

Rudolf Schwarz, Cologne, Essen, Aachen.

Local Heroes #09
Rudolf Schwarz
1897-1961

By Monique Hutschemakers
and Joost Hovenier
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Photos:
Wingender Hovenier Archi-
tecten and Monique Hut-
schemakers

Drawings:
Hugo Grail

English translation by
Menora Tse

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If you go to Cologne to visit the Kolumba Museum, it would be a good idea to also visit the nearby Wallraf Richartz Museum (now known as the Museum for Applied Arts). A building designed by Rudolf Schwarz and Josef Bernard, it is certainly not a crowd pleaser. Although the museum is reactive to its environment and history, it has an extremely unruly appearance. The east and west sides are articulated in smaller volumes, both in height and width. The side walls consist of saddle roofs, and the gable ends are alternately designed with a glass cover. The design is mainly derived from the construction, always looking for the right expression of the material. The masonry facades are loadbearing (!) while at the same time are heavy with parapets of massive limestone slabs. However, they are also subtle due to the precise key stones in the pocket gutters. The facade is straight with heavy pillars that extend upwards. The central hall is an unexpectedly light and magisterial space with an expressive concrete construction. It is this hall and the stairwell that are particularly memorable, as it is a large empty but beautifully designed space from where you can access the exhibition spaces which frequently occupy the central hall. Unfortunately, this means that the sequence of spaces in the building is lost.

For Schwarz and Bernard, the museum is not a neutral space, but the home for a collection. A permanent merger of objects and space. Like many of Schwarz's works, the reconstruction of Germany is literally visible in the museum.



