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Interventions in the Rijksmuseum: the reinvention of the museum

Aurora Fernández

The interventions within the Rijksmuseum offer us an opportunity to raise new concepts linked to museum-related functions and its relationship with the city. The Rijksmuseum museum was born with a series of conditions that have forced the building to be used under two superimposed premises: its form and museum-sort typology and its unique condition as a symbolic gate connecting the centre and south of the city via this passageway. These two superimposed premises have been key in its interventions, revealing disparate situations throughout history, turning it into an unfinished project. These functions - as a museum and as an infrastructure of connection - are linked and intertwined, therefore affecting the nearby spaces of the museum and its relationship with the city. The analysis of the interventions carried out till now - including the last one by the architects Cruz y Ortiz - unveil a new set of functions associated to the museum, creating a heterotopia by means of a series of constellations that correspond to a cultural and leisure-kind-of-space, that broadens the museum's function and project's the day to day life of the city distinguishing it from those particular spaces of the museum itself.



New Babylon ends nowhere (the earth is round), it knows neither borders (since no national economies exist) nor collectivities (since humanity fluctuates). Each place is accessible to a part and to the all of it. The entire earth becomes home for its owners. Life is the end of a journey around the world which is changing so fast that it always seems to be another.

(Constant, H.: 1974)

CONCLUSIONS

The Rijksmuseum museum locates itself in a building designed by the Dutch architect Pierre H.J. Cuypers at the end of the XIX century. Once the first project for its construction is presented, he is obliged to open an urban passageway within the building, enabling it to connect the centre of the city with the south of it. This passageway emerged from the planning carried out by J. G. van Niftrik in 1866¹, along an axis parting from the set of channels of the centre of the city reaching its southern side (fig. 02).

The passageway, the infrastructure, is placed on top of the north-south axis of the museum.

The design consists of an articulated prism with its four corners shaped by a series of differentiated volumes -especially tho-

se erected in the southern façade- establishing a symmetric balance between the elements and a certain play of volumes. The museum holds along its axis of symmetry, a north-south-oriented gallery, and to each side of this axis, two symmetric cubic empty spaces in the shape of two covered courtyards. This gallery is located on ground floor and is the passageway which connects the piece to the urban fabric dividing the building into two pieces.

This segregation of both functions -as a museum and as a connecting element of the building and the city- forces the architect to project two symmetric entrances in the northern façade to each side of the passageway in relation to each courtyard.

The museum area, on ground floor, is left divided into two volumes. However, on level one, it retrieves its spatial unity, establishing some sort of circulation around the atriums. The courtyards are of use to illuminate the passageway and the semi-public urban spaces which give service to both the museum and the public space. The passageway uses the building as its hinge to incorporate the urban dimension to the museum's typology. The idea has an impact on the concept of unity behind the building and its relationship with the museum, the street and the city. The passageway with its symbolic gate associated to the museum and the entrance to the city of Amsterdam turns it into a stage: Cuypers uses the passageway as a cultural interior space which exhibits the collection of the museum and enables a relationship with the citizens.

The passageway is projected with a domed ceramic structure anchored by refined iron latticework and decoration. The pedestrian walkway is clearly separated from that of the carriages, differentiated in height and type of paving (figs. 03 A and B). The side walls of the archery of the passageway are covered with vertically-cut glass pieces.

The north and south façades of the passageway have metallic doors, symbolizing the "new entrance doors" to the city created by the "infrastructures of transport"². The façades opening towards the courtyards joined by the passageway are designed as urban façades, as exterior elements, with the aim of creating a relationship between society and art. Thus, on the first floor, a series of windows are placed to illuminate the inside whilst on the second floor the openings do not let light in but constitute more of an ornamental element. These openings are decorated with a series of sculptures which cover the entire surface area connecting the cultural function of the museum and the space -open to the public- covered by skylights (fig. 04).

