

Kees Rijnboutt
architect

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What shall we do wit
useless beauty?

Elvis Costello, *All This Useless Beauty*,
Warner Brothers, 1996

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the probability of finding appropriate form to these is a mistake.

The appearance of an object is to most people most important, but perhaps too much importance is attached to it. It is less important we might develop a sensibility for the object. Designing in a way that allows other aspects to be considered to propose its form may be a step in the right direction.

The appearance of an object (...) could be the visual consequence of a material, a function or a feeling. Then again it could be borrowed form or a stolen object. There can be no doubt that the result contains something that wasn't there before. The design of every-day objects serves a dual-purpose: it is both a means to an end and a means to an end. It is not in an economical manner and making the point of it is not in the obvious or every-day. So describing the object is inaccurate, he may be this but not only this and not that. It is itself with creating form the better for all of us.'

about beauty and practical value, in all their potential connotations in terms of cultural response. This book is about what buildings mean to those who use them, about a building's atmosphere and what remains of it today. This book is not about the aesthetics of buildings in the superficial sense of beauty or ugliness, nor about the tectonics or the materials used, nor the building as an object on its own: frozen for centuries in a picture taken right after it was completed, as if its sole function was to exist as an ideal, never to be besmirched or damaged by the unaware, the circumstances or simply by time.

The buildings in this book are the work of Kees Rijnboutt, architect, and cover his entire oeuvre, from 1964 until the present. The buildings, which have different settings, sizes and functions, represent a range of typologies, from residential house to collective new-build, warehouse, courthouse, office, workplace, collective cultural complex and combinations of these. Even though projects that belong exclusively to the categories of urban planning or supervision initially fall outside the scope of this book, and many of the buildings created over the years will not be dealt with here, this book still does present a specific archaeology of a specific oeuvre.

The existing archive of images has not been used for this archaeology, even though it is prolific given the 50 years that it covers. Of the many images in that archive, it is not only the drawings but also the photographed buildings that merit attention. These are beautiful images, time-bound images, images made at the time of completion, tentatively but self-confidently facing reality. The kind of photos in which everything still exudes 'the new', and which bestow an instant future on the buildings in the photographs. We see new materials, taut masonry, shining window frames, a stray piece of construction tape. Young plants in the still empty public garden. And the longer it has been since the picture was

environment' means to those who live and work in it, who use it on a daily basis. More than an architectural-historical perspective, this book focuses on what it is to 'build for people', which is grounded in the deeply rooted consciousness of 'we', the collective, the notion that the architect does not build for himself or in service of a higher truth (the canon of architecture), but for and with the community of which he is a part. 'Making' is never a solitary act for the architect. This book seeks to confirm that notion.²

The meaning of an oeuvre

This introduction should not be viewed in isolation – rather it is part of this book's longer text. That text will, as a parallel reality to the images, justify the various views that Kees Rijnboutt has expressed throughout the years, some of which he later abandoned. Anyone looking at Kees Rijnboutt's work will instinctively identify a parallel between the history of Dutch building production in the last 50 years and the changing role of the architect.³ First leaving its mark in the late-modernist Bijlmermeer in the mid-1960s, the oeuvre is then marked by a reversal towards expansion areas such as Almere and Purmerend, with its emphasis on the human scale, from there on the urban renewal in the large cities in the mid- and late 1970s, the reuse of enduring (industrial) artefacts in the urban fabric in the mid-1980s, and last but not least, the advent of the market in the mid-1990s. During these periods Rijnboutt's views carried substantial weight, not only as an architect, but also in his capacity as chief government architect, urban planner (The Hague) and architectural supervisor.

Although Rijnboutt never conceals his indebtedness to others, he has never aligned himself unambiguously with any kind of 'dogma' in architecture whatsoever.

place and matures. Archive of images could serve architectural photography over what this succession of but the time in which each n. From the tranquil black- in the late 1960s, rectified, n occasional person in ely populated images of tos of an untroubled urban thing is left to fantasy and ng. What these extremes ir idealized approach, the red reality. And though more otography appears to accord icipation of 'human beings' ess 'formal', nonetheless that is function in these extremes presence, or even more so in statement about the 'quality isplayed, or its 'promise'; ll their story, as long as the al design or the architect's are not compromised. a different approach.

