

Old and New Times at the Faculty of Law: the Visual Representation of Justice at the Bouillonstraat

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The Visual Representation of Justice at the Maastricht Faculty of Law*

Jan Smits

It is no surprise that there can be more to a building than just serving the purpose of, in the case of a university, offering space for students and staff. A building should preferably also visually represent the functions it has. This is why court buildings, for example, are often decorated with symbols representing justice or power. Their architecture frequently testifies of what they (or rather their builders) wish to convey; while in the past court buildings were built to impose, it is currently far more often transparency in judicial decision making that is communicated to justice-seeking citizens. This can be realised by using open corridors, light materials and a fair share of glass, as in the case of the new building of the Netherlands Supreme Court at the Korte Voorhout in The Hague.

The *Oud Gouvernement*, now one of the two buildings accommodating the Maastricht Faculty of Law, is a good example of how its original function as the seat of the government and parliament of the Province of Limburg comes out. Built in 1932-1935 by Chief Government Architect G.C. Bremer (who also helped to design the Peace Palace and did a complete makeover of the building of the *Hoge Raad* at the Plein, destroyed in 1988 to make room for the new entrance of the House of Representatives), it clearly marks the power of both the Dutch State and the Province of Limburg. According to Bremer (1880-1949), the building was to "speak through its tower" (the much-criticised "Mongolian pagoda") to the citizens of Limburg. And indeed, whoever watches the skyline of Maastricht from the Pietersberg cannot help noticing this slightly provocative erection of State power next to the old churches of Sint Jan and Sint Servaas in a city that has long been devoutly catholic. The term "heersersarchitectuur" (*rulers architecture*) has been coined to describe the building. The tower itself shows the coat of arms of the Netherlands, while inside there are many references to Limburg as a cultural, local and State entity. In fact, the building itself was made of 2.5 million brick stones manufactured in Maastricht. Statues by Charles Vos (1888-1954) depict inter alia industry and agriculture, while one of three stained glass windows by Jan Grégoire (1887-1960) in the Lenculenhof shows justice and mercy (next to another one showing happy family life – certainly not a window that would be made in a similar way today).

These symbols, at least partly representing justice and the law, made the Bouillonstraat the perfect place to house the newly established Faculty of Law. However, it took more than 15 years before this was the case. When the first cohort of Maastricht law students arrived in September 1982, the very small Faculty was housed on the first floor of the former Jesuit monastery at Tongersestraat 53 (now home to the School of Business and Economics). On 1 December 1982 the Faculty moved to the *In den Nieuwenhof* (Zwingelput 4),

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originally a beguinage from the 15th century and the current home of University College Maastricht (UCM). In 1986 the departments of Criminal Law and International Law moved to the Bouillonstraat that at that time was also home to the Executive Board of the University; it would still take 12 more years before all jurists had left the *Nieuwenhof*. In those early days Faculty members may have been too occupied with setting up the new curriculum to worry about adding new elements reminiscent of the law to the building.

A unique opportunity presented itself in the late 1990s. The Maastricht District Court had just left Minderbroedersberg 4 (the current main building of the University, often affectionately referred to as "The Mountain") and had moved to the outskirts of town. As a result, the Faculty was able to take over the statue of Lady Justice that had decorated the facade of the court house since 1927. Also sculpted by Charles Vos, it greatly matches with his other statues that were already part of the outside of the *Oud Gouvernement*. In 1999 Lady Justice was placed on the North side of the main hall; she gives the impression she has always been there. Extraordinarily observant students may notice she does not carry scales and, instead, holds the book "Lex" in her hand. From the hundreds of statues of Lady Justice that exist around the world, I have never seen one with this unique outlook. Since 2001 the opposite side of the main hall (the former *griffiehal*) is dominated by an artwork by Sabine Lintzen (born 1956) called *The Untouchables*. It consists of 36 flowers of blown glass referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While some flowers contain words such as Tolerance, Hope, Respect and Family, others are deliberately left blank to indicate that even so-called human rights are subject to change.



