



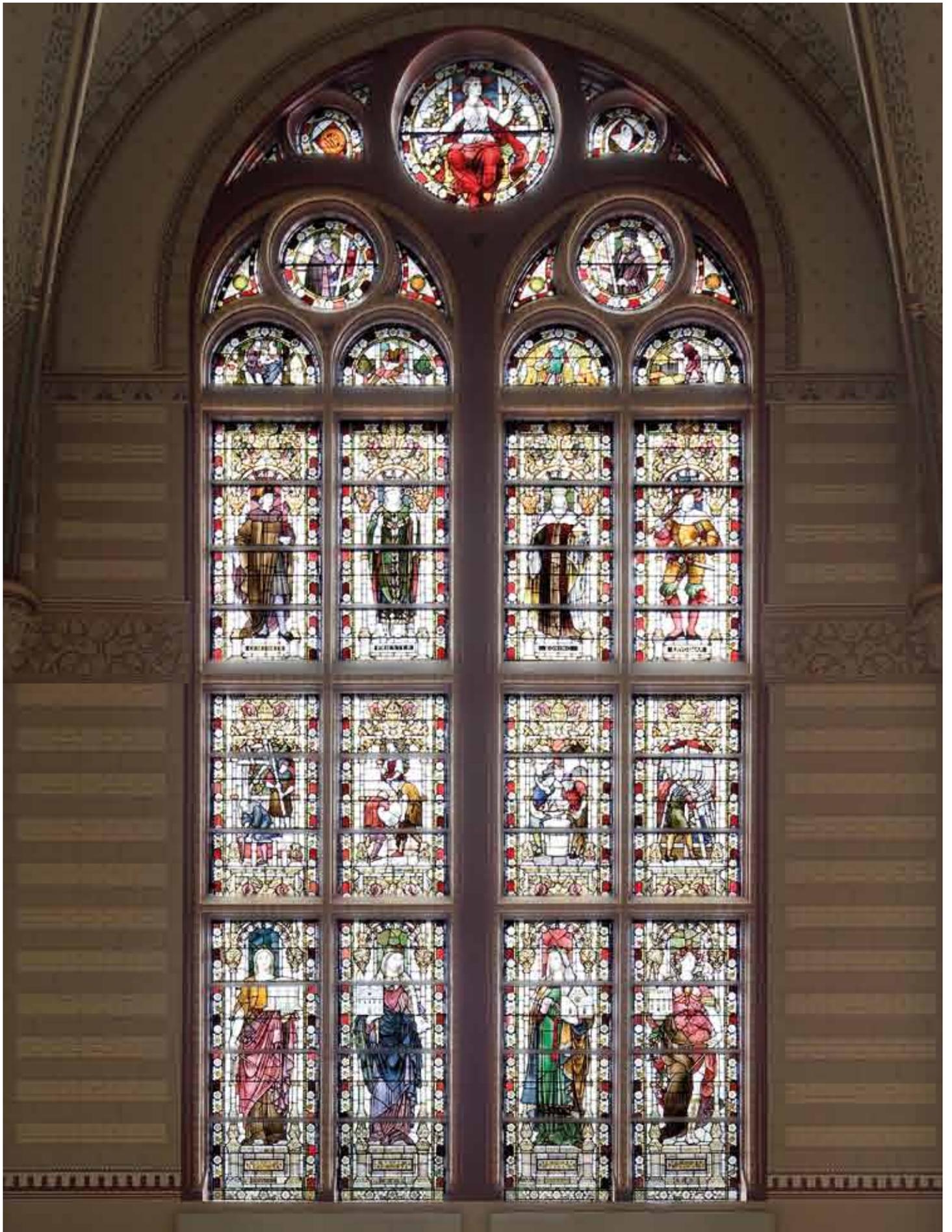
RIJKS MUSEUM





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**The Building,
the Collection and
the Outdoor Gallery**





