

**WESTMINSTER**

**RAE 2008, RA2 - H 30**

**GRIFFITHS, Sean**

**Identifier: 0210831865103**

**Output 4 (Design)**

**SINT LUCAS**

## **Griffiths, Sean (2006)**

### **Sint Lucas Art Academy, Boxtel, Netherlands**

#### **General Description:**

This is a £3.5 million phased project that has created a bold new identity for Sint Lucas, a Dutch art school, by rationalising its spaces, inside and outside, as part of a broader restructuring exercise for the institution. The existing unremarkable 1960s buildings are given a strong, colourful and unusual new external identity through the addition of decorative screens, surface treatments and signage. These elements communicate the inner life of a creative educational institution and enhance the outdoor spaces between the various existing buildings. The main thrust of the interior proposal was to increase the sense of identity and legibility in the main circulation spaces. This is achieved by integrating communal activities, such as study rooms, dining facilities and exhibition spaces, within the main corridors. These become more like streets with activities along them, fostering a greater sense of activity and exchange within the building. Existing circulation spaces are made more generous, and new connections are now far more obvious to everyday users and visitors alike, enhanced by punchy signage.

Established in 1995, Fashion-Architecture-Taste (FAT) has since developed a enviably broad approach to architecture. Early work included a series of seminal interior projects and art installations, but today the practice is far more involved in social housing and urban design work. FAT is also run along with Sam Jacobs and Charles Holland, but Sean Griffiths is the founding figure and senior participant in the firm, and he was the exclusive designer for the Blue House project – not surprisingly, since it is his own home. FAT are now gaining widespread accolades for their designs, such as being chosen as the Architecture Foundation's Next Generation Award winners in 2006 and being included in the 'Gritty Brits' exhibition at the Carnegie Mellon Institute, Pittsburgh, in 2007.

#### **Research Questions:**

The key research issues in the Sint Lucas project were:

- (1) How to develop a new contemporary image for an educational institution which is in the process of change and regrowth - and in particular regard to the fact that this tertiary educational college specialises in teaching design, then how to involve the client in the process.
- (2) How to interpret the existing urban grain in the town of Boxtel and its spatial shortcomings, so as to map out and be able to express architecturally the varied aspects of a complex institution.
- (3) How to use contemporary building techniques to recreate the kind of expressive popular iconography which was largely eroded by Modernism, and which communicates cultural values about architecture to users and passers-by.

Thus the core of the research work behind the Sint Lucas scheme lies in the combination of spatial and technical inventiveness to devise a dramatically new public image for a public organisation which was desperately in need of rejuvenating itself.

## **Aims/Objectives:**

(1) To come up with a fresh approach to ways of expressing popular iconography in the urban realm, this time in relation to vital cultural institutions.

Here the work of Sean Griffiths and FAT is openly indebted to the pioneering ideas of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, updating the concept of the 'decorated shed' to create a design that responds in different ways in its facades to the surrounding conditions it encounters - much in the same spirit as the Venturi Scott Brown's Sainsbury Wing Extension for the National Gallery. As well as this influence of ideas from American Post-Modernism, there are also wider issues in the Sint Lucas scheme about the very nature of hybridised public buildings, especially those which have developed over time, in layers, or those which were built at one point but consciously mixed and recombined styles, such as Barry and Pugin did in the Houses of Parliament.

(2) To adapt construction technologies to create new techniques of forming large-scale decorative and symbolic features in contemporary buildings.

Another distinctive aspect of the work of Sean Griffiths and FAT is their Arts-and-Crafts emphasis on the detailing and construction of their projects, which works in a different intellectual territory to their Venturian interest in the ways that buildings communicate visually within the urban realm. Much effort was spent by Griffiths in Sint Lucas in adapting typical decorative techniques in various materials to achieve formal innovation and variety while working with a commonplace palette. This interest in the nitty-gritty of construction has led to a number of articles on FAT projects which focus more on the building's details, and to them winning a variety of construction-related prizes for their work. Here for the dramatic architectural forms for Sint Lucas, detailed investigations were carried out into computer-controlled-manufacturing (CCM) for the neo-Gothic screen on the main facade, using factory-produced, pre-cast concrete elements. This involved extensive research and liaison with the Belgian manufacturer, Decomo, to develop CCM construction methods to make the neo-Gothic screen look as lacy as possible. In particular, numerous trial pieces and experimental tests were developed between the architects and Decomo to ensure that all the pre-cast concrete pieces could be fabricated to accurate tolerances, such that they could be brought to site and assembled speedily. Hence a lot of time was spent by Griffiths researching into pre-cast concrete innovations.

(3) To find ways to analyse and spatially reconfigure a complex public institution in a way to reposition it as a social entity.

Like many institutions, the Sint Lucas Art Academy had lost a sense of its core purpose or its relationship to the town of Bortel. By analysing how students and others circulated around the academy, within the wider urban network, FAT used their research for a bold revisioning of the way the institution was run. Thus the highly visible elements - screen walls, patterned facades, etc-- are but part of a bigger restructuring exercise. This involves a substantial (if incomplete) piece of urban design, reshaping a group of incoherent buildings to read as a 'campus' crossing what was once the town's axial pilgrimage route, and effecting a substantial amount of conservation work. Hence the bold decoration is just the icing on the cake; overall it is a highly contextual solution in terms of the history of the site, the fabric of the town, and the character of the institution. Consequently, far more of the teaching facilities and other activities were brought out into the open on the main thoroughfare which runs through the building, this being done in order to reanimate the life of Sint Lucas and give it a stronger, clearer public identity.

## **Context:**

Sean Griffiths is well known as one of the most talented, articulate and lively British architects who is operating in social housing and urban design, linking his research into the nature of contemporary visual communication with the creation of innovative design models. The Sint Lucas project thus contributes squarely to the research by Griffiths into current social structures and patterns of urban living, and continues in a deliberate fashion the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown - not least in the desire of a good number of their projects to provide clear visual legibility for otherwise mystifying public institutions. This was combined also with a level of experimentation in materials and construction that is not associated with American Post-Modernism.

## **Research Methods:**

Several visits were made to the existing buildings at Sint Lucas, and to the town of Boxtel, in order to understand its inherent complexity and latent potential. Extensive discussions were held with the local planning officers to get a sense of the local Dutch legislation, and above all with the college managers and the student users to see how a more popular and visually vibrant new building could be created out of the existing buildings. Concurrently a variety of programmatic solutions and spatial permutations, as well as the detailed three-dimensional complexity of the building and its surroundings, were tested out through extensive physical model-making and other forms of visualisation. These analyses in turn allowed the refinement of the overall configuration of the building in terms of accessibility, circulation, lighting conditions, external colouration, historical references and general functional viability.

This degree of complex testing in the Sint Lucas design therefore involved a large deal of public consultation and ways of disseminating architectural ideas to non-specialists, requiring different types of research and also different forms of drawing and modelling of proposals so that they communicated more easily. As well as more traditional forms of model-making, or the drawing of plans and sections, once again the design process relied heavily on programs like Photoshop and Vectorworks. In this sense, the revamping of Sint Lucas Art Academy was absolutely a project which capitalised on the abstraction which is enabled by contemporary representational techniques. For instance, the extraordinary pop-Gothic screen wall was generated by drawing and re-drawing the decorative patterns endlessly in Vectorworks, then interpreting these design motifs in digital format so they could be transferred directly to the Belgian concrete manufacturer, Decomo - who could then use the same information in their factory to computer-form the individual pieces as part of an elaborate, flattened cartoon pattern.

Since the clients were an institution of designers, then collaboration with them was a major and ongoing issue; again, this was something which appealed greatly to the way that Griffiths and FAT enjoy working. A particularly notable feature of the building contract and procurement system was that the Sint Lucas Art Academy for the purposes of this project set up their own not-for-profit contractor scheme. It was this decision which then allowed them, and also FAT, to privilege extreme expertise in making the building. This manifested itself in far more research into design and constructional issues than found in comparable projects: for instance, in the innovative CCM techniques to make the pre-cast concrete screens, and also matters of specialist painting and decorative techniques, such as in the laser-cut vinyl patterning for interior floors and walls.

## **Dissemination:**

The Sint Lucas project has been positively reviewed in books and architectural journals in Britain and continental Europe, including:

- Bullivant, Lucy. *Anglo Files: UK Architecture's Rising Generation*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005, p. 124.
- Pearman, Hugh. 'Your taste or mine?', *Sunday Times*, 15 January 2006, p. 18.
- Rattenbury, Kester. 'Gothic novel', *Building Design*, 26 January 2007, pp. 10-13.
- Dyckhoff, Tom. 'Grange Hill with chandeliers', *Times*, 20 February 2007, p. 24.
- Gregory, Rob. 'Sint Lucas Art Academy', *Architectural Review: Special Issue on 'Mending Modernism'*, March 2007, pp. 68-73.
- Bol, Jan, 'Verbouwing en restyling Sint Lucas Boxtel', *ArchitectuurNL*, vol.62 no.2, 2007, pp. 16-19.

