ERC0 lighting tools in one of the most dramatic museum projects this year: Designed by star architect and Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Rem Koolhaas (OMA/Rotterdam), the Fondazione Prada in Milan presents high-quality art across almost 20,000sqm – illuminated perfectly with state-of-the-art ERCO LED lighting technology.

When this year’s Venice Art Biennale opened its doors in May, so did a spectacular new museum venue in the south of Milan: The expansive complex, designed by Dutch star architect Rem Koolhaas practically as a city of art in the city, arose from the transformation of a distillery dating back to around 1910. The gigantic “creative playground of fashion designer Miuccia Prada”, as it was termed by the Italian newspaper ‘la Repubblica’, encompasses around 18,000 sqm of exhibition space as well as further outdoor areas open to the public. Next to the Fondazione Prada in Venice, located at the Ca’ Corner della Regina on the Canal Grande, which is dedicated primarily to contemporary art from Prada’s own collection, the Milan venue of the luxury brand’s foundation is designed as a multifunctional space.
for arts and culture. With this in mind, Rem Koolhaas combined seven existing buildings of the historic industrial complex with three new structures: a nine-storey white tower, a cinema, and a sleek glass box gallery called the Podium, which forms the central section of the museum showcasing exhibits from the Fondazione’s own collection alongside artwork from international museums. The complex is also home to a library and a museum café styled by American film director Wes Anderson as a typical Milanese café.

Ancient bronzes and marble sculptures in an avant-garde ambience

The cultural foundation spearheaded by Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli selected ERCO due to many years of experience in museum lighting. The exhibition spaces of the new Fondazione Prada are equipped with ERCO LED lighting technology that ensures precise illumination of the paintings and sculptures while providing the required flexibility to adapt to variable lighting tasks in a museum context – with the not untypical combination of uniform, glare-free ambient lighting, and exact accent lighting for the prized exhibits. In the central pavilion – known as the “Podium”, a building executed with glass façades on three sides in a style that reminds of Mies van der Rohe’s Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin – Parscan spotlights, Optec contour spotlights and Pantrac lens wallwashers in neutral white light at 4000K deliver a superb combination of highly professional LED lighting tools. The opening exhibition titled “Serial Classic” presents the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between original and copies in classical art showcasing world-renowned Roman reproductions of Greek statues. Parscan 12W with Spherolit lens with spot and flood distributions complement Parscan 4W with Spherolit lens narrow spot to illuminate and accentuate ancient masterpieces alongside the bronze runner from the Villa dei Papiri in Pompeji or the Apollo from Kassel, bringing out even the finest details of the bronzes and marble sculptures, displayed on bases of traditional grey travertine, in sharp contours for a three-dimensional effect delivered with absolute photometric precision.

On the first level of the “Podium”, Pantrac LED lens wallwashers in 24W, 4000K, illuminate the wall surfaces very uniformly in neutral white light resembling daylight – a lighting concept that produces a wide and spacious impression of the room.

Scenic light for a compact setting dressed in a gold mantle of art

The “Haunted House”, a renovated four-level section of the old distillery designed by architect Rem Koolhaas with gold leaf cladding, is easily visible from a distance. Its large windows create strong ties between the exhibition spaces and the surrounding urban landscape, the sequence of individual small rooms at once creating an intimate and dense atmosphere of confrontation with the art. The permanent
exhibition housed here displays masterpieces from the Fondazione Prada collection, including installations such as "Cell (Clothes)" by artist Louise Bourgeois.

Parscan spotlights in 24W used with wide flood distribution achieve uniform ambient lighting in the exhibition spaces, whereas Parscan in 12W with spot and flood lenses allow the colours and surface textures of the exhibits to come to the foreground of attention. The minimalist design of the black Parscan spotlights blends unobtrusively into the structural steel work of the existing building, thereby directing the focus entirely onto the illuminated exhibits. The flanking picture galleries, finally, feature Parscan spotlights in 12W and lens wallwashers in 24W for perfectly uniform illumination of the paintings on the wall, thereby emphasising their expressive colours.

ERCO lighting tools illuminate the new Fondazione Prada inside and out

Where ERCO LED lighting tools in the exhibition spaces are used with neutral white light at 4000K, the exterior sections between the individual buildings of the arts complex are illuminated using warm white light at 3000K. Beamer projectors in 36W with flood and wide flood distributions set off the paved pathways, while the special outdoor floodlights of the Lightscan range provide lighting for the ground around the entrance areas. Excellent glare control of the ERCO outdoor luminaires ensures a high level of visual comfort and makes certain that the light shines only, and precisely, where it is needed.

The lighting technology with ERCO LED solutions used in the exhibition spaces and exteriors of the new Fondazione Prada in Milan demonstrates how sophisticated lighting solutions are implemented efficiently in architecture and museums. Italy's rich museum landscape now boasts a new hotspot: Miuccia Prada's latest cultural sponsorship coup intends to be a reflection of contemporary art and popular culture – in partnership with ERCO.
About the author:
Kristina Radarschad 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&U, ELLE DECORATION, HÄUSER, MARK or WALLPAPER®.