

## **Babel**

### **Interventions in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen**

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Interiors Buildings Cities

# Babel. Interventions in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen

The booklet is the second in a series of publications that present the teaching and research of the Chair of Interiors Buildings Cities at the TU Delft in the Netherlands.

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MSc2 Design Studio

# Babel. Interventions in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen

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Fragment of a gallery in the Van der Steur wing, Model 1:5



**Babel. Interventions in Museum Boijmans van  
Beuningen is the result of a MSc2 Design course of  
the Chair of Interiors Buildings Cities.**

**The course was taught by Sereh Mandias and Tomas  
Dirrix in the spring semester of 2019.**



Introduction

Sereh Mandias  
Tomas Dirrix

This publication is the result of a MSc2 design course of the Chair of Interiors Buildings Cities (Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Technical University of Delft) in the spring semester of 2019 entitled Babel: Interventions in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

Following the assumption that a museum is never finished and through the making of large, physical fragments the design studio explored an architecture of careful readjustment to the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

Boijmans is the city's most significant museum and has a broad collection. It covers a period from the middle ages to the present, with works ranging from paintings by Rembrandt, Monet and Dali to objects and installations by Gerrit Rietveld, Yayoi Kusama and Pipilotti Rist. The building that houses this collection is extraordinary as well. In 1935 the original museum was erected, a design by Dutch architect Ad Van Der Steur, which is characterised by cabinets reflecting the domestic setting most paintings originated from. Over time the museum has expanded several times: in 1972 with a large-scale and flexible museum shed by Alexander Bodon, in 1991 with a transparent pavilion in the garden by Hubert-Jan Henket, and, most recently, with an extension by Belgian office Robbrecht & Daem, a wing that embraces the Bodon-extension and recalibrated the museum for the 21st century. As such, the ensemble itself can be seen as a collection that represents changing insights into museum building over time.

In 2018, the museum announced an extensive renovation, caused by the urgent need to remove asbestos from the building. As part of this project, the museum explores the possibility to demolish its latest two extensions. As there is value in these recent extensions—simply because they are relatively

new, and in their specific architecture—within the studio we looked for different ways to improve upon the current building. In doing so, we engaged with topical questions of the nature of the museum in the 21st century, its place within the city and who it is for, and how one might transform more and less monumental architecture.

The course was divided in three parts: I Survey, II Fragment, and III Intervention. This publication follows the same structure.

Aim of the survey was to develop an intimate understanding of what is there. The basis of the project was a close-reading of the museum, its multitude of characteristics and the different ways of making spaces for art. Due to its composition of different parts from different times, this amounted to a study into museum architecture from the 20th and early 21st century overlaid onto Rotterdam's specific circumstances. We did so by researching the history of the different building parts and the ideas that informed their design. In addition to this, we reconstructed and drew the museum in its various phases: the original museum of 1935, Bodon's 1972 extension, Henket's addition of 1991, the adjustments Robbrecht en Daem made in 2002 and finally the museum in 2019, right before it closed its doors. This phase is presented here through these five sets of drawings, demonstrating the evolution of the museum over time.

How can one capture the experience of the museum in a physical, architectural fragment? This question guided part II of the studio, that continued the analysis of the current museum by delving deeper into the experience of the museum as a physical and intimate encounter with the building and the art it contains. Students were asked to define a fragment of the building that, in their opinion and on the basis of the survey, captures or represents

something crucial about the experience of the museum, and build a model of this fragment at scale 1:5. They could be dealing with public aspects, such as entering and passing through, notions of viewing or displaying art, or simply articulate qualities in physical building parts such as façade, ceiling or stair. These models are a representation of an actual situation, but also powerful, physical objects in their own right.

Informed by the survey and these 1:5 fragments, in the final part of the studio, students developed architectural interventions that readjust the physical condition of the museum as needed. They were again asked to represent their interventions in a model at scale 1:5, while at the same time developing a larger strategy to contextualise these interventions. Among the results are a rethinking of the circulation of the museum by adding a staircase, a reorganisation of the entrance by adding one column, and a recalibration of relationships between building parts by adding a window or extending a landing.

This collection of interventions shows how one can address specific shortcomings of the current ensemble with interventions that while small in scale, have an impact beyond their physical limits, and manage to address a larger concern of the museum. In addition, these projects show, each in their own way, how one can develop a contextual and precise approach to adjusting the existing.



Meeting of the Robbrecht and Daem wing with the Van Der Steur building, Model 1:5





Survey

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen  
Ad Van der Steur, 1935

Exhibition Building  
Alexander Bodon, 1972

Van Beuningen-de Vriese Pavilion  
Hubert-Jan Henket, 1991

Interventions and Extension  
Robbrecht en Daem, 2002

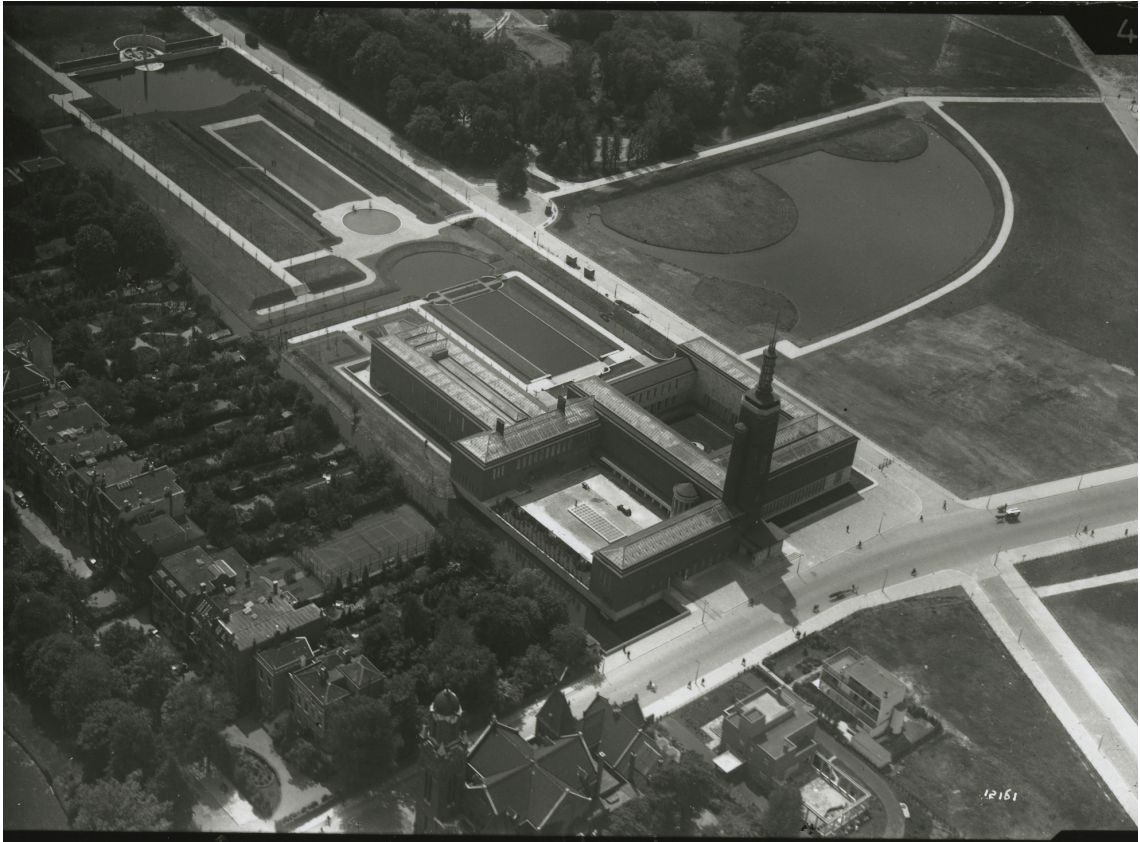
Current situation, 2019

Survey

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen  
Ad van der Steur, 1935

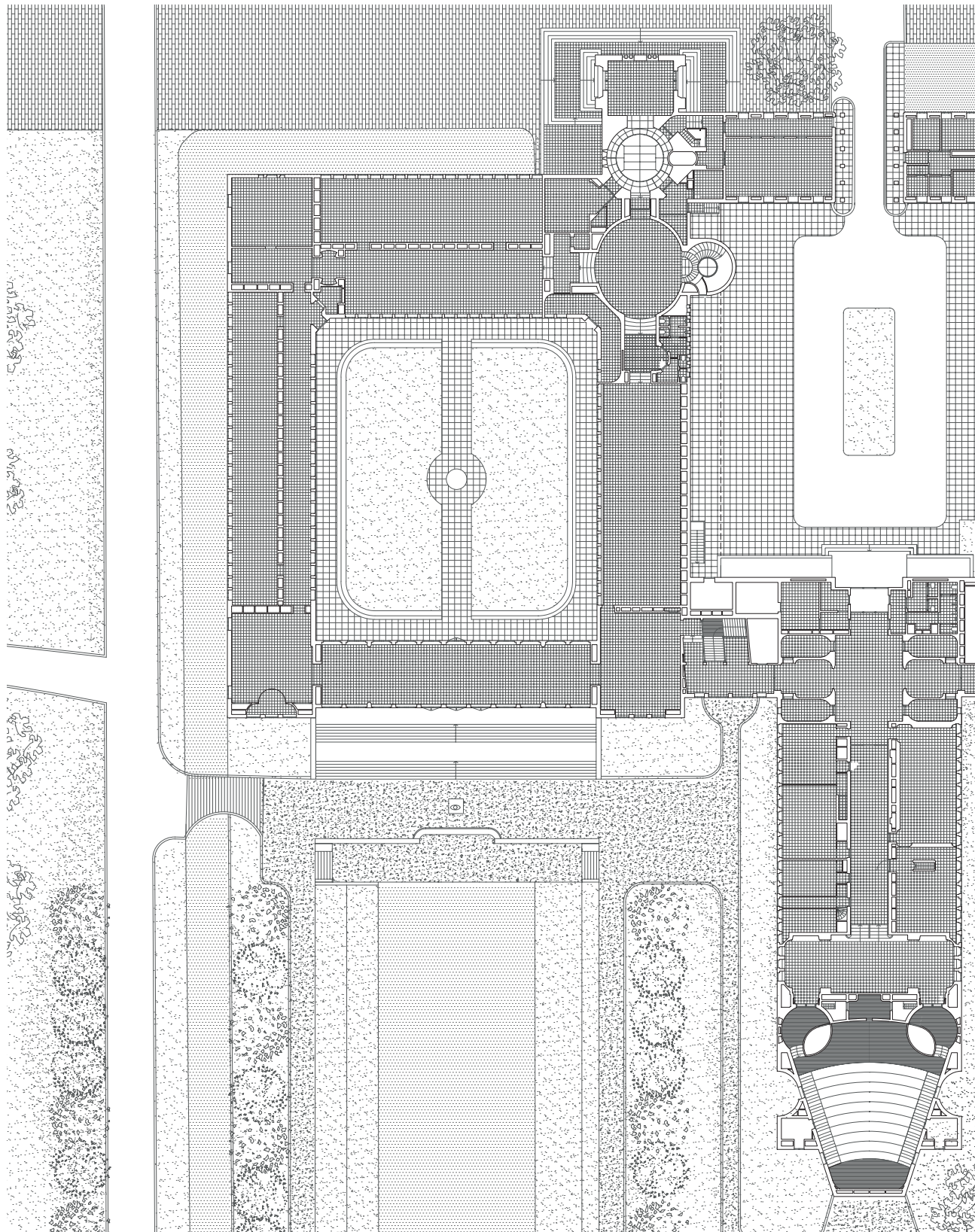


photograph by Marie Louise Nijssing

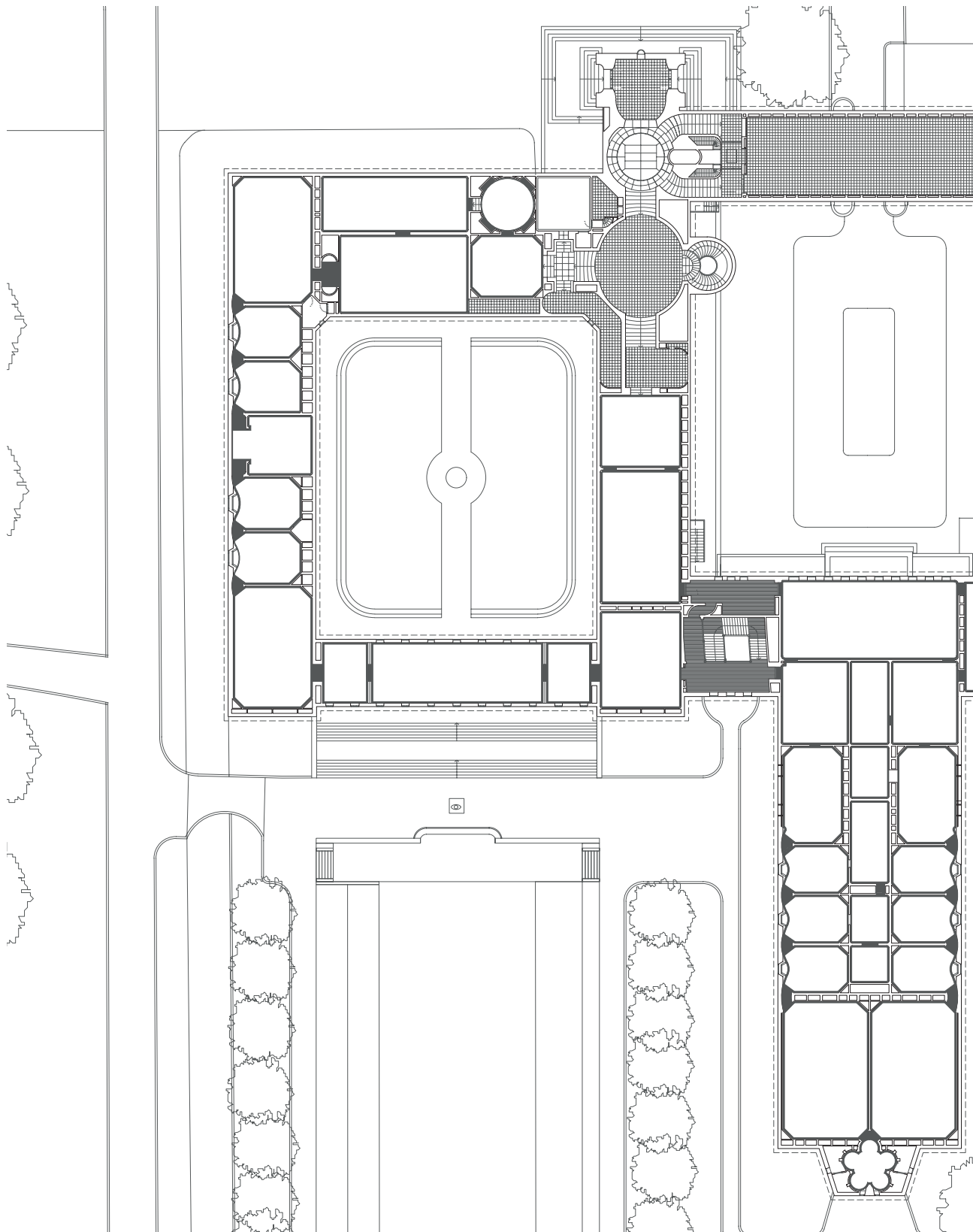


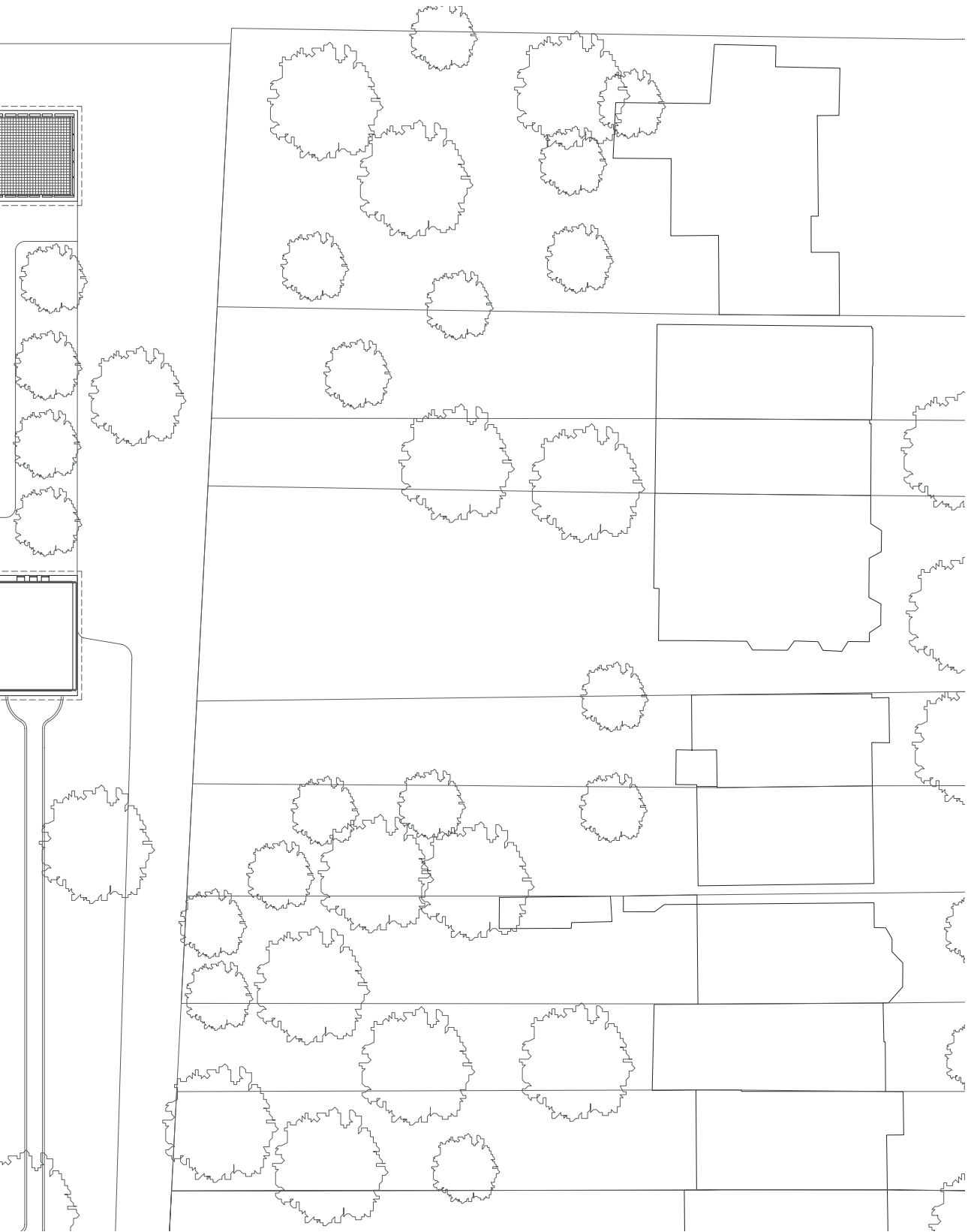
photographer unknown

The architect van der Steur and museum director Dirk Hannema designed the building specifically for the experience for works of art. With bright lit rooms and as a modern museum fully devoted to fulfilling its task. The tower marked its presence in the city and helped conceiving as a public building. Van der Steur was inspired by the domestic spaces of private collectors from which most of the works exhibited in the museum derived, and developed this in an architecture of small, intimate spaces. A variation of the rooms in size and shape, but also the alternation of exhibition halls with spaces where the visitor could relax for a moment and enjoy the surrounding park, had to prevent visitors from fatigue.