Significant exhibitions on the work of Fashion-Architecture-Taste (FAT) have been held since 2001 in places as far apart as London, Lisbon, Stockholm, Tokyo, Los Angeles and Pittsburgh - the latter, as mentioned, as part of the 'Gritty Brits: New London Architecture' show at the Carnegie Mellon Institute (January-June 2007). Furthermore, Griffiths has given nearly 50 public lectures on FAT's work across Britain, Europe and America, and especially in more recent lectures the emphasis has been very much on the Sint Lucas Art Academy as representing the largest and most complex piece of urban design carried out by FAT to date. To give examples, these lectures include those at the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam (November 2005), MIPIM property development fair in Cannes (March 2006), Yale University (January 2006), Royal College of Art (April 2006) and Tate Modern (May 2006 and June 2007).

## **Esteem Indicators:**

The Sint Lucas scheme has been awarded several accolades, including:

- Nominated and shortlisted for the Mies Van der Rohe / European Union Prize for Architecture (2006)
- RIBA European Design Award (2007)

The latter is an especially prestigious citation, since it is given only to the very best buildings by British architects in Europe, and in recent years it has been noted that the standard of design of these projects on the Continent has been particularly high. In part due to his work on the Sint Lucas Art Academy, Sean Griffiths along with FAT has recently been awarded with the following prize:

- Winners of Architecture Foundation New Generation Award (2006)

Also, as noted previously, Sean Griffiths has also been appointed as a visiting professor at Yale University for the 2007-08 academic year, indicating he is operating at a top international standard. Griffiths along with FAT were recently chosen as one of English Partnerships' Architecture Consultants Panel for 2006-10.



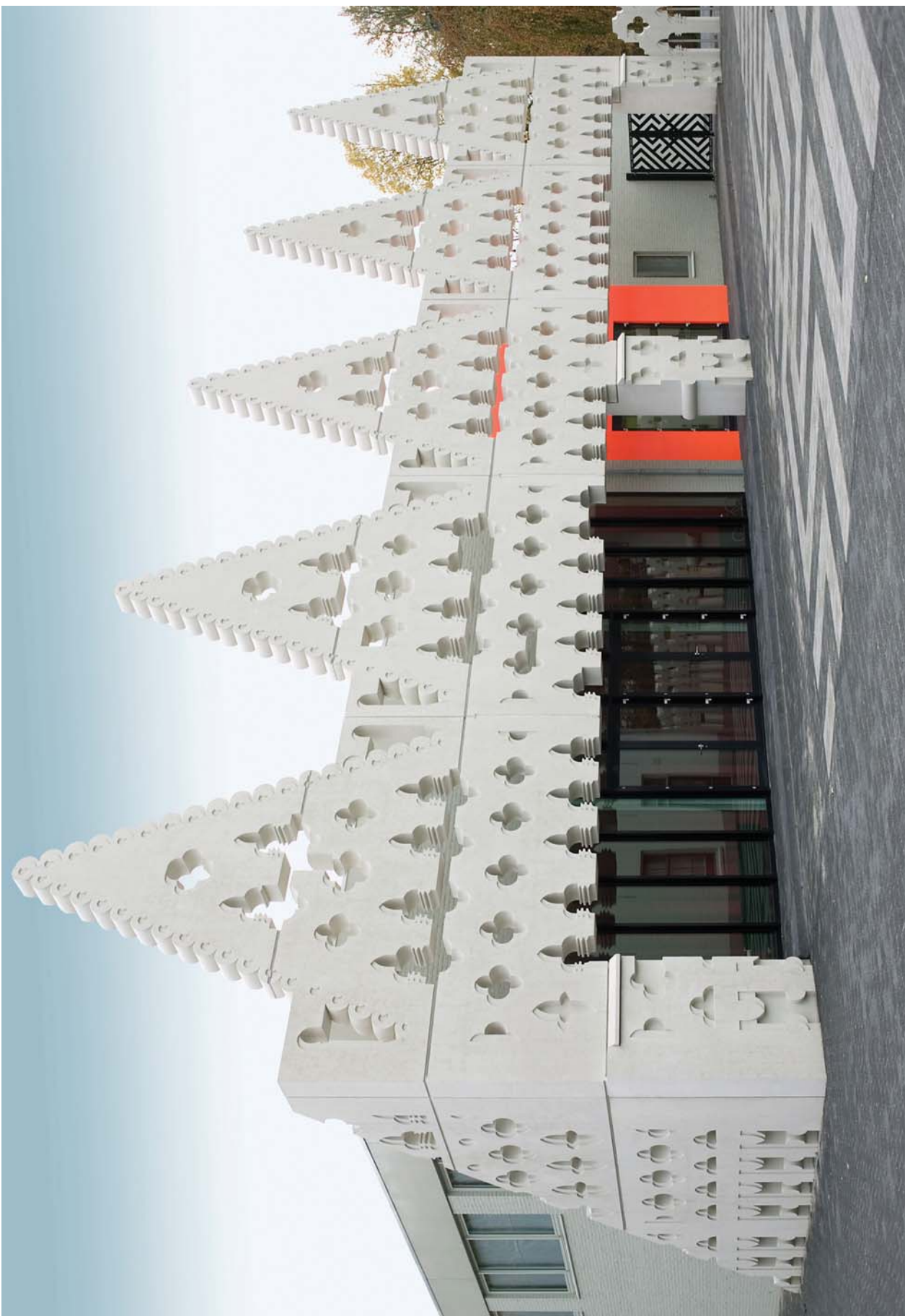
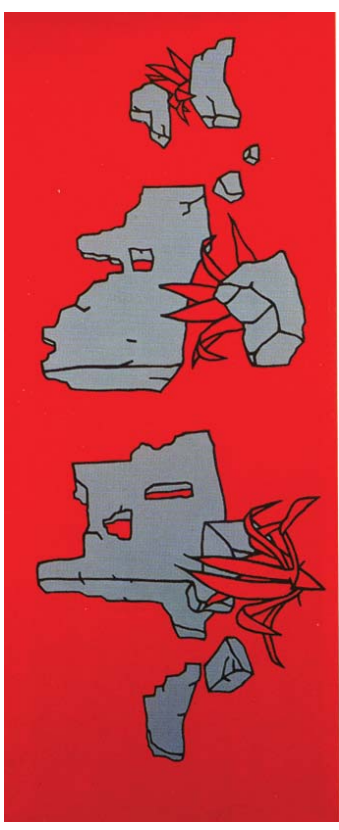


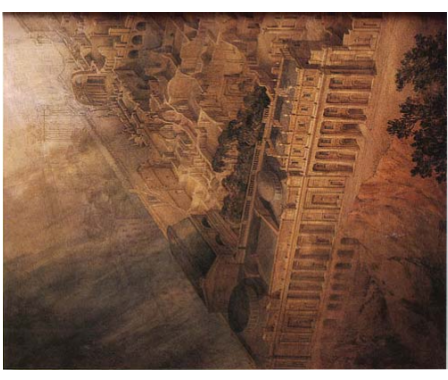
Image 1: Main elevations of Sint Lucas Art Academy with neo-Gothic screen



Boxtel



Patrick Caulfield, *Ruins*



Joseph Gandy



Image 2: Local photos of Boxtel and inspirations from ruins and portrayals of ruins



