

## ERFGOEDDAG 2021 (CULTURAL HERITAGE DAY)

### *B-magic* conjures up ghosts and ghouls

For Erfgoeddag (Cultural Heritage Day) in Ghent on 24 and 25 April our researchers from *B-magic* and vzw Mystery Lab joined forces in a shadowy event that took place at the House of Mysteries. We put together a one-hour tour with installations, demonstrations and unique objects based on the magic lantern and spiritualism. Visitors could finally gain an insight into how centuries-old techniques of magicians, illusionists and mediums are still able to deceive us.

Our guests entered – at their own peril – through the curtained-off Spiegeltent, where magic lantern collector and performer Ditmar Bollaert has followed in the footsteps of his late father, Herman, who has recently left us (see p. 8). Ditmar and his partner Els enchanted audiences with lantern demonstrations that included gliding devils and skeletons rising from their graves. They succeeded wonderfully in restoring the aged projection medium to its former glory and demonstrating its possibilities to the enthusiastic audience. They performed the show 80 times over five days! The lantern attracted a great deal of attention and was a topic discussed on national radio and TV, even appearing on the evening news.

The spellbound group at the exhibition was then immediately guided to the attic, where a ghostly recording recounted the history of spiritualist proceedings. The



*Ditmar Bollaert and his partner Els*

'materialised hand' and photographs from a bygone era adorned the large table in their midst. As if this presentation wasn't eerie enough, they were then led to the floor below, where a ghostly appearance, Nikolaas Martens from the House of Mysteries, made a table levitate ... Nonplussed, they continued their journey to the first floor, where



*The team at the House of Mysteries*

contemporary media artist Diederik Peeters brought ventriloquist dummies to life and summoned ghosts with light and mirror reflections

in his installation *Apparition of an Afterlife*. It is clear that Diederik was inspired by 19th-century optical illusions, since everyone present was torn between belief and scepticism, illusion and reality, familiarity and strangeness.

Our visitors breathed a sigh of relief when they were ushered downstairs again where the magic lantern exhibition provided the variety needed for those interested in the history and objects associated with this now less well-known mass medium. Other strange and interesting objects and illusions populated the space while, as a last hurrah, the nimble-fingered in-house magician entertained everyone with an extremely dexterous magic routine.

Thanks to this event, we can present our research findings to a wider audience in an interactive and peculiar way. We have spent a lot of time reading and writing about the many applications of the magic lantern, but now we finally had the chance to show it to a wider audience! The exhibition was visited by more than 400 visitors. We owe great thanks to our performers Ditmar and Diederik for evoking such marvellous sights.

Both the full programme and a press coverage list is on the *B-magic* website at: [www.uantwerpen.be](http://www.uantwerpen.be).

***Kurt Vanhoutte and Elisa Seghers***