



The Conservation and Installation of the Beuning Room in the Rijksmuseum*

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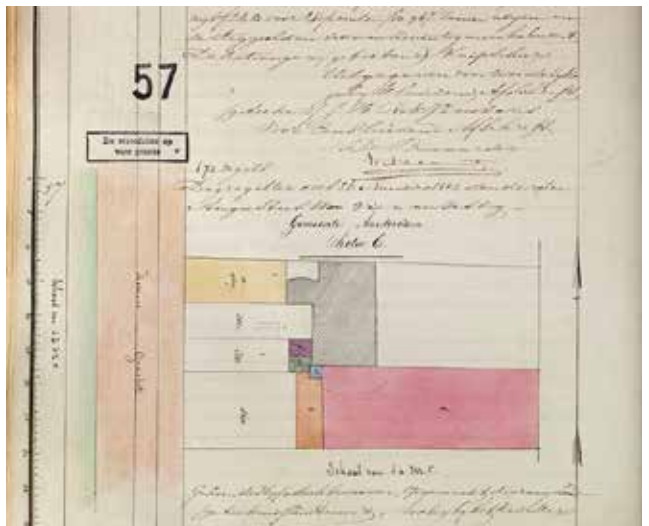
The conservation and installation of the Beuning Room in the Rijksmuseum, a complex and challenging project, were undertaken between 2009 and 2013. The most important elements of the room – the chimney-piece, double doors and pier-glasses – had previously been restored in 2001 for the exhibition *Rococo: A Riot of Ornament*.¹ In the light of the success of this display and the long-held wish to show the room to the public again, in 2006 the Amsterdam Museum ceded the room to the Rijksmuseum on long-term loan. The museum's eighteenth-century galleries now contain two important period interiors – the Beuning Room and the late eighteenth-century Kops Room – enabling the public to see two of the most beautifully executed Dutch eighteenth-century interiors. Visitors are free to walk around the Beuning Room to enjoy the architecture and the sumptuous ornament of both the Cuban mahogany panelling and the plasterwork on the ceiling. In this article we look at the decisions that were taken during the conservation and installation of the Beuning Room and compare them with the installation of the room in the Stedelijk Museum in 1896.

Number 187 Keizersgracht

In 1744, Matthijs Beuning inherited the houses at numbers 185 and 187 Keizersgracht and the coach house, one house

Fig. 1
Land registry drawing dated 3 August 1864 with the rear house with the Beuning Room and the staircase hatched in grey. The area of 4609 coloured yellow is the former front house at 187 Keizersgracht; 3801 is the former coach house. Noord-Hollands Archief, Hypotheekkantoren Amsterdam (accession no. 82.3), inv. no. 2763, deed no. 57 (dated 3 August 1864), supplement to deed no. 37 (dated 5 July 1864).

further along, from his mother Geertruijd van den Bosch. It was probably he who commissioned the building of a back house that ran across the full width of 187-89 Keizersgracht and the coach house (fig. 1; fig. 4 on p. 33). The rear house contained a staircase and two spacious rooms on the first floor. The larger room and the staircase have been held by museums since 1896. In that year a great many buildings were demolished to make way for Raadhuisstraat. As Ter Brugge recounts in this Bulletin, Jan Eduard Van Someren Brand, curator at the Stedelijk Museum, was granted permission to build a number of rooms from these



houses into the museum, whose first floor had opened in 1895.² The rooms were placed in the building's left wing. The room which came from the back house of 187 Keizersgracht became the most famous, as literature on Dutch period interiors reveals.³ It is now known as the Beuning Room, after the owner Matthijs Beuning.

Clues to the Original Appearance of the Beuning Room

Although the house repeatedly changed hands and, indeed, function, and was drastically remodelled after 1863, there seem to have been few changes to the two rooms on the first floor of the back house or the accompanying staircase, save only for the installation and later removal of the wall paintings by Jurriaan Andriessen.

