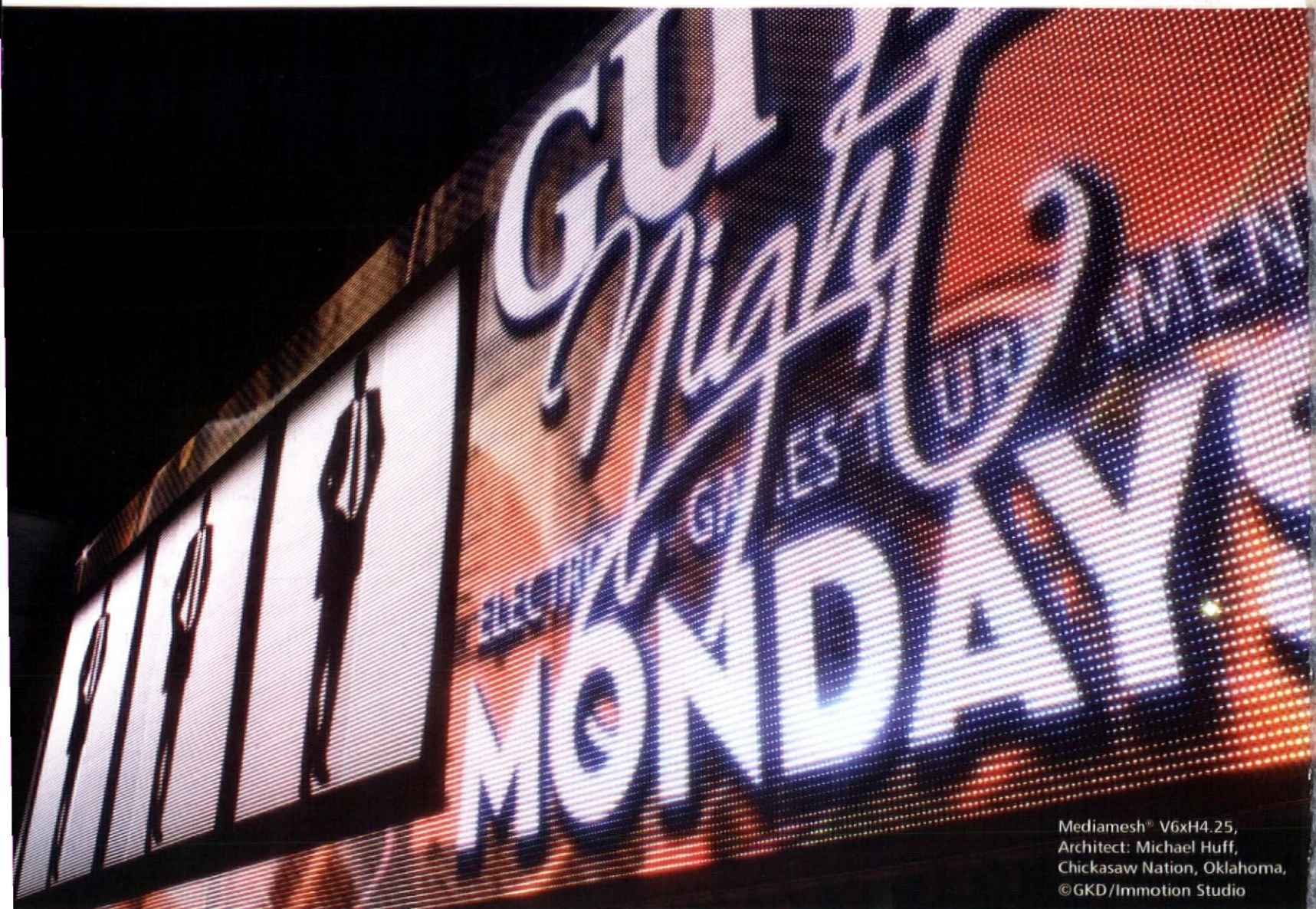




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Cover: historic  
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from *Landscape Futures:  
Instruments, Devices and  
Architectural Inventions*  
(reviewed p104)

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'Chipperfield quoted  
the late David Sylvester  
saying that the artist  
has no greater enemy  
than the architect'  
**Adrian Dannatt, p44**

'Architectural debate  
in London is like an  
overcrowded party at  
which the fashionable  
guests all shout louder  
and louder to be sure  
of being heard'  
**Niall Hobhouse, p102**

'The speculators have  
defeated the green  
campaigners and the  
North Pole will melt  
all the faster, while  
the sound of the bell  
ringing for the end of  
playtime is mistaken  
for a dance tune'  
**Alan Powers, p104**

'Jennifer Bloomer  
finds Louis Sullivan's  
decoration analogous to  
the brocade or even the  
plaiting of pubic hair'  
**Paul Davies, p110**



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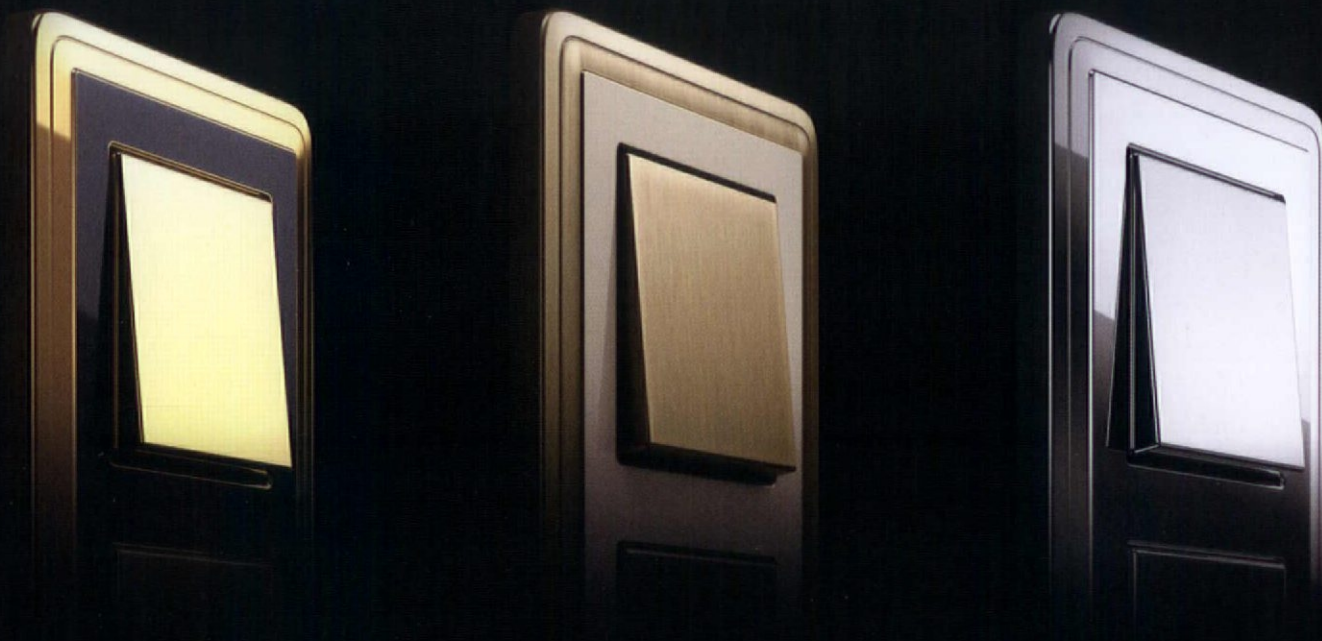
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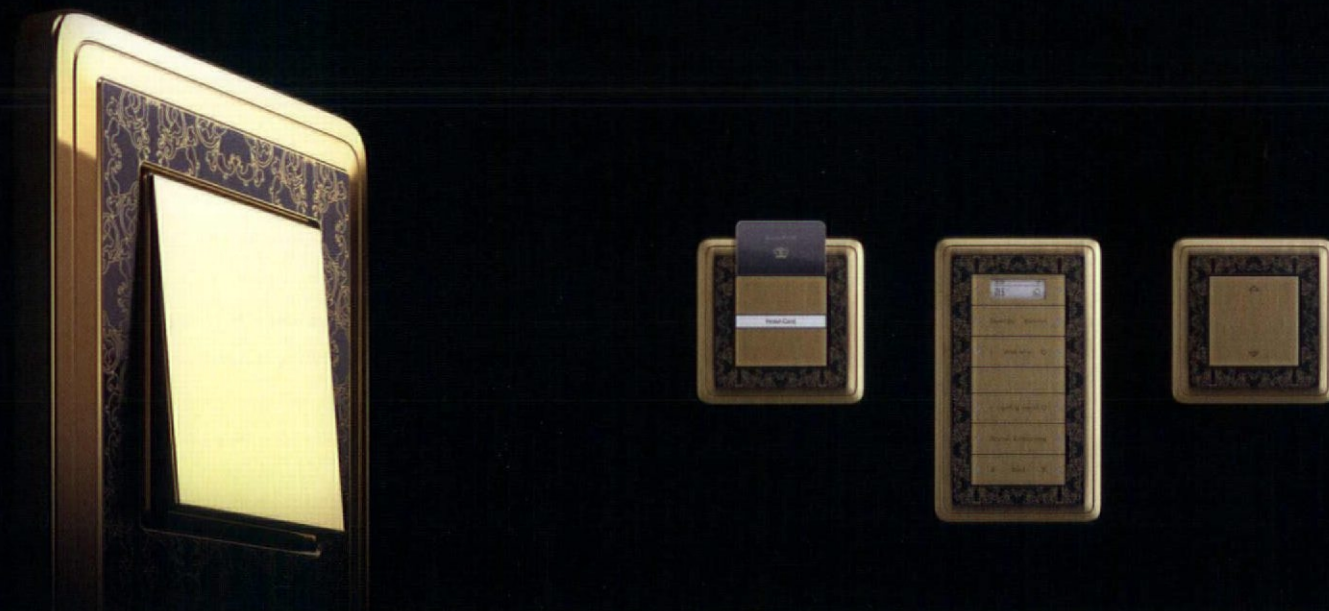
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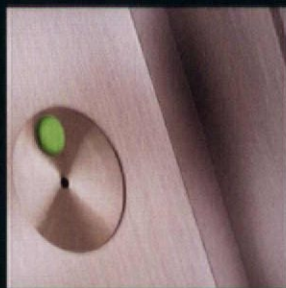
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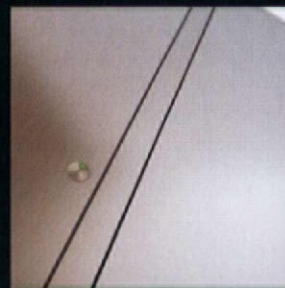
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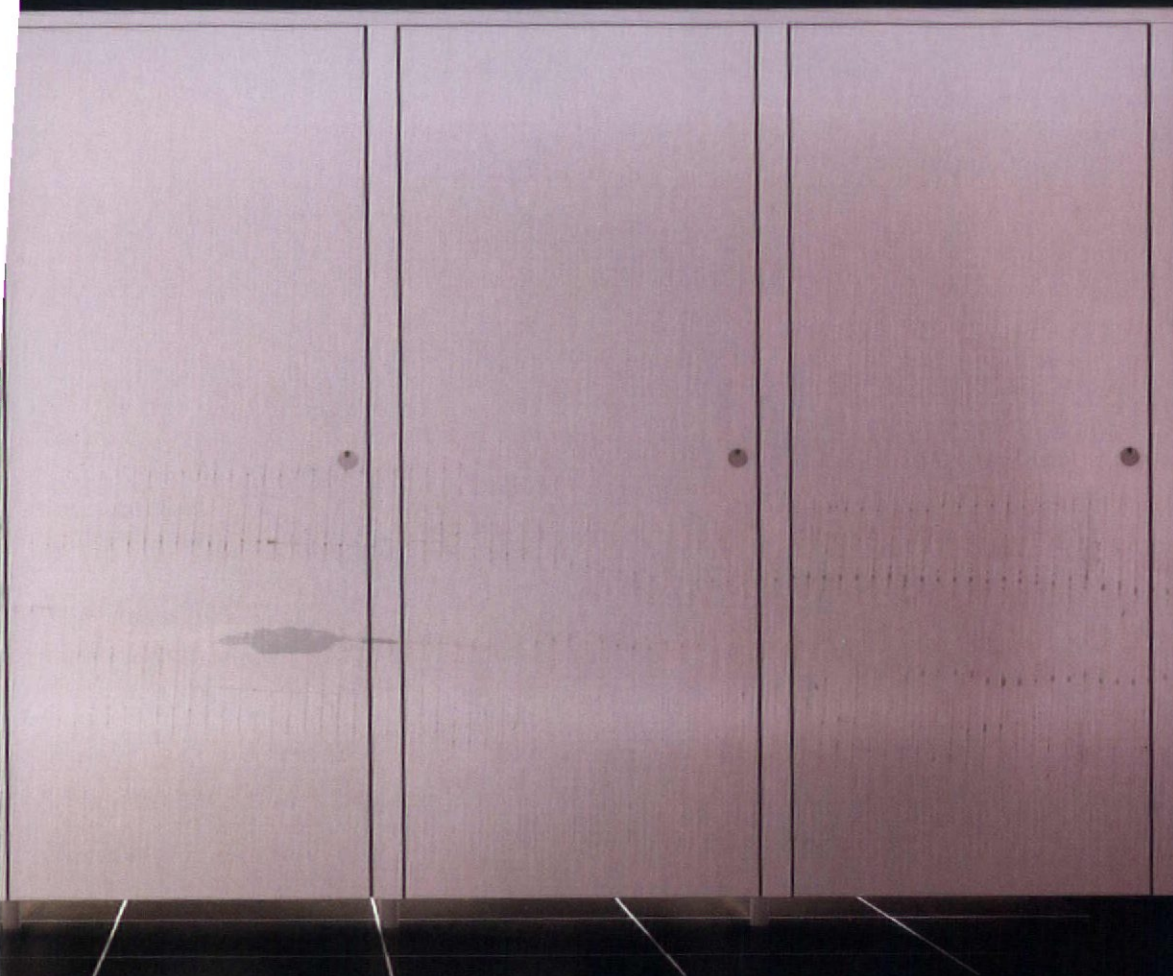
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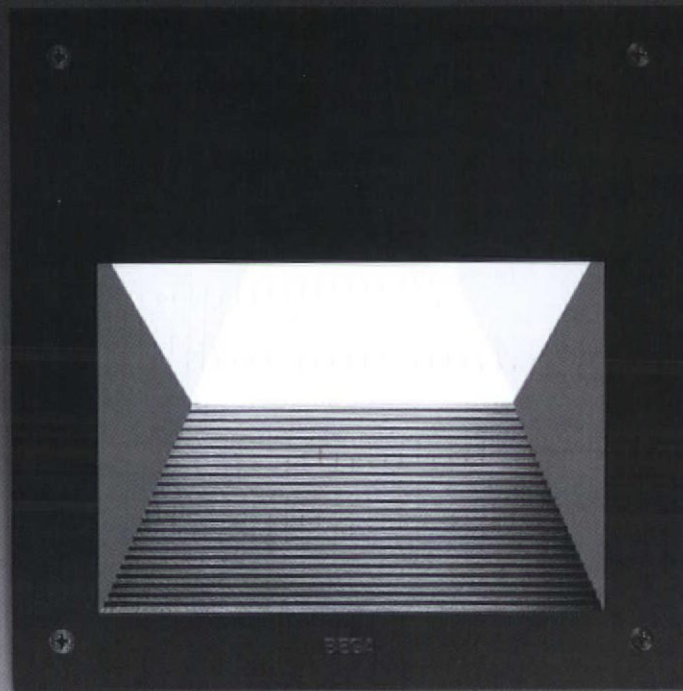


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# Editorial view

## **Sustained by the human factor, the networked world is creating a new sense of place**

How can architecture truly ground itself in an age of increased cultural and social homogenisation? The modern era has been dominated by the systematic erosion of difference and plurality, and the commodification of culture. While representing obvious material advancement and social liberalisation, these globalising forces also invariably involve the marginalising of traditional cultures and a disengagement with the past.

In its quest for reinvention, architecture has often found itself chasing ephemeral novelty rather than engaging with tangible realities. Reacting against this was the notion of Critical Regionalism, as advanced by historians and theorists such as Kenneth Frampton, Christian Norberg-Schulz and William JR Curtis. At its most relevant, Critical Regionalism addressed the particulars of place and culture, mining everyday life and perceptions for intimations about a truly progressive future. Drawing upon indigenous wisdom it penetrated beyond the superficial features of regional style to explore a more eloquent, authentic and resonant architecture rooted in responses to landscape, climate and context.

Critical Regionalism showed that investigation of the local is a fundamental step in the rehumanisation of architecture. But the world moves on. Most genuine vernacular traditions are now either extinct or under threat. And in any case, contemporary architects cannot simply reuse and appropriate such precedents without fatally devaluing them.

Paradoxically, while we are more connected than ever, we are also more atomised and dislocated. From Houston to Hanoi, you can be cosseted in the same experiential cocoon of global brands and lifestyle. This makes the humanising impetus behind Critical Regionalism even more relevant, but how can it be reframed for the current age?

One possible response, proposed in *Broader View* (p22), is Network Specifism, which seeks to ground architecture in a particular network rather than a particular place. 'The capacity of a network to connect and bring together people across a breadth of scales seems to provide a new way of mediating between the global and the local,' write Carlo Ratti, Antoine Picon et al. 'It is the fluid interface between the individual and the collective.'

Architecture has always been a collaborative enterprise involving many hands, and teams are now increasingly globally networked. But networks of human interaction are, crucially, locally grounded, which gives projects and initiatives their own authentic character. 'In this sense Network Specifism could be considered a redefinition of Critical Regionalism', say Ratti and Picon. 'In the latter, local culture serves as a lens to inflect local architectural production. According to Network Specifism, this very lens itself could change based not only on the building's place but also on the networked community that contributes to it.' In effect, 'the local becomes relational', impelled and sustained by the human factor.

**Catherine Slessor, Editor**



# Overview

## McCrowd funding

Hoping to spearhead a bottom-up housing revolution in Britain, Kevin McCloud talks exclusively to *Will Hunter* about his plans to use crowd-funding to bring the self-build dream to the mass market

Kevin McCloud has been a fixture in British television life for the last dozen years as the amiable presenter of *Grand Designs*, the flagship property programme of Channel 4. Explaining the format for international readers, it begins to sound almost quaintly geared towards our national psyche. We have a saying that 'An Englishman's home is his castle', and the show essentially follows those in these isles trying to make some iteration of this dream a reality.

Each episode chronicles the travails of a single project, with the opening optimism of the owners almost-inevitably followed by teary timetable and budget overruns (as the experimental windows arrive on site the wrong size; or an ancient burial ground is unearthed; or the structure collapses ...). The formula doesn't stale as strife isn't always followed by a happy ending: for all the jealous-making projects, a few turn out to be howlingly ugly, while others so overshoot that the narrative rounds off with the vexed building unfinished.

In the British imagination McCloud is fondly associated with domestic innovations, and in 2007 he furthered this by setting up a development company, Hab Housing. The ambition was to offer a design-led alternative to the monotony of the suburban mass-housing market, and he poached Isabel Allen from the editorship of the AR's sister magazine, *The Architects' Journal*, to become his design director. In 2011 Hab completed its first scheme comprising 42 new homes in Swindon designed by Glenn Howells (AR January 2012), and today it has a handful of other projects on site or on the drawing board by architects including AHMM, Sarah Wigglesworth and DSDHA.

Now Hab wants to expand into the custom-build market. To this end, last month McCloud launched a crowd-funding campaign to raise £1.5m, selling 20 per cent of the business

through Crowdcube in order to invest in the infrastructure to support and develop such schemes. 'When you begin to look at what the custom-build route delivers it becomes very compelling for developers and social housing organisations,' he says, 'because you're effectively taking people very early on in the process and forging bonds between them – which otherwise takes a long time – and using them to create a better building that will have a little bit more individuality about it.'

Custom-build is not new, and is much more popular on the continent than it is in Britain. Almere in the Netherlands is a noted example. With a population today of nearly 200,000 people, it was started in the 1970s on land reclaimed from the sea and developed impressively quickly – but the results were felt by many to be dreary, uniform and soulless. In 2006, local people started to be allowed to buy their own land, and to date more than 1,000 homes have been built in this way. In 2011, the British housing minister was inspired by his visit, and the government has now set aside £30m of loan finance to ignite community-based custom-build over here.

'Almost every self-build ever constructed demonstrates that when you have a client actively involved you get a better built

product – because someone is there acting as the site manager in a more engaged way than someone you might employ,' says McCloud. 'In terms of social cohesion, sustainability, build quality and deliverability: in all these things there's plenty to suggest that community custom-build is a fantastic route.'

Many volume housebuilders in Britain already offer individuals some version of this, but Hab wants to provide a much more integrated and engaged service. 'The reason I'm excited about it is that – unlike many other developers – with us, we spend a lot of time pre-planning in design, and we spend a lot of time pre-planning in communities,' says McCloud. 'We'll do exactly the same as we've ever done, but we'll introduce customers to the process earlier.'

Hab will perform a range of functions, from being responsible for the creation of the design codes with the local authority to providing physical back-up and training on site. 'It needs mentoring,' he explains. 'We'll be there to support self-builders. You can't expect people just to turn up on site and put a hard hat on and become the client.' And beyond the individual plots, they see their role as adding value to all the bits in between, providing excellent public realm and community opportunities for social sustainability.

It is in this arena that Hab primarily wishes to distinguish itself from the competition. 'If you improve the social sustainability, you improve the well-being. All the standard indicators – of how many people do you know on your street, how many conversations do you have in a day, when was the last time you helped a neighbour, etc – go to demonstrate this,' argues McCloud. 'It is going to become an enormously important part of how we organise ourselves spatially in the future, not just to reduce our environmental impact, but also to find happiness through social relationships.'



Hab Housing founder Kevin McCloud





PAUL RATTERY

Hab's first scheme: the Triangle by Glenn Howells Architects in Swindon is an exemplary riposte to the dreariness and mediocrity of most suburban volume housebuilding

Hab sees a perfect fit between the self-build model and using crowd-funding to capitalise the business – both of which are about opening up opportunities and engaging a much wider group of people. ‘We’re interested in doing things differently and in reaching a broad constituency. We’re not selling yachts to wealthy individuals, we’re selling houses to the largest number of people we can find,’ says McCloud, who has set the minimum investment at only £100. ‘The bigger effect we have in the housing market, the better. Changing expectations is a large part of what we do. Crowd-funding is therefore of great appeal because it’s getting out to the biggest number of people.’

Though more populist in his expression, the underlying thinking chimes with much that has been written in the AR recently, not least *The Big Rethink* campaign, which spoke of the importance of showing

the positives of sustainable living, in order to effect faster change by making it something chosen out of desire (rather than doom-mongered guilt). In the Neighbourhood Issue (AR June), guest editor Isabel Allen reversed President Roosevelt’s famous maxim – ‘If you build it, they will come’ – to conclude that today you can form a group of neighbours first and then build the neighbourhood. She championed the notion that: ‘Big ideas take root in people, and conversation, in common purpose and shared dreams.’

It is a line of thought explored in the next article below on how online communities interface with the real world; and in *Broader View* (page 22), where the notion of Network Specificism as a type of 21st-century app-update to Critical Regionalism is unveiled. As the human relationships and interconnections created in the digital arena begin to provide

the motoring forces reshaping the built environment, the old anxiety that the internet would supplant real face-to-face interaction is beginning to be superseded by the intuition that it might become its saviour.

## GLOBAL

### Crowdsourcing utopia

*Phineas Harper*

Throughout the 19th century non-conformist communities would pool their resources to build small chapels, modest architectural symbols of unity and a shared civic ambition. Today the congregations of those chapels are dwindling but the idea of crowdsourcing urban renewal is commanding a new lease of life, harnessing dispersed networks of individuals connected through the internet. A generation of intrepid software

developers is creating powerful tools for ordinary people to work together to achieve civic goals.

SeeClickFix.com and FixMyStreet.com are US and UK websites where users can report problems in their area directly to the relevant local authority. Collapsed walls, broken signage and faulty streetlighting can be logged by anyone in the community. Reports are mapped online while statistics about how swiftly issues are dealt with are automatically published, encouraging authorities to act quickly. Rather than individual complainants acting in isolation, the sites allow strangers to cooperate in holding their elected officials to account while improving their public spaces. Critics argue the sites foster apathy – encouraging the public to rely on local authorities for relatively minor maintenance jobs rather than taking responsibility as a neighbourhood, but nevertheless, the idea of using





RCA graduate Sam Aitkenhead's proposal for a crowdsourced self-build neighbourhood

decentralised web-based input as a generator for development is gathering momentum.

Bristol, Connecticut has implemented a radical scheme of crowdsourcing ideas for major urban interventions in a bid to regenerate the deteriorating city centre. The Bristolrising project allows residents to pitch any urban idea publicly, subjecting it to critique through social media. If an idea gets above a certain threshold of positive votes the municipal government conducts a feasibility study and takes the idea forward to planning.

Ideas generated this way now under construction include a performing arts centre, live-work units, a river walk and rooftop gardens. It is an appealing concept that directly hands agency to enthusiastic local actors, but the system is only effective because the incumbent officials already support it.

Kickstarter, a crowdsourced funding website, has shown that, presented with a compelling case, the internet community will generously donate to see creative projects realised. Since it was founded in 2009 Kickstarter (which is just one of many crowdsourced funding models) has raised over \$700m, posing the question of whether something similar could be harnessed

architecturally. Attempting to answer that is Brickstarter, a more complex concept that is both a fundraising platform and community advocacy tool to persuade decision makers to back popular projects. Brickstarter is still on the drawing board but if realised it would wield the potential to dramatically change the balance of power in traditional urban development.

The list goes on: Betaville is an online 3D environment mirroring certain US cities. It allows anyone to log-in and embellish an area using free software like SketchUp then share the designs for others to develop. CoContest enables users to launch mini international architectural competitions online for small projects.

Crowdsourcing.org is a collaborative archive keeping track of the growing number of similar initiatives springing up around the world. A shift is taking place from regional proximity being the critical factor in cultivating coherent neighbourhood identity to participation in networks of stakeholders connected digitally. As this takes place internet-based architectural tools will catalyse a new paradigm of cooperative but geographically dispersed communities working together on grand civic ambitions.

## LOS ANGELES, USA

### Core values

Michael Webb

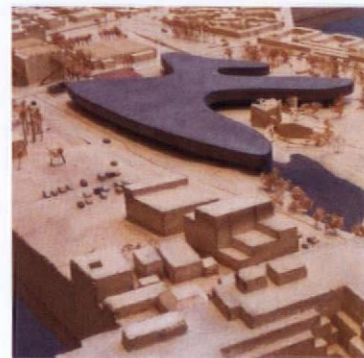
The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, re-energised over the past seven years by its director, Michael Govan, has unveiled an audacious scheme to replace its decrepit and dysfunctional core. An exhibition of models and drawings, *The Presence of the Past: Peter Zumthor Reconsiders LACMA*, is on display to 15 September. Taking his cues from the horizontality of LA and the tar pits that adjoin the expansive site, the Swiss architect sketched a biomorphic form comprising a single floor of galleries, wrapped in glass and supported on transparent plinths. The building would hover over landscaped open space like a great black flower, reaching out to Renzo Piano's axial additions and Bruce Goff's quirky Japanese Pavilion, as well as to the reticent George Page Museum, which exhibits mastodon bones retrieved from the tar. It's a design that evolved organically from six years of informal discussions, and it responds to the multi-cultural metropolis, the challenge of the site and the opportunity to present an encyclopaedic collection in an entirely new way.

Rem Koolhaas took an equally bold approach when he won the 2001 competition to remodel LACMA with a proposal to tear down everything but the Goff and install the entire collection within a huge translucent hangar. The design was schematic, but it prompted fresh thinking: the old buildings weren't worth the expense of renewing. In the early '60s, when LACMA was split off from the LA County Museum of History, Science and Art, its first director argued for a building by Mies. That was too adventurous for the trustees, who picked William Pereira to design a mini-Lincoln Center: three paper-thin pavilions on a podium that seemed to float on water.

Tar seeped into the pool, which was quickly drained; the pavilions were submerged in a bombastic 1986 addition that presents a blank wall to Wilshire Boulevard. The complex is a great muddle, aesthetically and in organisation, and the original buildings are seismically deficient. 'If there were a big earthquake, you'd be safer standing under Michael Heizer's rock,' says Govan, referring to the museum's celebrated example of earth art.

Though the trustees approved the Koolhaas scheme, it quickly floundered for lack of leadership and uncertainty on costs. Instead, they commissioned RPBW to masterplan the site, creating a new entry on an axis from the street, and new galleries astride an east-west axis (AR May 2005). This extends through the core buildings and links them to a former department store that LACMA planned to remodel for itself, but has now leased to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for its film museum.

Govan arrived at LACMA in 2006 with strong opinions on the fusion of art and architecture. At the Guggenheim he had worked with Frank Gehry on Bilbao, and as director of the DIA Art Foundation in New York he created the DIA Beacon gallery from a former factory, and approved Walter de Maria's choice of Zumthor to design a 5,000 square metre pavilion to house the *I Ching*, one of his largest installations – a project as yet unrealised. The architect's mastery of light and space in his



Peter Zumthor's proposal for LACMA





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Bregenz and Cologne museums made him an ideal choice for LACMA, and the DIA project suggested he could make a leap in scale and complexity.

'I knew we wanted an architect with a great sensitivity to the site,' says Govan. 'At first, we never considered what a new building would look like – neither of us thinks that way. I showed him Rem's plan and we exchanged ideas, using words like transparency, accessibility and non-hierarchical. I wanted a horizontal museum with no primary facade; one that can be approached from any direction with all the galleries on one level.'

The allocation of space had been worked out in 2000; now it was time to consider the ways it could be used to intensify the art-going experience. Too many museums (MoMA is a prime example) behave like sharks, constantly moving forward, adding wings and gobbling up everything in their path. Govan decided to stay within the footprint of the old complex and accept a closed form that cannot be added to. 'When the envelope grows too large it burdens the site and the budget, while diminishing the quality of the experience,' he insists. 'We should consider other sites in the county for future growth.'

Removing staff offices to a new building across the street helps add 7,000 square metres of display space, which should be sufficient for the next 25 years. There is no closed storage; rather, secondary items are tightly clustered and put on public view, in contrast to spare displays of one or two exceptional pieces. Signature works, such as the huge Tony Smith sculpture, will be installed at points of entry, and visitors will move around the periphery on what Zumthor calls 'a transparent veranda rather than a Beaux-Arts spine'. Break-out areas punctuate the grid, and a rare Persian carpet surrounded by steps evokes the enclosed garden of the 2012 Serpentine Pavilion. The museum

was designed from the inside out and that process generated the shell; now the interior has to be fleshed out and the exhibition can only hint at what that holds in store. The plinths will house ancillary functions and provide multiple points of access.

What makes this project so extraordinary, besides the originality of its form, is the extended period of gestation. Client and architect rethought every aspect of an encyclopaedic museum, as though the institution was beginning from scratch. Govan wants to increase attendance while providing more opportunities for quiet contemplation. He seeks a configuration that would allow art works to be rotated to tell different stories, dissolving the boundaries of geography and historical chronology. The linear narrative of Western art doesn't work for pre-Colombian and Asian cultures, where time may be considered as a circular phenomenon. Walls can also be eliminated or moved inside, to provide a seamless link between the urban landscape and interior spaces, and allow selected objects to be on view, day and night. Most remarkably, the solar panels that cover the roof will generate more energy than the building consumes, greatly reducing the cost of the operation.

If the trustees approve the scheme and are able to raise the funds (currently estimated at \$650 million), the new museum could open in 2025. It will take vision and philanthropy of a kind that LA has rarely manifested in the century since swashbuckling pioneers conjured a metropolis from the desert. Govan is convinced it can be done, and the construction of Piano's Resnick Pavilion and major site-specific art works, as well as a quantum leap in acquisition funds support his case. LACMA's collections are exemplary; they deserve the finest frame. And a city that routinely settles for second-rate architecture needs a worthy civic hub.

## OXFORD, UK

### Back from the dead

Tom Wilkinson

As a gang of estate residents dressed in frock coats and ratty wigs stared severely at us from the screen – looking like an acrimonious reunion of the Adam Ant fan club – I felt a pang of recognition. It's not often that an academic paper has such a visceral effect, but David Roberts' research into the demise of social housing hit close to home, literally; Roberts and his collaborators have been investigating the demolition of a 1930s neo-Georgian housing estate in East London, and its replacement by mixed-occupancy

faux-modern flats – one of which I inhabit (perhaps that frisson was something more like guilt).

Presented at the conference *Stylistic Dead Ends? Fresh Perspectives on British Architecture Between the Wars* (St John's, Oxford, 20-21 June), the film showed residents discussing their condemned estate while dressed as characters from Samuel Richardson's 18th-century novels, after whom the neo-Georgian blocks had been named. These invocations of Richardson's moralising tone – once naively, by idealistic planners, and now questioningly by the inhabitants of the homes those planners built – remind us that the query in this event's title is not just a matter of academic interest (démodé buildings are



The demise of social housing was highlighted by residents dressed in Richardsonian garb





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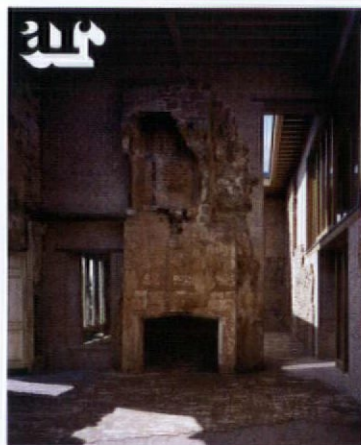


more easily demolished, after all). That the battle between Modernism and its alternatives continues, and continues to have a real impact on people's lives, was the abiding impression left by this thematically rich conference (put together by Neal Shasore and David Lewis).

Setting out the case for a more panoramic view of 20th-century architecture, in his keynote lecture Alan Powers argued for the inclusion of what he called Otherism: a neglected tradition of 'good-mannered Modernism' descended from stripped classicism, refracted through Goldfinger's 2 Willow Rd, and ending in the subtle vernacular of Tayler and Green – before being killed off by the Brutalists.

As Powers and Tim Benton discussed, the time seems right for this project: the autos-da-fé of the '20s and '30s have dimmed, and the bad-tempered tone of the postwar reappraisal of Modernism's legacy has mellowed. In the '70s, when Benton helped curate the *Thirties* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, knickers were still very much in a twist. The tantrums of the antis corresponded to the triumph of Modernism in architectural history – and to the end of its dominance in architectural practice. But despite the collapse of Ronan Point, the narrative related by Pevsner and co had become a new orthodoxy.

Though this narrative has been amended in recent years by people such as Powers and Elizabeth Darling, it has not – Powers argued – been fundamentally challenged (although as Jessica Kelly's paper on the AR's former editor JM Richards showed, some had been challenging it since the '50s). This event set out to conquer those dark regions of interwar architecture that once lay beyond the historian's pale: neo-Georgian housing estates and neo-Gothic crematoria, Islamicising petrol stations for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the Neoclassical coda of Charles Holden's career,



Half of this year's Stirling Prize nominations have graced the AR's cover: from left, Astley Castle by Witherford Watson Mann; Niall McLaughlin's chapel at Ripon College; and Park Hill renewal, Sheffield by Hawkins\Brown. Congratulations to our cover stars!

Herbert Baker's blowsy imperial bombast, Tudorbethan shopping parades, and the Art Deco mansions of monkey-loving nudist Oliver Hill. Were these all stylistic dead ends? (And, I wondered, did this tradition ever really die – doesn't it keep coming back, zombie-like, in speculative suburban housing, the palaces of Chelsea oligarchs, and Sainsbury's superstores?)

One of the biggest challenges presented by this macaronic buffet of oddballs, losers and the terminally infra dig (as Andrew Ballantyne argued in his paper on Tudorbethan housing) is weaving these various strands into a narrative using the current methods of architectural history. Despite recent decades of Poststructuralism, the discipline still often sets out with the assumption that cultural productions reflect the zeitgeist – but Ballantyne thought that the wild variety of interwar architecture voided any chance



of identifying a unified spirit of the period.

There is certainly a need to incorporate what he calls 'Tudoresque' suburbia into the history of interwar architecture. It is, as Ballantyne pointed out, where many of us live – and his work of historical recovery is for this reason vitally important. But instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we could ask if a more nuanced Hegelianism than this slightly straw-mannish version could be deployed to explore the conflicting forces coexisting in one historical moment.

One dialectic that did emerge quite clearly in the course of the conference was between two architectural languages, the symbolic and the spatial. The latter, popularised by Giedion, thrives today – especially in phenomenologically inclined criticism – but the symbolic potential of architecture (so the argument goes) was largely suppressed along with ornament by the Modernists.

In light of this, several speakers reexamined architectural sculpture, and indigenous theories of architectural symbol were unearthed (most notably in a paper by Neal Shasore on facades and the public in the writings of Arthur Trystan Edwards). You might ask how new this revisionism is: wasn't interest



in the symbolic potential of architecture rekindled some time ago, in the '70s? Preempting this criticism, Alan Powers dismissed the Postmodern moment as 'a carnivalesque re-enactment of Otherism played by Modernists'. While there's something in that, I don't think we can question the sincerity of some current architects working in the Postmodern tradition: practices such as FAT, who are critically engaging with architecture's 'stylistic dead ends'.

Perhaps this activity reflects the same spirit of conciliation that animated the conference itself. Reflecting on the tone of the discussions, Powers related a remark made to him by Andrew Saint: 'this is an incredible event, Alan: no one is angry!' But there is still plenty in the legacy of interwar architecture worth fighting for – not least the ethos of public housing.

## AR COMPETITION

### Emerging Architecture

The ar+d Awards are the world's most prestigious awards for young architects with a prize fund of £10,000. This year's jury includes Diébédo Francis Kéré from Burkino Faso and Manuelle Gautrand from France. The entry deadline is 30 August. Full information can be found at [architectural-review.com/emerging](http://architectural-review.com/emerging)



Monkey-loving nudist architect Oliver Hill



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# Broader view

## The power of networks

In this co-authored essay *Carlo Ratti, Antoine Picon, Alex Haw and Matthew Claudel* introduce Network Specifism: a redefinition of Critical Regionalism for the 21st century

In 1961 the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur observed: 'Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movie, the same slot machines, the same plastic or aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda.'<sup>1</sup>

Witness the problem of universalisation: a toxic byproduct of the globalisation process. Of course, we are familiar with solo cups and Oreos, but what does this mean for architecture and urbanism? Will all of our cities soon look the same? Are we on track to pepper them with a familiar mix of Hadid and Koolhaas, and then again with anonymous Modernist blocks and Postmodernist McDonald's?