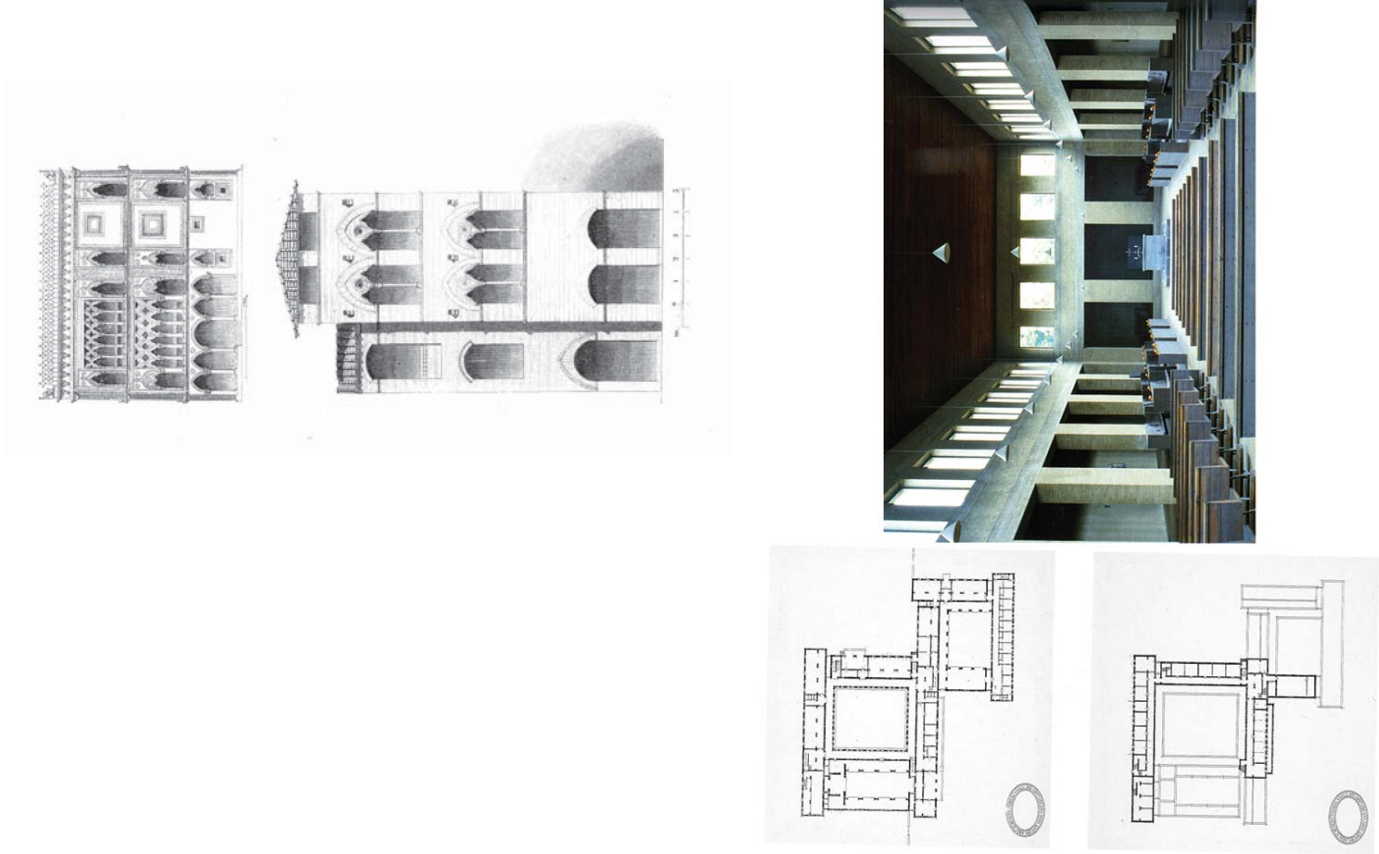


Image 3: Precedents of Gothic tracery, and of church designs and pattern studies by Dom Hans van der Laan



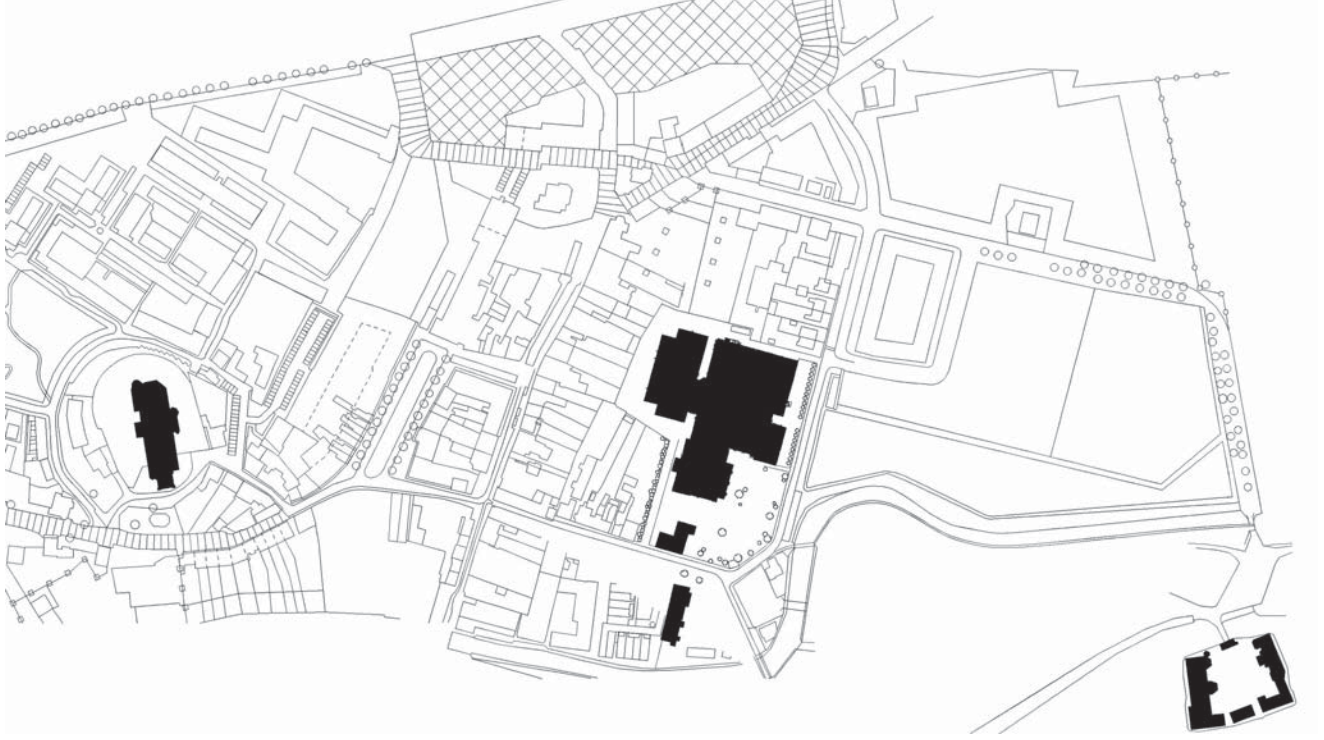


Image 4: Map showing Sint Lucas Art Academy in relation to Boxtel and its old church and castle

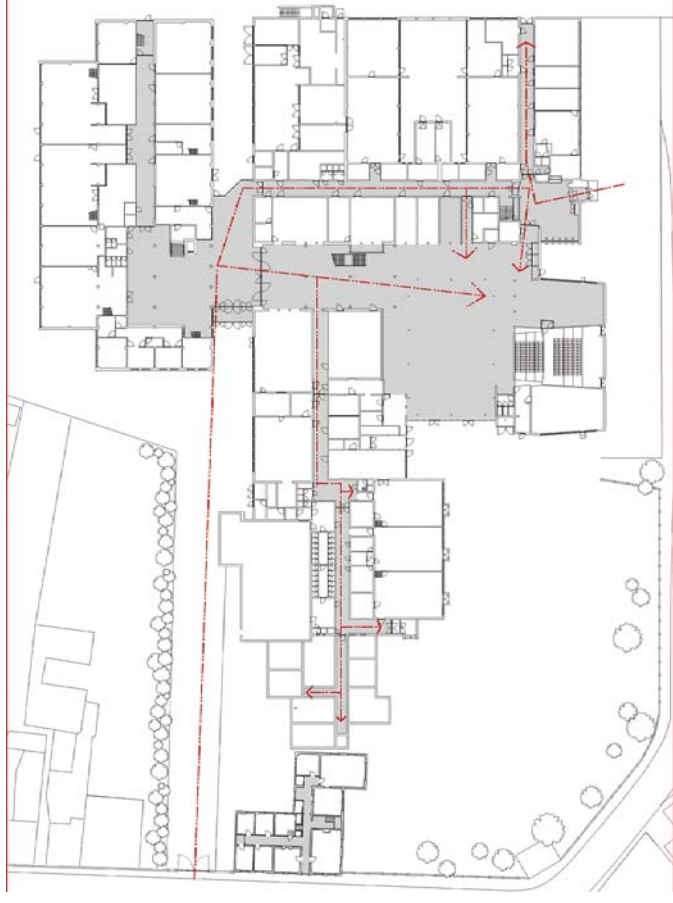


Image 5: Plans of Sint Lucas Art Academy as was, showing areas to be demolished (right) and existing circulation routes (right)

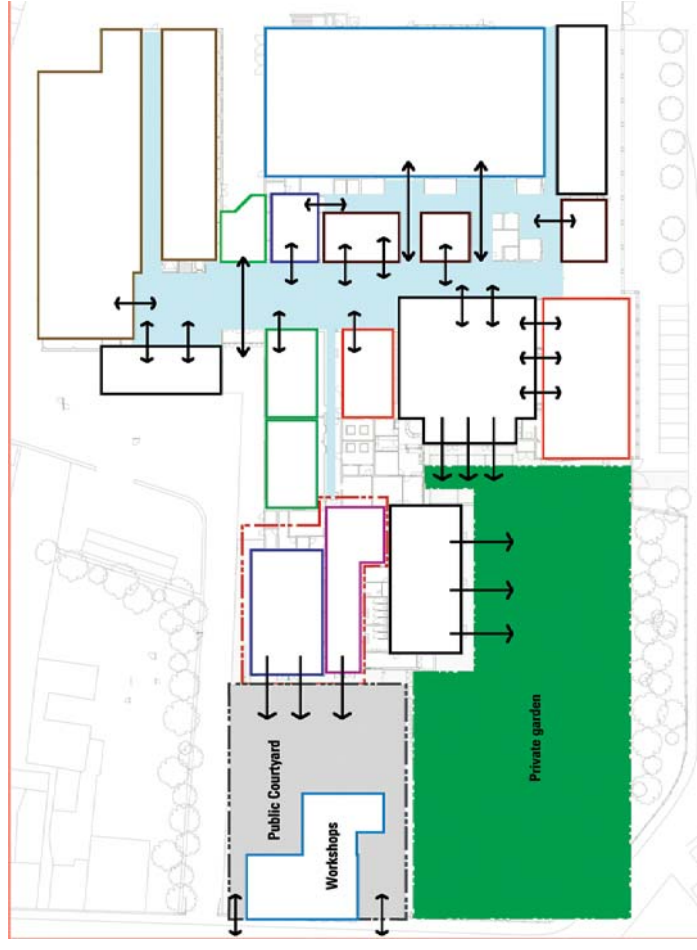


Image 6: Plans for Sint Lucas showing new insertions (left) and new circulation links (right)

