

PC – 'BRUSK', a new exhibition hall for Bruges, Monday 25 January 2021, 15.00, Gotische Zaal, Stadhuis (Gothic Chamber, Town Hall)

SUMMARY

Bruges has been known for years as one of Europe's most successful tourist attractions. With the construction of a new exhibition hall and the creation of a new and high quality artistic site in the heart of the historic city centre, the city authorities wish to underline their commitment to invest in an innovative and contemporary art policy. The policy objectives of both the City of Bruges and Musea Brugge include the realisation of a new museum and art site as a top priority. The assessment committee opted for the design of and collaboration with the developer CIT Red and the design team under the leadership of Robbrecht en Daem architecten and Olivier Salens architecten. Now that the commission has been awarded, work will be put in hand to submit an application for the necessary environmental permit with a minimum of delay, following close consultation by the city authorities with all relevant parties and local residents. Burgomaster Dirk De fauw: "We attach great importance to the opinions and support of people living in the area. With this in mind, we have planned a number of consultation moments. The first of these will already take place on 3 February. In principle, it is intended to start the phased preparatory work in the course of 2022. The construction of the new exhibition hall will commence at the start of 2023."

What's in a name? 'BRUSK'

With this name Musea Brugge wishes to put itself firmly on the cultural and artistic map, within the framework of a contemporary culture policy. BRUSK is an acronym that offers several possible interpretations in Dutch. For example, it can stand for Brugge (Bruges) + Stimulans (Stimulation) + Kunst(en) (Art(s)) or + Schone (Fine) + Kunsten (Arts) or + (Municipal) + Kunsthal (Art Gallery) or + Stedelijk (Municipal) + Kunstencentrum (Arts Centre), etc. With BRUSK, the city will focus in the future on attracting and organising innovative exhibitions, with state-of-the-art possibilities for performances and presentations.

The design

"On a site on the Garenmarkt, next to the Groeningemuseum, a new exhibition hall will be erected that will house two museum spaces and opens out onto a new park. In total, the site covers an area of some 20,000m², which will be attractively laid out and made available to the public. The exhibition areas will be constructed at a raised level and will be separated from each other by a public passageway, so that an open, transparent and freely accessible ground level will be created. This ground level will be given over in its entirety to the city, its inhabitants and its visitors," explains Burgomaster Dirk De fauw proudly.

At the request of the City of Bruges, the exhibition areas will be sufficiently spacious to accommodate international travelling exhibitions of both classical and contemporary works. However, the exhibition rooms will also be designed with sufficient flexibility, so that they can be divided up into smaller spaces to allow a number of exhibitions, performances or other events to take place at the same time.

BRUSK's exhibition rooms will stand out in the museum landscape, not only by virtue of their sublime natural fall of light (from the north side, as was usually the case in the great artistic workshops of the past), but also because of their unique height (which is reminiscent of a church or cathedral). In this way, BRUSK breaks with the trend of most museums and exhibition spaces, which tend to avoid making use of natural light, preferring to rely almost exclusively on its electric alternative.

Out of respect for the surrounding buildings, BRUSK will preserve the existing visual axes. The historic skyline will remain unaltered. The building does not make its presence felt by virtue of its height, but is discovered instead by walking through it. That being said, it does not necessarily call on walkers to stop; on the contrary, the public passageway makes it possible to walk through the entire complex without stopping. In this sense, BRUSK has more the allure of a public square than a building, which creates and stimulates opportunities for encounters between the public and art. Moreover, the design also takes account of the latest contemporary standards relating to sustainability. With this in mind, the exterior of BRUSK will be covered in dark green and electricity generating glass 'scales', which will provide the building with a sustainable form of

energy. As a result, it will be more than twice as energy-efficient as the current NZE-norm (Nearly Zero Energy). The green colour of these glass plates will complement and enhance the surrounding green ambiance of the adjacent new park.

