

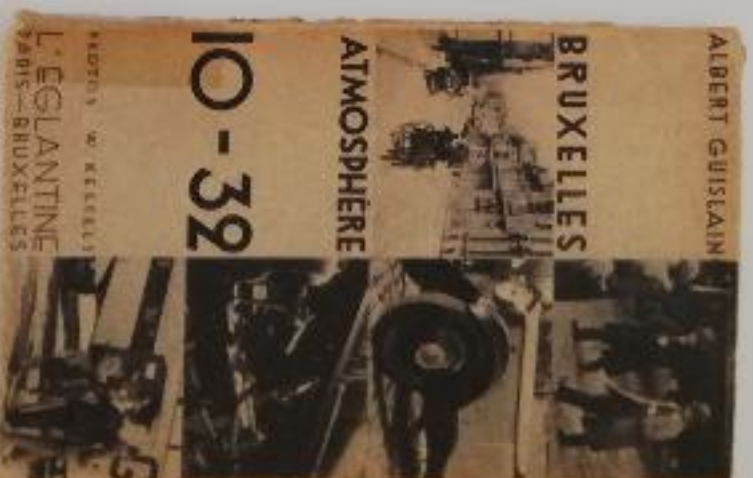
In the interwar period the Brussels socialist publishing house L'Églantine/De Wilde Roos (founded in 1922 by Piet I andstreugt) published three books with beautiful photo-gravures made on the presses of the 'Imprimerie scientifique' Charles Bulens.

The first book, *Découverte de Bruxelles*, was a success. It contains a text by the lawyer and writer Albert Guislain and pictures by the Belgian modernist photographer Willy Kessels, who was already well versed in advertising photography. The second, *Bruxelles: Atmosphère 10-32*, also about Brussels, is by the same author and photographer. The third, *Mons et les Montois*, explores the Walloon city of Mons, and is written by the regional writer Jules Desrée and illustrated by Albert Malevez, who was best known as an industrial and publicity photographer.

All these books are subjective, poetic tourist guides; they are full of anecdotes but structured to be used while visiting a city. They follow a route through Brussels and Mons, looking at their monuments, history and folklore.

Mons et les Montois focuses more on the city's population (the second part is called 'Découverte des Montois'), while the two books on Brussels have a stronger emphasis on the evolution of the cityscape. *Découverte de Bruxelles* is addressed to a young schoolboy and stops at important places in the city, such as the Grand-Place. Although the book takes us to picturesque places in tourist-oriented Brussels, Kessels' images are far from being 'banal touristic snapshots'.¹ The success of this first book is due, according to Guislain, to the fact this is a *livre de littérature* with a lively style, and not a book for specialists. Also, the low price of the book, the fact that it is not a coffee-table book, despite the high quality of Kessels' images, could explain its success.

Bruxelles Atmosphère 10-32 is much more modernist in its form and in its goal. It emphasises construction works and advertisements within the city and compares Brussels in 1910 (using archival images) to Brussels in 1932 (using photographs Willy Kessels took specifically for the book). It focuses on the modernist dimension of Brussels, notably through the bold photomontages Kessels created with pictures of modern buildings that give a kaleidoscopic look to the city. This book helped to 'promote to a large audience the image of Brussels as a city deeply involved in the present'.² Unlike London, Paris or New York, Brussels was not a common topic for photoalbums in the interwar period, but in these books published by L'Églantine, the Belgian capital appeared as a fertile field for experiment and collaboration between photographers and writers. Willy Kessels met the challenge and his photomontages of Brussels remain significant in the history of photoalbums. A.A.



¹ Christine De Naeyer, 'Willy Kessels (Charleroi): Musée de la photographie', Archives du Musée de la photographie, 1996), 19.

² Danielle Laeraerts, *L'image de la ville: Bruxelles et ses photographes des années 1910 à nos jours* (Brussels: CFC Éditions, 'Lieux de mémoire', 2009), 84.