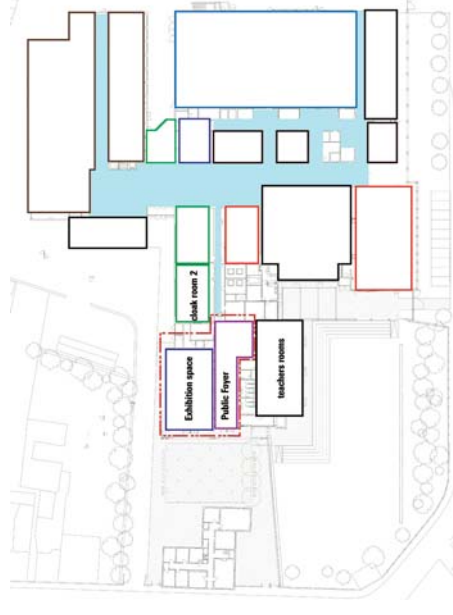
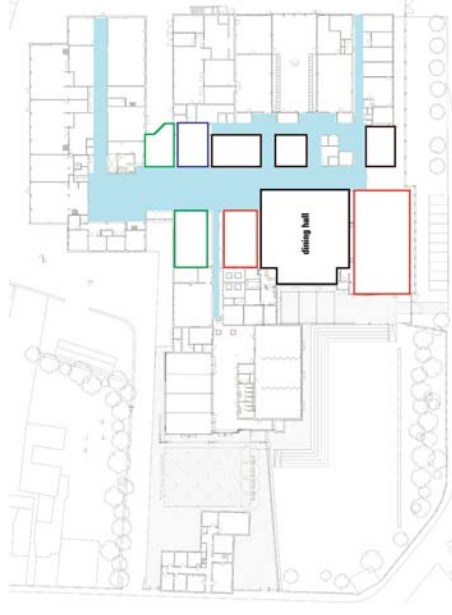
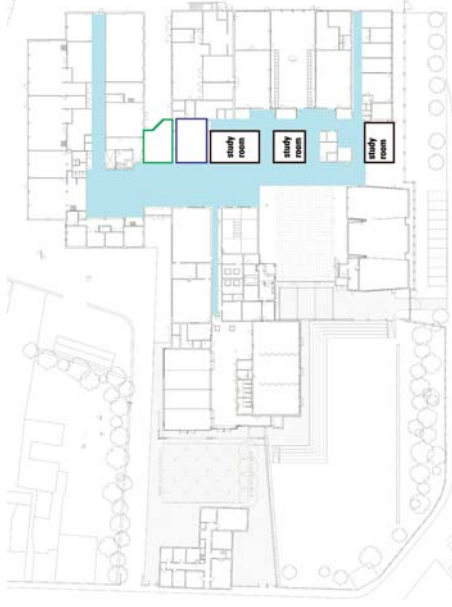
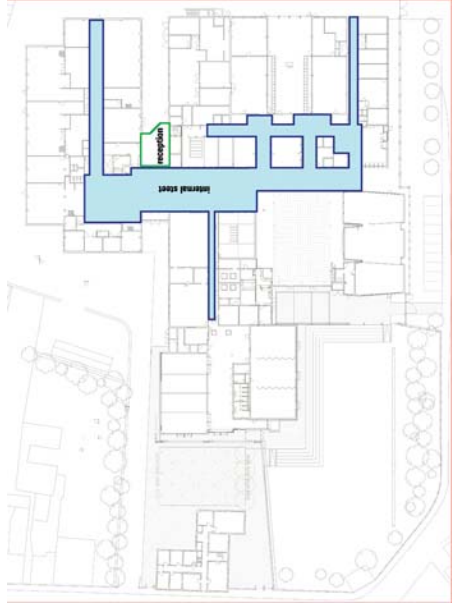


Image 7: Sequence of diagrams showing the build-up of functions in the revamped Sint Lucas Art Academy



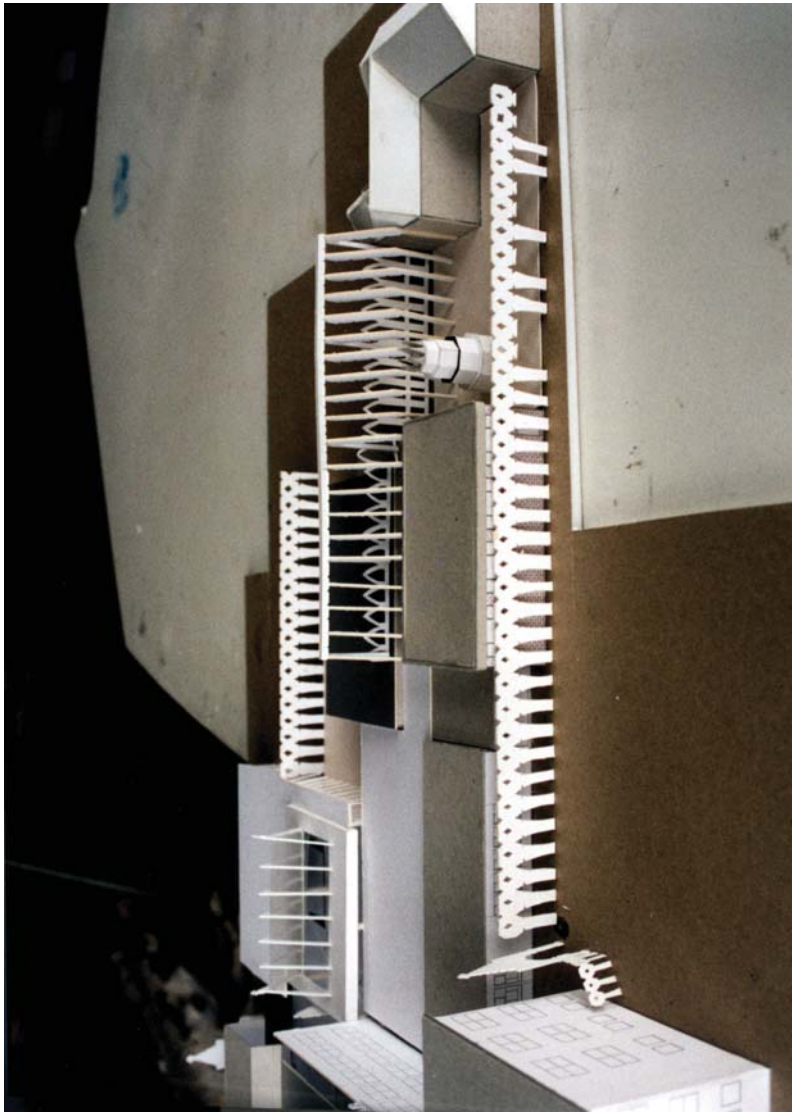
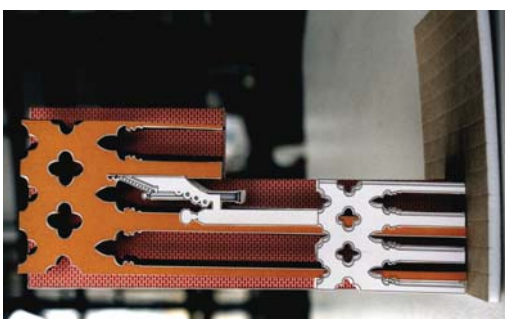
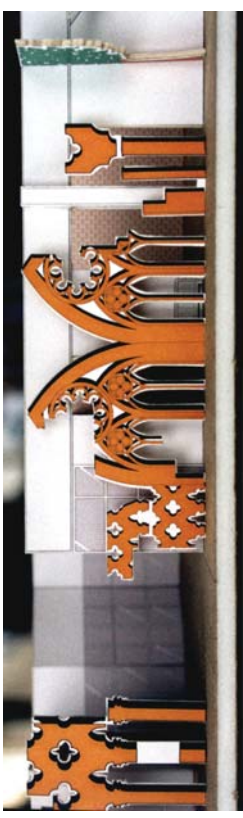
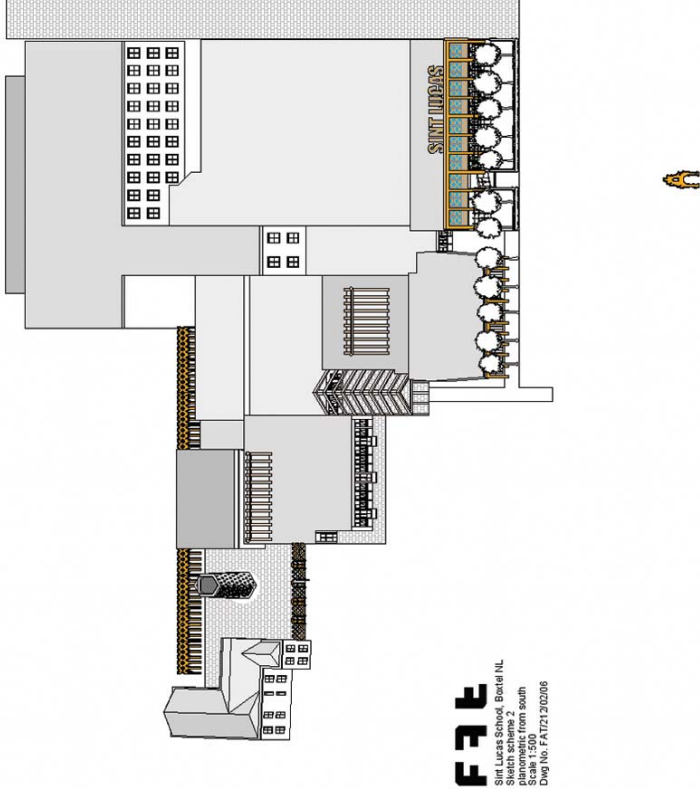
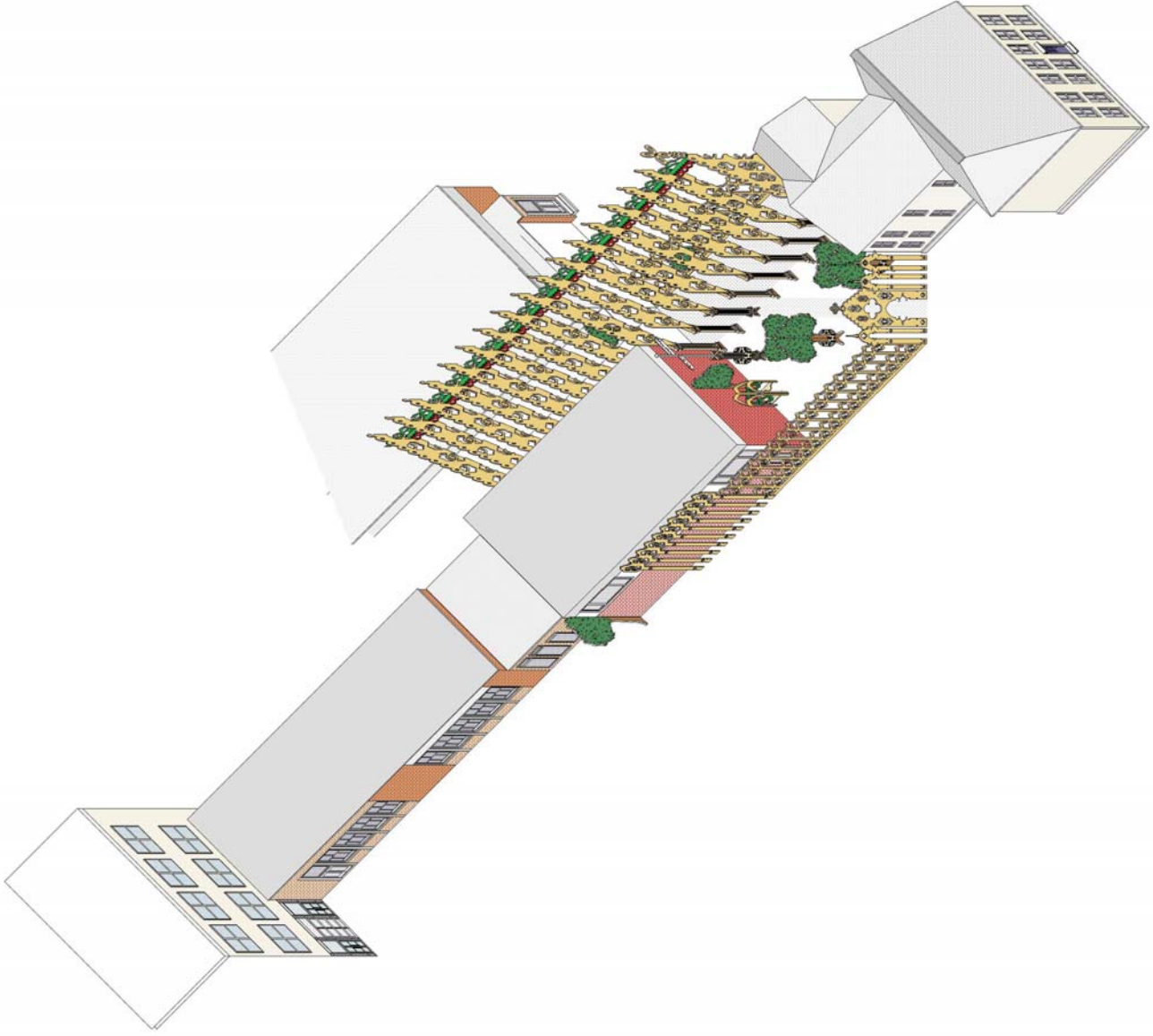