A famous answer to this question, one that gained great popularity towards the end of the past millennium, in the wake of the Postmodernist debate, was so-called Critical Regionalism. It championed place, above all, as a key force in shaping modern architecture and reconnecting design with specific cultural and natural forces. In the words of Kenneth Frampton, one of its main proponents: 'The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place. It is clear from the above that Critical Regionalism depends upon maintaining a high level of critical self-consciousness. It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in a tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site.'<sup>2</sup>

Critical Regionalism had a noteworthy impact, providing a useful lens to engage and weave together many experiments of the late-20th century, and equipping a new generation with fresh inspiration. However, its propulsive force seems to be evaporating. 'Starchitecture' is again on the rise, gracing skylines

of cities across the world with their share of signature icons (or, standard trophies).

In a certain sense, Critical Regionalism has been a victim of its success, as the leaders it brought into the global spotlight began building internationally. How does a Mexican-inspired Legorreta-designed building fit with London's genius loci? Its DNA begins to unravel the moment it is reproduced. The minutiae of place can't become a signature, if there is an expectation of working in a different region. Or more succinctly, it is the fine line between 'specificity' and 'inflexibility'. As these buildings are scattered around the globe, seemingly at random, it appears to be a radical fulfilment of inflammatory Koolhaasian rhetoric: architecture 'is no longer part of any urban tissue. It exists; at most, it coexists. Its subtext is "fuck context".'<sup>3</sup>

While the answer of Critical Regionalism might be outdated, the main questions behind it are more urgent than ever. If Frampton grounded his theory on the 'peculiarities of a particular place' could we respond by grounding theory on 'the peculiarities of a particular network'? Could this approach provide a new answer to the old problem of universalisation? With today's technologies and tools, a robust 'Networked Specifism' would emerge.

Within the conceptual bounds of Network Specifism, place would automatically manifest through the human lens – in other words, through the vibrant network of people who contribute to a project. In recent years, complex scientific analysis has shown us that networks of human interaction are locally grounded. It is what the technologic anthropologist Christopher Kelty describes as a 'recursive public' – an open community that is both a result and a generator of networks.<sup>4</sup>

The capacity of a network to connect people across a

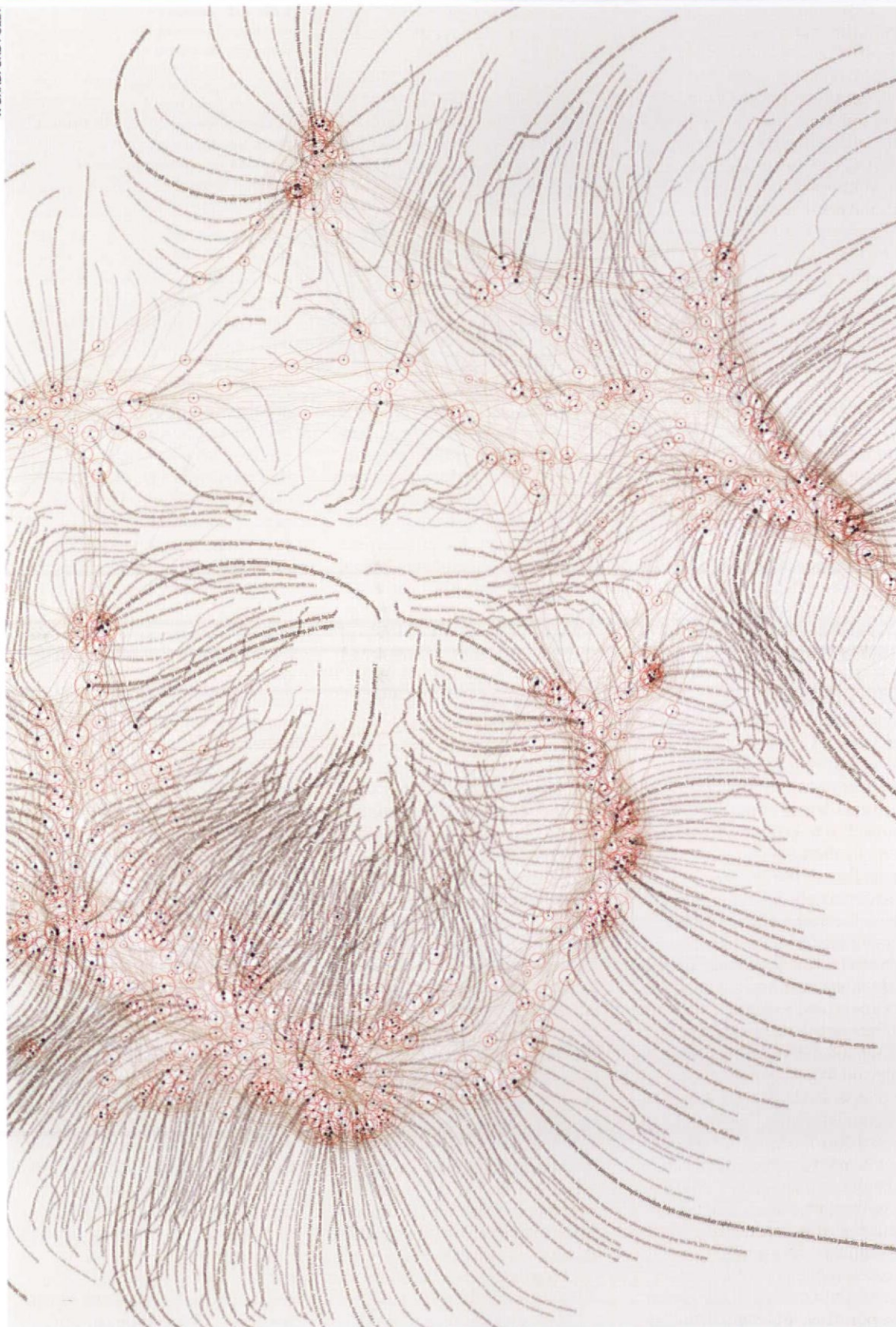
breadth of scales seems to provide a new way of mediating between the global and the local. It is the fluid interface between the individual and the collective.

And this isn't only happening in the realm of architecture. New fields like 'theoretical ecology' and 'network analytics' are emerging across disciplines, providing meta-analysis of the increasing connectivity within and between those disciplines themselves. They address the network – the fluid interface – and its constitution, propagation and potential valorisation. Science research, in particular, is undergoing a sea change in networked publication and collaborative writing, to the point that an ecosystem which was formerly populated by the likes of Bohr and Einstein is now driven almost exclusively by co-authored research. Just a handful of the 700 papers published in *Nature Magazine* in 2008 were written by a single author.<sup>5</sup> The same tide is rising, with more or less quantifiable metrics, across almost every discipline, from Broadway musicals to finance.

Even within the bounds of architectural practice, different forms of network seem to be emerging: networks of design professionals using synchronised digital tools to work together from across the globe; networks of competences that bridge traditional disciplines; networks of citizens and building users, who can embark on digitally-enabled participatory processes (a kind of participation 2.0). But now that we have the capacity for hyper-networking (almost limitless cloud-connection on the global scale), the challenge is in bringing it back down to earth, so to speak.

Since 2009, Kickstarter (kickstarter.com) has proven that – given a platform – anyone can make a compelling pitch to the world at large, and have a reasonable hope of getting their idea off the ground. With Kickstarter as a megaphone,





Topic map: sorting 800,000 scientific papers into 776 paradigms organised by connections, aggregations and popularity

voices reverberate throughout a global network and echo back the support of anyone from grandma to Japanese businessmen. Effective, but vast. More recently, Brickstarter ([brickstarter.org](http://brickstarter.org)) has emerged as the equivalent in urban activism, providing a similar venue for raising funding and support, but on the local scale – cities, neighbourhoods, communities. It targets the sorts of DIY projects that are typically checkmated when they run into bureaucracy, lack of funding and insufficient visibility. And instead of dollars and cents, you might expect support on the order of rolled-up sleeves and potting soil. Brickstarter is essentially a case study in Network Specificism.

As such, Network Specificism could provide very different outcomes based on where it is practised. The aggregation of people's input on a local project in a mid-sized city will inform the outcome and give it a unique flavour. A global project – say, a new building for the Olympics or the World Expo – could draw on an equally global networked input, mediating between the genius loci and the global zeitgeist.

In this sense Network Specificism could be seen as a redefinition of Critical Regionalism. In the latter, local culture serves to inflect local architectural production. With Network Specificism, this very lens itself could change based not only on the building's place but also on the networked community that contributes to it. The local becomes relational.

1. Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures' (1961), in *History and Truth*, pp276-77.
2. Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance' (2002), in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, p21.
3. Rem Koolhaas, 'Bigness, or, The Problem of Large' (1994), in *SMLXL*, pp494-517.
4. Christopher Kelty, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* (2008), p3.
5. John Whitfield, 'Collaboration: Group Theory' (2008), in *Nature Magazine*, 455, 720-723.



# View from...



A bystander checks debris around burnt-out cars after recent riots in Stockholm. Sweden's high but expensive social housing standards are under threat from politicians anxious to cut costs, exacerbating tensions between deprived and wealthy neighbourhoods

## Stockholm

Housing, once the bedrock of Sweden's welfare state, now needs radical intervention, says *Rasmus Wærn*

Sweden's development of the welfare state was admired long after it ceased to live up to expectations. The absence of social housing was a cause for pride. Instead of housing for specific categories of people, such as those who can't afford market prices, every home met a set standard in terms of planning and construction. Any extra cost was paid by taxes. This eventually led to the most generous housing standards in the world. A costly strategy, of course, but as long as the state could afford subsidies, housing was a pillar in welfare politics and an industry that involved most of the nation's architects.

The whole set-up vanished decades ago, but its legacy remains, with a relatively large housing stock still encapsulating the vision of a welfare state. However, the gap between vision and reality has now become painfully obvious.

Sweden's growing cities have a huge demand for homes that the market can't meet. Sweden and the Czech Republic are currently the only countries in the European Union without any non-commercial alternative to the housing market. And a large-scale industry and complex building regulations have made housing a costly affair. The government is now looking for cost reductions in all areas, as further state funding seems out of the question. Architects fear

the return of poor housing for the poor, a spectre Sweden has avoided for almost 90 years.

Yet as long as the effects of the US sub-prime loan crisis are still being felt, it's very unlikely that increased building activity will lower the cost of new homes, or that new subsidies will make them affordable. As the Swedish housing industry is one of the most, if not the most, industrialised in the world, making savings while maintaining decent quality will be tricky. Housing design is back in the hands of a few large construction companies, reminiscent of the infamous 'million programme' of 1965-74 aimed at building a million dwellings in a decade. Quality, diversity and dignified environments were not the main concern then. The current gap between supply and demand has generated intense discussion about what to do and calls for radical solutions. Cheap social housing could well be about to descend on Sweden. Still, it is not the worst case scenario.

Frustration over a segregated housing market has already sparked increasing desperation over the segregated cities that follow from it. In May, violent protests in Husby, a low-income suburb of Stockholm, emphasised the lack of inclusiveness. Burning cars sent a message that housing will be a political issue again.

Though the protests were against authority in general,

rather than specific development plans, as at Istanbul's Taksim Square (AR July 2013), no politician could refrain from bringing them into the larger context of housing and planning policy. But the real issue is how to solve a huge problem without government engagement. There is no lack of building. But there is a lack of housing for those that can't afford new homes. And due to a massive transformation of rented flats into condominiums, older housing stock has now become an investment, changing the image of the home as well as the city. For a growing pool of home owners, the city is a piece of common real estate, and a shortage of housing protects their expensive investments. So a big new subsidised housing programme is not only politically inconceivable, but also threatens this economy of vested interests.

It looks like large cities will continue to build expensive houses, smaller cities less expensive ones, while the housing industry continues to flood the countryside with affordable homes that no one wants. In 1966 the Swedish Prime Minister advised a young couple to move out of Stockholm. I doubt they listened. And with the global rise in city living, this strategy seems even more obsolete. So the market and government end up trying to do things on the cheap, with architecture the inevitable first sacrifice in this crusade.



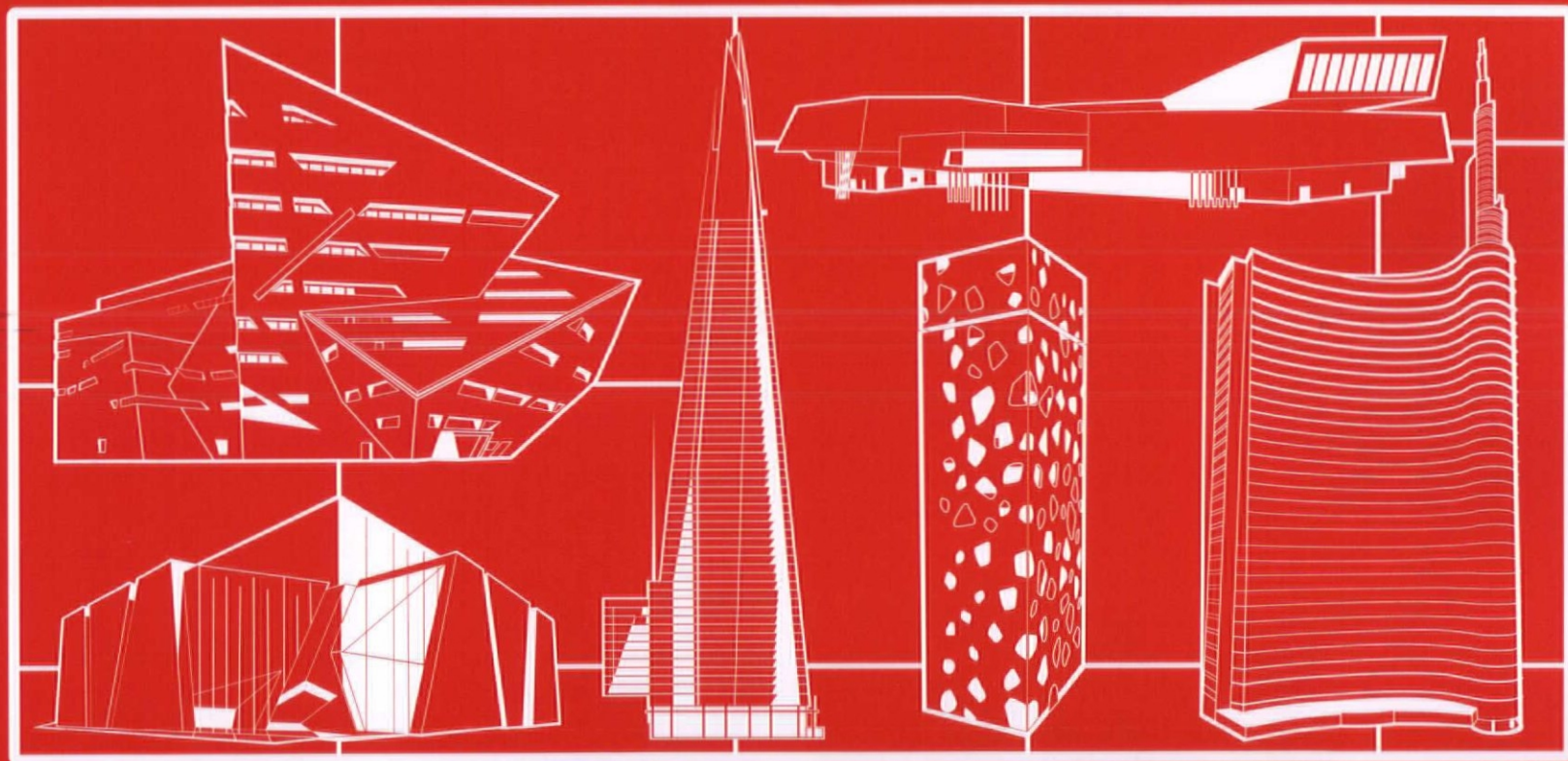
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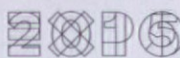
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# Viewpoints



PETER COOK

## What's to stop us diverting a watercourse to create our own riverside idyll?

Why do we so often want to be by the water – even away from the season when many actually want to be in the water? I sit pondering this in an Australian city called Gold Coast where the first generation who escaped into the sun away from Melbourne and Sydney were attracted by the surf and the beach. But as they continued to come in their tens of thousands, they became willing players in another game of ‘hug the water’, only this time along a series of inland lagoons fashioned out of a pliant river delta, where they could have a landing stage and a boat (pity about the sharks).

Florida was, I guess, the model. Even in locations where the sea is a constant threat, such as the Netherlands, a town such as Delft enjoys the tartan of narrow streets and little canals that actually feel so sweet and unthreatening. Then try to imagine Venice on land and so think of Cadiz – charming though its slivers of streets may be – but in the end lacking that watery something.

Nowadays in London, we are becoming quite used to the mysterious upswing of districts that I can remember as being dingy and smelly but which now find themselves unfolding their towpaths and dry white wine decks onto whatever piece of the Grand Union Canal still remains up for grabs.

At which point you open up your mind to a few propositions: look at a kilometre of the Thames estuary called ‘Two Tree Island’ and ask why some smart developer hasn’t planted a new miniature garden city on it?

After all in the hippy ‘70s there was Eel Pie Island, far upstream, whose winsome cottages and air of mystery hold a place in the history of rock ‘n’ roll. So far though, the other just sits there with its two trees. No fun in that.

When teaching in Frankfurt in the ‘80s I was constantly dangling in front of my students the site of the Westhafen (in the River Main), that simply hosted a few nondescript warehouses and further along a tiny island that sits astride an old bridge. My ‘sniff’ can’t have been so far off, for in the intervening years the punters and their architects have planted upmarket apartment blocks (in the typically German ‘villa’ mode) along the river and built a somewhat Gothic pavilion by the bridge that plays a similar role to London’s ‘Serpentine’ Gallery. Art feels so, so much more meaningful on an island does it not?

Whatever machinations it goes through with its concert hall, Hamburg’s port has turned out to be a smart location for small office blocks fashioned by a round-up of likely German architects. So other harbours watch out, for a certain generic harbourside formula seems to run thus: first convert some warehouses into ‘lofts’ and stick at least one Italian restaurant in them. Then hire Calatrava for a bridge (though Wilkinson Eyre are a suitable alternative). Then make sure there is a marker (Pelli in the case of Canary Wharf, Buenos Aires or Santiago – and probably some other places I don’t know). If he’s busy, KPF will do fine. Smaller cities will use the locals: whether Ipswich, Münster or Bordeaux.

The tower is the marker, the bridge brings a feeling of involvement and the Italian restaurant can’t go too far wrong. So back to propositions: why not divert a watercourse, create a lake, replicate a suggestion that there might have been a harbour, once. Insist on a high marker-tower, bridge and new restaurant – maybe Swedish or Vietnamese to be a bit more exotic? For soon we will run out of exploitable old ports. So, in a fit of lateral thinking that derives from hearing Beethoven played well on a portable Yamaha in a Melbourne alley (or was it the Shiraz?), I ask myself, if opera can be staged in a field in the English Midlands, why not a complete faux harbour (waiting for the inevitable kit of features as described); using a bit of after-the-event creativity and the dear old Grand Union Canal again ... maybe somewhere just short of Wolverhampton?

Seriously though, digging a canal or two in a new housing development might, in the long run, be as economic as landscaping the forecourts. Everybody can then boast a waterside residence.

The reflective ripples on the ceiling, the odd duck passing by, the odd tethered boat, a feeling of release that the unowned lawn or the unswept courtyard cannot provide. And in this meandering, or ‘floaty’, train of thought I haven’t even got onto the subject of houseboats.

Where I am now has a district called ‘Surfer’s Paradise’ but I am dreaming of another: let’s call it ‘Punter’s Paradise’ ... you can take that one any way you like.

## LAST WORDS

‘People climbing the Shard might not beat Shell but it does say something about how expensive the viewing platform is’

@blisslikethiss, Twitter, 12 July, on Greenpeace activists scaling the tower in protest against oil and gas drilling in the Arctic

‘We have created a new type of water, which we call “empty water”. This product is not a new faucet, it’s a new philosophy’

Philippe Starck on his new tap design for Axor, 15 July

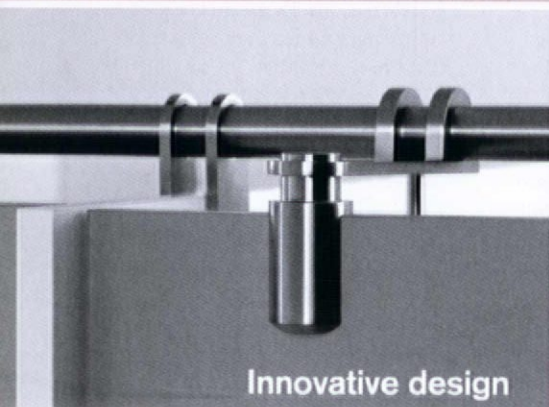
‘When people say that you have got to have vision, well Hitler had vision’

Terry Farrell responds to London Mayor Boris Johnson’s plan to build a £65 billion airport on the Thames Estuary, *Evening Standard*, 15 July



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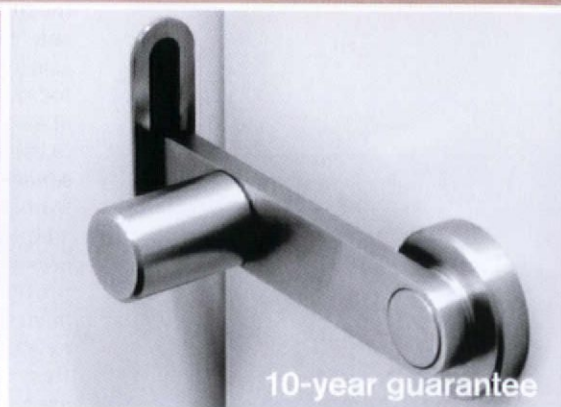
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# Your views

## The Big Rethink elicits further thoughts

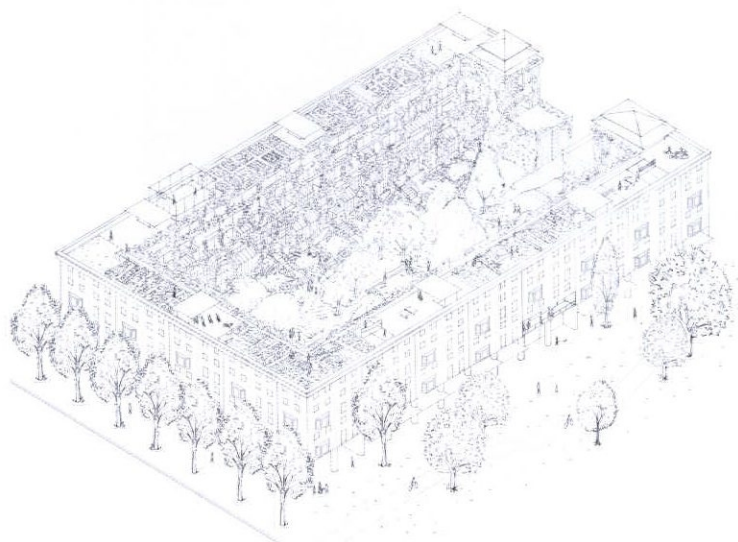
With reference to Maritz Vandenberg's letter (April 2013), I applaud the AR in introducing the series *The Big Rethink*. It was a catalyst for many of my peers to subscribe to the AR again with its renewed focus on critical thought and discourse. I would like to disagree vehemently with Maritz Vandenberg's assertion that real architects do not 'evolve designs in the way of theorists'.

*The Big Rethink* is not about a way of evolving design within the professional practice, it is about periodically asking ourselves (as a profession) the larger and broader questions in the tradition of John Henry Newman, 'true enlargement of the mind is the power of viewing many things at once as a whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values and determining their mutual dependence'.

**Ken Yeh, Darlington, Australia**

Peter Buchanan's *Big Rethink* has been most stimulating, but he has greatly exaggerated a largely non-existent problem, and diverted us from the most pressing architectural problem of our time, in the solution to which the AR can play a valuable role. As regards my first point, the social transformations we have experienced since Georgian and Regency times are at least as great as the ones Buchanan predicts for the future. Yet whole streets and neighbourhoods built 150 and 200 years ago are still happily in use today – even by that high priest of Modernism, Richard Rogers, in his lovely centuries-old Chelsea square. Loose-fit dwellings, built from materials that permit easy adaptation, and designed to be as beautiful as possible, have a proven ability to accommodate huge social change; and while experimental designs such as Buchanan's in your June issue are a useful part of the debate, there is no widespread need for wholly new types of urban layouts and dwelling designs.

The pressing architectural challenge before us is that millions



**A proposal for a new kind of housing block: the climax of Peter Buchanan's *Big Rethink***

of new dwellings will be built in Britain – as elsewhere – in the next 10 or 20 years (according to Boris Johnson, half a million by 2025 in London alone). These will create the townscapes of the future. Such numbers of buildings can't possibly be individually designed. So how can mass excellence be achieved? There is only one answer: by architects starting to develop, without delay, standard house types of various sizes and types which developers can use to create large-scale urban excellence at affordable cost.

These types must be affordable and technically excellent, adaptable to changing uses, and regarded by the public as beautiful; and the designs should cover the whole spectrum from authentic classical to cutting-edge modern, so that all tastes can be catered for. Beauty will have to be a central concern, because no developer can afford to adopt designs the public don't like. Here the AR can make a great contribution. Its coverage of exceptional buildings is superb, gives constant pleasure, and long may this continue. But what about ordinary buildings – ones which modestly fit in with their surroundings, do not draw attention to themselves, and can be replicated en masse by ordinary

builders to form quietly beautiful neighbourhoods with life expectancies of 100 or 150 years? The development of such types to the highest standards is the true architectural problem of our time, and I think the doyenne of the world's architectural magazines owes it to future generations to rise to the challenge!

**Maritz Vandenberg, London**

## Harmonic dissonance

We know that, through evolution, things change and adapt – they don't necessarily get better or more complex. Therefore 'progress', in the sense of movement to a happy place at the end of a Hollywood blockbuster, has nothing to do with life or human history.

Application of these simple fundamentals to the disciplines of architecture and music, and blocking out the Wagnerian romanticism about humankind, is the key to a useful exploration of the relationships of the two hybrid sciences and arts: music and architecture. Music exists in time and space; architecture exists in space and time. To my understanding music does not consist of a harmonic chord

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by strings and trumpets any more than architecture is grasped from a photograph, so the idea of spending five or six pages remarking on the role of proportional relationships in sound waves and in lines making a facade is futile and says very little about music or architecture.

In his recent article (May 2013) Charles Jencks gives away the shallowness of his analysis many times but, perhaps most tellingly, in this passage: musicians are often taught the six basic moods, and modes, they can stress – sadness, joyfulness, fearfulness, tenderness, love and anger ...

No, musicians are often taught the scales, the structure of a melody and how to build one in 4, 8 or 16 bars and how to build a musical phrase into a composition – which, nowadays, amounts to no more than an A-A or A-B-A song form. Alas, here is the true lesson: in music and architecture we are not sailing into the ether of perpetual progress, we are, most likely, in a dark age where a great deal of the technique of these hybrid arts and sciences has been forgotten and is no longer recognised or experienced.

Then there's the question of the actual 'new' and 'groundbreaking' in music and architecture ...

In Western music the last great fundamental advance was with JS Bach and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* that set the tuning of scales and, hence, instruments. Some abstract advances in terms of style and expression have been made up until late Beethoven in the quartets and 9th Symphony but since then (even with jazz and the sex-driven pop of our time) nothing has changed. Similarly in architecture it is true to say that the last meaningful change was with the Corb, Mies and Wright generation. The rest is essentially superficial and individual style which has little relevance beyond the particular practitioner.

This is obvious in music with Schoenberg and inventors of self-referential laws and regulations of composition that are irrelevant to the actual,

real, contemporary music scene and, in architecture, the Gehrys, 'Blobmeisters' and 'Parameisters' who, at the end, build the Eiffel Towers and Bilbaos – one-offs of no consequence to general, real, daily, contemporary architectural practice.

Reyner Banham is correct to call Le Corbusier (or at least his generation) the last form-givers; though there may be opportunity for a new generation once the computer is properly established in the design studio. The odd, idiosyncratic use of software and techniques exclusive to the Gehrys and Hadids of the world counts for little beyond the promotion of their personalities.

Architecture and music are highly technical endeavours: learning to play the violin or piano is far more complex than learning to drive a truck or fly an Airbus. Writing a piece of music or (in the case of jazz and pre-literate music) improvising on a theme or given structure is a complex technical exercise first and foremost. Emotional expression is consequent and not vice versa.

As architects we have it easier because of our (troubled) partnership with engineers so we sometimes lose sight of the fact that our designs have to stand up and not leak. Musicians, even the performers, are generally closer to the fundamental structure of their art. This is an example we can take from the correlation of these arts: that our work, as architects, may be enhanced by a closer knowledge and affinity with the enabling structure – just as Jimi Hendrix, at the height of his expressive powers, is acutely aware of the technical prerequisite of chord progressions, rhythmic synchronicity and dynamic correlation.

Can there be a more pointless question than, 'Are musical chords like space?' In the end it only tells us how different literature is from music and architecture and how ineffectual and inadequate it is in trying to explicate either.

**Michael L St Hill, St Lucia**

## Cultural vandalism

Catherine Slessor's editorial (AR March 2013) exposed the sorry destruction of unique ancient manuscripts and sacred sites in Timbuktu by fanatic Islamist militants. These groups destroyed what had endured for centuries, a priceless legacy that reminds us of our common humanity.

The editorial goes on to state that whether it be the Taliban using giant Buddhas for target practice or Napoleon's troops shooting off the Sphinx's nose, cultural vandalism is nothing new. And I agree with Catherine when she says cultural vandalism is not confined to the developing world, with reference to the defacing of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, by a visitor at the Louvre's SANAA-designed outpost in Lens.

But Western vandalism isn't just perpetrated by individuals. Since 9/11 the fight against terrorism has been used as an excuse not only to violate private freedom but also to bomb or shoot to kill, and ask questions later. Much collateral damage has been sustained by mankind's material history. The invasion of Iraq was particularly egregious: it has placed Mesopotamia – generally recognised as the first place where civilised societies truly began to take shape – at grave risk.

And although peace is – fitfully – returning, the damage continues. Oil companies are laying pipelines through archaeological sites between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Looting continues.

The authorities recovered numerous shipments of items, most stolen from the National Museum of Iraq, which were appropriated by Iraqi paramilitary units in May 2003. By that June, customs inspectors in the US had seized over 600 of the museum's artifacts. The Jordanian authorities recovered over 1,000.

As the Mesopotamians painstakingly organised oral traditions into written collections, producing *The Epic of Gilgamesh*,

the first book in recorded history, it is our duty to protect the legacy.

The developed world has exposed Iraqi museums and Mesopotamian archaeological sites like Adab, Babylon, Isin, Nipur, Nineveh, Nippur, Umma, places where Mesopotamians refined and added to systems, combining them to form current civilisation.

The protection of historical sites is a must. If Mesopotamians had not blazed the trails they did, the world would be very different.

**Viriato Teotónio e. Tamele, by email**

## Community challenge

In response to Paul Finch (June 2013), I am involved in my local Neighbourhood Forum in Oxford and am convinced that architects are important in making 'localism' work. They bring an understanding of the complexity of urban planning and can facilitate the process so that opportunities are not squandered by 'nimbyism'. Being on the steering committee of the Forum 'opens doors' and has introduced me to leaders in the community, widening my professional network significantly. For any architect working in the local area, this can be invaluable.

Creating a 'development brief' or 'neighbourhood plan' is a process which an architect understands and they can take a leading role – using skills including how to manage a public consultation but also design, masterplanning and development. Even if a 'neighbourhood plan' is not created, the architect can be proactive and lead the community by producing concept designs, feasibility studies or introducing developers who might be more sympathetic to the community's needs. In Oxford we have also got the architecture school at Brookes involved and students have presented their ideas to the local community – which has been most effective in challenging preconceived ideas of what 'development' might look like.

**Lucy Mori, London**



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The  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands,  
Cruz y Ortiz

# HOUSE OF HOLLAND

Beyond the art and architecture,  
the remodelling of the Rijksmuseum  
is underscored by how the Netherlands  
wants to present itself to the world









# CRITICISM

## STEVE PARNELL

If museums are about storytelling and identity, about curating a collection of artefacts and works of art to construct a history, then Holland has recently been busy redefining how it wants to be seen by the world for the 21st century.

In 1999, landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson replaced a busy road with a large open park and pond immediately to the south (then the rear) of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. This has become the *muséumplein* (museum square), around which two other nationally important museums sit: the Stedelijk museum of modern and contemporary art, and the van Gogh museum. The former of these re-opened last year after being upgraded and enlarged with an extension the appearance of an oversized sanitary fitting by Bentham Crouwel, and the latter – two buildings, one designed by Gerrit Rietveld (1973) and the other by Kisho Kurokawa (1999) – is itself on the point of re-opening after a six-month renovation. So with the recent unveiling of the re-oriented Rijksmuseum after a decade of renovation, the planners' dream of a real museum quarter in Amsterdam is finally being realised. The importance of the Rijksmuseum to the Dutch was emphasised when two weeks after re-opening the national museum, on the eve of her abdication, Queen Beatrix held a gala dinner for the royalty of Europe not in the Royal Palace, but in the museum's Gallery

of Honour, among the great paintings of the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic.

This Gallery of Honour is the museum's climax, in terms both of its layout and collection, and it understandably reinforces the idea that the museum celebrates the 17th-century Dutch Golden Age above all else. Resulting from Holland's independence from Spain, the Golden Age still defines the country's capital city, from its urban form, to its art, and architecture. Due to Amsterdam's extensive global maritime trade and its humanist and tolerant Calvinist culture, a mercantile middle class emerged which governed the city. A group of these burghers forms the subject of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, arguably the Golden Age's most famous cultural product, painted in 1642 at the peak of its painter's reputation. Originally commissioned as part of a large frieze for the civic guard building, it became the object around which Pierre Cuypers designed the Rijksmuseum and the only painting to retain its place after renovation. The subsequently named 'Night Watch Room', at the end of the Gallery of Honour, thus becomes the museum's destination, like the Mona Lisa for the Louvre.

At the beginning of the Golden Age, and celebrating its 400th anniversary this year, the famous canal ring, a series of concentric canals circumnavigating and defining the heart of the medieval city, was constructed to expand the booming city. Expansion halted at the end of the 17th century and the Rijksmuseum is to be found on the south-west edge of this stage of development. Completed in 1885,

the museum forms a kind of binary star relationship with Cuypers' other large public building at the north-east edge of the old city – the Centraal station, completed four years later. These buildings were designed in a hybrid brick and stone, Renaissance-Gothic style by the Catholic Cuypers and were poorly received at the time by Protestant Amsterdam for being too medieval, too Catholic, with all its idolatrous images adorning the walls. The building certainly has an ecclesiastical quality to it, with a vaulted crypt in what was the original basement, and stained-glass and copious wall decoration narrating the glories and victories of Dutch art. *The Night Watch* forms an altar at the end of the nave, against which the alcoves in the aisles boast paintings such as Vermeer's *The Little Street* and *The Milkmaid*, and Hals's *The Merry Drinker*.

