

Rotterdam

Arhitectura contemporana

Jo Coenen -

Institutul National de Arhitectura

N.A.I.



The new Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam is not meant to be just a solemn museum, but an informal and lively gathering place for professionals and the public alike. To this purpose, architect Jo Coenen did not design a building so much as a grouping of separate but interlocking parts, each an expression of the institute's various functions. The long, curving treasury containing the archives (among them those of Berlage and Oud) shields the ballroom (the exhibition space) from the street; above them towers the glass study, containing the library and offices. Angled under the glass tower is a two-story reception pavilion.

In 1988, more than 100 years of debate ended with a competition for the federally-funded complex. Coenen was chosen over the other five participants, among them fellow Dutchman Rem Koolhaas, and the Tessin Swiss Snozzi (one of Coenen's own mentors and the only foreign participant). Coenen champions a strongly contextual approach and a style in which Modernism is tempered by craftsmanship and tradition. "Architecture can easily be festive without becoming superficial," he says. "But the Dutch are inclined to dismiss it as empty rhetoric." Indeed, he is not averse to heightening the drama of this ensemble by the time-trusted technique of placing it in a pool of water.

