

ARoS Aarhus Art Museum - The History

Four different buildings in Aarhus have been home to Aarhus Kunstmuseum since it was founded in 1859. AROS Aarhus Art Museum in Aros Allé at the heart of Aarhus is the fourth.

It all began on 6th January 1859 when Aarhus Kunstmuseum opened in a loft room in the newly built Town Hall cum Courthouse cum County Gaol, with Aarhus Cathedral as its nearest neighbour. Indeed, the foundation for the museum had been secured twelve years previously with the founding of the Aarhus Art Society of 1847. Barely twenty years later, on Whitsunday, 20 May 1877, the nation's first museum outside Copenhagen opened its doors to the public in Vester Allé: Aarhus Museum, designed by W. Th. Walther.

Dissatisfaction with Vennelystparken

Over the following decades, it became clear that the building was too small and in 1967 the new "Kunstmuseum in Vennelystparken" – the creation of the architect responsible for Aarhus University, C.F. Møller – was officially opened. But no sooner was the inauguration ceremony over than the building began to attract criticism and, within a few years, dissatisfaction with the insufficiency of space in the buildings led to talk of a new Aarhus Kunstmuseum.

At the museum's 125 years jubilee on the 6th January 1982 Aarhus Mayor Thorkild Simonsen declared that the City Council was prepared to make the museum the gift of a site for a new art museum.

A dynamic picture gallery

Aarhus City Council sought to have the new museum sited where the pulse of the city is most palpable. Fattiggårdsbakken (the Poorhouse Hill) so-called, near Vesterallé was named as the site for the upcoming new art museum. In September 1995, the City Council agreed the proposed new museum and donated the site on Vester Allé. Aarhus County Council encouraged the plan further through an interest-free loan of DKK 60m with exemption from repayment.

A group supporting the project, which included representatives from the corporate sector – and later also from the royal family with Queen Margrethe II, Prince Henrik and Prince Frederik pledging their interest – offered both moral and financial support. And in early summer 1996, the New Carlsberg Foundation made a spectacular donation of DKK 40m over a ten-year period, designated for the purchase of art of an international standard. Optimism had reached new heights and May 1997 saw the launch of an architecture competition. In all, 110 architects from across the world took part. The winner was the Aarhus-based practice Schmidt, Hammer & Lassen.

An enhanced budget for operational expenses

In 1999 the operating budget for the museum fell into place. In terms of funding, the way forward for the new Aarhus Kunstmuseum now lay open – with Aarhus Municipality as the client in conjunction with Aarhus County and Aarhus Kunstmuseum.

On 13 September 2000 at 13.00, the ceremonial sod was turned for the new art museum. On 22 January 2003, the museum was given its new name. And on 7 April 2004 was officially opened.