Survey

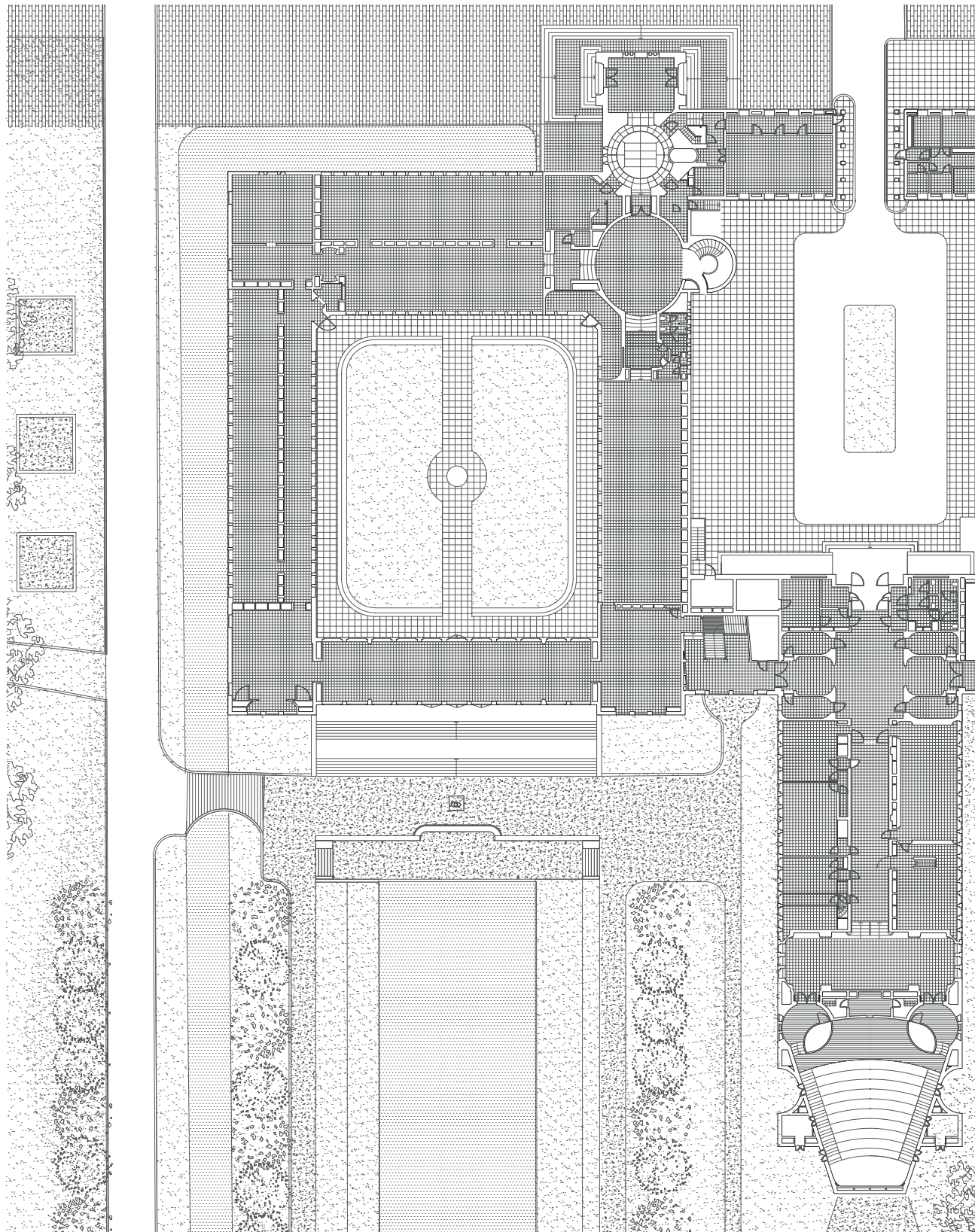
Exhibition Hall  
Alexander Bodon, 1972

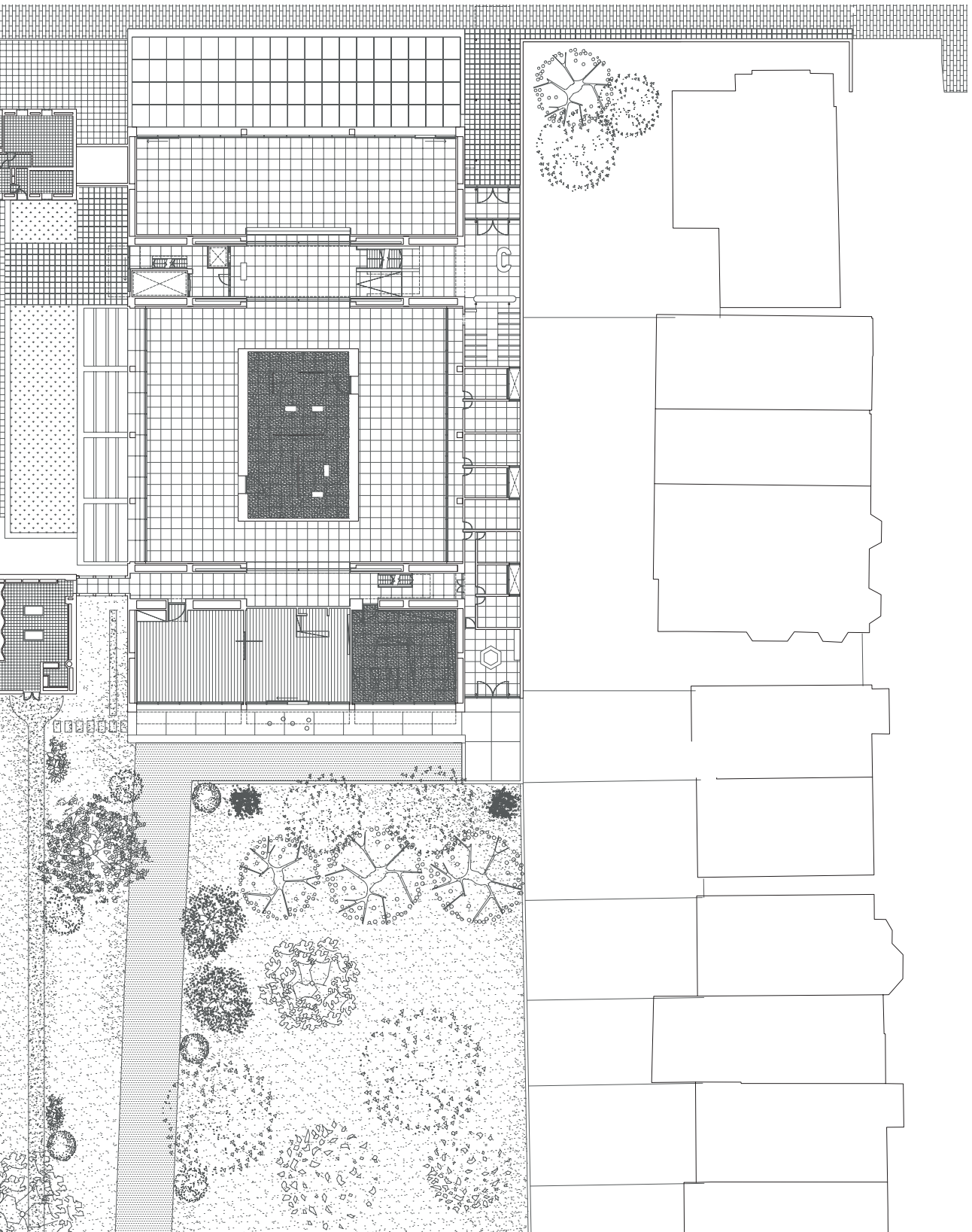


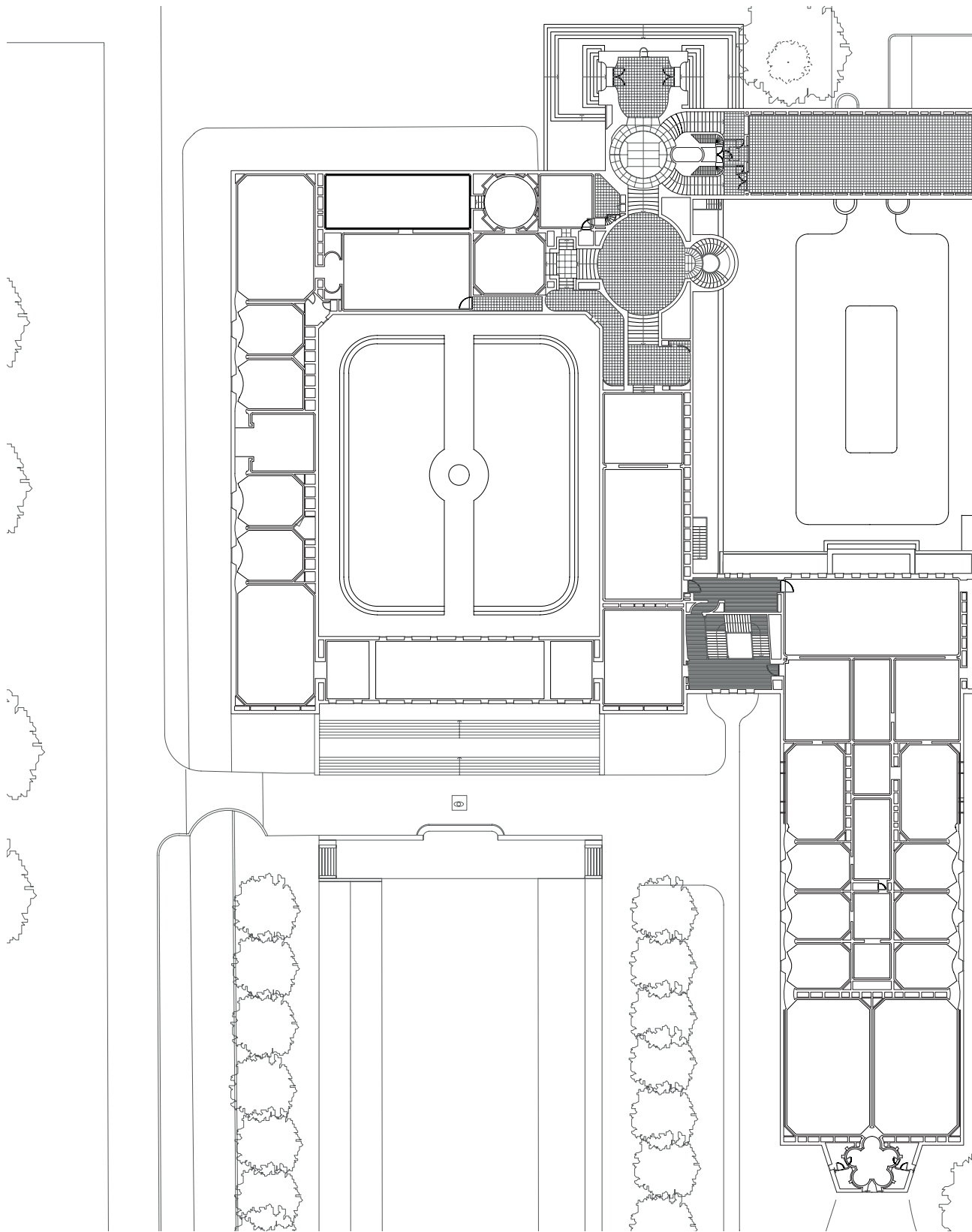


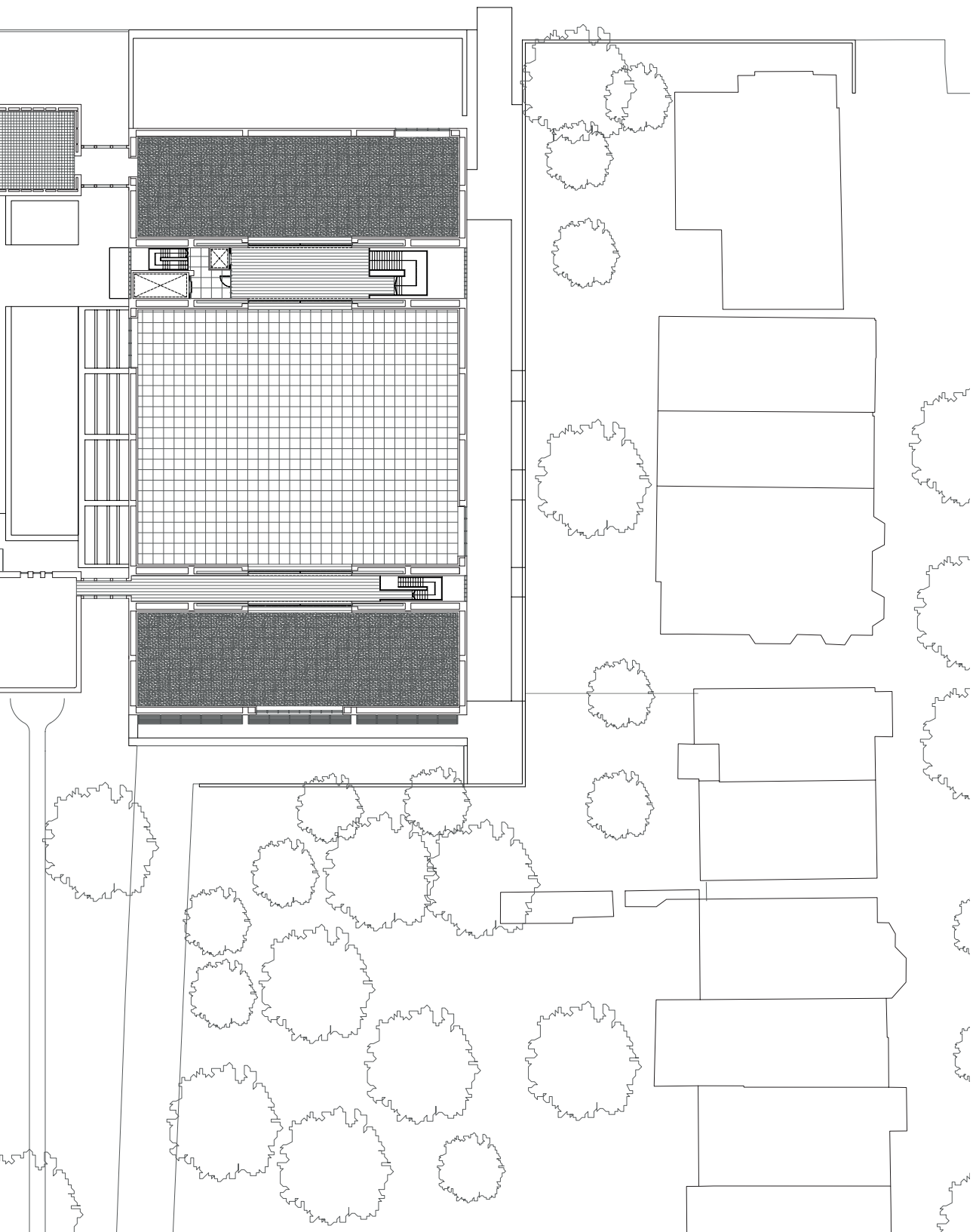
photographer unknown

For the first extension to the museum the architect Alexander Bodon, a former employee of van der Steur, was brought forward. He enlarged the museum in 1972 with a exhibition hall that was exemplary at that time in terms of size and open floor space. It allowed for the museum to completely rethink the format by providing large scale, temporary exhibitions. Artists and curators were invited to make works and installations specifically for the enormous space. The new wing had its own entrance and a gallery visible from the street and brought the art closer to the public domain.