In the northern and southern façades, on top of the passageway a series of covered cantilevered balconies could be seen. In the northern one, a vast glass window with a vertical-kind of rhythm is projected, opening towards the centre of the city. It promotes symmetry in terms of its volume and its elevation creating a small entrance hall to the museum, to which one has access via the two staircases placed in parallel to the passageway. In the case of the southern façade, a partially-closed balcony with a niche as the coronation element of the gallery -as if it were an altar- is projected. Here is where the star painting of the museum is placed, which is Rembrandt's *Nachtwacht*. The structure of the gallery, named the "Gallery of Honour", is projected in the image of a nave of a church oriented towards Rembrandt's painting and just above the passageway.

It understands the museum as a "total work of art", Gesamtkunstwerk³: The museum is the union of all the fine arts reunited in just one building, distancing itself from the idea of a picture gallery with less wall surface area where to exhibit the paintings and less storage area too. The excess of light of the spaces around the courtyard force a number of successive reforms. The museum grows until it becomes an "unfinished work", a building in constant renovation.

Cuypers' proposal reveals the contradictions under which the Rijks museum is projected: What is a museum? And what are the conditioning elements that an infrastructure -the passa-

geway– creates when, as it is so in this case, it is not linked to the function of the museum in the building. Is this function of the museum subordinated to the urban project? Is the connecting passageway a new utopic proposal of the outskirts?

The urban connection finds its limits in the backs of the bourgeois villas which draw a spare space at the rear end of the buildings⁴: remnant public space.

AVENUE MUSEUM

The museum is extended towards the south with different constructions which complement its museum-like and urban functions. They create a complex of volumes around the main building, creating an “open space” which expands the

connection of the passageway from the centre towards this empty unplanned space with the will of establishing a direct relationship between the Rijks museum⁵, the city and the new neighbourhoods –still to be planned– towards the south.

Museum and passageway, building and infrastructure of connection, they turn into spaces in permanent construction and change. The functional relationship between the main building, the spaces created with the southern fragments of the museum, the rupture of the building with the passageway and the location of the museum in relation to the channels and the idea of a rear space acquire an ambiguous character, denaturing the relationship with the passageway and therefore, with the city as well. A series of solutions are given where the urban outcome in relation to the museum are changing: villa-museum, garden-museum, avenue-museum (**figs. 05 A, B, C and D**).

In 1928 a new opportunity arises in terms of suggesting new urban relationships between the museum, the passageway and the vacant urban space towards the south. The winning proposal of the competition of the concerts hall shows a large connecting avenue with the Rijks museum, coinciding with the idea also submitted to the contest by Cornelius van Eesteren (**fig. 06**).

During the 50's Cornelius Van Eesteren, in his role as municipal architect, decides to open to road traffic the central street. Following his idea of creating a large avenue within that empty space, the passageway within the museum would be transformed into a passageway open to vehicle traffic.

The museum needs to grow during the 60's. That is why he builds walls within the courtyards and adds a series of slabs to enable more exhibition space for the museum. The museum becomes a real labyrinth in terms of circulation. The entrances to the museum located on the northern side of it, are incapable of guiding the crowds of visitors to the museum.

The reconversion of the courtyards of the museum into exhibition halls transforms the illuminated passageway into a tunnel. The walls of the passage are of use to advertise the exhibitions. In the large open space towards the south of the museum, a series of rows of trees are designed to somehow continue the central avenue and serve as an adornment to the rear of the buildings which can be found there.

The passage, reconverted into a high-speed road because of its strategic location is a rapid connection between the centre of the city, the airport and other close-by cities. Museum and passageway are understood as separate functional spaces. The ambiguity with which they were created loses all its sense. The urban avenue is thought out from a vehicle perspective.

This is the starting point of a great mobilization in order to fight for a safe street and public space, occupied by citizens since the 70's. The protest is against road traffic colonizing the centre of Amsterdam and for a change in habits, creating an alternative one to the use of vehicles as for example, the use of bicycles and public transport: “No more children deaths” <<Stop Kindermoord>> (**fig. 07**), is the motto citizens chose for their mobilizations.

There is also a great debate regarding the museum.

