

NEWS ANALYSIS

A tale of two extensions

The expansion project at Basel's Kunstmuseum is progressing at pace. In Zürich, however, the Kunsthaus's plans are in legal limbo

ARCHITECTURE

Basel/Zürich. Switzerland's two largest art museums are building extensions, although Basel is moving faster than its neighbour and sometimes rival, Zürich. In Basel, construction is proceeding apace on the Kunstmuseum's project, across the street from the original museum. Visitors to Basel will see that its exterior is nearly complete, and topping off is due later this month.

Meanwhile Zürich's Kunsthaus has become embroiled in a dispute which has halted work this month. The Swiss environmental group Archicultura is objecting, and permission to build is being withheld by a canton court.

The Basel and Zürich projects are remarkably similar in scope. Both museums run ambitious exhibition programmes alongside their permanent collections, but space has now become a major problem. They have adopted the same solution: a large extension on a neighbouring site across a road, linked by a tunnel.

Basel keeps it local

In Basel, the Kunstmuseum's main building dates from 1936. Six years ago the museum acquired land on the other side of Dufourstrasse, which at the

time had an office and apartment block on the site.

An architectural competition was held, with international stars – Zaha Hadid, Rafael Moneo, Tadao Ando and Jean Nouvel – all pitching, however eventually losing out to a young local firm, Christ & Gantenbein. The final design is an angled building, faced with concrete bricks, and at the same height as the original museum. Building work began last year and the museum is due to close next February and to reopen in April 2016 with its new extension.

The project's cost is Swfr100m (\$112m). Half is coming from the canton of Basel. The remainder – a huge single donation – has been given by the Laurenz Foundation, set up by Maja Oeri, the great-granddaughter of the founder of the city's Hoffmann-La Roche pharmaceutical company. Oeri is a well known figure in Basel, as funder of Schaulager, the contemporary art centre.

The extension will add 2,750 sq. m of galleries, increasing display space by 43%.

The original museum is to house art from the 15th century to 1950, with later work in the extension. The upper floor of the new building will be for temporary exhibitions and the middle floor and part of the ground floor for the permanent collection. Last year the Kunstmuseum had 238,000 visitors, but



The shapes of things to come: architects' renderings of the extensions in Zürich (above) and Basel. Far left, the late benefactor Walter Haefner and the pharmaceutical heiress Maja Oeri

this number is expected to rise to around 300,000 with the extension.

Zürich brings in Chipperfield

In Zürich, the Kunsthaus extension represents an even more ambitious project. Dating from 1910, the original museum building was extended in 1925, 1958 and 1976. The new extension will be across the street in Heimplatz, on a site with two 19th-century school gymnasias, which now face demolition.

Both museums run ambitious exhibition programmes alongside their permanent collections, but space has now become a major problem

The architectural competition for the extension was won by London-based David Chipperfield. His design is a massive rectangular sandstone-covered building. The two upper floors will be for art, with facilities at ground level and a basement link under the street to the original museum.

The cost could be as much as Swfr206m (\$230m), twice that of the Basel project. Swfr88m (\$98m) has

been pledged by the city of Zürich and Swfr30m (\$33m) by the canton. The Kunstgesellschaft foundation that runs the museum has already raised a further Swfr75m (\$84m), including Swfr20m (\$22m) from the Walter Haefner Foundation, set up by the Zürich businessman who died two years ago.

The extension will add 5,040 sq. m of galleries, increasing display space by 78%. The Kunsthaus will become the

largest Swiss art museum, overtaking Basel (even after Basel's extension).

A quarter of the new space will be for the E.G. Bührle Collection, which has until now been in a villa on the outskirts of the city (since a theft in 2008, public access has been limited). The Kunsthaus will then become the most important European centre for Impressionism outside Paris. There will also be more space for Modernism

and contemporary art. The Hubert Looser Foundation, set up by a Zürich entrepreneur, has already pledged to lend 70 works of post-war art.

The museum had 315,000 visitors last year; numbers are expected to rise to 400,000 with the extension.

But the project has been temporarily thwarted by the Lucerne-based Archicultura Foundation, which campaigns to preserve the historic urban landscape. Its spokesman told *The Art Newspaper* that the extension is "too big" for the site and its greenery should be preserved. Last December, Archicultura got the Zürich canton court to withhold permission to build – and the project is now stalled. At the request of the Kunsthaus, the court is currently re-examining the issues, and its judgment is expected shortly.

Until this challenge, the extension had been scheduled to open in 2017, a year after Basel's. Björn Quellenberg, the Kunsthaus spokesman, says he remains "very confident" that the project will go ahead, and the maximum delay will be two years.

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