The earliest surviving floor plans of the properties are sketches by G.B. Salm dating from 1863 (fig. 5 on p. 34), which clearly show the corridor leading to the staircase and the two rooms beyond it. The larger of the two, the 'Grand Salon de Réception', is what is now called the Beuning Room. The ceiling covering is schematically indicated with a single line close to the walls and a double line where the flat surface of the ceiling begins. These lines correspond with the plaster mouldings and also show the position of the fireplace. The windows, the corner cabinets and the further design of the ceiling are not shown. A rectangular space has been drawn between the outline of the ceiling and the structural wall opposite the rear elevation, which undoubtedly contained the cupboard listed on the inventory of Jan de Groot's estate drawn up on his death in 1801 (see Harmanni, p. 51).

Other clues to the room's appearance are found in a reverse glass painting by Jonas Zeuner, which gives a very detailed picture of the rear elevation and the garden (fig. 2 on p. 44).⁴ He left out the adjacent houses, but did show the observatory on the roof built by

Jacob de Clercq, who bought the house from Matthijs Beuning in 1753.⁵ The three left-hand windows are slightly wider than the three windows on the right, without doubt because of the proportions of the two rooms.

Jurriaan Andriessen's designs, done around 1781, give a rough impression of the walls, with panelling, double doors and fireplace (figs. 3-6 on pp. 46-48). The layout is as we know it now. There is more information dating from the late nineteenth century – a drawing by Willem Steelink accompanying an essay by A.W. Weissman on the Amsterdam residence, two different sets of photographs of the fireplace and the double doors, and an article about the rooms by Van Someren Brand in *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* in 1901. In his drawing, Steelink chose to show the walls with the fireplace and the double doors adjacent to each other – although in reality they were facing – so that the most important elements of the panelling could be seen in the same drawing (fig. 2).⁶ One set of photographs is held by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, the other belongs to the *Atlas van Amsterdam* owned by the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap (KOG). Both sets show the chimneypiece and the double

Fig. 2
Drawing by
Willem Steelink in
A.W. Weissman,
*Het Amsterdamse
woonhuis van
1500-1800, from
Jaarverslag van het
Koninklijk Oudheid-
kundig Genoot-
schap 27 (1885), p. 46.*
Koninklijk
Oudheidkundig
Genootschap, inv. no.
KOG-ZG-I-XXVA-14.





Fig. 3a
Inscription on a beam on which the ceiling was suspended in the Stedelijk Museum: 'Stedelijk Museum Johan Zikking 20 September 1896 Stad Amsterdam' with the arms of Amsterdam twice.

doors, with part of the wall in which they were set (figs. 2a-b on p. 63; figs. 8a-b on p. 84). The rooms are empty and uncarpeted, and the photographs were probably taken shortly before the house was demolished. The rather cockled wallpaper has a lozenge pattern with wreaths of leaves and the borders are finished with a thin wooden frame. Above the door is the grisaille of two reclining women (fig. 8b on p. 84). At this point a wider wooden frame conceals the join with the wall covering. A striped cloth hiding the inside of the fireplace and a hearth plate on the floor can be seen in the KOG's photographs but are not there in the Cultural Heritage Agency's set, which suggests that these were probably taken slightly later.

Van Someren Brand's exhaustive description of the dismantling of the room on Keizersgracht and its installation in the Stedelijk Museum has been crucial.⁷ He reported that the



Fig. 3b
Inscription on the inside of the former cupboard door: 'Zikking Timmerman 4e October 97'.

room was one of two at the back of the house. Although the house had undergone repeated alterations, he worked on the assumption that the room had been an exception and was largely in the condition it had been in when it was panelled around 1748. Not one of the angles between the walls was true, all the corners slanted: the room-high quarter-circle corner cabinets concealed these irregularities. One of these had a hidden spring to open the wallpapered door. By this he undoubtedly meant the door of the cupboard in the wall opposite the windows. The two corner cabinets adjacent to the window wall contained parts of the shutters of the three relatively narrow windows. Between the windows were mirrors with elaborately carved frames and tops in 'Cuban mahogany', which had been covered with a layer of French polish at a later date. Van Someren Brand waxed lyrical about the craftsmanship of those who had made the

ceiling. Unlike the plasterwork of his own day, this ceiling came from a time when people knew the art of modelling the ornaments freehand in stucco (plaster). He described the ceiling as 'truly Dutch', because it was white, not coloured or gilded.⁸

