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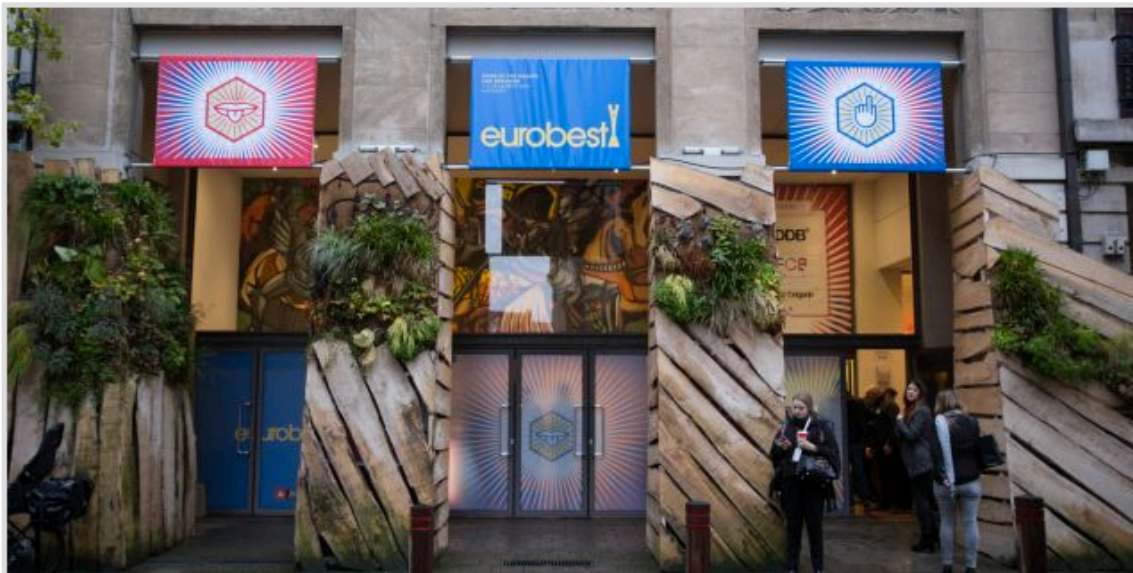
Eurobest 2015: In Antwerp's surreal surrounds, Europe's creative industry shows its fearlessness

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Despite testing times for Belgium, advertising, design and digital talent converged on Antwerp this week for the Eurobest Festival of European Creativity. The Drum's Cameron Clarke reports back from a unique – and occasionally surreal – event which showed Europe at its creative best.



It was fitting that Eurobest's opening address, delivered by Antwerp's vice mayor Philip Heylen, included a quote borrowed from Belgium's great surrealist artist René Magritte: "We are always on the lookout for what has never been." It would prove an apt motto for an unusual event hosted against a truly surreal backdrop.

Eurobest, for the uninitiated, is the little brother of Cannes Lions. Part conference, part awards show, it moves from city to city each year. So far so typical. But when the organisers chose quaint Antwerp as host venue 12 months ago, they would never have imagined that Belgium would become quite such a newsworthy destination.



With the country placed at the heart of the investigation into last month's Paris attacks - eight terror suspects have been arrested in Belgium in recent weeks - the timing could not have been worse for a festival attempting to entice the cream of Europe's creative talent to congregate for three days. Looking around a sparse auditorium as Heylen gave his opening address on Tuesday, it felt like the organisers' promise of strengthened security had not done enough to steel the industry into making the trip. In reality, and like the placid setting, the event just needed a little time to warm up.

Though Antwerp's heavy police patrol and the occasional presence of what appeared to be military vehicles were a daily reminder of Belgium's heightened state of alert, a certain calmness pervaded the city and the event itself. There were schedule changes as some agencies and speakers withdrew - an understandable choice, particularly for those companies touched directly by the dreadful events in Paris - but those that made the journey would be thankful they did.

What the UK took from Eurobest...

Paul Taylor, executive creative director, Brand Opus: "This was my first experience at Eurobest and I found it to be a positive hive of vibrant, energetic and inspiring ideas with a great emphasis on sharing and collaboration. I particularly enjoyed Ben Priest's refreshing candour regarding the journey his agency has been on through the last six years of John Lewis Christmas ads. I also thoroughly enjoyed the slightly unusual experience of presenting at the 'silent' discovery stage."

Mark Eaves, founder of Gravity Road and branded content and entertainment jury president: "Antwerp was a fitting host city for Eurobest - they share much in common. Both are hidden gems that we Brits have too often overlooked. But this was the year the UK arrived, led by a triumphant Monty. Whilst some work was still doing the post-Cannes rounds, there was some really fresh stuff that will be keeping Cannes juries busy next year. As for my category, its winner proved a basic, age old maxim: nothing, I repeat nothing, beats a hoverboard."

Miles Kempton and Mike Hill of sound studio GCRS: "The concept of the Discovery Stage with each listener having headphones worked incredibly well, especially for a talk on sound. It enabled the listeners to really focus in on the talk and clearly hear the audio from the different videos played, with no distractions of what was going on around them. It definitely helped get a few people jumping out of their seats during the part where we spoke about sound in horror!"