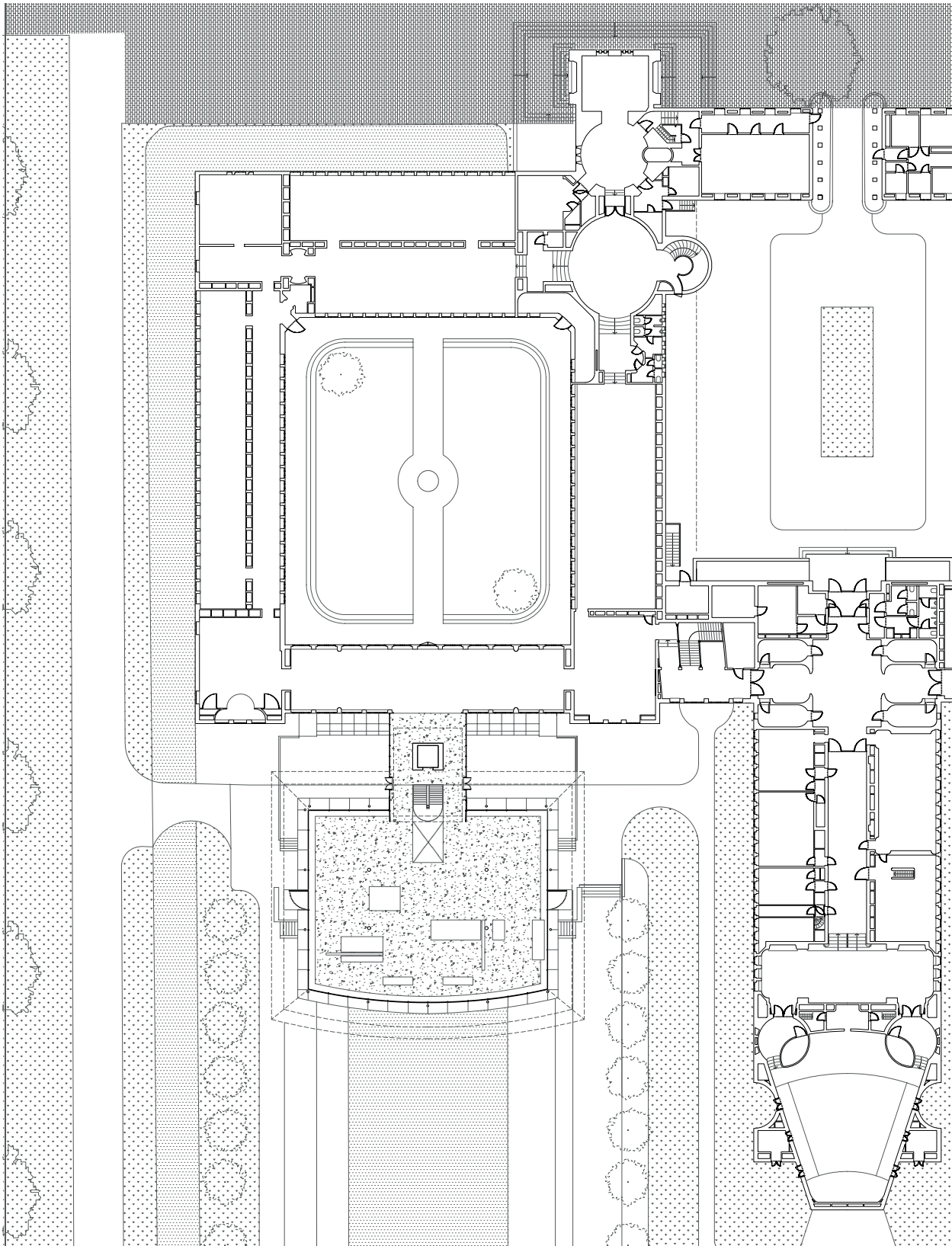
Survey

Van Beuningen–De Vriese Pavilion  
Hubert-Jan Henket, 1991

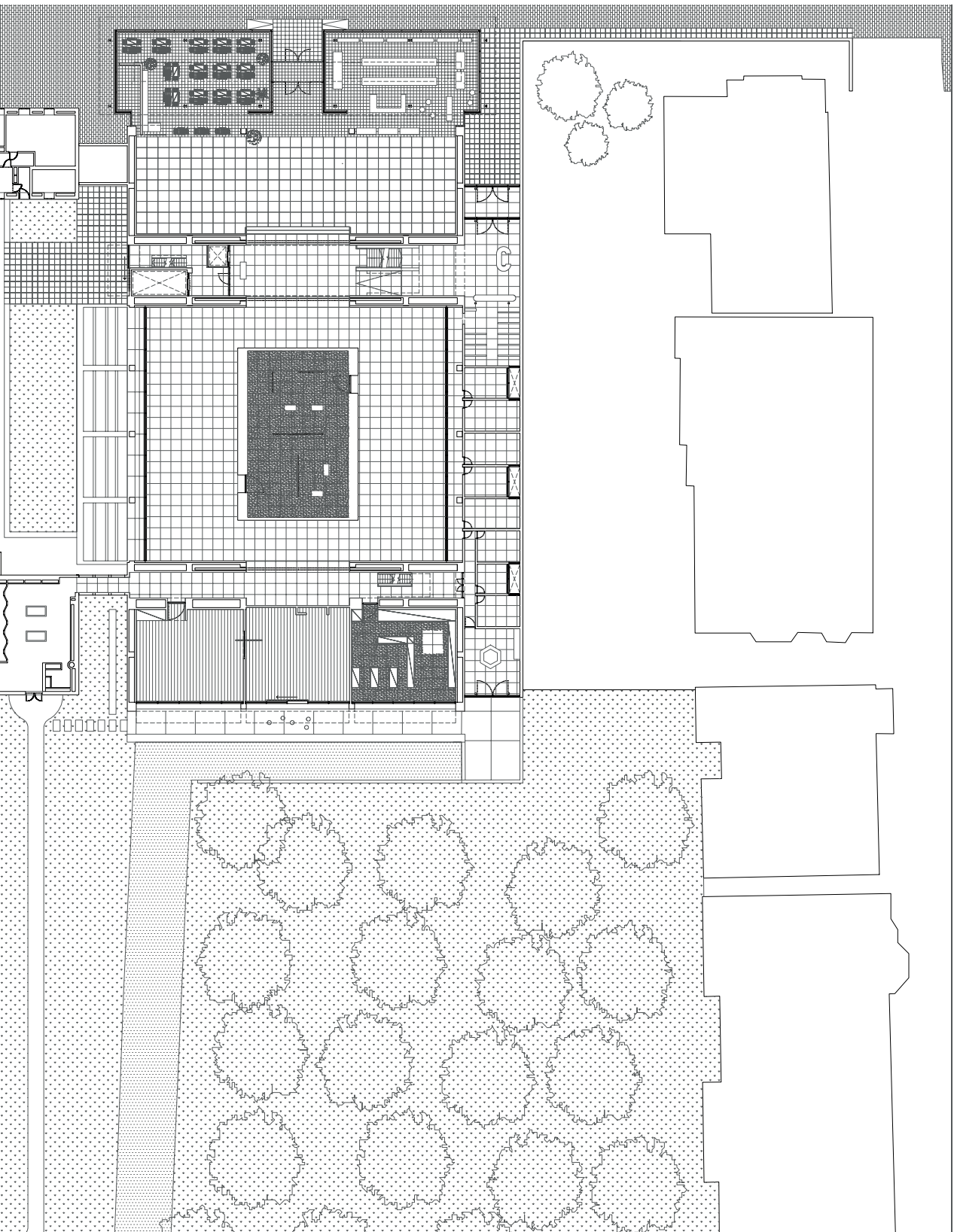


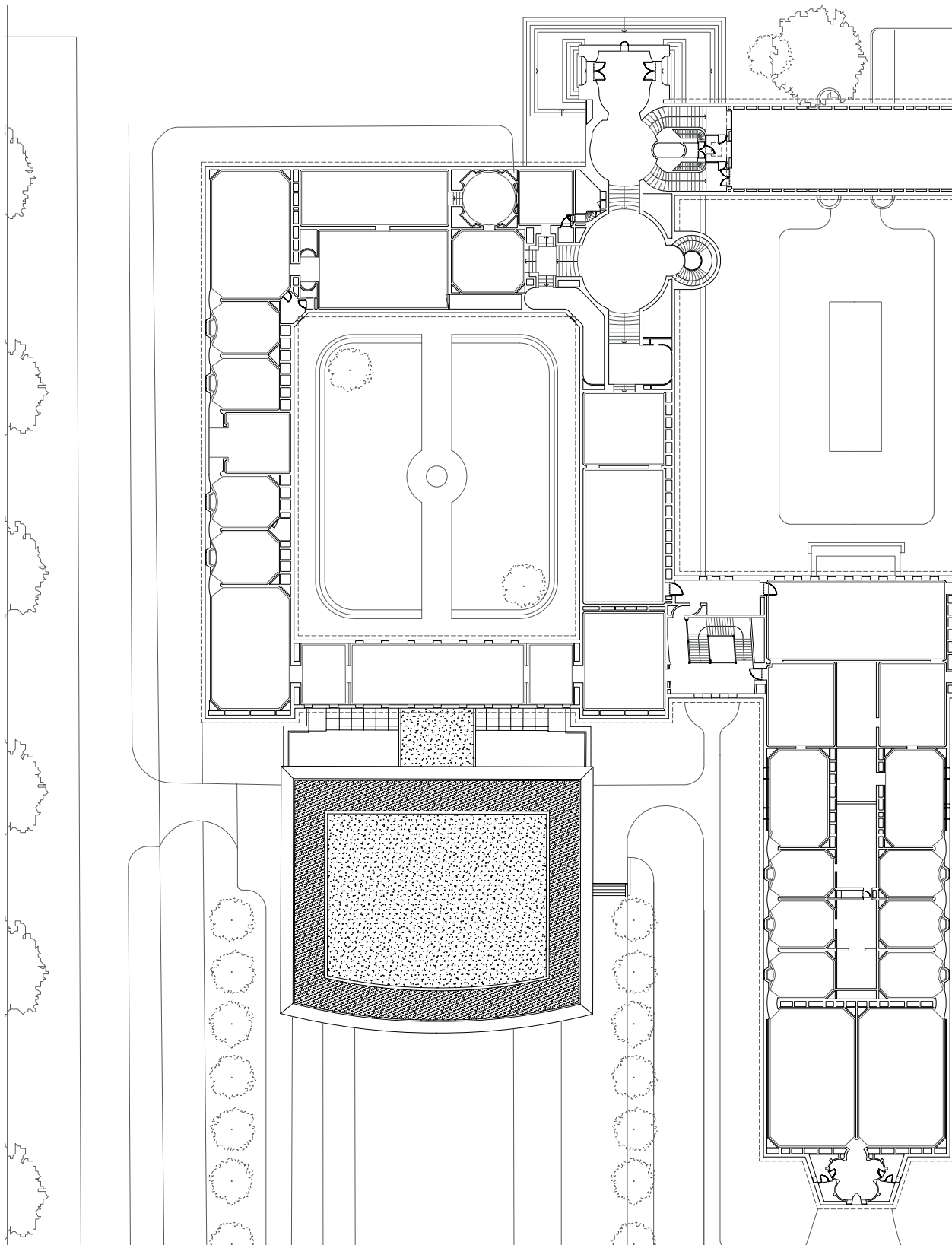
photograph by Aad Hoogendoorn

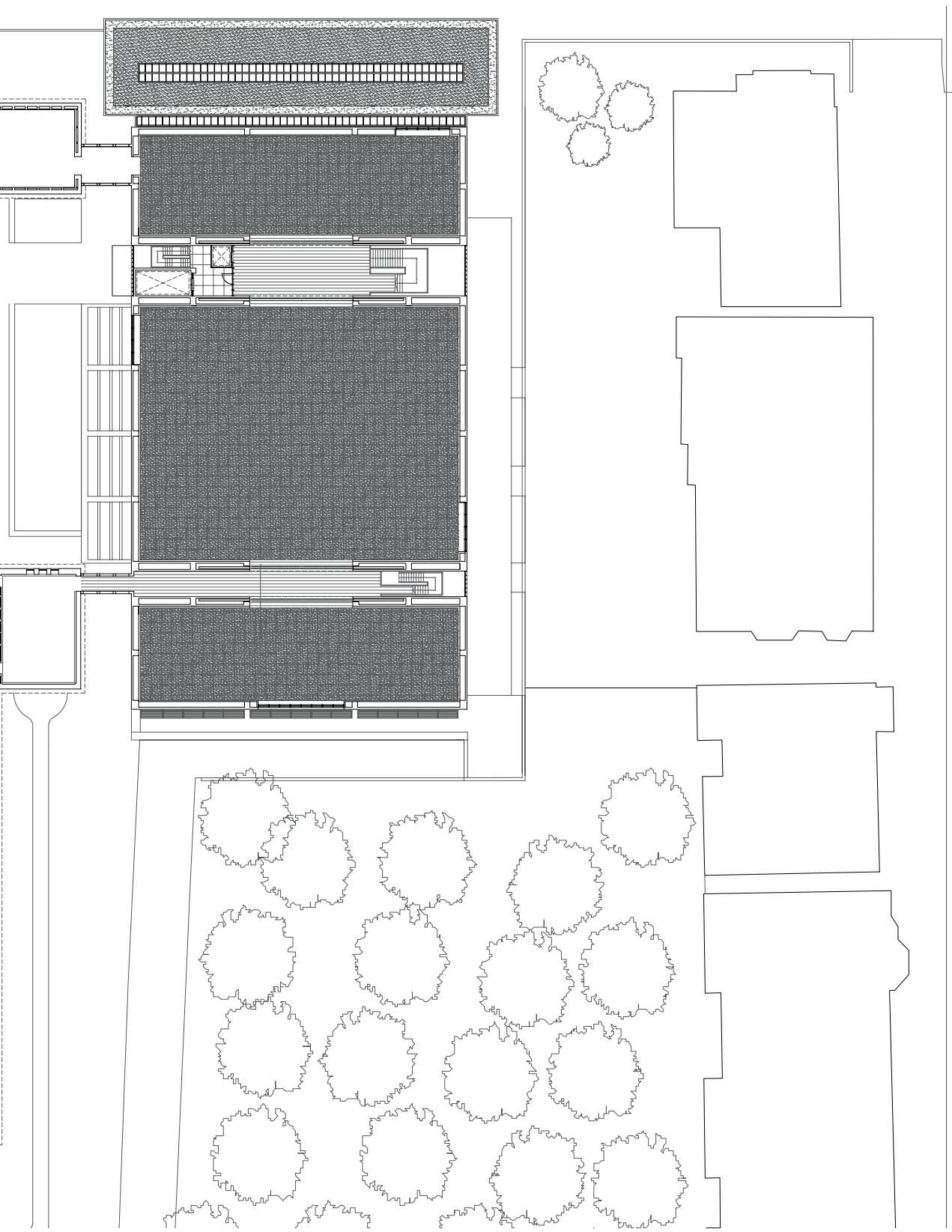
In 1991 the museum ensemble was enlarged again. Hubert-Jan Henket designed the Van Beuningen-De Vriese pavilion behind the museum in the sculpture garden, destined for the arts and crafts collection. The high-tech pavilion stands on its own and is only connected to the museum through a corridor. In the same year, Henket also executed a design of Alexander Bodon for an extension to the street replacing the gallery spaces with a cafeteria and shop.











