

Civil Architecture
Pierre Bélanger
Ahmad Makia



We Have Never Been Urban



Civil Architecture
Milliøns
Common Accounts



WISHFUL TROPICS

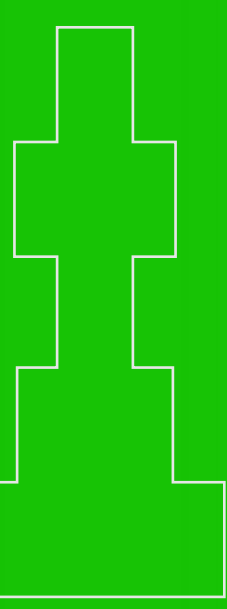
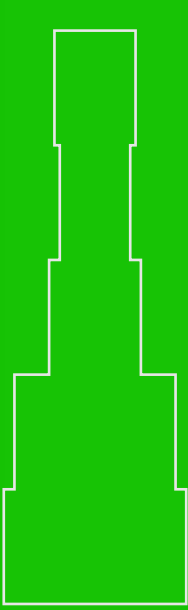
Wishful Tropics



Civil Architecture
Luis Callejas
Faysal Tabbarah



SCULPTURE



VERDANT



This reader is a compilation of three lectures held as part of Civil Architecture’s residency at Alserkal Avenue in 2018 and 2019. The lectures are centered around architecture’s relationship to ecology, landscape and life in the Gulf. We invited interlocutors from the region and abroad to discuss larger trends in the discipline and their connection to the context of Dubai.

“We Have Never Been Urban” invited Pierre Bélanger and Ahmed Makia to discuss the idea of land and our relationship to territory. “Wishful Tropics” featured MILLIØNS and Common Accounts for a discussion on the aspirational qualities of climate control, and forming architectural environments. “Verdant Sculpture” with Luis Callejas and Faysal Tabbarah was a discussion on the nature of objects in the landscape and the blurring of boundaries between the ecological and architectural.

These three lectures form a summary of on-going issues in the discipline and are intended to be a loose primer for architects of the Gulf.

Hamed & Ali

Civil Architecture

Civil Architecture is a cultural practice preoccupied with the making of buildings and books about them. The work of Civil asks what it means to produce architecture in a decidedly uncivil time, presenting a new civic character for a global condition. Since its founding by Hamed Bukhamseen and Ali Karimi, the practice has attracted a strong following for their provocative works and their offer of an alternate future for a nascent Middle East.

Pierre Bélanger

Pierre Bélanger is a landscape architect and urban planner with the *Landscape Infrastructure Lab* who has published several books including *“Landscape as Infrastructure”*, *“Ecologies of Power”*, *“Going Live”*, *“Risk Ecologies”*, *“Wet Matter”*, *“Extraction Empire”*. Collaborative public works projects include the Zakim Bridge Underpass Skatepark in Boston for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation (US), the Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto for the Ministry of Agriculture and Transportation (Canada), YVR International Airport Expansion for the Greater Vancouver Airport Authority (Canada), the Disaster Evacuation Park System in the Artibonite Valley for the Department of Civil Protection (Haiti), and the 2016 Canadian Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale (Italy).

Ahmad Makia

Ahmad Makia is a geographer from Dubai. He writes about wet matters, Gulf landscapes, and sex, particularly tormented expressions of masculinity. He also makes books.

Common Accounts

Founded by Igor Bragado and Miles Gertler at Princeton University in 2015, Common Accounts is a design practice which operates between Madrid, Toronto, and Seoul. Their work *Three Ordinary Funerals: Home for the Virtual Afterlife* was exhibited at the 2017 Seoul International Biennale on Architecture and Urbanism and *Going Fluid: The Cosmetic Protocols of Gangnam* at the Third Istanbul Design Biennial in 2016. Bragado and Gertler have lectured in Beijing, Toronto, Istanbul, Dubai, Seoul, Ithaca and New York, and recent work has appeared at the A+D Museum in Los Angeles, in *Uncube Magazine*, *Frame Magazine*, *Artsy*, and *Dezeen*. They have taught at Cornell University, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo and The Cooper Union. Their work has been acquired by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Korea.

Milliøns

Milliøns is a Los Angeles-based experimental design practice, founded by John May and Zeina Koreitem. Milliøns conceives of architecture as a speculative medium for exploring the central categories of contemporary life: technology, politics, energy, media, and information. Their approach insists on an expansive parallel project of technical, historical and cultural analysis, which surrounds and informs their work. Milliøns’ work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including a commissioned furniture set by Friedman Benda Gallery NYC and Chamber, shows at La Triennale Di Milano, Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, The Architecture + Design Museum of Los Angeles, Jai & Jai Gallery in Los Angeles, the Museum of The City of New York, the MIT Keller Architecture Gallery, and the Harvard Graduate School of Design, among others.

Luis Callejas

Luis Callejas is an associate professor at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design. He is an architect, founding partner and former director of Paisajes Emergentes and founder and director of Icla office. Having obtained diverse recognition in multiple public space design competitions, Luis Callejas was awarded with the Architectural League of New York Prize for Young Architects in 2013 and selected as one of the world’s ten best young practices by the Iakov Chernikhov International Foundation in 2010. Callejas was nominated again for the award in 2012 and 2014. In 2016 Callejas was one of the three finalists for the Rolex mentor and protege award.

Faysal Tabbarah

Faysal Tabbarah is Associate Dean and Associate Professor at the College of Architecture, Art and Design at the American University of Sharjah, and co-founder of the architecture and design studio Architecture + Other Things (A+OT).

Tabbarah’s teaching, research and practice interrogates the relationships between environmental and architectural imaginaries to develop alternative building solutions that are rooted in their surrounding material and cultural environments. Tabbarah works with computational tools, emergent technologies, materials research as well as historical archives.

The event looks to dismantle the socio-political complex which has defined landscape in the Gulf for the past century. By uncoupling territory from its colonial vision of fertile, or worked territory the conversation looks to imagine new ecological, social and political formations for the Middle East. In light of the complete bankruptcy of the architectural as a profession capable of offering formal and political alternatives, this conversation asks what new systems, new natures we can look to for new modes of governance and life.

Ali Ismail Karimi (Civil Architecture)
Hamed Bukhamseen (Civil Architecture)
Pierre Bélanger
Ahmed Makia

CIVIL ARCHITECTURE

Civil Architecture
Pierre Bélanger
Ahmad Makia

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We Have Never Been Urban

We Have
Never Been
Urban



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Civil Architecture



The Gulf

Our time at the Alserkal Residency has looked to dearchitecturalize architectural discourse in the Gulf. The abiding concerns that govern practice in the Gulf promote offices that are expedient, complicit and generic. Our discipline's body of knowledge, at least as formed regionally, has not only been unable to critique the trajectory of urban and architectural practice but has been one of the most willing participants in the transformation of the Gulf into a totalized speculative landscape.

The work we will show, and today's talk will attempt to provide counterpoints, and counterexamples to this role that academia and practice have played.

The residency has played a large part in creating a space apart from that of our academic or professional settings. The summer has been a time of research on the Gulf as a 'working territory', looking at its landscape and ideas of pre-oil labor that dictated life in the region. This investigation questions the relationship of the architectural, and the design project, to its territory.

This interest began with Kuwait Pavilion at the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale, which looked at the history of the Gulf as a body of water. The Kuwait Pavilion sought to transcend national narratives and divisions that are usually propagated in national pavilions, by looking towards new environments. A hydrography that sought to unify the countries that bordered the Gulf, and initiate a conversation amongst practitioners, writers, and designers from across the region.

By dismissing the national as unproductive mode of operation, we looked towards new territories to trigger collaboration and begin to think about the possibilities of a joint project across the gulf informed by its shared history.



Kuwait Pavilion



Kuwait Pavilion

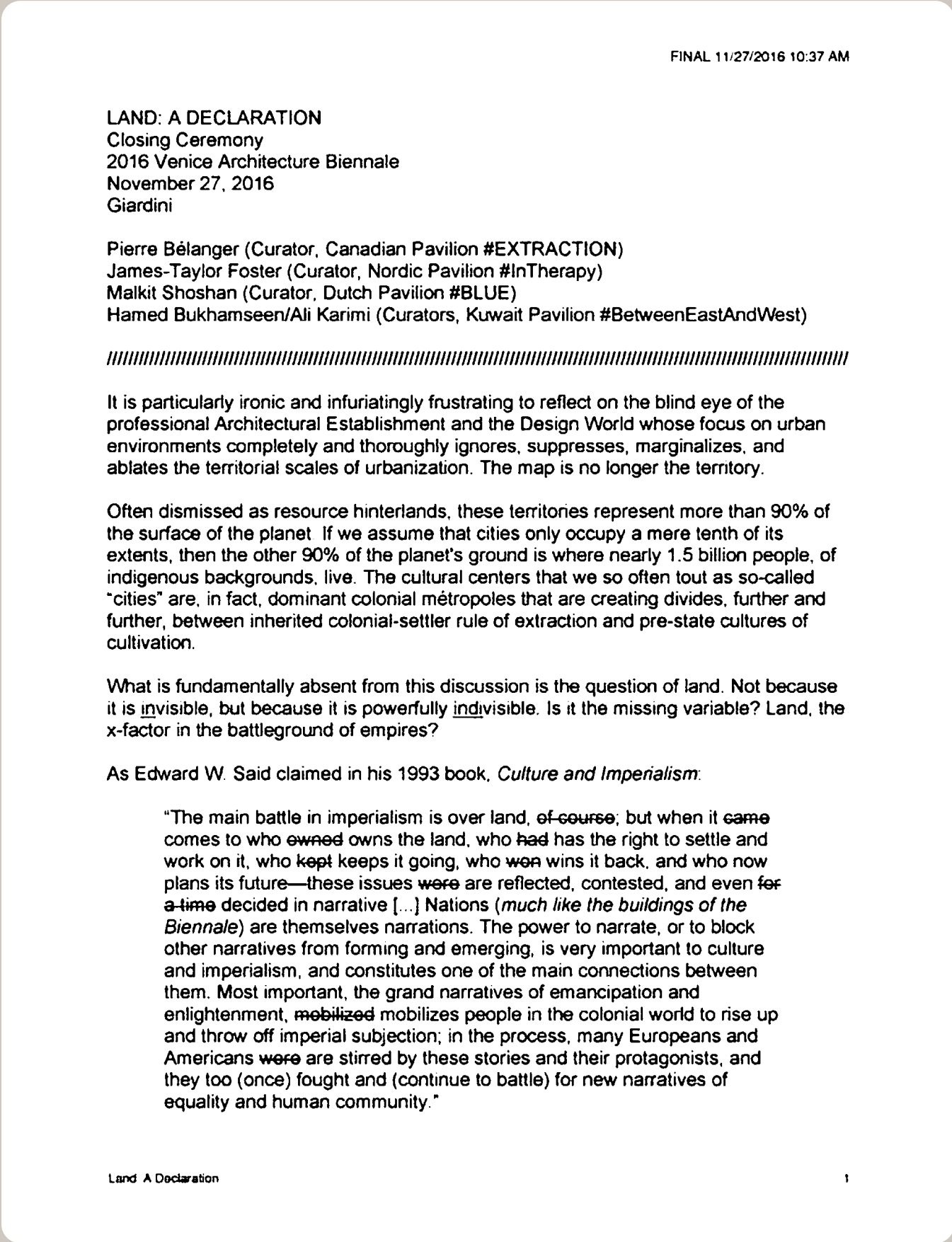
Hamed Bukhamseen

Of course this was no coincidence that the pavilion had taken place ten years after OMA, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture's, research on the gulf within the same venue. The Kuwait pavilion was a reaction to what had been displayed, and published about the region, which

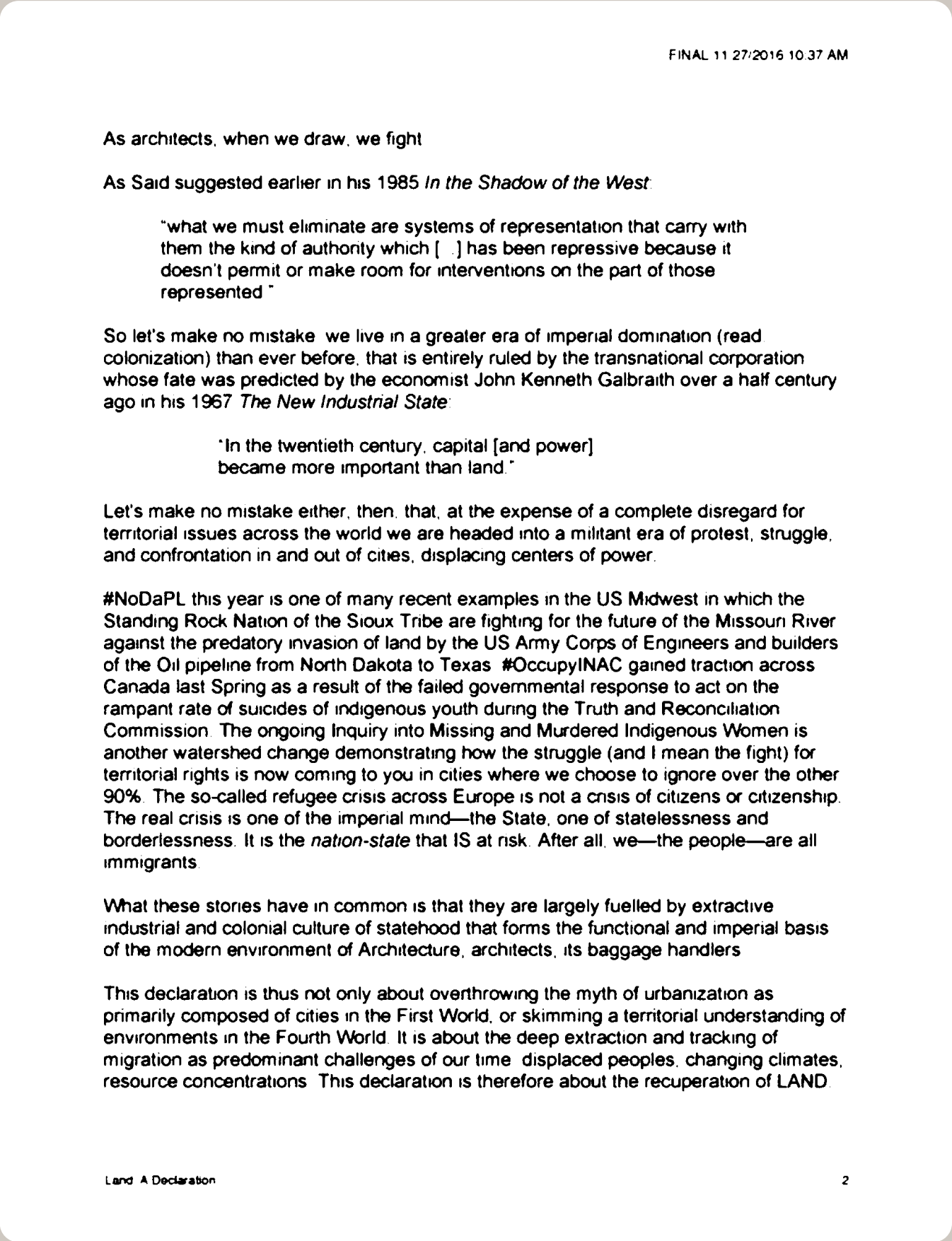
portrayed it as the tabula rasa, devoid of context and ripe for foreign expertise.

Dubai as a place to work has also contributed to the questions about place, and placelessness, and what it means to be associated/disassociated from land (or the idea of land) in a production of a work. We found in the year back, that there’s been this increasing need for a different mode of practice. That many of these themes that we began discussing in the Kuwait pavilion needed to be addressed.

We realized we weren’t on our own in these conversations about the territorial. Towards the end of the biennale, a joint declaration signed by Pierre Bélanger of the Canadian Pavilion, James Taylor Foster of the Nordic Pavilion, and Malkit Shoshan of the Dutch participation, and ourselves, proclaimed the significance of land and worked territory in urban discourse.



Land: a declaration



There’s a really strong need to evaluate and compose a body of knowledge from the region, but also from elsewhere in the world around land, territory. It’s not simply

an architectural exercise or one that aids the process of producing buildings, but one that’s crucial and essential to our understanding of architectural practice moving forward. To resolving this bankruptcy of the architectural project in which the need to constantly produce has far outstripped the need to actually think about what we’re producing.

Pierre Belanger

Upon receiving the invitation to speak today I wasn't sure what I would be able to contribute as a white, western man. Because I would assume also that there's a long-standing tradition of white, western men who have come through Dubai making claims on the future of the city, the future of urbanization, bringing with them American or U.S.-centric ideals of the future. I'm actually self-consciously trying to not only avoid that, but also potentially rethink that legacy and that tradition from my own perspective which I'm looking to find a point of intersection with you all here.

It seems tenuous that a Canadian landscape architect, and a recovering academic might have anything in common with people in Dubai, but there is actually something that we do have in common. I'm going to immediately say that if there are some Canadians in the room, that I'm not being unpatriotic to the country that I originate from, but rather that there are some serious questions that we need to be asking about the future of what we consider to be urbanism and when we are talking about the urban future and about the urban world.

On one end, when we talk about the urban future, we're talking about a future in which we're constantly living, working and growing up in cities. I can't fathom this idea that essentially the world becomes an entire gigantic city. I wake up with nightmares thinking about that at night, or from another perspective that the urban promises to be a revolutionary moment that will never happen. And I think that's highly problematic.

I have a very simple point. If you replace the word urban in everybody's conversation with the word colonial, you'll see that that still works. Because colonialism is something that never ended. It's something that's taken on such a large proportion in magnitude and scale, that we no longer recognize it.

Thankfully to the British colonizers that were in charge of creating Canada with the French colonizers, they were the ones to instill this idea that political independence equals decolonization and it does not. So I'm just going to ask you, all you have to remember is this idea that political independence touted primarily by British politicians, British geographers, British urbanists that are still pushing this idea that essentially we are in a post-colonial era when it is completely untrue. Colonialism is entirely dependent on the domination of people and territory and the dispossession of land and bodies in service of a distant empire that's taken on different forms, but still continues to this day.

There's a really interesting book, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World Economy*, from the 1990s worked by Anthony King who was not an urbanist, but was a historian of empire.

"Considering its impact on contemporary urban, political, economic, social, and cultural life; the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism is greatly under-researched." He wrote that in 1990, at a particular era in which there was major political transformations that were happening, whether or not it was with the fall of apartheid in 1994, the fall of the Berlin wall in the 1980s In which one could argue we were beginning to understand that we needed to re-politicize urban conditions and architects, urban planners, even my group of people, landscape architects have been experts at de-politicizing cities to talk about form. We need to re-politicize cities. We need to re-politicize environments, and we need to re-politicize territories in which we live because the city is not all we've got.

I absolutely hope that the city is not all we have got because there's a much greater future in front of us. This is the cover of "Mutations" project by Stefano Boeri, and Rem Koolhaas in 2001 touting this idea with a question mark, "Well, the future of the world is going to be one gigantic city."

We need to completely resist this idea because as I mentioned before the future of the urban world is a future of the colonized world. And we may not know it, or recognize it simply because the fact that we've forgotten to see things from a very large perspective.

So as I mentioned there's two extreme opposites by which we define the urban which is every time that we talk about the urban, we equate this idea that the world is an amalgamation of cities. But if you are to take all the cities of the world and put them in one place, you could fill the country of India and my question to you is: what about the rest? So you can study cities, but it's not like you're studying the rest of the world and other transformations that are occurring.

So that's on one end. This is the type of work that Ricky Burdett (a British scholar) pursues, and it's not by mistake that a lot of these ideas are constantly coming from England. And also by a French scholar, Henri Lefebvre, in *La Revolución Urbana* presents a completely opposite extreme of this idea of the urban being this liberating transformation that continues two previous stages of transformation from rural, to industrial, to then urban as a stage to pass through. And there's emphasis on these processes of transformation.

We're not in any of those because there's two things that these books do not touch on: they don't touch on land, this idea that grounds notions of urbanism, as opposed to an urban world that is entirely based on the creation of a free market of land. Dubai and the Emirates have based global world economy on a real estate market, in order to enable and open up land to foreign investment. But that's what the world urban economy is based on, but that also results in the second effect which is dispossession of indigenous people. And let's make no mistake, the indigenous world is not a world of the past, it's a world of the present, it's a world of ongoing oppression, and a world of the future.

Land is no longer part of the conversation about urban design, nor about architecture. We replace it with housing, property, you can't even go to university to take a degree in land. If you wanted to understand how land and landscape works, and I'm particularly interested as part of that, as a landscape architect to find out, how do we do this?

This means that for all the liberating aspects – and this idea of the future of the world as being an amalgamation of cities – that actually we really don't know what we're talking about.

In fact, if we have never been urban we can propose or claim that the project of colonization still continues. We have always been colonized and we will continue until we understand that part of our work is part of the resistance against the Empire and so this is the intersection, middle ground with friends, colleagues from the Emirates and also Dubai, is we have shared histories of course, Dubai and the Emirates as protectorates of the British Empire, but Canada was actually under the thumb of the British Empire and the French before that for almost 400 years.

So we have a much longer legacy of this, in fact, the UAE is much more sovereign and independent than Canada because our queen is actually still the same one as England, right? Queen Elizabeth. We haven't gained independence, no matter what Canadians tell you, ask them to show you their passport and on top of the passport is still the crown of England. That's significant because this is a map from a diagram from 1886, and for as much as there is a touting of multiculturalism from the generic, so-called Indian, or indigenous of Canada, or the Bedouins in the Middle East that ultimately the idea of multiculturalism was really the homogenization of national sovereignty.

The world's largest colonized territory is Canada, where I come from. I'm gonna be crude. Canada was, and really is Britain's bitch, and it will still remain that way, so long

as it does not change the constitution. It's a constitutional monarchy, so when you become Canadian you still have to pledge allegiance to the queen. Even though she's just apparently a symbol.

Of course, protectorates having their own relationship with the Empire, but a particularly important one given the fact that it'll just make a small coincidence in important intersections that the Dubai land department was created in 1960, as some of you may know. It was a setup for the free market of land, 10 years before independence and the British left.

We have to unlearn the history that we learned from the West, and I'm gonna speak as a Westerner, and start to relearn it. So, to the work of Henri Lefebvre that I mentioned earlier, *La Revolución Urbana*, the urban revolution book that was written in 1970, and then translated in English in 2003 touting this idea that the urban world was really the structural transformation that was occurring. There's one passage dealing with territory and landscape. One. And there's only about three passages dealing with indigenous people in passing, practically footnotes.

I would actually argue that what's useful to take a look at is: when did we start to replace the language of land to property, to property to housing? And what are the useful ones? And you could do this exercise in every country. You have your own Charles Abrams here in Dubai, for sure. An American historian, he wrote this book called, *Revolution in Land*, and you can see here, "To the stargazers who pioneered the housing movement from a dream to a frontier." This is a particular moment in which architects gave up on urbanism and all of a sudden spent their time working on housing. As if working on urban conditions and urban design was really about designing housing, and I think that's problematic because this book was not a revolution in land, it was a revolution in property.

It's an almost irreversible moment in America in which the notion of property irreversibly replaced and substituted the word land. And it's kind of interesting that the only mention of colonization is in the introduction. So Charles Abrams gets rid of the discussion about colonization and just gets the housing in the rest of the book. So this is in page seven of this 200 page book, "Patterns of land use and ownership in the entrenchment of possession and property flowed necessarily from the geographic, economic, and social backgrounds and outcomes of colonization." So as if colonization sort of like backgrounded, it's over now we can move on, right?

As if, the oppression doesn't continue, as if indigenous bodies are not displaced. They're not assimilated or attempted to integrate or attempted to eliminate, or at the same time, as if imported labor from guest workers in Singapore or to a number of other countries in which, or chattel slavery is not part of this ongoing project of colonization.

If you make a triangle between settlers, slaves, and natives, that relationship of colonization and its processes is a kind of structure that is ongoing, right? I can speak for the U.S. at the moment, the growing tensions between white supremacy, black bodies, and state police is ongoing.

I'll show how I deal with some of this in projects and I'm just going to mention, all I'm trying to do is propose this idea that landscape architects work as a form of resistance. Working on the ground, working on territory, working with plants, working with soils, working with water is a practice of resistance. So I'm not talking about greening cities and yes, while I work with plants there's plenty of greening. But I'm not trying to push any neoliberal ideas of sustainability or climate change. We can talk about that later on.

What's particularly interesting, at least for me, is the work of John Kenneth Galbraith who's an expatriate Canadian who went to the U.S. He became ambassador to India. In his book called, *The New Industrial State*, which you can buy for about 10 cents, (there were so many copies that were made), he has this interesting passage, "In the last century, capital and power became more important than land."

As a landscape architect, if I wanted to learn about land or landscape, you have to study capital, capitalism, and structures of power. In the case of North America, structures of white supremacy, or white supremacy in Europe, you begin to understand how those structures are inscribed in patterns of construction and building.

Uniquely, as part of this, I'm going to introduce another aspect or dimension as part of this conversation which as architects, as designers, as planners, as urbanists, as policymakers, we don't work on the ground most of the time. We actually work on paper. We work on maps. We work on rules. We work on policies. And there's a fundamental denial that we're constantly working on a layered stratification of different policies and rules that we inherit. I would argue that for as much as we like to imagine, what's outside or what's beyond us. Ultimately, we have to fundamentally understand the rules that we're working with. My proposal is essentially to do anything new, you have to break the law because everything is inherited from colonial rules of law. This is especially ingrained in planning, as well as in architecture.

The role of the map becomes particularly important as part of this work. J.B. Harley in, *Deconstructing the Map*, a great text from the late 1980s, which mentions that the cartographers are talking about their maps and not about landscapes, and the fundamental differentiation between territory and maps. They forget the difference between the map and landscape, or the map and territory and when they permit or persuade us to forget that difference,

all sorts of liabilities ensue. So while we may trick ourselves into thinking that we're changing the ground and that we're working on paper: there's a fundamental difference. I would argue that for students, professors, and teachers there's a confounding and a forgetting that when students are working on the screen, they're not working on the ground. When you're working between a screen, a plotter, a printer, and a board, you're not working on the ground. There's a whole other set of other people that are in communities that are erased as part of that process.

This is a picture in the oil sands in Alberta, Central Canada, photographed by Garth Lens. There was this word nature that came up earlier on which is of particular importance to this conversation. We need to transform the use of nature as it's uniquely positioned as a political tool. I don't think we really have a problem understanding this as a technological landscape. We don't have a problem understanding this as an industrialized landscape. We don't have a problem understanding this as a transformed landscape. However, just a little bit downstream, along the Athabasca River, this is a typical Boreal Forest of Canada which covers just about two thirds of the country. We have problems associating this forest, as being transformed, politicized, governed, worked, and planted.

Usually these forests are touted mainly through Canada's National Parks system as being nature. You've all seen the Canadian flag, the two red stripes and then the maple leaf right in the middle. Ian Campeau, who is a DJ with, *A Tribe Called Red*, indigenous band from Ottawa. He's an Anishinaabe, he said, "I want you to think of indigenous people, as being the people that were there before the Maple leaves." And so, if you think of the forest as being 10 thousand years old, governed, worked, lived in, occupied, as subsistence, as the economy, as the culture of over 2300 indigenous nations across the country.

I think that is particularly important and one could argue that the state of Canada is in denial of this lived condition, this governed condition, this politicized condition of its territory which is essentially covered two-thirds by the Boreal Forest.

Why is that? Because Canada is a state of extraction, where it practices extractivism of its territory for resources, and also of bodies by displacing them. Canada still has a system of indigenous reserves. They're called Indian Reserves, of course they're called Indian. By now you understand it's the mistake of the colonizers to when they saw red-skinned people, which are the indigenous people, mistaking them for Indians. Which to this day, Canada's system of Indian reserves is still under the Indian Act of 1876. Canada is still in a state of colonial extraction. Naomi Klein, one of the most important cultural thinkers about this phenomena of extractivism defines it as, "a non-reciprocal dominance based relationship with the earth, one of purely taking." Let's put a fact to that. So Canada is 10 million square kilometers. It is, I'm going to try to get this right, I believe it's 150 times of the U.A.E. but the important fact is that it's 93 to 95 percent Crown land. So there's no free market of land.

The Crown owns all of the resources below ground, and the rights to regulate waters and property within the free market of land. It's not about land, it's about owning the surface and being able to take on debt of property through mortgages. And so this relationship of being able to engage in property mortgage, as a part of a financial system of home ownership is completely divorced as result of this law of Crown land. Where the state owns 95% of the resources that are below ground. And that's particularly important because that law dates back to the Magna Carta which is 800 years old which is created by the British.

So the British created the Magna Carta, as this device for guaranteeing the civil liberties of people that were within

an area, but it also guaranteed that those who were not within the kingdom would essentially be dispossessed and displaced.