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Restored to future glory

'Colour and taste should not compete' is a quote taken from Polychromie architecturale (Polychrome architecture)* by architect and painter Le Corbusier. This previously unpublished text first appeared in the catalogue *Kleur en architectuur (Colour and architecture)* during an exhibition held at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum and the Groninger Museum. I visited it at the latter. At that time, the incomparable Frans Haks, former director of the Groninger Museum, had been overseeing plans for a spectacular new project - the construction of a new museum in the water. This postmodern concept was under the supervision of the dynamic Italian designer Alessandro Mendini with additional contributions from Philippe Starck and Coop Himmelblau. With its choice of laminate, Bisazza mosaic tiles and wildly decorative epoxy resin flooring, Groningen emerged as the city with the most colourful museum in the world. The artist Peter Struycken created a colour palette for the interior walls of the museum. The intense, crackling neon work of art from François Morellet in the entrance hall and Swip Stolk's exuberant graphic design complemented the overall effect.

I was a great admirer of Haks at the time - there, in Groningen, something happened the likes of which had never before been seen. This appreciation hasn't waned over the years because numerous exhibitions later - and I've seen quite a few - the museum still looks as fresh and vibrant as the day it first opened. I was treated to a visual delight. Expressionist painters from De Ploeg (The Plough) were highlighted in bright red and fuchsia, Ilya Repin in aubergine and Azzedine Alaïa in sky blue. Anything was possible and it all came together flawlessly. Frans Haks' incredible magic box still hasn't reached its limit. And each time, you leave with a smile on your face. That's the power of colour. Colour only becomes evident when you see it is a description that could easily be attributed to some typically unfathomable Johann Cruijff logic. Yet despite the fact that everything has colour, you're seldom aware of most of the colours around you. Even in a museum, where a heightened sense of visual perception is expected, not every colour will

be detectable. That is why Haks' Groninger Museum is so enjoyable. He completely immerses the visitor in a vortex of colour.

A hundred years before Haks, architect Pierre Cuypers achieved roughly the same goal with 'his' Rijksmuseum. Cuypers doesn't allow the eye a moment's rest in this neo-Gothic *Gesamtkunstwerk (Universal artwork)*. Bright stained-glass windows, terrazzo floors, intricately carved stone, wood and metal ornaments; everywhere, a bombardment of visual stimuli. Cuypers especially used colour and ornament to reinforce his agenda. His Rijksmuseum is an homage to Dutch patriotic art and history, an equally credible as surprising concept in which everything has a place and there is no room for aberrant behaviour. Cuypers was devoutly religious, which in turn influenced the use of colour. Colours are present in the same way they are in Groningen, but Amsterdam misses Haks' frivolity.

