

A SPACE OF INSPIRATION

REVITALIZING ARCHITECTURE
IN THE NETHERLANDS

Research plan

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Preface

My greatest passion next to architecture is breakdance. Since the overlap in creativity I often compare the two with each other. When I was younger I had this interesting talk with my breakdance teacher. He asked me how I would feel if someone used a dance move that I had invented in his own dance performance. I answered that I wouldn't really appreciate that, because he would basically 'steal' my dance move, one I might have spent a lot of time to come up with. He then explained to me this once happened to him. A quite famous dancer had seen one of his self-invented dance moves and used it later in one of his own performances. At first, my teacher was a bit annoyed. But after a while he realized how cool it actually is he inspired a dancer on a much higher level. He then grew up to be one of the most famous breakdancers in Netherlands. He made me realise how much energy it can give to inspire others through creativity.

When people asked me in the last years what I want to do after I graduate from architecture, my answer was always very simple, I want to make architecture that inspires others. It doesn't matter what type of architecture, as long as it influences the way people think about architecture and gives them new perspectives.

With my graduation project I've chosen a topic that lies very close to my own interests: **a space of inspiration**. A place where architecture firms come together sharing tools and knowledge to work on projects that can inspire the world of architecture.

The place itself could be a piece of architecture that inspires others. By bringing in my own ideas and position I hope to come up with a new approach to exhibition architecture.

Introduction

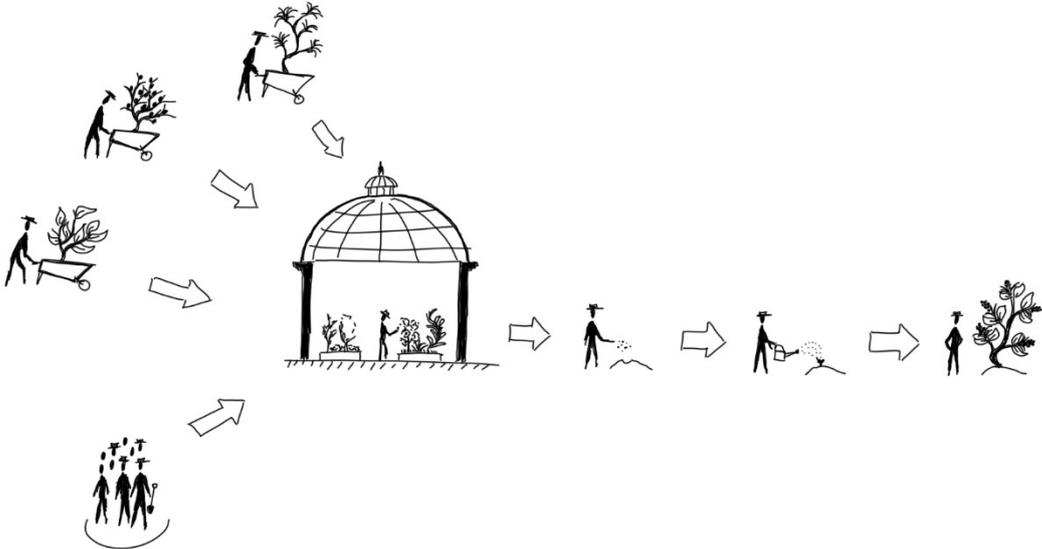
This project aims to create a space of inspiration. I have two primary fascinations that I believe can be synthesized into the basis of my research. This chapter will first explore these two fascinations individually and then discuss how I envision them merging into a single project.

First fascination: Biennials

In 2021 I had my first visit to the Biennale Architettura in Venice. It opened my eyes to how many inspiring projects from around the world were gathered in one place. To me it felt somehow like a botanical garden, where gardeners from all over the world plant their exotic plants. Other gardeners can look around and grab the seeds from the plants they think are most interesting to plant then in their own garden. The seeds can be interpreted as ideas and the plants as architectural projects. Like new plants can be developed by mixing the seeds, new interpretations of architecture can be developed by mixing the ideas presented at the Biennale.

Large-scale architectural exhibition events, like a biennial, have the ability to exert a big influence upon the architectural world. They offer space for experimentation, in which architects can push boundaries and showcase their unique vision, creating an open source of inspiration. Furthermore, these events provide a platform to connect with other architects, designers, clients, and other potential collaborators. And by exhibiting their work, architecture firms gain visibility and enhance their reputation.