There are two main questions which arise regarding museographic projects: Should the museum grow unlimitedly? And, what should the contents of the exhibitions be? These events set the attention back on the Rijks museum, the passageway and its relationship with the city.

The urban space from the passageway retrieves its pedestrian condition allowing cyclists as well, however, eliminating road traffic. Activism has come to be part of the streets and uses of public space in Amsterdam.

The reshaping of the public space located at the back of the museum turning it into a square –what today is known as *Museumplein*– during the mid-1990's, transforms this vast area in a leisure sort of area around the neighbouring museums. These museums create their extensions opening towards this garden, something which gives back the passageway its urban function of public infrastructure, even if by then it was considerably deteriorated.

There is a plan carried out to try and organize and improve the spaces of the museum and its relationship with the *Museumplein*. The museum is completely obsolete and the museographic proposal is linked to retrieving the concept of museum suggested by Cuyppers and the lost relationships between the passageway, the museum and the city, to turn the museum into a modern cultural space with sense and coherence.

THE MUSEUM OUT FOR TENDER

In the year 2001 there is call for tenders –a restricted international competition is carried out– for the rehabilitation of the museum which included among its aims: the maintenance of the passageway as an urban connection, the improvement of accesses,

circulations and installations of the museum and the inclusion of a plan for the layout of the gardens within their urban context. The aim was to find a proposal which did not search to create a conflict as a method to establish a contrast between the old and the new. The proposal should be a combination of that something new with the already existing prior to any future intervention. The proposal presented by the Sevillian team of architects Antonio Cruz and Antonio Ortiz was the winning proposal (**fig. 08**).

Among the presented proposals, those of the Dutch architects are discarded because they had not followed the aforementioned aims of the competition, and the one by Francesco Venezia was also discarded since it suggested an intervention which included the Museumplein space where he projected an underground palace-museum, liberating entirely the original museum from its function. Only two proposals were seriously considered by the jury, the one by the French architect Chemetov and the one by the Spanish architects Cruz and Ortiz.

Paul Chemetov suggested a continuous base-platform under the courtyards, where the entrance is located in the passageway facing the western courtyard and at the back of that same courtyard he adds a dense vertical glass wall containing the vertical communication systems. He lets natural light in reaching this suggested base-platform. The jury understands the clarity of the proposal but has its doubts concerning the creation of this platform under the courtyards which are technically unfeasible.

The proposal by Cruz and Ortiz, apart from being very clear, placed value on the former building and gave a precise and blunt solution to the two problems that the Cuyppers museum had raised and which had not been solved till then. The first, is the design of a great hall to welcome the public and give service to the museum, and the second, is the retrieval of the passageway as a connecting element between the centre of the city and the museum, opening towards its main doors, enhancing the motto of the competition –“Ahead with Cuyppers”⁶– and strengthening the idea of a gateway which at last unified the museum and the design for the urban space.

The project by Cruz and Ortiz was the only one which solved the issues of the museum within its own limits, making use of the great values of the pre-existing elements and safeguarding its identity without relinquishing its contemporary character, exploring new functions, spaces and connections and accepting the structure of the original building as designed by Cuypers.

Antonio Cruz in an interview summed up the project in the following ideas: renovating, not carrying out a restoration because of the underlying idea that the museum was never finished, new designs for new functions, a balance between architecture and exhibition spaces and an integrated design instead of one made out of patches.

The projects sets its attention on the creation of that great hall, a space, which some have named “tabernacle for Cuypers” and which holds the visitors’ entrance and the information desk and reshapes the areas for the uses of the shop, restaurant and events hall. It is a low space located to both sides of the passageway which joins both courtyards. It transforms them into a great illuminated atrium. The idea of emptying and (once again) illuminating the courtyards gave transparency to the passageway and organized the project for the museum. The new illuminated elements of the courtyards give light to both architectures –the new and the old– conveying an overall sense of coherence to the museum.