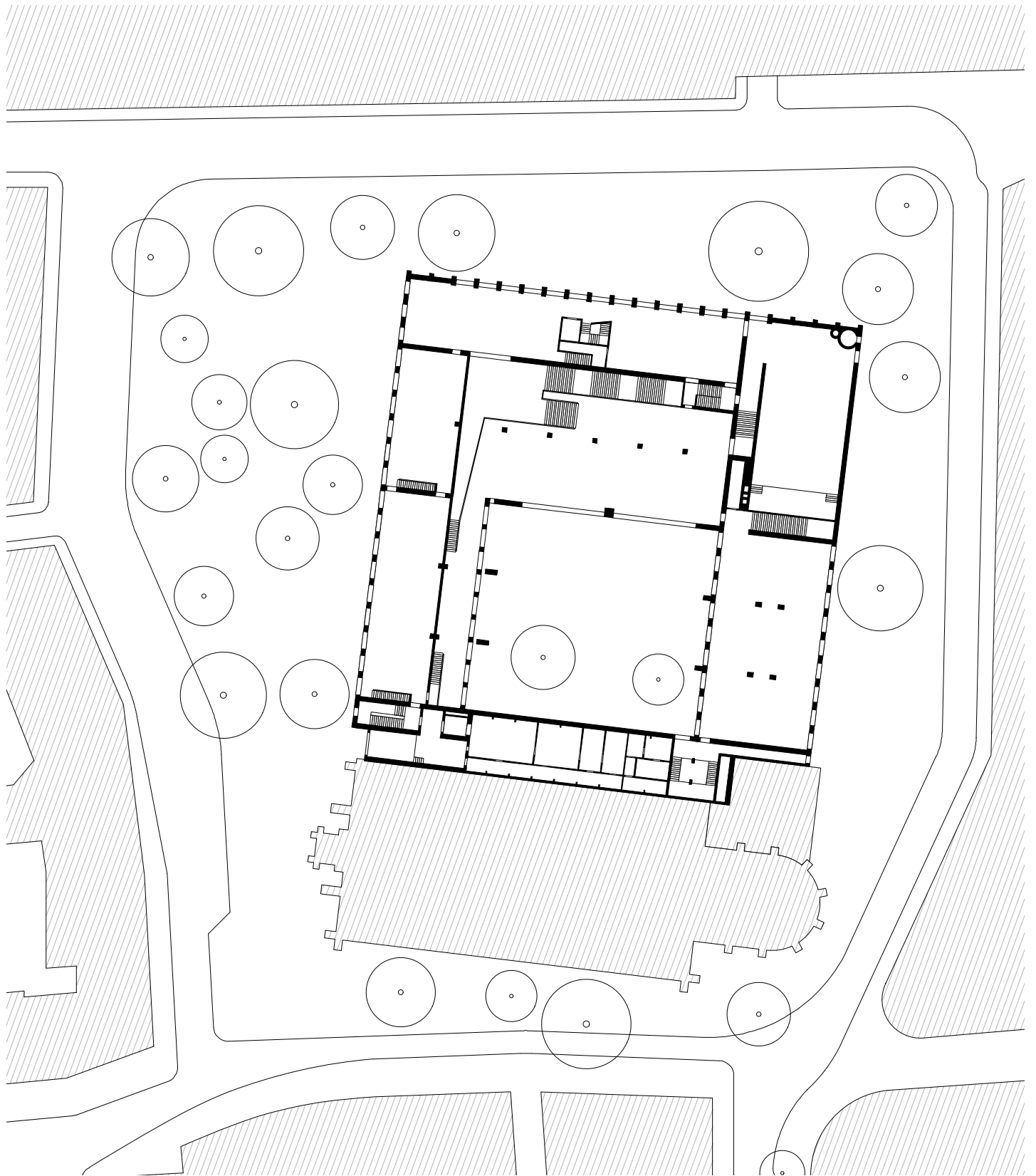


Former Wallraf Richartz Museum, Cologne (1957)



Local Heroes #9

Rudolf Schwarz



Former Wallraf Richartz Museum, Cologne
(1957)



The building stands on the site of a museum building that was destroyed in 1943. At the time, it was housed in a Minorite monastery since 1860. The design follows the U-shaped structure around an inner court. Remains of the Minorite monastery are carefully intertwined with the new building. For example, the facade behind which the cafe is located today consists of the walls of the former cloister. The museum is a mixture of what you would call modern and traditional at first glance. For Schwarz, the formal language of modernism was not necessarily the right one. It will come as no surprise that the building started a polemic between the modern and traditional currents at the time, as you can see in Muzio's Palazzo Dell 'Arte (Local Heroes #6). In 2001, the Wallraf Richartz Museum moved to a new building by Oswald Mathias Ungers. Unfortunately, the building and the collection have not been united for good, according to Schwarz's philosophy.

