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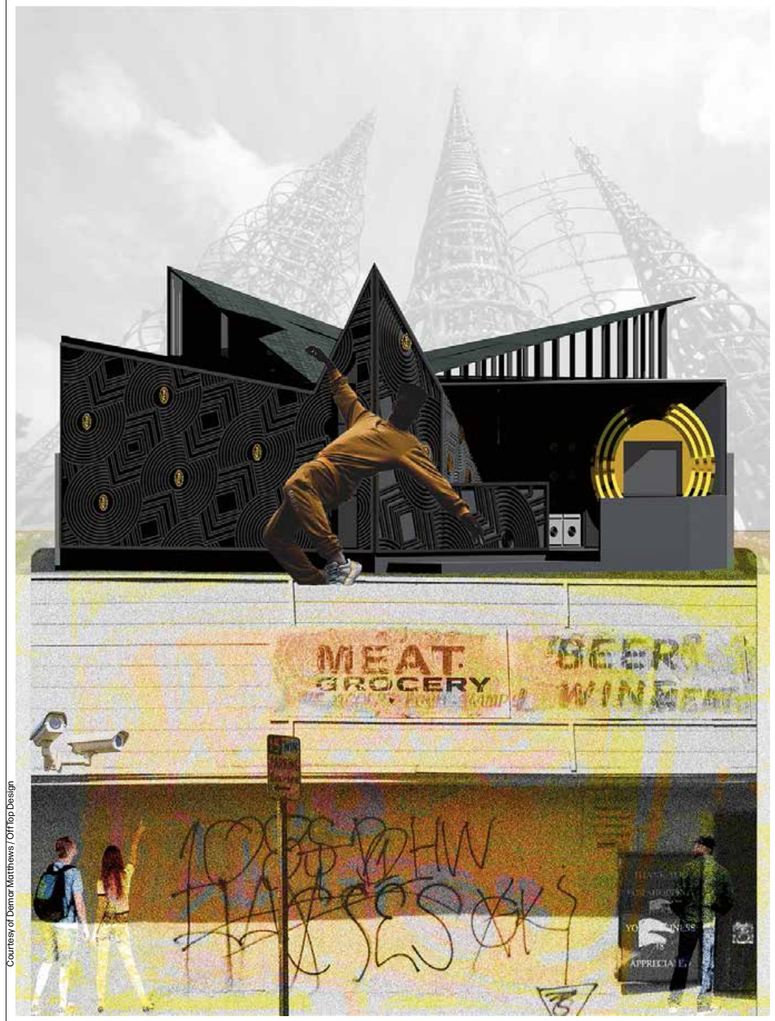
Courtesy of Demor Matthews / OffTopDesign

DIARY 11/20

The black utopia of an African-American Bauhaus

Testo/Text Melissa Daniel



Courtesy of Demar Matthews / OffTop Design

Opening page: the crown-like future house collage by OffTop Design is partly inspired by artists Noah Purifoy, John Outterbridge and Charles Dickson, pioneers of assemblage, black aesthetics and the art education movement in Watts, Los Angeles. These pages: renderings of the Unearthing The Black Aesthetic project by OffTop Design

Vibranium doesn't exist. And the black utopia of Wakanda, where our ancestors made vast technological advancements, superior transportation and infrastructure, and stunning architecture, is a figment of Disney's Marvel Universe imagination. After the American Civil War, African-Americans (AA) established thriving communities like Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1920s and Seneca Village in New York City in the 1820s. Unfortunately, the attempt to masterplan a black utopia was destroyed because of fear and hate. Throughout American history, African-Americans did not have the freedom to choose where to live. Exclusionary zoning and restrictive covenants, for example, excluded blacks from homeownership. What if, after the Civil War, African-Americans continued to thrive in these communities and hired black architects and planners. What if AA Architects make up 30 per cent of licensed architects today instead of the current 2 per cent. If there were no racially motivated barriers, how would the built environment look if there were more AA architects and planners?

Please note that black utopia is not exclusive. Seneca Village in New York City, for example, was an integrated community with European working-class immigrants, all owning property. This blended community worshiped together and children went to the same school. It wasn't until city officials imposed eminent domain rights and forcibly evicted residents to make way for a public park, now known as Central Park. If Seneca Village maintained its racial integration and the community remained intact, opportunities of ingrained stereotypes and inequalities would not prevail. No more color-coded patterns of concentrated black neighbourhoods and suburban schools busing black students. Instead, places like Seneca Village and Black Wall Street would set the precedence of the thriving middle-class communities. The opportunity for wealth building through property ownership for African-Americans would spawn other neighbourhoods across the United States and inspire future African-American architects and planners to design and build. Architecture education plays an important role in creating communities like Seneca Village and Black Wall Street. The foundation of an architecture education, curriculum and history would vastly differ from current accrediting bodies. The examination of indigneous land, ancestral artifacts and infrastructure would be the basis of any design. There are existing architecture practices that were thriving elsewhere. Architect Shelly-Anne Tulia Scott, a graduate from the Caribbean School of Architecture in Kingston, Jamaica, spoke highly of her education which included thinking of creative ways to build from the land and participating in study tours, where she spent two weeks in another country, to learn the ecology, the community and laws of the land in order to design. Shelly-Anne recalls her study tour in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico: "We examined these spaces, the public spaces, and how they dealt with architecture, how architecture embraced the street. And then we actually presented it at the University of Puerto Rico". Study abroad architecture programmes are common, however, the uniqueness comes from Non-European countries. "Being on the study tour, it's almost like I went there and you live the life and the culture before you design something," Scott continues. "Physically examining the site, understanding the existing community, immersing oneself with the inhabitants and recognizing existing cultural characteristics." A diverse architecture accrediting board would recognize that the foundation of any community contains a history of the indigenous. By being more inclusive, the authentic interactions manifest themselves into a cultural mecca of art, architecture and design.

Without racially motivated barriers, the evolution of this cultural mecca forms a new school of thought. Similar to the Bauhaus, the new school encompasses the re-connection to descendants of enslaved Africans to their homelands of Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ghana and other West African countries. This "African-American (AA) Bauhaus" would take lessons from indigenous cultures to form new styles of architecture and design. From Yoruba architecture in Nigeria to Pueblo architecture in the southwestern United States, the importance of preserving oral history takes precedence and the expressions of heritage finds place on stolen land and bodies. Dedicated to ethnicity and one's identity of place/space, the "AA Bauhaus" is an experimental hub that would define AA Architecture and produce the anthology of Who's Who Among AA Architects. As time and styles change, this architecture movement would eventually merge with colonial architecture.

Fast forward to the 30 per cent, Disney's Marvel Wakanda Universe (which now) seems less fictitious. Eliminating racial barriers would increase the pool of architecture typologies, vernacular architecture would be no more and the presumption of safe space is not dominated by social justice or gentrification. Black Utopia is not an Afrocentric style. It is an opportunity to form a more perfect union. A melting pot of equality and free-forming ideas, the black architect can just be an architect, enriched in their own cultural identity and sense of place.

Courtesy of Demar Matthews / OffTop Design

Unearthing the black aesthetic

Text Elena Sommariva

Barely 65 m², *for artists in residence. On a 1,200 m² property, an open-air library and vertical gardens for fruit, veggies, seeds and herbs to offer to neighbours. This is how, in the historic black section of Watts, South Central LA, the concrete utopia of Demar Matthews begins, founder of OffTop Studio and author of the images on these pages. His project is* Unearthing the Black Aesthetic *and, as he himself explains, "is an exploration seeking to further the possibilities of an architectural language deriving purely from black American culture: traditions, values, art, black experience". A participatory approach for a built environment that reflects the inhabitants. "I see the house being a vision of creativity and sustainable black life that is hopefully used as a creative incubator in the community". This is the first in a series, because the model Matthews has in mind is that of the Case study houses, built between 1945 and 1966. "The idea of developing an architectural language through an iterative process, as well as funding being made available to actually build this much-needed work", concludes. Currently, the project is seeking financial support and work should begin in 2021.* **www.offtopdesign.com**

Play distancing

Text Elena Sommariva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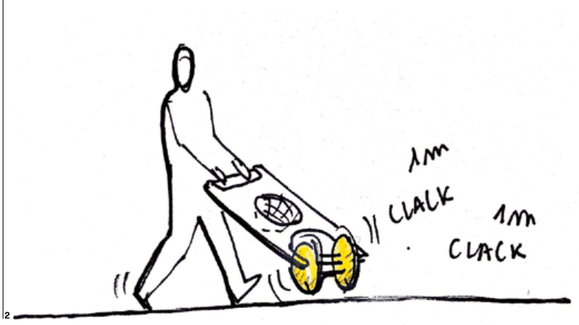
1. The Raccontametro at work. The parts are from a birch plank (100 x 42 cm), CNC cut and can be interlocked. 2. One metre corresponds to a wheel turn 32 cm in diametre. 3. Container. 4-6. The wheels become a stool

"It goes 'clack' every meter. So you can actually hear, listen to the distance". This is how Francesco Bombardi describes his latest innovative design, the Raccontametro, born "to be aware of distance through the dynamics of playing and games and to favour social distancing without imposing it". A pocket in the front helps to contain small objects while, upon reaching the destination, the Raccontametro transforms into a stool. "It's one of the experimental outdoor learning tools adopted by a school in Reggio Emilia as part of the vaster project called Scuola Diffusa," explains Bombardi, an architect and founder of Fab Lab in Reggio Emilia and of the first Fab Lab concept regarding food. The elements come from a single wooden plank and can be interlocked and assembled. The first self-built prototype was later followed by a limited series production with the children's furniture company Play+. The next step? "Digital," replies Bombardi, "to understand coding processes, to be done even when the body moves in space and in nature. And maybe to discover that mathematics can be good for our health."

www.francescobombardi.it



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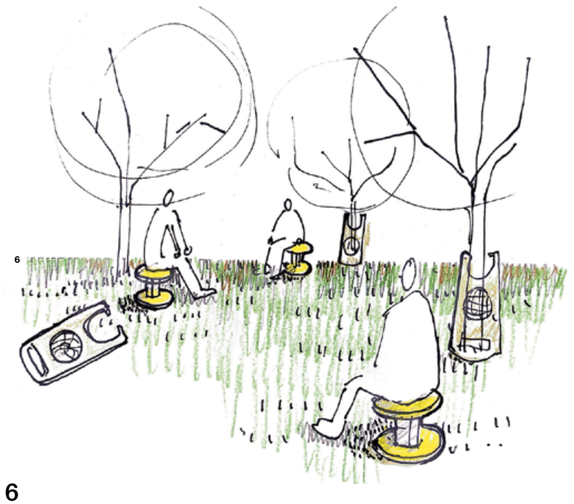
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Fragile architecture of cards

Text Angela Maderna


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© Dirk Pauwels

Throughout his artistic investigations, Thomas Demand challenges the credibility of the medium of photography. In fact, his practice includes the reconstruction of architecture and environments (often taken from other images and without human presences) in paper and cardboard; he then immortalises them through his photos, the sole memory of those models that are later destroyed. But for this new exhibition the fragile paper architectures ("House of Cards" is in fact the title of the show, open until 18 April 2021 in Leuven, Belgium) were not made by Demand; instead, the photographer chose to focus his lens on models created by other contemporary artists, designers and architects. This gave rise to a series of pictures called *Model Studies*, images that concentrate on details and materials and are thus characterised by a considerable tactile and abstract component. Some of these photos portray, for example, architectural models by John Lautner, or even by Hans Hollein or the studio SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa), but also by the fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa and the sculptor Martin Boyce.

www.mleuven.be


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© Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

This page: three of Thomas Demand's works on show at Museum Leuven, Belgium. 1. Installation view at the museum. 2. Thomas Demand, Goldstein #98, Model Studies I, *2011. 3. Thomas Demand,* Model Studies IV, chaffinch


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Cover Design: The cover image is a framed extract of the work THE MIGRANTS HAVE LEFT by artist and graphic designer Sameer Kulavoor. In wake of the pandemic, many parts of the globe, and especially India went into a rushed and harsh lockdown, and in India this resulted in one of the largest and most disturbing distress migration. Countless workers who migrate to the city annually or seasonally for jobs that pay on daily and weekly basis without any job securities or insurances were suddenly stranded with offices, production houses, and all other working places and systems coming to a sudden halt, making it diffcult for survival beyond a few days in cities for the migrant labour. The exodus from cities to homes in villages and the countrside in the midst of summer heat and all forms of transportation suspended amidst the lockdown was devasting and inhuman at all levels. But cities shut themselves up in the name of sanitisation and self-preservation; but can cities preserve themselves after shutting their doors? Can the city and its mega-structures, and bright architetcural trophies, survive its own vanity? This image by Kulavoor is bold and beautiful, the joy of architectonics, colour, and geometry, but it asks of us as planners, designers, and architetcs, as well as our designs, some deeply searing questions; the beauty we find in this image are the lacerations in our progfessional thinking.

Archive. Library. Laboratory...

Text Kaiwan Mehta

With this issue, we enter our tenth annual cycle of *DOMUS India*. The last nine years have seen crucial dialogues and discussions around architecture and the built environment in India. This magazine has indeed played a crucial role in producing the many critical discussion, reflections, and theses on architecture in contemporary India, as well the nature of the contemporary in India vis-à-vis the visual and built environment especially. The contemporary has been a condition of culture and the present and not essential a binary to either history or the modern. Various moments in architecture's history have been brought within the pages of this magazine without any indulgence in hyper-historicism or any romantic dalliance with the past. The past is archive and archaeological, the past is alive and present especially in India, where the last 30 years of national politics has revolved around a monument not in use and its perverse destruction 28 years ago. In a country like India where Indian-ness became a fashionable catchword and the past got reduced to a ready-reckoner of a few elements and cases to be emulated and shabbily reproduced ad-infinitum in the name of being 'authentic' or 'original' or worse, 'local'. In fact, the pages of this magazine have constantly invested in curatorial and research projects that cumulatively would contribute to a history of design and architecture in India.

This magazine has constantly believed that new parameters will have to be set up to understand what the contemporary in architecture in India is; and these parameters would only develop through a series of discussions on projects being built and produced here and now in India. In a way a serious engagement with practice and the building-object - building-landscape is very important as an active process of writing contemporary histories and developing theories for reflection and rejuvenation. It is these reflective constructions and conversations that then contribute a dialogue for practice to reflect upon its processes and productions. In the process, we have refused to employ easy and fashionable traps such as Green Architecture, or Sustainability, or Heritage, or Local and Global. Rather these values in the cultural sphere, especially visual culture, and ideas in architecture have been actively debated and their genealogies explored through projects and writings.

The pages of this magazine are consciously the building of an archive, as well the building of a library, and laboratory. Not only archival material is brought into these pages, but stories, essays, and research accounts are collected and collated to produce missing or denied narratives of architecture. It is a library of three generations of architects struggling through dilemmas in a rapidly changing scenario of politics, economies, patronage, taste, and moralities. Many of these three generations have not even realised the mills of economy and lifestyle they have served as handmaidens; some have realised and covered up with pomposities of words and ideas they have no imagination of; but there are few who have taken the bull by its horns and they are the laboratory of the contemporary. The magazine engages with these latter studios and their projects as active sites of enquiry, challenging them with questions and looking for answers however provisional they maybe.

The magazine hopes to make available this archive, this library, this laboratory to younger architects and students who could learn much from such active dialogues and conversations as we hope to present in the magazine, in the lack of good teaching materials and methodologies, as we struggle to provide our students and colleges with teachers who have imagination and the strength and fire to challenge themselves, and the notions of architecture, the rapidly changing nature of its practice, and questions of ethics and politics. We humbly hope this magazine can rise to this challenge and provide material, thoughts, and probably directions as well. There is no hope if we do not understand and accept the political nature of the architect's role - and is our training of young architects adequate to address what will be the 'role of the architect' in the century that stands beneath our feet already.

Architecture is the living and built environment around us, every object we use and which builds our environment around us is a history of culture and technology, and the very much the politics of how we live, and how we live as a society. Is the architect equipped to work with society, not simply think of providing 'for', but rather work 'with'... aware and engaged with the politics of land and people, technology and relationships? Is the architect political enough? The laboratory that the pages of this magazine are is precisely testing ground, challenging and teasing out newer ideas, and working out newer ways of thinking and seeing, to not only catch up, but to be part of the change that societies and politics are - grounds of thoughts, moral and material imaginations, aesthetics not devoid of ethics, message not without ways of seeing.

We can only humbly hope that we have contributed to the churning in a positive way; not only with matter, but with ways of thinking, and many lenses for seeing, debating grounds of, and for, action. We are grateful to all who challenge us, and contribute to our debates, or nudge us to open newer doors at times, through their provocative projects, well-debated ideas, and well-nourished arguments. We hope to have strength, to keep our convictions going, month after month, page after page...

This image was designed for our October 2019 issue that focussed on Mahatma Gamdhi and what some of his ideas and methods mean to us today, especially in our built fabric and visual world, and our engagement as architects, planners, and designers with the public world. Image design by artist and graphic designer Sameer Kulavoor.

Agenda

In unequal societies, how can we raise basic living standards? In a collapsing natural environment, how can we make planetary changes? In an increasingly globalised world, how do we define local identity? The ability to understand the role of the built environment at ever greater and ever finer scales is a skill our profession depends on for its survival. Saskia Sassen begins our final "Agenda" by considering how the abstract dynamics of the global economy are "rescaling" our spatial units. Despite our "impressive capacity to digitise just about everything", material conditions fortunately still matter. Lucia Allais reflects on the reappearance of the circle as a spatial ordering device in architecture, as well as our heightened consciousness of the perimeter around our bodies. The circle "help[s] us think about the new scaling mechanisms that have become dominant in social and cultural life".

Our increasingly scalar economies?

Text Saskia Sassen

Each phase in the long history of the world economy raises specific questions about the particular conditions that make it possible. One of the key features of the current phase is the ascendance of information technologies and the associated ease with which we can move what are mostly highly abstract forms of capital across the world.

That sharp rise of abstract ways of dealing with the mobility and liquidity of capital led many to argue that cities would become irrelevant to high finance. This sector's vast and impressive capacity to digitise just about everything was seen as eliminating the need of setting up offices in major cities. To bring it "to market", so to speak, would reduce just about everything to an electronic transaction – whether it involved items as diverse as currencies or corn. In that process, we would ultimately barely need big buildings to house the many workers – from experts to cleaners.
But it did not quite work out that way.

There have long been cross-border economic processes – flows of capital, labour, goods, raw materials, tourists. To a large extent these took place within the inter-state system, where the key actors were national states. The international economic system was ensconced largely in this inter-state system. This has changed rather dramatically over the last few decades as a result of privatisation, deregulation, the opening up of national economies to foreign firms, and the growing participation of national economic actors in global markets.

It is in this context that we see a rescaling of what are the strategic territories that articulate the new system. Yes, there has been a partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit. This is partly due to the already mentioned needs regarding privatisation, deregulation and the associated strengthening of global cross-border networks. With these, in turn, come conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units or scales. Among them are subnational actors, notably cities and regions variously enabled to enter the "global economy". The dynamics and processes that get territorialised at diverse scales can in principle be regional, national or global.

One mostly overlooked outcome that took off in the 1990s was the re-localising of a broad range of commercial operations and residential housing in what had become somewhat abandoned city centres. This was partly an outcome of new generations more interested in city life than their parents. But it was also due to the growth of high-level economic sectors operating increasingly at a global scale and needing access to knowledge about a growing range of countries. And needing the information immediately. It would be foolish for the financial sector to argue that it no longer needs the city. It is precisely now, when resiliency and innovation are so important, that finance especially needs the density, proximity, energy and diversity of a city and its bridging capacities.

The rise of finance in major cities did contribute to a kind of rebirth of major cities due to the massive growth of a very broad range of highly specialised firms that service investors. Many of these investors are interested in accessing a vastly expanded range of cities across the world. It is in some ways ironic that this mostly digitised world of transactions actually should also need very material conditions, including buildings, chairs, desks, windows, toilets and so much more.

The first phase of intelligent cities can be exciting. The city becomes a living laboratory for smart urban technologies that aim at handling all the major systems a city requires – water, transport, security, garbage, green buildings, clean energy and more. The work of installing, experimenting, testing, discovering – all of this, and more, can generate innovations, both practical and those that exist mainly in our minds, or when we play at being weekend scientists.
It does raise questions as to whether technology can become a driver of urban innovation, but in that process also have the effect of de-urbanising the city. As technologies allow communication across vast distances, they might have the effect of diminishing, even eliminating, the narrower engagement of citizens with particular urban spaces.