Survey

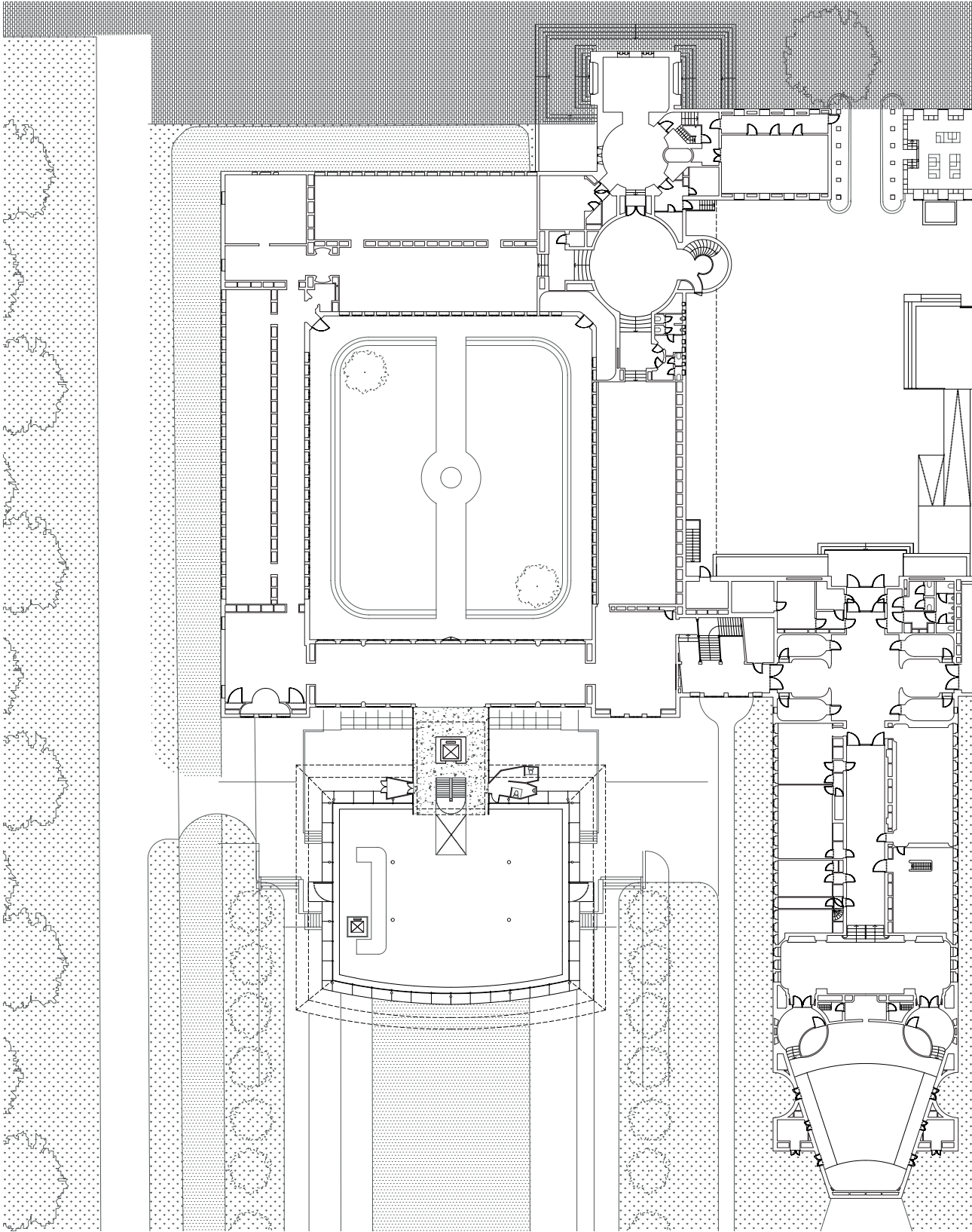
Interventions and Extension

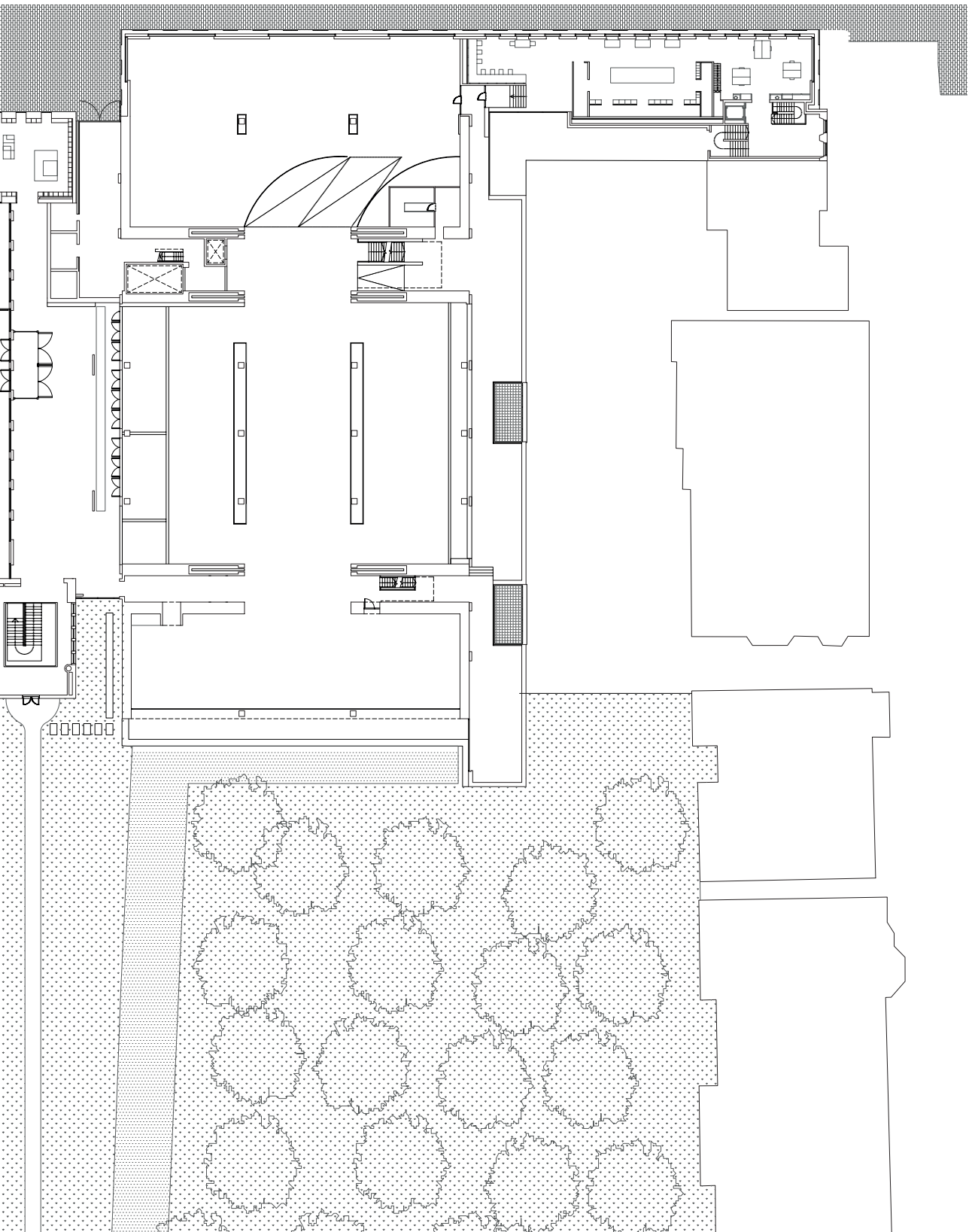
Robbrecht en Daem, 2002

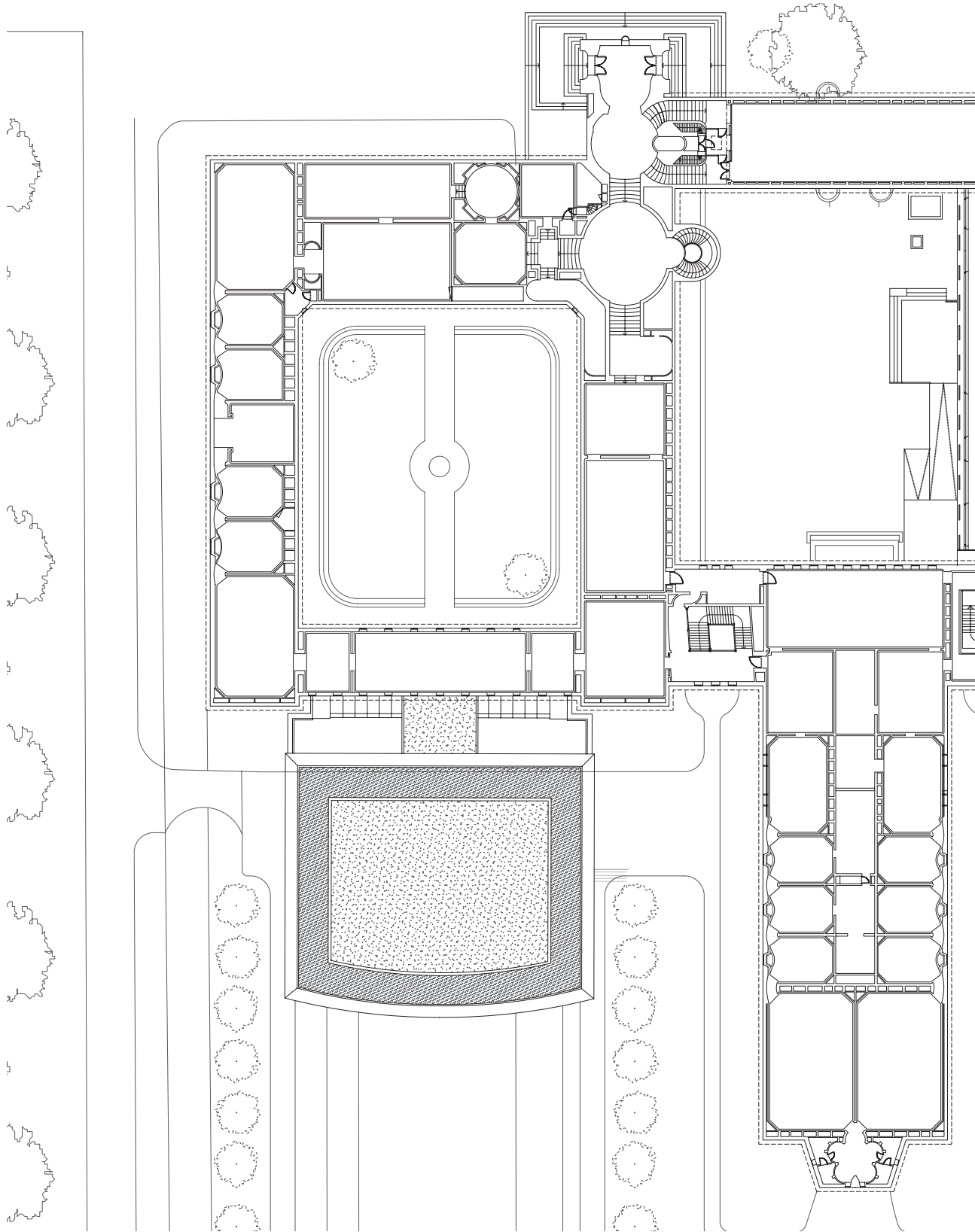


photograph by Studio Hans Wilschut 2008

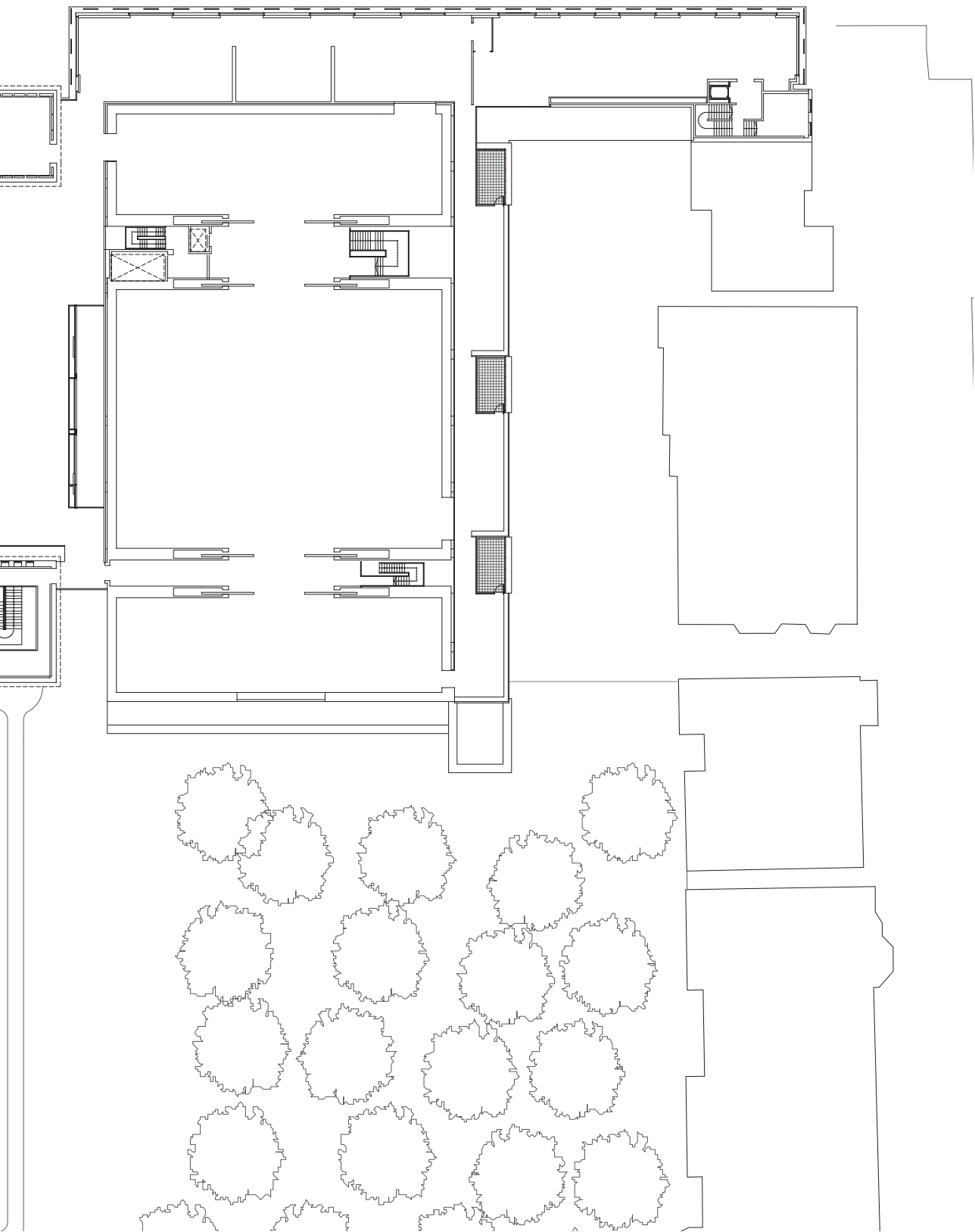
The last extension was designed by Belgian architecture office Robbrecht en Daem in 2002. They provided the museum with a series of smaller scale gallery spaces that enveloped Bodon's exhibition hall. In doing so, they reinforce the interpretation of Bodon's exhibition hall as an interior courtyard. Large windows along the street connect the galleries to the city and make the art visible from the street. Furthermore, the architects shifted the entrance of the museum to the central courtyard of the ensemble and transformed the courtyard into a public space with big works of art.











