

BELÉN

**FELIX MERITIS
– 2020**

**textile walls for Felix Meritis inspired by
the rich history of the building**

In collaboration with i29 commissioned by Amerborgh

Introduction —

During the intellectual movement *The Enlightenment*, Felix Meritis served as a location for a society of scientists, artists and thinkers to come together. Today this unique building is considered as one of the most important monuments of Amsterdam. i29, who is responsible for the interior design, approached Belén to investigate and develop the textile wall coverings of the restaurant and the entrance of this historical building. The zeitgeist of the Enlightenment period has a similarity with that of the present time. Many questioned the ways of thinking when it came to religion back then. A group of people found support, enlightenment and future prospects within the realms of art and science. We are now at a point in time in which we are questioning our ways of thinking. How do we want to move forward? How should we move forward? A new era full of interesting developments is dawning. Felix Meritis is the physical embodiment for the curious mind; a hub of creativity, ideas and cross-overs, and thus Belén immediately saw the potential to reference the history of this exceptional building in the execution of the textile walls.



Textile walls —

Belén approaches space as a starting point, in which the stories, the history and the soul of a space inspires the concept. The design studio does not see monuments as obstacles, but views them as enriching and a welcoming challenge. They approach space as living and breathing, in which they consciously work with its lifespan. Herein, Felix Meritis aligned with Belén's approach in reframing monumental spaces, in which the history and the current spirit of the time come together, and how this sets forth in the future. This led to Belén designing two installations of textile walls: in the entrée and the restaurant: 'Physical Time' and 'Scanning the Sky'. Delving deeper into the occurrences that have taken place in these rooms, as well as how the lifespan is experienced within the building, they sought to explore layers of colour and material and how these form the soul of the environment. The material herein speaks through its technical capabilities as well as the aesthetics that are inherently part of the studio's ethos.

Scanning the Sky —

The old observatory situated on the roof is where, in the past, the sky was often studied during the day but mostly by night. On January 18th 2018, after a heavy storm (sun follows rain after all) photographers Erik and Petra Hesmerg captured in 360° the slightly dramatic, yet, clear sky. These stills formed the textile walls of the restaurant. The restaurant of Felix Meritis is a vast space, and has only two windows on the front side. A space in which one easily spends a few hours, Belén drew on this space and felt its open and dazzling atmosphere. Inspired by this, the studio opted for mid blue as a colour, wanting to resemble the hue of an infinite sky. The tactile walls were stretched with 'sky', perceived as open windows offering a clear view. Herein, Belén opted for the idea of walls being borderless and see-through.

Physical Time —

Belén was inspired by the drawing room – a room that was lost due to a fire years ago at the Felix Meritis. They dove into the Rijksmuseum archive, which contains many etchings and paintings that were made in the Drawing Room (the room itself often visualised in these). The studio chose an etching by artist Reinier Vinkeles to translate into a textile wall. The etching is tufted in two colours – a technique that is generally applied to rugs. By opting for light and dark green, the textiles match the green hues of the i29 developed interior. The back of the panels depict a clearly recognisable etching. Yet, it is not visible. The front side is an abstract representation of the etching due to the threads being 10 centimeters long, each one poised in their individual manner. It is as though a memory from a long time ago remains faintly visible. The result becomes a physical manifestation of time. The vertical line is emphasised by the hanging threads. Because people spend a limited amount of time in this space of the Felix Meritis, "the vertical" emphasises the desired atmosphere. The textile walls ask for human touch and can be in fact, felt and adorned.

About Belén —

Belén is a design studio focused on material research and development. Specialised in utilising textiles for the customisation of existing spaces, Brecht Duijf and Lenneke Langenhuijsen bridge the realms of textiles, design, crafts and architecture. The design duo embarks on an awareness of the sensory relationship with the space surrounding our bodies, and relate this to deeper narratives connected to atavistic artisanal traditions and to the notion that everything is connected to nature. As a *buro*, Belén seeks to enhance a space – a living environment – and furnish it with technical characteristics (such as isolation, comfort, etc.) driven by intersectional environmentalism, in which ethics form a congenital basis. Embracing the history – of the space and placing it in a contemporary setting, the expressive materials and research form the method in every vignette of their work.

“We believe that everything is interconnected. We wish to offer openness, and study how the transient nature of this interconnectedness brings new insights and aesthetic materialisations that are accessible to everyone.” — Belén

Belén’s projects have been part of exhibitions curated by Paola Antonelli, Jan Boelen, Ilse Crawford, Joseph Grima, Alice Stori Liechtenstein. They have been commissioned by Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Atelier Luma Arles, Schloss Hollenegg for Design and Textiellab Tilburg amongst others. Objects and researches have been acquired by MoMa New York, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Vitra Design Museum Weil am Rein, Design Museum Den Bosch, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam.