We are just beginning to understand how these electronic capabilities can affect urbanity. In its simplest form this can be the fact that neighbours matter less because you can be in constant connection with good old friends, both those who live a few blocks away and those who are at the other end of the planet.

At its worst I see a shift from open-source urbanism to a managed space where "sensored" can too easily become "censored". One way of putting it is that what stands out is the extent to which these technologies have not been sufficiently "urbanised". That is, they were understood to offer us the advantage of not needing to be close to others. And in many ways this is wonderful for some of us, and in other ways it can get sad for others.

In the case of global cities, the dynamics and processes in play in these abstract financial operations have in fact generated, and continue to do so, massive construction processes concentrated in particular areas of major cities. Most of the firms in play were and are often engaged with highly complex abstract instruments that enable them to move funds in seconds across the globe. But to do so they actually need battalions of experts who in turn need chairs to sit on and whole buildings to actually produce the abstractions that allow them to buy and sell at grand scales and in fractions of seconds. In brief, speed and abstract instruments, both mostly invisible to our eyes, actually require very material and visible buildings to house people, machines, and yes, toilets.

Saskia Sassen is an American sociologist, writer and teacher. She is the Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and a member of its Committee on Global Thought, which she chaired from 2009 till 2015. Her recent books include Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages *(Princeton University Press, 2008) and* A Sociology of Globalization *(W.W. Norton, 2007).*

When circles are scales: notes on the new “small”

Text Lucia Allais

The current pandemic has not, as many commentators have pointed out, forced a whole new social order on the world. Rather, it has exacerbated existing inequities, accelerated some changes while slowing down others, and made manifest many latent, or hidden, aspects of contemporary life. For architectural observers, one of the more puzzling of these phenomena has been the sudden reappearance of the circle, as a spatial ordering device, in the built environment.

As soon as staying two metres (or six feet) apart became a global norm for avoiding transmission of the virus, images of cities dotted with graphic circles began to proliferate. In Brooklyn (USA), where I live, the white perimeters that were painted on a patch of synthetic grass made the Domino Park instantly famous, as if Charles and Ray Eames’s 1977 *The Powers of Ten* had been annotated with a circular stamp. Everywhere, architects found themselves designing with six-foot diameters as they were hired to retrofit the plans of offices, institutions and public spaces. Prosthetic circles have also appeared: in Rome one man wore a cardboard disk around his waist to the market of Testaccio; in Germany street vendors sold hats affixed with cruciform foam spokes; and in the USA “bumper tables” edged by rubber tubes were designed for drunk patrons in open-air bars.

This sudden visibility and physicality of the circle has dramatically reinscribed the human scale in the built environment. But we should be cautious not to see in this a return of Renaissance humanist principles which placed the body and its proportions at the centre of all architecture. When Leon Battista Alberti called the circle “the most perfect geometry” in 1452, setting in motion a centuries-long competition over who could best diagram how the human figure fits, arms extended, into a circle and a square, it was in order to demonstrate that one design system could be extended isotropically outwards, from a small circle to infinity. In contrast, the pandemic circle is not outward-looking but protective, not figural but empty. It may delimit a place, but in no way guarantees the homogeneity of space.

Nor can we say that these ubiquitous circles are a revival of the anthropocentrism of mid-20th-century architects who wanted to “humanise” modernism. When Aldo van Eyck inscribed a circular perimeter in the concrete floor of the municipal orphanage he designed in 1959, encircling the pilotis he had carefully placed at the entrance of each unit, it was in order to create a space of indeterminacy, to show that not everything in architecture can fit in a cellular grid. In contrast, today’s six-foot diameters don’t offer any centring, much less a phenomenology. It is the space between circles that is indeterminate. Witness the orderly randomness that occurs when the two-metre requirement is articulated not as perimeters but as a grid of points – when we arrive in a public space and encounter those adhesive dots telling us to “please stand here”, or “do not sit in this seat”. While this point-based approach implies an infinite extension, in fact its job is to immobilise us, to congeal space. This is why we are so tempted not to stand right there, but to circle the dot, to move off it, if just a little. The circular space of social distance does not proliferate; it locates and alienates at the same time.

Photo Marcelo Winograd / Courtesy of Domino Park

The circle has been instrumental in giving a new legitimacy to the small project as a site for formal exploration that is possibly far-reaching, because it is designed not “*to* a scale” but *as* a scale

The phrase “social distance” was coined by the German sociologist Georg Simmel in 1908, to describe an urban estrangement that was both spatial and psychological. He used it to theorise individual social types, such as “the stranger”, but by the 1930s this typology had been made collective, by Chicago School sociologists, who invented a social model of urban expansion which was graphically represented as concentric circles at the scale of the city. Alienation and other urban phenomena, they argued, spread concentrically across neighbourhoods, from centre to periphery. Today, no such concentric mobility is available to the human – it is the virus that spreads and moves, whereas we stay in our circles or pods, barely close enough to form a social aggregate.

What is the difference, then, between the circle as a form that generates rules and propagates them outwards from a central body or self, and the circle as an enclave in which a person may find herself maximally protected? The answer is that all these pandemic circles are a kind of scale – not in the abstract sense of an absolute measure of space, but in the physical sense of a tool, an instrument of the kind owned by the architect, which travels with bodies and helps adequate for their smallness in the world.

It is all the more intriguing, then, that the circle had already been making an architectural comeback in the last 15 years, as a spatial and visual trope in small- and medium-scaled projects built by architects of the international avant-garde. Diminutive, usually high-end, and often built for temporary display rather than permanent inhabitation, these projects also used the circle as a marker of smallness, but to entirely different ends.

In New York, the proliferation of circles has reminded many observers of the circles that were proposed as part of the Young Architects Program (YAP) at MoMA PS1. In this otherwise characterless site, designing a pavilion around a circle became a way to organise space since at least WW’s 2005 spiral scheme. But WorkAC inaugurated a whole new era of aggregated circular schemes in 2008, when they built a cluster of sonotubes, which worked as planters and canopies. While tightly and rigorously packed, they left the space below remarkably free of spatial prescriptions. More such plans were proposed in quick succession, with circles now varying in size from small to medium, but still more or less calibrated to a handful of bodies. Over the years, the circles became chimneys (MOS), roofs (Jenny Sabin), cones (UrbanLab), oculi (Matter), stacks (The Living) and sprinklers (Andrés Jaque), and the space below was modulated in density. To be sure, this strategy had precedents – as in OMA’s entry to the Downsview Park competition – but they were in the realm of landscape design, where circles domesticate a site on a much larger scale. Reduced to smallness and inflected with elemental functions (water, earth, steam, sun), the circles became associated with a new architectural approach to sampling “nature”. The feat was that the forms were circular, but steered clear of the cyclical iconography, and domed architecture, usually associated with ecological design.

It seems significant that many of these projects were built by a cohort of architects who have sometimes called themselves “pragmatic”, and thus use circular geometries without attaching to them any utopian meaning. Going up in size from the pavilion to the house, we find circles that are implied rather than whole (as in Office KGDVS’s Solo House or Johnston Marklee’s View House). These designers’ proliferation of circles has certainly been facilitated by software, which makes drawing and dividing arcs so much easier. But their interest lies not in geometric complexity. Instead, the “small circle” reveals a concern for controlling form just enough that the result can be authored but normative. Far from spectacle, this is about calibrating form just before it reaches the body, by an extension of human limbs with arcs that was first codified in ergonomics. For example, SO-IL have become experts at strategically deforming the rectilinear – whether by replacing one segment with an arc, or spanning with meshes and scrims between arcs and straight edges.

Adjusting the circle’s ambitions to “small” also has the effect of relieving its metaphysical burden and releasing a lighter, more actionable monumental potential. Höweler+Yoon and Studio &’s circular design for the UVA Memorial was inhabited this spring not by formal rituals but by spontaneous visits, such as activists who stood in a distanced crowd, bleeding out of the perimeter. Even the weighty legacy of the Enlightenment – where circles and spheres evoke cosmic forms – can be domesticated if the right size is achieved. See the enlarged circular picture-window dominating the facade of 6a Architects’s MK Gallery: on the outside the circle takes in, reflects and dominates the suburban landscape; but on the inside its geometry is unceremoniously demoted by intervening floors, windows, mullions, curtains and all.

What these recent projects show is that the circle has been instrumental in giving a new legitimacy to the small project as a site for formal exploration that is possibly far-reaching, because it is designed not “*to* a scale” but *as* a scale.

What do these bespoke experimental projects have to do with circles deployed as graphic stopgaps in a new global public health crisis? Isn’t it clear that what is experienced in one type of circle as alienation exists in the other as a kind of autonomy, or design freedom? Perhaps. But both types of circle help us think about the new scaling mechanisms that

have become dominant in social and cultural life. Whether in biomedical science or in the culture industry, the new "small" is defined not formally but statistically. The passage from small to large is no longer effected through a physical extension in homogeneous space, but rather through complex statistical transfers that don't guarantee a one-to-one accounting. Think of the way scaling "up" happens politically and sociologically – the ways populations are counted, vaccines are distributed, opinions are polled, visual effects are smoothed, markets are predicted, and "nature" is modelled, through algorithms, in all of its unforeseeable, unpredictable, unknowable behaviour.

Circles used to be a way to create worlds. Now they are a mode of sampling the world. As such, they also depict the rise of a statistical thinking, wherein a model is not a scaled-down copy of something, but a machine for transforming something small into something vast. In this paradigm, power goes to those who "design" samples, which are fed as input. To draw a circle is not to point to the presence of a point at the centre, but to increase the probability of catching at least something inside a sample perimeter. That may well be part of the small circle's visual appeal today: it captures not presence but probability.

Lucia Allais is an architectural historian and critic who writes about the global culture industry, the history of theory, international politics, and contemporary design. Her first book is Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the 20th Century, 2018. *She is associate professor at Columbia University, a founding member of the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative, and an editor of* Grey Room.

This sudden visibility and physicality of the circle has dramatically reinscribed the human scale in the built environment. But there's no return of Renaissance humanist principles

Photo: Johan Dehlin

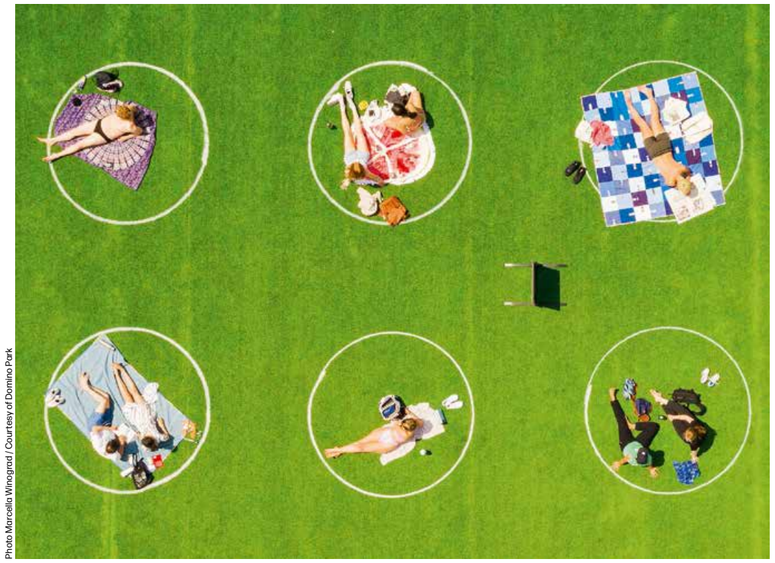


Photo Marcella Wingrad / Courtesy of Domino Park

**Page 14 and left: Domino Park in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, USA. On 16 left: May this year, white chalk circles were drawn on the carpet of synthetic grass to help the public respect social distancing during the pandemic.
top: the auditorium for film projections at MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, UK, expanded by 6a architects in 2019. Its grand circular window overlooks the City Club, a project by the artists Gareth Jones and Nils Norman for the public spaces around the building along Midsummer Boulevard**

Practice

Continuing on from our earlier issues, we are using the "Practice" section to open the floor and ask fellow architects to respond to the question: what is next for architecture? Over the last nine months we have tried to provoke a reflection on the ways in which the architectural profession can or should engage with the everexpanding issues of social inequality and environmental degradation – brought more sharply into focus by the pandemic – in our world today. This has forced us to reassess the agency of the architect, the principles of practice, the diverse range of qualities encompassed in built projects and the affinities between them. There are lessons to be found in every location, at every scale and across generations, not to mention in the rich history of our field and other disciplines too. How can we align large issues with the realities of professional practice? Is there evidence that the nature of practice is evolving? Where should it lead to? In these final two issues of the (international) guest editorship we want to keep this conversation going. The wide-ranging contributions over the following pages address these questions in both pragmatic and philosophical ways, giving us hope that there is still a vital and fulfilling role to be played. In the context of this conversation and these questions, we specially visit two projects by architect Revathi Kamath, from our archives, as a tribute to an architect from India who really expanded the role of the architect and the reach of architecture through her practice and her beliefs in certain processes of working and thinking; Revathi Kamath passed away in July this year and there remains much for us to learn from her projects, her ways of working, and the way she approached architecture.

Toshiko Mori – Toshiko Mori Architect

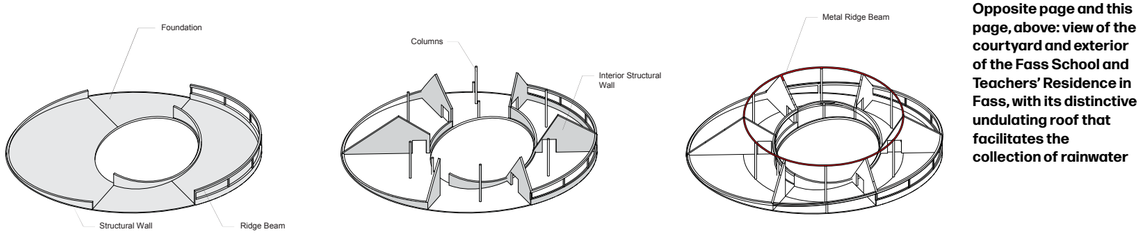
Architecture for resource stability

Our two projects in Senegal – the Thread Artist Residency and Cultural Center in Sinthian, and the Fass School and Teachers' Residence in Fass – were speculative propositions for the potential of architecture to help stabilise resource-scarce communities. Instead of imposing the idealistic formalism of modern and contemporary architecture based primarily on an understanding of Western civilisation, we sought to observe and understand the ethos and essence of West African community culture. Both projects are located in remote eastern Senegal in underserved communities known for high levels of migration due to a lack of jobs and resources. Obviously, an architectural solution cannot resolve all societal problems, but with these projects we tried to focus on one design aspect that could provide immediate relief to the community: securing the community's water supply. This modest proposal has the potential to produce a chain reaction for a variety of positive outcomes.

In Sinthian, the local aquifer had dried up due to climate change and there was no existing tradition of using cisterns to collect rainwater. The roof design of Thread optimises rainwater collection during the rainy season to sustain the community through the dry season. Its undulating roof geometry directs rainwater into sloped canals which empty into covered reservoirs, allowing the building to satisfy one third of the community's

Photo Iwan Baan

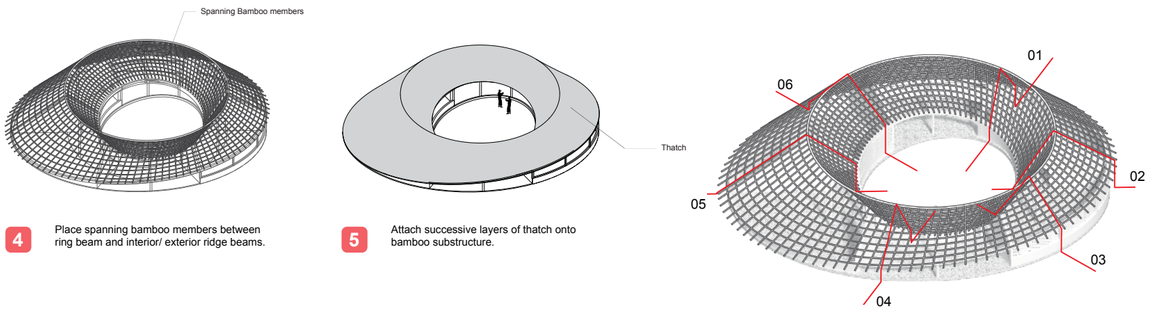
Photo Iwan Baan



1 Pour foundations, build structural walls with peremeter beam and spaced brick opening.

2 Build interior structural walls and columns.

3 Attach ring beam to top of column and structural wall.



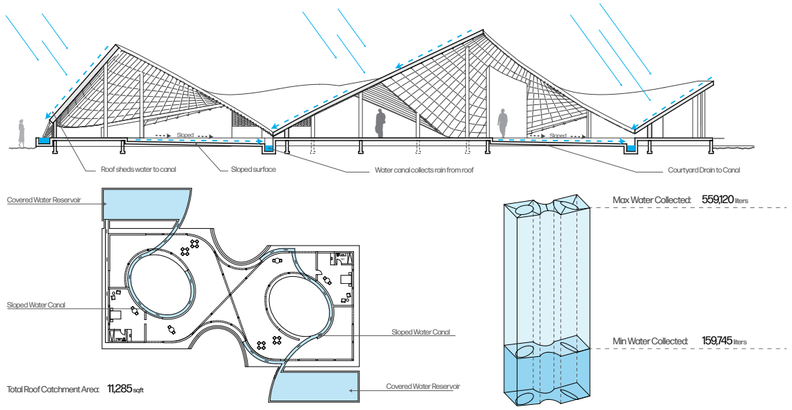
4 Place spanning bamboo members between ring beam and interior/ exterior ridge beams.

5 Attach successive layers of thatch onto bamboo substructure.

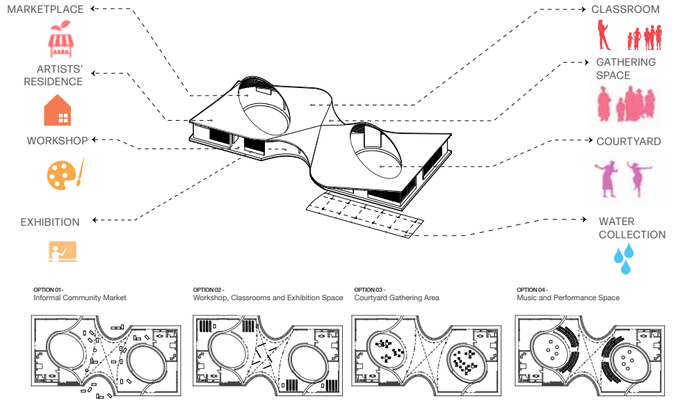
Assembly process of the Fass School and Teachers' Residence

Axonometric drawing of the Fass School and Teachers' Residence

Opposite page and this page, above: view of the courtyard and exterior of the Fass School and Teachers' Residence in Fass, with its distinctive undulating roof that facilitates the collection of rainwater



Rainwater collection system of the Thread Artist Residency and Cultural Center



Usage diagram of the Thread Artist Residency and Cultural Center

Opposite page, bottom: community use of the open-air spaces sheltered by a thatched roof at the Thread Artist Residency and Cultural Center in Sinthian. This page: exterior view of the complex complex and recycling of materials for the flooring. Due to the acute dryness of eastern Senegal's climate, the project was designed with an undulating geometry that allows rainwater to be channelled into cisterns

All projects and materials
© Toshiko Mori Architect

water needs. In four years, the building's source of water has gradually given rise to an agricultural collective mostly operated by women of the village. Thanks to the cisterns' proximity to Sinthian, these women no longer have to travel long distances to obtain water, and the girls who previously undertook the arduous daily voyage now have time to attend school. The garden's crops have given the women a means to provide for their families while helping to improve overall levels of nutrition.

At the Fass School (the region's first secular elementary school) the roof was similarly designed to collect water. This has spawned another women-led agricultural collective, which manages a large vegetable garden adjacent to the school despite being in one of the country's driest areas. This season, abundant rainfall has allowed the women to double the size of their garden to two hectares, just one year after its opening. Such outcomes were not preconceived architecturally in the design stage. But they illustrate how a design feature can initiate a cyclical reaction with diverse community benefits.

The designs of both Thread and Fass take the well-being of the community as the primary design motive. Both projects were built next to pre-existing clinics that promote public health. Focusing our design efforts to ensure the buildings collect rainwater has allowed them to become essential infrastructure within their respective communities. In addition to their original programmes, this creates new economic opportunities within the community while providing stability and water security.