This cathedral of art tells a story of Holland with each storey forming a stratum of history. The presentation of art works alongside artefacts derives from an approach to art history that describes the work as a product of its historical context rather than individual genius. Without doubt, seeing the actual guns, cannons and models of ships depicted in the paintings themselves makes for a more engaging visit. However, Cuypers didn't anticipate a chronological presentation and the progression from ground upwards is not quite so logical. On the ground floor are the medieval art and special collections, including Delftware, a fleet of model ships, jewellery and arms – so far, so heroic Holland. The first floor then houses the 18th and 19th century in order

2

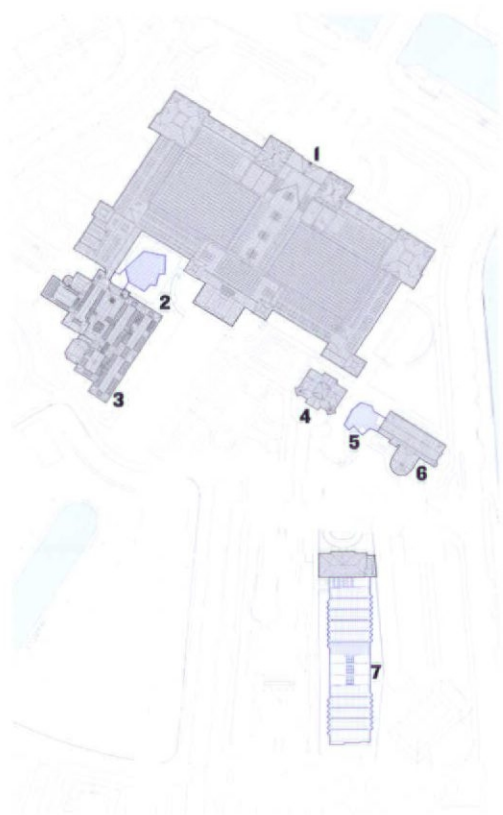
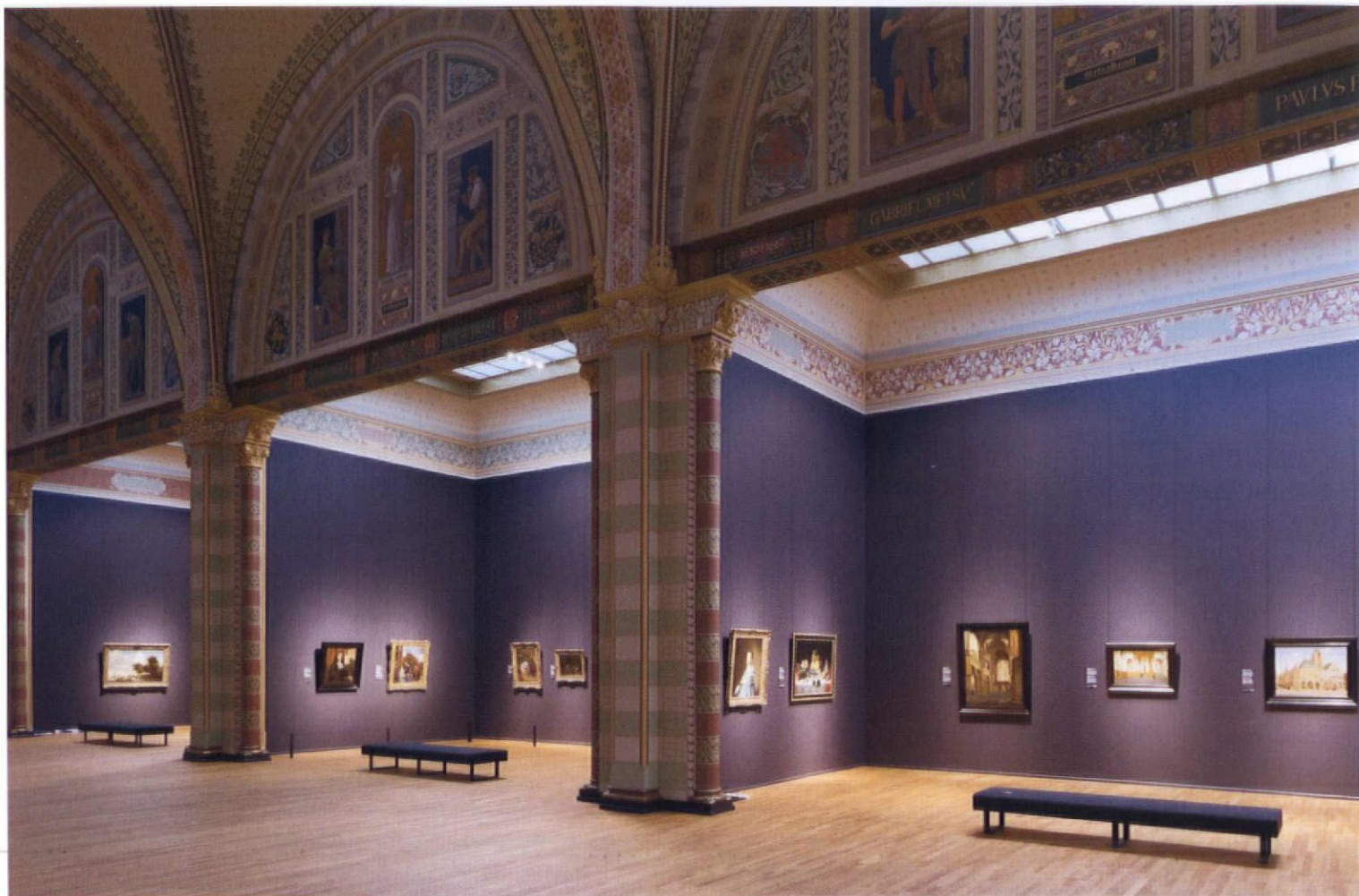


3



1. (Previous page) section showing the additions in blue  
2. & 3. A busy road was removed by landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson in 1999 and replaced with a park; from the canal, the Rijksmuseum now appears a serene tree-circled oasis  
4. Renovation has revealed the original ornate Neo-Gothic decor controversially ultramontane in its day, and later purged and whitewashed to create a neutral, white Modernist backdrop





- 1 main building
- 2 Asian pavilion
- 3 Philips wing
- 4 villa
- 5 entrance building
- 6 drawing school
- 7 atelier building

**The  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands,  
Cruz y Ortiz**

site plan



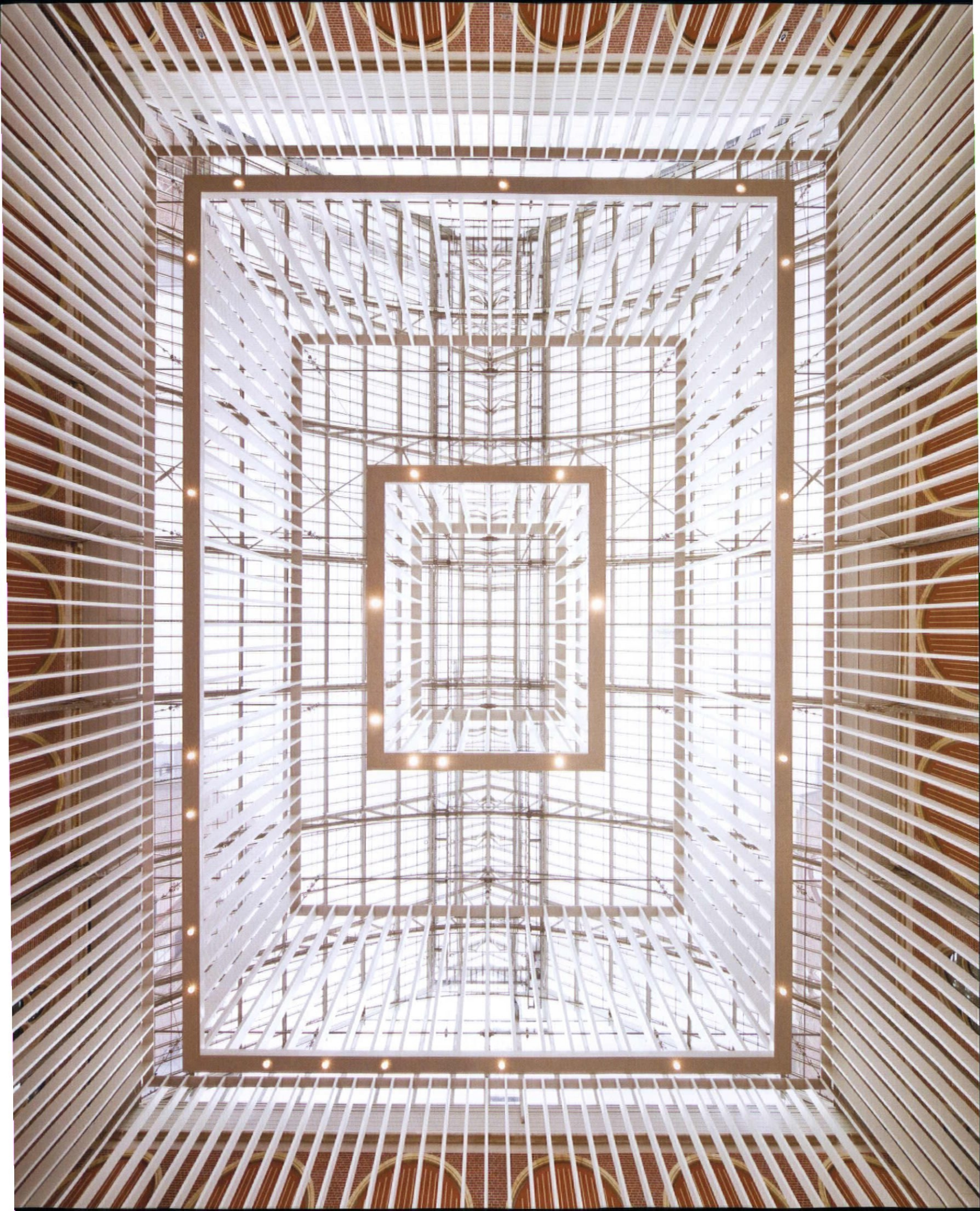




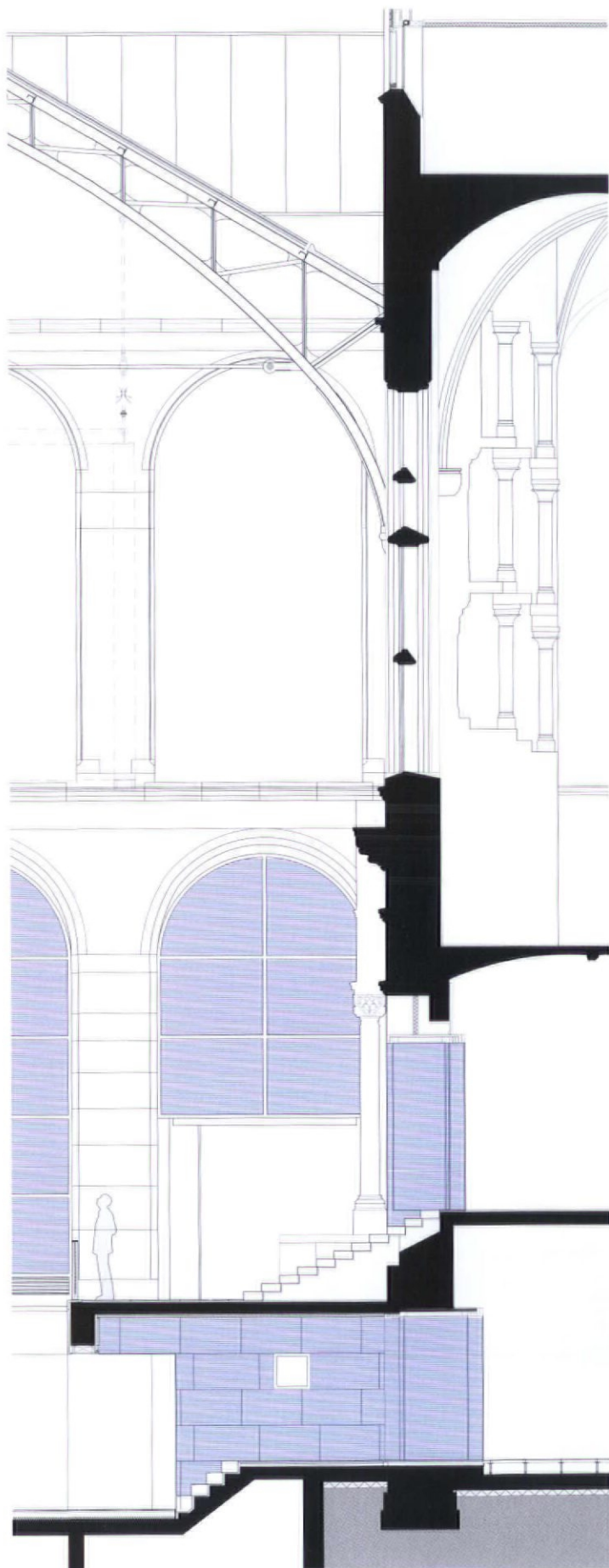












detailed section through internal courtyard

5. (Previous page) the newly cleared courtyards between the wings have been given glorious glass vaults, recalling the Neo-Gothic engineering of Deane and Woodward's Oxford University Museum of Natural History, built in 1861  
 6. (Opposite) chandeliers hang from the steel roof frame. They double as much-needed acoustic baffles, muffling the echoes and chatter  
 7. Archive photograph of an original gallery space



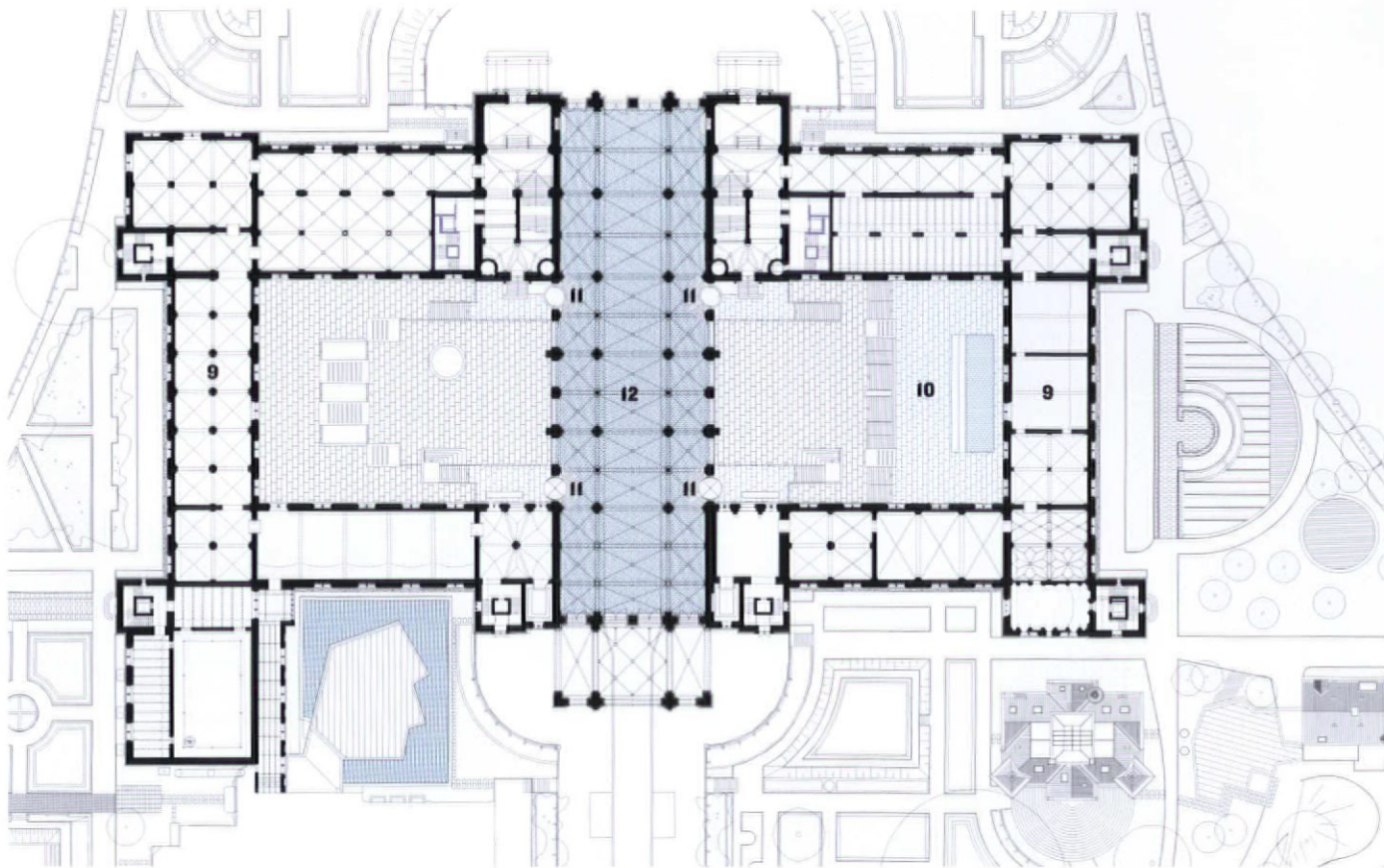
for the 17th-century masterpieces to be accommodated in the Gallery of Honour on the second floor. The third floor in the attic is annoyingly split into two halves, each inaccessible from the other without navigating the stairs. This contains the small 20th-century exhibition. Amazingly, the Rijksmuseum did not own any 20th-century art until it closed for renovation in 2003 and this split exhibition is a token gesture to Holland's considerable contribution to Modernism. It could easily be argued that it should concentrate on its core and leave the modern and contemporary to the Stedelijk, but where contemporary art has been integrated into the building, such as Richard Wright's dizzying star ceiling in the ante-chamber behind the Night Watch Room, it adds freshness.

The approach towards the integration of the new and old is completely contemporary, with lead architect Cruz y Ortiz's new interventions read as completely distinct from Cuypers' original – a result of the 'Forward with Cuypers' motto driving the renovation. Wherever possible, Cuypers' original building fabric and decoration has been faithfully restored under the guidance of restoration architect Van Hoogetest. Viewing it now, it is hard to conceive of a mentality that could whitewash the museum's walls and cover its floors with lino. But that's exactly what the directors did from the 1920s onwards, whether through Calvinist or Modernist zeal. The galleries' walls are now blocks of colour, from a dark grey in the basement to a dusky blue for the Gallery of Honour. They add warmth and complement the art respectfully, destroying the myth that a gallery must be whitewashed to enjoy the art. In conjunction with the warm LED lighting specially designed by Philips for the museum, the paintings are literally seen in a new light.

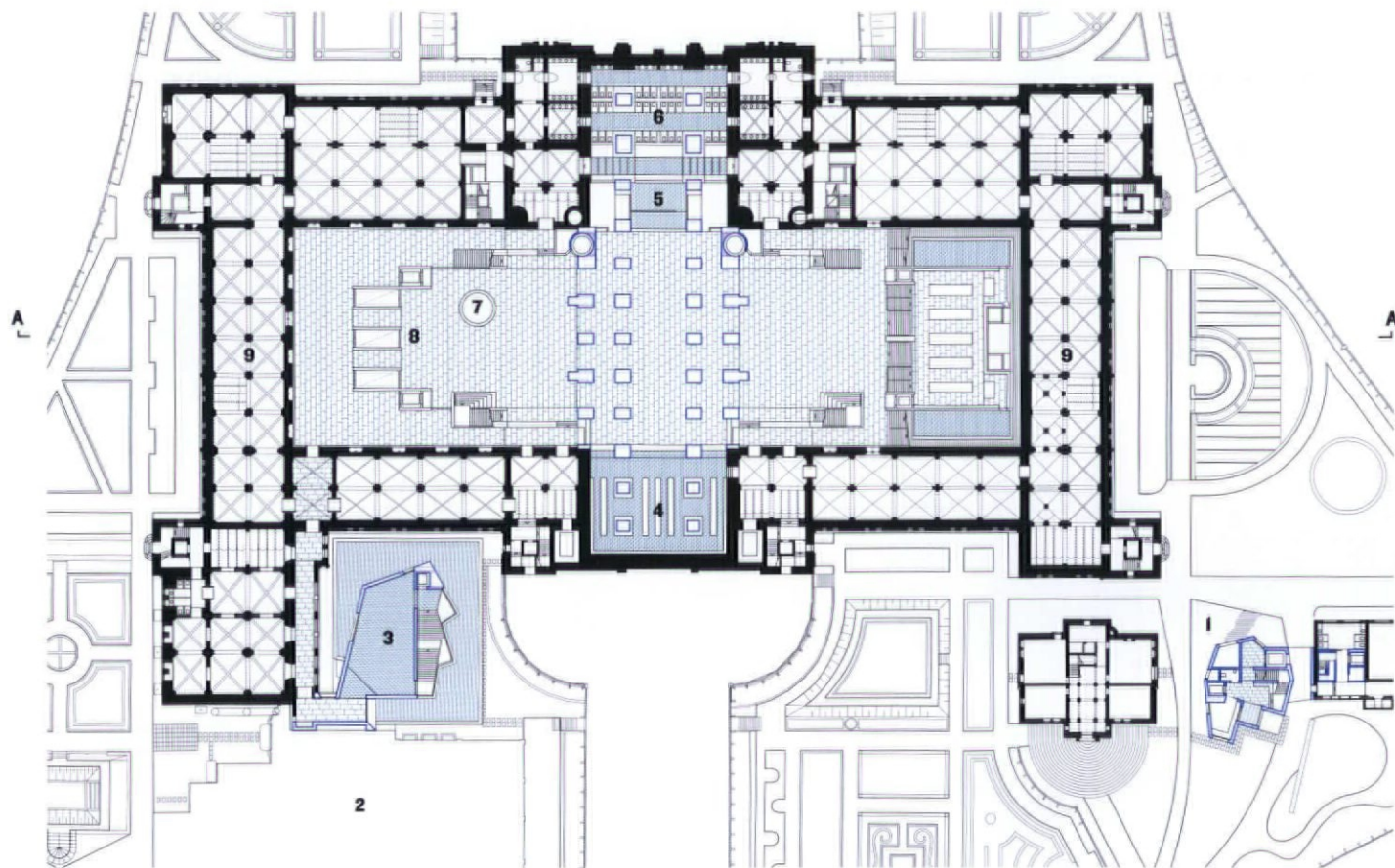
But the largest and most impressive change to the museum involves Cruz y Ortiz's overall strategy to its organisation which has allowed it to breathe again. Like much good architecture, a historical constraint has become the catalyst for an ingenious design

**The  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 Amsterdam,  
 The Netherlands,  
 Cruz y Ortiz**





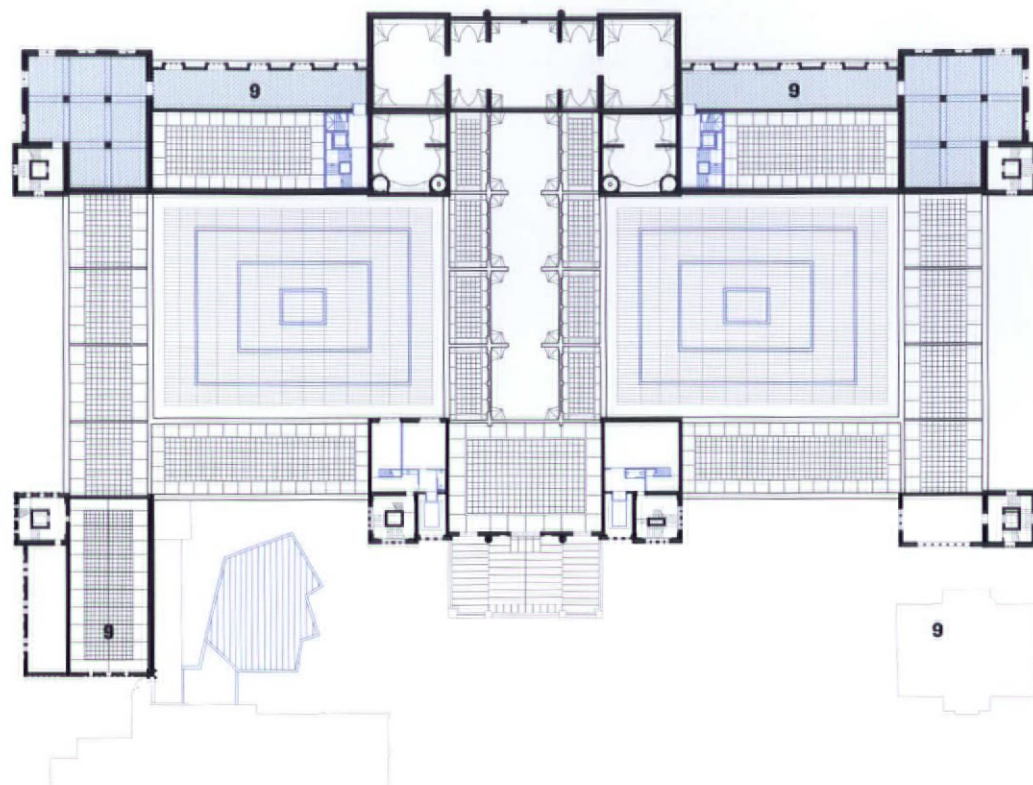
first floor plan



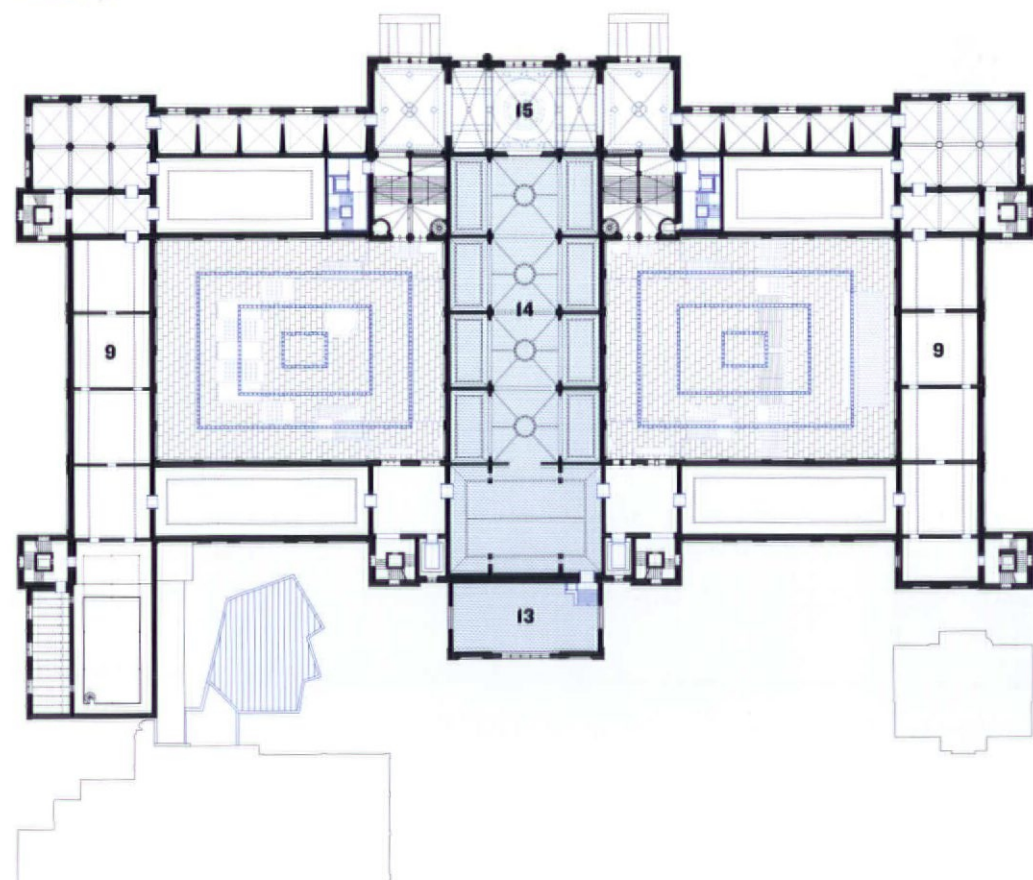
ground floor plan



**The  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands,  
Cruz y Ortiz**



third floor plan

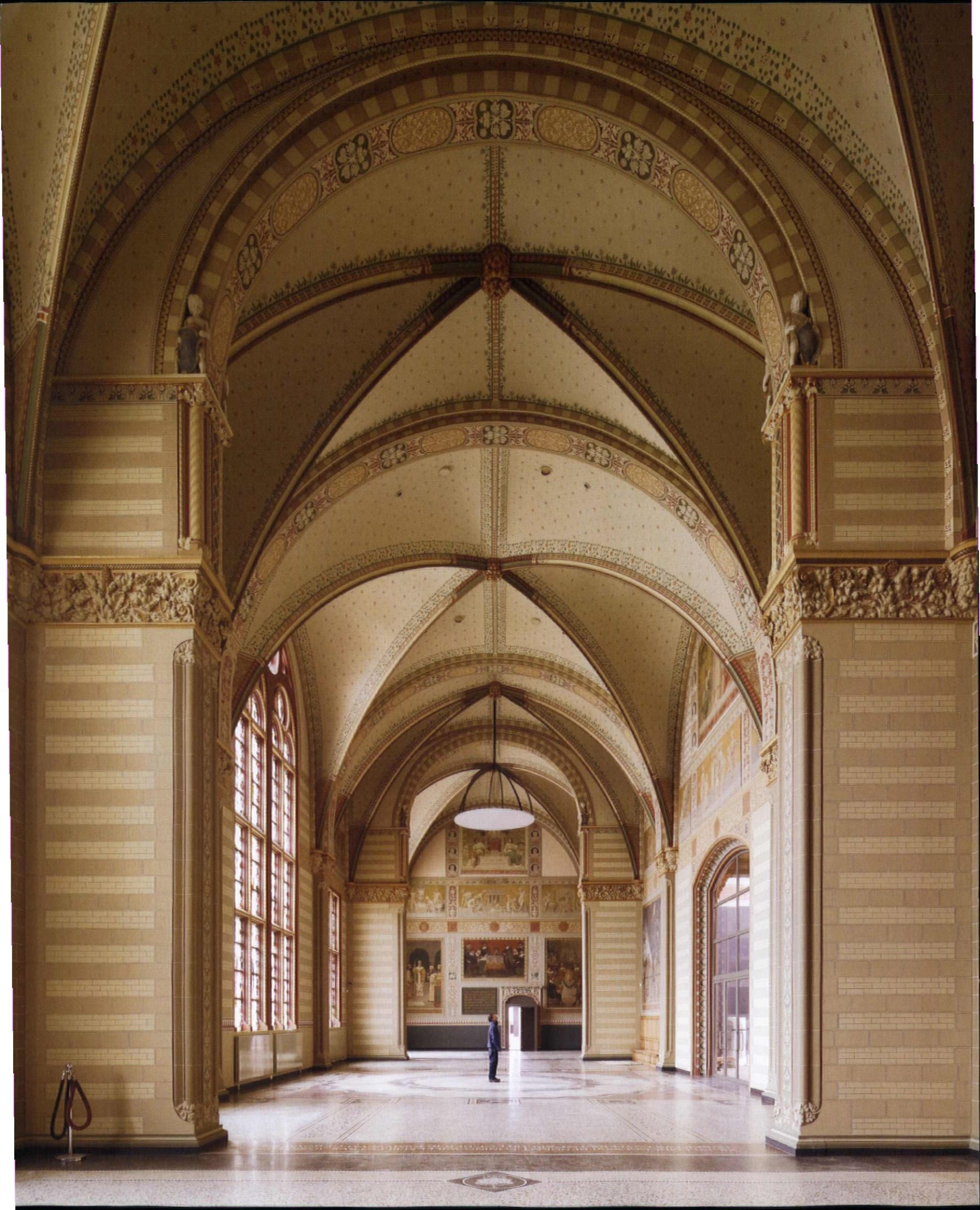


second floor plan

- 1 entrance building
- 2 Philips wing
- 3 Asian pavilion
- 4 cloakroom
- 5 ticket desk
- 6 WC
- 7 information desk
- 8 entrance to galleries
- 9 gallery
- 10 café
- 11 entrance to Rijksmuseum
- 12 museum passageway
- 13 Night Watch Room
- 14 Gallery of Honour
- 15 grand hall









solution. Due to an urban design requirement, Cuypers' building was as much a gateway as a museum with a pair of large courtyards either side of a public thoroughfare on its central axis. This passageway forms a public right of way that Amsterdamers used to access the new part of the city on the south side from the old on the north since the museum's completion. The museum wanted to close this route in order to re-locate their entrances there but after a protracted campaign, the powerful Amsterdam cycling lobby succeeded in keeping it open. The reason the passageway is able to work, however, is the complete clearance of the courtyards which allows light into it once more. In the 1960s, both courtyards were infilled with three-storey confusing warrens of additional galleries – an inward extension that suffocated the museum, making it dark and impossible to navigate. The architects' masterstroke, which won them the commission through invited competition, was as elegant as it was daring: link the two courtyards underneath the untouchable passageway to create one large, clear piazza for the ticket desk, cloakroom, shop, café and entrances to the galleries. The museum could then also be re-oriented towards the new museum square.

The courtyards are voluminous, light spaces acting as atria with nested cages of 'chandeliers' suspended from the glazed roofs. These chandeliers act as oversized light fittings and, apparently, as sound dampeners in conjunction with the brick-red acoustic panels fitted over the large faux second-floor

**'The approach towards the integration of the new and old is completely contemporary, with Cruz y Ortiz's new interventions read as completely distinct from Cuypers' original – a result of the 'Forward with Cuypers' motto driving the renovation'**

arched windows. Despite all the hard surfaces in the space, the reverberation was under control, as was the temperature, which, considering the hot day I visited and the extent of glazing, is remarkable. The architects dug even deeper down into the polder to create an auditorium and shop under the piazza, reaching 9.25 metres below sea level. This caused all sorts of headaches for the engineers. During construction, what is now the piazza was entirely flooded requiring divers and boats on site. The piazza is now relentlessly flooded with Portuguese Gascogne Azul limestone. This peculiarly Spanish strategy of covering every surface with tile is not the most sensitive of approaches, but it does form a new tidemark that clearly distinguishes the new from the old.

Cruz y Ortiz's involvement in the project did not stop at the renovation of the original building. They also constructed a new atelier building nearby dedicated to restoration and research, which opened in 2007, and a new staff entrance building and an Asia pavilion

on the south side of the museum. These latter buildings allow the architects to be more themselves. Clad in the same Portuguese limestone as the internal piazza, they stand out from the original museum with their formal whimsy which will quickly date. They are the least interesting aspects of the whole project. Curatorially, the fact that the Asian pavilion sits outside the walls of the original museum can perhaps be seen as an admission that Holland's former colonial policies don't sit easily alongside the construction of history the curators desire in their main galleries.

As in any gallery, seeing the paintings all lined up side-by-side invokes a curiosity about where they were individually commissioned for. Gathering them all together in a single building (with many, many more in storage that will rarely be seen) is an act of cultural collectivisation to which we have become accustomed and which, in theory, benefits everyone. The Rijksmuseum has gone even further during its rethink and made 125,000 high-resolution scans of their masterpieces freely available online through its Rijksstudio social media platform. Not only can you curate your own collections, but you can freely download them to print out and hang in your own living room. Not only are the Dutch national treasures set to enjoy a new life among a lighter, more spacious, and far better organised museum, but if the curation and narration is not to your liking, you can create your own. Perhaps there is no better example of Dutch identity – tolerance at its most enlightened.



**The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Cruz y Ortiz**

**8. The richly decorated vaults are adorned with allegorical figures and national heroes**

**9. Typical gallery**

**10. The star exhibit, Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, stands out brilliantly against the blue grey**

**Architect**

Cruz y Ortiz

**Photographs**

Iwan Baan, 3, 4, 9, 10

Pedro Pegenaute, 5, 6, 8











# FINE ART

David Chipperfield adds  
a tactfully austere new  
gallery pavilion to an  
American Beaux-Arts  
institution in Saint Louis

**Saint Louis  
Art Museum,  
Missouri, USA,  
David  
Chipperfield  
Architects  
and HOK**









site plan

## CRITICISM

### ADRIAN DANNATT

If every building extension is notoriously fraught with trouble, being a marriage not a stand-alone birthday, this is especially true when adding to a historic institution and one as cherished by the community as the Saint Louis Art Museum. Founded during the 1904 World's Fair, the museum is famed for its Cass Gilbert structure, an exemplar of Beaux-Arts mastery whose position is of prime importance on a dominant hilltop overlooking the formal lakes of Forest Park, larger than Central Park, created at the same time. So though the brief was relatively straightforward, to make more room for the permanent collection, and specifically postwar holdings, it required a civic solution of discretion and elegance, one amply provided by Chipperfield's work.

Here all emphasis is on the art, to grant maximum extra space allowing a full-scale reorganisation and re-hang of the rest of the museum to fully reveal a major international collection. And above all else, literally, it is the light that makes these new galleries so impressive. An abundance of natural light is filtered through a sophisticated ceiling system, allowing optimum viewing conditions, an entirely natural ambition which among the gimmickry of contemporary museum design seems radical in its simplicity.

In explaining his intentions Chipperfield quoted the late David Sylvester that 'the artist has no greater enemy than the architect', and also local patron Emily Pulitzer, who was sick of going to new museums where it takes half an hour before you can see a painting. So in opposition to such 'lobby-itis' and atrium-mania, the new single-storey building opens directly into a simple space where, despite restaurant to the left and gift shop to the right, you have an immediate sense of the art on

## Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, USA, David Chipperfield Architects and HOK

1. (Previous page) with its shades of Mies's Neue Nationalgalerie, Chipperfield's discreet new art pavilion docks onto Cass Gilbert's Beaux-Arts precursor  
2. (Left) natural light is diffused through the gridded concrete roof structure and washes around the sober gallery spaces

display, a notably fine Diebenkorn, and views of the works to come, luring you into the chain of galleries without further ado.

Chipperfield admits that the classic enfilade deployment of galleries is hard to better and has provided an updated version of the pleasures of such a formal promenade. These spaces flow together with rare ease, having obviously been closely plotted with the curatorial team, providing a classic chronological story but also the opportunity to cut through, across time, to adjacent rooms, and most importantly providing a vista of work in later galleries, pulling you toward them.

The dominant feature of the galleries, happily not 'dominant', is a ceiling built out of a poured concrete grid, a vibrant geometric pattern built from the paradox of using a 'heavy' material to provide light, bounced from skylights onto the smooth surface of the white concrete, diffusing out into the galleries below. Though there is a complex filter system, including a 'light-spreader', a stretched panel of 'Freeform' fabric complete with a discreet metal disc that hides sprinklers, the effect of daylight on concrete is consistently pleasing. There are also standard lights, the same basic '70s metal cases used throughout the museum, according to fluctuations in natural light.

As well as the permanent collection there are exhibition galleries – currently showing the museum's exceptional postwar German holdings – which do not use daylight so can show more sensitive works but which maintain the concrete grid. One piece on display, Thomas Struth's photograph of the Parthenon, even suggests a direct precedent in the fabled coffered-ceiling of that Roman building.

Chipperfield has also been generous with the windows, those full floor-to-ceiling walls of glass as mistrusted by conservators and curators as any top-light itself, though they are kept dim by automated scrim-screens which





supposedly open according to the weather but which you suspect may remain long closed. And it must be admitted that the siting of these windows is curious, especially as there is intended to be a surrounding sculpture park; for example at the moment a pair of major Henry Moore sculptures have been seemingly stranded on the blind side of the building unable to be seen from within the institution.

There seems to be some ambiguity about the rear of the museum which, rather than greeting the surrounding park, turns its back on it, refusing to provide exit or entrance upon that axis, ensuring visitors cannot pass *through* the building but only round it. Likewise the only real formal vista of the park is from the restaurant by the front entrance, but perhaps all this serves to remind us that we are here to look at the art not the surroundings.

Along with the ceiling, the other most notable feature of the design is the solid white-oak floor, an entirely satisfying artistic work in itself, with each 6-inch wide plank inspected and approved by director Brent Benjamin. Even individual knots and whorls were chosen for their aesthetic relation to each other, the entire composition being as pleasant to walk upon, especially with bare feet should one so dare, as to contemplate. However, the perfection of this wooden floor is challenged by the mootest element of the whole interior design, long metal HVAC grill-strips that run the length of the galleries and right through the middle of the floor-flush sculptures. The heating and air-conditioning of galleries is always a major source of contention between architects and conservators, not least due to the risk of the direct passage of air and dust over works of art, and there are strong arguments both for the usual American approach, of air flowing from above, and for the more European system of ventilation from below here adopted by Chipperfield.

**Saint Louis  
Art Museum,  
Missouri, USA,  
David  
Chipperfield  
Architects  
and HOK**

**3. Though inherently mistrusted by curators, floor-to-ceiling glazing offers tranquil views of the surrounding park. Automated scrim screens open and close according to the weather**

**4. Avoiding the trap of historical pastiche, the new building's dark concrete panels powerfully counterpoint Gilbert's creamy stone**

'In opposition to 'lobby-itis' and atrium-mania, the new single-storey building opens directly into a simple space where you have an immediate sense of the art on display'











These currently highly shiny metallic elements may become less bright with age, and could reference Minimalist art, Carl Andre floor-works, but they seem oddly intrusive, a technical solution of inapt visual dominance.

Chipperfield has provided some of the most ideally proportioned and perfectly lit display rooms of any recent museum, but the real achievement is not in the gallery design but the larger agenda, the infrastructural masterplan, those hidden issues of site and circulation. For example, the very elegant lavatories are highly important additions – being scanty and obscure in the old building – the sort of practical issue which is as crucial as any aesthetic consideration. And just as the galleries are built for massive Modernist works, requiring Chipperfield to provide even larger walls than originally planned, so the building extends below to provide three floors of parking, suggesting the symbiotic correlation between the large scale of postwar American art and its automobile culture.

These garages are crucial to the success of the museum; its operations are literally built on such foundations – a beautiful single-storey gallery sitting atop the very garages that support it. Without these, the site and grounds could not maintain their pristine *Novecento* aura; there would be no visitors and no staff. Chipperfield has built them into the programme with as much sensitivity as pragmatism. You could even read a symmetry to the three floors of the original Gilbert building and the three floors of sunken parking, at either end of the site and linked by the single level new addition, looking in cross-section like a weighted seesaw.

