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Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Wijnegem, Belgium



Superlative art in former granaries, illuminated with ERCO LED lighting tools: Axel Vervoordt's Kanaal project

- Client: Axel Vervoordt Company
- Architecture: Axel Vervoordt r.e., Bogdan & Van Broeck, Coussée & Goris, Stéphane
- Photography: Thomas Mayer, Neuss / Germany
- Place: Wijnegem
- Country: Belgium
- Website: www.axel-vervoordt.com

The antiques and art dealer Axel Vervoordt created an impressive mix of industrial heritage and contemporary architecture on the site of a genever distillery just outside Antwerp and built in 1857, later converted to a malt factory. The old grain storehouses and silos were supplemented by various new buildings and today house offices and apartments as well as spectacular spaces for art. ERCO LED lighting tools demonstrate highest levels of flexibility and efficiency in these atmospherically dense exhibition spaces: with a minimal number of luminaires, paintings and sculptures are illuminated with maximum impact and pinpoint precision.

Art and antiques dealer, collector and exhibition organiser Axel Vervoordt has made an international name for himself with a combination of antique and contemporary art from East and West, displayed in atmospherically illuminated rooms. The Belgian founded his company in Antwerp in 1969, in a small street with restored 16th century houses that have had cult status since then. Since 1998 Axel Vervoordt and his family has gradually acquired the 55,000 square metre site of a former distillery on the picturesque Albert Canal, a waterway linking the Belgian cities of Liège and Antwerp.



With the aid of several Belgian architectural practices they transformed and supplemented the industrial heritage site over a period of almost two decades to create a small green town that offers apartments, offices, studios, an auditorium, a restaurant and spaces for art. The historic warehouses and silos made of brickwork and concrete as well as a former chapel now serve as exhibition spaces. Artworks by renowned artists such as Anish Kapoor, James Turrell, Marina Abramović, Otto Boll and Tatsuo Miyajima can be viewed as permanent installations of the Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation. Three rooms for temporary exhibitions were also created at the Axel Vervoordt Gallery.



A tour, free of charge for visitors, connects the galleries and exhibition rooms of the Kanaal area. The "Escher Gallery" with a clear room height of around ten metres, nested staircases and circular ceiling cut-outs where steel silos once stood impresses with highly unusual visual relationships.



For the "Gazing into Sphere" installation, the South Korean artist Kimsooja used a reflective intermediate level that further intensified the complex spatial impression.



Parscan spotlights with a puristic design and warm white light colour were installed in the corners of the "Escher Gallery" and illuminate the ceiling underside of the former silo.



Dimmable ERCO Parscan spotlights were used in all gallery rooms. Axel Vervoordt Gallery exhibitions

change four times a year. The Spherolit lenses of the spotlights can be exchanged without tools to optimally modify the light distribution to the respective exhibits. Parscan is also ideal for ceiling channels: if the luminaires are integrated as here for example into an existing steel beam, they are largely concealed from the observer's field of vision and place the focus on the illuminated works of art.

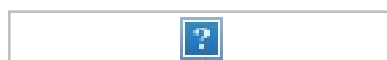
From there, a walk across the complex leads past a central concrete building surrounded by water basins that accommodates Anish Kapoor's monumental work "At the Edge of the World". Behind this is a new building designed by Axel Vervoordt in close collaboration with the Japanese architect Tatsuro Miki. It was created with maximum consideration for mathematical principles and proportions and is shrouded in natural light. Here he presents works of art from the collection of the Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation, including works by renowned Zero and Gutai artists.



Dark grey-toned walls create a contemplative atmosphere that promotes a more intense observation of the art. The very good glare control and precision of the Parscan spotlights installed enable this stimulating interplay of light and dark. ERCO LED lighting tools also demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and efficiency in the atmospherically completely contrary gallery rooms on the floor above used for temporary exhibitions: with a minimal number of luminaires, paintings and sculptures are illuminated with maximum impact and pinpoint precision.



The figure of a meditating Buddhist 'Lohan' priest made of varnished wood in the so-called Black Box is effectively illuminated by a Parscan spotlight. A rotary control on the luminaire allows the spotlight with 15W installed load to also be dimmed for the very soft lighting effect. Another Parscan spotlight accentuates the exterior wall of the Black Box.



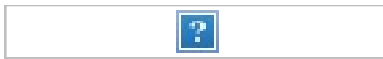
Almost black walls in some rooms create a contemplative atmosphere that supports a more intense observation of the art. Just a few spotlights are sufficient to precisely illuminate the displayed works of art from east and west. The Japanese Zen painting (left) from the 16th century, for example, is highlighted with just a single Parscan spotlight with an installed load of 12W and oval flood distribution; the spherical bronze 'Natura' sculpture by Lucio Fontana is illuminated with one Parscan spotlight with narrow spot distribution, and the other paintings with flood or wide flood distribution.

A focus on art: effective lighting with Parscan and Pollux from ERCO

Exhibitions change four times a year in Vervoordt's "Escher Gallery", "Patio Gallery" and "Terrace Gallery" at the Kanaal. The spaces accommodate paintings and drawings, photography and media art as well as sculptures in various formats. Some exhibition concepts also require separation of the spaces with use of mobile partition walls. In such cases Axel Vervoordt's scenographer Chris Pype then adapts the ERCO LED lighting tools to the new spatial situation and the various exhibits.



