

# The unmasking of the modern art museum

## *Museum Modules*

10/04 – 12/09/2010



White walls, a few art works hung with much space between, shown in a convenient chronological order. This is the impression many of us have of a museum of modern and contemporary art, and it is often also what we get. But how did this exhibition model arise and were there ever alternatives? And how can the museum display its exhibitions in future?

On 10 April the exhibition *Museum Modules* opens as part of *Play Van Abbe* (Part 2). In this show, historic exhibition models have been reinterpreted anew. Artists, designers and researchers reveal the familiar image of the modern museum as the end point (for now) of a series of dynamic exhibition practices from the first half of the 20th century. These contemporary re-workings of past display models not only offer a new look at the past, but point to a possible entirely different museum of the future. In them visitors will see works from the museum collection as well as art produced specifically for these spaces. Four very different interpretations give us an innovative perspective on museum history: *Raum der Gegenwart* (Room of Today), Museum of Modern Art New York, Musée Imaginaire and Museu de Arte de São Paulo.

### **Raum der Gegenwart (1930)** - reconstructed by Kai-Uwe Hemken and Jakob Gebert

*Raum der Gegenwart* from 1930 represented the development of mass media and knowledge production. The design was intended for a museum space at the Provinzialmuseum, Hannover, but was ultimately never executed by museum director Alexander Dörner and Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy. Together they conceived of a hybrid museum space aimed at continually showing a rapidly changing industrial society. So art, design, architecture, technology and sport of this modern society were not conveyed via original art works, but through all forms of reproduction processes, i.e. photographs, films and transparencies, plus a kinetic sculpture wall and the *Light-Space Modulator*.



*Raum der Gegenwart*, 1930, designed by Alexander Dörner and László Moholy-Nagy, realised by Kai-Uwe Hemken and Jakob Gebert. Installation view Van Abbemuseum, 2010. Photo Peter Cox

has been added in the adjacent space. Jakob Gebert considers the camera obscura to be a forerunner of the photography exhibited in the *Raum der Gegenwart*. Museum visitors can watch each other walking through the *Raum der Gegenwart*, while extracts from an early 20th century radio play with a dialogue between Dörner and Moholy-Nagy reverberate in its darkness. The space is a dim, atmospheric counterpart to the industrial type, museum space from the museum director and artist.

### **Museum of Modern Art (1929)** - interpreted by the Museum of American Art Berlin

After the Second World War, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, was regarded in many ways as the trendsetter for modern art museums. MoMA was the institute whose innovative approaches towards displaying art created a standard within the turbulent historical origins of modern art museums. The Museum of American Art Berlin explores this history, tracing the precursors of MoMA and looking at how this museum was able to extend its influence. In *Sites of Modernity*, the Museum of American Art Berlin highlights the legendary MoMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* from 1936, in which for the first time modern art was put into historical context based on international movements rather than national schools.

Alongside this exhibition, the Museum of American Art Berlin is also showing its version of an educational space around *Kabinett der Abstrakten* from 2009, based on the one by the Russian artist El Lissitzky (1926).

In the present reconstruction by art historian Kai-Uwe Hemken and designer Jakob Gebert, a camera obscura

**Musée Imaginaire (1947)**  
- interpreted by Florian Schneider i.c.w. Kim de Groot

The famous *Musée Imaginaire* (Museum without Walls) by André Malraux actually takes its title from the similar named first part of his three-part *Psychologie de l'Art*, later published as *Les Voix de Silence (Voices of Silence)* in 1953. He describes an art history in which photographic reproductions have a major role instead of the usual minor one. For his museum without walls, Malraux collected images of art works and used these to explore how modern reproduction techniques (close-ups, perspectives, etc.) made other arrangements of artworks possible. In keeping with Malraux, filmmaker Florian Schneider, along with artist Kim de Groot, reflects on the system a museum uses to arrange its art works, focusing chiefly on so-called grey areas. In *The Grey 19*, the duo analyse the "grey" archive of a museum, where objects, which fall between the categories of art work and archival piece are stored. Their status remains undetermined despite the fact that some of these objects have been stored in the museum for years.

