In 2018, BLOX opened its doors on the harbour front in Copenhagen. Designed by Dutch architects OMA and funded and built by the private association Realdania. The building is a programmatic mix of functions that creates a new destination in one of the most central and difficult locations in Copenhagen. The building is, among other things, home to the Danish Architecture Center's exhibitions and activities, and BLOXHUB – an interdisciplinary environment promoting innovation and sustainable urban development.

BLOX

Realdania

BLOX

Edited by
Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

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BLOX

Realdania

Published by Realdania

About Realdania

Realdania is a philanthropic association with more than 149,000 members. The association seeks to improve the quality of life through the built environment, defined as the physical settings for our everyday life. Realdania is focused on both living and future generations and seeks to promote sustainability and generate new knowledge and innovation. Since 2000, Realdania has supported more than 3,350 projects with a total of DKK 18,2 billion. Anyone in Denmark who owns real estate can become a member. Realdania has more than 150,000 members.

BLOX is funded by Realdania, and BLOX is built and owned by Realdania By & Byg, a subsidiary to Realdania. Through ownership of buildings and areas for urban development, Realdania By & Byg implements Realdania's mission and vision about improving the quality of life through the built environment.

Find out more on realdania.org

BLOX

Edited by
Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

Photographs by
Rasmus Hjortshøj

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Preface

Jesper Nygård

CEO, Realdania

A modern landmark on the waterfront

Architecture should touch us and be touched, alive and enlivening. Above all, architecture should be used and form a setting for lived life, content and activities. That is certainly true of BLOX – which is much more than a building. Many have had and continue to have great expectations for all the things that BLOX is and will become in the future – both indoors and out.

The story about BLOX begins in 2005. Then, the philanthropic association Realdania bought a neglected plot surrounded by heavy traffic in a central Copenhagen location – in between the two iconic bridges Langebro and Knippelsbro. Others had proposed plans for building on the plot, but none of the plans were ever realized. In other words, the place had the potential to become a hotspot in the Danish capital.

Rounding off the development of the harbour front

We wanted to create a building and an urban space of extraordinary architectural quality that would round off the development of Copenhagen's Inner Harbour, where popular recreational areas have transformed the former industrial port into a port for people. Copenhagen is known for its many cyclists and way of life. The many Copenhagen cyclists and pedestrians now have new access roads to reach their city. A new urban space, new passages stretching along and across the harbour. A footbridge across Frederiksholms Kanal and the upcoming Lille Langebro, the bicycle and pedestrian bridge that opens in 2019 to connect BLOX with the district of Christianshavn. A new urban neighbourhood has emerged.

This is how Realdania and local municipalities work with urban and harbour development in several locations around Denmark, where former industrial ports are transformed into new, vibrant neighbourhoods. With homes, businesses and cultural attractions and with room to meet, move and enjoy the water.
In the city of Sønderborg, on the water's edge, lies Alsion – an innovative landmark for the region of Southern Denmark and an internationally acclaimed concert hall and attractive recreational area. Similarly, the harbour-front area around the award-winning public library Dokk1 in the city of Aarhus has been transformed into a much more vibrant urban space. In a short amount of time, the squares, the size of four soccer fields, have become the new urban meeting place for ball games, children's activities, flea markets and a whole range of other activities. And in the city of Aalborg, the industrial port has been transformed into an area

with housing, businesses and cultural attractions – and an international art centre is taking form on the city's former brewery site. This is the sort of urban development we will be seeing much more of in the future, because the former industrial areas – including ports – offer tremendous potentials for adding more open spaces to our cities.

Architecture, design and quality solutions

In the everyday life in and around BLOX, both the Danish Architecture Center (DAC) and the innovation network BLOXHUB contribute to creating a place that lives and works for and with the city. The idea is that bringing several different functions together in the building will help ensure that there is activity around the clock, so that the building and the surrounding space do not turn into a ghost town after office hours. The name BLOX refers both to the architecture itself and to the idea of stacking many different activities and functions on top of each other.

From the outset, DAC was intended to reside at BLOX. With state-of-the-art exhibition facilities, guided city tours and towering aspirations, DAC is a world-class venue for architecture and urbanism that attracts both professionals and everyone else with an interest in architecture. Later, the idea emerged of creating an ambitious innovation hub for sustainable urban solutions, and in 2016, together with the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs and the City of Copenhagen, we launched BLOXHUB: an innovative network of researchers and companies – big and small – working to develop sustainable solutions for the cities of the future and bridging the gaps between the professional domains of design, tech and architecture. So, while local Copenhageners and tourists enjoy the outdoor space, visit the restaurant and play in the playground, professionals from a wide range of disciplines are hard at work inside, developing ideas to make our future cities green and liveable.

Sustainable cities now and in the future

BLOX is Denmark's world of architecture, design and new ideas. In addition to DAC and BLOXHUB, the building also houses a fitness centre, a café, a playground and flats on the top floors. It is a place where people can live, dine, work, network, play, work out and see exhibitions, with the cars safely out of the way in the fully automated underground car park that makes more room for urban life and for people to enjoy the weather, the water and the city. Thus, by virtue of both the building and the content, BLOX is a contribution to sustainable urban development. To quality of life on a big scale, on a local scale and in everyday settings.

BLOX is undoubtedly one of the biggest projects in Realdania's history. Measured in time, funds and physical scale. And it is the result of a lengthy process, full of challenges, modifications and adjustments of both the building and its contents. However, the essence has remained the same throughout. The result is a distinctive new architectural element in the city, a unique building that stands out while also referencing the existing surroundings. The building matches its neighbours in height and bulk, and the green glazing echoes the city's verdigris copper spires and waterways. This is a modern landmark that gives us more of all the good things in Copenhagen – as well as something entirely new.

We hope that BLOX will continue to make a splash in Copenhagen and beyond, both across the country and around the world. BLOX is a philanthropic effort with broad appeal. The project promotes several of the strategic goals of Realdania's philanthropic work. This includes the goal of promoting sustainable cities and new community settings. And overall, BLOX is a contribution to Realdania's vision of creating quality of life for everybody through the built environment.

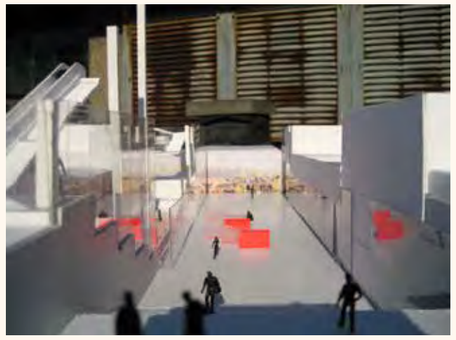
This is the story of BLOX. Of the history, the vision, the process and about how BLOX rounds off the development of Copenhagen's Inner Harbour – from former industrial port to a port for people. A story told by stakeholders who, each in their way, have helped make BLOX possible. Realdania wishes to thank everybody for their contribution. Including the author and the photographer for their thorough work. And to the readers: enjoy!

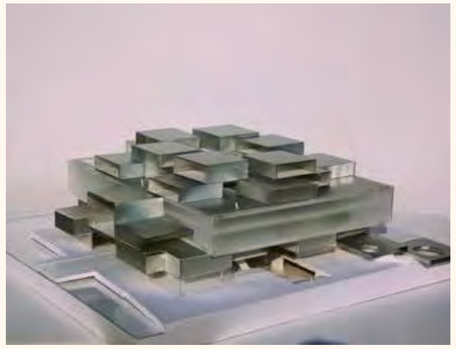
Jesper Nygård
CEO of Realdania

Introduction

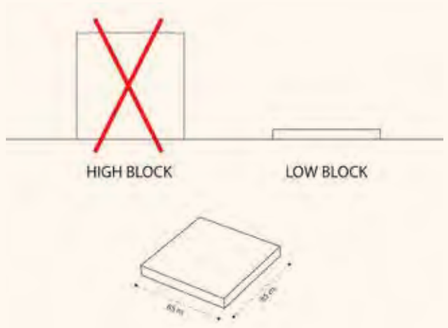
Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

Editor





Model studies of BLOX. OMA, 2011.



The building's volume and height are adapted to the urban context and to the scale of the Copenhagen city block. OMA, 2006.

When BLOX opened its doors to the public in May 2018, the event marked the conclusion of a 12-year effort to construct a both spectacular and controversial building on the Bryghus (Brewhouse) Site, one of the most challenging plots in Copenhagen. It also marked the beginning of a new chapter in the modern history of Copenhagen as a city that enlists architecture and urban development to reinvent the relationship between the city centre and the harbour front, which has always been a key aspect of the city's identity.

No fewer than 75 architectural proposals for the site have fallen by the wayside since 1941. The philanthropic association Realdania's project was the first that proved able to balance the many different demands involved in building on this particular urban site. BLOX redefines the city's relationship with the water, and new connections have sprung up to overcome urban barriers in the form of busy traffic arteries and the waterway with its very limited number of bridges. OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture), the Dutch architectural firm that won the assignment in an interview competition, has dubbed the building an Urban Connector, highlighting the ability of architecture to connect, enhance and energize urban spaces. The Bryghus Site has created an accessible urban space in a place that was used as a car park, dominated by one of Copenhagen's busiest thoroughfares, Christians Brygge. BLOX has become the focal point of a new neighbourhood. It epitomizes the way a modern Danish welfare city negotiates and frames the communal space as a universal resource that we are all entitled to use. Accessibility and the ideal of focusing the urban development on citizens are key values. BLOX completes the transition that Copenhagen has undergone since it was on the brink of economic collapse in the late 1980s. From struggling mini-metropolis to a welfare city known around the world for its investment in generous public spaces.

During the 2000s, BLOX soon became part of the debate about the so-called Metropolitan Zone, which extends from the main railway station, City Hall and Tivoli to the harbour. The Metropolitan Zone was to be the site of strategic densification, and the city centre was to be future-proofed through a series of projects representing the vision of a city that finally embraced modernity. The densification was also intended to activate the potential of the harbour, which after a prolonged and intense effort to clean the water suddenly emerged as one of the city's main recreational assets. In a dramatic transformation, Copenhagen Harbour went from an active industrial port that the city turned its back on to a living blue park that engages the city, with water clean enough for swimming. BLOX and the transformation of the industrial port infrastructure is one chapter in the story about the emergence of the late modern welfare city. It is the story about a city that has moved closer to the waterfront. In a search for projects capable of creating a new flow in the city, BLOX is the final piece in the puzzle. On a grand industrial scale, the harbour space was and is radically different from the city centre. The long, horizontal lines of the pier and the expansive water surface struck a clear contrast to the narrow streets in the city centre. That the harbour front, converted into a blue park, would become the city's main attraction was inconceivable just a few decades ago. With its 27,000-square-metre floor space, including a three-storey underground car park, spacious city squares, passages for bicycles and pedestrians and a wide range of attractions for the many tourists and locals, BLOX combines the urban ideals that have become the Copenhagen brand in the late modern era.

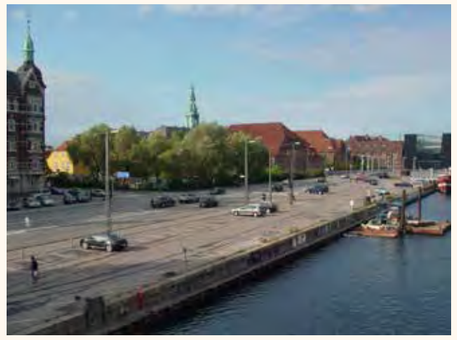
A modern building in an old city

The idea of building BLOX on one of the last vacant plots in the city centre arose in 2004 before the global financial crisis, which would put the project on hold for several years. In 1994, the development corporation Ørestadsselskabet took over the Bryghus Site, and in 2005, Realdania's subsidiary

Realdania By & Byg bought the plot. Even then, the vision was to create a new building and an urban square of high architectural quality in order to enhance the area and help tie the city and the harbour together. In 2006, the general vision for the project was formulated. OMA was selected in an international interview competition. The ground was broken in May 2013. For centuries, the Bryghus Site, where BLOX now stands, was an important part of the story about Copenhagen's profound dependence on and symbiosis with the water and the port as a source of income and a workplace for many of the people living in the city.

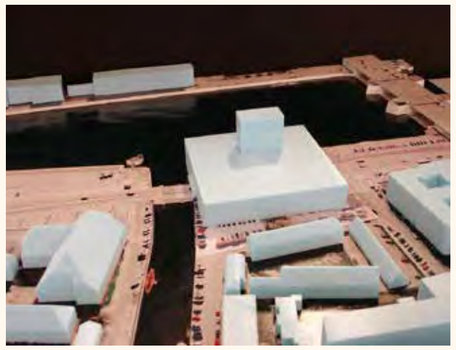
Copenhagen is a city that, for many reasons, never really stepped into modernity. It has preserved the image of the pre-modern city. Unlike many other European capitals, Copenhagen's city core did not undergo major renovation guided by modern principles, with infrastructure slicing up the city centre. H. C. Andersens Boulevard has served as a traffic artery since the late 19th century. The large expansion outside the city's original embankments happened before the modern turn in architecture and before urban development began to set the agenda. The cityscape in the small capital with the large built heritage has served as an ideological barrier to the development of the city core. Over time, the qualities of classic Copenhagen have been zealously guarded. The iconic figures of Danish modernism never had the opportunity to leave their mark. The megalomaniac plans of sacrificing the Lakes in Copenhagen in favour of a large-scale traffic solution were abandoned, and thus the city centre and the surrounding districts of Vesterbro, Nørrebro and Østerbro remained connected via a generous, public recreational space. Despite the relative absence of large, coherent modernist areas in the city centre, Copenhagen is full of modernist elements, including buildings such as Arne Jacobsen's SAS hotel, works from the late modern period such as the Scandinavian modernism and a gradual transformation of the harbour front with high-profile projects throughout the 1990s and 2000s, such as the Black Diamond, the Royal Playhouse, the Opera and the buildings on Kalvebod Brygge.

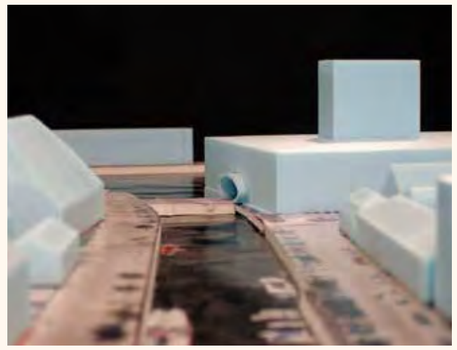
As part of the modern tradition, BLOX can be perceived as an urban machine – an Urban Connector, as the architects have called it – and the machine metaphor is evident in the way the building 'works'. Modernism has always flirted with the notion of the building as something more than a symbol and a representation. It has to function. And it has to function in accordance with principles that make a difference, not just as a pure image of the city. That is the strength of BLOX as an urban building. It is performative, it alters the environment it enters into. In light of history and, not least, the demand for a different type of relationship with the city and the everyday life that is a key constituent of the functioning of the welfare city, there was a clear awareness that BLOX had to contain a range of functions that would create a living building. The mono-functionality that is the hallmark – and burden – of many other culture centres is replaced by a more modern vision of what a harbour-front building can be, and what it can offer. OMA was chosen for the project as representative of an architectural trend with a considerable analytical flair and a basic understanding of the conditions shaping the modern city that had the capability to take on one of the most challenging plots in the city and thus realize the client, Realdania's ambitions on behalf of the city's communities. BLOX is not just complex in terms of its programme and site. It was constructed in a context of urban development, conservation, economic and democratic institutions and local community associations, all of which had a strong impact on the process. Building in a highly regulated city such as Copenhagen, in one of the most conservation-heavy urban environments, required a high degree of creative adaptability. The negotiation between the many different versions of what a city is and can be is the essence of the project statement: in its basic concept, BLOX offers a vision that deviates from the existing image of what a city can be. Traffic management and urban space requirements

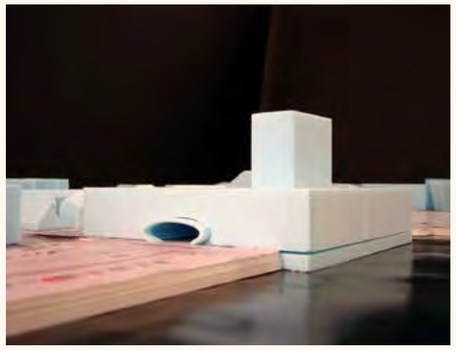


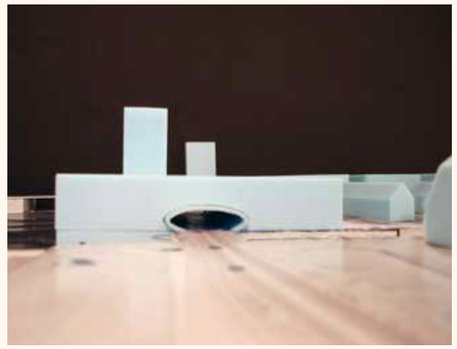
Before BLOX, the Bryghus Site consisted for decades of a temporary car park, a busy traffic artery and a makeshift adventure playground.

BLOX seen from the Langebro bridge. Pontoon and harbour-front promenade in the foreground, Fæstningens Materialgård (the Arsenal) on the left and the Black Diamond in the background.









Early concept studies by OMA, 2007. Positioning of the building volume on the Bryghus Site, including bisection of the road.

Copenhagen's most striking examples of modernist architecture are scattered more or less arbitrarily throughout the city. OMA collage, 2007.

impose further demands. There was high expectations that a new building on the Bryghus Site would correspond and react to its surroundings, while giving something back to the city.

Architecturally, and in terms of its content, BLOX is part of the city's cultural circuit of venues that have a role to play in a new urban economy. The building is a well-defined spatial link connecting important cultural institutions situated on and around Slotsholmen (Castle Island) and finally completes the kilometres-long harbour-front promenade, which makes up Copenhagen's largest recreational space. With BLOX, this space is finally completed. A key element of the project is the circulation of people around and underneath the building. Gehl Architects conducted urban space analyses of the potentials with regard to accessibility and traffic flow in the area. Multiple elements help make BLOX a natural part of urban life: DAC's café, a fitness centre and a restaurant with outdoor seating. And, not least, a playground that is open to the neighbourhood children and also has facilities for local preschools. The urban space that is established between Fæstningens Materialgård (the Arsenal) and BLOX completes the spatial sequence that emerged with the extension of the Royal Danish Library, the Black Diamond, and invites many different types of recreational use, including market events, sports and other activities. The harbour-front promenade lets pedestrians walk around BLOX along the water. The 22 flats on the top two floors help ensure that there is life in and around BLOX around the clock. The underground car park not only removes cars from the nearby streets and squares but also helps create a natural flow of people in and around the building.

City in a city

The choice of the Dutch firm OMA signalled the desired design direction and spatial focus. With its diversity of users and functions, BLOX is like a city in the city. The building's architecture connects the urban spaces with the inner life of the building and connects parts of the city that used to be bisected by heavy traffic. The architecture links up functions, professional environments and experiences and forms a new, extraordinary meeting place. The staggered boxes that make up the building create a terraced landscape and clearly convey that the building contains a wide variety of activities. BLOX relates to the city in its own way in size and materials. The green glazing references the characteristic verdigris of the Copenhagen copper spires and reflects the sky and water that frame this port city. The building is the same height and size as Chr. IV's Brewhouse and the surrounding housing blocks and also respects the main sight lines in the area. A key architectural theme of BLOX is transparency. From inside the building, one can look into the many different rooms and staggered floors through the interior glass facades. From the large, central exhibition hall, one can see the traffic glide noiselessly through the building and the harbour space. The same principle applies internally, with a free view of the offices and the fitness centre inside the building. One of the main challenges was the physical properties of the site. It has water on two sides and a busy road that is used by 25,000 cars a day, and which could not be closed during construction. Although it is one of the most attractive and centrally located plots in the city, dense traffic made it one of the most deserted. BLOX is pushed all the way down to the waterfront, referencing the canal city of Venice, where the houses are in direct contact with the water. A wooden pier lets pedestrians pass around the building along the water. This creates a large, sheltered, sunlit urban square between Fæstningens Materialgård and BLOX. Entering BLOX is like entering a living urban space. Urban life and the urban space are drawn into the building and returned to the city, which has rediscovered the connection between the dense city centre and the open water surface of the harbour.

BLOX seen from Frederiksholms Kanal with the pedestrian bridge that connects the urban square Søren Kierkegaards Plads with BLOX and the Bryghus Site.

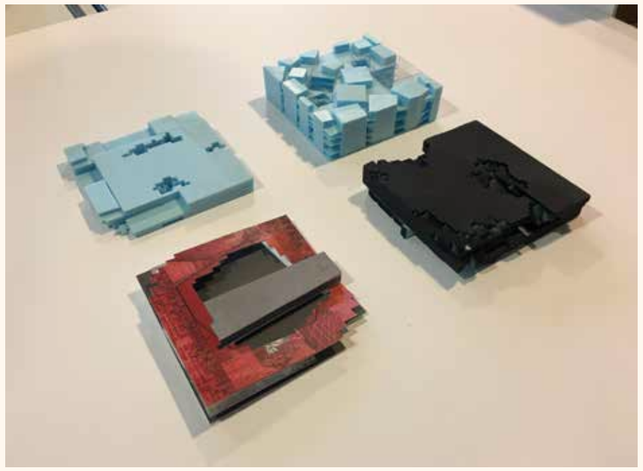
About the book about BLOX

The book about BLOX follows three tracks. Essays by experts and interviews with the key actors involved in the project offer insight into the basic principles, the urban policy ideas and the historical context that shaped the project. In addition, the book contains extensive documentation in the form of photographs and drawings that offer detailed insight into the spatial qualities BLOX creates for the city and its users. Last but not least, the book provides insight into OMA's design process through a presentation of sketches, diagrams, models, collages and other material that show the extensive studies that resulted in the final design. In the interview *City in a Box*, OMA partner Ellen van Loon presents the project's concept and analytical approach. With a keen understanding of and practice-oriented approach to the fundamental urban conditions that shape our cities, OMA has created a building that acts both as a comment on contemporary urban thinking in Copenhagen and as a solution that realizes a complex programme on one of the most difficult sites in the city. It is the story of the building as an Urban Connector that fulfils the ambition of creating architecture that represents its time and reinforces the potentials of the city.

In his historical essay about the Bryghus site, Professor Emeritus Carsten Thau offers a thorough introduction to the dilemmas and challenges involved in building on and activating the harbour front over the years. The many radical solutions that have been proposed, many in connection with architectural competitions, reflect the complexity of infrastructural conditions, historical heritage and visions of the modern city that have unfolded around the site where BLOX now stands. Each in their way, the many abandoned projects represent the ideas about the city and the good life that preceded the building we see today. It is the story of Copenhagen, with its intact city centre, which has only occasionally allowed modern architecture to manifest itself with its ideals and promises of a better future. Only at a late stage in the city's modern development were architectural firms from abroad invited to take on major assignments in Copenhagen and environs. Zaha Hadid's extension of the Ordrupgaard museum and Jean Nouvel's hotly debated concert hall, DR Koncerthuset, in Ørestad are examples of buildings that were realized during a time of renewed openness to outside impulses. Now, OMA has realized a project

in Copenhagen that may well become a showcase for the way the country's capital presents itself to its citizens and outside visitors.

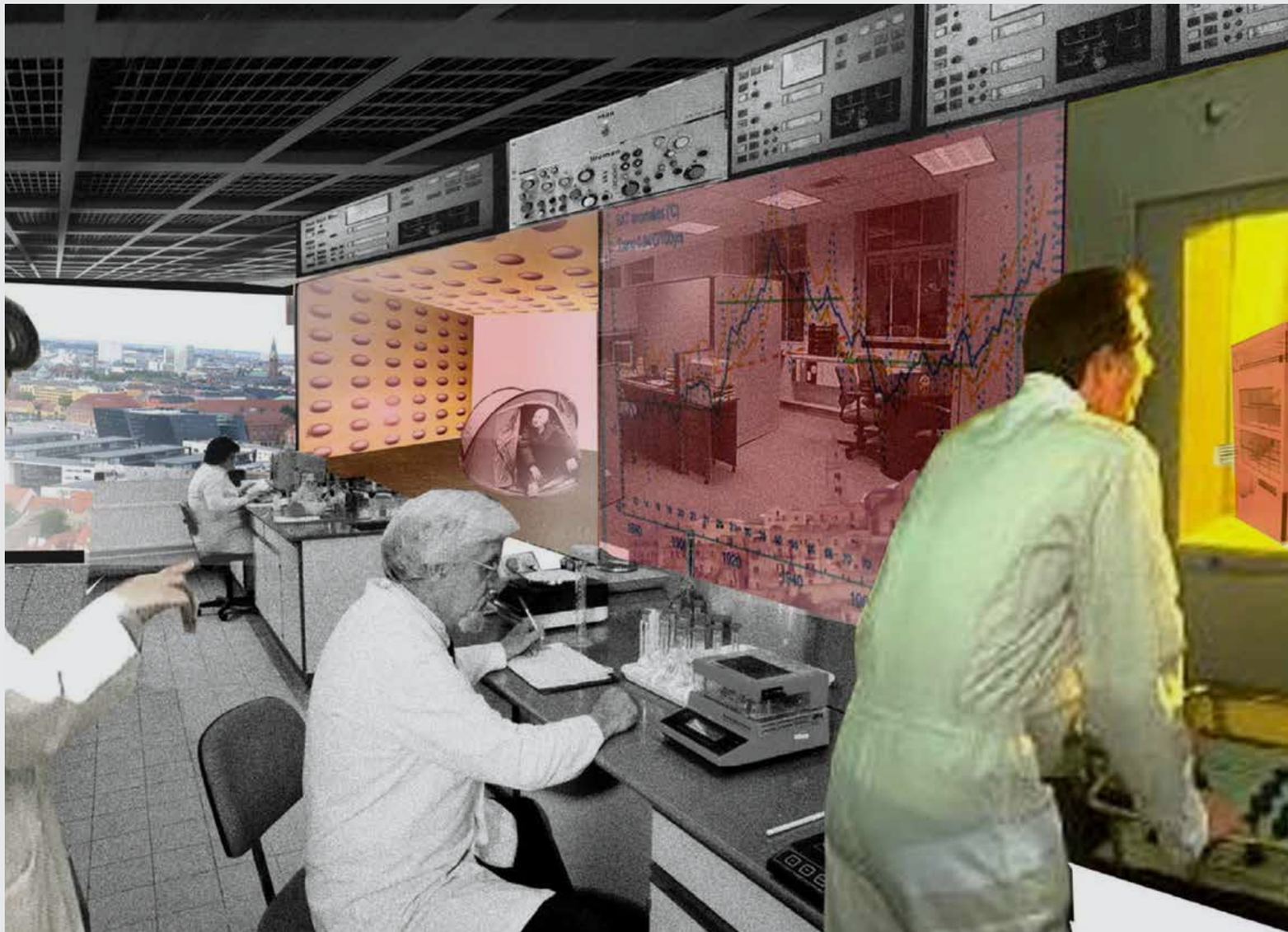
Through her previous employment in the City of Copenhagen, CPO of Realdania Anne Skovbro has been involved in formulating how the densification of the city centre can help move the city closer to the water and activate the harbour front as part of the recreational zone along the blue park that is the Copenhagen Harbour. In the interviews, the discussion about the content of BLOX, including BLOXHUB, the interdisciplinary inspiration environment for global, sustainable urban development, offers important insight into what the building and the many people who are engaged in creating sustainable cities can contribute, not only in Copenhagen but globally. Together with the Danish Architecture Center (DAC), BLOXHUB represents a desire to bring together and communicate the many urban solutions that are necessary for handling major challenges, such as the present climate crisis. In the interview *Towards the Architecture Centre of the 21st Century* Kent Martinussen, director of DAC, describes how an institution dedicated to the development and dissemination of knowledge can contribute to realizing the urban vision that BLOX represents. The DAC programme has been a key element in the building design, and in its rethinking of exhibition spaces it represents the basic design principles of BLOX and the way the building engages with the city, and vice versa. Aaron Betsky, the former director of the Dutch architecture centre NAi, portrays OMA's work with urban issues through an introduction to several of the firm's projects over the years, each in their way contributing to the overall analysis of the insights that architecture can offer into the problems and challenges facing cities in the 21st century. That insight is important for understanding how architecture, in shaping our physical settings, can influence and drive an agenda. BLOX is just that: a building that handles difficult challenges for the city and generously introduces a new image of the kind of city Copenhagen can be. ●



Typological concept models and research-based test prototypes. OMA, 2007.

Concept Collages

OMA's signature collages from the early stages of the development of BLOX in 2006 and 2007 are compound future visions of the urban life that is going to unfold in the building and the urbanism that defines the building's conceptual universe. The aesthetic of the collage derives from a direct juxtaposition of different worlds, which together create a unity where the individual components preserve their distinct identity. This is reflected in the structure of BLOX as a programmatic mix of functions that inspire and influence each other. The collages reflect the culture of mutual exchange that is the building's primary goal.



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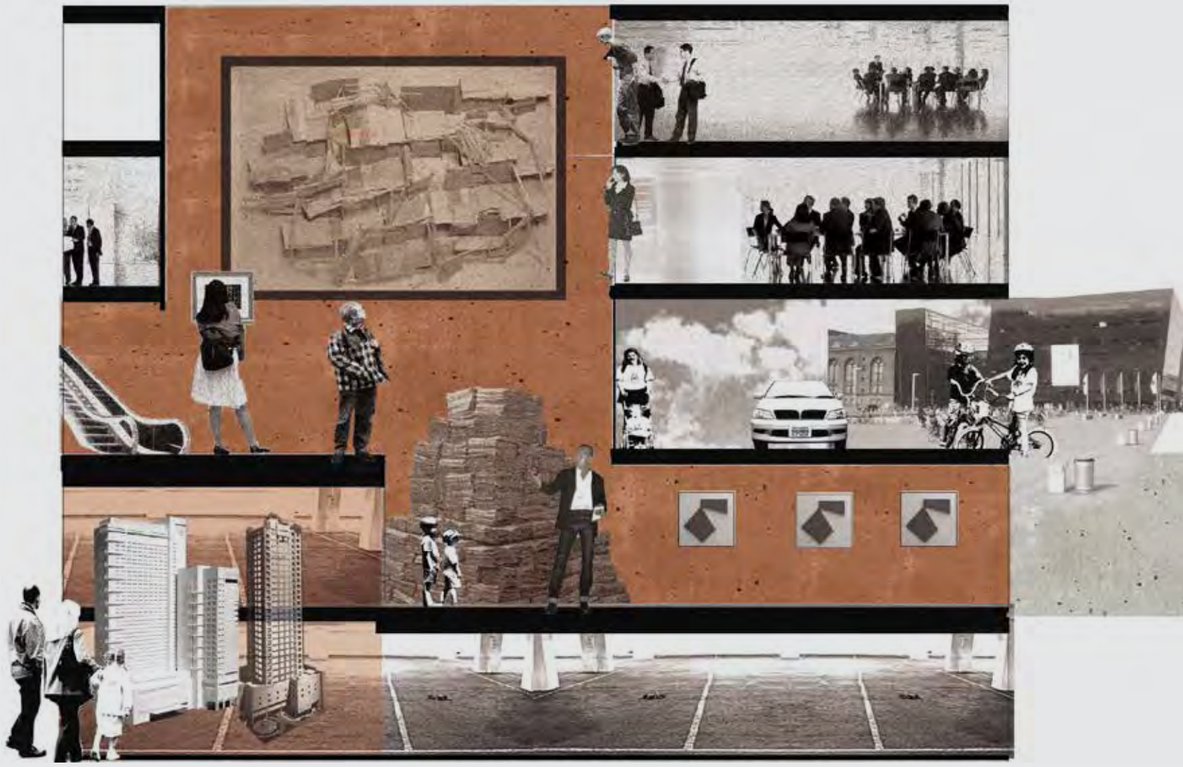
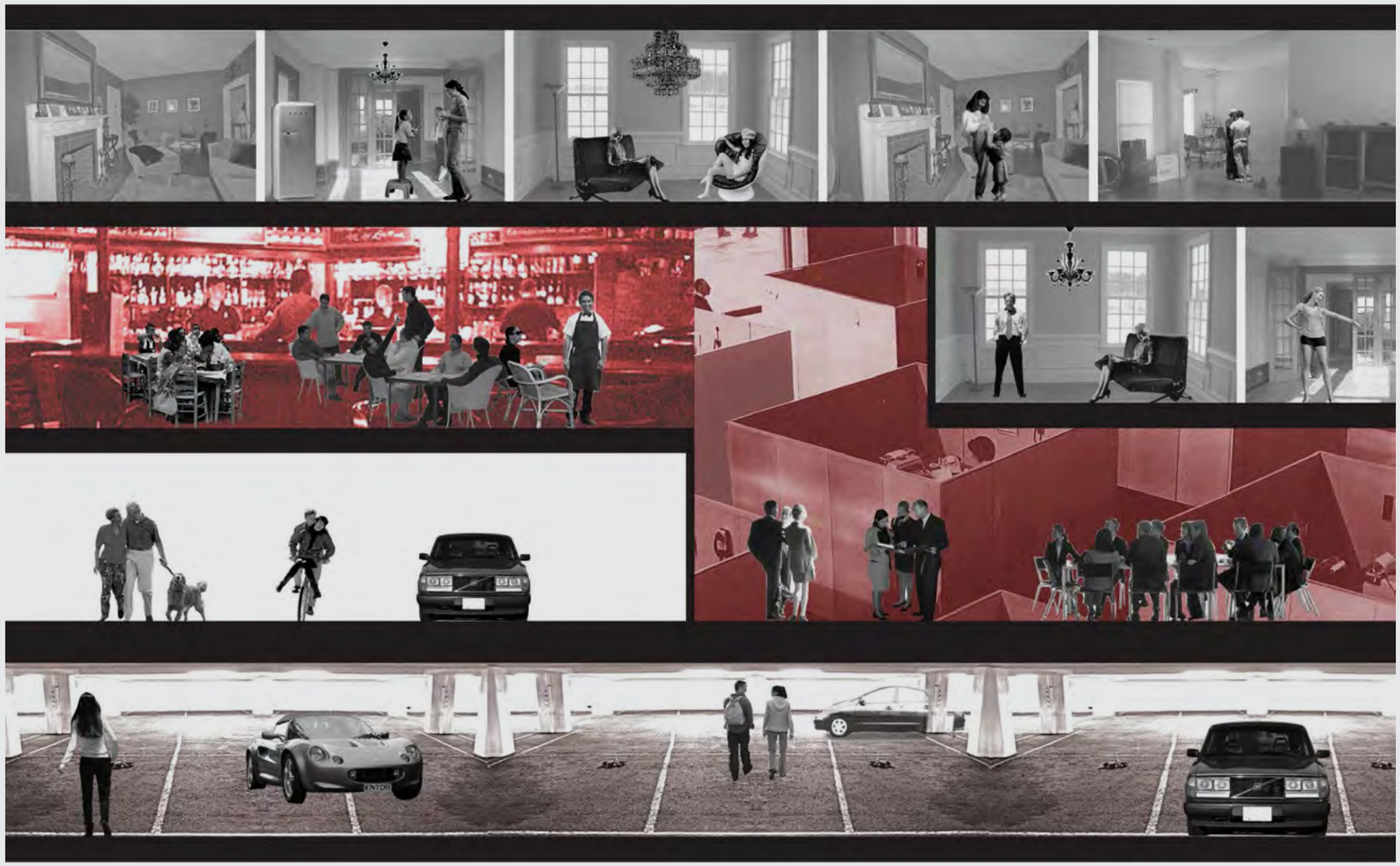
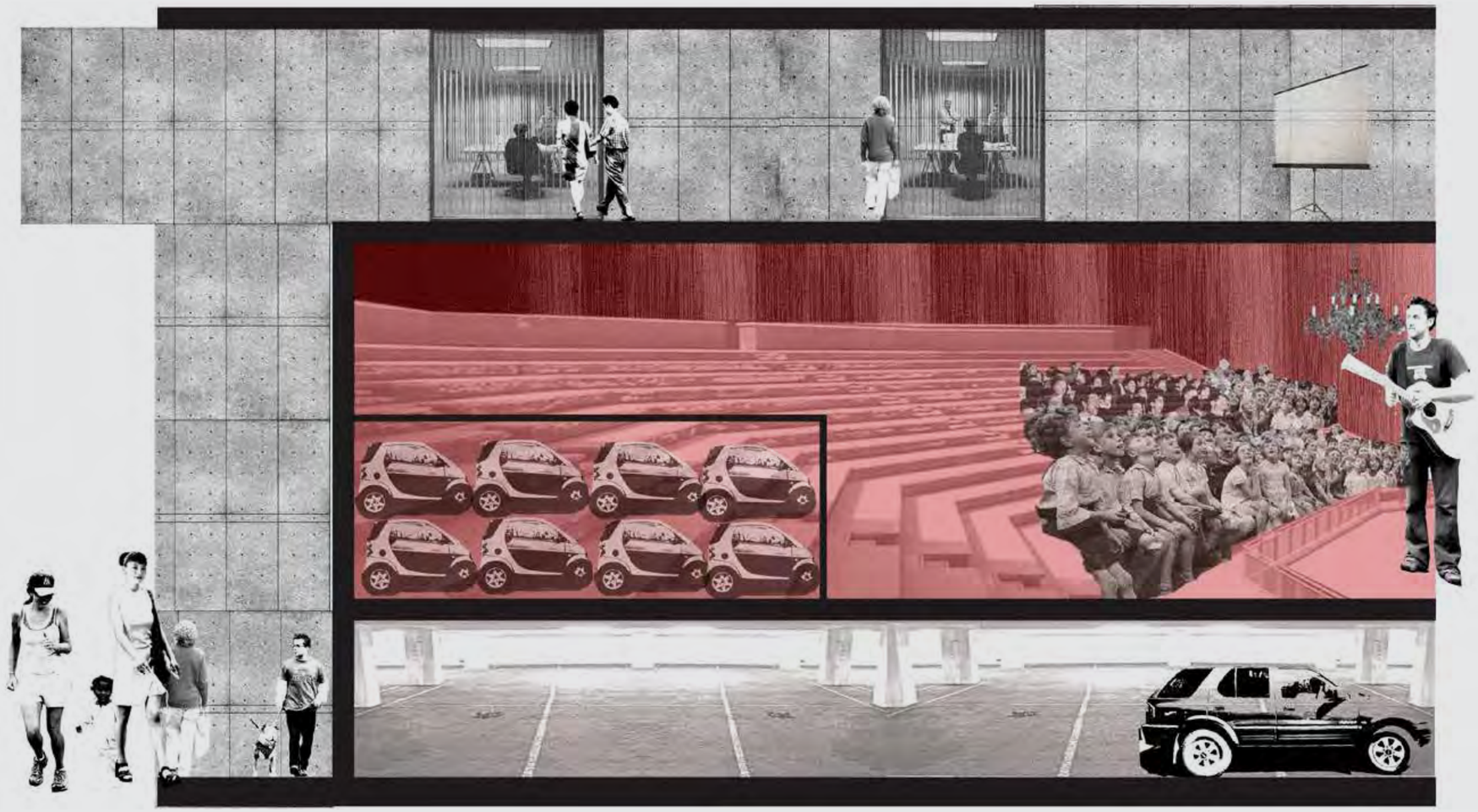
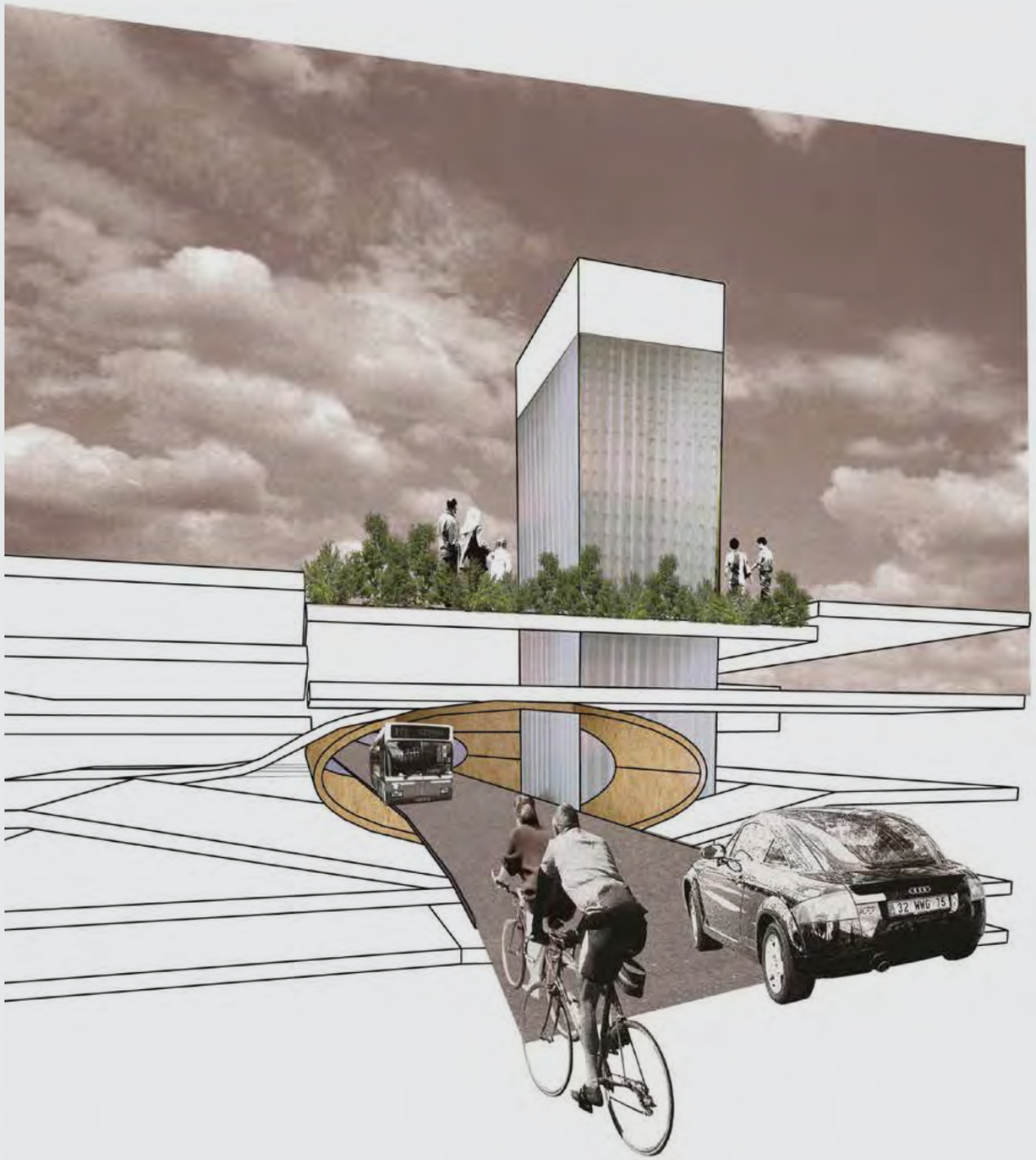
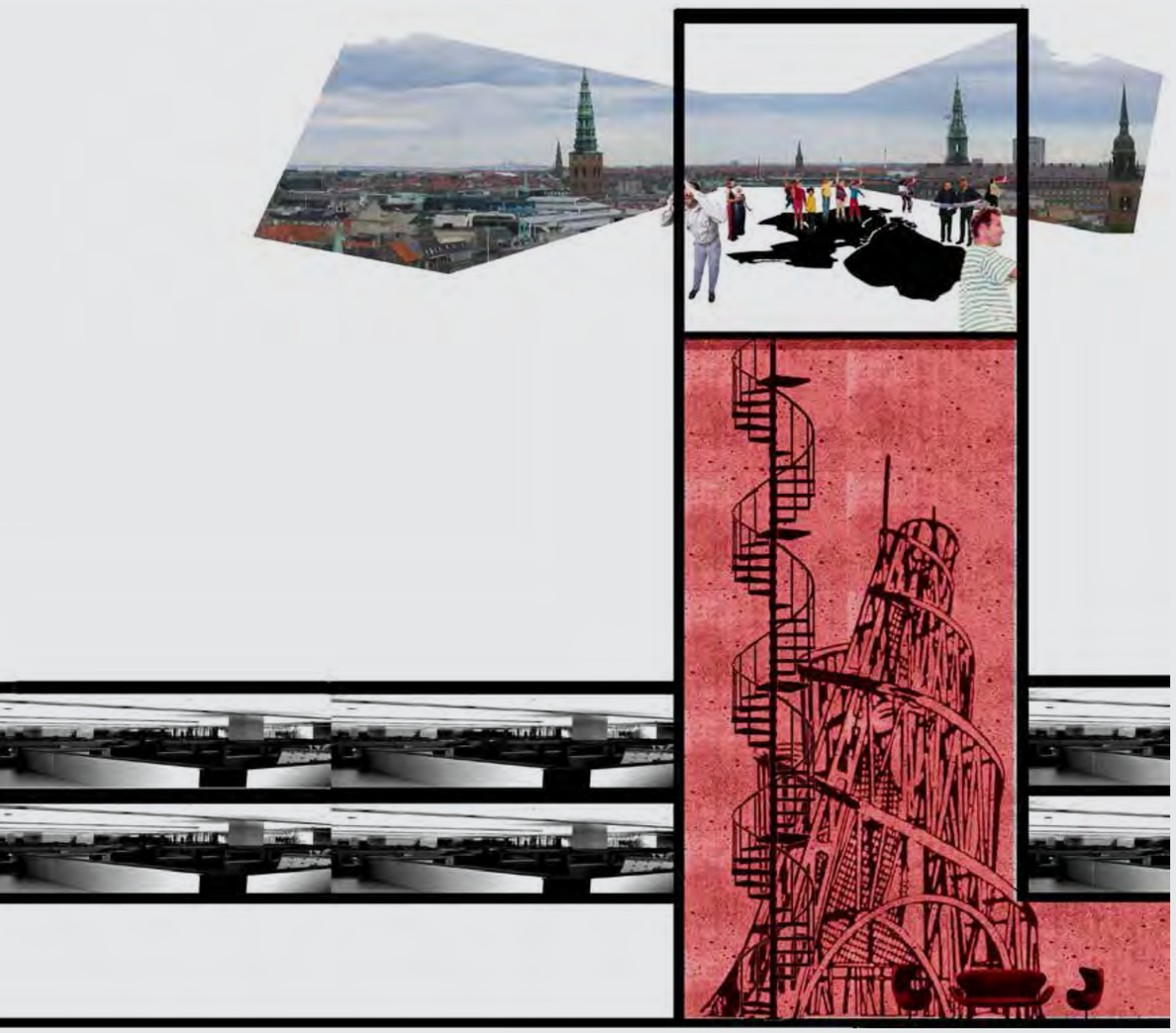








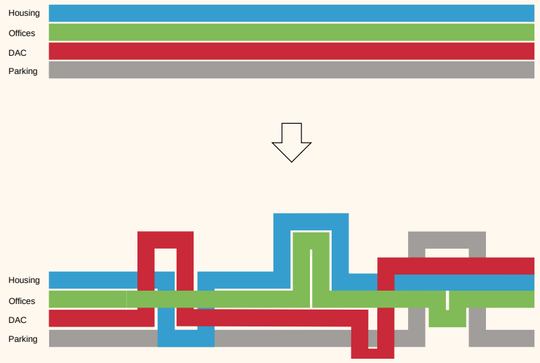


City in a Box

Ellen van Loon

Partner, OMA – Office for Metropolitan Architecture
in conversation with Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

As a partner at OMA, Ellen van Loon was responsible for the design of BLOX. In this interview van Loon discusses the development of the project and the underlying analysis behind the key conceptual features of the architecture.



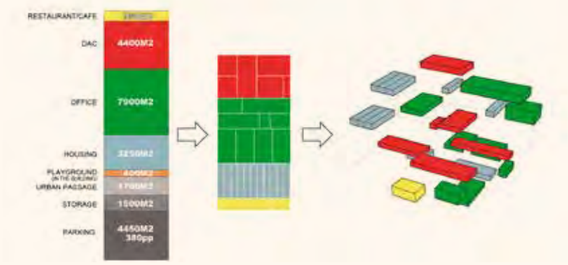
The building's programmes are interwoven, generating exchanges between functions that are normally separate.

KLW When you look at architecture centres around the world, there seems to be a critical lack of new ideas when it comes to exhibition formats and audience engagement. Did you believe that your spatial concept could address that problem and create a new kind of flow, a new loop of relations between the audience, the people working in BLOX and the exhibition content? That the functional layout could actually challenge the very core of the institution?