The museum site master plan

In the years ahead Bruges plans to invest in an impressive master plan for its historic city centre. In addition to the construction of BRUSK, the heart of the museum city will be refurbished. The entire site will be given a make-over that will include a new park and in which the renovation of the Groeningemuseum forms an essential part. "By opting for an approach that tackles the site as a whole, we will create a unique chain of museal buildings, starting with the medieval infirmary wards of the Sint-Janshospitaal and running through the museum section of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, the Gruuthusemuseum and the Groeningemuseum, before ending with BRUSK. The new Musea Brugge Centrum voor Collectieonderzoek (Centre for Collection Research) – a place for in-depth scientific investigation – will be given a prominent position. With this ambitious project, Musea Brugge has four core objectives: display, preserve, research and welcome. BRUSK and the surrounding museum site will be much more than just another place for a 'quick visit'. Instead, it will be a new creative and artistic hub in the city, a place where different artistic forms can co-exist and thrive to the full. We also hope to attract overnight tourists, who will no doubt appreciate the added cultural value that BRUSK will provide, in addition to the existing museums, the Concertgebouw and the Cultuurcentrum," adds Dirk De fauw.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bruges has been known for years as one of Europe's most successful tourist attractions. With the construction of a new exhibition hall and the creation of a new and high quality artistic site in the heart of the historic city centre, the city authorities wish to underline their commitment to invest in an innovative and contemporary art policy. With this project, Musea Brugge, which is one of the world's leading museum institutions, seeks to give concrete expression to its international ambitions. Via a 'design & build' procedure, the city authorities opted for the design submitted by CIT Blaton Real Estate Development and a design team under the leadership of Robbrecht en Daem architecten and Olivier Salens architecten.

With its thirteen museum locations in historic buildings, the Musea Brugge collection is diverse, extensive and iconic. Its more than 74,000 artefacts make it one of the richest collections in Flanders. In non-corona times, it attracts almost a million visitors each year, 80% of whom come from abroad. Notwithstanding its long tradition and outstanding reputation, the city still does not possess the necessary infrastructure to properly accommodate international exhibitions. On each occasion, space has to be made by removing part of the permanent collections into temporary storage. The construction of the new exhibition hall will mean, for example, that the frequently visited works of the Flemish Primitives can remain permanently on display.

The **policy objectives** of both the City of Bruges and Musea Brugge include **the realisation of a new museum and art site as a top priority**. The Flemish Government also regards the BRUSK project as an important lever for cultural policy in Flanders. The new site promises to have a major cultural impact, which will extend far beyond the boundaries of our city and even our country. With this in mind, in 2020 the Flemish Government awarded Musea Brugge a subsidy of 27.25 million euros, the largest project subsidy ever received by the City of Bruges.

1. 'Design and build' competition

After a first selection round, the five strongest teams were invited to submit a design and a tender. These were thoroughly assessed by a multi-disciplinary jury of experts.

The assessment committee consisted of:

- Chairman bOb Van Reeth, former Flemish Government Architect and chairman of the UNESCO Expert Commission.
- Dirk De fauw, Burgomaster
- Mercedes Van Volcem, Alderman for the Public Domain, Finance and Property
- Nico Blontrock, Alderman for Culture
- Minou Esquenet, Alderman for Climate, Energy, Environmental Policy and Facility Management
- Franky Demon, Alderman for Spatial Planning, Environment and Sport
- Pablo Annys, Alderman for Social Affairs, Employment and Enterprise
- Philip Pierins, Alderman for Tourism

In addition, a number of external experts were appointed by the College of the Burgomaster and Aldermen:

- Jan Vermassen (expertise: museum operations and knowledge of the Bruges area)
- Steven Ducatteeuw (expertise: public-private collaboration, process management, procedures, school construction)
- Geert Anthierens (expertise: judicial and procedural)
- Kries Vriesacker (expertise: urban planning, project development, financial feasibility)
- Manfred Sellink (expertise: museum operations)
- Eddy Eeckhout (expertise: land surveying, property valuation)
- Leo Van Broeck, current Flemish Government Architect
- Till-Holger Borchert, director Musea Brugge
- Asli Çiçek, architect
- Chris Dercon, museum director Grand Palais, Paris
- Pieter Boussemaere, lecturer in history and climate

2. The choice

The assessment committee opted for the design put forward by the architectural team of Robbrecht en Daem architecten and Salens architecten, working in collaboration with CIT Blaton as the project developer and constructor. This design achieved the highest combined score for a set of previously agreed assessment criteria. These covered many more matters than architecture alone. High standards were also set for, among other things, functionality, flexibility, sustainability, energy conservation and experience value.