Survey

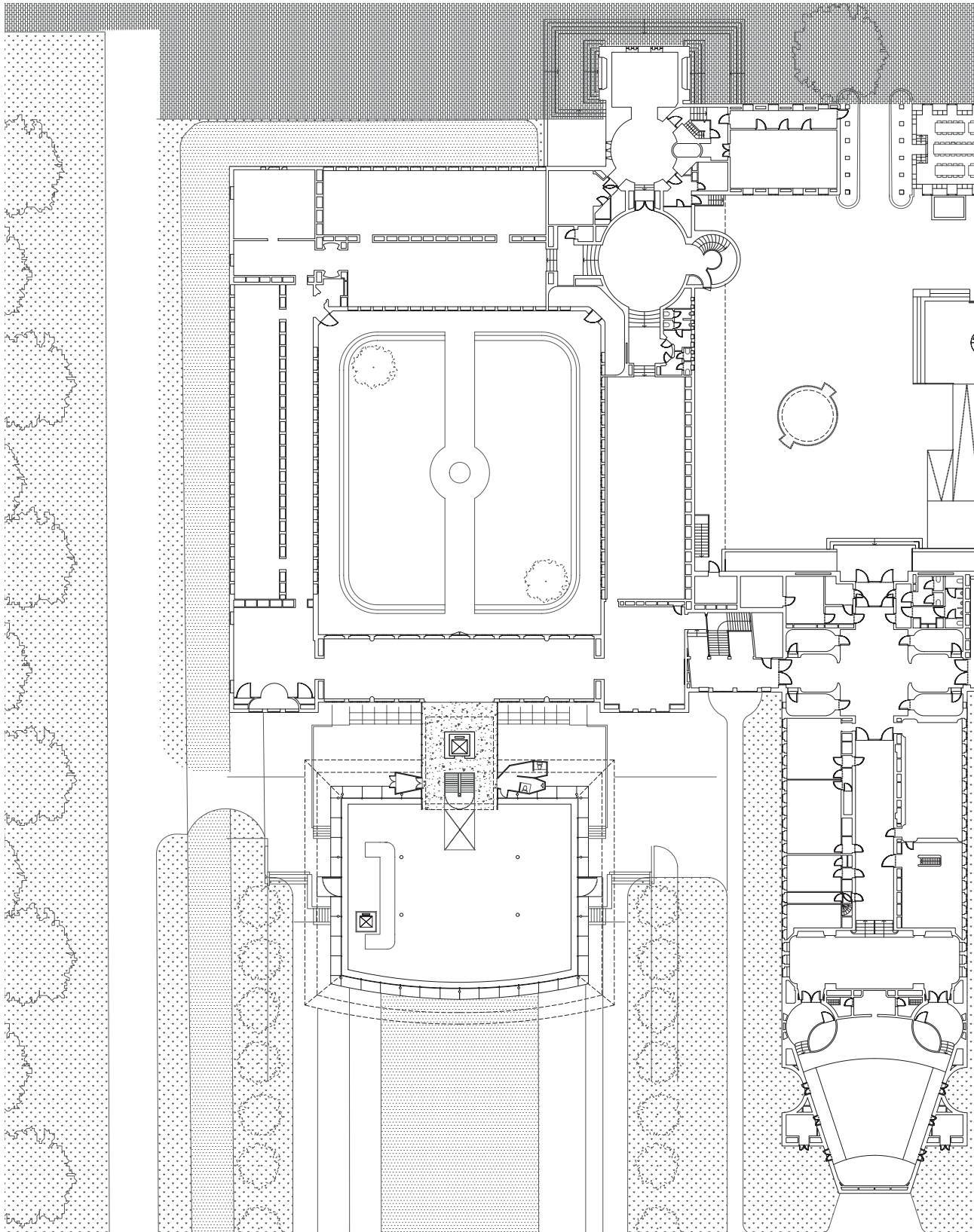
Current situation

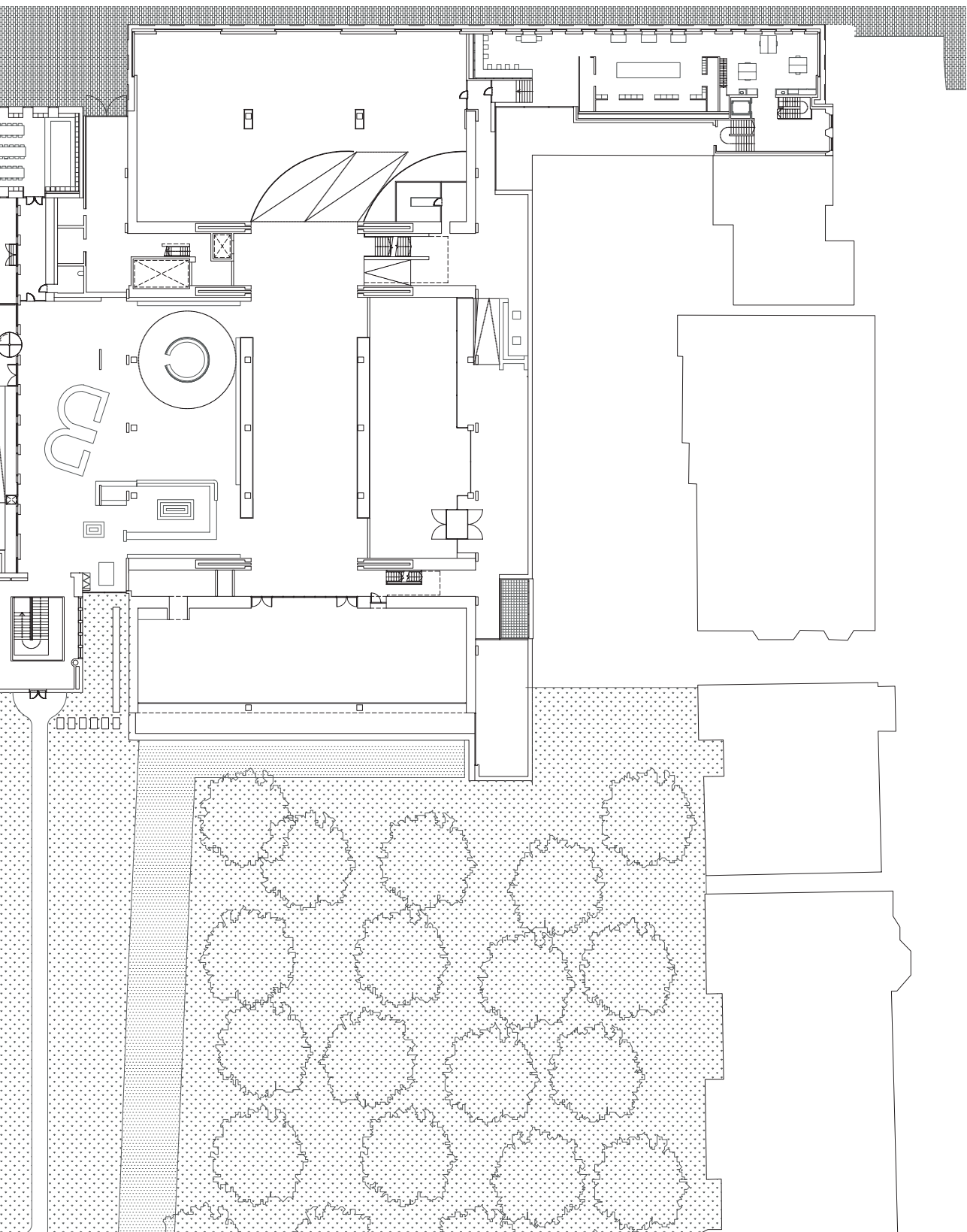
2019

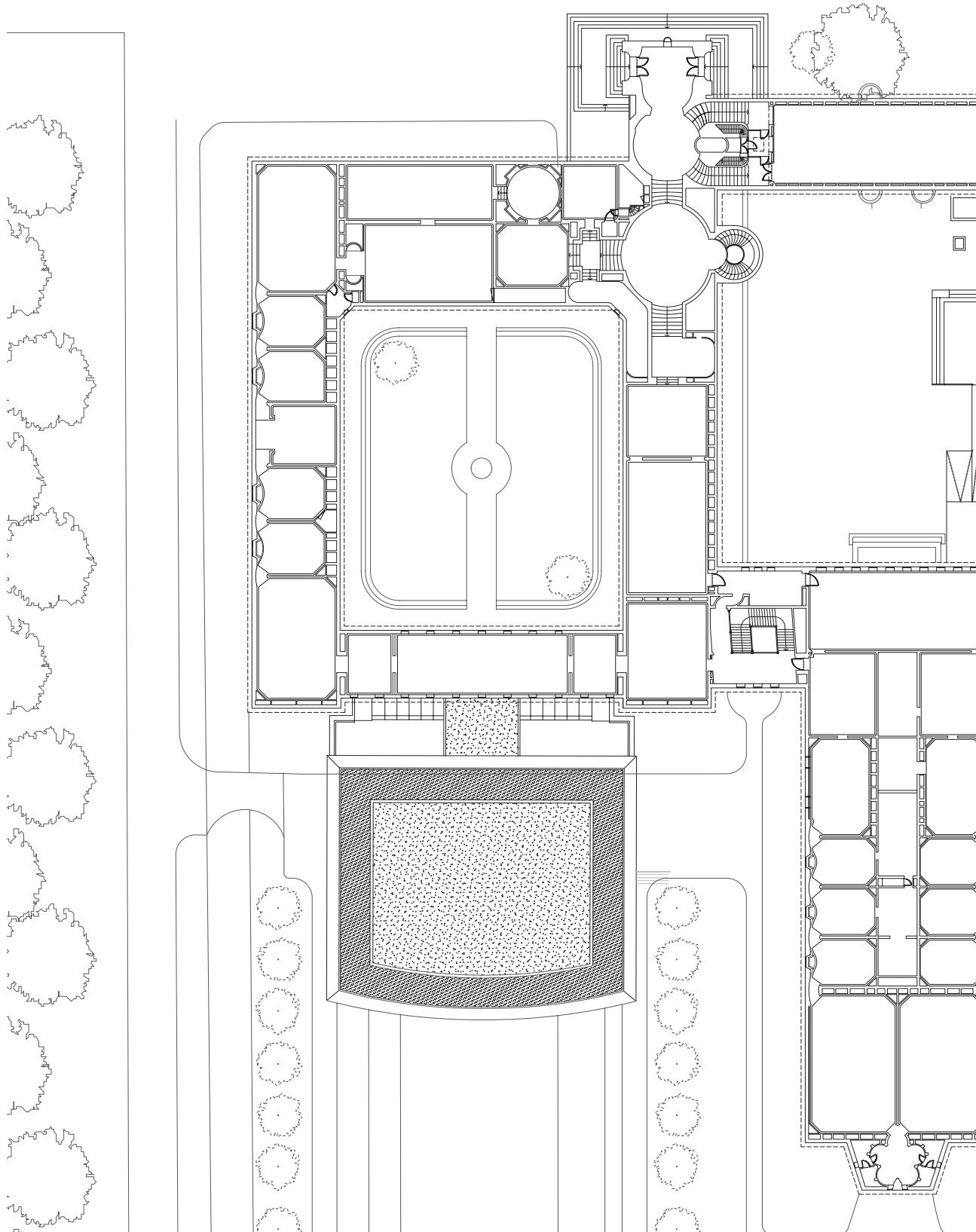


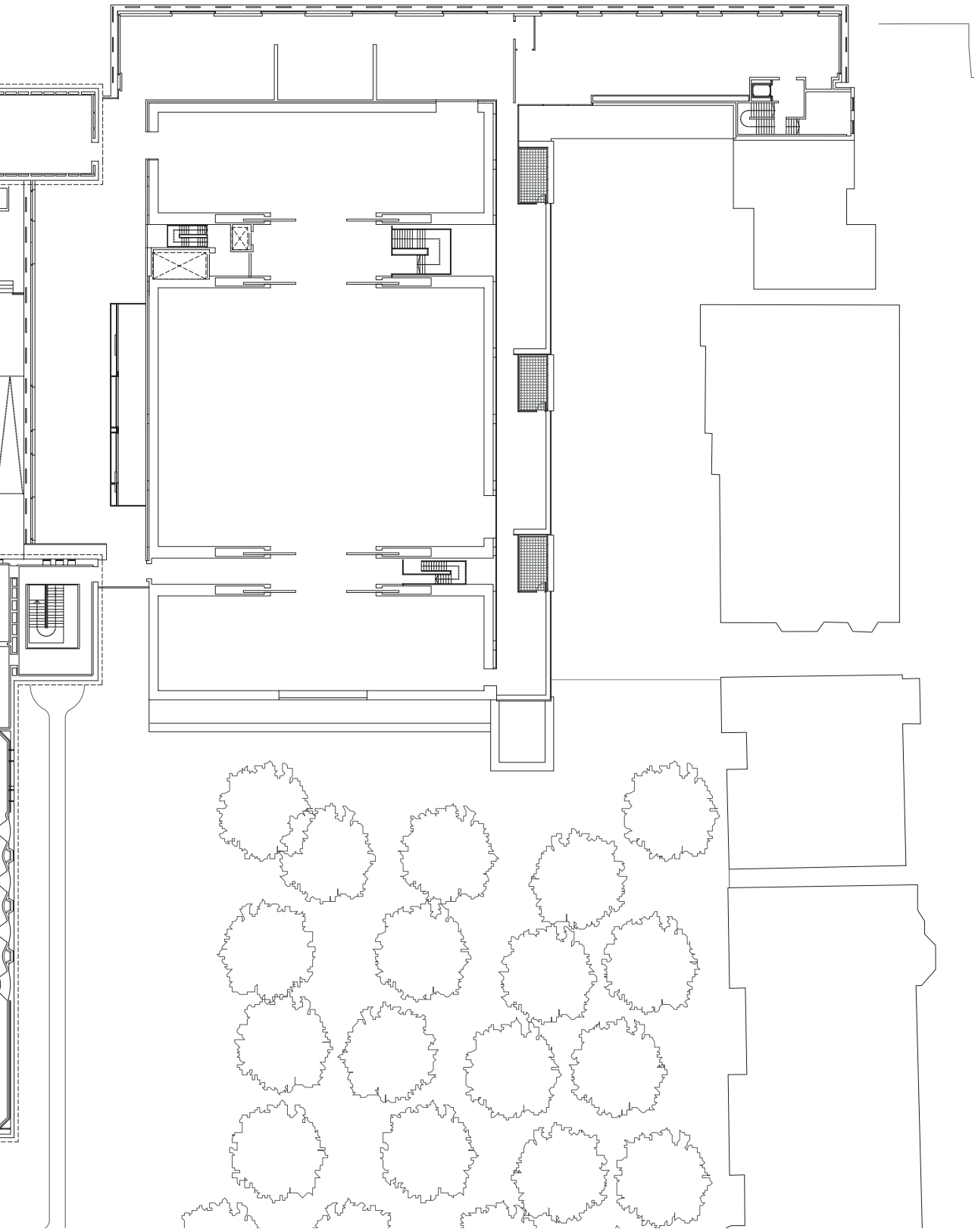
photograph by Maurice Boyer

In its current composition, the museum can be seen as a collection of buildings and extensions that represent the changing insights into museum building over time. After the last extensions, over time a series of further, smaller interventions were made in response to changing circumstances and the wishes and needs of the museum organisation. The visible interventions are largely situated within the entrance area and the entrance courtyard.











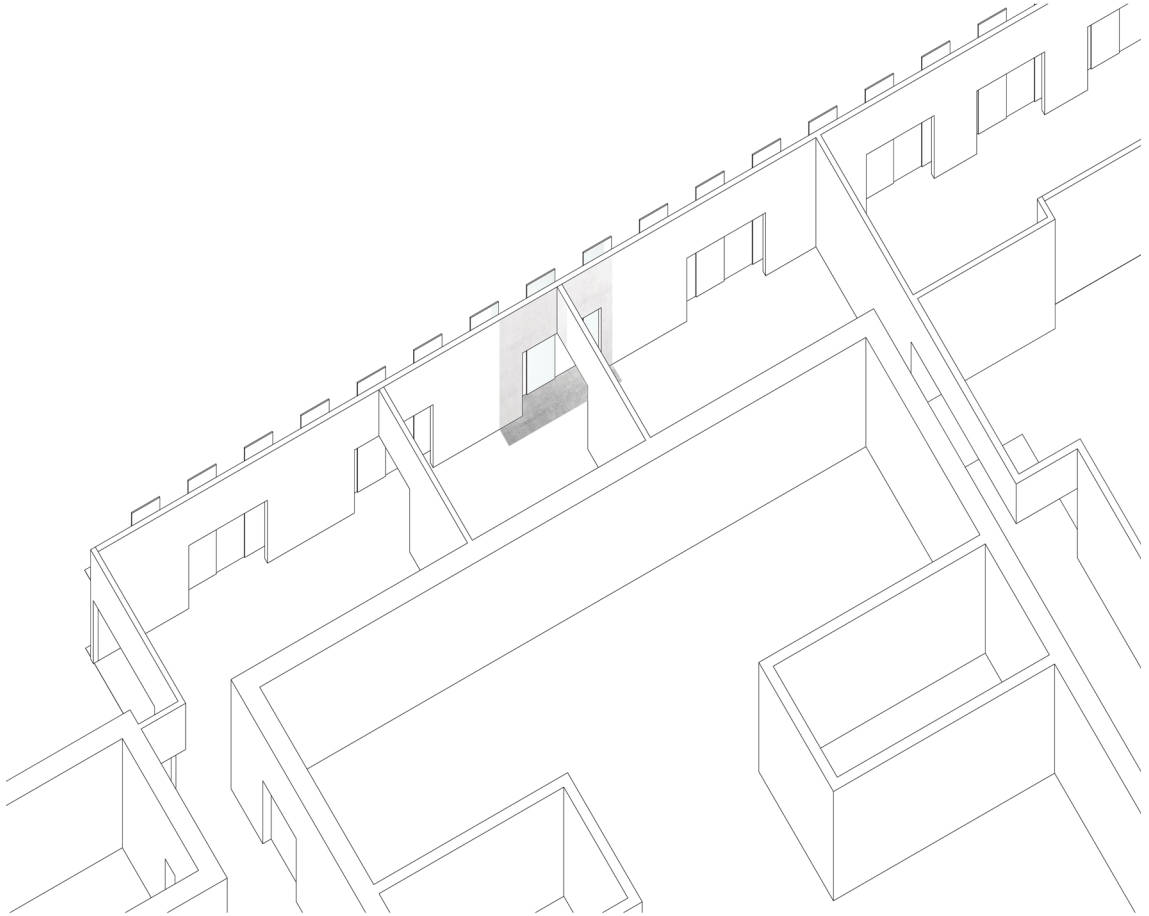


Fragments

Babel

## Facade

Tommaso Tellarini  
Mees Wijnants



Axonometric drawing

This is a fragment of the facade of the Robbrecht and Daem extension of the museum. The fragment is taken from one of the exhibition spaces. The three vertical bands of opaque panels give a hint of the rhythm of what is at first glance a uniform facade. In the interior, the fixed spacing between the opaque panels in combination with the more irregular placed windows creates moments where light is tempered and views towards the city are staged.

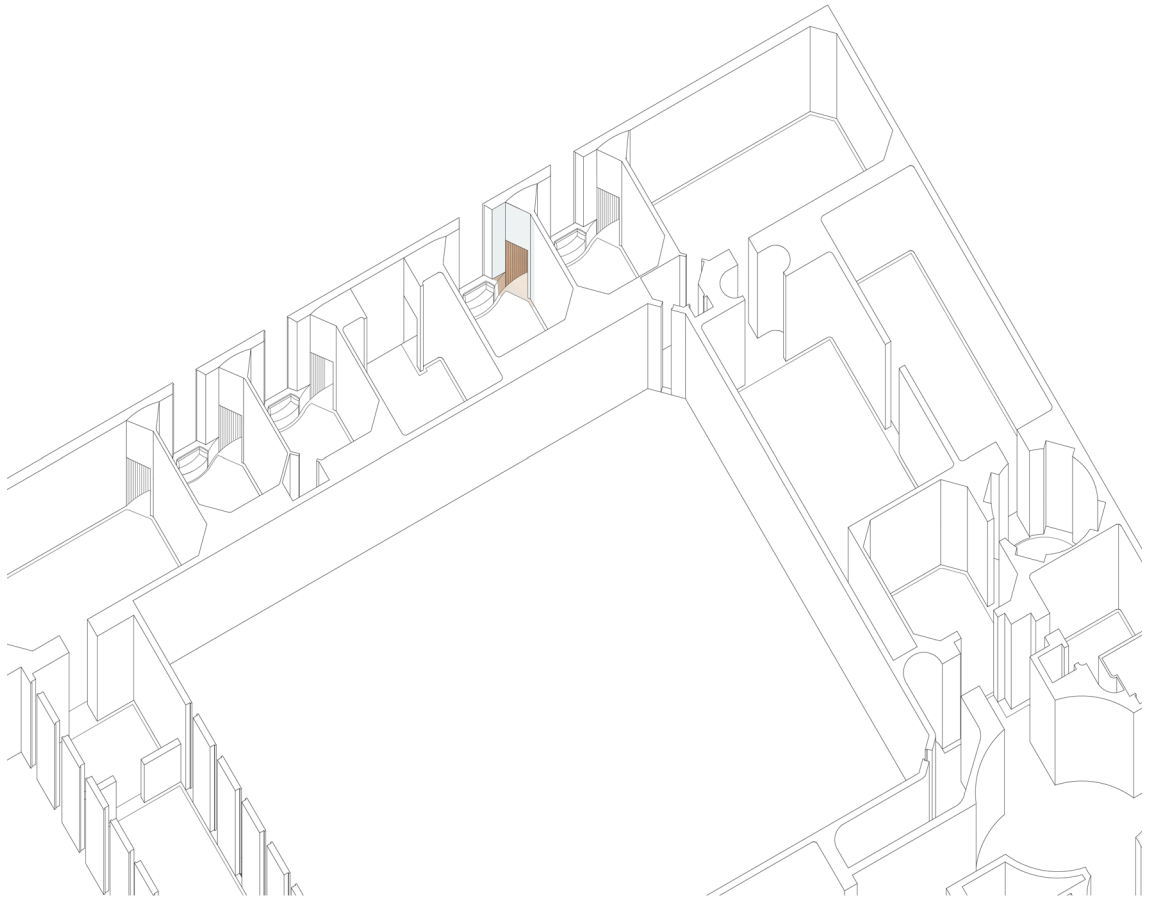


Model 1:5

Babel

## Threshold

Shamila Gostelow  
Silja Sikka



Axonometric drawing

This fragment is taken from one of the original galleries of the museum, designed by Van de Steur. It presents a threshold between two rooms. These and other thresholds create both physical and mental moments of rest within the museum. The paneling, which extends as wainscoting beyond the fragment into the galleries, works to push and pull forward the visitor at different moments within and between the rooms. The curved geometries of the threshold serve many purposes: to prevent harsh shadows, create an enfilade of spaces and make experience flow more seamlessly.

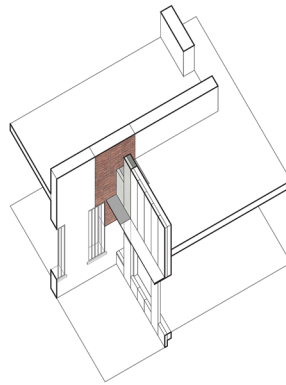


Model 1:5

Babel

## Walls

Sam Stalker  
Riccardo Garone



Axonometric drawing

The Boijmans exists as it does today after several phases of construction from four different architects; Van der Steur, Bodon, Henket and Robbrecht en Daem. Each of the phases required a negotiation with the previous architect, showing a respect to the others intentions whilst facilitating the new needs of the time. These negotiations, or architectural joints, form the elements of the Boijmans which give the building its uniqueness. The fragment presented here showcases one of these moments, where Robbrecht en Daem's concrete structure sits in harmony with the original Van der Steur wall, allowing the viewer to experience the external qualities of the wall within the museum interior.

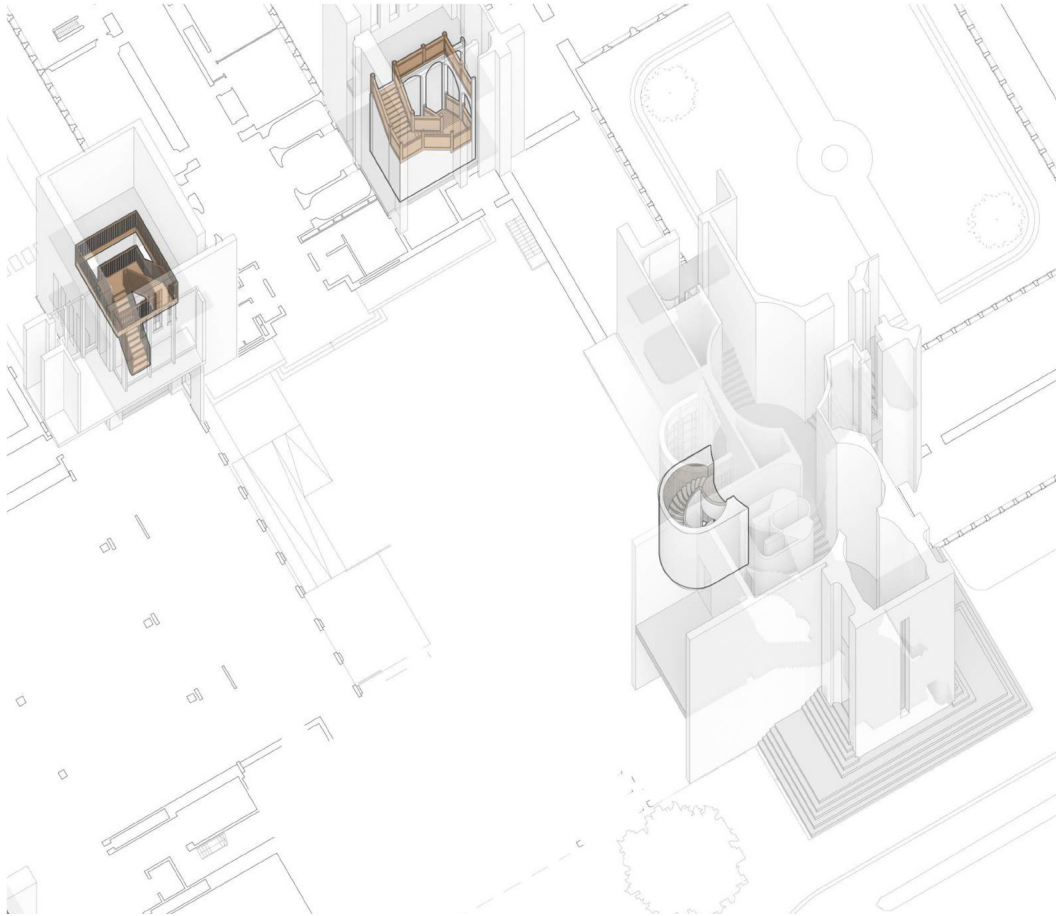


Model 1:5

Babel

## Stair

Seongchul Yu  
Chen Zhu



Axonometric drawing

The staircase presented in this fragment is located near the original museum entrance by Van der Steur. It connects the painting collection on the first floor with the design objects on the ground floor. It has a strong symmetry, and the circular wall embracing the interior creates a quiet and intimate space. The main material of the staircase is marble of four different kinds, cladding the step surface, the wall, the ground floor, and the first floor. The appreciation of the formal language of this staircase was the starting point of a research into the many staircases of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen ensemble.