The Description of the Installation of the Room in the Stedelijk Museum

We learn from Van Someren Brand's description that he wanted to install the room in a condition as nearly like the original as possible. When it was decided to transfer the panelling of the room to the Stedelijk Museum, it was found to be necessary to take the ceiling too, because it formed an intimately coherent whole. There was no time to make a copy, so against the advice of experts, he had the ceiling sawn up into transportable sections and moved. Jacks were used to wrench the pieces away from the beams. The boards to which the plasterwork was attached were fastened to the beams with large, old-fashioned nails, in rows of seven. He described how the heavy oak deflected until the pieces of the ceiling came loose with a bang and hung with the jacks on the ropes with

which they were attached to the beams of the floor above. The occasional ornament came loose, revealing the charcoal drawing on the ceiling that the modeller had used as his guide.⁹

Van Someren Brand regretted that it was necessary to adapt the window wall (see fig. 9 on p. 67).¹⁰ He described the finishing: the layer of French polish was removed and the mahogany was waxed, as it had been originally. The many coats of whitewash on the ceiling, which had blurred the outlines of the ornament, were removed after the installation so that the plasterwork regained its original sharpness. Unfortunately, the original wall covering could not be found. He assumed that it was probably 'painted in grisaille'. All that remained were the two women executed in this technique above the double doors, most likely because they only fitted here and were therefore difficult to sell. The women are still in place in the late nineteenth-century photographs. In the Stedelijk Museum the other walls were covered with imitation 'quasi-Gobelin' (see Ter Brugge, p. 62).

At the same time as the room, the fine staircase and the corridor were also installed in the Stedelijk Museum. From the room, one passed through the former wallpapered cupboard door into the corridor, clad in beautifully veined light grey marble, with a landing at the end where the entrance to the room had originally been. The spiral staircase with carved mahogany balusters of which, according to Van Someren Brand, no two were the same, led up from the landing. In the Keizersgracht house the outside of the staircase ran along a glazed extension in the courtyard, but in the museum it was partially free-standing. The additional elements made for this proved, said Van Someren Brand, that there were still Dutch woodcarvers whose work was fit to be seen alongside that of eighteenth-century craftsmen. The Sophia Augusta Stichting, as the

Fig. 4

Inscription on a piece of chipboard between the ceiling beams: 'De Stuk plafond er uitgehaald op 30 Maart 1976. Firma Stucbedrijf W. H. v. Teunenbroek. J. de Bruijn 63 jaar EN J. v. Zweeden 58 jaar Stucadoors. J. v.d. Hall 33 jaar Timmerman. Laatste stuk op 6 mei 1976 M.E. v. Teunenbroek en Zn BV'.

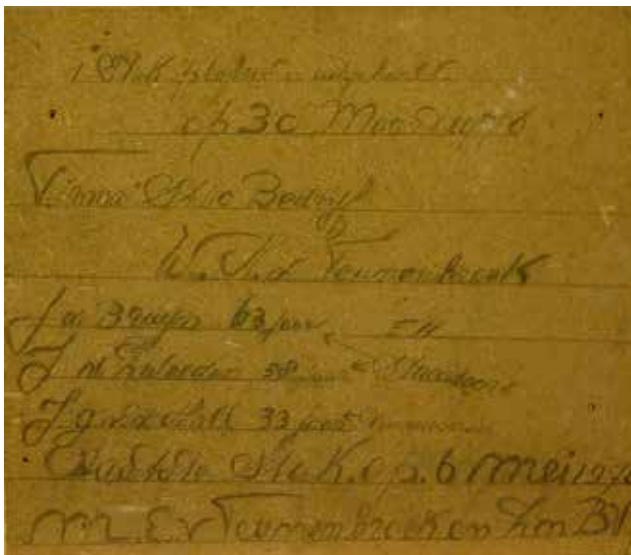




Fig. 5
Detail of the ceiling, after removal of the coats of whitewash, revealing the superb quality of the decorations – and two holes left by the bolts with which the ceiling was secured to the beam framework in the Stedelijk Museum, still filled with grey mortar.

department containing the Stedelijk Museum's period interiors was known at the time, was opened in 1900.¹¹ A bequest from the Suasso family funded the installation of the rooms. The Beuning Room was placed in a corner gallery measuring 10 x 10 metres on the corner of Van de Veldestraat, now Willem Sandbergplein, and Museumplein. Regrettably, we cannot infer from Van Someren Brand's description how the room was transported, what sort of supporting structure was made, who was responsible for designing and making the new elements of the mahogany panelling and the ceiling in the bay, or who restored the original ceiling. Some names were discovered during the conservation work: see figs. 3a-b. The date 1896 on a joist suggests that the work proceeded swiftly.