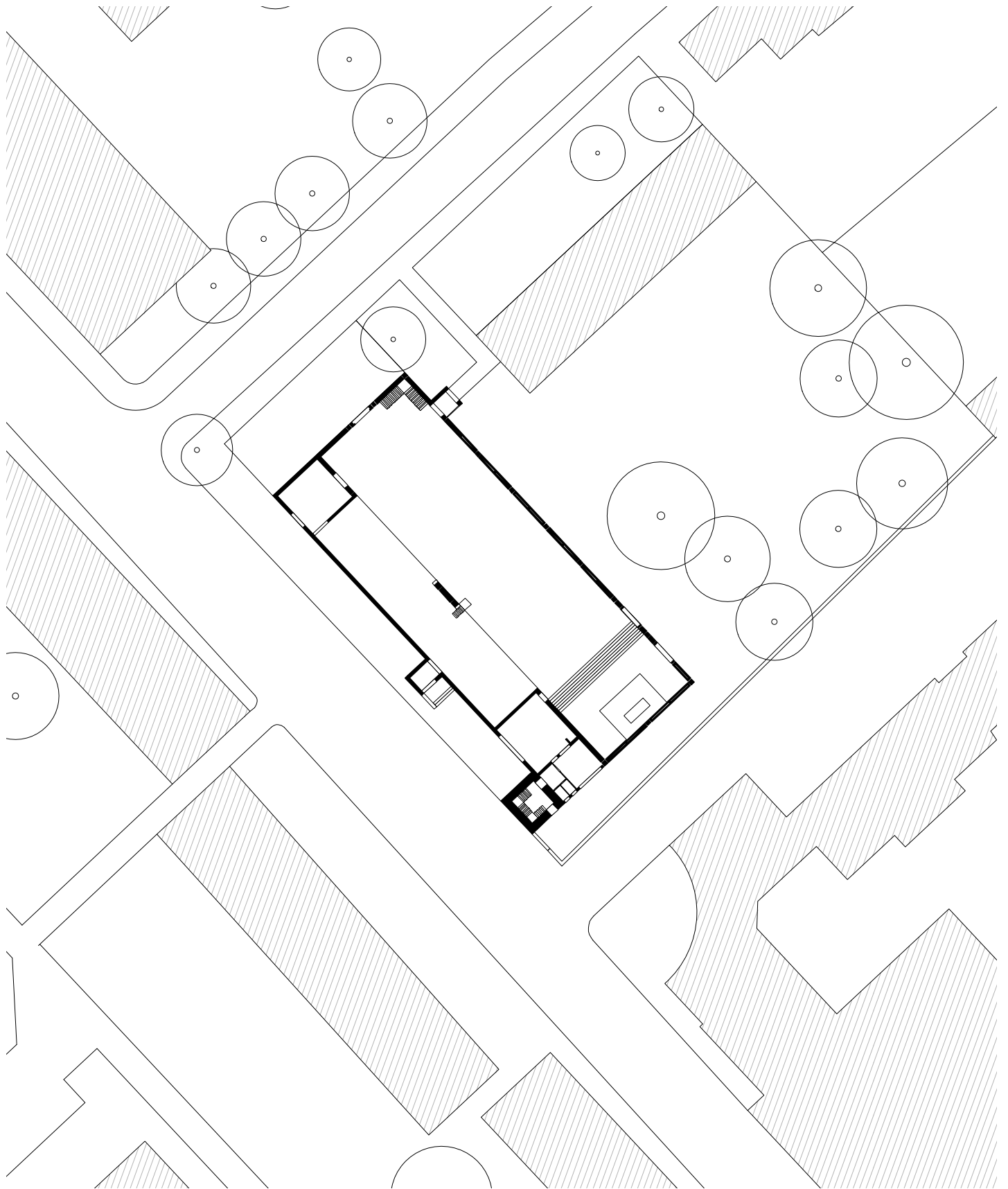
Rudolph Schwarz is, of course, best-known for his church buildings, a building type that he developed throughout his life. Yet he found that an architect could not only build churches as that would remove him from society. The work of Schwarz is indeed broad. The museum and the reconstruction of the Gurzenich banquet hall in Cologne are examples of this. He made a large number of urban development plans and was even the General Planner of Cologne for an extended period of time. However, the focus was clearly on churches and related programs. Even as early as the 1920s he was interested in the architecture of the church. Just before the war he wrote the book "From the Construction of the Church" (1938) with a completely new vision on the construction of churches. Schwarz's writings are among the most important theoretical works on modern church building. He did not use writing to explain his buildings. He used the word, just like the stone of his churches, as an instrument to convey his vision. He was also particularly interested in the technology of construction. Re-releases of "Church Building, World for the Threshold" (1960) and "Guide to Technology" (1929) are still available for purchase.

Nobody could have foreseen that his in-depth investigation into the typology of the post-war church



St. Fronleichnam, Aachen (1930)





St. Fronleichnam, Aachen (1930)





