

Museum of Contemporary African Art (MOCAA)

Background

The design brief, for Heatherwick Studios, was to reinvent the historic 90-year-old Grain Silo, at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, as a not-for-profit cultural institution housing the most significant collection of contemporary art from Africa. Unlike many conversions of historic buildings which have grand spaces ready to be repurposed, this building has none. The project became about imagining an interior carved from within an infrastructural object. It was 90 years old and (the Grain Silo Complex) was the tallest building in Sub-Saharan Africa for apparently half a century.

Challenge

The principle challenge for the acoustic design of the MOCAA was to provide a suitable acoustic environment in the public spaces without impacting on the strong, clean industrial aesthetic of the building. The large public atrium had to accommodate a wide range of uses, including multimedia art installations, public and private events, concerts, presentations and exhibitions. While in use, noise from the atrium could not be allowed to affect the adjoining galleries, or the high-end hotel and spa in the same building. It was crucial to the success of the project that the acoustic design did not dominate the building's design.

Solution

SRL solved this complex problem by working closely with the architects and design team, so that all acoustic treatment was done in a way that visually blended into the background. But reviewing the building design we could identify where it was possible to include localised and highly strategic absorption together with careful layout changes so that the minimum possible absorption was used, and then only where it was needed. To complete this review of the building we built a 3D model of the Silo within our acoustic modelling software that highlighted areas for treatment. We then used this information in conjunction with our experience to optimise and position the acoustic treatment. The museum opens in September 2017 and at 100,000-square-foot and over nine floors will be the biggest museum to open on the continent for more than a hundred years.



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