Biennale as botanical garden



Drawing by author. 2024

Second fascination: Ise Jingu

The city Ise, Japan, is home to the one of the oldest traditions in the architecture. Since the year 690 the village community rebuilds the Ise Jingu complex every 20 years. This temple complex is piece by piece demounted and then reconstructed with new materials in the exact same way. The 20 years between the reconstruction ceremonies are filled with various preparation stages: from collecting and preparing lumber to manufacturing the temple parts.

By periodically reconstructing the complex as an tradition, it seeks **perpetuity** (the quality or state of lasting forever) and **ephemerality** (the quality or state of lasting only for a short time). Perpetuity, because the tradition and memory are enduring the centuries. The perpetuity is not linked to architecture as a physical, but to architecture as an idea. Ephemerality, because it brings this piece of architecture with recurring fresh materials. The degradation of the construction materials evokes the cycle of life and death. And the beautiful thing it includes, is the way they circulate all the involved materials, just like their believe in reincarnation. For every tree they cut, a new one is planted, providing wood for the next phase (this explains the specific cycle of 20 years). The trees are moved via the river, from which river stones are collected to be stacked on each other to line the new Jingu's terrain. After deconstruction the materials are transported to other villages to be integrated in their temple complexes, giving them a second life.

Ise Jingu. Ise, Japan.



Images by Tourinho. 2023

Synthesis of fascinations

The Ise Jingu presents a beautiful example of timeless design, one that seeks quality of lasting forever as well as for a short period of time. To create a place that serves as an inspiration source for architecture, like a large-scale exhibition event, it is of importance that it seeks perpetuity and ephemerality as well in its design. Perhaps not a structure that is timeless, but a concept that is timeless. Just like memory and tradition become eternal through the ruin and demolition of the old temple and the construction of the new one, a biennial exhibition could form the tradition that revives the complex bringing perpetuity. At the same time, structures can be added or altered to the existing structure every biennial, giving a new character to the complex, matching the zeitgeist of that period. These structures could serve as exhibition spaces while being part of the exhibition itself as well. Structures that are not of use anymore can be demounted and get a second life as exhibition attribute or furniture.

Problem statement

Architecture, as a reflection of societal needs, is constantly evolving. Architects are tasked with responding to these shifting demands, while simultaneously facing rigorous scrutiny. This is particularly evident in the Netherlands, a country which had its major shifts in the architectural history. The recent publication of Aaron Betsky's article, "Architecture in the Netherlands has become notably boring" (2023), reignited a much-discussed topic. In this piece, the former director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (2001-2006) critiques the current state of Dutch architecture, contrasting it with the *Superdutch* era that produced some of the most striking, innovative and experimental architecture in the world. He states the new-build architecture to have become 'boring', mainly existing out of 'boxes'. While Betsky perhaps exaggerated a bit, and might have a bias opinion regarding his role as director of the NAI in the peak of the Superdutch era, his article did spark a discussion.

The Superdutch era started in 1991, when the *Ministerie voor Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer* published the policy document *Ruimte voor Architectuur*, the first architectural policy from a government in the world. This policy institutionalized Dutch architecture at the national level and encouraged its development (Stegmeijer et al., 2012). Partly due to this institutionalisation, the *Netherlands Architectuurinstituut*, now *Het Nieuwe Instituut*, was centralised in 1993 in a new building in Rotterdam. Through the establishment of this institute, funds were provided to starting architectural firms, and competitions were organized, with the help of the Dutch government. As a consequence, architecture firms were able to experiment more and develop outstanding architecture that captivated the world.

As a result of the 2008 financial crisis and right-wing-dominated politics, cost-cutting measures have eroded generous subsidies. On top of that, many regulations, both financial and in terms of codes, have become more restrictive, making it increasingly harder for younger firms to participate in the market (Archined, 2005). While the more experienced firms are given less competition, the younger firms are excluded from projects, having less opportunity for experimentation. These firms may have less expertise and manpower to handle larger projects, but they are generally more agile and better attuned to contemporary societal problems (Tontini, 2024). More importantly, they bring fresh perspectives to the field of architecture.

