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Renovated and extended AfricaMuseum in Tervuren opens its doors on December 9th, 2018

The global renovation of the AfricaMuseum (Royal Museum of Central Africa) is completed. The Belgian Buildings Agency (Régie des Bâtiments/Regie der Gebouwen) acted as prime contractor for this exceptional mission. After five years of hard work, the museum will reopen its door for the public this Sunday, the 9th of December 2018.

Why renovate?

The museum building dates from 1910. It exuded a unique charm but was no longer adapted to the requirements of a modern museum. The permanent exhibition was severely outdated and only a fraction of the collections was shown. An intervention was also needed structurally and in terms of infrastructure and techniques (safety, climate, lights, humidity, conservation).

The starting point: restoration and renovation of the museum building, construction of a separate visitor center and connecting both below ground(level).

The Belgian Buildings Agency acted as prime contractor and led among other things all the administrative procedures to appoint the multidisciplinary study team and the contractor. The multidisciplinary temporary association Beel-Origin-Kortekaas-Desvigne-Arup-RCR-Daidalos-B-B was selected as study team and the N.V. Denys was appointed as contractor.

Thanks to the realisation of this project, the museum now has approximatively 11.000 m² of exhibition and circulation space

The visitor center

The reception, the lockers, the museum shop and the cafeteria were removed from the museum building so that it could be used at 100% for the permanent exhibition.

The visitor center has been completely integrated in the environment. The light building structure and curtain wall out of glass emphasize the respect for nature and the surrounding historical buildings. The restaurant on the first floor offers a spectacular view of the surrounding park, the fountain pond that was renovated in 2016 and the museum building. White stages between the visitor center and the museum building can be used to play music in open air for example.

The visitor goes down to the underground levels through large impressive stairs. The daylight shines through the deepened "English" yard into the lower levels. All levels are accessible to people with reduced mobility. There is also a refectory for school groups.

Underground exhibition gallery/connection

The underground connection is 100 meters long. This is the most important passage and both the entrance and the exit for the visitors.

It connects the visitor center to the historical museum building. The gallery includes one exceptionally large space that can be divided into 1 or 2 parts thanks to a pivoting wall (13 x 5 meters). This allows the creation of a room of 300 m² or 600 m². In addition, there is another flexible space that can be turned into an auditorium or an additional exhibition hall.

The underground gallery is comparable to a big white box. The minimalistic design and the conscious choice for a white ceiling as well as a white wall and white polished concrete floors create a unique atmosphere.

In the underground connection you will discover the pirogue (22,5 meters and 3.500kg), that was already brought in in February 2016 because it would not have been possible afterwards (not enough access openings anymore).

One of the most delicate works that had to be done was to create the connection between the underground gallery and the museum building. To this end, the foundation of the museum building had to be drilled.

The museum building

The museum building and the immediate surroundings are a listed monument and landscape since February 1978. The interior of the ground floor is listed as well, including the original furniture.

The imposing palace architecture was handled with respect and was kept as much as possible like the original. The viewing axes were cleared and the experience of the park has been enhanced from the inside by reopening the window.

The facades of the museum building were cleaned and restored. The skylights in the zinc roofs were renewed and made sunlight-reflective. The roof was insulated and has a roofing out of zinc or slate. The wooden outside joinery was pickled, restored and painted in the original color.

The quality of the insulation was strongly improved by the deduplication of the windows, whereby steel double windowframes and inner doors were placed. Two curtains have been placed between the old and the new windows: one curtain is used as blinds and the second one is a UV-filter. Depending on the weather conditions, none, 1 or 2 can be let down to optimize the conditions for the objects.

The parquet floor was scoured and polished. The paintings and maps (Belgian Congo) on the walls were cleaned and restored where necessary. The original template painting in the hall with hardwood flooring were partly cleared and reconstituted via serigraphy in the whole hall.

Floors were broken out to place inclined surfaces for people with reduced mobility. Marble floors and walls were restored where necessary.

The listed display cases have been restored on site. In the halls with the marble floors, they were placed on a technical platform allowing the techniques (electricity, multimedia, air-conditioning) to be integrated. The lightning was installed in the upper platform. The display cases have been complemented by new ones, creating a contemporary modular system.

One of the most spectacular interventions in the museum building is the deepening of the inner courtyard.

This allows more light to shine into the underground level. The visitor enters the museum building through the underground level.

The global investment cost for the construction, the fees and the financing amounted to approx. 66,5 million euros.

Specifications sheet

Owner: Belgian State

Principal/prime contractor: Belgian Buildings Agency

User: Royal Museum of Central Africa

Multidisciplinary study team: temporary association Stephane Beel Architecten + Origin Architecture and Engineering + Niek Kortekaas + Michel Desvigne + Arup NL + Bureau Bouwtechniek + RCR + Daidalos

Contractor: NV Denys (Wondelgem)

Duration of the works: approx. 5 years

Available space: approx. 11.000 m² (24 halls and circulation spaces)

Global investment cost (construction, fees and financing): 66,5 million euros

Contact:

Johan Vanderborght, Head of Communications

Johan.vanderborght@buildingsagency.be

Gulden Vlieslaan 87 b2 - 1060 Brussels

M: 0479 31 26 91

www.buildingsagency.be

The Belgian Buildings Agency

The real estate expert of the federal state

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