The new semi-buried pavilion, located in the far west and south end, is a space left for the Asian art in continuity with the garden, adding greater complexity to the annex buildings of the museum and working on new scales and topography for the exterior garden, adding up fragments creating a new relationship between new angles and new perspectives. The architects place within the passageway, in its central area, the entrance to the museum. Apart from that, they maintained the connection between the centre and the southern part of the city, reinforcing its condition as a symbolic gate to the centre of the city and its connection to the *Museumplein*. Placing the entrance to the museum via the passageway, unifies the entrance and leads you straight towards that large atrium that is anticipated in the passageway. The architects retrieve the combination of public museum-like space and that space belonging to pedestrians and cyclists.

The entrance to the museum and its relationship with the passageway is going to be the key to the problems that are going to occur regarding the renovation works of the museum: the partial closing of the passageway to the general public and the bicycle lane resulted in a citizen’s mobilization driven by the associations of cyclists of Amsterdam, who under the motto of “Let’s save the passageway”, led to the temporary cessation of the works on the museum until they found a valid solution for the citizens⁷.

This situation forced to change the position of the entrance to the museum. The solution for this new entrance, presented by the architects, was to open four perpendicular and symmetric swinging gates to the passageway, occupying the sides of the pedestrian areas with a perpendicular development to the direction of circulation through the passageway. This solution, which had been agreed with the citizens and the cyclists associations, was not however of unanimous satisfaction to the architects.

These final accesses make it difficult to find one’s way towards the main hall of the museum. However, new categories associated to them from an urban point of view and from the point of view of a day to day use arise, enabling non-programmed events and actions which had not been contemplated in the project .

REINVENTING THE MUSEUM

The role the main architects Cruz and Ortiz and the role of the Dutch restoration architects were to have was unclear and the elaboration of the general premises regarding their tasks did not coincide.

They and Cuypers were confronted by a third party: the interior designer of the museum. Despite all these problems, Cruz and Ortiz with their intervention and their general

vision on the renovation of the museum unified the fragments around the main volume of the building, with a precise language in contrast to that of Cuypers, and they conceived the entire set of buildings as units of dialogue with an open leisure space opening towards the south and open to future expansions. A hinge connecting the centre of the city via the passageway and as Moneo⁸ would describe, they conceived the museum as a cultural campus, offering a common scenario towards the south and a compact image towards the centre of the city. The museum is no longer a space which gathers together all the fine arts as Cuypers suggested, but a superimposition of functions which complement it. They reinvent the museum via the set of different buildings, suggesting different constellations associated to the pre-existing fragments which qualify and broaden the function of the museum and the compiling of works of art.

The opening of the new pavilion dedicated to Asian culture, as well as the small extension of the Teekenschool and the new restoration building, create a front made up of a series of pieces which enhance and open Cuypers’ proposal, extending the space which is the museums’ as such, beyond its limits to project a new relationship with public space.

The passageway, the main building and other buildings around the museum have continued a parallel history which talks about the relationships between the social construction of the street and the urban space of day to day use and the cultural representation of a country. The museum-like function of the Rijksmuseum also holds restoration workshops for the works found within the museum, conferences and classes.

The best response to the rehabilitation of the Rijksmuseum might not be the space of the museum itself or the “great hall” giving access to it, but the set of spaces that are joined via the passageway where both the tourist and the citizen share that “atrium”⁹ in its connection with the Museumplein space and the sum of the buildings around it which add a new scale, and a new function to both the museum and the city.

This space –a cultural stage and campus– we build with our imagination makes us become closer to the concept of heterotopia defined by Foucault. This set of constellations of both the museum and the infrastructure it holds, joined to the presence of other buildings, creates a counter-space –museum versus campus and street versus museum which coincides with a contemporary cultural and leisure kind of space which projects the day to day life of the city and it distinguishes it from the specific museum–type spaces characteristic of that use, with several layers of deep meaning (fig. 09 A, B and C).

