Cahiers de Mariemont, no. 49: The Museums and their Architects

Deadline: Nov 15, 2026

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The Museum and its architects. Designing, transforming and bringing museum spaces to life.

Whether housed in a historic building or a venue created from scratch to accommodate it, every museum tells its own unique architectural story. In Mariemont, the Museum's collections are housed in a building designed by the architect Roger Bastin (1913-1986), one of the leading figures of the Brutalist movement in Belgium during the second half of the 20th century. In the short term (2027-2029), thanks to exceptional private funding, the Museum is set to transform the layout of its permanent exhibition. In a second phase, a wide-ranging revitalisation plan for the 45-hectare estate and its museum, approved in 2024, will be rolled out at a pace dictated by the public authorities, who are the project owners. Against this backdrop, the director and the teams of the museum have embarked on an in-depth consultation with the architects responsible for designing the Mariemont of tomorrow. In this context, the editors of the Cahiers de Mariemont propose to devote a special issue to the key elements of the dialogue that develops between the museums and their architects.

The aim of this special issue is to highlight the notion of exchange, dialogue and, at times, confrontation, which must guide the choices regarding the architectural 'gesture' in the service of a museum. As it has evolved, the museum institution has gone far beyond its sole – albeit still essential – purpose of conserving and exhibiting cultural artefacts to become a space serving society, open to research, education and entertainment.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of themes and avenues to explore:
- Palimpsest museums (19th-21st centuries): writing the history of the building that houses the museum is a key aspect of its identity; it is often likened to a parchment on which successive layers tend to overlap, or even to erase the previous one.
- Space, functions, users: a museum's spatial requirements evolve with each generation; today, the museum is a place of conservation and exhibition but also tends to establish itself as a cultural forum. The layout and circulation through the spaces are a constant concern for the museum and its architect.
- Materials, light, climate: displaying objects and learning to view them are linked to essential physical parameters such as light and climate. Windows, artificial or natural lighting, air-conditioned spaces, materials, etc. form an integral part of the dialogue between the architect and the museum.
- Public authorities, patrons, partnerships: throughout history, those in power have been involved in the cultural sphere. Indeed, the financial requirements for museum buildings – construction,

renovation, adaptation – are often colossal and depend on external stakeholders, whether public and/or private.
- Exhibition design, interior design, visitor experience: creating an atmosphere for visitors also requires integrating the work of designers and artists into the architectural design of the project. Furniture, lighting, display plinths, multimedia and so on all tell the museum's story, rooted in its own time.
- Museum, local area, landscape: a museum is not limited to the buildings it occupies. Rooted in a socio-economic context that is subject to change, its location within an urban fabric, a park, a landscape or a given area contributes to its identity and determines the uses to which it is put.

Proposals for papers, in French or English (including an abstract of 2,000 to 3,000 characters, including spaces, along with a provisional title, a short bibliography on the subject, and a 2- or 3-line biography) should be sent to Jean-Sébastien Balzat (jean sebastien.balzat@musee-mariemont.be) or Gilles Docquier (gilles.docquier@musee-mariemont.be) by 15 November 2026. The full text of the article, together with an abstract (in French and English) and 10 keywords (in French and English), is due by 15 April 2027.

Reference:
CFP: Cahiers de Mariemont, no. 49: The Museums and their Architects. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 12, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54151>.