

HOUSING

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a case study by REMCO TORENBOSCH

The availability and affordability of housing in the Netherlands is under severe pressure, with the country's homeless population doubling in the last ten years and housing shortages continuing to rise. Low-income families in particular are affected by the widespread selling, liberalization, privatization and demolition of social housing. As a result, affordable housing has become severely scarce, especially for people with disabilities, the elderly, young adults and aspiring first-time home owners. The marginalization of social renting has consequently made the private rental sector more expensive and less secure, leaving middle-income households in a precarious position. What opportunities arise when the housing rights take precedence over property rights in the transformation of the city?

– Based on the Woonopstand Manifest

HOUSING takes place in the Justus van Effen-complex, a historical complex in Rotterdam's Spangen neighborhood. The complex was built in the 1920s when the city's port and industry grew tremendously, which led to the first housing crisis. In the 1980s, during the second housing crisis, developers combined the original 264 small dwellings of the Justus van Effen-complex into 164 standard maisonettes as part of an urban renewal project. Despite the renovation, the homes soon failed to meet modern housing requirements and the complex fell into disrepair. In 2012, the number of housing units was further reduced to 154 as part of a complete renovation project that brought the complex up to current living comforts. Anticipating the current housing crisis, this latest renovation transformed the Justus van Effen-complex from an idealistic social housing project for the working class into a middle-class residential community within Spangen.

HOUSING is a case study by REMCO TORENBOSCH that consists of an exhibition and public talks. It is the second part of an ongoing series of case studies in which Torenbosch collaborates with artist and archivists to research the history of (social) housing, accessibility and ownership. *HOUSING* focuses on the notion of (social) housing through the history and present of the Justus van Effen-complex, which exemplifies the last three housing crises in Rotterdam. The selected works consist mainly of interventions that actively dialogue with the historical space and its accessibility, as well as with the few archival documents on Rotterdam's history of housing distress loaned by Het Nieuwe Instituut Rotterdam. The public talks revolve around housing conditions within Rotterdam and Spangen, examine the complex influence of ownership and accessibility on housing, and explore possible alternatives.

Essay

Name: Justus van Effen-complex

Location: Justus van Effenstraat, Rotterdam

Original building

Design-completion: 1922

Architect: Michiel Brinkman

Client: municipal housing department

Number of building layers: 4

Number of dwelling layers: 4

Number of dwellings: 264

Number of dwelling types: 36 (3 main types)

Dwelling sizes: 45 m², 90 m², 100 m²

Amenities: shared bathhouse, private gardens



Transformation 1

Design-completion: 1984
Architect: L. de Jonge
Client: -
Number of building layers: 4
Number of dwelling layers: 4
Number of dwellings: 113
Number of dwelling types: 68
Dwelling sizes: -
Amenities: -

Transformation 2

Design-completion: 2009
Architect: Molenaar & Van Winden Architecten, Hebly Theunissen Architecten
Client: housing association Woonstad Rotterdam
Number of building layers: 4
Number of dwelling layers: 4
Number of dwellings: 151
Number of dwelling types: 26 (4 main types)
Dwelling sizes: 45 m², 70 m², 90 m², 100 m²
Amenities: café with terrace, communal gardens

In 1922, construction of the Justus van Effen block was completed in the Rotterdam Spangen district. This residential complex was designed by architect Michiel Brinkman (1873-1925), a representative of both the artisan tradition of the nineteenth century and the modern era. Brinkman considered architecture a social challenge and advocated rationalization and functionalism. The Justus van Effen complex epitomizes different architectural features, such as subtle brick architecture, the layout of the dwellings, the ground floor design, the composition of the façades, the use of color and the logistical organization of the complex that originally comprised 264 dwellings. However, the complex gained worldwide fame due to its third-floor gallery or raised street. Factors contributing to the success of the raised street include:

- its width: it measures 2 m at its narrowest point, but includes many wider sections;
- its unambiguous position;
- it is open to the sky, which exposes the gallery to both daylight and rain, and evokes an actual street experience;
- its circularity, which transforms this raised world into an autonomous urban unit;
- the complexity of the circuit;
- and, finally, the architectural sophistication of the complex as a whole.

