

Graduation Plan

Personal information

Name: Nathan Chan
Student number: 4702913

Studio

Name: Interiors, Buildings, Cities
Theme: Contemporary art museum
First mentor: Mark Pimlott (Architecture)
Second mentor: Matthijs Klooster (Architectural Engineering)
Third mentor: Amy Thomas (Research)

Argumentation of choice of the studio:

Interiors, Buildings, Cities nurtures a serious yet sensitive attitude towards architecture, valuing interventions in a city's urban fabric which responds to its social, cultural, and historical context. The scope of the projects allows for the rigorous development of concrete architectural skills useful for professional practice.

Graduation project

Title: Housing Art
Location: Antwerp, Belgium
The posed problem: The graduation project of the studio is the design of a new contemporary art museum in Antwerp for the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA). In 2019, a competition was held, and five architecture teams were selected to submit a proposal for this project. However, the competition was cancelled due to a split jury and the future of this project remains uncertain. Our studio picks up the competition brief as a starting point for our own architecture proposals.
Research questions: How to integrate a new and existing building technically, aesthetically, and conceptually? What is the ideal space for showing contemporary art? How to design a building that will be useful for future uses and users? How can a building respond to the history and context of its site? How can the design of a museum stimulate engagement between art and a wider public? How can a building create and activate the surrounding public space?
Design assignment: The design of the contemporary art museum should offer a clear and compelling answer to the complex and ambitious brief that gives form to the future of M HKA as an institution and integrates itself into the urban, cultural, and social fabric of the city.
Process/method: The course began with the study of a precedent museum and an exercise to design a space to display an artist's work. While a research course ran in parallel where we read, discussed, and wrote about issues surrounding art, its display, and the museum. These activities formed some of the ideas that will be applied to the graduation project and should remain a continuous strand of research throughout the project to some degree. The study (on paper and in person) of precedent museums that relate specifically to my design, and perhaps the building of a study model would be very important. Also, reading and writing could help to clarify ideas about the ambiguous *forum* component of M HKA, and my position on the image and role of a contemporary art museum. Furthermore, more research is needed to gain a better grasp of the history of Antwerp and its material and building culture.

The evolution of plans, sections, elevations, details, and models (both physical and digital) are not only the requirements for graduation but should be the distillation of all my thinking and research.

Literature and general practical preference:

The work of three architecture offices have been highly inspirational for my project: Herzog de Meuron, Caruso St. John, and Grafton Architects. While the Flanders Architectural Review series can give a broad overview of contemporary architecture in the region. Spatial and technical reference books include Architects' Data (Neufert, 2019), Constructing Architecture: Materials, Processes, Structures (Deplazes, 2022), Building Construction Illustrated (Ching, 2008), and Omhulling: Gevels (Reijmers, 2011). Other books about art and museums include Wide White Space (Aupetitallot, 1999), The Anti-Museum: An Anthology (Copeland & Lovay, 2017), The Constituent Museum (Byrne, 2018), Art and the Power of Placement (Newhouse, 2005), Staging the Museum (OASE, 2022), and Inside the White Cube (O'Doherty, 1986).

Reflection

What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

To design a contemporary art museum is to work in the realm of Architecture with a capital A. The museum not only has to fulfil strict quantitative building technology requirements but is also judged on ambitious un-quantitative symbolic requirements, as there is a desire or tendency towards iconic forms that could offer identity to a city.

Within the master program there has been a (burdensome) emphasis on the equivalence of research and design. Within this graduation studio these two activities have been integrated and the lines between the two often blurred. The continuation of the design of my graduation project will rely to a large degree on the quality of my continued research into art, museum and gallery precedents, the history of Antwerp, and building technology aspects.

What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional, and scientific framework?

Adaptive re-use of existing buildings is a prominent topic in the professional discourse in architecture, not only related to sustainability or economics, but as a position towards creating something "new" within the existing built environment.

This approach is increasingly used in the design of spaces for art with the Tate Modern being a great catalyst for this trend. The design of a building, perhaps even as a student project, has the potential to contribute to the development of its typology, which in a museum's case is the interface between art and society.