

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp

KAAN Architecten unveils the main phase of the intervention on the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (KMSKA): a daylight museum for the 21st century

Built in the 19th century, Antwerp's Royal Museum of Fine Arts was conceived as a 'daylight museum' by architects Winders and Van Dyck. During the 20th century, the building underwent many fundamental changes in the layout, modifying the original circulation route and the connection with the city. Our intervention aims to reverse these spatial changes by combining a thorough renovation of the historic museum with a contemporary extension completely concealed within the existing structure. A complete overhaul of the 19th-century building restores the intrinsic qualities of the space by reinstating original colours, materials and routing within the historic halls. Guests can walk through an enfilade of exhibition rooms tinted in dark pink, green and red; oak doors, tall columns and ceiling ornaments in plasterwork convey a feeling of ancient grandeur. Meanwhile, hidden in the heart of the old building, a new vertical museum arises as a completely autonomous entity built within the four original patios. With bright white exhibition halls, hidden rooms, long staircases, far-reaching sightlines and varying gradations of daylight, the new museum charts a route full of surprising vertical experiences. Wherever the new extension 'cuts' the museum's solid mass, subtle marble inlays have been added, echoing the elegant 19th-century museum's materiality. These contrasting yet dialoguing entities coexist as two different worlds in one building, sharing the ability to unveil themselves little by little. The experience is never predictable and always in balance, both routes are challenging and at the service of the art.

Photography by Sebastian van Damme, Karin Borghouts and Stijn Bollaert



2003, The exterior of the Royal Museum



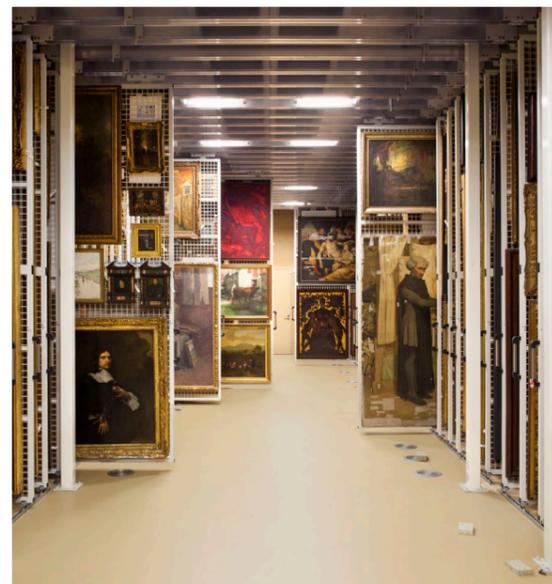
Before renovation, the artworks had to be packed and transported to the underground depot



The front museum façade. The extension of the museum is completely concealed within its existing inner structure. From above, the H-shaped structure of the 21st-century museum emerges, built on the position of the four original patios

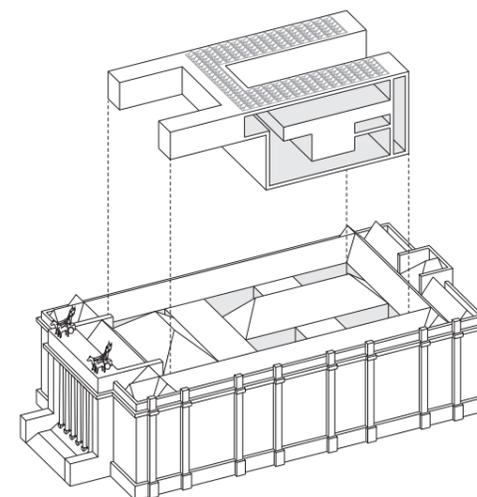


Extra-large paintings, taller than the already high doors, can travel from the depot through one of the original 19th-century hatches to the upper floors



The collection depot relocated inside the original bomb free zone, before the construction of the artworks storage premises

21st-century museum



19st-century museum



The Royal Museum is located above the remains of the 16th century citadel and intertwined within the remarkable star-shaped urban fabric