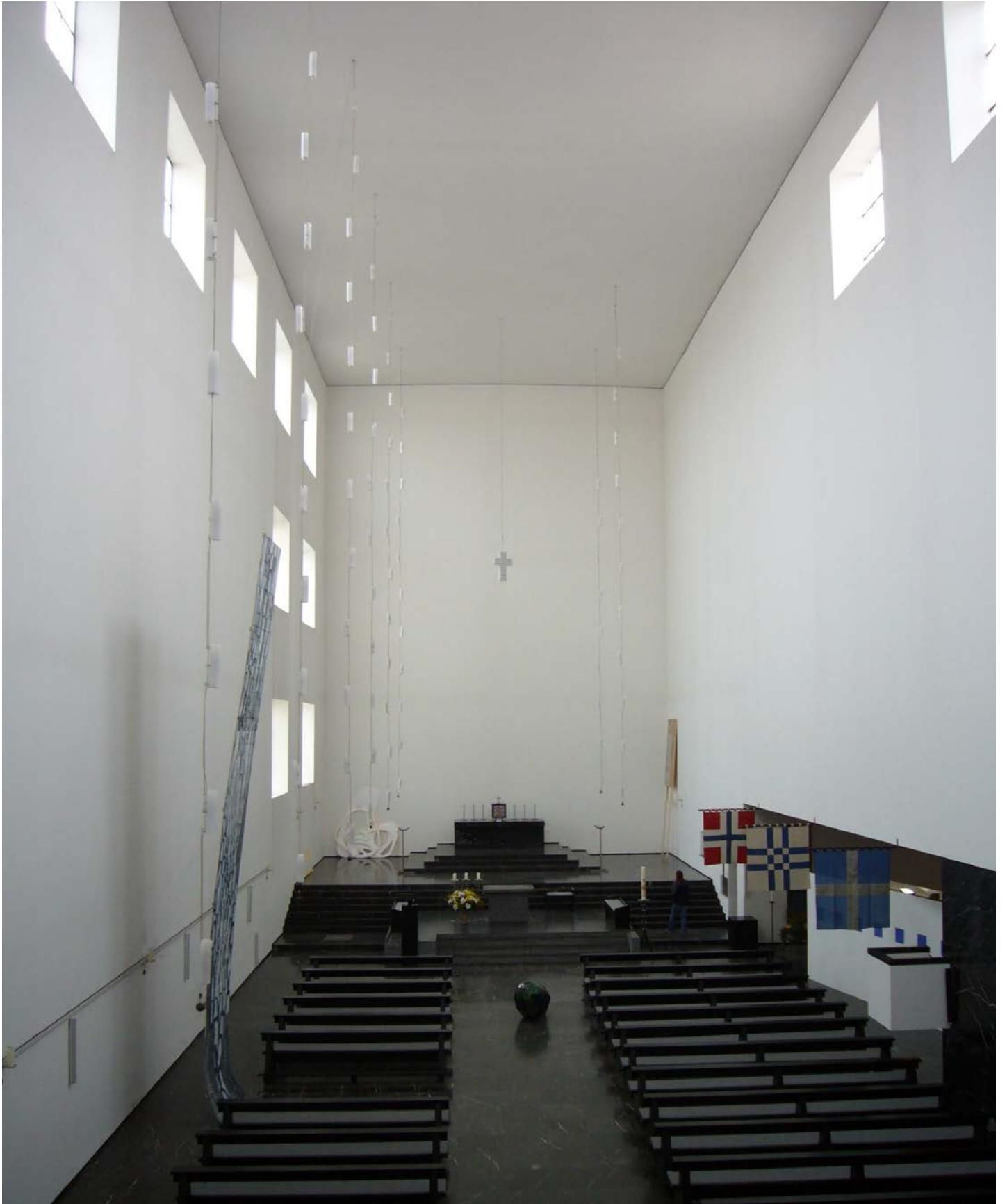
building would take off. In the post-war era, Germany was a place of doubt, facing an identity crisis. Until that time, Catholic church buildings were often grand and monumental, built to impress the crowd. But the memory of the mass manipulation during the war was freshly etched in the memory of the citizens. The Catholic Church realized that the church building had to take on a new shape. During the centuries before, the visitor had been reduced to a spectator. After the war, more and more calls were heard within the Catholic Church to create a community again. Rudolf Schwarz was already one of the architects at the time who questioned the typology of the Catholic Church building and gave faith a new home. In the decades after the war, many churches, including those in the Netherlands, would have a new organization around the renewed liturgy. However, Schwarz did not only look for an expression of the liturgy. He wanted to express a different experience, the mystical. He always had this elusive goal in mind.

He built his first church as early as 1930, and is remarkably the most radical - the Fronleichnamskirche in Aachen. You could also say this was the most modern, the word that Schwarz hated so much. Upon entry, it takes your breath away. The church hall is high, empty and ornate. The wall behind the altar is not painted, and does not represent an after-life that is inaccessible by the living. It is white in its immense greatness. Schwarz described it as follows: "Here is nothing more than the silent presence of the Church and Christ". It was the start of a long series of church designs. A lifelong search, where the focus was not on being modern or innovative, but on the search for the correct expression of the space and the material.

