

Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination: a playful exhibition that inspires knowledge and understanding

The distinctive Czech artist Petr Nikl and another 15 Czech and foreign artists have created an interactive exhibition called Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination, which is being presented in Brussels as part of a world tour. The quality of this showcase has already delighted half a million visitors in Paris, Canada, the Czech Republic and Italy. It has now been given the status of an official accompanying event within the framework of the Czech Republic's presidency of the EU Council. It has also become one of the exhibitions accompanying the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. From 1 to 27 April it will excite visitors' imaginations and give them food for thought at the Madou Plaza Tower, which is the Brussels headquarters of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. The exhibition will also be housed at the Czech Centre Gallery from 8 to 28 April.

The unique exhibition entitled Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination was created according to a concept by the Czech artist Petr Nikl. It was implemented with the help of a further 15 artists of various nationalities. The people behind the event were inspired by *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, the landmark book by the 16th-century Czech pedagogue, philosopher, writer, theologian and reformer John Amos Comenius. Each staging of the exhibition has been complemented by the publication of this work in the language of the host country. Visitors to the Brussels exhibition will be able to avail of an English translation of the book with illustrations by Petr Nikl.

The popularity of Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination is quite simply down to the original manner in which it has been prepared. You won't see any signs saying "Don't touch the exhibits" at this event. On the contrary, it is actually necessary to touch them! The installed instruments and objects do not contain any electronic equipment, computers, recorded music or film loops. Human energy and creative imagination are the only things that can bring them to life, set them in motion and make them ring out. This is the only way in which you can see how the exhibits operate in all their beauty. Examples of some of the items on display include The Songster Butterfly, The Dreamers' Horologes, The Fountain of Delight, The Water Organs, and the event's centrepiece The Heart. The spontaneous, enthusiastic reaction of visitors to Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination demonstrates how the phenomena of games and play work as a universal means of communication, regardless of age, nationality or religion. The possibility of getting to know the world and how it works through one's own sensual perception and energy is genuinely fascinating and enticing.

Orbis Pictus or the Gate to the World of Human Imagination was first installed in Paris in June 2006. A year later, it then travelled to the Czech cities of Prague, Brno, Kroměříž and Opava, as well as to Florence in Italy. It was also displayed at the prestigious TELUS World of Science venue in Vancouver, Canada from October 2008 to February 2009.