

Press release
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Fenix, the new international art museum about migration, opens in Rotterdam

- First cultural project in Europe designed by MAD Architects
- Centrepiece of transformation of Rotterdam's historic dock area
- Press information and images: press.fenix.nl

Fenix, the new international art museum devoted to migration, opens to the public on a landmark site in Rotterdam's City Harbour on Friday 16 May 2025.

Fenix is located in a restored historic warehouse, which has been transformed in a radical design by Ma Yansong of MAD Architects, the internationally acclaimed Beijing-based architecture practice. It is the centrepiece of the regeneration of the harbour-side neighbourhood of Katendrecht, which was formerly home to Rotterdam's red-light district and the oldest Chinatown of continental Europe.

The 16,000 sqm building, dating from 1923, was once part of the largest warehouse in the world and served as an important building for storage and shipping for the Holland America Line – a Dutch cargo and passenger line. The Holland America Line facilitated the journeys of millions of migrants in the 19th and 20th centuries who arrived and departed from the surrounding docks.

Fenix is the first cultural project in Europe designed by MAD architects. Visitors will immediately see its architectural masterpiece, the Tornado, an organic, dynamic structure evocative of rising air. This double-helix staircase climbs from the ground floor and flows up and out of the rooftop onto a viewing platform hovering above the city. Visitors will encounter dramatic views across the River Maas and of Hotel New York, the former headquarters of the Holland America Line.

The museum opens with three exhibitions:

1. *All Directions* showcases over 150 artworks and objects ranging from the historical to the contemporary, drawn from the Fenix collection and acquired over the past five years. The artists featured are from across the globe, including Francis Alÿs, Max Beckmann, Sophie Calle, Honoré Daumier, Jeremy Deller, Rineke Dijkstra, Omar Victor Diop, Shilpa Gupta, William Kentridge, Kimsooja, Laetitia Ky, Steve McQueen, Adrian Paci,



Cornelia Parker, Gordon Parks, Grayson Perry, Ugo Rondinone, Yinka Shonibare, Alfred Stieglitz, Do Ho Suh, Bill Viola, and Danh Võ.

The exhibition includes a series of new works specifically commissioned by Fenix from artists based in Europe, USA, and Asia exploring their views on and personal stories of migration. They are: Beya Gille Gacha; Raquel van Haver; Hugo McCloud; Chae Eun Rhee; Martin and Inge Riebeek; Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek; and Efrat Zehavi.

It is also interspersed with a collection of personal mementos, gathered from the people of Rotterdam and telling individual stories of migration, alongside important historical artefacts such as a section of the Berlin Wall, a migrant boat from Lampedusa and a Nansen passport from 1923, an internationally recognised travel document that was issued to stateless refugees after World War I.

2. *The Family of Migrants*, inspired by Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*, one of the most famous photographic exhibitions of all time, which was first shown at MoMA in 1955. This new exhibition features a selection of the most striking photography on the subject of migration, bringing together 194 photographs from 55 countries taken by 136 photographers. The works range from 1905 to the present day and are a mix of documentary images, portraits and journalist photography drawn from international archives, museum collections, image banks and newspapers. Photographers featured include Abbas, Eva Besnyö, Chien-Chi Chang, Fouad Elkoury, Robert de Hartogh, Lewis Hine, Ata Kandó, Dorothea Lange, Steve McCurry, Yasuhiro Ogawa, Emin Özmen and Sergey Ponomarev.
3. *The Suitcase Labyrinth*, a monumental interactive installation made up of 2,000 donated suitcases that brings to life a collection of personal histories from countries, cultures and communities from around the world. The collection ranges from large leather trunks with elaborate fittings to small, battered cases bearing stickers of their destinations. Some were handed down through generations alongside stories of life-changing relocations, others were more recently acquired. A number of suitcases, originally from Rotterdam, have been donated from the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, returning now to their original port of departure. Visitors will be accompanied by an interactive audio tour, revealing select personal stories about the suitcases' past owners and their journeys of love, homesickness, hope, and longing. The Suitcase Labyrinth also features *(Kindness) of (Strangers)*, a work by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar.



Plein on the ground floor of Fenix, measuring 2,275 square metres, is conceived as an indoor city square. It will serve as a space for connection and exchange, curated for and with Rotterdam's many communities and free for all. It will host large scale events, explorations of different styles of food culture, community meetings, performances and events throughout the year. It will have a kiosk in which visitors can read newspapers from around the world and buy a drink or snack.

The museum's retail and dining options include O Café and Bakery, led by the Michelin-starred Turkish chef Maksut Aşkar, and Granucci Gelato, a gelateria on the museum's quayside serving award-winning artisanal ice cream by the Granucci family who have been making gelato in the Netherlands since 1929. The Espresso Bar is located within the first floor gallery space of the museum and offers views across the city. The museum shop is located in the main entrance area and features tableware, games, food and other items to create a sense of home and belonging.

Anne Kremers, Director of Fenix, said:

'Migration stories are the heartbeat of Fenix. We've woven them into every element - whether it's the magic of Ma Yansong's architecture, the memories evoked by the artworks on display, the freely accessible Plein, or the gelateria by the Granucci family. We want everyone to feel welcome.'

Fenix is funded by the Droom en Daad Foundation, founded in 2016 and led by Wim Pijbes, former Director of the Rijksmuseum. The Droom en Daad Foundation is helping redefine Rotterdam for the 21st century – developing new kinds of arts and culture institutions and fostering new creative talent that reflects the city's diversity, its spirit and its history.

For more information on Fenix, including opening hours and ticketing, visit: www.fenix.nl

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Notes to Editors:

It was from the quays around this warehouse that millions of emigrants boarded ships bound for destinations such as America and Canada from the late 19th century, including notable figures such as Albert Einstein, Willem de Kooning, and Max Beckmann. The departure and arrival of people made Rotterdam the city it is today, one shaped by the more than 170 nationalities of its inhabitants.

Rotterdam has a long history as a significant trading hub, with its huge deep-water port and strategic location with easy access to the North Sea and the Rhine making it an ideal thoroughfare for shipping and the gateway to Europe. In the 19th century, Rotterdam's port facilities and infrastructure as an international trade hub grew dramatically, expanding to meet the new demands and opportunities generated by the industrial revolution, with larger steam ships, mechanised loading cranes, and steel bridges connecting both sides of the Maas river. The surrounding areas of Katendrecht and Rijnhaven experienced dramatic change, transforming from quiet residential communities to a dynamic international shipping hotspot.

The warehouse in which Fenix is located was at the heart of this expansion in Rotterdam's history. Built by architect Cornelis Nicolaas van Goor (1861 – 1945) and completed in 1923, the building, known as the San Francisco Warehouse, served as an important storage and trans-shipment building for the Holland America Line – a successful Dutch cargo and passenger line founded in Rotterdam in 1873, which provided steam shipping between the Netherlands and America and facilitated the journeys of millions of emigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over 360m long and made from reinforced concrete, the vast warehouse was the place where the Holland America Line loaded and unloaded its ships carrying goods to and from destinations as far as South Africa, Canada, Mexico, and the Gulf States.

Much of Rotterdam was destroyed during World War II, and the city has now become a world-class destination for architectural innovation, known for its landmark buildings and experimental construction. Following bombing and a fire, the warehouse was rebuilt in the 1950s as two separate buildings, Fenix I and Fenix II. Fenix II Warehouse has undergone an extensive transformation led by MAD Architects to become the Fenix museum, ensuring this fine example of Rotterdam port architecture is preserved for the future.