For images of ‘Scanning the Sky’ and ‘Physical Time’ please click [here](#).

For high-res images, please e-mail us.

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Client: Amerborgh International N.V.

Interior Design: i29

Walls Textile Design: Belén

Photography sky: Erik and Petra Hesmerg

Development Scanning the Sky: Belén and EE Exclusives

Execution Scanning the Sky: EE Exclusives

Development Physical Time: Belén and Millenerpoort

Execution Physical Time: Millenerpoort

Placement Walls: Oostendorp

Fire retardancy: Asphalia



Q&A —

What is 'Scanning the Sky' and 'Physical Time'?

Scanning the Sky and Physical Time are two different translations in textile walls that we designed and developed in assignment of investment group Amerborgh. 'Scanning the Sky' is a physical representation of the sky in the restaurant area. The day after a heavy storm, we stood on the rooftop together with Erik and Petra Hesmerg. We photographed the skies and this served as the images that were developed for the textile walls of the restaurant. In 1932, the drawing room of Felix Meritis was destroyed by a fire. Quite a few etchings and drawings were made in and of this very drawing room, one of these served as a basis for the textile wall of the entrée of Felix Meritis. Thus, 'Physical Time' was developed. The etching is comprised out of 2 colours, which can be logically translated into a tufted image. Different proportions of light and dark green represent a fairly graphic architectural depiction herein. By utilising the maximum length of tufted yarns, the image becomes slightly blurred. Much like memories. The tufted yarns represent, as it were, the physical time in which the drawing room is no longer there.

What is the inspiration behind the textile walls?

The monumental building of Felix Meritis was the inspiration for the walls. Offering a vast history and valuable content to work with, Belén utilised this information to translate into tactile walls. According to Belén, this should always go hand in hand with a more emotional attachment to the space. The restaurant is elongated and only has windows on the front side. When i29 intended to turn the room red, we immediately felt it necessary to create a see-through effect. Red is a colour that overcomes you; sky blue is a colour you look into. Especially when the two are placed next to one another, the effect is quickly experienced. Alongside the discovery of the observatory, the idea was brought into fruition.

What techniques were utilised to create the textile walls?

For 'Scanning the Sky', we collaborated with EE Exclusives. We translated the sky into a fabric consisting of shiny threads that alternate in loop length, resulting in a tactile depiction of the sky. By applying the loops horizontally, this enhances the idea of a horizon and gives a feeling of tranquility. This plays on the idea that one spends hours dining in this room. The textile is woven with a jacquard machine, which allows one to work with the outmost precision. We chose to work with the backside of the material because the falling threads of varying lengths are visible here. This made it possible to give the fluffy clouds of the sky a true soft look and feel, and to ensure the blue sky an even and taut look. Texture plays a pivotal role in this manifestation. For 'Physical Time' we searched for the most flaccid threads. These are knitted threads, also known as chainette threads. Due to the high density in material and its smooth construction, the threads fall straight downwards. This is seen as vital, the horizontal restaurant textile

plays with contrast to the vertical entrance textile. One is only in the entrée for a short period of time, and one mostly stands in this space. In collaboration with Millenerpoort, we developed a technique to create the longest possible tuft yarns. The tufting technique is conventionally utilised for flooring. By using it vertically, gravity comes into play.

How did Belén collaborate with i29 on this project?

Both being very different in physical language, this resulted in exciting contrasts. Our design complemented theirs strongly. i29 was asked to reinvigorate the interior of the entire building of Felix Meritis. Within the textile walls, they approached us and asked for our expertise to think alongside the ambit of the spaces of the restaurant and the entrée. The collaboration was very much open and both studios were able to complement one another in the process and execution.

How does Belén approach materiality and interiors?

Interior is a person's most direct environment. Over time it has become more standardised due to globalisation, losing its tactility and depth within materiality. We approach every space as its own world. What is the history? What occurrences took place? Who spent time in these spaces? Who will spend time in them in the future? How does it feel? Looking at what the light does during the day, and what the space asks for. By investigating how to build on layers that capture the lifespan of an environment, we tackle a space from its history moving into its future. White paint, concrete and glass are the most common materials utilised in architecture. In order to make the space a pleasant place to reside in, work in and simply be in, we find the challenge in thinking within a richer variety of materials: their appearances and their effects.