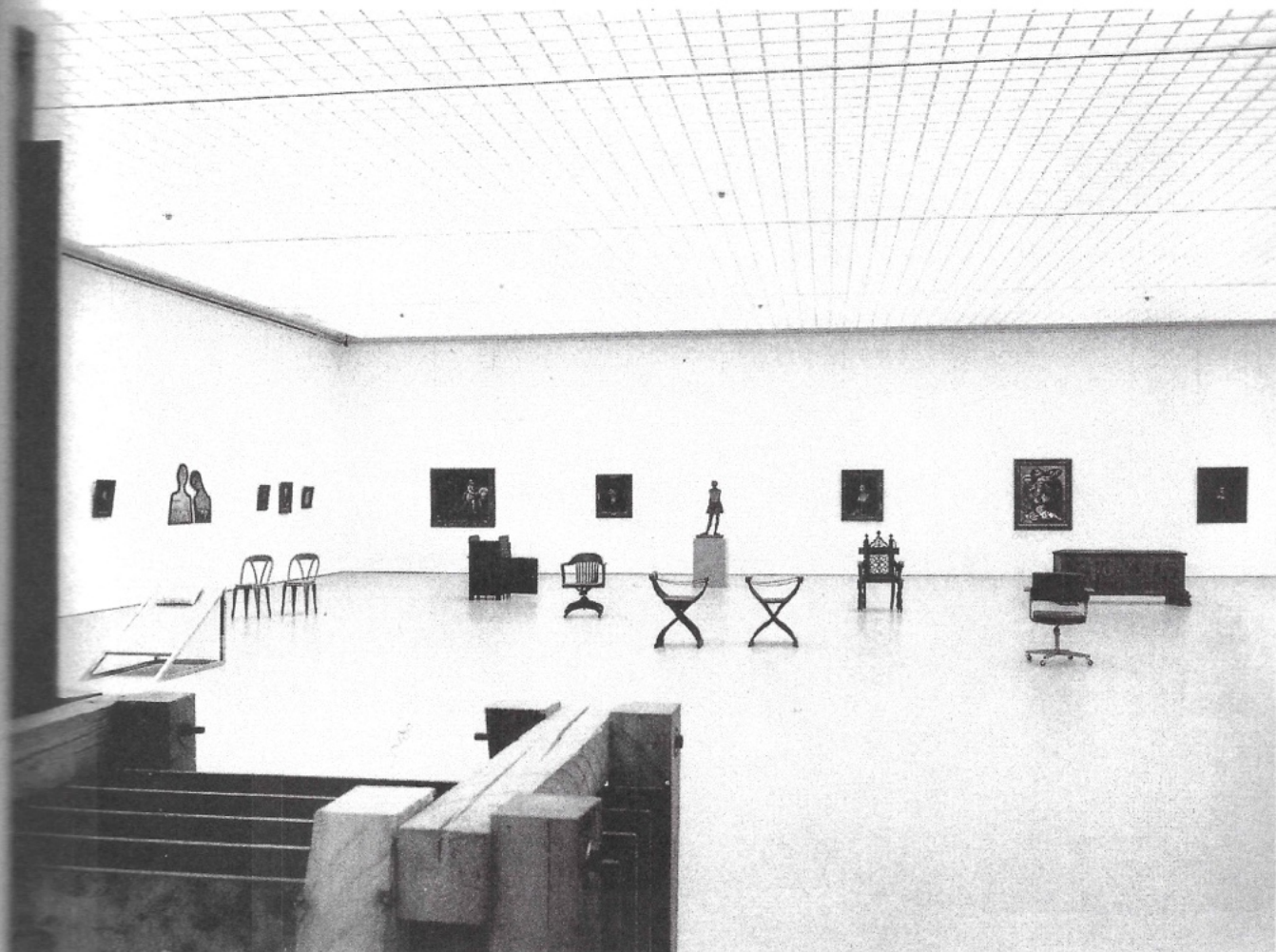


# a-Historische klanken / a-Historical soundings

Harald Szeemann's choice from the collections of the Museum Boymans Van Beuningen

