

R/O

22 December 2015

Press Release: R/O

A centre of high technology and creativity unique in the world from where will emerge tomorrow's heroes and fiction universe.

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Mr François Pernot, CEO of Pôle Image of the publishing company Média-Participations, Managing Director of the Editions Dargaud / Lombard and Managing Director of Dupuis, Mr Philippe Reynaert, Manager of Wallimage and Managing Director of Wallimage Entreprises, and the Government of Wallonia are pleased to announce the launch of R/O, a unique venture in Belgium, dedicated to the creative arts and scheduled to start operations in September 2016.

The reputation of Belgium, and Wallonia in particular, as creators of some of the most extraordinary fiction characters needs no further introduction. The Smurfs, Lucky Luke, Gaston, Spirou, plus a host of others have shaped the imagination of many generations. But who has never dreamed of seeing these heroes rise out of his smartphone to project their world into his living room and play interactive games with them? Of immersing himself in Gotham City or unravelling mysteries with Largo Winch?

“The R/O project, born out of a reflection by the Média-Participations Group on the creative industries and public consumption patterns represents this link – economic and artistic – that will guide the whole of the entertainment industry towards a new economic creativity, a future sector and a stimulus for increased employment in Europe. This initiative - unique in its genre – will bring together private and public investments. Thanks to the support from Wallonia and the City of Charleroi, this international project will become anchored into the cultural and educational context of the Region. The objective is to offer talented artists concrete and immediate professional prospects and opportunities, but also to go prospecting well beyond our own borders”.

Today, every character in the world of fiction is expected to be familiar with variations on different support and media systems and platforms: from comics to film, from television to video games, from linear broadcasting to mobile screens.

R/O is a complete facility meant for the implementation and the speedy production of trans-media projects. Its aim is to give birth to tomorrow's heroes and sagas, all of them part of a strategy of multi-support broadcasting.

The artists who, just yesterday, created a story or a hero for a single support system (cartoon strip, film, graphic novel,...) will henceforth need to plan for their adaptations to different media platforms. In the same vein, they will have to anticipate the interaction with their public, under the stimulus of the social networks and the newly emerged media systems. Where once the great stories and creative inputs of the 20th century were conceived in a linear form, those of the 21st century need to be perceived at a turn-about of 360 degrees, and this for all of the support systems, present and future. The artists need to morph into **trans-media creators**. The whole of the R/O facility will provide them with the technologies, the room for reflection, and the support of international experts in the development of their project in that direction, within a creative environment out of which the heroes and their fiction world will eventually emerge.

It concerns a support vehicle as exists nowhere else: we are leaving the school benches and bring to bear all of the skills that create these novel stories. Creators and image professionals, but likewise sociologists, orchestra conductors, astrophysicists, trend-setters and, naturally, specialists assembled from world renowned art and animation colleges. The tools have been developed and placed at the disposal of talented artists to help them create their characters and their stories. And specialist partners are ready to assist them in their professional development.

This project is being co-financed by Wallonia through government support in the amount of two million euros, to become available at the start of 2016. Research assistance to the tune of one million seven hundred thousand euros has already been allocated in November 2015 by the Vice-President of the Government, Jean-Claude Marcourt, on a total research project of three million, that is part of the R/O LAB, one of the dimensions of the R/O facility.

For all further information, please contact:

Stéphanie Thirion

R/O - Program Manager

Mobile: +32.491.56.77.02

Email: stephanie.thirion@r-o.be

Skype: [thirionsteph](https://www.skype.com/people/thirionsteph)

www.r-o.be

For any enquiries involving the Walloon Region:

Gaël Lambinon

Spokesman for Jean-Claude Marcourt,

Vice-President of the Walloon Government,

Minister of Economy, Industries,

Innovation & Digital

Mobile: +32.472.45.59.87

Email: gael.lambinon@marcourt.gov.wallonie.be

www.marcourt.wallonie.be

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Technical description: R/O

The overall R/O project counts three dimensions:

- R/O Institute
- R/O Lab
- Belgian Heroes S.A.

The three-dimensional R/O facility has been conceived as a step towards an ambitious full-service solution capable of addressing and meeting the challenges that face the creative industry:

- Generating global opportunities for the artists
- Stimulating the emergence of new talent that will be competitive in the market
- Providing the necessary tools to enable the alignment and harmonisation of content creation with innovative technology
- Achieving coherence within the creative processes in order to arrive at global success

An institute - R/O Institute – in Marcinelle, on the premises of Dupuis, to function as a specialised training facility that will at the same time be artistic, theoretic (screen writing, development of the fiction world, creation of the characters, etc.), technological (technological approach to the storytelling), and practical (development of concrete projects):

- Some fifteen talented collaborators, some fifteen projects
- Highly accomplished international instructors

- A curriculum and a pedagogy developed in collaboration with Gobelins (Paris).
- A special focus on the development of the worlds of creative talent
- The prototyping of these worlds on several support media
- The development of, and experimentation with, projects initiated by the founding members

An innovative laboratory - R/O Lab – located next to the Institute, on the premises of DreamWall in Marcinelle, this laboratory has been established to collaborate with the R/O Institute for the purpose of realigning content and technologies. It is a laboratory for applied research and development, for software innovation to serve in transmedia creation : a high-tech platform for the creation of the worlds developed by the R/O Institute, which requires technological but likewise workable innovations (initial group of talented collaborators at the Institute), developed by web-based tools and infographics made available for the creation of collaborative Transmedia content.