The Rijksmuseum which was born during the Enlightenment as a pedagogical institution was enshrined during the Romanticism as an instrument of exaltation of the national identity of the country. Via the rehabilitation carried out by Cruz and Ortiz for the museum, supplemented by the citizens’ voice who have demonstrated their implication via mobilizations and activism, the urban areas around it have acquired the highest of considerations in relation to other international museums: it is a product which exports Dutch culture in two aspects, as an element which is part of the city and as a museum. Moreover, because of its location and the creation of a large cultural and leisure-like square which is shared with other museums, it is part of a cultural fabric and a monumental centre which has been able to enhance the city and improve an urban park where bicycles, citizens and tourists come together. The passageway has become a symbolic gate to the centre of the city and to the cultural and leisure-like park.

The renovation of the museum and the passageway have created a new typological space of museum with great urban and infrastructural quality connected. It is the “new campus museum” suggested by Cruz and Ortiz which includes the Museumplein “reinventing”¹⁰ the Rijksmuseum from an everyday approach.

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Notes

01. The plan by Niftrik places the Rijksmuseum on the left side of the axis, towards the west. However, Cuyper places the museum in the centre of the axis. There is another plan dating 1876 by J. Kalff which already places the museum in the centre too. BOSCHIERO, Patrizia; LATINI, Luigi; and LUCIANI, Domenico, cura, *MUSEUMPLEIN DI AMSTERDAM Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino*, diciannovesima Treviso: edizione, Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche .pubblicazioni@fbsr.it www.fbsr.it 2008.

02. The new gateways of the XIX century cities are train stations. See PEVSNER, Nicolaus, *Historia de las tipologías arquitectónicas*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili ed. 1980.

03. See NEVZDODIN, Ivan, *Transformations of the Rijksmuseum. Between Cuyper & Cruz y Ortiz*. Pages 78-93 in Paul Muers y Marie Thérèse van Thoor: *The Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The restoration & transformation of a national monument*. Rotterdam & TU Delft Ed. nai010. 2013.

04. See WAGENAAR, Cor, *The Rijksmuseum and the City. A Hundred Years of Planning for Museumplein*. Pages 204-221 in Muers, Paul and van Thoor, Marie Thérèse: *The Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The restoration & transformation of a national monument*. Rotterdam & T.U.Delft Ed. nai010. 2013.

05. The museum was inaugurated two years after 1885. The entrance is carried out via the passageway of the museum. See OXENAAR, Aart, *Design & context. P.H. J. Cuyper and the Mise en scène of the Rijksmuseum*. Pages 51-67 in Meurs, Paul and Van Thoor, M. Thérèse: *Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Restoration & transformation of a National monument.*, Rotterdam and TU Delft: Netherlands Architecture Institute Ed Nai010 2007.

06. Hans Ruijssenaars is the architect of the Museum between 1996 and 1998. He is the one who creates this motto for the rehabilitation of the museum. See HUISMAN, Jaap, *The New Rijksmuseum Cruz y Ortiz architects*. Rotterdam: Nai010 publishers. Netherlands, 2013.

07. See <https://bicycledutch.wordpress.com/2013/07/18/bicycle-underpass-rijksmuseum-amsterdam>. See activism MEUERS, Paul & VERHEIJEN, Marc: *In Transit. Mobility, city culture and urban development in Rotterdam*. Rotterdam Nai publishers. 2003 e MEURS, Paul & VAN THOOR, M. Therese, *The transformation of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*. 2013 <http://www.archimaera.de> ISSN: 1865-7001 urn:nbn:de:0009-21-42544 September 2015 #6 "Einfügen".

08. MONEO, Rafael, *Jaulas Metafísicas allí donde había patios The Rijksmuseum Ámsterdam*. In Ulargi, Jesús coord.: *12 edificios/ 12 textos*. Madrid Exhibition's Catalogue: Ed. ICO Foundation. 2016.

09. CRUZ, Antonio ORTIZ, Antonio, *The Rijksmuseum, rehabilitation, adaptation and enlargement. Memoria en inglés*. Sevilla: Estudio Cruz y Ortiz arquitectos. 2013.

10. Taking the words of Win Pidjes: "The museum is not only rehabilitated, but reinvented" PULIDO, Natividad, *Cruz y Ortiz reinventan el Rijksmuseum de Ámsterdam*. Special Envoy to Amsterdam ABC newspaper 18/03/2012.