3. The timing

Now that the commission has been awarded, work will be put in hand to submit an application for the necessary environmental permit with a minimum of delay, following close consultation by the city authorities with all relevant parties and local residents. In principle, it is intended to start the phased preparatory work in the course of 2022. The new building is scheduled to become operational in the autumn of 2024.

4. 'BRUSK' is the name

The new name is the result of a thorough brainstorming process, taking due account of a number of internal considerations. BRUSK is short and sounds powerful, perfectly matching the forceful statement that Musea Brugge wishes to make with this building and its surrounding site. Bruges is a historic city, but also wishes to commit fully to the pursuit of an innovative and contemporary cultural policy.

BRUSK is an acronym that offers several possible interpretations in Dutch. At the same time, it also has an international appeal and a resonance in a number of other languages.

BRUSK stands for:

- Brugge (Bruges) + Stimulans (Stimulation) + Kunst (Art)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Stedelijk (Municipal) Kunstcentrum (Art Centre)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Schone (Fine) Kunsten (Arts)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Schept (Creates) Kunst (Art)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Stedelijke (Municipal) Kunsthall (Art Gallery)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Stedelijke (Municipal) Kunsten (Arts)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Serveert (Serves) Kunst (Art)**
- Brugge (Bruges) + Stad (City of) Kunsten (Art)**

The name emphasises the positive aspects of encouraging reflection on art, the contrast between the past and the present, and the difference between the norm and other ways of thinking. With BRUSK, the city will focus in the future on attracting and organising innovative exhibitions, with state-of-the-art possibilities for performances and presentations.

It is the ambition of BRUSK to become a place where a unique synergy can develop between art, the city and people. At the heart of the medieval city centre, a brand new architectural palace of wonder and amazement will blossom, surrounded by centuries of historical beauty.

5. The design

On a site on the Garenmarkt, next to the Groeningemuseum, a new exhibition hall will be erected by the end of 2024 that will house two museum spaces and opens out onto a new park. The exhibition areas will be constructed at a raised level and will be separated from each other by a public passageway (Scala Grande), so that an open, transparent and freely accessible ground level will be created. This ground level will be given over in its entirety to the city, its inhabitants and its visitors.

The exterior of BRUSK will be completely covered in textured and electricity generating glass 'scales', which will provide the building with a sustainable form of energy. At the request of the City of Bruges, the exhibition areas will be sufficiently spacious to accommodate international travelling exhibitions of both classical and contemporary works. However, the exhibition rooms will also be designed with sufficient flexibility, so that they can be divided up into smaller spaces to allow a number of exhibitions, performances or other events to take place at the same time.

BRUSK's exhibition rooms will stand out in the museum landscape, not only by virtue of their sublime natural fall of light (from the north side, as was usually the case in the great artistic workshops of the past), but also because of their unique

height of 17.40 metres (making them reminiscent of a church or cathedral). In this way, BRUSK breaks with the trend of most museums and exhibition spaces, which tend to avoid making use of natural light, preferring to rely almost exclusively on its electric alternative.

With several large architectonic buildings (such as the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, the Belfry, the Market Square (Grote Markt), Sint-Salvator Cathedral, the Arentshuis Museum and the Groeningemuseum) in the immediate vicinity, BRUSK forms a cluster with other very important components in the city. "These neighbouring monuments played a fundamental role in determining the design for BRUSK," explains Olivier Salens. "They provide the site with a magisterial inner-city landscape. The two visual axes – one running in the direction of the Belfry and the other in the direction of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk – invest the design with a deep sense of urban connectivity."