Stedelijk Museum 1896-1976 and *Rococo* 2001

The room remained virtually unchanged in the eighty years it spent in the Stedelijk Museum. The furnishing, though,

did change, as we see in various sets of photographs taken of the room. The most significant alteration to the room was the replacement of the painted wall hangings from Heeswijk Castle with a lozenge-patterned green damask (see Ter Brugge, p. 69). The overdoor decoration was taken down at the same time.

In 1976 the period interiors were removed from the museum and stored in the municipal repository. In contrast to the situation at 187 Keizersgracht, the room was well-documented when it was in the Stedelijk. There are photographs dating from the early twentieth century, from the period when the wall-covering was changed and finally an extensive set of the situation taken immediately before the room was dismantled in 1976. Detailed drawings of the walls and ceiling were done in that same year. For the second time the ceiling was sawn into pieces, this time including the joists to which the ceiling was secured in the Stedelijk Museum (fig. 4).



Fig. 6

Side view of a piece of ceiling, with the heavy plaster moulding that frames the oval central field. Three different layers of boarding for the different levels of ceiling can be seen. The top planks carry the plasterwork of the oval central field, the boards in the middle are the basis of the surrounding fields. The lowest planks are the basis for the framing of these fields. The bound bundles of reeds in the mouldings are also visible.

In 2001, the Amsterdams Historisch Museum gave the chimneypiece, double doors and pier-glasses on loan to the Rijksmuseum for its exhibition *Rococo: A Riot of Ornament*. These carved elements were restored with the aid of their furniture conservator, Jaap Boonstra.¹² The marble, which was broken in many places, was restored by Paul van Laere. The panelling itself was quite dirty, but cleaned up well. It was also necessary to fill cracks and glue loose decorations. In response to the success of the exhibition, the room was ceded on long-term loan so that it could be given a permanent place in the Rijksmuseum once the building had been renovated.

Conservation and Installation in the Rijksmuseum, 2007-13

In 2007, the crates containing the pieces of ceiling and panelling were transferred to the Rijksmuseum's repository. The underlying principle for the conservation and installation was that there should be no modifications to the layout, with the excep-

tion of the window wall, which had to be installed in as close to the original arrangement as possible. Visitors had to be able to walk around freely. The double doors were shown closed, as they had been in the *Rococo* exhibition. It was not considered necessary to be able to look outside through the windows. A gallery was found on the second floor in which the room would fit in terms of both chronology and size. Unfortunately, there was no room for the staircase and the corridor.

In 2009 the conservation firms of Hoving & Klusener, for the panelling, and Delmotte, for the ceiling, were awarded the commission and started work in a workshop in the Rijksmuseum's repository large enough to lay the elements out and construct the walls and the ceiling. Given the care with which the elements had been documented in 1976 and the experiences of the conservation in 2001, it was assumed that the room was complete. What was unclear, however, was the extent to which the elements of the original window wall had been reused and/or kept.

The parts of the ceiling were very dirty and badly cracked. At the start of the conservation process, it was found that stud bolts had been used to attach them to the beam structure in the Stedelijk Museum. This consisted of eleven tall beams with a square beam on either side that acted as supports for short horizontal joists at right angles to the long beams. Some 250 bolts, 10 mm thick with a square head, had been put in through the plasterwork and the original boarding. For this purpose, the plasterwork had been removed down to the wood for each bolt, a hole had been drilled in the boarding, and the bolt, with a washer under the head, had been screwed into the beam. The head was covered with grey mortar and the hole that was left was filled with gypsum plaster (fig. 5). Similar plaster was also used to fill the joins and irregularities and make good partially missing mouldings and ornaments. As the ceiling parts were packed upside down in their crates, the beams were now suspended from the plaster ceiling. It was decided to remove these heavy beams. This was done by loosening the stud bolts where possible, but more often by sawing through the bolts between the later beams and the original boarding.