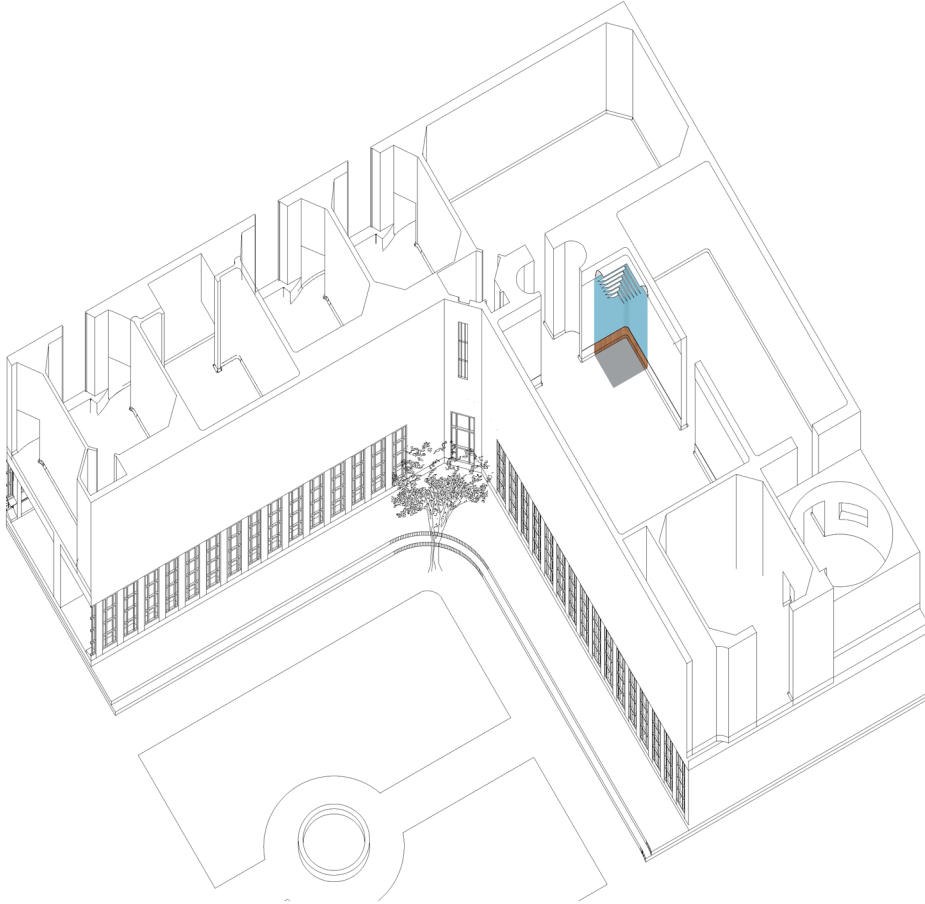


Model 1:5

Babel

## Wall

Helen Cao  
Dinand Kruize  
Jakub Wysocki



Axonometric drawing

The interior character of the museum Boijmans designed by Ad van der Steur can be understood as an environment prioritising the viewing of art. A number of architectural aspects support this intention. One of the main aspects is the infiltration of daylight from the ceiling, spread into the exhibition space by the curved corners of the interior to optimise the lighting conditions. The art is placed onto the wall plane as an isolated object, the wall functioning as a neutral background for the art. The lining of the gallery presented in this fragment forms a continuous surface: floor, wall and ceiling are detailed as an unbroken line.



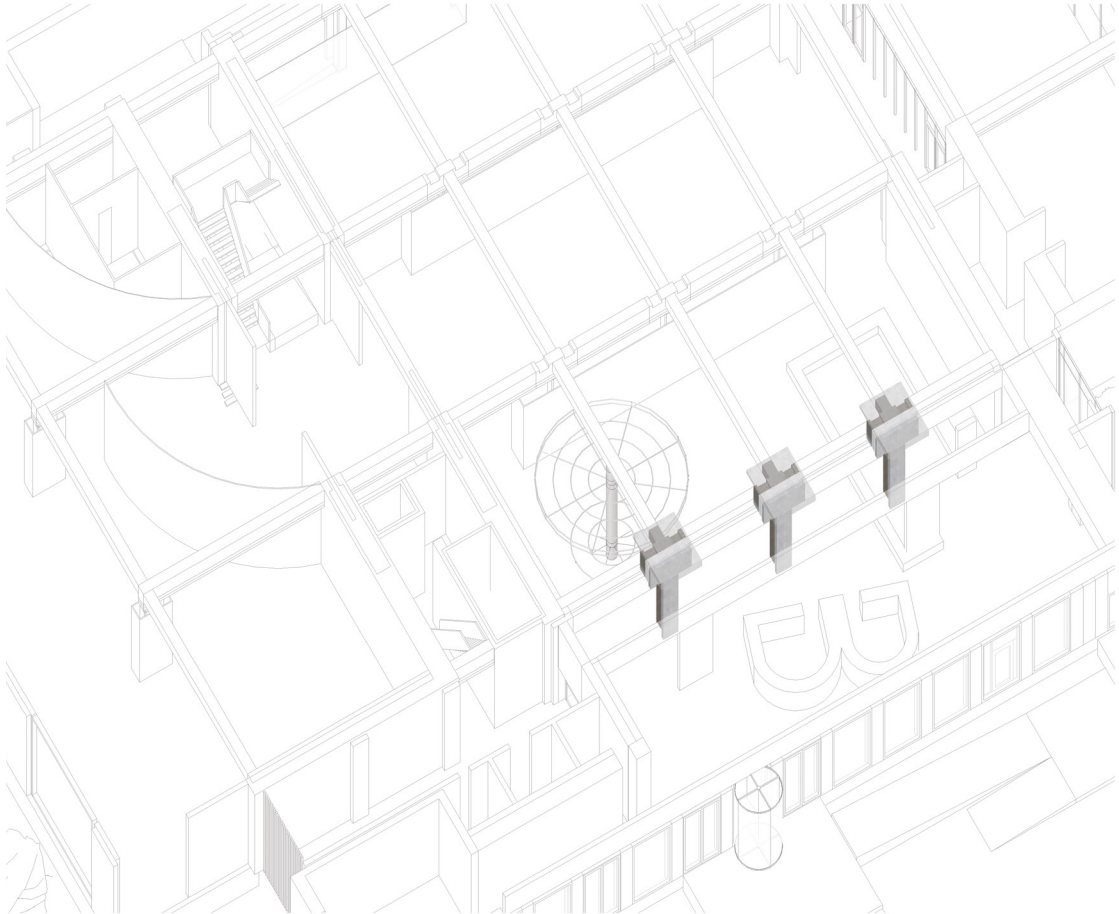
Model 1:5

Babel

## Column

Coen Gordebeke

Ananta Vania Iswardhani



Axonometric drawing

This fragment shows the meeting of two columns: one designed by Robbrecht en Daem, the other by Alexander Bodon. The Bodon column is square and has a rough finish. The surface is bush hammered, with smooth and rounded edges. The Robbrecht en Daem column is a stretched rectangle (ratio 1:5), whose concrete surface is smooth and of a lighter colour than the Bodon column. By extension, these columns represent the way the two building parts meet: Robbrecht en Daem's extension almost touches Bodon's structure, with only a slight gap in between. This intimacy makes explicit the seam between the two extensions, and strengthens the relationship between the two building parts.



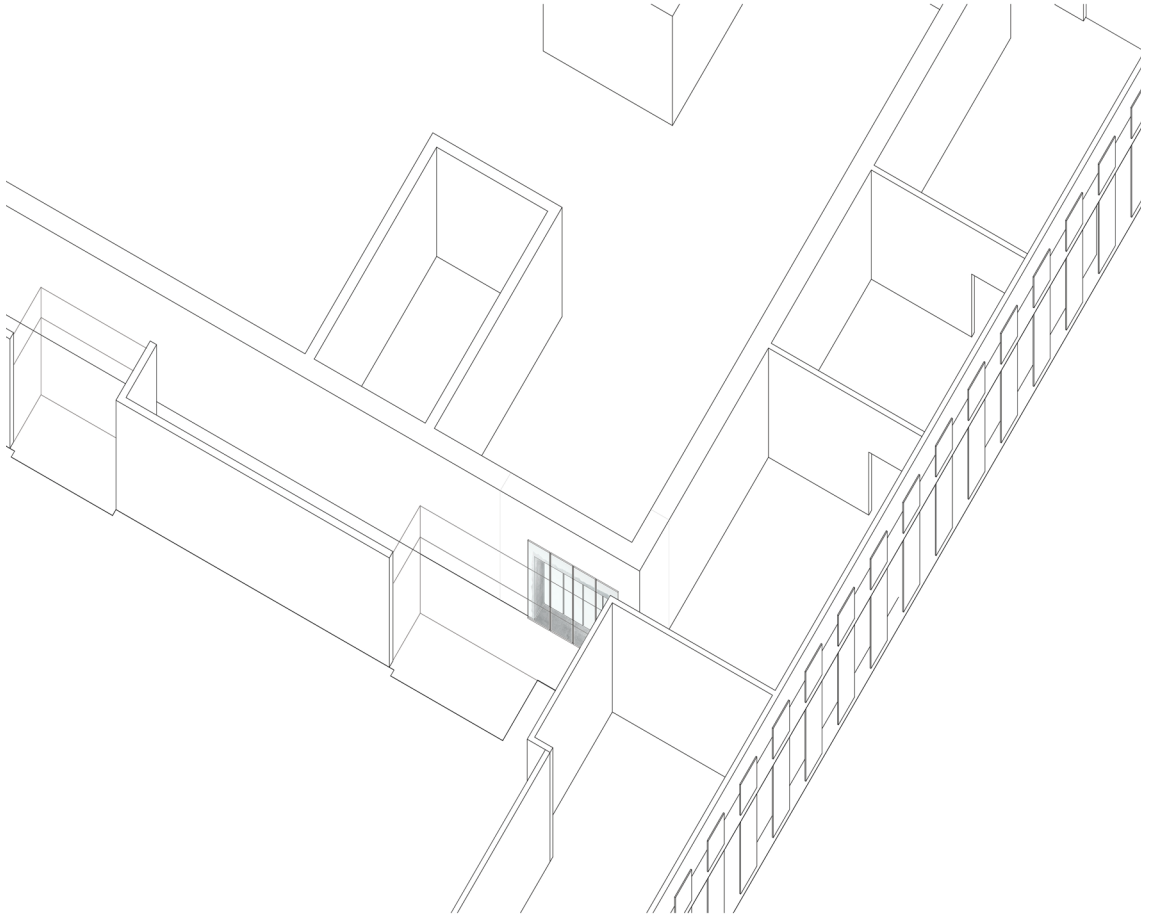
Model 1:5



## Interventions

## Window

Tommaso Tellarini  
Mees Wijnants



Axonometric drawing

In 1973, Alexander Bodon created the first extension to the museum, with as its main space a large white box with three large windows connecting the museum to the outside. In 2002, the latest addition to the museum by Robbrecht en Daem created a series of rooms around the open space of Bodon, enveloping the earlier addition and closing two of Bodon's windows. The extension of Bodon is often interpreted as an interior courtyard (to complement the two exterior courtyards of Van der Steur), which Robbrecht en Daem's extension is meant to reinforce. However, the visual relationship between this courtyard and the enveloping rooms is missing. This intervention therefore reintroduces a window, situated in the wall between Bodon and Robbrecht en Daem's extension. This creates a visual and at times physical relation between the two building parts.

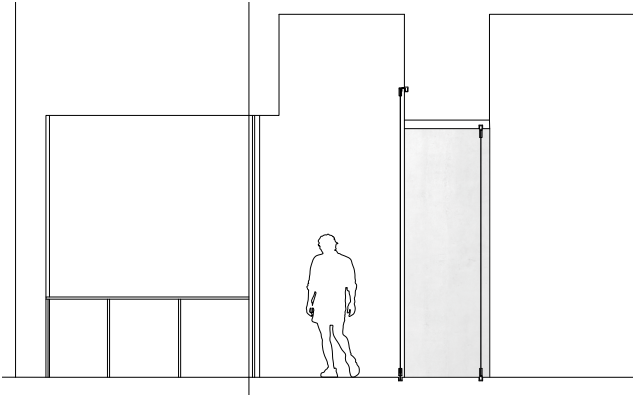




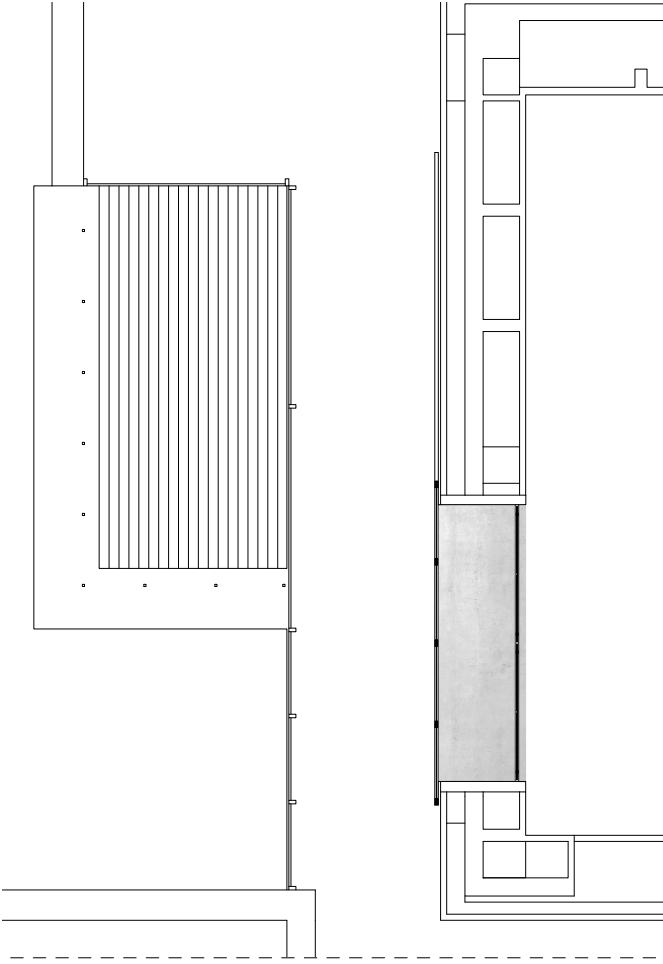
Model 1:5



View on the new window letting in light and life from the adjacent Robbrecht and Daem extension.