The Patio Gallery is a white exhibition space which receives northern light via saw-tooth roofs and thus offers the ideal backdrop for the presentation of paintings (shown: Raimund Girke "The Dominance of Light").

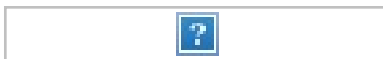


White Parscan spotlights complement the daylight.

The Spherolit lenses of the Parscan and Pollux spotlights can be exchanged without tools. The exhibition organisers are able to convert their luminaires from narrow beam spotlights to wide beam floodlights for example. Asymmetric light distributions such as oval flood and wallwash are also possible, enabling the light beam to be optimally matched to the works of art on display.



The Terrace Gallery with grey walls and floor as well as a dark wooden ceiling provides a neutral, reduced backdrop for the temporary exhibitions of the Axel Vervoordt Gallery (shown: exhibition view of Chung Chang-Sup).

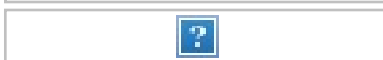


With nine possible light distributions, ERCO Parscan is the perfect lighting tool for accentuating works of art in different formats against this neutral background; the luminaire itself recedes completely into the background. The works of art seem to radiate from within and the grey wall takes on the appearance of a passe-partout.

Projection of the light via lenses achieves high-lumen accents even with low wattages. With LED modules of 6 and 12 watts respectively, Pollux and Parscan feature compact luminaire dimensions. The spotlights have a highly discreet appearance in the atmospherically dark rooms of the converted industrial buildings, and the viewer's attention is focused solely on the light and the superlatively illuminated, high-calibre works of art.

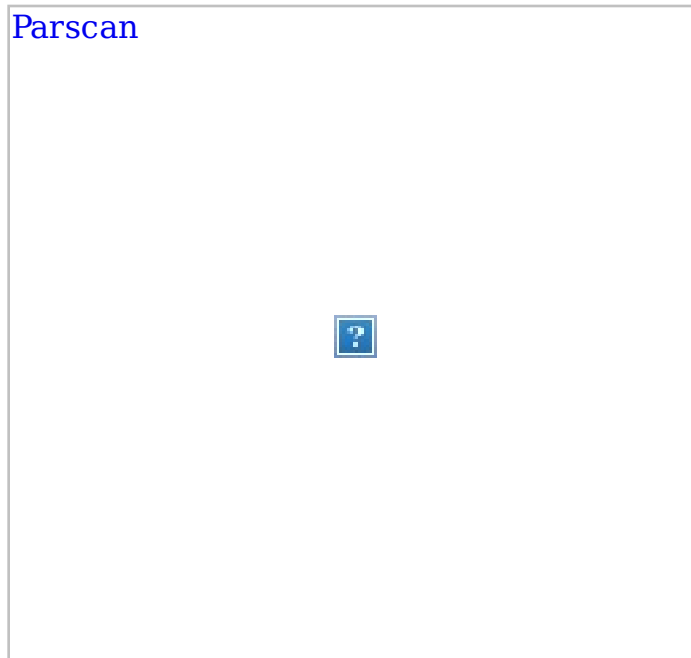


The Terrace Gallery with grey walls and floor as well as a dark wooden ceiling provides a reduced backdrop for the temporary exhibitions of the Axel Vervoordt Gallery (shown: painting by Saburo Murakami). Crisp illumination with Parscan spotlights with spot, flood and oval flood light distribution, as well as compact Pollux spotlights, brings the presented works of art into focus against this neutral background.



About the author: Kristina Raderschad has run an editorial office in Cologne since 2005. A qualified interior designer (Dipl.-Ing.), her articles, reports and interviews on architecture and design are published worldwide - in magazines such as AD Architectural Digest, A&W, ELLE DECORATION, HÄUSER, MARK or WALLPAPER*.

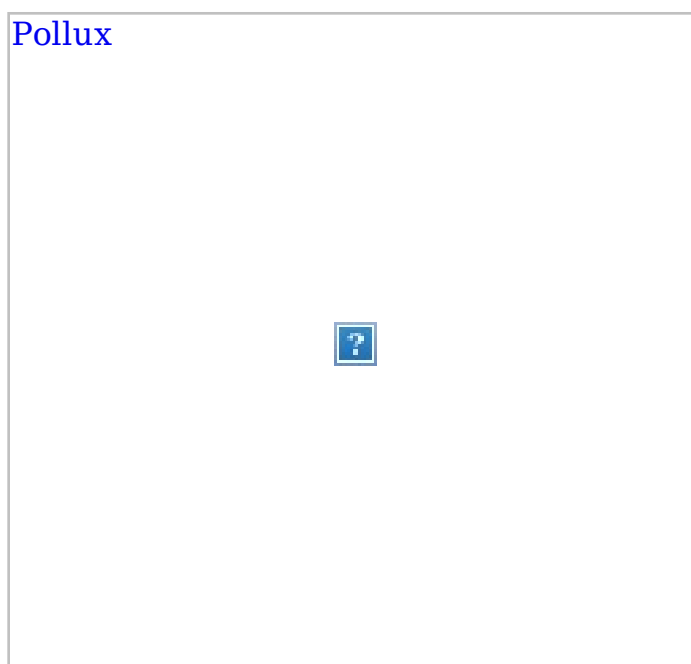
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