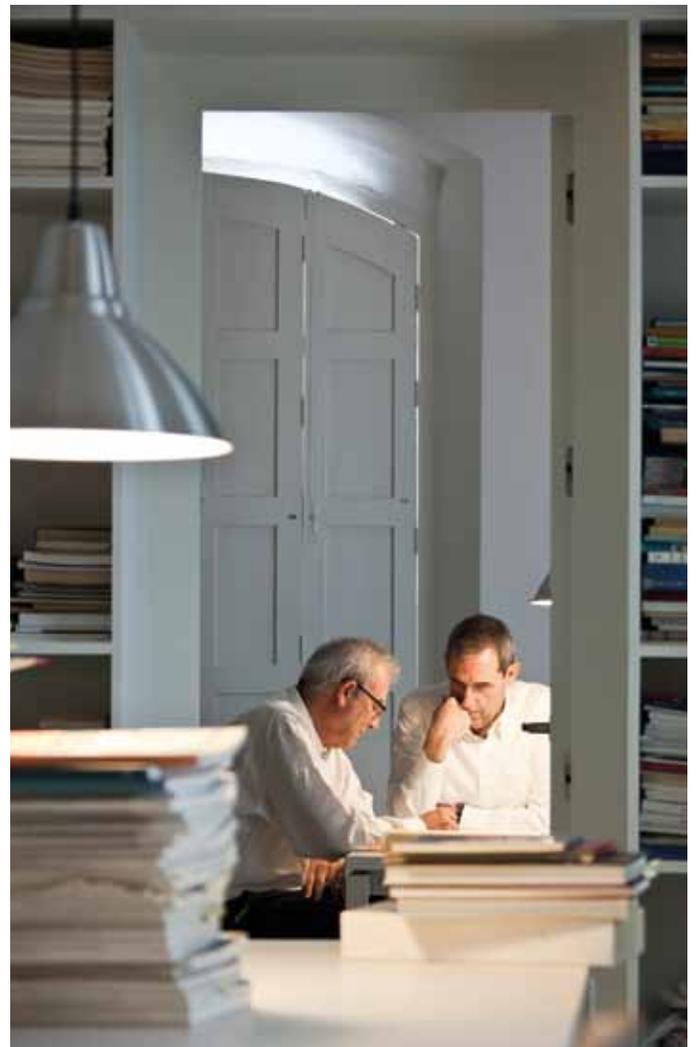
In 2013 the Rijksmuseum opened, courtesy of Cruz y Ortiz Arquitectos, 'restored to future glory'. Under the motto 'Continue with Cuypers' the main aim has been to return the building to its original condition. The exterior façade has been magnificently renovated, the inner courtyards have been re-established, incorporated floors have been demolished and the original skylights have been reinstated. The monumental stairwells, library and majestic Grand Hall have all been fully restored and redecorated with original ornamental elements including paintings by Georg Sturm, which were removed at the start of the twentieth century. In short, Cuypers fans can indulge themselves to their heart's content. At the same time the building has been prepared for today's and tomorrow's visitor who expects a contemporary museological scenography, while also complying with current safety- and environmental regulations. The collections in the Rijksmuseum are diversely showcased over more than 80 rooms - from the Middle Ages to Mondriaan. Where various areas were once divided into sections - glass, painting, furniture, historical objet d'art, weapons, Delftware etc - this new arrangement allows the story of the Netherlands to unfold in chronological order,

Work meeting held between Antonio Ortiz and Antonio Cruz, Cruz y Ortiz Arquitectos, Seville. The architects were responsible for the renovation and the restoration under the motto 'Continue with Cuypers'.