On November 8th of this year, Marjolein van Eig, a Dutch architect and regular columnist on Dutch architecture, urged the Netherlands to prioritize potential and talent over expertise and status when awarding architectural tenders. She argued that it's absurd for the Kröller-Müller Museum to seek out a starchitect like Tadao Ando for an extension, while disregarding the wealth of talent within our own country.

Van Eig also presented a diagram illustrating the imminent shift towards bio-based materials in architecture, a transformation driven by climate change. This shift mirrors historical transitions, such as the shift from wood to stone after city fires and the shift from bricks to concrete after World War II. To effectively navigate this material transition, we must embrace more experimental architecture. This necessitates the involvement of younger, innovative firms. We need an avant-garde movement again, a movement to put architecture in the Netherlands back on the map.

Diagram of material shifts of the last centuries in the Netherlands

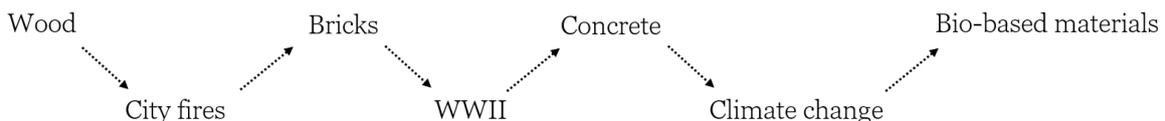


Diagram by Marjolein van Eig (translated to English). 2024

To conclude, the architectural market in the Netherlands has become too restraining in the last two decades and there is little of openness to experimentation that the Dutch government and clients at various levels used to display. The younger architecture firms are affected the most

and are essentially excluded from the more ‘experimental’ architecture. To create more interesting architecture while coping with the complex questions in the future, it is crucial to increase the involvement of the younger architecture firms in this ‘experimental’ architecture.

Research goal

This research seeks to explore the potential of spaces that bring new ideas into the world. The goal is to identify key factors and strategies that can be applied to design a place where younger architectural practices get the opportunity to experiment and exhibit work, in order to revitalize architecture in the Netherlands.

Research questions

This research goal leads to the following research question:

What are the conditions to create a space for revitalizing architecture in the Netherlands?

Sub-questions:

1. What examples of spaces exist that are focused on exerting influence on the field of architecture?
2. What kind of architecture is associated with these examples?
3. What is a suitable site for this space to be located?

This brings the following design question:

What kind of space can assist in revitalizing architecture in the Netherlands?

Methodology

The methodology aims to identify key factors and strategies that can be applied to design a place where architectural practice and exhibition comes together. The methodology can be split into three parts: **case collection and selection**, **case analysis**, and **implementation**.

I. Case collection and selection

The first step is to collect case studies that can serve as good examples for my research. These include: biennials/triennials, architecture festivals, museum parks, and creative districts that host exhibition events. This forms a list of case studies that is most likely too extensive to do proper analysis of within the given timeframe. Therefore, a selection is made from this list based on relevancy for my research.

The selection is based on the following criteria:

- **Availability of plans:** Are there any architectural plans available?
- **Focus:** What disciplines are being exhibited?
- **Scale:** What is the scale of the terrain? Is it a complex with multiple buildings or just one building?
- **Impact:** What is the impact of the exhibition on its local environment? How many visitors does it have annually?

The complete list of collected case studies can be found in the Appendix. The list of the selected case studies can be found under the heading ‘Selection of case studies’.

Next to the case studies, a collection is made of a variety of literature sources that can assist in gaining more knowledge about exhibition design. Literature is chosen based on the relation to the following topics: biennials/triennials, architecture festivals, exhibition design, museum design, circular architecture, and adaptable architecture. The list of this collection can be found under the heading 'Selection of literature'.

II. Case analysis

The collected case studies will be briefly analysed and compared based on the aspects listed below:

Goals

- What are the disciplines exhibited at the event? (architecture, urban planning, art, etc.)
- What are the target groups?
- What were the curatorial visions or themes of the last editions?
- How does the curation engage with the local context and global trends?

Context

- Is there a permanent location or does it vary per edition?
- Where in (or out of) the city is it located and what is the relationship between the city and the site?
- How is the accessibility of the site?

