

— A NEW HOME —
FOR THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

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WE WANTED A CONTEMPORARY
BUILDING, NOT A STEP BACK
TO THE STYLE OF THE EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURY.
Steven van Hoogstraten

Acquiring a place

Finally, this new building can serve to clarify an enigmatic architectural phenomenon. Despite the considerable attention devoted to the exterior and in particular to the interior, the building does not at first sight easily lend itself to appropriation by the viewer. On the one hand, this has its origin in the nostalgia for the old building, but this phenomenon is of a temporary nature. Two other reasons lie in universal principles of perception and the effect of art.

The principle of perception can best be explained with reference to smaller objects. A new piece of furniture, for example, initially looks out of place in a room. One looks at it first from one side and then from the other. The relationships between the room, the new object and the beholder, it seems, are not immediately established. After a night one returns and in the beholder's eyes the room and the object are suddenly reconciled with each other. The only thing that has happened is that time has passed. The form of the object has redrawn the vectors of the room, added shadows, a form and a colour. It apparently takes a while before the viewer's mind and feeling adjusts to the strangeness of the new object and a balance with the existing space is restored. The larger and more distinctive the object the longer this period of strangeness lasts. The object has to literally acquire a place in the room and in the mind of the beholder. Innumerable contextual helping hands have been extended in the new Academy Building, so that there is already an anchoring at this particular spot and this will only increase as time goes by. In order to begin to appreciate this building, however, the viewer also perhaps has to renounce something of himself, to free himself of his own prejudices, and this requires courage. If we are to believe the art critic Viktor Shklovski, it is precisely this that constitutes the function of good architecture and art.

'And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.'^[1]

[1] Viktor Shklovski, *Art as Technique*, 1917



Auditorium and garden.



View in the Foyer towards the red mural by Irene Fortuyn and the Academy Hall entrance.