**Museu de Arte de São Paulo (1968)**  
- interpreted by Wendelien van Oldenborgh

Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), the contemporary art museum designed by architect Lina Bo Bardi in 1968, symbolises modern Brazilian architecture. The building was designed as a coming together of different types of art production and to be accessible to people from all backgrounds. The superabundant use of glass represents the architect's ambition to create an open building. When Lina Bo Bardi presented the MASP collection on glass, it was an expression of her wish to free artworks from fixed interpretations and to leave room for new relations between works and the viewer.

In her interpretation entitled *Lina Bo Bardi: the Didactic Room*, artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh, in the same spirit as the architect, has used glass panels to exhibit art works. In her approach to Bardi's architectural vision, she has thus reconstructed glass elements from the São Paulo museum interior. Entirely in keeping with the architect, Van Oldenborgh's programme of events in this room explores spontaneous spatial interventions that may lead to a renewed engagement with the visiting public.

**Museum Modules**

*Museum Modules* is a component of Part 2 of *Play Van Abbe*, a multi-faceted, eighteenth-month programme exploring the role of the contemporary art museum in the 21st century. Each part of the programme looks at the functioning of the museum in the past, present and future. In Part 2 of *Play Van Abbe* time as a factor plays a central role. *Time Machines* questions how art history is written and raises the issue of the traditional perspective on the museum. This Part breaks firmly with the idea that a museum is neutral and objective. On the contrary. It

suggests that the museum is a time machine which uses subjective devices in order to arrange time and to collect and present its art.

**Opening**

Saturday afternoon 10 April 4 pm as a component of the opening of *Play Van Abbe*, part 2: *Time Machines*.

**Curators**

Diana Franssen and Steven ten Thije

**Sponsors**

*Play Van Abbe* is made possible by contributions from The Mondriaan Stichting, BankGiro Loterij, Provincie Noord-Brabant, VSBfonds and SNS REAAL Fonds.



Museum of Modern Art New York (MOMA), 1929. Curated by Alfred H. Barr Jr., interpreted by Museum of American Art Berlin. Installation view Van Abbemuseum, 2010. Photo: Peter Cox

**Press release**  
**April 2010**



Musée Imaginaire, 1947, written by André Malraux, interpreted by Florian Schneider. Installation view Van Abbemuseum, 2010. Photo: Peter Cox



Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), 1968. Designed by Lina Bo Bardi, interpreted by Wendelien van Oldenborgh. Installation view Van Abbemuseum, 2010. Photo: Peter Cox

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of the first public museums for contemporary art to be established in Europe. The museum's collection of around 2700 works of art includes key works and archives by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys, McCarthy, Daniëls and Körmeling. The museum has an experimental approach towards art's role in society. Openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange are important. We challenge ourselves and our visitors to think about art and its place in the world, covering a range of subjects, including the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' and the museum as a public site. International collaboration and exchange have made the Van Abbemuseum a place for creative cross-fertilisation and a source of surprise, inspiration and imagination for its visitors and participants.

**Van Abbemuseum**

Bilderdijklaan 10  
Eindhoven, The Netherlands  
For more information, please visit [www.vanabbemuseum.nl](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl)

**Opening hours**

Tuesday to Sunday 11:00 – 17:00  
Thursday 11:00 - 21:00  
On Thursdays, entrance to the museum is free from 17:00

**Entrance**

Adults: € 9,00  
Groups of 15 persons or more, senior citizens: € 6,50  
Students, holders of the Dutch young people's cultural pass (CJP): € 4  
Thursdays from 17:00 - 21:00: free entrance (until 31/12/2010)

For more information please look at our website [www.vanabbemuseum.nl](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl)

**For the editors**

**Press opening**

Friday 9 April, 11 am – 2 pm.

More information and images can be downloaded from:  
[www.vanabbemuseum.nl/pers](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl/pers).

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