

The renovation of the Rijksmuseum was about more than adapting an outmoded museum to the demands of the time. On 19 September 2000, State Secretary for Culture Rick van der Ploeg wrote to the Chairman of the House of Parliament and the director of the Rijksmuseum that the government had decided on a total makeover of the museum. This meant that the main building would have to be completely emptied for the first time since it opened. This in turn provided an opportunity to clear out the museum, which over time had become a veritable maze, and to give the monument its old grandeur together with a fresh new look. The Kok government's millennium gift provided the financial boost that made this prestigious national project possible.

In 2000 the museum was designated an exemplary project in the government's architecture memorandum, *Ontwerpen aan Nederland* (Designing the Netherlands). It was one of nine 'Major Projects' designed to showcase and propagate architectural policy ambitions aimed at raising 'the cultural dimension and overall design quality'.¹ The list of Major Projects was quite a mixed bag, in which the Rijksmuseum stood side by side with the route design of state highways, the construction of the Zuiderzee train line, the reconstruction of agrarian landscapes on sandy ground and encouragement of owner-built housing. The memorandum argued that design quality could be improved by bringing designers into the process at an early stage and through their sketches help to clarify both the task and the solution strategy. The idea was that the parties involved, with their often conflicting interests and positions, could be brought together behind an integrated vision of the future. In other words, the designer was being presented as mediator and coalition builder, with the design functioning as the basis for the formulation of fundamental principles. It was thought that inspiring and appealing designs might benefit and speed up the planning and construction process. With its Major Projects, the government as client was also keen to set a good example for 'Dutch builders and designers' in the pursuit 'of optimal design quality and exemplary collaboration between interested parties'. Given the project's intrinsic challenge and huge prestige, the Rijksmuseum fit perfectly with the ambition to promote the design of the Netherlands. The design task extended over several domains, from city to detail, so that to arrive at an integrated solution it was necessary to work across the spatial levels of scale and participating disciplines. The desire to promote design quality by way of good commissioning practice was equally challenging, given that there were three commissioners: Stichting Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (Foundation Rijksmuseum Amsterdam), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency; Rgd) – at the time part of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

The Rijksmuseum project brought the worlds of heritage preservation and modern architecture together and perhaps they could learn from one another:

How can the important cultural-historical values be rediscovered and preserved and how can the building be simultaneously turned into a contemporary museum? . . . The modernizing aspect may lie in the way back:

Conclusion

From 'Major Project' to Small Projects

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the desire to reintroduce Cuypers and his decoration into the building and to reverse most of the later changes (based on building archaeological research).²

Commissioning

This book focuses on the design history of the Rijksmuseum, a tale of concepts, designs, debate, plan evaluation and decisions throughout the design process and preparations for the implementation. For the production of this book we spoke with dozens of the hundreds of people involved in the new Rijksmuseum – a sizeable, but arbitrary sampling. In almost every interview the complex and often difficult course of events came up. Oeke Hoogendijk's famous documentary series is eloquent on this point.³ Yet, every interview we conducted ended in satisfaction with the result. Wytze Patijn summed it up with a comment often heard in the construction industry: 'A wretched process with a good outcome.'⁴ That is striking. Does this almost euphoric reaction to the end result stem from relief that the project actually reached a conclusion? Have the successful reopening, the positive media coverage and the gratifying visitor numbers led to a closing of the ranks and allowed all those involved to feel like co-authors of this success? Or is the new Rijksmuseum a fine example of the 'Polder model', where each party can ultimately take pride in what it has managed to pull out of the fire for itself? There are many examples of positive Small Projects in the Rijksmuseum. For example, Cuypers' decorations were reinstated, the cycle path was saved, the garden was modernized, the collection acquired a contemporary setting and architecture and restoration achieved a high-quality finish.

The project started out with high ambitions:

By participating in concrete processes, the national government will also attempt to improve the organization of the construction and design processes.

The question of who does what (in other words, the issue of decision-making) is perhaps the most important. It must become clear who the 'problem owner' is; generally this will be the commissioner.⁵

In the stubborn reality of the project it was not easy to live up to these ambitions. This was chiefly due to the complexity of the task, but also to the fact that there were three commissioners of equal standing and sometimes contradictory interests. In 2006 there was a change in the management of the Rijksmuseum project. The Rgd took on the role of commissioner for the renovation and in turn worked for the Rijksmuseum and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.⁶