The architectural forms of both Thread and Fass were inspired by ancient vernacular Senegalese impluvium huts, the essential family compound. In collaboration with Schlaich Bergermann structural engineers, we conducted extensive research into local material usage and construction techniques to arrive at final geometries. In essence, we demonstrated that the African hut structure comprised of mud bricks, bamboo and a thatched roof can be applied at the larger scale of a public programme without importing foreign techniques or materials. With cast-in-place concrete columns and foundations, as well as small pieces of steel added to the bamboo structure, we were able to create a sweeping roof of substantial size for public use. Both buildings utilised local materials, local craft traditions and local builders in order to work within the existing palette of local building practice. This has permitted the community to take ownership of the building by eliminating their reliance on foreign expertise for maintenance and repair.

In both buildings we oriented the courtyard aperture to optimise ventilation and create a pleasant airflow. The thatched roof creates a stack effect by letting hot air rise and escape gradually through its porous yet dense assembly, resulting in interior temperatures that are substantially lower than those outside. In the case of the Fass School, the thatched roof is a dramatic improvement on the corrugated metal roofs of government-mandated school buildings, which can make school lessons inaudible during the heavy rains of the wet season and unbearably hot during the summer. This simple delivery of climatic comfort by design is enough to attract villagers to Thread and to entice students to come and stay in the school building at Fass.

Photos Iwan Baan

Photo Iwan Baan

One design feature can initiate a cyclical reaction with diverse community benefits

© Toshiko Mori Architect

Revathi Kamath, Kamath Design Studio

So the object building will transform society?

Text Suprio Bhattacharjee

Not always is a tabula rasa necessary for the making of thought-provoking architecture and evocative spatial narratives. The challenges of working within 'the existing' outnumber by far those that one encounters on a more-or-less blanket site. I remember engaging with students and professionals who assume that for an architect, the greatest sense of (supposed) artistic freedom comes from the ability to shape the 'object' unencumbered – to conceive of the building 'completely' without the constraints of an imposed physical structure. In fact I have often argued with professionals and students to insist that, well, you are just plain wrong. A glance at contemporary architecture in historic contexts shows one what the adaptive re-use and the rehabilitation of older buildings can do for the discourse of architecture. So much so that the last chapter of the European Union Prize for Architecture[1] celebrated what by now has become a significant genre within architectural production by awarding its top honours to projects that masterfully served to rehabilitate existing buildings. Closer home, we still need to see a significant developing culture in terms of renewing buildings – one remembers the dramatic transformation of the CJ Hall in South Bombay into the four-storeyed National Gallery of Modern Art by Romi Khosla in 1996, as well as the expansion of historic buildings by Brinda Somaya, again in Bombay.

But not always does the older fabric need to be 'historic' or necessarily 'significant' for it to be saved and adapted for re-use. Often it just makes economic sense to do so. Revathi Kamath's Tal Chhapar project is an example of this. But that is perhaps only the smallest aspect of significance in what can be seen as an important programme of transformation that not only deals with the physical aspect of the 'building' but also with the context within which the buildings assume their presence. This project is a manifestation of all the 'other' processes that entail the making of the building, where the actual 'making' of it becomes the means to an end – the crucial final gesture within a web of interdependency and socio-economic concerns that leaves us with lasting impressions in terms of the larger ramifications of building practice and continuity of craft traditions, with a renewed understanding of our role as architects and our corresponding social obligations within a post-colonial, post-global nation.

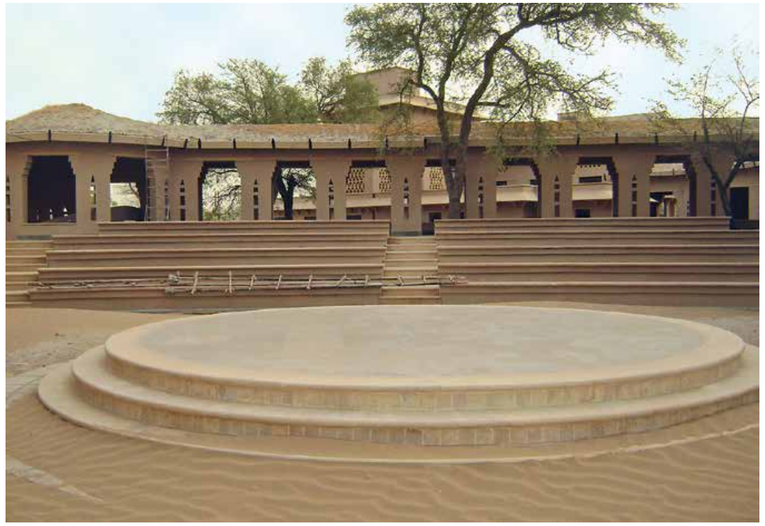
Let us begin with the setting. Tal Chhapar in Rajasthan (Tal means 'flatland' in local lingo – the region is a Savannah-like grassland – and Chhapar is the name of an adjacent settlement – literally the 'flatlands of Chhapar') is a 715-hectare blackbuck antelope reserve in northern Rajasthan carved out in the 1960s of what used to be the hunting grounds of the Maharaja of Bikaner. Encroachment into their habitat (the sodium content in the soil and the availability of fresh water draws them to this region) has meant that human-animal interactions have increasingly become violent – with a few of the animals killed due

A programme that understands the relationship between animal survival, human culture and folklore, while also becoming a driver for socio-economic upliftment is translated into architecture, its language and systems of construction

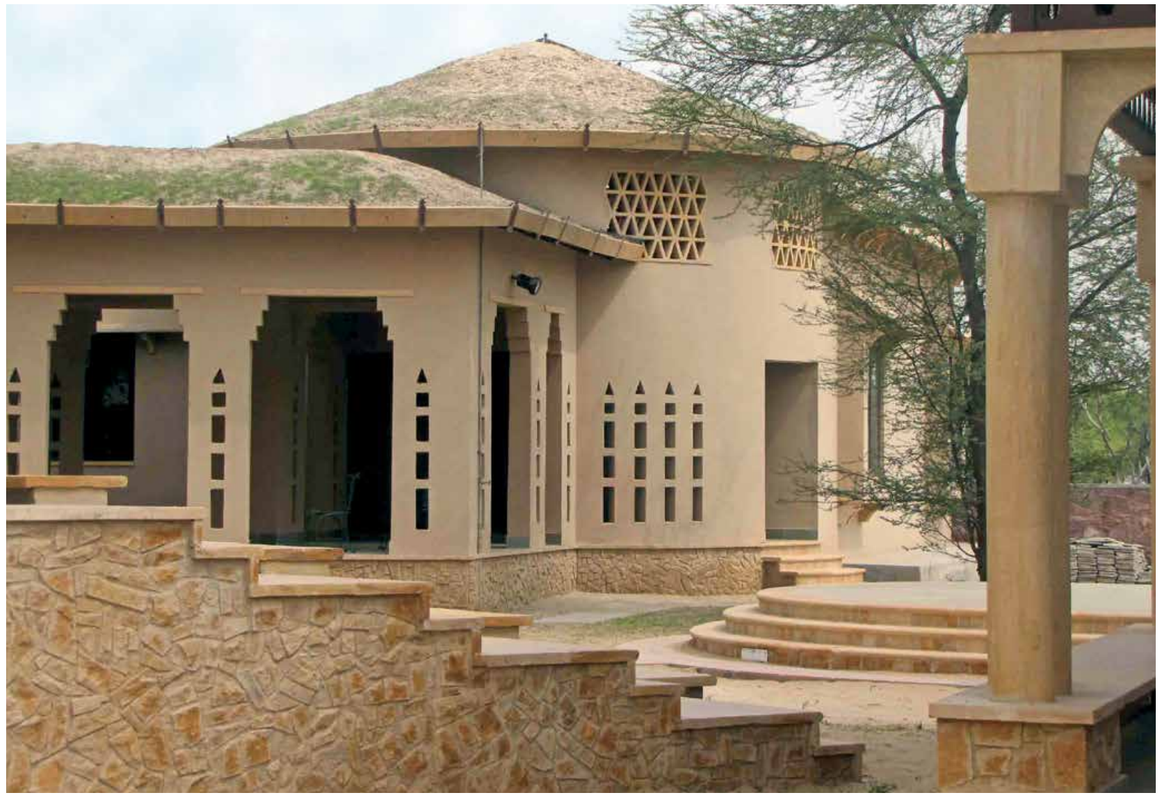
The building is located in a 715-hectare Savannah-like grassland in northern Rajasthan – home to blackbuck antelopes

to their straying into cultivated land. This is in stark contrast to the traditional symbiotic relationship shared by local communities with the animal. The antelope wanders freely within inhabited settlements, and millennia of human contact has meant that these proud and elegant animals do not shirk away from people.

A transformative programme was needed – that would not only ensure the animal's survival and its continued intertwining with human culture and folklore, but also become a driver for socio-economic upliftment and women's empowerment. A nodal agency was established to cohesively plan and actualise an integrated strategy that involved various Government departments and the local administration. The focus was on achieving an ecological balance that would enable the creation of sustainable livelihoods. Enlightened political leadership has meant that a participatory process ensued wherein all stakeholders such as the bureaucrats, local panchayats, engineers, local politicians, social workers and the architects themselves (as shapers of the physical environment) became involved in structuring a future for the place.



The buildings are so designed to be open and porous as compared to the earlier buildings, and they constantly are in dialogue with the landscape and the surrounding environment



The buildings sport a graft of stonework that has added a layer of 'localisation' as well as functioning as 'vents' to ensure pressure equalisation during frequent dust storms

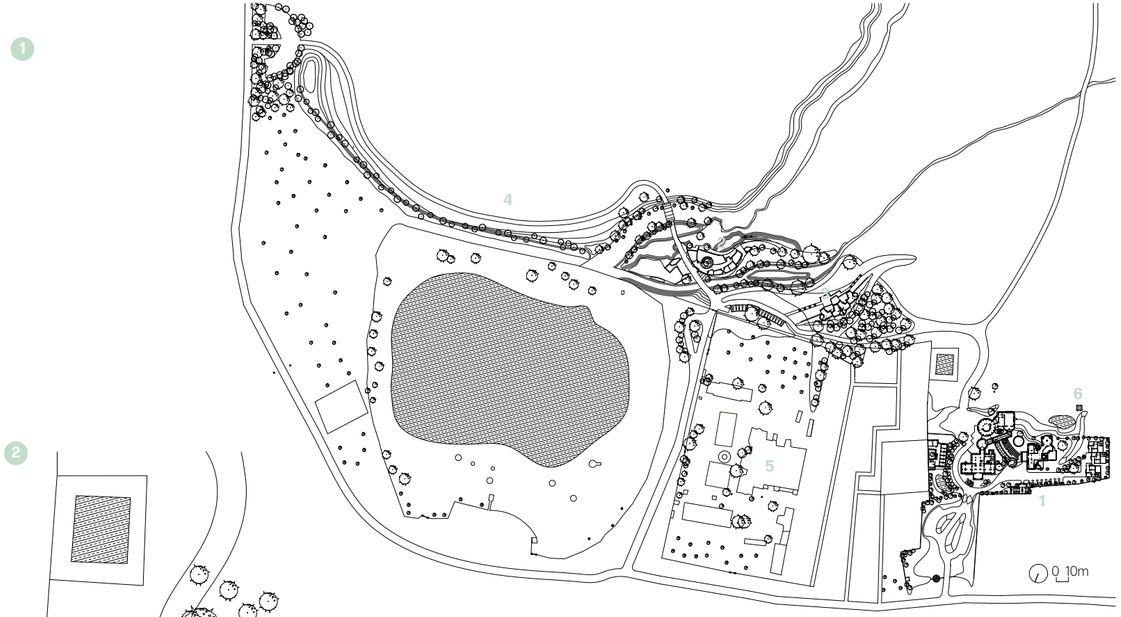
One of the first tasks for the architects involved the outlining of an ecological programme and masterplan for the entire sanctuary. A highway that runs adjacent to the sanctuary will be shifted in the long term, as would be salt pans that have caused an increase in the acidity of the soil. The edge between the sanctuary and the adjacent inhabited areas was also in dire need of definition, as the antelope was being attacked by predators such as dogs and foxes. A long-term strategy of replacing the boundary wall with a traditional dola or a berm with thorny bushes has been chalked out.

The building programme became intertwined with a programme for women's empowerment as well as the larger ecological programme. The first tasks involved the conversion of four disparate and disjoint extant buildings strewn across the landscape into a cohesive facility with a multi-dimensional functional programme involving an Interpretation Centre as well as Tourism-related facilities and accommodation, in addition to spaces for community welfare and vocational training programmes. This act of reprogramming and transformation of the building's physicality is a striking aspect of the project. Formerly closed and confined buildings have now become open and porous – with the 'insular boxes' now transformed into airy chambers for the free use of the surrounding populace.

The buildings now sport a graft of stonework that has added a layer of 'localisation' as well as functioning as 'vents' to ensure pressure equalisation during frequent dust storms. The most remarkable of these grafts is a three-storey high triangulated jaali that replaces former closed walls. Revathi Kamath sees the triangle as a translation of her experience with the black bucks – the patterns formed in the landscape by the animals and their antlers as well as the patterns inherent in local crafts that come from black buck folklore. These jaalis, built completely out of local sandstone form a visually intricate but robust and sturdy iconographic image – and seem more abstract in comparison to the other stone features that are derivative of traditional forms – such as the chajjas and their bracket supports. But the architect does not see this as 'replication' – a term that she believes connotes to extinct cultures. Here, in contrast, the building traditions and craft cultures are still 'alive', she argues, and thus needs to be seen within the framework of continuity of aesthetic values and native intelligence.

Stone is used in more dramatic fashion for the newer extensions and additions to the project such as the covered verandahs – distinctly as sandstone lintels and hexagonal vents that float within the matrix of plastered brickwork[2]. The brickwork is articulated in minute detail – forming delicate corbels to support the sandstone lintels whilst also being built as a 'jaali' or massive screen – with a repetitive pattern of openings. A similar 'visual' character also pervades the architect's own house but she discards this as an 'idea' – rather choosing to regard it as a 'functional' strategy to mitigate a harsh climate without compromising on thermal mass and natural ventilation. Small openings within massive walls ensure that the sand is deposited outside the walls during dust storms as the air forces itself through the narrow openings[3] – a strategy that, now scientifically proven, has been adopted by native wisdom for centuries.

1



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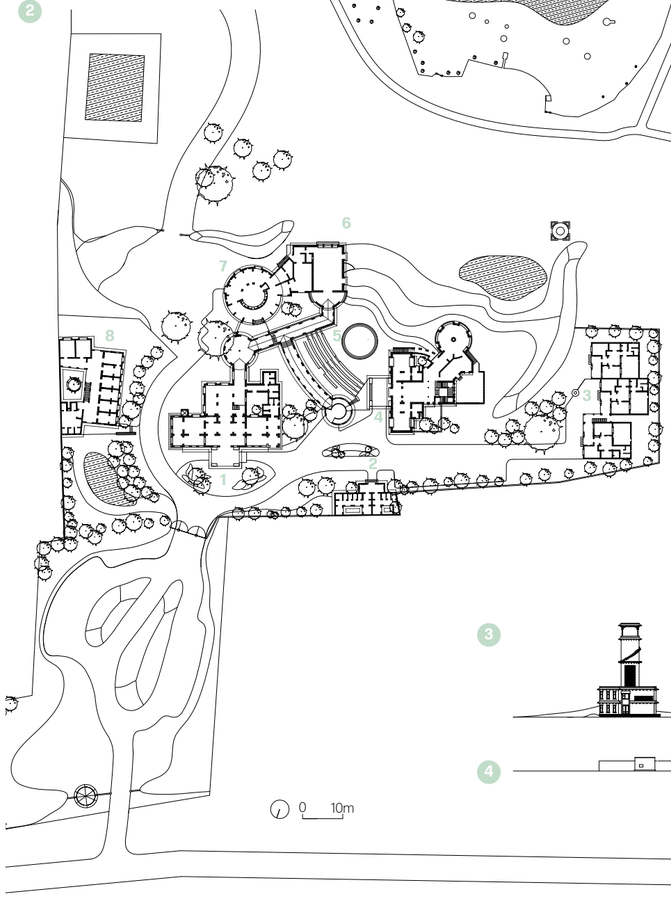


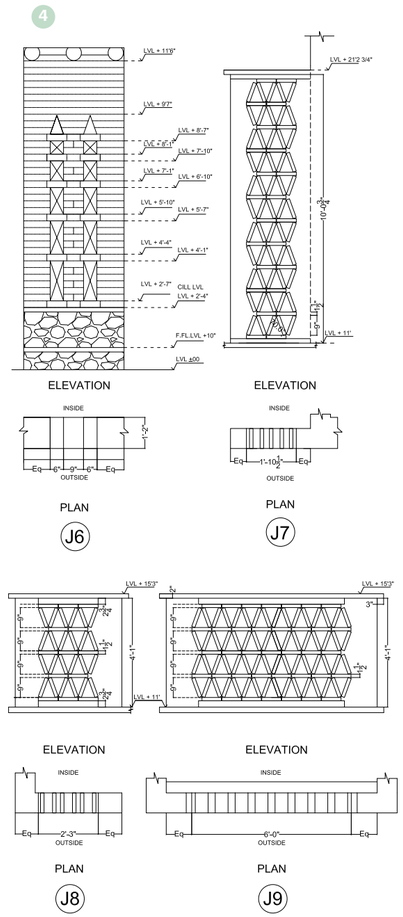
- 1 D.F.O's Office and Interpretation Centre
- 2 Public Toilets
- 3 Staff Housing
- 4 V.I.P Guest House
- 5 Amphitheatre
- 6 Seminar Room
- 7 Crafts Shop and Cafeteria
- 8 Forest Rangers' Quaters

3

4

- **1 Phase One**
  D.F.O Office
  Interpretation Centre
  Public Toilets
  Staff Housing
  V.I.P Guest House
  Amphitheatre
  Seminar Room
  Craft's Shop
  Cafeteria
  Forest Rangers' Quaters
- **2 Phase 2**
  New Interpretation Centre
- **3 Phase 3**
  Guest Rooms
- **4 Phase 4**
  Development and landscaping of Interface
- **5 Phase 5**
  Heritage Resort
- **6 Phase 6**
  Watchtower and water Tank
- **7 Phase 7**
  Hides

4



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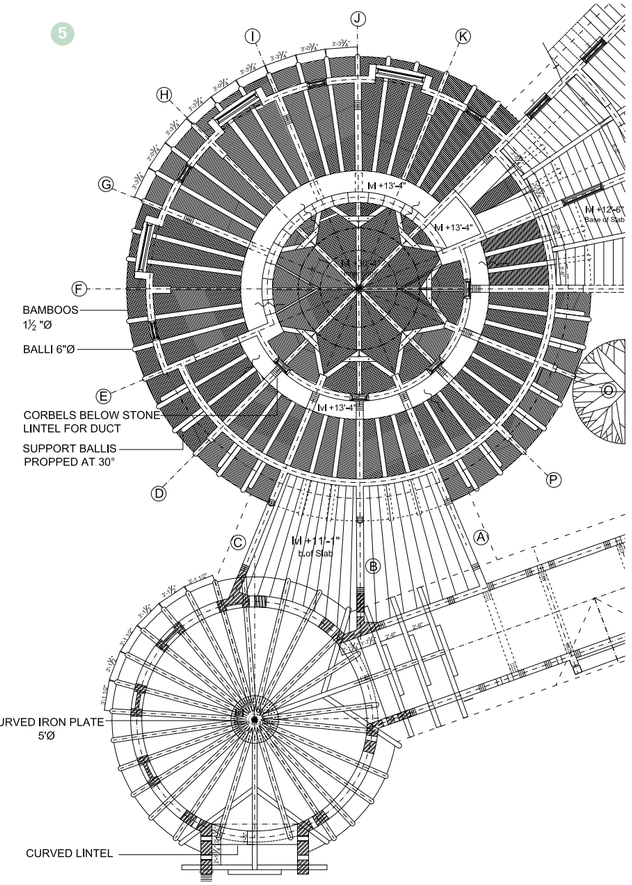


TAL CHHAPAR

Design
Kamath Design Studio

Principal Architect
Revathi Kamath

Design Team
Revathi Kamath, Shruti Soni, Smriti Chauhan, Jaskeerat Sangra, Satendar Garg

Civil Contractor
Bhageerat Prajapati

Carpentry
Bhageerat Prajapati

Client
Government of Rajasthan

Location
Chhapar, Churu District, Rajasthan

FACT BOX

Project Area
7150000 m²

Built Area
350 m²

Construction Phase
2006-2011

DRAWINGS

1 **Site plan**
2 **Floor Plan**
3 **North Elevation**
4 **North Elevation (old)**

DRAWINGS

4 **Jaali details**
5 **Ceiling details**

The architect sees the triangles in the jaali as a translation of her experience with the black bucks – the patterns formed in the landscape by the animals and their antlers as well as the patterns inherent in local crafts that come from black buck folklore

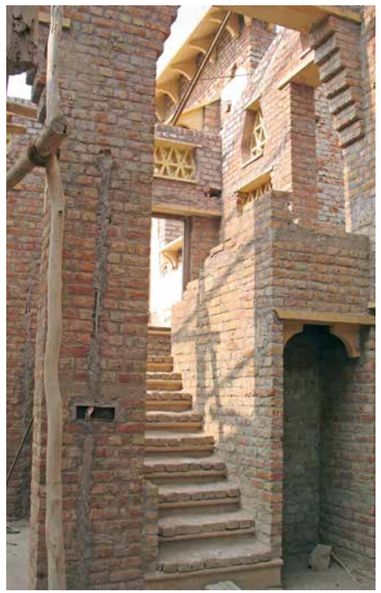
The 'neo-jhumpas' boast of an articulated triangulated steel frame that holds up a bamboo roof finally decked out in concrete. Above: A layer of soil and grass imparts thermal mass to the roof, thus lowering indoor temperatures

Thus the interior spaces are always vented, but kept comparatively free of sand particles to a great extent.