28 August to 2 October 1988

Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

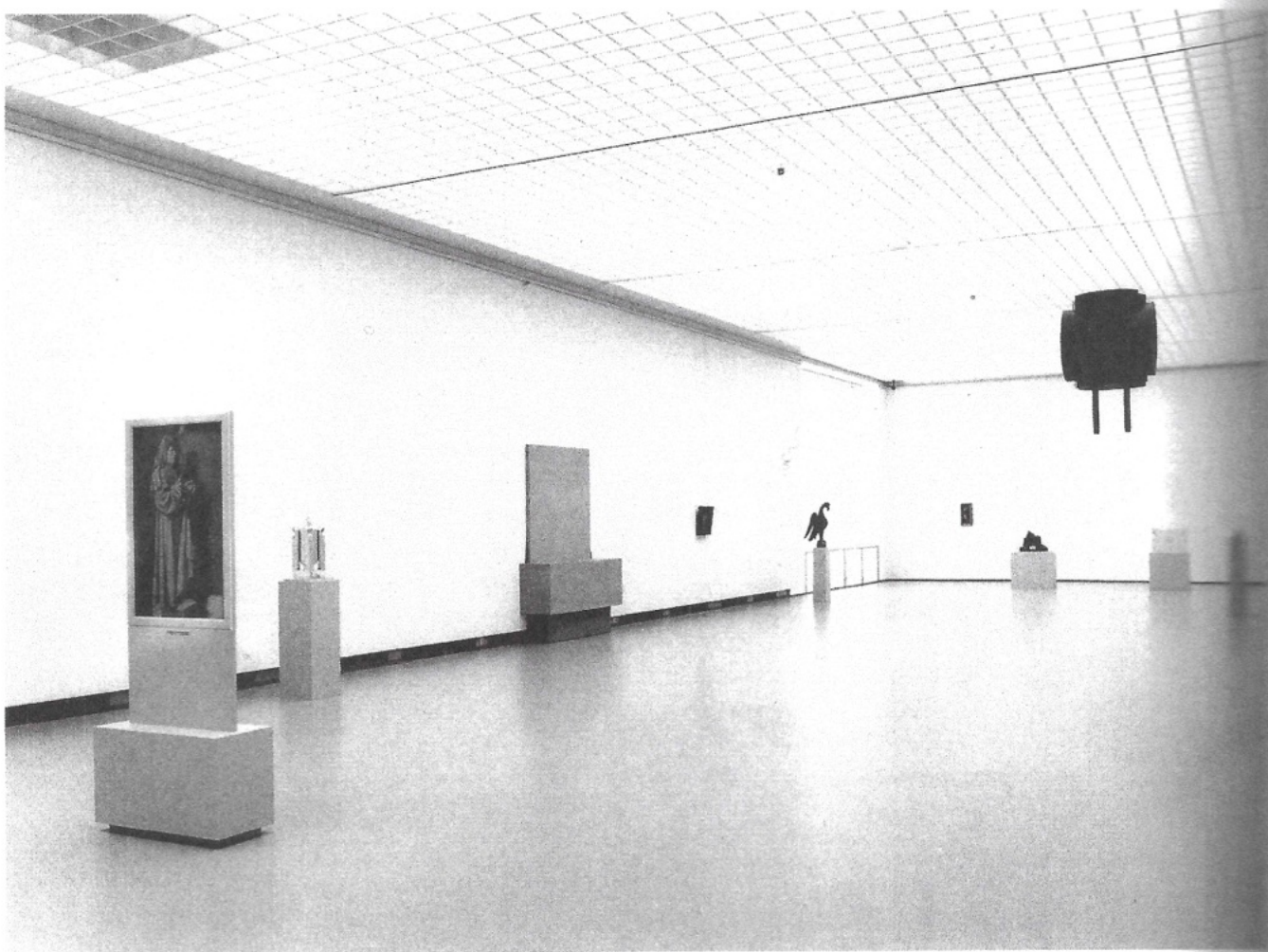


*Wim Crouwel, the museum director, wanted to eliminate the boundaries between the sections. And he thought that could best be accomplished by an outsider. He turned to me first and later to Bob Wilson and Peter Greenaway. I attempted to create a synthesis of the collections of modern art and ancient art and design, whereby I used a sculpture by a contemporary as a point of departure for free association—the a-Historical soundings in each of the three rooms: Joseph Beuys's Grond, Bruce Nauman's Studio Piece, and Imi Knoebel's Buffet. — HSz*

