

# A CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL TREASURES

One of Rotterdam's oldest buildings is St Lauren's Church, which, for decades, has not just been a place of worship, but has also played a role in public life. It has been, and still is open for lectures, discussions, concerts and cultural activities. Its eventful history has now been presented by Kossmann.dejong in a thrilling exhibition.



Photo: Thijl Wolzak

In the vibrant, constantly changing city of Rotterdam, there are few historic buildings – a consequence of the almost complete destruction of the inner city during World War II. One of the buildings which survived, at least as a ruin, was St Lauren's Church, which was restored in the 1950s, but has nevertheless lost some elements of its history and its heritage for ever. Last year, the Kossmann.dejong agency, which specialises in exhibition and interior design, was commissioned to stage an exciting long-term exhibition that would encompass and revive the history of this living building. The size of the exhibition, 2,700 square metres, may, on first impression, afford ample scope for design creativity to unfold, but space also had to be found for the aforementioned events which are a significant part of the life of the inhabitants of Rotterdam. The creative team, while treating the building as a monument with great respect, took a bold new approach: »The design for the exhibition is based on stories that are embedded within the building. By touching essential themes that show the church as a spiritual place, as the heart of the city and as a witness of history, the exhibition manifests different layers of meaning. The exhibition is not traditional because there is no historical collection displayed. Instead stories and events are depicted and presented to the visitors.«

For this fascinating exhibition, Kossmann.dejong has used the individual chapels of the church building and has applied to each one a motto presenting the church as a place of remembrance. »We brought its story back – from various vantage points and by depicting some almost forgotten details. We tell of the past and the present, of life and death, of the bombing of the city and of reconstruction, and of course, we tell of silence,« say the creatives. To guide visitors through this complex and multi-layered set of themes, the agency also developed an audio book which looks like a bible – while the dates and facts can be read in it, supplementary stories can be listened to in the audio version. »Never before has such a project been undertaken in a church in the Netherlands,« the creative team declares proudly. »With this kind of exhibition design, we have found a different way of lending new life to historical monuments as communicators of history. What is more, the solution provided for this commission is totally in line with our philosophy. The exhibition is not set up in the space – the space itself is the exhibition.« *bs*



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