St. Maria Königin in Frechen, a visit by Monique Hutschemakers (2008)

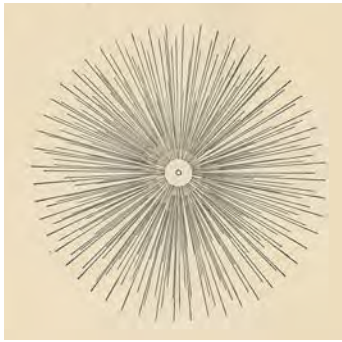
There is no path to the entrance, no central axis, no stairs that make me feel humble. There is no pride, no



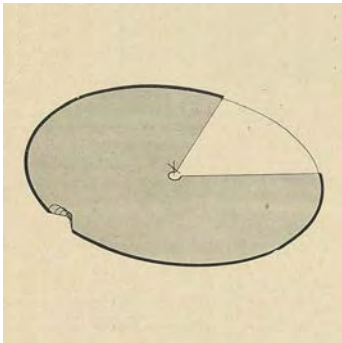


St. Fronleichnam, Aachen (1930)





drumming when approaching this “House of God”. Unlike classical church buildings, the bell tower is not directly above the door, but stands apart from the church building. Therefore, I did not feel a huge weight on my shoulders as I entered. The entrance is in a volume that is lower than the main volume. A modest mass development, and a subtle prelude that ushered me inside. The door lies deep in the thick wall in a niche on a human scale. There is a sign next to the entrance declaring that this church is now a monument because of the translation of a new concept for a church space.



Illustrations:
Vom Bau der Kirche (1938)

The closing of the heavy wooden door behind me makes the sounds of the street fall away, shutting out everything else. I am in a low entry space, the transitional zone between the outside world and the main space. It is dimly lit, so at first, I only look at the main room. The reception hall is still too dark for my eyes. Slowly I begin to notice more and more contours here in the entry space, and the main aisle becomes more and more surreal. There is no backlight, and I see no windows. There is a veil of light through which the altar looms in the distance. I want to preserve this image, but it seems elusive. It is fleeting like a mirage in the desert. The light seems to vibrate, or is it the wall that is vibrating? The particle of light intertwines with the particle of the stone. Wall and space merge. I could perhaps best explain the dancing light as a photo with a very coarse grain, but with the addition of a time dimension and depth. However, those are two dimensions too much for paper. (This is how Rudolf Schwarz starts his book “Kirchenbau, Welt vor der Schwelle” with an apology that there are no photos in the book. He writes that a photo is not appropriate for displaying spaces and has nothing to do with the way it is - lively seeing.”). Because I have to walk around the baptismal ceiling to reach the entrance to the main volume, I have to turn my body twice. Front and main volume are thus disconnected from each other. For a moment, I am put on another leg, so my body knows that it will enter another world. Never before has a threshold felt so magical. Yet what I see is no surprise, since I have just seen everything. It is the change of light that intensifies this boundary: The moment I cross the threshold to the main ship, the light is directly above me. It falls through a translucent glass wall above the front room, on the border of front and main volume. Not only does another space present itself, but another light as well.

The veil has fallen away. The mystery of the past has been replaced by serenity. The silence of the church is not just an audible silence. It is a visible one as well. The brick walls have no windows. My experience was not driven by ornamentation, specialization or Biblical figures in stained glass. The wall itself is still, it is whole and complete. It increases in intensity because my eyes do not get excited. The red of the stone gets extra depth. The coarseness of the stone brings it closer, and I can almost





St. Maria Königin, Frechen (1954)

feel the grain between my fingers. At a distance, above the altar and the very top, I see a triangle of light. It is a perfect isosceles, so it was not a beam of light falling through the window. Or am I mistaken? It is like a shadow where you cannot discern which object it is cast from. Clearly present, but after every blink of the eyes it seems to have disappeared. It is a shadow of itself. I proceed forward. The space in front of me seems to literally meet me. It is becoming wider rapidly. It is a strange experience. Through my eyes, my perception tells me something different from the perception from my feet. I seem to be proceeding faster than my walking pace. From the back of the church, I did not see that there are two side aisles at the height of the altar, so that the wall behind the altar is wider than the room I am in. This means that the further I proceed, the more of the rear wall I see. The building seems to open up, and its arms are spread out. The wall is also curved, so the closer I get, the more the wall seems to absorb me. This has nothing to do with moving forward. It is now a seduction.