Out of respect for the surrounding buildings, BRUSK will preserve the existing visual axes. The new building will not attempt to impinge on the visual profile of the city. The historic skyline will therefore remain unaltered. BRUSK will be positioned in the middle scale of buildings and building elements, which characterise a city by virtue of their special and specific functions. "The building does not make its presence felt by virtue of its height, as is the case with primary historical buildings, such as a church, cathedral or belfry," explains Johannes Robbrecht. "Instead, you discover it by walking through a sequence of alleys, passageways and an enclosed garden." That being said, it does not necessarily call on walkers to stop; on the contrary, the central public passageway makes it possible to walk through the entire complex without stopping. "You don't walk around or past the building; you walk through it," adds Paul Robbrecht, "even if you do not intend to visit one of its exhibitions. BRUSK is an urban gesture of invitation. It is more like a public square than a public building, which openly and freely creates and stimulates opportunities for encounters between the public and art."

"No space, architecturally, is a space unless it has natural light."

These are the words of the architect Louis Kahn. It is with and through light that a building becomes real and is written into time, the days and the seasons. This idea seems to be so self-evident that it hardly requires any defence. But nothing could be further from the truth when dealing with museums. The vast majority of museums being built today try to avoid the ingress of natural light. For the design of BRUSK, a conscious decision was taken to open the building to the outside world and allow exterior light to flow in abundantly. This makes it possible for BRUSK to offer a different kind of artistic experience than people are used to in museums that are dominated by artificial light; an experience that is not static, but which is – again in the words of Kahn – full of change and surprise created in and through the architecture.

Towards the typology of a workshop

The first floor of BRUSK will house two large museum spaces (40 x 40 m and 20 x 40 m). These will be designed to reflect the characteristics of an archetypical artist's workshop. This will require these spaces to have a very explicit orientation. Like most workshops, they will be aligned towards the northern light that is so highly appreciated by artists. Two large, north-facing windows (measuring 19 x 15 m and 9.5 x 15 m) will allow the light to flow copiously into both of BRUSK's main halls. By using the intimate typology of the workshop as the basis for the exhibition spaces, the link between the place where a work of art is displayed and the place where it was first created will be more strongly underlined.

During the design process, the design team took this link between a work of art and its place of exposition a step further. Today, museums are the places where people are most likely to come into contact with art. However, many medieval works of art were conceived by the artists who made them for display in tall spaces, such as those found in a church or cathedral. Over the centuries, these works were removed from their original settings and transferred to museums and other spaces with very different dimensions, falls of light and general atmosphere. BRUSK wishes to offer Bruges – which has a rich collection of these medieval masterpieces – a modern museum space that provides a degree of historical nuance. For this reason, the two exhibition halls in BRUSK will have a unique height of 17.40 m, which mirrors the enormous verticality of a church. As a result, both spaces exude a certain 'cathedrality', which can be of great interest for Bruges in general and the Groeningemuseum in particular.

This does not mean that there is no place for modern art in BRUSK. The new complex will embody all that is modern in Bruges. Above all in this city, which exudes history and was the home of the Flemish Primitives, BRUSK will be a symbolic location where classical and contemporary art can co-exist and be displayed in turn, creating a modern dialogue in a centuries-old art centre.

Flexibility in use

BRUSK will be a place where exceptionally large works of art (up to 15 m high and 70 m long) can be exhibited. The artistic output of the 20th and 21st centuries has resulted in works of a type that require a large amount of space to be displayed. These works can be either large or small and can range from pictorial art to performance.

In addition to their spaciousness, the exhibition halls can also be used with great flexibility. Because they can be divided up into different compartments, it is possible for smaller, separate exhibitions to be held concurrently.

