

On 13 April 2013, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam reopened after a renovation process that had lasted more than a decade. The building, which originally dates from 1885, was designed by architect P.J.H. Cuypers (1827-1921). In the space of over a century, the building underwent numerous major and minor renovations, prompted by lack of space, growing visitor numbers and changing ideas about museum design. The end result of all those renovations was a labyrinth that was no longer able to fulfill its role as a national museum for the public. The recent adaptation had a very ambitious aim which, translated to the building meant the most radical approach: modernization instead of preservation or improvement.<sup>1</sup> This was combined with ambitions regarding the building's status as an embodiment of national identity and a cornerstone of cultural infrastructure. Accordingly, the renovation turned into a prestigious, national project, with international allure. In 1999 the project received a major boost in the form of the Kok government's 'millennium gift' to the Dutch population. The gift was intended as a financial catalyst to prepare the Rijksmuseum for the new millennium for, as the prime minister put it, 'the Netherlands has many museums of international standing, but there is only one Rijksmuseum'.<sup>2</sup> One year later, in 2000, the new Rijksmuseum was one of the nine 'Major Projects' listed in the *Ontwerpen aan Nederland* (Designing the Netherlands) memorandum. The main aim of this architectural memorandum was 'to strengthen the contribution of the design disciplines to spatial and architectural tasks by means of "customized" government participation in concrete projects'.<sup>3</sup>

Within this ambitious context, the design task for the new Rijksmuseum spanned many different scales and domains. First of all there was an urban design task: to improve the building's relation with the city and in particular Museumplein. This also encompassed a solution for the entrance and the design of the underpass that cuts the museum in half over two floors. The second task concerned the restoration of Cuypers' monument, including reinstating the lucid structure and deciding how the decorations might be brought back in the interior. Then there was the task of modernizing the museum and making it suitable for large numbers of visitors. This involved the routing, public facilities, security and the internal climate. The challenge for the new Rijksmuseum was to strike a balance between the sometimes conflicting interests of city, monument, museum, collection and public. This was reflected in the mottos devised during the course of the project, such as 'Onwards to Cuypers', 'Continue with Cuypers' and 'Back to Cuypers'.

This book focuses on the planning process for the new Rijksmuseum, with special attention for the evolution of the design and the associated history of ideas. What became of the objectives in the architectural memorandum? How did opinions on the intervention evolve from the concept for a master plan in 1996 to the realized project? To what extent were all those diverse ambitions regarding the city, the monument and the museum realized? What was the role of the designers? How did the design evolve in a complex and ambitious context involving a great many interested parties, and what effect did this have on the design process from the first sketches to the ultimately realized renovation? Curiosity about the answers to these questions was the motivation for this book. This study is based chiefly on

the primary sources behind all the visions, the plans and the execution. Interviews were also conducted with many of the architects, advisers and experts involved. Yet completeness was an unattainable goal and we consequently had to make choices and be selective. One important choice, for example, was to focus on the main building of the vast Rijksmuseum complex.

The book opens with a consideration of Cuypers' creation and his ideas for the building and the surroundings. An overview of the history of the museum's use and its subsequent construction history reveals the urgency of the intervention, as articulated in the Masterplan Ruijsenaars Rijksmuseum of 1996.<sup>4</sup> The description of the evolution of the executed design for the intervention and restoration follows the design process from four perspectives: intervention, restoration, interior and surroundings. Several design firms were involved in these operations, Spanish architects Cruz y Ortiz arquitectos, Van Hoogevest Architecten, the French firm of Wilmotte & Associés, and Copijn Tuin- en Landschapsarchitecten. In its totality, the new Rijksmuseum is the result of all their efforts and comprises every level of scale, ranging from the city, the infrastructure, the garden and the civil engineering works in and around the building, to the finer details of finishing and furnishing. How did the ambition of the Major Projects relate to the varied interests and spatial dimensions of the task? What was the outcome, including in light of international projects and developments?

One example of the dilemmas and contradictions that arose during the design process, concerned the task of ensuring the optimal conservation and presentation of the exhibited objects. This led to technical interventions in terms of the architecture, structural engineering and above all building physics, which were very difficult to reconcile with the desire to preserve and restore the monument. On the other hand, the preservation of intrinsic and highly valued elements of the original architecture clashed with the museum's most important task, the display and conservation of the collection. Cuypers' design, referred to in this book as the Cuypers concept, included a carefully modulated daylight penetration in all the rooms in the building. The Rijksmuseum was originally a daylight museum with a very deliberate choreography of light and dark. The interplay of top lighting and side lighting provided the interior with the necessary illumination, and from the windows it was possible to get one's bearings in every direction around the building. But in the twenty-first century it is sufficiently well known that direct daylight is harmful for museum collections. Did this mean that the restoration of the Cuypers concept, an important component of the renovation and restoration plan, was irretrievably at odds with what were regarded as the indispensable wishes and requirements of the custodian of this important collection?

Another aspect of the renovation, and of the Cuypers concept, was the reinstatement of the spatial structure of the original design, in particular the reopening of the filled-in courtyards. The removal of non-presentational functions, such as offices, studios and storage spaces, made more room for gallery exhibitions. At the same time it was necessary to improve the entrance, together with the associated public functions, and to raise it to a level appropriate to the present day. The architects' desire to move the entrance to the underpass was difficult to reconcile with the passageway and the original spatial concept of the building as a gateway building that was literally and figuratively designed as a linking axis between the city centre and Amsterdam-Zuid.

The new Rijksmuseum also acquired a new museological presentation. In the old Rijksmuseum, five sub-museums effectively told their own story. The current presentation is an integrated display of Dutch national history and visual and

applied arts that sets the Rijksmuseum apart from other national museums around the world. The interior design by Wilmotte added an extra layer to the building, which had to relate both to the monument and to the contemporary intervention by Cruz y Ortiz.

The complexity that arose at the level of the design had a lot to do with the manner of commissioning, organization and direction, which was realistically portrayed in Oeke Hoogendijk's four-part documentary, *Het Nieuwe Rijksmuseum* (The New Rijksmuseum), broadcast by NTR in 2013. The results and the successes, as well as the conflicts, the delays, the setbacks *and* the emotions associated with the protracted process cannot have escaped anyone's attention. This book is not about that process of organizing and directing the project as a whole, but about the realized design and the work that went into shaping it. Organization and direction constituted the internal project context within which the design and the built result came about. In addition, the architects and contractors had to deal with an external project context consisting of numerous social and administrative factors, committees, advisory boards and individuals. Both the internal and the external project context had a varying impact on the results and thus became part of the design process.