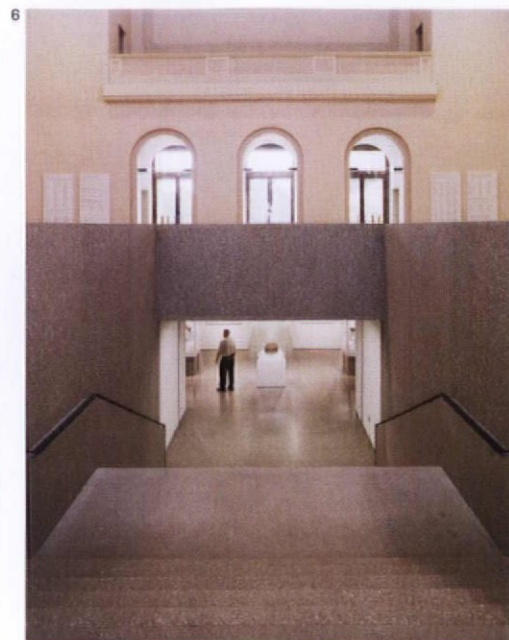
Circulation between the original building and the addition is as fluid and natural as the circulation in the new galleries themselves, aided by a well-planned curatorial segue, for example Surrealism in New York exile leads

on into the origins of Abstract Expressionism, so you are barely aware of the transition, only signalled by glass doors. On the main axis of connection the museum has boldly placed its Ancient Art collection. This can be seen crossing from the old building or immediately on entering the new, juxtaposing the ancient and modern and emphasising that this is a 'universal' museum like the Metropolitan, with which it can well stand comparison.

This might seem at first a curious choice, breaking with an otherwise fairly orthodox chronological display, but on a crowded Sunday its effectiveness is evident, as many visitors for once studying Greek and Roman sculpture as contemporary art. The seamless link between the two sections of the museum acts as a sort of handshake extending into the past and the future, a handshake that confirms the continuity of the institution's objectives.

Chipperfield has also provided a lower-level loop that brings visitors, especially those from the garages, back into circulation through the two buildings, a long sloping corridor – decorated with architectural elements by Louis Sullivan – which leads to a new café and the remarkable 'Stone Sea'. This is a new site-specific sculpture by Andy Goldsworthy, a cluster of Missouri limestone arches which discreetly reference Saarinen's Gateway Arch, also in St Louis, and more practically fill the gap at the back between old and new buildings.

Chipperfield is keen to emphasise the discretion if not humility of his addition, an entirely practical single storey tucked neatly into the edge of the original structure, rather than a freestanding sculptural monument, and this is particularly evident when looking at the main museum from the other side of the formal lake from whence it was originally intended to be seen, and from where the new structure is hardly noticeable. Likewise, even when lit at night the facade of the new building works



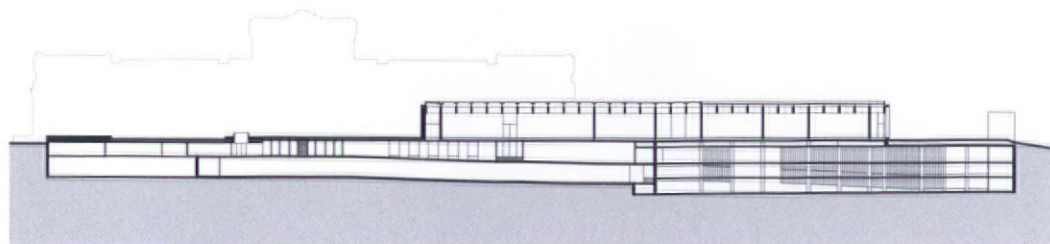
**Saint Louis  
Art Museum,  
Missouri, USA,  
David  
Chipperfield  
Architects  
and HOK**

**5. Entrance lobby.  
Unlike many galleries,  
here the impact of the art  
is immediately apparent  
6. A new staircase in  
the original Beaux-Arts  
building has a formal  
and material precision**

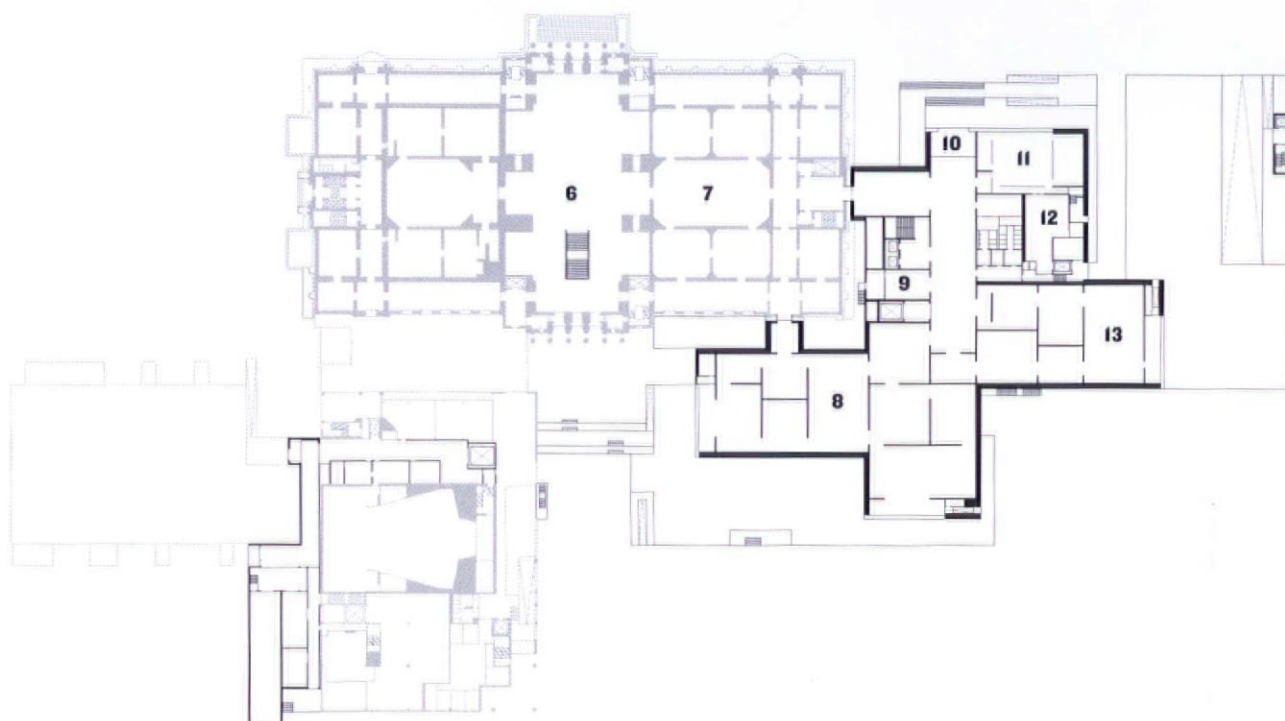
'The seamless link between the two sections of the museum acts as a sort of handshake extending into the past and future'



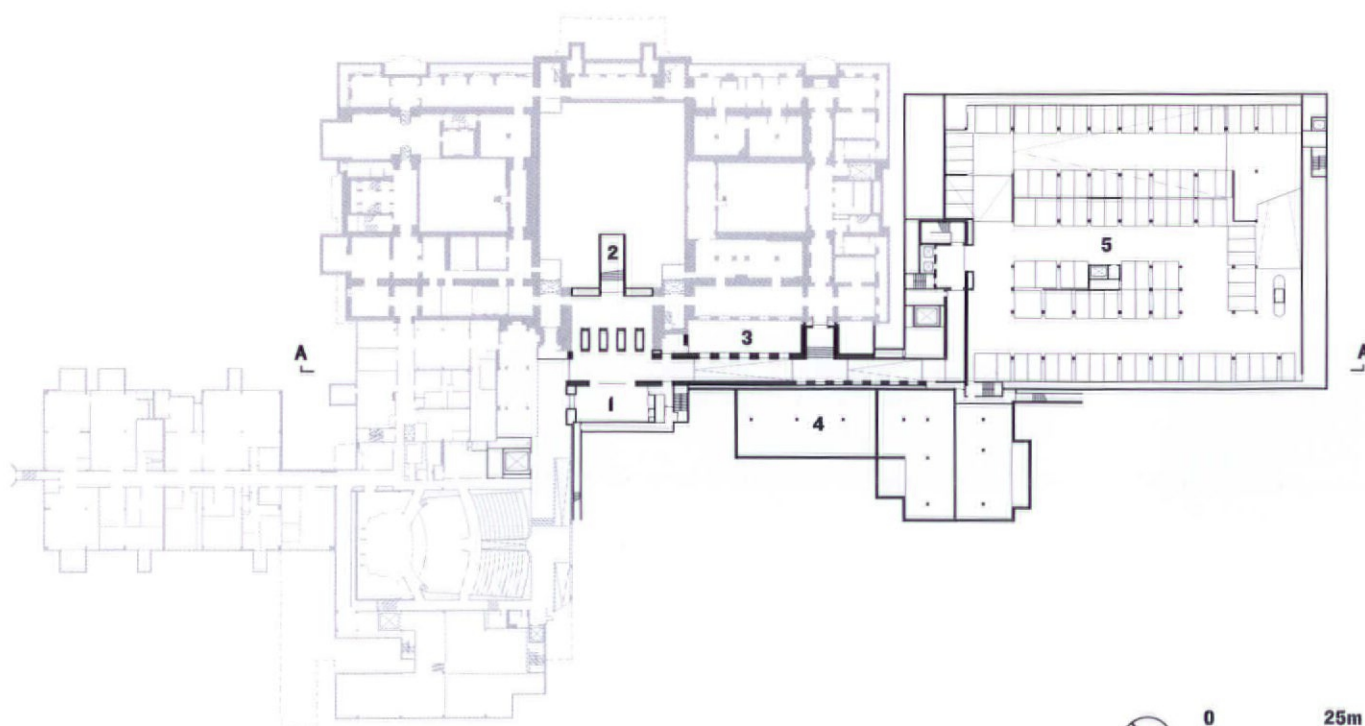
- 1 café
- 2 stair to sculpture hall
- 3 sunken courtyard with Goldsworthy sculpture
- 4 conservation studios and storage
- 5 garage
- 6 sculpture hall
- 7 permanent gallery
- 8 contemporary art collection
- 9 bookshop
- 10 East Building entrance
- 11 restaurant
- 12 kitchen
- 13 main exhibition



section AA



ground floor plan



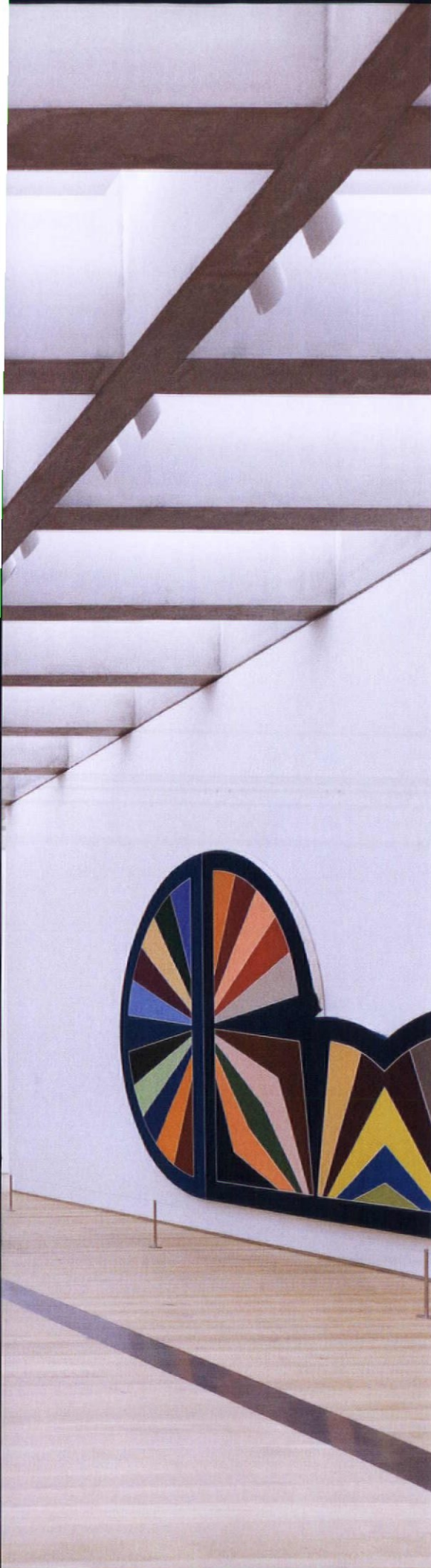
lower ground floor plan











**Saint Louis  
Art Museum,  
Missouri, USA**  
**David  
Chipperfield  
Architects  
and HOK**

**Architect**  
David Chipperfield  
Architects and HOK  
**Photographs**  
Simon Menges



**7. (Opposite) the enfilade  
of galleries forms a  
neutral backdrop to the  
art with white walls and  
floors of solid white-oak.  
Each piece of oak was  
inspected and approved  
by the museum's director**  
**8. The dignified space  
of the museum café**

in harmony with the Gilbert frontage, despite being of such differing material and idiom.

This is the more remarkable as Chipperfield deliberately signals the break between the two structures by using signature dark concrete panels incorporating Missouri river aggregates, as opposed to any continuity that could have been provided using a similar tone to Gilbert's pale stone, for example the soft Missouri limestone of Goldsworthy's sculpture. Chipperfield may well have feared that extending a similar tonal or material version of Gilbert's frontage would smack of a sort of Robert Stern historicism, and the visual shift actually works to both buildings' advantage.

Chipperfield was obliged to occupy the site to the east of the Gilbert building because the most ideal direction for any such extension, at the back to the south, was taken by a long addition begun in the 1950s and completed in 1980 which, in providing administration offices, library and auditorium, at least allowed the new building, for once, to concentrate upon the art itself. This southern extension also provides a statutory lesson in humility as it is as seemingly unloved as the latest wing is celebrated, nobody even being able to recall the name of the architects (in fact Murphy & Mackey, a St Louis firm, followed by Kivett & Myers, with Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer).

The new extension's official name, the 'East Building', also surely deliberately has a historic resonance, most obviously with the 'East Building' at the National Gallery, Washington DC, long-considered one of the most successful postwar museum additions. But rather than IM Pei's monumental Modernist massing, Chipperfield's own facade not only nods to the canopy of Mies's Neue Nationalgalerie but also might suggest a very different East Building, the classical colonnade of Claude Perrault's Louvre, an equally resolved extension of an equally revered cultural institution.





# COQ OF THE WALK

Mixing sensuality and gesture, Rudy Ricciotti's new museum of Mediterranean civilisation is less about content and more about adding to Marseille's thrilling palimpsest

**MuCEM,  
Marseille,  
France,  
Rudy Ricciotti**









## CRITICISM

## ANDREW AYERS

Marseille, France's principal Mediterranean seaport, is European Capital of Culture 2013. Of the many new buildings opening this year, by far the most prestigious is the €191-million Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, or MuCEM. Conceived in 2000 as part of the €7-billion Euroméditerranée redevelopment of the city's docks, the MuCEM as an institution has a curious history. Its ancestor is the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MATP), founded in 1937 as a national museum of ethnography that collected everything from *guignols* (puppets) to rural interiors and regional costumes. By the end of the millennium its location in Paris's Bois de Boulogne (far from the city centre) and its ageing building were taking their toll on visitor numbers and on the quality of displays.

It was at this point that the authorities decided to 'decentralise' the MATP and move it to Marseille in the hope of achieving a brilliant symbiosis: the moribund museum would be reborn in its new setting, while the troubled regional capital would benefit à la Bilbao from the presence of a prestigious

national collection in an eye-catching building. To this end the museum was allocated a spectacular site: the historic Fort St-Jean (13th-17th centuries), which guards the entrance to the Vieux Port, as well as the adjacent J4 pier, right on the water's edge with sweeping westward views to the setting sun.

Thirteen years, three French presidents and six culture ministers later, the MuCEM has finally opened. And more than just a French folklore museum, it aims to be a pluridisciplinary, multi-textual institution of a type never seen before. The MuCEM actually occupies three buildings: as well as the aforementioned Fort St-Jean and J4, there is also another new building (by Corinne Vezzoni et Associés) in Marseille's Belle-de-Mai quarter, where the MATP collections are conserved, and these reserves can be visited. But the main exhibitions are held down on the waterfront, partly in the beautifully restored (by François Botton, *architecte en chef des monuments historiques*) Fort St-Jean, but mostly, given the latter's poky spaces and complicated layout, in the giant new J4 building.

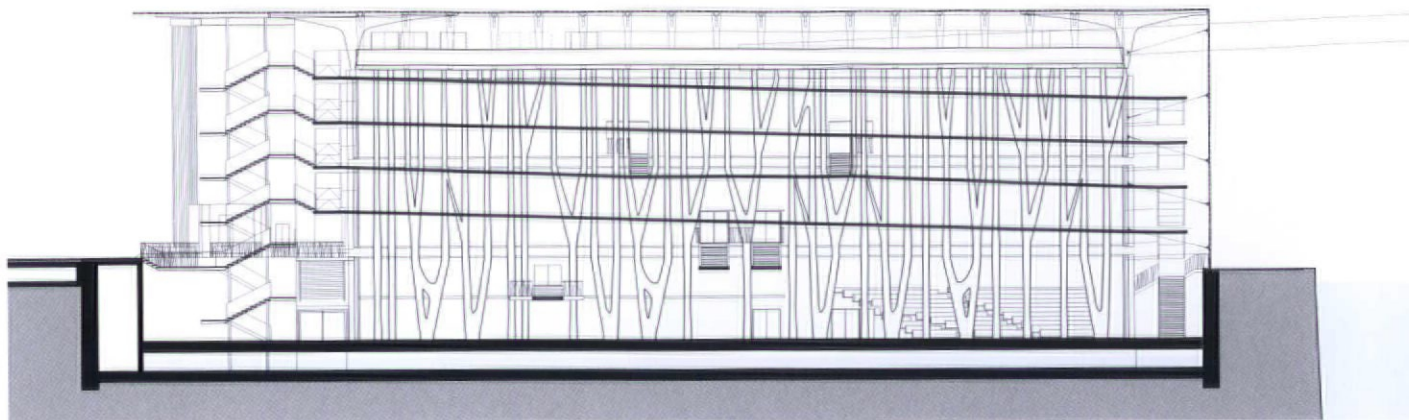
J4's design was the object of a 2002 architectural competition, which resulted

**MuCEM,  
Marseille,  
France,  
Rudy Ricciotti**

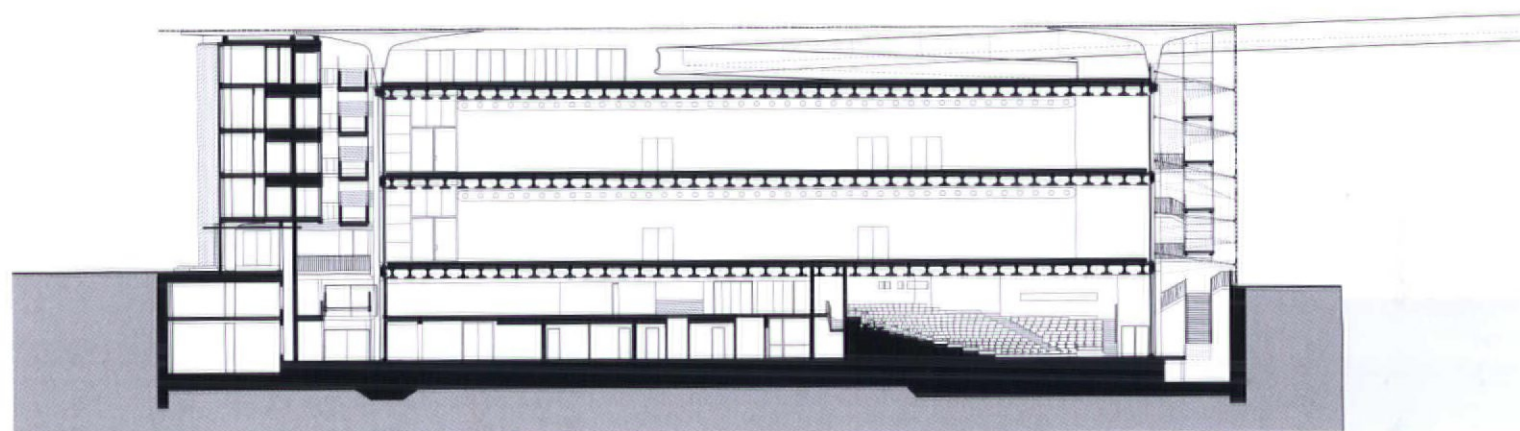
1. (Previous page, left) occupying the site of a former pier, the new MuCEM dominates the Marseille waterfront  
2. (Previous page, right) the glass box of the museum is veiled in a lacy concrete mantilla  
3. A meandering ramp can be read through the concrete veil, connecting the museum with the neighbouring Fort St-Jean

'Starchitects Hadid, Holl and Koolhaas were thrown overboard in favour of an almost-unknown local based just up the coast in Bandol: Rudy Ricciotti'





section AA



section BB

in general surprise when starchitects Hadid, Holl and Koolhaas were thrown overboard in favour of an almost-unknown local based just up the coast in Bandol: Rudy Ricciotti. Little-known back then, Ricciotti is now ineluctable in the French scene, partly because of high-profile projects such as the Pavillon Noir dance studios in Aix-en-Provence (AR February 2007), the Musée Jean-Cocoteau in Menton (2011) and the Islamic-art galleries at the Louvre (2012), but also because of his colourful and conspicuous public persona, which has made him a media darling that many in the architectural profession love to hate.

His provocative, impudent rants have become legendary – for example on Minimalism: ‘The miracle of the Anglo-Saxon-style neo-Modernist project ... One can really call it architectural fundamentalism, because architects and Salafists could be said to have in common the same hatred of the face’; ‘The minimum is a dick, the minimal is a dildo’ – all delivered in a strong regional accent by a self-proclaimed *sudiste*, a child of the south naturally suspicious of Paris and of northern-European ways in general, whose image embodies the regional macho clichés of

contrariness and love of the corridor. But things are actually a little more complicated than that, since Ricciotti was not born in Provence but in French Algeria, to Italo-Gypsy parents, making him a true representative of that particular chapter in Mediterranean history (moreover the J4 pier was one of those onto which thousands of *pieds-noirs* disembarked following Algerian independence).

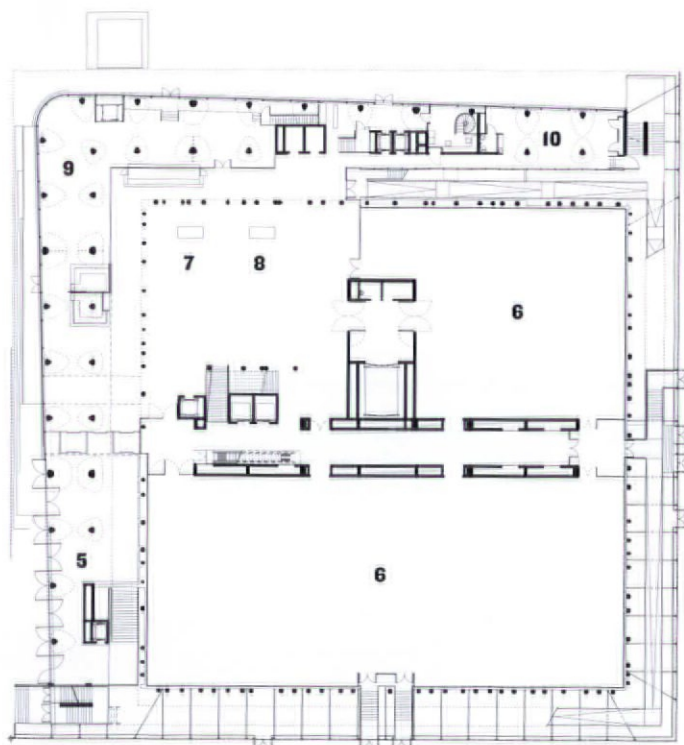
As a practitioner, ever since his bunker-like sports/concert hall in Vitrolles (AR February 1996), Ricciotti has been an ardent apologist for concrete, whose advantages, he claims, are manifold: it is a ‘patriotic’ material in that concrete has long been a French affair and France is a leader in concrete research and development; it is eco-friendly since water, sand and aggregate can all be found locally, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (he always omits to mention the steel); and it is humanly responsible too, in that it requires a local, highly skilled workforce to realise the form- and steelwork. For his detractors, this is all posturing intended to justify his 15-year-long relationship with construction giant Lafarge – exactly the kind of rapacious multinational, they claim, that in the interests of profit destroys marine environments in its hunger for

sand and develops working practices abroad requiring unskilled low-paid labour. (It should be noted that the love affair is mutual, for it was Lafarge that sponsored the exhibition of Ricciotti’s oeuvre currently on show at Paris’s Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine.)

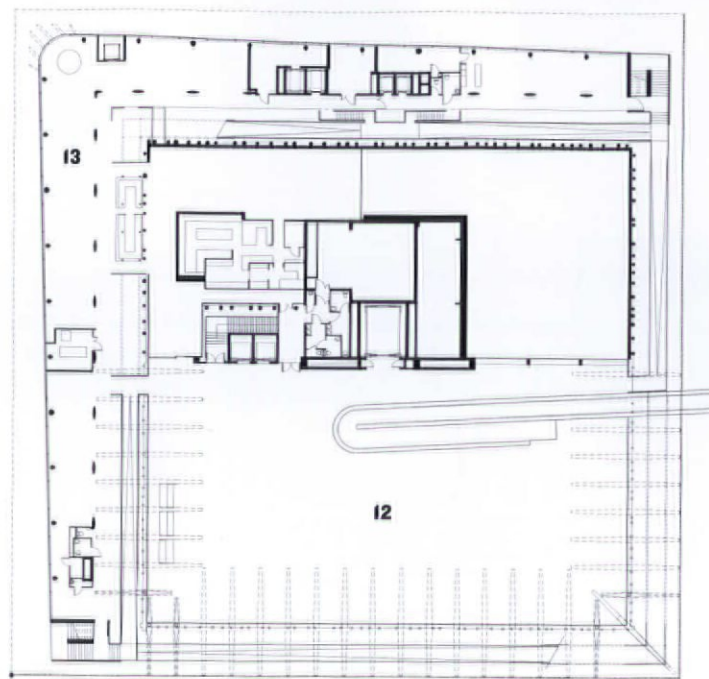
‘I undertook the MuCEM in a state of anxiety. I wasn’t worried about losing [the design competition], I was afraid of winning with a scheme that would be a mistake. I designed it with fear in my guts, under the pressure of that metaphysical horizon that is the Mediterranean, of that cobalt blue that becomes Klein blue then ultramarine, that drives you mad after a while and turns silver when the wind gets up. It’s violent ...’

Who, given his background, could be more sensitive to the pressure of this particular site than Ricciotti? But as well as to the site he had to respond to the brief which, given the all-embracing vagueness of the MuCEM’s curatorial ambitions, offered few cues. He therefore opted for the Centre Pompidou solution – pure, neutral, ‘supermarket’ space, entirely free of clutter and intermediary supports, in which an ever-changing array of objects could be exhibited as the curators wished. This choice also allowed him to indulge





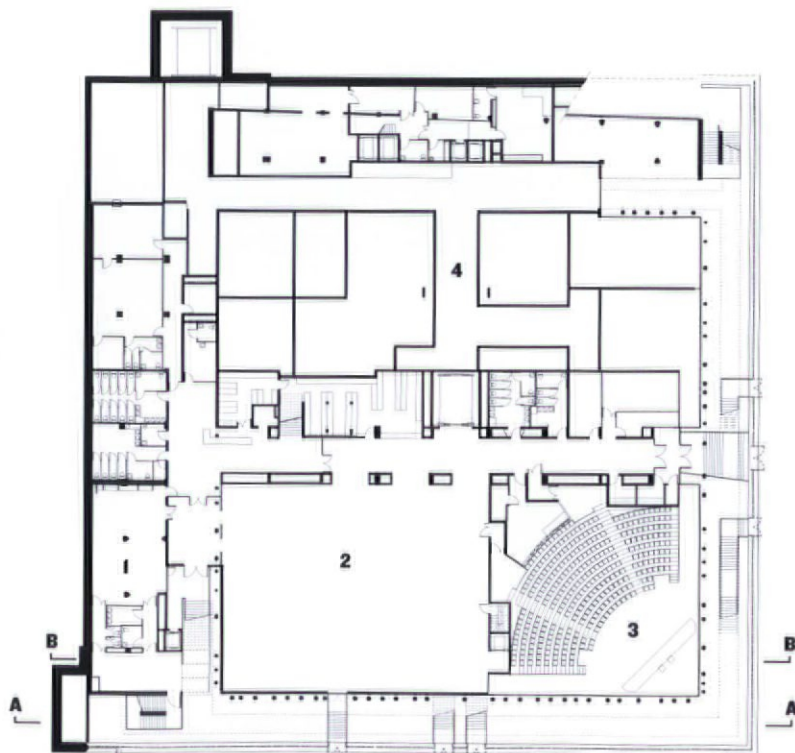
ground floor plan



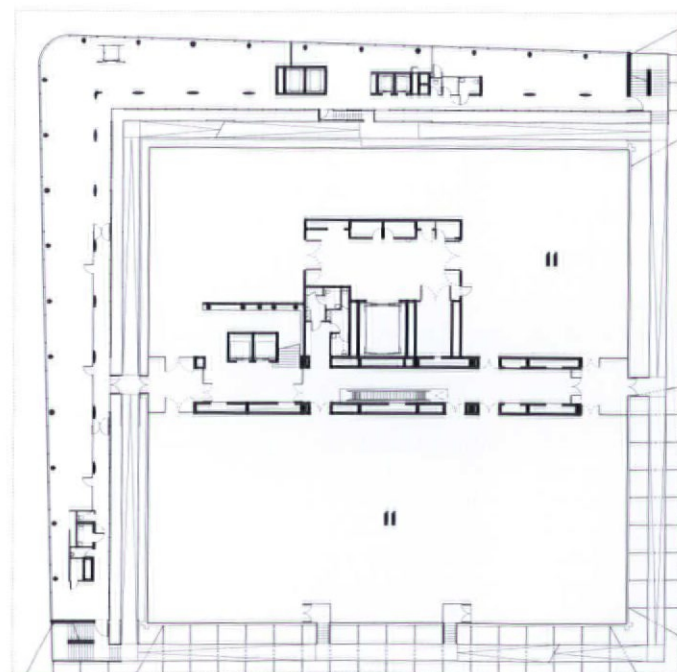
fourth floor plan

**MuCEM,  
Marseille,  
France,  
Rudy Ricciotti**

- 1 group meeting point
- 2 forum
- 3 auditorium
- 4 administration offices
- 5 main entrance hall
- 6 Méditerranée gallery
- 7 ticket area
- 8 kiosk
- 9 bookshop
- 10 children's area
- 11 temporary exhibition
- 12 terrace
- 13 restaurant

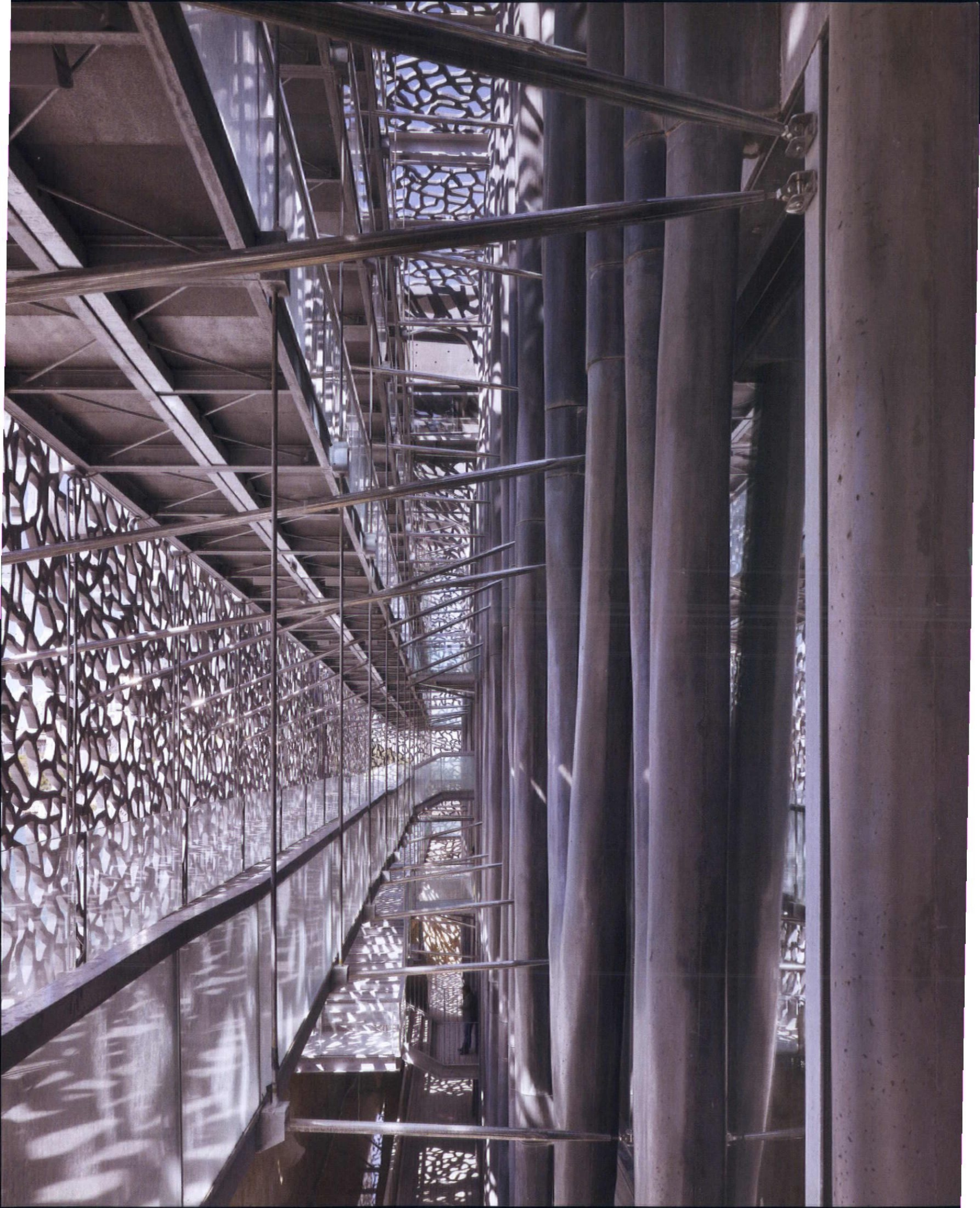


lower ground floor plan

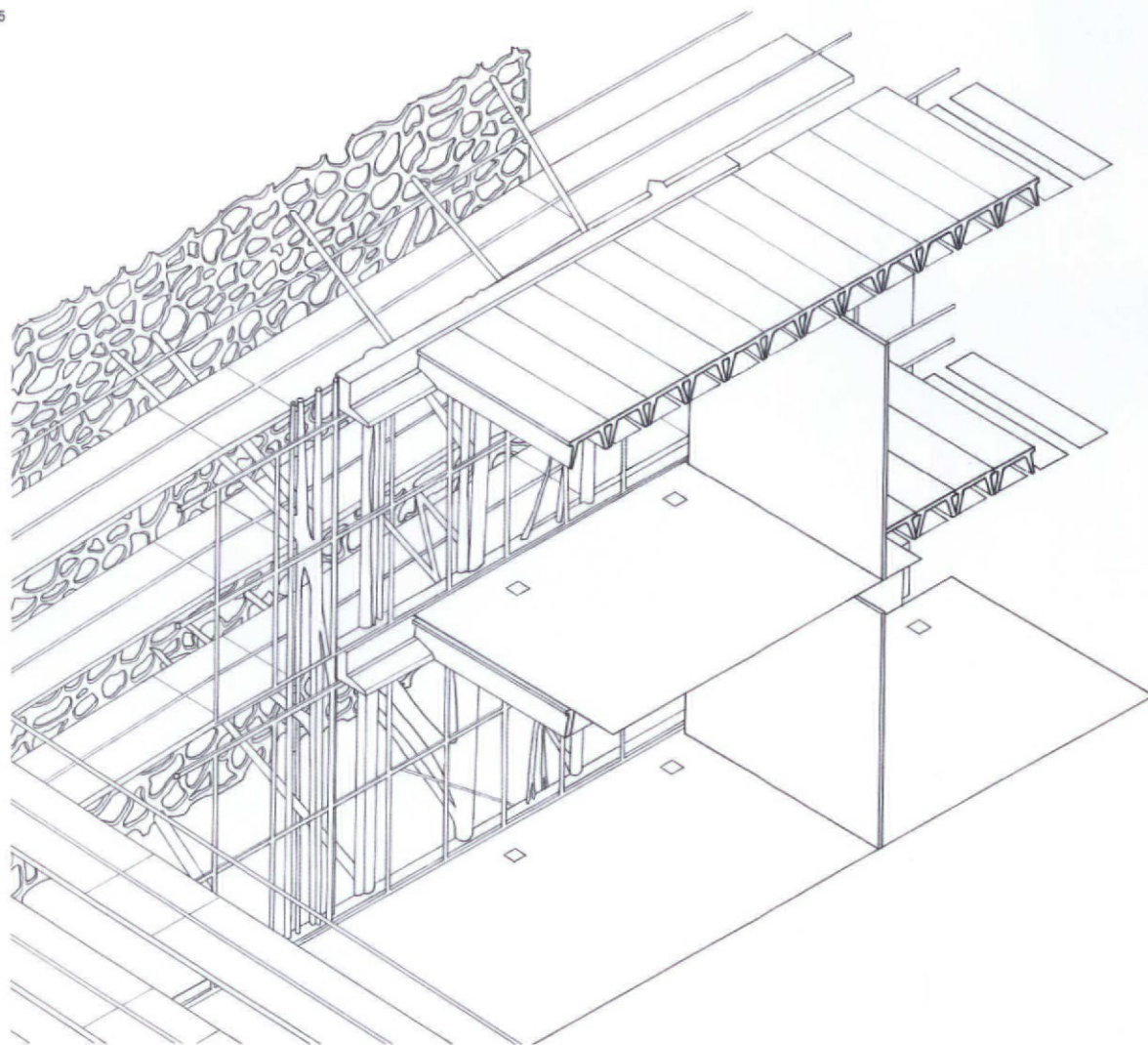


second floor plan









4. (Previous page)  
a system of ramps  
winds up behind the  
layered facade, forming  
a leisurely promenade  
architecturale  
5. Exploded detail  
of external wall  
6. The rooftop terrace  
frames the intense  
blues of sea and sky

**MuCEM,  
Marseille,  
France,  
Rudy Ricciotti**

**Architect**  
Rudy Ricciotti  
**Photographs**  
Roland Halbe  
**Drawings**  
Courtesy of the architects  
except 5 by Emma Galvin  
based on architect's detail

his interest in exoskeletons, a structural solution he had treated with bravura at the Pavillon Noir. But what about the Mediterranean, right on the doorstep? Impossible to ignore in a museum dedicated to the culture of that very sea, but how to bring it into neutral exhibition space where light-sensitive objects might be displayed?

