

Future for Roosenberg Abbey of Dom van der Laan

The Benedictine and architect Dom Hans van der Laan (1904-1991) built his masterpiece in Dutch Limburg, the abbey of Mamelis near Vaals. This was an extension of an already large complex designed by Dominikus Böhm. What many do not know is that Van der Laan also built a monastery in the wooded municipality of Waasmunster, located between Antwerp and Ghent. Together with his brother Nico van der Laan, the design plans were drawn up in 1972-1973 and the inauguration followed in 1975. Van der Laan also designed the furniture and liturgical objects.

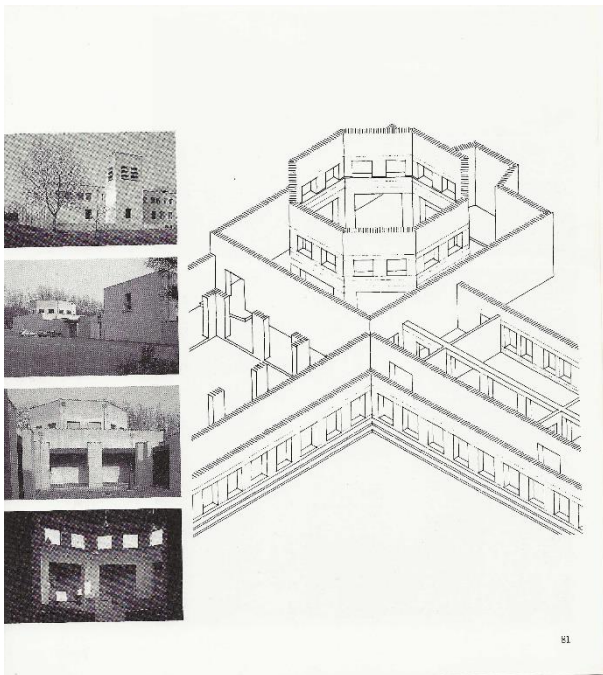
There are differences between the two monasteries. In Vaals it is a Benedictine monastery for monks, in Waasmunster the question was to design a monastery for 12 sisters with accommodation for 25 guests. The theme of "hospitality" is the key concept for this place in the forest. This special question had an impact on the basic configuration of the monastery, but not on the architectural language that Van der Laan developed, nor on his ratio system that he meticulously applied. Roosenberg consists of four wings surrounding a large courtyard, an uneven quadrangle. While in Vaals the monastery church is a large rectangle to accommodate the large number of monks, in Waasmunster a square with an octagonal superstructure was chosen, creating a more intimate character.

Marc Dubois, book "Tendenze dell' architettura contemporanea / Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent'anni", uitgeverij Electa, 1993.



The choice for Dom van der Laan came after a publication in De Standaard newspaper in 1971. For the sisters and their director Henri Raemdonck, this was a discovery and for Van der Laan a unique opportunity to further develop his theoretical ideas and also to develop the building. to position on the construction site, an urban development dimension. Van der Laan described his design in nine letters to Mother Superior Germaine Vael (Sister Fernandine) ¹.

Publicatie in boek *Electa* 1993 & foto's anno 2023 Marc Dubois



Dom Van der Laan's oeuvre only received increasing international appreciation after his death in 1991 ². In 1993 I published this project in a book in Italy by the publisher Electa entitled "Tendenze dell' architettura contemporanea / Belgio Architettura gli ultimi vent'anni". In it I gave two

pages to this monastery. It was one of the first foreign publications concerning Waasmunster. In 2000 his work was presented in the Italian city of Vicenza, in the Basilica of Palladio ³. This happened in the context of the Holy Year 2000 and an accompanying publication was published by Electa ⁴. In 2017, deSingel organized an exhibition in Antwerp. The number of publications is already impressive. Waasmunster became widely known abroad, mainly due to the study work of Caroline Voet ⁵.



Foto's Marc Dubois

The monastery was placed on the monument list in 2009. In 2016, the Marian Sisters of Francis left their monastery. Ingel Vaikla captured a beautiful film documentary of this event. The German photographer Friederike von Rauch also took a series of beautiful shots during her stay. In recent years, various avenues have been explored for repurposing. Most proposals were too drastic and would have too great an impact on this monument.

HERITA heritage foundation

Ultimately, the HERITA heritage foundation will receive a leasehold of the building for fifty years. Herita's baseline is "Caring for historical places together". This organization's ambition is to become a Flemish "National Trust" and to give the heritage a greater social image. Herita also organizes the annual Open Monument Day in Flanders. They manage several buildings, such as the Royal Palace on the Meir in Antwerp and Fort Napoleon in Ostend. The castles of Laarne, Horst and Beauvoorde are also in the Herita portfolio. They want to expand this with 20th century architecture. At the same time, they want to carry out the necessary renovation work and convert the rector's house into a caretaker's house. Herita will appoint a site coordinator to make Roosenberg properly accessible to visitors and to organize cultural and reflection activities.