0 works has been made from sive oeuvre. These buildings vious choices, nor the most s Hummel has made new if these works, mostly in depict the buildings and their present state. Some of een 'renovated' through the rious ways to the changing Other buildings seem to have still stand proudly, having me. The photos alternate and detail, between exterior er and time frame differ for

van die opgaven steeds minder vanzelfsprekend is geworden. Schrijven over zijn werk wordt welhaast als vanzelf het schrijven van de geschiedenis van de Nederlandse bouwproductie in de laatste 40 jaar en de veranderende rol daarin van de architect.³

glimmende kozijnen, een verdoemd stuk bouwliint. Jonge aanplant in het nog lege plantsoen. En hoe langer het geleden is dat de foto werd gemaakt, hoe meer het gefotografeerde gebouw een retrospectieve actualiteit ontwikkelt, ergens halverwege tussen herkennen en herzien, die de afstand die we vanuit het nu tot het gefotografeerde ervaren, steeds opnieuw herschrijft.¹ Het is de kracht van deze fotografie om het gebouw te tonen aan het begin van zijn bestaan: het gebouw neemt zijn plaats en wordt volwassen.

Terloops schetst dit beeldenaarchief een kroniek van de architectuurfotografie van de laatste vijftig jaar, en wat deze opeenvolging in 'standpunten' zegt over de tijd waarin elk van die foto's werd genomen. Van de verstilde zwartwitbeelden uit de late jaren zestig, onthoekte, afstandelijke opnamen met sporadisch wat mensen in beeld, tot aan de drukbevolkte impressies van nu, foto's van een rimpelloos stedelijk leven in kleur, waar niets aan de fantasie is overgelaten en altijd de zon schijnt. Wat deze uitersten gemeen hebben, is hun geïdealiseerde benadering, de extrapolatie van een gewilde realiteit. En al lijkt de recentere architectuurfotografie een grote rol toe te kennen aan de deelname van 'de mens' en ogen de beelden minder 'formeel', toch is dat maar schijn. De mens functioneert in beide uitersten als een zetstuk, die met zijn aanwezigheid of juist afwezigheid, vertelt over de 'leefbaarheid' of de 'belofte' van het getoonde gebouw, mag vertellen, zolang de leesbaarheid van het ruimtelijk ontwerp of de door de architect beoogde sfeer er niet door wordt verstoord.

Met dit boek is voor een andere invalshoek gekozen. Uit het omvangrijke oeuvre van Kees Rijnboutt is een selectie gemaakt van bijna dertig werken. Niet per se de meest voor de hand liggende gebouwen, ook niet vanzelfsprekend de meest 'succesvolle'. Van elk van die werken zijn door Kees Hummel nieuwe foto's gemaakt, voor het merendeel in zwart-wit, die de gebouwen en hun omgeving tonen in hun huidige staat. Sommige van die gebouwen zijn in de loop

society in the broader sense, as well as architects, architects, not to mention builders, owners and investors, residents reputation and recognition even than on his qualities as an architect's ability to connect, to tighten things out'. Anyone who is aware that he is not a man in terms of temperament or a man full of enthusiasm and agreement with what he considers a task – expressed during the work of VDL's work in Venice and still confirmed by the dedication to service, the perspective and the search for a special appropriate for an extremely bizarre situation on what you could call a cultural and social main-



confirms that time does not stand still. (...) For the time being we are trying to make buildings on squares like buildings on streets, redefining the relationship between the individual and the group. And when we use quotes there is no other reason for doing so than to show our engagement with tradition, whether it links us to Palladio, Ledoux, Taut or Venturi.¹⁴

Aware of a position between the existing city and the new land, between urban renewal and the expansion areas, Architectengroep VDL plainly demonstrates that architecture is profoundly interwoven with civil society. No manifesto here that calls for an architecture that only has itself as a subject, but rather a reflection about origins, orientation and the goal of the profession and the position of the architect within it. Never assuming a militant or pedantic tone, they express the urgency for an architecture that is willing to bear responsibility for the demands of that architecture's community, the need to always question and re-question directions and resources, in every ensuing period and every situation anew.

