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Foster + Partners and Rubio Arquitectura win international Prado Museum competition

Foster + Partners and Rubio Arquitectura have won the international competition to revitalise and refurbish the historic Hall of Realms (Salón de Reinos) as a new addition to the Museo del Prado campus in Madrid.

The vision is to create a new public focus for the city by bringing together the various buildings that comprise the Prado with public spaces and underground links.

The Hall of Realms is a noble structure and one of the very few that have survived from the former Palacio del Buen Retiro of the seventeenth century. It has been the subject of changes and expansion, gathering many layers of history over the centuries.

The interventions will bring fresh life to the magnificent interiors from the past as well as adding new state-of-the-art galleries and public spaces. The proposal goes back four centuries to re-discover the original three storey southern façade. This becomes the backdrop for a spectacular new space within the building. The existing outer walls have been delicately opened up to bring light and views in from the new civic plaza.

The transformed Hall of Realms will be permeable, offering a new public route through the building with terrace cafes on the north side.

Working within the outline of the original building envelope a new roof will harvest energy from integrated solar cells, give natural light to the galleries below and cantilever as a shade to protect the southern façade. It also heralds the rebirth of this historic monument.

Lord Foster said:

“On behalf of the team that I led at Foster + Partners in collaboration with Rubio Arquitectura, I would like to say how honoured we are to contribute to this next phase of the expansion of the Prado – one of the truly great museums of the world. The Hall of Realms, built by Crescenzi and Carbonel in the 1630's, is one of the very few remains of the former palace and predates the Museum which was conceived in 1819. Two centuries later the transformation and expansion of this historic hall will add significant new galleries and related public spaces to the Prado. It will also create, as a setting, a new urban focus for the city of Madrid.”

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Notes to editors:

Foster + Partners were one of eight architects from four countries shortlisted for the international competition.

The other practices were:

- Cruz y Ortiz Arquitectos
- Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos
- B720 Arquitectos – David Chipperfield Architects
- Office for Metropolitan Architecture (O.M.A.) Stedebouw B.V.
- Souto Moura Arquitectos - Juan Miguel Hernández León - Carlos de Riaño Lozano
- Garces de Seta Bonet Arquitectes - Pedro Feduchi Canosa
- Gluckman Tang Architects - Estudio Álvarez Sala - Arquitectura Enguita y Lasso de la Vega

The competition brief was to restore the Hall of Realms of the Palacio del Buen Retiro and create additional display space for permanent and temporary exhibitions at the Prado in Madrid. The addition of this building to the Museo del Prado's Campus, will form part of the Museum's 200th anniversary celebrations in 2019.

The competition was open to both Spanish and non-Spanish architectural practices, from which eight were selected to produce preliminary proposals.

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Extract from Competition submission by Foster + Partners and Rubio Arquitectura

Our vision for the new Prado Campus brings the essence of the Palacio del Buen Retiro back to life, by creating a new public focus for the city and stitching the various buildings of the Museo del Prado together. The primary protagonist is the noble Hall of Realms, a monument which has gathered many layers of history throughout the centuries. These layers will be peeled back to reveal the original 17th century façade, which will become the primary exhibit of the new museum.

The recovery of the south façade of the Palace requires the removal of the floor slabs to reveal the full extent of the facades, creating a spectacular new indoor public space: the new Prado Campus. By means of a delicate procedure the original façade openings will be reinstated so that sunlight reaches the interior spaces of the Hall of Realms again, re-establishing its former bond with the surrounding landscape.

The area lost by the removal of the intermediate floors will be reinstated on the third floor, above the newly revealed façade. This new floor will house a broad and versatile exhibition hall with a double-height ceiling. The new roof will be fully tuneable for controlled natural and artificial light, with full environmental controls – perfectly adapted to the varied nature of the exhibits. The new roof will also set new standards for sustainability, harvesting energy from integrated solar cells, while creating shade on the southern façade.

By situating the gallery spaces above, the ground floor is released and becomes the heart of the new building: this public level will be filled with exhibition and recreational areas, with the surrounding urban milieu flowing through the atrium, reconnecting both north – where the main entrance is located – and south, where a gathering space receives the visitors from the Villanueva building and restores the relationship between the Hall of Realms and the Casón del Buen Retiro.

A holistic vision for the future, the proposal for the Prado Campus will become a vital urban focus: a project that strengthens the urban linkages by stitching together the city, bringing clarity and coherence to the visitor experience. The project expands the role of the museum as a contemporary cultural institution, reaffirming its role as the custodian of the Royal Collections that were formerly housed in the Palacio del Buen Retiro.

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