



Press Release

International conference and civic reflection on the historical rooms of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces:

A heritage for the future

19.01.2018 – The Palace of the Academies, Brussels

A plan of classification of the two rooms of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces

Prompted by the disquieting information about the imminent dismantling of the historical rooms of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces (namely, the Historical Room and the Technological Room), the Citizens' Committee of Montgomery-Tervuren and the asbl Art & Héritance have initiated discussion on the possible classification of these two rooms, created in 1923 by Louis Leconte in the encyclopedic spirit of the 19th century. This concerns the first classification plan for a museum setting in Belgium.

This classification plan has received the support of the Brussels Capital Region through the asbl "Pétitions Patrimoine" and the Citizens' Committee of Montgomery-Tervuren, which has collected the signatures of more than 12,500 on petitions covering all of Belgium. For its part, the asbl Art & Héritance has drawn up the documents necessary for classifying and for organizing a professional and civic conference; it will bring together the scientific approach of world-class museologists and designers for a civic perspective drawing on the participation of the public concerned.

A museum within the museum

The two "twin" museum rooms truly capture the spirit of the period preceding the First World War. The Historical Room in particular is most impressive. Its setting is an immersive one, plunging the visitor into a unique ambiance containing an extremely diverse array of military items. This profusion of objects perfectly reflects the vision of that time, meant to accompany the emergence of a national feeling as well as glorify the Belgian army and volunteers who were fighting abroad.

The Technological Room was also conceived in a way which took account of the surrounding interior architecture, and makes a somber and orderly impression. In the Armory area, the room consists of a museum specialized in the evolution of technology along with a teaching museum intended for the students of the Royal Military School; its usefulness, however, extends to foreign specialists in the history of armaments and ballistics technology.

A debate complicated by legal procedure

Already by the 2000s, the museum itself had identified these two rooms as “masterpieces” on the international level.

On 28 April 2017, the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces, accorded the status of a scientific institution, was integrated into a new structure, the War Heritage Institute (WHI), subject to the authority of the Ministry of Defense and assigned to new management. An appeal against the classification of the Brussels Capital Region – and the demand of 12,500 Belgian petitioners – was introduced to the Council of State by the new body, on the grounds that the Historical Rooms need to be modernized in order to adapt to the current needs of the public and that the classification in question would prevent this modernization.

Opening the debate to citizens and finding solutions to modernize the rooms

This conference is intended to be both international – so as to open the necessary debate, properly assess the intrinsic value of these rooms, and put them in a global perspective – and local, so that users, whether specialists or the general public, Belgian or foreign, can make their voices heard, and in this way combine the scientific plan with that of the practical, lived experience of museum visitors.

A second step is to formulate innovative solutions for museums that are housed in settings from another era, to update the point of view, and to take a critical look at these museum interiors.

The conference will close with the presentation of a memorandum intended for the various stakeholders of this scientific, institutional, and civic debate. A book will be published in 2018 by the asbl Art & Héritance on this citizens’ initiative regarding the classification project and containing the conference proceedings.

Practical information:

Date and location: Friday, 19 January 2018 in the Palace of the Academies (next to Brussels Park), 1 Rue Ducale in B-1000 Brussels. Access by mass transit: Metro lines 2 or 6 (to Trone stop); bus lines 27, 38, 95 (to Trone stop).

Hours: from 8:45 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Registration fee: 25€ (15€ for students), which covers registration, 3 coffee breaks and the afternoon lunch; transfer should be made to the bank account of Art & Héritance asbl, 26 avenue baron Louis Huart, B-5000 Namur

IBAN: BE26 3631 5299 7029. BIC: BBRUBEBB

E-mail address for registrations: info@artheritance.be / jacques.toussaint@artheritance.be

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Reservation required. Registration is recorded upon receipt of the fee and return of the registration form; the form entails public authorization to the filming of the proceedings. Conference limited to 250 places.

For more information on the asbl Art & Héritance: www.artheritance.be