Sabine Lintzen, The Untouchables (2001)

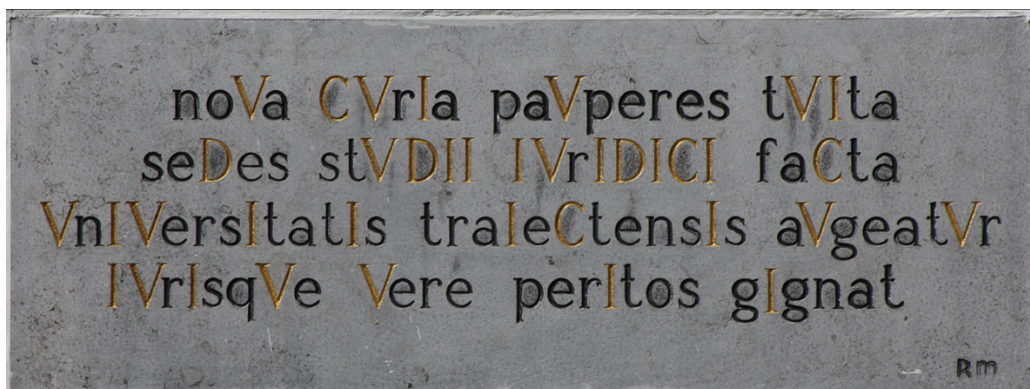
Design for ramp at main entrance (2017)





Ramp as realised

I should add this is not the first time the Law Faculty decided to manifest itself in Latin to the people of Maastricht. In 1983 a gable stone was placed next to the entrance door of the then newly renovated *Nieuwenhof*. The stone shows a chronogram made by Ruud Mestrom (born 1941) of which the cumulated numbers (in capitals) add up to 1983. The text reads: *noVa CVrIa paVperes tVIta seDes stVDII IVrIDICI faCta VnIVersItatIs traIeCtensIs aVgeatVr IVrIsqVe Vere perItos gIgnat* (May the Nieuwenhof that had taken the poor under its wing, and which has now become the seat of the legal science of Maastricht University, gain honour and prestige and produce truly good jurists). Little did we know that the building would soon grow too small for the ever-increasing number of law students.



Chronogram Nieuwenhof (1983)

Inside again, we climb the stairs to the first floor where we find the renovated Board Room (the famous room 1019, where many a decision in Faculty history was made) and adjacent Alumni wall put into place in 2019. The Board Room was known to all for the four all-male portraits on loan from the Province of Limburg, and of whom no one really knew who they were. Maastricht decorative artist Margarita Gaier (born 1979) was asked to revamp the room and make better come out how much the Faculty embraces the diversity of its staff and students. She made four textile panels inspired by *The Kiss* (1908) of Gustav Klimt. The four lavishly decorated panels represent diversity by showing a variety of colours, tissues and structures, and yet form one harmonious work of art. This is in line with how the Faculty likes to see itself: diverse in many different ways, yet forming one community of students, scholars and support staff. When in February 2019 the room was re-opened in the presence of the former Deans of the Faculty, Margaretha explained she designed the room to make history, time, building and people come together in a harmonious whole. Just outside the Board room the chair and small table (both originating from Palace Het Loo) can be seen at which Queen Juliana signed the founding act of the University at the Sint Servaas church on 9 January 1976.



