

# A helping hand for passionate, talented artisans

Promoting talent through education is the mission of the Platform for Education and Talent. The Platform was created in 2011 by the descendants of Belgian industrialist Gustave Boël and the holding company Sofina, together with the King Baudouin Foundation.

Anne Emsens, a member of the Monitoring Committee, explains that the Platform supports craftsmen and women. “They often work alone and would love to be able to have further training with a master, but they don’t always have the means to do so,” she says. “Each year, the Platform provides this opportunity to around 10 young artisans.”

## Made-to-measure glasses

Ludovic Elens makes spectacles and is passionate about his work. “Fifty years ago, opticians used to make all their glasses themselves,” he explains. “Today, people are content to sell ready-made frames that have been designed for a standard physiognomy. Thanks to an internship I did in Morez in France, in 2014, I discovered my passion – to create made-to-measure glasses.”

Elens creates glasses for a variety of clients. “It’s mainly for people who have a face that’s a bit unusual. Someone with a nose that’s higher or lower on the face, is thicker or thinner, or widens out. I even made some glasses for a

client who now has only one ear,” he says. “These people often have to put up with glasses that don’t really suit their face. Others want to treat themselves to a pair of personalized glasses.”

*“My glasses are mainly for people who have a face that’s a bit unusual.”*

Ludovic Elens

Initially, Elens used acetate and horn, but the grant enabled him to return to Morez for further training with some of the finest craftsmen. “They are passionate and want to pass on skills that are disappearing,” he explains. “They taught me how to use other materials, such as metal.”

Elens has hired an employee and an apprentice. He is passing on his skills to keep this craft tradition alive in Belgium.

## Credibility is everything

Although the stained glass workshop started by her grandfather was doing well, Katrien Mestdagh felt she was missing out on interesting projects because she did not have the right qualifications.



Apart from many others, Atelier Mestdagh currently has three major restoration projects on the go for historic stained glass windows. This is partly thanks to the Platform.

With the Platform's support, Mestdagh completed a Masters in Stained Glass Conservation & Heritage Management at the University of York from 2012 to 2014. "I wanted to continue Atelier Mestdagh after my parents. We work with a team, but if circumstances forced me to carry on alone, I want to have the knowledge and skills," she says.

"Studying opened my eyes," Mestdagh explains. She learned about techniques, the evolution of restoration and experiments that had already been done. "Thanks to the Platform, I was able to finish my studies in two years. Otherwise I would have had to spread them over several more."

The degree had an immediate impact on the Atelier's image, which started being considered for restoration projects.

In 2016, Atelier Mestdagh restored two 16th-century stained



glass windows from the St. Genevieve church in Steenhuffel, 34 medallions from the 15th to the 19th century in the Arenberg collection, and stained glass windows from the Saint Servatius Church in Schaerbeek.

Mestdagh says the training enhanced her credibility: "Now I have learned to speak the same language as heritage consultants."

## THE PLATFORM FOR EDUCATION AND TALENT

From 2012 to 2017, 116 young craft workers were supported for a total amount of €918,061. They were offered scholarships to speed up their pathway to excellence in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The next selection of craft workers to be supported will be announced in December 2018.

The Platform:

- supports education and training of talent in Belgium through individual grants;
- offers high level training opportunities to talented young people including craft workers (20 to 35 years old in traditional trades; and
- supports university students and pupils from underprivileged social backgrounds in secondary education in Liège and Antwerp.

*"I have learned to speak the language of heritage consultants."*

Katrien Mestdagh

MORE INFO?

Read the stories of Ludovic Elens and Katrien Mestdagh on [www.kbs-frb.be](http://www.kbs-frb.be) and [www.sofinaboel.be](http://www.sofinaboel.be)