The removal of the beams made it possible to better understand the original construction of the ceiling. The plasterwork was applied on boarding of joined planks 3 cm thick and 27-30 cm wide. Reeds were attached to the boarding with copper wire and nails to serve as an anchor for the first, quite coarse, layer of lime plaster. The mouldings have a core of reeds bundled together with copper wire, which acted as anchors but also saved on plaster and kept the weight of the ceiling down (fig. 6). The layer was applied around this in the shape of the moulding. The flat and moulded elements were then finished smoothly with a layer of very fine stucco. The ornaments were added, modelled in

plaster, as Van Someren Brand wrote, with a charcoal underdrawing, which could be seen where ornaments had come loose. The shape of the concave coving was determined by the wooden ribs to which the planks were nailed. The rectangular, 'flat' part of the ceiling has three different levels, corresponding with the levels of the planks that make up the boarding. The triangular fields in the corners, with symbolic images, are the middle level, their framing is 3 cm lower and the oval central field is 3 cm higher than the triangular fields (fig. 6). Only two joists of the attachment of the boarding to the original beam structure have survived. They hung on a small vertical beam with a dovetail joint. Only the dovetail remains.¹³ Elsewhere many remnants of thick forged nails can be seen; they correspond with Van Someren Brand's observation that the boards were attached to each beam with seven nails.

When the beam structure was removed, it emerged that the highest planks of the boarding were interrupted where the beams ran. These planks had probably not been allowed for in calculating the height of the supporting structure. Sawing out and removing these pieces without damaging the plasterwork must have been a complicated job. In order to stabilize the extremely fragile ceiling pieces, they were screwed to new wooden frameworks during the recent conservation. The twenty pieces of the rectangular, 'flat' part of the ceiling were put together on eight frames, considerably reducing the number of individual ceiling parts. Extra ribs were screwed to the boarding to stabilize the structure of the fourteen parts of the coving. Once all the remnants of the 1896 beams had been removed and the structure of the parts of the ceiling had been stabilized, the ceiling elements could be laid side by side so that the dimensions of the ceiling could be established. This was done by laying

the ceiling – still with the plaster surface up – on trestles (fig. 7). The coving elements were supported on struts. Because the corner cabinets abut the corner pieces of the ceiling, it was possible to work out the floor plan. The cornices of the cabinets were fitted on to the ceiling and the distances between them measured.

Panelling

The conservation of the panelling commenced by erecting the walls, making it possible to investigate to what extent they were complete and original. The back of the panelling was left visible so that the construction could be closely studied. The hope that other elements of the window wall besides the pier-glass walls had been reused to construct the bay in the Stedelijk Museum proved a vain one.

The added panelling and frames had all been constructed differently. The original panelling is made of oak with a 10-mm-thick sheet of mahogany glued to the front. The panels in the frameworks are solid, 10-mm-thick mahogany. The doors, including those of the corner cabinets, are also solid mahogany. The panelling of the wall with the bay, however, is mahogany glued to pine. On closer inspection, the carving and mouldings are simpler (figs. 8a-b). This is not very evident, however, which supports Van Someren Brand's praise for the woodcarvers who had repaired the banister.

The two tall posts on either side of the mirror walls in the bay, exhibited with the pier-glasses at the *Rococo* exhibition in 2001, also have a pine back and proved not to fit in the reconstructed window wall. The mirror

Fig. 7
After the Stedelijk Museum beams had been removed and the structure and plasterwork consolidated, the ceiling was placed on trestles to establish the correct dimensions and shape of the ceiling – and thus the floor plan for the walls.