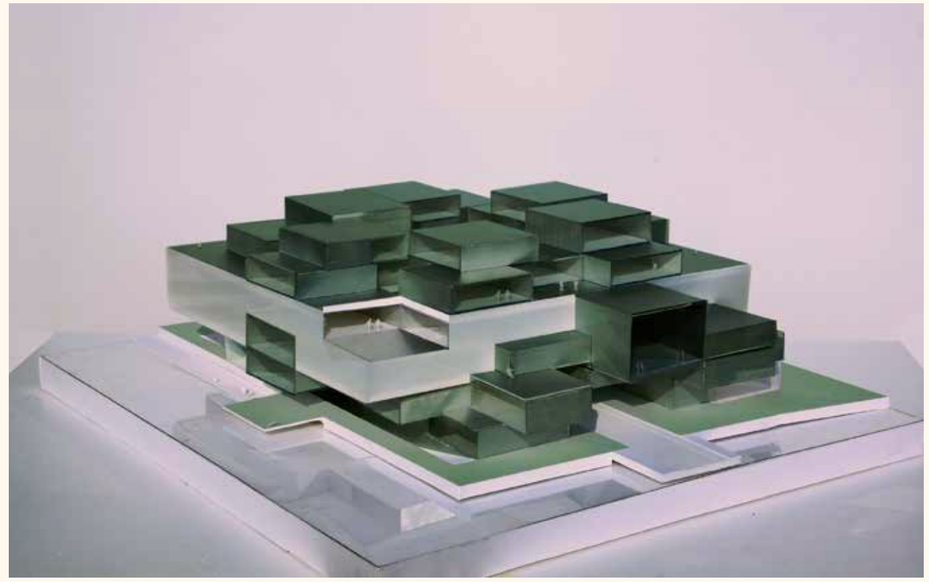
EvL It's rare to encounter a very good exhibition on architecture. Usually exhibitions end up being a collection of foam models and black-and-white wall sheets that nobody really understand except for architects. So that's a big problem. A good exhibition has great visual impact on visitors. Especially in a digital age, people only want to go to buildings and exhibitions which impress spatially. Otherwise you might as well stay home, looking at a digital computer screen. So it was really important to investigate what the ideal spatial format and character are for an architectural museum in which even a not so well curated exhibition looks impressive.

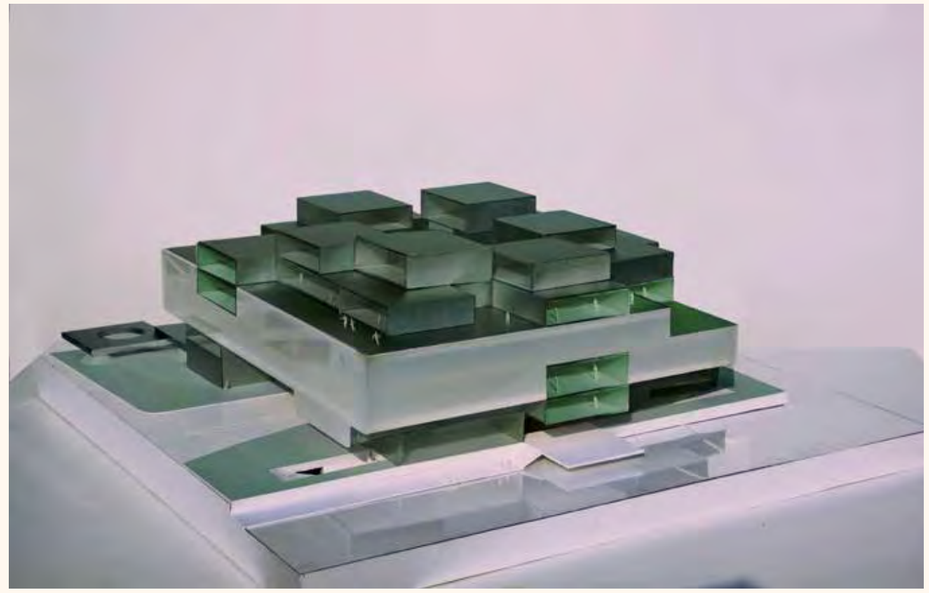
KLW BLOX is obviously not only an architecture centre, but hosts a range of other activities. I know it has been one the most complex building programmes OMA has ever worked on. How did you approach it?

EvL Realdania asked us to design a mixed-use building consisting of the Danish architectural museum, offices and parking facilities, and to

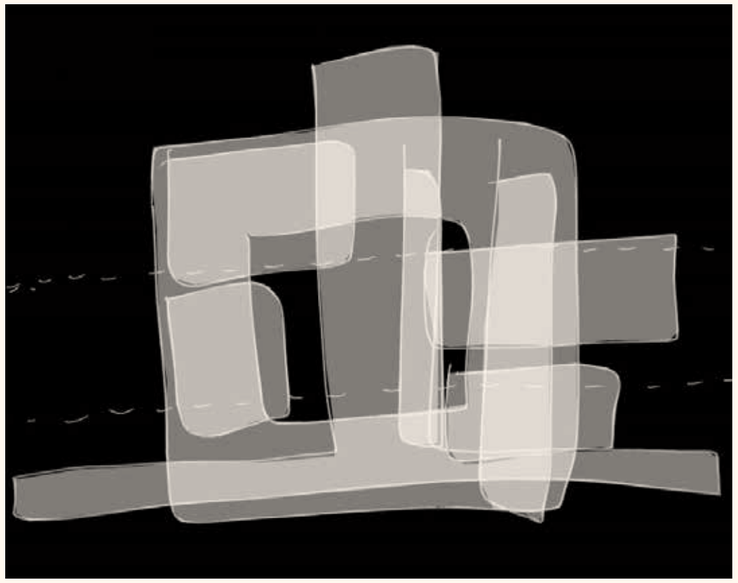


BLOX is organized as a complex combination of programmes stacked on top of each other.

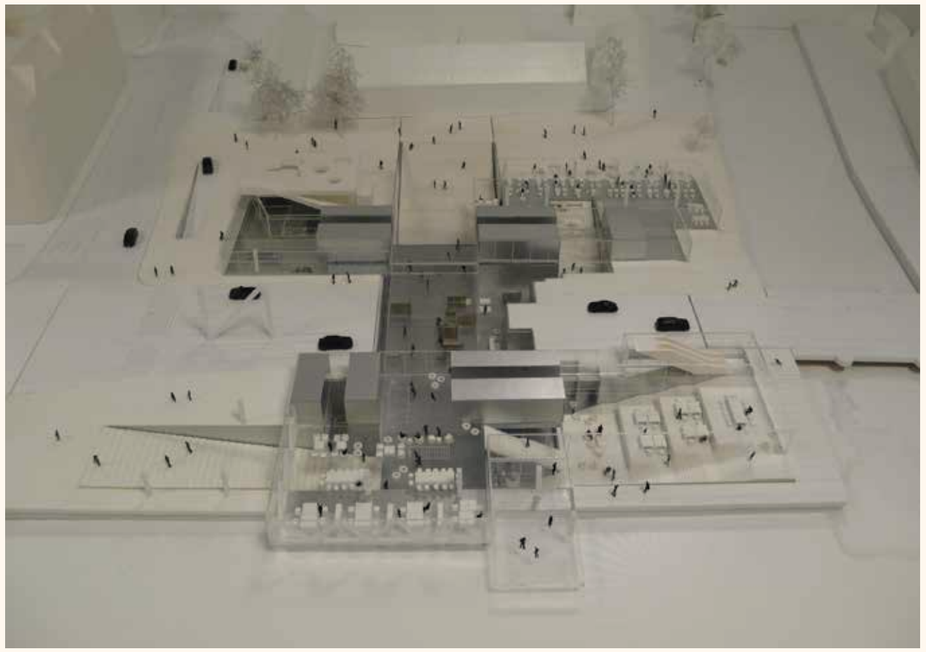




The facade varies in expression and takes on a more open and staggered profile towards the Black Diamond and Søren Kierkegaards Plads (top model). Facade studies, OMA 2012.



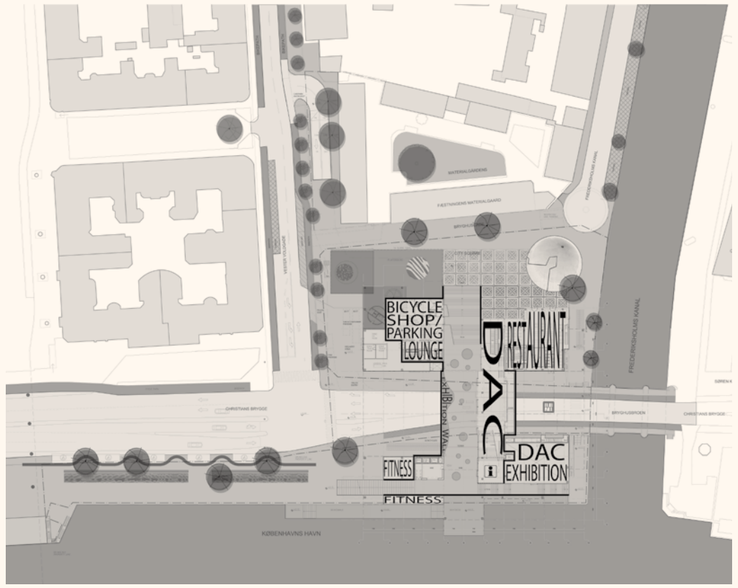
Early OMA concept sketch showing the building's exterior boundaries and its programmatic organization and functions wrapped around DAC's central exhibition space.



Sketch model. Studies of internal relations between functions and flows. OMA, 2007.

DAC Passage. The underpass is located two storeys below ground. It is a public space with access to the harbour front and entrance to the Danish Architecture Center.

Concept model that illustrates the stacking and combination of the building's diverse programme elements. OMA, 2006.



The Danish Architecture Center's central exhibition space is both the heart of DAC and a bridge across the road that passes through the building along the harbour front. OMA, 2011.

In height, BLOX adapts to the urban context and the Copenhagen skyline. AMO, 2006.

incorporate the existing playground in the master-plan for the site. In addition, the lord mayor at that time pushed for the development of more affordable housing in Copenhagen. A typical mix of content for a mixed-use building, you could say. What was interesting for me, however, was that the Danish Architectural Center would be surrounded by functions that are part of their own study domain. Taking this thought a bit further one could even imagine that the institution could architecturally contaminate the surrounding functions. By temporarily infiltrating the office and or housing functions, new office and housing typologies can be tested in a physical space.

KLW Extending the architecture centre into other programmes over time?

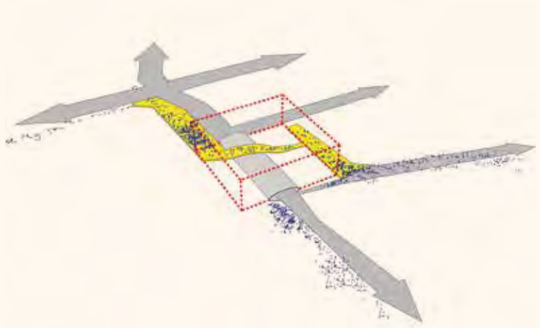
EvL Basically 'stealing' from the others, in some way; expanding the notion of the architecture centre as a confined space. The different building functions would no longer only coexist next to each other, but would constantly react to and be influenced by each other, thus turning the complete building into an architectural centre. Each user would become part of this larger, changing environment. The proof is of course eventually in the pudding: are the different users open for such an experience? We tried to merely create the basic settings by designing a flexible structure where DAC can expand and explore the other elements of the building.

KLW On that note, could you talk a bit about the circulation principle? When I experienced the building for the first time, I was actually struck – and delighted – by how easy it was to get lost. It gives you a very explorative feeling, I would say. You feel like constantly turning corners, like jump cuts in a movie.

EvL You're supposed to get lost! Not only do the functions in the mixed-use programme intermingle with each other, but on top of that the complete infrastructure on and around the site penetrates the volume. In this complex organization DAC is positioned in the centre of the block, starting under the road and slowly rising on each side of the main road, and trying to reach the facades by penetrating the surrounding programme like an octopus. This principle gives you the feeling of getting lost sometimes. The sequence of the different experiences on every level stimulates to continue the exploration of the building. For example, what even struck *me*, though I know the concept quite well, is that when moving through the building it is not quite clear if you are under the next building or above the road.

KLW A far as I know, the programme of BLOX changed through the process, challenging the way you orchestrated the interaction between the different programmes of the building?

EvL Originally, Realdania was planning to occupy the office areas in the project. At a fairly early stage in the process, however, Realdania decided to move into another building in Copenhagen. Due to the fact that Realdania sponsors a lot of cultural institutions in Copenhagen, the idea came up



Study of traffic flows. The constant flow under and through the building had a significant impact on the design. AMO, 2006.

to incorporate them all in the same project. From that moment on the project was branded as BLOXHUB; a centre for urban development, where different disciplines of design not only coexist next to each other but with each other.

KLW **BLOX as a building had to perform in the political context of the city at the time, where harbour transformation was on the agenda, as was an attempt at densifying the city centre called the Metropolitan Zone. That influenced your understanding of the programme as well?**

EvL Densification is high on the agenda in most of our projects, depending on the location of the project. In this project we were at firstmore occupied with the question of how on earth we could transform this desolate parking space into a new vibrant urban area in this prime location in the centre of Copenhagen. There was a lot of unrealized potential. And we asked: how can we connect this area to the vibrant parts of the city and all the other existing cultural institutions? We proposed the idea of a cultural route to the client, not only by redesigning urban connections but also by offering a special entry ticket which enables visitors to visit several institutions.

KLW **I think they offer that now.**

EvL Eventually they did. However, it took a long time to convince the other institutions that eventually everybody would benefit from this idea. In our experience, cultural institutions have the habit of operating in their own cocoon. You can imagine that by combining the forces of all of them, each institution will not only be able to operate within their own restricted premises, but could for example expand their exhibition by thousands of square meters by collaborating with others. Casa da Música in Porto is a good example in this context. They do not only programme their own building, as originally planned, but at the same time also programme other theatres in Porto, and vice versa. This idea boosted the complete artistic programme in the city.

KLW **As you mention, BLOX is part of a system of institutions, all situated within close proximity of the harbour and the medieval urban fabric. And located on a notoriously difficult site on the harbour front, with virtually no urban activities. What was your thinking about the context?**

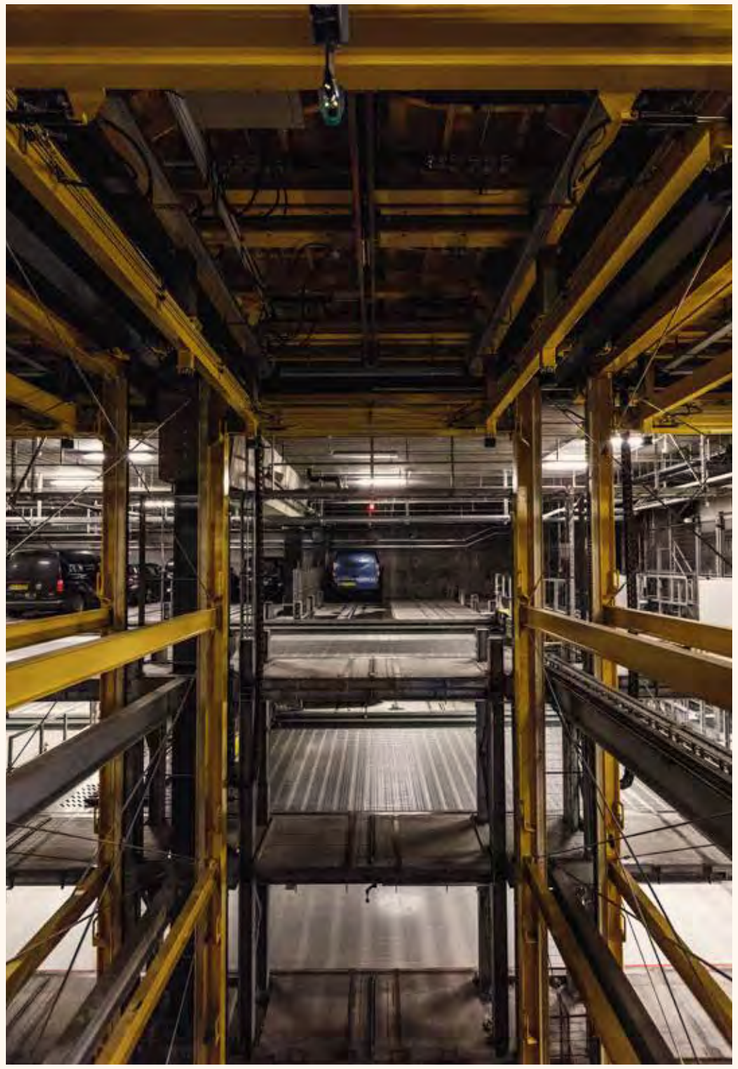
EvL Because BLOX is a crazy intersection of ring roads, water and all kinds of other roads, we had this idea of making the building what we call the 'Urban Connector', where you either go by car or by bicycle or you park your car and then you take the boat, you walk or you take a bike. That's also why you go down stairs and escalators, and we of course also had the big issue that there is a ring road going through our building – it's not that busy during the day, but it is of course a barrier, and what you want to do here is of course to connect the city back to the water, because that was the biggest issue in this area. It happens in many other places, but here it was problematic.

KLW **In contrast, the the Royal Library is turning its back on the road, where you seem to have taken the opposite approach, and seem to be embracing it.**

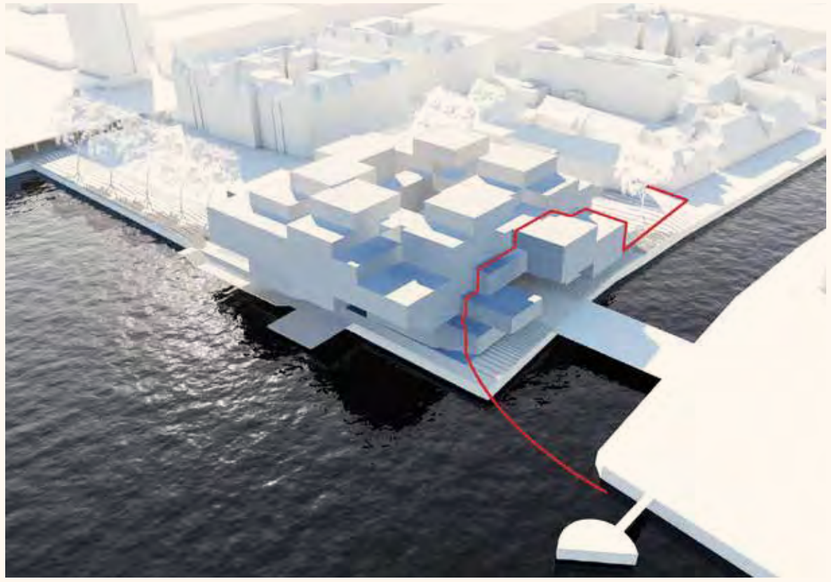
EvL We normally embrace everything including roads. However, the first time we proposed to incorporate the busy ring road through the centre of the building you might quess what the first reactions were. Why? Cars are awful, bad smells, noise, we don't want any cars! Not quite grasping what the positive impact can be of adding the dynamics of a constant moving city into a project.

KLW **In that respect, the building is like a machine integrating and enhancing and accelerating the natural flow of the place. I saw the parking machine in BLOX. You see the glass walls between the end of it, connect the stuff, it's really fascinating. Like a real machine feeling.**

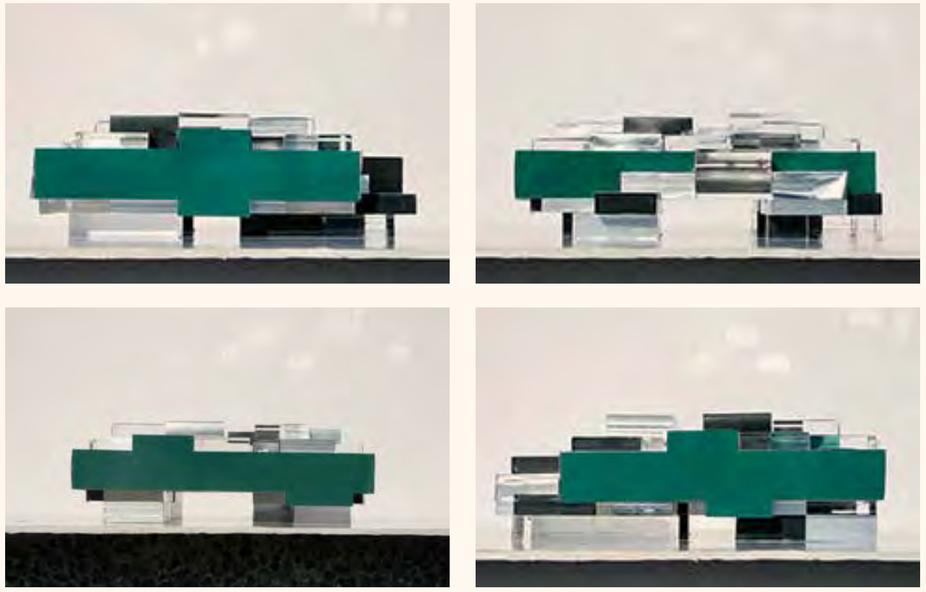
EvL Indeed. Almost an inhabited highway intersection embracing city movement. Exposing automated parking facilities and incorporating bicycles, pedestrians and water bus routes all into the same volume resulted, I think, in a surreal experience of



The fully automated underground parking facility is an important part of the building-as-machine and reduces street-level parking to make room for urban spaces and urban life. The facility is three storeys deep.



Protective zone (red line) towards Christian IV's Brewhouse (not shown in the illustration) on the opposite side of Frederiksholms Kanal. BLOX is situated in a part of the city with a particularly rich cultural history.



Facade studies. OMA, 2011.

a machine, without being exposed to the negative impact of the cars in terms of smell and sound. When you enter the building you see everything – bicycle storage, parking garages, roads going through the building, people passing, cyclists passing, people exercising in the fitness centre, people working etc.

KLW And turning towards the city, you created a big urban scale space by pushing the building all the way to the waterfront. Surprising to many. It is a rather generous gesture. But it was needed in order to add valuable space to the area?

EvL As already said, the original site, including the urban square next to the library, lacked any sense of space definition and character. By positioning the new volume on the corner of the site we created three new, distinctive, redefined urban areas: a linear water square extending the water promenade of the Metropolitan Zone, a sheltered city square between the new building and the historical yellow houses and a new city wall to the square of the library. To further increase the quality of the library square, Søren Kierkegaards Plads, we proposed to plant 3,000 trees. A Parisian city forest in the city of Copenhagen. The city has not responded sofar. Maybe one day ...

KLW The building ends up staging the entire area by pointing to the unrealized potentials. But it must have been difficult – close to impossible – to make it happen with the preservation codex within the old fortification of Copenhagen City?

EvL Yes, it was rather difficult. All understandable to a certain extent, of course. However, In this case I was rather puzzled, I must say. Some argued that despite the original fortification no longer existing in its original state, all new buildings next to the fortification should be positioned outside of the original canon lines. Considering that many historical buildings, including the former brewery on the site, did not comply with this rule, you wonder if such a consideration is still relevant. Eventually it was decided by the court that this argument against the new development was not valid.

KLW Still, the many failed attempts at building on this site since the brewery burned to the ground in the 1960s is a testament to the difficulty of the site. How would you describe the OMA interpretation of urban complexity, in a setting like this?

EvL We really wanted the new building to fit into the typical Copenhagen city block fabric. But contrary to the non-interactive, closed character of these blocks, I was after creating an inviting, open, dynamic public building. A mini metropole, so to speak, that embraces on one hand the city dynamics of the site and on the other hand reconnecting the desired disconnections of the site to the other parts of the city. The building as urban connector, where city functions come together, but also in which you feel the tension between the functions and the city infrastructure.

KLW And maybe exactly what that site needed? It's been sort of an urban wasteland for decades.

EvL Beside the restrictions, it is a very difficult site to build on from a developers point of view. The ring road cuts the site into two plots, each plot too small to build an efficient building on. It seemed that connecting the two halves by incorporating the ring road in the new building was the only solution.

KLW Is the colour scheme you have chosen a tribute, or an attempt, at relating in a very direct sense to the existing context's materiality?

EvL It felt important, in designing a modern structure, to somehow connect to the context. Historic Copenhagen is a rather flat city consisting of typical regular Nordic city brick blocks in which only the green copper historic tower spikes extend above the typical height of this urban fabric. Not only the green colour of the copper roofs but also the beautiful deep green colour of the surrounding water inspired us to use the colour green. The contrasting white fritted facades enhance the brightness of the Nordic light inside as well as outside when the sky is clouded.

In Denmark there is almost no interaction with the public realm in the city block structure. The private life inside exists behind closed walls and in the private courtyard. To boost the public character of the building we placed the Danish Architectural Centre in the typical private courtyard of the city block. This also explains the different entrances leading you to the centre of the building under as well as over the road, demonstrating the different functions on the way, and leading you to the waterside or vice versa.

KLW That's the conceptual base for public interaction?

EvL That's the conceptual base. DAC is the octopus in the building, functioning as the public backbone.

KLW When you look at the many tests and prototypes you did while designing the building, it's obvious that the building's outline ended up more simple than in your initial conceptual testing?

EvL Yes it's a lot simpler. We had very small pixels in the beginning. The chosen dimension had

no correlation with the useful functional units required for offices or flats. The larger pixels did not change the concept but simplified the whole thing. The original pixelated concept was more a pile of very small individual cubes. Over time we felt that just a pile of pixels reduced the readability of the pixel as the base element. By introducing a contrasting rectangular, white floating office ring as a contrast to the pixelated top and bottom we felt the readability of the pixel improved. From an urban point of view this also made sense. The ground floor is more fragmented, allowing different entry points in between the pixels. The pixelation on the roof created nice, large terraces for the flats and functions as a setback. In this way the overall height experience was reduced. We combined the main office programme into a white floating ring; to improve the effect of the pixels we decided to only pixelate the top and the bottom part of the building.

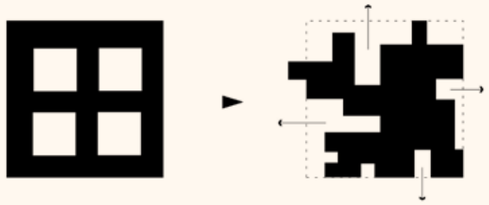
KLW But it's still more animated on the other side, towards the library?

EvL On the side of the library we wanted to create a softer transition towards the historical building. The pixels on this side are effectively falling down like a waterfall.

KLW And what about the harbour proportions? What about the lines, the whole transformation from an industrial infrastructure, which is basically what it is, or should I say, was?

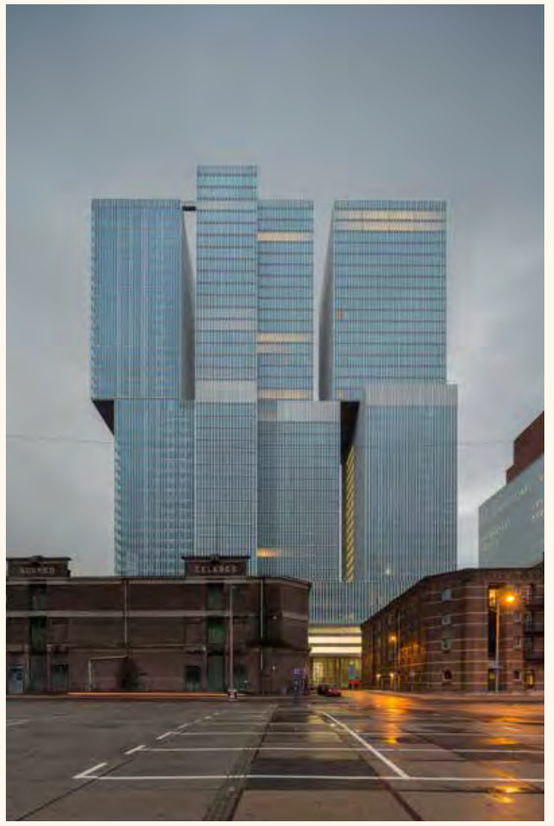
EvL The beautifying of the waterfront in Copenhagen, turning the quayside into a leisure park, that is what I'm most sceptical about. In 'De Rotterdam', which is a large building we designed in one of the former port areas in Rotterdam, the most exciting experience is standing on the 7th floor, seeing oil platforms passing by. In Copenhagen this will very soon no longer be possible. The bridges are planned in such a way that the large barges cannot enter the city centre anymore. Which is a shame. Look what happened with Papirøen in Copenhagen. It was a big success, and for me that is a sign on the wall, that if you beautify all of this, the dynamic actually goes. Striking a balance between leisure and the original harbour qualities is key, I think.

KLW That is quintessential Danish welfare urbanism. Your idea about public space, the basic analysis or your starting point, was more urbanistic from the beginning, meaning, you try to create another image of what a city can be – through the building? Allowing, insisting, that you have to go down through the pathway, that it becomes an infrastructure, right?



BLOX turns the traditional Copenhagen block inside out and engages the surrounding urban spaces with an inviting gesture. OMA, 2007.

BLOX creates its own surrounding urban space and embeds itself in the waterfront promenade. The many terraces create viewing platforms for the public.



De Rotterdam. OMA, 2013.

Early sketch models from the process of defining a basic concept for BLOX. OMA, 2007.

EvL Yes, exactly. But I would also say that we tried to create dynamics in the building, because there weren't any..

KLW It's monofunctionality...?

EvL I think the city allowed far too much housing on the waterside. Due to the strong increase in housing prices in Copenhagen there was a strong desire on the side of the City of Copenhagen to create more and more housing projects. Letting city planning be dictated by economic forces might not lead to the right mix of functions in the city, to that urban life everybody likes. In this field of forces the public authorities have a major role to play to safeguard development of the city in the future.

KLW After all, Copenhagen is a very market-driven city with a very high demand of housing. Quite far from the original ideas of the city of the welfare state.

EvL Yes, that is what we realized over time. We thought that Scandinavia was an example of a social democratic society in which, even more than in Holland, the municipality to a great extent directs the development of the city. The funny thing was, however, when the city did the Metropolitan- Zone competition, and they asked Rem Koolhaas and me to critique the different plans, it became very clear in all the plans that the city has no say whatsoever because they own only the streets, not the land. All the land is owned by private investors. Despite the competition with the call for new urban ideas for this area, the city was only able to change the streetscape, including the city squares. In Holland, the cities treat developers slightly different. They say 'You want to develop X, fine, you deliver me a museum.' It's always a trade-off and that's not really happening in Denmark the way I see it.

KLW Coming back to your reference to Papirøen, it's fair to say that the materiality of BLOX reflects the rawness of the harbour milieu?

EvL You could say that. When you go down the pathway along the harbour, I want you to feel the backside of the key wall. Since sheet piling is the most used material to construct quay walls, it was evident to me that we should use this rusty material as the finish to the Urban Connector in this location.

KLW It seems almost theatrical in its staging of the building?

EvL I was interested in more drama. As in theatre, referring to archetypes in architecture is a good

BLOX under construction. Like a Venetian palazzo, the building sits directly on the water. 2017.

tool to communicate the meaning and experience of spaces. Another example is the exhibition space facing the river. In order to be able to exhibit valuable art in this space, the room had to comply with the Danish national indemnity requirements. Because of this special requirement and use of the room we designed the room as a jewel box by using gold coloured brass as a floor finish. The design of the curtain in the same room, with its strong graphic pattern, draws very much on the typical Scandinavian graphic patterns of the 1970s.

KLW In the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2014, the Arsenale show, you staged performances, the dancing and you gave us the feeling of jump cutting, from one scene to the next. In the BLOX building you go abruptly from one urban setting to the next. It seems to be a very deliberate urban staging?

EvL Yeah exactly, it's an urban staging of scenes reinforcing the experience when moving through and around the building as an object with a specific function as a film script.

KLW And that is quite, as you say, foreign to Danish architecture and urbanism. In all fairness, that's probably one of the main reasons why they invited you to do this project in the first place?

EvL Possibly. The complications on the side might have also triggered the choice. Not quite sure. Never asked them the question. To be honest, I do not think that either of us knew at day one what the result would be.

KLW BLOX is home to 22 flats, adding to the 24/7 character of the building and urban context. How would you describe the housing concept in BLOX?

EvL Normally city flats in Copenhagen have a very small balcony. When we were designing BLOX we wanted to add a new typology to the large amount of newly constructed flatss. Due to the concept of the pixelated shape of the building and the arrangement of the flats we were able to provide very large terraces to the flats. You could say that these flats are not really flats but basically rowhouses with large gardens. The only difference is that you just live in the sky.

KLW You also cultivated the difference between public and private. Since you can actually move around, it feels very public, which I think is a quality, it doesn't feel claustrophobic.

EvL Some functions in a mixed-use building need to be public, whilst other functions require more privacy. To find the right mix is crucial in a city

Interior study. OMA, 2011.

The Venice Biennale 2014, curated by Rem Koolhaas, shows OMA's affinity for theatrical spaces as a key effect in the architectural repertoire.

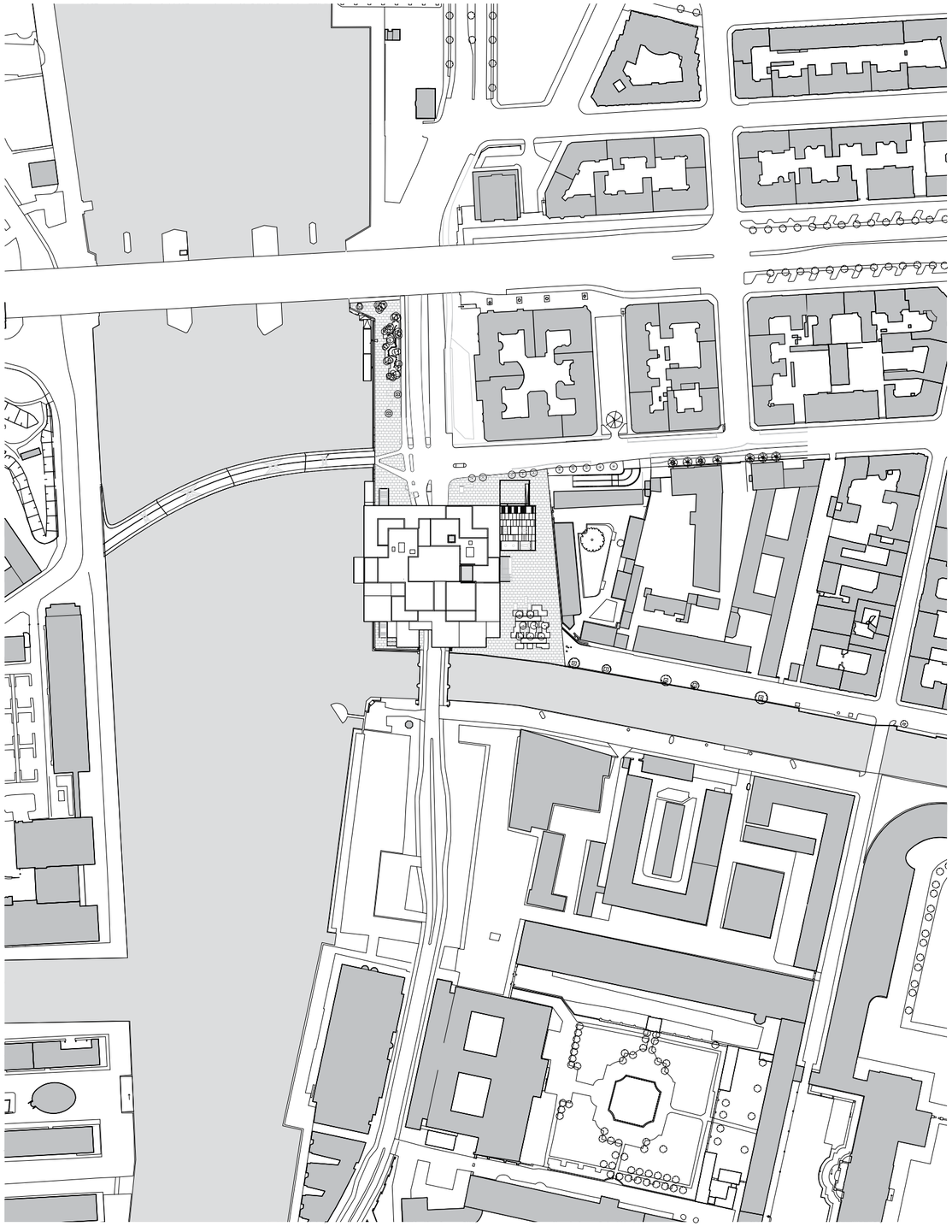
centre development. DAC and the office areas inhabited by BLOX as a starters hub require a public character and maximum visual connections to each other to boost the interdisciplinary connections between the different users. And as you said, despite the large dimension of the different floor plates, this transparency creates very dynamic, ever-changing spatial configurations with very long sight lines to the outside. On the other hand, the flats positioned on the top two levels of this building require more privacy at the same time. The courtyard feels private and intimate. From the courtyard you have oblique views down into the different public functions in the building. The flat, on the other hand, is privately oriented in such a way to embrace the panoramic views of the city.

KLW **Almost a little suburban?**

EvL Indeed a little suburban inside a larger city building. Comparable to the private courtyard of a typical city block. Combining different suburban typologies into a city block multiplies and enriches, I think, the diversity of experiences.

KLW **What you do here is through the power of example to demonstrate a different kind of dynamic relation to the harbour and in this very politically preservation-infested environment, you know, just building inside the wall is highly controversial in itself. BLOX actually demonstrates that you performative-wise can add a lot of new elements to the city.**

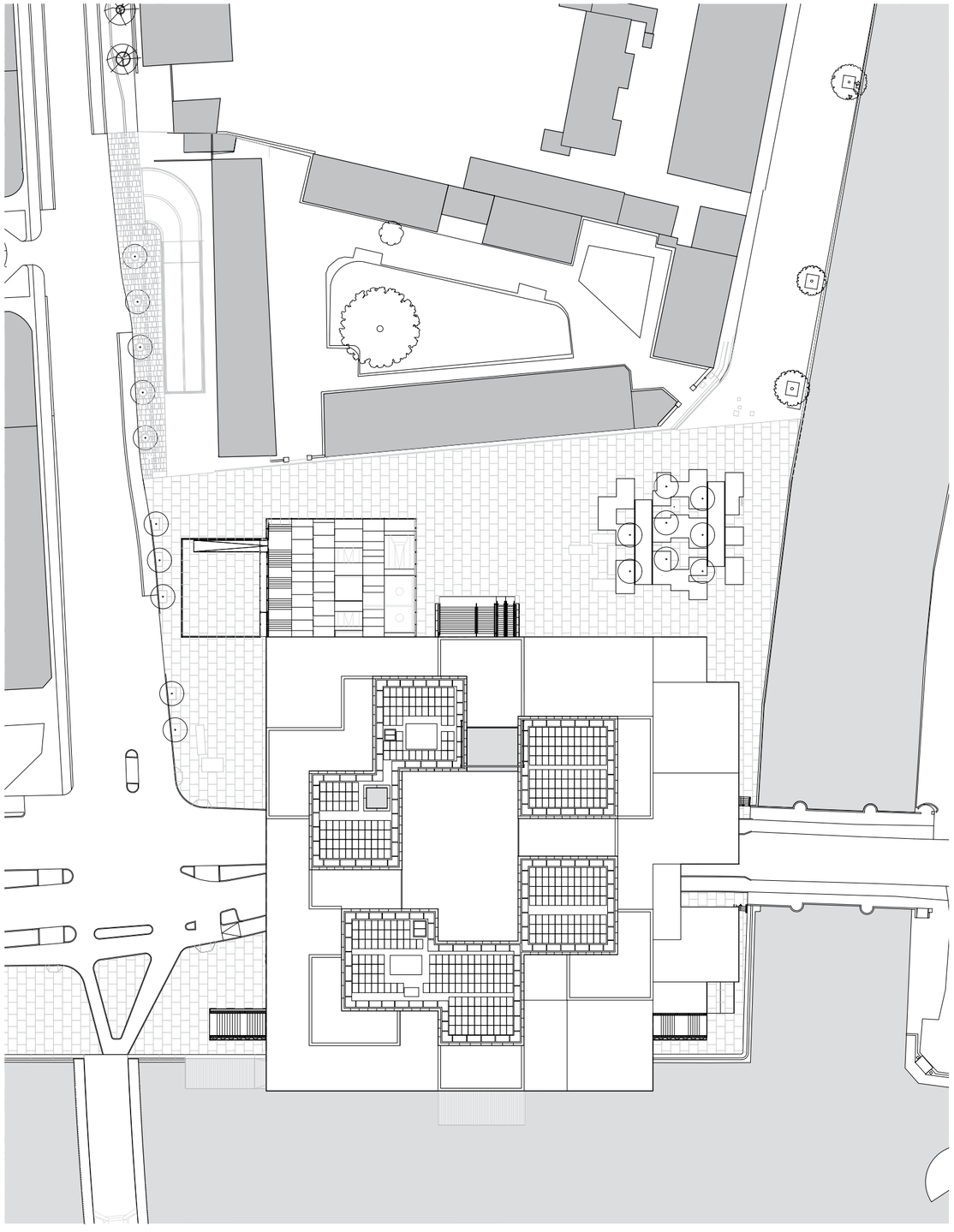
EvL Yes; however, the proof is still in the pudding. I am still curious how the building will work in full operation. So more to that in a year's time ... ●



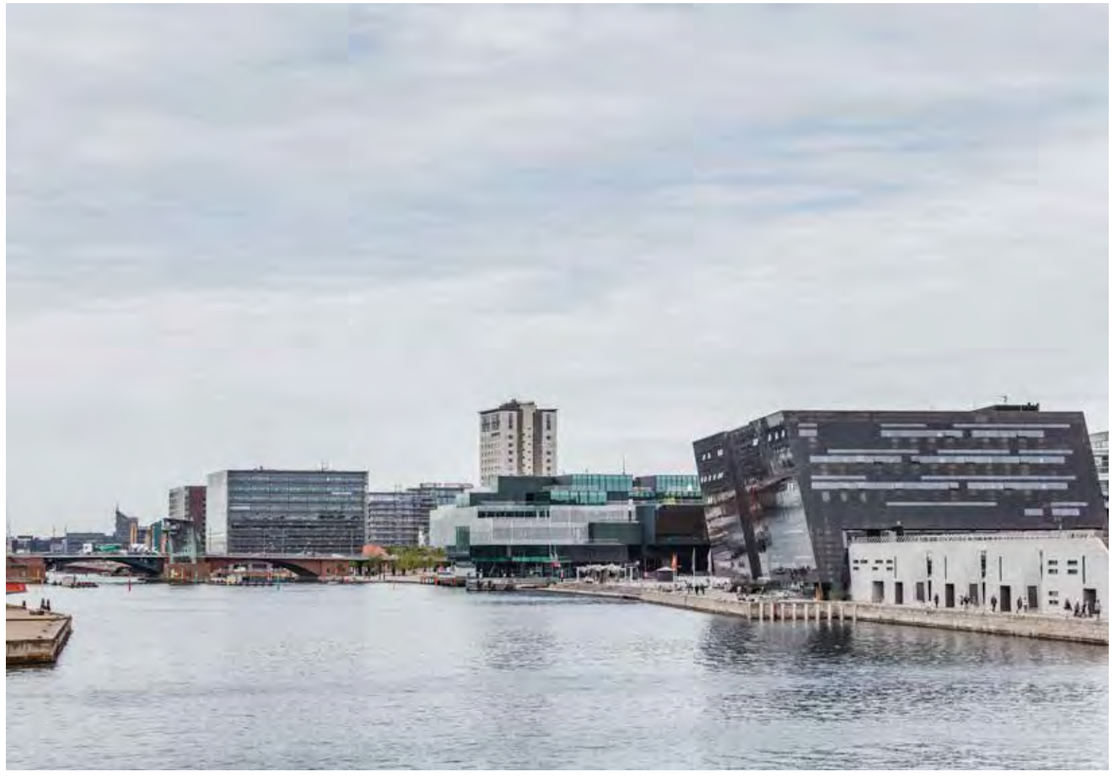
Site plan 1:2500.

BLOX and the urban context. The building is part of the harbour-front promenade that provides public access to the water and connects the urban spaces along the harbour.

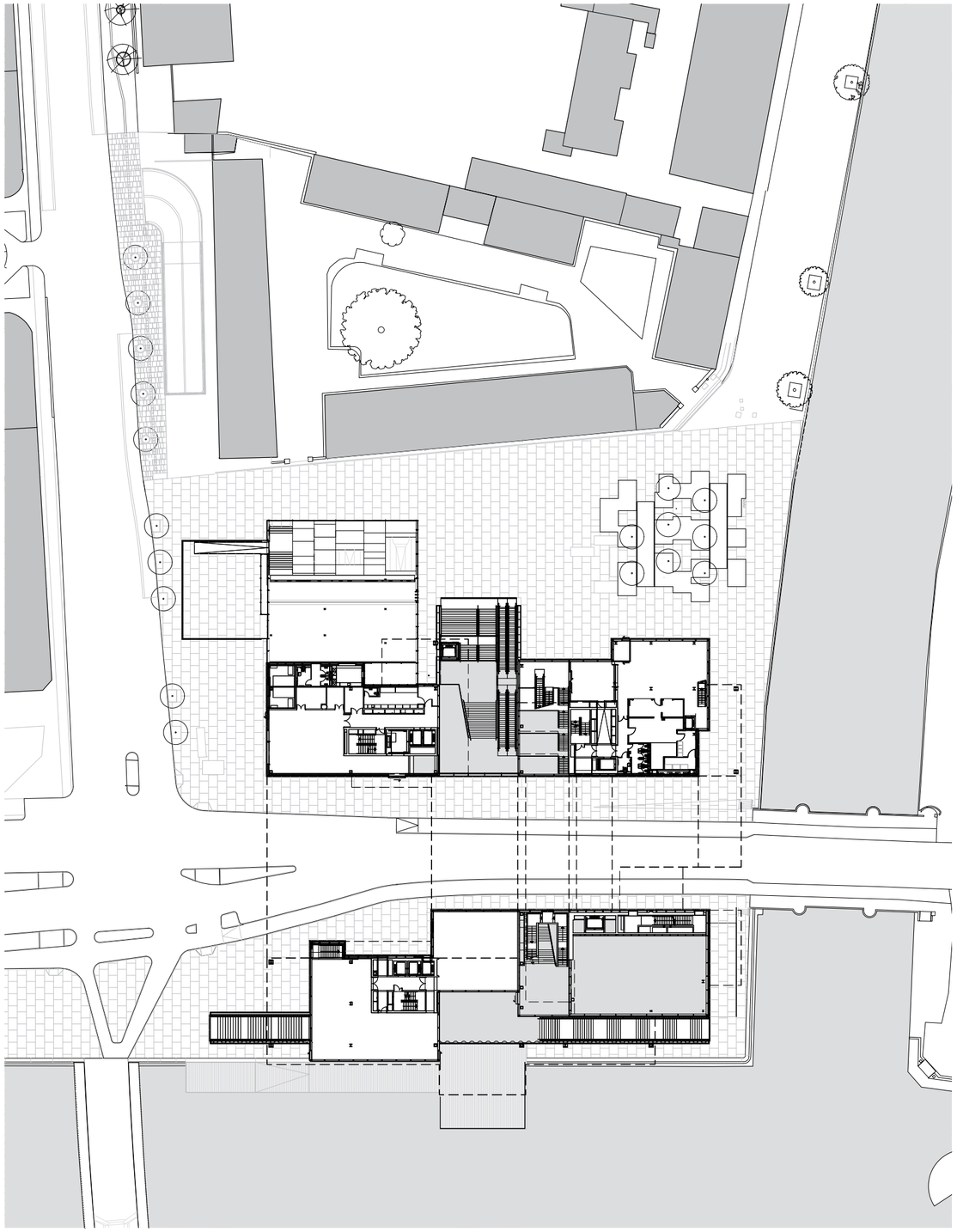
A public playground is an important element in the new urban space around BLOX.



Site plan 1:750.



↑ The building is situated on the Bryghus Site in a way that preserves the most important sight lines.
↓ BLOX is incorporated into the existing strategy for developing the interior harbour areas.



