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Fondation Beyeler



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Architect

Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Paris/Genua

Lighting designer Elektrizitäts-Aktiengesellschaft, Basel

Photographer Thomas Mayer

Project location Riehen, Basel



The gallery master Ernst Beyeler from Basle is without doubt amongst the most important contemporary art dealers and collectors.

As early as 1991 his foundation trust, Fondation Beyeler, entrusted the Genoese architect Renzo Piano with the task of working out a building concept for a collector's museum.

Embedded in the Berowerpark in the Basle suburb of Riehen, the new building seems to be the epitome of a dream museum since it evidently has no other purpose than to be an unobtrusive background for showing off the artworks. It is situated next to the 18th century Berower Villa, in which the restaurant and administration area are accommodated.

Acting in close collaboration with the gallery, the trust founder and the town, Renzo Piano has created an ideal building for the presentation of old and modern art.

The structure is 127m long and its elongated form is reminiscent of a ship. The museum is protected against the noise of the street's heavy traffic by a wall clad with porphyry.



Four supporting walls running from north to south and standing 7m apart define the plan of the building. Movable partitioning walls create about 19 rectangular, ground floor rooms with an exhibition area of 2,700 m².

The unusual thing about the architecture is that it unites two basic yet contrasting themes: solid, lengthy walls and a light glass roof 'floating' overhead. The complex roof construction is spread over the galleries like a 4,000 m² canopy. 864 louvered screens in saw-tooth formation afford protection from the sun.

The building opens onto the park via a conservatory and thereby establishes a direct relationship between indoors and outdoors. Matching the hues of Basle Cathedral's sandstone, all the external walls are clad with red porphyry stone from Patagonia.



The clear lines of the architecture means that one's gaze can concentrate on the artworks. There is no prescribed route: visitors stroll through the galleries allowing the entrances to the rooms to lure them in. Only a handful of museums can afford themselves the luxury of such a generously spaced presentation as is the case with the Fondation Beyeler.





Castor spotlights are also used in the rooms at basement level - mounted with transadapters on 3-circuit track and combined with downlights and recessed wallwashers for compact fluorescent lamps.

Thanks to the museum's glazed front, the garden and the surface of the water outside both form a backdrop against which works such as Rodin's male torso in bronze are presented.

Warm, directed light, emitted by suspended Castor spotlights for low-voltage halogen lamps, shapes the individual sculptures.



A saw-tooth roof construction serves as an external sunscreen. The angled glass panels, white enamelled on the reverse, reduce direct sunlight while allowing the diffuse light from the north to shine into the exhibition rooms unhindered.



Hidden behind a 'velum' of a metal grid spanned with transparent material, Optec floodlights evenly brighten the vertical surfaces. Combined with the filtered daylight from high above, this gives rise to a much more favourable contrast in the room than with conventional overhead lighting.

An additional glazed level forms a 1.40m high false ceiling. This can be heated to compensate for lower temperatures in winter and also serves as a location for technical installations. The lighting equipment is located here as well as the sensor-controlled, movable louvres for automatic regulation of the natural light.

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Daily from 10:00 am - 6:00 pm

Wednesdays till 8:00 pm

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www.rpwf.org

History of the collection

In the past 50 years, Ernst Beyeler has established himself as one of the most renowned art dealers for classical modern art. Beyeler's career began at the beginning of the 1940's. As a student of economics and the history of art, he worked as an assistant at Oskar Schloss' antique dealers. After the death of his mentor he took over the business, but in 1947 he transformed the bookshop into an art shop. His first exhibits were Japanese woodcuttings. These were followed by illustrations from Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Klee. Following drawings by Auguste Rodin and Pablo Picasso, in 1951 he presented paintings by Pierre Bonnard, Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse for the first time. Like many other art dealers of his generation Ernst Beyeler developed into a great collector. His collection currently stands at nearly 160 pictures and sculptures from 33 artists. Initially, it was mainly works that did not sell that ended up in his collection - like Kandinsky's 'Improvisation 10' (1910). These were subsequently joined by those artworks that Beyeler no longer wanted to part with.

Just how extensive and significant the collection had really become first became clear to the public - and allegedly also to the collector himself - when, on the invitation of the Spanish Minister for Culture, it was presented in the Centro de Arte Reina, Sofia, Madrid in 1989. It then went on display in the Berlin National Gallery in 1993. The idea of building a museum solely dedicated to the collection was already afoot quite early on: In 1991, Renzo Piano was entrusted by the foundation with the task of working out a building concept. Less than two years after the museum's inauguration in Autumn 1997, the building was lengthened by 12 metres. This increased the exhibition area by 458 m² to its current 3,764 m².

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