The search for a division of roles between the state and the increasingly independently operating government departments and state museums was very topical around the turn of the millennium. For the Rgd this meant assuming the role of a commercial landlord who rented state-owned property to the government. The Rijksmuseum for its part felt that it was just as much the 'owner' of the museum building, which was after all intimately interrelated with the collection. From the museum's perspective, the Rgd was dominating the renovation. The museum directors were determined to set their stamp on the renovation as well. For example, during the design process in 2004, the Rijksmuseum decided, virtually of its own accord, to engage an interior architect whose design undermined the integrated plan of the chief architect. The light-coloured museum galleries conceived by Cruz y Ortiz arquitectos made way for the colour scheme of Wilmotte & Associés. The Spanish architects were understandably upset, but this did little to change the situation. To avoid having constantly to disrupt and hold up the construction

process, once the shell was completed the Rgd introduced a period during which the Rijksmuseum could carry out various minor and major adjustments along with the rest of the fitting out. Prompted by a desire to keep the construction process manageable, this resulted in changes to work that had in some instances just been completed. Not only were parts of Cruz y Ortiz's design modified, but even certain hard-fought restoration decisions were overturned. The Aduard Chapel disappeared behind a 'box-in-a-box construction' and carefully restored vaulting and exposed construction traces in the basement were whitewashed. As consolation for the heritage authorities, all these changes are reversible, but the compromise about how to deal with Cuypers' legacy in the interior, in which the Rijksmuseum, too, had long taken part, gradually disappeared.

In 2002, at the time of the Preliminary Design (PD), it was assumed that the renovation would take three years, with the museum reopening in 2008. Instead the museum was closed for almost ten years, reopening in 2013. The causes for the delay include an underestimation of the complexity of the intervention (such as the extensive and complicated below-grade works), interests and organization, the issue of the entrance in the passageway and the failed tendering of the main building. The design pushed the boundaries of what was possible, both in the physical foundations and in the many preconditions. With a certain optimism people no doubt thought that the original planning should be attainable, but every setback immediately resulted in delay.

One consequence of the long lead time was that the creation of the new Rijksmuseum exceeded the average shelf life of the administrators and directors. During the life of the project the country was run by a succession of seven governments.⁷ Including the preparatory phase (Ruijsenaars' 1996 plan), the Rijksmuseum had three directors who devoted themselves to the renovation: Henk van Os, Ronald de Leeuw and Wim Pijbes.⁸ Five Chief Government Architects and three programme directors were involved in the actual renovation of the Rijksmuseum.⁹ Which all goes to show how difficult it was to sustain the ambitions of the design and the collaboration of all the parties involved.

Apart from time, money and collaboration, the quality of the design process can also be expressed in terms of support for the decision-making. In 2000, State Secretary Van der Ploeg emphasized the importance of the public debate about the significance and purpose of the Rijksmuseum:

The new Rijksmuseum will set many tongues wagging. About the role of history, about the role of the cyclist in the passageway, about the integrity of the monument. I expect the Rijksmuseum to play an active role in this social debate.¹⁰

Accordingly, a round table discussion was organized and a number of writers and filmmakers were invited to write an essay giving their personal view of the Rijksmuseum.¹¹ In addition, an international reconnaissance of European museums was organized (chiefly among decision-makers and politicians). A social debate certainly took place, but not exactly as envisaged. To what extent the essays influenced the design is impossible to say, except that there is no reference to them in the design explanations.

Design Quality

As already mentioned, a central theme of the Major Projects of 2000 was the ambition to improve design quality and to deploy the design early on in the planning process in order, among other things, to help to define the task more

precisely. This meant that during the selection of the architects in 2001, the chief architect and restoration architect were given a lot of freedom in the formulation of a concept. The implicit expectation was that all parties would rally behind the winning design and that the basic principles would emerge in part from the design instead of vice versa. This approach, which had proved successful for infrastructural works like the southern high-speed train line, turned out not to work so well in the case of the Rijksmuseum. There were several reasons for this. To begin with, the division of roles between the chief architect and restoration architect had not been clearly defined beforehand and their ideas about the building and the restoration diverged. A second point was the handling of the basic principles and the evaluation framework for the heritage permit, which could not be inferred from the design concept. The same applied to the urban design preconditions. Finally, the chief architect was chosen mainly for his plan for the entrance, but at the time it was not at all clear what should happen with crucial tasks such as the historical interior, the gardens, the connection with the city or the technical implementation. This was not the fault of the architects since they had been asked to present a concept and an attractive perspective, not a fully worked out design. But the integrated concept design was lacking at the moment when the chief architect was given responsibility not only for the architectural design but also for the restoration plan, the garden layout and the museum interior.