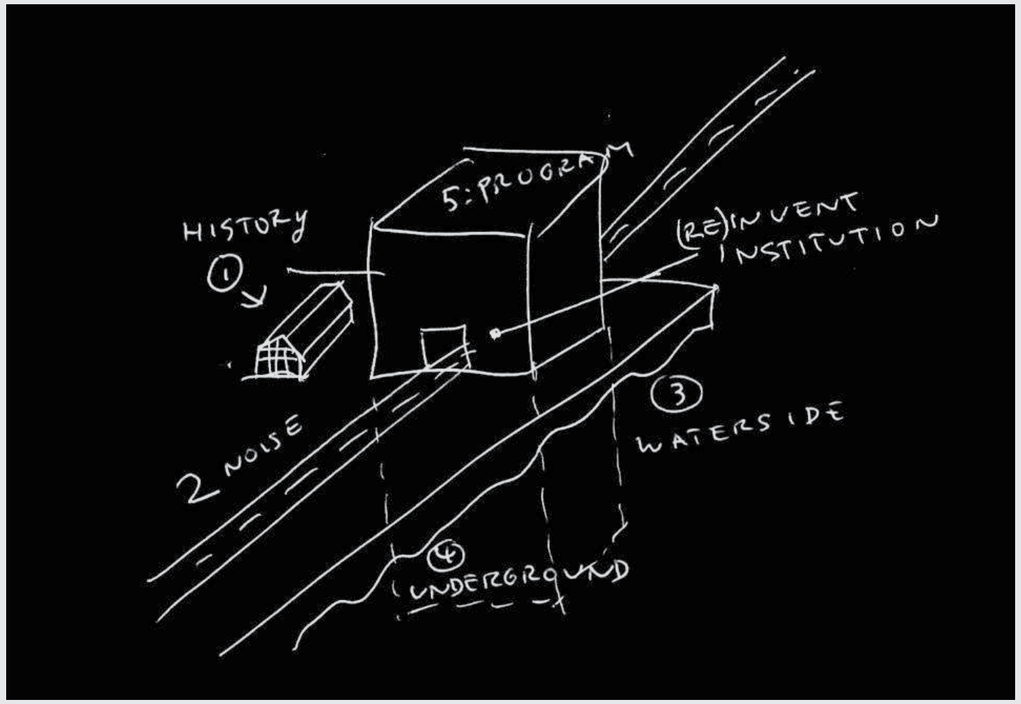
Site plan 1:750.

Traffic on Christians Brygge is taken through the building, which straddles the road.

Pedestrian passages under and around the building ensure close integration with the everyday life that naturally unfolds in the area.

Context

BLOX does not turn its back on its context but reacts to it and creates spatial urban entities. BLOX is more than a building in a city. It insists on being and functioning like the city itself, with all the contradictions and connections that it represents brought together in a single building. BLOX engages actively with its surroundings by creating open urban squares and directing the flow of traffic under, through and around the building. The external relations and the way in which BLOX engages with the urban space around it have helped define the basic conceptual character of the building. OMA's context studies suggest that the design of BLOX incorporates elements of urban life, heavy traffic and the challenge of creating a new space on a tricky urban plot, which have lacked a tenable urban and architectural solution for years. The context studies point to the spatial solutions that are the basis of the building's success.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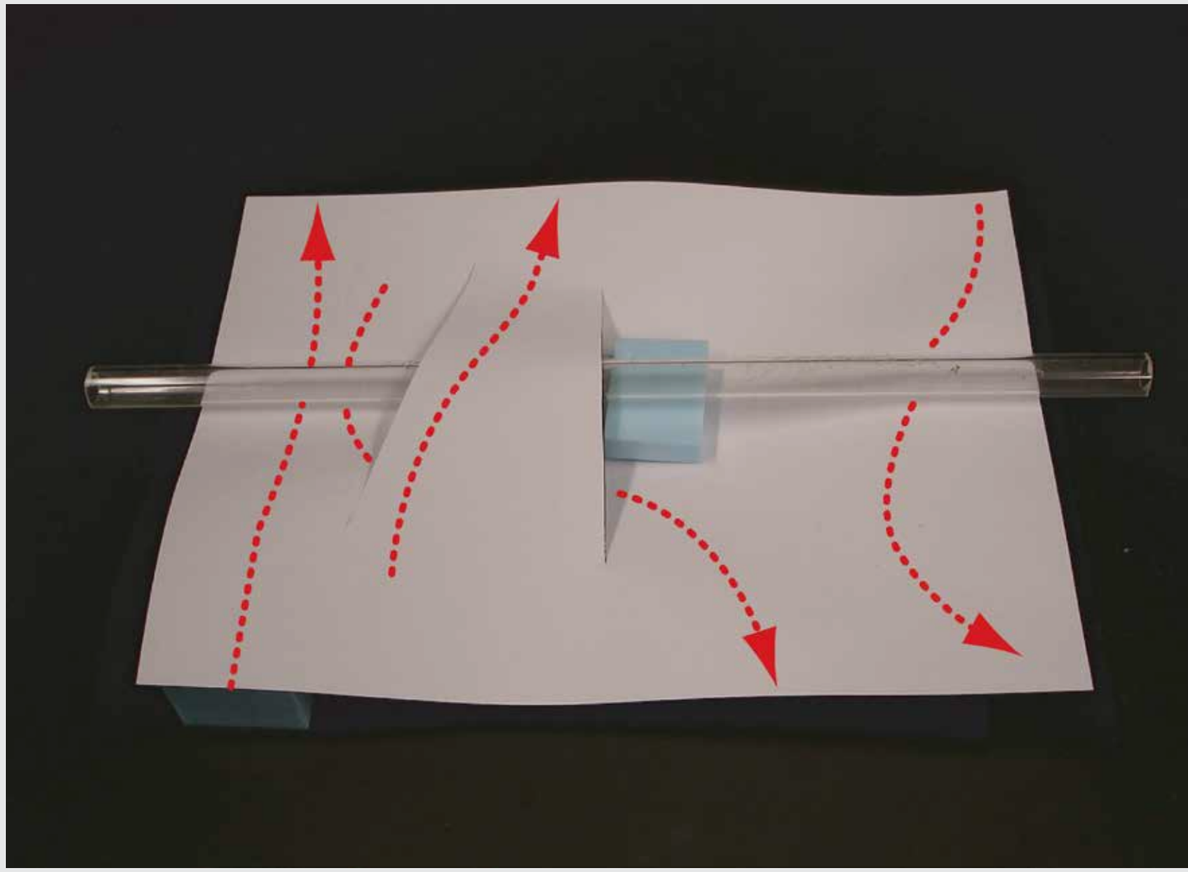

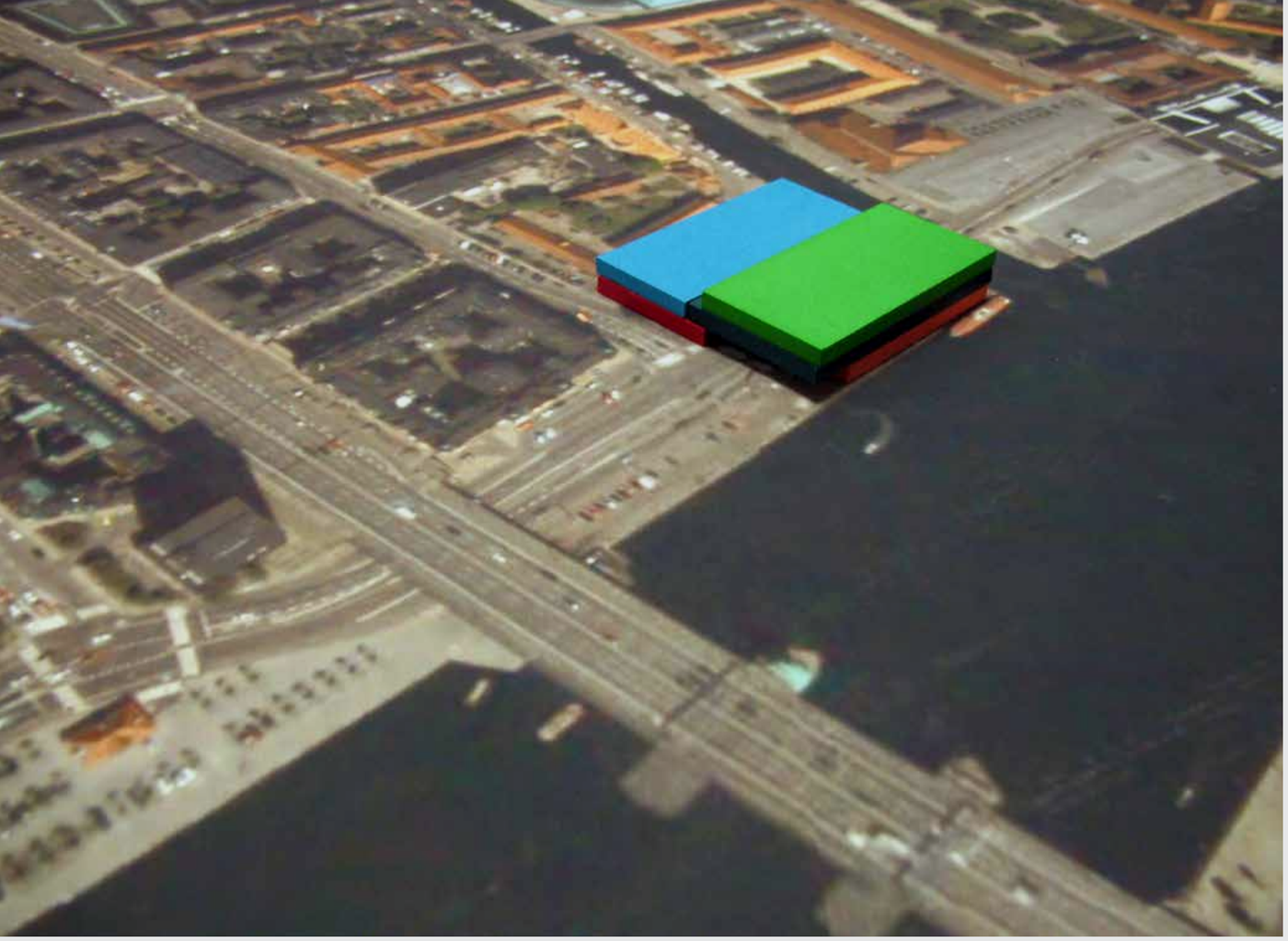

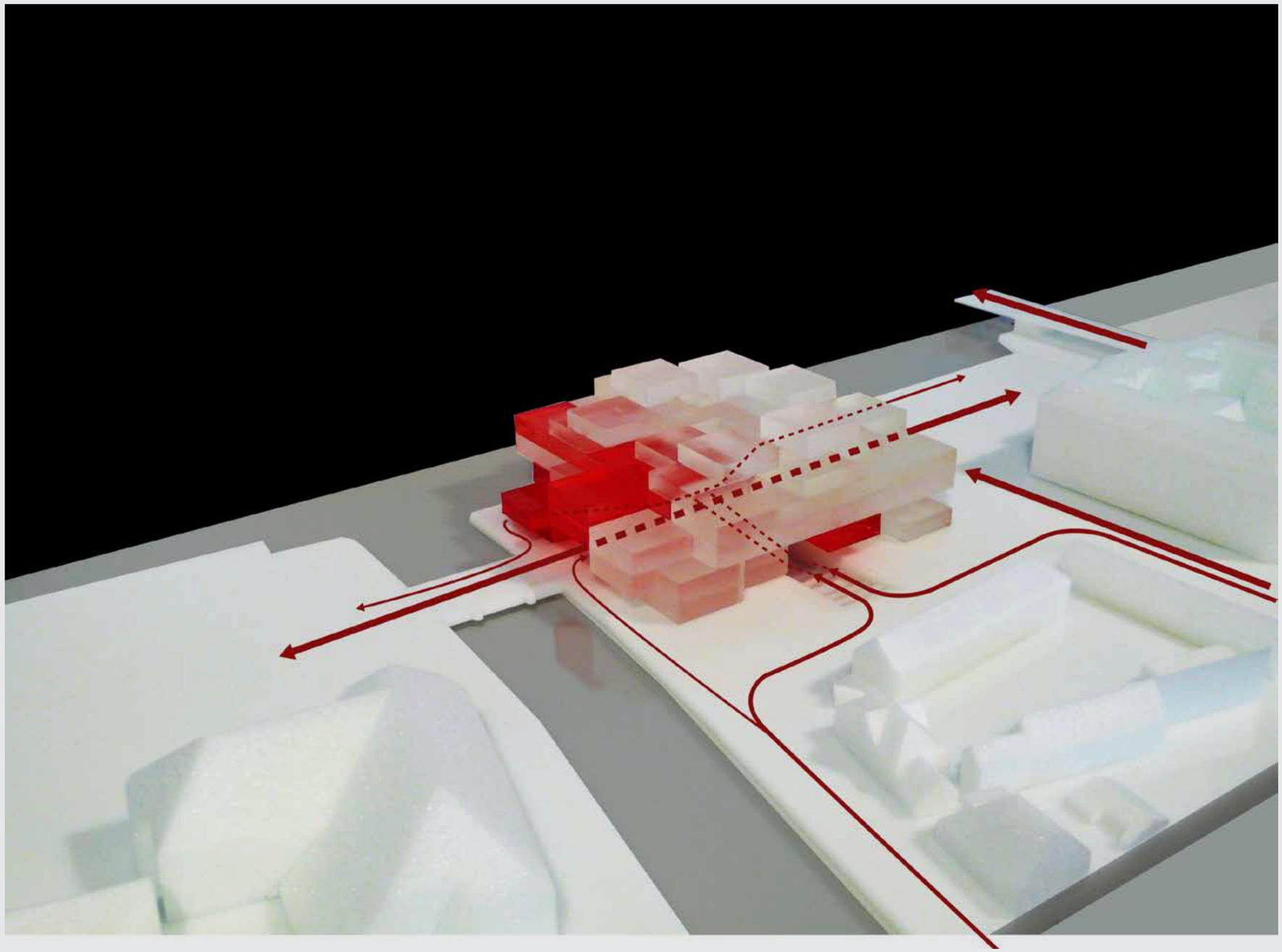

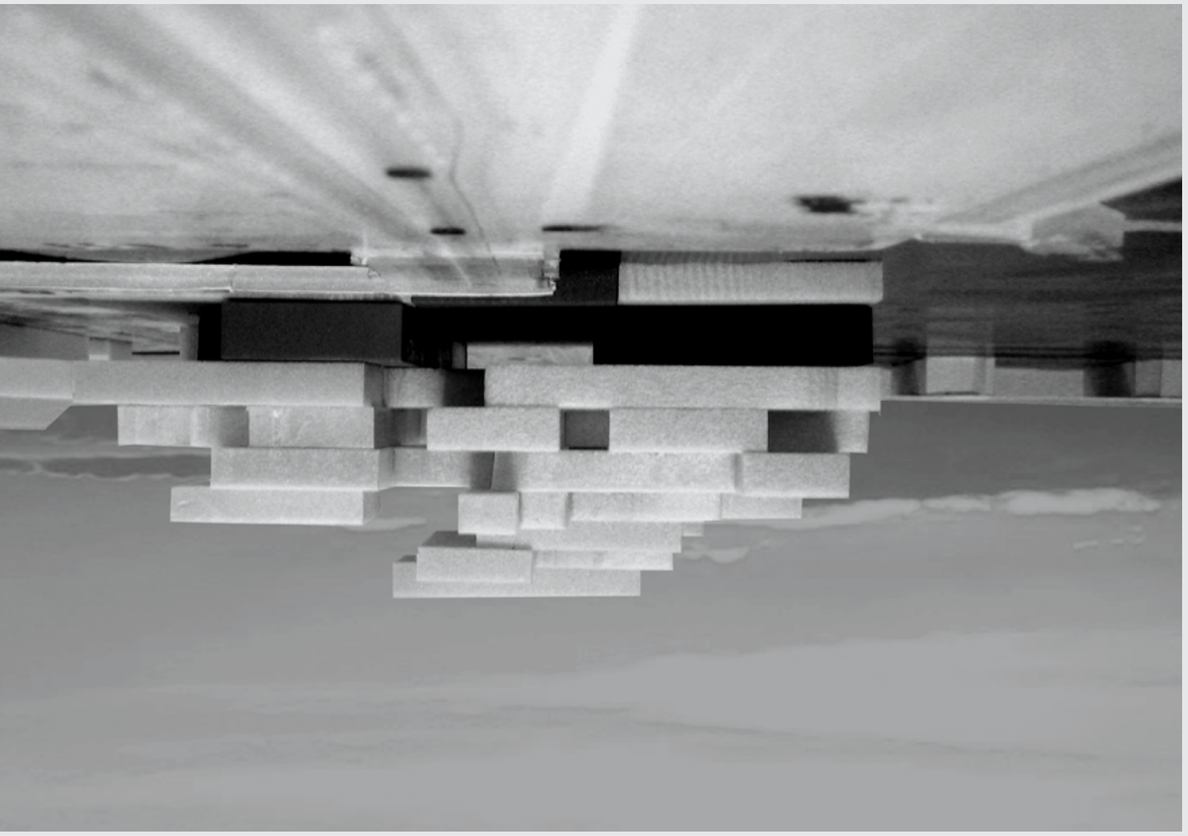

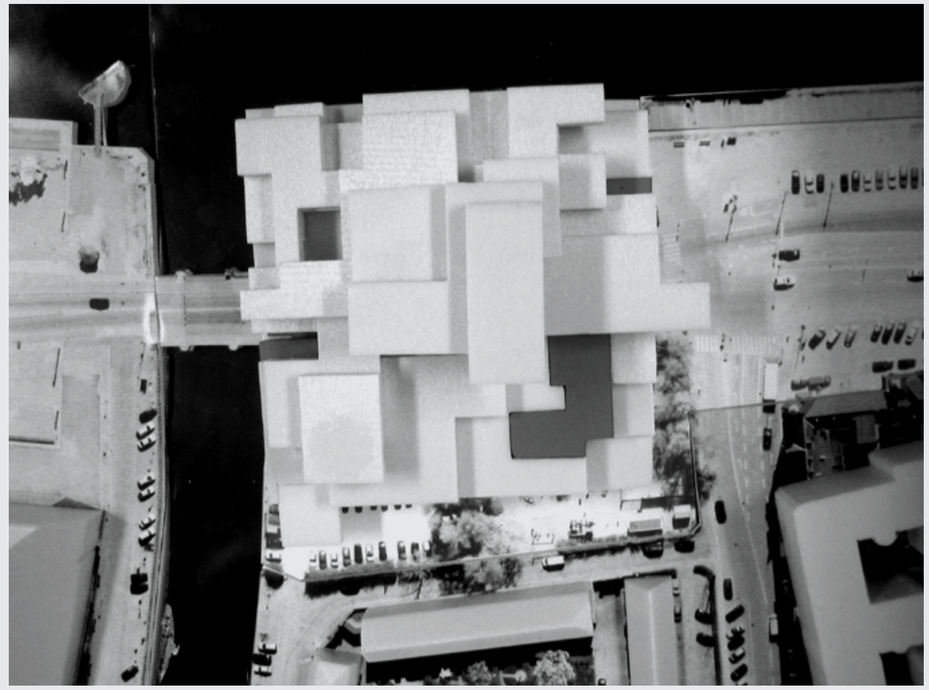

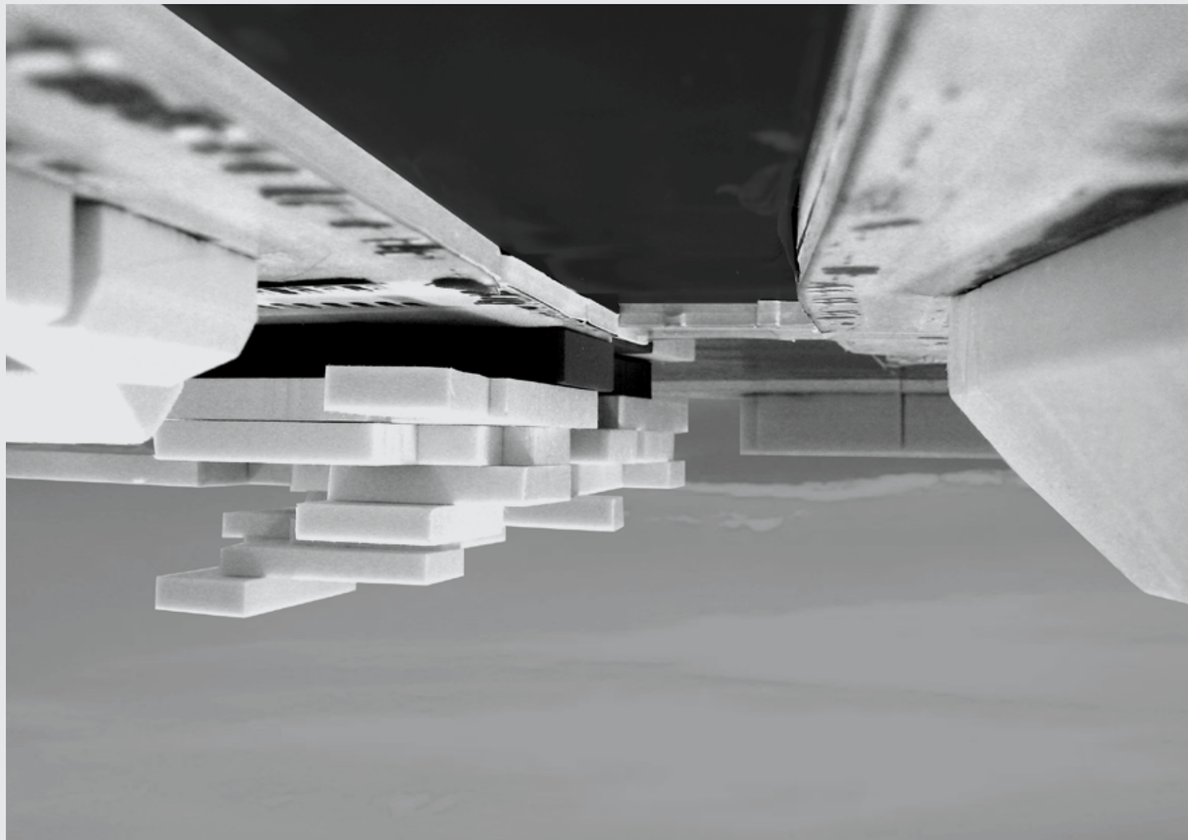

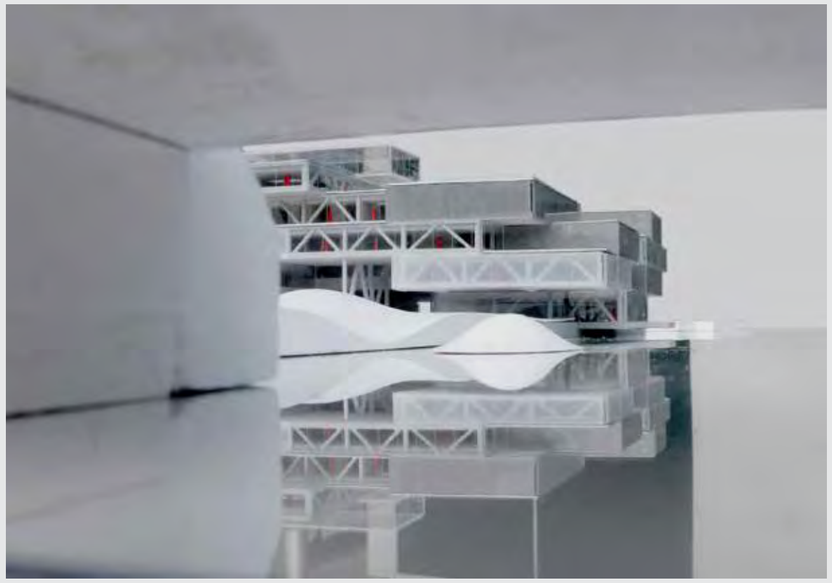

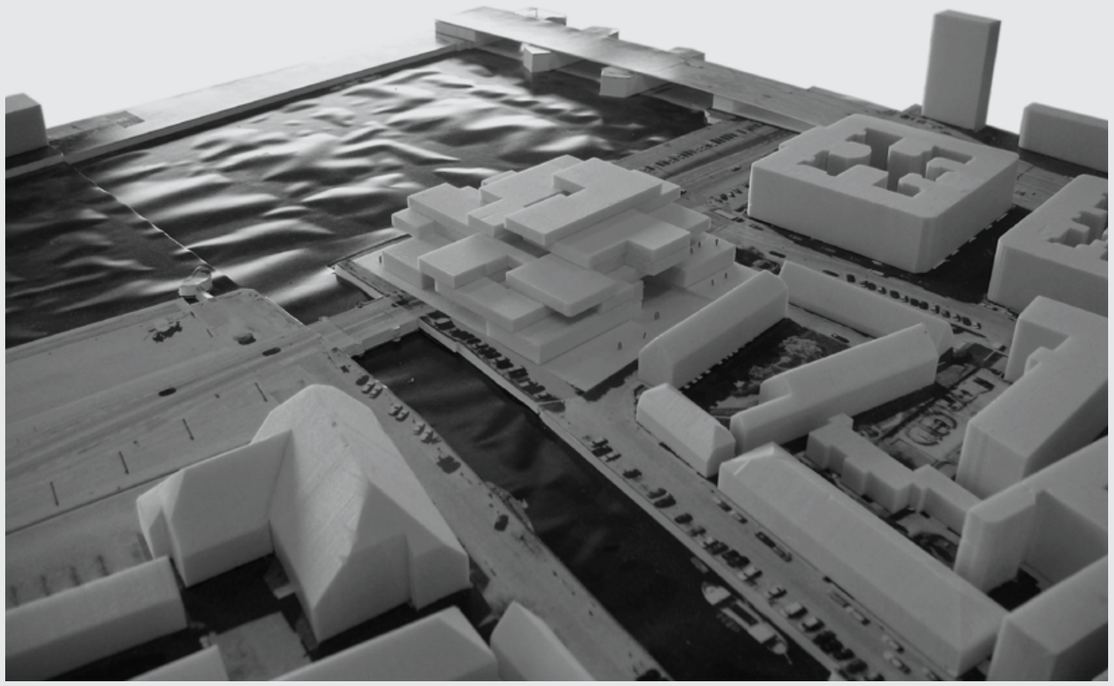

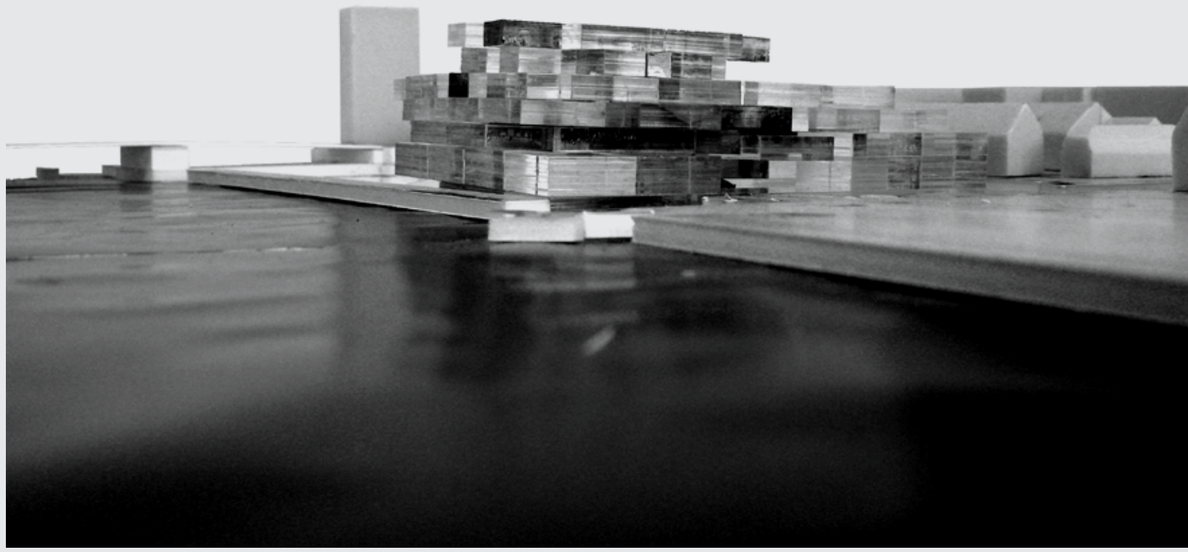

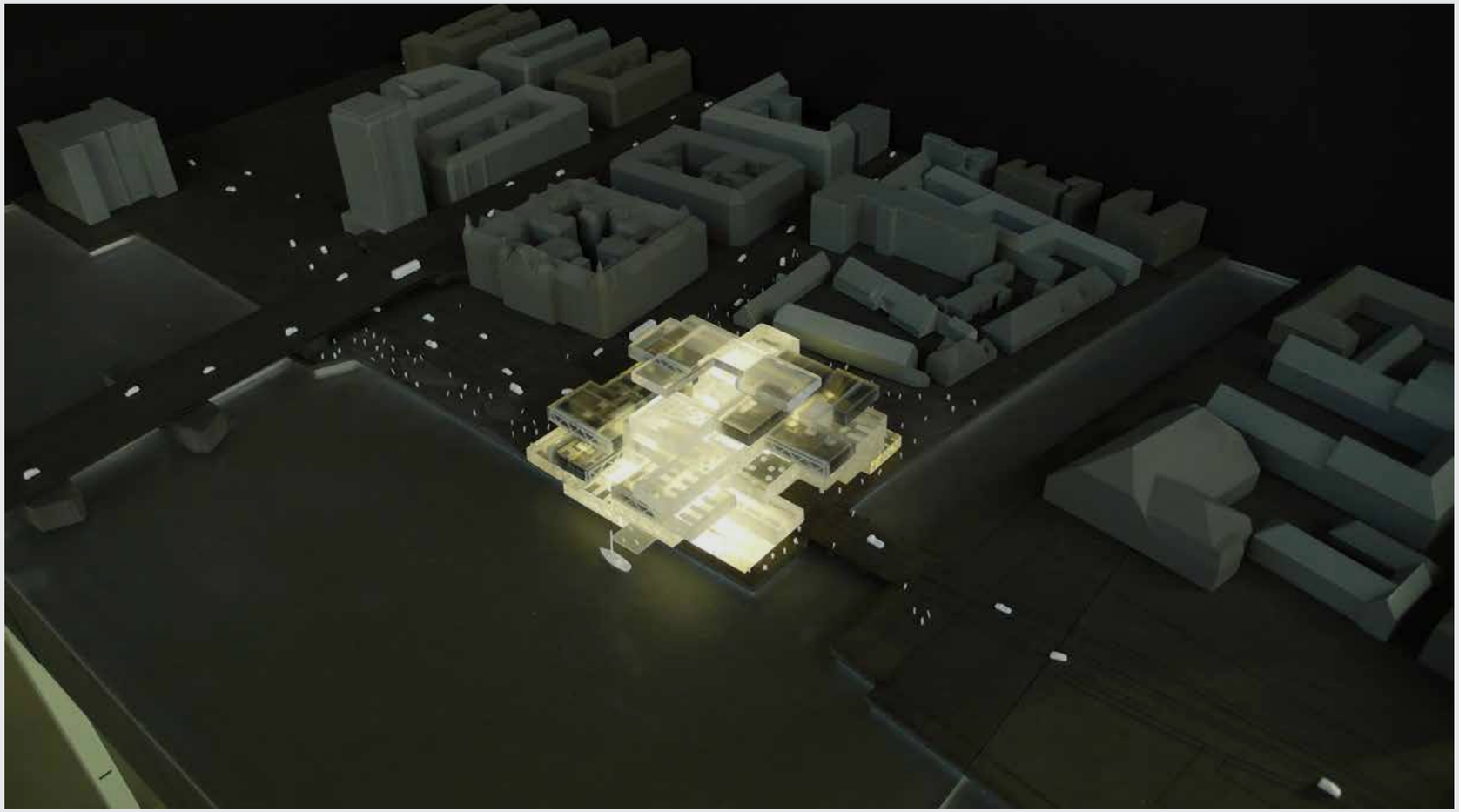

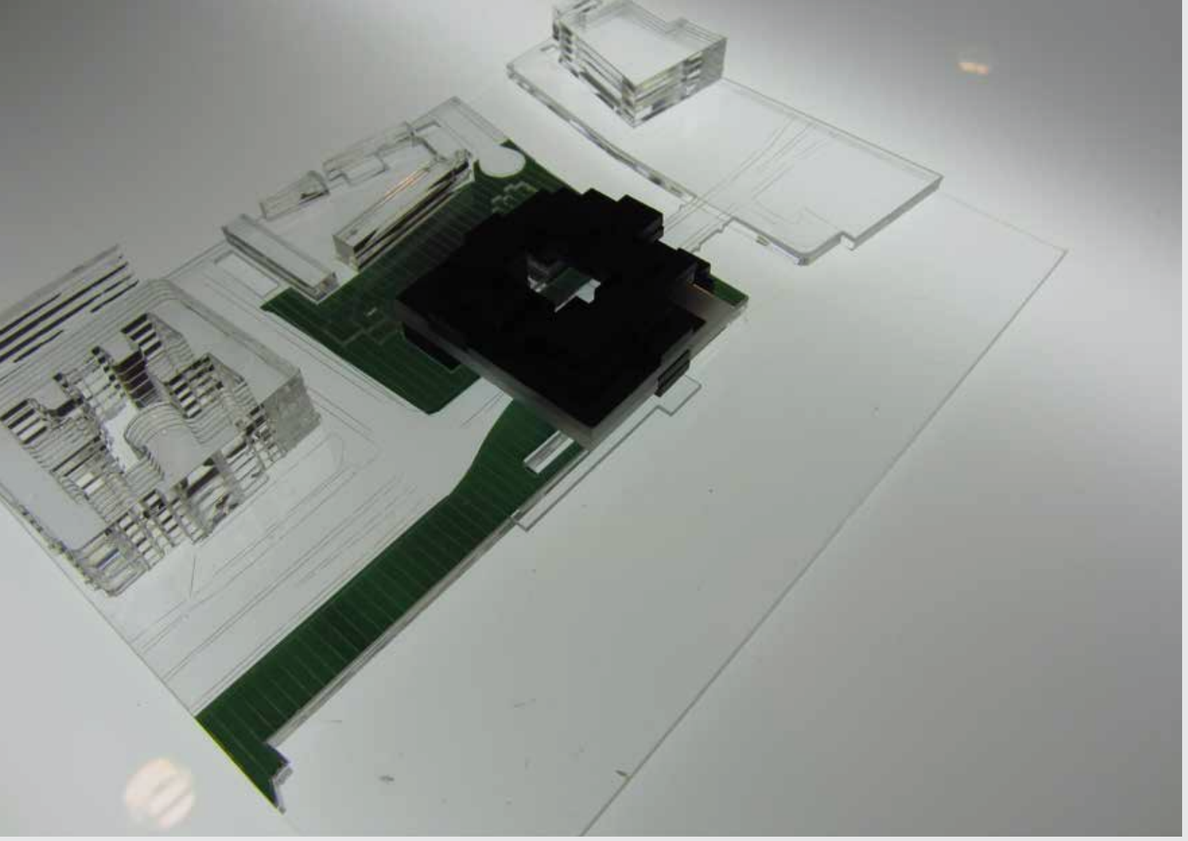

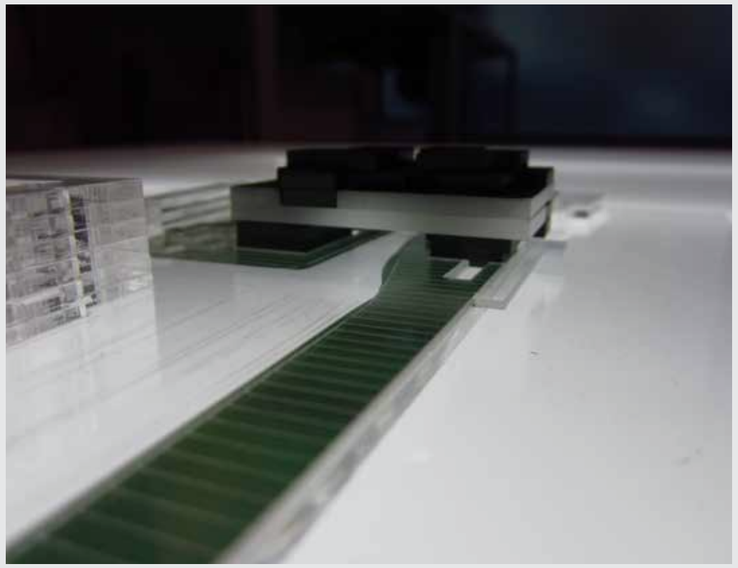

Near and Far in the City – the Building as Urban Nerve Centre

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Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation

Aerial photos of BLOX during the construction phase and after completion. Copenhagen, 2017.

Frederiksholms Kanal

Just like Nyhavn, Frederiksholms Kanal (Frederiksholm Canal) forms a tangent that connects the city to the harbour and, ultimately, the sea. A famous cartoon from more than a century ago, by Fritz Jürgensen, shows the boy Gysse on a stroll through the city with his dad. Gysse points and asks, 'Dad, is that the Ocean?' Dad replies, 'No, Gysse. That is Frederiksholms Kanal.' The cartoon is remembered today not only for its portrayal of children's vague sense of scale but also for its ironic perspective on Denmark as a tiny country whose people are used to the pleasant, intimate and manageable liveability of city and nature.

The idyll has long since been shattered. Most now experience Gysse's vantage point for themselves by crossing Stormbroen (Storm Bridge) and casting a fleeting glance along the canal. A view that is, regrettably, invaded by the trivial high-rise (the SAS Scandinavia hotel) towering on the island of Amager. This clash between old and new may just be part of the pain we must endure while living in what we call modernity. Apart from the high-rise, which plays the involuntary role as *point de vue* at the end of the canal, the vista along the axis has remained virtually unchanged for a few hundred years. The recurring architectural competitions for the Bryghus Site (1941, 1967 and 1993) all came to nothing.

On the Bryghus Site, at the end of the street on the right-hand side of the canal, however, we now find BLOX, a large, contemporary node linking up waterways, bridges, streams of cars, cyclists, pedestrians. In addition to the passage leading under BLOX, no fewer than four bridges cross Frederiksholms Kanal across the perspective but without disrupting the plane of water. The four connections are Stormbroen, from which we pass Marmorbroen (Marble Bridge), Tøjhusbroen (Arsenal Bridge) and, second to last, the footbridge that is closely connected to BLOX's green outdoor space towards the city.

But as a turntable in the larger urban circuit, BLOX also sits at the intersection of bigger constructions such as Langebro (Long Bridge), its underpass and the new bicycle bridge, Lille Langebro (Little Long Bridge), snaking its way to the other side of the harbour. BLOX links up with a system of bridges, meeting our inherent desire to cross over, overcome barriers, the possibility of the leap, transit and the cheerful retrospective.

In many regards, a new circulation emerges. For tourists and other urban ramblers, BLOX has added a loop to Copenhagen. It is now possible to walk from Strøget/Højbro Plads, along Gammel Strand, continuing along Frederiksholms Kanal to BLOX and from here via Søren Kierkegaards Plads to the Black Diamond; then, passing through the adjacent garden (the Royal Library's) and finally Christiansborg Slotsplads (Christiansborg Palace Square), one returns to Højbro Plads and the street networks by the main pedestrian street, Strøget. A route around Slotsholmen (Castle Island) offering a suitable number of sights.

For a route striving to rise above the mundane, a regular scattering of attractions is crucial. BLOX has created such an attraction that completes the above-mentioned loop; a loop that makes it possible to 'shave Slotsholmen's chin'. The previously diffuse setting of the recreational stretch along the harbour front is now repositioned as the space framed by BLOX and the Black Diamond. Now, Søren Kierkegaards Plads claims its role as an actual urban space.

Frederiksholms Kanal is one of the most idyllic stretches in Copenhagen. Few places feature such extensive and subtly present history in such an exquisite promenade blend of cultural heritage and listed buildings.

No wonder that Vilhelm Hammershøi, who portrayed the most distinguished parts of Copenhagen in a manner as if the city had sunken into a dream of itself, painted a view of Marmorbroen with the two surviving pavilions from the old Christiansborg Palace. An example of 18th-century architecture that measures up to the finest in European architecture.

The Bryghus Site was and is a part of the busy harbour front. 2012.

↑ Langebro bridge as a swing bridge, situated where the current Langebro bridge spans the harbour. The swing bridge existed from 1903 to c. 1930.
↓ This version of the Langebro bridge was situated in front of the residential property Ny Christiansborg (New Christiansborg) from 1930 until the 1950s.

↑ The old Kongens Bryghus (The King's Brewhouse) towards Vester Voldgade. Before the Ny Christiansborg (New Christiansborg) block was built in 1907.
↓ One of the first bridges named Langebro between Vester Voldgade and Langebrogade. A succession of wooden bridges were built here between 1690 and 1903.

For many years the Bryghus Site lay vacant, waiting for a project that would tie the city and harbour together. 2012/2013.

At Frederiksholms Kanal, Copenhagen displays its own temporal dimension. History and time appear as a romantic archaeological space that we can move through. Or experience from a comfortable distance in a cavalcade of events from the long Canal Tours tourist boats with their acoustic confetti of historical facts.

Mustering the buildings along the canal, we realize not only their diversity but also their outstanding quality. The diversity notwithstanding, a harmonious impression emerges. As the colours in older paintings harmonize over time, the buildings along the canal form a complex unity, in part due to the soundscape related to the water and the wharf. Moreover, the site is permeated by a special tone of light that owes to the refractions of light on the cobblestones, reflections in the water, the foliage of the trees, the relative absence of cars but also, of course, the rich textural qualities of the buildings, from sandstone to brick to the yellow limewash on the facades of the lower buildings. A rich and saturated atmosphere envelops the scene. Frederiksholms Kanal is an oasis in the city, a fortunate, moist biotope with a distinguished air of permanence, a unique pocket of time that by BLOX meets the intense contemporary traffic systems and larger features in the urban structure. From a place on the periphery of the city, the Bryghus (Brewhouse) site has become a node where many arteries come together. Here, the canal is harnessed to a machine. In addition, BLOX is an architectural octopus that also embraces a high degree of internal complexity.

The ideal formulated by the Renaissance architect and artist Leon Battista Alberti for palatial architecture, that 'the city should be like a house, and the house like a city,' applies to the ambition behind BLOX. A quality that one naturally has to enter the building to appreciate. None of the competition proposals that have addressed the site throughout the 20th century have shown a similar degree of complexity with regard to the interior spatial formations.

Promenade along the canal

Walking from Stormbroen on the right-hand side of the canal, we first encounter Prinsens Palæ (the Prince's Palace, the venue of the National Museum of Denmark), which retreats from the street with a forecourt flanked by imposing wings perpendicular to the canal, followed by a couple of fairly neutral buildings and then two old mansions, one of which houses the folk high school Johan Borups Højskole, while the other, on the corner, as the last such mansion in Copenhagen, still belongs to an aristocratic family. Then we pass by the Hestegardekasernen (the Royal Horse Guards' Barracks), Atelierbygningen (the studio building), which housed the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Sculpture, for a few hundred years, and finally, the commandant building at Materialgården (the Arsenal), which links up with the Bryghuspladsen (Brewhouse Square) and BLOX.

This right side of the canal yields to the grand gesture from the outward-pointing crescent of Christiansborg Palace on the left, which both fuses and branches out through the palace's pavilions towards Marmorbroen and then connects with the larger buildings around the Christiansborg riding ground: the indoor riding arena and the royal stables. Standing in the middle of Marmorbroen, one senses the dramatic pull of the open space in the view towards the tower of the main building. Distinctive elements on this left side are the stable master's quarters, Staldmestergården, and, finally, the brooding and secretive Christian IV's Brewhouse, which concludes this side of the canal with its monumentally pitched roof that, although it was hardly intended that way originally, grandly gives way to the view along the canal towards the expansive waterway of the harbour. At the same time, Christian IV's Brewhouse pulls together and concludes the canal space by virtue of its volume and architectural gravity. Seen from the harbour, it dominates the corner towards Søren Kierkegaards Plads with its powerful presence.

Computer rendering of the construction site and surrounding area from the competition brief for the Bryghus Site in 1993.

The Bryghus Site occupies a central location in Copenhagen next to Slotsholmen and Frederiksholms Kanal. Illustration from competition project, 1993.

The Bryghus Site competition

BLOX is located on what was once known as the Brewhouse Site (named after a motley, dilapidated brewhouse complex vis-à-vis the famous, old Christian IV's Brewhouse) and later became known as the Concert Hall Site after a competition for a Copenhagen concert hall as late as 1993.

For almost a century, planners have known that the city's architectural configuration lacked a significant element on this site, because the existing, run-down buildings had long been deemed ready for demolition. It was the last vacant plot adjacent to Slotsholmen. It was both important and precious. Moreover, it was too expensive to be used for housing, according to both the participants and the jury in the big competition in 1941 known as the *Brewhouse Site Competition*.

Properly applied, an architectural development of the site would include links to both City Hall, the city's surrounding residential neighbourhoods that developed during the 19th century, and to the Copenhagen of the Holberg era (the first half of the 18th century) by Gammel Strand. Viewed from a suitable elevation, it was seen to occupy a central location and qualify as having considerable potential.

In addition, around 1940 there was a plan for modifying Langebro, so it no longer fed directly into Vester Voldgade but instead, elevated and with the waterfront streets passing underneath (like the nearby Knippelsbro), would send the growing volumes of traffic into H. C. Andersens Boulevard and from here into the boulevard system; a factor that complicated the handling of a site that was already challenged by its historical heritage and the existing properties' successful, if irregular, balances along the canal. The matter was not made easier by new building codes, which created uncertainty about what building heights would be allowed in a city that had yet to see its first high-rise.

In 1941, it was decided to organize an architectural ideas competition, where the participating architects, first, were free to choose the function of a future building; second, were required to explain the relevant functional requirements; and, third, had to present arguments concerning the building's relationship with the site. The participants thus had to consider very different aspects before settling on a concept. Many contemporary Danish architects felt motivated to take part, and a total of 74 proposals were submitted. Among the participants were architects who were to play a pivotal role in the golden era of Danish architecture between 1930 and 1960, including later canonized names, from Vilhelm Lauritzen to Kay Fisker, to C. F. Møller, to Arne Jacobsen.

The competition brief from the limited company 'Gamle Kongens Bryghus' (Old King's Brewhouse) includes the following passage:

> With regard to the type and scope of the project, the contestants have a completely free hand. The proposals are expected to rest on a reasonable economic basis, but the company wishes to see special consideration given to creating a project that is worthy of the location, and the company hopes to see the inclusion of plans that may be of more general public interest to the city or which contain ideas whose realization may benefit a wider circle of the population.[1]

As illustrated by this passage, it was the sensible notion at the time that very large, central buildings in the city should not be private settings, closed off to the public, but belong to and express common interests in society.

In addition to legal experts, civil servants and politicians, the jury included the architects Kaj Gottlob, Louis Hygom and Thorvald Dreyer,

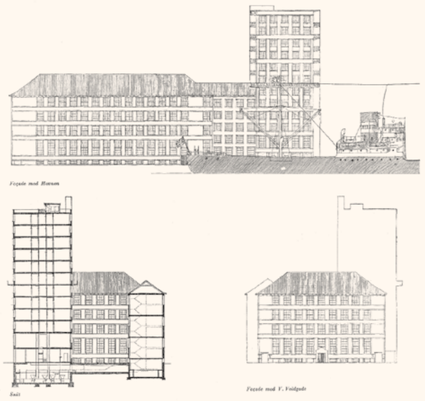
First prize went to the architects Peter Bredsdorff and Poul Kjærgaard. They proposed a *Fish Market*. This function would be moved from Gammel Strand, with the famous 'Skovser wives', the fishwives from Skovshoved, to the obvious location by the harbour and would

also include wholesalers. The simple composition consists primarily of an office building, quite tall by the standards of the day, with a frame construction, cast-concrete floors and external galleries with pillars running the full height of the facade. The ground floor was to have a large lobby with entrances from Kanalgaden and Vester Voldgade. The second main element is the fish market itself, housed in a low building directly on the harbour front, which would contain halls, freezing facilities and water tanks.