Design approach

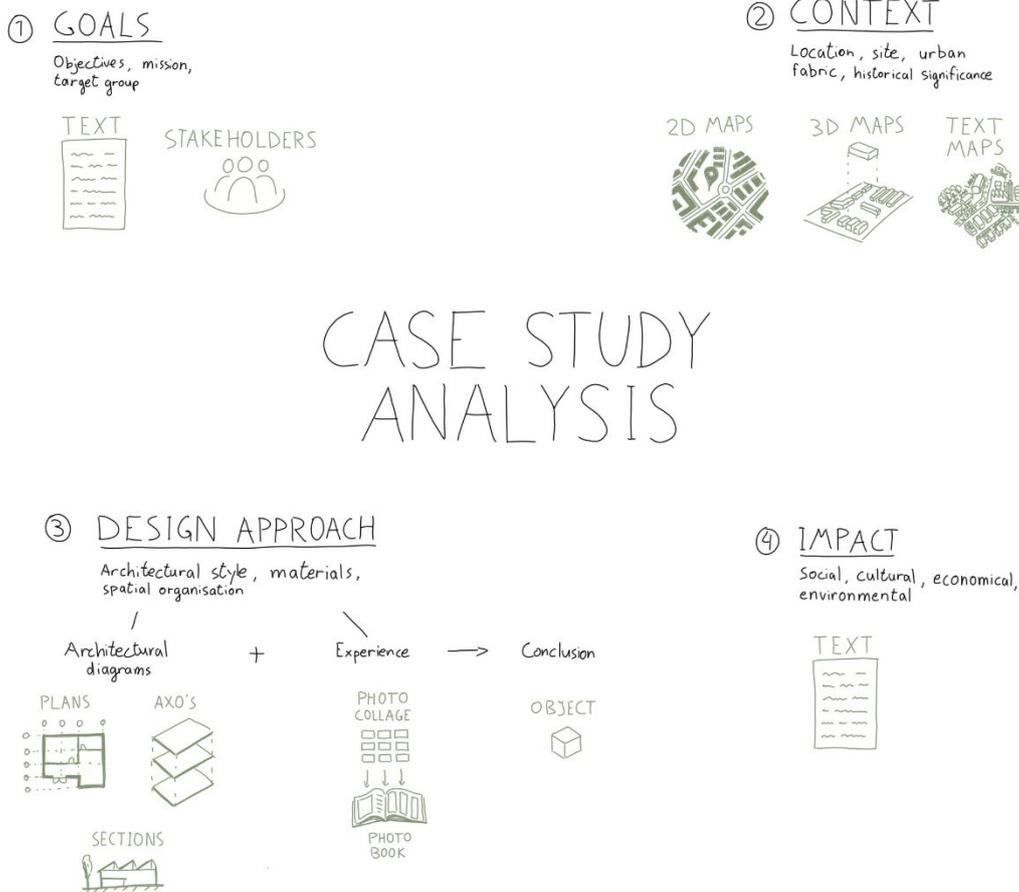
- How can the general layout of the site be described?
- What can be said about the scale of the site in relation to the exhibition?
- What is the scale of the interior spaces compared to the exterior spaces?
- How is the logistic and routing of the terrain and buildings?
- How does the exhibition space itself contribute to the overall experience?
- Are there innovative spatial strategies or architectural interventions?

Impact

- How does the exhibition contribute to the revitalization of the local area?
- What is the long-term impact of the exhibition on the architectural community?

All these results will be documented in different ways suiting the topic best. The scheme on the next page shows how every topic will be documented.

Case study analysis scheme



Drawing by author. 2024

Similar as to the case studies, the literature will be analysed as well focusing on different topics. Questions that will be covered are:

- What are the **main points and arguments** presented in each source and what **strategies** can be derived from that?
- Are there any **similarities** or **contradictions** between the different sources?
- Are there any areas that the literature is **not touching**?
- How **relevant** are the findings to my own research?

III. Implementation

The final step is to decide what knowledge from the analysis can be derived that is useful for my own design. Are there any conditions that can be set for designing an exhibition space that is focused on architectural practice?

Within this phase, research will be done into a suitable site for the 'space of inspiration' to be located.

Theoretical framework

Overall, architecture for exhibitions is covered extensively for it has been an important discipline in presenting art, design, photography, etc. Exhibitions can vary from quickly built, temporary

structures to permanent museum-like buildings. Furthermore, the scale can differ from a small pavilion to an exhibition festival existing out of multiple buildings/structures. To get a grasp on the wide spectrum of exhibition design, multiple sources are being looked into.

