

Graduation Reflection  
P4 Roosenberg

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Roosenberg graduation studio  
Chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities

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## roosenberg //

The Marian Sisters of St.-Francis have only recently left their former home in Waasmunster; the abbey of Roosenberg. Built in 1975 and designed by the Benedictine monk and Bossche School protagonist Dom Hans van der Laan, Roosenberg is the incarnation of Van der Laan's architectural philosophy. Van der Laan's unique methodology, combining his rational system of the Plastic number with ideas about the perception of space and sizes is demonstrated beautifully in the inspiring architecture of Roosenberg. As no other building, Roosenberg in itself embodies a manifesto for Van der Laan's quest for fundamental architectural rules.

With the last nuns having left the convent only a year ago, the unique Bossche School abbey is bought by the catholic university of Louvain. The university wishes to realise a centre for education and congresses for culture, arts and architecture related studies. This new function requires an addition to the existing structures, as well as possible adjustments to the work of Van der Laan.

The design assignment therefore entails the realisation of a university campus that includes the existing abbey by Van der Laan as well as a new architectural addition on the site. The two parts should form a coherent architectural ensemble, respecting both the site and the landscape as the heritage of Van der Laan.

The main research question of the design project is as follows:

Which design intervention is suitable for the transformation of the Abbey of Roosenberg into a university centre for arts, culture and architecture, whilst respecting the unique qualities of the site and the building by Dom Hans van der Laan?

Reflecting on the process of finding an answer to this question, several aspects are now to be considered. Starting with the relationship between design and research.

## design vs. research //

The research methods used during the design process so far, entail the theoretical research done during the course Studio Specific Research by Irene Cieraad, the research of the general course on Research Methodology and the architectural research of the studio. My theoretical research has focused on several subjects, from the typology of courtyards to the different ways to achieve contemplative architecture. The

studio related research was focused on analysing the work of Van der Laan and making spatial design solutions on different scales.

Especially reading the very thorough analysis of Caroline Voet in her book 'A House for the Mind', which is completely focussed on Van der Laan's theories in relation to the Roosenberg abbey, was extremely helpful to understand both the building and its philosophy. The current plans and themes of the design are in great extent based on Voet's findings. Taking aspects of Van der Laan's architecture to create a fitting homage to the Bossche School and Roosenberg in particular.

Besides analysing the theoretical aspects of the Bossche School, I also studied the plans and facades of different Bossche School projects. The Tomelilla and Vaals abbeys by Van der Laan, Van der Laan's own house in Vught and Jan de Jong's house in Schaijk were the most useful inspirations. I visited Jan de Jong's huis to experience Van der Laan's theories in real life and was impressed by the staged entrance sequence and the way the garden and house work together to create a unique architectural experience. Roosenberg and Jan de Jong's house both possess the themes I eventually adapted in my own project; the gradual unravelling of the building and site, the superposition of spaces and the plastic number.

Since Van der Laan's theories are formulated very exhaustively, I took the opportunity to investigate the role of objectification in architecture during the general Research Methodology course. Comparing Van der Laan's theory with renaissance rational systems and Le Corbusier's measurement system Le Modulor, I tried to find out whether intuition kept a major role. The outcome of this research, finding out that also Van der Laan would in the end trust in a big extend on his intuition, sometimes only using his theories afterwards to objectify the subjective, gave me more knowledge on how to use his theories in my own project. Using it as a guideline instead of an exhaustive method.

the theme //

The theme of the graduation studio is defined by the site; the abbey of Van der Laan. Relating to the style of the Bossche School, the themes part of its philosophy depict a general theme for the project as a whole. It is simply unavoidable to relate to the architectural legacy of Van der Laan whilst building next to it.

Being from 's-Hertogenbosch, having spent my high school time in a Bossche School building, I'm very familiar with the

style and atmosphere of Bossche School buildings. My admiration for this heavy, sincere and sometimes monumental style was one of the reasons I chose this graduation studio.

My project refers to the Roosenberg abbey in different ways. The gradual entering via the heart of the building is comparable to that of Van der Laan's Roosenberg or Jan de Jong's house. The contrast in the use of natural light between the actual functional space and the intermediate spaces are reversed. Every useable space in the project's new wings is super positioned by the antecedent space, just like in Roosenberg.

Aesthetically the use of material is very much based on the tradition of the Bossche School, the interiors are similarly materialised, the exteriors are a naked version of Van der Laan's original. The composition of the facades is related to the Vaals abbey in Marmelis, which also possesses a peculiar combination of colonnades and closed volumes with incidental windows.

Based on my admiration for this specific style, I tried to design a contemporary building that is clearly related to the Bossche School and the work of Van der Laan and Jan de Jong in particular.

#### methodology //

The chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities is, within the faculty, known for its method of designing through making. Model making on different scales allow for a very thorough and detailed outcome of the project. Until I started this studio, I hardly ever made models, and I must admit I still only made models for presentations purposes during my graduation. I worked mainly through designing in digital models, as this allows for quick changes and many try outs.

Another methodological theme of the chair is to design from inside out. Interiors, buildings, cities is not without reason put in this order. I very much tried to work from this principle, but in the end I rather designed on the levels simultaneously. Especially on this matter, I think I learned a lot from my tutors, who always took me back to the interior and the experience of the user when I could have lost track of it and was mainly focussed on aesthetics of the facades.

I've been working at Wiel Arets for 2 years now, and the methods used in the office are very different from those used by the chair of Interior. I've therefore been very happy to experience the way of working at the chair, learning a lot about interior based design and the chair's particular aesthetic.

## social context //

Whereas the abbey used to be reserved for a very small amount of people and some occasional guests, it will now become a much more public building. Congress visitors and university students will bring an entirely different atmosphere than a small group of sisters. Programme wise I've tried to be aware of this difference, spreading functions according to their appropriate atmosphere.

The KU Leuven's appreciation of the building and site as heritage that should be preserved and opened to the public, on the one hand preserves Van der Laan's legacy and architectural philosophy for future generations, but at the same time threatens its fragile stillness and contemplative atmosphere. I personally believe the abbey can deal with this change in function without losing its power, as its architecture so strongly depicts a certain atmosphere. In this perspective I think the particular heritage of the Bossche School is helped by the redevelopment, and a project like this assignment could make sure the legacy of Van der Laan will not be forgotten.