

**SPEECH LESS
MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL
JUNE 2019**

THE PAST IS NEVER DEAD. IT'S NOT EVEN PAST.
William Faulkner

Director Meta Knol at the entrance of the new exhibition halls, summer 2018
Photo: Rob Overmeer

It is not that I am particularly lost for words or reluctant to give an actual opening speech. Quite the opposite. But because there is so much to tell you about the journey our museum has made in recent years, I thought it would be a better idea simply to tell this story in writing.

You will then have the opportunity to read about it at your leisure, so that we can all enjoy a pleasant, informal opening together.

I wish you pleasant reading and a great visit!

**MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL IS GIVEN A MAKEOVER
2009-2019**

Today, we are returning Museum De Lakenhal to the public. We are doing so after an intensive decade-long renewal process, which was capped off with the spectacular restoration and expansion.

It is a time of celebration for everyone who was involved: museum staff, architects, builders, engineers, restorers, designers, artists, funders, organisers, guides, teaching staff, volunteers, friends, patrons and many others. It marks a new episode in the life of this beautiful museum, which opened its doors for the first time in 1874, was last expanded in 1920 and is now ready for the future.

For the whole museum team, Leiden's glorious and notorious past is an inexhaustible source of inspiration and boasts a collection of more than 23,000 works of art, crafts and history to set the mind working. We want to entice as many different people as possible to view Leiden's past from a fresh perspective and to give every visitor the opportunity to be seen and heard, irrespective of their age, social or cultural background, beliefs or limitation. We hope their visit leaves a positive impression on them, so they can look back on a rewarding experience. This will provide the link between the exhibits themselves and the stories that they generate, and people of flesh and blood. We want to achieve this based on the realisation that we all look at the past from the perspective of how we view the world today. That it was once very different. That lessons can be learned from the past. And that nobody can know for certain what it was really like.

Everything that can be found in this museum belongs to you: Museum De Lakenhal is public property. And this calls for public accountability. I would therefore like to tell you more – be it in summary – about how things were a decade ago, how we got here today and the steps and choices underlying the whole renewal process.

MUSEUM IN TRANSITION

The transition began in 2009 when the Leiden City Council decided to contribute substantial funding to get the 'Cloth Hall in order'. It was disparately needed. The initial buildings were purchased in the early fifties with the planned expansion of new exhibition halls in mind. In the impoverished city at the time, however, a succession of museum directors were unable to bring the project to fruition and for many years the upkeep of the listed building was put on the back burner. The delays in planning also led to the postponement of many other developments. This meant that the national significance of Museum De Lakenhal slowly slipped away. The prevalent fatigue was also noted in the aforementioned Council Decision. 'The stagnation has had a crippling effect on the museum organisation. In the absence of decision-making, the museum... has fallen seriously behind compared to similar museums elsewhere. A benchmark with similarly sized museums shows that Museum De Lakenhal trails far behind with regard to budget and staffing. ...It is essential that the vicious circle in which the museum currently finds itself is broken as soon as possible. Over-exploitation of the organisation and resources is no longer an option.'¹ The shortcomings had already been listed in a comprehensive report in 2008: the basic inventory directory of the collection was a disaster, staffing policy needed urgent review, 95% of the available budget was spent on fixed costs and maintenance of the buildings was long-overdue².

Combined forces pulled together to draw up a renewal plan. However, the severely needed restoration and expansion was not yet a priority. Instead, the roles were reversed: first the organisation had to be put back on track and only then could the hammer and chisel be taken up. The recovery process began with the 'Work in Progress' project. All exhibitions planned for 2010 were cancelled. The whole museum team worked for a year on cataloguing the collection again. We also typified it as 'a sabbatical from the machinery of exhibitions'. A 65-metre-long rolling conveyor belt was set up in the exhibition hall along with four workstations. We emptied the storage rooms plank by plank and processed the exhibits along the line: silver, ceramics, optics, biscuit moulds, tally sticks, halberds, archaeological finds, sugar casters, stave gauges and much more. Under the watchful eyes of the public, each item was cleaned, indexed, examined, registered, photographed and digitally catalogued. Continuously, we would ask ourselves why a particular object was ever included in a collection such as ours and what it meant for the DNA of our museum.³

1 Council Decision 'Lakenhal op Orde', 2009.

2 Quick Scan of Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal by Berns Museum Management, September 2008.

3 For more information about the 'Work in Progress' (Werk in Uitvoering) project see: lakenhal.nl/werkinuitvoering

The collection therefore became the actual generator of the renewal process. The museum's new mission, vision and core values were then determined at the end of 2010 thanks in part to the input of the public, who had actively followed and witnessed the entire project. This step was invaluable for the continuation of the renewal process, because now that the identity of the museum had been established, we were able to define the organisation and set out the course we should follow. This new course would be shaped by adventurous, high-quality collection presentations, exhibitions and public programmes, based entirely on sources from Leiden. Robin Stam designed a beautiful corporate identity, which was inspired by the lead hallmark that historically had been attached to woollen cloth in the 'Laecken-Halle' after passing inspection by the Master Samplers. We designed a new

website in collaboration with Fabrique, which incorporated stories about the city and the collection. It would take too long to explain all the steps of the renewal process, but it is important to emphasise that without these intensive, content-oriented preparations the museum would not have become what it is today.