Square in plan (72 x 72m) and box-like in volume – a deliberate rejection of Gehry-esque formal contortions (dismissed as ‘bling bling’) and a gesture of humility towards the Fort St-Jean – the J4 building comprises an inner volume of 52 x 52 x 18m containing a basement auditorium and two floors of glass-fronted gallery space. Around this inner box, on two sides, are wrapped bands of glass-fronted administrative spaces like sunshades, while the other two are veiled in a lacy concrete mesh, which also covers the roof, except for the open-air terrace. As at the Villa Savoye or the Maison de Verre, the J4 comprises two circulation routes, one eminently practical – a central set of stairs and lifts – the other a long, meandering *promenade architecturale*, which takes the form of a ‘ziggurat’ of ramps running around the 52 x 52m core, behind the admin spaces and the mesh, linking all the levels from

basement to roof terrace. The promenade then continues from the roof onto the Fort St-Jean via a 135m-long footbridge spanning a water-filled basin, and another footbridge connects the fort to the historic Panier quarter on the hill, making the promenade grandly urban and – if Ricciotti’s wish that it be open to all comers (not just ticketholders) is observed – generous in scale.

Approaching the J4 building from the dockside road, you see a generic-looking glassy box, and nor are the dingy entrance hall and poky internal circulation spaces encouraging. But as you enter the galleries the magic starts. This may be the cultural equivalent of warehouse or retail space, but no supermarket was ever so *soigné*, Ricciotti having gone to great lengths to devise a system of floor beams that allow lighting and ducting to be accommodated within them without false ceilings. And then there is the Mediterranean, veiled behind its concrete mantilla (and, on sunny days, diaphanous black curtains), tantalisingly present but never intrusive.

Stepping onto the ziggurat ramps, you enter a quite extraordinary space, bristling with stainless-steel tie and suspension rods whose pins-and-needles ballet is dappled with shade

from the concrete mesh, behind which winks and scintillates the mythical Mediterranean. Arriving on the roof terrace, which is partly shaded by the concrete mantilla and serves the inevitable panoramic restaurant, you are confronted by the sensuously moulded footbridge, which shoots off across the abyss in a minimal (minimum? phallic?) marker-pen streak. Once on the Fort St-Jean, you enjoy sweeping views of the J4 in its wider setting, a charcoal-grey shadow to the fort, its concrete shawl evoking not just flamenco Spain but the mashrabiyas of the caliphates, the pattern of reflected ripples on a sandy seabed, or the late-summer cracks of the Camargue mudflats where Ricciotti spent his boyhood.

The treatment of the J4 programme demonstrates a boldly simple logic, but the structure was anything but simple to build. Presumably, using steel, an elegantly slender building could fairly easily have been achieved. But Ricciotti wanted concrete, and not just any old concrete but ultra-high-performance fibre-reinforced concrete (UHPFRC), a cutting-edge material developed in France over the past 20 years, which he first tried out at Seoul’s Seonyu footbridge (2002). Because of its density, UHPFRC is impermeable, unlike





classic concrete, and can be made using either metal or plastic fibres, meaning that it suffers from none of the corrosion problems to which steel or classic concrete are subject in marine environments – ideal for this waterfront site exposed to the full fury of the Mediterranean. UHPFRC cannot be poured in situ but must be precast in moulds, leading Ricciotti to design an elegantly slender, tree-like set of columns for the J4 that branch out in Ns and Ys to form an exoskeleton that ensures wind bracing as well as bearing floor load. But what Ricciotti had not solved was the problem of flexion, since although UHPFRC is six to eight times more resistant in compression than classic concrete, it is very weak in tension. As a result the engineers – led by Ricciotti's son Romain – had to devise a complex system of non-linear post-tensioning with cables running through all the columns.

As Ricciotti later admitted, 'When I designed the MuCEM, we didn't know how to build it! The bravura footbridges could only have been done in UHPFRC (moulded steel would have been far too heavy and expensive), but a system of post-tensioning had to be devised for them too, and the assembly of their interlocking units necessitated precision

'I designed it with fear in my guts, under the pressure of the metaphysical horizon that is the Mediterranean, of that cobalt blue that becomes Klein blue then ultramarine, that drives you mad after a while'

to one-tenth of a millimetre and one-tenth of a degree to ensure even transmission of forces. In interviews, Ricciotti describes the J4's construction as a heroic battle in the manner of a corrida, a fight to the death to beat the material into shape, a race against the clock to finish on time (building began in November 2009, for completion at the end of 2012), as well as a Howard Roark-style stand-off with the authorities, who required no fewer than 11 *appréciations techniques d'expérimentation* (the standard French certification procedure for technical innovations, requiring the fabrication and exhaustive testing and analysis of prototypes) for the J4, including for earthquake and fire resistance.

The completed building is enigmatic and somehow slippery to grasp. For Ricciotti

it is both masculine and feminine, macho and girlish; there is great subtlety in the handling of materials, yet it can seem slick (Ricciotti called it vulgar); where is the 'architecture' in a project that was ostensibly all about neutral space, construction and engineering? And despite Ricciotti's protestations that Minimalism has killed off signs and symbols, the J4 is surely just as shallow in meaning as the sandy shores its rippling covering recalls, let alone the *Playtime* Modernism he professes to abhor. But then how else to respond to a curatorial remit so vast and so vague (and that went through umpteen mutations following the architectural competition), and does it matter when the spectacular site provides all the depth and richness you could possibly desire, the *point zéro* in the bitter, thrilling palimpsest that is Marseille? For the MuCEM is above all a response to this impossible site, and is perhaps best read as a brilliant piece of landscape design where questions of scale, monumental repetition and handling of light and shade are brought into play, a landscape whose presence both frames and enriches the experience of this exciting, difficult city.









**C-Mine  
Cultural Centre,  
Genk, Belgium,  
51N4E**

Grappling with the familiar dilemma of how to shape a post-industrial future, this former powerhouse in the mining town of Genk has metamorphosed into a new cultural centre

# **KRAFT WERK**



# REPORT

## TOM HOLBROOK

C-Mine, by Brussels-based architects 51N4E, establishes a regional cultural centre in the Flemish town of Genk. The project, completed in 2010, reworks the powerhouse buildings of a former coalmining complex to provide a pair of multipurpose auditoria of different scales, meeting rooms and spaces for flexible cultural programming, and accommodation for technical support and administration.

Genk is, quite literally, at the end of the line: at the eastern edge of the Province of Limburg, Belgium's border with the Netherlands. Hasselt – the neighbouring city and regional capital of Limburg – is a much more urban proposition, but Genk sits at the heart of Belgium's Kempen coalfield, part of a coal deposit stretching to the Ruhr Valley, which was exploited at an industrial scale from the close of the First World War to the end of the last century. Over this period Genk grew from a village to become one of Belgium's most important industrial centres.

Quite unlike British coal-mining districts, Limburg does not seem poor: perhaps because it is located not on the margins of the country, but in a strategic border position between Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and has benefited from continuous government investment. Coal was discovered in the region at the beginning of the 20th century, and extensive deep mines were dug at Winterslag, Zwartberg and Waterschei from 1917. Winterslag is a suburb of Genk: a company town built largely by the mine, at the head of a mine system that extends over a vast area, with galleries up to a kilometre deep. The Winterslag pit closed in 1988 – the last of the great mines of the Limburg coalfield.

Flanders seems to have a culturally intimate relationship with topography. So many of the establishing narratives of the country are played out at a grand scale over a subtle landscape, from the defensive topographic connoisseurship of the Western Front (or its prequel, Vauban's fortress system, for example), to the colonial exploitation of Congolese rubber, with its concomitant built

riches in Brussels and Antwerp, commissioned by the 'Builder King' Leopold II. In all these narratives, the landscape is seen as something wholeheartedly purposeful.

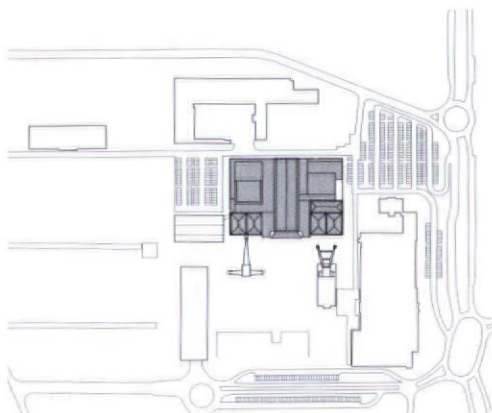
The familiar patchwork landscape of central Belgium gives way to orchards in Limburg, and then with a dramatic shift, to a mix of forest and heavy infrastructure around Genk. The discovery of coal brought all the accoutrements of a carbon economy to the region: power stations, high-voltage power lines and the huge Albert Canal, connecting Liège with Antwerp, characteristically establishing both defensive line and European trade artery.

Slagheaps from the mines are prominent in what was originally a heath landscape which was reminiscent of the Norfolk Breckland. From the vantage point of the top of the Winterslag pit's winding tower, this whole landscape is revealed as an instrumental one: shaped by the process of coal extraction. Even the extensive forest – part of Hoge Kempen, Flanders' only National Park – turns out to have been planted to supply timber supports and props for the mine workings, and is largely a species of pine that groans under excessive compressive load, so warning those underground of imminent collapse.

Against the background of this immense landscape drama is a more intense, but interrelated narrative: the two-decade conundrum of what to do with the former mine buildings and landscapes, and the economic void left by their closure. When a culture ceases to operate at this grand scale, the anxiety of what replaces the lost activity of extensive industry is palpable.

### Devising a masterplan

The mine complex established itself on a high terrace, commanding the remnants of the settlement of Winterslag to the south. From 1988 a series of masterplans have attempted to posit a means of locating the surface buildings of the Winterslag pit in a new economic reality, largely supported by European 'conversion funds'. Two masterplans from this period represent the poles of a possible development approach for this post-industrial landscape, on which structures were set out according



site plan



**C-Mine  
Cultural Centre,  
Genk, Belgium,  
51N4E**





**1. (Previous page) the heavy industrial armoury of pitheads and slagheaps still studs the landscape around the city centre 2&3. A terracotta-tinted concrete wall unites the new extension with the old mine building**

3



‘Against the background of this immense landscape drama is a more intense, but interrelated narrative: the two-decade conundrum of what to do with the former mine buildings and landscapes, and the economic void left by their closure’









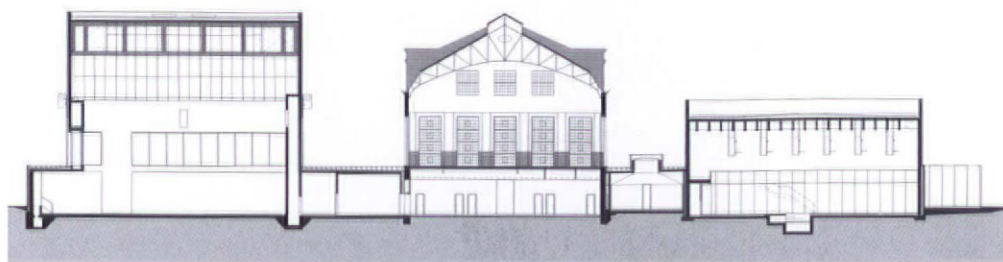




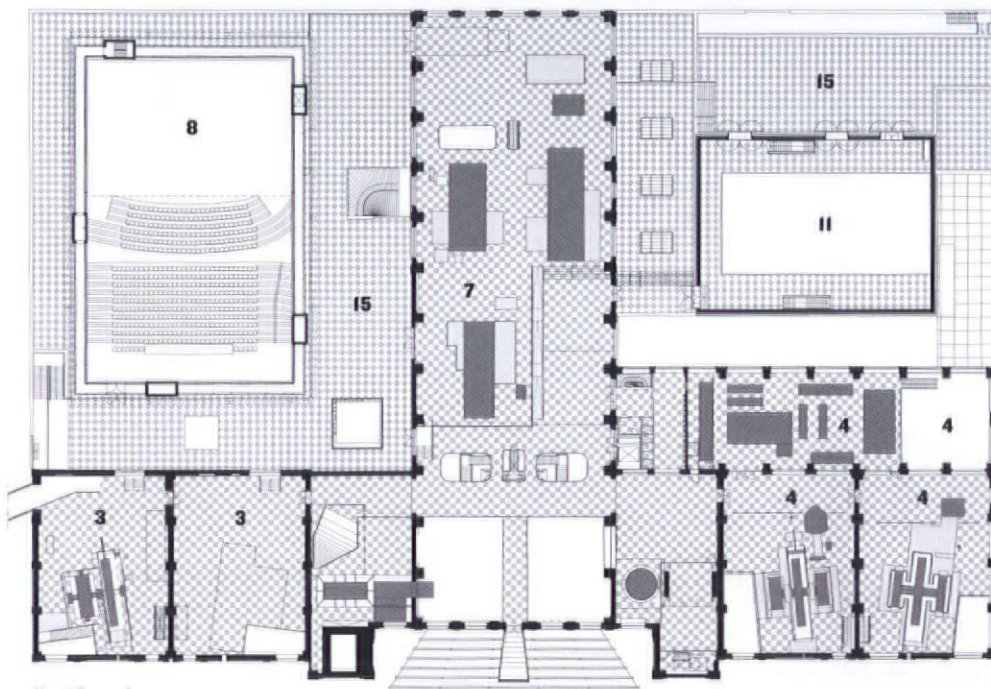


**C-Mine  
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Genk, Belgium,  
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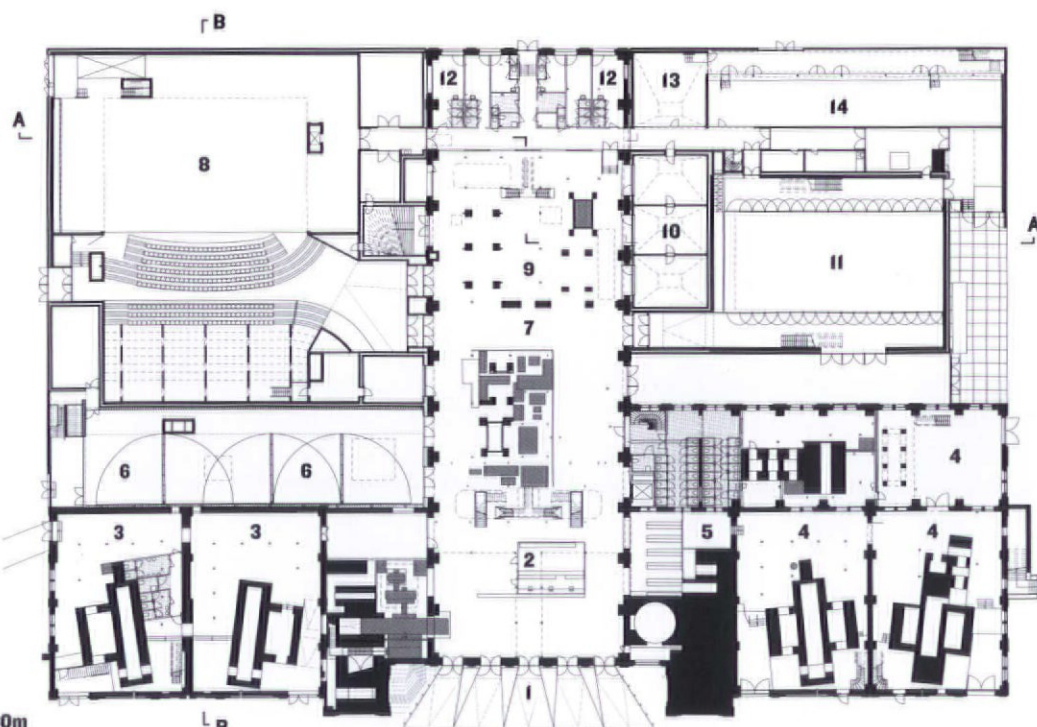
4. (Previous page) the black steel 'megaphone' of the new entrance structure draws on the sculptural heft of the rooftop water tanks  
5. (Left) the mute machinery speaks eloquently of the building's productive past



section AA



first floor plan



- 1 main entrance
- 2 reception
- 3 café
- 4 design centre
- 5 cloakroom
- 6 kitchen
- 7 foyer
- 8 main theatre
- 9 bar
- 10 multi-functional space
- 11 theatre
- 12 changing rooms
- 13 kitchen
- 14 offices
- 15 terrace



ground floor plan



to a Fordist diagram, but then robbed of the very process that gave them form.

The first masterplan from 1991 was commissioned from architects BOB 361 by the Kempische Steenkoolmijnen company, working with the town council of Genk. This early plan proposed embedding the industrial remnants in an orthogonal plot-based field, allowing sequential speculative additions of new programme, allied to the process of de-industrialisation and conversion to a more urban condition. This responsive masterplan was replaced by a more formalised approach, designed by De Gregorio & Partners, setting buildings around a formal square created at the front of the mine buildings with parking behind formally arranged institutional buildings, including a fire station, a design faculty and a multiscreen cinema.

C-Mine diverges from the masterplan in a way that gives an interesting critique of the urban-scaled project, while establishing the overall theme for the new cultural centre. Rather than retain the T shape of the mine building, with the required new programme of the cultural centre added as a side extension (as envisaged by the De Gregorio masterplan),

51N4E chose to superimpose these new volumes onto the existing, completing the T to form a rectangle in plan. The trinity emerging from this includes the superscaled mine machinery, the pragmatic but beautifully wrought and inventive industrial shell, and the new cultural programme. The result is much closer in spirit to the previous BOB 361 masterplan of negotiative urbanism in the way that it avoids the mere adjacency of 'heritage industrial' and 'new culture', but establishes a more compressed and spatially active exchange between the two.

The hubristic masterplan's formal figure-field relationships are subverted into something much more spatially rich. A terracotta-coloured concrete flank wall that creates the overall quadrilateral is used to unite the various components of the project, and the plan for the cultural spaces is worked out to develop a logic of relationships with a discipline as tough as the original industrial planning. Here the formality of the masterplan helps by establishing a clear 'back', allowing separate servicing of both stages and a wing of administrative and artists' spaces.

The ground-floor former machine hall is used as the foyer from which to access all other spaces; the plan discipline helps to hold a dense collection of fragments in a unified field, creating an introverted order. This field includes elements left over from the industrial process, the original fabric, together with subsequent pragmatic interventions in the powerhouse (huge concrete piers punch down through earlier brick fabric to support pieces of machinery). Each space has a relationship to the next, arranged in an enfilade or through jump-cut splices, with clever use of borrowed light and framed sequential views.

The lower realm is highly practical, densely containing all the defined programme required by the cultural centre. 51N4E's coup de grâce comes in the creation of an upper realm, structured around the volumes of the compressor hall, the halls of the pit winding gear, and the upper horizons of the new auditoria and terraces. In contrast with the ground floor, with its aestheticised clutter of pipes and ducts, and the bar and the stages



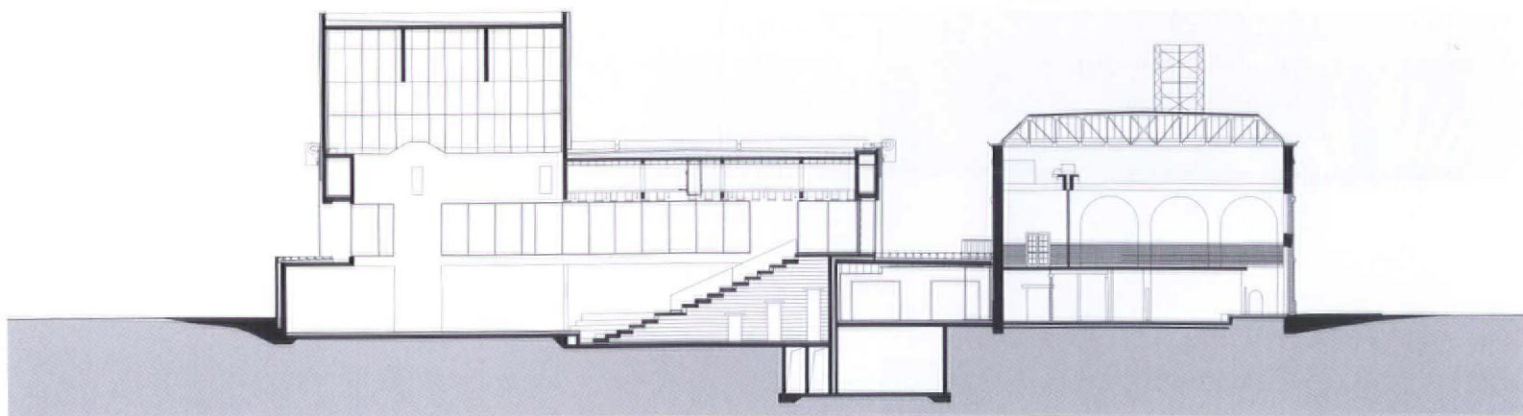
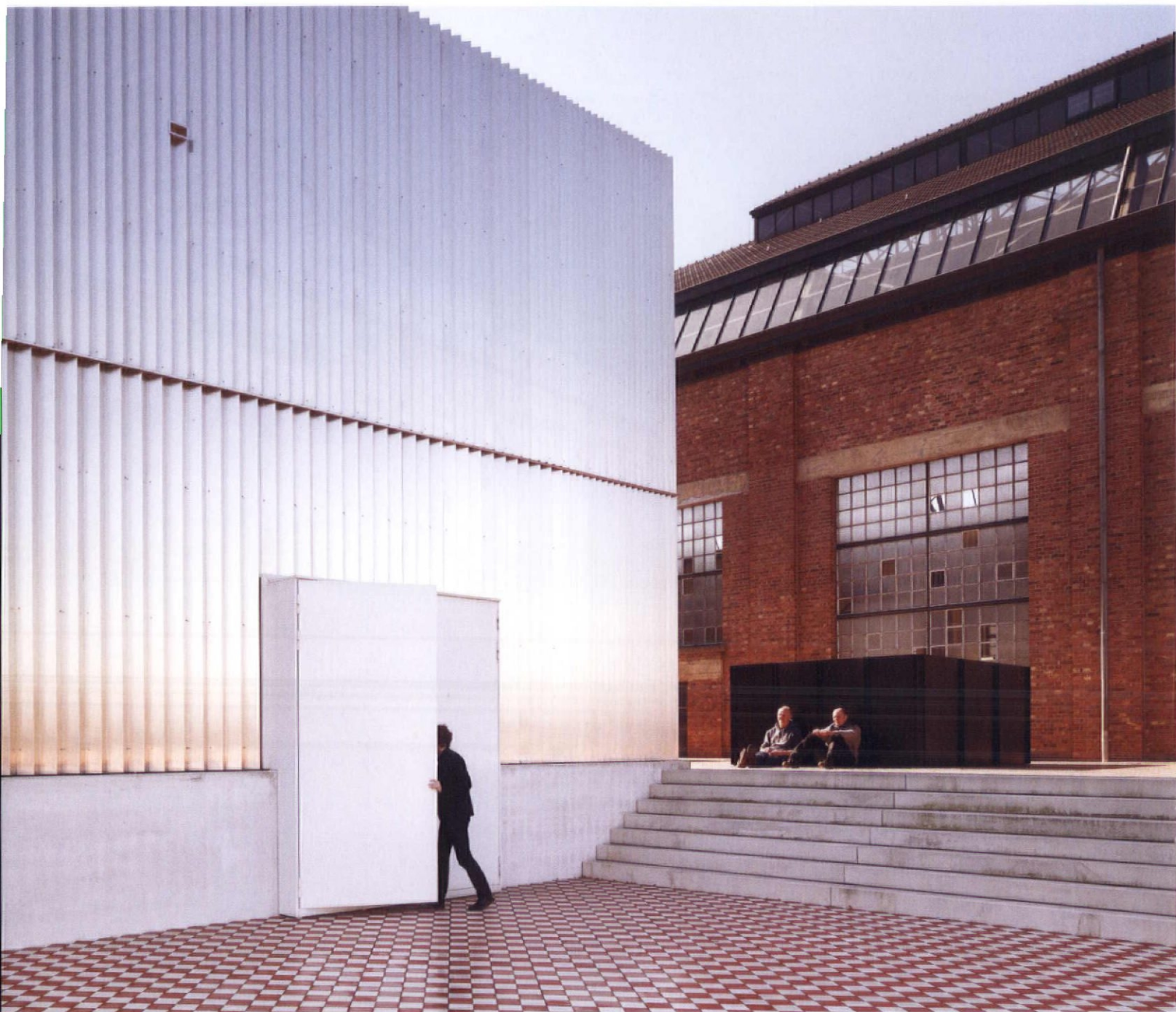
'The plan for the cultural spaces is worked out to develop a logic of relationships with a discipline as tough as the original industrial planning'



**C-Mine Cultural Centre, Genk, Belgium, 51N4E**

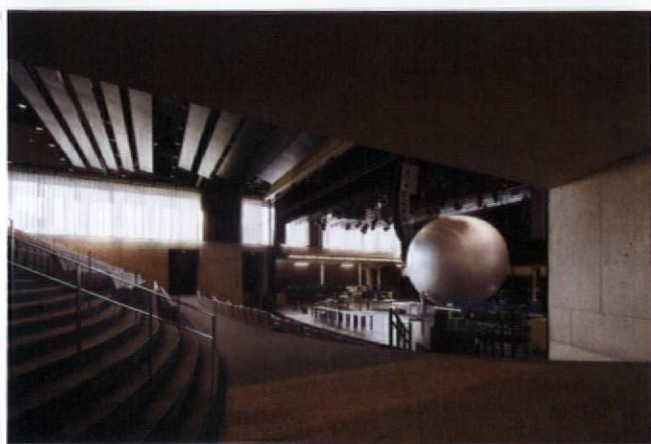
**6&7.** The single-storey volumes that link the old and new buildings create multi-level terraces, paved with the same red and white tiles found in the machine hall





section BB





'When a culture ceases to operate at this grand scale, retreat does not seem to be an option, but the anxiety of what replaces the lost activity of extensive industry is palpable'





**C-Mine  
Cultural Centre,  
Genk, Belgium,  
51N4E**

**8.** The upper level is left relatively unprogrammed  
**9.** In contrast, the ground floor is occupied by the functions of the cultural centre, such as auditoria

**Architect**  
51N4E  
**Photographs**  
Stijn Bollaert

and seating of the new auditoria, where all is purposeful, the piano nobile is quite different in character, with very little programme. Here the found red-and-white chequered tiling of the machine hall is matched and extended to create a field that unites fragments of new and old space, creating a Euclidian abstraction between spaces, composed like a piece of Donald Judd's *Marfa*, and keyed more to the aura of loss and doubt.

This upper realm is open to a more speculative, questioning idea of the role of culture in the regeneration of a place like Genk. The complex's original function creates a surplus mirroring the slackness of the post-industrial surrounding landscape. As 51N4E's director Peter Swinnen notes, C-Mine's raw material is the excess of space, converting a problem into an opportunity: 'At C-Mine ... an infrastructure that had been severed from its industrial context was used to give structure to new city fabric. Perhaps it's no longer possible today to build industrial structures of this scale in an urban context. Everything about them seems just too large ... The unrefined materials allow users to appropriate the building in a rough way. The dimensions of the interior space are pushed to the limits, as if in anticipation of continually new transformations and conversions. These buildings are made out of "surplus space".'

The architecture brings into play a conversation pertinent to the regional problem of industrial conversion: if the 20th century could conjure a whole landscape out of a single physical process, what can replace that? How do you recover meaning from that landscape?

**Craft and industry**

The powerhouse buildings stem from a period in industrial history when craft skills were more fully integrated with manufacturing and industry. This cultural manifestation of industry is evident in many structures from this period in Belgium, particularly in public infrastructure: structures for the railway for example. It illustrates a sensitivity to making, decoration and materiality that seems far removed from our present cultural condition, and again it has a scalar dimension.

On the day of my visit, the auditoria and the switch-house (the Barenzaal) were preparing for a trade show by General Electric, a company deeply implicated in the shaping of the northern European landscape, through involvement in power generation and other critical infrastructure (for example, the Port of Rotterdam). At one end of the Barenzaal is the mine's original switchgear, each dial and switch lovingly made and mounted into a screen wall of sheet marble, occupying the entire end of the hall like a Roman *scaenae frons*. At the other end of the space was the manufacturer's latest switch module presented on a table: engineered with great skill, and probably containing in miniaturised form the capability of much of the marble switch-wall.

While the earlier approach mediates with architecture – as part of the creation of a fine room for example, now popular for wedding receptions and events of all kinds – the contemporary manifestation, while impressive, is hard to locate in cultural terms beyond its technical utility. 51N4E encountered these issues of craft limitation in building the work. The project architect related the problem of matching the 'found' red and white tiling used to finish the upper floors. The contractor could only offer tiles pre-laid in 16 tile modules, as it would now be uneconomic to lay tiles individually. 51N4E find modes of resistance against this coarseness: an example would be the use of ready-made profiled sheets of aluminium to clad the auditoria, but to create the corners using a 'special' which increases the number of folds, achieving a form of entasis across the whole elevation and turning the corners elegantly. This delicacy is extended to create subtle means of introducing different degrees of luminance to the auditoria through layered clerestories, with the ability to turn a technically efficient 'black box' into a room flooded with daylight.

C-Mine represents an important attempt to reconnect the immediate scale of making and creativity with more extensive problems of landscape and urbanity. Through an extensive and painful re-imagining of its post-industrial context, Genk now has a significant forum to consider this contemporary cultural dilemma.







**Jeweller's studio,  
Southwark,  
London, England,  
DSDHA**

Perched atop a corner shop, this wedge-shaped, zinc-clad jewellery studio and shop mediates between the medieval street plan and modern towers of south London



# PRETTY IN ZINC

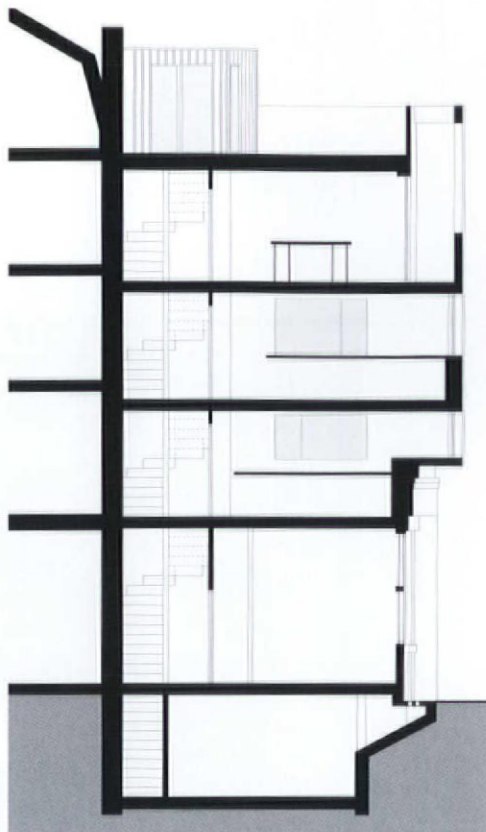


# REPORT

## ROSAMUND DIAMOND

Compared with some of the recent towering developments at nearby London Bridge, the new building in Snowsfields, Southwark by DSDHA for fashionable jewellery designer Alex Monroe is decidedly diminutive. Yet the planning argument prompted by its zinc-clad facades – which took two years to resolve – must have made it feel to the architects and client almost equivalent in scale to that of Renzo Piano's soaring Shard.

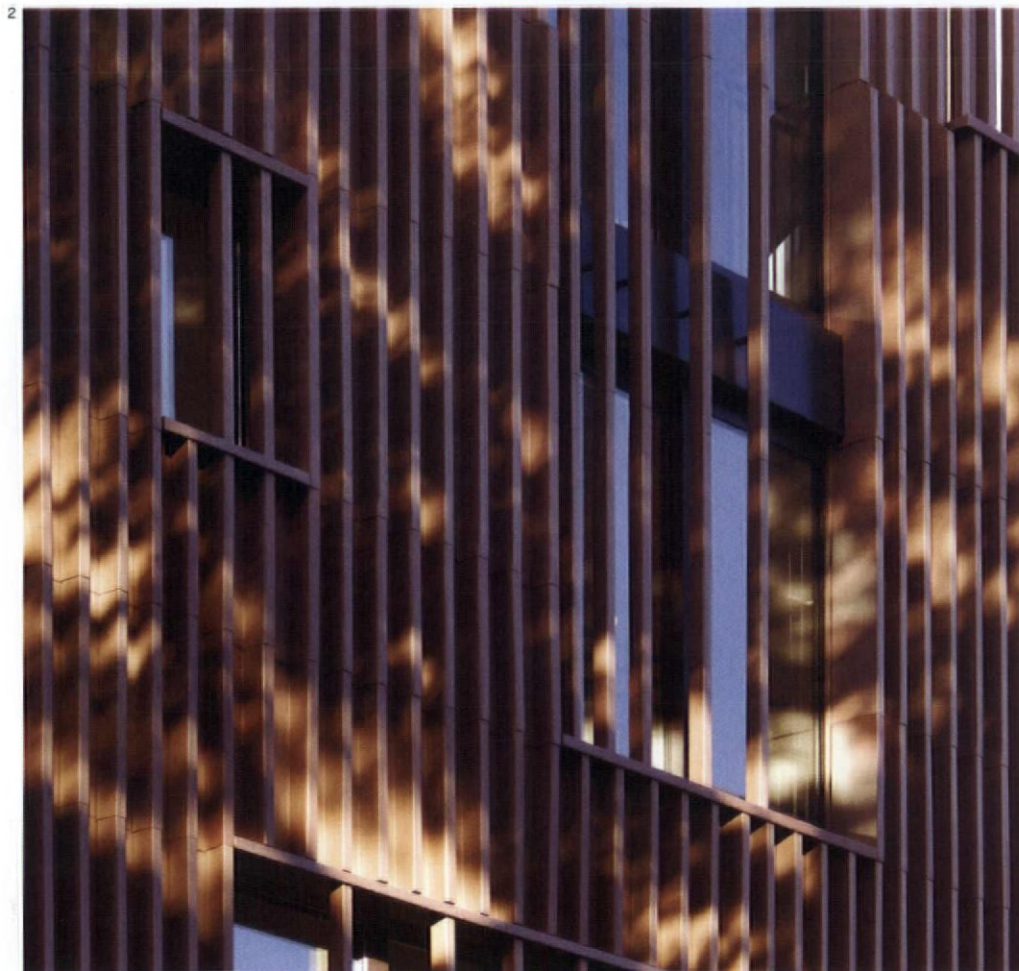
The studio is in an area of mixed use and diverse architecture, on one of Southwark's oldest streets. In the heterogeneous condition of a 'continuously transforming' city, the project addresses issues of appropriate urban form, which are as relevant for inner-city inhabitation as the large scale of the neighbouring towers. An existing single-storey shop at the end of a mansion block terrace has been capped with a new three-storey extension. The modest 20m<sup>2</sup> wedge-shaped site generated one room per floor with the staircase space, a studio, workshop and meeting room occupying the upper levels. Rather than becoming an impediment, the constricted footprint has been used as a generator of internal spatial tensions, shifting between the fields of tight corners and views.



section AA

## Jeweller's studio, Southwark, London, England, DSDHA

1. (Previous page) the ribbed zinc box, tinted to match the bricks of the terrace at the insistence of the council, forms a much needed link between the medieval street pattern of Southwark and the metal-clad Shard
2. The zinc shell was craftily moulded to its timber frame on site
3. Stained timber lightens the interiors



location plan







'The project addresses issues of appropriate urban form which are as relevant for inner-city inhabitation as the large scale of the neighbouring towers'

The planners, validating the terrace as a fragment, approved the body of the new building with its semi-aligned window openings, while disputing its skin, which they required to be brick-red (or subsequently terracotta) to match the adjacent facades. In a paradoxical move, they sought to maintain the conservation area's fabric by demanding homogeneity, yet the area is characterised by a diversity accrued from the street pattern and its architectural variety.

Snowsfields was once an area of tanneries and leather preparation. Its curving medieval form and changing character, with pockets of open space, is the kind of location one imagines the writer WG Sebald describing in one of his late-night meanders, invoking histories and collective memory which Aldo Rossi identified as vital urban constituents. The surrounding buildings include an artist's house, late 19th-century Peabody-type housing, a mission building, and metal-capped brick-clad industrial sheds.

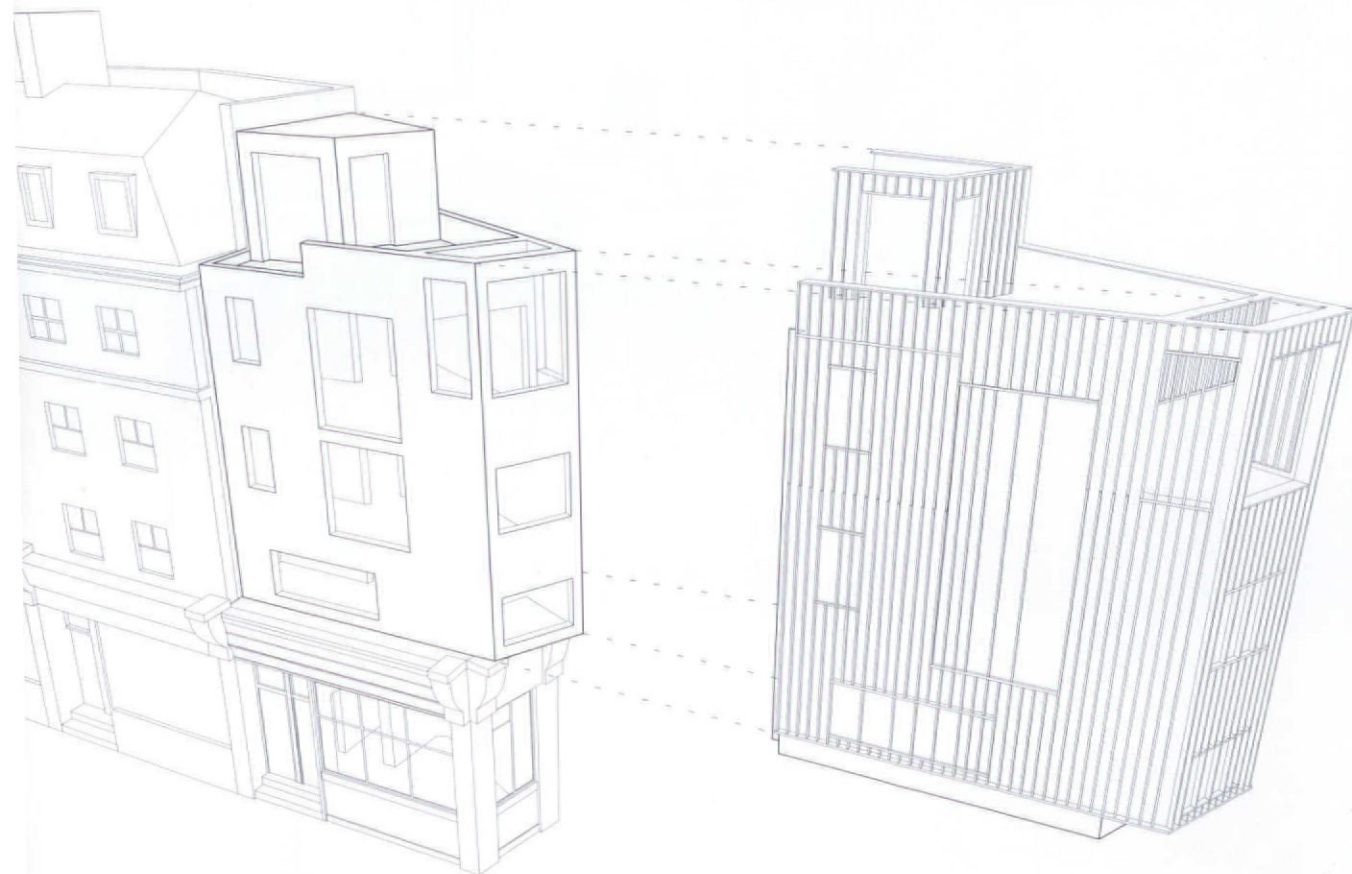
Monroe produces cult fashion and bespoke precious metal jewellery, with a particular following in Japan. The building is for jewellery to be designed, finished, distributed and displayed. Studio spaces are designed to reproduce the sociable character of his existing workshop in a 19th-century mews, where the courtyard becomes a shared meeting space, and its staircase and the meeting rooms and terraces on its upper floors are more sociable still.