"The Museum of Obsessions and its executive body, the 'Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour,' have always held the view that fear of transgressing boundaries in vertical, compartmentalised historical thought can be overcome by a manifest art history of sensitivity towards the intensive intentions of the works of all times, in the form of visualised a-historical dimensions. [...] The Museum Boymans Van Beuningen is

PAGES 509 TO 513: Views of the exhibition.

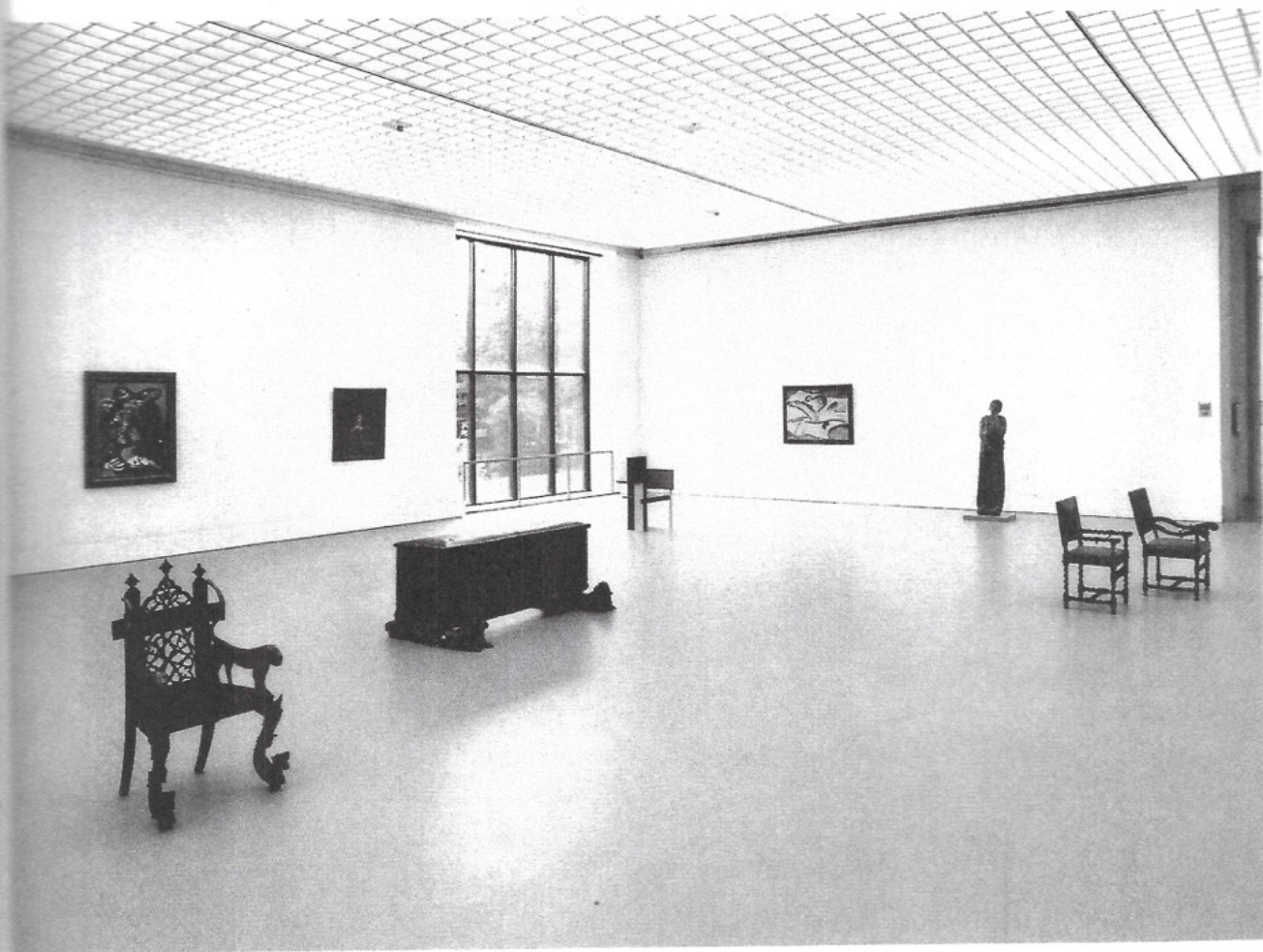
PHOTOS BY JANNES LINDERS



not only fortunate in having a large, relatively neutral suite of galleries for its changing exhibitions, rooms which in proud defiance of the original building ignore all allusions to the otherwise so tempting 'cabinet' set-up; it also possesses superb collections that are excellently suited to the experiment of decompartmentalisation