The original layout of the building features a standard layering of four dwellings over four floors in two naves, each with an internal width of 4 m. This arrangement alone reveals an unusual differentiation. The structure successively comprises a single-floor dwelling on the ground floor, topped by another single-floor dwelling. The ground floor dwellings, which account for a quarter of the total number, are accessible for people who cannot use stairs. An ingeniously designed staircase running through the building wall provides access to the upstairs dwellings from the ground floor. Each 4-meter-wide nave on the raised street includes one maisonette. This design allows for a maximum number of dwellings. All kitchens face the courtyard.

From these two dwelling types, in which the position of the stairwell and kitchen are essential, the housing differentiation multiplies over the entire complex, resulting in a total of 17 other types, most of them located on the first two floors. This is due to the building block being closed over the first two layers and having complicated T-shaped connections. The inner corners in the south and the 'dwelling nodes' at the T-shaped connections in the north demonstrate not only the agility of the system, but also create fascinating architectural forms. Combined with the locations and dimensions of the windows and the clever sight lines from the dwellings, these features evoke the impression that the architect inhabited each dwelling he designed.

In the 1980s, the first large-scale renovation took place, in which the desire to enlarge and add



bathrooms to the dwellings led to the total abandonment of Brinkman's system. Especially the new position of the staircase (in the middle of the house), the kitchen (on the outside) and the open-plan living room were incompatible with this system.

From 2000 to 2012, the most recent renovation was carried out by Molenaar & Co and Hebly Theunissen Architects. The exterior of the complex was restored to its former glory and new sustainable installations were implemented. Additionally, Brinkman's system was reintroduced, with the original position of staircase and kitchen on the courtyard (with the new bathroom above) serving as fixed elements that determined the floor plan. The spaces around these elements were left as free and open as possible to introduce a new, modern way of living and dwelling to the complex. Again, the agility of the original system played a role in solving the new problems. The most striking are the 75-m² 'bayonet dwellings' on the upper two floors and the four so-called 'skyscraper dwellings' that occupy four floors at the ends of the two dead-ending galleries. Uniting all of the storeys into one dwelling was unavoidable because current fire requirements do not allow escape routes to run past other dwellings. Following the wishes of the client as well as regulations and the existing architecture, the Brinkman system developed some 60 different dwelling types.

Acknowledging the inextricable link between exterior and interior in residential architecture not only does credit to the original logic of the buildings, but will also prove to be the key to modern renewal challenges. In addition, this approach produces dwellings that are idiosyncratic and therefore transcend the mediocrity of current new construction.

— Source: Arjan Hebly, TU Delft, Architecture and the Built Environment



Exhibition

Accessibility regulations in the Building Code do not guarantee that a building or public space can actually be used safely by disabled people. In consultation with the participants, it was therefore decided to make the exhibition and the public program of HOUSING completely wheelchair-friendly. This means that during the entire exhibition period of HOUSING, all spaces that are not accessible by wheelchair will be closed to the public.*

Ima-Abasi Okon

M - C - M, 2019-2023

Ima-Abasi Okon is an Amsterdam and London based artist. Okon works with sculpture, sound and video to produce installations that explore exhibition-making as an exercise in syntax, adopting linguistic and grammatical structures within her installations as a way of complicating the construction of knowledge. The ceiling of the space is partially lowered using a standardized modular system often found in offices, stores, waiting rooms and other administrative environments. For HOUSING, Okon has asked Bloemendaal Bouw to install the metal grid that was left over from one of Okon's previous iterations of this modular work. Using a pre-existing amount of material until it ran out, Bloemendaal Bouw was asked to fill the space in whatever way they saw fit. By reusing industrial objects and stripping them of their original function, Okon raises questions of value, productivity and excess in her practice.

Ghislaine Leung

Browns, 2021

Score: All available walls in brown to standard painting height

Ghislaine Leung is a British artist whose work often takes a critical look at the sociopolitical and spatial conditions of art production and (re)presentation. For *Browns* the artist instructs cultural institutions to paint all available exhibition walls up to the standard height for hanging paintings

*The Dutch Building Code includes technical and other regulations required for the construction of new buildings, as well as for the condition of existing structures and their use, such as homes, offices, stores and hospitals.

with a specific pigment. The pigment's color is reminiscent of the brown tones of coffee and tea, two distinctive hot beverages often consumed in places where labor is performed or paused, such as offices and canteens. It is the thinness of the paint, designed to be able to be painted over easily after the exhibition, that situates this labour. The way its translucence highlights the previous institutional labour performed in maintaining the exhibition space and its construction of whiteness as a neutral field; the filler applied, the walls reused, the walls ignored.