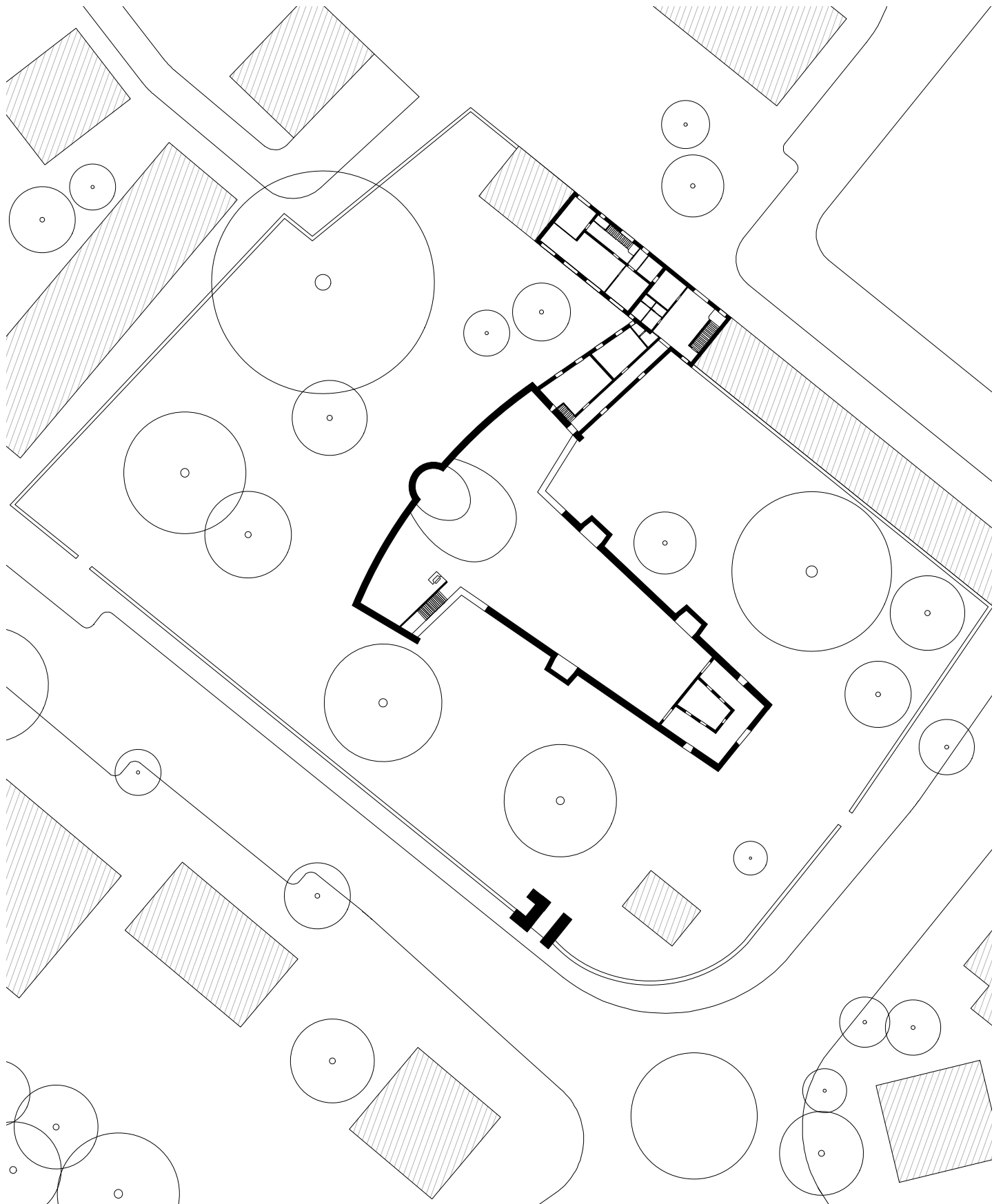
From the back of the church it appears to be a straight wall, but here the curvature is most evident in front of the altar, and the embrace is complete. When I turn around and look back into the church, I am surprised at the depth of the room. It seems much shorter and wider, more intimate as well. It appears to be a perspective tool that Schwarz has used to increase the sense of community. As early as 1938, in his book "Vom Bau der Kirche", Schwarz proposed a circle around the altar so that the experience would be a shared ritual again. With this form of organization, he already indicated that the circle essentially pushes a community away: Because the least people can sit close to the altar, the majority of the crowd would