Fishing boats would be able to unship their catch here, and a rail track would take provisions in from the outlying areas. Between the low building and the main building, there is an open square that would serve as the city's fish market. Cars could reach the location via Kanalgaden, Vester Voldgade and other routes. The large block has a neutral facade towards the city and is pulled away from the edge of the site to avoid interfering with the view along Frederiksholms Kanal from Stormbroen. The winners, with the competent planner Peter Bredsdorff at the helm, present well-considered arguments for the larger urban context the project envisions, that is, the handling of traffic, the transportation of goods and the connections to the boulevard system and goods station. The main building contains conference facilities, offices for the fishery organizations and, on the top floor, a restaurant with a panoramic view of the harbour and the island of Amager. Parts of the gables would be clad with tiles and a steel grid that would support neon ads visible from all over the city. A slight modernist shock for the beautifully sombre Slotsholmen and an electrifying flash of light towards the city and the harbour.

The proposed steel-frame construction with external galleries was radical and probably unprecedented on that scale in Denmark.

The *second-prized proposal* by the eminent single-family-house architect Thomas Havning seems less striking. It follows the recommendation of his colleague Aage Rafn of using a 'pitched roof'[2] to match the existing buildings along the canal. Havning's composition consists of a tall tower with a flat roof; above the lower floors, a balcony running all the way around the building forms a distinctive horizontal band. The lower wings, with steep pitched roofs, have similarly striking horizontal features. The overall impression is coherent, the elements are organically connected, and the form is clear. But the project is much more conservative than the other projects that the jury reward with special mention. Also, the chosen function, a *Nordic Building,* makes it difficult to determine the content in relation to the specific functional requirements.



Competition project. Won second prize. Thomas Havning, propoosal for Nordens Hus (The Nordic House), 1941.

Monumental cubes

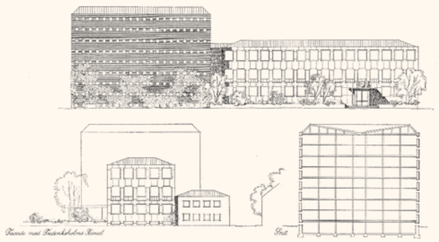
Two projects share a certain likeness, as they both propose a *National Archive*. One was submitted anonymously by Arne Jacobsen, the other by Hans Erling Langkilde and Ib Martin Jensen.

Jacobsen's entry shows a tall, compact, box-shaped building for documents and records connected to a lower wing with a reading room, offices, a canteen and so on. The tall, solid-looking section is oriented towards the harbour and Vester Voldgade, while the low section, which is oriented towards the canal, is adapted to the dimensions of the adjacent Materialgården and Hestegardekasernen. The large box is bevelled slightly on the corners, which adds to its perceived volume.

Arne Jacobsen did not achieve a prize, or even special mention. Still, his proposal for a modern monumental building in the grand tradition must be described as remarkable. In connection with the city halls in the Danish cities of Aarhus and Søllerød he had been criticized for not using brick. Here, he returns with a grand block in red brick, which is also a nod to Christian IV's Brewhouse across the canal.

His masterly watercolour evokes a rich, textural facade that appears as a large, stretch-mounted draping with calm surfaces in red brick. The

Plan and section. Anonymous proposal for National Archives building, attributed to Arne Jacobsen. 1941.



Hans Erling Langkilde and Ib Martin Jensen, competition project for Rigsarkiv (National Archives). Special mention in competition. 1941.

Facade towards the harbour. Otto Frankild, proposal for Værkstedshus (Workshop Building), 1941.

basic construction consists of a concrete frame, for fire safety reasons, while the large brick surfaces almost resemble a royal robe, underscored by the appliqué of a huge, ceramic royal coat of arms, a possible reference to King Christian X's role as a national rallying point at this time, during the German occupation. The sense of draping is underscored by the tiny, cruciform holes in the brick facade, glazed with wired glass. The small size of these openings also helps to reduce the light exposure of documents, boxes and records.

As a front towards the harbour, the motif is striking, in part because the building is typologically related to the hermetical warehouses in the harbour, in part because the theatrical royal emblem towards the sea tells a story of historically accumulated wealth stemming from maritime trade and marks the status of Copenhagen as the seat of the monarch.

It is unknown why Jacobsen submitted his project anonymously. It may be because he was not satisfied with it – as was often the case with the competition proposals from his small studio – or because he feared it might be seen as unfortunate if the committee allowed a citizen of Jewish descent to emerge as the lead figure in the big competition of the year, during the German occupation. At any rate, two years later, Jacobsen had to seek refuge in Sweden.

Looking at the 74 submitted projects, one cannot help but wonder what role the ideas competition for the Bryghus Site may have played as a national manifestation. Certainly, the sheer number of submitted entries was reflective of the relative slump in construction as a result of the political situation in Denmark. Architects were keen to secure work, and the young sought the exposure that the open ideas competition for such a central site would bring.

Most of the submitted projects proposed hotels and conference centres. One stands out in particular: Edvard Thomsen's proposal for an apartment hotel with a restaurant. It consists of a large block with a lower building in front that would house the lobby and restaurant. Both buildings have a stepped design, one on the top floors, the other as a lengthwise feature in the section towards the front square. Thomsen's sophisticated watercolour would fit right into publications of works by Russian constructivists such as Yakov Chernikhov and others.

Like Jacobsen, Hans Erling Langkilde and Ib Martin Jensen proposed using the site for a new *National Archive*. Which makes sense, considering the proximity to Parliament and the government offices on Slotsholmen. With Lyngby-Taarbæk City Hall, the two had won a major competition ahead of Arne Jacobsen & co., albeit a city hall with a material character akin to the city halls of Aarhus and Søllerød. Here, Langkilde and Jensen place a large square building in the same position on the site as the above-mentioned proposal by Jacobsen, but with an office wing and a reading room in a wide, stepped-down wing towards Frederiksholms Kanal. The brick-built records building has delicate perforations in the form of small square windows, and a small, copper-clad roof softens the transition to the sky. The office section, however, has references to the fenestration and cladding in the city halls. As in Jacobsen's proposal, the two buildings seem slightly uncoordinated, but nevertheless, Langkilde and Jensen get special mention.

Another project that achieved special mention was Otto Frankild's draft for a *Workshop Building*. With its large-check facade, a frame construction covered in glass and light-weight boards in a very precisely proportioned modular grid, this is a highly advanced proposal for its time in line with international modernism. However, the jury perceived the intended function of the complex as slightly far-fetched. What does a workshop building require, one might ask?

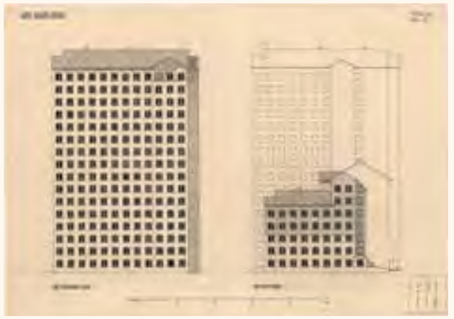
Kay Fisker's project, *House of Initiative*, in collaboration with C. F. Møller and Sv. Eske Kristensen, belongs in the sculpturally distinctive

Modernist competition proposal, the Bryghus Site.
Unnamed architect, 1941.

Competition proposal, hotel and restaurant.
Edvard Thomsen, 1941

Competition proposal. Frits Schlegel and
Magnus Stephensen, 1941.

Competition proposal. Kay Fisker, C. F. Møller and
Sv. Eske Kristensen, Initiativets Hus (House of Initiative),
1941.



Competition proposal. Povl Baumann and Aage Müller, 1941.

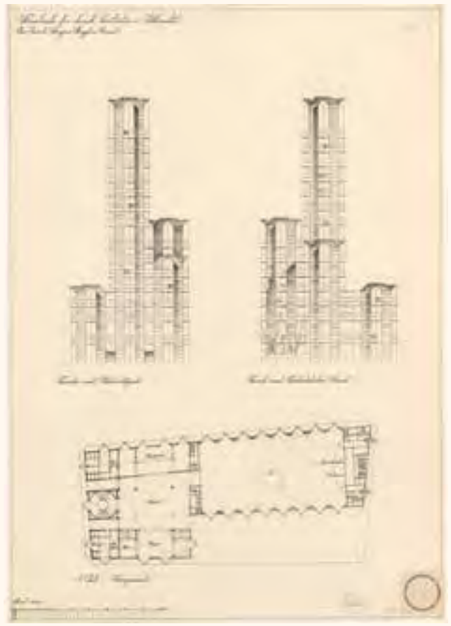
category. It consists of three volumes nestled inside each other in a hierarchical design with a main office building in the middle. Its facade toward Marmorbroen stands out with a dynamic perforation with square windows in a confidently extended horizontal and diagonal pattern, a motif that is also seen in the architects' proposal for Dronningegården (Queen's Court) in Copenhagen. The design, a coherent whole of volumes in varying sizes, lets the complex accommodate the many different scales at play in the area. The facade towards the harbour is more uniform and resembles many other proposals.

Harbour cathedrals

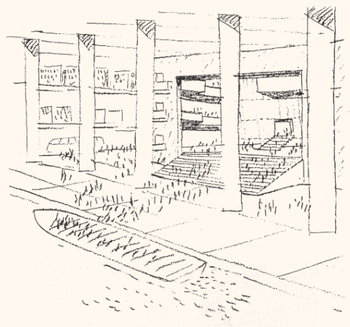
Many contributors had no qualms about going high. So, for example, two cathedral-like proposals, one of them submitted by Povl Baumann and Aage Müller. In outline, it is reminiscent both of silos and of church towers in a twin formation. In the project, one senses the fascination with the crystal and the cluster that had preoccupied some circles in Danish architecture during previous decades. The watercolour shows a panoramic view of the 16-storey red-brick towers where they appear as a 'crystal cluster'. One of the true masters of brick constructions in Danish architecture, Baumann presents a spacious proposal with a homogeneous expression, at once robust and iconically concise. However, the shade cast by the building would presumably have caused problems for the surroundings.

The other cathedral-like project, *Headquarters for Danish Initiative Abroad*, was submitted by Ib Lunding. This too is a building with character. In its gothicizing style it is unique in Copenhagen, and had it been realized, it would have been for its exteriors. The angled, prismatic dormer windows would have created a surprising variety of reflections and mirror effects. The modern transformation of a historical style is successful. But perhaps the jury felt that it sparked too many sacral associations.

Several of the submitted projects were quite audacious, with regard to both iconographic expression and construction method, compared to what one would expect from Danish architecture at the time. Due to general circumstances, including material shortages at this point, two years into the German occupation, the competition did not lead to a tangible result.



Draft proposal for Headquarters for Danish Initiative Abroad. Ib Lunding, 1941.



Winner of competition, music building on the Bryghus Site. Henning Larsen Architects, 1993.

Intermezzo

During the 1960s there were considerations of building a new Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the site. Ultimately, however, the choice fell on the Ministry's current site, on Christianshavn, at the corner of Strandgade.

The next initiative followed in 1973, when the influential director of Carlsberg, A. W. Nielsen, proposed turning the Bryghus Site into a sort of memorial park for brewer J. C. Jacobsen (who had worked at Christian IV's Brewhouse) with a primarily recreational purpose. Ole and Edith Nørgaard prepared a very unobtrusive proposal with a playground and a place for small boats to tie up, which also was not realized.

The concert hall competition in 1993

In 1993, the site drew attention again. There were plans to establish a concert hall to match the best European standards. The hall would be the seat of the then Zealand Symphony Orchestra (now Copenhagen Phil) and 'Den Anden Opera' (The Other Opera), which in addition to being a major draw for local Copenhageners and containing a music library, facilities for music and video recordings with close ties to the DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) Radio/TV, would offer exceptional acoustic qualities and serve as a conference venue.

The competition brief highlights three factors:

> The competition site has a very prominent location, and the future building will be an important element, both in relation to the historic building and canal environment and the harbour front and in relation to the approach roads from the south and west into central Copenhagen, Langebro and Kalvebod Brygge (Kalvebod Wharf).

In line with requests in the brief for the Bryghus competition 50 years earlier, the brief calls for a harmonious appearance in relation to the existing environments and the future building projects in the area by Christiansholm – Knippelsbro – Langebro. Further, it reads:

> It is important that the proposal demonstrates how the building, with its content, can help turn this central harbour-front area and the nearby streets and promenades into lively and active elements of central Copenhagen.[3]

The jury included then Lord Mayor, Jens Kramer Mikkelsen, municipal civil servants, engineers, musical conductor Michael Schønwandt and architects Claus Bjarrum, Finn Selmer, Hans Dall and Gudmundur Jonsson. The competition was open to architects within the European Union, Iceland and certain other countries. Once again, competition fever struck, and 262 proposals were submitted.[4]

Among the contestants were internationally acclaimed names such as Hans Hollein and Meinhard von Gerkan. The latter designs a monumental, classical project that raises the entire building up from the terrain with wide stairs on both the canal side and towards the harbour front. Von Gerkan moreover wraps the thoroughfare in concrete in a solution that would undoubtedly reduce noise and vibrations from the motorway, a major and highly relevant challenge for all the projects.

A remarkable proposal was submitted by Knud Fladeland Nielsen and Anne-Marie Kruse. It features a structural lobby hall that is literally transparent from three sides, borne by a mast/wire construction, likely a maritime reference. According to the jury, perhaps an overly explicit reference. Nevertheless, the porous structure would appear as a beautiful beacon, a shining light towards the water, after dark, and during the daytime it would invite the public in for a range of activities, from small concerts to performance art and exhibitions.

The winning entry

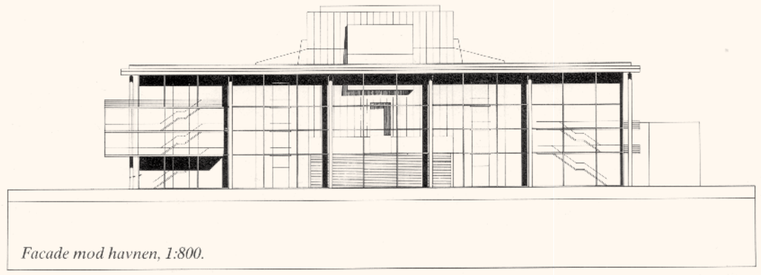
The jury found Henning Larsen's project to be the one that best met the extensive demands for the building. After pointing out its successful adaptation to the setting, the jury offers the following motivation for awarding the project the first prize: the roof above the block formed by the building '*rises above it as an independent element. In addition to manifesting itself above the roof in every direction, the concert hall will be visible, both from the glass lobby and from Christians Brygge, viewed through glazed sections.*' The transition from the lobby level to the entrances to the concert hall takes place via a wide stair that may find use in connection with '*more informal events*,' as the jury states.[5] The exterior of the building volume may be dyed plaster or calcite marble, that of the section housing the concert hall and its roof perhaps leaded steel sheeting. The lobby would, as the jury states, gain from having slightly greater depth, and it is deemed to be impractical that the library is distributed over three floors. The hall's rectangular footprint with galleries along the end and side walls in combination with the large ceiling height is evaluated as conducive for good acoustics. Even with an estimated audience capacity of 2,200, the hall would be a few hundred seats short, which in combination with the large distance from the stage to the back of the room would necessitate greater width.

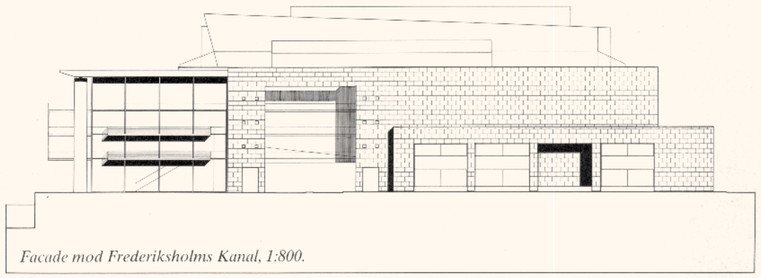
Towards the sides and as part of the block design, the project includes a small hall and a rehearsal hall.

Like several of the other proposals, Henning Larsen's is deftly fitted into the plot. It consists of two main sections with flat roofs, with the front section towards the harbour containing the lobby, with ticket sales, wardrobe and a restaurant. In full mirror symmetry, the facade is constructed around a large entrance section – a modern version of a classical principle for monumental buildings. People crossing Langebro will see the front as an expansive, fairly transparent facade, lit up at night, with similarly open gables with glazed sections and visible floors. Overall, the experience is one of a welcoming reception system, both for visitors arriving via the harbour-front street and getting out by the stairs, for others who arrive via Frederiksholms Kanal and for concertgoers arriving via Vester Voldgade. The second section of the Concert Hall contains the main hall itself in a so-called double cube. It has a stepped superstructure, which the jury refers to as the sculptural roof, that contains various stage functions. The building thus consists of two sections that are divided because the road along the wharf is integrated in a fairly open design here, similar to the existing plan for the expansion of the Royal Library, the so-called Black Diamond, which contains the dramatic feature of an intersecting corridor with a footbridge above the through traffic. Traffic along the harbour front necessitated a similar bisection in the Concert Hall project, although it is handled differently in different proposals.

Covered passages of this type are not so rare in architectural history. Many mansions and palaces, large and small, include a majestic corridor running through the building, allowing visitors direct access to the building without being exposed to the elements. The same feature is found in theatre buildings, such as the stunning Teatro Farnese in Parma (designed in 1618 by G. B. Aleotti), Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Schauspielhaus in Berlin from 1821 and, naturally, in Copenhagen, the arch underneath architect Holger Jacobsen's New Stage at the Royal Danish Theatre, opened in 1931 and known as Stærekassen (Starling's Box). A passage for cars leading away from Kongens Nytorv through the building to Tordenskjoldsgade, with access to the theatre lobby from within the arch itself. Here, though, the cars arrive fairly quietly.

Henning Larsen's Concert Hall contains a passage that may be seen as continuing the tradition for these arrival systems. Compared to the Black Diamond, the two sides of the corridor here appear more integrated and homogeneous, because the building, unlike the Diamond, is not perceived as an extension of an existing building. Nor is the corridor exclusively intended for transit purposes. Stairs in connection with the underpass lead up to the Concert Hall lobby. The carved-out sections in the roof above the road draw daylight into the traffic space.





Facade towards the harbour and Frederiksholms Kanal, winning entry, concert hall on the Bryghus Site, Henning Larsen Architects, 1993.

The height of Larsen's Concert Hall shows discretion in relation to the surroundings and also strives for a balanced relationship with the historicist residential building from around 1900 between the Concert Hall and Langebro. The basic footprint of the Concert Hall incorporates what resembles a city-block structure. The classic floorplan, with its lengthwise symmetry, essentially creates a perception of balance that brings a sense of calm to the difficult site, as the balance perceptually projects itself into the surrounding space. The proposal meets expectations of monumentality, but avoids bombast. It strikes a cautious note in relation to the unmatched elements in the urban space that the project concept aims to reconcile and match.

Scrapped

In a sensational move, however, Henning Larsen decided to scrap the project on the very day when his firm was awarded the first prize, as during the award ceremony he suddenly felt that the plot was too small for the intended purpose. A very remarkable decision that the City of Copenhagen accepted due to Henning Larsen's national and international standing. His statement may also have offered the City a convenient excuse not to raise the funds needed to realize the project.[6] Historically, conflict and disagreement have characterized the relationship between city and harbour, city and state and so forth. With respect to some aspects of the development of the harbour in modern history, this has had unfortunate results; Kalvebod Brygge springs to mind. Hence, the architecture editor of the newspaper *Politiken* suggested appointing a person with sovereign authority over the area. The public had grown tired of the recurring skirmishes.

BLOX

No other building site in Copenhagen has been the topic of so many competition proposals. Shortly after the millennium, the process gained real momentum. Now we have BLOX, designed by the Dutch firm OMA. Until the project was unveiled, the principle of stacking volumes was unheard of in the classical parts of Copenhagen. Now the building has been realized, and this project too has a laborious process behind it during the public phase, as is often the case with high-profile buildings. The project has been modified in a number of ways, including matching it to the height of Christians IV's Brewhouse and accommodating local community requests to preserve/reestablish playgrounds and other features. The original form concept with the cantilevered boxes referred back to experimental drafts from the Dutch De Stijl group during the 1920s, in particular projects by van Doesburg and van Eesteren. Within OMA's own extensive production, the building may be regarded as a horizontal relative of the city hall in Rotterdam.

As a result of the extensive modifications the project underwent during the public phase, the building has lost some of its sculptural expressiveness. The stacked volumes in the completed building do not appear as boxes that are clearly and independently drawn out into the facade. The building has been toned down, although it remains a very visible addition to the Copenhagen cityscape. The building's appearance and the horizon of meaning that it invokes point far into modern Copenhagen as a wide-ranging field that is tied together by traffic, a city with hectically insistent traffic arteries, bridges and extended railway lines. A structuring feature in the neighbourhood, which will be similarly potentiated on the Post Office site near Copenhagen's main railway station with a compact complex of buildings and tower blocks. BLOX not only relates to the historical environment on and around Slotsholmen but to Copenhagen at large as a contemporary traffic metropolis in the midst of a decade-long frenetic building boom affecting every district in the city.

As was the case for several projects during what became known as ‘the Dutch wave’, it also shakes up the common perception of order in the distribution of functions and elements throughout the multiple programme components. In the interior of the building, these components are allowed to collide and bisect each other in a simultaneous experience of different spatial qualities. The arrival design too is unorthodox, as the wide, monumental stair that provides access to the multi-functional building first leads down and then into the building.

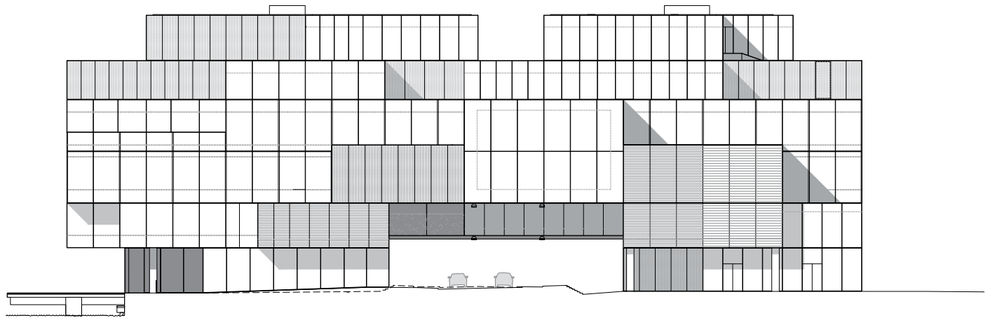
In bisecting functions, piecing them together like the little plastic bits that are used to make composite figures for keyrings and Humpty Dumpty figures or as the colour patches in a Rubik’s Cube, OMA follows, as it has many times before, an avant-garde tradition for breaking up form templates, for decomposition, for collision, slits and seams in the montage, a strategy that began in early-20th-century art and continued in the Neo-Dada of the 1960s.

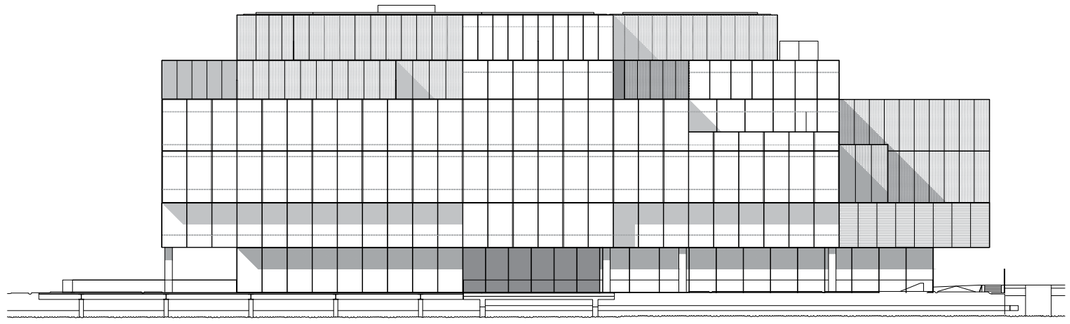
Among other influences, the spatial concept draws on Adolf Loos’s so-called *Raumplan* (spatial plan), an energetic articulation of three-dimensional spatial sequences.

Its principle of balance, one might add, owes more to Mondrian’s angular interplay of lines and surfaces – in a vertical form – than to the principle of symmetrical balances that was applied in the winning Concert Hall project and which, in a modern architectural context, refers back to Schinkel.

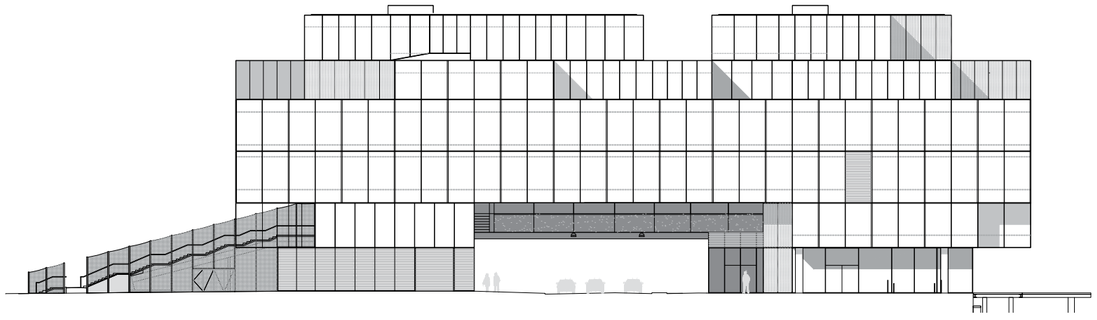
The interior of the BLOX building unfolds on the boundary between the complicated and the complex. Like an urban mega-machine it sits there, humming with bustling traffic at the end of Frederiksholms Kanal. From the arrival point, one goes down, into and up through a world of intricate, three-dimensional spatialities driven largely by an unsentimental machine aesthetic with Dadaesque, friction-filled material assemblages. And then, on the large, elevated open-air terrace in connection with the café, it offers a stunning and grandiose vista of large parts of the harbour between Knippelsbro and Langebro. And farther into the Copenhagen landscape, which the building clearly addresses. Standing here, one is reassured that Copenhagen’s waterways are connected to the Ocean; Gysse and the Golden Age are forgotten, and there is hardly anywhere in Copenhagen where the firmament above the city appears as magnificent as here, where one not only stands at the top of something, looking down, but stands on a wide platform with a balustrade in clear glass panes, and where in the euphoria of all these visual impressions there emerges an inner, blissful buoyancy point. ●

1 *Arkitektens Månedshefte, XLIII*, 1941, 7: 102.
2 Aage Rafn: “Om Bryghuskonkurrencens resultater”, *Arkitektens Maanedshefte* op. cit.: 108.
3 See *Arkitekten*, 1994, 3: 82f.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.: 94.
6 During the initial stages leading up to the competition project, Henning Larsen had contributed sketches and descriptions. It was prepared by Troels Troelsen, Lars Steffensen, Dorte Mandrup-Poulsen and Kjeld Vindum. For a prolonged period prior to the submission of the proposal, Henning Larsen had been bedridden due to influenza. To everyone’s surprise, when the firm’s proposal was awarded first prize in a ceremony at Copenhagen’s City Hall, he suddenly declared that the project would have to be abandoned, because the plot was too small. This is historically rather unprecedented and led to some astonishment among Danish journalists, as Larsen later, during the work on the Opera on Holmen (the former naval base), accepted a string of compromises and professional humiliations from the client without, on this occasion, finding it necessary to withdraw from the project.



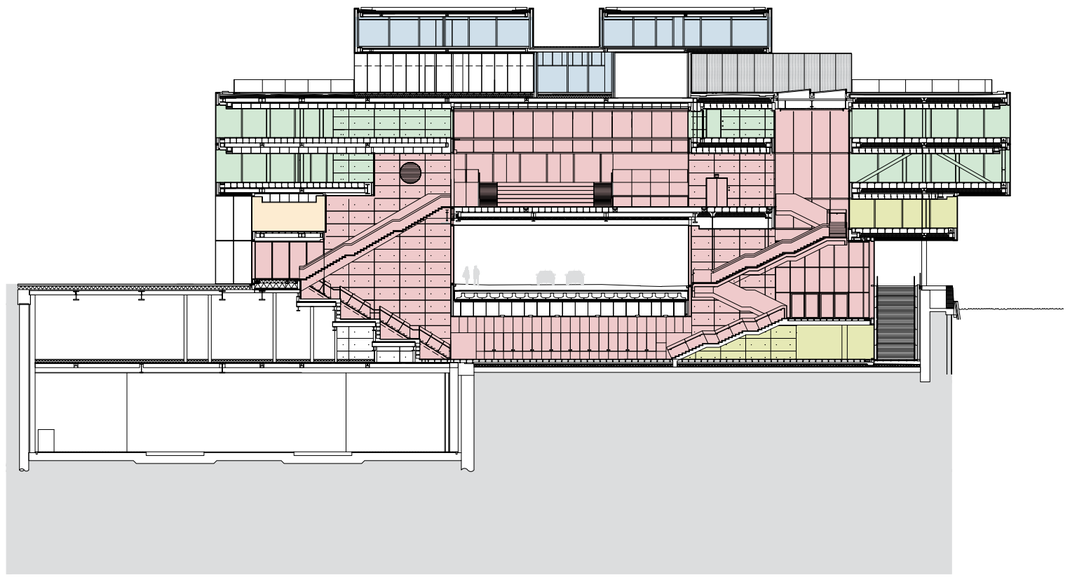


↑ South-west facade 1:500.
↓ South-east facade 1:500.



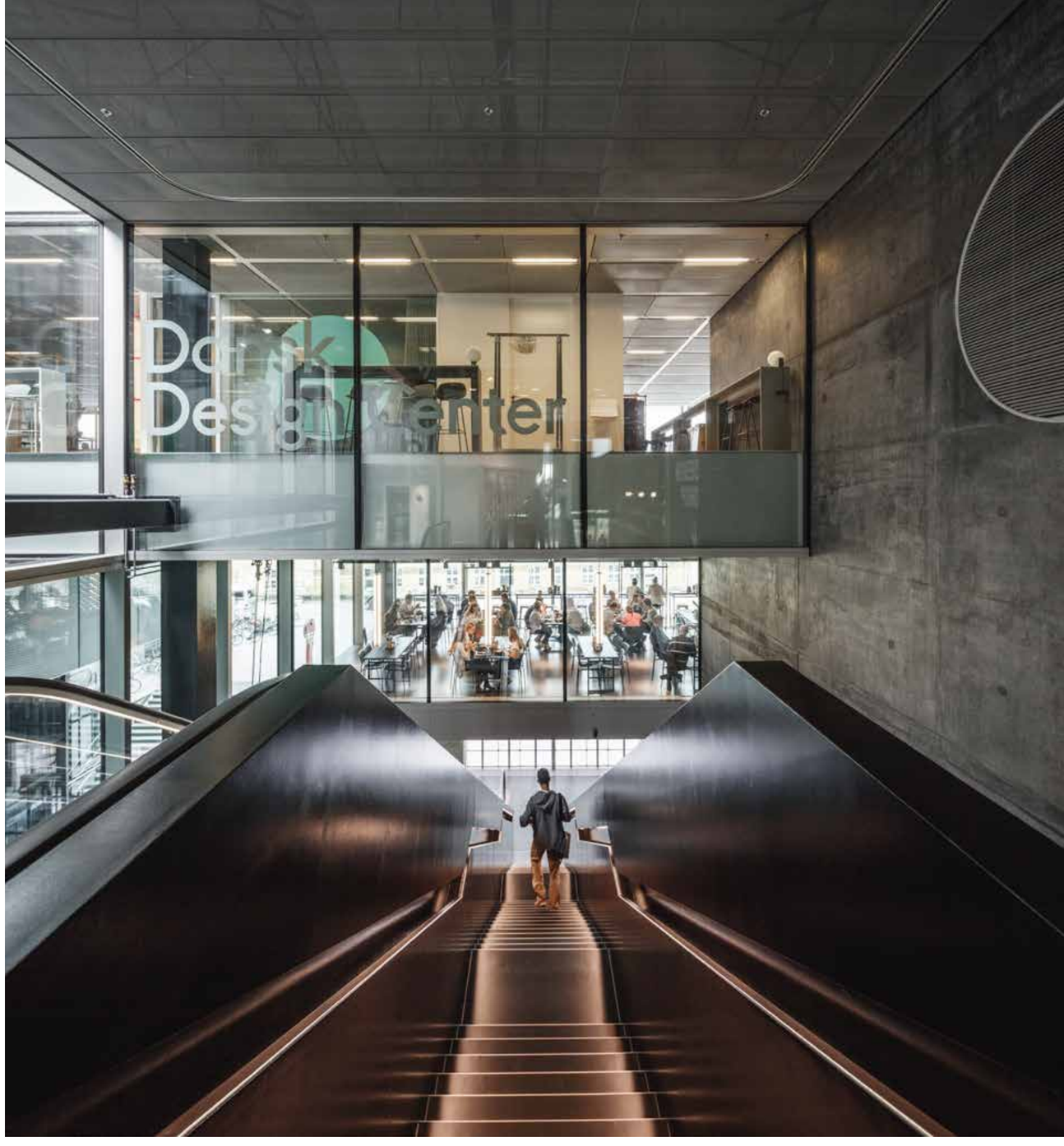
↑ North-east facade 1:500.
↓ North-west facade 1:500.

The central staircase is a monumental public space leading down to the entrance to DAC and the passage underneath the road.

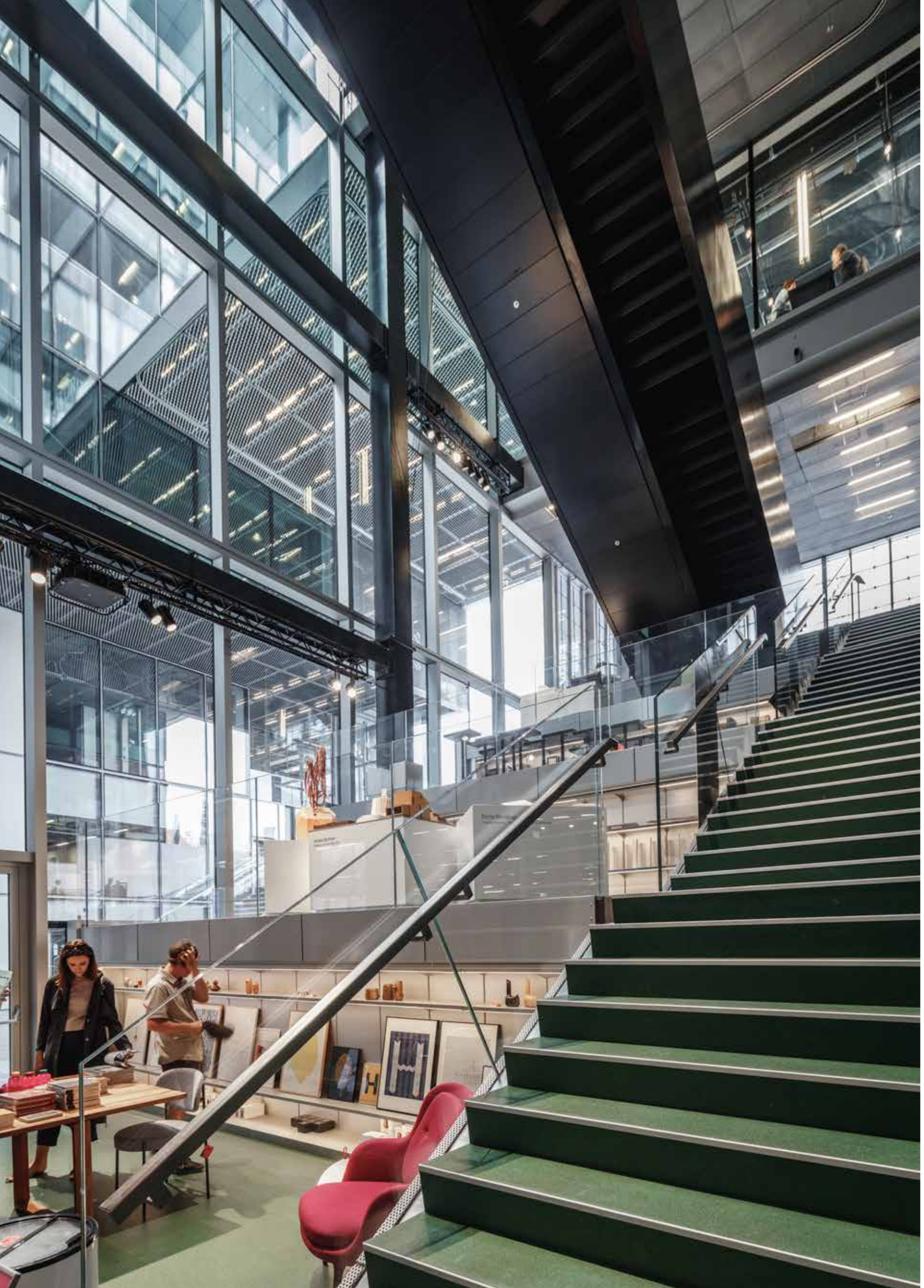


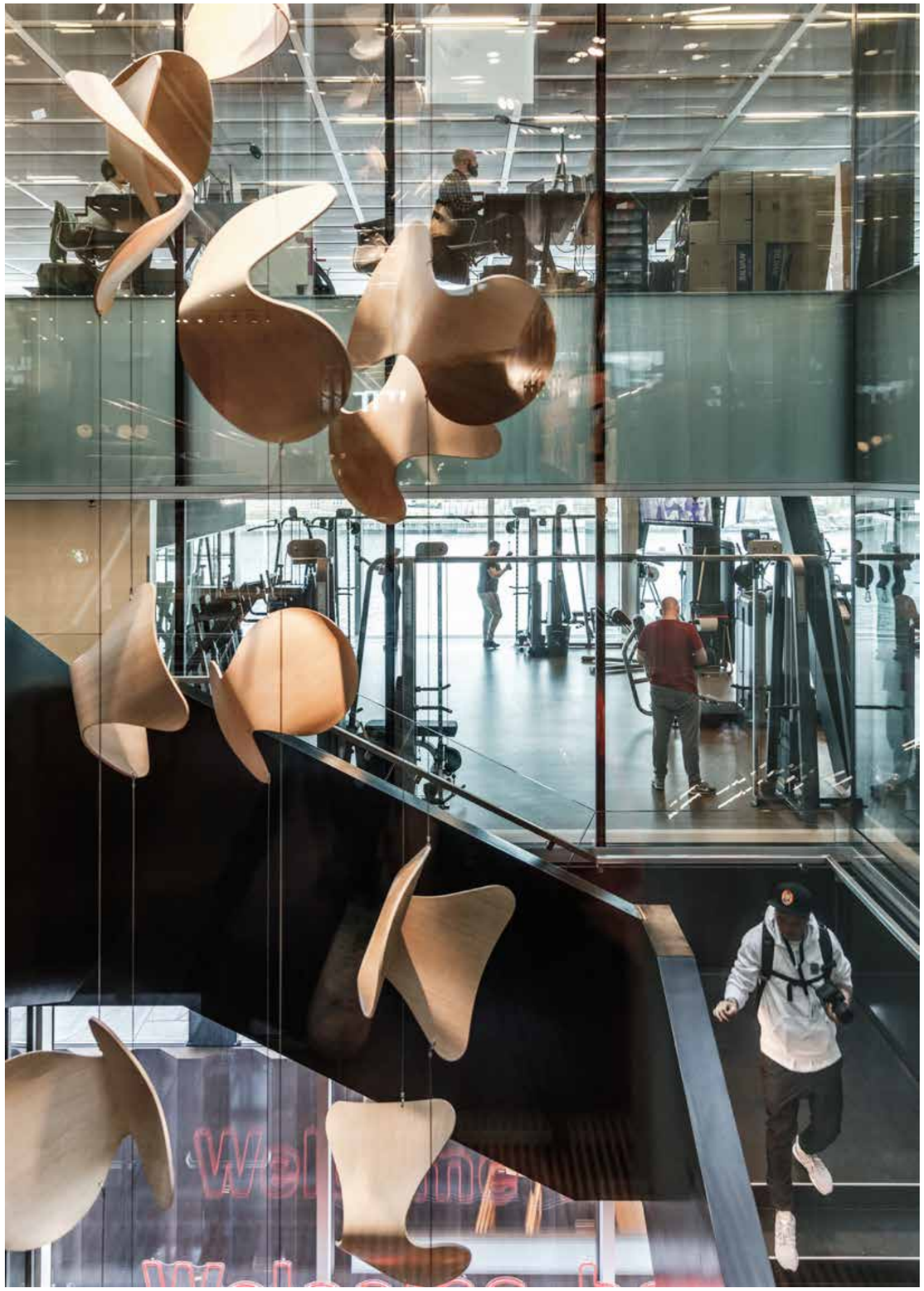
DAC is situated in a loop under and over the road that passes through BLOX. North-east section 1:1000.

- Urban connector
- Office space
- Retail space
- Store room
- Technical facilities
- Housing
- Basement
- Restaurant
- DAC
- Playground

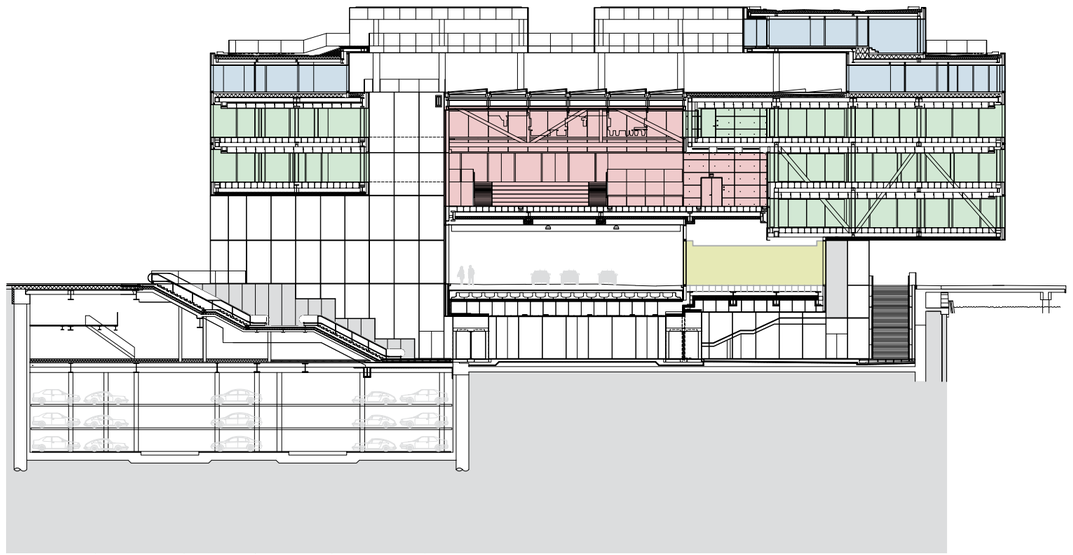


A consistent principle throughout is the transparency between the office space and the building's public traffic flow.





← Design shop and stairs leading up to DAC's exhibition hall.
↑ From the stairway, there is a view into the fitness centre and out to the harbour. The building's interior facades are largely transparent.



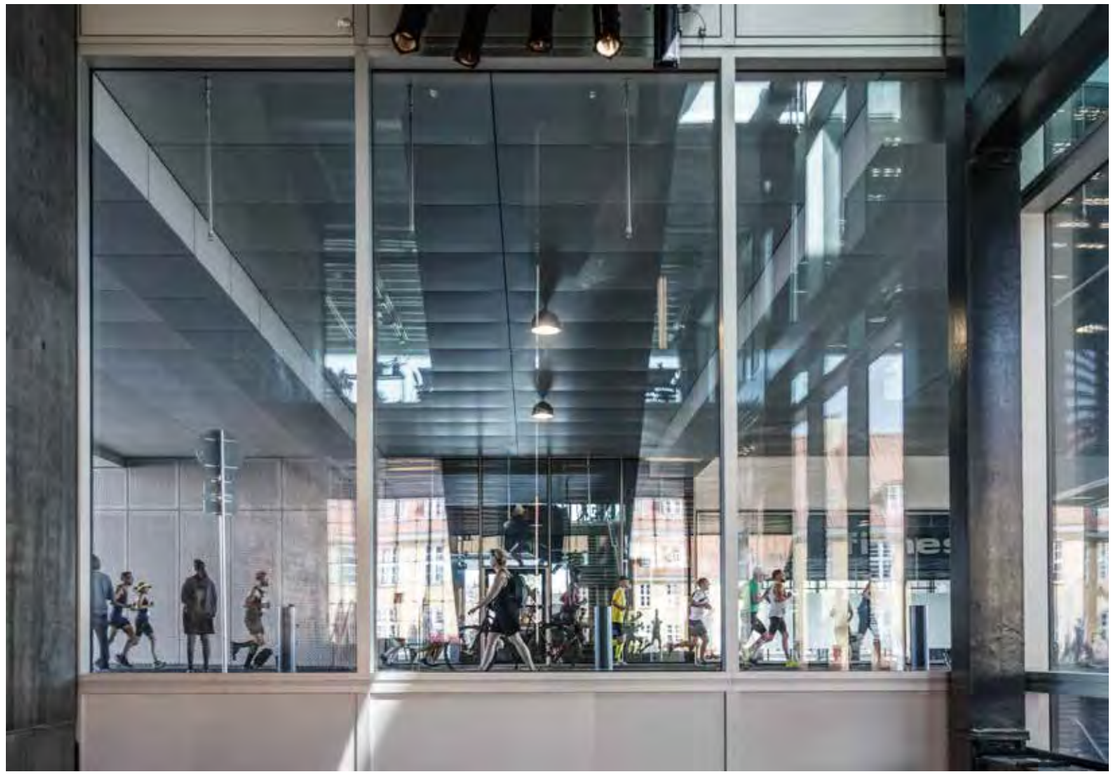
- Urban connector
- Office space
- Retail space
- Store room
- Technical facilities
- Housing
- Basement
- Restaurant
- DAC
- Playground

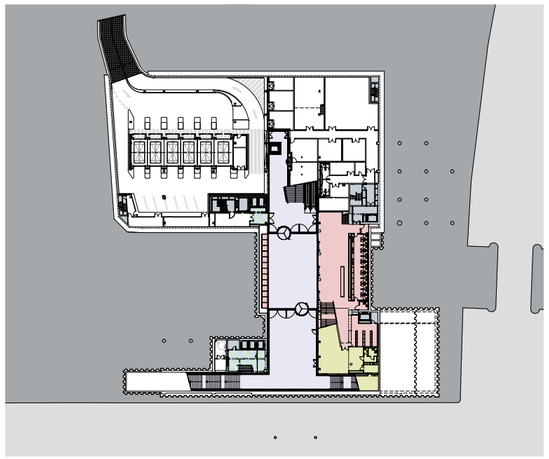
North-east section 1:1000.

Waterfront promenade and the DAC Passage. The public spaces in and around BLOX tie the city and the building together.

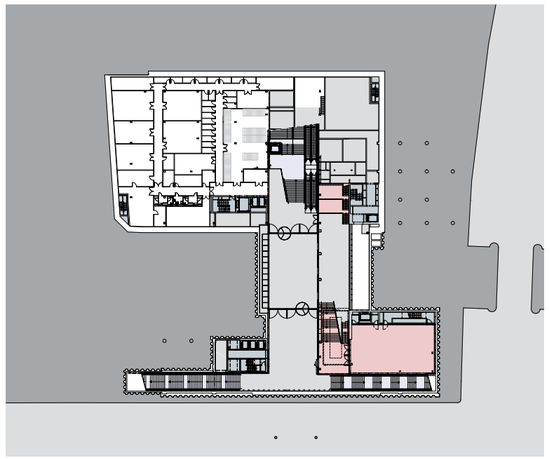
South-east section 1:500.