Although we speak of 'exhibitions', the flexibility with which the space can be used allows this term to be expanded. During the design process, account was taken of a diverse programme of possible events and of anticipated changes in the museum landscape. The world's museums are currently being 'conquered' by various forms of non-traditional art. Exhibitions are no longer a matter of simple 'display', but can involve dancing, singing and play. BRUSK wishes to be an instrument for all possible forms of art and their cross-fertilisation.

A practicable and passable ground floor level

A public square does not have walls. It contains nothing that can prevent people from meeting. This was the starting point for the low-threshold ground floor level of BRUSK. Surrounded by glass but with complete accessibility for the public, this level recreates the openness of an outdoor space. Three entrances make it possible for tourists, local residents, art lovers and even ordinary pedestrians to move freely into and out of the building. This freedom of passage helps to break through the cliché expectations of both people who frequently visit a museum and of those who never set foot inside of one.

The design also mirrors the trajectory of the walker and therefore elevates the museum spaces centrally to a higher level, so that it is possible at ground level to move through the entire volume via the Scala Grande, the central interior street of the complex, but with an outdoor climate. This Scala Grande plays an important connective role in BRUSK's function as a meeting place. It is an open and extended hand of invitation that encourages doubtful passers-by to come inside. In the building's interior, the Scala Grande also offers an attractive yet subtle 'through-view' experience, which is yet another fascinating way of meeting.

In addition to the Scala Grande, this public level also contains a number of other functionalities that add to the dynamism of the overall experience. These include in succession a reception area, ticketing desk, bookshop, children's workshop, educational space, auditorium and restaurant, before exiting to the outside terrace and the new park.

Logistical apparatus

Via a walkway, a logistical unit has also been attached to BRUSK. This structure has been deliberately positioned on the street side, so that the site itself can remain completely car-free and logistics-free. The unit is a cleverly conceived stacking of functions at four different levels, designed to create a compact footprint. It is linked directly with the two museum spaces in BRUSK by means of an overhead walkway, in such a way that both spaces can be serviced without the need to cross the one to get to the other. One of the main headaches in museums is the disruption that can often be caused to the rhythm of the museum's operations by the need to regularly install and dismantle new exhibitions. This will not be a problem for BRUSK. It will be perfectly possible for an exhibition to be installed or dismantled in one of the two halls, whilst a second exhibition can continue undisturbed in the other hall. Moreover, the positioning of the logistical unit and its walkway have been planned not only with BRUSK in mind, but also to make possible the future provision of logistical services to the Groeningemuseum.

Colour and materials

BRUSK will be covered completely with dark green glass plates, applied to the exterior surfaces in the manner of scales. These glass scales contain photovoltaic cells, which in turn have an impact on the overall colour of the outer shell. By integrating dark-coloured cells into the glass and mounting the scales against a black background, the original green of the glass is transformed into a 'monumental green' – a shade that belongs to a historically responsible range of colours and one that has been associated with 'harmony in the city' for centuries. Being complementary with the characteristic red-brown tints of the city, the design team believes that this skin of canal-green glass will enhance the surrounding greenery, allowing the building to become a natural extension of the adjacent new park.

Sustainability

Right from the very start, BRUSK intends to achieve a high degree of integrated sustainability, which will involve, among other things, the installation of a GRO sustainability meter. This sustainability ambition has guided the development of the project from the very first draft sketches. When completed, BRUSK will be twice as energy efficient as the current BEN (NZE) norm. Solar energy will be generated via the glass-plate covering of the exterior, while the building's heating and passive cooling will make use of energy extracted from the ground. This will result in an annual CO2 saving equivalent to more than 200 tons of CO2 in comparison with a 'business as usual' approach. BRUSK is also ready to participate in the circular economy. Its glass wall and roof elements can be dismantled via a click-system and the building materials have been chosen with their impact on the environment in mind. Last but not least, the sustainable use of space foreseen in BRUSK can also be included under the broad heading of 'sustainability'. The spaces of both the exhibition halls and the ground level facilities are not only intended to serve as museum spaces, but are also easily able, by virtue of their flexibility, to serve a wider range of functions.

