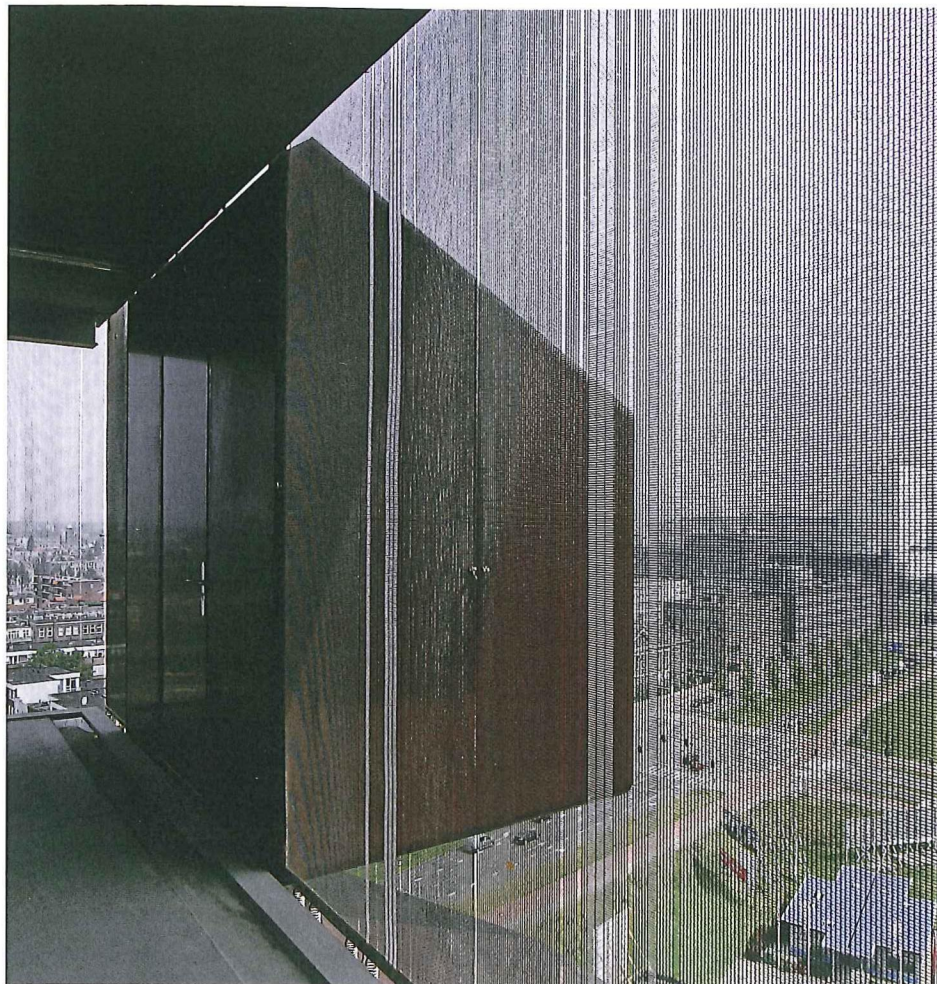


mei



breathes new life into rotterdam's gallery high-rise

Text **Arthur Wortmann**
Photos **Rob Hoekstra**



A former power plant in the port of Rotterdam has been renovated over the last several years and redeveloped into a 'creative epicentre' aimed at the audiovisual industry. In addition to radio and television studios, there are countless small creative businesses, a hotel, restaurant and café venues, a supermarket, sport accommodations, childcare facilities and housing.

Many of the buildings in the complex have been given an industrial appearance. People working in creative professions get priority in housing allocation. As the last element of the redevelopment, an office and residential building was recently added, 130 m long and 50 m high and designed by Mei Architecten, who were also responsible for other parts of the complex.

The building features a steel skeleton and the same ceiling height throughout, which affords great functional flexibility. Office space can be turned into housing space, and vice versa. Partition walls can be put up anywhere. Sections that are not rented out can easily be assigned other functions. The flats and offices are oriented to the west, with views of the Nieuwe Maas River. On this side, they feature sleek glass curtain windows with floor-to-ceiling accordion doors.

Most remarkable, however, is the east façade, which features gallery access. Gallery high-rises have a bad reputation in the Netherlands. They symbolize mass housing in the cheap rental sector – and therefore residents from the social underclass. They lack both privacy and social control. In current apartment construction, therefore, entrance lobbies or corridor access are the clear favourites. Mei Architecten, however, have come up with a solution that increases the value of the gallery as a place of abode and therefore, it is hoped, will lead to greater social control. The galleries are protected from rain and wind to a certain extent by a mesh of stainless steel and translucent plastic.

In addition, the storage spaces of the flats are hung on the façade as separate plastic blocks – with a maximum load allowance of 1,000 kg. Architect Robert Winkel figures that things like freezers will be housed in these storage spaces, with a more intensive use of the galleries as a result. Whether this will work remains to be seen, but the atmosphere of the new mega-building, thanks to these additions, undeniably exudes something industrial and creative.