RESTORATION AND EXPANSION

Only when the museum was on course again could we embark on the restoration and expansion. Now in 2019, the museum has been carefully restored and expanded. There is room for exhibitions in two brand new halls, enabling the existing building to be entirely dedicated to the collection. There is space for the public, with a new entrance area, a fine studio and a wonderful auditorium. The coffee vending machine has made way for Café Laken. The museum shop now sells New Leiden Cloth by the metre. And, behind the scenes, the installations have been renewed and logistical facilities implemented, while, for the first time in decades, the staff have all been united in a characteristic, functional building.

If you now stand in front of the museum on the Oude Singel, you will see a restored, 17th century palatial town house that evokes the heyday of the Leiden textile industry and conjures up the same image that the young architect Arent van 's-Gravesande must have envisaged in 1640.

And if you walk to Lammermarkt, you will see the Van Steijnggebouw building: a sturdy and confident functional structure and a striking symbol of our times. The two façades of Museum De Lakenhal connect past and present and therefore represent the old and new faces it received in 2019.

The renovated museum is a carefully orchestrated 'Gesamtkunstwerk', which came about thanks to a close-knit team of architects, a critical client and a dedicated contractor. The restoration was led by the internationally acclaimed agency of Julian Harrap Architects in London. Museum De Lakenhal was their first assignment in the Netherlands. Together with David Chipperfield, they won the Mies van der Rohe Award in 2011 for the restoration of the Neues Museum in Berlin, which was also an important reference project for us. By bringing the procurement criteria in line with our own vision, we were able to commission the young talented architects of Happel Cornelisse Verhoeven from Rotterdam for the new build. What you now see before you is the result of an inspiring editorial collaboration between the two agencies and the museum team, under the direction of a professional project and site management team.

We were united in our objectives. Each part of the building had to maintain its individuality – the 'Laecken-Halle' from 1640, the 'Hartveltzaal' from 1890 and the 'Papevleugel' from 1921 – while it was important to ensure the Van Steijnggebouw building from 2019 had its own character. At the same time, the four parts had to radiate harmony: unity in diversity. The noble simplicity of the old 'Laecken-Halle' was a model for the quality of later additions to the complex and for the contemporary interventions. The restoration of the 17th-century element was particularly important. We were eager to restore the original H-shaped layout, so that the original front and rear courtyards of the building would be revealed. And so it was. Each layer of the building was then given a slightly different orientation. The ground floor was designed as the public area, the first floor transformed into 17th-century chambers and the second floor maintained the 19th-century gallery, as a tribute to how the museum came about. The architects' subtle approach has done full justice to its historical character. The building's unique architectural history has become tangible and coherent, as if it represents a detailed book of samples through layers of time. Finally, the new Van Steijnggebouw building became the fourth spatial element of the museum: a single-piece

structure that connects wonderfully with the existing architecture through its use of materials and ornamentation. The consolidating hand of architecture unites the four layers of the museum in the restored Achterplaats courtyard. Every museum visit will now begin from this beautiful, light space at the heart of the museum complex.

INTERIOR AND DECOR

In 2016, the team of curators completed the Interior Design Plan. You are now able to witness the successful realisation of this concept in Museum De Lakenhal. But it was not a simple task. Having 23,000 objects and numerous local stories to choose from only adds to the difficulty. However, by making these choices early in the process on the basis of sound museum criteria, we were able to realise an optimum integration between object, story and space. Light has now been shed on the city's glorious past through seven core narratives: Devotion in Middle Ages and Renaissance (with the finely restored triptych of the Crucifixion by Cornelis Engebrechtsz), Leiden as the cradle of the Golden Age (with Rembrandt and his contemporaries), Collectors in the 18th century, Seven centuries of Leiden cloth, the Siege and Relief of Leiden (the hotchpotch! the Van Bree painting!), Leiden a University City and The modernisation of life. It is astonishing that Museum De Lakenhal has never before exhibited a collection of work dedicated to the history of Leiden University, even though the university has occupied a significant place in the history of the city. And we have once again breathed new life into the story of Leiden as historic city of cloth. Fortunately, we can now finally pay some much needed attention to the collection dating around 1900, with works by Alexander Hugo Bakker Korff, Floris Verster and Theo van Doesburg. The eighth story, incidentally, is that of the museum building itself: this extensive collection with numerous, unique permanent fixtures (known as the structural and nailed-down collection) was given the registration number '0' during the Work in Progress project.