Philip Hughes and Aurelia Bertron et al. provide with their books *'Exhibition Design'* (2010) and *'Designing exhibitions: A compendium for architects, designers and museum professionals. Birkhäuser'* (2006) a comprehensive manual for designing exhibitions. By describing design principles, design strategies and illustrations, these books give a clear guide for designers in the scene of exhibition.

Diving deeper into this topic: *'Art on Display'* by Penelope Curtis & Dirk van den Heuvel and *'Exhibiting the Postmodern : The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale'* by Lea-Catherine Szacka describe two specific cases that can be used as examples for exhibition design.

Looking at more permanent buildings used for exhibition, there is plenty of written work covering this topic. One example is *'Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art'* by Joan Darragh & James S. Snyder. This book explores all aspects of the construction of an art museum. And for this topic as well, several books are published with great examples of museum design. Three books, coincidentally with the same name 'New museums' (independently written) by Raul A Barreneche, Catherine Donzel and Mimi Zeiger, illustrate incredible examples of museum design.

Expected results

With this research I hope to identify key factors and strategies that can be applied to design a place where architectural practice and exhibition comes together. These key factors and strategies should cover the following topics:

- Routing and logistics
- Scale, form and composition
- Material use
- Circularity
- Environmental/urban impact

To create a visual overview of these key factors and strategies, every analysed case study will be worked out in an all-encompassing poster.

First design ideas

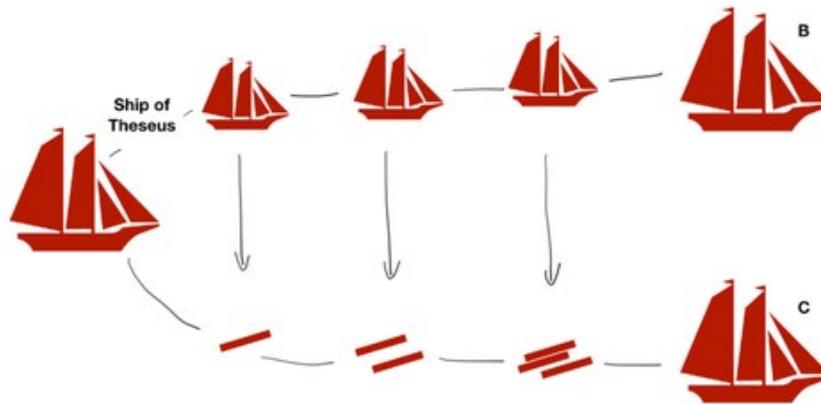
To explore my first ideas for the final design, I decided to design a vedute: a three-dimensional object measuring 44x32x7cm. This object, as a visualization of my thoughts, makes the concept of space that I aim to design tangible and accessible.

With this vedute I wanted to explore the concept of timeless design. While this concept is a long-standing concept with various definitions and interpretations, I prefer to think of it more as a concept linked to the architecture rather than the physical architecture itself. To illustrate this, consider Theseus's Paradox: the Athenians preserved a ship by gradually replacing its decaying parts. This led to the philosophical question of whether or not a ship that had all of its components replaced one by one would remain the same ship.

Similarly, we can apply this to architectural structures like the Ise Jingu complex. Despite the periodic replacement of its elements, the temple retains its identity due to its enduring traditions, historical significance, and spiritual purpose. This concept aligns with the idea that while our physical bodies undergo constant renewal - with 98% of all our atoms replaced annually (Nelson, 2023) - our essence remains relatively unchanged.

Ultimately, I believe timeless design is not merely about physical durability but about the enduring story and significance that a structure carries through time.

Ship of Theseus paradox



Drawing by Ahmed Lawati. 2020

I have designed a structure that evolves over time by replacing its construction elements with duplicates stored within its framework. These duplicates, identical in size but made from different materials, allow for adaptability to changing preferences and the need for material replacement. The duplicate elements can be seen as loose elements, like furniture, which can be reconfigured in order to create new spatial arrangements within the structure.