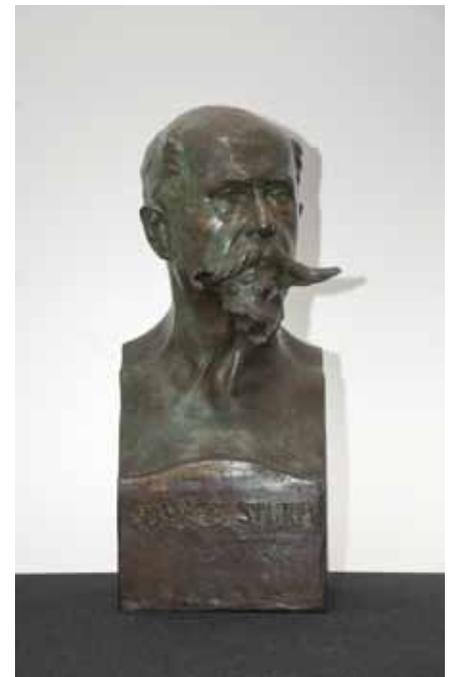
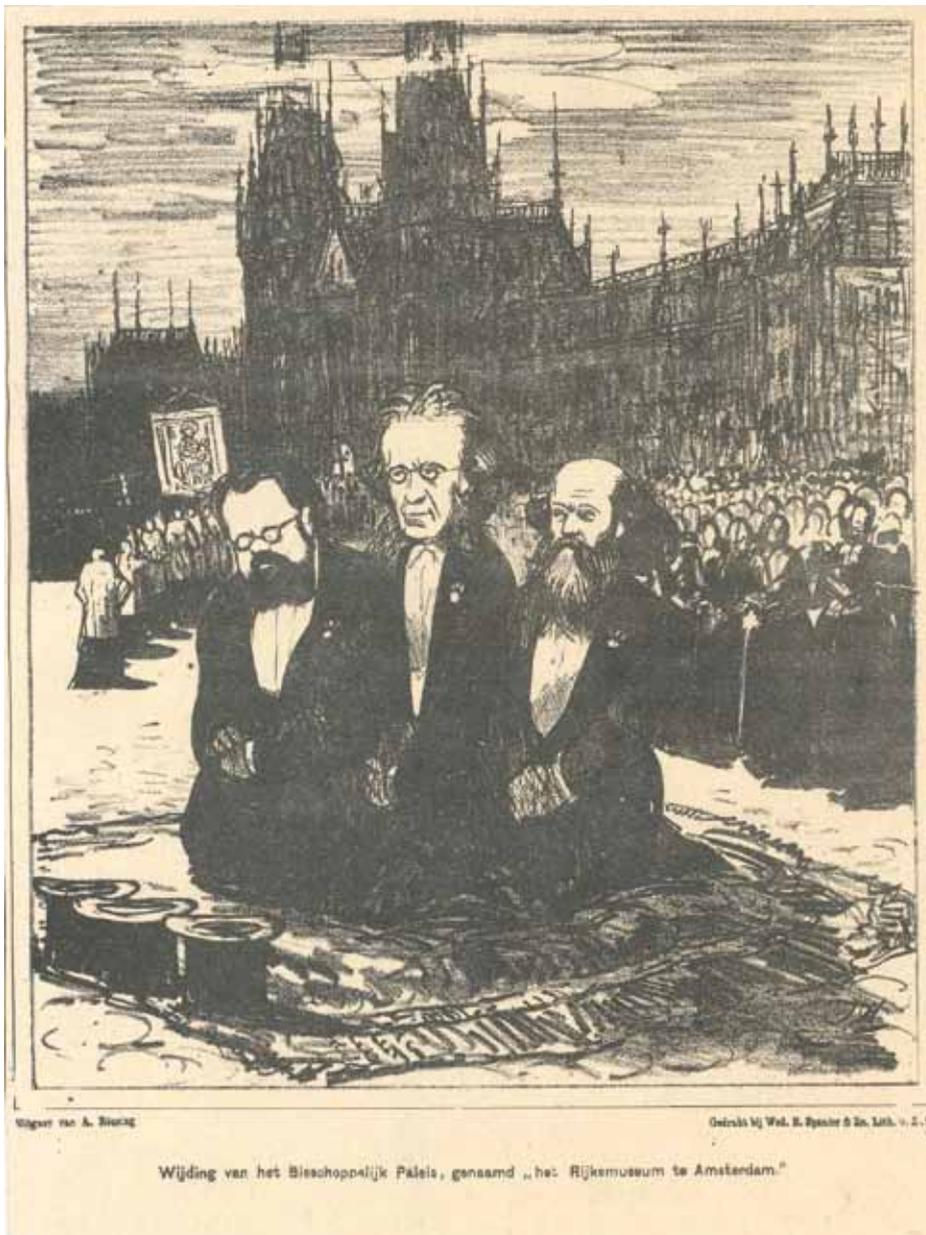
and art and history to parallel each other. In this three-dimensional timeline, the rooms on each floor are painted with new colours courtesy of the French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte. His interior colour palette complements Frans Haks' philosophy: colour in the service of art. The visitor will encounter a colour on every floor, in every century, which repeatedly refocuses the eyes. Wilmotte's colour palette is aligned with that of Cuypers, which, because of the monochrome application and the lack of ornaments, forms a complementary contrast. In addition to Cuypers' original colours - restored largely by restoration atelier SRAL under supervision of Anne van Grevenstein- the colours for the new spaces were determined, in consultation with Wilmotte, by the principal Spanish architects Cruz y Ortiz Arquitectos. Natural materials, glass and travertine, have been chosen for the new atrium, left and right of the passage, the many corridors, stairs, lifts, toilets, the auditorium and the new museum shop. One colour dominates the areas which were painted: white RAL 9010. This rewarding 'no-quibble-colour' is now considered a museum colour par excellence. During my years at the Kunsthal Rotterdam, RAL 9010 was the standard. The renovated Stedelijk Museum boasts the same white, which incidentally seems slightly warmer than the famous white with which Sandberg once whitewashed the colourful brick walls. White has however now been 'banished' to the non-museological spaces in the new Rijksmuseum. Because of the recent renovation and redesign, Cuypers' nineteenth century colour palette has been restored. We recognise twentieth century modernism in non-museological spaces and the exhibition rooms have been decorated 'à la mode française'. And so it goes that the new Rijksmuseum anno 2013 is restored to its future glory.