Unfortunately, it would take up too much space to discuss these eight stories in greater detail, but it is important to mention that the same principles were applied to the interior design of the museum that were employed in the other restoration work. The DNA of the city, the museum and the collection forms the substantive framework that is supported architecturally through the application of 'unity in diversity' and 'noble simplicity'. Happel Cornelisse Verhoeven were also responsible for the design of the interior, including a magnificent series of exhibition cabinets, which included special drawers for families with children. Naturally, the image of the museum that functions at the intersection of past and present also served as a source of inspiration for the design. That is reflected, for example, in the ten assignments we commissioned with contemporary artists and designers. Ankie Stoutjesdijk designed a monumental tapestry with a map of Leiden, Aleksandra Gaca had an acoustic wall covering woven in the Textile Lab for the auditorium and Kolk & Kusters designed a special Rembrandt palette for all the exhibition halls, which is brought to life through the layered application of KEIM paints. Poet Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer compiled an anthology about the passage of time, and even wrote a special sonnet on the subject. The anthology can be read in the form of a spatial concertina in the monumental stairwell of the Papevleugel. It is also worth pointing out that we do not offer multimedia tours. Instead, we developed an innovative ecosystem that links the physical and the online museum. For example, we have narrated all the texts and panels from the exhibition and included them in the mobile L@kenhal App, which is available for everyone inside and outside the museum. By scanning an image with your smartphone, you can enjoy looking at the exhibit while listening to the story behind it. Wieteke van Zeil's viewing tips can be of some help in this, because nothing beats 'slow looking'. You are completely free to decide how much time you want to spend on looking, experiencing, learning, discovering and sharing in order to satisfy your own curiosity.

THE FUTURE

So, it has all been thought out, drawn up, built, completed and almost opened. I am now at the end of my imaginary speech and you are probably eager to go and explore the museum for yourself. But before you do, I would just like to say that the intensity of the renewal process meant that occasionally we might not have always been in the public eye, because we were forced to be preoccupied with the task at hand. This opening therefore represents a symbolic moment in a variety of ways. For you, because you get Museum De Lakenhal back again. And for us, because we can finally show ourselves again. But also for both of us, because we can all now enjoy the riches this wonderful Leiden city museum has to offer.

On behalf of everyone who participated in this unique renewal process, I would like to wish you all an unforgettable experience in Museum De Lakenhal.

THANK YOU

The restoration, expansion, interior design, refurbishment and all the new public programmes were realised thanks to a close collaboration between various people, organisations and disciplines. We would like to thank everyone who participated in this unique project.

COMMISSIONED BY

The Municipality of Leiden

ARCHITECTURE

Julian Harrap Architects, Happel Cornelisse Verhoeven Architecten

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Museum De Lakenhal Team

PROJECT & SITE MANAGEMENT

Bespoke urban development, Webbers Bouwmanagement

RESTORATION & EXPANSION SUPERVISION & ADVICE

Arup, LBP|SIGHT, Van Rossum Raadgevende Ingenieurs, Herms van den Berg, Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and representatives of the Municipality of Leiden

RESTORATION & EXPANSION IMPLEMENTATION

IBB Kondor, Koninklijke Woudenberg, Automatic Signal, Homij Technische Installaties

INTERIOR & DECOR DESIGN & REALISATION

Happel Cornelisse Verhoeven Architecten, Karen Polder Grafisch Ontwerpen, Beersnielsen Lichtontwerpers, Vermaat, AV Beeldvertaling, Marie Baarspul, Verver Reclame, Hizkia Van Kralingen, Van der Werf Vastgoedonderhoud, Beam Systems, Jilleba, Oostendorp, Brinkman Kuiper, Bronnenberg, Brandwacht en Meijer, Planemos, Barri & More, Bruynzeel, ALV, Hout van Eijk, Hamannahout, Joost Koster, Gört, Titus Verbeek Concept & Design

ART COMMISSIONS

Karin Borghouts, Iemke van Dijk, Mark Dion, Sophie Ernst, Aleksandra Gaca, Hansje van Halem, Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, Thomas Raat, Ankie Stoutjesdijk, Studio Maarten Kolk & Guus Kusters, Marjan Teeuwen

NEW LEIDEN CLOTH

Petra Blaisse, Mae Engelgeer, Christie van der Haak, Claudy Jongstra, Edwin Oudshoorn

RESTORATIONS

Boeijnk/Boekel/Van der Knaap, Jan Bodijn, Joost Caen in collaboration with Verstraete-Vanhecke NV, Jurjen Creman, Caroline van der Elst, IPARC, Richard Kettenis, Katrin Kirsch, Adriaan van Lelyveld, Henk Nijenhuis, Gert Oorschot, Simon Oost, Stephan de Raat, Adriaan van Rossem, Willianne van der Sar, Steenhouwerij Bambam, Steenhouwerij Maarssen, Anna Stringer, Studio Redivivus, Atelier De Vlam

ECO SYSTEM

Sohé Educatie, Fabrique

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