

Hedge House

The understanding that art should be inextricably a part of everyday life forms the starting point for this design. The commission was to design an art gallery within the working garden of the landmark seventeenth century Wijlre Castle, directly adjacent to the formal garden of hedges. Yet the preservation and zoning regulations governing the landmark property would not allow such a change of use from a working garden to an art gallery. The resulting design, which was approved by the authorities, incorporates all the existing uses of the working garden—a chicken coop, greenhouses for orchids, and a tool shed—into the upper level of the new art gallery, literally making the art a part of everyday life.

The building is made of cast concrete and aluminum-framed glass, and rises only a single story above the ground in the garden, matching the height of the surrounding hedges. This upper portion of the building contains the chicken coop, two orchid houses, the tool shed and a garden room. The large gallery space is carved into the earth, beneath these ground-level functions, and the gallery, which is almost completely hidden from sight, receives its light through the sloped-roofed volumes that are lifted above the ground.

At the entry, a large stair leads directly down into the art gallery, while a narrow ramp slowly rises to the garden room, which has a view out into the walled chicken yard, as well as into the chicken coop and orchid house. When leaving the garden room on our way to the art gallery, one passes by the chicken house, which is a triangle in plan, with one glazed wall opening to the chicken yard and another opening to the garden room. Adjacent to the chicken coop, and visible at the top of the gallery stairs, is the first concrete-walled orchid room, the roof of which, as in both orchid houses, is made entirely of glass.

Descending a narrow, concrete-walled stair, ones arrives at the space at the far end of the art gallery, which is a zigzag in plan, with a concrete floor and the walls and ceiling finished in smooth white plaster. This space has a lower ceiling, and is illuminated by the light pouring in through the full-height glazing at the end of the gallery, as well as by the more subtle top-light washing down the narrow space within the double outer wall of the second orchid house and tool shed, above. Turning the corner, one enters the tallest portion of the art gallery, where the ceiling rises all the way up to the sloping roof of the upper level, and one can look back and see into the second orchid house through the glass wall at its inner edge. The ceiling again lowers over the final, L-shaped space of the gallery, which is illuminated by light washing down the double outer wall of the first orchid house, above, and by the light pouring down the entry stairway.

Location

Kasteel Wijlreweg 1
6321 PP Wijlre
the Netherlands

Program

Gallery, Institutional

Size

560 m²

Date of design

1998–2001

Date of completion

2001

Project team

Wiel Arets, Bettina Kraus, Lars Dreessen

Client

Private

Consultants

Palte BV, Huygen Installatieadviseurs BV, Xhonneux BV, Cauberg-Huygen Raadgevende Ingenieurs BV