nimmer onder stoelen of banken steekt, heeft hij zich nooit eenzijdig bekeerd tot welke 'geloofsleer' in de architectuur dan ook. Zijn werk kent geen structurele, (zelfonderbouwde) theoretische reflectie, er zijn geen teksten van zijn hand die nadrukkelijk positie zoeken in de grondslagen van een vakdiscours. Toch is hij een veelgevraagd spreker die ferme uitspraken niet schuwt. Talrijk zijn de lezingen, toespraken en publicaties waarin hij ruimhartig blijkt geeft van zijn diepe verbondenheid met de geschiedenis, de samenleving in bredere zin en de cultuur, met architecten, musici, kunstenaars en dichters, met bouwers, bestuurders, ontwikkelaars en beleggers, met bewoners, gebruikers en wie al niet meer. Zijn publieke reputatie en erkenning berust, meer nog dan op zijn kwaliteiten als ontwerpend architect, op zijn vermogen tot binden, het creëren van draagvlak, het 'op orde brengen van de dingen'. Wie Kees Rijnboutt kent, weet dat hij geen man is van uitersten, niet in temperament of expressie, wel een man met een sterke bevoegdheid en een niet-aflatend engagement met wat hij beschouwt als de eigenlijke opdracht aan de architect, verwoord in een combinatie van dienstbaarheid, zelfrelativering en daadkracht bij de presentatie van het werk van de Architectengroep VDL op de Biënnale van Venetië in 1980 en beleiden in de decennia erna: 'Wij zijn niet op zoek naar een bijzondere situatie die geschikt is voor een uiterst bizarre expressie, maar houden ons bezig met wat je het uiterste drukking geven aan de culturele en maatschappelijke hoofdstroom zou kunnen noemen. In die pragmatische benadering hebben we er geen moeite mee om bouwtechnieken en voorschriften, spelregels en budgettering als onze gegevens te aanvaarden en als behorend tot onze taal te hanteren. (...) We vinden niet dat we behoren tot één of andere geëtiketteerde beweging. Het is niet belangrijk in een na-na-modern tijdperk een postmoderne architect genoemd te worden, het bevestigt hooguit dat de tijd niet stilstaat. (...) Voorlopig proberen we gebouwen aan pleinen te maken als gebouwen aan straten, de relatie van het individu met de groep opnieuw definiërend. En als we citeren, heeft dat geen andere betekenis

ew time'

oog op
ve tijd'

goal, from the material's natural character and elegance.

- 4 The aesthetics of the new building does not depend on the material, but on the relationship between façade and plan, between street and building. Not a single element has been put there for its own sake, but serves as a useful link in the whole. If some elements are not good.
- 5 Just like its parts, a house is no longer a decorative object, but (...) It is an expression of its collective and individual character, is therefore not undesirable, but on the contrary a tool of art. A given need demands a given material, and alone we only need special finishings to complement it, not too. Particularly, the need to neutralize homogeneity is primarily seen in buildings with sweeping surfaces.

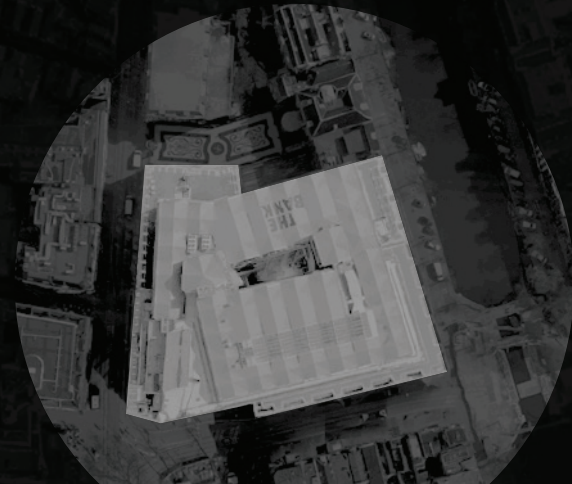
(2)

'The inherent material essence of colour differences is not to be worked out and pursued in its own theme. It is not a matter of theme runs parallel to form. The theme can also be worked out itself from form or evoke a dissonance just to be worked out again later.'⁶

by J.B. & W.B. Oüëndag and H.P. Berlage, and drastically rebuilt in the 1960s by Zwiers and Fontein.⁸ There was no question of historicization here.