The new additions also feature circular rooms in the form of the 'jhumpa' – a traditional desert typology in the region with thatched roofs. Here these 'neo-jhumpas' boast of an articulated triangulated steel frame that holds up a bamboo roof finally decked out in concrete. A layer of soil and grass imparts thermal mass to the roof, thus lowering indoor temperatures. The use of renewables and materials sourced locally means that the building has an exceptionally small ecological footprint. Wastes were used too – the stone comes from leftovers after slab-cutting from a nearby sandstone quarry and bricks from adjoining structures was recycled. The overall small dimensions of the stones used in the grafting exercise as well as the new jaalis meant that this was possible. This is evidence of a deep consciousness within the architects to 'make do with what is available' such that the act of building does not necessarily become

This page: the spaces within the facility – such as the amphitheatre, the open verandahs linking the buildings, the crafts shops as well as the accommodation facilities ensure that the local population is supported and local women are trained in a number of crafts and vocations

Opposite page, bottom: sandstone lintels and hexagonal vents float witin the matrix of plastered brickwork. Top: small openings within massive walls ensure that the sand is deposited outside the walls during dust storms



the energy-intensive act of destroying the landscape, but rather becomes an active agent in reducing ecological damage.

What is also remarkable is the manner in which the architecture becomes an active agent in the larger aims of economic welfare and wealth-distribution (and generation) programme that is part of the project. 70% of the project budget was spent towards the fees of local craftsmen in the building of this facility. The architecture is 'close to being hand-made'[4]. The spaces within the facility – such as the amphitheatre, the open verandahs linking the buildings, the crafts shops as well as the accommodation facilities ensure that the local population is supported and local women are trained in a number of crafts and vocations such that they can earn a livelihood. In this manner, the preservation of an endangered species has become the fulcrum in the restoration of the man-nature balance within a region, as well as a driver for economic and social transformation.

It is not often that architecture can become the mechanism of socio-economic engineering – but this project shows the dormant possibilities inherent within the act of building and its capacity to 'really' transform the lives of surrounding populations as well as making far reaching statements on sustainability and support of local crafts traditions – that in turn becomes the means of preserving cultural wealth as well as economic wealth distribution, besides relevancing these for our current times – in a country at the crossroads between advanced technologies and the persistence of vast craft traditions. What is important is that this project, much like the 'Modernist' programme, seeks a social transformation – but whereas the latter focussed on homogenisation and the adoption of a technological future, here this spirit is made relevant by contexting it to a specific purpose and celebrating diversity and heterogeneity, yet adding a layer of coherence and solidarity[5] of expression to a set of former buildings that stood at odds with their context. What is even more remarkable is that all this has been achieved within the framework of an archaic Public Works Department.[6] But it is also a testament of the latent skill and drive of the few intelligent individuals who are lodged within this behemoth[7] – as well as the finery in execution that is possible within this system.

This building is a direct outcome of the architect's deep-seated empathy and pragmatism[8] of approach with respect to building. As has been established in an earlier essay on the practice's Tribal Museum, the architecture is intentionally self-effacing and devoid of the 'architect's voice' – a telling 'anti-monumentalist' reminder in our current age of 'starchitecture' that it is not always

necessary to build an expensive, striking but alien 'object-building' to transform a context and focus public attention. Sometimes it can be done with humility and without much fuss. But with the approval, consent and participation of those for whom the piece of architecture is made for in the first place. And for this perhaps the architect's premier task is to prepare the ground for an 'appropriate' building to be built when the time is right – by instigating an "authentic set of relationships that create the right environment for architecture.[9]"

Suprio Bhattacharjee
Architect

1. See the 2011 edition of the Mies van der Rohe Prize. The winner was David Chipperfield's remarkable transformation of the Neues Museum, Berlin, Germany; with the Emerging Architect Special Mention going to a young Spanish practice Bosch.Capdeferro for their fantastic and aptly titled Collage House. Both these buildings stand at the opposite end of the 'object-architecture' trend
2. Mud plaster was not used as it is 'not legal' as per PWD norms – the final building has the appearance of the mud-plastered walls of the buildings in the region
3. This is also true for the triangulated grafted stone jaalis – the 'Venturi Effect' as it is known also lowers the temperature of the air gushing in – thus ensuring a significantly lower air temperature
4. A true 'handmade' building can be seen in those by the Aga-Khan Award winning Barefoot Architects in Rajasthan, as well as another acclaimed Aga Khan Award winner – the Handmade School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh
5. Here 'solidarity' is expressed with the people and the land – and not as an external influence at 'imposing' an overarching visual order
6. The architect described how it was 'not legal' to use mud plaster according to the PWD
7. The architect has deep regard for the PWD engineers who were instrumental in executing the project and understanding its conceptual aspects in terms of continuity of heritage traditions and local consciousness
8. Here the pragmatism is the polar opposite of what has been termed a radical 'pragmatism' within contemporary architectural cultures of the Netherlands and lately, Denmark. Whilst those are driven by a bare-bones utilitarianism and adoption of industrial components and techniques, here, within a less-industrialised context, one refers to the native wisdom and indigenous knowledge of the local populace
9. Conversation with Revathi Kamath on 10 March 2013. This was said in context to an unfinished building within the Tal Chhapar context

Revathi Kamath, Kamath Design Studio

Debating tactile engagements

Text Suprio Bhattacharjee

“So you wanted a white box?”

We live in a country where our very relationship with the nation’s original inhabitants is contentious. Labelled ‘tribals’ by colonial settlers and socially victimised by the caste-system, these communities have, over thousands of years, evolved a way of life that stems from a ‘one-ness’ with the land and the direct experience of the life-world[1]. This engenders a collective consciousness, a ‘living heritage’ that is manifest in their daily rituals, their social customs, and the objects and patterns that enliven their everyday – what we label as their ‘art’.

As such, this art is representative of, and a product of, the values and beliefs of the community, and not of the individual. This is not in the manner of art as understood today – ‘art for art’s sake’. Far from being the intellectualised ‘object’ created in isolation for display in a clinical environment devoid of context (in the manner of ‘modern’ art), tribal art is intertwined with everyday rituals and living. It becomes inseparable – forming the tools and mechanisms of everyday existence, whose meaning and sense of purpose derives from the very cultural context it has been evolved within. As John Berger explores[2], the very meaning of such specific works can be lost by a distortion of context. The act ‘re-contexting’ or mere ‘replication’ would thus make us wonder ‘how its (the art work’s) unique existence (should be) evaluated and defined in our present culture’[3] such that they do not become objects of ‘bogus religiosity’[4] There is an understanding of the inherent schism in this presumably ‘accommodative’ view – in the persistence of the ‘us’ and ‘them’. At its worst, this leads to the common prevalence of perceiving these ‘objects’ as exotic relics. This is a challenge any museum dedicated to anthropological studies would need to engage with, and as a container of the museological programme, so too the architecture.

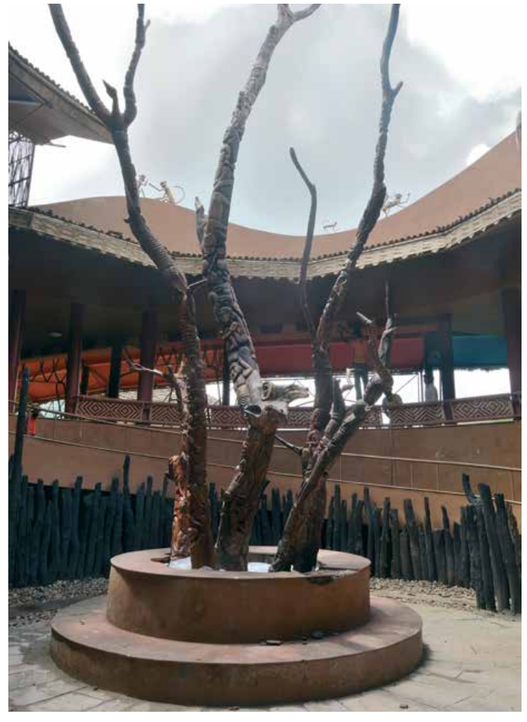
A new museum building dedicated to the tribal heritage of Madhya Pradesh in Bhopal seeks to engage with this challenge. Designed by Revathi Kamath of Delhi’s Kamath Design Studio, this is not the usual snazzy white-box museum in chic designer wear. Far from offering a reductivist environment with discreet objects in a hermetic environment, this building intends to be a heterotopia[5] of polychromatic textural delight – full, ‘messy’ (as opposed to the white-box), lived-in and through its adaptable and transformative nature, representative of a ‘living heritage’ – a space in which the architect hopes to embody the ‘spontaneous energy and innate wisdom’[6] of these communities. In opposition to a container for the display of lifeless relics past their time, this museum intends to be ‘alive’.

Conceived as a ‘tribal hamlet’ with an enfilade of raised pavilions anchored off an arced processional route, the project negotiates a substantial gradient and allows users to explore its spaces in an uninhibited fashion. The building becomes an experience in itself and has a sense of remarkable permeability. It is open to the elements, making it a part of the museum’s experience. The formal gestures are ‘vaguely familiar’ and non-alienating – a significant aspect. The lower level is conceived of as a generous verandah offering spaces for workshops conducted by craftsmen and artisans, defined

Conceived as a ‘tribal hamlet’, the Museum of Tribal Heritage in Bhopal designed by Kamath Design Studio opens up a range of questions regarding architectural language, collective consciousness as well as cultural representations. The building is designed to emphasise the experience of ideas and visual figures of speech through a built geography that is ‘vaguely familiar’ and non-alienating

A view of the entrance courtyard. The upper verandah is accessed through ramps that encompass generous courtyards. The route takes the visitor past courtyards between the pavilions on one side, while the other side overlooks a focal amphitheatre

View of the gallery courtyard from the lower level corridor



by the superposed structural order of steel columns and castellated steel beams that support the building volumes floating overhead. The scale of this space is intimate and allows for a sense of 'tactile engagement'. This verandah becomes a belvedere, offering views to the landscape beyond. The upper verandah traces the same arc as below, accessed through ramps that encompass generous courtyards. The route takes the visitor past courtyards between the pavilions on one side, while the other side overlooks a focal amphitheatre. The pavilions are large shed-like spaces, with few openings for natural light.

These spaces, as seen when vacant, strike one as dark and mysterious, in contrast. Revathi Kamath explains that these are intentionally dimly-lit to allude to 'dark spaces that are part of the tribal consciousness'. As a broader strategy though, one can see this connect to an innate stream of consciousness in eastern spatial thinking[7] – that is less actually about the 'tribals' themselves, but about our primordial urge for womb-like spatial enclosures. Perhaps the sheds then, in that case, may come across as a bit overscaled.

On this upper level, the project's most striking iconographic gesture – the lace-like truss elements – can be experienced up-close. Composed of a filigree arrangement of welded steel bars in pairs or trios, these trusses with their almost 'ornament'-like disposition become the project's most memorable aspect. The scale of their 'braiding' transforms with the nature of geometry and support conditions. At times though, they appear to be too frail to be actually carrying the cumbersome load, leaving the viewer a bit confused as to their true structural function, besides appearing clunky – as in the connecting verandah. The practice has used steel to dramatic fashion before – in the roof of the St. Joseph's Cathedral in Imphal, Manipur. But whereas in

On the upper level, the project's most striking iconographic gesture – the lace-like truss elements – can be experienced up-close

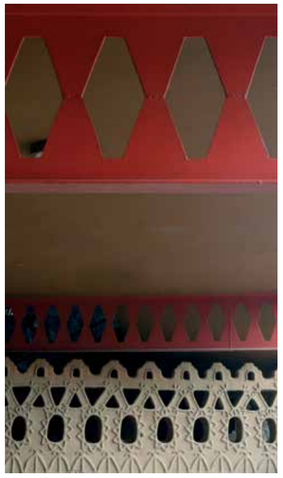
that project, the steel roof had an overbearing presence, here the spatial effect within the sheds is light and buoyant, as the eye follows the triumphant arcs traced by the bottom chords of the trusses. The use of steel can be seen in continuity with the metal working traditions of the region since the Iron and Bronze Ages, as well as in the more contemporary truck body-building industry in nearby Indore.

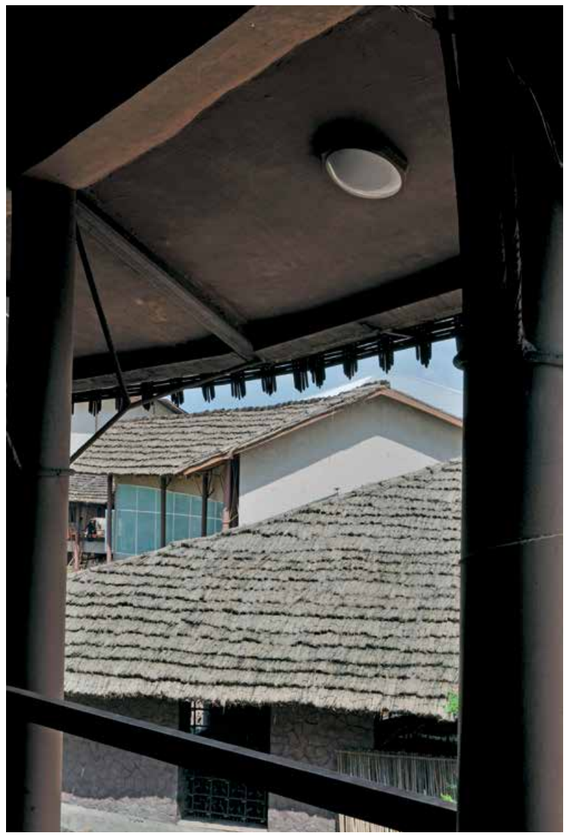
In addition, the building features an ambitious environmental programme – roofs are meant to be grassed over (administrative 'image-making' exercises have resulted in the use of thatch on some roofs instead) – angled to 30 degrees – the optimum angle of repose – to contain soil and prevent its run-off until the rhizome-like doob grass has sufficiently grown. The earth offers insulation, tempering the hot and dry climate of the region. Additionally, the courtyards shall have atomisers to induce a more humid micro-climate. Rainwater run-off is intended to be stored too.

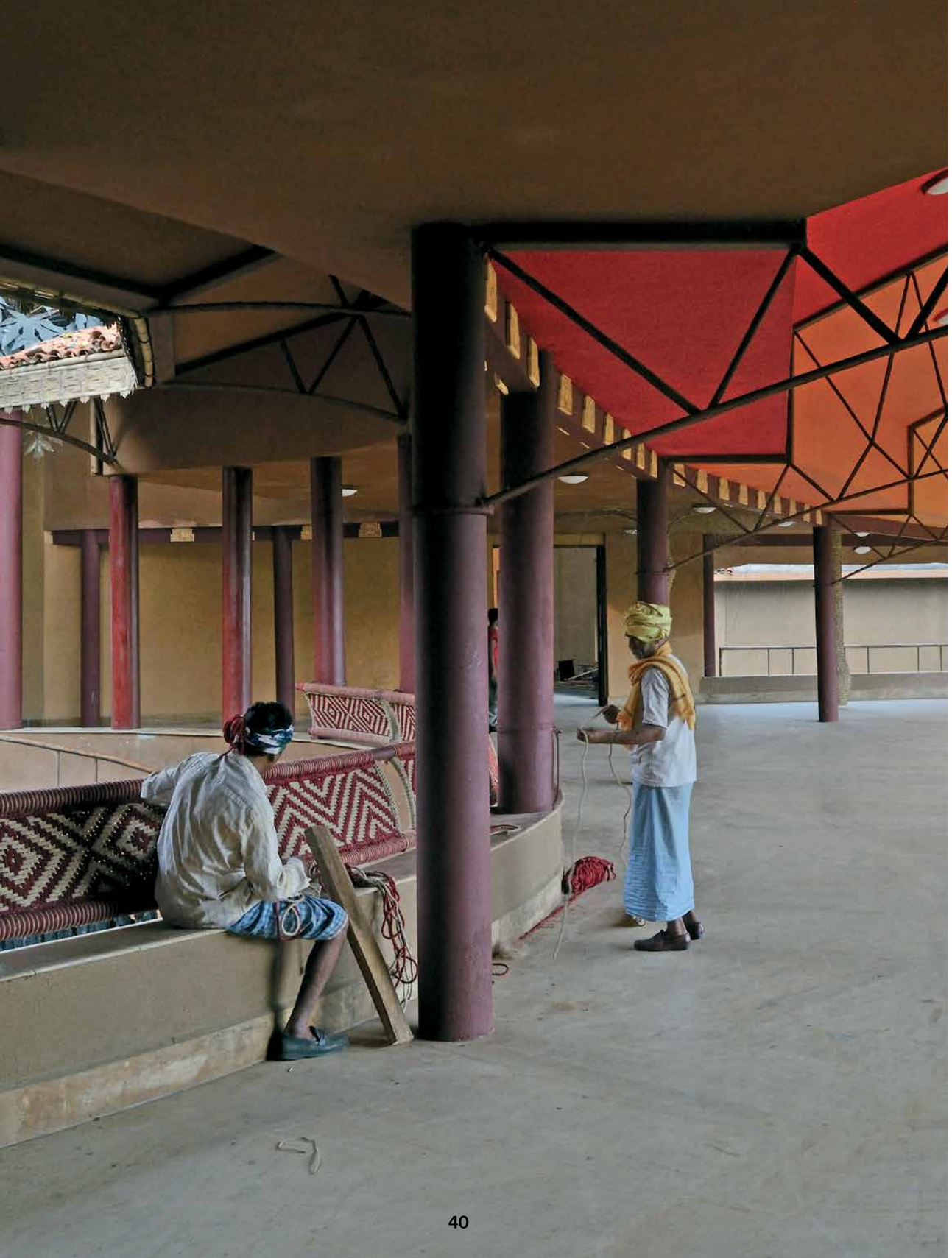
As a set of flexible spatial environments, the museum's decidedly self-effacing architecture succeeds in creating an enabling environment that the exhibiting communities can immediately identify with and appropriate as their own. Clearly, this 'de-objectified' architecture does not display an aversion to this, but rather welcomes it. The office's early collages illustrate ideas of how the buildings could become an active participant in the curatorial programme. This open-ended nature reflects the process of the building's complex making, through a participatory-design agenda – over a series of workshops with the participating communities, government officials, anthropologists and ethnographers, where ideas were evolved through common consensus.