That's really the beauty and essentially the complete monstrosity of colonization. It's great for people who are in, and it really sucks for people who are out. And of course, for white Westerners and white European descendants and settlers, it worked great for them. And it doesn't work well for immigrants. And it doesn't work well for indigenous people who essentially suffer and are oppressed under that system.

We need to essentially completely displace this idea that the city is at the center of the future. And we need to develop a language related to territory, which ironically has a lot to do with indigenous self-determination and resurgence.

I'm speaking as a Canadian. Probably the image you have of Canada is these great wilderness and national parks. Maybe you've even visited many of them. But I want you to understand this; that essentially those national parks were a tool to dispossess indigenous people by removing them from their hunting grounds. There are now claims on the national parks to change them back to the hunting grounds of indigenous nations.

There's an urban historian, her name is Jane M. Jacobs. This is not the Jane Jacobs that talked the life and death of great American cities; this is not her. This is another one; she's still alive. She's from Australia. Colonization depends upon fine grain spatial technologies of power such as town planning. Control structures such as the planning grid. Policing of that system. Empirical expansions establish specific spatial arrangements in which imaginative geographies of desire harden and sort of like entrenched inter-material spatialities of political connection, economic dependency, architectural imposition and landscape transformation.

Canada's a master in touting this idea that it's a resource-rich country. There's not one country in the world that doesn't have Canadian mining services and technologies in it. Not one. And when we went to the Venice Biennale a couple of years ago, we also found that even the dirty hands of the Canadians were involved in gold mining there as well.

We have to renew this and rethink our language related to the city in the urban world. And start speaking about the relationship between the colonial metropolis and the hinterland. For every city, which is really a colonial metropolis, there's a set of hinterlands. We need to start asking the question where stuff comes from. It's really useful to understand and start tracking and tracing where things come from.

This is from an issue of Canadian Dimension Magazine, 1970's. A whole series of great articles by Arthur K. Davis that spoke about the relationship between the metropolis and the hinterland. I assure you, constantly talking about the future of cities is going to get you nowhere. On top of renewing discourse between metropolis and hinterland, I do actually think we need to study architecture, but I think we need to stop studying architecture from the outside, and start studying architecture from the inside. We need to completely smash the patriarchy associated with the education of designers and planners and architects. And ultimately, we need to completely de-nationalize this idea of nature.

Okay, so I'm just going to take you through 300 years of history in just a matter of slides to be able to understand how geometry, and infrastructure is, is now inscribed in everything from buildings, pre-development, etc. as it is inherited from the colonial survey. But I think it's also the one thing that, as part of all the work of designers and planners and urbanists, it's the one thing that we don't rethink. Which is the survey.

The survey is taken as being the permanent base to the work that we do, and we don't rethink it. And I would actually argue the survey, this legal permanent document, is exactly what we need to undo and unmap. Think of the 36 square mile township, and how it was convenient for the empire because it can be infinitely subdivided and infinitely scaled. That's the beauty of the grid for the empire, right?

And it takes on all these different forms, but of course it requires things on the ground. The survey itself, the grid, is a practical means of developing the country. But the thing is that even though it's practical, the grid essentially is also extremely violent.

Nicholas Blomley writes about an understanding of the implied physical violence, implied and realized, that's part of the legitimization, foundation and operation of a Western property regime. So these are essentially a series of images that take you through all the different permutations and formations over a period of essentially 350 years in Canada of those variations. But keep on watching, get an understanding of the water bodies and rivers that are constantly transgressing and passing through, and define the nature of the grid itself across a number of different scales.

But I want to mention something, because a lot of people think that Canada is a new country. It just celebrated 150 years of confederation. In fact, it was a corporation for 300 years based on the Hudson Bay Company, a fur trading company, far before it was actually a confederation. But that country was entirely based on a company called the Canada Lands Company, which was in charge of essentially serving the country and then bringing in settlers and immigrants to create it. Inscribed as part of the symbolism of that company was its own motto and motivation, in Latin: *non mutant genus solum*, country does not alter the race. So for the British, this idea that essentially

even if you go to a different country, you are still white, you are still British, you are still European, and therefore you still carry the supremacy with you, even though you changed territory.

It's a bit of an anecdote. We proposed this idea of exhibiting resource extraction as part of the Canadian Pavilion. And of course the bureaucrats were really excited ... Mining, resources, big things. And we said we're going to fill up the Canadian Pavilion with gold ore. And they said ha, ha, ha, okay, why don't you propose that and we'll see what happens. And so we got chosen to do this. But then the Canadian bureaucrats, as part of the Canadian Council for the Arts, were really scared that then people were going to start throwing rocks at the Canadian Pavilion, thinking of course, this is at a time when Canadian mining companies are coming under a lot of scrutiny for the violence of their operations in different countries. Like this is serious stuff.

So they waited a little while, and they said well, we're going to renovate the Pavilion this year, and so you're going to have to exhibit a different project. So we put together this image to talk about the fact that we decided not to find a space that we were going to have to spend a lot of money, and we applied to the Venice Biennale to essentially do the first pavilion outside in the ground. And that's what we did, we planted a solid gold survey stake in the ground with a hole in it, to watch a film, which I'll show you a part of it, like in the last minute here, to essentially speak about the project.

But what we did is we took the preeminent instrument that is in between the map and the territory. All engineers, urbanists and planners can understand this: the survey stake; the monument in the ground that is the permanent marker of the point on a piece a paper and of the survey, and essentially the permanent instrument on the ground that marks territory.

And we decided to essentially subvert it. And essentially we made the first solid gold version of it. A series of different markings on it associated with the year, this is a small version of it. It's got a hole the size of an iPhone camera. And we located it at the intersection, not beside the Canadian Pavilion, but at the intersection of the British, French and Canadian Pavilion. Now of course the British started to get really nervous, because we were going to put a project right in front of their pavilion, so they pushed us over a little bit here. Anyways, they were great to work with. But they didn't understand what we were up to. Because we had people then kneeling on the ground, kneeling towards the British Pavilion as opposed to the Canadian one.

So a diagram of it, that's the British curator who said no way, you're going to x that and put it over here and there was negotiation back and forth. And we kept on saying no, no; we'll just move it a little bit. But then the Canada Council for the Arts got nervous and they said where are you going to put the Pavilion? We didn't tell them where it was going to go. We told them at the very last minute we're going to do it outside. It took us about a year and a half of permissions, because it's all UNESCO grounds on the Venice Biennale grounds.

We told the Canadian government that Britain had done this for the Crystal Palace in 1857, they put all the Canadian work outside, so all the Canadian rocks and stones. It was too big to be inside the Crystal Palace, so they put it on the side of the building. So we said there's precedent for doing this. Everybody told us that Italians don't like to get their hands dirty. They don't like to kneel on the ground. But actually it proved the opposite. In a series of different images, you see people kneeling down, lying down on the ground looking through this hole. And they're watching a film of 800 images across 800 years since the British Magna Carta, of 800 years of colonization that are flicking in front of your eyes in 800 seconds.

But this was the idea of the project. To be alone underneath the pines and the trees, and that relationship about the project of decolonization needs to happen one on one. It's not this massive bureaucratic project with a political campaign. It happens through education. And I'm speaking specifically to educators and professors, to practitioners who work with their interns. It happens one on one in the specifications, in the details of our work, when we no longer ask questions about the ground, the territory, that we're working on.

And so I'll just finish off with the fact that the Canadian government wanted us to do a tour of the exhibition across the country. And after this ordeal of dealing with them, we said no. We finished off the exhibition by burning it in Venice. So apparently you're not supposed to burn anything at the Venice Biennale, so I don't advise it. Because although things happen really slowly in Italy, the fire department gets there in five minutes flat. But they let us have our fire. And what was really beautiful I think there's a picture of the fire at the very end there was a woman from Florence with her boy who had never been they'd never been close to an open air fire before. The project was looking to simply appeal to some basic human senses that we've completely removed from cities in planning regulation.

Ahmed Makia

Hi, I'm Ahmed Makia. I'm a geographer. I write about wet matters, which is actually a concept I had borrowed from Pierre's edition for the Harvard Design Magazine, in which he depicts the ocean as landscape's other, given our over-reliance on land as a form of circulation and as an idea for our urban processes. A general note on what also on what I think brings us all together is that we're all men interested in architectural thinking and discourse.

I'm bringing this up because I'm trying to problematize these very formalized and sanctioned circulations and infrastructures. Whether it is through the more formal roots of intellectual dialogue and knowledge transfer or whether it's about these kinds of representations and remixes of different masculine expressions. It is because I'm trying to reveal my kinds of fatigue with structures of socialization.

I believe that we're very much induced into a trauma of collective social experience. And I say induced because I think to say made culpable or implicated into these social dynamics is to suggest that we have some choice in how we are socialized. But the matter of fact remains that we're already politicized and institutionalized long before born or even able to develop certain critical and cognitive capacities. The efforts that work towards making a social identity I think sort of reveal themselves to be very unimaginative and almost maybe destructive efforts.

In response to that, I became much more interested in thinking about how we're actually induced into environments rather than society. I'm interested in knowing why certain fruits or pollen might cause certain allergic reactions, how certain garments and costumes are used to defend ourselves against certain climatic conditions. Why iron is found in our blood but also found at the core of the earth. And so I started to work towards thinking about how we might be considered environmental beings rather than social or political beings. And I've been thinking

about this a lot in relation to Dubai and the inhabitation of these Gulf landscapes. Now Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha too have become examples of what is today's standard for urban development and living, or more precisely the threat of what might become the global standard for urban development and living.

This is the second time I've worked with Ali and Hamed, and our relationship, like most of my relationships today, tend to use these very legitimized and formalized and sanctioned ways of knowledge transfer and the creation of dialogue, and whether it's publications or biennials or lecture series like this. And I think the same would ring true for how I have consumed some of Pierre's information in the past, where I've looked through different magazine articles or academia.edu or watched recorded presentations.

What brings us together today is that we're also very interested in thinking about architecture in relation to artistic platforms, which are now integrating architecture as an exhibitionary, curatorial and theoretical framework. And this is mainly because the disciplines and practitioners, whether its architects or urbanists or geographers or planners, are seen as equipped with certain tools and a vocabulary for understanding our systems of power.

And when I say systems of power, I'm not referring to more terminal unseen structures of power, but mostly the literal and physical surfaces of power. Things that allow us a certain motion and circulation of power and access through the world. And this is everything from mining of minerals to oil extraction to cargo and logistics shipping routes, to airport surveillance to storage facilities for digital data.

And these are the more planetary and worldwide infrastructures that work to freely evade even concepts of continents or nations or regions.

In the blurb that went out for today, there was a quote that said, “Given the complete bankruptcy of the architectural as a formal and political project in the Gulf, this conversation must imagine new natures, new systems for governance and life in the Gulf.” Now, I might have paraphrased a little bit, but what I’m also going to be revealing as this presentation unfolds is that we, as people that are interested and think about the landscapes of this place, all have to make amends with the idea that the inhabitation of this landscape is both apocalyptic and catastrophic. Now Dubaization or Dubaification has become a very common term that people use in architectural thinking to refer to a style of development that is unregulated and is an unfettered movement of capital able to disregard all local environmental and labor laws.



Jumeirah Beach Residences, 2012.

It’s a very ominous merger that we’re seeing now between government services and facilities, multinational corporate interests, real estate developers and the entertainment industries advertising for leisure, wealth, health, retail, fitness, outdoor activities, arts and culture,

photography, outdoor activities, and they're all smoothed out and expressed through these very slick and savvy urban and interior design measures. And you know, they're sometimes referred to as multi-use parks or green spaces or public space even.

In effect what these developments are saying is that we no longer live in a direct political environment. There's no longer an interface between a political leader and a receiving public, but we live in an age of a complete technocracy which is connected to a very scattered and mobile oligarchy. In effect what happens in a lot of these developments is that they render a lot of social ideology and political ideology as very, very vacant enterprises for us to encounter or think around.

Dubaization or Dubaification is also referring to a certain process of mimicry of architectural fabrication processes which are enabled by the proliferation of software that is able to architecturally model different urban imaginations and then completely project and simulate itself out onto a physical landscape. And what happens is that the landscape or the land becomes completely dispossessed of any activity or any feeling and instead becomes the place just to act as a host to receive a lot of this capitalistic imagination.

And so what happens is that the 3D rendering model and the 3D architectural model somehow becomes the totalizing landscape and in effect becomes the total landscape. What these developments express is that human intelligence and human engineering become dominant, and that the human here is very much able to fully satisfy how we are meant to move into a future. And it's mostly expressed through city and urban landscapes. I'm interested in thinking how we can relate this particularly to your immediate environments and how this development is connected to the environmental resources that are found in a landscape. And I would like to specifically do this in

addressing the Gulf and crude oil. We need to understand that at least today, oil itself is no longer valued to be this very precious and finite material, or resource rather.



Palm Island | Source: Ikonos

This is precisely because we've developed so many technologies that are making the possibility of locating oil so much easier and much more convenient. We've also invested in so many other alternative energy solutions that are able to mimic the sense of motion and sense of velocity that we've become accustomed to with the cultivation of crude oil but without needing it as a resource anymore. Now as an example, an electric car is a very wonderful invention in a certain way, but it does not address that the architecture that happens around the car is actually the larger structural issue that most urban development is

around building roads and highways and parking. It does not address that the car or the vehicle actually has completely radicalized forms of social relations and intimacy.

But to think of oil and specifically in connection to the Gulf, is that up until 100 years ago, the Gulf was mostly considered environmentally a coastal area. It wasn't until the discovery of oil that we started to see that the lands of the peninsula became a possibility of value. And so we started to kind of condition the environment to becoming these locales for possible capitalistic activity. And then with the discovery of oil and a pipeline goes out that supports all of this extravagant development that we see and also the emergence of a Gulf society that now shares a very, very important and valuable geopolitical interest in international diplomacy and international relations. The infrastructures of oil become understood to be an authentication or as the point of ecological origin for what we see as the Gulf.

If you think of it, it's similar to kind of the Darwinian linear narrative of how humans look to apes to understand how they had evolved. Oil is similarly considered to be the reason as to why this society evolved. And in effect, most subjects and most people that are part of this landscape become considered oil subjects. This is not unique to the Gulf. I mean there are several communities or groups of individuals that become very much related to the environmental resources that are around them. Whether it's fur in Canada, macadamia nuts in Australia, tea plantations in Ceylon in India or to sugarcane plantations in the Caribbean. People become much more read alongside the environmental resources that are around them. And so what happens in this narrative is that you suddenly start to consider that these groups of individuals do not necessarily become thought of as evolutionary beings or, or ethnographic subjects, but they become a matter subjects and specifically in the Gulf's case they would be fluid matters subjects are wet matter subjects.

Why these kinds of challenging and contrasting narratives appear is that reconciling the relationship between these different environmental imaginations becomes very difficult. How can we as a more collective, global society, who have developed such philosophies of love and trust and friendship and integrity and work and all of these universal institutes that work towards social equality and human rights and things, how can any of that really be reconciled or be made available in such a brutal and extractive landscape that is the Gulf? This is precisely the point where I think it becomes exciting to practice here. Whether it is as an architect or as an artist or anyone who has to think about the contextual landscape that they are in; thinking about the context that they are working in is that they have to constantly be addressing and thinking about where their moral compass lies given all of these dynamics that they see just in the surrounding landscape. Not even so much in the society or even how they become expressed in society.

But on the contrary, I think that what might be seen as an ecological loss is actually a position of possibility. To frame ecology and the environment as a place for activation and for possible politics is something I think that is worth pursuing. This because social and political representation or efforts in the Gulf are actually very, very absent or made unavailable for a great majority of us. So to start thinking or positioning the environment as a place for creative practice I think becomes a much more engaging way to think about what's happening here. This is not something that is, I would say maybe unique that I'm suggesting in this presentation, but that throughout history there have been a variety of examples for how an environmental being or an environmental situatedness in the Gulf is somehow for more productive and imaginative pursuit.

Jasim bin Jabir Raqraqi is a very well-known, venerated pirate of the Gulf coast from the 19th and 20th centuries.

He was very much against British presence and British activity that was occurring across the Gulf waters. He was also very dissatisfied with many of the local tribes and dominant rulers that were found across the Gulf and eventually became so hostile that he decided to exile himself and his community of followers to an area known as Katif which is found next to Khawr al Udayd or the creek of Udayd in what is today the Qatari peninsula. And over there he was able to establish a very successful society and economy that only made its successes through pillaging and racketeering vessels that were traveling on Gulf waters.

I have to think that this pirate crew was challenging an alliance and a British presence that was much more powerful, whether it was in military intelligence or weaponry or know-how, and there was a variety of patrols that were happening around the Raqraqi crew, but they were continuously able to attack these ships and no one was able to stop them precisely because of their knowledge and sensitivity to the terrain. They knew exactly where the blind spots of all the ships were and they were able to go and attack them and take what they needed and leave unscathed. It was precisely through this activity of being environmentally embedded, let's say, or environmentally knowledgeable and having know-how in a mastery of the terrain that they were able to compete and challenge these forces.

The only way that they stopped their activities was when they chose to have certain negotiations with the local tribes and alliances. This is not, again, unique to the Raqraqi crew, but having knowledge and understanding of the terrain has proven throughout history to be a very, very powerful tool.

The other example that I would like to bring up is from a New Zealand scientist who was in the Gulf during the 1800s researching Gulf Marine Ecology. She had compiled

all of her field notes and data observation in this book that was titled *Murmurs of the Submerged*. It was found on the *Sultana*, which was the first vessel to have traveled from the Middle East to the United States and it made this journey from Moscow to New York. It is said that this scientist had either maybe disappeared or was kidnapped or maybe killed or had escaped herself during the journey of this ship. What was found in her notebook was that she had documented a lot of the different political philosophies and activities of the Qureshi Movement.

The Qureshi Movement was known to be in the Gulf operating with group of different ship crews and seamen that were advocating for certain philosophies that called for mating practices between their crews and sea creatures. And they were hoping to spawn and create a new citizenry that was able to kind of challenge and destabilize a lot of the tribes that were found on the land that were more interested in preserving blood lineages and things like this. They thought that through creating this new offspring that they would be able to very much challenge the powers that were in play.

By illustrating these two examples and also by providing some of the analysis around what we might mean by landscape infrastructure and what style of urban development we have here, I do believe, and this is something that I have reiterated again now I'm reiterating, that I've also advocated for in my work is that creative and political practice here can only really be achieved when it is environmentally situated.

Q&A

Hi. I was just wondering if you could expand on the quote about the bankruptcy.

Ali Karimi

The bankruptcy of the architectural project lies in the complete commodification of a body of knowledge: this ability to sell urbanism, sell development and ultimately form a project purely around business interest has bankrupted it as a discipline - whereas before we could have said architecture is irresponsible, navel gazing, or intellectually vapid - today it is simply bankrupt - an idea that can't sell and an idea whose only aim was to sell.

It's a pursuit a mode of practice, separate or maybe at least beside that of the contemporary architectural scene. Finding that the fascination with the notion of the urban or at least the self-congratulatory notion of the urban in the Gulf, is its own intellectual dead end that hasn't produced meaningful alternatives. Meaningful typologies either in the form of housing, mixed use complexes and so on.

Hamed Bukhamseen

One of the things that we also really want to call into question is the agency of the architectural profession in really addressing these political or social issues that at times we as architects feel completely unable to affect or alter. One of the first things that we would look towards is to begin to tap into land and territory as this, not necessarily new frontier, but this existent field that one could really delve into and politicize.

Ali Karimi

Not to put too fine a point on it, but I think it really extends into also the ways in which academia has produced these bubbles of archival practice or documentary practices in the Gulf. It's also the creation of a body of knowledge which doesn't serve to actually critique, analyze and understand the very built environment we're producing. So

I think the bankruptcy isn't only in people working in the professional setting, but it's the complete inability to find a meaningful way of building knowledge in practice or academia that is able to do more than simply inventory and create an archive of what has existed and no longer does.

Audience Member 2

I have a question for Pierre. It's kind of a two part question. The first thing was you said that a future of cities shouldn't happen. I just wondered if you could elaborate on that because how I see it is the population of the world is increasing, people need more housing. While a more sustainable solution would be to put them in housing or apartment buildings, that would result again in cities because the population will continue to grow. So what would you say is an alternative solution to that issue? The other part of that question is how you mentioned that in most of the books you talked about they don't bring up land. But land has always been a valuable commodity. Ever since the beginning of civilization land has always been as valuable as gold. Lands is what gave monarchs their crowns and knights there knighthoods. It was the land. But of course I could be wrong.

Pierre Bélanger

You're making great observations. First of all maybe I'll just clarify that I think a future dominated by cities is extremely problematic. Because a future that's only dominated by a culture of intrinsic and forced consumption leads us to this situation that we're in right now. I don't want to turn this also into a housing conversation because it can also quickly go down that road. Housing is a really important question from certain perspectives, but then one could argue there are other issues. Similar to the questions of climate change and global warming, one could argue that the solutions lie in the hands of the engineers to find ways of repairing the layer of the ozone. But I would actually argue that those are constructed perceptions in which we're spending all of our time. For example, I'll take the case of

North America, the question of resilience of cities along coasts. We're spending all our time downstream literally along coasts when we're overlooking exactly everything that's happening upstream and where resources are coming from. We should just take a break and spend some time understanding what's happening upstream, what's happening in territory, where things are happening and how for example, this pattern of entrenched consumption downstream is essentially dependent on a number of processes upstream. And they're not just processes; they are lands that don't belong to us. They're lands that also lie outside of so called civilized areas.



We use the idea of the word civilized indiscriminately as if this is what civilized is, right? Like we have leisure time to spend our evenings, have conversation. Whereas I would actually argue just as an exercise, it wouldn't take more than I think looking at your generation, like your past generation, your parents or your grandparents to understand how there's knowledge that we're about to lose, which makes us in this room entirely responsible of whether or not that knowledge carries over into the next generation. And what I'm talking about is where our food comes from.

So let me ask, does anybody own a rifle here? Or maybe there's an equivalent. Does anybody have a falcon? Because for me, I think the answer is actually on the 100 Dirham bill. You know the one with the World Trade Center by John Harris and then the Falcon. We're spending all our time on the World Trade Center, the financial economic system and we're not paying attention to more than what's the symbol of the Falcon and essentially traditions of hunting, I'm just giving one example. North America, same thing, ask any academic at Harvard University, MIT, who fishes and who hunts, you'll get probably within like 5%. One could argue in order to practice and embody that work you need land, you need terrain, you need territory, and it's not just space or open space, but also those lands are governed those lands are owned by a number of different people, they're occupied. There's also knowledge about the living world so anybody ... do you hunt by the way?

So in order to hunt there's tremendously important information about the living world that's particularly important, and some of you or the same in terms of like understanding how to even either learn, relearn, how to garden, and some people might be rolling their eyes just thinking like I'm either too rich for that, too wealthy for that, don't have time for this. Okay, you don't have time for it, but it's gonna pay, it's gonna equate in another different level. And I would actually argue that there's a number of practices, behaviors, ways of life, that would actually change how things operate. It's not gonna be an object or technology that's gonna save anyone, it's not gonna be an electric car, it's not even gonna be the solution to like oil.

Audience Member 2

On that point I agree with you, it's going to be psychology that will change. If the person doesn't want to have a sustainable future there will be no sustainable future. If people don't want a future there will be no future no mat-

ter how much technology you get to try and substitute it, man or humankind as a race can only continue to exist if it wants to exist. And the point is that I had the same discussion in the municipality where we were discussing sustainability. And I said, you could put solar panels, you can fine people that don't have them, you can tell them to do it, but the point is that if they don't want a sustainable future we can't have a sustainable future. So on that point, yeah, I agree, but my issue was just about the cities and I feel satisfied with the answer honestly.

Pierre Bélanger

Yeah, I think all of us could essentially reach towards parents, and grandparents, or great-grandparents like people that are alive today to reach for that knowledge because it's more than just a tool, it's more than just a way, it's a



whole set of spaces, ways of doing things, that while they may not appear like a lot of people are gonna start asking questions like how do you make money with this, that's the point. It's actually you just want to focus on one thing and you want to locate your currency within one system and one agency of an economy, we already know the con-

clusion to that. And one could argue that there's a number of people that are actually fighting for alternative ways of life already. I would just actually argue that it is within our power within this generation literally within tomorrow, and it actually rather surprising how much knowledge is within this generation that can be then transmitted. And it is transformative to the point that it can be transgressive and sometimes you need to break the law in order to make that work

Audience Member 3

Hello, thank you for the talk. I want to open up maybe not really a question but more open up a conversation with a question. We're talking about landscapes and I'm surprised that the conversation is about the notion of the landscape as a green land maybe in some sense, but we're forgetting about sort of our digital landscape, our urban landscape. And I want to understand how those landscapes fit into the existing conversation. And a second question is sort of related to my fear of what you are saying. I'm scared of the future that you depicting where we don't have a city the same way you're scared of the future where there's only cities. I think there is a possibility of misunderstanding the argument and ending up with sort of this suburban houses with cul-de-sacs because so far that has been the understanding and interpretation of a world where we don't have the city, we end up having a lot of roads and we end up having problems that are urban without the advantages of urban condition. So why are we dismissing cities, why not talk about a different type of a city, question number one. Number two, can this landscape become the city? Thank you.

Hamed Bukhamseen

It's an interesting provocation. The fact there are many ways of rethinking what is the urban. I mean the title of this event taken from Pierre is *We Have Never Been Urban* is also provocation onto its own. It could be argued that landscape is a contributing factor of what is considered

urbanity. It's not necessarily dismissing cities I would say and maybe Pierre could argue with us on that or elaborate further on it, it's also about expanding what the notion of the city is. It's inclusive of all the territories that would feed into 'civilizations' and considering them as part of these larger networks not necessarily density, but these systems that are all conducive to human survival and habitation.

Ali Karimi

I'll touch upon the point you brought up but also the previous one about land being of value as great or greater than gold throughout history. I'll give the example of Bahrain, but I think it could apply to anywhere in the Gulf. Land was extremely valuable and also extremely useless depending on if it could or could not be worked, if nothing could be grown on it, it was of no value. All the non-agricultural land in Bahrain up until the turn of the century was of no value unless you could put a well on it, or if it was hunting ground. Ownership of that land for the most part occurred on the basis of whether or not you had worked it, whether or not you could grow something on it, and whether you could put a wall on it so you had palm trees on it and tend to it and that was yours.

And so for us it's these questions that begin to underscore our understandings of land, sovereignty and territory. Asking what is useful and what are our understandings that it existed prior to oil. These questions begin to produce a body of knowledge that's specific to the region. So if you go to the point about whether or not we have been urban, if we then take this understanding of land and then match it also the understanding of let's say what whatever urban life would have been prior to the discovery of oil or prior to independence, then we begin to understand that the cities that existed as a agglomerations of various tribes, merchants, each with their own varying degrees of autonomy. This meant that although we had maybe cities in the idea of an agglomeration of

people, but perhaps not cities in an understanding of the urban as an 18th century or 19th century idea of agonistic coexistence. I mean there were the tensions of coexistence in cities in the Gulf, but not the understanding of urban living coexisting in a political setting that we know of today.

Similarly there are issues with what we understand to be urban or the things we assume as ideas of political activity in coexistence that come with the idea of urbanity, which don't apply. I think much more fruitful is understanding the backdrop of tribal sovereignty versus tribal autonomy, which existed in the Gulf, and this is a much longer conversation. So the way relations between tribes, merchants, and seafaring communities in the beginning of 20th century maps on to the way we understand that the region much more today than the understanding of a political coexistence as understood in Spain with the invention of the urban in Barcelona or the citizen/civitas as understood in a Roman sense. We should also be hesitant using these terms and deploying them as a way of constructing a vision of our politics, which it doesn't exist.

Just to go back to the point of land and whether it is useful or not; if we apply the narrative of cities to early 20th century Saudi then you would have expected the Sherif and those the inhabitants of either Hejaz or Eastern Province to be what now is Saudi. And I think Saudi is proof that often sovereignty rests not with the cities but is much more contingent on a hinterland. I think these are important discussions, they're discussions that can only come from some extent from the Gulf, but they underpin the last century and a half or more of development.

Pierre Bélanger

The way that cities work right now they work pretty well, in fact they work too well. In fact the reason for the bankruptcy of architects is actually because engineers are doing all this work. Engineers actually don't need architects

in the end; one could argue AECOM is more about engineering than it is about architecture. It's not by mistake in the case of AECOM, one of the world's largest architecture and engineering firms, that it's a landscape architect running the design and planning division. I mean look, what I'm sort of proposing is that who is that who's it working well for? Is it working well for like the southwest Indian cab driver who sees this family only one month a year and for 11 months he's staying here driving a car where there's no possibility of advancement or citizenship? Does it work well for the domestic workers in Singapore that are coming from Indonesia or from Burma, Myanmar, who also have absolutely no chance of benefiting from the system that they are supporting?