in the museum. And also to take the risk of the amalgamation: how can the guaranteed autonomy of the work of art be coupled with the interpretation of its current intrinsic value in another context, when it is no longer in its accustomed place but

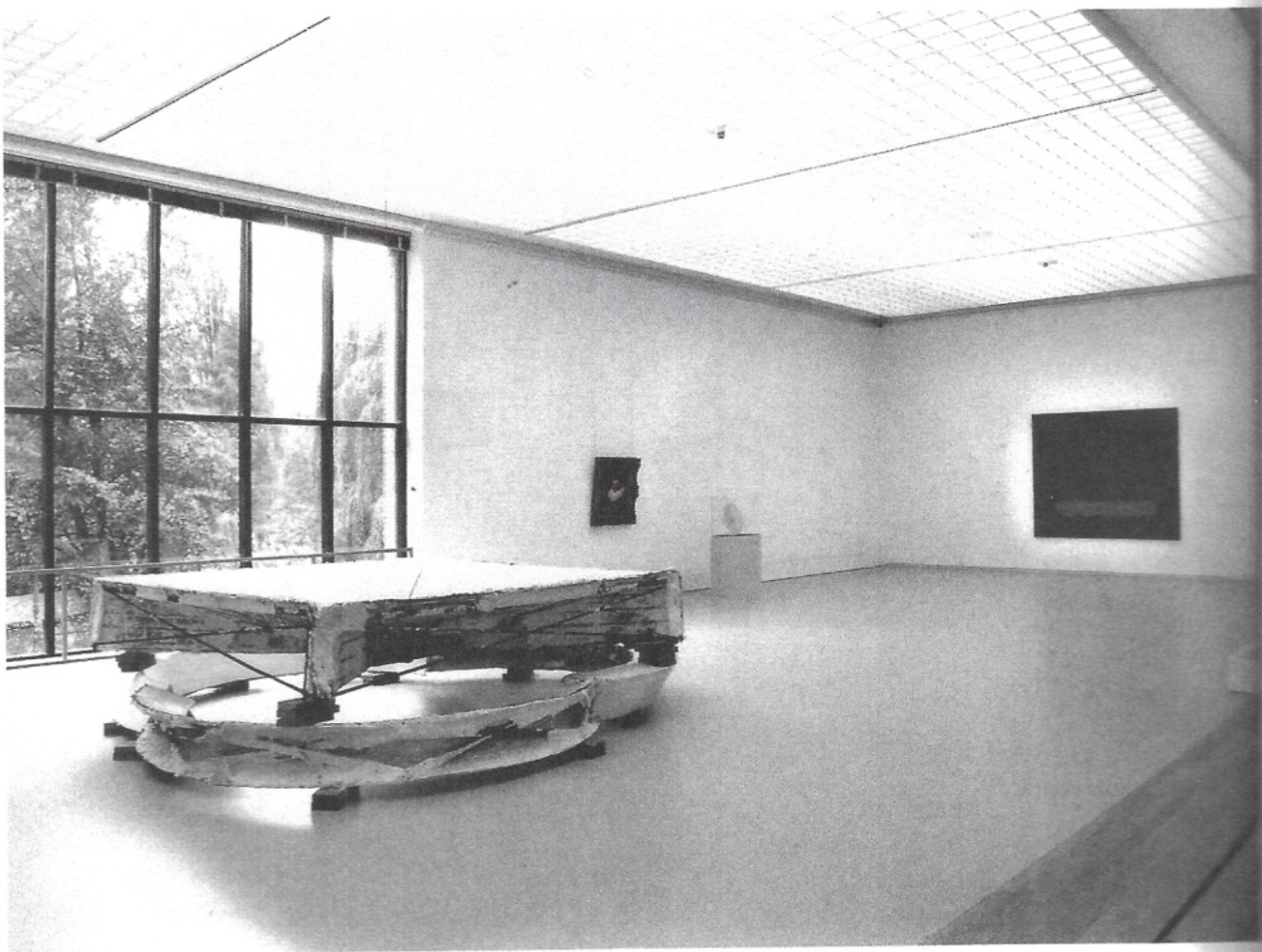
in another room? After all, we do not look at a Rembrandt with 17th, 18th, or 19th-century eyes, but as modern beholders, perhaps quite curious to see a Rembrandt alongside a Beuys. In its guest appearance then, the Museum of Obsessions opts for simultaneity rather than the normal sequence of rooms separated according to the period and technique of their contents. This imposes a constraint, though. Large rooms should be left as they are, not partitioned off by 50-lm zones for works on paper. The Print Room collection is therefore absent. The arrangement consists of part-





