

Haworth Tompkins wins planning for £14.5m London University institute

By Elizabeth Hopkirk 29 November 2019

Architect's brief was to restore Warburg Institute's revolutionary spirit



Source: Haworth Tompkins. Lecture theatre extension – Warburg Institute

Haworth Tompkins' £14.5m redevelopment of the Warburg Institute has been approved by Camden council.

The project will see the expansion, modernisation and modernisation of its Bloomsbury home, designed by Charles Holden who was also responsible for nearby Senate House, as well as dozens of Tube stations.

The institute, now part of the University of London (since 1944), was founded by Aby Warburg in Hamburg in 1900 and studies the interaction of ideas, images and society through history. In 1933, the collection escaped the rise of Nazism and the 'burning of books' in Germany and relocated to London. The move gave protection to about 60,000 books, thousands of slides, photographs and furniture allowing the Institute's roots to continue to thrive in the safer lands of Britain.

Haworth Tompkins was appointed to the Warburg Renaissance project last year to open up the building and make it suitable for future generations of students.

Plans include a 140-seat lecture theatre in the central courtyard, enlarged seminar rooms, a new exhibition space and a ground-floor café for the debate of ideas, in the style of a Viennese coffee house.

Hugo Braddick of Haworth Tompkins said: “In addition to implementing physical improvements such as expanding the institute’s research and collection spaces, the brief seeks to revive the original spirit of discovery and debate of Aby Warburg’s science of culture.”



Source: Warburg Institute. Warburg Institute on Woburn Square in Bloomsbury

The work will also give the existing library spatial capacity for another 20 years of growth, refurbish the stacks and reinstate Warburg’s unique classification system, which has been partially dispersed due to lack of space.

The institute, next to the University of London Union and Christ the King Church on Woburn Square, is noted for its interdisciplinary research extending across the histories of art, science and religion to anthropology and psychology.

It prides itself on its “engagement with what are often considered the superstitious, irrational and emotional elements of cultural phenomena. This has enabled some of its most significant contributions to the understanding of both the dynamics and forms of cultural transmission”.