To a certain extent those who are touting the global urban future and digital landscapes metaphorically are using the word landscape as opposed to actually being literal about it. German companies like Siemens who are looking forward to a completely automated in digital future, I would actually say: for who? And now beyond municipalities, beyond states, corporations essentially are the ones that are controlling now urban areas, it is the third state, right? That's what city states have become, there are corporations, and they're no longer in the public service. So to ask in the service of who, and I'm afraid by what I already see, which is that it works too well and it's going to continue to work too well for one very narrow and increasingly narrow cross-section. And without being confrontational I would actually argue it will continuously marginalize more and more people and extract a larger and larger number of people. We're seeing that already, patterns of urban development are essentially getting better and better and I would actually argue that's always been the platform of cities, it's never been about democracy it's always been about colonial forms of extraction. It just becomes a little bit better at entrenching forms of consumption.

Can I ask a quick question to follow up to what you just said? When you define the hinterlands, are you talking about the countryside or rural? Because that's also been colonized by corporate interests. So are we setting ourselves up here for a complete alienation from all landscapes?

Pierre Bélanger

That's a great question. It would be useful to find out what's happening in the other 90% of the environments. Right now we're concentrating more and more of our time, and urbanization is becoming equal with interiorizing everything that we possibly can, right? More time spent inside to essentially interiorizing resources that are on the outside. I think first it would be really useful to just redraw or unmap what we think is happening and understand it, and it needs to be part of embodied knowledge. So it's not stuff just done through screens, through digital data like us moving ourselves into that space, and instead taking the time to understand where things are going. It would be really interesting to find out where all the sewage sludge of a city that doesn't have any underground infrastructure goes, like in Dubai, because that one of the strategies to build soil is with sewage sludge, and that's a basic fundamental principle of gardening - it's kind of dumb, right?

There's some unlearning and relearning, I'm not pessimistic at all about the future I'm actually extremely excited, but it's happening on different terms. I would say something maybe in provocation to perceptions of architecture and also statehood. Maybe the state and architecture was always about the colonial project, and - I'm gonna place myself within the same boat - has only been from the margins of somewhat elitist or elitist trained people who believe that architecture or planning and another professional discipline should be something else. Maybe it just works really well. Architecture was formed out of

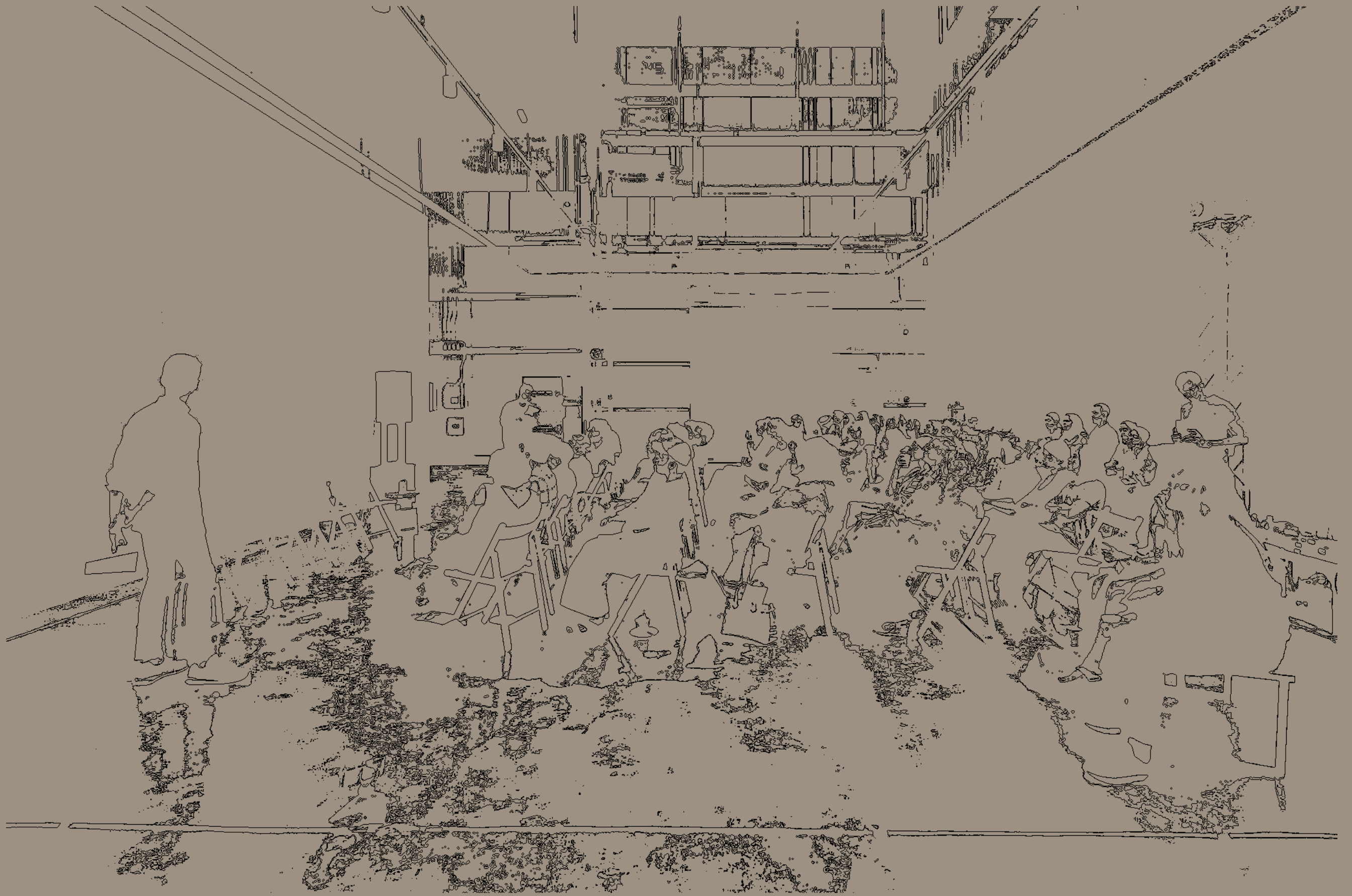
an imperial era to create monuments in service of its own image. You need to imagine colonization and to entrench that image over and over again to perpetuate it. I would actually argue that maybe it actually works really well, and a lot of people are surprised right now but what's happening in the US or Canada in regards to levels of protectionism and white supremacy, it was always that. It was always in service of the elimination of indigenous people in terms of kind of servitude of black and brown bodies, it was always about that.

Ultimately for those who are surprised that this is happening as opposed to getting to work and on a daily basis calling it out wherever it happens, a workplace, hiring the next architecture professor as part of the architecture school that can understand that it cannot be another white Westerner coming in as opposed to hiring young female faculty that are representing other perspectives, other cultures, other lived experiences, so I'll just leave it at that.

Audience Member 5

Sorry, so I'm coming from a zoning perspective because we're a regulatory authority and we review a lot of these master plans, and even speaking from an architect's perspective. A lot of the things which you say are very theoretical on a high level. If I were to apply that on a straightforward master plan that's coming out from any other master developer, which means that you have an allocated GFA. From a zoning perspective we just apply a lot of these review methodologies that we do in terms of a minimum 10% of land should be available for open space recreational use. And then all the approvals have to be obtained from the different regulatory authorities, which is either by the municipality from the environmental department and so forth. What I'm trying to say is that a lot of the topics that I've heard today if you had to apply it on a practical level you would be very confused because it's not easy to adapt especially in the sense of pre-

serving cultural buildings, talking about hierarchies, and monarchies, and so forth, and even taking it from a social perspective.



The only takeaway from this session is we should be asking bigger questions in terms of a master plan, which is not done by any regulatory authority, it is on a much higher level. Second point is in terms of the actual application of the new kind of cities I think they're already changing because a lot of the typology is that going back to residential, a lot of the master developers they're not selling these units big, the big units are not selling. The units are becoming smaller and most of the spending is coming from, you can say people who are working here on a daily level and commuting because they prefer to live in. So a lot of these questions I think should be asked and I thank you for your input, all of you, and I just hope that this would be translated in a more practical level in terms of maybe doing master plans more in a front-loaded study rather than it being already produced because honestly the way to buy works is sometimes the land is built even before you get approval. And land is sometimes used for buildings, but there is no way you can con-

trol it because it's already determined and done.

A lot of these questions that you're asking I think are thought-provoking yet its application is very difficult to adapt unless it is tackled on a very high level, so that's my only response and thanks. It's not really asking for questions, but I'm just trying to put all of what you've said in a practical framework, which I think is impossible so that's my only reply, yeah.

Pierre Bélanger

There's a sign as you come out of the airport, how do three million inhabitants become part of the planning process? Actually I have a simple line of questioning: which is about where the waste, water, transport, and energy comes from and goes? Because the system of master planning externalizes those issues and actually we don't need to ask those questions because we so beautifully so-called engineered that system. I would actually argue it's in also the hands of the master planners like yourself to ask those questions because if you don't ask the question you are perpetuating the system. So I don't want to put it in your lap, but it's a very simple line of questioning as well.

I also want to be careful also that we don't equate zoning with planning. And I'm not trying to play rhetoric with you, actually I'm trained as a planner as well so I have total respect for an understanding a spatial zoning. But over time we've tricked ourselves into thinking that the regulatory process of planning is zoning and it's actually arguably not. Second, there was a moment in the histories of planning, without getting nostalgic or even traditional, that there was a tradition of landscape planning and we could reintroduce or innovate the landscape plan that very often brings together the separate segregated issues of waste, water, energy and transport. I'm not calling for centralization, in fact it doesn't really matter what the government structure is underneath. I think we have to find very simple mechanisms, and if we ask the question we

start developing and saying, we need landscape plans where we are not just talking about green space here.

Pierre Bélanger

I think it'd be easy to leave this room tonight thinking that we don't know what to do as opposed to being practical and saying: there are three things that we can do. At some point some of us are gonna buy land so you need to ask who designed it, how is this master plan, and where this shit is going. That's up to you, right? Because you're gonna spend the next 30, 40 years paying for it. Second, who are the bad master planners because if you're not one of them you need to fucking call them out. The shit needs to stop here. And if you're a part of that project, if you're a part of the city, you have to start asking the question about the landscape plan. If you're a part of the master planning you need to answer a simple question: who are we accountable to?

Wishful Tropics is a panel discussion between three architecture collectives; Civil Architecture, MILLIONS, and Common Accounts, which asks what wanting to be tropical means for the 21st century city. Recently, a post-crisis rebranding has shifted Dubai's image away from the metropolitan (ie London/New York) towards the tropical, LA/Miami style image: forgoing problematic notions of urban politics or public space for luxury, greenery, and autonomy.

Ali Ismail Karimi	(Civil Architecture)
Hamed Bukhamseen	(Civil Architecture)
Igor Bragado	(Common Accounts)
Miles Gertler	(Common Accounts)
Zeina Koreitem	(MILLIONS)

Wishful Tropics



69-86-99 Municipal Accommodation Council 58-68-85 Architectural

Civil Architecture

Dubai hotel plans first-of-its-kind indoor tropical rainforest

ABC 7 NEWS – TUESDAY, SEPT 6, 2016

Tropical cyclone likely to hit Dubai this weekend

The cyclone is heading towards Oman.

By Staff Writer, Khaleej Times

MASALA.COM – 30, AUGUST, 2016

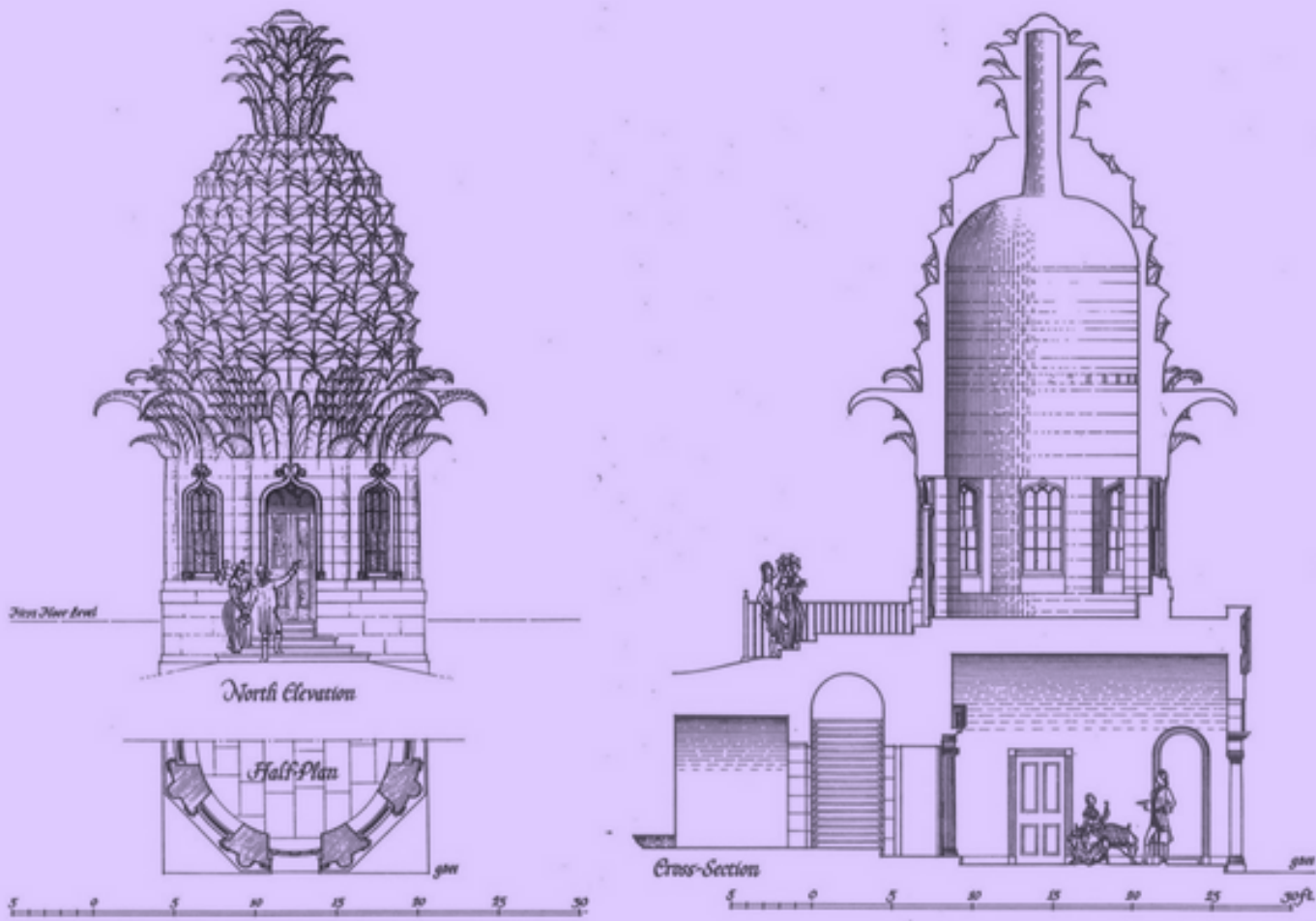
Good afternoon everyone and thank you all for coming.

Our last event with Pierre Bélanger and Ahmed Makia, which was titled *We Have Never been Urban*. The event looked at land as a physical, economic, and colonial construct. We discussed the relationship of land to cities like Dubai, where land has largely left the conversation and architecture has occupied the territory with a discourse that separates both bodies of knowledge, and human bodies from their relationship to land.

As the second event in the series we hold a conversation today with Millions and Common Accounts under the theme *Wishful Tropics*, looking at the tropics not as a place but an idea. Not just a matter of branding, but an idea of consistency: environments with infinitely renewable resources, a climate that is unchanging, and business without politics or places without politics.

The artist Robert Smithson in his text *A Sedimentation of the Mind* describes the Earth's surface as being made of discrete regions of art, an abstract geology in constant erosion – a combination of fictional and real matter. Speaking about Walter De Maria and Heizer in the American Southwest, he refers to the desert as a consciousness between craving and satiety. The desert is “less nature than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries”. In the past five or so years, Dubai has seen a shift in its image, away from its desire to perhaps be metropolitan, or city in the desert to suddenly become a luxury resort, an event tropicopolis. To introduce today's topic we will ask then, what does it mean to be tropical, to wish to be tropical? What does this mean for architecture, for urbanism, and for the humans who inhabits those realms?

To understand this fascination with the tropical, we delve back into the history of Victorian England. When wealth begins to enter the UK from the tropics through the exploitation of colonial environments and bodies, pineapples and all other sorts of plants and animals would be introduced into the context of Victorian English society. In late 18th century, tropical fruit and specifically the pineapple had become synonymous with wealth, to the point that pineapples would become incorporated into ornamentation of various buildings in the UK. In the case of the Dunmore Pineapple, the building is a scaled up version of the fruit and is symbolic of a trajectory of new classicism, where new orders are derived from new plants. Around the same time, Horace Walpole was writing the Gothic Horror, and designing Strawberry Hill, where the neoclassical breaks into the eclectic, the Dunmore pineapple lies in the realm of the literal and the classical, where the urns are chimneys, and the building a greenhouse.

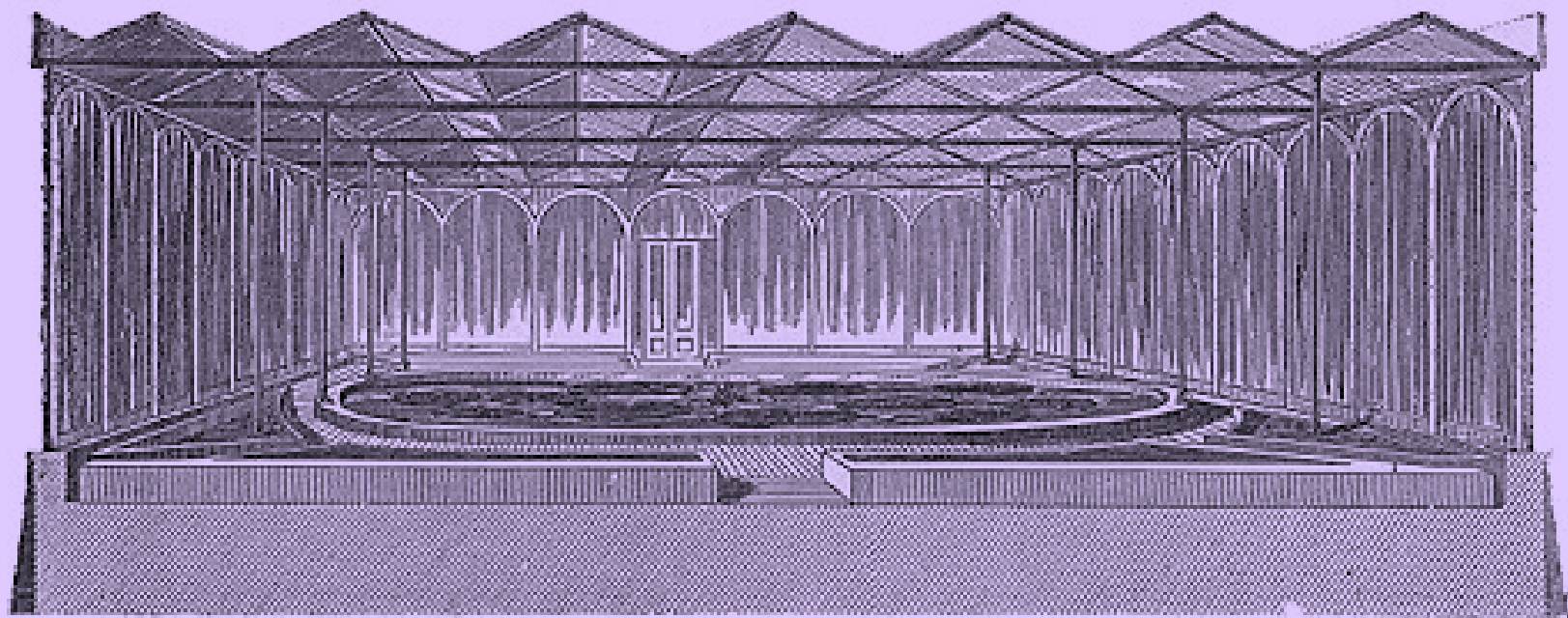


Dunmore Pineapple Elevation + Section



Dunmore Pineapple Scotland 1761

But perhaps a greater achievement comes 50 years later with Joseph Paxton's Victoria Regia House, a greenhouse used to cultivate the massive Amazonian water lily. It is perhaps, through this success, that we witness first moment of modernity as we know it today.



Joseph Paxton's Victoria Regia House - 1836

The greenhouse designed by Paxton incorporated complex water systems, heating systems and glass panes to maintain the precise tropical climate from which the lily comes from.

What's interesting about this is it's not just an achievement of gardening, but it's an achievement of architecture: an architecture that allows for the tropics to be simulated in the UK. In the conquering of the tropics, it isn't purely about the power over working bodies or ability to work land. The conquering of the tropics is the ability to reproduce them anywhere and anytime. You can have your pineapple in any season, and you can have your tropics at any place. Paxton's conquering was not to dress a building as a pineapple, but to say, "Well, you could have your lily at any time."

And this was a conquering of architecture itself by the invention of the integrated building systems, which allows the tropical condition to be produced. It's no coincidence that shortly after this triumph comes Paxton's design for the Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Crystal Palace held over 15,000 contributors, and cemented its place in history as the first major world expo of its kind, where fruits, plants and the products of industrial revolution were all exhibited.



The Chrystal Palace – 1851

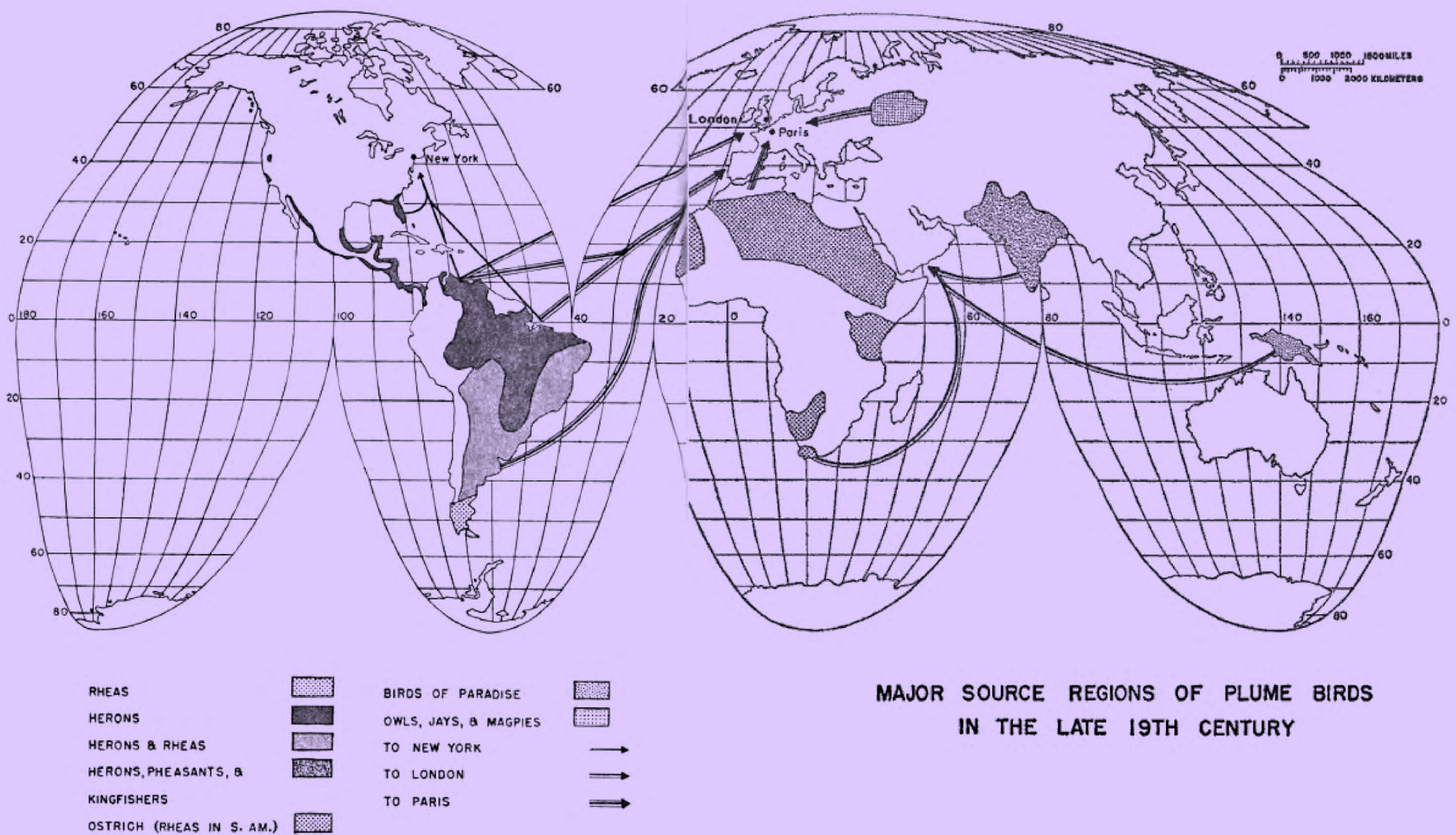
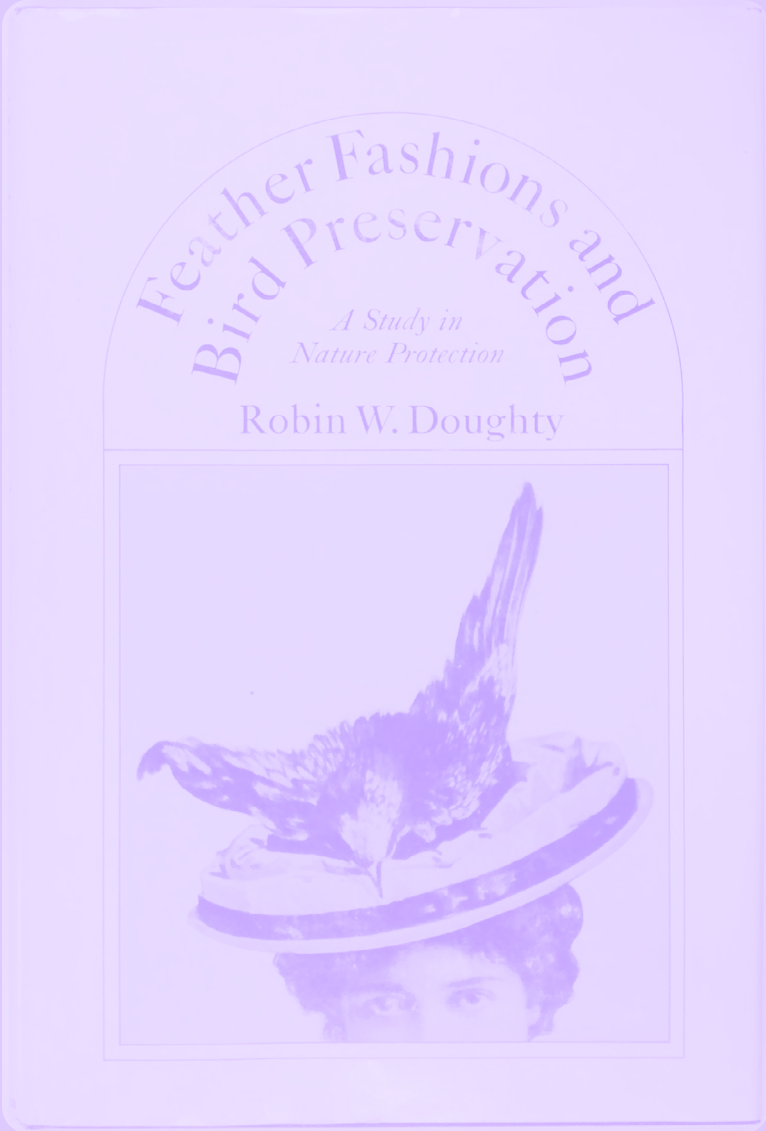
Within the 50 years after this moment of triumph, we see the fading away of the Beaux-Arts and the Neoclassical, towards the language of modernization: as facades take a backseat and the importance of interiors enter the forefront. To be modern is to be able to simulate an interior atmosphere, at all times, anywhere.

And this does not only apply to notions of environment in the UK, but to notions of burgeoning capitalism, which can produce the same building, in any condition, in any place, to allow for labor and work to exist in any place as well. Ultimately, this is a condition in which any building can suddenly enter the burgeoning capital market, and where the beginnings of speculative real estate can occur in any context. And the labor which occurs in these buildings, whether industrial or later, non-industrial form in the form of the service industry, could be produced and reproduced anywhere in the world.

But this doesn't just tie into attitudes of architecture or urbanism, but really into also the relationship to the body. So at the same time, Victorian fashions incorporate the plumage of the thousands of tropical birds into women's hats to the point that, so much so that several species would go extinct.

So this idea of incorporating these resplendent plumes of these birds onto these bodies would symbolize opulence, fertility, and wealth. As you can see in these diagrams showing where these birds would come from: predominantly from Brazil, South America, but also Central America and elsewhere in the world. So this

notion of this luxury, this hedonism related to these birds and the extraction of these birds from their context spread really all over the, from the Colonial world into Russia, North America and also Europe.