The project's conceptual origins lie in the development of an urban architecture which can be simultaneously uniform and independent. Snowsfields Studios is a building of two parts: the base, replicating the shop front as a discernible urban form sustaining the street's liveliness, and the zinc-clad block above in which issues of scale and craft are embedded. As an independent entity, the new building, supported on a steel frame, is constructed from prefabricated cross-laminated timber panels: their surface is exposed as the internal finish, and the material has also been used for the studio's fitted furniture.

For 18 months while the approval for the cladding was negotiated, the waterproofed timber box stood naked, waiting to be clad in its concertinaed zinc skin. This articulated carapace rescales the building, overriding

**Jeweller's studio,  
Southwark,  
London, England,  
DSDHA**

**4. At ground level, the shop is used to display Alex Monroe's jewellery: the building as a whole returns to medieval vertical integration**



structure and facade diagram













'The site's constriction has been used as a generator of internal spatial tensions, shifting between the fields of tight corners and views'

window openings to obscure its functions and internal volumes, and enrobing a double-height loggia and the roof terrace. It recalibrates relationships between internal spaces and their urban fronts, mediating the immediate environment's relationship with the towers of the middle distance city behind.

At the same time as it respects the uniform sweep of the terrace, the building reveals monolithic tendencies. Its autonomy, manifested in its articulated wrapped cladding with its barely visible joints, presents an architecture of emblematic scale, with the idea that its entity can be maintained whether at the size of a model, a small studio building or a large block.

The tight-ribbed zinc reinforces the abstract inscrutable form. Detaching the material from associations with roofs or bar-tops, its dark reddish-brown pigmented coating matches the neighbouring brick facades. The on-site fabrication of the folded zinc, with its slight inflections and stepping

at the terrace junction, has left the building with an apt sense of handcrafting. There is a directness to this construction, in which materials are not detailed for their own sakes but with smooth utility, acknowledging their weathering and potential for change. The screen resists revealing the building's functions, but the zinc ribbing conveys a material imagery offset from the fine jewellery crafting conducted inside the building. The elevations are made to be dynamic, to change in different light conditions and from different viewpoints.

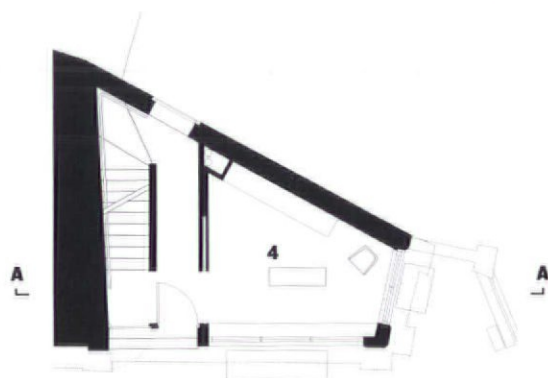
The preoccupation with the development of the urban block as an abstract urbane entity links this to other recent DSDHA projects, such as their South Molton Street Building (2012), also on a wedge-shaped site. Each project, capitalising on non-static notions of the city, works with a quality of dynamic instability – a theme already discernible in some of the practice's earlier works. In Snowfields, it is present in the building's explicit suspension above the shop, and its placement in a context of extreme juxtapositions of scale, including the London Bridge towers. As a distinct architectural response to its collaged surroundings, the building flattens its depth of field, not retreating from the city but engaging with it.

**Jeweller's studio,  
Southwark,  
London, England,  
DSDHA**

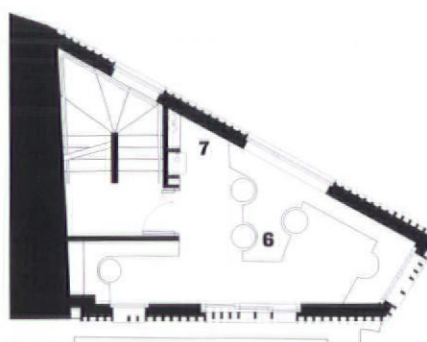
**5. (Opposite) the  
circulatory spaces,  
like the rest of the  
interiors, are panelled  
with light-coloured wood**

- 1 dispatch
- 2 storage
- 3 WC
- 4 shop
- 5 studio
- 6 workshop
- 7 kitchenette
- 8 meeting space
- 9 balcony
- 10 roof terrace

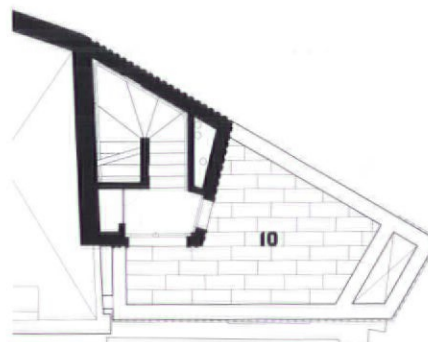
**Architect**  
DSDHA  
**Photographs**  
Dennis Gilbert



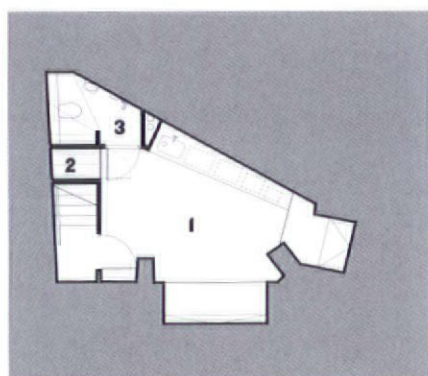
ground floor plan



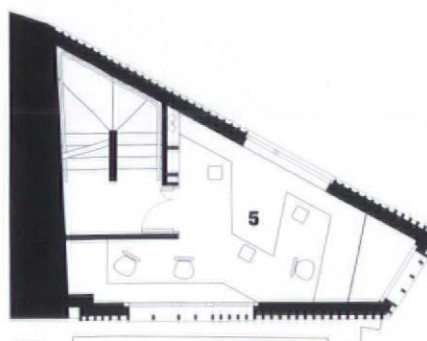
second floor plan



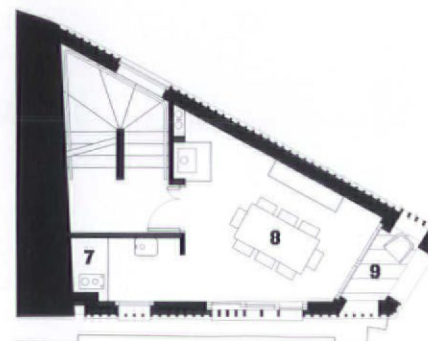
roof plan



basement plan



first floor plan



third floor plan



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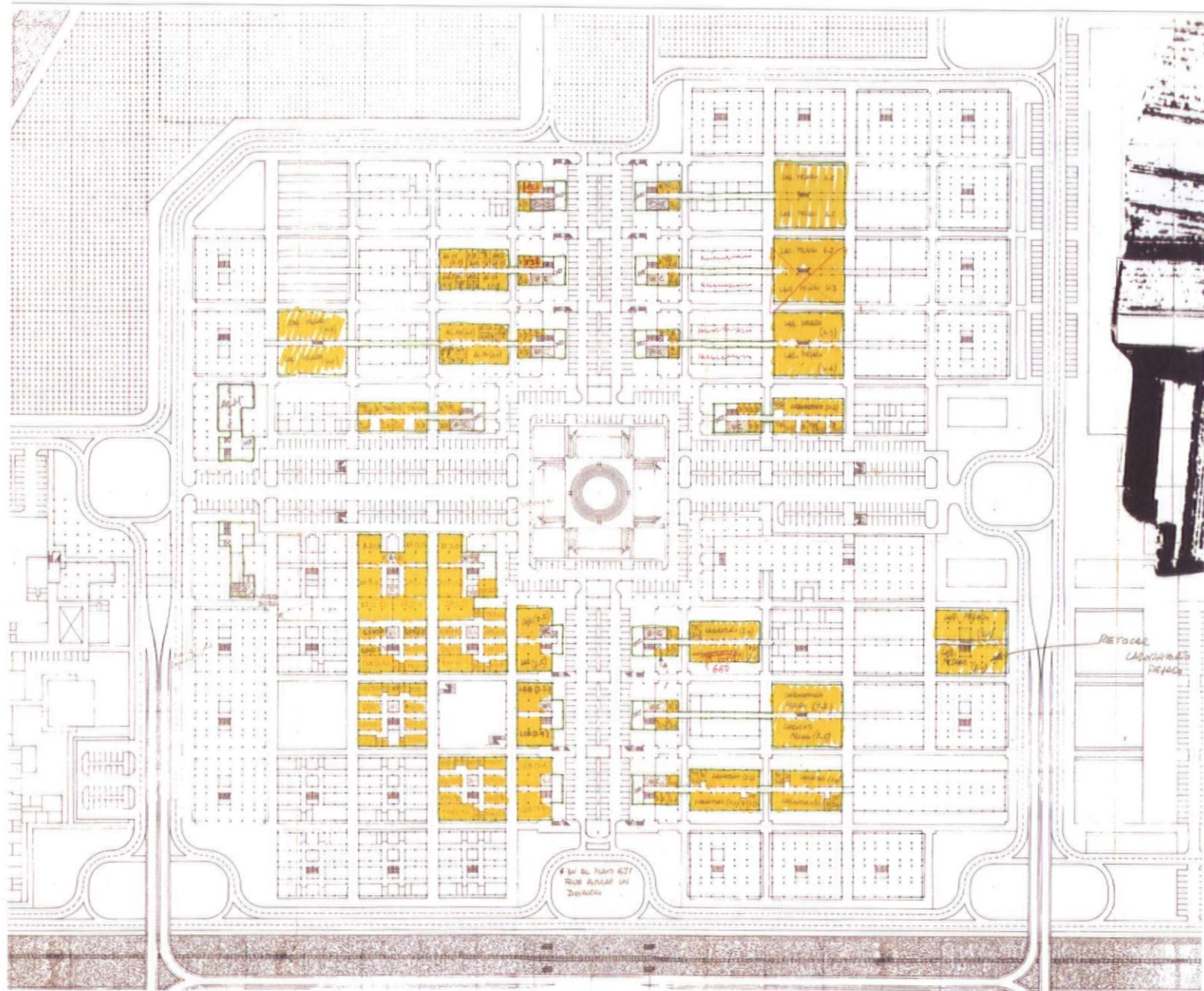
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## THE STRATEGIES OF MAT-BUILDING

Dismantling and reframing programme and composition, mat-building envisaged architecture as a dynamic, flexible armature

**DEBORA DOMINGO CALABUIG,  
RAUL CASTELLANOS GOMEZ  
& ANA ABALOS RAMOS**



# HISTORY

We owe the term mat-building to Alison Smithson. Her article 'How to Recognise and Read Mat-Building. Mainstream Architecture as it has Developed Towards the Mat-Building' in *Architectural Design* of September 1974 included a definition of this type of building and an extensive list of works and projects from the 1950s to the '70s related to it. Several studies have recently revived the interest in this topic.<sup>1</sup> As in the case of the buildings themselves, the appeal of re-reading Smithson's article lies in its open and flexible theoretical framing.

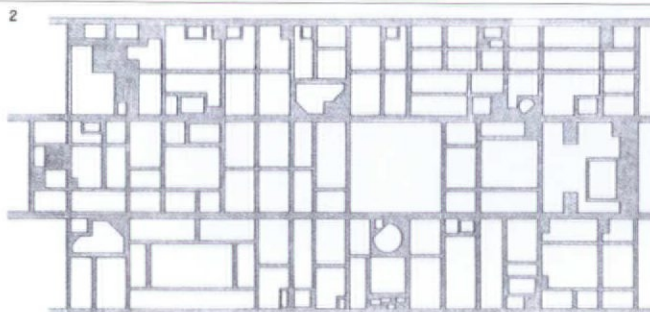
Smithson reviewed the items discussed at Team 10 meetings, pointing out that mat-buildings were not dependent on a specific architectural language, and identifying certain contemporary works as offshoots of this phenomenon. 'Mainstream mat-building became visible, however, with the completion of the Berlin Free University', she said – but what are the characteristic features of a mat-building? We aim to answer this question by analysing five case studies: four projects mentioned by Alison Smithson and another in our own locale of Valencia. Our research, which gave rise to an exhibition, explains and provides clear examples of the main mat-building strategies. The basic hypothesis focused on three compositional principles: metrics, programme and place.

To understand those decades of the last century, some context is needed. The link between Team 10's ideas and French structuralism had already been analysed, demonstrating the belief of that generation of architects in the new social sciences, the application of relational thinking to the programme, and the legacy of linguistics to be seen in the re-organisation of architectonic and urban concepts.<sup>2</sup> Examples include the revised concept of association, the concern for cultural identity, and the understanding of urban life as a function of the relationships among its inhabitants.

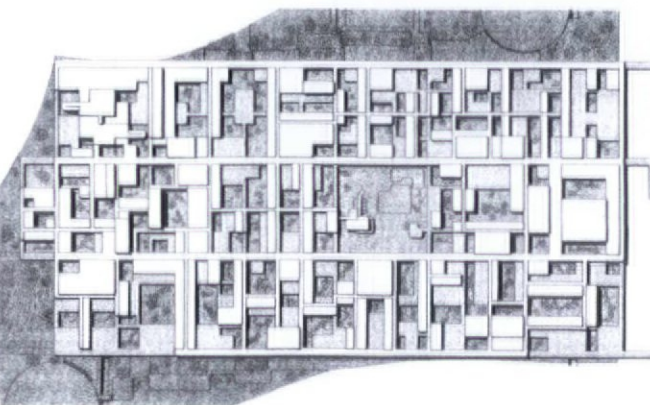
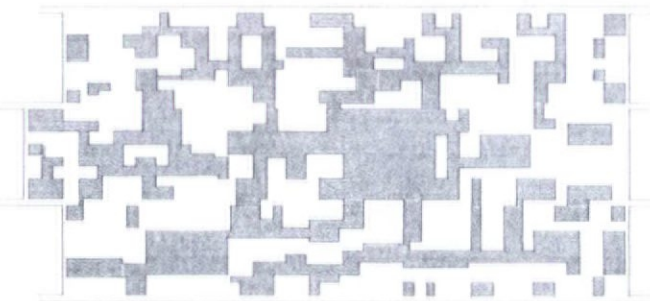
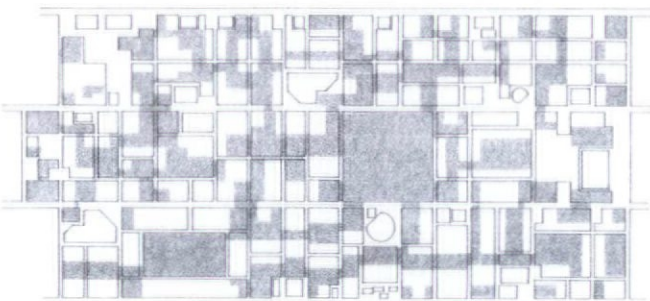
It is no coincidence that this happened at a time of social and economic growth. After recovering from the Second World War, the countries of central Europe aimed for a welfare state requiring new programmes for a growing middle class. Large housing estates, tourist facilities, universities and administrative centres were often commissioned with short lead-times and governed by notions of flexibility and growth. They all allude to *Opera aperta* (The Open Work) a term coined by Umberto Eco in 1962 in the realm of aesthetic theory, insofar as, as with works of art, their lack of formal definition is precisely the key to their potential multiplicity. 'The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented and endowed with specifications for proper development', writes Eco.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the architecture designed on the basis of these referents is systematic from conceptual and constructive perspectives, and shares strategies during its creative process. Mat-building seemed to use new tools that dismantled the compositional principles of the early modern period.

In the last quarter of 1963, Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods worked in conjunction with



**1.** (Previous page) completed in 1974, the groundscaping plan of the Universitat Politècnica de València in Spain by L35 Arquitectos typifies and rationalises the mat-building ideals of flexibility and growth  
**2.** Original competition drawings illustrating the Free University of Berlin by Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm  
**3.** Courtyard at the Free University of Berlin. First conceived in 1963 and completed 10 years later. FU-Berlin's open-plan layout, a city in miniature, perfectly epitomised the dynamism and potential of mat-building  
**4.** 1963 competition drawing for the reconstruction of the centre of Frankfurt-Römerberg, by Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm





the German architect Manfred Schiedhelm in two competitions, the results of which took critics by surprise. Although the design for the reconstruction of the centre of Frankfurt-Römerberg was not retained, it triggered a heated debate that culminated in the announcement of the winning design for the Free University of Berlin.

The Frankfurt plan entails thoughtful interaction with a well-established setting. The local council that organised the competition wanted to rebuild the city centre in keeping with the historical character of a site that had been bombed during the war, by using 'town planning featuring small blocks – either modern in style or imitating the old ones'.<sup>4</sup> However, the planning approach was based on a compositional network that could be adapted to cater for the city's future needs. The authors defined the project as a flexible megastructure on a scale directly related to the pre-existing construction.

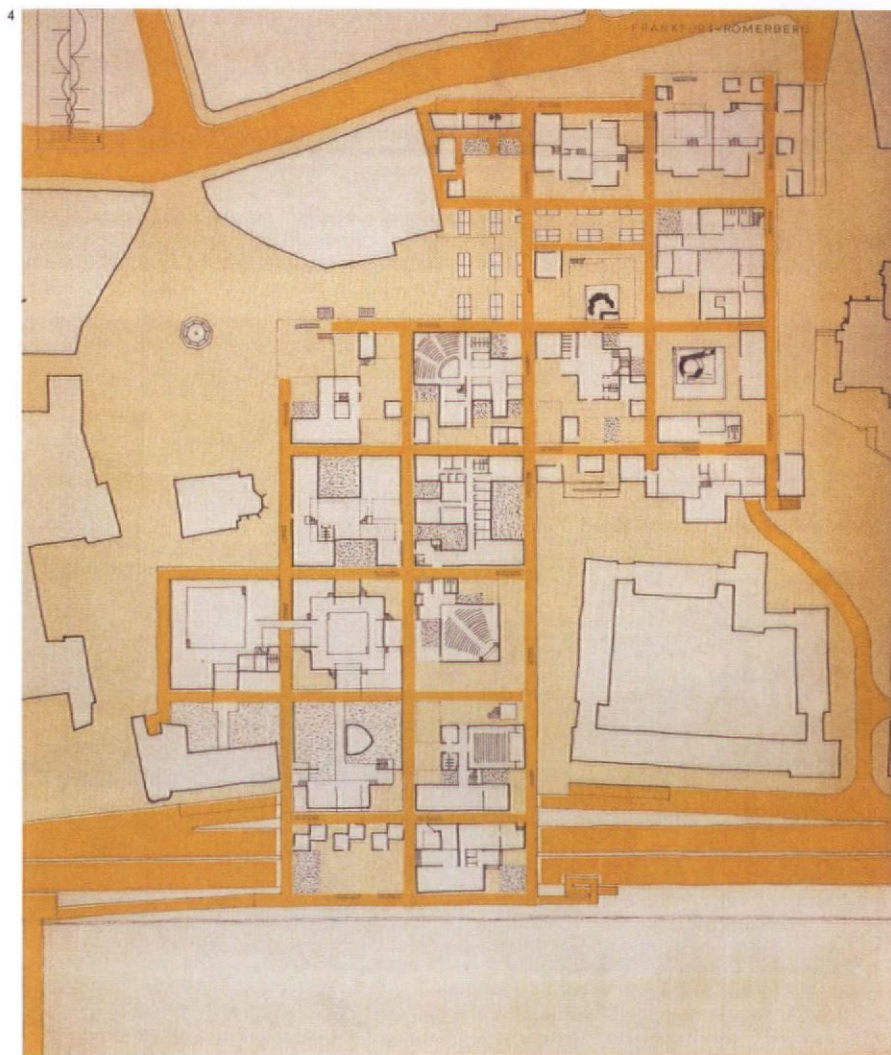
Many of Candilis, Josic and Woods' aspirations finally materialised in the paradigmatic Free University of Berlin whose open-plan design – typical of the universities in the 1960s – matched the characteristics of mat-building perfectly. This university is an exceptional example: its construction involved the French engineer Jean Prouvé and was overseen by the Berlin studio run by Manfred Schiedhelm, in collaboration with the American architect Shadrach Woods. In addition, the university was reconditioned and enlarged with a library by Foster + Partners, resulting in new reviews.

Le Corbusier and Guillermo Jullian de la Fuente's design for the Venice Hospital (1964-65) is seen as the culmination of a line of work, but could also be deemed to be a sort of mat-building. The search for an element able to repeat itself and spread out culminated in the definition of the design module, or *Unité de Bâtisse*: a volume with no facades, lit by natural light directly overhead, with access on the ground floor, and which spirals upwards and is complemented by a horizontal circulation grid.

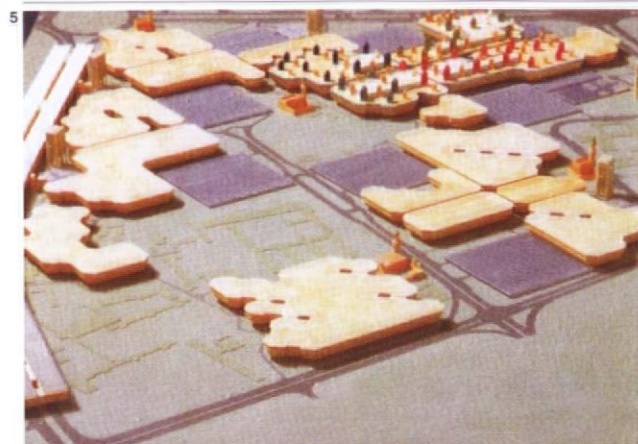
Another singular case is Alison and Peter Smithson's design for Kuwait entitled 'Urban Study and Demonstration Mat-Building (1968-72)'.<sup>5</sup> This project involved two points of particular interest to the subject under study here: its empathy with Arabic culture and tradition of open spaces, and the introduction of climate control elements. The architects of the Kuwait project, despite its later date, once again employed a mat-building design because it enabled them to include the vast and heterogeneous programme required by the original ideas competition.

Oblivious to the theoretical framework of these discussions, but undeniably immersed in a discipline, many works of architecture reproduce mat-building principles with remarkable simplicity. This is the case of the building designed and built between 1970 and

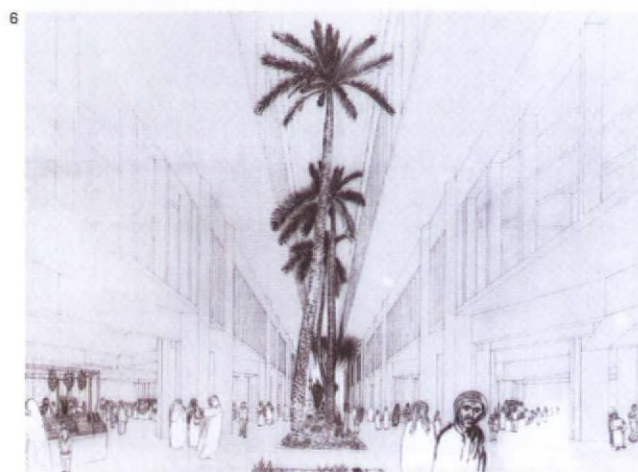
'In the Free University of Berlin, the module is a function of time: 65.63 metres (another Modulor dimension), is roughly the distance covered by a one-minute walk'







**5&6. Urban Study and Demonstration Mat-Building for Kuwait, by Alison and Peter Smithson, empathises with Arabic culture and its tradition of open spaces and climate control**  
**7. Walkways and courtyard at the Universitat Politècnica de València in Spain by L35 Arquitectos**  
**8. Comparative modules and metrics for mat-buildings in Frankfurt, Berlin, Venice, Kuwait and Valencia**



1974 for the Universitat Politècnica de València by L35, an architectural practice from Barcelona. Like other contemporary campuses, the design of this campus incorporates the departmental programme into its functional distribution, and is built of prefabricated concrete characterised by an obvious formal clarity.

## Compositional principle I: Metrics

A mat-building is a large-scale, high-density structure organised on the basis of an accurately modulated grid. A first look at any mat-building geometry shows a ground plan in the form of a regular grid that constitutes the general order. However, further analysis of the drawings reveals certain specific characteristics.

First, the size of the module used for the project is surprising. Frankfurt, Berlin and Venice have the red and blue series of Le Corbusier's Modulor in common. Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods met and began their careers at Rue de Sèvres, and their indebtedness, in this respect, is clear to see. In any case, in each of the three proposals just a few centimetres provide the starting point for designing buildings hundreds of metres in size (Figure A).

In addition, the Modulor series forms the module which is multiplied in both directions to create all kinds of variations. In Frankfurt, Berlin and Kuwait half modules were also employed. In Venice, there are few complete modules in the plan since most lack a quadrant (Figure B).

The basic Frankfurt module is approximately half that of Berlin, and is determined by the width of the pedestrian streets: 3.66 metres (Modulor dimension) which just happens to be the same as the archways around the Odéon theatre in Paris.<sup>6</sup> The complete module measures 36.47 metres, ie, the depth of the adjacent buildings. In the Free University of Berlin, the module is a function of time: 65.63 metres (another Modulor dimension), ie, roughly the distance covered by a one-minute walk.

The formal construction of Venice Hospital starts with consecutive additions: several *Unités de Lit* or bed modules (based on a module of 2.96m, a Modulor dimension) combine with several service rooms to form a *Unité de Soins*, or treatment module. Four *Unités de Soins* and the respective corridors constitute a *Unité de Bâtisse*; and finally, the hospital consists of a specific number of *Unités de Bâtisse*, square rooms about 60m along each side.<sup>7</sup> Le Corbusier uses a completely different procedure to form a size very similar to the one used by his colleagues in Berlin (Figure C).

On the other hand, Alison and Peter Smithson's buildings in Kuwait, using a basic module of 20 metres (4 x 5 metres), and the Universitat Politècnica de València, with a 36m module (based on the 3m series), approach the Frankfurt scale and demonstrate the effectiveness of round-figure metrics.

Furthermore, it must be said that the final result does not exceed a specific maximum dimension, ie, 400 metres, or a six-minute walk, according to the other scale used. It would seem that larger dimensions would overwhelm and jeopardise the design.

Finally, the analysis of the underlying patterns in each case study revealed a complex grid of strips forming



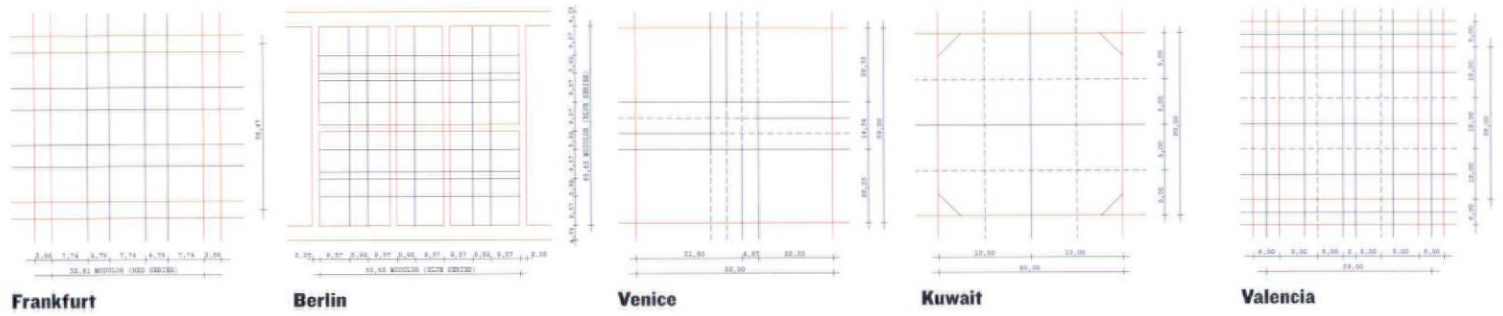


Figure A

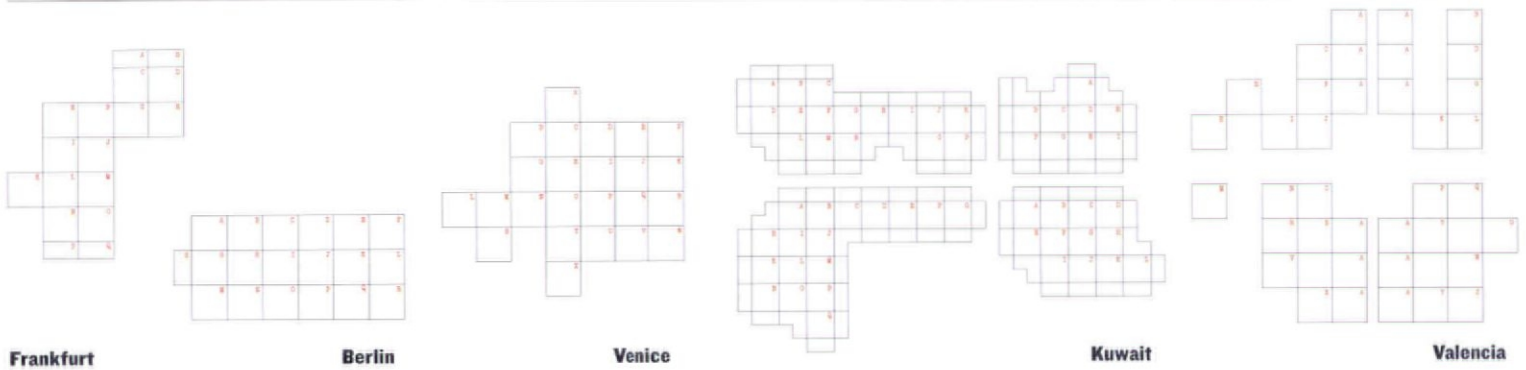


Figure B

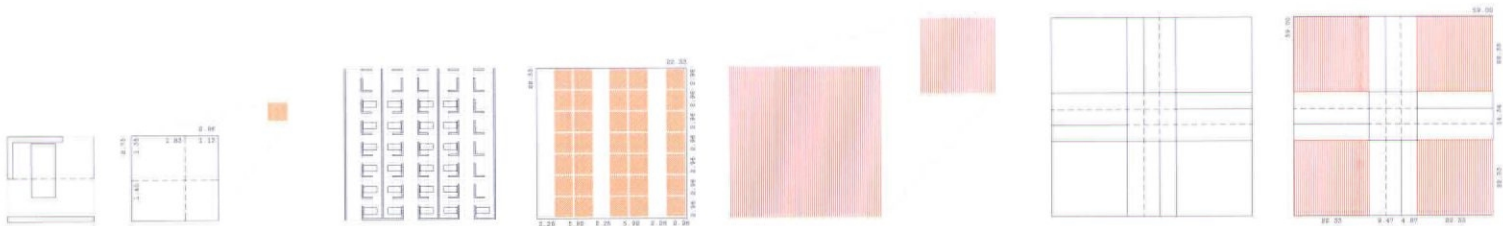


Figure C

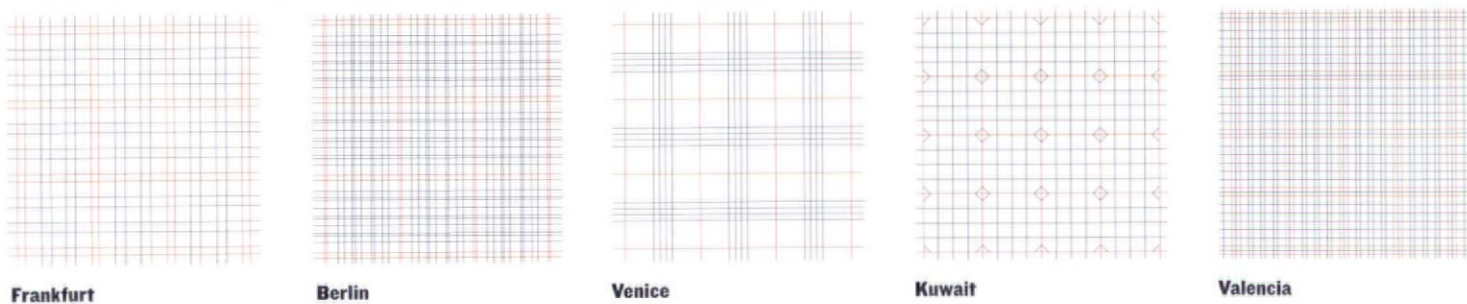


Figure D



a tartan-like fabric. Each strip can be understood to be a widened grid line that houses a set of specific functions. This purpose-built grid is simply a framework or fixed base upon which a volume may (or may not) be built. It is precisely this ambiguity that enables compositional flexibility resulting in stratified and profusely perforated buildings (Figure D).

## Compositional principle 2: Programme

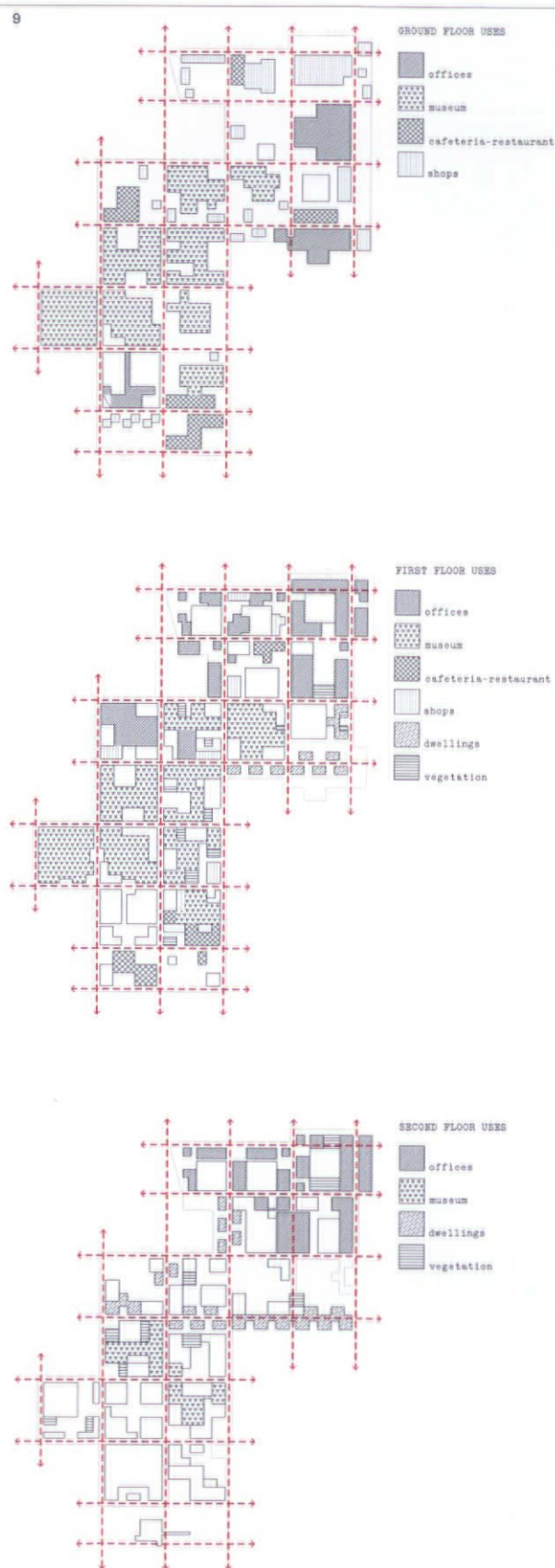
Issues related to the programme also arise in the form of shared strategies in building. In the words of Alison Smithson's definition, 'Mat-building can be said to epitomise the anonymous collective, where the functions come to enrich the fabric, and the individual gains new freedoms of action through a new and shuffled order, based on interconnection, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution and change'. The five instances studied do indeed respond to this premise, directly linked to the relational thinking prevalent in the 1960s and '70s.

Under Claude Lévi-Strauss's influence, structuralism embraces social phenomena like an 'abstract organization constructed from relations among elementary units'. Indeed, the structure would be 'a set of rules for defining relationships and correspondences'. These words can be applied literally to the functions of a mat-building, based on dismantling the programme's functions, emphasising circulations and deconstructing formal hierarchies.

In the Frankfurt and Kuwait projects, the architects mention functional hybridisation as a value added. In both cases, the design includes offices, shops, housing, hotels and cultural facilities: different activities enabling the building to always be seen as a living organism. In Frankfurt, each of these parts of the programme is hardly recognisable on the general plan. Candilis, Josic and Woods were called 'anti-monumental architects' – a label they were very proud of – because their urban intervention had no hint of representation more in keeping with the site's symbolic nature. In Kuwait, the Smithsons do not detail the regulations; there are no furnished plans or sections – the activities on each level are only described in the architects' report. Administrative services are laid down like layers, moving from public to private realms, pierced by vertical communication towers and ventilation shafts.