Carolyn Lazard

A Recipe for Disaster, 2018

Carolyn Lazard is an American artist based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Lazard uses the experience of chronic illness to examine concepts of intimacy and the labor of living involved with chronic illnesses. Lazard expresses their ideas through a variety of mediums including performance, filmmaking, sculpture, writing, photography, sound; as well as environments and installations. Lazard's video *A Recipe for a Disaster* features an episode of *The French Chef*, in which famous American TV chef Julia Child fries a scrambled egg. Originally aired 1963, the episode was rebroadcast in 1972 by WGBH with real-time subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, making it one of the first shows to feature this type of accessibility. The WGBH network in Boston (USA) became the first channel in history to adopt this system of subtitling. Lazard's version *A Recipe for a Disaster* reproduces the original 1972 subtitles, and adds a transcription of Julia Child's monologue at the bottom of the screen. The artist also verbally describes actions of the TV presenter, making the video accessible to a blind and visually impaired audience as well. Finally, a text in yellow capital letters appears on the screen, written and read aloud by the artist. Lazard's work is a critique on the lack of accessibility and the barriers created by mass media.

Park McArthur

Carried & Held, 2012-

Park McArthur is a New York City based artist who works with sculpture, installation, text, and sound. McArthur urges change in the systems that see the presence of individuals with disabilities as a mere act of accommodation. *Carried & Held* applies the idea of a museum label to publish a list of everyone who lifted McArthur in her daily life. The label is reprinted each time it is exhibited to provide the most up-to-date and complete representation. The section of the label typically used for listing material specifications, dimensions or donors now features hundreds of names, ranging from family members to passersby.

Bik Van der Pol

a half mile of string, 2023

Bik Van der Pol are interested in the potential of transposing the classical chorus into the present, whose role is to speak and deliberate for, with and through past and future generations in a multiplicity of voices. *a half mile of string* is based on the 17th century satirical text "Another world and yet the same" by satirist and moralist Joseph Hall. The text describes two countries with the same latitudes and longitudes as England and Germany, where food and drink are the main industries. In one of the cities, all inhabitants suffer from tooth decay and bad breath, while in another full citizenship is granted only to those with a stomach size above a certain minimum. In yet another town, each man owns a special rope with rings spaced at intervals, leading from the marketplace to his home, to help find his way back after parties; sometimes these ropes get tangled, with all the complications that entail.

a half mile of string is a work that sets the potential of the imagination in motion and incites possible action. The work references the utopia and dystopia of modernity, often perceived as unfulfilled, which can result in great social discontent and disillusionment. It raises questions about the notion of an ideal society, as well as about ways of living and coexisting, and our choices regarding what to possess, initiate or reject. What invisible lines divide and fragment society, leading to an uneven distribution of collective values? Is it possible to create shared spaces, as originally intended by the Justus van Effen complex, or does it remain 'a different world and yet the same'? *a half mile of string* claims potential space for further thought.



The New Institute

Document AFFV422 - *Houses are for living in... not to trade with*, 1985
Document AFFV1440 - *Talking and lying about housing shortage*, 1990
Document FFV1434 - *We just want affordable housing!*, 1985
Document MAQV1175 - *Renovating Kiefhoek, Workers' Housing Kiefhoek*, 1977

A selection of three national housing protest posters and a maquette taken from the archives of The New Institute in Rotterdam. One of the posters is explicitly about a housing protest in Crooswijk and Feijenoord in Rotterdam. The maquette of a model house of the Kiefhoek, built in Feijenoord borough in Rotterdam-Zuid in 1930, was designed by J.J.P. Oud. The Kiefhoek, like the Justus van Effen complex and the Witte Dorp, is a textbook example of how social housing was used to provide better living conditions for the lower working class.

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Hosts: Marina Eroshenko, Leonie Fernhout, Vivien Hollo, Edith Lee, Akvil Šl geryt , Alëna Vinokurova, Alina Sing-Cih Wang, Tutu Xinyi Guo, Lisa Zakharova, Noëlle van Dungen, Antonina Iakovleva, Amishi Singhal.