Furthermore, the structure itself is capable of transformation. By adjusting its connections, it can fold into a compact 44x7x7cm box, enabling relocation to a more suitable environment. This makes the structure highly flexible; adapting to its surroundings and adapting its surroundings to itself.

Vedute



Scan the QR
for the full GIF:



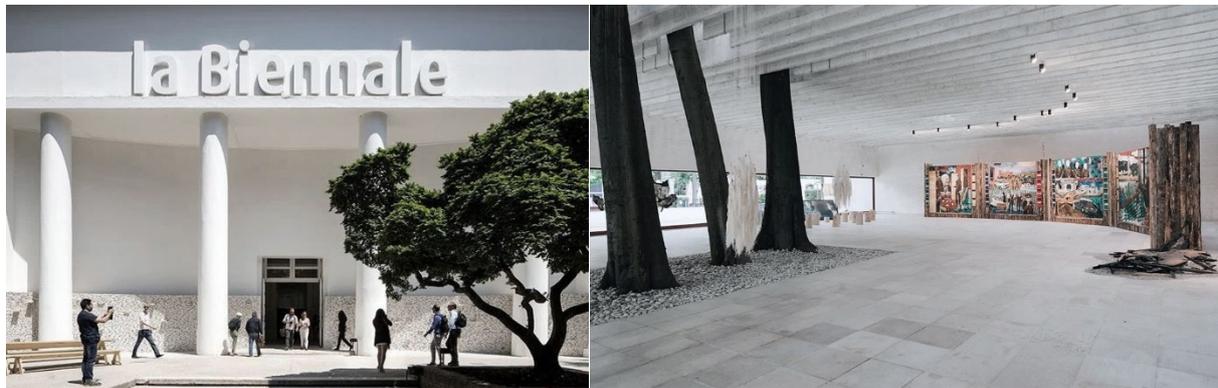
Work and photos by author, 2024

Selection of case studies

Based on the earlier discussed criteria, the following 10 projects will be used as case studies for the research:

1. Venice Biennale Architettura.

Venice, Italy

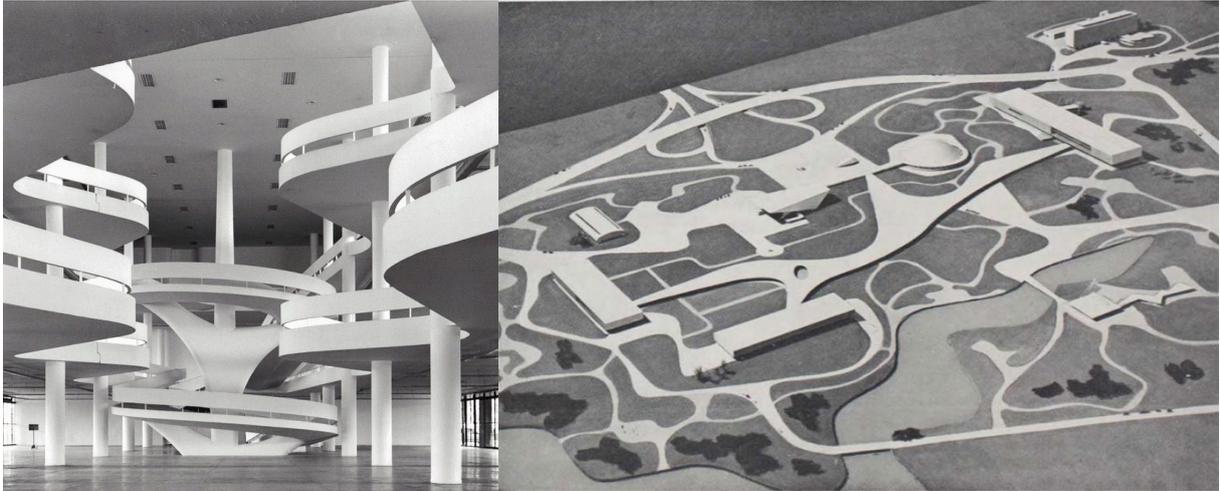


2. Triennale Milano

Milan, Italy



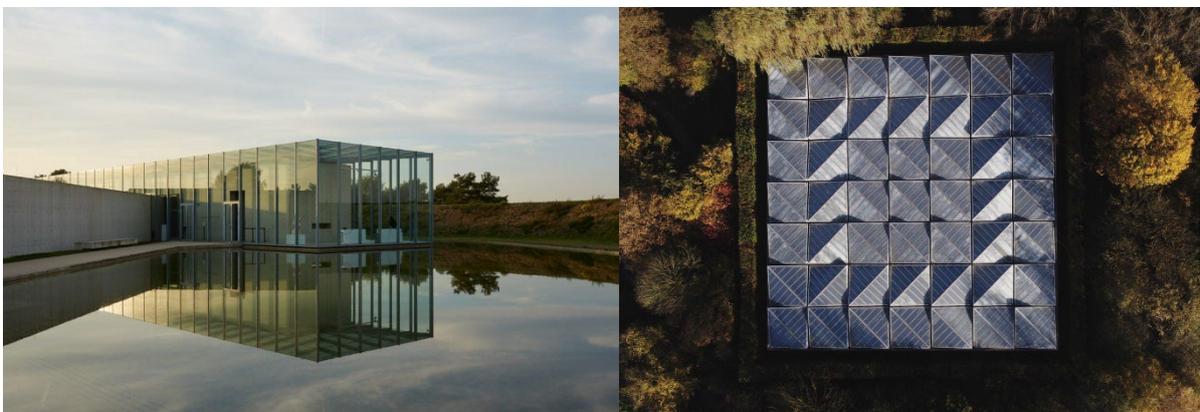
3. Bienal de São Paulo (ibirapuera parque)
São Paulo, Brazil



4. International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam
Rotterdam, The Netherlands



5. Insel Hombroich
Neuss, Germany



6. Parc de la Villette
Paris, France



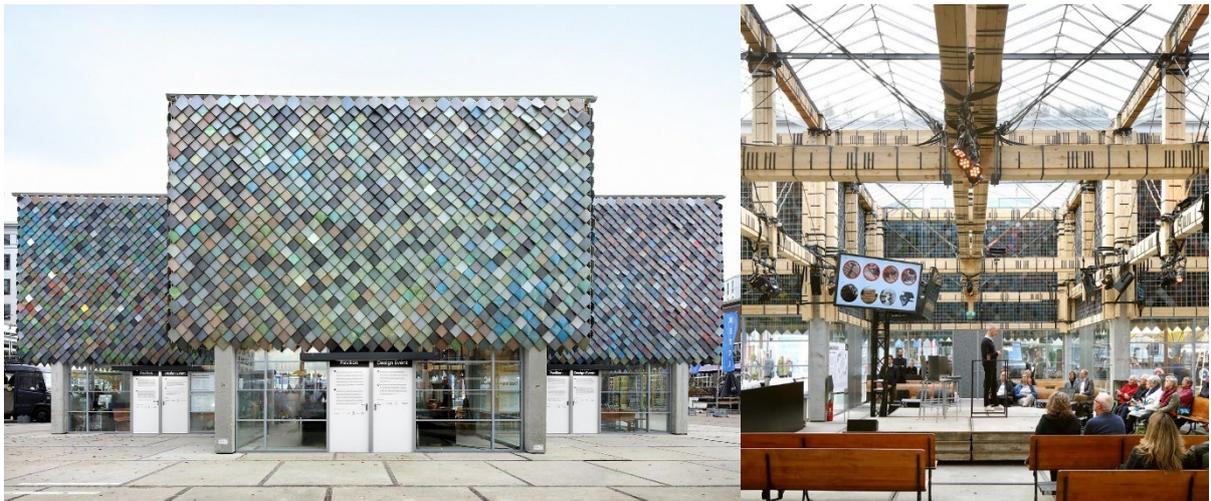
7. Keilewerf
Rotterdam, The Netherlands



8. LocHal
Tilburg, The Netherlands



9. People's pavilion
No location



10. Huidclub
Rotterdam, The Netherlands



Selection of literature

A Barreneche, R. (2005). *New museums*. Phaidon Press.

Bertron, A., Schwarz, U., & Frey, C. (2006). *Designing exhibitions: A compendium for architects, designers and museum professionals*. Birkhäuser.

<http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA79878307?l=ja>

Betsky, A. (2008). *Out There. Architecture Beyond Building: 11th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia*. Marsilio.

Darragh, J., & Snyder, J. S. (1993). *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*.

<http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA20461280>

Donzel, C. (1998). *New museums*. Telleri.