Image 8: Early study models of building and screen wall



**F&E**  
 Sint Lucas School, Borel NL  
 Sketch scheme 2  
 View from south  
 Scale 1:500  
 Dwg No. FAT213/0206

Image 9: Early projection drawings of scheme



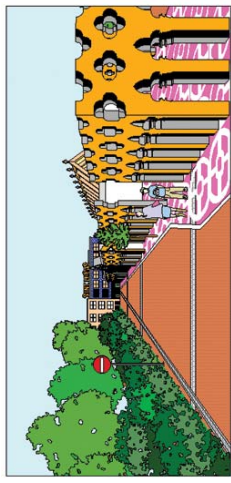
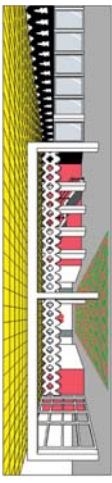
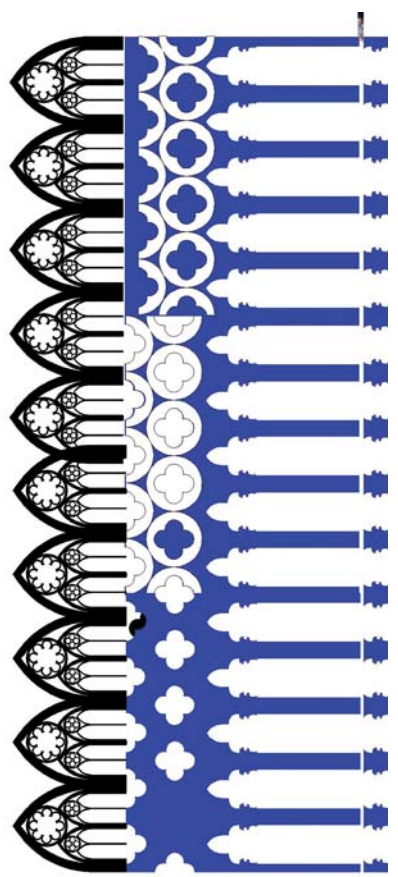
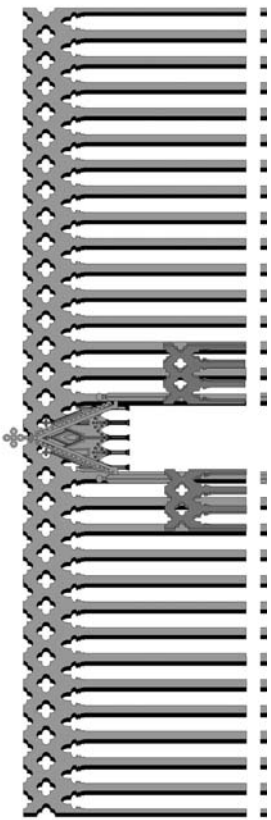