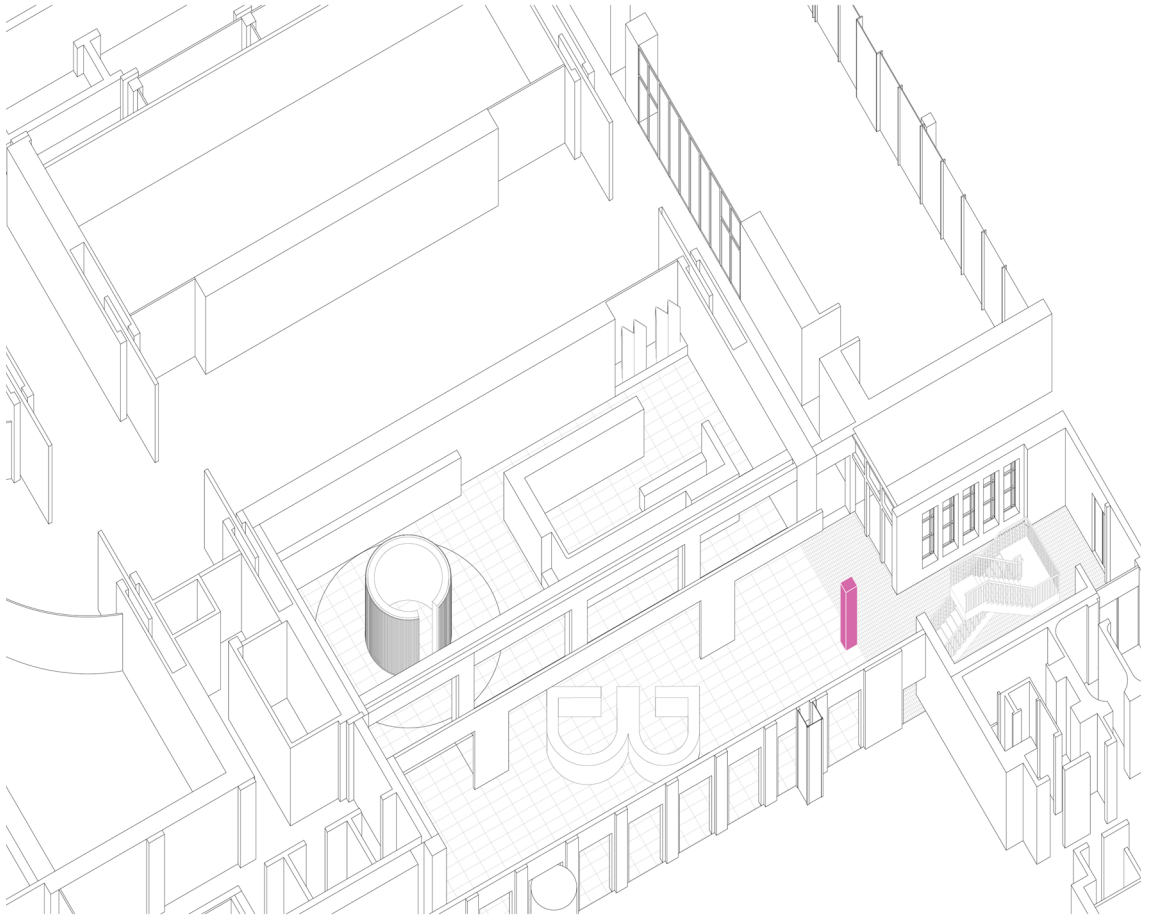
Section 1:100



Plan 1:100

## Column

Shamila Gostelow  
Silja Sikka

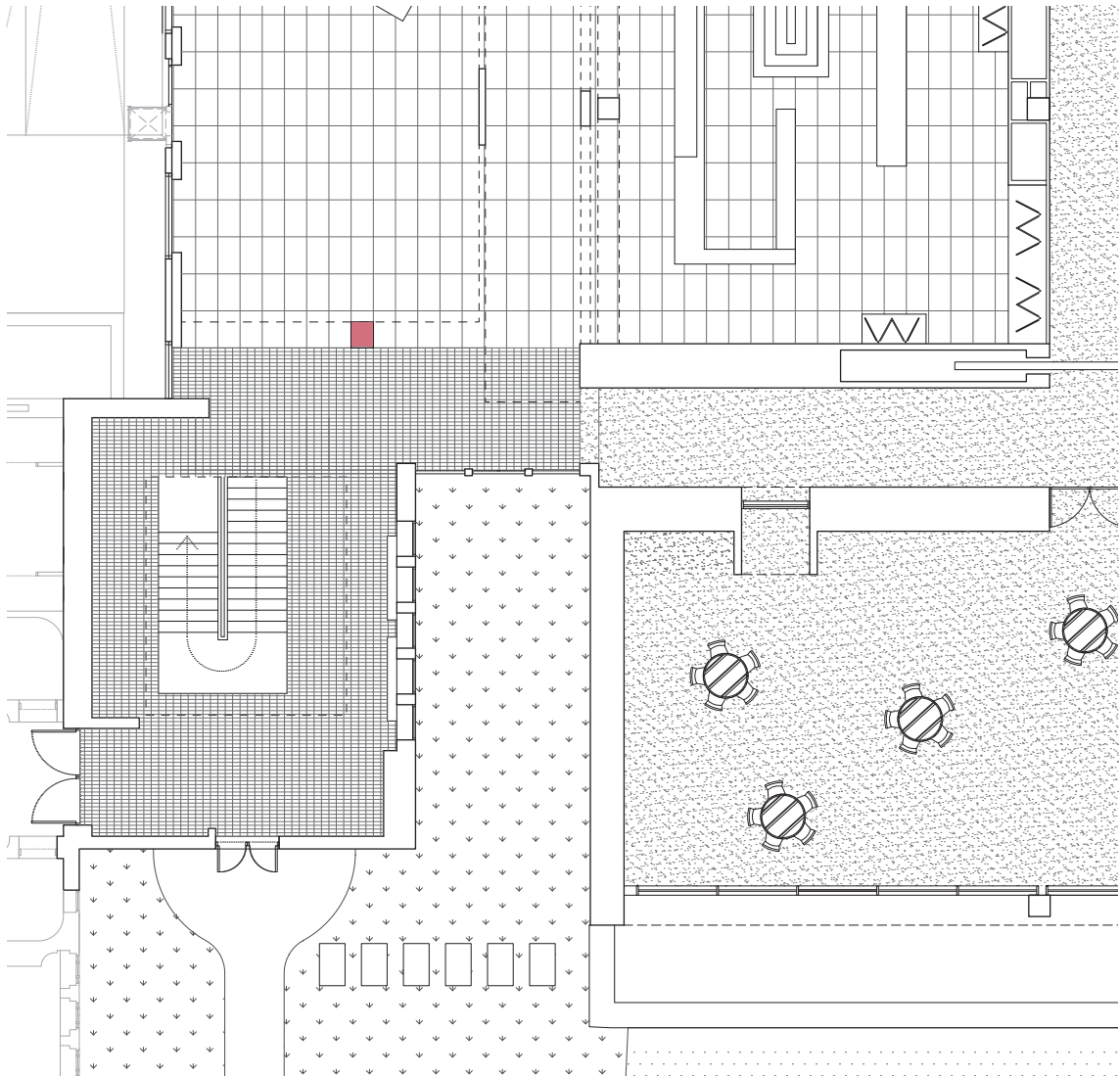


Axonometric drawing

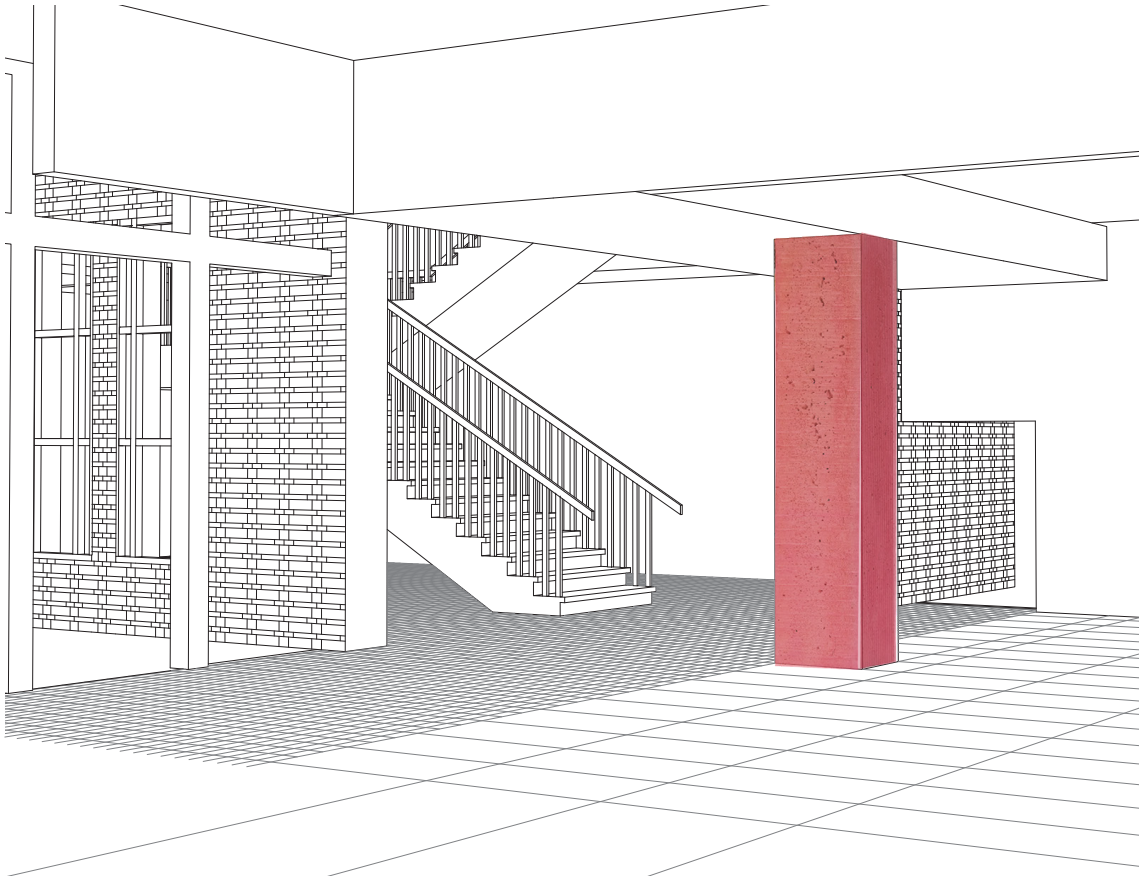
One could interpret Museum Boijmans van Beuningen as a collection of thresholds. We see the entrance sequence from purchasing a ticket to entering the exhibitions as the area that is currently the most difficult to navigate as a visitor, and therefore chose to intervene here. We have experimented with texture, colour and tactile qualities using concrete as a material to create an object that strengthens the notion of the threshold. We enjoy the playfulness of the other art objects in the entrance hall and build on this through our introduction of a new whimsical object: a pink column. The column is used as a gatekeeper, signaling the entrance and symbolising the crossing of the threshold as a ritual act. Several smaller adjustments, such as aligning the floor finishes and reorganizing the other objects in the entrance, help structure the space as a whole.



Model 1:5



Plan 1:200

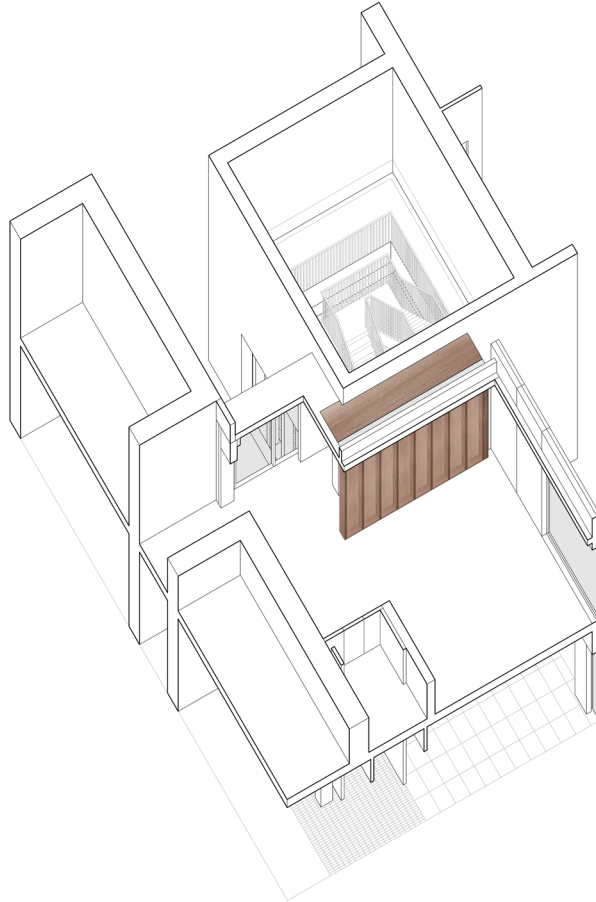


View on the staircase from the entrance area

Babel

## Passage

Sam Stalker  
Riccardo Garone



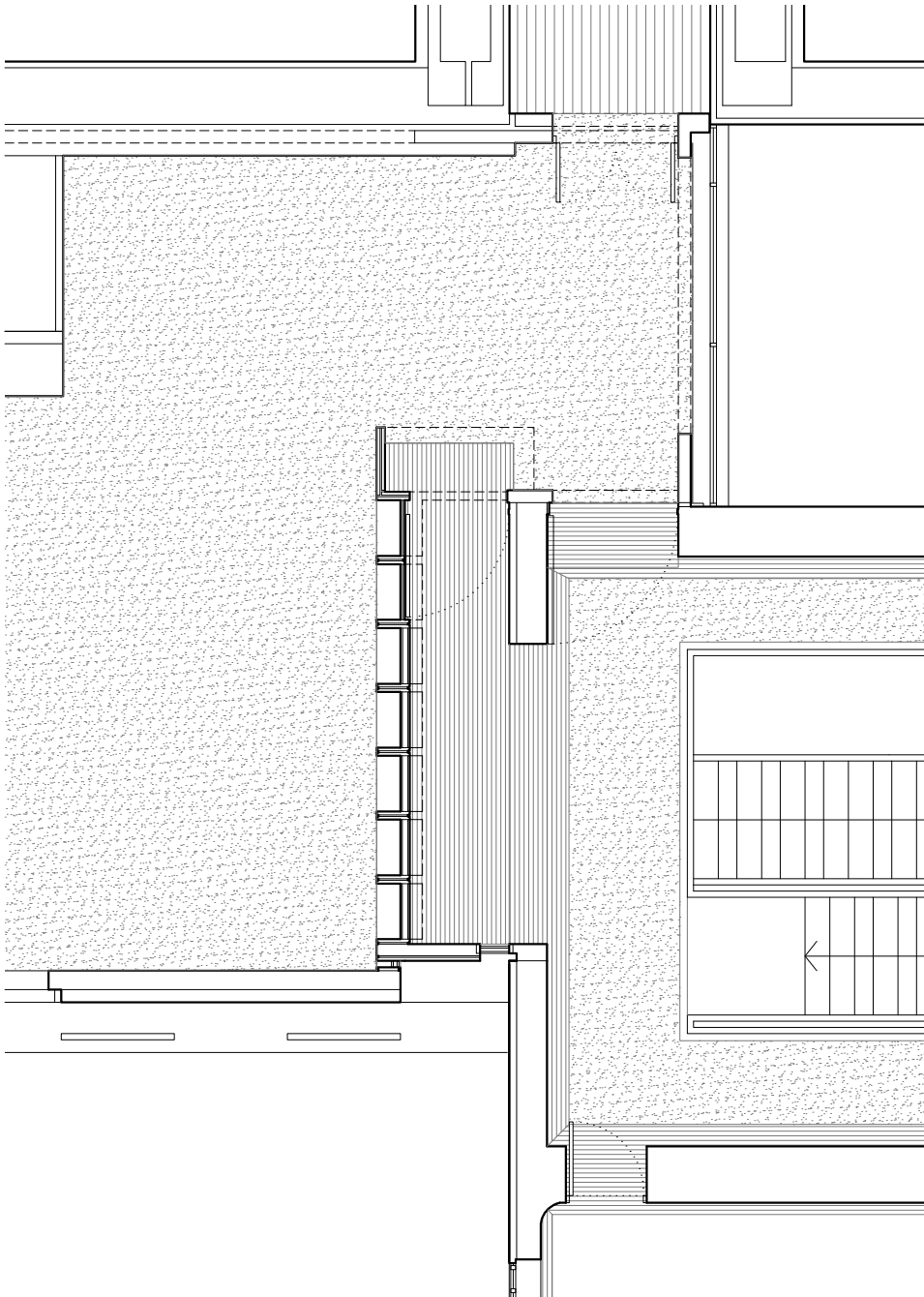
Axonometric drawing

The intervention sits within the glass offset between the top of the stairs in the Van der Steur structure and museum space of Robbrecht en Daem. This arrangement forces a tightened, awkward moment along the journey of the museum, in a space that is one of the important nodes in the building. The intervention instead creates a welcome experience of entry into the galleries on the first floor. The proposed structure, crafted out of timber, sits between the layers of history the various architects have constructed, embodying the principle of a respectful distance to the previous work whilst still showcasing itself as a new chapter in the Boijmans history.





Model 1:5



Plan 1:100



View on the passage from the staircase

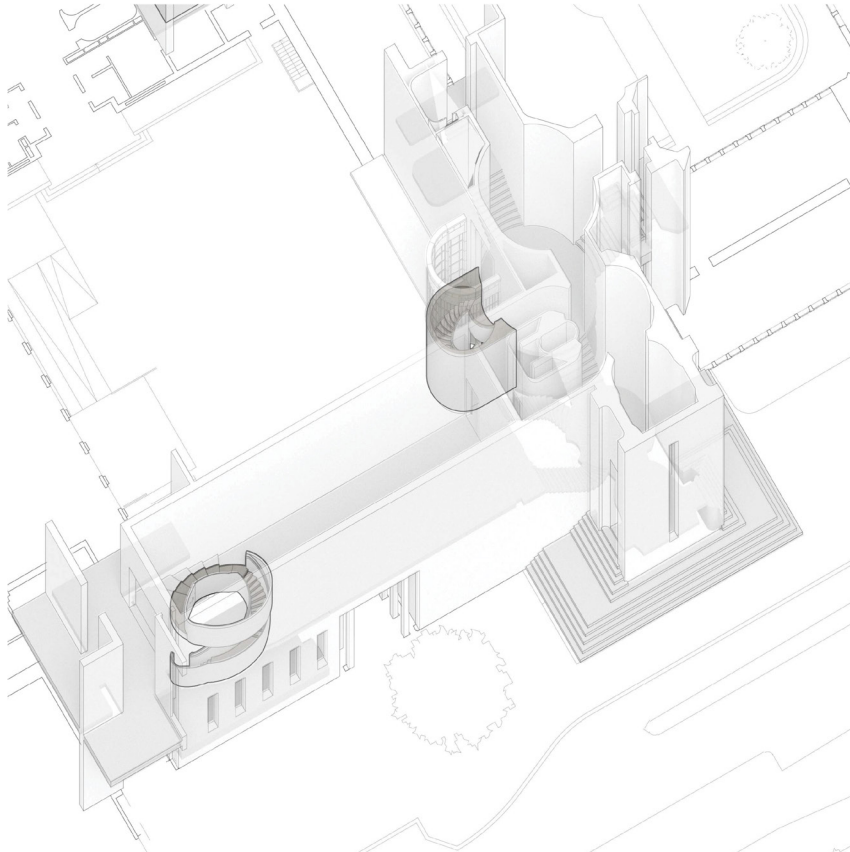


View on the passage from the gallery

Babel

## Stairs

Seongchul Yu  
Chen Zhu



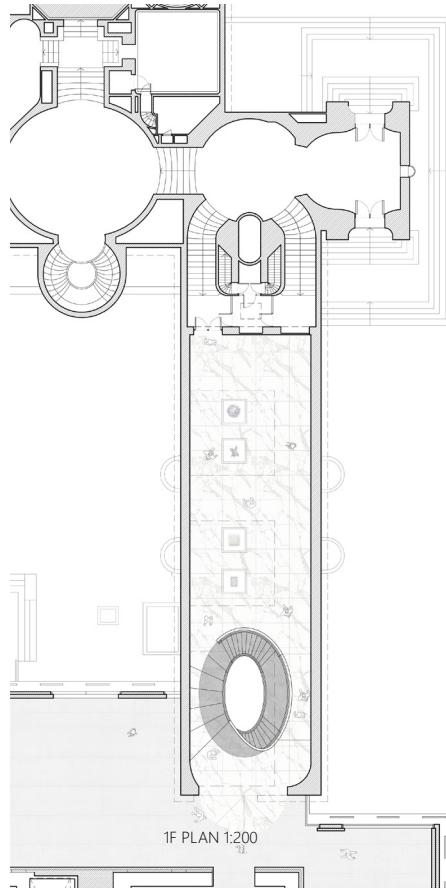
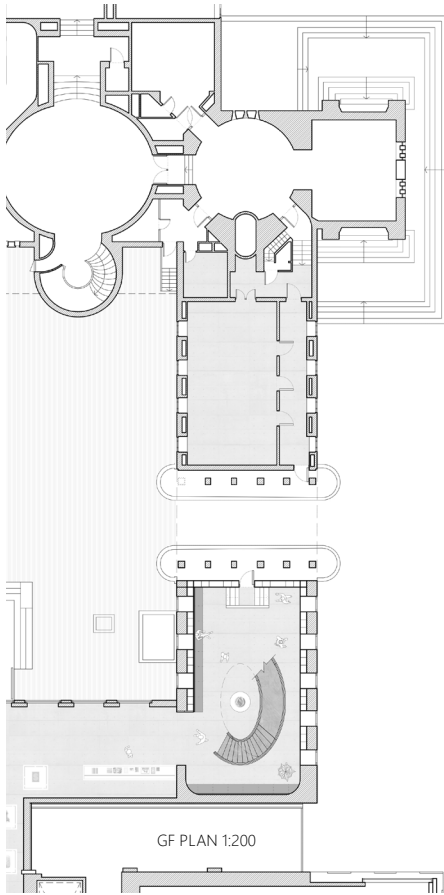
Axonometric drawing

In the current museum there are three main staircases, surrounding the central courtyard: Van der Steur's original entrance stairwell, a seventeenth century staircase that Van der Steur integrated into the museum, and Robbrecht en Daem's wooden staircase. Especially Robbrecht en Daem's staircase is overburdened by the amount of visitors the museum receives. This project proposes to add a new staircase, that relieves Robbrecht en Daem's staircase and enables new routes through the museum. This new staircase is situated to the left of the main entrance, in what is now a small café. On the first floor, the staircase occupies the original space for temporary exhibitions. By opening up this space, it offers a new connection of the spaces for temporary exhibitions (Bodon and Robbrecht and Daem's extensions) to the original entrance landscape of Van der Steur's museum.

