

Press release

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FENIX TO OPEN IN ROTTERDAM IN MAY 2025

- First art museum to explore the theme of migration
- First cultural project in Europe designed by MAD Architects
- Centrepiece of transformation of Rotterdam's historic dock area



Press information and images available to download [here](#)

Fenix, the first museum in the world to explore themes around migration through the lens of art, will open to the public on a landmark site in Rotterdam's City Harbour on Friday **16 May 2025**.

Fenix will be located in a restored historic warehouse, which has been transformed in a radical design by Ma Yansong of MAD Architects, the internationally acclaimed Beijing-based architecture practice. It is the centrepiece of the regeneration of the harbour-side neighbourhood of Katendrecht, which is Rotterdam's former red light district and the oldest Chinatown of continental Europe.

The 16,000 sqm building, dating from 1923, was once part of the largest warehouse in the world and served as an important building for storage and shipping for the Holland America Line – a Dutch cargo and passenger line. The Holland America Line facilitated the journeys of millions of migrants in the 19th and 20th centuries who arrived and departed from the surrounding docks.

Fenix is the first cultural project in Europe designed by MAD architects. Visitors will immediately see its architectural masterpiece, the Tornado; an organic, dynamic structure evocative of rising air. This double-helix staircase climbs from the ground floor and flows up and out of the rooftop onto a viewing platform hovering above the city. Visitors will have dramatic

views across the River Maas and of Hotel New York, the former headquarters of the Holland America Line. The building has been restored with consultation by Bureau Polderman.

A series of vast gallery spaces across the two floors of museum will house Fenix's growing collection, exhibitions, installations and programmes.

The inaugural collection exhibition, **All Directions: Art That Moves You**, will showcase 150 artworks and objects ranging from the historical to the contemporary, drawn from the Fenix collection and acquired over the past five years. The artists featured are from across the globe, including Francis Alys, Max Beckmann, Sophie Calle, Honoré Daumier, Jeremy Deller, Rineke Dijkstra, Omar Victor Diop, Shilpa Gupta, Alfredo Jaar, William Kentridge, Kimsooja, Laetitia Ky, Steve McQueen, Adrian Paci, Cornelia Parker, Gordon Parks, Grayson Perry, Ugo Rondinone, Yinka Shonibare, Alfred Stieglitz, Do Ho Suh, Bill Viola, and Danh Võ. Alongside these works will be a collection of personal mementos, gathered from the people of Rotterdam and telling individual stories of migration, alongside important historical artefacts such as a section of the Berlin Wall.

Fenix will also present **The Family of Migrants**, an exhibition inspired by Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*, which was presented at MoMA in 1955 and is one of the most famous photographic exhibitions of all time. Fenix's extensive exhibition will feature a selection of the most striking photography on the subject of migration, bringing together 194 photographs from 55 countries taken by 136 photographers. The works range from the late nineteenth century to the present day and are a mix of documentary images, portraits and journalist photography drawn from international archives, museum collections, image banks and newspapers. Photographers featured include Dorothea Lange, Steve McCurry, Lewis Hine, Chien-Chi Chang, Abbas, Robert de Hartogh, Eva Besnyö, Fouad Elkoury, Yasuhiro Ogawa, Emin Özmen, Sergey Ponomarev and Ata Kandó.

Fenix has commissioned a series of new works specifically for the museum by emerging artists from Europe, USA, and Asia exploring their views on and personal stories of migration. They are Beya Gille Gacha, Raquel van Haver, Hugo McCloud, Chae Eun Rhee, Martin and Inge Riebeek, Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek, and Efrat Zehavi.

The spacious Plein on the ground floor of Fenix will be a community-led space, where large scale events, exploration of different styles of food culture, community meetings, Dutch-language lessons and performances will take place, free to enter every day.

Anne Kremers, Director of Fenix, said:

"The story of Fenix is inextricably linked to Rotterdam and its many communities; but that story is also the world's. It is a story of arrivals and departures, and of constant change to face the future.

From the crossing of the Berlin Wall, to the departure for the USA on the great steam ships, to the arrival of new communities from every part of the world to build, to create, to learn, Fenix is a mirror to the experience and the stories of people from everywhere told through the lens of art. It is with this in mind that we are working not just with local and international artists to explore the topic of migration, but also inviting communities across Rotterdam to co-create programming within our public spaces. We cannot wait to open up the conversation to visitors next year."

Ma Yansong, Founder & Principal Partner, MAD Architects:

"When MAD Architects were asked to work on Fenix, we knew we had to create a dialogue with the existing building and its surroundings – and with a past containing so many stories of migration, memories, and uncertainty. In designing a new structure, we had to show this dialogue between the future and the past, and so continue the story of the building. The Tornado is all about the future, but it's rooted in the past. For me, it's a metaphor for the journeys of migrants who passed through this building."

Art historian Anne Kremers is the Director of Fenix and was appointed in 2020. She is working with a curatorial team consisting of Hanneke Mantel, Head of Exhibitions and Collections, and Curator of Photography; Rutger Doop, Migration Historian; Hanneke Mantel, Curator of Photography; Abdelkader Benali, Curator, Writer and Journalist, and Selinay Sucu, Curator of Personal Objects.

Fenix is funded by the Droom en Daad Foundation, founded in 2016 and led by Wim Pijbes, former Director of the Rijksmuseum. The Droom en Daad Foundation is helping redefine Rotterdam for the 21st century - developing new kinds of arts and culture institutions and fostering new creative talent that reflects the city's diversity, its spirit and its history.



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Notes to Editors:

It was from the quays around this warehouse that over three million emigrants boarded ships bound for destinations such as America and Canada from the late 19th century, including notable figures such as Albert Einstein, Willem de Kooning, and Max Beckmann. The departure and arrival of people made Rotterdam the city it is today, one shaped by the more than 170 nationalities of its inhabitants.

Rotterdam has a long history as a significant trading hub, with its huge deep-water port and strategic location with easy access to the North Sea and the Rhine making it an ideal thoroughfare for shipping and the gateway to Europe. In the 19th century, Rotterdam's port facilities and infrastructure as an international trade hub grew dramatically, expanding to meet the new demands and opportunities generated by the industrial revolution, with larger steam ships, mechanised loading cranes, and steel bridges connecting both sides of the Maas river. The surrounding areas of Katendrecht and Rijnhaven experienced dramatic change, transforming from quiet residential communities to a dynamic international shipping hotspot.

The warehouse in which Fenix is located was at the heart of this expansion in Rotterdam's history. Built by architect Cornelis Nicolaas van Goor (1861 – 1945) and completed in 1923, the building, known as the San Francisco Warehouse, served as an important storage and trans-shipment building for the Holland-America Line – a successful Dutch cargo and passenger line founded in Rotterdam in 1873 which provided steam shipping between the Netherlands and America and facilitated the journeys of millions of emigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over 360m long and made from reinforced concrete, the vast warehouse was the place where the Holland America Line loaded and unloaded its ships carrying goods from destinations as far as South Africa, Canada, Mexico, and the Gulf States.

Much of Rotterdam was destroyed during World War II, and the city has now become a world-class destination for architectural innovation, known for its landmark buildings and experimental construction. Following bombing and a fire, the warehouse was rebuilt in the 1950s as two separate buildings, Fenix I and Fenix II. Fenix II Warehouse is currently undergoing an extensive transformation led by MAD Architects to become Fenix museum, ensuring this fine example of Rotterdam port architecture is preserved for the future.