walls themselves also have a pine backing, which makes it likely that they, too, are not original. The pier-glass frames and cornices are original, and are mentioned in Van Someren Brand's description of when it was built into the rear house at 187 Keizersgracht. The tables were solid mahogany and original, but the consoles on which they rested probably were not. The carving is more robust and less refined. The panelling of the other three walls is all original, with the exception of the panel to the left of the former cupboard door. Seen from the back, the mahogany panel is clearly much newer than the panels elsewhere (fig. 9). The other panels are grey, whereas this panel is still the red-brown colour of mahogany. Closer inspection reveals that the graining on the front is more striped than the panels elsewhere. The former cupboard door in the wall opposite the windows is mahogany on the outside, as is the door frame crowned with a crest. Compared with the exuberance of the carving, the ornaments are rather stiff. This door is clearly a replacement of the original. In the Stedelijk Museum this cupboard door opened on to the corridor that came from the same Keizersgracht house. The corresponding opening in the museum gallery wall was moved accordingly, and it is conceivable that the position of the door was also slightly displaced. That could explain why this part of the panelling was replaced (see Vos et al., p. 91 and Ter Brugge, p. 66).

Although the parts of the panelling described above are probably not original, it was decided to keep them because the original parts are missing, they are not obtrusive and they have been part of the room for more than a hundred and ten years. The former cupboard door and the door to the left of the double doors now open on to the room as they did in the Stedelijk Museum. The double doors are closed so that the moulding and the exceptionally elaborate carving can be



Fig. 8a
Panelling added in 1896 underneath the bay window in the Stedelijk Museum.

Fig. 8b
Original panelling of the wall opposite the windows.

seen to best advantage. The grain of the mahogany of the doors has mirror symmetry, which indicates that the planks were facing one another in the same tree. The backs of these doors are very simple, without ornaments or elaborate mouldings.

Window Wall

The bay that was made, with some reluctance on Van Someren Brand's part, to fit against the wide window in the Stedelijk Museum was a significant departure from the original room. For this reason the window wall was reconstructed. The work was based on three sources: the information that could be gleaned from the room itself, Van Someren Brand's description and the reverse glass painting of the rear elevation made by Zeuner in 1780. The ceiling defines the width of the window wall. In Zeuner's reverse glass painting the three windows are the same shape and size. According to Van Someren Brand, parts of the shutters were stored in the corner cabinets. It may



Fig. 9
Back of the corner cabinet and panelling by the former cupboard door, in the trial set-up in the Rijksmuseum repository. The back of the panel on the left of the corner cabinet looks much fresher and cleaner than the panel between the corner cabinet and the chimneypiece.

be assumed that these covered half of the outermost windows. The other shutters would have been folded back between the window frame and the pier-glass walls, as was customary in this period. They are found, for instance, in the window frames of the very similar mahogany room in the Bartolotti House at number 170 Herengracht,¹⁴ which was created eight years later. Both pier-glass walls thus had a shutter casing on either side. The width of the window frames could be derived from this information. Since the corner cabinet doors begin immediately above the skirting, the same must have been true of the shutters. This is confirmed by the mahogany inserts spaced at regular intervals on the inside of these cabinet doors (fig. 10). The lowest of these inserts is 15 cm from the bottom of the door and they undoubtedly mark the places where the shutter hinge leaves had been set in. Recesses in the mouldings were made in the underside of the doors, most probably corresponding with the moulding of the former windowsill. This means that the window frames must have been very tall. Zeuner's reverse glass painting shows the height to width

ratio of the windows, the spacing of the glazing bars and even grilles to stop people falling out (fig. 11).¹⁵ Using these sources, Van Hoogevest Architecten made a structural drawing for the window wall. The same firm was responsible for designing the installation structure.



Fig. 10
Inside of the door with the corner post of the corner cabinet on the right-hand side of the window wall. At the bottom of the door there is a cut-out for a missing espagnolet lock. Above it is a lighter-coloured inset block of mahogany to fill the place of a former hinge of the shutters that were stored in the cupboard.