ings, sculptures, and objects from the departments of 'Old Painting and Sculpture,' 'Modern Art,' 'Decorative Arts,' and 'Design.' My selection was guided by two impulses. The first was an inborn urge to pick the raisins out of the cake without succumbing to the temptation of 'highlights' or 'the world's 100 best paintings.' Secondly I wanted to fashion the incomprehensible Utopia of Art, its search for the concentrate in the work as content, into a timeless part of pure vision. The mutual positioning of the works is meant to convey a direct sensation of a kind of zone of freedom in

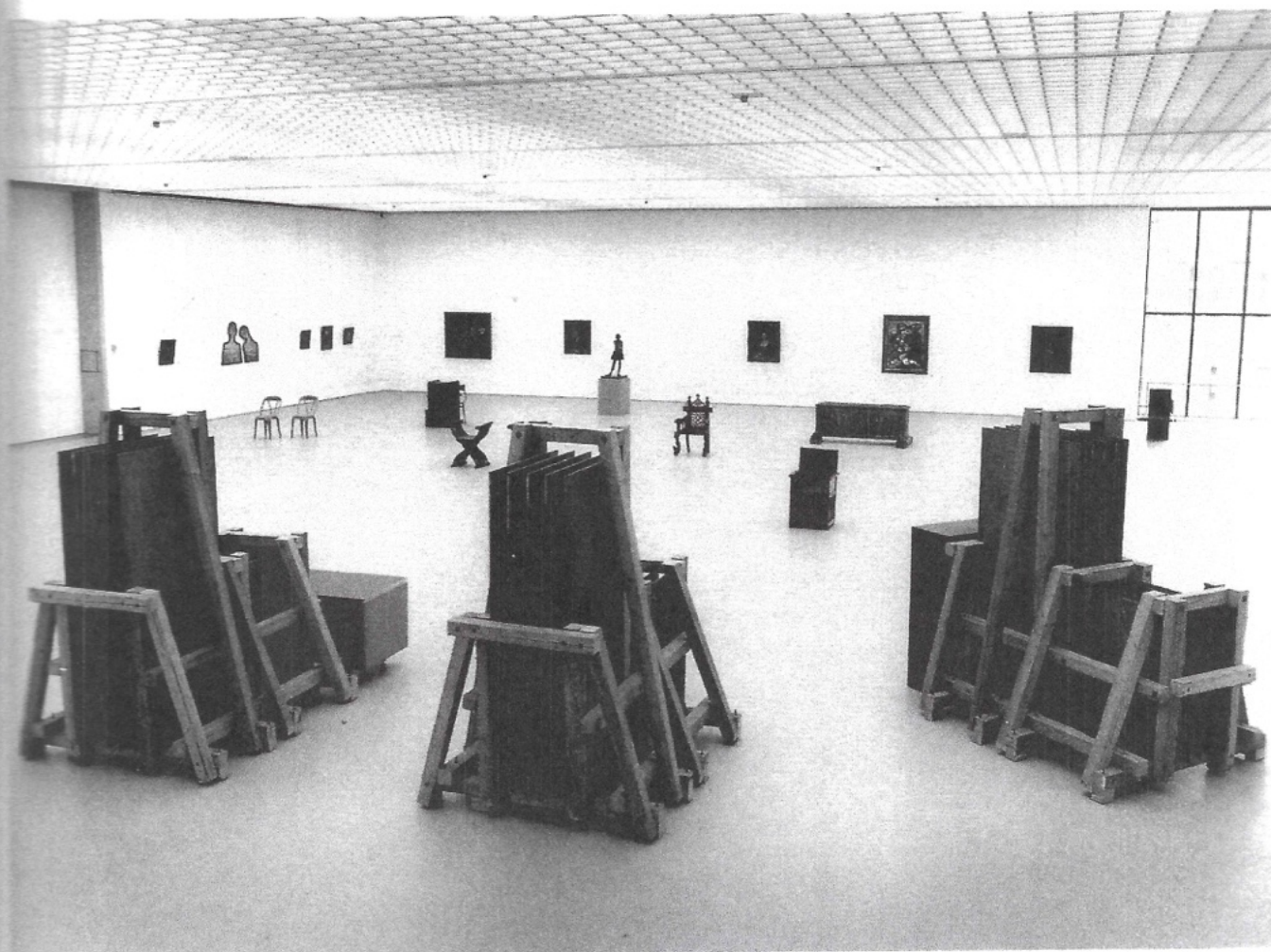
and between them, and of the Utopian condition of an ideal society in the form of an Academia of 'not-one-being togetherness.' My first proposal for a title was 'the conquest of materialism,' in order to indicate the guiding impulse of the selection and presentation principles. A little bothered by the crudely manifesto-like character of the statement, I cast around for a more poetic form and came up with 'a-historical soundings,' not so very far from the music of the spheres and my own ineradicable 'tendency towards *Gesamtkunstwerk*.' I also wanted to avoid a simple confronta-



