



MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL

ARCHITECT STATEMENT

Final Design Renovation & Expansion Museum De Lakenhal

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Leiden, The Netherlands

The Purpose

Museum De Lakenhal is the museum for the arts, artistry and history of the city of Leiden. It has been housed in the monumental *Laecken-Halle* (Cloth Hall) since 1874, a city palace originally built in 1640 by city architect Arent van 's-Gravesande, and dedicated to the inspection of the famous Leiden Cloth. Today, the museum and the city of Leiden are intimately connected. The museum's current ensemble of structures is the result of a extensive (re)building evolution that spanned centuries and lends the museum a particularly personal story. The museum wants to keep up with the times, but has expanded up to its limits a long time ago and currently lacks the space to live up to the demands of a contemporary museum. It is vital that the museum is transformed into an attractive and approachable public domain that can welcome a diverse public; an accessible and lively meeting place that provides a wide and diverse array of permanent collections, changing exhibitions, lectures and other activities. This also necessitates the development of a clear entrance, a museum shop and a catering area. It also requires an environment that is up to the security demands that other museums attach to their loan programmes. By expanding and restoring the old *Laecken-Halle*, the museum is preparing itself for the next century. In that process, creating sufficient working space in an urban environment – while staying true to the museum's rich history – is the main challenge.

Unity in diversity

The museum's current ensemble of structures is the result of a number of transformations brought about by changing preferences and necessities. Starting as a labour environment, the *Laecken-Halle* first transformed into a museum in 1874. The building was expanded by adding the Hartevelt-room in 1890, an exhibition hall featuring a natural skylight. Its largest transformation came about in 1921, when the museum's exhibition surface more than doubled thanks to the construction of the Pape-wing, a truly 20th century exhibition wing. The ensemble of structures thus reflects a series of museological developments, from 1874 up to now. Unfortunately, these successive expansions and interventions have also caused some serious congestion; the structure's layout can be puzzling and visitors have a tendency to get disoriented.

Of all the structures, the old *Laecken-Halle* was subjected to the most radical revisions, as it is also the only building not designed to function as a museum. Only the façade and attic are still in their characteristic and original state, which dates back to 1640. However, the internal organization of the rest of the structure has undergone multiple transformations. The wide bow-shaped entrances on the first floor were added in the 19th century, and conflict in both size and scale with the room structures of the original 17th century urban palace. The

bows are a typical museological addition, which sadly overshadow the building's original functions and diminishes the monument's architectural expressiveness and recognisability.

The design for the restoration therefore aims to implement a nuanced balance between the building's different historical layers, restoring the *Laecken-Halle*'s unique style. To ensure that this 17th century monument becomes more recognisable in the larger ensemble of the museum's structures, the architects have relied on the principle of 'unity in diversity' to guide them. Traces from the past will not be erased from the museum's nature, but will instead become an explicit part of its aesthetics. This is realized by applying a particular archaeological approach that respects the totality of existing layers. Traces of historical and contemporary interventions will thus be kept visible, allowing the structure to share an additional story: that of museological development. In this entire process, new interventions will have a distinctly contemporary feel to them.

Noble Simplicity

One of the main goals of Museum De Lakenhal is to restore Leiden's historical reputation as the world's cloth capital. Sharing the building's history as the official inspection hall of Leiden's cloth industry will play a vital role in achieving that objective. This is a perfect opportunity for the restoration to be inspired by the structure's past, allowing the structure and the museum's collection to enhance each other. Though the façade presents the Hall as a lavishly decorated urban palace, the interior housed a functional and plainly decorated workspace that included wooden floors and ceilings, and simple white walls. It was a place where notable merchants and the weavers of the cloth met. In line with this practical nature, the building's architecture breathes a sense of 'noble simplicity'.

By accentuating the original room structure of the interior, the restoration will make the building more accessible and comprehensible once again. This will be especially the case on the first floor, where the original structure, consisting of the *Grote Pers*, the *Kleine Pers*, the *Stempelkamer*, the *Staalmeesterskamer* and the *Gouverneurskamer*, will be restored. This will mean that the historical distinction between the simple workspaces and the lavishly decorated boardrooms will be restored again, in line with the design principle of 'noble simplicity'.