What fails miserably though, and not to the fault of the architecture, is the curatorial programme. A change in administration midway through the project resulted in a curatorial

On the upper level, the project's most striking iconographic gesture – the lace-like truss elements – can be experienced up-close



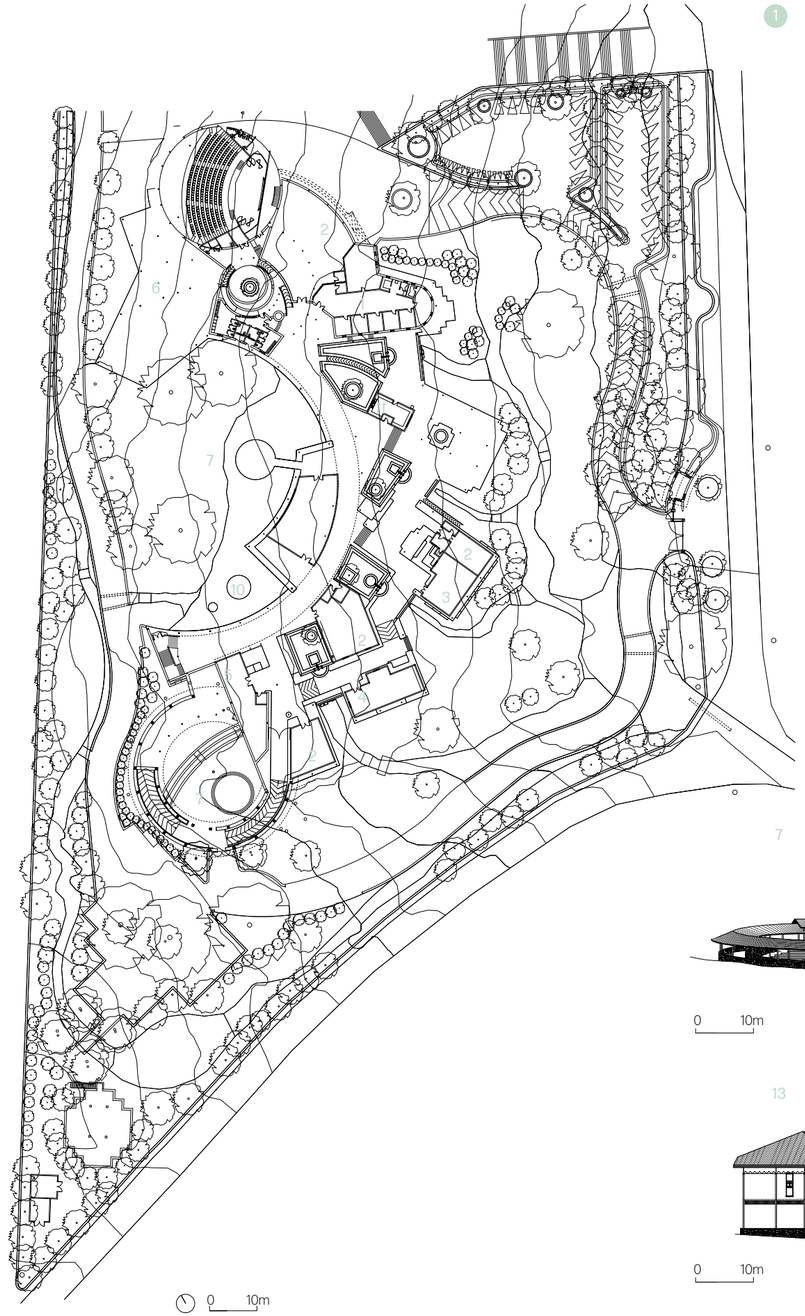




The building features an ambitious environmental programme – roofs are meant to be grassed over – angled to 30 degrees – the optimum angle of repose – to contain soil and prevent its run-off until the rhizome-like doob grass has sufficiently grown. The earth offers insulation, tempering the hot and dry climate of the region

programme devoid of intellectual strategies, but replete with exoticised image-making that has distorted the larger purpose of an institution of this nature. In the museum's current state, one confronts a visual cacophony of unrelated objects that contest with each other for the viewer's scant attention, much like entering a typical 'crafts emporium' with zillions of tribal artefacts (read: consumerable 'goodies') 'crowding' from every corner. A space meant for the contemplation of culture becomes one for conspicuous consumption. Far from representing richness, this has the effect of a 'white noise' that soon becomes unbearable. Should one be amazed at the sheer skill of the craftsmen involved as they inhabit every available corner, or be appalled at the de-contexted, comic translation of the displays into objects of 'delightful charm' for the sheer 'viewing pleasure' of the urban visitor[8] (like the cute little horses marching on a truss or the flags that actually denote a religious festival) – a cultural Disneyland? This loss of authenticity is a nagging problem – one sees the fallacy of the (overtly sincere but misplaced?) curatorial

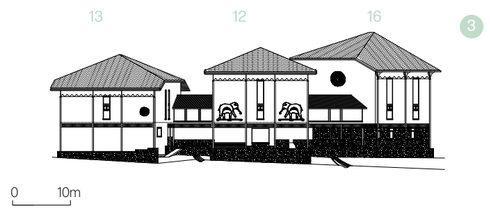
1



1 Lobby
2 Store
3 Wood Workshop
4 Metal Workshop
5 Reserve Collection
6 Library Block
7 Amphitheatre
8 Auditorium
9 Seminar Hall
10 Display
11 Pantry
12 North Zone Gallery
13 East Zone Gallery
14 South Zone gallery
15 West Zone Gallery
16 Introduction Gallery

2

3



MUSEUM OF TRIBAL HERITAGE

Design
Kamath Design Studio

Principal Architect
Revathi Kamath

Design Team
Revathi Kamath, Ayodh Kamath, Usman Khan, Sanjay Das, Manoj Gupta

Civil Contractor
Dilip Gangwani Carpentry
Tribal craftsmen

Client
Government of Madhya Pradesh

Location
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

FACT BOX

Built Area
13,000 m²

Site Area
32,000 m²

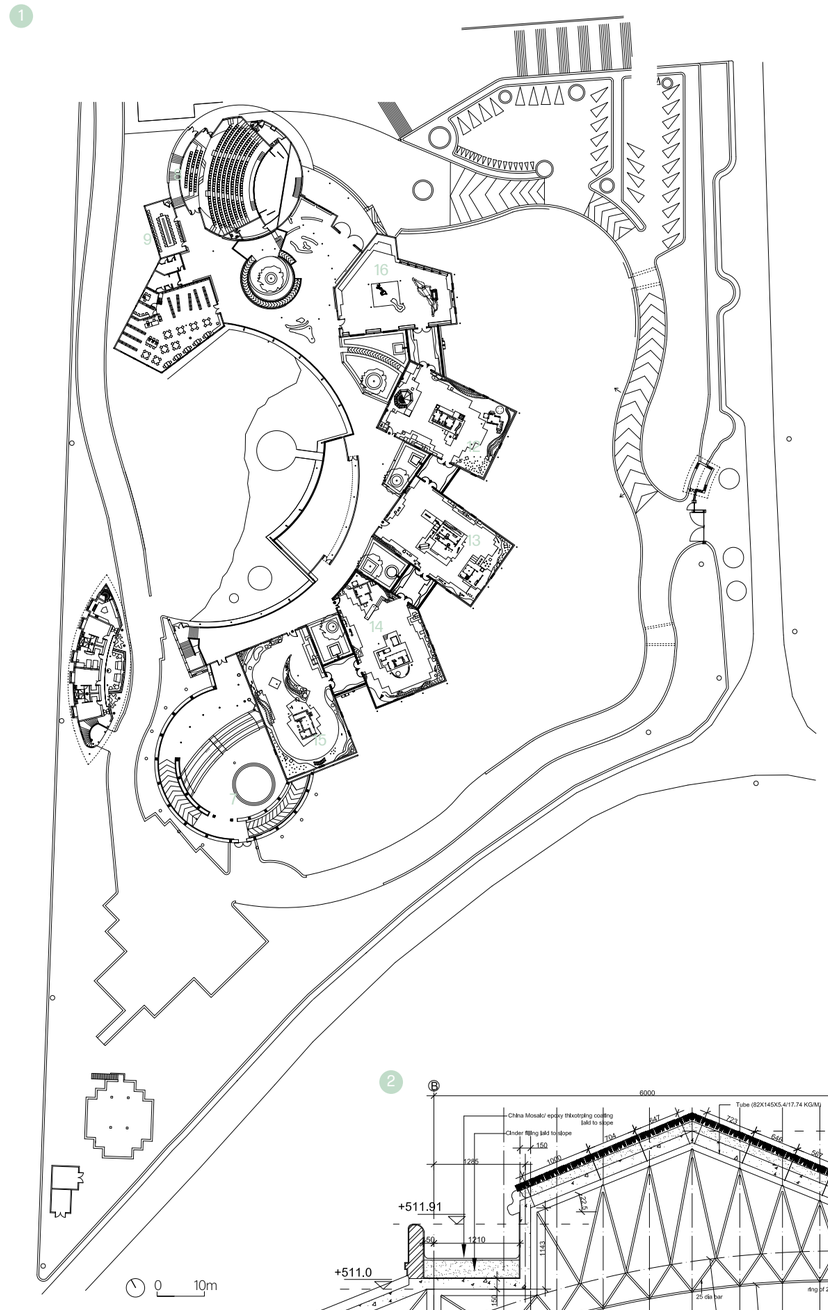
Project Cost Estimate
₹28 crore

Construction Phase
2004-2013 (expected)

DRAWINGS

1 **Lower level plan**
2 **Part elevation at southern end**
3 **Part elevation at northern end**

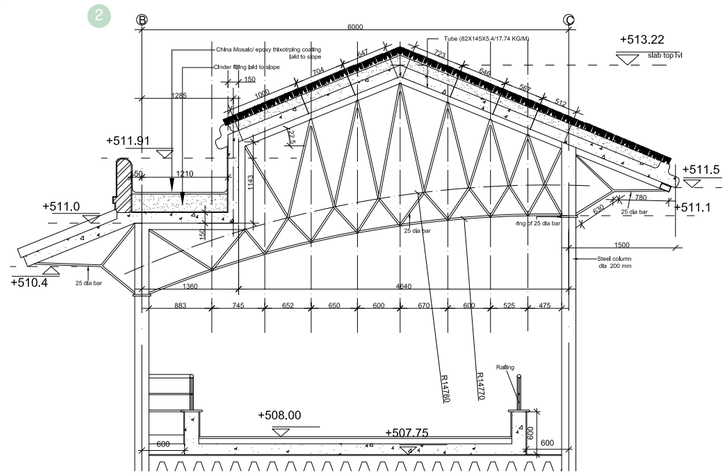
1

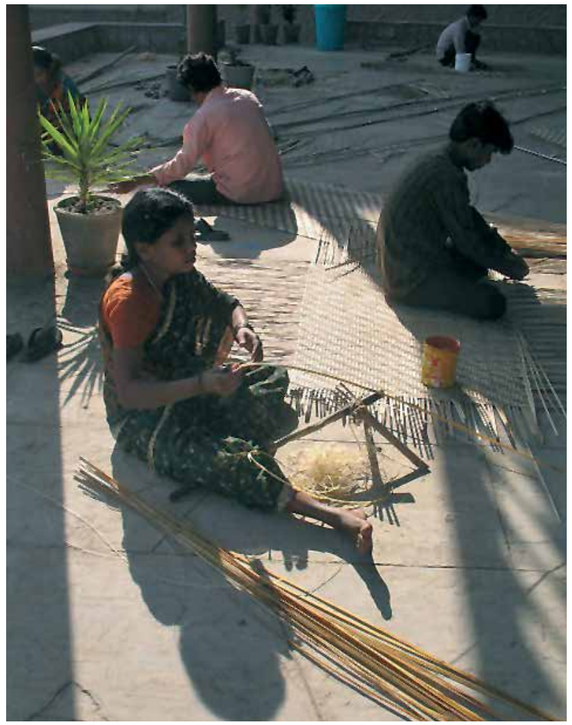


DRAWINGS

1 **Upper level plan**
2 **Truss detail over corridor**

2





programme – as an engagement with these communities has been reduced to the mere representation of their 'skill' in the production of 'beautiful' and 'decorative' embellishments – as 'competent artists' of pretty but meaningless infill that makes a mockery of their indigenous intelligence and broader participatory intentions. This museum, unfortunately, has been invaded by a bureaucracy that favours the exotic and the reduction of meaning to mere mannerism.

A lost opportunity? Revathi Kamath is optimistic – "Buildings need to be participatory to allow values of society enter their edifice, where the architect is not solely the 'creator' but is infiltrated by the consciousness of all (the contributors of the process)..." She believes that the building's inherent capacity to adapt and transform will ensure its ability to host a more intelligent programme in the future. As such one can consider the museum building to be a work-in-progress, as an adaptive environment that has the capacity to accommodate, or even facilitate, changes in programme. This will be the building's success, in its ability to withstand the test of curatorial and administrative change of hands.

As a piece of architecture, the building's emphasis on enabling a visceral engagement does succeed in translating the direct experience of the life-world – the core from which tribal art forms take their cue. Its raw power ensures its ability to be 'inhabited' – as well as remaining timeless and 'always contemporary' in its referencing of primordial forms of creating shelter – much like the nature of tribal art. It fittingly is devoid of the 'architect's voice' but reflective of the spirit it intends to capture. While it does not have the refinement seen in the architect's other works (such as the striking Aga Khan Award nominated Tomar Residence in Delhi), the intentionally 'coarse' nature of the architecture can be seen as a welcome departure from the glitzy, image-driven visual culture invading our cities today. The architect sees this as part of her efforts at 'eroding the mainstream'. The building does manage to raise significant questions about our building culture, and as such is bound to have its many detractors. Yes it is not perfect, yes it has its obvious flaws as an architectural object – but that is missing the point. This project is less about the building but what it enables and represents in the difficult Indian context of building within the archaic confines of the public works system. This barebones celebration of 'unity in diversity' is welcome. Much like the resilient 'cock-a-snook' spirit of Lucien Kroll's MéMé[9] and Greg Burgess's deep respect of the genius-loci n the 'Liru-Kuniya'[10] (both significant examples of participatory strategies within architecture), this building challenges established practice cultures whilst celebrating its spirit of purpose.

Suprio Bhattacharjee
Architect

As a set of flexible spatial environments, the museum's decidedly self-effacing architecture succeeds in creating an enabling environment that the exhibiting communities can immediately identify with and appropriate as their own

1. the German Lebenswelt *– as introduced by Edmund Husserl in 1936 in the* Crisis of European Sciences. *'The world as immediately or directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life, as sharply distinguished from the objective "worlds" of the sciences' (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica)*
2. See John Berger, Ways of Seeing *(Penguin, London, 1972). His discussion on this subject within a specific cultural context is nonetheless relevant across the gamut of the visual arts*
3. Ibid. p 21
4. Ibid
5. Derived from ideas of Michel Foucault explored in 1966-7. A space of multiplicity and non-hegemony, especially reflective of our multi-cultural society, explored by human geographers today
6. Telephonic conversation with Revathi Kamath on 16 February 2013
7. See Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows, *translated by Edward G Seidensticker (Leete's Island Books, Chicago, 1977)*
8. Here, the museum programme becomes no more than the 17th-18th century 'cabinet of curiosities' of the British
9. Medical Faculty Housing in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Leuwen, Belgium, 1970-72
10. Greg Burgess, Uluru Aboriginal Cultural Centre, near Ayers Rock, Australia, 1997

Momoyo Kaijima, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto – Atelier Bow-Wow

Drawing and architectural ethnography

Drawings are a significant platform for sharing the resources of society. Atelier Bow-Wow has been experimenting with them using different methods and circumstances. Drawing can represent a bridge from the past to today with a perspective of our time, and also a bridge from urban to rural with a perspective of ecology. In this article we present two drawing projects carried out with students at the time of Covid-19. We hope these offerings will encourage everyone to think of a better life in the future through architectural design.

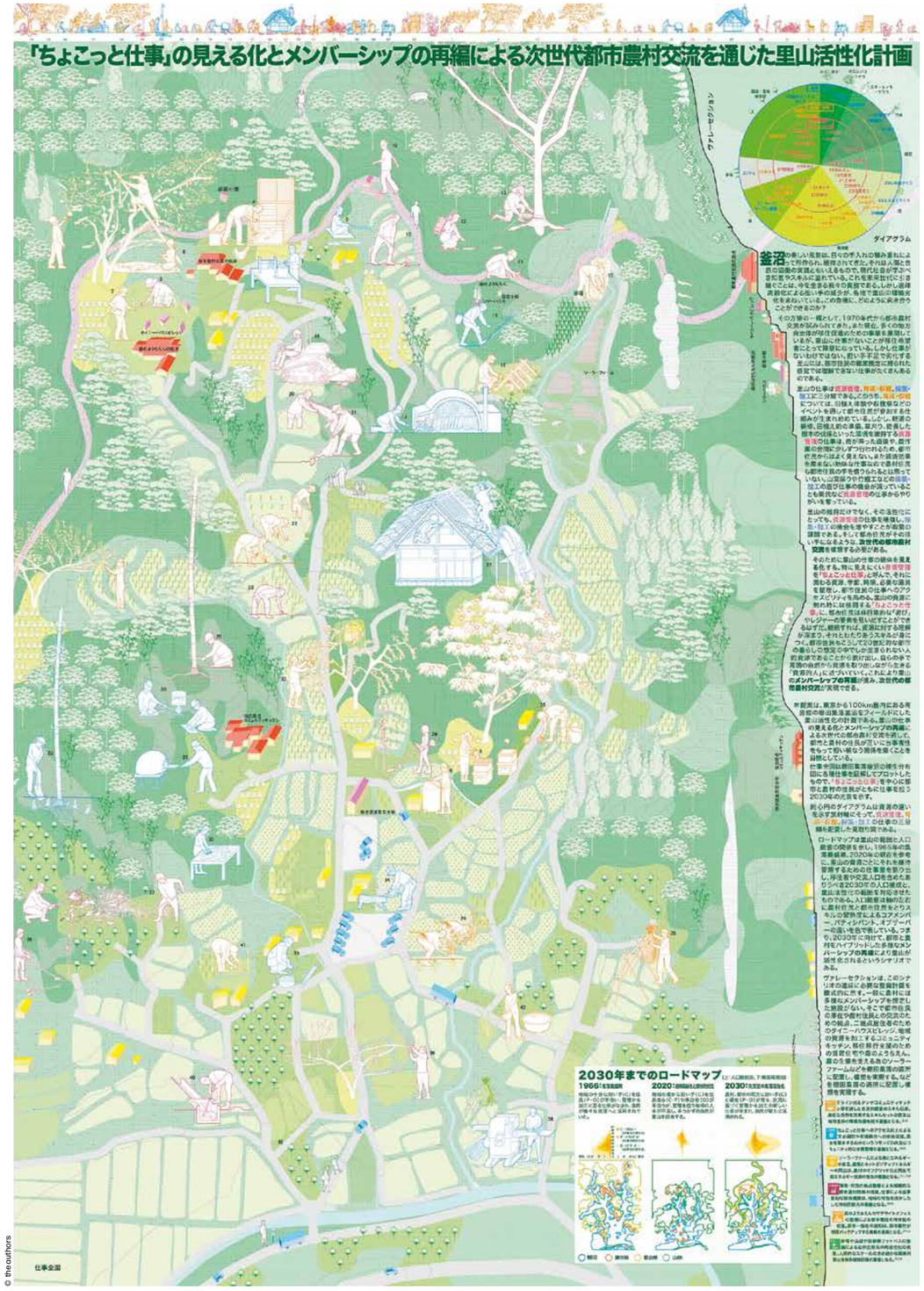
A *satoyama* village

The beautiful landscapes of *satoyama* villages (i.e. settlements lying between foothills and cultivated plains) have been shaped and maintained through the accumulation of daily care by farmers. It can be seen as a collaborative practice between humans and nature in a community. However, it has deteriorated due to the dwindling and ageing working population in villages throughout Japan.

Presenting a plan to revitalise a *satoyama* village with terraced rice fields situated in Kamanuma, Chiba, this drawing visualises daily short-term jobs that people can undertake to assist in the maintenance of the *satoyama* landscape. Such occupations are often unknown to city dwellers and may consist in morning or afternoon work, tasks carried out just after rainfall, etc. With the involvement of these people in the landscape's preservation, the next generation rural-urban exchange programmes will be able to reconfigure the membership of *satoyama* village communities. In the process of landscape maintenance, we defined these minor subsistence activities as *chokotto shigoto* ("piecemeal jobs"), which is a new term for sharing work. This could also involve longer-term exchanges for seasonal work aimed at the revitalisation of beautiful landscapes. But it could also provide a platform for rural-urban exchange as a school of life, and an invitation for people to migrate to this village from urban areas in order to find an alternative, more creative quality of life.

Opposite page: : revitalisation plan for a *satoyama* village with a visualisation of *chokotto shigoto* as part of the next generation rural-urban exchange programmes aimed at reconfiguring community membership, 2020.

