

Antwerp HQ, 2018

Location: Diamond District, Antwerp, Belgium

Building: 1950's

Year Renovated: 2018

Studio Job HQ is a gallery, a headquarters, and also artist & Founder of Studio Job, Job Smeets main residence.

Designer: Job Smeets with Studio Job

Studio Job first decided to move their Headquarters to Antwerp in 2003, drawn to the dynamic culture of a raw export city and its history, but all the while being one of the first Northern European cities experiencing the golden age and renaissance. Job Smeets explains "Antwerp can be rough as Berlin but as refined as Bruges and that was a really exciting mix for me. The Northern Renaissance was a huge draw, it echoed our own Renaissance style of working. I also wanted to escape the suffocating Dutch design scene as our work was much more international and I felt it didn't belong to one country or city we wanted to make it broader than that. If we stayed in the Netherlands we would end up becoming some sort of local heroes being on a talk panel rotation about Dutch design. I felt the work is more important than just being one of those 'talking heads', we wanted to focus on our work, our ideas and our creativity, moving countries helps with that it keeps things fluid and changing and away from a local bubble."

The 1950s concrete building, which was originally a Jewish school, features a 500 sq m rooftop space (a rare find in the city) and Smeets saw huge potential this, knocking down the walls and stripping it back to unite the brand's universe all under one roof.

The property has all the workings of a functional apartment – bedroom, bathroom and living space – but is designed with Studio Job's 'serious fun' ethos, with many of their humorous and whimsical designs populating the interiors, creating an archive of the firm's oeuvre. 'It is overwhelming sometimes to see pieces from over 20 years of work all together in one space, it makes me realise how much we have done over the years and how prolific we have been,' Smeets muses.

Visitors are invited to enjoy this design journey inside the headquarters. 'The plan was to create a Studio Job world where pieces are mixed with the styles and years sitting alongside each other, on paper this shouldn't work but in reality it's perfectly balanced in my mind,' he continues. This transformative vision is certainly reflected in the space which includes everything from scale models to design highlights including the 'Punch-a-wall' bag for Gufram and the banana sculpture the studio made for Design Pride at Salone del Mobile. These are scattered alongside products by other artists including Misha Kahn, and Smeets' own father, Johan Smeets.

Elsewhere Smeets' own office is inspired by the workspace of Italian Design legend Alberto Alessi, while a tomato-red tiled bathroom makes an impact with its deep copper tub and gold-hued appliances. There are surprises around every corner with each room exuding its own eccentric personality.

'With minimalism you can hide behind the aesthetic values of line and colour,' Smeets explains, 'with an eclectic style you need to know what you are doing otherwise you overcook it. It could be a well-executed modern interior of a 90-year old-collector'.

Both a living space and a working space it serves as the main Studio Job Headquarters and gallery to bring clients to get a full experience of the work of Studio Job over the last 20 years. "The aim was to create an inspiring, fun and serious space to be in which really gives people a feeling of being fully immersed in the space. It is great to bring someone over for a tour, people are often shocked into silence their brain can't really process everything that's there, they're not sure if it's a gallery, or my office, or my home, and in fact it's all three."

"The space has been essence we needed a space for our collecting-rush. In the end I am just an old lady with a bad habit. The apartment was originally more residential and I wanted to change the purpose and feel but still keeping some living and working areas. The plan was to create a Studio Job world where pieces are mixed with the styles and years sitting alongside each other, on paper this shouldn't work but in reality it's perfectly balanced in my mind. Some people say it's a crazy and intense space but for me it's a interior reflecting in part the inside of my head, and the history of our work."

- Rebecca Sharkey, 2018

Q&A with Job Smeets, 2018

Q: How would you describe the space?

JS: It's out of this world, and I love it. It also depresses me a lot. So in part I hate it too. It's overwhelming sometimes to see pieces from over twenty years of work all together in one space it makes me realize how much we have done over the years and how prolific we have been. It's an exhausting body of work to even take in. We are in a unique situation that not many artists or designers are able to do, we can display our art pieces and sculptures in a space then also our wallpapers, rugs, products, lighting, furniture even the kitchenware right down to the cocktail stirrers are by Studio Job as well. We have such a large body of work that covers so many areas we are able to use so many pieces to create a workspace, living space and gallery with our own work. Of course we have mixed into our own collection the work of other artists and designers into our own work, which allows us to display pieces we've been collecting over the years, really we were prolific collectors and I'd rather live in the collection than have it collecting dust in storage.