The Venice hospital also uses layers of functions similar to those in Kuwait. The *Unité de Bâtisse* or basic design module follows a pre-established order by levels. The ground floor built on *pilotis* is a public area consisting of two mezzanines where general services are provided and admissions take place. The next level is used for medical assistance (surgeries and operating theatres) and is also subdivided into two mezzanines that separate circulations from the other areas. The top floor is occupied by wards. Since each *Unité de Bâtisse* is intended to accommodate

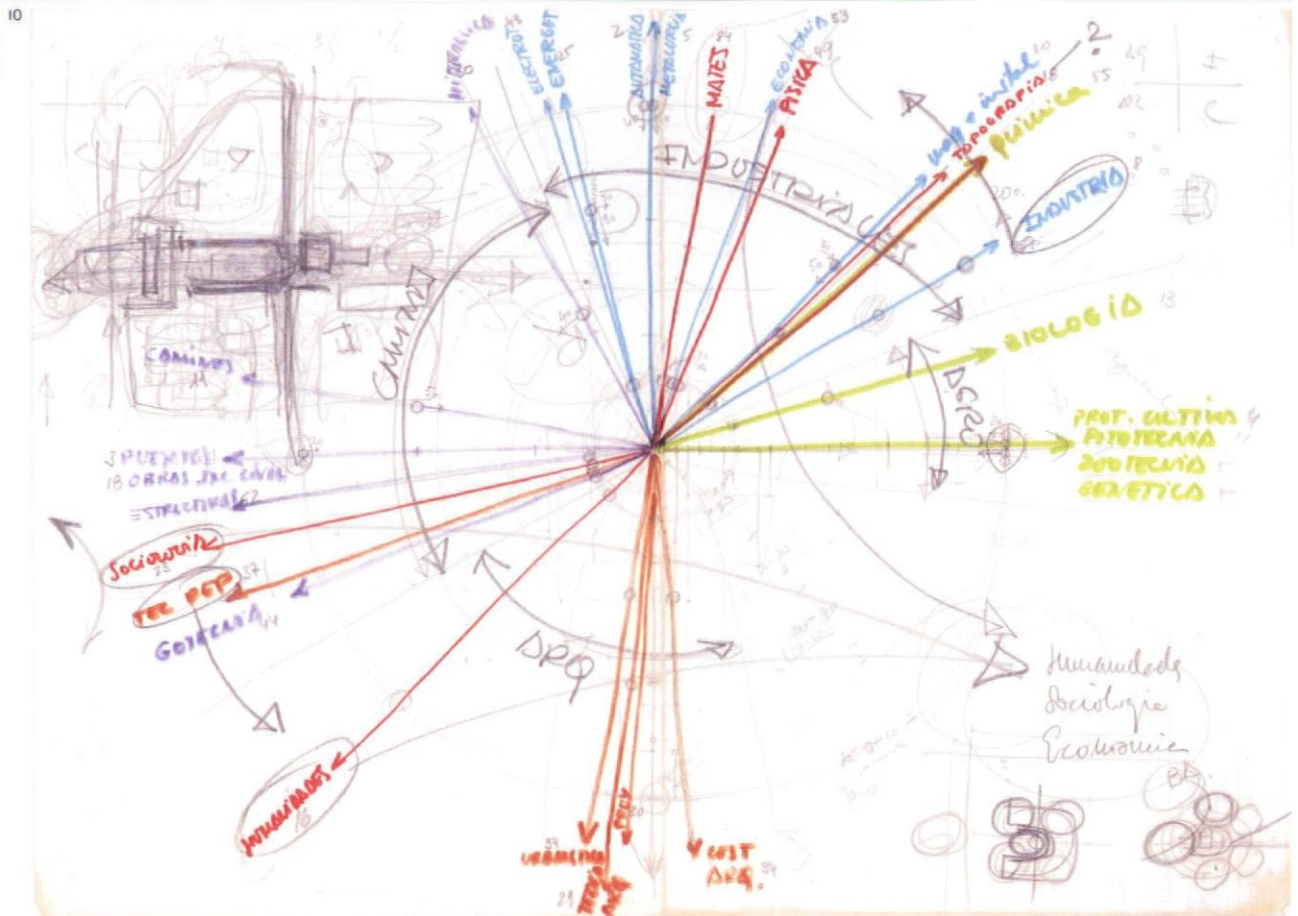
**9. Analysis of plans for Frankfurt-Römerberg, by Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm. Though hardly distinguishable on the original drawings, different activities, such as offices, shops, housing and cultural facilities, enable the resulting mat-building to be seen as a living organism**



'Form did not follow function; on the contrary, there were no aprioristic forms but certain human activities that would eventually define them'



10. Topological organisational diagram for the Universitat Politècnica de València mapping out the relative position of the constituent departments and their distance from the centre of the university. This organisational diagram thus becomes the basis for the plan 11. Analysis of the plan of Venice Hospital by Le Corbusier showing circulation paths 12. Analysis of departmental programme and circulation flows at the FU-Berlin. Lack of hierarchy is an inherent characteristic of mat-buildings

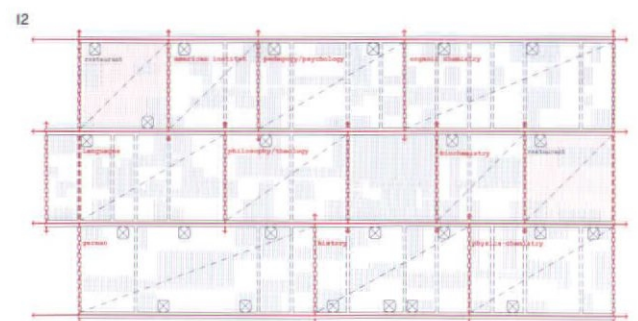
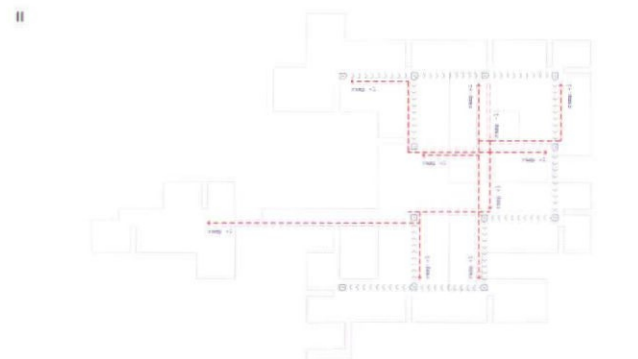


a medical service, adding them together enables all functions to be interwoven like an intricate pipe network. Some ramps and corridors are reserved for doctors and patients while the vertical cores are occupied by lifts for visitors and 'dirty' and 'clean' service shafts.

Kuwait and Venice also resemble each other as regards circulation. In both cases the freedom of movement permitted by an unobstructed ground floor – emphasised by dotted lines on Alison and Peter Smithson's plans – contrast with the movement in a building conditioned by vertical circulation cores.

Meanwhile, the Berlin and Valencia projects make it clear that the departmental programme characteristic of European universities in the 1960s is suitable for mat-building. First, university operations tally with the relational concept of the mat-building insofar as they prioritise correspondences between departments rather than the traditional separation into independent faculties. This fosters informal pedagogy based on the spontaneous encounters between students, teachers and researchers in the wide corridors. It also caters for increasing numbers of students and changes in curricula which require flexible structures that can be enlarged. And, finally, it encourages the free-flowing exchange of knowledge in keeping with the mat-building's inherent lack of hierarchy.

In Berlin, the real teaching occurs in the common areas such as interior walkways, courtyards and the





# HISTORY

gentle ramps between the two levels of this distinctly horizontal organism. In Valencia, the design process is dictated by a painstaking study of the departmental programme: depending on the number of semesters in which a student on one degree course attends two different departments, the architects quantify the intensity of the relationship between the two departments. They then use these data as coordinates to draw a topological organisation diagram that establishes the relative position of the departments and their distance from the centre of the university: the Agora. After this analysis, the resulting organisation diagram is accurately transferred to the general plan. The architect of the mat-building is, above all, an organiser.

## Compositional principle 3: Place

House and city have an identical nature to which the mat-building offers a structural synthesis.<sup>8</sup> The dialogue with the (urban) place to which the mat-building belongs – or, at least, helps build *ex novo* – is the third principle in common to the five cases analysed. Not for nothing did some reveal the well-established city to be a staunch supporter of the project. This is the case in Frankfurt: the site of an old urban fabric destroyed during the war is now equipped with a network that has recuperated some of its former morphological features within a new order: the previous grain texture, the connection with the immediate setting and the functional multiplicity of the replaced fragment can be seen in the new, reorganised formalisation. The Candilis, Josic, Woods design demonstrates the common values of the traditional city and the urban fabric composed by the mat-building.

The care with which Le Corbusier depicted the buildings typical of Venice near the future hospital reveals a regard for the historic city similar to Candilis, Josic and Woods' attitude to Frankfurt which, in the case of Venice, also concerns cultural identity. It is, in fact, the *campiello*s (squares) and *calli* (streets) of Venice that structure the in-patients' floor: an immense tapestry raised above the lake on an increasingly large building. In this way the different *Unités de Bâtisse* reflect these two elements of Venice urbanism as if the construction of the hospital was an enlargement of the city it was built for.

In Kuwait, the minarets of mosques are used as nodes of a visual web that fragment the mat-building and canalise the galleries while anchoring the new design to the tradition of the place. The minarets operate as a network of fixed points in the territory that offset the lack of urban definition in a way mentioned by the Smithsons in the article 'Fix', published in the December 1960 issue of the AR.<sup>9</sup>

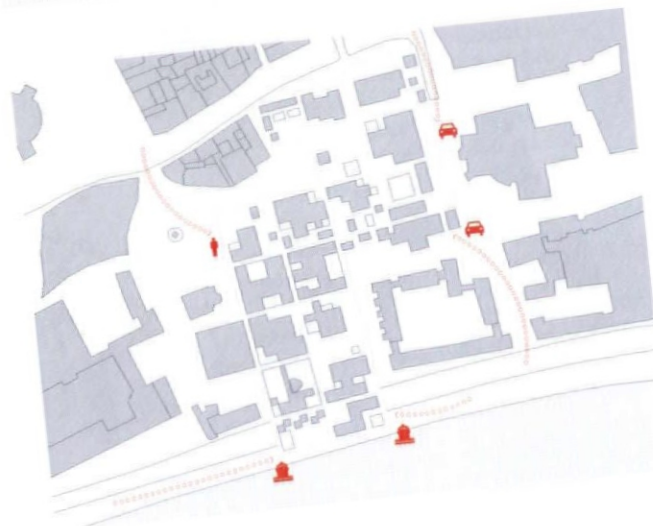
On the contrary, the universities of Berlin and Valencia are both isolated from the consolidated city. Each could, however, be said to be a city in itself – with Berlin capable of spreading out and weaving its networks between the isolated buildings of Berlin-Dahlem, and Valencia capable of recreating a recurrent urban utopia of those days by employing a horizontal stratification that strictly separates vehicular traffic (on the ground floor) from

13&14. Urban plans of Frankfurt showing the original dense grain of the fabric (13) and the reorganised formalisation of the Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm proposal (14)  
15&16. Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital. Plan of hospital (outlined in red) showing how it is raised above the site, like a tapestry or piece of city (15); and (16) section through the hospital showing its clear horizontal functional stratification

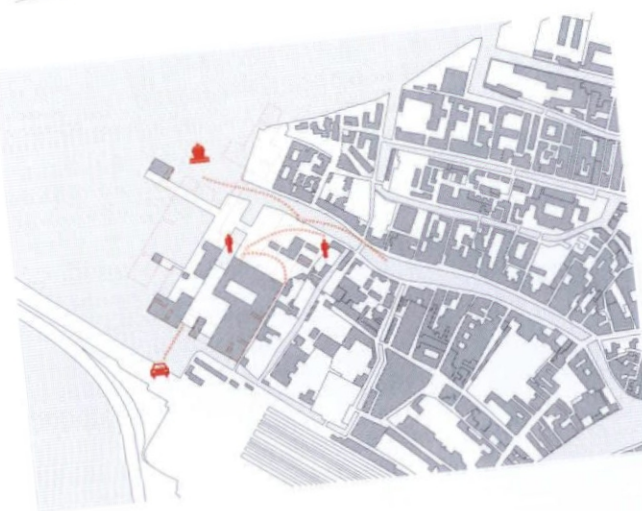
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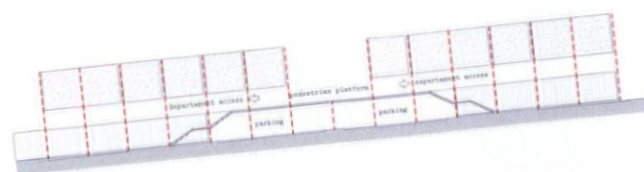
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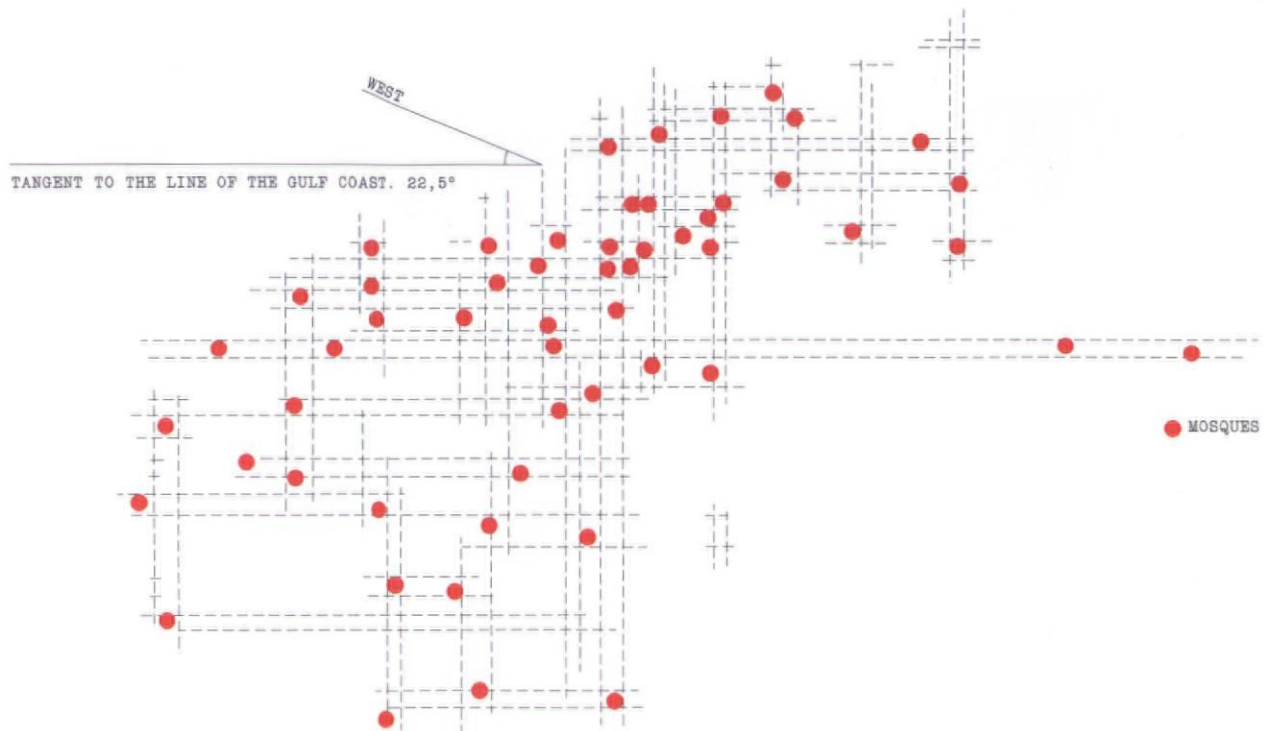


16





17. Visual web of the Smithsons' Kuwait project using minarets as nodes and familiar fixed anchoring points in a territory that lacks urban definition



#### Images

L35 Arquitectos, 1, 7, 10  
Schiedhelm & Partners, 2, 3  
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, 4  
Francis Loeb Library, 5, 6  
Authors, 8, 9, 11-17

#### MAT-BUILDING

Frankfurt Berlin Venice Kuwait Valencia, was exhibited at Valencia School of Architecture, Spain (27 September - 6 November 2012). Association of Architects of Valencia, Spain (14 January - 14 February 2013).

pedestrians (on a platform characterised by spontaneous social interaction).<sup>10</sup>

Before Alison Smithson called this type of architecture 'mat-building' in 1974, Shadrach Woods had already referred to the Free University of Berlin as a 'groundscraper'. In some sketches for that competition Woods declared, 'In skyscraper type buildings disciplines tend to be segregated. The relationship from one floor to another is tenuous, almost fortuitous, passing through the space-machine-lift. In a groundscraper organisation greater possibilities of community and exchange are present without necessarily sacrificing any tranquillity.'

Both terms were equally expressive and summarised some strategies opposed to modernity as it had been known so far. Form did not follow function; on the contrary, there were no aprioristic forms but certain human activities that would eventually define them. The city was not functional but relational, not made of isolated objects on a free ground floor. Now, a shapeless built mass was spreading out and absorbing any variations in the plan. This is no place for singular figures but for a system prone to serialise, regulate and repeat them. All these standpoints reveal the logical continuity of architecture in keeping with the environmental concerns of the '60s and '70s. Shadrach Woods devoted his last books to explaining this new direction to American readers - *What U Can Do* (Rice University, 1970) and *The Man in the Street* (Penguin Books, 1975) - and an ironical Alison Smithson reproached him for such theories which, in her opinion, only made sense wherever the Modern Movement had not yet made inroads.<sup>11</sup>

1. Since the Harvard Design School published *Case: Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital and the Mat Building Revival*, Hashim Sarkis (ed), Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2001, many academic articles have been published in different journals.

2. Jean-Louis Violeau: 'Team 10 and Structuralism: Analogies and Discrepancies', in Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, *Team 10. 1953-81. In Search of a Utopia of the Present*, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005, pp280-85.

3. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, p19.

4. Georges Candilis, *Bâtir la vie. Un architecte témoin de son temps*, Paris: Infolio Éditions, 2012, p231.

5. AR September 1974, pp179-90.

6. As the assistant architect Manfred Schiedhelm recounts, this Corbusian Modulor dimension of 3.66m was considered functionally 'very suitable' in the Candilis, Josic, Woods studio. The architects' office was near the Odéon theatre and they often went past it.

7. María Cecilia O'Byrne Orozco, *El proyecto para el Hospital de Venecia de Le Corbusier*, thesis. Director: Josep Quetglas, Departament de Projectes Arquitectònics, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2007.

8. Alan Colquhoun recalls Alberti's analogy when addressing the 'superblock', in *Collected Essays in Architectural Criticism*, London: Black Dog, 2009, p78.

9. Alison & Peter Smithson, 'Fix', AR December 1960, pp437-39.

10. According to Reyner Banham, '60s university campuses are the fulfilment of certain urban utopias which, in many other cases, never got off the drawing board. See Banham: *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, p131.

11. Alison Smithson, 'A Worried Man. Man in the Street. By Shadrach Woods', AR November 1976, pp317-18.





# CITY OF ANGELS

## A CRUCIBLE OF CONTENTION

Beset by curatorial and funding issues, a new survey of Los Angeles architects at MOCA is a missed opportunity, with genuine talent lost in an indiscriminating blare of projects

**MICHAEL WEBB**

Los Angeles has been a crucible of architectural experimentation for the past century, but outsiders (especially New York critics) paid little attention before Frank Gehry won the 1989 Pritzker Prize. Now, he and fellow laureate Thom Mayne enjoy more respect from afar than on home ground. 'We export our ideas around the world,' says Mayne. 'For me, LA is a base of operations, but it has had little to do with my practice over the past 20 years.' There's a yawning gulf between the suits of America's second city and its abundance of creative talent, except for the design of private houses that few see and which rarely support a practice. Yet, adventurous architects – worldwide – continue to emulate the example of Schindler and Neutra, setting up offices that are partly staffed by graduates of seven local architectural schools and restless spirits from the Ivy League.

So the time seemed ripe for a major survey of progressive LA architects, and independent curator Christopher Mount sold the idea to the Museum of Contemporary Art. He gave the show a snappy title – *A New Sculpturalism* – and the Getty Trust awarded the project \$445,000, the largest of its 11 Pacific Standard Time grants, confidently expecting it to be matched. It was a reasonable hope. Though MOCA has struggled for funds since its inception 30 years ago, director Richard Koshalek presented a stream of exciting architectural exhibitions attracting more visitors than the art shows. The momentum he created carried the institution forward for a decade, and



1. Lorcan O'Hertlihy's colourful condominium at Formosa II40 in West Hollywood expressively reworks a generic typology  
2. Alan-Voo House by Neil Denari typifies the LA penchant for the architectural trophy house



then it began to flounder, with the cancellation of an exhibition on Morphosis and the dismissal of its architecture curator. It teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, but was rescued by philanthropist-collector Eli Broad, who persuaded the board to name New York art dealer Jeffrey Deitch the new director. His mandate was to engage the public, and he launched that effort with shows of street art (aka graffiti) and work by actor Dennis Hopper. The chief curator was ousted and the five artists on the board quit.

After two years of preparation, the architecture show ran into problems. MOCA failed to raise much money and Mount says he was told to cut back or charge the participants. He refused, but installation architect Annie Chu was promised only \$90,000 to install a show of work by 35 architects in a 1,600 sqm gallery. The opening was delayed, and after reading the catalogue Frank Gehry decided he wasn't being taken seriously and pulled out. You can't produce *Hamlet* without the prince. MOCA then halted construction and the show seemed doomed. Mayne intervened, assembled a group of 40 volunteers who worked with MOCA staff to install the show in four weeks, and persuaded Gehry to return. To eliminate any suspicion of hierarchy or value judgement, models and drawings were lined up in rows and demarcated by category. Private houses occupy much of the space; multiple housing, commercial, cultural, educational and civic buildings (vestigial) take the rest. Three walk-in pavilions by younger firms are up-front; research models, mostly by Greg Lynn,

are displayed on tables at the far end. Four overhead ribbons of white scrim serve as projection screens for moving bands of still images introduced by the disembodied voices of the participating architects. The material is fascinating; the presentation sadly deficient.

If a celebrated chef were to throw handfuls of the finest ingredients into a pot, add stock, and vanish from the kitchen it would be hard to imagine a greater disappointment. It's a miracle that the show was rescued at five minutes to midnight, and everyone should be deeply grateful to Mayne and his team for averting its cancellation. But it has lost its narrative, however misconceived that might have been, and is now no more than a three-dimensional portfolio. The grid of white models on white plinths is monotonous and entirely lacking in scale and context. The overhead projections compete with each other to produce a visual and aural cacophony. Chu is a skilled designer who brought Schindler to life, 12 years ago, and has done the same for Quincy Jones in the current Hammer Museum exhibition. But those shows focused on residential architects, and it was easy to represent the ambience. The selection of 38 architects (several were added) working on houses, commercial towers and everything in between over a period of 25 years presents a much harder challenge.

Gehry's display suggests a strategy the whole exhibition might have followed. As a struggling radical in the early 1980s, he converted a police garage into MOCA's widely-admired temporary home, now guaranteed permanence as



3



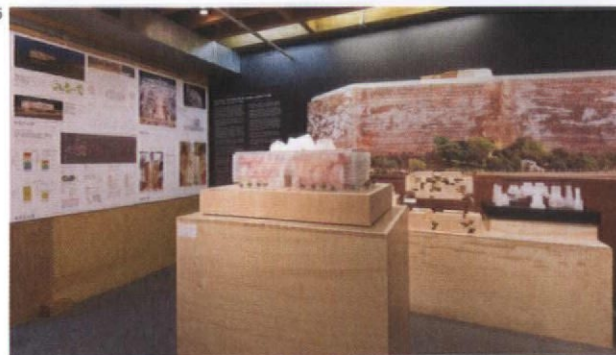
the Geffen Contemporary. The exhibition was always going to be staged in a Gehry; now Gehry has taken possession of the reading room, lined with knotty Douglas fir, which he added in the 1990s. He has chosen to show his competition entry for the National Art Museum of China in Beijing – a job he lost to Jean Nouvel. It's an inspired move, for the room has the warmth and human scale the main gallery lacks, and it showcases a brilliant, unfamiliar project in depth. Concept sketches, study models, a video and sample materials (including a newly invented 'translucent stone' of layered and heat-moulded low-iron glass) explain the what, why, and how of the building. It's a simple rectangular block with a rooftop garden and four tapered lanterns that double as sculpture galleries. Each side is composed of shimmering ribbed blocks set at angles to animate the mass. Inspiration comes from Chinese buildings and artists' representations of the landscape. Nothing could be simpler or subtler. For Gehry, it's a new material and a new language; the five-level block is designed to display large-scale contemporary work and precious scrolls, while accommodating 12 million visitors a year – twice the number visiting the Louvre.

You could imagine an exhibition in which 15 carefully selected architects were each invited to present a single project in depth, explaining its location, context, programme, materials and performance. Images and models of other projects by the same firms would provide back-up for the chosen work, with videos and backdrops

4



5



**3. The Cahill Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics at Caltech is one of 10 projects by Morphosis on show**

**4. A model of Morphosis's sensuous Phare Tower for La Défense in Paris soars over the unconsidered jumble of the exhibition**

**5. Frank Gehry's evocative tableau for the National Art Museum of China expounds on an unfamiliar project**

**6. Samitaur Building by Eric Owen Moss exuberantly rebrands a dull business park in Culver City**

## Photographs

Lawrence Anderson/Esto, 1  
Benny Chan, 2  
Roland Halbe, 3  
Brian Forrest / MOCA, 4  
Tom Bonner, 6





to establish a sense of place. Instead, the exhibition is a caucus race in which everyone (including marginal talents and fellow travellers) receives a prize. Some architects are featured repeatedly, and a few models stand out by their size and originality, notably Morphosis's Phare Tower and an LED-lit canopy by B+U. Therein lies the problem: an icon to rival the Eiffel Tower sits alongside a folded polycarbonate canopy for a house in Pasadena.

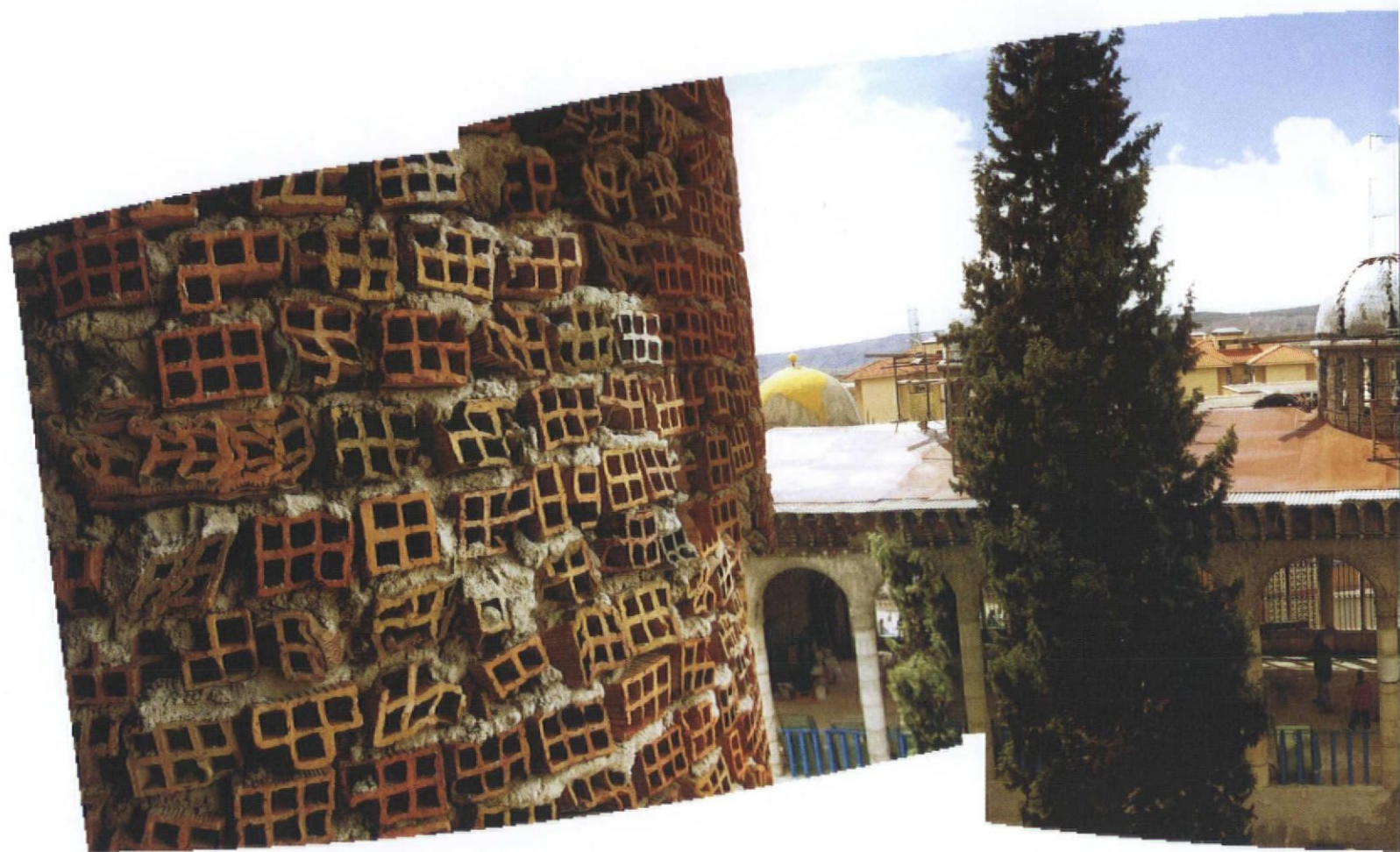
Morphosis has 10 projects in the exhibition, but none is elucidated and there is no connective tissue. There's little indication that Eric Owen Moss has cleverly transformed a drab block of Culver City warehouses into an exuberantly expressive high-tech park, branding anonymous buildings to lure ambitious tenants. Architects of the calibre of Michael Maltzan, Kevin Daly, Neil Denari and Craig Hodgetts, who have spent their careers crafting buildings to please exacting clients, are given no more attention than wannabes. The imaginative condo blocks of Lorcan O'Herlihy and the inventive geometries of Patrick Tighe and XTEN are lost in the crowd. Art works by these architects add another layer but do nothing to interpret their work. Architects may be entranced by this parade of their peers, but civilians are likely to be overwhelmed by the overload of uncoordinated objects. Though Mayne never had time to re-curate the show, the end result emphasises aesthetics as much as the original scheme.

The exhibition was never intended to be scholarly. Arresting photos dominate the catalogue, which has

no plans and few drawings. In his curatorial essay, Mount declares, 'This is architecture that wows by boldly challenging the status quo ... a form of building that delights in the abstract and flaunts a visual richness.' He writes, as many critics have, of LA architects' reaction to the loose, generic quality of the metropolis; the 'made in the garage' tradition of bricolage and ad-hocism. These are helpful generalisations, but architects hate being grouped and labelled, especially in LA where they cherish their autonomy. And, indeed, they are very different, within and between the three generations represented here. If the show had been titled *Free Spirits* it might have avoided censure. Instead, a new logo has been devised in which *A New Sculpturalism* is scratched out, leaving *Contemporary Architecture from Southern California*. You feel sorry for the younger architects who are most in need of a boost.

Deitch's apparent loss of interest is embodied in the lack of signage. Gehry's exhibit is barely acknowledged. Visitors are confronted with a banner announcing that Urs Fischer (a Swiss artist of dubious talent) has collaborated with 1,500 Angelenos (selected online) to create a kind of playground full of grey plaster gnomes and other cute creatures, which fill most of the museum and entirely conceal the gallery containing the architecture. As a small child growing up in England I was keen on making sand sculptures during seaside holidays, but I hardly expected they would be exhibited at the Tate.





# UNSUNG DEVOTION

Dedicated to the Virgin Mary and fabricated from scavenged materials, this eccentric Spanish cathedral is a unique architectural bricolage that may never be completed

**PATRICIA MATO-MORA**

Only on Sundays does Justo Gallego Martínez take a break from his titanic endeavour. He has been working ceaselessly for the last 50 years on what has by now become a cult landmark in Mejorada del Campo, a village some 20 kilometres from Madrid. It is a self-declared cathedral, devoted to Our Lady of the Pillar, a shrine in the making with no completion date foreseen.

Following an intimate conversation with Our Lady, Gallego Martínez recovered from the severe illness that had caused him to be expelled from the Monastery of Santa María de Huerta, in the nearby province of Soria, where he had intended to spend the rest of his life. At that point, he decided that he would devote his life to God by erecting the building that today bears witness to his tenacious determination.

Roughly half the size of a football pitch, Gallego Martínez's cathedral is still far from finished: the skeleton of the dome alone, inspired by that of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, took him over 30 years to finish. Now a ghost of the fully-clad structure that Gallego Martínez had devised it to be, this semi-spherical ribcage has become an unexpected contemporary icon of Mejorada del Campo's skyline.



Skeletal domes form a pepperpot roofscape, while deformed terracotta blocks give the architecture a deliciously woozy quality. For more information on volunteering and fundraising visit [www.justogallego.es](http://www.justogallego.es)



Unlike your average contemporary architectural practice, dangerously disengaged from the materiality of the built entity it claims to be designing (by virtue of the mediation imposed by architectural drawings), Gallego Martínez is in direct and undeniable contact with his work. He has put it together by assembling multifarious bits of debris that he has found or that have been donated. Bicycle wheels become pulleys, coloured necklace-like beads make for the patterning on the visually saturated windows, springs of all sizes define the rounded shape of steps and arches alike.

The matrix of towers at either side of the main nave is made of discarded and deformed terracotta bricks. Despite their beguilingly squashed appearance, they have prompted health and safety concerns that have led the Catholic Church and local authorities to condemn Gallego Martínez's work as 'the misguided project of a local eccentric'. The Cathedral is open to the public daily, yet the 84 year old is less interested in entertaining visitors than he is in the industrious diligence of his lifelong task. Volunteers are nonetheless welcome – and so are donors who, like Gallego Martínez himself, would like the building to transcend its creator's very existence.







Opposite: amid the  
scrum of construction  
that eccentrically mixes  
scavenged and donated  
materials, the interior  
of the huge cathedral  
slowly takes shape  
This page: frescos of  
the Virgin's life adorn  
the walls. Our Lady of  
the Pillar, who appeared  
to St James, is a major  
patron saint of Spain  
and the Hispanic world





## EXPLORING EYE

Stained-glass windows are created by applying coloured beads to the glass. Yet whether this colossal endeavour will ever be finished is debatable, despite the devotions of its architect, 84-year-old Justo Gallego Martínez, who has spent 30 years on the project. All photographs by Patricia Mato-Mora









# REVIEWS

## Watching the quiet ones

NIAL HOBHOUSE

*ARU: Translations*, Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel, closed on 26 May

Architecture made a strong start as a global business, and in the last 30 years London will seem to have been the key location for many ambitious practices; a historian will easily be able to trace a direct line from Bedford Square in 1975 to the provincial China, or the Gulf, of today. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the architectural debate in London in the same period – at least when the architects have done the talking – is like an overcrowded party at which the fashionable guests all shout louder and louder to be sure of being heard. Some pointlessly repeat whatever it was they had said (rather more thoughtfully) 20 years before; some say silly things for the sake of not repeating themselves; and others again the same things in different ways, in an effort to sound interesting. Of course, this is partly to reassure the partygoers themselves that the smart kids haven't already moved on to a better joint; but quite a number of the noisier theoretical statements do actually achieve some sort of built form around the world. Our historian may yet ask what exactly it was about all the talk that convinced the new global clientele that the talkers were the right people to build projects on such a large scale, and so many of them.

One dignified response to this theoretical din has been a retreat into the reflective cultivation of one's own garden – into a whispered enquiry into how to intervene carefully in the urban landscape. Even this has its dangers – 'whispering' quickly becomes a (scarcely articulate) polemic position

in itself, and even a term of snarled abuse by the party set. But it is important to make the bleak observation that if in the last 30 years your interest as an architect happened to have been in understanding the texture of the city, and in tactfully filling its gaps, then it was astonishingly hard to find anybody, least of all in London, who asked you to build anything, even if that is what the local fabric needed most. No client ever really does want a background building; and it is worth adding that the particular analytic skills required to build a good one are much the most difficult to learn. Whispering – call it that – only *sounds* easy.

The exhibition *Translations* at the Swiss Architecture Museum, which closed on 26 May, tracked years of quiet thought and the relatively small body of built work by Florian Beigel and Philip Christou, practising as the Architecture Research Unit (ARU) based at London Metropolitan University. That the exhibition should happen at all can be read as a quizzical commentary – on the part of a less frenetic architectural culture than our own – of the way we order things in London. One discovered with discomfort that in Switzerland at least there is a sophisticated critical audience for Slow Architecture; in fact, ARU is a practice whose work has by far its largest group of dedicated followers outside the UK. Its most substantial built projects, and most ambitious landscape propositions, have all been in South Korea, where the two principals come close to being architectural royalty. This year, Beigel was awarded the Großer Kunstpreis by the Berlin Academy of Arts (it has also gone to Scharoun, Mies, Häring, Frei Otto, Foster, Piano and SANAA, among others).

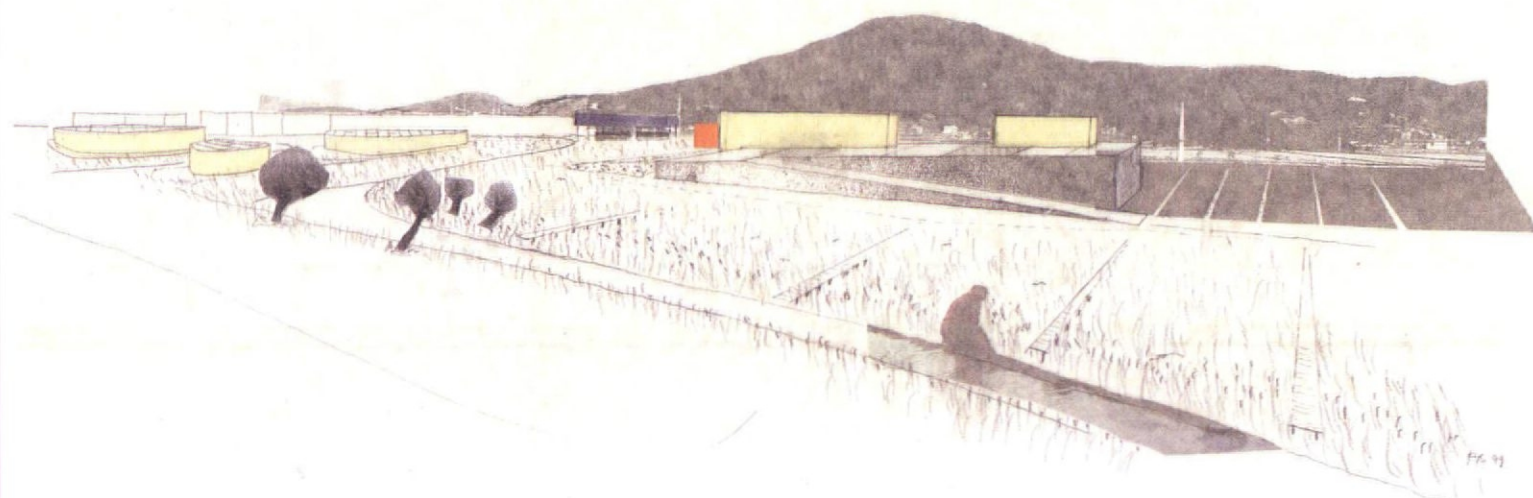
The elegant premise of the exhibition was to take six ARU projects from 1998 onwards, and key each of them to reflective texts



written over the years by the architects themselves. As the bridge between text and project, six works of art were imported into the space; these were presented both as a reference for each project and as an analytic tool with which the projects might be examined. Each choice here – of Ernst Josephson, Agnes Martin, Klee, and others – was so suggestive, and the mode of presentation so diffidently respectful, that you were not drawn into any portentous comparison with the architecture. Instead, you were asked to examine each exhibit – a Klee or a presentation sheet, preliminary sketch, model, construction drawing, or photograph of a finished building – as though each was an equally valuable component of the project, and had an equal amount to tell us about what it consists of. In contrast to conventional monographic exercises on architecture – books as much as exhibitions – the effort here was to document simply the process of research; the built work understood as something that emerges with no special privilege, while the unbuilt retains all its gorgeous latent promise. This is as far as we can get from the kind of finished buildings which spring, somehow fully fledged, from casually stylised sketches by architects within the star system – to which they have only a passing formal resemblance, and no possible relationship of scale or material.