tion of old and new, a somewhat jaded form of presentation, preferring to preserve the primacy of the work that does not document something but speaks for itself. An adventure of mixed tenses and reconciled opposites, then: to tackle a big job respectfully, while remaining thoroughly disrespectful of traditional categories. And all this in rooms with lengths of up to 30 meters, for viewing a small picture, a large picture, an object, a sculpture, and embarking on the quest for the inner, ideal distance from the detail and from the whole. [...] In both a neo-Brueghelian, so to speak,

and a timelessly aesthetic form I wanted to give form to three parables: first the confusion of spirits, the living appeal to the human creative urge, suffering, and death in the main gallery; then the wondrous silence of emptiness and monochromaticism in the second room, ending with the sacralisation of seeming indifference in the third. [...] And somewhere in the middle, Kandinsky's *Lyrisches*. I revel in this profusion, and yet so much is uncertain: how will the works coexist? Is my favorite average eye-height of 155 cm enough? How many kilometers must be traveled before every-





thing is right, before the a-historical soundings are there, at least for my senses? DBB [Danke Museum Boymans Van Beuningen]. AGG [Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit]." — HSz, in the catalogue

TRANSLATION BY RUTH KÖNIG

#### CATALOGUE

with contributions by Wim Crouwel and Harald Szeemann, 24 pages, 18 illustrations,  
20 × 27 cm