Q: What sorts of things happen here? How do you and others interact with the space?

Q: Can you point out a few design highlights?

JS: I can't really, it changes all the time as some pieces come in and out much like a gallery. I like the toilet holder (note to editor: sculpted and cast bronze toilet roll holder). There's a mix of historic pieces and our own work; some of my first ever pieces, some scale models of projects (eg. Mika neon light, and Barney's love boat) mixed in with our products and other artists' work. On the terrace I made bad taste/good taste 1970's gas heater in bronze so I can sit outside in the winter. When you are the artist and you have your own atelier then anything is possible for your own interior. I also love the unique piece Misha Kahn made for us last year titled 'Grandfather'. There is an oil portrait by my father Johan Smeets (behind the punch bag in the kitchen), the punch bag 'Punch-a-wall' is an amazing piece in itself, we designed it for Gufram as part of our SuperGufram last year and added a bronze chain made in our atelier, I just thought why should something for sports be ugly, or in fact anything in your home be ugly, it can be an art piece and a practical sports piece.

Q: Can you think of any aspects of the design have funny stories behind them?

JS: Well everything in this space is #seriousfun. We are often perceived as putting a lot of humour into our work and putting two fingers up to the art and design scene but one can only really be humorous when you are not asked about it, when I think about humour it doesn't work any more. It's not something we discuss, it's in the collective memory people understand about humour without talking about it. Humour is a very good cover up for pointing out something more serious.

Q&A with Job Smeets  
April 2018

Q. How do you live/work in the apartment?

JS: It's partly house, partly studio, and also a place keep part of the art collection. As a company and personally we have a vast collection of design pieces and art collected over the last 20 years as well as a constant stream of new work we produce from sculpture to product. In some ways it's the showroom for the Studio Job world, I bring clients here to give them an idea of who we are as a company and also who I am personally. You could say it was a reflection of the inside of my head but the calmer curated measured version. At one end there's a working kitchen where I sometimes cook and entertain a friend or two, and a great place to make drawings at the kitchen table. At the other end there's a second kitchen which is more for drinks and parties. It's my main residence so am always here when I am not travelling, it's also the perfect place for friends to come and stay as it's a great quiet location in the city but close enough to everything you need.

Q. Describe your typical day of work there

JS: I travel a lot for work, but when I'm not away I have the same kind of routine that keeps me grounded. When I'm at home I mostly I wake up, drink a coffee, work out in the gym, then usually am straight out to the atelier to meet with my team and see the progress of projects. I then like some quiet time to make drawings which I'm doing almost every day, sometimes it can be a quick sketch other days it can be hours of work depending on how the ideas are flowing. In the evening I usually go out for dinner with my partner or some friends and try to decompress. I'm lucky as there are so many great restaurants here in Antwerp and many within walking distance, they may not be famously polite people here but they do know good food. It's important to me to look after myself as much as I can because of all the travel.

Q. Is there a particular room that you prefer?

JS: It changes all the time, as the weather has been so awful this winter I have to say the main bathroom with the copper bathtub is very much a favourite space right now. The main gallery/living area is the space that guests always fall silent in, it's like a visual assault of so many pieces and so much to take in, plus it's the area with the most of my own sculptures which is a blessing and a curse, I'm proud of my work yet it can be overwhelming to see how much work we've produced over the last 18 years, maybe I need a holiday. The kitchen area **\*\*round marble table\*\***, like every house is the place everyone ends up hanging out, I like to be here making drawings in the evening, on one side I have this gallery like space with this huge Mischa Kahn sculpture my the table, and on the other side the rooftops of the neighbours, it's the perfect creative corner to be.

Q: What do you like most in that house?

JS: My favorite piece is always the last piece that I buy, so right now it's a Tom Wesselmann I picked up last week, it takes pride of place above the two metre banana sculpture the studio made for Design pride Milano. The motorbike in the office with only 5km on the clock is pretty special, and everyone wants to sit on it when they visit, but really it's an art piece I won't ever ride the thing. The self portrait painting by Eugene Leroy next to my bed is fascinating, in daylight you can see an abstract face in one place, and in the half light of the evening you see two totally different faces, it's incredible. I think the 'Piece for Peace' sculpture is really special, made for Herman van Rompuy, president of the European Council, Brussels as a centerpiece for his office. I love the outdoor stove we made in our atelier in casted bronze based on a 1970s gas stove. One of the funniest things I decided to make for the house is the double sided tv, no one in the world has done it before I'm sure. I had two TVs and thought why not make a beautiful piece that houses both back to back. For some reason it really works because you go into the bedroom and you're not faced with the back of a tv or unit you can display a beautiful image. But at the moment it's actually a piece I didn't design, the copper bath tub it's the perfect size for two.