- Urban connector
- Office space
- Retail space
- Store room
- Technical facilities
- Housing
- Basement
- Restaurant
- DAC
- Playground

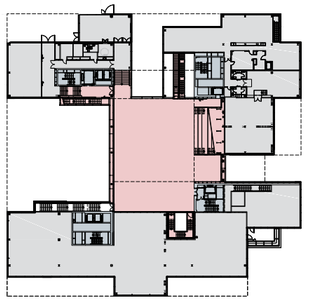




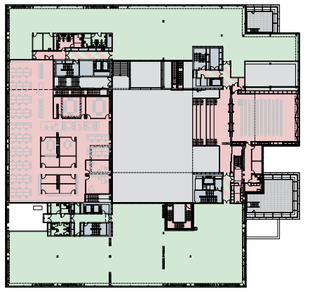
Basement, level 2



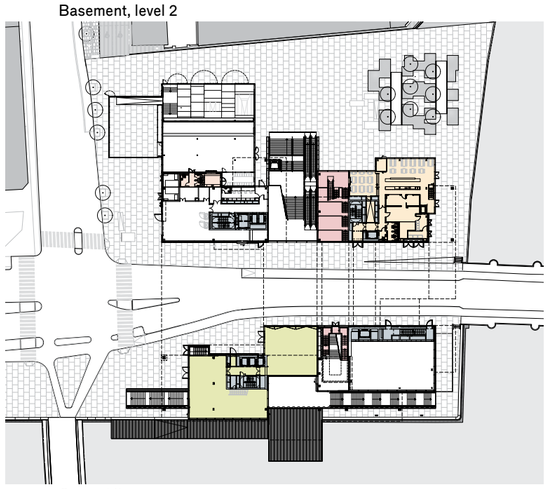
Basement, level 1



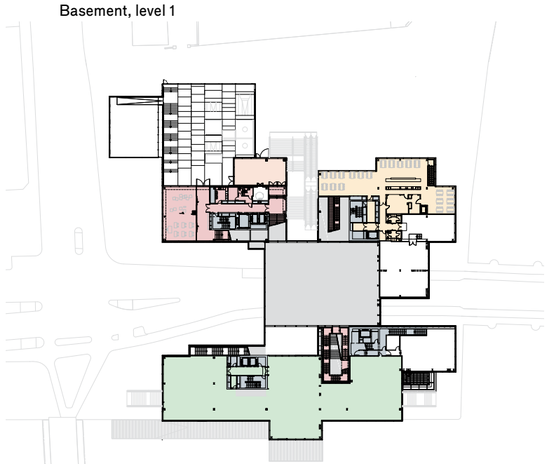
First-floor mezzanine



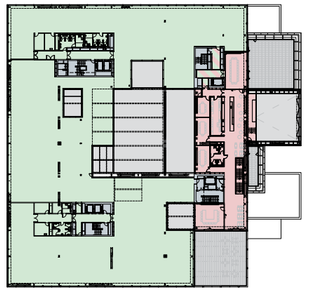
Second floor



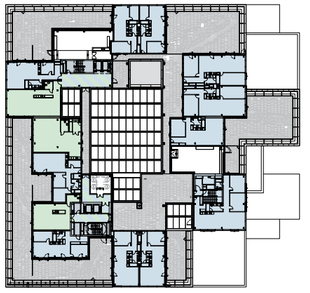
Ground floor



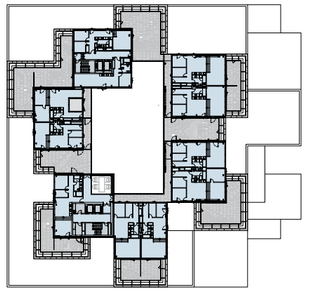
First floor



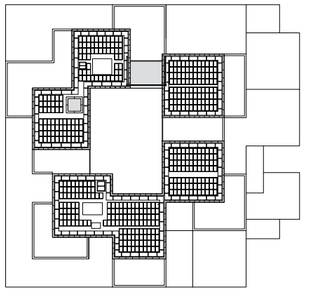
Third floor



Fourth floor



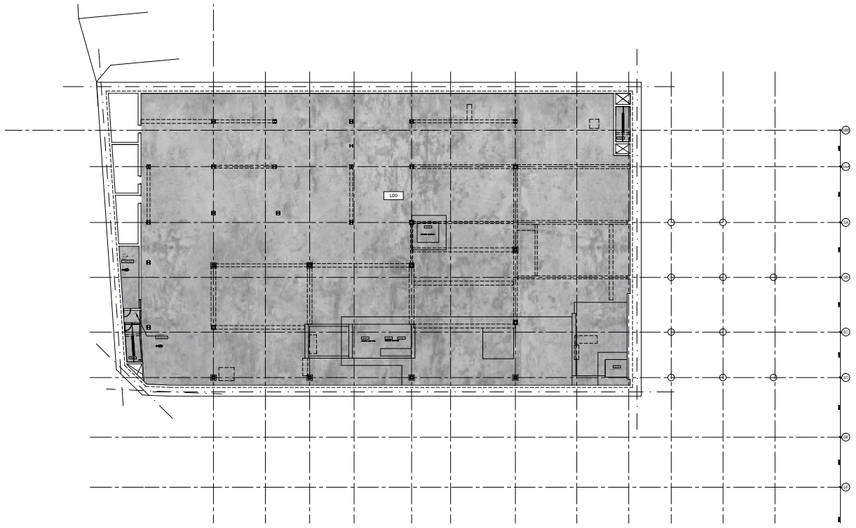
Fifth floor

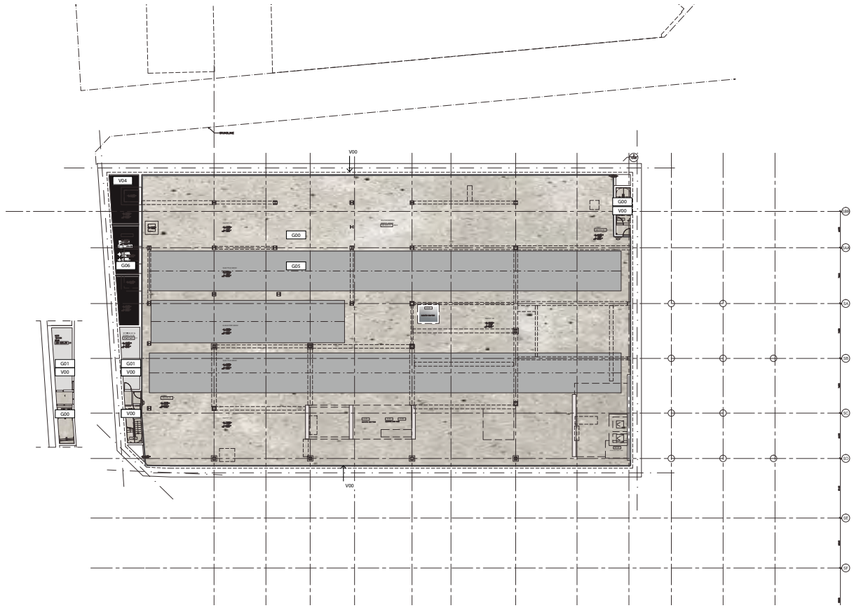


Roof

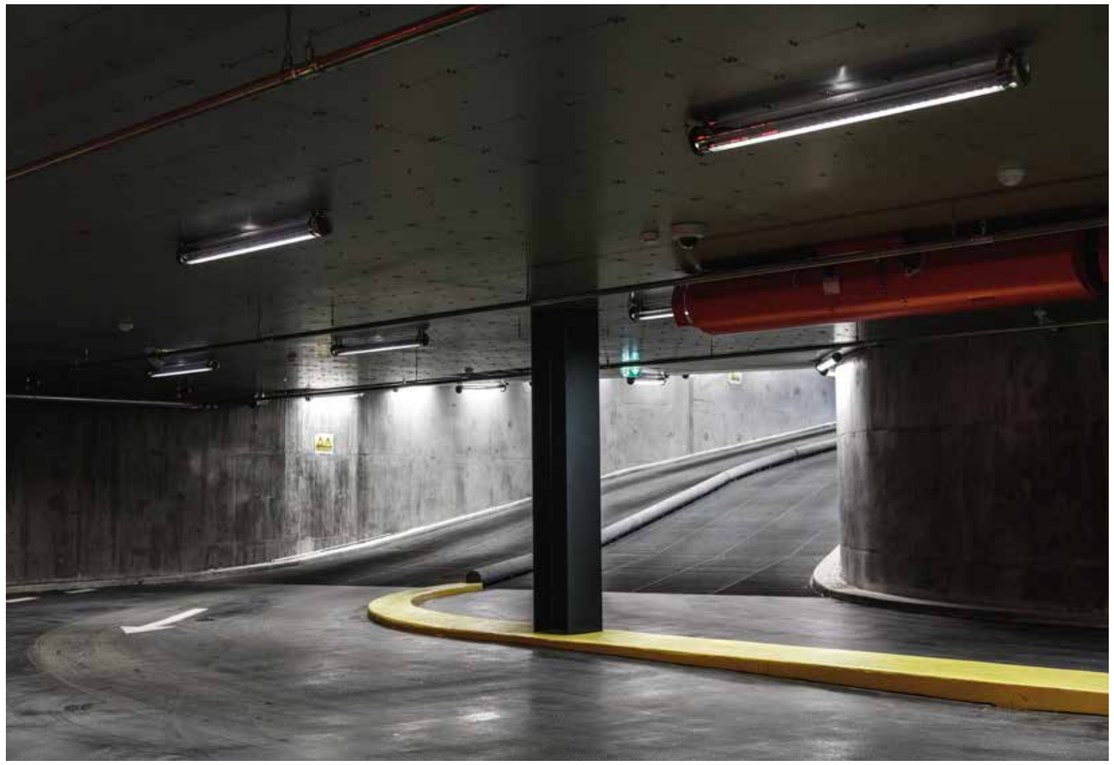
Floor plans 1:1500.

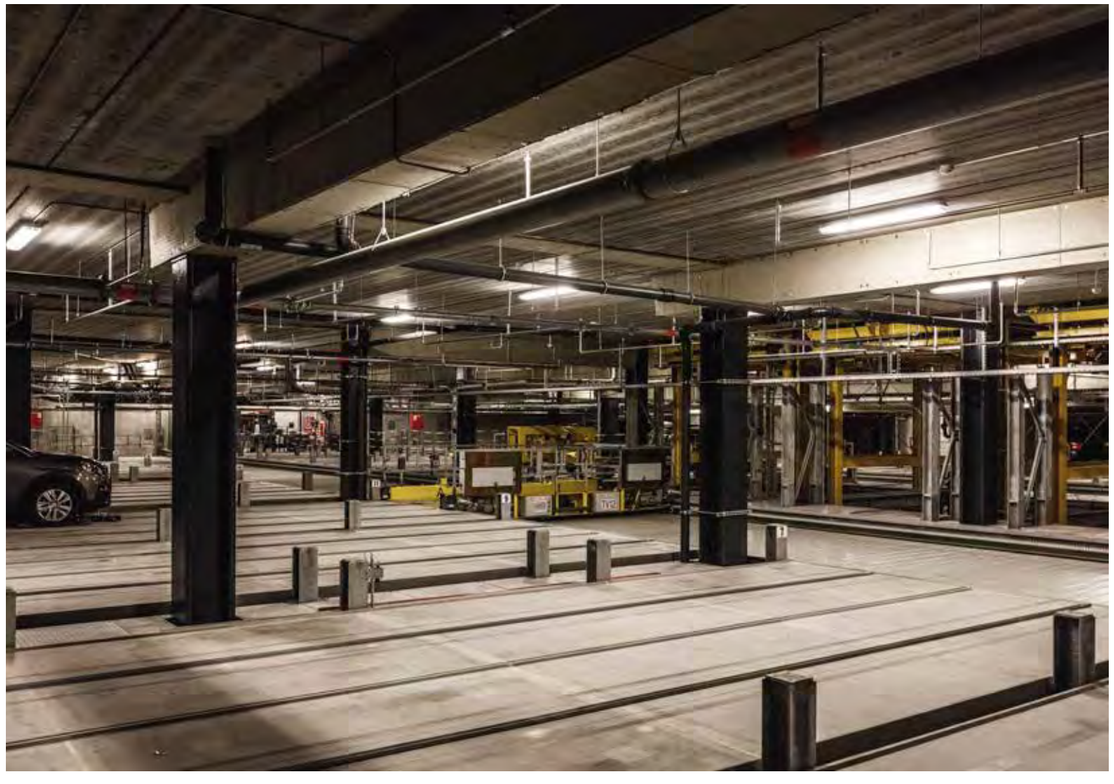
- Urban connector
- Office space
- Retail space
- Store room
- Technical facilities
- Housing
- Basement
- Restaurant
- DAC
- Playground



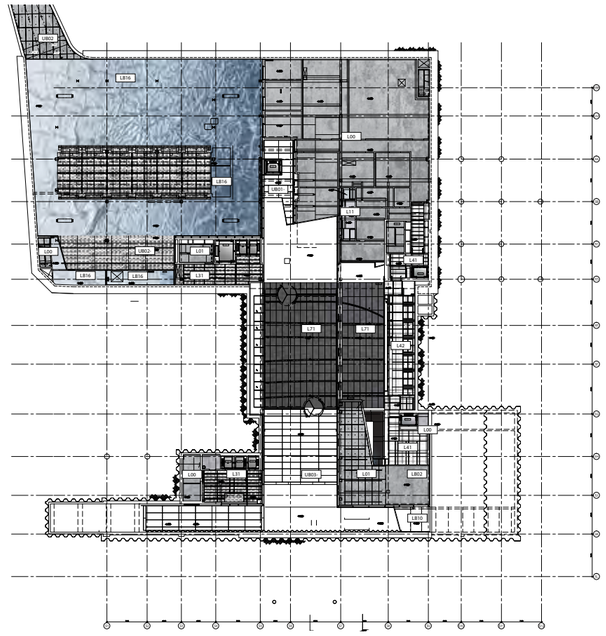


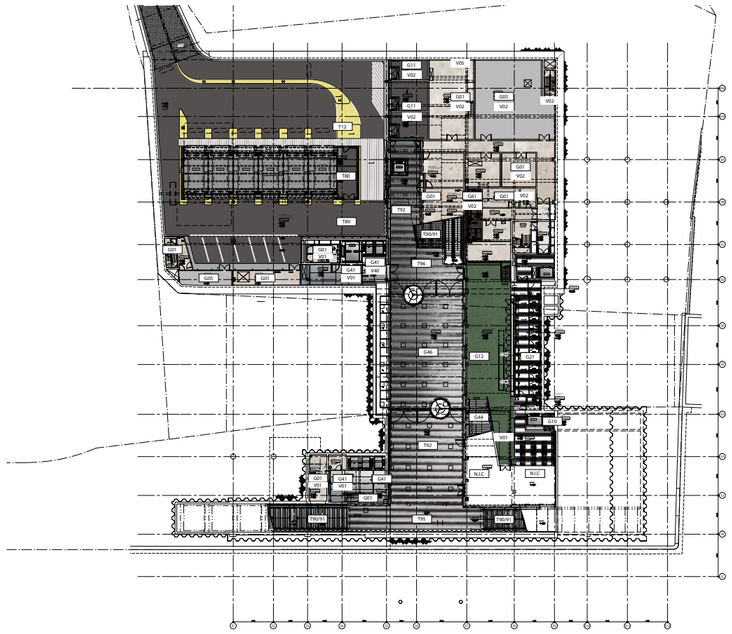
↑ Material plan, ceiling – basement, level 3.
↓ Material plan, floor – basement, level 3.





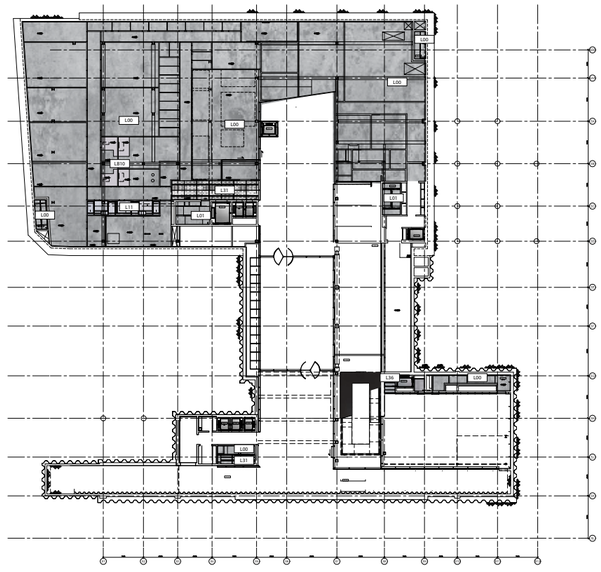
The fully automated parking facility under BLOX helps reduce street-level parking.

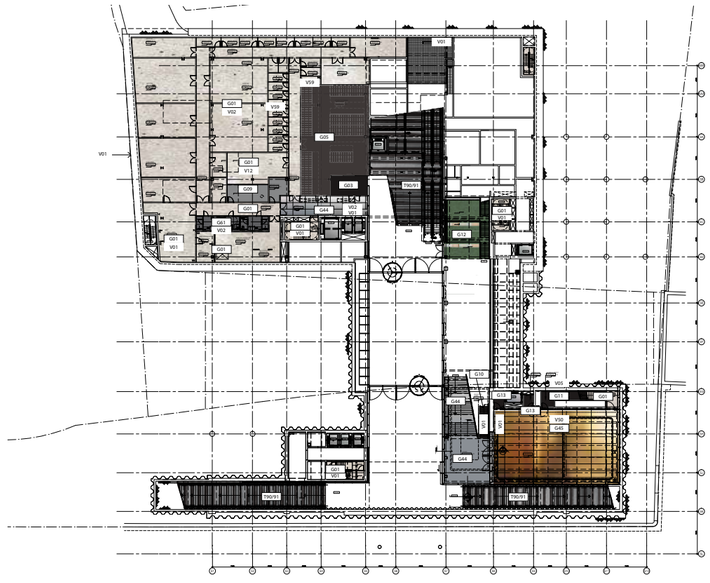




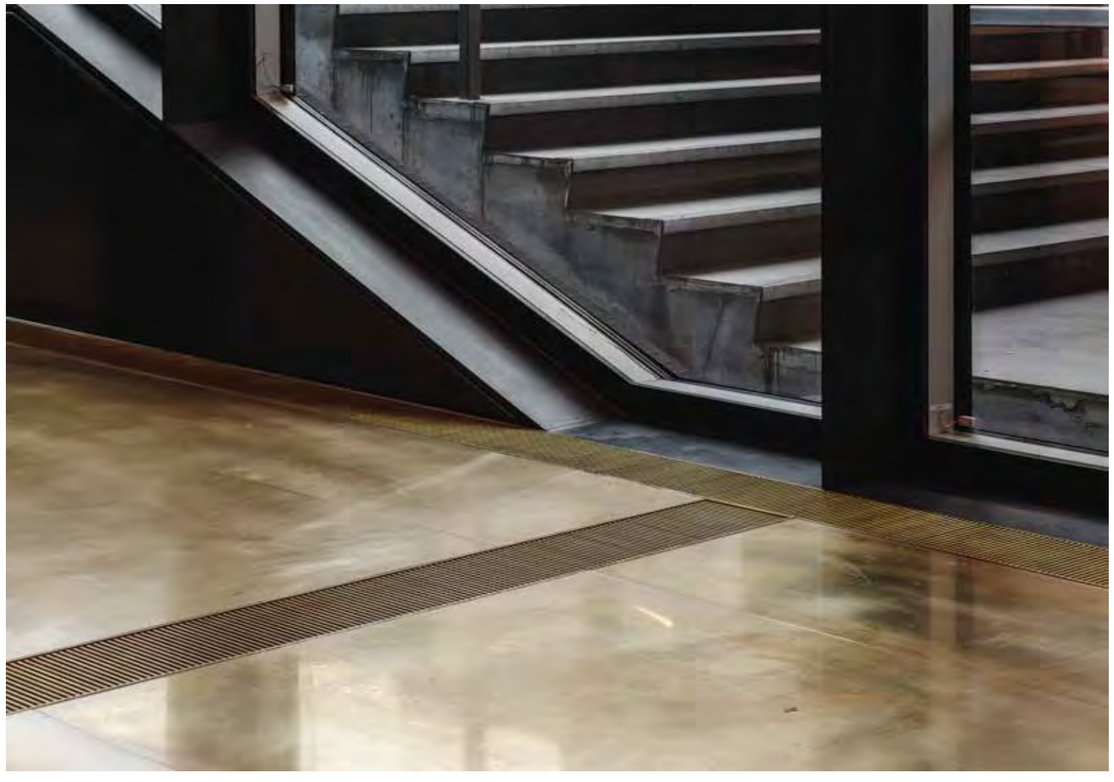
↑ Material plan, ceiling – basement, level 2.
↓ Material plan, floor – basement, level 2.

Plateau and stairs for arriving to BLOX from the public square by Fæstningens Materialgård (the Arsenal).

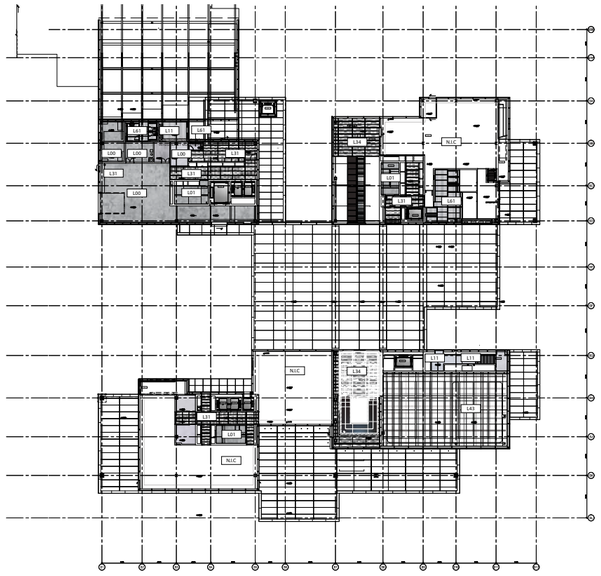


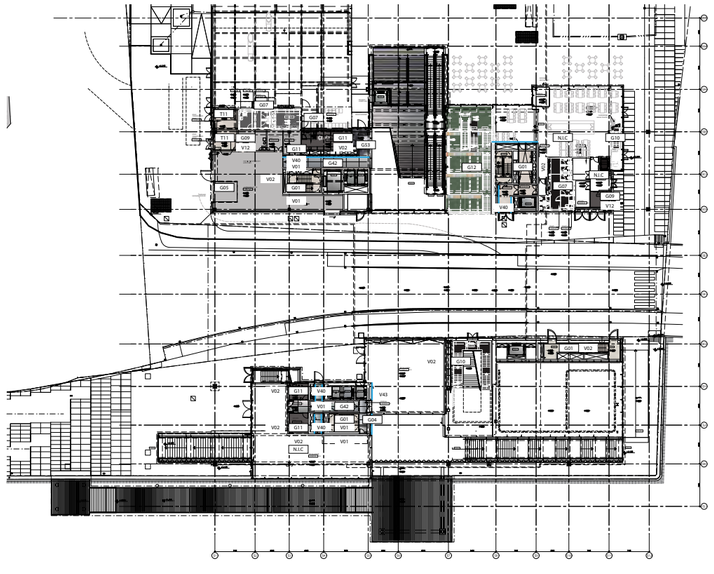


↑ Material plan, ceiling – basement, level 1.
↓ Material plan, floor – basement, level 1.



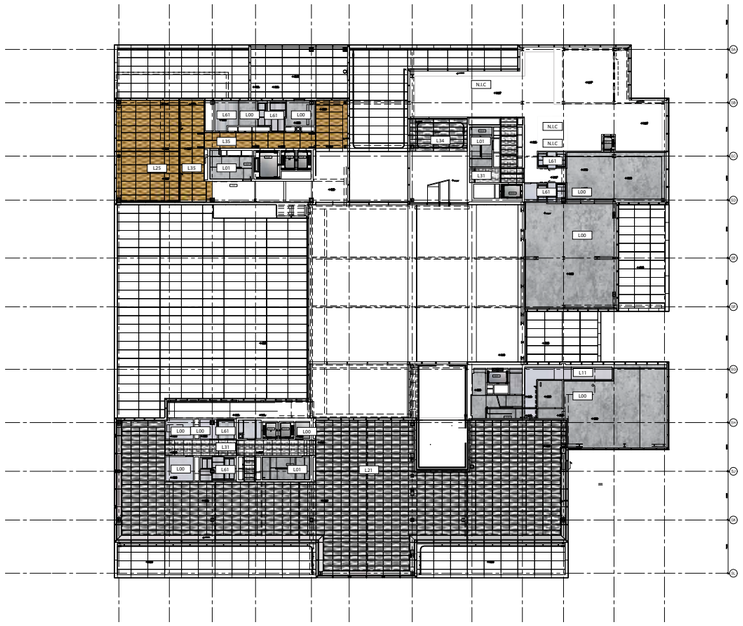
The Golden Gallery. A high-security exhibition room and signature space.





↑ Material plan, ceiling – ground floor.
↓ Material plan, floor – ground floor.

Visitors to DAC's design shop are at eye level with the traffic passing through the building.



↑ Material plan, ceiling – first floor.
↓ Material plan, floor – first floor.

The great variation in materials gives every room a specific expression and transparency that help communicate and articulate the transition between builidng and context

BLOX from the Inside Out

Anne Skovbro

Chief Philanthropic Officer, Realdania
in conversation with Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

With BLOX, Realdania has realized the foundation's biggest project to date. Anne Skovbro, Realdania's chief philanthropic officer, talks about the ambitions behind the project and the interdisciplinary cooperation that creates liveable cities and buildings.

The bicycle and pedestrian bridge Lille Langebro (Little Long Bridge) is going to connect the Christianshavn embankments with central Copenhagen. Lille Langebro is scheduled to open in autumn 2019.

KLW With its harbour-front location, BLOX transforms a central part of Copenhagen. How would you describe the original ambition of the project when it was initially launched, almost 12 years ago?

AS The transformation of the industrial port to recreational space and blue park is perhaps the most important thing that has happened for Copenhagen as a city in recent history, and it is a fundamental ambition that BLOX would continue that development. BLOX is arguably one of the last – and one of the very large – building blocks in the part of the city's history that began when the first harbour bath opened 15 years ago, and which has made Copenhagen famous around the world. It has made the city a place where it is nice to live, bike and work. We want it to stay that way in the future. One of our ambitions for BLOX was to preserve Copenhagen's pole position as one of the most sustainable and viable cities in the world. The new bicycle and pedestrian bridges that are part of the project tie the city even closer together. That's how we make room for both the Sunday stroll along the harbour and for cyclists traversing the city on their daily commute.

BLOX also contains innovative meeting rooms for researchers, organizations and companies dedicated to working with sustainable urban development around the world, and in that sense, it's a contemporary landmark, not only for Copenhagen but for sustainable urban development. The ambition behind BLOX and the many activities that it houses is to create a destination in the city that appeals to a wide Danish and international audience with an interest in how we can build sustainable cities in the future.

KLW As you point out, BLOX is about much more than exhibitions and modern office facilities; it is also a setting for local Copenhagener's everyday life. It's a new way of using the harbour front?

AS Yes, 50 years ago we would not have been talking about whether it might be relevant to have a lowered pier, so that kayaks can tie up. Now it is. We are using the harbour and the pier in a new way. BLOX as a building was conceived as the urban cogwheel promoting modern urban living, which wasn't thriving in that part of the city. With BLOX, the City of Copenhagen and Realdania aim to demonstrate that it's possible to build on one of the most challenging sites in the city while creating new, welcoming urban space in the process. In that sense, BLOX is itself a demonstration of what will be important in future urban development.

KLW As then director of planning and development in the City of Copenhagen you were involved

The Bryghus Site, in between Fæstningens Materialgård (the Arsenal) and BLOX, features both a playground and room for many different different events and activities.

BLOX is a natural part of the harbour's tranformation from industrial infrastructure to recreational blue park.

The Bryghus Site. A recreational zone has been established in the section towards Frederiksholms Kanal.

in formulating the grand narrative of the Copenhagen Metropolitan Zone, which was about the densification of the inner city. The goal was to accelerate the conversion of the harbour as a strategic focal point for the city?

AS Yes, there was a very active debate at the time about the development of the harbour areas. The main criticism was that there was a real risk of the area ending up as a windswept, unattractive part of the harbour that no one would want to use as a recreational urban space. That the demands to the quality of the architecture and the public squares around the buildings were not ambitious enough. Copenhagen should still be a place with room for all sorts of everyday life, and we know that a broad partnership involving the municipality, the state, business and industry, citizens and private actors provides the best basis for architectural projects and urban development; and that is exactly how the process for the BLOX project was designed. The entire area around BLOX is like a giant classroom, in the sense that school groups from all over the city come here to visit the National Museum, Tivoli, the Glyptotek or Christiansborg Palace – in addition to the many tourists and architecture aficionados who come to Copenhagen every year. That's the kind of diversity that characterizes a metropolis, and that is the meeting place that the area around BLOX is turning into. The part of Copenhagen where BLOX is located is a hyper-public space with large cultural institutions that attract many visitors. It is our ambition to position BLOX as a central element in that urban space and as an attraction that offers unique experiences.

KLW **For decades, the site that BLOX occupies today was little more than a windswept car park. So the building also had a role to fill as the project that finally completed that urban space?**

AS Of course it's important to be thorough when you build in a difficult spot where other projects have already faltered. The harbour front already features important public functions and large volumes, including the Black Diamond, for example. It's important not to be afraid to create something that stands out in a place that interacts with the other functions and urban spaces in the area. Realdania was able to bring in the Danish Architecture Center (DAC) as a main attraction. For the city council, residential space was a priority. There was – and still is – a huge demand for housing in

The public playground by BLOX with a ball cage and a climbing rack, seen from Vester Voldgade. Behind the climbing rack there are other playground facilities.

The colour scheme and volume of BLOX reflect the existing building context, the green colour referencing the city's old verdigris copper roofs and the colours of the water.

Copenhagen. The Dutch architectural office OMA placed a high priority on creating a building and an urban space that would be full of life, so housing was soon included as an element in the project. In that way, the project gradually took shape as a building with very mixed functions that addresses the site very directly. Ultimately, it's all about what the building gives back to the city.

KLW **It has to take a high degree of sensitivity and responsibility to shape the harbour-front on behalf of the large community that Copenhagen is?**

AS That's where architecture has something special to offer, if it's properly conceived. But yes, we have been asked many times why BLOX is placed so close to the water's edge. Whether it might be too close. But no, BLOX embraces the road, wraps up the busy transport artery. That produces a large recreational space with a restaurant and a playground on the other side of the building and creates passages both above and under the road. You can walk through the building – from the city side and down to the water – going through the public foyer, taking the underpass and reaching the new waterfront promenade on the other side.

KLW **To make a slightly polemical comment, it seems that Realdania may have learned from the many mono-functional institutions on the harbour front that fail to add anything meaningful in terms of urban life?**

AS Realdania had an ambition of creating a programme with mixed functions and thus realizing the vision of bringing more life to the urban space that had been a political ambition for years. That is an issue in many of the projects Realdania works with all over the country. And in our experience, a broad collaboration ensures the sustainability of a project – also in the long term. In fact, the content is the most important element; the presence of activities that help make Copenhagen a more interesting city. We secured that with DAC and with the innovation environment BLOXHUB, which, with its focus on sustainable cities and innovation in architecture and construction, is a crucial part of the project concept. The initial ideas about BLOXHUB emerged half-way through the process, and BLOXHUB was founded on the premise that future solutions will require much closer cooperation between architects, technology, design, construction, urban development and research. And we shouldn't just talk about it. We should show it, through BLOX as a building.

Despite the modern and unconventional architecture, some of the typological aspects of BLOX are also reminiscent of typological features in city houses and the old residential blocks in the city, where the ground floor is always occupied by public functions, such as a bar, for example. On the first and second floors, there may be an architecture studio, while the third and forth floors are occupied by flats. BLOX represents a similar idea on a bigger scale, a very classic Copenhagen approach.

KLW **The establishment of BLOXHUB also addresses the debate about what sort of city Copenhagen should be in the future?**

AS The project has been a journey for Realdania, where the initial plans involved a fairly traditional concept of rental office space. But the new government that took over after the general election in 2011 had a strong focus on the growth potential in the creative sector, and among the recommendations that came out was the call for a HUB, a growth environment for the creative professions. The expert panel that had been established to make policy recommendations pointed to BLOX as an obvious candidate. The state then began to consider moving not just DAC but also the Danish Design Centre to BLOX. All along, the focus has been on what the building can contribute to the city as the setting for a community. Realdania's mission is to improve the quality of life through the built

The waterfront promenade wraps around the building in the form of a wooden pier. A space that lends itself to dancing and workouts and an element that connects the city and the harbour.

environment. And if actors within architecture, design and urbanization can live together under the same roof, Copenhagen is in a strong position to become a centre for the development of the kinds of solutions we need to create the cities of the future.

KLW And a hub would promote the innovation in the sector, which needed a boost a the time?

AS It's an industry with a big economic volume and multiple links in the value chain. Our strength in Danish design and architecture is our roots in the Danish soil. We build in cement, because we have natural access to cement, we build in brick, because clay is a highly accessible material, and we love the Nordic wood types that are native to Denmark. It's a strength, but it can also place a constraint on innovation with regard to sustainable construction materials and the implementation of new technology. BLOX and BLOXHUB invite a dialogue across the industry. That's how new ideas are created. Realdania has supported innovation for years, but innovation shouldn't be the reserve of big companies. Start-ups are just as important, and a research environment with a broad outlook can promote the agenda of addressing the many challenges and possibilities that face cities in Denmark and around the world.

KLW From an outside perspective, BLOX is a mix of business development policy, urban policy and research and innovation policy. Add to that the public dimension, where DAC sits in the middle as an octopus, its arms reaching out to every corner of the building. Is that the way the content was conceived, as a deliberately complex entity?

AS Yes, there is a 1:1 link between the design thinking that shaped the building and the content inside. That is also one of the reasons why we established BLOXHUB as an association with a board made up of elected representatives, to make it as organic as possible. It includes the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs, the City of Copenhagen, the chairman of the board is Lars-Peter Søbye, CEO of COWI, and the vice chairman is Jørgen Bardenfleth, who was CEO of Microsoft Denmark for a number of years. The make-up of the board is intended to help BLOXHUB grow independently as an association where more and more actors can get involved to build an attractive professional community and environment. It is an urban innovation environment where people expect things of each other. Everyone has to contribute to the community; it's a very collectivist endeavour.

KLW And the building design supports this idea of combining audience activities and industry network?

AS We are very happy that we now have a building that contains many different meetings between different types of experiences under the common heading of improving our cities. BLOX is a unique building, but I don't really care for the concept of 'iconic architecture'. Bruce Katz (global urbanization scholar and expert at the American think tank the Brookings Institution, ed.), who is on the board of BLOXHUB, calls BLOX 'a lighthouse': it stands out in the landscape, it reaches out. In the BLOX project there has been keen awareness that the main issue is the content, which needs a contemporary and relevant setting. The building is flexible and provides a global outlook with a local foundation. BLOX serves as a window to the world for Danish companies and scholars in the field of urbanization and sustainable development, and the outside world also comes to BLOX for inspiration and to use BLOX as a gateway to the Nordic markets. In keeping with the exchange of goods, ideas and languages that characterizes a port.

KLW So, if you had to boil it down: what BLOX contributes is to bring different actors together around the same table?

AS It is intended as an innovation environment. And that reflects the way Realdania acts: cultivating existing environments, making them stronger and creating a growth and innovation environment that contributes something new. The role of facilitator is an important one, and the projects we support should be model projects that point to the future. We have to have the courage to lead the way. We have ambitions for the sort of difference that BLOX can hopefully make. BLOXHUB and DAC will be able to embrace and facilitate key debates that have the potential to benefit a large number of cities. We can field bold points of view, provoke the debate and offer new knowledge. Whenever people initiate a conversation, that initiates an idea generation process. And BLOX provides an ideal basis for that conversation to unfold. ●

Transparency is a defining quality throughout the building, not least on the office floors. BLOXHUB.

Towards the Architecture Centre of the 21st Century

Kent Martinussen

CEO, Danish Architecture Center,
in conversation with Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss

A small section of *Welcome Home*, DAC's opening exhibition at BLOX, 2018.

As CEO of the Danish Architecture Center (DAC), Kent Martinussen helped conceive and define the programme for BLOX. Today, the building offers a brand-new venue for DAC that challenges conventional ideas of how architecture can and should be communicated.

Map of Copenhagen that was used in AMO's urban studies of the context around BLOX. AMO, 2006.

The Bryghus Site is situated between the historical city core and the Metropolitan Zone. Densifying the central city core and re-establishing the connection to harbour front are long-standing political ambitions. AMO, 2006.

KLW With the construction of BLOX, the Danish Architecture Center (DAC) not only gains a new home but also a chance to redefine what an architecture centre is and should be in the future in interaction with the new setting that BLOX offers?

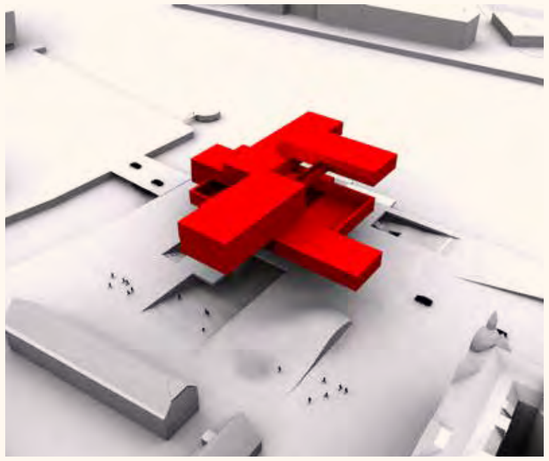
KM It was a remarkable situation when Realdania decided, in 2004, to create a new building that would be custom-designed to house the Danish Architecture Center. BLOX is built on a plot that is situated in the heart of 850 years of Danish history in central Copenhagen. This is where the city was founded. Christianity with Absalon, the monarchy, the development of democracy and the major national cultural institutions. All in all a condensed tale of Danish history. What is missing is the story of the physical settings, architecture and how we design our built environment in Copenhagen. We would love to be able to put that on the last available shelf in central Copenhagen, because there's a huge potential in the story about society's physical settings. The big focus on architecture, design and urban development was, after all, a fundamental strategic cultural concept for modern Denmark.

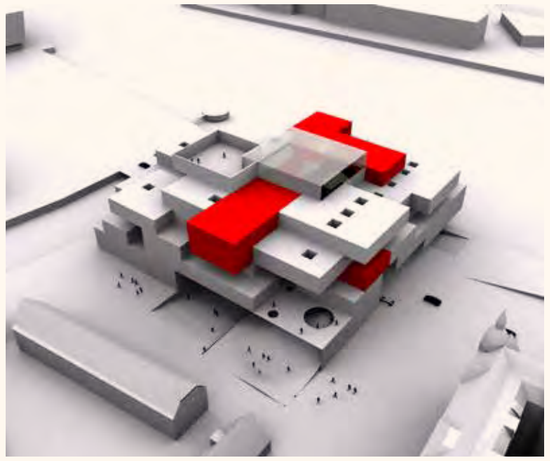
KLW Should BLOX and DAC be seen in the context of the Metropolitan Zone initiative and the ambition of densifying central Copenhagen as a way of future-proofing the city's development and activating the potential of the harbour?

KM It was part of our self-concept that we had this opportunity to position ourselves exactly at the boundary between the historic city centre and the Metropolitan Zone. To us, this specific site, where we can focus on architecture as a narrative about our identity along with the other major cultural institutions on the cultural horizon, was a match made in heaven. Rem Koolhaas, Ellen van Loon and OMA did the right thing when they latched on to the project's multi-programmatic concept, based on the situation of the plot in a tricky urban location with heavy traffic along the harbour front and with the historic urban environment. And then, of course, creating something in the cultural context of Denmark, which at the time, in OMA's perception, had a fairly self-sufficient view of architecture. OMA was able to bring in something brand-new. The decision to inject something completely alien into this culture was a fully deliberate move. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) says, 'Go there, where you cannot go, to the impossible,' in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the meaning of culture. In that sense, the project contains a deconstructive element. Doing something that differs from what the best within the field have already done. It was important not to wind up with nice, Danish modernism. But when it comes right down to it, it's not that different from how it was when the entire Christianshavn district was planned by Semp [Johan, also known as Sems, a Frisian surveyor and engineer, 1572–1635, ed.], an outsider who developed plans that are alien to the existing setting. So this concept of bringing something new into the culture is not a new phenomenon. It's an opportunity to rethink oneself. To us at DAC, it was an important opportunity to rethink the meaning of our work.

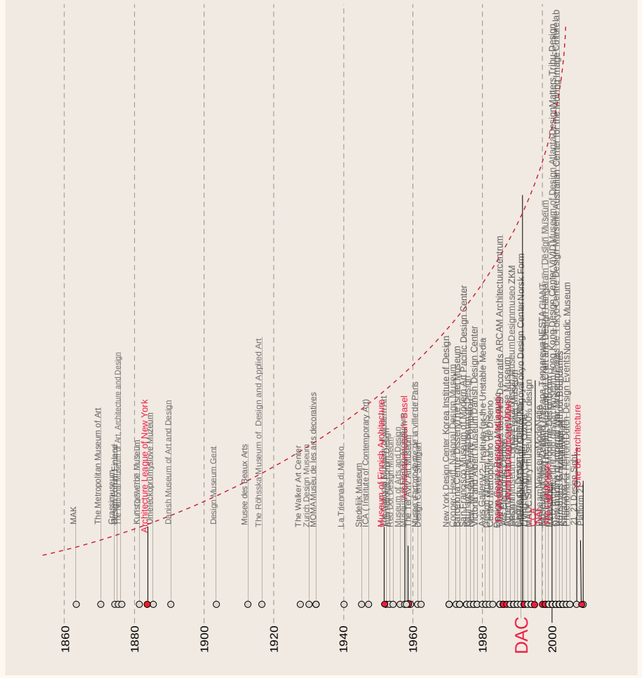
KLW But it was also a trend in the early 2000s that architects from other countries began to be invited in and there was a greater openness towards the outside world. The architectural profession became more dynamic during those years?

KM Zaha Hadid had broken through the wall in 2005 with her extension of the Ordrupgaard museum. In 2004, we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Academy, which de facto had led to a 250-year virtual exclusion of foreign architects in Denmark. We began to train our own architects, so now they were in charge of architecture. That was, after all, the whole point of the Academy. Hence, putting an end to protectionism was key to the way in which we now understand the city and what architecture can contribute. OMA and Rem Koolhaas did an amazing presentation during the interview competition, and their angle was, 'I want to pose the question: how





The Danish Architecture Center is centrally situated in the heart of BLOX and has been described as an octopus, stretching out its limbs and interacting with the building's other programmes. OMA, 2007.


1860
1880
1900
1920
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1960
1980
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DAC
MAK
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Architectural League of New York
Victoria & Albert Museum
Design Museum, Gent
Musée des Tissus, Arts
The Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Design and Applied Art
The Walker Art Center
La Triennale di Milano
Stedelijk Museum
ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art)
Museum of Modern Art
Museum of Contemporary Crafts
Museum für Gestaltung Basel
Design Center Stuttgart
Musée des arts décoratifs
Musée des Arts Décoratifs
New York Design Center (Kreis Institute of Design)
Pacific Design Center
Arts & Architecture Museum
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum
Vitra Design Museum
Museum für Gestaltung Zürich
Design Museum
Centre de Création Industrielle
Museum für Angewandte Kunst
Museum für Kunsthandwerk
Museum für Gestaltung Zürich
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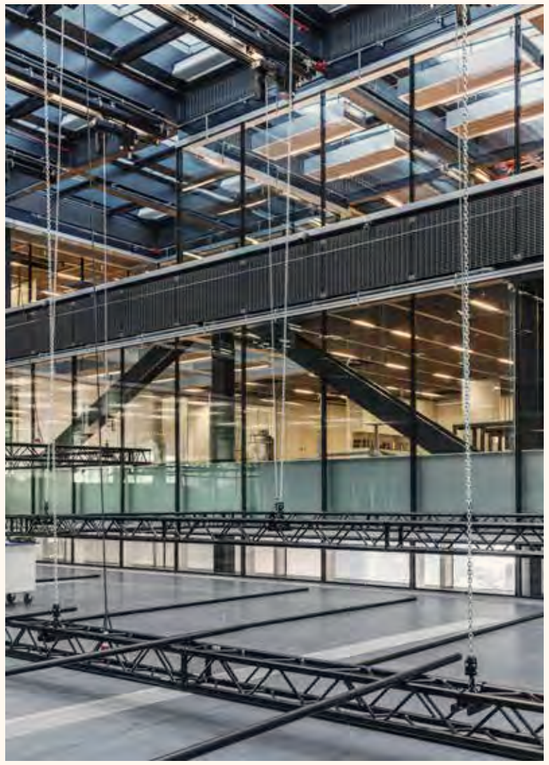

DAC's central exhibition space is akin to a theatre space with a multi-functional, flexible ceiling.

playground, a restaurant, a café, a fitness centre, a shop and DAC, among other functions. That is the image of 'The Downtown Athletic Club' and of a city-in-a-building, where work, leisure, culture and body fuse into a whole.

KLW **You sometimes use the machine metaphor in describing BLOX. In 'The Downtown Athletic Club' it was the visitor's trip in the elevator between the different floors in the skyscraper that created the surprising, almost filmic changes of scene between the very different functions in the building. By virtue of the machine, the building became a dense typological category in the city. Is that the interpretation you tend towards in your description of BLOX?**

KM I have often referred to Le Corbusier's concept of a machine for living, *machine à habiter*, in talking about the project. A machine for creating culture, cultural exchange, densification and a total work of art, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where the urban culture that is the dominant condition of life for people in the 21st century, is contained in the building, including cars, bikes and pedestrians passing through. The building invites pedestrians into the underpass, provides a link to the harbour and stages the city as a theatre of culture. It contains urban typologies, urban traffic types. The harbour tour boats sail right up to the building, the cars pass through around the clock, people walk under it, there are people living on the top floors, and many have their daily working life in the building. That is completely unique. In that sense, as I see it, BLOX is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the Wagnerian sense of cramming contemporary culture's finest insight into what and who we are into a work of art. To borrow the United Nations' concept, we are now *homo urbanus*. The 21st century is the urban century, the century of urbanization. That is not to say that the rural districts are depopulated, but it does mean that the world in general is moving to the cities. It's a new condition, that we have, so to speak, become an urban species. With BLOX, OMA has designed a building where the public can experience what that implies. That makes it a monument, in a postmodern sense, for metropolitan human life in the 21st century. Visitors encounter the other functionalities in the city all the time. The artist Paul Klee has a truly interesting observation about the 'in-between city', which may be understood as an interface in between the small and the big city. Perhaps not so different from the role of BLOX in relation to Copenhagen.