Image 10: Development studies of the scheme

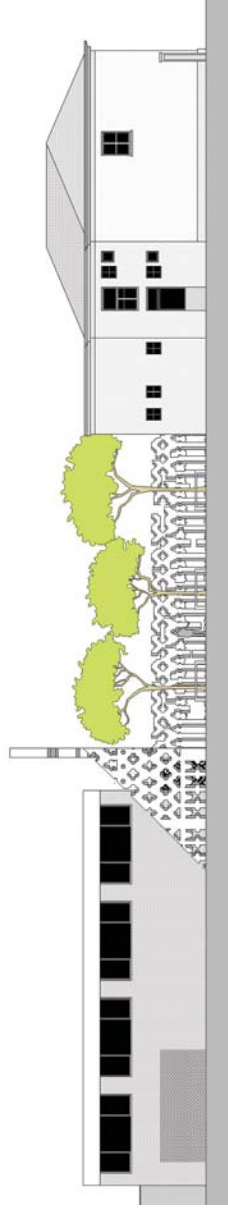
Burgakker



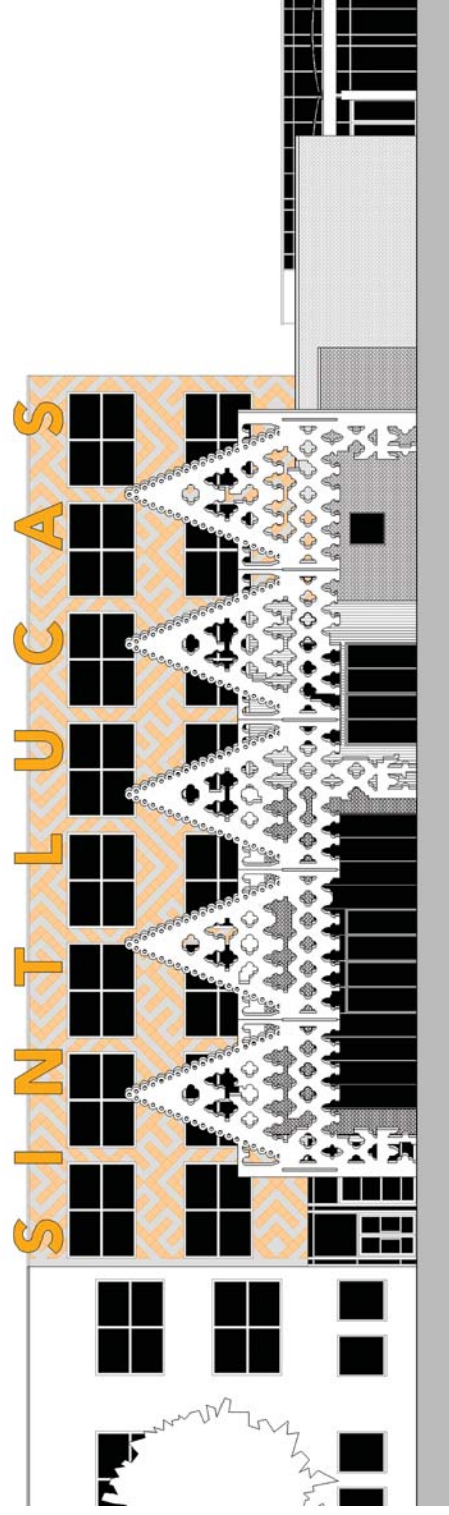
Grote Beemd

Image 11: Layout plan of Sint Lucas Art Academy

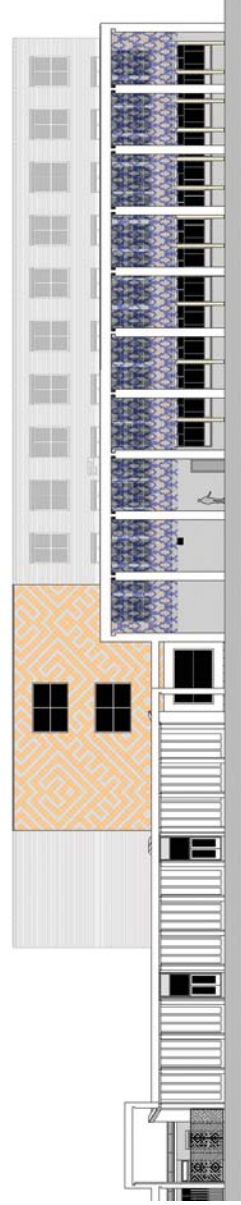




North



West



South

Image 12: Final elevations

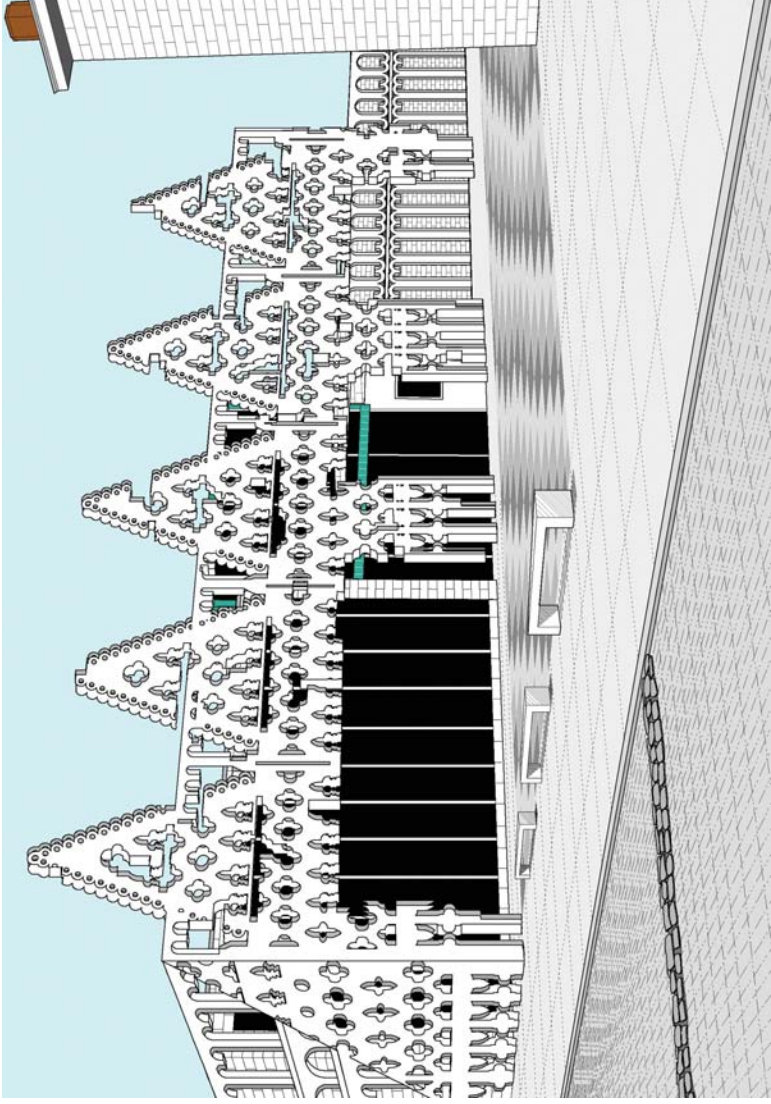
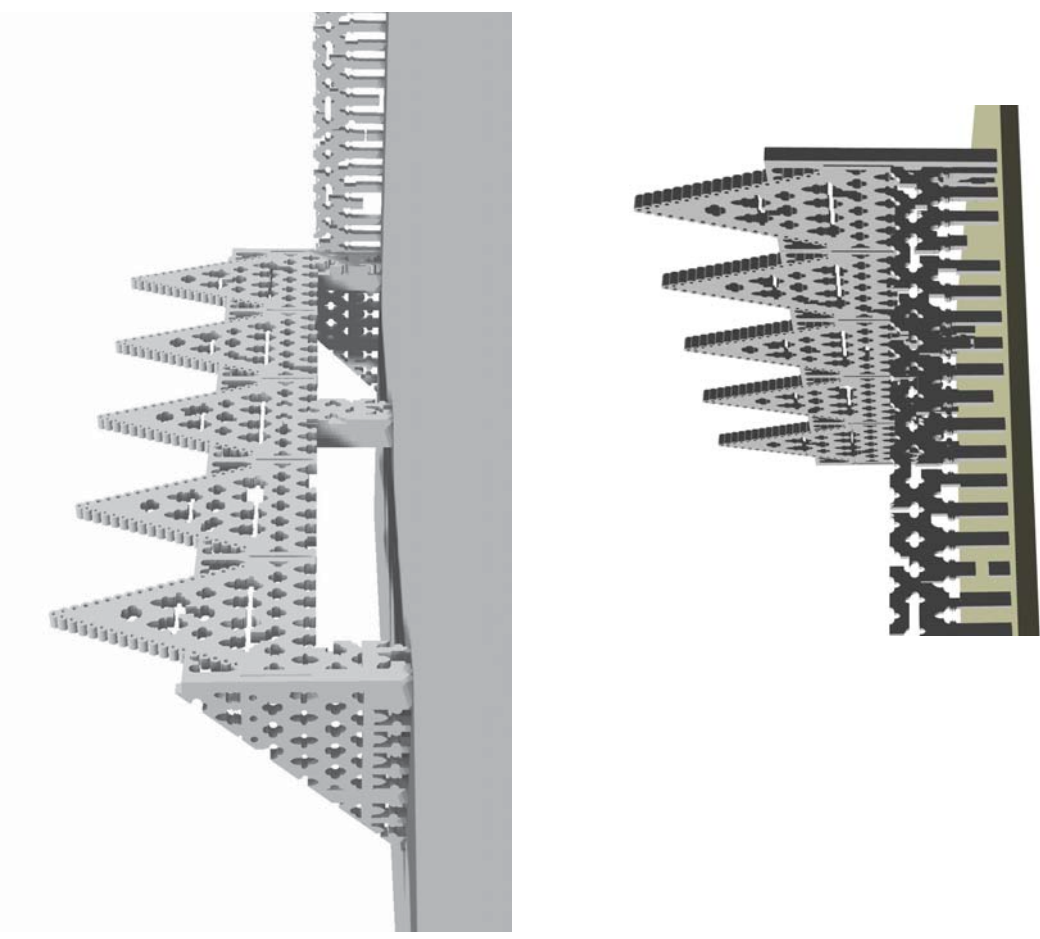


