

Press release

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Major New Migration Museum to Open in Rotterdam in 2025 Iconic Design by Leading Architects MAD

FENIX, a major new museum inspired by stories of global migration, will open on a landmark site in Rotterdam's City Harbour in 2025.

The 16,000 sqm building, dating from 1923, was once part of the largest warehouse in the world. Located on the south bank of the River Maas in Rotterdam's historic port district, the warehouse served as an important building for storage and shipping for the Holland-America Line – a Dutch cargo and passenger line. The Holland-America Line facilitated the journeys of millions of migrants in the 19th and 20th centuries who arrived and departed from the surrounding docks.

The building is being transformed in a radical design by Ma Yansong of MAD Architects, the internationally acclaimed Beijing-based architecture practice. Visitors will immediately see its architectural masterpiece, the Tornado, an organic, dynamic structure evocative of rising air that climbs from the ground floor and flows up and out of the rooftop onto a platform hovering above the city – an uplifting symbol for the journeys experienced by migrants globally. Climbing the stairs of the Tornado will offer an exhilarating new perspective on the city of Rotterdam, with dramatic views across the River Maas and of Hotel New York, the former headquarters of the Holland-America Line.

The building has been restored with consultation by Bureau Polderman.

FENIX explores the timeless story of human migration in a changing world through a series of encounters with art, architecture, photography, and history, setting out to redefine the role of a museum for the next generation.

Inside the building will be a series of vast gallery spaces over two floors, housing the museum's growing art and historical collection as well as a series of commissions by emerging artists from across the world, telling stories of migration from their perspective. These include Paris-based Beya Gille Gacha; the Rotterdam-based artist Efrat Zehavi; Korean artist Chae Eun Rhee; artist Raquel Van Haver and US based Hugo McCloud.

Over 200 acquisitions have already been made which examine the theme of migration through the lens of contemporary art, including Bill Viola's *Ancestors* and work by contemporary artists such as Francis Alÿs, Steve McQueen, Grayson Perry, Rineke Dijkstra, Kimsooja, Shilpa Gupta, Jeremy Deller and Danh Võ.

The ground floor will house three keynote projects:

- The Maze is a monumental installation made up of 2,000 suitcases donated by individuals from the country's many communities and the world - a labyrinth-like, immersive installation in which visitors can discover the stories of their previous owners.
- Inspired by Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*, one of the most famous photographic exhibitions of all time, an installation entitled *Family of Migrants* will occupy another of the huge ground floor galleries, made up of hundreds of documentary images and portraits touching on the themes raised by human movement, family love, the danger of the voyage, and saying goodbye. Among them will be iconic images by over 200 photographers from over 60 countries, including Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine, Wang Fuchun, Ara Güler and Sem Presser.
- Plein, the 2,275 sqm third ground floor space, will represent a radical new approach to the curatorial role of the museum. This vast, flexible space for events and performances will host a constantly changing programme of activity curated by Rotterdam's communities. Every day and every hour in Plein will be different. For example, at Chinese New Year Plein will celebrate the food and culture of a community who created Europe's first Chinatown in FENIX's neighbourhood in 1900.

In the words of the Director, Anne Kremers:

"FENIX's story is Rotterdam's. And its story is the world's: one of arrivals and departures, and of constant change to face the future. In its landmark new home, FENIX will inspire a profound new curiosity about the world we live in."

Ma Yansong, Founder & Principal Partner, MAD Architects:

"When MAD Architects were asked to work on FENIX, we knew we had to create a dialogue with the existing building and its surroundings – and with a past containing so many stories of migration, memories, and uncertainty. In designing a new structure, we had to show this dialogue between the future and the past, and so continue the story of the building. The Tornado is all about the future, but it's rooted in the past. For me, it's a metaphor for the journeys of migrants who passed through this building."

Between 2013 and 2017, Anne Kremers (b.1989) led the Museum Villa Mondriaan in Winterswijk in the Eastern Netherlands, appointed at the age of 24, the youngest museum director in the Netherlands at that time. Between 2017 and 2020 she worked for the Chow Tai Fook Art Foundation, designing innovative art and design projects in Hong Kong.

FENIX is funded by the Droom en Daad Foundation, founded in 2016 and led by Wim Pijbes, former Director of the Rijksmuseum. The Droom en Daad Foundation is helping redefine Rotterdam for the 21st century - developing new kinds of arts and culture institutions and fostering new creative talent that reflects the city's diversity, its spirit and its history.



Media Enquiries:

Press images available to download: <https://shorturl.at/nuOX3>

FENIX

Willemijn van Drunen

pr@fenix.nl

+31 10 313 4760

+31 6 158 307 03

Bolton & Quinn

Jane Quinn or Lara Delaney

jq@boltonquinn.com / lara@boltonquinn.com

+44 (0) 207 221 5000

Notes to Editors:

It was from the quays around this warehouse that over three million emigrants boarded ships bound for destinations such as America and Canada from the late 19th century, including notable figures such as Albert Einstein, Willem de Kooning, and Max Beckmann. The departure and arrival of people made Rotterdam the city it is today, one shaped by the more than 170 nationalities of its inhabitants.

Rotterdam has a long history as a significant trading hub, with its huge deep-water port and strategic location with easy access to the North Sea and the Rhine making it an ideal thoroughfare for shipping and the gateway to Europe. In the 19th century, Rotterdam's port facilities and infrastructure as an international trade hub grew dramatically, expanding to meet the new demands and opportunities generated by the industrial revolution, with larger steam ships, mechanised loading cranes, and steel bridges connecting both sides of the Maas river. The surrounding areas of Katendrecht and Rijnhaven experienced dramatic change, transforming from quiet residential communities to a dynamic international shipping hotspot.

The warehouse in which FENIX is located was at the heart of this expansion in Rotterdam's history. Built by architect Cornelis Nicolaas van Goor (1861 – 1945) and completed in 1923, the building, known as the San Francisco Warehouse, served as an important storage and trans-shipment building for the Holland-America Line – a successful Dutch cargo and passenger line founded in Rotterdam in 1873 which provided steam shipping between the Netherlands and America and facilitated the journeys of millions of emigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over 360m long and made from reinforced concrete, the vast warehouse was the place where the Holland-America Line loaded and unloaded its ships carrying goods from destinations as far as South Africa, Canada, Mexico, and the Gulf States.

Much of Rotterdam was destroyed during World War II, and the city has now become a world-class destination for architectural innovation, known for its landmark buildings and experimental construction. Following bombing and a fire, the warehouse was rebuilt in 1950 as two separate buildings, Fenix I and Fenix II, and is currently undergoing an extensive restoration process led by MAD Architects to become FENIX Museum, ensuring this fine example of Rotterdam port architecture is preserved for the future.