KLW **What BLOX expresses is an enhanced understanding of what it means to be part of the urban space as a place that contains many contradictions, a setting where they actually thrive as a quality?**

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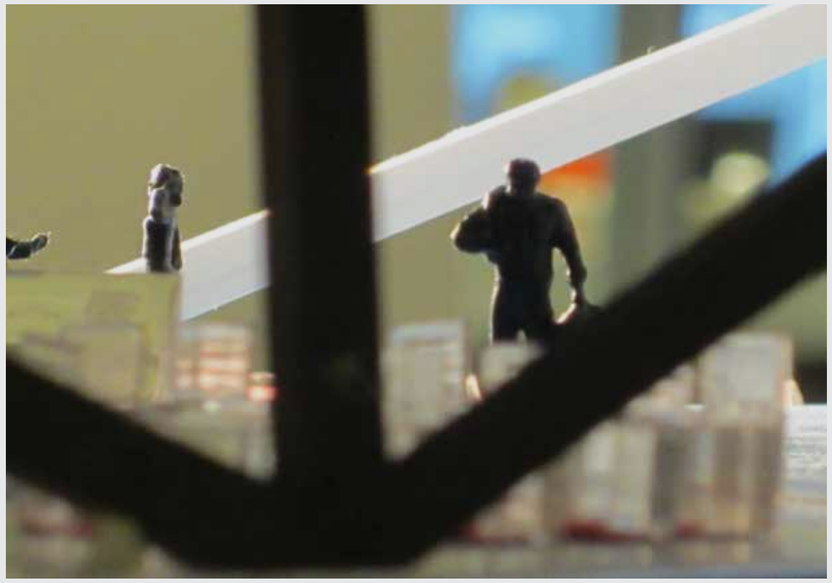
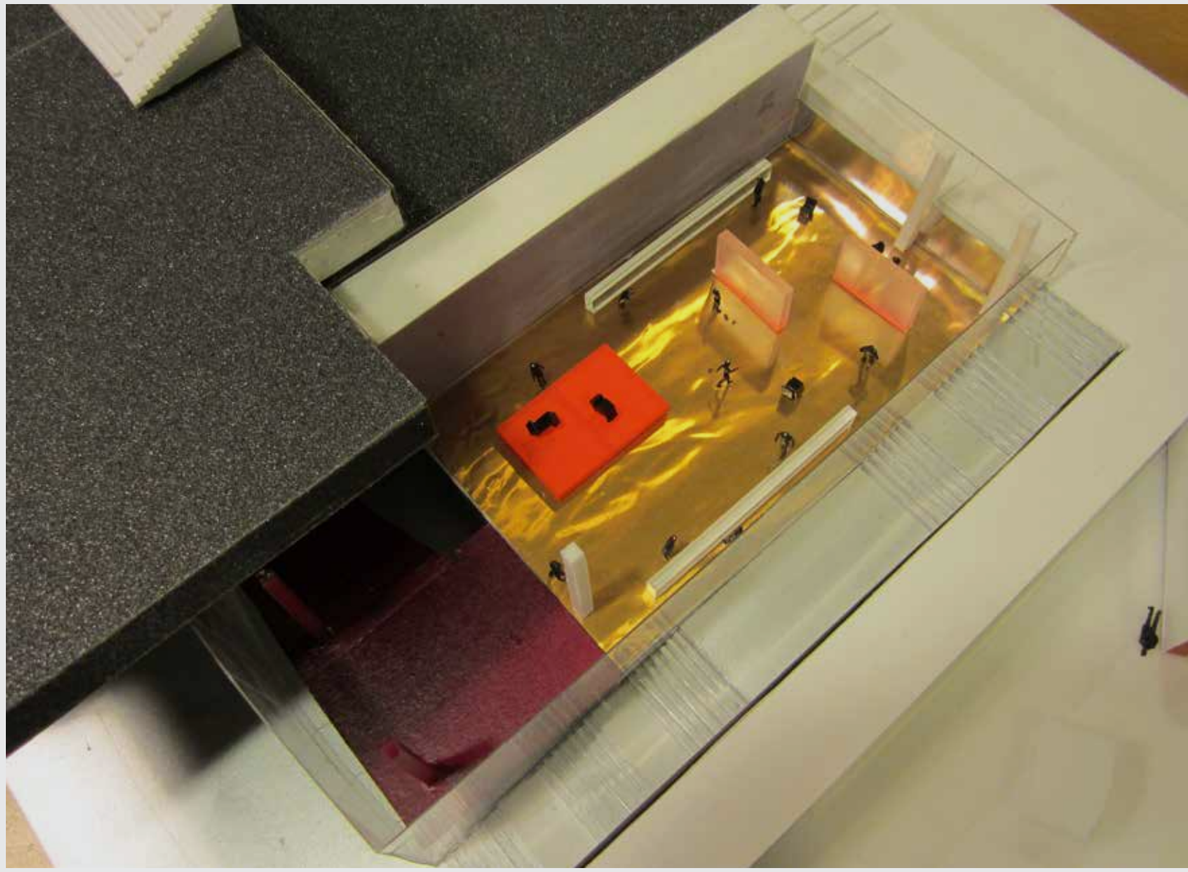
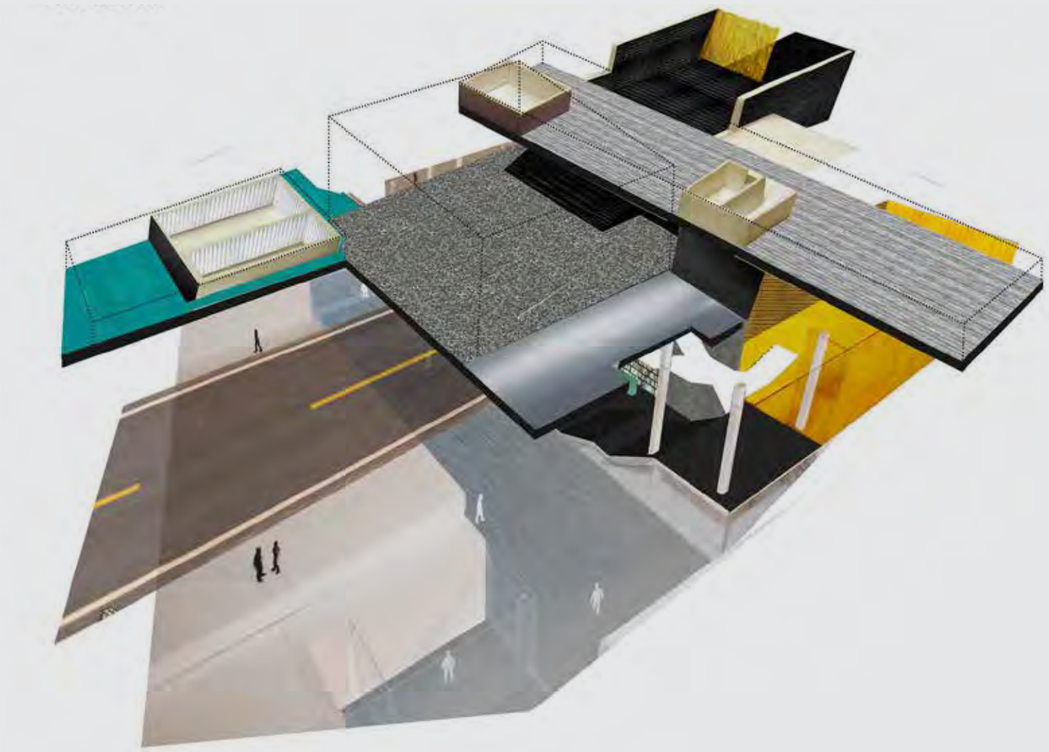
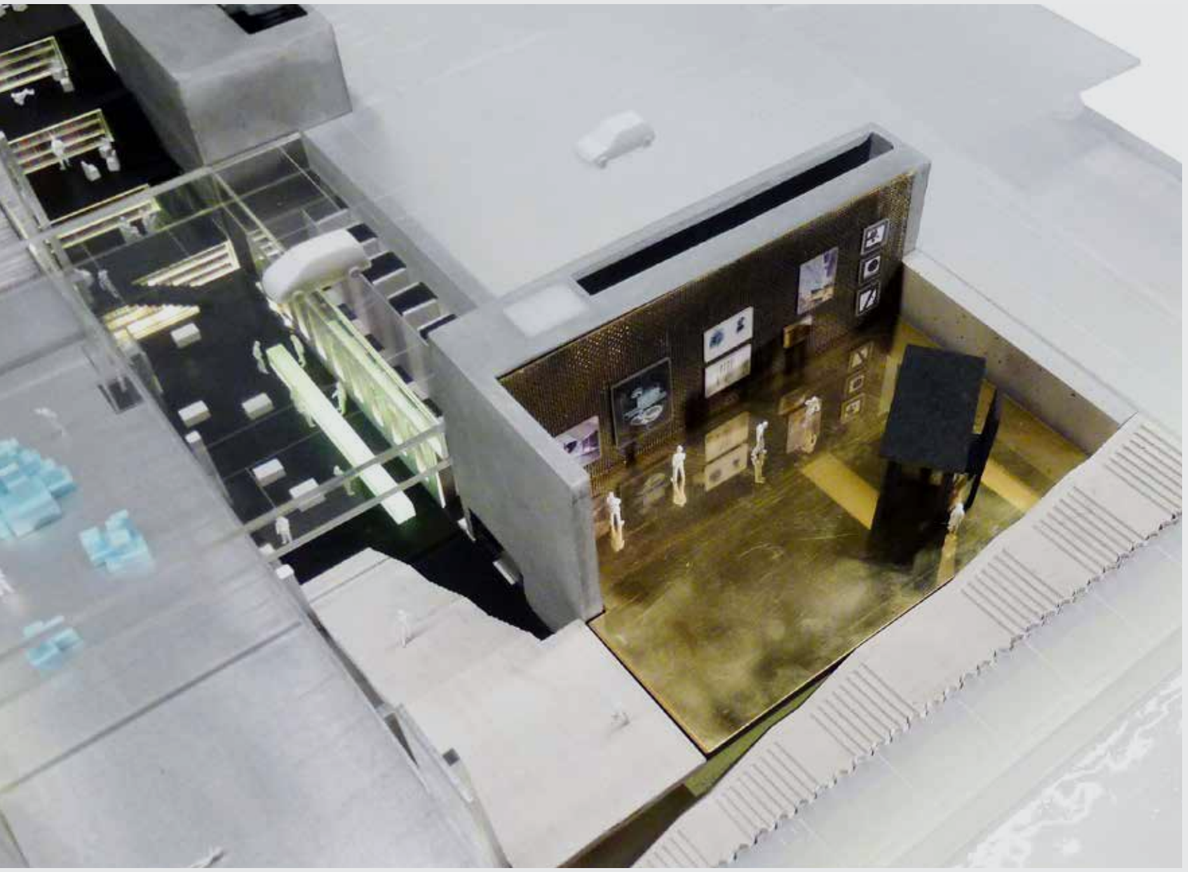
Interior

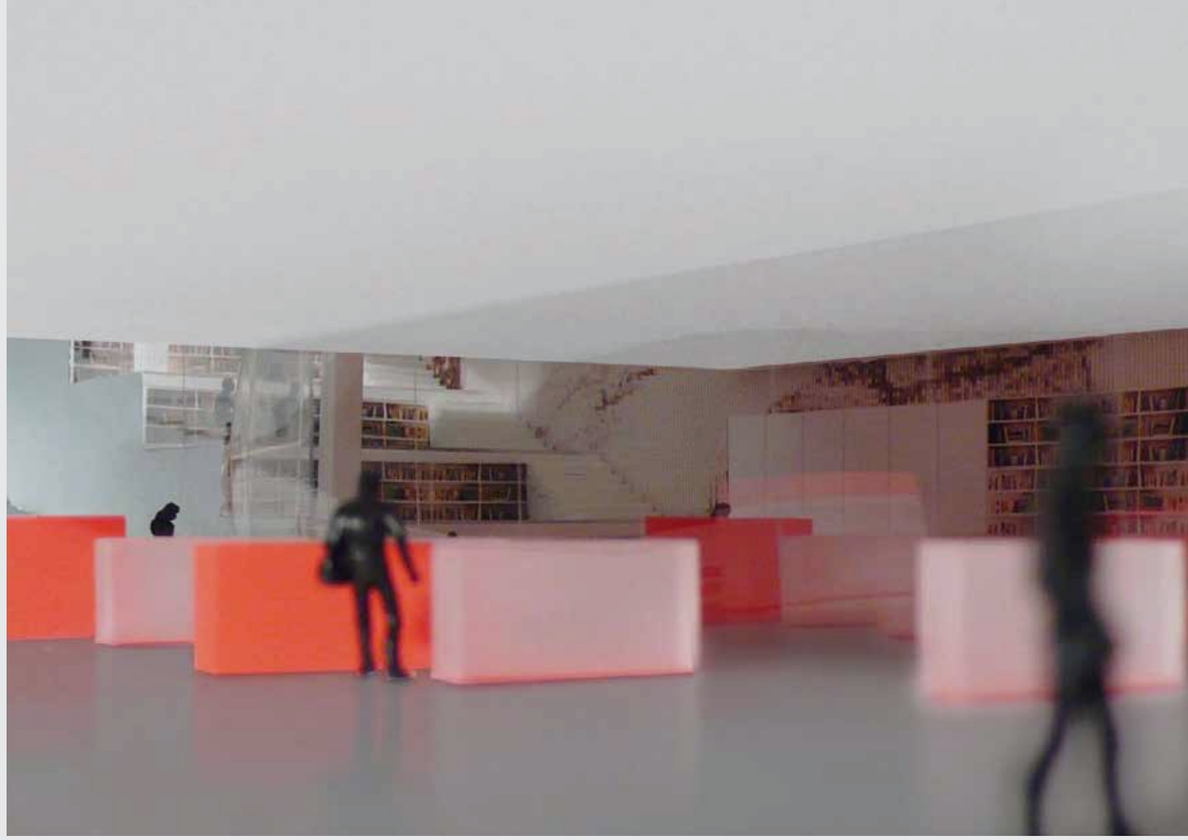
Through extensive studies of the building's internal relations, OMA uncovers the mechanisms that shape the flow of people and the meeting and interaction of the programmes. The studies, which were carried out during the concept stage, are also a study of the materials and surfaces that help define the individual rooms and give BLOX its urban character. As a visual material they convey the basic understanding of the specific way in which the rooms promote the interplay between people and activities in the building, and as an early visual material they offer an indication of how the final design handles the major challenge of containing the diverse range of activities under one roof.

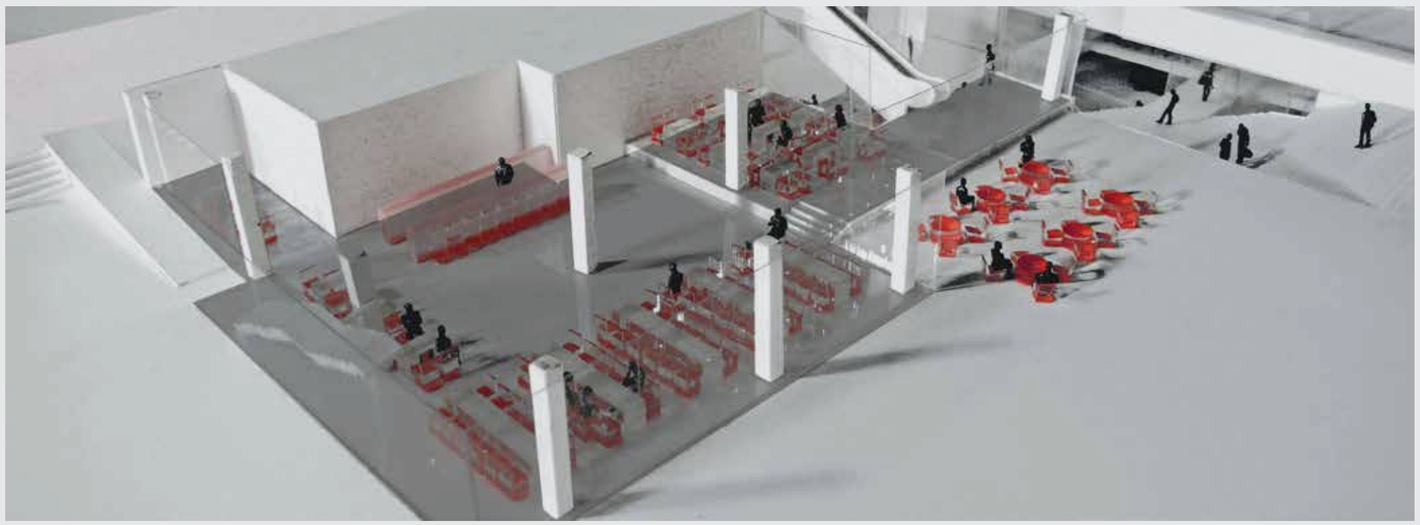


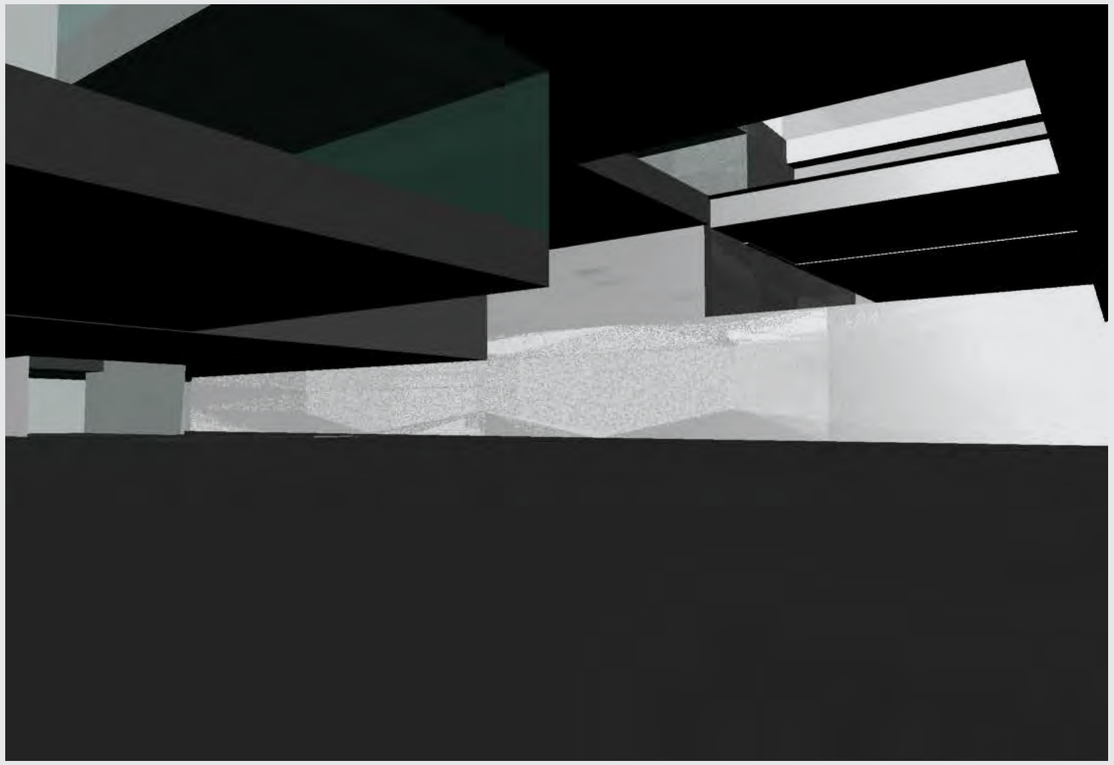


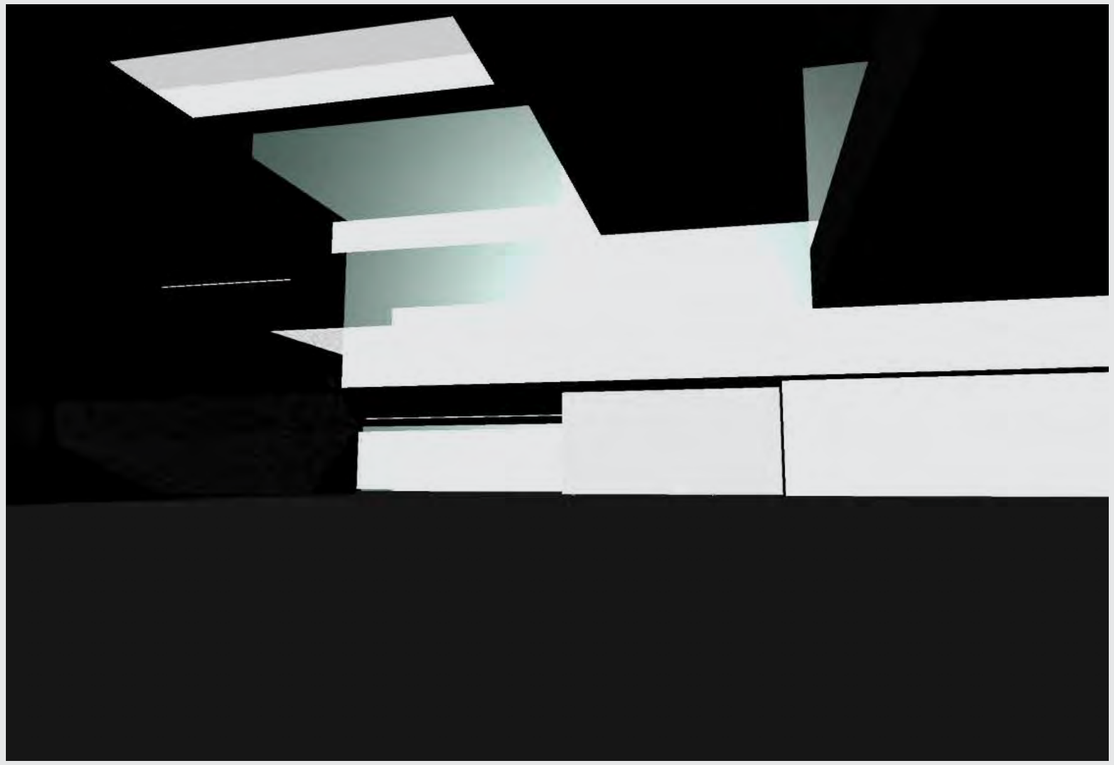


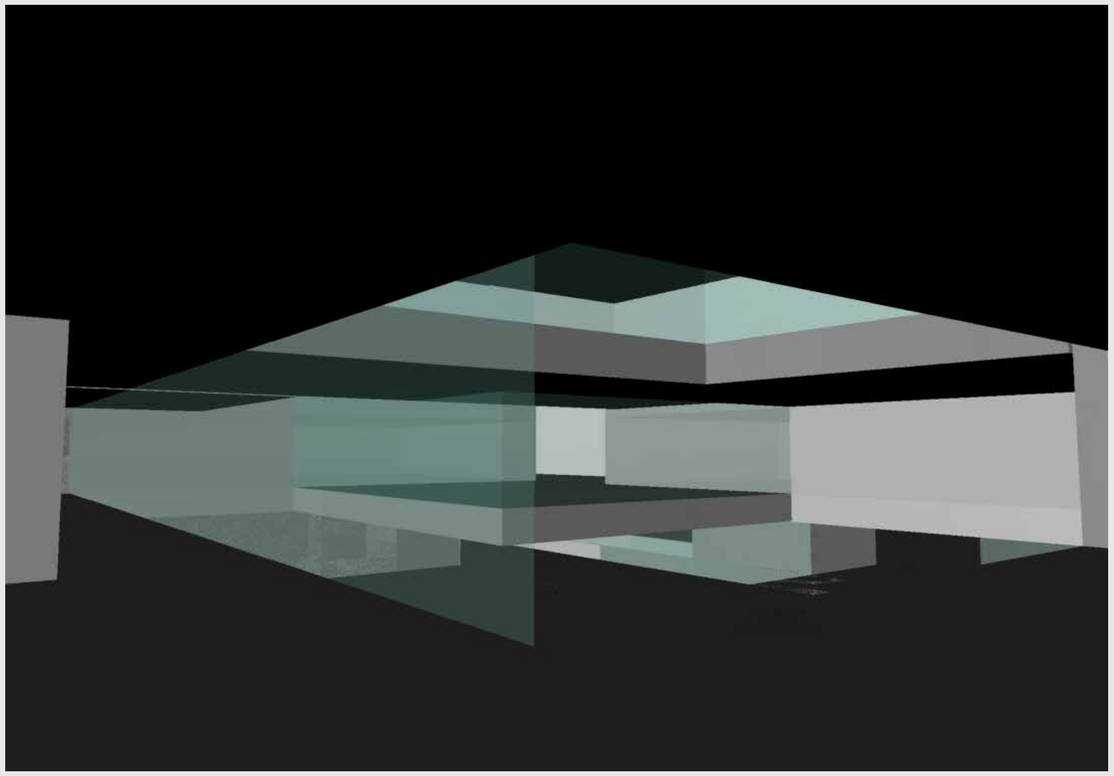


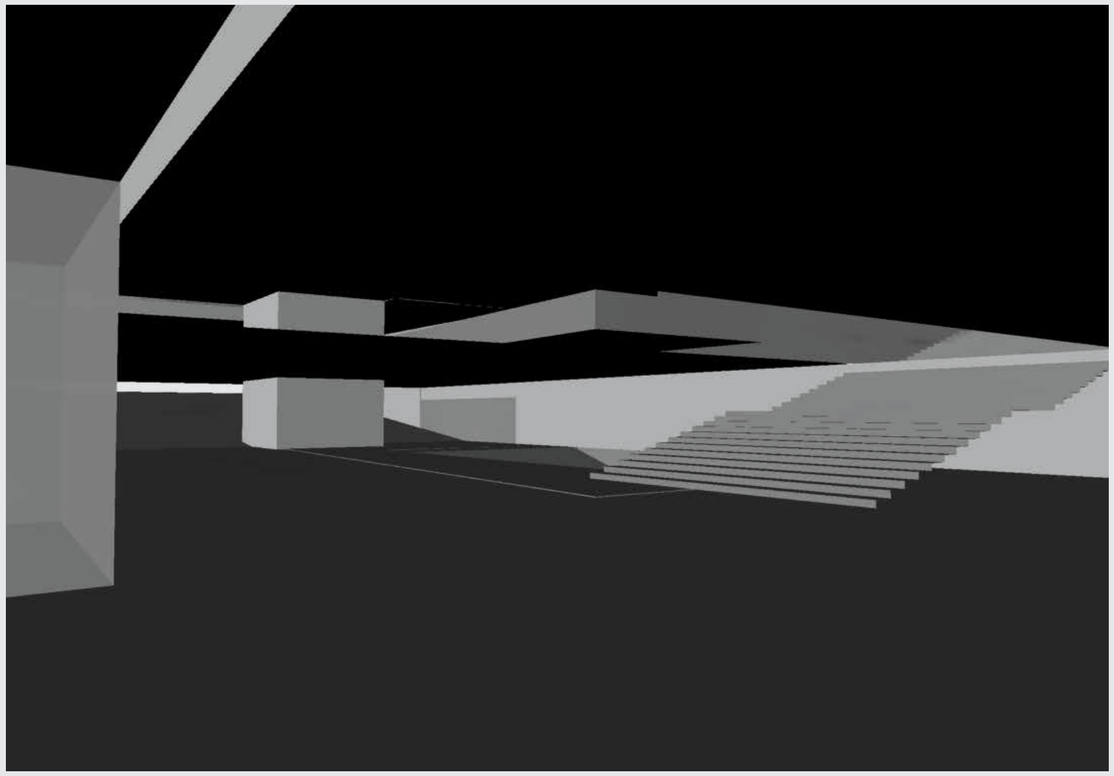




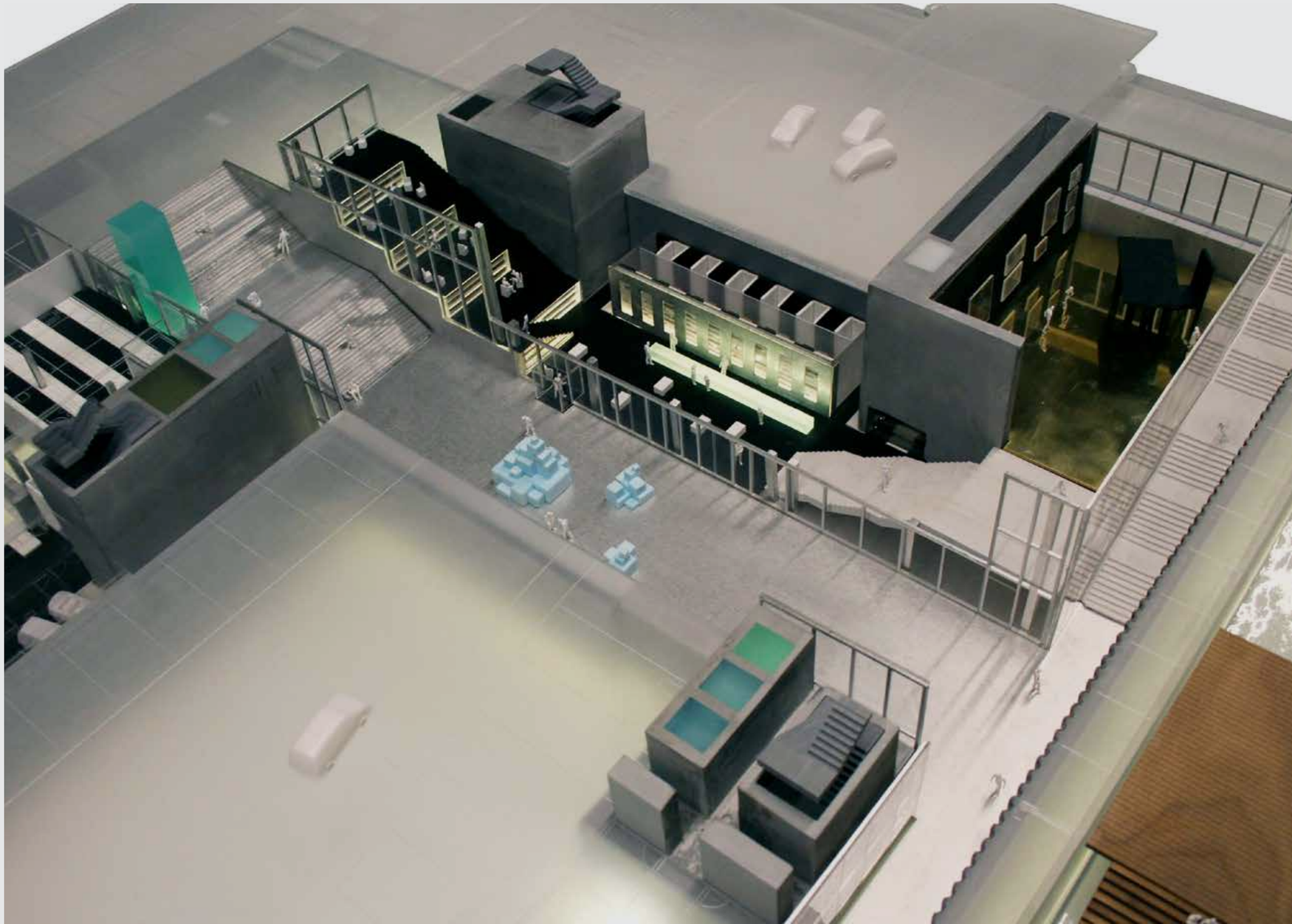








architecture



A small section of *Welcome Home*, DAC's opening exhibition at BLOX, 2018.

KM Yes, exactly. Basically, the idea is that DAC is situated in the middle of BLOX with all the public spaces it holds. In a sense, it is a city *en miniature*, a city with its typological elements, including an underground car park and public passages that go underneath and through. DAC has to be the first choice for experiencing urban culture, the city and architecture as the factors that create the settings for urban life. Thus, we would like to adopt the position as an epicentre of architecture, design and urban culture. Copenhagen has become an architecture city, and BLOX is a building that is in itself an architecture city. We promote ourselves through the phrase *Explore the Architecture City.* So, first you go down into, inside and up into BLOX, and then you see the urban space, you see the exhibition, and afterwards you go out to experience the city 1:1 and are introduced to the city's architecture and urban spaces. But DAC is not just the tourists' window to Denmark. It is also a window for Danes to understand what is happening around the world. Our architects are highly competent, we sing their praises, but there are some really wild things happening around the world, and we should invite that into BLOX. So, it's an intersection between national and international perspectives, between citizens and building sector. Our approach is based on offering a relevant and valuable experience to Danes and our visitors from abroad.

KLW **BLOX helps you strengthen the narrative of urbanization as a basic condition for humanity and thus also of the huge challenges involved in handling the pressures on our cities?**

KM The design – and the content – of the building forms a proactive basis for communicating the new reality.

KLW **How do you activate the potentials of the building in a professional sense in relation to the agendas you define?**

KM If we survey our audience, no more than 30–40% of them have any relation to the building sector. You might think that only architects visit DAC, but that is far from the case. We need to create an international cultural destination with local roots, so we should expand our reach – nationally

as well as internationally. DAC should go from a local architecture centre to an international architecture destination. The clear purpose of Realdania's big investment is to increase DAC's visitor numbers in order to increase its impact and enable it to reach the broad cultural segment, and we expect that about half of them will be visitors from abroad. That is, after all, one of the things they come to Copenhagen to see – architecture, design and Danish urban culture. In terms of content, we are going to move more into the artistic-aesthetic domain. That is why we have requested an actual museum space with facilities for presenting original works of art, architecture drawings and models. We have the facilities to present a genuine Le Corbusier model, but we can also showcase paintings – 'Golden Age' or Hammershøi juxtaposed with Henning Larsen. Or Christen Købke alongside landscape artist Stig Lennart Andersson. This is an OMA signature room with high architectural and artistic value – with brass-linedwalls and floors. We call it the Golden Gallery.

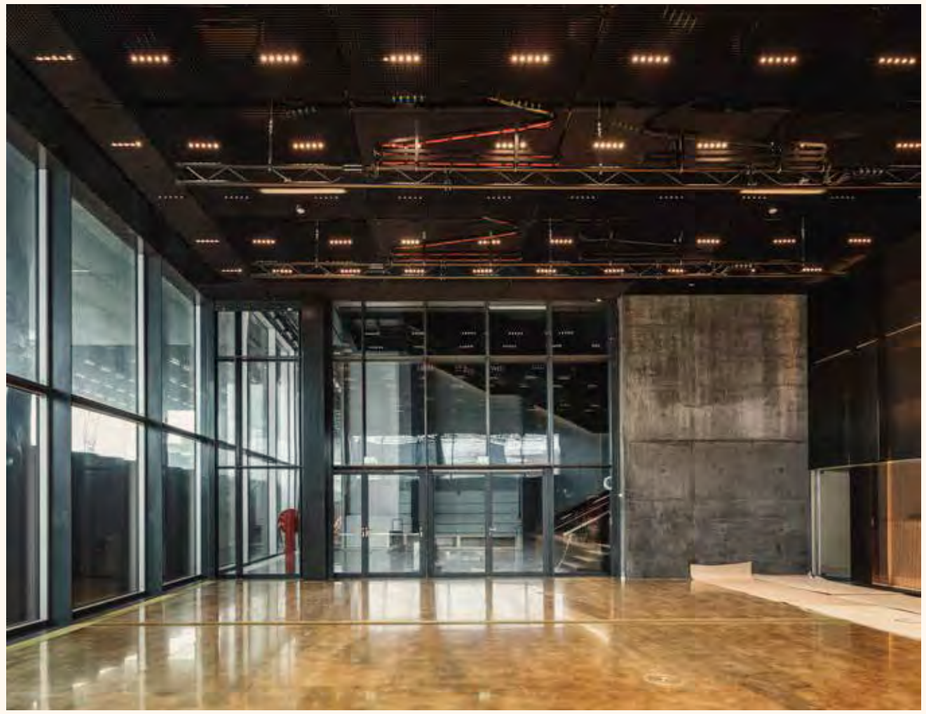
KLW How are you going to use it for exhibitions?

KM We stage curated exhibitions of high aesthetic value, but always with a clear communication profile in relation to the broad target group. That will include, for example, collaborations with the Royal Library's collection of architectural drawings, which we hope to activate. The collection of architectural drawings is one of the three best and oldest in the world – absolutely unique. The signature room – the Golden Gallery – is at the opposite end of the spectrum in comparison to the large exhibition room in the centre of the building, the Forum. The Forum, in many ways, is the classical curator's nightmare, because it has both natural light and office facades facing into the room and lots of transparency in relation to the building's other functions and the urban space. We believe that it contains an appeal to a modern audience looking for something other and more than simply stepping into the traditional white museum cube.

KLW In other words, it is a radical space.

KM Yes! Because it is both an exhibition space in a building and a small urban square. The stair leading to the square creates sort of an urban forum, where we can stage multiple exhibitions at once and reach out to many people in connection with major events. The stair is a striking feature and a multi-programmatic event space that embraces urban life. It underscores the principle that when you move through BLOX you have a view of work spaces, housing and BLOXHUB on

The Golden Gallery – one of DAC's two main exhibtions spaces.



DAC gallery space. Illustration OMA, 2011.

Welcome Home, DAC's opening exhibition at BLOX, 2018.

the top floors. You can look into the café, DAC's meeting room, the bar and, finally, the large staircase leading up to the Hall, our large auditorium. We wanted a stage ceiling with cranes and rigs, so we can set our own lights and create new and varying spaces. It will be used to create new exhibition-, meeting- and event experiences to the benefit of our visitors and the building sector at large. As an analogy to life in the city square throughout history! The building thus features several strong narratives as you move around inside it. One of its strongest narratives emerges when you visit DAC's top floor, where the DAC Café is located with its large terraces, one of them overlooking Copenhagen Harbour in its entirety. Here, the large-scale impact of the latest ice age suddenly becomes visible, the deep gully that has been carved into the soft landscape – the gully that led to the emergence of a natural harbour in this particular location. The other terrace overlooks the unique ensemble of 850 years of building culture that represents our key values throughout history and tells the story about the emergence and development of the nation. Then, afterwards, you go into the city to experience the lived life in the built environment.

KLW **In that sense, BLOX is a building that criticizes – in the most constructive sense of the words – the 'architecture centre' as an institution and its way of being an institution in the city. The building offers something different than we're used to when we visit architecture centres and exhibition venues around the world. BLOX is a modern representation of a positive form of confusion and urban complexity that brings out lots of interesting possibilities and narratives?**

KM In the past, for almost 2000 years, the buildings remained representational –representing something that lay outside themselves. BLOX is analogue; it does something similar to what the city does, only on a different scale – but it does not represent it. If BLOX is modern, it may be in the sense that all its elements and functions revolve around a large central void, almost like a classical Mies van der Rohe building. With a view of the four corners of the world, one is in an empty space, which seems to suggest that the meaning of this large and complex building structure is precisely what we put into its large void. The building does not represent any specific meaning that lies outside itself. It is up to us – as a culture and as an institution – to make meaning and meaningfulness for the people visiting, working and living in it. It is up to us to fill the void – through lived life. The raison d'être of architecture: creating the setting for culture to take place. ●

Exploding the Building, Imploding the City – an Archaeology of OMA's Post-object Urbanism

Aaron Betsky

Dean, the School of Architecture at Taliesin, USA.
Former Director (2001–2006) of Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam.

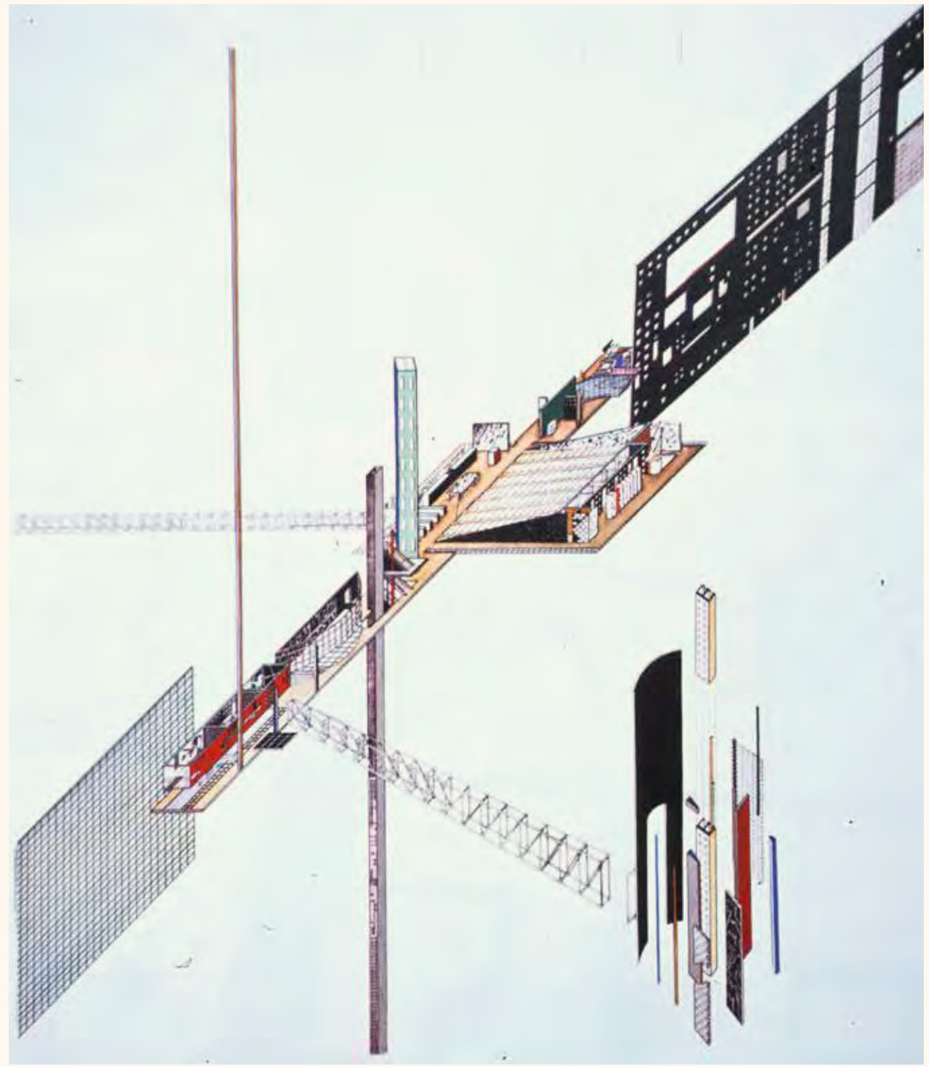


Illustration from competition proposal for extension to the Dutch Parliament. OMA, 1978.

If architects once sought to both build monuments and design the perfect city, that endeavor has proven difficult in the post-object city. The dissolution of form and the evanescence of memory have eaten away at this twin utopian project. The question then is how to answer a city that has grown and distended into a sprawling metropolis with architecture that coalesces in a manner that captures the critical role of architecture in articulating urbanity itself.

The heart of the Office of Metropolitan Architecture's (OMA) practice has been the conflation of urbanity and building. The figure that best shows this approach is one that shows up over and over in their work: intersecting forms spiraling around interior spaces that combine uses and open to each other. This simple trope is evident in all their strongest work, from the seminal Kunsthal Rotterdam of 1992 to the infrastructure and public space of Euralille (1989–1994), through such structures as the IIT McCormick Tribune Campus Center (2003) and the Seattle Public Library (2004) and more recent renovations like those for the Prada Foundation in Milan (2015), Il Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice (2016) and the Ministry Building in The Hague (2017). OMA's work at its best takes what to many of us is the very essence of urban environments, enhances and condenses that quality into a single structure, and then makes the resulting syncretic building into a multifaceted interior world, one conditioned, controlled, and highlighted by technology.

The firm developed this tactic out of the theoretical work of its co-founder. It is evident in the final thesis project OMA's most public figure, Rem Koolhaas, created at London's Architectural Association with several collaborators with whom he then founded the firm. A satire on modernist utopias, *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972) proposed creating a walled precinct within London that would bring all of the qualities that were good about the city together for the lucky 'inmates', leaving the rest of the city – in a harrowing prophecy of the take-over by the one-percenters of most downtown areas – as ruin:

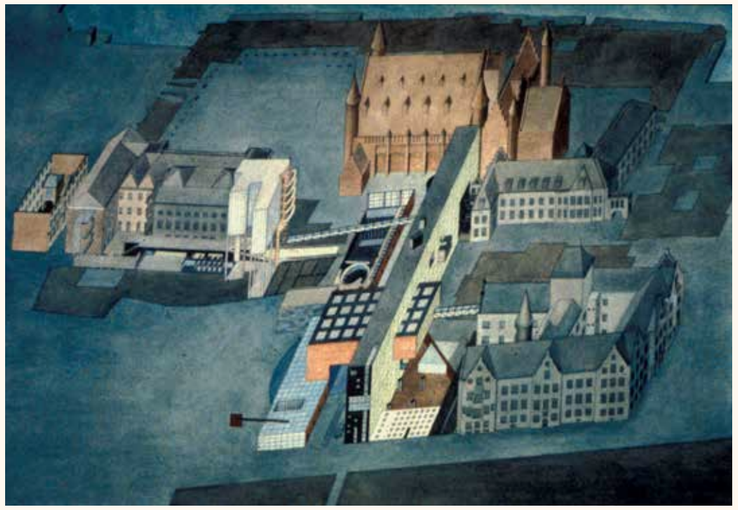
Illustration, *The City of the Captive Globe Project*. OMA, 1972.

> Suddenly, a strip of intense metropolitan desirability runs through the center of London. This strip is like a runway, a landing strip for the new architecture of collective monuments. Two walls enclose and protect this zone to retain its integrity and to prevent any contamination of its surface by the cancerous organism that threatens to engulf it. Soon, the first inmates beg for admission. Their number rapidly swells into an unstoppable flow. We witness the Exodus of London. The physical structure of the old town will not be able to stand the continuing competition of this new architectural presence. London as we know it will become a pack of ruins.

Koolhaas went on to spend several years in New York, producing a book that still counts as one of the most evocative and influential treatises on architecture of the latter half of the 20th century. Disguised as a mythic story of Manhattan's architecture between the Gilded Age and the 1960s, *Delirious New York* (1978) proposes that the island's grid made possible the creation of skyscrapers whose iconic exteriors together expressed the excesses of capitalism in competition, but whose interiors made that system consumable in spectacles, stores, restaurants, hotels and athletic clubs. As Koolhaas says, the result is a terrible beauty:

> Manhattanism, whose program – to exist in a world totally fabricated by man i.e., to live inside fantasy… is the one urbanistic ideology that has fed, from its conception, on the splendors and miseries of the metropolitan condition – hyper-density – without once losing faith in it as the basis for a desirable modern culture. Manhattan's architecture is a paradigm for the exploitation of congestion… a blueprint for a 'Culture of Congestion.'

Kunsthal Rotterdam. Renovation of the existing building that includes new circulation flows, new entrance and a museum shop. OMA, 1992.



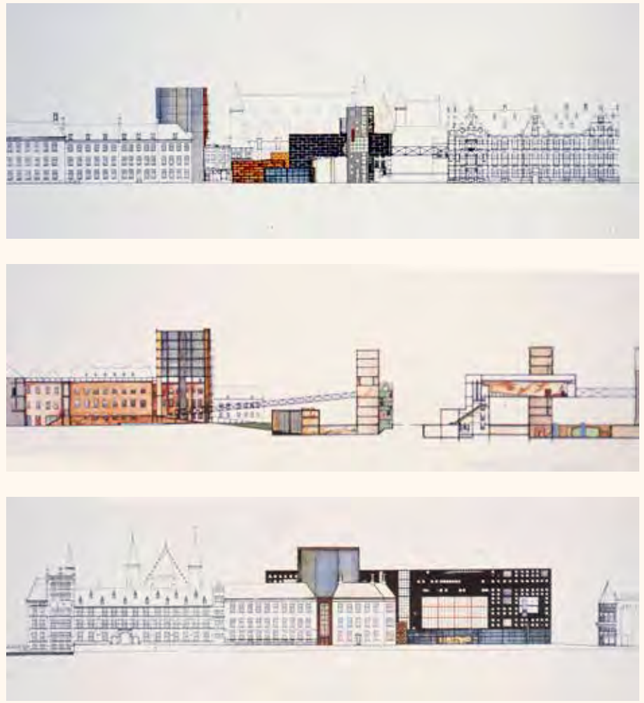
Illustrations from the winning proposal for renovation of the Dutch Parliament. OMA, 1978.

This picture, Freud Unlimited, by Madelon Vriesendorp is included in the book *Delirious New York*, 1978.

Koolhaas had little interest in the creation of the kind of objects that obsessed architects, whether they were classical monuments, modernist boxes or postmodern wedding cakes. What intrigued him was seeing architecture as an intersection of forces that produced a collage of spaces and forms. The intersections became both circulation routes and slices through the buildings, opening them in two ways: for access and for confrontation of different forms, programs, and images with each other. As he said towards the end of *Delirious New York*, where he presented five projects as a 'Fictional conclusion': '…the Metropolis deserves its own specialized architecture, one that can vindicate the original promise of the metropolitan condition and develop the fresh traditions of the Culture of Congestion further.'

Thus the work, from the theoretical projects at the end of *Delirious New York* and his thesis project, to the early proposals for the new Parliament Building in The Hague (1978) and the Arnhem Domed Prison (Koepelgevangenis) (1979), consist of collages of existing forms and images, both torn apart and connected by circulation elements and shown as exploded structures whose interiors contain all the excitement of the new within existing forms. Developing first images and forms they culled from Russian Constructivism, including crosses, cantilevered volumes, thin planes and other fragmented geometries, the work developed a lexicon that was an archaeology of modernism in general. When the firm came to design ground-up buildings, they made those new structures into forms whose neutrality they nuanced by stacking, cutting, or cantilevering them in a manner that made both their internal and external relationships unstable.

From the beginning, OMA and Koolhaas thus believed in the new, or what they created, as a digging up and reusing of past forms. This was logical, given the fact that they were operating in the middle of the rehabilitation of history by postmodernism during the 1970s and 1980s, but they also saw their work as an act of uncovering latent possibilities, traces of



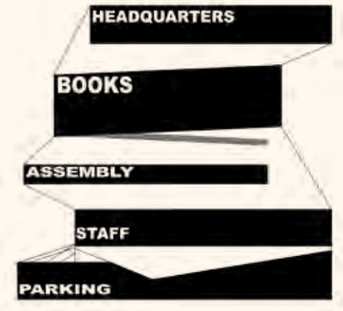
Sections of the project for the Dutch Parliament. OMA, 1978.

existing forms, the potency of existing types and the surfaces that appeared to represent something, but were in fact hollow. OMA has always been a firm that uncovers, dissects, and repurposes existing forms and images as it has been a maker of new forms.