Image 13: Digital studies for neo-Gothic entrance screen

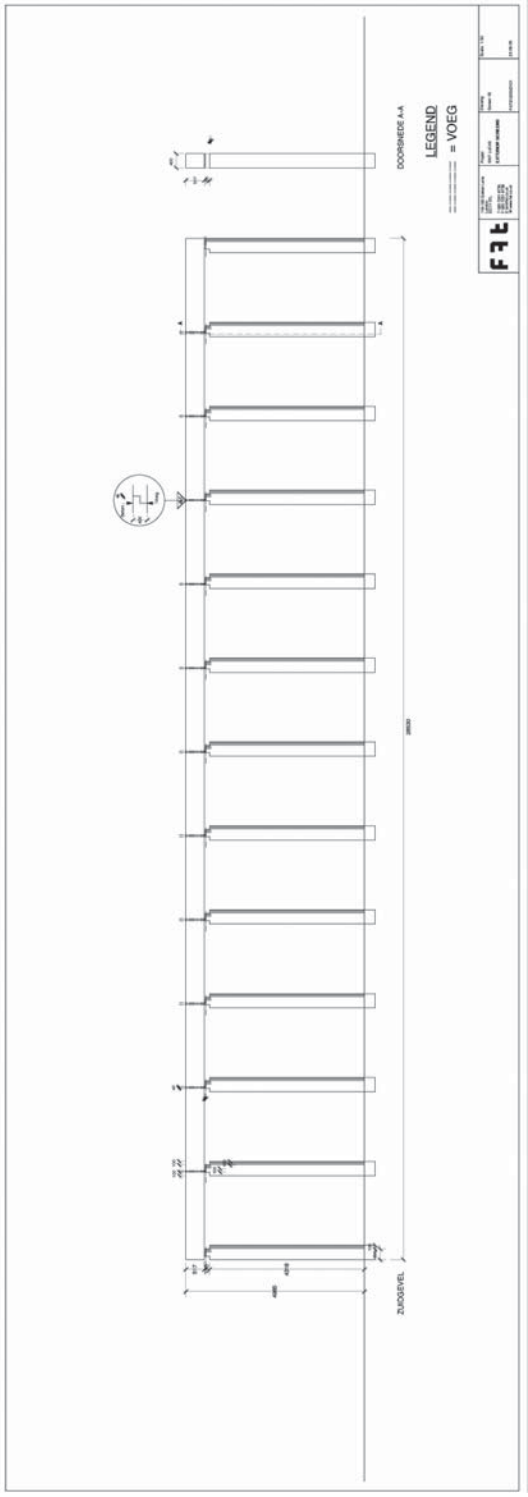
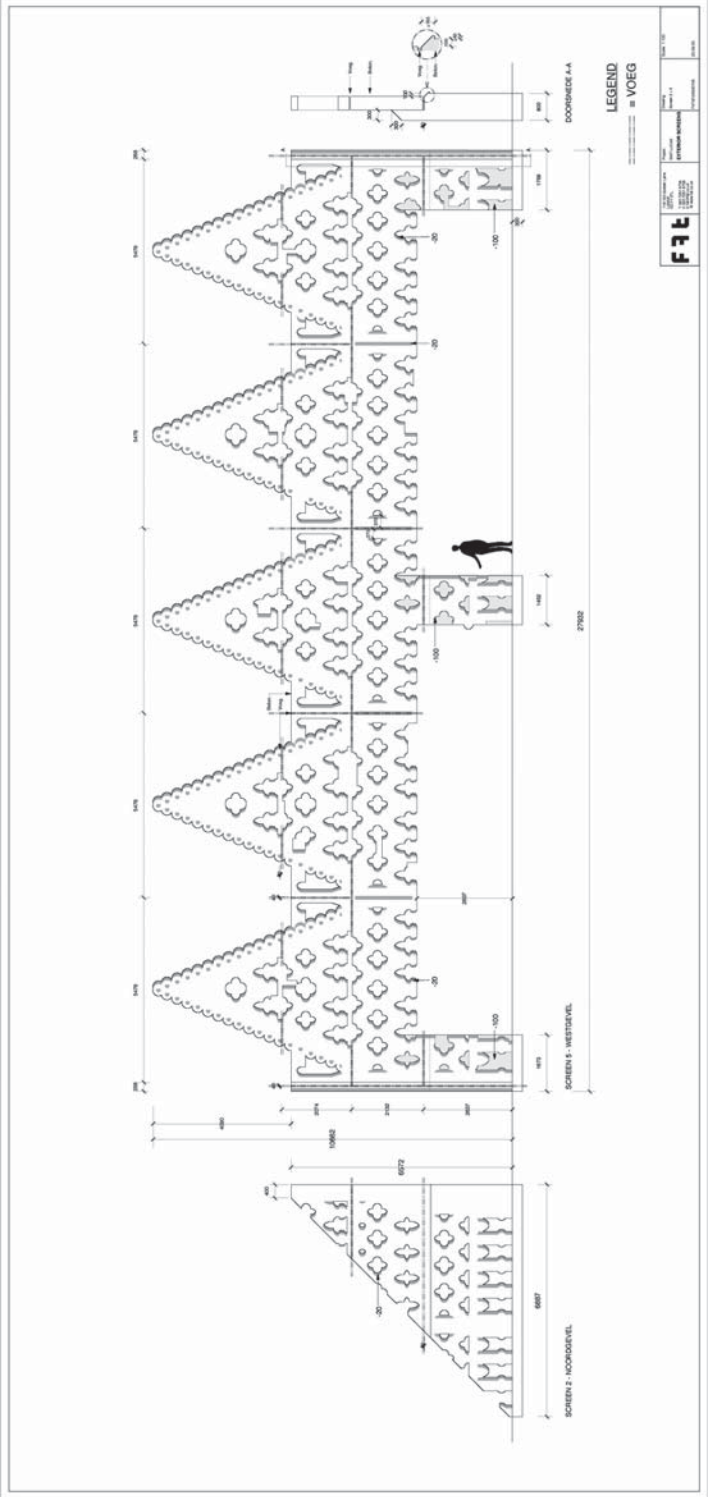


Image 14: Production drawings for neo-Gothic and modernist precast concrete screens





Image 15: Test production of precast screen in Decomo's factory

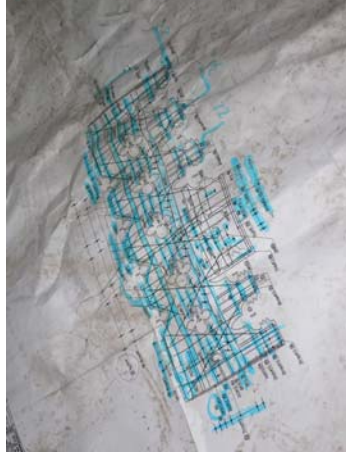






Image 16: Site construction photos for neo-Gothic and modernist screens



SINT LUCAS ART ACADEMY  
Boxel, The Netherlands  
FAT LTD  
New Foyer and Rooflight Details  
1:20  
Ref No. 2071 011

SINT LUCAS ART ACADEMY  
Boxel, The Netherlands  
FAT LTD  
Section through New Foyer  
1:100  
Ref No. 2071 005

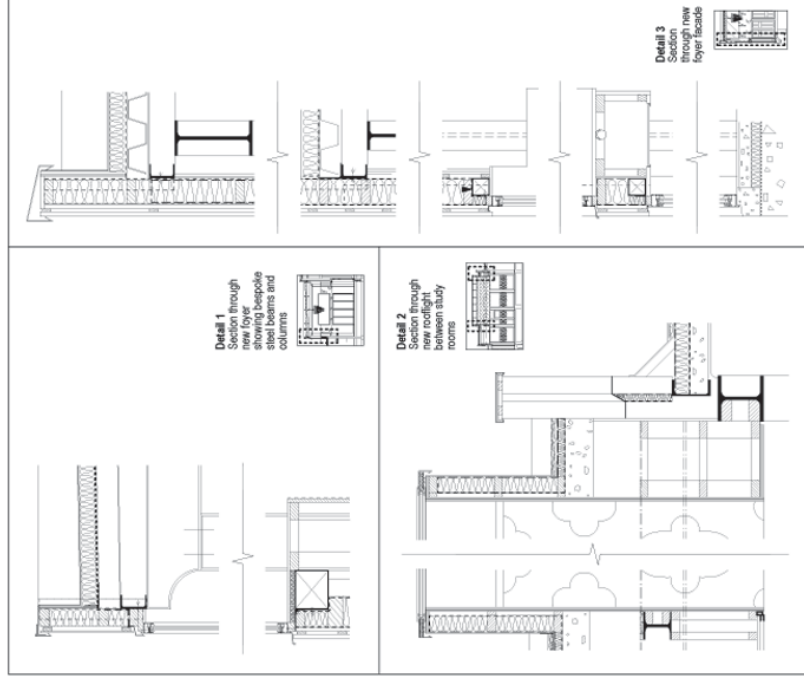
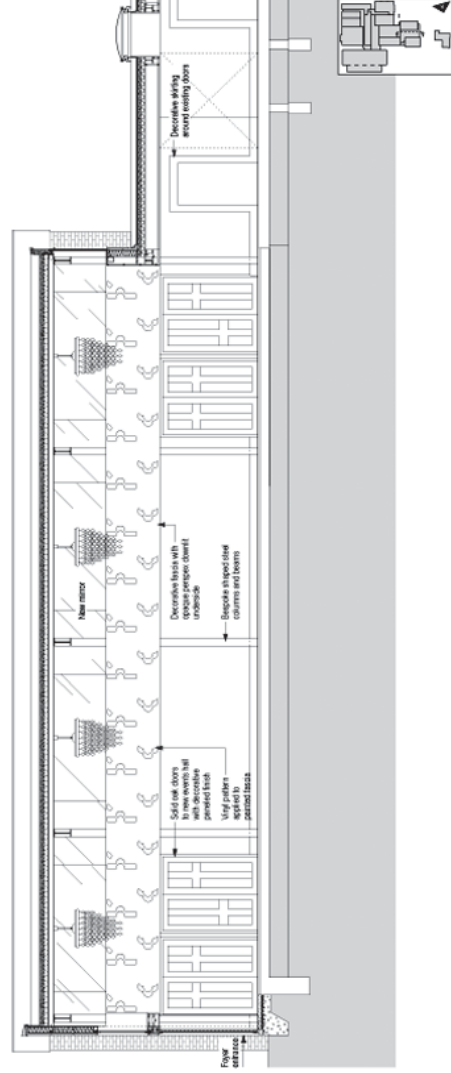