In contrast, in the exhibition you gathered a sense of particular architectural and contextual problems addressed very directly, and of ARU evolving in sophistication and experience each step of the way. As a case in point their masterplan and buildings for Paju Book City, conceived over many years, had the same rising narrative sweep as did Lewerentz's in the Eastern Cemetery at Malmö, on which he worked throughout his career.





**Above: a preliminary sketch for Florian Beigel and Philip Christou's colossal Paju Book City masterplan, so-named because it provides offices for South Korea's publishing industry and numerous second-hand book dealers**  
**Left: the Youl Hwa Dang Book Hall, just one of the buildings in this city of 750,000 people**

This was most obvious in the face of the astonishing, even wilful, range of scales at which ARU has worked – the smallest project here was for an aedicular urban monument, the largest for a city of 750,000 people; of course they didn't look anything like each other, but only *because* they shared the same scrupulous analysis of what the architects found, by way of form and history, when they arrived at their site.

In all this, it was clear that Beigel and Christou do nothing to make architecture an easy profession to follow, or good architecture ever something that can be shaken out of one's sleeve. It is symptomatic, as the Swiss wryly tell us, that they have chosen to work in London all of this time – the city that has the most to learn (and least patience in learning) from their process of thoughtful dissection.

In part, this has happened by their preference for combining the work

of design and of teaching; what was the best contextual laboratory, for themselves and for generations of students, may well have been the hardest place to practise the lessons learned there. Perhaps there is a more abstract premise here as well, of the pursuit of beautiful architectural form as an exercise that is somehow apostolic, and of an ethical rigour in defining the problems raised in producing it.

And it raised a question, too, about whether staying away from the noisy party down the road might not turn out to have been the more dignified professional position for our time and place – and the one which in the long run makes for the most powerful cultural legacy?

It is worth remembering how rarely the mainstream of architectural thinking has been found just where the current seems to be running fastest.

## Information underload

**PETER BUCHANAN**

*Understanding Architecture: a primer on architecture as experience*, Robert McCarter and Juhani Pallasmaa, Phaidon, London and New York, £49.95

This handsomely designed and produced book, a collaboration between two of today's most prolific and respected architectural writers, Robert McCarter and Juhani Pallasmaa, is inspired by John Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Emphasising the experience of architecture, it comprises 12 essays by Pallasmaa on various experiential aspects of architecture and descriptions by McCarter of visits to 72 buildings or architectural environments. Together these will immeasurably expand and enrich any

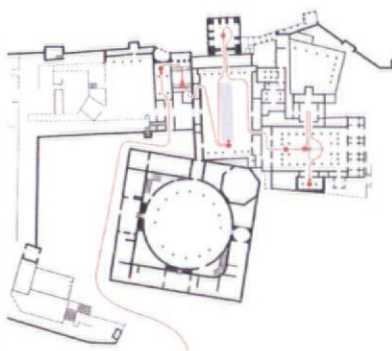


reader's appreciation of the multifaceted nature of architecture. It is thus a valuable contribution to the very topical and necessary quest to recover architecture from the reductionist dead end that modern architecture and its education became, as well as from the concept-/theory-driven design that too many still take seriously. The book may draw on the sort of theory now fashionable in architectural schools, particularly phenomenology, but because grounded in the actual experience of buildings what it has to say is in marked contrast to the obfuscatory theorising found in academe.

That said, few, or perhaps only the initiated, will find Pallasmaa's essays, though immensely illuminating, to be an easy read. They are a concise distillation of a lifetime's deep thought and wide reading, which has furnished the illuminating quotes (many of them gems) liberally used in the essays and to introduce them. All these ideas have been explored over the years at greater length in Pallasmaa's copious writings so that some of what is said in compressed form here would be more readily grasped in all its ramifications by those already familiar with his writings. So the book is most definitely not the primer claimed in the subtitle. It is unsuited as an introduction for lay people and students in their early years. Instead it would be better suited to architects, or those nearing the end of their studies, as a reminder of all that they have yet to learn about appreciating architecture.

The immediate question provoked in the reader is why was Pallasmaa not encouraged to elaborate upon these texts and unpack their ideas in more detail so as to be accessible to a wider readership. One answer might be that they would then be much longer and the book unwieldy. Besides the book could still be an immensely useful educational tool if the essays became the core of seminars that would expand upon them so that students could fully grasp and internalise the ideas. Sometimes a single sentence could furnish the theme for a whole seminar, such as this chosen more or less at random: 'As structural forces are inescapable physical facts, they provide the ground for a heightened sense of reality: an architectural approach that aims at precise structural articulation and

**Below: the Alhambra's dramatic hilltop site is absent from McCarter and Pallasmaa's book, as is much contextual information**  
**Right: plan of the Alhambra showing the route followed by the author in red is a useful orienting innovation, and though these routes often deviate from the route intended by the architect, our experience does not always accord with the dictatorial will of the designer**



expression turns into a form of poetic realism.' A few words express an enormous amount that will probably only be fully intuited by those who have already read and thought deeply about these matters.

McCarter describes visits and walkthroughs to a well-chosen selection of buildings and places. These are augmented by good photographs (the picture research must have been quite an undertaking) laid out in a sequence indicated by red line marking the route of the visit on the accompanying plan. McCarter is a wonderfully sharp-eyed observer and draws attention to things that many might have otherwise missed when visiting or studying the buildings. This could prove a useful corrective to the reportedly widespread misapprehension of students claiming to know a building having merely looked at pictures of it online. But this approach is also of limited value as it does not discuss the building or place in use, nor the experience of it over time, both of crucial importance to any experiential appreciation of architecture. Indeed, the whole book deals little with function or use, perhaps because these aspects have been too exclusively focused on during the modern era. It also largely ignores post-modernity's concerns with meaning and narrative. This too is highly problematic as they also can so influence the experience of architecture. For instance, it is the density of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel's multi-layered meanings and narratives, as well as the highly synthesised nature of its design, that makes the experience of it so powerfully moving in contrast to that of the spuriously contrived and decorative, rapid confection of Steven Holl's Chapel of St Ignatius – one of the few buildings that does not merit inclusion here.



There are other consistent problems. Generally neither photographs nor plans show the buildings in context, although this is often crucial to the understanding of them. For instance, the experience of Ronchamp, a pilgrimage chapel, starts with the first distant glimpse of it and includes the whole processional route up to and around it, all now irrevocably mutilated by Renzo Piano's recent additions.

Also, as with the Acropolis, the route marked is not the processional one intended by the architect, which is again to ignore the mode of use designed for. Something similar applies to the presentation of the Alhambra, which is again not shown with any contextual views showing its elevated siting, nor does it include an explanation of how it was shaped mainly for evening and night-time use, as adorned with rich fabrics and banners in guttering lamp light. Furthermore, missing from all plans are north points and indications of scale. Most serious of all is the lack of sections, so crucial to understanding the internal volumes and experience of the buildings, and which could usefully have included a human figure for scale, or an indication of the human eye level.

Nevertheless, this is a book to be treasured, studied and reread. A lot of care has gone into writing, assembling the illustrative material and designing the book. But it sorely misses the guidance that can come from an informed and discriminating editorial and publishing team.

## Steampunk goes off the boil

ALAN POWERS

*Landscape Futures: Instruments, Devices and Architectural Inventions*, Geoff Manaugh (editor), Actar, Barcelona and New York, \$21.79

Jules Verne's novel, *The Purchase of the North Pole*, 1889, summarised at the end of James R Fleming's essay, 'The Climate Engineers' in *Landscape Futures*, tells of a group of American investors who pay two cents per acre, promising to melt the ice for the benefit of the world's climate and extract the mineral resources. This being fiction, they fail and the world carries on, although with hindsight, the reality appears to be catching up fast.



A great deal of this book, produced as the retrospective catalogue of an exhibition held at the Nevada Museum of Art between August 2011 and February 2012, joins Verne in his speculation about climate and technology in places that are largely uninhabitable. Situated on the boundary between conceptual art and architecture, this familiar space is approaching self-parody unawares. The opening pages of the book are populated by period photographs of old-fashioned scientists under open skies standing awkwardly with their spindly tripods and arcane measuring devices.

These were not 'philosophical toys' in origin, but have been co-opted as such. Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* trilogy conjures their world – the sinister but enthralling quality of remote scientific outposts on Svalbard, hot-air balloons manned by obsessional men wearing clothing made from dun-coloured natural fibres whose equipment involves wood, leather and lots of dials. Student projects involving climatic devices, drawn in meticulous detail but axiomatically unworkable, situated in an extremity of climate or geology, have become the equivalent of the 1920s joke about the self-evident uselessness of the recurrent Beaux-Arts project of 'A house for an admiral on a rocky promontory'.

Archigram were responsible for cutting a doorway into this parallel universe. When Michael Webb made beautiful drawings of a mini submarine approaching Temple Island on the Thames, and when David Greene proposed a wired log in a field, foundational acts duly acknowledged in *Landscape Futures*, they started a global movement, distinguishable by sly humour with a straight face, the use of catchy reverse-engineered acronyms as project descriptions, and, above all, the absence of anything resembling a conventional idea of a building. That theoretical explorations of the nature-culture divide continue to follow these rules of cool is a tribute to the imaginative power of that original act.

Smout Allen's 'envirographic' architecture projects with students form the core of the book. In Lanzarote, for example, rising sea levels and temperature, and winds from the Sahara bringing quantities of sand, genuinely threaten the future of inhabitation. The background research covers history



**Above: the exasperating techno-whimsy of the steampunks and their architectural equivalents follows in the footsteps of Victorian gentleman scientists and their pointless inventions, such as this doughnut-shaped kite for measuring the weather designed by Alexander Graham Bell, pictured here (far right) supervising the launch of his creation**  
**Below: a boffin quizzically studies the skies**



and the possible application of technology in search of solutions, and provides 'a context for understanding works of architecture as ecological systems that can function through principles of sustainability and the future of urban and rural environments'. The piquancy of the proposals comes from the perversity of their art-gallery context that shapes the form and content of the product and requires that they should not qualify for a museum of technology.

Houses for admirals on rocky promontories were discredited in the 1930s when the real problems of society could no longer be excluded from the curricula of architecture schools. It was not long before they returned in altered guise and the question raised by *Landscape Futures* is whether an equivalent playfulness retains its value as pedagogy, creative art or even applicable technology. Right at the end of the book – which until this point evades the issue – Cassim Shepard claims that 'the immediate goal for your design is to provoke amazement while simultaneously inspiring new understandings of worldly processes and physical phenomena'.

The premise that the definition of architectural activity is changing and

expanding is not contentious, but the rules of its game are. Out there, the speculators have defeated the green campaigners and the North Pole will melt all the faster, while the sound of the bell ringing for the end of playtime is mistaken for a dance tune. We may save something from the wreckage, but is it better to engage with this immeasurable disaster with a knowing grin of denial, or to acknowledge the new reality? If the former, then *Landscape Futures* performs excellently. If the latter, it is yet another portent of doom.

## Come rain or shine

**JOSEPH DEANE**

*Weather Architecture*, Jonathan Hill, Routledge, London and New York, £34.99

The 'hermetic double neutralising wall' was Le Corbusier's ultimate attempt to isolate architecture from its environment. Consistency and control were its ideals. Like Georg Simmel's reading of the ruin, the fear of the architect was that his exquisite creation might somehow be undermined by the will of another agent: Nature. In *Weather*



*Architecture*, his seventh book, Jonathan Hill seeks to deconstruct this conceit as part of his ongoing investigations into the nature of architectural authorship.

Anyone who is familiar with Hill's teaching at the Bartlett will be aware of his interest in the relationship between weather and architecture. However, what is perhaps surprising is the specificity with which Hill has chosen to examine such an expansive topic: by allying his research with the philosophies of the Romantic and the Picturesque, Hill hopes simultaneously to raise both movements from their ocularcentric connotations and highlight the continuing significance of their shared tenets. This might at first seem an unnecessary aside to what is already a considerable task, but it does serve to ground the research in a critical context that makes it more readily applicable to contemporary practice.

Throughout the impeccably referenced 320 pages of text and photographs, Hill suggests that we are still bound to the hubris of a 'technocratic Modernism'. Itself a philosophical vestige of the Renaissance, this practice sees the artist rule as autocrat; truth as universal; and beauty as formulaic. By comparison in the tradition of the Picturesque beauty is to be understood as subjective; perception as variable; and creativity as aleatory. Hill's principal aim is to show how these motifs – together with Romanticism's attachment to the senses, time, decay and the imagination – are critical if we are to reach a more holistic understanding of architecture, ecology, politics and the self. Architecture has to be considered 'an incident in an environment with which it converse(s)', writes Hill. The problem at the root of Le Corbusier's neutralising wall was the presumption that Architecture, together with all human constructs, could be somehow isolated from the complex, immersive phenomenon that we call 'nature'. With each chapter of the book Hill draws from an array of Romantic and Picturesque art, philosophy and architecture to illustrate weather's unequivocal role as a creative agent. Whether this be through its political effects on cultures, its somatic and emotional effect on humans, or its unpredictable physical effects on their creations, in each case it is

**Right: Mies's Farnsworth House is mirrored by floodwaters after an inundation in 1996. It's a Ballardian portent of modern technological civilisation meeting a natural crisis**  
**Below: Sverre Fehn's Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1962 was punctured by tree trunks: an example of Modernism in tune with the natural world**



the blurring of the natural and the manmade, the interrelation of nature and culture, which forms the thematic crux of the text.

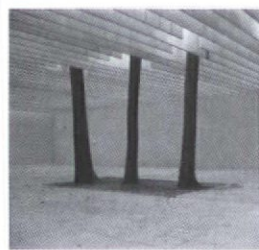
However, Hill is not suggesting that Modernism has been *wholly* devoid of such sensitivities. Far from it. Nikolaus Pevsner advocated a movement more romantic in its ethics: situated, emotive and reactive as opposed to international, mechanical and inert. Sverre Fehn and Sigurd Lewerentz accomplished this by effectively translating the national romanticism of Scandinavia into what Christian Norberg-Schulz called a 'romantic Modernism'. The particularities of Nordic light, clouds and air defined the region's cultural sensibilities and came to form the *raison d'être* of its architecture. Culture and climate, landscape and vernacular, were considered reciprocal authors. Similarly, Alison and Peter Smithson's numerous works, in particular their 'House of the Future' (exhibited 1956) and Upper Lawn Pavilion (1959-62), rejected the Modernist hermetically sealed unit in favour of an architecture that was open to weather's advances. Testing the assumption that 'some loss in environmental comfort is amply compensated by, and even necessary to, a more complete experience of nature', Hill cites these examples as indicative of a Modernism that is both poetic and pragmatic.

Weaving his argument with clarity throughout, Hill arrives at an understanding of weather, architecture and user as 'co-productions' of one another. Examining Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage, together with Joseph Turner's 19th-century London studio, we find an alignment of these agents. While the former found itself

under the shadow of a nuclear power station on the exposed brim of Kentish coast, in the case of the latter, soot-laden rain from an industrialised city streamed in through the roof. In both cases, however, the biome of architecture, weather and inhabitant is to be considered a hybridisation, with each element produced in variable measure by human and non-human actors.

It is here that Hill's research becomes most relevant. However, those who are familiar with the works of Erik Swyngedouw, Matthew Gandy, Jane Bennett or Antonio Damasio would perhaps like to have seen Hill's work make better reference to its wider academic context. The Picturesque and Romantic idioms that he draws upon – overshadowed as they are by the persistent rationalism of the Enlightenment – have recently found renewed significance following discoveries in contemporary physics, neurology, geography and the social sciences. One cannot help but think that the book would have done well to capitalise on such an engaging body of sympathetic literature.

That said, *Weather Architecture* remains an impeccably researched and thought-provoking work in its own right. By shifting the trend of normative thought, Hill hopes we can arrive at a revived, more dynamic understanding of the complex ecology in which we are embedded. Architecture is not a timeless object. It is part of an infinitely complex network of actors of which the architect is only one. Natures produce cultures and cultures produce natures. The dialogue between weather and architecture is a microcosm of this inseparable interrelationship.





## Up on the roof

ROBERT BEVAN

*Architectones: Xavier Veilhan at the Mamo, MAMO – Marseille Modulor, Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, until 30 September*

'I couldn't buy a Picasso but I could buy a Corbusier building.' It's an unlikely confession, but Ora-ïto is an unlikely person. Also known as Ito Morabito, he is the 35-year-old scion of an architectural family who, a decade ago, began amassing a personal fortune (plus requisite art collection) after designing a suite of infamous fake ads that successfully marketed luxury brands.

The Corbusier building in question is the gymnasium on the roof terrace of the Unité d'Habitation, 56 metres above Ito's home town of Marseille: 'The first manifestation of an environment suited to modern life,' declared Le Corbusier when he handed the building over in 1952. Alongside the gym was built a nursery, paddling pool and raised solarium deck – later built over with an inapt pitched-roof structure.

'Ever since I was a kid I have been crazy about Le Corbusier's work,' says Ito. 'He was my Superman, my Batman. I couldn't believe it when the gymnasium came up for sale – I had to have it.'

Following intense negotiations, trying to meet the competing demands of contemporary building regulations, the Fondation Le Corbusier and the Centre des Monuments Nationaux, the pitched-roof addition has been removed, the Modulor-proportioned timber glazing bars of the gymnasium reinstated, concrete shuttering repaired and the space restored as an art gallery, bookshop and apartment/studio for a resident artist – all carved out of the existing volumes.

The €7 million restoration funded by Ito, the Unité's owner-occupiers and the government, is now known as MAMO – Marseille Modulor. Central to the gallery's programme is an artist's residency each summer where the artist installs their work on the roof terrace in dialogue with the architecture. Winter months will see a local mix of poetry, dance, fine art and design.

This June saw the arrival (along with truckloads of Corbusian *chaîses* for the interior) of the work of French



**Above: looking like an escaped member of omnipresent irritants The Blue Man Group, this bust of Le Corbusier by sculptor Xavier Veilhan occupies the roof of the Marseille Unité**  
**Below: the recent restoration of the Unité was funded by Ito Morabito, who now lives in the former gym**

sculptor Xavier Veilhan, whose series of *Architectones* site-specific installations have had previous incarnations in California houses by Lautner, Koenig and Neutra.

'At first I thought it was a dialogue with the buildings but it has [also] ended up a dialogue with people,' says Veilhan. 'They always have something in common and it is this interest in architecture that is almost a devotion to a building; to something bigger than yourself in scale and in time.' This presumably extends to Ito.

Veilhan's outdoor interventions include a giant blue bust of Corb drawing directly on his own building ('a short circuit') and new framing planes created by stringing parallel wires between architectural elements and building a stage where models of boats by Buckminster Fuller and Pierre Jeanneret sail past each other. 'As a viewer, I wouldn't want something in the way – I don't want to impose,' explains Veilhan. 'My work is an optical tool – something you look through rather than at – it is about celebrating rather than appropriating fame.'

Inside the gallery, where the shell form has been relined meticulously in Eraclit panels and a self-supporting balcony inserted, items include a large mobile whose counterweight is a figure of Le Corbusier smoking. The cigarette smoke is actually the mobile's supporting wire. There is also an imaginary euro note featuring the Unité and a musical piece by Nicolas Godin, former architecture

student and half of French synth-pop duo Air. It is one of a series that Godin has composed to accompany Veilhan's interventions. The music will eventually be released on vinyl alongside a set of books charting Veilhan's progress. Next up are installations at Claude Parent and Paul Virilio's St Bernadette du Banlay and, in all likelihood, Mies's Barcelona Pavilion.

Veilhan's opening work at the Unité is a sincere if curious and at times somewhat literal-minded response but it also clearly sets out the gallery's programmatic stall. The real gain, however, is the restoration of the terrace and the gallery space itself, adding to the rooftop's already considerable magic.

'It's a dream come true,' admits Ito. 'Three years of hard work. I put everything I have into this. I even sold Xavier's piece from my collection – he was so mad with me.'

The project has coincided with Marseille's year as European Capital of Culture so the opening has come in the same month as a clutch of new museums including Rudy Ricciotti's mannerist MuCEM (page 54) and a quayside folly with a mirrored soffit by Norman Foster that owes no small debt to SANAA's Serpentine Gallery pavilion.

Marseille's slow and troubled but perhaps inexorable gentrification continues. Ito will be part of it once more – his next big project is a land art park on a rocky island offshore that is visible from the Unité's roof.





# PEDAGOGY

## Beirut Arab University, Lebanon

MATTHEW BARAC

Arriving for the first time at Beirut Arab University (BAU) school of architecture, part of the Faculty of Architectural Engineering, you cannot help but admire the view. The four-storey building, sited at the edge of a plateau, is entered from the top, and as the eye is drawn up towards egg-crate stone sun-baffles and ahead – to marvel at the twinkling Mediterranean languishing some 10 kilometres to the west – the section steps down into a studiously convivial internal courtyard. Activity is everywhere in and around the light-filled space, which brings together design studios, library spaces, computer labs and workshops.

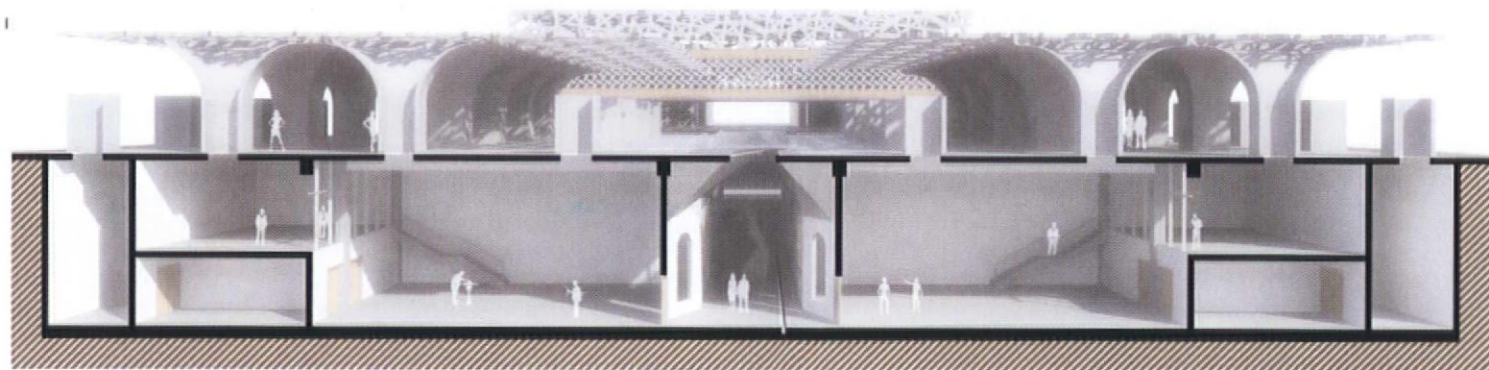
First established in 1962, the faculty moved to its dramatic location on Debbieh Campus in 2006. Although almost an hour from the city by student bus, campus life is connected to Beirut by a concern with the challenges that face this once-thriving cultural melting pot, an urban milieu marked in modern times by strife. To an extent, the BAU mission emerged as a way of dealing with such conditions, seeing Beirut less as a case study and more as a point of convergence for what Ahmed Attia, Dean of the Faculty, describes as a 'diversity of influxes' concerned with 'place-making and the cultural identity of cities' in the Arabian Gulf and Middle East.

Attia is unsentimental about the pedagogical challenges presented by the globalisation of practice, and pragmatic about the need for students to be worldly – able to steer between domestic priorities and the

**I-4. Karrar Ihsan Al-Jassani proposed a traditional craft school in Baghdad that refers to local traditions – for example, in its filigree abstract patterned roof – without recourse to Islamicising clichés**

increasing mobility of modern life. In this negotiation, between local and global scale, BAU has a strategic function: 'It is clear the role of Lebanon as a bridge between Western and Arab cultures'. This is not just about being open to diverse ideas, but about framing the school as a context for dialogue: bringing the world to Beirut. This objective is put into practice by engaging with institutions such as the RIBA (BAU recently acquired accreditation at Part 1), in exchanges with regional partners such as Alexandria University, and in a programme of visiting academics. Such initiatives contribute to the school's comparatively cosmopolitan sensibility, as well as conferring the institutional authority associated with providing an international hub for debate.

Visiting professor Ana Serrano, a Spanish architect whose practice, Serrano Evans, is based in London,





offers workshops at BAU that mobilise alternative ways of thinking about design; this year her focus is on narrative as a tool for architectural conceptualisation, an approach that – at face value – seems at odds with an established emphasis on typology. Yet she believes her contribution aligns precisely with Attia's objectives: 'BAU teachers train architects primarily for the Arab world, but they know that if the school is to compete it must create adaptable and flexible professionals – not just technical experts'. Although traditional and regional precedents are held in high esteem, debate encourages students to think independently. 'The BAU idea is about moving towards a culture of critical thinking.'

As a result, many student projects embrace themes of dialogue and change, attempting to strike a balance between local and global

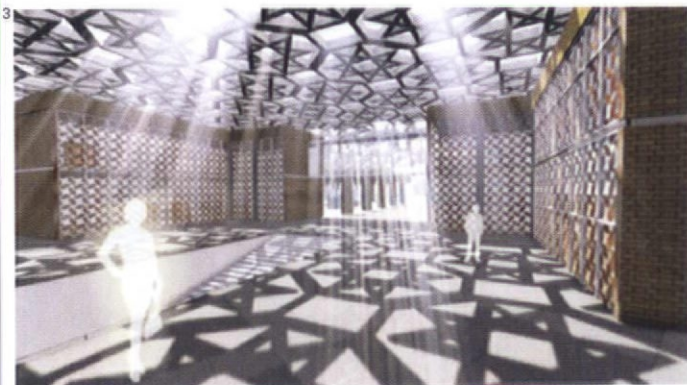
**5&6. Rand Jamal Farhat's centre for the treatment of children with cancer is located in an agricultural region of Lebanon, and attempts to create a more holistic and less institutional healing environment**

demands. In his proposal for a traditional craft school in Baghdad, Karrar Ihsan Al-Jassani celebrates Ancient Near Eastern motifs while studiously avoiding pastiche. Geometrical studies and attention to the relationship between construction and ornament inform his design, which choreographs an architectural promenade to a rhythm of exchange between darkness and light. Tarek Akra's tourism development at Sidon, Lebanon's third largest city, builds not only on the notion of traffic between past and present, but on an idea about professionalism that casts the architect as mediator between technological, social and spatial concerns. With the aim of rehabilitating a deteriorated site, the ambitious project encompasses elements of landscape, infrastructure and architecture.

Rand Jamal Farhat's rural centre for the treatment of children with

cancer occupies a challenging locale in Bekaa, a fertile valley district in Lebanon renowned for agriculture. In an effort to address primary human issues of wellbeing and loss – issues often 'medicalised' in care-giving institutions – Farhat's proposal organises its accommodation into a 'healing village' with spaces designed to promote emotional and mental health, hoping to give young cancer-sufferers back the childhood that their illness has taken from them.

The active sense of exchange embodied in the central space of the faculty building characterises much student work. This intellectual and architectural dialogue – between foreground and background, past and present, local and global – doesn't seem threatened by the idea of what tomorrow may bring, but rather informed by a curiosity about future possibilities.





# REPUTATIONS

## Louis Sullivan

PAUL DAVIES

Nobody illustrates the perilous fate of the idealist architect better than Louis Sullivan and few offer such a merry dance in interpretation.

The most precise definition of his personality comes from Kenneth Frampton: 'metropolitan demiurge and Celtic mystic'; the most laconic via Leonardo Benevello: 'a little man in an impeccable brown suit'. But elsewhere is a wealth of adjectives: egotistical, remote, temperamental, abrupt, condescending, self-destructive, obstinate, outspoken, dandyish, drunk and (possibly) gay.

He was the pioneering 'Lieber Meister' for Frank Lloyd Wright, and a tragic hero who suffered a penniless death at 68 under a single light bulb in a shabby rooming house in 1924. It's a story straight out of John Dos Passos: the life of an American hero, a life without a second act.

Wright deceived Sullivan by moonlighting while his employee, and then took his most useful ideas and privatised them. He'd had a drunken, despairing Sullivan thrown out of his club asking for change, but he lionised him in death. Sullivan was a handy predecessor but a fundamentally different kind of idealist, perhaps in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson and certainly Walt Whitman (who Sullivan emulated), less selfish than Wright, but more doomed. His inspiration was a social whole, embodying a utopian frontier spirit to sweep away corrupt European taste; his imperative to respond to the New World and illustriously occupy the Jeffersonian grid with buildings in which Edison's electricity and Otis's lifts could work their magic.

The buildings themselves have a profound solidity. If Sullivan inherited any European taste (he studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1874), it was something of the spirit of Michelangelo, and the repertoire in the Richardsonian

Romanesque; so heavy that he watched his own Chicago Auditorium Building literally sink month by month as he marched into his office within. Here, in partnership with the urbane, under-appreciated Dankmar Adler (who provided the engineering technique), they escaped load-bearing masonry to produce such frame-built classics as the Wainwright Building in St Louis (1891) and the Guaranty Building in Buffalo (1894).

That his monumentality is matched by unbridled filigree has made him the doyen of post-structuralist critics, who wonder at the dressy elements. For Sullivan, his architecture was not costume, but closer to trees and flowers. His writing certainly runs with metaphors from nature.

His books, to which he devoted his later years, notably *Kindergarten Chats* and *The Autobiography of an Idea* are offputting but strangely mesmeric/turgid bordering on the insufferable and reveal a man morbidly sensitive to the culture that stood in his way. Especially in Europe the self-serving preachy tone meant difficulty in publication. It is 'The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered' which provides the landmark manifesto: solid base on two floors, middle section of many floors, and attic storey with cornice for services, still relevant today, at least among more conservative architects. It is a robust formula, and Sullivan carved it up accentuating first the vertical, and latterly the horizontal. Szarkowski's photographs of Sullivan's oeuvre in the 1950s, in the cityscape of *Guys and Dolls*, give us something of his dramatic contribution. By then cluttered with vulgar (now vintage) advertising, these pictures strongly demonstrate Sullivan's unique sense of purpose.

Sullivan was bedevilled by financial crises, and undone by the very 'hustle' and 'salesmanship' he abhorred. He had been let go by Frank Furness in the depression of 1873, and his partnership with Adler dissolved with the financial panic that followed

**'His inspiration embodied a utopian frontier spirit to sweep away corrupt European taste; his imperative to respond to the New World and illustriously occupy the Jeffersonian grid'**

**Louis Sullivan**

**1856-1924**

**Education**

**1872 MIT at the age of 16**

**1873 Apprentice to**

**Frank Furness**

**1874 Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris**

**Key buildings**

**Wainwright Building, St Louis (1891)**

**Guaranty Building, Buffalo (1895)**

**Carson, Pirie, Scott, & Co Department Store, Chicago (1904)**

**Key essay**

**'The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered' (1896)**

**Quote**

**'It is the pervading law of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function'**

20 years later. In 1899, after six years struggling on his own, Sullivan married Mary Azona Hattabaugh. This further precipitated disaster. They bought a second home in Mississippi, but separated in 1909, days after Sullivan had auctioned off most of the household goods to pay debts and support her fledgling acting career. The same year he was passed over for the design of Mr Selfridge's flagship London store despite having designed Selfridge's Chicago base: the astonishingly modern (if you ignore the lace skirt) Carson, Pirie, Scott, & Co (originally Schlesinger & Mayer) building of 1904. He drew few commissions from then on. His loyal draughtsman George Elmslie also left in 1909. A year later he had to sell the Mississippi home and was divorced in 1916. They had no children.

Sullivan originally said he liked his buildings 'in the nude', so sporting so much in the way of 'cabbagey' (Pevsner) or even geometric ornamentation may seem a contradiction. Recasting the question has brought a new linguistic intricacy to criticism, but to paraphrase Terry Eagleton, these days the emphasis tends to be the erotic body rather than the pissed and penniless one.

Jennifer Bloomer finds Sullivan's decoration analogous to the brocade or even the plaiting of pubic hair. By enjoying her argument we might penetrate the recesses of Sullivan's mind, a mind that, if you like, didn't know it was, and even if it was, couldn't have been open about it. Indeed Sullivan and his buildings were given to exquisite trimming, and he seems to consistently elaborate more literal interpretation. Noting the rings around the entrance of the Transportation Building for the Chicago World's Fair (1893), we shouldn't be surprised at Bloomer's interest. Meanwhile Clare Cardinal-Pett has evocatively rolled around in full-size Elmslie details (presumably drawn while Sullivan was drowning his sorrows in the bar) that she found in one of his eight small later banks.





EMILY FORGOT

Both images are still controversial; he was considered a gentleman by clients and builders even in this sad late period, as shown in Szarkowski's exquisite volume of photographs and homely interviews published in 1956. However, it may give rose-tinted memories, as Sullivan had died 30 years earlier and been respectfully awarded the AIA Gold Medal in 1944.

The detective game of influence continues. We have Wright, but also Berlage and Loos (Bloomer makes an amusing connection with his Chicago Tribune Tower) and Scully cites the Wainwright Building as a source for Rossi. But they all ditch the filigree. James Stevens Curl assures us of the dislocation between American ideas and European ones. 'Form follows function' may be carved in his tombstone, but we Europeans misinterpreted it. We should understand his functionalism as more 'spirit into being', but adopted the catchy phrase more superficially as buildings defined by use. Contrarily, Sullivan, with months to live, complained to Neutra that he was perhaps only an influence in Sweden and Germany, but these seem surface affiliations since he also complained that Loos was a 'no good' and derided almost all but good honest folk.

Whatever Sullivan's decline, the late banks are fabulous. They are essentially secular churches, with the bank vaults as altarpieces; a tribute to toil on the land and the thankful harvest, and to probity and thrift. Sullivan purposely over-specified the vaults. The banks themselves were consistently over budget, but the locals saw the benefits. Sullivan referred to them as jewel boxes; an apt epitaph given his credit history.

He was a great architect with little faith in the establishment, even wondering if 'the discovery of America had proven to be a blessing or a curse to the world of mankind'. He made many intemperate public statements that alienated him from his colleagues, but such were the makings of a hero.





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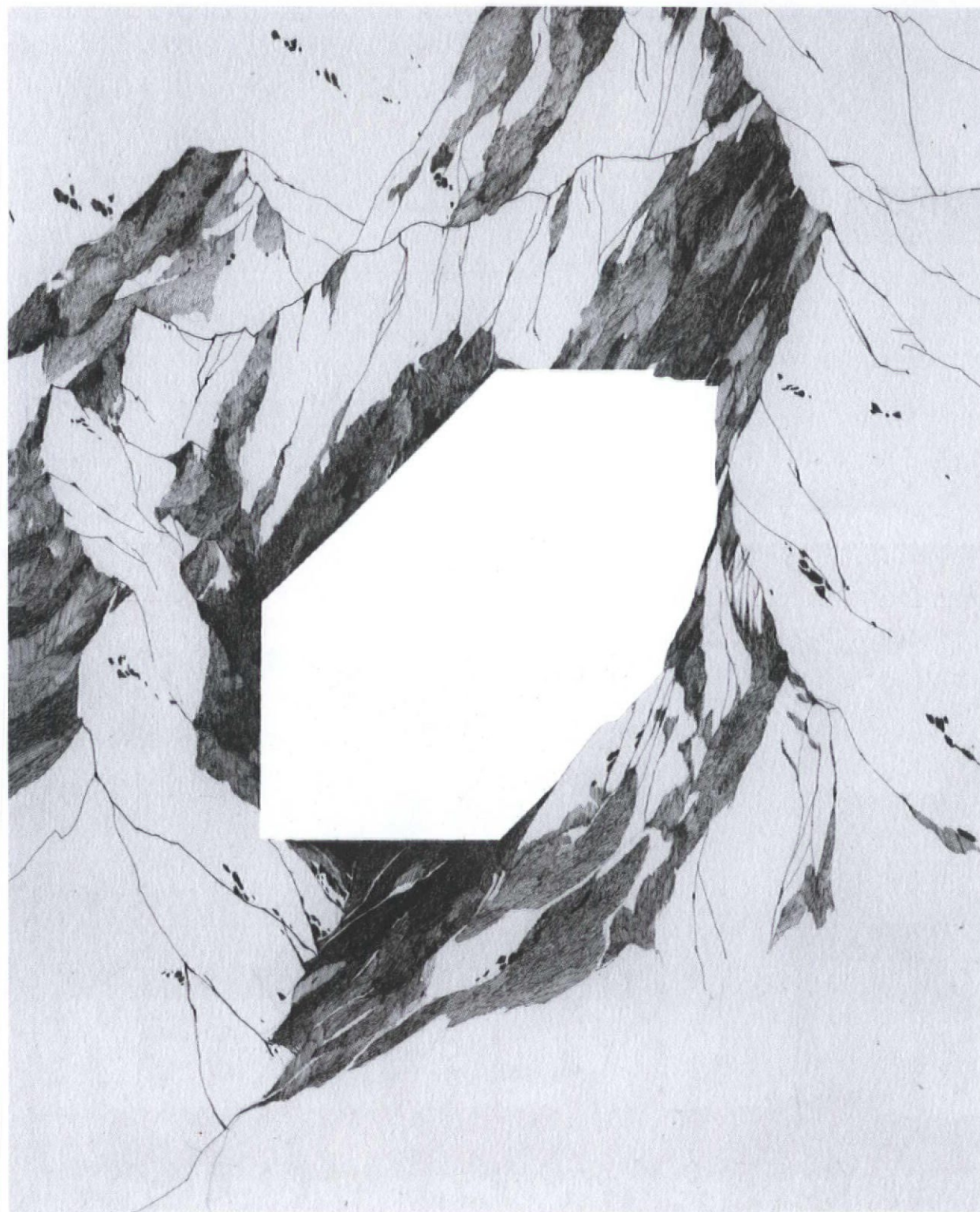
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In HP Lovecraft's overbaked fantasy novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, polar explorers discover 'curious regularities of the higher mountain skyline – regularities like clinging fragments of perfect cubes ... The effect was that of a Cyclopean city of no architecture known to man or to human imagination ... embodying monstrous perversions of geometrical laws.' This Lovecraftian drawing by Éva Le Roi is part of a series showing permutations of a cuboid form. Published in the May edition of the journal *OASE*, Le Roi's images respond to a collection of essays answering the question: 'What is good architecture?' The text by Pier Vittorio Aureli, illustrated here, concludes that 'in order to be good, architecture has to fulfil a *tabula rasa*. It has to become destructive'





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