Chief Architect versus Restoration Architect

The collaboration between the chief architect and the restoration architect was in the case of the Rijksmuseum an arranged marriage. This formula had been used before by the Rgd and dated from the time when new construction and restoration were separate activities and architects specialized in one or the other métier. In recent decades, however, the domain of restoration has increasingly been subsumed in architecture and vice versa. Interventions in heritage buildings are less and less about creating a contrast between old and new than about achieving a symbiosis. The restoration plan and the architectural plan coincide; at most, specific know-how relating to the restoration process and technology is obtained from restoration specialists who are part of the team of architects.

In the case of the Rijksmuseum, especially in light of the choice of a foreign chief architect, experience from Dutch construction and restoration practice was essential in order to be able to tackle the task and the implementation. For the Spanish architects, however, this was a completely new way of doing things. There was a split commission with a division of tasks and responsibilities but the demarcation had not been worked out in detail and in addition there was an overlap in the task as presented to the chief architect and restoration architect at the time of the invited competition. Communication was difficult. Up to and including the PD, Cruz y Ortiz and Van Hoogevest Architecten worked alongside one another, each with their own restoration plan. There were no major differences as far as the exterior was concerned, but their ideas regarding the interior and how to deal with the decorative schemes inside Cuypers' building differed widely. In this respect the chief architect's restoration ideas did not correspond to those of the restoration architect and the heritage authorities. In this instance, however, delays in the process had a favourable effect. Extra time allowed for extra research, such as the historical colour research carried out by Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (Foundation Restoration Studio Limburg; SRAL). Thanks to SRAL's work, which was conducted as an educational project involving a variety of students, Cuypers' colours were brought to light once more and compromises could be found for

the approach to the interior. It also served to highlight the interior characteristics of Cuypers' building. Another positive consequence of the delay was that a productive division of work between the chief architect and the restoration architect eventually emerged, which allowed the façades and the courtyards in particular to be preserved and restored with great precision.

Heritage Authorities

In the architecture memorandum of 2000 and in the invitation to the restoration architects it was stated that archaeological building research would be carried out in the preliminary phase and that further consultation was necessary with the City of Amsterdam. Neither of these things had taken place, however, when the architect selection took place in 2001. At this early stage, therefore, it was unclear what the new Rijksmuseum could expect in the sphere of heritage preservation and urban design. Archaeological building research works towards an evaluation in which the heritage values are spelled out and this provides a basis for design decisions and for developing an assessment framework for the granting of a heritage permit. Generally speaking, insight into the historical building and its unique qualities develops in part during the course of the work, when the building has been dismantled and revealed its secrets. This means that a design and restoration plan needs to be flexible enough to allow it to be refined and modified along the way. Both Chief Government Architect Coenen and Cruz y Ortiz indicated repeatedly that they did not think such building archaeological research was necessary. In their view Cuypers had already been sufficiently researched.

The design was completed before any verdict had been given on the building's specific heritage qualities. Cruz y Ortiz proposed a restoration of the spatial organization of the building, but in a modernist manner whereby the historical interiors – from the museum galleries up to and including the courtyards – would make way for light interiors. This way of thinking was out of step with common heritage practice in the Netherlands, which is to cherish the history of a heritage building, by retaining historical fragments and traces, for example, and where possible making them visible. The project organization established a Heritage Forum made up of architects and heritage experts, tasked with advising on how to deal with elements that emerged in the course of the dismantling and renovation work. Not that there was much room to manoeuvre any more. In the principles drawn up for the renovation it had already been established that historical layers added post-Cuypers (up to 2000) would be removed altogether. For the restoration a compromise was reached whereby Cuypers' decorations would be retained and above all reconstructed in a number of spaces and that all other building traces and fragments would be covered up or removed. At the insistence of the heritage authorities and private organizations, the archaeological building research was eventually carried out at a late stage, in accordance with an experimental approach of the Rgd. Although there was no longer any chance of basing the design on the results of the investigation, this did give the review bodies a frame of reference with which to assess the design. The research was primarily encyclopaedic and descriptive. The results provided useful information for the implementation at the level of the detail. The crucial design decisions had already been made, however, before the research began. The heritage authority's task was consequently limited to reviewing and researching. There was no possibility of playing a strategic role in the process as advocated in the *Nota Belvedere* (Belvedere Memorandum) and later in the 'Beleidsbrief Modernisering Monumentenzorg' (Heritage protection policy paper on modernization, 2009).¹²

