

# public + building.

a design approach for the new Flemish Museum of Modern Art Antwerp  
( Vlaams museum hedendaagse kunst Antwerp **VMHK** )  
formally known as **M HKA**

**[positioning and proposal.]**

The Flemish Museum of Contemporary Art (M HKA) is an institution strongly rooted in the existing fabric and socio-political framework of Antwerp South. The museum is located on the outskirts of the city, which has undergone consistent urban development and urban planning as the city grew into one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in Europe. In this development, the Antwerp Museum of Contemporary Art gradually sought to evolve with society and make way for a larger institutional purpose that pushed the museum agenda towards a more formal and generic interpretation of art spaces and how they are interpreted in light of the current zeitgeist.

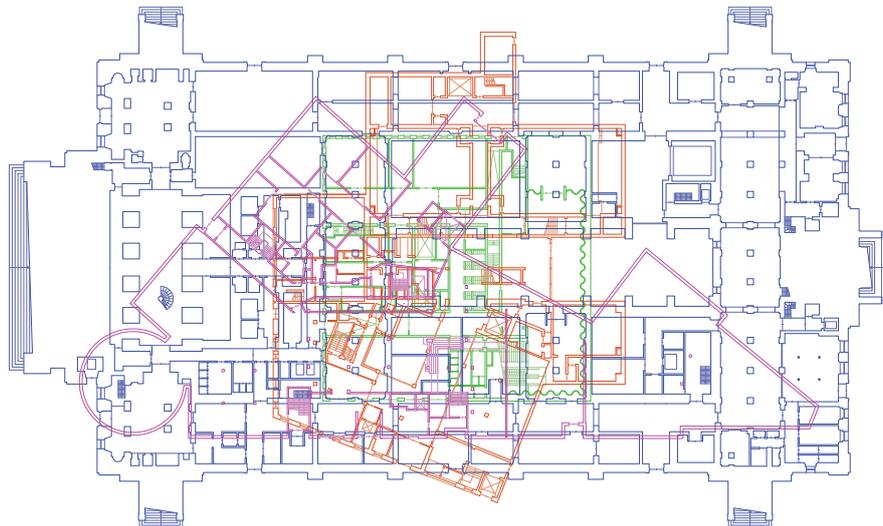
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In my final project, I revisit the meaning of art presentation in relation to cultural building by reconnecting with MKHA's historic approach of capturing the essence of conserving and presenting contemporary art, an identity and genesis of an institution that has curated its growing collection between less conventional building layout and architectural fabric.

My design proposal is based on the sustainable idea and design language of reusing existing building tissue, specifically the former courthouse building which is assigned for the new developments of the M HKA or at the time entitled: Vlaams Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst (VMHK). A building typology that exists of two prefabricated office towers that are connected by a low-rise structural addition and entrance.

Here, the practice of preserving and exhibiting art in an anti-museum condition becomes relevant again through the presence of existing structure and building layout, which, in resemblance to the former MHKA building, reinforces this familiar identity in which exhibiting art bears the title 'symbiosis between' anti-museum condition and institutional purpose.

**[the relation between your graduation topic, your master track and master program.]**

The studio describes its brief as "An Architecture for Art" where it resonates directly with architectural practice (museum building) and research and subject matter (art and exhibition). Within the Interiors Buildings and Cities chair, this is translated into the focus where the name already suggests its resonance with the three different scales of building autonomy and how these scales relate to each other. This layered focus helps to define and touch upon different segments of the design proposal, which becomes important within the specific large-scale project to which this year's graduation project is subject, a public building design for a contemporary art museum in Antwerp.



Scale 1:750

Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen  
Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen  
Fotomuseum Antwerpen  
Museum aan de Stroom Antwerpen

[Fig.] Compariment of spatial features, M HKA, KMSKA, FOMU & MAS. Antwerp

**[the relationship between the graduation project and the wider, social professional and scientific framework.]**

The ambition of my project is to investigate how a partially existing structure can be given a new purpose through public use and a museum programme. In doing so, the project articulates itself primarily in a rather technical elaboration of fusing new construction onto existing building texture, but it is equally important what characterizes the building, how this relates to the neighboring context and the social relevance of a public building and its environment t' Zuid.

A public architecture deeply embodies a social character, intrinsically designed for and by people. These individual users are part of the larger museum community made up of individuals like, staff, researchers, professionals, neighbors and recreationists who relate in some form to the context highlighted within the museum framework.