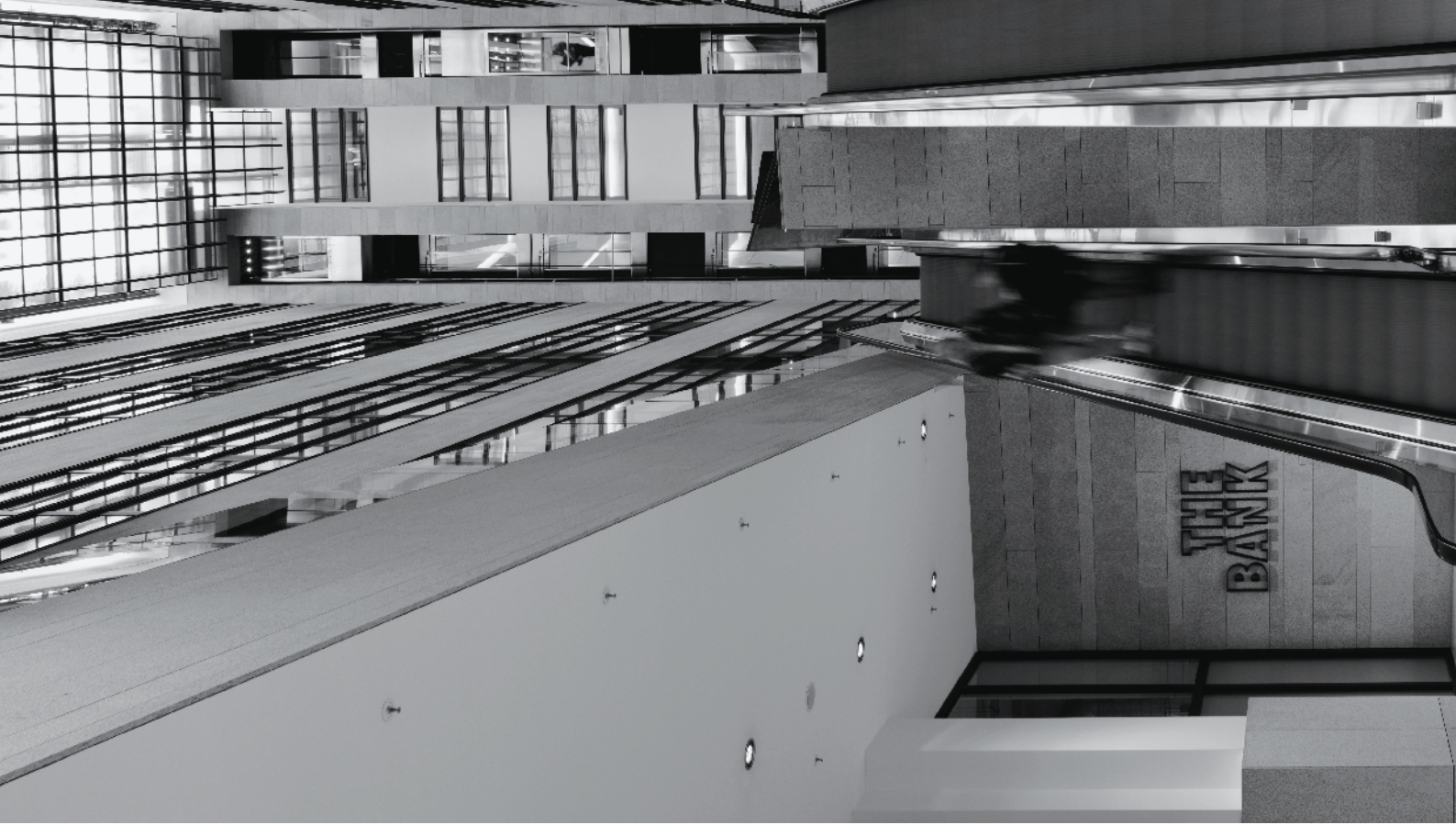
The closed plinth of the stately bank building was made accessible on the street level with high windows for shops and cafés and restaurants and a new entrance on the corner of Rembrandtplein – the bank's former rear entrance. The space above this was intended for offices. What was adapted in the 1960s, has been restored to its original condition: relief, rhythm and articulation have all been returned to the façade.

The most radical intervention took place in the heart of the building, where the atrium is located. Originally consisting of two parts and gradually built shut floor by floor in the 1960s to create more floor area, the intervention broke open the atrium from the first floor to the roof, as a result of which daylight seeped into the building further than ever. It was a striking decision on the part of the architect and client, given the dire economic circumstances at the time, to sacrifice a substantial amount of lettable space for a spatial flourish. The non-Dutch appeal of the immense light well evokes Frank Lloyd Wright's famous Larkin Building, which for good reason was one of the reference points used by the architects to persuade the client.

















Havenkwartier

gen