have to sit at a great distance from the altar. Therefore he divided the community into three arms here in St. Maria Konigin. By giving these arms a trapezoidal plan, they also narrow towards the back. This allows the most people to sit near the altar. It also creates an inverse perspective, with which even the room takes part. Baroque architecture has done the exact opposite by making its spaces appear longer. The distance between the altar and crowd therefore increases. Here the space is drawn towards the altar, and the community participates in the ritual again. The stairs to the crypt are almost casually on the side. Only downstairs does it turn, and I am suddenly standing in front of a door. I look for the handle by feeling my way. I am now in a low dark room. I wait for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. In vain I struggle to see thin shadows, but they disappear as soon as they appear. Maybe I should not wait to see it with my eyes. Perhaps I should dream it instead. In the classical church buildings, a mist of incense is often hung to give the visitor a sense of the 'other side', the boundary that can only be crossed after death. The church of Schwarz does not need an artificial layer to mystify the experience. The building itself is already mystical.

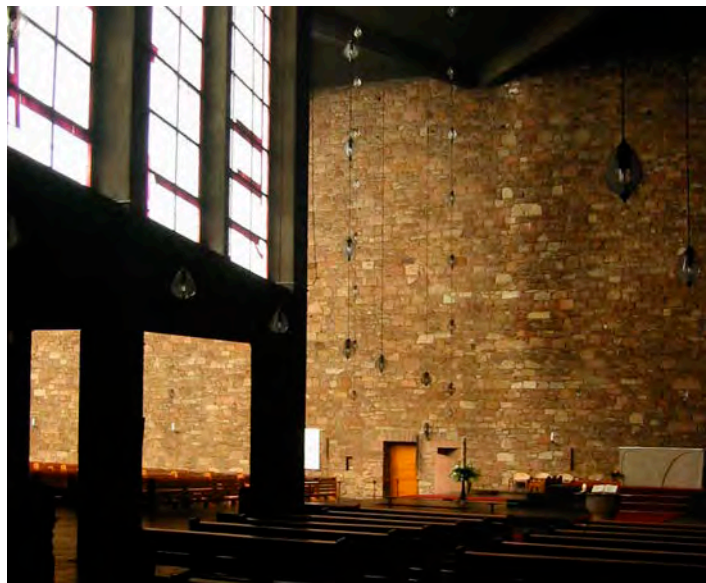


St. Maria Königin, Fre-
chen (1954)



St. Maria Königin, Fre-
chen (1954)





St. Anna, Düren (1956)





St. Bonifatius, Aachen 1959



Rudolf Schwarz



Local Heroes #9



St.Andreas, Essen-Ruttenscheid (1957)



