



The Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern offers the spectacular with or without art. Photo by Michelle Aldredge.¹

Of Tate and Tuymans

Individual reflection by Nathan Chan for the course AR3A010 Research Plan, part of the MSc 3 graduation studio Interiors, Buildings, Cities. 17/11/22.

The Tate Modern in London occupies a central place in the art world and in the evolving discourse of what a contemporary art museum should be and how art should be displayed. Due to its size and complexity, grasping the labyrinthine building was a daunting task. In its urban context, the *Tate effect* draws millions of visitors spurring development in the disadvantaged Southwark borough where it resides.² While inside there are many ideas, processes, and programs packed into this building. Beyond the art, it also functions as a shopping mall and an electricity substation.³ Unsurprisingly, the Tate Modern was referenced in many of the readings, podcasts, and discussions in class.

The Turbine Hall stages itself

Mark Pimlott describes the contemporary art museum as engaging in a performative staging of “atmospheres of spectacle and publicity.”⁴ While most of the work in the Tate Modern is displayed in white cubes, it is the Turbine Hall where the monumental theatre emerges from a found industrial space to become one of the most iconic *rooms* for the staging of art. By digging out the basement, visitors entering the building from the North or South are brought, from street level, into the middle of the hall on a bridge with the vast space stretching out in front, behind, above, and below.

But the Turbine Hall is more than a grand public interior or a temporary exhibition space, the Hyundai Commission as it is now officially called, is awarded annually to an artist. The curator of this prestigious commission wields enormous power to anoint their chosen artist as a leading contemporary figure, and, with the institutional weight of the Tate, can nudge the trajectory of art and society, like Arnold Bode and his Documentas. Inequalities of gender, race, sexual orientation, and Global South can be addressed by a single artist’s installation that fills almost half of the total cubic area of exhibition space in the museum.⁵



Left: The *weather project* in the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern, Olafur Eliasson, 2003. Photo by Ari Magg.⁶

Right: *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1818.⁷

Spaces about space, a house for Luc Tuymans

Luc Tuymans’ paintings are often imbued with layers of meaning, referring to politics, history, or the incidental, all with his signature un-sharpness and eerie colour palette. His paintings in the M HKA collection, a monumental mosaic, and the Rubenshuis in Antwerp form the three ingredients of my spatial ensemble.

The M HKA collection contains only five of Tuymans’ smaller paintings done early in his career. Coincidentally, they all depict architecture or interior space. Supplemented by a selection of prints that relate to this theme, an idea for *Spaces about space* was formed.

In this assignment we were allowed to borrow or acquire one work. I choose the piece *Schwarzheide* (2019), which is a 9.6m x 9.6m mosaic of a painting from 1986 about the Holocaust which he installed in the Palazzo Grassi in Venice.⁸ The mosaic brings his work off the wall and becomes a floor, a space itself



Schwarzheide in Palazzo Grassi, Mosaic, Luc Tuymans, 2020.⁸

The Rubenshuis in Antwerp combines many ideas about collecting, showing, producing, and living with art. Its expansion calls for the use of the inner garden to connect the existing museum with the new buildings which face the street on different sides of the urban block. This reference allowed me to imagine a scenario where a house to display Luc Tuymans' work would be an extension to an existing museum embedded in a dense urban context.

The square dimensions of *Schwarzheide* are repeated twice to create a sequence of three spaces to show three types of work. The outdoor mosaic forms the center of the spatial ensemble that includes a white cube space for temporary exhibitions, which could include Tuymans' more monumental paintings, while on the other side, a house creates a domestic-like space to view his smaller paintings and prints in the collection. The house also provides a staircase to a loggia, to view the mosaic and other visitors from above.

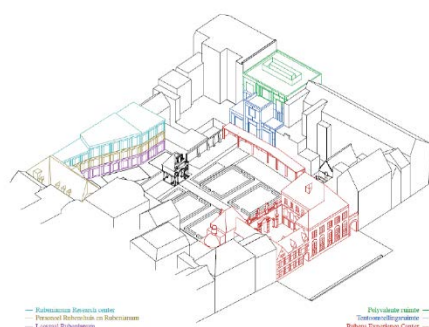


Diagram by Bovenbouw Architecten showing the three separate buildings of the museum within the urban block.⁹

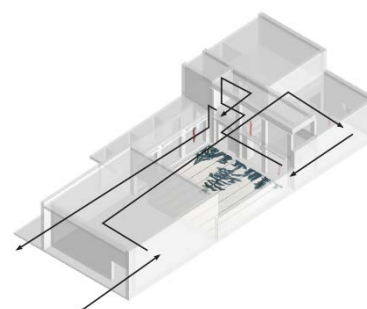


Diagram by author showing circulation scheme and massing of spatial ensemble.

References

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