Q: Is it an apartment /studio, or something else?

JS: It's a space here I live and a space where I work out of also, and also a showpiece for the Studio Job world. When we have clients here they can really understand Studio Job, from the Barney's Love Boat piece (living room) to the hand painted pigeon table to our production pieces, even the glasses are Studio Job.

We have our main atelier about 45 minutes away where we have around 35 people metalworking, sculpting, painting etc.. so here is where I can make drawings and doing the work that requires peace and quiet.

Q: Why did you choose that particular building?

JS: It was bought it back in 2007, at that time it was the biggest place you could get in Antwerp for the budget I had. The location is in the diamond sector, the neighborhood is a really dynamic mix of orthodox Jews and the Muslim community, I didn't want to live in the sterile pseudo 'chic' area of Antwerp wanted to be in the heart of a community. The street it is on is notorious for drug dealing, then you turn the corner for some of the best restaurants in the area, it's a real mix, I liked the edginess.

Q: Tell me about the structure of the apartment?

JS: It's a totally concrete structure so very timeless and resistant, unfortunately Belgium is known for it's badly built buildings but this one was in really great condition. The apartment is 35m long and with a 400 sqm roof terrace which is really rare in Antwerp.

Q: Tell me more about the internal spaces?

JS: The building used to be a Jewish school with all these small classrooms inside. The place was totally covered with 1970s plasterboard and suspended ceilings in every area, so I had it completely

stripped down to the concrete and sandblasted, until I was left with one big 600 sqm space. From there I could build the walls back in and create spaces.

It's based on the concept of a modern city loft, with big open spaces, two big bedrooms both with en suite bathrooms, standard things you would expect in a modern city loft, it's definitely not a family home, it's the perfect house for a couple, so it's perfect for me. The whole space is open down the window side so you can walk the full length of the apartment.

The main office is my space, and the pink office next door is for our communications. My office is inspired on the office of Alberto Alessi, was once there and loved how it was packed with prototypes of people he's worked with, it was impressive and indoctrinating, I wanted to create my own version of this, if you enter my office or studio then it's a dominant space, you feel a little vulnerable if you enter that space it's the same feeling I had when I entered Alberto's office.

The feel of the place is an old collectors house or I guess a collectors loft, a collector who puts more and more stuff in, like old people with this place filled with stuff, this collection that is an orchestrated spontaneous collection. It's all been collected over 20 years, pieces and artists I was fascinated by and bought, but didn't want it to look like an old dusty museum, it's an eccentric space packed with pieces yet the way its been shaped, it's a very peaceful and calming place to live and work.

The interior design decisions are very connected to the house, for example the Studio Job House is a modernist villa so it's this modern, contemporary space you would expect a mid-century minimal interior which it has. I could have done that here very easily but I wanted to make it like a curiosity store, so I want to try to break that by putting the incredible bold wallpapers and window graphics Nynke had designed and eclectic collection mixed together, even the big banana which is almost an advertising item. It's a rococo approach with these heavily patterned wallpapers with paintings on top. It's modern rococo.

The garden is a 400sqm space, the roof of the parking building that was nothing but pebbles when we bought the place. It's not really a garden you can hang out on, it's in the middle of the city and is overlooked by all these houses at the back so pointless to create a hang out spot. What I wanted was to create a view from the house to the outside, and a garden that needs no maintenance. So it's created in a way that looks like an extension of the interiors with oversized Eames furniture that you would expect inside but then it's outside. And of course surround the whole terrace with multi-colored funfair lights!

Q: What was renovated and when?

JS: We've been working on it since the beginning of 2017, it took nearly a year and but we wanted to take the time to make decisions and evolve the project, the studio is also so busy with projects so it took some time we made all these beautiful details such as the devil door handle.