Doughty, Robin (1974) Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection

In case of even fishing, the use of the feathers from these birds will begin to be used for it to catch salmon, to catch other fish. So really the killing of these birds and the killing of these animals and the importation not only is it incorporated into fashion, but also it becomes a simulation as well. So the fishing tackles would be dressed up to look like [native] insects or fish of the UK, so the idea is that you would be killing birds from the tropics and using them to simulate insects in London and Europe as well. So really these ideas of the body in nature as a simulation begin to derive from the tropics as they blur the line between the artificial and the natural.

Hamed Bukhamseen

What could also be to understand with Paxton’s greenhouse and the Victorian obsession with the importation of the tropics is this hegemony and dominion over the climate, one that is representative of status and wealth, extracted from the colonies. We will also begin to notice within the mid to late 1800s, is that this notion of tropical luxury makes its way to the domestic realm with the development of conservatories, as represented in this Manet painting.



In the Conservatory, Edouard Manet - 1879

The painting is of a young couple, one of higher socioeconomic status, as evident in their clothing, and of course in the luxuriously decorated and intimate locale, a secluded indoor area conducive of a private rendezvous.

So the tropics would continue to remain in the imaginary of the domestic, and its association with wealth and luxury finds its way across the pond into the work of interior decorators, such as that of Dorothy Draper in the 20th century. Miss Draper, an aristocratic American socialite would become the one of the foremost pioneers of the Hollywood Regency style with its distinct elements of the tropical.

Here, you see Miss Draper with one of her furniture pieces, an emblematic *Brazilliance* wallpaper. The tropics, of course, will then continue to be used time and time again in the 20th century, no longer as place of malaria, decay and sickness, but of [appeal] and marketing. The ideals of luxury and the good life associated with the

ecological condition would be tapped into and applied into a vast scale into the appeal of the city.

The most pertinent example is the purposeful importation of the flora and fauna of California (in particular Los Angeles) in order to attract citizens to settle West. An image was sold to settlers vis-à-vis palm trees. So the ecology of LA would become fundamental to its image to the point of cliché. As a synecdoche of West Coast culture—and a part of near-universal pop culture aesthetics – palm trees and the greater California environment become aspects to draw inspiration from. We see it in Hockney’s paintings (the one that we have over here is called ‘Garden’ and shares qualities with



Dorothy Draper



Dorothy Draper – Braziliance, 193

that of Henri Rousseau’s forest scenes) and in John Baldessari’s cataloging of plant life in *2623 Third Street, Santa Monica*.



LOS ANGELES, 1913. CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

The significance of image and ecology in city making become instrumental in selling the city to an audience that finds comfort in the idea of constant sun, surf and sand. The tropics become the most reassuring element to retain and attract investors due to their isotropic climates in otherwise volatile regions. Miami would replicate this example in South Beach and Dubai would begin to tap into this notion as it sells itself to a global audience that finds serenity in its consistent environment.



Garden, David Hockney



2623 Third Street, Santa Monica, John Baldessari

Through this presentation and talk we ask what does happiness, hedonism, and the fictional ecology mean for the 21st city - how are these interrelated and what role does architecture play in mediating between the environmental and the fantastical.



South Beach Miami, FL, USA



Jumeirah Beach Residences, Dubai, UAE

So without much further ado, let me introduce our speakers starting off with Zeina Koreitem of MILLIØNS followed by Miles and Igor of Common Accounts.

Millions

Thank you, Ali, Hamed and Alserkal for organizing this event. I'm very happy to be here.

I will present three projects today. But first, I would like to talk about how we work. In general, our work at MILLIØNS breaks down into two categories, or two sets of explorations. The first category contains projects that we call experimental: not quite architectural in a traditional sense, but somewhat more limited experiments that deal with material, formal and aesthetic questions, but are in a sense protected from certain realities, such as scale, site, weather, or program, etc. The second category of projects asks more expansive and complex architectural questions that deal with the social, the political and the built. The projects that I have selected today exist at three different scales, addressing our interests in critical hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure and the culture of the body.

Between Pleasure and Peril

Wishful Tropics is a great title. It pretty much summarizes my own imagined relationship to the two cities that I call home: Beirut and Los Angeles.

In my conversations with Ali and Hamed, it became clear that the ambition of the event today is to flesh out the existential conditions around the image of a "tropical city." Beirut and Los Angeles both have populations that live in an environmental zone between pleasure and peril, or let's say between pleasure and danger. In both cases, people live in these cities mostly in order to consume the natural environment, rather than to, say, produce from it.

So both cities engage in a kind of image-consumption, which becomes the stage on which this oscillation between pleasure and danger plays out. LA's number one export has always been its own image of itself. This is a

Wishful Tropics



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key factor in understanding how the tropics play a role in this pleasure-danger dichotomy.

Of course, palm trees and clear blue skies remain the iconic figures in the image of Los Angeles. But the built environment has also always been a central protagonist, and never more so than today, as it becomes a mediatized backdrop where tourists come to LA to take selfies—I am thinking for example of the “Paul Smith” pink store on Melrose Avenue.

The collective psychology of L.A. always swings between two extremes. On the one hand, the image of the tropics, an image of pleasure, on the other hand the image of danger, represented by natural disaster such as earthquakes, floods and fires—the latter so well documented by Mike Davis, in his book *Ecology of Fear*.

In the 19th century, L.A. was advertised as a subtropical paradise, but this analogy evoked in Anglo-Americans a nightmarish image of malaria, and all kinds of other “tropical” diseases. So by the early 20th century, as you can see in some of these postcards, it was rebranded as a Mediterranean city.

“Our Mediterranean, our Italy:” this slogan was adopted to crystalize this image, and it is still used today to propel all kinds of developments across California: suburban communities with red tiled roofs, all of which were used to create “faux-urbanisms” that erased the indigenous history of the region.

Palm trees were introduced, alongside the many streets that were paved for the city to sprawl. They came to represent the decentralized metropolis of L.A: it’s not a New York; it’s not a Paris; it’s something else. Beirut’s contemporary image is strangely not so different from L.A.’s image in that regard. In the 1960s, Beirut marketed itself using tropical imagery as well.

2

Wishful Tropics

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The palm trees in Beirut are not native, they were first planted in the 1920s and continued to be planted until the 1950s. There is a kind of circularity that I find really interesting between the ways Los Angeles imaged itself throughout history, and how, let's say a city like Beirut—which is actually in the east—imaged itself using the same landscape, in this case the palm tree.

Let's go back to California. Many of you might be familiar with this particular street in LA, which is lined with tall palm trees that frame the Hollywood sign—arguably the most common image of Los Angeles, exported around the world. In exactly the same street last year, there was a mudslide and a flood. I think it's interesting here to think about the difference between temperate climates and Mediterranean climates. Temperate climates—I'm thinking of Europe's climate, or the US northeast (Boston, New York etc.)—have predictable seasonal changes. Temperate climates have a summer, a fall, a spring and a winter. The weather and landscape are shaped by a low intensity and high frequency events. There is a kind of predictability to the pattern of the weather, the seasons and rain falls etc.

In Mediterranean climates, averages, in fact, are mere abstractions. They do not really mean anything. Weather events are low frequency but high intensity. So if there is a rainfall, in Dubai for example or Kuwait where I partially grew up, there will be a flood, and it will happen once a year, or once every few years. Same thing in L.A.: if it rains, it floods, and if there is a wildfire followed by rain, there are mudslides.

At MILLIØNS, we have always tried to acknowledge this pleasure-danger duality of environmental factors. We recognize that this duality will continue to intensify with climate change. As architects, we cannot necessarily participate so directly in the immediate solutions to address these issues, but we can ask: "how can we live differently?"

The first project I would like to discuss is a renovation of a four-story war-torn residence in downtown Beirut, and the addition of a large, two-story penthouse. The second phase of the project allowed us to test some of the ideas around collective living experiments on a domestic scale.

The modern domestic interior was organized around a kind of functional (programmatic) stasis; meaning, rooms were assigned and designed according to their functions in the cycles of daily life, and in general those “room assignments” did not change day-to-day. Rooms are assigned and designed according to their functions: one room is assigned to bathing, one is assigned to sleeping, one is assigned to living and those functions rarely change or shift. We are interested in rethinking this approach to interiority. In reality, this approach to the interior secretly depended upon the mechanically regulated interior climate; the modern HVAC system that emerged in the 20th-century, which provided a blank canvas onto which the architect could assign rooms with little to no consideration for energy consumption or the consequences of energy consumption, when energy was more affordable. Today we should care deeply about such consequences; the mechanically-perfected interior climate has of course been a significant contributor to global climate change—and gestures towards incrementally improving the efficiency of those systems will never be sufficient.

We started to see this as a very problematic way of designing and we began to challenge the idea of the mechanically perfected interior. That perhaps we should not be comfortable all the time, perhaps we should sweat or be cold occasionally, or that maybe we should switch rooms throughout the day to adjust to the thermal shifts and oscillating temperatures of the day. All these questions lead to our investment in critically investigating our routines and the way we live.

Temperament became an experimental arena for us, where deliberate physiognomic explorations into countercultural domestic habits could be tested in Mediterranean climates like California and Lebanon. The concept of an un-programmed architecture emerged, founded on active bodies living amidst active surfaces in a deregulated interior, whose way of life wells up in various spaces at various times—never establishing itself with permanence—moving from collective activities to individual solitude.

These ideas rely on the principles of thermal mass. We’ve been experimenting with this principle for a number of years, across a range of projects—in part because of the role it can play in climates like Beirut and LA, which have hot days and cool nights. We became interested in solidity, thickness and the capacity of thermal mass to mitigate and regulate interior conditions in a Mediterranean climate. In general, in this climate, the entire mass (built out of variable thicknesses and a variable aggregation of concrete density) “lags” several hours behind the ambient air temperature and the natural diurnal cycle (day vs night). It feels cool to the touch, as it slowly stores heat energy during the day. This heat is then slowly re-radiated throughout the night.

This “delayed oscillation” produces zones that fluctuate between warm and cool in various parts of the project—within a temperature bandwidth that is still comfortable and maybe even desirable. These zones gradually invert and migrate across the diurnal and seasonal cycles. Surfaces remain cooler for longer periods during the daytime, but radiate warmth in specific zones during the evening hours, thus eliminating HVAC requirements, and lowering energy consumption and carbon footprint.

I love the image of Peter Koenig’s children, at the Stahl House, sleeping in the living room on cold winter nights. The living room was the warmest space in the house

between the months of January and April due to its solar orientation. There is something interesting about this idea: migrating between rooms, depending on the solar orientations on the house and subverting the functions that the rooms were designed for. What does it mean for a room to be lived in informally rather than merely functionally? And how does this idea change the way we design a domestic interior? How does it change the kinds of domestic routines in a house?

From the beginning, the Beirut Rooftop project was driven by producing a single communal space beneath a large interior ceiling, where rooms are packed above. So the reflected ceiling plan became a driving instrument to test these ideas. This condition of the surface of the large ceiling in relationship to the volumes hollowed out in the mass above was studied closely in this sectional model that we produced for a group exhibition at Jai & Jai gallery in Los Angeles, curated by William O'Brien.

“Variable density” wall systems are made possible by 3-d printing technology, which is capable of producing differentiation within a single print from hyper-sense to hyper-porous. Somewhere between the stereotomic stonework of classical architecture and the “service cavity” logic of the Modern plenum wall, we find different kind of solidity. Variable-thickness concrete, in conversation with sunlight and air, provides a material philosophy for an architecture whose true geology is neither program nor materiality but an energetically conceived life, in which the whole casuistry of modern comfort is destabilized by the storage capacity of thermal mass.

Collectives

The next project is a series of ongoing speculative housing typologies that ask similar questions, but on a much larger scale. Questions about domestic

Wishful Tropics

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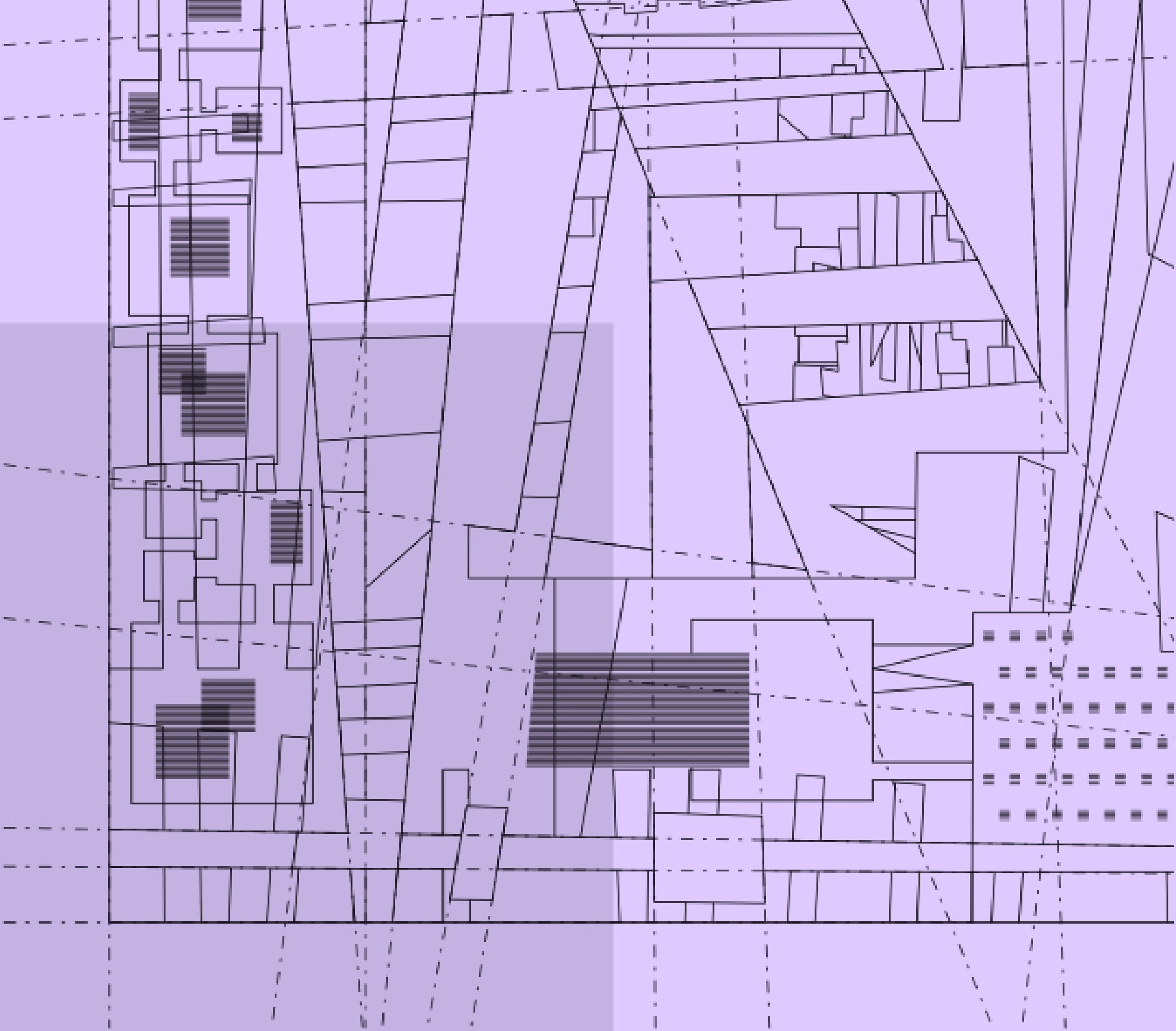
habits, collective living, contemporary domesticity and thermodynamics. When we began this series, we were interested in reviving a perhaps more conventional program: that of social housing and collective living. We wanted to challenge the notion that “efficiency”—especially circulatory efficiency like corridors—should be a goal or aim in collective living projects. Perhaps it was the obsession with efficiency that ultimately doomed the early modern housing movements.

We engaged in a way of working that necessarily produced excess: excessive circulation (we replaced hallways and corridors with large spaces for traversing the structure); excessive vertical spaces (large atria for air exchange and visual continuity); and excessive living areas (macro spaces for communal events juxtaposed with micro spaces for solitude). We wanted to think through how we can challenge certain ideas and preconceptions about collective living so we eliminated corridors in place of profiles. We called this method Profiling, which in this case is the outlining of objects on different opposing projection planes.

This series of projects express a somber nostalgia for the experimental spirit of early modern housing—knowing that it cannot be duplicated. The fact that these early housing projects did not produce permanent utopias is not any reason to condemn them as failures.

Bathing, again

We like to move between different scales when we test ideas, and we like to test them using multiple mediums. The last project I will show is a furniture set, in which we explored similar questions around collective experience and the body. We were approached by Chamber Projects and Friedman Benda Gallery to design a furniture set for a group show in New York City. The brief was relatively open: we were asked to produce a furniture set that

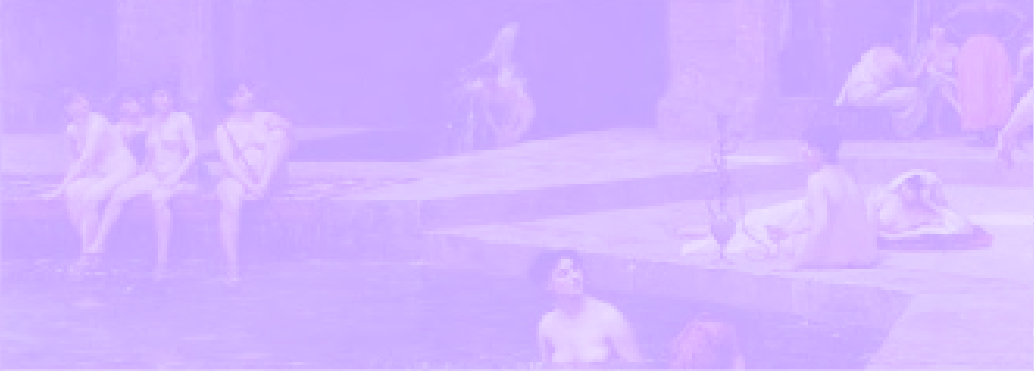


reflects the, let's say, ethos of our work. At the time, we were already researching the history of pre-modern bathing, which revealed that in the early twentieth century, two changes transformed the space of bathing. The dimensions of the bath became set based on the one sided porcelain tub which was cheaper to produce than the larger cast iron freestanding tub. That, together with the invention of the wet wall as a construction technique in balloon frame construction in the 19th century, set the dimensions and the arrangements of the modern bathroom. At that point, all of the elements ceased to be furniture and became "fixtures." Bathing became a solitary activity, a relationship between yourself and your reflection in a wall-mounted mirror.

When one looks carefully at the history of pre-modern bathing, you realize how much that practice changed over the past century. By the outset of the twenty first century, bathing—a concept that once meant entering into an extended social period of conversation, relaxation, enjoyment and semi-collective self-care—had been reduced to a private and individualized efficient hygienic routine. There are of course many subtle differences across cultures of bathing, but one of the commonalities found across cultures was that the bathing elements were designed in the round, to be shared.

So from the beginning, we wanted to re-establish this multi sidedness or circularity by freeing the elements from the wet wall and arranging them in a looser and more shared organization.

For our proposal, we introduced three elements: a shared washbasin as a place for socializing during washing, a bathing tub, and large heating slabs that serve as lounging and resting surfaces. The basin and the tub would be 3D sand-printed with a specific density that has exceptional insulative properties, acting as a



single thermal mass that preserves the internal water temperature, hot or cold. The slabs were cast in white concrete with embedded radiant heating—cool to the touch unless activated.

The set is meant to be loosely aggregated in a room (outside or inside) and can be reimagined and used in different ways configurations, to encourage new routines and different collective and individual experiences. In many ways this project is a continuation of two themes that have animated our practice in recent years. The first is an ongoing re-examination of collective living, imagining shared daily routines and habits as loose aggregations of people and objects. The second is our interest in large scale variable density 3D printing and thermal mass. Both of which are always mitigated between material and culture.

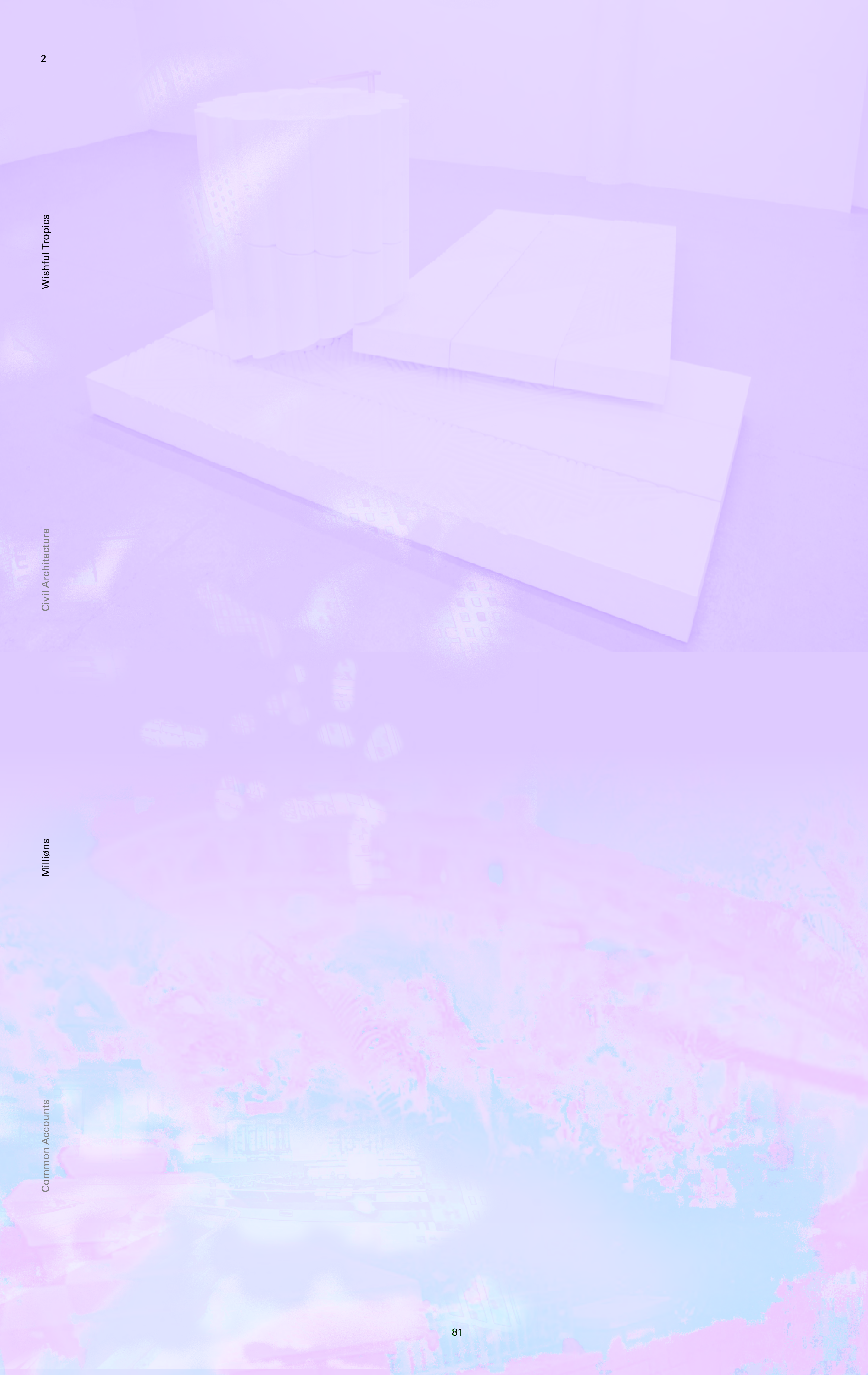
Thank you.

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Common Accounts

Igor Bragado

Hi, everyone and thanks Ali, Hamed and Alserkal for having us. We are Common Accounts, I'm Igor Bragado.

Miles Gertler

I'm Miles Gertler.

Igor Bragado

I feel that there are many points raised by Zeina that are very much aligned with our own interests, so we're looking forward to chatting about all this later. Today Miles and I are going to focus on the plastic surgery industry as a vehicle to discuss how architecture produces desire, pleasure and violence through design action on the human body.

Miles Gertler

We're thrilled to be here and thank you so much for including us. I think this talk will designate a counterpart site for 'Wishful Tropics' in a kind of 'other space', one somewhat divorced from land and territory. We'll begin by saying that there's arguably no other moment in history when the average human being is so drawn to beautifying, hardening, conditioning, face-lifting, building itself. At the anthropogenic saturation of the atmosphere, geography and climate, the body remains the ultimate counterpart site in the Anthropocene, one that reflects also the colonial ethos of the Western imperial project.

Igor

As an indicator of precisely that, almost 20 percent of all US citizens have currently a gym membership. The total number of gym members in the US for example has doubled since the year 2000, and the global 'athleisure' apparel has seen 5 percent of growth only in 2017.

Miles

It's not coincidental perhaps that in the Anthropocene, where prospect of the extinction of the human species comes ever-nearer into focus, we're also facing an unprecedented obsession with the body in design

discourse and in the popular imaginary.

Igor

These obsessions towards body images and also self-design operating reflexively between the virtual space and physical domains is perhaps nowhere more evidenced today than in the world’s most active plastic surgery district. This is Gangnam in Seoul, South Korea.



Gangnam, Medical Tour Guide Map

Miles

Miles: This research from our project Going Fluid: The Cosmetic Protocols of Gangnam was commissioned for Beatriz Colomina and Marc Wigley’s Istanbul Design Biennial in 2016. As is the case for the American post-war fitness and gym culture, the modern Korean plastic surgery industry originated from a culture of war. In the 1950s, the American air force surgeon, Dr. Ralph Millard, began a program of physiognomic reconstructions on wounded survivors of the Korean War, which led to the development of new procedures not rooted in an ethos of repair, but in modification and enhancement.



Going Fluid

His best-known invention is the blepharoplasty, or double eyelid surgery, and was first practiced on Korean military aids working with the foreign command and also on sex workers catering to American GIs. This is to this day among the most popular surgeries practiced in Gangnam.



Blepharoplasty

Igor

These identity politics have influenced much of the modern cultural history of Korea, predominantly since its liberation from the Japanese empire in 1910. For instance,

modern Korean poetry and literature have worked to find an answer to what Korean-ness is. Set against that cultural backdrop, and in the context of post-Korean War reconstruction, the modern plastic surgery industry in Seoul begins to organize. First in a period of medical and political legitimization in the 60s and 70s, followed by the cultural popularization in the 80s and 90s, and ultimately with its industrialization from the new Millennium onwards. Gangnam, the area of Seoul south of the Han River, develops across this timeline.

Miles

And it's a neighborhood that now really compromises a sophisticated infrastructure, medical, bureaucratic, urban and digital, that literally and physically softens its subject. It promotes a cellular, nutritional and identity fluidity, both corporeal and legal. New noses, eyelids and jaw lines demand protocols across scales, facilitated by tubing, smoothies, neck pillows, automated beds, cushioned vans, hotel rooms and convenience stores, beauty salons and shopping centers, as the technological and urban counterparts to the bloggers, nurses, beauticians, administrators and customs agents also required along the way.

Facial Collage

Igor

The late 1990s and early 2000s marked the period of consolidation of plastic surgery clinics in Gangnam. At the same time, Cyworld “Virtual Homes” (in 1999) and Daum Cafe (in 1999)—the first Korean social media computer programs based around the construction of an avatar or a new self—and Naver Knowledge Search (2002), YouTube (2005), and Facebook (2006) became regular spaces of participation in the daily lives of millions in South Korea. When these spaces of design agency start to multiply, the language used to describe body enhancement starts to take on the descriptors of market property, extending the reach of the traditional milieu of the colonial project from land to body, and opening up the self as a neoliberal project of lifelong perfection.

Miles

So at the beginning of the new millennium when clinics towers begin to reach a critical mass and participation in virtual worlds multiplied, Koreans could design their avatars in both material and digital worlds with equal fluency. Gangnam is an ecosystem of both radical and mundane logistics for body processing in a context where youth culture’s engage in a casual yet constant worship of the image of the body.

It constitutes cosmetic urbanism where technologically enhanced face of the patient is yet another televisual surface for reprogramming and playback. The trans-media exchange of images, traveling freely between billboards, screens and faces has produced a dominant urbanism for this district and indeed for an expanded economic and digital milieu well beyond its borders.