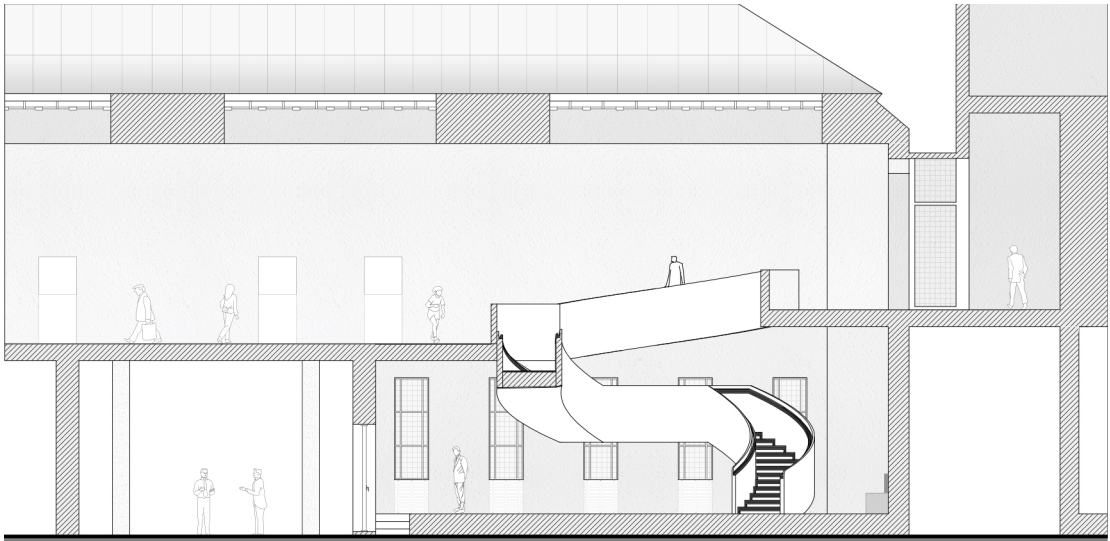


Model 1:5

# Babel



Plan 1:500



Section 1:200

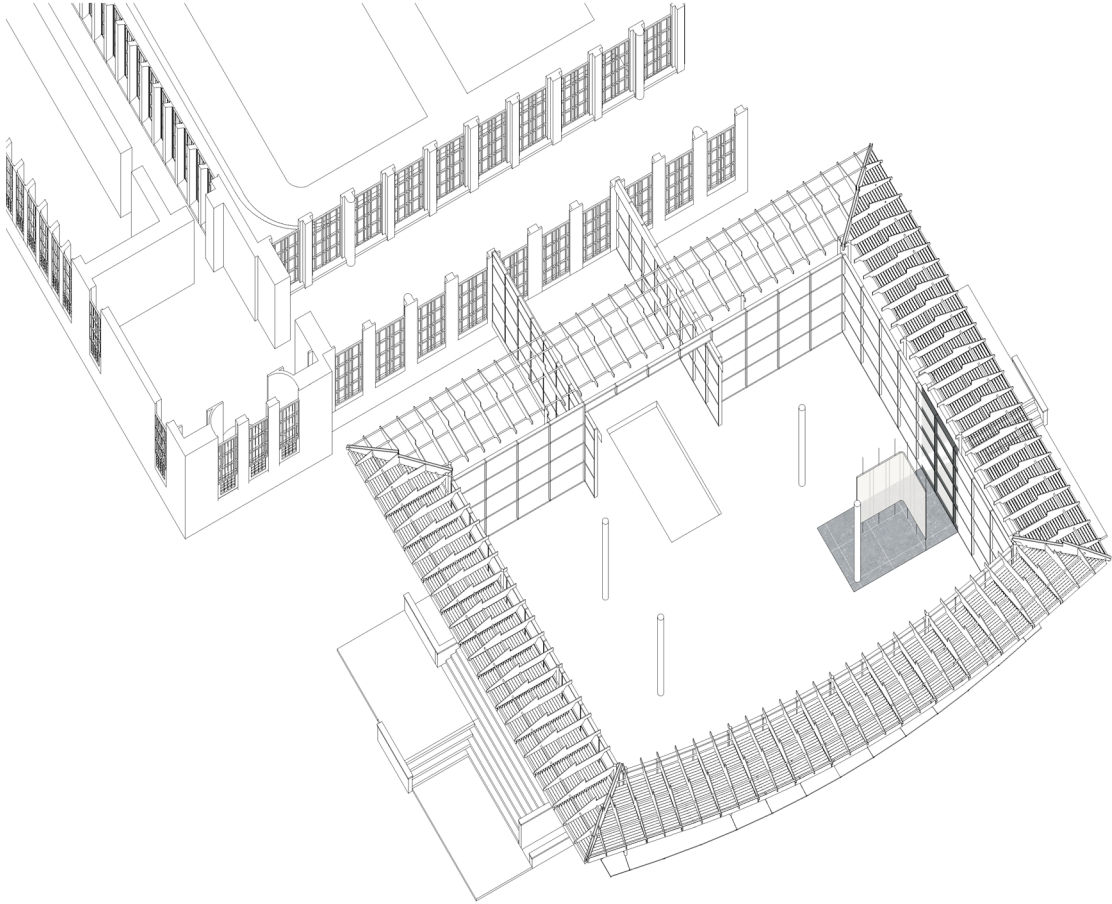


Model of staircase, close up

Babel

## Wall

Helen Cao  
Dinand Kruize  
Jakub Wysocki



Axonometric drawing

The Van Beuningen De Vrieze pavilion is designed by Hubert-Jan Henket as an exhibition space, with a visual connection to the garden. However, the current pavilion is not very suitable for these functions: there is too much infiltration of daylight from the transparent facades, and the space does not offer a physical connection to the garden (as there used to be before Henket's extension). The aim of this project is to again making the space suitable for displaying art. By hanging vertical surfaces from the ceiling based on a grid deriving from the rhythm of the façade, a flexible system to display art is introduced. These vertical surfaces contain a changeable opacity creating a neutral background for art. Secondly, the original connection to the garden is reintroduced by enabling the east and the west facades to be opened completely. A series of steps is added to connect the pavilion to the level of the garden.





Model 1:5



Interior view on the hanging wall

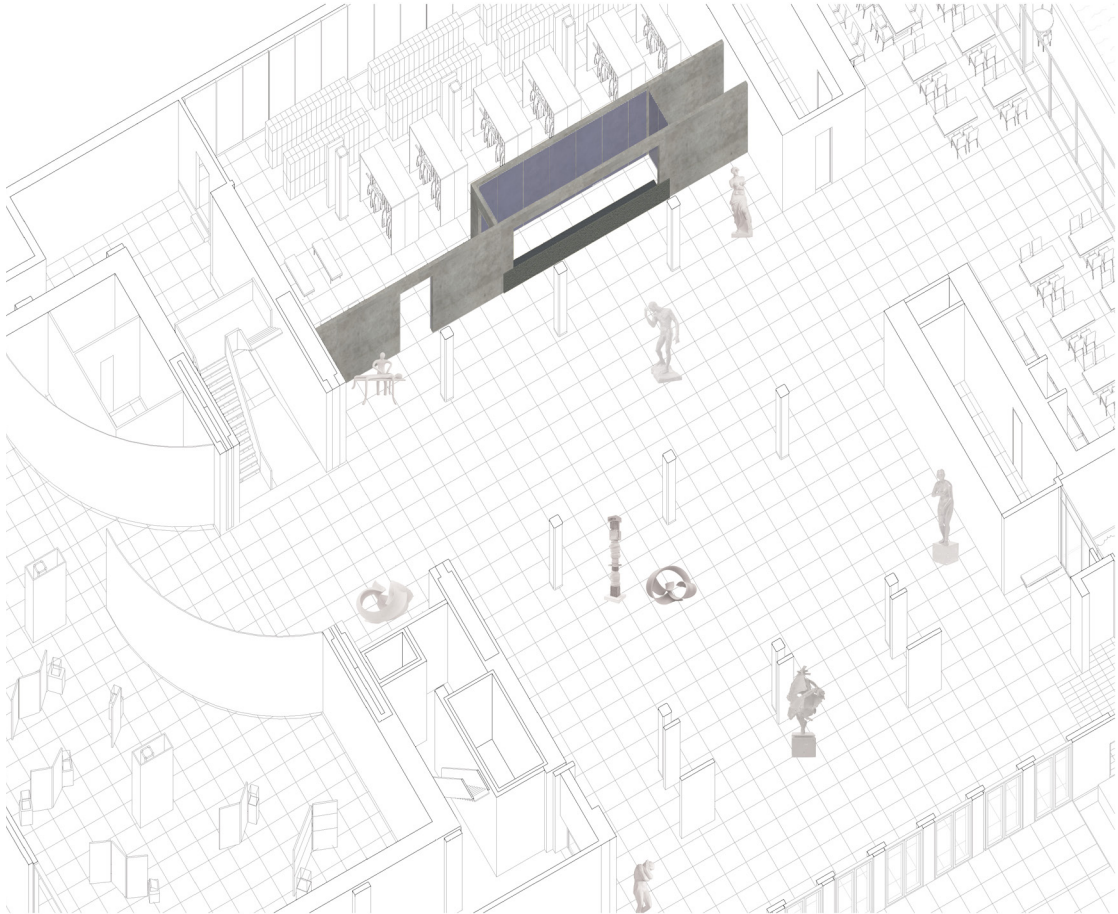


Interior view on the hanging wall

## Entrance

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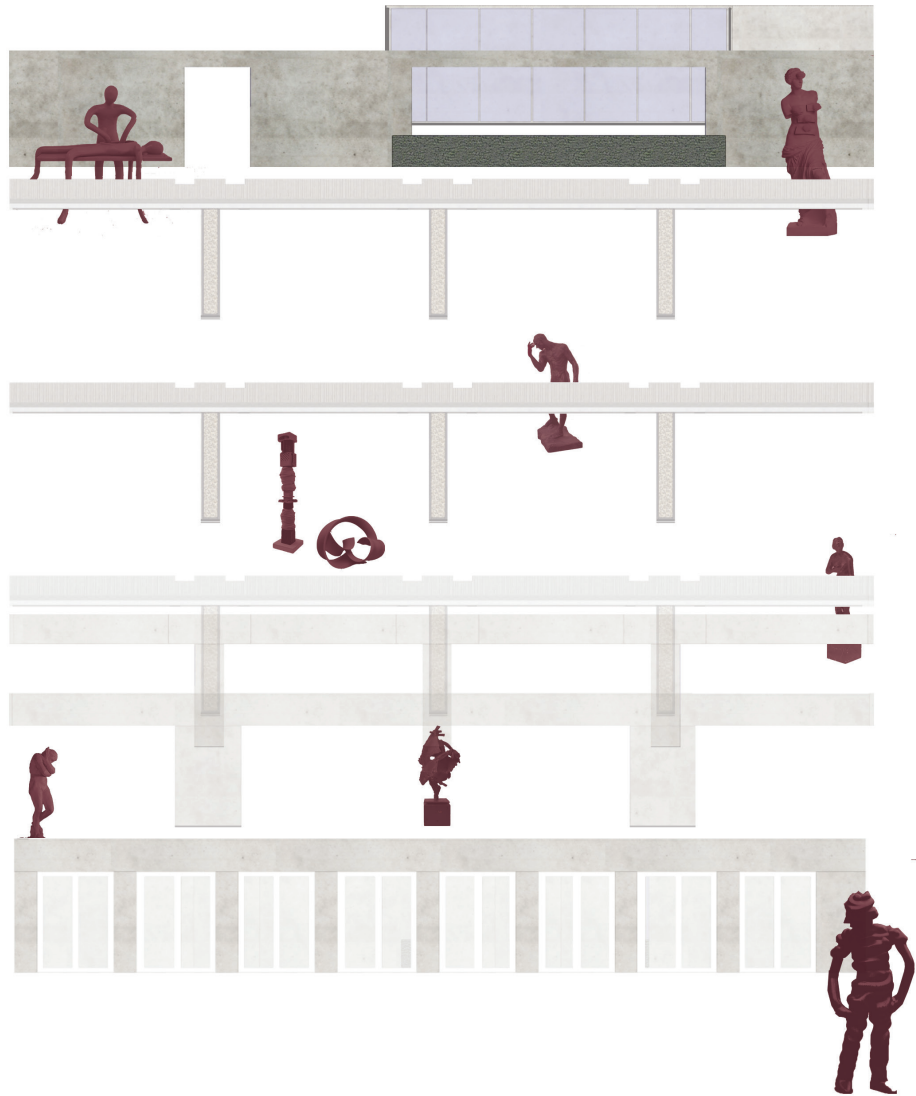
Axonometric drawing

The start of any museum visit sets the tone for the visitor's experience. In Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, the entrance area gives the visitor a sense of confusion. Different functions and objects (ticket desk, cloakroom, shop) are scattered around the space. In our intervention, some existing partitions have been removed in order to create a continuous exhibition area for sculptures from the courtyard all the way through to the ticket desk, now situated at the back of the building. In doing so, the logistics of purchasing a ticket and hanging up coats are delayed, and the visitor becomes immersed in art from the beginning. The structure of the building can be interpreted as a series of concrete layers, where each row of columns (a layer) has its own role within the exhibition area. To the existing six layers we have added a seventh layer. This is a wall on the border between exhibition space and cloakroom. The ticket desk is integrated into this wall, and is emphasized by using different textures and colours. Because of these subtle differentiations in texture and colour, the wall forms a quiet backdrop for the art in front of it.

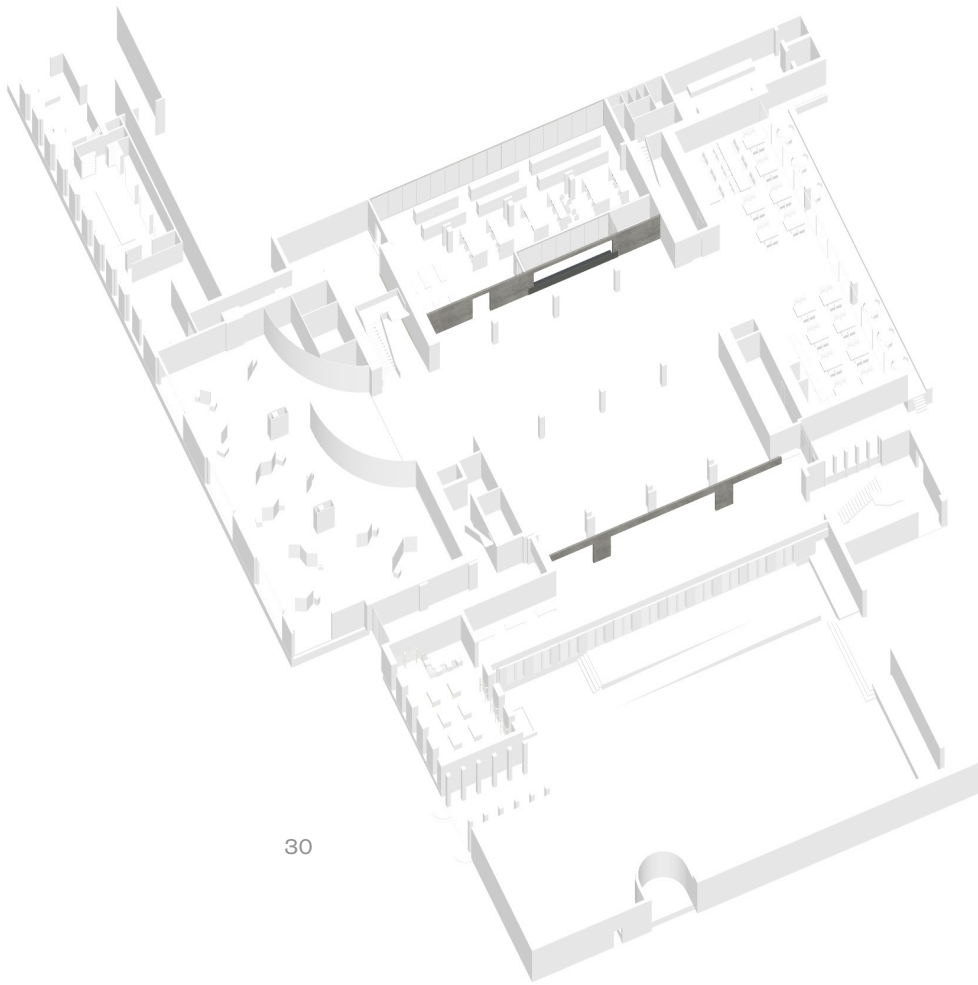


Model 1:5

# Babel

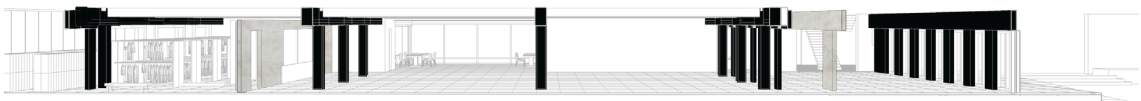


Ground floor as a continuation of the courtyard - the first place to encounter art



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The ticket desk, doubling the structure of the Robbrecht and Daem extension



Section of the proposed entrance