Restoring and conserving the paneling and the ceiling was done as far as possible in the repository. As well as consolidating the wooden framework of the ceiling elements, it entailed filling cracks and gluing loose pieces, making good holes, joins and missing mouldings and cleaning all the parts. Unlike the installation in 1896, lime plaster was used to make good the ceiling. It has the same physical properties as the original plasterwork and, unlike gypsum plaster, dries gradually. Adding the finishing plaster layer was postponed until the room was installed. After dirt and deposits had been removed, the beeswax finish on the panelling proved to be well preserved. The same was true of the elements treated previously for the *Rococo* exhibition. The ceiling was found to have three to five coats of whitewash. A trial to remove it revealed so much greater sharpness of the ornaments and mouldings that a supplementary commission was given to remove the whitewash from the whole ceiling

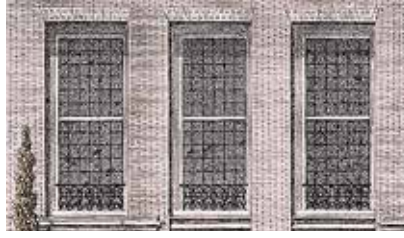


Fig. 11
Detail of fig. 2 on p. 44. The window frames of the Beuning Room with grilles in front of the bottom of the windows.

(figs. 12-13). This extremely time-consuming operation was made possible by the generosity of the Rijksmuseum Patrons. In the meantime, Jacob de Wit's chimneypiece and Jurriaan Andriessen's overdoor were treated by Lisette Vos.

Installation in the Rijksmuseum 2012-13

In 2012, the final transport of the Beuning and the Kops Room from the repository to the Rijksmuseum by Crown Fine Art took seven journeys by a large van with a trailer. The ceiling elements were transported virtually upright, at an angle of 75 degrees, mounted on pallets; the panelling was packed in crates and transport frames (fig. 14).

Fig. 12
Marie Huys using a scalpel to remove later coats of whitewash from the original plasterwork. Photo: Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, HA-0022610.





Fig. 13
Corner of the ceiling during the trial set-up in the Rijksmuseum repository. The individual ceiling elements have been consolidated, and holes or missing pieces have been filled with lime plaster. The finishing plaster layer, mouldings and ornaments were completed after the ceiling was installed. The white areas are earlier restorations with gypsum plaster.

The installation of the rooms was started before the contractors working on the Rijksmuseum had finished. A supporting structure for the panelling and the ceiling was built in accordance with the architect's drawing. The walls

were a light frame construction with plywood sheets. On top of this was a structure of wooden beams resting on two steel portals in the middle of the room. An extra opening was made in the museum gallery wall connecting

Fig. 14
Transporting the largest section of the ceiling through the Rijksmuseum's former main east entrance, 12 April 2012.





Fig. 15

Suspending a corner piece of the ceiling from the beam framework in the Rijksmuseum. Unistrut channels are attached to the ceiling and the beams.

Fig. 16

The ceiling after it was suspended in the Rijksmuseum. The joins between the parts of the ceiling were filled with coarse lime plaster. The final fine plaster

layer, mouldings and ornaments still have to be completed, as does the flat oval in the centre. Photo: Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, HA-0025561.

to the former cupboard door. The panelling was attached to the supporting framework with adjustable wooden blocks, so that the elements could be lined up precisely. The parts of the ceiling were lifted with a block and tackle one by one and suspended on a total of some two hundred threaded rods with the Unistrut system, previously used for period rooms in the Metropolitan (fig. 15). This made it possible to align the individual pieces with millimetric precision. The ceiling elements were then joined together with wooden chocks on the boarding.

Once all the elements had been installed, the conservation and installation of the room could be completed. The joins between the ceiling elements and the missing flat central area were filled with a coarse lime plaster (fig. 16) and all the added elements were finished with a smooth layer of plaster. An extremely thin layer of pipeclay was applied to mask the differences in colour between the original plasterwork and



the 1896 and 2012 additions. The window wall was reconstructed by Lucas de Jong to the design described above, with new frames, skirtings and other missing finishing carpentry (fig. 17). The area of the missing shutter casings either side of the pier-glass walls was filled with a neutral field, painted in a plain colour approximating mahogany. The layer of wax on the mahogany was polished up and lightly supplemented where necessary.

The walls are covered with damask woven especially by Richard Humphries to a pattern documented as having been used in a house in England in 1738. It is 53.5 cm wide with a 217.6 cm repeat. The particular shade of green is based on a silk fragment of the same period. A woollen triple-glazed damask was chosen to achieve a discreet sheen. The walls were upholstered with the damask by A.T. Cronin on a hessian-clad framework covered with two layers of paper.