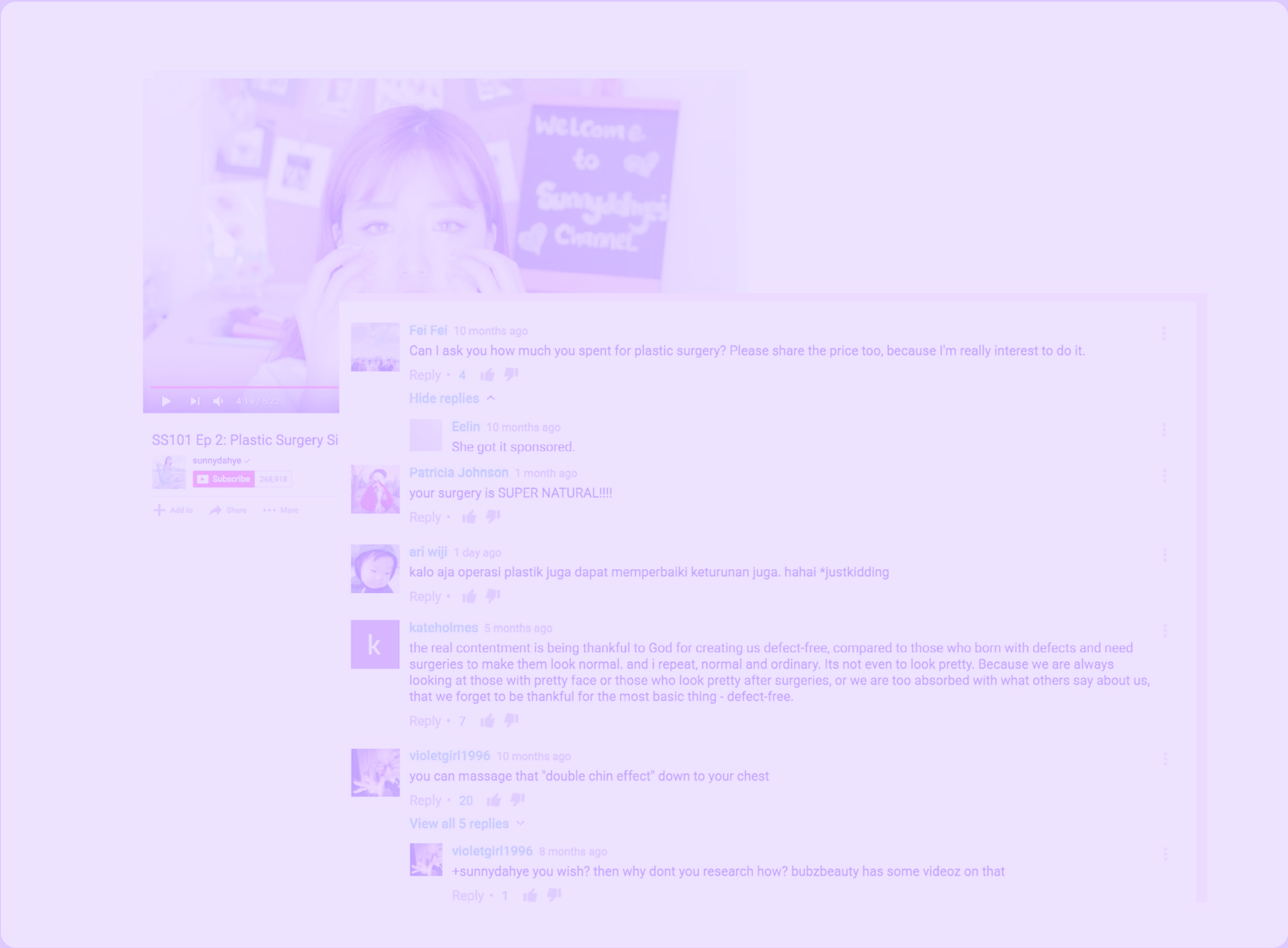
Igor

According to the Gangnam Local Government and South Korea’s National Tax Service, more than 500 of Korea’s 671 registered plastic surgery clinics were located in Gangnam as of 2015. The neighborhood’s doctors attract

no less than 55,000 annual foreign patients. Seoul’s Banobagi Clinic, for instance, operates on roughly 28,000 patients annually in their own fifteen-storey building.

Miles

The public video diaries of East Asian beauty bloggers hired to advertise clinics through broadcasts of their own surgeries reveal the swelling and bruising that obscure the body in the two weeks of recovery following surgery. During this time many patients, including medical tourists who have travelled to Seoul from afar, take up residency in the neighborhood.



The video diaries of East Asian beauty bloggers.

Igor

The district’s cosmetic skyscrapers are unique socio-technological ensembles that simultaneously engage extreme conditions of radical isolation and hyper connectivity. The towers isolate themselves with ornamented and screened façades, “cutening” and masking any external reading of the violence of its interiors, and by consolidating retail and pharmaceutical

programs within, reducing the need for clients to leave and engage the neighborhood. In contrast, the fluidity and connectivity that the plastic surgery towers demand in the public realm are critical to their survival.

Miles

In Korea—the fastest and most web-connected country in the world—an extreme body-consciousness and the rate at which body images circulate in social media have pushed clinics like Regen Plastic Surgery to redirect advertising from subways, streets, and buses to KakaoTalk groups, Youtube vlogs, Daum forums, BabiTalk posts, and the profiles of Instagram micro-celebrities. Meanwhile, clinic lobbies are often reduced to the minimum permitted by bylaw and elevator and website menus are often now identical. The spaces previously reserved for the urban realm—for casual encounter, discussion, and incidental participation—are now often centered thousands of miles away from Gangnam. The bedroom of Indonesian, Singaporean, or Chinese lifestyle bloggers are some of the backdrops where the cosmetic agora opens up, where people meet, negotiate, and chat about past, future, and hypothetical body updates.



The bedroom layout of lifestyle bloggers.

Igor

So as we were saying earlier, how South Korean art and literature and poetry were struggling to find their own identity or ‘Koreanness’ or uniqueness—it is now with the aid of cosmetics and plastic surgery, which come hand-in-hand with K-Pop music, that South Korea has found one among many forms of national identity that merges economic, cultural and body characteristics that are ultimately quite unique.

And now we are seeing how these socio-economic organisms are being exported. One reflection of that is how South Korean cosmetic clinics are opening branches and campuses across Southeast Asia and China.

So not only are they exporting these architectures and urbanisms, but also bodies. Let us talk now about our recent projects engaging precisely the self-construction of bodies.



Bedroom to store technological migration.

Our recent design project for the Superset for Sephora’s Shanghai flagship store channels precisely that trans-media space of the blogger’s bedroom. It uses the retail environment as a hub to connect a broad audience of brand enthusiasts with the in-store population and activities.



Bedroom to store technological migration - Sephora.

Miles

The Superset operates at the geographic center of the store where it connects to an open range of online fora. It alternates between selfie photo booth and live show platform. Pivoting screens, illuminating ring lighting, and reconfigurable satellite furniture comprise an arsenal of backdrops for an encounter of the blogger bedroom with Sephora, which resonates beyond West Nanjing Road.

Igor

This intervention replaces a loosely programmed lounge area which was intended to encourage shoppers to spend more time in the store. Opened only three years prior, the brand's attitude has since shifted. Though they still want shoppers in the store, retailers like Sephora want customers to simultaneously spend more time elsewhere—on their phones, editing photos, tuning in online and perhaps even watching the events unfolding before them IRL, on a screen of their choosing, and to broadcast the experience of the store to those places with them. They want them to engage the brand remotely as an always-accessible site. Thus, the Superset appears—a stage that promotes this kind of casual performance.



The Sephora Superset. Shanghai, China.

Miles

Our recent work is focused on this—on the online/offline bridge of body transformations—in a living body, as the previous projects attested, but also in death and in dead bodies. This is the case of Three Ordinary Funerals, a proto-typical funeral home built for the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, which we equipped with funerary protocols to simultaneously serve the material and digital remains of a fictional blogger. The material realm we address with liquid cremation, or alkaline hydrolysis, and a memorial garden, and the digital we engage with the consolidation of the deceased's virtual afterlife. This project is part of a larger line of questioning the body's role in the age of the internet, and what to do with bodies when they start to traverse the limits of the physical domain.

Igor

So maybe we clarify what liquid cremation is, we might have gone a bit too fast, but if you go back a couple of slides, there's a machine inside the courtyard that is an alternative technology to cremation and burial, which basically liquefies a human body in three hours.

Miles

And it’s considered an ecological alternative because there are no direct emissions in this process. Alkaline hydrolysis is legal and operating in several countries, including parts of the US and Canada and England at this moment, but it has yet to become mainstream on the death care scene.

Igor

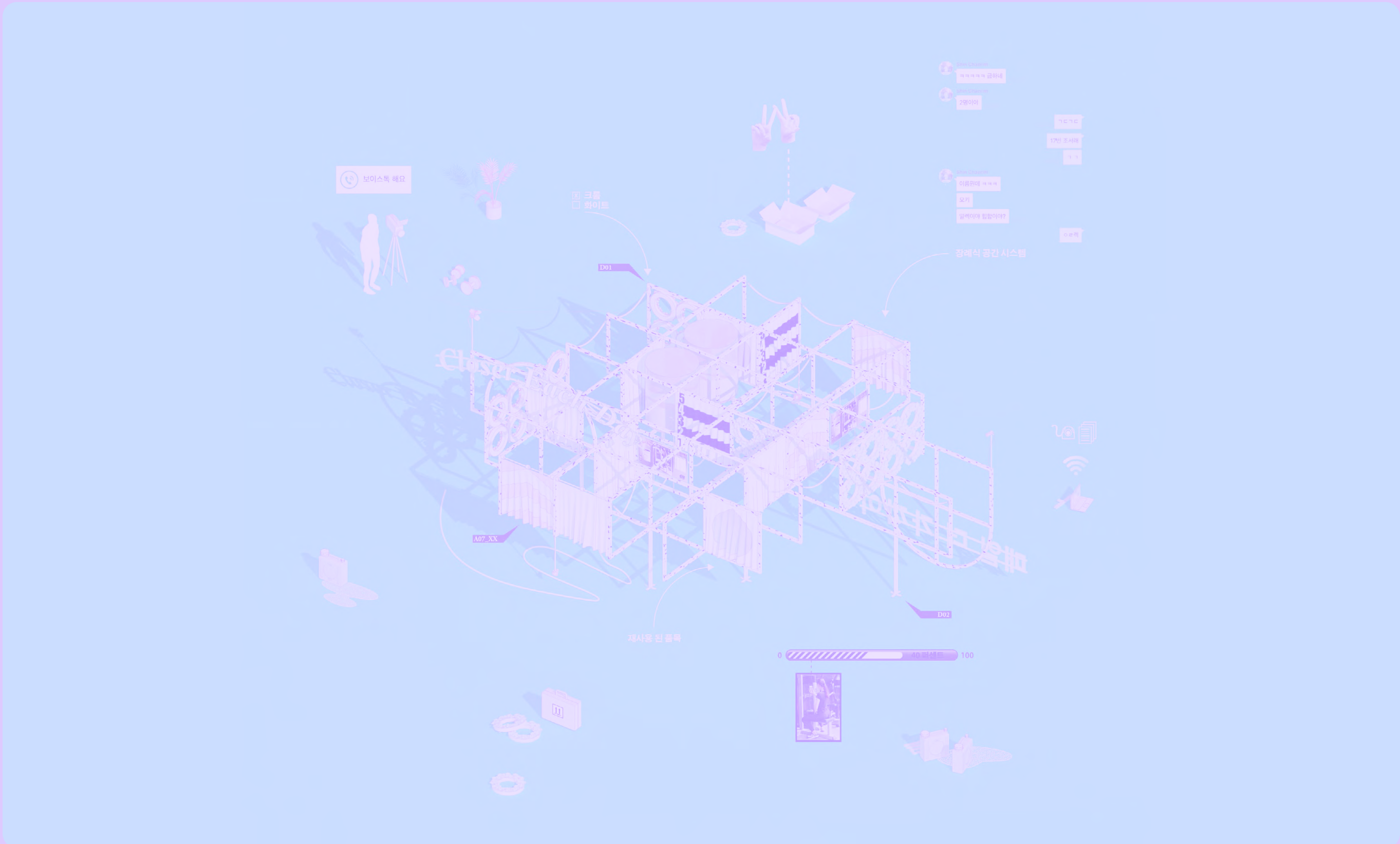
The product of this process is a super fertile liquid. So one could use it to fertilize a garden. And this here is a version of two other funerals that was commissioned by, the National Museum of Contemporary Art of South Korea. They focus more on its virtual counterpart, on the uploading to the cloud of the three avatars of this single blogger.



Second iteration of Three Ordinary Funerals for the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Korea (MMCA).

Miles

That condition was based on the trend forecasting group, K-Hole’s 2013 Youth Mode report in which they coin the term ‘norm-core.’ But what they meant rather than the kind of celebration of banal aesthetics of dress and daily life that it’s come to define, was instead authentic and simultaneous participation in several different niche



Axonometric view of second iteration of Three Ordinary Funerals for the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Korea (MMCA).

cultural groups that didn't cancel each other out, but that meant that in the morning, you could be a hardcore gym buff, and participate fully and actively in that social group and yet in the afternoon, you might play bridge with, you know, a totally different generation. Or you might embody or self-fashion yourself according to a totally different set of principles and that the internet lubricated and made easy the transition and migration between separate social intelligences. And so here we had one blogger who actively lived as three simultaneous avatars all demanding simultaneous funerals when the physical figure passed away.

Igor

And extending on that obsession of the virtual remains and the virtual afterlife... these prints on the screen develop that idea of the fluidity between online avatars and the material entities needed to sustain their online life. And it's interesting that you brought the bath tub earlier, Zeina, because it has been one interest of ours because of the fluidity between health and death, between construction and destruction of bodies since, for instance, according to Gottfried Semper, the origin of today's bath tub is the Egyptian sarcophagus/bathing vessel.

So ultimately this research mobilizes the body, as a site for design intervention and identifies a very real urban consequence of a cultural economy, mostly active below the radar of architecture.



Three Ordinary Funerals at the Seoul Biennale, 2017: the Memorial Superstructure.

The bond today is of course further expanded, multiplied and reproduced with the ubiquity of the camera and the increase of per capita servers that we are afforded. Paradoxically, in a moment where humankind's existence is decidedly uncertain we might as well then consider the rather global condition of body consciousness through the lens of a new existential crisis of humankind, this time the one of climate change and ecological degradation at a planetary scale.

Q&A

Thank you all for the wonderful presentations. To start off the conversation and the Q+A, I just want to begin with a quick anecdote, to go back to the way these things work in the Gulf: I recently had to pick up my cousin from the airport and he had made two trips to Iran, and on his second one, he was held up for 30 minutes for questioning and they had asked him why he had gone to Iran twice in the span of half a year. So you see, my cousin is radically bald, well he used to be, and he had gone to get hair transplants... And so they began by asking 'who did you see?', 'where did you go?' and upon finding out that he had gone to get hair transplants, he was detained by a guy who asked him more information on the procedure because he wanted to go and get the same one himself.

And to me, this is interesting because it meant that suddenly by participating [in this body modification] you become completely separate from your political background. As soon as you say, 'Oh, I'm an individual, I'm an individual that cares about this image', you're suddenly completely an apolitical entity, whereas any other participation in this geography whether as a tourist, a lecturer, or as a student, suddenly places you in a completely other political system, but in fact almost like a different cartography. Like you suddenly shift out of the spectrum of someone who travels for a supposedly nefarious deed and then to somehow you're in an apolitical realm.

And I think that's what's interesting in both of your works, is this idea of these bodies these bodies that shift into a completely different environment, a different fantasy, but they somehow occupied a completely separate space.

And so I'd like to put it back in the case of the city: in the case of Dubai, it's almost a celebration this apolitical individual, coming for a weekend or coming for a week

and you guys are here in the context of design week. How do you see yourselves as practices – where these ideas extend from personal identities to the identity of a collaboration or office; where you are on one hand sited in a place, but also conducting architecture between places.

Igor

Just maybe to follow up on that anecdote of your cousin Ali, we are seeing precisely that Trojan horse-y display of the body on top of a layer of cuteness, which is a-priori decidedly apolitical, played out in contemporary Korean popular culture. On the one hand, I very much see this new pop culture (no matter how cute, puffy, augmented, prostheticized...) as a search of a new identity, as a cultural project rooted in a political struggle in the search of a form of independence from colonial traditions. And sometimes this display of the political power of the new cultural identity is very much on the nose, such as the smuggling of South Korean soap operas to the North to display the abundance and wealth of the South...but some other times is less overt or deliberate.

There was recently a huge political debate sparked by a member of the band Twice, one of the biggest K-pop bands at the moment, which completely shifted the outcome of the Taiwanese elections because this one member displayed the Taiwanese flag in a concert and was later pressured by China and her label to make a video apology of it. No one expected that xino-taiwanese relations would be debated at a musical stage, let alone a pink and cute one, and that made it a more powerful political statement.

It seems that we are going to be seeing more of this economic and cultural machinery that South Korea has been able to engineer around cuteness and humor becoming a powerful diplomatic and a political tool.

I think also to follow on your line of questioning, the temporality of not only the projects that we're proposing, but also the temporality that characterizes our way of producing this work is really informed by the database mode of working remotely across servers, across invisible digital space. For instance, for us, we refer constantly back to Lev Manovich's text on the "Database as a Symbolic Form"; which is to say that the reality of digital space and its attendant infrastructures has started to reorganize information and knowledge to a point where I think, for us, it becomes forgettable until it's right in front of you, instantaneous until it's held somehow. And easily 'migrate-able', constantly in flux. In that sense we're constantly strangers to our own work and knowledge, and then made familiar again, sometimes by accident.

I mean, here for instance, this last slide is really just a freeze frame of several strips of Instagram, which is organized as an endless collage of ideas and material that constantly comes back into our work, and then escapes again for a minute and sometimes re-enters and re-appears. So I think that temporality is also very much just a product of conditions of working today. Especially, I mean we operate remotely, Zeina and John often operate remotely as well, so I can only imagine... and two of you as well. I mean we are so rarely actually in the same spaces.

Zeina Koreitem

Yes. That's an interesting way of putting it. I think temporality for us is the idea that a building can also be an event. John and I always ask, whatever happened to the event? This idea, which was explored by Bernard Tschumi, but that seems to have dissipated and lost purchase in architectural thinking today. For us temporality is much more about thinking of daily spaces as fluid rather than about programming them for static use. We like the idea that depending

on the time of the day and the formal capabilities and temperature of a room, that different events can naturally happen.



Ali

Any comments from the audience?

Audience member (Dima Srouji)

Thanks for the talk guys, it was really interesting. In a lot of your work specifically you were talking about the interiority and you all started talking a little bit about how modernism as actually defined by simulation of interiority, anywhere any place, I think that was a really interesting statement. And your model of the tower where you're looking at the corridors and deconstructing interiority in a way, I wonder how that relates to the question of the palm tree and the pineapple in your case, where you're tracing the narrative of these objects parallel to the question of modernity.

Where modernity is defined as this interior space, [that's simulated] versus this embrace of exteriority where the palm tree is defined in your space and pineapple is defined in your space as a symbol of exteriority. Yesterday

[at Adrian Lahoud's lecture], he was talking about the Anthropocenic age where humans have a responsibility, specifically architects have a responsibility to be outside of interiority, where this question of loneliness in the interior needs to be readjusted in solidarity with the exterior space, with the environment, and all of the other issues that all of you are touching on. Maybe that brings us back to the question of wishful tropics.

Zeina

In 2014, Kiel Moe wrote a brief essay addressing our work "New Massings For New Masses," which was on display in the Keller Gallery at MIT, in which he referred to the work as Nonmodern—which was a term he and John had been using for some time. Nonmodernism is a complete fragmentation, as you say, an atomization of modernity, perhaps much more capable of addressing the multitudes and complexities of our time, between interiority and exteriority.

Ali

So just to tap into the question of the palm trees, I think what's interesting in your work, and also in Dubai to some extent, is this idea of not the planning of the future, but the on-going present. I think one of the interesting facets of the Dubai economy is this idea of soon-to-come or soon-to-be. There is this kind of weird, almost miniature economy of the Dubai within five years. There is always this subset of the economy which is occurring and which is always about to occur. And I can't tell if it's projections for the sake of attracting investment, or if they are never intended to be built, and are only to keep Dubai's name in media. Now to go back to Dima's question about the palm tree: in rebranding Dubai as tropical, the palm tree takes on a different tone. It's not about actually building the rainforest, but in fact completely shifting a visual language and understanding of this imagery within the short term or within the present. Within the LA case,

what's interesting is as Zeina touched upon, that the people who brought the palm tree to L.A. were Catholic missionaries. And so the palm tree, in its history is...

Zeina

Historically biblical.

Ali

Exactly, so it was interesting, because one – there is this undercurrent of American exceptionalism while simultaneously America as a super religious place. The palm tree also has an extremely biblical and religious undertone, it's in the flag of North Carolina or South Carolina, right, the palm tree and the moon which, we also see in the Gulf.

So I think this kind of question of redressing of the imagery through the tropics, this notion of an 'always wishful present' is a way of rebranding the palm tree from a religious image to a hedonistic image, to the palm tree of the tropics. And I think in these projects that never happened, it's a way of suddenly shifting our present, not the future, which makes it not a vision for radical future, but actually a far more pragmatic reimagining of the present.

Hamed

To touch upon the points specifically about the rebranding of the palm trees into something that is tropical. One of the points that we had brought up in the beginning of the presentation was this idea of maintaining the coast, the whole idea that the tropics are a consistent environment that are able to constantly produce as opposed to a Californian precarity being on the of San Andreas fault...

It's this comforting ecology that is also conducive to capital.

Zeina

Yes, in the case of L.A., the palm tree is like a match, it's

extremely flammable and it's arguably the worst tree for this climate. It does not adhere to the high intensity climate of the region.

Ali

And it uses up a lot of water too.

Zeina

Exactly, it is not drought tolerant.

Ali

It doesn't provide that much shade and also palm trees are actually responsible for the eradication of the tropics, for example, rainforests are cleared for palm oil for the purpose of tanning someone in the UK. This is not a recent thing, but it goes back to the history of colonial intervention of the tropics where you completely deforest islands like Java, and used them to plant nutmeg. So even this idea of useful economy, either reproduces these extremely useless trees, not that palm trees are not useful, but I mean this idea of utility in a plant is a questionable one.

Zeina

This brings us back to the idea that life under modernism is about efficiency, utility and artificial comfort which of course has had tremendous effects on the environment and the climate crisis. So we need to embrace discomfort and move away from this culture of dependency on external systems.

Audience member (Raja'a Khalid)

Okay. So would you say then that some of the remarks that were made earlier, in terms of like a political iconology that is covered even though these are such diverse case studies, that there was a kind of Messianic quality about these architectural projects. Like you said, something is about to happen, but doesn't really arrive, that is informed very much by the

monotheistic religions that kind of govern this part of the world. So would you say that Dubai or like similar cities are running on pregnant time, they're waiting for something to happen and that is what kind of informs many of the architectural visions that these cities have for themselves? And likewise would you say similarly in Korea, the obsession with death very much governs these kind of architectural imaginations.

And since these two being the concerns of these two different cultures since time immemorial, would you say that is comparable in any way, I mean the "Messianicity" for this region and perhaps death for like the East?

Igor

I don't think I would agree with the idea that death governs much of the current Korean landscape, or not necessarily does govern body modifications or the construction of a new Korean body. It's definitely an obsession of ours, and our work has been built some connections between those two, but it'd be adventurous to see causality here. I couldn't say if plastic surgery, cosmetic surgery or its cultures and urbanisms are guided or rooted on an idea of the arrival of death only.

Raja'a

Yeah, I meant in sense of a response to.

Miles

Although understood on the spectrum of healing and death, the massive attention and investment in beauty and skin care, and that economy in Korea, I think could be placed within that kind of logic.

Raja'a

Part of that question is addressed to Ali...

Ali

I think what's interesting about the qualities of either of

life and death is the creation of an idea of the near-future rather than a distant one. I mean the idea that you’re not going to die, but you always *dying*, so the active maintenance always occurs in a near-future, which is also precarious for the architectural project. The *raison d’être* of architecture is producing something for the long term. And so being forced to operate in the short term is not only kind of precarious as a model, but also as a way of thought.

To go back to this Messianic quality, the use of architecture as a way of underscoring the near-future and not any vision of the future, that’s what puts architects/ architecture in this region in a position of constant anxiety: you’re always producing something that will happen, which provides a sense of the stability, but never contributing to a discussion on a much longer term future, which means that when you use the sort of image of the tropics, it’s almost a celebration of someone being temporary. It’s not even Messianic, because that assumes that a Messiah will come, whereas I’m not sure there is any idea of a goal in the current vision of the future.

Hamed

Yeah there’s hopefulness, but there is also this demise immediately afterwards. So there is there this precarity that we’re all talking about, the whole idea that we’re building towards something that eventually has its peak, but then comes crashing down at a certain point.

Miles

There’s also an evolution of the precarity and the execution or at least planning of the built environment which does exist in Korea, but it’s really that things get built quickly, but don’t last very long, so the average lifespan of a building in Seoul has been known to be much closer to two or three decades than it is to something approaching a half century. And you’ve seen that elsewhere in East Asia too.

But that’s another condition, the kind of promised city which is then obsolesced, builds over itself almost immediately before that promise is fulfilled

Ali

There seems to be a glut of biennials. The constant need to produce for these things also is a strange thing because suddenly your project timespan is now two months or a three month sprint. At best two years which seems like a gross luxury.

Igor

Absolutely, not only affects the timespan of our work, but also messes with conditions of site and public. Biennale architecture or gallery architecture, if one could call them that way, are not architectures only put to the service of society, but ones that are almost exclusively conformed to a public with quite a level of technical, cultural, and architectural expertise, and that often frees us from standards and common denominators we would necessarily have to engage with if we were building a traditional building.

Zeina

This is the reality that young practices in US and Canada face. I imagine it is similar here. The profession is now dominated by mega-companies who have monopolized the construction industry. In Los Angeles for example, the combination of extremely high real estate prices and risk-averse developers produces a culture of “reliable” building products, built fast and cheap. This of course leaves no room for any radicality or any kind of experimentation.

As a result, young offices operate in the space of the exhibition with often limited budgets. These kinds of projects are temporary, they are assembled then disassembled and if we are lucky re-assembled again.

The notion of assembly is interesting here. More than just material, this work has become an assembly of effects and images. If you were to publish your work on Instagram, you will probably capture it in a specific way, suitable for social media consumption and as a result, you will probably conceive of a different kind of object from the get go, an objects that fulfills its own imaging, above all else. One that is flat and light but that images well. In our work, we like to challenge this by pushing these extremes. Most of the work I showed today is very heavy.

I showed a slide of our *Bathing, Again* furniture set, where we were setting up in the gallery. We had to use an Egyptian pulley to lift the washbasin in place. 800lbs of silica. It required at least four or five strong men to be lifted. We are interested in pushing the limits of heaviness, slowness and awkwardness with these materials in the context of the exhibition space. Materials and objects which are conceived and fabricated within a computational efficient and highly precise space but that require quite the opposite to be handled.

Audience member (Murtaza Vali)

Thank you very much for those great presentations. I wanted to bring it back to the body since all three of you guys mentioned the body, and there's a certain degree of ambivalence on the relationship between the body, architecture and design that I wasn't quite sure about, because on one hand, this discourse about migrating to a post-human age, where the limits of the body can be transcended both had a negative quality to it and a positive quality to it.

And then there was also this idea that somehow a new type of architecture can produce new modes of living, but that was precisely the problem with modernism, is

that architecture didn't do what we thought it would. So I guess I just wanted to bring the body back and then ask you guys to reflect on that. The other comment that I have is this idea about the 'wishfulness' of the tropics that was in the title of the panel, and to think about the aspect of



desire.

Because efficiency and comfort and convenience are all things we don't think of in terms of desire in some sense, like desire is what exceeds those things, and I'm just wondering what happens if we start thinking of those as being the things that we desire most?

Zeina

No, I absolutely agree with you and that's why I said that there's a [somber] nostalgia. Of course the social housing project failed in some ways. But not all failed. If you visit the [Unité d'habitation in Marseille] in France, you will be reminded of how successful this project still is. I had the opportunity last year of interviewing residents who had been there since it first opened – a school teacher, a mechanic and a dance

teacher now in their 80s. They spoke very highly of their life in the Unité and the community and culture of the Unité. In my view the failure and criticism of the modern social housing project pertains to the idea that it produced a model that was intended to be repeatable and efficient. A model that relied heavily on mechanical systems. This is where experimentation becomes necessary. How can we think of spaces, buildings, communities that can operate outside the thermostat?

Igor

Yes, as for the body, I believe that architecture has always been about a construction of a subject, and about the construction of a body around that subject. We think that that's the case also for modern architecture. In terms of the ambivalence you mentioned between body, architecture and design, it is our understanding that, very much in line with Marshall McLuhan, the elements that surround us, the tools that we grab in our hand, are extensions of ourselves, from glasses that see for us, to satellites that see for us. Architecture and urbanism is obviously part of this expanded body too. We could say that that's been the case for ever. But how is it different now? I think that now we find ourselves in a moment where because of the possibility of prosthetics, enhancement, modifications, and drugs, that the body itself is enough to construct a form of interiority. A form of self-sufficiency relied upon walls and roofs until now. The body itself is enough.

