshops for children (aged 8 and 12) during the school holidays.

#### **Little designers of Antiquity**

*04.05.2026 > 08.05.2026 (FR)*

#### **Archikids. Let's build the city of tomorrow!**

*06.07.2026 > 10.07.2026 (FR)*

## **Weaving Brussels: textile creation between history and imagination**

17.08.2026 > 21.08.2026 (FR)

### **GROUPS**

Are you a school group, a group of friends, a non-profit organisation, a cultural group, or a company? We offer guided tours tailored to your group, available upon reservation. Contact us at [info@designmuseum.brussels](mailto:info@designmuseum.brussels)

This programme is subject to changes. Please visit our website for the latest information and to register for activities: [designmuseum.brussels/en/agenda/](https://designmuseum.brussels/en/agenda/)

### **PARTNERS:**

Korei Guided Tours

Franch-speaking library of Laeken

Pizzicato asbl

Jeunesse à Bruxelles

## 8 ABOUT THE DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS

The Design Museum Brussels, a museum project initiated and developed by the Atomium, is a space dedicated to design from the 20th century to the present day and to its evolution. More than just a formal, aesthetic, and functional object, design is presented here as a witness to the economic, social, ideological, cultural, and technical dynamics of its time. Since 2015, *the Plastic Design Collection* has explored the use of plastic in design, from the mid-1950s to the present. This emblematic collection offers a key to understanding the creative and technical landscape of the second half of the 20th century. In September 2020, the museum inaugurated *belgisch design belge*, a permanent exhibition space dedicated to Belgian design, highlighting its richness, diversity, and uniqueness.

Beyond its collections, the Design Museum Brussels aims to be a living platform for reflection and exchange. Its temporary exhibitions, along with its cultural and educational programming, express a desire to promote a transversal, inclusive, and accessible approach, crossing disciplines and perspectives. In doing so, the museum traces the cultural and technical story of the objects that have shaped our daily environments, revealing how these creations reflect the evolution of our lifestyles, values, and know-how.

From this perspective, the museum accompanies the major transitions of our time by questioning the role of design. As a place of awareness and education, it contributes to the development of critical thinking and to bringing design closer to society. It is also committed to archiving knowledge, preserving and transmitting the material and immaterial heritage of design, thereby enriching its understanding for present and future generations. By combining heritage and innovation, memory and foresight, the Design Museum Brussels asserts its mission: to make design a tool for interpreting the world and a lever for change.

The museum has been committed for several years to an eco-design approach, integrating sustainability as a guiding principle in the conception of its exhibitions. In this context, 80% of the scenographic elements presented here come from reclaimed materials or are designed to be reused in future projects. This long-term strategy not only helps reduce the environmental footprint of our activities, but also extends the lifecycle of materials, limiting waste and promoting circularity. By rethinking the way exhibitions are designed and produced, the museum demonstrates its determination to combine creativity with environmental responsibility, and to make sustainability an integral part of its cultural mission.

## 9 PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### EXHIBITION *Designing Childhood. A History of Design for Children*

01.04 > 20.09.2026

### EXHIBITION *Val Saint-Lambert & Design*

24.04 > 25.10.2026

#### Design Museum Brussels

Place Belgique 1

1020 Brussels

[designmuseum.brussels](http://designmuseum.brussels)

Facebook: [@designmuseumbrussels](https://www.facebook.com/designmuseumbrussels)

Instagram: [@designmuseumbrussels](https://www.instagram.com/designmuseumbrussels)

TikTok: [@designmuseumbrussels](https://www.tiktok.com/@designmuseumbrussels)

LinkedIn: [@designmuseumbrussels](https://www.linkedin.com/company/designmuseumbrussels)

Open from monday till sunday 11h > 19h

Tickets: €10 (+ other discounts)

Permanent exhibitions:

[the Plastic Design Collection](#)

[belgisch design belge](#)

[designmuseum.brussels](http://designmuseum.brussels)

#### The Design Museum Brussels is supported by the Atomium

The Atomium was designed and built for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair and quickly grew into the symbol of the country. What was originally intended as a temporary pavilion became a permanent icon thanks to its spectacular silhouette.

Today, the Atomium shines more than ever, both inside and out. It offers you the most beautiful panoramic view of Brussels, while you marvel at a variety of exhibitions. The permanent exhibition retraces over 65 years of the history of the former Expo 58 pavilion. More than half of the tour is dedicated to installations exploring themes related to digital arts. At the moment, the Atomium invites you to discover **ROTONDE** – gives the Atomium a new nocturnal identity, animating the rotonde each evening with rhythm and movement, **NIMBUS** - creates a monumental and immersive environment where light and sound reshape the architecture of the Atomium into a sensory landscape, and **Supply Chain** - offers a poetic journey combining moving light, reflections and sound.

The Atomium, at its brightest since 2006.

#### ATOMIUM

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