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Levy, A., Menking, W., & Gregotti, V. (2010). *Architecture on Display: On the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*.

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Paulino, C. (2019). *Art on display: 1949-69*.

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Appendix

List of relevant biennials, architecture festivals and museum parks:

Biennale	Location	First edition	Appr. visitors of last edition	Focus	Permanent building	Arch. plans available	Accessibility
Venice biennale	Venice, Italy	1895	800.000	Art and Architecture	Yes		
Triennale Milano	Milan, Italy	1923	No information	Art, design, architecture, fashion and cinema	Yes		
Bienal de São Paulo (Ibirapuera parque)	São Paulo, Brazil	1951	750.000	Art	Yes		
Documenta	Kassel, Germany	1955	1 million	Visual arts	No		
Biennale of Sydney	Sydney, Australia	1973		Contemporary visual arts	No		
Bienal de la Habana	Havana, Cuba	1984		'Non-Western' art	No		
Sharjah Biennial	Dubai, UAE	1993		Innovative and challenging art	No		
Gwangju Biennale	Gwangju, South Korea	1995	200.000	Contemporary art	No		
Shanghai Biennale	Shanghai, China	1996		Contemporary art	No		
International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam	Rotterdam, Netherlands	2001		Architecture and Urban planning	No		
Beijing Design Week	Beijing, China	2009		Design	No		
Kochi-Muziris Biennale	Kochi, India	2011	1.2 million	Contemporary art	No		
Chicago Architecture Biennial	Chicago, US	2014		Architecture	No		
Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism	Seoul, South Korea	2017		Architecture and Urban planning	No		
Yeditepe Biennial	Istanbul, Turkey	2018		Contemporary architecture and Design	No		
Architecture festival	Location	First edition	Appr. visitors of last edition	Focus	Permanent building	Arch. plans available	Accessibility
World's Columbian Exposition	Chicago, US	1893	"millions"	Commerce, industry, technology and entertainment	No		
Concéntrico	Logroño, Spain	2015	No information	Architecture and Urban planning	No		
Barcelona Architecture Week	Barcelona, Spain	2017		Architecture and Urban planning	No		
Museum park	Location	First edition	Appr. visitors of last edition	Focus	Permanent building	Arch. plans available	Accessibility
Insel Hombroich	Neuss, Germany	1983	No information	Contemporary art in a natural setting	Yes		
Parc de la Villette	Paris, France	1984	8 million (a year)	Art, music, science, sports and other activities	Yes		
Chaïbad La Douce	Le Puy-Sainte-Reparde, France	2010	No information	Contemporary art	Yes		

List of relevant creative districts/centres and architecture groups:

Creative district/centre	Location	Year of establishment	Previous function	Functions	Accessibility
Fun Palace	London	1965	Never build	Interactive and adaptable, educational and cultural complex	
Verkadefabriek	Den Bosch	2004	Chocolate factory (1929)	Theatre, film and catering	
Sectie-C	Eindhoven	2011	Nolte Elektrotechnik en Mech	Art, design, music, entrepreneurship, writing, craftsmen	
Strijp S	Eindhoven	2012	Philips industry (1916)	Business in the creative sector, living, art & culture, events, sports and light art	
Toni-Areal	Zürich	2014	Yoghurt factory (1977)	A location for education, culture and housing	
Keilewerf	Rotterdam	2014	Shipyard halls (early 20th cen	Furniture design, art, foodtruck building, music	
Hembrogtterrein	Zaandam	2017	Militair terrein (1897)	Festivals, creative initiatieven, musea, evenementen, film en televisie opnames, exposities	
LoCHal	Tilburg	2017	Locomotiefhal (1932)	Centre for art, culture and meeting	
People's pavilion	No location	2017	No location	Meeting place	
Kazeme	Eindhoven	2019	Marechausseekazeme (1825)	Design exposition and catering	
Huidenclub	Rotterdam	2022	Tannery (1914)	Centre for contemporary art and culture, design studios and meeting	
Architecture group	Location	Year of establishment	Previous function	Functions	
De Dèpendance	Rotterdam	2009	No location	Platform for city culture and public debate	
Raumlaborberlin	Düsseldorf, Germany	1999	No location	Architecture, city planning, art and urban intervention	