Paul B. Preciado talks about this important transition. For example, the possibility of surveillance which could only be performed initially with built architectures, say with a panopticon-like structure, but how now much of the roles of that subjectivization and control of bodies can be and is currently performed with drugs, like say the birth control pill. And that new body now subject to the pill is in itself that "interior" architecture. Once you read

it that way, you can revisit and reassess this new body with traditional tools or architectural analysis, like, how is this body materially and temporally constructed, who is designing it, what are the politics to its aesthetic, how can it be represented, what are its standards...

Whether we like it or not that's where we mostly operate as architects, constructing bodies, which is a pretty scary thing to think about being the construction of a new subject also at the root of any and all colonial projects...

Miles

At least in the scope of our research, being so much in Korea, we found that the language of market property was being applied to the design of the body, and this is basically a recognition of the culture that our own selves are the most immediately available property so to speak, to develop as a lifelong project, and that that is a product of a neo-liberal moment, rather than what might have shaped the thinking of prior generations.

Generally, we find it hard to propose anything stranger than what's already happening in death, in plastic surgery and often just generally, and a lot of our work is really just trying to acknowledge what's happening at these extremes, hiding in plain sight, and often just reorganizing or re-concentrating the situations that we encounter.

To bring everything together, let me back up to a whole idea of wishfulness which is this wishfulness to be something else. This idea that the body, the interior, and the city become these sites for situating yourself within different contexts: tanning, plastic surgery, wallpaper, and so on and so forth, all become these place or these media to really just get out on our own context, essentially, and that's one of the things that we've been fascinated with from the get-go.

Audience member (Murtaza Vali):

So I guess what I was trying to ask is that 'wishfulness', is that something that will take us towards liberation or is that something that oppresses us or is it always built? I guess that's what I was trying to ask because on one hand, body modification can be beyond gender binaries or the physical embodiment of sex, but then on the other hand, it also seems like there is a certain perversion to this desire to be something else that you guys are mapping in Gangnam and you guys are suggesting this is part of the condition of the city like Dubai or L.A. or Miami. And I guess that's what I was asking.

Igor

Sure, I agree that it is important to read and understand what the forces behind these wished-for bodies are. Are we caught between liberation and oppression? But we honestly try as a methodology not to start assuming too much regarding these forces and their motivations. I guess our work here, in this context of Korean Plastic Surgery, is closer to that of a journalist, trying to acknowledge and represent the situation, then as designers we just channel the ingenuity in the findings. I could say "I think it's great that people are submitting themselves to change if they wish so freely and leads them to a form of freedom", but on the one hand I guess that we are not entirely equipped to answer those types of questions, and on the other there is an intrinsic problem in defining freedom. What we are

doing is drawing and representing the material parameters and the context of those wishes and that freedom.

Miles

You know, it's impossible to engage this world without also encountering some of the feminist critiques of it. So one that emerged in the 90s with plastic surgery in Korea, in particular, is that this is a new effort to colonize bodies and at that moment, in particular women's bodies. Although now in Korea, it's more evenly practiced among men and women. And the other is the perspective of agency feminism, which is, these are rational actors entirely capable and justified in operating on their own selves; that they have every right to fulfill the desire to be who they imagine themselves to be. And, of course, in encountering those two critiques, we can't side with one. We acknowledge and understand both of these rationales and also recognize our status as strangers here: we are not doing plastic surgery, we are not Korean.

Zeina

The relationship to "wishfulness" in my work is perhaps more oblique. Rather than a yearning for an unfulfilled desire that will either save us or sink us, we try to understand the complex conditions of the cities we live in, under the pressures of neoliberalism, geopolitics and the climate disaster. We look to projects that have historically rejected the toxic cultures and economies that they were in. Social Housing was, during its early and most radical period, the first legitimate architectural counterculture. The hope is that my work will provoke necessary conversations and actions that can destabilize this binary understanding of "wishfulness".

Hamed

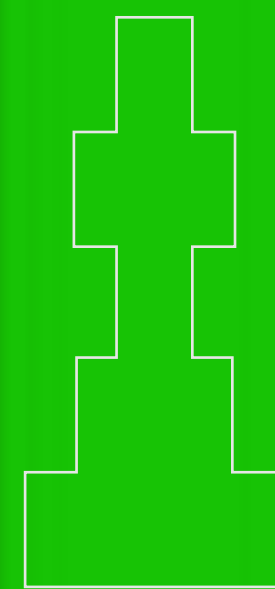
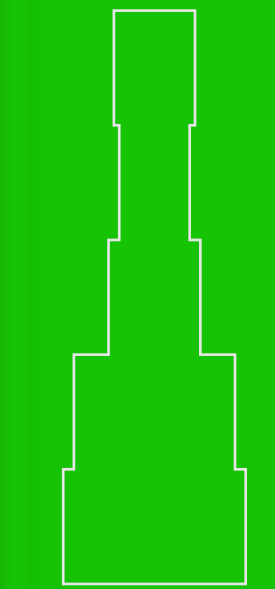
And perhaps on that note, we'll conclude the session. Thank you so much for attending and thank you guys for flying all the way out here to Dubai.

FEB 27, 2019, Duabi, UAE

“Verdant Sculpture” is a conversation between Colombian landscape architect Luis Callejas, AUS architecture professor Faysal Tabbarah and former Alserkal residents Civil Architecture as they discuss their practices and the changing relationship of the architectural object to nature.

Ali Ismail Karimi (Civil Architecture)
Hamed Bukhamseen (Civil Architecture)
Luis Callejas (LCLA Office)
Faysal Tabbarah (Architecture + Other Things)

VERDANT
SCULPTURE



Alserkal
arts foundation

Civil Architecture
Pierre Bélanger
Ahmad Makia

VERDANT SCULPTURE

Alserkal Residency Project Space

CIVIL ARCHI TECTURE

LUIS CALLEJAS FAYSAL TABBARAH

FEB 27, 2019

Warehouse 50, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8,
Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE, 6:30 PM.

Alserkal Residency invites you to Verdant Sculpture, a conversation between Colombian landscape architect Luis Callejas, AUS architecture professor Faysal Tabbarah and



former Alserkal residents Civil Architecture (Ali Karimi and Hamed Bukhamseen) as they discuss their practices and the changing relationship of the architectural object to nature.

CIVIL ARCHITECTURE



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124-120Fay'sTabh



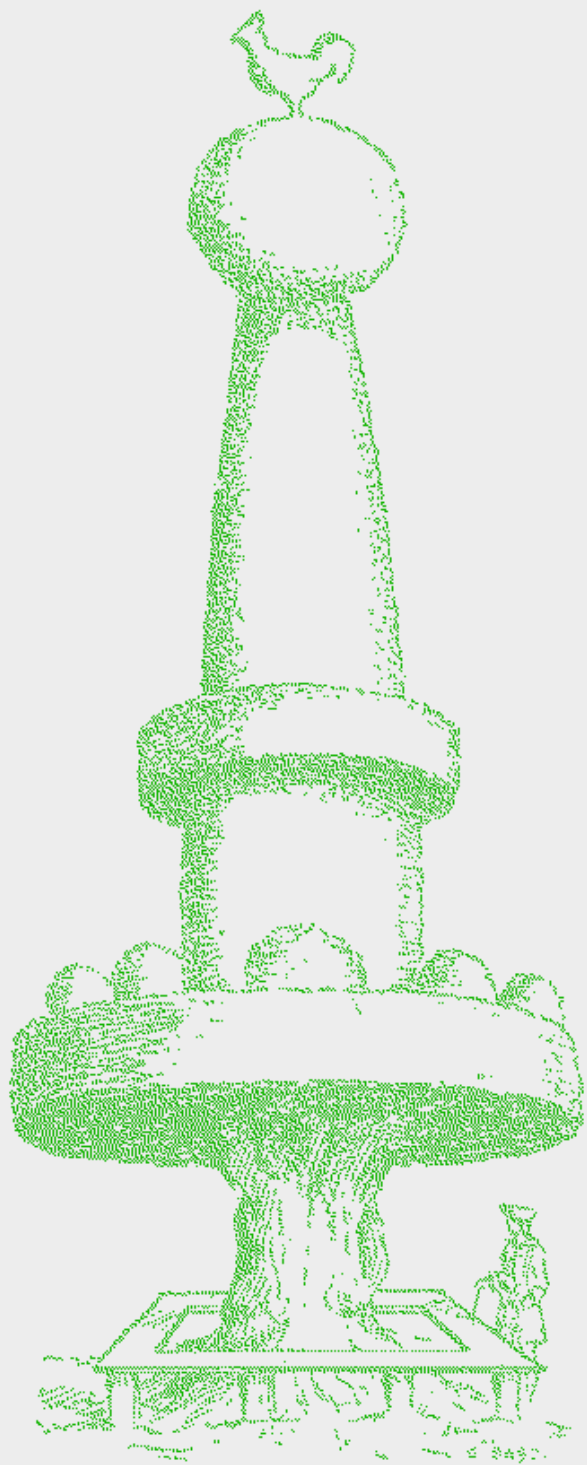
Thank you to everyone who made it out to attend an event with the dubious title of Verdant Sculpture. For the gardeners here or the sculptors here, I think you’ll be a bit disappointed that this isn’t about either of the two topics. But hopefully it’ll still be of interest.



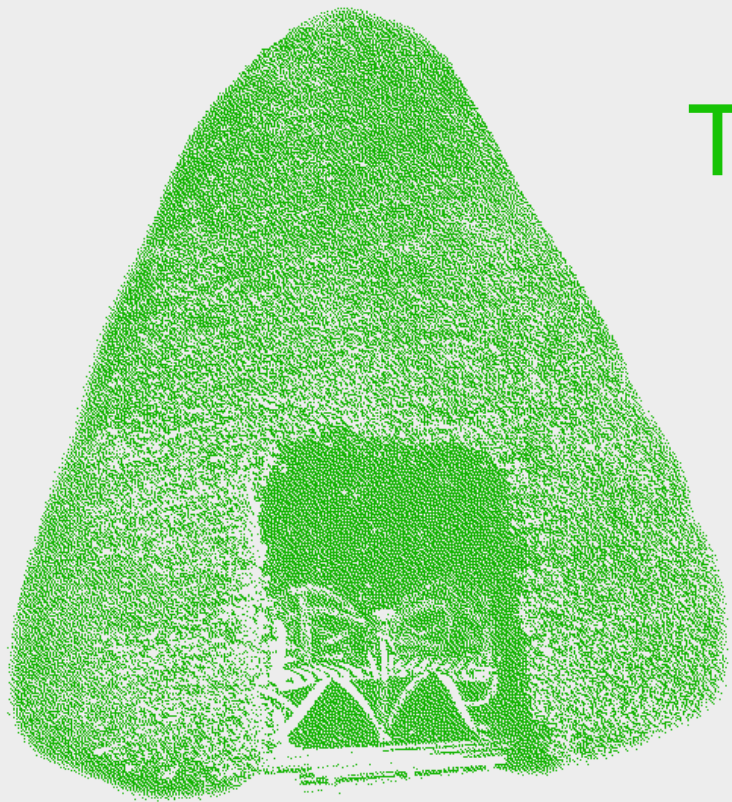
Pig cut at Compton Wynates

Today’s conversation occurs under the theme of landscape, architecture, and ideas of nature as they play out in the Gulf, a continuation of the previous two talks that occurred at Alserkal.

Today’s talk is the third in the series, occurring under the title of Verdant Sculpture. This title is borrowed from Albert Pope’s famous essay from 1713, an epistle written in a newspaper in which Pope mocks, quite scathingly, the tradition of French gardening and particularly that of topiary. In his essay he makes fun of the representations of manmade objects in nature, the use of nature to create forms resembling textiles, embroidery, and figures seen in other art forms. In the essay he mocks the statues of St. George in which the dragon is still a shrub or images from the Bible where baby Jesus has yet to be planted.



The Harlington Yew (1729-1790)



Seat at the Priory, Glastenbury

This essay comes at a point in time where in its harsh critique of this tradition, begins to pave the way for a complete shift in the perception of the English garden. Up until this point, the gardening tradition had largely come from the French ornamental planting of

yew trees and their trimming, maintenance, or the idea of maintenance as being the continuous preservation of an a priori form. This move away from the French gardening tradition begins to make way for what we would know today as the English garden, its picturesque forms, and which eventually leads up to the public park.



Crown Garden, Muntham Court, Sussex

Of course these changes don't occur simply within the circles of taste makers in London and in the UK, but in fact is really a representation of changes of the idea of the world occurring within the late Georgian period entering the Victorian. The context is the increasing colonization of the globe, the extraction of plants and animal life, but also, and maybe most essentially within the expropriation of land by the crown and the control of all agricultural land within Britain & the United Kingdom.

What this really means is that a move away from, let's say 'fake nature', or the idea of verdant sculpture in the context of the time, means that there's a sudden understanding that nature is not meant to be cropped to an idealized form, but has to be preserved. As all land or agricultural land is owned and controlled, then the idea of nature becomes as a reserve - a moment of nature as an

exception to everything that is not. So the qualities that Pope begins to promote in the garden become qualities of nature’s refusal to adapt to an a priori vision. The park emerges as a place of exception, as a place for nature to exist in increasingly industrial and unnatural conditions. For him, the qualities of natural form are given a priority over the ability to sculpt nature into artificial forms.

Hamed Bukhamseen

In the context of the questions brought about by Albert Pope’s essay, about the natural and its formal qualities, we invite both Faysal and Luis to discuss their practices.

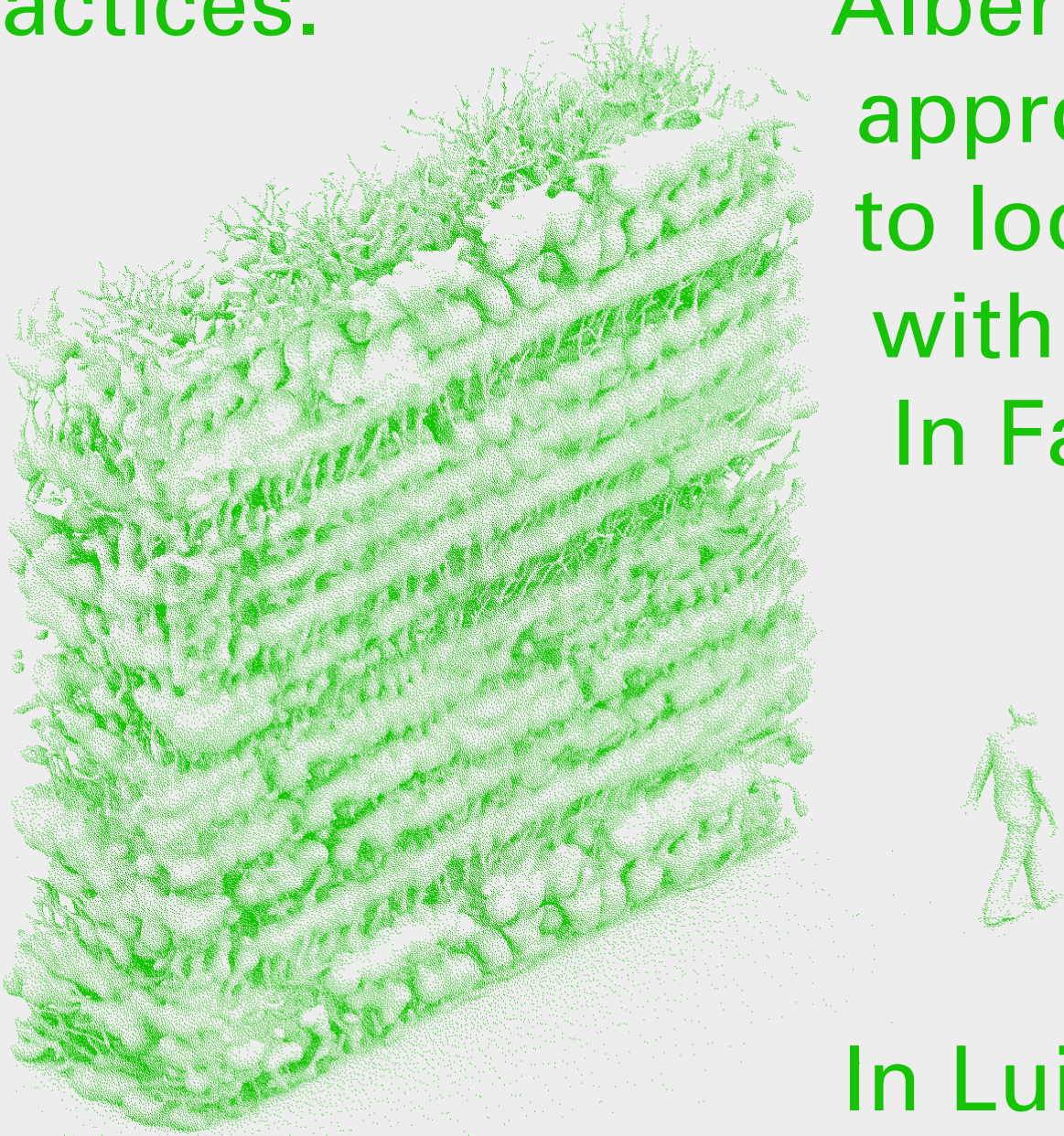
Albert Pope’s essay provides the appropriate middle ground to begin to look to their work as they deal with issues of natural processes.

In Faysal’s case it is through the material studies which approximate qualities found in nature.

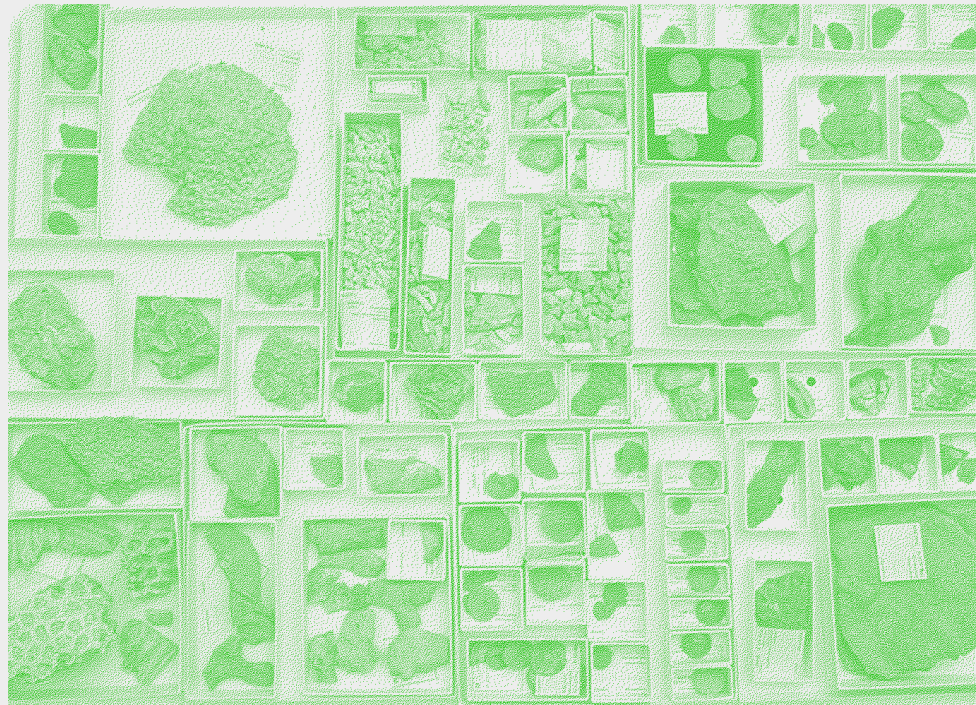
Hamed Bukhamseen

In Luis’s practice, we see an approach which is taxonomic, involving the depth of research and exploration of Euclidean geometries and their imposition onto the landscape, thereby engaging the architectural object within its context. Both practitioners, operate along the same spectrum of verdant sculpture, albeit at different points and positions. So without further ado, we’ll allow the speakers to elaborate on their work and the practices and allow Luis to start off the conversation.

Abwab Pavillion, Architecture & Other Things



Coral display, Natural History Museum



LUIS
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S CALLEJAS :

Thank you for this wonderful invitation. First time for me in a region that has a lot to do with the origin of many of the ideas that I think you are bringing up. I was provoked by the essay, also the title, but particularly about something that you described one in your first emails, which is this relationship between object and nature. That is, I think, one of the issues at the center of my work.



Tropicarium – LCLA+MAZZANTI

I'm an architect, but often find myself working with landscape. Some of the work I will show, as you will see, is not actually very green, and depending on the context, some of it has been described as art, but it's just a space. These are the issues that are important to me. The categories in which this work is inscribed I leave to other to decide.

I enjoy this image because I think we need to start by talking about what nature is and what is not. As a counterpoint to Pope, I propose this image, nothing new, this is from one of known texts by John Dixon Hunt where he defines nature in a quite rudimentary way. Perhaps at this point in time his definition might even come as outdated to use it, nevertheless I still find it useful. He says that there is not one nature; there are three natures. To some extent this separation also clarifies the divisions between the English tradition and the French tradition.

There is the first nature. That is, what you see in the background. This is the pristine nature, the untouched. He described it as the realm of God, every place in the world where you cannot see any trace of human activity; the wilderness..

The middle ground in the image is the second nature, the agricultural landscape. At that point in time, this is a very Eurocentric image and idea. That's space represents pretty much everywhere in Europe. A continent with very few places left where there is still pure wilderness, and nature or green is mostly a product of agriculture. But I think contemporarily you could describe this, also, as a landscape of oil or mining, it is also the landscape where there is destruction happening. It's about the landscapes that sustain society.

The third nature is where things get interesting to me, because this is what Pope is criticizing in your

introduction, what John Dixon Hunts called 'The Greater Perfection'. This is not natural, obviously, but it's also not utilitarian. So it's what doesn't belong to the natural world, but it's also not meant to be useful. It's when nature is tamed just for the sake of creating some kind of new autonomous beauty. That's gardening for him. So he describes it as a third type of superior order. He calls it The Greater Perfection and that's the garden.

What is interesting is that many of these gardens actually have their origin in early Persian gardens, even though the French might not like to admit that easily. Many of the first botanical gardens of the world, in Italy, for example, were not only meant to be beautiful. They were also meant to be spaces for science and experimentation, places for seeing how plants that were brought from other parts of the world would work. There was not too much difference between the aesthetics of a garden for science and a garden for beauty and pleasure.

It's about also these forms that seem to be somehow gratuitous. Actually, many of them have origin in science and experimentation and mixing the species that otherwise could not be mixed. This is borderline irresponsible and reductive as I'm going very fast through a rich history. This is France, Versailles, some of these gardens you have probably seen and visited many times. The geometries also have a close connection with some of the architectural ideas that were happening at that time, clearly in terms of geometry.

What is perhaps more interesting, to me, from that tradition is that they managed to develop a vocabulary that allows them to produce a space of architectural quality with stuff that is alive. Some of these words you see on screen are used in many places of the world to describe open civic spaces. So I think pretty much everybody knows what an alleé is: how do you define space with trees and create a pleasant boulevard. But

they created the vocabulary, which is perhaps more common in architecture if you think about typological approaches, ways and recipes to create space, so it's not only about the shaping of the plant; it's also how to use the void to create seemingly architectural spaces. Some of them are almost cathedral-like. So this also belongs to this, let's say, formalistic tradition that actually Pope was critical of, but nevertheless, it's still fascinating and is gaining renewed relevance.

Some of these drawings are fascinating because it was not only form; it was also the clarification of technique. That's why they still teach in schools Versailles recipes and ways of doing things with plants, with drawing that transmit the spatial implications of each recipe. It's, of course, completely artificial, we're not talking about nature, but they thought this was, in a way, better than nature. That's quite a bold claim, that to me, is also acquiring renewed relevance.

I'm particularly interested in not making distinctions between objects and nature. I will try to explain it with three projects.



Frankfurt Book Fair

This is a project that I like a lot because it's going on now and relates also to my own story living in Norway. It was an interesting commission because it's for the Frankfurt Book Fair. It's the most important book fair in the world and Norway will be the guest of honor this year. We won the competition with a project that's about an interior landscape, no plants. But at the end of the day, this is a project about national identity being displayed in Germany, and a challenge to the persistent idea (particularly in Norway) that natural landscapes are the best ambassadors when representing a country abroad.

We found something really interesting that gave origin to this project, which is the origin of the word 'thing' or 'object', which in English, of course, you all know. Actually, if we go back to German and Old Norse, the word, was not only used to describe 'thing' as object; it was also the word for parliament or assembly. These are two things that are as contradictory as, let's say, object and nature. So we decided to work with this beautiful idea of thing as parliament, rather than with representations of Norway as a country with beautiful landscapes. This is an image of that first Norse parliament. This is where they used to meet in Iceland. This is where they used to meet to decide the fate of their societies and to give names to things. It was an open-air parliament, so it was indeed a landscape; it was not a building. The word to describe that was thing/ding, which later became the word thing. I find that story fascinating. How this place as a landscape was described as a thing which became the word for parliament and somehow later evolved in the Germanic language as 'object'.

The project is called Norway Tells. If you know a little bit about Norway, you know that it's a beautiful country that often sells itself with images of fjords and incredible arctic landscapes. Often when Norway goes abroad with art exhibitions or these kinds of events, it tends to focus too much on this untouched nature. I think they

really like the idea that Norway is perhaps one of the last wildernesses of Europe, together with Iceland, even though that might not be completely true anymore. So we wanted to think, how we can create a 'thing' or assembly, in an interior, a landscape of object that could speak about landscape without necessarily having to rely on interpretations of the Norwegian fjords or other natural formations.

We thought perhaps one of the most primitive objects that relates to the book was a table, so we decided to do a landscape of tables. The forms of these tables are very abstract, but what they do is that they relate to the landscape; not the natural landscape, but the landscape of literature. I'm not Norwegian, but I've been interested in the culture, and we had the impression that perhaps like in Latin America, there is a landscape embedded in the literature that is perhaps as powerful as the real landscape. This is something that you find probably in most countries, fantastic landscapes in children's stories or fantastic landscapes even in crime stories that are quite known in Scandinavia. So each one of these tables has forms that are in a way created or traced while interpreting landscapes that don't exist outside of literature. We never thought we would win this competition because Norwegians really like to showcase their landscape and perhaps this abstraction was a bit difficult to communicate.

What we're trying to say with this project is that at the end of the day, the landscape in literature is as influential and powerful as the real for Norwegian design culture. So it's very abstract, the shapes, of course, are a bit gratuitous. But what we're doing is that we sit down with poems and text and we reread them and when we do that we design these tables. As it often happens in all these recent competitions, there's the question of sustainability. In our case, what we decided to do is just to just make them very well, and in aluminium, so they last. They will

be then later going to different libraries in Germany and in Norway. So it's about making them as good as we think Norwegian furniture can be, rather than making something that'll only last four days. This fair is only up for four days in Frankfurt. Our tables were designed to work in the open air. We dreamed of them ending as part furniture after the book fair.

When the lights go down at night it's also creating other forms and perhaps other readings of these stories. In a way they almost become like characters and of course they are objects, they are things. But when they are in the space hopefully they are experienced as an interior landscape that speak about the landscapes for Norwegian literature.

In 2016, we were invited to the Oslo Triennale in Norway. This project is also about landscape and the interpretation of these landscapes as objects. The triennale was organized by a Spanish team that was interested in islands and borders and conflicts around the world. They located us in a section that was called 'Borders Elsewhere'. So the only condition they gave us was to do a project that related to borders in some way.

I have been interested in stories about islands all over the world in different countries, islands in conflict which somehow end up being central to territorial issues. It can be fishing, it can be oil rights, it can be sometimes even military presence, and how the only thing that is shared among countries is this abstract treaty called the laws of the sea. The parts of the law that interesting to me are the fragments that speak about topography, underwater topography, as something central to help in international sovereignty claims. Many of these conflicts, as you probably have heard, are often resolved by interpreting how topography works. So there are examples of islands where lawyers study the extension of a continental shelf to know if that island should belong to this or

that country. These are the treading of topography that influence the resolution of these conflicts.

We found a very specific case between Sweden and Finland. This is a very strange conflict that happened between these two countries. You might remember that Finland was part of Russia and when Russia had a border with Sweden, the Russians decided to put the lighthouse on the Swedish side, which did not give an equalitarian distribution of the island. When Finland finally becomes its own country, they decided to have a more equal distribution of land with Sweden, and they traced a new border that is perhaps one of the strangest, more convoluted borders in the world. What you see is an attempt to give an equal amount of square meters of island to both countries by giving back to Sweden an area of equal dimensions than the area taken by the Russian lighthouse.