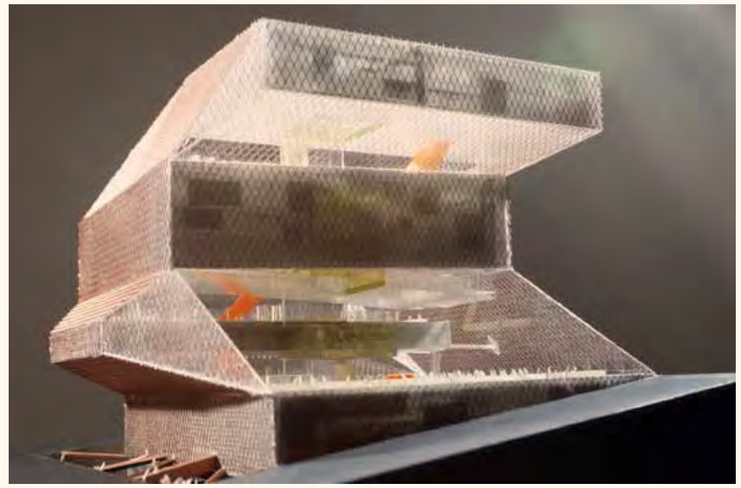
What makes OMA's work so interesting, in other words, is that it is not so much a proposal for fixing the city, or for offering new urban configurations, but rather for figuring out what makes the city so interesting, so intense, so vital, and then figuring out how to condense, amplify and hybridize those situations. The ideal OMA building would be Benjamin's Paris *Passagen*, Radio City Music Hall, the Rotterdam harbor and a Russian Workers Club of the 1920s taken apart, put together, kneaded into a highly volatile structure and then shot through with streets, stairs, escalators, ramps and structural elements.

We can find other reasons for why the firm's approach developed in the peculiar scene, both national and theoretical, in which they found themselves operating. Though OMA started in London, Koolhaas soon moved back to his native Netherlands, setting up office in the city of Rotterdam. He chose that industrial port city on purpose, staying away from the picturesque scene of Amsterdam, but also eschewing the metropolitan culture of New York or London that would seem more productive to the making of the kind of architecture he was imagining. What Rotterdam offered was a clean slate, which in fact had qualities of great importance to OMA and Koolhaas.

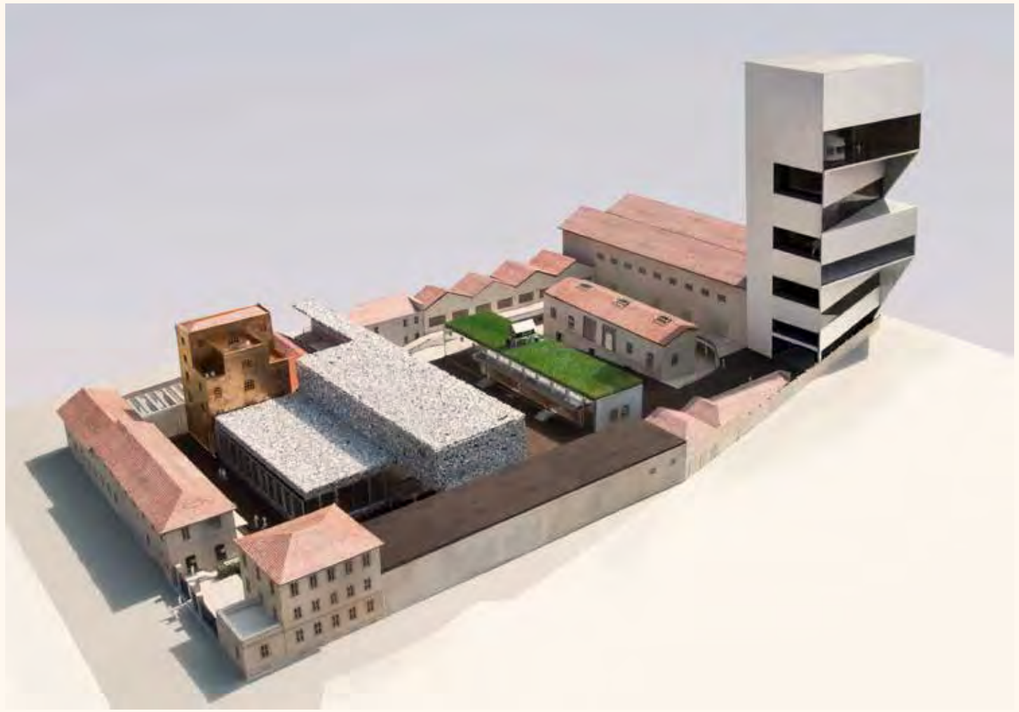
The city's centrer had been wiped out by first German and then Allied bombing during the Second World War. Planners had then replaced the old city fabric with one of the most fully realized mixed-use urban projects of the



Seattle Central Library programme.



Seattle Central Library. Public spaces and the passage through the building are intervwoven with the library programme. OMA, 2004.



Conversion of an industrial building complex in Milan from 1910. Fondazione Prada Milano. OMA, 2015.

Fondazione Prada Milano, 2015.

Fondazione Prada Milano, 2015.

post-war era: van der Broek & Bakema's Lijnbaan of 1951–53. The project reads almost like a recipe for much of OMA's work: dense shopping areas in two-storey lines intersected by larger objects such as Marcel Breuer's Bijenkorf department store (1956), which surround small patches of green and service courts populated with residential high-rises. Beyond this core, more traditional architects continued the same fingers of commercial and residential blocks interspersed with open space for service and relief with structures clad in brick, which also eased the transition to the remaining street fabric around the core.

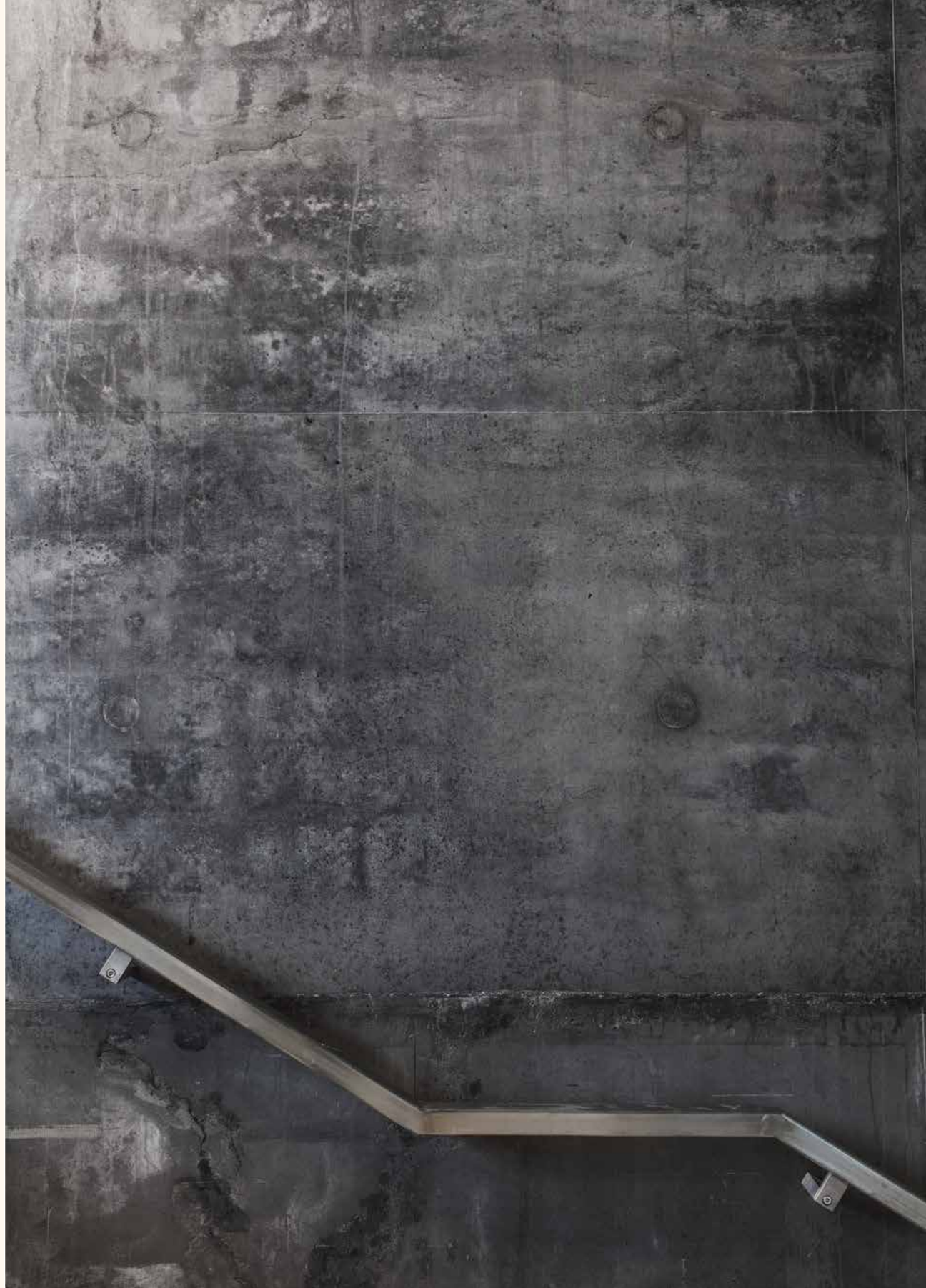
At the time that Koolhaas and OMA set up shop there, Dutch thinking about urbanism was, however, changing from the *tabula rasa* approach that had dominated here, as in most Western countries, since the War. After a period of pure reaction in which architects tried to create artificial smallness and communities with nostalgic forms, a new breed of planners, who came together in the Rotterdam City Planning Office in the early 1980s and were led by Riek Bakker, developed a strategy of fingering new development through existing landscape patterns. Continuing the urban or rural grid, breaking it, paralleling it and contrasting the scale of the new with the complexity of an accreted fabric became the hallmark of Dutch urbanism, and one in which OMA created one of the most sophisticated examples in their IJ Plein project for Amsterdam North in 1988.

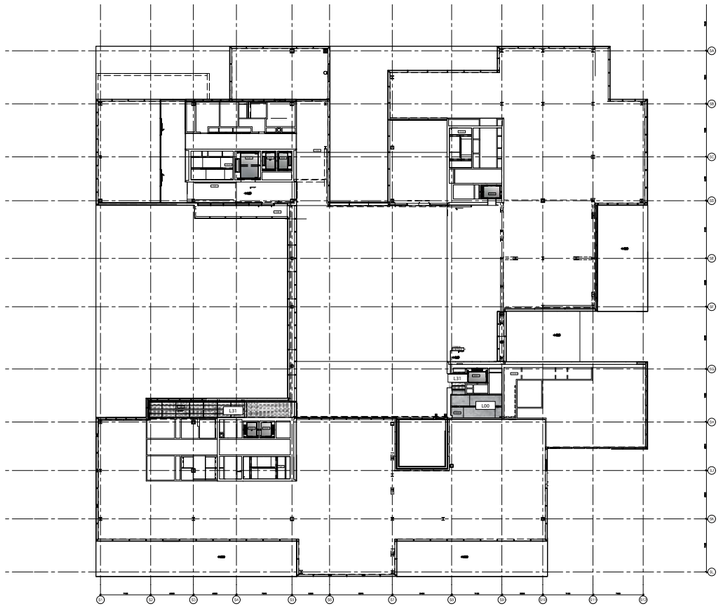
In addition to being part of the development of the collage of old and new, large and small, and infrastructure and urban form as urban strategy, OMA was also party to the development in the Netherlands and elsewhere of conceptual and project-based architecture. During three decades, government-steered planning efforts, coordinated by the central Planning Ministry through five-year plans (the 'Nota's Ruimtelijke Ordening,' or White Papers on Spatial Arrangement), allocated the use of every square meter of the country's landscape according to a calibration of social, economic and (sometimes) aesthetics. When the government started to withdraw from such efforts in the 1980s, privatizing and decentralizing many planning efforts, the focus turned from 'spatial arrangement,' or the making of coherent and cohesive assemblies of urban and suburban blocks to support a 'makeable society' ('maakbare samenleving') to the adaptation of scenario planning and project-based thinking that large Dutch companies such as Shell and Unilever had brought to the fore.

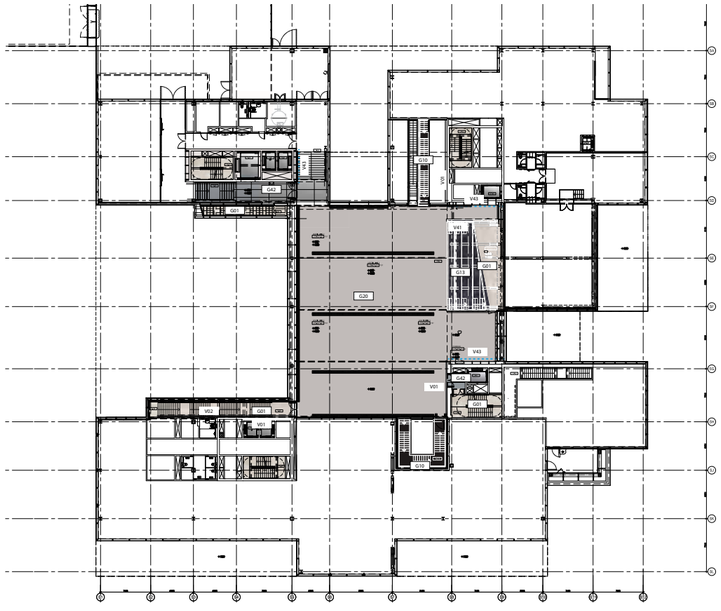
Here the idea was to work not on tasks, fulfilling, in the case of architecture, a program within the parameters of site, budget and the client's desires, but rather to see what one was doing as a project within a given scenario. This meant analyzing current conditions, developing scenarios as to how they might develop, then formulating a clear goal for how one could operate in one or more scenarios, mapping out a strategy to arrive at this goal, allocating resources and personnel, and then evaluating the project continually to be able to adjust according to changing conditions. The goal was not necessarily a building, nor was the context necessarily the context (hence Koolhaas' statement: 'Fuck the context'), let alone the one that happened to exist at the time. The goal was to articulate a viable and efficient tactic within the continually developing scenario of the city.

This approach, in turn, aligned with the interest in scenarios then prevalent in architecture theory, as evidenced in the 'Event Structures' and 'narrative architecture' espoused by Bernard Tschumi, the evocative work of Daniel Libeskind, the 'what is your fantasy question' at the core of Frank Gehry's work, the 'architecture of the leaping whale' of Coop Himmelb(l)au, the impossible and apposite buildings of Peter Eisenman and the post-metabolism of Arata Isozaki, to name widely different designers. What these architects all shared was an interest in developing a scene or malleable scenario that did not so much come out of either a program or a site, nor out of an attention to materials or details, but that was an always provisional scaffolding for human activities. The aim was no longer to make either

Nederland nu als Ontwerp. OMA, 1986.







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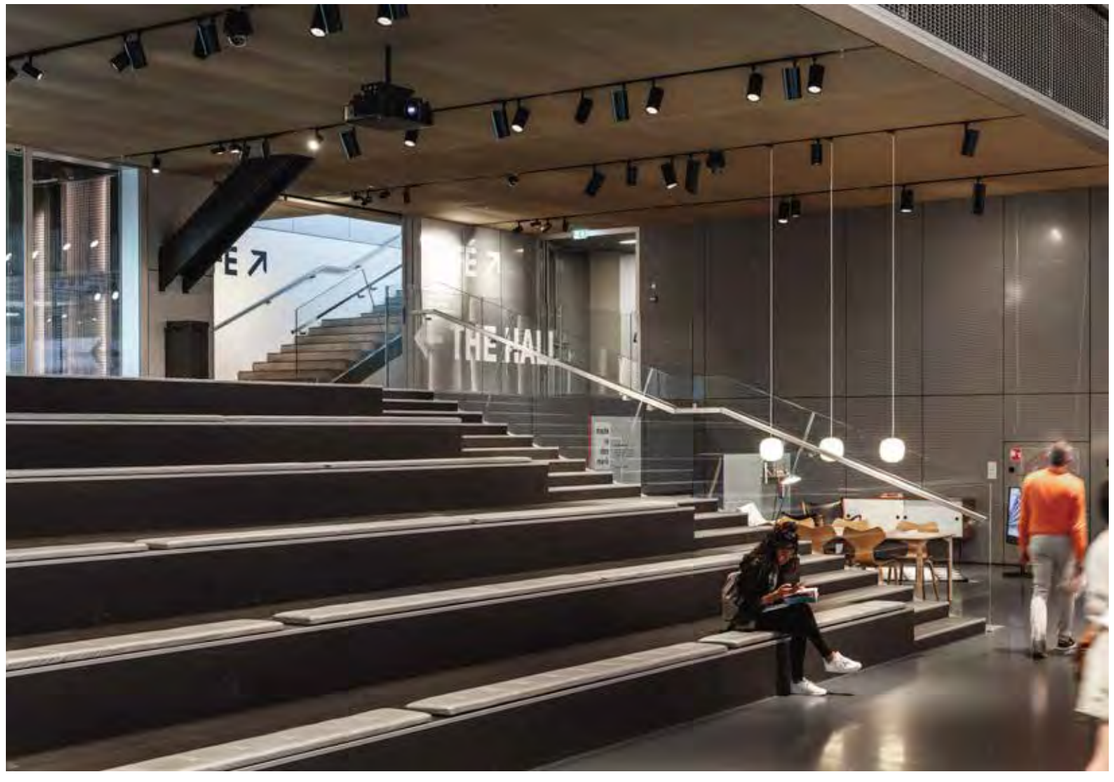
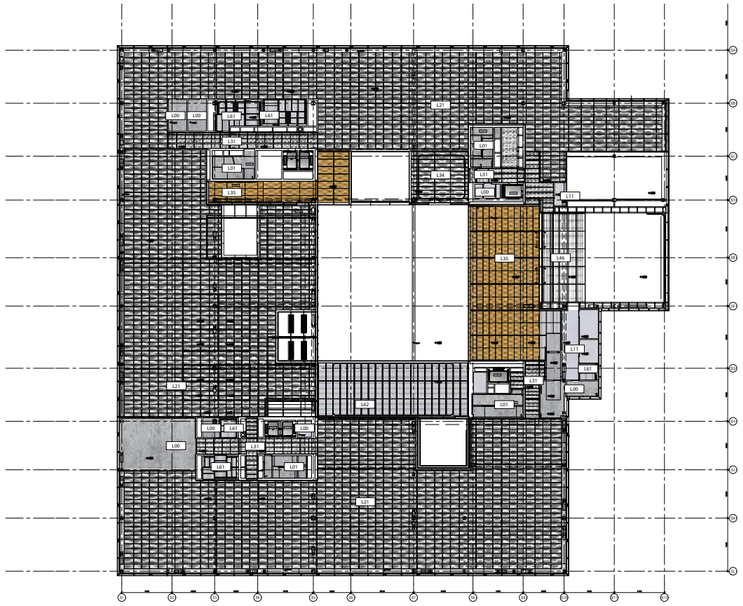
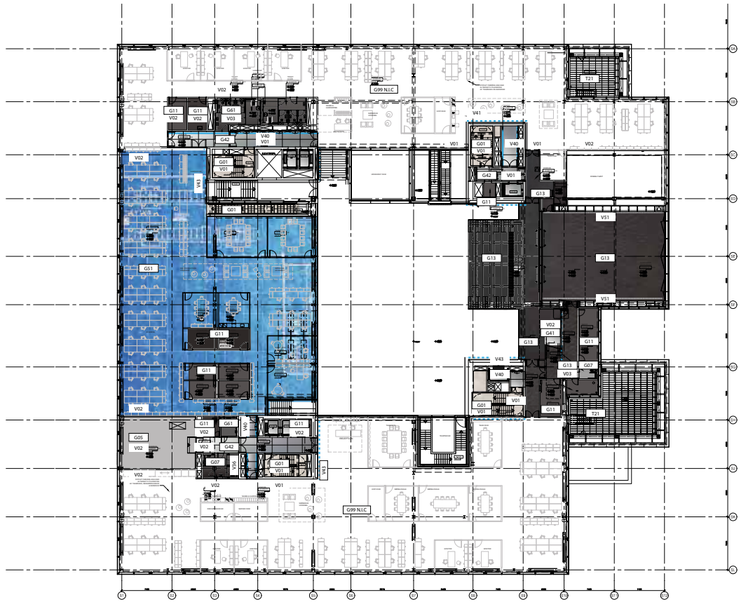


DAC's main exhibition space in the heart of BLOX.
Stairs lead up to the The Hall.





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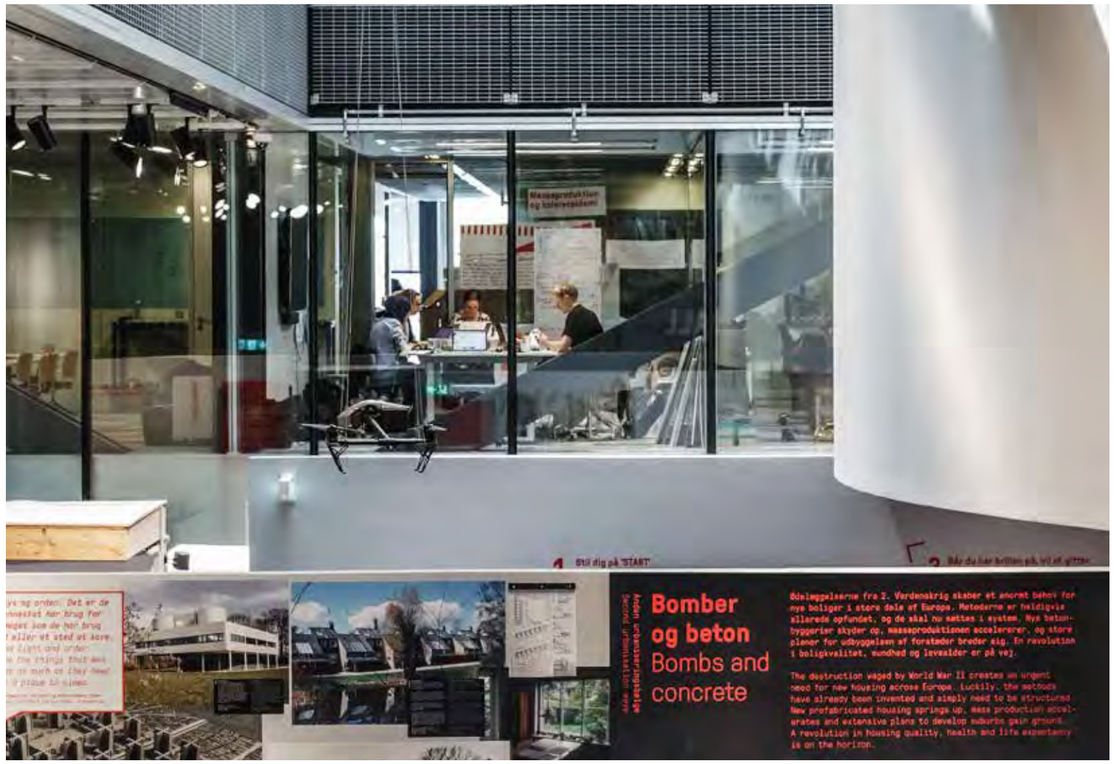
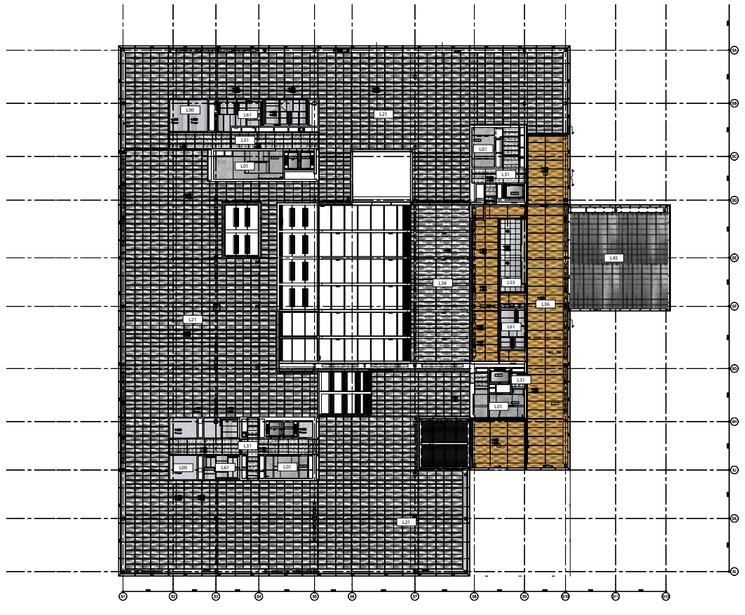
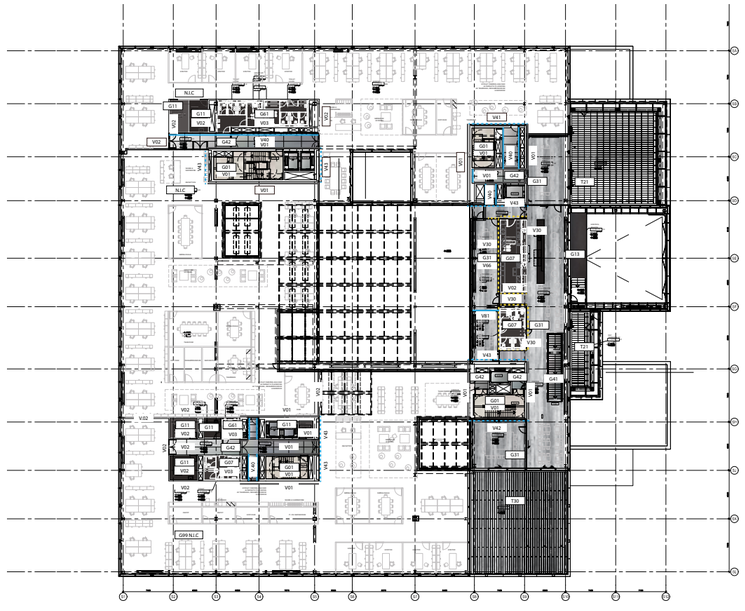

Bomber og beton
Bombs and concrete
Efterkrigstidens arkitektur
Modernismens arkitektur
Nutidens arkitektur
Efterkrigstidens arkitektur
Anden arkitekturretning
Specielt arkitektur-område
Efterkrigsårenes byggeri
Efterkrigsårenes byggeri
Efterkrigsårenes byggeri





↑ Material plan, ceiling – third floor.
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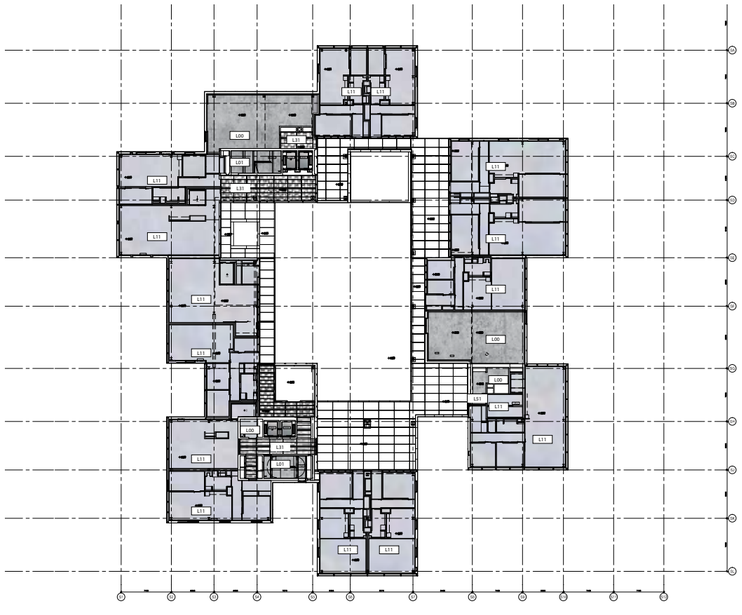
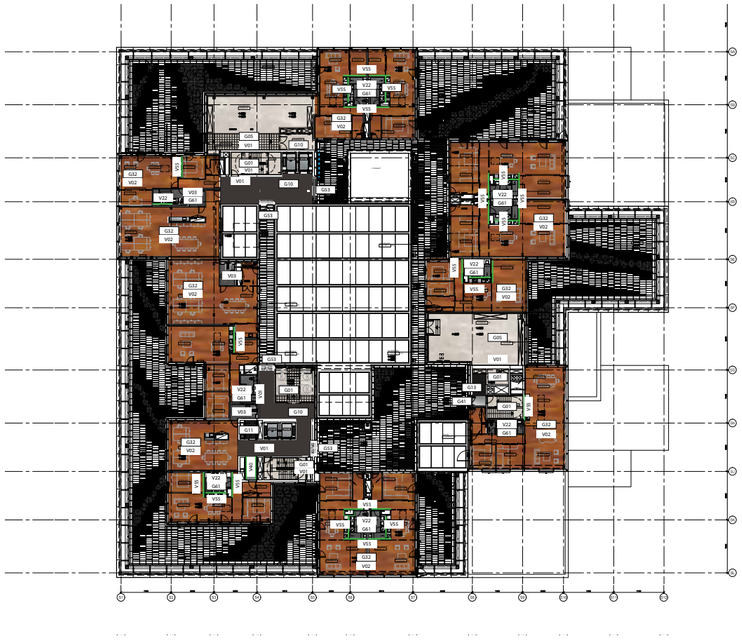
DAC's café and roof-top terrace.





↑ Material plan, ceiling – fourth floor.
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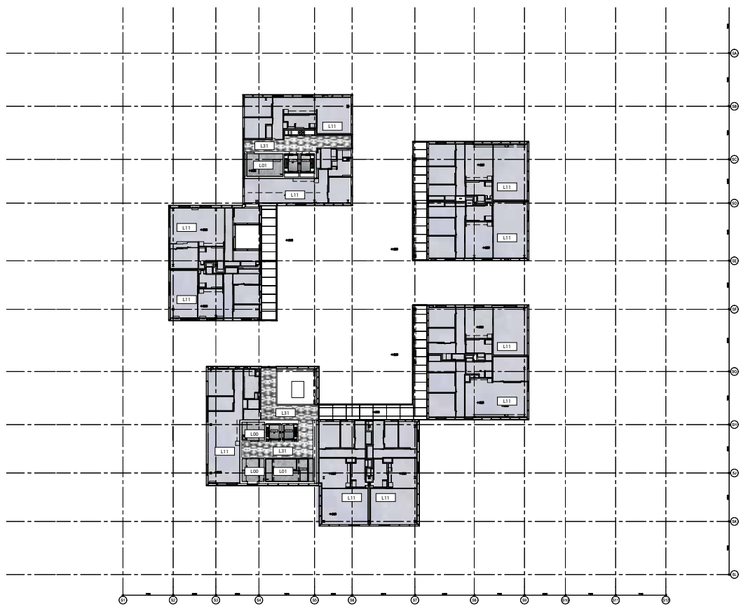
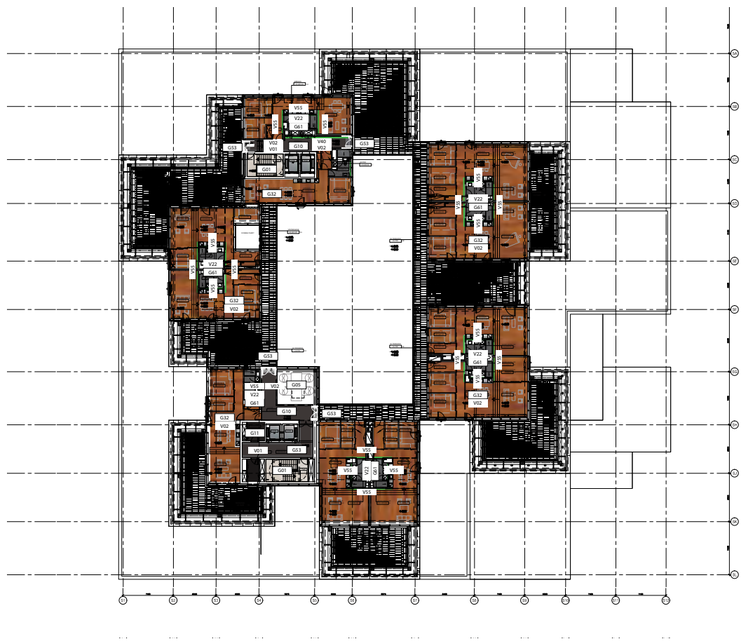
The flats at the top of BLOX have individual roof-top terraces with a view of the city.





↑ Material plan, ceiling – fifth floor.
↓ Material plan, floor – fifth floor.

Sketch Model Archive

In the effort to define the fundamental concept for BLOX, OMA relies on extensive studies based on sketch models. The models reflect a method where sketching and testing many different ideas and angles on the project are used to examine the possible spatial variations in the architectural programme. They represent a thorough exploration of organizational and material possibilities that underpins and justifies the final design. The early years of the design process, in particular, were driven by an explorative and open approach. Each of the sketch models is a step on the way and part of the story of a spectacular building created in a collaborative approach.

2006

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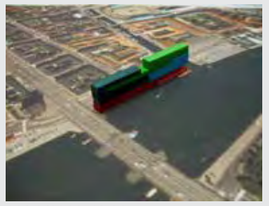
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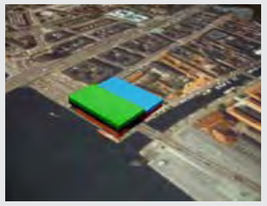
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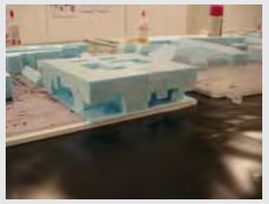
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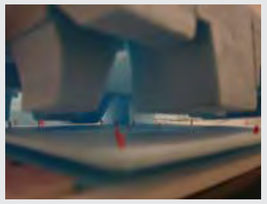
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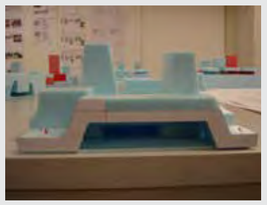
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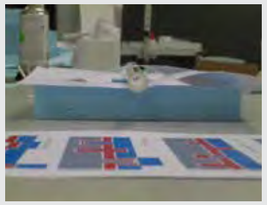
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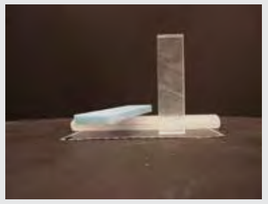
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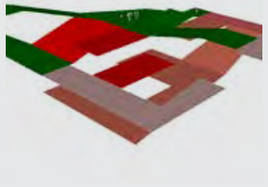
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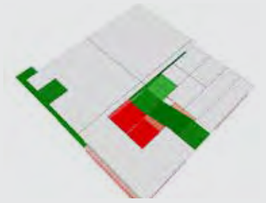
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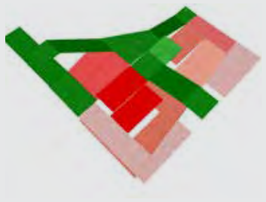
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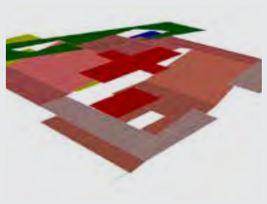
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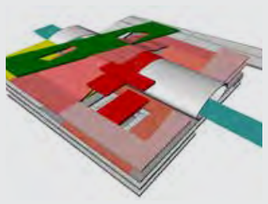
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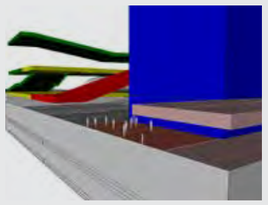
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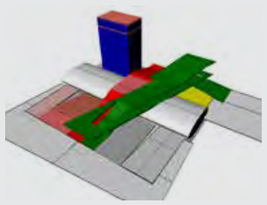
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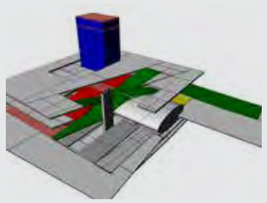
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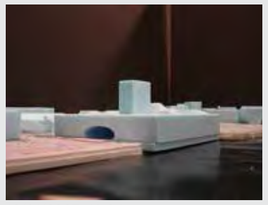
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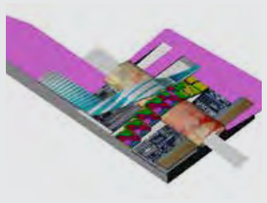
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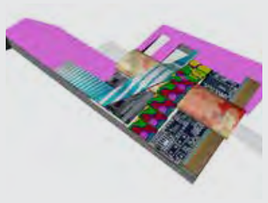
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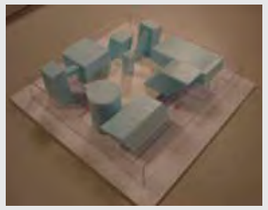
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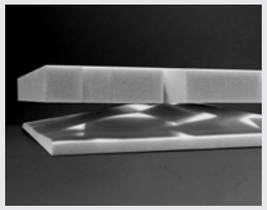
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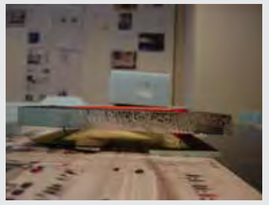
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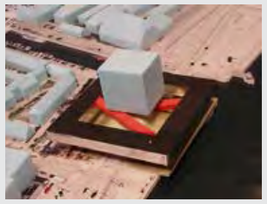
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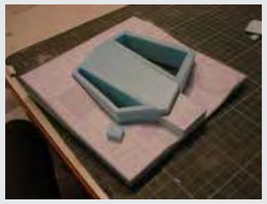
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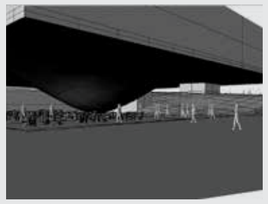
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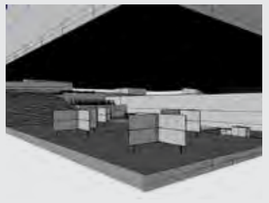
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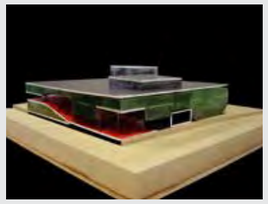
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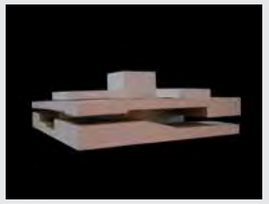
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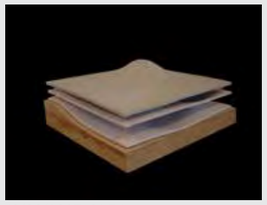
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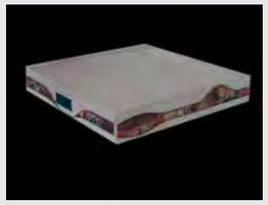
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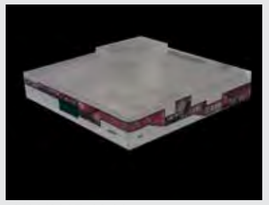
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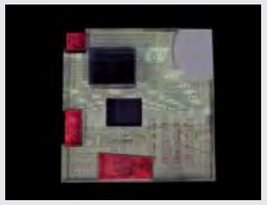
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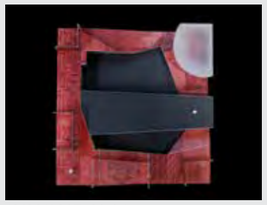
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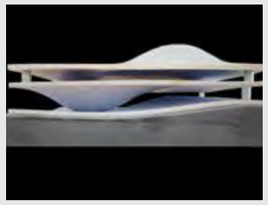
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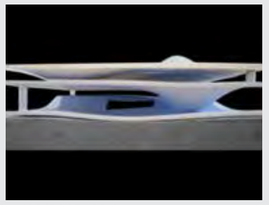
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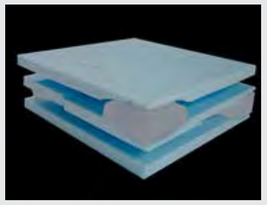
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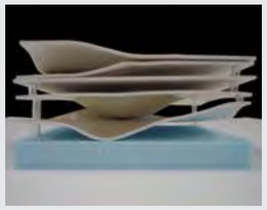
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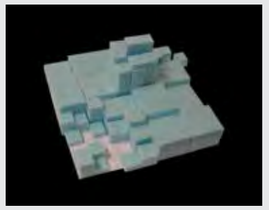
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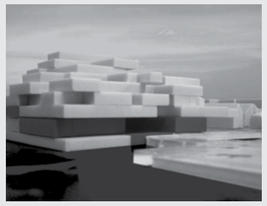
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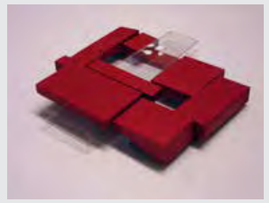
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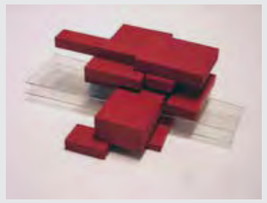
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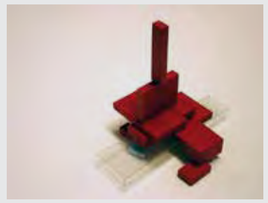
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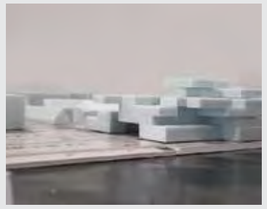
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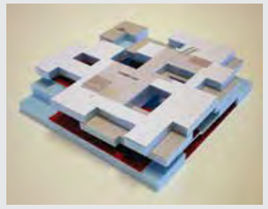
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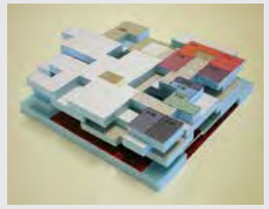
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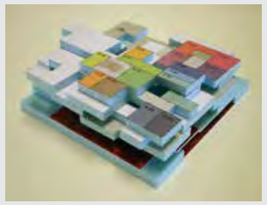
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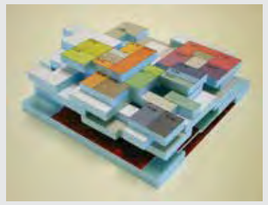
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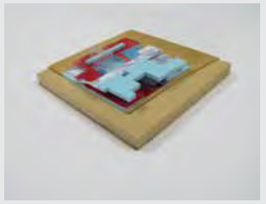
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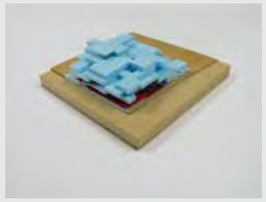
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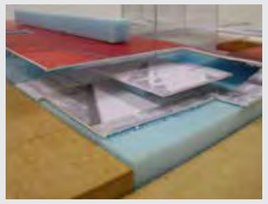
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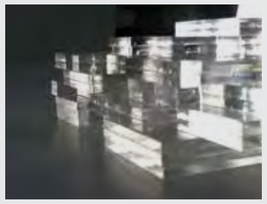
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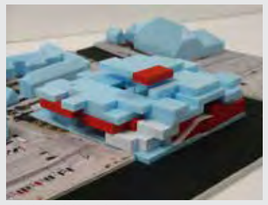
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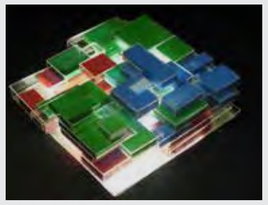
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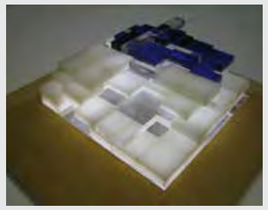
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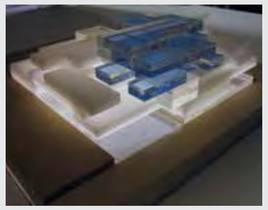
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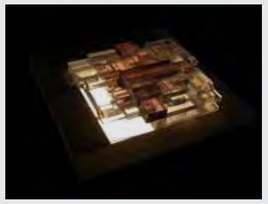
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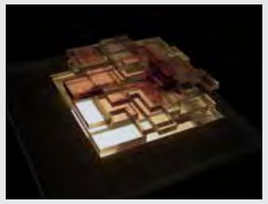
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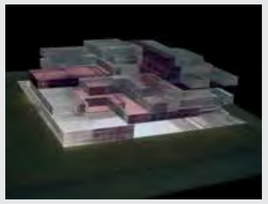
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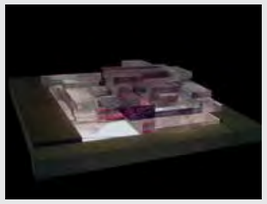
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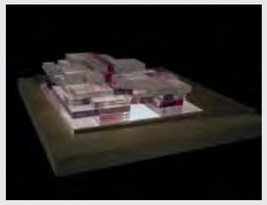
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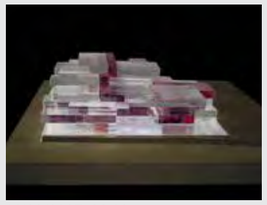
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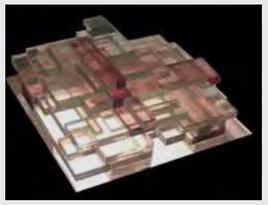
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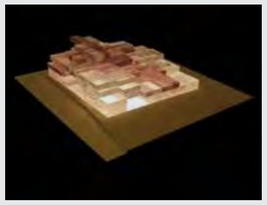
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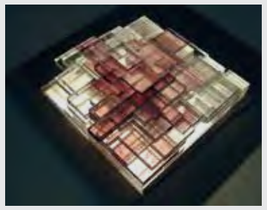
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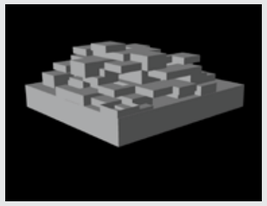
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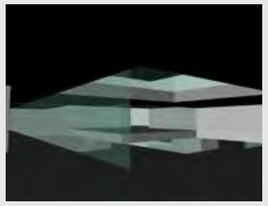
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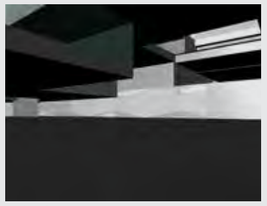
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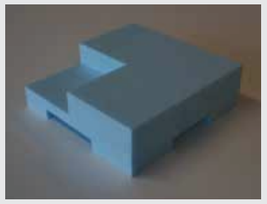
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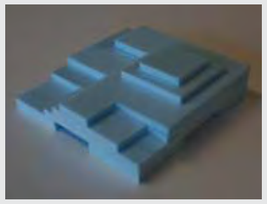
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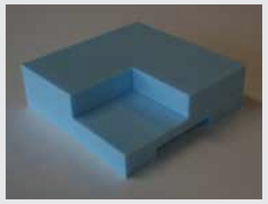
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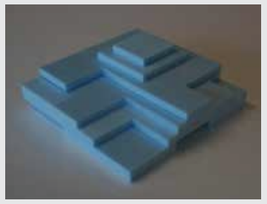
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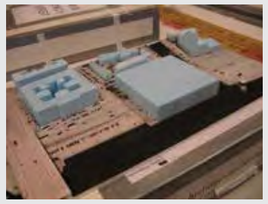
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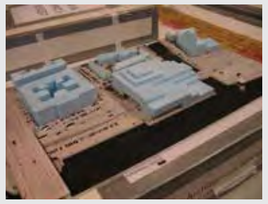
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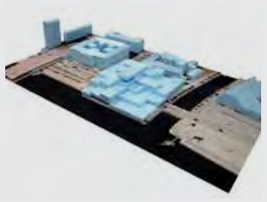
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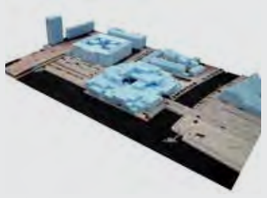
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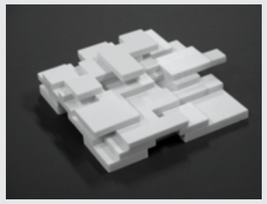
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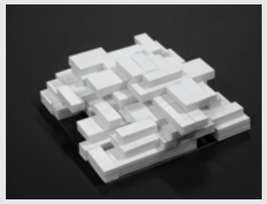
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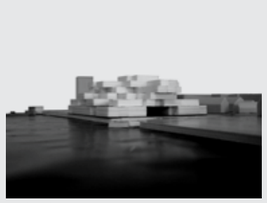
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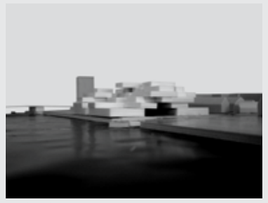
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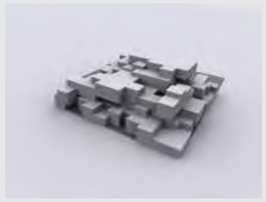
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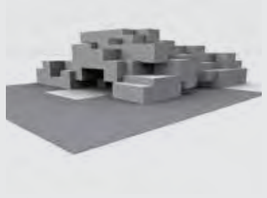
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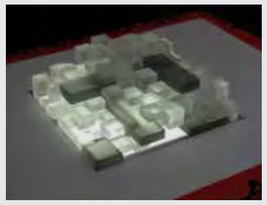
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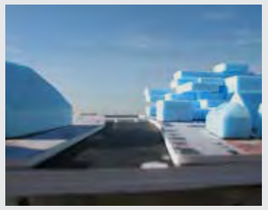
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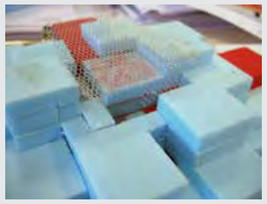
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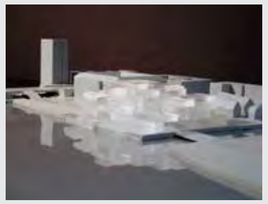
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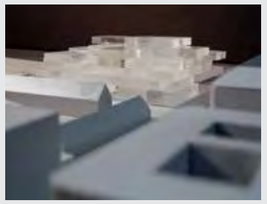
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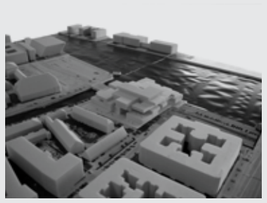
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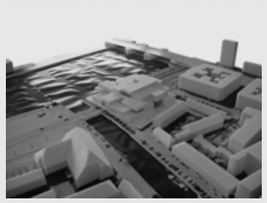
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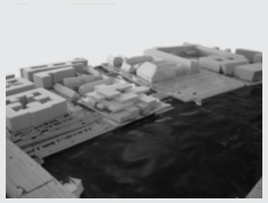
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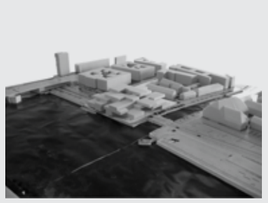
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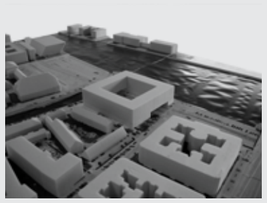
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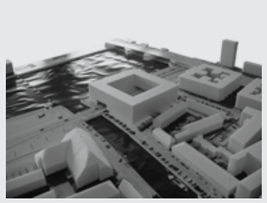
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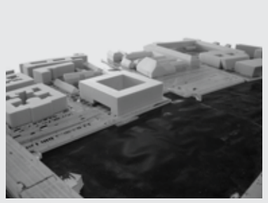
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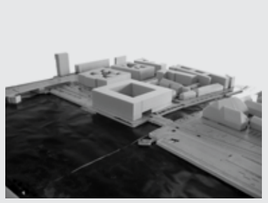
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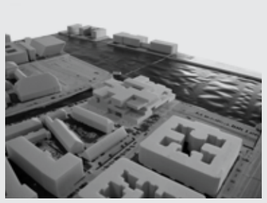
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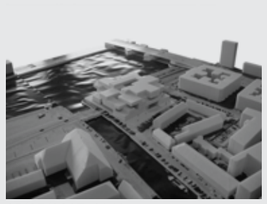
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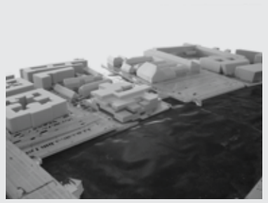
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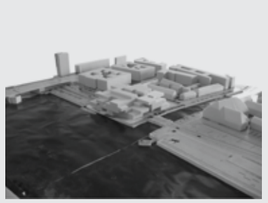
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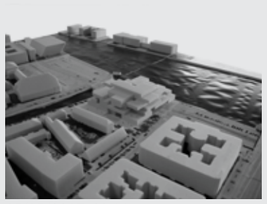
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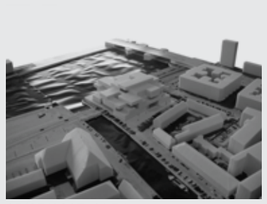
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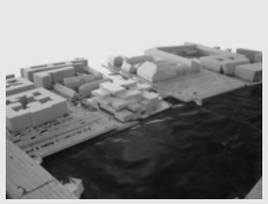
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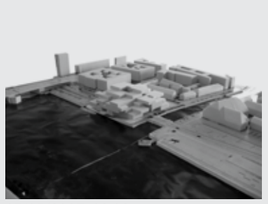
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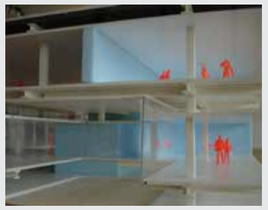
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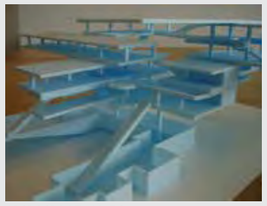
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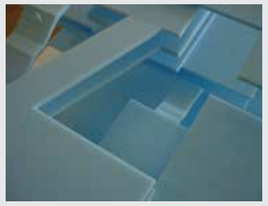
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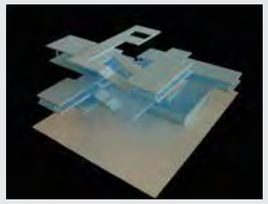
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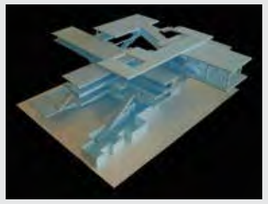
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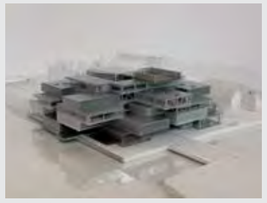
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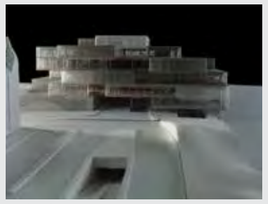
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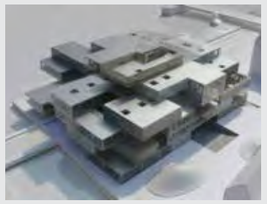
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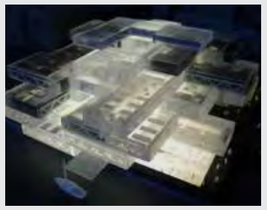
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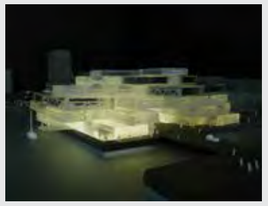
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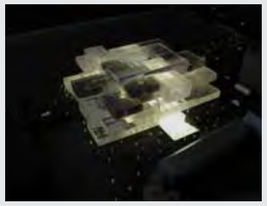
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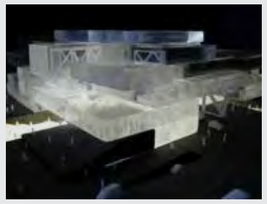
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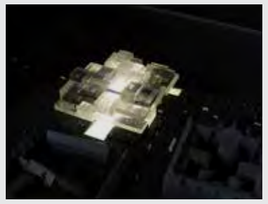
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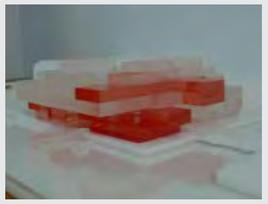
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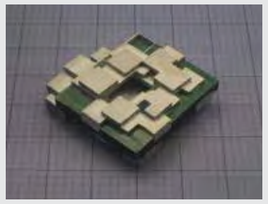
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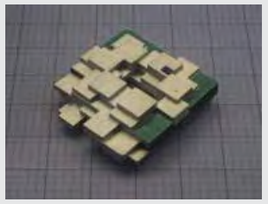
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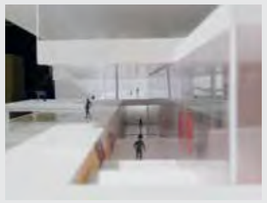
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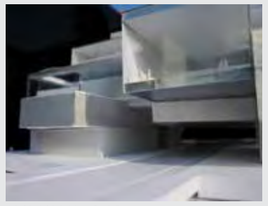
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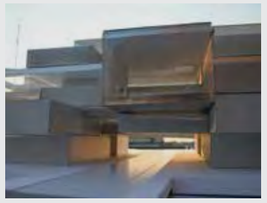
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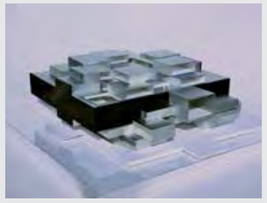
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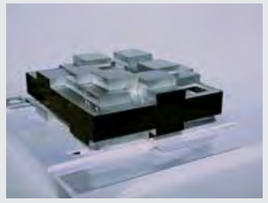
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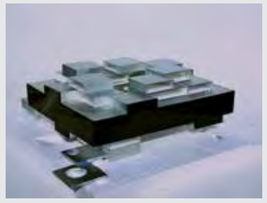
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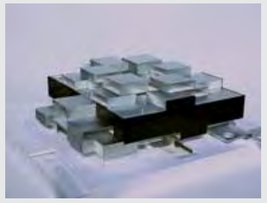
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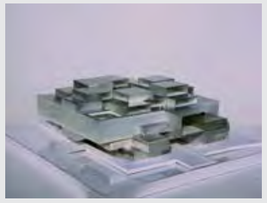
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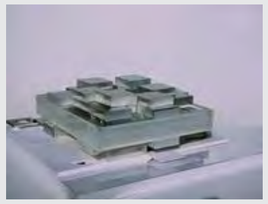
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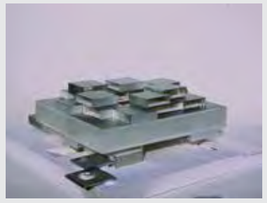
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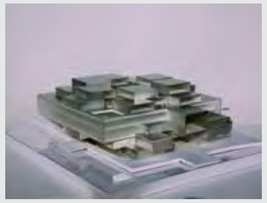
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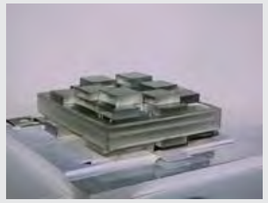
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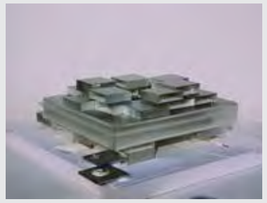
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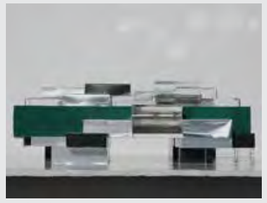
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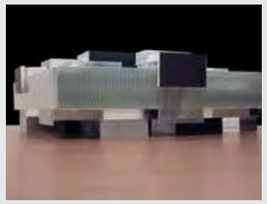
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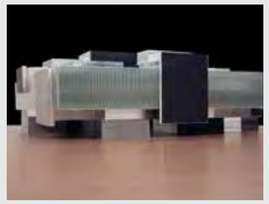
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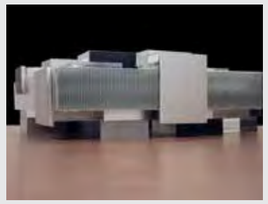
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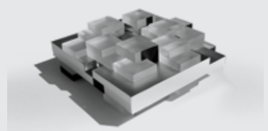
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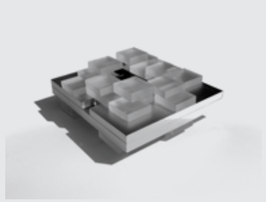
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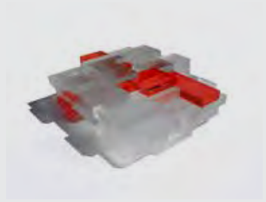
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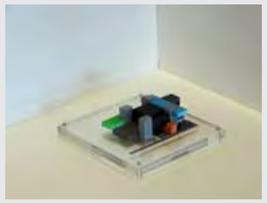
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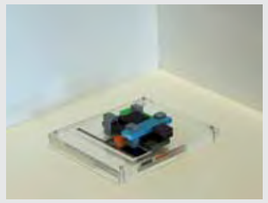
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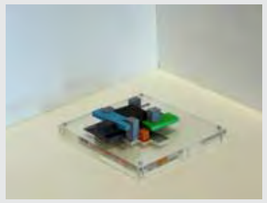
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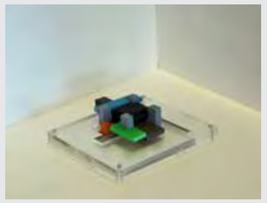
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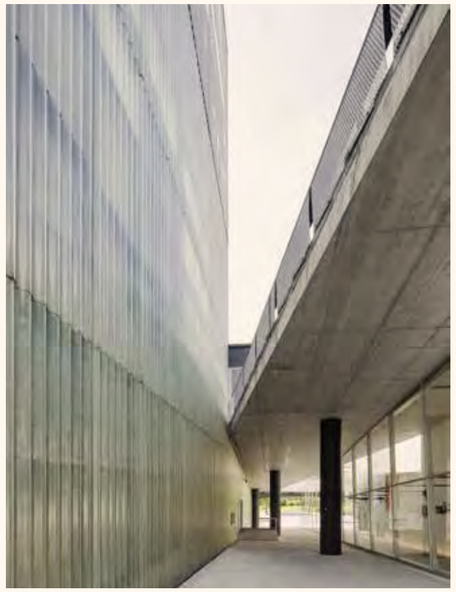