Image 17: Typical studies of sections, details and spatial design of interior corridors

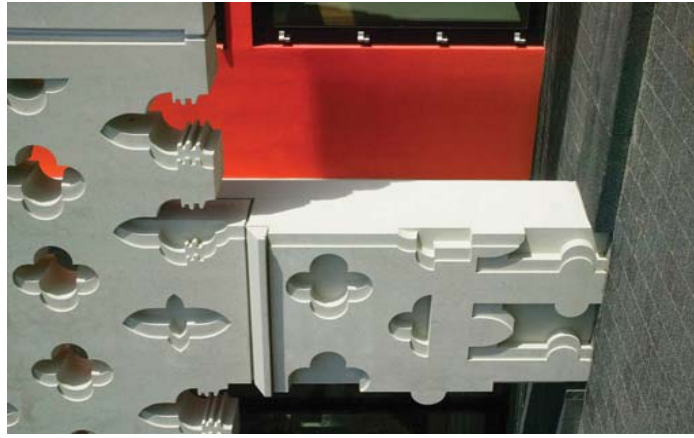


Image 18: Photos of neo-Gothic screen as built



Image 19: Exterior photos of Sint Lucas Art Academy





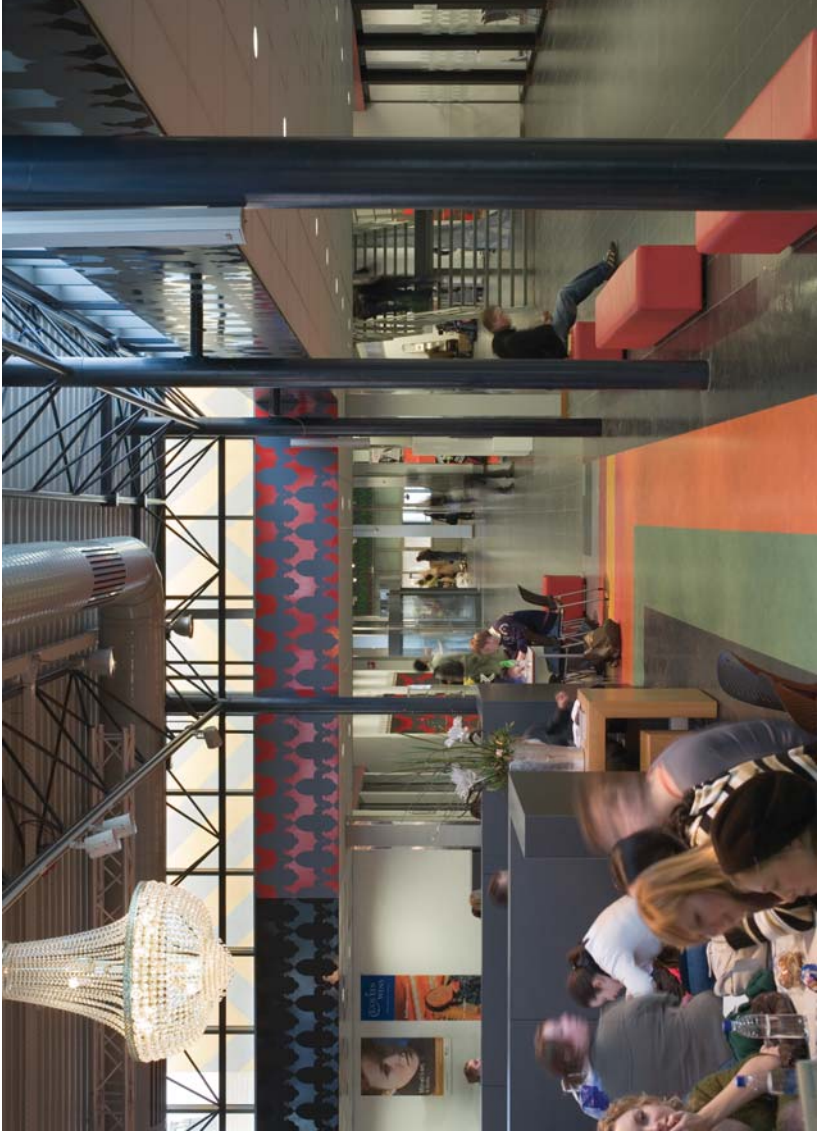


Image 20: Interior photos of Sint Lucas Art Academy



Image 21: Interior details in Sint Lucas Art Academy



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## Press Release - Sint Lucas Art Academy

Fat's much anticipated project for Sint Lucas Art Academy, in Boxtel the Netherlands is complete and will officially open on 25 January 2007. The project has already been nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture, the Mies van der Rohe Award 2007.

### The Brief

Sint Lucas is a 1200 student art academy in the town of Boxtel in the Noord Brabant region of Holland. The school specialises in design and maintains strong links with the design industry. Fat was asked to respond to the client's brief which required a major reworking of the school's interior spaces, the reorganization of the external spaces and the creation of a new, unifying external identity. The project also required the incorporation of a newly acquired 19th Century building into the campus and the renovation of that building.

### Main Design Components

#### 1. New Public Piazza

The project comprises a radical reworking of the existing campus, including a number of major additions and alterations to the existing buildings. The academy's entrances and new public facilities (exhibition spaces, public foyer and lecture space) are reorientated towards the Burgakker, Boxtel's main historical street. This reorientation is reinforced by the demolition of some existing buildings to create a new piazza, which opens onto the Burgakker and reconnects the school with the town.



#### 2. Reinforced Concrete Screens

The piazza is bounded by a number of highly ornamented concrete screens which form new facades to the previously non-descript buildings and help form a hierarchy of external spaces comprising the public piazza, the semi-public garden and ancillary and car parking. The screens are designed to suggest ruined buildings and constitute an ambitious essay in the use of prefabricated reinforced concrete. Concrete screens of a more restrained design create new facades on the remaining, less important public faces of the buildings along the Gote Beemd.





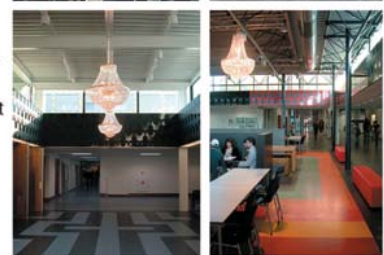
### 3. Façade Patterns

The administration and teaching blocks are decorated in a complex abstract pattern derived from the work of the Belgian monk and architect Dom van der Laan. These patterns also form the basis of the design of the new steel gates, the floor patterns in the main internal public spaces and the paving design of the new piazza. When used at a large scale, the patterns have a “commercial” character which is suggestive of the academy’s close relationship with industry, whilst the origins of the pattern refers to the college’s beginnings as a religious institution.



### 4. Legibility of the Interior

Internally, the school has been reorganised into three distinct areas: 2D, 3D and new media. The main corridor through the school, which had previously been lined with store rooms, toilets and electrical cupboards, has been recreated as a vibrant internal street, lined with social spaces, such as cloakrooms and seating niches, together with teaching spaces and study rooms. The internal street connects a new reception area and a colourful new dining hall. Off the street new top lit spaces have been formed to create an exhibition hall and to carve new connections between the internal street and the newly extended workshop spaces. Throughout the building, previously blank walls have been demolished and replaced by floor to ceiling glazed panels. The overall result is that the internal circulation system is much more legible, and a tremendous sense of the multitude of creative activities happening within the school is felt in the main circulation spaces.



### 5. New Public Foyer

At the west end of the building near to the main historical street, and fronting onto the new piazza, existing corridors, toilets and storerooms have been demolished and replaced by an elegant public foyer in a new building which is inserted into the existing built fabric.



### 6. Interior Identity

Throughout the interior, a beautiful new identity has been created using a “pop gothic” motif, which further connects the interior and exterior. These design motifs, together with decorative lighting fixtures, are juxtaposed against the lightweight industrial character of the existing buildings.



The completion of the scheme is testament to the tenacity of architect, client, design team, and contractor who together, have succeeded in delivering a remarkable transformation of this educational institution despite the obstacles of a tight budget, an unsympathetic planning committee and a number of very challenging technical issues.