Authors: Tsukamoto Laboratory, Tokyo Institute of Technology – Ayaka Ishikawa, Masamichi Tamura, Art Maruyama, Miyuki Watanabe, Yoko Kihara, Mana Wakamori, Kim Junho, Hiroki Kiyoto, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto



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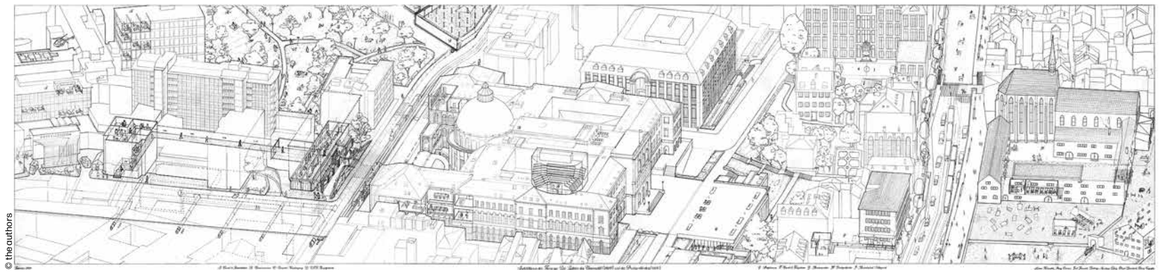
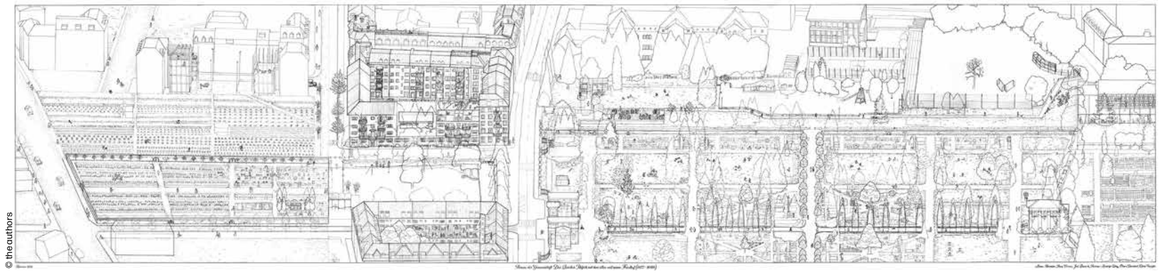




Welfare and community

The drawings are focused on the management of disease and death and its transcription into architecture, which can also be seen as part of the commons of the city of Zurich, Switzerland.

Architektur der Fürsorge ("Welfare Architecture") shows the university hospital today during the Covid-19 pandemic, managing the flow of staff, public and patients, and the care for the latter, as well as the 13th-century Predigerkloster hospital of the Dominican monastery. Today the former is at the heart of the city and manages its spatial boundaries within its system, separating its intensive care by fine and almost invisible boundaries. The latter, on the other hand, was built at the city limits and its entire infrastructure was arranged behind walls. The visible and the invisible are side by side; the juxtaposition of functions is transformed over time.

Räume der Gemeinschaft ("Community Space") shows the Sihlfeld cemetery district in its present state, at the time of the Covid-19 crisis, and as it appeared in 1877, when it was located on the outskirts of the city. In that period, the dead were carried to the city borders, close to the countryside and rural activities. The drawing offers insights into the management of public spaces through time, their uses and transformations, and their displacement within free or built spaces. Thus, at the time of the pandemic, certain spaces such as balconies or the cemetery had to play the role of common spaces. They became places of intense life, while the closed and empty parks and schoolyards only intensified the perception of human activities grinding to a halt.

From top: public drawing Covid-19 *Architektur der Fürsorge: die Spitäler der Universität (2020) und des Predigerklosters (1204)*; drawing *Räume der Gemeinschaft: das Quartier Sihlfeld mit dem alten und neuen Friedhof (1877-2020)*, 2020. Authors: ETH, Chair of Architectural Behaviorology, IEA, D-ARCH – Oliver Brunhart, Rémy Carron, Clara Copiglia, Momo Hososaka, Rodrigo Mendoza Diaz, Joel Zimmerli, Momoyo Kajima, Christoph Danuser, Grégoire Farquet, Simona Ferrari

Design and Art

With this issue, we begin a new journey of looking at aesthetics in India - one with letters; a letter opens up a theme or a subject for us and we view the various imaginations that have produced that theme/subject, given it visual wings, and created a microcosm of ideas and imaginations. We start with Ravana in this month of Diwali; complexities of evil and hatred are very important and necessary discussions in the contemporary world, as much as in India, and with Diwali around, which celebrates the victory of good over evil and bringing light to the world, the return of hope and happiness, light and vision, let us also understand what is 'evil' in times when we rush to make demons out of all those who are simply not us. With this complexity of our times, especially in India where protests have bookended the pandemic, student protests a year ago and now farmer protests, we look at the works of artist Sameer Kulavoor who is using his long-running interest in drawing and documenting public life in his own unique way, to understand cities - when people, the migrants are forced to empty cities in the wake of harsh and rushed lockdowns, and also when people throng the city to ask for what is theirs, the right to disagree thoughtfully, without demonising or destroying those who are not us, but engaging the city as a site for arguments and negotiations.

Art and Politics

Locked. Unlock

Text Kaiwan Mehta

The recent body of work by graphic designer and artist Sameer Kulavoor currently on show at the Mumbai-based gallery Tarq is a fitting reflection on the last one year we have had. The lockdown following the Covid-19 pandemic has been bookended between two crucial protests – the student protests against the NRC and CAA bills that began in December 2019 and the protest by framers going on just now against bills by the central government again. What has life – the life of the individual and the public life meant for all of us, or anyone of us in this one year. This one year has made us realise how frivolous we are in certain ways as a civilization and a society, and how incapable and undeveloped we are as professional societies be it medicine, governance, or politics. The protests and pandemic has shown us our dirty insides – corrupt, incapable, and unwilling. One may argue against this with stories of hope and heroism; yes human life, society, and civilization has enough tenacity to survive, build back, bring out the good in human hearts and minds... but let us not cover the wrongs that we wake up to everyday in stories of hope and heroism. This pending conflict between the need to reflect on our civilization and societies, while the ability to work for an argumentative, democratic, and human society should be imagined, invested in, and struggled over is what Kulavoor's recent body of work captures. The artist in Kulavoor has captured the unsaid ruminations of our minds, as we live and work in India today.

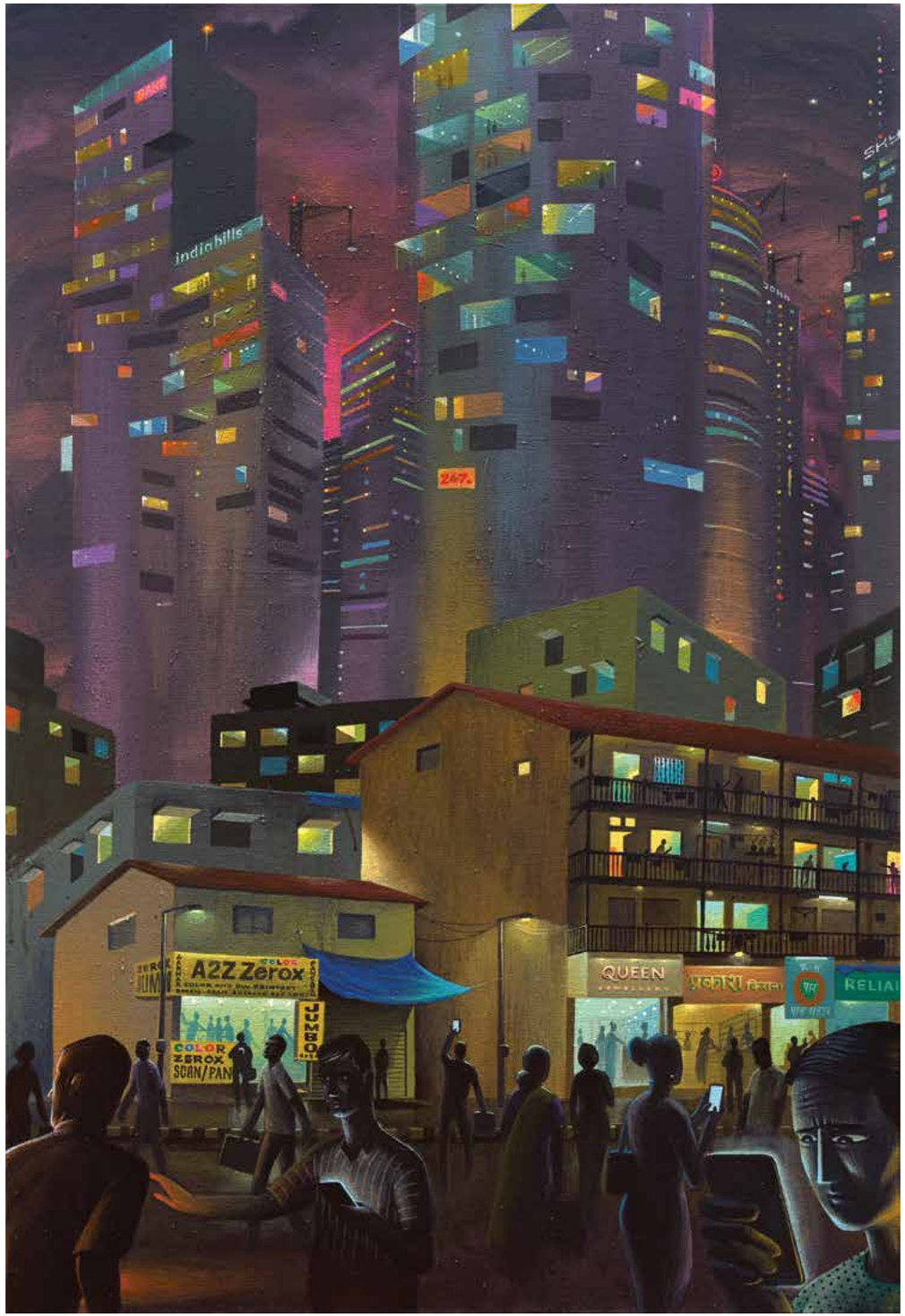
Sameer Kulavoor
***UNEMPLOYED BUT FREE DATA*, 2019**
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 inches

Sameer Kulavoor
58, 2019
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 36 inches

Sameer Kulavoor
JCB, 2019
Acrylic on canvas
10 x 10 inches

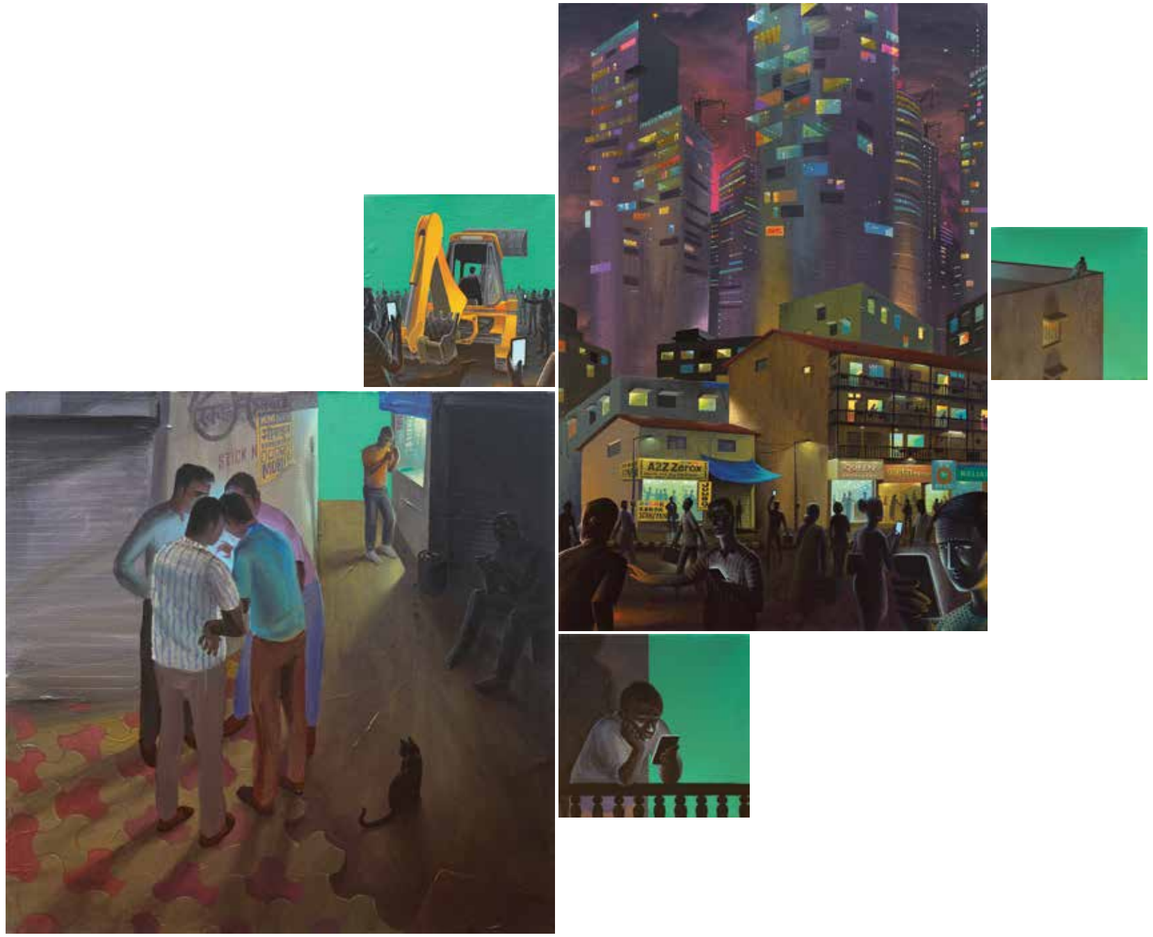
Sameer Kulavoor
***MAN ON TERRACE*, 2019**
Acrylic on canvas
9 x 9 inches

The public life and the private self both stand challenged, and at dangerous thresholds. The collective is distributed across private spaces, faked over screens, while the private space stands pushed into further loneliness of the mind, the longing for publicness. The street is no longer a space but only a thoroughfare, and you go to the balcony to rescue yourself when the world is not out banging chauvinist patriotism. Infrastructure continues to dig and build for an imagined public, where now you hide your face and precariously engage with every human encounter. The protest reverses the pandemic, because its fights the virus of corrupt thinking by asking you to be public, to 'read and resist', the freedom of thought and engagement with voices and minds beyond your own. The city the people left, the migrant was forced to lealve, then becomes only a physical and social caricature of its own dreamy aspirations. The beautiful city, with people locked indoors or only in their phones, is no city at all. What will be this city, that will emerge from the pains of protests and pandemics? It will be a city and society, the landscape of human civilization not any longer divisible in the binary rural-urban or the amusing term 'rurban', but one that will need a discerning set of ideals and processes of reconstruction and restoration. Kulavoor's recent



Opposite page:
Sameer Kulavoor
***RE-DEVELOPMENT*, 2019**
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 24 inches

This page:
***YOU ARE ALL CAUGHT UP*,**
Installation image, 2020

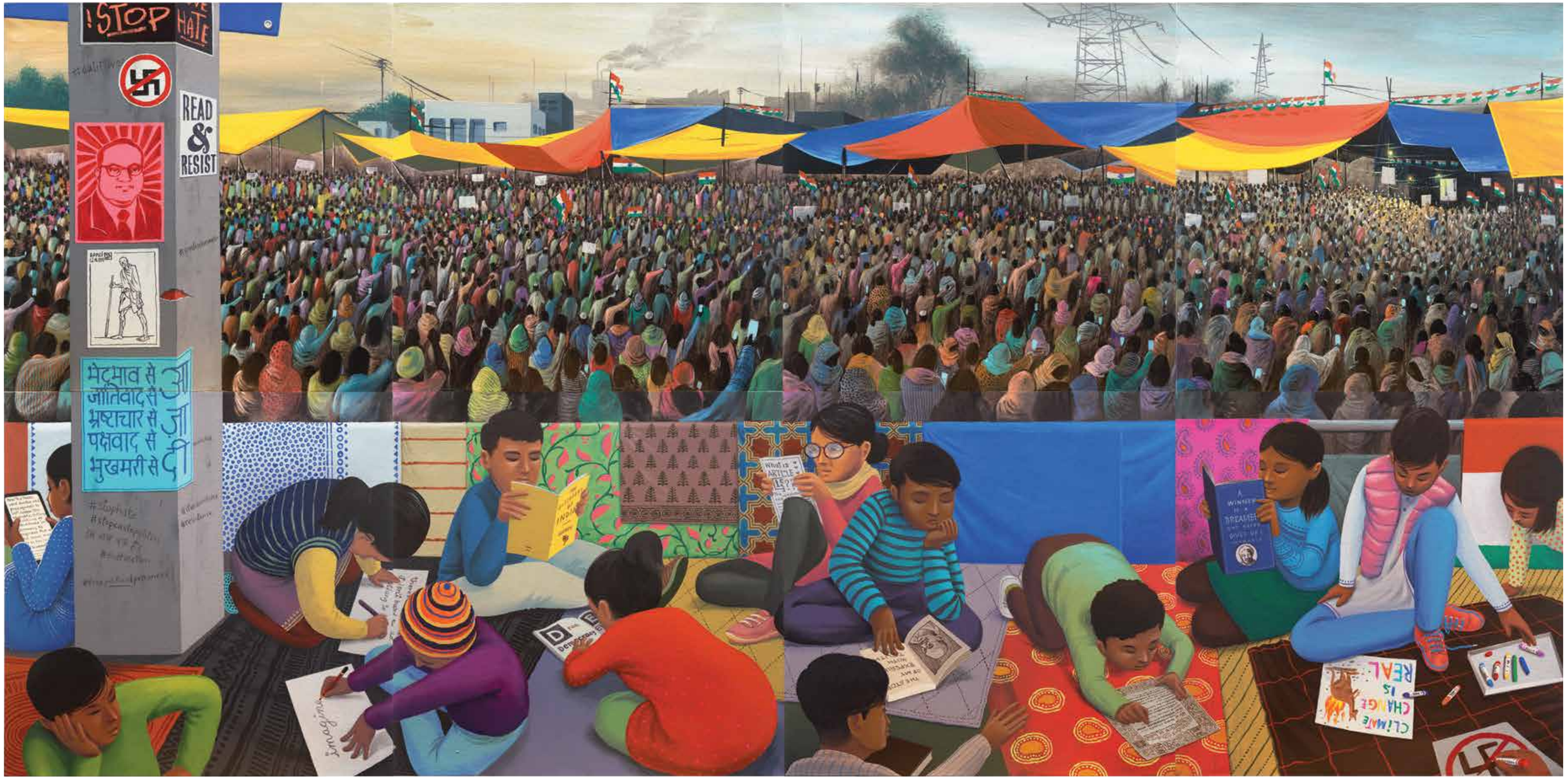


body of work brings us to a point of reflection, collating our shared experiences over the last one year, nudging the mind to unlock out of safety-nets and address actively the emerging new (and one does not mean here the other amusing coinage 'new-normal')... because the normal changes and we never realise, the protests and the pandemic expose the normalized changes, and we will have to work with, discerningly setting up, constituting-reconstituting, restoring, ideals and processes for the emerging life and landscape.

Sameer Kulavoor
***THE MIGRANTS HAVE LEFT*, 2020**
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 72 inches

Sameer Kulavoor
***READ & RESIST,* 2020**
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 96 inches

You Are All Caught Up is an exhibition of recent works by artist Sameer Kulavoor, produced by, and showing at TARQ Gallery between 3 December 2020 and 7 January 2021. All images reproduced courtesy the gallery and the artist.



Aesthetics and India

₹ is for Ravana

Text and photographs Anuradha Shankar and Sudha Ganapathi

₹ is for रावण / Ravana. We know Ravana as THE villain of the Ramayana. But he was also the King of Lanka, a great devotee of Shiva, a musician par excellence and an erudite scholar of the Vedas and the Shastras. Also known as Dashanan or the one with ten heads, Ravana is easily identifiable in art with his 10 heads and 20 arms.

Ravana as a Shiva devotee is a popular figure in South India, though not so much in the North. He is said to have offered his 10 heads to please the Lord, who appeared only when the tenth and final head was to be offered.