Kunsthal Rotterdam. OMA, 1992.

modernist machines for living, working or playing, nor postmodern monuments, but to open up the city through architecture, to provide pathways and create moments of wonderment that could come as much out of a perception of what was there as they could out of the opening towards something new.

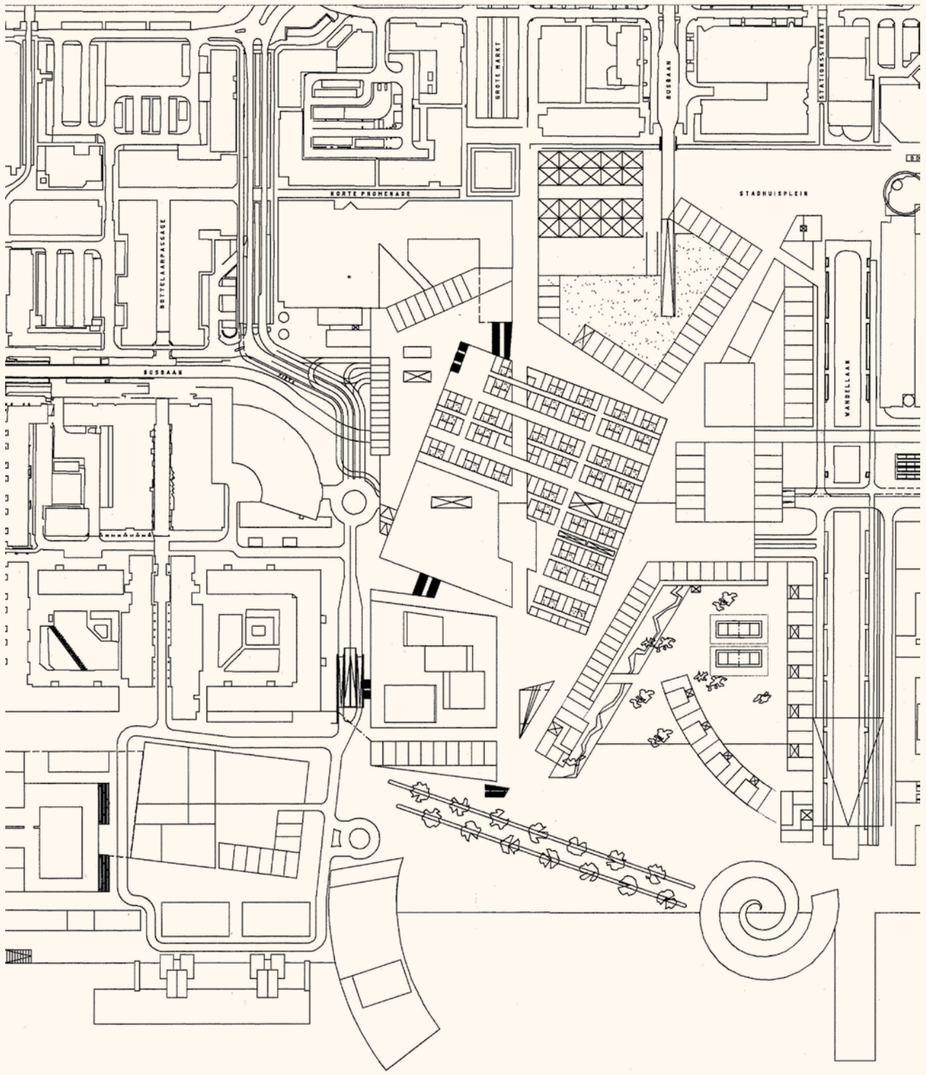
What is equally important is that this approach made little if any difference between different scales of work. The designers could make drawings and models that could not be built. They designed furniture that might be mistaken for a building. They designed ephemeral events (like Coop Himmelb(l)au's burning of a flag as their firm's founding statement) and proposed cities or even whole worlds (in the work of Lebbeus Woods or in Zaha Hadid's 1983 *The World at Eighty-Nine Degrees*), and, somewhere along the way, maybe buildings.

On a more prosaic level, OMA's position made sense, and led to great success, because the logic of capitalism at this point was to leach all investment it could out of permanent buildings. 'No money, no details,' Koolhaas famously said in response. While other architects sought to instead find ways to justify their buildings through their 'unique selling points' or advertising and magnet functions, OMA rather went with the flow, proposing their buildings as installations that allowed forces to come together in the thinnest envelope possible, and even proposing multiple uses (such as a staircase that was also an auditorium) for the same function. Trees could be fake, facades could be unfinished, and many things could happen in one space without having to build out specific furniture. I do not think OMA did this from a cynical perspective. They believed rather that this elusive and recessive attitude towards form allowed them to use what investment was possible to create confrontations and elisions that would be critical: they would allow the unexpected to meet, as Richard Sennett proposed at that time the city should, and would bring metropolitan delight and danger close to each other.

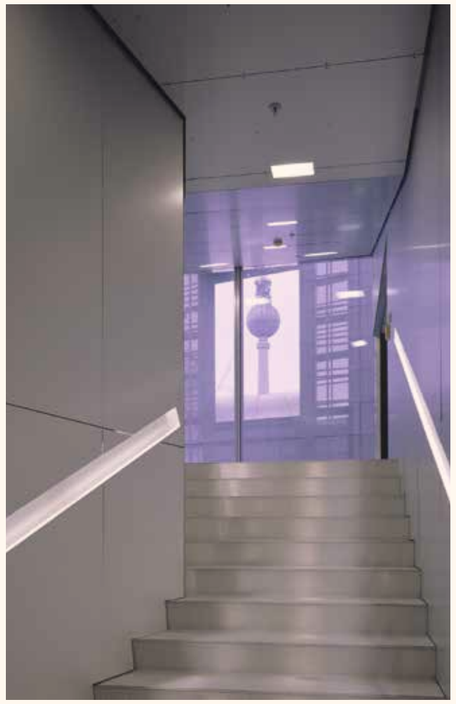
Their approach had both philosophical roots in the palimpsest and metaphorical thinking of the French poststructuralists, and in the open attitude towards popular culture, mass production and the reuse of existing forms then being developed as design strategies by movements such as Droog, founded in Amsterdam in 1992. From philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and others associated with 'deconstruction' as a philosophical tool, Koolhaas and his associates assimilated, whether directly or through the conversation that was then all-pervasive in the academies, the notion that art was not so much a new production as a re-reading, or rather an inter-textural activity that pried open existing structures, whether they be texts, laws or buildings, to find within them images, forms and eventually fragments of coherence (narratives, built structures, collages) that destabilized perceived and received realities. OMA had practiced such tactics in projects such as the Koepelgevangenis and the Dutch Parliament competition, and now they made them part of both urban and single building projects.

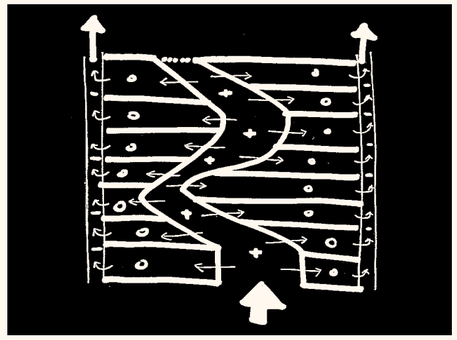
Thus, the project for the Dutch Embassy in Berlin (2002–2004) re-reads the office corridor as a connective spiral that tears open the block, revealing unstable relations between the different aspects of the bureaucracy housed there. The project for the center or Almere (2005–2010) lifts up and distorts the grid the original planners had placed there, itself a warping of the traditional Dutch polder plan, and misreads the relation between commercial and cultural structures to create a disturbing conflation between these elements. Even more thoroughly, the original project for the Prada New York store (2001), of which only a part was built, would have extended the subway into the store and vice versa, while using technology to project human figures onto mirrors wearing the clothes they might buy.

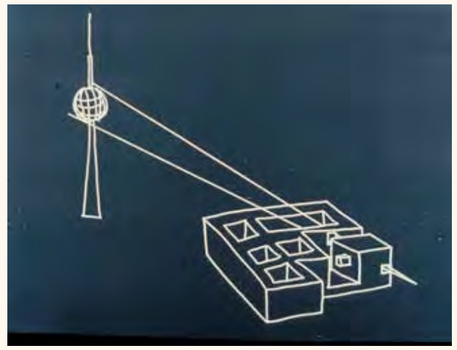
The Droog movement, which launched itself under the direction of the critic Renny Ramakers and the jewelry designer Gijs Bakker at the Milan Furniture Fair in 1992, proposed re- and misusing existing consumer



Master plan for Almere Centrum by OMA. 2005–2010.







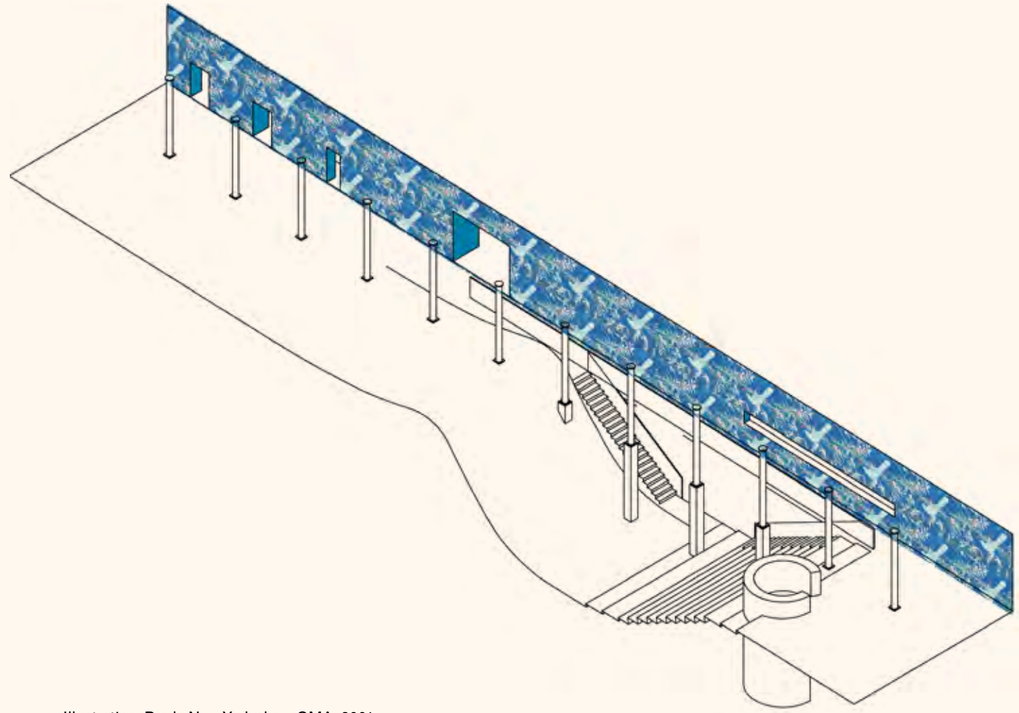
OMA's design for the Dutch embassy in Berlin provides spectacular views of the city. The building's infrastructure was one of the defining design parameters. OMA, 2004.

artifacts and furniture to create hybrid forms that were both eminently practical economic and that questioned or created an ironic twist on their character. Thus 85 bare light bulbs could be a chandelier, discarded drawers could be tied together with furniture straps to create a new armoire, and (a few years later) a radiator could become a rococo proliferation of curls that both emitted heat more efficiently and turned the unlovely heating device into an attention-grabbing object of beauty.

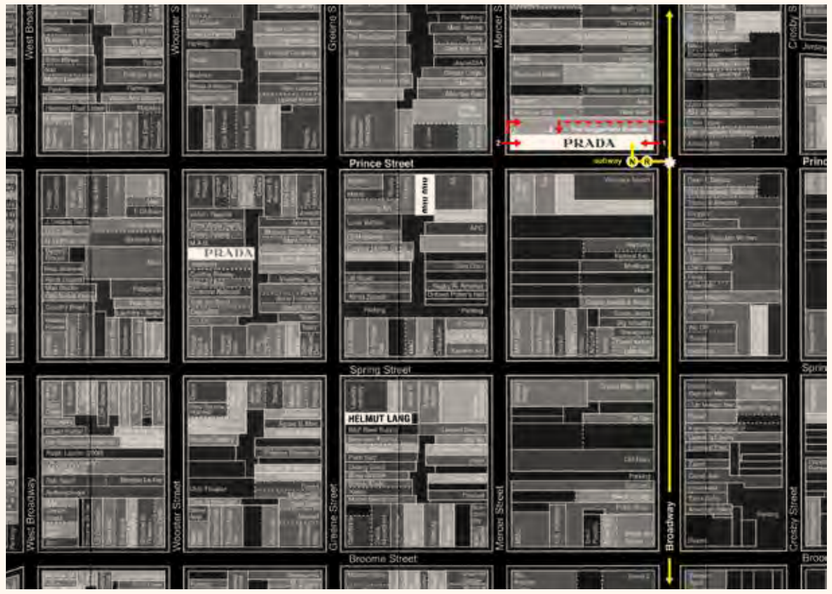
OMA used some of Droog's early collaborators as designers on their projects in the 1990s and 2000s, but of equal importance is the sensibility they assimilated that showed that, at the level of mass-produced objects at least, the newness of modernism could be compatible with both humor and reuse. Unfortunately, however, OMA seems not have allowed themselves enough leeway to use such tactics beyond the scale of a building, although such designs as the ITT Campus Center and perhaps the absurd Dubai Waterfront City project (2008), with its reuse of utopian images such as the perfect globe and the mass-produced skyscrapers then sprouting all around the Arab Peninsula, came close.

At the same time, OMA was very early in realizing one aspect of the challenge architecture was beginning to confront at the time: the abandonment of public space and the street as the true locus of metropolitan activity. Although some of that space has since been re-conquered, the rise of the shopping mall, the interiorization of social life, the spread of the computer as a site for social connection and the development of places of spectacle, from movie theaters that were multiplexes with built-in bars and restaurants, to raves, to choreographed sports events and pop concerts, as well

OMA design for Prada's shop in New York.
Prada New York, OMA, 2001.



Illustration, Prada New York shop. OMA, 2001.

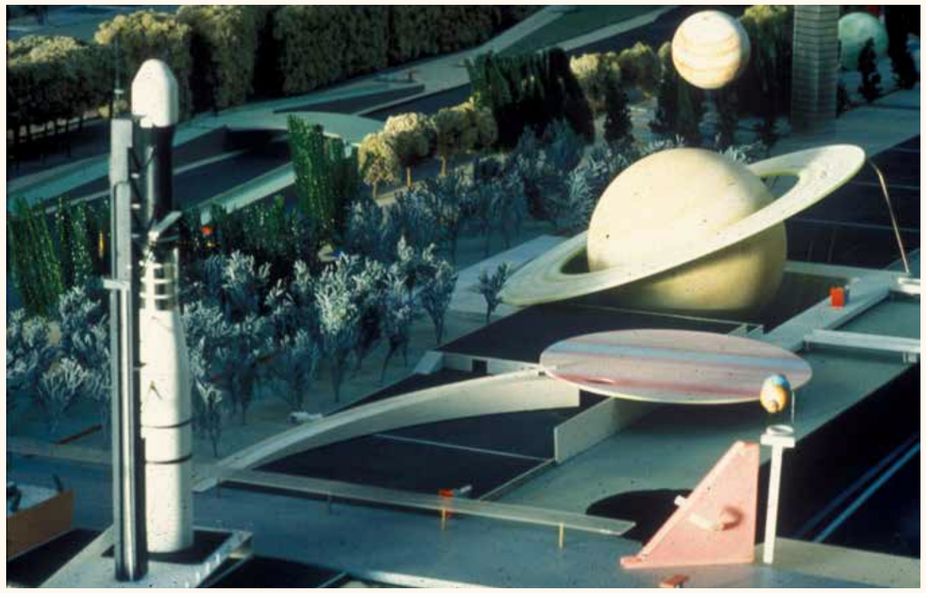


Site plan, Prada New York. 2001.

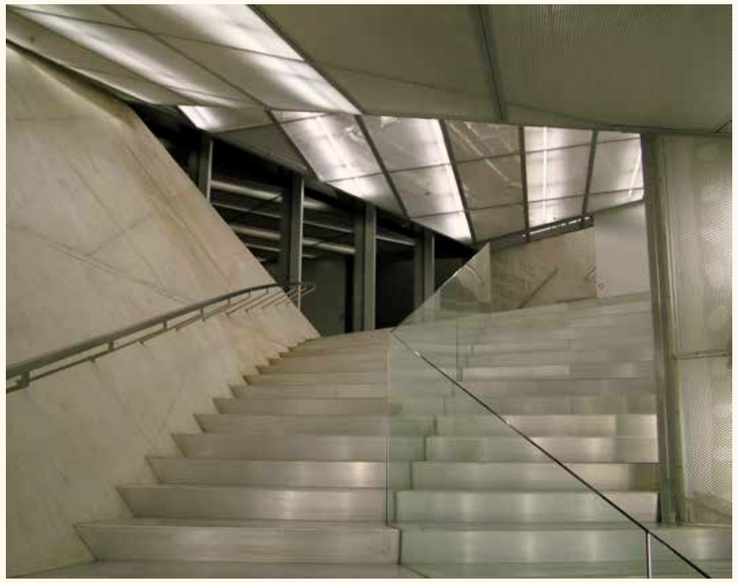
as the development of flagship stores, gave OMA a whole new territory in which to operate, and made their proposal for critical, collage-based forms of spectacle seem especially prescient. It was in these privatized semi-public spaces that they were able to build some of their most thoroughly urban work, whether it was the arts buildings of the Kunsthal Rotterdam of 1992 or the Casa da Música in Porto (1999–2005), or retail structures such as the stores they did for Prada.

It was in this context, then, that the Office for Metropolitan Architecture developed their practice. Starting with a few enthusiastic collaborators and many unpaid or barely paid interns, they dove into entering competitions and often-speculative projects. In 1982, the firm almost won the competition for what was then to be Europe's largest new park, the Parc de la Villette in Paris. In their scheme, which intersected strips of activities with a circular copse of trees, objects strewn across the field and intersecting lines, they called for doing away with the 'aura of monumentality' in favor of the 'mutability of form.' The promised to 'keep the illusion of architecture intact, while surrendering wholeheartedly to the needs of the metropolis.'

Though they lost the competition to Bernard Tschumi, their program statement became the script for many of their later buildings. When OMA made objects, they were critical urban condensers, and, when they designed urban projects, they were collages of objects and interiors blown up and reconnected across the terrain on which they operated. What mattered was not the type (cultural, residential, offices), the discipline (architecture, landscape, interior or urban design), or whether something was inside or outside (except that, as Koolhaas said of shopping malls, 'all conditioned space is conditional'), but only scale. The same operations could take place at the scale *S,M,X,XL*, as Koolhaas' 1995 book of that title, a kind of follow up on realized work coming out of *Delirious New York*, made clear.



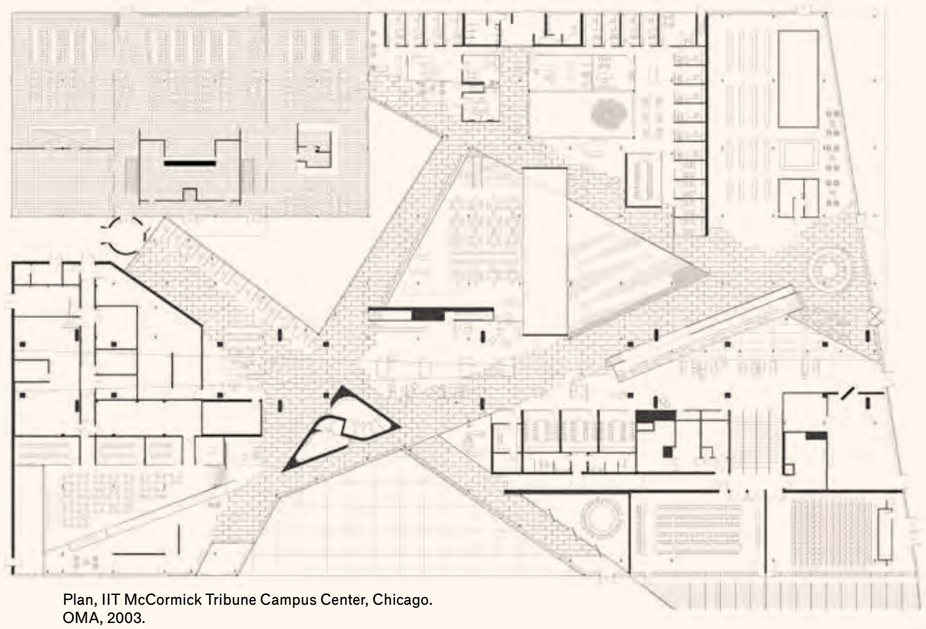
Competition proposal, master plan for Parc de la Villette, Paris. OMA, 1982.



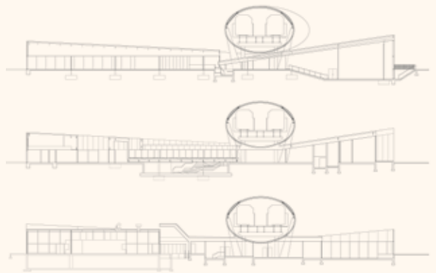
Stairway, Casa da Música, Porto. OMA, 2005.

Public square and entrance, Casa da Música, Porto. OMA, 2005.

IIT McCormick Tribune Campus Center, Chicago. OMA, 2003.



Plan, IIT McCormick Tribune Campus Center, Chicago. OMA, 2003.



Section, IIT McCormick Tribune Campus Center, Chicago. OMA, 2003.

In fact, the touchstone, despite Koolhaas' apparent preference for the extra-extra-large, was the medium-sized building at which the firm has always been most successful. Their urban schemes are the Kunsthal, the Seattle Library, or the ITT Campus Center blown up in scale, while their interiors, such as the Prada stores they designed in the early 'naughts, were fragments of such structures. What these buildings showed was their ability to make moments of both intense and extensive urbanism at an interior scale. The Kunsthal, a spiraling loop of galleries and circulation spaces conflated and wrapped around a public pathway while straddling the side of a levee meant to protect Rotterdam from the Rhine's floods, was their most perfect statement of such moments. At every level, from the collage of disparate materials, ranging from fake trees to red-painted steel beams to translucent plastic walls, to the making of a circulation path that both disappeared into other functions and looped back on itself, to the mixing and matching of places for performance, viewing, being viewed, and park activities, the Kunsthal stated their deconstructive approach to architecture and urbanism in its purest form.

The reuse of a site under the elevated railroad in Chicago for the IIT Campus Center took this approach even further, re-purposing and re-reading a leftover space in the city as a new center that was, however, decentered. Various activities slide by each other on diagonals, both vertically and horizontally, offering vistas, unexpected places of collision, and incomplete enclosure. At the Seattle Public Library, OMA took this approach to a larger scale, and moved it up vertically, creating an internal mountain of books and reading rooms that jumbled up the classical notion of the stacks serving the places of study and turned them into a continuation of the sidewalks and public spaces all around the building.

At times, OMA extended the sensibility to larger and more urban projects, at least around the turn of the millennium. In the booming economy of the time, they received a few chances to reread and rethink existing urban conditions and used the tactics they had developed in the previous decade at this scale. Though some of the more ambitious of these, such as the proposal to move the Charles River to reconnect Harvard's main campus to its burgeoning expansion in the town Alston (2009) and the proposal to renovate the Hermitage (2008) in St. Petersburg by opening up the storerooms, uniting the Winter Palace with the ministries across the plaza, and erasing the difference between storage and display, never came to fruition, some of their other projects, especially in the Netherlands, did.

The tactic of pop art scaling the essential OMA building is clearly evident in the project for the Chasse area in the Dutch town of Breda (1994–2000), in which they used the existing field as a 'unifier' for distinct buildings they strew around, while sending green fingers out from this treed plain into the city to reconnect the rehabilitation of a military barracks with the central city. It was even more evident in their renovation of the core of the town of Almere. Barely three decades old when OMA went to work there in 2001, the project used the central train station as a divider between a conventional march of 130,000 square meters of new office buildings to the north and an undulating 'urban carpet' that reached down to the town lake, burying parking while sprouting various shopping and cultural objects whose seemingly random placement the firm calculated both for scenographic effect and to create a density of connections and juxtapositions.

For all the innovation and drama evident in such projects, the project that showed their abilities off the best was much smaller: a new tunnel, parking garage, and pedestrian connection in the center of The Hague (Soutterain Train Tunnel, 2004). What is a project of burying trams that interrupted the flow of both pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the city center turned into a Piranesian design in which glimpses into the underground parking garage, bridges over different modes of transportation and structural elements unfold under the otherwise barely touched

street surface above. More than the Prada New York project, the design achieved an erasure between the urban and the building, the public and the private, and infrastructure and functional spaces – not to mention the destabilization of the relationship between inside and outside and above and below ground.

This hidden urbanism, condensed into buildings, masquerading as infrastructure, or placed into the spiraling interiors of autonomous structures, was in fact much more successful that OMA's more conventional urban design projects. While their proposal for the Zollverein area in the Ruhr (2001–2010), for instance, is highly successful, both aesthetically and economically, because it is predicated on preserving existing buildings, intersecting them with connective devices such as a long escalator leading to the top of one of the former factories, and surrounding them an amoeba-shaped ring of space dotted with new buildings, their 11.8 million square foot proposal for Waterfront City in Dubai looks like exactly the kind of utopian projects the firm tried to avoid for so many years. Much of their urban design work is now in Asia and the Arab Peninsula, and they turn out proposals for grids intersected by a few dynamic diagonals and eccentric buildings on an assembly line that no doubt feeds the firm's many hungry mouths.

The heart of OMA's urbanism is thus to be found in buildings, and in particular buildings that are urban condensers. In their most recent work, the firm has calmed down their aesthetics and their organizational approach. Rather than combining widely disparate materials and forms, their work for the new City Offices in Rotterdam (2015) and the renovation of the former Ministry of Spatial Arrangement in The Hague (2017) appear to be simple and straightforward. Their subtlety come from the realignment of elements that might seem at first glance to be basic, such as in the stacking and then partial occlusion of the Rotterdam project's facade and

Master plan for a former military terrain. Chasse Terrein, Breda, the Netherlands. OMA, 2000.

Conversion of a former coal mine to a museum and visitors' centre, Zeche Zollverein, Essen. OMA, 2010.

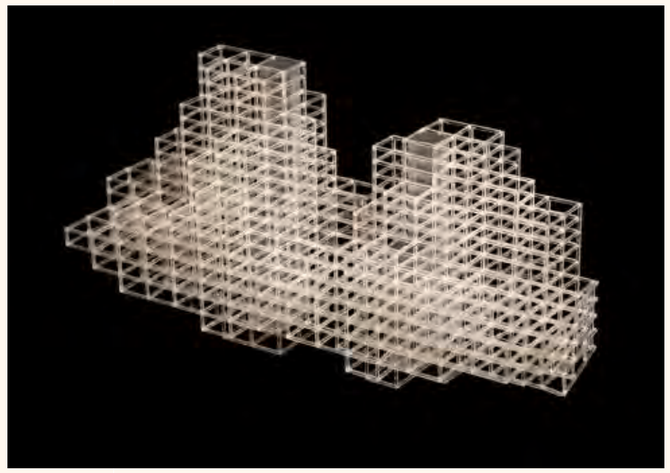
Multi-programme building with housing, offices, exhibition facilities and parking. Rotterdam, Timmerhuis. OMA, 2015.

Terraces and staggered levels show a structural similarity to BLOX. Timmerhuis. OMA, 2015.

the shooting through of the Hague project's offices with connective devices, while opening up the previously closed office floors to promote new forms of social and work interaction.

The question then becomes what the result of OMA's project of confusion and tactic of congestion has been. In revealing the 20th century city's reliance on moments of stimulation that are both internal and external, tracking the confusion of scale and materials such metropolises produced, unearthing and revaluing its infrastructure and hidden or leftover spaces, and then giving the whole back to us in condensed and clarified (if also confusing) forms, OMA created a paradigm for an architecture as urban collage. It would seem to call for the abandonment of overall or all-over planning, as well as the reliance on monuments as the core of architecture. Instead, the stacking and mixing of moments of urbanity would seem to be the central contribution architecture could make to the modern city.

Faced with the next phase of the city's development, however, one in which the diffusion and embedding of technology has reached a level that was unknown to Koolhaas and his fellow founders of OMA when they started, the firm seems stymied, turning back instead to a more recessive and even traditional stance. It will remain to be seen whether the newest generation they have recruited into the firm can continue their blowing up and rebuilding urbanity in the next few decades. ●



The entire building volume is defined by a coherent grid structure. OMA, 2009.

Biographies

Aaron Betsky
Aaron Betsky (born 1958) is a critic, curator, educator, lecturer and writer of texts about architecture and design. He is the former director of the Cincinnati Art Museum and the current dean of the School of Architecture at Taliesin (formerly the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture). He graduated from Yale University in 1979 with a BA in History, the Arts and Letters (1979) and received his Master of Architecture from Yale School of Architecture in 1983. From 2001 to 2006 Betsky served as director of NAi, the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam.

Ellen van Loon
Partner Ellen van Loon (born 1963) joined OMA in 1998 and has led several award-winning building projects. Her significant contributions include the new home of the Danish Architecture Center in Copenhagen (2018), Rijnstraat 8 (2017), De Rotterdam, the largest building in the Netherlands (2013), New Court, the Rothschild Bank headquarters in London (2011), the Prada Transformer pavilion in Seoul (2009), Casa da Música in Porto (2005), winner of the 2007 RIBA Award, and the Dutch Embassy in Berlin (2003), winner of the European Union Mies van der Rohe Award in 2005.

Kent Martinussen
Kent Martinussen (born 1960) is a Danish architect and since 2001 CEO of the Danish Architecture Center in Copenhagen. Kent Martinussen studied architecture at academies in Paris, Milan and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture in Copenhagen, where he graduated in 1989. Kent Martinussen has served on several committees and boards and has been the holder of other honorary positions (including the Danish Association of Architects and the Academy Council – the board of The Royal Danish Academy for Fine Arts).

Jesper Nygård
Jesper Nygård (born 1961) graduated as an MSc (Public Administration) from Roskilde University, RUC. CEO of Realdania since 2013, managing director of the social housing association KAB from 1996 to 2013. Chairman of the boards of Realdania By & Byg and Bolius, vice chairman of the philanthropic association Fondenes Videnscenter and member of the board of Danish Architecture Center – DAC, the sports association Brøndby IF, Fonden for Socialt Ansvar (Foundation for Social Responsibility) and the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. In 2012 he wrote the op-ed 'Det sociale enzym' (The Social Enzyme), calling for a strengthening of the cooperation and interaction between civil society, marketplace and public sector.

Anne Skovbro
Anne Skovbro (born 1969), graduated as an engineer from Aalborg University, Department of Planning, and subsequently earned a PhD, also from Aalborg University, Department of Architecture and Design. In 2000–2006 she held a variety of positions at the Ministry of Environment and the City of Copenhagen and in 2006–2015 a number of executive positions in the City of Copenhagen, most recently as head of the Finance Administration from 2010 to 2015. Anne Skovbro was appointed Chief Philanthropic Officer (CPO) of Realdania in 2015, a position that she stepped down from in August 2018 to take over as CEO of CPH City & Port Development.

Carsten Thau
Carsten Kipper Thau (born 1947) is a former professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, and holds an MA in Intellectual History. Thau's main field of interest is the interfaces of modern cultural theory and architecture, and in addition he has written on film theory. Thau was an associate professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture 1976–94 and has been a professor of Architectural Theory and History at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture since 1996. Thau was awarded the N.L. Høyen Medal in 2002.

Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss
Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss (born 1977) holds an MA in Philosophy from the University of Copenhagen and Paris-Sorbonne. A former partner in the architectural firm EFFEKT (2002–2007), Weiss is a writer, architecture critic, lecturer at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture and at the University of Copenhagen, co-author of and contributor to publications, catalogues and exhibitions. Curator of the Danish contribution to the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2016. Author of The New Wave in Danish Architecture (2012), Adventures in Conceptualism (2017) and Nordic Architects – Global Impacts (2017). Received the Golden Lion award (together with EFFEKT, TRANSFORM and others) at the Venice Biennale of Architecture 2006.

About BLOX

BLOX is much more than a building; it is a new destination on Copenhagen's harbour front, located between Langebro bridge and the Black Diamond building that houses the Royal Library. BLOX was funded and built by the private association Realdania. The building is home to the Danish Architecture Center's exhibitions and activities and BLOXHUB – an interdisciplinary environment promoting innovation and sustainable urban development.

BLOX is a building surrounded by city squares, a footbridge across Frederiksholms Kanal and the future Lille Langebro (cycle and pedestrian bridge) between BLOX and Christianshavn.

In the centre of the building is the Danish Architecture Center, which offers exhibitions, guided tours, events, a design shop, a café and conference and training facilities.

BLOX also forms the setting for BLOXHUB, an interdisciplinary innovation environment for sustainable urban development.

Restaurant, with outdoor seating, playground, fitness centre and 22 rental flats at the top of the building.

Fully automated underground parking facility with room for 350 cars.

Low-energy building fitted with solar cells and connected to district cooling provided by HOFOR – Greater Copenhagen Utility.

The site previously had a dense concentration of buildings, including Kongens Bryghus (the King's Bewhouse), among other buildings. The buildings burned down in 1960, and until 2006, when Realdania By & Byg bought the plot from the City of Copenhagen, it was used as a playground and a privately operated, temporary car park.

The City of Copenhagen and Realdania collaborated on developing the area around BLOX.

The groundbreaking took place in May 2013 and the official opening in May 2018.

Lille Langebro is expected to open in autumn 2019.

BLOX is Denmark's world of architecture, design and new ideas.

BLOX in figures
The total floor space is 27,000 m², of which 17,000 m² are above ground.

There are 5 storeys below ground and 6 storeys above street level.

The building's ground plan is 74 m × 75 m.

The height is 25 metres above terrain – matching the nearby buildings.

The recreational outdoor spaces and playground space amount to 5,500 m².

They designed and built BLOX
Realdania's subsidiary Realdania By & Byg was the client and owns BLOX.

BLOX was designed by the world-famous Dutch firm OMA – Office for Metropolitan Architecture.

COWI and Arup were the engineers behind BLOX.

Züblin is the general contractor for BLOX, assisted by a large number of competent sub-contractors.

Lödige delievered the fully automated parking facility.

Metallbau Früh delivered the facades.

Gehl Architects conducted several urban space analyses, which were a valuable contribution to the development of BLOX as a new destination in Copenhagen.

The turnkey contract for Lille Langebro was a joint venture between Mobilis Danmark and Hollandia Infra.

Lille Langebro was designed by an international team headed by the British engineers BuroHappold Engineering in cooperation with the architects WilkinsonEyre and Urban Agency.

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