The forum space currently relates to the means and aspect of the architectural intervention that outlines the public character of the museum, where the design must equally consider the very public purpose of this type of building, attempting to transcend the building design from an introverted character to a more inviting extroverted nature. To promote meaningful interaction with the public and the neighborhood, particularly the emerging and vibrant cultural space of Antwerp South. The goal of the project in this becomes to not only facilitate a museum, but with its development to generate an active public environment that accommodates the various interests and activities pursued by its direct and indirect audience. Consequently, the design questions the formal public museum by ensuring its anti-museum constitution. (origins)



[Fig] Groundfloor forum space - final render

## [research and design process.]

Our graduate studio was interrogated by six individual assignments, each of which was a focal point for different research and design aspects. The framework for our research was initially the first assignment, formulated in a series of reading responses alongside a technical and practical precedent study of several contemporary museums and their gallery spaces. As for the precedent study, I was tasked with recreating a gallery space located in the iconic contemporary museum Centre Pompidou by Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers and consorts. This exercise gave immediate insight into the very practical and technical qualities of an exhibition space that was strongly rooted in the idea of anti-museum. Whereas exhibition spaces were normally very stylized spaces that ironed out all the technologies as much as possible out of sight. The Centre Pompidou is precisely an over-stimulation of all that the contemporary museum must deal with in terms of art conservation.

As part of the second brief, we as a studio investigated ensemble projects related to the M HKA's extensive collection, researching the various artworks and artists that make up the M HKA's extensive contemporary art collection. This exercise became particularly valuable because it provided an in-depth understanding of the artworks and how these works relate to different architectural contexts.

Regarding the third brief, our focus was on building up our individual research and design position while dealing with the content of the actual design competition for the extension of M HKA to the Walse Kaai, Antwerp. Here we were confronted with the list of requirements for the future institution of M HKA. These kinds of documents are usually drawn up by people who are not directly concerned with the actual architectural qualities of spaces, but rather with the quantitative qualities of what an institution of this size should represent. With relatively little to no knowledge and experience of the issues involved in constructing a design proposal for this scale and type of competition, it became clear to me during the work sessions that it is very important for the architect to adopt a critical attitude.

Not only to look at the importance of developing the required square metres, but also to question these square metres and spatial requirements from the point of view of a specialist. Indeed, the scale of this building quickly showed what the impact could be in an area where there are mainly residential properties. To situate a public building like this on the site, I initially started looking at what precisely could be removed from the prescribed programme of requirements rather than simply adding required volumes that were essentially provided to be developed.

Departing from the P2, it became essential to specify the M HKA Institute as one that was strongly connected to local architectural tissue, and to understand its history as one that confronted their art works and gallery spaces with the existing building structure, firmly establishing the anti-museum stance they were known for. Over time, it seemed that the institutional ambition began to displace this historical narrative by becoming more generically specified by expanding their heritage towards a more common and sterile interpretation of gallery as a white cube. Mainly because of this attitude, I found it extremely interesting and relevant to once again entangle with this form of building typology, specifically since there was still a working structure presence on the situated site. I developed the position of rethinking the existing building structure as a core catalyst for further design development. This led me to work in and around a building structure that was more indicative of the decisions to be made, rather than building a perfectly defined set of floor plans, ceiling heights and exaggerated programming, the existing structures worked as a guide to possibilities rather than the project becoming an undefined form of possibilities that would have become more relevant with a completely new built design.

My attitude within this design process is reflected in the research and work I have been able to do during the last several months, particularly my interest in different building processes and how design mediates between old and new had become a large form of inspiration. Determining a character that fits this type of building construction and how this 'masking' ensures that the museum still operates within the architectural requirements of this time. In doing so, I turned to several reference scales that could help inform my approach and understanding of the museum, from a very perceptive point of view to a very practical way of building the project. This led me to study ways of visiting the site, reading and documenting publications, reviewing existing examples that addressed the same issues as directly implementing strategies and design proposals that would clarify the useful components that would make up this project.

### [towards P5.]

The past period has been dedication to defining the ideas and design exercises gained so far. During this period, I have mainly focused on the different aspects of the project regarding material, appearance and programme in order to come up with a single aggregated story that reveals the precise consequences of the interventions developed for this type of building adjustment and adding. In addition, this will also lead to the processing of the final feedback that was initially discussed during P4.

In doing so, this period included the final part of the studio that focussed on the production of the interior and precise models representing facade interpretation and overall image of the interior spaces and layout.

The coming period is all about defining the ideas and design exercises done so far. During this time, I will combine the various aspects of the project into a single narrative that will reveal the precise consequences of interventions that were developed for this type of building. In addition, this will also lead to incorporating the final feedback that will initially be discussed during P4.

In doing so, this period also includes the final part of the studio which will focus on the production of a physical model representing one of the exhibition spaces. In similarity to the ensembles study, I therefore hope to create a well-represented image of the interior character of my building.



[Fig] Image models 1.200, Existing Court of appeal, Exterior & section