International ambitions

The international ambitions held by the City of Bruges for the BRUSK project were made very clear to the design team in advance. The ode to the artist's workshop, the new type of light in the exhibition areas and the high degree of 'cathedrality' in these same areas: these are all aspects which will ensure that BRUSK is able to display works of art in a manner that is unprecedented worldwide. Taken together, these characteristics will result in a building whose appearance will be regarded as an international marker, but one that clearly speaks the language of Bruges. Its proximity makes it part of the city but it profiles itself in such a manner that the historical views of Bruges are never in any way disturbed. In this sense, BRUSK is a grand gesture, albeit a gesture from the outside.

6. The museum site master plan

In the years ahead Bruges plans to invest in an impressive master plan for its historic city centre. In addition to the construction of BRUSK, the heart of the museum city – within the boundaries set by the Dijver, the Groeningemuseum, the Nieuwe Gentweg and the Eeckhoutstraat-Garenmarkt – will be refurbished. The entire site will be given a make-over that will include a new park and in which the renovation of the Groeningemuseum forms an essential part. The new Musea Brugge Centre for Collection Research – a place for in-depth scientific investigation – will be given a prominent position. The various buildings will be closely connected and will complement each other: the exhibition halls in BRUSK, where influential exhibitions and memorable events will be held; the non-public areas where the collections are stored and cared for; the research centre where knowledge about these collections is expanded. A special depot will also be created for the most vulnerable of the collections managed by Musea Brugge; namely, the painting, print and drawing collections. Finally, additional space will be devoted to conservation and restoration.

With this ambitious project, Musea Brugge has four core objectives: display, preserve, research and welcome. BRUSK and the surrounding museum site will be much more than just another place for a 'quick visit'. Instead, it will be a new creative and artistic hub in the city, a place where different artistic forms can co-exist and thrive to the full.

In addition to its museum-related ambitions, this project also has social and educational ambitions. The design foresees space for instructive and creative workshops for children, young people and adults, as well as an auditorium for lectures, symposia and other events. A new city park will be laid out around the building, as an integral part of it. First-class catering and hospitality facilities will be available. As a result, the new site will form the final link in a chain of buildings in the Bruges museum quarter. This chain includes other locations such as Sint-Janshospitaal, the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, the Gruuthusemuseum and the Groeningemuseum. Taken together, these institutions form a museum offer of the very highest quality.

7. The start of a communication process with neighbouring residents

Now that the commission has been awarded, work will be put in hand to submit an application for the necessary environmental permit with a minimum of delay, following close consultation by the city authorities with all relevant parties and local residents. The city attaches great importance to the opinions and support of people living in the area. With this in mind, a number of consultation moments have been planned. Today, everyone living in the surrounding streets will receive a letter giving more details about the design and inviting them to attend a first digital information meeting that is being organised by the city authorities and the design team on 3 February. This meeting is the first step in a communication process that will be further developed in the months ahead.

Data sheet

Name of the project: BRUSK

Location: Garenmarkt, Bruges

Area: 9,500 m²

Budget: 28,500,000 euros (all in)

Date: provisional completion is foreseen for 16/12/2024

Design team:

Commissioning party	City of Bruges
Developer	CIT Red
Architecture	Robbrecht en Daem architecten Olivier Salens architecten
Museum experts	Frits Scholten – Head of Sculptural Art, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam Wouter Davidts – Professor, University of Ghent Max Fordham – Building Services Engineering, London
Construction	CIT Blaton
Landscape	Georges Descombes, Geneva, Switzerland
Technology	Study Bureau De Klerck (SDK) Max Fordham – Building Services Engineering, London
Stability	Ney & Partners
Security	Allseccon Security Consultancy
Acoustics	Bureau De Fonseca
Flows	360 Solutions Risk & Safety
Sustainability	SuReal Sustainability Experts



Photos for the press:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/museabrugge/albums>

Website for the public:

<http://www.museabrugge.be/brusk-en>