A new yet existing entrance

After the restoration and expansion are completed, the museum entrance will still be located in the old *Laecken-Halle* on the Oude Singel, as the Hall will remain the historical heart, as well as the eponym, of the museum. Furthermore, keeping the entrance in the monumental building will ensure that the *Laecken-Halle* remains the focal point of the museum. The temporary roof currently covering the forecourt will be removed, turning it into a true court again. Visitors and passers-by will thus again be able to fully experience the characteristic 17th century façade and its allegories on the cloth industry. Starting in this "cour d'honneur", visitors pass through the monumental front door to find themselves in the vestibule: a low, open space featuring a characteristic beamed ceiling and a series of historical windows and doors. The cash register and museum shop can be found here, while the adjoining rooms will house the museum café, the cloakroom, toilets and the orientation area. A new stairway will be constructed in the current 'lichthof', which can be found to the east of the vestibule. From here, visitors can reach the first floor.

Open up!

The Cloth Hall and its two wings used to be adjacent to regular homes on both its sides, firmly placing this urban palace in the city's fabric. This urban symmetry will also be partly restored, by replacing the low, brick wall on

Oude Singel 30 with a brand new façade and entrance that leads to the museum's café. This also means that the The Mayor Van der Werff-gate will stay exactly where it was built.

The closed wall of the forecourt fits the *Laecken-Halle*'s original purpose as a place of business and enterprise. But as the structure has been functioning as a museum for more than 140 years now, it's time to open it up again and create the open and inviting entrance that suits a modern, accessible and inviting museum. In its current state as a closed wall, many visitors tend to pass right by the museum. The new design of the wall will therefore feature two modest openings, to increase the museum's visibility.

The "Achterplaets"

The Laecken-Hall was originally an H-shaped structure, featuring both a forecourt and a backyard. The woollen fabrics could be inspected for their colour vastness on the forecourt during the day, while the weavers, burlers and many fullers gathered in the backyard, where their fabrics would be inspected for imperfections and weaving errors. However, the lay-out of the backyard changed along with the purpose of the Hall, as exhibition halls, inner courts and passageways were built over time. By restoring this space to its original function, a central inner court comes to life where all the museum's historical layers and structures meet. It's therefore the perfect location to build a recognizable orientation area, from where visitors can begin their own routes through the museum.

This "Achterplaets" will be a naturally lighted space with an exterior character; an open space in the heart of the museum complex. This will also bring the rear façade of the Hall in sight again, opening a part of the collection up to the public that has been previously hidden from view simply because it was nailed to the wall. This way, many historical traces inherent to the building can be an important element of the restored architecture. The building's historical soul, consisting of stories and layers that time has buried within it, will finally be unearthed.

The "Achterplaets" will not only function as a central place of orientation, but is a multifunctional space where opening ceremonies, events and receptions can be held. This compensates for the loss of space at the opened-up forecourt. Because this space can be closed off from the exhibition halls, events can also be hosted here after closing time.

The Joris-room

To realize the multifunctional Achterplaets, the so called "Joris-staircase" will have to be moved to the west side of the Lakenhal, on Oude Singel 30. Here a new building will be created, in which the Joris-staircase will form a historical ensemble with the 'Windows of the Counts', a set that dates back to the 16th century. This will result in a new "period room": the Joris-room. The stairs will continue to connect the first and second floors, while the windows will form a united panorama lit by natural light. The ensemble of the current Joris-staircase will be transported to the new room as completely as possible. The new room will be adjacent to the museum café, from where it will be completely visible. This will allow the staircase and the 'Windows of the Counts' to shape the atmosphere of the new café.

The Museum café

The new museum café will be located at Oude Singel 30, directly adjacent to the historical *Laecken-Halle*. It consists of an a series of three rooms, connected to each other by spacious passageways. The café area itself will feature a high ceiling and natural lighting, and will be furnished with long benches and tables. The café provides direct access to the forecourt of the Lakenhal, where the museum's terraces can be found, facing south. The middle of the three rooms will room feature a bar, directly connected to the vestibule. The third room, instead, is

a multifunctional space that includes a large reading table. During opening ceremonies or other events, the latter room can be closed off from the others to function as a workspace for the caterers.

The new exhibition rooms

The Achterplaets will also provide access to two new exhibition rooms, where the museum will provide changing exhibitions of (inter)national importance, that always take Leiden as its source. To facilitate these exhibitions, both rooms will be equipped for maximal flexibility where furnishing, lighting and technical options are concerned. The materials used for the floors, walls and ceilings in these rooms will provide a unique and distinct character. The ceilings of these flexible rooms are constructive and will be built as shell-roofs, using architectonic concrete and a granulate of natural stone. The walls will feature mineral stuccowork capable of holding nails. The floors will consist of light, nuanced brickwork, as was the case in the historical *Laecken-Halle*. The floors of the new structure will also serve to connect the Oude singel with the Lammermarkt on the other side of the museum, through the usage of identical clinker bricks, all laid out in differing patterns.