Wim Pijbes,
General-Director Rijksmuseum

*) *Kleur en architectuur (Colour and architecture)*, exposition catalogue
Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam and Groninger Museum, 1986



Well-known cartoon from J.P. Holswilder, from *De Lantaarn* dated July 15th 1885, where Pierre Cuypers together with sympathisers Joseph Alberdingk Thijm and Victor de Stuers kneel in front of the Rijksmuseum during its investiture as the Dutch temple of nationalistic art (Collection Cuypers House Museum Roermond).



Commemorative medal bearing the portrait of Pierre Cuypers, born in Roermond May 16th 1827, (Collection Cuypers House Museum Roermond).

Bronze bust of Georg Sturm fashioned in 1918 by August Falise, (Collection Cuypers House Museum Roermond).

Consummate experience

It has been claimed that some cave paintings in the Spanish region of Nerja are 42,000 years old. That is extraordinary because that would make the artist a Neanderthal. Artistic ability has long been seen as a quality typical of modern man, the *homo sapien*.

Throughout history man has felt the need to incorporate colour and form in his interiors. Sometimes there is mention of extreme sobriety, for example in a Benedictine cell or a modern, sterile interior. Man has often surrounded himself with exhibits, such as the frescos typical in Roman villas of the time or the awe-inspiring ornamental murals found on church walls. Unfortunately in the Netherlands, with its Calvinist heritage, the majority of the latter disappeared under layers of whitewash.

The realisation of the Rijksmuseum wasn't without its controversy. Victor de Stuers was one of the leading men of the time behind its conception. He was said to be an ultramontanist (advocating Papal superiority), wanting to convert the Netherlands back to Roman Catholicism by means fair or foul. In a well-known cartoon he is seen, together with sympathisers Joseph Alberdingk Thijm and Pierre Cuypers, kneeling in front of the Rijksmuseum during its investiture as the Dutch temple of nationalistic art. It's true that the Rijksmuseum conforms architecturally and ornamentally to De Stuers' recommended government doctrine. Furthermore, with its neo-Renaissance towers, it brings to mind the then newly constructed neo-Gothic churches – and Cuypers, who designed the Rijksmuseum, and an unprecedented number of the churches too.

To call the Rijksmuseum ultramontanes is going a bit too far. Indeed, on the exterior as well as the interior, there is mention of – the sometimes effusive – ornaments like those found in neo-Gothic churches; here they don't glorify God, but 'Patriotic Art' of which the Rijksmuseum was, and still is, the Netherlands' most important shrine. Even the interior ornamental elements, which will be touched upon in this book, are an integral part of the neo-Renaissance architecture and should be treated as such.

Inextricably linked. That was the conclusion of everyone who deciphered *and* understood the architecture of the Rijksmuseum. However, the number of proponents quickly declined. In 1908, architect Adolf Loos declared ornamentation to be a crime. Worse still, museum directors were granted complete control. The building had to adapt to the exhibition. For a museum director the building is a mantle that shrouds the religious artefacts he cherishes: Art – with a capital A. The Rijksmuseum never became what Cuypers intended it to be. As soon as parts of the building were completed and museum directors began to take control, the whitewash brush came out, modifying the interior to modern tastes and the changing views on exhibiting. Even the new Rijksmuseum must comply with regulations associated with the collection and presentation of that which the building religiously cherishes: Art. Still, during the transition from the old to the new Rijksmuseum – principally a continuation of Cuypers – particular attention has been given to his architecture including the interior ornamental elements, which are inextricably connected. Especially if they formed an essential and indispensable part of the architectural structure, they were fully restored. Since the opening, a visit to the museum is much more complete and the experience far better than the present generation ever dreamed possible. Although this might take some getting used to for the modern museum-goer.

Frits van Dongen,
Chief Government Buildings Architect