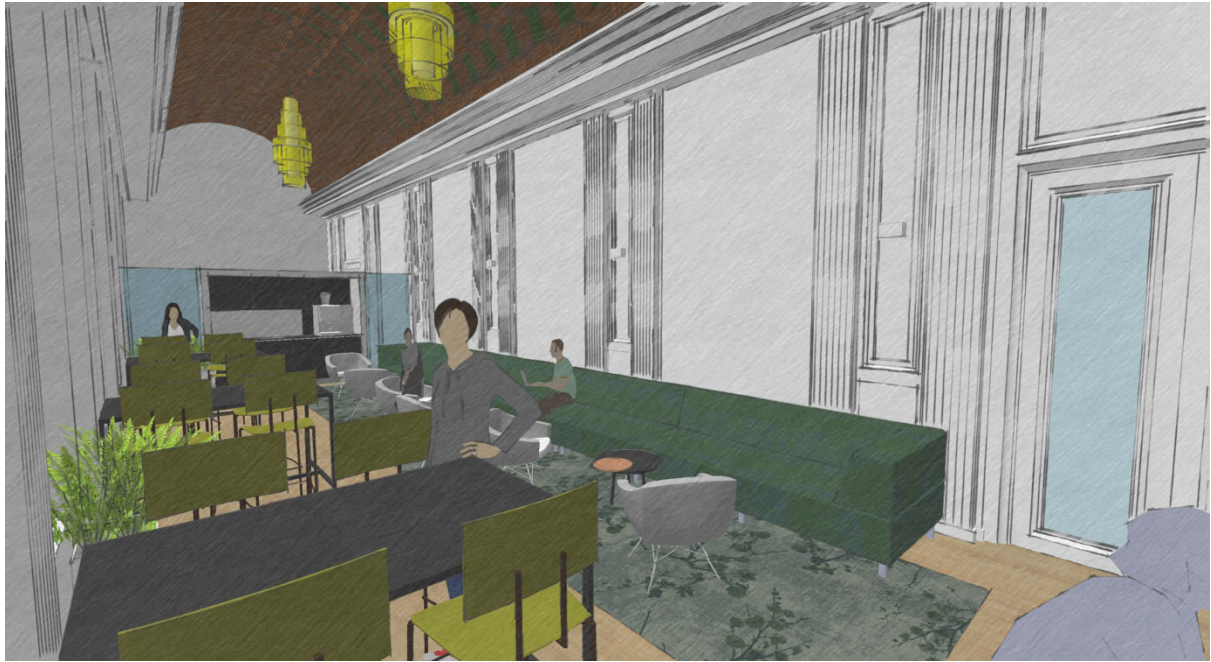
Board Room old and new (2019)



Board room (2019)

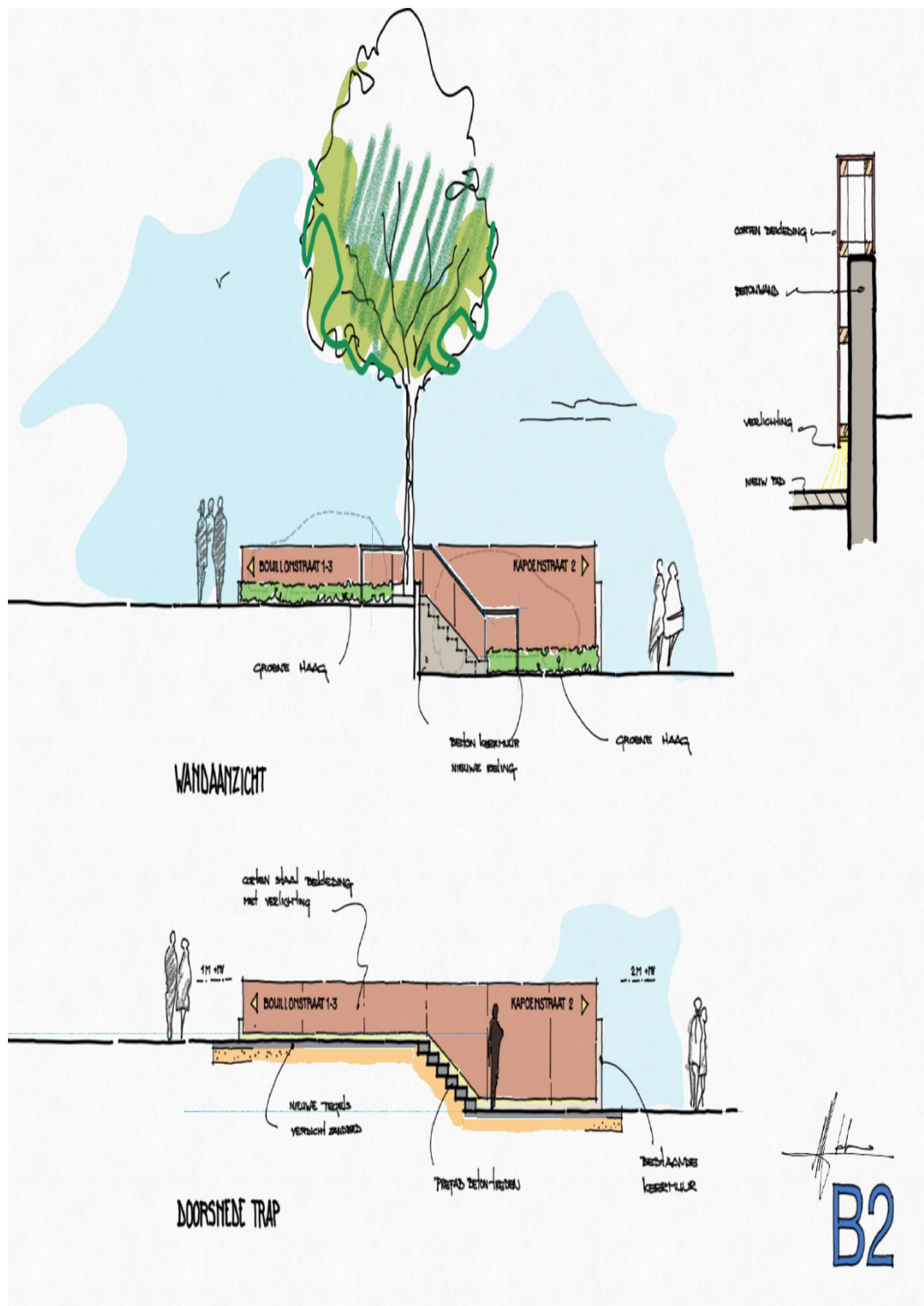
The redesign of the Board Room was the prelude to another project to better show the link between the building and the jurists inhabiting it. In the Summer of 2019 17 tutorial rooms were named after landmark cases, famous jurists and persons and cities important to the law. Among them are Aletta Jacobs, Montesquieu, Johanna Hudig, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, Hugo Grotius, Simone Veil, Taslim Elias and Jean Monnet; their names were chosen after a Faculty wide survey. Each room has a small plaque made by graphic designer Frie Hoekstra commemorating the person in question.