The smaller hall will feature a natural skylight, while the larger hall will give visitors a great view of the Lammermarkt through a large window. Lighting for the exhibition, as well as the necessary climate control, will be integrated into the shell-roofs. By optimizing the connections between the logistic rooms, like the workshops, storage rooms and transporting areas, the exhibitions will be effectively and quickly assembled and disassembled, conforming to standard museal practises.

Related yet differing

While the various museal structures certainly differ when compared to each other, largely thanks to the typical stylistic characteristics of their age, they are all connected through their construction materials, purpose and tectonics. Their façades reflect the purpose of their interior and support their functionality. All structures consist of brickwork and sandstone, featuring unsaturated brown and red hues. The buildings are also firmly anchored into the ground. The solid nature of all materials also resulted in a beautiful aging effect, creating a patina that reflects a respectable change over time. All structures are a beautiful and monumental sight from afar, but are also interesting to study from close by, thanks to the tectonics, **plasticity** and ornamentation of the individual structures. Especially the careful details of the seams and joints catch the eye. Together, these themes shape the museum's DNA, which will be carefully guarded during the renovation and expansion. The new structures will both respect and innovate this signature, and add a new chapter to the history of this museum complex.

Architecture in a single piece

Just like the *Laecken-Halle* and the Pape-wing, the new building presents itself as a recognizable architectonic unit, in alignment with the larger ensemble. It consists of a classical order, featuring a plinth, a middle section complete with bay windows, and is topped with a circulating cornice. Though distinguishing itself through its size, the structure's low flanks allow it to link up with adjoining homes. Its narrowing upward movement gives the structure a daring appearance: of a slender building that is firmly rooted into the ground. The new building will be constructed using warm, grey bricks; the same materials used to construct the current buildings, but only in a different colour. By mixing three different types of clay and employing an innovative double-baking process, a nuanced palette of grey colours is created, that reminds one of the skies you can find in 17th century paintings of Dutch masters, like those by Jan van Goyen from Leiden.

Through the tectonics and the plasticity of the layered masonry, the building presents itself as a monolithic unity, opening up in an upward movement. The bay windows lend the building a spacious and poetic expressiveness when seen in relation to the large, open size of the Lammermarkt. Above all, it ensures that the building will catch the floodlight in the mornings and afternoons, giving the façade a playful complexion of light and shadow, despite its northern orientation.

The Functional building of the Lakenhal

The new structure will primarily function as a work location. Aside from the two exhibition rooms, the ground floor will play host to the museum's new logistic department, while the upper levels will house the museum's workshop, storage rooms and offices. While there won't be a public entrance on the Lammermarkt side of the museum, it will feature a staff entrance that leads up to the office levels. By combining the large doors of the transportation section with the staff entrance in once single archway, this truly becomes the Lakenhal's work address. The other bow will feature a large window, which will serve to create a special connection between the museum and the city surrounding it. The exhibition room presents itself as truly transparent and inviting, being visible to passers-by on the Lammermarkt.

Because of the differences between the arched openings in the largely closed plinth and a series of office windows in the cluster above it, the functional stacking becomes a visible and inextricable part of the architecture.

Material and ornament

The modern brick building on the Lammermarkt perfectly fits in the tradition of the Dutch city. Its architectural beauty can be found in a tone-upon-tone application of a limited palette of materials, consisting of brick and architectonic concrete. The window-frames and doors will be realized in patinated brass. Using the same brick in an constantly changing pattern allows for a a playful light and shadow complexion to come into existence, which supports and enforces the façade's lay-out.

The brick patterns in the eaves and "lampettes" that can be found closer to the street, are reminiscent of weaving patterns. This, finally, introduces these ornaments in relation to Leiden's historical cloth trade. The bows are both a traditional construction method for brickwork, as a reference to Leiden's building traditions, that emphasize tall gates and arched windows. The bows in the façade are emphasized by the distinctions between the full and smooth seams.

The building thus has a monumental posture when seen from afar, while it is equally fascinating up close, thanks to the tactile qualities of the materials that are carefully combined in a single entity.