The last challenge was to lay a floor. The parquet flooring in the museum galleries, made of short oak strips, was not appropriate in the context of the eighteenth-century décor of the room, which had had a floor made of wide boards, as can be seen in the photograph of the chimneypiece on Keizersgracht (fig. 8a on p. 84). These would probably have been made of pine, as was customary at the time. A second-hand pine floor would have given the erroneous impression that it was original, so new wide pine floorboards were used. They came from the Twickel estate, sawn there at the sawmill of the same name, having lain in water for a year. Doetinchem Parket glued the 10-mm-thick boards to the substrate, then treated them with linseed oil and wax as usual (fig. 16 on p. 73). The building services in the room were concealed. Conditioned air comes in through the mantelpiece and the void between the room and the surrounding museum

Fig. 17
Installing the new frames and making good the plaster layer as part of the installation of the room in the Rijksmuseum. Photo: Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, HA-0029047.



gallery; it leaves through the doorways. The smoke and fire detection system and the climate sensors use tiny tubes in the ceiling. The lighting of the room, designed by BeersNielsen, follows the same method as period rooms in the Metropolitan Museum. The wall of the museum gallery, painted light grey, which is 50 cm behind the windows, is lit by concealed lamps behind the pier-glass walls and corner cabinets. A strong spotlight casts a beam of light into the room from behind the top left corner of the left-hand window to imitate sunlight.

A significant difference between the conservation of a room and of a piece of furniture, painting or other object is that the room has to be built up first before it is possible to get an idea of the condition and potential conservation problems. In the case of the Beuning Room, for instance, the pieces of the ceiling had to be laid out together to establish the exact floor plan. This proved to be a difficult job because hundreds of kilos of support beams had to be removed first. These had been fastened on with bolts through the layers of plaster. Removing them caused new damage or brought to light old damage – in this case saw cuts dating from 1896. The very consider-

able dimensions and weight were an additional challenge. As the treatment progressed, it was decided to remove the coats of whitewash from the ceiling – something that had not been foreseen, but revealed the crispness of the detailing of the ceiling ornamentation and set off the superb quality of the carving in Cuban mahogany. Alongside the eleven firms already mentioned, Rijksmuseum staff from many different departments played an important part in the success of this project. The Amsterdam Museum was generous in offering to loan the room, and in its confidence in the outcome.

The room gives visitors a wonderful opportunity to walk around in one of the most beautifully executed Dutch rococo interiors. Although the view from the room over the garden and the rear houses on Herengracht has not existed since 1896, the room still gives visitors to the Rijksmuseum an impression of the magnificence of the Amsterdam canal ring, which has been a World Heritage site since 2010. Assembling the parts stored in sixty crates is the best possible guarantee that the room will be preserved for many future generations.

NOTES

* The conservation and installation of the Beuning Room was made possible by the extra contributions made by private donors and the Patrons of the Rijksmuseum, 2011.

- 1 Baarsen et al. 2001, pp. 204-10; Van Loosdrecht 2001.
- 2 See also Boonstra 2015.
- 3 Sluyterman 1907, pp. 2-3, figs. 4, 7-8; Van der Pluijm 1954, figs. 162-63, 169; De Vriend 1950, figs. 89, 92.
- 4 Cat. Amsterdam (Christie's), 27 June 2001, no. 226: Jonas Zeuner, *Rear Elevation of 187 Keizersgracht. Verre églomisé, 1780*, engraved in silver and gold, 50 x 63 cm.

- 5 <http://www.famiedeclercq.nl/nl/geschiedenis/woonhuizen/keizersgracht-187-adam.html> (consulted 8 July 2016).
- 6 Weissman 1885, p. 46.
- 7 Van Someren Brand 1901, pp. 310-14.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 312-13.
- 10 Ibid., p. 311.
- 11 Ibid., p. 251.
- 12 Van Loosdrecht 2001.
- 13 Van Duin 2010, p. 83.
- 14 Baarsen et al. 2001, pp. 209-10.
- 15 With thanks to Pieter Vlaardingbroek, architectural historian, City of Amsterdam, who drew the grilles to our notice.