Images

01. Aerial view of the Rijksmuseum & the Museumplein

02. Picture of the plan by J. G. van Niftrik dating 1866

03. A. Picture of the passageway by Cuypers showing the urban nature of it. 1885.

B. Interior of passageway with its ceramic finishing, decorated with carpets, curtains and flowers, photography dating 1935.

04. Drawing carried out by Pierre J.H. Cuypers of the northern façade, cross-section showing the passageway, the covered, illuminated courtyard and the entrances to the museum of the northern façade covered by a canopy. It includes the image of the tramway passing through the passageway, 1885.

05. Proposals for the extensions on the southern side: A) Site plan of the museum within the plot and its surrounding by Cuypers 1876. Cuypers understands the continuation of the passageway as a boulevard. B) Site plan of the International Exhibition's Pavilion for the Trade and Exportation of the Colonies Fair dating 1883 and its relationship with the Rijksmuseum floor plan facing the entrance. The surroundings become a large garden, with very clear limits. It is close to a suburban villa. C) Proposal for a square carried out by Cuypers and Akersmit 1891. D) Proposal for the park developed by H. P. Berlage 1895-96.

06. J.F. Staal, winning proposal for the competition for the opera house building. To the north, the Rijksmuseum, to the south, the concert hall and to the west the Stedelijk museum, 1925-1928

07. Citizen mobilization during the mid-70's in the central avenue of the Museumplein "Stop kindermoord"

08. Floor plan of the new buildings shaded light violet around the Museumplein, suggested by Cruz and Ortiz. Rehabilitation of the Rijks Museum 2013

09. A The Amsterdam Marathon crossing the passageway of Rijksmuseum 2016.

B A view from the passageway towards the great hall.

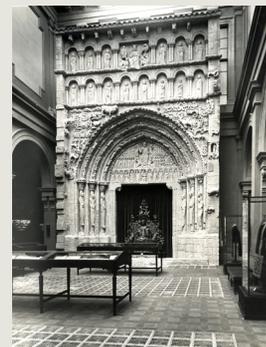
C A view from the hall of the Rijksmuseum and at the back of the image, the passageway.

08

... Let us take an excursion around the world! Monument and copy as curatorial practice in the international exhibitions and their museums of collections, 1854-1929*

Carolina B. García-Estévez

In December 2018, the Victoria & Albert Museum reopened Cast Court after a period of intensive rehabilitation. Its collection of plaster casts of the principal monuments and works of art is one of the very few that is still held in the original place for which they were designed. The impact of this encyclopaedic, exhaustive and universal collection on visitors to what was then London's South Kensington Museum was summarized as "an excursion around the world", in a spirit close to that which lit up the Great Exhibition of 1851. Originally, the dual function of museums as teaching workshops and catalysts of the general public's critical culture placed collections of full-scale architectural reproductions in the ambiguous terrain between the academy and the market. Architecture in the museums took on board the risks of defining the value of the copy, its pedagogic purpose and its circulation as manifesto. This article concentrates on two reproductions of Spain's architectural heritage that allow us to reconstruct this journey: from the Court of the Alhambra to the Pórtico de la Gloria.



FROM THE EXHIBITION GALLERY TO THE MUSEUM: NAILING DOWN THE EPHEMERAL AND TRANSITORY, 1854-1873

1.1 The Crystal Palace at Sydenham

On October 11, 1851, the Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations closed its doors in Hyde Park after being visited by over six million people. Its success and the problem of what to do with most of the collections on exhibit soon aroused in English society a desire to give continuity to the effort involved in constructing the Crystal Palace.

Taken down in 1852, it could then be rebuilt somewhere else. Just two years later, on June 10, 1854, the second Crystal Palace, built at Sydenham, was opened by Queen Victoria. Considerably larger than the original, the new building also differed in its exhibition intentions: the commercial impulse behind the 1851 Exhibition gave way to a general pedagogic project in 1854. This was a purpose shaped by Owen Jones and Matthew Digby Wyatt in their well-known *Fine Art Courts*.