With the growth of the Faculty in recent years, it became clear something was missing: a staff common room. For a long time *Café De Tribunal* (until 1998 operated by Lou and Joke Graus, and from 1998 to 2021 by Leo Graus and his Rianda) *de facto* played this role. While an earlier attempt in the 2000's to create a common room at the Faculty had failed for lack of interest, in 2021 the time seemed ripe to try again. To this end, the "Salon" (the former "Receptiezaal" of the Province) was redesigned after a design by Marcel Kaesler. Together with the Law Café and the student common room in a medieval cellar at the Kapoenstraat (also opened in 2021), it forms the heart of academic life at the Faculty.



Design for Common room (2021)

An important change necessitated by the growth of students and staff was the move to a second building. Since 2020 the Faculty is also housed in *Huis Hustinx* at Kapoenstraat 2. This building was previously both used as Tax Office and as offices of *Gedeputeerde Staten* (the Provincial government) before the University took over in 1987. Since the back entrance of the Bouillonstraat and the back entrance of the Kapoenstraat are only separated by a (not so attractive) parking lot, the idea came up to connect the two buildings through a walking path. This materialised in late 2021. Marcel Kaesler's design is again based on the use of weathering steel, including an eye-catching structure at the newly created stairs indicating the name of the Faculty and directing visitors to each of the Faculty buildings. Small trees were planted to separate pedestrians from cars. The path, partly laid out in the pavement, follows the shortest distance between the two buildings.

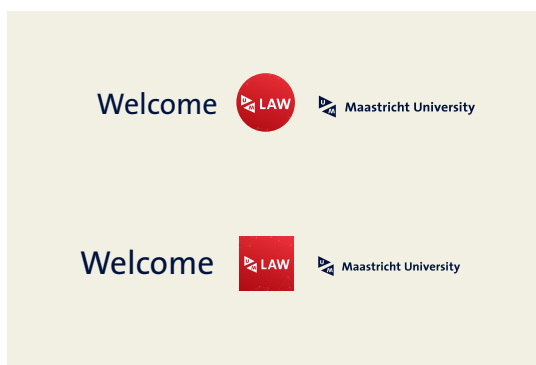


Design of walking path (2021)



Structure (still oxidating) at walking path (2021)

At the entrance to the parking the Faculty logo designed by Thomas Soplanit (the UM logo and "Law" in white letters on a red square) can be found to welcome visitors.



Design Welcome sign parking (2021)



As realised

A braggart – a category of people having a difficult time at a Faculty ranking aptitude higher than attitude – would say that a true Law Campus was created in the heart of the city.

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