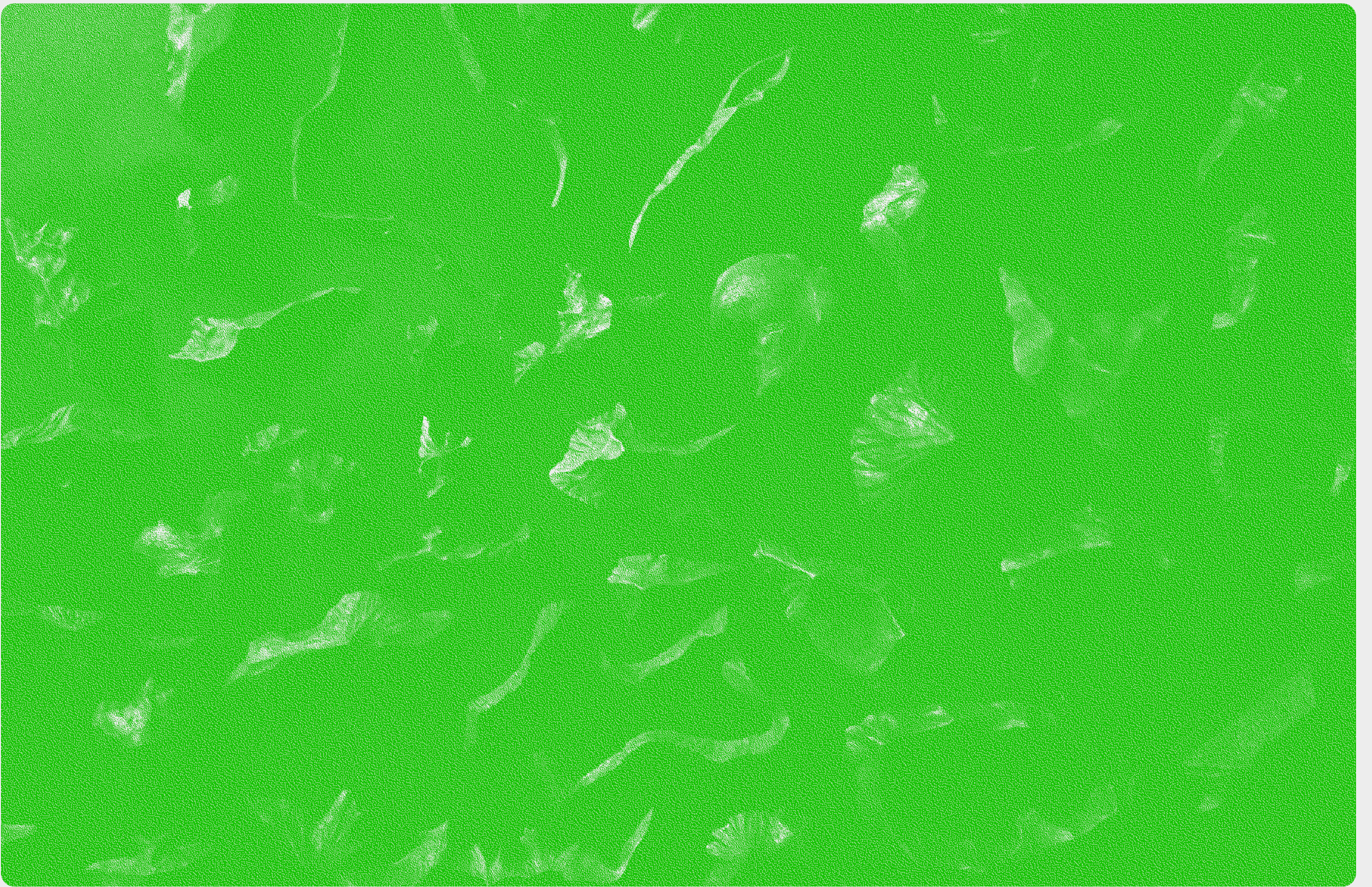
Islands 1

We wanted to talk about this way of conflict resolution. If the goal is to do this with these islands that we study all over the world, these are conflicts from Latin America to Asia, all happening because of different reasons. What will it take to interpret topography in order to achieve that kind of equalitarian distribution of land? So it's almost like an impossible problem. This is one of those projects that

I tell you is very strange because I don't think it's either architecture or landscape; it's more of a speculation in the form of an exhibition. If this could happen in any of these islands, what will it take in terms of topography for the law to really create that artificial topography?

Back to the objects. So the second part of this work that is important is that as in the case of the table we wanted to find a specific object that in a way is very pure, or speaks directly about what an object or a thing can be when representing landscape. When describing such large scale issues as these islands, it became very important for us to work with ceramics. It was really important to make these small ceramics as fired clay probably last longer than some of the real islands - some of which are actually sinking. Making them in ceramics, suddenly there is this connection with anthropology that becomes really interesting, this idea that clay objects could have been made long ago. These are models done in ceramics in collaboration with Rodrigo Callejas, my father who is a ceramist based in Colombia. They have finishes in the ceramic that are actually using very ancient techniques, which have a lot in common with early Japanese pottery, as well as pre-Colombian pottery. This is an oxide reduction which gives a finish that is almost black without the need to use enamels that would lower the resolution of the finished texture.

I guess what is interesting about this, is that we are mapping these islands in a pragmatic way, the plans are very accurate, coming from different sources, and at the same time we're writing about these conflicts. The islands all have very different degrees of detail when you look up their drawings. For some you can find contours every 20 centimetres; some others you have to completely model from scratch. They started as 3D models. They all look like these ugly low res cakes in Rhino.



Islands 2

Then when moving from 3D to ceramic, the detail or the resolution of the island, it's in a way driven by the stories, because it's happening by hand. So this is us reading these histories, like in the project in Norway, and reshaping the topography. What happened is that the models that have perhaps the most dramatic topography are not because the island is really like that; it's perhaps because the islands are loaded with even more violent stories. What is interesting is that in the context of the exhibition, I think many people will probably recognise the names of these islands and even the outline of the plan. The plans are precise, however, the elevations are completely invented and fictional, the elevations are interpretations of the conflicts, a surface inscribed by hand almost as if a telluric forces could scrape the clay depending on the dramatic events that have happened in each island. Of course this is an Architecture Triennial, so it was also important to talk a little bit about the tools of the architect. We decided to work mostly in plan and elevation and to have this almost contradictory approach in which the plan is accurate, but the elevation is not. These islands don't look like that; they look like that in plan, but the elevations are a completely subjective,

therefore you could say the project is also about an intentional mismatch between two typical projections.

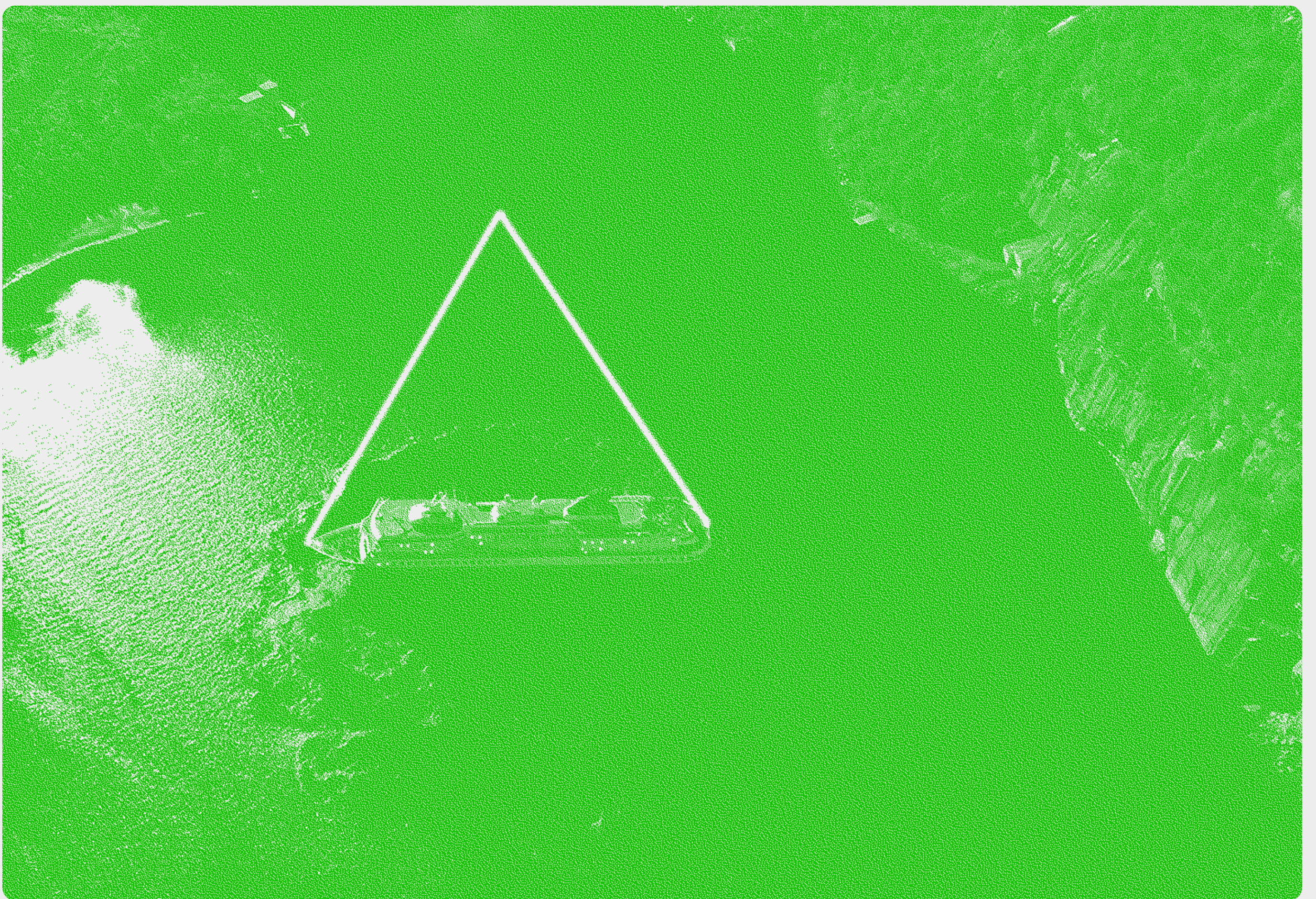
This is another project that is about landscape in Norway. Trinakria means triangular island, by the way, a word coming from Greek. We received an interesting invitation to make an installation on a large ship, in what is perhaps one of the most interesting cruise ships in the world. Norway, as you might know, has a very long coast, it gets deep into the Arctic Circle.

This cruise ship that is called Hurtigruten we initially thought, “Well, this is maybe a bit tacky. It’s just like a cruise ship in the Caribbean.” But it actually has a quite beautiful history because the Hurtigruten a a mail route shaped the history of all these towns along the coast. They didn’t have a road, they didn’t have a rail, and before aviation the only thing that they had to connect all these islands in this quite rough coast was the Hurtigruten, which is the mail boat, carrying mail and food along with passengers. But the landscape of this coast is so incredibly beautiful that it became very popular for tourists, so mostly Danish and German tourists started to take the boat simply because the scenes along the route are beautiful.

So the mail boats evolved into this large cruise ships, and that’s how they look like now, and nowadays it’s mostly touristic attraction. But they still carry local passengers and, for example, even kids that go to schools in different towns. What is interesting about the Hurtigruten is that they really advertise themselves as an exploration company. So they have been also a company that it’s behind the mapping of all these waters and recently these people *Coast Contemporary* have been organizing a wonderful art festival that happens in the boat. So they invite artists from all over the world to have installations in the boat, and cultural institutions, for example, the Pompidou and Fondation Cartier, were there in the

boat with us. So it's like a Biennale in a boat along the Norwegian coast. This is the route. It is very long, and stops in all these places with gorgeous backgrounds.

We were interested also how Norwegian sailors were so good at night navigation in the long nights in the Arctic with artificial lights. In a way the project became an homage to that narrative. There are many islands along these routes and what has happened is that the towns remained very small while the boats grew very big. So it's a little bit like Venice where the boats are becoming a problem for these small cities. We thought that the boat is growing so large that it's becoming almost like one more island. When each of these boats approaches a town, it acquires a geologic scale compared to the smallness of the little towns.

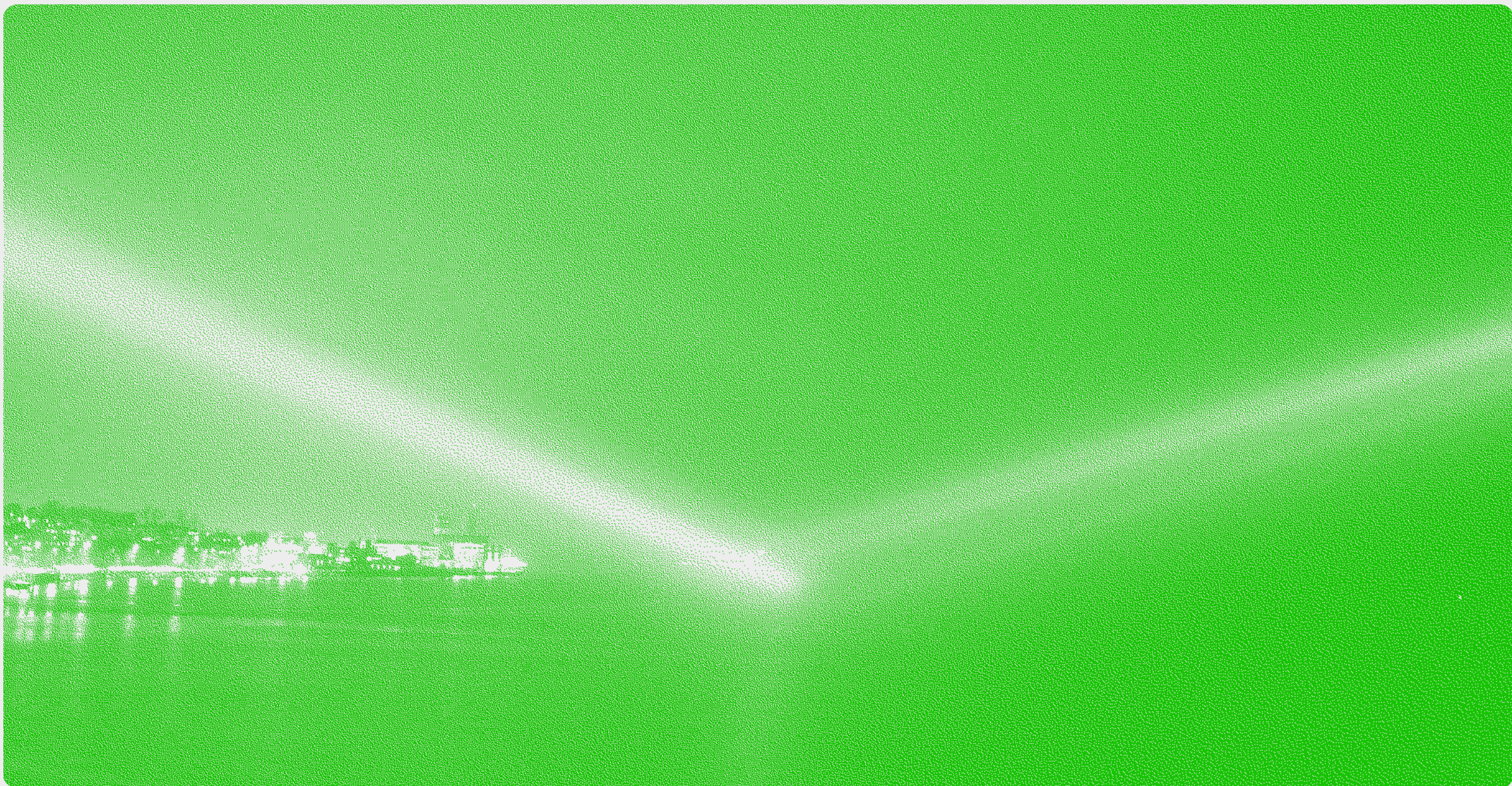


Laser sketch

The installation is very simple. We decided to play with the emergency search lights; these are lights that can reach 1.5 kilometers. We also proposed to change some of the bulbs in some of the rooms for old fashioned incandescent lights because they have switched to LED, so when they approach

the town, they look more like they are part of the town. So the idea was to light up this triangle, this triangular island, every time we are close to one of these towns and make the boat more like an island rather than a boat.

If we understand the large ships as a long line, and we complete the other two vectors of the triangle with the searchlights, we can create this triangular island in which only one out of three vectors is solid. It's really a simple geometric problem, however, the narrative behind geometric problems in navigation is equally interesting to me, because when reading stories about how many islands were named in the Mediterranean, their names started with geometric problems. There's an important scholar and geographer, Pascal Arnaud, who talks about something that he calls common sense geography. For example: Sicily. The original name for Sicily is Trinakria, which means triangular island. You could assume that the irregular shape of Sicily in a map looks like triangle, but what is most interesting it that the navigation around the island is what perhaps influenced the naming of it as triangle. The idea that navigation has been important in the creation of mental models in Greek and Roman thought has been fascinating to me. It is central to the work of Arnaud that I referred before.



Lasers

It was an interesting project because we were allowed to play with their lights. This is from the bridge of the Hurtigruten and using their radar system also to help us point and define this tracing. It becomes like a one to one sketch of an island that is bigger than the islands around that specific town. You can see the images, all I can say besides what you see is that we felt from the bridge the scale of the island made of light, imposing itself to the little town of Molde. It is simply an exaggeration of what is already happened with these large ships approach the small towns.

Thank you.

Verdant Sculptures

FAYSAL
TABBARAH
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Civil Architecture

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Luis Callejas

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Faysal Tabarrah

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The title of the talk that I’m going to give is ‘Other Environmental Imaginaries’. The two subtitles hint at how one could achieve this environmental imaginary. The first one is about tactics, about how we can make things and spaces. The second one will make sense when I show you a series of images that started to drive the work. What I’ll do is to lay out a framework of goals, and propositions, and then I’ll show how this framework becomes or influences some of the actual material work.



Coral Test 1

The work operates on three registers and almost parallels what an environmental historian would do or what three environmental historians would do. There’s an

environmental register and the observation is that today there’s a problematic relationship in architecture; in how architecture generally deals with nature at a time where natural and synthetic things are becoming much more blurred in everything, such as: impossible foods, growing lab cultured meats, and things like that.

The second register is a material register and it’s almost a critique of digital fabrication and its failed promise of giving us precision, speed and mass customization. The joke I make all the time that doesn’t land well is I’m sick and tired of seeing digitally fabricated things banged into place. If this was a digital fabrication crowd, that would get sneered at.



Coral Test 2

The third register is a cultural register which comes from an

observation around an

ongoing environmental orientalism that permeates much of architectural production in the region, and by region I mean the Middle East and North Africa. So the goal along these three kinds of planes is to uncover an alternative mode of sustainable design production. The material goal is to leverage the failure of digital fabrication to create new models of production, material production, and specifically assemblies. The third goal is the big aspiration and that is to challenge this ongoing environmental orientalism through architectural work.

The proposition that pushes the work forward is to use tactical and painterly attitudes in making to blur between natural and synthetic things. Where it gets to is the production of almost natural things. I like the parallel usage of the word thing between Luis and I, that we are both talking about ‘things’ in general. How

this work develops is through a combination of scavenging and making. There’s a lot of scavenging that happens. So this is an actual natural thing that someone in the audience gave me. It’s the opposite of what one would think as a manicured nature, it might



Rubber crumble mix

almost tell you that it’s been put together by someone else, right? But he just picked it up and gave it to me. It talks about these ideas of misfit assemblies, things that

don't really want to fit with each other, but by some force have been made to.

The other thing that I've been looking at it for a while is land art.

This is an example of a Richard Long work, a mud painting that is five meters by five meters that he does in 10 minutes.

What's interesting about this from the perspective of the work is the material that's used, mud, there's an embodiment in the making.

Verdant Sculptures



Rubber crumble seat

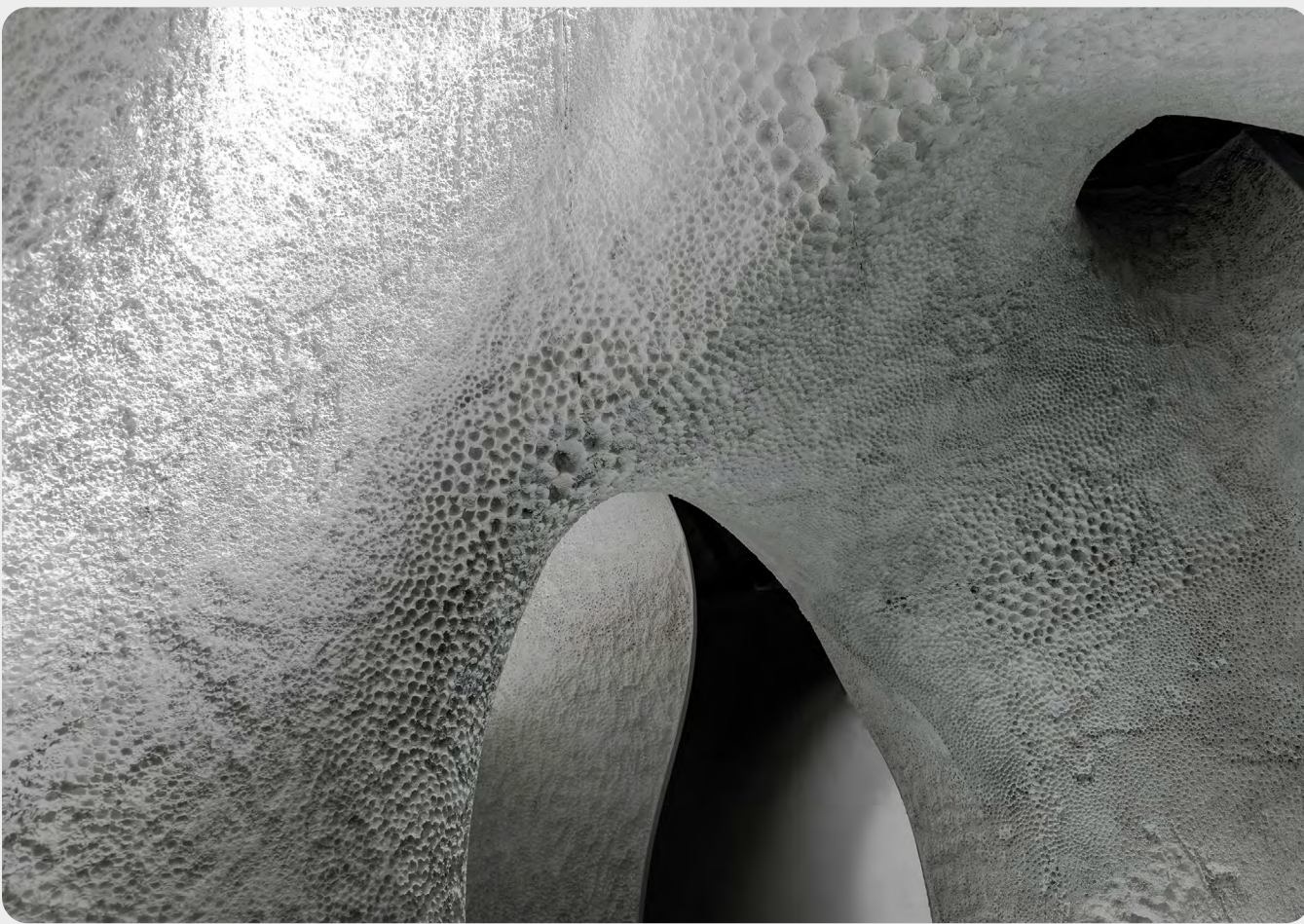
Seat test



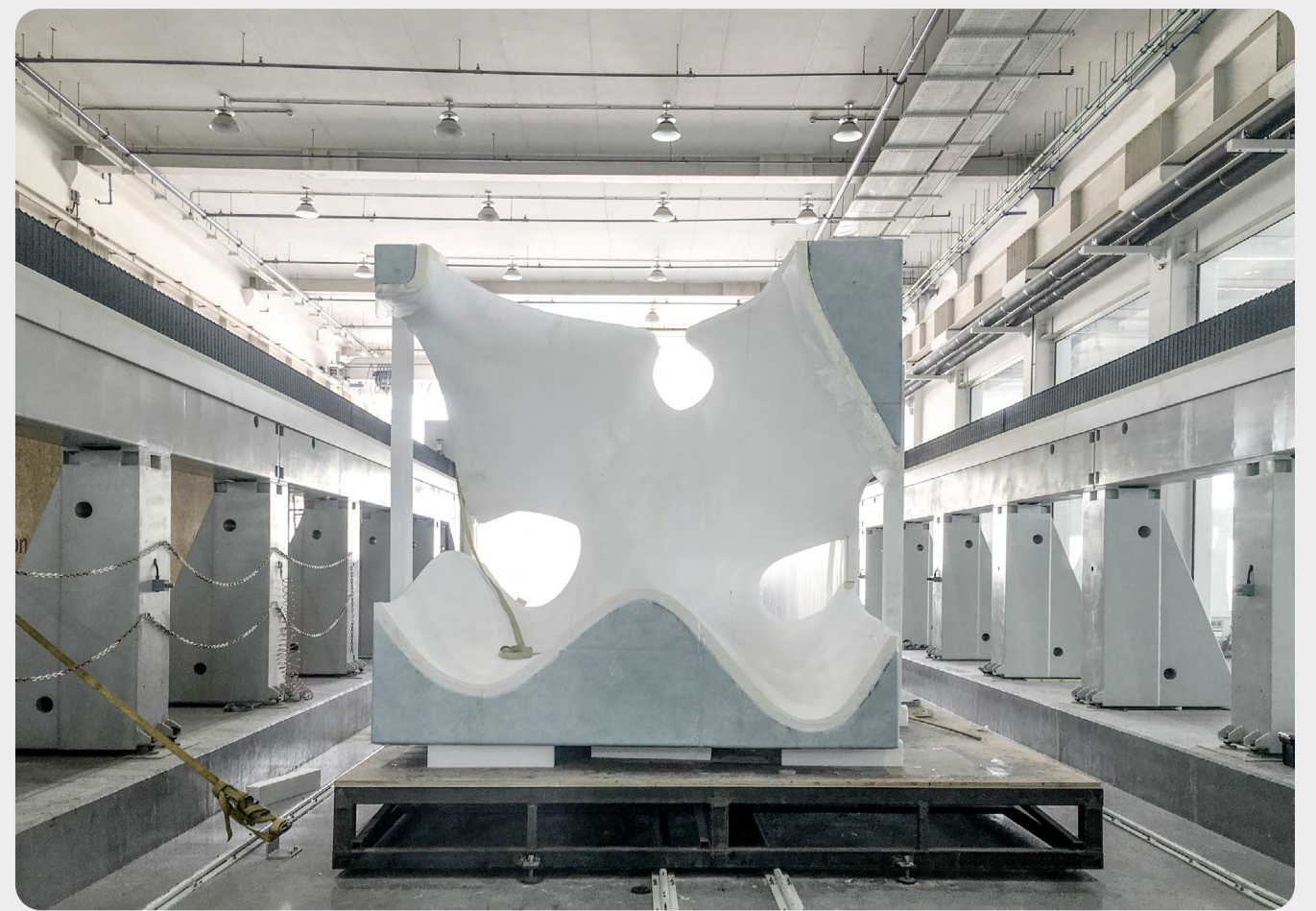
Civil Architecture

There's some form of relationship between painterly and the geometric, so in this case it's a circle. From what I can tell there is no guide and it ends up being a full circle, but that's just a side note.

Luis Callejas



Almost Natiral



Almost Natiral

Faysal Tabarrah

These precedents result in work that looks like this. This was done maybe four years ago now, the first kind of work that I've done in this 'un'-natural world. The first questions the work registered were: 'where did you find this?'. So we put it in a white room and people come and tell you what the material is. If it's here somehow it's coral, if it's in Jordan they think it is from Petra. All I have to show them are my bloodied hands and arms to

tell them that I did not find this. But somehow I did, in the sense that much of the work is me setting up parameters and allowing the material to be found in some way, shape, or form, which is where the material science aspects come into this. Much of what you will see is reactionary, so reacting to one image after the other.

One thing I've reacted to here is that while the processes and the tactics for producing these almost natural conditions there is from my point of view, a rejection of its homogeneity, and while it produces a singular object, a mass, but even on a textural level it doesn't produce any homogeneity. I need heterogeneity; the other iteration of these is trying to uncover some form of heterogeneity. This is also a moment which makes someone ask 'where did you find this?' I've even convinced someone it's



Abwab Pavilion



dried honey because if you look at the interior, it could look like hibiscus infused with honey. It's important here to understand from my point of view that this isn't an active reproduction of natural things, so there is no form of intentional biomimicry. The processes create these kinds of things and yes, there is an aesthetic agenda that

forces some form of heterogeneity, either of texture or of porosity and transparency, sometimes color and shape and tone, but they aren't meant to be reproductions of actual natural things.

A lot of these things would be nods to the Richard Long image in the sense of the body is a huge part in this making, at multiple scales, so the chisel and the mallet are the tools to excavate or scavenge this kind of thing. A lot of the work also operates on a material science level, so it crosses material. I've received a ton load of crumb rubber from Bee'ah (UAE waste management company) and asked to do something with it. It's the tires that they have recycled here in Sharjah, which is a form of siting the work. The tire probably existed in Sharjah or the UAE and the shredding happened in the UAE and the second life of the material happens in the UAE. A lot of the work has to go through these kinds of experiments in terms of hardness, mixing. There's a form of material alchemy. Maybe material science isn't the right word, but there's a form of material alchemy. There's also a form of the body being actively engaged in this and always in integration with digital technologies.