So great was Ravana's devotion that he wanted to take Shiva with him to Lanka. He first tried to take Shiva's Atmalingam to Lanka, but was thwarted by Ganesha. Ravana then tried to lift Mount Kailash with Shiva, Parvati and the ganas and carry it off Lanka. This time, it was Shiva who prevented Ravana from doing so by pressing his little toe on the ground. In this form, Shiva is known as Ravana Anugraha murti.

Ravana was also a renowned musician, who had mastered the veena and is believed to have invented the Ravanahatta. While the former is part of the classical music ensemble of instruments, the latter is a favourite of folk musicians from Rajasthan.

This page, left: A 5' tall leather puppet of Ravanudu (L), as Ravana is known as in the Tholu Bommalata or shadow puppet tradition. 5' in height. (National Crafts Museum, New Delhi).

Below: The 10 heads and 20 arms of Ravana make him easily recognisable in this shallow relief at the Vitthala Temple, Hampi (c. early 16th century).

This page above left : Ravana offering his heads to Shiva (Aundha Nagnath Temple, Maharashtra, c. 12th/13th century CE). He is seen on the left with one head and 20 arms; the other nine heads are shown stacked in the shape of a lingam on the right. This sculpture depicts the moment Shiva appears in front of Ravana.

Above right: Ravana offering his heads to Shiva (Ellora, Kailasa Cave, c. 8th century CE). The nine heads he has already offered are shown around the lingam, and he is about to cut off his tenth head with a sword.

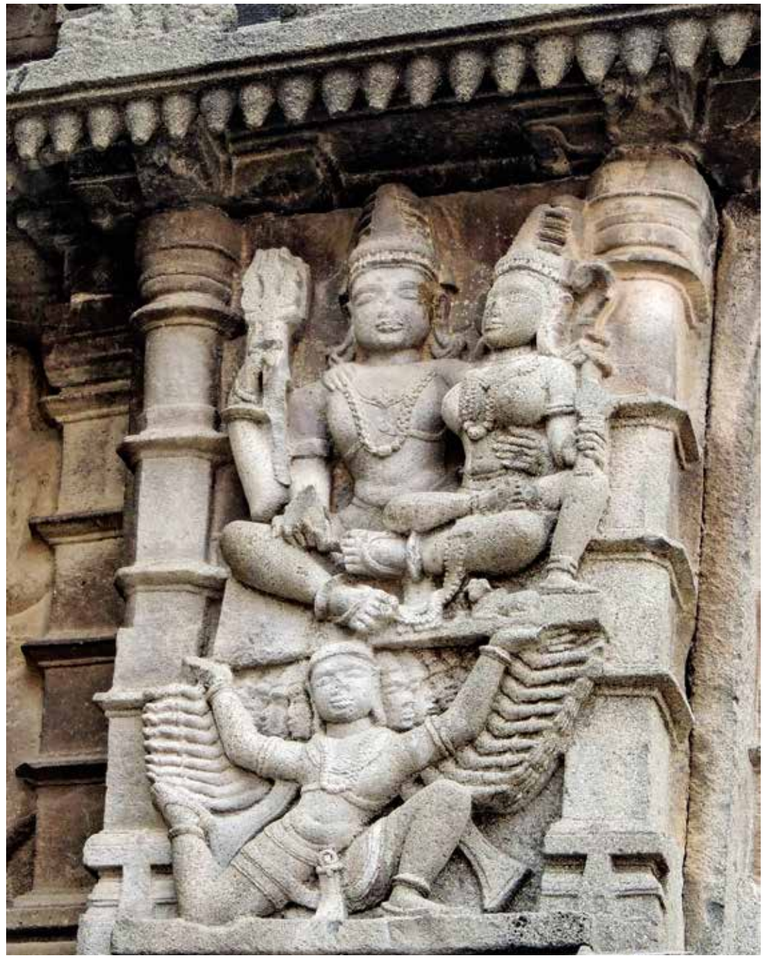
Left: Ravana trying to uproot the Atmalingam from the ground at Gokarna, where he was tricked into placing it by Ganesha. Despite his efforts and his strength, he is unable to uproot the lingam and take it with him to Lanka.

As the King of Lanka, Ravana was considered to be a good and just ruler, qualities which are highlighted in the earliest known version of the Jaina Ramayana, the Paumacariyam. He also made his kingdom so prosperous, that it came to be known as the Sone ki Lanka or Golden Lanka.

Ravana is, however, best known and sometimes only seen as the villain of Ramayana; the discourse around him as well as depictions in art and popular culture illustrate that. Indeed, Ravana is the personification and face of all things evil and the annual Ramleela where his effigy is burnt is a testament to that.

Ravana is an apt example of how characters and the worlds they inhabit are appropriated and transformed depending on the social, cultural and political contexts. The many versions of the Ramayana that exist and Ravana's characterisation in them attest to that. As the noted dancer, Leela Samson while quoting Ambai's retelling of a tribal version of the Ramayana, says:

At the end of the epic Sita, waiting to be swallowed up by the earth, walks into the forest. There she hears someone playing the veena. She sees that it is Ravana. She says to him, 'I thought you were dead.' He says that the truth keeps changing.



This page, left: A very simple Ravana Anugrahamurti, where Mount Kailash is represented only as a block. It appears as if Ravana is lifting Shiva and Parvati and his 20 outstretched arms appear to be similar to Garuda with his wings spread, lifting Vishnu and Lakshmi. (Aundha Nagnath Temple, Maharashtra, c. 12th/13th century CE)

Below right:This Ravana Anugrahamurti depicts his struggle to lift Mount Kailash. His body is twisted with the effort he is making even as his 20 arms are working frantically to ensure that he does not get crushed in the process. (Ellora Caves, c. 8th century CE) Opposite page: In this Ravana Anugrahamurti, nine of his heads are arranged around the central one and he holds a variety of weapons in his arms. (Abhaneri, now at the Albert Hall Museum, Jaipur, c. 8th century CE)

This page, above: Ravana holding court outside his palace in Lanka. Note the adoring audience listening to Ravana with folded hands. (Shantinath Temple, Jhalarapatan, early 20th century, CE). Left: Ravana at Sita's Swayamvar (Bhagaton ki Haveli, Nawalgarh, early 20th century CE).

Left: The Ravana Anugrahamurti at the Chennakeshava Temple at Belur (1210 CE) is extraordinarily detailed, especially Mount Kailash which is shaped like a shikhara. Shiva and Parvati are depicted right on top with Nandi at their feet. Other inhabitants of Kailash as well as gods like Brahma and Vishnu can be seen here.

Below: Disguised as a mendicant, Ravana approaches Sita for alms. Once she crosses the threshold to do so, Ravana will kidnap her, setting into motion for the war to follow (Garh Mahal, Jhalawar, c. 1920s).

This page, above: The Ramayana war is underway and Ravana is a blur in this painting. On the right, you can see Golden Lanka. (Sone chandi ki dukaan, Mahensar, early 20th century CE)
Right: The battle between Rama and Ravana has reached fever pitch and the blurred background emphasises that. Soon Rama will kill Ravana. (Garh Mahal, Jhalawar, c. 1920s)

This page, left: Ravana effigy at the Chembur Ramleela, Mumbai.
Below: Just outside the city gates of Jhalrapatan and on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga is a quirky set of installations of Ravana (L) and his family. Collectively known as Ravan Darbar, these are about 25-30 ft tall permanent installations that come to 'life' during the annual Dussera celebrations. These are reportedly about 180 years old and are maintained by the locals.
Next page: Ravana Anugrahamurti is a popular image on temple gopurams in Tamil Nadu. In this stucco image, Ravana holds a veena where the gourd is actually a human head. He is said to have plucked one of his heads, and used his veins as strings to play it, thus creating the first veena.

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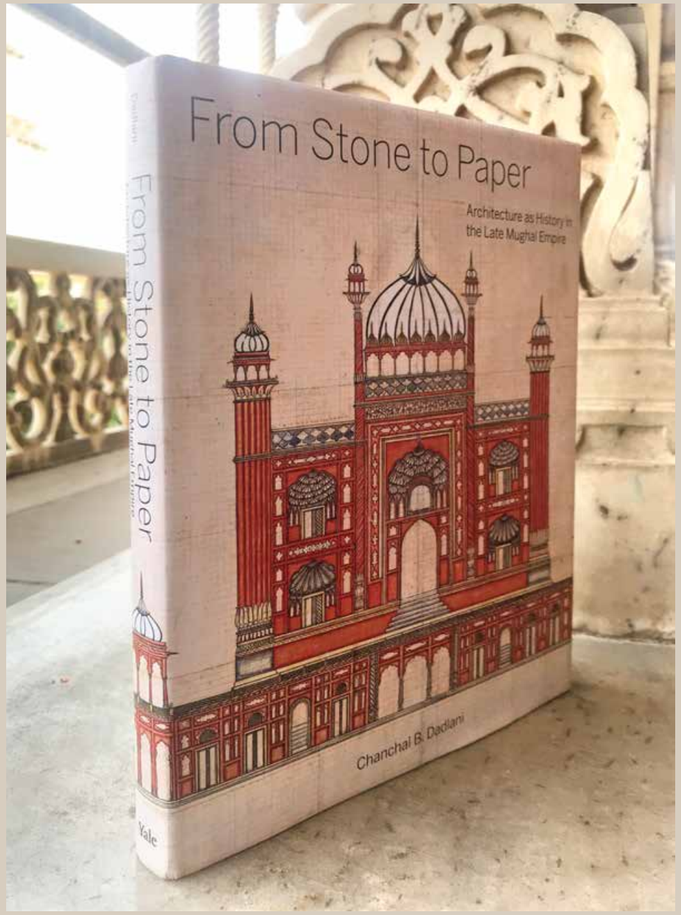
Reflections

We bring here a discussion on a book that looks at what power and identity mean in architecture; a reflection where architecture as history is allowing us to think afresh about continuities and complexities of running time rather than architecture as objects slotted in time and style and little to do with crossing boundaries and the leap of ideas, rather much the contrary. From the archive Fulvio Irace pulls out Aldo Rossi's Teatro del Mondo to contemplate scale. Playing with both miniturisation and enlargement, from architecture to object and back again, Rossi's work "questions the identity of size."

Books
From Stone to Paper

Text and photographs Aparna Andhare



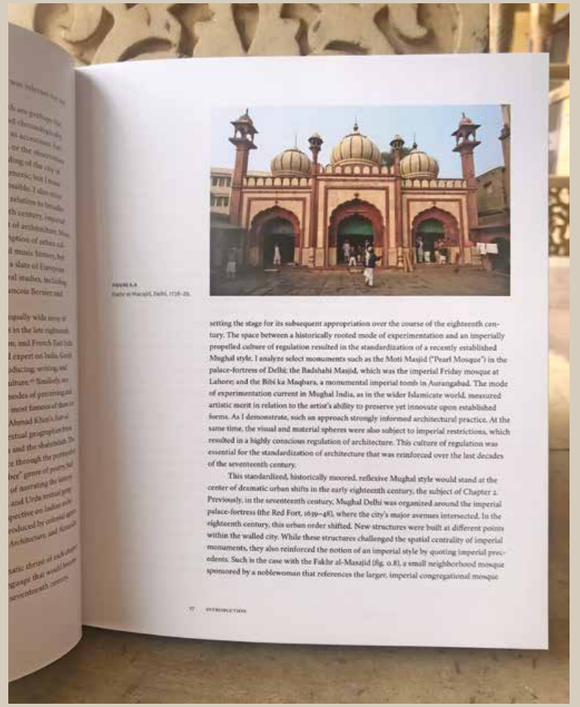
A recently published book reveals how Mughal architects, artists and patrons built on the cultural legacy of their imperial predecessors to create the very concept of a historical style identifiable as 'Mughal'.

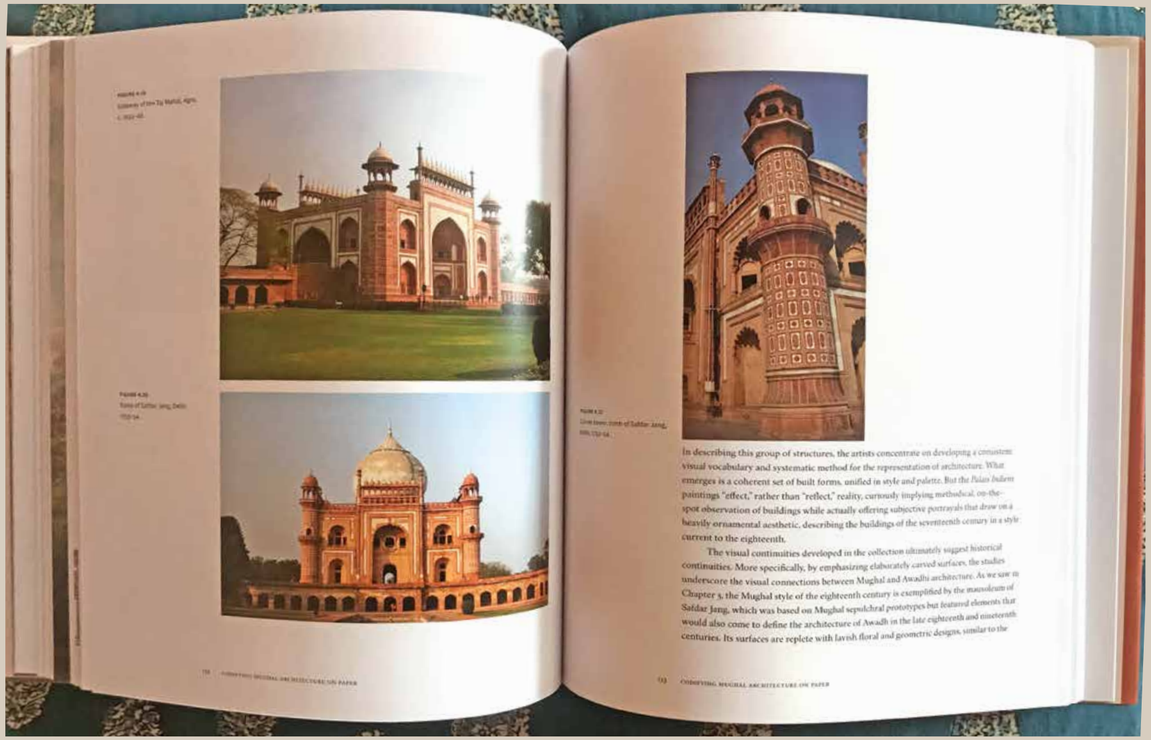
The readers of *Domus* don't quite need to be told about architecture as a means of articulation of power and identity in our times, but how did this work in the past? To find out, we step back into a span of time in the eighteenth century (a period of about 150 years, extending into the nineteenth century), with Chanchal B. Dadlani's acclaimed *From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire*, published by Yale University Press last year.

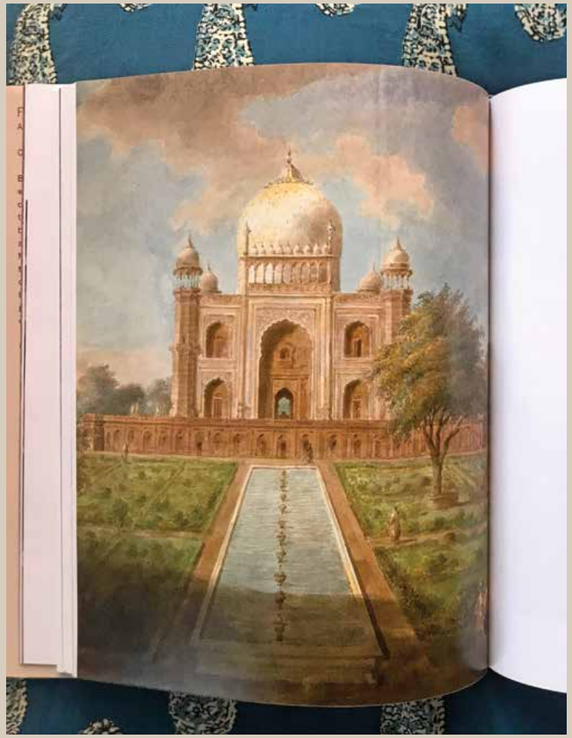
Even as the Mughal Empire crumbled and its influence stretched only from Dilli to Palam, the Mughal style of architrcture, according to Dadlani, was forged in the long eighteenth century as architecture moved past amalgamating influences from Persian and Timurid sources, and referenced monuments patronised by the Mughal dynasty to communicate authority. Her argument is bolstered by the architecture of newly formed Rajput states in central and western India, which draw on Mughal precedents in their capital cities. Dadlani also engages with the representation of buildings, the theorising of architecture, and evolving new methodologies to understand the transition from the early modern to the modern, as well as the shift from Mughal imperialism to the British colonialism. Going further, she places architecture collectively with literary and visual traditions at the centre, examining the building traditions, urban planning and the theoretical preoccupations of the later Mughals. Accessing a wide range of visual and textual material, from colonial archives and records of travellers and visitors to texts in Persian, Urdu, Bhasha, English and French, *From Stone to Paper* is a multi-layered narrative scaffolding a close reading of monuments – many well-known, and some forgotten, like the Zafar Mahal in New Delhi.

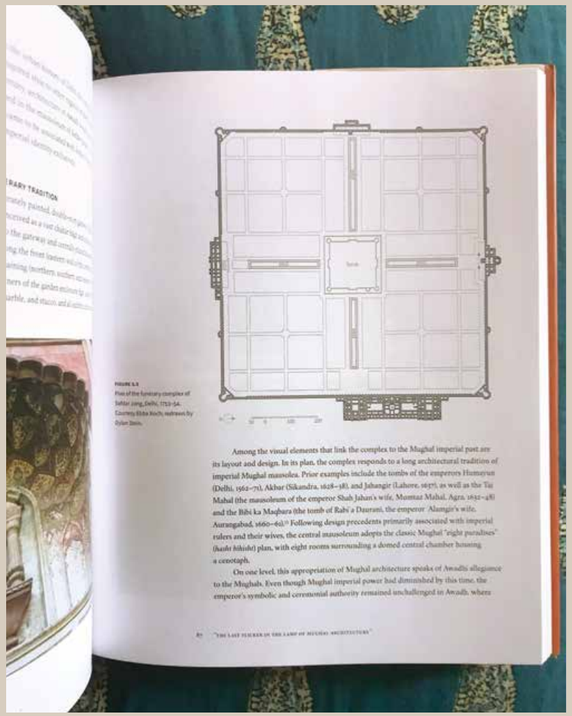
Dadlani explores structural and decorative elements of Aurangzeb's architecture and the legacy of Shah Jahan's building programme. At the core of this chapter is the concept of *istiqbal* or active reception (Laura Parodi's succinct translation), which carries traditions of absorption and exchange within itself, and the intention of refining pre-existing masterpieces. This leads to a new language of architecture using elements like cornices, *chhatri* (kiosk), *chajja* (bracket), the *jali* (lattice) and so on. These Indo-Persian elements were to become iconic of early modern Indian architecture, constantly reproduced and referenced as they responded to political and social conventions of the period. Dadlani illustrates her argument by placing buildings in conversation, alongside a father-and-son and master-pupil relationship: Taj Mahal and the Bibi ka Maqbara, Shah Jahan to Aurangzeb, extending to the architects Ustad Ahmad Lahori (Taj Mahal) and Ata Allah Khan (Bibi ka Maqbara). She analyses proscription and its logic at Aurangzeb's court which restricted opulence in traditions, clothing, construction and decoration. The chapter analyses regulation and law, and the responses of architects to the new demands of imperial patronage.