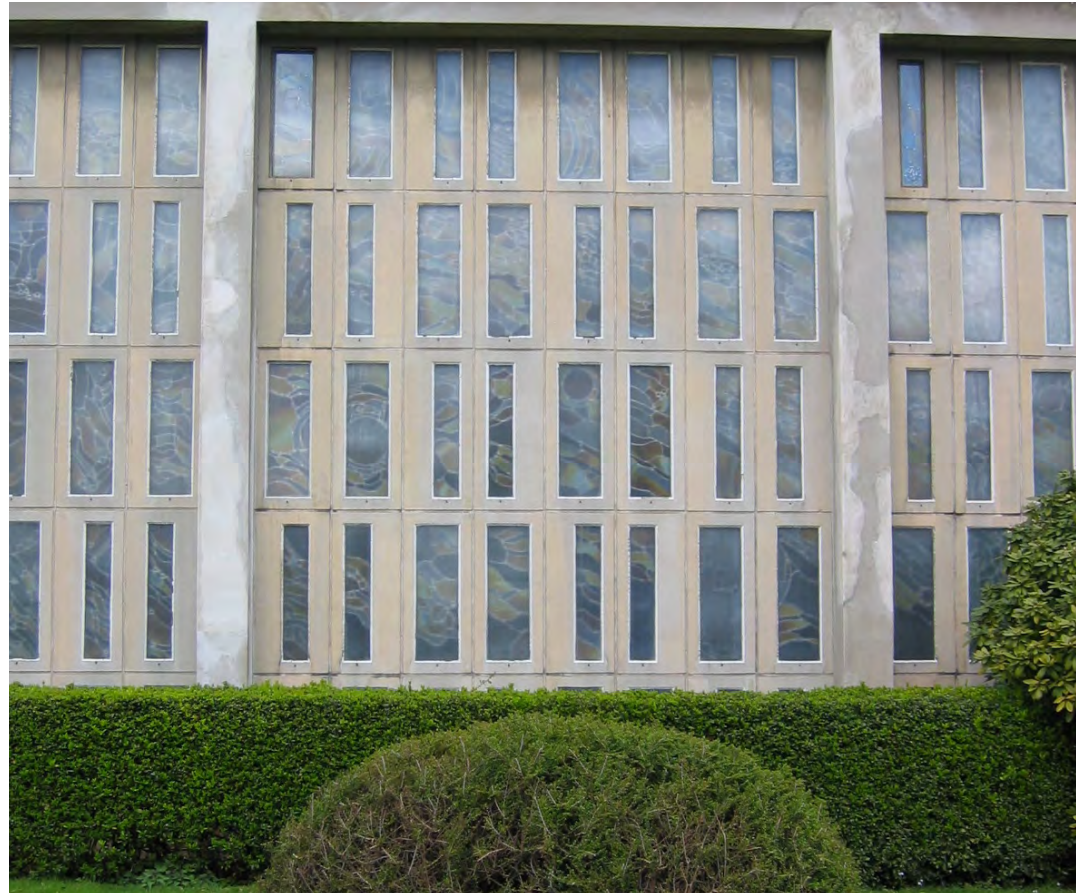


St. Antonius, Essen (1959)





St. Franziskus (1960)



Adresses:

Cologne e.o.

- Museum für Angewandte Kunst
(v.m. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum)
An der Rechtschule, 50667 Köln
- Gürzenich
Quatermarkt 1, Köln
- Pfarrkirche St. Mechtern
Mechternstrasse 2, 50823 Köln-Ehrenfeld
- Pfarrkirche St. Christophorus
Allensteiner strasse 5, 50735 Köln-Niehl
- St.Josef Kirche
Wiethasestrasse/Braunstrasse, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld
- St. Maria Königin (bij/near Köln))
Kirchweg 9, 50226 Frechen

Aachen

- Pfarrkirche St. Fronleichnam
Leipziger Strasse 19 / Rudolf Schwarz-weg, 52068
Aachen-Rothe Erde
- Pfarrkirche St. Bonifacius
Mataréstraße 10, 52078 Aachen Forst

Essen e.o.

- St. Andreas kirche
Brigittastrasse / Olga strasse, 45130 Essen-Ruet
tenscheid
- St. Antonius kirche
Kölner Strasse 37/Berlin strasse. 45145 Essen-Frohn-
hausen
- St Franziskus kirche
Rabenhorst 2, 45355 Essen
- Heilige Familie Kirche
Gustavstraße 54, 46049 Oberhausen
- Die Kirche Heilig kreuz
Scharnhölzstraße 37, 46236 Bottrop

Düren

- Kirche St. Anna
St. Anna-platz 8, Düren
- St.Albertus-Magnus (bij/near Düren)
Am Leversbach 32, D-52372 Kreuzau - Leversbach

Verder

- St. Michael
Butzbacher Str./Gellerstrasse, 60389 Frankfurt
- St.Albert kirche
Breite Straße 110, 56626 Andernach
- Burg Rothenfels (Rothenfels)
Burg Rothenfels Bergrothenfelser Str. 71,
97851 Rothenfels



Google map:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1N-eA-QzT40qB3iFRu3ULIC9y7qXFOMPI&usp=sharing>



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(Italian version by Electra)
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Thomas Hasler, Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000
- OASE 45-46 (1997)
Christoph Grafe: Bare truth, Physical Experience
and Essence in the Architecture of Rudolph Schwarz

St.Mechtern, Keulen-Ehren-
feld (1954)