The only new building by Dom Hans Van der Laan in Belgium is often described as a "timeless modern architectural style" or "Modern Primitive"



Foto's Marc Dubois

by Richard Padovan. The monastery is located 500 meters from the E17 motorway, formerly the E3, the connection between northern and southern Europe. The E3 was put into use in Flanders exactly fifty years ago. A stop along this European axis is recommended, it is something different than refueling and having a quick bite. Here you will find a stop to reflect and discover that spirituality is part of this architecture. A visit will leave a big impression.

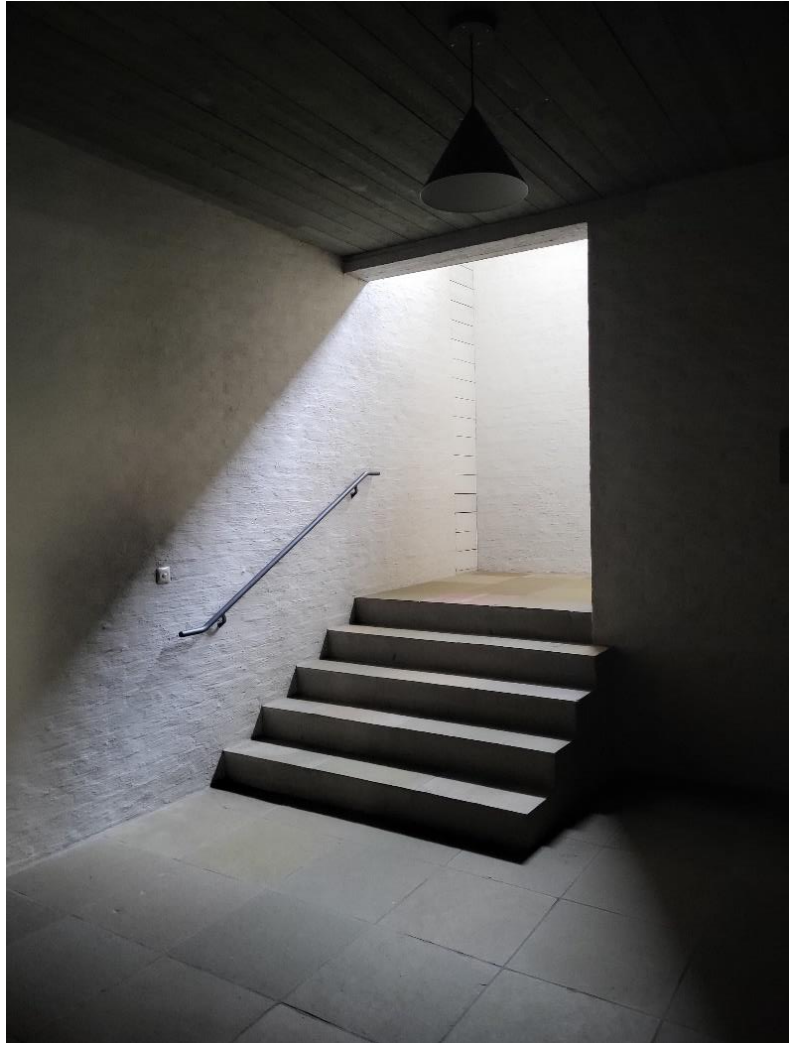
Marc Dubois, architect HonF RIBA

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Dutch version on website

www.marcdubois.be / News

www.herita.be



Endnotes

¹ Hilde de Haan, Ids Haagsma, *Gebouwen van het Plastisch Getal / een lexicon van de 'Bossche School'*, Architext, Haarlem, 2010

² Rik Nys, Dom Hans van der Laan, *Abbazia a Vaals / Olanda*, in: *DOMUS*, no. 735, febbraio 1992, pp. 40-49

In 1994, Architectura & Natura Press (Amsterdam) published Richard Padovan's book "Dom van der Laan / Modern Primitive"

³ It was a double exhibition in Vicenza in the Basilica Palladiana. In addition to the work of Van der Laan, the oeuvre of the German architect and especially church builder Rudolf Schwarz.

⁴ Alberto Ferlenga, Paola Verde, *Dom Hans van der Laan / le opere, gli scritti*, Electa, Milano, 2000

This book was published in an English edition in 2001 by Architectura & Natura, Amsterdam

⁵ Caroline Voet, *Dom van der Laan / A House for the Mind – A design manual on Roosenberg Abbey*, VAI, Antwerp, 2017