It is essential that the content pursued by the Institute be novel, transmedia-oriented and technologically relevant. The R/O Lab project therefore forms an integral part of the R/O strategy which is to develop, evaluate, and ensure the enduring sustainability of the patrimony created by the R/O Institute.

Belgian Heroes SA – the company that is to put the capstone on the entire facility. It will form the anchor that is to solidly root this novel and daring venture into our Walloon cultural heritage. It will finance the Institute and the Lab and manage the intellectual property rights and assure that the selected projects be exploited to their full potential. It comprises the shareholders of the project.

The Belgian Heroes company will also be situated in Marcinelle, on the premises of Dupuis.

An extension of the R/O project will in due time likewise occupy premises on Quay 10 : all public meetings, exhibitions and demonstrations, conferences and the like will be capable of taking advantage of this new infrastructure in downtown Charleroi.

Talented artists wishing to become part of this R/O facility in September 2016 will need to respond to a call for applications that will be issued no later than 30 April 2016. An initial pre-selection committee

will in the context of a summer school session for one week entertain some thirty projects. This summer school session will prepare the applicants for the final selection that is to take place at the end of September. The choice of 15 chosen projects is anticipated in the course of October.

The first year of training will run until July 2017, when the selected artists and projects will receive guidance and assistance to develop themselves into animators/creators versed in Transmedia projects.

During the year spent at the R/O Institute and the R/O Lab, the projects will be supported by the **founding partners** and some of them will subsequently be selected as commercial products, to be distributed and marketed by the joint partners, the objective being to speed the introduction into the market of this novel content and to increase the chances of success through collaboration amongst the different creative and commercial dimensions thus assembled by the shareholders and supporters of the R/O initiative.

For all further information, please contact:

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Mobile: +32.491.56.77.02
Email: stephanie.thirion@r-o.be
Skype: thirionsteph
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R/O – The support by the public authorities in Wallonia

Vice-President of the Government, Minister of Economy, Innovation and Digitalisation, Jean-Claude MARCOURT, takes pleasure in announcing the launch of the company 'Belgian Heroes', a private partnership – wholly unique on the international plane and based on the exploits in the world of the comic strip and movie cartoons. He adds: "it is in Marcinelle, at the Dupuis Publishing House, that numerous of our historically renowned cartoon heroes saw the light of day, all of the characters that have shaped the collective imagination of young and old the world over. Spirou, naturally, but also the Smurfs, the Marsupilami, Boule and Bill, Lucky Luke, Tif and Tondu, and so many others still – I personally feel a particular affection for Gaston – all of them have not only become truly ambassadors of Wallonia and Belgium but even up to this very day continue to reap significant spin-offs for our economy. It is for that reason that, we, the Walloon Government, are today ranging ourselves fully behind the R/O project. We are aiming to promote and boost the burgeoning of new and novel creative and technological projects, carriers of important gains for our economy, in order to reinforce and confirm our status as exceptional leaders in this hybrid transmedia sector of film and comic strip. The future of our region shall be fashioned by heroes, more particularly 'paper' heroes but nevertheless heroes, their stature enhanced in the 3D world by their incorporation into smartphone applications, transformed by, and adap-

ted to, the new media and their support venues of the 21st century ... It is this Wallonia that we are ready to support via two flagship initiatives, namely Digital Wallonia and Creative Wallonia, programmes that permit the start-up and development of unique and innovative projects, the necessary ingredients for our changing progressive Region."

For Minister-President Paul Magnette, "The reputation of the Marcinelle School has been a long established fact. Franquin, Morris, Jijé, Will, Peyo have shaped the imagination of numerous generations. The project R/O represents a link – economically and artistically – that is to guide the Marcinelle School towards a creative economy, a future sector bound to generate added employment in Europe.

This enterprise - unique in its genre – will bring together private and public investments. Thanks to the support of Wallonia and the City of Charleroi, the project will have no difficulty integrating itself into the cultural and educational environment of the Region. The objective, and our ambition, is to offer talented artists concrete and immediate professional opportunities.

And finally, the R/O project takes for its vocation the prospecting for opportunities well beyond our borders."

"Thanks to this dynamic innovative initiative, it is clear that numerous high value-added quality jobs

will be created in Wallonia”, the Minister of Employment and Education Eliane Tillieux is pleased to add. “In effect, the involvement of our Region in a sector such as the audio-visual and multimedia field carries a real opportunity for the future and for emerging professions. It is for that reason important to me that the project incorporate an educational segment. This way, the objective of this new partnership is likewise

to include an encompassing educational offer directed to the entire sector and opening the door to the training of screen writers, specialists in computer-generated imaging, in other words, the Walloon 3D animators of tomorrow. They will be the spearhead leaders of Walloon excellence within this domain”, emphasises Eliane Tillieux.



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