

***A New Publicly-Accessible Art Storage Facility
for Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen***

Sjarel Ex, Director of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Abstract

As the museum's main financing body, the municipal authority of Rotterdam did not pay too much attention to the work that a museum has to do behind the scenes, and the conditions in the spaces where that work is done. Since 1999, the water that was seeping every year into the basement rooms beneath Boijmans's current building at Museumpark, which contain much of Rotterdam's art treasures, started to pose a serious threat of flooding. The first action to be taken was to move the print room up to a higher floor. This was executed in 2008. Plans were then devised to build a new storage facility for the museum's entire collection of paintings and three-dimensional artworks.

Firmly convinced of the need for a top-class storage facility and the importance of taking proper care of the artworks preserved there, the museum ran a successful external fundraising campaign and invited tenders for a new storage facility in Museumpark that would be open to lay visitors. This idea immediately attracted widespread support among Rotterdam's city council and the local population. Visitors will be free to roam around about half of the facility at their leisure, and will have an opportunity to view the rest – the closed part – in guided tours that will be provided on a permanent basis throughout the day.

For visitors the change means many interesting additions to the museum's regular program: they can learn about the collection's care, the way exhibitions are prepared, conservation and restoration projects, and problems relating to packing, natural lighting, and pest control. In addition, the museum – which has received gifts of over 52,000 artworks in the 170-odd years of its existence – will be able to devote more attention than in the past to historical and recent donors. It can also highlight the world of collecting. All these innovations will be strengthened by the public-private nature of this initiative, in which both corporate enterprises and private individuals will have the opportunity to place their collections with the museum for safe keeping.

About Sjarel Ex

Sjarel Ex majored in Modernism and was awarded his master's degree with distinction by Utrecht University in 1982. After some years at the Free University of Amsterdam in a research post funded by the then Netherlands Organization for Pure Scientific Research (ZWO) and a number of freelance research and exhibition projects for diverse museums, he was appointed as director of the Centraal Museum Utrecht in 1988. In the fifteen years in which he headed this museum, its regular program was thoroughly revamped, the building itself was completely renovated and upgraded, a new storage facility was installed, and a comprehensive collection catalog was produced. In 2004 Sjarel Ex took up his post as director of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.