

CALL FOR PAPERS
CAHIERS DE MARIEMONT -
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THE MUSEUM AND ITS ARCHITECTS

Designing, transforming and bringing
museum spaces to life



Whether housed in a historic building or a venue created from scratch to accommodate it, every museum tells its own unique architectural story. In Mariemont, the Museum's collections are housed in a building designed by the architect Roger Bastin (1913-1986), one of the leading figures of the Brutalist movement in Belgium during the second half of the 20th century. In the short term (2027-2029), thanks to exceptional private funding, the Museum is set to transform the layout of its permanent exhibition. In a second phase, a wide-ranging revitalisation plan for the 45-hectare estate and its museum, approved in 2024, will be rolled out at a pace dictated by the public authorities, who are the project owners. Against this backdrop, the director and the teams of the museum have embarked on an in-depth consultation with the architects responsible for designing the Mariemont of tomorrow. In this context, the editors of the *Cahiers de Mariemont* propose to devote a special issue to the key elements of the dialogue that develops between the museums and their architects.

Numerous articles, journal issues and monographs have been published on the renovation projects involving historic buildings and major architectural achievements around the world that provide museums with their ideal formal framework¹. The narratives surrounding these projects are numerous, varied and often imbued with contrasting emotions; they are undoubtedly a reflection of the society and the era in which they are set. The aim of this special issue is to highlight the notion of exchange, dialogue and, at times, confrontation, which must guide the choices regarding the architectural 'gesture' in the service of a museum. As it has evolved, the museum institution has gone far beyond its sole – albeit still essential – purpose of conserving and exhibiting cultural artefacts to become a space serving society, open to research, education and entertainment.

How has architecture, from the 19th century to the present day, kept pace with changes in the very definition of the museum? How have architects managed to reconcile their creative approach with the expectations and needs of those who bring the museum to life on a daily basis? What approach must they adopt to blend, as harmoniously as possible, respect for the site's identity, the complex nature of the collections housed

¹ To name but a few titles: P.-J. Foulon (dir.), *Architecture et musée. Actes du colloque organisé au Musée royal de Mariemont les 15 et 16 janvier 1998*, Tournai, 2001; Suzanne MacLeod (ed.), *Museum Architecture. A New Biography*, Londres/New York, 2013; the special issue « Musées et monuments historiques » in *Monumental. Revue scientifique et techniques des monuments historiques*, 2017/2; Josep Maria Montaner, « Architecture », in François Mairesse (dir.), *Dictionnaire de muséologie*, Paris, 2022, p. 73-77; Simon Texier (dir.), *L'invention du musée moderne*, Paris, 2023, 191 p.; the special issue « Histoire architecturale des musées » (Chr. Hottin, dir.), in *Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture*, 47, 2024.

there, the diversity of the functions carried out within it, and the engagement of its users in the broadest sense? What are the key stages in the long (and sometimes tedious) process of development, from the first sketch to the opening of the new complex?

This issue welcomes contributions from architectural historians, art historians, museologists and museum professionals (curators, outreach officers, etc.), as well as accounts from architects, production managers, exhibition designers and designers.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of themes and avenues to explore:

Palimpsest museums (19th-21st centuries): writing the history of the building that houses the museum is a key aspect of its identity; it is often likened to a parchment on which successive layers tend to overlap, or even to erase the previous one.

Space, functions, users: a museum's spatial requirements evolve with each generation; today, the museum is a place of conservation and exhibition but also tends to establish itself as a cultural forum. The layout and circulation through the spaces are a constant concern for the museum and its architect.

Materials, light, climate: displaying objects and learning to view them are linked to essential physical parameters such as light and climate. Windows, artificial or natural lighting, air-conditioned spaces, materials, etc. form an integral part of the dialogue between the architect and the museum.

Public authorities, patrons, partnerships: throughout history, those in power have been involved in the cultural sphere. Indeed, the financial requirements for museum buildings – construction, renovation, adaptation – are often colossal and depend on external stakeholders, whether public and/or private.

Exhibition design, interior design, visitor experience: creating an atmosphere for visitors also requires integrating the work of designers and artists into the architectural design of the project. Furniture, lighting, display plinths, multimedia and so on all tell the museum's story, rooted in its own time.

Museum, local area, landscape: a museum is not limited to the buildings it occupies. Rooted in a socio-economic context that is subject to change, its location within an urban fabric, a park, a landscape or a given area contributes to its identity and determines the uses to which it is put.

Proposals for papers, in French or English (including an abstract of 2,000 to 3,000 characters, including spaces, along with a provisional title, a short bibliography on the subject, and a 2- or 3-line biography) should be sent to Jean-Sébastien Balzat (jean-sebastien.balzat@musee-mariemont.be) or Gilles Docquier (gilles.docquier@musee-mariemont.be) by 15 November 2026. The full text of the article, together with an abstract (in French and English) and 10 keywords (in French and English), is due by 15 April 2027.

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THE CAHIERS DE MARIEMONT

Established in 1970, the *Cahiers de Mariemont* is the annual journal of the Royal Museum of Mariemont (Belgium). The journal is peer-reviewed. It aims at promoting the study of the Museum's rich collections, and also publishes articles, mainly in French and English, about a wide range of subjects from various disciplines including Ancient Mediterranean art and archaeology, extra-European arts, Belgium's regional archaeology and history, rare books, decorative art, and museology. Its dossiers deal with current research themes in both transversal and cross-disciplinary perspectives. Issues 1 to 4 (is available on the open access academic platform Persée (<https://www.persee.fr/collection/camar>)).

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