'Urban Culture of Mughal Delhi' posits the shift between a city built around the person of the ruler (Shah Jahan), and the changes that occur later, when sub-imperial patronage of architecture is more commonplace. Here, she









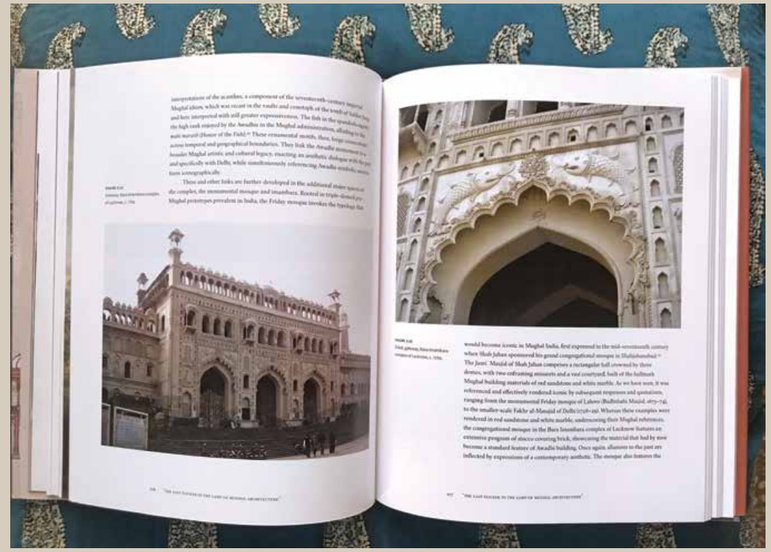
compares the building programme and differences between the *dargahs* of Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizam al'Din Auliya, and the changes in imperial burial practices as the decades go by. This chapter maps the assimilation of the *dargahs* from being peripheral, into the capital. Various aspects of Delhi – its social hierarchies, private, public, religious, and imperial spaces, and the social fabric of the capital – are under examination through the *Muraqqa'-yi Dihli*, an account Dargah Quli Khan, a companion of the Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah I of Hyderabad, who visited in late 1730. Dargah Quli Khan also comments on architecture, and describes the city with respect to the Red Fort, making a map for the contemporary reader. Dadlani weaves together an image of Delhi through various accounts and offers sharp insights.

The grand tomb of Abu al-Mansur Safdar Jang of Awadh, built in 1753-54 is central to the third chapter. Once described as 'The Last Flicker in the Lamp of Mughal Architecture', Dadlani unpacks the highly charged symbolism of the tomb, its negotiations of Shi'i iconography and belief, the implementation of the *hasht-bihisht* (eight paradises) in architecture. The Awadh rulers, also high-ranking Mughal courtiers, legitimised their kingship and closeness to the imperial court through architectural forms and design in funerary architecture, gardens and mosques and palaces in Delhi as well as in Lucknow, their capital. The chapter touches upon the rise of independent kingdoms with allegiance to the Mughals, the setting up of new ateliers and patronage patterns. Dadlani analyses the tomb of Safdar Jang and compares the plan with older Mughal funerary structures, with a keen eye for detail and insight, elucidating how the Mughal style became codified into the definitive template for new rulers and those seeking administrative and political legitimacy.

The penultimate chapter 'Codifying Mughal Architecture on Paper' begins with *Palais Indiens* acquired by the French Jean-Baptiste Gentil in 1778. The paintings were made in the large scroll format, bringing together Indian and European methods of depicting architecture, and documented structures aiding the creation of a distinctive visual archive of buildings and contained plans and elevations of palaces, mosques, funerary monuments, forts, and garden complexes in Delhi, Agra and Faizabad. These paintings are very different from the depiction of architecture in earlier Mughal traditions. Dadlani discusses the interventions and development of architectural depiction, with possible influences in Mughal art. Going over the traditions of mapmaking, hand-drawing graph paper in Central Asia with respect to the subcontinent, she talks about the contribution of Indian artists in the Mughal court and the Rajput States. She considers accuracy of the *Palais Indiens* as a documentation project, reiterating that the artists focused on effect more than being true to detail, especially when it came to groups of monuments. However, these paintings were important to map the use of motifs and decoration, borrowed symbols and development of architecture in Delhi and beyond. She discusses Gentils' own collection strategies and places these images in context to a colonial enterprise of curiosity and authority, as well as his relationship with Shuja al-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh and a vizier at the Mughal court. The chapter goes on to place the *Palais Indiens* in context of other depictions of architecture by Indian painters, including the Company School (where she contests the term and elaborates on its problems and scope), as well the European Picturesque traditions. She also talks about other collections and patronage, new research on various artists and the significance of the depiction of eighteenth-century architecture on an international scale, with enough references and further readings for those interested. She points to the shift in the receivers of these manuscripts – mostly non-Persian reading European—hence the need to rework iconography.

The final chapter, 'Mughal Architecture Between Manuscript and Print Culture', brings the reader into the nineteenth century, and the addition of architectural renderings into the repertoire of paintings, with Akbar II's commission of the *'Amal-i Salih*, a retelling of Shah Jahan's reign. Dadlani uses manuscript paintings to understand the links that later Mughals were making to their more glorious past and the ways in which symbolism developed at the now-weak imperial court. She juxtaposes the commissions of the Mughal court with colonial writings, to glean details of history and make clear the haze of colonial snobbery. Mughals had engaged with historiography since the beginning but architectural drawings and physical architectural references were added to genealogical portraits to remind the viewer/visitor of their legacy. Dadlani examines subject and stylistic

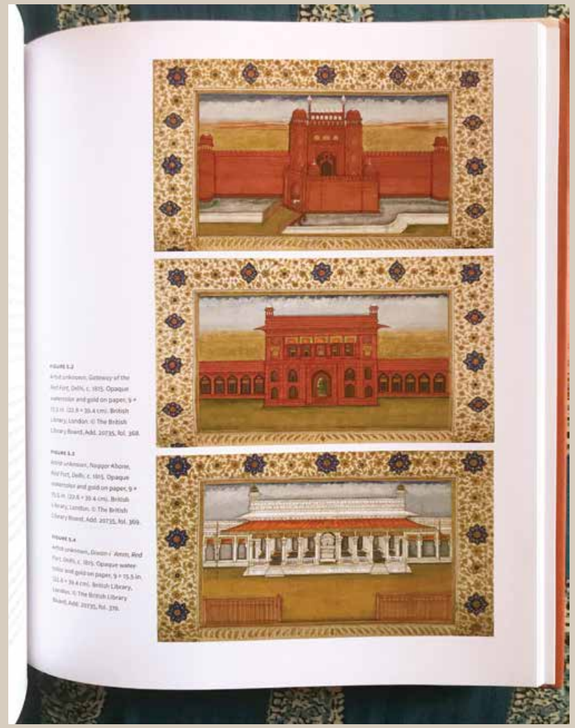
In Dadlani's words: "Taking my cue from the Mughal conception of the monumental, which eschewed the idea of monuments as monolithic entities and instead favoured expansive, multisensorial complexes, I consider the monument in space...and time..."



choices, which turned buildings into icons, and compares depictions of architecture in older manuscripts to those commissioned in the long eighteenth century, pointing to new innovations with older narrative conventions. She places the *'Amal-i Salih* at the transition point between constructed histories in architecture and later nineteenth century textual geographies written in Persian, English and Urdu, all of whom had Delhi at the centre. With an analysis of texts and artistic output, Dadlani turns to the modern writing of archaeology and architectural history under colonial rule, and the construction of a Mughal past. She successfully refutes a simplistic reading of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century depictions as only souvenir shopping or ethnographic projects. She deconstructs the claims of a recalling glorious past and the role of artists, writers, patrons and collectors in the interlinked 'project of architectural representation'.

A nifty conclusion wraps up this conceptual exploration of Mughal architecture in the Indian subcontinent and its impact on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century building traditions, the reception and proliferation of the "Indian" style in the West. While it is a thorough investigation, the prose is lucid and the book is sumptuously illustrated, making it visually and intellectually engaging. *From Stone to Paper* pushes the dialogue across disciplinary thresholds, merging literary, political and art historical research. Although not an exhaustive survey of monuments in the eighteenth century, Dadlani makes connections between famous and lesser known monuments and manuscripts, tempting the reader to revisit these jewels.

From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire by Chanchal Dadlani is published by Yale University Press (2019).



From the archive

Aldo Rossi: From scale to scale

Text Fulvio Irace

ArchivioDomus

Left: the cover of *Domus* 602 (January 1980) featuring Aldo Rossi in an Occhiomagico photograph revamped by Emilie van Hees. Opposite page: a page from Manfredo Tafuri's article on Rossi's Teatro del Mondo in Venice, in the same issue of *Domus*

***Domus* presented the Teatro del Mondo** or Venetian Theatre – a floating structure designed by Aldo Rossi in 1979 for the 1980 Venice Biennale – in issue 602 (January 1980). It was the first with Alessandro Mendini at the helm and from graphic design to editorial content it marked a radical shift for the magazine that Gio Ponti had handed over to the young Milanese architect a few months earlier.

The contents changed but, crucially, so did the form of communication – starting with the cover which showed the faces of those featured in the issue for the first time. In that case, it was Aldo Rossi in an Occhiomagico portrait on which Emilie van Hees had used acid to produce unrealistic colours. Superimposed diagonally across Rossi's lemon shirt was a teaser of the title of the mini-essay written for the occasion by the historian Manfredo Tafuri: *L'ephemere est eternel*. Tafuri's complex interpretation of the work's genesis and its potential meanings included two topics that are still of special importance: an (inevitable) comparison with the Teatrino Scientifico of 1978 and the recurrence of the octagonal-tower type in Rossi's graphic and design production.

Midway between architectural mock-up and Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*, the Teatrino Scientifico is a portable museum of Rossi's recherche, its small size (80 x 70 x 55 cm) placing it in the category of objects. The Venetian Theatre is a parallelepiped with a square base (9.5 x 9.5 m) from which rises an octagonal tower 11 metres tall. Tafuri believed the Teatrino Scientifico reduced the architectural figures around it to players in a static *pièce* while the Venetian Theatre compressed inside it the architect's fantastic worlds in a collage of memories.

It was also Tafuri who pointed out that the octagonal body type first made its appearance in a proposal (1977) for a competition for the Centro Direzionale in Florence, the general composition of which revolved around a theatre-museum, reminiscent of the baptistries of Florence and Parma. To complicate the narrative, Rossi drew the attention of critics and commentators to a fascination for the lighthouses he had admired with a child's wonder on his excursions along the coasts of Maine.

In subsequent years, this chain of references was enriched with many more episodes, perhaps the most notable being the octagon set in the courtyard of the Broni school complex. These episodes should, however, be supplemented at

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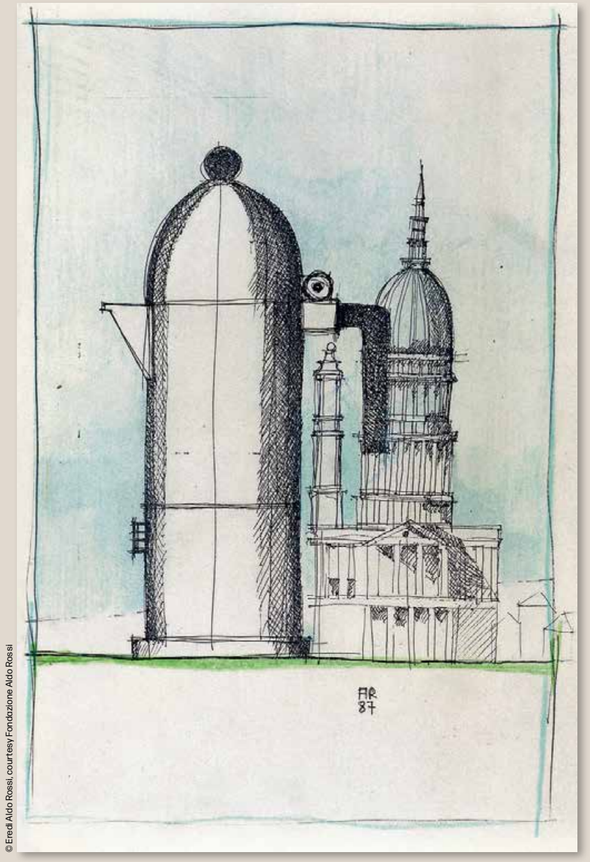

© Eredi Aldo Rossi, courtesy Fondazione Aldo Rossi

Left: Aldo Rossi's Teatro Domestico installation at the XVII Triennale di Milano in a photo by Luigi Ghirri (*Domus* 671, April 1986). Right: a sketch of the Cupola coffeepot designed by Rossi for Alessi, with San Gaudenzio in Novara in the background (*Domus* 691, February 1988)

least with extracts from Rossi's vast graphic production as he used drawing to train his memory, almost turning the sheet of paper into a preparatory sinopia of his erratic thoughts. In the Proustian flow of signs, types and fragments that Aldo Rossi traced sometimes almost automatically – as if in a spontaneous psychoanalytical practice – we witness the triumph of autobiographical representation in which architecture and dream (or delirium?) come together without self-destructing. This is well known and one of the focal points of the vast literature produced on the concept of "analogy" in the Rossi poetic. Less well-known or noticed however is the issue of "scale" whereby the same form – baptistery, lighthouse, theatre, mini-theatre – undergoes a process of miniaturisation or enlargement. What does the change in size produce? How, in the passage from small to large and vice versa, does the different scale impact on the meaning and role of the form which remains identical?

In practice, this shift in scale corresponds to the ratio between architecture and design, predictably successfully practised by Rossi in his work with Alessi: the Conica coffeepot which he imagined as Antonelli's dome on the Basilica of San Gaudenzio in Novara also appears in countless designs as an inhabited construction or an enigmatic tower in an urban framework.

Rossi believed that architecture could be reduced to the size of a household object and that this, in turn, could oneirically be expanded to the city scale: like the Cabine dell'Elba: beach huts, buildings and household storage containers for Molteni & C. Similarly, the Teatro Domestico on the grand staircase of the 1986 Triennale was an oversized mise en scène of the Teatrino Scientifico, featuring a cross-section of an interior that in turn contains an "improvisation" of traditional coffeepots in the centre. Reality or performance? The "Gulliver effect" (as Mendini called it) checkmates the rules of realistic vision: it is the curveball of memory and sensation according to the Modernist axiom "from the spoon to the city". It questions the identity of "size", no longer objective and absolute but variable depending on the observer and the context.

Fulvio Irace is a full professor of the history of architecture at Milan Polytechnic. A columnist for Il Sole 24 Ore*, he has written monographs on Italy's leading architectural figures of the 20th century. He has curated several exhibitions, including "Gio Ponti. Loving Architecture", MAXXI, Rome.*

Rassegna

Offices

Relationships governed by instruments of digital connection have altered design criteria for the contemporary office in recent years, influencing modes of social interaction. This phenomenon has undergone an unprecedented acceleration over the last few months having found ourselves unable to physically meet one another. For some aspects of work, telephone conversations, emails and online meetings function, what is compromised however is personal interaction, a fundamental part of communication and for the development and transmission of ideas and emotions: targeted work has come out a winner, while spontaneous interaction has lost out. Although development in the medium to long term of the Covid-19 health emergency and its impact on the workplace is still uncertain, companies in the sector have begun to develop and test new solutions for the post-pandemic workplace.

Home Smart Office

DVO
www.dvo.it

With options that range from a multipurpose lounge to workstations suitable for small spaces, Antonio Morello has created for DVO a collection of pieces that builds on the products already in the company's range to offer versatile furnishing solutions for creating a workspace within the domestic environment. In the photo, the DV816 Nida desk, the modular metal bookshelf and sound absorbing panel Colibrì.

Seventy-seven

CUF Milano
www.cufmilano.com

A system of office furniture conceived by Giovanni Giacobone of Progetto CMR characterised by a search to combine the performance required by work environments with a language that can enter into both working and domestic environments. The result is a series of workstations with a light appearance combined with a selection of materials with a domestic feel: a slender top sits on a structure enhanced with connection elements that develop from the beams to wrap around the leg.

T-Share

Dieffebi
www.dieffebi.com

The possibility of being rearranged, even by the users themselves, in response to changing working conditions, is very much part of the brief for contemporary office furniture. In response to this market demand, this system of shared tables with accessories can be reconfigured as desired. T/Share includes a range of tables of varying proportions, with heights of 74 cm and 105 cm and depths of 90 cm and 130 cm.

Vista Essence

Newform Ufficio
www.newformufficio.aranworld.it

An evolution of the Vista collection, Essence is distinguished by the choice of melamine articulated in a wide range of finishes able to reproduce the effect of wood. Simple and linear in terms of design, all the elements in the collection – desks, units, shelves and accessorised partitions – have been conceived to adapt to all kinds of different needs and to guarantee maximum use of space enabling multiple configurations of workstations.

Bridge

Citterio
www.citteriospa.com

The design criteria for the contemporary office led Pinussio Borgonovo and Paolo Pampanoni to create this system of furniture that goes beyond the stereotypes of the office and desk, populating it with systems of tops, chairs, shelving and containers that can be rearranged to respond to specific needs. The basic element of the design is the 'bridge', a wood-panelled truss that constitutes the supporting structure for all the elements in the range.

USM Haller

USM
www.usm.com

The outcome of a collaboration between architect Fritz Haller and engineer Paul Schärer in 1963, the USM Haller furniture system is a successful example of engineering applied to industrial design. The programme is based on a structure formed from metal tubing connected via spherical joints. Conceived as such, the system can be used to create compositions as desired to delineate space and fulfil different storage requirements.

Fil Rouge

Las Mobili
www.las.it

Milan studio 967 Architetti Associati founded by Cesare Chichi and Stefano Maestri, have designed this range of work tables for Las Mobili with a perimeter frame in aluminium that is characterised by its extremely clean lines. Thanks to the continuous cuts along the top that provide access to cables, along with the fabric screens, this range enables the creation of operational and semi-executive linear arrangements as well as conference tables.

Woods

Fantoni
www.fantoni.it

Designed for the contract market, this complete programme of tables conceived by design studio Metrica has arisen from a consideration of new ways of working and marks the entry of wood into the world of Fantoni. The Woods programme is made up of large meeting and executive tables, fixed operative desks and workstations with adjustable height. The system is able to range from the aesthetics of operating tables to that of executive tables with a simple alternation between tops and legs.

A work club

The spaces in the Caselli at Porta Garibaldi, in Piazza XXV Aprile, the headquarters of Tecno in Milan, have become the site of an exclusive club for architects and design professionals who, on invitation, can access the rooms set on two floors and book the space most suited to their needs whether it be for individual or team working. There are meeting rooms for conferences, presentations or group meetings along with smaller meeting spaces, operative workstations and areas for individual focus. It is known as TClub and can be booked through the app DINA-Connecting Spaces developed by IO.T Solutions, a company that is part of the group.

Tecno
www.tecnospa.com

Manta

Rimadesio
www.rimadesio.it

This system of tables interprets the diverse and multi-faceted needs of contemporary spaces. Made in different versions, Manta features a modular structure that enables it to be produced in non-standard formats, also in larger sizes, ideal for both office and home use.

Blitz

B&B Italia
www.bebitalia.it

This large sculptural table that recalls a suspended bridge has been designed by Mario Bellini. The entire structure is made from bamboo, an unusual choice for interiors, and consists of a top that is folded at the ends like a piece of origami, becoming a support that tapers off and folds over to meet the ground.

Follow Desk

Mara
www.marasrl.it

Versatile and functional, this table with adjustable height responds to the multiple needs of the contemporary office, enabling alternation between seated and upright positions during the working day, as such improving comfort and maintaining people's physical wellbeing, increasing performance.

Halia

Koleksiyon
www.koleksiyoninternational.com

Designed by Studio Kairos for the Turkish brand of office furnitureKoleksiyon, Halia is a range of hybrid chairs that fulfil numerous functions: executive chairs, operative, waiting and for meetings. The chair is available in different types of fabric and leather, while the legs come in chromed steel.

Elinor

Pedrali
www.pedrali.it

Flexible and attentive to personal wellbeing is how this executive chair by Claudio Bellini is described. Elinor is able to guarantee optimal functional efficiency thanks to a synchronised mechanism integrated into the chair, that regulates the intensity of the oscillation in relation to the body weight of the user.

SmartBack

Luxy
www.luxy.com

Characterised by its clean and dynamic forms, this collection of chairs has been designed for intensive use and illustrates the determination of the designers from Air Design, along with the manufacturer, to achieve aesthetic originality through technical innovation. The back support is in polyamide reinforced with fibreglass.

Milly

Viganò & C
www.viganoffice.it

To celebrate sixty years of manufacturing chairs and office systems, this Brianza-based company established in 1961 commissioned the studio Basaglia + Rota Nodari Architetti Associati, head of artistic direction, to carry out a rebranding for the group. The work of the studio has given rise to a new brand – Viganò, office chairs and more – new communications material and new furniture proposals in which the common denominator is colour. One of the new products is Milly, a crossover chair with soft and enveloping forms that combines a fabric-covered shell with different types of base: chromed metal base in a fixed version, swivel and swivel with wheels, a structure in steel rod or legs in ash.

Hit

Lamm
www.lamm.it

The apparent structural rigidity of this iconic chair designed by Dante Bonuccelli conceals an unexpected degree of comfort. The polyurethane shell surrounds a complex, flexible frame that is able to ergonomically support the flexible material of the seat and back, ensuring high performance and comfort.

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