Q: Describe me the mix of different styles and the interaction of the artistic aspects

JS: It was an evolving thing that I've learned over many years, the more you feel confident with design and shaping interiors you become bolder and braver and I can trust my instincts. I was looking more of an eclectic approach and eclecticism you can only use when you know everything about it, and apply it when you feel confident enough because it's a style that's very on the edge. With minimalism you can hide behind the aesthetical values of line and colour, with an eclectic style

you need to know what you are doing otherwise you overcook it. It could be a well executed modern interior of a 90 year old collector.

It's an ever changing space, in flux constantly changing as pieces leave to go on loan to museums and exhibitions and new pieces come in. I knew this would be the case so had to make the shell of the interiors interesting enough themselves so you don't end up with gaps like you would with a minimal interior.

General Questions:

Q: How does this project sit within the context of your work?

JS: I'm being asked to do more and more total projects these days and not just pieces or interiors, it's also branding, concept and products. We are just completing a project with our client Cretuz and Partners, a private bank based in Luxembourg, which is not only about interiors, it's also their identity, how they are marketed. And approaching the project in a contemporary and tonally new way, so it's not just a nice room with furniture in it's a place that a bank can be or should be, or what we think a financial institution should look like, including fake money made by Studio Job. We don't ask old fashioned questions like how big should your desk be, we question what pieces make this space portray the soul of the company. I come at the projects from a totally new perspective, the idea you have a so-called office-designer to design your office means you will only be working in the confines of their limited imagination, and almost always they have no imagination! Interior designers are over, it needs different people like artists to approach spaces from a completely different point of view. We work across music, art, museums, interiors, and technology to name a few, people come to us because they are strangled by marketing bullshit with figures and spreadsheets, they need real concept and passion. I wanted to celebrate money and finance and this strange world of investments, investments are risks and take bravery and passion so the building we made echoes this.

Over the years we have been working with Mika, we came up with the whole identity for him which he uses on everything, we produce all of his pieces for his stage shows and TV shows such as the wardrobe, revolving doors, oversized toilet and cakes, as well as his clothes along with Valentino using our iconography to make these icons be instantly recognizable as Mika. They guys in our atelier love working on these pieces as they are really bold and fun ideas, it gives a nice change from the highly detailed bronze sculptures.

Notes to editors:

Studio Job Biography

Job Smeets, a pioneer of contemporary conceptual and sculptural art and design founded Studio Job in 1998 in the renaissance spirit, combining traditional and modern techniques to produce once-in-a-lifetime objects. Joined in 2000 by graphic designer Nynke Tynagel the duo went on to work with a vast range of high profile clients and collectors.

In the ateliers, traditional and modern techniques are combined to produce once-in-a-lifetime

objects. A vast range of crafts are practiced at Studio Job, where traditional craftsmen such as sculptors and specialists in casting bronze and making stained-glass windows work alongside experts adept in using lasers and 3D printing. Based in both Belgium and the Netherlands, Job Smeets leads as art director with Nynke Tynagel as graphic designer. Technique, science and ornamental designs come together in their work as examples of what can be described as Gesamtkunstwerk - a total art work or an all embracing art form.

Studio Job are pioneers of contemporary conceptual and sculptural design. The results range from unique bronze artwork in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, to a royal stamp featuring the Dutch King (forty million pieces produced) from the unique life-size bronze sculptures on Miami Beach, to the one-off Wunderkammer curiosity cabinet that Studio Job produced for Swarovski in Innsbruck.

All Studio Job projects are distinguished by a love of detail, freedom of expression and blend of 2D and 3D. With more than 400 exhibitions, including solo shows, around the world Studio Job's work can be found in many important museum collections. Their iconic, heraldic and cartoon-like sculptures are popular with collectors world-wide. Proclaimed one of the most influential design teams by the Financial Times, Studio Job are passionate about building up an oeuvre that is becoming increasingly extravagant in its details and increasingly personal.

Studio Job work across many areas including art, design, fashion, architecture and interiors having worked with a vast range of high profile clients including sculptures for Swarovski, Barneys and Land Rover, and product collections for many brands such as Alessi, Moooi and Pepsi to name a few. In 2017 Studio Job teamed up with Italian manufacturer Seletti to form the joint brand BLOW producing products in their pop spirit with a radical twist.

Studio Job are consistently ranked as one of the world's most influential players within design and art. Their highly collectable work creates a bridge between object and product by merging monumental design and graphic artwork.