Urban Design

Prior to the architect selection, the city council's position was that the passageway should be turned into a public space as an extension of Museumplein and the entrance to the museum.¹³ By choosing Cruz y Ortiz's design, the selection committee was taking a bit of a risk, because placing the entrance in the passageway implied that the public space beneath the building had been more or less annexed by the museum. But this public space – complete with barrel organ and street musicians – did have significance in the collective memory of the city.¹⁴ In the elaboration of the PD, it was suggested that the passageway be closed off with glass revolving doors and glass walls. Only the cycle path along the side would remain open and publicly accessible. This decision was motivated by the need to introduce a climate separation between inside and outside, but it was certainly not the intention to execute the ramps to the entrance zone as glass 'bus shelters'. There was little choice other than to incorporate the passageway into the interior. However, the retention of the cycle path resulted in an unsightly long glass wall, which is why Chief Government Architect Coenen and others argued in favour of removing the cycle path and installing glass doors in all the gateways. This idea had previously been put forward by Wim Quist, and Hans Ruijsenaars had also incorporated the passage into his 1996 master plan in the form of an urban foyer (and event venue). The conflict over the passageway ultimately led not only to the retention of the cycle route beneath the museum, but more especially to the retention of the passageway as public space in the city. Despite years of irritation with the museum's abysmal entrances, the design was unable to change the urban design significance of the gateway and the passageway. The solution was found in locating the entrance at the side of the passageway and incorporating the climate separation – quite logically – into the windows between the courtyards and the passageway. Cuypers would have endorsed this solution.

Interior

Whereas the dispute about the passageway was widely covered in de media, the interior design led to a discussion that was primarily conducted internally, among designers, commissioners and plan evaluators. From the heritage authority's perspective, this discussion was about the decorations, building traces and building elements, like the brickwork vaulting ('Back to Cuypers'). For the museum the dilemma was a presentation of the twenty-first century ('Continue with Cuypers'), with Cruz y Ortiz's ideas in the main building being exchanged for Wilmotte's vision. Museum director De Leeuw sought where possible for harmony between building and collection, for example by presenting nineteenth-century art on the eastern part of the ground floor where Cuypers' original painted decoration could also have been displayed. He eventually relinquished this idea out of practical considerations: by keeping the interior and the display separate, the museum would be able to use the space more flexibly. Under his successor Pijbes the guiding principle of a chronological (serpentine model) presentation was abandoned and replaced by an elective model because it was considered unlikely that visitors would look at the entire collection in chronological order.

The realized interior does not provide the total concept of the earliest plans, but a collage of signatures: Cuypers, Cruz y Ortiz and Wilmotte. But thanks to the design by Cruz y Ortiz it has become 'unity in diversity'. The museum did not get the serenity desired by the Spanish architects, but it gained space for a dynamic presentation, reinforced by the ubiquitous visitors who have a substantial influence on the contemplation of art nowadays. It is to be expected that the lifecycle of

pages 266-267: Aerial photograph of the reopened Rijksmuseum complex, with the South Wing still covered by scaffolding.

these interiors will differ. Although it has been established that old art is best seen against a darker background, Wilmotte's shades of grey will undoubtedly be painted over by a future museum director. Cuypers' cathedral will probably survive. It represents the cultural-historical legacy of the nineteenth century as well as of the period around 2000, the time when there was a passionate debate about national identity.¹⁵ How the logistical interventions will fare is difficult to estimate. Owing to the relocation of the entrance, the original routing has lost some of its clarity; in particular, the space below the passageway and the routing from the entrance gateways to the museum galleries is no longer entirely logical. In theory it would be possible to implement Cruz y Ortiz's original entrance at a later stage. The problem will be to realize an effective climate separation between inside and outside if the passageway remains open.

Back to the result. The Rijksmuseum experience shows that the leap in the dark of an appealing design has finally delivered a good result, but in its realization it ran up against the exalted heritage qualities of the museum and the many interests involved. In the absence of fully crystallized urban design and cultural history principles a design evolved that later came under considerable pressure precisely on those points. Essential elements of Cruz y Ortiz's design, such as the central entrance and large parts of the museum interior, were not realized. The Major Project eventually materialized in the form of several Small Projects, all with interesting results, such as the reconstruction of Cuypers, the new entrance hall, the gardens, the interiors by Wilmotte and the circumspect restoration of the exterior. This gave rise to a building with the variation and diversity of a city, while also strengthening the national and international iconographic value of the museum. The preliminary design process was long and complex. But the sting was in the head: after the reorganization of the process structure in 2006, the design was relatively quickly completed. The unsuccessful tendering was the catalyst for a new beginning and from 2008 onwards the project was completed without delays, cost overruns or accidents. It shows that the real challenge of this Major Project laid not only in the museum techniques or the underground engineering works, but also in the collaboration of all concerned. If there is a lesson to be learned from the new Rijksmuseum, it is that there is a challenge for the future in the social, economic and cultural dimension of designing.