That goes to the second observation that I made which is questioning if we can leverage digital technologies, but in a way not build on its false promise of precision and speed and mass customization. This is an example of a crumb rubber table, but a lot of the work uses these architectural domestic objects as excuses: a chair, for scale, a table for scale, a wall, a panel. These are architectural excuses to try something at a particular scale that people can become comfortable with even though no one's comfortable with this as a table.

The aspiration is also to try these kinds of ideas at a spatial scale. This is the first jump of this mass scavenging, carving situation into a room, so from chair to table to room. It follows in the same logic, so there's

a form of digital fabrication that has to happen. This is a three-by-three-by-three meter volume. There's a form of digital fabrication that has to happen and then there's a form of hand making that comes in and carves this thing. Mainly because the fabricator would've charged us an arm and a leg. So it forces the body to come in and manufacture this thing.

You guys will see a shift now in the projects. The problem with this stuff at that scale is because there's an aspirational architectural scale, these things are just singular in their construction. Yes, it's multiple pieces of foam, at the end of the day, but it doesn't leverage the reality that architecture comes in pieces and needs to be assembled and has more complications than carving.

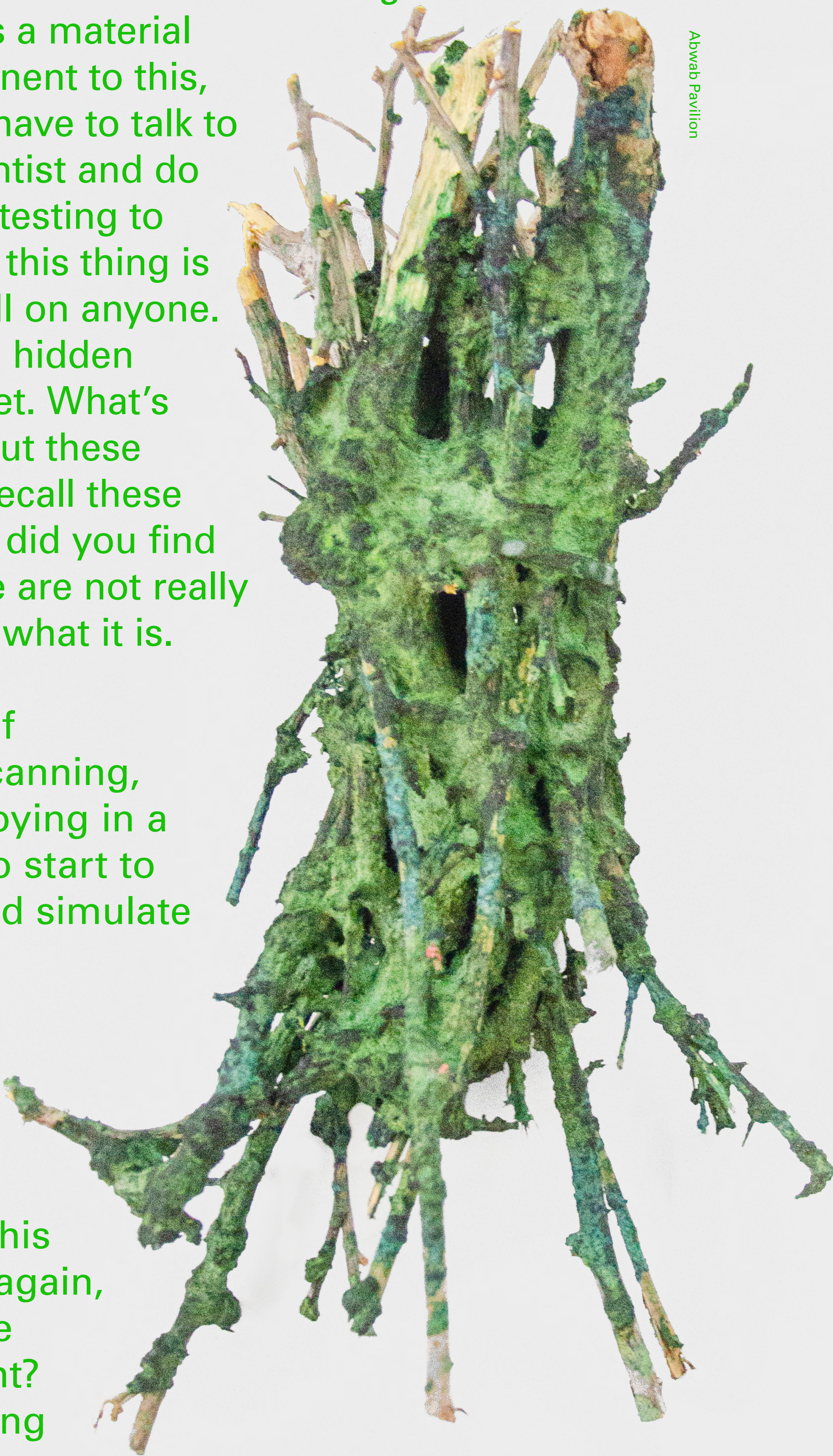
There was a shift at one point into looking at things that want to assemble. That goes back to the first image that's been seen, and also a shift at looking at the landscape as opposed to looking at synthetic materials. Everything that you've seen up to now is the manufactured material that goes through a process that allows it to look not synthetic. So its resins, foam, and crumb rubber. There's a shift here into looking at the landscape and what the landscape can offer as raw material. There's a digital allegiance to all of this. So while there is a critique of the digital and the material-digital binary, there still a belief in that it can offer us some solutions. So there's a scavenging, scanning, and then simulating these things in a digital world, so this simulates these sticks that one can find and scan and deploy at a much larger scale.

This is the final project I'll show. This is the Abwab project that was in D3 a couple of months ago. Why I'm showing this image is maybe the nod to the third register of environmental discourse. In the sense that well, the landscape isn't useless, because that's much of the environment. The discourse about the environment in the region is that it's arid and useless and we need to come

and fix it when in actuality, no, we can potentially get material from the land and use it.

The project is essentially palm fronds that go through a material alchemy process and that starts to redefine it. So this really is plant material, paper pulp or papier-mache that's worked together to become a binder and this thing becomes a full freestanding object. There is a material science component to this, which is that I have to talk to a material scientist and do some physical testing to make sure that this thing is not going to fall on anyone. But that can be hidden under the carpet. What's interesting about these things is they recall these ideas of where did you find this and people are not really understanding what it is.

This process of scavenging, scanning, and then deploying in a digital world to start to understand and simulate the paper pulp and all of that just start to understand what kind of walls one can achieve from this material. And again, the wall is here a stand in, right? It's the first thing



Abwab Pavilion

that one can do to create some form of architectural scale. What this eventually became was a series of five pavilions.

You can start to create these non-linear plan conditions, and you very naively render them. You think this is all going to come out, but then you realize that the material doesn't like you and it won't. The simulation didn't really work. The material and the body and machinery tell you that what you've rendered isn't going to happen. Even at that jumping and scale, like actually it's sort of the master who eventually took over the spraying. If you watch him you can start telling he knows exactly what he should do at every moment in time, which is what I used to do when I was scavenging the chairs and picking them out. So that was an interesting moment.

This was one of the first prototypes. These were color tests, color swatches, at a full scale. I wanted the green but it was too cheeky because sustainable...green... it doesn't really land well. So eventually went with the red. What's interesting in terms of homogeneity is we can start to get different kinds of textures depending on how you treat it. This was the external texture and this was internal texture because, again, people needed to exhibit something in it, so we might as well maybe not take over the whole project. This is just a couple of images of the walls and the context. That's it.

Hamed Bukhamseen

I wanted to make a general observation which is that both of you operate along the same spectrum that we had brought up; one which is concerned with the replication of these natural processes and one concerned with its abstraction. Luis, your work leans towards the direction of abstraction, while in Faysal's case it's a methodical precision in trying to replicate the natural world. However, what I've also noticed in Faysal's case is that when scaling

up, you've reverted back to these Euclidean geometries, which Luis had always stuck to. My question is when it comes to an issue of scale and when it comes to the architectural object within the landscape, how do you begin to see these natural processes come into play?

Faysal Tabbarah

The two objects, the two spatial objects: one is a wall or a series of walls that make a room, for lack of better word. Then the other one is a cube. In my case, it's budgetary. The structure had to be wood, so linear members. So there's a budgetary reason there. But you can go back to the Richard Long at one point it became an intent in the sense that can we overlay this textural condition on top of a Euclidean condition, so that where the circle comes in. While I would maybe honestly say that wasn't the intent from the beginning, it eventually became one and then you start to leverage it and figure out how we could get the most out of it.

Luis Callejas

In my case there's something that I share with other architects and landscape architects, which is this idea that certain geometries when they are very simple and when they get blown up at the large scale, they make these processes readable. Which are processes that maybe not everybody will be paying attention to. The simplest case is the tide on the beach, it probably rises only a few centimeters, but when you look at it horizontally the whole landscape changes in 60 meters, 80 meters, 100 meters. So the moment that you introduce a very simple modest wall of 30 centimeters, that's when you finally see the tide creating a very large space. A tiny change in elevation causing a massive change in plan.

Luis Callejas

Euclidean geometries allow these processes that are otherwise either too slow or too large to be visible. That was something that was also in the work of many land

Q&A

artists. They were not as interested in the processes as they were in scale. We can perhaps all agree that land art died long ago. It's because they were not really engaging in this question. It was not so much about the processes and, let's say, ecological implications of their work, many of them described the desert as a barren space, the American desert in that case, or the ocean as a vast space. Generalizing, their work was photographed and exhibited in galleries in New York, so it became suddenly very small. Framed work in a gallery is not land art. Anyway, what I can say about my work is that I am interested in scale as something elastic. Geometries and forms that are useful in the design of very small things, like a table, or very large, like the triangular island in Norway.

Luis Callejas

The documentation of this work through photography is important in a different way than it was for land art. What for land artists was a way to take the desert into the gallery in New York, for me is simply a way to start another project. So when I photograph, for example, the work we did in Sardinia with lights that I didn't show today, those were 1:1 sketches for the project in Norway. Every project is the sketch of the next. It doesn't matter if the location is distant. Photography is not documentation; it's the way to make those geometries operational and to collect the results so they become new projects. Keep in mind, I have a life as an architect, landscape architect, then maybe artist. All these things keep feeding each other. Photography is a way to somehow collect and archive these results to make them useful. For me photography is a way to collect experiments that happen in different mediums.

Some of these geometric experiments end up in a building or in a garden or an installation. The scale really doesn't matter that much. I think there is a shift in scale that I'm also very deliberate, which is that some

operations of very large scale might be in forming a piece of furniture like in the Oslo project for Frankfurt or the other way around. Like very tiny things that somehow end up in forming very large projects.

Ali Ismail Karimi

One of the interesting commonalities or maybe misreadings of both your works is the scale question. For Pope there was definitely a concern that there's a certain scale to topiary. You can make 100 or 200 of them in a garden, but at some point it's the proliferation of individual objects, whereas a public park is somehow always a stand in for a landscape. You can have a smaller park or a larger park and there's an articulation of the mounds or the lakes, but it's understood to be a piece of a much larger condition.

In both your practices there's an almost estrangement from scale. So, for example, it could be coral, it could be a single geode, or it could be a mountain. I can't tell if it's almost you saying, "Well, we're at a point where I can't read scale whatsoever." I wonder for you guys in this reading of the objects, is it a matter of a disinterest in scale because all scale has become, let's say, transmutable?

Luis Callejas

I'm not so interested in sticking to a specific scale of intervention. I am equally interested in a jewelry project as in designing a large park. Maybe the scales in the middle are the ones that are sometimes less interesting, especially because those are the ones that often have names like buildings. So I think it gets interesting when you do things very small or very large. Also, because the way that you draw them, document them, makes them even more blurry, perhaps.

When you talk about the parks and the gardens, perhaps this is more historic; it's not so much about my work, but

I think in different design cultures across the world you find these moments of very intense figuration. Whether is the follies in some of the French gardens or the English tradition, bringing a pagoda from Asia and just putting it in a park. There is almost an animistic quality that different design cultures find important when inserting objects in open spaces. Even in the English garden, that was supposed to emulate nature, they still find the space for this intense figuration, recognisable figures which were also mocked by Pope.

I like projects that exist, as I said, in the detail and in the large scale, while trying to be very deliberate by skipping the middle. I often design projects where it's about a bench and how two paving units meet and then the very large tracings and skipping the middle scale. At some point things become so large that its hard to call them things anymore. That's why I like many of these Italian designers mentioned that seemed equally comfortable with jewelry and urban speculation, for example Andrea Branzi and Enzo Mari.

Faysal Tabbarah



From a scale point of view, the work is being photographed on purpose, as a kind of studio photography. The photographs are scaleless, mainly to help push an imagination about what could be at an architectural scale. I know I've seen the thing, I've made it, and I know what scale it is. But if I take a photo, then even seeing it at the scale of this lecture projected on a screen helps me think about what this could be at a larger scale. It goes back to your earlier question, because they're not pieces of brick. I don't think of them as I make this thing and then I make 10 of them to make a wall. It's almost like taxidermy just in a white space. You can't really tell whether this is alive or not.

Audience Member 1

You're both dealing with very much a kind of question of representation, mimesis, and repetition. What is this when we were clearly told by the moderator this is not about verdant or sculptures? How do we talk about what you're talking about? There's something really interesting that you're both doing and the language for that is hard to find. I can hang on to it from a couple of different directions, but I loved this problematic that you've thrown at us with what is this thing.

To be very honest with you and this is a cheap answer but I speak about it purely as architecture. When I'm talking about this I use architectural language. These are assemblies. They have textures or they're formations or they're cast. So either processes I talk about them as architectural processes, so either something is sprayed or cast or cut or carved, or as what they are as objects, they're assembled or they're stacked or they're glued, et cetera.

Luis Callejas

I'm really only interested in the geographic tropes, or geographic knowledge, written or drawn, moments in design history where there is a clear connection between geography and spatial thinkers. By thinkers I mean architects, industrial designers, landscape architects. That's why the methods of representation are so linked to geographic representation. I guess there is also has a very specific reason related to my own biography, coming from Latin America, particularly Colombia, where as a generation of architects we might have had more influence from the natural sciences and geographic representation than from architecture as in specific buildings. I think we were much more influenced by this very intense connection between the representation of our land because of geographers, some from Europe, some from America, and the artists and architects that were in direct contact with them.

Luis Callejas

So when you look at Humboldt, for example, and the way he was drawing our territory and the way he was collaborating with artists and all these moments where there has been artists and naturalists working together have become very important for my work and also the work of others by the way. This keeps coming back to late 1700s. Also, recently I think there have been very intense moments of connection between geographers and artists.

So I'm looking at these moments and that ends up in forming projects that, as I said, are sometimes very tiny or very large.

If we talk about philosophical references, I am interested in writers like Simondon, describing a kind of phenomenology of machines. There are a few working with that idea, and I think in Faysal's work that's really interesting, because at some point it's not that these boundaries are blurring; it's also that serious scholars like Simondon are suggesting us that these boundaries actually not existing at all.

Audience Member 2

I'm curious about finding or locating the metric for success for these kinds of projects. So Luis, you mentioned speculation in the form of an exhibition and Faysal, you spoke about material alchemy. I understand quite intimately what the protocol is for understanding whether the artistic object works, but how do I know if any of the objects that you have been speaking about, how do I know if they work and more interestingly what is the work that they do beyond the form?

Luis Callejas

Well, I have to commend you; I think this is beautiful question. I think this is a really important one because it's hard to know, there are some parameters to judge if a building is successful, if a park is successful, and with art perhaps it's even more difficult and subjective. But the work I do, I often don't think too much about that, but I try to pay close attention to interesting things that happen when the work is finished.

I can give you specific examples like the work in the boat. Of course, it's great to be invited to be in this boat along this beautiful coast and play with these lights at night. It was from the beginning not so clear to us what this will be. The communities in these islands are very sensitive

to this, of course, because some of them are very critical to the impact of these big ships that suddenly arrive. I admit that I was afraid of the violence of arriving with the searchlights on.

For me, the moment of success is something as simple as how this geometric problem reveals the boat to the ones that know it the most: the captain and the crew, they seemed not to know their boat was so large. Of course they knew it very well from the point of view of the pragmatics of navigation, but it was striking when we were there in the bridge and they were helping us point the lights with the radar to things that we could not see; we could only see them on the radar. Suddenly when they see these two vectors they understand that the boat is the third vector. The scale of the boat is revealed to the ones that know it the most, which I think it was quite fascinating. Of course it sounds a bit selfish, because in that moment I was more interested in the captain than the little town, but that happens.

I think your question also is a critique to Biennales and events because I think with our biennales maybe it's a bit clearer what the purpose is. Architecture is very strange, because there are many Biennales, especially recently, which are not about architecture. They encourage you to do installations, as architecture can not travel, and drawings and models are easily available online nowadays. In the worst case, biennales are full full of 1:1 mock-ups of building details placed in interiors. I know well that I'm not interested in that.

I wouldn't talk about success, but it's more about, let's say, distorting how we understand these drawings as truth or false. When you look up these islands, they don't look that different than the islands in Norway. So Norwegians are very used to islands that look like that because they have a dramatic coast. The ones we present are fake, but they are only real in that context where that

romantic coastline looks like that. So in that case it's about connecting with the audience at that level.

With the tables, we don't know, because it's going to be completed in October. So we are working with it, but we really hope we reveal that Norway doesn't always need to send its natural landscapes in diplomatic missions. I think it's a very interesting design culture that has a lot more to offer than just landscape. I would consider it successful if this message comes through.

Faysal Tabbarah

If I answer the question around the body of work and criteria for success of the body of work, I've got two answers. One is if you realize how it's structured; every image is a rejection of the image before it. So every image attempts to fix this failure from the image before it. And at one point there's a huge rejection of the mass in favor of the tectonic. So the quick answer is they're all failing, but that's how it's structured and that's how it feels to me. But if I want to answer it a bit more seriously, and that also probably tells me that they're all failing is that I've set out three goals in the beginning. If it achieves one of the three goals, maybe that's a factor of success or there's an environmental goal, there's a cultural goal, there's a material goal. If it's able to touch on any one of them, ideally all three, then that's potentially a form of success. That's the difficulty is I might have to tell you these criteria so that you could tell me why I don't think it's working. That might also be a form of failure.

Ali Ismail Karimi

But your desire to work at this middle scale is you trying to find that metric of success, right? If it's financially or tectonically viable then it has succeeded.

Faysal Tabbarah

Yeah, so eventually there is. The less academic answer is that there is a metric which is an architectural metric:

does it stand up, does it keep the wind away, et cetera. Going through the process of convincing a mechanical engineer to do some tests on the paper pulp is hard. But it is an attempt to at least enter the league of those criteria, because it hasn't been there yet. But eventually, yeah, once it achieves that, then I think the criteria becomes obvious, architecturally obvious.

Audience Member 3

It's funny to ask a question in a place that you haven't been to because usually they have context to where the questions originate from and to me, I travel with my architectural agenda on most of the times. If you come at it from an architectural disciplinary point of view, you talk about putting the geometry against the natural, but then the question that comes to mind, is it really a playfulness that's about, for example, is it architecture because now it deals with the wall and is it architecture because now it's placed as an archipelago as a grid?

Audience Member 3

So at what point does it actually become architecture? There was a question about representation, but really to me the talk was mostly presentation. Like we didn't really get to see any drawings or representation of the work from a disciplinary point of view. We saw the presentation of the work as a selling point, as if maybe if I'm to be a slightly provocative and blunt it looks like there might be a sponsor in the back of the hall that might actually decide like, "Oh, I like that. I want to build 25 tables like that," or "I'd like to have a wall like that." I wonder at what point in the discussion where if you quickly Google verdant, which I did as I was walking into the hall, it's reduced in use by 89% since the 1800s. So bringing it back up as half of what the title is and then pitting it against sculptures it makes me wonder at what point does architecture as a discipline come into the work? My question is do you believe that the work still belongs in architectural realm or is it and architectural derivative?

Luis Callejas

I am very deliberate in avoiding presenting the work from a disciplinary point of view. This work is undisciplined. I am not so interested in the differences between disciplines, but the differences between media. I was trained as an architect and I still think that what I do is architecture. However, I think it's very important to be conscious when the media that is used for certain work is not architectural or not typical of architecture.

Luis Callejas

By that I mean three things. One is live matter, so stuff that is alive. That's plants, but also animals. Time. So acknowledging that things change in time. For these landscape architects are much better than architects. So the ground, the surface of the Earth. So not walls, not bricks. These three things: the ground as media, live matter, and time are these fundamental media that I think landscape architects have been more skilled for longer time than architects. I think many architects in different moments in time have claimed that architecture is everything, that everything is architecture. Ecological thinking comes in and out in different moments. When you ask that question to landscape architects, they will probably not understand it, because from the beginning of the profession and the discipline, these three things have been part of what they do, which means that they have in a way always worked with ecology, even when the word ecology perhaps didn't even exist at all. They have always dealt with environmental questions and their media has been the environment itself. It is fascinating that architecture, even though it's a larger discipline with a bigger cultural capital, is still quite limited and finds itself borrowing from landscape architecture every once in a while when suddenly these issues become relevant. In short, some of the work maybe doesn't become architecture, because the media points somewhere else. For some projects is pertinent not to do architecture.

Faysal Tabbarah

I clearly want to think it's architecture, but maybe as a response to your question about the drawings, I've shown the only drawing that was produced for Abwab. That was actually the only plan drawing and then I just gave a number for the height. I didn't need to produce a section. This is not a claim that architectural drawing is irrelevant. It's just this work hasn't lent itself to be drawn in an architecturally disciplinary fashion. It's not recent, like SHOP did this in 2001 when they did the PS1 and they just



had like one printed thing and then they laid the wooden pieces and then they just put a top. So it is architecture, in my mind, otherwise even architecture adjacent would make me depressed.

Luis Callejas

But I think you're doing landscape, too. But maybe you don't know it.

Faysal Tabbarah

Potentially, yeah, potentially. Architecture/landscape potentially. I would take that. To counter your questions, I fully accept your first critique that maybe I haven't

fully shown you behind the curtain and shown you the Wizard of Oz situation. That hasn't happened. Maybe there's like one image in my office with me chipping at it. But none of this was drawn, so in fact nothing that I've shown has been drawn except for that drawing. I'm maybe countering your question with suggesting that you might've defined the discipline very narrowly in the sense that it needs to be drawn in a particular way. It needs to be represented in a very particular way to become, or to lift itself on the pedestal of architecture. I'm arguing at least this work doesn't lend itself to those kinds of representations. We can have a longer chat.

Ali Ismael Karimi

What's interesting is that in this case the typical argument would be that the value or the measure of architectural work is drawings or concepts that can be sold. Whereas in Faysal's case the merit of architecture is finding utility to the things you produce. So it's almost the different conversation occurs when the question says, "Architecture's the production of drawings," and Faysal replies "Well, the need for architecture is the need to find some sort of utility to my objects, otherwise they're furniture."

Faysal Tabbarah

There are elements of architecture in the work. There's a wall, there's a column, there's a roof, but they haven't fully coalesced or been represented in an architectural way, but the elements of it exist.

Luis Callejas

I also think it's important to talk a little bit about the context, because I think in most part of the world it's acknowledged that the production of drawing, text, Biennales, exhibitions, it's architecture; it's not only buildings. So it's a discipline and profession with a very, very big cultural capital. There have been moments of big crisis where architects just draw and they're still called

architects, they still get professorships, and landscape it's not like that. This is a very interesting contradiction because even though it's a very rich discipline, it's so rich and so necessary in a way that there has not been enough crisis, so the landscape architects have the need, actually, of become producers of something other than parks, boulevards, plazas. It's tricky because if you do something else out of those categories, those landscape architects will not see you as a landscape architect because you're not doing parks, plazas, streets, boulevards. While in architecture, I think we can talk more openly about these blurry boundaries because it's a so much bigger environment. I always tell my students in landscape that the architecture cultural capital is greater but in a way landscape relevance is great and architecture relevance is always struggling, especially recently.

It's also a question of identity for these professionals that can do a lot more than just parks, streets, and boulevards. It always comes to this question that the moment that you don't do that, you are either doing architecture or art. But it's an important moment to also raise the culture capital of landscape beyond gardening, beyond putting trees in certain places. In some countries it's still like that, so you will show up, you will say that you do landscape and they will still think that you know a lot about trees and you just put them in display in the places that architects tell you to put them. That has changed but it's changing very slowly.

Audience Member 4

Thanks for your intriguing presentations. I don't really have a clear cut question, but was just wondering if you could elaborate a bit more on some concepts that your works seem to draw on. It is, in a way, refreshing to attend the talk, which is partially about nature and not even once hear the word Anthropocene, but then it might be quite inevitable to not address it. Luis, you talked about this relationship that you find interesting between things and nature.

Audience Member 4

You treated things and objects quite synonymously. That's a whole other thing, I guess, but you know this relationship between a thingified nature or naturalized things, if that binary at all exists or not, or if it all totally collapses into what Faysal called a material alchemy, which in a way could be the nature itself. In a way in Faysal's terms when you were showing those works, the title was Almost Natural as if there is something totally natural or something not natural at all.

Luis Callejas

The reason I don't even mention Anthropocene is because it should be already in a way absorbed. Like this image, the reason I said that it's important, but it's outdated is because this distinction between these three things doesn't exist any longer. You could say now everything is second nature. There's almost no wilderness left. I guess in some places of the world they would be quite provoked by that idea, but many people think every single atom is somehow touched by human activity. There's also very few places where nature is shaped



just for the sake of contemplation, so I think this image, that was part of a very important moment in time when there is art, there is the world of extraction and how we use the land for the sake of sustaining civilization. And then some wilderness left like the Amazon and the north of Norway and the desert in some places. So the whole thing about Anthropocene is that this separation doesn't exist anymore. That's what exactly makes this distinction between things and plants and trees, maybe not so relevant. Maybe we should be describing the animistic qualities of plants. So maybe it will become very primitive again, and all of the mythologies of certain objects. And I think different cultures will start to produce new readings, but I think we're in an interesting moment where these boundaries are being blurred. I thought the invitation was very provoking, of course, because these images of shaped trees tell us that this is not the first time that design cultures attempt to either make objects that are alive or make objects out of things that are alive. I think that's part, perhaps, of our work, in a way. But where I'm going, is that even mentioning Anthropocene for me has become something almost irrelevant.

Faysal Tabbarah

I would echo that. It's just at this point it's at least within maybe a subset of academia. It's been architecture. It's taken for granted. Obviously we are in Anthropocene, so how do we respond to that? There's also the other end of this, which is like it's become super buzzy. At least, in architecture it's like a buzzword. This is very honest, but a practitioner needs to make a decision, which is if you've been doing that work to begin with, do you jump on the bus, because that bus in five years will die. Or do you continue your capital P project regardless of the bus?

It's important to understand your landscape, no pun intended. It's the first time I make a pun in my life. It's important to understand the landscape while you're framing your work. I think I'm just echoing what Luis is

saying.

Luis Callejas

Well, I think it's also going back to landscape. The other reason why I don't mention is I think it has become very useful for contemporary architects that address the environment or ecological questions. But the very origin of landscape architecture was actually to address the problems of urbanization and issues of pollution. Things that are just recently becoming relevant in architecture or have come and gone since the '70s and it's actually the origin of landscape architecture. It doesn't matter where you look at it; it could be England looking at making parks because they were afraid of the pollution created by industrial revolution, or if it's France opening boulevards because the city was just too problematic, also because of disease. It was the environment driving the creation of a new discipline. That has been continuous with no moments of disruption that these issues have been relevant for landscape architects all over the world. So in a way when you look at it from that point of view, architects are coming a bit late.

Hamed Bukhamseen

What I also want to point out specifically about this image, and I'm glad that Luis, you decided to bring it up, is there is that picturesque quality to it, that there is this foreground, middle ground and an untouched background, which provides this icon for the Anthropocene. The whole idea that landscape as we know it now has been completely constructed and manmade.

Ali Ismail Karimi

The image also reveals a certain moment when you needed things to map your understanding of where you are. Whether it's the domestic landscape, the articulation of clear things that make you understand which room is which room. I think one of the ideas that has been lost in the Anthropocene is that the wilderness is not purely condition of productivity or unproductivity, but it's also a cartographic condition. Moun-

tains are things that allow you to understand where things are located. There’s a quality of navigation that things provide; a river is a thing that either splits terrain or you binds it – it is a vector in the landscape.

Ali Ismail Karimi

There’s an understanding of the world through things and that scales up and down. This image makes you question whether you can say “I no longer need that river, because I can now look up who owns the things on either side of it,” or “I need that thing as a mountain, but because it helps me figure out where I’m going” Because we’ve been able to map, and chart the globe we’ve arrived at a point where we need things again not to navigate but to make sense of the landscape. They have reverted to objects that instead of acting ecologically perhaps they work cartographically, acting as signifiers helping give us a sense of the landscape and nature around us. Hopefully the discussion can continue. Thank you.

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